

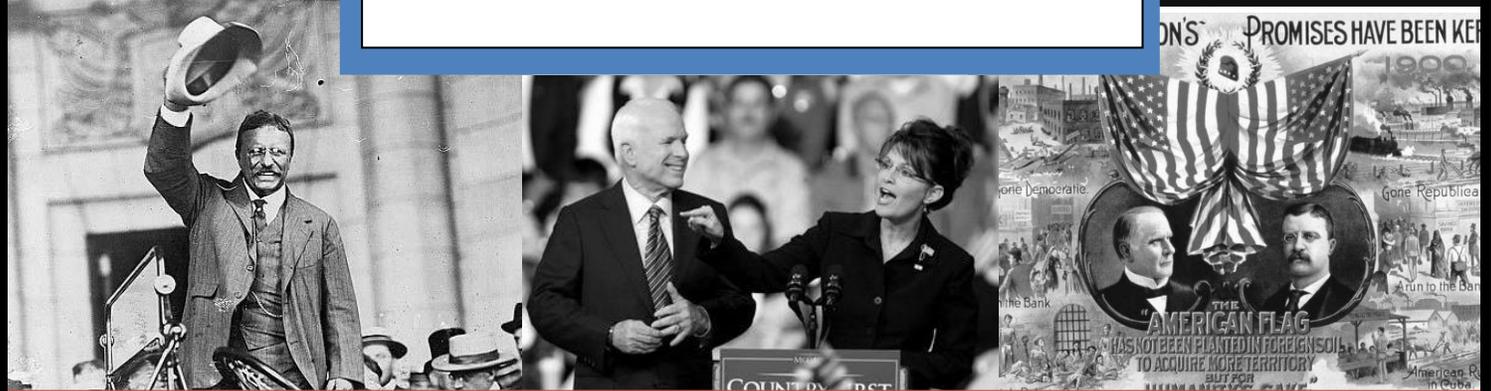
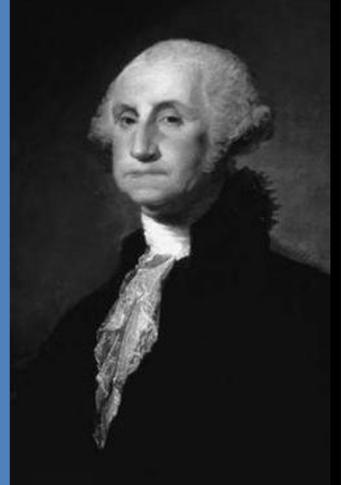


New Generation, New Politics:

DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON IT

A report examining the future of politics in America and why we need to get Generations X and Y involved.

Now.



September 1, 2010

By Sarah L. Sladek
with Melissa Hackenmueller

Introduction

New Generation, New Politics is a position paper examining the engagement of younger generations in the political processes and leadership of the United States. Our research, which comprised of reading articles and documents, interviewing sources, and surveying 18-40 year olds, revealed that younger generations pose the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity to America's political landscape.

For numerous reasons outlined in this paper, today's young Americans are largely uninformed and unengaged in the political landscape and, for the most part, have been uninvited.

Young Americans also represent the largest population in history and by 2015 will comprise the majority of the workforce and one-third of the voting population.

For the first time in history, our nation has come to the realization that a succession plan is needed to educate, inform, and engage these 'lost generations', because without their active participation our country's future will certainly be in jeopardy.

Our hope is that this study can be a guide for city, state, and federal leaders and government organizations to fully understand the challenges and opportunities associated with succession planning and to successfully engage young people in our nation's political processes.

Sarah L. Sladek
Melissa Hackenmueller

Shifting Demographics

A new generation is coming of age in America that's changing everything about the way we live, work, communicate, and do business. At 80 million Americans, Generation Y (1982-1995) is the largest generation in history. When the full group is of voting age, it could have as much, if not more, political significance than the Baby Boomer generation (1946-1964).

In fact, Generation Ys were Barack Obama's strongest supporters in 2008, backing him for president by more than a two-to-one ratio.

According to the Pew Research Center, this was the largest disparity between younger and older voters recorded in four decades of modern Election Day exit polling.

Moreover, after decades of low voter participation by the young, the turnout gap in 2008 between voters under and over the age of 30 was the smallest it had been since 18-to-20-year-olds were given the right to vote in 1972.



What makes these American teens and twenty-somethings such a unique demographic?

They are more ethnically and racially diverse than older adults. They're also less religious, steeped in technology, less likely to have served in the military, more optimistic than their elders about the state of the nation, and are on track to become the most educated generation in American history.

They've proven their power at the polls, but few have run for public office.

For 40 years, Baby Boomers have dominated the workforce and the political scene. But in 2015, Baby Boomers will cede the majority of the workforce to Generation Y, marking the largest turnover in human capital in history.

This demographic shift will undoubtedly shuffle the cards in America's political scene. The vast majority of political and government officials –at the city, state, and federal levels – are Baby Boomers. This means lobbyists, activists, political officials, even government workers will likely retire in overwhelming numbers in the not-too-distant future.

The question is: Will Generation Y take their place?

It is more important than ever before that Generation X, and especially Generation Y, get involved in the political process and takeover where the Boomers left off.

Our democracy depends upon it.

Recruiting the Missing Demographic

Recruiting young people into the political scene is easier said than done.

