

# How young voters shaped 2020 General Elections



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Isabella Farinelli Eichhorn e Janina Onuki



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**Abstract:** Core political values change between generations, considering the ways groups of people experience economic, social, and political events. This paper will draw the voting tendencies of younger generations in order to understand shifts in the U.S political pendulum as younger people outvote elderlies at the ballots.

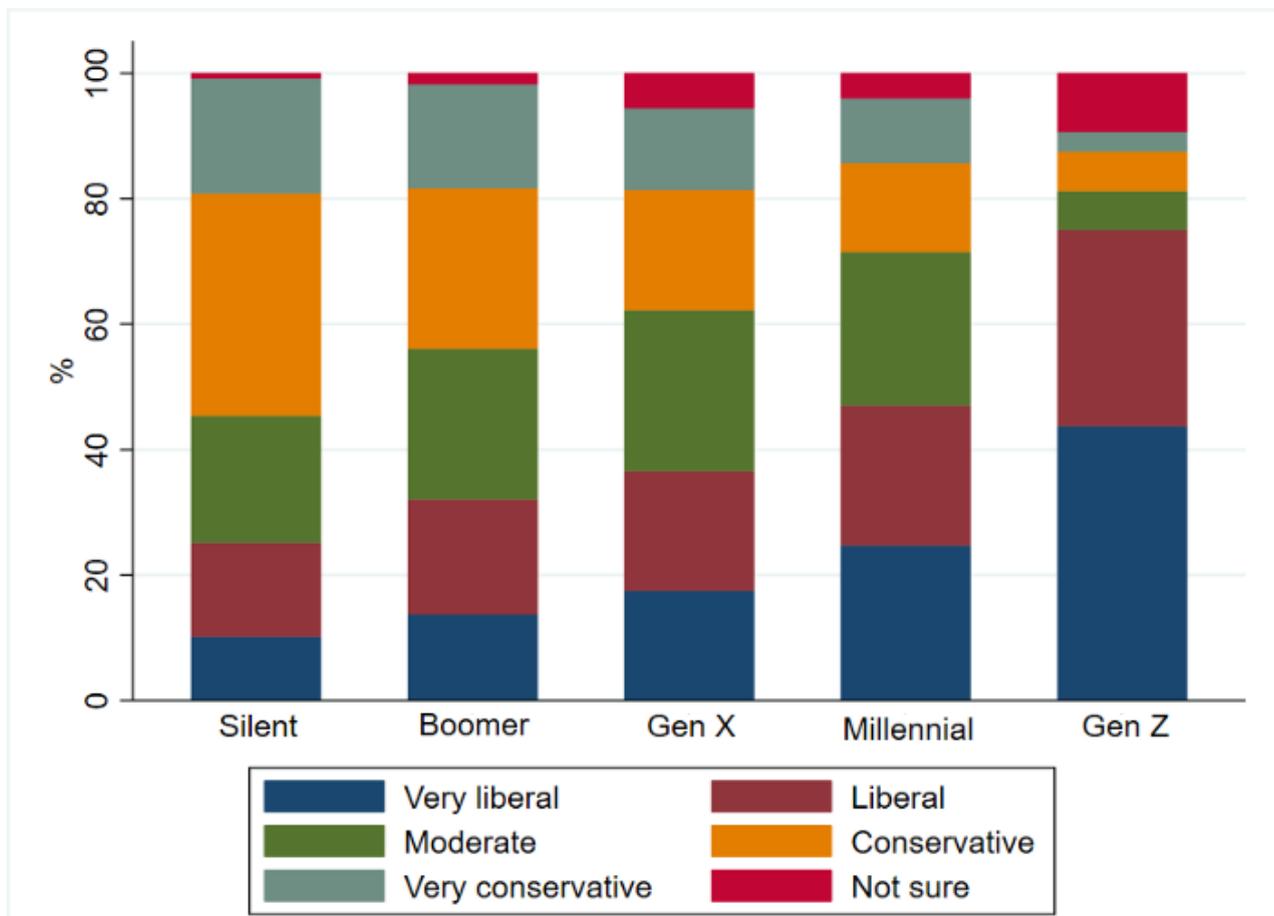
Today in America there are six generations: The Greatest Generation (individuals born before 1928), The Silent Generation (individuals born between 1928–1945), The Baby Boom Generation (individuals born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (individuals

born between 1965 and 1980), The Millennial Generation (individuals born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (individuals born after 1997) (PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2019). Each of these groups has different understandings of civic culture and political participation, as according to Almond and Verba (1963), the age in which people experiment political, social, and economic events is a determinant factor for shaping their political preferences, which impacts directly on the nation's civic culture.

