

Monitoring the Future

You cannot be replaced!

You were scientifically selected to be included in the follow-up sample so that your responses represent the views of thousands of people your age. If we lose contact with you, no substitution can be made, and the views of adults similar to you will not be as well represented by the study. The success of the study depends upon your willingness to continue to complete and return the questionnaire to Monitoring the Future. For this reason, we work hard to keep track of you and other participants around the country and the world. We are indeed grateful for your cooperation.



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News Update

This newsletter contains results from the follow-up surveys that you completed for the Monitoring the Future study. It represents our commitment to sharing some of the results of the study with our participants. We are also committed to distributing the information we gain from this study to policymakers and the public. Political leaders, influential organizations, and the general public have consistently shown their interest in the attitudes and actions of young adults, and Monitoring the Future is an effective means of communicating your viewpoints and experiences to them.

This important study is designed to look at changing behaviors and preferences of young Americans. We believe that studying the way young adults are today will tell us a lot about the way the whole nation will be tomorrow.

This year's newsletter contains updates on some topics that you may have seen in previous newsletters, as well as some new topics.

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Life in the Fast Lane

It used to be that many of us tried to keep up with the Joneses, those neighbors who really seemed to have it all together. But, over the years the rules of the game seem to have changed. Now, we are not only trying to keep up with the Joneses, we are also trying to keep up with ourselves. Depending on your perspective, keeping up can be an interesting challenge or a trial. Whichever way you feel, you may be interested to know how study participants responded when asked how much they agreed with the statement, “I enjoy the fast pace and changes of today’s world.” We wondered whether getting older would affect people’s answers, so we followed the same group of participants every two years, starting in high school at age 18 and continuing through age 30. We also were interested in finding out if men and women differ in their enjoyment of a fast-paced society.

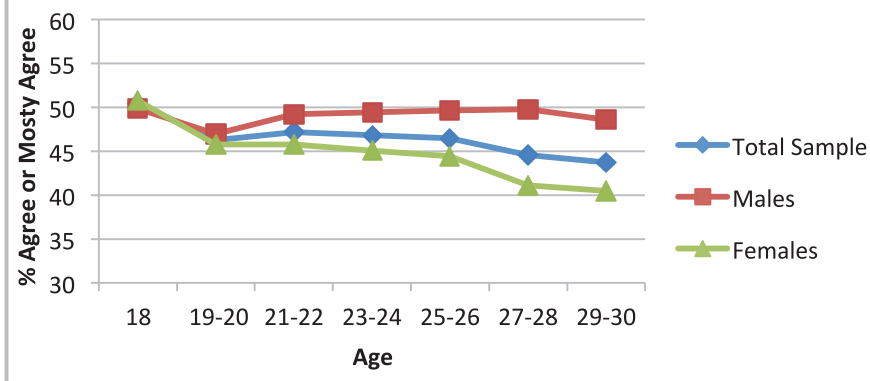
Figure 1 shows the percentage of those who “agree” or “mostly agree” with the above statement. The line marked by diamonds shows responses for all participants. Overall, there hasn’t been a great deal of change as our participants progressed through young adulthood. As seniors in high school, half agreed with the statement. However, one or two years after high school (ages 19 and 20,) the percentage dropped to 46%. From age 21 through 26, about 47% agreed with the item. A slight drop-off started at ages 27-28 and continued down to about 44% at ages 29-30.

The numbers and trajectories were a bit different for our male and female respondents. As high school seniors, there was almost no gender difference with about half of the men and women agreeing that they enjoyed the fast pace and changes of today’s world. For men, this percentage dropped at ages 19-20 to 47%, then increased


and remained at about 49% to 50% through age 30. However, among the women, enjoyment of a fast pace declined considerably over time. Similar to men, there was a drop of almost five percentage points one or two years after high school to 46%. Unlike the men, the number stayed lower. Through age 24, about 46% agreed with the statement. The number then dropped off to 40% by ages 29-30.

We were intrigued by the relatively large decline in enjoyment of a fast pace and change right after high school and wondered if a number of people simply became indifferent to it (answering “neither agree nor disagree”). That explains a small part of the change (21% at age 18 compared to 25% at ages 29-30), but the number of people who reported disliking the fast pace was higher among men right after high school than at any other age. Women’s dislike of a fast pace also increased right after high school, but it never decreased at older ages. Perhaps taking on adult responsibilities such as having to support oneself, going to college, or beginning a family have a somewhat different effect on men and women. However, it is important to note that at all ages and for both genders, considerably more people said that they enjoy a fast pace and change than indicated that they dislike it.

