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Voices of The Future:

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*PREPARED FOR UNICEF USA
BY THE HARRIS POLL, JUNE 2026*

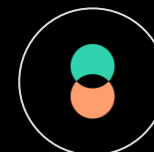


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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

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



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 towards foreign aid, the U.S.' and multilateralism?
- 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 = 3,204 young people



Field Dates

April 23–May 19, 2026



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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KEY FINDINGS

1. In 2026, economic concerns are crowding out everything else
2. Ahead of the 2026 midterms, youth are becoming more politically engaged, not less
3. Progress is being made in terms of feeling heard, but youth still want a greater voice



What changed in 2026

Economic concerns dominate	Political engagement grows	Feeling heard improves
Inflation remains #1 concern (60%)	+9 pts increase in intended participation in local elections since 2024 (53% → 62%)	-10 pts decline in the share who say their opinion does not matter to elected officials since 2024 (73% → 63%)
Cost of living/housing #1 issue facing the country (61%)	+10 pts increase in intended participation in state elections since 2024 (57% → 67%)	-8 pts decline in the share who find it difficult to engage in issues that matter to them (50% → 42%)
Affordability is by far the top midterm issue (31%)	59% think believe the upcoming midterm elections will include issues that directly affect your future	+4 pts increase in the share who feel included in the political process compared to 2024 (26% → 30%)
<i>Economic concerns now outweigh nearly every other issue facing young people</i>	<i>Young people are becoming more politically engaged— not less.</i>	<i>Progress is being made, but most young people still do not feel adequately represented.</i>

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ORGANIZATIONS SEEKING TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE

1

Lead with issues that directly affect their daily lives and future opportunities.

- Economic concerns continue to dominate the youth agenda, with inflation remaining the top issue and cost of living, housing affordability, and economic security consistently ranking among young people's highest priorities.

2

Recognize that youth are paying attention and increasingly ready to participate.

- Interest in voting increased substantially across every level of government compared to 2025, while roughly 6 in 10 young people report regularly consuming content about politics, current events, and global issues.

3

Move beyond outreach and toward meaningful inclusion in decision-making.

- When asked what would help them feel heard, young people most often pointed to leaders understanding their perspectives, considering how policies affect them, and involving them in decision-making processes.

4

Demonstrate how youth input is considered and acted upon.

- While perceptions have improved over the past two years, nearly two-thirds of young people still believe their opinions do not matter to elected officials, highlighting the importance of closing the feedback loop.

5

Connect global issues back to tangible impacts on young people's communities and futures.

- Most young people believe events happening elsewhere in the world directly affect their lives, and more than 7 in 10 support the U.S. playing a role in helping other countries.



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DETAILED FINDINGS



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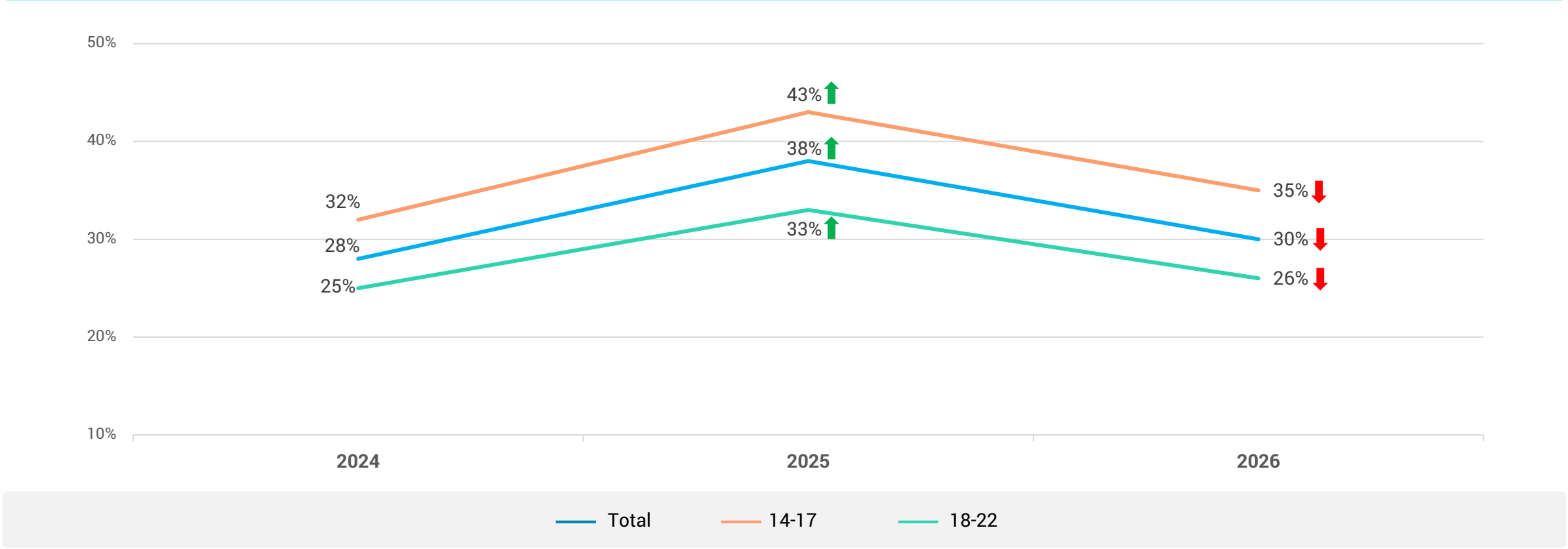
YOUNG PEOPLE'S **MACRO** **ATTITUDES**



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MOST YOUTH CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THE COUNTRY IS ON THE WRONG TRACK, WITH RIGHT-TRACK SENTIMENT DOWN SIGNIFICANTLY SINCE 2025

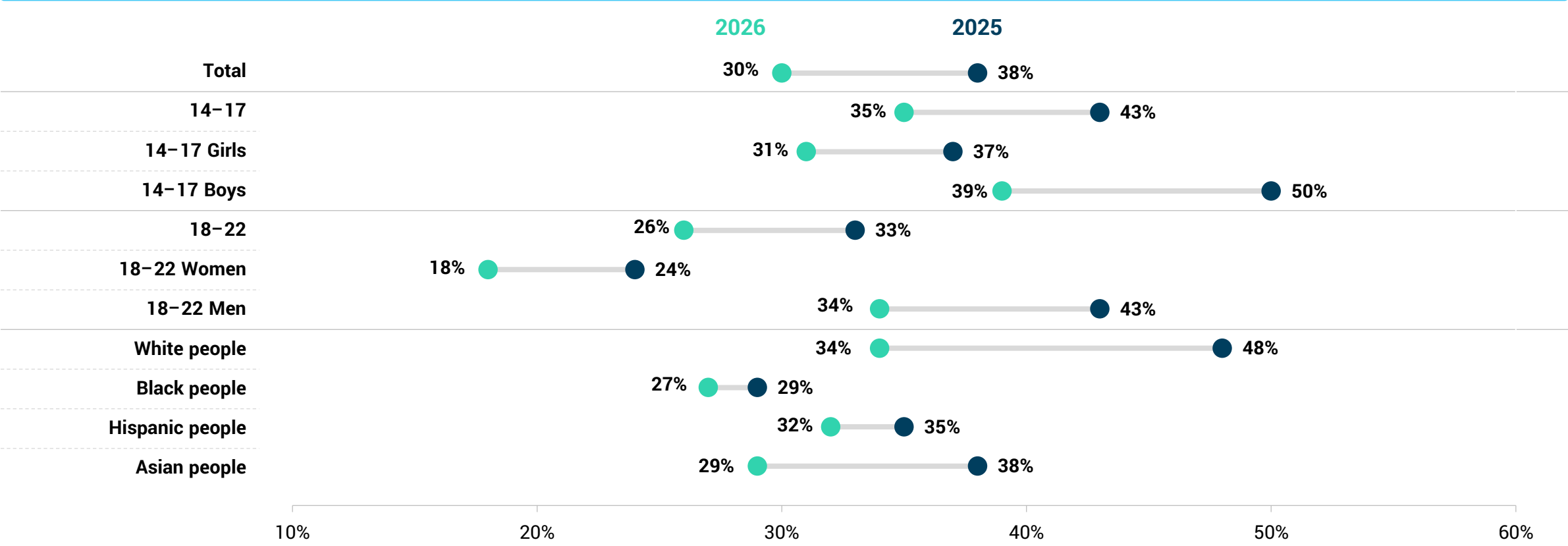
Would You Say The Country Is Currently On The Right Track Or The Wrong Track?
% Right Track



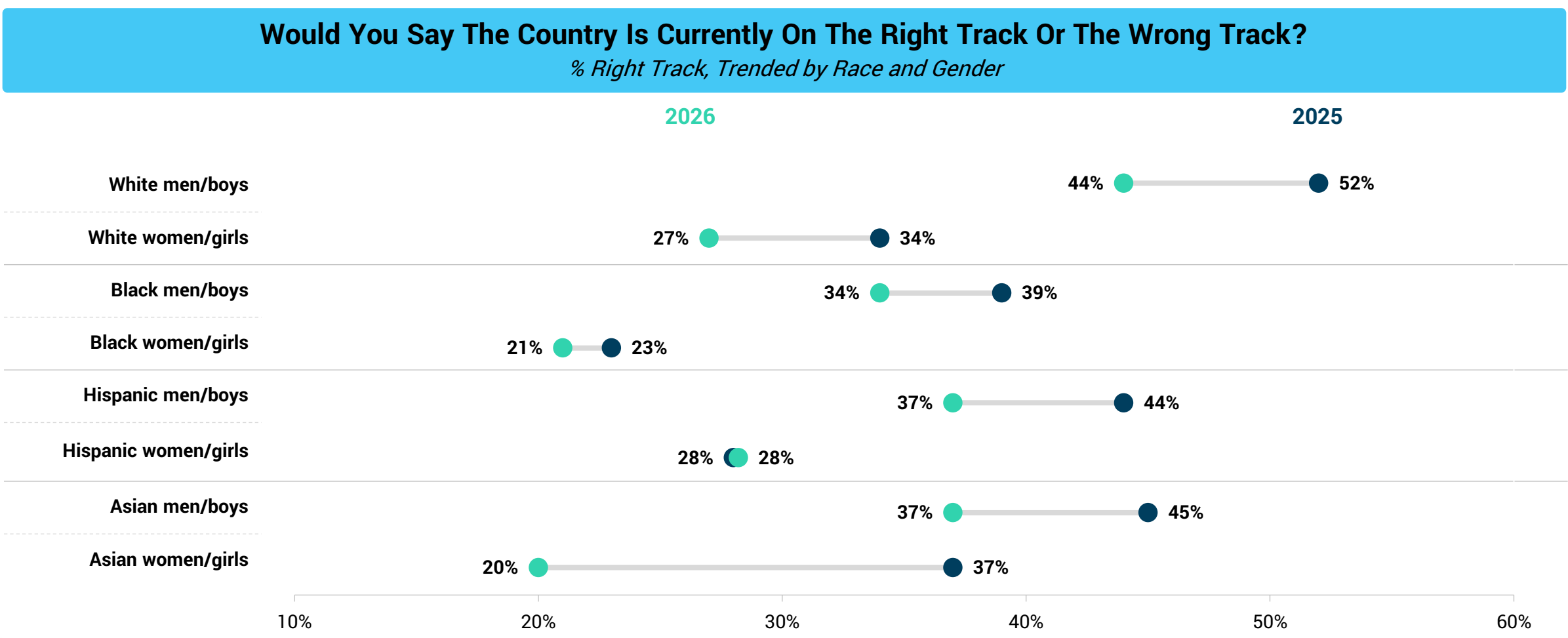
DECLINING OPTIMISM IS BROAD-BASED, WITH THE SHARPEST DROPS AMONG YOUNG MEN AND WHITE YOUTH

