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Young people usually become less radical with time. Are we seeing an exception?

Gen Z, the Useful Idiot Generation

By Mark Penn And Andrew Stein

Young people typically start out on the political left but become more conservative as they get older. Baby boomers who once marched against the Vietnam war got jobs, got married and had children. Now their grandchildren see them as tethered to Fox News.

Today's young Americans are following the first part of that pattern. Ask a group of them to choose between capitalism and socialism and they will split right down the middle. Their support was crucial in nominating Zohran Mamdani, who says he wants to capture "the means of production," as the Democratic candidate for mayor of New York.

But will the young people outgrow their radicalism? There is reason to doubt. Record numbers of Generation Z are pursuing higher education, with 53% of those 18 to 24 having completed at least some college. That's a troubling sign given how left-wing ideology has come to dominate higher ed.

College is where many young people learn that socialism means free stuff. They are indoctrinated to blame capitalism for racism, inequality and climate change. Unlike the

older generations, they grew up after the end of the Cold War and have no memory of the atrocities committed by the Soviet Union, Maoist China and other socialist regimes. Maybe they'll see socialism in action in New York.

Meanwhile, the process of growing up is slowing down. The median age of first marriage is 30, almost five years later than in 1985, and this means that young people settle down and take on responsibilities later—if they ever do. Nearly half of Generation Z adults (born between 1997 and 2007) aren't in a committed romantic relationship. They largely live communally, often work from home, and are connected primarily through the four-plus hours they spend each day on their phones. Their primary sources of information are TikTok and Facebook, whose algorithms lead them to material that reinforces their preconceptions rather than challenges them. ✖

Another traditional source of ballast, religion, has become lighter as well. More than onethird of Gen Z reports no religious affiliation, and roughly 60% didn't participate in religious services growing up. That produces a lack of moral grounding.

Put all this together, and it's little wonder that about half of 18- to 24-year-olds tell pollsters they support Hamas over Israel. By and large these young adults aren't hard-core ideologues; they're merely ignorant. About half of young Hamas supporters say they don't want to wipe out Israel and prefer a two-state solution. Call them the Useful Idiot generation, mouthing slogans and causes they don't understand and from which they would recoil if they did.

The older generations aren't blameless here: We created the environment that produced this unmoored generation. Socialism and antisemitism will continue to fester and grow if we don't stand up and reform our universities, reinforce our basic values, and balance our social media.

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