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### **What factors cause the millennial generation to lean more liberal than conservative especially on issues of abortion and LGBTQ rights?**

Rachel Kaiser

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## Final Survey Project

PLS 3723

Rachel Kaiser

What factors cause the millennial generation to lean more liberal than conservative especially on issues of abortion and LGBTQ rights?

**Introduction:**

The primary goal of my study was to look at what factors cause the millennial generation to lean more liberal than conservative, especially on abortion and LGBTQ rights. “In 2016, a majority of Millennials (55%) identified as Democrats or leaned Democratic; 27% described themselves as liberal Democrats – the highest share of any generation” (Maniam & Smith, 2017). Originally, I would’ve liked to survey people of all ages in order to get an accurate result to see where exactly those changes in social ideology took place. Because the survey was only sent out to college students, I decided to focus on the factors that play a role into the more common liberal views in the millennial generation. For this analysis, I will be focusing on LGBTQ rights as well as abortion rights.

According to the *Analysis of the General Social Survey Cumulative Data File, 1972-2014*, there is quite an increase in homosexual relations, but there is only a small increase in whether or not it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion (Clawson & Oxley, 2016: 63). Both are controversial social issues, and I expect to come to realize why there are increases in each category. It will be important for me to take into consideration which specific theories and ideas have a part in the results. Generational and period effects, political socialization, mass media, and ideology, all play a great role in the evidence that shows why exactly the millennial generation is more liberal on social issues.

A generational effect occurs when changes in the political context influence the political socialization of an entire age cohort (Clawson & Oxley, 2016: 60). A period effect occurs when salient features of the political period influence the political attitudes of many, regardless of age (Clawson & Oxley, 2016: 61). A political generation, “refers to a group that is [politically] distinctive in any number of respects by virtue of having experienced a specific set of social, economic, technological, and/or political circumstances at a formative period in their lives” (Clawson & Oxley, 2016: 62). It will be beneficial to understand how the generational and period effects play a role by studying previous generations and look at how exactly things have changed overtime.

The LGBT community is growing all over the world and it has become more of a “norm” in recent years. “One of the greatest contemporary challenges in human rights norm making is defining the protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression as an international standard” (Nogueira, 2017). Protecting LGBTQ rights is taking place all over the world, and it is a growing platform (Nogueira, 2017).

Mass Media has changed dramatically in the past few years. The continuous innovative technologies have great effects on the political opinions of those who pay any attention to any type of media. Objectivity is something that is almost impossible to find in news sources today. For example, Fox News is known as a “republican” network and CNN is known as a “democratic” network. I believe that because mass media has such a large impact on our daily lives, that it must have something to do with the more “open-mindedness” when it comes to general human social rights.

“Ideologically, they are more liberal. Compared to older cohorts, Millennial’s are more supportive of LGBT rights, racial and gender equality, a path to citizenship for undocumented

immigrants, and government involvement to address societal ills” (Clawson & Oxley, 2016: 62). Ideology and political parties definitely “shake up” the system. The problem is that there are people who are not necessarily interested in politics and they choose to vote just simply based on the party. Many people don’t even study the different policy issues and what each party stands for. This can cause great problems especially through research that is asking which party the subjects choose to identify with.

### **Methods:**

Analyzing basic information as well as questions that are relating to social issues will be beneficial while conducting this survey analysis. The survey was given to college undergraduates, so that the majority, if not all of those who went through the survey will be a part of the millennial generation.

While studying the LGBTQ effects, I will look at questions relating to gender identification and sexual orientation. Nearly 32% of the Millennial generation believe that allowing gay couples to raise children is a negative thing for society (Millennial’s: Confident. Connected. Open to Change, 2010). This is quite a decrease compared to the Gen X, Boomer, and Silent generations (Millennial’s: Confident. Connected. Open to Change, 2010). Looking at the location in which students grew up in could play a special role in social issues as well. For example, those who have grown up in a diverse metropolis area are much more likely to be open-minded rather than those who have grown up in rural areas.