Generation X has thus far shown itself to be disdainful of politics, cynical about political parties, and more likely than any other age group to support third-party candidates.

This isn't all that surprising considering Generation X's worldview. This generation was the first generation to be raised on cable television.

With access to news 24 hours a day, 7 days a week this generation witnessed, in great detail, the nation's leaders lying and failing to deliver on their promises. They have seen numerous political leaders fall from grace or stoop to producing mud-slamming political campaigns.

Generation X was born on the heels of Watergate and most Xers were young adults during the President Clinton-Monica Lewinsky debacle. They were raised during the 1980s era of President Reagan, who was on a mission to shrink government and stated: "Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem."

All of these situations have resulted in a generation that views government and related institutions with distrust and blames their economic struggles on their own decisions or missteps.

According to the article, 'A Politics for Generation X' which appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1999, 61% of Gen Xers believe the statement: 'Politicians and political leaders have failed my generation.' Three-quarters of Xers agreed with the statement 'Our generation has an important voice, but no one seems to hear it.'

At 48 million people, Generation Xers (currently ages 29-45) are the next leaders in line. They are an obvious and important demographic to recruit, but they don't hold the same promise for America's future as Generation Y—the largest generation in our country's history.

Nearly 13,000 young people are turning 18 every day across America, introducing 9 million new potential young voters the cycle.

The problem is, Generation Y is also showing signs of straying from the fold. This young generation has little interest in retirement security or reforming Medicare, the dominant political issues of the last few election cycles.



"Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem."

-President Ronald Reagan

And even though Gen Y is credited with the Obama election, their enthusiasm has since subsided. In the latest Pew Research Center survey, about half of Generation Y said the president failed to change the way Washington works.

Up until now, America's political system has largely neglected its succession planning efforts, overlooked the relevance of engaging younger generations, and dismissed them as a powerful demographic, stereotyping them as disinterested and difficult to reach.

Therefore, it's really no surprise that today's young people aren't jumping on any political bandwagons.

Now faced with such a significant shift in demographics, our political and community leaders are realizing the error of their ways. Writing younger generations off politically was a considerable risk, and we must find a way to re-engage them and prepare them to take over the reins.

William Galston, a former policy advisor to President Clinton has written about the departure of young Americans from the electorate.

He wrote: "The withdrawal of a cohort of citizens from public affairs disturbs the balance of public deliberation—to the detriment of those who withdraw, but of the rest of us as well."

Michael Slaby, Chief Technology Officer for the Obama Campaign who is now the Chief Technology Strategist for TomorrowVentures, LLC echoed this concern. "The more engaged and informed the electorate is as a whole, the better democracy works as a whole," he stated.

In other words, in order for democracy to work at its best, every sector of society must be engaged in political life.

Yet, by 2015 young people ages 18-29 will make up one-third of the voting population. They are the future electorate--and regardless of whose fault it is, young Americans are simply not engaged.

"The more engaged and informed the electorate is as a whole, the better democracy works as a whole."

Michael Slaby,
Chief Technology Officer
for the Obama Campaign

Understanding the Urgency of the Situation

If Generations X and Y continue to be observers instead of participants in our nation's political affairs, this could lead to the transition from a democracy to a demographic oligarchy, where the power to rule lies in the hands of a segment of the population.

While the active participation of Baby Boomers and older generations is excellent, we cannot continue along this path of dominance on one end of the age spectrum and inactivity on the other end.

At 120 million Americans, Generation X and Y holds the fate of our democracy in their hands. Their participation-- or lack thereof--could determine America's political landscape and policies for many years to come.

A review of history proves that young people have historically been unengaged in our country's political life. This is evident in voting records, positions of elected office, and volunteers for campaigns or candidates.

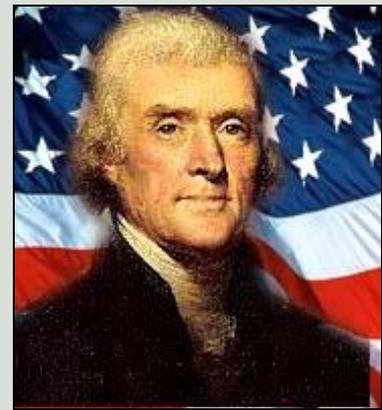
This isn't a new phenomenon. So why bother with outreach to younger generations now? For three critical reasons:

- 1.) America is on the brink of the largest turnover in human capital in history and even though the voting majority is getting younger, America's political representatives are getting older.
- 2.) The young vote counts now more than ever before. Even if they turn out at lower rates, today's young voting population is so large they can dramatically affect the election landscape and outcomes.
- 3.) The participation of young, motivated people has the potential to revitalize America's federal, state, and city governments. Revitalization would likely be good considering the current state of America's political affairs: partisanship and political gridlock has become the norm; the nation has an accumulating trillion-dollar budget deficit; and the U.S. has been at war in Iraq for seven years.

History can teach us a lot about political involvement among younger generations, but we must take into consideration that these are different times. Unprecedented changes are occurring and we must be responsive to them.

To borrow from the words of Thomas Jefferson, "Every generation needs a new revolution."

Undoubtedly, change in the political arena needs to be this generation's revolution.



"Every generation needs a new revolution."

