Civility in America

2014

01

INTRODUCTION

Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate, in partnership with KRC Research, have been conducting **Civility in America** annually among American adults since 2010. In this year's fifth installment, one finding remains consistent: America has a civility deficit, and most Americans think civility will worsen in the years ahead. Roughly two-thirds of citizens still believe that we have a major civility problem, and seven in 10 believe that civility has eroded over the past few years. Only one in eight Americans believe civility will get better over the course of the next few years.

This year, we decided to focus on the Millennial generation, defined as people born between 1981 and 1996 (currently 18–33-year-olds). How do America's youngest adults see things? Is incivility intractable, or is it a passing and unpleasant characteristic of our current society? **Civility in America 2014** focuses on Millennials in an attempt to provide a glimpse into how their perceptions of civility are shaped so that we might understand what the future holds for Civility in America.

Why focus on Millennials? For starters, the sheer size of this generation demands attention. There are approximately 83 million Millennials in the United States, outnumbering the Baby Boomer generation by about eight million. According to *The New York Times*, the Millennial generation's size, the economic environment in which Millennials grew up and their relatively high level of education differentiates their spending habits from those of older generations. Millennials still face a tough job market, but have a high earning potential. While Millennials do not yet outspend Baby Boomers, they represent $1.3 trillion in consumer spending according to a recent study. Their size and spending power means that Millennials have the potential to shape the future of the American economy.

Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate provide unique insights into helping individuals, businesses, government and its institutions enhance their communications and stakeholder engagement online and offline. We regularly conduct research on the effects of how people engage today, and leverage our findings to help our clients inform strategies to address their most pressing communications challenges.

We are pleased to share the results of our fifth wave of Civility in America, conducted in July 2014 using an online survey of 1,000 U.S. adults, 295 of whom are Millennials.

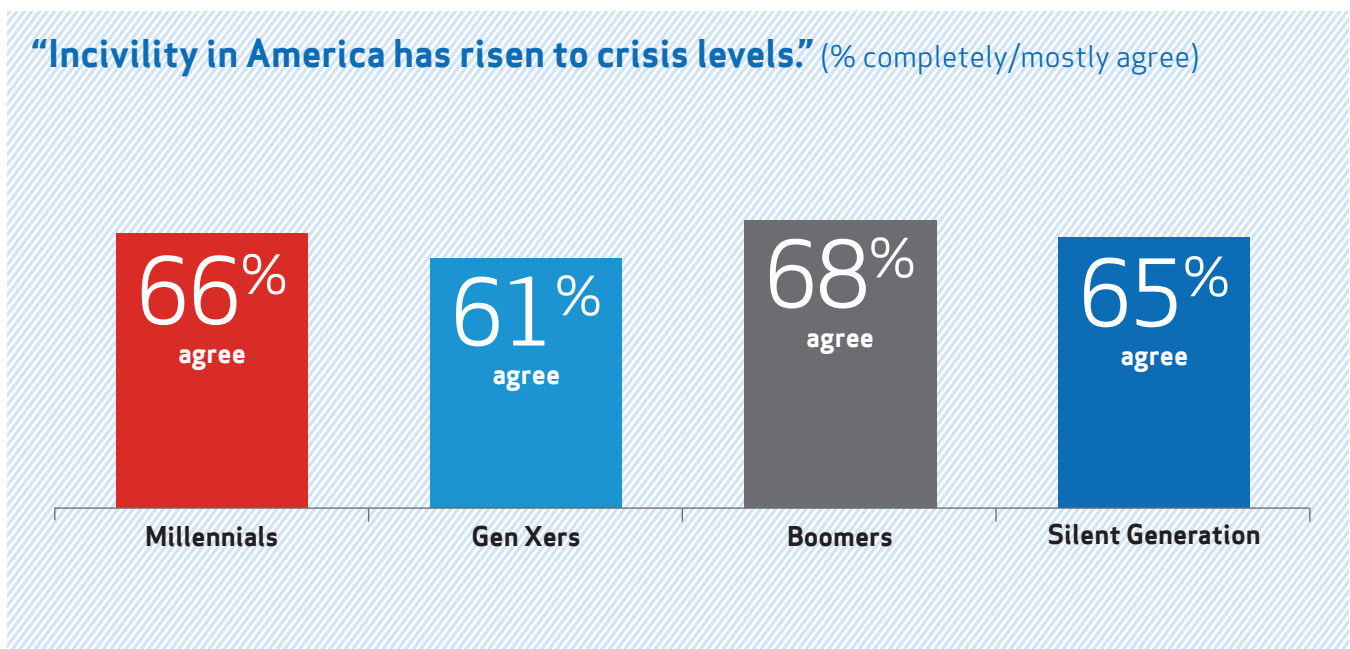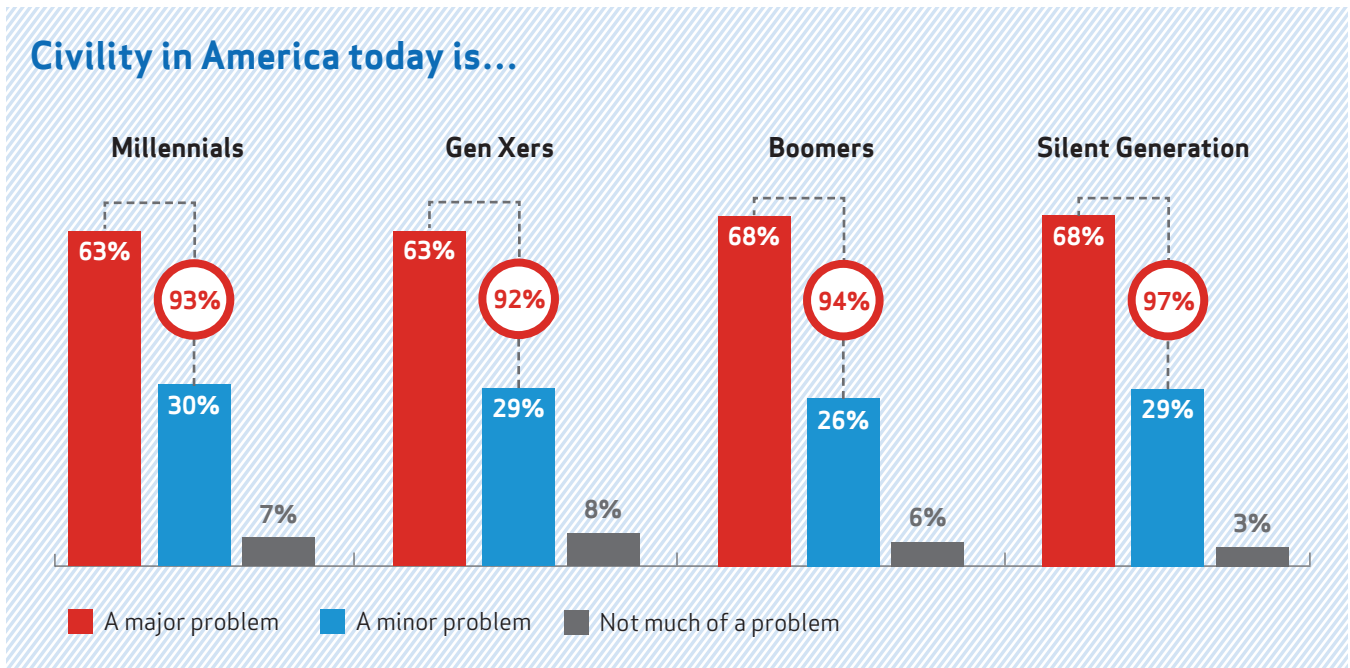"Americans continue to see civility eroding in our society. While all generations share this opinion, by understanding the experiences and perceptions of the different generations, we get a more personal sense of the challenges facing our citizens and how they are coping. Perhaps this can help us identify better ways to interact with each other and create a more civil society."

