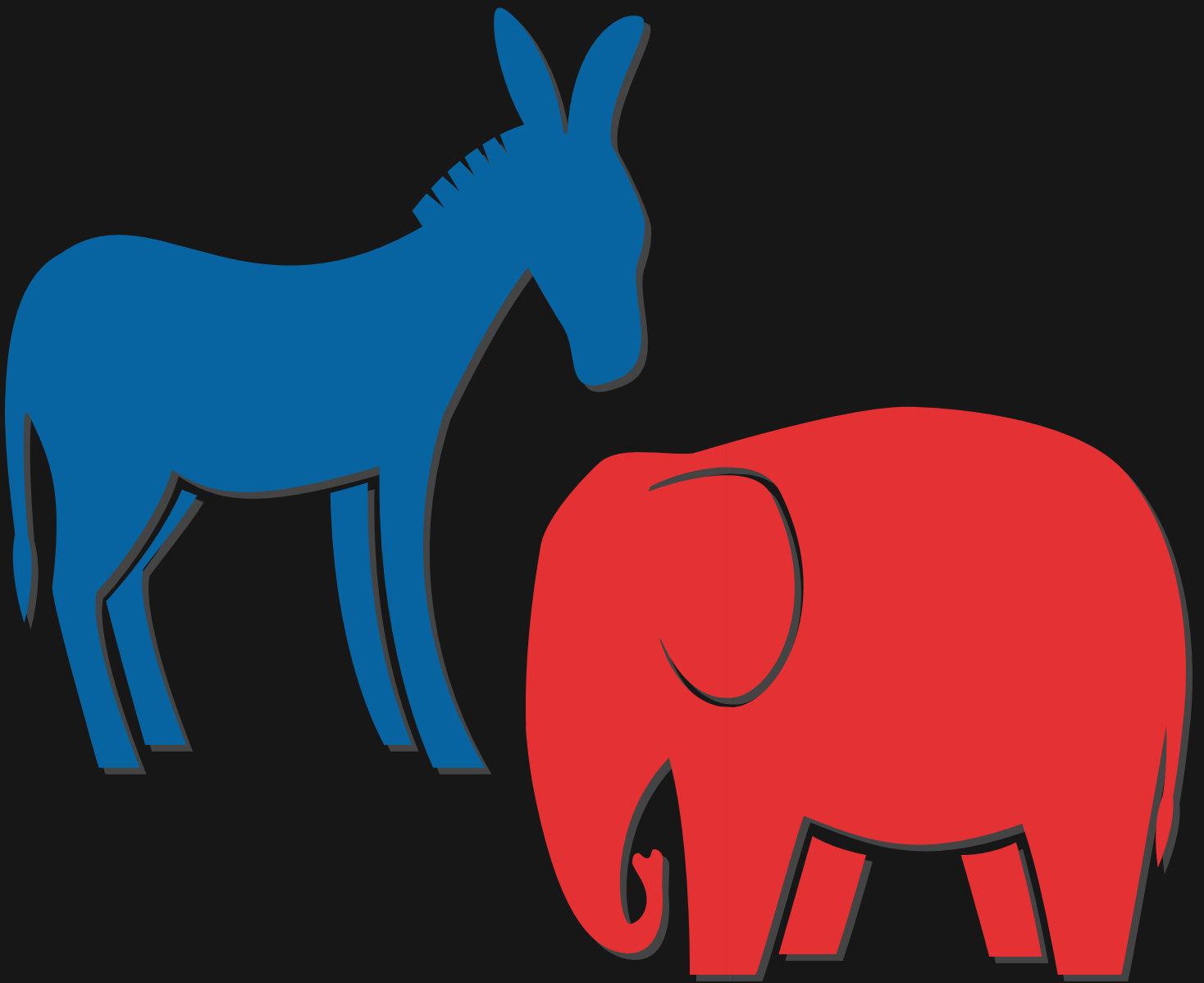




EDUCATION WEEK
RESEARCH CENTER

Youth Politics

Results of a National Survey



About Editorial Projects In Education

Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization based in Bethesda, Md. Its primary mission is to help raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education. EPE covers local, state, national, and international news and issues from preschool through the 12th grade. Editorial Projects in Education publishes *Education Week*, America's newspaper of record for precollegiate education, the online *Teacher*, *EdWeek Market Brief*, and the TopSchoolJobs employment resource. It also produces periodic special reports on issues ranging from technology to textbooks, as well as books of special interest to educators.

The Education Week Research Center conducts surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in *Education Week* and special reports such as *Quality Counts*, and *Technology Counts*. The center also conducts independent research studies and maintains the Education Counts online data resource.

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Executive Summary

In February of 2018, the Parkland school shootings sparked a wave of student activism that included rallies and voter registration drives held throughout the nation. As these students turn 18 and 19 years old and contemplate voting in their first general election, close to half (40 percent) report that their level of political engagement has been influenced quite a lot or a great deal by those shootings. In fact, school shootings are viewed by first-time voters in this age group as the most important social and political problem facing the country today, according to a survey sponsored by the non-profit, non-partisan Education Week Research Center.

The online survey, conducted in September 2018, included 1,339 18- and 19-year-olds who said they had not yet voted in a general election.

Sixty-three percent of the respondents say they plan to vote in the November 2018 general election. The number-one reason why the youth plan to vote is that they perceive that it is good for the country. The most frequent reason that they do not plan to vote is that they are not interested in voting at all.

Those who characterize themselves as liberal are over-represented among those who plan to vote in November 2018. Moderates are under-represented. Conservatives are roughly equally likely to vote or abstain.

Family members are the top source of information for possible voters. It is possible that respondents need more information: nearly half cannot name a single candidate in the November 2018 races. Although most have taken a standalone civics course, about 1 in 3 have not. Of the 17 civic activities listed on the survey, volunteer work is the most frequently experienced.

Despite their shortage of knowledge about candidates, nearly half of survey respondents say their level of political engagement has increased in the past two years. Nearly half also report that their level of political engagement has been influenced quite a lot or a great deal by reaching voting age, the Parkland shootings, and the desire to support or oppose Donald Trump and his administration.

School shootings, guns/gun control, and immigration are the top social/political concerns for young voters. The high cost of living/inflation is the top economic concern, followed by the economy in general and the gap between rich and poor.

The nationally-representative survey described in this report had a margin of error of plus or minus three percent with a 95 percent confidence level.

Introduction

They came of age in the era of Trump. In the era of the Parkland, Florida school shootings that sparked a movement to register youth voters. In a time of nearly unprecedented political divisiveness in our country.

So what are their political tendencies, influences, and beliefs? Those are some of the questions that this report sets out to examine based on a September 2018 online survey of 1,339 18- and 19-year-olds who said they have not yet voted in a general election.

The nationally-representative survey has a margin of error of three percent with a 95 percent confidence level. Survey results were weighted by gender and by race to reflect the make-up of the overall population of adolescents in America.

The survey, sponsored by the nonpartisan, nonprofit Education Week Research Center, included 25 questions.

