

# US Attitudes Toward Socialism, Communism, and Collectivism

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YouGov®



VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM  
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION



# Annual Report on US Attitudes Toward Socialism, Communism, and Collectivism

The Report on US Attitudes Toward Socialism, Communism, and Collectivism has surveyed Americans annually since 2016. The survey is commissioned by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and conducted by YouGov.

The goal of the report is to explore perceptions of collectivist systems, such as communism and socialism, among Americans ages 16 or older. This has been explored through direct questions concerning different economic systems and knowledge about the history of collectivist systems and their leaders and movements.

The last three reports have garnered wide attention from media outlets across the country, highlighting the knowledge gaps and perceptions of collectivism among the American public. This research has furthered VOC's mission of educating people about the ideas, history, and legacy of communism.



Findings reflect the responses of 2,100 Americans.



The survey was conducted between September 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and had an average survey length of 10 minutes.





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# KEY INSIGHTS: Opinions on Ideologies

## Capitalism is still viewed most favorably, while socialism favorability is down from 2018

- Overall, capitalism is viewed far more favorably than other economic systems—holding relatively steady from 61% in 2018. At the same time, favorability of capitalism is far lower among Gen Z and Millennials at around only 50%. Its favorability rises among Gen X, again among Boomers, and again among the Silent Generation, where 77% have a favorable opinion of capitalism.
- Favorability of capitalism is down 6 points and 8 points for Gen Z and Millennials respectively from 2018. It is up 5 points for the Silent Generation.
- Socialism favorability is down to 36% from 42% in 2018. This is due to a decrease in favorability among Gen Z, Gen X, and Baby Boomers. Millennials are holding steady at around 50% and a 7 point uptick in favorability is seen among the Silent Generation.
- While most Americans perceive the label ‘capitalist’ as neutral, it is the only ideology that is considered a compliment by more than consider it an insult.
- ‘Socialist’ is viewed as an insult by 37%, with ‘Marxist’ and ‘communist’ being viewed as insults by 49% and 61%, respectively.
- Percent who say ‘socialist’ is an insult is up 7 points from 30% in 2018. This is driven by the following generations:
  - Gen Z: 20% → 27%
  - Gen X: 27% → 40%
  - Boomers: 35% → 46%

### GENERATIONS DEFINED

Gen Z (ages 16-22)	13%
Millennial (ages 23-38)	27%
Gen X (ages 39-54)	24%
Boomers (ages 55-73)	29%
Silent Generation (74+)	8%

## Favorability of communism and Marxism is rising among Millennials

- Communism is viewed favorably by around one-in-three Millennials—this is up 8 points from 2018.
- Marxism has the highest favorability among Millennials, at 35% (up 6 points from 2018). Meanwhile, favorability of Marxism is down 6 points for Gen X from 2018.

## Knowledge of world events dominated by Trump and economy

- 71% of Americans are familiar with Donald Trump’s relationship with Kim Jong-un and a near equal percent are familiar with US tariffs on China. 22% are familiar repression of the Uyghur people in China, still low, but up 7 points from 15% in 2018.





# KEY INSIGHTS: Communism and Marxism

## Americans remain concerned about communism

- A plurality (40%) believe that concerns about communism are equally as relevant today as they were during the Cold War, another 18% believe concerns are more relevant.

## Perceptions of communism and Marxism vary widely across generations

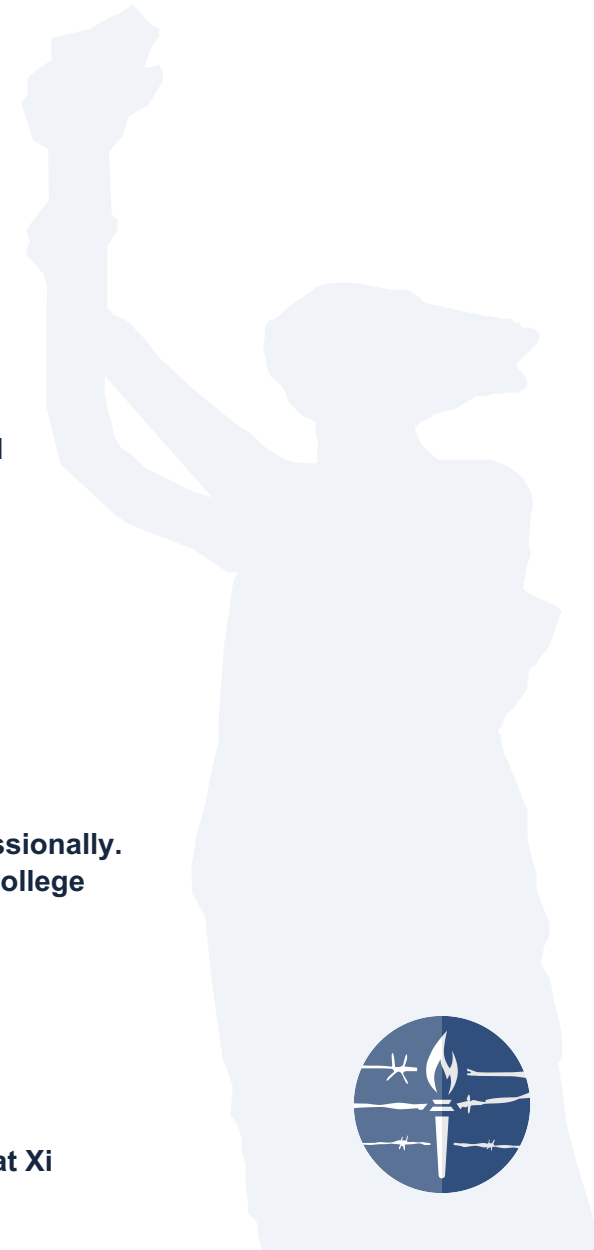
- Around half of Americans define Marxism as when the government owns all property and controls the national economy, as in the Soviet Union.
- Only 57% of Gen Z and 62% of Millennials, compared to 88% of Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation think China is a communist country and not a democratic country.
- Only 57% of Millennials, compared to 94% of the Silent Generation, think the Declaration of Independence better guarantees freedom and inequality over the Communist Manifesto.
- Around a quarter of Millennials think the Berlin Wall was built to protect East Germans from NATO expansion.
- 76% of respondents are unaware that the Hitler-Stalin Pact started WW2.
- 15% of Millennials think the world would be better off if the Soviet Union still existed.

## Experiences studying communism differ depending on generation

- Millennials are the least likely to have studied communism in high school, but are more likely to have studied in college.
- Americans report communism being presented more unfavorably in elementary/middle/high school than later in life in college and professionally. And Gen Z and Millennials are much more likely to report communism being presented favorably in elementary/middle/high school and college than older generations.

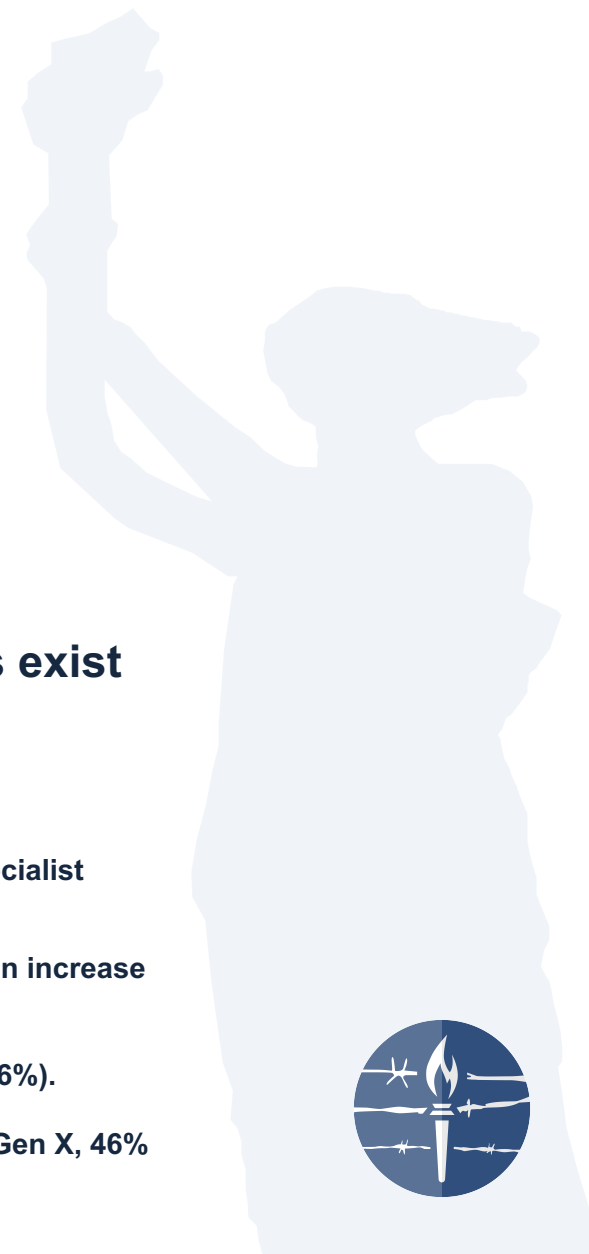
## Americans continue to underestimate the death toll of communism

- Gen Z is more likely to think global terrorism has killed more people than global communism in the past 60 years.
- A quarter of Americans believe that Nazi Germany is responsible for more deaths than the former Soviet Union.
- While Hitler and Stalin are viewed as responsible for the most deaths across generations, Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to say that Xi Jinping and Donald Trump are more responsible.





# KEY INSIGHTS: Socialism



## Most Americans feel knowledgeable about socialism

- Overall, 83% say they know at least a little about socialism; 39% of Americans say they “know a lot”—a near 40% (up 11 points) increase from 2018.
- 66% of Americans cannot accurately define Socialism.

## Yet there is not a unified definition of socialism

- In a reversal from 2018, more Americans define socialism as akin to the Soviet Union (an 8 point jump—26% → 34%), rather than Scandinavian and Western European countries.
- 21% of Americans (but far fewer in the Silent Generation) think the United States is more socialist than China.

## Overall Americans are opposed to voting for socialist candidates, yet generational divides exist

- 70% of Millennials say they would be at least somewhat likely to vote for a socialist candidate.
  - The percentage of Millennials who say they would be “extremely likely” to vote for a socialist candidate has doubled (20% vs. 10%).
  - Whereas Gen X and Boomers are six and five points, respectively, more likely to say they would be “not at all likely” to vote for a socialist candidate.
- Likelihood of NOT voting for a democratic socialist is up. Just over half (53%) are hesitant/would never vote for a democratic socialist—an increase of six points from 2018
  - Baby Boomer opposition to voting for a democratic socialist (would never vote for) has increased by 8 points since 2018 (38% vs. 46%).
  - Gen Z and Millennials are the least likely to say they would never vote for a democratic socialist at about 22%, compared to 39% of Gen X, 46% of Baby Boomers and 54% of the Silent Generation.





# KEY INSIGHTS: America and Its Values

## Younger generations expect more of the government

- In Self We Trust (if you are in your 40s and beyond!). While 80% of Americans say they trust themselves (over government and community) to take care of their own interests, younger generations are about 25% less likely to say this.
- Nearly half of Millennials think the government should provide a job to everyone who wants to work, but can't find a job.
- Overall, fewer Americans favor than oppose the idea of a universal basic income. However, Gen Z and Millennials are essentially split on the issue: 39% of Gen Z thinks there should be a universal basic income stipend—agreement decreases steadily across older generations.
- 40% of Americans (45% of Gen Z and Millennials) think all higher education should be free.
- Around one-in-five Millennials think society would be better off if all private property were abolished.

## Economic disparity in the US is still a major concern

- 70% of Americans say the divide between the rich and the poor is a serious issue—still a majority, but trending down from previous years.
- Of the more than half (63%) of Americans who think the highest earners are not paying their fair share, 54% think increased taxes are part of the answer and 47% say a complete change of our economic system is needed.
- Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation are the most likely to view America's economic system as working for them.
- 37% of Millennials think America is one of the most unequal societies in the world.

## Most Americans place free speech above social harmony

- They overwhelmingly place more importance on free speech over social harmony—more so for Gen X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation.
- Overall, Americans place more importance on protecting free speech at colleges/universities than on excluding hate speech—though Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to fall in the middle.
- More Americans place greater importance on protecting free speech on social media sites, but a good portion (32%) lean in favor of excluding hate speech.

## Donald Trump is seen as a threat to world peace

- Over a quarter of Americans see Donald Trump as the biggest threat to world peace (across every generation) over figures like Kim Jong-un and Vladimir Putin.



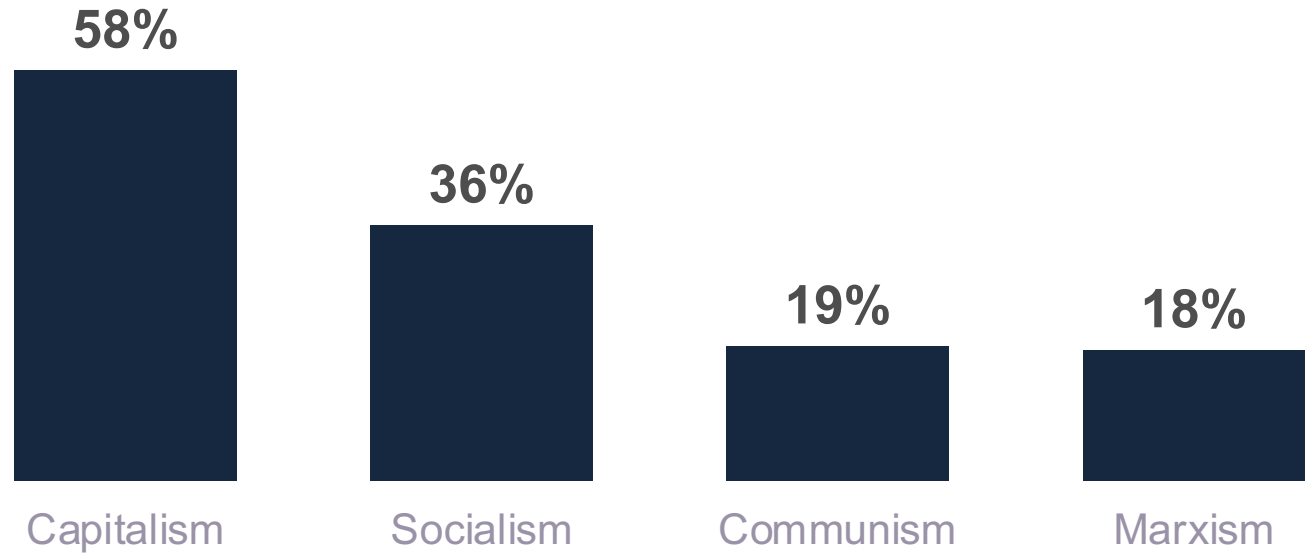
# OPINIONS ON IDEOLOGIES

Socialism favorability is down from 2018 as more Americans (particularly Gen X and Baby Boomers) consider calling someone 'socialist' an insult. Capitalism remains favored above all other ideologies, though favored less by younger generations.

Overall, capitalism is viewed far more favorably than other economic systems. Its favorability is holding relatively steady from 61% in 2018.



### Favorable opinion of the term...



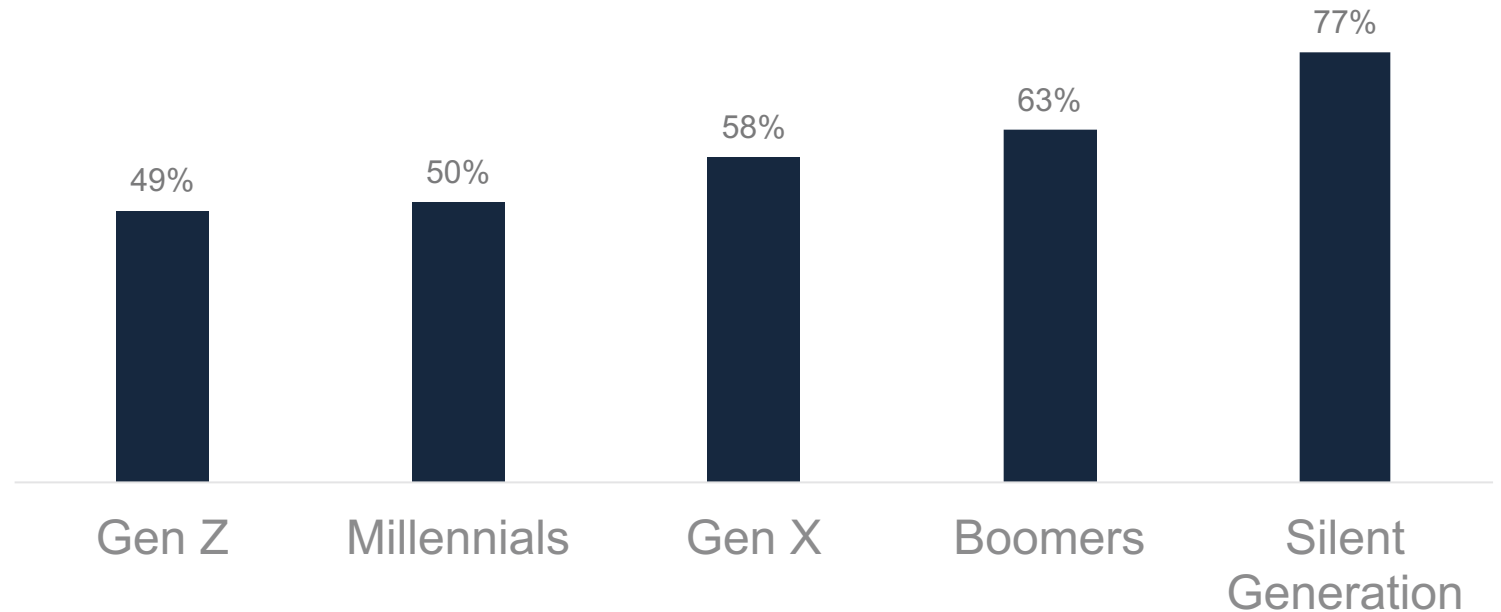


At the same time, favorability of ‘capitalism’ is far lower among Gen Z and Millennials at around only 50%. Its favorability rises among Gen X, again among Boomers, and again among the Silent Generation, where 77% have a favorable opinion of it.



Favorability of ‘capitalism’ is down 6 points and 8 points for Gen Z and Millennials respectively from 2018. It is up 5 points for the Silent Generation.

