MILLENNIAL GENERATION VOLUNTEERISM

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Public Policy

By

Tasha Beth Patusky, B.A.

Washington, DC
April 6, 2010
ABSTRACT

In his inaugural speech, President Obama called upon Americans to embody a “spirit of service; a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves.” Research has shown that the Millennial generation, consisting of Americans born between 1980 and 1995, is poised to respond to the president’s call to serve. Millennials volunteer at higher rates than Americans from older generations. This is good news for America, considering the relatively large size of the Millennial generation and the heightened need for service caused by the recent economic downturn.

Despite Millennials’ relatively high rates of volunteerism, surprisingly little research has been done on the factors influencing their engagement. Using the 2009 Civic Health Index Survey, I analyze the effects of factors that are particularly important to the Millennial generation – college attendance and the use of the Internet for civic purposes – on a Millennial’s propensity to volunteer. My findings suggest that frequent use of the Internet for civic purposes has a significant positive effect on a Millennial’s likelihood of volunteering. Surprisingly, when online civic engagement is taken into consideration, college attendance has no significant effect on Millennial volunteering.
I dedicate this thesis to my family,
who supported me throughout my research and writing.

With gratitude,
Tasha B. Patusky
# Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1  
Policy Relevance ........................................................................................................................ 2  
Literature Review ...................................................................................................................... 3  
  Recent Trends in Volunteering ................................................................................................ 4  
  Generational Differences in Volunteering .............................................................................. 4  
  Factors Potentially Impacting Millennials’ Volunteerism ...................................................... 6  
Summary ................................................................................................................................... 8  
Conceptual Framework .............................................................................................................. 9  
Hypotheses ............................................................................................................................... 10  
Data ......................................................................................................................................... 11  
  Description of Data Set ......................................................................................................... 11  
  Limitations of Data Set ......................................................................................................... 13  
Analysis Plan ............................................................................................................................. 14  
  Population of Interest ......................................................................................................... 14  
  Regression Model ............................................................................................................... 14  
  Variables ............................................................................................................................. 14  
Results ..................................................................................................................................... 18  
  Descriptive Results ............................................................................................................ 18  
  Regression Results ............................................................................................................ 21  
Discussion ................................................................................................................................. 25  
  Analysis Limitations and Directions for Future Research .................................................. 27  
  Policy Implications ............................................................................................................. 29  
Bibliography ............................................................................................................................... 32
FIGURES

Diagram of Conceptual Framework........................................................................................................ 10

TABLES

2009 Civic Health Index Survey Sample................................................................................................. 12
Empirical Model Variables.................................................................................................................. 16
Descriptive Statistics for Millennial Subpopulation............................................................................ 19
Regression Results for Probit Analysis of Millennial Volunteerism................................................... 22
Marginal Effect Results for Probit Analysis of Millennial Volunteerism........................................... 23
Introduction

America is experiencing a renewed spirit of volunteerism and service among Millennials—the 80 million or so Americans born between 1980 and 1995. After 9/11, thousands of Millennials enlisted in the military; and after Hurricane Katrina, many of them descended upon New Orleans to help rebuild a devastated city. Millennials are applying in droves for AmeriCorps (national service) programs like Teach For America and City Year. At all levels of education, they are increasingly exposed to and engaged in service-learning, a teaching and learning strategy that intentionally integrates community service with instruction (Learn and Serve America 2007). According to America’s Civic Health Index of 2009, “Millennials lead the way in volunteering,” with 43% of Millennials (compared to 35% of Baby Boomers) participating in volunteer activities (National Conference on Citizenship 2009).

This is good news for America and for the young people who are volunteering. A surge in Millennial volunteerism has clear benefits for the country, particularly during the current economic downturn. In September of 2009, President Obama said, “I would argue that now is exactly the time where we need more volunteerism … because needs are greater, more people are hungry, more people are out of work, more people are falling through the cracks” (cited by Stengel 2009). The ways in which volunteers, themselves, profit are widely documented. A slew of reports from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), Independent Sector, and other organizations offer abundant evidence of the social, educational, and health benefits volunteerism engenders.

While the advantages of volunteering have been well documented, several aspects of
Volunteers – especially Millennials – deserve more attention from researchers and analysts. What are their demographic characteristics? Do they use email or online social networking sites for civic purposes? Do they attend college? Some of these questions have been asked and answered before; but in the current economic climate, when a new generation is embracing volunteerism, they should be asked and answered again. This analysis will explore the characteristics and activities related to Millennial volunteerism. It will draw from data provided by the 2009 American Civic Health Index Survey, produced by the National Conference on Citizenship.

Policy Relevance

On April 21, 2009, President Obama signed The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act into law. This legislation calls for a dramatic increase in the number of service and volunteer opportunities supported by the federal government. In fact, it is the largest expansion of national and community service since the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps seventy-five years ago (Service Nation 2009). It not only reauthorizes the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and its programs until 2014, but it also sets a path for 175,000 more Americans to give a year of service to solve a specific national challenge (e.g., education or energy conservation) and authorizes a Volunteer Generation Fund to award grants to states and nonprofits to recruit, manage, and support volunteers.

