

Political Engagement

Much has been written about low voter turnout among younger generations, why this may be the case, and what it may mean for the future of politics, political institutions and society. This study addresses the question by focusing on Millennials' expressed interest in current affairs, and how they are engaging (or not) in terms of voting and in other ways.

Following news and current events

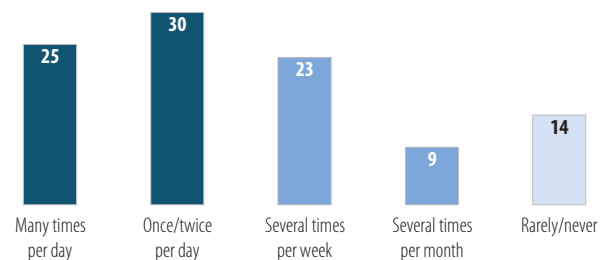
More than half of Millennials say they follow news and current events on at least a daily basis, focusing on such issues as safety/security, politics, the economy and social issues. They rely on various media sources, mostly online, but also TV and radio. Education level is the strongest predictor of keeping up with current issues in the news.

Frequency of attention. The stereotypes surrounding Millennials do not include them having an active interest in what is happening in the world of politics and current events, but in fact most Canadians in this generation claim to be paying attention. More than half report following news and current events (e.g., international, national, regional, local) at least once or twice a day (30%), if not many times throughout the day (25%). Fewer than one in six (14%) say they do so rarely or never.

Frequency of attention is most closely linked to educational attainment: Following news and current events at least daily rises from 38 percent among Millennials without a high school diploma to 75 percent among those with a graduate degree, with the biggest gap among those who do so many times throughout the day. Daily attention is also somewhat more evident among men (64% versus 47% of women), and is lower in Quebec (48%) than elsewhere in Canada.

Differences across social values tribes are modest and linked to education. Daily attention is most widespread among Critical Counterculturists (the most educated of tribes) (67%, with 35% doing so many times each day), followed by Engaged Idealists (62%) and Diverse Strivers (62%). Lone Wolves are least apt to report the same frequency (43%), with one-quarter saying they pay little or no attention to news and current events.

How frequently do you follow news/current events?



It is often said that today's youth are not engaged or interested in politics and public affairs. Do you think this is true, and why?

I actually really disagree that youth aren't as engaged in politics or public affairs 'these days.' I think they're actually more engaged and more interested and more knowledgeable than they were when I was a teenager. – Critical Counterculturist (female, 32, Nova Scotia)

I don't feel that politics is important to me in respect to my daily life. Like, I don't see how something that's happening in a different country, how that would affect me in my life.

– Bro & Brittany (female, 29, Ontario)

Today's youth are engaged and interested in politics and public affairs only on a superficial, surface level.

– Engaged Idealist (male, 36, Nova Scotia)

Issues most closely followed. The survey also asked survey participants (without prompting) what news and current affairs issues they have been following most closely in the past few months. Just over half identify one or more issues, covering a range of themes. Most commonly mentioned are issues pertaining to **security and safety** (terrorism, crime cases/trials, gun/other violence) (35%), and **politics** (U.S. politics in particular, international politics, Canadian politics) (31%).

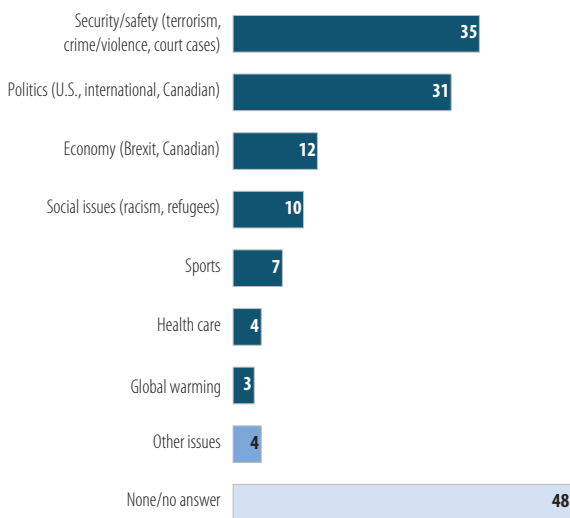
Smaller proportions say they have been closely following the **economy** (Brexit, Canadian economy) (12%), **social issues** (racism, refugees) (10%), **sports** (7%), **health care** (4%) and **global warming** (3%). Almost half (48%) do not identify any issues they have been paying attention to recently, with this response most common among groups least apt to be following news and current events on a regular basis (e.g., those with lower levels of education, Lone Wolves).

