The Millennial Effect

by
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Abstract

Political polarization is one of the most commonly discussed topics in American politics today. In this paper, I analyze polarization and discover that polarization in government, as measured by first-dimension DW-Nominate Scores, has increased in recent years. As the evidence shows, increased polarization in the American government is the result of increased polarization within the American electorate. Social issues influence polarization in the electorate. Recent evidence from the Pew Research Center shows that the Millennial Generation is not only demographically different from any generation to come before it, it also shares more moderate views with respect to social issues than the electorate at large. As the Millennial Generation increases its representation within the American Electorate, polarization can be expected to decrease.

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<center>**I.**</center>

<center>**INTRODUCTION**</center>

As a child of the nineties, polarized politics are the only variety I can ever remember existing. All of the political events in this period have occurred in the age of the 24-hour news cycle and partisan commentary on demand. One of my first memory of a political event was learning of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, which was quickly followed by a hotly contested and highly controversial election in 2000. The War on Terror was declared a year later following the attacks of September 11, 2001, and in March of 2003, President Bush launched what would come to be the widely unpopular Iraq War.   A bitter 2004 election preceded the political fallout following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Two years later, a financial crisis began that would lead to the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. Despite the Republican defeat in the 2008 election, the Tea Party would continue to oppose President Barack Obama and the passage of the Affordable Care Act, marking his presidency as the most polarizing on record (Jacobson 2013, 689).

Excluding the intense nationalism and patriotic displays in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, it is hard to remember a time when the polarization of the political parties did not seem to increase with every passing day. Numerous recent surveys have shown that the polarization of both political elites and the American electorate as a whole have been steadily increasing over the course of the last few decades (Jacobson 2013, 691; Mason 2013, 440; McCarty 2011, 359). For both government officials and the electorate as a whole, Carroll

<div align="right">1</div>

Doherty (2014) writes that, "Political polarization is the defining feature of early 21st century American politics."

While the causes of current polarization can indeed be traced most effectively through a historical analysis, the coming demographic changes to the American electorate can be expected to have a far greater degree of effectiveness in reducing political polarization than any proposed structural reform. Demographic shifts are occurring in the American population that will increasingly affect the composition of the American electorate as members of the Millennial Generation, defined by Paul Taylor of the Pew Research Center as those born after 1980, continue to represent an increasingly large percentage of the electorate (Taylor 2014, 33). The voters in the 2012 election were the most racially and ethnically diverse electorate in American history, and this trend in increasing multicultural representation is expected to grow every year as more and more members of the Millennial generation come of age (Taylor 2014, 2). Furthermore, the members of the Millennial Generation show, on average, considerably more moderate viewpoints on most social issues than the electorate as a whole (Kiley 2014).

When it comes to political polarization, Gary Jacobson claims, "...the only reliable source of change would be an electorate that punishes extremism and intransigence and rewards moderation and compromise at the polls" (2013, 705). I intend to build off of his premise and study whether it is possible that the relatively moderate political stances of the Millennial Generation could lead to a decrease in political polarization.

II.

THESIS STATEMENT

I will argue four points in my thesis.

1. Polarization in government, as measured by congressional first-dimension DW-Nominate scores, has increased as the result of increased polarization in the electorate.

2. Social issues influence polarization.

3. The Millennial Generation holds more moderate viewpoints on social issues.

4. Polarization in government can be expected to decrease due to moderating tendencies on social issues within the Millennial Generation.

III.

POLARIZATION IN GOVERNMENT

AND POLARIZATION IN THE ELECTORATE

Polarization, defined herein as the degree to which the two major parties diverge with respect to political ideology, viewpoints, values, assessments of the opposing party, and views for the country's future, has become a subject of frequent discussion within American politics. In the last few years, leading political scientists and legal scholars have written numerous papers and articles detailing the current state of polarization in American politics and have subsequently attempted to track its development so as to attribute it to specific causes. Professor Richard Pildes wrote a frequently cited article that organized potential causes of modern polarization into three categories, which he labels, "Persons, History, and Institutions" (2011, 274). Both his article and much of the subsequent research published by other scholars have, in essence, relied upon the use of these three categories in the search for not only the causes, but also the potential solutions to a reversal in current trends of increasing polarization in politics.

"Persons" refers to a view that the personalities of specific political figures are responsible for polarization (Pildes 2011, 274). This has certainly been a popular area of discussion for journalists in the age of the twenty-four hour news cycle when discussing suspected sources of increasing polarization. Paul Frymer writes, "The divide between Fox News and MSNBC further exacerbates this polarization by amplifying extremes in short sound bites and promoting an increasingly angry mood of voters on all sides" (Frymer 2011, 348). Newt

Gingrich, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Ted Cruz, and countless others have been frequently described in recent years as "polarizing figures" within the mass media, and the difference in President Obama's approval ratings between Republicans and Democrats is larger than any other president for which data is available (Jacobson 2013, 689).

"History" ascribes the polarization between today's Democratic and Republican parties to large-scale historical and transformative forces. The racial realignment of the South with respect to the two major political parties that occurred following the Civil Rights movement is the most commonly studied example of this type. Many view the 1965 Voting Rights Act as the first step towards our current climate of polarization, which seems logical when reviewing historical events. Ridding states of the ability to institute literacy tests, poll taxes, and other registration practices aimed at deterring non-white voters had an overwhelming impact on the South. Pildes (2011) explains it as a, "...massive infusion of new voters, mostly black but white as well, that entered and reconfigured Southern politics" (290). This left the South divided into a party of highly conservative Republicans, to which most of the white, formerly Southern Democrats fled, and an essentially new electoral coalition in the South composed largely of moderate to liberal Democrats who had previously been absent from the voting booth in those states. Although the Voting Rights Act and the emergence of civil rights overall were factors in this new electoral composition in the South, Pildes argues that the evidence for either being the dominant catalyst in increasing polarization is not overwhelming (291).