Topics covered included:

- Plans to vote in the November 2018 general election
- Reasons for voting or not voting
- Sources of information on voting
- Voting influences, including experience in school, the Parkland shootings, and Trump
- Top issues of concern
- Demographics
- Questions about political affiliations, beliefs

Even after the election ends, these topics will continue to resonate. This is only the first of many lifetime opportunities these young voters will have to participate in a general election.

SURVEY DETAILS

Survey Administered: September 22 to September 27, 2018

Sample: Nationally-representative

Respondents: 18- and 19-year-olds who said they have not yet voted in a general election

Total Respondents: 1,339

Voting Plans

Plenty of previous polls have found that young people vote at lower rates than their older counterparts.

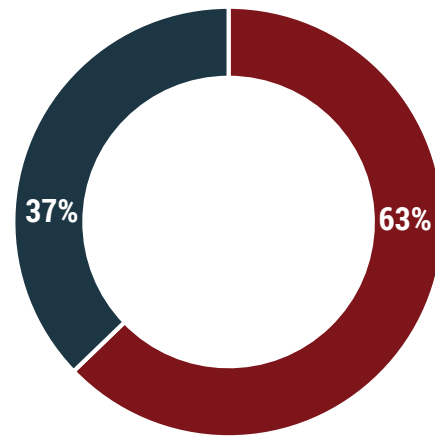
For example, a July 2018 article in Vox notes:

- A 2018 poll from the Public Religion Research Institute and the Atlantic found that 28 percent of 18 to 29-year-olds are “absolutely certain” they will vote in the midterm elections
- A 2018 Associated Press/University of Chicago NORC poll of voters under age 34 found that 32 percent were “certain to vote”
- A 2018 poll sponsored by Cosmopolitan and SurveyMonkey found that 68 percent of 18 to 34-year-olds were certain to vote or will probably vote in the 2018 midterm elections

In the 2014 midterm election, 22% of eligible Millennials turned out to vote, according to the Pew Research Center. As Pew notes, however, the 2014 election is not representative of all midterms, as only 42% of all eligible voters reported voting — the lowest turnout in a midterm election since consistent data have been available.

This Education Week Research Center survey found that 63 percent of 18 and 19-year-olds plan to vote in the November 2018 general election. It is important to note here that other surveys have not typically restricted their samples to 18 and 19-year-old first-time voters. So our results may not be entirely comparable to the results of other polls. However, it is also possible that our voting rate estimates are higher than those of other surveys because we did not ask how likely the respondents were to vote. Instead we asked a yes/no question (“Do you plan to vote in the November 2018 general election?”). Some of the youth who responded “yes” may have been more certain than others that they planned to vote. Based on the previous track record for this age group, the actual voting rates for 18 and 19-year-olds probably won’t approach 63 percent. For this reason, we will refer to those who plan to vote as “possible voters.”

Do you plan to vote in the November 2018 general election?



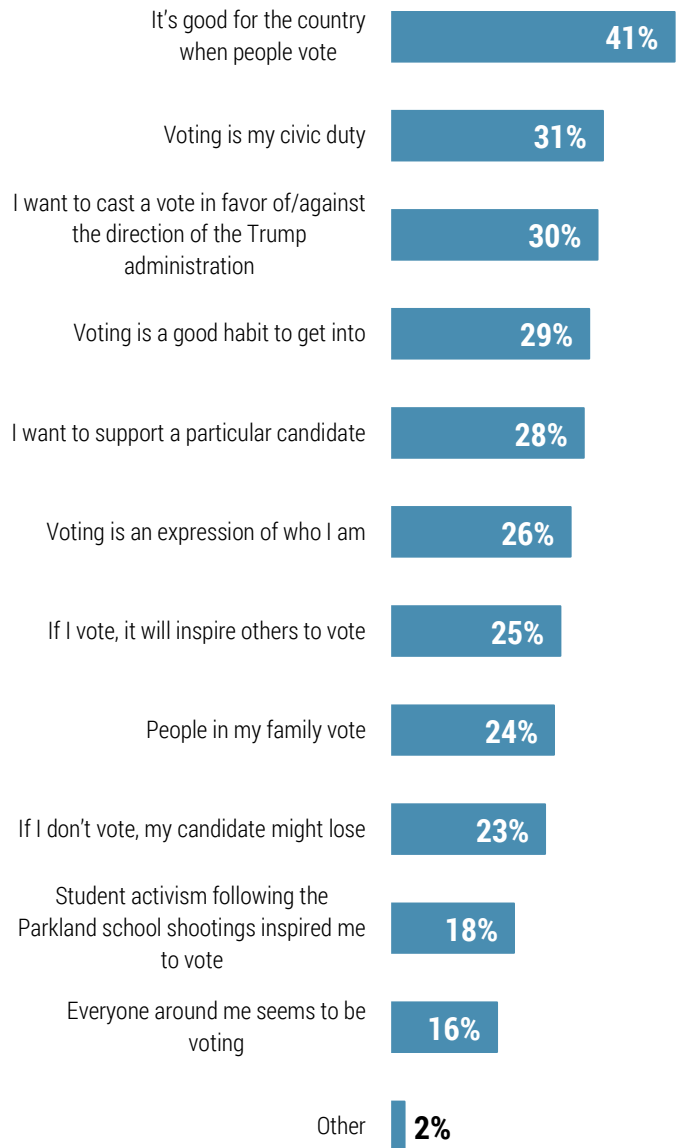
■ Yes ■ No

Why Vote?

The top reasons for voting are:

- It's good for the country when people vote (41 percent)
- Voting is my civic duty (31 percent)
- I want to cast a vote in favor of/against the direction of the Trump administration (30 percent)

Why are you planning to vote in the November general election in 2018? Select all that apply.



Note: Only respondents indicating they planned to vote were asked this question.

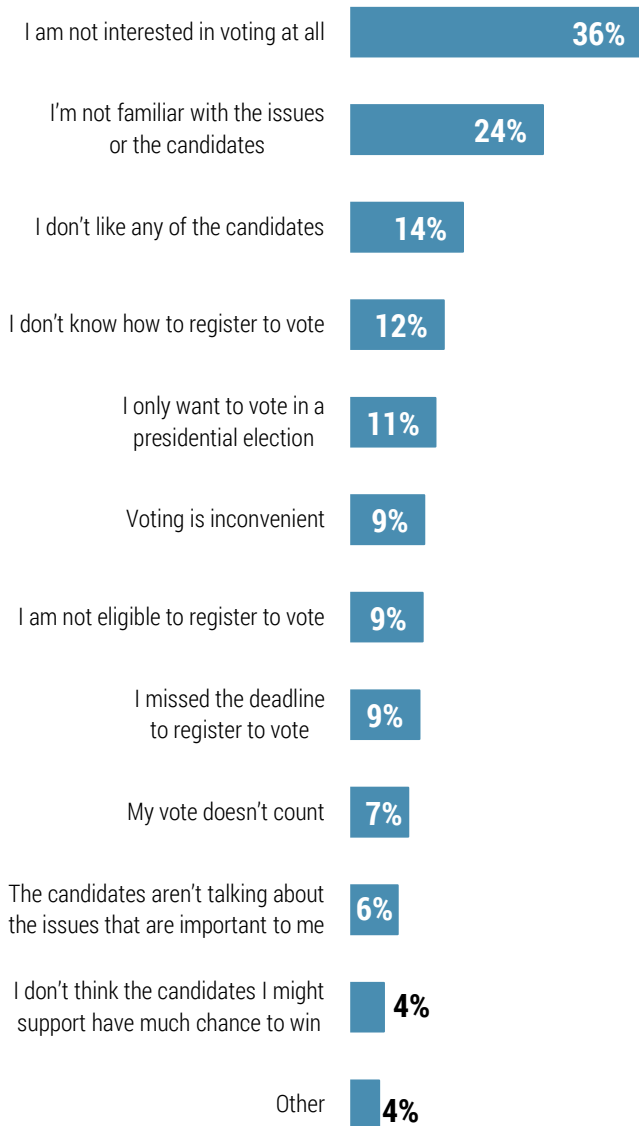
Why Not Vote?