Jack Leslie
Chairman of Weber Shandwick

02

CIVILITY FORECAST: BLEAK WITH A GLIMMER OF HOPE

The overwhelming majority of each generation perceives a civility problem in America. More than nine in 10 of each adult generation — Millennials, Gen Xers, Boomers and the Silent Generation — believe that civility is a problem, with most leaning toward it being a major problem. The generations are also in agreement that incivility has reached crisis proportions in America.

Civility in America today is...

Millennials
63% | 93% | 30% | 7%

Gen Xers
63% | 92% | 29% | 8%

Boomers
68% | 94% | 26% | 6%

Silent Generation
68% | 97% | 29% | 3%

■ A major problem   ■ A minor problem   ■ Not much of a problem

"Incivility in America has risen to crisis levels." (% completely/mostly agree)

66% agree — Millennials

61% agree — Gen Xers

68% agree — Boomers

65% agree — Silent Generation

02 CIVILITY FORECAST: BLEAK WITH A GLIMMER OF HOPE

All generations believe civility will get worse in the years ahead. But, perhaps in an expression of hope over experience, the M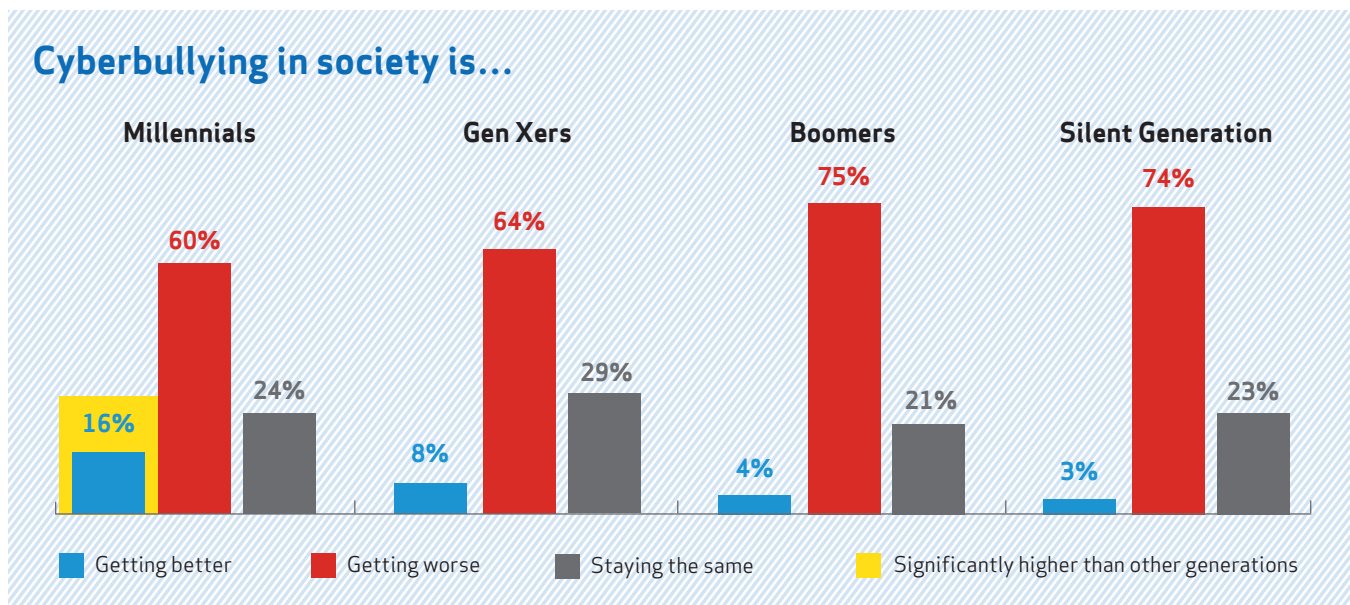illennial generation is less convinced of this bleak future. Nearly one in four Millennials (23%) — two to four times the percentage of other generations — believe civility will improve in the next few years. And the proportion of Millennials who think civility will decline rather than improve is about 2 to 1 — vastly less pessimistic than the ratios for the preceding generations.

In the next few years, civility will...

	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Generation
Get better	23%	11%	9%	6%
Get worse	44%	56%	58%	53%
Stay the same	32%	33%	33%	40%

Legend: Get better · Get worse · Stay the same · Significantly higher than other generations
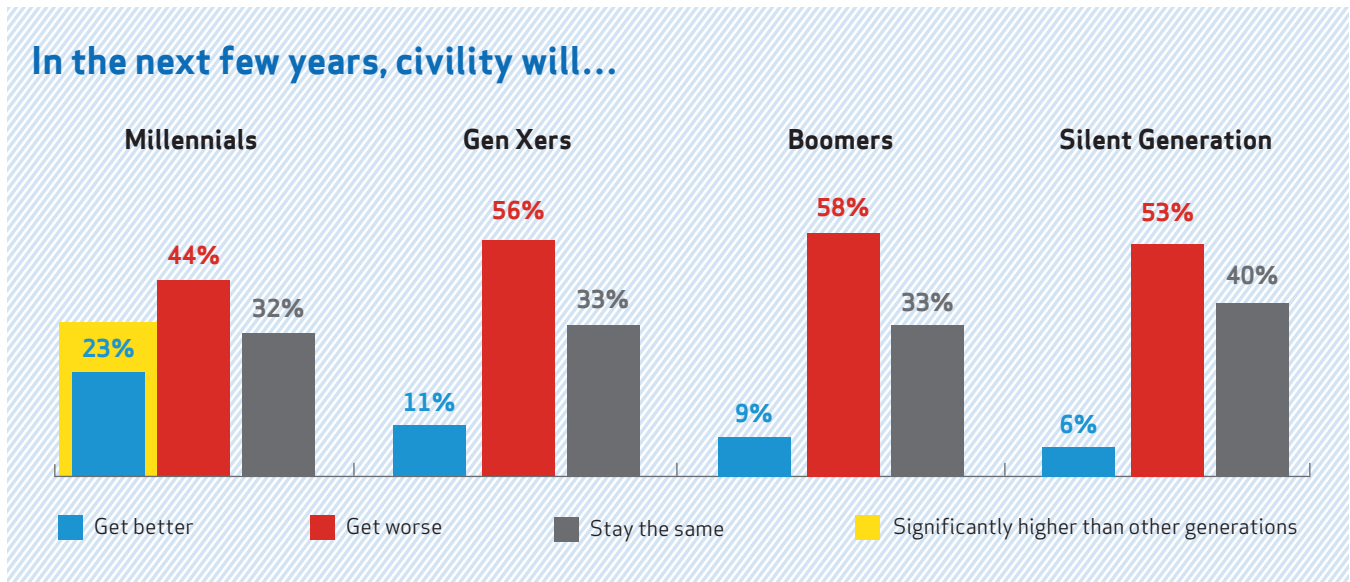
Cyberbullying continues to be a great concern among Americans — most believing it is a problem that is getting worse. However, Millennials, those on the front lines of online-everything, are significantly more likely than older generations to believe cyberbullying is getting better. Again, this is just a glimmer of optimism, since 60% believe it is worsening.

