

THE 50 MILLION: GEN Z TAKES THE MIC ON THEIR TOP ISSUES



Published:
September 14, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

PASS THE MIC TO GEN Z

02

KEY 2026 ACTIVATIONS

03

TOPLINES THUS FAR

05

COST OF LIVING
AND INFLATION

08

IMMIGRATION

11

HEALTHCARE

14

RACISM

17

ABORTION AND
REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

20

WHAT'S NEXT

PASS THE MIC TO GEN Z

Pass the Mic to Gen Z is a national campaign to engage the next generation of voters and empower them to be active participants in our democracy. Since our launch earlier in 2026, we produced first-of-its-kind research capturing what young people care about in their own words and went on a listening tour across the country. Our initial report, The 50 Million: Gen Z's Power, Priorities, and Participation — conducted in partnership with the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University — offered a first look at Gen Z's priorities and perspectives, helping shape how we can meet young people where they are with activations designed to move them to action.

Pass the Mic to Gen Z is engaging Gen Zers with in-person activations, digital outreach, sweepstakes, and creator partnerships. Across these efforts, we are hearing directly from young people while testing new ways to effectively engage them. This report reflects the data we've collected through mid-August 2026. Our work to listen to young people does not stop here, and this report offers an early opportunity to share the trends emerging from our new data. Over the next four years, Pass the Mic to Gen Z will reach one million young people and will continue to create meaningful opportunities for them to share the issues that matter most.



KEY 2026 ACTIVATIONS

In 2026, Pass the Mic to Gen Z's listening campaign is showing up where young people already gather — from college campuses and major sporting events to key cultural and fashion moments. Going beyond a transactional civic engagement model, each activation gives young people unforgettable experiences and an opportunity to share what matters to them most.



So far, key stops have included:

College campuses:

North Carolina A&T and the University of Houston featured student-focused activations with a photo booth, snapback decorating, custom embroidery, hometown heroes like Serena Page, giveaways, and more.

Major sporting events:

FIFA World Cup activations in Philadelphia and Seattle featured VIP fan experiences and giveaways, while NBA Summer League in Las Vegas featured live keychain creation, a raffle wheel, and more.

Fashion and culture:

Teen Vogue Fest in New York City paired a live conversation with Marsai Martin with an opportunity for young people to take the mic and have a photoshoot, and Fanatics Fest in New York featured a camera autograph activation, giveaways, and more.

Digital engagement:

Sweepstakes tied to major cultural moments offered prizes including VIP tickets to FIFA World Cup games, jerseys signed by Major League Soccer players, and VIP tickets to Lollapalooza's four-day Chicago festival.

TOPLINES THUS FAR

48,621 survey responses as of August 17, 2026

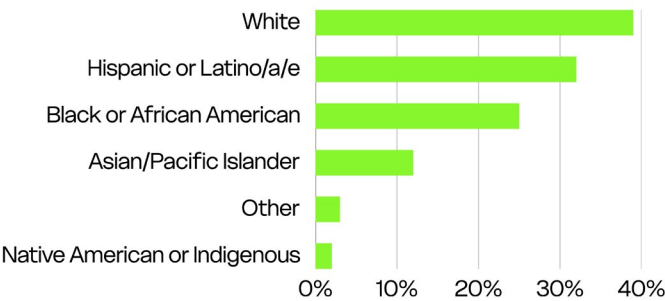
DEMOGRAPHICS BREAKDOWN

Race/Ethnicity:

61% provided information on their race/ethnicity

11% selected more than one option

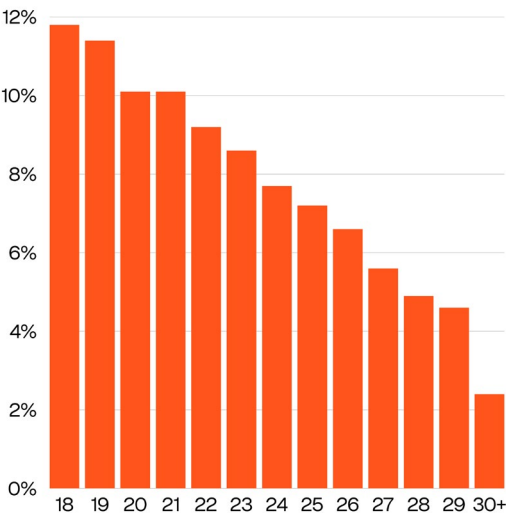
Of those who provided this info:



