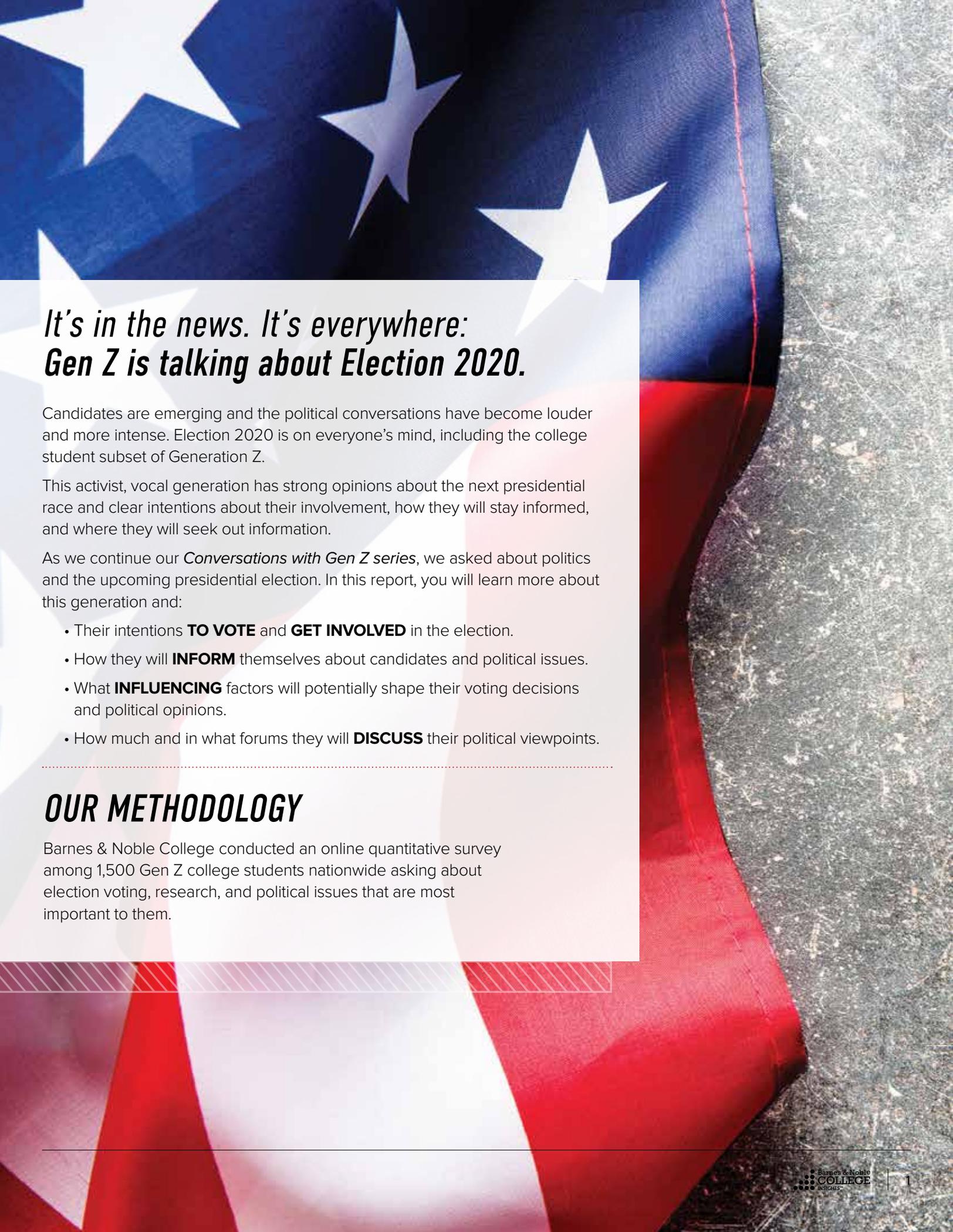




# CONVERSATIONS WITH GEN Z: THE 2020 ELECTION

 Barnes & Noble  
**COLLEGE**  
INSIGHTS™

The background of the entire page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes in shades of blue, white, and red. The flag is draped over a dark, textured surface, possibly asphalt.

