

Not Who You Think They Are

Rethinking what young voters want and who they
need to hear from

Terrance Woodbury

Founding Partner

Ashley Aylward

Sr Research Manager

Michelle Whitlock

Analyst

Roshni Nedungadi

Founding Partner

Erica Tebbs

Senior Analyst

HIT STRATEGIES
WASHINGTON, DC

www.hitstrat.com

🎯 *Why We Are Here: The **Gen Z** Dilemma*

1

Gen Z distrusts political institutions and is **pessimistic about the future of the country.**

2

Half of Gen Z **didn't turn out to vote** in 2024.

3

Young men **moved towards Trump and Republicans** in their vote choice in 2024.

4

Campaigns are not reaching Gen Z in a way that resonates with them.

*The **HIT** Team*

HIT Strategies is a public opinion research firm that goes where traditional research doesn't. Our diverse team specializes in the voters, consumers, and communities that are actively reshaping politics, culture, and markets — delivering the data-driven insights and cultural intelligence that give leaders a clearer picture of what's coming.

Our research is conducted by people with a deep understanding of underestimated communities, delivering nuanced, data-driven insights that traditional firms can't replicate. We give your strategy, the cultural intelligence it needs to connect authentically and win.



The *HIT* Panel



Ashley Aylward
Senior Research Manager



Erica Tebbs
Senior Analyst



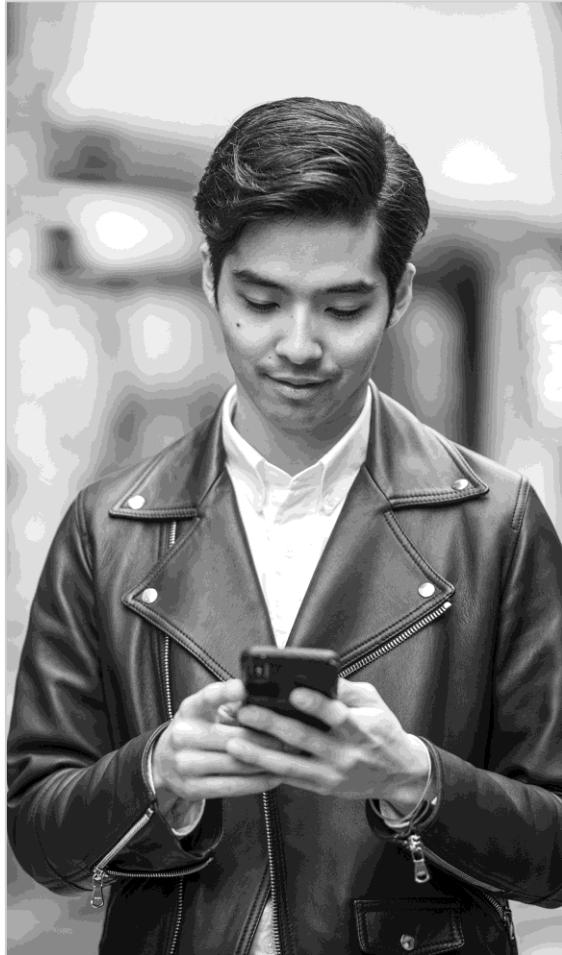
Michelle Whitlock
Analyst



Thank you to our clients



🎯 The Landscape



Gen Z refuses to be defined by party labels. **Democrats are increasingly falling out of favor.** Young 2026 primary voters are choosing new, progressive candidates over established incumbents.



Gen Z is less socially engaged compared to prior generations, contributing to feelings of **isolation and depression.**



Gen Z is the most online generation of voters. Their internet fluency contributes to **skepticism about what they see online** – they do not take it at face value.



🎯 Gen Z wants to disrupt the status quo politically and economically.

62%

of Gen Z thinks the design and structure of our nation's government needs **significant change** no matter who we elect to represent us.

56%

of Gen Z identifies as **Independent** rather than Democrat or Republican.

53%

of Gen Z reports have participated in, are currently participating in, or plan to participate in a **boycott against a corporation, business, or brand**.

🎯 Gen Z is the most socially isolated generation but craves connection.

70%

of Gen Z says they have built a community of friends through **online experiences**.

41%

of Gen Z is single, of which half are **not looking for a romantic relationship**.

30%

of Gen Z reports feeling **no sense of belonging in community** or are still searching for it.

