

Gen Z in the West

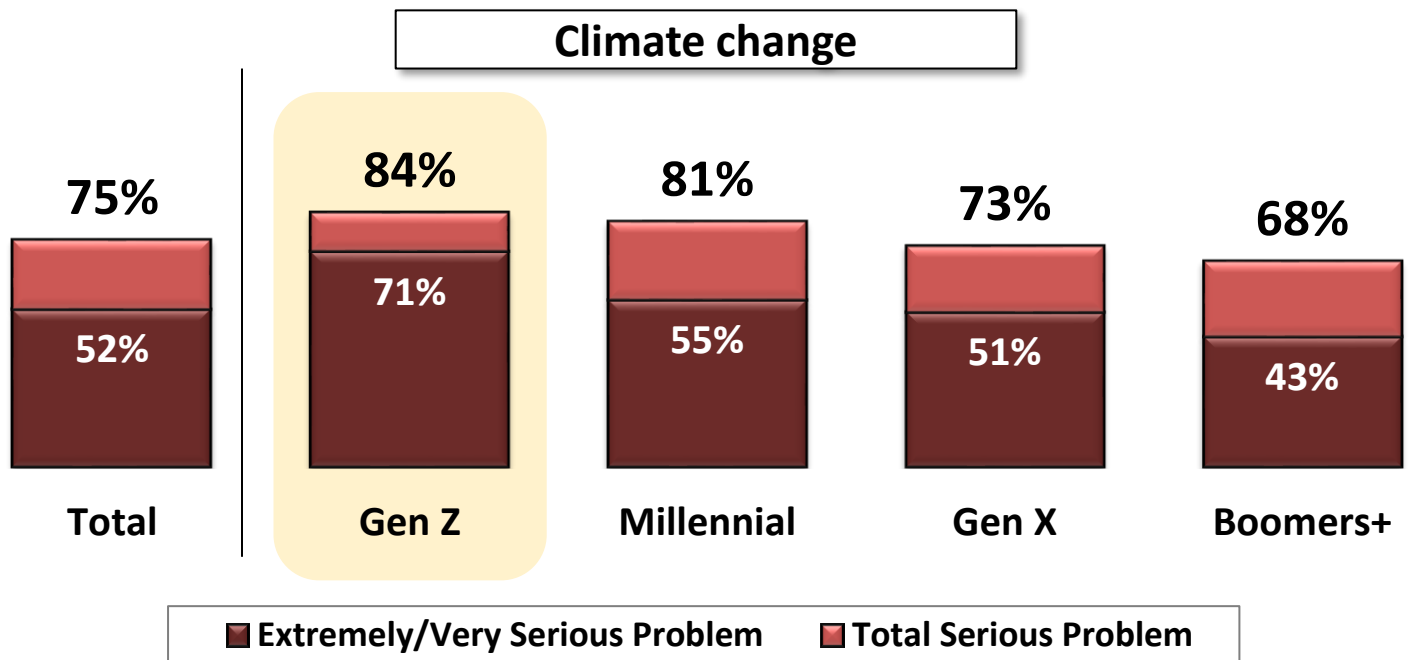
Gen Z voters represent an increasingly influential and distinct constituency in the West. They are the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in the electorate and are more likely than older voters to identify as politically independent, making them especially important to engage in future elections. As this generation continues to enter and shape the electorate, their views on conservation, climate change, energy, and public lands offer insight into the long-term direction of public opinion in the region.

Gen Z voters are more diverse than any other generation surveyed, with 43 percent identifying as voters of color, compared to 36 percent of Millennials, 26 percent of Gen X, and just 14 percent of Boomers and older voters. Along with Millennials, Gen Z voters are the most likely to identify as politically independent, with 40 percent describing themselves as independents. This combination of diversity and political independence underscores the importance of Gen Z voters to candidates and policymakers seeking broad-based support in the West.



When faced with tradeoffs, Gen Z voters consistently prioritize protecting land, water, and wildlife over energy development or other uses. For example, more than four-in-five Gen Z voters (81 percent) say their Member of Congress should place greater emphasis on protecting clean water, air quality, and wildlife habitat rather than maximizing public lands for oil and gas drilling and mining (17 percent). This is the widest margin of preference of any generation. It also represents a 13-point increase in just the last few years since 2023, when 68 percent of Gen Z voters favored prioritizing conservation.