Responses to this question are generally similar across the generation, with a few notable differences. In particular, attention to politics and the economy is closely linked to higher levels of education. Critical Counterculturalists and Engaged Idealists (the two most educated tribes) have been paying particular attention to U.S. politics, with the former tribe also focusing on the economy and social issues.

Media sources. Millennials make use of a wide variety of media to follow news and current events. Not surprisingly, online digital sources are the most common, starting with social media (67%), but also online news platforms (e.g., Huffington Post, iPolitics) (51%), online blogs (17%) and online commentary shows (e.g., Daily Show, Colbert Report) (16%). But traditional media also figure prominently, including television (53%), radio (38%) and print newspapers (28%).

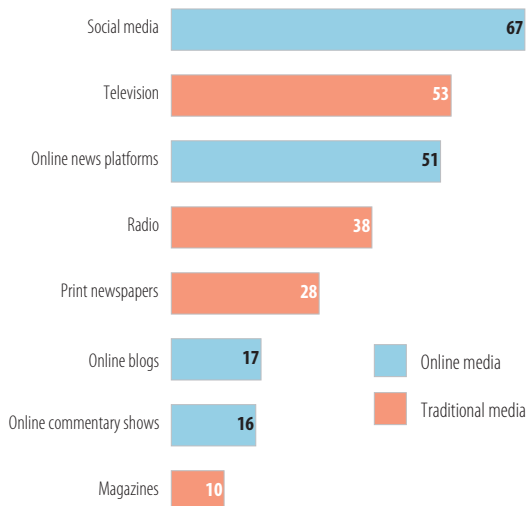
Media use for news and current events varies by group. Social media is most popular among younger Millennials, women, and residents of Atlantic Canada and Alberta. Television is more apt to be used by older Millennials and those with less education, while use of online news platforms and commentary shows increases with education level (68% of those with a graduate degree use the former, compared with only 36% of those without any post-secondary education).

What issues do you most closely follow?*



* Those who follow issues at least several times per month

Which media do you use for news/current events? *



* Those who follow issues at least several times per month

Differences in media use are also apparent among social values tribes in a predictable pattern. Engaged Idealists are most likely to use all sources for news and current events, except TV. Critical Counterculturists also rely on multiple sources, but with a particular emphasis on online content.

Diverse Strivers tend to rely more heavily on traditional media relative to other tribes, although most do use social media for this type of information. And, consistent with other results in this section, Lone Wolves are least apt to use most types of media to stay current, although they are average users of TV.

When I look at my Facebook page, you know, and something horrible has happened across the world, everyone is so engaged with that and discussing about it and sometimes, like, my Facebook wall and Twitter feed just won't shut up about the issue.

— Bro & Brittany (female, 34, Ontario)

I think social media has a MASSIVE influence on this and provides a way for youth to engage in politics and public affairs that simply didn't exist when I was younger.

— Critical Counterculturist (female, 32, Nova Scotia)

Interest in politics

This generation is evenly divided between those who are and those who are not interested in politics, based largely on how much education one has. Those who do pay attention have broad interests covering international, national and provincial/local politics.

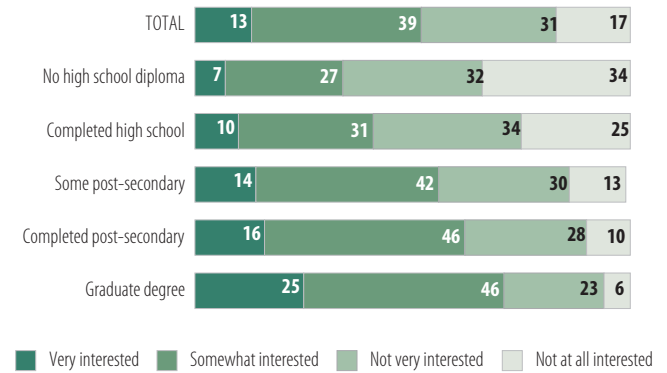
General interest in politics. Survey participants were asked more specifically about their general interest in politics. Across Millennials, there is a range in the degree of interest, largely a function of certain demographics, and to a lesser extent social values. Overall, about half of Millennials say they are very (13%) or somewhat (39%) interested in politics, with the other half indicating they are not very (31%) or not at all (17%) interested.