Taking a look at specific party identifications within the millennial age range will be useful as well. Normally, society views liberalism to be open to social issues and conservatism to be more close-minded. Conservatism focuses more on tradition and value rather than diversity and civil rights. It is also possible that there could be a difference depending on how involved the

parents are not only politically, but also with their children in general. “To be sure, Millennial’s remain the most likely of any generation to self-identify as liberals; they are less supportive than their elders of an assertive national security policy and more supportive of a progressive domestic social agenda” (Millennial’s: Confident. Connected. Open to Change, 2010).

Finally, I will focus on the basic question of whether college students agree or disagree with abortion in general. The problem with this question, is there are always other scenarios that are brought up. It is such a grey question because people always tend to have certain “exceptions.” Looking at the questions relating to religion will also play a role in abortion. “Moreover, abortion is a most relevant topic for the analysis of the relationship between the national question and social policy because it brings the issue of religion to the forefront of that relationship, as religious factors and discourses are central to abortion debates around the world” (Kozloska, Beland, and Lecours, 2016). As abortion continues to be an issue, it is still considered an “ethical challenge for Protestants and Catholics” (Stettner and Douville, 2016).

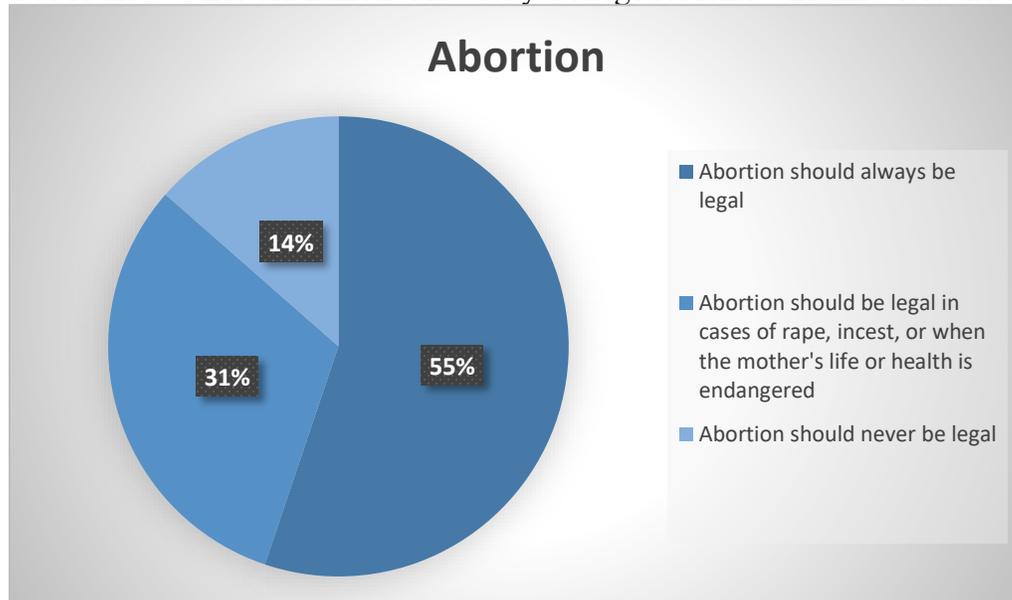
Overall, all these different variables will play a role in my study. The goal is to ultimately see on average what specific factors play into the liberal social opinions within the millennial generation. By studying these factors, I will actively work to achieve an accurate study.

### **Findings and Analysis:**

367 students answered a question about abortion based on which they most agree with. The statements were: abortion should always be legal, abortion should be legal in cases of rape, incest, or when the mother’s life or health is endangered, and abortion should not be legal. The statement that said, “Abortion should never be legal” had a dramatically lower percentage. The middle statement that says, “Abortion should be legal in cases of rape, incest, or whenever the mother’s life is at risk” is near the middle of each demographic category.