For Millennials, The Serve America Act might be particularly meaningful. It establishes a Summer of Service program to engage middle and high school students in community service. Participating students earn a $500 education award to put toward college expenses; and they can
serve up to two terms for a total of $1,000. Additionally, it establishes Campuses of Service to support colleges and universities with strong service-learning programs.

With the passage of The Serve America Act, the nation is poised to make a significant investment in national service, local volunteerism, and service-learning. However, we do not yet know if this legislation will be adequately funded or successfully implemented. Right now, more research on national and community service, including the attributes of Americans who serve, will benefit lawmakers who must make tough funding and implementation decisions. Policy implications that arise from this paper’s analyses should inform Members of Congress as well as others who have a stake, or simply an interest, in American volunteerism.

**Literature Review**

Over the past decade, there has been no shortage of research on American volunteerism. Since 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics have administered an annual Volunteering in America survey, a supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Every year, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the federal agency that funds this survey, produces a report summarizing its findings. Several studies from CNCS and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) have addressed youth volunteerism, in particular. In recent years, the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) and CIRCLE have explored Millennial volunteerism and compared Millennials’ volunteer participation with Americans from other generations.

In addition to summarizing the main findings of recent studies of American volunteerism, this literature review will highlight research on factors shaping the Millennial generation that
may affect their volunteering and differentiate it from that of older Americans. These characteristics include increased opportunities for service-learning in middle and high school and the emergence of new media, such as social networking websites.

Recent Trends in Volunteering

The CNCS 2009 Volunteering in America report, based on CPS data, claims volunteering rates have remained steady at 26.4 percent compared to last year’s 26.2 percent, even in the face of the 2008 economic downturn. In terms of youth engagement, the CNCS report reveals that 8.24 million people between 16 and 24 volunteered in 2008, over 441,000 more than the previous year. According to CNCS, the volunteer rate for this group rose from 20.8 percent in 2007 to 21.9 percent in 2008, which coincides with the reported increase in their belief that helping others in need is “essential” or “very important” (2009, 2).

The 2005 Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey provides less recent, but more youth-specific data. The survey, administered to 3,178 Americans between the ages 12 and 18, generated two CNCS briefs. “Building Active Citizens: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering” suggests that the state of youth volunteering is strong, with 55 percent of youth participating in volunteer activities each year. “Educating for Active Citizenship: Service-Learning, School-Based Service, and Civic Engagement” reveals that 38 percent of young people – 10.6 million students – have engaged in school-based service-learning.

Generational Differences in Volunteering

NCoC’s report, America’s Civic Health Index 2009: Civic Health in Hard Times, offers
the most recent generational comparison of volunteer participation. The report notes, “In the past, the Civic Health Index and other surveys have generally found that older people have volunteered, voted, and otherwise participated more than younger people. This year, however, younger people (currently, members of the Millennial Generation and Generation-X) have emerged as leaders in formal volunteering” (2009, 6). According to the Civic Health Index, 43 percent of Millennials and Generation-Xers volunteered in their communities, compared with 35 percent of Baby Boomers and 42 percent of people aged 65 and over. The report slightly overstates the volunteering discrepancies between Millennials/Generation-Xers and older generations. After all, the 65+ group only volunteers at a rate one percentage point less than Millennials and Generation-Xers. Even so, the suggestion that, in 2009, young people are volunteering at slightly higher rates than older Americans is intriguing.

Other key generational comparisons stem from CIRCLE’s 2002 and 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Surveys (CPHS). The 2002 survey asked its 3,246 respondents about 19 activities considered central to civic engagement, including regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization, community problem solving, and participation in a fundraising run/walk/ride. “The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: a Generational Portrait” (Keeter et al 2002) uses the survey results to compare the civic engagement of Matures (born before 1946), Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1964 and 1976), and DotNets (born after 1976—also known as Millennials or Generation Y). According to the study, 15 to 25 year-olds reported the highest rates of volunteering, with 40 percent serving in the past year compared to one-third of Generation-Xers and Baby Boomers (32 percent each) and just 22 percent of Matures. The authors assert that much of the DotNets’ volunteering “advantage” is
due the opportunities and supports offered by high schools and colleges (Keeter et al 2002, 19). It is worth noting that the authors characterized DotNets’ volunteering as “episodic, apolitical and reliant on the assistance of facilitators” (2002, 19)—meaning most do not volunteer regularly, for political reasons, or without someone else organizing the volunteer activity. Baby Boomers and Generation-Xers are slightly more regular in their volunteering (Matures, slightly less regular) than DotNets. All of the older generations are significantly more involved in political volunteering and less reliant on outside facilitators.

