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The Emerging Millennial Majority

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The Emerging Millennial Majority

by

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Abstract

This thesis operates under the framework of two theories: the realignment theory and the generational theory. I focus on a model of realignment developed by Arthur Paulson which determines three criteria that are necessary for a political realignment to occur: 1.) a new governing coalition, which is 2.) lasting and durable with 3.) a new policy agenda. A realignment can be driven by various factors, one of which being through generational replacement. Generational change can lead to a realignment when a new generation of voters emerges with unique political views that are likely to remain over time and cause the power to shift from one party to another.

By using existing sources of survey data, the purpose of this research is to show that 1.) Millennials are a unique generation with distinct experiences and characteristics; and 2.) that the Millennial generation will thus bring about a realignment that meets Paulson's criteria of a "new and persistent governing coalition, yielding a new policy agenda." The results of this study confirm that Millennials are distinctly more Democratic with more progressive policy views as result of generational factors that will persist throughout their lifetime and result in an imminent political realignment.

Keywords: Millennial, Generation, Political, Electoral, Realignment, Democrat

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are specific reasons that explain nearly every major political moment and transformation throughout history. Each candidate, policy, and new coalition emerges to meet a need that the existing policies or party leaders are failing to adequately address. America is facing several turning points in our current society, most of which are a result of economic, social, and demographic changes. Even more importantly, many of these changes are being driven by the emergence of new generations.

During 2019, the Millennial population is projected to become the largest adult population in the country as they reach 73 million people and outnumber the declining Baby Boomer population (Fry 2018). Along with Generation Z (those born after 1996), Millennials will make up thirty-seven percent of the electorate in 2020 (Cilluffo and Fry 2019). These changes represent who votes, who runs for office, who makes the laws, and who has the power of the majority.

While it is inevitable that new generations will continually replace previous generations, not every generation will cause a shift in the balance of political power and result in a realignment. A generational realignment is not simply triggered by a new generation of voters entering the electorate, but by a new generation of voters who are united by a similar worldview or impacted by a common struggle or event, making them distinct from previous generations in some way.

Due to their increasing potential to influence elections and play a role in shaping the nation's political agenda for years to come, this thesis will examine how the Millennial generation's views differ from previous generations and what this could mean for the future of American politics. This thesis operates under the hypothesis that

Millennials are distinctly more Democratic with more progressive policy views as a result of unique generational factors that will persist throughout their lifetime and will cause an immindent political realignment.

Little research has been done analyzing the prospect for a political realignment under the framework of the generational hypothesis, especially in relation to the Millennial generation. Considering the distinctiveness of this generation, I feel that this study is particularly significant.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This thesis operates on both two major theories that will be further examined: the realignment theory and the generational theory. The model of realignment I will be using to test my data derives from Arthur Paulson's *Electoral Realignment and the Outlook for American Democracy.* Paulson states that the three elements of a realignment are: 1.) a new governing coalition, which is 2.) lasting/durable with 3.) a new policy agenda (Paulson 2007).

Because I am interested in the role of Millennials in a future realignment, I will be applying a generational hypothesis to the realignment theory. This generational hypothesis suggests that unique political, economic, or social circumstances can shape an entire generations political views for their entire life (Mannheim 1928; Ryder 1965). The following section will review some of the relevant academic literature regarding both the realignment theory and the generational theory in order to provide a better understanding of how these frameworks might be applicable to the Millennial generation.

Realignment Theory

The concept of political realignment has been of interest to political scientists and scholars for decades, many debating whether or not the realignment theory remains relevant. While different versions of the theory have been formulated, one of the most recent defenses of the realignment theory was established by Arthur Paulson. He addressed many of the common objections to realignment (Paulson 2007). His publication responsed to David Mayhew, one of the most notable critics of the realignment theory (Mayhew 2002).

Paulson dismissed the relevance of many of Mayhew's claims, pointing out that Mayhew's objections were largely based on old criteria that is not necessary to understanding the realignment theory. In addition, Paulson established a a more flexible, updated model of the realignment theory. Paulson's theory of realignment will be the primary framework for this thesis.

V.O. Key Jr. was among the first to formulate the theory of political realignment in his 1955 essay *A Theory of Critical Elections* (Key 1995). According to Key, a critical election results in "a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate" and forms "new and durable electoral groupings" (Key 1955). While this theory implies that realignments take place as a result of a single critical election, Key later expanded his theory in his 1969 publication, *Secular Realignment and the Party System* and established the theory "secular realignment" (Key 1969). Unlike a critical realignment, a secular realignment happens gradually over an extended period of time.

Key acknowledged that "the rise and fall of parties may to some degree be the consequence of trends that perhaps persist over decades and elections may mark only

steps in a more or less continuous creation of new loyalties" (Key 1969). These trends can include an increase in immigration or the replacement of one generation by a new generation (Key 1969). While Key's realignment theory has been widely supported and expanded over the years, it has faced criticism by some who believe that it is no longer relevant or applicable in the modern-day political system.

Among the most prominent critics is David Mayhew, who published *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre* in 2002 (Mayhew 2002). He addressed several of the criteria from different realignment theorists and concluded that the theory is nothing more than "an impediment of understanding." Mayhew argues that it would be more accurate to assert that America's political parties are in an era of dealignment, referring to the increasing number of independent voter identities (Mayhew 2002).

In 2007, Arthur Paulson published his defense of the realignment theory, arguing that Mayhew's criticisms of the theory, as well as all other criticisms "share two faults in their approach to realignment. They attribute to realignment theory observations that are not essential to the theory; and both treatments render the concept of realignment ahistorical (Paulson 2007)." Rather than seeing this as a period of "dealignment," he argues that "American political parties are being revived in new form." He recognizes that "the party systems born in the nineteenth century have decayed, as have their coalitions of electoral support" (Paulson 2007).

A large portion of Mayhew's argument is based on criteria described in early theories of realignment, including the idea that realignments should occur according to a set time period (Mayhew 2002). According to this, he argues against the theory's relevance due to the absence of realigning events that have occurred "on the historical calendar the way

they should." He further states that "politics cannot be about waiting for electoral realignments or anything else" (Mayhew 2002). However, Paulson does not contend that realignments occur according to a certain schedule. He believes that it is a useful analytical tool to aid our understanding of political change (Paulson 2007).

While Mayhew does acknowledge that 1932 "stands out for its durable realigning effects," he argues that there has not been an election or a set of elections since that has produced the same effect (Mayhew 2002). Paulson disagrees with this claim. Not only does Paulson argue that a realignment has occurred since the 1930's, he argued that it was the "most compelling electoral realignment in American history" due to the "disintegration of the solid South and the movement of most of its white voters from the Democrats to the Republicans in Presidential elections" (Paulson 2007).

A fundamental element of Paulson's theory is understanding that "a realignment should be understood contextually, in terms of the system of change it represents" (Paulson 2007). Paulson's model emphasizes that realignments may not always occur in the same way or at the same rate, but it can still be a realignment, nonetheless (Paulson 2007).

Thomas Brunell and Bernard Grofman produced an earlier study that supports the flexibility of Paulson's realignment model (Brunell and Grofman 1998). By using longitudinal comparisons to analyze state level data on state level US Senate delegations from 1788-1996, Brunell and Grofman identified cyclical patterns that indicated realignment during critical election years. While realignment theorists typically study national trends, Brunell and Grofman's experiment revealed realignments that occurred at the regional level (Brunell and Grofman 1998). They suggest that a Democratic

realignment can occur in one region while a Republican realignment can be occurring in another.

Paulson's theory removes some of the previously required criteria and simply states that a realignment will result in a "new and persistent governing coalition, yielding a new policy agenda" (Paulson 2007). While Paulson states that the result of a realignment will be a new governing coalition, a realignment begins with changes in the electoral coalitions (Paulson 2007). He states that "the shift of decisively large minorities" has the power to create a "new and 'normal' majority."

