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UNICEF USA/Harris Poll HOW YOUNG PEOPLE SEE AMERICA TODAY

October 10, 2025



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of this research is to gain understanding to young people's views on issues important to them, perceptions of their own civic engagement and civic participation.



In this research, we explore the following among people ages 14-22:

- What do they think about the state of the world?
- What are their beliefs, including attitudes on global issues?
- Who and what are influencing young people and their opinions?
- What are their views on the government?
- Are they engaging in politics or politically-adjacent behaviors?
- What are the barriers to engagement?

METHODOLOGY AND REPORT NOTES



Audience

n = 3,253 young people



Field Dates

June 23–July 15, 2025



Mode

Online survey, avg. 15-minutes



Qualification Criteria

Resides in the U.S.

Aged 14–22, with parental consent if ages 14–17

In Tables and Charts:

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighting and/or computer rounding.

An asterisk (*) signifies a value of less than one-half percent and a dash (-) represents a value of zero.

Color Labeling:

Dark/Light Blue is used throughout the report to show results by **Total**

Dark/Light Orange is used throughout the report to show results for **Teens 14–17**

Dark/Light Green is used throughout the report to show results by **Young adults 18–22**

Significance Indicators:

Significant subgroup differences at the 95% confidence level are indicated using lettering.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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DESPITE FEELINGS OF DISCONNECTION, YOUTH WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Takeaways from the Survey

- A year after our inaugural poll, a majority of youth still see a country on the wrong track, guided by leaders they see as ignoring their core concerns.
- *The majority of young people continue to think the country is on the wrong track, however young people are more likely to express positivity and optimism toward the state of politics and the country compared to 2024.*
- Despite mild improvements, most young people feel shut out of politics and civic life, and the disconnect is especially strong for youth in rural and suburban communities.
- *Young people are increasingly interested in politics at various levels.*
- For youth, economic and basic needs issues are top of mind. Compared to 2024, their interest in immigration has increased.
- *90% of young people are asking for more engagement to share thier ideas and be part of community solutions.*
- *Young people are motivated by impact to their community and their ability to make a difference.*
- *Young people are globally focused and want policymakers to address issues domestically.*

DETAILED FINDINGS



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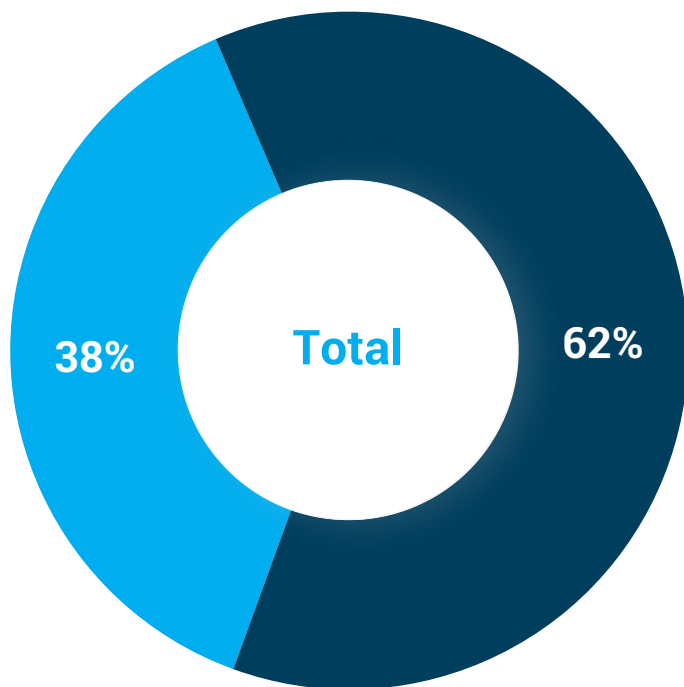
YOUNG PEOPLE'S **MACRO** **ATTITUDES**



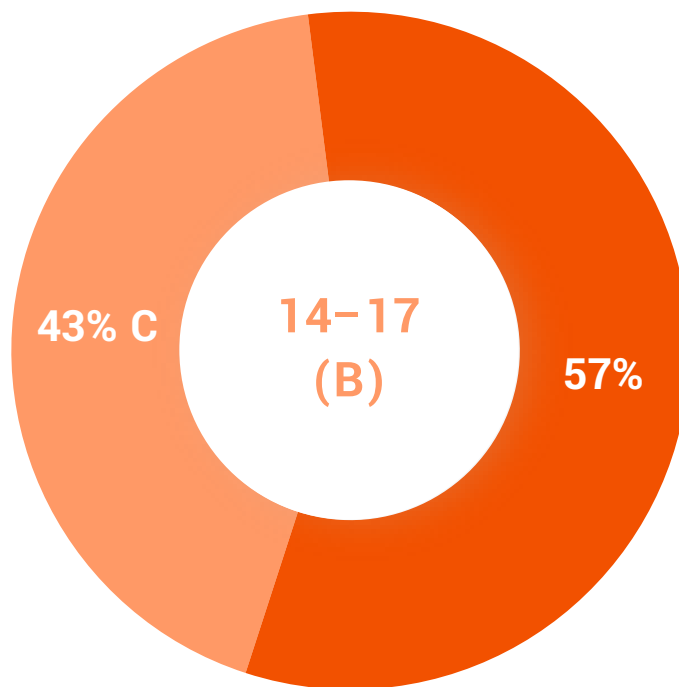
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THE STRONG MAJORITY CONTINUE TO HAVE A POOR OUTLOOK ON THE PATH OF COUNTRY

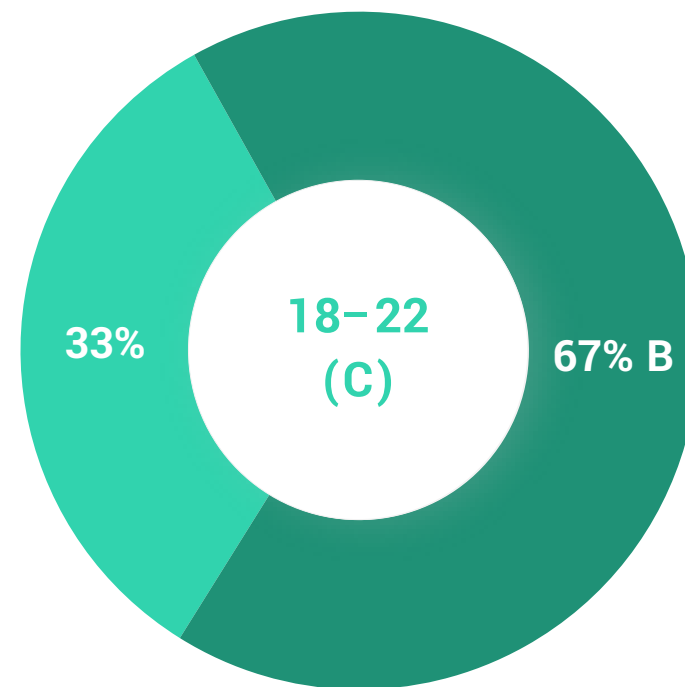
Would You Say The Country Is Currently On The Right Track Or The Wrong Track?



■ Right track ■ Wrong track



■ Right track ■ Wrong track

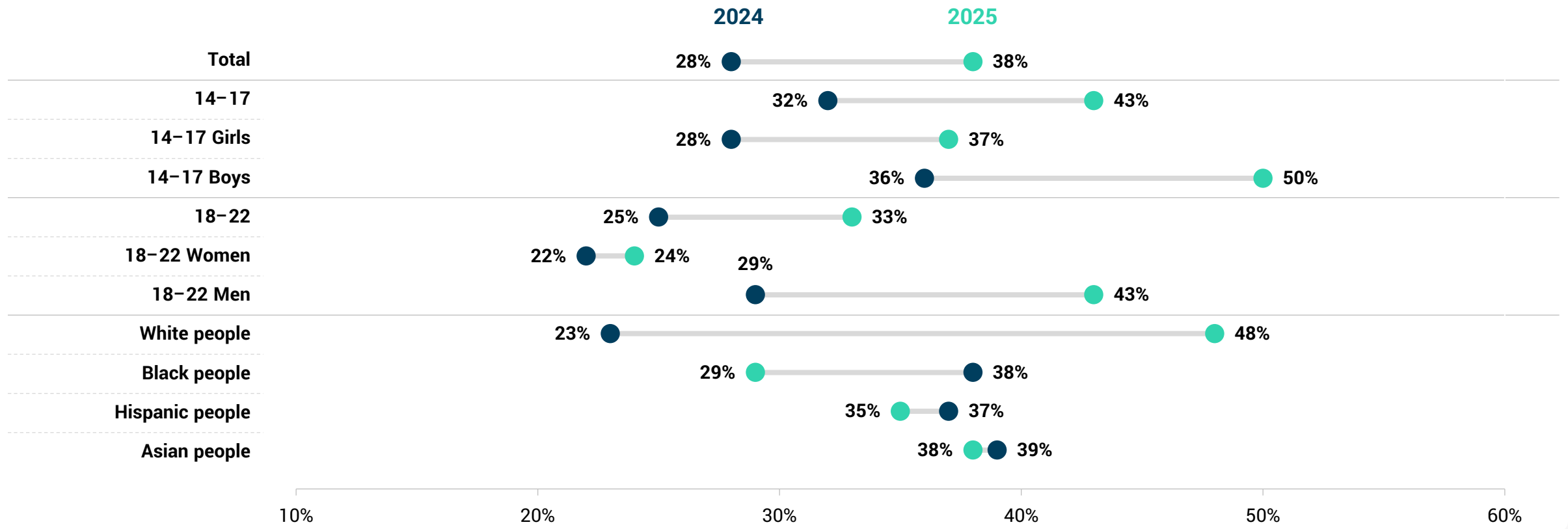


■ Right track ■ Wrong track

INCREASED OPTIMISM OVER LAST YEAR IS LARGELY DRIVEN BY BOYS, MEN, AND WHITE PEOPLE

Would You Say The Country Is Currently On The Right Track Or The Wrong Track?

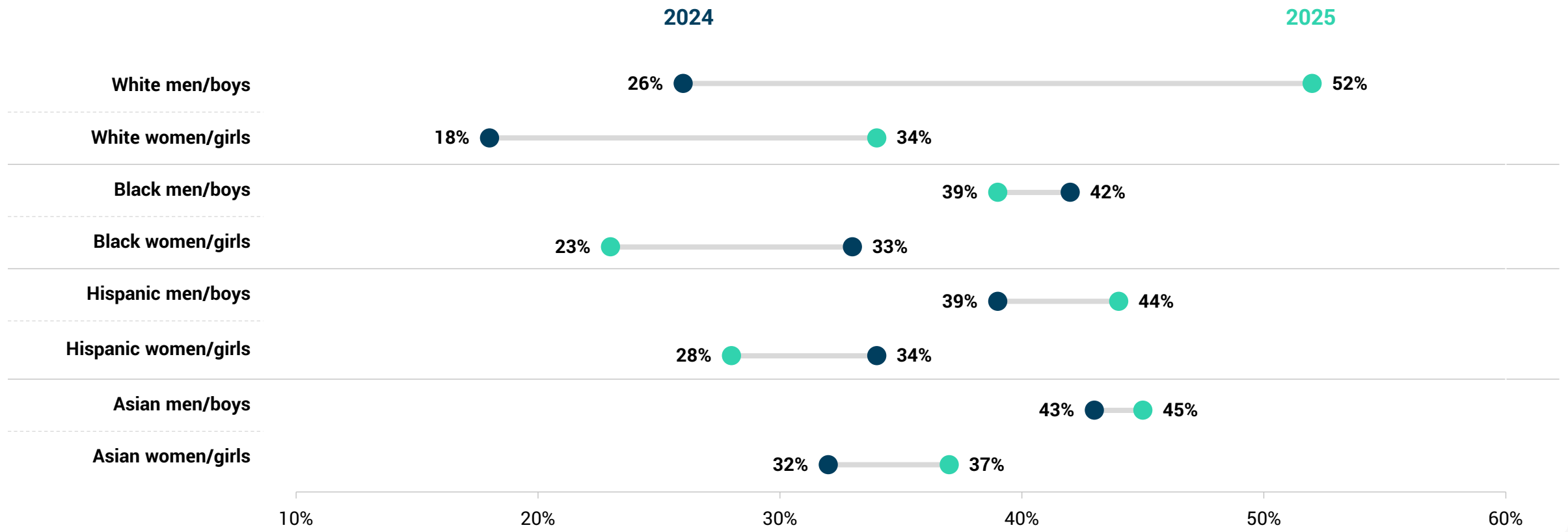
% Right Track, Trended by Subgroups



WHITE YOUTH, REGARDLESS OF GENDER, ARE FAR MORE POSITIVE ABOUT THE COUNTRY'S TRAJECTORY COMPARED TO LAST YEAR

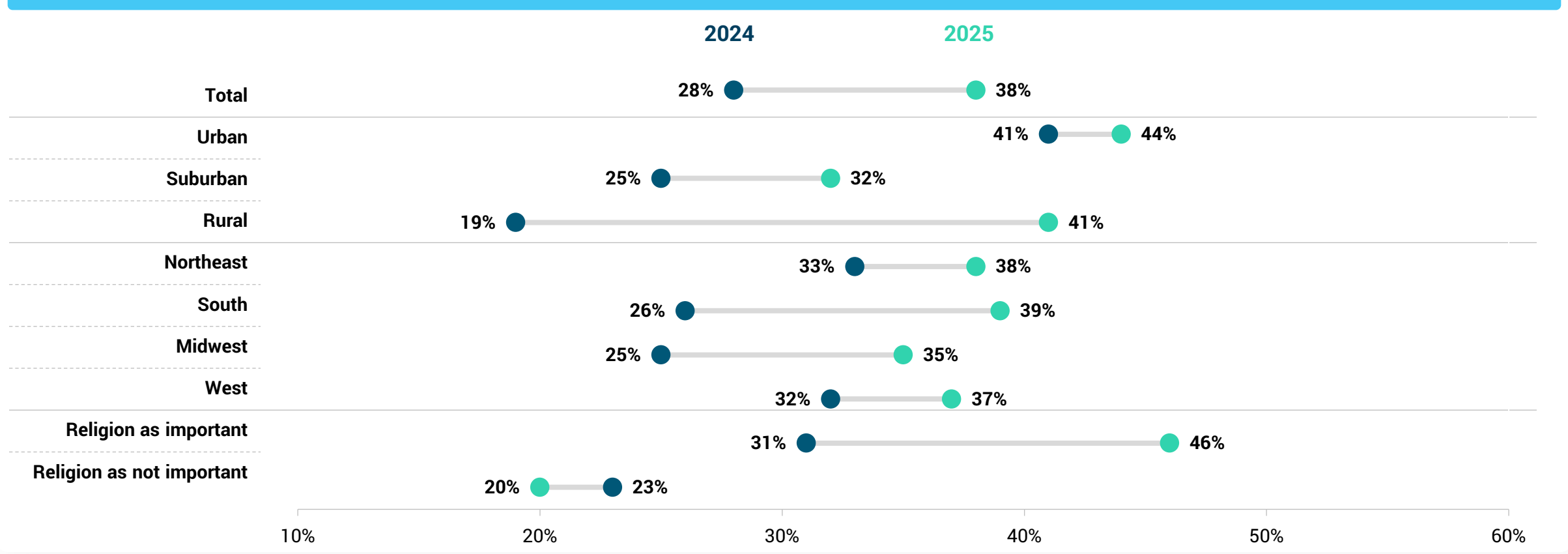
Would You Say The Country Is Currently On The Right Track Or The Wrong Track?