As with frequency of following news and current events, interest in politics is closely linked to educational attainment: Millennials with a graduate degree are twice as likely to say they are at least generally interested (and almost four times as likely to be very interested), in comparison with those who do not have a high school diploma. Interest in politics is also higher among individuals with a South Asian background.

By comparison, interest (not very/not at all interested) is least evident among Millennials aged 21 to 26, women, Quebecers and those with the lowest incomes. Among social values tribes, Critical Counterculturists stand out as the most focused on politics (77% are very/somewhat interested), with Lone Wolves at the other end of the spectrum (35%).

Current interest in politics

By educational attainment



I feel like my voice wouldn't be heard if I even tried to enter the political ring or whatever. I think it's really just because it's mostly the older generation that's in there. — Bro & Brittany (female, 29, Ontario)

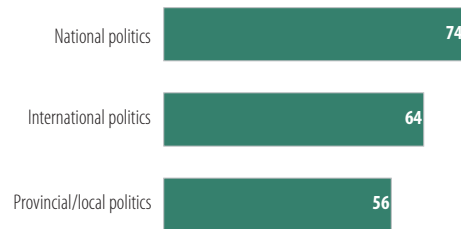
I don't follow [politics] daily, but I will be involved and be informed when it comes to making decisions about my country. — Engaged Idealist (female, 36, British Columbia)

Type of politics. Millennials who closely follow politics tend to focus broadly rather than at just one level. Among those who say they are very or somewhat interested, three-quarters (74%) follow national politics, with clear majorities also following politics at the international level (64%), and provincial or local level (56%).

National politics are most likely to be of interest to Millennials with a graduate degree, while international politics are particularly relevant to immigrants and ethnic Chinese. By comparison, provincial or local politics are most apt to be of interest among older Millennials (32 – 36), those with an undergraduate degree, and residents of Atlantic Canada, Quebec and Alberta.

Critical Counterculturists express the strongest interest in politics at all three levels (mirrored by Engaged Idealists to a lesser extent). Despite Diverse Strivers being a group with a high concentration of immigrants, they are no more likely than average to be focusing on international politics (as immigrants are generally). Lone Wolves are the tribe least apt to be interested in politics, but for those who are there is notably strong focus on politics at the provincial or local level.

Interest in politics is mostly ...
Among those interested in politics



Benchmark Comparisons

Several of the same questions were on the 2013 General Social Survey. A direct comparison of results with the current survey cannot be made because the age cohorts are not identical and the survey mode was different (in-person and telephone interviews, versus online). But the results from the GSS are instructive in terms of how attention to news and current events and general interest in politics varies across the population.

Following news and current events. Results show that in fact Canadians’ interest in news and current events increases with age in a linear fashion: Among the youngest group (15 to 24) only 28% report daily attention, and this level rises steadily with each older cohort: 46% (25 to 34), 55% (35 to 44), 65% (45 to 54), 76% (55 to 64) and 85% (65 plus).

Interest in politics. There does not appear to be a large generational gap when it comes to general interest in politics. Millennials (defined here as ages 25 to 34) are only marginally less apt to be very interested than Gen-Xers, with a somewhat larger gap in comparison with Boomers and Elders.

Voting behaviour

Three-quarters of Millennials eligible to vote in the 2015 federal election say they did so, with educational attainment the most significant predictor. Those not voting are most likely to cite motivational reasons, such as lack of trust in candidates or parties, cynicism about politics, lack of interest and feeling uninformed.

2015 federal election. The 2015 Canadian General Election marked a significant change in direction for the country, with the young upbeat Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau leading his party to a major upset victory over the long-governing Conservative Party led by a very different type of leader. Much has been made of Trudeau's youthful appeal, and his success in attracting young voters not previously engaged in politics.