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

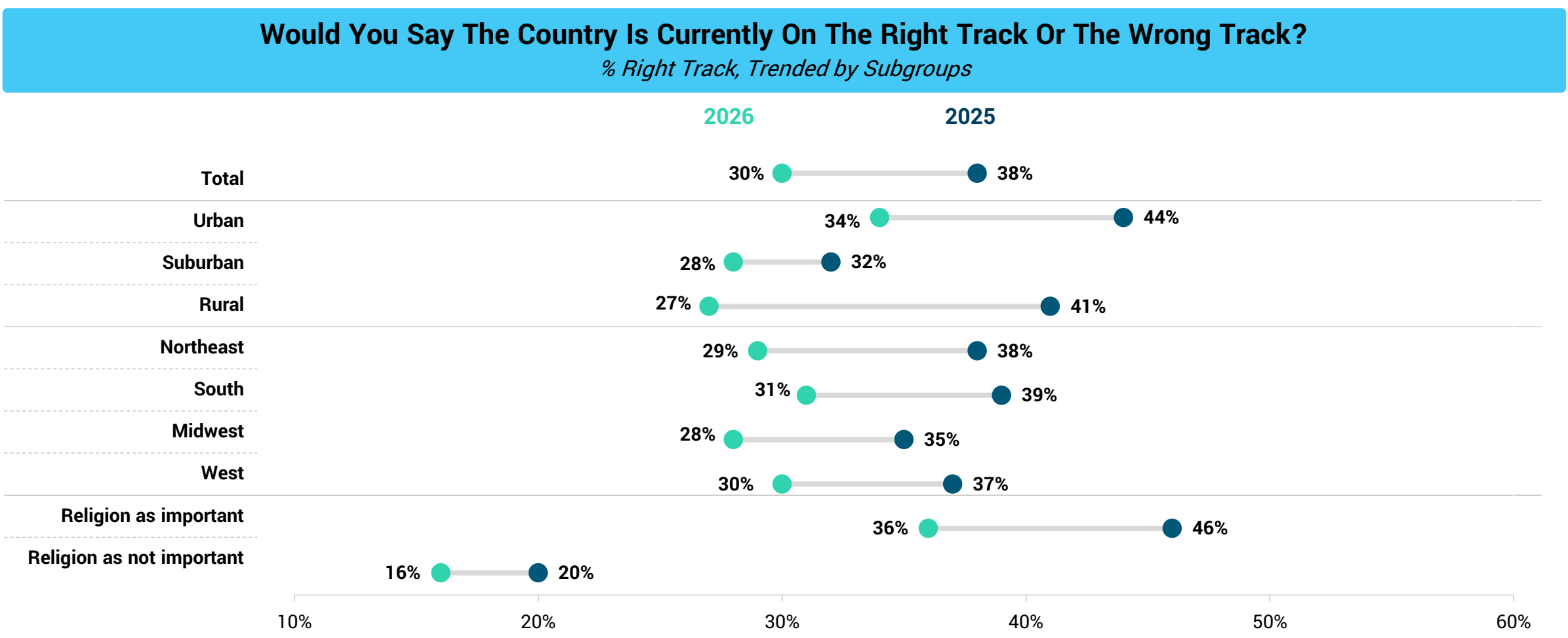
% Right Track, Trended by Subgroups



RIGHT-TRACK SENTIMENT FALLS ACROSS NEARLY EVERY RACIAL AND GENDER SUBGROUP



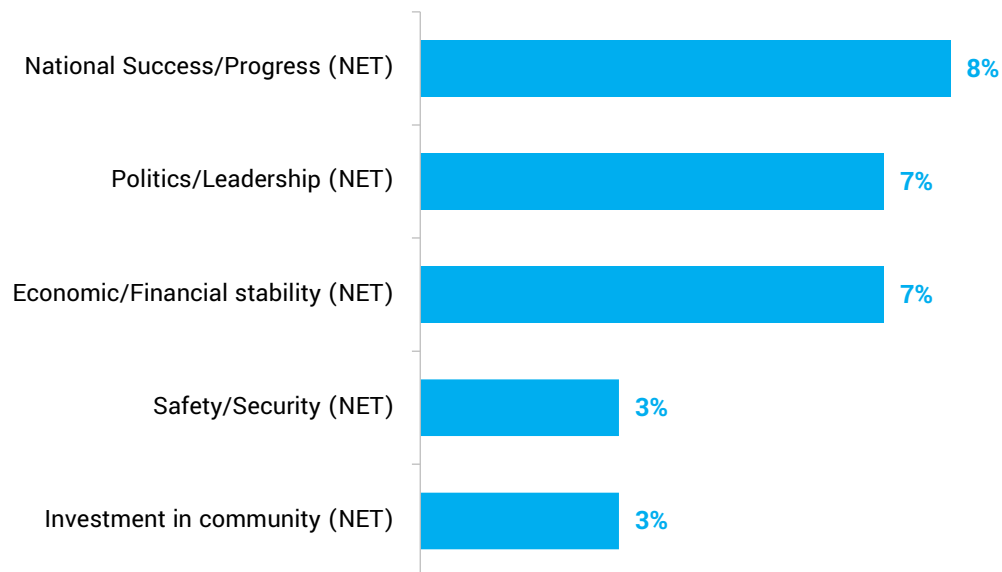
RELIGIOUS YOUTH REMAIN RELATIVELY MORE OPTIMISTIC THAN THEIR PEERS



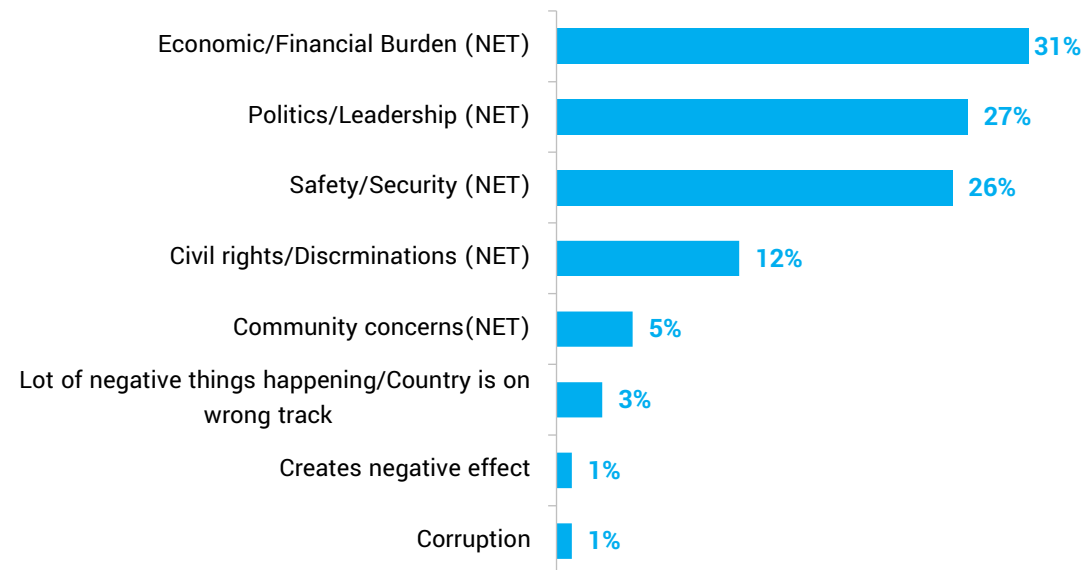
ECONOMIC CONCERNS AND DISSATISFACTION WITH POLITICAL LEADERSHIP DRIVE PESSIMISM ABOUT THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY

Why Do You Think The Country Is On The Right/Wrong Track? *Unaided*

26% NET POSITIVE RESPONSES



72% NET NEGATIVE RESPONSES



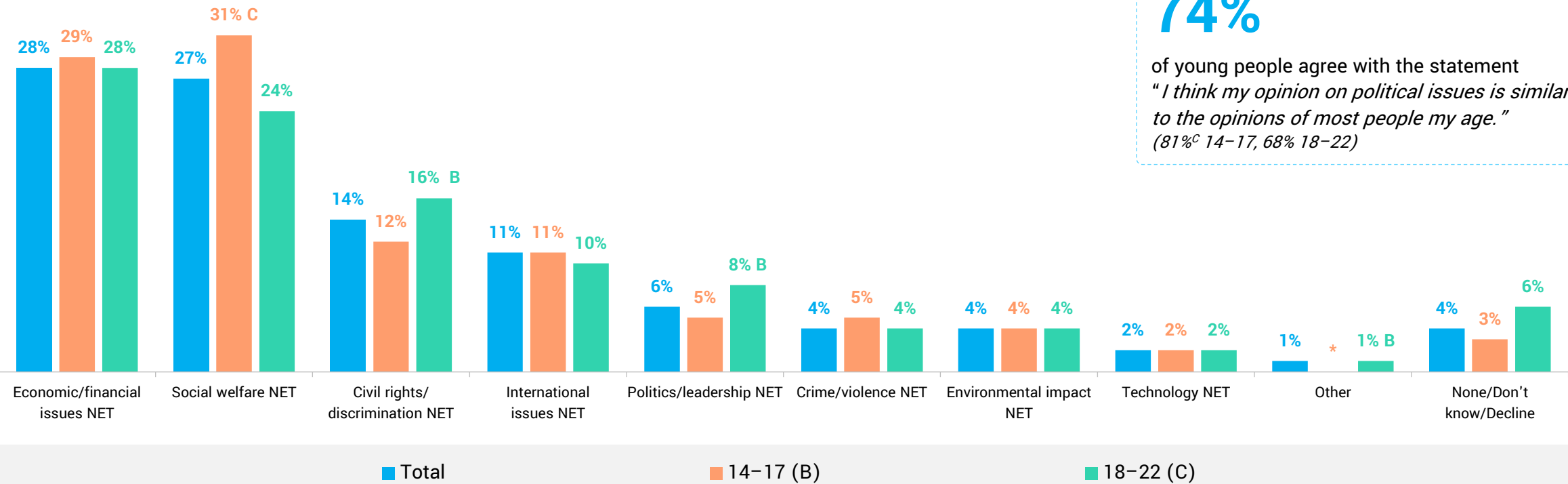
YOUNG PEOPLE'S BELIEFS & ATTITUDES



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ECONOMIC CONCERNS HAVE OVERTAKEN SOCIAL WELFARE AS YOUTH'S TOP PRIORITY IN 2026

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



74%

of young people agree with the statement
"I think my opinion on political issues is similar to the opinions of most people my age."
(81%^C 14-17, 68% 18-22)

YOUNG PEOPLE FRAME TODAY'S CHALLENGES THROUGH AFFORDABILITY, HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS, AND GLOBAL INSTABILITY

Economic/Financial



"I hold the belief that all people should have the right to afford basic necessities and have the freedom to chase their dreams, and I am troubled that many individuals are unable to. I have encountered many different forms of people living in financially troubled situations in my own experience, such as encountering a pessimistic cashier who has accepted the destruction of their dreams and is working a dead-end job, people sitting on the street with signs asking for anything that can be given, elderly individuals rocking back and forth on the pavement under a thin sheet to stay warm at night, and areas of my own community that are populated by disheveled houses and garbage. I want to help people, and it breaks my heart to see so many suffering or living rough because of rough financial situations.."

– 18-year-old Hispanic man, Poverty and other financial struggles

Civil Rights/Discrimination



"Women, queer individuals, transgender individuals, drag queens, people of color, and anyone who is not a traditional white man is slowly having their existence be criminalized. Women are losing the right to their own bodies, Hispanic Americans are losing their homes and are having their loved ones kidnapped and exploited, racism is spiking, freedom of expression is being taken away, etc."