"Institutions" are the structures underlying the organization of our democracy. These structures include the use of open or closed primary elections, campaign finance laws, gerrymandering, and internal legislative rules for the House and Senate—each of which is frequently blamed by both pundits and politicians alike for today's climate of polarization. Frances Lee, writing in the 2013 American Political Science Association's Task Force Report on Polarization, believes the current relative parity of the political parties most maintains our state of polarization, as there is less incentive for elected officials to cooperate if it is still likely for those currently in the minority to retake power in the next election by rallying support through strong opposition (Mansbridge 2013, 55).

Professor Pildes and others have conducted research analyzing the effects of "Persons," "History," and each of the aforementioned structures on current polarization. The studies have shown the likelihood of initiating real change through the reform of any of these, but have found the potential impacts to be minimal (Pildes 2011, 333; Jacobson 2013, 706; McCarty 2011, 371).

A metric known as first-dimension DW-Nominate scores can be used to place members of Congress on a liberal-conservative spectrum based on all nonunanimous roll call votes taken during each Congress. These come from the statistical analyses of congressional voting patterns by political scientists Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal (Abramowitz 2013, 710). The scores extract dimensions underlying voting patterns in Congress. Abramowitz writes that, "In the modern era, the first and most important of these dimensions—the one that accounts for by far the largest share of the variance in congressional voting— corresponds to the liberal-conservative divide over the size of the welfare state

and role of the federal government in the economy" (2013, 710). The ideological preferences of party elites with respect to social and cultural issues (which are considered second-dimension) have become so consistent with their preferences on the size of the welfare state and the role of the economy that scores for party elites on both the first and second dimensions can be used interchangeably (Carmines 2012, 1632-1633). According to an article published in *Political Analysis*, these "scores for the U.S. Congress are widely used measures of legislators' ideological locations over time. These scores have been used in a large number of studies in political science and closely related fields" (Carroll 2009, 261). Using these scores, increases in polarization in government can be tracked by analyzing any increasing ideological divide.

The DW-Nominate scale measures the locations of members of both houses of Congress on the first dimension as determined by all recorded votes in each congress (Abramowitz 2013, 710). Abramowitz explains:

> This score measures the position of each member on a liberal-conservative continuum that ranges from -1 on the far left to +1 on the far right. We can therefore use this scale to measure the distance between the average Democrat and the average Republican in each chamber in each Congress (2013, 710).

These scores, collected from 1973 to 2012, demonstrate a steady and asymmetric growth in the ideological gap between House and Senate members from the two major political parties (Jacobson 2013, 690). Since 1973, the Senate has increased its polarization score by 29% and the House has increased by 47% (Theriault 2006, 483). Not only has this gap increased to the point that 2012

represents the largest divergence observed between the two parties in data going as far back as 1879, the ratings show that congressional Republicans are responsible for more than 80% of this change (Jacobson 2013, 690-691). Put simply, Republicans in Congress have grown much more conservative while congressional Democrats have remained fairly steady in their ideological positioning **(See Fig. 1 and Fig. 2)**.

The data from the DW-Nominate scores can be analyzed in a number of ways that demonstrate the intensity with which political polarization has increased in recent years. In the thirty years that passed between the 93rd Congress (1973-1974) and the 108th Congress (2003-2004), the average standard deviation between Democrats and Republicans increased by 2 in the House and 2.5 in the Senate (Theriault 2006, 498). In the 93rd Congress (1973-1974), 252 out of 435 U.S. Representatives scored between the most conservative of the Democrats and the most liberal of the Republicans (Theriault 2006, 499). This finding indicates that within the House of Representatives, there was much overlap between the parties and it was not uncommon to find a Republican more liberal than many Democrats and vice versa. Party coalitions in the Senate at this time were similarly heterogeneous, with 40 of 100 Senators also scoring between the most conservative of the Democrats and the most liberal of the Republicans (2006, 499). By the 108th Congress (2003-2004), that overlap was gone. The most liberal Republican and the most conservative Democrat are separated by 0.151 on the DW-Nominate scale in the House and 0.104 in the Senate. There is no longer any overlap at all between members of Congress from each of the two

Party Means on Liberal-Conservative Dimension (House—1879-2014)

House 1879-2014
Party Means on Liberal-Conservative Dimension

Liberal - Conservative

Republicans

Southern Democrats

Democrats

Northern Democrats

1879 1887 1895 1903 1911 1919 1927 1935 1943 1951 1959 1967 1975 1983 1991 1999 2007
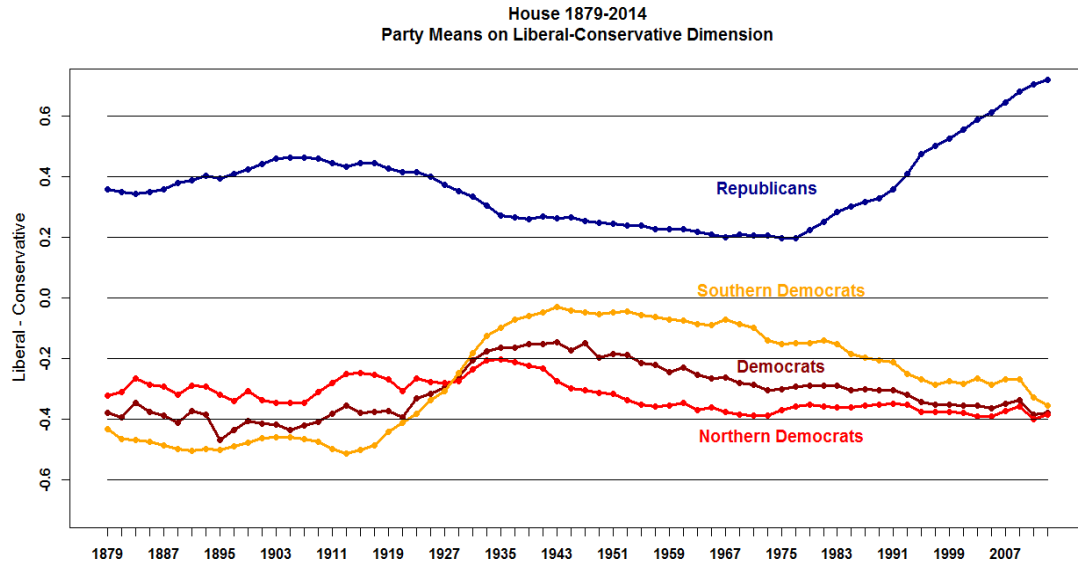
Polarized America / voteview.com

Figure 1: As shown, there has been a steady and asymmetric growth in the ideological gap between members of the House from the two major political parties. Since 1973, the House has increased the ideological gap by 47%.