Estimates from Elections Canada provide evidence of this change. Overall voter turnout in 2015 was 68 percent, up noticeably from the previous election (61%), and across age cohorts the biggest jump was among voters aged 18 to 34 (65%, up from 49% in 2011). Moreover, turnout was significantly higher among young Canadians eligible to vote for the first time (74%) compared with those who were previously old enough to do so (64%).

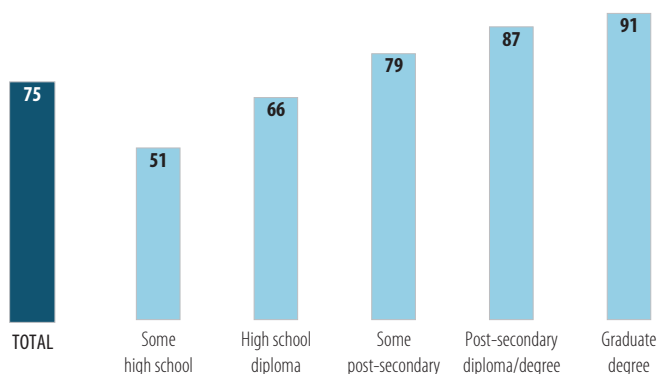
Results from this study are roughly comparable with the Elections Canada estimates, although somewhat inflated.

Seven in ten (69%) participants surveyed say they voted in the 2015 federal election, and this number increases to 75 percent when the percentage who say they were not eligible (mostly immigrants) are removed from the total.⁴

As with general interest in politics, voter turnout among Millennials is mostly a function of educational attainment: 91 percent among those with a graduate degree, compared with only 51 percent of those who have not completed high school (numbers are adjusted for eligibility to vote). Self-reported voting in the 2015 federal election is also somewhat higher among older Millennials and men, as well as among Critical Counterculturists and Engaged Idealists (all groups with higher levels of education).

Voted in 2015 federal election

Among those eligible to vote, by educational attainment



⁴ It is almost always the case that self-reports of voting behaviour is inflated above actual turnout, and this occurs for various reasons (e.g., people say they voted because they feel they should have done so, or it's the expected thing to do).

Reasons for not voting. Those Millennials who were eligible to vote in the 2015 federal election but did not do so (23% of this cohort) were asked (unprompted) why they didn't vote. A variety of reasons are given, with most fitting into one of two themes: motivation and barriers.

Close to six in ten (57%) eligible non-voters say they didn't vote in this election for motivational reasons, which include not trusting or liking any of the candidates, lack of interest, feeling uninformed, cynicism (nothing changes, don't like politics), laziness or indecision about who to support. Three in ten (31%) cite reasons relating to external barriers, such as lack of time/schedule issues, being out of town and medical reasons.

Reasons for not voting differ somewhat across the population. Motivational reasons are most commonly given among non-voting Millennials who are older and have children, and those experiencing precarious employment (e.g., lower education, inadequate incomes, working part-time or looking for work). Men tend to be more likely than women to express a lack of interest and cynicism about politics, while women are most apt to say they are uninformed.

Among social values tribes, it is Bros & Brittanys and Lone Wolves (the two expressing the least interest in politics) who are most likely to cite motivational reasons for not voting in the past federal election.

Reasons for not voting in 2015

Those eligible who did not vote

MOTIVATIONAL REASONS	57
Did not trust/like the candidates	15
No interest in voting	11
Uninformed	9
Cynical (nothing changes/doesn't matter)	8
Don't like politics/don't like to vote	7
Lazy/forgot	5
Couldn't decide who to vote for	4
BARRIERS	31
No time/too busy	17
Out of town	6
Sick/medical reasons	2
Couldn't get a ride	2
Religious reasons	2
Didn't receive a voting card	2
OTHER REASONS	5

By comparison, not voting because of external barriers is more commonly mentioned by Millennials with higher levels of education and income, as well as among women. This category is also more prominent among Critical Counterculturists, New Traditionalists and Engaged Idealists, although even among these groups such barriers are less apt to be mentioned than motivational reasons.