-President Thomas Jefferson

Moving Forward, Making Change

Throughout history, our nation has observed low participation among younger generations as it relates to voting, holding positions of elected office, and volunteering for campaigns or candidates.

Taking both history and future trends into consideration, we get a holistic view of the political arena and we can determine solutions to each of these challenges.

VOTING

It isn't exactly news that young people tend to vote at lower rates than older voters. The more interesting story is that even if young people turn out at lower rates, they can dramatically affect the election landscape and outcomes.

Voting records show young people have traditionally turned out in low numbers.

In fact, people over the age of 30 have voted at twice the rate of those under 30 since 1971, when the voting age was lowered to 18.

Since then, turnout for Americans ages 18 to 24 has risen above 50% only once. That was in 1972 when Nixon was re-elected and the first presidential election when young adults were allowed to vote. Even then the young voter turnout was only 52.1%.

From 1972 until 2004 voter turnout for 18 to 24 year olds has steadily decreased. It reached a low point in 1996 with 35.6% of the demographic voting.

In 2004, however, it jumped 10 points from 2000, bringing it to 46.7%. The 2008 presidential election saw the third highest young voter turnout at 48.5%.

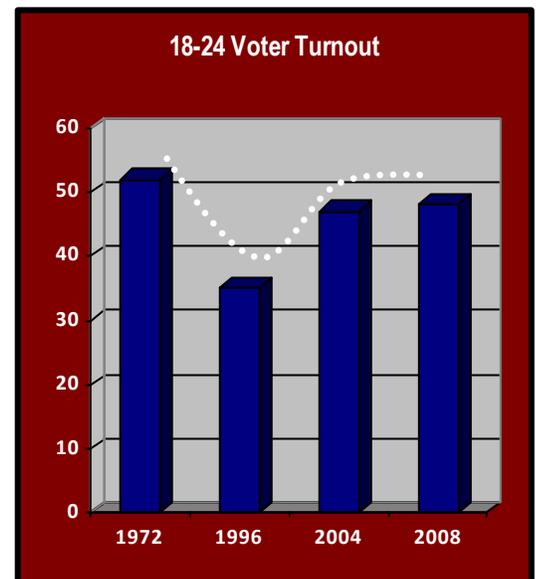
Those young voters were Generation Y. The spike corresponds to the Democratic Party's efforts that targeted young voters.

Therefore, it can be proven that when they are targeted, young people do show up.

Many people believed young people related to Barack Obama simply because he was young himself. However, he is the fifth youngest president, inaugurated at 47-years-old.

For a recent comparison, Bill Clinton was 46-years-old when he was inaugurated in 2001. Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Ulysses S. Grant assumed office at 42, 43, and 46 respectively.

The difference in was that Obama intentionally targeted the younger population.



Targeting Young Voters

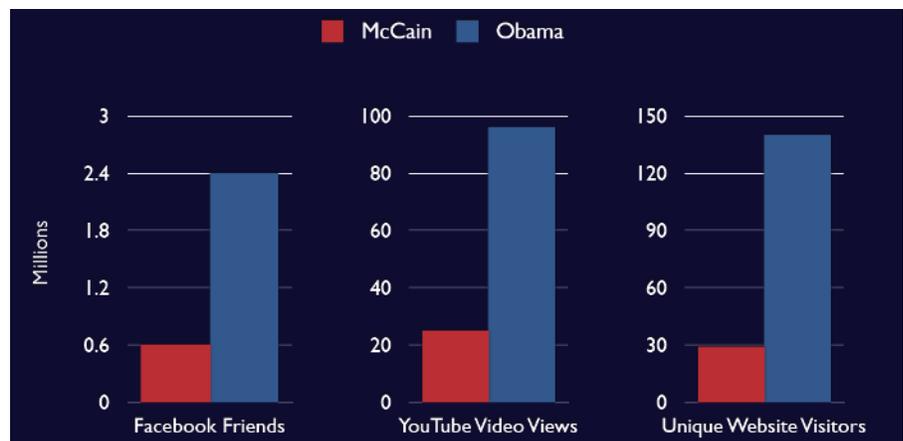
In 2008, Barack Obama's energized presidential campaign turned out about 15 million voters who went to the polls for the first time. Many of these first-time voters were young, female, minority and independent. In the end, Obama received 66 % of Generation Y's vote. The next closest was Generation X at 52%.

Obama's campaign launched with a logo similar to Pepsi-Cola logo, a call to action, a sophisticated recruitment and mobilization effort to target young voters on and off college campuses and an aggressive marketing campaign utilizing YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, text messaging and cell phones to reach young voters.

In contrast, Obama's opponent, John McCain, targeted veterans.

Peter Dreier, professor of politics and director of the Urban & Environmental Policy program at Occidental College, authored an article that appeared in the September 2008 issue of the *Huffington*

Post, which addressed the recent spike in youth voter turnout.



According to Dreier, the spike in youth voter turnout in 2004 and 2006 was no fluke. It was the result of a significant increase in voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives by political campaigns, party groups and nonpartisan organizations.

In 2004, in the ten most competitive battleground states where campaigns targeted young voters, the Generation Y turnout was at a whopping 64 percent. In these situations, organizers used social media and cell phones to raise awareness and expand social networks and then bring together young people in person.

Studies confirm that direct contact by peers increases the likelihood that young people will vote.