– 18-year-old white woman, De-humanization of people of marginalized groups

"People should not be discriminated based on sexual orientation."

– 17-year-old girl, LGBTQ rights

Social Welfare



"I know many immigrants and they are all very valuable members of society, but because their ancestors immigrated to illegally, they aren't allowed to be a part of society and they have to worry about ice hunting them down and that seems ridiculous. They have done more for society than our own president and yet they get the short end of the stick and they get beaten and killed if they don't comply with these unofficial police officers."

– 18-year-old white woman, Immigration

"it's important to me because good education affects everything in life, like jobs, stability, and success. I worry about pressure in school and whether students really get equal chances to do well."

– 16-year-old Hispanic girl, Education and future opportunities

International Issues



"I feel that this war is unnecessary and wasting a lot of lives and money, and I believe its true purpose does not follow the interest of the American people."

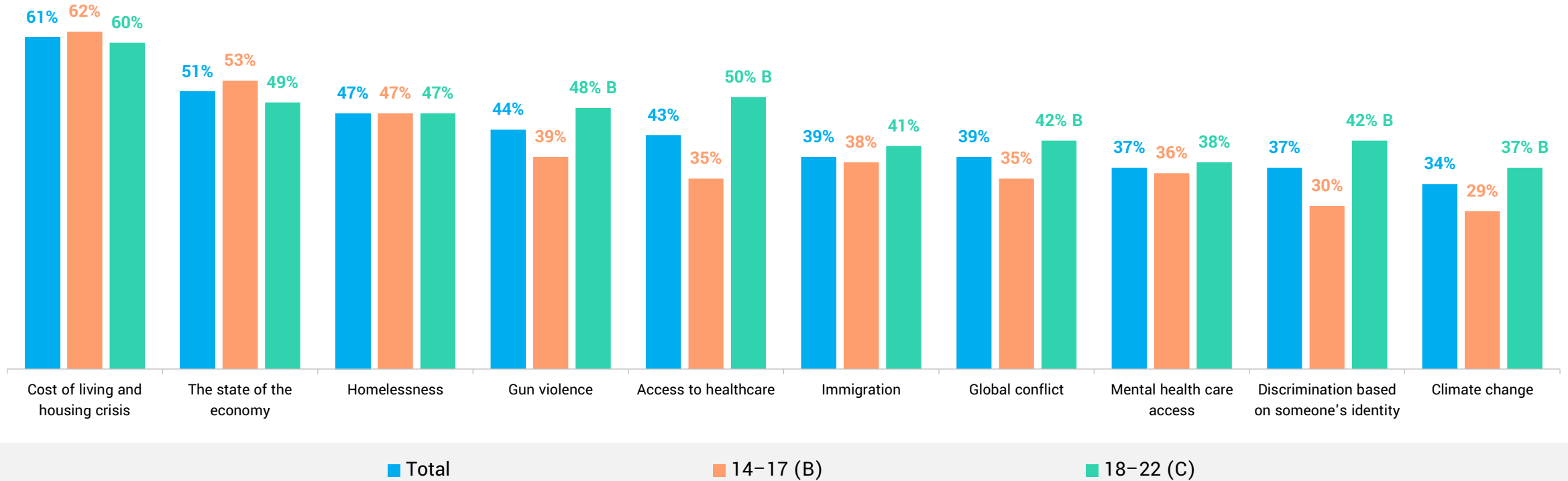
– 18-year-old Asian man, War on Iran

"It's not American business it's only hurting our people we need to let Israel deal with it's own problems."

– 20-year-old white man, Iran

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

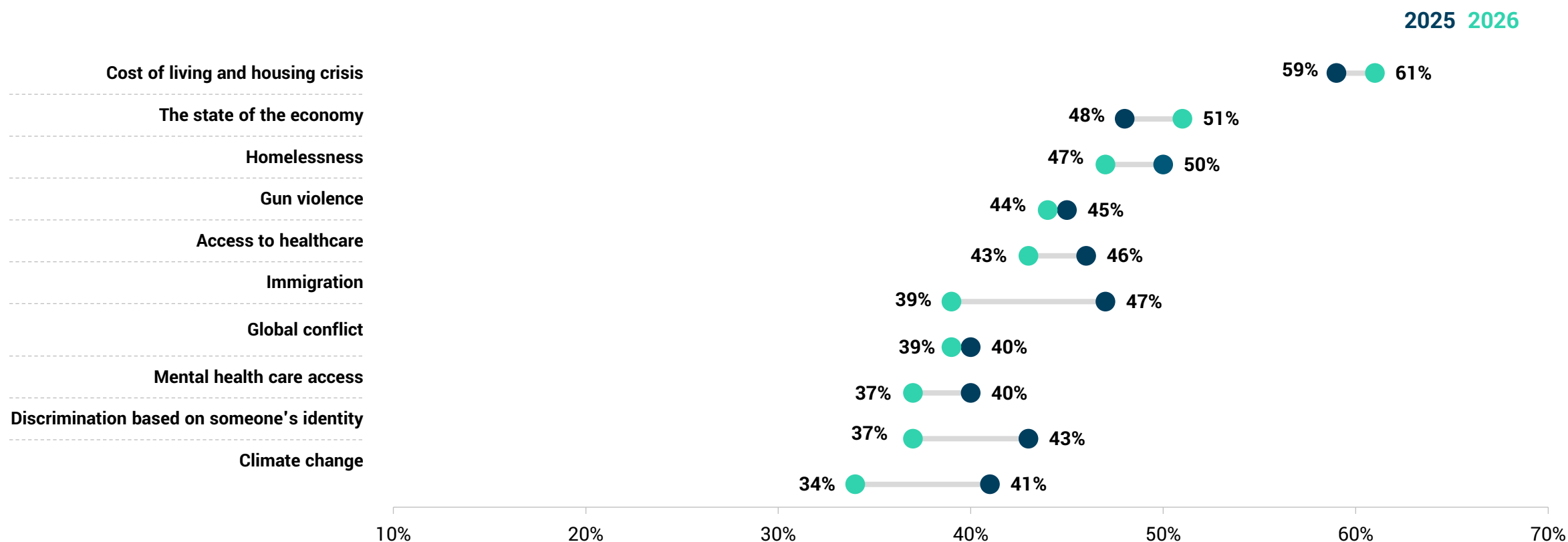
Top 10 Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today



IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC CONCERNS OUTWEIGH BROADER SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2026

Top 10 Most Important Issues Facing The Country Today

Trended by Total



COST OF LIVING CONTINUES TO UNITE YOUTH ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Top 10 Most Important Issues Facing the Country Today

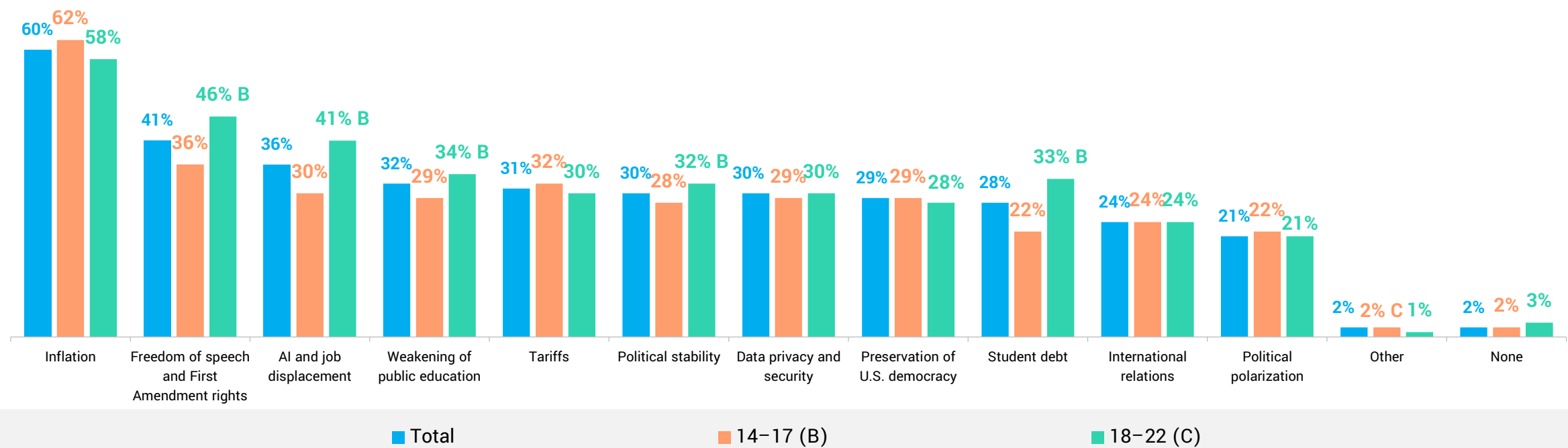
Trended by Political Philosophy

Liberal			Moderate			Conservative		
	2026	2025		2026	2025		2026	2025
Cost of living/housing crisis	68%	64%	Cost of living/housing crisis	58%	59%	Cost of living/housing crisis	55%	53%
Gun violence	58%	58%	The state of the economy	51%	49%	The state of the economy	45%	42%
The state of the economy	58%	54%	Homelessness	45%	48%	Immigration	42% ↓	53%
Access to healthcare	57%	60%	Gun violence	42%	43%	Homelessness	38%	42%
Discrimination based on someone's identity	55%	59%	Access to healthcare	41%	43%	Access to healthcare	32%	33%
Homelessness	53%	55%	Global conflict	35%	36%	Global conflict	32%	33%
Global conflict	50%	50%	Immigration	34% ↓	43%	Mental health access	31%	30%
Climate change	49% ↓	58%	Mental health access	34% ↓	40%	Gun violence	29%	31%
Reproductive rights	47% ↓	53%	Discrimination based on someone's identity	31% ↓	42%	Access to healthy food	28%	29%
Wealth inequality	47%	49%	Access to healthy food	31%	33%	Terrorism	24% ↓	32%

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

INFLATION REMAINS THE DOMINANT CONCERN, BUT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ALSO THINKING ABOUT TECHNOLOGY'S IMPACT ON THEIR FUTURES

