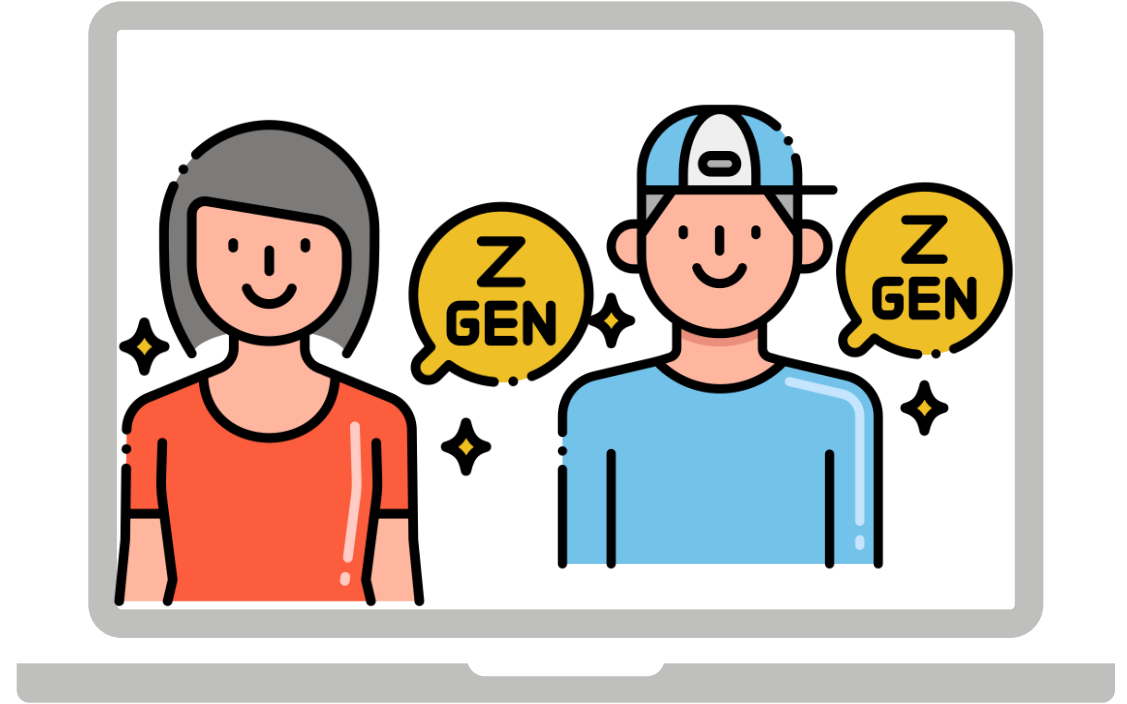


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FOCUS GROUP REPORT

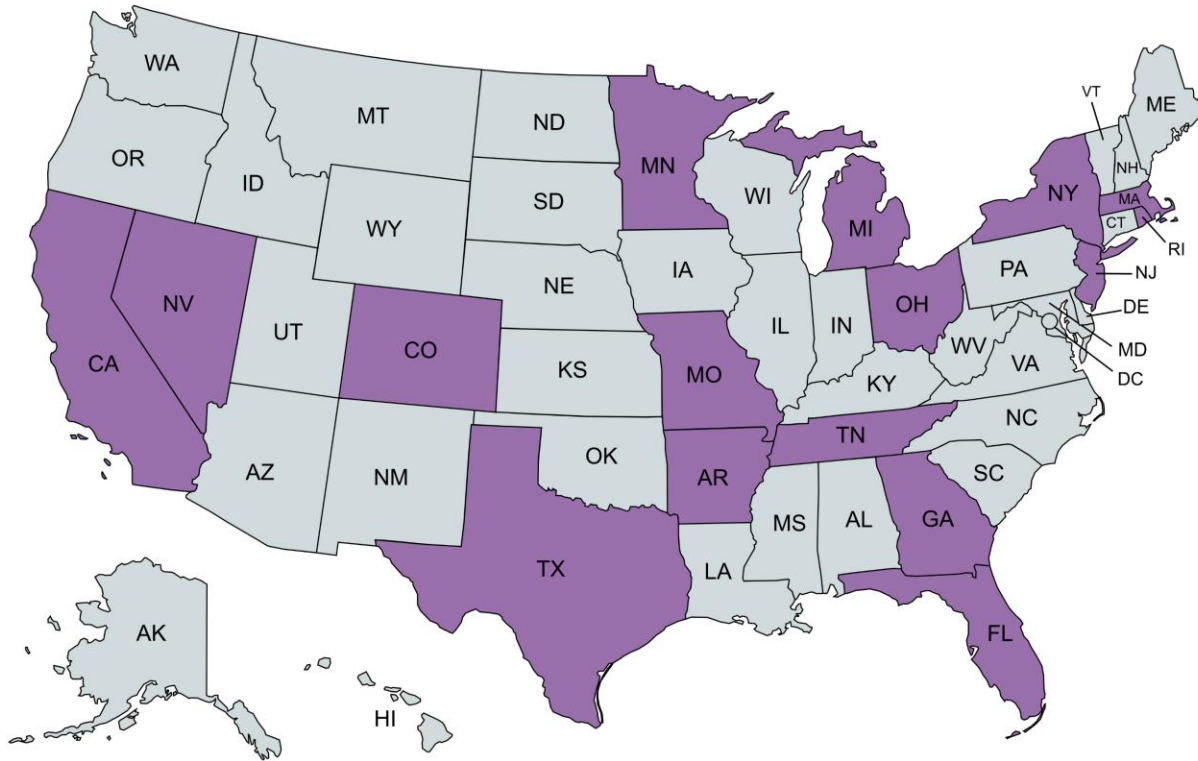
Tuesday, July 29, 2025

Gen Z Voters on the State of the
Country



Methodology

On July 16, 2025, GBAO conducted three online focus groups with Generation Z voters (20-28 years old), including a mix across partisanship, education, gender, and race.



- ❖ Group 1: Non-college educated women, ages 20-26, soft partisans* or independents
- ❖ Group 2: Non-college educated men, ages 21-27, soft partisans or independents
- ❖ Group 3: College educated women and men, ages 25-28, soft partisans or independents

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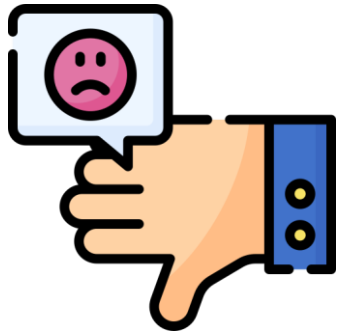
Key Takeaways

- Gen Z feel deeply pessimistic about the country
- Many are struggling with acute personal challenges
- For many the news is unpleasant and to be avoided
- Others rely almost exclusively on social media, with “Big Old News” simply a resource for double-checking
- “Political identity” can be undefined – both the term itself and how people connect to politics

Gen Z Largely Feel Deeply Negative About The Country

Moderator: Fill in the blank for me: I feel BLANK is going (well/not well) right now.