Among those who do not plan to vote, the top reasons are:

- I am not interested in voting at all (36 percent)
- I'm not familiar with the issues or the candidates (24 percent)
- I don't like any of the candidates (14 percent)

Logistical barriers also play a role for some young people. Twelve percent of 18- and 19-year-olds say they do not plan to vote because they do not know how to register. Nine percent say they are ineligible to vote. And nine percent say they will not vote because they missed the registration deadline.

Why don't you plan to vote in the November general election in 2018? Select all that apply.



Note: Only respondents indicating they did not plan to vote were asked this question.

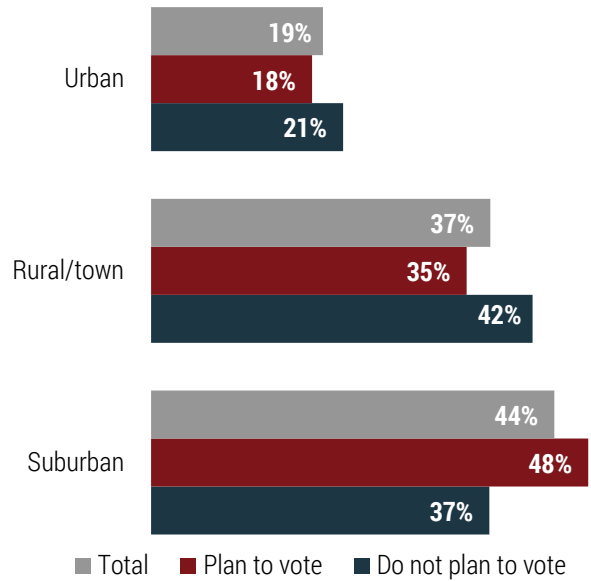
How Do Possible Voters Compare to Non-Voters?

Demographics

Eighteen and 19-year-olds who spent most of their lives living in the suburbs are more likely to plan to vote than are those who grew up in rural areas or urban areas.

Students who attended or attend private high schools are also more likely to plan to vote than are their public school counterparts.

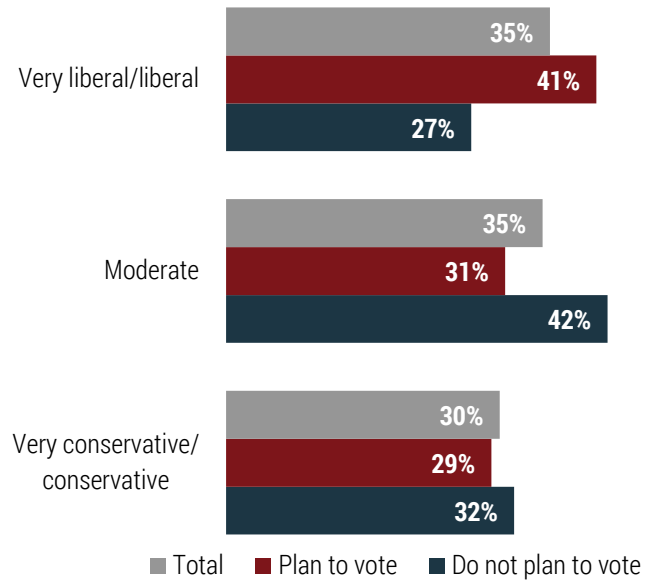
Which of the following best describes the location of the community where you have lived for the longest amount of time?



Political Beliefs and Affiliations

Those who characterize themselves as liberal or very liberal are over-represented among possible voters. Moderates are under-represented among possible voters. Conservative/very conservative respondents are about equally represented among those who do and do not plan to vote.

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, or very conservative?



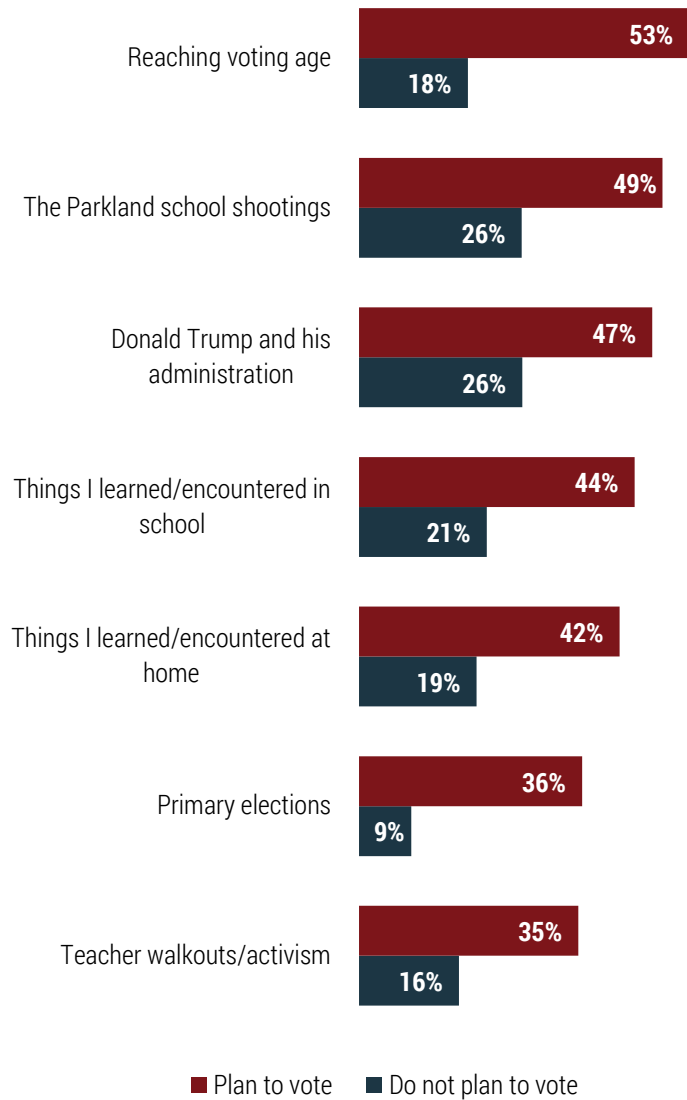
Voting Influences

Possible voters are considerably more likely than non-voters to report that their level of political engagement has been affected quite a lot or a great deal by every type of political influence listed on the poll including:

- Reaching voting age
- The Parkland school shootings
- Donald Trump and his administration
- Things learned/encountered at school and at home
- The primary elections
- Teacher walk-outs/activism

Possible voters are also more likely to have participated in all the types of school and non-school-related civic activities listed on the survey, including student government, student newspapers/news outlets, and attending or viewing a session of a legislature or government meeting.