A 2006 study by Harvard's Institute of Politics credited young voters with Jim Webb's Senate victory in Virginia and Jon Tester's Senate win in Montana in addition to the election of several freshman Democrats in House races.

Likewise, Yale political scientists Don Green and Alan Gerber, co-authors of *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*, found that peer-to-peer contact raised youth turnout by eight to twelve points among registered voters.

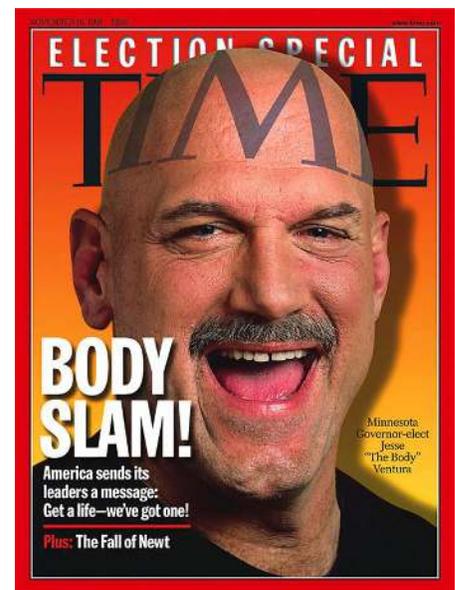
An earlier example of this youth marketing concept occurred when former pro-wrestler Jesse Ventura ran for Governor of Minnesota in 1998 as the nominee for the Reform Party. Jesse referred to himself as someone who wasn't a professional politician and his campaign consisted of a combination of aggressive grassroots and quirky television spots using the phrase "Don't vote for politics as usual."

He spent considerably less than his opponents (about \$300,000) and was a pioneer in his using the Internet as a medium of reaching out to voters in a political campaign.

He won the election in November 1998, narrowly, and quite unexpectedly, defeating the major-party candidates, St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman (Republican) and Minnesota Attorney General Hubert H. Humphrey III (DFL).

Ventura won partly because he was able to get a large number of people—especially young people—to register to vote on Election Day.

Election Day Registration (EDR), also known as same-day voter registration, EDR permits eligible citizens to register and vote on Election Day—a process that ensures young people, who move frequently, will be able to vote. Currently, six states have EDR. They boast voter turnout 8-15 percentage points higher than the national average.



Jesse Ventura also won the Governor seat because the young people related to him. They saw in Jesse a straight-talking, regular guy who refused to dance around the truth and who was fed up with politics as usual.

Rick McCluhan, chair of the Reform Party in Minnesota, credited young voters for Jesse's win, stating in an interview following the election:

"This generation has been told during its maturation that they'll do less well than their parents. They've been condemned inadequate. They're the inheritors of a \$4 trillion debt and a damaged environment. They're too cynical to buy manufactured people right now. This generation gave Minnesota the election."

With historically low voter turnouts, political leaders made the conclusion that investing in the young vote was just too big of a risk.

“Young people were cut from canvassing in the past,” said Emily Kirby, senior research associate at the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. Yet, “one of the most powerful things that can influence you is simply being asked.”

Mary Starrett, Communications Coordinator for Constitution Party explained: “The younger people especially want someone to represent them. They don’t care about voting history; they vote according to principles.”

For some, taking the risk has led to the reward. For future elections, it is likely that taking the risk will become the rule. With 44 million eligible voters, Generation Y comprises almost one-quarter of the potential electorate; by 2015, they will make up one-third of potential voters.

ELECTED OFFICE

There is a significant lack of young people elected to office both nationally and locally. Equally alarming is the reality that our nation’s elected officials almost exclusively represents one section of the age spectrum. Even though our voting majority is getting younger, our political officials are getting older.

On a national level, the median age of the United States Senate is 63. Even considering the Senate’s age requirement (over 30 years old), there is only one sitting senator under 40 years of age.

The median age of the United States Congress is 57-- the oldest in its history. And the median age of state governors is 60. (Interesting enough, 12 of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence were 35 or younger.)

Interesting enough, age and politics, specifically young adults and elective office, has not been a subject of particular interest or scholarly study. Most of the research related to youth political participation has focused on the low voting rates of young people, but not the topic of age and politics.

However, the New Generations Program did a case study of Allegheny County, PA, which highlights the aging civic leadership trend on the local level.

The study found that in 2002 the median age of Allegheny residents was 39.5, but the median age of all elected officials was 51. To further demonstrate the generation gaps, the New Generations Program listed out Allegheny’s elected officials under the age of 40:

Median age of the U.S.

Senate: 63

Median age of the U.S.

Congress: 57

**Median age of state
governors: 60**

- Out of the 849 council members 106 were younger than 40 (8%);
- Out of 86 mayors, 11 were younger than 40 (7%); and
- Out of of 387 school board members, only 37 were younger than 40 (10%).

In all, only 8% of elected officials in Allegheny were under 40, while more than a quarter of the population was between 18 and 40.

This phenomenon isn't unique to Allegheny. Across the board, our nation's local, state, and federal governments are heavily dominated by Baby Boomers.

There are many factors that play a part in the shortage of younger generations holding elected office:

- **Baby Boomers have held the majority of the population and leadership in the workforce and government for 40 years.**

At the time the Boomers were coming of age, they were the largest generation in history and had the opportunity to move into positions of power. When Generation X came along, this generation of only 48 million couldn't compete with the Boomers and struggled to influence change or move into positions of influence. Basically, our nation has long relied on, and taken for granted, the participation of Baby Boomers.