This paper will analyze different generations' political preferences by drawing tendencies according to the *What the hell happened?* survey, a project by Data for Progress, in order to understand how youth turnout shaped U.S. General Elections in 2020 by investigating their political preferences and their connection to the different government projects pushed forward by President Donald Trump and President-elect Joseph Biden.

### 1.1. Political ideology and party identification

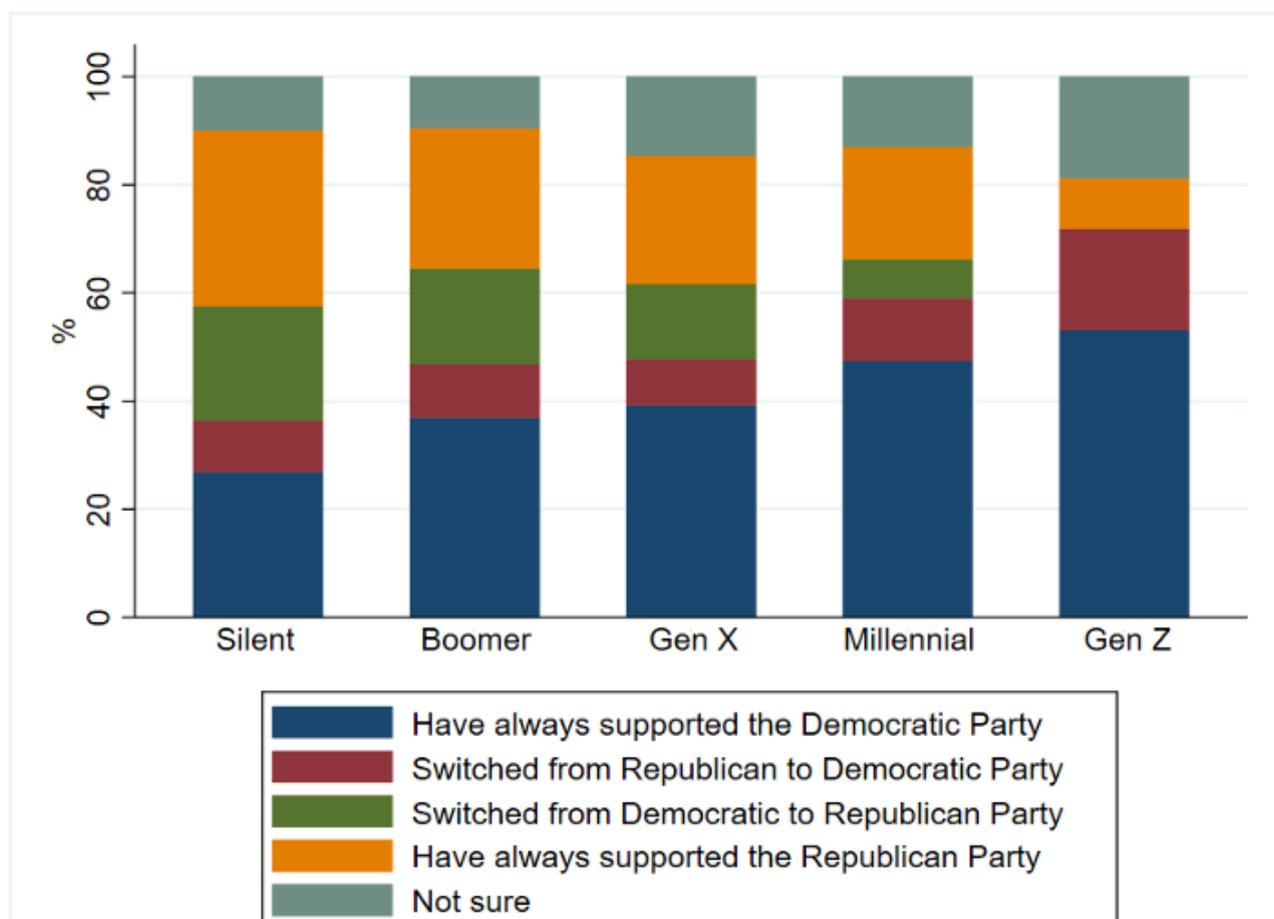
When asked “In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?”, over 70% of the respondents of Generation Z said they were either liberal or very liberal, in opposition to only over 10% of respondents of Silent, Boomer, and X Generations.