Age:

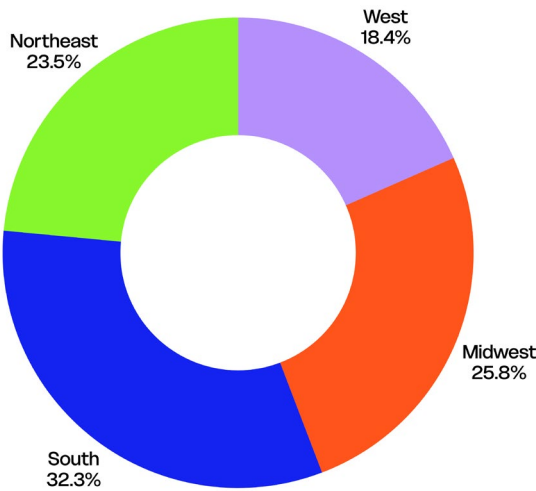
52.5% of respondents are 18–22

45.1% of respondents are 23–29



Geographic Distribution:

Responses reflect all 50 states and Washington, D.C., and we have good regional distribution of responses.

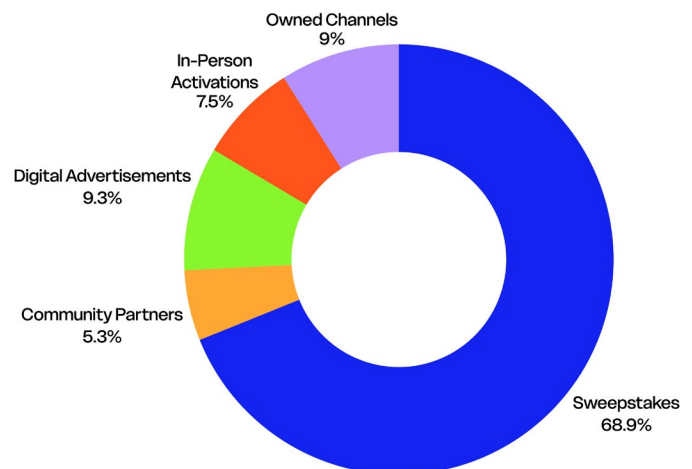


TOP ISSUE PRIORITIES

GEN Z'S ISSUE PRIORITIES AND RANKINGS						
ISSUES	OVERALL		BLACK		LATINO	
	%	RANK	%	RANK	%	RANK
Cost of living and inflation	36.9%	1	37.4%	2	34.1%	2
Immigration	25.7%	2	15.4%	8	45.3%	1
Healthcare	24.6%	3	22.2%	3	28.2%	3
Racism	24.4%	4	42.2%	1	22.4%	4
Abortion and reproductive rights	23.8%	5	19.5%	5	20.7%	5
Climate change and the environment	19.7%	6	13.0%	10	17.2%	7
Education and student loans	16.4%	7	20.8%	4	17.7%	6
Jobs and unemployment	15.0%	8	17.8%	7	14.9%	9
Voting rights and democracy	14.4%	9	18.1%	6	12.5%	11
LGBTQ+ rights	14.4%	10	10.4%	12	13.7%	10
Housing costs	14.2%	11	13.5%	9	16.5%	8
Gun policy	11.4%	12	11.2%	11	12.0%	12
Free speech and religious freedom	11.2%	13	8.7%	14	11.3%	13
Foreign policy and humanitarian crises abroad	9.8%	14	8.0%	15	8.3%	14
Criminal justice reform	6.1%	15	8.9%	13	5.9%	16
Childcare	5.5%	16	6.3%	16	6.8%	15
Other	1.5%	17	0.8%	17	1.8%	17

Note: Respondents were asked, "What issues do you care about the most?" and were able to pick up to three responses. The order of the issues was randomized.

