

The Socialist Generations?

What Millennials and Gen Zs
really think about work,
effort, opportunity,
and economic outcome.

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Executive Summary

We discuss survey results revealing what Millennials and Gen Zs think about opportunity, work, effort, and economic outcome. And what these generations think the government should do to manage economic inequality. Millennials and Gen Zs have different ideas than older generations about the interface between government and markets. Many strongly support free-market activities and safety net concepts such as Universal Basic Income. Many support the government providing jobs and think there should be a work requirement for welfare. There are divergent views among Millennials and Gen Zs and these are driven by ideology more than by gender, race, and ethnicity. The attitudes we describe can manifest in workplaces in ways that are either beneficial or problematic for hiring, productivity, and corporate culture. Here are two key findings and related questions for business leaders to consider.

Key finding: Compared to Gen Zs, older Millennials (aged 33-41) look more economically conservative. Older Millennials have significantly more positive views about opportunity and getting ahead by hard work than Gen Zs. Those who are married or in partnerships are generally doing well economically. They are concerned about inflation and the costs of healthcare, housing, and education.

Related questions:

- Are older Millennials in your firm ideal partners to explain and demonstrate the links between opportunity and getting ahead by hard work to younger workers?
- What perceptions do employees have regarding healthcare, housing, and education as a portion of their earnings? Are there opportunities to engage in conversations and actions that help develop solutions to how these costs impact the economic health of these generations?

Key finding: Differences in views about capitalist concepts, opportunity, effort and business success have more to do with ideology than gender, race, or ethnicity. Business leaders should not assume that everyone in a certain kind of industry thinks the same. Unless your firm has instituted an echo-chamber, ideological differences have the potential to make workplace conversations about certain economic concepts as fraught as conversations about hot-button topics such as abortion and immigration.

Related questions:

- Given the statistics below, how might your firm handle a conversation about a statement like “The profit system teaches people the value of hard work and success.” When looked at by age group, 45% of Older Gen Zs, 50% of Younger Millennials, and 52% of Older Millennials agree with this statement. When looked at by ideological inclination, 72% of Conservatives, 55% of Moderates, and 36% of Liberals agree.
- What role could moderate and older Millennials play in encouraging ideological diversity, heterodox thinking, and productive conversations about complicated economic issues?

Millennials don't match the stereotypes developed about them as adolescents and entry-level workers,

We encourage employers to update their views of Millennials as their current characteristics may be different than those assigned to them as adolescents. Some part of who we are is genetic. Some part is acquired during adolescence and shaped by culture and upbringing until the age of about twenty-five when brains become fully formed and people tend to become more set in their views. We all change with age, work, and life experience. A generally accepted hypothesis is that there is a correlation between age and conservatism and, as people age, shifts tend to occur toward the political right rather than the political left.¹ If this is true, it is not necessarily true that both economic and social views become more conservative. On the one hand, most research shows older people are likely to support lower taxes and smaller government.² On the other hand, research about social views is mixed. Some studies show older people become more conservative in their views about abortion and others show that adults hold views they developed as young adults throughout their lives.³ As we describe below, after a tough start, Millennial economics are changing for the better.

We also encourage employers to avoid stereotypes about both generations. Here is an example of what we mean by avoiding stereotyping. While surveys find that most Gen Zs generally reject discrimination based on gender, race or ethnicity, using these data to assert that “Gen Zs embrace and affirm all people” is a step too far. This kind of assertion, taken from an actual PowerPoint that was created to instruct business leaders on their incoming employees, could only be true if most Gen Zs support the Taliban, Pro-life groups, Eco-terrorists such as the Earth Liberation Front, and Neo-Nazi National Socialist organizations. Surveys also show Gen Zs are less likely than previous generations to support free speech and ideological diversity. Their views about gender and race partially stem from a strongly individualistic self-conception and a do-your-own-thing attitude.⁴ On some metrics, Gen Zs look different than Millennials, but it is a mistake to assume that in the next decades they will keep the same attitudes or start to look more like Millennials. We really don't know what will happen.

¹ Peterson, Johnathan C., Kevin B. Smith and John R. Hibbing (2020). Do People Really Become More Conservative as They Age? *The Journal of Politics*, 82 (2): 600-611

² Journal of Politics (2012) *The Development of Tax Attitudes Over the Life Course*. Journal of Public Economics (2015) Age, Taxation, and Social Preferences.