## *It's in the news. It's everywhere: Gen Z is talking about Election 2020.*

Candidates are emerging and the political conversations have become louder and more intense. Election 2020 is on everyone's mind, including the college student subset of Generation Z.

This activist, vocal generation has strong opinions about the next presidential race and clear intentions about their involvement, how they will stay informed, and where they will seek out information.

As we continue our *Conversations with Gen Z series*, we asked about politics and the upcoming presidential election. In this report, you will learn more about this generation and:

- Their intentions **TO VOTE** and **GET INVOLVED** in the election.
- How they will **INFORM** themselves about candidates and political issues.
- What **INFLUENCING** factors will potentially shape their voting decisions and political opinions.
- How much and in what forums they will **DISCUSS** their political viewpoints.

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## ***OUR METHODOLOGY***

Barnes & Noble College conducted an online quantitative survey among 1,500 Gen Z college students nationwide asking about election voting, research, and political issues that are most important to them.

# WHY THIS STUDY IS IMPORTANT

Gen Z has come of age – voting age, that is. The oldest members of this group will be 24 in November 2020, making many of them eligible to vote in the presidential election for the first time. In fact, this group is projected to account for one-in-ten eligible voters. Added to their intentions - 95% of college students who are registered voters intend to vote in 2020 - it yields striking implications for Election 2020.

*Generation Z is positioned to be a truly defining force in the upcoming election. This generation views the presidential election as a tremendous opportunity to fulfill the role they've taken on as societal change agents. They want to make their voices heard by casting their ballots on election day.*

## ***CONTINUING OUR CONVERSATION WITH GEN Z.***

In July of 2018, Barnes & Noble College published *Conversations with Gen Z*, a provocative and telling replay of our candid, in-depth discussions with 18-to-22-year-olds across U.S. college campuses. It provided a revealing look into the mindset of this generation in terms of their values, priorities, and outlook on life.

Since Barnes & Noble College continuously speaks with this generation, both on and offline, we recently talked politics, asking them about their political opinions and intent regarding the 2020 election.

**What we found:** The core tenets and beliefs of this generation remain steadfast. They are empowered, activist-minded, and driven as they embrace a responsibility to make the world a better place. This includes voting in the 2020 presidential election and doing everything possible to keep themselves informed on candidates and the issues. Differently now, they've added more items to their social priority list, and they primarily communicate their political viewpoints to curated, scaled-back social networks, rather than to the world at large.

## ***WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS INFORMATION?***

Really anyone or any organization interacting, serving, or marketing to Generation Z will benefit from understanding the collective mindset, actions, and intentions regarding the upcoming election.

**These groups will see direct applications of the topics discussed with our Gen Z college students:**

- News media and information sources providing election and candidate information
- Political candidates at all levels
- Political parties
- Universities and colleges nationwide and their administration and faculty members

# VOTING IS PATRIOTISM IN THE GEN Z WAY

We know that Generation Z is a vocal lot, holding firm beliefs and a strong sense of responsibility to improve the world around them. They feel empowered to share their voice and ideas and will exert themselves to do so – whether it be speaking out, helping others, or in this case, voting.

