

Demography

Generational Shifts in Values

U.S. generations may not fit pundits' labels.

A presumed "trend" toward conservatism in America may be highly overstated—and on the way out—along with the label itself, suggests a sweeping examination of the attitudes and beliefs of different generation groups.

Many pundits predicted a rise in conservatism as baby boomers en-

tered middle age and as Generation X'ers began their family-forming years; indeed, increased public emphasis on "traditional family values" in recent years seems to support that prediction. But there's more to the story than simply the maturation of these two groups, according to demographer Susan Mitchell, author of

American Generations, a voluminous collection of consumer statistics.

"Several factors account for the differences in behavior of consumers from different generations," Mitchell writes. "One is education, which greatly influences people's attitudes and values, wants and needs. The Baby Boom and Generation X are much better educated than older Americans. This fact alone means that younger generations will behave differently than their parents did at the same age."

In fact, Generation X'ers and baby boomers are the two most-liberal generations in the United States today, though the majority in both groups identify themselves as moderates, according to Mitchell.

Twenty-seven percent of boomers (those born from 1946 to 1964) and X'ers (1965–1976) rank themselves from "extremely" to "slightly" liberal, compared with 20% of the Swing generation (1933–1945) and only 17% of the World War II generation (born before 1933).

But such labeling may be misleading to anyone hoping to understand the differences among these groups of people and the changes in their values and lifestyles.

"The terms 'liberal' and 'conservative' are becoming less and less useful for predicting public opinion on issues," says Mitchell. "Many boomers and Gen X'ers are fiscally conservative, but liberal on social issues."

Of the four groups, X'ers are the most likely to be registered as political Independents (45%) rather than Republicans or Democrats. "Independence is the hallmark of the individualistic younger generations," says Mitchell, who warns that this individualism has eroded party loyalty. "In the future, elections will be won by candidates who best articulate the wants and needs of voters—regardless of political party."

Religion is another area where X'ers are significantly different from older generations: When asked their religious preference, a whopping 19% of X'ers said "none," compared with 12% of baby boomers, 7% of

Demography in Brief

Lifestyle and Cancer

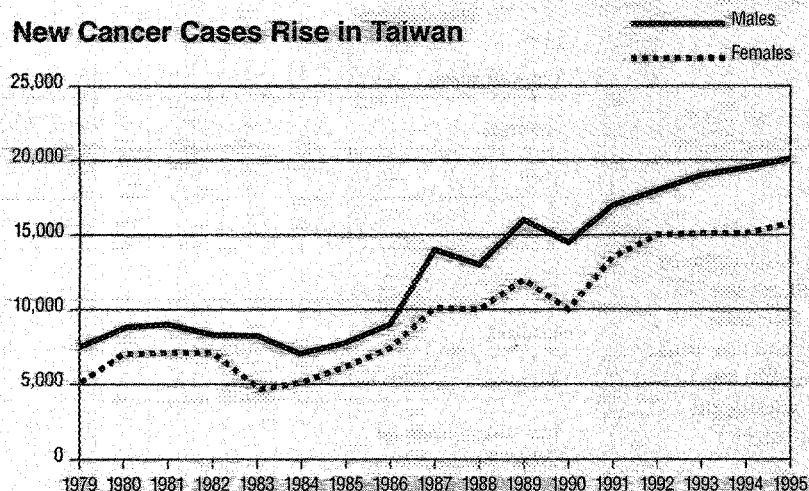
New cases of cancer are on the rise in Taiwan, largely due to lifestyle choices such as eating more meat. With women consuming more animal fat, the incidence of breast cancer is catching up to the rates in many Western countries, according to Taiwan's Department of Health.

Among males, lifestyle is blamed for

an increase in oral cancers; of particular concern to health officials is the high number of men who smoke, drink alcohol, and chew betel nuts, a stimulant.

Source: *The Free China Journal* (October 2, 1998); Kwang Hwa Publishing Co., 6300 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1510 A, Los Angeles, California 90048. Web site: www.gio.gov.tw.

New Cancer Cases Rise in Taiwan



Source: ROC Department of Health.

Cancer cases in Taiwan grew from about 12,000 in 1979 to over 36,000 in 1995.

Swing, and 4% of WWII.

"This does not mean that they are not religious, however," says Mitchell. Like the boomers before them, X'ers are increasingly seeking a wider variety of beliefs and practices. "While some adopt religions such as Buddhism (reflected in the higher percentages of X'ers and boomers who say their preference is 'other'), some express their spirituality through a variety of 'New Age' beliefs that are not considered religions."

Mitchell argues that it is important to understand the values and beliefs of younger people because, as the "replacement generation," they are the ones who will be shaping the future of society. —*Cynthia G. Wagner*

Source: *American Generations: Who They Are. How They Live. What They Think* by Susan Mitchell. New Strategist. 1998. 473 pages. Available from the Futurist Bookstore for \$79.95 (\$71.95 for Society members), cat. no. B-2216.

More Children Live With Grandparents

Grandparents are increasingly stepping in to take care of children whose parents can not: The number of American children living with their grandparents has nearly doubled since 1970, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

In 1997, 6% of the nation's children lived with their grandparents, up from the 3% who did so in 1970. These statistics reflect the grim reality that many parents cannot take care of their children because of drug and alcohol abuse, AIDS, incarceration, divorce, or teen pregnancy, say community health researchers.

The majority of these grandparent-headed families are white (42%), followed by black (36%), Hispanic (17%), and other races (5%). Such families are particularly prevalent in

low-income inner-city areas, where social-service providers estimate that 30%–50% of children are cared for by grandparents or other non-parent relatives.

The 1995 White House Conference on Aging passed a resolution calling for greater assistance to grandparent caregivers, who in most states receive less government support than foster parents. Additionally, programs to help caregiver grandparents have sprung up across the country, such as the Brookdale Grandparent Caregiver Information Center in Berkeley, California, and the Harlem Hospital Grandparents Program.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office, Room 2705-3, Washington, D.C. 20233. Telephone 1-301-457-3030; Web site www.census.gov.

"Grandparents as Surrogate Parents" by Meredith Minkler and Kathleen M. Roe, *Generations*, Volume 20.

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