Gen Z voters also view conservation-related challenges as more urgent than older generations. While the rising cost of living is the top concern across all age groups, climate change is not far behind among Gen Z voters, with 71 percent saying it is an extremely or very serious problem.



Climate change is not the only issue which provokes greater concern among the youngest voters. Two-thirds of Gen Z voters describe rollbacks of laws that protect our land, water and wildlife as an extremely or very serious problem (nearly 10 points higher than the electorate overall). They also register stronger concern about loss of fish and wildlife habitat (68 percent, 15 points higher); the impacts of oil and gas drilling (54 percent, 12 points higher); PFAS in water (69 percent, 10 points higher); and pollution of rivers, lakes and streams (67 percent, 10 points higher).

On water issues, Gen Z voters stand out for the weight they place on climate change and energy development as threats to water supply. Two-thirds of Gen Z voters (66 percent) say climate change is a major threat to their state’s water supply, compared to smaller majorities among Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers. Oil and gas development is the second-highest rated threat among Gen Z voters, with 56 percent calling it a major threat – again notably higher than among older generations. In contrast, Gen Z voters are less likely to cite population growth as a major threat, reflecting a distinct prioritization of environmental drivers over demographic ones.

Showing % Extremely Serious

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers+
Rising cost of living 53%	Rising cost of living 56%	Rising cost of living 54%	Rising cost of living 38%
Climate change 41%	Inadequate water supply 41%	Inadequate water supply 36%	Inadequate water supply 34%
Rollbacks of laws 35%	PFAS 34%	Rollbacks of laws 31%	Funding cuts to management 29%
PFAS 32%	Climate change 32%	PFAS 29%	Rollbacks of laws 28%
Impact drilling 32%	Pollution rivers/lakes/streams 32%	Climate change 29%	Uncontrollable wildfires 27%

Despite these concerns, Gen Z voters are relatively optimistic about the potential for bipartisan cooperation on conservation. More than two-thirds of Gen Z voters (67 percent) say issues involving public lands, waters and wildlife are areas where people have more in common rather than more partisan differences, a level of optimism similar to Millennials (68 percent) and higher than Gen X (61 percent) and Boomers (63 percent).

Gen Z

Millennials

Gen X

Boomers+

Issues where people have more in common and we should be able to find common ground in order to get things done

67%

68%

61%

63%

Issues where there are more partisan or other differences that will make it very hard to get things done

