

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: September 8, 2015
RE: Research Findings from Battleground-State Millennials on Climate

Overview

Throughout March and April of 2015, Hart Research Associates conducted extensive qualitative and quantitative research among millennial American adults in key 2016 presidential battleground states, including eight in-person focus groups across four swing states and an online survey among 1,501 respondents. We also conducted research among Millennials who are already active on or enthusiastic about climate and clean energy issues, including four online focus groups and an online survey among 403 of these “activist” Millennials.¹ From June 17 to 23, 2015, Hart Research conducted a telephone survey of 2,002 likely voters (including 376 Millennials) in eight key swing states for the 2016 presidential election.²

In conversations with these young people, and through insights gleaned from our survey data, it has become evident that enthusiasm about the presidential election is lacking at this early stage, as young people are discouraged by the political process and anxious about the future of the country more generally. Their top concerns are jobs, the economy, and the cost of college tuition. However, it is also clear that today’s Millennials accept the established science around climate change and see it as a serious problem and a threat. What is more, they are looking for a presidential candidate with a forward-looking vision to solving our country’s toughest economic problems—presenting clear potential for a candidate who has a bold plan around expanding clean, renewable energy to heighten their enthusiasm and capture their vote.

¹ On behalf of NextGen Climate, Hart Research conducted eight in-person focus groups among eligible voters age 18 to 29 across four battleground states: New Hampshire, Florida, Colorado, and Iowa. In the quantitative phase, Hart Research surveyed 1,501 Millennials (age 18 to 35) from 10 battleground states: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Hart Research conducted an additional four online focus groups and an online survey among Millennials with a demonstrated interest in climate and the environment.

² The eight key swing states for the 2016 presidential election: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

The Benefits of Clean Energy

Our research indicates that large majorities of swing-state Millennials accept the science of climate change and recognize that it is a threat, with 78% saying it is a serious problem, including 92% of Democrats, 80% of independents, and a 59% majority of Republicans. Three-fifths (60%) of these young adults recognize that human activity is a major cause of the problem.

Millennials are looking for a bold solution to climate change and are solidly behind plans to expand clean energy in the United States. The overwhelming majority (73%) is favorable to setting a goal to power America with at least 50% clean energy by the year 2030 (including 52% who are very favorable). Furthermore, they see direct economic benefits to setting this goal. Sixty eight percent (68%) of Millennials believe that setting this clean energy goal would have a positive effect on America's economy overall (only 10% think it would have a negative effect) and 68% say the same about jobs.

Creating jobs for the next century is a top priority for Millennials and offers a potential connection to expanding clean energy jobs. When presented with a list of various priorities a candidate for president might express, *wants to make America a leader in creating jobs for the next century* emerges as most important to these Millennials, with 82% saying this is very important to them personally (ratings of seven to 10 on a zero-to-10 scale). Millennials are also strongly supportive of proposals with an explicit connection to clean energy jobs. We found that *expanding clean, renewable energy technology and creating more clean-energy jobs* is an effective way to connect the problem of climate change with the more idealistic, optimistic goal of spurring the economy and creating good-paying jobs for the next generation of Americans. Expanding clean energy is seen as a multi-faceted solution: it will create jobs, grow our economy, and reduce our dependence on foreign oil, while still addressing the problem of climate change. Participants throughout our focus groups also were able to envision a wide array of what "clean energy jobs" might look like—from manual labor, to engineering and design, to sales and marketing—indicating a belief that these jobs will benefit Americans across socioeconomic lines and be a driver of middle-class opportunity.

In fact, of several climate-related messages we tested, the idea that *combating climate change will create the jobs of the future, spur innovation and investments in clean energy, and put young people to work in good-paying jobs* tested among the top-tier, with two-thirds (66%) of Millennials in battleground states saying this was a strong reason (ratings of seven to 10 on a zero-to-10 scale) why climate should be an important issue in the upcoming presidential election. This includes large majorities of Democrats (79%) and independents (61%), as well as more than half (52%) of Republicans—the only climate message to surpass the 50%

threshold among the latter group. Even battleground Millennials who express only muted enthusiasm about the 2016 election respond very positively to this message: 59% of the least enthusiastic group say it is very important to them, as do 63% of those who are only fairly likely to vote next year—the top-testing climate message for both of these groups.

Among 2016 likely voters polled in June, there is no downside for Hillary Clinton in committing to a clear and ambitious clean energy goal, and there is a considerable potential upside for her. There is a pool of voters representing 12% of the total swing states' electorate who do not support Clinton in a trial heat against Jeb Bush, but who later say they would be more likely to vote for her if she committed to a clean energy goal. There is a different pool of voters representing another 14% of the total swing states' electorate who support Clinton weakly, but who later say they would be much more likely to vote for her if she committed to a clean energy goal. Millennial voters are more likely than average to be included in both of these groups of voters, and Clinton's commitment to a clean energy goal could help both in growing her total support and in energizing her current support among millennials.

Climate Change Denial is a Turn-Off for Millennials

It is clear from our research not only that Millennials accept the science of climate change, but that a candidate who does *not* is at a disadvantage. We heard throughout our conversations with swing-state Millennials that climate denial is associated with stubborn or backward-looking thinking. And in our survey, 70% of Millennials say they would have major concerns (45% very major concerns) about a Republican candidate who *disagrees with NASA, the US Military, and 97% of climate scientists that human activity is responsible for climate change*, including 69% of independents and half (50%) of self-identified Republicans.

The Koch brothers, specifically, are viewed by Millennials in a very unfavorable light, especially when attached to a short identifier explaining who they are. At the outset, Millennials view the Koch brothers negatively by 19 points (8% positive, 27% negative), and a 55% majority know who they are. And after reading a description of a hypothetical candidate who is *backed by the Koch brothers, the big oil billionaires who have a long record of environmental violations, who, along with their network of wealthy conservatives, have pledged to spend almost a billion dollars on the presidential election*, 72% of Millennials (including 74% of independents) say they would have major concerns about supporting that candidate, with 47% saying they would have very major concerns. What is more, 74% of Millennials would have major concerns about a candidate who has *close ties to the oil industry and supports tax breaks for oil companies*, including more than

half (52%) of Republicans—reflecting the broader distaste Millennials have for the industry.

Climate Activists are Ready to Serve as “Boots on the Ground”

Expanding clean energy is extremely popular among Millennials who are already active on energy and environmental issues, and they can thus be used to serve as “boots on the ground” to stoke engagement among their age group. Among Millennials who demonstrated an interest in energy and the environment via their Facebook activity, a whopping 84% say that expanding renewables and creating clean-energy jobs is an extremely important priority for them (ratings of nine to 10 on a zero-to-10 scale)—by far the top-testing issue among this group—along with 71% of those respondents who have already interacted with NextGen Climate by pledging to become “climate action voters.” And when presented with a list of various issue positions a candidate might take and asked which two or three would be most important when casting their ballot, both groups of “activists” are most likely to choose expanding renewable energy—edging out not only unrelated issues such as student debt and equal pay, but also reducing carbon pollution, having a strong environmental record, and making corporate polluters pay.