Cyberbullying in society is...

	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Generation
Getting better	16%	8%	4%	3%
Getting worse	60%	64%	75%	74%
Staying the same	24%	29%	21%	23%

Legend: Getting better · Getting worse · Staying the same · Significantly higher than other generations

03

THE INCIVILITY BLAME GAME: A GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

While there is consensus across the generations of an incivility problem in our society, there is a distinct divide between older and younger generations about the causes of eroding civility.

- **Millennials and Gen Xers** cite the top civility killer as the Internet and social media, perhaps not surprisingly since these generations came of age during the formative years of online communications.

- **Boomers and the Silent Generation** almost emphatically blame politicians.

- **The Silent Generation** spreads blame across the most sources.

What is making civility worse? (% agree among those who expect civility to get worse)

	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Generation
Politicians	50	54	70 ★	77 ★
Internet/Social media	56 ★	55 ★	53	53
Government officials	41	53	58	58
America's youth	51	54	52	37
Celebrities	45	46	49	54
News media	46	43	51	54
Economy	41	46	41	31
Movies or TV shows	38	38	43	54
Facebook	44	41	39	30
Liberal interest groups	30	36	46	53
Corporate America	39	34	40	26
Video games	30	34	39	50
Twitter	32	37	33	30
YouTube	37	30	28	28
Bloggers	28	26	38	39
Cellphones/Smartphones	28	27	28	36
Conservative interest groups	26	23	35	36
Sports figures	24	27	32	32

★ Number one response

■ Millennials ■ Gen Xers ■ Boomers ■ Silent Generation

▭ Causes of increasing incivility according to 50% or more respondents

04

LIVING WITH INCIVILITY: A MILLENNIAL PROBLEM

The Millennial generation is most likely to have personally experienced incivility, with 90% saying they have experienced an uncivil episode. Most uncivil encounters for all generations have happened while driving, but Millennials are more likely than others to have experienced it at school and online.

On average, these encounters happen at a rate of nearly 9½ times per week, and are more likely to happen online than offline. Since Millennials experience incivility more than once a day, it's not surprising that members of this generation are more likely than any other generation to expect to encounter bad behavior in the next 24 hours.

The pervasiveness of incivility has caused some Millennials to make drastic changes in their relatively young lives. More than one-quarter (27%) have quit a job because their workplace was uncivil, and one in six (16%) have moved from a residence because of uncivil neighbors.

Millennials have also made changes in their lives that carry economic consequences for American businesses. Because of uncivil treatment by a company representative, nearly half (49%) have either stopped buying from the company or advised others not to buy from a company (44%). Professional and college sports have also lost fans because of uncivil behavior: one-quarter (24%) of Millennials have stopped attending professional or college sporting events because of uncivil behavior on the field or in the crowd. These findings should raise a red flag for brands that seek to establish sponsorships and build loyalty among this increasingly influential — and financially significant — segment of the market. Millennials are all too aware that they have the power of choice, and many of them are prepared to exercise that power when they experience uncivil behavior.

Personally experienced any of the following…

	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Gen
Total	**90%**	**83%**	**82%**	**77%**
Incivility on the road	58%	59%	66%	61%
Incivility while shopping	49%	49%	50%	43%
Incivility at work	44%	40%	34%	22%
Incivility in the neighborhood	33%	31%	28%	19%
Incivility at school	51%	27%	23%	10%
Incivility online or cyberbullying	43%	24%	12%	5%

Average number of times incivility is encountered in average seven-day week

	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Gen
Total	**9.3**	**7.3**	**4.9**	**4.2**
In real life/offline	4.2	3.6	2.6	2.3
Online	5.1	3.7	2.3	1.9

Expect to experience incivility in next 24 hours

	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Gen
% Yes	43%	25%	22%	10%

🟨 Significantly higher than other generations

"**Marketing strategies have largely been defined by the tastes and habits of the baby boom generation. But the next generation of spenders, the Millennials, spend money differently and marketers will need to adjust.**"

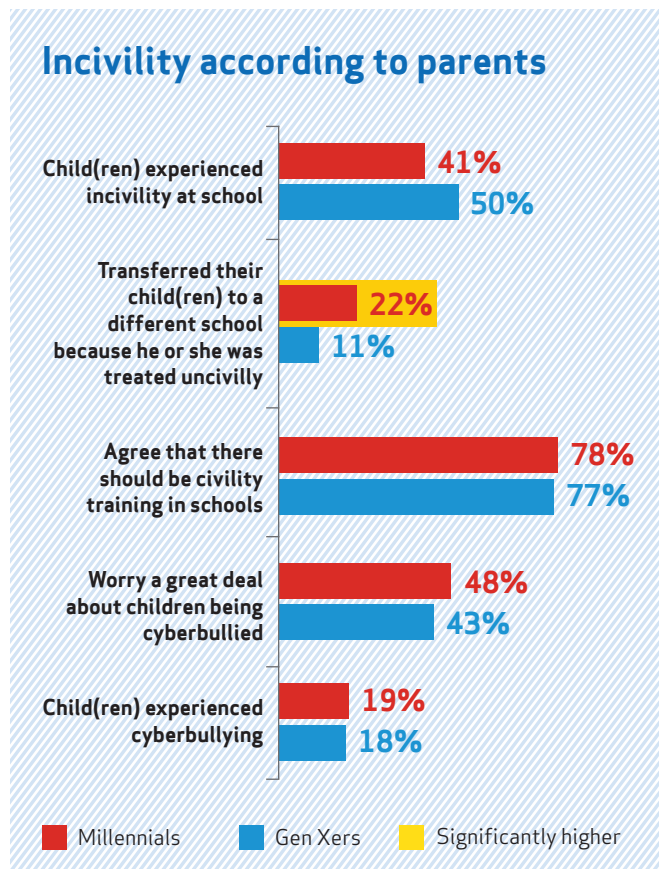*The New York Times,* **August 21, 2014**

05

MILLENNIAL PARENTING IN THE INCIVILITY AGE

Millennials who are parents are slightly less likely than Gen X parents to report that their kids have experienced incivility at school (41% vs. 50%, respectively). Presumably, Millennial parents have younger children who haven't been in school as long as Gen X's children or haven't entered school yet. Despite less experience with incivility at school, Millennial parents are twice as likely as Gen X parents to have taken the extreme measure to transfer their kids to different schools because their children were treated uncivilly (22% vs. 11%). Parents of both generations agree that there should be civility training in schools (78% and 77%).

