

# Divided America: Diverse Millennials Are No Voting Monolith

Younger voters share a sense of disillusionment, but little else, pollsters say

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Associated Press

The oldest millennials — nearing 20 when airplanes slammed into New York City's Twin Towers — are old enough to remember the relative economic prosperity of the 1990s, and when a different Clinton was running for president. The nation's youngest adults — now nearing 20 themselves — find it hard to recall a reality without terrorism and economic worry.

Now millennials have edged out baby boomers as the largest living generation in U.S. history, and more than 75 million of them have come of age. How they vote on Nov. 8 will shape the political landscape for years to come. Yet with less than three months to go before Election Day, the values of young Americans whose coming-of-age was bookended by the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the Great Recession are emerging as an unpredictable grab bag of fiscal conservatism and social liberalism.

What they share is a palpable sense of disillusionment.

As part of its Divided America series, The Associated Press spent time with seven millennial voters in five states where the oldest and largest swath of this generation — ages 18 to 35, as defined by the Pew Research Center — could have an outsized influence in November. They are a uniquely American mosaic, from a black teen in Nevada voting for the first time to a Florida-born son of Latino immigrants to a white Christian couple in Ohio.

Taken individually, these voters illustrate how millennials are challenging pollsters' expectations based on race, class and background in surprising ways, reacting to what they see as the loss of the American Dream. They are intent on shaping something new and important that reflects their reality — on their own terms.

"Millennials have been described as apathetic, but they're absolutely not. I think you can see from this election year that they're not, and that millennials have a very nuanced understanding of the political world," said Diana Downard, a 26-year-old Bernie Sanders supporter who will

vote for Hillary Clinton. "So yeah, I'm proud to be a millennial."

Just 5 percent of young adults say that America is "greater than it has ever been," while 52 percent feel the nation is "falling behind" and 24 percent believe the U.S. is "failing," according to a GenForward poll released last month. The first-of-its kind survey of young people between the ages of 18 and 30 was conducted by the Black Youth Project at the University of Chicago with the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Fifty-four percent believe only a few people at the top can get ahead in today's America, and 74 percent say income and wealth distribution are uneven, according to the poll.

Briana Lawrence, a 21-year-old videographer and eyelash artist from Durham, North

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Carolina, identifies with those numbers.

She was just 7 on Sept. 11 and the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks is the only time she can remember the nation feeling united, even if only by grief. With \$40,000 in student debt, she's working hard to establish her own cosmetic business after graduating from North Carolina Central University. She plans to vote for Hillary Clinton, but feels America has lost its way.

"My biggest hope for this country is for us to come back together as a community. As a United States of America, to unite together again," she said.

But millennials know that getting to that place won't be easy. Many, like Lawrence, are saddled with college debt and have struggled to find jobs.

In Denver, 1,600 miles to the west, Downard also has almost \$40,000 in student debt that's already changed her path. A dual U.S. and Mexican citizen, she feels she can't afford to work for an overseas organization — one of her dreams — and plans to delay having a family at least 10 years.

"We went to college in pursuit of a better life

and really, now, we're kind of just paralyzed by our student debt," said Downard, who works for a nonpartisan organization that works to improve youth voter registration. "You can't even think about those sorts of alternative options."

In part because of these economic pressures, a 2014 Pew Research Center poll found that — for the first time in more than 130 years — adults ages 18 to 34 were slightly more likely to be living with their parents than with a spouse or partner in their own residence. And one in four millennials say they might not ever marry, a Pew survey found.

Only 8 percent of young adults feel their household's financial situation is "very good," and education and economic growth ranked No. 1 and No. 2 as the issues that will most influence their vote, according to the

GenForward poll.

"We might be in a 'good-ish' finance situation right now as a country, but I was always taught there's ups and downs in the finance world and with every up, there's a down. So we should be preparing for that down to come," said Brien



AP PHOTO/GERRY BROOME

Briana Lawrence, 21, adjusts a camera in a studio at North Carolina Central University in Durham, N.C., on Thursday, July 14, 2016. She was just 7 on Sept. 11, 2001 and the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks is the only time she can remember the nation feeling united, even if only by grief.

Tillett, who graduated this spring from a high school just miles from the Las Vegas Strip.

Tillett, who turned 18 in July, was 10 when the recession hit and sucked the wind out of his family. His mother, a single parent, was in a car ac-

insolvency has deeply influenced his views.

The national debt is his No. 1 concern.

As a young black man, he's turned off by remarks by Donald Trump that he finds racist and xenophobic, but likes Trump's aggressive stance on the economy. "We're trillions of dollars in debt and that should not be happening," said Tillett, who started running track at a two-year college this month.

He strongly considered voting for Trump, but will now vote for Clinton because Trump has become "a loose cannon" in recent weeks. Still, he's angry about Clinton's use of a private email server when she was Secretary of State. "We have to basically question if we can truly trust her with all of our nation's secrets," he said.

Anibal David Cabrera was in high school when Tillett was just a small boy — but he's part of the same generation.

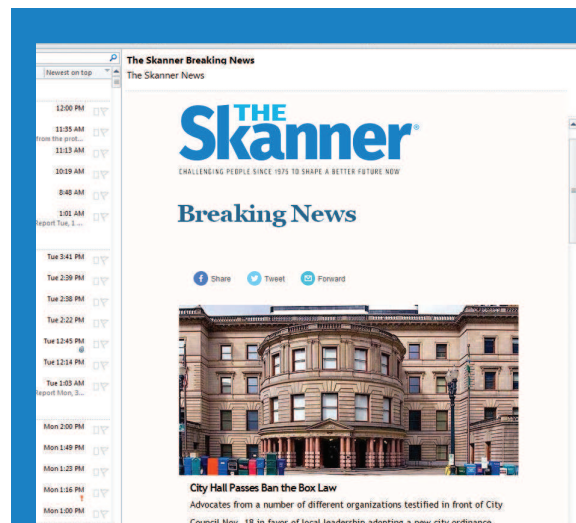
The son of a Honduran mother and Dominican father, he graduated from college in 2008 as the recession was picking up steam. A finance major, he wanted to work for a hedge fund or bank, but the economic collapse meant jobs had dried up. Eventually Cabrera, now 31 and living in Tampa, Florida, got an accounting job at a small tech firm.

He feels he's entering the prime of his life a few steps behind where he could have been, through no fault of his own.

A Jeb Bush die-hard in the primaries, he's now supporting Trump and hopes the business mogul can make good on his promises.

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