How much, if at all, have the following influences affected your level of political engagement over the last two years?



Top Issues

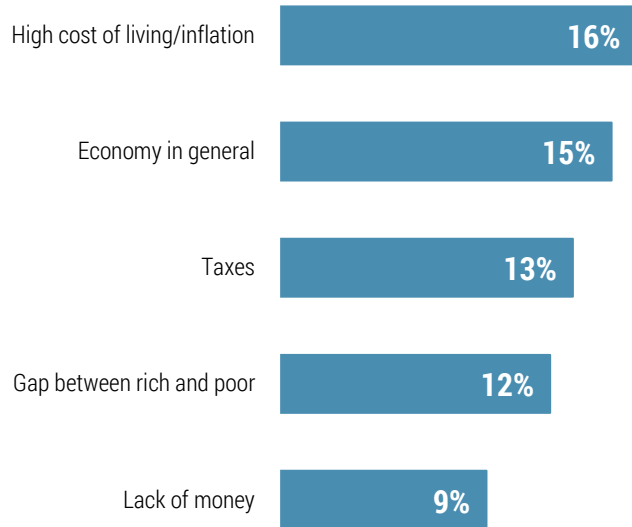
The high cost of living/inflation top the list of economic problems perceived by possible voters and non-voters alike. The economy in general, the gap between rich and poor, and a lack of money also make the top five for both groups. Taxes make the top five for possible voters, but not for non-voters.

Unemployment/jobs make the top five for non-voters but not for possible voters.

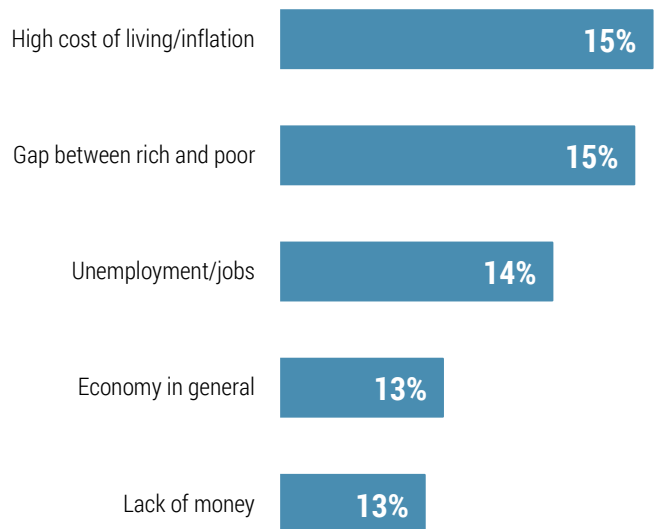
When it comes to the most important social/political problem facing the country today, possible voters and non-voters alike share four of their top five priorities (school shootings, guns/gun control, immigration, and crime/violence). Race relations/racism makes the top five for possible voters, but not non-voters. Children's behavior/the way they are raised makes the top five for non-voters, but not for possible voters.

What do you think is the most important economic problem facing the country today?

Plan to vote



Do not plan to vote

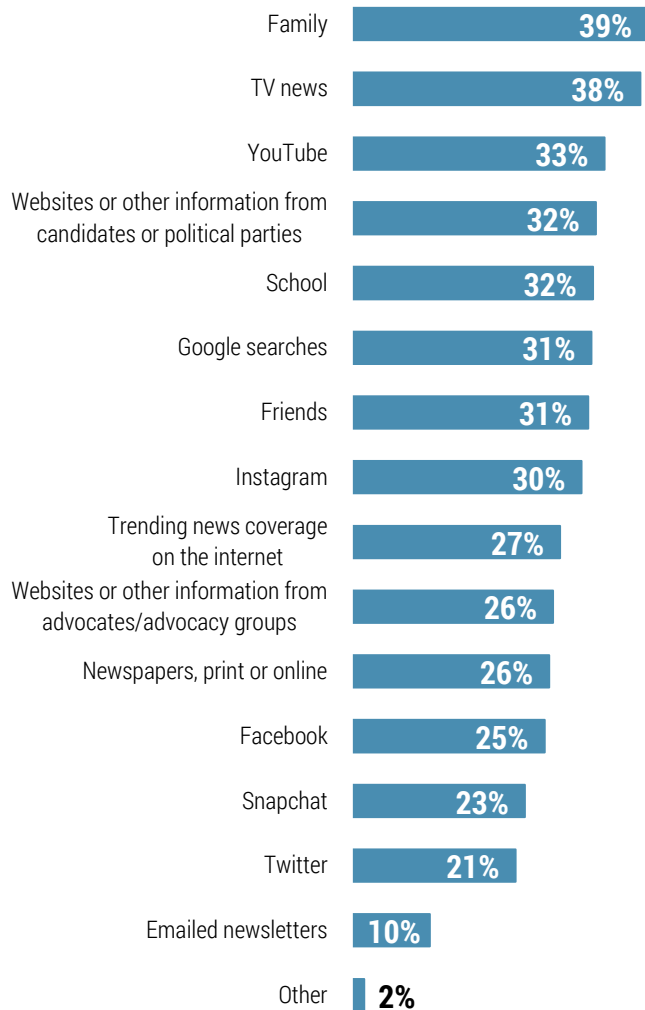


Information

Sources of Information

Family members are the top source of information that possible first-time voters are using to decide how to cast their ballots. (Non-voters were not asked what source of information they were using to decide how to vote.) Number two is TV news, followed by YouTube, websites or other information from candidates or political parties, and school.

What sources of information are you using to decide how to vote? Select all that apply.

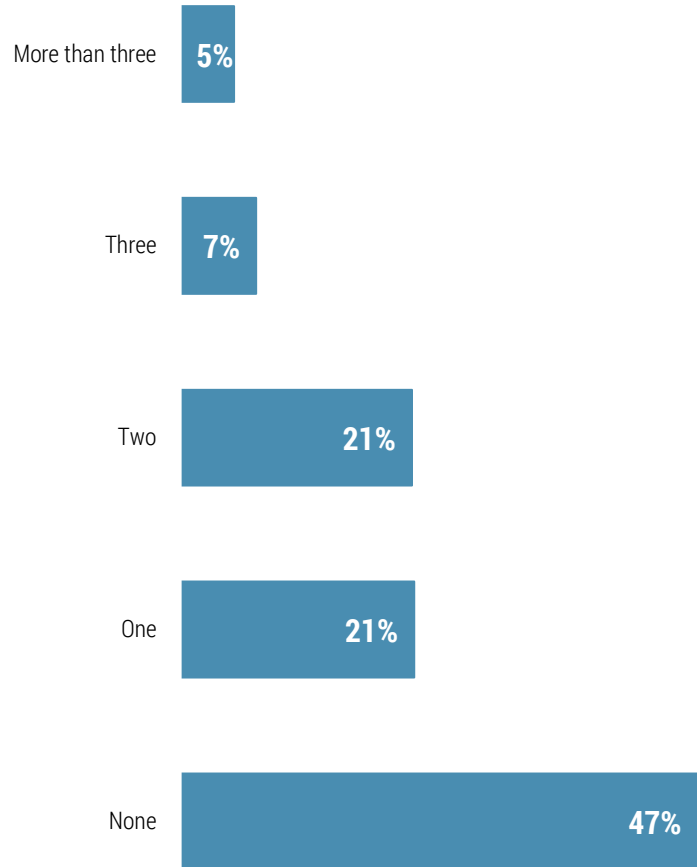


Note: Only respondents indicating they planned to vote were asked this question.

