

# PURDUE

## AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS REPORT

### NCR-Stat: Generational Gap in Rural North Central Region

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*Summary: A generation gap revealed differences in diversity and trust in institutions.*

We’ve heard a lot about GenZ being the most diverse generation (Pew Research Center, 2018). There has also been more discussion about the generational gaps in subjective well-being, social inclusion, and trust in institutions. The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development’s (NCRCRD) NCR-Stat: Baseline survey data concur with these national trends.

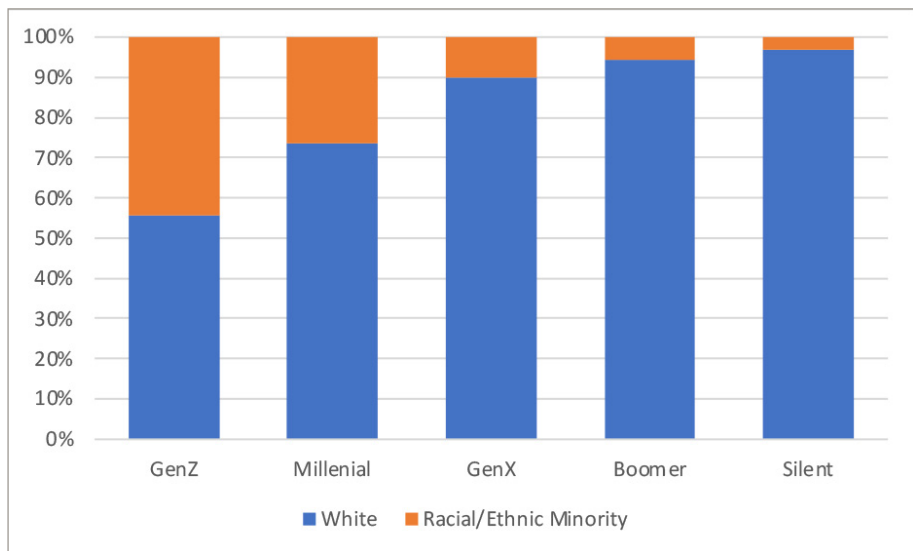
A generation gap refers to differences between generations in terms of their attitude, beliefs, actions, behaviors, or perspectives (Soni and Ashish, 2016). The differences across generations as demographic groups matter because their position in the life cycle shapes their views of the world. The members of particular age groups can express different opinions on most aspects of their lives, including social and economic equality, politics, social justice, technology, access to information, mental health, or trust.

We used the Pew Research Center’s generational categories to learn about generation gaps in the North Central Region (NCR): GenZ, Millennials, GenX, Boomers, and Silent Generation (Pew Research Center, 2019). We also looked at what the different generations thought about their communities and their trusted sources, specifically community equity and belonging, trust in institutions, life satisfaction, and mental health.

The NCRCRD collects data to understand the challenges facing rural and urban communities within the NCR. Data are collected across households and focus on demographics, economics, health, housing, community development, and social behavior. NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey (Bednarikova et al., 2022) includes data collected on 4,668 households for the 12<sup>1</sup> states in the NCR. Although the NCRCRD surveys households in rural and urban areas, we concentrate only on the rural respondents in this article.

<sup>1</sup> The 12 states include: IA, IN, IL, KS, MI, MO, MN, ND, NE, OH, SD, and WI.

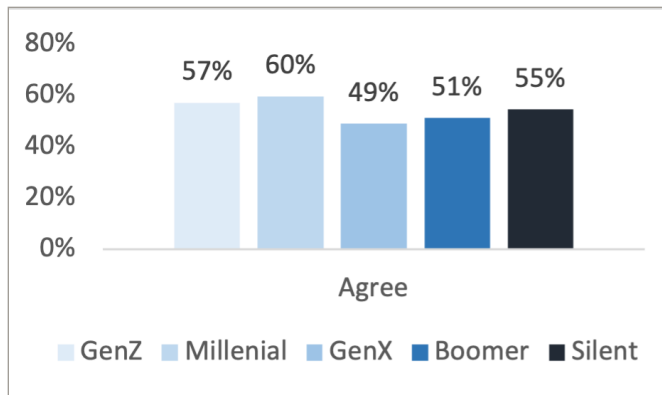
**Figure 1.** Diversity by generation  
 Source: Bednarikova et al. (2022). NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey



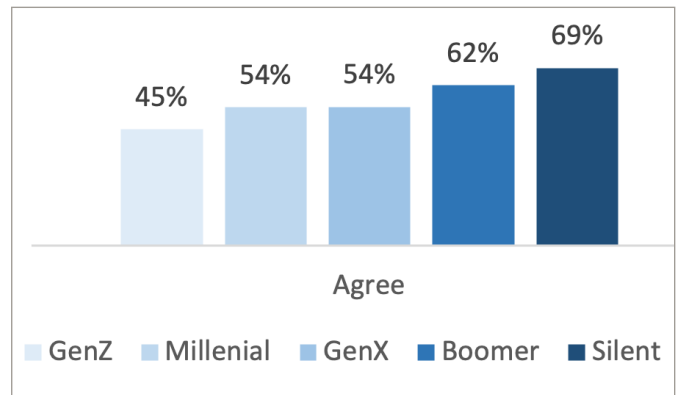
Overall, 16% of the respondents identified as either a racial or ethnic minority and 12% stated they were in multiracial or multiethnic households. Only 6% of white respondents were in multiracial/ethnic households compared to 46% of racial/ethnic minority respondents. Figure 1 shows the racial diversity across generations and demonstrates how each subsequent generation has become more diverse. In fact, 44% of GenZers are identified as a racial/ethnic minority compared to 5% of Boomers and 3% of the Silent Generation.

### Community belonging and security

Younger generations (GenZ and Millennials) agreed at a higher rate than older generations with the statement that their local rural community made all residents feel welcome (Figure 2). However, only 45% of rural GenZ respondents reported that their community provided a safe and secure environment for residents of all backgrounds. It is a disconcerting result, especially compared to responses of older generations that felt otherwise (Figure 3).



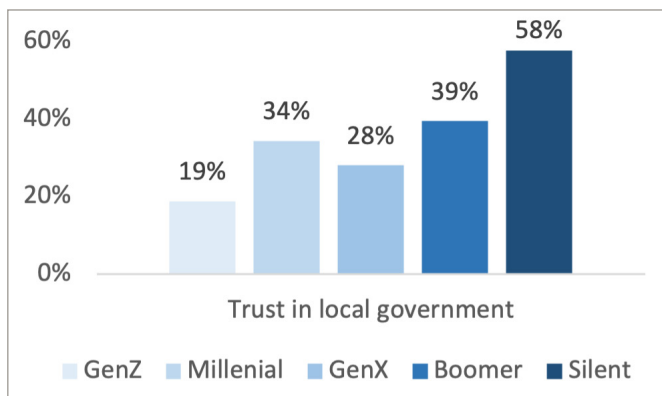
**Figure 2.** Community belonging  
 Source: Bednarikova et al. (2022). NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey



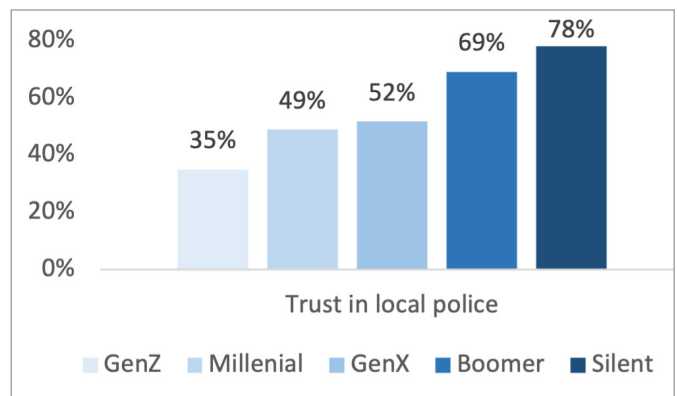
**Figure 3.** Community is safe and secure for all  
 Source: Bednarikova et al. (2022). NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey

### Trust in local institutions

We measured trust in local institutions by asking how much the respondents trusted their local government and police. Only 19% of GenZ members trusted their local government compared to 58% of Silent Generation (Figure 4). About one-third of GenZ trusted their local police, which is again the lowest share among the generations, as each older generation reported higher trust in the local police (Figure 5). The results regarding the younger generation's mistrust concur with national trends (Harvard Youth Poll, 2023)



**Figure 4.** Trust in local government  
 Source: Bednarikova et al. (2022). NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey

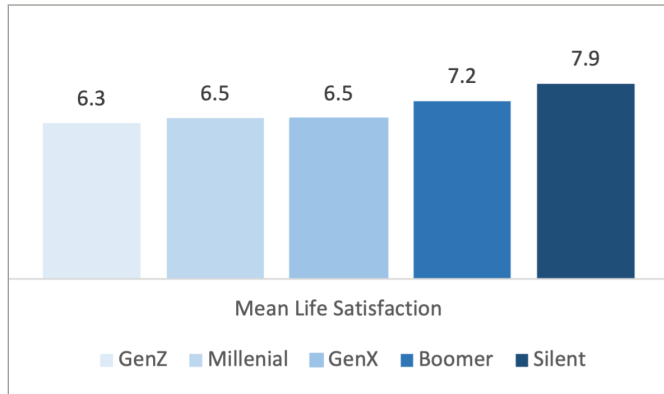


**Figure 5.** Trust in local police  
 Source: Bednarikova et al. (2022). NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey

### Life Satisfaction

In the NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey, we asked respondents how satisfied they felt at the time of the survey. We used a Likert scale to measure self-reported life satisfaction, with 0 representing “not at all satisfied” and 10 as “extremely satisfied.” The value of 5 is considered the midpoint, meaning “neither unhappy nor happy.” The rural Silent

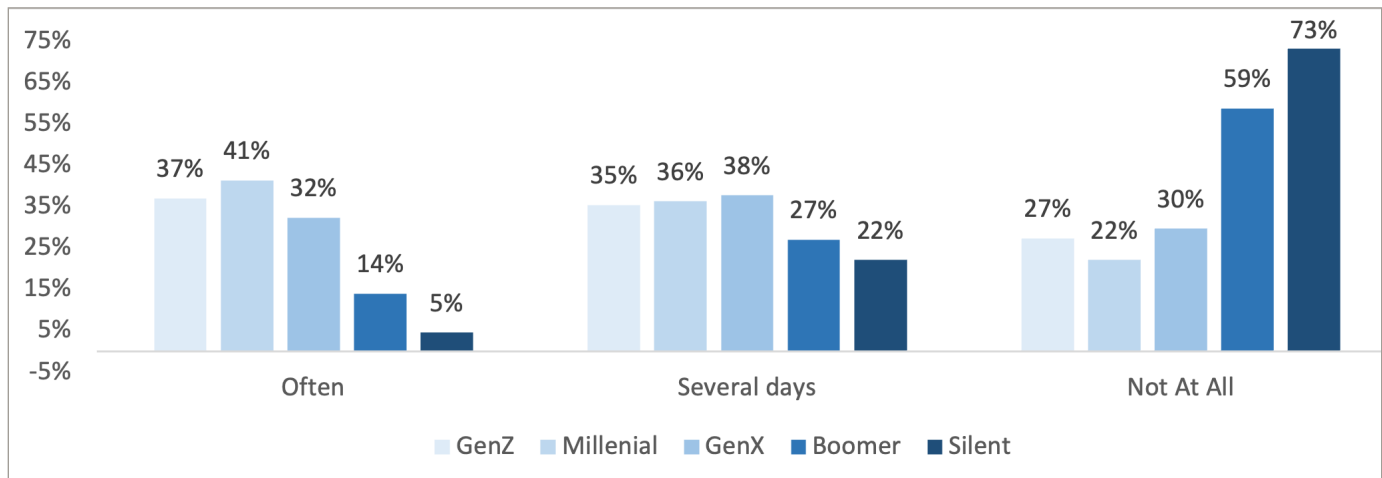
Generation was clearly the most satisfied with their lives among all generations, followed by the Boomers (7.9 and 7.2, respectively). On the contrary, GenZ reported the lowest level of life satisfaction (6.3) (Figure 6). This result suggests the existence of various factors that may influence the life satisfaction of the younger generations but may not necessarily be a concern for older generations.



**Figure 6.** Mean life satisfaction by generation  
 Source: Bednarikova et al. (2022). NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey

### Mental health

Mental health includes our psychological, emotional, and social well-being. Mental health is important in every stage of life as it affects our everyday living – how we feel, think, and act. It also helps determine how we relate to others, make choices, and handle stress. Figure 7 shows that younger adults – GenZ and Millennials tend more often than other generations to feel down, depressed, or hopeless. This trend reflects the national situation, showing that people between the ages of 18 and 44 reported the highest share of those living with symptoms of depression and anxiety (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).



**Figure 7.** Frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless by generation  
 Source: Bednarikova et al. (2022). NCR-Stat: Baseline Survey

### Summary

Rural communities across the NCR are seeing the same demographic changes as the rest of the nation. The GenZ and Millennial generations are the most diverse. While younger generations feel more community belonging than older generations, they do not feel that their communities provide a safe and secure environment for all residents. Our data show that rural communities in the NCR are suffering from the same trust and mental health challenges as others across the country. The Boomer and Silent generation feel more life satisfaction than other generations. However, younger generations seem to be feeling disconnected and distrustful of institutions. The national mental health crisis is also affecting rural communities and in particular GenZ and Millennials.

### References

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