Nearly half of Millennials with children (48%) worry a great deal about children being cyberbullied, which is slightly higher than Gen X parents (43%). Their fears may be founded, since approximately one in five of each generation report that their child experienced cyberbullying (19% and 18%, respectively). These may be small numbers, but represent a very large number of parents who have had to deal with their child(ren) being bullied online.

Incivility according to parents

	Millennials	Gen Xers
Child(ren) experienced incivility at school	41%	50%
Transferred their child(ren) to a different school because he or she was treated uncivilly	22%	11%
Agree that there should be civility training in schools	78%	77%
Worry a great deal about children being cyberbullied	48%	43%
Child(ren) experienced cyberbullying	19%	18%

■ Millennials ■ Gen Xers ■ Significantly higher

06

STANDING UP TO INCIVILITY

In general, Americans of all ages are more likely to do nothing in the face of incivility rather than confront it. Sixty percent of all Americans report that they do little about incivility when they experience it.

Millennials, however, are more likely than other generations to take a proactive measure. One-third of them report doing something proactively, mostly coming to the defense of the victim of incivility (16%).

Action taken last time incivility was experienced

	Total	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Gen
Removed myself from the situation	30%	27%	29%	31%	41%
Ignored the person acting uncivilly	29%	24%	29%	33%	36%
Defended a person being treated uncivilly*	10%	16%	8%	9%	1%
Responded uncivilly myself*	6%	6%	8%	6%	3%
Wrote a letter or email to complain about uncivil treatment*	2%	5%	1%	1%	0%
Called the police to report uncivil treatment*	3%	4%	3%	2%	2%
Filed a report to document uncivil treatment*	2%	3%	2%	2%	1%
ANY PROACTIVE ACTION (NET)*	23%	33%	22%	18%	7%
NONE OF THE ABOVE	60%	52%	58%	64%	76%

* Actions we count as proactive

▢ Significantly higher than other generations

"The modest sign of 'civility activism' by Millennials is a refreshing finding from the Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate study. If all Americans were to behave as proactively, we would be one step towards turning our nation back to a more civil environment."
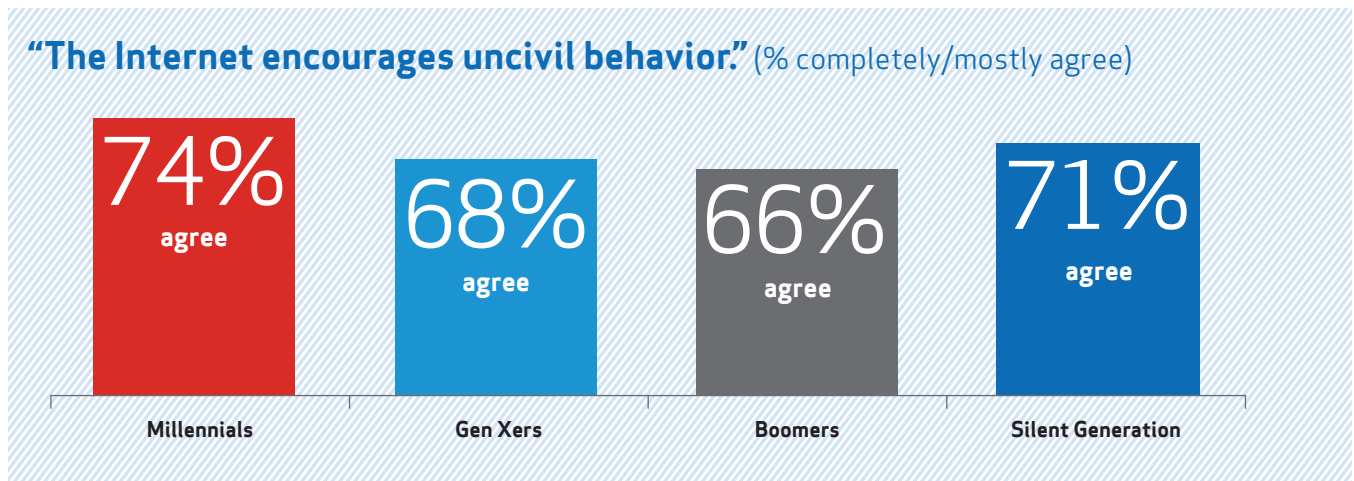
Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer, Executive Director, National Institute for Civil Discourse
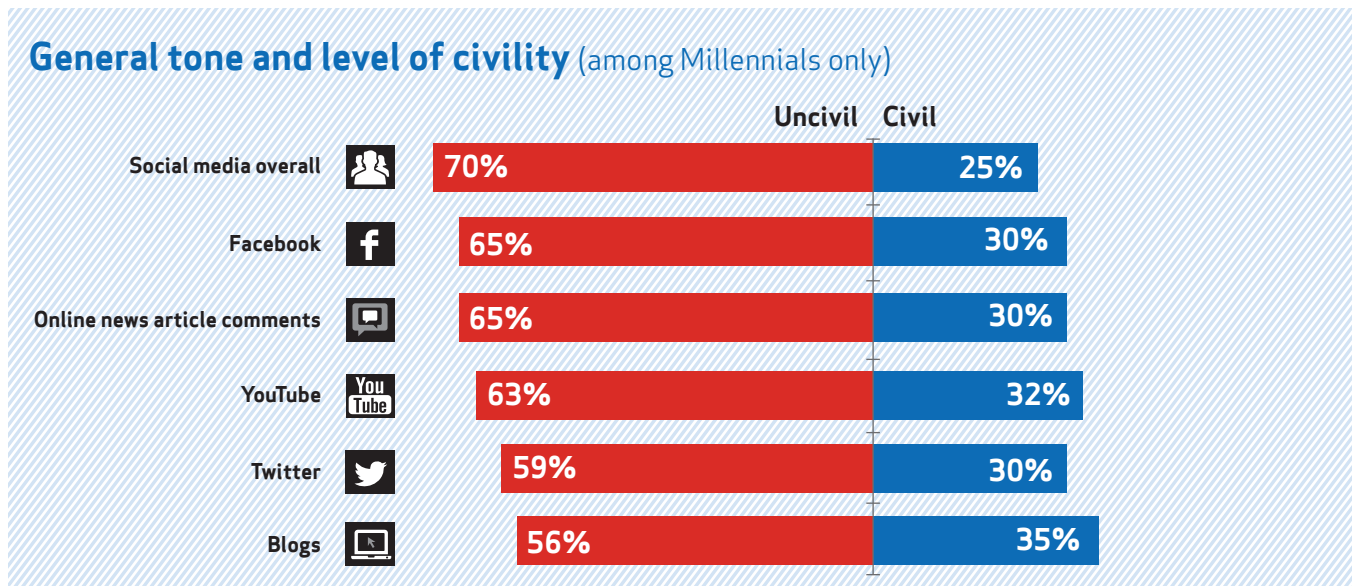
07

POINTING FINGERS: THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Seven in 10 Americans agree that the Internet encourages uncivil behavior. This belief is consistent with American perceptions in 2013, and is pervasive across the generations. However, Millennials are somewhat more likely than other generations to believe this (74%).

