

THE 50 MILLION: GEN Z'S POWER, PRIORITIES, AND PARTICIPATION



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than 40 million young people were eligible to vote in 2024, and their power to shape the election was clear — so why did more than 21 million decide not to cast a ballot? And what will their participation look like in the future? Many in the civic engagement space have tried to answer this question, but the answer isn't simple. It's not just low enthusiasm or suppression — distrust and disconnection play a key role.

Nearly a third of Gen Z lack confidence that today's democracy is functioning or meeting the country's needs, and 17% of Black and 12% of Latinx young people trust no institutions. Trust in fellow Americans is eroding: only 35% of Gen Z believe those with opposing political views want what's best for the country. This distrust is reinforced by rising isolation: half of young people rarely or never spend time with their community, and 15–24 year olds spend 70% less time with friends than in 2003.

In order to truly explore Gen Z's past political behavior and potential for future civic engagement, When We All Vote and CIRCLE came together to listen and better understand their outlook, experiences, and priorities.

Through a national, representative survey of Gen Z 18–29 year olds, we deepened our collective understanding of how to support and mobilize this generation as nearly 50 million become eligible to vote in 2026. We also oversampled Black and Latinx Gen Zers to better understand their experiences. While explored in greater detail in the report, key findings include:

Gen Z is engaged and passionate across the political spectrum — despite current narratives.

- Gen Z cares deeply about a range of issues and the country's future, and they are willing to take action: 89% report being willing to vote, 88% are willing to talk to friends and family about issues they care about, and 78% will sign petitions. While Black and Latinx respondents are more likely to protest or boycott, a majority of respondents (57%) are open to doing so and to registering others to vote (52%).
- Gen Z is not fully represented by the dominant two-party model. While 57% do still identify as either a Democrat (36%) or a Republican (21%), that leaves 43% without a party affiliation.
- Narratives of disengagement more accurately reflect lower political efficacy: 44% are unsure whether their vote matters or do not believe it does — rising to 58% among Independents. And 62% believe the country is headed in the wrong direction, including 69% of Latinx respondents.

Gen Z's top issues are the economy, housing, and healthcare — with the economy dominating across demographics and political beliefs.

- Economic concerns dominate across demographic groups, especially for Black young people, driven by affordability across sectors like housing, groceries, and healthcare. Cost of living and inflation are cited by 65% of respondents, followed by healthcare and housing costs.
- In addition to the economy, Black respondents prioritize racism more often, and Latinx respondents prioritize immigration more often.
- Black respondents, men, and Republicans are most likely to prioritize cost of living and inflation, while LGBTQ+ individuals, nonbinary respondents, and Democrats are slightly less likely to do so.

Access to information is a key barrier between what Gen Z cares about and how they show up at the ballot box.

- While Gen Z reports a strong motivation to act (including by voting), they experience informational barriers when connecting the issues they care about to candidates and ballot choices. Informational barriers are most reported: 28% of respondents lack information about candidates and 20% about ballot issues.
- This gap persists despite feeling informed on issues, indicating a need to translate key concerns into electoral choices — especially as Gen Z shifts away from a two-party system that fails to fully represent them.
- Black young people — who are as likely as all respondents to be willing to turnout and value voting — report more barriers, including information, transportation, and registration challenges. These barriers could result in lower participation.

As part of broader efforts by When We All Vote and CIRGLE, these findings offer direction for advancing equitable, nonpartisan political engagement, including:

- **Engage Gen Z through the context of their experiences, especially how they experience the economy.** Despite frustrations with the status quo, Gen Z is not apathetic. Practitioners and leaders can more effectively engage Gen Z by recognizing their experiences and focusing on the economy in responsive ways.

- **Collaborate with young people to make the connection between what they care about and their choices at the ballot box.** There is a real opportunity to use this richer understanding of Gen Z to provide education about voting through the lens of what they care about (and how they care about it).

- **Nonpartisan paths to political engagement are critical for mobilizing Gen Z voters.** As political parties continue to be less important to Gen Z, nonpartisan paths offer new opportunities for education and mobilization that engage Gen Z on their terms.

Gen Z has clear needs, concerns, and critiques of U.S. democracy — and political institutions must evolve to better include, inform, and mobilize young people or risk losing the engagement of a generation critical to the country's democratic future. What Gen Z says matters, and what they do next matters too.

To build on what we've learned in this report, When We All Vote launched Pass the Mic, the largest effort ever to listen to and amplify the voices of young people across America.

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PURPOSE

PURPOSE

THE PROJECT

The past decade has been a tumultuous time in American democracy, filled with moments and movements that have reshaped political attitudes and the landscape of civic participation. This era is also the time period of Gen Z's coming of age to vote, lead, and influence our democracy. Shaped by considerably different circumstances than their parents, these young people — currently between the ages of 14 and 29 — saw their formative years defined by post-9/11 surveillance and perpetual foreign intervention, gun violence in their schools, the proliferation of social media, economic recessions, shifting political norms, a global pandemic, national protests and dialogue after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others, and subsequent counter-mobilization, and the deployment of ICE agents into their communities.

With many of these political shifts and crises recent or ongoing, we are just beginning to understand how they affect young people's ability and desire to engage in civic life. Other barriers and inequities have been persistent in American democracy and yet still demand continued attention and action. Overall youth turnout has often been a headline, but as [CIRCLE's research on young voters](#) has shown for more than two decades, there are persistent gaps in youth electoral participation by gender, race, educational attainment, rurality, socioeconomic status, and other factors. Many of these differences in participation are byproducts of broader historical inequities, and all of them contribute to an unequal and unrepresentative democracy.

Looking forward to the upcoming 2026 general election, we cannot ignore the realities of and lessons learned from voter turnout in the 2024 election. Across all age groups, it is estimated that 90 million eligible voters¹ did not make their voices heard in the most recent presidential election. While [more than 40 million members](#) of Gen Z were eligible to vote in that election, more than [21 million](#) young people did not cast ballots. And in 2026, nearly 50 million members of Gen Z will be eligible to vote. Similarly concerning is the abundance of recent research documenting how little confidence young people have in our political system and our country's future.² Gen Z (and the generations that follow them) are our nation's future, yet we do not yet know enough about what they want, need, and believe in order to support their civic growth.

Addressing this reality requires a nuanced, up-to-date understanding of how old structural barriers and new challenges intersect to determine whether young people vote and engage. The insights from this work can inform immediate programming to promote Gen Z participation in upcoming elections, as well as long-term efforts to support young people's ongoing civic development.

¹ This estimate is derived from the work of the [University of Florida Election Lab](#).

² Examples of recent research include: the [Fall 2025 release of the Harvard Youth Poll](#); CIRCLE's 2025 report, "[How Does Gen Z Really Feel About Democracy?](#)"; GenForward's [2025 Good Governance Survey](#); Project 26 Pennsylvania's [2025 Campus Listening research](#); and "[Gen Z is Rewriting Civic Life](#)" (a 2026 conversation between Murruration's Sarah Stamper and The Up & Up's Rachel Janfaza).

When We All Vote is a national, nonpartisan initiative where young people, especially voters of color, are encouraged to not only participate in our democracy, but also to shape it. When We All Vote is on a mission to increase participation in each and every election, close the race and age voting gap, and change the culture around voting.

As one of the nation's leading research centers on youth and civic life, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) conducts groundbreaking investigations of youth democratic attitudes and participation. It seeks to understand the structural and motivational barriers to youth engagement to inform and empower practitioners to take action. The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) is based at Tufts University's Tisch College of Civic Life.

When We All Vote and CIRCLE have a shared interest in equitable youth political participation, and we both believe that rebuilding young people's trust in democracy starts with listening. We came together to deeply understand what matters to young people and where they are coming from, and to connect with them on their terms. Using a national, representative survey of voting-age members of Gen Z, we amplify the issues that matter to them most, as well as reveal structural and motivational barriers to youth engagement.

This project is a collaboration to deepen our collective knowledge of how young people experience democracy now, with a particular focus on Black and Latinx young people whose voices are too often ignored at the ballot box and by their elected representatives. This work can inform When We All Vote and other practitioners to take action to support these communities. It also represents the beginning of a dedicated, multi-year effort by When We All Vote to listen to, support, and educate the youngest cohort of voters. For CIRCLE, it helps strengthen a foundational research agenda on gaps in youth civic engagement that can drive action to support a more representative electorate and a more equitable democracy.