- **Few efforts have been made to invite younger generations to the table or to succession plan.**

By 2015, Boomers will cede the majority of the workforce to Generation Y. Whether this shift will carry over into politics remains to be seen, but presently there are few indicators that point to the successful recruitment or engagement of younger representatives.

- **The general public has long used the excuse that young people aren't available, interested, or experienced enough to be in politics.**

Indeed, younger generations tend to be focused on college, starting a career, and then caring for a family. Yet, among today's top elected officials who are Baby Boomers, more than half were elected by age 35.

- **In the current political climate of scandals, heightened partisan discourse, and a struggling economy, politics is a challenge few young people are willing to tackle.**

The current state of national affairs and inflated media coverage coupled with the lack of outreach and empowerment has created a political divide among the generations. Young people feel frustrated, powerless, distrusting, fearful, and disconnected.

Among today's top elected officials, more than half were elected by age 35.

John Mayer captured this feeling of disconnect between the nation's leaders and Generation Y in his 2006 Grammy Award-winning single, *Waiting on the World to Change*.

Mayer stated in an interview with *The Advocate*: "It's saying, 'Well, I'll just watch American Idol because I know that if I were engaged in changing anything for the better, or the better as I see it, it would go unnoticed or be completely ineffective.' A lot of people have that feeling."

Even so, the song alludes to hope for the future, intoning that with a younger generation's ascension to power, things will change:

Now we see everything that's going wrong/ With the world and those who lead it/ We just feel like we don't have the means/ To rise above and beat it/ One day our generation/ Is gonna rule the population/ So we keep on waiting/ Waiting on the world to change.

Generational disengagement is usually the direct result of one of three things:

1. Feeling powerless to make a difference;
2. Feeling there is no room to get involved; or
3. Feeling uninformed.

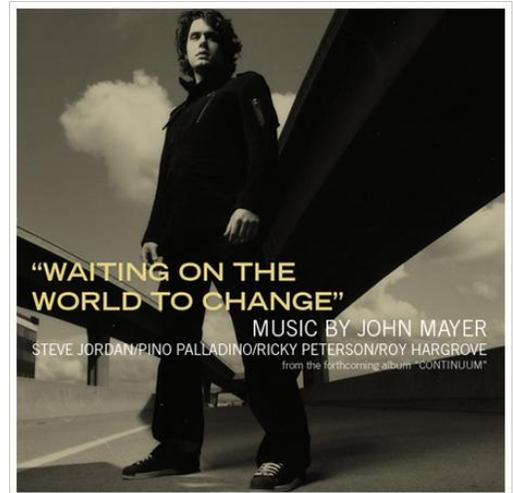
In the political arena, all of these barriers are currently present.

When the Baby Boomer generation came of age, many of them delved into or were invited into public office. In fact, among today's top elected officials, more than half were elected by age 35. Somewhere along the line, that succession planning and recruitment of younger generations stopped.

Perhaps our nation's education system is to blame. Beginning in the 1980s, civics requirements in high schools were gradually reduced. This directly affected civic participation. In the 1980s and 1990s, young people were among some of the most politically unengaged in our nation's history.

In any case, Baby Boomers went into public office and stayed and continue to hold the majority in local, state, and federal governments.

Now, with Generation Y assuming the popular majority, coupled with an uninvolved and largely ignored Generation X, it is imperative that younger generations are actively encouraged to get involved in American politics.



Encouraging more young adults to run is not simply about fairness and representation, but will likely introduce a different and better way of governing. For example:

- **Young people will not contribute to partisan gridlock.**

Young adults have been shown to be more inclusive and more likely to reach out to opponents for support. Because of their age, young adults are not embedded in any political network, allowing them to form their own opinions about policies to enact and people to trust. This can mean the people they come to trust are different from those who have been in power a long time, which provides an opportunity for new leadership.

- **Young people will not equate experience to age.**

Party structure has been largely hierarchical, and young people resent such a structure. While it's important to work hard and earn promotions, young adults will balance the 'pay your dues' mentality so it actually rewards intelligent people who work hard, not just those who are next in line.

- **Young people will do more than just read the bill.**

A 2002 Rutgers study of elected leaders age 35 and younger in municipal, state, and national offices found that young people have a 'can do' attitude and belief that hard work will get any

problem solved. They will look beyond the passage of bills to get to the root of the problem.

- **Young people will be activists.**

They may be less radical than Baby Boom activists in the '60s and '70s, whose demonstrations for civil rights, women's equality, and protests against the Vietnam War became flashpoints for their times. But thanks to the Internet, this generation is much more aware of the world. And because tragedies such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina have scarred their youth, experts see signs young people are creating their own brand of social consciousness.

- **Young people have first-hand knowledge of major issues.**

Young adults are intimately aware of the most pressing issues of our times. As recent or current students of the public education system, those most hard-hit by incurring debts and job loss in the recent recession, and those caring for young children and aging relatives, they have first-hand insight into educational, workforce, and healthcare improvements.



When Sam Rasoul, a 26-year-old Democratic candidate for Congress in western Virginia was running for office in 2008, he was quoted in an interview as stating: "I tell them I am running for Congress because I am young. I have more invested in the future than the people sitting up there on Capitol Hill right now."

