

Views of the World by Generation and Political Affiliation

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Abstract

This study assessed people’s views on what concerns them most, what is most important to them, and their knowledge of some major issues (e.g., crime rates, poverty levels). Comparisons were made across generations (Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennial) and political affiliations (Democrat, Republican, Independent). Participants were 150 MTURK Masters. Results showed that differences across generations were relatively minor compared to the differences across political affiliations. One surprising finding was that all generations cited inflation and crime as their top two concerns. Rankings of level of concern similar for Gen X and Millennials, but differed from Baby Boomers.

Introduction

In a study done by Twenge et al. (2012), generational differences were measured when it came to life goals, concern for others, and civic orientation. The results showed that Millennials and Gen X both viewed being financially well off, living close to parents, and working as more important than developing a meaningful philosophy of life, being up to date on current political affairs, and getting more involved with programs to help the environment. When it came to concern for others, Gen X and Millennials scored lower than boomers. Boomers were more likely to donate to charity and to want meaningful jobs that were worthwhile to society (Twenge et al., 2012).

One thing that has always been around is confirmation bias. Confirmation bias connotes the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand (Nickerson, 1998). Nickerson (1998) talks about how when there is nothing at stake and there are two strangers that are engaging in an argument, people are able to be very intelligent at weight the evidence and coming to a rational conclusion. But when the argument becomes personal, it is seen that people lose the ability to see any side other than their own.

In the current study, the generations studied were Baby Boomers (born between 1955 and 1964), Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980), and Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996). Generations were compared across topics such as political issues, attitudes towards mental health, and lifestyle.

Participants

Participants were gathered through an online forum Mechanical Turk. The sample comprised 150 MTurk Masters, who are deemed the best workers in their pool of participants. Demographics of the participants were 78% White, 5% Black, 10% Asian, and 4% Hispanic. There was 38% female and 61% male. Of the participants, 71% had some college or less, and 18% had a PhD. For political affiliation, 51% were Democratic, 21% were Republican and 26% were Independent. Participants were paid \$1 for completing the survey. Procedures were approved by the Rider IRB.

Procedure

The survey commenced immediately after participants signed the consent form and they were allowed to finish at their own pace. Part one of the survey showed a list of words (see Figure 1) and participants were asked to pick the top 10 that were most important to them. In part two, participants were given topics which were Military, BLM, Feminism, Abortion, LGBTQ+, and Police where they had to rate them from most negative to most positive. In part three, participants had to estimate percentages of crime rates, poverty, single parent households, and high school graduation. In part four, ten items were given and they were to rank them from most concerning to least concerning. In the last part of the survey, demographics were collected.

Design & Analysis

The independent variables were generation (Baby boomers, Gen X, and Millennials), genders (Male, Female), and political affiliation (Democratic, Republican, and Independent). For section 1 of the survey, word frequencies will be analyzed by generation. For section 2 of the survey, the mean rating for each variable was computed. For section 3 of the survey, the accuracy of estimates was compared across generations, genders, and political affiliation. For section 4 the mean rankings were computed for each generation. The type 1 error rate was .05 for all tests. The minimum effect of interest was $r = .25$. Power was .85 and the Type II error rate was .15.

Results

Results for Part 1 of the survey for the generations where participants had to choose 10 of 32 words are shown in Table 2. For Part 2 of the survey, where participants had to rate different views of topics, the mean positivity ratings for generations and political affiliations are shown in Figures 1 and 2. In part 3 of the survey, where participants had to give a general estimate for data that have already been researched previously, the overestimation of scores are seen in Figure 3. For Part 4 of the survey, where participants had to rank items from most concerning to least concerning, the mean rankings are shown in Table 3. Table 4 shows levels of concern by political affiliation.

Table 1: Word List for Part 1 of Survey

Beauty	Family	Happiness	Patriotism
Body Image	Fashion	Having Children	Popularity
Civil Rights	Feminism	Health	Race/Ethnicity
Culture / Customs	Free speech	Love	Social life
Dieting	Freedom	Marriage	Social Status
Environment	Friends	Mental Health	Technology
Equality	Global warming	Money/Wealth	Weight
Exercise	God/Religion	Neighbors	Work

Table 2: Top 5 Importance Items Chosen by Each Generation

Boomers	Gen X	Millennials
Freedom	Health	Happiness
Health	Family	Health
Mental health	Happiness	Family
Family	Freedom	Money
Happiness	Free Speech	Freedom