Four years later, “The 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey: A Detailed Look at How Youth Participate in Politics and Communities” updated CIRCLE’s initial generational comparison. According to the report by Lopez et al, the 2006 CPHS shows a lower volunteering rate among young people (36 percent in 2006 vs. 40 percent in 2002). However, despite the drop in youth volunteering, DotNets continued to outpace their older counterparts (only 32 percent of respondents 26 and older had volunteered in the past year). The study shows that youth volunteerism remained largely apolitical—most young people said they volunteered to help others, not to address a social or political problem. The 2006 study also provides a more detailed demographic breakdown than the 2002 study. It notes that youth volunteers are more likely to be single, female, and regular church-goers (Lopez et al 2006, 11). Not surprisingly, they are also more likely to state a personal belief that they can make a difference in their community (2006, 11).

Factors Potentially Impacting Millennials’ Volunteerism

Because the Millennial generation “is not just a continuation of GenX” (Keeter et al
2002, 2), it is important for this paper to consider factors that affect and potentially define the youngest generation. It is possible that the “institutionalization of volunteerism” (Levine et al 2008, 16) and abounding new media are not only shaping the unique identity of Millennials but also influencing their volunteering.

In “The Millennial Pendulum: A New Generation of Voters and the Prospects for a Political Realignment,” Levine et al contend that Millennials have grown up in a period when community service has become a “normative expectation” (2008, 16). Since the 1990s, an increasing number of high school seniors are reporting that they have volunteered (Levine et al 2008, 16). Not surprisingly, this trend coincides with the rise of school-based service-learning. Based on the greater incidence of youth volunteering in the past two decades, Levine et al predict that Millennials will respond to President Obama’s call to “boldly enter a new era of responsibility” through service (2008, 16).

New media may also play a role in youth volunteering. CIRCLE’s “2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation” indicates that the 69 percent of young people report using the Internet at least a few times per week. The report asserts that, in general, those who use the Internet at least a few times per week are more engaged in civic activities than those who never use it (2006, 26). America’s Civic Health Index of 2008 reveals that young people who use new forms of media (email, social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, Youtube, and text messaging) for civic purposes volunteer at a higher rate than those who do not. Hoban Kirby et al note that this finding should be interpreted with caution, given that the use of new media is likely to be associated with other factors, like income, that are related to volunteering (2009, 7). Yet they also raise the possibility that new media are “breaking down barriers to volunteering”
by spreading information and opportunities to youth who would not normally be engaged (2009, 7).

Summary

Despite the current economic recession, a significant portion of Americans, including Millennials, are still volunteering. Millennials surpass older generations in volunteering, but generational discrepancies vary slightly by survey and study. Millennial volunteering has been characterized as “episodic, apolitical and reliant on the assistance of facilitators” (Keeter et al 2002, 19). Young volunteers tend to be female, single, and regular church-goers – and they are more likely than non-volunteers to believe that they can make a difference in their community (Lopez et al 2006, 11).

Have any demographic characteristics of Millennial volunteers changed since 2005? What other demographic traits characterize Millennial volunteers? What about their educational aspirations and use of new media for civic purposes? Some studies have scratched the surface of youth volunteering in the Millennial age, and others have offered useful comparisons of generational volunteering. There have even been in-depth analyses of Millennials’ political activity (Levine et al 2008 and Howe & Nadler 2009). Yet, there is a startling lack of in-depth research on Millennial volunteering.

In an age when volunteering has become institutionalized in schools, new media are opening up pathways to engagement, and the newly elected president has called upon Americans to fight the recession through service, now is the time to look more closely at Millennial volunteerism. This paper aims to add depth to the existing body of research on American
volunteering by providing a focused, up-to-date analysis of Millennial service.

**Conceptual Framework**

While numerous studies have shown that Millennials volunteer at higher rates than older generations, there has been little exploration of the factors that might be contributing to their relatively high participation in volunteering. Although a variety of factors may have an effect on Millennial volunteering, this paper will focus on factors that seem particularly relevant to the Millennial generation and are therefore plausible reasons for Millennials’ higher rates of volunteering. It will test two main hypotheses about Millennial volunteering, looking closely at Millennials’ use of the Internet for civic purposes and college attendance.

With the rise of new media in the past two decades, it makes sense to pay attention to its possible impact on Millennial volunteering. Through online tools such as social networking websites and email, Internet users can learn about and get involved in volunteer opportunities in their community.

It also makes sense to consider the potential effect of college attendance on Millennial volunteering. In today’s job market, a degree from a four-year college or university is more important than ever. Millennials are responding to a changing labor market by attending institutions of higher education in record numbers. Given that most (if not all) four-year colleges value an applicant’s volunteer experience, Millennials may be volunteering to increase their likelihood of getting accepted into a four-year college.

A diagram of my conceptual framework (Figure 1) illustrates how new media and college attendance might contribute to Millennial volunteering. From left to right, my diagram shows
that Millennials’ demographic characteristics are likely to affect their use of the Internet for civic purposes and college experience (whether or not they attend or have attended college) – which, in turn, might influence their propensity to volunteer. Pertinent demographic factors include gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religiosity. Household Internet access is another factor that must be considered, given that it will influence whether or not a young person uses the Internet for civic purposes.

**Figure 1: Diagram of Conceptual Framework**

![Diagram of Conceptual Framework](image)

**Hypotheses**

The first hypothesis test will determine if use of the Internet for civic purposes has a significant effect on Millennials’ propensity to volunteer. The model will hold constant gender, race/ethnicity, household income, religiosity, and household Internet access.