For the statement that abortion should always be legal, 23.08% of those who agree were male, 74.52% were female, 1.92% were genderqueer/nonconforming, and 0.48% identified with a different gender. The statement that allows abortion to be legal in certain cases received a more even vote. 44.07% who agreed were male, 54.24% who agreed were female, the only transgender male agreed with this statement as well, and 0.85% of the different identity agreed that it should be legal in certain situations. 33.3% of those who believe abortion should not be legal were male, 64.71% were female, and 1.96% had a different identity.

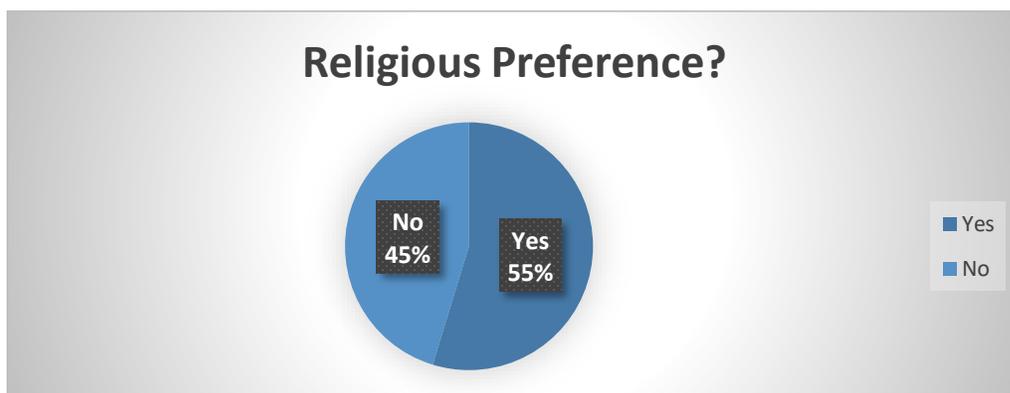
Out of the 376 Eastern Illinois University College students who answered the question



concerning abortion rights, I was not surprised by the results. Because of the demographics that the survey participants, there was not a great turn out concerning the metropolis area and the city. However, it is safe to say that within metropolis, suburban, city, large town, town, and rural area, the statement that said “Abortion should always be legal” took the lead. This was no surprise to me; it just comes to show how people in the millennial generation tend to lean more liberal on issues such as abortion.

The only living area that stuck out to me and was different was those who lived in the city. The statements, “Abortion should always be legal” and “Abortion should be available in cases of rape, incest, or whenever the mother’s life is at risk” were tied. Only 15 people out of the 376 who answered this question were from the city, and that is the least amount of all other living categories.

“While the pro-life movement tends to focus on fetus-centered narratives to bolster their arguments, the abortion rights movement chooses to focus on the narratives of women who have successfully defended their abortions to the public” (Settles & Furgerson, 2015). The issue of abortion gets very complicated because both sides have a logical, valid argument point. Those who choose to be pro-life claim that the fetus is a living person and it is considered murder to abort the innocent life. The pro-choice advocates argue that it is the women’s right because it is her body. This idea is very complicated which is why it is considered a big issue today. After looking at the results from the survey, I was not surprised that more people from the millennial generation were pro-choice. I also think that religious preference plays a role in opinions on abortion. Out of the 497 responses, 85 males, 183 females, one transgender male, and three who identify with a different gender said that they do have a religious preference. 63 males, 157 females, four of the genderqueer/nonconforming, and one of those who identify with another gender do not have religious preferences.