"I feel like there are still a lot of people that are **seeking for jobs** that you hear a lot of stories of people saying that they're applying to hundreds of places, and can't get accepted anywhere, and also fighting back and forth between politics right now, and **are we going to war? Are we not going to war?** And everything with deportation... I feel like none of that stuff is really going well for us right now."
– MI woman, weak Republican



"Could **nothing** [is going well] be an answer?" – MI woman, independent

"I would say **cost of living has been very, very high right now**. Like, everybody else saying education, I feel like I was personally affected by it, because my freshman year of college was funded by FAFSA, and now that is being dismantled. So, that's fun." – FL woman, independent

"American society is **not sustainable** at the rate it's going." – NJ man, weak Democrat

"I mean, I **don't think I'll ever afford a home**, I don't think, I mean more people are living paycheck to paycheck than ever before. Over two thirds of people. That's not sustainable. We're sponsoring a literal genocide." – CA man, weak Democrat

"**Terrible**. Just on eggs, the price of eggs. I personally don't even like eggs, I don't know why people actually get hung up on that, egg stuff. I mean, I guess source protein or whatever, but whatever....Have you been to the store lately?"
– TX man, independent lean Democrat

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Even Those Saying Our Best Days Are Ahead Of Us Are Only Reluctantly Optimistic

Moderator: Would you say America's best days are ahead of us, behind us, or happening now?

