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**ROBERT REICH: WHY MILLENNIALS WILL SAVE AMERICA | OPINION**

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ON 9/24/18 AT 1:08 PM



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[**OPINION**](https://www.newsweek.com/opinion)

Millennials (and their younger siblings, Generation Z) are the most diverse and progressive group of potential voters in American history, comprising fully 30 percent of the voting age population.

On November 6th, they’ll have the power to alter the course of American politics—flipping Congress, changing the leadership of states and cities, making lawmakers act and look more like the people who are literally the nation’s future. But will they vote?

In the last midterm election, in 2014, only 16 percent of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 29 bothered.

In midterms over the last two decades, turnout by young people has averaged about 38 points below the turnout rate of people 60 and older. Which has given older voters a huge say over where the nation is likely to be by the time those younger people reach middle age and the older voters have passed on.

I’m not criticizing younger non-voters. They have a lot on their minds—starting jobs, careers, families. Voting isn’t likely to be high on their list of priorities.

Also, unlike their grandparents—boomers who were involved in civil rights, voting rights, women’s rights, the anti-Vietnam War movement—most young people today don’t remember a time when political action changed America for the better.

They’re more likely to remember political failures and scandals—George W. Bush lying about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction; Bill Clinton lying about Monica; both parties [bailing out Wall Street](https://www.newsweek.com/robert-reich-critical-lessons-we-didnt-learn-financial-crisis-opinion-1123466) without so much as a single executive going to jail.

Most don’t even remember when American democracy worked well. They don’t recall the Cold War, when democracy as an ideal worth fighting for. The Berlin Wall came down before they were born.

Instead, during their lives they’ve watched [big money take over Washington and state capitals](https://www.newsweek.com/robert-reich-we-might-be-heading-crash-bad-1929-opinion-1101869). Which may explain why only about 30 percent of Americans born in the 1980s think it “essential” to live in a democracy.

Many young people have wondered if their votes count anyway, because so many of them live in congressional districts and states that are predictably red or blue.

Given all this, is there any reason to hope that this huge, diverse, progressive cohort of Americans will vote in the upcoming midterms?

My answer is, yes.

First, the issues up for grabs aren’t ideological abstractions for them. They’re issues in which millennials have direct personal stakes.

Take, for example, gun violence—[which some of these young people have experienced first-hand](https://www.newsweek.com/we-will-not-live-fear-guns-844376), and have taken [active roles in trying to stop](https://www.newsweek.com/my-best-friends-were-killed-pulse-change-gun-laws-we-must-change-congress-972276).

Or immigrants’ rights. Over 20 percent of millennials are Latino, and a growing percent are from families that emigrated from Asia. Many have directly [experienced the consequences of Trump’s policies](https://www.newsweek.com/dream-act-my-sister-called-america-home-20-years-dont-deport-her-915443).

A woman’s right to choose whether to have a baby, and same-sex marriage—issues millennials are also deeply committed to—will be front and center if the Supreme Court puts them back into the hands of Congress and state legislatures.

In my thirty-five years of teaching college students, I’ve not encountered a generation as dedicated to making the nation better as this one.ISTOCK

Millennials are also concerned about student debt, access to college, and opportunities to get ahead unimpeded by racial bigotry or sexual harassment.

And they’re worried about the environment. They know [climate change](https://www.newsweek.com/felipe-calderon-human-cost-climate-change-opinion-998072) will hit them hard since they’ll be on the planet longer than older voters.

They have also learned that their votes count. They saw Hillary lose by a relative handful of votes in places like Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania.

In recent months they’ve witnessed razor-thin special elections, such as Conor Lamb’s win by a few hundred votes in the heart of Pennsylvania Trump country, and Hiral Tipirneni’s single-digit loss in an Arizona district Trump won by 21 points in 2016.

They know the importance of taking back governorships in what are expected to be nail-bitingly close races—in states like Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Kansas.

And as doubtful as these young people are about politics, or the differences between the two parties, they also know that Trump and his Republican enablers want to take the nation backwards to an old, white, privileged, isolated America.

Most of them don’t.

In my thirty-five years of teaching college students, I’ve not encountered a generation as dedicated to making the nation better as this one.

So my betting is on them, this November 6th.

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*The views expressed in this article are the author's own.*