You can predict a lot about someone's attitudes on climate issues if you know their age. Millennials are much more likely to understand climate change and support carbon reductions than their elders. The good news is that it will get easier to find political support for climate action as the population shifts toward millennials and boomers fade from the scene.

A 2016 University of Texas poll reports the millennials and seniors differ on many issues. About sixty-percent of millennials want to reduce the use of coal, twice the percentage of over-65 Americans. Notably, half of millennials support a carbon tax, which again is twice the percentage of senior citizens. And according to a Pew poll, 56% percent of millennials, but only 37% percent of seniors, regard climate change as a high policy priority.

Even among Republicans, there is a gap between millennials and seniors on environmental issues. According to another Pew survey, more millennials say the federal government isn't doing enough to protect animals and their habitats (60% of millennials vs. 34% of older Republicans), water quality of lakes, rivers and streams (59% vs. 43%) and air quality (49% vs. 29%). millennials are also less likely to support expansion of fossil fuels – for instance, only 44% of millennials support expanded offshore drilling versus 75% of the Boomer generation. Another survey showed that most young conservative think human activities are the primary cause of climate change, and a majority also supported the Paris Agreement (pre-Trump).

There's also a generation gap over renewable energy. Most Americans support expansion of renewable energy. According to a Pew survey, 84% consider increased use of renewable energy an important or top priority. Over half think more government regulations are needed to reach tis goal, while about 40% think the market will take care of the problem. But among millennials, it's 66-to-28% in favor of government intervention, whereas for baby boomers is 41-to-50 in the opposite direction. Essentially, the retirement-age generation looks like the GOP on this issue, whereas the millennials look like the Dems.

We don't know the reason for the gap between generations. Here are some plausible possibilities:

- Higher levels of education among millennials.
- Better education of millennials on the issue in school.
- Less ability by seniors to absorb new ideas such as climate science among seniors.

- Nostalgia among seniors for the more industrialized America of their youth.
- Greater likelihood that millennials will live to experience more severe effects of climate change.

Of course, if the numbers had come out the other way, we might easily have found plausible explanations for that outcome, such as greater ease of seeing how the climate has changed for older Americans or a greater propensity to take the long view and worry about future generations. Plausible explanations are easy to come by but hard to test. The generational differences are very real, but we simply don't have firm evidence about their explanation.

I don't want to exaggerate the importance of this shift in attitudes. Even among millennials, there are still too many who have been taken in by denialist propaganda. And there are not nearly enough to view the issue as a high priority. Still, the worst of the resistance to climate action is likely to weaken in coming years. It's a pity that this will only happen because of generational turnover.