

What to expect as Gen Z starts to parent

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What's in this research

- Demographics, characteristics, and values of Gen Z
- Environmental influences and societal trends shaping them
- Where Gen Z gets information and how to engage them
- When Gen Z is likely to have children and how they might parent differently than previous generations
- Possible futures for Gen Z



Who Are Gen Z?

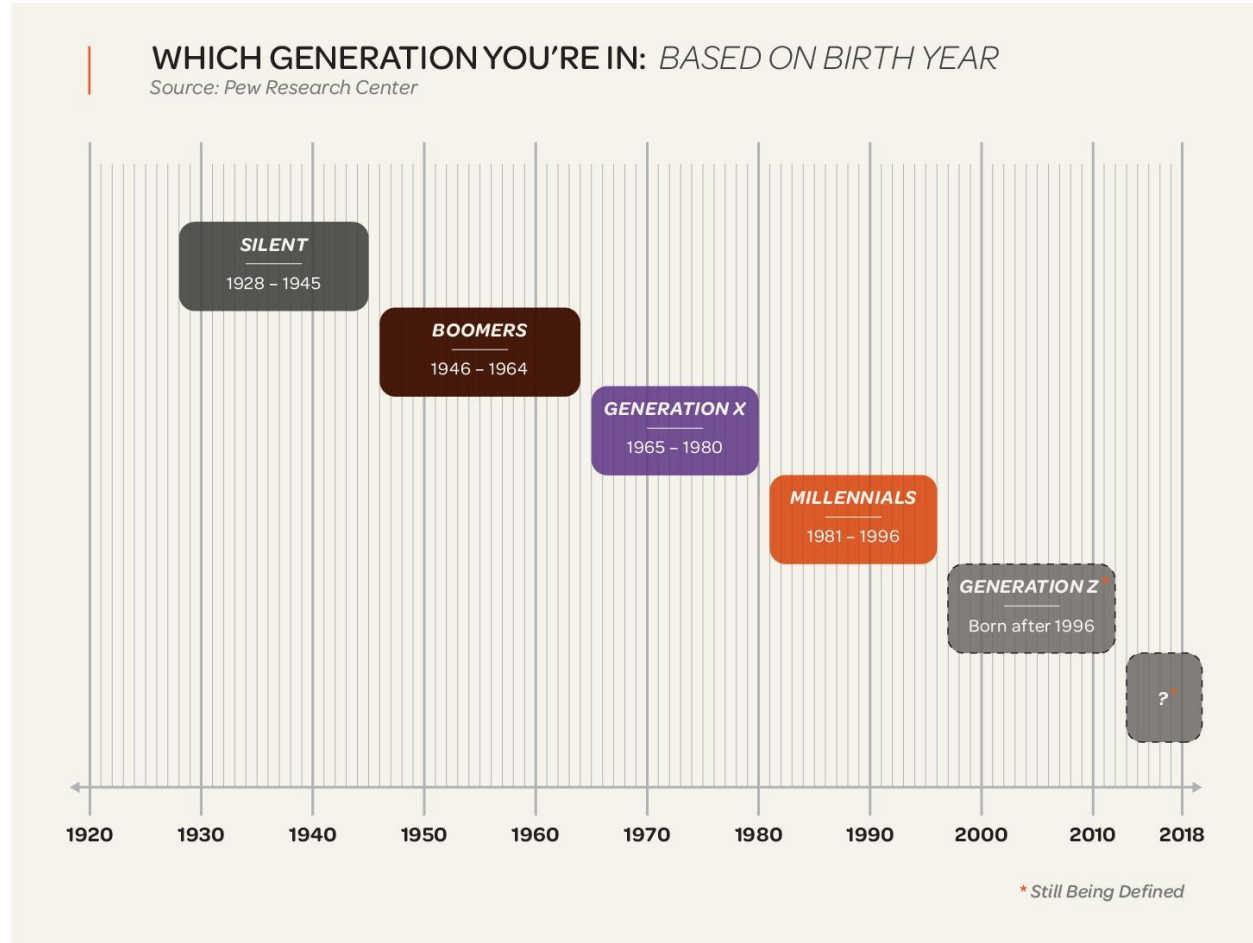
Gen Z Defined

Born 1997-2012*

*According to Pew Research Center

Oldest members of Gen Z
turn 26 in 2023

Other names:
Centennials, iGen, Zoomers,
post-millennials



A Snapshot of Gen Z

True Digital Natives

Never known life without internet, smartphones, social media. Tech fluent not just tech savvy. Navigate life seamlessly between virtual and non-virtual.

Skeptically Pro-Government

More likely than older generations to look to government to solve problems but have little trust and confidence in government officials and institutions.

Politically, Socially Progressive

See the country's growing diversity and changes to family structures and societal norms as positive.

Social Justice Oriented

Value individuality, diversity, and inclusion. Aware of injustice and inequality in society and are engaged in creating change, promoting fairness and equality.

Gen Z Compared to Other Generations



Most Racially & Ethnically Diverse

Gen Z is projected to be majority nonwhite by 2026. 1 in 4 are Hispanic. ¹



Most Educated

Less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to enroll in college than all previous generations. ¹



Loneliest

8 in 10 say they're lonely. ²



Worst Mental Health & More Likely to Seek Support with Mental Health

More likely to report poor mental health than any other generation. 55% of Gen Z adults reported having received a diagnosis or treatment for mental disorder. 33% of those who received a diagnosis sought treatment from a mental health professional. ³



Least Traditional Families

1 in 3 Gen Z parents grew up in single parent household. Currently about half of Gen Z parents are married. ^{4,5}

Key Influences on Gen Z's Identity Formation

- Smartphones + social media
- Great Recession
- Terrorism, War on Terror — *though too young to really remember 9/11 or were born after*