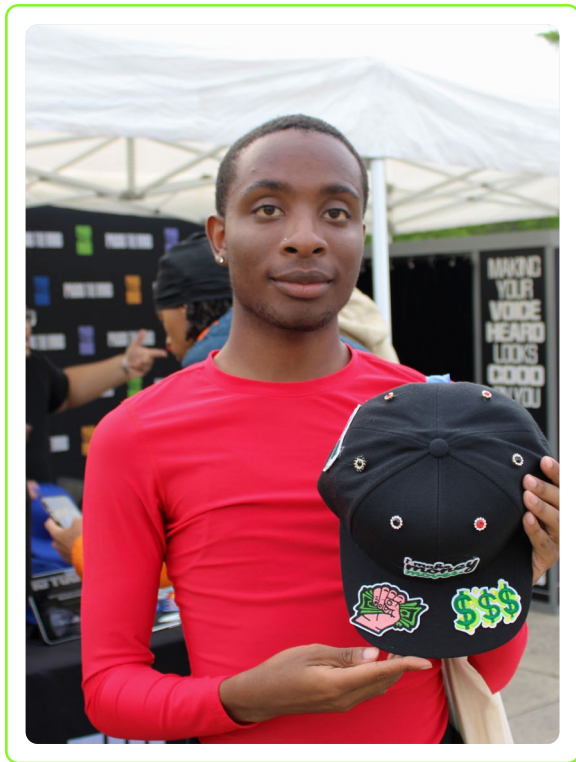
In the first year of Pass the Mic to Gen Z, we are trying a variety of tactics to reach Gen Z where they are. Sweepstakes are responsible for over two-thirds of our responses collected thus far, although we are also collecting a significant number of responses through digital advertisements, our existing social media and email channels, and in-person activations. Our community partner program debuted over the summer and will continue to collect responses into the fall.



COST OF LIVING AND INFLATION

Aligned with our [April 2026 report](#), **cost of living and inflation remains top of mind for Gen Z throughout the listening tour, ranking first overall.** Across tour stops, sweepstakes, and more, 36.9% of respondents identify cost of living and inflation as their top priority.





COST OF LIVING AND INFLATION

Prioritizing this issue holds true across many demographic groups. While Black respondents choose cost of living and inflation at a comparable rate (37.4%), they rank the issue second behind racism. Latino respondents also rank cost of living and inflation second (34.1%), after immigration. Even as the ranking shifts slightly by demographic group, it is clear that **Gen Z prioritizes cost of living and inflation as a top issue across the board.**

RACE/ETHNICITY	%	RANK
Overall	36.9%	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	35.7%	1
Black or African American	37.4%	2
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	34.1%	2
Native American or Indigenous	37.8%	1
White	40.6%	1
Other	35.0%	1

AGE GROUP	%	RANK
Ages 18–22	35.0%	1
Ages 23–29	42.3%	1

REGION	%	RANK
Midwest	36.9%	1
Northeast	36.7%	1
South	39.9%	1
West	37.5%	1

IF YOU COULD PICK ONE THING, WHAT SHOULD ELECTED LEADERS IN THE U.S. FOCUS ON?

"INFLATION. MONEY IS BEING SPENT ON THINGS THE AMERICAN PEOPLE DO NOT BACK OR WANT, MAKING THE COST OF LIVING SO MUCH HIGHER THAN IT NEEDS TO BE. AND I FEAR IT MAY NEVER COME BACK DOWN AGAIN."

"Rising costs. Individuals and families are struggling. This needs to be addressed and turned around. It's really getting unbearable and simply out of control."

"If I could pick one thing, elected leaders in the United States should focus on lowering the cost of living for everyday people. That means making housing more affordable, reducing healthcare and prescription costs, creating better-paying jobs, and helping families keep up with inflation. Many people work hard but still struggle to afford rent, groceries, education, and basic necessities. Focusing on economic stability and affordability would improve quality of life for millions of Americans and create stronger communities."