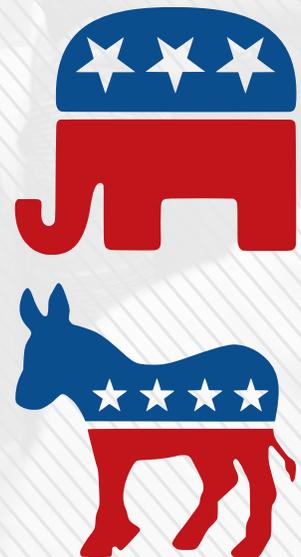
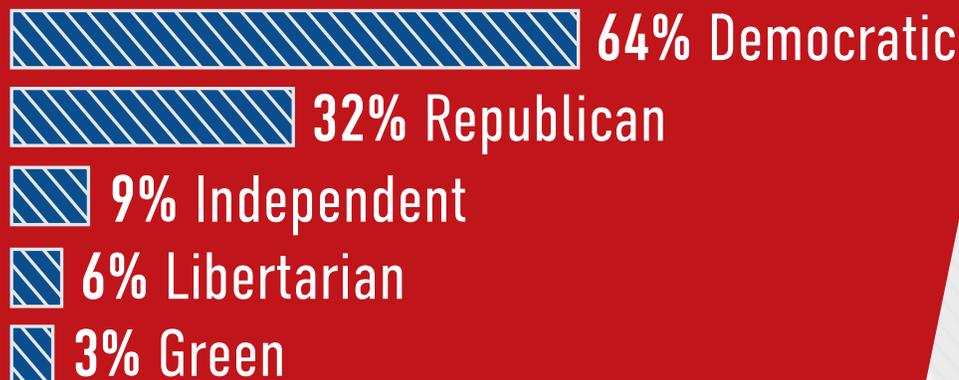
*They've declared their party affiliation and their intention to vote.*

**95%** of registered college students plan to vote in the upcoming presidential election because:



## PARTY AFFILIATION

Slightly more than half (55%) of students identify with or support a political party. Here's how they identify along party lines:



More than 3 in 4 (77%) students are currently registered to vote. Among those registered to vote, more than 3 in 4 (77%) have voted.

## WHERE THEY REGISTERED

25% Department of Motor Vehicles

16% High school voter registration program

15% National mail voter registration form

Among students who are not currently registered to vote, 60% plan to register to vote.

## WHERE THEY PLAN TO REGISTER

30% Voter registration website like Rock the Vote or Vote.org

22% State or local election office

21% College campus canvasser

# GEN Z PLANS TO VOTE IN 2020

*Among students who are currently registered to vote more than 9 in 10 (95%) plan to vote in the upcoming 2020 presidential election.*

The majority (60%) will vote in person, 27% by absentee ballot, and 12% through early voting. (Many students, although living outside of their home state, didn't realize they could mail in a ballot.

Important for organizations that facilitate mail-in voting and for timing of candidate and party messages.

This is the first election where Gen Z will be able to make a real impact and contribution to the election

conversation. This generation will not sit on the sidelines during this election as many of their Millennial predecessors did.

While only 50% of these students voted in the previous 2016 presidential election (mainly because they were not of voting age), that will change dramatically for 2020.

*Many students, although living outside of their home state, didn't realize they could mail in a ballot.*

# INVOLVEMENT BEYOND THE VOTING BOOTH

One finding was surprising to us, as Generation Z typically does not hesitate to get involved in issues they feel strongly about – from the environment to human rights. **More than half of the students we spoke with do not plan to be involved in Election 2020 outside of the voting process.**

★ *54% I don't plan to get involved other than voting.* ★

**HOWEVER, FOR THOSE WHO DO PLAN TO GET INVOLVED, HERE'S HOW THEY WILL DO IT:**

24% Attend school discussions

23% Log onto online social discussions

15% Attend campus political rallies

10% Join political school organizations

9% Become an election day volunteer

9% Donate to a campaign

*Private is the new social and a new level of political involvement.*

We wanted to dig deeper into the 54% non-involvement stat in the previous section. While slightly over one third of those we spoke with are close-lipped when it comes to politics (“I feel that who I vote for is private information.”), others are talking politics.

We learned that most students talk to their family and friends about political issues, parties and candidates, so they are indeed getting involved, but in a very personal way – and within their close circles.