Poole, Keith and Howard Rosenthal. 2015. *Voteview*. March 21.
http://voteview.com/political_polarization_2014.htm

9

Party Means on Liberal-Conservative Dimension
(Senate—1879-2014)

Senate 1879-2014
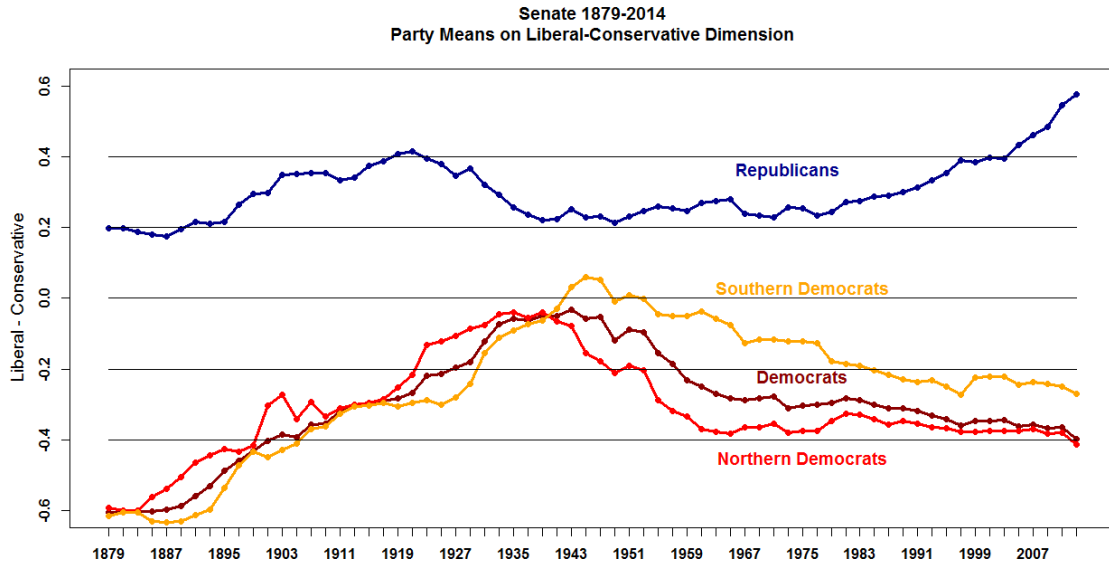**Party Means on Liberal-Conservative Dimension**

Polarized America / voteview.com

Figure 2. As shown, there has been a steady and asymmetric growth in the ideological gap between members of the Senate from the two major political parties. Since 1973, the Senate has increased the ideological gap by 29%.

Poole, Keith and Howard Rosenthal. 2015. *Voteview*. March 21.
http://voteview.com/political_polarization_2014.htm

major parties. When the most conservative Democrat is still considerably more liberal than the most progressive Republican and vice versa, the likelihood of the two parties working together or reaching acceptable compromises is significantly diminished. Common ground breeds cooperation, but any common ground between Republicans and Democrats in Congress appears to have disappeared over the last four decades. Since 1973, the Senate has increased its overall polarization score by 29% and the House has increased by 47% (Theriault 2006, 483).

This is a problem. Good governance is achieved through compromise and negotiation. In 2011, a bi-partisan debt reduction compromise crafted by a so-called "gang of six" within the U.S. Senate was an example of each side compromising slightly on its principles to improve the overall health of the country. Unfortunately, when President Obama embraced the compromise, a Republican aide claimed that, "the President killed any chance of its success by 1) embracing it; 2) hailing the fact that it increases taxes; and 3) saying it mirrors his own plan" (Mason 2012, 1678). Our polarization has reached the point of absurdity. In this instance, even when Republican leaders were willing to compromise slightly on principle, they were unable or unwilling to do so once it was made clear to the public that they were compromising with "him."

The unusually high level of polarization currently within government is undeniable. Jacobson (2013) writes:

Partisan disputes over matters large and small, personnel as well as policy, occur almost daily…overcome only when dire necessity compels short-term compromises to stave off such disasters as default on the national

debt or a government shutdown. Conflict and gridlock have damaged the

public standing of everyone involved, for most Americans detest the

partisan posturing, bickering, and stalemate that leave disputes

unresolved and major problems unaddressed (688).

Polarization in government, as measured by first-dimension DW-Nominate scores of

nonunanimous roll call votes, has increased and evidence suggests this is actually

the result of increased polarization within the electorate. Multiple studies have

analyzed the degree to which the polarization of the political elites in government

relates to the polarization of the electorate as a whole. Abramowitz (2013) and

Jacobson (2013) are two of the most recent researchers to study polarization in

both the American government and the electorate. The studies have shown that

polarization in government is rooted in divisions within American society itself.

Abramowitz writes, "Polarization in Washington reflects polarization within the

American electorate" (Abramowitz 2013, 709). According to Gary C. Jacobson,

"The evidence...shows that elite polarization is firmly rooted in electoral politics"

(2013, 689).

If it is polarization in the electorate that is the source of polarization and

gridlock within the government, it is helpful to then analyze what drives the

electorate's polarization. In order to decrease polarization in government, it is

first necessary to experience a decline in polarization within the electorate.

IV.

