

Not Your Parents' Party: How Gens X, Y, and Z Will Shake Up Our Politics

Speaker 1: Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon. Hello, and I want to thank everyone for joining us, um, for this event. Um, my name is David L. Cohen and I'm senior executive vice president and chief diversity officer of Comcast NBC universal. I am thrilled to be here. I'm at the Aspen ideas festival and our company is excited about sponsoring this event for the fourth consecutive year. Um, I think what's great about Aspen and I know everyone in this room would agree, is that, is that this is a opportunity where real thought leaders can get together. We get intellectual, intellectually stimulating conversation, a fair exchange of views, um, and really the opportunity to listen to some really smart people who know a lot about some very timely topics. Um, and this evening's conversation will be no different as we're going to hear about the cultural and political shift that we're experiencing in generations x, Y, and Z as they come of age and reshape our politics.

Speaker 1: And I promise I won't ask anyone to define the precise age parameters of generations x, Y, and z. So at Comcast, NBC universal, we have 184,000 employees around around the world. Um, and the majority of those employees are from that generation that is generation x, y or Z. I am the father of two Gen y millennial sons. I know their ages. Um, and I've seen personally how differently they interact with media, with technology and with politics. And no matter what the hot topic of the day climate change to gun laws, net neutrality, media center, Censorship, media ownership, um, we have this new generation of Americans. It's looking at these issues differently, care about them maybe more passionately than some of the rest of us night. Um, and are changing the rules of engagement both directly and through social media. So while millennials are the largest generation in the labor force today, they aren't yet the largest force in politics, but that might be changing and someday that will probably be true as well. So in this session you're going to hear from two prominent pollsters from both sides of the aisle, and they're going to discuss what are leaders of gen x can learn from Gen y and Gen z. So without further ado, I want to turn the stage over to the really terrific moderator. We have one of the most knowledgeable political reporters, observers, one of the most connected in Washington and nationally. I'm Mike Allen, cofounder and executive editor of Axios.

Speaker 2: Mike, Thanks so much from you Thi David,

Mike Allen: thank you very much for, uh, making this possible, uh, you in Comcast. Thank you for the debates, uh, in the next two nights, which we're very excited about. Think all of you for coming out and we're delving in to one of the most exciting topics, which is how are young voters going to change how we vote and ultimately how we govern. How will the country be different based on the very large cohort of younger voters, uh, coming? Uh, I've a spoiler for all of you. I'm

not a millennial, uh, but we have, uh, two speakers who are experts in them. So this is kind of fun. The two our two guests, uh, do a podcast, the pollsters, and this could be as sort of the pollsters live. Uh, so, uh, first on the right as they used to say, Kiersten Soltis Anderson has the best one mind biography. Kiersten, let's hear it. Um,

Mike Allen: Kiersten has the best one line biography in American. I'm just going to let you say, Oh, Florida woman in DC. It's kind of says it all. Uh, Kirsten wrote the book, the Sophie vote where millennials are leading America and she also hosts a series six m's, the trend line and her partner in crime. Margie Omero is a principal in the democratic city. Berm GB a. Oh and Margie told me people want to say, Gee, bow. Uh, but you just say g B a o and Margie is New Jersey and Texas woman and to come park and she a consults to brands, consults to nonprofits, uh, and to candidates. So let's just start out with a provocative idea that David had backs backstage and he was asking, is it possible the were overstating the youth vote? That, in fact, a lot of them don't vote. And B, their don't vote. They don't vote. Monolithically they're like the country. Kiersten. What does the data say? So

Kristen A: well, I want to thank the Comcast NBC Universal Folks for sponsoring this before I explained why. David's question, why he's totally wrong. Uh, universal studios was my first job as a Florida woman in DC, grew up, got growing up in Orlando. So I feel a certain level of loyalty there. Um, but the idea that young voters don't vote monolithically is correct. Uh, so first of all, that's, that's true. But they overwhelmingly, these days tend to favor Democratic candidates and on a variety of issues, lean more progressive. Now, one thing that I hear a lot is, well, but isn't it the case that young people are always more progressive? Why does that matter? Kids always start off progressive and then they become conservative. So this was something that about 10 years ago, right around the time of the election of Barack Obama, um, and, and the sort of subsequent him being inaugurated, a lot of young people getting engaged in politics.

Kristen A: I coming from the right wanted to understand was all of this youth enthusiasm around Obama. This is just normal. Young people always embraced the Democratic candidate, or is this really something unusual? Is this something that is very historically different? And what I found was that there have been plenty of times where the Conservative Party has done better with young voters. Ronald Reagan won young voters by almost 20 points in 1984 I'm conservative parties around the world. Sometimes we'll be doing better with younger voters than with older voters, depending on the way the country's government works. So it's not the case that young voters, you know, they're always progressive and they become conservative. And the real reason why winning young voters matters isn't just about elections today in the midterm elections, if you combine Gen z, Gen x and the millennials together, they collectively cast over 62 million votes. The boomers in up cast 60 million votes.

Kristen A: So younger voters are making their political voice heard. And in these last midterms, millennials, 42% of those eligible to vote turned out, which was a huge spike over the relatively sleepy mid term of 2014 so they're turning out to vote, they're turning out to vote in the sorts of elections young voters didn't use to participate in. And what is most important, I think for Republicans is that long term, these young voters are not likely to just come back to the GOP anytime soon. They're breaking for Democrats by historic 20 plus point margins, which again, prior to the election of Barack Obama was not the norm. It used to be 10 single digits,

Kristen A: um, margins among younger voters. Is it someone who turned 18 on the eve of the presidential election in 2070 or in, pardon me, in 2016 based on life expectancy will be voting until 2076. So winning them when they're young will pay dividends over a lifetime of votes. And that's why they matter. Yeah. As Democrats, I think we're lucky that not many Republicans listen to the advice Kristin's been giving. And maybe I should start worrying about Selfie vote 2.0 but um, because it's, it's, there's the issue of vote propensity, the likelihood of voting as well as vote performance and how young people vote. So in vote propensity, that shift that happened in the midterms was so dramatic with young people. I mean it was really, really astounding. One of the very first projects that I worked on many, many years ago when I first entered polling was to figure out what predicted the reason someone would vote or not vote.