Why in Canada are young people less likely to vote in elections than older people?

Younger people just need to be more informed. I think that there's a possibility that they do not think that their one vote is going to make a difference. The biggest thing I think is just interest – interest in politics, interest in everything to do with politics including the actual politicians.

– Engaged Idealist (female, 35, Prince Edward Island, voted in 2015 federal election)

I don't feel like in school we really learned very much about politics . . . I know that I didn't feel like I really understood political parties or what they stood for, or how the system sort of works today. – Diverse Striver (female, 28, Ontario, voted in 2015 federal election)

The generation we grew up in, we watched our parents vote and it did no good. It didn't matter who they decided to support, whether it was provincial or federal or even like in your small town; there were no changes, there was no benefits to it . . . I myself have never voted for anything for that reason. One voice isn't going to make a difference. – Diverse Striver (female, 31, Ontario, did not vote in 2015 federal election)

I think the reason in Canada why younger people are not voting as much as older people is because we have kids, we're working one to three jobs. I know for me personally I couldn't get the time off work. – Engaged Idealist (female, 28, British Columbia, did not vote in 2015 federal election [unable to leave work])

Federal party identification. Two-thirds of Millennials identify with one of the federal political parties, and in roughly the same order as the 2015 election outcome. Three in ten (29%) identify as Liberals, followed by Conservatives (16%), the New Democratic Party (11%) and the Green Party (5%); 15 percent in Quebec identify with the Bloc Québécois.

Liberal Party supporters are most likely to be immigrants, and individuals of South Asian descent (49%), as well as Diverse Strivers and Critical Counterculturists, while Conservatives are well-represented among men, Millennials with a Chinese background and New Traditionalists. NDP supporters are most apt to be looking for work, have lower levels of life satisfaction and to belong in the Critical Counterculture tribe, while the Green Party is most apt to attract Engaged Idealists.

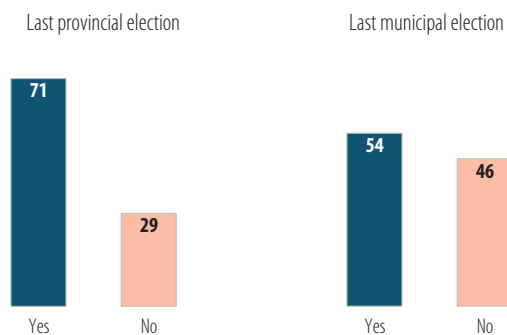
Household income and education play a significant role in whether or not Millennials identify with any party: those without a high school diploma (49%) are almost twice as likely to say they have no affiliation, compared with those who have a graduate degree (26%). Low party identification also typifies Lone Wolves, consistent with their general lack of interest in politics.

Voting in provincial and municipal elections. What about participation in provincial or municipal elections? Among Millennials eligible to vote (92% of the survey sample), seven in ten (71%) report voting in their most recent provincial election, while just over half (54%) say they voted in their previous municipal election.

The pattern of who has and has not voted in provincial and municipal elections is largely the same as with the past federal election. Voting is most closely linked to educational attainment, and this is also reflected among social values Tribes: Critical Counterculturists and Engaged Idealists are the most active voters at both levels, with Lone Wolves and Bros & Brittanys least apt to report the same.

Across the country, voting in the last provincial election is most widely reported by Millennials in Quebec (77%), and least so in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (65%).

Voted in previous provincial/municipal elections Those eligible to vote



Active engagement in issues

One in four Millennials report active engagement with issues and causes in the past year, most often online but also in-person at events and meetings. Social values help shape the extent and nature of involvement, with Engaged Idealists and Critical Counterculturists leading the pack.

Active involvement in issues and causes. Beyond voting and following current events in the news, are Millennials also actively engaged in other ways? Just under one in four (23%) identify one (or more) causes or issues in which they have been actively following or are engaged in over the past 12 months. This is most likely to include social justice issues (e.g., animal rights, racism, refugees, Pride) (9%), followed by global warming/environmental issues, politics and health care. Three-quarters (77%) do not indicate any issues they are actively following or engaged in over this period.

