Study: Millennial Leaders Are Isolationist; Like Obama, Not Palin
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They favor isolationism but revere wartime leaders who used America's power abroad. They worry about China almost as much as Iran as a likely future foe. And they think Barack Obama is the ideal 21st century leader and Sarah Palin is not.

Those are just a few of the fascinating gleanings from a new Brookings Institution survey of millennial movers and shakers of the future called "D.C.'s New Guard: What Does the Next Generation of American Leaders Think?"

Brookings surveyed more than 1,000 young leaders about their views on foreign policy, leadership and where they get their news. What they said matters because the generation born between 1980 and 2005 is 30 percent larger in raw numbers than the baby boomers and three times the size of Generation X.

"They are going to have as big an impact on the American political and economic and social scene as the baby boomers did before them," said Brookings senior fellow Peter Singer, who conducted the survey with colleagues. "We're only at the bow wave of this generation. It's just starting. Anyone who ignores their impact is simply not going to get it right."

Millennials -- also known as the Echo Boom, Generation Y, the 9/11 generation and the Facebook generation -- have already flexed their demographic muscles to help Obama win election in 2008. The new survey offers a hint, though no guarantee, of what their attitudes may be when it is their turn to take the reins of power.

The survey polled young leaders, average age 16, who have voiced interest in careers in politics and policy. They identified themselves as 38.2 percent Democrats, 28.8 percent independents and 26.4 percent Republicans.

Asked how many e-mail messages, text messages, blog posts, tweets and other digital communications they sent each day, the young leaders reported an average of 79. That's up from 39 in 2009, when many of those surveyed answered, "What are tweets?"

But, contrary to popular opinion, these millennials aren't getting their news from Twitter and Facebook, which was cited by just 3 percent. They also aren't looking to blogs or comedy shows like Jon Stewart's, which ranked last as a source for the latest on current events. Instead, they rely on the websites of news organizations and cable news shows such as CNN, ABC News, Fox News and The Associated Press.

Unlike the baby boomers, 60 percent of this generation look to parents as influencers of their own politics. Least influential in shaping their views: celebrities like Puff Daddy and faith leaders like Pat Robertson.
When asked who is their ideal leader today, nearly half named Obama, with Democrats more likely to favor him than Republicans and 28.5 percent of independents choosing the president. The next closest person named was his 2008 opponent, Sen. John McCain, with 5.5 percent.

Despite her ubiquitousness in the media, Palin got just nine votes. Stewart and right-wing opinion shapers Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck got one or two each.

Not surprisingly, more than a third of the generation that came of age after 9/11 cited a military or civilian leader who served during wartime when asked to choose a historic figure who personifies greatness.

President Franklin Roosevelt was the top pick. Less than 14 percent named a Founding Father such as Thomas Jefferson. The fewest votes went to religious leaders like Mother Teresa or the Muslim Prophet Muhammad.

The survey focused on foreign policy and found:

• Isolationism is preferred by 58 percent of young leaders who say America is "too involved in global affairs" and should focus more on issues at home. "As a generation that overwhelmingly thinks the nation is too involved in world affairs, however, the millennials' belief that the 'U.S. is no longer globally respected' perhaps should come as little shock," the survey said.

• Terrorism is considered the No. 1 challenge for the future, followed by climate change, nuclear proliferation and global poverty. A whopping 84 percent said they couldn't envision a time in their lives when terrorism would no longer be a threat.

• Despite growing attention in the media to immigration and religious extremism, they ranked among the least important priorities for young leaders.

• The top three priorities of U.S. foreign policy for those surveyed is to reduce dependence on foreign oil, strengthen the international economic system to solve the problems of globalization, and engage diplomatically with adversaries.

• The least important priority for policymakers, they said, should be to build a stronger military, reduce U.S. troops abroad and reduce poverty.

• China was listed second only to Iran as the country they think will pose the biggest problems over the next two decades. It ranked ahead of North Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan and Russia.

• When asked to name allies and problem states, they offered mixed sentiments about which category countries such as China, Russia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, India and Israel fall into.