% Right Track, Trended by Race and Gender



RURALITY AND RELIGION ALSO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN INCREASED OUTLOOK

Would You Say The Country Is Currently On The Right Track Or The Wrong Track?
% Right Track, Trended by Subgroups



YOUNG PEOPLE'S BELIEFS & ATTITUDES

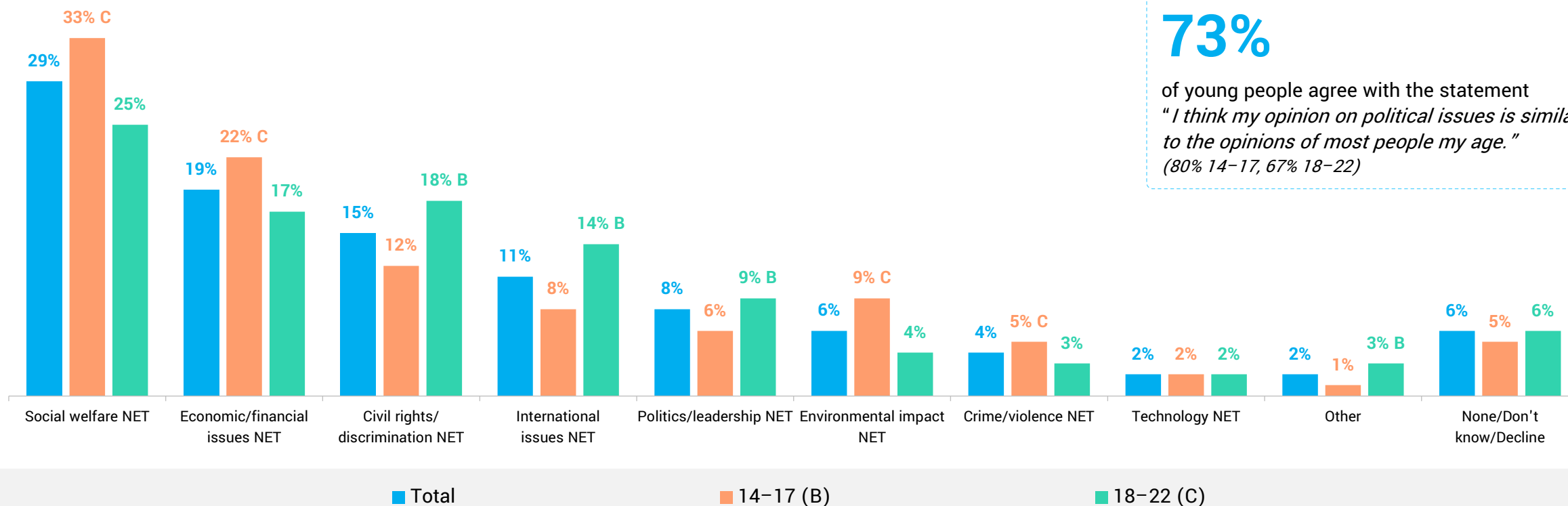


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SOCIAL WELFARE ISSUES ARE TOP OF MIND, FOLLOWED BY ECONOMIC ISSUES

If You Were to Pick One Political or Social Issue that Matters Most to You Right Now, What Would that Issue be?

Unaided

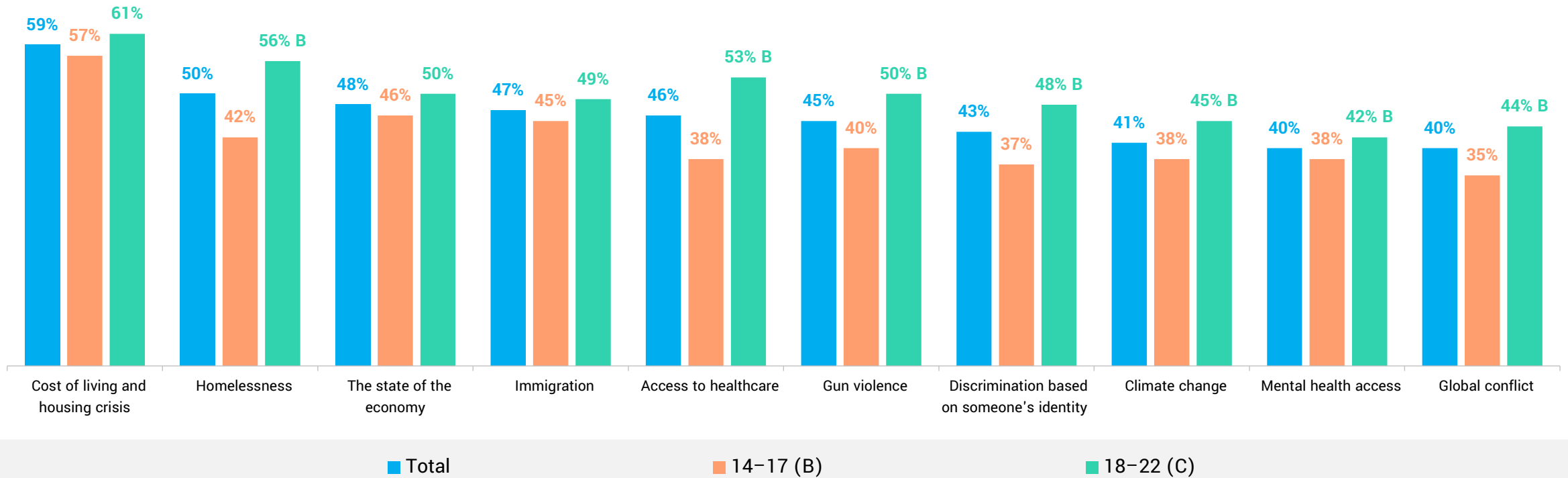


73%

of young people agree with the statement
"I think my opinion on political issues is similar
to the opinions of most people my age."
(80% 14-17, 67% 18-22)

SPECIFICALLY, COST OF LIVING AND RELATED ISSUES RISE TO THE TOP OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S MINDS

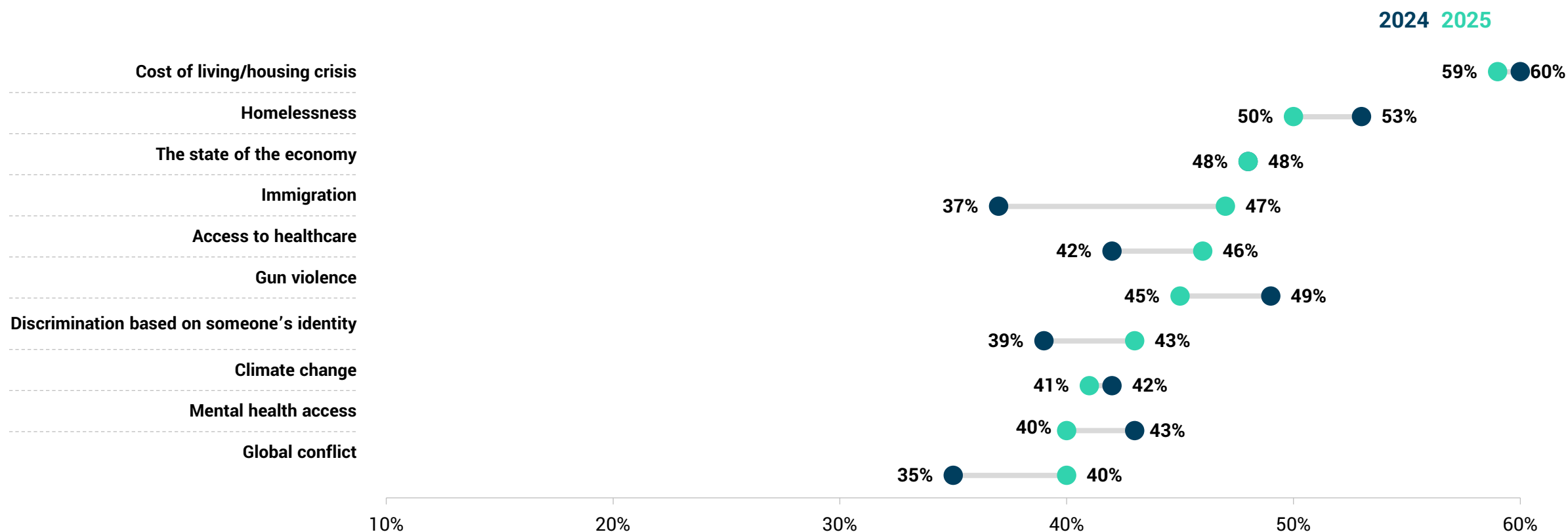
Top 10 Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today



YET IMMIGRATION SHOWS THE GREATEST JUMP IN PERCEPTION OF IMPORTANCE OVER LAST YEAR

Top 10 Most Important Issues Facing The Country Today

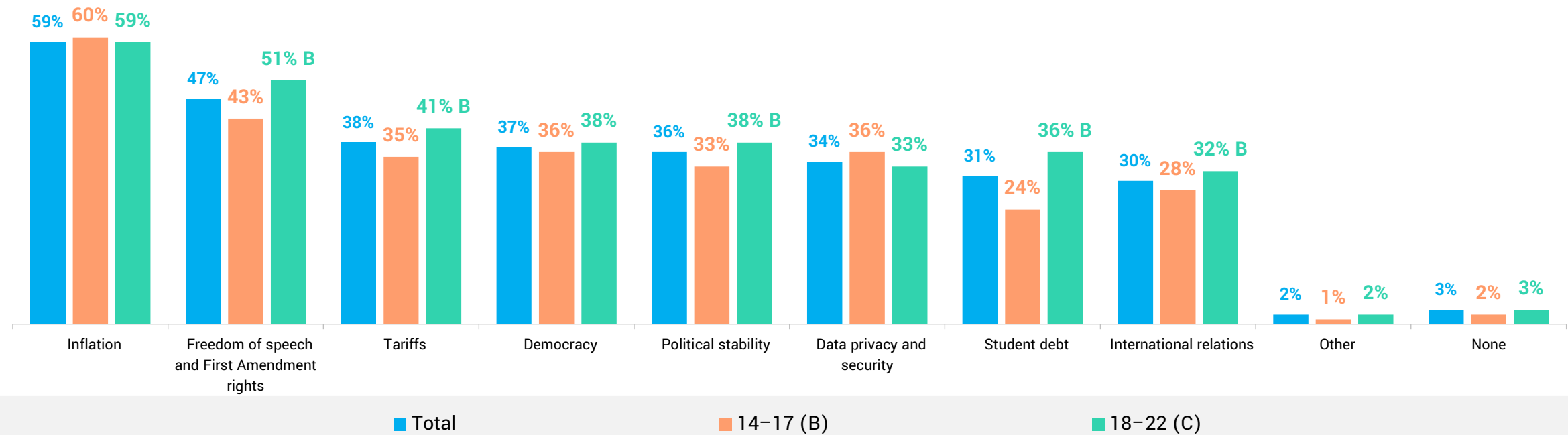
Trended by Total



AMONG OTHER HOT-BUTTON ISSUES, INFLATION IS TOP OF MIND

Continued coverage of freedom of speech on college campuses translates to being top of mind among traditionally college-aged youth

Thinking About Different Issues Facing The Country, Which Are The Most Important?



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MOST FOCUSED ON DOMESTIC ISSUES

However, most understand that international issues have an impact at home

I Am More Focused On Political Issues...

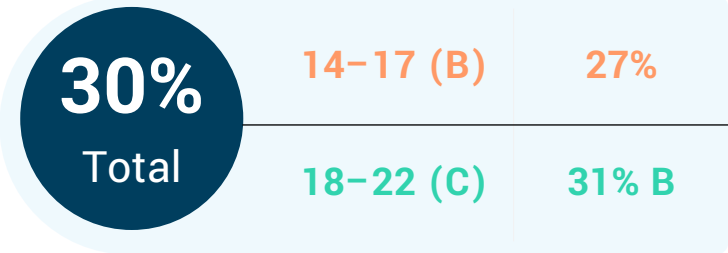
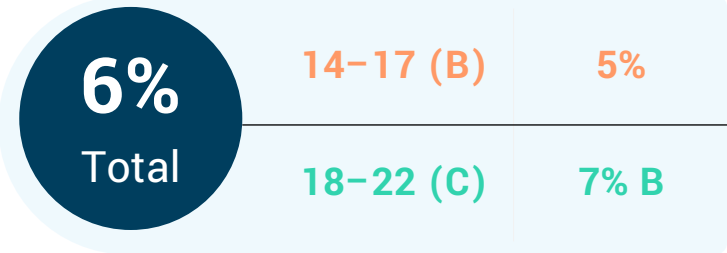
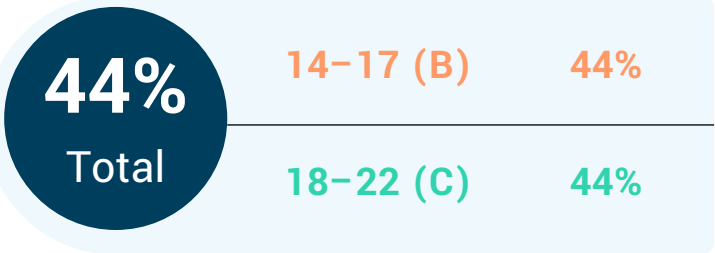
In the U.S.

or

In Other Countries/Parts of the Part

or

Both, Equally



73%

of young people agree with the statement,
"I think what happens in other countries has or will have an impact on my life."
(76% 14-17, 71% 18-22)



AND MOST WANT TO SEE LAWMAKERS PRIORITIZE OUR NATIONAL ISSUES

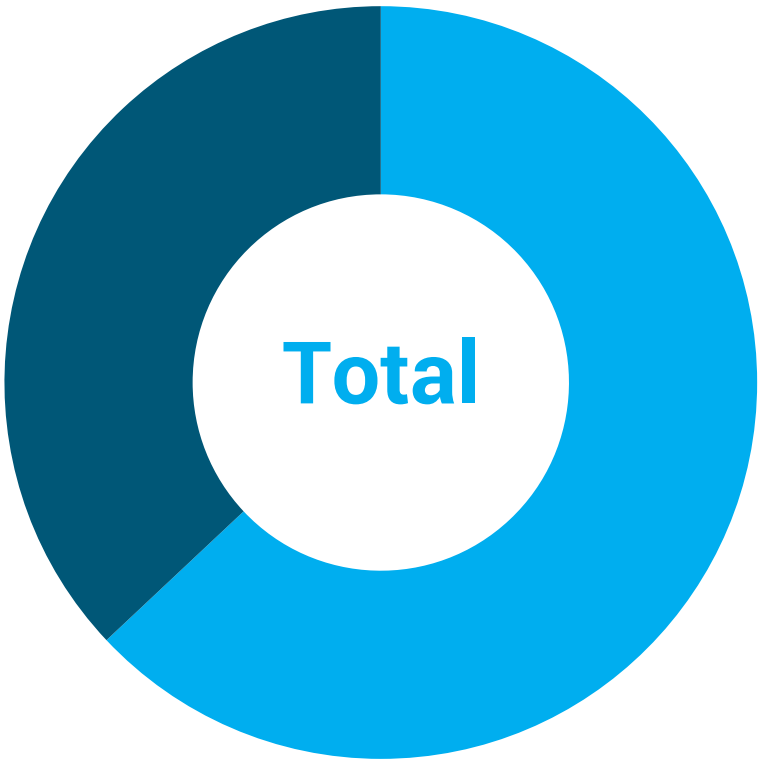
Which of the Following Best Describes Your View?

