The time has come for reform on how the United States deals with the electoral process, the environment and social justice, according to a new national poll released today by the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion that takes an in-depth look at the views of Americans age 18 to 39.

The poll found that the public favors reforms in a range of areas and that the movement for those changes is being driven by younger Americans.

Asked whether the Supreme Court should be expanded, a majority, 52 percent of Americans are in favor of increasing the number of justices from nine to 13. Support is strongest among millennials, 66 percent of whom favor expansion. Sixty-two percent of Gen Z respondents also favor the change. On whether Supreme Court justices should have term limits instead of a lifetime appointment, 72 percent of all surveyed favor limiting the time the justices spend on the court, with 79 percent of millennials and 62 percent of Gen Z in support of such a measure.

"It's no coincidence that as Joe Biden's lead has grown in the polls, the more comfortable Americans are with expanding the size of the Supreme Court. As the chance of Trump holding a second term and appointing more justices dwindles, the opposition to court-packing dwindles as well. Saying Americans are opposed to expanding the court used to be conventional wisdom; now it's a commonly held misconception," said John Cluverius, associate director of the Center for Public Opinion and assistant professor of political science.

On the subject of eliminating the Electoral College in favor of a national popular vote, millennials led the support at 64 percent, followed by 58 percent of all respondents and Gen Z at 54 percent. Millennials also most strongly favored the idea of the nation having more than two competitive political parties, with 71 percent in support, compared to 61 percent of all adults and 59 percent of Gen Z respondents. Sixty-four percent of millennials support ranked-choice voting, followed by 54 percent of Gen Z and 47 percent of all American adult respondents.

A majority of all of the respondents, especially those younger than 40, voiced support for reforms that would make it easier to vote. Sixty-nine percent of all adults surveyed support "no excuse" absentee balloting for all voters in future elections, with 77 percent of millennials and 75 percent of Gen Z in favor. On registering to vote at the polls, 64 percent of Americans are in favor, as are 76 percent of millennials and 75 percent of Gen Z. Older voters, however, were the most likely to support term limits for members of Congress; overall 84 percent support them, with the weakest support among Gen Z (65 percent) and millennials (80 percent), and the strongest among baby boomers (age 56 to 74) with 94 percent and 92 percent of the Silent Generation (age 75 and older).

While millennials polled are more consistently reform-oriented and liberal in their attitudes than their Generation Z counterparts, both groups...
believe strongly that change is needed in how the nation is addressing climate change.

Eighty-five percent of millennials and 84 percent of Gen Z respondents said human activity contributes to climate change and 65 percent of Gen Z and 60 percent of millennials said the U.S. government has done too little to combat the effects of climate change. More than two-thirds of both groups believe laws should be put in place to prohibit new fossil fuel plants and pipelines. Forty percent of Gen Z and 41 percent of millennials attributed the wildfires that have heavily damaged areas of California to climate change, compared with 35 percent of all adults surveyed.

The poll also asked participants about social justice issues that are the source of debate in the U.S., including whether Blacks are treated less fairly than whites. Overall, 43 percent of Americans surveyed said Blacks are treated less fairly than whites, down eight points from a poll conducted by the Center for Public Opinion in August. On whether the Black Lives Matter protests around the country are generally peaceful or violent, a majority, 51 percent, said they are mostly or somewhat peaceful. Only 29 percent said they favor decreasing funding for police and reallocating funds to other programs.

On each of these issues, Gen Z respondents were the most ideologically liberal, with 54 percent (compared with 53 percent of millennials) saying Blacks are treated less fairly than whites, 70 percent (vs. 63 percent of millennials) saying Black Lives Matter protests have been mostly or somewhat peaceful and 47 percent (compared to 42 percent of millennials) who were in favor of so-called "defunding the police" reform efforts.

"What I find most interesting is that it is not always the youngest Americans who espouse the most liberal viewpoints. Here we see millennials, the oldest of whom are about to turn 40, as the driving force behind the vision for a more progressive future." said Joshua Dyck, director of the Center for Public Opinion and associate professor of political science.

The poll also found:

- Trust in government in the overall population is quite low—only 24 percent of respondents trust the government ("almost always"—5 percent, "most of the time"—19 percent). However, the most trusting age cohorts are the youngest and oldest respondents: among Gen Z respondents, trust is at 31 percent, millennials 27 percent, Gen X 22 percent, baby boomers 19 percent and Silent Generation 30 percent.

- A majority of Americans, 52 percent to 48 percent, are in favor of canceling all student loan debt. Support is strongest among Gen Z respondents (66 percent) and millennials (66 percent), while Gen X respondents are split (51 percent). Thirty-eight percent of baby boomers and 31 percent of the Silent Generation oppose canceling student loan debt.

- On whether it is safe to open schools in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, a majority of Americans said they feel it is not safe. Members of Gen Z were the most likely, 39 percent, to say it is safe followed by 30 percent of millennials.

More information:  
www.uml.edu/Research/public-op .../n/polls/default.aspx

Provided by University of Massachusetts Lowell