"So, I feel like, hopefully, we have **better days ahead of us with Trump in office**, and with all the changes that he's going to be making." – GA woman, weak Republican

"I think our country has a little bit of a dark past that I wouldn't want to say [are] our best times, especially, when it comes to rights of women and minorities. So, I would think that, **hopefully, our better days are ahead of us.**" – GA woman, weak Democrat

"I say ahead of us, because I feel like we've been able to see how things have gone in the past. I wouldn't say we're in our best time now. So, seeing how the economy was, and how the economy is now, and things that ... **Everybody being able to recognize and see what needs to be fixed, I would only hope that we could get better instead of going backwards.**" – MI woman, weak Republican

"A lot of people coming together, realizing that I think we might have to put in some hard work, but because we recognize kind of how great the threat is... I feel like people are really getting that **mindset locked in**. And I like to try and be optimistic for the future." – MI man, weak Democrat

"I guess I'm just trying to be optimistic because in some ways the country's better. I mean, technology is making things more accessible than ever and I don't know, things are uncertain, but I just don't think we've seen the best yet. I don't know. **I guess more of an instinctual feeling and hope.**" – MO woman, weak Republican

"I like to believe that with the gravity of everything happening right now, it's eliminating a lot of things wrong with our system in our country that people needed to realize for a long time. So I **hope that'll inspire people to make change in the future.**" – CA man, weak Democrat

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Many Struggle With Acute Personal Challenges

"They're cutting federal contractors, which is hundreds of thousands of people. Especially OPM, they just cut 75% of their contractors, and, unfortunately, my dad was part of that. And he's had about a month, and has had no jobs even really offer him an interview, or anything. Like, he's applied to, I want to say, probably close to 500 jobs, and there's nothing." – GA woman, weak Democrat



"I know I mentioned about the ICE raids. Since I am Latino like I said, I felt like I have a target on my back. I do carry my passport everywhere I go now just in case they want to stop me." – CA man, weak Democrat

"My cousin had cerebral palsy and I took care of him... since I was, say, about 13 years old. Well, Texas' healthcare system is botched completely... he died from a sudden seizure because we couldn't get a seizure medication... I've had way too many, all of them, all my family die due to poor management of the health system and the systems they're in." – TX man, independent lean Democrat

"I feel like what's not going well is I don't have enough time in the day. I feel like every day I'm waking up at 6:00 in the morning, I'm not going to bed until 12... I'm in school, I have work, I have to take care of my daughter, I have to cook, clean. You know what I mean?" – MI woman, independent

"A lot of people like Gen Z, like me in our twenties. I still live with one of my parents... Everything just seems very unattainable or inaccessible for my generation and maybe affordable health care too. I spend a good chunk of my income on my medical costs." – CA woman, weak Democrat

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Their Recollection of Their 18-Year-Old Selves and Questions For Their Future Selves Belie Anxieties About Finances and Mental Health

Moderator: When you were 18 years old, if I asked you where you would be in this stage of your life, or how things would be going, what would you have said? How do things compare to what you expected?

"So, 18, I was pregnant with my first child in a different relationship. So, I did think that my life would be—I would probably have a job. Like, try to move up in a job. It was a different situation." – TX woman, weak Republican

"I definitely felt like the economy would have been better, because I would have bought a lot of more houses back in the day, because it was so cheap." – MI woman, independent

"I've got some mental health struggles that I thought would've been more resolved by now, but it's hard just with resources available. Also, a couple of health things that are just expensive to take care of." – CA man, weak Democrat

"I'm on track to where I always wanted to be when I was younger, but I hit a bunch of roadblocks and I would say learning lessons, things that I had to learn along the way a lot more than I expected." – MA man, weak Republican