Margie Omero: It was a kind of, it was a bipartisan type of project to figure out what really drove people on. Everyone had all these different hypotheses about how alienated you felt from government and whether or not you felt governments spoke to you, different kinds of demographics and whether you felt you had a real voice, whether you thought voting mattered and the single biggest predictor was age. I mean, age has always been a real predictor of voter turnout and it still is. I don't want to minimize the fact that there is a real difference in turn out between older folks and younger folks. Even in the Democratic primary, it's still going to be a lot of older folks as opposed to younger folks. Um, and part of it is just getting into the habit of voting. Part of it is having skin in the game of the policies.

Margie Omero: As you get older you become, you know, less mobile. You've settled down, you in the place more likely obviously not necessarily become a homeowner or have more interaction with government in a way where you see the repercussions more, uh, immediately. Maybe you're taking care of an elderly parent, have more interaction with the healthcare system. All those things kind of lead you to kind of figure it out a little bit more about how the, how government works and, and the stakes, uh, that we have. Um, eh, but performance is really in democratic performance among younger people. It, you know, it doesn't have to be that way. That really is about the policies and about which party and younger people, but also obviously democratic performances increasing. And lots of other groups do. Who feels communicated to, who feels heard, who feels listened to, who feels, who sees the advertising, if they are watching cable or

are they, if they cut the cord or are they getting ads on snapchat and all these things, or are they seeing people knock on the door where they live or come to their college campus? So all these things are part of, you know, both at performance and the turnout among young people.

Mike Allen: Now the Pew Research Center is the official arbiter of the generational alphabet. So if you're 39 to 50 for your Ex, if you're 23 to 38, you're Y and if you're 22 or younger, your z or something to be named later out today, you taped an episode of the pollsters. Take us behind the scenes. Where did you tape it? And what's

Kristen A: one thing that you said? Oh Gosh. Well, so we taped because we are not in our cozy little studio in DC. Um, we each were in separate hotel rooms, recording remotely with two our producer back in d c so it really wasn't all that glamorous. Um, what did you talk about that sneak peek? I mean some of the topics we covered, uh, Gallup has some fresh polling that tracks attitudes on immigration going back decades and the percentage of people who think immigration is the top issue facing our country, uh, is at record highs. Um, but you're also seeing really high levels of people saying that immigrants are good for this country, they're a net positive, they're good for the economy, et Cetera. So it's, it's interesting it's Republicans who are most likely to sort of be more ambivalent on those questions. And they are finding immigration. They're the most likely to say immigration is a top issue. But at the same time you're seeing those trend lines towards sort of more of a belief that immigrants are positive for America.

Margie Omero: We also talked a little bit about the upcoming debates. Obviously there's not going to be any mobile burnout recording until next week. So what is, what kind of Poland can we use or discussing to preview the debates? And so there was a couple of polls about how interested in engaged Democratic primary voters are about two thirds according to an AP NRC polls say there of Democratic primary voters say they're not really paying attention yet. They don't really know much about where the candidate stands. Um, there was a mammoth poll that was interesting that you had over half say they were almost certain to watch it live but like a quarter I think so that they were excited about watching it so they were going to watch it, you know, with some other kind of attitude I guess and begrudgingly watch it. Um, which was interesting. And then we always wrap the show with something kind of ridiculous.

Margie Omero: Like we don't like with just a, I don't want to say garbage Paul, but like I pull that just some, you know, they're usually garbage poles. It's just some, you know, somebody's, no, not even worse, even worse than that. So like it just, somebody just haven't making it like a kind of nonsense poll that would be funny. And so when there's like an age thing, then we're particularly interested since Kristen is the expert on the youngs. And so this one was the young people you gov poll that showed 40% of young people don't use deodorant, which we thought was hilarious. And so to back to the, you talking about, I think maybe a little bit too long in hindsight to connect that back to the overall topic of this panel. I mean

there are being someone who is a member of the millennial generation myself, we take a lot of, I think rhetorical abuse out there in the public. You can find headlines that say millennials are killing Hollywood, millennials are killing cable TV theaters, millennials get a drink and Kim Makada everything. Millennials are killings, we are mass murderers. We are killing everything. And something that I find to be really a valuable lesson that I try to convey to a lot of my clients whenever I sort of give talks to people about the generation is that you should have hope,

Kristen A: um, that, that sometimes a lot of times these headlines really get oversold. But again, that millennials are all monolithic. And that, you know, wow, millennials really want, you know, snacks and a good attractive office environment. Well guess what? I think everybody likes snacks in an office. That's good track. You know what I mean? No snacks for her. She has no comfort.

Mike Allen: It's a great term for this. There's a book out. The remix about leading millennials is by Lindsay Park, an expert on millennials who in her book, thanks my sister Cathy Erickson for research and writing, but she has a great term generational shaming. So Marjorie, why do ever, why does everybody hate millennials?

Kristen A: I don't mean, I don't think they do. I mean, look, I think there's always something, you know, first it's like an easy joke for people to make. And also I think people, you know, w w are feeling like there's something new that they don't understand. And, and so when they, you know, so that, I think that's what people are responding to. But ultimately, you know, we should not think of millennials as model. I think we should not think of millennials as folks who come to work and demand to get gold stars for participation instead of another theme, right? When there are so many millennials who are working incredibly hard who you know went to college with the promise of you know, the have a better life and you know, have debt for a long time and feel that they are graduating in a job market that's not really what they expected or for us to take care of elderly parents or you know, or have children and get married.

Kristen A: All kinds of things besides sort of like the hipster meme of what a millennial looks like. That obviously exists but it's not all of them yet. There is, I remember the New York Times magazine did a cover story about what happened or an article about what happens when millennials were in the workplace. And it starts off with this anecdote about a young man who's working@acompanycalledmike.com which is a sort of millennial focused publishing platform online and it talks about this young man who tolls. It tells his boss, I had a friend who just passed away. This has really hit me hard. I need to go to the funeral. I need to take the week off. I'm so sorry. And the boss's okay, go, you know, be, be emotionally better, better and come back to work. And then a couple days later they find out that this, this employee had been lying.