**64%** I discuss political issues with my family and/or friends

**18%** I share my opinions about political issues on social media

**56%** I discuss political parties/candidates with my family and/or friends

**16%** I share my opinions about parties/candidates on social media

These findings correlate with another trend that will surely become an undercurrent of Election 2020: Generation Z is paring down the size of the groups with whom they share life details and opinions, including political commentary and beliefs, often using private messaging and similar social media app features. So, for the generation that grew up on social media and came into their own, sharing every aspect of their lives with close friends and “non-friends” across the globe, this is a remarkable change from our last discussion with Generation Z just less than one year ago.

# NEW LEVELS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT HAVE EMERGED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

★★★★	I actively learn/research (i.e., posting, sharing, commenting)	I passively learn/research (i.e., reading, watching)	Both actively and passively learn/research
Twitter	13%	57%	30%
Facebook	11%	62%	27%
Instagram	9%	67%	24%
YouTube	13%	66%	21%
Reddit	11%	69%	20%
Snapchat	8%	73%	19%



# GEN Z SEEKS POLITICAL AND CANDIDATE INFO FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES



This group strives to be super-well informed – and to stay on top of the issues as they evolve in the pre-election period. Where they get their info, how often and when they access it is important to all wishing to reach this audience.

## *Gen Z Seeks the Latest News From:*

- 70%** Social media platforms  
(i.e. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram)
- 69%** Major news networks  
(i.e. CNN, Fox News)
- 60%** Written news publications  
(i.e. The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times)
- 60%** Friends and family
- 43%** Word of mouth
- 27%** Radio discussions
- 22%** Rallies or political events
- 21%** Podcasts
- 20%** School organizations/clubs

## PREFERRED SOURCES

Their **most preferred sources** were CNN, The New York Times, Fox News, The Wall Street Journal, social media, friends and family, and candidate specific websites and accounts.

WALL STREET JOURNAL



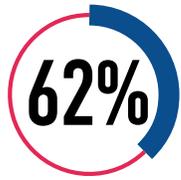
The New York Times

# ENGAGEMENT VARIES BY SOURCE TYPE

Gen Z is engaging with most sources at least once a week. Social media sources are being accessed most frequently, given this generation respondent is on social media more than any other source.

★★★★	Once a day or more	A few times a week	Once a week	A few times a month	Once a month or less
Social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram)	37%	32%	13%	12%	6%
Word of mouth	16%	35%	21%	21%	6%
Friends and family	15%	35%	18%	24%	8%
Major news networks (i.e. CNN, Fox News)	10%	32%	18%	25%	16%
Written news publications (i.e. The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times)	10%	25%	21%	26%	18%
Radio discussions	9%	23%	24%	25%	19%
School Organizations/Clubs	7%	15%	21%	33%	24%
Podcasts	7%	27%	24%	27%	15%
Rallies or political events	2%	6%	6%	22%	65%

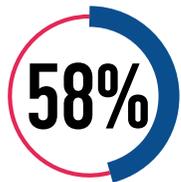
# HOW THEY CONSUME TRADITIONAL MEDIA



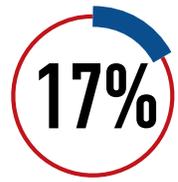
Watch on cable TV



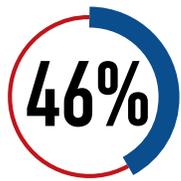
Through a streaming platform  
(i.e. Fox News Online, Hulu,  
HBO Go, CNN Live Stream)



Read/watch their content  
on social media platforms  
(i.e. Twitter, Facebook)



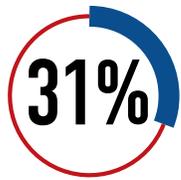
Radio



Visit their websites directly  
(CNN.com, FoxNews.com)