THE SURVEY

When We All Vote and CIRCLE jointly developed a 30-question survey designed to capture key attitudes and aspects of Gen Z's political engagement. Embold Research fielded the survey to a sample of 5,549 adults between the ages of 18–29 nationally in the U.S., and it was conducted between January 26 and February 12, 2026. The sample included oversamples of Gen Z adults identifying as Black or Latinx, as well as oversamples of the same populations within specific states of interest. To provide context for the degree to which these populations were oversampled, Black respondents accounted for more than 1,400 of our raw respondents and Latinx respondents constituted more than 1,300 of our raw respondents. This approach allowed us to have more precision when analyzing findings for those groups. The modeled margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.5%. A detailed accounting of the methodology is provided at the end of this report.

In undertaking this research, it was crucial that our sampling goals reflect our desire to listen to a representative sample of Gen Z, with particular attention to understanding and amplifying the experiences of Black and Latinx young people. We also wanted to secure sufficient representation of college-going and non-college-going young people, in addition to unregistered voters, as registered voters are often overrepresented (or exclusively focused on) in survey research. In our sampling approach, we sought to ensure our ability to make conclusions

on the most representative sample possible, as well as allow ourselves the chance to dive into key subgroups of interest to ensure our analysis had nuanced insights based on identity and lived experience. Further details about our vendor's sampling approach are included in the methodology section.

We note that our survey was in the field during a period of several major political developments. ICE enforcement in cities like Minneapolis resulted in instances of violence and death; the Justice Department began releasing a large volume of the Epstein files; the U.S. had recently attacked Venezuela and was threatening to annex Greenland; dialogue about the legality of tariffs applied to imports continued, leading up to the Supreme Court decision later in February; and, while this covers the national level, even more was happening in local communities. In acknowledgement of the potential impact of current events on what was salient for respondents, we noted when respondents mentioned these timing-specific events while reviewing the open-ended responses. More broadly, it is important to note that many people, including the Gen Z adults sampled in this survey, were highly activated and aware of current events during the time of this survey's administration.

The survey questionnaire included six questions³ in which respondents were prompted to pick up to three options from a list (e.g., "What issues do you care about the most? Select up to three."). However, due to issues with survey administration, respondents were able to select more than the intended maximum of three options on these questions. There is wide variation in the number of options selected by respondents, with some limiting themselves to three or less, as instructed, and others selecting more. We note that very few respondents select all items in a given list, which suggests that even when selecting more than three, respondents were reviewing the options and selecting the responses that applied to them. However, we share the data from these questions as indicative of general trends while acknowledging that specific percentages may be inflated by respondents' ability to potentially choose an unrestrained number of responses. Where possible, we attempted to validate the conclusions drawn from these questions using related questions (such as the open-ended version of the example issue question above), prior similar research, and comparisons of those who select more than three and those who did not.

³ Of these six questions, two are explored in the present report. The remaining questions will be analyzed in subsequent releases.

**WHO WE
TALKED TO**

WHO WE TALKED TO

Our goal was for the sample to be as representative as possible of the full spectrum of members of Gen Z over 18 years old, which dictated the vendor's sampling strategy. In addition to this strategy, the sample was weighted to ensure even more accurate representation of this population (see the methodology section for more details). As shown in the (weighted) summary table, the sample used to provide the insights in this report had representation of Gen Z across age groups, gender, race, education, LGBTQ+ identity, and urbanicity. In alignment with our goals to listen to Black and Latinx voices that are too often ignored at the ballot box, for the remainder of the report, we will focus on Black and Latinx Gen Zers in comparison to the overall sample. To give more complete visibility into the representation of racial identities in the overall sample, the below table provides full demographic data.

NATIONAL SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS			
n = 5,549, weighted, modeled margin of error = 2.5%			
DEMOGRAPHIC		DEMOGRAPHIC	
AGE GROUP		COLLEGE-GOING	
18-24	58%	Yes	71%
25-29	42%	No	29%
GENDER		LGBTQ+	
Man	46%	Yes	24%
Woman	51%	No	71%
Nonbinary	3%	Prefer not to say	5%
RACE		URBANICITY	
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%	Rural	24%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5.0%	Suburban	42%
Black	11.9%	Urban	35%
Latinx	16.4%	REGISTRATION STATUS	
Multi-Racial	12.8%	Yes	81%
White	52.1%	No	13%
Other	1.4%	Not sure	7%

Notes:

- Respondents chose between man, woman, and "neither of these" for gender. The "neither of these" response is categorized as nonbinary in this report.
- Latinx in these results encompasses those who identify as Hispanic, Latino/a/e, or were from a Spanish-speaking background.
- Respondents were asked to select all races that applied to them. Those classified as multi-racial here selected more than one option.
- College-going is defined as those who are either currently attending college or reported having at least some college experience.
- Urbanicity is based on the population density of the respondent's ZIP code.
- Voter registration status is self-reported.

Despite the care put into our sampling strategy and specific attempts to recruit less participatory young people by targeting nonvoters, this sample is still likely more politically engaged than the full population of Gen Z due to social desirability bias and the well-documented challenges of polling disengaged youth.⁴ However, given the size of our sample, we are still able to confidently make conclusions comparing more politically active young people to their less politically active counterparts.

⁴ "Briefing: Polling Disengaged Voters in 2024," Presentation to the Analyst Institute on June 5, 2025. Full recording available to Analyst Institute members.

WHAT

THEY SAID

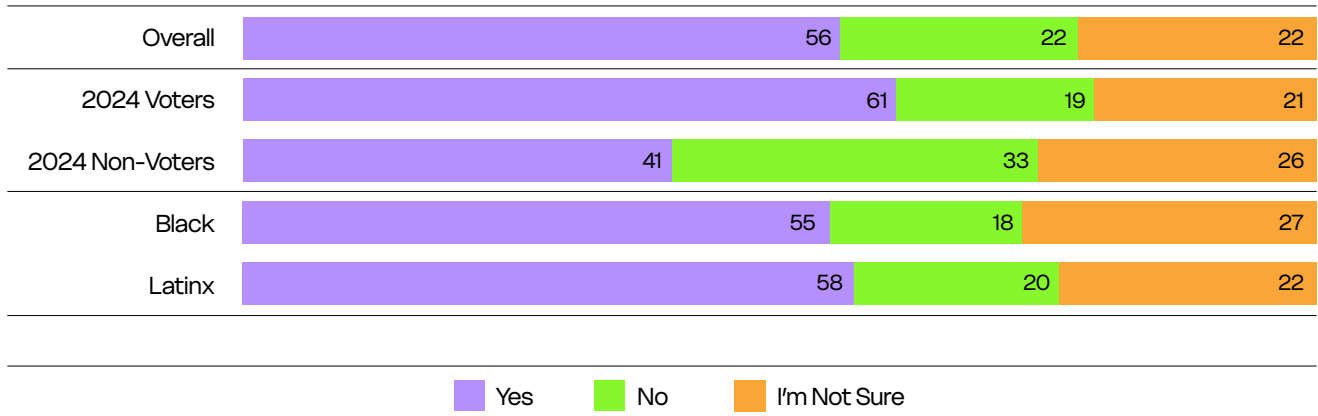
WHAT THEY SAID

GEN Z ON VOTING AND POLITICS

Voting: Gen Z Shows Up to Vote Whether They Believe in It or Not

To understand the voting behavior and political stances of Gen Z, we asked a variety of questions about voting behavior, voting beliefs, and party identification. We then explored how these elements intersected both with each other and with demographic identifiers. In our sample, 73% report voting in the 2024 election (the 27% who report not voting include those who opted out and those who were not eligible, due to age or other criteria).⁵ In addition to voter registration status and prior voter behavior, we were also interested in understanding Gen Z's beliefs about voting, especially considering their political coming of age. Our main metric for this is the response to the following question: "Do you believe **your vote** matters?"