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



INFLATION ALSO TRANSCENDS POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, WHILE SECONDARY CONCERNS VARY

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

Trended by Political Philosophy

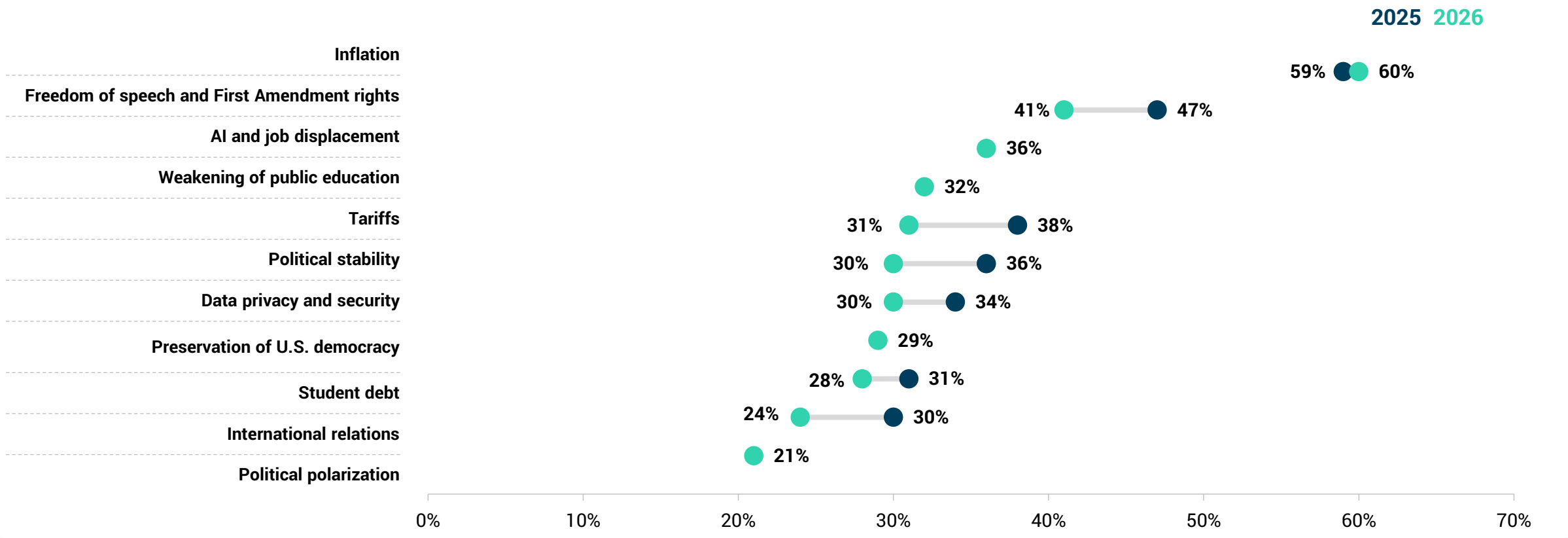
Liberal			Moderate			Conservative		
	2026	2025		2026	2025		2026	2025
Inflation	62% ↑	56%	Inflation	63%	63%	Inflation	56%	61%
Freedom of speech/First Amendment rights	49%	52%	Freedom of speech/First Amendment rights	39% ↓	45%	Freedom of speech/First Amendment rights	36% ↓	45%
AI and job displacement	44%	-	AI and job displacement	33%	-	AI and job displacement	34%	-
Preservation of U.S. democracy	42	-	Tariffs	32% ↓	39%	Data privacy and security	32%	37%
Weakening of public education	39%	-	Weakening of public education	28%	-	Political stability	30%	32%
Political stability	39% ↓	48%	Data privacy and security	28% ↓	33%	Weakening of public education	28%	-
Tariffs	37% ↓	45%	Student debt	25%	27%	Student debt	27%	26%
Student debt	32%	36%	Political stability	25% ↓	33%	Tariffs	26%	30%
Data privacy and security	32%	35%	Preservation of U.S. democracy	23%	-	Preservation of U.S. democracy	25%	-
Political polarization	30%	-	International relations	22%	26%	International relations	22% ↓	30%

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

INFLATION STANDS ALONE AS MOST OTHER ISSUE PRIORITIES LOSE MOMENTUM

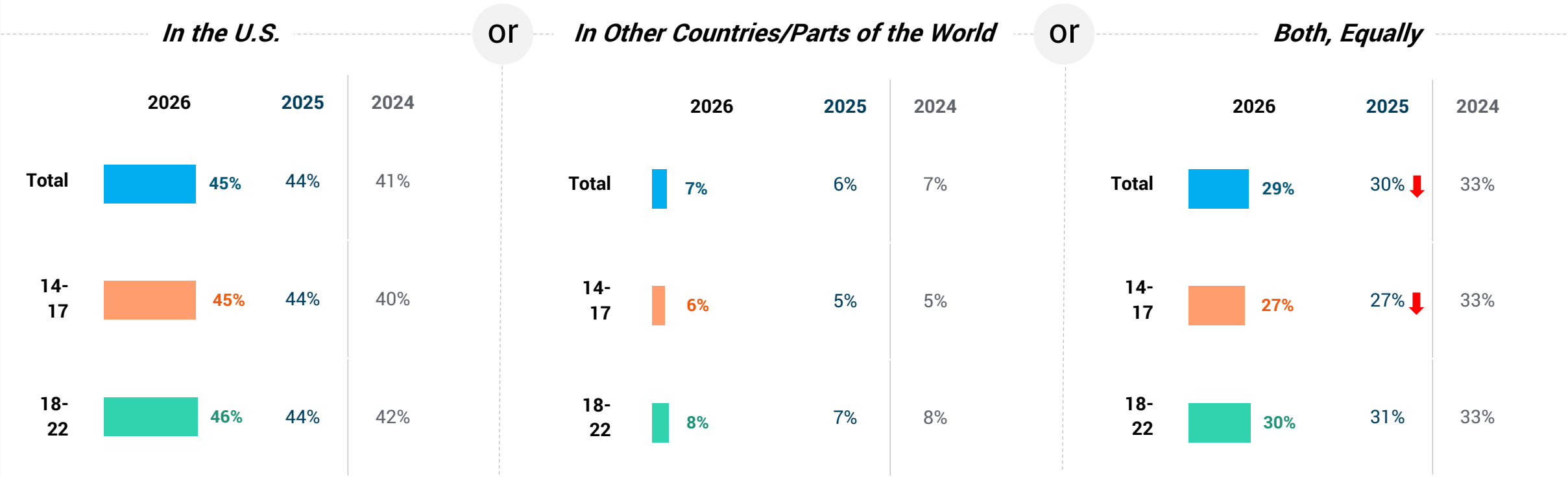
Top 10 Most Important Issues Facing The Country Today

Trended by Total



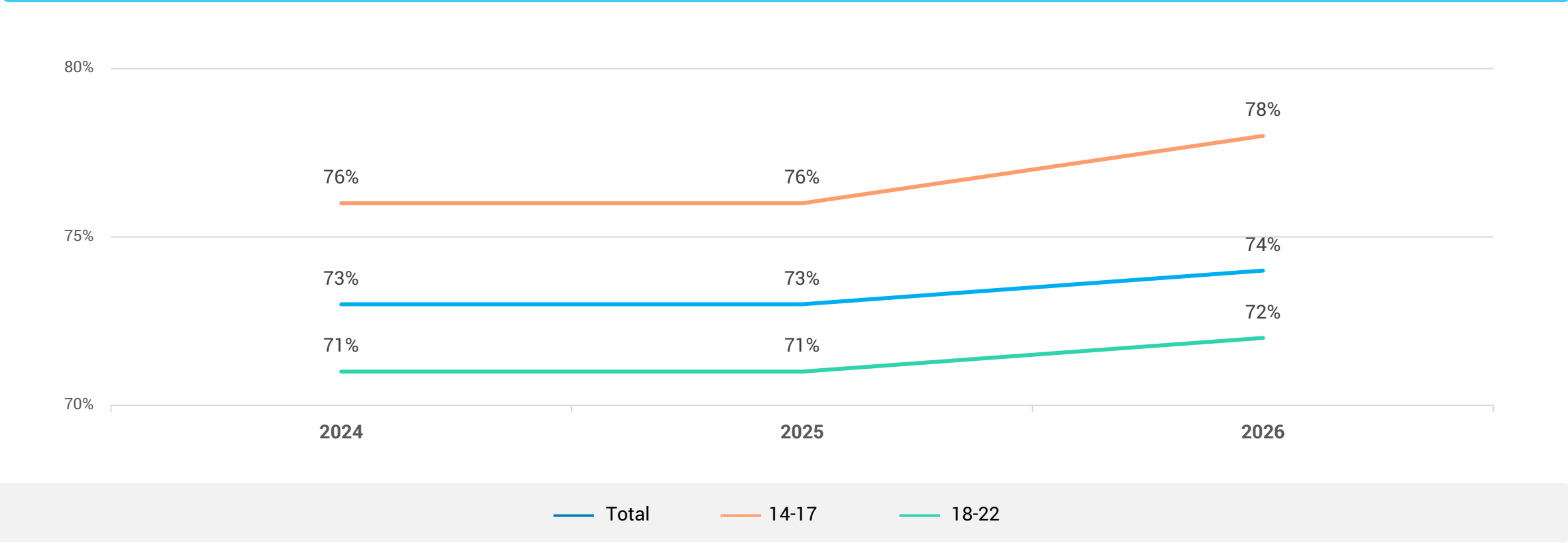
YOUNG PEOPLE FOCUS PRIMARILY ON DOMESTIC ISSUES—BUT MANY ALSO RECOGNIZE GLOBAL IMPACTS

I Am More Focused On Political Issues...



MOST YOUTH BELIEVE GLOBAL EVENTS DIRECTLY AFFECT THEIR LIVES, UP DIRECTIONALLY SINCE 2025

"I think what happens in other countries has or will have an impact on my life."
% Agree



↑↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

2026 POLITICAL INFLUENCES



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YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTERESTS CONTINUE TO SHIFT TO POLITICS AND CURRENT EVENTS

How Interested are You in the Following?

% Interested

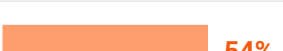
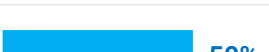
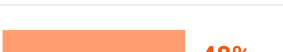
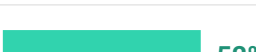
	Total			14-17			18-22		
	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024
Current events	 82%	81%	80%	 83% ↑	80%	79%	 80%	81%	81%
Technology	 75%	77%	78%	 84%	83%	83%	 68%	71% ↓	75%
Global issues	 74%	72%	71%	 72%	68%	68%	 76%	76%	75%
Politics at the national level / in the U.S.	 69%	69% ↑	64%	 67%	67% ↑	62%	 71%	70% ↑	66%
Viral trends on social media	 68%	70%	70%	 77%	80%	79%	 61%	61%	63%
Politics where you live	 64%	62% ↑	59%	 63%	59%	58%	 65%	65% ↑	60%
Celebrity news	 53%	51%	54%	 60%	63%	63%	 48% ↑	40% ↓	45%

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

CURRENT EVENTS, GLOBAL ISSUES, AND POLITICS REMAIN PART OF MANY YOUNG PEOPLE'S REGULAR MEDIA DIETS

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

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

	Total			14-17			18-22		
	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024
Viral trends on social media	 70%	70%	71%	 74%	76%	75%	 67%	64% ↓	68%
Current events	 69%	66%	64%	 68% ↑	63%	61%	 69%	68%	66%
Technology	 61%	60%	59%	 63%	62%	60%	 59%	58%	59%
Global issues	 60%	58% ↑	54%	 55%	52%	49%	 65%	63% ↑	58%
Politics at the national level/in the U.S.	 58%	60% ↑	50%	 55%	53% ↑	46%	 61% ↓	66% ↑	54%
Celebrity news	 51%	50%	51%	 54%	58%	56%	 48% ↑	44%	47%
Politics where you live	 50%	48% ↑	42%	 48%	45% ↑	39%	 52%	52% ↑	44%

TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF MEDIA INFLUENCE CONTINUE TO TAKE A BACK SEAT TO TRUSTED PERSONAL NETWORKS