³ Journal of Youth and Adolescence (2015). *Age and Attitudes toward Abortion: A Longitudinal Analysis*. Journal of Women's Health (2017) *Age and Attitudes Toward Abortion: A Cross-Sectional Analysis*.

⁴ Jean M. Twenge and her colleagues have published high-quality research and created psychological and behavioral profiles describing these groups roughly between the ages of about thirteen and twenty-one. This work is summarized by Twenge in three books: *Generation Me* (2014), *I Gen* (2018), and *Generations* (2023).

American economic views respond to the pros and cons of capitalism and how well they think it is working.

America is a political democracy and a capitalist economy. America's version of capitalism is currently ranked number 25th in the world in economic freedom. This places it below Singapore, Switzerland, Ireland, Taiwan, New Zealand, Estonia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Australia, Germany, South Korea, Canada, Latvia, Cyprus, Iceland, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Chile, Austria, and the United Arab Emirates.⁵ Most younger generations expect democracy and capitalism to work together. In our survey, 59% agree, 30% are neutral, and 11% disagree with the statement "political freedom and economic freedom depend on one another." As a point of comparison, in the late 1970s, when asked in a yes/no format, 92% of Americans chose "probably" and 6% chose "probably not" when asked "Is the free enterprise system necessary for free government to survive?"

Capitalism and democracy do not guarantee equal outcomes. Democracy assures a high level of individual political freedom and creates unequal outcomes in the distribution of power. Capitalism assures a high level of individual economic freedom and creates unequal outcomes in the distribution of wealth. Although American Millennials and Gen Zs are commonly described as hostile to capitalism, the views of most Americans on democracy and capitalism have remained within a relatively narrow middle ground.⁶ This stems from a cultural ethos of egalitarianism, meaning Americans emphasize opportunity, access, and rights, and recognize that there is a role for choice, effort, and ability in determining outcomes.

Martin Wolf elaborates on this point in *The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* noting that democracy and capitalism focus on equality of status in the effort to shape one's own life through having a voice in public affairs and being able to buy and sell what you own. Thus, both "are based on the proposition that people's choices have inherent value." This means people with political power need to be accountable to citizens, not responsible for them and those who participate in markets must be responsive to the choices of customers rather than dictate those choices.⁷

In the past, "capitalism" has not been ideological. Ideological differences focused on the best way to ensure opportunity, access, and rights and offset individual bad luck and market distortions. President Biden summarized this view in a 2023 tweet "Look, I'm a capitalist. I have no problem with companies making reasonable profits. But not absurd levels on the backs of working families and seniors – it's about basic fairness." Values, culture, experiences, upbringing, and age give every American a unique view of what is fair and how to mitigate bad outcomes.

⁵ See the [Index of Economic Freedom](https://www.heritage.org/index/ranking) <https://www.heritage.org/index/ranking>

⁶ McCloskey, Herbert and John Zaller (1984). *The American Ethos: Public Attitudes Toward Capitalism and Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁷ Wolf, Martin. (2023). *The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*. Penguin Random House.

Economically, Millennials are doing well. Over half own homes and most older and married Millennials are middle class.

Millennials are doing well economically. Around or by 2019, Millennials started doing better than their parent’s generation at the same age. These patterns hold for race, ethnicity, and gender, but not for workers lacking a college degree.⁸ Was this important to them? Our data show 63% of Millennials and Gen Zs want to amount to more than their parents (Figure 1).

Figure 1. We should all try to amount to more than our parents.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	59%	29%	12%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	67%	25%	8%
Older Millennial (33-41)	64%	30%	6%

In our survey and on par with national data, half of older Millennials reported owning their own home, compared to about 66% of all Americans in 2022. Our data also show that most older Millennials who are married or in a domestic/civil partnership say their current income is as good or better than their family income growing up. Specifically, 56% of older Millennials reported being married or in a domestic/civil partnership. Of those, 69% said they had a current income of over \$50,000. Of that group, 64% said their income was about the same or better than their family income growing up. We also found that although 22% of older Millennials said they receive some parental support; only 10% of older Millennials who reported being married or in a domestic/civil partnership said they receive parental support (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Parental support, health insurance costs and coverage, student loans, and inflation.