- Helicopter parents
- Mass shootings, active shooter drills in schools
- More frequent and intense natural disasters

Currently Influencing Gen Z

- COVID-19 Pandemic - “Missed” coming-of-age experiences, record-high unemployment, potential lifetime wage loss, exacerbated loneliness, and mental health challenges
- Navigating early careers - Multiple jobs, remote work, Great Resignation, “quiet quitting”
- Struggling with mental health, but prioritizing self-care - Record rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide while a \$450B self-care industry thrives
- Highly curated but seeking authenticity - BeReal app and flip phones
- Cancel culture - Demanding accountability, but young and prone to making their own mistakes

Currently Influencing Gen Z

- Racial reckoning - Protests, "woke culture," diversity and inclusion initiatives
- Eroding democracy and trust in democratic institutions - Supreme Court, state governments, January 6 attack on the Capitol
- Rise of multipolar world order - Ukraine War, fading petrodollar
- Inflation, rising interest rates - Living at home, high student loan debt, limited ability to save
- Pessimistic, "Doomerist" outlook - Climate anxiety, uncertain financial future, growing risk of global conflict

Values Driving Gen Z's Behavior

The search for the truth is at the root of all Generation Z's behavior.

Undefined ID
"Don't define yourself
in only one way"



Expressing
individual truth

Communaholic
"Be radically
inclusive"



Connecting through
different truths

Dialoguer
"Have fewer confrontations
and more dialogue"



Understanding
different truths

Realistic
"Live life
pragmatically"



Unveiling the truth
behind all things

Gen Z Characteristics

Worried, cautious, risk averse

Less idealistic about their future. Very concerned about how the economy, growing inequality, climate change will impact their futures.

Slower to “grow up”

Engaging later and less often in “coming of age” activities like getting a driver’s license, drinking, spending time with friends without parents, dating, and becoming sexually active.¹

Financially pragmatic

Living through uncertainty and economic instability for most of their lives, they are pragmatic, values-based spenders concerned for their financial futures but willing to spend in alignment with their values.