POLARIZATION IN THE ELECTORATE

AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Polarization within the electorate itself differs from polarization among political elites. Most importantly, the ideological orientation of the public cannot adequately be reduced to a single dimension. An article in the *American Behavioral Scientist* claimed, "...the domestic policy preferences of the public vary along two principal dimensions, a first dimension associated with economic and social-welfare issues and a second dimension dominated by social and cultural issues" (Carmines 2012, 1632-1633). As previously stated, the preferences of party elites on these two distinct areas are nearly identical. As a result of this, only one dimension is used to score Congressional leaders. In contrast, the economic and social ideological dimensions are separate and only moderately correlated for the majority of the public at large (Carmines 2012, 1633). The research concerning the different ideological preferences between elites and the electorate is especially significant with respect to the political actions of those citizens whose beliefs are ideologically consistent with the party elites across both social and economic issues compared with citizens whose beliefs are inconsistent on one dimension. As a result of this, Carmines et al. found that, "...citizens who have views that are ideologically consistent with political elites across both social and economic issues have become increasingly polarized in their partisan orientations from each other" (2012, 1633). This has led to increases in polarization among those citizens whose views are ideologically consistent with respect to social and economic issues, but this same

trend of increasing polarization has not occurred with voters whose views are liberal with respect to social and cultural issues but conservative with respect to economic issues. Members of the electorate with conservative views on social and cultural issues but liberal views on economic issues have also not experienced an increase in polarization. Unlike Congress and the rest of the electorate, those citizens identifying as liberal or conservative on one dimension and taking the opposite view on the second dimension have not seen an increase in polarization in recent decades (2012, 1636). This results in a lower likelihood of identifying with either of the major political parties for people in this group. Christopher Hare has also noted this trend and, with Keith T. Poole, wrote in 2014:

> ...social/cultural issues are increasingly being drawn into the main dimension of conflict, which has usually been nearly exclusively occupied by economic issues. The end result is that the Democratic and Republican parties have become more ideologically homogeneous and are now deeply polarized (417).

Abramowitz concurs, writing that, "The policy divide between the Democratic and Republican electoral coalitions now encompasses a wide variety of issues including both economic and social issues (2012, 724).

It is true that in the last several decades, Americans' partisan and ideological identities have come increasingly into alignment (Mason 2012, 143). This is significant because it has led to a stronger identity within a social group, whether Democratic or Republican. Mason writes:

...sorting has been responsible for increased levels of partisan strength, in-group bias, activism, and anger. As sorting has moved our ideological and partisan identities into alignment, this new alignment has worked to increase the strength of those identities (143).

This suggests that polarization has been exacerbated by the homogenous views held by most members of the Democratic and Republican parties and that these homogenous views contribute significantly to the difficulty partisans have in understanding one another.

If it is true that polarization has been exacerbated by the homogenous views held by members of both parties, then it follows logically that a decrease in the percentage of Americans whose views are homogenously conservative or homogeneously liberal on both social and economic issues will lead to a decrease in the average strength with which people identify with their own party. This decrease in solidarity is likely to produce a greater willingness to compromise with members of an opposing party. Indeed, Mason distinguishes between issue polarization and the behavioral polarization that follows once sides have been selected. Behavioral polarization is characterized by, "...increasing partisan strength, partisan bias, activism, and anger" (141). Behavioral polarization is especially dangerous in that it leads to an exhibition of bias by citizens in evaluating the merits of both major parties. Behavioral polarization results in party members, "viewing their own party's actions as more positive and praiseworthy than the opponent party's actions, even when the two parties are behaving in similar ways" (Mason 2013, 142). An inability to evaluate honestly

the behavior of government officials makes it more difficult for the electorate to hold parties responsible when their policies fail.

According to the research up to this point, polarization in government has increased in recent decades. The source of this increase in polarization has been attributed to a subsequent increase in polarization within the electorate. The electorate's polarization is driven partly by social issues, and the behavioral element of polarization is made worse by the intense partisan identities of many Americans within the electorate. To reverse the increases in governmental polarization, electoral polarization must decrease as well. Decreasing electoral polarization requires an electorate with fewer disagreements over social issues and weaker attachment to party identifications.

<center>**V.**</center>

<center>**THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION**</center>

<center>**AND SOCIAL ISSUES**</center>

The majority of the American electorate can be divided into four generations. The names and dates assigned to each and used throughout this paper correspond to the divisions assigned to the topic by the Pew Research Center in their publications on generational politics **(See Fig. 3)**. The oldest of these four main groups is referred to as the Silent Generation, and this group contains 12% of the adult population and represents the citizens born between 1928 and 1945 (Pew Research Center 2014, 9). The Baby Boom Generation, also referred to as either Baby Boomers or Boomers, represents those born between 1946-1964 and contains 32% of the adult population. Baby Boomers are followed by Generation X, a demographic group referring to U.S. citizens born between 1965 and 1980, comprising 27% of the adult population. Finally, members of the Millennial Generation, sometimes known as Millennials, refers to those born after 1980 and currently represents roughly 27% of the adult population (Pew Research Center 2014, 9). USING the vast amount of survey data collected and published by the Pew Research Center, it is possible to construct a general framework of important differences between the Millennial Generation and those that came before it.

Millennials within the electorate currently range in age from 18-34 (Pew Research Center 2014, 4). Overall, this is a group that is far less attached to institutions of organized politics and religion than the generations that have come before it. The Millennial Generation is unique within American politics due

The Generations Defined

The Generations Defined

The Millennial Generation
Born: After 1980
Age of adults in 2014: 18 to 33*
Share of adult population: 27%
Share non-Hispanic white: 57%
Ind 50%; Dem 27%; Rep 17%

Generation X
Born: 1965 to 1980
Age in 2014: 34 to 49
Share of adult population: 27%
Share non-Hispanic white: 61%
Ind 39%; Dem 32%; Rep 21%

The Baby Boom Generation
Born: 1946 to 1964
Age in 2014: 50 to 68
Share of adult population: 32%
Share non-Hispanic white: 72%
Ind 37%; Dem 32%; Rep 25%

The Silent Generation
Born: 1928 to 1945
Age in 2014: 69 to 86
Share of adult population: 12%
Share non-Hispanic white: 79%
Dem 34%; Ind 32%; Rep 29%

* The youngest Millennials are in their teens. No chronological end point has been set for this group.