Fig. 1 Do you enjoy the fast pace and changes of today's world?



So what is the verdict? During the twelve years in which we followed the same group of participants, we have learned that the youngest people and men are more likely to enjoy the fast pace and changes of today’s world. Is this a trend we will continue to see? Or will the younger

generations shift these gender and age differences in the enjoyment of life in the “fast lane?” We will look at this issue in future newsletters, so stay tuned! 

Political Beliefs

Some of you may have experienced a new opportunity for the first time in 2016—voting in a presidential election. In the time it took to choose a candidate and decide on the issues, no doubt you encountered the political labels “liberal,” “conservative,” and “moderate.” Politically speaking, you probably had already decided what you considered yourself to be. We wondered, do young people at the beginning of their 20s consider themselves more liberal than those at the end of their 20s? What about men and women, do they differ in their political views? And, has there been any political shift over the last four decades among our nation’s youth? In both school-based surveys and follow-up surveys, Monitoring the Future has asked respondents, “How would you rate your political beliefs?” We thought it might be interesting to look at the responses to this question to see if age, gender, and history might make a difference in how our respondents describe their political point of view.

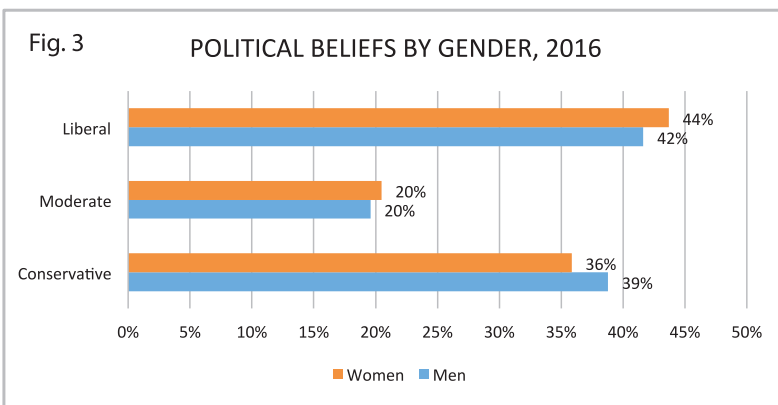
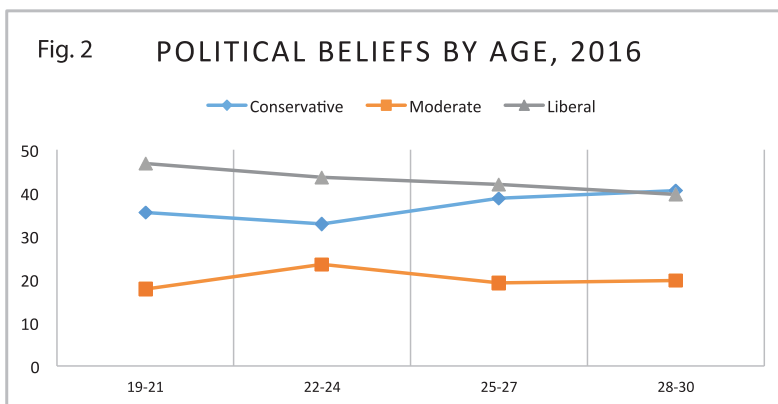
The following figures report data from the Spring 2016 follow-up and in school surveys. As shown in Figure 2, among the youngest respondents, aged 19-21, almost one-half (47%) considered themselves liberal, compared to just over a third (35%) who reported being conservative. However, between ages 19 and 30, the percentage of respondents who report being liberal decreased by 7 percentage points from 47% to 40%. Meanwhile, between the ages 19 and 30, the percentage of those reporting being conservative increased 6

percentage points from 35% to 41%. By age 30, there is no longer a gap in percentage report being liberal and conservative. Respondents of all ages are less likely to say that they are somewhere in between conservative and liberal; 18% to 20% rate themselves as moderate.

Gender is another, although somewhat less distinctive, indicator of how people rate themselves politically. In Figure 3, you can see that slightly more men than women report being conservative, while women are slightly more likely to categorize themselves as liberal. One-fifth of both genders did not identify with either category, but described their political view as moderate.