Skeptical of traditional sources of information

With declining trust in institutions, appointed leaders, and news sources, members of Gen Z form opinions and make decisions by using their digital fluency to navigate various online sources and crowdsource opinions from their online social networks.



Socially, Politically Active

Aware of, and comfortable driving change on, many social justice issues. Key issues important to Gen Z include: climate change, income inequality, affordable health care, racism, gun violence, police brutality, and fair treatment of people of color and LGBT individuals

Vanishingly Rural

Nearly 9 in 10 Gen Zers live in urban or suburban areas (13% live in rural)¹

More Likely to be Second Generation Immigrant

22% of Gen Z has at least one immigrant parent, up from 14% of millennials. Only 6% are immigrants themselves, down from 7% millennials¹



Increasingly Identify as LGBT

1 in 5 Gen Z adults (aged 19-26) considers themselves LGBT. Of those Gen Z adults who are LGBT, 66% say they are bisexual, only slightly more than the 62% of millennial LGBT adults identifying as bisexual.¹

More Comfortable with Gender Fluidity

1 in 3 Gen Z adults personally know someone who goes by gender-neutral pronouns. 6 in 10 Gen Z adults say that when a form asks about gender it should include options other than “man” and “woman” and about half say society isn’t accepting enough of people who don’t identify as “man” or “woman.”²

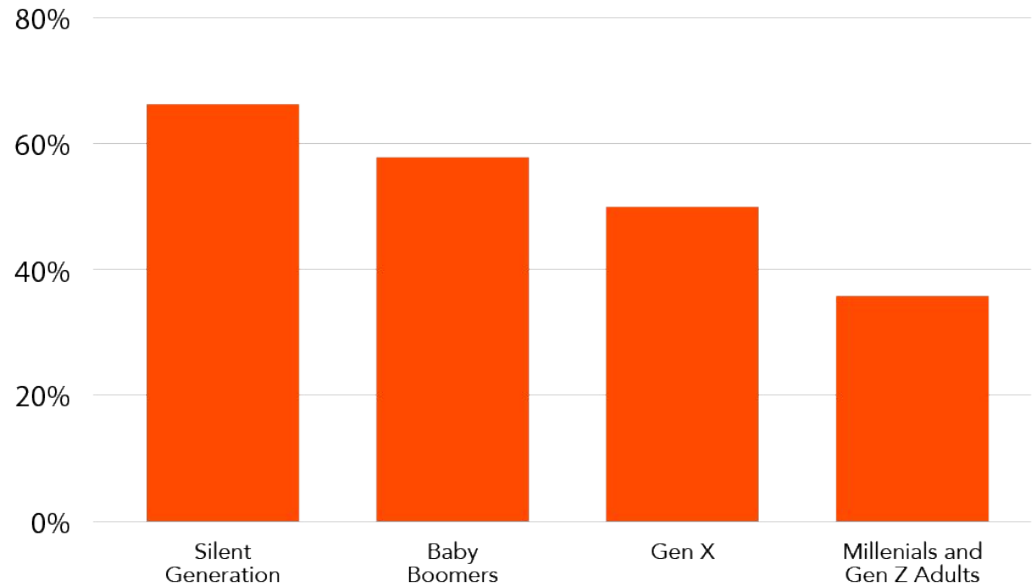


Gen Z craves community, but is less likely to belong to formal groups

Gen Z is looking for connection, community, “something bigger than themselves.” But they’re less likely to be connected to groups and institutions like a house of worship, organized sports leagues, and civic groups— places where Americans have traditionally found community.

Only 1 in 3 Gen Z adults belongs to a church, synagogue, or mosque, compared to nearly 2 in 3 members of the Silent Generation, the oldest living generation.