$H_0$: There is no significant difference between the likelihood of volunteering for Millennials who use the Internet for civic purposes and Millennials who do not use the Internet for civic purposes, holding all else constant.
H1: Millennials who use the Internet for civic purposes are more likely to volunteer than Millennials who does not use the Internet for civic purposes, holding all else constant.

The second hypothesis test will determine if college attendance has a significant effect on Millennials’ propensity to volunteer. Like the other model, it will hold constant gender, race/ethnicity, household income, religiosity, and household Internet access.

H0: There is no significant difference between the likelihood of volunteering for Millennials who attend college and Millennials who do not attend college, holding all else constant.

H1: Millennials who attend college are more likely to volunteer than other Millennials, holding all else constant.

Data

Description of Data Set

To explore Millennial volunteering, I will use the 2009 Civic Health Index Survey, sponsored by the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC). Chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1953, the NCoC tracks, measures, and promotes American civic participation. According to the NCoC, its annual Civic Health Index is “the nation’s leading measure of citizen actions and attitudes” (2009, 27). It is even highlighted in The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. This newly enacted legislation calls on the NCoC, Corporation for National and Community, and U.S. Census Bureau to work together and use the Civic Health Index in order to “help communities harness the power of their citizens” (NCoC 2009, 27).

Knowledge Networks conducted the 2009 Civic Health Index Survey on behalf of NCoC.
It surveyed a total of 3,889 individuals from April 28, 2009 to May 11, 2009.

Survey participants were part of Knowledge Networks’ national survey panel, the “first online research panel that is representative of the entire U.S. population” (Knowledge Networks 2009, 6). To minimize potential biases, the panel was chosen through random-digit sampling, address-based sampling, and cell-phone based sampling. It even includes households that do not have Internet access. Knowledge Networks provided an Internet connection and necessary equipment to those who did not have Internet at home (19.3% of the sample).

According to Knowledge Networks, their goal was to interview a representative national sample of people 15 years of age and older as well as oversamples of certain states (2009, 4). Table 1 shows the planned and actual sizes of the national sample and state oversamples.

**Table 1. 2009 Civic Health Index Survey Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Sample</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Oversample</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida Oversample</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois Oversample</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Oversample</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota Oversample</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire Oversample</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,773</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,889</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey’s response rate (referred to by Knowledge Networks as “cooperation rate”) was 63.4%.

For my research, I will use a sub-sample of participants 15 to 29 years of age. The NCoC’s report, *America’s Civic Health Index 2009: Civic Health in Hard Times*, uses this age
range to delineate the Millennial generation. For consistency, I will use the same range. The data set contains 687 observations of respondents ages 15 to 29.

Limitations of Data Set

The 2009 Civic Health Index Survey has several advantages for my research, including its recentness and the methodological techniques Knowledge Networks used to minimize potential biases (e.g., random-digit sampling, address-based sampling, and cell-phone based sampling as well as providing Internet access for households without it). However, there are a few limitations to this data set, and it is important to take them into consideration.

A noteworthy, but not serious, limitation of the 2009 Civic Health Index data set is that it includes only 687 observations of Millennials. While this n-size is large enough to ensure credible determinations of statistical significance, it may shrink for certain cross-sectional analyses if respondents failed to answer certain survey questions. The relatively small number of Millennial observations may limit the granularity and depth of my analysis.

The 63.4% cooperation rate may be a further limitation of the 2009 Civic Health Index Survey. Whether or not a selected participant decides to complete the survey is likely to be associated with their propensity to volunteer (the dependent variable in my model). I would suspect that there is a positive relationship between survey completion and willingness to volunteer in one’s community. If that is the case, the sample would include a higher proportion of people who are likely to volunteer, instead of being perfectly representative of the population. And if there is selection bias, the coefficient on any independent variable of interest in my model
is likely to be biased, as well. This must be kept in mind when interpreting my results.

**Analysis Plan**

*Population of Interest*

For my analysis of Millennial volunteering, I will study the population of Americans born between 1980 and 1994. The 2009 Civic Health Index Survey includes 687 observations that fall in this age range (15 to 29 years old). I plan on including all Millennial generation observations in my analysis, except in regression models that include college experience as an independent variable. Only survey participants who are at least 18 years of age can report college experience (unless there are underage exceptions), so I must drop observations in the 15 to 17 age range in order to minimize bias in my results.

*Regression Model*

I will use a probit model to study Millennials’ propensity to volunteer as the dependent variable (propensity to volunteer) is dichotomous. A probit model fits a curve that is constrained between 0 and 1. It will recognize and account for any latent, unobservable variable that reflects one’s propensity to volunteer, and therefore reduce the potential for bias.