Figure 1: Mean Positivity Ratings by Generation

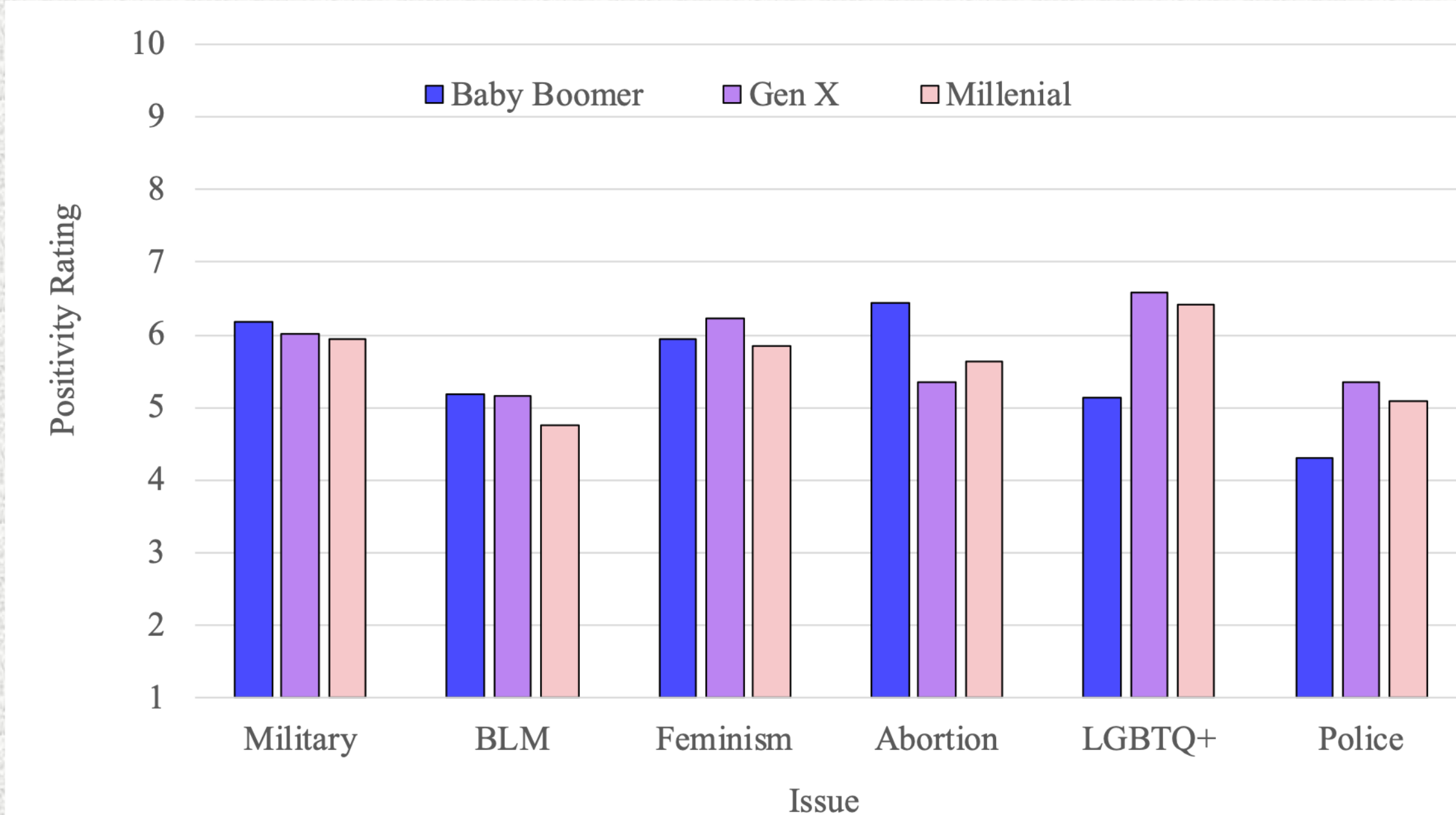


Figure 2: Mean Positivity Ratings by Political Affiliation

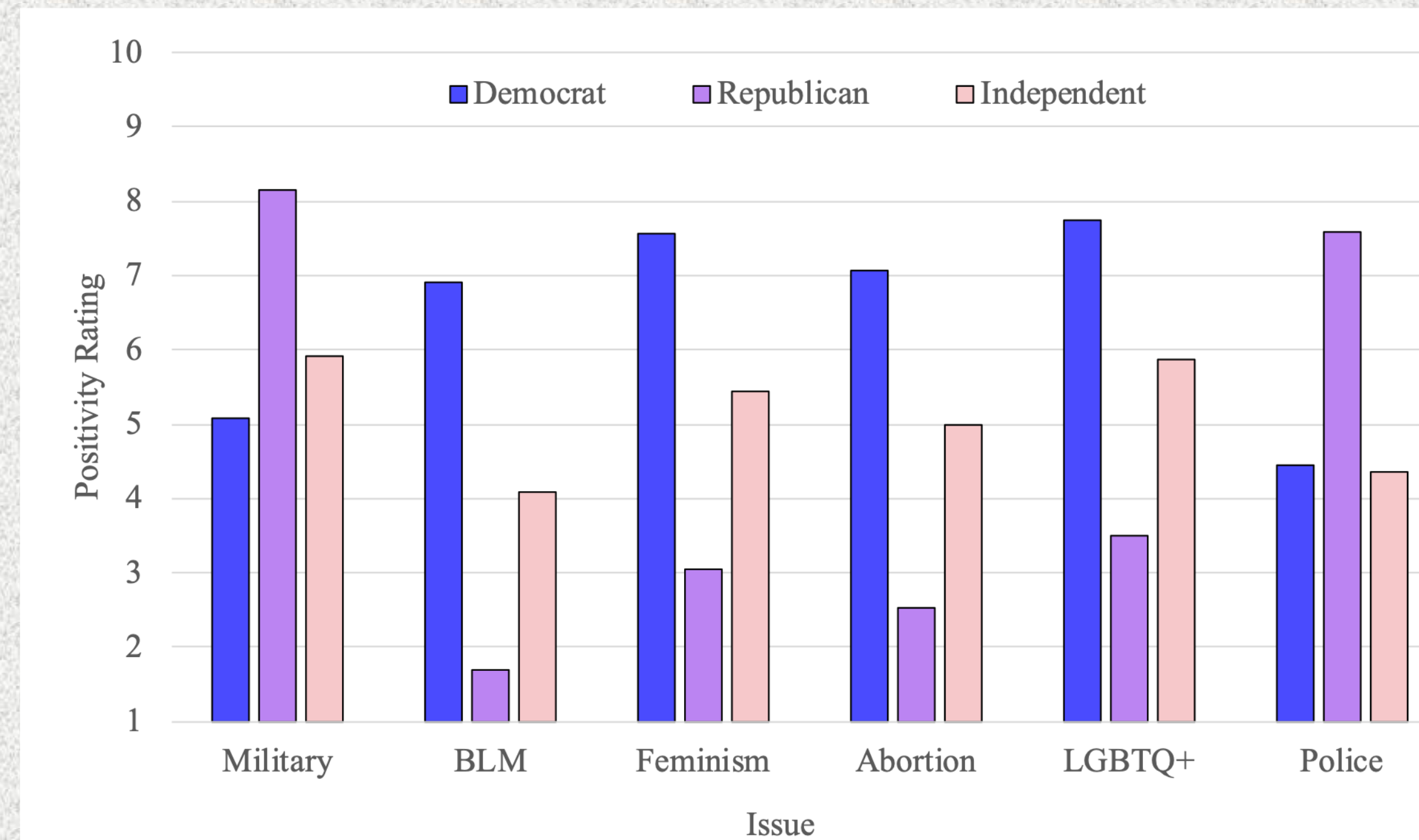


Figure 3: Levels of Overestimation by Political Affiliation and Generation

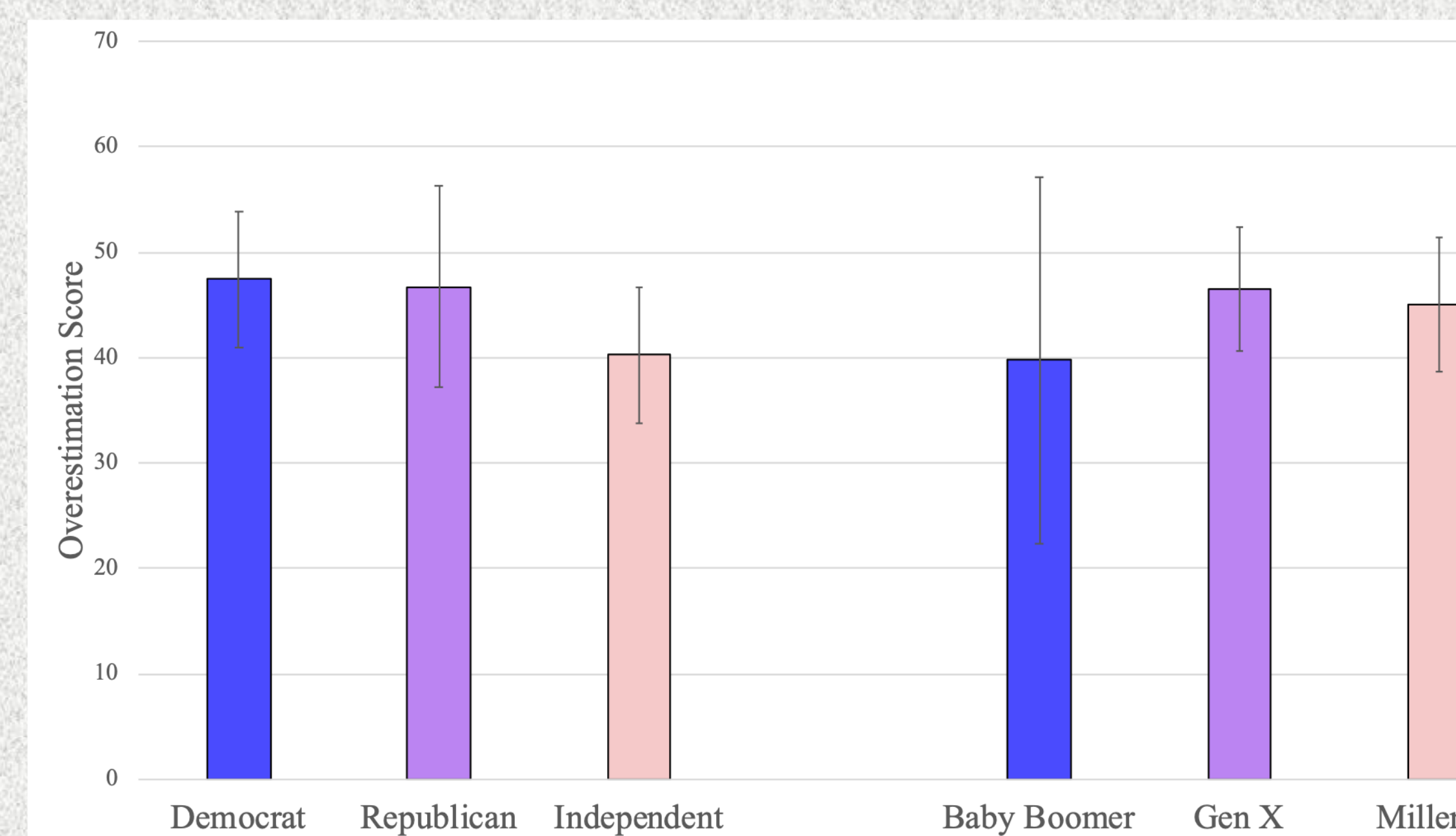


Table 3: Levels of Concern Rankings by Generation

Boomers	Gen X	Millennials
Inflation	Inflation	Inflation
Crime	Crime	Crime
COVID	Education	Global warming
Racism	COVID	COVID
China	Global Warming	Education
Homelessness	Homelessness	Racism
Immigration	Racism	Homelessness
Drug Abuse	Drug abuse	Drug Abuse
Immigration	Immigration	Immigration
	China	China

Table 4: Levels of Concerns Rankings by Political Affiliation

Democrats	Republican	Independent
Global warming	Inflation	Inflation
COVID	Crime	Crime
Inflation	Immigration	Education
Racism	Drug Abuse	COVID
China	China	Homelessness
Homelessness	Education	Global Warming
Education	COVID	Drug Abuse
Crime	Homelessness	Racism
Drug Abuse	Racism	Immigration
Immigration	Global Warming	China

Discussion

This study has demonstrated that there are some differences between generations, but for the most part, views have not changed throughout the generations. The views have been seen to only be altered slightly. What was interesting to see was that there seemed to be more differences