Kristen A: He had just wanted to go build a tree house in his backyard and so like lying to his boss so that he could have some me time and then oversharing on social media. It was like the perfect storm of every band, millennial stereotype, aggressive play space, and this is what the New York Times magazine holds up as like when millennials run the workplace, I'm like, oh my gosh, this is, that's not the norm. Right? I think this theme is the New York Times writing some sort of like, hey click piece that we're all like, no, that were outraged by that. That is the theme that actually unites us all. It's that there's so much attention placed I think on people who work in particularly industries like media, tech and politics, where you're going to overindex for people with certain personality quirks. But the majority of people in the millennial generation are not even going to wind up getting a four year college degree. And this is something that I think a lot of people sort of forget when they think of millennial. They think of the hipster glasses riding on a hoverboard, um, demanding free time and safe spaces, uh, wanting everything organic. I'm going to into my office at 10 with my iced coffee kind of person. And that is just not actually the norm. That may be somebody who you've encountered in your workplace, but that is not the norm for the millennial generation.

Mike Allen: Right? And hope for the millennials. Uh, Lindsey Pollock's book, the remake points out that genexers were slackers and baby boomers were hippies in the me a generation. So everyone comes back. I want to pick up on Kirsten's point about immigration because that really is a tell about where our politics are going. David Brooks, the festival columnist of the Aspen Ideas Festival. A recently had a column that said the coming GOP apocalypse. And he said in there the Republicans have a problem and that is young adult hate them. And he pointed to the fact that 79% of millennials think immigration is good for America. Kirsten, you're giving advice to the White House, to the RNC. What do they do

Kristen A: also on an issue like immigration, the first thing you have to realize is that the millennial generation is the second most diverse generation of voters out there. Second only to generationZ or generationZ is only only half the generation is white, non Hispanic. So anytime you're talking about generational politics, you are inherently also talking sort of racial and ethnic politics because the younger generations are just so much more diverse. So that's piece number one. If you are sort of alienating Latino voters writ large, you are going to have a real uphill battle trying to win younger voter groups. Um, but also, I mean, one thing that's important to point out is that for younger voters, there are certain ways in which they are a bit more sort of isolationists let's focus here at home. It would be lovely to be generous to the rest of the world, but we can't, we've got to start home.

Kristen A: In a way, Donald Trump's foreign policy is kind of the closest issue where he hits where millennial attitudes are on like, let's bring the troops home and we shouldn't be off fighting all these wars. Um, but when it comes to being sort of engaged around the world, millennials are very much of the mind that the rest

of the world has good things to offer us, um, that we should be engaging productively and positively with our allies. Um, and that includes countries like Mexico. So rather than saying, let's build a wall, let's engage with them to solve problems. And so I think the kind of combative, um, you know, racial polarization that we see is just totally out of step with the ability to win over millennials and Gen Z. I mean, the other thing to remember is a columnist job is to be provocative and simple in a short, you know, in a short piece, in a short platform, um, when as upholster.

Kristen A: But my role is to really understand the bigger trends, but also the breadth and depth of people's experiences too. That even if you have something that says 65% say this, well let's look at the other folks who don't agree with that. Or let's look at the intensity of people who have that opinion or let's look at to the extent that, that this drives their voting decisions or how worried they truly are not just how they favor or pose a specific thing, whether it's immigration or anything else. And that's really how we come to understanding and what makes

Margie Omero: the internal polling. The folks don't always see different than kind of the big picture polling that sometimes folks do

Mike Allen: in that sense is being a podcaster a bit at odds with being a pollster.

Margie Omero: It does give you a different sense of what is out there because, and I don't know if folks were at that panel I spoke to last night. We're at this point I think is really important. We had a really good conversation about media coverage, what public polling outlets do and what they cover, what they include in their polling questions, reflects what newsrooms and media outlets want to cover. So you'll see tons of horse race questions, you'll see tons of stuff about electability and all kinds of like cringeworthy framing and questions. You'll see, you know, a thousand Q, you know, you'll see no job approval ratings of Steve Bannon and you know, Ivanka or whoever, whoever's in the news that day, Mitch McConnell and so on. And you won't see, I haven't seen a question on the horrible situations at the border and how we're treating children. I haven't seen a public polling question on that in the last week or two.

Margie Omero: Um, I haven't seen, you know, we haven't seen a lot of public polling on family separation or some of the or, or even on the issues affecting young people about how they feel about how the economy is going to work for them when they, as they get older. I mean some, but the internal organizational work, campaign polling, organizational work digs a lot deeper into these because you were really trying to figure out the answer. How do you talk about these issues? How do people hear them when you do talk about them and the way that, uh, you know, communicates your values when you're speaking to people here, are you the way you intend? Um, but public polling often we'll have a lot of the kinds of political back and forth that feeds the, you know, newsroom and on air back and forth that is very political in nature. And we miss a lot of that understanding

Mike Allen: Kiersten and astonishing. Turn in the story at the border today is you've seen some of the kids sent back, uh, to one of those, uh, institutions where there were the horrible conditions. What's your instinct about how that issue is going to play or could play?

Kristen A: So one thing that I think when we're, we're talking about sort of the, the younger voters and how they're looking at these issues. Um, there's a really great book, um, by Social Shauna social scientists, Jonathan Haidt called, uh, the righteous mind. And it's about the sort of moral foundations that people use to make decisions about what's right, what's wrong, um, what their political views are. And he finds that there are sort of five that they call moral tastebuds or moral foundations that, that help people make these decisions. So it's things like care, fairness, uh, authority, sanctity, um, and loyalty. And so for instance, if you, do you believe like, let's take something like, um, uh, saying the pledge of allegiance, uh, you know, kneeling for the anthem. Do you believe that by not kneeling for the anthem, you're doing something disloyal to this country? Does that make you feel angry?

Kristen A: Although to the contrary, if you, if you do nail to the flag, does that, or do you kneel instead of pledging? Does that mean that you, you know, hold a position where you don't think the black lives matter? I mean there's, there's all sorts of different ways that people, good people can have very disagreements about what is right and wrong. And what I find in a lot of my research is that for younger voters, care and fairness are two. The two sort of things that drive them the most questions of loyalty, questions of authority, questions of sanctity don't really drive them as much. They're really asking, um, who's being hurt by this? I think that's a big reason why you see young people so vehemently or so adamantly positive about things like mirror, uh, legalizing marijuana. Um, but the question is, well, who's it hurting, right?