GEN Z'S BELIEF THAT THEIR VOTE MATTERS



A majority (56%) of young people report that they believe their vote matters. More concerningly, equal parts (22% each) believe it doesn't or are unsure. Black young people are slightly more likely than the overall sample to report being unsure (at 27%). However, notably, young people's answer to this question does not necessarily dictate their voting behavior. While the percentage believing their vote matters increases to 61% for those who report voting in the 2024 election, notable proportions of 2024 voters still said "no" (19%) or "I'm not sure" (21%). On the other side of the coin, among those who answer "no," 62% report voting in 2024 and 51% report

⁵ This statistic is higher than we know [youth turnout to be](#), again due to the aforementioned issues of social desirability (as voting self-reports were not validated in this survey) and a more participatory sample. However, nonvoters representing over a quarter of our sizable sample gives us enough to draw upon for comparison along other lines of difference.

being likely to vote in the November 2026 election. These two findings emphasize that young people’s personal sense of voter efficacy does not necessarily dictate if they show up in a given election. However, it can point to potential risk for voter turnout — 31% of those who think that their vote does not matter also describe themselves as unlikely to vote in the November election and 33% report being unregistered.

Party Identification: Young People Who Don’t Identify With Major Parties Are Less Likely To Be Engaged

Another key component of understanding Gen Z politically — especially in comparison to past generations — is their relationship to political parties. Our questionnaire teased out partisanship through a short series of contingent questions, beginning with asking them to broadly identify as either a Democrat, Republican, or Independent/Other before probing into the strength of that identification (if one of the two major parties is selected) or their closeness to one of the existing parties (if Independent is selected), allowing for a response of neither. This approach allowed for the breakdown of our respondents into a scale from strong Democrats to pure Independents to strong Republicans.

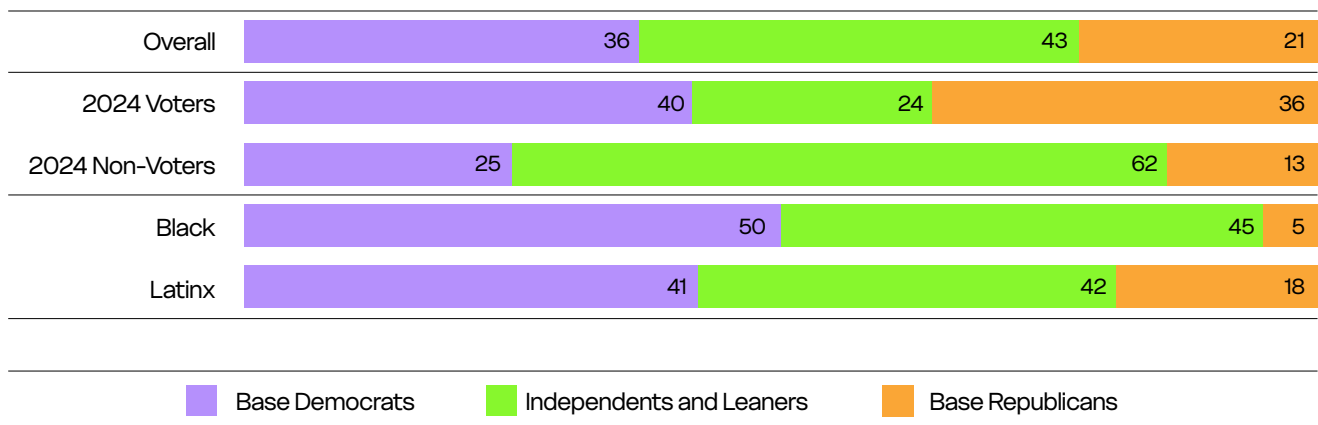
GEN Z’S SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL PARTY IDENTIFICATION					
Strong Democrats	24%	Base Democrats	36%	Democrats + Leaners	49%
Weak Democrats	12%				
Independent lean Democrats	13%	Independents and Leaners	43%	Pure Independents	22%
Pure Independents	22%				
Independent lean Republicans	8%				
Weak Republicans	7%	Base Republicans	21%	Republicans + Leaners	29%
Strong Republicans	13%				

While it has been widely reported that younger generations eschew party identification, our results show that there are still subsets on each side of the aisle identifying strongly with either the Democratic (24%) or Republican (13%) Party. However, our results confirm that the plurality (43%) of 18–29 year olds identify as Independents (including those who solely identify as Independents and those who only lean toward either party). To respect the self-identification made by respondents in response to the questions asked about partisanship, the remainder of the analysis on partisanship will focus on the middle column of the visual (Base Democrats, Independents and Leaners, and Base Republicans), but these various conceptions provide helpful context regarding the role party identification plays for young people, as well as insights for survey practitioners in being thoughtful about measuring partisanship moving forward.

When looking at the results for those who reported voting in the 2024 election, there is stronger evidence for the persistence of party identification, with only 24% identifying as Independents and Leaners and the plurality identifying as Base Democrats (40%), a trend echoed in respondents' expressed intention to vote in the November 2026 election. The entrenchment of the two-party system in this country's electoral systems likely enforces this finding. Similarly, those categorized as Independents and Leaners are less likely to believe their vote matters (with 31% saying "no" and 27% being unsure).

The lower political participation and efficacy of young people who do not strongly identify with either major party presents a challenge. Because so much election-year youth outreach is explicitly partisan and often based on tools like party registration lists and past voter rolls, young people who are not already engaged Democrats or Republicans may be left out. This suggests the need for stronger nonpartisan outreach efforts that are more effective at connecting with the plurality of young people who identify as Independents.

GEN Z'S POLITICAL PARTY IDENTIFICATION



Examining the data by identity shows that Latinx respondents do not deviate much from the overall distribution with regard to partisanship, but Black young people are 14 points more likely than young people overall to identify as Democrats (at 50%), with an additional 45% categorized as Independents and Leaners. Similarly, 45% of women identify as Democrats (and 40% as Independents and Leaners), while 56% of those who identify as LGBTQ+ are Democrats (and 40% are Independents and Leaners). Respondents identifying with the Republican Party are more likely to be white (70%) and men (62%).

When considering the rise of Independent identification among young people, it is important to contextualize that parties still have strong relevance for those already engaged in voting, including the continued relevance the Democratic Party has for Black and Latinx young people, as well as young women and LGBTQ+ individuals. However, it is also crucial to keep in mind that a plurality of young prospective voters lack a partisan home in our current political system.

Barriers and Motivations: Gen Z Needs More Information to Vote

Particularly for populations with historically lower turnout, like young people and people of color, it is important to consider barriers and motivations when looking at voting behavior. While 50% of young people indicate they haven't experienced any barriers to voting (with 17% of these respondents also indicating they've never voted before), this means that half of young people report experiencing at least one barrier to voting. Republicans are more likely to report not having experienced any barriers (62%), as are men (54%).

The most highly reported barriers are informational — overall, 28% indicated a lack of information about candidates and 20% noted a lack of information about ballot issues. Democrats and Independents are more likely to report these informational barriers than their Republican counterparts, and Black respondents are more likely to experience them than Gen Z overall. Logistical barriers like having to take time off work, figuring out where or how to vote, transportation, etc., are far less common; although Black young people encounter transportation and registration barriers at a slightly higher rate. In addition, while the nonbinary sample is small, it is important to highlight that those outside of the gender binary are more likely to report barriers to voting (only 33% reported not experiencing barriers), with logistical barriers being far more common for this group. It's also worth noting that, with nearly 50 million members of Gen Z eligible to vote, barriers that affect even a small percentage of young people may still hinder the participation of millions of young people. For example, when 10% of young people report that they do not know where to vote, that means more than five million young people lack that critical information.

GEN Z'S BARRIERS TO VOTING

BARRIERS	OVERALL	BLACK	LATINX	BASE DEMOCRATS	INDEPENDENTS + LEANERS	BASE REPUBLICANS
I haven't experienced any barriers to voting	50%	45%	47%	48%	47%	62%
Lack of information about candidates	28%	32%	30%	29%	31%	19%
Lack of information about ballot issues	20%	25%	22%	23%	22%	13%
Issues getting time off work	14%	17%	14%	14%	14%	13%
Not knowing where to vote	10%	9%	13%	12%	10%	8%
Trouble getting to my polling place (transportation)	8%	12%	9%	8%	10%	6%
Challenges registering to vote	7%	11%	8%	8%	7%	4%
Issues with identification	3%	5%	3%	3%	3%	1%
Trouble obtaining childcare	2%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%
Language barriers	1%	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%
Other	6%	4%	6%	6%	7%	7%

Note: To measure barriers experienced, respondents were given a list and instructed to select all that apply, with the option to type in their own response if they experienced something not listed.