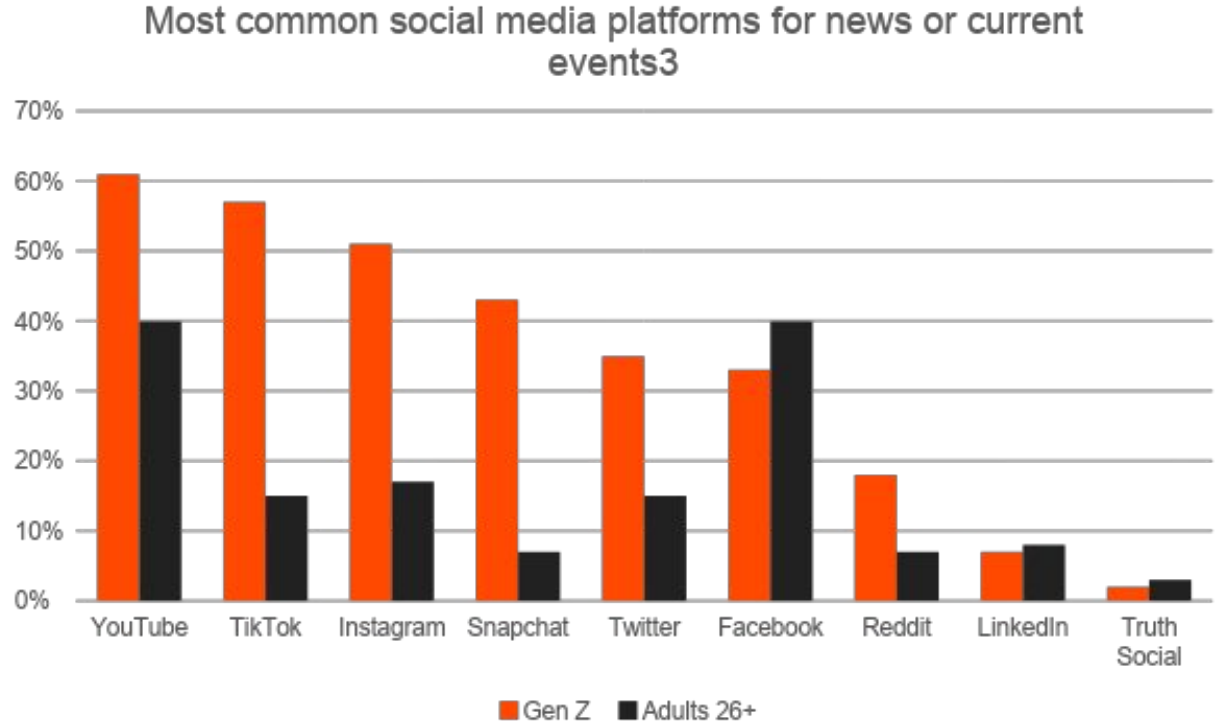
Younger Americans Much Less Likely to Belong to a Church



Where Gen Z Gets Information

68% of Gen Z turn to social media for news at least once a week, and 37% use it for news daily.¹

Millennials use social media for news at nearly the same rates as Gen Z but the generations use very different sources.²



What Institutions Need to Know about Engaging Gen Z

- They **refuse to be put in a box and will reject a "one size fits all" approach.** They expect personalization and an acceptance of differing lifestyles.
- They are **shrewd consumers who will not take information and advice at face value and are particularly skeptical of traditional sources of information.** They will research issues for themselves using various online sources and consult their extensive social networks to form opinions and make decisions.
- They expect NGOs, businesses, government agencies, and other institutions to be socially respectful and ethically responsible. They **will demand that organizations "practice what they preach" and act ethically.** When organizations' actions do not align with their professed values, it will be noticed by Gen Zers, who will view them as inauthentic and even untrustworthy.
- Increasingly they **expect organizations to take a stance on social and political issues and will align themselves with organizations that have similar views and values as theirs**—and will distance themselves from those that don't. They see engagement and consumption as an expression of their values and identify.