### Favorable opinion of the term ‘capitalism’





**‘Socialism’ favorability is down to 36% from 42% in 2018.**



### Favorable opinion of the term ‘socialism’

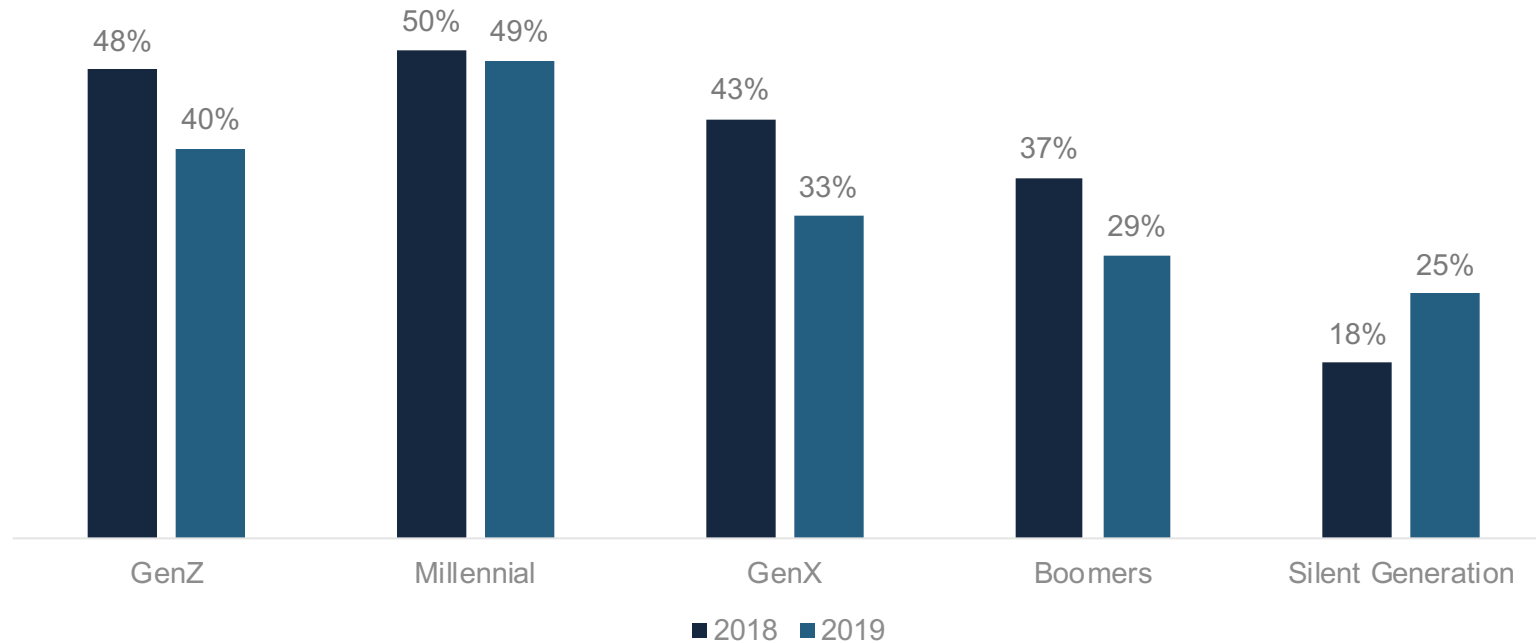




**Favorability of 'socialism' is down from 2018 for Gen Z, Gen X and Baby Boomers.**

**Millennials are holding steady at around 50% and a 7 point uptick in favorability is seen among the Silent Generation.**

### Favorable opinion of the term 'socialism'





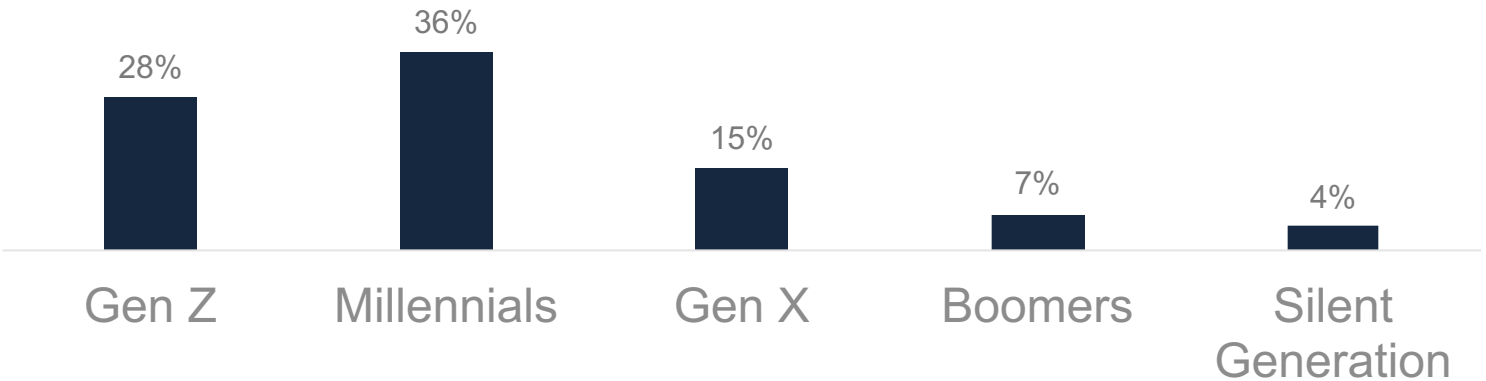
‘Communism’ is viewed favorably by around one-in-three Millennials—this is up 8 points from 2018.



Percent of Millennials who say the term ‘communism’ is favorable



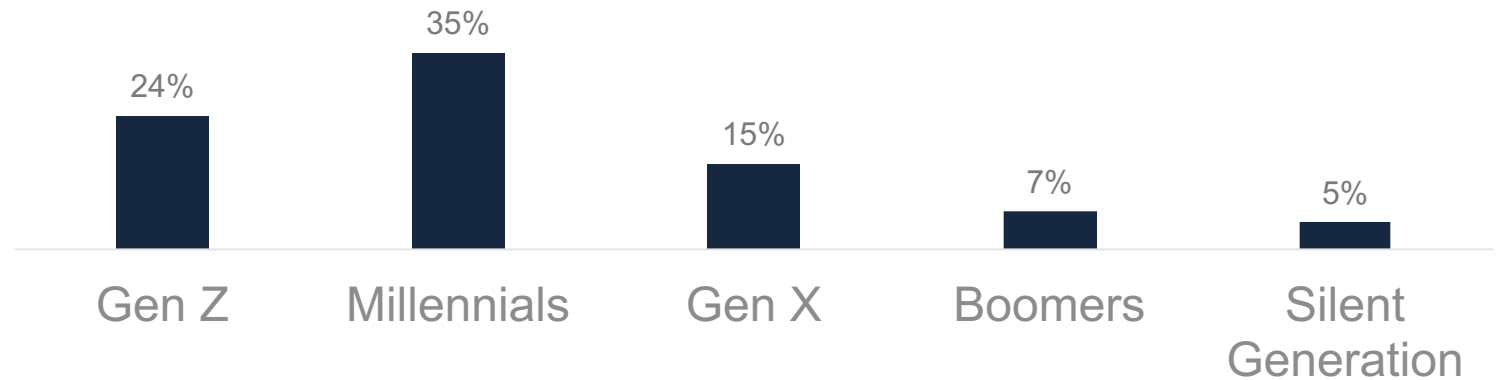
Favorable opinion of the term ‘communism’



**‘Marxism’ has the highest favorability among Millennials, at 35%.**



### Favorable opinion of the term ‘Marxism’



Favorability of ‘Marxism’ is up 6 points for Millennials and down 6 points for Gen X from 2018.





While most Americans perceive the label ‘capitalist’ as neutral, it is the only ideology that is considered a compliment by more than consider it an insult.

‘Socialist’ is viewed as an insult by 37%, with ‘Marxist’ and ‘communist’ being viewed as insults by 49% and 61%, respectively.



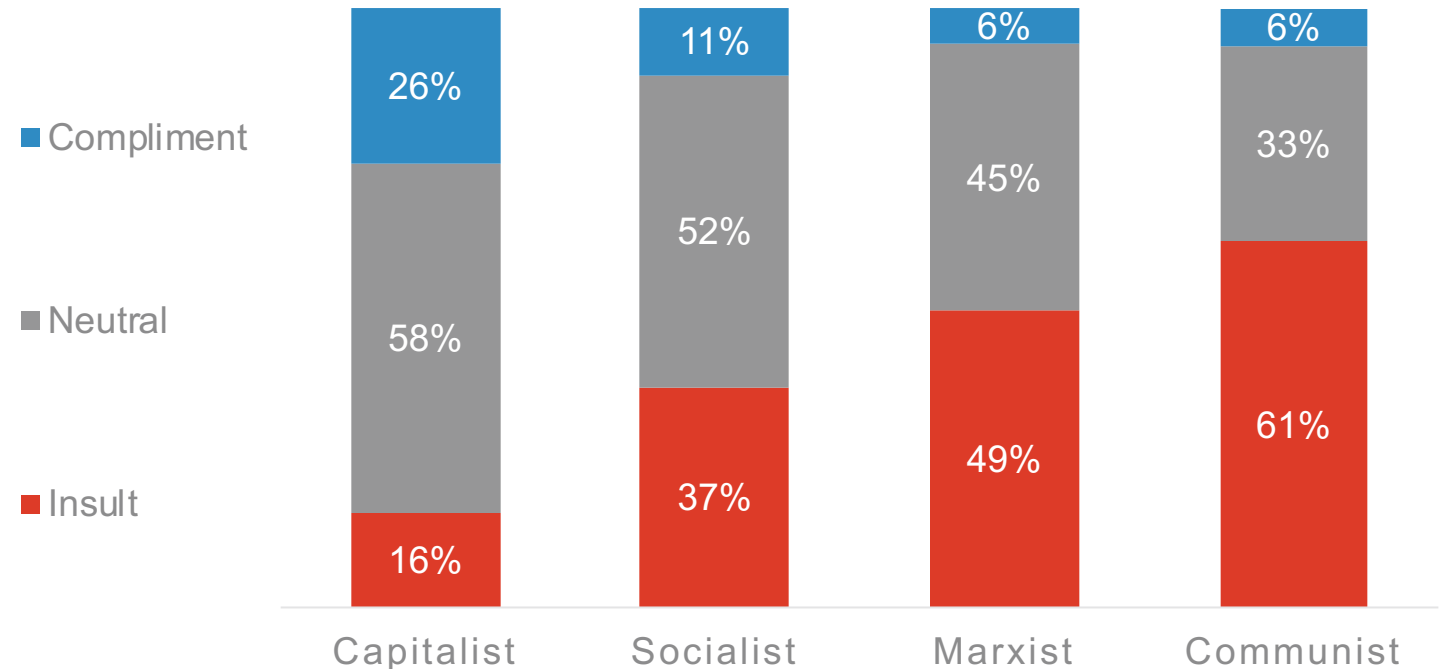
Percent who say ‘socialist’ is an insult is up 7 points from 30% in 2018. This is driven by the following generations:

- Gen Z: 20% → 27%
- Gen X: 27% → 40%
- Boomers: 35% → 46%

Percent who say ‘capitalist’ is an insult is up for the younger generations from 2018:

- Gen Z: 13% → 19%
- Millennials: 14% → 20%
- Gen X: 14% → 18%

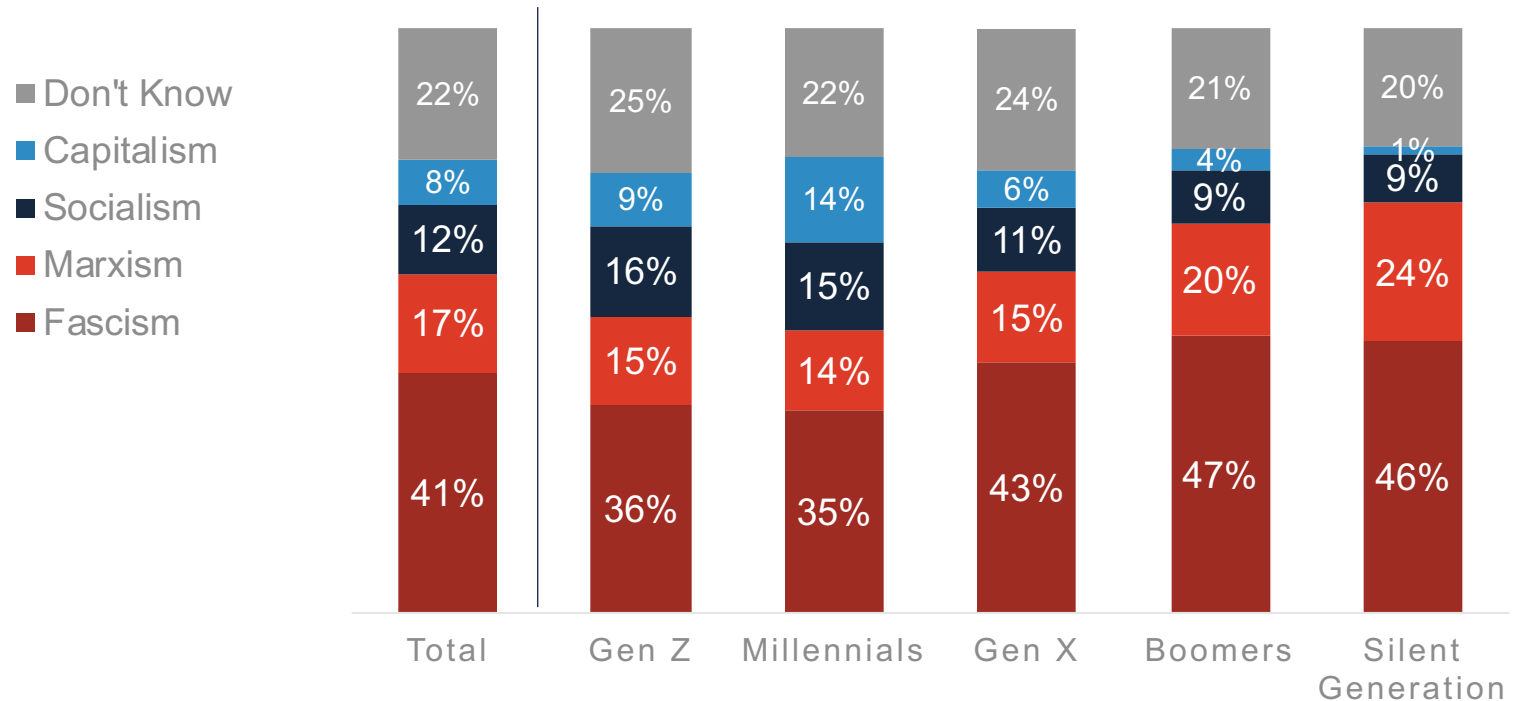
### Complement, insult, or neutral to call someone a...



Fascism is viewed as more violent than any other ideology across generations.



### Most violent ideology/system



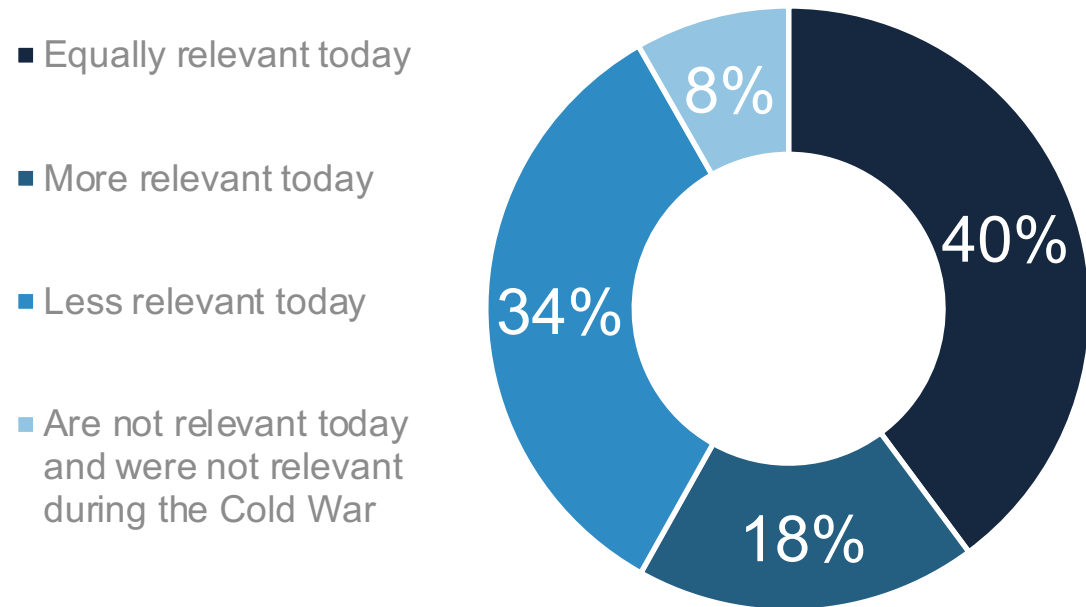
# COMMUNISM AND MARXISM

From experiences in studies to knowledge of history, ideas about communism and Marxism vary widely. Most Americans continue to underestimate the death toll of communism.



**A plurality of Americans (40%) believe that concerns about communism are equally as relevant today as they were during the Cold War, another 18% believe concerns are more relevant.**

### Relevancy of concerns about communism today compared to the Cold War







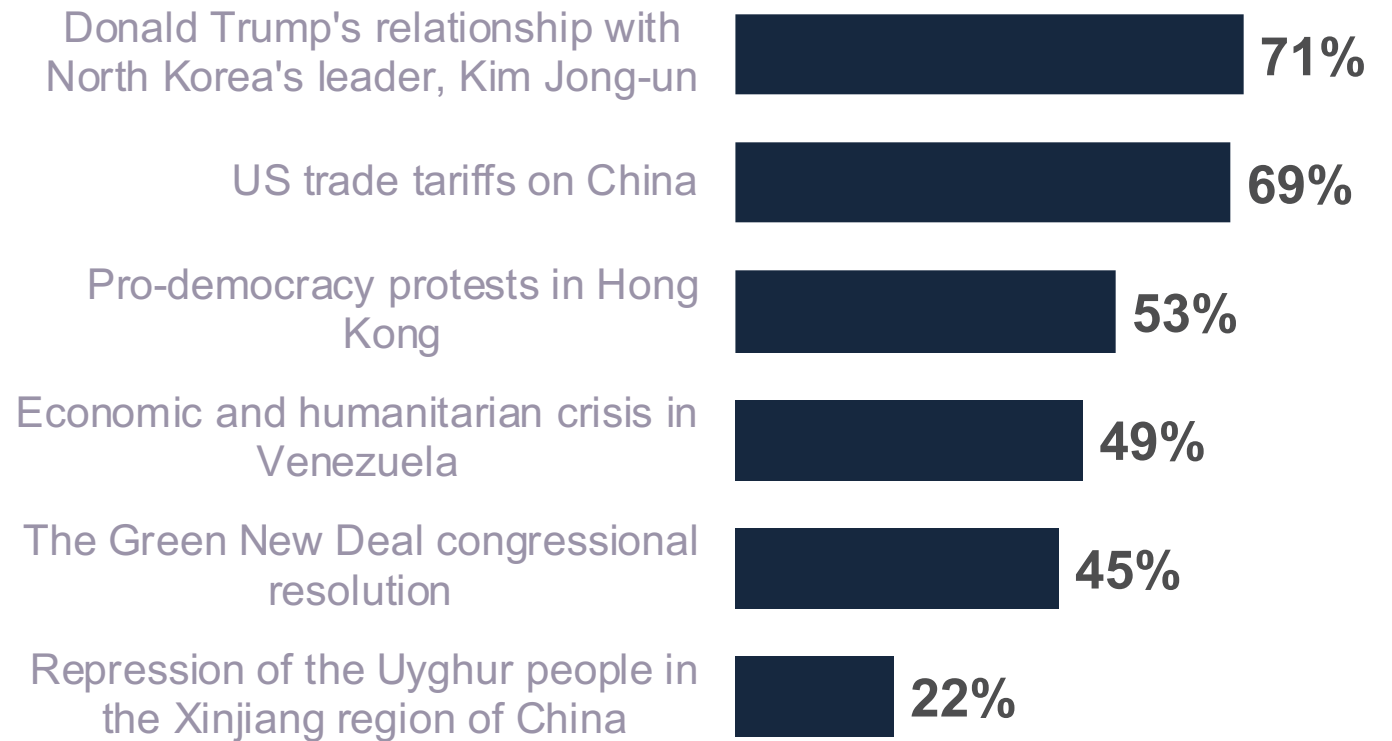
Relations with communist countries are among the news stories a majority of Americans are familiar with from the past year.