Lastly, we looked at high school seniors’ responses over the last forty years. We wanted to see if the political “winds” have shifted from the baby boomers to the iGen. Overall across the four decades, a higher percentage of high school seniors

have considered themselves politically conservative than liberal since 1976, when Monitoring the Future first surveyed young people. We saw a continuous increase in conservative identification through the mid-1990s. Almost two in five (38%) seniors from the class years 1976-1979 reported they were conservative, to an all-time high of one-half of seniors in 1988-1991. Indeed, if you could first vote during the administrations of Ronald Reagan or George H. W. Bush, you were almost twice as likely to self-identify as conservative than as liberal. During the last term of the Clinton presidency (1996-2001), the margin between con-



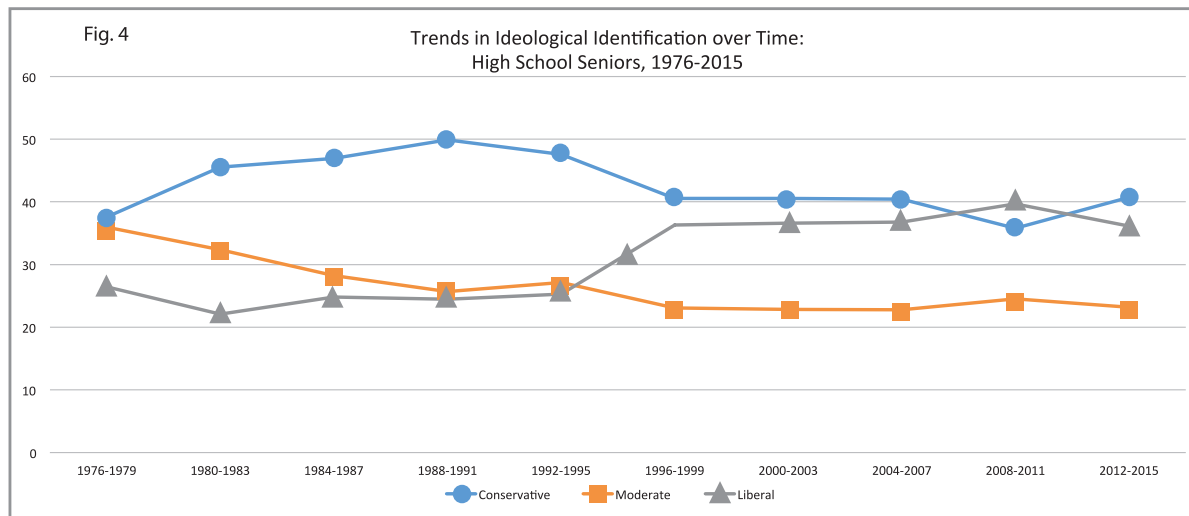
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servatives and liberals tightened up (41% compared to 36% respectively). During the years when George W. Bush or Barack Obama held the White House, high school seniors continued to become increasingly liberal. At the beginning of the Obama administration (2008-2011), for the first time in our study, more high school seniors said they were liberal (43%) than conservative (35%). The percentage of moderates, dropped across the 1980s and early 1990s, and since has remained level at about 23%.

In summary, history seems to be the biggest distinguishing factor in how respondents categorize their

political ideology. And age is the second biggest distinguishing factor. It appears to be the case that as we age, many of us become more politically conservative. In 2016, just over a third of 19-21 year olds, but 41% of 28-30 year-olds, called themselves conservative. Although women are slightly more liberal than men, an equal percentage of men and women identify as moderates. For high school seniors, most of the change in political views occurred before 1996, with political views remaining fairly consistent since then. Conservatives were consistently the most prevalent group leading up to the presidential election of 1996. However, as

we entered into the new millennium, high school liberals were on a fast pace to catch up with their conservative counterpart and for a brief period (2008-2011) became the majority. ☞



What you've asked us...

What are the results used for?

The results will allow an understanding of young adults' values, perceptions, behavior, and their hopes for the future. Most important, we can understand how these things change or remain the same as people gain new freedoms (e.g. leaving the parents' home, being of "legal age") and take on new responsibilities such as full-time work, marriage, and parenthood. The findings will reach a wide audience and have an impact in many ways. Results appear in the popular media as well as in scientific journals and are often used by policy makers at the national level.

Can I get a summary of my individual answers throughout the years I have been a part of this survey?

A summary of results from a variety of topics are mailed out to all respondents in the form of this newsletter in December of every year. However, due to confidentiality concerns (e.g. is it really the study participant who is asking), and our policy of never connecting names and responses together, we are unable to accommodate requests to mail out individual answers.

From our house to yours, we wish you a very happy holiday season!