As with interest in politics and current affairs, active engagement with issues or causes is mostly strongly determined by educational attainment and social values. Engaged Idealists and Critical Counterculturists are, by far, the most involved of tribes: They are roughly twice as likely as the generation average to be engaged in social justice, environmental and political issues, and they are the only two tribes to mention more than one issue in any appreciable numbers. In contrast, only one in ten (11%) Lone Wolves has been active on any issue over the past year, with Bros & Brittanys only moderately more so (16%).

Also noteworthy is the fact that such activity does not vary by gender, age sub-cohort, place of birth or ethnicity, and (unlike education) is only weakly related to income. Across the country, Quebecers are less likely than other Millennials to identify issues in which they have been actively engaged.

Actively followed/engaged in issues – past 12 months

By social values tribe

ISSUE/CAUSE	TOTAL	BROS AND BRITTANYS	LONE WOLVES	ENGAGED IDEALISTS	DIVERSE STRIVERS	NEW TRADITIONALISTS	CRITICAL COUNTERCULTURE
Social/justice	9	5	3	17	10	11	19
Global warming/environment	4	1	1	9	4	4	7
Politics	3	2	2	7	2	4	8
Health care	3	2	1	6	3	4	3
Community planning/development	2	1	1	5	2	3	4
Other	7	4	2	10	5	9	13
None/no answer	77	84	89	61	75	70	63

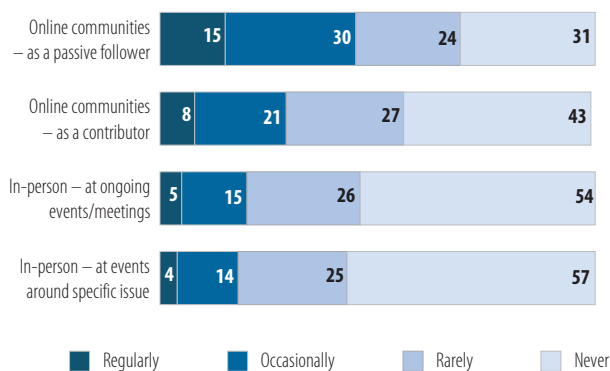
Modes of engagement. Survey participants were also asked how frequently they have been following or engaged in causes/issues in the past year in each of four specific ways. As digital natives, Millennials are more likely to be involved online than in person. More than four in ten say that in the past 12 months they have regularly (15%) or occasionally (30%) participated in online conversations about an issue or cause, **passively as a follower** (e.g., social media “liking” or responding to content), while close to three in ten regularly (8%) or occasionally (21%) participated in online conversations, **actively as a contributor** (in blogs or on social media content sharing).⁵

By comparison, one in five Millennials have participated regularly (5%) or occasionally (15%) in **ongoing events or meetings about a cause/issue** in the past 12 months (e.g., organized by a collective or interest group), with similar proportions doing so in the case of **in-person meetings organized around a particular issue** (e.g., protests, demonstrations, meetings).

The pattern of engagement across the Millennial generation is largely similar across the four modes of engagement. Educational attainment is only modestly related to the frequency of reported activity, while social values appear to be the most significant discriminator.

Consistent with the other questions in this section, Critical Counterculturists and Engaged Idealists are among the most active participants, while Lone Wolves and Bros & Brittanys the least so. But in this case, Diverse Strivers stand out as the most active of all in being regular or occasional participants in active online conversations (51%), and in-person events both ongoing (39%) and specific (36%). This may be a function of their interest in networking, and seeing such participation as valuable to their professional and/or personal development.

How have you been actively engaged – past 12 months?



⁵ Given the social desirability embedded in this type of question, the “regularly participate” response likely provides the most accurate indication of actual behaviour.

Those who rarely or never participated in these four modes of engagement were asked why they have not done so more often or at all (offering five possible reasons plus the opportunity to give others). In all cases, Millennials are most likely to say they are not interested or don't consider it worthwhile, followed by lack of time or it simply not being a priority for them.

A much smaller proportion indicate they haven't had opportunities to be more active (with this somewhat more evident of in-person events). Very few volunteered any additional reasons (totals exceed 100% because participants could and often did provide more than one reason). Diverse Strivers are more likely than other tribes to cite lack of time as the reason they are not more actively involved both online and in person.

