

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH



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Coming of Age in America
Part III – Eschatism in Generation Y

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Coming of Age in America, Part III Eschatism in Generation Y

In the last 5 years, our nation has witnessed a series of traumatic events, among the worst that young people have seen in their lives. We are still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Katrina, which crippled the city of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region. Yet this is only the most recent example of a string of strong hurricanes that ravaged Florida and the Gulf Coast region over the past few years. At this time last year, the world looked on in horror at the effects of a tsunami that hit Southeast Asia and the Pacific, killing 294,000 people. And the pain still lingers from the Americans in New York and Washington, DC, and rural Pennsylvania, who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, in the largest act of terrorism ever committed on American soil.

We still live with the specter of a terrorist threat; many young Americans are overseas fighting in a war, and it seems logical that another terrorist attack is only around the corner. On a near-daily basis, we hear the drumbeat about medical disasters waiting to happen: potential pandemics like Bird Flu, SARS, and Ebola, and summer will undoubtedly bring with it the dreaded “flu-like symptoms” of West Nile Virus. Finally, as global warming increases, high hurricane activity seems likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

For those coming of age during a period where it seems there is no longer any safe haven, it begs the question: is this just the way it is? For those trying to search for an explanation in a time of chaos, one has to wonder: is this a sign the end of the world is at hand?

This is the third part of our ongoing investigation into Gen-Y. In this study, we explore Gen-Y’s attitudes toward the future, their level of uncertainty in a world of uncertainty: how safe do they feel today amidst a new round of disasters, do they trust our government to protect us, and do they hold an apocalyptic vision to account for the spate of recent disasters?¹

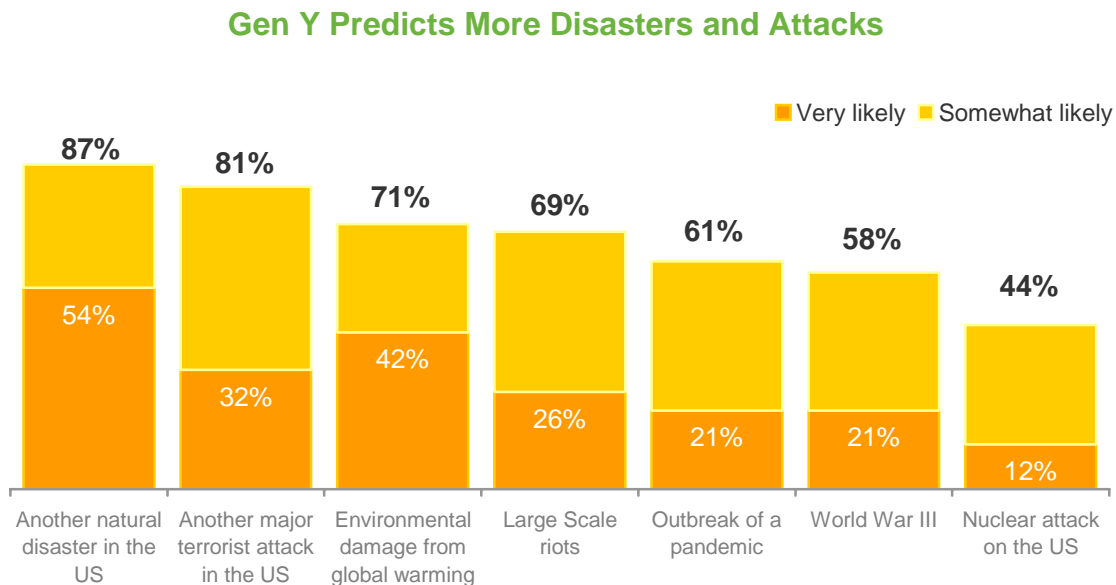
¹ The Youth Monitor Sample is a nationally representative Internet sample, created by matching Polimetrix panelists to demographic characteristics among randomly selected records of 18-24 year olds in the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS) dataset. The survey fielded December 8-13, 2005. During the six-day fielding period a total of three contacts were made with respondents. In all, 1,195 respondents completed the Internet survey with an in-panel response rate of 11 percent. Internet surveys use, by necessity, non-probability based sampling methods and these results need to be considered with that limitation in mind.

