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Gene Healy

# Under-30 crowd may provide a new voice for conservatives

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Surely even in his darkest moments, the 20-year-old Pete Townshend — who penned the lyric "hope I die before I get old" — never imagined himself as a paunchy geezer of 64, lurching his way through the geriatric wasteland of The Who's recent Super Bowl halftime show. Such are the indignities that come with age.

Likewise, I never thought I'd be old enough to grumble about "kids today." But last week the Pew Research Center released the most comprehensive survey to date on Americans born after 1980, the so-called Millennial Generation. And there's plenty in it to make this libertarian Gen Xer want to scream, "Get off my lawn!"

Two-thirds of Gen Y voted for President Barack Obama, a candidate just half of their elders backed. It was the largest generational disparity recorded in 40 years of polling. Millennials "are significantly less critical of government" than their predecessors, Pew said. They're the only one of the four generations polled in which a majority says, "The government should do more to solve problems."

So should the limited-government movement's new slogan be "don't trust anyone under 30"? Not quite.

True, moral-values conservatives and foreign-policy hawks will have a hard time finding a pony in Pew's data pile. Gen Y is more socially liberal and more likely to endorse same-sex marriage and immigration rights than earlier generations. It's also the least likely age group to support an aggressive, interventionist foreign policy, and the only one in which a majority of respondents disapproved of Obama's doubling down on a bad bet in Afghanistan.

Pew called the Millennials "a pro-government, socially liberal generation." For libertarians, often described as "fiscally conservative and socially liberal," there's at least some common ground there.

And those of us who recognize that war is, like most federal initiatives, costly, destructive and rarely necessary, we can only welcome the rising generation's coolness toward foreign-policy adventurism.

What's more, there may be room to work on the "pro-government" side of the equation. The Democratic Party's

advantage among younger voters dropped off significantly during the last year, from 32 to 14 points. College-educated Millennials show more skepticism toward government, and Gen Y is "on course to become the most educated generation in American history."

Meanwhile, the lesson here for the conservative movement: change or die. At the Sept. 12 Tea Party march, the crowd skewed heavily toward middle age. But judging by the signs they carried, many of the young people who showed up were supporters of Rep. Ron Paul, energized by the libertarian Republican's small-government, pro-Constitution message.


And at the recent Conservative Political Action Conference, when an obnoxious loud named Ryan Sorba condemned the CPAC organizers for welcoming a gay organization, it was members of groups like Students for Liberty and the Ron Paul kids who booed him off the stage.

The Millennials don't like the culture wars — and they're not very keen on wars in general. If conservatives want to appeal to younger voters, they'll leave social issues to the states and the people, show the neocons the door, and focus on warding off our looming fiscal catastrophe.

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