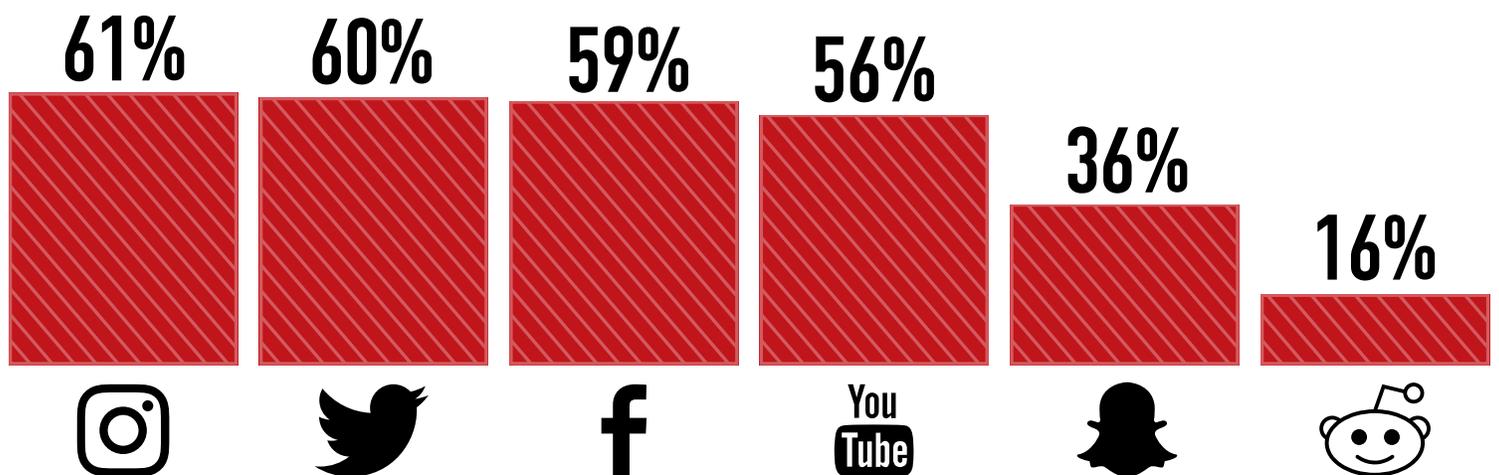


Podcasts



Use a mobile app

# TOP SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS





# ON-THE-GO GENERATION IMPACTS DELIVERY CHANNEL EFFECTIVENESS.

This generation is learning about the election “on-the-go” and makes it a priority in between their daily activities. Our respondents are multi-tasking and consuming information while performing other activities. This undoubtedly affects their ability to concentrate, absorb, and retain information and dictates it to be easy to access on mobile devices.

*Gen Z college students often learn and research political issues, candidates, and other related matters while...*

- 42% While I'm eating a meal
- 41% In between classes
- 40% Right before sleep in the evening
- 38% While socializing with friends
- 27% While commuting
- 25% Right after waking up in the morning
- 20% At work

# THEY WANT TO GATHER INFORMATION FROM EVERY ANGLE, BUT TRUST IS A MAJOR CONCERN.

Gen Z grew up as the first generation that didn't need to rely on an authoritative figure to answer any of their questions as kids. They had Google for that, delivering instant gratification and access to multiple sources at a moment's notice.

That access has translated into their adult lives as Gen Z values both sides and is actively seeking multiple sources of information on the upcoming 2020 election. Consistent with past research, students feel it's critical to get information from unbiased sources yet believe that it's hard to find them.

## GEN Z ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING:

It's important to get my information from sources that are as unbiased as possible .....	87%
It's hard to find informative sources that are unbiased as possible .....	75%
I actively try to learn about and understand both sides/ the opposing point of view for important political issues .....	71%
I believe my vote makes a difference .....	65%
During the elections, I have a good understanding of the candidates and their stances.....	62%
During the elections, I have a good understanding of the top political issues .....	56%