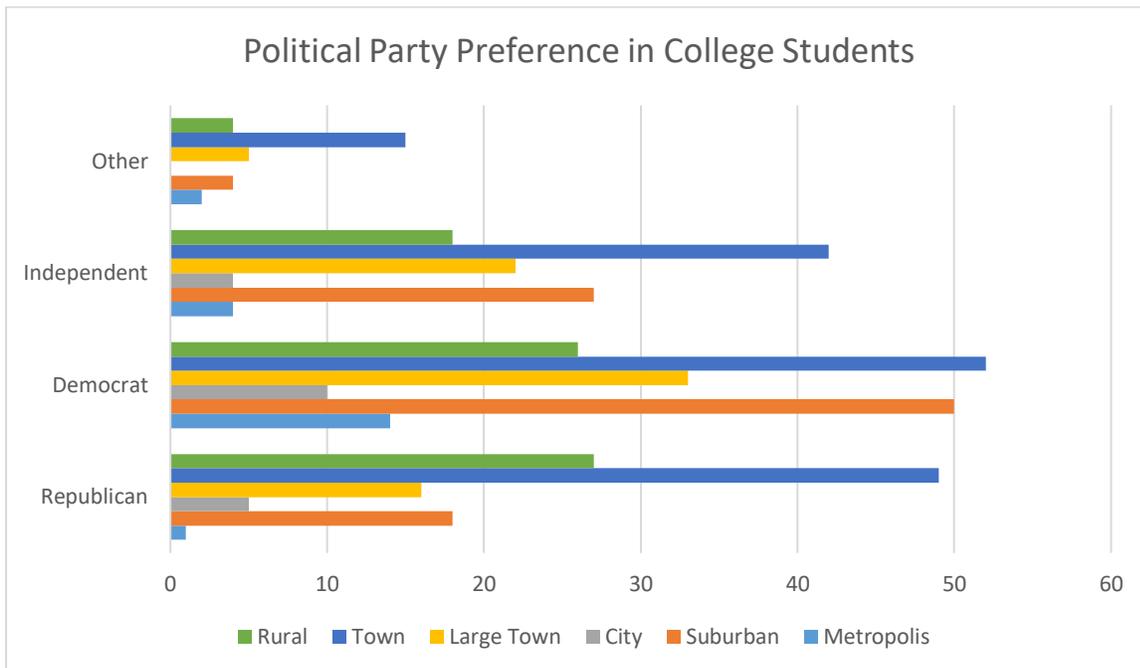
Even though more than half of the students do have a religious preference, more than half still believe abortion should always be legal. This comes to show that religion may not have a very big role in abortion views.

Out of the 516 Eastern Illinois University students, only 10 of them identify as something other than male and female. In the results, there was one transgender male, five gender or nonconforming, and four that identify as something other than what was on the survey. Nearly 67.4% of those who answered the question identify as female, 30.6% identify as male, and the other categories are less than 1%.

There were also 516 students who answered the question, "How would you describe your sexual orientation?" The options to the question were: Opposite-Sex attraction (straight), Same-Sex attraction (gay/lesbian), Bisexual, Queer, and Orientation not listed. Out of those who identify as male, 89.8% classify themselves as straight, 0.50% classify themselves as gay, 0.25% are bisexual, and 0.19% are queer. There were 349 females who answered how they describe their sexual orientation. 83.9% of females said that they are straight, 0.22% said that they are lesbian, 0.88% said that they are bisexual, 0.08% said that they are queer, and 0.40% say that their orientation is not listed. The one transgender male describes the sexual orientation as queer. The ones who identify as gender-queer/nonconforming, have diverse results. One of them identifies as straight, two of them identify as bisexual, and the other two identify as an orientation that was not listed. Three of the four people whose identities were not provided, say that their sexual orientation was not provided either. The other person describes their sexual orientation as straight.

In the survey, students were asked whether they consider themselves a republican, a democrat, an independent, or something else. Out of the 448 students who answered the

question, there was a diverse group of results. There is a steady correlation with the students who live in either a town or a rural area. Those are the only two areas in which republicans and democrats are about even in numbers. When it comes to large towns, cities, suburban, and metropolis areas, a lot more students consider themselves to be democratic rather than republican. Through this question it is very clear that there are more democrats among college students than republicans.



Students were then asked to indicate whether they support or oppose the following proposals. 55.56% of those who identify as male strongly support allowing LGBTQ people to adopt. 55.05% of males strongly support ending housing discrimination against LGBTQ people and 59.09% strong support ending job discrimination against LGBTQ people. Only 57.39% of males strongly support protecting marriage equality. 36.7% of males strongly support protecting transgender people’s rights to bathroom access.