© Gen Z is online, and algorithms guide the content they see.

77%

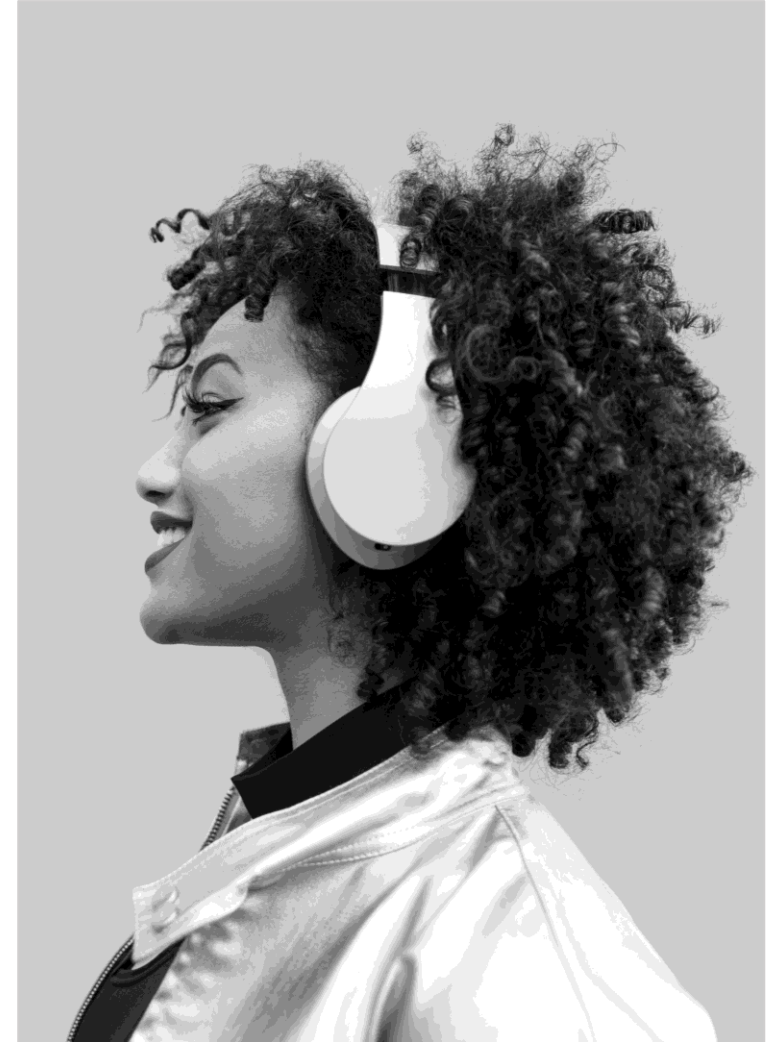
of Gen Z names at least one **social media** platform as **top source of news**.

77%

of Gen Z reports having checked whether something **they saw online is true**.

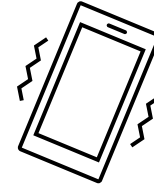
70%

of Gen Z reports coming across **political news** rather than looking for it.

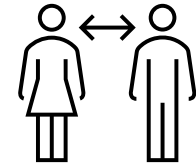


🎯 Gen Z: One generation, distinct lived experiences.

Gen Z includes young people ages **14 to 29** years old.*



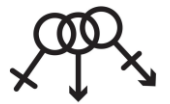
Gen Z men and women are **polarizing right and left** on the political and ideological spectrum.



Gen Z is the most **racially and ethnically diverse** generation.



More than one in five Gen Z adults identify as **LGBTQ+**.



50 million members of Gen Z are **eligible to vote** in 2026.



*This report focuses on Gen Z adults, ages 18-29; Sources: Tufts University Tisch College CIRCLE survey of 5,000 young people, oversampling young Black and Latino voters, conducted January-February 2026; aggregated data from 2024 Gallup telephone polls of US Adults



Gen Z is anti-establishment,
not conservative.

© There is a tension among young voters who both increasingly favor Trump and increasingly prefer progressive candidates.

12

On one hand...

The Washington Times

America's Newspaper

The rise of the young conservatives: Gen Z turns away from the left

By Mallory Wilson · The Washington Times · Monday, September 1, 2025

AXIOS

Sep 28, 2024 · Politics & Policy

America's youngest voters turn right



Noah Bressner

➤ AFROTECH

Op-Ed: Is Social Media Turning Gen-Z More Conservative?