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

Trended by Total

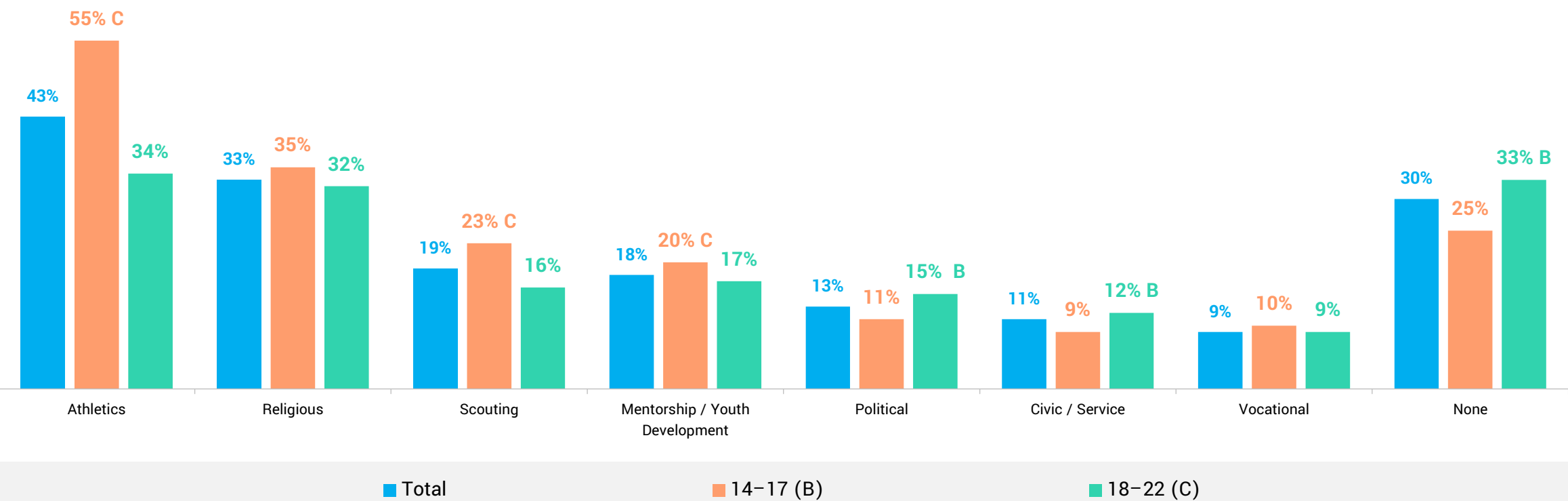
	Total		
	2026	2025	2024
My parents / guardians	47%	46% ↓	55%
Social media	31% ↓	38%	-
My friends	29%	29% ↓	36%
Religious groups^	29%	-	-
Politicians^	28%	-	-
Mass media	23% ↓	27% ↓	31%
Civic^	21%	-	-
Mentorship^	18%	-	-
Vocational groups^	17%	-	-
Politicians	16% ↓	21% ↑	17%
Members of my extended family	16%	18%	20%

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

^Among those who have been / are members

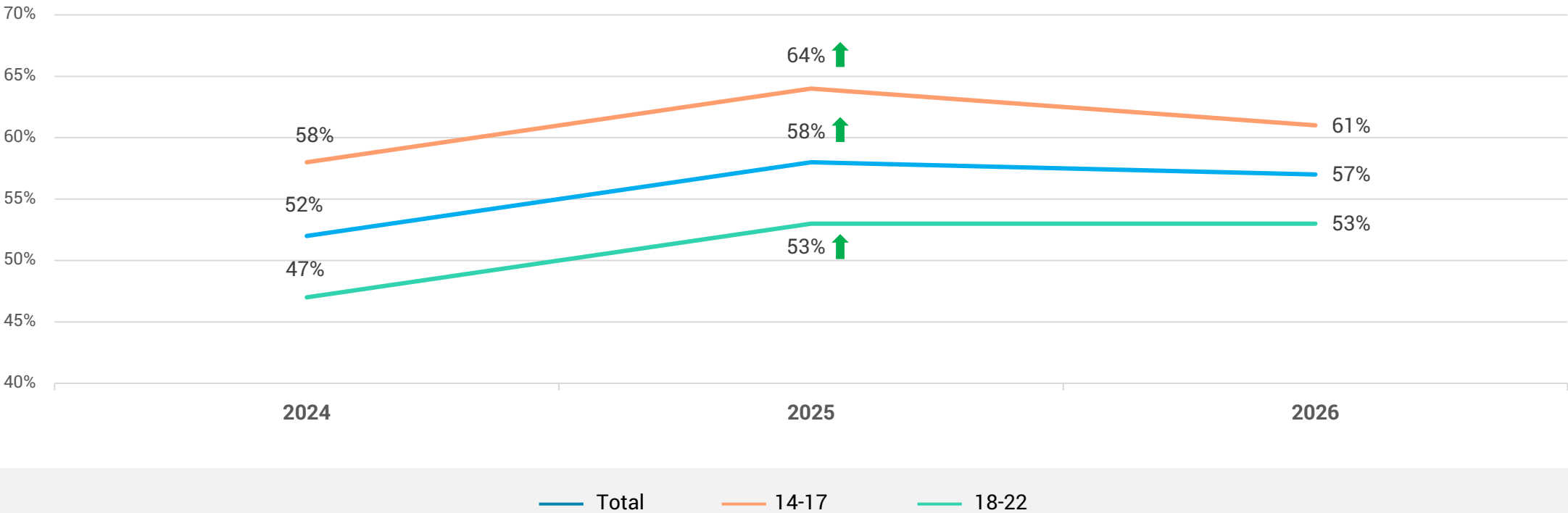
GIVEN THE INFLUENCE OF REAL-LIFE RELATIONSHIPS ON VIEWS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS MAY BE AN UNDERUTILIZED PATHWAY TO ENGAGEMENT

Have you ever been/are you a member of any of the following types of groups or organizations?



MOST YOUNG PEOPLE STILL DISCUSS POLITICS AND VOTING WITH ADULTS IN THEIR LIVES, THOUGH DIRECTIONALLY LESS SO AMONG YOUNGER TEENS THAN IN 2025

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



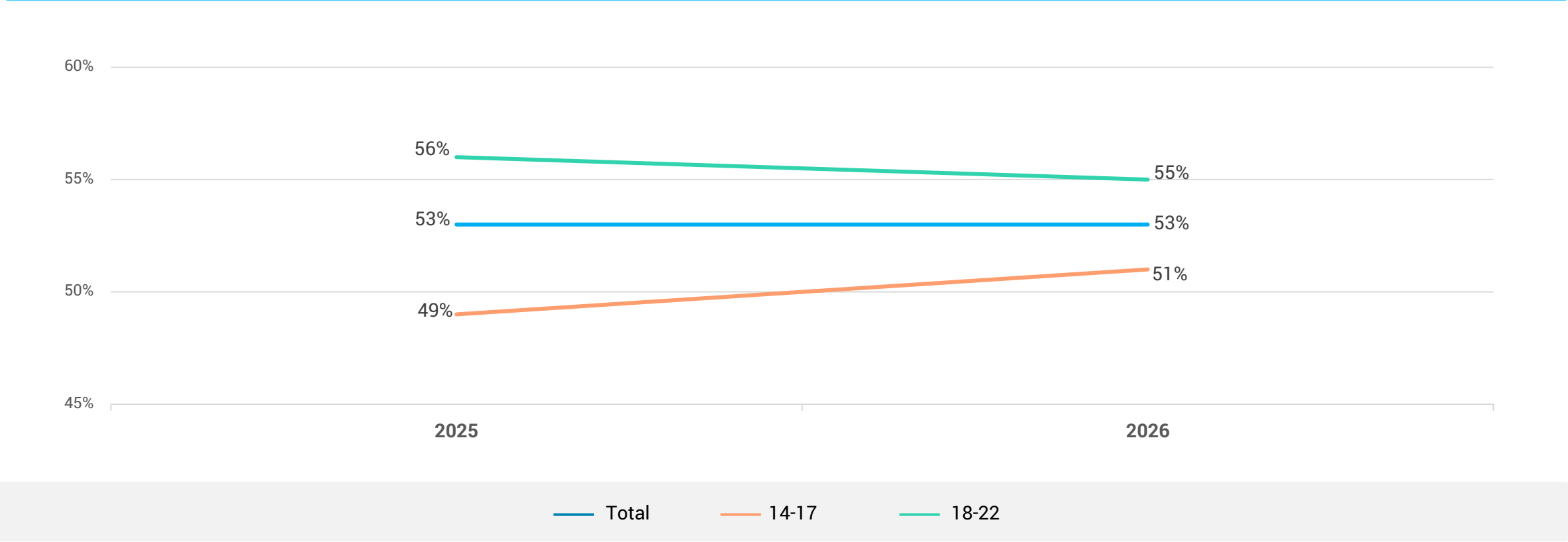
ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT PERCEPTIONS



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CURRENT EVENTS CONTINUE TO MOTIVATE MANY YOUNG PEOPLE TO BECOME MORE POLITICALLY

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



↑↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

AWARENESS OF ELECTED OFFICIALS HOLDS RELATIVELY STEADY SINCE 2025

Do You Know Who Your Elected Officials Are?

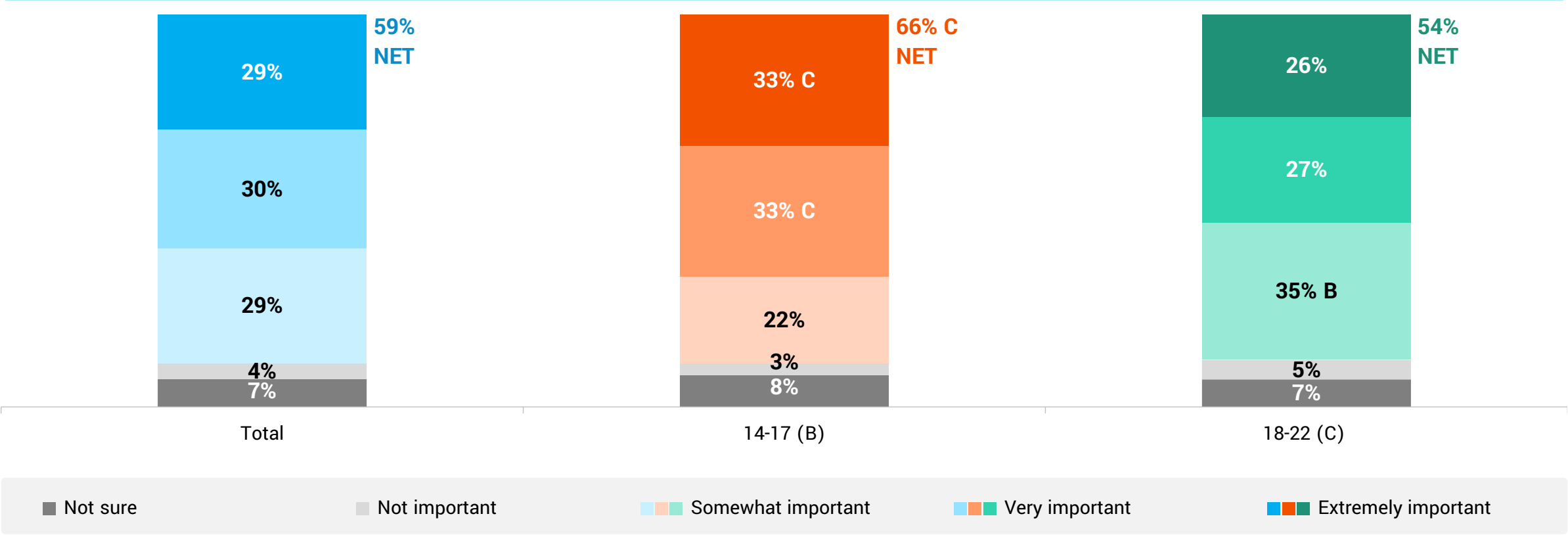
% Yes

	Total			14–17			18–22		
	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024
President of the United States	91% ↓	93% ↑	90%	94%	95%	95%	89%	91% ↑	87%
Your school’s president, dean, or principal	64%	63%	65%	84%	82%	84%	47%	46%	49%
The people who represent you in your state	57%	57%	54%	59%	58%	59%	55%	56% ↑	51%
The people who represent your county, city, or town	45%	47% ↑	43%	50%	49%	47%	41%	45% ↑	40%
The people who represent you at the national level	39%	39% ↑	35%	39%	36%	36%	38%	42% ↑	34%
The president of your local board of education	27%	27%	26%	30%	30%	27%	24%	25%	25%