	Older Gen Zs (18-25)	Younger Millennial (26-32)	Older Millennial (33-41)
Do you receive any parental support? Yes	58%	31%	22%
Yes, among Gen Z with any work status other than student.	38%	n/a	n/a
Do you have health insurance? Yes	79%	81%	81%
If so, are you on a parent’s plan? Yes	49%	n/a	n/a
If so, who pays the premiums? Parent	83%	n/a	n/a
Do you have student loans? Yes, among those with some college to 4+ years	40%	33%	40%
Has inflation impacted your ability to pay basic bills? Yes	49%	48%	50%

⁸ See *Generations* and Twenge’s summary of data on household income, wages, wealth, poverty, and home ownership.

Gen Zs receive more economic support from their family.

Gen Z, even those who are not full-time students, rely more on their parents for support (Figure 2). Among Gen Zs, 38% who reported any work status other than student receive parental support. 80% of all Gen Z say they have health insurance and 49% who have insurance report being on their parent's plan. 83% of them rely on their parents to pay the premiums.

Inflation, and the costs of healthcare, housing, and education are big concerns for Millennials and Gen Zs.

We described data on loan burdens and views on loan forgiveness in a previous paper.⁹ Overall, 40% of Millennials with college experience reported having student loans. Over three-quarters of Millennials and Gen Zs say the cost of healthcare, housing, and education are big problems for social stability (Figure 3). These issues outweigh concerns about the existence of the very rich/billionaires or the idea of kids inheriting wealth from their parents.

Over half of Millennials and Gen Zs perceive that inflation has made it difficult for them to cover basic expenses such as food or housing costs. Among older Millennials, 27% said inflation has made it difficult to pay for healthcare and 48% it has made it difficult for them to contribute to savings or retirement (Figure 2).

Figure 3. Are...a problem for a stable society?

	Yes	Not Sure	No
The cost of health care	77%	14%	10%
The cost of college education	78%	13%	10%
The cost of buying a house	77%	14%	9%
Rental prices for homes	74%	17%	9%
Worker wages	70%	18%	12%
The quality of jobs available	56%	25%	18%
The existence of the very rich/billionaires	51%	24%	26%
Kids inheriting wealth from parents	33%	26%	41%

⁹ See <https://capitalism.wfu.edu/what-we-do/research/>

Aging and work experience likely foster more positive attitudes toward capitalism.

Because America is a capitalist system, our goal is to evaluate current views about capitalist concepts. Capitalism is based on the idea that individual choice has inherent value. Individuals can own tangible and intangible property. They can sell labor and property for a profit. Capitalism is competitive because others are doing the same thing, placing a premium on creativity and cost. In open and well-functioning markets, long term success is gained by a focus on the customer. Fair dealings in inclusive and competitive markets generate better outcomes for everyone. No one person can capture all the benefits of this kind of productive competition and over time information and items become widely dispersed and affordable, increasing general prosperity.

Some of the items we use in surveys ask about these basic concepts in different ways. Figure 4 provides outcomes for five items. Millennials are significantly more positive about items reflecting basic concepts about capitalism than Gen Z and the shift is primarily due to a decline in ambivalent, neutral responses (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Items assessing the basic tenants of capitalism.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. The way private property is used should primarily be decided by its owner.			
▪ Older Gen Zs (18-25)	63%	26%	11%
▪ Younger Millennial (26-32)	70%	21%	8%
▪ Older Millennial (33-41)	76%	17%	7%
2. There's nothing wrong with trying to make as much money as you honestly can.			
▪ Older Gen Zs (18-25)	64%	24%	12%
▪ Younger Millennial (26-32)	70%	18%	12%
▪ Older Millennial (33-41)	72%	18%	11%
3. Competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas.			
▪ Older Gen Zs (18-25)	64%	25%	12%
▪ Younger Millennial (26-32)	70%	20%	10%
▪ Older Millennial (33-41)	70%	19%	11%
4. Wealth can grow, so there's enough for everyone.			
▪ Older Gen Zs (18-25)	45%	27%	28%
▪ Younger Millennial (26-32)	58%	22%	20%
▪ Older Millennial (33-41)	57%	20%	24%
5. The profit system teaches people the value of hard work and success.			
▪ Older Gen Zs (18-25)	45%	31%	24%
▪ Younger Millennial (26-32)	50%	29%	21%
▪ Older Millennial (33-41)	52%	23%	25%

Although these cohorts think polarization is less problematic than the media portrays, ideology is the best indicator of positive or negative attitudes toward capitalist concepts.