Paulson argues that "emerging electoral coalitions reflects varying combinations of vote switching, voter mobilization, and generational change" (Paulson 2007). These are three prominent causes of realignment among electoral coalitions. Realignment caused by vote switching, which is also referred to as "conversion," occurs when voters who were once affiliated with one party switch or convert to the opposing party (Paulson 2007). Realignment can also occur by mobilizing voters who were previously non-voters or did not have a strong allegiance to a specific party (Paulson 2007).

Generational change, also referred to as generational replacement, can cause a realignment when a new generation of young voters who have views that are distinct from the majority of society enter the electorate (Paulson 2007, Norpoth 1987). This leads to "the overall balance shifting as the new generation grows up and the older cohorts die out" (Norpoth 1987).

Generational Theory

In order for a generational realignment to occur, a new generation of voters must emerge who are distinct form the majority of society; however, however, many doubt that Millennials today are different than young voters from previous generations, suggesting that young voters have consistently preferred Democratic candidates and have a tendency to favor more liberal policies and ideology. Differences between age groups are typically attributed to either life-cycle effects or generational effects.

Life-cycle effects are influences that affect people when they are at a certain stage in their life and occur as a result of their age, while generational effects are unique factors that shape a generation's behavior, views, and ideology. Generations can be influenced by certain demographics, social norms, economic conditions, or political events (PEW Research Center). This thesis provides support for the generational theory and against the life-cycle theory, arguing that Millennial's political views and partisan identification are a result of unique generational factors that will persist throughout their lifetime.

The idea behind the life-cycle theory is that people develop new priorities and preferences, which are typically more conservative as they age and enter different stages of their lives (Streig, and Bourg, & Riley). The life-cycle theory implies that there are universal roles or events that people will experience during their life and that each of these roles shape one's views and beliefs. As an individual reaches adulthood, these events typically include having a family, buying a home, and reaching a point of financial stability (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1998).

In 1962, John Crittenden published *Aging and Party Affiliation* where he confirmed this theory. Using national surveys over the course of twelve years (1946-

1958), Crittenden used a cross-sectional analysis method to conclude that "the aging process has an impact on party affiliation that is independent of any such generational factors" (Crittenden 1962). However, Neal Cutler recognized a crucial misstep in Crittenden's analysis. Rather than analyzing the ideological shifts of any specific age cohort or generation in order to examine whether a certain group of voters became more conservative over time due to aging, Crittenden compared people of the same age but from different generations (Cutler 1969).

According to Cutler, studying generational trends, "can only take place in the context of repeated measurements of the same set of individuals" (Cutler 1969). In order to study this, one must use a cohort analysis method, which was developed in 1959 by William Evan as a way to examine generational differences in behavior or preferences (Evan 1959). Therefore, Cutler used a cohort analysis method to reanalyze the same survey data used in Crittenden's analysis. Cutler's study revealed evidence of a generational effect over time and no evidence of age leading to increasing conservativism (Cutler 1969).

Following Cutler, researchers Norval Glenn and Ted Hefner further disproved Crittenden's life-cycle theory in their own study (Glenn and Hefner 1972). They performed a cohort analysis using Gallup data over the course of twenty-four years (1945-1969) to analyze the development of party identification among age cohorts. They concluded that there was no evidence of aging leading to the development of conservative ideology or alignment with the Republican party (Glenn and Hefner 1972). Recent studies have continued to debunk the life-cycle theory, including a study by Nicholas Danigelis, Melissa Hardy and Stephen Cutler who examined public opinion data

from the United States General Social Survey over a period of 25 years (1972-2004) and also concluded that aging effects had no impact on the development of conservative ideology (Danigelis, Hardy, and Cutler 2007).

While both the life-cycle theory and the generational theory emphasize the importance of age in developing one's political ideology, the generational theory is very different from the life-cycle theory. The concept of age in the generational theory is an important component because it implies that young people are more impressionable and the political views that one develops early in life are likely to last throughout an individual's lifetime (Mannheim 1928). The durability of this theory has been tested many times and studies have continually shown that in most cases, an individual is likely to remain consistent in his or her partisan affiliation and political views with age.

Peter Levine, Constance Flanagan and Les Gallay studied long-term generational trends in order to assess the extent of Millennials progressive identity and estimate the likelihood of it sustaining over time (Levine, Flanagan, and Gallay 2009). Concluding their research, they found that that: "Millennials have a more progressive identity than did previous generations at their age and are likely to move the country leftward on economic and social issues for decades to come" (Levine, Flanagan, and Gallay 2009).

Duane Alwin and Jon Krosnick studied NES panel data over several decades and found that political ideology developed during early adulthood "appears to remain at a constant and high-level throughout the remainder of the life cycle" (Alwin and Krosnick 1991). They also concluded that "party loyalties either increase or persist with age" (Alwin and Krosnick 1991). Gregory Markus provides an explanation for this effect, stating that "the socializing experiences of late adolescence and early adulthood are of

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crucial importance in forming political outlooks because of the heightened sensitivity of cohort members during this formative life stage" (Markus 1983). Political Scientists Andrew Gelman and Yair Ghitza argued one's teenage and early adult years are when most long-term political views are developed (Gelman and Ghitza 2014).

Karl Mannheim made the distinction between members of a generation and members of a generational unit, insinuating that a generational unit is more than a group of people who were born within the same time frame, in the same region, and who exist together, but people who also participate in social movements and experience historical problems that are unique to their generation's formative years (Mannheim 1928).

Mannheim argues that early formative experiences have the potential to shape an entire generation's worldview in a way that could influence their perspective for their entire lifetime (Mannheim 1928). Mannheim believes that being "exposed to social and intellectual symptoms of destabilization" can form a lasting bond among members of a generational unit and lead to the development of enduring characteristics and beliefs that are distinct from other generations (Mannheim 1928).

Norman Ryder draws a similar distinction between cohorts and generations, stating that a cohort is a "group of persons born in the same time interval and aging together," while a generation shares not only cohort membership but also a unique consciousness and a distinct set of preferences and ideas (Ryder 1965). Ryder also emphasizes that an individual's early years are critical for developing lasting beliefs and ideologies. He states that "the potential for change is concentrated in the cohorts of young adults who are old enough to participate directly in the movements impelled by change,

but not old enough to have become committed to an occupation, a residence, a family of procreation, or a way of life" (Ryder 1965).

In this thesis, I will be testing the theory that 1.) Millennials are a distinct generation with distinct experiences and characteristics; and 2.) that the Millennial generation will thus bring about a realignment that meets Paulson's criteria of a "new and persistent governing coalition, yielding a new policy agenda" (Paulson 2007).

Chapter 3: Methodology

I am using existing sources of survey data in order to establish that Millennials are distinct from previous generations and represent: 1.) a new electoral coalition that will 2.) endure over time and 3.) establish a new policy agenda (Paulson 2007).

According to the consensus among the academic literature, a generational realignment is likely to occur when a new generation of young voters enters the electorate with distinct political views and a strong preference for one party over the other. By using survey data to create data points over time, it will be easy to observe the long-term trends of each generation's party identification and support for various policy-related issues. If the survey data reveals that Millennials have a tendency to align with the majority of the electorate, then it is unlikely that their increased participation will cause the balance of power to shift from one party to the other and cause a realignment. However, if it is evident that Millennials display significantly more or less supportive views for a certain party over time, it is likely that this will indicate which direction the balance of political power will shift towards as the they increase their participation in the electoral process and as older generations decline.

The generational trends regarding partisan identification and policy views over time will indicate if Millennials are in fact a distinct generation with views that diverge from the general generational pattern, or if Millennials appear to present views that are consistent with previous generations. If Millennials tend to surge in their affiliation with the Democratic party or in their support for certain issues at a similar rate as other generations, then it is more likely that their views are explained by a national event, significant President, or political movement that impacts all voters equally, regardless of their generation.

Chapter 4: Data

I will be using survey data from the Pew Research Center which has tracked party identification trends from 1992-2017. The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that provides valuable, scientific research regarding American's opinions on various issues over time through public opinion surveys and polling among other means. Because of the vast amount of content provided by Pew Research Center and the nonpartisan intent of the organization, I have chosen to use their data for my research.