↑↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

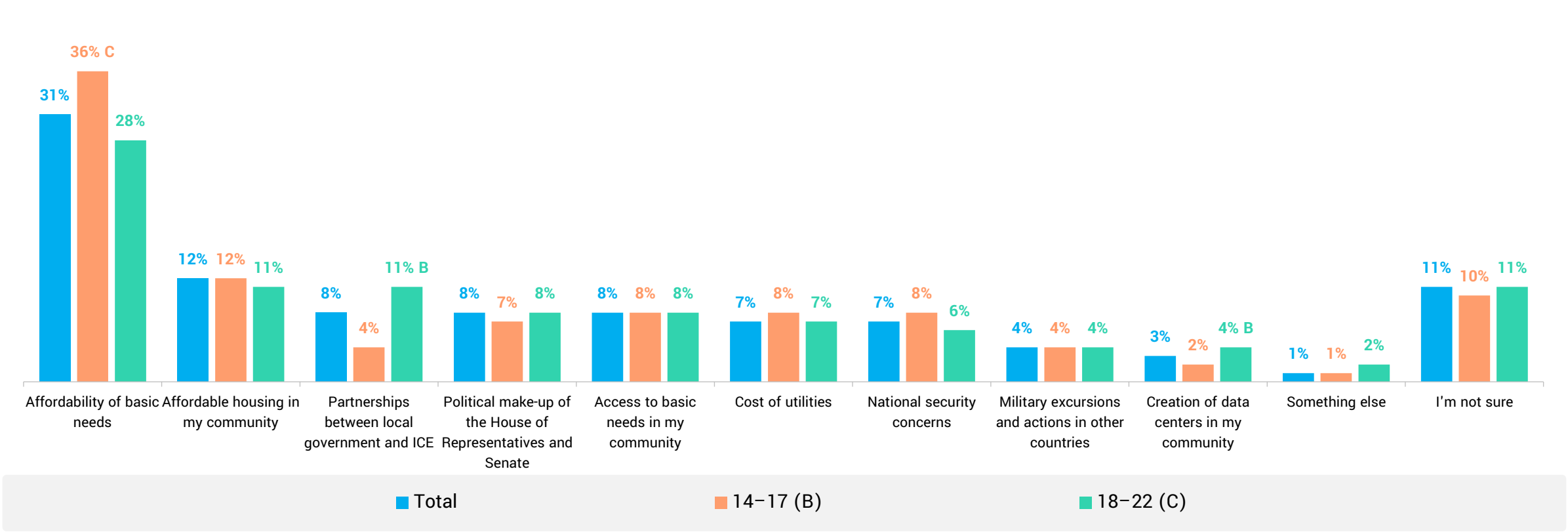
THE MAJORITY VIEW THE 2026 MIDTERMS AS IMPORTANT TO THEIR FUTURE, PARTICULARLY TEENS

How important do you believe the upcoming midterm elections are for issues that directly affect your future?



ECONOMIC CONCERNS LEAD YOUTH THINKING ABOUT THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS BY A CONSIDERABLE MARGIN

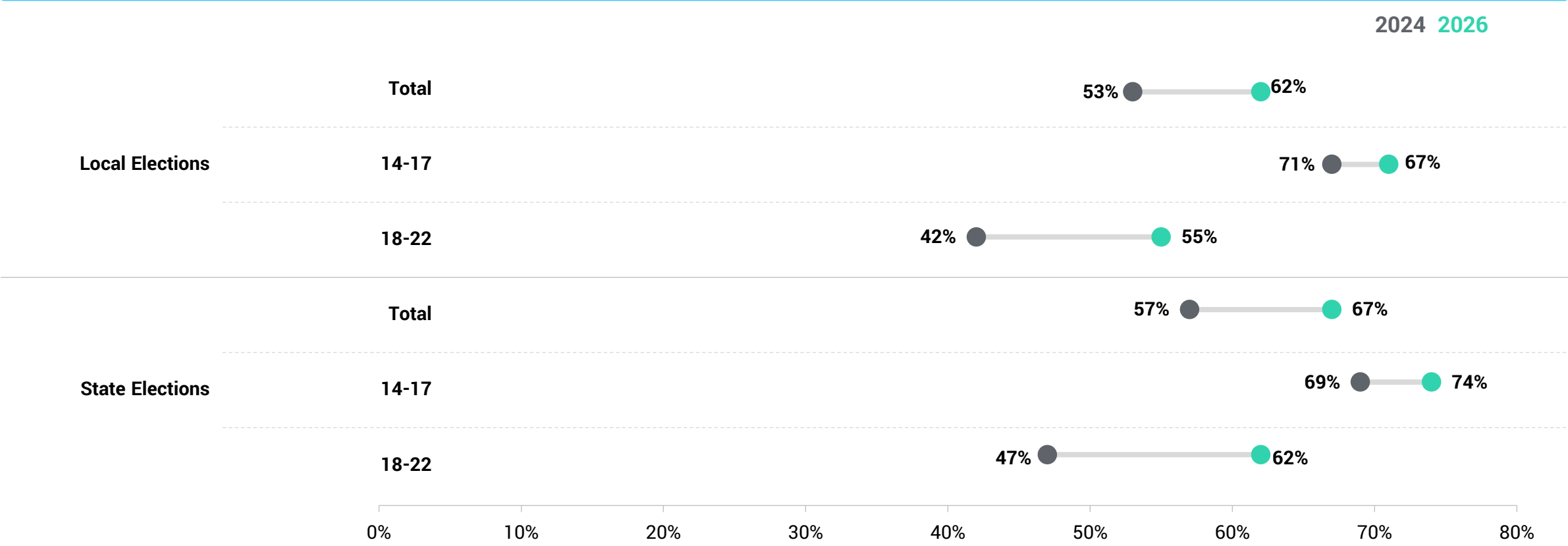
What issue are you most focused on when thinking about the impact of the upcoming midterm elections?



INTEREST IN VOTING IN STATE ELECTIONS SURGES AS THE 2026 MIDTERMS APPROACH

Do You Plan To/Would You Vote In The Following Elections This November?
% Yes

2024 2026



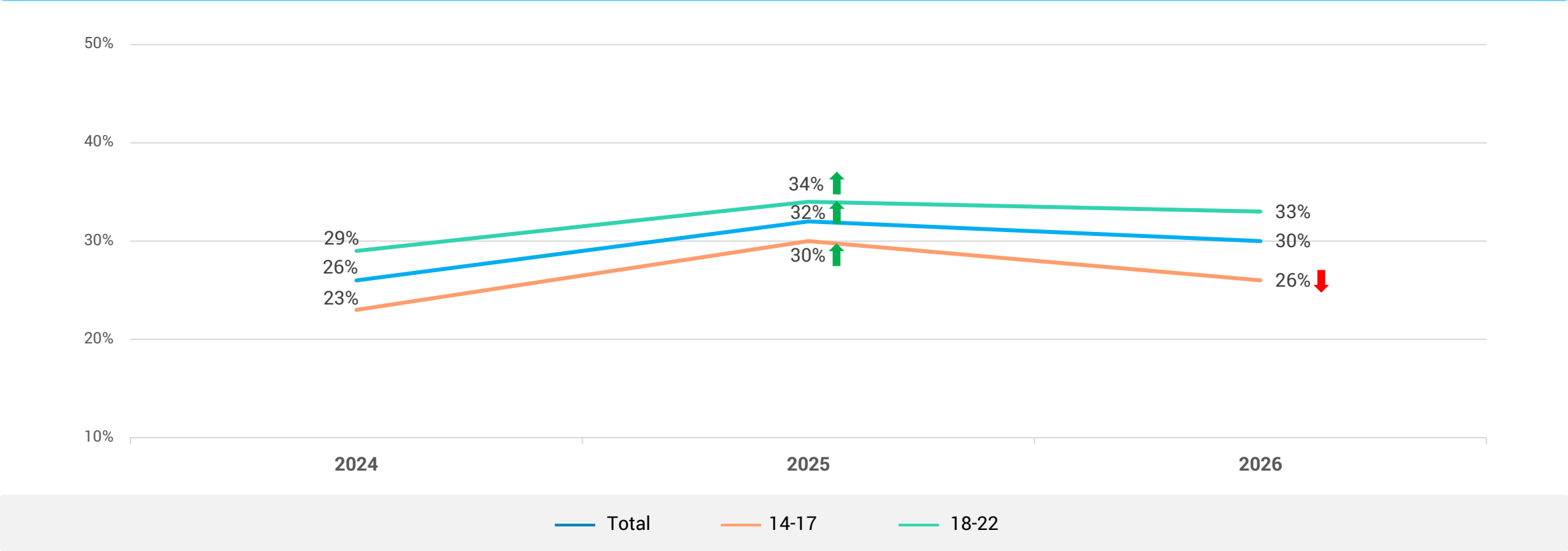
AMONG THOSE THAT DON'T PLAN TO VOTE, MOST STILL DON'T TRUST THAT THEIR VOTE MATTERS OR THAT THE PEOPLE RUNNING REPRESENT THEIR INTERESTS

Why Aren't You Planning On Voting In Upcoming Elections? Top 10 by Total – Among those who do not plan to / would not vote or not sure

	Total		14–17		18–22	
	2026	2024	2026	2024	2026	2024
I don't think my vote matters	 23%	23%	 21%	24%	 24%	23%
I don't think the people running for office have my best interest in mind	 21%	23%	 16% ↓	24%	 23%	23%
I don't trust any of the people running for office	 20%	23%	 17%	21%	 22%	24%
I don't think the political system is effective	 17%	19%	 13%	15%	 19%	20%
I don't think the people running for office understand my generation	 16%	19%	 15%	20%	 17%	19%
I don't agree with the way our voting system is organized	 15%	15%	 11%	12%	 16%	16%
I don't have enough time	 14%	12%	 5%	6%	 18%	15%
There are too many barriers to voting	 13%	11%	 11%	9%	 14%	12%
I don't feel passionate about the issues	 13%	16%	 13%	13%	 13% ↓	17%
I don't think voting impacts politics as much as other activities	 13%	13%	 8%	10%	 15%	14%

FEELINGS OF INCLUSION HAVE SOFTENED SINCE 2025 BUT REMAIN ABOVE 2024 LEVELS

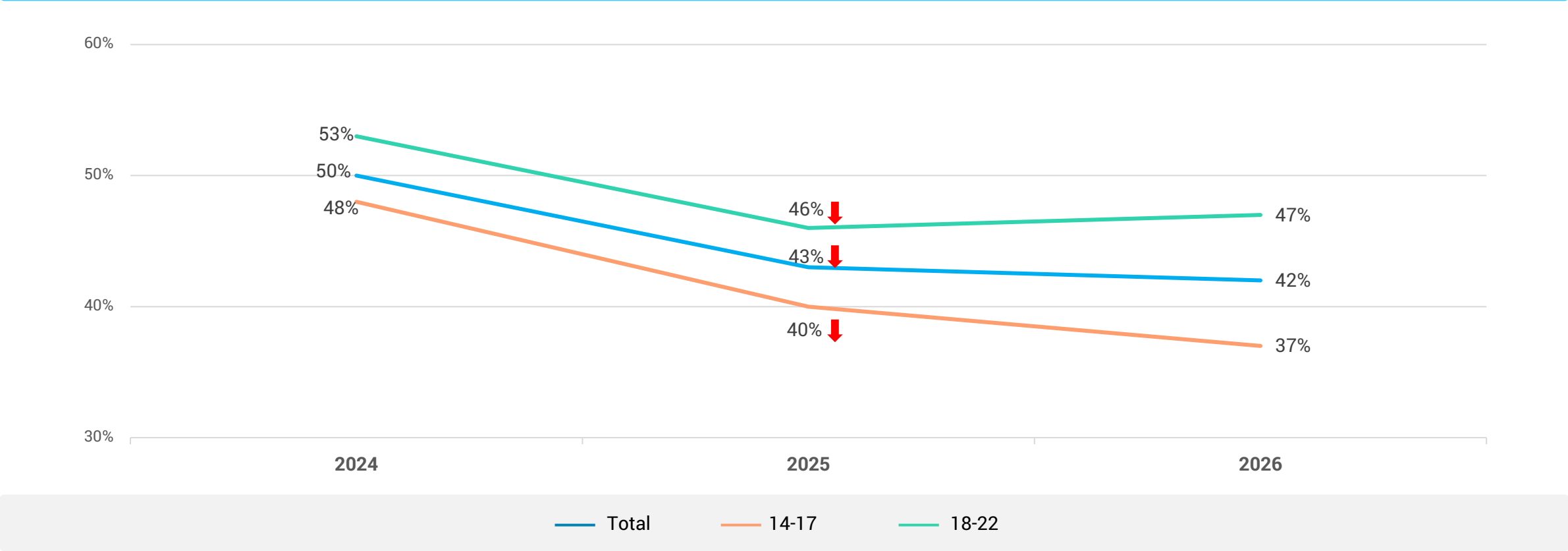
Overall, Do You Feel Included In The Political Process In The U.S.?
% Yes



Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

THOUGH CHALLENGES PERSIST, YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FINDING IT EASIER TO GET INVOLVED IN THE ISSUES THEY CARE ABOUT

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

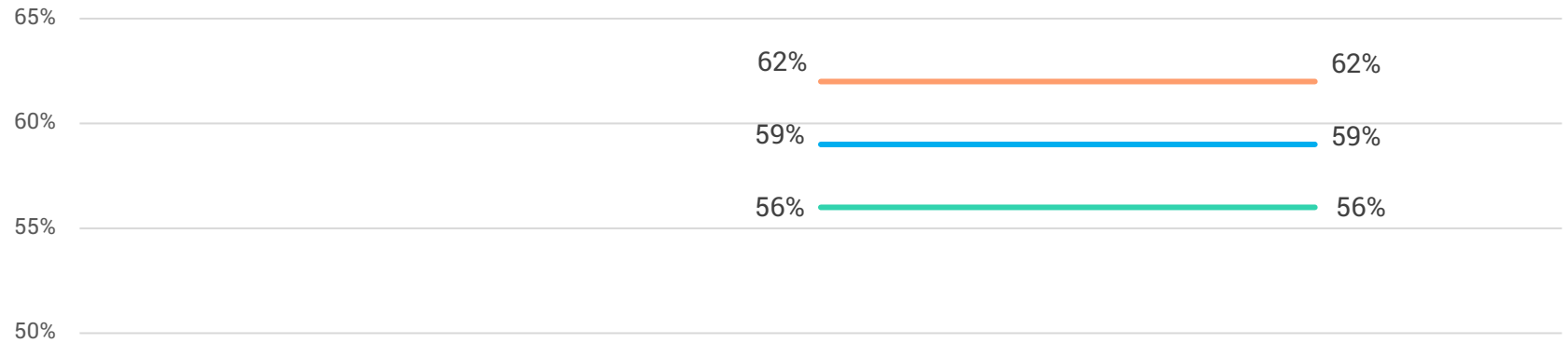


Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

YOUNG PEOPLE CONTINUE TO FEEL UNDERSERVED BY TODAY'S POLITICAL CHOICES

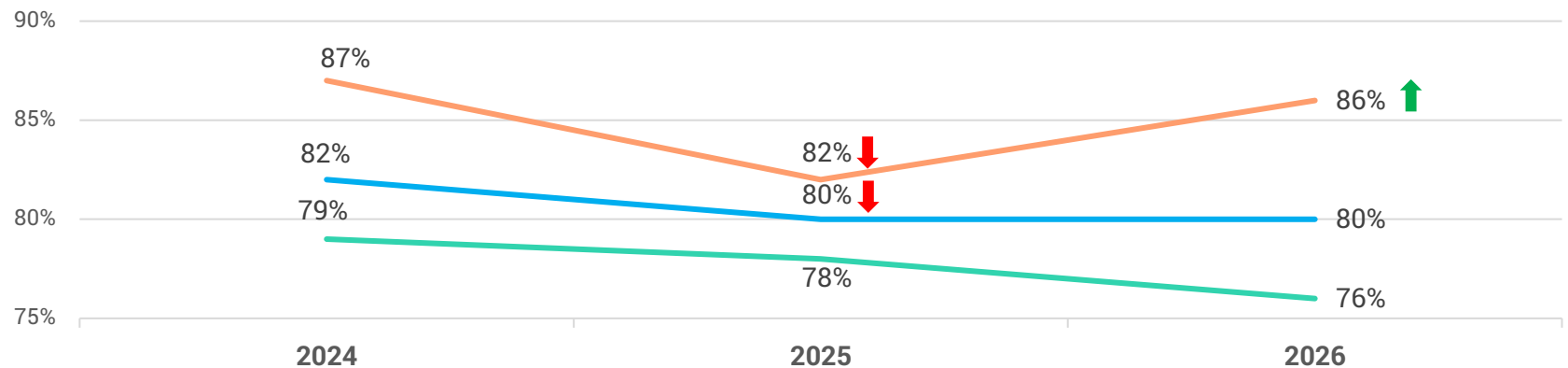
"Young people now are less empowered to be politically involved than previous generations."

% Agree



"I wish there were more opportunities to vote for politicians I believe in."

% Agree

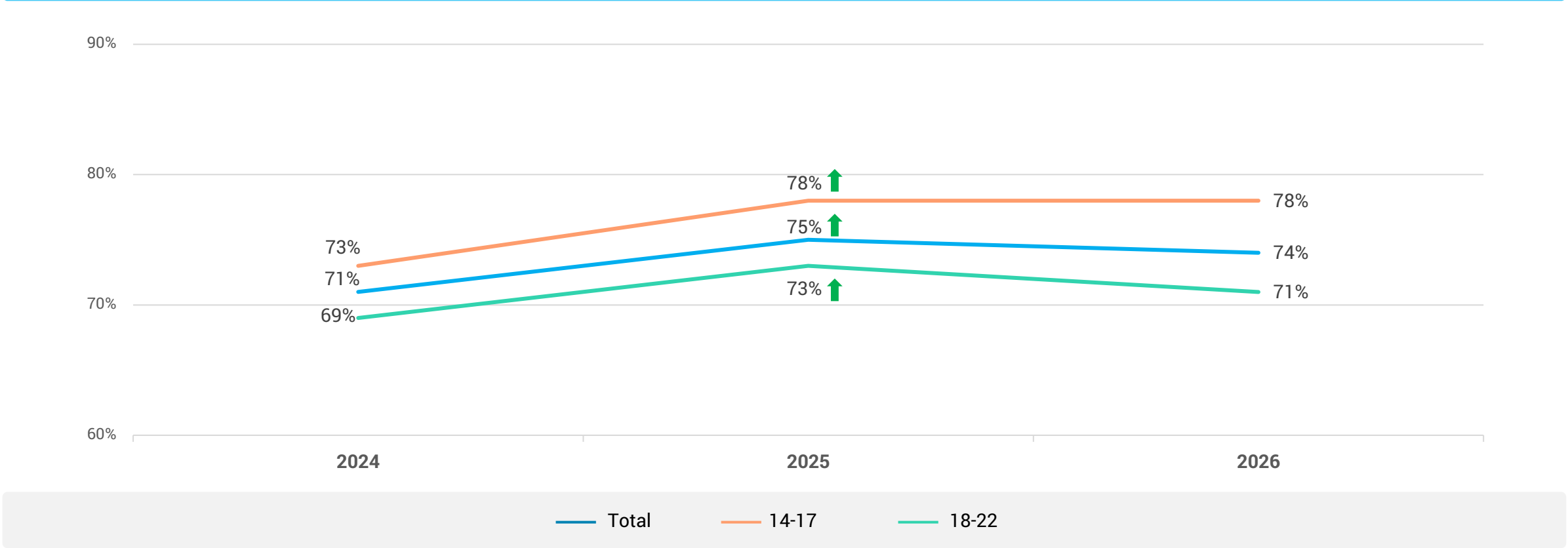


— Total — 14-17 — 18-22

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

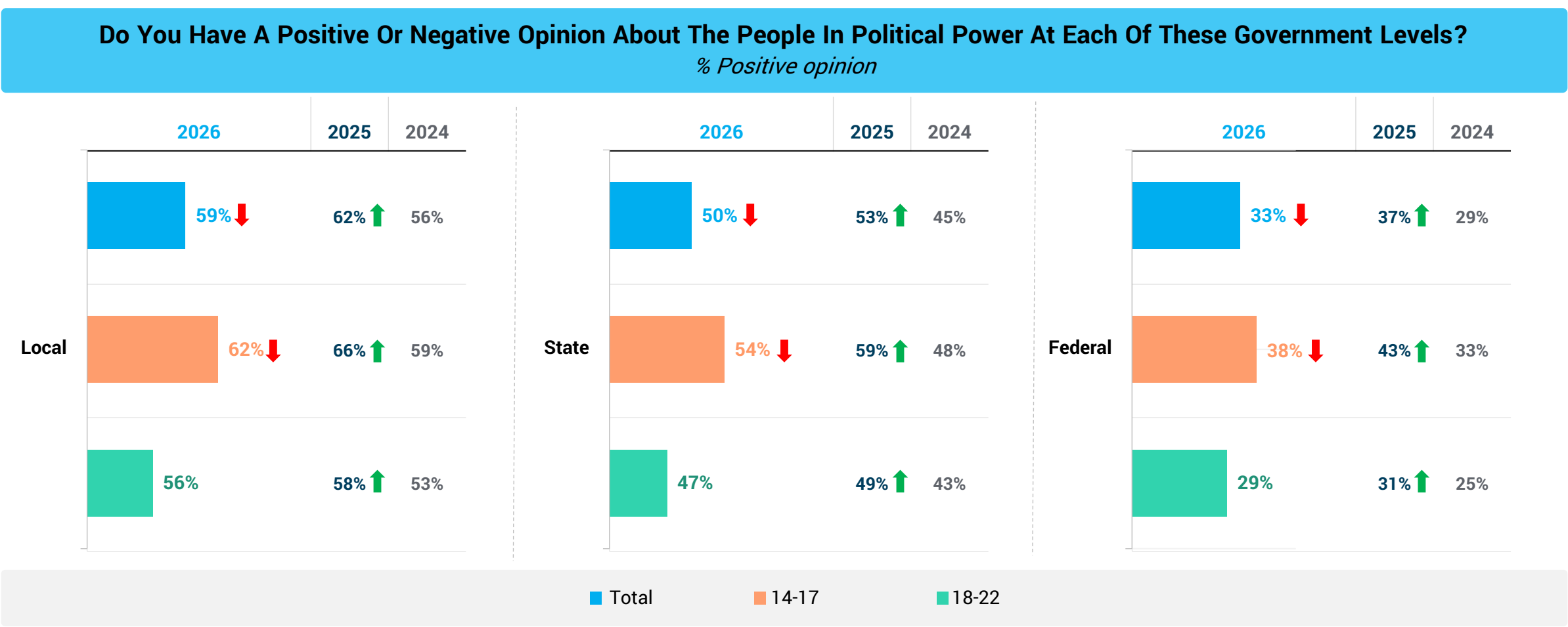
YOUTH HOLD STEADY IN THEIR BELIEF THAT POLICYMAKING IMPROVES WHEN YOUNG VOICES ARE INCLUDED

In Your Opinion, Can Including Young People in Policymaking Make America Better?
% Yes