"The Internet encourages uncivil behavior." (% completely/mostly agree)

74% agree	68% agree	66% agree	71% agree
Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Generation

Millennials, the heaviest users of social media, are significantly more likely than other generations to consider the medium uncivil, and they overwhelming identify social media in general and with regard to individual social networks as being uncivil. Since this is the generation most involved with digital and social media, familiarity, it seems, breeds discontent.

General tone and level of civility (among Millennials only)

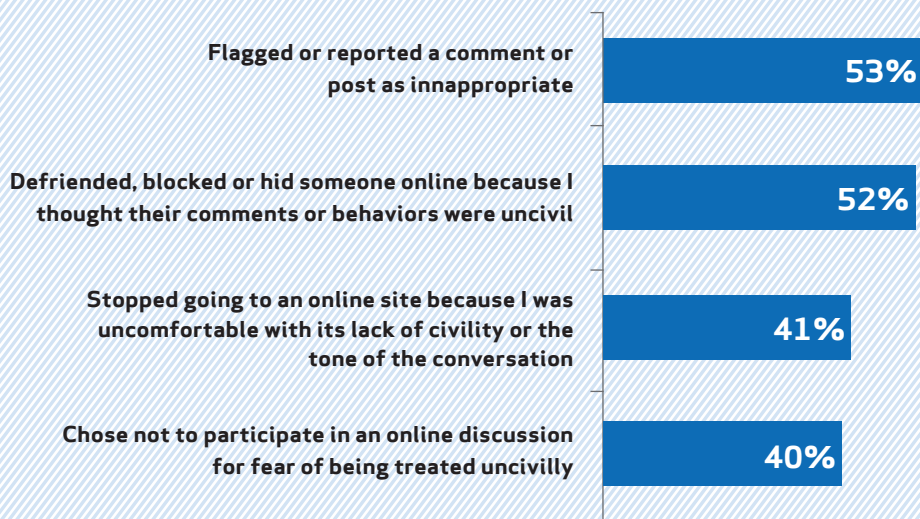|	Uncivil	Civil
Social media overall	70%	25%
Facebook	65%	30%
Online news article comments	65%	30%
YouTube	63%	32%
Twitter	59%	30%
Blogs	56%	35%

07 POINTING FINGERS: THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Interestingly, despite the prevalence of online incivility and the relative ease with which that incivility can be avoided, only about half of Millennials flag inappropriate comments (53%) or reject those who behave uncivilly online (52%). Retreat is another option: 41% of Millennials have stopped visiting an online site due to incivility or just simply choose to not participate (40%).

Avoiding online incivility (% Millennials who have ever…)

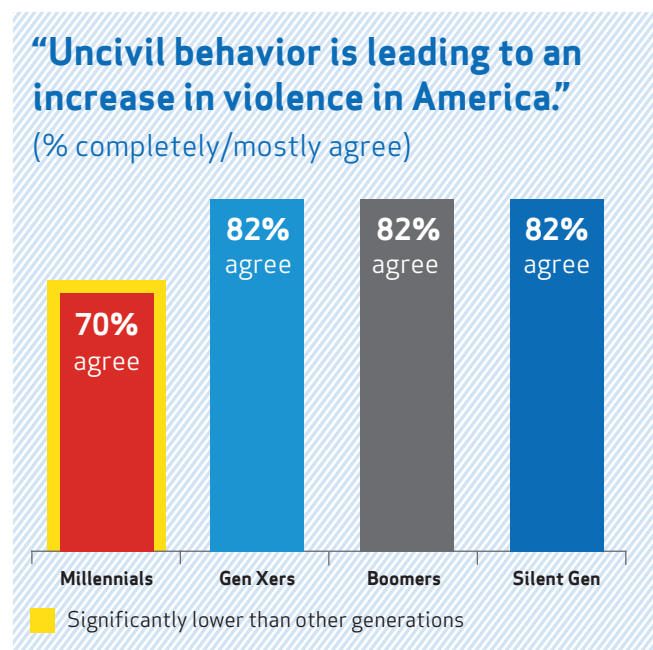|	
Flagged or reported a comment or post as innappropriate	53%
Defriended, blocked or hid someone online because I thought their comments or behaviors were uncivil	52%
Stopped going to an online site because I was uncomfortable with its lack of civility or the tone of the conversation	41%
Chose not to participate in an online discussion for fear of being treated uncivilly	40%

08

THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF INCIVILITY

Millennials acknowledge their own uncivil actions. Four in 10 Millennials report that they have acted uncivilly toward another person, and are slightly more likely than Gen Xers (37%) and Boomers (35%) to have done so. The Silent Generation is self-reportedly by far the least uncivil, with just 27% saying that they have ever acted uncivilly toward someone else.

violence, and ultimately, that violence can be an outcome of incivility. Perhaps their lack of life experience makes them less likely to see a connection or perhaps because they are the most likely group to admit to incivility, they are less likely to concede that such actions have a violent result. Or simply, they just don't see the cause and effect.

Have acted uncivilly toward another individual

Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Gen
41% yes	**37%** yes	**35%** yes	**27%** yes
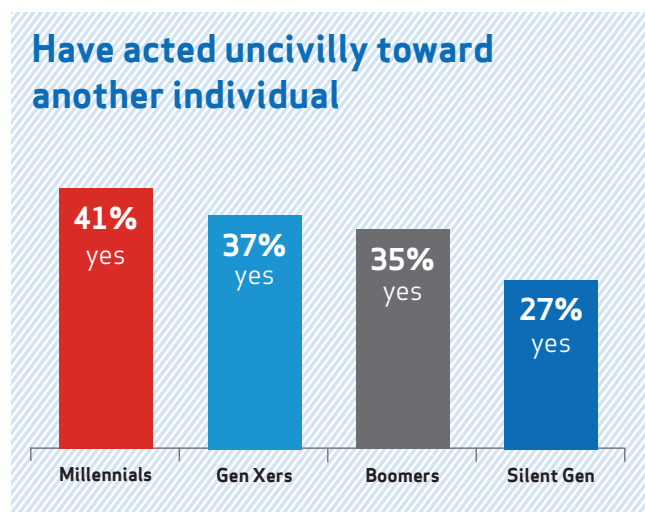
There could be any number of reasons as to why Millennials are the least likely generation to see the link between incivility and