With regard to motivations, respondents were asked to consider when they had voted in the past and to similarly select all choices that applied to their experience voting. Overall, the top two motivations to vote are: "making a difference on issues that matter to me" (45%) and "because it is my civic duty" (45%). However, the motivations to vote vary considerably by a young person's identity. For example, for Black young people, while "making a difference" remains the top choice at 47%, the next highest motivation is "because people have sacrificed for my right to vote" at 46% (with that difference driven almost entirely by Black Democrats). For men, "civic duty" is the top motivator (50%), while women's top motivator is "making a difference" (49%). And again, while the nonbinary sample is small, those outside the gender binary rank "making it more likely to pass laws helping people like them" (44%) and "firing politicians harming their community" (40%) closely behind "making a difference on issues" (47%). We saw a similar trend in the motivations to vote among LGBTQ+

respondents, a group that partially overlaps with nonbinary young people. From a partisan lens, Independents and Leaners show more even distribution in their motivations to vote than Democrats or Republicans, with the largest motivation being "civic duty" (39%). Independents and Leaners are more likely to report never having voted (24%), which further underscores the risk declining attachment to political parties poses to voter turnout.

GEN Z'S MOTIVATIONS FOR VOTING

MOTIVATIONS	OVERALL	BLACK	LATINX	MAN	WOMAN	NONBINARY	BASE DEMOCRATS	INDEPENDENTS + LEANERS	BASE REPUBLICANS
To make a difference on issues that matter to me	45%	47%	43%	40%	49%	47%	56%	35%	47%
Because it is my civic duty	45%	34%	38%	50%	41%	42%	48%	39%	53%
To support candidates I believe in	39%	31%	40%	40%	38%	35%	47%	28%	49%
Because people have sacrificed for my right to vote	37%	46%	35%	34%	40%	37%	42%	30%	44%
Because my vote could make a difference in the outcome of the race	37%	38%	35%	34%	40%	22%	46%	27%	42%
To hold politicians accountable	34%	30%	30%	38%	32%	31%	42%	30%	31%
To fire politicians who are trying to harm my community	31%	29%	29%	33%	29%	40%	38%	26%	30%
To make a difference in my local community	28%	27%	27%	27%	30%	21%	34%	23%	28%
To make it more likely that laws helping people like me will get passed	28%	34%	27%	30%	26%	44%	34%	23%	26%
I have never voted.	16%	11%	16%	13%	19%	24%	10%	24%	9%
Because of encouragement or pressure from my friends and family to vote	11%	18%	9%	10%	12%	8%	12%	10%	9%
Other	4%	2%	3%	5%	3%	2%	3%	5%	3%

Note: To measure motivations to vote, respondents were given a list and instructed to select all that apply with the option to type in their own response if they are motivated by something not listed.

GEN Z ON WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT

The Issues: The Economy Dominates Gen Z's Concerns

To understand the issues Gen Z cares about, we began with an open-ended question: "If you could pick one thing, what should elected leaders in the United States be focusing on?" We followed up with the invitation to select the issues that they care about most from a provided list (with the prompt to select up to three⁶), including the ability to specify something not on the list. The purpose of this approach was to allow insight into what is top of mind for Gen Z, in both an unconstrained manner and one more in line with traditional polling practices around issues.

Across both questions, respondents frequently fail to constrain their responses to one or three issues (depending on the question). In particular, those who are more politically engaged (as measured by their beliefs on voting and intent to vote this fall) are more likely to select more than three issues on the second question. The frequent phenomena of offering a list of things for the open-ended question (instead of one in alignment with the prompt), in addition to the sentiment of those responses and selecting more than three options from the issue list, may be interpreted as evidence of young people being strongly activated across multiple issues.

However, despite caring about multiple issues, the economy rises to the top of the list for Gen Z in both questions. Responses to the open-ended question talk about affordability across sectors (housing, groceries, healthcare, etc.). They also link their experience of the economy to related issues or policy solutions such as wealth inequality, taxing millionaires and billionaires, and raising the minimum wage. When expressing their frustrations related to their economic concerns, respondents often emphasize a need for accountability from elected leaders for not focusing their efforts on economic issues or for directing taxpayer money to things that were not materially improving their lives.

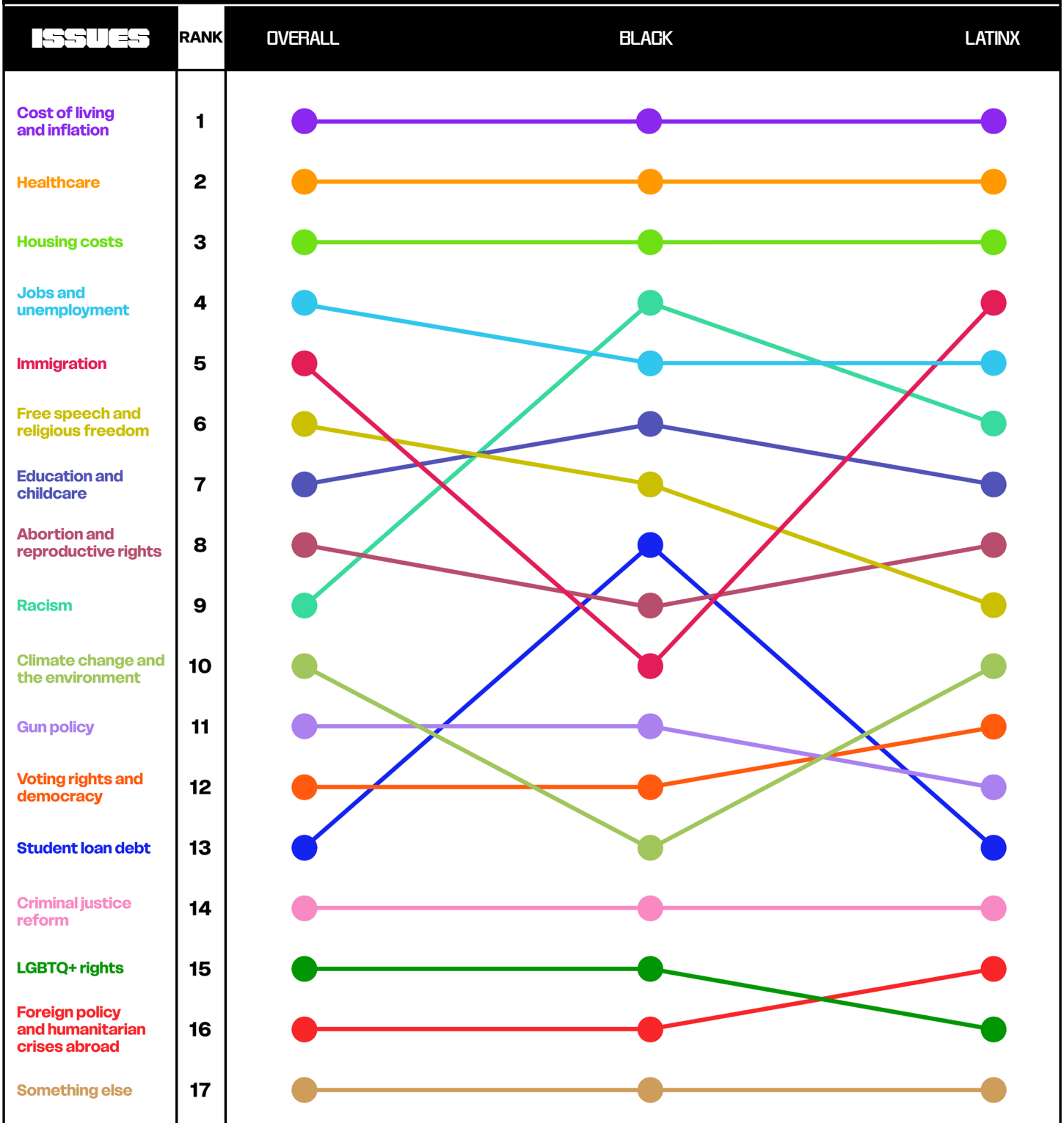
Looking at the results of the second issue question, cost of living and inflation is the majority response (65%) by far, a result affirmed by the qualitative results. Furthermore, the next two most frequent issues selected are healthcare and housing costs, both tied to the economic anxiety experienced by Gen Z. Healthcare is not solely an economic issue, but in the open-ended responses, it is often discussed as one. For example, young people express worry about how to afford medical treatment or insurance premiums in the same way that they convey concern that they will never be able to own a house. With regard to subgroups, those identifying as Black, men, or Republican are most likely to identify cost of living and inflation as a top issue. LGBTQ+ and nonbinary individuals, as well as Democrats, are slightly less likely to select this issue, but even when a lower proportion picks this issue, it remains the majority selection across every subgroup studied. While the younger generation cares about more than just the economy, our results show that economic concerns are pervasive, informing their experience with other issues and government at large.