How Much Information do 18- and 19-Year-Olds Have About Candidates?

Nearly half of 18- and 19-year-olds who have never voted in a general election cannot name a single candidate for the November 2018 general elections. Only 5 percent can name more than three candidates.

How many candidates, if any, can you name in the upcoming November elections?

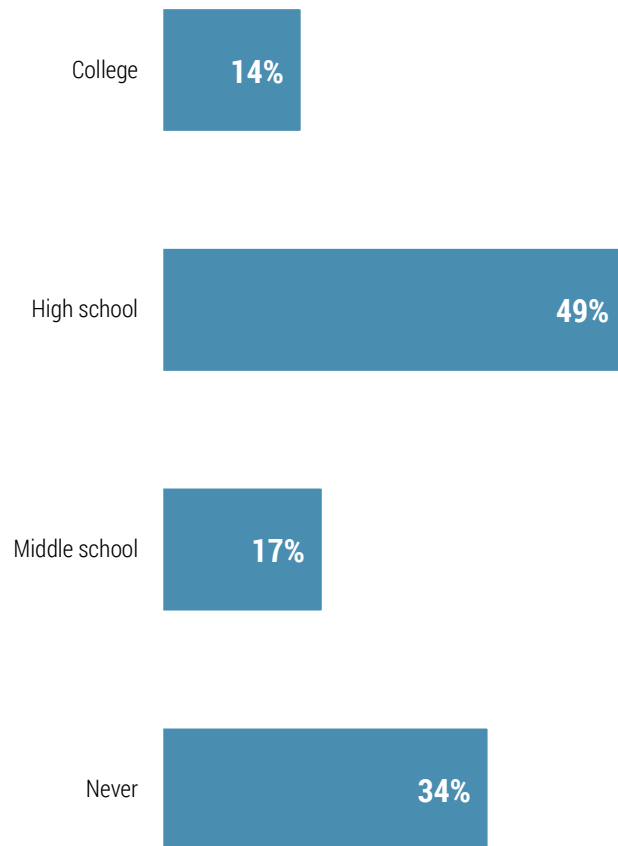


Civics and Civic Activities

Civics Class

More than 1 in 3 18- and 19-year-olds who have yet to vote in a general election have never taken a standalone civics class. Close to half took civics in high school.

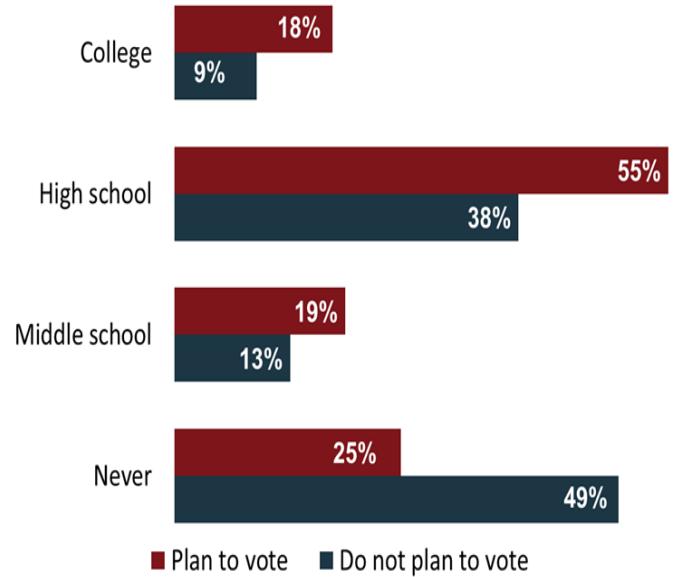
When, if ever, have you taken a separate/standalone civics class for school? Select all that apply.



Civics and Possible Voters

Youth who have never taken civics in school are more likely to abstain from voting. Just a quarter of those who plan to vote have never taken civics in school. Nearly twice as many of those who do not plan to vote (49%) have never taken civics. This correlation does not signify a causal link between voting behaviors and civics education. However, previous research has found that high-quality civics education is associated with higher youth voting rates, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement at Tufts University.

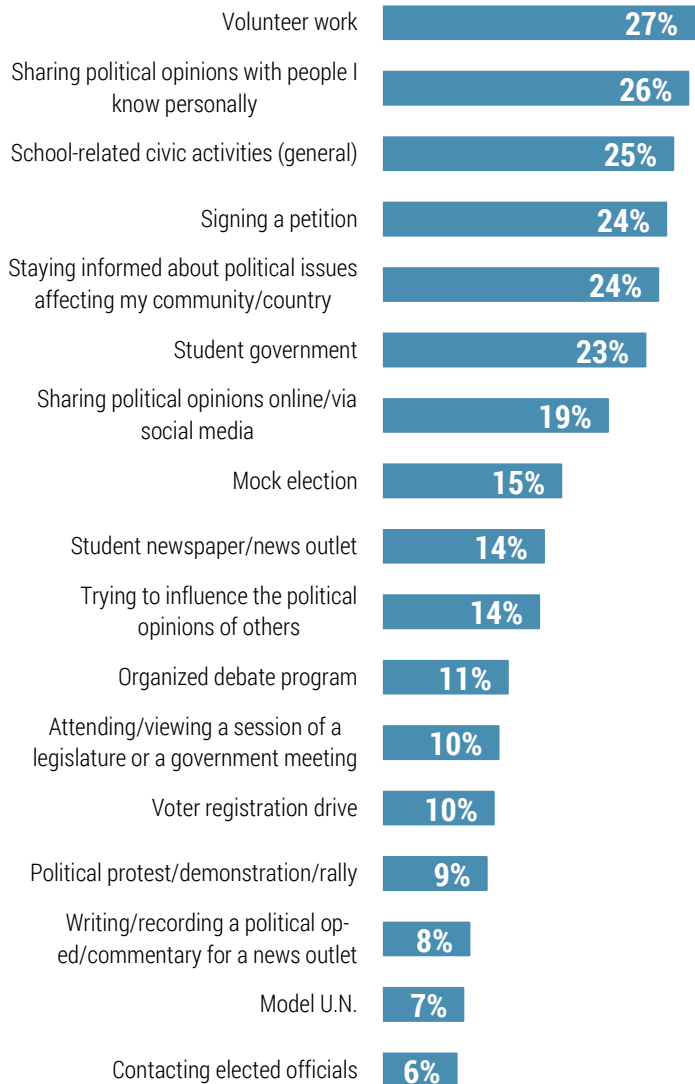
When, if ever, have you taken a separate/standalone civics class for school? Select all that apply.



