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Millennials, Mississippians, and the 2016 Presidential Election: Implications of Generational Differences on Voter Behavior

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MILLENNIALS, MISSISSIPPIANS, AND THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:
IMPLICATIONS OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES ON VOTER BEHAVIOR

by
Bess Nichols

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
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Approved by

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Reader: Professor John Bruce

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ABSTRACT

Millennial Voting Patterns: A Study Of Mississippi Voters And The 2016 Election
(Written by Bess Nichols under the direction of Marvin King)

This is a study of the voting patterns of millennial voters (predominately students at the University of Mississippi) and “traditional Deep South voters,” which for the purpose of this study is men and women above the age of 35. The paper seeks to answer the question: Are millennials ideologically different than their older counterparts in the state of Mississippi? I surveyed a sample of 4,000 students at the University of Mississippi (with approximately 500 responses) and a sample of traditional voters gathered from social media and employees at the University of South Alabama. Respondents were asked questions about their political ideology and demographics. Results showed that while the traditional Deep South voters proved to be very conservative, the millennial voters were much more moderate to liberal, particularly on social issues, but compared to millennials in regions other than the Deep South, they are a little more conservative.

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Chapter 1: What is a millennial voter?

What is a millennial? Who is a millennial? Why do they matter?

These are questions that many people asked in 2016. In a year of political outsiders and party frustration, voter participation mattered more than ever. The general population associates the millennial label with the 13-34 year old age range, born in the years 1982 to 2003. Many also associate the term with a negative connotation, and are quick to categorize millennials as “the most narcissistic generation in modern history” (Winograd 5). However, millennials are also regarded as the most educated generation to date (Kent). Millennials straddle the fence between the norm and the future of our world. While millennials are innovative, driven, and focused, many times they are also regarded as narcissistic and unworldly. While millennials generally are more ideologically liberal, they do not have a high voter turnout rate (Dalton).

A higher percentage of millennials align with the Democratic Party (Fry). The Republican Party has struggled to appeal to this generation due to the party’s conservative stance on many popular social issues, like same-sex marriage and climate change policy (Dimock). Not only that, but millennials have been at the forefront of legislation concerning the legalization of same-sex marriage and marijuana (“Millennials in Adulthood”). Compared to the generations before them, millennials are by far the most liberal, with about 50% of millennials aligning with Democrats, and only 34% aligning with Republicans (“Millennials in Adulthood”). In comparison, of the Baby Boomer generation, 46% align or lean with the Democratic Party, and 42% align or lean with the Republican Party.

Millennials and Politics

The millennial generation is slightly larger than the Baby Boomer generation in size. Therefore, they are the largest generation in the voting electorate. Yet, they have the lowest voter participation rate. That means millennials are the largest generation of untapped potential. While they are the largest generation of potential voters, they are not the largest generation of actual voters, meaning that either millennials lack quite a few registered voters or simply do not make it to the polls (Fry). For the purpose of this thesis, we are looking directly at millennials, but it is important to point out that millennials are not the only generation voting at relatively low rates. Americans, in general, are voting at lower rates than previously, decreasing from 61% turnout in 2008 to 58% in 2012 (FairVote).

However, it is incredibly important to point out the fallacy that the millennial generation's "apathy" towards voting is a threat to future generations; that is not the case (Khalid). Each generation, during the young adult period, experiences a pattern of low voter turnout (Khalid). That is an age problem, and not necessarily a generational one. The 2016 presidential election is the first election that many of the millennials are eligible to vote. However, we can attribute the causes for lack of voter participation to a number of different factors. For starters, many millennials are not registered to vote. This seems like a simple fix, but it definitely contributes to millennials not going to the polls.

Another contributing factor is because there is such a strong frustration with the political process; millennials care about politics, but they dislike it. For the majority of

their lifetimes, jobs have not been plentiful. Many of my own childhood memories go back to the time of the Great Recession, when my own father was out of work. College-age students today leave university with a degree and a mount of student loan debt, only to go home and live with their parents, search for a job by day, and watch the nightly news about gridlock in Washington by night (Montenegro).

In addition, this reality is harsh, but true; some needs of millennials are not addressed by the major political parties, but also for good reason. Millennials are not tying themselves down to a party. In fact, according to Pew, 48% of millennials identify as independents (P. Levine). Unfortunately, this lack of clear party identification leaves room for the parties to determine that they do not need to address the issues most important to millennials because they are not assured to get their vote, or just as importantly, their donations. In the end, all of these factors related to millennials not voting really boil down to frustrations of millennials. This shows why Bernie Sanders was such a popular candidate among millennials: he changed the way that millennials think about politics, particularly on issues like the government providing healthcare and that government should be doing more to eradicate poverty (Ehrenfreund). A 2014 Harvard poll showed that for the first time in five years, more millennials identified as Democrats over Independents (Ehrenfreund). According to FiveThirtyEight, the under-25 coalition that supported Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 was not voting for Hillary Clinton as enthusiastically (Enten). While this group still very much leans left, they gravitated toward Bernie Sanders due to his ideology as a “democratic socialist,” promoting a welfare state and closing the gap between rich and poor (Silver). In 2012, the choice for this coalition was between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, but in 2016,

that choice was between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton. While many believed Clinton’s presidency would be “Obama’s Third Term,” Bernie Sanders took a step further than Obama in regards to economic redistribution, which is what drew so many millennials to him (Silver).

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about the millennial generation is that they are the largest and most racially diverse generation alive (Winograd 2). At 83.1 million people, the millennial generation represents one-fourth of the American population (US Census Bureau). As seen in Figure 1.1, while 57% of the millennials are

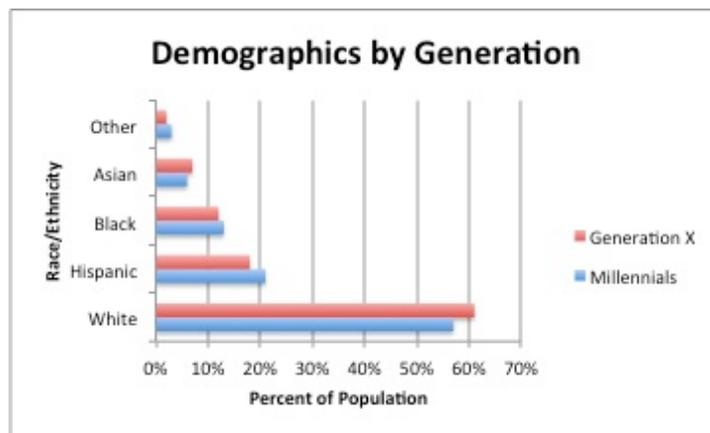


Figure 1.1

white, 21% are Hispanic, and 13% are Black. It is even easier to see the diversity when compared to even one generation older, the Generation Xers (aged 34-49), who break down to 61% white, 18% Hispanic, and 12% Black (“Comparing Millennials”).

Millennials are also behaviorally different from the generations that preceded them. Technological knowledge is increasing, age of marriage is increasing, religiosity is decreasing, and the gender gap in education is steadily closing (Winograd 71).

Millennials and Culture

The millennial generation’s tendency to resort to instant communication can be attributed to the innovation of social networks early on in their lives. Millennials grew up

with MySpace, and then ventured into Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Because they grew up with this technology, it is embedded in their programming; they know no other way of life than this “way of the future.” The millennial generation runs at light-speed, expects instant gratification at the click of a button, and has a high ability to absorb large amounts of content. All of this sets them apart from the generations before them, who generally have not adopted this high speed standard and norm because it came after their time of education.

A Gallup study showed that not only are millennials in no rush to marry, but that the rate of single/never married people has increased from 52% to 64% in the past ten years (Saad). While marriage stays steady for those in their 30s and above, the 30-somethings that live with their significant other but are not married almost doubled, jumping from 7% to 13% between 2004 and 2014. While an important note to keep in mind about that statistic is that marriage laws differed from state to state until 2015, and many of those cohabitating relationships could have been same-sex relationships, the data does not break down those numbers. However, it is interesting to note that overall many couples are choosing to simply cohabit and not actually marry.