"Uncivil behavior is leading to an increase in violence in America."
(% completely/mostly agree)

Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Gen
70% agree	**82%** agree	**82%** agree	**82%** agree

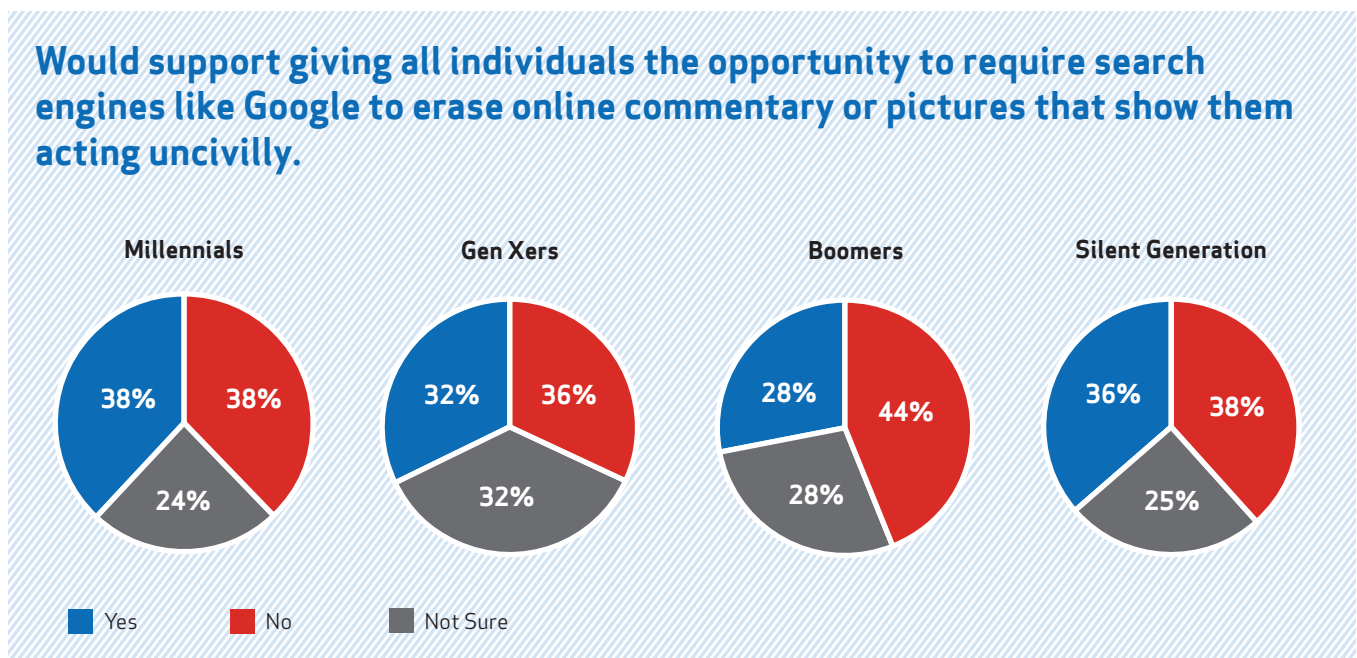■ Significantly lower than other generations

09

FORGIVE, DON'T FORGET

Seven in 10 Americans think that society does not do enough to punish those who act uncivilly. This sentiment increases with age, with Millennials being the least likely generation to feel that society doesn't punish incivility enough. Again, Millennials may just feel that incivility is the norm.

"Our society doesn't do enough to punish people who act uncivilly."
(% completely/mostly agree)