Kristen A: Just because it's against the law, that doesn't mean that it's wrong. If it's not hurting me, if it's not hurting anyone else, we should do it. All of which is to say, I think when it comes to the issue of immigration, you find some older voters, especially ones in the Republican party who take a kind of authority view of things and they say, look, people should be following the law within the consequences of not following the law. They are what they are. But for younger voters with that care and harm sort of thing really activated for them. And that's not to say it's only young voters that see these images and hear these stories and are horrified. But I think especially for younger voters, these are, it's really the kinds of stories that are just sort of continually pushing those buttons that say this may not be a party for you. And I think is continuing to entrench the gops problem with younger voters. I think one of the big things that happened in the last election cycle in the last couple of years is the incredible movement among young people

Margie Omero: guns. I mean you had, you know, I've been studying guns for a long time. Public opinion actually was leading where politicians, were you public opinion

supported stronger gun laws for a very long time. Maybe not every single thing that's been discussed, but a lot and politicians were on democratic side too. We're overly cautious feeling that there would be a penalty for them. That the, the polling didn't really seem to suggest that there would be, certainly not to the degree that people felt nervous about it on both sides. Um, then you had younger people really after Parkland really change the political dynamic and force leaders to take notice to younger people in a way that they had it before. They hadn't necessarily listened to younger people and they headed to listen to where the public was on guns. And until now you see a real change where you see, you see in a democratic primaries, you see it on, you know, you see, you see Republicans know, struggling to figure out how to talk about guns. You see them less using it less as a negative, uh, on Democratic candidates. So it, it has changed dramatically. Even though the underlying structure, which is people want to see guns at a dangerous hands had been true for a long time.

Mike Allen: A fascinating real world manifestation of the gun issue and I know a lot of you have kids in school. I was asking some of my younger colleagues at Axios what they would like to hear from Kirsten and Margie and one of my colleagues on the news desk route, a meany email that said that something was very much on the mind of young people was active shooters in schools. She says, I think the psychological effects of African shooter trainings are significant new phenomenon for young people. She says, my sister middle school had a sweep over and they were talking about the strategic advantage of jumping out a window or hiding in a closet. She says it's horrifying to here, but indicative of just how normalized school shootings have become. What is, what could that do to change middle scores? We'll probably have a new name for their generation by the time they come on. Do they have a name by the way?

Margie Omero: I don't think so. No, I don't think so. So by the time they do that along, that can be one of your ideas.

Kristen A: Sure. So, so things that happen when you're very young have a very profound effect on your political attitudes over the course of your life. Um, the folks at the upshot, uh, which was the New York Times sort of data journalism blog, uh, did a project with, um, a data firm called catalyst where they did 200,000 interviews with people and looked at their political attitudes over the course of their lifetimes and found that as I mentioned, people don't necessarily all start off as Democrats and become Republicans. And in fact the political events that happen when you are between the ages of, I think it was 14 a and 20, I have four times an effect on your lifetime political attitudes as something that happens to you when you're 40. So starting at age 14, I mean, that's when you really begin to try figuring out what your worldview is. So take the millennial generation, for instance, you know, many of us, the events that shaped our worldview were for the older millennials, nine 11, uh, the, the Iraq war and the financial crisis.

Kristen A: And so you can see how that's led to my generation being more kind of skeptical of authority. I'm more sort of fiscally conservative, personally not, I don't mean in terms of government finances. I mean in terms of not wanting to make, you know, they, they want to keep their [inaudible], their savings in cash when they can save. I'm afraid to put it in risky investments, worried about they want to buy houses but are worried because they remember what that was like to see that happen. So things that happen that are, that are traumatic during your young adulthood really shaped your worldview long term. And something that really breaks my heart for Gen z and younger is the data about the anxiety levels that for younger people nowadays, even though by many, many, many metrics, it is a better time to be alive today than it was 50 years ago. Um, you nonetheless see young people feeling a significant degree of anxiety and it expressing itself and horrifying trends and things like higher suicide rates, especially for young girls. And, and it's, it's really having negative effects and, and I think there are a lot of things that are causing this younger generation to feel this anxiety, but it's, there's no doubt in my mind that it's going to have political consequences down the road.

Margie Omero: I think it also, and I say this as both someone who's studied and talked to parents, but as a mom myself and listening to other parents, right, where you know, you, you grow up not having the experience of had of active shooter drills, but your kids do. And you get notices from schools saying, just FYI, today we had an active shooter drill and just, you know, wanting to make sure everybody knows. And you know, some kids feel that pressure or some kids don't, but they will have it for years. Meanwhile, for us, and probably, you know, other in this room, just remember seeing black and white videos of people hiding under their desk during, you know, air raid drills from years ago. It seems like an ancient memory to me. And now my own children have to have their own active shooter, Joel. So I miss that kind of thing entirely and, but it's something that my children have to face.

Margie Omero: And I think one of the repercussions of this as it's also led to a increased political engagement among moms, um, like Shannon Watts who has a new book out and she's from Colorado who started, um, a part of every town she moms demand action, who's really mobilized a lot of moms around the country. And in other ways where you see moms feeling like they have to take political action for their children to help their kids in a way that they don't, you know, they feel shut out of the process. The political dialog is not talking to them or about them, but they have issues that affect them and their families too.

Mike Allen: Kiersten, I was fascinated by your point about anxiety. There's been reporting in the Atlantic and elsewhere linking that anxiety to our screens. How much of a factor do you mean?

Kristen A: Oh, it's huge. Um, so think about what it was like to be in high school. Uh, whenever you were there for. So I was in, in high school in the late nineties, early two thousands and it was a great time, but it's also was a tough time,

right? You're figuring out who you are, you're trying to understand what your identity is and there were all of these pressures on you and nowadays if you are someone in high school or Middle School, how popular you are is quantifiable by how many people like your posts on social media that if you are someone who is facing some kind of social turmoil at school, you could come home and that could still kind of be a safe haven. Now. It follows you everywhere, including on the screens. The pressure to be sort of perfect in all ways I think is especially as I mentioned for young girls, really, really causing significant harm to many of them in a way that is deeply troubling.