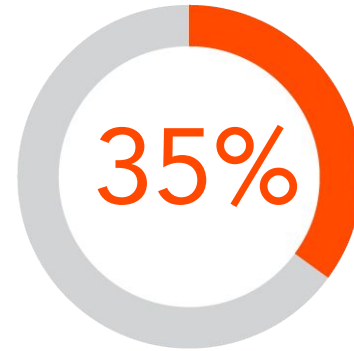
Gen Z is the leading edge of America's less traditional views on marriage and parenting

With favorable views of cohabitation and negative views of single parenting, Gen Z views marriage as inessential but partnership as key to healthy relationships and parenting.



~9 in 10

believe couples living together without being married isn't harmful for society.¹



say that single women raising children on their own is a bad thing for society.¹

Solid majorities of American adults now hold less traditional views on a range of moral issues impacting family life.



of American adults say having children outside of marriage is acceptable.¹



say it's very important for a couple to marry if they have a child.¹



view birth control as morally acceptable.³



think that same-sex couples should be able to adopt children.



of American adults, or nearly 1 in 5, view polygamy as morally acceptable.³



Though marriage rates are declining and less than half (49%) of American adults are currently married, the desire to marry is still high, with 8 in 10 singles saying they want to marry.¹



OLIVER MOUNSEY, 23
HANNAH KILLEEN, 25,
DALI, 2

Do you think your generation is having more children than millennials did at your age?

“It’s hard to say...I think maybe Gen Z is realizing you don’t need to have a traditional family life, you don’t need to have a house and get married. Maybe our generation is challenging social norms, which is a really good thing. A family is what you make it.”¹


HANNAH KILLEEN

When Will Gen Z Become Parents?

A silhouette of a woman standing next to a stroller, looking down at it. She is positioned under the large, leafy branches of a tree. The background is a bright, overcast sky. The foreground shows a field of tall grass.

Gen Z parents are likely to continue the trend of having children later in life

- Gen Z has record-low teen birth rates with just 15.4 births in 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in 2020.¹ Birth rates are of what of they were from the time Gen Z entered childbearing age, plummeting from rates of 53 in 1996 and 34 in 2011.
- There is a trend of waiting longer to have children—the median age for women is now 30, up from 21 five decades ago, and 31 for men, up from 27.¹

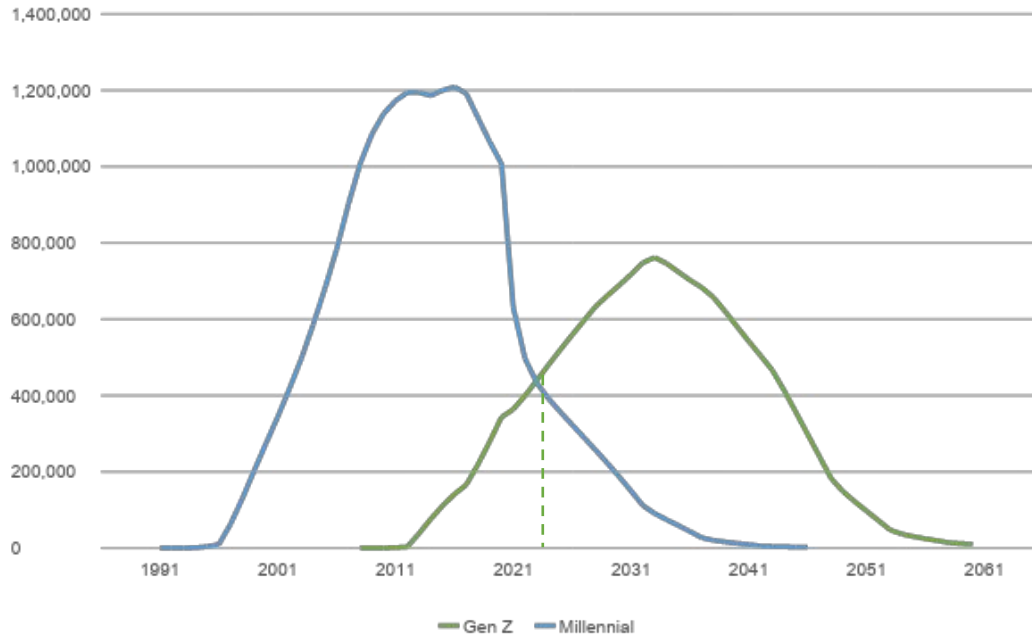
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Gen Z parents are likely to continue the trend of having children later in life