**71% of Americans are familiar with Donald Trump's relationship with Kim Jong-un and a near equal percent are familiar with US tariffs on China.**



Familiarity with the repression of the Uyghur people is up 7 points from 15% in 2018.

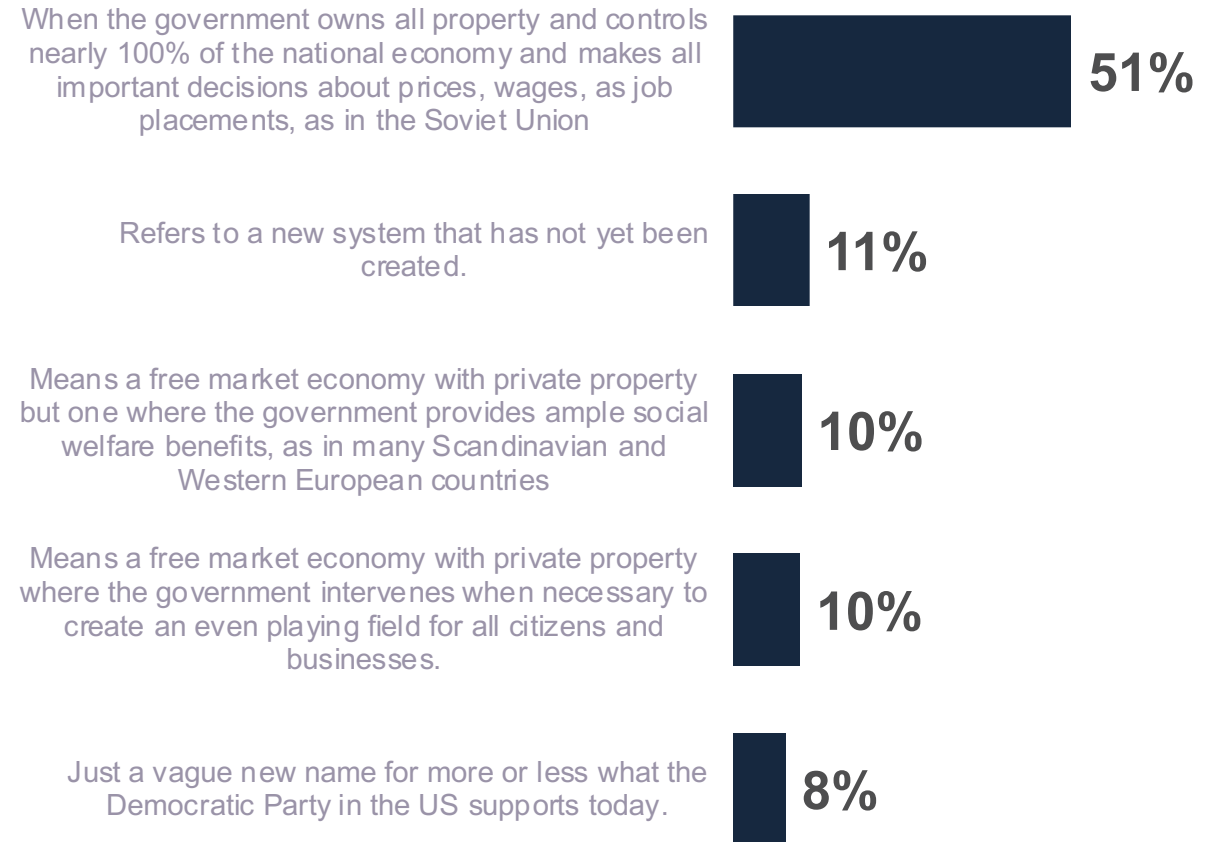
### Familiarity with news stories from the past year



In a new question this year, around half of Americans define Marxism as when the government owns all property and controls the national economy, as in the Soviet Union.



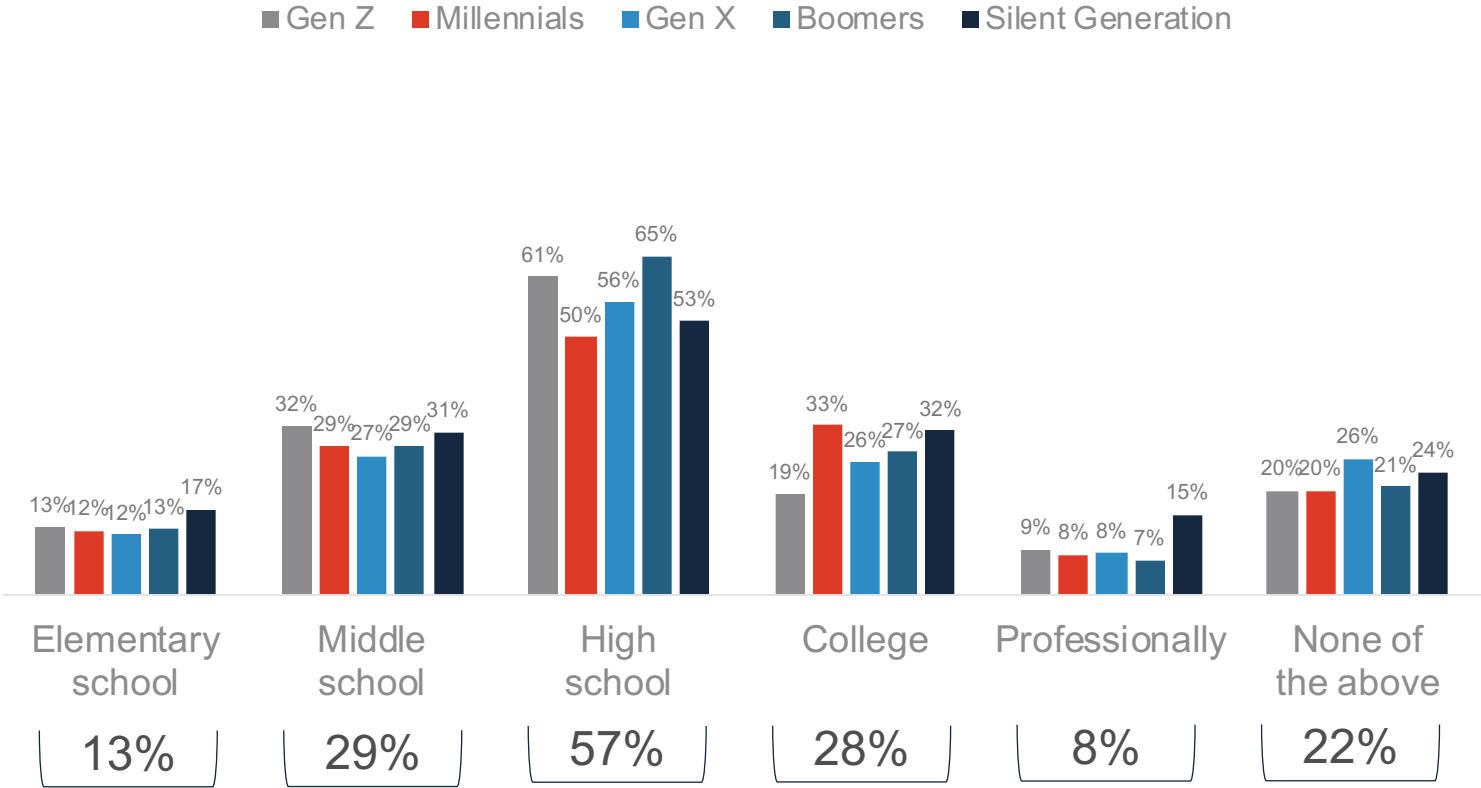
## Defining Marxism



Millennials are the least likely to have studied communism in high school, but are more likely to have studied in college.



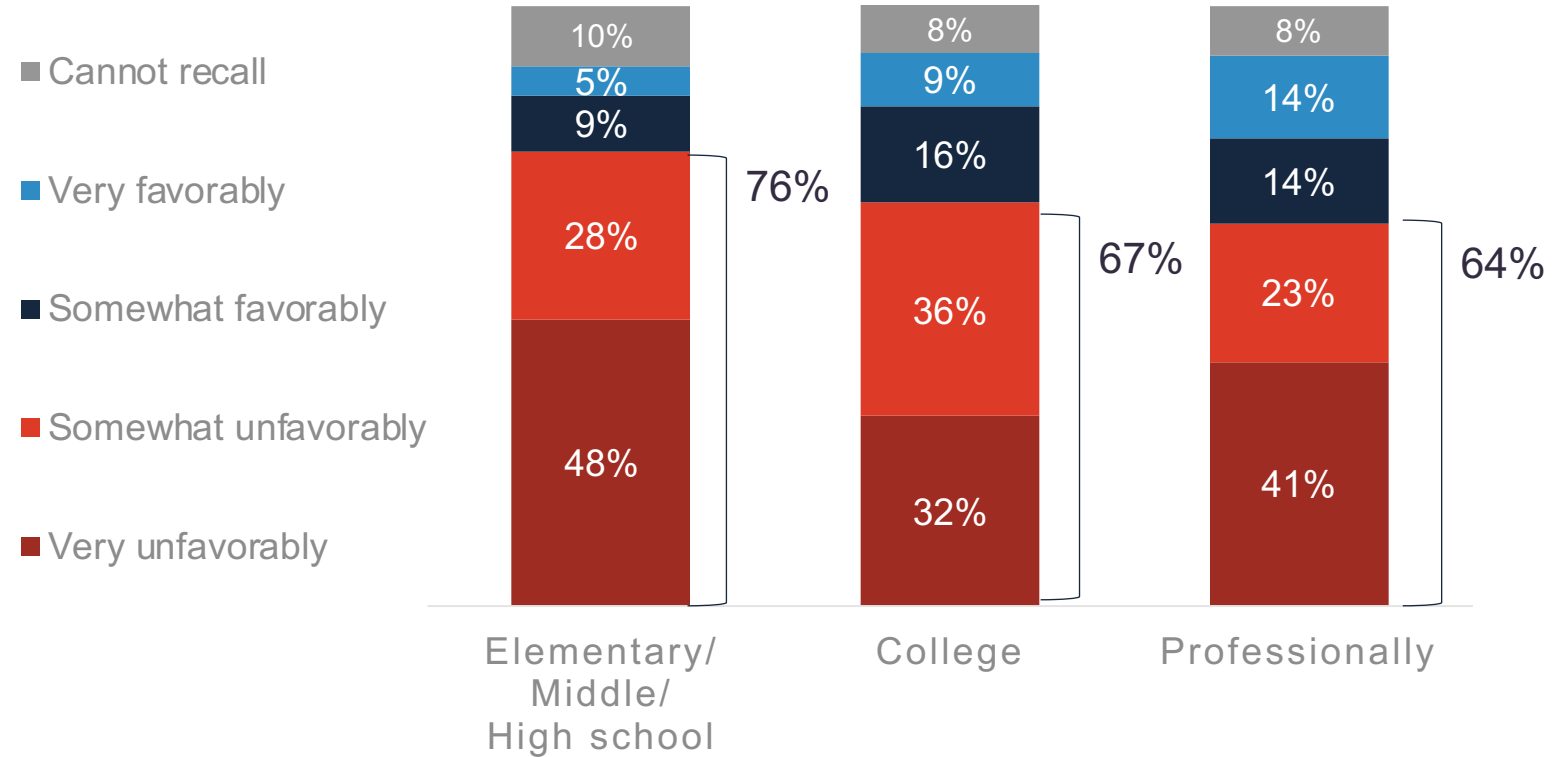
Settings where communism/communist countries were studied



Americans report communism being presented more unfavorably in elementary/middle/high school than later in life in college and professionally.



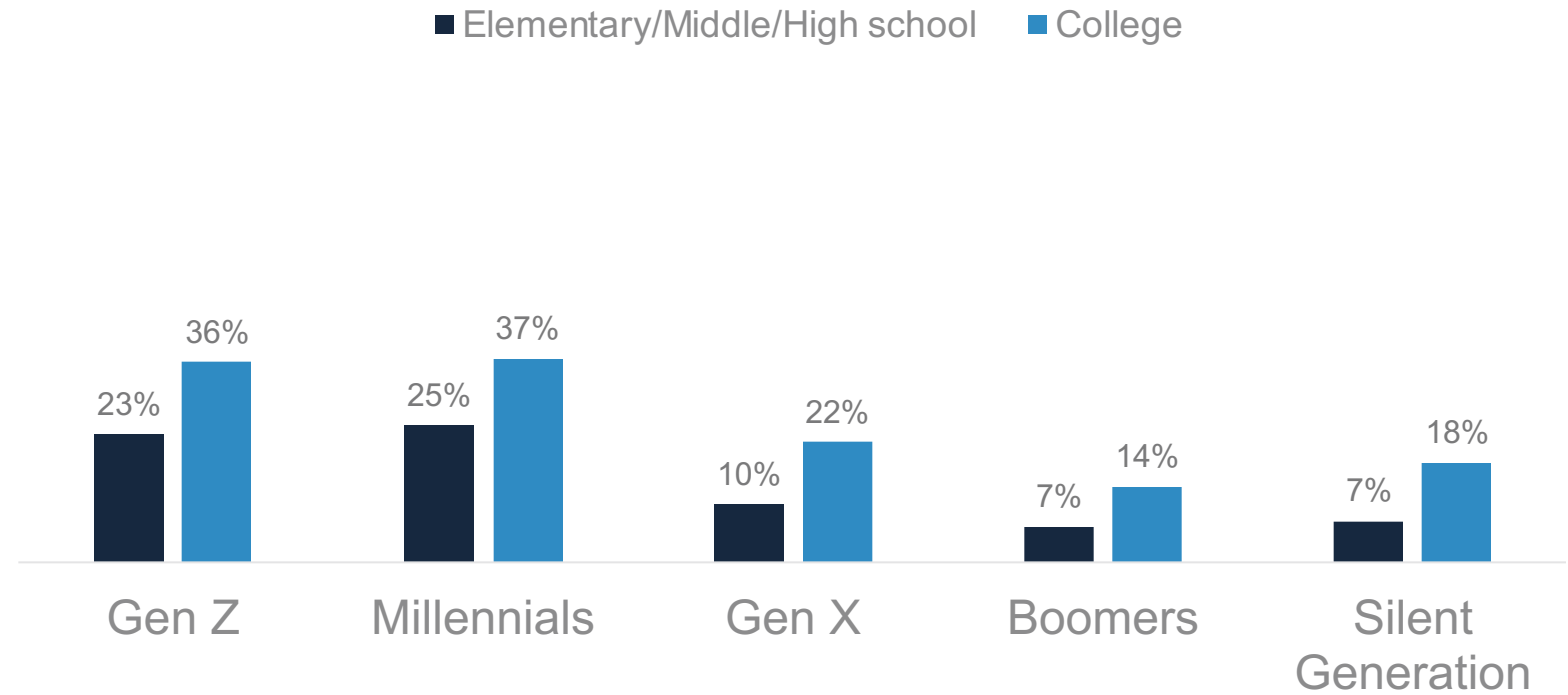
### How communism is/was presented in studies



**Gen Z and Millennials are much more likely to report communism being presented favorably in elementary/middle/high school and college.**



**Percent who say communism was presented favorably in studies**



Americans continue to underestimate the death toll of communism.