in the answers based on political affiliation rather than generational differences. It also brings up the question whether there really are differences in generation but rather differences based on confirmation bias, where individuals seek out information that supports what they already believe to be true.

Before the start of the survey, it was expected that there would be significant differences among the different generations. Rather than differences, it was found that the generations were more similar than was expected. It was seen that there were more differences when looking at it from each of the participants political standpoint than looking at it by generations. In Part 1 of the study, it was found that Health was among the top two for all generations and of the top five that were chosen by each of the generations, there were a lot of overlaps of items. Happiness, freedom, and family were the three that overlapped through all generations.

In Part 2 of the study, it was seen that the mean positivity ratings were similar throughout the different generations but when compared against different political affiliations, it was seen that there were vast differences. Democrats were seen to have a higher positivity than Republicans for all but Military and Police. Those that were associated with having an Independent affiliation were seen to fall in the middle for most of the ratings except for when it came to Police.

In Part 3 of the study, it was found that there were no differences when it came to different generations for estimating scores. When comparing Democrats to Republicans, it was also seen that they were almost identical when guessing the correct scores. But those that were Independent were seen to have more accurate scores. Independents were seen to be more accurate by 8 points.

In Part 4 of the study, it was seen that the rankings for the levels of concern of various topics were generally the same throughout the generations, with Gen X and Millennials having more similarities in their rankings than Baby Boomers. When looking at the differences when it came to political affiliations, it can be seen that the rankings were all different with there being slight similarities between each of the different parties.

While not every aspect was explored to see if there were generational differences, the data that was collected was not what was expected and it showed that differences didn’t have as great of an impact on the generations as it was previously thought to be. The key differences in the U.S. today seems to be driven by political affiliations and not generations.

References

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