- Experts believe the postponement of childbearing is a trend likely to continue with Gen Z, given societal and economic trends
- With more of Gen Z identifying as LGBTQ and generally embracing nontraditional family structures, it's reasonable to expect that more members of Gen Z than past generations will become parents through pathways other than childbirth.

When is Gen Z likely to have children?

Number of first-time Millennial and Gen Z mothers in the U.S. by year, projected to 2060¹



Notes:

- Chart data shows reported first births 1991-2019 (CDC) and projected first births 2020-2060
- First time birth rates were applied across 5-year age cohorts and do not account for rate variations among ages within a single cohort.
- These data does not include adoptive or stepmothers due to data limitations.

In 2022, Capita commissioned a study to examine when the majority of births would shift from Millennial parents to Gen Z parents.

2022 was predicted to be the year in which the majority of first births were from Gen Z mothers rather than Millennial mothers. The actual changeover could be a year or two later due to data limitations).

2032 is forecast as the year in which there will be the largest number of projected first-time Gen Z mothers, over 770,000.

Overall, Capita's model predicts there to be fewer Gen Z mothers than Millennial mothers, due to the difference in generation size and declining fertility rates.

Sources:

- CDC Wonder Natality Databases 1995-2022, 2003-2006, 2007-2020
- CDC National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 49, Numb. 10
- U.S. Census Populations Estimates 2003-2019
- U.S. Census Population Projections for 2020-2060

What Might Gen Z Be Like As Parents?

Qualities to Expect from Gen Z as Parents:

- Accepting, understanding, empathetic towards their children, as well as other children and their families.
- Concerned, maybe even fearful, for their children's futures, but willing to be involved in their community and politically to create a better future for their children.
- More likely than previous generations to talk with their children about emotions and mental health, equip them with social-emotional skills, and seek mental health treatment when needed.
- Likely to be hands-on parents who value sharing experiences alongside their children in reaction to how they grew up with highly scheduled childhoods and technology as their babysitter.
- More likely than Gen X and Millennial parents to recognize the potentially harmful impacts of technology and social media and to possibly adapt their, and their children's, usage to buffer these negative impacts—but less likely to be able to build relationships without online connections.



Data From the Earliest Wave of Gen Z Parents*

Embracing nontraditional households



of Gen Z parents are married, although this share may increase as other members of Gen Z have children later in life^{1,2}

Feeling pressure to be perfect



of Gen Z mothers feel they need to be the perfect mom, with social media being identified as the top source of pressure³

Wary of their children's exposure to digital media...



of Gen Z mothers (compared to 50% of Millennials) believe in setting screen time limits³



Prioritizing mental and emotional well-being



Gen Z mothers report prioritizing parenting ideals related to promoting the mental and emotional well-being of their children and themselves³

See's parenthood as part of their identity, not their defining feature



Gen Z parents say that parenting enhances who they are as a person, whereas only 35% felt they lost part of their personal identity¹

...but not their own



of Gen Z mothers spend more than 2 hours per day on social media²

*Data comes mostly from Gen Z mothers

A Range of Possible Futures as Gen Z Starts to Parent

Gen Z's Loneliness & Mental Health Challenges

Will Gen Z's overwhelmingly poor mental health and social isolation negatively impact their ability to provide nurturing, reciprocal relationships with their children and build social community for their families?

