



POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR OF FLORIDA MILLENNIALS

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Overview

Young voters comprised a crucial element in the voter coalition that allowed Barack Obama and the Democrats to win Florida in 2008. In 2010, a solid plurality of Florida Millennials (18-29 year olds) intends to vote for Democratic Congressional candidates in this year's midterm elections, while narrow pluralities prefer the Democrats in the state's gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races. The Democratic vote intentions of Florida Millennials are based on the continued identification of a majority of them with the Democratic Party, and of the greatest number as liberal or progressive. In addition, a solid majority support governmental activism in the economy, a position normally associated with the Democratic Party. Finally, most continue to hold favorable attitudes toward the Democratic Party and to approve of Barack Obama's performance as president.

At the same time, the extent to which these young Floridians turns out at the polls this fall is a major concern. Less than half say that they are certain to vote and only a third believes that the outcome of this year's midterm elections is very important to them. As almost everywhere across the United States voter turnout, and the extent to which the political parties and other organizations attempt to enhance it, is the overriding issue in Florida youth politics in 2010.

2010 Vote Intention

Young voters in Florida prefer Democratic candidates narrowly in the gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races and by a wide margin on the congressional generic ballot. In addition, significant numbers remain undecided.

- In the race for governor, a slight plurality favors Democrat Alex Sink against Republican Rick Scott by 33% vs. 24%. Independent Lawton "Bud" Chiles is a distant third (8%) and 35% are undecided.
- In the race for the US Senate, Democrat Kendrick Meek and Independent Charlie Crist are tied (26% each). Republican Marco Rubio is preferred by 21% and nearly three in ten Millennials (28%) remain undecided.
- In the generic House ballot, a clear plurality (41%) say they will vote for the Democratic candidate in their district while 28% prefer the Republican and 31% have not yet decided.
- In all races, the Democrats are strongest among women and, especially, minority Millennials. Among both African-Americans and Hispanics Democratic candidates hold at least a 2:1 margin in both the gubernatorial race and on the congressional generic ballot. In the Senate race, a large majority of African-Americans, but only a plurality of Hispanics, favors Democrat Kendrick Meek. Most of the remaining Hispanics favor Independent Charlie Crist rather than Republican (and Hispanic) Marco Rubio. Republican candidates perform most strongly among white Millennials, among whom Republicans have a plurality in all three contests.

- Neither party suffers significant defections from within its ranks in either the gubernatorial or congressional races. Upwards of two-thirds of both Democratic and Republican identifiers prefer the candidates from their own party in each of those races with no more than one in twenty indicating support for a candidate from the opposition party. However, while about half of both Democratic and Republican identifiers prefer the candidate of their own party in the hotly contested, three-candidate, U.S. Senate race, a quarter of each party's identifiers defect to Independent Charlie Crist. In addition, a plurality of Independents (41%) also favors Crist while about one in ten each prefers either Republican Marco Rubio (13%) or Democrat Kendrick Meek (10%).

Turnout Issues

Youth turnout remains an important issue in Florida as it is elsewhere in the U.S.

- Overall, registration is a mild barrier to voting turnout among young voters in Florida, but is much less important than are attitudes toward politics. A solid majority of Florida Millennials (80%) are now registered to vote. However, significant percentages (36%) of the youngest Millennials—18-20 year olds— and African-Americans (31%) have not yet registered.
- Among those who have not yet registered, a plurality (32%) explains this by saying that they only reached voting age recently. However, a significant number also say that they don't know enough about politics to have registered.
- Fewer than half (48%) of Florida Millennials say they are absolutely certain to vote in November. About one in five each say there is a better than even (22%) or a 50/50 chance (20%) that they will vote. Nine percent indicate that there is a less than even chance that they will do so. There are only slight demographic differences in projected turnout, although Hispanics (51%) are most likely to say it is certain that they will vote and African-Americans (45%) and 18-20 year olds (39%) are least likely. Both Republicans (63%) and Democrats (47%) are more likely than Independents (34%) to indicate that they are absolutely certain to vote in the 2010 midterm elections.
- Those unlikely to vote base this on three primary factors: a lack of information about and interest in politics; a perception that politics is corrupt and dirty; and, a belief that voting doesn't produce political change or that an individual's vote has little impact on election outcomes.
- Only one-third of Florida young people (32%) claim that the outcome of the 2010 elections is very important to them. Similar percentages say the results of the elections are only somewhat or not very important to them (34% each). There are few demographic differences on this item. Concern with the election is greatest among Republicans (48%) and Democrats (38%) and least among Independents (9%).