"From a relationship and financial standpoint, yes, but when I was 18, I was in an abusive household and I had a lot of mental health problems... here 10 years later, I still have OCD and other anxiety, stuff like that that lingers on. I would've hoped I would've been able to figure it out by now, but I haven't been." – NV man, independent lean Republican



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AI Looms Large – As Both a Positive and a Negative

[What's going well?] "I said AI, because I just like that there's a lot of advancement going on, and now you don't have to rely as much on people. And AI is very precise for certain things. **So, you're able to get high quality information quickly.**" – FL woman, weak Republican

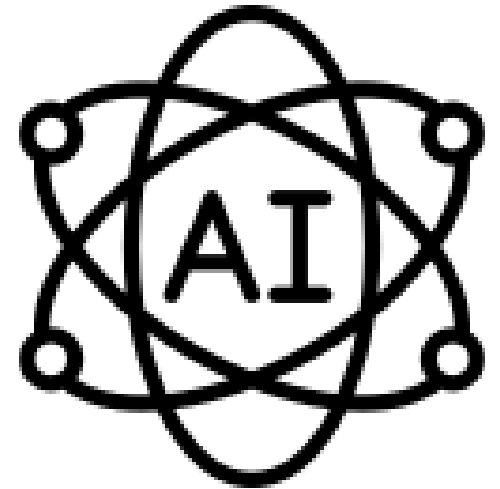
"I'll still say **AI is going well for me just because I think it helps me out a lot.** Like, with questions that I have that are too detailed for Google, and when I just need to make ... If I have to double-check something, it's always really handy...I'm like, 'Let me make sure I couldn't say this any better.'" – OH woman, weak Democrat

"The rate at which **AI** specifically and machine learning and deep learning is accelerating its growth... **will either kill us all... or make everything amazing.**" – TX man, independent lean Democrat

"Since we have private corporations developing these AIs, they're going to be **used to develop corporations**, not to help community." – NJ man, weak Democrat

"I was thinking of how we're doing **really well in AI race.** So is China, but we have open AI and stuff here, so I think that's going well. We have that advantage." – MO woman, weak Republican

"But I think **this new wave of AIs, it's going to start coming for people working office jobs and driving the Ubers** and who knows what else. And it just makes me scared for when a large amount of the workforce doesn't have a job." – NV man, independent lean Republican



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Although Significant For Some, COVID Did Not Come Up Unprompted As a Reason For Where They Are Now

"I think it's a weird point in time that's... Like, at least, in my mind, it's swept under the rug, and it's just weird. Like, this weird little area that's just... Because nothing happened. Not that COVID didn't happen, but nothing was going on. No one was working. No one was making memories, experiences." – TX woman, weak Republican

"It's weird to remember, because it feels like a time that I forget about just because nothing was going on besides me sitting at home watching TikTok pretty much." – OH woman, weak Democrat



"COVID actually pushed me into like, 'you're not going to live tomorrow.'...I was like, 'I have to travel now, I don't know if the world's going to end. I have to date now, I don't know if the world's going to end. I need to make music if I'm going to make music, I need to go for that career if I'm going to do it.'" – MI man, weak Democrat

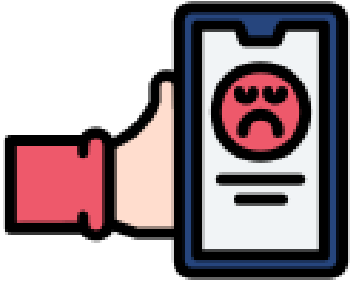
"I was more so thinking about being free to travel, to go state to state. I think that's still good in the country. I know when it was COVID times, everything shut down and it was amidst travel scares and stuff, but I think everything is open so it's good." – MA woman, weak Republican

"I planned to go right into law school at that point and it just had to stop and not go straight into it. And I think ever since then I got delayed or got stuck." – CA woman, weak Democrat

I feel like COVID really impacted my social skills. I forgot how to talk to people, how to speak to people, how to conversate, how to articulate myself to a certain extent." – FL woman, independent

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For Some, The News Is Too Negative and Depressing, and So Is Better to Be Avoided