MEDIA

YANNISE JEAN

MAR 31, 2025

UPDATED MAR 31, 2025

2 MIN

...On the other hand

amNY

2025 Mayor's Race

Gen Z and first-time voters played a key role in Mamdani's primary victory. Here's how the youth vote is reshaping NYC politics.

am By Shea Vance

Posted on June 27, 2025

Comments

n p r

POLITICS

Democratic socialist Melat Kiros poised to become the first Gen Z woman in Congress

UPDATED JULY 1, 2026 · 8:55 AM ET



Elena Moore

🎯 Gen Z are clear-eyed about problems with the system and they want an alternative.

Gen Z is highly aware of the **power of corporations and the 1%** in society, in politics, and their own lives.

They are **distrustful of outdated institutions** in politics, economics, and culture.

Gen Z wants **systemic pain-points** recognized and addressed.

Money in Politics: “There's just like systems larger at play... I think of it as just legal bribing really. That has a huge voice in the government. **More than a person, a corporation or a lobby always has a bigger voice** than a single person.”

— Young Hispanic Man, Independent, July 2024

© 2024 campaign confirmed young voters' concerns and has implications for trust-building in future elections.

14

Backdoor handoff of candidacy from Biden to Harris without primary elections confirmed to jaded young voters their vote does not matter.

The campaign centered on Project 2025 and the threat of what Trump would do **rather than what Harris could offer young voters.**

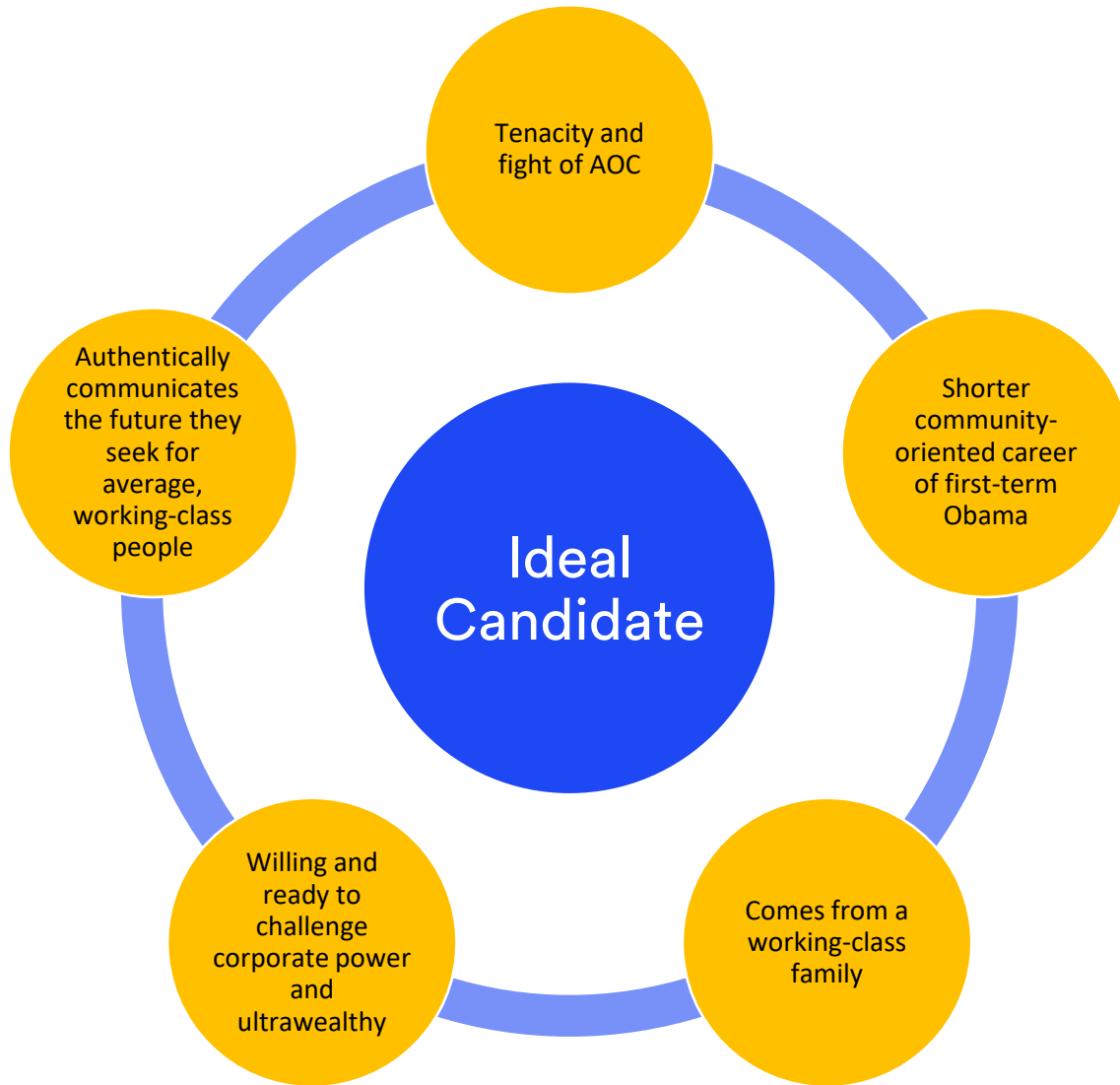
When Democrats are seen as **defenders of the status quo** that is failing Gen Z, they fail.