⁶ See section above describing how respondents were able to select more than three options.

GEN Z'S ISSUE PRIORITIES

ISSUES	OVERALL		BLACK		LATINX		MAN		WOMAN		NONBINARY		LGTBQ+		BASE DEMOCRATS		INDEPENDENTS + LEANERS		BASE REPUBLICANS	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Cost of living and inflation	65	1	71	1	66	1	69	1	63	1	56	1	55	1	59	1	68	1	71	1
Healthcare	45	2	58	2	51	2	37	4	52	2	52	2	47	2	52	2	50	2	25	7
Housing costs	45	3	57	3	48	3	50	2	42	4	22	12	33	6	39	5	48	3	50	2
Jobs and unemployment	35	4	50	5	37	5	37	3	34	8	32	7	31	8	32	10	38	4	35	5
Immigration	34	5	32	10	46	4	34	6	34	7	26	9	26	12	32	9	30	7	44	3
Free speech and religious freedom	34	6	38	7	33	9	34	5	34	9	25	11	27	11	25	13	37	5	41	4
Education and childcare	33	7	47	6	36	7	28	7	39	5	26	10	31	9	34	8	36	6	27	6
Abortion and reproductive rights	31	8	36	9	34	8	17	14	43	3	40	6	40	4	44	3	26	9	19	9
Racism	28	9	54	4	36	6	19	11	35	6	29	8	32	7	42	4	26	10	7	15
Climate change and the environment	27	10	28	13	29	10	20	10	32	10	42	4	37	5	37	6	28	8	7	16
Gun policy	24	11	30	11	26	12	24	8	25	11	9	17	22	13	26	12	23	11	23	8
Voting rights and democracy	24	12	30	12	27	11	23	9	24	12	41	5	29	10	34	7	22	12	11	13
Student loan debt	19	13	37	8	22	13	16	15	22	13	10	16	14	15	23	14	19	14	12	11
Criminal justice reform	17	14	25	14	19	14	18	12	16	15	13	15	16	14	17	15	20	13	12	10
LGBTQ+ rights	17	15	22	15	17	16	12	16	20	14	51	3	40	3	28	11	16	16	2	17
Foreign policy and humanitarian crises abroad	15	16	19	16	18	15	17	13	13	16	18	13	13	16	15	16	17	15	11	12
Something else	8	17	4	17	7	17	10	17	6	17	15	14	7	17	4	17	11	17	9	14

BLACK AND LATINX GEN Z'S ISSUE RANKINGS



Note: This chart shows a comparison of how all respondents, Black respondents, and Latinx respondents ranked all 17 issues presented in the survey. To see how all demographics ranked these issues, see the appendix on page 36.

Moving beyond the economic concerns of the top four issues selected by respondents, the next set of key issues identified by Gen Z are: immigration, free speech and religious freedom, education and childcare, and abortion and reproductive rights. As we have mentioned, this survey was in the field during increased media coverage of ICE activity in cities like Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and D.C. Immigration may be ranked more highly due to those recent events, though [previous research](#) aligns with our findings that immigration is a top issue for young people.

At the same time, despite having multiple foreign conflicts and crises occurring at the time of survey administration, foreign policy and humanitarian crises abroad notably rank last among the issues provided. This ranking does not necessarily mean young people do not care about and are not paying attention to foreign policy; instead, it may indicate Gen Z's views on international affairs may be connected to their political priorities at home. Some open-ended responses point to a sense that the attention and resources of the U.S. government would be better spent addressing domestic crises, including the economic issues afflicting younger generations. These views could reflect both a desire for a larger focus on domestic policy and a displeasure with U.S. actions abroad that many young people disagree with or do not support. Taken together, our results show Gen Z imploring elected officials to focus on their needs and take the responsibility of representation more seriously.

While there are overarching themes to the responses of the issue-focused questions, like the pervasiveness of economic concerns and general dissatisfaction with elected officials, identity factors into how respondents rank other issues. For example, Black respondents rank racism (fourth) and student loan debt (eighth) much higher than the overall sample; Black respondents also select gun policy, voting rights, and criminal justice at higher rates. Men are more likely to prioritize various economic issues (except for healthcare, perhaps indicating a gendered difference in the experience of healthcare) over issues like education and childcare, abortion and reproductive rights, racism, and climate change. Among those who identify with a political party, there is a strong partisan divide on many issues, with the sharpest contrasts when prioritizing racism, LGBTQ+ rights, abortion, climate change, and healthcare. Gen Z Democrats rank these issues much higher. Young Republicans, on the other hand, are more likely to prioritize education and free speech.

Taking Action: Those Who Identify as Black, Women, and LGBTQ+ Lead in Civic Action

In addition to investigating what Gen Z cares about, we also inquired about the actions they feel motivated to take on the issues they care about most. Respondents were asked to rate their likelihood of taking various potential actions on a scale of very likely to very unlikely, with our analysis focusing on the likely versus unlikely totals (grouping very/somewhat on both ends of the scale). The central finding here is that Gen Z reports being willing to take a variety of actions on the issues that they care about. The actions they indicate being most likely to take are: voting (89%), talking to friends or family about the issue (88%), and signing a petition (78%). A majority report a likelihood of undertaking higher engagement activities like protesting or participating in a boycott (57%) or registering people to vote (52%). While running for office has the lowest likelihood of the actions listed, it is notable that 16% of our sample describe themselves as likely to run for office.

Specific actions have a higher likelihood among certain subgroups. Black respondents are more likely to protest or participate in a boycott (66%) and Black young people are also more likely than the general population to take the following actions: register people to vote, reduce or cut off contact with those who disagree, and post on social media. Outside of voting, women are more likely than men to take any given action — except running for office, where men are twice as likely (22% compared to 11%). [Past research](#) has identified that young

women can face more barriers to running for office, from a lack of explicit encouragement and support to deeper concerns about loss of income and other economic barriers.

Similarly, young people identifying as LGBTQ+ or Democrats are more likely to take all actions than the general population, with the exceptions of choosing not to vote (23% and 14%) and running for office (12% and 13%). In recognition of the potential for rational abstention, we included the option of choosing not to vote as an action one might take based on their issue preferences: 27% of respondents select this option as likely, with Independents and Leaners more likely to do so (39%), potentially due to the two-party system constraints described throughout this report. Democrats, nonbinary individuals, and college-going individuals are the least likely to select this option. In general, being affiliated with one of the two major parties makes you more likely to vote, and not having that affiliation makes you less likely (though still 80% likely to take action through voting on issues you care about). Young people identifying as men, Black, or Republicans are the most likely to run for office.

GEN Z'S LIKELIHOOD TO ENGAGE IN CIVIC BEHAVIORS

ACTION	TOTAL LIKELY	BLACK	LATINX	MAN	WOMAN	NONBINARY	LGTBQ+	COLLEGE-GOING	NON-COLLEGE	BASE DEMOCRATS	INDEPENDENTS + LEANERS	BASE REPUBLICANS
Voting	89%	86%	89%	89%	88%	92%	90%	93%	79%	95%	80%	94%
Talking to friends or family about the issue	88%	87%	87%	86%	90%	91%	91%	90%	82%	93%	85%	85%
Signing a petition	78%	78%	82%	71%	83%	89%	88%	80%	71%	88%	75%	67%
Protesting or participating in a boycott	57%	66%	62%	48%	64%	88%	77%	60%	50%	78%	55%	25%
Posting on social media	53%	61%	59%	42%	63%	80%	69%	54%	53%	67%	49%	40%
Registering people to vote	52%	62%	52%	48%	55%	67%	62%	54%	46%	64%	44%	46%
Contacting an elected official	46%	46%	44%	44%	48%	54%	56%	51%	36%	54%	45%	36%
Reducing or cutting off contact with those who disagree	42%	54%	46%	31%	51%	77%	64%	44%	40%	66%	35%	18%
Choosing not to vote	27%	31%	27%	29%	25%	18%	23%	20%	42%	14%	39%	23%
Running for office	16%	21%	13%	22%	11%	12%	12%	17%	16%	13%	17%	20%

Knowledge and Information: Gen Z Is Discerning in Their News Consumption

To continue our exploration of how issues shape Gen Z civic engagement, we asked respondents to assess how informed they are (on a scale of very informed to very uninformed) on the same list of issues provided previously. Similarly to the approach with issue-based action, we grouped responses into informed and uninformed to allow for ease in analysis. Overall, respondents rate themselves as being highly informed across the issues, ranging from a high point of 91% on racism to a "low" of 61% on student loan debt, an issue around which there is widespread confusion. While these self-reports may seem high, it is possible that they are reporting experiential knowledge of issues, as well as more traditional, academic knowledge. For example, for cost of living and inflation — the top issue respondents reported caring about and one where the open-ended responses detailed the experience of economic anxiety — our sample reported being highly informed (88%). There is also the possibility that social desirability bias plays a role on this question.