As part of their broad field of research, they have tracked each generation's opinions on a variety of policies and political issues over time. The Pew Research Center defines Millennials as anyone born between 1981-1996 (Doherty, Kiley, and O'Hea 2018). Those born between 1928-1945 are part of the Silent Generation; those born between 1946-1964 are part of the Baby Boomer Generation, and those born between 1965-1980 are part of Generation X (Doherty, Kiley, and O'Hea 2018). Those who were born in 1997 or after are part of Generation Z; however, due to the small amount of

information that has been collected from this generation, I will be focusing primarily on Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation.

For my analysis, I will be using the results from three survey questions that have been administered to members of each generation. The three topics that I will be examining are: granting citizenship to immigrants who came to the United States illegally as children; same-sex marriage; and expanding the role and responsibility of the federal government. These are three questions that have been asked consistently over time; therefore, there is data over a number of years recording each generation's response to these specific statements. I also chose these three questions because they represent three very different but widely contested issues.

Chapter 5: Discussion

A Lasting New Coalition

While it is not uncommon to see a contrast between younger voters and older voters, the divide between Millennials and older generations in regard to to party identification and policy issues presents the largest generational gap to exist in American politics (Pew Research Center 2018). This divide became evident following the 2008 Presidential election when party identification among 18-29-year-olds. reached a 19-point-gap, separating those who affiliated with the Democratic party (45%) and those who affiliated with the Republican party (26%). This was a dramatic shift from 2000, when the difference between party identification was almost evenly split. These trends have only continued to strengthen as Millennials have aged and become a larger share of the electorate.

The generational trends in party identification reveal a significant shift in partisan affiliation. In Table 1, which tracks the percentage of registered voters in each generation that have identified as Democrats or leaned Democratic from 1992-2017, it is clear that the three older generations (the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and Generation X) tend to remain closely aligned over time. This is true in both Table 1 which tracks Democratic party affiliation and in Table 2 which shows the percentage in generation that have identified as Republican or lean Republican. While party identification does vary slightly over time among the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and Generation X, the variation remains very small. As reflected in the tables, the three older generations shift either left or right only by small margins and typically do so in the same direction and at the same time.

The contrast is clear, however, when Millennials become part of the picture in 2004, as 53 percent of Millennial voters identified as Democrats or leaned Democratic (Table 3). This resulted in only 38 percent of Millennial voters identifying as Republican or leaning Republican in 2004. Similarly, when the Pew Research Center started tracking these trends in 1992, only 38 percent of Silents affiliated with the Republican party; however, this was the only time that any generation identified with the Republican party at such a low rate (Table 6). Even in this case, the Silent generation increased their Republican/Lean Republican identification to 45 percent by 1994.

Millennials did not have the same change of heart for the Republican party. Indeed, the percentage of Republican/lean Republican Millennials continued to drop to 30 percent in 2008 while their Democratic identification rose in 2008 to 61 percent. This was a popular year for the Democrats among all generations, 51 percent of Generation X,

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50 percent of Baby Boomers, and 48 percent of the Silents identified as Democrat/lean

Democrat (Tables 4-6). The Democratic enthusiasm of 2008, however, should not

discount the significant surge in support reflected by the Millennial generation. These

findings present evidence that Millennials expressed a higher tendency to identify with

the Democratic party from the moment that they entered the electorate and have

continued to exceed other generations in their Democratic affiliation over time (Table 1).

Generational Change

To contribute Millennials partisian affiliation to their youth does not explain the stark

divide between Millennials and the other generations. If party identification was a

product of one's age, then there would be far more significant differences between Gen

Xers, Baby Boomers, and Silents over time. Instead, it appears that when one of the three

older generations increased in support for one party, the other two followed at around the

same time. This indicates that the changes in party identifiation within Gen Xers, Baby

Boomers, and Silents are likely a response to the President's popularity, current events,

and the political climate.

However, it is evident that the generational theory is the best explaination for

Millennial's significant level of support for the Democratic party. If Millennials party

identification could be explained by the life-cycle theory, then Millennials partisan

affiliation should follow a similar pattern to previous generations when they were

younger. This is not the case, however. At this time, Silents were 47-to-64-years-old,

Baby Boomers were 24-to-42-years-old, and eligble Generation X voters were 18-26-

years-old. Therefore, the data reflects Gen Xers partisan affiliation over the course of

their entire political lifetime thus far, as well as most of Baby Boomers. If it were true that party identification is a result of one's age and can be explained by the life-cyle theory, then Millennial's party identification over time should be relatively similar to Gen Xer's and Baby Boomer's party identification over time.

According to the academic literature and numerous studies which confirm the stability of party identification, it seems clear that Millennial's strong support shown very early for the Democratic party is likely to persist throughout their lifetime. Equally as significant as Millennials distinctly Democratic identification and progressive policy views is that the generation appears to be united in these respects. Older generations have had a tendency to show vast intergenerational differences (Milbank 2016). Baby Boomers, for example, have typically been split between those born before 1954 who leaned more Democratic and those born after 1954 who have been more likely to lean Republican (Milbank 2016). While the Baby Boomers might have been equal in their share of the electorate when they were the age of Millennials, they only made half the impact. Because it appears that the majority of Millennials are unified in their partisan identification and policy views, their ability to form a lasting majority coalition is that much stronger.

New Priorities

One problem with the life-cycle theory is that it insinuates that most people will fulfill traditional roles, experience certain life events, and follow a generic timeline throughout their lifetime. This typically includes getting married and having children, buying a home and starting a career, and reaching a point of economic stability. However, research

shows that most Millennials are straying away from the traditional timeline that might be expected of them.

In 2015, only 8 percent of 18-to-24-year-old Millennials and 44 percent of 24-to-34-year-old Millennials were married; however, 29 percent of 18-to-24-year-old Baby Boomers and 68 percent of 24-to-34-year-old Baby Boomers were married in 1980. While most Silent men and women were married by ages 21-to-23, the average age for Millennials to marry in 2018 was 28-to-30. This has likely led to Millennials starting families later in life. In 2016, 48 percent of 20-to-35-year-old Millennials were mothers, compared to 58 percent of Gen Xers in 2000 and 58 percent of Baby Boomers in 1984.

One explanation for this is the increasing importance of higher education. As the most highly educated generation, Millennials are delaying marriage and children and going to school at much higher rates and for much longer periods of time than previous generations. As of 2018, 38 percent of Millennials between the age of 25-to-37 received at least a Bachelor's degree compared to only 15 percent of Silents in 1968; 25 percent of Baby Boomers in 1989; and 29 percent of Gen Xers in 2000 (Bialik and Fry 2019). Even more prominent within the generational contrast is the gender contrast. Millennial women in 2018 were nearly four times more likely to have obtained a college education compared to women in the Silent Generation at the same age (Bialik and Fry 2019).

According to projections, white people with college degrees are expected to make up 23 percent of the electorate in 2020, a small increase from 22 percent in 2016 (Cilluffo and Fry 2019). In a slightly more significant shift, white people without college degrees are expected to drop from 46 percent of the electorate in 2016 to 44 percent of the

electorate in 2020 (Cilluffo and Fry 2019). These are small percentage points, but these changes represent long-term trends that benefit Democratic party.

Over the past twenty years (from 1997-2017), the percentage of college educated people and minorities has increased in the United States while the percentage of white people without college degrees has decreased. During the same time period, the Republican candidate has lost the popular vote in four out of five elections (Bacon, Jr. and Mehta 2018). In other words, if current trends continue, it is likely that as older, white, non-educated voters decrease, so will Republican support.

The cost of being the most highly educated generation, however, is not cheap. From 1998 when Gen Xers were 20-to-35-years-old, until 2016 when Millennials were the same age, student debt in America doubled (Bialik and Fry 2019). As of 2018, the Federal Reserve reported that people under 35 were responsible for nearly half of the $1.5 trillion in outstanding student loans (Thompson and Merchant 2018). Even as they are paying more for their education, college-educated Millennials today make less than members of previous generations with a college degree at the same age.