37%

It's important to me that lawmakers focus on political and social issues around the world and in the U.S. equally.

14-17 (B) 33%

18-22 (C) 40% B



63%

It's important to me that lawmakers focus on political and social issues in the U.S. before issues in other countries.

14-17 (B) 67% C

18-22 (C) 60%

2025 POLITICAL INFLUENCES

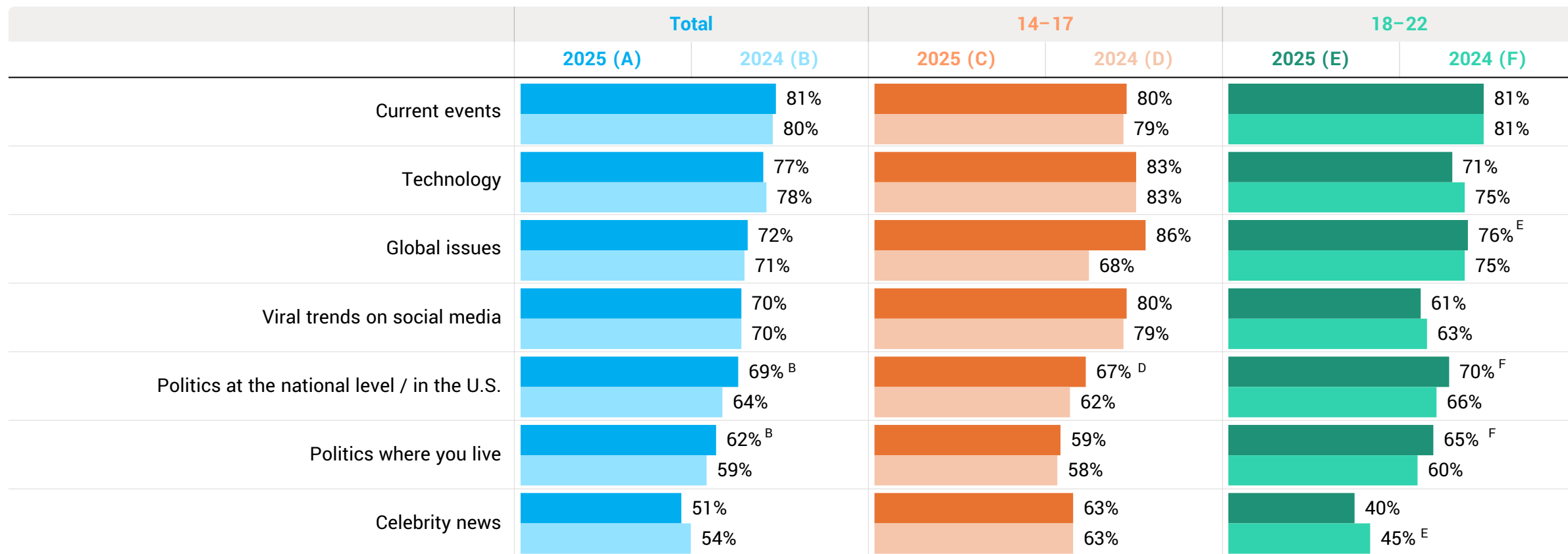


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YOUNG PEOPLE ARE INCREASINGLY INTERESTED IN POLITICS AT VARIOUS LEVELS

How Interested are You in the Following?

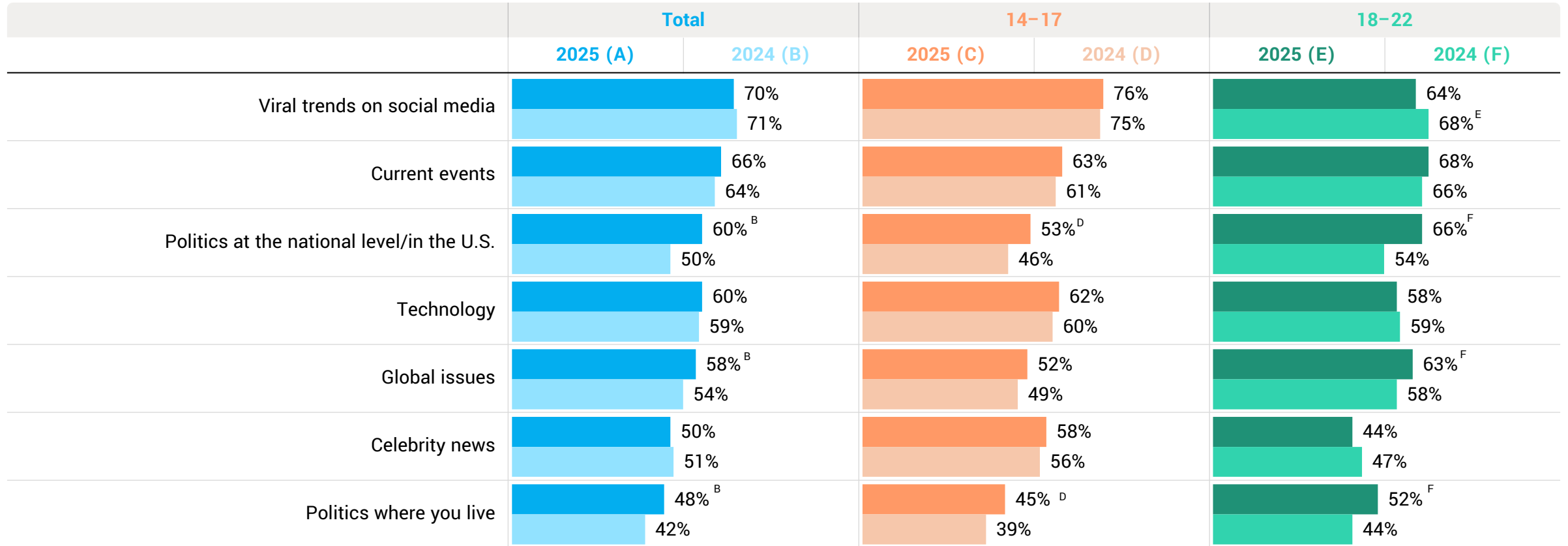
% Interested



AND HAVE INCREASED THEIR CONSUMPTION OF POLITICAL NEWS AT ALL LEVELS

How Often Do You Read, Watch, Or Listen To Something About... ?

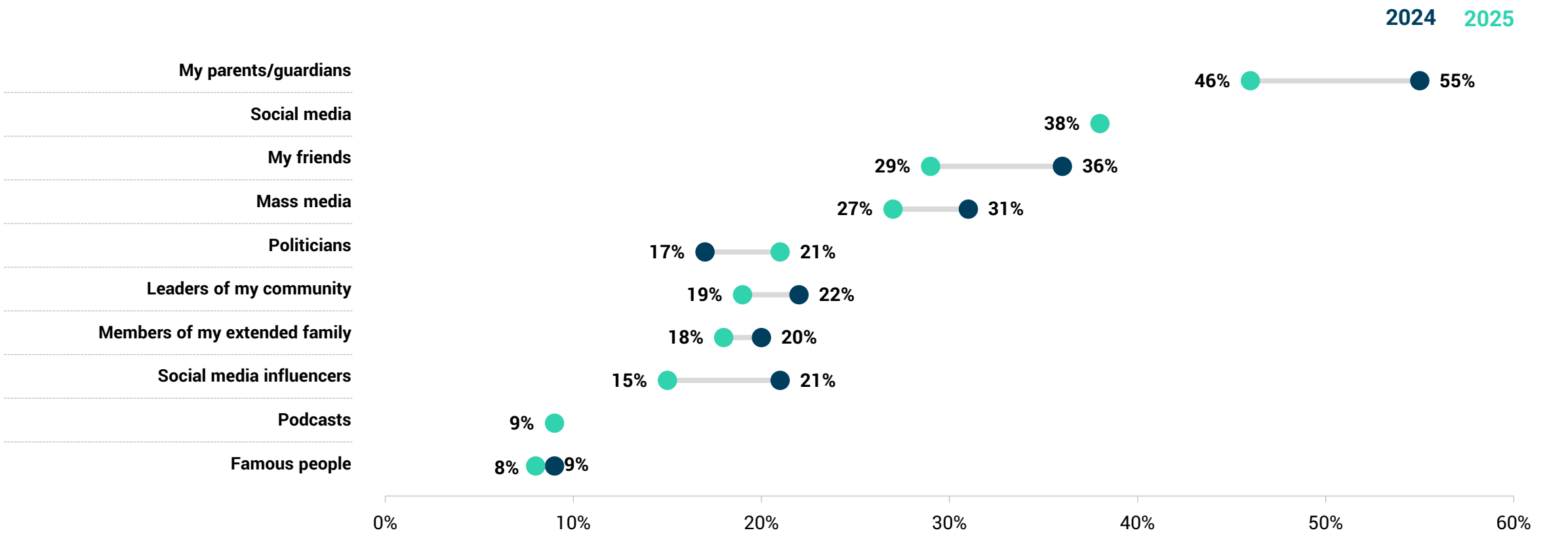
% Several times a week/About once a day/Several times a day



THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS HAS DECREASED

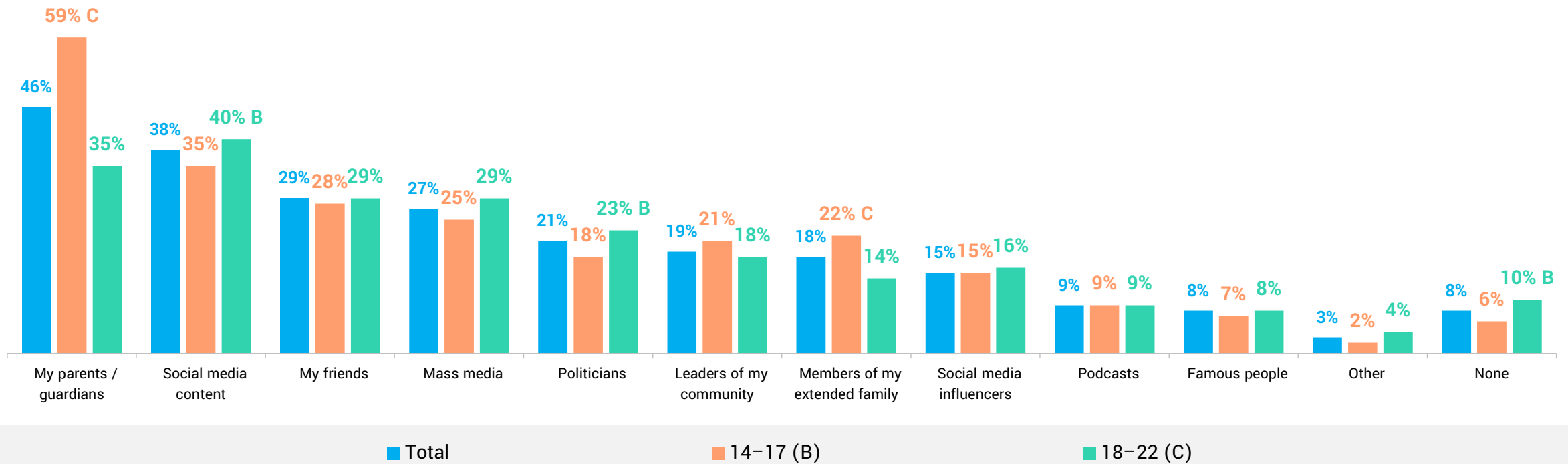
Who Or What Influences Your Opinions On Political And Social Issues The Most?

Trended by Total



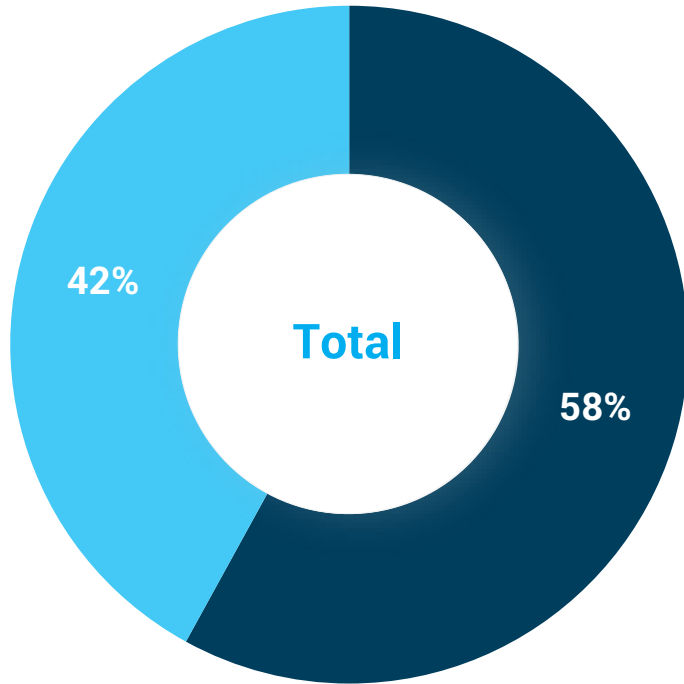
BUT THEY REMAIN A KEY INFLUENCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S POV, ESPECIALLY TEENS

Who Or What Influences Your Opinions On Political And Social Issues The Most?

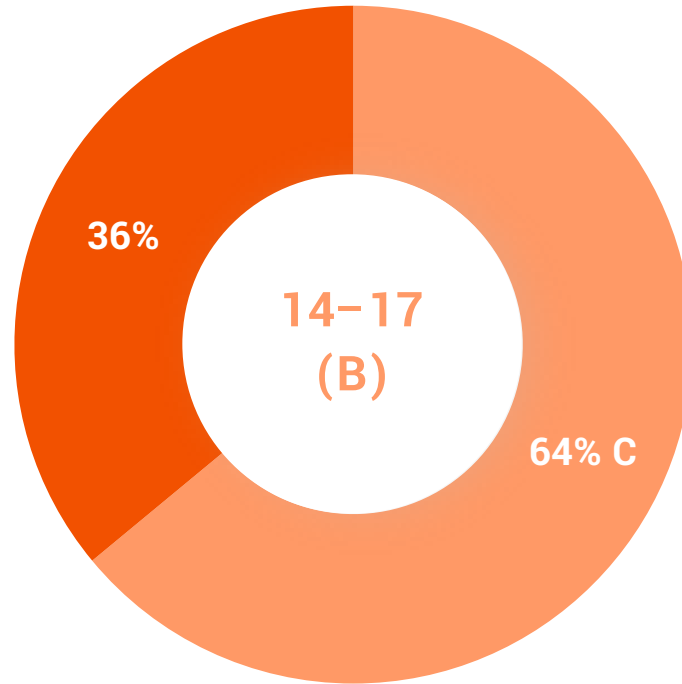


IN FACT, A MAJORITY TALK TO THEIR ADULTS ABOUT VOTING

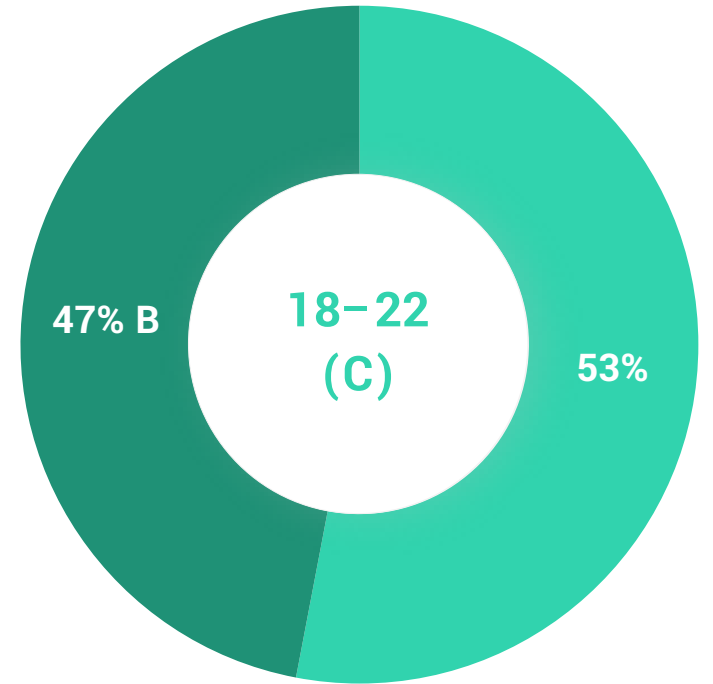
Do You Talk With Adults In Your Life About How You Think They Should Vote?