Graph 1 — In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint

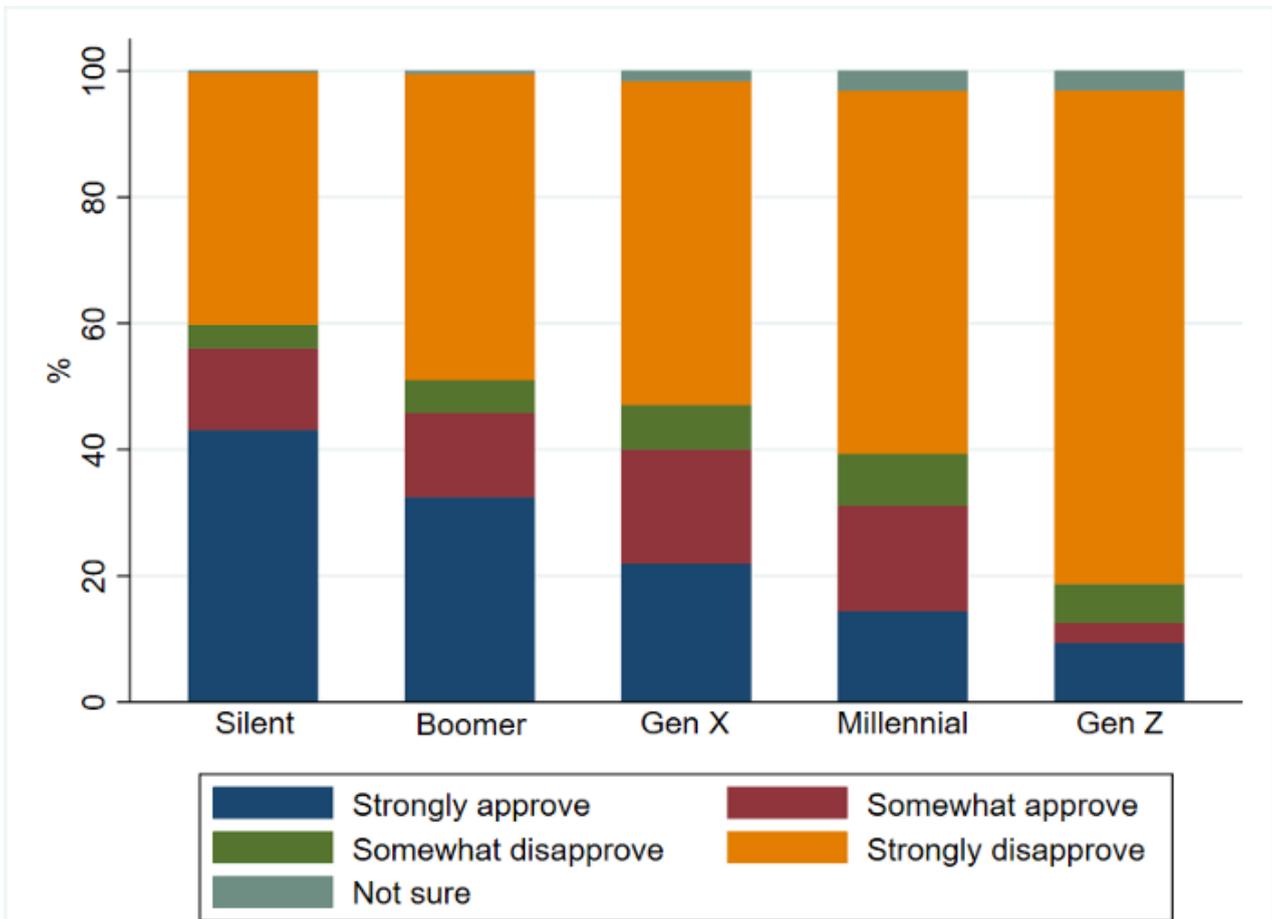
The graph allows the understanding of Generation Z as the most liberal, as older generations are progressively more conservative and moderate levels present stability over the different cohorts. It is important to shed light on Millennials, as they are often linked to the concept of “Millennial socialism” and politicians such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and yet less than half of the generation describes itself as liberal. In the editorial “Resurgent left: Millennial socialism” by The Economist (2019), several political preferences of this generation are underlined, but mainly this reborn left, or so-called new socialism, is no longer accepting of market and political practices that deepen inequality, perpetrate race, sexuality and gender prejudice, harm the environment and favor elites.

