

Will Millennials Pick the Next President?

They're passionate and engaged, concerned about others, and come 2016, the millennial generation could very well determine the course of the United States of America, politically and religiously.

Those born from 1981-1997 overtook the baby boomer generation this year as the largest in American history, according to a Pew Research study. By next year, nearly all of them will have reached voting age, something that's increasingly weighing on the minds of those running for president.

It's also on the minds of those in the church. With social issues quickly becoming political platforms and biblical mandates becoming lines in the sand that separate millennials from traditional church conservatives, politicians and pastors alike are gearing up for the campaign that will set the nation's future course.

In a voting bloc that has traditionally leaned toward the Democratic Party, a recent Harvard University Institute of Politics poll found that 51 percent of millennials would prefer a Republican-run Congress, something the church would do well to consider.

"I have a couple of millennials myself and I think they are starting to recognize that we're in fairly serious trouble in this nation and I think that probably makes them open to listening more carefully than they have in the past when they just ran along with the crowd," Dr. Ben Carson, a retired neurosurgeon, author and candidate for president, told *Charisma*.

"I think every vote matters tremendously, but they are going to be the leaders in the very near future so we really have to

get them to start thinking for themselves as opposed to the herd mentality.”

Engaging Millennials

But for the church to engage millennials, it means first and foremost, they must engage with politics themselves, something many have shied away from in recent decades.

“The church needs to put into context what voting is, that it is not a political act, but a prophetic witness to community that arises from Christ and the work of God,” says Mat Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel and dean of the Liberty University School of Law.

For this voting generation, many of the promises the sitting president made in the last two campaigns ring hollow. President Barack Obama ran his 2008 campaign on “hope and change” and, according to a Pew research study, garnered 66 percent of the millennial vote, compared to 60 percent in 2012. He won those elections because he captured their attention, meeting them on their own terms, from social media to celebrity endorsements. Obama promoted issues that millennials care deeply about, issues that have polarized children from their parents.

But they’ve soured on his promises, divorcing themselves from his political party, and going rogue, picking and choosing political ideologies—and religious ones—they like and ignoring all others. Half of millennial voters are registered as independents, moving away from the two-party system.

“The rosy picture of (Obama’s) campaign has been tempered by reality,” says millennial Dan Gilmore, a conservative commentator for the *Patriot Post*. “The Republican Party is still poking holes in the ‘Affordable’ Care Act. Opening dialogue with our enemies? The images of burning pilots and beheaded Christians fill our screens.”

Because of this, the president's job-approval rating has dropped to 43 percent among voting millennials, and voters are looking for new ideas. With 2016 rapidly approaching, the country has a chance to elect new leadership and make policy changes to move America forward. It's also an opportunity for fresh faces to make a huge impact on this demographic.

The Who's Who of the 2016 Race

Carson says he's never been particularly enamored with the sitting president's ability to bring people together. With a chance for new leadership, Carson is looking for someone—perhaps himself—to repair the economy and enhance the country's military.

"The culture in our nation has been damaged severely by the animosity that is created by leadership that is always saying negative things about the other side rather than trying to work with the other side," Carson says. "We need leadership that is willing to truly work with other people and listen to other ideas and recognize the 'my way or the highway' doesn't work in a pluralistic society."

Marco Rubio, the charismatic senator from Florida draws many parallels to the incumbent, and may resonate with younger voters, says National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference President Samuel Rodriguez. Rubio's stance on gay marriage largely differs from traditional conservatives, but that may appeal to millennials.

The pastor also thinks former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush is the strongest contender against the only Democratic candidate named thus far: Hillary Clinton, whose social media game—a necessity in this technology time—has fallen short, drawing revelers instead of supporters.

U.S. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, took his campaign to YouTube almost immediately, attempting to woo young voters. Others, like U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, is sticking to his

conservative guns, fighting for faith and freedom at every turn.