Kristen A: Um, so look there, there are good things that have come from social media. I am not saying we should all throw the phones away and go back to a time before the iPhone. I think we have, there has been enormous potential unlocked in our society by these technological advances. But we also have to recognize that there is, there is bad that has come with the good and for young people. Uh, they are I think as a rose in large part as a result of social media sort of facing things that other generations never had. Two pressures that other generations did not have to. Um, and I think one other thing that is interesting and I don't know to what extent this is caused by screens or if this is just simply the rising political engagement among young people. I mean, as I mentioned when, when I first started studying young voters, it was right after Obama was elected and I was very excited that so many of my peers were getting politically engaged.

Kristen A: Though as a Republican, I was dismayed that so many of them thought that I was crazy for being a republican. But I was glad to see more young people getting involved in politics cause it hasn't always been the case. So it's a good thing. Now if young people can access more political news, be more engaged, find others who support them on issues, but there are also ways that that can turn bad. Um, there was a story, I believe it was in Esquire a couple of weeks ago. They did a profile of a young man named Ryan who was a high schooler in Wisconsin and talked about what it was like, just sort of go through the day with him in high school. And of course you've got the pressures of social media, you've got all, you know, all of those sorts of things. Uh, but you also then had him describing how the clicks within his high school were being divided up based on like, there was the click of the Bernie Bros and there were like the Trump guys with their hats and their trucks and their guns and like, can you imagine taking the already kind of, uh, divided clickish world of high school and then adding into it are sort of hyper polarized political environment that sounds like a recipe for disaster.

Kristen A: Um, it sounds like a recipe for, for real, real problems, I think. And, and I, so I believe that as we see these, today's high schoolers age up, we're gonna get to see what makes them different than the millennials. And I think it's going to be that they have come of age in a world where social media was the norm for them during high school. And this level of polarization was something that had sort of filtered all the way down to,

Margie Omero: yeah, well everybody, you know, is sick of talking to their friends and family about politics on social media. I mean that's not, that's a trend that, you know, transcends all kinds of groups. People have unfriended their family members on Facebook. They don't like talking about it. They, you know, they feel that it is a place, you know, between feeling anxious about their young, their kids being on phones and also feeling like when they interact with others on social media, it's fraught with political tension people. I think it has a real implication to how people feel about social media and the tech industry more broadly.

Mike Allen: So in two minutes we're going to bring you into the conversation. Uh, please just signal there's a couple of microphones around her. And by the way, please be sure to thank the people who volunteer and help with Aspen ideas, festival many of them from this beautiful a community. So, uh, just a signal urgently and someone will bring you a microphone. In the meantime, we've talked about immigration, we've talked about the border. Uh, we've talked about the guns. Another issue we'll hear a lot about in tomorrow's debate, uh, I expect is climate. And there's some very fascinating polling of college students. You may be familiar with the work of cyber specialist, who's the founder and CEO of college reaction. They just did a poll with 1,052 current students. So it's a good a poll. Did it for WB, are you, uh, the Brown, um, radio station and among those, uh, college students, most important issue to vote climate change, 31 economy 16. So a massive drop off. What's gonna be the manifestation of climate in 2020?

Margie Omero: Uh, it's, it's essential to, I made it's gonna be huge in the Democratic Party. I mean, you see, you know, Jay Inslee having some success in his campaign, you know, to the extent anyone can relate, show success with this field. He's had some success talking about climate change. Um, there was a poll that we talked about today, um, Sierra Club did with morning consoles and it was, you know, it's kind of funny, the response to it said, I mean, in hindsight, maybe the question should have had a different kind of scale that said, how important is the candidate's view on climate change? And thinking about how you're gonna vote in the primary. This is among Democratic primary voters, not even just among young people. And 100% said very important. I don't think I've ever seen a poll released that wasn't a demographic screening questions. Is The sky blue and white?

Margie Omero: Very important. And so, I mean that's just, you know, if you know, there are other ways to ask that question, but it's a sign of how important climate change is. And again, I think similar to guns but not, you know, identical identically parallel where I think you have a lot of younger people saying like, you know, hey folks who are in charge ahead of us, what are you doing about this problem? This is a problem that seems to affect us a little bit more disproportionately and so can you please do something about it. And so I think that that's, you know, I think that's part of what we're seeing in addition to, you know, some of the, you know, habits that form at a young age. And before you get to kind of the Co, you know, you get into a habit of, of not having it sort of

an environmental action, but you have a lot of environmental actions that you're supposed to when you're young, it's kind of a thing, you know, I think there are more ways to kind of incorporate that into young people's daily life. So you add that all together, plus the progressive nature of younger people. And it's not a surprise that younger people find this most important issue.

Kristen A: I do think that for Republicans, there is an opportunity on this issue, uh, in that when you talk to a lot of young voters about what they feel about it, they'll you, if you first ask them, is the climate changing? Overwhelmingly they say yes. Is mankind playing a role or driving that change? Overwhelmingly they say, yes. Should we do something about it? Yes. Can we do something about it and what can we do? And all of a sudden it gets to be a lot more of a gray area. Well, what would work well, what do you think about a carbon tax? Well, we don't know, well what do you think about this policy? What would you be willing to give up your car? You know? And, and all of a sudden the, how do we actually get there becomes a little bit less appealing and there's more of a question mark and there's less a sense that either party has captured the best answer to that.

Kristen A: So I think for Republicans, the fact that for younger voters, when you ask them, you know, do you think that the way you communicate with people has changed a lot over the course of your lifetime? They say yes. Do you think the way that you procure goods and services for yourself has changed a lot over the course of your lifetime? Yes. The technological change has been rapid and enormous and disruptive in so many areas of life. And then you say, has the way you get electricity changed that much in your lifetime, has the way you get from point a to point B changed that much in your lifetime? And they'll kind of go, oh, well, I guess not really that there's a sense that maybe there's not as much innovation happening in that space that they're aware of or could we accelerate that more? And I think there are things that Republicans could do that are completely in line with conservative values and republican views on the role of government to make it easier for a limited carbon forms of energy to be able to really get a foothold in the market and to take off.

Kristen A: And so instead of saying, hey, you'd have to give up your car, Republicans can have a message that says we want to leverage the forces that we believe in to innovate our way to lower carbon emissions.

