

Inspiring Gen Z Voters to Participate in Voting and Volunteering

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Abstract

Generation Zers are a cultural phenomenon. They are a diverse generation that is progressive and social-justice-minded. While they are engaged in social causes of their interest, they need to have an affinity for a respective political candidate. They need to know their vote has meaning. This article speaks to the stage of development Gen Zers exist in and how voting and volunteering capture the investment these youth are to society. It offers recommendations on how to engage these youth as vital members of society. Because of their diversity, the issues they are most inclined to embrace are those issues that are more progressive.

Keywords

Gen Z, Voting, Politics, Volunteerism, Activism, Social Justice

1. Introduction

Young people identified as Generation Z (those born after 1995) are a cultural phenomenon. They were raised in a digital era, survived the Covid-19 pandemic, and are coming of age at a time of low unemployment (Snyder, 2021). This is a culturally and racially diverse generation (Parker & Igielnik, 2020), that has been described as progressive and social-justice-minded (Snyder, 2021). Further, while they are engaged in social causes of their interest, they need to have an affinity for respective political candidates.

According to McDonald & Deckman (2021), Generation Z prefers women and minority candidates, with no preference for age. These candidates are more likely to have a social justice platform that appeals to Gen Zer. Clearly, Gen Zers seek to know that they can impact the world foremost through activism, volunteerism and voting. This article articulates how to inspire Gen Zers to expand

their activism, while reviewing how this “Solidarity Generation” can be more engaged in the political and voluntary processes (Snyder, 2021).

2. Literature Review

According to the report by Pew Research Center, Gen Zers are more likely than any other generation to want an activist government, and believe the government should solve national and local problems (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Further, this generation is very invested in climate change activism, and racial justice. Even among political parties, Republican Gen Zers are more likely to be social-justice-minded than the older generations in the same party.

Gen Zers are developmentally attuned to engaging in activities that promote social belonging and group identity (Camera, 2022; Shane et al., 2021). They join groups and organizations that offer an extension of their personality and identity. But beyond this dynamic, they are intrinsically justice-oriented. According to Snyder (2021), Generation Z should also be known as the “Solidarity Generation”—“emboldened by its profound care for one another” (p. 6). They have an appeal for unity and social justice. Snyder (2021) says they challenge the status quo and hold those in power accountable. They will rally together for a cause (McDonald & Deckman, 2021), be purposeful in their volunteerism (Peck, 2022; Snyder, 2021), and see no problem going against their parents’ generation to see change (McBeth, 2022).

When McBeth (2022) questioned whether Gen Zers were coddled or engaged, he noted that these youth were resistant to ideas with which they disagreed. To move them, you have to cater to them with bursts of anecdotal information and data that is meaningful to them and their ideals (McBeth, 2022). Much of these ideals can emerge from a Gen Zers interaction with social media. According to Parmelee et al. (2022), Gen Zers gain a lot of information from social media, and politicians and organizations who want their support need to deliver dynamic messaging through these media platforms.

Gen Zers are likely to favor women and minority leaders because of their affinity for social justice and helping others (Peck, 2022; Jensen, 2015). To rally Gen Zers to a cause, you have to inspire and motivate them to an ideal. An example of this is the activism and volunteerism that occurred after the George Floyd murder. Countless young people were moved to march, demonstrate, volunteer and vote to enact change for marginalized groups (Jensen, 2015; Parmelee, Perkins, & Beasley, 2022; Snyder, 2021).

These Gen Zers were a force behind the civil rights movement and showed they are a critical mass in an election. They were instrumental in the marches and forceful in the political campaigns. According to Johnson Hess (2020), Gen Zers were significant to President Biden’s successful win.

“Gen Z voters were very enthusiastic about this election,” says Karlyn Bowman, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. “A number of things appeared to be driving young people’s level of participation and level of ex-

citement about the campaign and it wasn't Joe Biden, though they certainly like Joe Biden overall. They were voting more against Donald Trump than they were for Joe Biden." (Johnson Hess, 2020).

According to many Gen Zers, the 2020 Presidential election was a referendum on the previous four years. Many states turned blue or purple because of the impact of Gen Zers.

"It wasn't any one thing. It was a whole series of things. It was the economic and physical dislocation of Covid. It was climate change, which is a major issue for young people. It was the protests that we saw this spring and summer which really turned huge numbers of young people into political activism for the first time. And it was the gun violence movement that came out of Parkland that I think also brought a lot of young people [into politics]. I mean, kids getting killed in schools, now that's a motivator." (Johnson Hess, 2020)

Racial justice is a primary concern for Gen Zers. This is fueled by an increase in police brutality and fatal encounters with police. These individuals were motivated to support Black Lives Matter and spur a definitive movement for racial and criminal justice reforms. This may mean that the more Progressive Gen Z may not find allegiance with the Republican Party.

"I think the real question for younger millennials and Gen Z is will the Republican Party ever be able to re-establish itself as a legitimate option?" "Of course, the opportunity is there, but the combination of racial intolerance and sort of backwardness on climate, the way that Trump handled the protests and the rallies this spring and summer, I mean, Trump really was the sort of the antithesis of a lot of Gen Z and younger millennial values." "That being said, [the] group will lean heavily Democratic." (Johnson Hess, 2020)

The 2020 election shows the importance for politicians to reach out to younger voters. But how do you reach out? What do younger voters need?

They need to know that they are seen, heard and valued. Gen Zers have a lot to contribute to our society by growing up in a digital age. They know the value of data and information and rely on thought leaders who speak to their interests. They are insightful and reflective, which speaks to McBeth's article as to whether Gen Zers were coddled or engaged (2022). Intersectionality is not just a theory to them, they believe in it and it speaks to their culturally diverse existence.

Knowing that the Solidarity Generation is committed to an ideal, leaders need to pivot their message to speak to the overemphasis on purpose, connectivity and information. Gen Zers know their beliefs and skills are assets to the Republic. They believe in change and have an ideal that government should work for everyone. Politicians and leaders need to see Gen Zers as assets to the Republic and that any lack of involvement is more attune to lack of inspiration from leaders who do not live up to the Gen Zers' ideals.

3. Conclusion

Generation Z is an inventive, aspirational generation committed to social justice. Everything they do is entrenched in the unified belief that Government is there to work for the people and the people should have a semblance of equity to enjoy the freedoms of the Republic. To inspire Gen Zers to activate and participate in the democratic fabric of society, we need to focus on meaningful messaging that speaks to solidarity in democracy and social justice. Then, you will have affinity with Generation Z.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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