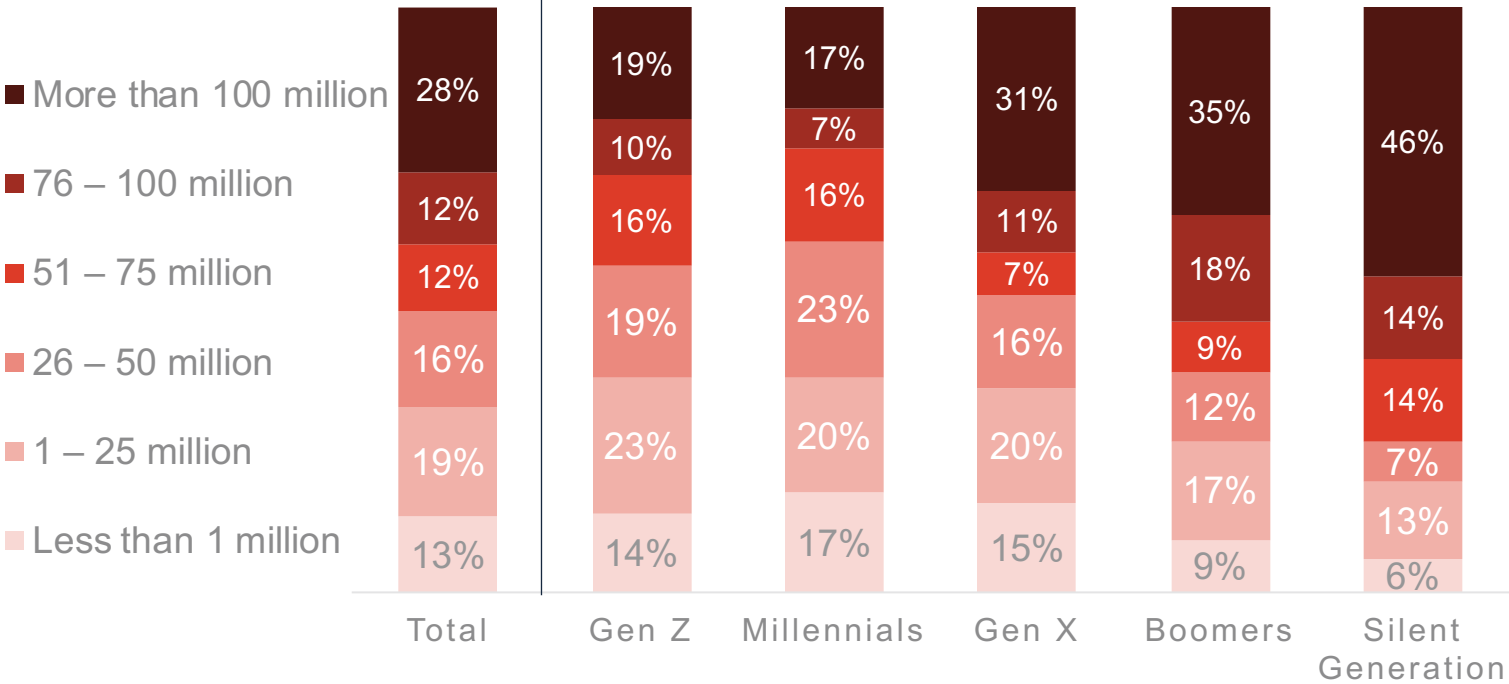


Number of people communism has killed in the past 100 years

72% incorrectly say communism has killed less than 100 million



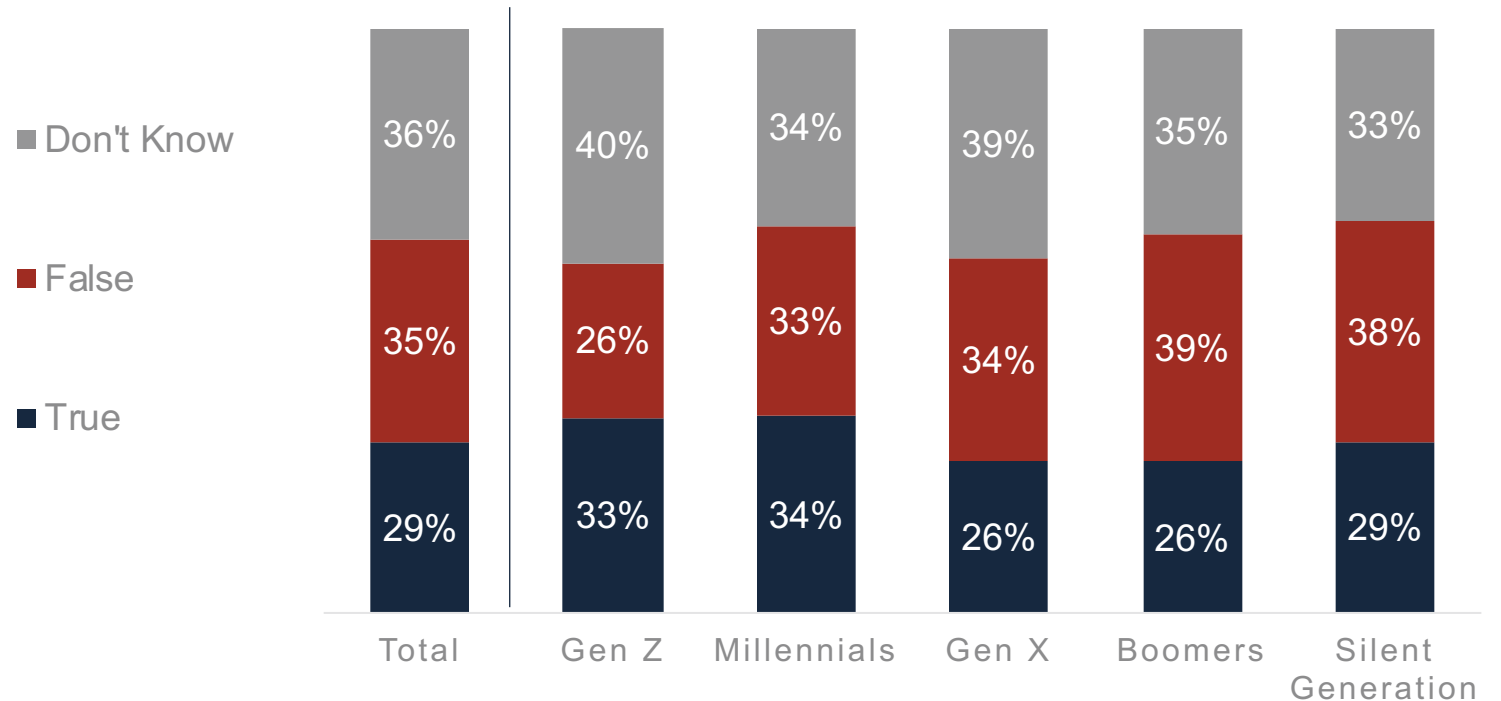
No significant changes in the past four years.



Gen Z is more likely to think global terrorism has killed more people than global communism in the past 60 years.



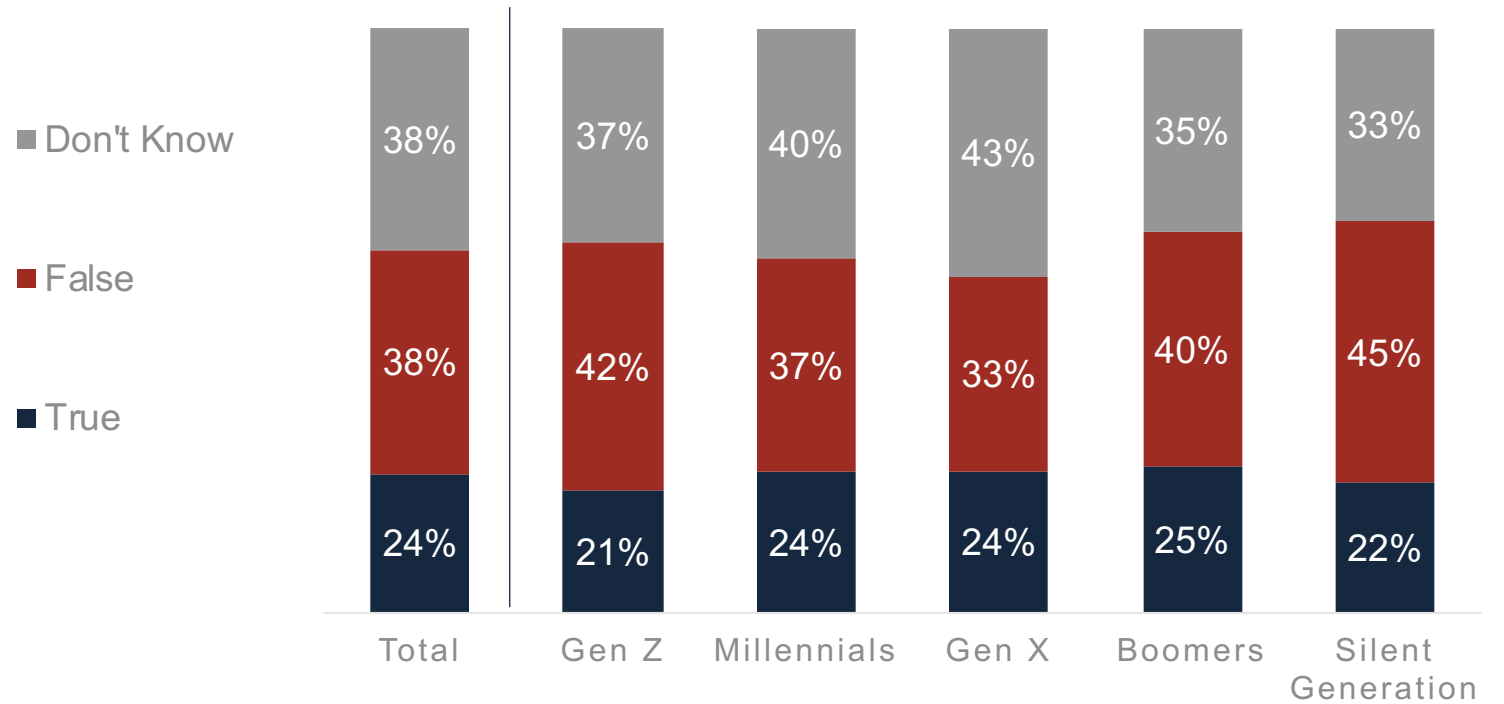
**True or False: In the past 60 years, global terrorism has killed more people than global communism.**



76% of respondents are unaware that the Hitler-Stalin Pact started WW2.



### True or False: The Hitler-Stalin Pact started WWII.

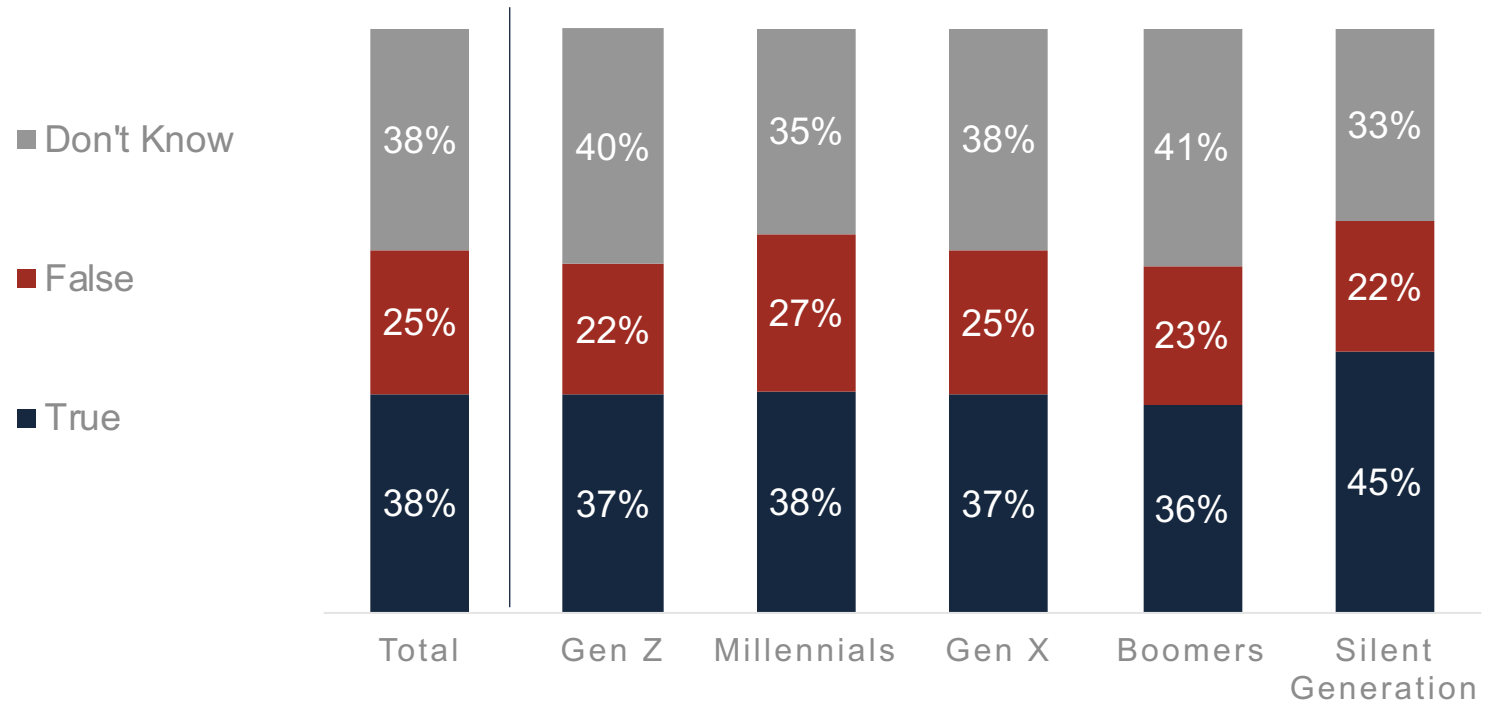




A quarter of Americans believe that Nazi Germany is responsible for more deaths than the former Soviet Union.



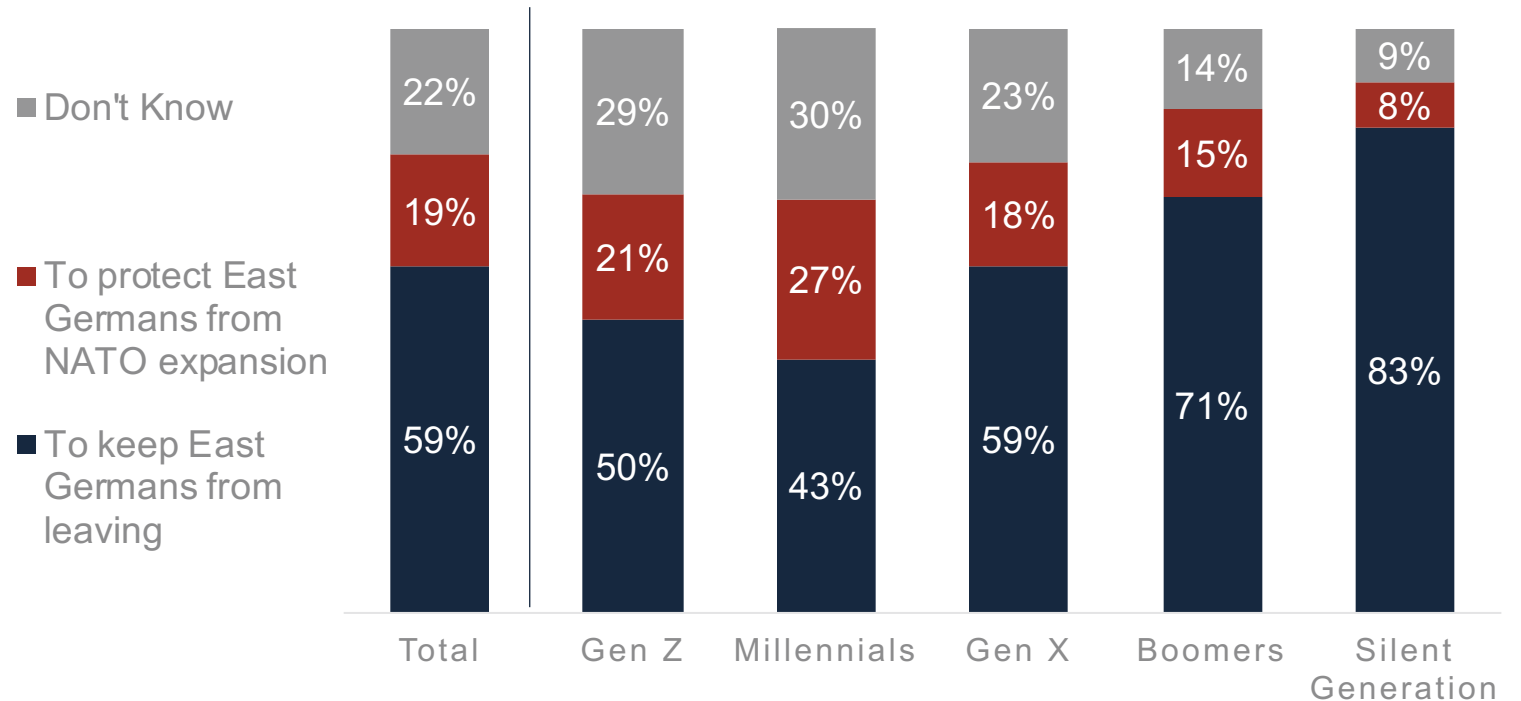
**True or False: The former Soviet Union is responsible for more deaths than Nazi Germany.**



About a quarter of Millennials think the Berlin Wall was built to protect East Germans from NATO expansion.



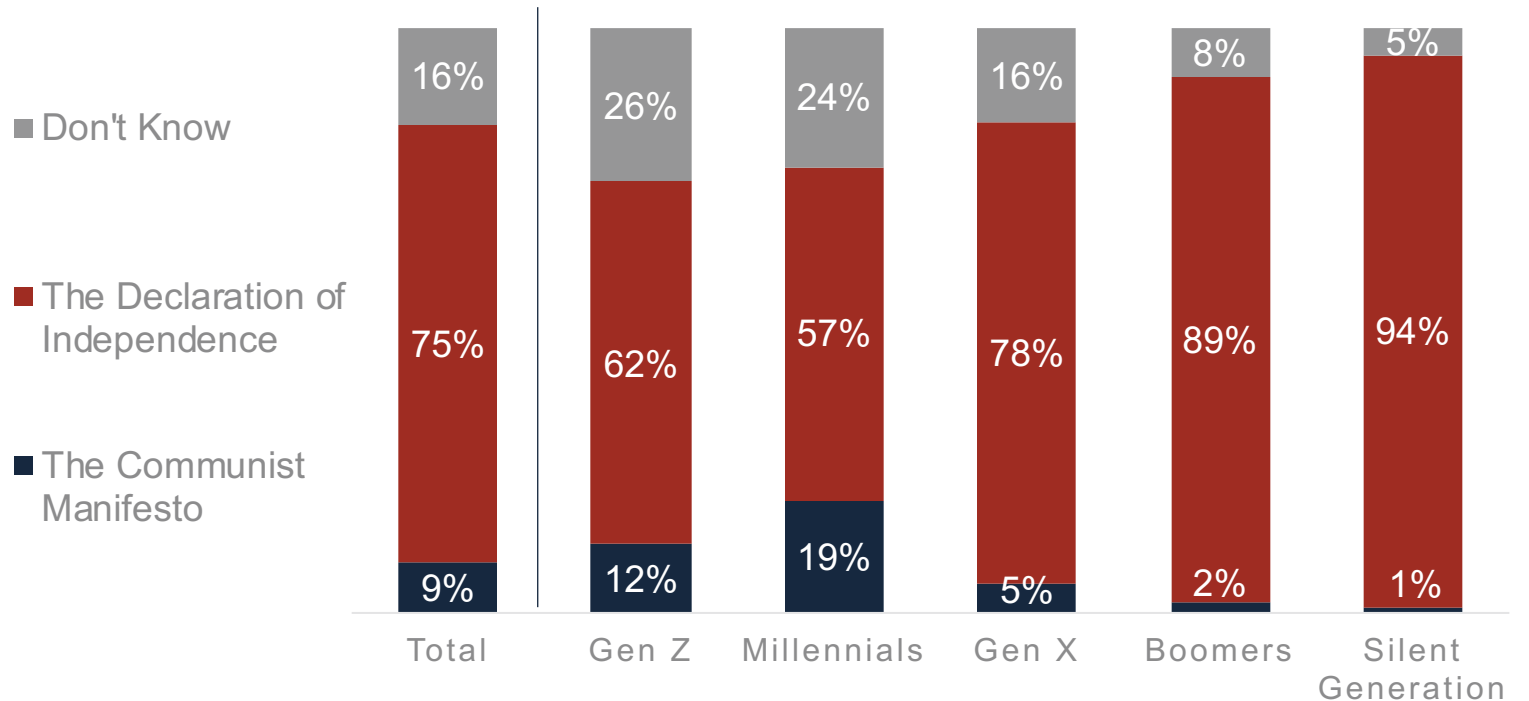
## Why was the Berlin Wall built?



Only 57% of Millennials, compared to 94% of the Silent Generation, think the Declaration of Independence better guarantees freedom and equality over the Communist Manifesto.