But is that a hindrance when it comes to millennial voters? Staver says avoiding the tough issues altogether could be the downfall of potential candidate Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker. Clint Jenkin, vice president of research at the Barna Group, agrees, noting it's the issues that are making the election, not the names and the parties that back them.

"The bigger political issues are being driven by the cultural issues, and millennials are more likely than anyone else (to vote) as independent," Jenkin says. "There's an aversion to labels, categories ... a change in how they're identified: More moderate political views, driven by cultural views of homosexuality, somewhat by abortion, but by sexuality issues in general, and we see them really coming down on the liberal side of issues, though they may not identify as liberal or democrat."

The Unexpected Big Issues

And while those from Generation X or even the baby boomers are focusing on big-ticket items, abortion and same-sex marriage are not the driving issues behind millennials' voting choices. Instead, you're more likely to hear about their burdensome student debts, health care, Pre-K education, war with the Islamic State, Iranian nuclear talks, Social Security, environmental policies, the National Security Administration and inequality, to name a few issues millennials are concerned about.

University of Iowa law student Em Papp agrees, saying the current candidates often lack civility.

"We don't need brash, self-aggrandizing politicians who are more worried about 'taking a stand' on every single issue than finding ways to sit down with people of differing opinions and listen," Papp says.

Beyond his or her social platforms, each candidate has a religious affiliation. Clinton is a Methodist; Walker attends a Baptist church, as does Rubio, who's also identified as Roman Catholic and Mormon at earlier points in his life. Paul is a "Christian, but not always a good one," as he told *On the Issues*, and Cruz is a Southern Baptist, who launched his campaign—and the presidential bids—at Liberty University.

While previous generations of Christians may be up in arms, splitting hairs over the semantics of denominations and what that means for politics, millennials don't care.

"I take every profession of faith by a politician with a thick pinch of salt," Gilmore says.

For Carson, it is vital for the voter to consider the Judeo-Christian roots of the country. Faith is important, he says, because it helps voters identify a value system, as well as create a strong identity that allows the country to fend off enemies.

"Religion tends to be more tradition, and faith tends to derive from their personal relationship with God," Carson says. "In my case, I have to be true to God foremost, which means it's going to be very difficult for me to be political."

But one-third of millennials do not formally identify with any given religion, according to a report by the Public Religion Research Institution. The same report by Robert P. Jones and Daniel Clark says 25 percent believe marriage is old fashioned and out of date.

For Liberty Counsel's Staver, this reflects the nontraditional families—including single-parent homes—in which many millennials were raised, and, in turn, are supporting gay marriage (68 percent, according to a Pew Research study, are in favor).

"We pay a consequence when we eliminate a mom or dad from

marriage relationship. We cannot replace mother or father with someone from the same sex," Staver says.

So how can the church not only welcome, but engage this generation when the culturally accepted beliefs are categorically separate in the mind of millennials?

For Jenkin, it's recognizing this disconnect, as well as the pick-and-choose philosophy they live by.

"The church has to find ways to engage millennials without requiring them to tow the line on range of issues," Jenkin says. "Millennials have grown very comfortable picking and choosing. I think churches have to respect that. If the church's message is, 'here's the litmus test to fit in, here's what you have to think,' ... it's not going to work well. Too many millennials have friends who are gay, living together, smoking marijuana."

But is the church preparing rhetoric on these issues? Should they?

The Church's Role in Politics

Separation of church and state weighs heavily on the mind of millennials. They want to worship in one place and vote in another, while older generations support an all-encompassing environment where church and morality are on the offense in leading politics.

Southfield, Michigan City Council President Sylvia Jordan says the church's involvement in politics should begin on the front end.

She argues politics begins at the local level and there are a myriad of ways for local congregations to engage and build relationships with city councilmen and women, as well as mayors and state representatives. What's hindering believers, Jordan says, is their attitudes and how they reach out to

government officials.