# AT LEAST 30% OF STUDENTS WERE UNSURE OF MOST SOURCES' TRUSTWORTHINESS.

## *Most Trustworthy*

**62%** Written news publications  
(i.e. The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times)

**52%** Podcasts

**51%** Rallies or political events

## *Least Trustworthy*

**43%** Word of mouth

**29%** Social media platforms  
(i.e. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram)

**20%** Friends and family

**20%** Major news networks (i.e. CNN, Fox News)

<i>How Trustworthy is...</i>	<i>Trustworthy</i>
The New York Times	63%
The Washington Post	56%
The Wall Street Journal	54%
CNN	41%
USA Today	35%
The Economist	31%
Fox News	26%
The Guardian	24%

# GEN Z'S LIST OF IMPORTANT ISSUES CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

This generation of concerned individuals has a long list of issues they want addressed in the 2020 election discussion. Most of their top issues have remained the same since we last spoke with them in 2018: gun violence, environment, and college costs. Immigration and pro-life/pro-choice rights have risen to the top given the latest news related to border security and “heartbeat bill” discussions.

★	2018	vs.	2019	★
	#1 Gun violence/mass shootings		#1 Gun violence/mass shootings	
	#2 Racial injustice and inequality		#2 The health of the environment	
	#3 The health of the environment		#3 Immigration	
	#4 The ability to go to and pay for college		#4 The ability to go and pay for college	
	#5 Division within our nation		#5 Pro-life/Pro-choice rights	★★★

# BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER. TURNING INSIGHTS INTO ACTION.

Generation Z is positioned to be a truly defining force in the upcoming election. Better understanding of their mindset and motivation will lead to stronger relationships with them.

## Use these tips as a guide when you reach out to Gen Z before, during and after the election.

### *All brands and anyone engaging with Gen Z*



- Be conscious of the issues that are important to them. Does your company or organization have the power to make a difference on any of them? Do you support similar causes?
- Remain respectful of different opinions and perspectives that are sure to arise on a daily basis.
- Support election day by encouraging voting and allowing time off if you are an employer or higher ed institution.

### *News media and information sources/outlets*



- Understand how your outlet is perceived and how well your brand and offering are known. Use this as an opportunity to refresh your brand based on current Gen Z views.
- Adjust your content strategy based upon how frequently Gen Z is accessing your platform or site. Determine ways to get them to access more frequently – easier access, reminders, and fresh information will help.
- This generation is always on the go, gathering bits of information here and there. Multichannel approaches are critical if you want to engage with this demographic.
- In a world of #FakeNews, it's important that stories and content feature both sides. Convey this in your messaging and offer more proof points that you are unbiased. For example, interview from both sides of the aisle and report all viewpoints. Show results of polls that reach ALL voters, not just your viewer base.
- Take a look at the issues you are covering and how much attention you're giving them. How closely does your coverage align with Gen Z's most important issue?
- If you offer subscription services, ensure that this audience is aware of and understands your offering. With the upcoming election, there is an opportunity to highlight free student subscriptions and special offers as incentive for students to subscribe.

### *Candidates, parties and platforms*



- Understand and prioritize this generation's issues. Show clear proof of how you are currently addressing them or your plan to tackle them moving forward.
- Consider low cost, high return methods to reach Gen Z. For example, it's interesting to note that podcasts and rallies/political events – while trusted – aren't utilized as often.
- Going "live" on Instagram, for example, seems like a good way for candidates to interact with future voters. Gen Z demands authenticity and they want to hear from the candidates directly, not from a spokesperson.

## ***ABOUT US.***

With over 768 on-campus retail stores, 750+ online sites, and daily access to 6 million college students, a proprietary influencer panel of 15K college students and a national email network of 6MM+, Barnes & Noble College Insights is the leading authority on Gen Z college consumers, their parents and alumni.

Through our custom quantitative and qualitative methodologies, we deliver strategic insights for our University partners and full-service research capabilities for anyone wishing to engage with Gen Z. We aren't merely experts in the college market, we live the college experience every day.

***READY TO ENGAGE WITH GENERATION Z FOR THE UPCOMING ELECTION AND BEYOND?***

Connect with our team of experts today, visit [partnerships.bncollege.com](https://partnerships.bncollege.com)

