

## 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 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.

In 2020, the Pew Research Center noted that “As Members of Gen Z are more [racially and ethnically diverse](#) than any previous generation, and they are on track to be the most well-educated generation yet. They are also [digital natives](#) who have little or no memory of the world as it existed before smartphones.”<sup>1</sup>

## Generations *at a glance*<sup>2, 3</sup>

### The Greatest Generation

Born: Before 1928  
Age in 2021: 93+  
Population in 2021: 1.7 million  
Influences: Great Depression, WWII, New Deal

### Generation X

Born: 1965-1980  
Age in 2021: 40-55  
Population in 2021: 65.2 million  
Influences: MTV, Internet, Challenger Disaster, AIDS

### The Silent Generation

Born: 1928-1945  
Age in 2021: 75-92  
Population in 2021: 20.9 million  
Influences: Korean War, McCarthyism, American Exceptionalism

### The Millennial Generation

Born: 1981-1996  
Age in 2021: 24-39  
Population in 2021: 72.1 million  
Influences: 9/11, Social Media, Great Recession, Mass Shootings

### The Baby Boom Generation

Born: 1946-1964  
Age in 2021: 56-74  
Population in 2021: 69.6 million  
Influences: Civil Rights Movement, Cold War, Moon Landing, Vietnam War

### Generation Z

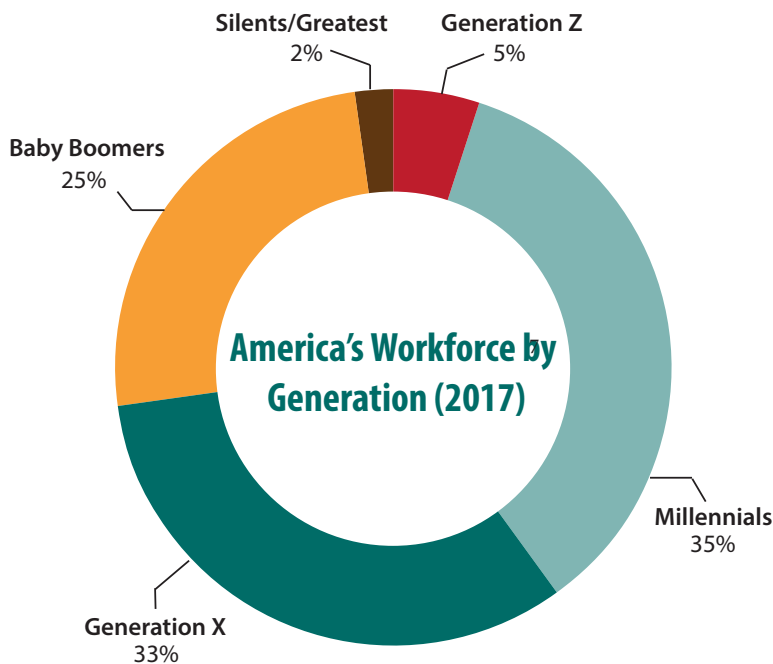
Born: 1997-?  
Age in 2021: 0-24  
Population in 2021: 67.2 million  
Influences: Sharing Economy, Political Polarization, Reality Entertainment, COVID-19

## 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 2033 at 74.9 million.<sup>4</sup>
- The Gen X population is projected to outnumber the Boomers in 2028 when there will be 63.9 million Gen Xers and 62.9 million Boomers.<sup>4</sup>
- More than half of the nation's total population are now members of the Millennial generation or younger.<sup>5</sup>

## 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 past 60 years, with each succeeding generation more likely to hold a bachelor's degree than the one before it.

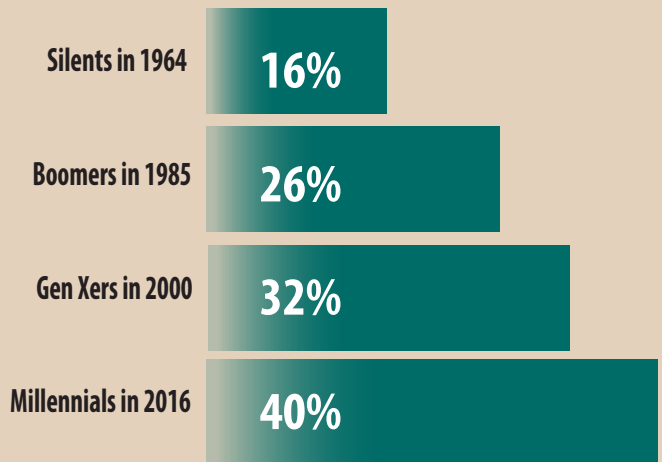
We do not yet know what impacts the COVID-19 pandemic will have on postsecondary participation, as well as our ability to meet state and workforce needs.

## Workforce Participation

Currently, 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.

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

% of employed 25- to 29-year-olds with a bachelor's degree or more<sup>6</sup>



## References

1. [“On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far”](#)
2. [“Resident population in the United States in 2019, by generation”](#)
3. [“Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins”](#)
4. [“Millennials overtake Baby Boomers as America's largest generation”](#)
5. [“Now, more than half of Americans are millennials or younger”](#)
6. [“Today's young workers are more likely than ever to have a bachelor's degree”](#)
7. [“Millennials are the largest generation in the U.S. labor force”](#)