■ Yes ■ No

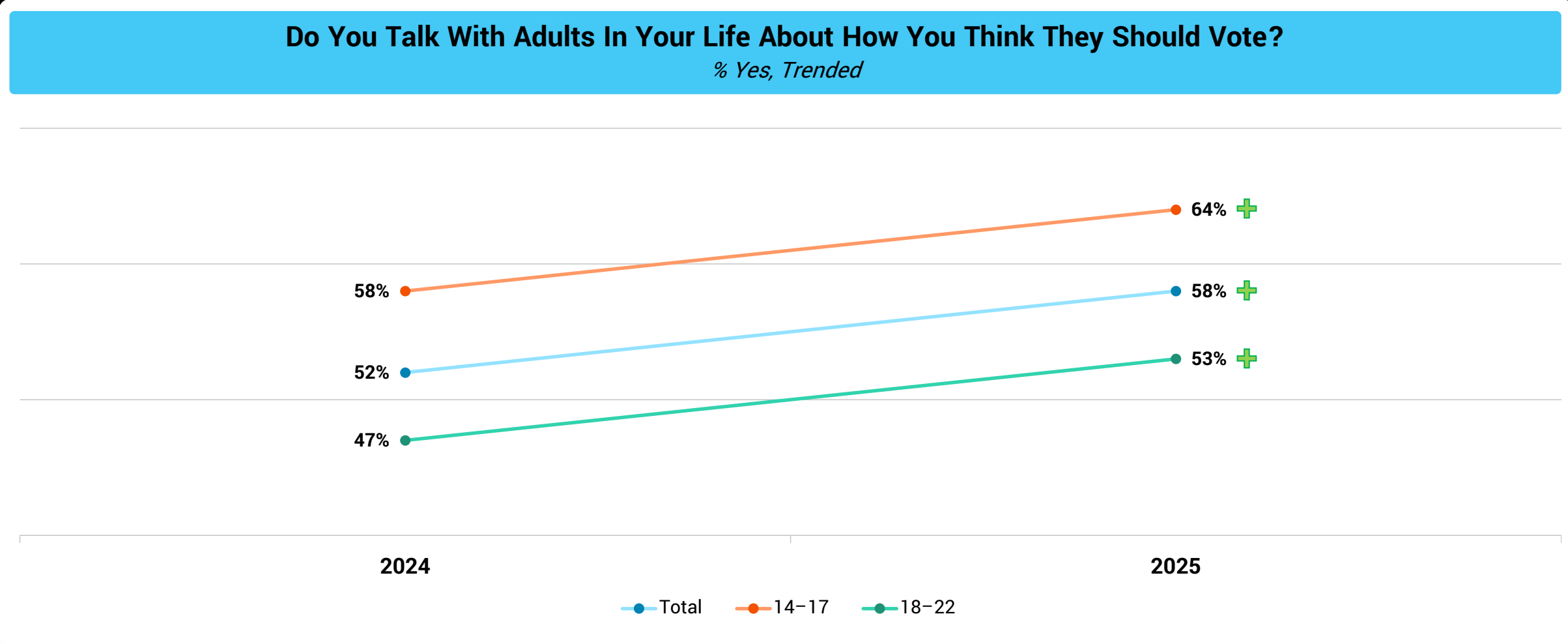


■ Yes ■ No



■ Yes ■ No

AND THESE CONVERSATIONS ARE ON THE RISE AMONG ALL YOUNG PEOPLE



ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT PERCEPTIONS



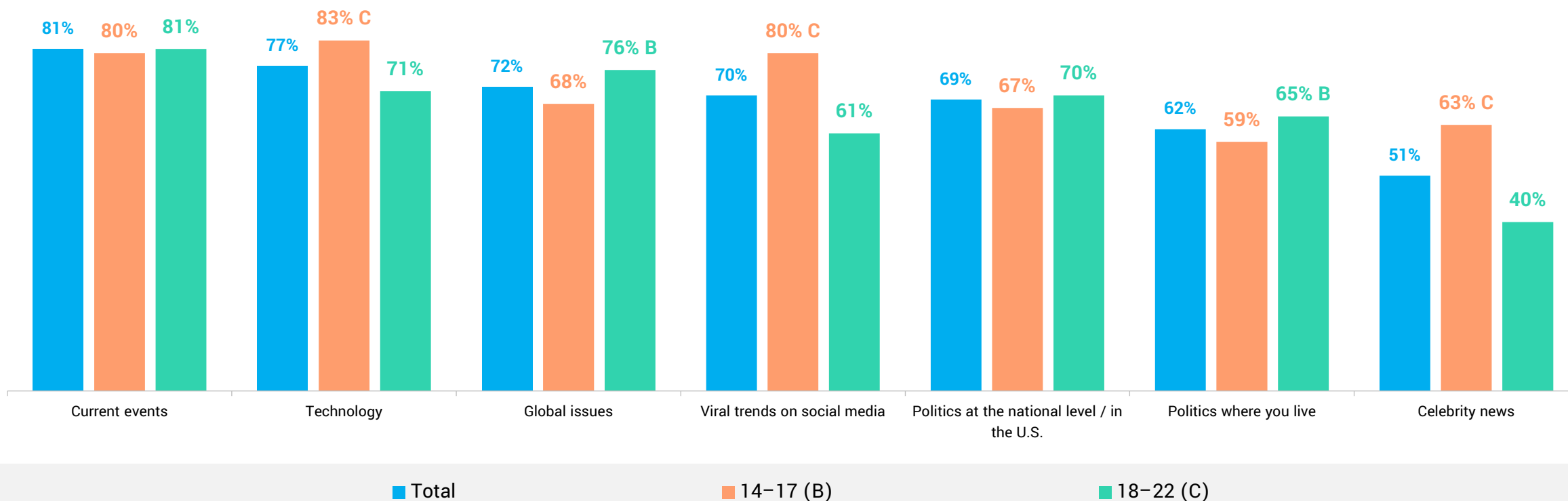
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MOST YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A HIGH INTEREST IN POLITICS

Global issues also top the list of areas young people are most interested in – for young adults, in particular

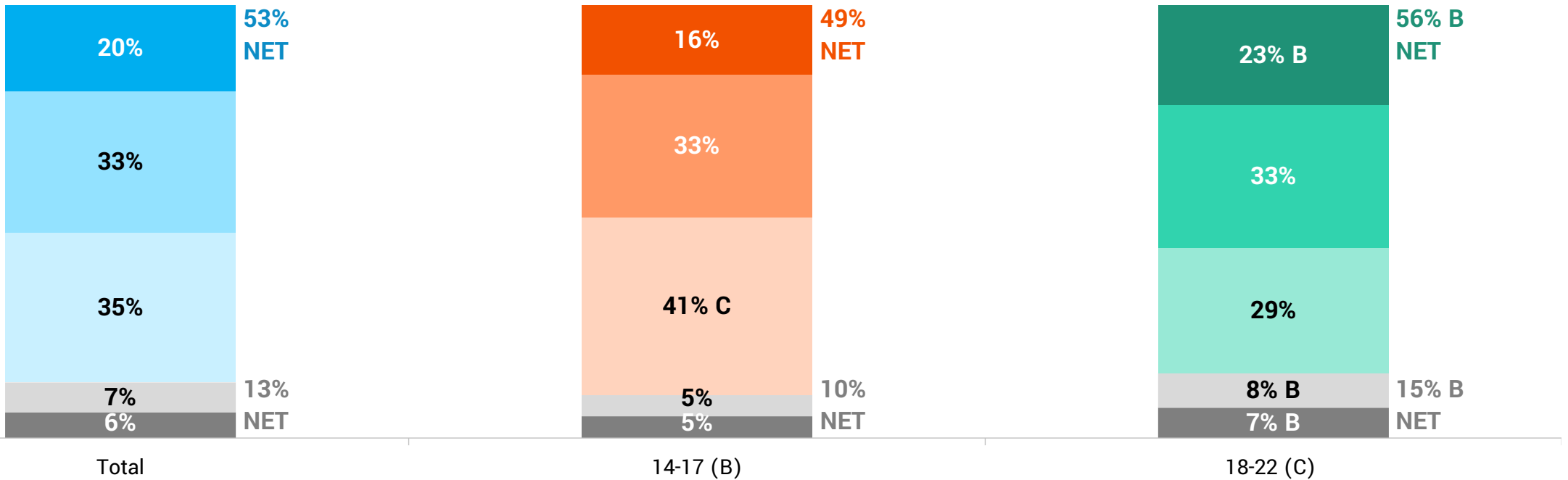
How Interested Are You In The Following?

% Interested



CURRENT EVENTS ENCOURAGE HALF TO BE MORE POLITICALLY INVOLVED

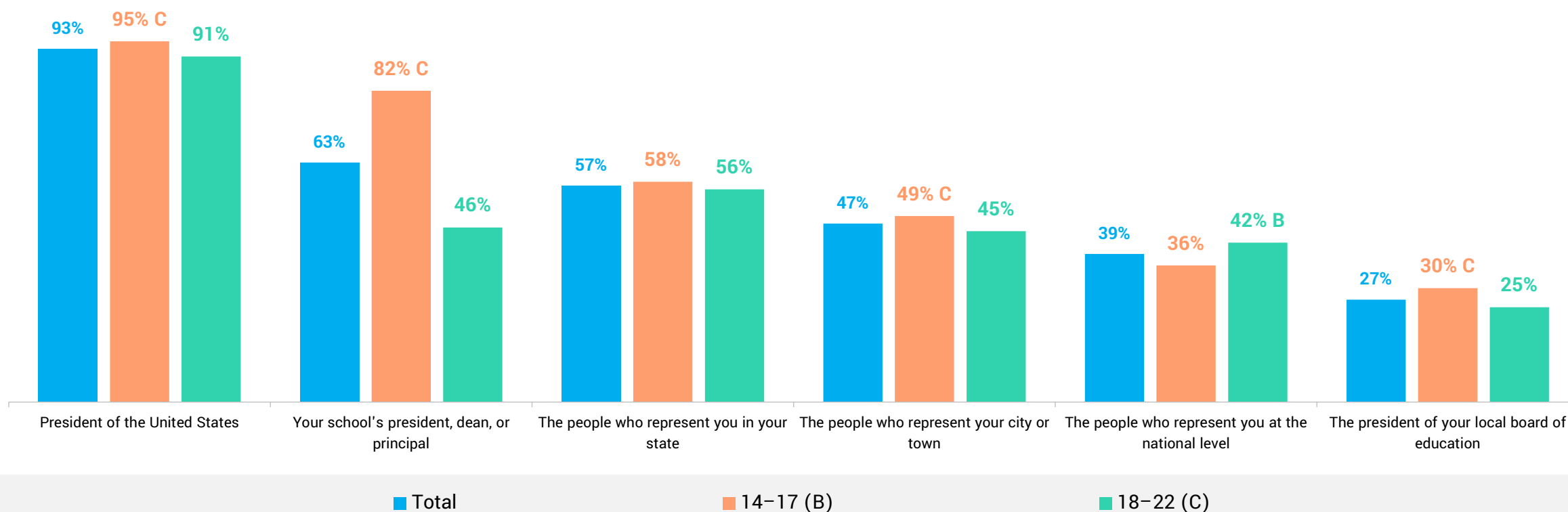
Have Current Events Encouraged You To Be More Or Less Politically Involved?



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FAR MORE FAMILIAR WITH FEDERAL LEADERSHIP THAN LEADERS IN THEIR DIRECT COMMUNITY

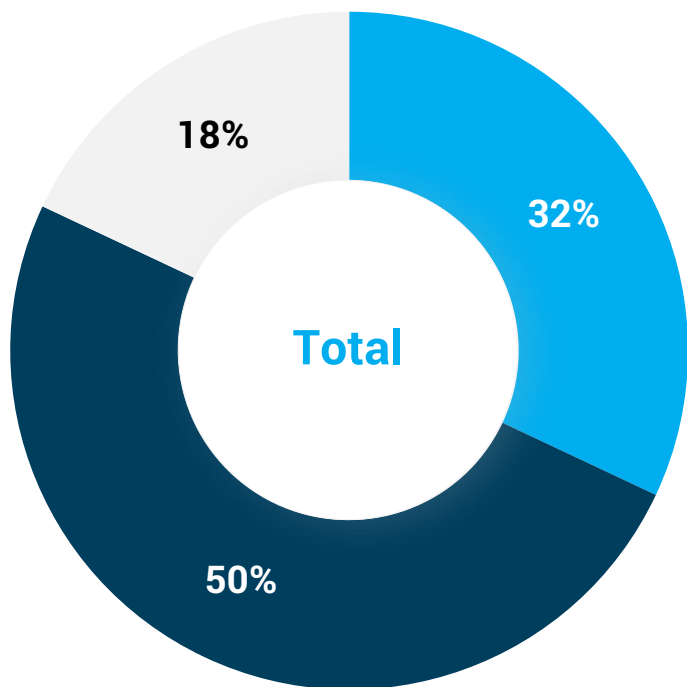
Do You Know Who Your Elected Or Appointed Officials Are?