When leaders **authentically challenge the system, prioritize delivering solutions** on day-to-day needs, and offer an **alternate vision** of the future, they succeed.



Opposition Without Vision: “For me, sometimes it just feels like **the Republican Party stands for protecting the power of the elites and protecting the rich. And the Democratic Party doesn't feel like it has any values other than to be against the Republican Party...** No one is committed enough to making positive changes. They're only committed to preventing Republicans from being in power.”
— Young Asian woman, Democrat, May 2024

🎯 Young voters' ideal candidate breaks the establishment mold.



Dos



Don'ts



Source: HIT Strategies focus groups with young voters in GA, NV, and MI conducted April-May 2026. Groups included a mix of Democrats, Independents, and men that show signs of benevolent sexism.



Gen Z wants to see a
government that puts people
over profit.

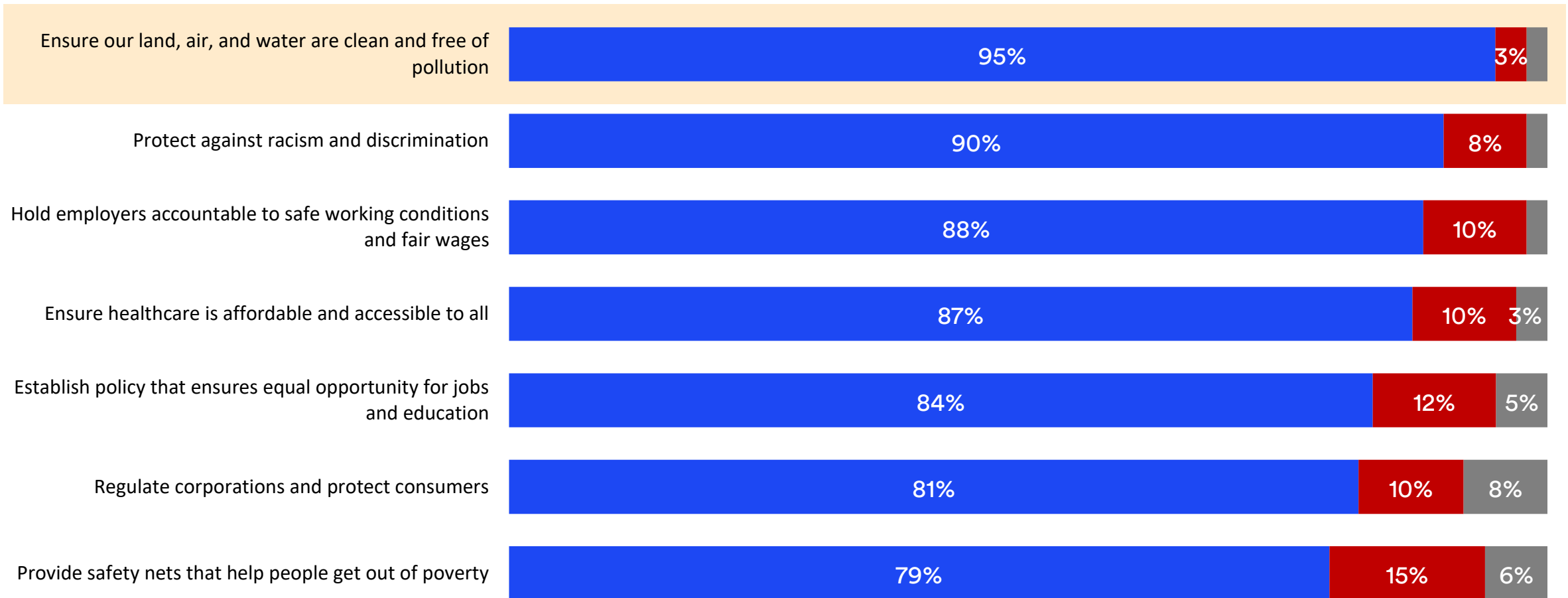
🎯 There is strong agreement on progressive government roles...