When analyzing shifts in party support overtime, The Silent Generation and Baby Boomers have the highest conversion percentage from Democratic to Republican, as well as the highest support for the Republicans. The two youngest generations are most staunch of the Democratic Party. Again, it is possible to notice how the older generations are progressively more linked to conservatism than younger people.



Graph 2 — Which of the following best describes you?

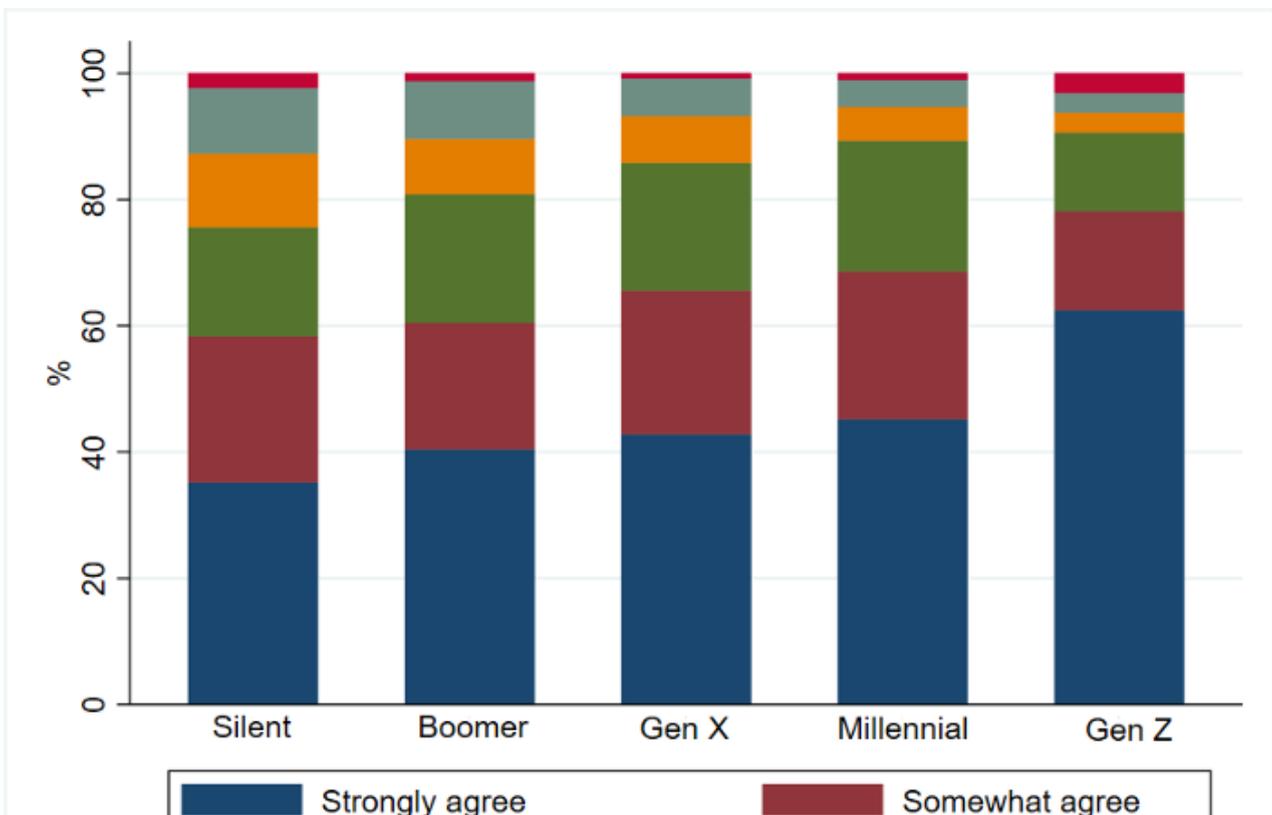
Lastly, by approaching each generation’s support of President Donald Trump, it is clear how young generations, especially Generation Z, tend to disapprove the current national government, which could contribute to the votes against Trump in the 2020 elections.



Graph 3 — Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President?

### 1.2. Views on key social and political issues

This section will explore the preferences of the generations concerning racial and gender discrimination, immigration and public healthcare (Obamacare and Medicare).