Older generations are more likely to believe in God and millennials are the least religious generation. Only half of millennials say that they have a concrete belief in God, and only 2 out of every 5 millennials say that religion plays an important part in their lives (Alper). However, much of this also is in reference to religious practices, according to Pew Research. While the millennial generation may not be explicitly religious, attending services weekly or even monthly, they still contemplate the “meaning of life” and “wonder about the Universe” (Alper). According to Dr. Jean Twenge, a psychologist

at San Diego State University, the reason for the lack of religiosity among millennials is not due to their age, but due to the culture of the generation. Growing increasingly popular is the culture of individualism, or the idea of being self-reliant. The trend of individualism in the country has more people, particularly millennials, less focused on any type of group religion (Cooper-White).

Another generational behavior shift is the gender gap on education between males and females. While in recent years, millennial enrollment in higher education has skyrocketed; even more so can be said for female millennials. Women now outpace men when it comes to college enrollment, especially among the Hispanic and Black communities (Lopez). While female college enrollment has grown from 63% to 71% from 2004 to 2012, male enrollment has stayed at 61% during that time. It is especially interesting to note that the statistics do not favor the male gender regardless of ethnicity. Despite the ethnicity, between 1994 and 2012, women increased college attendance more than men. In fact, the only race that rivaled women was black men, but they were still a full percentage point behind women (Lopez).

Millennials and Future Elections

While it is difficult to predict with certainty what any election will turn out like, it is safe to say that millennials are not going to take a sharp turn to the right anytime soon. With the recent election of Donald Trump, I predict that millennials will veer slightly away from the Republican Party. While Trump is by no means a “traditional” Republican, or maybe even a true Republican at all, he is the face of the party. Being optimistic, his presidency will be good for American businesses and jobs, which will work in the favor of millennials, especially recent college graduates. Because millennials

are categorized as leaning slightly left as it is, I think the 2020 presidential election will give a better glimpse into how the generation will vote in the coming years. It is hard to predict anything based on results from the 2016 election due to the irregular nature of the election; however, based on their behavior as a generation thus far, such as a later marriage age, less religiously adherent, and more diverse, it would not be shocking to see millennials lean more to the left as they grow older.

Chapter 2: Traditional Mississippi Voters

To predict the future, we must first understand the past. Here's a quick history lesson: Mississippi has been considered a "safe Republican" state for many years. Like most other southern states, from the period of Reconstruction until the 1960s, Mississippi voted almost solely with the Democratic Party. With the 1964 election and the "Southern Strategy," Mississippi and other southern states began the switch to the Republican Party, in order to revolt against Civil Rights legislation. After this party realignment, Mississippi went through a few fluctuating election cycles, but since 1980, Mississippi has consistently voted Republican in every presidential election, as seen in Figure 2.1 (270towin.com). In addition, since Thad Cochran was elected in 1977, all subsequent senators to date (Trent Lott and Roger Wicker) have been members of the Republican Party (Black 118).

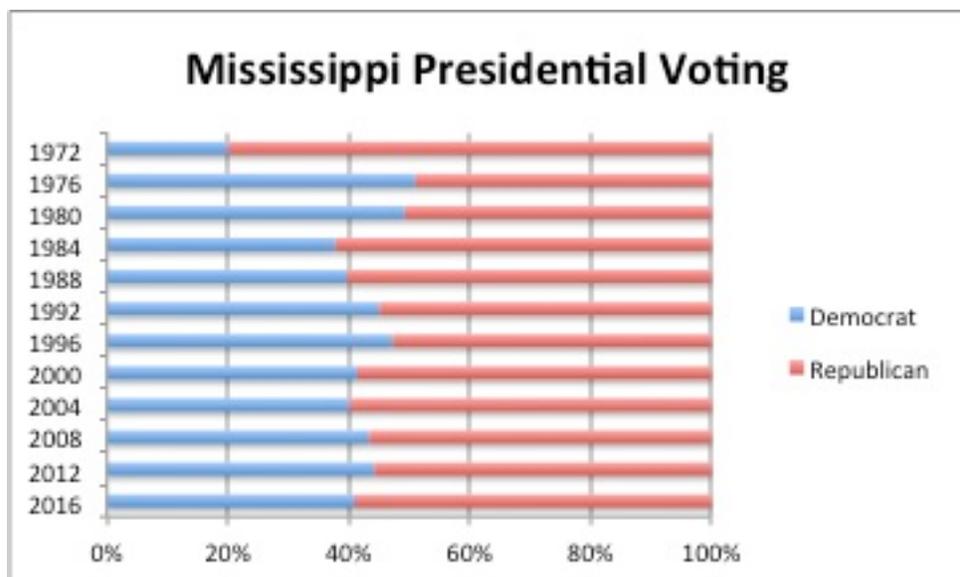


Figure 2.1

In their book *The Rise of the Southern Republican*, Earl Black and Merle Black state “no state has produced less ideological change in its Senate delegation than Mississippi” (Black 117). An integral part of the “Deep South,” Mississippi’s tradition of conservative values, both social and economical, has contributed to similar voting patterns for generations of residents.

This work seeks to define the “traditional” Mississippi voter in order to provide an adequate comparison with the “millennial” Mississippi voter. As a general statement, we will define the “traditional” Mississippi voter as a member of the two generations older than the millennial generation: Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation. Generation X is classified as the generation born after the “Baby Boomers”, born between the early 1960s and the early 1980s. “Baby Boomers” are people born during the post World War II “baby boom,” between 1946 and 1964. These generations are made up of the parents and grandparents of the millennial generation. These are the generations that give Mississippi “safe Republican state” status; for the past six presidential elections (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016) Mississippi has voted for the Republican nominee,

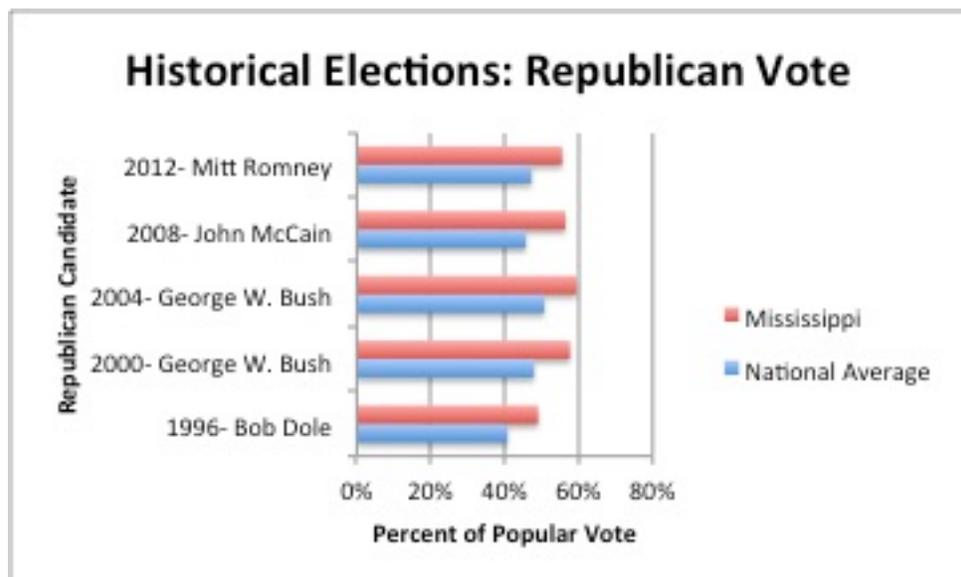


Figure 2.2

and these adults were the ones voting.

