

Pandemic Era Impacts on Generational Cohorts in Federal Corrections

Millennials now comprise the largest proportion of federal custody and community supervision populations.

Why we are doing this study

Along with unprecedented declines in the federal offender population during the pandemic era¹, there were also substantial shifts in composition as it relates to different age groups^{2,3}. Another way of exploring impacts of the pandemic era is by means of analyzing change from a generational cohort perspective which presupposes that groups of individuals based on their early life experiences may share a set of similar beliefs, values and behaviours. Membership in a cohort of individuals born at a similar time allows for understanding the trajectory of how worldviews might differ across generations.

What we did

Age distribution data recorded in Correctional Service of Canada’s Corporate Reporting System-Modernized were extracted at year-end for federal custody (13,720 in 2019-20 and 12,328 in 2021-22) populations. Data was then disaggregated according to six generational age cohorts of people born in the same date range: “Silent Generation” (1928 to 1945), “Baby Boomers” (1946 to 1964), Generation X (1965 to 1980), “Millennials” (1981 to 1995) and Generation Z (1996 to 2010). One case was removed from the analysis who was under community supervision belonging to the “Greatest Generation (1901 to 1927).

What we found

In Table 1, statistics show that for inmates belonging to the generational age cohorts “Silent Generation”, “Generation X” and “Millennials” there was no change in their percentage representation in the in-custody population. However, inmates belonging to the “Baby Boomers” cohort increased both numerically and proportionally whereas those from the “Generation Z” cohort had declined.

Table 1: Age Generations – In-custody

Label	Birth Years	Age	2019-20 # (%)	2021-22 # (%)
Silent Generation	1928 - 1945	77 - 94	98 (1)	98 (1)
Baby Boomers	1946 - 1964	58 - 76	1,574 (11)	1,613 (13)
Generation X	1965 - 1980	42 - 57	3,854 (28)	3,490 (28)
Millennials	1981 - 1995	27 - 41	6,268 (46)	5,668 (46)
Generation Z	1996 - 2010	12 - 26	1,926 (14)	1,459 (12)
			13,720	12,328

Similarly, Table 2 statistics show that for offender under community supervision belonging to the generational age cohorts “Silent Generation”, “Generation X” and “Millennials” there was also no change in their percentage representation in the community supervision population. However, offenders belonging to the “Baby Boomers” cohort increased both numerically and proportionally whereas those from the “Generation Z” cohort had declined.

Table 2: Age Generations – Community Supervision

Label	Birth Years	Age	2019-20 # (%)	2021-22 # (%)
Silent Generation	1928 - 1945	77 - 94	251 (3)	256 (3)
Baby Boomers	1946 - 1964	58 - 76	1,945 (21)	2,045 (24)
Generation X	1965 - 1980	42 - 57	2,946 (31)	2,592 (31)
Millennials	1981 - 1995	27 - 41	3,482 (37)	3,036 (36)
Generation Z	1996 - 2010	12 - 26	757 (8)	549 (6)
			13,720	12,328

What it means

While “Millennials” now make up the largest percentage of federal inmates (46%) and those under community supervision (36%), it would appear that during the pandemic era “Baby Boomers” have shifted upward /increased whereas “Generation Z” declined in their percentage representation. Although generational cutoff points are deemed not to be an exact science, they can have profound impacts on a variety of generation shaping considerations such as the rapid evolution of technology in how people communicate and interact. Tracking how the next generations of correctional populations will respond in a largely digital world will become increasingly important.

¹ RIB 22-05 - Pandemic Era Impacts on the Federal Supervision Populations (2022)

² RIB 22-28 - Pandemic Era Changes in Federal Corrections Age Structures (2022)

³ RIB 22-29 - Pandemic Era Older Offenders (65+) in Canadian Federal Corrections (2022)

For more information

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