“Neither party is perfect, so you pray and ask God which to connect to, get in there and stand up,” Jordan says. “Don’t go walking in there with your Bible. It should be in your heart. What I see believers doing is walking into meetings, saying ‘I praise You, Lord,’ and they alienate nonbelievers. You don’t have to go in there with a big cross—go and learn, learn the law of the land, speak out of convictions, speak out of what you know, speak out about what you know.” It boils down to this: The church needs to advocate for the Lamb’s—not the donkey or elephant’s—agenda, says Rodriguez, challenging believers—and millennials—to evaluate their convictions and vote accordingly.

Rodriguez has created a covenant voters can make with themselves, a way for them to align their religious beliefs with political ones. The covenant says that a voter will do his or her spiritual due diligence before any election, thoroughly vetting any sort of potential candidate with the following: Life, family, religious liberties and limited government inasmuch that when government gets big, it puts man at the center, and not God.

The right to life, though, is far more than the cultural evaluation of contraception in regards to conception. Instead, valuing life is about depending on God for your needs—not the government. God called us to thrive, Rodriguez says, and by depending on the government to pay portions of your food or rent, you are not living your best life.

What is known as “social justice” lies at the epicenter of how the church can engage millennials. In traditional Republican philosophy, it is not the government’s responsibility to collect taxes from the masses to fund a welfare program, but allow benevolent charities to aid the poor and needy.

Instead, though, in all appearances, that biblical mandate has

been all but stripped from the church. With millennials looking to engage their fellow man by way of nonprofit work, charity, startups and crowdsourcing, the church has the opportunity to not only add the young voters to their flocks, but to bring about a social revolution that could alter the perception of Christianity.

“If the church actually assumed the role it was intended to have in civil society, we’d be in a much more productive place. Churches could stop pontificating because they feel threatened—and instead actually affect social good by implementing programs that care for and feed people,” says millennial Seattle Pacific University political science and journalism graduate Melissa Steffan, who now works at 1776, a global seed fund in Washington, D.C.

“(The church) was intended to step up and care for the poor and the orphans and the widows because that is the call of Jesus. However, we have churches that are more concerned with image, with issues, with so many things besides what they’re called to do, and the result is that the government has had to step in (to fill) the church’s role with social programs and the ‘safety net’ that care for the very people the church is called to serve.” It echoes Jenkin’s research indicating the church must begin to accept that millennials may never totally be on the same page politically or religiously as previous generations. For Carson, the answer to how the church can engage in politics lies in history, particularly in the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville.

“One of the things that impressed him the most was the fiery sermons that didn’t tread lightly,” Carson says. “And it was that convergence of truth and morality that made Americans into a different kind of people.” The solution, according to Rodriguez, is prayer—but not in a passive, “Oh, I’ll be praying for you” sort of afterthought. Rather, it’s up to church leaders and elders to organize monthly prayer meetings for intercession over our country—and appeal to heaven on

behalf of voters and leadership, for policies and tactics, for how to approach the evil that seems to encompass parts of the world.

His prescription is this: Beginning this month, churches should launch a strong campaign of monthly prayerful intercessions, just one Sunday per month from now until the election. They'll pray for the salvation of America, pray for God to change the nation, change our politicians and for God to activate the church. "This is a full-out initiative for the church to engage in prophetic activism, not political advocacy," Rodriguez says. With genuine faith, the church can show younger voters that Christianity is about honesty and vulnerability when building a relationship with Jesus, it's about fighting for justice in the name of grace and mercy, it's about forgetting all that a singular person is and putting the control entirely into God's hands.

"We need to rebuke the idea of comfortable Christianity, speak about biblical truth from the pulpit," Rodriguez says. "You have civic duty, biblical vote; you must vote righteousness, for the Lamb's agenda, and you must do that (as) expeditiously as possible. We will not be silent on these issues—We need to speak about what ISIS is doing, Kenya, Coptic Christians; we need to address these issues, not from politics, not from the right wing—millennials hate these terms ... From our pulpits, we must."

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Francis Chan shares his insights on the young generation as they come into leadership at .