

Spotlight on American Generations

The American population is typically classified into a series of generations in order to discern key trends and patterns of behavior. The names and age ranges that comprise generations vary widely. Despite generational markers, postsecondary education and training have never been more important, with recent generations being on average more reliant on technology, more educated, and competing in an economy that increasingly demands a postsecondary credential.

Generational Variations

The characteristics of a generation are based on the sum total of the individuals who comprise it. The [three](#) key trends that shape generations are parenting, technology, and economics.

Millennials are [less](#) likely than their elders to have grown up in intact families. Asked about their parents' marital status during most of their own childhood, about six-in-ten (63%) of Millennials say that their parents were married, while 20% say their parents were divorced and 12% say their parents were never married to each other. By contrast, 76% of Gen Xers, 83% of Boomers and 89% of Silent Generation adults say their parents were married most of the time they were growing up.

Generations *at a glance*¹

The Greatest Generation

Born: Before 1928
Age in 2017: 89+
Population in 2016: 5.4 million
Influences: Great Depression, WWII

Generation X

Born: 1965-1980
Age in 2017: 36-51
Population in 2016: 66 million
Influences: MTV, Internet, Challenger Disaster

The Silent Generation

Born: 1928-1945
Age in 2017: 71-88
Population in 2016: 33.6 million
Influences: Korean War, McCarthyism

The Millennial Generation

Born: 1981-1997
Age in 2017: 19-35
Population in 2016: 75.3 million
Influences: 9/11, Social Media, Great Recession

The Baby Boom Generation

Born: 1946-1964
Age in 2017: 52-70
Population in 2016: 77.6 million
Influences: Vietnam, Civil Rights Movement, Cold War, Moon Landing

Generation Z

Born: 1998-?
Age in 2017: 0-18
Population in 2016: 65.2 million
Influences: Sharing Economy, Political Polarization, Reality Entertainment

Did You Know?

- Millennials recently passed Baby Boomers as the largest American population. With immigration adding more numbers to its group than any other, the Millennial population is projected to peak in 2036 at 81.1 million. Millennials are more likely to have a college degree, more connected to technology, and more politically engaged.
- The Gen X population is projected to outnumber the Boomers in 2028 when there will be 64.6 million Gen Xers and 63.7 million Boomers. The Gen X population will peak at 65.8 million in 2018. Generation Z will continue to grow due to births and immigration for the foreseeable future.

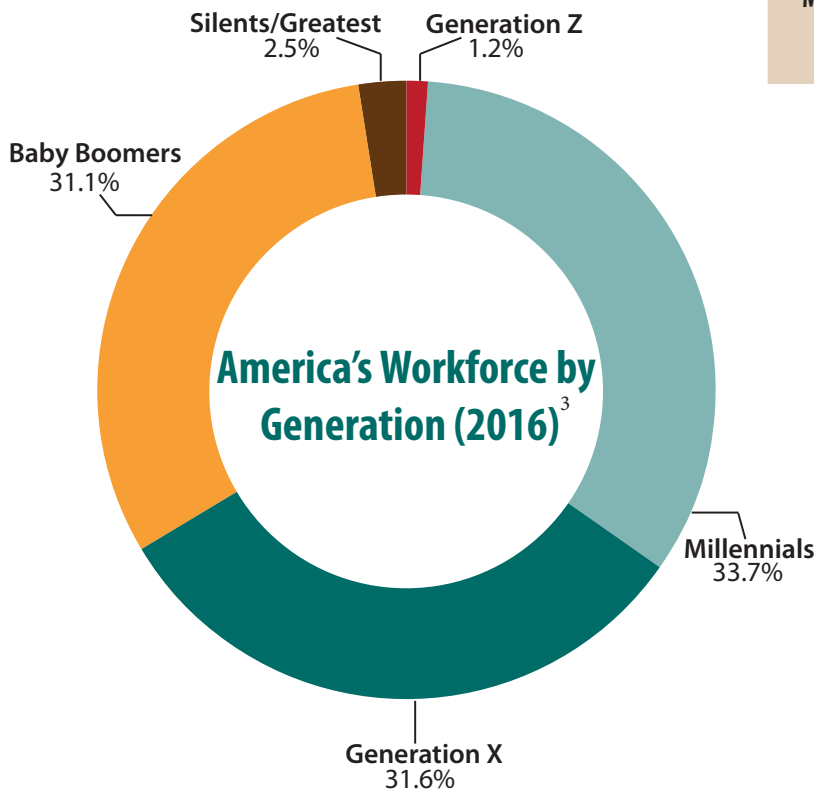
Technology

Each generation has been affected differently by the [pace](#) of technological innovation. More than 50% of American households possessed AM radio and a telephone around 1930 and 1945, respectively, whereas Baby Boomers first experienced wide adoption of color television in 1953 and FM radio in 1967. Generation X benefitted from widespread cable television in 1987, followed by the VCR a year later, the CD player in 1997, and email during this same time. Millennials experienced widespread ownership of computers and cell phones as well as use of the Internet. Generation Z's rise aligns with the spread of smart phones, social media, tablet computers, and high speed Internet.

Educational Attainment

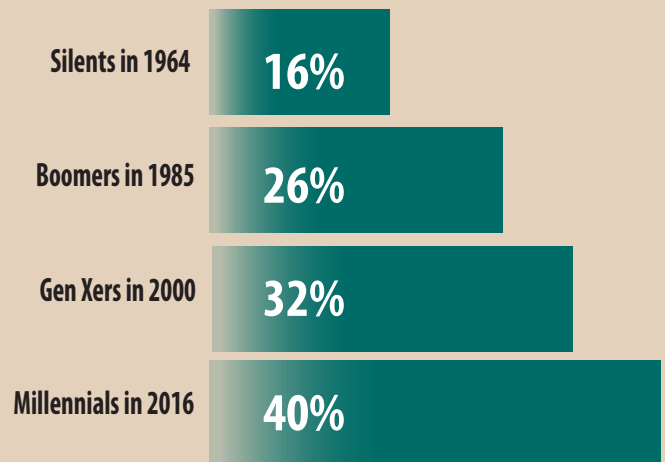
There has been a significant shift in educational attainment over the last 75 years, as evidenced by Figure 2. Whereas 29.6% of Americans aged 55 and older possess a bachelor's degree or greater, compared to 35.7% aged 35-54 and 37% aged 25-34. Virtually all of that growth resulted from growth in bachelor's degrees.

The [share](#) of college-educated young Millennial adults (between 25-29 years of age) in today's workforce is higher than ever before.



Young workers in U.S. more likely than ever to be college graduates²

% of employed 25- to 29-year-olds with a bachelor's degree or more



Workforce Participation

Currently, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials comprise a nearly equal share of the workforce, with Millennials having [surpassed](#) Gen Xers as the largest generation in the labor force in 2015. By [2060](#), the workforce will experience profound demographic shifts. Most notably, as Baby Boomers and other current generations age, the percentage of workers 55 and older will increase from 22.2% of the workforce in 2015 to 26.8% 35 years later. In contrast, workers aged 16-34 will decrease from 35.5% to 30.7%. The aging of the population will result in a decline in overall labor force participation, from 62.7% in 2015 to a projected 57% in 2060.

References

1. U.S. Census Bureau: <https://census.gov/data/datasets/2016/demo/popest/nation-detail.html>
2. Pew Research Center: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/16/todays-young-workers-are-more-likely-than-ever-to-have-a-bachelors-degree/ft_17-05-15_workerseducation_grads/
3. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat03.htm>