*Variables*

My thesis sets out to uncover the factors that influence a Millennial’s likelihood of volunteering. Past research has shown that Millennials tend to volunteer at higher rates than older generations. To investigate factors that may explain Millennials’ relatively high rates of
volunteerism, my model will include independent variables that I believe typify the Millennial generation. Instead of focusing on the “usual suspects” – variables that tend to explain one’s propensity to volunteer, such as voting behavior and religiosity – I will focus on the use of the Internet for civic purposes and college experience. Millennials are known for embracing new media, such as online social networking sites and blogs; and they are responding to America’s changing labor force by attending college at higher rates than older generations.

My empirical model is designed to explore causal relationships between these key characteristics of the Millennial generation and a Millennial’s propensity to volunteer. It will also control for important independent variables: gender, race/ethnicity, frequency of religious service attendance, household income, and Internet access. Table 2 presents the variables that constitute my model as well as my rationale for including each one.

Propensity to volunteer is the model’s dependent variable. The model seeks to explain what factors influence a Millennial’s likelihood of volunteering.

Frequency of using the Internet for civic purposes is a key independent variable that represents how often one uses the Internet to gather information about politics, a social issue, or a community problem. This variable is important to my analysis because it represents an activity that is particularly relevant to the Millennial generation and may have a significant impact on Millennials’ propensity to volunteer. Responses for this variable are separated into seven ordinal categories: never, less than once a month, once a month, several times a month, once a week, several times a week, and more than once a day. I plan on collapsing the categories “once a month” and “several times a month” into a new category called “less than once a month.” I will also collapse the three highest-frequency categories into one category called “at least once a
week.” By collapsing these categories, I will ensure a sufficient number of observations in each ordinal interval.

**Table 2. Empirical Model Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dependent or Independent</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Rationale for Inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Propensity to volunteer</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Binary</td>
<td>Key behavior of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of using the Internet for civic purposes</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
<td>Potentially defining characteristic of Millennials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College experience</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Binary</td>
<td>Potentially defining characteristic of Millennials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Binary</td>
<td>Control variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Binary</td>
<td>Control variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of religious service attendance</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
<td>Control variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Household income</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
<td>Control variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Internet access</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Binary</td>
<td>Control variable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**College experience** is the other key independent variable in the model. I suspect that Millennials are more likely to volunteer if they aspire to attend college; and an increasing number of Millennials are pursuing higher education because a college degree is becoming mandatory for an increasing number of jobs in the American labor market.

The college experience variable is my best proxy for whether or not one aspired to attend college, given that the 2009 Civic Health Survey did not ask participants explicitly about their aspiration to attend college. The survey asks about a participant’s level of educational attainment and offers the following responses: no formal education, 1st-4th grade, 5th or 6th grade,
7th or 8th grade, 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade with no diploma, high school graduate (diploma or equivalent), some college, Associate degree, Bachelor’s degree, Master’s degree, and professional or Doctorate degree. Because I am only interested in whether or not a survey participant attends college, I will collapse the data to make a binary college experience variable (college experience or no college experience). As mentioned earlier, I will have to drop observations for respondents ages 15 to 17 since they have not yet had the opportunity to attend college.

Control variables constitute the rest of the independent variables in my empirical model serve. Since gender, race/ethnicity, household income, and religiosity tend to explain a lot of variation in American’s activities – and research shows they all have a significant effect on one’s likelihood of volunteering – they must be included in my model.

I will treat the gender and race/ethnicity variables as binary, which will lead to the following control variables in my model: female (as opposed to male) and White/non-Hispanic (as opposed to all other races/ethnicities). Household income will be an ordinal variable. I will use most of the income brackets the data are already grouped into: under $25,000, $25,000-$49,999, $50,000-$74,999, $75,000 and above. However, I will collapse the “under $25,000” and “$25,000-$49,999” categories to ensure a sufficient number of observations in each ordinal interval. To control for religiosity, I will use the proxy of religious service attendance. The survey asks how frequently the participant attends religious services aside from weddings and funerals. Response options are: never, a few times a year, once or twice a month, almost every week, and every week. I will collapse religiosity responses into broader categories: infrequent or no church attendance (less than almost every week) and frequent church attendance (almost
every week or more).

I have also included Internet access because one of my key independent variables measures one’s use of the Internet for civic purposes. To minimize the bias that could result from some survey participants not even having access to the Internet (and it turns out that nearly 20% of them did not), this factor must be taken into account. This variable is binary (participant’s household does or does not have access to the Internet).

**Results**

*Descriptive Statistics*

My study of Millennial volunteering focuses on 2009 Civic Health Index Survey respondents born between 1980 and 1994. To analyze this subpopulation, I dropped any observations that did not fall in range of 15 to 29 years old. This left me with a total of 687 observations. For my regressions involving the college experience variable, I limited my analysis to respondents ranging from 18 to 29 years old. I generalized that 15 to 17 year-olds would not yet have the opportunity to attend college and so should not be included in these regressions. It should be noted that none of the 15 to 17 year-olds in this sample are exceptions to the rule, possessing college experience at an early age.