Or will their firsthand experience with mental health disorders and receiving therapeutic care make them more empathetic, attuned, and responsive parents who are able to develop bridging and bonding relationships for their families?

Gen Z's Digital Fluency

Will growing up immersed in technology and social media negatively impact their social development, creating unhealthy ways of relating to themselves, each other, and the world?

Or will their digital nativism position them to be less enamored with technology and social media and more honest and pragmatic about the ways it can enhance and harm their lives, leading to healthier relationships with technology for their children?

Gen Z's Worry About a Dystopian Future

Will Gen Z's pragmatism and concern for the future overwhelm and dissuade them from bringing children into the world—or if they do have children, will they pass on their anxieties?

Or will having children of their own further motivate them to create a more inclusive, equitable, sustainable world—and instill these values in the next generation?

References

Endnotes

Slide 4: Snapshot of Gen Z

¹ [Pew: On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far \(2020\)](#)

² [Cigna: Loneliness and the Workplace 2020 Report \(2020\)](#)

³ [McKinsey: How does Gen Z see its place in the working world? With trepidation. \(2022\)](#)

⁴ [Vice: We, the Family: How Gen Z is Rewriting the Rules of Parenting. \(2021\)](#)

⁵ [Motherly: State of Motherhood 2022 Report. \(2022\)](#)

Slide 8: Gen Z Characteristics

¹ [Atlantic: Have Smartphone Destroyed a Generation? \(2017\)](#)

Slide 9: Gen Z Characteristics, Cont.

¹ [Pew: Early Benchmarks Show 'Post-Millennials' on Track to Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet \(2018\)](#)

Slide 10: Gen Z Characteristics, Cont.

¹ [Gallup: U.S. LGBT Identification Steady at 7.2% \(2023\)](#)

² [Pew: Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues \(2019\)](#)

Slide 11: Gen Z less likely to belong to formal groups

¹ [Gallup: U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time \(2021\)](#)

Slide 12: Where Gen Z Gets Information

¹ [Morning Consult: Trust Isn't Everything When It Comes to Gen Z News Consumption. \(2022\)](#)

² [Y-Pulse: News Consumption & Trust Report. \(2020\)](#)

³ [Murmuration: Gen Z Post Election Research. \(2023\)](#)

Slide 14: Gen Z is the leading edge on America's less traditional views on marriage and parenting

¹ [Pew: Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues \(2019\)](#)

Slide 15: Solid majorities of American adults now hold less traditional views on a range of moral issues impacting family life.

¹ [Gallup: Is Marriage Becoming Irrelevant? \(2020\)](#)

² [Gallup: LGBT Rights](#)

³ [Gallup: Americans Say Birth Control, Divorce Most 'Morally Acceptable' \(2022\)](#)

Slide 16: Do you think your generation is having more children than millennials did at your age?

¹ [Vice: 7 Gen Z-ers on Raising Kids in a Pandemic \(2021\)](#)

Slide 17: Gen Z parents are likely to continue the trend of having children later in life

¹ [Office of Population Affairs: Trends in Teen Pregnancy and Childbearing](#)

Slide 18: When is Gen Z likely to have children?

¹ [CDC Wonder Natality Databases 1995-2022, 2003-2006, 2007-2020; CDC National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 49, Numb. 10; U.S. Census Populations Estimates 2003-2019; U.S. Census Population Projections for 2020-2060](#)

Slide XX: What We've Seen From the Earliest Wave of Gen Z Parents

¹ [Vice: We, the Family: How Gen Z is Rewriting the Rules of Parenting. \(2021\)](#)

² [Motherly: State of Motherhood 2022 Report. \(2022\)](#)

³ [What to Expect.: Gen Zers and Millennials Have Very Different Ideas of What It Means to Be the 'Perfect Parent'. \(2023\)](#)

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