Note: The "Greatest Generation," which includes those born before 1928, is not included in the analysis due to the small sample size. Share of total population and share non-Hispanic white are based on adults only in 2013; 85-year-old Silents are not included due to data limitations.

Source: March 2013 Current Population Survey (IPUMS) and Pew Research surveys, January and February 2014

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Figure 3: Generational Breakdown including statistics on racial composition, political ideology, share of adult population, and years of birth for each of the four generations.

Pew Research Center. 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions,Networked with Friends. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/

most significantly to its demographic composition, the low rates of party identification within the generation, and a considerably more moderate position on a variety of social issues than the public at large.

The United States has always been a melting pot of sorts. That term is certainly one of the most common phrases associated with the ethnic composition of the United States. For hundreds of years, people from all parts of the world have come to the United States in order to seek fortune or success here. This has led to one of the most diverse populations of any country today, but America's historical relationship with diversity is an evolving one.

Today, this evolving relationship has been compounded further by increased immigration, with a particularly large wave of Hispanic and Asian immigrants moving to the United States over the past half century (Pew Research Center 2014, 6). As a result, the Millennial Generation is the most ethnically diverse generation in American history (Pew Research Center 2014, 4). This is highly significant, as tensions between majority and minority racial groups have been historically both an unfortunately common and exceptionally divisive element of American society. The U.S. Census Bureau currently predicts that the country's population will be majority nonwhite by 2043 (Pew Research Center 2014, 6).

This is unprecedented in American history. The exact effects of this transition are impossible to predict with any level of certainty, but the Millennial Generation's political viewpoints, if viewed as a leading indicator of the political effects of racial change, are a useful guide. The demographic composition of the

Millennial Generation's effects on the political viewpoints of its membership is summarized in an article written for the Pew Research Center in 2014 as:

> The racial makeup of today's young adults is one of the key factors in explaining their political liberalism. But it is not the only factor. Across a range of political and ideological measures, white Millennials, while less liberal than the non-whites of their generation, are more liberal than the whites in older generations" (6).

Race is clearly not the only or most important distinguishing characteristic of the Millennial Generation, but it is certainly an important one with respect to political opinions. Gary Jacobson attributes the success of President Obama's reelection to his ability to, "attract the votes of growing segments of the electorate: young people, singles (especially single women), social liberals, the nonchurched, and ethnic minorities—Asian Americans as well as Latinos and blacks" (2013, 704). This illustrates the practical political consequences of a changing electorate. Jacobson goes on to describe the Republican camp during the same election: "Romney's coalition…was overwhelmingly white, older, married, religiously observant, and socially conservative, all shrinking demographic categories" (704). Not only are the categories shrinking, they are doing it so quickly that the white share of the electorate is projected to decline to less than two-thirds in only a few more elections (704).

Religiously, the Millennial Generation is also setting records within American Society. While the frequency, duration, and nature of the interaction between religious faith and government activity has changed significantly throughout the history of the United States, Christianity has played a dominant

Millennials: Unmoored from Institutions

Millennials: Unmoored from Institutions

Percent who consider themselves political independents

Percent of adults in each generation who are religiously unaffiliated

50%

40
39
37
36
34
32
29

26
29% Millennial (ages 18-33)*
21 Gen X (34-49)
18
16 Boomer (50-68)
12
9
9 Silent (69-86)

'07 '08   '10   '12   '14   '07 '08   '10   '12   '14

* Age ranges are for 2014
Source: Data points represent totals based on all Pew Research surveys of the general public conducted in that calendar year.
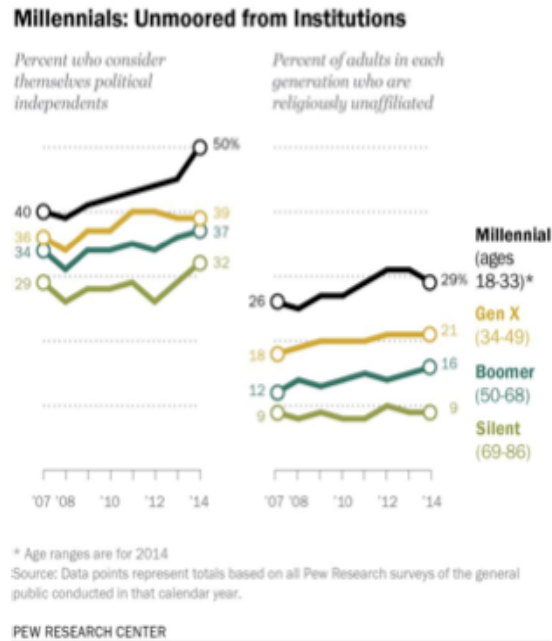
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Figure 4: Within the Millennial Generation, 29% of respondents reported being unaffiliated with any religion.

Pew Research Center. 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends. 4. Retrieved from
http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/

role in the country's political culture since its beginnings. Members of the

Millennial Generation are far less likely to be affiliated with any religion, and are

also less likely to believe in God (Pew Research Center 2014, 13).

This decrease in the importance placed on religious faith has potentially

large effects in reducing polarization. The use of "wedge issues," or those social

issues that have proven particularly divisive or emotionally manipulative, has

been a recurring feature of GOP politics. In the 2004 Presidential Election, Karl

Rove successfully introduced gay marriage as an issue for Ohio voters. Rove's

strategies ultimately secured an electoral victory for President Bush, which was

partially the result of Rove's success in mobilizing conservative voters opposed to

any possibility of gay marriage. A lack of conflicting religious dogmas eases

negotiations on a variety of issues. In a 2014 Pew Research Center Survey, 29%

of Millennials claimed to be unaffiliated with any religion **(See Fig. 4)**, and the

data would suggest that the percentage of people responding in the same manner

will increase further over time **(See Fig. 5)** (Pew Research Center 2014, 45).

Religion is not the only institution to which Millennials offer a

significantly lower degree of loyalty. Identifying as a member of either of the two

major political parties within the Millennial Generation has also decreased

substantially compared to preceding generations (Pew Research Center 2014, 4).