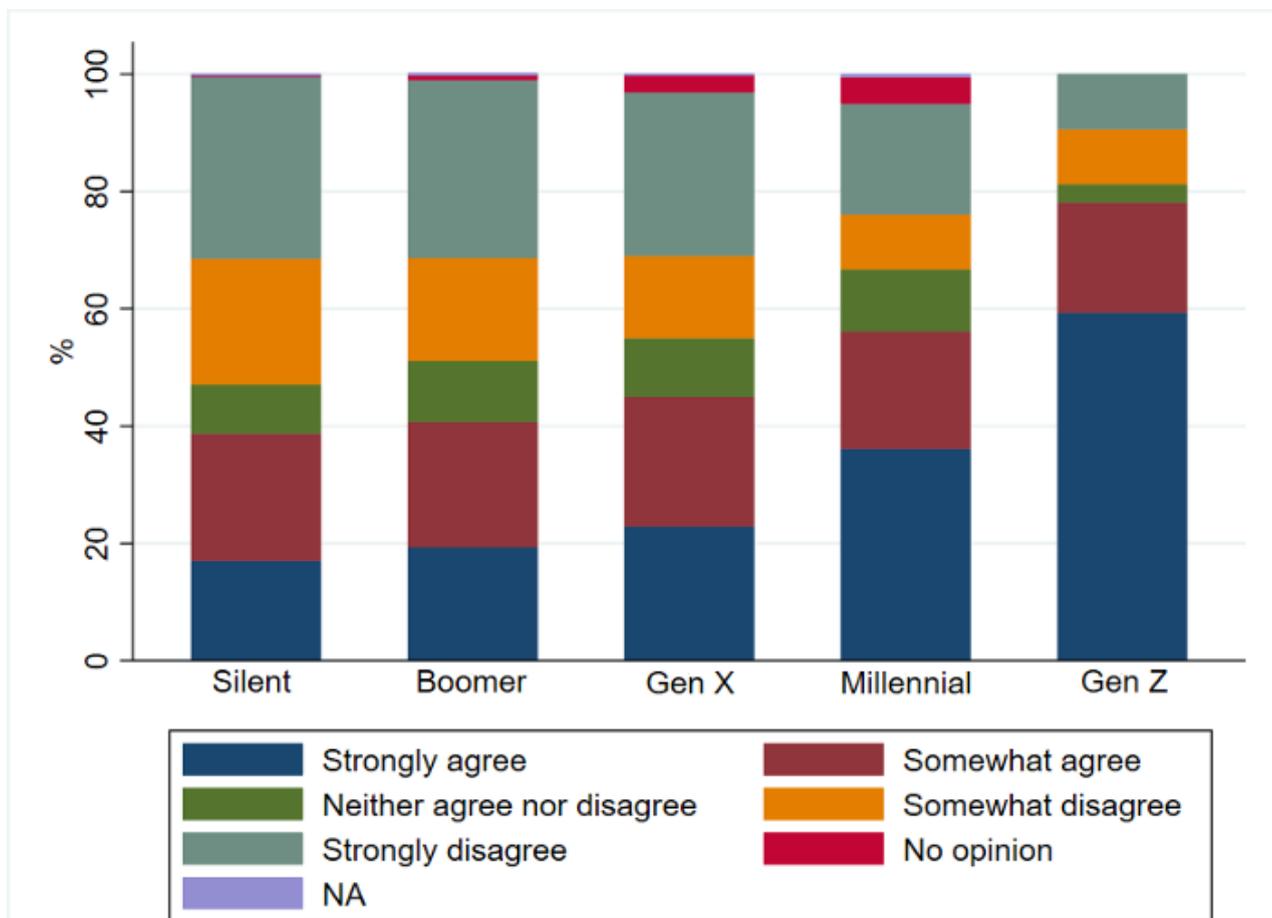




Graph 4 — Group equality should be our ideal.