While reported knowledge levels are high across issues, there is notable variation across key subgroups and identities. Women report being more informed on issues such as abortion and reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and education and childcare, whereas men consider themselves more informed on foreign policy, jobs and unemployment, and voting rights and democracy. Those identifying as LGBTQ+ indicate being more informed than the general population on LGBTQ+ rights, abortion and reproductive rights, and climate change and the environment. With regard to party identification, young people report being more knowledgeable about issues that have galvanized each party's voters in recent elections, with Democrats indicating higher levels of knowledge about abortion and reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, climate change and the environment, and healthcare, while Republicans consider themselves more knowledgeable about free speech and religious freedom, gun policy, housing costs, and foreign policy.

In recognition of the fact that respondents previously told us what issues they care about the most, we also utilized that data to assess if the issues identified as top issues by each respondent are the same ones they report having more information on. Respondents are considered aligned if they select an issue and also describe themselves as either very or somewhat informed on that issue. In general, high levels of being informed about the issues carry through to alignment, with lower levels of information mirroring lower priority issues, such as criminal justice reform, education and childcare, and student loan debt. The intent of this analysis was to surface if there are any issues about which respondents struggle to feel informed, despite caring about them, but no significant gaps seem to exist to that effect.

DEGREE OF SELF-REPORTED KNOWLEDGE BY ISSUE

ISSUE	TOTAL INFORMED	INFORMED RANK	TOTAL ALIGNED	ALIGNED RANK
Racism	91%	1	94%	3
Immigration	90%	2	95%	2
Cost of living and inflation	88%	3	91%	5
Free speech and religious freedom	88%	3	90%	7
Abortion and reproductive rights	86%	5	93%	4
Voting rights and democracy	83%	6	90%	6
Housing costs	82%	7	87%	11
Gun policy	80%	8	87%	10
Jobs and unemployment	80%	8	88%	9
Healthcare	78%	10	85%	12
Climate change and the environment	77%	11	89%	8
LGBTQ+ rights	77%	11	95%	1
Education and childcare	73%	13	79%	15
Foreign policy and humanitarian crises abroad	66%	14	82%	13
Criminal justice reform	62%	15	73%	16
Student loan debt	61%	16	80%	14

Finally, in addition to asking about the level of knowledge on the issues themselves, we also wanted to understand more about how young people obtain information. We asked respondents to identify the top three information sources or platforms⁷ (from a list, with a type-in response option) where they get information about what is going on in the world, as well as an open-ended question inviting them to list their favorite places to get news. For Gen Z overall, a news website or app is the most frequent selection (48%), followed by Instagram (39%), YouTube (38%), and TikTok (38%). However, the top source for both Black and Latinx young people is TikTok (at 54% and 48%). There is a strong gender divide shown with regard to both YouTube and TikTok: YouTube rises to the top for men (51%) and ranks sixth for women (26%), while TikTok is the top platform for women (50%) and ranks fifth for men (25%). X (formerly Twitter) shows a similar divide to YouTube, but is less popular overall (fourth for men and ninth for women). While news websites and apps are the top choice across party identification (although 55% of Democrats select this option compared to 45% of Republicans), there is notable variation about the other platforms young people rely on based on political party, with Democrats having a preference for TikTok and TV news and Republicans preferring YouTube and Facebook.

⁷ See section above describing how respondents were able to select more than three options.

GEN Z'S PREFERRED NEWS SOURCES

INFO SOURCES	OVERALL	BLACK	LATINX	MAN	WOMAN	NONBINARY	BASE DEMOCRATS	INDEPENDENTS + LEANERS	BASE REPUBLICANS
News website or news apps	1	4	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Instagram	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
YouTube	3	3	4	1	6	2	4	2	2
TikTok	3	1	1	5	1	3	2	4	6
TV news from major networks	5	6	5	8	4	5	5	6	8
Facebook	5	7	8	7	5	8	10	5	3
Podcasts or streaming radio	7	9	6	5	7	7	8	7	5
X (formerly Twitter)	7	5	6	4	9	11	6	8	7
Local TV	9	8	8	9	7	10	7	10	10
Reddit	11	10	11	11	11	8	9	11	11
Print newspapers	12	13	12	12	12	14	12	13	12
Discord	13	12	13	13	13	13	14	12	13
Substack	14	14	14	14	14	12	13	14	14
Twitch	15	14	14	14	15	15	15	15	15
Other	10	11	10	9	10	6	11	9	9

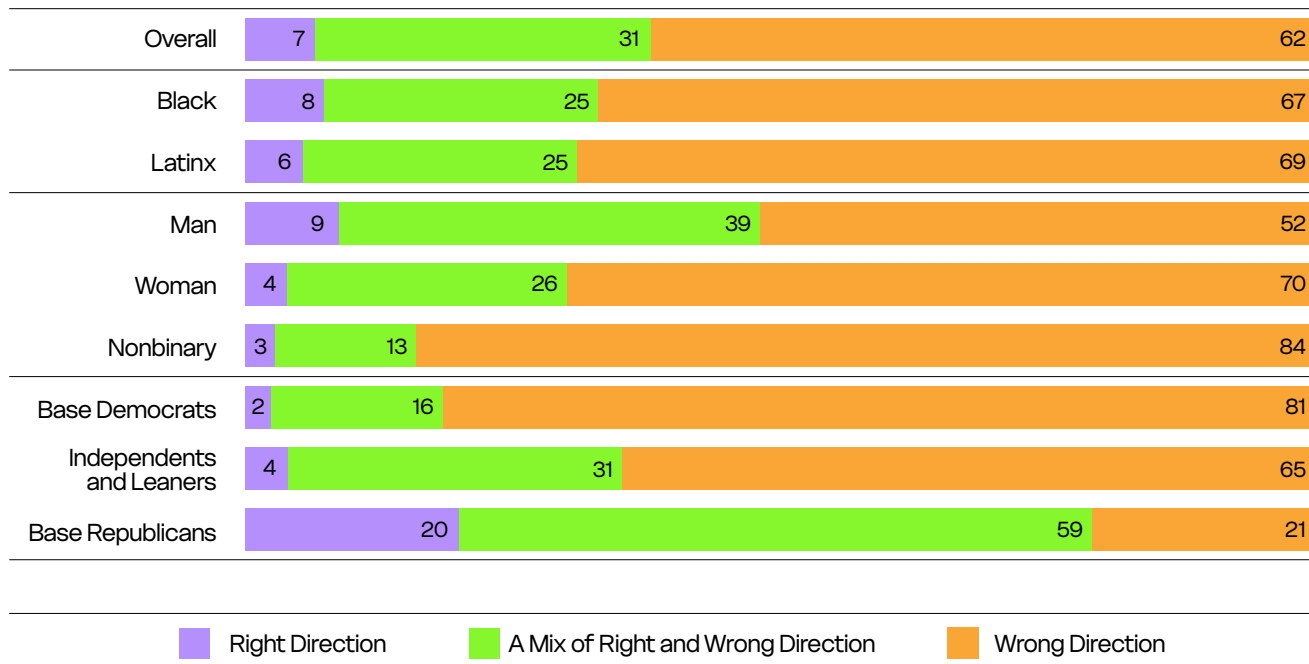
Overall, our results show that traditional news still has a role to play for Gen Z, although it is less likely to do so in its broadcast or print formats. Insights from the open-ended question highlight the role that foreign outlets can play for some members of this generation, perhaps due to a desire for an outside perspective on current events. Unsurprisingly, our findings also underscore the importance of social media in informing Gen Z, as well as how social media platform preferences vary significantly by identity. The qualitative analysis emphasizes the fragmented nature of the information landscape, which requires this generation to be discriminating about whom and what sources to rely upon. The continued use of news sites and apps, in addition to the importance of social media and the role that news aggregators play for some respondents, may indicate that the non-traditional information landscape can be overwhelming at times. Combining the themes from the qualitative

analysis of their favorite news sources with recent relevant research, it becomes clear that Gen Z is discerning about whom they trust to provide them information, that the “who” could just as easily be a traditional news site, an influencer, an organization, or even an elected official (once trust has been established), and that they can — and will — engage with these sources across platforms.