% Yes

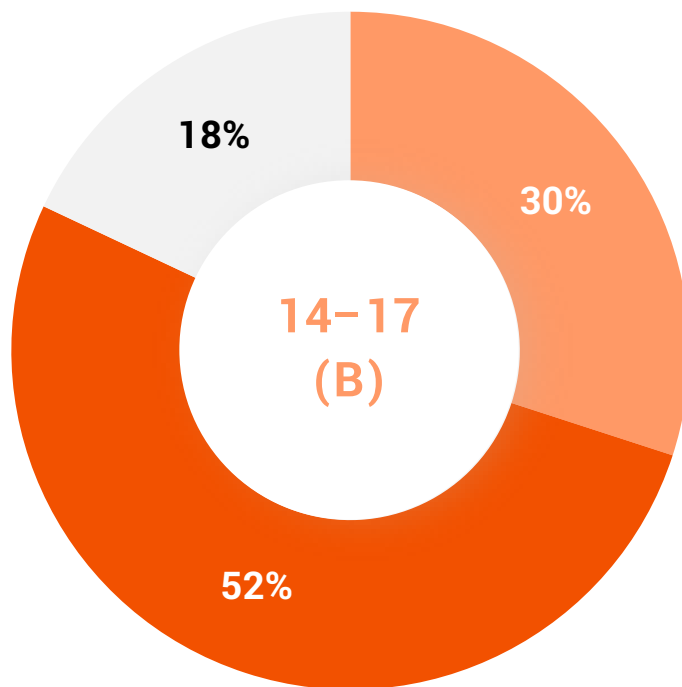


WHILE YOUNG PEOPLE INCREASE THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS, HALF FEEL EXCLUDED FROM THE POLITICAL PROCESS

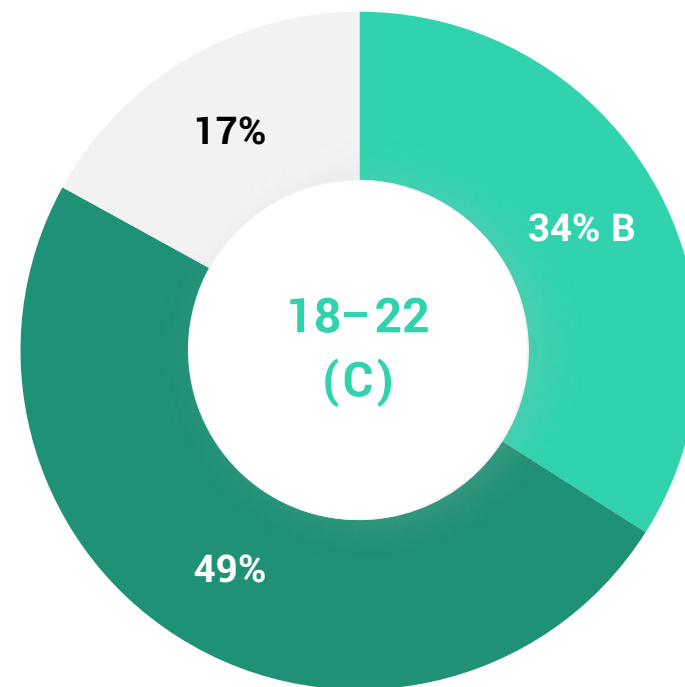
Overall, Do You Feel Included In The Political Process In The U.S.?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure

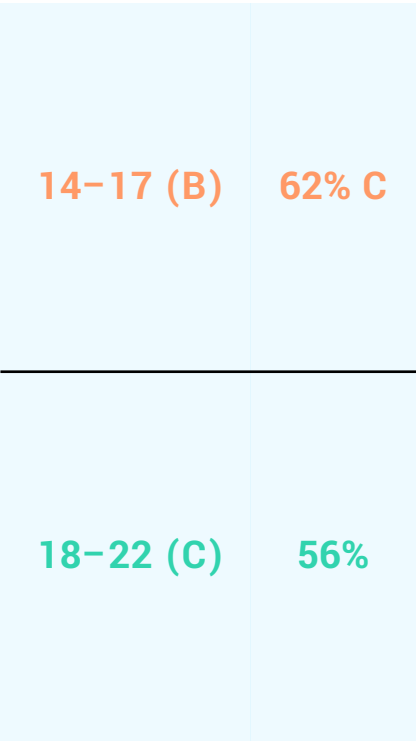
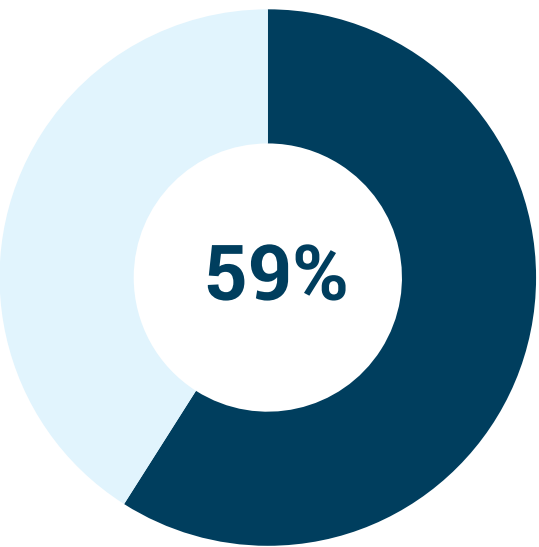


■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure

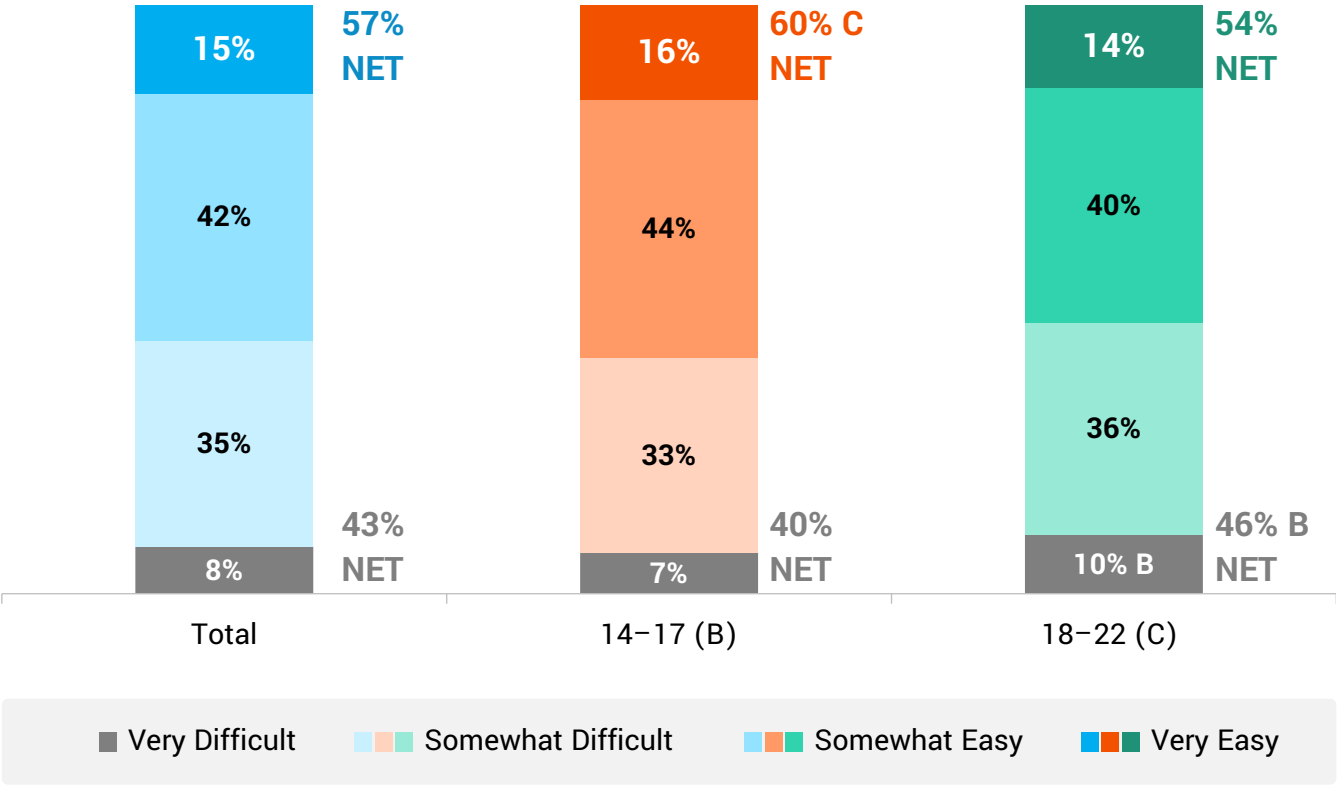
MANY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ENGAGE IN IMPORTANT ISSUES

And the majority find themselves less empowered to be politically involved compared to previous generations

“Young people now are less empowered to be politically involved than previous generations.”
% Agree

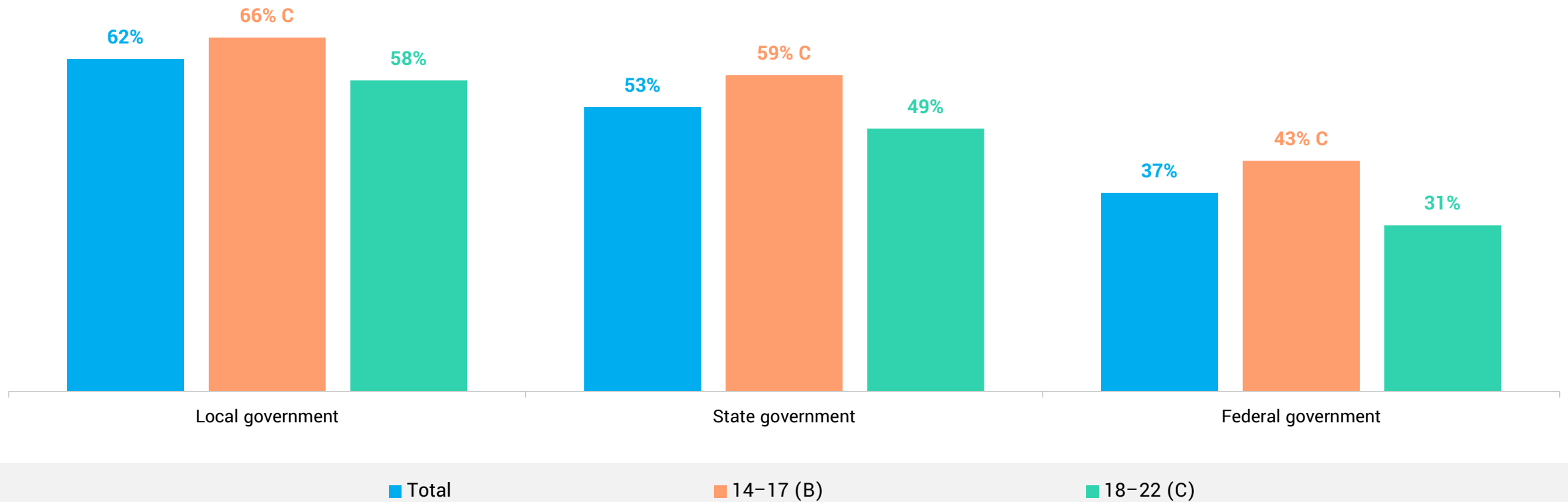


How Easy Or Difficult Is It To Be Engaged In The Issues That Matter To You?



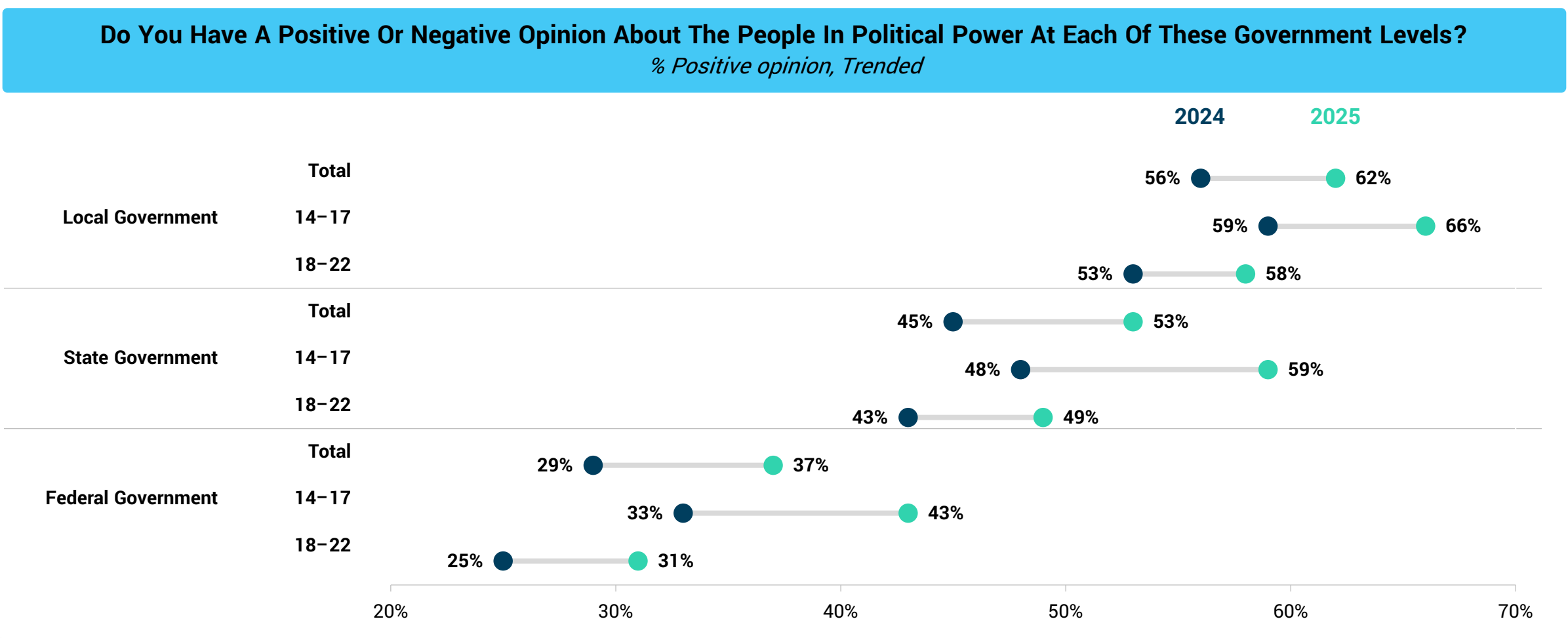
FEW HAVE A POSITIVE PERCEPTION OF THOSE IN POWER AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Do You Have A Positive Or Negative Opinion About The People In Political Power At Each Of These Government Levels?
% Positive opinion



LOCAL LEADERS CONTINUE TO BOAST MORE POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS

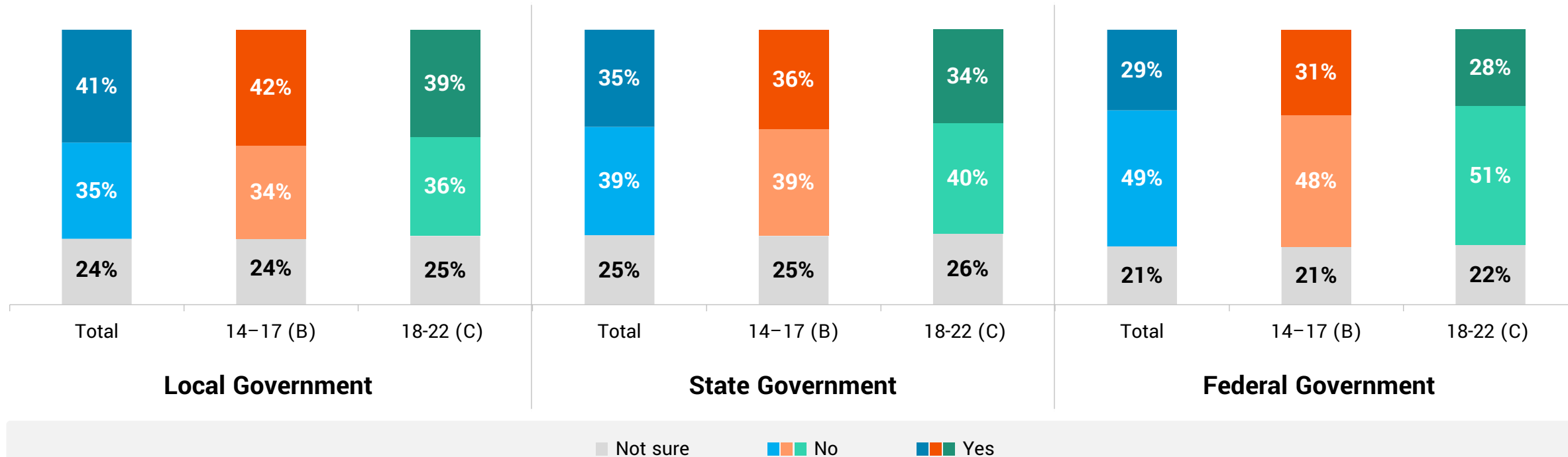
Relative to young adults, teens have a high opinion of those in power at all levels of government



YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL THEIR CONCERNS ARE IGNORED BY OFFICIALS IN THEIR DECISION MAKING

Young people have the least faith in federal officials

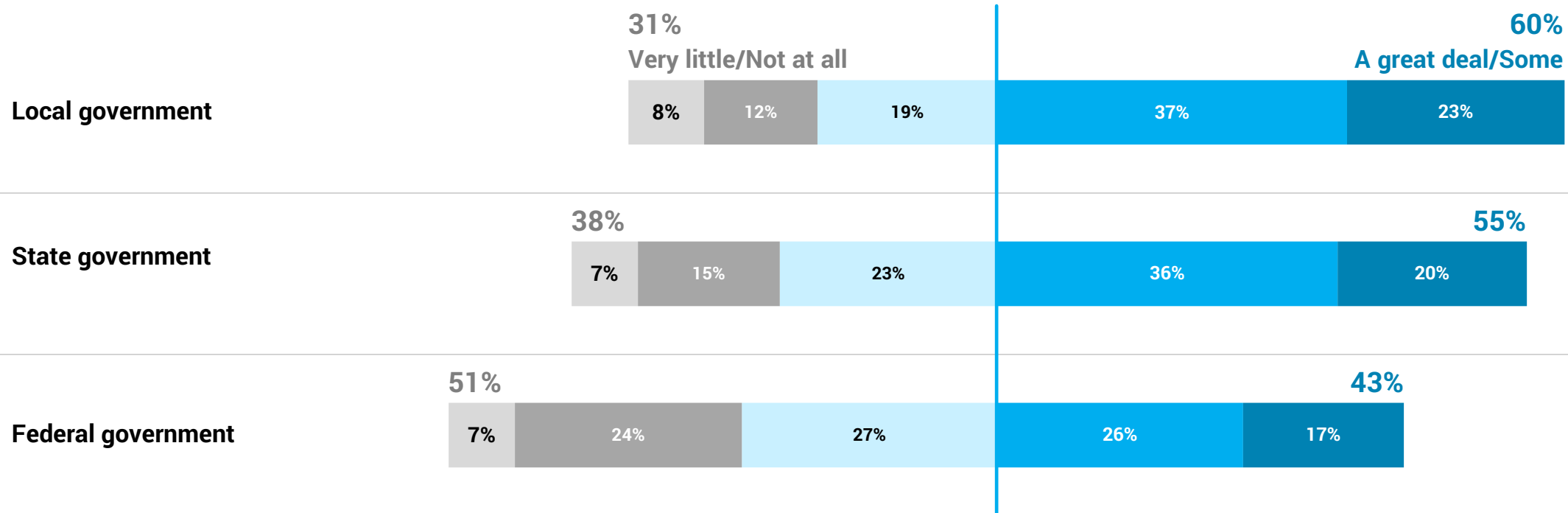
Do Leaders In The Different Levels Of Government Think About Issues That Impact Young People When Making Decisions?



YOUNG PEOPLE DO NOT TRUST THAT LEADERS AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL ARE INVESTED IN THEIR FUTURE

To What Degree Do You Think Leaders In The Different Levels Of Government Are Invested In Your Future?

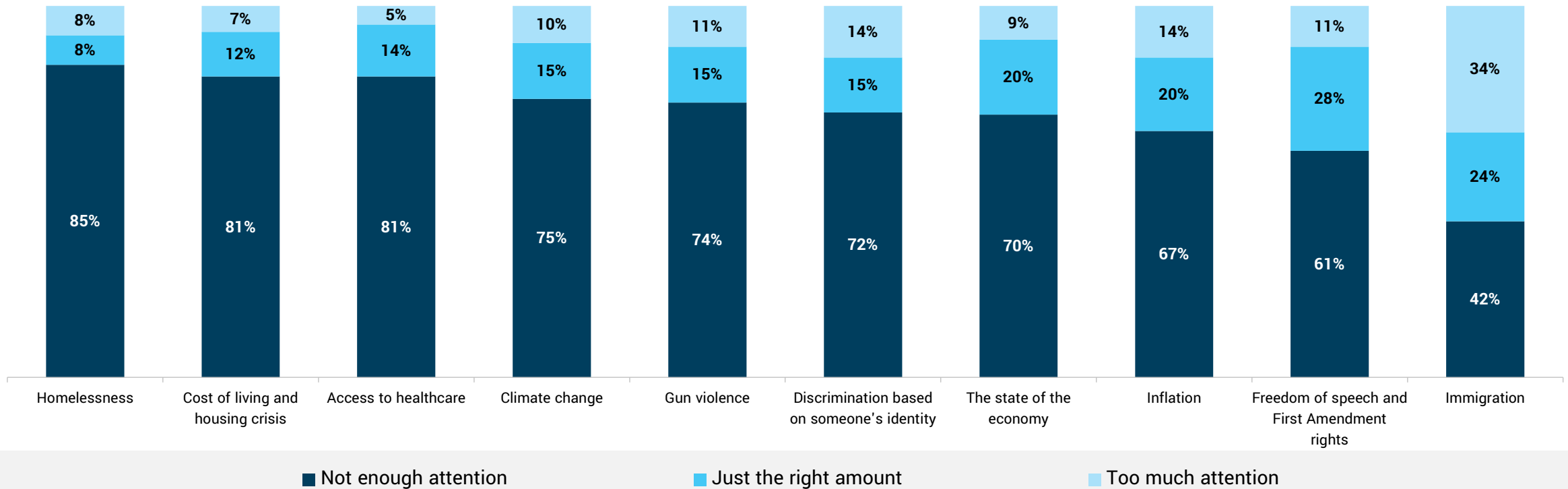
□ I don't know ■ Not at all □ Very little ■ Some ■ A great deal



PERCEPTIONS MAY BE LOW BECAUSE ELECTED OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO NEGLECT ISSUES MOST IMPORTANT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

How Much Attention Do You Think Elected Officials Give To These Issues?

Top 10 issues, among those who find them important



IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT MOST THINK THEIR OPINION DOES NOT MATTER TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

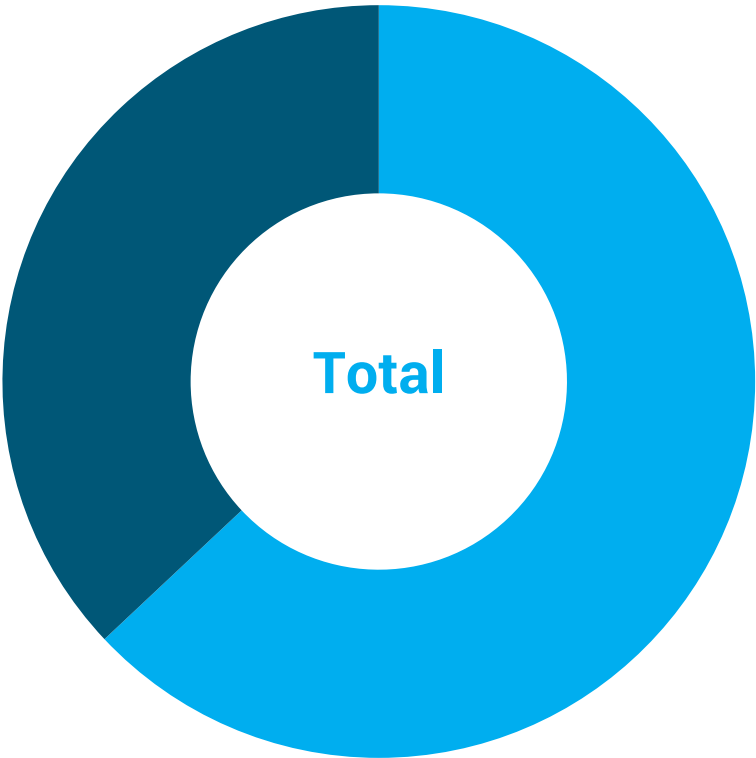
Which Of The Following Statements Do You Agree With More?

34%

My opinion matters to elected officials.

14-17 (B) 34%

18-22 (C) 34%



66%

My opinion doesn't matter to elected officials.

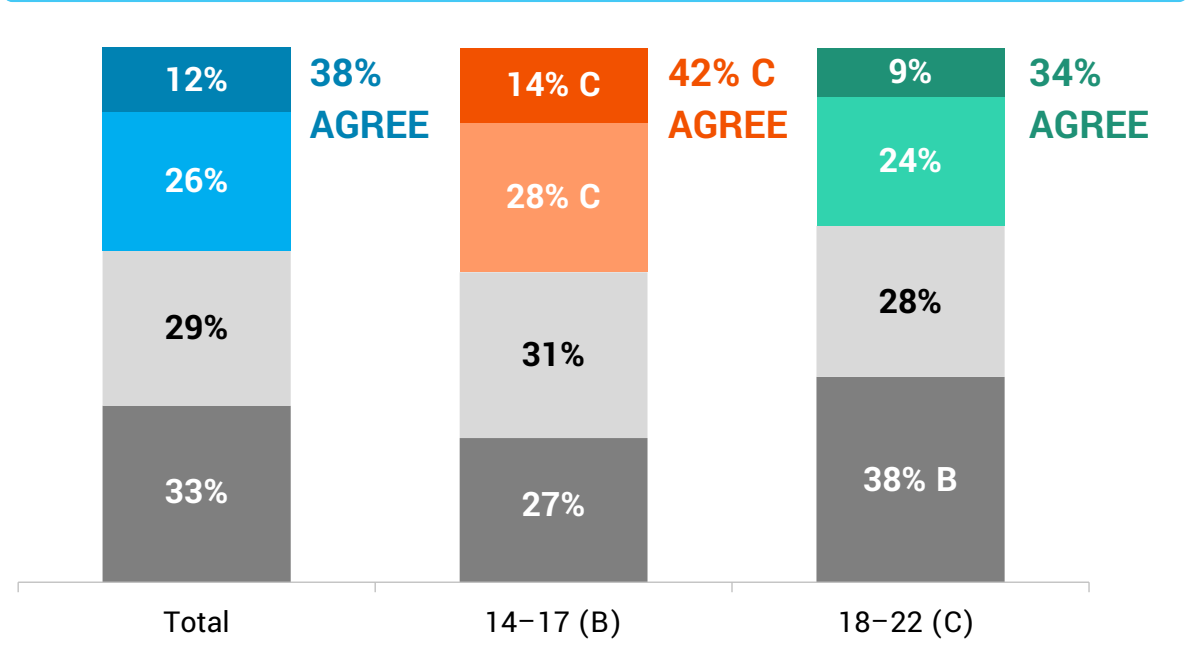
14-17 (B) 66%

18-22 (C) 66%

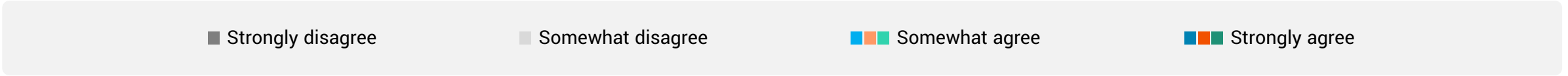
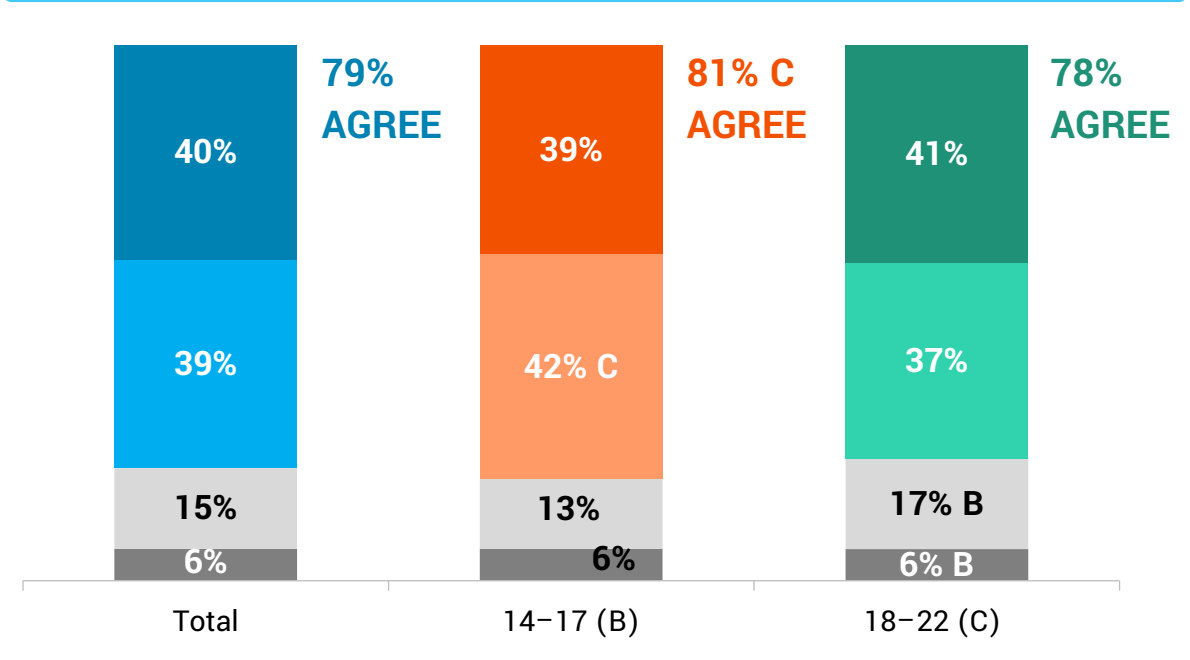


THE ISSUE MAY LIE IN THE FACT THAT MOST YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T FEEL THAT THEIR VOICES ARE BEING HEARD

"People in positions of power are making decisions with my best interests in mind."

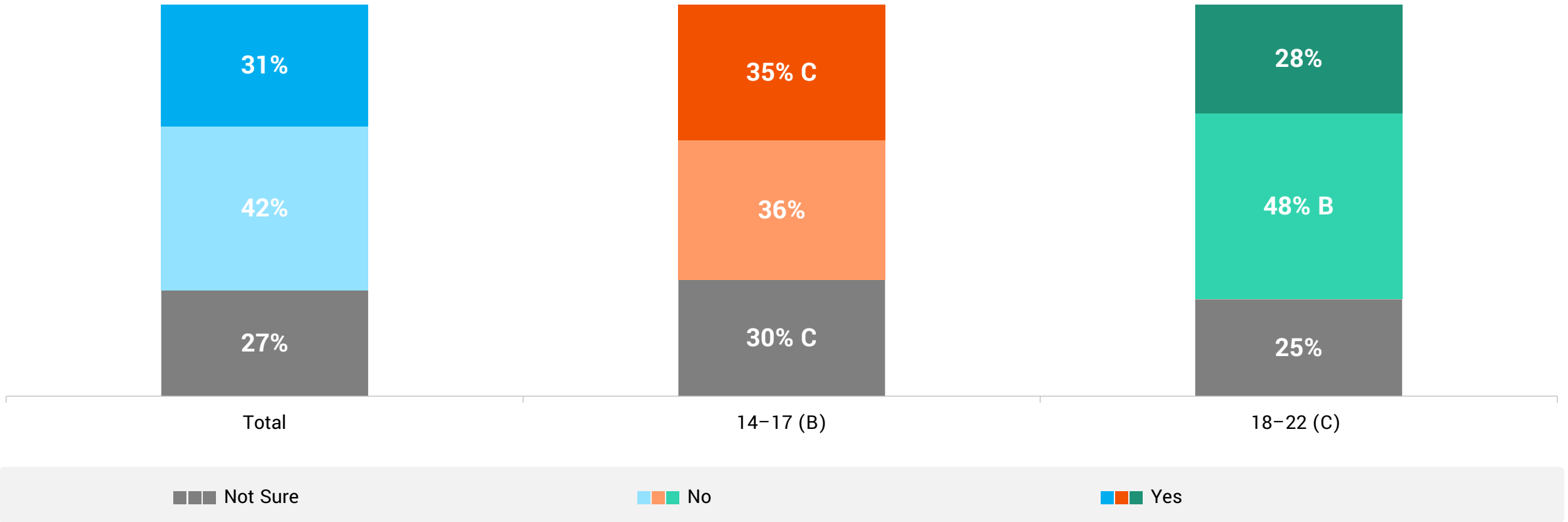


"The people in positions of power don't really care about what people my age have to say."



