The 2012 Vote

Likelihood of Voting in the 2012 Election

Approximately 6-in-10 college-age Millennials say they are registered to vote, either at their present address (49%) or at a different address (12%). One-third of Millennials report that they are not currently registered to vote.

There are stark differences in registration status between white, black, and Hispanic Millennials. Roughly two-thirds of white and black Millennials report that they are registered either at their current address or a different address (67% and 66% respectively). Only about 4-in-10 (41%) Hispanic Millennials say they are registered to vote at any location, while 45% say they are not registered, and more than 1-in-10 (14%) say they are not sure or do not know.

Fewer than half (46%) of college-age Millennials say that they are absolutely certain that they will vote in the 2012 presidential election. One-in-five (20%) say they will probably vote, and roughly one-third say the chances are 50-50 (14%) or less than 50-50 (19%).

Compared to white and black Millennials, Hispanic Millennials are much less likely to say they will probably vote in the upcoming election. Only one-third of Hispanic Millennials say they are absolutely certain to vote, compared to 46% of black and 52% of white Millennials. More than 4-in-10 Hispanic Millennials say their chances of voting are 50-50 (15%) or less than 50-50 (29%)

Millennials with at least a bachelor’s degree are significantly more likely to say they will vote in 2012, compared to those with a high school education. More than 6-in-10 (62%) Millennial college graduates say they are absolutely certain they will vote, while fewer than 4-in-10 (37%) Millennials with a high school education say the same.

Among Millennials who are registered to vote, roughly two-thirds (63%) say they are absolutely certain they will vote. Nearly 1-in-5
(21%) say they will probably vote, and more than 1-in-10 (14%) say the chances are 50-50 or less.

**Voting Preferences in 2012**

Among college-age Millennial voters at this point in the 2012 campaign, Barack Obama holds a 7-point lead over a generic Republican candidate.\(^5\) Nearly half (48%) of Millennial voters say they would prefer that Obama win the 2012 election, compared to about 4-in-10 (41%) who say they would like to see a Republican candidate win.\(^6\) More than 1-in-10 (11%) say they are not sure, or say that they would like to see a third-party candidate win the election.

There are substantial racial and ethnic divisions in voting preferences. Barack Obama holds overwhelming leads over a generic Republican opponent among black Millennial voters (92% vs. 2% respectively) and Hispanic Millennial voters (61% vs. 28% respectively). In contrast, a majority (55%) of white Millennial voters say they would prefer that a Republican candidate win the 2012 election, compared to one-third who say they would like to see Obama win re-election.

Among white Millennial voters with a college degree, Obama and a generic Republican candidate have roughly the same support with 45% saying they would prefer that Obama win the election, versus 44% who say they would like to see a Republican candidate win. Majorities of white Millennial voters with some college education or with a high school education report a preference for the GOP candidate in the 2012 election (56% and 59% respectively). Interestingly, there are no gender differences in the preferences of white Millennial voters.

\(^5\) Voters are defined as those who are registered to vote either at their present address or at a different address.

\(^6\) Two percent of Millennial voters volunteered that they would like to see Republican candidate Ron Paul win the election.
The voting preferences of Millennials differ markedly by religious affiliation. Fewer than 3-in-10 white mainline Protestant (27%) and white evangelical Protestant (11%) voters report that they would prefer to see Obama re-elected in 2012. More than 6-in-10 (63%) white mainline Protestant voters and nearly 8-in-10 (79%) white evangelical Protestant voters say they would like to see a Republican candidate elected. Half of Catholic voters say they prefer it if Obama won the election, while fewer than 4-in-10 (39%) Catholic voters favor a Republican candidate. Roughly two-thirds of religiously unaffiliated voters (64%) say they would like to see Obama re-elected, as do an overwhelming majority (95%) of black Protestant voters.

Among Millennial voters who favor a Republican candidate, most would prefer it if Mitt Romney or Ron Paul won the nomination (34% and 30% respectively). Roughly 1-in-5 (19%) say they would like to see Rick Santorum win the nomination, and 14% say they would prefer Newt Gingrich to be the Republican nominee.

More than 7-in-10 (72%) of the Millennial voters who support Obama’s re-election say that they would be excited to cast a vote for him, compared to 27% who say they would not. Romney is the preferred GOP candidate among voters who would like to see a Republican win the 2012 election, but he also inspires less excitement than Obama. A majority (54%) of Millennial voters supporting Mitt Romney’s candidacy say they would be excited to vote for him, while among voters who prefer Santorum the election, 65% say they would be excited to cast a vote for him. Sixty-two percent of voters who prefer Paul report that they would be excited to vote for him.

**Feelings about the Candidates and the Political Parties**

Obama holds a sizeable favorability advantage over Mitt Romney, the presumptive Republican nominee. A majority (52%) of college-age Millennial voters say they have a favorable opinion of Barack Obama, while 43% have an unfavorable opinion. Mitt Romney is viewed much less positively. Fewer than one-third (32%) of Millennial voters say they have a favorable view of Romney, while a majority (53%) hold an unfavorable opinion of him. Sixteen percent of Millennial voters say they have not heard of or have no opinion about Romney.

