

Consumer News & Views

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Despite the Political Climate, Millennials are Still Optimistic. *This article first appeared in the USA Today and Rock the Vote Poll and was reported on by USA TODAY Washington Bureau Chief Susan Page.*

In a rowdy political climate and ever-changing economy, millennials surprisingly still believe in the American dream.



Despite growing up during the worst downturn since the Great Depression — and coming of age at a time of wage stagnation and widening income inequality — more than two-thirds of those in the nation's rising generation predict they will be more successful in their professional lives than their parents were.

Just one in five say that won't be true.

"I feel that I will be more successful than my parents in my professional life because of my level of education," says Diana Ruocco, 21, a student from Daytona Beach, Fla., who was among those surveyed. "But I think the 'American dream' has changed," she adds, because of dramatic shifts in the economy.

"Our ideas of 'success' are different," agrees Michelle Stevens, 30, of Gainesville, Fla.

The latest USA TODAY/Rock the Vote Poll of 18-to-34-year-olds explores the economic expectations and concerns of the largest generation in U.S. history, an accelerating force that is changing the way consumer goods are sold, elections are won and careers are pursued. The poll, the second in an election year series, is part of USA TODAY's One Nation initiative, a series of forums across the U.S. on the most important issues of 2016.

After the financial crash of 2008 and the economic woes that followed, adults of all ages have bemoaned the demise of the American dream, the animating belief that with hard work the next generation will have the opportunity for a better life than the previous one. But millennials still embrace that idea, and across demographic lines.

Thirty percent of whites "strongly agree" that they will be more successfully professionally than the previous generation. Optimism is even higher among African Americans (34% "strongly agree") and Hispanics (32%). Asian Americans are a bit less upbeat, at 26%.

That said, millennials believe success will require a lifetime of effort on their parts. Nearly nine out of 10 say they will need to continually develop new skills to advance their careers.

And they are surprisingly skeptical of the "sharing economy" that their generation pioneered, including the explosion of app-based services such as Uber. Just shy of half, 49%, say the "sharing economy" reflects an improvement on the American economy. Nearly a third say they don't know, a higher level of uncertainty than on other economic questions, and one in five says it's not an improvement.

"With a profession like Uber, you will be able to see more people who will be able to enter the current job market," says Gavin Hamilton, 23, a student from Fresno, Calif. "I think it'd offer more jobs in areas that we're not seeing right now."



"Your own success is completely dependent on how you want to deliver it," Stevens says, but she cautions that she sees "two different flip sides to it."

The online survey of 1,541 young adults, taken by Ipsos March 3-10, has a credibility interval (akin to a margin of error) of 4.6 percentage points. The poll included an over-sample of African Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans. The credibility interval for those subgroups is +/- 7.9.

By big margins, those surveyed say the economy, including jobs and the minimum wage, should be the first priority for the next president. Other issues at the top of the list relate to the economy: The second is education, college affordability and student debt. The third is health care.

Trailing far behind, at fourth, is foreign policy and terrorism.

"Immigration is important but in my view, it's education," says Melissa Roloson, 32, of Sodus, in upstate New York, who is now working in retail. Roloson supports Democrat Hillary Clinton in the presidential race. "I'm a college graduate but I have student loans, and I don't have a great job."

Ashley Yago, 33, a supporter of Republican Donald Trump who lives across the country in Greeley, Colo., finds herself in a similar retail job and with a similar outlook.

"I've had two grants but I'm still hung up with schools and have loans," she said in a follow-up phone interview. She tried to apply for a job as an administrative assistant in a hospital, but the hospital wouldn't give her an interview until she had completed classes she's taking for an associate's degree. "It's either you have a degree or you don't. And in this competitive world, you have to have a degree, a college education."

By more than 9-1, 86%-9%, those surveyed say most people aren't prepared for the impact of student-loan debt. Nearly as many, 83%-15%, call the American higher-education system "broken."

"They show on television that it's so easy to go to college, but it's really not," says Andres Palmer, 21, of Farmington, N.M. "It's really expensive and if you have a hard time in school and you end up failing, you end up having to pay a lot of money and so you're worse than where you started."

In the survey, millennials are eager for some help in navigating the new economy. By nearly 4-1, 71%-19%, they say the U.S. economy "needs more organizations and rules to protect workers." By an even wider margin, 85%-11%, they say Americans should be able to support themselves and their families based on a 40-hour work week.

Many say improving the education system is the key to a range of other issues.

"Education is a big problem in America that needs to be addressed if the economy's going to get better, if opportunities are going to get better," says Christopher Sturup, 28, of Evanston, Ill.

The nation's education system is "very broken" despite efforts by a series of administrations, says Olga Figueroa, 27, of Silver Spring, Md. "If we could get some type of consistency, it could lead to lower rates of poverty, lower rates of criminal activity. I think education crosses all sectors, including climate change and a lot of different policy issues."

U.S. Supreme Court Vacancy May Split Consumer Issues. *By Donna Fuscaldo. This article first appeared in Bankrate.com*

The death of Justice Antonin Scalia may not seem like it will have a big impact on consumers. After all, it doesn't mean interest rates will go up or you'll pay more in taxes. But without Scalia, the current makeup of the Supreme Court is evenly split, affecting big cases on everything from your right to sue to how much you pay to borrow money. "It potentially has very important impacts on a lot of things," says Alan Kaplinsky, partner and chair of the consumer financial services group at Ballard Spahr LLP, the New York and Philadelphia law firm. "It's going to depend on who Obama nominates and will Republicans act on the nomination or not?"



Ever since word broke of the sudden death of Scalia, speculation has been swirling over whom Obama will choose as his replacement and whether or not a Republican-led Senate will confirm Obama's nominee.