Likewise, Jeremy Yamaguchi, who was elected to the Placentia, California City Council at age 18, stated: “More people are willing to come and talk to me because of my age and openness. It’s not about the experience, but how willing you are to listen to the community and do what’s best on their behalf.”

Despite the unique struggles that young adults face in balancing family, career, and campaigning, the best solution to improving government is not simply changing the party in power, but rather changing the demographics of power by electing more young adults to political office.

Empowering Young Candidates

In spring 2010, Limelight Generations conducted a survey of 18-40 year-olds. Out of the 379 respondents, 73% said they do not feel that older generations are not open-minded, respectful, or welcoming of younger generations in government affairs.

In addition, 29% felt that young people wanted to be more involved in government affairs, but 29% also felt their generations were not well-informed about government affairs.



Indeed, whether it’s due to the lack of civics taught in the public school system or the disinterest of younger generations in politics, young people are largely uninformed about basic civics. For instance, the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation study found 56% [of young people] are unaware that only citizens can vote in federal elections.

Further research indicates that there are simply far too few outreach efforts to educate, invite, or encourage young people to run for office.

From school field trips to leadership seminars, there are numerous programs focused on students.

For example, the Washington Workshops Foundation is a non-profit organization offering seminars about national politics, law, American history, and government to high school and junior high or middle school students. And the Presidential Classroom provides outstanding high school students with rigorous educational experiences in Washington to prepare them for roles as leaders in public service and private enterprise.

But there are few non-partisan efforts to empower young candidates and encourage them to run for office.

Rutgers University is home to Eagleton Institute of Politics' YEL (Young Elected Leaders) Project. In 2004, Eagleton conducted a study of the nation's young elected leaders and published these conclusions in their report:

“Politics and governance would benefit from deliberate efforts to reach out to find potential new leaders as well as from efforts to build the capacity of young people already in office.

Such efforts would focus on: (1) attracting greater numbers of young women and men to electoral politics; (2) recruiting a diverse candidate pool; and (3) devising programs that give young officeholders information, tools and support to enhance their individual and collective effectiveness as future public leaders.”

She Should Run is a program of the Women's Campaign Forum, providing an online nomination tool and campaign resource center to encourage women – especially young women -- to run for public office.

Indeed, our country needs more outreach programs such as this one to educate, empower, and inspire young people to run for office. As young, ambitious, and successful young adults begin their careers and families, we need everyone – regardless of party affiliation – to support their candidacy not ‘someday,’ but in the near future and give prospective candidates the knowledge and resources to succeed.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer rates among young people for a candidate or campaign reveal comparatively low figures.

According to John Della Volpe, polling director for Harvard University's annual Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes Towards Politics and Public Service the recent history of volunteering among young people is substantial. “Over 60% of college students are involved in some form of community service in some way,” said Della Volpe.

By comparison, only 23% of people over the age of 59 volunteer.

According to Della Volpe, much of the University's research indicates that the spike in volunteerism was driven by most public schools in America, which in the 1990s started to either require or suggest getting involved in volunteering. Once the students got involved in high school, they found that it was good for their communities and felt good to do.

In the last presidential election, 20% of 18 to 29 year olds volunteered for a candidate, according to the Harvard Institute of Politics.

However, this is still not at levels representative of its demographic proportion in society.

The CIRCLE Institute's study, Civic and Political Health of the Nation, found that of people ages 15 to 25 who volunteer, only 6.1% volunteered for a political organization. By comparison, 67% volunteered for a youth-related organization and 52.2% for a social services organization.

The main motivations most often cited by volunteers are:

- Belief in the cause/want to make a difference;
- Desire to impart skills and experience;
- Having been somehow touched by the cause (even if only through the voluntary work of friends and family members); and
- Desire to learn a new skill.

Volunteers' indication that they are primarily motivated by a belief in the cause and a desire to make a difference would suggest that if it is made clear to them that their role (no matter how mundane) contributes to the greater cause of the organization, they will remain engaged.

This is especially true among younger generations who like to see the big picture and understand how their efforts can make a substantial and lasting difference.

This is also why the Obama campaign and its message, Change We Can Believe In, resonated with younger generations in the 2008 presidential election. In fact, on many levels the Obama campaign far surpassed any volunteer movement in political history.

**Organizations where
15 to 25 year olds
volunteer:**

67% youth-related

52% social services

6.1% political

Training and Motivating Volunteers

While all campaigns rely heavily on volunteers to carry the candidate's message and do much of the campaign grunt work, the Obama campaign tried something different in order to capitalize on the huge number of young people expressing an interest in the Illinois Democratic senator's run for the White House.

Camp Obama, a camp for young adults and college students, were four-day training sessions designed to hone the political skills of young volunteers and teach them the basics of organizing for a presidential candidate.

"Barack Obama is inspiring a new generation of people to come in, and a lot of people have not been involved in the political process before," stated Hans Riemer, national youth vote director for the Obama campaign, in an interview with National Public Radio.

“The most important thing is that they understand they are an important part of our strategy to win the election. This is not for show, this is not to feel good; this is to get trained and help us to win this election.”

Camp Obama provided participants with the needed training and tools—covering canvassing, phone banking, volunteer recruitment, and campaign messages--to create a campaign plan.