Civic Activities

Of the 17 civic activities listed on the survey, volunteer work is the most frequently experienced. The top five is rounded out by sharing political opinions with people the respondent knows personally, general school-related civic activities, signing a petition, and staying informed about political issues affecting the community/country.

Which of the following civic activities, if any, have you participated in? Select all that apply.

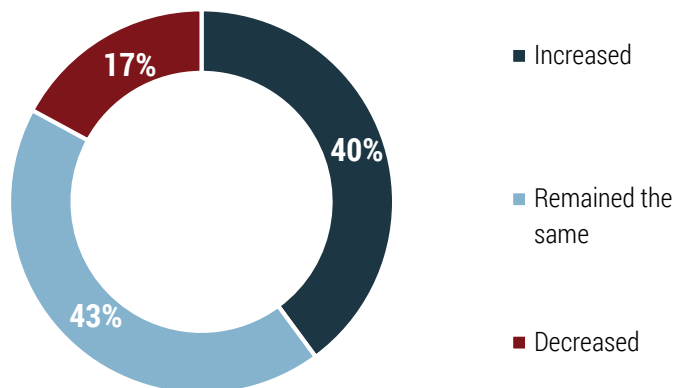


Political Engagement

Levels of Engagement

Forty-percent of survey respondents say their level of political engagement has increased in the past two years. A similar share (43 percent) report that their engagement levels have remained the same. Just 17 percent are less engaged.

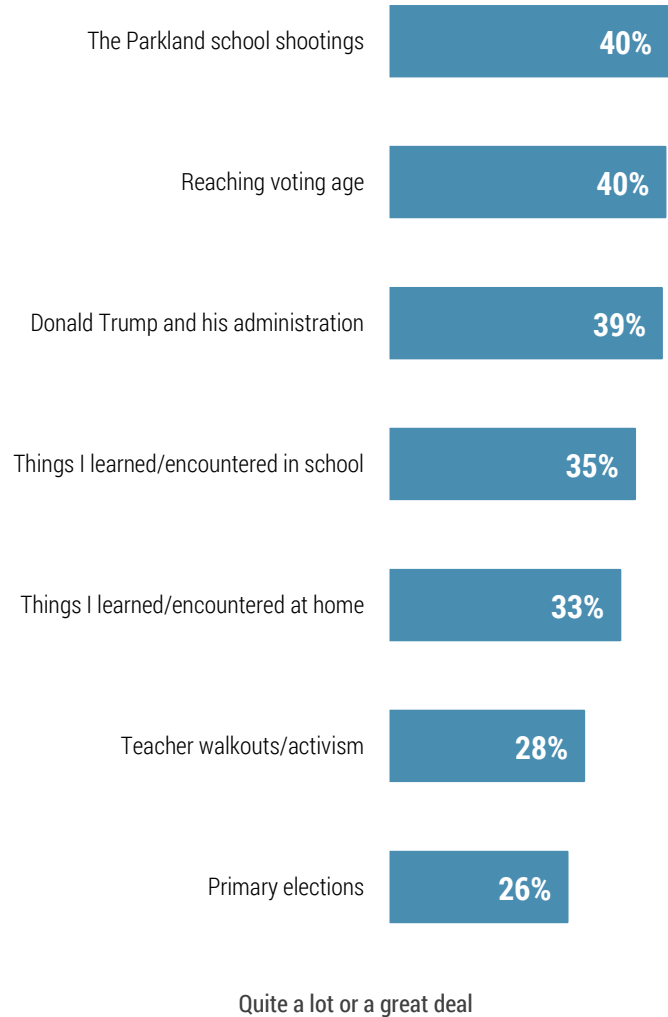
In the past two years, my level of political engagement has:



Influences of Engagement

Nearly half of survey respondents (40 percent) say their level of political engagement has been influenced “a lot” or “a great deal” by reaching voting age and by the Parkland school shootings. Nearly as many (39 percent) have been influenced a great deal or a lot by Donald Trump and his administration.

How much, if at all, have the following influences affected your level of political engagement over the last two years?



Problems Facing the Country

Economic Concerns

Two survey questions asked of the young, first-time voters are modeled on a longstanding Gallup poll that asks U.S. residents their opinion on the most important problem facing the country today.

In September 2018, the economy in general was the top economic concern for participants in the Gallup poll, followed by the federal budget deficit/federal debt, and unemployment/jobs.

By contrast, 18- and 19-year-old first-time voters say that the high cost of living/inflation is their top economic concern, followed by the economy in general, and the gap between rich and poor.

What do you think is the most important economic problem facing the country today?