For each of the following items, please indicate whether you think the American government should or should not play a role in addressing that issue.

■ Yes, the American government should play this role

■ No, the American government should not play this role

■ Don't know



Source: HIT Strategies/All Above All survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted May-June 2025; displaying Gen Z (n=311); numbers less than 3% not displayed



...But messaging matters. Trigger words from politicized rhetoric causes the perception of Gen Z's shift to conservatism to be overstated.

Please indicate whether or not you would like to see each of the following outcomes happen, or if you feel indifferent.

■ Yes, I want to see this outcome ■ No, I do not want to see this outcome ■ Indifferent - I don't care whether or not I see this outcome ■ Don't know

Actions that address climate change



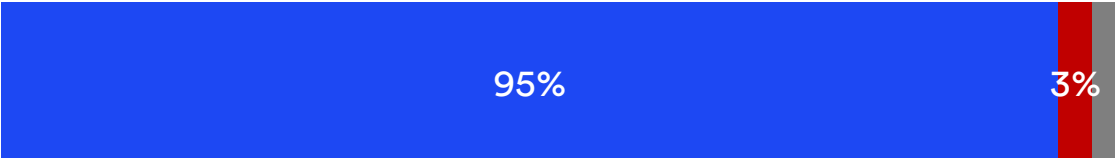
Gen Z Men* Gen Z Women*

60%	83%
16%	6%
21%	8%
3%	3%

For each of the following items, please indicate whether you think the American government should or should not play a role in addressing that issue.

■ Yes, the American government should play this role ■ No, the American government should not play this role ■ Don't know

Ensure our land, air, and water are clean and free of pollution



Gen Z Men* Gen Z Women*

91%	98%
5%	1%
4%	1%

Source: HIT Strategies/All Above All survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted May-June 2025; displaying Gen Z (n=311); numbers less than 3% not displayed

**Small sample size, directional finding*

🎯 GOP policy priorities are far less popular among Gen Z.

Do you support or oppose the following?

■ Support ■ Oppose ■ Don't know ■ Refused

Ending Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives
in the federal government

32%

42%

23%

3%

Significant reductions in the number of federal
government employees

28%

43%

25%

4%

The implementation of tariffs on foreign goods

19%

50%

28%

3%

Abolishing the US Department of Education

20%

52%

23%

5%

Conducting immigration enforcement actions in
schools, hospitals, and places of worship