Figure 2.2 gives a breakdown of how the state of Mississippi voted in the last five presidential elections, from 1996-2012. Each year the state has used its six or seven electoral votes for the Republican candidate. Interestingly enough, even in 2000 and 2004, when the Republican nominee did win the presidency, the vote in Mississippi is

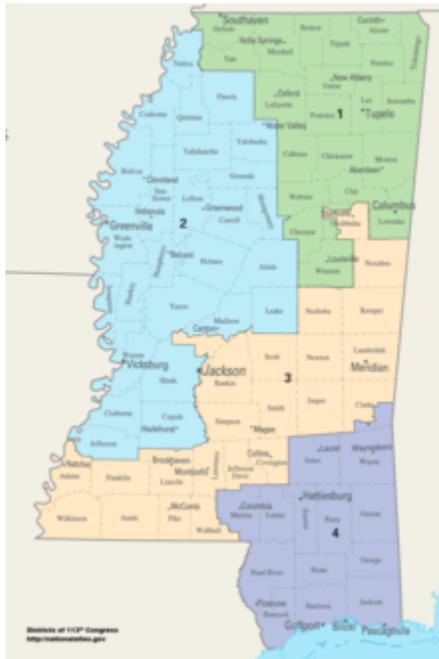


Figure 2.3

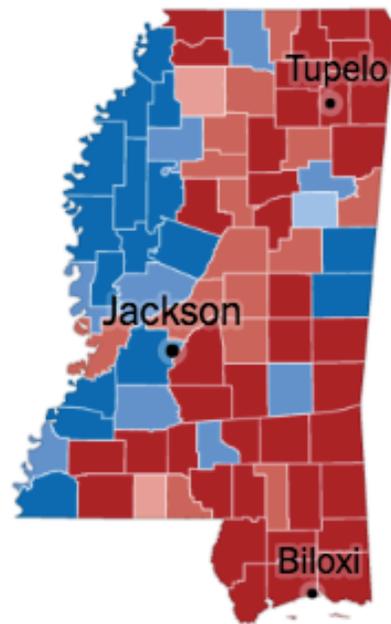


Figure 2.4

still proportionately higher than the rest of the country.

Looking at the state of Mississippi, despite the evidence that the state as a whole votes Republican consistently, there are some Democrats scattered across the state. Figure 2.3 is a map of the four congressional districts, and Figure 2.4 is the breakdown of Mississippi counties based on how they voted in the 2016 presidential election. The counties in the top and mid-left of the state (predominately District 2) are 65.2% African American. District 2 is the only district in the state that is represented by a Democrat,

U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson, who has represented this district since 1993, and has been represented by a Democrat since 1987 (Ballotpedia). This area of the state, known as the “Mississippi Delta,” and famous for its southern soul food and blues music, is the poorest region in the entire country (Ryssdal). Despite the fact that this area votes with the Democratic Party, it does not make up for the other $\frac{3}{4}$ of the state that are incredibly conservative by history and nature.

I bring up the example of the Mississippi Delta to show the level of racially polarized voting in the state of Mississippi. An article from *The Griot* posed a very interesting question: Why is Mississippi so red when it is so black? The 2010 census claims Mississippi to be 37.6% black, compared to 59.5% white, compared to Alabama (a comparatively equally conservative state) which has 26.8% black population, with 69.5% white (US Census Bureau). Census data also shows that Mississippi is the poorest state in the country, which again, begs the question of why the state is so conservative. The answer lies in those four districts. Looking at the map of the 2016 election on the previous page, the majority of the counties that voted for Hillary Clinton were those of District 2, which is predominately African-American. As previously stated, this district is 65.2% African American. Of the 26 counties in the predominately African-American District 2, 17 of them voted Democrat in the 2016 Election (“Presidential Election Results”). Of the 82 total counties in Mississippi, 26 voted Democrat while the other 56 voted Republican. Compared to District 2, in District 1 (consisting of 22 counties), three counties voted Democrat; in District 3 (consisting of 23 counties), six counties voted Democrat; in District 4 (consisting of 14 counties), zero counties voted Democrat. With this data in mind, it is clearly evident that the number of counties in District 2 that voted

with the Democratic Party is disproportionate to the rest of the state, and this can be explained by the higher percentage of African American people in that region. However, to answer the question of how Mississippi is one of the most conservative state in the Union, yet also has a large African American population, we have to remember the original purpose of the voter districts. History reminds us that in the South, African American voters were placed in a district together so that they would have a voice; however, this has backfired to falsely make evident that there is a possibility of a moderate Mississippi, when in reality, Mississippi is still one of the most conservative state in the Union, and also has a large segment of racially-polarized voters.

Chapter 3: Primary Survey Research

In April 2016, I sent a survey to 4,000 University of Mississippi students, which equates roughly 20% of the student body. This survey consisted of ten questions about demographics, political ideology, party identification, and voter participation. The 4,000 students were selected at random, with the only requirements being they are a current graduate or undergraduate student at The University of Mississippi, enrolled in classes at any of the satellite campuses or the main Oxford campus. The survey was sent to their University-issued e-mail account, and the e-mail addresses were obtained from The Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning at the University of Mississippi.

I chose to use a random sample of University of Mississippi students for several reasons. First, these students were readily available to me. The majority of them are located on the Oxford campus, and I was able to reach them through their provided e-mail addresses. Because the survey was quick, I knew that I would be able to collect a respectable amount of responses by simply sending the survey to the students' e-mail addresses. University e-mail accounts are regularly checked by students due to academic classes and financial notifications from the University both operating through the University e-mail system; I knew these addresses would be reliable.

Another reason I selected this particular sample is because I knew that the Ole Miss student body was diverse enough for me to achieve my research through using the

student body. The University of Mississippi is roughly evenly split between in-state residents and out-of-state residents, 55% to 44%, respectively (Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning Department). Because of this, I knew that a solid portion of my respondents would be from somewhere other than Mississippi, which fulfilled my goal for the survey. I wanted to ensure that I got a mix of both students that were raised in Mississippi and students that grew up in a different state. My goal was to compare the result, especially the millennial mindset of Mississippians versus millennials that are not from Mississippi.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the broad topic being millennials, but now it is time to drill down into a specific subset of millennials: current students at the University of Mississippi. For this thesis, I conducted two surveys: one in April 2016 and one in November 2016. In my April 2016 survey, I asked my sample of Ole Miss students how interested in politics and current events they were, giving them the options of “very interested”, “somewhat interested,” and “not interested at all.” Of the 512 respondents, only 4.9% said they were not interested at all. That means that 95.1% of the millennial survey respondents indicated they had a moderate to strong interest in politics. As previously stated, one of the basic facts about the millennial generation is that they statistically have a tendency not to vote; this survey data shows that the problem lies more in their lack of drive to actually register to vote, or even to get to polls on Election Day, but that lack of interest is not an issue. Thus, that was my next step. In the same survey, I asked if they voted or planned to vote in their state’s primary: 55.8% voted, while 44.2% did not. Considering that those were results from the primary season, when turnout is always lower, I moved to my data from the November 2016 survey, which was

released the morning after Election Day. From that survey, the results denoted that 74.8% of respondents voted in the presidential election, while only 25.2% did not. The national voter turnout among eligible registered voters was 65%, according to Politico, and Mississippi had just over 81% of eligible registered voters vote (D. Levine; Jackson Free Press).

All of these questions are extremely relevant in light of the 2016 presidential election, one referred to by many political experts as an “unprecedented fluke” and by others as the beginning of a transformation of American politics (Fouriezos). This particular study takes an in-depth look at the way that millennials vote, focusing on Mississippi, one of the most conservative states in the Union. Students from all across the nation and the world travel to attend the University of Mississippi; through survey research, this study looks at the way that they vote, and how that correlates with where they are from. I hypothesize that despite the fact that Mississippi is classified as a “safe Republican state,” meaning that it isn’t difficult to generalize the state as conservative, the millennial voters from this part of the country will contain some social liberalism. In 2016, the social issues of the Republican Party are beginning to be moot points, as we have seen with the legalization of gay marriage and in some states, the legalization of marijuana (Meyer). However, the election of President Donald Trump in November 2016 may make some issues salient once again, especially if he attempts to privatize healthcare and reverse the legalization of gay marriage.

To measure the survey respondents for the hypothesized characteristic of social liberalism, there are five statements for the students to identify how strongly they agree or disagree with. The statements included some references to policy, but without explanation, so as to also test for prior knowledge of these issues.

Within the first week, the spring survey received 322 responses, just under a 10% response rate. The survey was open for several weeks, and then closed on May 9, 2016. Students received reminder e-mails about the survey in late April, and a small surge in responses occurred following the reminder. At the survey's closing, I had 562 responses, a 14% response rate.

In the fall of 2016, I wanted to send another survey to the same group to observe their responses after the general election. However, in order to test the traditional Mississippi voter, I also needed a large sample of adult voters. Therefore, I sent a survey to the same sample of 4,000 students, as well as sending the link via Facebook to be shared on social media (see Appendix).