New Challenges

Many of the unique economic challenges that Millennials face today are a result of the Great Recession. Though it began in 2007 and ended in 2009, it was not until 2011 that the economy reached pre-recession figures. Millennials continue to face the repercussions more so than any other generation. The employment rate among students fell from 47.6 percent in 2007 to 40.7 percent in 2011. Meanwhile, the employment rate

hit those not enrolled in school even harder, dropping from 73.2 percent to 65 percent (Taylor, et al., 2015).

The economy's slow recovery has resulted in Millennials facing higher rates of poverty and lower rates of employment than experienced by Generation X, Baby Boomers, or the Silent generation at the same age (Bialik and Fry 2019). The percentage of 18-to-24-year-old's in poverty increased from 12 percent in 1980 to 20 percent in 2015; and the percentage of 24-to-34 year old's in poverty increased from 9 percent in 1980 to 15 percent in 2015 (Shambaugh, Lauer, and Breitwieser 2017).

These conditions have resulted in a clear difference in economic status and security between young adults today and young adults in previous generations. Millennials in 2016 who were between the age of 20-to-25 had accumulated significantly less wealth than Baby Boomers when they were the same age. The median net worth of Millennial households was around $12,500 in 2016, compared to $20,700 when Baby Boomers were the same age in 1983 (Bialik and Fry 2019). It is no surprise that this has led to a decrease in the percentage of young homeowners. In 1980, 55 percent of those between the age of 25-to-34 were homeowners, compared to only 39 percent in 2015 (Bialik and Fry 2019).

New Demographics

One of the defining aspects of the Millennial generation is their diversity. Only 55 percent of Millennials are white; 21 percent are Hispanic; 13 percent are African American; and 7 percent are Asian (Bialik and Fry 2019). This is a large contrast from the demographics of older generations when they were the same age. In 1980, 78 percent of Baby Boomers were white; as well as 73 percent of Gen Xers in 2000 (Bialik and Fry

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2019). Almost 1 in 7 Millennial marriages are biracial; compared 1 in 20 Baby Boomer marriages when they were the same age (Bialik and Fry 2019). Millennials are the most diverse generation yet, followed by Generation Z who will be even more diverse.

The diversity that Millennials and Generation Z will bring to the electorate is likely to have a significant impact on who is elected. The majority of the electorate has always been composed of white voters; however, that share of the electorate is consistently is declining. The share of the white voters in the electorate dropped from 77 percent in 2004 to 74 percent in 2008. It reduced further from 72 percent in 2012 to 70 percent in 2016 (Adams 2019).

According to voting trends expert Bruce Gyory's "Double 75" rule: "outside the Deep South, whenever the white vote in a state or nationally shrinks to 75 percent or less of the total vote, and the Democrats can carry 75 percent or more of the aggregate minority vote, the Republicans have no margin for error" (Gyory 2016). Both the 2012 and 2016 election confirmed his theory. When Barack Obama defeated Mitt Romney relatively comfortably in 2012 (51% to 47%), white voters were 72 percent of the electorate, while Obama won 79 percent of the minority vote (Phillips 2016). In 2016 when white voters were 70 percent of the electorate, Hillary Clinton received only 73 percent of the minority vote (Zingher 2018).

Recent election results and demographic data provide further support that a more diverse electorate will benefit the Democratic party. In the 2018 elections, 92 percent of African-American voters under thirty supported Democratic candidates; as well as 80 percent of young Latino voters (CIRCLE 2018). White voters under thirty also supported Democrats over Republicans (57% to 42%), though at a smaller margin (CIRCLE 2018).

Chapter 5: The Millennial Policy Agenda

As Paulson states: "the new governing coalition seats new directions in public policy and redefines the salient issues of American politics for an extended period of time" (Paulson 2007). It is clear that a Millennial majority will mean the advancement of a progressive policy agenda. From the survey data, it appears that the overall electorate has grown increasingly more supportive of the issues reflected in Tables 7-9; however, Millennials have consistently shown a higher degree of support than other generations. While the degree of support within the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and Generation X fluctuates over time, the difference between the three remains small. The gap that exists between the Millennial generation and the three older generations, however, provides compelling evidence for an impending realignment.

A More Active Government

Millennials have historically been far more likely to see the need for government assistance. Table 7 reflects Millennial's consistent support for the idea that "the government should have a bigger role in providing services and regulations." Even in 2007, 68 percent of Millennials agreed with this statement (Pew Research Center 2018). The majority of Millennials (56%) and Gen Xers (53%) agreed in 2017 that "the government should do more to help the needy, even in the case that it means going further into debt." While 48 percent of Baby Boomers agreed, 45 percent still insisted that the government could not do anymore to help the needy (Pew Research Center 2018).

Millennials have also held a consistent view regarding the government's responsibility to ensure healthcare for all; as 61 percent of 18-to-29-year-old Millennials were in favor of a government-provided health care plan in 2008 while 56 percent of 18-to-29-year-old's in Generation X were opposed to this in 1978 (Pew Research Center 2018). More recently in 2017, 67 percent of Millennials believed that it was the government's responsibility to ensure healthcare for all (Pew Research Center 2018). Support for government-provided healthcare has not always been a "young" person issue. In the 1970s, the age group that showed the most support for a government-provided healthcare plan were those 60 and older.

Because the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and some of the older members of Generation X grew up in a world where you could "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" and be successful, it is easy to see how this shaped their fiscally conservative views regarding individual financial responsibility. But the economic conditions facing Millennials are very different than what older generations experienced. The concept of the American Dream is much more of a fantasy today than it once was. This is a generation that has come of age in an economy where it is far more difficult to make ends meet, which has likely influenced Millennials views on policy in a way that will last throughout their lifetime.

The Pew Research Center has shown that people who were eighteen during the New Deal Era, making them part of the Greatest Generation, were consistently more supportive of the Democratic party and of economically liberal policies than other generations throughout their lifetime. In 1994 when they were the oldest age cohort (ages 67-to-81), they were the most likely to identify with the Democratic party (Pew Research

Center 2015). This further debunks the life-cycle theory, proving that Democratic affiliation is not a result of one's youth, but likely a result of the experiences that shape one's generation.

Coming of age during the Great Depression, the Greatest Generation experienced dire economic conditions first hand. These tough times were followed by a series of New Deal legislation implemented by a Democratic President and Congress that paved the way for economic recovery. These relief programs were not looked down upon as "handouts" for people who simply did not want to work, they were crucial in order for the majority of Americans to survive. While the economy did recover over time, many of the programs that were introduced during the New Deal Era remain in place today and continue to be a part of the Democratic party's policy agenda.

The Greatest Generation remained supportive of the Democratic party and of these programs throughout their lifetime, likely because they had a personal experience which made them understand the need for federal assistance. Their dependence on relief programs was not by any fault of their own. It is clear that these early life experiences had a lasting effect on the Greatest Generation's policy views and their political affiliation, and could likely have a similar effect on the Millennial generation, as well.

A More Inclusive Nation

While each generation has shown more favorable views regarding same-sex marriage over time, Table 8 shows that Millennials have consistently been the most supportive. Even in 2007, 53 percent of Millennials supported same-sex marriage while 42 percent of Gen Xers, 34 percent of Baby Boomers, and 24 percent of Silents shared this view (Pew

Research Center 2018). In 2017, still less than half of the Silent Generation supported same-sex marriage (Table 8). The majority of each of the other generations do show more supportive views, however. In 2017, 56 percent of Baby Boomers and 65 percent of Gen Xers were supportive. Millennials continued to show the largest percentage of support at 73 percent (Pew Research Center 2018).