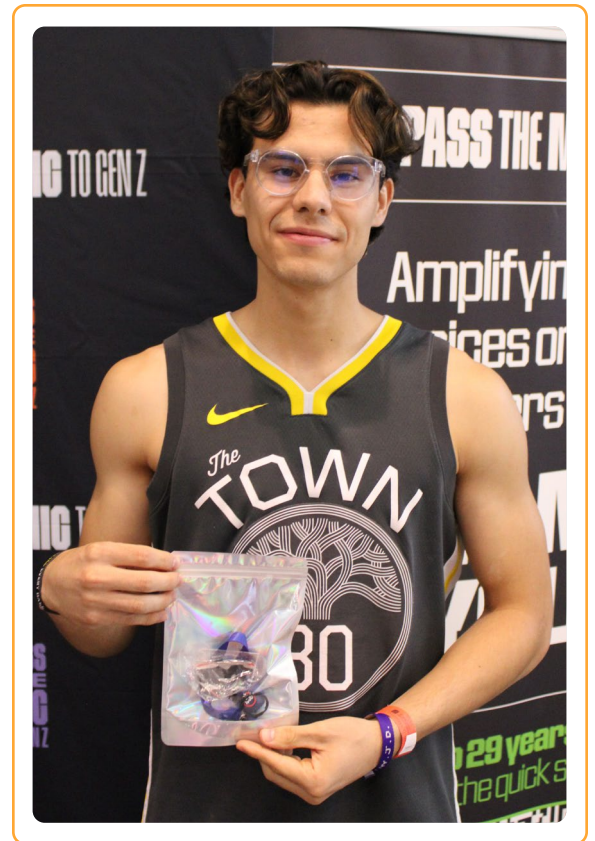
"Elected officials should focus more on issues that ultimately affect Americans. In our world the price of goods are going up. Families are struggling to pay and make ends meet. I believe that politicians should focus on doing good for us and lowering prices on goods allowing families to not always worry about paying for the next bill or even going to the grocery store and worrying about not being able to get their family or their kids stuff that they need."

"They should focus on actually controlling the price of living for Americans, and fixing how hard it is for the middle class to continue existing."

IMMIGRATION

Gen Z consistently names the cost of living and inflation as their top issue, while four other issues consistently appear in the top five. Those rankings shift both over time and with the audiences of our various activations. As of mid-August, **immigration is the second highest ranking issue**, although the spread between second and fifth is less than two percentage points.





IMMIGRATION

Despite being ranked second overall at 25.7%, **immigration is the highest ranked issue for Latino Gen Zers** at 45.3%. Immigration is a lower priority for respondents identifying as Black or white and those from the Midwest.

RACE/ETHNICITY	%	RANK
Overall	25.7%	2
Asian/Pacific Islander	23.8%	4
Black or African American	15.4%	8
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	45.3%	1
Native American or Indigenous	21.7%	5
White	16.7%	7
Other	21.1%	4

AGE GROUP	%	RANK
Ages 18–22	26.3%	4
Ages 23–29	24.0%	3

REGION	%	RANK
Midwest	23.6%	6
Northeast	26.0%	2
South	22.3%	5
West	32.4%	3

IF YOU COULD PICK ONE THING, WHAT SHOULD ELECTED LEADERS IN THE U.S. FOCUS ON?

"I believe that the current elected leaders of the United States need to focus on the way we treat people coming to the country for help and work. In the past, our country was seen as a beacon for hope to those struggling in other countries, and many came into America seeking the 'American Dream.' Nowadays, our country is laughed at and ridiculed for our immigration and foreign policy, and we are no longer the symbol of hope that we should be for those struggling."

"I believe one of the most important issues right now is immigration and I want leaders to heavily focus on getting ICE out of our cities and closing the detention centers."

"Personally I believe that elected officials should focus on the issues surrounding ICE and immigration. As a daughter of an immigrant seeing how it's become more common for people to show racism and hostility towards the Hispanic community for sacrificing a lot to give a better future to their children."