FEW FEEL CONSIDERED BY THOSE IN THEIR COMMUNITY

In Your Opinion Do Adults In Your Community Think About The Needs Of People Your Age When Voting?



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MAKING ENGAGEMENT MORE ACCESSIBLE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

What Would Make It Easier For You To Be Engaged In Political And Social Issues That Matter To You?

Among those who find engaging difficult

	Total	14-17 (B)	18-22 (C)
ANY	92%	93%	91%
If I knew I could actually make a difference	41%	40%	41%
Feeling more educated on the issues	39%	41%	39%
Knowing my opinion is important	37%	41% C	34%
Understanding the political system better	33%	32%	33%
Knowing how to get started	33%	33%	32%
Feeling safer in my community	32%	28%	36% B
Finding more people who think like me	31%	31%	32%
Knowing my friends were also involved	27%	28%	25%
If it was easier to find ways to get involved	26%	22%	29% B
Having more time to focus on political issues	24%	18%	29% B
Knowing who my elected officials are	19%	18%	21%
Having more support from my family	18%	19%	18%
Having greater access to transportation	18%	15%	21% B
Being asked to participate by advocacy organizations	13%	11%	14%
Other	1%	>1%	1%
Nothing would make it easier	8%	7%	9%

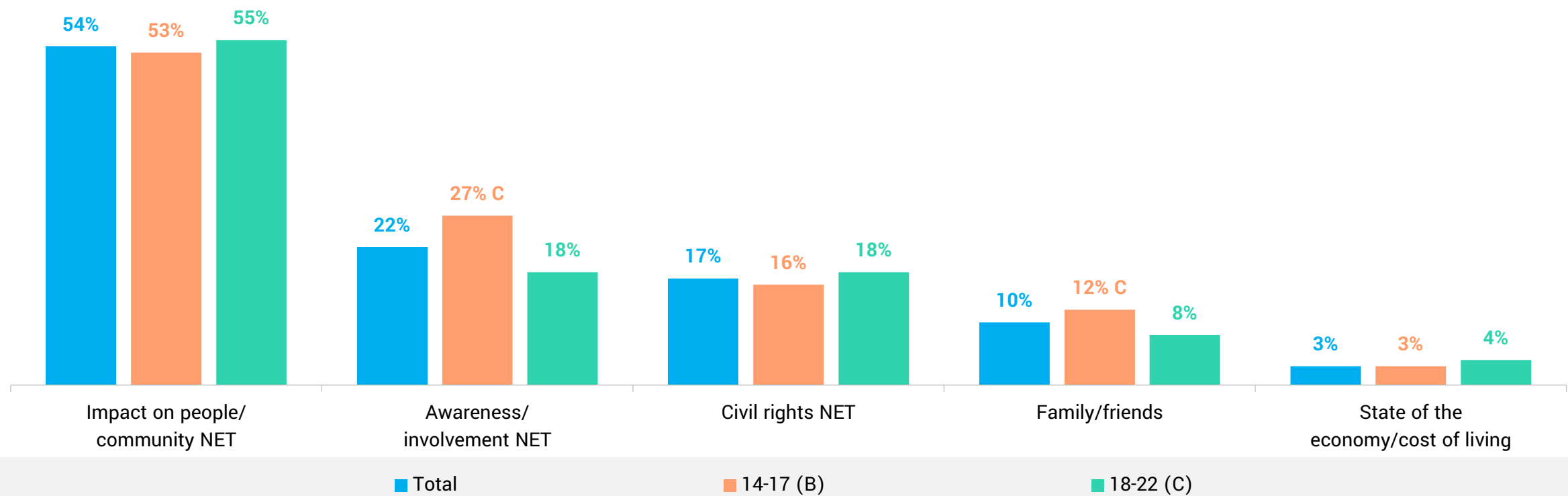
SOLUTIONS, BY YOUNG PEOPLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



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YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MOTIVATED BY THE IMPACT TO THEIR COMMUNITY

What Motivates You To Be Politically Engaged?
Top 5, Unaided



Note: Chart shows categories with 3% mentions or higher.

**"I THINK
PEOPLE MY AGE
CAN MAKE A
DIFFERENCE IN
AMERICA."**

81%

**OF YOUNG
PEOPLE AGREE.**

82% 14–17, 80% 18–22



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YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MOTIVATED BY RESPONSIBILITY AND THEIR ABILITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Which Of The Following, If Any, Reflects What Might Motivate You To Vote In Future Elections?

	Total	14–17 (B)	18–22 (C)
It's my responsibility to vote	43%	45% C	40%
I feel like I'm making a difference	40%	44% C	37%
I feel passionate about the issues	37%	33%	40% B
I believe in American democracy	35%	40% C	31%
My opportunity to support those who will best represent me	34%	33%	35%
I feel proud that I have the opportunity to vote	34%	37% C	31%
I want to set an example for others	30%	30%	31%
Voting has the most impact on politics compared to other activities	25%	26%	25%
I want to be as politically engaged as possible	24%	21%	26% B
I want to prove that our political system works	21%	22%	21%
Other	1%	1%	2%
Not Sure	11%	10%	12%

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE SOFT CONFIDENCE ABOUT THEIR FUTURE

How Confident Are You That You Will Be Able To Achieve The Following?

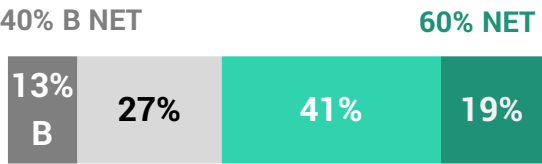
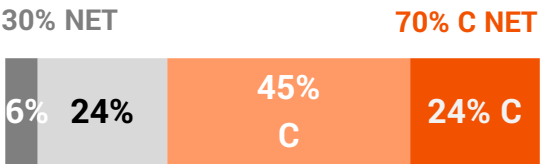
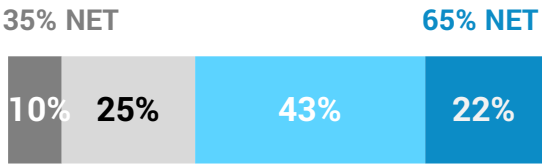
Total

14–17(B)

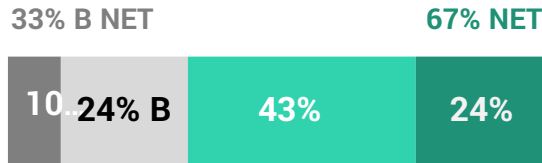
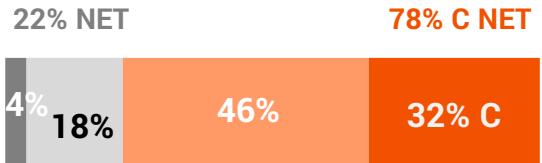
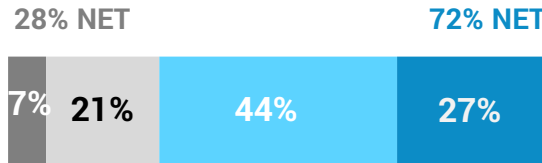
18–22(C)



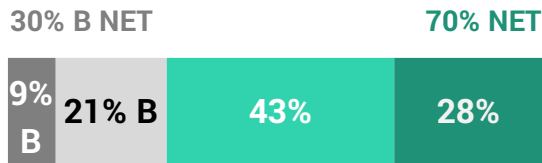
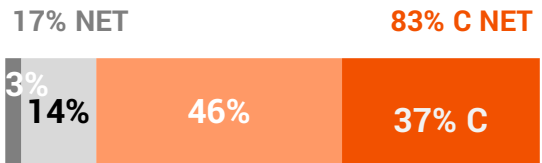
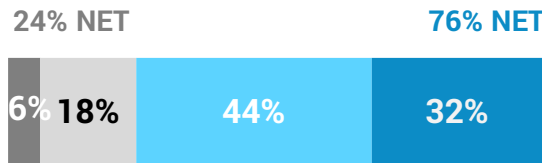
Financial stability



The lifestyle I want



My goals and dreams



■ Not at all confident ■ Not very confident
■ Somewhat confident ■ Very confident

■ Not at all confident ■ Not very confident
■ Somewhat confident ■ Very confident

■ Not at all confident ■ Not very confident
■ Somewhat confident ■ Very confident

**"I WISH THERE
WERE MORE
OPPORTUNITIES
TO VOTE FOR
POLITICIANS I
BELIEVED IN."**

80%

**OF YOUNG
PEOPLE AGREE.**

82% 14–17, 78% 18–22

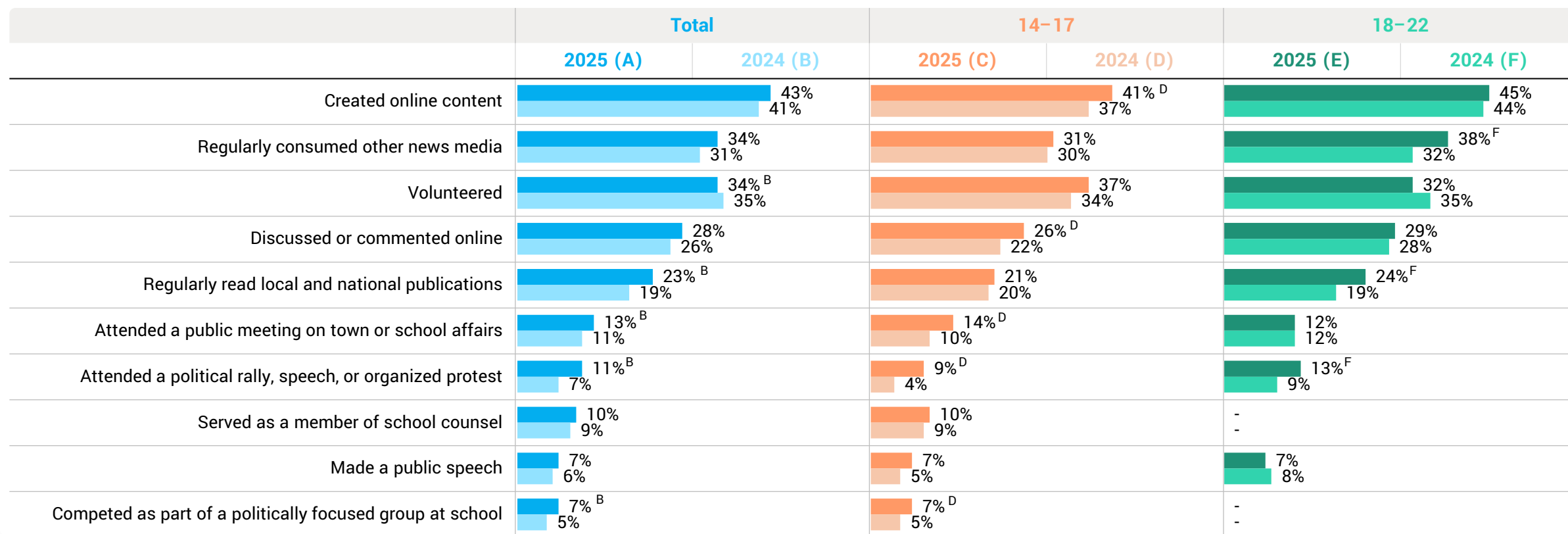


YOUTH ENGAGEMENT THRIVES ONLINE

Young people are shaping discourse through digital platforms

What Activities Have You Done In The Past 12 Months?

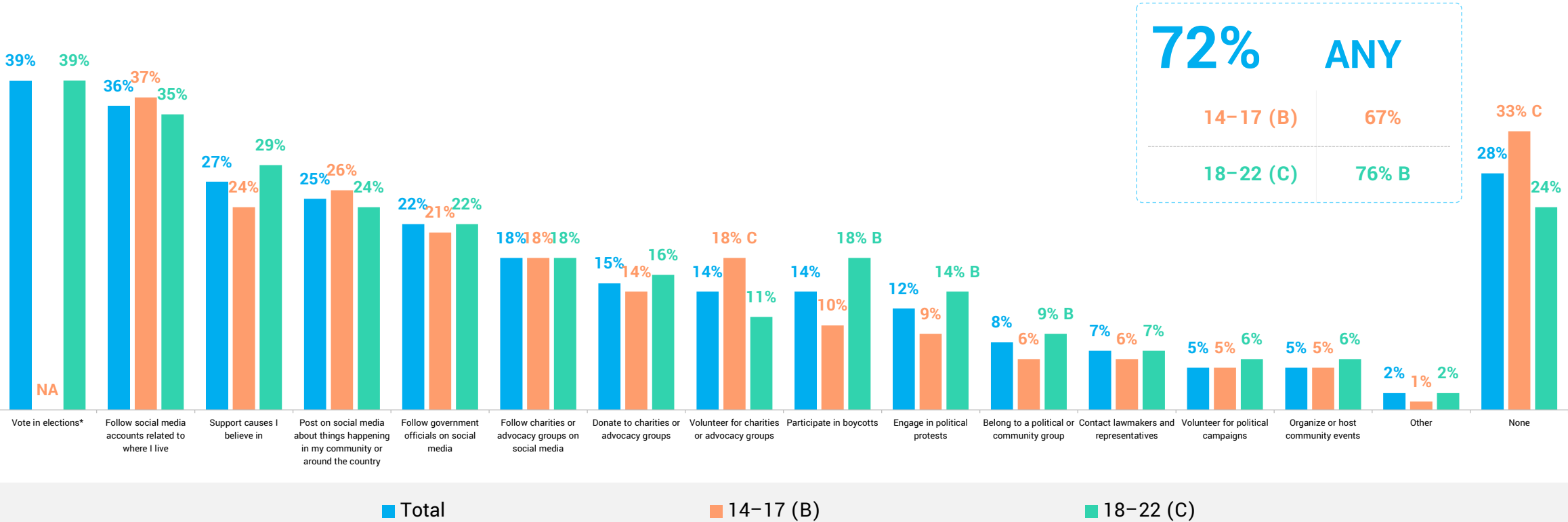
Top 10 Activities by Total



POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IS WIDESPREAD, BUT NOT EQUALLY

Young adults are more likely to act than teens

Do You Currently Do Any Of These Politically Focused Actions?



*This option was only presented to respondents ages 18-22

**"I SPEND A LOT OF
TIME THINKING
ABOUT AND TALKING
WITH MY FRIENDS
ABOUT POLITICAL
ISSUES."**

50%

**OF YOUNG
PEOPLE AGREE.**

46% 14–17, 53% 18–22



for every child

YOUNG PEOPLE PLAN TO DEEPEN THEIR POLITICAL FOOTPRINT

Whether through voting, activism, or social media, young people are preparing to amplify their voices

In Which Ways Do You Plan To Become More Politically Involved?