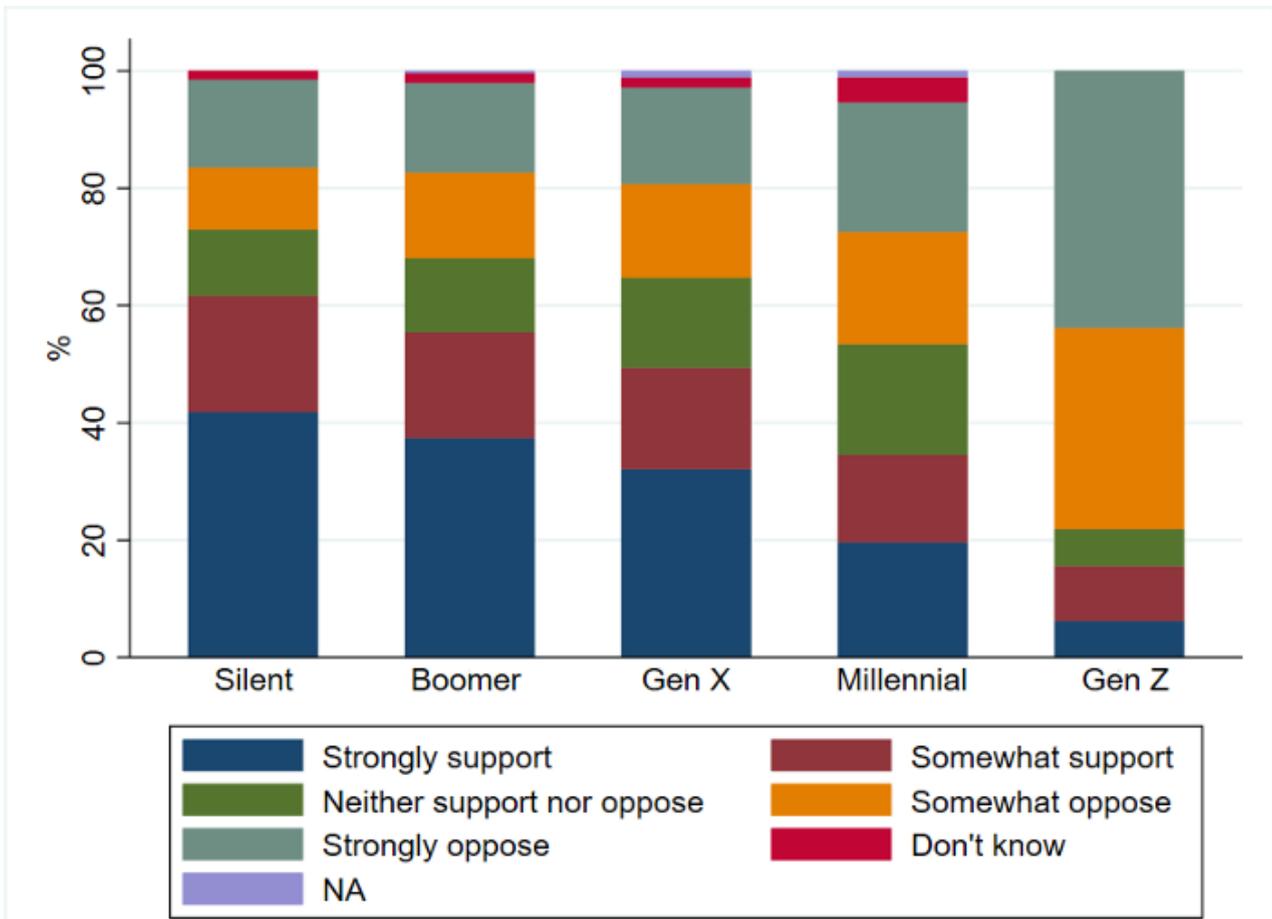
When asked if group equality should be our ideal, again we see a prevalence of Generation Z’s respondents agreeing with the statement, as older generations tend to progressively disagree that equality between different ethnic, religious, and political groups should be the goal for societal conviviality.

In matters of racial and gender injustice, Millennials look-alike Generation Z, as Generation X, Baby Boomers and The Silent Generations tend to have more similar views. The following graph refers to the concept of structural racism, in which people of color were marginalized since the early years of society and are still facing discrimination today.