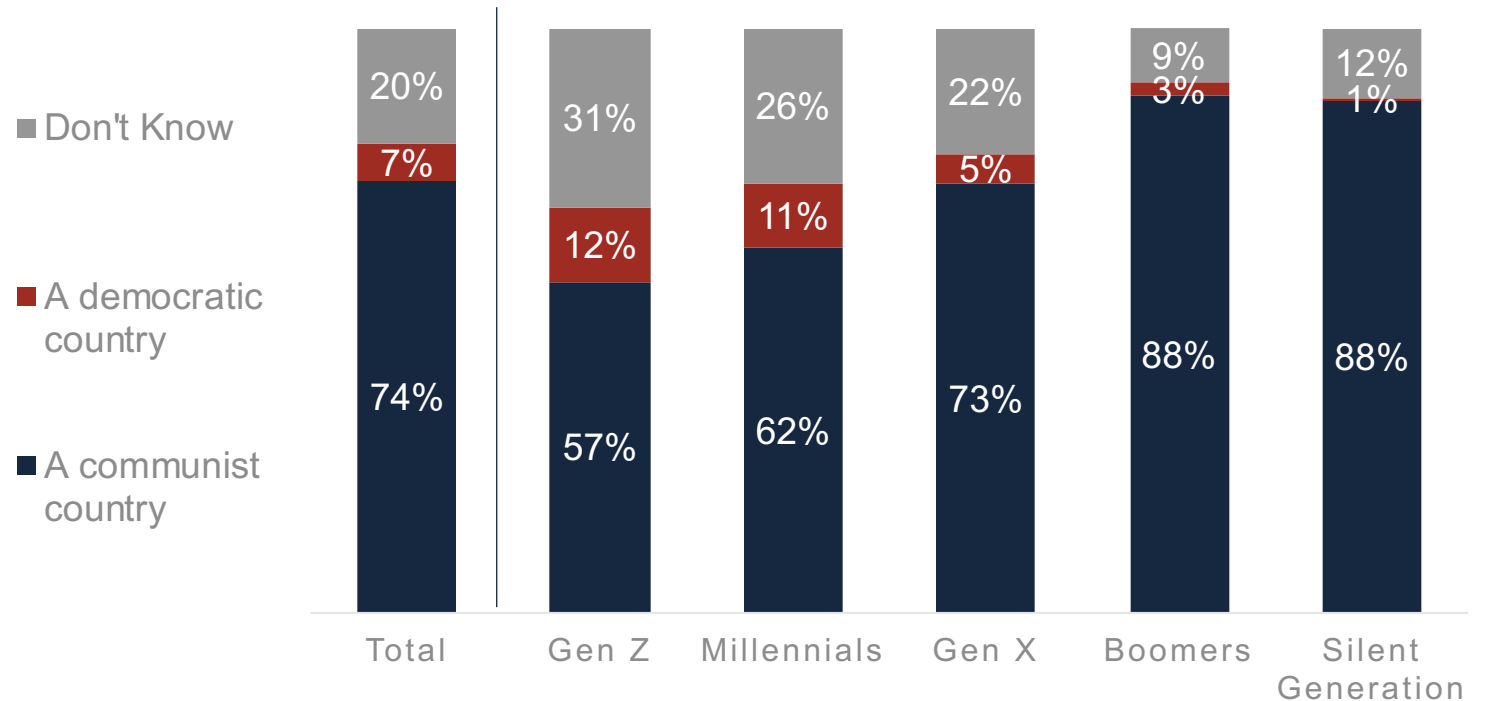
Which document better guarantees freedom and equality for all?



Only 57% of Gen Z and 62% of Millennials, compared to 88% of Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation think China is a communist country and not a democratic country.



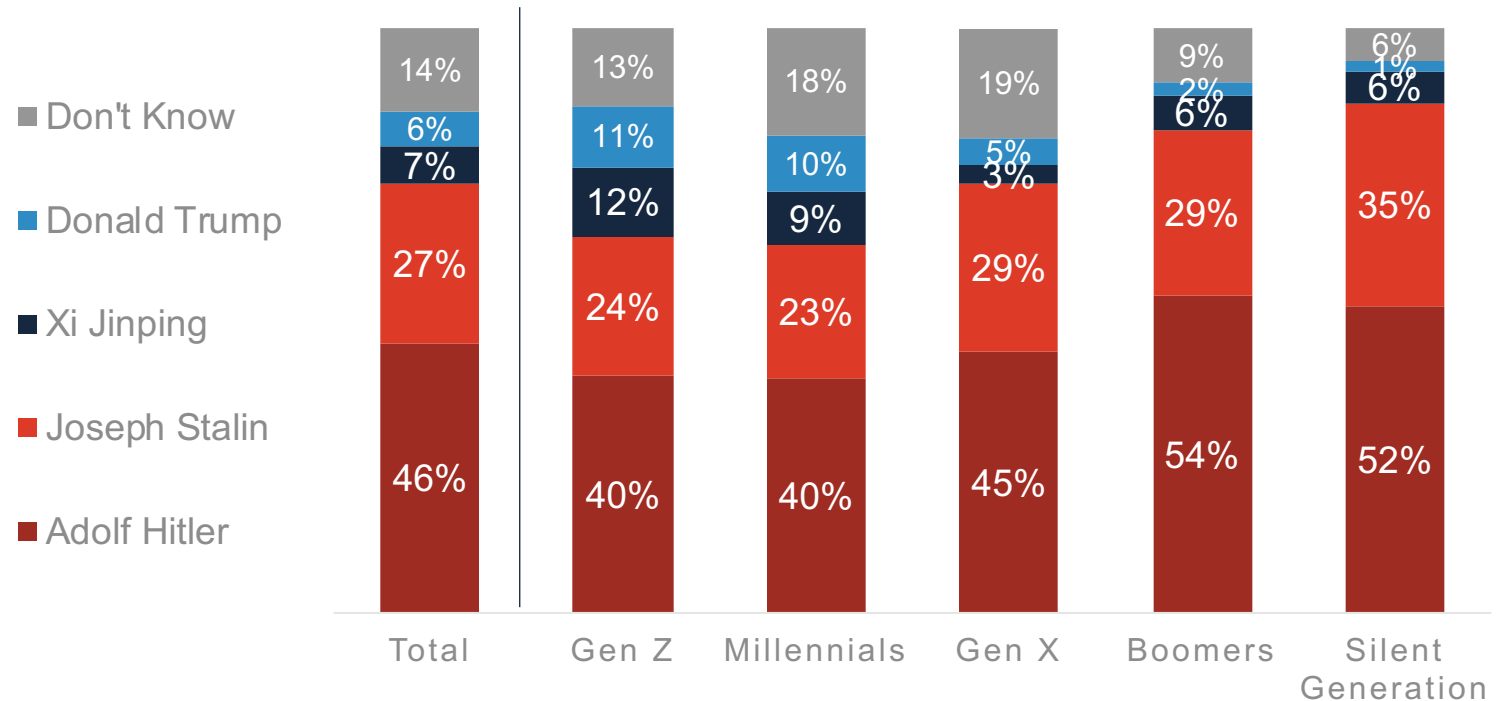
## Is China...?



While Hitler and Stalin are viewed as responsible for the most deaths across generations, Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to say that Xi Jinping and Donald Trump are more responsible.



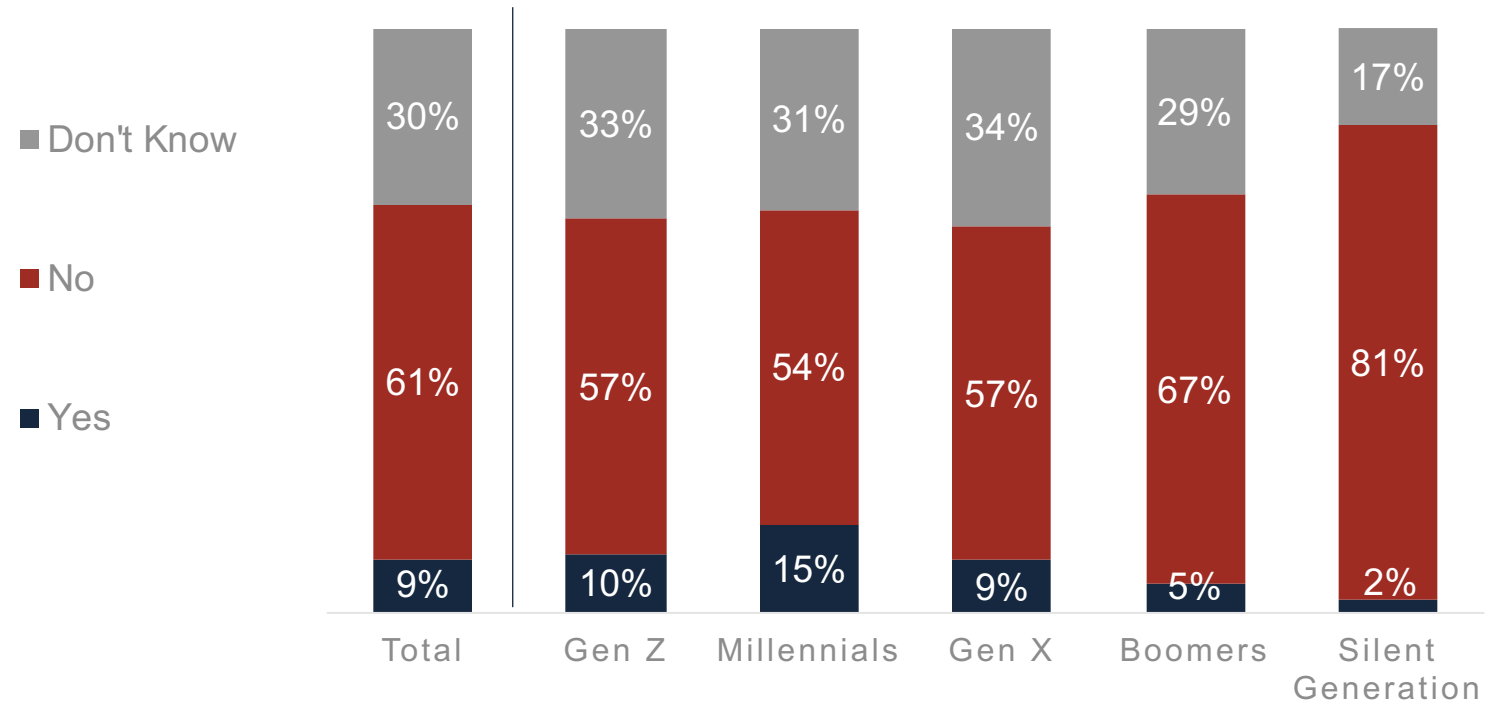
## Responsible for most deaths and human rights abuses



**15% of Millennials think the world would be better off if the Soviet Union still existed.**



**Would the world be better off if the Soviet Union still existed?**



# SOCIALISM

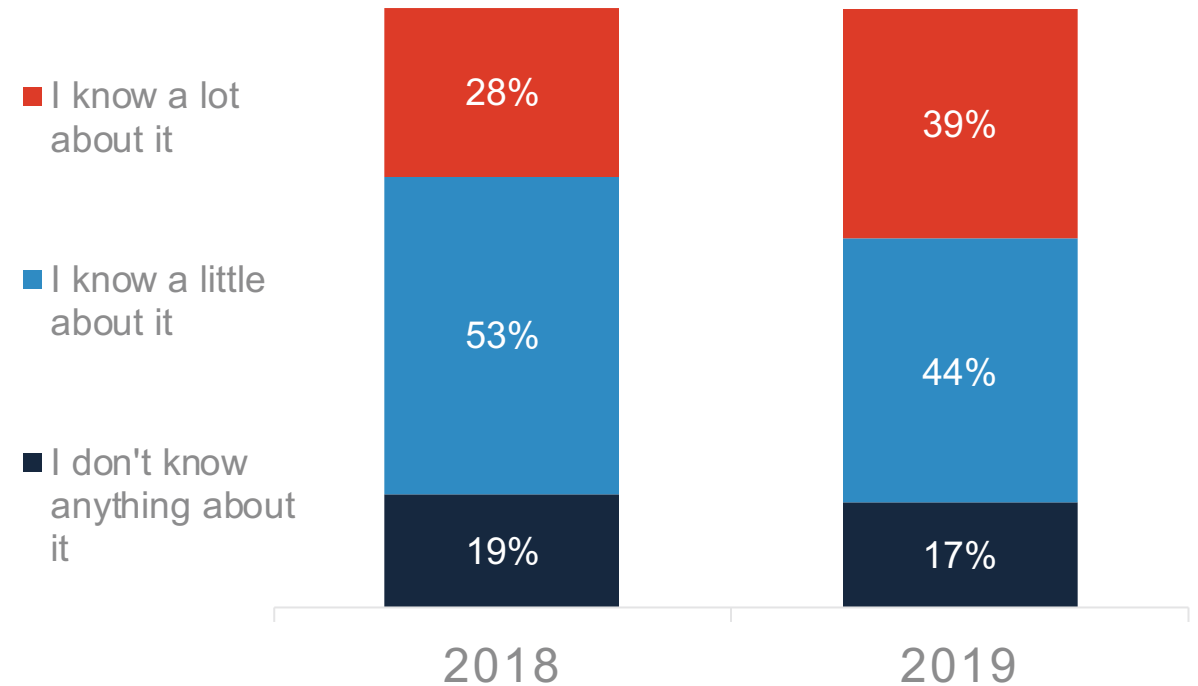
While Americans increasingly feel knowledgeable on the topic of socialism, there is not a consensus on what constitutes socialism.



**39% of Americans say they “know a lot” about socialism—a near 40% (up 11 points) increase from 2018.**

**Overall, 83% say they know at least a little about socialism.**

### Self-professed knowledge of socialism

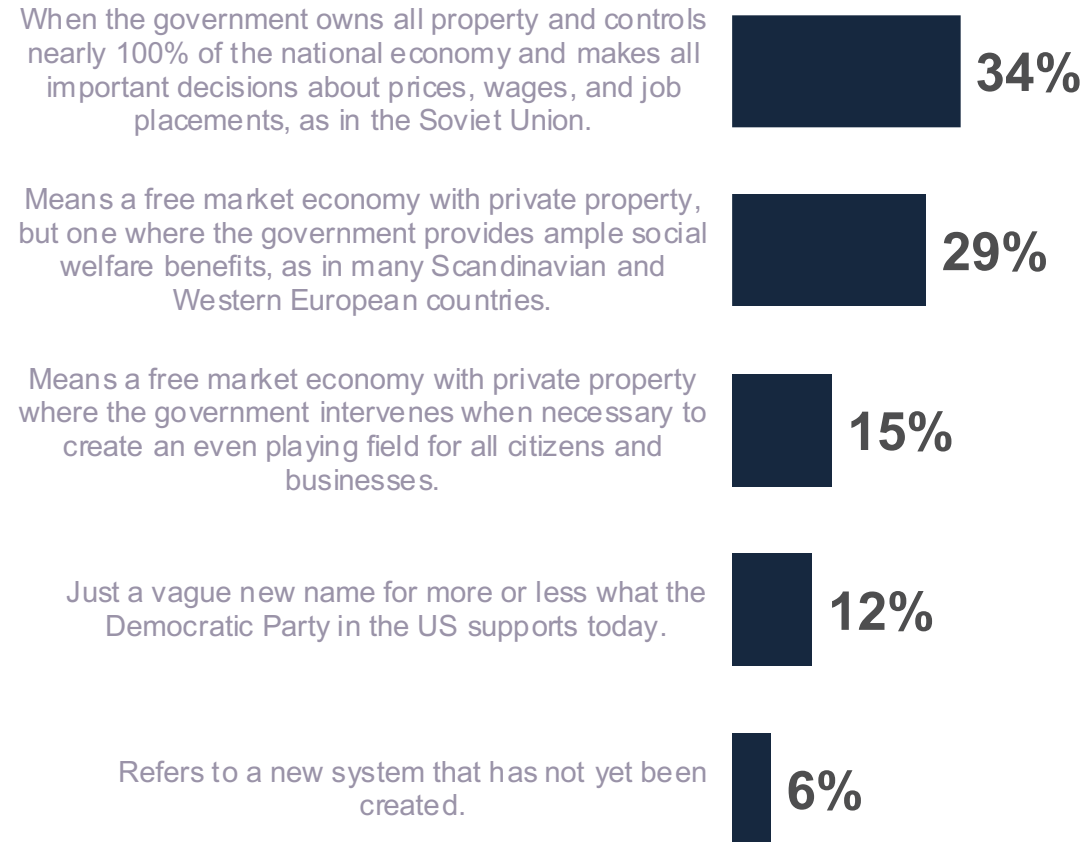




66% of Americans cannot accurately define socialism.



## Defining socialism



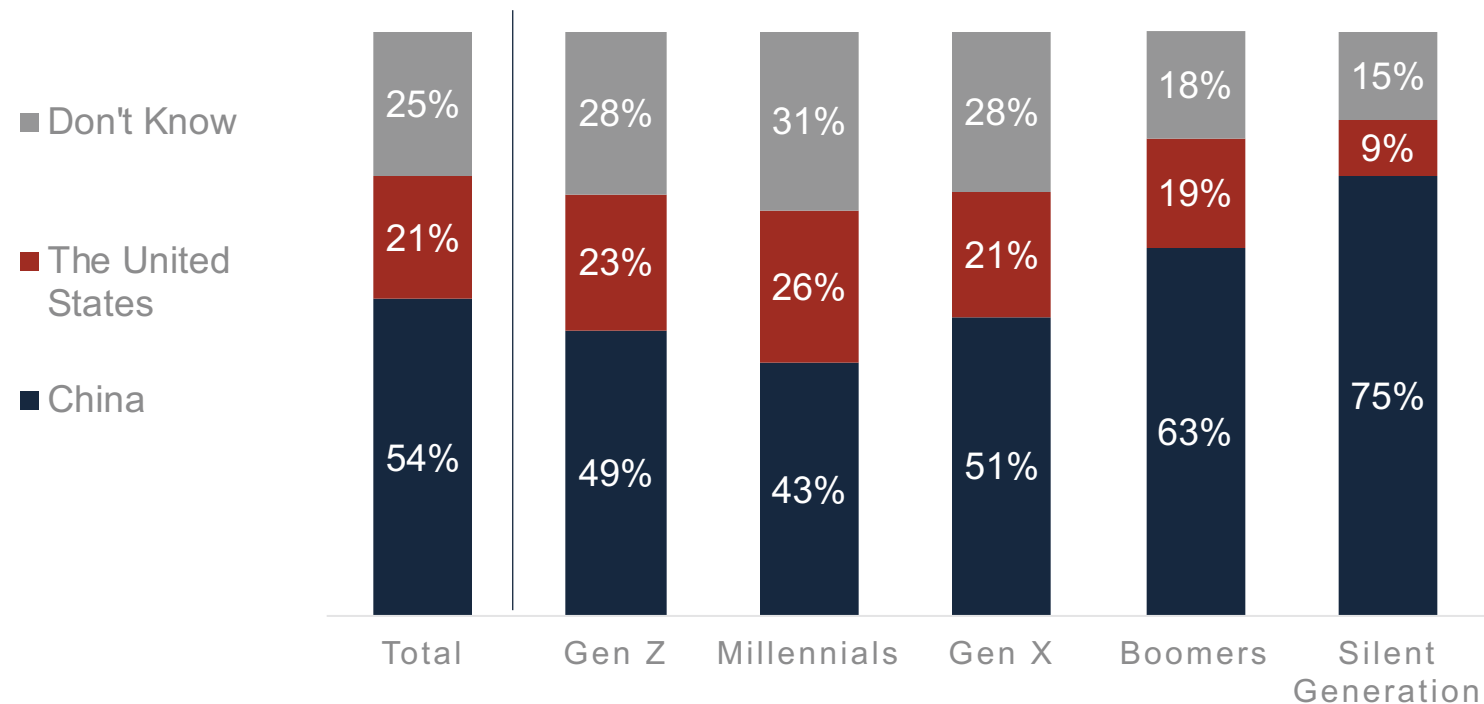
This is a reversal from 2018, when more Americans defined socialism as akin to the government and economic systems in Scandinavian and Western countries, rather than the Soviet Union (an 8 point jump for the Soviet Union—26% → 34%).