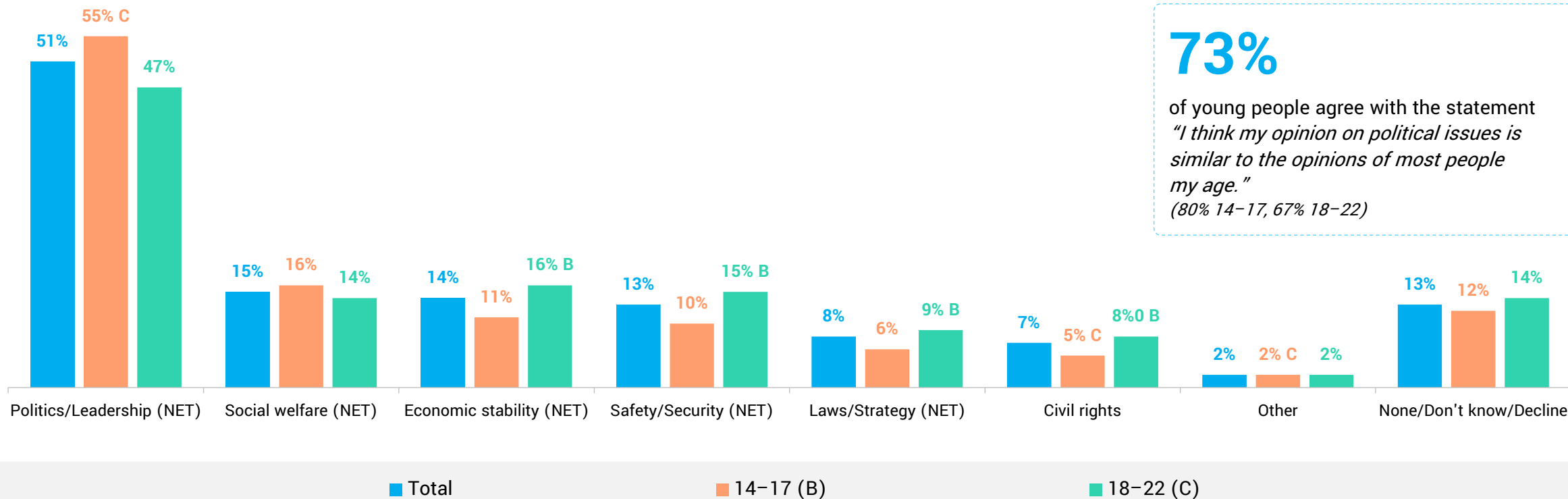
Among Those Who Were Encouraged to be More Politically Involved

	Total	14–17 (B)	18–22 (C)
Vote in elections	47%	35%	57% B
Support causes I believe in	46%	46%	46%
Follow social media accounts related to where I live	42%	45%	40%
Post on social media about things happening in my community or around the country	37%	41% C	34%
Follow charities or advocacy groups on social media	30%	31%	29%
Participate in boycotts	29%	22%	35% B
Follow government officials on social media	29%	30%	28%
Engage in political protests	28%	20%	33% B
Volunteer for charities or advocacy groups	27%	30% C	25%
Donate to charities or advocacy groups	21%	20%	23%
Belong to a political or community group	20%	16%	23% B
Volunteer for political campaigns	18%	17%	19%
Contact lawmakers and representatives	18%	13%	22% B
Organize or host community events	13%	10%	14% B
Other	1%	1%	1%

YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO OVERHAUL THE CURRENT STATE OF POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP IN THE U.S.

If It Were Up To You, What Changes Would You Make To The Current State Of Politics In America?

Unaided



YOUNG PEOPLE TELL POLITICAL LEADERS TO LISTEN, INCLUDE, AND ACT

Young people want leaders to understand their views, involve them in decisions, and prioritize youth-driven solutions

How Can Political Leaders Best Support Young People In Making You Feel Heard?

	Total	14–17 (B)	18–22 (C)
ANY	90%	93% C	88%
Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues	48%	47%	48%
Consider how young people are impacted by legislation	47%	47%	46%
Engage in honest dialogue with younger generations	45%	48% C	43%
Allow younger people to be a key part of decision-making and developing solutions	42%	40%	44%
Make room for younger people to be in political power	41%	35%	46% B
Create youth advisory boards for young people to voice their opinions	40%	45% C	35%
Be transparent about how much money is invested in programs or policies for young people	37%	34%	40% B
Create strategies for change based on issues that matter to younger people	36%	35%	36%
Fund programs aimed at focusing on unique issues experienced by young people	35%	36%	34%
Draft policies that address unique issues experienced by young people	27%	25%	29% B
Other	1%	1%	1%
I'm not sure	10%	7%	12% B

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES & SOLUTIONS



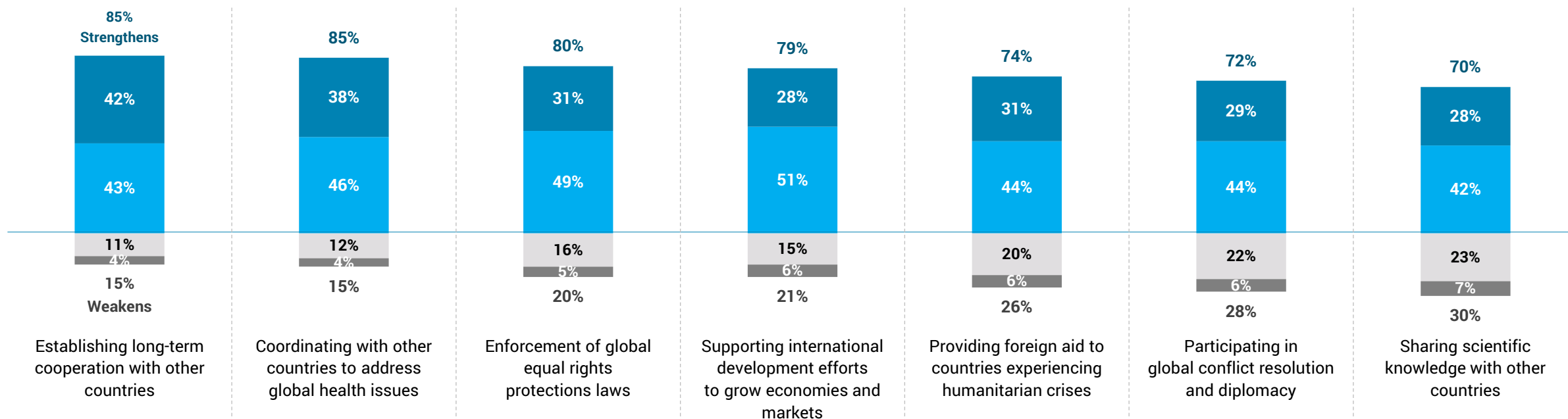
for every child

GLOBAL COOPERATION STRENGTHENS PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S.

Young people believe diplomacy, health partnerships, and equal rights enforcement strengthens America's global reputation

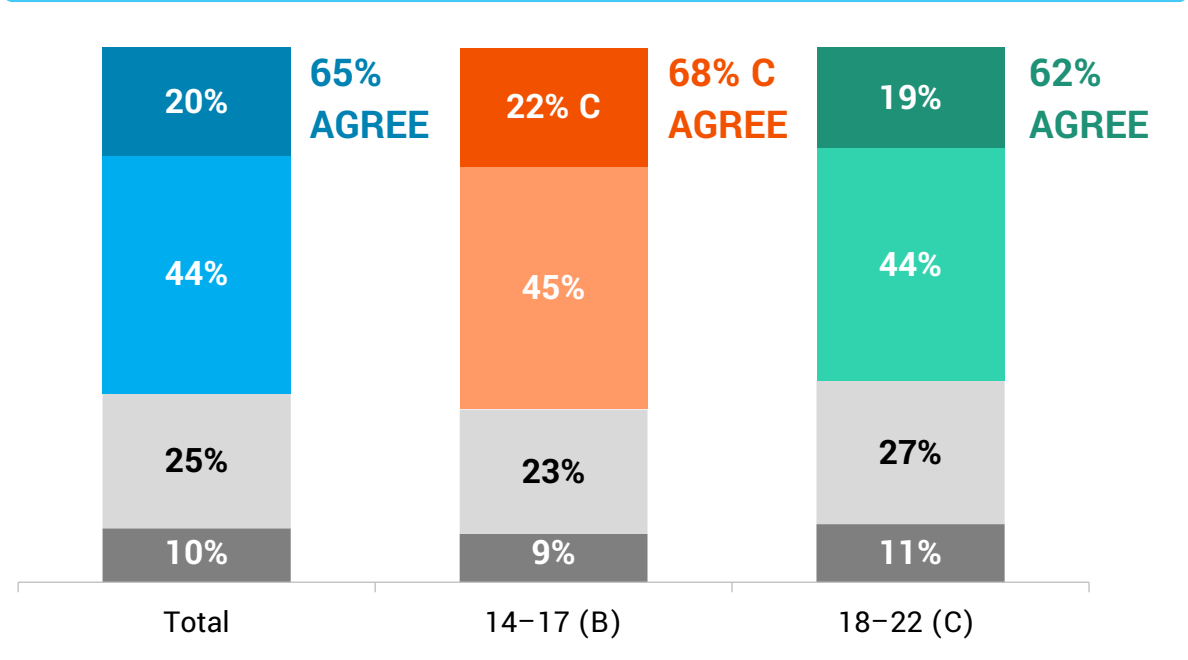
Do You Think The Below Strengthens Or Weakens The Reputation Of The U.S.?

■ Somewhat weakens ■ Significantly weakens ■ Somewhat strengthens ■ Significantly strengthens

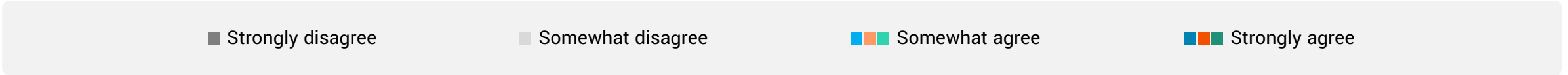
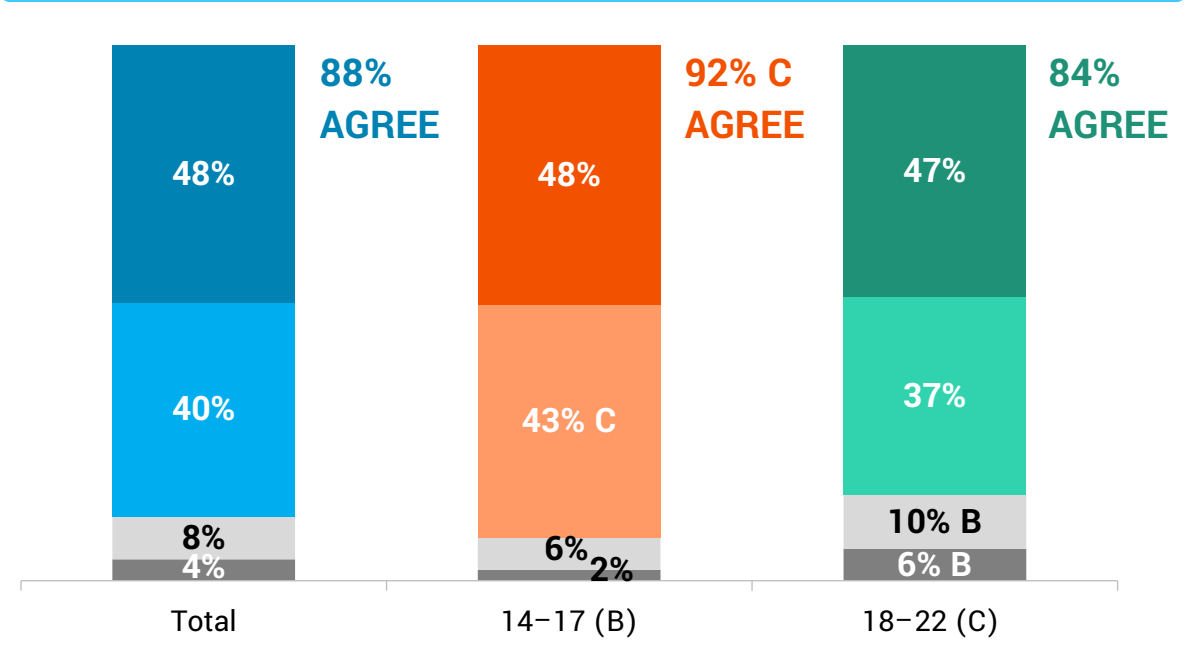


AMERICA'S YOUTH SUPPORT A GLOBAL ROLE FOR THE U.S.

“The U.S. should have a role in supporting other countries (e.g., economically, militarily, etc.).”



“The U.S. should build and maintain positive relationships with other countries as an important priority.”



AUDIENCE PROFILES



for every child

DEMOGRAPHICS

Race/Ethnicity			
	Total	14-17	18-22
White	49%	53%	47%
Hispanic	26%	26%	25%
Black	14%	14%	14%
Asian	6%	6%	6%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%	1%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	1%
Another Race or Multi-Race	4%	2%	7%

Household Size			
	Total	14-17	18-22
1	7%	-	12%
2	12%	6%	17%
3	21%	19%	23%
4	28%	34%	23%
5+	32%	41%	24%

Gender			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Man/Boy	50%	50%	49%
Woman/Girl	48%	49%	48%
Other	2%	<1%	4%

LGBTQ+ Status			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Member of LGBTQ+ community	17%	7%	25%
An ally	30%	29%	31%
Neither	49%	61%	39%

Importance of Religion			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Somewhat/Very Important	66%	75%	59%
Not Too/Not Very Important	34%	25%	41%

Engagement			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Engaged Youth	22%	23%	22%
Unengaged Youth	78%	77%	78%

Urbanicity			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Urban	29%	29%	30%
Suburban	46%	44%	48%
Rural	24%	28%	22%

Political Lean			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Democrat	31%	27%	34%
Republican	26%	30%	21%
Independent	25%	21%	27%
Other	4%	1%	5%
I'm not sure	16%	19%	12%

Political Philosophy			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Conservative	24%	26%	22%
Liberal	30%	24%	34%
Moderate	32%	34%	30%
Not Sure	15%	16%	14%

14-17 ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

14	24%
15	24%
16	26%
17	25%

School Location

Urban/City	30%
Suburban	39%
Small town/Rural	31%

Academic Grade

8 th	6%
9 th	21%
10 th	22%
11 th	26%
12 th	20%
Graduated	6%

Type of School Attended

Homeschool	8%
Public school	75%
Private school	15%
Religious school	2%
Not sure	1%

Plan After Graduation

Work	18%
Vocational/trade school	11%
2/4-year university	61%
Military	4%
Something else	7%

Parent's Education

Less than high school degree	6%
HS degree to less than 4-year college degree	46%
4-year college degree or more	48%

18-22 ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Age	
18	20%
19	20%
20	19%
21	21%
22	20%

Household Income	
Less than \$15K	17%
\$15K to \$24,999	10%
\$25K to 34,999	11%
\$35K to \$49,999	11%
\$50K to \$74,999	16%
\$75K to \$99,999	11%
\$100K or more	16%
I don't know	8%

Work Status	
Employed	54%
Not employed but looking for work	15%
Not employed and not looking for work	2%
Unable to work	2%
Student	25%
Stay-at-home partner	3%

Education Type	
Undergrad	68%
Graduate	10%
Doctoral	1%
Vocational	1%
Technical	6%
Professional	3%
Seminary	1%
None	10%