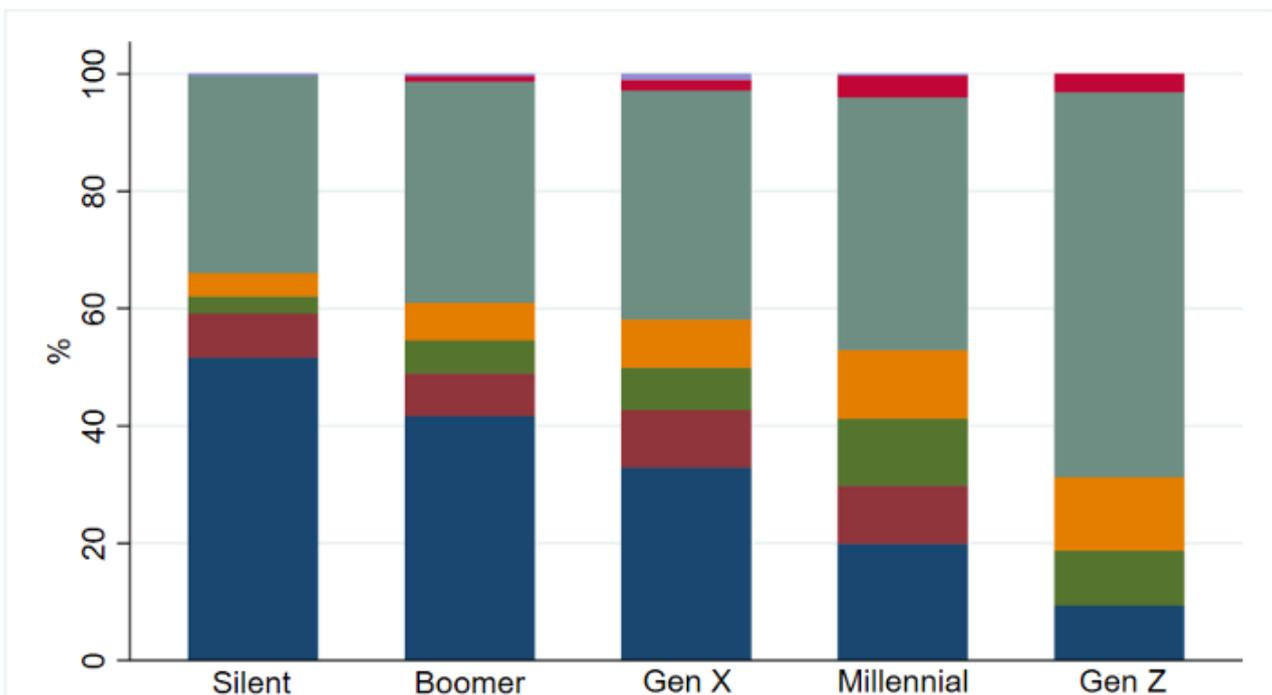
Graph 5 — Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for African Americans to work their way out of the lower class.

As for immigration, it is clear how younger generations vehemently oppose policies related to Donald Trump’s administration. The President was elected on the promise and rhetoric of firmly combatting illegal immigration by deporting undocumented immigrants and building a wall along the U.S. — Mexico border.



Graph 6 — Deport undocumented immigrants to their native countries.

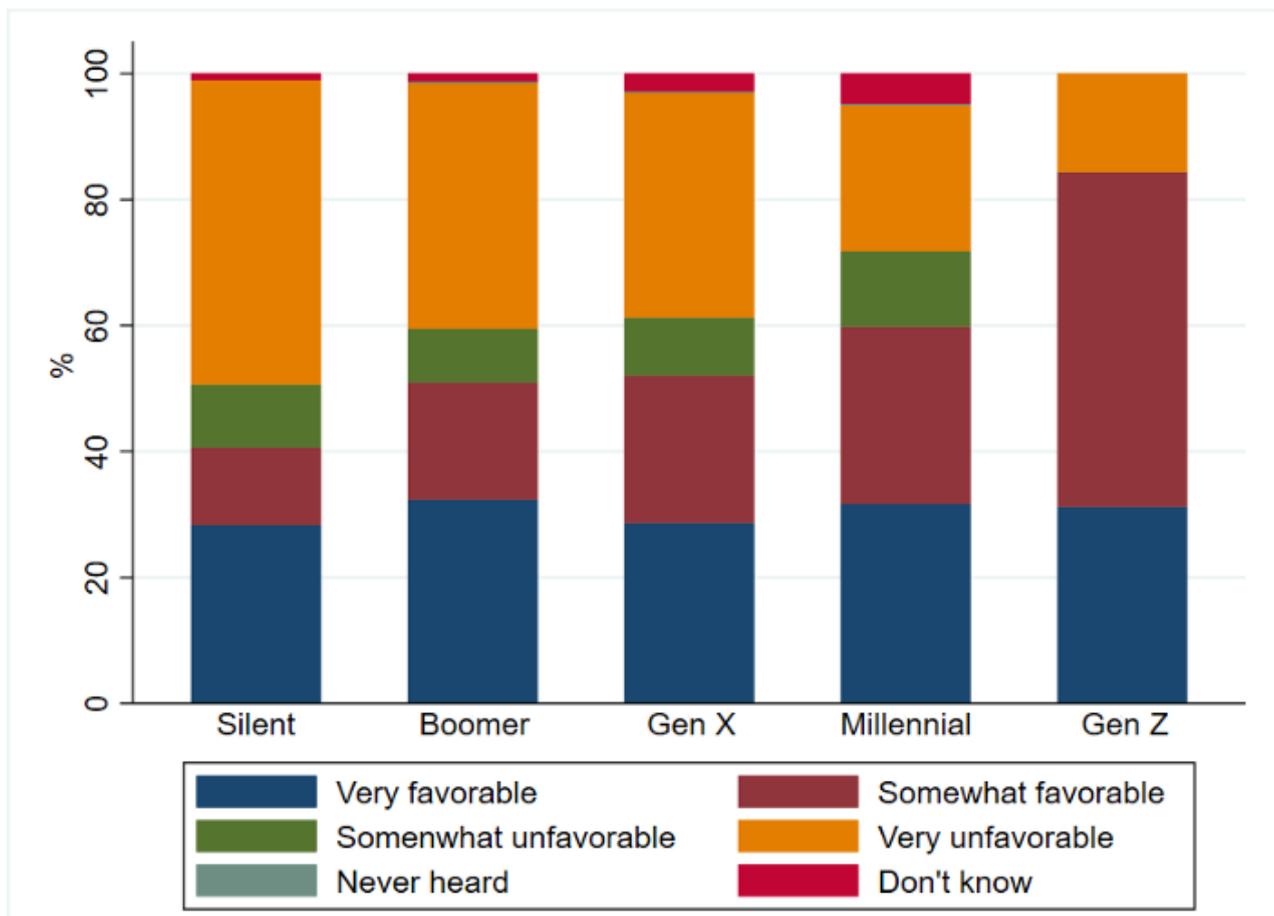
In 2017, Donald Trump issued the Executive Order: Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States, setting priorities for immigration enforcement and deportation. In the same year, according to the Immigration and Custom’s enforcement’s (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Report, conducted the highest number of arrests over the past three years, which lead to a 25% increase of arrests followed by removals from the previous year.