20%

55%

21%

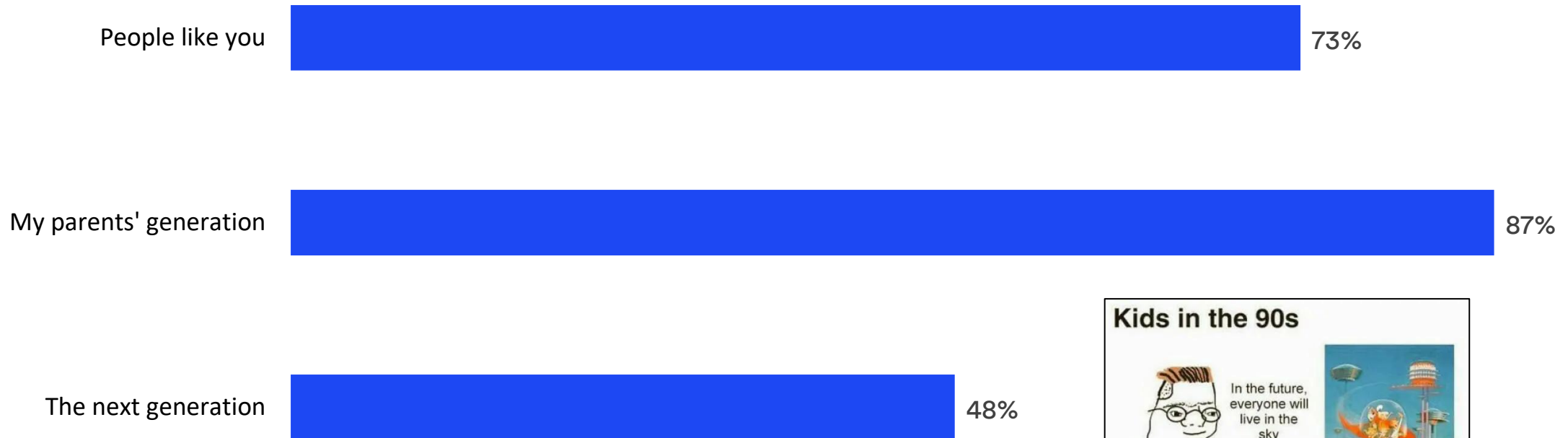
4%

🎯 Gen Z sees that the American Dream is getting **harder and harder** to achieve.

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think it is very achievable, somewhat achievable, not very achievable, or not at all achievable.

The American Dream Is Achievable For...

■ Very/somewhat achievable



Source: HIT Strategies/All Above All survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted May-June 2025; displaying Gen Z (n=311)



🎯 Gen Z is struggling financially and knows who to blame.

This economy is especially difficult for young people entering the workforce....



May 19, 2026 - Technology

The new college graduation ritual: booing AI

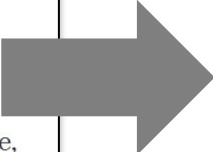


Josephine Walker



Young Graduates Face the Grimmiest Job Market in Years

Artificial intelligence could reshape work, but for now a low-hire, low-fire labor market is the main impediment for young people seeking employment.





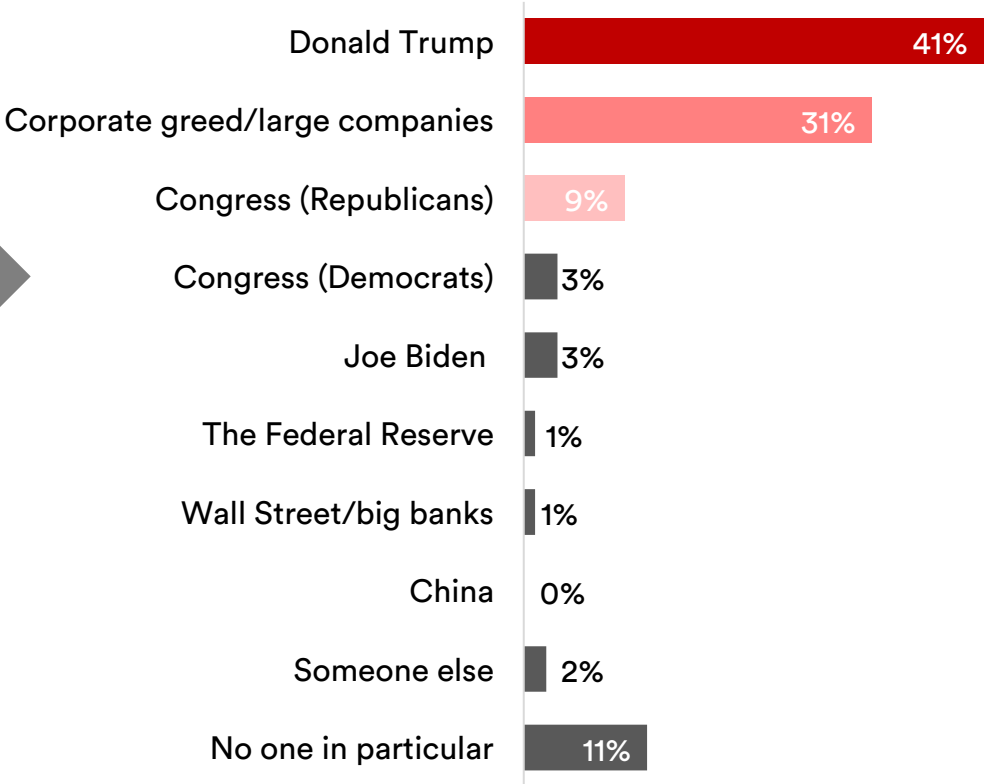
Many Young Adults Have Taken on Debt. It Could Jeopardize Their Financial Futures.