Romney’s Republican primary opponents are not viewed any more positively, although they remain less well known. About one-third (32%) of Millennial voters say they have a favorable view of Ron Paul, and fewer than 3-in-10 Millennial voters say they have a favorable view of Rick Santorum (27%) and Newt Gingrich (24%). A significant number of Millennial voters say they have not heard of or have no opinion of Paul (22%), Gingrich (16%), or Santorum (22%).

There are dramatic differences in Millennials’ views of the candidates by race and ethnicity. Among white Millennial voters, Romney and Obama are viewed equally favorably (39% each), although a majority of white Millennial voters view Obama unfavorably, compared to less than half who view Romney that way (56% vs. 49%)
respectively). Hispanic and black Millennial voters have much more positive feelings about Obama than Romney. Nine-in-ten (92%) black Millennial voters, and almost two thirds (65%) of Hispanic Millennial voters, have a favorable view of Obama. About 1-in-10 (13%) black Millennial voters and 1-in-5 (20%) Hispanic Millennial voters have a favorable view of Romney.

There are also significant educational gaps in views about Romney and Obama. More than 6-in-10 (63%) of Millennials with at least a bachelor’s degree have a favorable opinion of Obama, compared to fewer than 3-in-10 (29%) who feel similarly about Romney. In contrast, the favorability gap is much smaller among Millennial voters with a high school degree. Fewer than half (45%) of this group have a favorable view of Obama, compared to one-third (33%) who have a favorable view of Romney.

There is a large favorability gap in Millennials’ opinions about the two major political parties. Half (50%) of Millennial voters say they have a favorable view of the Democratic Party, compared to 35% who have a favorable view of the Republican Party. A majority (56%) of Millennial voters have an unfavorable view of the GOP, while roughly 4-in-10 (43%) have an unfavorable view of the Democratic Party.

Among Democratic Millennials, Obama’s favorability (84%) is roughly equivalent to the Democratic Party’s favorability (89%). Among Republican Millennials, however, Romney’s favorability lags nearly 20 points behind the favorability of the Republican Party. Nearly 8-in-10 (82%) Republican Millennials have a favorable view of the GOP, while 64% say they have a favorable view of Romney.

### Feelings about the Obama Administration

Millennial voters are somewhat divided in their opinion about how Barack Obama is handling his job as President. Half of Millennial voters report that they approve of the way Obama is handling his job as President, while about 4-in-10 (42%) say they disapprove. At this point, views of the Obama presidency are fractured. One-third (33%)

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**View of Political Leaders and Parties Among Millennial Voters**

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<th>Favorable</th>
<th>Unfavorable</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
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Source: Public Religion Research Institute, Millennial Values Survey, March 2012 (N=2,013)
of Millennial voters feel satisfied with the Obama presidency, while nearly as many (27%) say they are disappointed. Fewer than 1-in-5 (16%) say they feel worried, while fewer than 1-in-10 say they feel excited (7%) or angry (9%).

Millennial voters’ opinions vary considerably according to political party affiliation. A majority (53%) of Democratic Millennial voters feel satisfied with Obama’s performance, while fewer than one-quarter say they feel disappointed (17%) or worried (9%). By contrast, only 9% of Republican Millennial voters say they feel satisfied, while roughly 6-in-10 feel disappointed (40%) or worried (23%). Independent voters’ opinions generally mirror Millennial voters’ overall views.

Almost 6-in-10 (57%) of Millennials who say they voted for Barack Obama in 2008 report that they are satisfied with his presidency. Fewer than 1-in-5 (18%) say they are disappointed or worried (7%), and 14% say they are excited. Among McCain voters, 6% say they are satisfied. Roughly 6-in-10 say they are disappointed by (37%) or worried about (24%) the Obama presidency.

Economic Inequality and the Role of Government

Economic Inequality and Opportunity

*The American Dream*

College-age Millennials (age 18 to 24) are divided on whether the American Dream – the idea that if you work hard you’ll get ahead – holds true today. A plurality (45%) believe that the American Dream once held true, but not anymore, while 4-in-10 (40%) say the American Dream still holds true today. One-in-ten (10%) Millennials say that the American Dream never held true.

Partisan differences on this question are modest, but Millennials vary more significantly by political ideology. Millennials who identify as conservative are more likely than moderate or liberal Millennials to say that the American Dream still holds true (53%, 38%, and 34%, respectively). Liberal and moderate Millennials, by contrast, are more likely than conservative Millennials to say that the American Dream once held true, but not anymore (50%, 49%, and 36%, respectively).

Millennials who attend religious services at least once a week are more optimistic about the status of the American Dream than Millennials who seldom or never attend religious services. Nearly half (49%) of Millennials who attend services at least weekly say that the American Dream still holds true, while fewer than one-third (32%) of Millennials who seldom or never attend religious services say the same.