Camp directors also kept in touch with campers after camp completed to provide support and help them execute their strategies.

The Obama campaign recognized that young people were historically overlooked by political campaigns, but quickly realized that with adequate training, the young vote could capture the election.

“Winning an election is just a matter of breaking it down into manageable pieces, so we show them (younger generations) what those pieces are, and then turn them loose. As long as we can do that, there's no problem. They can make it happen,” stated Riemer.

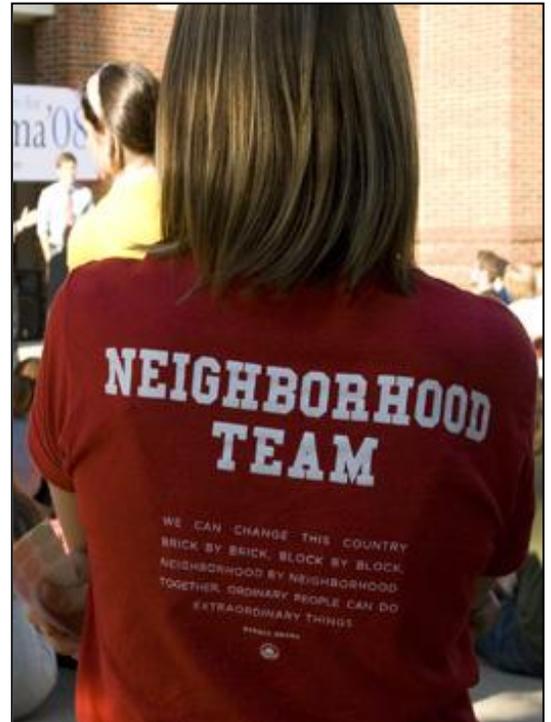
The Obama campaign didn't stop there. In June 2008, *The Washington Post* reported that Senator Barack Obama's campaign deployed 3,600 volunteers in 17 states, each committed to six consecutive weeks of full-time political work.

The campaign put out word in April about Obama Organizing Fellowships, which, according to the *Post*, was “an approach that went well beyond the ‘y'all come’ model of luring volunteers with free doughnuts for two-hour canvassing stints.” Supporters were required to answer essay questions, supply references, and go through a telephone interview with campaign staff members.

In return for a promise to give the campaign at least six weeks of their lives, they were promised training in community organizing techniques. More than 10,000 people applied.

Furthermore, during the course of his presidential campaign, Barack Obama often highlighted his volunteers at rallies. At many events, he chose one of them — rather than a local politician — to introduce him.

In addition to training and recognition, the Obama campaign created a massive on-line volunteer effort. The campaign created its own social-networking site, called my.barackobama.com, or MyBO for short. The site continually focused on prodding visitors to take some kind of action to help the campaign, such



as organizing a small party at your home and downloading campaign literature to hand out to friends and neighbors at the party.

Once you gave the campaign your e-mail address, you would get messages from the campaign — sometimes signed by Obama’s wife, Michelle, or former Vice President Al Gore. These messages would ask people to perform specific functions that were helpful to the campaign at that time, perhaps calling undecided voters in such important U.S. states as Ohio and Pennsylvania.

The campaign also rallied people based on geography, for example, providing MyBO members with lists of people living nearby who were not registered to vote and instructions for contacting and registering them.

Thanks to MyBO—plus other strategies, including asking people at rallies to text message their e-mail addresses to the campaign —Obama developed a vast army of online volunteers. According to America.gov, when the campaign ended Obama held a list of 13 million supporters and their e-mail addresses. This was an enormous and unprecedented achievement.

According to the Pew Center for the People & the Press, young people have been active in recent campaigns--matching or exceeding the Baby Boomer cohort in several campaign activities such as displaying buttons, signs, or bumper stickers, attending rallies, or trying to persuade others to vote.

Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research, stated: “Electoral activity isn't the only story. Young people are active in public life in many other ways not reflected in the voting statistics. ...many are engaged in volunteer activities and community problem-solving, and even more voice their opinions on public issues through the internet and more conventional media.”

Nevertheless, only 6% of youth and young adults volunteer for political organizations, and this lack of participation is a real concern. If our nation wants to increase volunteerism in the political arena, our nation’s leaders and institutions will have to place more emphasis on its value and engage in succession planning by mentoring young people, recruiting them as volunteers, and inviting young aspiring leaders to serve with them.

If anything can be learned from the unprecedented success of the Obama campaign’s volunteer movement, it’s that young people are an emerging, capable, and very powerful demographic that should not be overlooked.



Call to Action

In summary, the vast majority of U.S. political officials—at the city, state, and federal levels—are Baby Boomers. Our leadership is aging, even though the nation is getting younger with our largest demographic currently under the age of 28.

The median age of the United States Senate is 63 with only one sitting Senator under 40 years of age. The median age of the United States Congress is 57-- the oldest in history. And the median age of state governors is 60.

Younger generations are vastly under-represented in government, and the approaching retirement wave means lobbyists, activists, political officials, and government workers will likely retire in overwhelming numbers in the not-too-distant future.

History can teach us a lot about political involvement among younger generations, but we must take into consideration that these are different times. Unprecedented changes are occurring and we must be responsive to them.

