

To: Voter Participation Center
From: Celinda Lake and Jamie Lee, LRP
Re: Results from Two Online Message Boards Among Generation Z Participants
Date: May 27, 2020

Recently, LRP completed two online message boards, each among 20 Gen Z participants from various battleground states.¹ Participants in the message boards logged in twice a day for three days of discussion, providing deep insight into a range of topics, including how the coronavirus has affected them and how they perceive the American political system. While last year's study focused on mobilization efforts, especially voter registration, this study focuses heavily on how the coronavirus has impacted participants' daily lives, worldviews, access to election information, and their plan to vote in November, namely the role that vote-by-mail will play.

Major Takeaways Heading into November

Gen Z tends to be cynical and distrustful towards American politics, but they show a lot of passion towards the issues that they care about. They want the government to help with these issues but don't put much faith in it to get things done. They feel ignored by older generations, and they want to see more people in the public eye talking to them, especially through social media, about what they think is important. They want politicians and media outlets, both traditional and social, to back up their claims with facts. Drawn-out, flowery language isn't effective with them, and they prefer public figures who are honest and realistic over charismatic. They will be motivated to vote in November not by any candidate or social media post, but by the issues that matter for the future that they want for themselves and others.

Here are some of the major findings:

1. **Gen Z is concerned about the state of the country, and their outlook moving forward is pretty bleak unless they start to see changes from federal leadership.** These Gen Zers are concerned and anxious about the way things are going in the U.S. and in their own lives right now, largely due to the coronavirus – both in the way leaders have gone about dealing with the issue (namely the Trump administration) and in how people are reacting to the restrictions put in place.
2. **The virus has had a big impact on Gen Z, especially in how they participate in and pay for their education and the job market they are entering post-graduation.** Many Gen Zers have had their high school and college classes transferred to online classes as a result of the virus, and they do not appreciate how the transition to online learning has occurred at their schools. They feel that they have seen a massive drop in the quality of their education, and they are upset that they are still paying the same fees regardless. Those who just graduated college are worried about entering a job market with so few opportunities right now, and even those who have a job already are concerned because the youngest people are always the first to get laid off.

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3. **Gen Z is social media savvy, but they know its limits as a reliable news source.** Gen Zers love spending time on social media, especially Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. However, they would not pick social media as an information source over other, more credible sources. They don't think social media is a reliable source of facts and information, and they value thinking and researching for themselves.
4. **Gen Z thinks voting is extremely important, but they are critical of parts of the election system.** Most say that voting is very important. However, there is some cynicism about the American electoral process. Many are fed up with how partisan the parties have become and with how little is being accomplished as a result. In fact, despite their generally liberal opinions, many don't identify with either party since they see the parties as too extreme. Some even suggest switching to a multi-party system. And, while they think their vote makes a difference, they think their vote would count more if the electoral college was eliminated.
5. **Gen Z loves voting, but they don't love the presidential candidates.** There is plenty of dislike towards and distrust in President Trump, from the way he has handled the pandemic to the way he has spread hate among his supporters. However, former Vice President Biden does not have much of an appeal either. They are worried that he is too old, too moderate, and not mentally fit for the job. Tara Reade's sexual assault allegations also play a role in negative attitudes towards the former VP. All of this considered, Gen Z prefers voting for "the lesser of two evils" to voting for a third option.
6. **Gen Z is passionate about social justice issues.** The most important issues among this generation are racial equality and justice and mass incarceration and criminal justice reform. They are sick of just how often they see instances of racial violence. Other notable issues are climate change and student debt, both of which came up as issues throughout the message boards. Gen Z generally feels like the government isn't doing enough, particularly when it comes to helping those who are struggling, so they do not put a lot of faith in the ability of government to make sweeping changes.
7. **There is a general openness towards voting by mail.** Gen Z thinks that the process of registering and voting is easy. Many already understand what voting by mail is, and several have done it themselves while they were away at college or out-of-state. Those who have voted by mail say that it is easy, and the only real difficulty is making sure you know when to request the ballot and mail it back. While several prefer voting in-person, the benefits they list mostly relate to the experience of voting rather than simplicity or accessibility. There is strong commitment to voting in November, and many are likely to absentee vote in November if the pandemic continues to be an issue at that time.

ⁱ Participants were recruited from a list of battleground states (AZ, FL, GA, NC, MI, NV, PA, WI, CO, IA, ME, NH, and NM) using a database recruit. Recruitment was based on a mix of gender ID, a mix of age (half over and half under 20), a mix of race ID, a mix of education (half students and half college educated), and eligibility to vote by November 2020. Although the demographics for both groups were comparable, they were conducted with a one-day gap (May 11-13, 2020 and May 13-15, 2020) so that we would be able to adjust the creative for the second group as necessary.