Q23. A lot of people these days are talking about socialism. Which of the following definitions, in your opinion, is the most accurate description of socialism?

21% of Americans (but far fewer in the Silent Generation) think the United States is more socialist than China.



Which country is more socialist?



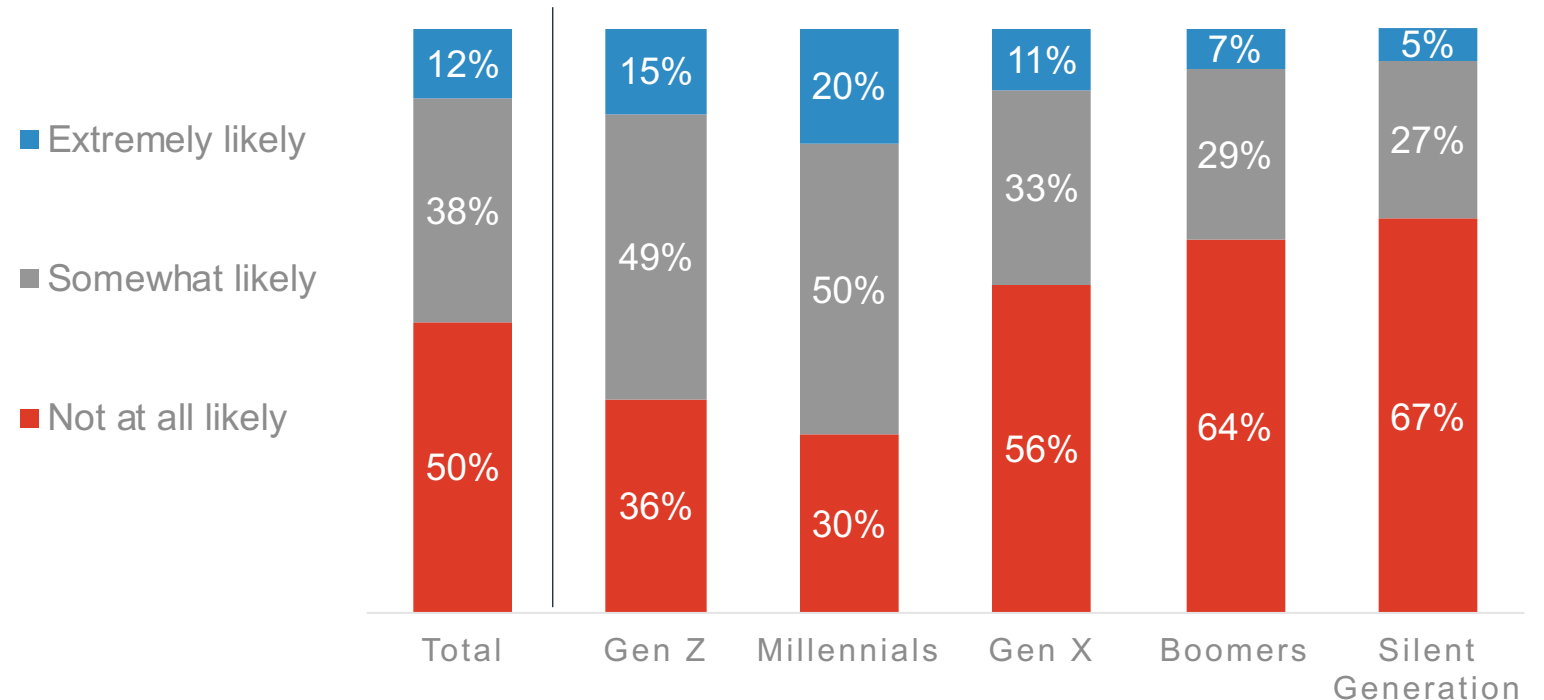
## 70% of Millennials say they would be at least somewhat likely to vote for a socialist candidate.



- Overall, the percentages are steady from 2018, but within generations there are shifts from last year.
- The percentage of Millennials who say that they would be “extremely likely” to vote for a socialist candidate has doubled (20% vs. 10%).
- Whereas Gen X and Boomers are six and five points, respectively, more likely to say they would be “not at all likely” to vote for a socialist candidate.



### Likelihood of voting for a political candidate who identifies as a socialist

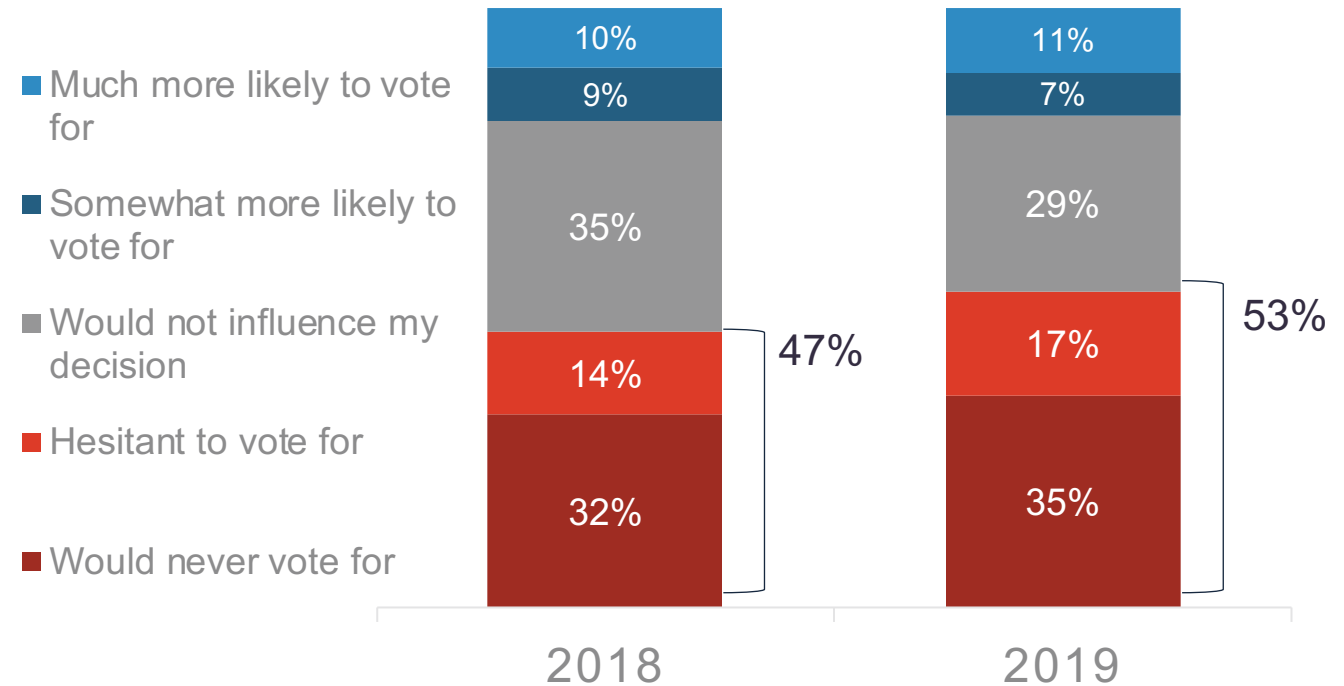




**Likelihood of NOT voting for a democratic socialist is up.**

**Just over half (53%) are hesitant/would never vote for a democratic socialist—an increase of six points from 2018.**

### Likelihood of voting for a 'democratic socialist'



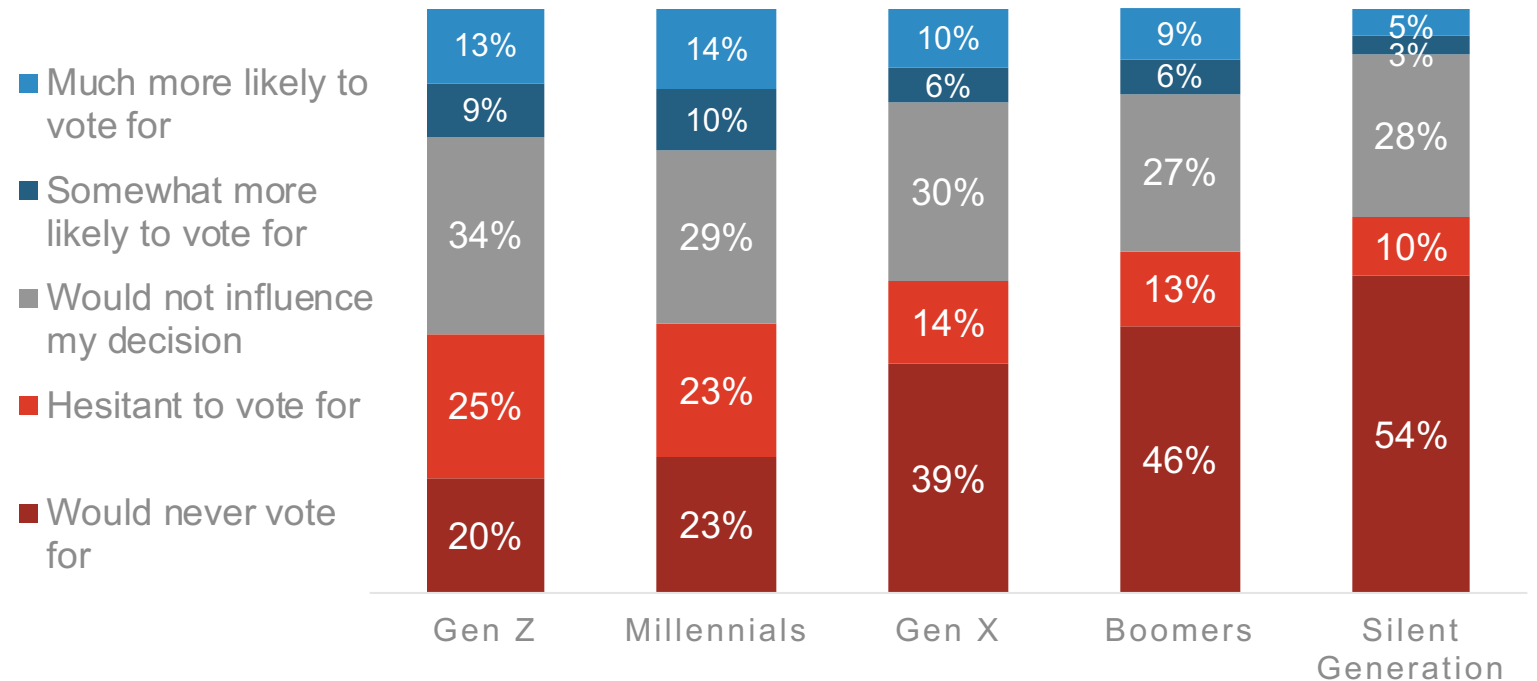


**Gen Z and Millennials are the least likely to say they would never vote for a democratic socialist at about 22%, compared to 39% of Gen X, 46% of Baby Boomers and 54% of the Silent Generation.**



Baby Boomer opposition to voting for a democratic socialist (would never vote for) has increased by 8 points since 2018 (38% vs. 46%).

## Likelihood of voting for a 'democratic socialist'

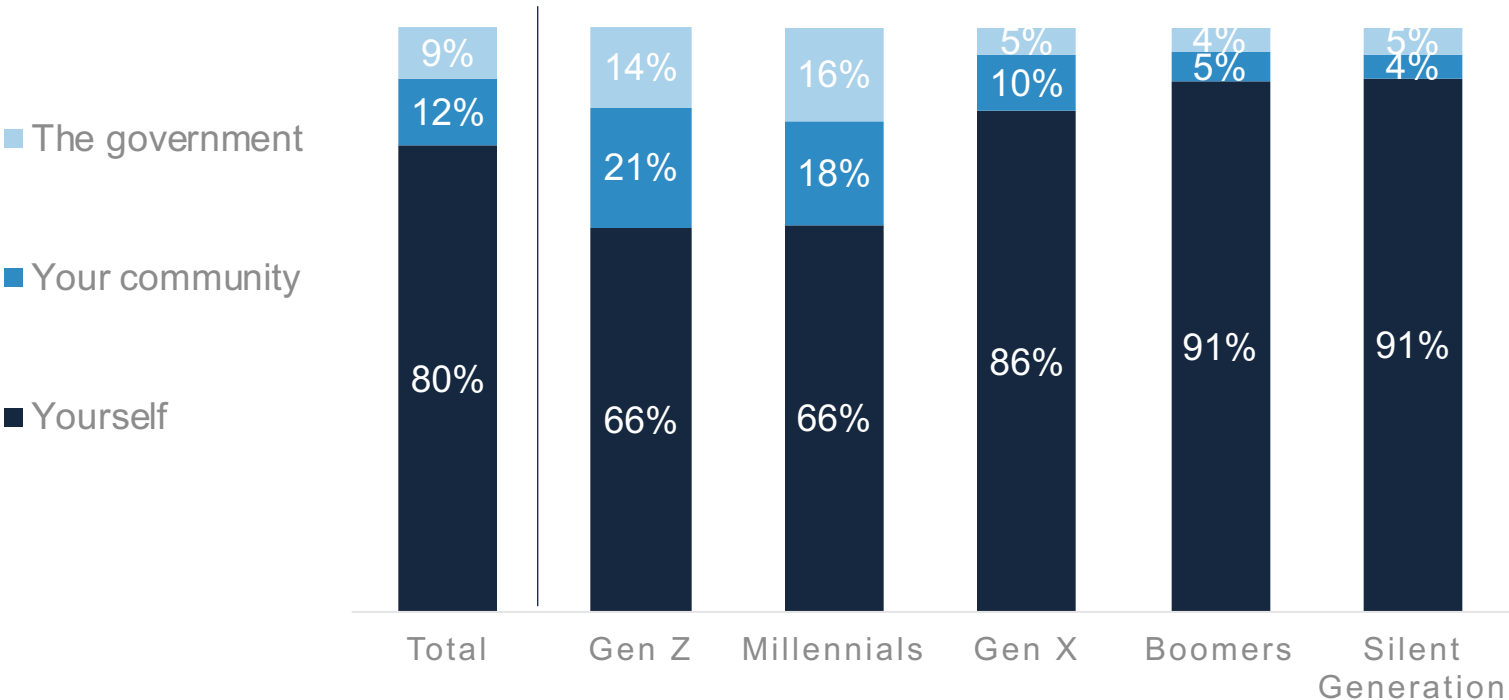


# AMERICA AND ITS VALUES

There are generational divides on the role of the government and the fairness of America's economic system. There is unity, however, on the topic of the importance of free speech.

# In Self We Trust (if you are 40 and older).

While 80% of Americans say they trust themselves (over government and community) to take care of their own interests, younger generations are about 25% less likely to say this.



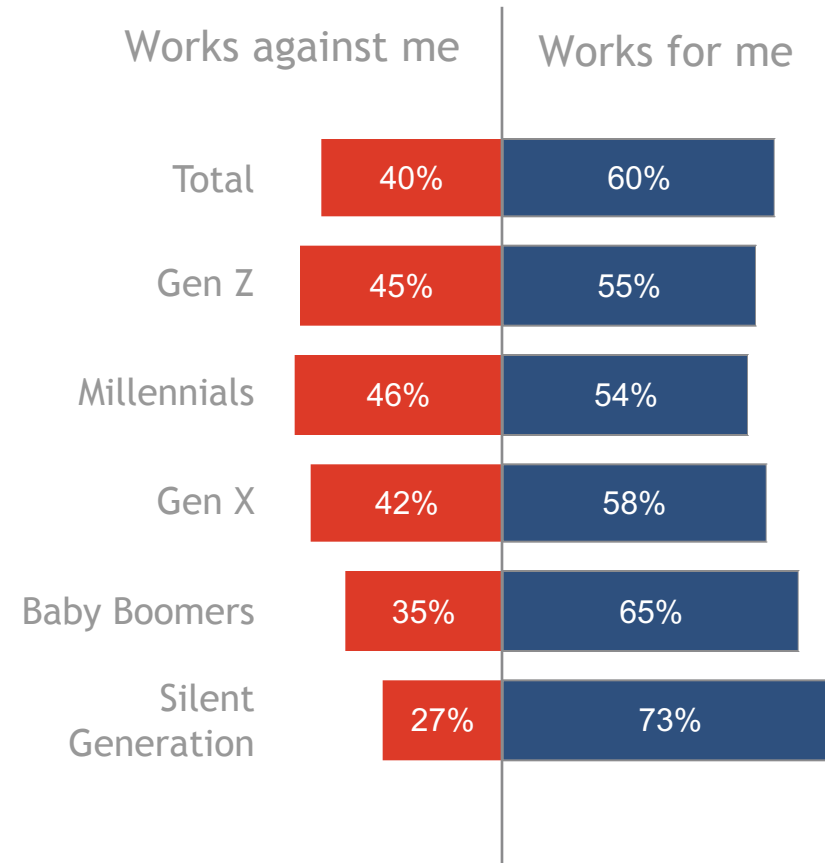


**Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation are the most likely to view America's economic system as working for them.**



Percent who say the economic system works for them is steady from 2018.