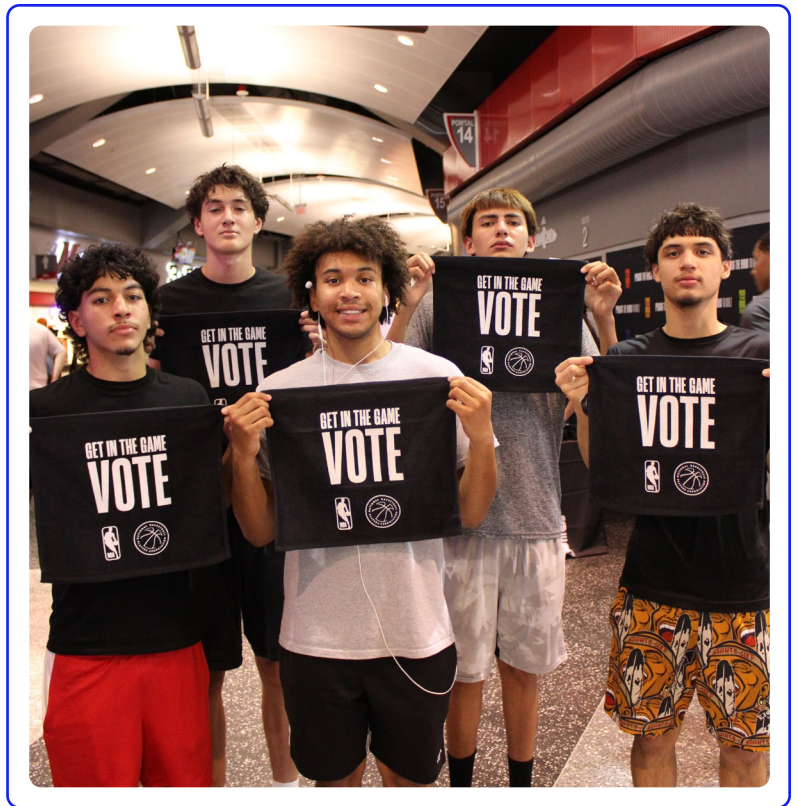
"One thing I think elected leaders in the United States should focus on more is immigration reform. America is a country built by immigrants, and I think a lot of people forget that almost every family here came from somewhere else at one point. Instead of treating immigrants like a problem, I think we should recognize how much they contribute to our economy, culture, and communities. I believe the immigration process should be more accessible, efficient, and humane."

There are so many hardworking people who come here looking for safety, opportunity, and a better future for their families, and they deserve to be treated with dignity. I also think political leaders should focus less on creating division around immigration and more on finding realistic solutions that support both national security and human rights."

HEALTHCARE

Gen Z consistently names the cost of living and inflation as their top issue, while four other issues consistently appear in the top five. Those rankings shift both over time and with the audiences of our various activations. As of mid-August, **healthcare is the third highest ranking issue**, although the spread between second and fifth is less than two percentage points.





HEALTHCARE

In our [April 2026 report](#), healthcare ranks second in issue priority, but in the listening tour data thus far, it ranks third overall at 24.6%. **The older cohort of Gen Z, ages 23–29, is more likely to rank healthcare higher** (second), as well as those who identify as Asian/Pacific Islander or “Other.”

RACE/ETHNICITY	%	RANK
Overall	24.6%	3
Asian/Pacific Islander	30.5%	2
Black or African American	22.2%	3
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	28.2%	3
Native American or Indigenous	20.9%	6
White	22.8%	4
Other	26.9%	2

AGE GROUP	%	RANK
Ages 18–22	22.0%	5
Ages 23–29	26.5%	2

REGION	%	RANK
Midwest	24.7%	3
Northeast	23.1%	4
South	22.9%	4
West	34.1%	2

IF YOU COULD PICK ONE THING, WHAT SHOULD ELECTED LEADERS IN THE U.S. FOCUS ON?

"Improving mental health support and access to care. This includes making therapy and counseling more affordable, expanding crisis intervention and suicide prevention resources, increasing mental health education, and reducing the stigma surrounding mental illness. Mental health affects people's ability to succeed in school, maintain relationships, work effectively, and live healthy lives, making it one of the most important issues facing the country today."