Margie Omero: Yeah, I wish, I wish Republicans would take that opportunity, but some folks are saying, you know, I mean I w because that may be where voters are. Um, and there may be were, you know, a number of Republican voters are certainly younger, Republican voters are more likely to, to have those kinds of views. But you hear from a lot of republican elected officials, this is the greatest hoax. This is a hoax. This is not happening. You know, this is not real. And then it makes it much harder to have these kinds of conversations. I'm like, well, this, you know, this guy said it's not real, so why should I, you know, think about all these other kinds of things. And so, you know, so that to me, it puts us at a real impasse. And when you look at a lot of polling on a variety of issues, you routinely see

that the biggest partisan divide is on climate change. And in part, I'm afraid to say is because the Republican leaders have, you know, have made it so, I mean, that Republican voters didn't, you know, wake up and say, I'm mad about the idea of climate change. I'll propublican leaders have it, you know, have wide into that gap. It didn't exist when I started doing polling, when I was first start pulling, there wasn't a big party difference on climate change at all.

Kristen A: Uh, we're going to go right here in five seconds, but Kirsten has a rule that you picked up about question. Oh. Oh, so you're gonna make me the bad guy. I've got to give it the rule. Okay. So the Harvard Institute of Politics, JFK junior forum, they bring speakers in to talk to students there all the time. And it's a policy that all speakers that come to the forum have to get asked questions. But the rule is a question, a meaning singular and question meaning ending in a question mark. So we were discussing backstage and we think those are good rules for today, but you made me the bad guy cause I,

Margie Omero: I was here as, I didn't know about the, what's the rule of nobody? You guys talked about a rule. Can you tell me what it was? Orange microphone.

Audience Member: I was wondering if you could comment on young people's perceptions of religious affiliation with the Republican Party. Um, and particularly I'm thinking on the issue of abortion.

Kristen A: Sure. So the, I'll, I'll answer the latter part of the question first, which is that on the issue of abortion, I think the, both the generation divides and gender divides are sometimes portrayed as being much bigger than they actually are in the data. Um, you know, it's certainly the case that when it comes to younger voters, things like birth control are relatively uncontroversial. I mean there are lots of things and sort of the reproductive health arena where younger voters are very much of the mind, why are we even debating this? Why is this political? Um, but there is a significant portion of the, of younger voters and this, whether this is because of sonogram technology or what have you, that actually do consider themselves pro-life, not necessarily of the sort of Alabama, no exceptions, variety, but of the look, we need to find a good balance between all of the rights involved here.

Kristen A: So there's less of I think a generation gap on the issue of abortion. There is a big difference in the way young people think about religion. Um, and it's really fascinating. I mean there's tons of data that younger people are just as likely as their elders to say they pray daily to say they consider themselves spiritual or people of faith, but they are dramatically less likely to identify formally with a religious affiliation. And you're also seeing declines and religious affiliation among older voters, but for younger voters, that's kind of just the default is saying, look, I, I pray daily. I maybe I believe in a higher power, but I'm not going to church. I'm not sitting in the Pew, I'm not calling myself by a certain label. Um, and I think you actually see that aversion to labels manifest itself in a lot of ways with young people.

Kristen A: The idea that like I have, I may believe a couple of things, but I don't want to sign on with your whole ideology, your entire religion, your entire political party. You see a lot of young people saying, I want to be independent because I agree with you. Three things here and five things there. So I think when it comes to religion, you know, to the extent that Republicans are branded as the party of more religious people, I mean that will obviously be another sort of divide with a younger voters. But I don't think necessarily being a party that welcomes people of faith is bad for Republicans or Democrats. Um, it's just sort of recognizing that traditional labels and the way people think about religion is different for younger.

Audience Member: We had a number of questions in the sip code right there. Yes. My question is about climate change. Um, the question is why is it unclear? I ran into John Kerry who was speaking at tattered cover in Denver and this was immediately after Trump had left the, you know, climate accord and he was talking very, very clearly about what had been done during the Obama administration and what he personally had done and what could be done within 50 years in terms of addressing climate change. It wasn't vague at all. So why is it confused?

Margie Omero: Oh, I mean confusing for who? Confusing among voters who made, I mean, my sense is, and you hear whether it's the president or whether it's, you know, vocal folks on the right, um, who like to portray, I mean, you've heard this before, that, you know, conservation is sort of seen as kind of a, is, is mocked as its own sort of religion or lifestyle as opposed to a something that's good. And you know, that has a purpose in and of itself. You also see a key folks in the Trump administration with ties to extraction industry, right? And that's part of this too. It's not simply believe it or don't believe it. There's also, you know, the conflict of interest involved with a lot of folks on the right who are part, I'm part of the debate. Um, and, and so, you know, and you hear anecdotally and you hear in a lot of different, um, states where you have folks who, you know, how do you talk about the resources and jobs in a particular state that is, you know, transitioning from one type of economy to another, or may have other economics, whether it's coal or whether it's, you know, clean energy or natural gas or solar.

Margie Omero: I mean, you see these conflicts in a variety of different states and they become political when they don't have be. I think people take their cues from their leaders. And so there are lots of things. Climate change is one of them, but sometimes views toward the FBI or views toward Vladimir Putin can become partisan. All of a sudden, if you see, you know, our leaders, you know, try to create new wedges.

Mike Allen: We have a high hand in the very back, uh, excuse me. Uh, uh, the, the microphone is right here. So maybe a to the lady in Green. Yeah, right there.

Audience Member: Thank you. Lucky me. Um, so there's been, uh, an alarming rise in the favorability of socialism among younger voters. And I wonder, do they have the same definition of socialism as older people do?

Kristen A: They do not. Okay. I will happily take this question. Can I just, okay. Sorry for the second,

Margie Omero: second question mark. And because socialism devastated, so I didn't socially devastates the very people that purports to help. So why is it that a, um, your definition of caring, why isn't that an argument against socialism for younger voters?

Kristen A: So when it comes to the definition of socialism, um, the Gallup has actually asked this question. They asked it in 1949 and then they asked it again, I believe last year, which was when you hear the word socialism, what do you think it means? And back in 1949, almost half of people gave an answer that was something like the government owns the means of production. The government runs the economy, something to that effect. Um, and very few said it means, uh, you know, we're all friends or something like that. Nowadays, a significant portion think that it means we are social with one another. Um, or I'm serious, or that social issues or social issues, social issues or, or does it, doesn't it mean that we just have equality, um, that they don't think of it as it means that the government plays sort of the primary role in, in driving the economy and making decisions.