Political Identifications

- As with Millennials across America, a majority of Florida young people (50%) identify as or lean to the Democrats. A third (33%) says they are Republicans and 16%, Independents. Democratic identifications are greatest among women (53%), 21-24 year

olds (53%), African-Americans (75%), and Hispanic (58%). Republican identifications are greatest among males (34%) and whites (43%).

- A four in ten plurality of Florida Millennials (41%) label themselves liberal or progressive. Nearly that percentage (37%) claim to be moderate and about one in five, conservative (22%). Women (44%), Hispanics (49%), and 21-24 year olds (47%) most often say they are liberal, while men (25%) and whites (29%) most frequently label themselves conservative.

Political Attitudes

- A solid majority of Florida young voters (63%) favors a government that actively tries to solve the problems facing society and the economy. A quarter (26%) prefers a government that stays out of society to the greatest extent possible. Women (66%), African-Americans (71%) and Hispanics (73%) favor an activist government. Males (30%) and white Millennials (34%) prefer a more restrained government.
- A plurality of Millennials (46%) believes that the best policy is to promote economic equality by ensuring that all Americans have at least a basic standard of living and income, even if that increases government spending. Four in ten (42%) favor letting each person get along economically on their own, even if that means some have more than others. The greatest number of women (48%), African-Americans (53%), and Hispanics (57%) favor policies designed to produce greater economic equality

Attitudes Toward Political Institutions and Figures

- A plurality of Florida Millennials holds favorable as opposed to unfavorable attitudes toward the Democratic Party (45% favorable vs. 36% unfavorable). By contrast, a majority holds unfavorable versus favorable attitudes toward the Republican Party (26% favorable vs. 53% unfavorable).
- A clear plurality of Florida young people have unfavorable in contrast to favorable attitudes toward the Tea Party movement (20% favorable vs. 41% unfavorable).
- A majority of Florida Millennials (54%) have a favorable impression of Barack Obama. A third (34%) has unfavorable impressions of the President. Women (57%), African-Americans (66%) and Hispanics (64%) are most favorable toward Obama.
- A plurality approves rather than disapproves of Barack Obama's performance as president (49% approve vs. 35% disapprove). Women (53%), African-Americans (63%), and Hispanics (58%) are especially positive.

Perceived Importance of Issues

- Majorities of Florida Millennials rate jobs and the economy (67%) and education (56%) as critical issues on which the federal government should focus. These are followed in perceived importance by the cost of college education (47%); government spending and the federal deficit (44%); reform of the financial system (38%); healthcare reform, energy, and national security (36% each).

- At least a plurality of Florida young people believes that the Democratic rather than Republican Party will do the best job of dealing with each of these issues except for national security, on which the greatest number prefer the GOP.

Methodology

The poll results described above were obtained in an online survey of Florida Millennials (18-29 year olds) sponsored by NPI. The survey was designed and analyzed by Dr. Michael D. Hais, an NDN Fellow, and fielded by communications research and consultation firm, Frank N. Magid Associates. The sample was stratified and weighted to ensure that it reflected the gender, age, and ethnic distribution of Florida young adults based on current Census Bureau estimates. A total of 633 respondents participated in the survey resulting in a sampling error of +/- 4% for results based on the entire sample. The interviews were conducted from August 25-30, 2010 and averaged 20 minutes to complete.