Half of Millennials (50%) surveyed by the Pew Research Center identify as

politically independent (Pew Research Center 2014, 4). This is perhaps explained

by the average response from members of the Millennial Generation when asked

if there was a great deal of difference between the Democratic and Republican

Millennials Don't See Themselves as Religious

Millennials Don't See Themselves as Religious

% saying ... describes them very well

- ■ Millennial
- ■ Gen X
- ■ Boomer
- ■ Silent

A religious person
- 36
- 52
- 55
- 61
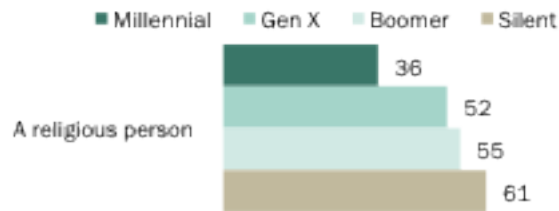
Note: Percentages reflect those who rated the description 8-10 on a scale of 1-10 where "10" is a perfect description and "1" is totally wrong.

Source: Pew Research survey, Feb. 14-23, 2014

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Figure 5: Americans have steadily decreased the rate of self-identification as a religious person across each generation.

Pew Research Center. 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends. 45. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood
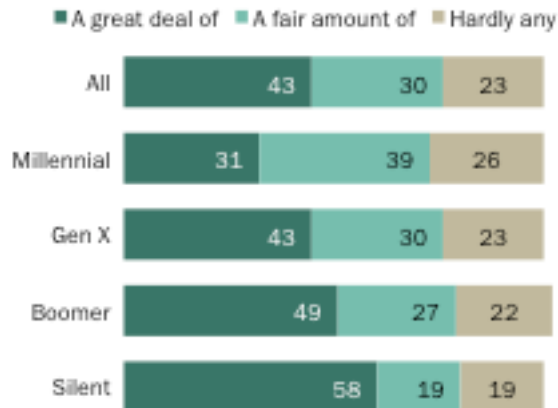
parties. Only 31% of Millennials surveyed believed there actually was a great deal of difference between the two, the lowest positive response rate among the generations surveyed **(See Fig. 6).** These findings do not appear to indicate a life-cycle bias. According to Glenn Utter, the rate at which members of the Millennial Generation identify with either of the political parties is lower than the rate for other generations, even when those generations were the same age that Millennials are now (2011, 11).

Despite these results, the Millennial Generation has leaned heavily towards the Democratic Party throughout the last several elections, and especially with respect to the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections (Pew Research Center 2014, 11). The Pew Research Center summarizes the results, "According to national exit polls, the young-old partisan voting gaps in 2008 and 2012 were among the largest in the modern era, with Millennials far more supportive than older generations of Barack Obama" (Pew Research Center 2014, 11). The exact degree of variation in the young-old voting gap is illustrated in a chart prepared by the Pew Research Center to summarize its findings **(See Fig. 7)**. It is also worth noting that this degree of support has not proven irreversible, as Millennials have joined other adults in lowering their own assessments of the president simultaneously (Pew Research Center 2014, 15). Despite this, Millennials continue to view the Democratic Party more favorably and represent the only American generation in which liberals are not significantly outnumbered by conservatives (Pew Research Center 2014, 11).

Fewer Millennials See Big Differences Between Parties

Fewer Millennials See Big Differences Between Parties

% saying there is ... difference in what the Republican and Democratic Parties stand for

■ A great deal of ■ A fair amount of ■ Hardly any

	A great deal of	A fair amount of	Hardly any
All	43	30	23
Millennial	31	39	26
Gen X	43	30	23
Boomer	49	27	22
Silent	58	19	19

Source: Pew Research survey, Feb. 12-26, 2014

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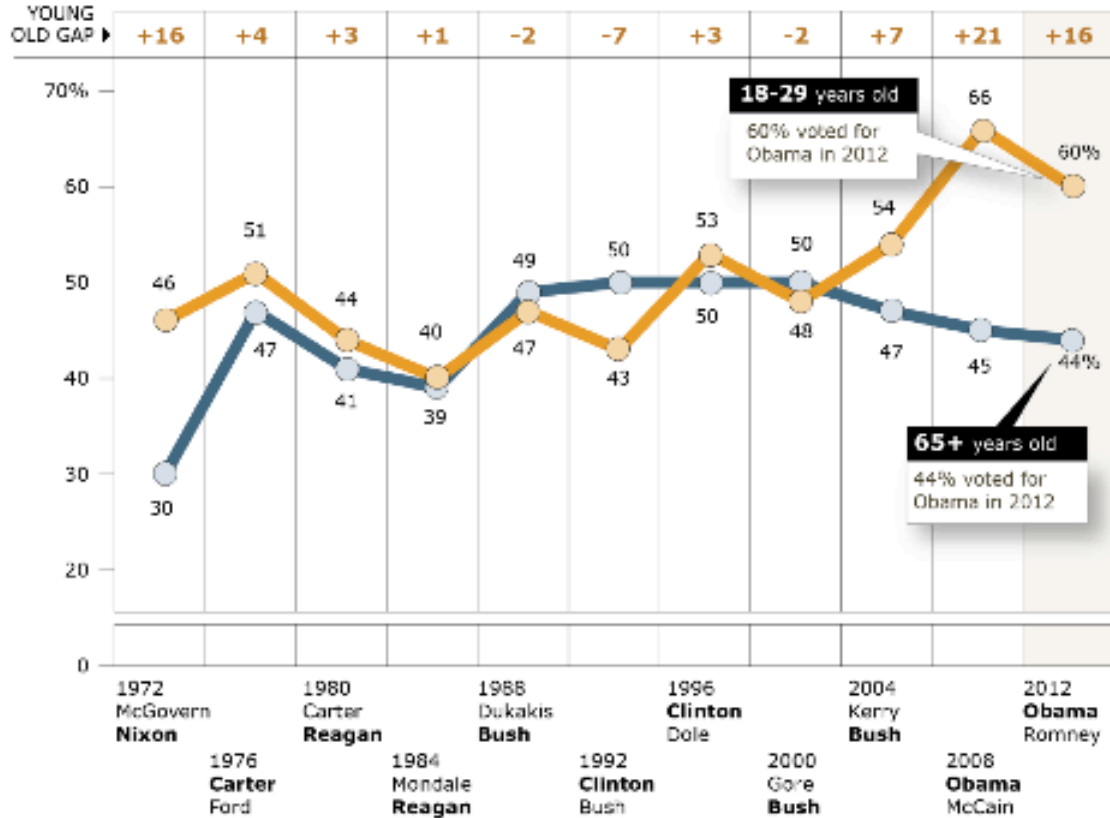**Figure 6: Only 31% of Millennials surveyed believed there actually was a great deal of difference between the Democratic and Republican parties, the lowest positive response rate among the generations surveyed.**