"THE INCREASE IN MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES DUE TO THE STRESS OF LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES."

"Universal Healthcare would save a good chunk of our problems because people could afford a therapist, surgeries, and medicine."

"LEADERS SHOULD FOCUS ON OUR HEALTHCARE SYSTEM AND ENSURE THAT HEALTHCARE IS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE, INCLUDING HOMELESS PEOPLE. I THINK ACCESS TO CARE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A NECESSITY AND NOT A PRIVILEGE."

"Providing equality within the healthcare system. I strongly believe a socialist approach to healthcare is the only way to make America united. The inability for homeless individuals and low income families to receive needed healthcare on the day to day is extremely detrimental to the overall health of society. The government must address and fix the healthcare system. It shouldn't matter who you are or where you were raised - everyone deserves quality healthcare."

RACISM

Gen Z consistently names the cost of living and inflation as their top issue, while four other issues consistently appear in the top five. Those rankings shift both over time and with the audiences of our various activations. As of mid-August, **racism is the fourth highest ranking issue**, although the spread between second and fifth is less than two percentage points.





RACISM

Despite being ranked fourth overall at 24.4%, **racism is the highest ranked issue for Black Gen Zers** at 42.2%. Younger Gen Zers (ages 18–22) and those located in the South place a higher priority on racism as well, ranking it second.

RACE/ETHNICITY	%	RANK
Overall	24.4%	4
Asian/Pacific Islander	22.3%	5
Black or African American	42.2%	1
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	22.4%	4
Native American or Indigenous	24.2%	4
White	16.9%	6
Other	22.7%	3

AGE GROUP	%	RANK
Ages 18–22	26.6%	2
Ages 23–29	21.6%	5

REGION	%	RANK
Midwest	23.8%	4
Northeast	24.9%	3
South	26.7%	2
West	18.6%	7

IF YOU COULD PICK ONE THING, WHAT SHOULD ELECTED LEADERS IN THE U.S. FOCUS ON?

EQUAL RIGHTS



"If I could choose one thing for elected leaders in the United States to focus on, it would be addressing systemic racism and inequality in a meaningful and lasting way. Too many communities still face injustice in education, healthcare, housing, policing, and economic opportunities simply because of their race or background."

"CIVIL RIGHTS FOR BLACK AND BROWN PEOPLE. MINORITY AMERICANS, PARTICULARLY BLACK AMERICANS, HAVE CONTRIBUTED SO MUCH TO THIS NATION; YET, WE ARE THE MOST HATED, MISTREATED, UNDERVALUED, AND TARGETED."

"Racial and economic disparities growing larger and larger within all communities. Specifically with legally illegal red lining, cost of living never being supported by the state, cutting public transportation and healthcare all across the US for all groups."

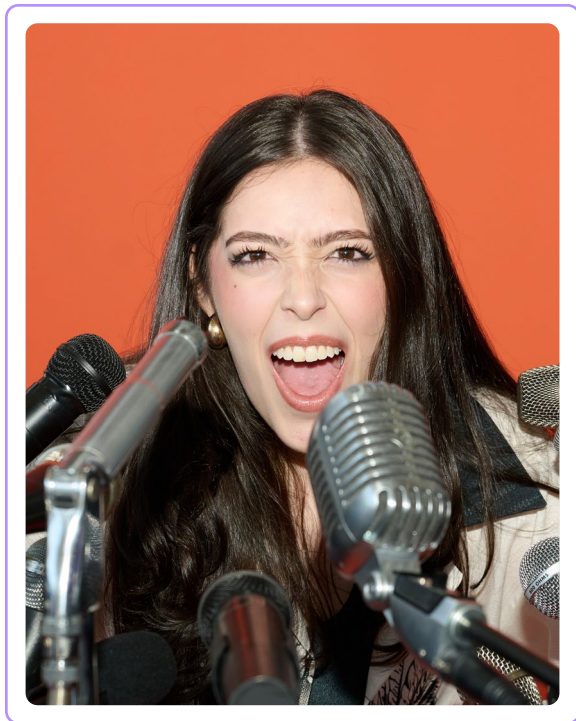
"I think addressing that America still systematically benefits white people even if there aren't explicit laws that show it. Racism is so deeply integrated into everything whether it comes to pay wages, job opportunities, or education opportunities. I think admitting that the system is unfair and actively working to undo the harm is a hard thing to do but necessary to show that a leader actually cares about its people."