Liberals vs. Conservatives:

Some Republicans even want the process delayed until after the November presidential election, arguing that too much is at stake. Without Scalia, the Supreme Court is made up of 4 liberal judges and 4 conservative ones. Scalia was the 5th conservative vote, giving Republicans a lot of victories. If Obama's nomination gets approval it potentially tips the Supreme Court in the Democrats' favor.

"It will be a big, big win for liberals if Obama gets through even a moderate," says Kermit Roosevelt, a professor of law at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. "If Obama doesn't get it through and a Republican wins (the election), conservatives dodged a bullet."

While it's not clear how long a political and legal showdown will drag out, one thing is for sure: During that time frame, cases heard by the Supreme Court may end up in a 4-4 split, and if that happens, it won't be the Supreme Court that's deciding the case, but the court below it.

With that in mind, here's a look at 3 cases on the Supreme Court's docket that could impact consumers on everything from peer-to-peer lending to whether or not you can claim damages even if you aren't injured.

Madden v. Midland Funding LLC:

The U.S. Supreme Court has been asked to review a lower court decision that prevents marketplace lenders from getting around state usury laws by hooking up with banks headquartered in states that don't have those rules. That would prevent a lender from making a loan to a resident in New York where there is a cap on the interest rate that can be charged, where in another state there is no limit.

Peer-to-peer lenders could be negatively impacted if the lower court's ruling stays because of a split decision or if Obama appoints a less business-friendly judge who rules with the lower court. "The implications of that case are much broader than the facts in the case," Kaplinsky says. "Potentially, it also applies to a lot of other very common business arrangements where banks originate loans and sell them to 3rd parties." Why you should care: If the lower court ruling stands, nonbank lenders may not be able to charge overly high interest rates.

Spokeo Inc. v. Robins:

In this case, the Supreme Court is looking at whether a violation of federal law can be enough for someone to sue, even if there was no evidence of harm. A man sued, arguing that Spokeo Inc., an online information aggregator, violated the Fair Credit Reporting Act by reporting inaccurate information about him.

"This one is being very closely followed," Kaplinsky says. "If we have an equally divided court the 9th Circuit opinion will hold, and industry will be very disappointed because everybody was hoping and expecting that to be reversed."

Why you should care: If the Supreme Court rules in favor of Spokeo, consumer lawsuits can't proceed unless the plaintiff can show harm, ending a lot of class-action cases recently lodged against online companies.

Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged v. Burwell:

Obamacare created a stream of legal challenges when he implemented the Affordable Care Act, with one of the more recent ones focusing on birth control and contraceptives. Religious nonprofits, including the Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged, want to be exempt from covering contraceptives when providing health insurance to employees because it goes against its religious beliefs.

While the Affordable Care Act provides exemptions for employers that don't want to cover birth control, the religious groups are still challenging it because, although they don't have to cover contraceptives, the insurance companies will for their employees.

"The Supreme Court has encouraged religious freedom, but that's probably not going to happen (in this case)," law professor Roosevelt says. "They need 5 votes, and they don't have the votes."

Why you should care: Depending on where you fall on this matter, you are either going to be hoping for a split or praying for a right-leaning court justice to be appointed.

Immigration and Abortion:

While the Supreme Court is slated to hear cases that could affect consumers' finances, there are also some big social issues coming down the pike that may have a consumer component to them, whether it's a case that challenges Obama's immigration reform or one in Texas on abortion.

"The reality is this vacancy will have a major effect on all the cases before the court in this term, and if they don't move, into the next term," says Michele Jawando, vice president of legal progress at the Center for American Progress, a Washington, D.C., policy institute. "If the Supreme Court continues to have just 8 people who ideologically fall along the same lines, we will consistently see a 4-4 split in much of the cases for the remainder of the term."

Donna Fuscaldo is a freelance writer in Bethpage, New York.

[Read more](#)

ACC Annual Meeting Scheduled for June 10, 2016. The American Consumer Council will hold its annual membership and business meeting on Friday, June 10, 2016 at 10:00 am at The Lodge at Torrey Pines located in La Jolla, CA. The meeting is open to all members of ACC and there is no charge to attend the meeting. The business agenda for the meeting will be published in May 2016. For more information, please contact ACC's meeting department at 1-800-544-0414.



The Lodge at Torrey Pines, La Jolla, CA

ACC's Friend of the Consumer Award Recognizes Outstanding Businesses in 2015-2016.

Is your business consumer-friendly? Does your business deserve greater recognition for its service to consumers? If so, you should apply for the American Consumer Council's Friend of the Consumer Award. Now is the time to apply!

Throughout the year, ACC presents its "Friend of the Consumer" Awards. This prestigious award recognizes manufacturers, retailers, and other businesses that produce or sell products in the United States that meet or exceed federally-mandated standards and are touted by consumers as "consumer friendly."

Each year, ACC awards numerous "Friend of the Consumer" Awards to deserving companies and organizations because they have "demonstrated a commitment to American consumers by providing a specific product or service that fosters consumer confidence and market acceptance."



To apply for the "Friend of the Consumer" Award, complete the online application and return it to ACC with the application fee. Applicants will be notified within 5 days of receipt of their application. Thereafter, a panel of independent judges will review your application and make a formal recommendation within 20 days of receipt of your award application.

For more information, visit: <http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp>

Green CSM Certification Accepting Applications for 2016 Summer Cycle:

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for the **Green CSM Certification**. Applications for the 2016 Summer cycle are now being accepted through September 30, 2016.

It's a proven fact that consumers want to do business with companies that are eco-friendly and practice Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The process is straight-forward and all applicants are recognized by ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants complete the criteria and submit their responses to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the **Green CSM Certification** criteria can be viewed at ACC's website located at: <http://americanconsumercouncil.org/greenc.asp>