Chapter 4: Results

April 2016 Results

My first glimpse into the real political culture of the University of Mississippi was examining my results from the Spring 2016 survey. Ending with about a 14% response rate, I got a good idea of the political climate on campus.

I had several initial hypotheses. First, I expected the Mississippi millennials to be more socially liberal than their older Mississippi counterparts. More specifically, I expected them to more strongly agree with the legalization of marijuana and same sex marriage, especially more so than the traditional Mississippi voters. Because the millennial generation as a whole is more accepting and open, I figured that despite their likely traditional, conservative upbringing, Mississippi millennials, especially college-aged students at the University of Mississippi, would identify more with their generation.

Second, I expected the millennials to have more Independents than the older generation of voters. Because millennials feel disconnected from the traditional political parties, I envisioned more of them not only identifying as an Independent as opposed to a traditional Democrat or Republican, but I also expected them to vote for one of the third party presidential candidates in higher numbers.

Third, I envisioned that the traditional Mississippi voters would choose Donald Trump as their presidential candidate by a landslide. However, I did not think that he would win as big with millennials. I predicted that while Donald Trump might still win with the millennials, he and Hillary Clinton would be quite a bit closer, and that there would be more voters for Gary Johnson, Jill Stein, or an “other” choice.

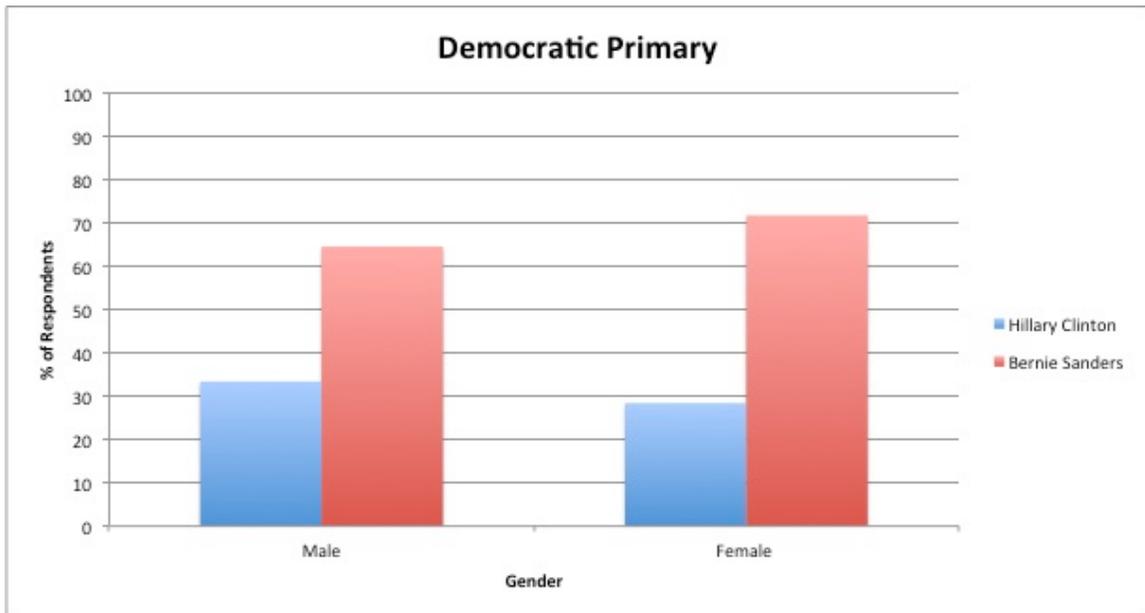


Figure 4.1

In examining the actual data, one correlation that I noticed immediately and had not predicted is the pattern between gender and their choice for Democratic candidate. For the primary elections, out of the 114 students that identified as Democrats, 90 of them voted in their states' primary. When asked their choice for the Democratic nominee, 30 voted for Hillary Clinton and 59 for Bernie Sanders (one respondent voted for "other" candidate). However, when I specifically viewed who the female Democrats voted for, I found that out of 67 women, only 19 chose Hillary Clinton and 48 chose Bernie Sanders; more than double the amount of women voted for Sanders over Clinton, as seen in Figure 4.1. Compared to the rest of the country, this was spot on because this survey addressed college-aged voters. According to an article from CBS News, Bernie Sanders won big among female voters under 30, while Hillary Clinton did well among older women (Pinto).

This correlation was particularly interesting to me because I initially thought that these college-aged women would identify with Hillary Clinton based on their gender. However, it seems as though their identification as a woman was less important than their identification as a millennial, and particularly their liking of Bernie Sanders. According to a poll by Harvard University, Sanders changed the way that millennials thought about politics; when asked three different statements about what government should provide (healthcare, providing basic necessities, and spending more to reduce poverty), the millennials were all for it, their answers going up as much as 5% from the previous year, which is incredibly unusual (Echrenfreund).

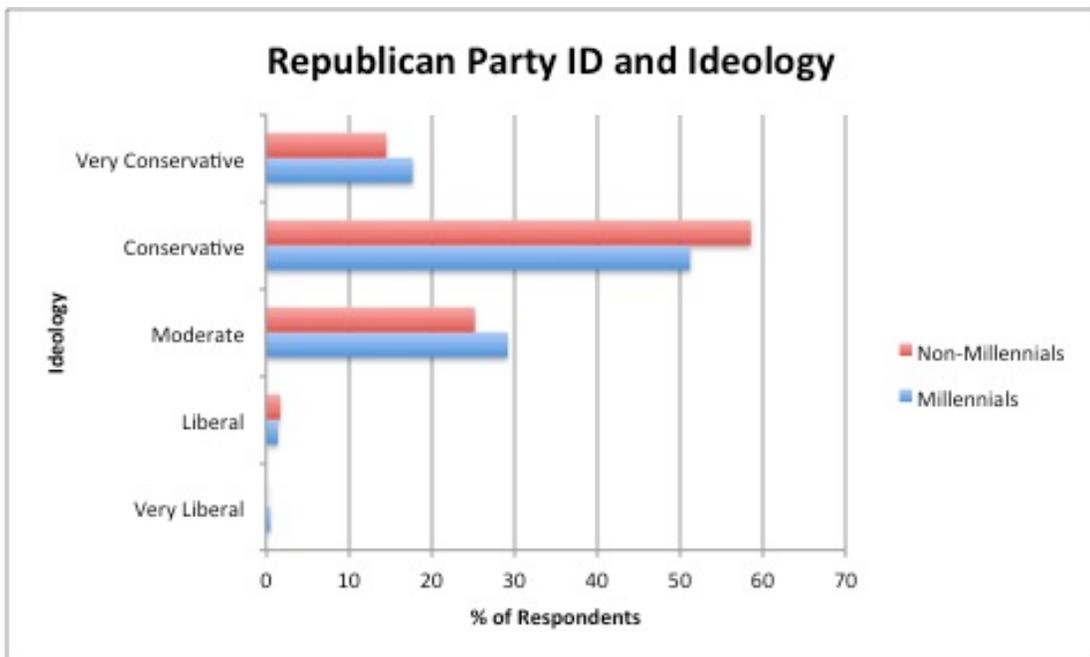


Figure 4.2

Another finding from the spring survey involved the degree that Republican voters consider themselves moderates. I looked specifically at two questions on the survey: party identification as a Republican and political ideology. I looked specifically at the sector of people that identified as a Republican, and then how that group responded to the Likert scale ideology question, which asked them to place themselves somewhere

on a scale of moderate to conservative. While the majority (56%) identified as “Conservative,” almost 27% of the respondents identified as moderate. I found it interesting that although a majority identified as conservative like I expected, almost a third of them claimed to be more moderate because I assumed that in a place like Mississippi there would not be so many moderate Republicans.