### America's current economic system

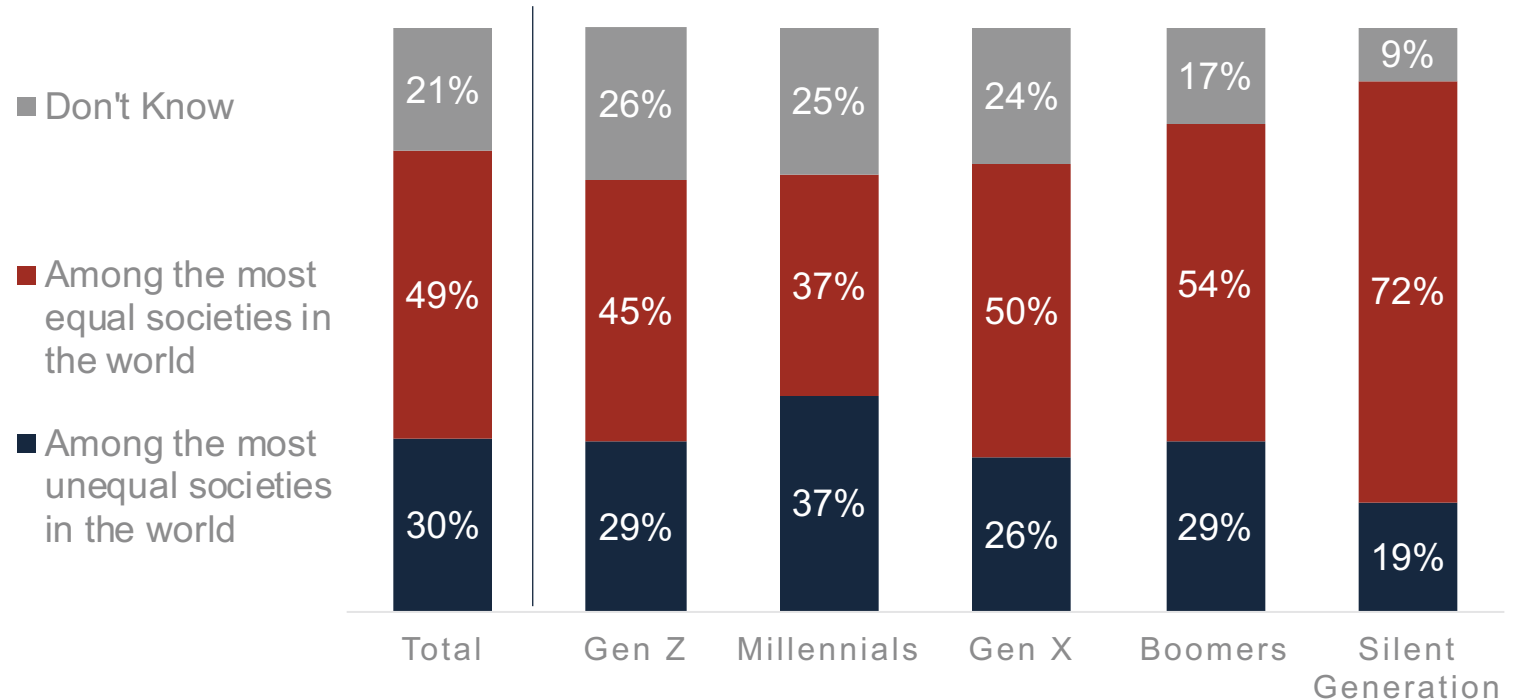




**37% of Millennials think America is one of the most unequal societies in the world.**



### Do you think America is...?

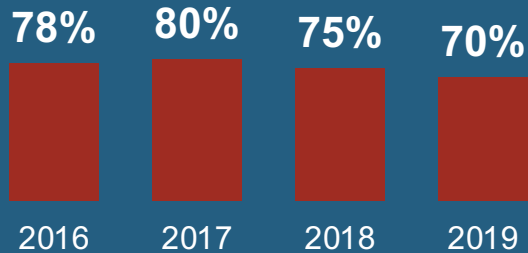




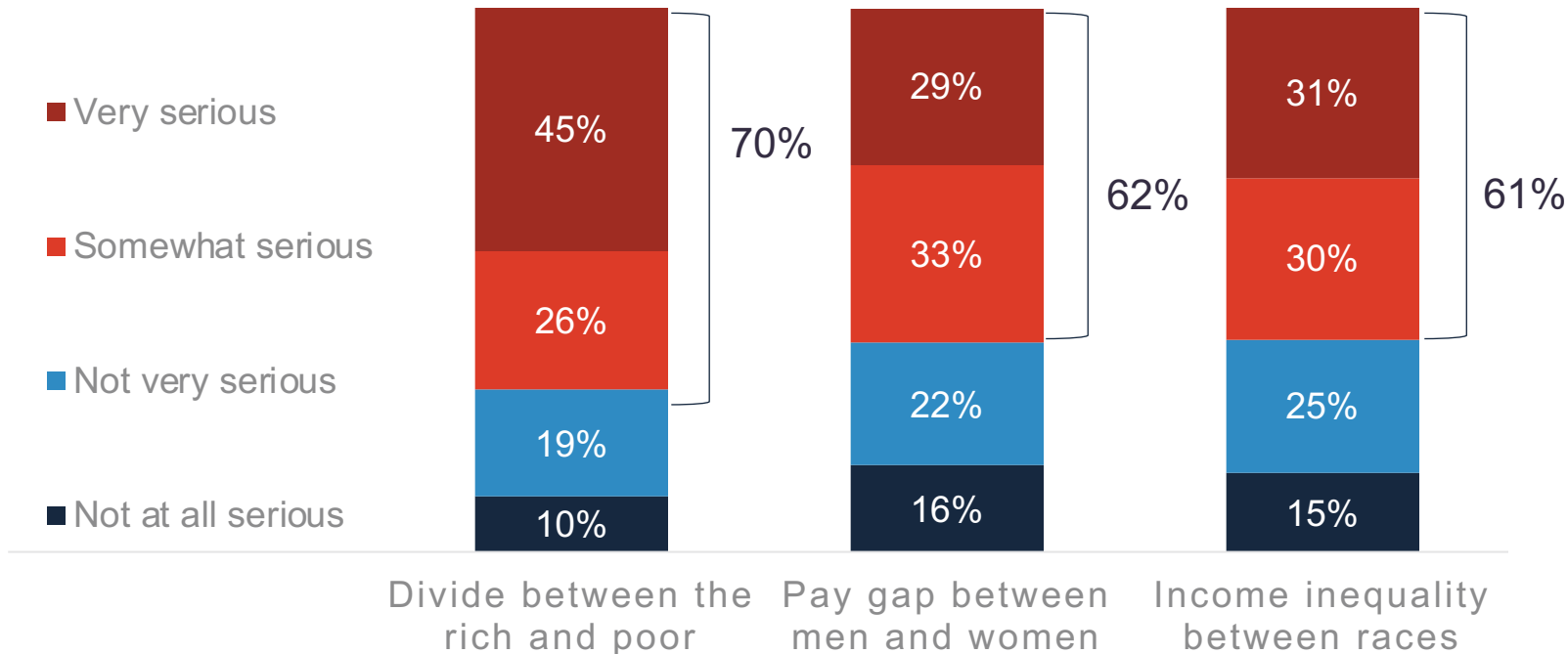
70% of Americans say the divide between the rich and the poor is a serious issue—still a majority, but trending down from previous years.



Percent who say the divide between the rich and the poor is very/somewhat serious



### How serious are facets of income inequality





Of the more than half of Americans who think the highest earners are not paying their fair share, 54% think increased taxes are part of the answer and 47% say a complete change of our economic system is needed.

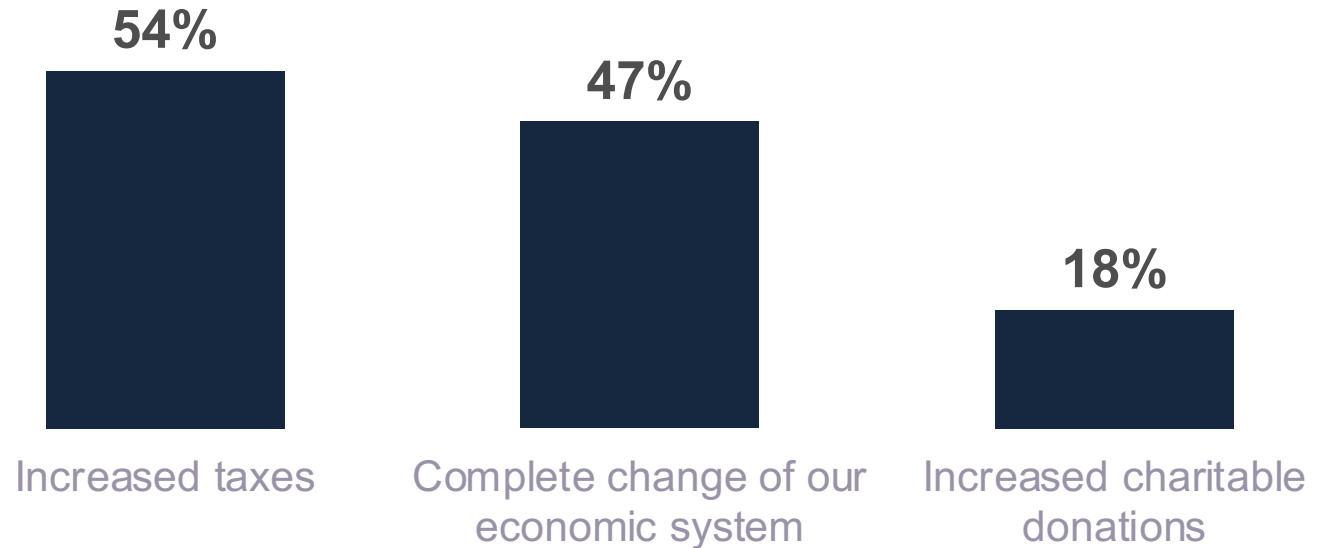


Views on highest earners paying their fair share (and ways to ensure they pay their fair share) are steady from 2018.

63% disagree that “the highest earners pay their fair share”....

### How to ensure the highest earners pay their fair share

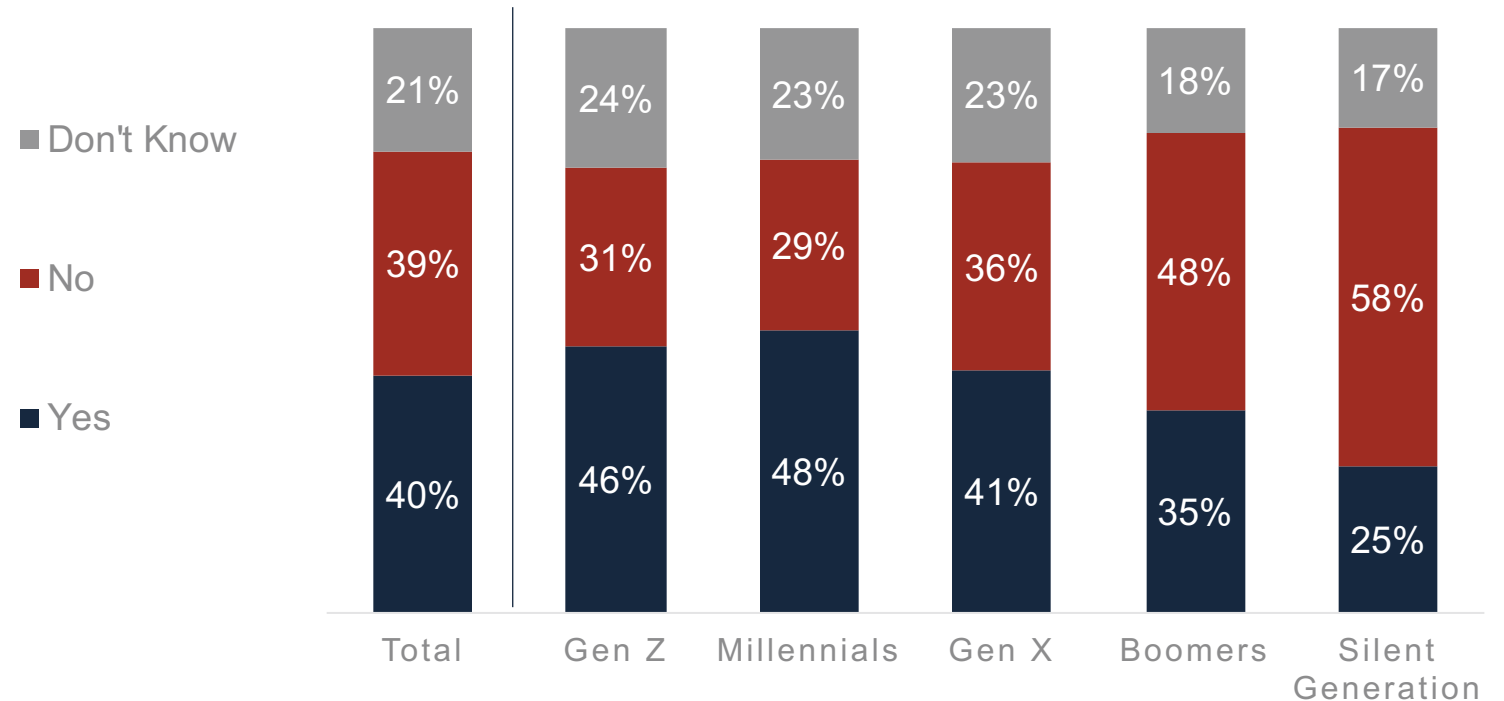
AMONG AMERICANS WHO DISAGREE THAT THE HIGHEST EARNERS PAY THEIR FAIR SHARE



**Nearly half of Millennials think the government should provide a job to everyone who wants to work, but can't find a job.**



**Should the government provide a job to everyone who wants to work if they can't find a job on their own?**

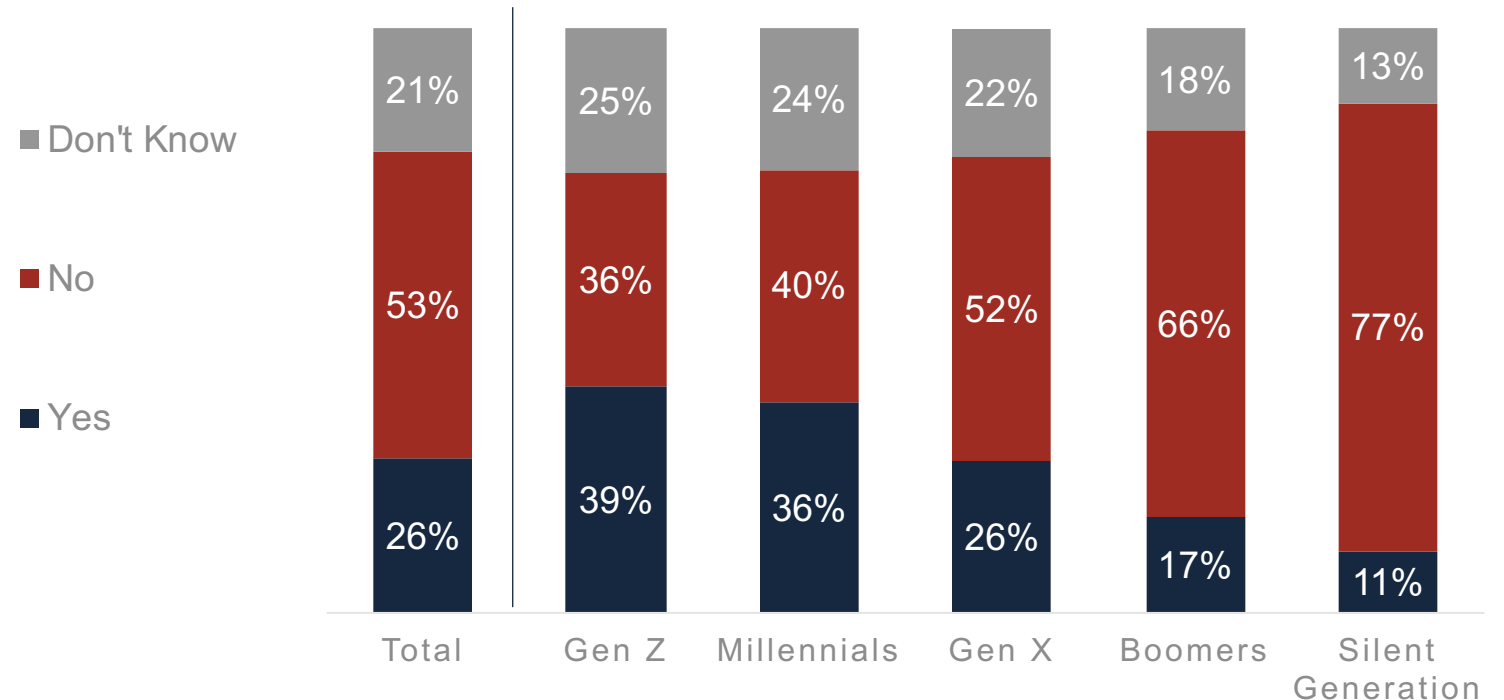




Overall, fewer Americans favor than oppose the idea of a universal basic income.

However, Gen Z and Millennials are essentially split on the issue: 39% of Gen Z thinks there should be a universal basic income stipend—agreement decreases steadily across older generations.

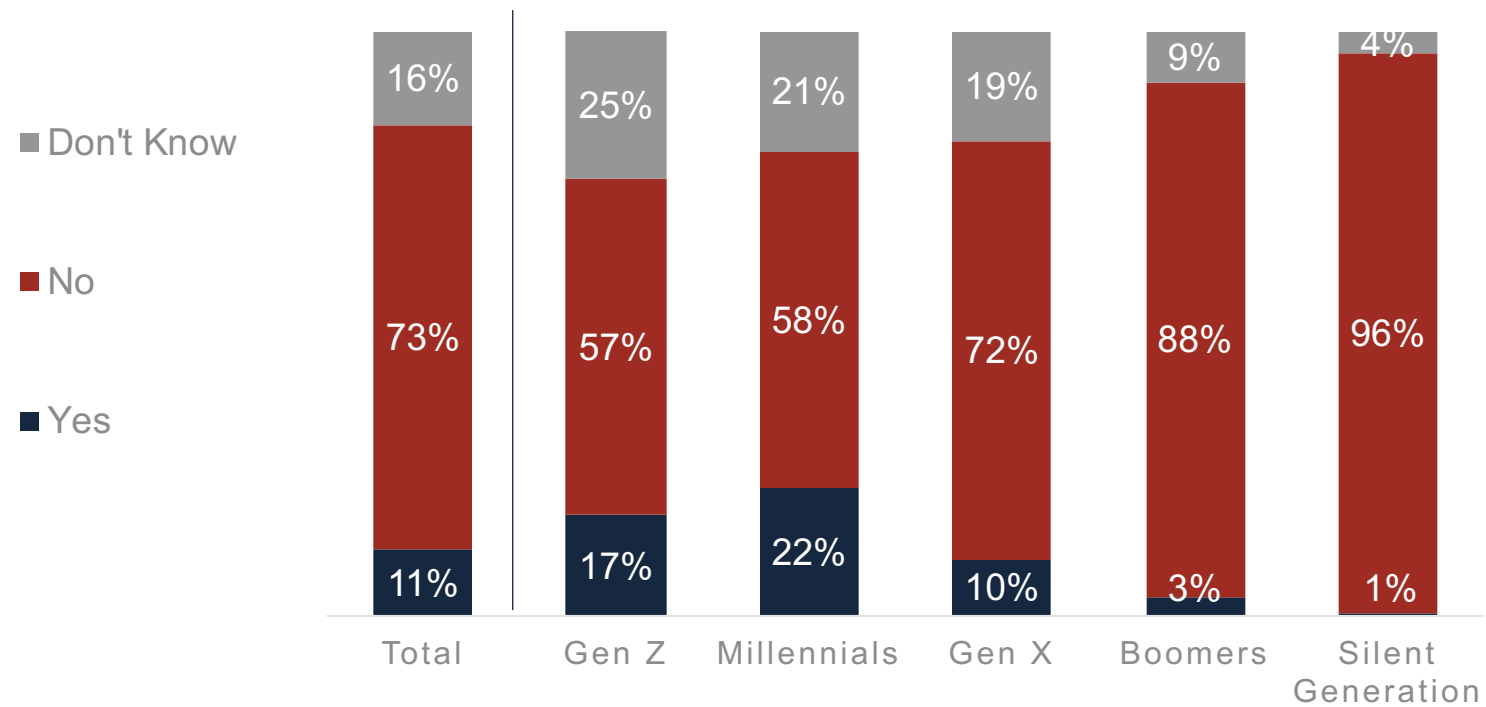
Should government provide a universal basic income where every citizen receives a monthly stipend from the government?