Graph 7 — Increase border security by building a fence along part of the US border with Mexico.

Lastly, by analyzing each generation’s view on the rights to public healthcare access, once again, the feelings of strong disagreement are prevalent within older generations, as Generation Z shows the highest rates of support to public healthcare programs, especially Obamacare.



Graph 8 — The Affordable Care Act or Obamacare

## 2. Meaningful youth voter turnout

The distinctions between the preferences of the different generations are clear. Generation Z and Millennials tend to look more alike than other cohorts, but still, Gen Z is the one with the strongest progressive views. On the other hand, Boomers and Silents are the ones most linked to conservatism and aversion to social inclusion. Furthermore, the older generations are more approving of Trump’s administration than the youngest, therefore there was a clear demographic dispute over the presidency in 2020.

According to the Pew Research Center (2017), Generation Z represented 2% of the share of the total votes in 2016. This number doubled in 2018. As for the other generations, the share of the electorate remained stable over the two years, with Silents representing around 13%, Boomers 35%, Generation X 26% and Millennials 22%. These numbers show how little the percentage of the younger vote is compared with older generations, albeit the vertiginous increase in Generation Z's turnout, which could represent a tendency for growth in the insertion of this generation within America's civic culture.

Baby Boomers and Millennials should represent the largest share of eligible voters in the country in 2020 (27% and 26%), according to Pew Research Center, as Generation Z was expected to surpass Silents and reach 10% of the eligible electorate. Furthermore, Gen Z electorate should be 45% non-white, the most diverse cohort analyzed. The main difference between Generation Z and other groups is that the number of eligible voters within the generation increases every year as more people turn 18 and will soon make up a larger share of the electorate with more progressive tendencies.

According to AP VoteCast Survey 2020, 13% of the voters are less than 30 years old, which 61% cast their votes for Biden. In conclusion, by analyzing the profile of Generation Z by its ethnical diversity, liberal political preferences towards social welfare and gender, race and nationality inclusion, it is clear how this generation has the most potential to shift the U.S. political pendulum (SCHLESINGER, JR., 1986) towards a more progressive spectrum. According to Circle at Tufts University (*Election Week 2020: Youth Voter Turnout 52%-55% research of November 18th*), if only people under 30 voted, key states for Biden's victory such as Arizona, Georgia, Wisconsin and Michigan would all turn blue with at least 58% of the votes for the Democrat, not only for representing a more progressive agenda than the incumbent, but also for the strong disapproval ratings that Donald Trump faces among younger people. This data confirms the thesis that youth turnout was decisive for the election results in 2020 and as younger people represent more ballots cast, there is a clear tendency towards electing more progressive politicians to office.

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## About the authors:

Isabella Farinelli Eichhorn, undergraduate student at the Institute of International Relations at the University of São Paulo.

Professora Dra. Janina Onuki, PhD in Political Science and Full Professor at the Institute of International Relations at the University of São Paulo.

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