"Can I be honest? I tend to ignore the news because it's really negative. But it's been a lot of war, a lot of deportation, just a lot of violence, killing, just a bunch of negative stuff." – MI woman, independent

"I feel like there's so much talk from these news articles and in the world... until this is concrete, until this is actually happening, then I don't even really want to hear about it, to be honest."
– MA man, weak Republican



"All the stress of the news. Someone else mentioned sometimes just opening my phone it's like, 'World War III, is that coming now?' It's not bad enough that I have my own anxiety. The whole world is stressful too....That's why I try to minimize negative news, but it's really hard. It's everywhere." – MO woman, weak Republican

"I try not to dig myself a huge giant hole. Not that I'm uneducated, but in all honesty, I get really anxious, and stuff when I start digging through rabbit holes, and stuff. So, I try to just stay in the surface, and then when I do get invested in something, I do my research, and stuff, but I try not to stick to watching the news regularly." – TX woman, weak Republican

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News Breaking Through: Deportations, Epstein, and War

Moderator: What news stories have you been paying attention to recently?

"I would say the stories about **US citizens being detained by ICE** for multiple days or even sent to Guatemala before things get figured out and returned home because it made me consider wanting to get one of those passport cards just to keep on me like ID all the time because it's just pretty frightening the idea of being detained for multiple days wrongly." – NV man, independent lean Republican

"I'm just seeing a lot about the **deportations**, the new Alligator Alcatraz lately." – FL woman, weak Republican



"Well, lately, the **Texas flooding, definitely deportations, ICE, and federal workers getting fired.**" – RI woman, independent lean Democrat

"**They don't want to release the files, now they said there's no files.** Two months ago she had the files on her desk, now there's no files." – NJ man, weak Democrat

"I'm hearing that they're **protecting a lot of people that are governing us.** I mean, it's quite obvious what they're doing." – TX man, independent lean Democrat

"Well, the conflict between Israel and Gaza comes to mind. We recently bombed Iran. Russia, Ukraine. It just feels like there's a lot going on that sometimes I read a headline and I'm like, 'Is this World War III starting?'" – MO woman, weak Republican

"I used to meet with Holocaust survivors who tell me they would spit in Nazi potatoes that they were forced to peel. This is going on in America today. You know what I mean? So we're tarnishing a legacy." – NY man, independent lean Republican

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Social Media Is Preferred For News, Even If Some Can't Name the Exact Source

"I follow a few people that are very neutral I guess. They try to just give the straight-up information...I don't know their names. I just know their face on TikTok. I just know their face." – TX woman, weak Republican

"Like, I don't really watch the actual news on TV unless I just happen to see it, but it'll be on my timeline, on Instagram, the pages that usually post about all the gossip as well as the news. Like, to The Shade Room or It's On Sight, like, Follow Alert." – OH woman, weak Democrat



"I get my news from Reddit. And then maybe 20% of it is from YouTube shorts when I'm scrolling through and some news channel or something will pop up." – NV man, independent lean Republican

"I do like some kinds of content creators on YouTube, someone informed on economical stuff... But also, I do watch a lot of YouTube and Twitch. So I like creators as well." – MI man, weak Democrat

"I'm constantly getting news I didn't sign up for on my phone. So we're constantly being berated by headlines." – NY man, independent lean Republican

"YouTube mainly. And then occasionally Facebook and Apple News, if it'll pop up on my phone and I click on the article, read it." – MA woman, weak Republican

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"Big Old News" – Like Broadcast News, AP – Is Good For Fact Checking, But Not a Primary Source

Moderator: How do you know what news you're getting is correct vs not correct?