Curiously, most Millennials and Gen Zs say Americans are less ideologically polarized than what is commonly described in the media. Older Millennials are more likely to think this: 62% of older Millennials and 55% of Gen Z agreed with the item “Most Americans are more moderate in their views than what is shown in the media.”

Nevertheless, ideology is usually more meaningful than gender, race, and ethnicity, in predicting how someone responds many items. At times, differences between Liberals and Conservatives are extreme. Given these differences, sorting data by ideology gives us a sense of how far apart Conservatives and Liberals are on many concepts. Before we describe ideological differences, we briefly describe self-reported ideology and the relationship between it and political party affiliation.

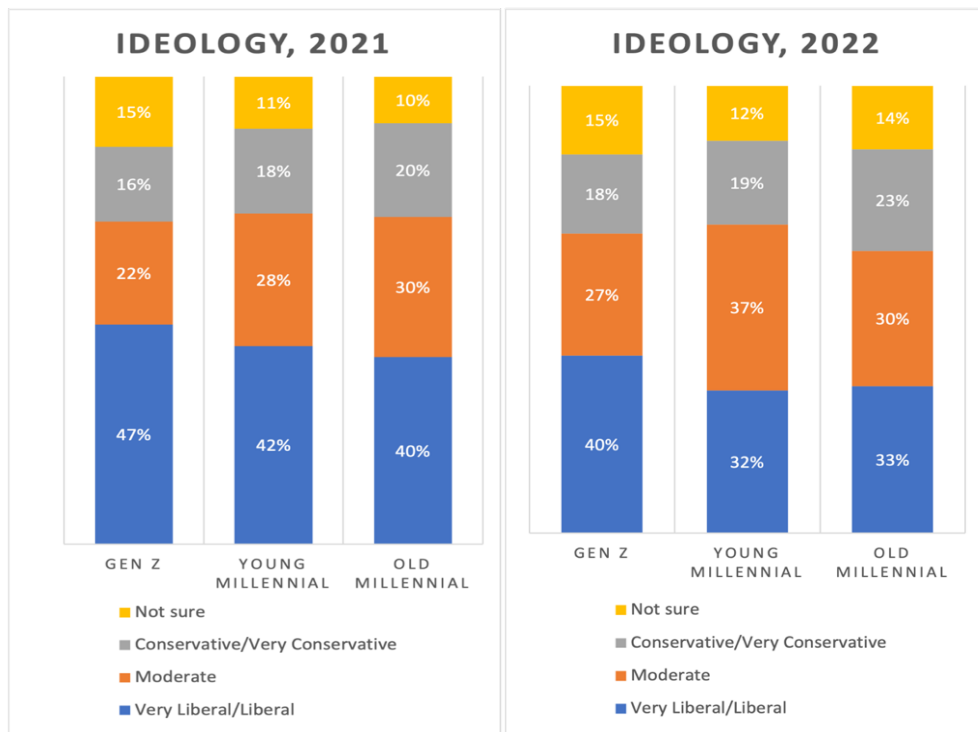


Figure 5. Self-Reported Ideology in 2021 and 2022.

In our surveys, the number of respondents claiming to be liberal declined from 2021 to 2022 in favor of other groups; however, a general estimate is that a third to half of younger generations might identify as liberal, a quarter to a third as moderate, and about a fifth as conservative (Figure 5). With age, the number of respondents identifying as liberal decreased, and moderates

and conservatives increased, supporting the idea that as people age, they generally shift to the ideological right.

Our data shows that there is no strict agreement between self-reported ideology and self-reported political party.¹⁰ In 2022, half of both cohorts identified as Democrats / Lean Democrats, yet as many as 16% do not consider themselves Liberal or Very Liberal. Almost a quarter identify as Republican / Lean Republican, yet as many as 7% don't consider themselves Conservative or Very Conservative. A fifth say they are political Independents, which does not necessarily mean they identify as Moderates.

Figure 6 shows that Liberals hold more negative views on capitalist concepts. The smallest difference is in views about private property. The largest difference is a 35-point difference in views regarding the profit system teaching the value of hard work and success.

Figure 6. Percentage of Millennials and Gen Zs in agreement with items describing capitalist concepts by ideology.