Similarly, Millennials are the only generation that has continually shown positive views in regards to immigration. Table 9 reflects each generations support for "granting permanent legal status to immigrants who came illegally to the U.S. when they were children." In 2017, the majority of each generation showed support, while Millennials remained the most supportive with 82% in favor (Pew Research Center 2018). Further, another survey revealed that 72 percent of Millennials and 60 percent of Generation X were opposed to "substantially expanding the wall along the U.S. border with Mexico;" reflecting a far more negative view than the 49 percent of Baby Boomers and 47 percent of those in the Silent Generation who were opposed to the border wall (Pew Research Center 2018).

In 2017, however, 79% of Millennials, 66% of Generation X, and 56% of Baby Boomers agreed that "immigrants today strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents" (Pew Research Center 2018). Less than half (47%) of the Silent Generation held this view, however. There has been considerable progress since 1994, first year that this question was asked (Pew Research Center 2018). Only 29 percent of the Silent Generation, 31 percent of Baby Boomers, and 36 percent of Generation X believed that immigrants strengthened the country (Pew Research Center 2018).

While millennials have grown up in a largely diverse nation, America's racial and ethnic composition largely began transforming once the Silent generation and Baby Boomers reached their adult years. Many members of the older generations have had to adjust to the changing demographics of our country, prompting feelings of fear, resentment, or discomfort. Millennials, on the other hand, have come of age in a country that is far more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations and is growing increasingly more diverse.

In many ways, the older generations' disapproval of or inability to accept certain people, ideas, or policies that are popular among the Millennial generation can be understood their resistance to anything that is unconventional or unfamiliar. In 2015, the Public Religion Research Institute asked: "Since the 1950s, do you think American culture and way of life has mostly changed for the better or, or has it mostly changed for the worst?" The results of this question revealed a stark generational divide, as 55 percent of those between the age of 18-34 said "for the better;" opposed to 56 percent of those between the age of 35-54 and 56 percent of those 55 years and older who said "for the worst" (PRRI 2015).

Many of the priorities of conservatives today consist of limiting government as much as possible, advocating for individual financial responsibility, promoting traditional family values, and protecting the rights and the norms that were established long ago and that they believe make this country "great." However, the "great" country that they long for is a version of America that very specifically did not welcome many of the people, the communities, and the ideas that embody the Millennial generation.

Chapter 6: The Case for a Millennial Realignment:

The New Deal Majority

One of the most notable and agreed upon eras of realignment led to the New Deal Majority (Reagan 1996). Key argues that the realignment began during the 1928 Presidential election when Republican Herbert Hoover defeated Democrat Alfred Smith (Key 1955). Paulson agrees, referring to this as a "converting election." Because Alfred Smith's platform was able to resonate with Catholic, working-class, and urban voters, Paulson argues that the 1928 Presidential election resulted in "an altered electoral coalition" (Paulson 2007).

The increase in Democratic support surged even more in 1932 which was an indisputable victory for the Democrats (Reagan 1996). Franklin Roosevelt defeated incumbent Herbert Hoover in the Presidential election while the Democrats won 103 seats in the House of Representatives and 12 seats in the Senate (Reagan 1996). While many aspects contributed to this realignment, one factor that made it possible for the Democrats to maintain power for such a long period of time was their ability to appeal to a broader group of voters and expand their coalition. During a time of economic crisis and instability, Roosevelt appealed to the needs of the people that the Republican party had failed to acknowledge. These people included the working class, immigrants, and some racial minorities (Reagan 1996).

Each of these groups were united by Roosevelt's platform emphasizing economic recovery and his willingness to take federal action in order to help those who were most affected by the Great Depression. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation established programs and policies that still impact us to this day, such as the Social Security Act and the Fair

Labor Standards Act (Reagan 1996). The Democrats maintained their majority in both

chambers for fourteen years following this election and continued to win Presidential

elections for five consecutive terms (Reagan 1996). The fifth Presidential victory

occurred in 1948 during the election of Harry Truman (Reagan 1996).

The Reagan Revolution

Though Democrats lost control of the White house in 1952 with the election of

Dwight Eisenhower, they maintained their control in both the House and Senate and

quickly regained the Presidency when John F. Kennedy was elected in 1960 (Paulson

2007). While these might have been taken as signs that the Democratic majority was

secure, it soon faced conservative backlash. Paulson argues that the 1964 Presidential

election represented the disintegration of the New Deal Era (Paulson 2007).

Despite Lyndon Johnsons' landslide victory against Barry Goldwater, Paulson

claims that the groundwork was being laid during this election for a conservative

majority that would fully emerge in the 1980s and would last for several years (Paulson

2007). While Goldwater lost the election, he played a huge part in laying that

groundwork and in bringing the conservative majority to fruition.

In 1960, Barry Goldwater published "The Conscience of a Conservative," which

established the philosophy for the modern Republican party (Castle 1990). He stated:

"Politics is the art of achieving the maximum amount of freedom for individuals that is

consistent with the maintenance of social order" (Castle 1990). He addressed the

criticism that conservative ideas were 'outdated' by arguing that, "to suggest that the

Conservative philosophy is out of date is to say that the Golden Rule or the Ten

Commandments or Aristotle's Politics are out of date" (Castle 1990). He followed by stating: "The laws of God, and of nature, have no dateline" (Castle 1990). Goldwater not only foreshowed the mainstream Republican platform, but provided the philosophy that is used to justify it.

According to Paulson, the most important realigning effect of this era was the transformation of the parties' electoral coalitions which occurred as black voters shifted away from the Republican party and white Southerners distanced themselves from the Democratic party (Paulson 2007). Peniel Joseph, a historian at Tufts University, claims that Barry Goldwater was the force that drove the black community towards the Democratic party (Bates 2014). When he ran against Johnson in 1964, he received only 6 percent of the black vote (Bates 2014).

For comparison, Richard Nixon received 32 percent of the black vote in 1960 when he unsuccessfully challenged John F. Kennedy and Dwight Eisenhower received 39 percent of the black vote when he was elected in 1956 (Bates 2014). Goldwater's "Southern Strategy," which aimed specifically at appealing to white Southerners, became the blueprint for Republican Presidential candidates (Bates 2014). It would soon lead Richard Nixon to victory against Hubert Humphrey in what was one of the closest Presidential elections in U.S. history in 1968 (Bates 2014).

In the Presidential election of 1972, Richard Nixon faced a much easier challenge when he was re-elected 60.7 percent to 37.5 percent against Democratic cantante George McGovern (Hughes 2018). Despite McGovern's loss, Judis and Teixeira argue that this election "foreshadowed a new Democratic majority in the twenty-first century" (Judis and Teixeira 2004). McGovern's coalition of supporters consisted mainly of women,

highly-skilled professionals, racial minorities, and young people. Further, they argue that the "Conservative Republican Majority" began to disintegrate in 1992 and that a new majority would begin to emerge "through birth, immigration, and economic change" (Judis and Teixeira 2002). They projected that a new Democratic coalition would fully come to fruition between during the first decade of the twenty-first century (Judis and Teixeira 2002). However, many began to doubt the future of an emerging Democratic majority after the 2016 Presidential election.

However, just as African Americans did not leave the Republican party without cause and the South did not become a Republican stronghold for no reason, Donald Trump's election was no coincidence. His candidacy met a certain need for a specific group of the electorate, which was largely older, non-college educated, white voters. Those who grew accustomed to traditional norms and policies found comfort in a message that incited nostalgia and provided hope for making America what it once was. Boston College Historian Heather Cox Richardson argues that Trump "used the dog-whistle language that movement conservatives have used to hang on to power since Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy" in the 1960s" and that he was "playing to a population that movement conservatives have been grooming for a generation, but he himself is not a movement conservative."

Goldwater's campaign was influential in the development of the "Southern Strategy" which led to formation of the modern conservative coalition. From Nixon, to Reagan, to Donald Trump, Republican Presidential candidates have continuously utilized this approach to appeal to a specific group of supporters. Even in cases when the Republican candidate did not win the election or win the popular vote, the faithful base of

older, white voters was reliable, both in the South and elsewhere. The problem facing the Republican party is not that this strategy is failing to mobilize their target group of voters, but that they are appealing to a consistently declining share of the electorate. Meanwhile, the voters that the Republican party have consistently disregarded are increasingly becoming the majority.

