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PROJECTS

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A Portrait of "Generation Next"

How Young People View Their Lives, Futures and Politics

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A new generation has come of age, shaped by an unprecedented revolution in technology and dramatic events both at home and abroad. They are Generation Next, the cohort of young adults who have grown up with personal computers, cell phones and the internet and are now taking their place in a world where the only constant is rapid change.

MILLENNIALS

A PORTRAIT OF GENERATION NEXT

This is part of a Pew Research Center series of reports exploring the behaviors, values and opinions of the teens and twenty-somethings that make up the [Millennial Generation](#).

In reassuring ways, the generation that came of age in the shadow of Sept. 11 shares the characteristics of other generations of young adults. They are generally happy with their lives and optimistic about their futures. Moreover, Gen Nexters feel that educational and job opportunities are better for them today than for the previous generation. At the same time, many of their attitudes and priorities reflect a limited set of life experiences. Marriage, children and an established career remain in the future for most of those in Generation Next.

More than two-thirds see their generation as unique and distinct, yet not all self-evaluations are positive. A majority says that "getting rich" is the main goal of most people in their age group, and large majorities believe that casual sex, binge drinking, illegal drug use and violence are more prevalent among young people today than was the case 20 years ago.

In their political outlook, they are the most tolerant of any generation on social issues such as immigration, race and homosexuality. They are also much more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than was the preceding generation of young people, which could reshape politics in the years ahead. Yet the evidence is mixed as to whether the current generation of young Americans will be any more engaged in the nation's civic life than were young people in the past, potentially blunting their political impact.

This report takes stock of this new generation. It explores their outlook, their lifestyle and their politics. Because the boundaries that separate generations are indistinct, the definition of Generation Next and other generational groups mentioned in this report are necessarily approximate. For analysis purposes, Generation Next includes those Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 years old.

Meet Generation Next:

- They use technology and the internet to connect with people in new and distinctive ways. Text messaging, instant messaging and email keep them in constant contact with friends. About half say they sent or received a text message over the phone in the past day, approximately double the proportion of those ages 26-40.
- They are the "Look at Me" generation. Social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and MyYearbook allow individuals to post a personal profile complete with photos and descriptions of interests and hobbies. A majority of

Generation Next		
		Age
		18-25
		%
<i>Think your generation is unique and distinct?</i>	Yes	68
	No	31
	DK	1
		100
<i>Compared with 20 years ago young adults today have...</i>		
		%
	Better educational opportunities	84
	Access to higher paying jobs	72
	Live in more exciting times	64
<i>Compared with 20 years ago young adults today...</i>		
		%
	Have more casual sex	75
	Resort to violence more	70
	Binge drink more	69
	Use more illegal drugs	63
	Vote less often	49
-----Age-----		
<i>2004 presidential vote*</i>	18-25	26+
	%	%
	John Kerry	56 47
	George W. Bush	43 52
	Other/Didn't vote	1 1
		100 100
<i>Homosexuality should be...</i>		
	Accepted	58 50
	Discouraged	32 39
	Mixed/DK	10 11
		100 100
<i>Impact of immigration...</i>		
	Strengthens nation	52 39
	A burden	38 42
	Mixed/DK	10 19
		100 100
Based on 2006 Gen Next Survey		
*2004 NEP Exit Polls, 18-24 year-old voters		

Gen Nexters have used one of these social networking sites, and more than four-in-ten have created a personal profile.

- Their embrace of new technology has made them uniquely aware of its advantages and disadvantages. They are more likely than older adults to say these cyber-tools make it easier for them to make new friends and help them to stay close to old friends and family. But more than eight-in-ten also acknowledge that these tools “make people lazier.”
- About half of Gen Nexters say the growing number of immigrants to the U.S. strengthens the country more than any generation. And they also lead the way in their support for gay marriage and acceptance of interracial dating.
- Beyond these social issues, their views defy easy categorization. For example, Generation Next is less critical of government regulation of business but also less critical of business itself. And they are the most likely of any generation to support privatization of the Social Security system.
- They maintain close contact with parents and family. Roughly eight-in-ten say they talked to their parents in the past day. Nearly three-in-four see their parents at least once a week, and half say they see their parents daily. One reason: money. About three-quarters of Gen Nexters say their parents have helped them financially in the past year.
- Their parents may not always be pleased by what they see on those visits home: About half of Gen Nexters say they have either gotten a tattoo, dyed their hair an untraditional color, or had a body piercing in a place other than their ear lobe. The most popular are tattoos, which decorate the bodies of more than a third of these young adults.
- One-in-five members of Generation Next say they have no religious affiliation or are atheist or agnostic, nearly double the proportion of young people who said that in the late 1980s. And just 4% of Gen Nexters say

people in their generation view becoming more spiritual as their most important goal in life.

- They are somewhat more interested in keeping up with politics and national affairs than were young people a generation ago. Still, only a third say they follow what's going on in government and public affairs "most of the time."
- In Pew surveys in 2006, nearly half of young people (48%) identified more with the Democratic Party, while just 35% affiliated more with the GOP. This makes Generation Next the least Republican generation.
- Voter turnout among young people increased significantly between 2000 and 2004, interrupting a decades-long decline in turnout among the young. Nonetheless, most members of Generation Next feel removed from the political process. Only about four-in-ten agree with the statement: "It's my duty as a citizen to always vote."
- They are significantly less cynical about government and political leaders than are other Americans or the previous generation of young people. A majority of Americans agree with the statement: "When something is run by the government, it is usually inefficient and wasteful," but most Generation Nexters reject this idea.
- Their heroes are close and familiar. When asked to name someone they admire, they are twice as likely as older Americans to name a family member, teacher, or mentor. Moreover, roughly twice as many young people say they most admire an entertainer rather than a political leader.
- They are more comfortable with globalization and new ways of doing work. They are the most likely of any age group to say that automation, the outsourcing of jobs, and the growing number of immigrants have helped and not hurt American workers.

- Asked about the life goals of those in their age group, most Gen Nexters say their generation's top goals are fortune and fame. Roughly eight-in-ten say people in their generation think getting rich is either the most important, or second most important, goal in their lives. About half say that becoming famous also is valued highly by fellow Gen Nexters.

About the Project

In coordination with *Generation Next*, an initiative aimed at studying the lives and opinions of young people, the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press conducted a special survey in September and October 2006. The survey included an oversample of 18-25 year olds, who were reached on both landline and cell phones.

To place *Generation Next* in perspective, this report also draws on the full history of Pew Research Center surveys over the past 20 years, as well as exit poll analysis and census data on youth voting patterns. For more details on the Gen Next survey and other data sources, see pages 42-43.

This report is drawn from a broad array of Pew Research Center polling data. The main survey was conducted Sept. 6-Oct. 2, 2006 among 1,501 adults - including 579 people ages 18-25. In addition, the report includes extensive generational analysis of Pew Research Center surveys dating back to 1987.

Much of the analysis deals with comparisons among the four existing adult generations. For purposes of this report, **Generation Next** is made up of 18-25 year-olds (born between 1981 and 1988). **Generation X** was born between 1966 and 1980 and ranges in age from 26-40. The **Baby Boom** generation, born between 1946 and 1964, ranges in age from 41-60. Finally, those over age 60 (born before 1946) are called the **Seniors**. These generational breaks are somewhat arbitrary but are roughly comparable to those used by other scholars and researchers.

The report is divided into four main sections: (1) Outlook and World View, (2) Technology and Lifestyle, (3) Politics and Policy, and (4) Values and Social Issues.