32%

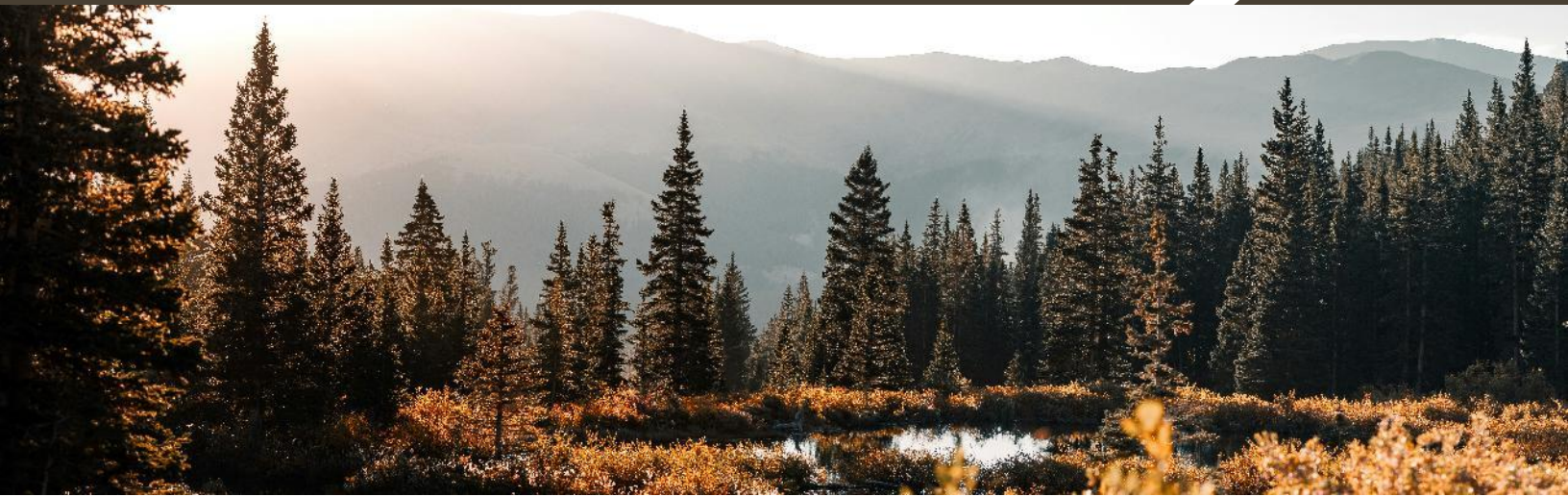
30%

37%

36%

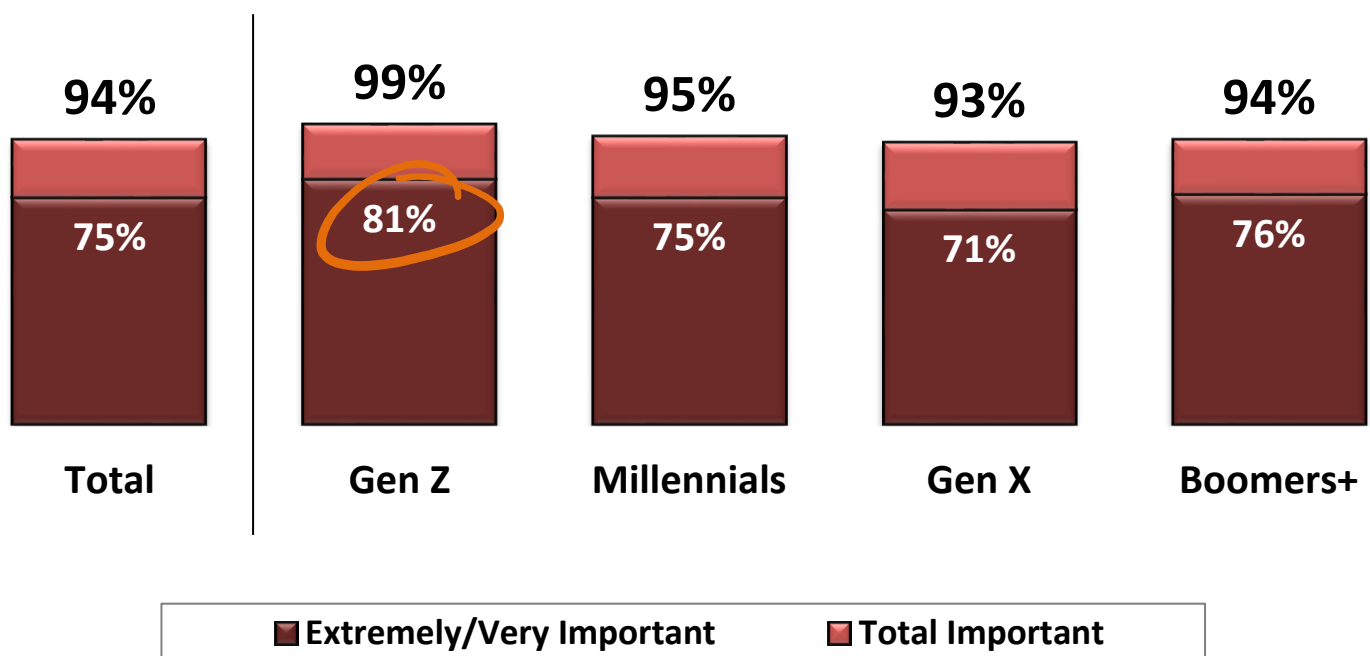


Gen Z voters' views on public lands also reveal some nuance. While majorities across all generations oppose selling public lands for housing development, Gen Z voters are more open to this idea than older voters. More than one-in-three Gen Z voters (36 percent) say they would support selling some national public lands to private companies for housing development, compared to only 26 percent of Millennials, 23 percent of Gen X voters, and 18 percent of Boomers.