	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
The way private property is used should primarily be decided by its owner.	70%	69%	80%
There's nothing wrong with trying to make as much money as you honestly can.	63%	72%	80%
Competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas.	64%	69%	82%
Wealth can grow, so there's enough for everyone.	52%	53%	61%
The profit system teaches people the value of hard work and success.	36%	55%	72%

Liberals think they lack opportunities and can't get ahead.

Views about equality of opportunity and equality of outcome underlie an individual's views about their potential to succeed in a free market economy. Two items illustrate views of opportunity. One is phrased as the more individualistic "I have the same opportunities to succeed in my career as anybody else" (Figure 7). The item "Most people who want to get ahead can make it if they are willing to work hard" provides insight into perceptions about society in general (Figure 8).

Millennials agree with both. The Liberal-Conservative spread is dramatic. Liberals are 34 percentage points less likely than Conservatives to think they have opportunities in their careers and 33 percentage points less likely to think most people can get ahead through hard work.

¹⁰ See a discussion of these patterns by Twenge in *Generations*.

Figure 7. I have the same opportunities to succeed in my career as anybody else.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	46%	24%	30%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	53%	23%	24%
Older Millennial (33-41)	50%	21%	29%

- By race and ethnicity 65% of Hispanics, 55% of Blacks, and 51% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 72% of Conservatives, 54% of Moderates, and 38% of Liberals agree.

Figure 8. Most people who want to get ahead can make it if they are willing to work hard.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	55%	26%	19%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	58%	23%	19%
Older Millennial (33-41)	60%	17%	23%

- By race and ethnicity 79% of Hispanics, 57% of Blacks, and 58% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 77% of Conservatives, 64% of Moderates, and 44% of Liberals agree.

Gen Zs and Liberals are less likely to believe income should be tied to effort and productivity. They are also less likely to think that business success translates into generally beneficial societal outcomes.

Anonymous surveys are good opportunities to assess views a person may feel uncomfortable sharing publicly. The item “No matter how fairly we treat everyone, some people will turn out better than others” was asked in a national survey in the late 1970s and about 70% of the public agreed with the statement. In our survey, a similar number of Millennials and Gen Zs still believe some people will turn out better than others (Figure 9). Most also believe that people with more abilities should earn more and the spread between Liberals and Conservatives is relatively small (Figure 10). However, Liberals are 38 percentage points more likely than Conservatives to believe the “greater needs of others” outweigh an individual’s right to the fruit of their effort (Figure 11).

Figure 9. No matter how fairly we treat everyone, some people will turn out better than others.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	67%	23%	10%
Younger Millennials (26-32)	70%	22%	8%

Older Millennials (33-41)	72%	19%	9%
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- By race and ethnicity 73% of Whites and 70% of Blacks, but only 64% of Hispanics agree.
- By ideology, 77% of Conservatives, 72% of Moderates, and 69% of Liberals agree.

Figure 10. Under a fair economic system, people with more abilities would earn higher salaries.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	55%	31%	13%
Younger Millennials (26-32)	64%	24%	12%
Older Millennials (33-41)	61%	26%	13%

- By race and ethnicity 85% of Hispanics, 62% of Blacks, and 60% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 69% of Conservatives, 64% of Moderates, and 56% of Liberals agree.

Figure 11. People should be allowed to keep what they produce, even if there are others with greater needs.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	44%	32%	24%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	51%	28%	21%
Older Millennial (33-41)	52%	25%	23%

- By race and ethnicity 70% of Hispanics, 55% of Blacks, and 48% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 72% of Conservatives, 55% of Moderates, and 34% of Liberals agree.

These attitudes translate into views about work. Conservatives and Hispanics are very likely to think that productivity matters at work (Figure 12). Most also think that business success translates into generally beneficial outcomes for society. Most younger Americans, however, do not think that everyone profits when businesses are allowed to make as much money as they can (Figure 13).

Figure 12. If an employer is forced to lay people off who are doing the same job, they should lay off the least productive employees first.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	64%	28%	8%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	67%	24%	9%
Older Millennial (33-41)	69%	23%	8%

- By race and ethnicity 91% of Hispanics, 64% of Blacks, and 68% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 79% of Conservatives, 69% of Moderates, and 63% of Liberals agree.