Kassandra Martinczek, Miranda Santillo

September 18, 2024

...And they primarily blame Trump and corporate greed.

[Among those who said the economy is bad or terrible] Who do you give the most blame to for the economic conditions?



Source: Generation Lab survey of 1,002 18-34-year-old U.S. adults conducted April 2026

🎯 Gen Z's personal priorities are related to financial wellbeing, health, and caring for family.

Thinking about this chapter of your life, which TWO or THREE of the following items do you currently prioritize the most? Please select up to three.

		Gen Z Men*	Gen Z Women*
Financial security	45%	41%	48%
Your health	35%	31%	43%
Caring for family members	29%	29%	32%
Work-life balance	26%	25%	32%
Relationships (like romantic partnerships or friendships)	26%	27%	21%
Hobbies and free time activities	20%	16%	21%
Faith and spirituality	17%	19%	15%
Advancing in your career	16%	23%	10%
Your education	14%	13%	12%
Contributing to positive change in your community	13%	15%	11%
Having children	7%	7%	6%
Other	4%	5%	2%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%

Source: HIT Strategies/All Above All survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted May-June 2025; displaying Gen Z (n=311)

*Small sample size, directional finding

Gen Z still values partnership and family, but it has concerns about the stability of their own future and the world.

23

Gen Z is **cautious about bringing children into an unstable world** (e.g., climate change concerns, political unrest, mass shootings).

Gen Z **doesn't feel financially prepared** to get married or have children.

Gen Z is **distrustful of institutions** that have repeatedly failed them.

Without protection of LGBTQ+ and reproductive rights, **dating, marriage, and starting a family is less safe.**

Gen Z only knows school shootings and the possibility of death at school

Our kids know that, on any given day, at any school in America, a gunman can open fire and kill children. Who are we to let that be their reality?



"Collapsing birth rate is the biggest threat to society"

Me looking at the world I'm expected to bring children into:



Dateflation

Singles are spending an arm and a leg trying to find someone to share their heart with on dates.

The average single spends \$213 per month on dating, while active daters spend \$310.

This is a significant increase from \$188 in 2022 and \$112 in 2013, making dating more expensive than ever.





Gen Z is incredibly media-literate in an era of misinformation and disinformation.

🎯 People say that Gen Z can't discern fact from fiction...

POLITICO
MAGAZINE
THE MEDIA ISSUE

How Gen Z Became the Most Gullible Generation

The almighty algorithm is fueling conspiracy theories among young people and ruining their ability to tell fact from fiction on the internet.

Washington[®]
MONTHLY

Gen Z's Problem with "Fake" News

Teens' distrust in news is a crisis. Better "news literacy" can help.

by Anne Kim February 11, 2026



🎯 ...But young voters are especially likely to fact check political information they find online.

Media Literacy Practices (Displaying those who said “strongly agree/agree”)