The descriptive statistics for this Millennial subpopulation indicate that there are very few missing observations. For several variables of interest (college experience, gender, race/ethnicity, religiosity, and household Internet access), all 687 Millennials provided a response. For others (volunteered within the previous 12 months, frequency of online civic engagement, and household income), a small fraction of Millennials did not respond and are
therefore considered missing observations. Given the relatively small proportion of missing
observations, I am not concerned about any bias their absence might cause.

The descriptive statistics also reveal a fairly diverse group of young Americans. Approximately
half of them volunteered within the previous year and roughly a quarter of them have no college
experience. Slightly more than a quarter of the Millennials surveyed are frequent church-goers and
slightly less than three-quarters are white/non-Hispanic. Nearly 10% do not have Internet access at home.

With respect to their annual household income and frequency of using the Internet for civic purposes,
these Millennials distribute fairly evenly into each category. In other words, about one-quarter of the
Millennials fall into each of the four income brackets; and about one-quarter fall into each of the four
Internet usage categories. Detailed statistics are presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable of Interest</th>
<th>Variable Value</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteered within the previous 12 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>349 (50.80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>335 (48.76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3 (0.44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of online civic engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>177 (25.76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>187 (27.22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Once or several times a month</td>
<td>158 (23.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>142 (20.67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>23 (3.35%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Millennial Subpopulation (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable of Interest</th>
<th>Variable Value</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College experience</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Never been to college</td>
<td>133 (25.73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>At least some college experience</td>
<td>384 (74.27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>287 (41.78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>400 (58.22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/non-Hispanic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Other than white (non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>176 (25.62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>White (non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>511 (74.38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Infrequent or no church attendance</td>
<td>484 (71.39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Frequent church attendance (almost weekly or weekly)</td>
<td>194 (28.61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual household income</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than $49,999</td>
<td>236 (36.36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Between $50,000 and $74,999</td>
<td>146 (21.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Between $75,000 and $99,999</td>
<td>120 (17.47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>147 (21.40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>38 (5.53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Internet access</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>98 (8.73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>589 (85.74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regression Results

By performing three probit regressions with Stata software, I examined relationships between a Millennial’s propensity to volunteer and a variety of Millennial characteristics and activities. Each model differs with respect to its independent variables. Model 1 includes college experience and control variables for gender, race/ethnicity, religiosity, household income, and household Internet access. Model 2 includes the frequency of online civic engagement and the aforementioned control variables. Model 3 is a full model, including all of the variables of interest. Table 4 presents the regression results for each model.

Model 1 parameter estimates suggest that college experience and religiosity are the only factors that have a significant effect on a Millennial’s likelihood of volunteering. The coefficient estimates on the variables for college experience (p<0.036) and religiosity (p<0.000) are significant at the 1% level. None of the other coefficient estimates are significant, even at the 5% level.

Although probit regressions are nonlinear and therefore difficult to interpret, I used the dprobit function in Stata to determine the marginal effects of college experience and religiosity. According to Stata, dprobit “reports the marginal effect, that is, the change in the probability for an infinitesimal change in each independent, continuous variable and, by default, reports the discrete change in the probability for dummy variables.” It does so by calculating the slope of the regression line at each independent variable’s mean. Table 5 presents the dprobit calculations for each model.
## Table 4. Regression Results for Probit Analysis of Millennial Volunteerism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1: College Experience</th>
<th>Model 2: Online Civic Engagement</th>
<th>Full Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of online civic engagement</strong></td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.291*** (0.068)</td>
<td>0.356*** (0.084)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College experience</td>
<td>0.410** (0.195)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.191 (0.211)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.096 (0.175)</td>
<td>0.260 (0.153)</td>
<td>0.186 (0.181)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/non-Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.179 (0.193)</td>
<td>0.077 (0.176)</td>
<td>-0.187 (0.202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0.731*** (0.179)</td>
<td>0.670*** (0.158)</td>
<td>0.645*** (0.186)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual household income</td>
<td>0.122 (0.073)</td>
<td>0.090 (0.068)</td>
<td>0.088 (0.078)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Internet access</td>
<td>0.058 (0.308)</td>
<td>0.081 (0.251)</td>
<td>0.055 (0.303)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.938** (0.386)</td>
<td>-1.46*** (0.310)</td>
<td>-1.57*** (0.394)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>476</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R-squared</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<0.01
**p<0.05
Table 5. Marginal Effect Results for Probit Analysis of Millennial Volunteerism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1: College Experience</th>
<th>Model 2: Online Civic Engagement</th>
<th>Full Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of online civic engagement</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.114***</td>
<td>0.137***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
<td>(0.084)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College experience</td>
<td>0.155**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.195)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.211)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.175)</td>
<td>(0.153)</td>
<td>(0.181)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/non-Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>-0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.193)</td>
<td>(0.176)</td>
<td>(0.202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0.285***</td>
<td>0.262***</td>
<td>0.252***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.179)</td>
<td>(0.158)</td>
<td>(0.186)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual household income</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
<td>(0.078)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Internet access</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.308)</td>
<td>(0.251)</td>
<td>(0.303)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R-squared</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<0.01
**p<0.05

Model 1 suggests that my hypothesis about college experience was correct: Millennials who attend college are more likely to volunteer than other Millennials. The marginal effect of 0.155 for the college experience variable indicates that Millennials who have at least some college experience are approximately 16% more likely to be classified as a volunteer than Millennials who have no college experience, holding all other factors constant. This is not
surprising, given the growing importance of volunteerism in the eyes of college admissions boards.