Kristen A: So the definition has changed. And I think for a lot of young people, they also view socialism on a spectrum, right? That it's not a, you are or you aren't. It's that, well, I don't want North Korea and Venezuela, but Ma is, is Denmark socialism and I, I think that there's actually this tendency both on, I think people who are proponents of socialism as well as on the far right to define socialism down, to take it away from this, it means the government playing sort of a dominant role in, in the economy to say, you know, advocates of socialism will say, well, if you like public schools and roads, you like socialism and Republicans, I think make a mistake. When they point at Democrats and everything Democrats do, they go, oh, that's socialism. It defines the term down and suddenly it becomes kind of meaningless. And suddenly if we're fighting over, do we like socialism or not?

Kristen A: If people have an agreed on a definition, what is the debate all about? So what I find is that young people actually quite, they actually are okay with capitalism. They actually think capitalism could be fair. Um, but that in its practice today, they're not crazy for going. What is that CEO making 5,000 times as much as I'm making when I'm working 50 hours a week. And two jobs doesn't feel to me if that's what the market is delivering. Something seems wrong about that. And it doesn't mean they want the government to seize the means of production, but they'd like to see capitalism delivering on the idea that if you work hard and play by the rules, you can get ahead. And they're not wrong for thinking that

there are ways in which that is not the case these days that could use some remedies.

Margie Omero: I mean, there, I think it was, um, was it knocked up or Seth Rogan said, I don't know what gluten is. I just think it's everything that's bad. And so I think somehow like socialism is like become like that, you know, when people don't really have a common understanding, so their fight, you know, there, but Republicans are trying to define the left on it. That doesn't mean that voters are gonna all of a sudden say, well, I don't want equal pay and I don't want, you know, childcare, I don't want, you know, or a college affordable college. Like just cause you're calling and socialism doesn't mean I now hate all those things.

Audience Member: Bright Orange microphone and then we'll grab our friend in the back next. Um, okay. So as someone who's definitely classified as the Gen z pretty young, um, what do you think, you talked about what's shaping our views from 14 to 20. Um, so what do you think is gonna end up shaping our views? Will it be like what effect will the Trump era have? What effect will school shootings have and how will that really affect elections like 20 years down the line when we start to adult? So I think the, and I like the use of adult as a verb. [inaudible]

Kristen A: um, I think the, so I want to go back to that, that Esquire piece I mentioned before about that kind of the political polarization within a high school where normally, you know, you would think it's like the jocks and the cheerleaders versus the debate kids and now it's like the Bernie kids versus the Trump kids. Um, something that I think characterizes millennials is that we were, you know, coming up in the Obama era, it was more of the let's all find a way to work together. Let's compromise, let's try to be pragmatic. Let's be kind of center left. Like that really defined us. Um, I think for Gen z there is the likelihood that there will be much more like combative. Like th there is no compromise. You're either with us or you're against us. And the people on the other side are bad people who need to be stopped.

Kristen A: And so I think the gen Z is, is potentially going to lead to sort of greater polarization because they, they feel very passionately about things from a very young age and feel that the stakes are very high. Um, and so I think coming of age in the Trump era with all of the polarization and the tension and the division that comes there, um, I think there's the potential that Gen z could, could turn away from it and say, we don't want any of this. But the, the little bits and pieces of evidence that we have so far, I don't think suggest that will be the case. I think suggests that Gen z will, will bring this kind of combative style of politics along with them as they age. And I hope it's not, you know, feeling kind of, you know, alienated in rejecting politics and government and public life after seeing, you know, a corrupt administration and saying, well, who wants to be part of that or very,

Mike Allen: I,

Audience Member: I'm going to build on what the last person talked about and it's a little bit more on Gen Z. Um, it's interesting to me because everyone will talk about the younger voter and they'd sort of grouped them all together. I mean the younger vote, the younger vote. Yet millennials and Gen z are so radically different in different parents who raise them. Definitely events and conditions yet was like the younger voter. And on top of that, what really concerns me as at least millennials saw a time where people reach across the aisle post nine 11, the young woman who just started stood up, I don't even know her by guarantee you she's never seen a time where Republicans and Democrats have even tried to work together. She's only seen political polarization. And the one in the middle just said, well hopefully they'll be into politics. And I'm saying, why would they, they've only seen it, they've got no reason. And yet including the people up there aren't even saying, let's go get them. Like, Whoa, Whoa, wait and see. That's a small group. And what bothers me is you don't hear one candidate acknowledging that we have a generation that's about to vote for the very first time. We have a chance to kind of get them involved in, they're showing signs of civic engagement, but political engagement, I feel like Evans is sitting back and ignoring. To me a generation that's got way more potential than even the millennials.

Kristen A: I have good news for you, which is that if you took a look at voter turnout, so actually the last midterms was the first time that Gen z years could participate and for gen x and for the millennials, the very first time people from their generation participated in midterms, less than a quarter actually did up. The numbers were abysmal. For Gen Z, it's 30% so it's not great. That's not Goldstar numbers, but it's better. It's an increased certainly over the past two generations where they started off. So there's possible that their baseline will simply be higher. That for them, again, I mean if you've got high schools where, where people are picking their friends based on political ideology, politics is present in their lives. It is a part of, of their identities in a way that other generations, it may not have been as much at that age. So I actually think that you are very likely to see them, them engaged a lot.

Kristen A: I think for us as pollsters, the big question is where will they land on certain issues and because some of them are not even of the age of 18 yet, we still don't have enough data to analyze with a lot of clarity where they will stand. Um, but I think if you're looking for them to get engaged, I believe the preliminary signs we've seen suggest they are going to be a force to be reckoned with. And I know, you know, I don't think I sounded a flip. I certainly didn't mean to sound flip about like, oh I hope they're in the politics. I feel like ashamed that younger people are coming of age and seeing like a corrupt joke of an administration. That's how I feel that I'm, you know, if I didn't elaborate on it's, cause we only have a few minutes left. There's a handrail right

Audience Member: here for the orange microphone. It's right behind you sneaking up on you. Um, do you have any polling information for young people and how age and

experience factors into their potential vote? For example, Buddha church versus Biden in Sanders?