It's the End of the World As We Know It, And I Feel Fine

Generation Y has seen several world-altering events in a relatively brief period of time. Yet, these disasters do not seem to create much worry or uncertainty among America's young people. Disasters rank low on their list of concerns, and most think they will live a long life and die of old age.

Just as there have been many tragic events in recent memory, young people expect the trend to continue. They fully expect to see more large-scale disasters, especially more large-scale natural disasters, again in their lifetimes. Half (54 percent) think it is very likely they will see another disaster in the United States wipe out a major city. And one-third (32 percent) strongly suspect they will live to see another major terrorist attack in the United States.

■ **Figure 1: Likelihood of Disasters/ Attacks (Percent Responding)**



"For the following list of events, please rate how likely it is that each of these might happen in your lifetime."

Young people believe climate change is playing and will continue to play a role in natural disasters. Nearly half (42 percent) believe it is very likely that environmental damage caused by global warming will happen in their lifetimes. Young people also believe climate change is affecting us now, most vividly and recently exemplified in Katrina. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Gen Yers believe that global warming is responsible for making hurricanes like Katrina worse. However, there are strong partisan effects driving this feeling. Most Democrats are convinced that global warming has contributed to the strength of storms like Hurricane Katrina (86 percent), whereas Republicans remain more skeptical (33 percent responsible).

■ **Figure 2:** Likelihood of Event vs. Trust in Government (Percent Responding)

Likelihood of Event vs. Trust in Government

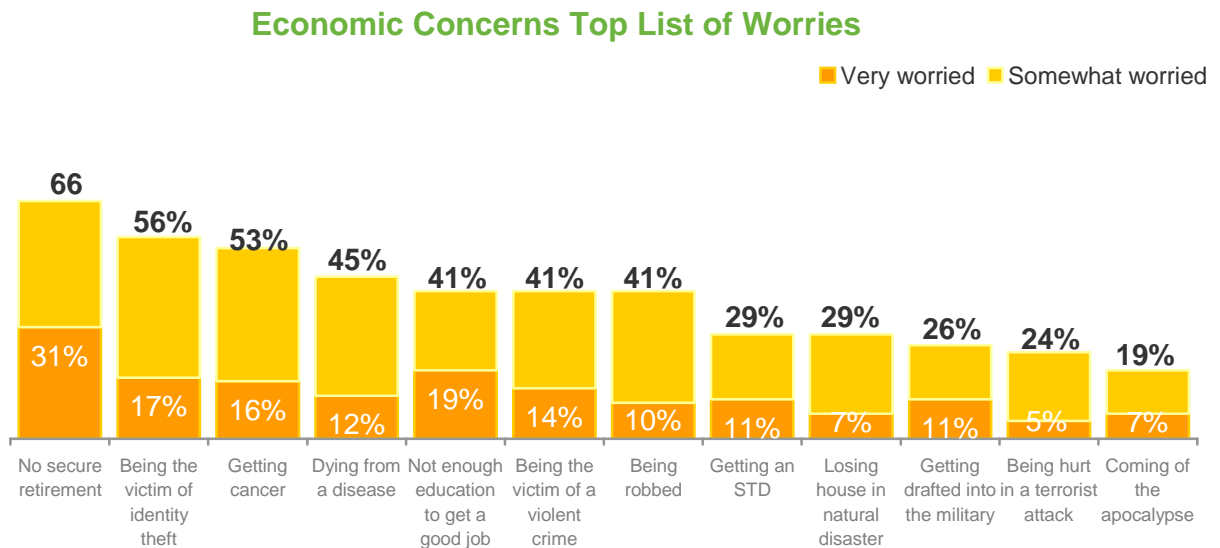
	Total Likely	Total Trust Government	Net (Trust – Likely)
Another natural disaster in the US	87	28	-59
Another major terrorist attack in the US	81	44	-37
Environmental damage from global warming	71	17	-54
Large scale riots	69	41	-28
Outbreak of a pandemic	61	40	-21
World War III	58	45	-13
Nuclear attack on the US	44	47	+3

“For the following list of events, please rate how likely it is that each of these might happen in your lifetime.” AND “The following is a list of things that could go wrong in the United States. For each one, please rate whether you trust the government to protect the country from each event.”