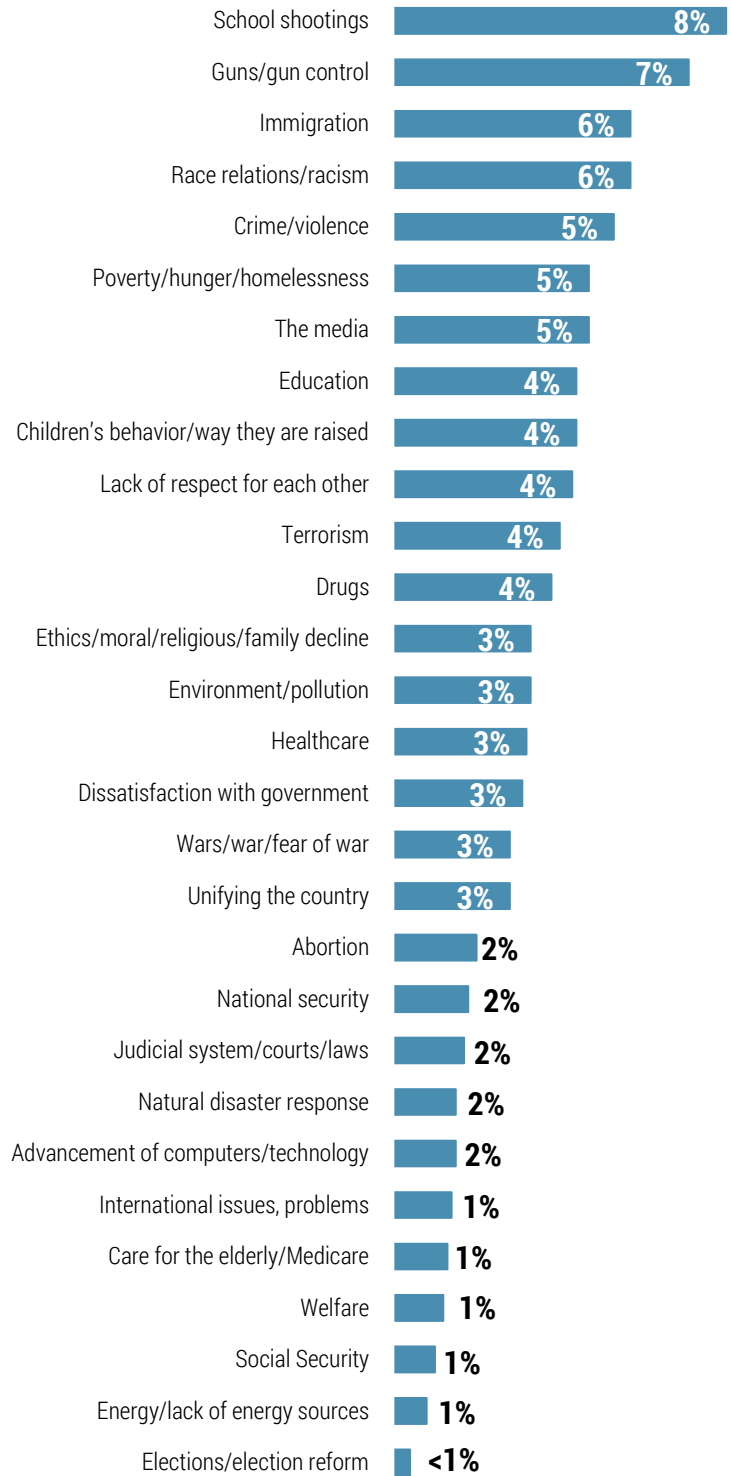


Social/Political Concerns

Dissatisfaction with government/poor leadership is the top non-economic concern among U.S. residents, according to the September 2018 Gallup poll. Immigration is the second biggest concern, followed by race relations and racism.

By contrast, school shootings are the top social/political concern for young, first-time voters. Guns/gun control is number two, followed by immigration.

What do you think is the most important social/political problem facing the country today?

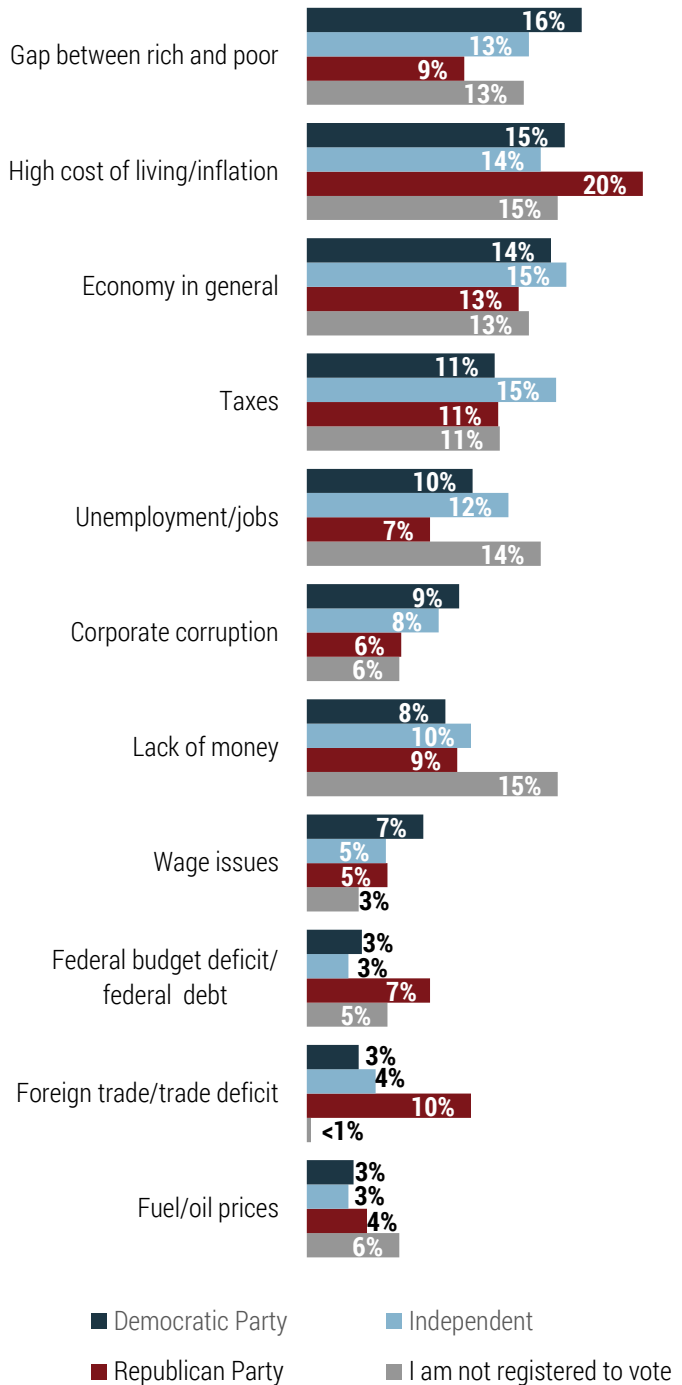


Top Economic Concerns by Party

For young, first-time voters, top concerns vary by political affiliation.

For Democrats, the gap between rich and poor is the top economic concern. Independents are most concerned about the economy in general. And Republicans worry about the high cost of living/inflation. Eighteen and 19-year-olds who say they are not registered to vote are most concerned about a lack of money and the high cost of living/inflation.

What do you think is the most important economic problem facing the country today?

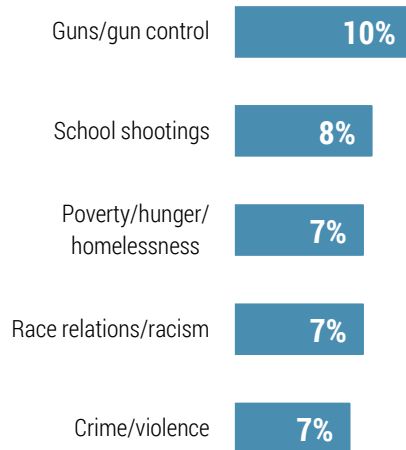


Top Social/Political Concerns by Party

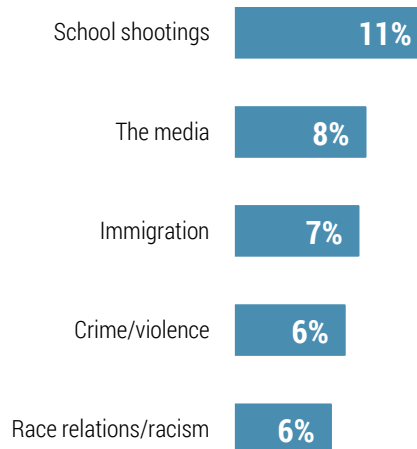
Guns/gun control are the top social/political concern for young Democrats. Independents and Republicans alike are most concerned about another gun-related issue: School shootings. Those not registered to vote are most concerned about children's behavior and the way that they are raised.

What do you think is the most important social/political problem facing the country today?