Margie Omero: My favorite question is allowed to take this course. I can talk about this question. So I mean there's been a lot of, you know, there's been a lot of public polling about the kinds of candidates that people are looking for and I haven't seen a lot that suggest to me that younger people are appreciably different than older folks. Maybe there has been some, I haven't seen it either. There's been a little bit of breaking out looking at gender and how folks view, um, uh, you know, they're interested in a woman candidate. How women feel differently than men. I have a problem with a lot of that public polling and it's, it's hard to ask people about their preferences. Their preferences cannot be sort of teased apart into demographic characteristics when you also have a sense of who they're asking you about. And some of the questions ask you to think about what the broader electorate looks like.

Margie Omero: They'll say, okay, which would you, you know, who do you think is the most electable? So then are you asking people about what they think about or the rest of America's biases, which you know then, and that drives news coverage about who's elected bald. I don't know if that's really the right way for that conversation to go. Um, there are other questions that ask what would you prefer? Somebody who agrees with you on the issues or someone who can beat Donald Trump. First of all, who would want to pick somebody who can't be Donald Trump and to wa as a Democratic primary voter? Why would you be, you know, why would say I want that person who can't win in two? You're also implying by the question that you know that your choice, you clearly, that's what your choices, that clearly your preference can't possibly win. So would you prefer that choice or would you prefer the person won and the, you know, the desire among Democrats would beat Donald Trump is so strong that we've split sample this in, in a question in a, and this was just among women, but presumably we would see the same thing among Democratic primary voters overall would you prefer, and we split sample and a candidate who could beat Donald Trump was stronger than a candidate who could win in November.

Margie Omero: Right? That's how strong the beating Donald Trump pieces is that like that. Even just winning in November, I was like, oh, that also sounds good. We just want someone that can be bounced. Donald Trump. Um, so these questions are really fraught. I mean, there was another one, like should democrats focus on independence or on the base? And I think we're asking voters in these public questions to be political consultants and to think about the broader electorate. When remember I said in the beginning, two thirds say that they haven't really, they're not really following it very closely. So, so I don't know if younger people are going to have a different calculation. They're going to be attracted to Buddha judge or they're going to be attracted to Beto. Bernie Sanders did very well, but younger people in 2016 he, you know, they, they responded to his issue policy and his authenticity and you know, they thought he was, you know, something kind of new they hadn't seen before. So I don't think it's a

requirement that the candidate look exactly like that group more junior, one of the world's living experts on Walmart moms. Who did they vote for in 2016 and who will they vote for in 2020?

Margie Omero: I don't know who they'll vote for in 2020 but they were split. They voted a little bit. They voted for Clinton in 2016 but they've been divided overall. I mean, they've been a little bit more left than a then women as a group. Um, but they've been a swing voter over time. And what was interesting about that project was this was, you know, done over the course of several years, bipartisan, is that we live streamed focused groups where, this was before everybody was talking about women voters. They should have been talking about women voters all this time. But this was before everyone was talking about women voters. And so we would live stream focus groups of moms talking about the issues that concern them and they would be in stories where, you know, moms did not appear in a lot of political stories before. So that was new. And I think what was interesting about that is you could hear the beginning of this like I, you know, candidates talk like children. You know, I wouldn't tolerate this from my third grader. You'd hear that before 16. You definitely heard it in 16.

Mike Allen: We're about to get the hook. So real quick tomorrow night as we curl up with NBCU or MSNBC or Telemundo, uh, to watch the first of two back to back debate, an insider's guide to look what to look for. One of you tweeted, I think it was a Kiersten, I wonder if Warren's team is excited that she's clearly top of the heap in her group or bummed the cheese in the West stars that night cause all the other front runners are on Thursday night. What is the answer to that? Is she better off or disadvantaged?

Kristen A: So I think in thinking about it, I think it's good for her and I think part of it is because, um, I think she is actually had, and again this is if you are looking at 2020 primary polls, which you probably shouldn't be doing in a serious way at this point cause it's very early. But she's had I think a pretty good couple of weeks as people have said, hey, you know, while we were all over here focused on like Beto live streaming has dentist appointment, she was putting out plans for things and as a Republican, I don't agree with those plans but I'm glad that they're there. I'm glad it's substance that can be, can be debated with. Um, so you know, if, if her being sort of the one of the loan people out of that top tier, so if people to be on the stage, if that gives her more oxygen to sort of air those things without, with less of kind of the circus that may unfold the night, the next night, I think that could be favorable. Um,

Margie Omero: I'm working with a candidate who will not appear on the debate stage and he will be doing live town halls. It televised town halls in New Hampshire and in Iowa and he's Steve Bullock. Yes. So that's an alternative to being on the debate stage, but we don't know what's going to happen with the debates. 50% over say 50% say they going to watch it live. Maybe not enthusiastically. They say we'll see. But you know, we're going to find out how many people watch him.

Audience Member: What is the likelihood that people gang up on vice president Biden or are they afraid to do that? Like there's a real split, right?

Kristen A: Who's afraid to do that? Is Anybody of, I'm leaving this [inaudible] there,

Margie Omero: there, there. I mean lots of candidates are trying to find some contrast. I don't know if they're going to gang up on him. I think they want to, you know they only have a few minutes to their voice heard and it's going to depend on what kind of question they get and you know they're going to want to, you know, is it good, will a candidate want their five minutes to be a zinger against Joe Biden? Maybe, maybe not. Maybe they want their five minutes to be something about what they're, what they're for.

Kristen A: Yeah. What I was interpreting your question as is, remember with the Republicans back in in August of 2015 that first Fox News debate, you had Trump at the center of the stage, Trump and a commanding position in the polls and a lot of Republicans figuring, well do I go after him or is this just a weird thing that's going to go away? And so I don't want to waste my time going after him because this is going to stop going away. But I don't, I don't think it's viewed as like this, oh, Biden's this temporary thing we can just avoid.

Margie Omero: Oh, we'd like to think, uh, David and his colleagues at Comcast universal. NBC for mucking. Thank you. Thank the Aspen ideas, festival person, silver Sanderson and Margie Omera. Thank you. That was so fun.