We recommend that our nation's city, state, and federal officials take an active role in succession planning for the benefit and sustainability of our nation's government. Implementation of the following strategies will ensure our country's future leadership and prosperity.

Target Young Voters

Historically, the young vote has been overlooked. With Generation Y (ages 15-26) being the largest generation in history, America is on the brink of the largest turnover in human capital in history, which means targeting this generation of young voters is now a necessary campaign tactic. With 44 million eligible voters, Generation Y comprises almost one-quarter of the potential electorate. By 2015, they will make up one-third of potential voters.



This means more states need to introduce Election Day Registration, also known as same-day voter registration. EDR permits eligible citizens to register and vote on Election Day—a process that ensures young people, who move frequently, will be able to vote. Currently, only six states have EDR. These states boast voter turnout 8-15 percentage points higher than the national average.

This also means that political candidates will need to take a more honest, down-to-earth approach to win the favor of young voters. In recent history, candidates have taken the approach of pandering to voters, mud-slammng their opponents, and partaking in other undesirable tactics. Young generations want a candidate who is genuine, honest, and visionary, which is further proven in the elections of Barack Obama and Jesse Ventura where the young vote made the difference.

Encourage Young People to Run for Office

Half of our nation's top elected officials were holding an office by the time they were 35 years old. That trend of young Americans running for office has ceased. There is a significant lack of young people elected to office—or running for office--both nationally and locally. So even though our voting majority is getting younger, our political officials are getting older.



Our nation needs more organizations, like the Women's Campaign Forum, to take a vested interest in advocating for more young people to run for office and also provide them with the information, tools, and support to be able to do so.

Also, our nation's leaders need to take responsibility for mentoring young people, inviting them to volunteer on their campaigns, join their staffs, and teach them the fundamentals of running for office. As young, ambitious, and successful young adults begin their careers and families, we need everyone – regardless of party affiliation – to support their candidacy not 'someday,' but in the near future and give prospective candidates the knowledge and resources to succeed.

Educate Young Americans

Beginning in the 1980s, civics requirements in high schools were gradually reduced. As of 2009, only 21 states included civic learning in their state assessment and accountability systems.

These cuts have directly affected civic participation. In the 1980s and 1990s, young people were among some of the most politically unengaged in our nation's history—a trend that has continued into adulthood.

Our nation must reverse this trend by increasing the civics



curriculum within the American public school system. This will aid our efforts to succession plan in government, but also instill awareness, pride, and engagement among future generations.

Organizations can take a lesson from Rock the Vote, which launched a new program aimed at high school juniors and seniors called Democracy Class.

Through this free and non-partisan class, youth nationwide will learn about the history of voting, the connection between issues they care about and those they elect to office, and their right to vote. The lesson engages students with music and pop culture to start a discussion, and demystifies the voter registration process by walking them through the key steps.

The supporting website, DemocracyClass.com, offers access to election information, ways to get involved in registering voters, interviews with artists and athletes, and materials for teachers and community groups to use in their classrooms.

Train Young Volunteers

Young people need to understand they are an important part of our nation's democracy and election processes. Just as political organizations, candidates, and elected officials need to take a role in encouraging young people to run for office, they also need to take a role in educating young Americans and training them.

Provide young volunteers with substantial training and tools—including information on canvassing, phone banking, volunteer recruitment, campaign messages, and the creation of a campaign plan.

Post-training, provide a means for keeping in touch with trained volunteers to give them the support they need to execute their strategies, as well as to network them with other trained volunteers and provide recognition for their efforts.



It is more important than ever before that Generation X, and especially Generation Y, get involved in the political process and take over where the Baby Boomers will leave off.

Our democracy depends upon it.

The Authors

Sarah L. Sladek

Sarah Sladek is the President and CEO of Limelight Generations. A Generation Xer, Sarah recognized the significance of the approaching demographic shift in the late 1990s and began to research its impact on membership associations, the workforce, and specific industries.

She is the author of two books on the topic of demographic shifts: *Rock Stars Incorporated: Hiring the High Performance High Maintenance Hotshots Half Your Age* (2008) and *The New Recruit: What Your Association Needs to Know About X, Y, & Z* (2007).

Sarah is also the founder of XYZ University, a learning community educating association leaders on how to stay relevant in the midst of current demographic and economic shifts, and the RockStars@Work Conference, the nation's first business conference addressing succession planning in the workforce.

Melissa Hackenmueller

Melissa Hackenmueller assisted Sarah in writing this position paper, conducting research and collecting survey data. As a Generation Y she has a vested interest in the topic—Melissa is embarking on a career in the world of politics.

Since graduating from college, Melissa has worked for the Minnesota House of Representatives and on multiple political campaigns, and founded a chapter of the Minnesota Young Republicans. She is currently working as Field Staff for the House Republican Campaign Committee in the 2010 elections.

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Additional Resources

Campus Progress	campusprogress.org
Campus Vote Initiative	compact.org/vote
Future Majority	futuremajority.com
Mobilize.org	mobilize.org
New Voters Project	newvotersproject.org
Pew Research Center	people-press.org
Project V.O.T.E.	projectvote.org
Swing Semester	swingsemester.org
The Hip Hop Caucus	hiphopcaucus.org
The League of Young Voters	theleague.com
Your Vote/Your Voice	yourvoteyourvoice.org
U.S. Student Association	usstudents.org