A third finding, and perhaps the most interesting one to me, was the ideological identification within the segment of those millennials who were from Mississippi. I filtered my search to include responses only from students who said they were from Mississippi, and then I looked at their answers to the Likert scale question. 33% (the largest segment) of the Mississippi residents identified as moderate on an ideological scale that ranged from very liberal to very conservative. Looking at Figure 4.2, it is easy to see a breakdown of the different responses. While the traditional Mississippi voter survey had less respondents, it is still easy to see that in comparison to the millennial voters, they proportionately have more respondents who self-identify as conservative than moderate. To me, this is one of the clearest indicators that what we have previously said about millennials appears to be true in Mississippi: the younger generation is making subtle moves to becoming more moderate than ultra-conservative.

One of my favorite questions on the survey is the question concerning current issues. The wording is simple: respondents were simply asked to choose the most important issue to them from a given list of eight choices: abortion, the economy, education, environmental protection, gun rights/gun control, healthcare, national security/defense, and race relations.

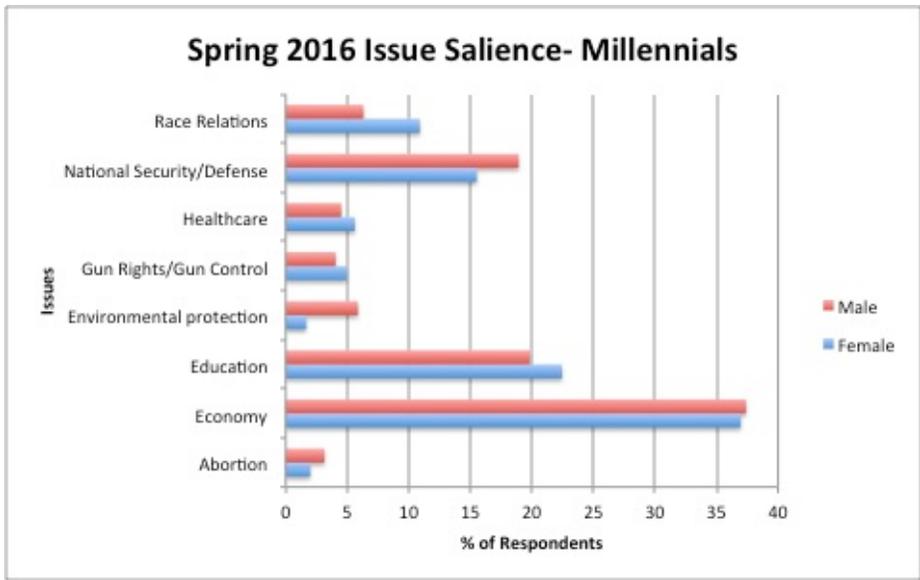


Figure 4.3

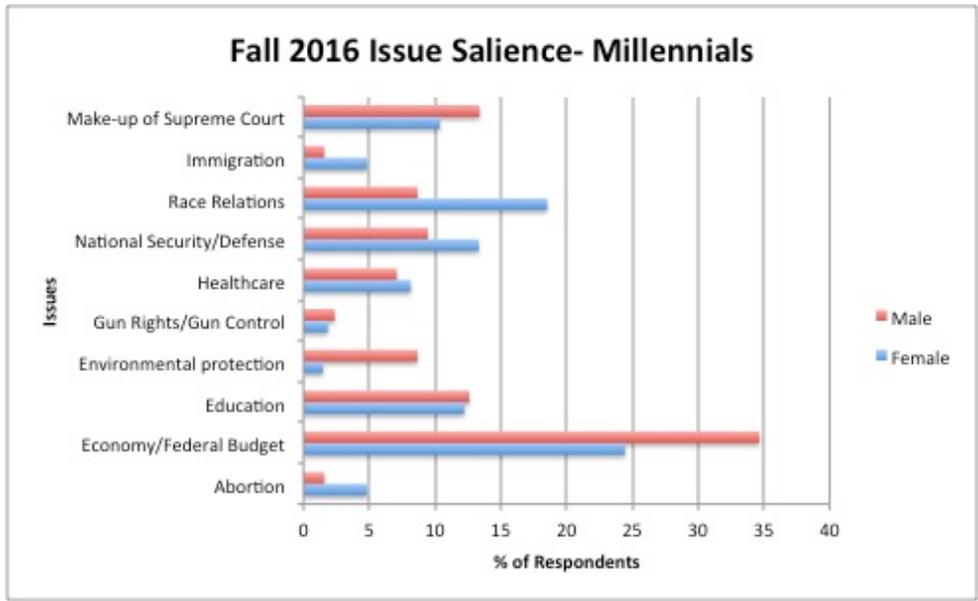


Figure 4.4

The options altered slightly in the fall

survey, based on their salience: I kept all the original choices, but altered the “Economy” choice to say “Economy/Federal Budget” and then added a ninth choice, “The make-up of the Supreme Court.” I found it incredibly interesting that both genders had the same concerns based on my results from the spring survey (in Figure 4.3). The top two choices for female millennials were Economy and Education, with 36% and 22%, respectively.

The top two choices for males were Economy and Education, with 37% and 19%, respectively. I was initially expecting gender to have a significant role in the choice for the importance of issues, but males and females saw eye-to eye on those.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, those results changed dramatically between April 2016 and November 2016. While both males and females still claimed that the Economy/Federal Budget was their top priority, the runner-up choices changed. Looking at Figures 4.3 and 4.4, we have a visualization of the most important issues. For males, their second choice was make-up of the Supreme Court, with Education falling to third place and Defense falling to fourth. For females, race relations moved to up second place, with Defense at third and Education moving from second place (its position in the spring results) to fourth place. Due to the current events, especially the summer 2016 shootings and police violence related to race, it makes sense that race relations became a higher priority. However, it is interesting that this was the case for females and not for males. These answers from millennials provide interesting insight into what millennials want from government. Based on these responses, it is very clear that millennials want the government to play a role in fixing the economy and federal budget, in the sense of reducing the national debt and creating a strong business industry. These results also indicated that they want a better education system from the government, with better schools to send their future children to. Neither of those issues is incredibly partisan, but rather issues that apply across the board, regardless of political ideology.

Another breakdown was that between the age groups: the comparison of issues and voting patterns between the millennials and the traditional Mississippi voters. The

first statistic I compared between the two surveys was who actually participated in voting in the presidential election. Not surprisingly, the millennials lagged behind the traditional voters; while a whopping 91% of traditional Mississippi voters reported going to the polls, just fewer than 75% of millennials did so. Both of those percentages (probably exaggerated) are actually very high compared to the national results of about 55%, which was a 20-year low according to CNN (Wallace). My results can be explained by the fact that the survey that was sent out to traditional voters was distributed via social media; therefore, the people taking the survey were doing so not only voluntarily, but also out of genuine personal interest in the election. The situation with the student survey is similar; the survey was sent to their Ole Miss e-mail account and was still voluntary to take and therefore many of the people taking the survey did so out of personal interest in the presidential election. In addition, there is data that shows that to a certain degree, survey results are biased on the side of the consumer; respondents taking the survey tend to lie, and therefore we must weigh that when looking at extraordinary data and survey results.

When looking at the survey, I was most interested in the candidate choice of both

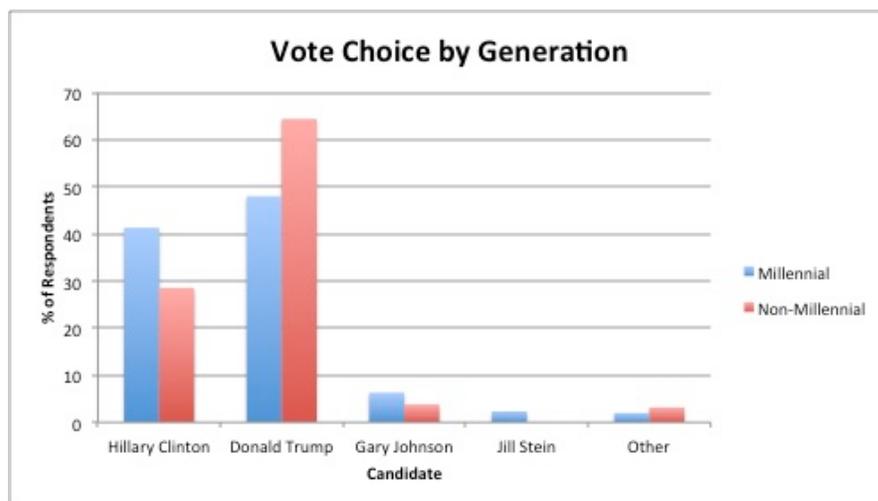


Figure 4.5

demographics. As seen in Figure 4.5 on the previous page, Donald Trump was the winning candidate between both demographics; the race between he and Hillary Clinton was closer with the millennials. Just as I hypothesized, Donald Trump won by a much larger margin with the traditional Mississippi voters; whereas with the millennials, he and Hillary Clinton were separated by fewer votes. More millennials also voted for third party candidates compared to the older generation surveyed.