Democrats



Republicans

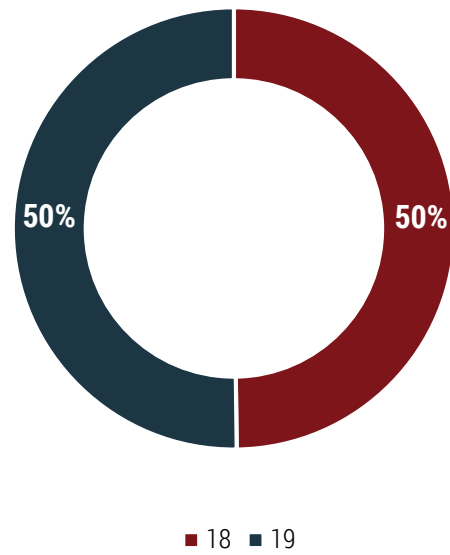


Demographics

Age

Because the population of interest for this poll was youth who had just reached voting age, survey respondents were screened out of the study if they reported being any age other than 18 or 19 years old. Half the survey respondents are 18 and half are 19.

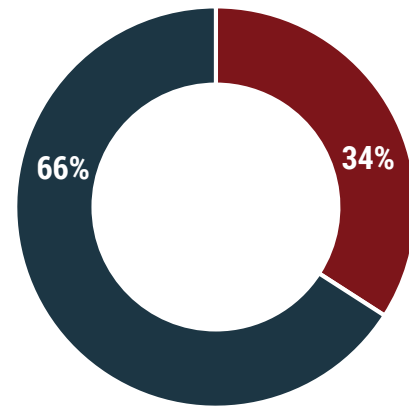
How old are you?



Voting Status

Because the study focused on first-time voters, respondents were also screened out if they reported having previously voted in a general election (Respondents were still counted as first-time voters if they had voted in a primary). Among those included in the survey analysis, just over 1 in 3 had previously voted in a primary election. The remainder had never voted in any election.

What kind of election, if any, have you voted in?

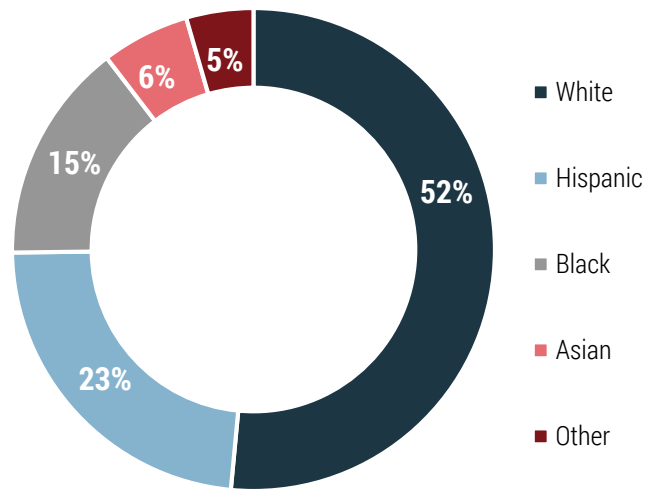


- Primary election
- I have never voted in a general or primary election

Gender and Race

Roughly half of survey respondents are male and half are female. Just over half are white. The survey results were weighted to attain this balance, which is representative of the nationwide population of adolescents.

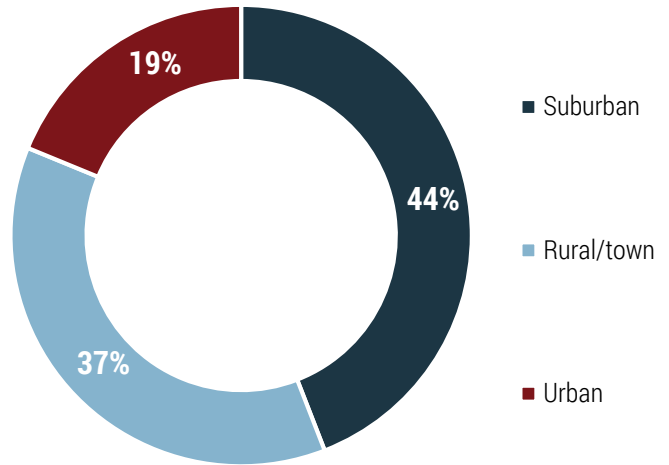
What is your ethnicity/race?



Community

Respondents are most likely to hail from suburban communities. Respondents live in every state, as well as the District of Columbia. More than 1 in 3 report growing up in a predominantly Democratic community. Close to a quarter are from a majority-Republican area. The remainder are from communities where Independents reign, or where no on affiliation dominates.

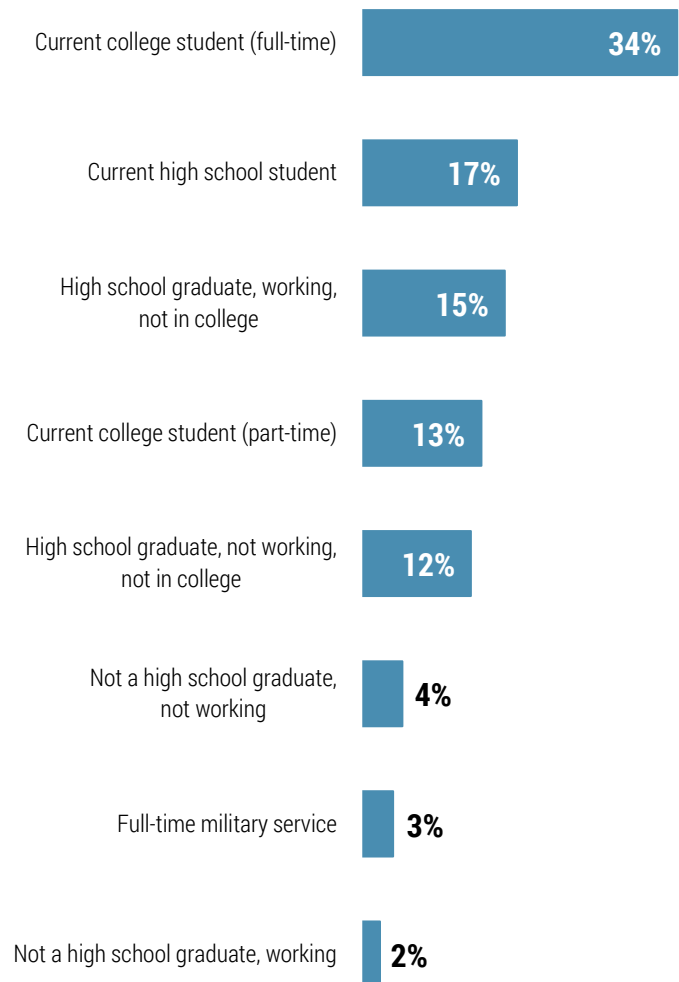
Which of the following best describes the location of the community where you have lived for the longest amount of time?



Education and Job Status

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) are either full or part-time college students. The remainder are either still in high school, have dropped out, or have graduated and aren't in college.

Which of the following best describes your current situation?



Party Affiliation and Ideology

Nearly 1 in 3 respondents report that they are registered Democrats. One in 5 are Republicans and a quarter of the youth are Independents. The remainder are either members of a third party, or have not registered to vote.

More than 1 in 3 respondents identify themselves as liberal or very liberal.

Nearly as many (30 percent) are conservative or very conservative.

The remainder (35 percent) identify as moderates.

Which of the following best describes your registered affiliation?