Other forms of engagement in social or political issues. The survey also asked Millennials to identify (unprompted) any other ways (not already presented) in which they follow or engage in social or political issues, whether in their community or at a broader scale. One in ten (9%) responded affirmatively, mentioning such activities as discussions with friends/family/colleagues, social media, becoming informed/research, donations or volunteering. Across social value tribes, such activity is more widely reported by Critical Counterculturists (14%), Engaged Idealists (14%) and New Traditionalists (12%), and least evident among Lone Wolves (5%), Bros & Brittanys (7%) and Diverse Strivers (8%).

Why not more actively engaged in issues/causes?

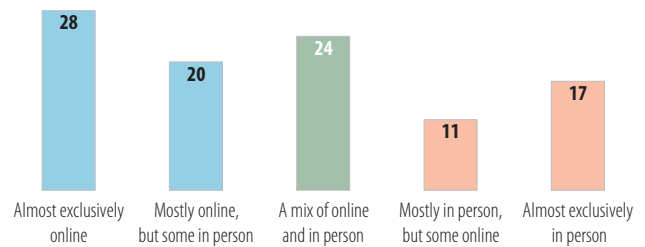
ISSUE/CAUSE	ONLINE: AS A PASSIVE FOLLOWER	ONLINE: AS AN ACTIVE CONTRIBUTOR	IN PERSON – ATTENDING ONGOING MEETINGS	IN PERSON – ATTENDING SPECIFIC EVENTS
Not interested/not worthwhile	60	56	49	50
Not a priority right now	31	36	32	32
Lack of time	31	31	41	39
Lack of opportunity	6	7	12	12
Did so previously/no longer able to	2	2	3	2
Other reasons	1	2	1	1

Online versus in-person involvement. How do Millennials' generally get involved in their community and participate in organizations, causes or issues? Overall, the balance clearly favours online connections, but many in this generation also value in-person involvement. Close to half say their involvement is exclusively (28%) or mostly (20%) online, compared with fewer than three in ten who say they would rather participate exclusively (17%) or mostly (11%) in person. The balance (24%) like a mix of online and in-person interaction.

Of note is the fact that, most (70%) Millennials say their current mode of involvement is the way they like it (i.e., their preference) rather than what they do out of necessity. This is the case regardless of the balance of their activity online versus in person.

The mode of community/issue involvement varies noticeably across social values tribes. It is Bros & Brittanys and Lone Wolves who are most heavily tilted toward online engagement (when they choose to do so), making up a majority in each group (with significant proportions saying they do so almost exclusively). A majority of Critical Counterculturists also engage online, but are not as likely to do so exclusively. In contrast, New Traditionalists are more likely to get involved in person (38%) than online (34%). Engaged Idealists and Diverse Strivers are closer to the generational average on this question, with the former more likely than average to fall into the most/exclusively in-person category. What doesn't change across tribes is the satisfaction level with the current mode being preferred rather than out of necessity.

How do you generally engage with your community and issues?



Belief in collective action making a difference in solving community problems. Active engagement may depend in part on how confident people feel that collective action can have a positive impact. Canadian Millennials as a whole express a moderate degree of agency. Four in ten (41%) believe that people working together as a group can make “a big difference” solving problems in their community, with a comparable proportion (45%) saying this can make “some” difference. Another one in ten (13%) are more cynical in maintaining that such efforts make “little or no” difference.

How Millennials answer this question depends in large part on their social values. Engaged Idealists are by far the most optimistic (59% say a big difference), followed closely by New Traditionalists (55%) and Critical Counterculturists (51%). By comparison, fewer than three in ten Lone Wolves (24%) or Bros & Brittanys (29%) share this view; these are the same tribes that demonstrate the least interest or activity in current events and issues.

Perspectives on this issue also vary more modestly by other characteristics. Belief in making a big difference is more evident among younger Millennials, those with at least some post-secondary education, Indigenous individuals, those with “other” ethnic backgrounds, and residents of the Prairie provinces. This view is least apt to be shared among Quebecers and ethnic Chinese.

How much difference can people working together make in solving community problems?

By social values tribe