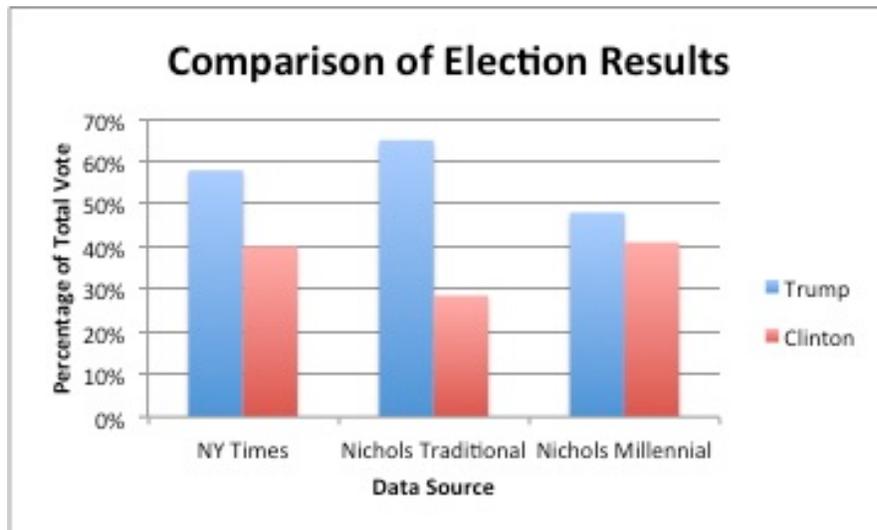


Figure 4.6

When compared to the results from the *New York Times* vote count for the state of Mississippi (denoted in Figure 4.6 as “NY Times”), my results from the traditional voters (“Nichols Traditional”) are more conservative, while the millennials (“Nichols Millennial”) are more liberal. Of the millennials in my survey, 41% voted for Hillary Clinton while 48% voted for Donald Trump; for the traditional voters, 28.5% voted for Hillary Clinton and 65% voted for Donald Trump. A comparison of these can be seen in Figure 4.6. According to the *New York Times*, 57.9% voted for Donald Trump and 40.1% for Hillary Clinton (“Presidential Election Results”). This is somewhat what I predicted before the election results were announced. I knew from the beginning that Mississippi

would vote with the Republican Party, but I was curious as to how the millennials (also known as the college-aged students) that took my survey would vote. As we can see from Figure 4.6, they still voted Republican like the state of Mississippi, but were not nearly as skewed to one side; the results were much more even than in my survey with the traditional voters, and even the official election results for Mississippi.

November 2016 Results: Millennials compared to Generation X/Baby Boomers

Similar to the results from April, this survey closed with just over a 10% response rate for the student survey. It is difficult to calculate a response rate for the survey sent to adults due to social media being the main form of distribution, but when the survey closed, it had 368 responses.

One of the biggest benefits of having the second student survey is being able to compare the results that were obtained seven months previously. Quite a bit happened in those seven months: both major parties secured nominees and held conventions, both major party candidates debated against each other on three occasions, and we saw the 58th presidential election unfold. In those seven months, Donald Trump went from being the laughing stock of the election that no one took seriously, to winning the election and becoming President-Elect of the United States. This was a big change for the Republican Party; going from a field full of candidates to the nomination coming down to Ted Cruz and Donald Trump. At that point, many moderate Republicans had nowhere to turn other than to Independent candidates. By the time November rolled around, most people had made up their mind about which major party candidate would be receiving their vote, which we see in the survey results.

In comparing the responses from the older generations to those of the college-age millennials, much of what I researched proved to be accurate, even in this small data set. I found patterns related to ideology, voters in Mississippi, and the ranking of most important issues to be similar to what I would have predicted based on national polls and averages.

One relationship I found particularly interesting was the correlation between religious adherence and the issue that the respondents found to be the most important issue facing America today. It is common for people with a higher religious adherence or stronger faith to feel a particular way about political issues, especially current social issues. However, what I found interesting was that there was no relationship. How much

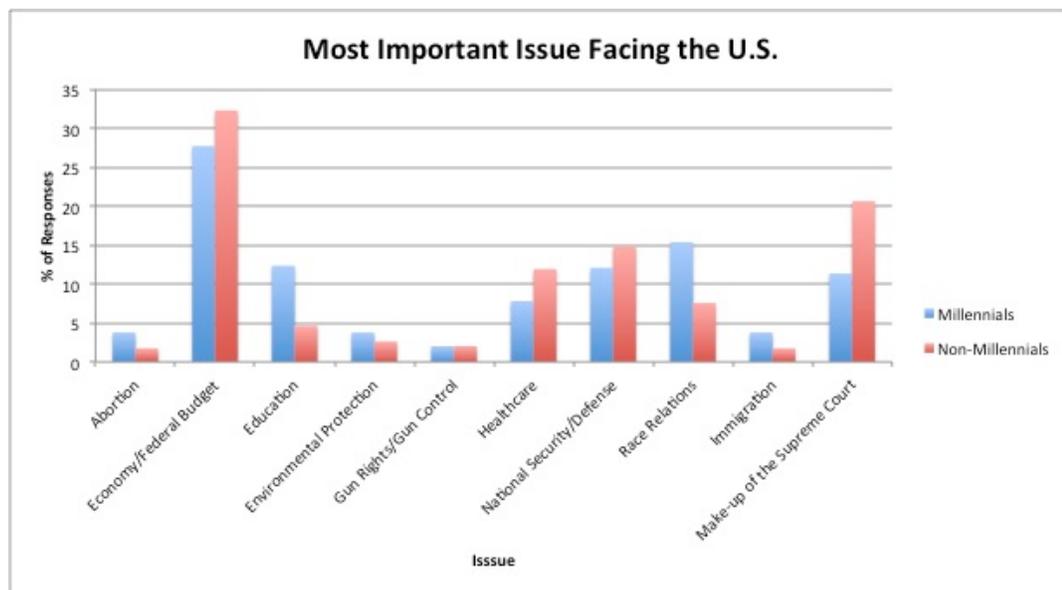


Figure 4.7

one attended church services was very little related to the issue that they found most important with both generation groups. Those from Generation X or the Baby Boomer generation that reported attending worship services multiple times a week or even once a week had the same top issue as those that went seldom or never: the economy/federal budget. These results were the same with the college-aged millennials. Even among the most religiously adherent respondents, abortion was the most important issue for 6.9% of the college-aged respondents, and only 1.7% for the older generation respondents. Compared to the 26.4% of older generation respondents and 27.6% that claimed the Economy/Federal Budget was the most important issue, it seems like abortion is very low on their priority list.