GEN Z ON WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE'RE GOING

In seeking to understand Gen Z, we included an investigation into their perspective on the current state of the country, as well their outlook about the future. To that end, we asked respondents to characterize the direction the country is headed in (right, wrong, or a mix of the two) and then asked a pair of open-ended questions probing what gives them hope and what worries them. Only 7% of young people believe that the country is headed in the right direction, with 62% believing that we’re headed in the wrong direction. Among that small subset of young people who believe the country is headed in the right direction, 66% are men and 61% identify as Republican. However, despite the Republican Party being in power nationally, only 20% of those identifying as Republicans believe we’re headed in the right direction, with 59% reporting a mix of the two. Among those who believe we’re headed in the wrong direction, 57% are women and 33% are LGBTQ+.

WHAT DIRECTION IS OUR COUNTRY HEADED IN?



The majority of young people are not able to identify anything that gives them hope in this political moment. Responses are categorized as hopeless for those explicitly stating they have “no hope” (or “not much”), as well as those responding with some version of “I don’t know” when asked what gives them hope.

For those who are able to verbalize what still gives them hope, Gen Z/young people, community activism, and upcoming elections are all frequent themes. Mentions of community activism are often linked to the current events in Minnesota and anti-ICE activism, as expected for the time at which the survey was administered. In terms of referencing specific leaders that bring them hope, there are notable subsets that reference President Trump, his administration, and the MAGA movement, as well as those that highlight Zohran Mamdani’s recent mayoral election. Responses to this question often reflected the respondent’s underlying political beliefs — for example, a subset of anti-immigration respondents expressing hope because of recent deportation actions, compared to many others expressing hope because of the rise of resistance in response to those same actions. References to upcoming elections giving them hope range from this fall’s upcoming midterms to the presidential election in 2028. These responses, paired with those referencing Mamdani’s election, show that, despite pessimistic views with regard to the direction the country is headed, some young people remain invested in political engagement as a path forward.

To dig into respondents’ reported outlook on the future, we also analyzed responses to the question: “What worries you about our country?” The most common worry for young people is the current presidential administration. While this response may be more expected for respondents identifying as Democrats, there are also a notable number of young people who identify as former Trump voters expressing concern about the actions of his current administration. Other common themes of worry include fascism, corruption, and ineffectual government, followed by racism and hate. Worries about costs and wealth inequality show up in this question as well, but their frequency is lower than the other highlighted themes, which is notable given how strongly it shows up as a top issue in both the closed- and open-ended issue questions. This may be a function of the framing of the question, which focused on worries about the country, as opposed to personal concerns. Finally, and to further emphasize the degree of concern felt by young people at this time, many respondents listed either multiple worries in response to this question instead of focusing on one worry or simply said something to the effect of “everything.”

Taken holistically, the responses across the open-ended questions reveal that the vast majority of young people believe that there is much work to be done as a country. Young people have specific, though challenging, diagnoses about what ails our democracy and what they want to see in order to feel like the country is back on track: unity over division, increased transparency and accountability, and more responsiveness overall from elected leaders. However, despite the negative feelings associated with the current levels of division and lack of accountability, the responses show that some young people remain tentatively hopeful about the future. Paired with their responses to the earlier questions about political participation (showing a willingness to engage and take action on issues that matter to them), there still seems to be an openness to the possibility of future change through political action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1

Engage Gen Z through the context of their experiences, with particular attention to how they experience the economy.

Much research, including this effort, has been conducted to better understand Gen Z. But practitioners often fail to apply that knowledge to how we consider and engage with them. Just because Gen Z is often dissatisfied with the current political system does not mean that they do not care deeply about the country's future and are unwilling to mobilize on issues important to them. In this research, we heard Gen Z express deep frustration with the failure of leaders to listen to them and take their lived experiences and beliefs into account when governing and making policy decisions.

In particular, there appears to be a disconnect between young people's deep financial concerns and the ways many policymakers and candidates approach the economy when speaking to Gen Z — if they talk about it at all. Economic anxiety has become a pervasive factor in many young people's coming of age and civic development. Any leader or organization wishing to engage Gen Z must address the economy in ways that align with their everyday experiences, whether it's buying groceries and gas or paying rent and credit card bills. We must:

- Acknowledge young people's economic concerns and speak to how we can alleviate their financial struggles, instead of relying on macroeconomic data that may not reflect their realities.
- Focus on Gen Z's particular economic worries, including cost of living, housing, or the availability of jobs, with specific messages about how political engagement can make a difference in those areas.
- Shift how we engage with Gen Z by collaborating on solutions that respond to their concerns and connect their desired changes in the economy to concrete action steps.

In a subsequent report on young peoples' financial wellbeing, CIRCLE will break down these diverse economic priorities and concerns, and provide further insights into how they can inform youth outreach.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Collaborate with young people to make the connection between what they care about and their choices at the ballot box.

As emphasized throughout this report, Gen Z is activated and engaged. They report caring about many key issues, having knowledge about them, and being willing to take action related to those issues. However, a gap exists in connecting the things that they care about to the candidates and issues on the ballot, as evidenced by informational barriers being the most significant hurdle to them voting. This finding, paired with their general sense that most elected officials do not listen to them, indicates that there's an opportunity for education and connection to better support Gen Z in feeling prepared and motivated to vote in each election. In considering how to execute this recommendation, it is also important to understand that this generation consumes information differently than past generations. Those seeking to fill this informational gap need to focus on building trust with awareness of how Gen Z consumes information across platforms, acknowledging an information ecosystem that includes both traditional news sources and social media.

At the same time, building authentic connection and trust with young people involves far more than identifying the right platforms through which to talk to them. It means listening to Gen Z, encouraging them to use their voices, and supporting accessible avenues and specific opportunities for their participation. It's not enough to tell young people that elections matter. We must show them that their votes can have an impact on the issues they care about, that democracy can work, and that it works best with their active participation before, during, and after election cycles. That requires more than messaging — it demands equitable pathways for deeper engagement. That can mean support and encouragement for young people who want to run for office, expanding the resources and capacity of youth-led organizations, paid positions for young people on political campaigns, and youth poll worker programs.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Nonpartisan paths to political engagement are critical for mobilizing Gen Z voters.

As political parties continue to be less important to younger generations, it is crucial to cultivate nonpartisan paths to political engagement, offering new opportunities for education and mobilization that meet young people where they are. To support young people in participating in a political system they have reservations about, we need spaces for civic engagement that cater to the broad spectrum of political identities Gen Z is a part of. The two-party system does not reflect where young people are today; Leaners and Independents especially need political homes to build their capacity for sustained civic engagement.

Political homes are physical, virtual, or hybrid spaces where young people can learn about issues, develop their political voice and identity, and take action together. They are grounded with a sense of belonging and accountable relationships with peers and across generations. While they fulfill a political role, they can also help young people meet basic needs and succeed in other aspects of their lives. CIRCLE research reveals this type of holistic inclusion and support is critical — especially for historically underserved groups like Latinx young people. CIRCLE's framework and toolkit for how to build effective youth political homes can help leaders and organizations serve this vital role.

WHAT'S NEXT?

To build on what we've learned in this report, When We All Vote launched Pass the Mic, a national, nonpartisan effort to engage hundreds of thousands of young people and amplify the key issues that matter most in the world they want to build. We will continue these efforts with a listening campaign that includes both in-person and digital moments, meeting Gen Z where they are throughout this year and in subsequent years.