About one-in-five Millennials think society would be better off if all private property were abolished.



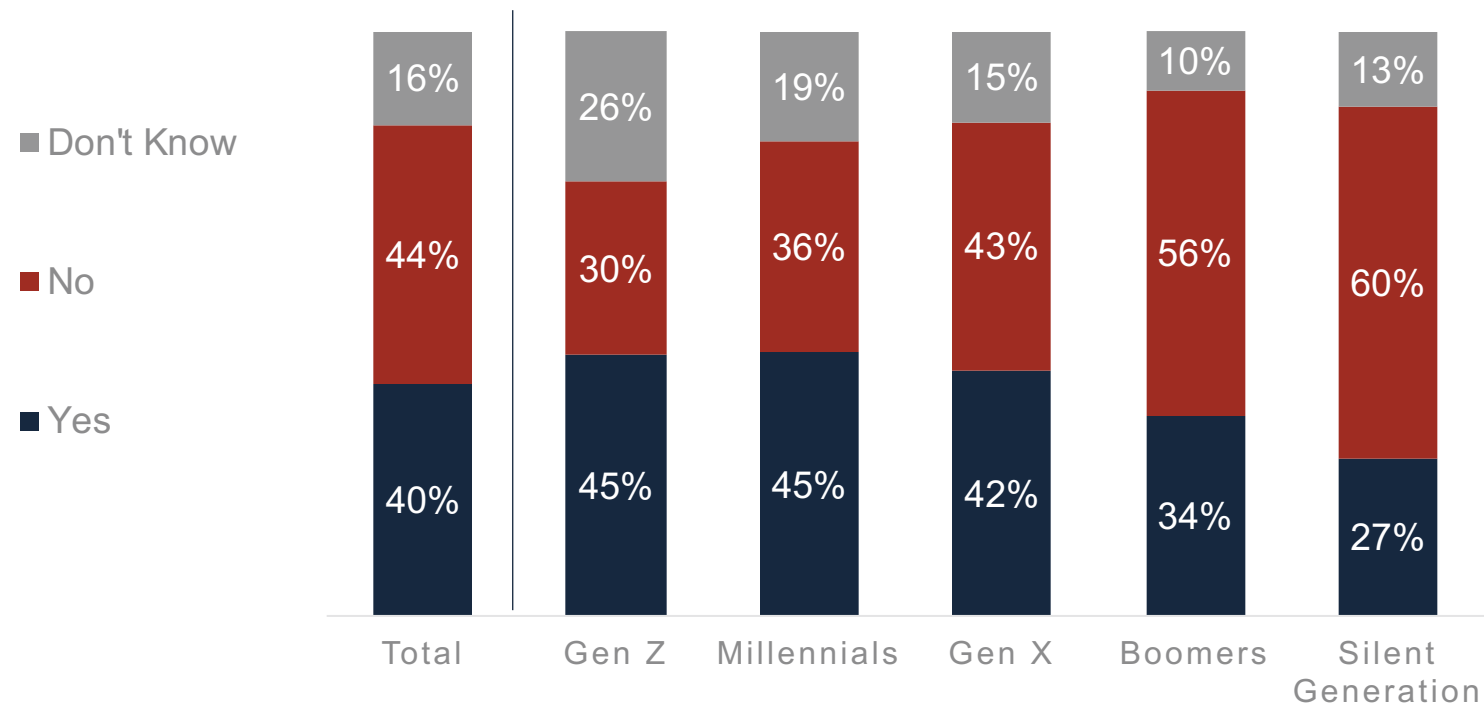
Should all private property be abolished?



40% of Americans (45% of Gen Z and Millennials) think all higher education should be free.



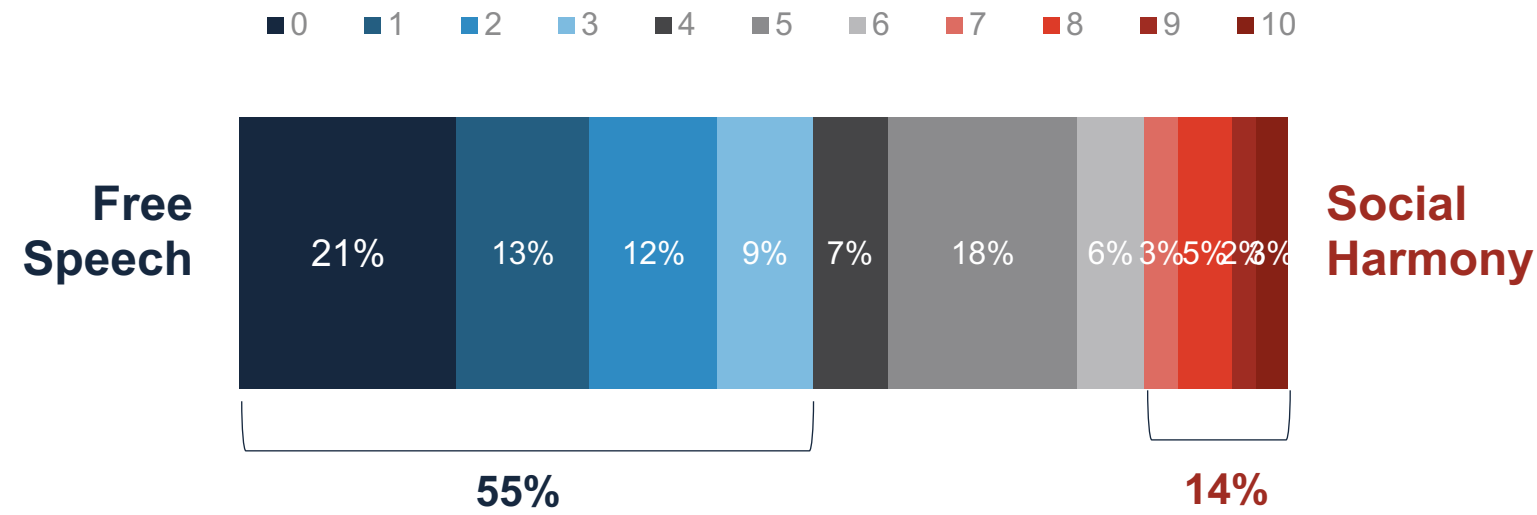
Should all higher education in America be free?



Americans value freedom of speech. They overwhelmingly place more importance on free speech over social harmony—even more emphatically for Gen X, Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation.



Free speech vs. Social harmony



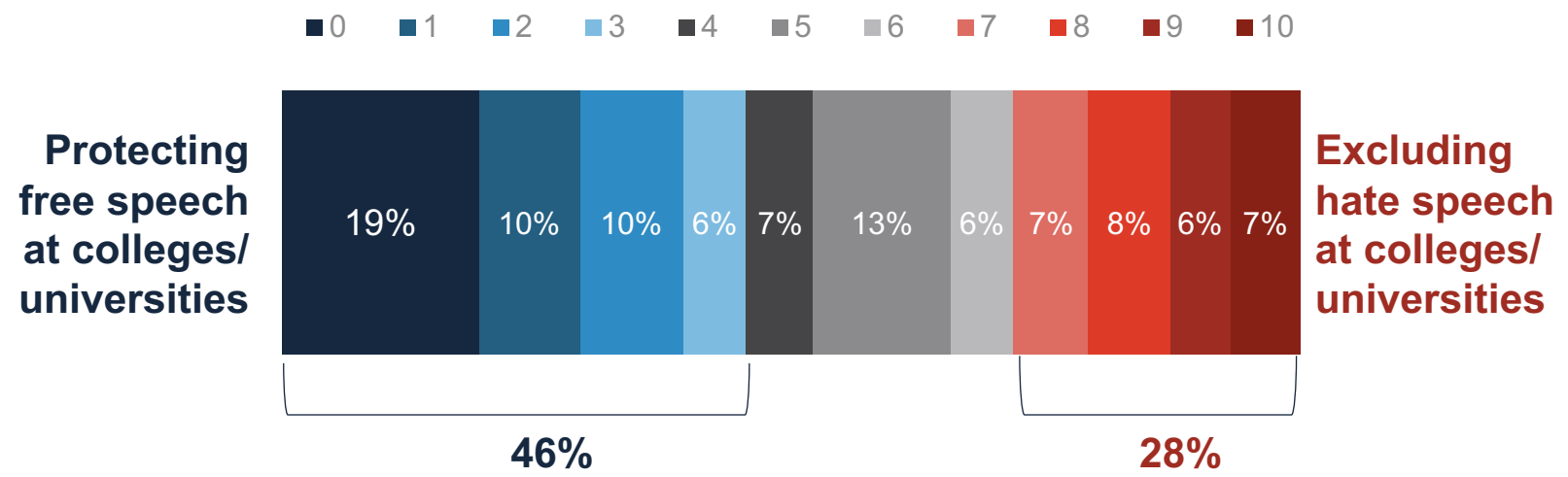
Gen Z	49%	15%
Millennials	46%	17%
Gen X	56%	13%
Baby Boomers	61%	11%
Silent Generation	63%	13%



Overall, Americans place more importance on protecting free speech at colleges/universities than on excluding hate speech—though Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to fall in the middle.



Protecting colleges and universities as a place for free speech vs. Excluding hate speech on college and university campuses

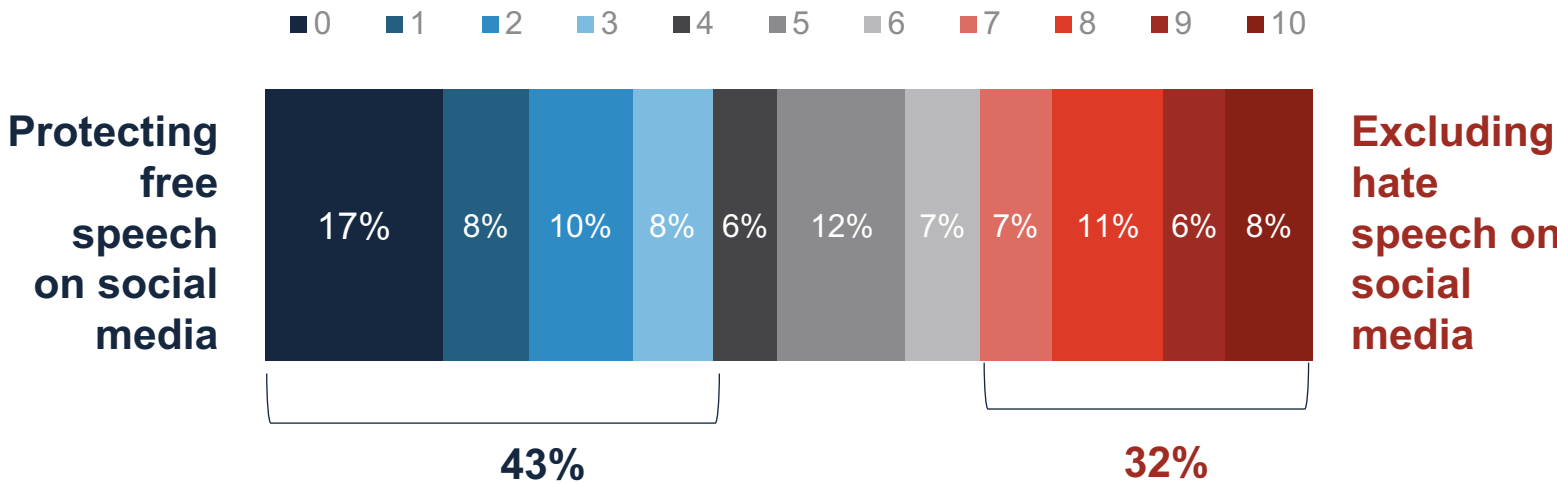


Gen Z	41%	31%
Millennials	40%	27%
Gen X	50%	27%
Baby Boomers	48%	28%
Silent Generation	51%	30%

More Americans place greater importance on protecting free speech on social media sites, but a good portion (32%) lean in favor of excluding hate speech.



Protecting free speech on social media sites vs. Excluding hate speech on social media sites

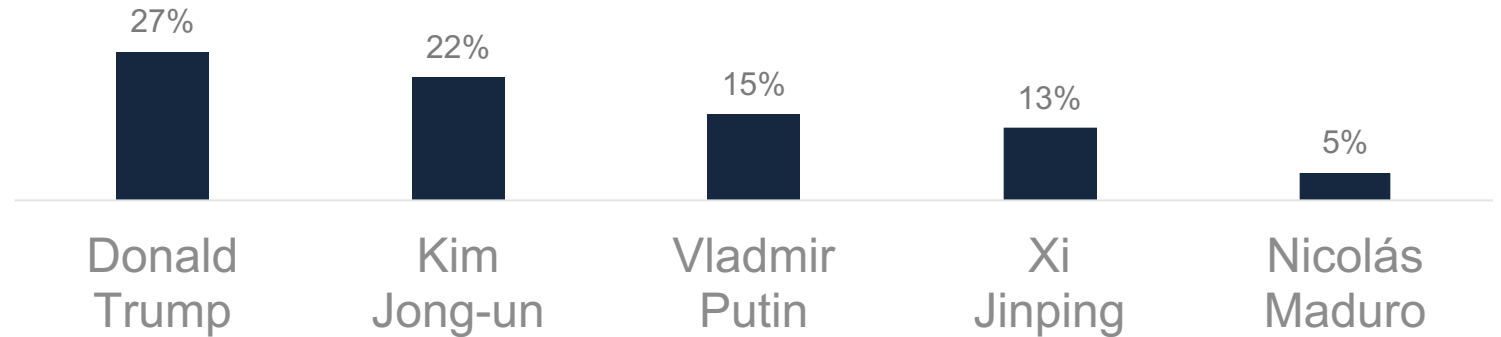


Gen Z	40%	33%
Millennials	39%	31%
Gen X	48%	30%
Baby Boomers	44%	33%
Silent Generation	40%	35%



About a quarter of Americans see Donald Trump as the biggest threat to world peace (across every generation) over figures like Kim Jong-un and Vladimir Putin.

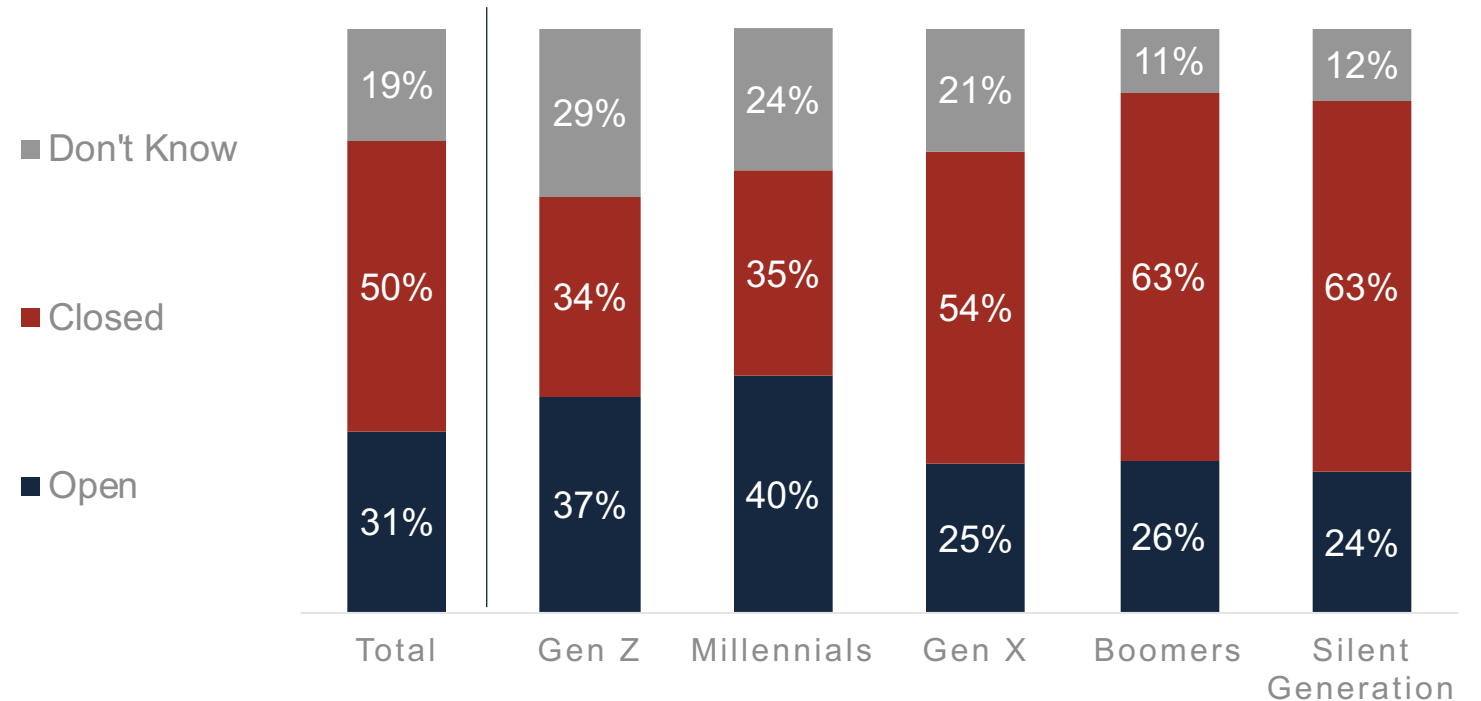
### The biggest threat to world peace



Millennials and Gen Z are more likely to say America's borders should be open than older generations.



### Should America's borders be...?



# **DETAILED METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION**

# Detailed Methodology

YouGov surveyed 2,518 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 2,100 to produce the final dataset. 2,000 respondents were matched to an adult (18+) frame and 100 respondents were matched to a 16-17 year old sampling frame. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file).

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, and years of education. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), education (4-categories), and ideology (5-categories, using benchmarks from the 2014 Pew Religious Life survey) to produce the final weight.



**Survey conducted from September 6<sup>th</sup> to September 13<sup>th</sup> 2019**



**Average Survey Length: 10 minutes**



## Sample Demographics

### Education



No high school	10%
High school graduate	32%
Some college	17%
2-year	12%
4-year	18%
Post-grad	10%

### Income



Less than 10,000	8%
\$10,000 - \$24,999	15%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	23%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	26%
\$100,000 or More	16%
Prefer not say	13%

### Age

Gen Z (16-22)	13%
Millennial (23-38)	27%
Gen X (39-54)	24%
Boomers (55-73)	29%
Silent Generation (74+)	8%



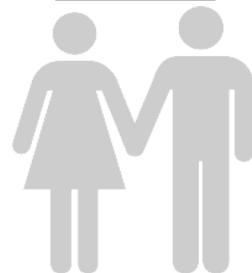
### Ethnicity

White	63%
Black	12%
Hispanic	16%
Asian	3%
Native American	1%
Middle Eastern	0%
Mixed Race	3%
Other	2%



### Gender

Female  
51%



Male  
49%