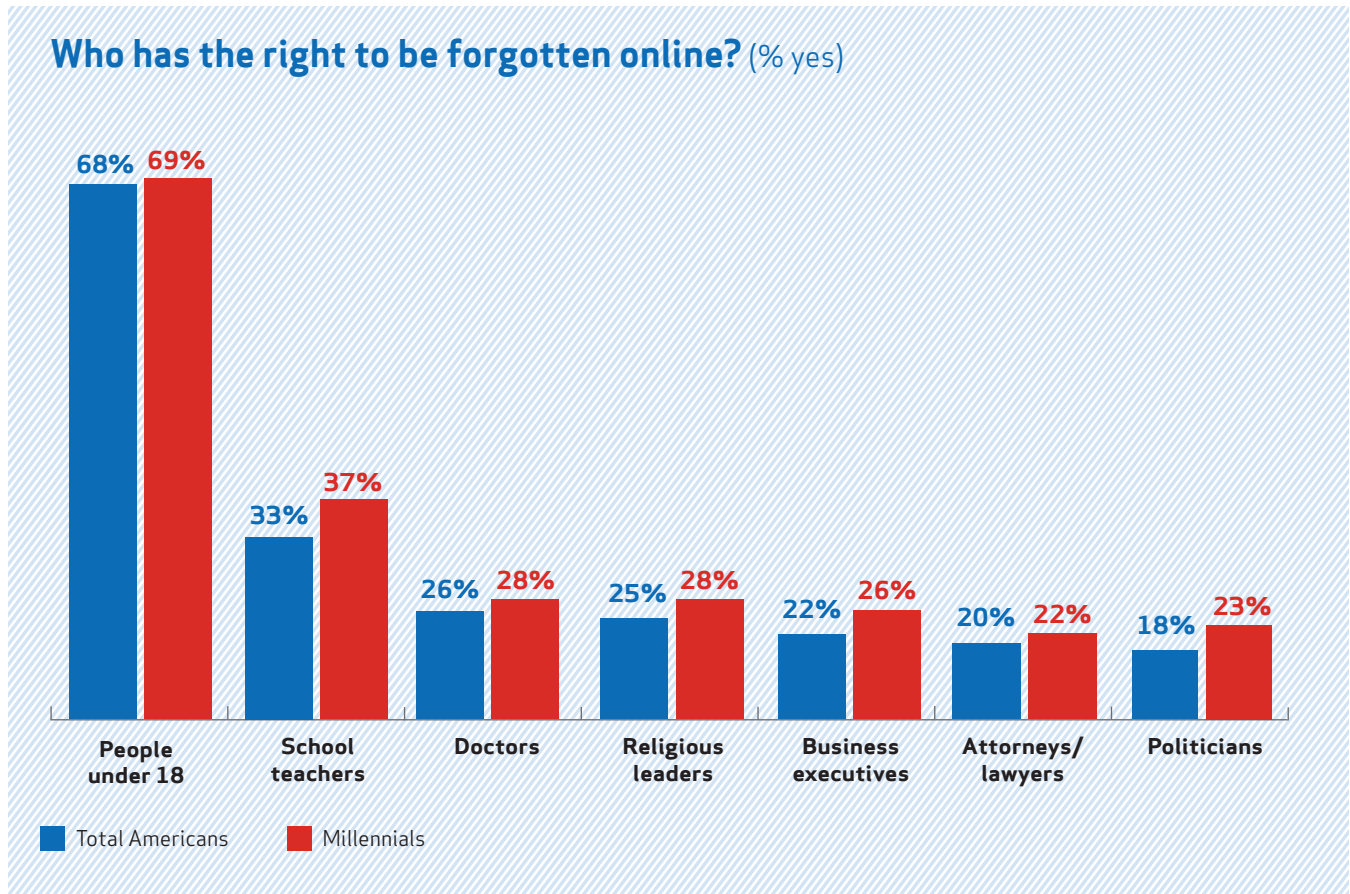| 70% agree	64% agree	69% agree	74% agree	77% agree
Total	**Millennials**	**Gen Xers**	**Boomers**	**Silent Generation**
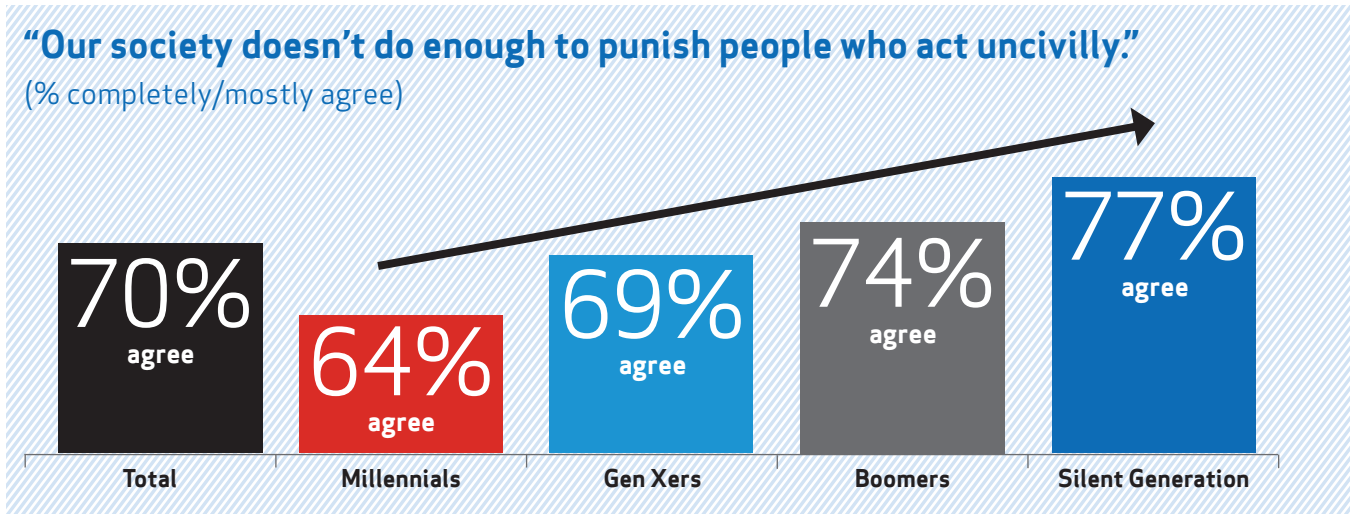
Americans have mixed feelings about allowing individuals the right to have online postings that show them acting uncivilly removed by search engines such as Google. Millennials are no more likely than the average citizen to say they'd support this right. In fact, Millennials are equally divided between "yea" and "nay" on this issue.

Would support giving all individuals the opportunity to require search engines like Google to erase online commentary or pictures that show them acting uncivilly.

Millennials
- 38% Yes
- 38% No
- 24% Not Sure

Gen Xers
- 32% Yes
- 36% No
- 32% Not Sure

Boomers
- 28% Yes
- 44% No
- 28% Not Sure

Silent Generation
- 36% Yes
- 38% No
- 25% Not Sure

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure

09 FORGIVE, DON'T FORGET

When asked which types of individuals should be allowed the "right to be forgotten" online, Americans overall typically say children under 18 years of age should be given this right. Politicians are afforded the least opportunity to be forgotten online. Millennials are in agreement with the general population.
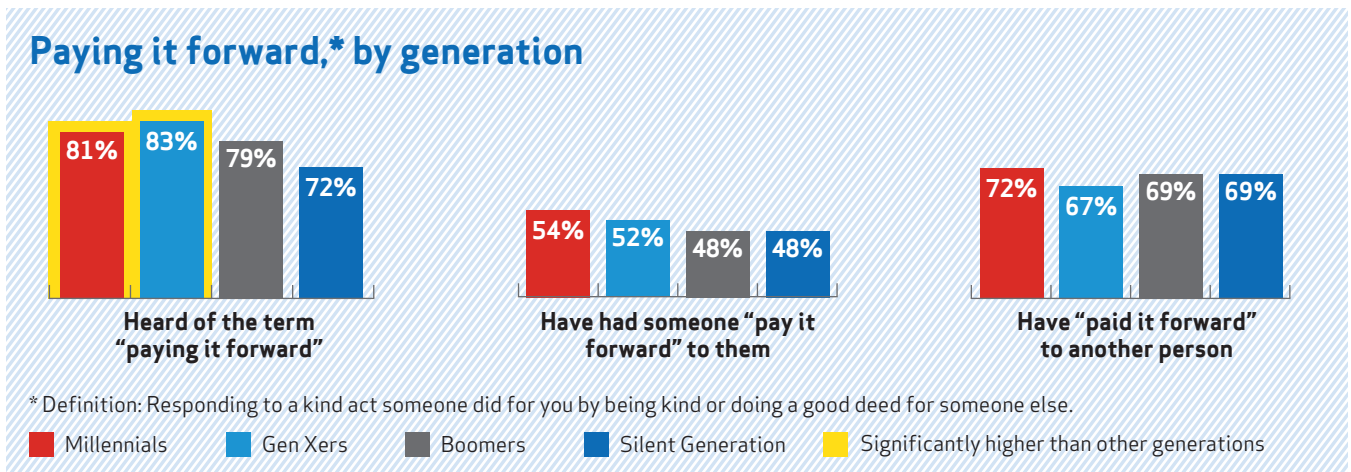
Who has the right to be forgotten online? (% yes)

	Total Americans	Millennials
People under 18	68%	69%
School teachers	33%	37%
Doctors	26%	28%
Religious leaders	25%	28%
Business executives	22%	26%
Attorneys/lawyers	20%	22%
Politicians	18%	23%

10

PAY IT FORWARD

The majority of each generation is aware of the term "paying it forward," but the younger generations are significantly more likely than older generations to say they've heard of this civil trend that has begun to take hold.