The Emerging Millennial Coalition

Both of the eras of realignment discussed fulfill the requirements of Paulson's criteria, representing 1.) a new governing or electoral coalition that is 2.) durable and lasting; and that has a 3.) new policy agenda. Further, from viewing the concept of realignment though a historical framework, it provides a better way of understanding the changes taking place in the current political era. While there were various causes that led to the New Deal Majority and the Reagan Revolution, it does not appear evident to me that generational replacement was among the leading factors. However, I would argue that based on the contrast Millennial's political views and the views of previous generations, Millennials will be a driving force in realigning the system. I would even argue that generational realignment could have a stronger potential to shift the balance of power from one party to another due to the large number of new voters entering the electorate through generational change.

Though I am unsure of when a new Democratic majority will come to fruition, evidence of a Millennial realignment is already underway. While the vast majority of this thesis has focused on their role in shaping a new electoral coalition, the Millennial generation's role in shaping the next governing coalition is already evident. Before the

2018 midterm elections, the average member of the United States House of Representatives was 57 years old; while the average United States Senator was 61 (Pew Research Center 2018). The Millennial generation has nearly doubled their representation in Congress, from only 14 members to 30 members.

There are few people who represent this change in generational leadership as well as Mayor Pete Buttiegieg of South Bend Indiana who could be the first Millennial President of the United States in 2020. His candidacy itself is a testament to the desire that this nation needs for new leadership. For far too long, issues that are impacting young people today have been placed on the backburner by politicians who will not be around to face their repercussions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

By using Paulson's criteria, I have demonstrated that 1.) Millennials are an enduring electoral coalition with a 2.) new policy agenda, thus providing evidence to support an impending realignment. Facing a distinct set of economic conditions and growing up in an increasingly diverse society has inevitably played a role in Millennial's political views. The widening generational gap regarding policy preferences is likely to influence policy on the national scale for years to come as Millennials take a larger role and begin to shape the policy agenda. While it is not clear exactly how soon Millennial and Generation Z voters will outnumber older voters at the polls and have the power to control the outcome of elections, it is evident that it is in the future.

Because race is such an essential component for understanding the changes taking place in America and understanding Millennials, I would suggest for future research to

examine the political views and characteristics within the Millennial generation, particularly comparing Millennials of different races. Limited by time and due to the more broad scope of my research question, this thesis focused very little on the intergenerational differences that might occur between Millennials.

While I do not suggest that the Republican party will inevitably become extinct as a result of generational replacement, the data presented in this thesis does make it seem likely that the party's current coalition will be outnumbered sooner rather than later. America is changing, and in order to appeal to the country's new constituency, candidates and parties may have to alter their strategies and platforms. With that being said, it is the responsibility of the Republican Party and its leadership to evolve and meet the needs of the transforming electorate.

Table 1

% IN EACH GENERATION WHO ARE/LEAN DEMOCRAT

Silent — Boomer — Gen X — Millennial
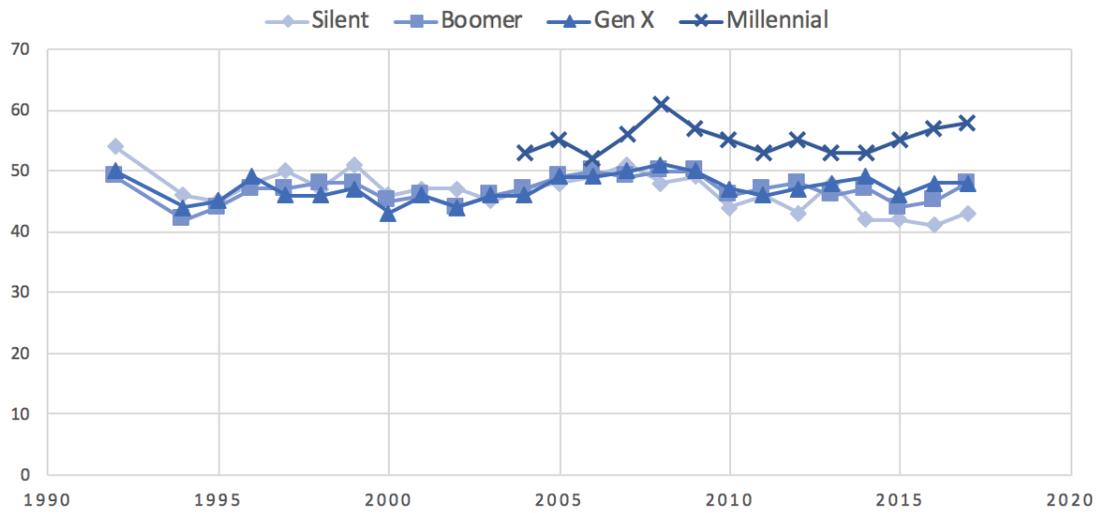
Table 2