"I grew up watching the news all day every day. And I don't like the news. I think it's very biased, whether it's one side, or another side. I don't like it. So, I tend to not watch it. ... I **tend to see more of what's going on in the communities rather than big old news.**" – TX woman, weak Republican

"Whenever I see those things [news on social media] I usually go and I **look up whatever they're saying, and I try to get it from somewhere like AP News,** because I know they're generally non-biased." – GA woman, weak Democrat

"So I like to search a bunch of information, really broadly, **pick whatever is repeated, so then I know that information is true because it's repeated towards all the outlets.**" – NJ man, weak Democrat



"I'll seek out different sources on both sides just to see what both sides are saying and the way they're portraying it, but I **don't trust either one because I feel like each side has their own opinion.**" – MA man, weak Republican

"I usually **go back to my big three US ones, ABC, NBC, and CBS.** And if I'm really uncertain, sometimes I'll **go to BBC** because... they have some greater perspective on what's going on here in the States." – AR woman, independent lean Democrat



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Some Are “Doing Their Own Research” on Deportations And Food Safety, Relying on AI, Reddit, or Even Comments

Moderator: Tell me about a time you actually did your own research—where did you go to do that research? What was the topic?



“So, I've seen a lot of claims about certain things just being a lot more harmful than they really are. Like, the **environmental impact of ChatGPT**, and I **decided to look for information about it**. And after looking at a bunch of information, I decided it's not that serious.” – FL woman, weak Republican

“I do my own research. I actually am really big into the food one as well, because with my son's **autism**, he also has an **eating disorder**. So, it's really, really hard for him to grow and gain weight. So, I've had to do a lot of different research, and a lot of different studies on foods.” – MI woman, weak Republican

“I use a bunch of different **AI tools**. I like **Perplexity for news**. It's a really good format and they also have a good news section about tech, so I just will ask whatever's big in the news and ask a lot of follow-up questions to try to understand it.” – MO woman, weak Republican

“That's why I'm getting my news now from YouTube or Facebook **because there's a comment section....So it's like you have people that could go back and forth, so you can see both sides** especially if you don't know much about the situation. So I like doing that, going through the comments when I see a news article and just seeing, okay, if someone's saying this and a lot of people are saying the same thing, and then I'll go from there to then look it at myself and then make my judgment.” – MA woman, weak Republican

“Obviously I'd go to Ground News first because I'm a little shill for them. But after that I would go to Reddit. I **would go to sources of community discourse where we can all get together....It's a melting pot where everybody can air what they actually feel free of any kind of audits.**” – TX man, independent lean Democrat

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The GOP Budget Bill Is Mostly Known, and Almost Exclusively Seen Negatively

Moderator: Let me ask you about something specific that was in the news recently – the Republican budget bill, or the One Big Beautiful Bill. What have you heard about it?

"I don't agree with I guess tax cutting for the wealthy, and, yeah, I don't think that's good for other people that have those circumstance" – RI woman, independent lean Democrat

"All that behind the back, secret deals, under the table just to get this passed. The whole tone is off for me." – AR woman, independent lean Democrat

"Personally, it doesn't affect me except for the food stamps part of it. I do get food stamps. So, it probably will make it a little bit harder for me." – GA woman, weak Republican

"I've read that it's the biggest wealth transfer in history from the bottom to the top in modern history." – CA man, weak Democrat

"A lot of just the ICE expansion has been pretty terrifying. Deficit increase... Anytime people talk about the deficit, it's such a tired talking point... No one actually cares about the deficit, let's be real." – MI man, weak Democrat

"They're putting a stipend on food funding, which is so weird to me." – MI man, weak Democrat



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People Use a Variety of Terms to Define Their Own Political Identity

Moderator: How would you describe your own personal political identity?

"I would consider **myself pro-neighbor**... it doesn't split left or right... I want to take the best of the left and the right and create this pro-community movement." – AR woman, independent lean Democrat



"I would say I'm **conservative**, and **moderate** for economic stuff." – FL woman, weak Republican

"I would say I'm in the middle, leaning **conservative/Republican**, **moderate**, more moderate." – MA man, weak Republican

"I label myself as a **left libertarian** because I find myself agreeing with a lot of things on the left. However, I do tend to vote right just because gun rights is my number one priority." – NV man, independent lean Republican

"I guess if I put a label on it, I'd just say generally more **leftist** leaning." – MI man, weak Democrat



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Several Can Point to a Moment Their Own Political Identity Changed

Moderator: How have these words [used to describe your political identity] changed for you in the past few years?