Pew Research Center. 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends. 11. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/

The Young/Old Voting Gap, 1972-2012

The Young/Old Voting Gap, 1972-2012

% voting for Democratic candidate

YOUNG OLD GAP ▶	+16	+4	+3	+1	-2	-7	+3	-2	+7	+21	+16

18-29 years old
60% voted for Obama in 2012

65+ years old
44% voted for Obama in 2012

70% — 66
60% 60
51 54
46 53
49 50 50 50
47 44 47 48
41 40 43 47 45 44%
39
30
30

1972 McGovern **Nixon**
1976 **Carter** Ford
1980 Carter **Reagan**
1984 Mondale **Reagan**
1988 Dukakis **Bush**
1992 **Clinton** Bush
1996 **Clinton** Dole
2000 Gore **Bush**
2004 Kerry **Bush**
2008 **Obama** McCain
2012 **Obama** Romney

Note: From 1972 through 1988 oldest age category is 60 and older.

Source: Based on exit polls. 1972 and 1976: CBS. 1980–1988: CBS/New York Times. 1992: Voter Research & Surveys. 1996 and 2000: Voter News Service. 2004–2012: National Election Pool

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Figure 7: The young-old partisan voting gaps in 2008 and 2012 were among the largest in the modern era, with Millennials far more supportive than older generations of Barack Obama.

Pew Research Center. 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends. 12. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood

All of these traits of the Millennial Generation are significant and help both to define the generation and explain some of the most potentially consequential political views of the Millennial Generation. The Millennial Generation has demonstrated stronger support for the Democratic Party's position on many of these issues. Millennials differed ideologically from other generations on questions of the role and size of government (Pew Research Center 2014, 35). The table in Figure 8 illustrates the degree to which the Millennials deviate from the positions of former generations **(See Fig. 8)**. As shown, the Millennials are serving as the only one of the four major generations in which the majority of the generation supports an expansion in the size of government and the services provided. This is a significant ideological divide. Opinion polling on social issues demonstrates further differences and can further illustrate the effects of different political ideologies.

Same-sex marriage was one of the first and most prominent social issues in which the Millennial Generation staked out a decidedly more progressive position than other age groups within the country, and this divergence is represented in the following graph **(See Fig. 9)**. Millennials began in 2004 with a same-sex marriage support rating already well above the older generations, and have steadily increased the support offered to same-sex marriage at a rate sufficient to maintain this lead.

Support for the legalization of marijuana also finds high levels of support from Millennials. Over the past eight years, support for marijuana legalization among Millennials has nearly doubled from 34% in 2005 to 69% in 2013 (Pew Research Center 2014, 32). The rapid increases in support for both same-sex

Support for Bigger Government Highest Among

Millennials

Support for Bigger Government Highest Among Millennials

Would you rather have ...

	Smaller government, fewer services	Bigger government, more services	Depends/ DK
	%	%	%
Total	51	40	9=100
Millennial	38	53	9=100
Gen X	49	43	7=100
Boomer	59	32	8=100
Silent	64	22	14=100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

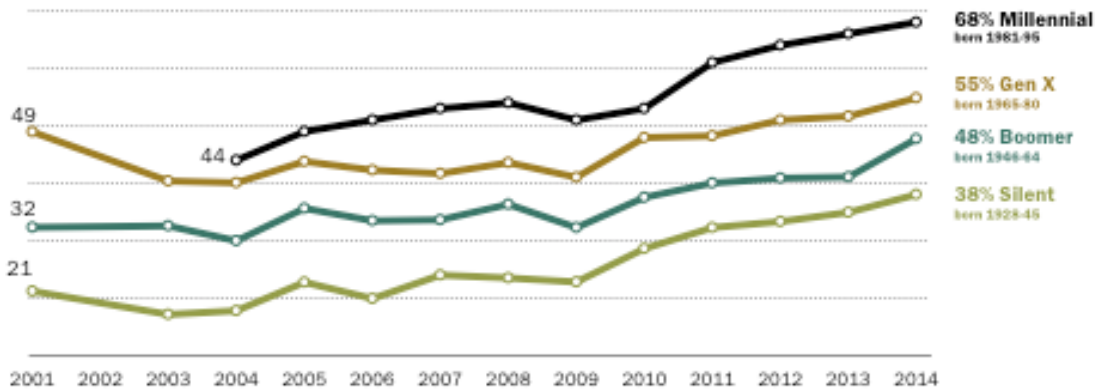Source: Pew Research survey, Sep. 4-8, 2013

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Figure 8: Millennials differed ideologically from other generations on questions of the role and size of government. As shown, the Millennials are serving as the only one of the four major generations in which the majority of the generation supports an expansion in the size of government and the services provided

Pew Research Center. 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends. 35. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/

Growing Support for Same-Sex Marriage across Generations

Growing Support for Same-Sex Marriage across Generations

% of each generation who favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry

68% Millennial
born 1981-96

55% Gen X
born 1965-80

48% Boomer
born 1946-64

38% Silent
born 1928-45

49

44

32

21

2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014

Source: Data points represent totals based on all Pew Research surveys of the general public conducted in that calendar year

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 9: Same-sex marriage was one of the first and most prominent social issues in which the Millennial Generation staked out a decidedly more progressive position than other age groups within the country.

