

## [Millennial Apathy and a Possible President Trump](#)

Despite the widely recognized shellacking of Donald Trump by Hillary Clinton in Monday night's debate, polls show that the presidential race remains surprisingly and disturbingly close.

There are a number of reasons for this, including the historical tendency for an incumbent party to [lose support](#) after eight years in office, and a [shift among white working class voters](#) who supported Barack Obama in the last two election cycles to the Republican nominee.

But perhaps the single most important factor influencing the election is the number of 18-to-30-year-olds who identify themselves as "likely voters" this November.

The millennial vote has proven critical in recent election cycles. Relatively high numbers of young voters in 2008 and 2012 led to important Democratic victories; a much lower turnout in 2010 and 2014 resulted in major Republican gains.

There are disturbing indications that turnout for 18-to-30-year-olds this coming November will be significantly lower than for Obama's election and re-election. And, according to one [recent poll](#), 44 percent of millennials said they will be voting for either Green Party nominee Jill Stein or Libertarian Party nominee Gary Johnson.

I have heard my colleague Ken Goldstein, a respected analyst of elections and voting patterns, talk about how millennials willing to "stand in line in the rain for hours" outside polling stations in order to vote for Obama are likely to be far less willing to do so for Clinton. This could prove significant, given that Republican-controlled election boards in a number of swing states have [gone to some lengths](#) to ensure that the Election Day lines in precincts near campuses (as well as in African American neighborhoods and other Democratic strongholds) are as long as possible.

As a college professor and the father of three children in this age bracket, I have a fairly good sense of where millennials are coming from politically. There is little support for Trump; indeed, polls indicate he has the lowest support among 18-to-30-year-olds of any major party presidential nominee in history.

At the same time, I have heard hardly any enthusiasm expressed for Clinton. My 25-year-old daughter, who volunteered countless hours for Obama in 2008 and was hired as a field organizer in North Carolina for the 2012 campaign, is not lifting a finger for Hillary.

This generation has been profoundly impacted by the U.S. invasion, occupation, and counter-insurgency war in Iraq. Many of them know veterans who have suffered physically and mentally from their service, and have seen how the war has destabilized the region and led to a dramatic increase in terrorism. They see Hillary Clinton as someone who supported sending thousands of young Americans to die in an illegal and unnecessary war regardless of the all-too-predictable consequences.

My students, my children, and their friends have expressed other concerns regarding the foreign policy positions of the Democratic nominee. For example, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become an issue of increasing concern for young Americans, with activism on some college campuses on a level comparable to the

activism on South Africa and Central America in the 1980s. Many are put off by Clinton's support for Israel's rightwing government and her refusal to criticize even its most repressive policies.

The main issue I have heard my students talk about, however, is the economy. They are faced with huge student debt, poor job prospects, expensive housing, costly health care, and the worst economic inequality in the industrialized world. Many of them were drawn to Bernie Sanders's calls to break up big banks, support more progressive taxation, prioritize climate change and work toward single-payer health care, tuition-free public higher education, adequate housing, and better public transportation.

Clinton, by contrast, is seen as too close to powerful financial interests. Millennials I talk to note that while she said many of the programs advocated by Sanders were too expensive, she has nevertheless been willing to support a costly war in Iraq and other dramatic increases in military spending.

Sanders's defeat in the primaries has not only dampened enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton, but for politics in general. As one of my students put it, "It's hard to get as excited about being against somebody as being for somebody." Another student told me she felt "cheated" by having her first vote for President be such an unpalatable choice.

Emphasizing the negatives of Donald Trump, while certainly easy to do, will not be enough to get millennials to support Hillary Clinton. The Clinton campaign needs to unapologetically embrace issues that will inspire this critical millennial voting bloc to support her. As millennial writer Kate Aronoff [recently noted](#), it is her generation that "occupied Wall Street, shut down bridges for black lives and chained ourselves to the White House fence to stop the Keystone XL pipeline." Recognizing the dangers inherent in a Trump victory, Aronoff advises that what Clinton can do now is "prove she's listening." She writes:

Clinton needs to let millennials—who will be disproportionately impacted by the policies of the next President—know why it is very much in their interest to elect her in November.

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