Looking at religiosity, Model 1 tells us that, all else constant, Millennials who attend church frequently (almost weekly or weekly) are 28% more likely to be classified as a volunteer than Millennials who never or infrequently attend church. This makes sense, considering religion’s longstanding ties with community service.

Model 2 reinforces the significance of religiosity and introduces the significance of online civic engagement. In this model, the only independent variables with significant coefficient estimates are frequency of online civic engagement (p<0.000) and religiosity (p<0.000). Both are significant at the 1% level.

As I predicted, Millennials who use the Internet for civic purposes are more likely to volunteer than Millennials who does not use the Internet for civic purposes. For every one unit increase in a Millennial’s frequency of using the Internet for civic purposes, his or her likelihood of being classified as a volunteer increases by 11 percentage points, all else equal. To clarify, a one unit increase represents a move from one level of online civic engagement up to the next level of engagement (e.g., using the Internet for civic purposes less than once a month to using the Internet for civic purposes once or several times a month).

With respect to religiosity, Model 2 suggests that, all else equal, Millennials who attend church frequently are 26% more likely to be classified as a volunteer than Millennials who never or infrequently attend church. As in Model 1, religiosity makes a significant difference in Millennials’ propensity to volunteer.

Finally, Model 3 provides the most complete picture of which factors significantly
influence the probability that a Millennial will volunteer. It confirms the significance of online civic engagement and religiosity. Interestingly, however, the significant effect of college experience found in Model 1 fades away in the full model. Again, online civic engagement and religiosity are highly significant (p<0.000 and p<0.001, respectively). None of the other independent variables, including college experience, are significant at the 5% level, let alone the 1% level. Thus, Model 3 supports my hypothesis about the significant effect of online civic engagement on Millennial volunteering – but not my hypothesis about the significant effect of college experience.

For every one unit increase in a Millennial’s frequency of using the Internet for civic purposes, his or her likelihood of being classified as a volunteer increases by 14 percentage points, all else equal. Millennials who attend church frequently are 25% more likely be classified as a volunteer than Millennials who never or infrequently attend church, holding all else constant.

Discussion

My analysis draws from data collected in the 2009 America’s Civic Health Index Survey to offer an updated examination of Millennial generation volunteerism. My findings suggest that online civic engagement and religiosity have a significant effect on a Millennial’s likelihood of volunteering. My findings also indicate that, when online civic engagement is taken in account, Millennials’ college experience has no significant impact on their propensity to volunteer. Other potentially relevant factors, such as gender, race/ethnicity, household income, and household access to the Internet, also seem to have no significant effect on Millennial volunteering.
With respect to religiosity and online civic engagement, my findings lend support to claims made by earlier studies. CIRCLE’s 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey found that Millennial (or DotNet, to use their term) volunteers are more likely than non-volunteers to attend church on a regular basis (Lopez et al, 11). This aligns with my finding that religiosity has a significant effect on a Millennial’s propensity to volunteer. The same 2006 survey from CIRCLE found that Millennials who use the Internet at least a few times per week are more civically engaged (according to 19 indicators of civic engagement – five of which involve community volunteerism) than those who never use it (Lopez et al, 26). My analysis is more narrowly focused than CIRCLE’s analysis in that it looks at Internet usage for the purposes of civic engagement, rather than Internet usage in general. Nonetheless, it produces a similar finding: Millennials who frequently use the Internet for civic purposes are more likely to volunteer than those who never or rarely use the Internet for civic purposes. Hoban Kirby et al draw the same conclusion, using data from the 2008 America’s Civic Health Index Survey (2009, 7).

Yet, Hoban Kirby et al caution that their results do not control for household income – a factor that, historically, has been positively associated with volunteering (2009, 7). My analysis does control for household income; and it reveals that online civic engagement has a significant impact on volunteering, no matter what one’s family earns. This is a powerful finding, for it raises the possibility that the Internet is breaking down barriers to volunteering, making it more inviting and accessible to people of all income levels.

While the results of my analysis support findings from previous studies in regard to religiosity and online civic engagement, they shed new light on the effect of college experience.
In a 2002 report, Keeter et al contend that Millennials (or DotNets) volunteer at higher rates than older generations because of the many volunteer opportunities and supports now offered in high school and on college campuses (2002, 19). Keeter et al provide a logical explanation for the youngest generation’s relatively high rate of volunteerism. After all, many high schools have promoted volunteerism via service-learning and Millennials are attending college in record numbers. My analysis, however, lends no credence to the significance of school-related volunteer opportunities and supports. Surprisingly, it reveals that Millennials’ college attendance has no significant effect on their propensity to volunteer, holding constant their level of online civic engagement.