Pass the Mic is focused on authentically listening to Gen Z about their priorities, taking their needs and concerns seriously, and using those insights to inform our voter education and mobilization efforts in alignment with this report's first recommendation. Our listening campaign also offers the option to receive follow-up outreach from us about the issues they care about. These subsequent engagements are meant to address both recommendation two and three — helping to fill the identified education gap and providing a nonpartisan path to political engagement. We expect to release further results of our findings from these dedicated listening and mobilization efforts as the program continues to grow and evolve.

Young voters have the power to decide the future — and When We All Vote is ready to meet them where they are.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

SAMPLING METHODOLOGY, WEIGHTING, AND MARGIN OF ERROR

This survey was conducted online by Embold Research, the nonpartisan unit of Change Research, a Public Benefit Corporation, on behalf of Civic Nation (the home of When We All Vote) and CIRCLE at Tufts University. Embold Research surveyed 5,549 adults between the ages of 18–29 nationwide from January 26 and February 12, 2026. The sample included oversamples from Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, as well as further oversamples of Black young people in Arizona; Latinx young people in Georgia; and Black and Latinx young people in Michigan, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. The following sources were used to recruit respondents:

- Targeted advertisements on Facebook and Instagram, as well as across the web via Facebook’s ad platform (1,721 respondents);
- Text messages sent via the Echo19 platform to cell phone numbers listed on the voter file for individuals who qualified for the survey’s sample universe based on their voter file data (3,528 respondents); and
- PureSpectrum, which aggregates participants from various online survey panel providers (300 respondents)

Regardless of which source a respondent came from, they were directed to a survey hosted on SurveyMonkey’s website.

Advertisements placed on social media targeted adults aged 18–29 either nationwide or in the oversampled states. Those who indicated that they were not 18–29 had their survey automatically terminated. Panel recruitment was targeted at those aged 18–29; some additional filters were applied for some outreach, either by ethnicity or to those who were not registered to vote. Panel respondents whose survey response times were so quick as to suggest speeding, and/or whose open-ended responses suggested speeding or inattention, were removed from the sample. As the survey fielded, Embold Research used dynamic online sampling — adjusting ad budgets, lowering budgets for ads targeting groups that were overrepresented, and raising budgets for ads targeting groups that were underrepresented — so that the final sample was roughly representative of the population across different groups. The survey was conducted in English.

Post-stratification was performed on: Census 4 region; state; regions within each oversampled state; gender; race/ethnicity; 2024 presidential vote; and voter registration. Weighting parameters are based on the demographic composition of each surveyed region, based on Census data, as well as 2024 vote choice calibrated to precinct data.

The modeled margin of error⁸ for this survey is 2.5%, which uses effective sample sizes⁹ that adjust for the design effect of weighting. This research, like all public opinion research, does entail some additional unmeasured error.

QUALITATIVE CODING

This survey included multiple open-ended questions in addition to many opportunities for respondents to write in responses if those provided were insufficient. For this report, we primarily focused qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions on the issues that elected officials should be focused on, as well as the paired questions of what gives the respondents' hope and what worries them. Qualitative coding took place in the Dedoose platform, utilizing a combined approach of inductive and deductive coding. Two main researchers reviewed the open-ended responses. Codes were discussed and revised to reflect what the research team observed in the data. For corroboration, an additional researcher read through responses to each question, sharing their impressions with those conducting the coding to ensure that it was as inclusive and unbiased as possible.

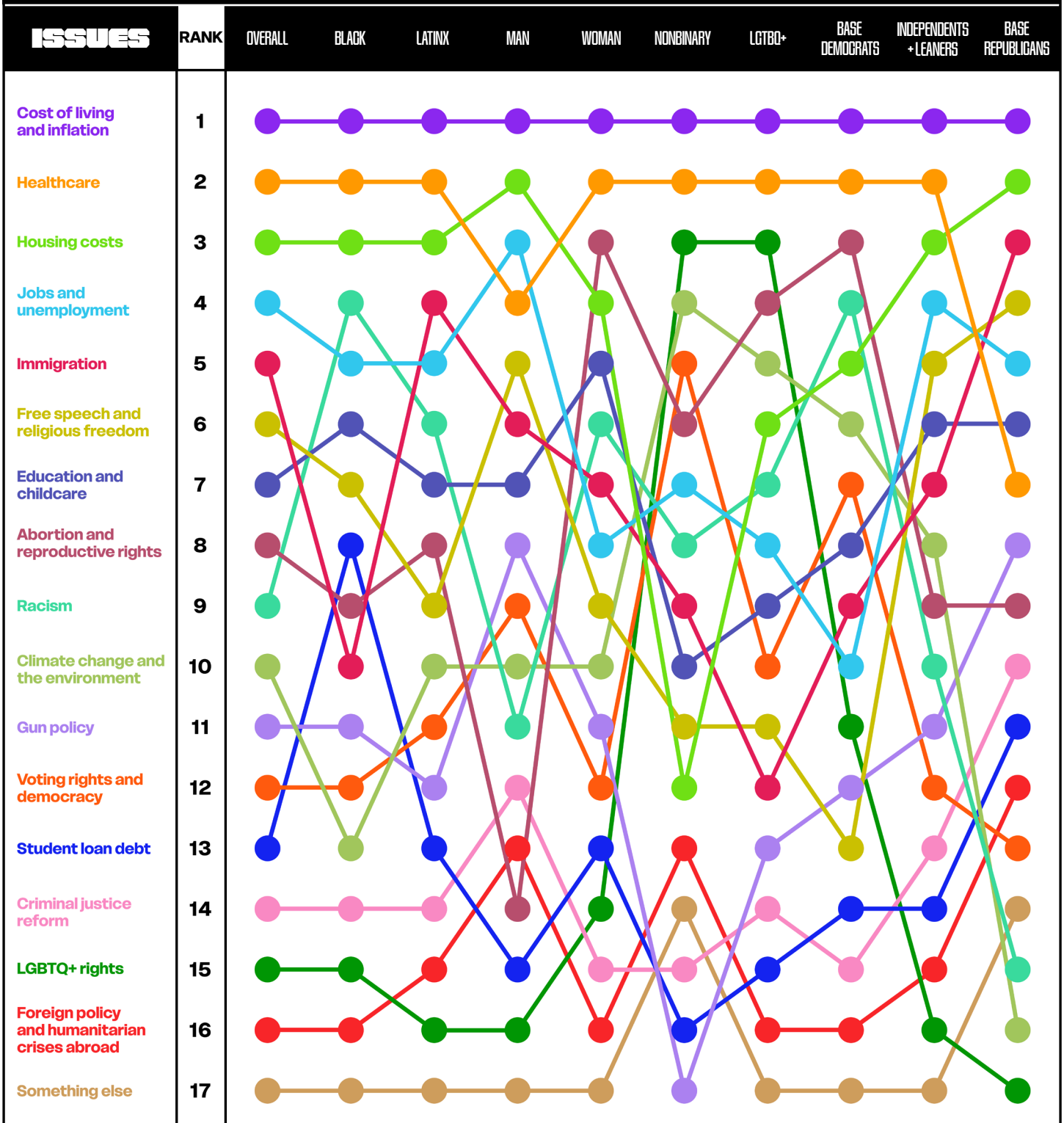
For the open-ended question where respondents shared their favorite news sources, a different approach was utilized in order to leverage subject matter expertise on the media landscape for Gen Z. The main researcher cleaned the dataset to remove responses that did not answer the question or merely restated the platform selections in the prior question. That researcher then identified references to specific news sites, podcasts, and news influencers in order to generate the insights regarding this question. These findings were then corroborated by the two main researchers on the other open-ended questions.

⁸ Embold Research adopts [The Pew Research Center's](#) convention for the term "modeled margin of error" (mMOE) to indicate that our surveys are not simple random samples in the pure sense, similar to any survey that has either non-response bias or for which the general population was not invited at random. A common, if imperfect, convention for reporting survey results is to use a single, survey-level mMOE based on a normal approximation. This is a poor approximation for proportion estimates close to 0 or 1. However, it is a useful communication tool in many settings and is reasonable in places where the proportion of interest is close to 50%. Embold reports this normal approximation for our surveys assuming a proportion estimate of 50%.

⁹ The effective sample size adjusts for the weighting applied to respondents and is calculated using [Kish's approximation](#).

ALL ISSUES ACROSS DEMOGRAPHICS

GEN Z'S ISSUE RANKINGS



Note: This chart shows how all demographic groups ranked the 17 issues presented in the survey.

PASS THE MIC

PassTheMic.info