The correlation between gender and the candidate choice for the general election was interesting in the sense that with results from the college-aged survey more females voted for Clinton (see Figure 4.8), but just barely, with percentages of 46.6% voting for Clinton and 45.7% voting for Trump. However, more males voted for Donald Trump and there was a bigger split among them, with 53.3% voting for Trump and 29.3% voting for Clinton. Why is there a difference in male vote choice but not female vote choice? It

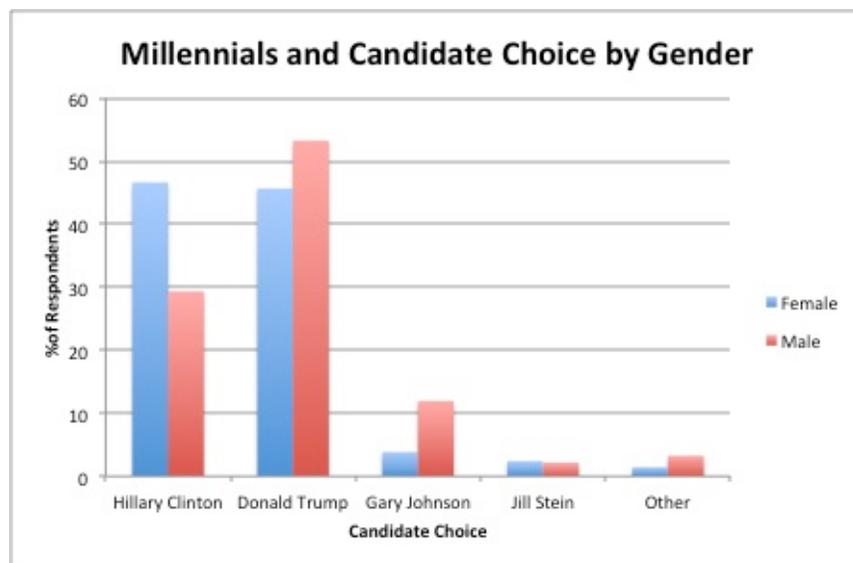


Figure 4.8

could be because Trump's rhetoric appealed more to males, giving them less of an incentive to look at the other candidates. However, I think that the closeness in female breakdown can be attributed to the draw to Bernie Sanders in primary season. As I previously stated, he attracted the majority of female voters under 30. When he did not win the Democratic nomination, it seems that some of the female voters were loyal to the Democratic Party, but others did not like the chosen candidate, Hillary Clinton, and looked elsewhere to cast their vote for president.

The polarization in the voting of the college-aged students reflected national averages as well, seeing as no respondents that reported to be "very liberal" cast their vote for Donald Trump, and no respondents that reported to be "very conservative" cast their vote for Hillary Clinton. This was to be expected. However, the ideologically moderate respondents interested me the most. Those that placed themselves on a Likert scale as a "not very strong Democrat" did not cast any votes for Donald Trump or any of the third party candidates. However, of those that identified as a "not very strong Republican," 13 respondents voted for Hillary Clinton, and 7 for Gary Johnson. I find this interesting because Donald Trump was a polarizing candidate, and he pushed away some more moderate Republicans to vote for either a third party candidate or even Hillary Clinton. These results reflect the conclusion of a Gallup study of the ideology of members of both main parties and independents. From 2000 to 2015, the percentage of Democrats that consider themselves to be "liberal" has increased 16%, while the percentage of those claiming to be "moderate" or "conservative" has decreased (Saad).

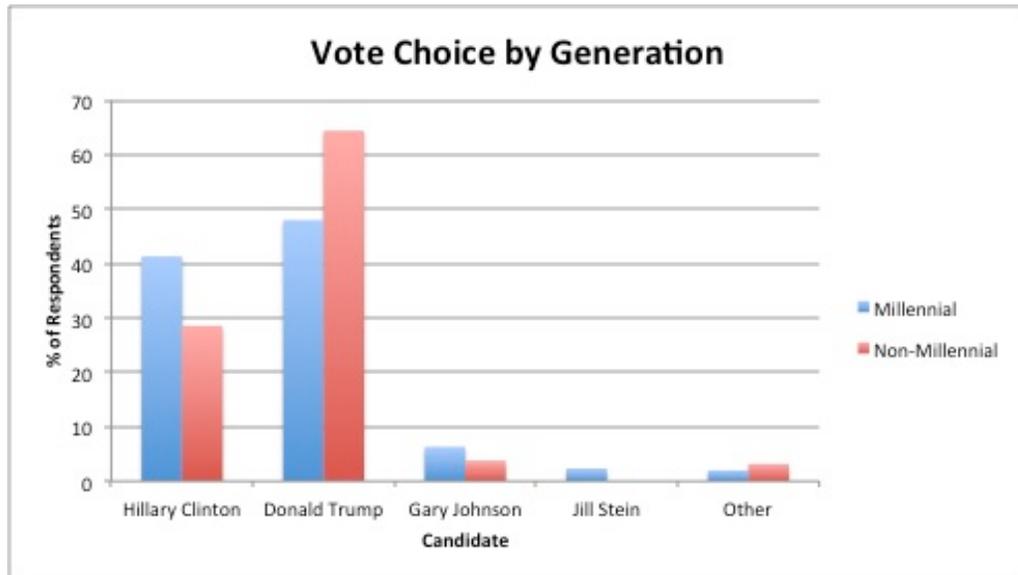


Figure 4.9

Turnout among millennials in Mississippi reflects the expected patterns. While 75% of the college-age respondents reported voting, a whopping 89% of the non-millennial respondents reported voting. Both of these were above national averages, which could be largely due to the fact that both surveys were advertised as being part of a study on the presidential election, so therefore those that were not interested in the election could opt not to participate. We must again take into account that respondents sometimes lie when taking surveys, so there is an expected margin of error with the data. However, it is important to point out that the older generation respondents still reported to vote at higher numbers than the college-aged voters. The breakdown of candidate choice also reflects predicted results. Of the college-aged voters, 48% chose Trump, while 41.8% voted for Clinton and another 6.3% for Gary Johnson and 2.3% for Jill Stein, as seen in Figure 4.9. Interestingly, 78% of the older generation respondents voted for Trump, with only 20% for Clinton, 3.8% for Gary Johnson, and 0% for Jill Stein. The Weak support for Johnson and Stein reflects the tendency of the millennial generation to have faith in the third party candidate as a viable option, whereas the older generations

stick to voting for one of the two party candidates, knowing that in a two party system, one of those candidates is likely the only viable option.

Another great comparison is that of Mississippi millennials and Mississippi non-millennials to all millennials and older generation voters. I compared the specific subset of millennials from Mississippi to all millennial survey respondents and all non-millennials from Mississippi to all the non-millennial survey respondents.