% IN EACH GENERATION WHO ARE/LEAN REPUBLICAN

Silent — Boomer — Gen X — Millennial
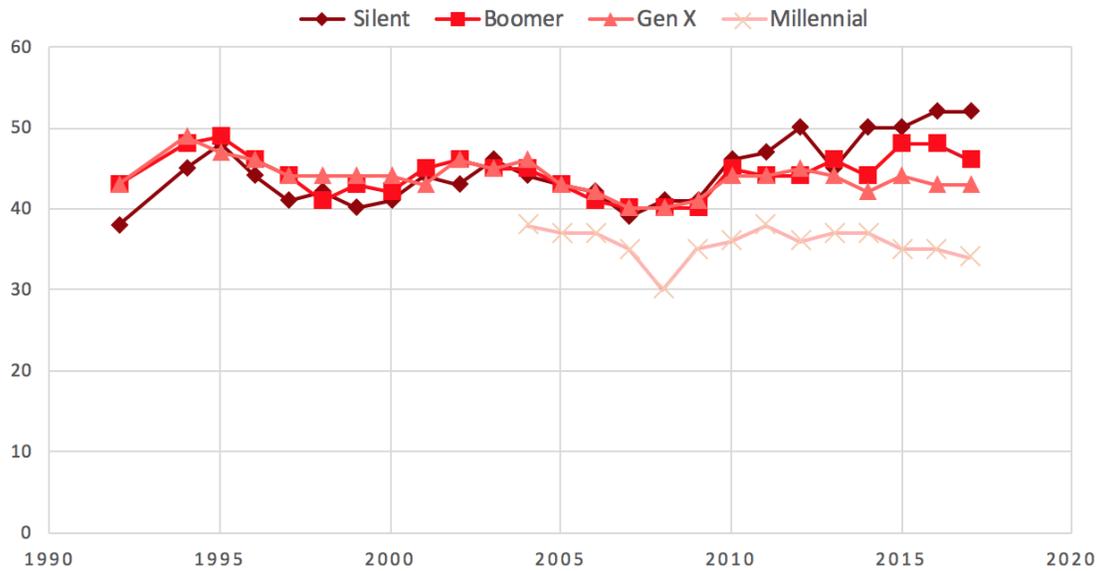

33

Table 3

% OF MILLENNIALS WHO ARE/LEAN...
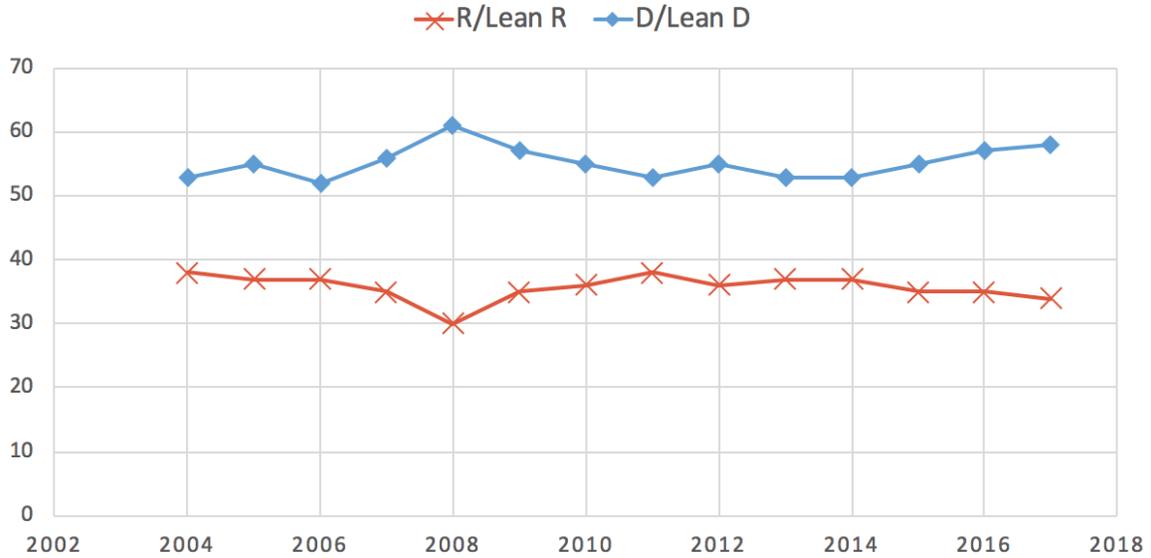

Table 4

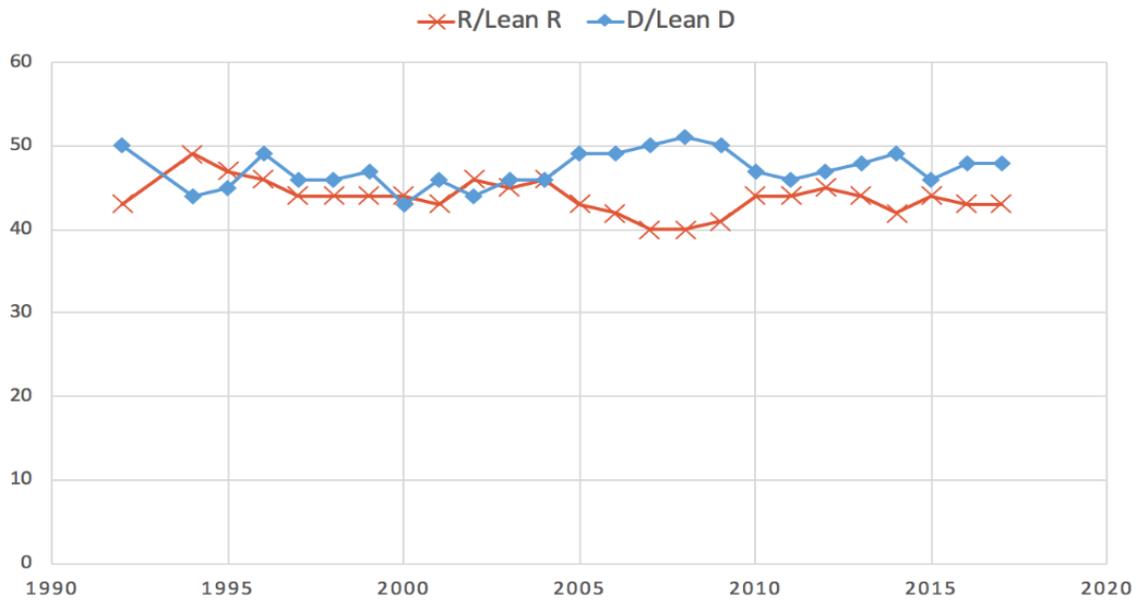## % OF GENERATION X WHO ARE/LEAN...
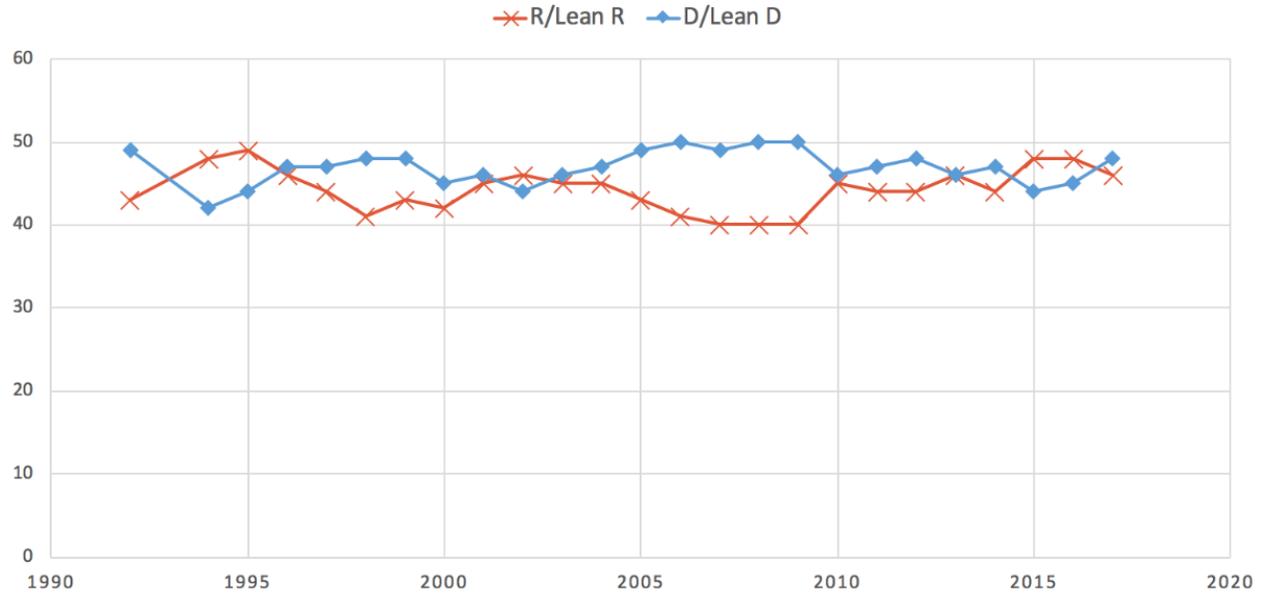
Table 5

% OF BABY BOOMERS WHO ARE/LEAN...
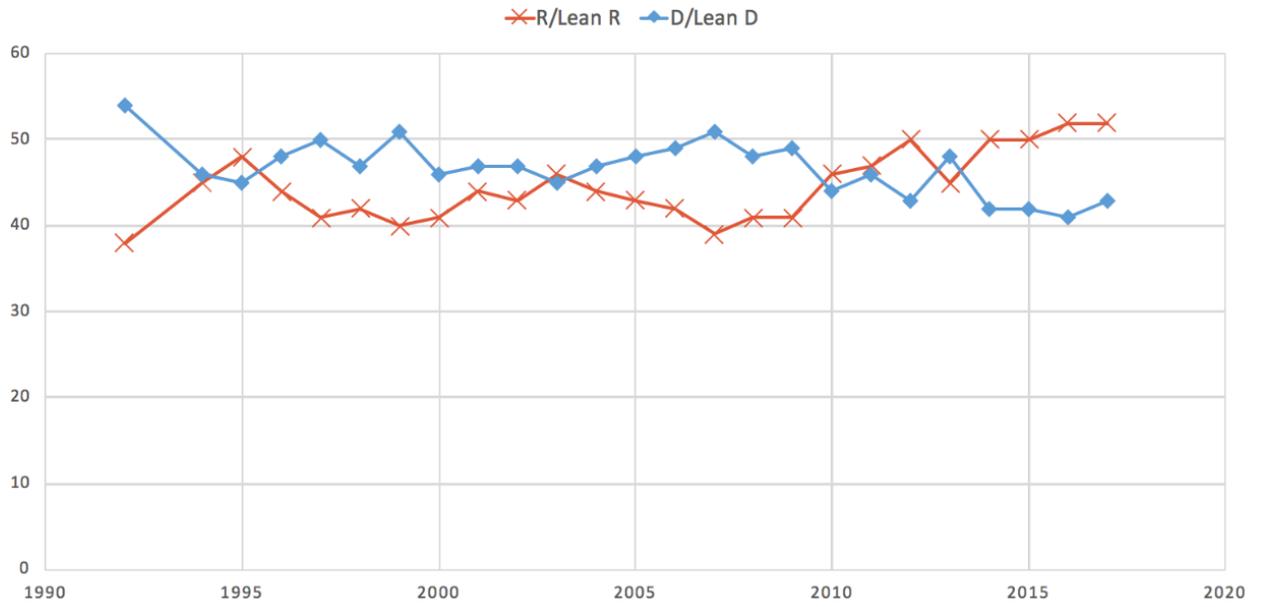
Table 6

% OF SILENT GENERATION WHO ARE/LEAN...

