



Comparing Conservative and Progressive Investment in America's Youth

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Introduction

The Millennial generation is the largest, most diverse, and most progressive generation in American history.¹ Young Americans between the ages 12 and 29 comprise the Millennial generation and, as of this year, represent a full quarter of the voting-age American public; in total, 46 million Americans are considered Millennials.² In 2012 they surpassed the 39-million-strong bloc of voters older than 65, and by the 2020 election, when all Millennials will have reached voting age, they will total 90 million eligible voters—or 40 percent of the electorate.³ In the 2012 elections the group’s national turnout of roughly 50 percent meant their 18-percent share of the electorate surpassed the 16-percent share of the electorate for those voters older than 65. This also demonstrates the significant work that remains to be done to ensure more than half of Millennials vote in the future.⁴

Millennials have already begun and will continue to shape America’s increasingly diverse culture, with 44 percent identifying as people of color, according to a recent Campus Progress analysis.⁵ Additionally, 44 percent of young Americans consider themselves liberal or progressive, as opposed to 28 percent who identify as conservative or libertarian.⁶ Even those who identify as young Republicans demonstrate a more progressive outlook than older members of the same party. This progressivism is visible in a wide range of issues, from the broad debates surrounding the role of government and the economy to issues such as immigration, marriage equality, and women’s health and rights.

Libertarians in particular are well-positioned to win over young supporters on social issues and make a renewed argument regarding the role of government. Coverage of the 2012 elections has included numerous young conservatives expressing “relief” that they can “reset the [Republican] party’s values around race and sex.”⁷ Brad Dayspring, the director of the Young Guns Action Fund super PAC—which focuses on helping young Republican challengers win in Democratic-leaning areas—and former aide to Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA), said recently that, “Broadly, we have to find a way to communicate on these issues in a way that doesn’t scare people.”⁸

Clearly conservatives recognize that Millennials are increasingly assuming a larger role in choosing our leaders and determining the issues that dominate our political dialogue. Long-term policy debates will hinge on the perspectives and engagement of the Millennial generation as the group continues to make up a larger share of the potential voting electorate. As Millennials' power within the electorate grows, conservative organizations will increasingly invest in young people in order to shape their ideology and build a stronger conservative base within the generation. With the 2012 elections now behind us and the influence of younger voters deciding outcomes from the presidency to ballot initiatives, conservatives are likely to expand youth investment and adopt new strategies in an attempt to win over young voters.⁹

Conservatives are not new to this effort. This is clear in the number of conservative groups aimed at young adults, such as the Young America's Foundation and Collegiate Network, and the resources with which these groups are provided, including financial support. Conservatives have invested heavily in long-term leadership development organizations that provide trainings, internships, and fellowships to conservatives starting in college and continuing through post-graduate life.

As evidenced in the recent 2012 elections, the progressive movement already boasts a huge advantage with Millennial voters, with 60 percent of young voters supporting President Barack Obama compared to Republican candidate and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney's 37 percent. Young voters also made the difference in deciding numerous progressive ballot initiatives such as Proposition 30 in California, which raised taxes on the wealthy to fund public higher education.¹⁰ But the battle over ideology will only grow more intense as the youth electorate expands. Allowing conservatives to outspend, outpace, and outmaneuver when it comes to young adults could lead to irreversible, costly, and easily preventable losses for progressives in the future.

This report is based on the examination of public tax records and outlines the assets, spending, and personnel differences between conservative and progressive youth organizations. We pulled Public 990 tax forms for the past four years for conservative and progressive organizations and used them to determine all the financial information in this report. Only organizations exclusively focused on youth were examined. Additionally, estimates on staffing, internships, and fellowships were based upon information that organizations posted publicly on their websites, unless otherwise noted. The research focused primarily on organizations that were nonpartisan and geared toward young people, and the categorization

of conservative or progressive was based upon internal analysis. Our analysis provides a fresh analysis based on the examination of this new data, which shows significant financial and staffing advantages for conservative youth organizations.

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