Figure 13. When businesses are allowed to make as much money as they can, everyone profits in the long run.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	30%	29%	41%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	40%	25%	35%
Older Millennial (33-41)	36%	22%	42%

- By race and ethnicity 50% of Hispanics, 44% of Blacks, and 34% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 55% of Conservatives, 42% of Moderates, and 22% of Liberals agree.

Millennials do not think the government should limit individual profit. They are slightly more accepting of government intervention in company profit. Gen Zs are more ambivalent about these concepts. About 40% of both groups think regulation impacts efficient business operations, but about 30% are ambivalent.

Millennials are thirteen percentage points more likely than Gen Zs to disagree with the idea that government should limit individual earnings. The difference comes largely from a shift in the number who are neutral about this item. Half of Liberals disagree and 68% of Conservatives disagree (Figure 14). Regarding company earnings, however, only Older Millennials and Conservatives disagree that the government should decide how much money companies should earn (Figure 15).

Views on government regulation are more polarized (Figure 16). About two in five agree that the more government regulation there is, the less efficiently companies can operate, but 68% of Conservatives, as opposed to 28% of Liberals, agree. Compared to the items just described, this item evoked a higher number of neutral responses.

Figure 14. Government should decide how much money individuals can earn.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	26%	26%	48%
Younger Millennials (26-32)	26%	21%	54%
Older Millennials (33-41)	21%	17%	61%

- By race and ethnicity 51% of Hispanics, 44% of Blacks, and 58% of Whites *disagree*.
- By ideology, 68% of Conservatives, 54% of Moderates, and 50% of Liberals *disagree*.

Figure 15. Government should decide how much money companies can earn.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	37%	28%	35%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	36%	22%	42%
Older Millennial (33-41)	29%	20%	51%

- By race and ethnicity 39% of Hispanics, 37% of Blacks, and 45% of Whites *disagree*.
- By ideology, 60% of Conservatives, 46% of Moderates, and 30% of Liberals *disagree*.

Figure 16. The more government regulation there is, the less efficiently companies can operate.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	41%	32%	27%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	44%	32%	24%
Older Millennial (33-41)	41%	28%	30%

- By race and ethnicity 42% of Hispanics, 45% of Blacks, and 42% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 68% of Conservatives, 48% of Moderates, and 28% of Liberals agree.

Many Millennials and Gen Zs see government as a backstop to mitigate bad economic outcomes.

Millennials think getting help should be linked to doing work.

The concept of a “social safety net” means different things to different people. In the past, it generally meant society had a duty to help people, such as orphans, sick people, and old people, who simply should not be expected to support themselves through their own labor. Able-bodied people were expected to work. The overriding concern was making individual suffering less severe.

As America became wealthy, the idea of a social safety net became more comprehensive and came to include the idea of eliminating poverty altogether and increasing opportunities, such as government loans to pay for college. It also included government-run insurance schemes such as unemployment and social security intended to make sure individuals who suffered market downturns or could not save money for retirement didn’t fall into severe poverty.

American views on the relationship between getting support and doing work are complicated. Student loans, for example, are not particularly contentious. Ideally, going to college gets you a better-paying job. You pay the loan back (usually with interest) and pay more taxes over your working life, essentially becoming a better customer for the government. A more contentious area is providing aid to abled-bodied people who can work and don’t work or do work and still

can't earn enough. In the past, "earn enough" was generally defined the federal poverty level. Overall, our data suggest that Millennials and Gen Zs think one role for the Federal government is providing work and setting wages for the bottom end of the workforce as opposed to setting limits on earning. In 2021, 47% of these cohorts agreed that government should provide a job for anyone who wants one. In fall 2022, at the height of inflation and with the year a recession looming, that rose to 65%. And, almost half of Conservatives agree (Figure 17).

Typically, views about whether welfare lessens one's interest in work and whether work should be required to receive welfare are ideologically polarized (Figures 18 and 19). By age, more Millennials and Gen Zs agree than disagree that welfare programs create dependence and over half of Millennials think people who accept government welfare should be required to do some kind of work. By ideology, over 70% of Conservatives say welfare creates dependence and work should be required while about a quarter to a third of liberals think this.

Figure 17. Government should provide a job for anyone who wants one.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	65%	21%	14%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	63%	21%	16%
Older Millennial (33-41)	55%	22%	23%

- By race and ethnicity 64% of Hispanics, 62% of Blacks, and 60% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 46% of Conservatives, 58% of Moderates, and 73% of Liberals agree.