"ELIMINATING RACISM, AS IT IS THE BASIS OF OTHER PROBLEMS SUCH AS POVERTY, CRIMINAL JUSTICE + MORE."

ABORTION AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Gen Z consistently names the cost of living and inflation as their top issue, while four other issues consistently appear in the top five. Those rankings shift both over time and with the audiences of our various activations. As of mid-August, **abortion and reproductive rights are the fifth highest ranking issue**, although the spread between second and fifth is less than two percentage points.





ABORTION AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

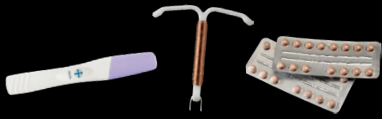
Abortion and reproductive rights rank fifth overall, selected by 23.8% of our listening tour participants. While this issue is not the top priority for any demographic group, Gen Zers identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American or Indigenous, and white are more likely to rank it higher. **Those in the Midwest and South are also more likely to prioritize abortion and reproductive rights**, which generally corresponds with regions where those rights are more under threat.

RACE/ETHNICITY	%	RANK
Overall	23.8%	5
Asian/Pacific Islander	26.4%	3
Black or African American	19.5%	5
Hispanic or Latino/a/e	20.7%	5
Native American or Indigenous	24.6%	2
White	30.0%	2
Other	16.2%	7

AGE GROUP	%	RANK
Ages 18–22	26.6%	3
Ages 23–29	23.0%	4

REGION	%	RANK
Midwest	28.6%	2
Northeast	19.7%	4
South	24.9%	3
West	19.9%	6

IF YOU COULD PICK ONE THING, WHAT SHOULD ELECTED LEADERS IN THE U.S. FOCUS ON?



"if i could pick one thing elected leaders should focus on would be abortion and reproductive rights. as a young woman i would like to think that i have the right to my own body, make... decisions i think are best for me, and most importantly have the ability to have accessible abortion and reproductive healthcare."

"AS A WOMAN IT IS TERRIFYING TO HAVE MY RIGHTS STRIPPED AWAY FROM ALL OF US. THE FACT ABORTION IS NOT YOUR CHOICE IS HORRIFYING."

"GIVING BACK WOMEN RIGHTS TO [THEIR] BODIES, GETTING RID OF ABORTION LAWS, MAKING IT AFFORDABLE FOR WOMEN TO OBTAIN BIRTH CONTROL AND THE PRODUCTS THEY NEED."

"The one thing I would focus on the most is bring back the rights that women should have over their own bodies and autonomy. So much damage has already been done, and if I were president I would probably work on reversing that damage."

"There are many things I could passionately write about in terms of how elected U.S. officials should do more or better, but if I picked only one it would be bodily autonomy. To me, this is the most urgent and impactful topics that has a very broad reach. Restrictions on bodily autonomy cost lives, stifle quality of life, and affect us all."

WHAT'S NEXT

Pass the Mic to Gen Z is a long-term effort focused on authentically listening to this generation and creating paths to civic engagement, voter education, and mobilization grounded in what young people care about. This report offers initial findings from the first four months of this program, but we're just getting started.

When our pilot ends, we'll return with a comprehensive analysis of our 2026 data, bringing together findings from the research survey and listening tour, as well as qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses featured throughout this report. We will also evaluate which tactics were most effective in 2026, using those learnings to inform data-driven updates to Pass the Mic to Gen Z programming in 2027.

In the meantime, follow along with us at [@the50million](https://twitter.com/the50million) and, if you are 18–29 years old, take the survey yourself at PassTheMic.info.