When those who identify as female answered the questions relating to LGBTQ, the percentage was much higher for a stronger support. 79.42% of females strongly support allowing

LGBTQ people to adopt. 78.9% strong support ending housing discrimination against LGBTQ people and 80.41% strongly support ending job discrimination against the LGBTQ people. When it comes to protecting marriage equality, 78.19% of females strongly supported it. 68.78% of females also strongly support the protection of transgender people's rights to bathroom access.

The only transgender male that took the survey strongly supports everything including LGBTQ rights, which only makes sense. The Genderqueer/Nonconforming people strongly supported everything considering LGBTQ rights as well. As for those who have a different identity other than what was provided, only 33.3% of them strongly support allowing LGBTQ people to adopt, only 50% of them strongly support ending housing discrimination, and 33.3% strongly support ending job discrimination among LGBTQ people. Only 25% of the genderqueer/non-conforming people strongly support protecting transgender people's rights to bathroom access.

One interesting finding was that there is a huge gap between LGBTQ rights such as allowing gay couples to adopt, end housing and job discrimination, gay marriage, and the transgender bathroom rights. My theory is that there is less support for the transgender bathroom rights because that is a much more recent issue. "Almost half of the states have lawsuits against the federal government over this issue and there have been, and continue to be, numerous lawsuits between students and school districts. In addition to being unsettled, the law is constantly evolving as policies change and new legal challenges are filed and decided" (Philips, 2017). The whole transgender rights issue is clearly an unresolved problem, but with time, I expect it to become a norm just as gay marriage became a norm.

### **Discussion:**

Based on this study, it is clear that the group of students who answered this survey was not as diverse as I had hoped. It was interesting to find that based on this study, religion was not as big of a role when it comes to abortion views as I originally thought. But at the same time, maybe this study just comes to show that religion does not play a big role concerning opinions and views in the millennial generation. "In 1967, Louise Summerhill (1967a, 6) wrote to *The Globe and Mail*, arguing, 'The moral position of the [Roman Catholic] Church on abortion is that the fetus is a human being made in the image and likeness of God. The mystery of God's creation is attacked when abortion is attempted'" (Stettner & Douville, 2016). This statement is clearly more focused on the traditional values of the Roman Catholic church, and with my conclusions either the respondents do not fully understand their religious beliefs, or they don't think of it hypothetically.

LGBTQ rights are definitely considered to be a newer "norm" in the United States. Ann Florini argues that, to emerge and acquire legitimacy, "any new norm must fit coherently with other existing norms" (Nogueira, 2017). It wasn't until the early 2000's until the LGBTQ community started to become noticeably present, and during that time is when the millennial generation was growing up (Noquiera, 2017). Gay rights started to become more of a norm in the early 2000's, but the transgender bathroom issue is a much more recent issue. I think that more students were able to agree with gay marriage and ending discrimination against LGBTQ when it comes to housing and jobs, rather than agree with the transgender bathroom issues because the gay issues have been a norm since the millennial generation has grown up. However, because the transgender issue is newer, it might be more difficult for people to accept it because it is not considered a norm yet.

In order to further develop this project, I would like to conduct interviews on individual students. I would like to get a diverse group of people and ask them questions specific to why they feel the way they do on issues such as abortion rights and LGBTQ rights. Being able to get more in depth with how they feel the way that they do would be very beneficial. I would like to ask religious students why they feel that abortion is okay or why they feel that it is not okay. It was difficult to find that in this study because I couldn't see how the students who were religious answered the question relating to abortion. As for the LGBTQ rights, I would like to interview those who identify with another gender or those who consider themselves a sexual orientation rather than straight. A problem with my study was that the majority of males and females were considered straight, and those who identified as a gender other than male or female were less than 1%. Overall the respondents were not as diverse as I would have hoped on a college campus. In the future, I will take these findings into consideration in order to further my study.

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