Pew Research Center. 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends. 31. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood

marriage and legalization of marijuana have occurred over the same period in which state governments first began to alter or soften these laws, indicating that the strong support for these two causes of the Millennial Generation can affect society as a whole and demonstrating that, through the democratic process, it is entirely possible to influence other policies enjoying similar levels of support.
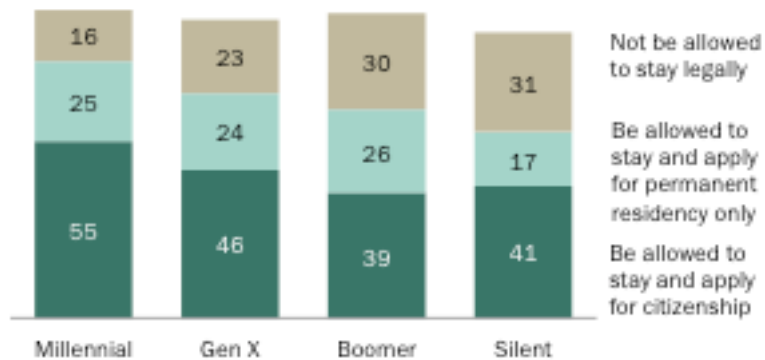
Immigration reform is another social issue in which the Millennial Generation decisively embraced a view of the issue shared by none of the older generations (Pew Research Center 2014, 33). While most Americans favor some form of immigration reform, only within the Millennial Generation is it possible to locate majority support for extending U.S. citizenship to undocumented immigrants. This table published by the Pew Research Center best summarizes the responses of the four major generations on the question of immigration **(See Fig. 10)**. These are three examples of issues that have proven decidedly divisive in Washington politics throughout the modern era, but that already enjoy majority support among the Millennial Generation. When fewer items are available to serve as wedge issues, the electorate is given a better chance to evaluate honestly rather than merely to react fearfully.

It should be noted that while a broad array of the political positions adopted by the Millennial Generation represent a progressive leaning stance, there is still stark division within Millennials on certain issues (Pew Research Center 2014, 34). Specifically, surveys regarding both abortion and gun control legislation show no significant difference in the level of support between Millennials and older generations. There will always be discontent and

Broad Support for Legal Status for Undocumented

Immigrants; Millennials Favor Path to Citizenship

Broad Support for Legal Status for Undocumented Immigrants; Millennials Favor Path to Citizenship

% who say immigrants now living in the U.S. illegally should ...

Generation	Be allowed to stay and apply for citizenship	Be allowed to stay and apply for permanent residency only	Not be allowed to stay legally
Millennial	55	25	16
Gen X	46	24	23
Boomer	39	26	30
Silent	41	17	31

Note: "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research survey, Feb. 14-23, 2014

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 10: Immigration reform is another social issue in which the Millennial Generation decisively embraced a view of the issue shared by none of the older generations.

Pew Research Center. 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends. 33. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood

disagreement within a democratic country. The Millennial Generation's
responses to abortion and gun control demonstrate this principle, but their more
unified stance on a variety of social issues coupled with a vast decrease in party
identification represents a significant change from the party dynamics of older
generations.

VI.

THE MILLENNIAL EFFECT ON POLARIZATION

The future of American politics is impossible to determine with any certainty, but there are transformations within American society that will doubtlessly have significant impact.

American politics are prone to gridlock, and according to James Madison's *Federalist 10*, designed that way intentionally. Jacobson writes:

> The bicameral legislature, presidential veto, and separate electoral bases and calendars of representatives, senators, and presidents were intended to thwart simple majority rule, and they always have...Thus when the parties are deeply divided and neither enjoys full control of the levers of government, acrimonious stalemate or unsatisfactory short-term fixes to avoid pending disaster become the order of the day (2013, 689).

This system has proved an enduring one, but research has shown that recent years have seen an unusual degree of polarization, even relative to American politics. As shown earlier, Republicans and Democrats in Congress are more ideologically polarized than at any point since the Gilded Age. Jacobson writes that, "Acute partisan conflict arising from the ideological polarization of the national parties is now a dominant feature of American politics" (Jacobson 2013, 688).

Others have researched America's political polarization and have attempted to trace its recent increase. Abramowitz (2013) and Jacobson (2013) both attribute increases in polarization to the current state of electoral configurations and conclude that a different electorate is the only thing capable of

diminishing polarization. The electorate is changing now. More and more

members of the Millennial Generation enter the electorate every day. Mason

(2012) argues that increased partisan ideological sorting drives polarization, and

that, "If American political bias, activism, and anger are driven by strongly sorted

political identities, the only way to reduce this behavioral polarization is to

reduce the strength or alignment of political identities" (155). I do not dispute

any of these findings. I believe Mason is also correct, and as the Pew Research

Center's data shows, the Millennial Generation has consistently demonstrated

lower levels of attachment to both of the political parties.

I do not believe that polarization is due entirely or even mostly to social

issues; however, I do believe that disagreements over social issues between

Republicans and Democrats can significantly exacerbate the problems of

stalemate and governmental gridlock that accompany polarization. Social issues

that have been used to divide the public will no longer be available as tools once

the electorate contains larger portions of voters with moderate views. Millennials

as a group have been shown to have more moderate views on social issues. Paul

Frymer summarizes the effects of changing attitudes within the electorate on the

decisions of party leaders:

> After all, if parties want to get elected, they ought to devise the way in
>
> which they nominate candidates in the manner that best leads to their
>
> candidate winning the election—something scholars have found that party
>
> leaders indeed devote extensive attention to (2011, 344).

The Pew Research Center's data on the political leanings of Millennials indicate

the Republican Party will require the most change in order to appeal to the new

generation. Millennials who identify with the GOP are less conservative than Republicans in other generations (Kiley, 2014). The percentage of each generation to identify as Republican is lowest among Millennials (Kiley, 2014). As Frymer goes on to explain, "…over time, parties need to win elections to remain politically relevant. Losses lead to disgruntled politicians and party voters who demand changes" (2011, 345). The Millennial Effect will be one of moderation, mostly with respect to the Republican Party.

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