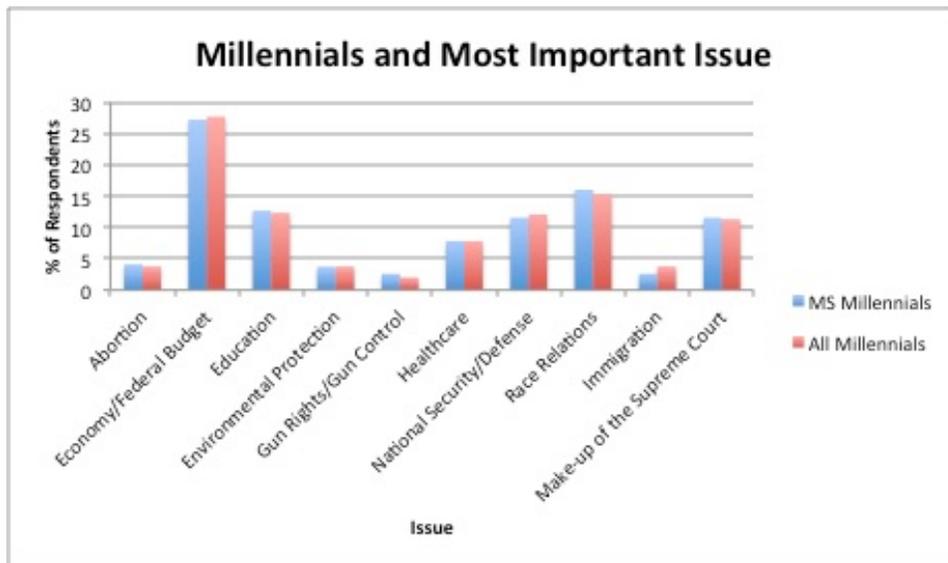


Figure 4.10

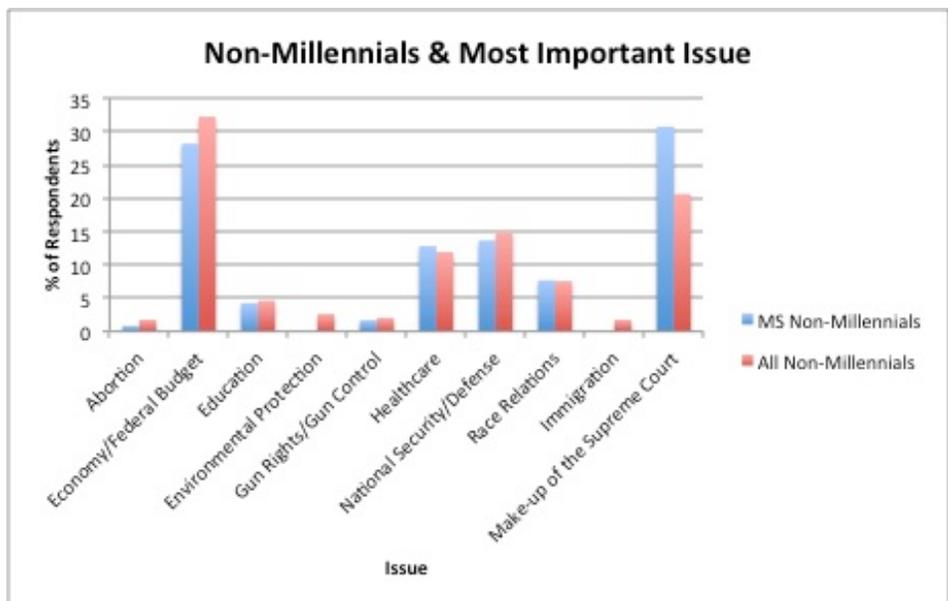


Figure 4.11

Mississippi millennials stacked up exactly the same to those across the country, with both groups claiming that the most important issues facing the United States are the Federal Budget and race relations (see Figure 4.10 on the previous page). However, the older Mississippians compared to the older generation across the United States was a little different: the Mississippians claimed that the makeup of the United States Supreme Court and the Federal Budget (in that order) were the most important issues, while the older generation as a whole saw that the Federal Budget was the first and foremost issue, and the makeup of the Supreme Court came in second place (see Figure 4.11 on the previous page). This shows that while the older generation in Mississippi slightly differs from the rest of the country, maybe the millennial generation is more similar across the board. However, since the survey was released, some of the salient issues in the country have changed. For example, based on outcry to President Trump's executive order in January temporarily banning Muslims from entering the country, immigration might have been ranked higher.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The 2016 election is one that will be studied and talked about for years to come. While that is the case for most elections that have an unpredicted outcome, this was particularly unusual due to two unpopular candidates, one of which was a political outsider. The most important message to take away from the election is the influence that millennial voters can have on presidential elections. As the largest group of potential eligible voters, in the coming years they could have a huge impact on how political candidates not only campaign, but also in how they create their platform.

As I have discussed in this thesis, the millennial generation is unique. They are technological natives. They have grown up with iPhones and Siri, high definition televisions, and essentially everything they could ever want being a click away. They are also more tolerant of other cultures than any generation before. This could partially be due to upbringing, but more so because so much of what used to be societally unthinkable is no longer abnormal: same-sex marriage, women in the work force, different race and ethnicities working side-by-side with white people. Our world and country have evolved as this generation has grown up, which makes them more susceptible to accepting the new normal.

When we apply this argument of millennials introducing new societal norms to a place like Mississippi, it changes, but not entirely. Mississippi, as I have discussed, is arguably one of the most, if not the most ideologically conservative places in the nation. Historically, white voters elect white representatives to represent their conservative agendas and there has not been much ideological change. African-American voters represent the majority of the Democratic Party in Mississippi, while whites represent the

Republican Party. Political science teaches that children and young adults inherit the beliefs of their parents; if we apply that logic to Mississippi, with adults that represent an ultra conservative line of thinking, then their children would follow suit. However, some of the millennials are different. The majority of the data I received from this thesis reflected the ideology of students at The University of Mississippi. I'm not trying to say that the University is full of liberal students and strays from the conservative ways of the state, because that is not the case. However, many of the students are less conservative than one might think. There is a spectrum of conservatism, and many of the students believe in the ideals of the Republican Party as far as a smaller amount of government intervention, but when it comes to modern social issues, many of the students lean a little more to the left. While the majority of students voted for Donald Trump for president, Hillary Clinton was very close behind him. That's not something that you observe in most of the rest of Mississippi. The key difference here is that the college-aged students think differently than their parents. This is where their identification as a millennial overshadows their association with Mississippi.

I do not predict that Mississippi will be a blue state because of the millennial generation. We are not going to see a change that dramatic due to this one group, but I do think that Mississippi will no longer be able to be characterized as the state with the least amount of ideological change, as said in *The Rise of Southern Republicans*. It will not happen over night and might not be a bipartisan initiative, but once members of this generation penetrate the Mississippi legislature, I think that real change will be seen. Based on their interest in the issues and drive to produce progress, I think that with time we will see a transformation in Mississippi.

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APPENDIX

April 2016 Survey

State

Which state do you live in?

Hometown

What is your hometown? _____

Race/Ethnicity

What racial or ethnic group or groups best describes you?

White

Black

Hispanic

Asian

Native American

Mixed

Other: _____

Gender

What is your gender?

Female

Male

Age

What is the year of your birth?

Party ID

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?

Democrat

Republican

Independent

Other

And which party is that? _____

Party ID, 2

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or not a very strong Democrat?

Strong Democrat

Not very strong Democrat

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or not a very strong Republican?

Strong Republican

Not very strong Republican

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic party, closer to the Republican party, or equally close to both parties?

- Closer to the Democratic party
- Closer to the Republican party
- Equally close to both parties

Ideology

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Below is a scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely conservative to extremely liberal. The scale ranges from extremely liberal (0) to extremely conservative (100), where 50 would represent someone who is considered to be moderate.

Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale?

0 _____ [] _____ 100

Primary Vote

Did you vote in your state's primary/do you plan to vote in your state's primary if the primary has not yet occurred?

- Yes
- No

Primary Party

Which party primary did you/will you be voting in?

- Democratic
- Republican

(Depending on this question, they will be directed to options for the respective primary in the next question)

Primary Choice

Which candidate did you vote for/will you be voting for in the [PARTY] primary election?

- Hillary Clinton
- Bernie Sanders
- Other (w/ box to write in)

OR

- Donald Trump
- Ted Cruz
- Marco Rubio
- John Kasich
- Other (w/ box to write in)

Most Important Problem

What is the most important problem facing the United States today?

- Abortion
- Economy
- Education
- Environmental protection
- Gun Rights/Gun Control
- Healthcare
- National Security/Defense
- Race Relations

Issue Positions

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Response options:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Statements (rotate order):

1. The recreational use of marijuana should be legalized in the United States.
2. Same sex marriage should be legal in the United States
3. The Affordable Care Act should be repealed.
4. The United States should take in more Syrian refugees.
5. The minimum wage in the United States should be \$10 per hour.

Political Interest

How interested are you in politics and current events?

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not at all interested

November 2016 Survey

State

Which state do you live in?

Hometown

What is your hometown? _____

Race/Ethnicity

What racial or ethnic group or groups best describes you?

White

Black

Hispanic

Asian

Native American

Mixed

Other: _____

Gender

What is your gender?

Female

Male

Age

What is the year of your birth?

Party ID

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?

Democrat

Republican

Independent

Other

Ideology

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Below is a scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely conservative to extremely liberal. The scale ranges from extremely liberal (0) to extremely conservative (100), where 50 would represent someone who is considered to be moderate.

Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale?

0 _____ [] _____ 100

Primary Vote

Did you vote in your state's primary?

- Yes
- No

Did you vote in the presidential election on November 8, 2016?

- Yes
- No

Most Important Problem

What is the most important problem facing the United States today?

- Abortion
- Economy/Federal Budget
- Education
- Environmental protection
- Gun Rights/Gun Control
- Healthcare
- National Security/Defense
- Race Relations
- The make-up of the Supreme Court

Issue Positions

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Response options:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Statements (rotate order):

1. The recreational use of marijuana should be legalized in the United States.
2. Same sex marriage should be legal in the United States
3. The Affordable Care Act should be repealed.
4. The United States should grant asylum to immigrants here illegally.
5. The minimum wage in the United States should be \$10 per hour.

Political Interest

How interested are you in politics and current events?

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not at all interested

Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?

- More than once a week

- Once a week
- Once or twice a month
- A few times a year
- Seldom
- Never
- Don't know