■ Gen Z 2024 Voters

I have checked whether something I saw online
is true

81%

I have compared online content about
the same topic across more than one source

72%

I take steps to find out who created the content
I view online

53%

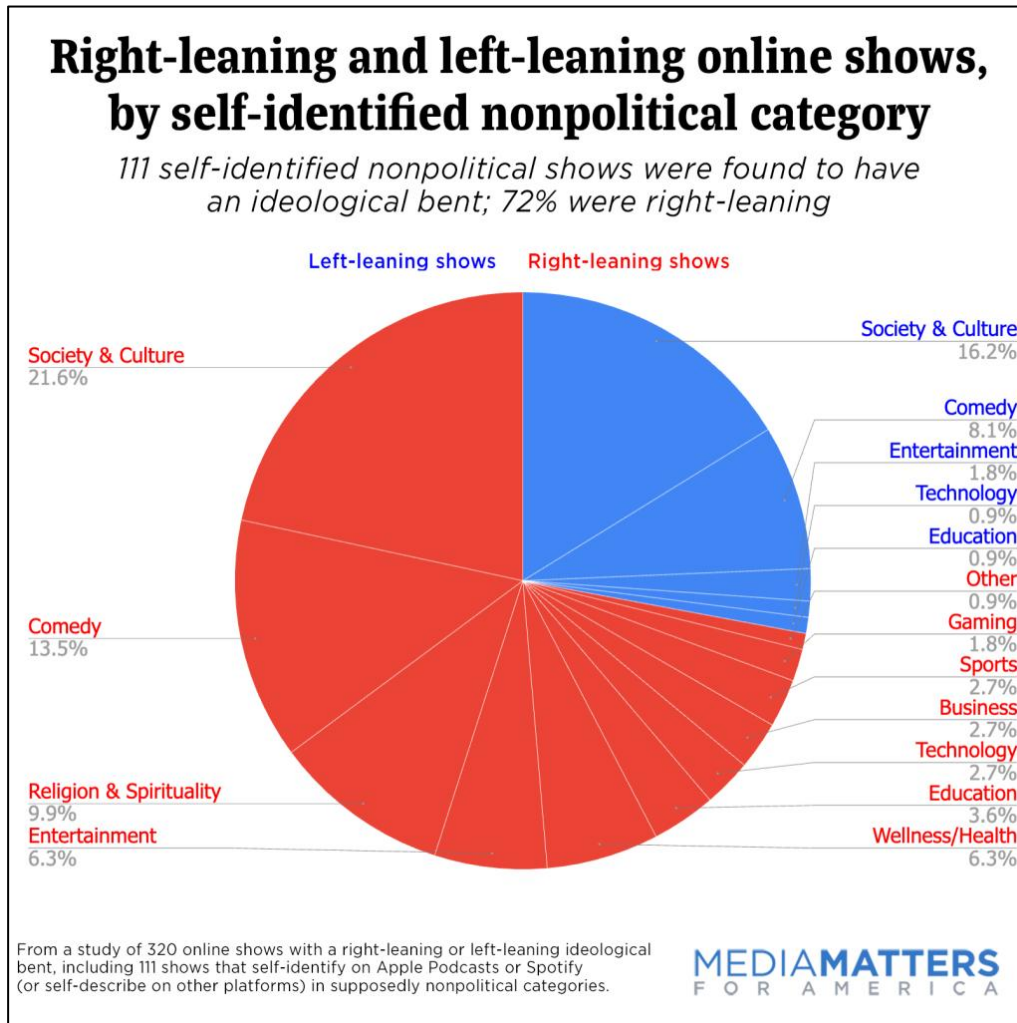
🎯 Gen Z receives information online with a critical eye.



Gen Z often turns to comment sections to try to find the “aggregate” truth.

Young adults are less likely to trust news from chatbots than older adults.

🎯 “Non-political” media spaces are dominated by right-leaning ideology.



9 out of the 10 “nonpolitical” online shows with the largest followings across platforms were identified as ideologically right-leaning.

Passively scrolling or listening to “nonpolitical” podcasts can lead to unintentional consumption of right-leaning ideology.

We need an increased presence of progressive figures, content creators, and online shows outside of the directly political sphere.

© HIT Strategies' Research Opportunities: Winning Back Young Voters

Digital Strategy

How does Gen Z determine if a source is reliable or trustworthy?

Message and Language Testing

How should we frame each issue in our platform so that it resonates with Gen Z?

Candidate and Institutional Trust

How can we regain Gen Z trust in Democratic candidates and their ability to follow through on campaign promises?

Tracking Attitudes

How do young voters' views change over time and why?

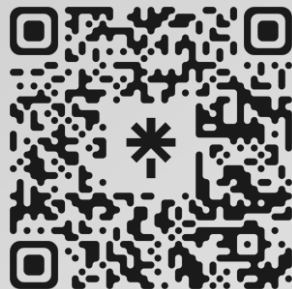
🎯 Connect with Us!

✉ *Book a Discovery Call*

sales@hitstrat.com



Join our newsletter list!



Follow 🎯 **HIT**strategies



@HITStrat



@hitstrategies



HITstrategies



@hitstrategies



Thank you

Terrance Woodbury

Founding Partner

Roshni Nedungadi

Founding Partner

Ashley Aylward

Sr Research Manager

Erica Tebbs

Senior Analyst

Michelle Whitlock

Analyst

HIT STRATEGIES
WASHINGTON, DC

www.hitstrat.com