"I think I would have had different words. I considered myself a Democrat growing up, but now I'm on whoever economically benefits society. That's whose side I'm on." – MI woman, independent



"I would say Trump has definitely changed how I feel about my own political identity...In the past, I used to like him a lot more. So, he was how I originally became conservative, because I used to like him. And now I don't really like him that much." – FL woman, weak Republican



"Before I came to this country, I used to be a hard right person... But when I came to America and I lived with Americans, I realized how broken society in America is." – NJ man, weak Democrat

"With Trump in office saying like, 'oh yeah, on some issues I lean more conservative.' It feels like a crime to say that because some of the things he's done in office, it's just embarrassing." – MO woman, weak Republican

"I would say what happened with the last administration, because I generally would lean Democrat up until the last administration, and my parents would too. But I think what would happen with the last administration was complete chaos and anarchy, that it almost forced me to go to the other side because the other side was so illogical." – MA man, weak Republican

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Not All Are Sure The Government Impacts Their Lives

Moderator: What did you think about this video?

"I guess it **doesn't necessarily affect my daily life**, but just overall or ... Like, in terms of some situations, I guess, it does, and I guess cost of different things, and just inflation....Yeah. Things like that." – RI woman, independent lean Democrat

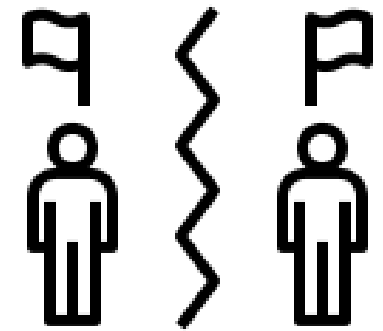


"I don't think it has anything to do with my personal identity... Just because it **doesn't really have much of an effect on my life.**" – GA woman, weak Republican

"Politics are not important to my personal identity because I **think it causes too much division...** I've always felt like that." – NY man, independent lean Republican

"**National politics, not very much. Local politics, absolutely.** I see a lot of coverage about my national politics, but I don't see a lot of coverage about my local politics, the school board meeting down the street, or if they're going to put in a new heart down the road, that's going to impact me much more than foreign policy." – AR woman, independent lean Democrat

"**When you're the political minority... we are the bottom,** this is the bottom of the food chain... So I feel like in the aspect of, just putting it in political terms, it's something that I've been experiencing for years." – MI man, weak Democrat



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A Wide Variety of Candidates Have Stood Out to Make People Excited

Moderator: Have you ever felt excited about a candidate?

"Yeah, **Bukele** from El Salvador, I think he's a great president, or right now I would say more of a dictator, but the country, in the position that it was in, I do believe it was a great move." –TX woman, weak Republican

"Honestly, I was excited for **Trump** to get into presidency." – MA man, weak Republican

"I would say **Kamala**, but not for the sake of her being Kamala, but for the sake of us having a femininity aspect on the judicial system. I feel like we have yet to experience feminine culture on the judicial system for real." – MI man, weak Democrat



"**Zohran Mamdani** was very exciting to me. He's just like, he's really young and hearing him answer questions, it's just insane because I haven't heard a politician just answer things directly like that in so long, and I think a lot of the young people are very excited about him." – CA man, weak Democrat

"I like at least someone who's a little bit more passionate who doesn't fall in line with a lot of establishment talking points or backslides on promises. But yeah, **Mamdani or Bernie**, that was the first political rally I went to was when he was in Flint in 2014/2015, and that was an awesome experience." – MI man, weak Democrat

"For me, it would be **Gavin Newsom**. I know he has his issues, but I feel like the way he stood up to Trump when Trump came to LA for the fires really resonated with me. Of course, he has his own issue of being the governor of California, but I feel like he'll be one of the only people to actually stand a chance against Trump." – CA man, weak Democrat



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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds; Mike Podhorzer; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups July 16, 2025 with Generation Z voters (20-28 years old) with a mix of partisanship, race, and education, specifically: non-college educated women, non-college educated men, and college educated men and women.

For Press inquiries contact:

press@navigatorresearch.org

To learn more about Navigator:

<http://navigatorresearch.org>

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