Roughly half of Americans of each generation report that they have been the beneficiary of a kind act, with Millennials slightly outnumbering other generations, especially Boomers and the Silent Generation. Many more than that, however, report they have paid it forward to someone else; approximately seven in 10 per generation. In theory, "paying it forward" is a reciprocal concept — as one receives a kind act, one does a kind act for someone else — yet substantially more people, regardless of generation, have paid it forward than have been a recipient.
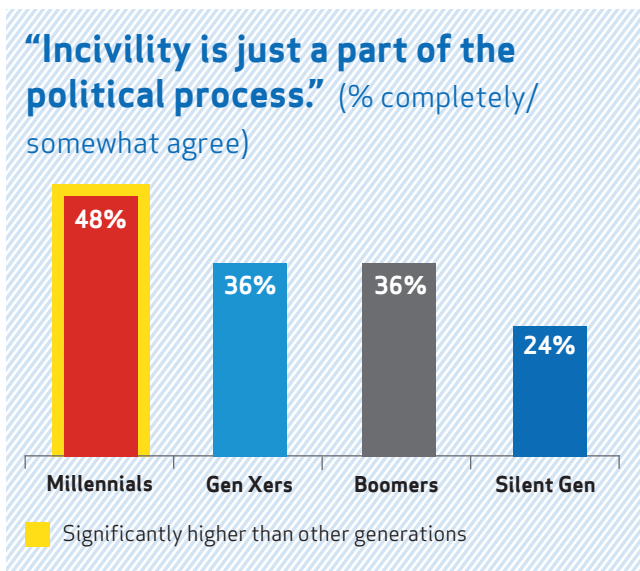
Paying it forward,* by generation

	Heard of the term "paying it forward"	Have had someone "pay it forward" to them	Have "paid it forward" to another person
Millennials	81%	54%	72%
Gen Xers	83%	52%	67%
Boomers	79%	48%	69%
Silent Generation	72%	48%	69%

* Definition: Responding to a kind act someone did for you by being kind or doing a good deed for someone else.

■ Millennials ■ Gen Xers ■ Boomers ■ Silent Generation ■ Significantly higher than other generations
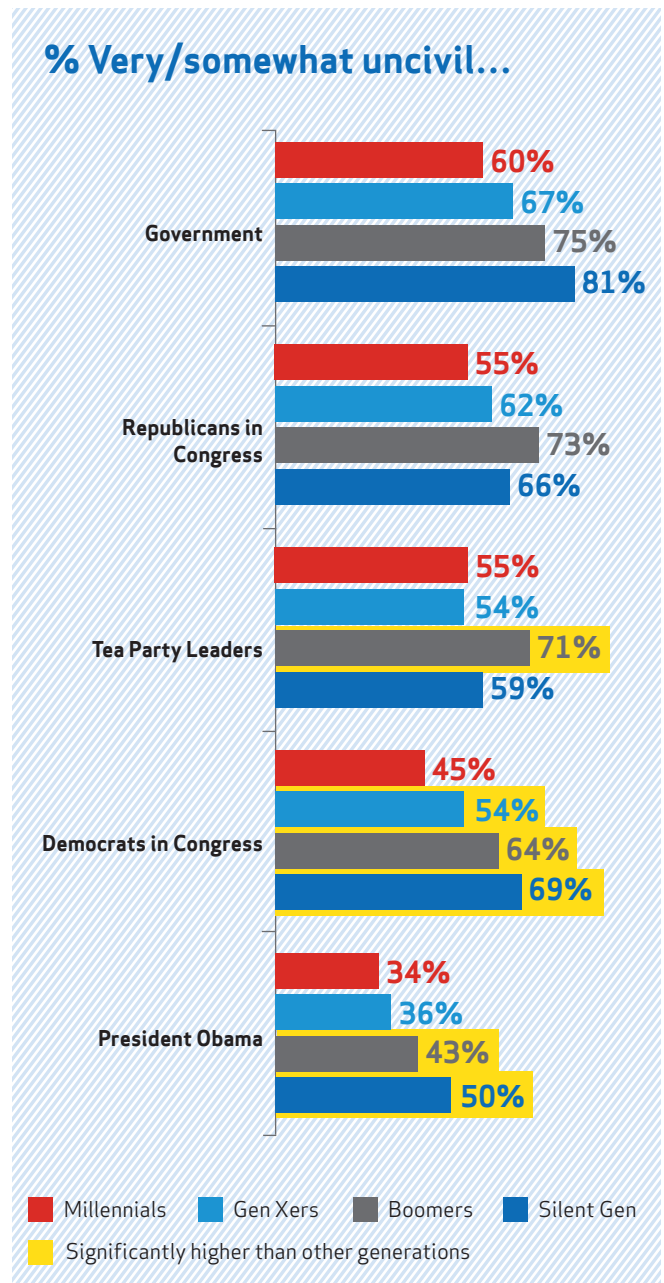
THE CIVILITY OF POLITICS

Year after year, **Civility in America** finds agreement among Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike: the government behaves uncivilly and politicians are seen as the number one cause of civility erosion in America. Disturbingly, and perhaps expectedly, nearly half of Millennials — significantly more than any other generation — accept that incivility is just part of our political process.

Millennials generally see less incivility in government and among the political parties than other generations. They are the least likely to rate the government, Congressional Republicans and Democrats as uncivil. They are about as likely as Gen Xers to rate Tea Party leaders and President Obama as uncivil.

"For me, this study prompts several key questions. Can the tide be turned on political incivility? Is the damage to our political system irreparable? And can Millennials serve as a catalyst for shifting the social norm back toward civil debate?"

Pam Jenkins
President, Powell Tate

"Incivility is just a part of the political process." (% completely/somewhat agree)

Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Silent Gen
48%	36%	36%	24%

🟨 Significantly higher than other generations

% Very/somewhat uncivil...

Government
- Millennials: 60%
- Gen Xers: 67%
- Boomers: 75%
- Silent Gen: 81%

Republicans in Congress
- Millennials: 55%
- Gen Xers: 62%
- Boomers: 73%
- Silent Gen: 66%

Tea Party Leaders
- Millennials: 55%
- Gen Xers: 54%
- Boomers: 71%
- Silent Gen: 59%

Democrats in Congress
- Millennials: 45%
- Gen Xers: 54%
- Boomers: 64%
- Silent Gen: 69%

President Obama
- Millennials: 34%
- Gen Xers: 36%
- Boomers: 43%
- Silent Gen: 50%

🟥 Millennials 🟦 Gen Xers ⬜ Boomers 🟦 Silent Gen
🟨 Significantly higher than other generations

Civility in America 2014 shows that incivility continues to be a way of American life with no generational boundaries. However, this year's study reveals an important finding: the Millennial generation, the one that has personally experienced the most incivility and is most accepting of incivility being an inherent part of the political process, doesn't seem defeated. Millennials have taken actions to avoid incivility in their lives, and are more proactive than older generations when they experience or witness incivility. This young generation, which agrees that civility will get worse in the years ahead, are still more likely than others to think civility will improve. For Millennials, who will one day bear the burden of solving America's incivility problem, this faint optimism may be the strength they need to overcome uncivil obstacles.

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