Again, the finding that online civic engagement is a significant factor – but college experience and household income are not – speaks to the Internet’s remarkable ability to spread information and opportunities to people at all levels of American society. It is possible that, because the Millennial generation has embraced the Internet, America’s youth have greater awareness of, interest in, and access to volunteer opportunities than their older counterparts.

*Analysis Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

My analysis offers a fresh look at Millennial generation volunteerism, but it is, by no means, comprehensive. First, it is limited by its inability to control for high school-specific factors, like service-learning classes. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, 38 percent of young people have been involved in school-based service-learning (Spring et al, 2006). As Keeter et al assert in their 2002 generational portrait of volunteerism, it makes sense to attribute Millennials’ relatively high rate of volunteerism to the rise of service-learning.
However, since the 2009 America’s Civic Health Index Survey does not contain any questions about exposure to school-based service-learning, I was unable to tease out and control for this factor in my regression models.

Second, my analysis is limited in its ability to account for the collinearity between college experience and online civic engagement. The most interesting finding from my study is the suggestion that, if one controls for online civic engagement, college experience has no significant effect on a Millennial’s propensity to volunteer. This may be the result of the Internet’s unprecedented ability to democratize information and access, thus spreading volunteer opportunities to Millennials beyond the bounds of college campuses. However, it may also be the result of a significant overlap between those who have college experience and those who use the Internet for civic purposes.

A simple cross-tabulation of the online civic engagement and college experience variables illustrates that this overlap exists. Over half of the Millennials who have not attended college (90 out of 128) have low levels of online civic engagement (i.e., they never or infrequently use the Internet to gather information about politics, a social issue, or a community problem). On the other hand, over half of the Millennials who have attended college (204 out of 370) have high levels of online civic engagement (i.e., they frequently use the Internet to gather information about politics, a social issue, or a community problem). The online civic engagement and college experience variables do not have perfect collinearity and are therefore not redundant or problematic for my Model 3 regression. However, their collinearity should be taken into consideration when interpreting my results.

To overcome the limitations of my analysis, further research on Millennial generation
volunteerism should control for school-based service-learning and draw from a larger sample of Millennials with no college experience. By controlling for exposure to service-learning, future studies can test the hypothesis that Millennials who participated in service-learning at the high school level are more likely than other Millennials to volunteer. It would be interesting to control for online civic engagement when testing this hypothesis. Perhaps the use of the Internet for civic purposes outweighs the effect of college experience (as my study indicates), but will it outweigh the effect of high school service-learning? Further research should also take a more rigorous look at what increases the probability that a Millennial without college experience will volunteer. My analysis suggests that online civic engagement makes a significant difference for these Millennials. However, a more rigorous analysis would use a much larger sample of Millennials – especially those without college experience – to test this hypothesis and minimize any concerns about the collinearity between college experience and online civic engagement.

**Policy Implications**

My analysis uncovers two Millennial generation attributes/activities that significantly influence their propensity to volunteer: online civic engagement and religiosity. Bringing these factors to light, my study raises important policy implications for the implementation of The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, enacted one year ago. It answers the question, “How can we tap into the spirit of volunteerism that lies in our youngest generation?” and provides federal policymakers with much needed guidance as they allocate an unprecedented level of resources to national service and volunteerism.

The implementation of The Serve America Act will rely heavily on recruiting Americans,
especially from the Millennial generation, to serve their communities. This legislation
authorized the greatest expansion of national service in the United States since the creation of the
Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. It aims to grow AmeriCorps from
75,000 to 250,000 by 2017 and also creates a Volunteer Generation Fund to provide states and
nonprofits with additional funds for volunteer recruitment and management. Two programs
authorized by The Serve America Act target Millennials. The Summer of Service Program will
increase middle and high school student involvement in community service over the summer
months, and the Campuses of Service program will bolster service-learning programs on college
campuses. For The Serve America Act to make a meaningful difference in communities across
our nation, Millennials must get involved.

Considering the recent economic downturn, the federal government must direct resources
to Serve America programs with the utmost fiscal responsibility. Thus, as it develops regulations
for Serve America grant-making and program implementation, the government should actively
promote strategies that will engage young Americans in volunteer activities. As my analysis
suggests, Serve America programs can most effectively recruit Millennials by seeking out those
who attend church frequently and those who regularly use the Internet for civic purposes.
Accordingly, the federal government should give Serve America grant priority to applicants
(e.g., nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education) that plan on attracting young
volunteers by partnering with faith-based organizations and utilizing social networking sites and
other forms of new media. By encouraging evidence-based recruitment strategies, the federal
government can ensure that Serve America funding is wisely allocated. Reaching out to the
Millennials with the greatest propensity to volunteer will generate the highest return on
investment and contribute to the strength of America’s renewed commitment to service.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

60 Minutes. 2007. The “Millennials” are coming.  

Corporation for National and Community Service. 2009. Volunteering in America research highlights.  


Grimm, Robert, Jr., Nathan Dietz, Kimberly Spring, Kelly Arey, and John Foster-Bey. Building active citizens: the role of social institutions in teen volunteering.  

Hoban Kirby, Emily, Karlo Barrios Marcelo, and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg. 2009. Volunteering and college experience.  


