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Six reasons Paul appeals to some young voters



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Since starting this blog nine days ago, I've twice noted the popularity that Ron Paul enjoys among young voters ([here](#) and [here](#)). I haven't yet offered an explanation for his success, but others have. To my knowledge, the most recent of these explanations comes from **Alex Pearlman** writing at [Policymic](#) and [The Next Great Generation](#) (same article).

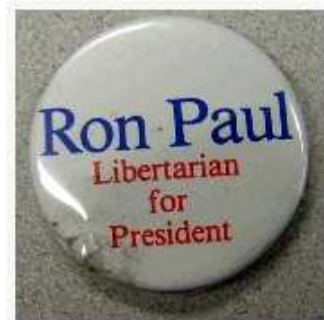


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Pearlman's article doesn't come to any strong conclusion — Pearlman offers her own three scattered reasons (Paul's different; he's the "least evil"; and he speaks to youth issues) in addition to four distinct suggestions from outsiders. It's a good effort at a hard task. To get at the real reasons, you'd first have to round up a random group of young Paul supporters, then you'd have to sit them down long

enough for focus groups and surveys (I imagine Paul supporters as overly-excitable and opposed to labels, so it would be hard to do this). Then you'd have to deal with the differences between what young Paul supporters say draws them to Paul versus what actually did attract them.

Nonetheless, Pearlman's article got me thinking about the subject, and I figured I'd have a crack at six reasons why Paul appeals to many young voters:

1. Paul is a rebel. According to some social science literature, young people are more apt to be rebels who enjoy swimming against the stream of society (crime, for instance, is more commonly committed by young people). Ron Paul is perfect for these young contrarians — he bucks the establishment by suggesting ideas such as “The FED should be eliminated” or “The War on Drugs should be ended” that are outside or opposite the political mainstream. In this sense, Ron Paul is the tattoo or nose piercing for the nerdy political junkies that never seriously rebelled.
2. He's unusual. According to David Boaz of the Cato Institute, only 2% of Americans identify as libertarian; many Americans don't even know what libertarianism is (if you don't know, see Cato's libertarianism.org). By supporting a libertarian-in-name (not political party this time — that's Libertarian), young voters can impress their peers with their sophistication: The 20-year-old who knows about Ron Paul and libertarianism is a bit like the 20-year-old who knows about a special wine vintage or a remote micro brew — so erudite!
3. He's not going to win. There's something romantic about supporting a campaign that you know won't win. It creates solidarity between the soldiers who are marching to defeat, but do so willingly, and it takes on the charm of Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn in which the imagination of the kiss between two lovers is never spoiled because they are frozen in the second before the kiss. President Paul — the idea — will never be tarnished because he will never be President. Additionally, when things invariably go wrong with the next administration, young Paul supporters — over their college cafeteria tables — can say, “You can't blame me. I supported Ron Paul!”
4. He doesn't care if he wins. This sort of nonchalance about the most powerful office in the world, coupled with his seeming preference for ideological purity rather than political power, is attractive to young voters who loathe “selling out.”
5. He addresses youth issues. According to a 2010 CIRCLE study, the top four issues for young voters are: Economy, health care, Afghanistan, illegal immigration. Rock The Vote (2010) found the rank to be: 1) Jobs and the economy, 2) education and the cost of college, 3) budget deficit, 4) healthcare, 5) Afghanistan, 6) immigration. As portrayed by the debates, Paul's focus is on: getting government out of the economy, reducing government spending, getting out of foreign wars, and sealing the borders. That seems to address the issues quite well.
6. He's online. Kristen Soltis and others have written a lot about the importance of getting online to win the youth vote. The media seemingly bestowed the Republican-online award in 2008 to Ron Paul. He might be winning it again this year. Ironic given that he's the oldest candidate (76).

Notes:

a) Just because Ron Paul has been doing the best among young voters in the Republican primaries to date does not mean he is the favorite Republican candidate of young voters. This [Harvard Institute of Politics survey](#) conducted in December 2011 found that Mitt Romney led the youth vote (23%) and that Ron Paul placed second (16%). It could simply be that Ron Paul supporters are more apt to show up to caucuses and primaries.

b) “Youth issues.” I’m growing less certain that there are distinct “youth issues.” For the most part, our issue rankings line up with adult America’s. Peter Levine at CIRCLE shares this sentiment.