Figure 18. The more welfare programs the government creates, the less self-sufficient citizens become.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	39%	29%	32%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	46%	25%	30%
Older Millennial (33-41)	45%	19%	36%

- By race and ethnicity 62% of Hispanics, 46% of Blacks, and 43% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 71% of Conservatives, 49% of Moderates, and 24% of Liberals agree.

Figure 19. Anyone who accepts government welfare should be required to do some kind of work.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	43%	29%	29%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	53%	25%	21%
Older Millennial (33-41)	52%	21%	27%

- By race and ethnicity 51% of Hispanics, 53% of Blacks, and 49% of Whites agree.
- By ideology, 74% of Conservatives, 54% of Moderates, and 34% of Liberals agree.

Millennials and Gen Zs may picture a baseline economic level that is different from past generations and may view programs such as universal basic income as working together with free markets.

In some ways Millennials and Gen Zs are similar. Both received parental help for much longer than previous generations. Both have been concerned about their ability to succeed in the market and about their ability to live as well or better than their parents. In other ways, Millennials and Gen Zs are very different.

Gen Zs, now entering the workforce, grew up with the perception that the economy was struggling for most people other than the college educated. They developed heightened anxiety about their prospects. Until the pandemic, rising inequality of income between groups with and without a college education, a shrinking middle class, and even the decline in economic prospects for college graduates with humanities degrees as opposed to science, business and technology degrees, placed different kinds of pressures on them to succeed. It may not be surprising some have less positive views about capitalism, are anxious about employment, and are concerned about falling into poverty.

Most Millennials, in contrast, grew up in a good economy, although growth was best for white-collar jobs. Then the situation changed, Millennials entering the job market in the aftermath of 2008 were slower to accumulate wealth. The costs of home ownership and education soared and, for many, mortgages, healthcare, and student debt consume significant portions of income. Now, Millennials are doing well, but many perceive they fit the old stereotype of being broke. Why? One view is that Millennials entered the workforce with a stronger sense of entitlement than past generations. This mindset developed because they were brought up in an environment of relentless positivity coupled with a focus on self-esteem. The message they got was that wealth, prestige, and authority were easy to achieve. Millennial adults appear to be more depressed than previous generations at the same age. Although they are doing well, they are disappointed by the reality of an adulthood that does not match unrealistic aspirations.¹¹

Our data indicate Millennials link ability and productivity with economic reward. In this sense, they are interested in individual success and wealth creation and they largely support free markets as a road to building economic security. However, they don't necessarily accept that business success translates into widespread prosperity and they are looking for assurances regarding their future economic status. They may harbor anxiety from experiences with economic uncertainty and/or some disappointment that their economic situation does not meet their childhood expectations. Millennials are concerned with things that will depress their economic status. For them wages, job quality, and the affordability of healthcare, housing, and education are important issues.

¹¹ see *Generations* where Twenge summarizes data Millennial mental health and why many perceive they fit the old stereotype of being broke.

We see these views reflected in perceptions about welfare as opposed to ideas about insurance schemes such as Universal Basic Income (Figure 20). Universal Basic Income implies a constant baseline level of support regardless of income. In our results, Older Millennials are almost 20 percentage points more positive about a universal basic income program than they are about the idea of a welfare state. This may be a good example of a Millennials perspective that eliminates the downside of capitalism and acts as a foundation upon which they can engage in free-markets and build additional wealth.

Figure 20. Views of the Welfare State and Universal Basic Income.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Welfare State			
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	33%	45%	22%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	31%	41%	28%
Older Millennial (33-41)	29%	37%	34%
Universal Basic Income			
Older Gen Zs (18-25)	45%	36%	20%
Younger Millennial (26-32)	46%	32%	23%
Older Millennial (33-41)	48%	26%	26%

Survey Methodology

For most items, we use a Likert scale with five response points (strongly agree, slightly agree, neutral, slightly disagree, strongly disagree) and generally provide results as agree, neutral, and disagree. Neutral implies the respondent hasn't really thought about the issue or does not have a particularly strong opinion. Generally, 25% to 30% of respondents choose neutral.

For this survey, YouGov interviewed 2135 18–41-year-old respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 2000 respondents equally divided into 3 age groups (18-25, 26-32, 33-41) to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file).

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 and 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (3-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.