Young people do not particularly trust the government to protect the country from these new disasters. Half (49 percent) do not trust the government to protect the country from natural disasters, and nearly half (42 percent) do not trust the government to protect them from another terrorist attack in the United States.

Yet, young people are not particularly worried that they will be personally impacted by natural or human disasters. Their worries are more about retirement (66 percent worried), their health (53 percent worried about getting cancer) or identity theft (56 percent worried). In contrast, relatively few worry about losing their house in a natural disaster (29 percent) or being hurt in a terrorist attack (24 percent). Indeed, most young people think they will die of old age (61 percent), cancer (35 percent), or a heart attack (24 percent), rather than war (5 percent), or a natural disaster (2 percent).

■ **Figure 3:** Concerns (Percent Responding)



“For the following list of statements, please rate how worried you are that this might happen to you personally.”

Because they are not worried about disasters, young people are relatively unlikely to be prepared for emergency situations. Only half (49 percent) feel that they know what is necessary to be prepared for most emergency situations caused by a natural disaster or terrorist attack. And fully 3 out of 4 young people (77 percent) admit they do not have a specific plan that details what they would do in the event of a disaster.

Preparedness is low even among those who are confident in their base of knowledge about what to do in the face of a disaster, which suggests that few Gen Yers have applied what knowledge they might have. Even among people who feel that they know what is necessary to be prepared in the event of a disaster, two-thirds (66 percent) do not have a specific plan for disaster preparedness.

The Wrath of God? As If

Young people do not assign larger meaning, such as divine intervention, to explain these recent events. Even though 72 percent of young people believe in God, relatively few (29 percent) feel that God has had something to do with the hurricanes the country has been experiencing. Young people also generally reject the idea that these tragedies are a “sign” of the end of the world. Few young people are actually concerned that the Apocalypse will happen in their own lives; only one in five (19 percent) Gen Yers are worried that they will personally experience the coming of the Apocalypse.

The most-well known description of the Apocalypse is in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, although apocalyptic narratives also exist in Judaism and Islam. In our poll we confirm that an apocalyptic worldview is strongly tied to religious, especially

Christian, values. Roughly one-third (35 percent) of young people believe the world will end as the Bible predicts, in a battle at Armageddon between Jesus and the Antichrist, but it rises to 64 percent among self-identified Protestants and Christians and 73 percent among Protestants and Christians who regularly attend church. Protestants are far more likely to believe the battle of Armageddon will result in the end of the world than Catholics (25 percent).

■ **Figure 4:** Belief in the Apocalypse (Percent Responding)

Belief in the Apocalypse High Among Protestants

	Yes	No	Don't know
Total	35	39	25
Protestant	64	12	24
Regular Protestant	73	7	20
Irregular Protestant	55	18	26
Catholic	25	31	44
None	4	76	19

"Regarding your own religious beliefs... Do you believe that the world will end, as the Bible's New Testament predicts, in a battle at Armageddon between Jesus and the Antichrist?"

Generally speaking, however, younger people are not particularly religious in the sense that they are not as attached as older Americans to denominations and faith traditions. In our poll, only 41 percent say they are Protestant or Christian, 19 percent say they are Catholic, but 23 percent claim no religious preference.² At the same time, 72 percent of Gen Yers believe in God, 77 percent believe in Heaven, and 64 percent believe in Hell.³ Perhaps reflecting a relatively unconcerned view about their future, only 51 percent believe they will be going to Heaven.

² In contrast, a recent analysis for Religion and Ethics Newsweekly showed that 55 percent of Americans identify as Protestant or Other Christian religion, 21 percent are Catholic, and only 11 percent say they have no religious preference. See "Faith and Family in America": <http://www.greenbergresearch.com/index.php?ID=1565>.

³ For more information about religion among Generation Y, see "OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era": <http://www.greenbergresearch.com/index.php?ID=1218>.

■ **Figure 5:** Belief in Afterlife (Percent Responding)

Young People Optimistic/ Lackadaisical about Afterlife

	Total
Believe in God?	
Yes, believe	72
No, do not believe	16
Don't know	12
Believe in Heaven?	
Yes	77
No	23
Believe in Hell?	
Yes	64
No	36
Believe you are going to Heaven or Hell?	
Heaven	51
Hell	3
Don't believe in Heaven or Hell	18
Don't know	27