35

Table 7

% WHO BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE A BIGGER ROLE IN PROVIDING SERVICES AND REGULATIONS
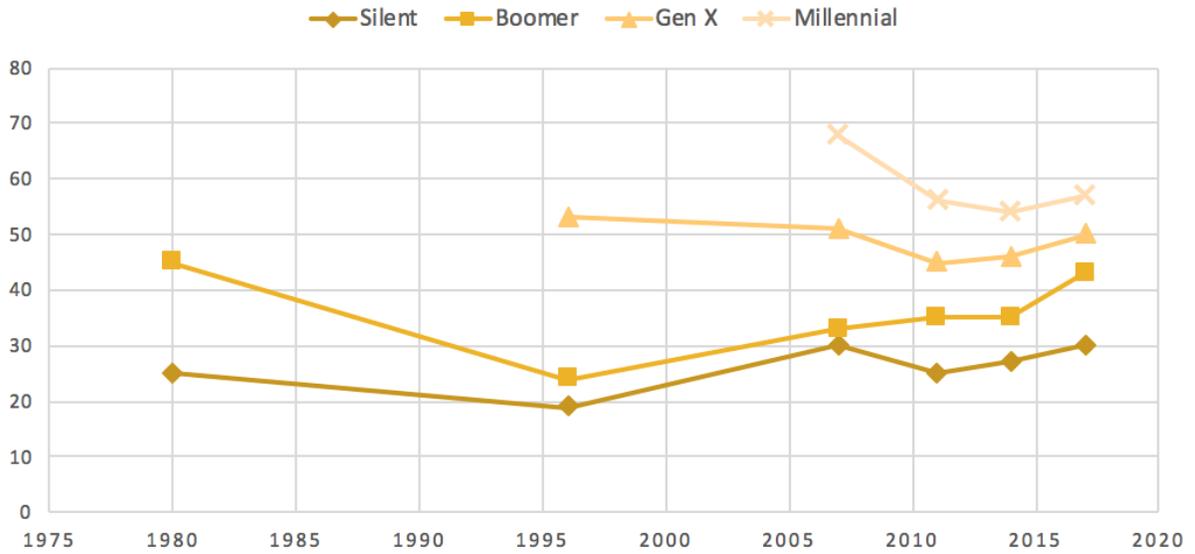

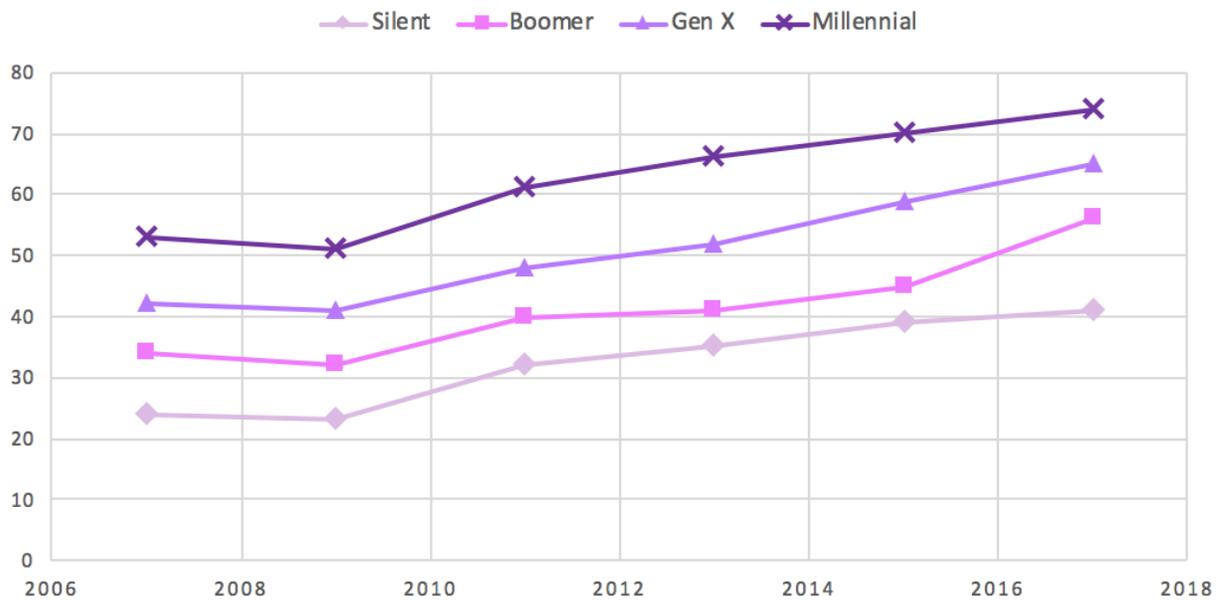
Table 8
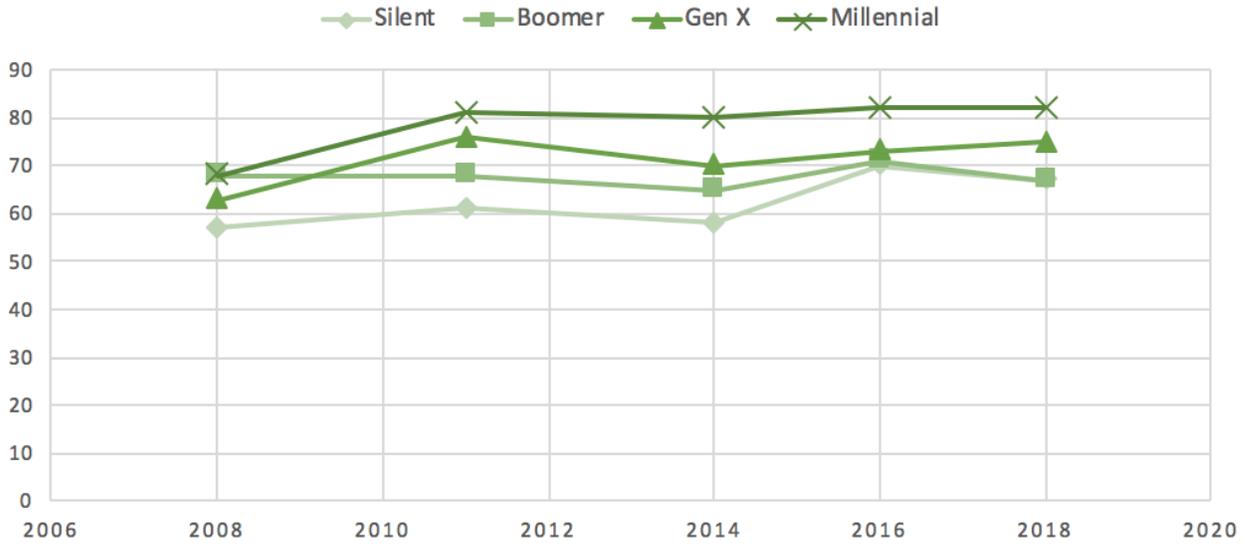
% WHO SUPPORT SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Table 9

% IN FAVOR OF GRANTING PERMANENT LEGAL STATUS TO IMMIGRANTS WHO CAME ILLEGALLY TO THE U.S. WHEN THEY WERE CHILDREN

◆ Silent   ■ Boomer   ▲ Gen X   ✕ Millennial

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