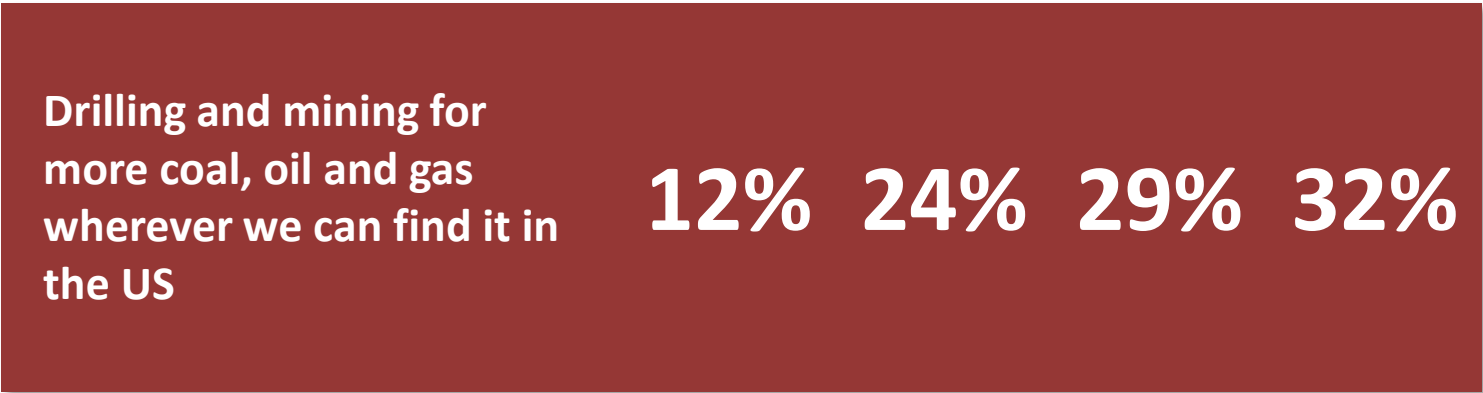
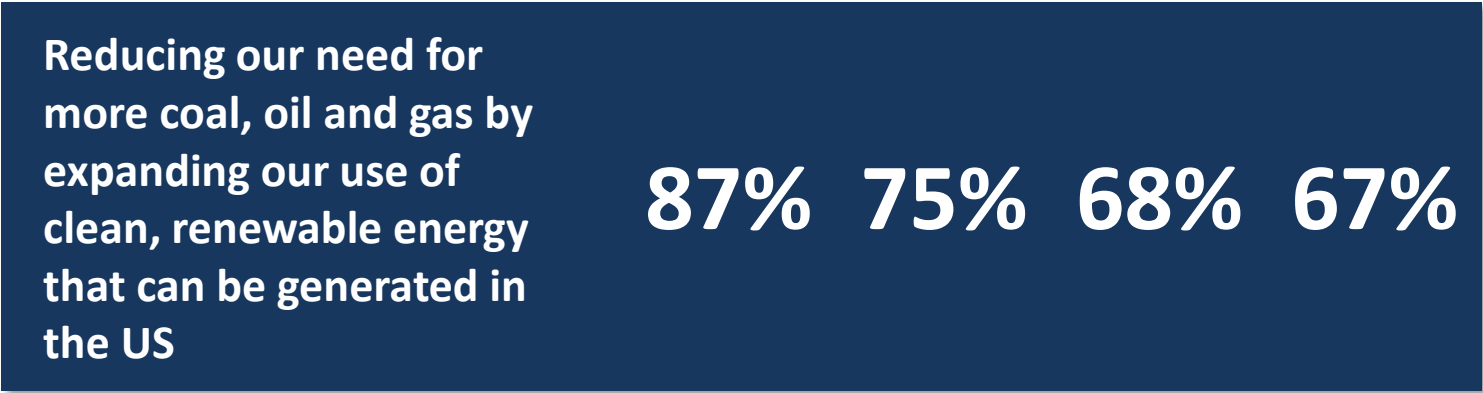
At the same time, Gen Z voters place exceptional importance on investing in long-term protection of public lands. Nearly all Gen Z voters (99 percent) say it is important to continue using Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars to protect inholdings within the boundaries of parks and public lands, including more than four-in-five (81 percent) who say this is extremely or very important – significantly higher than among other generations.

Thousands of acres of private lands within existing national parks and other public lands are up for sale. Right now, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has dedicated money to purchase these areas and ensure they are incorporated into our public lands.



Gen Z voters also show the strongest preference for clean energy over fossil fuel extraction. Nearly three-in-four (71 percent) say they would encourage the use of solar energy over other energy sources, and nearly nine-in-ten (87 percent) prefer reducing reliance on coal, oil and gas by expanding renewable energy rather than increasing drilling and mining. This preference is markedly stronger than among older generations, particularly Boomers.

Gen Z Millennials Gen X Boomers+



Overall, Gen Z voters in the West demonstrate a clear and expanding commitment to conservation, environmental protection, and clean energy. Their high levels of concern, strong policy preferences, and growing presence in the electorate suggest that their views will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future conservation and public lands policy in the West.