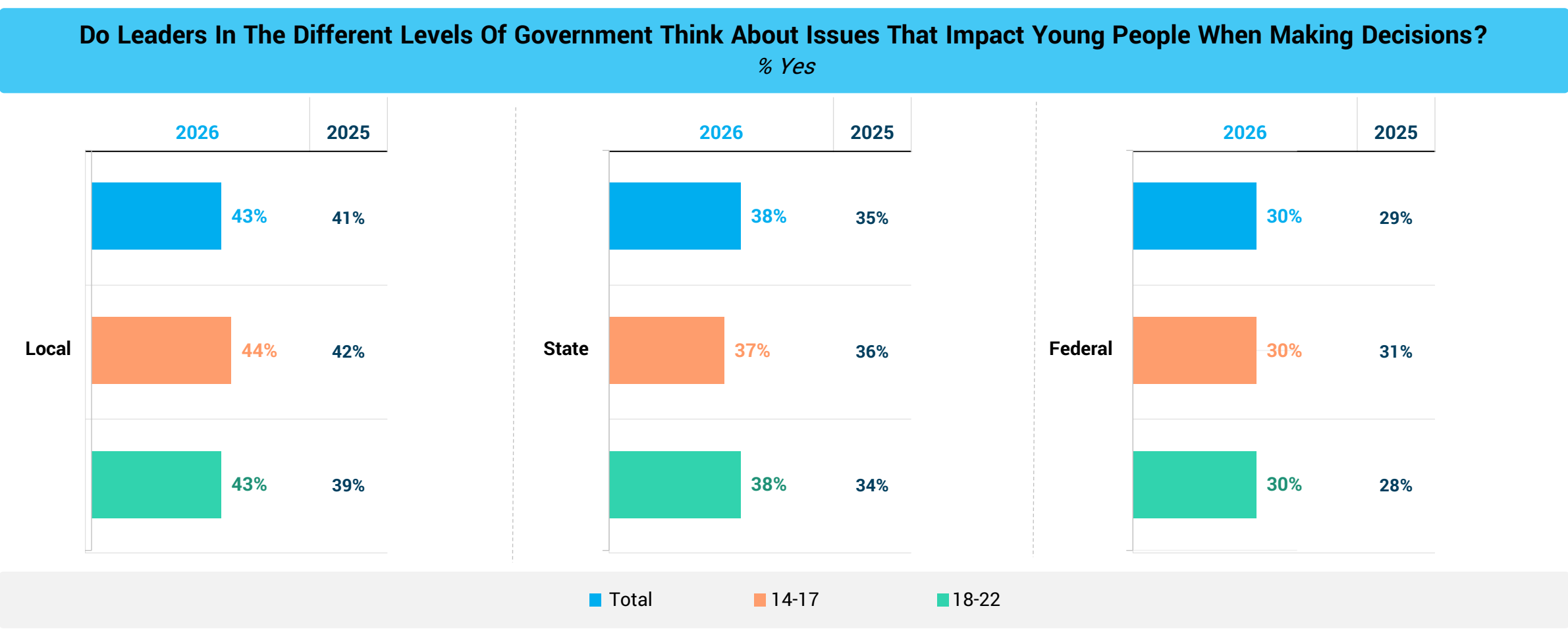
↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THOSE IN POWER DROP ACROSS ALL LEVELS



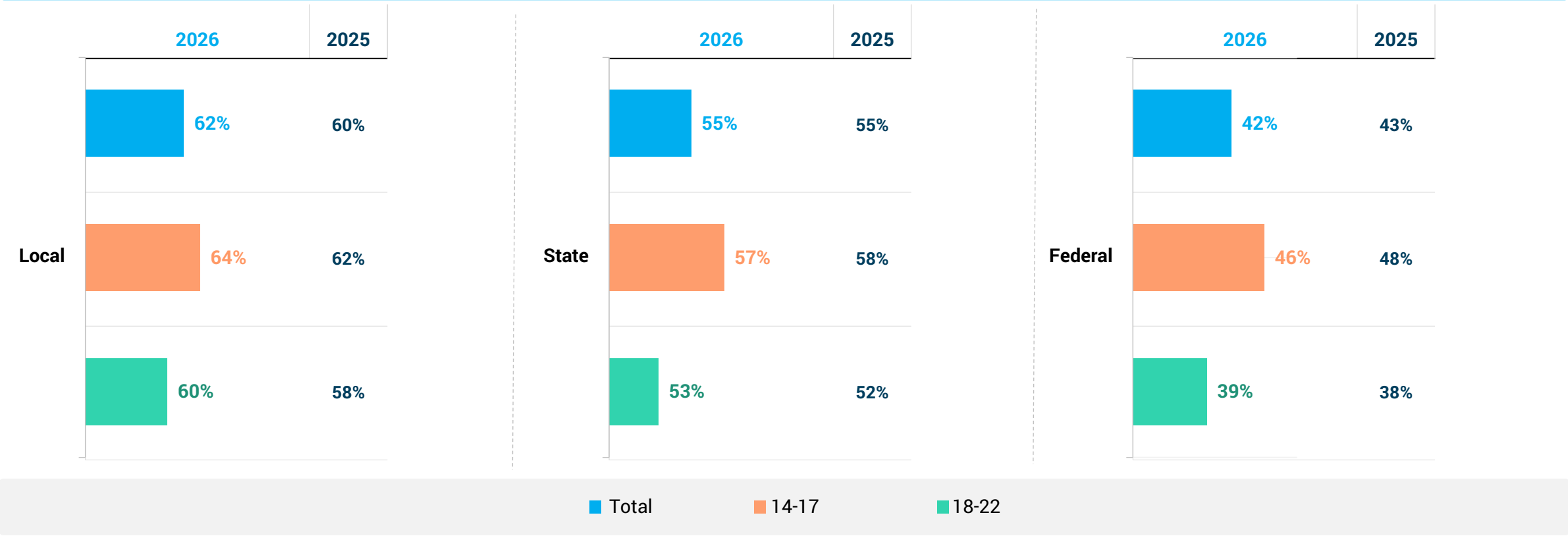
↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL THEIR CONCERNS ARE IGNORED BY OFFICIALS IN THEIR DECISION MAKING, PARTICULARLY AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL



YOUNG PEOPLE SEE LOCAL LEADERS AS MORE INVESTED IN THEIR FUTURE THAN FEDERAL LEADERS

To What Degree Do You Think Leaders In The Different Levels Of Government Are Invested In Your Future?
% Some/A great deal



↑↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

PERCEPTIONS REMAIN LOW BECAUSE ELECTED OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO NEGLECT ISSUES MOST IMPORTANT TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2026, PARTICULARLY THE ECONOMY

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

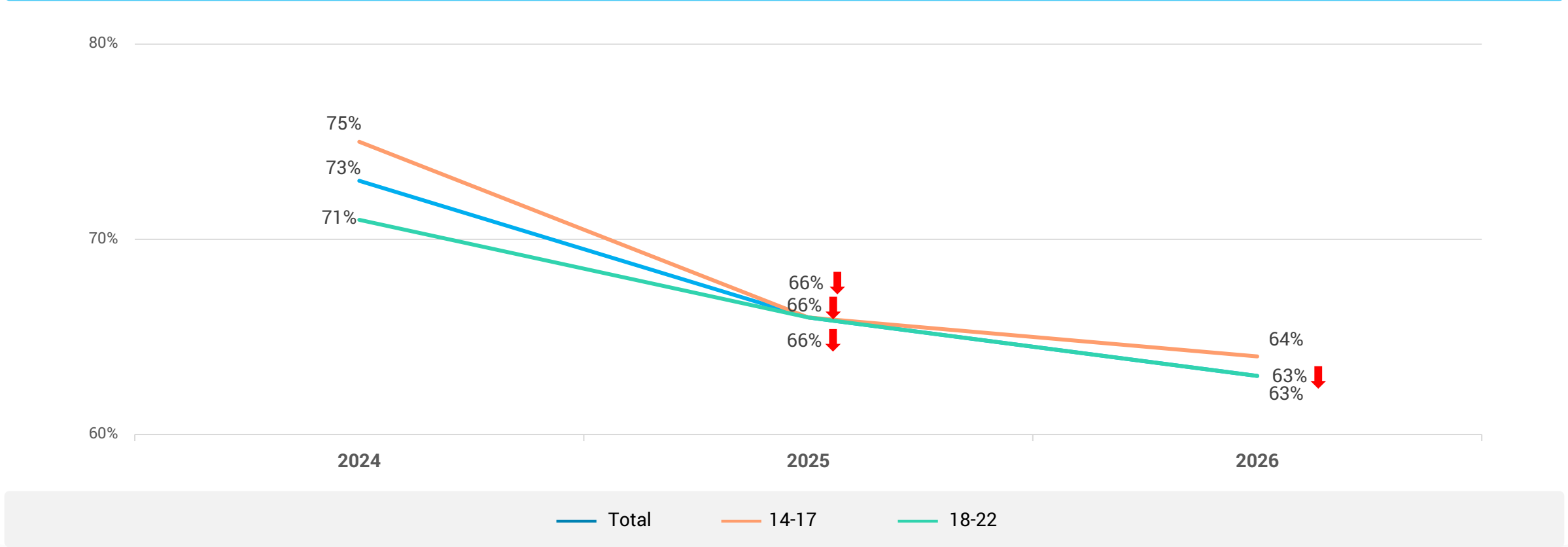
'Not Enough Attention' Among Top 10 issues, among those who find them important

	2026	2025	2024
Homelessness	85%	85%	84%
Cost of living and housing crisis	83%	81% ↓	85%
Access to healthcare	82%	81%	81%
Mental health care access	81%	81%	80%
Wealth inequality	80%	80%	81%
Climate change	77%	75%	76%
Weakening of public education	77%	-	-
The state of the economy	76% ↑	70% ↓	77%
Gun violence	76%	74%	76%
Access to quality education	76%	76%	75%

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

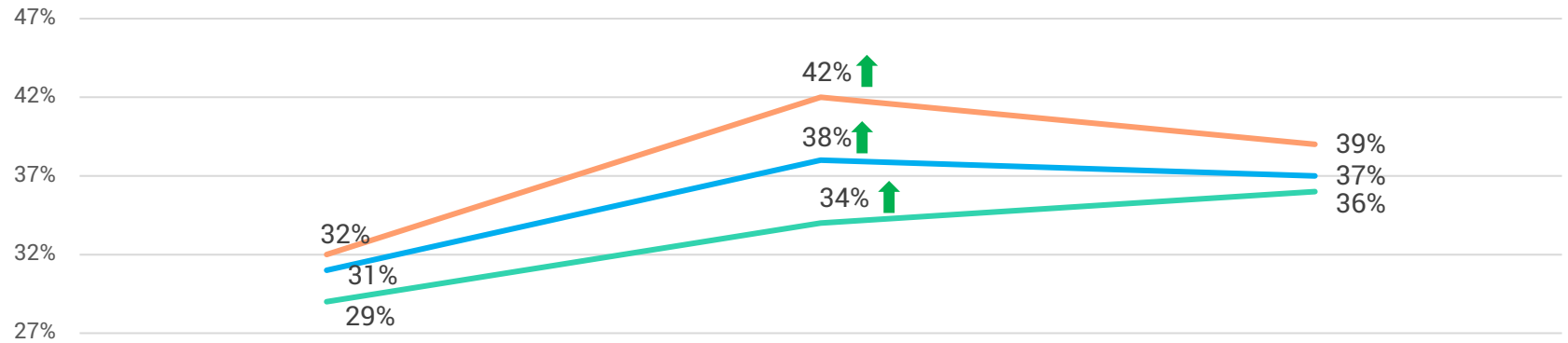
ENCOURAGINGLY, THE NUMBER FEELING IGNORED BY ELECTED OFFICIALS HAS DECLINED FOR TWO STRAIGHT YEARS

‘My opinion doesn’t matter to elected officials’

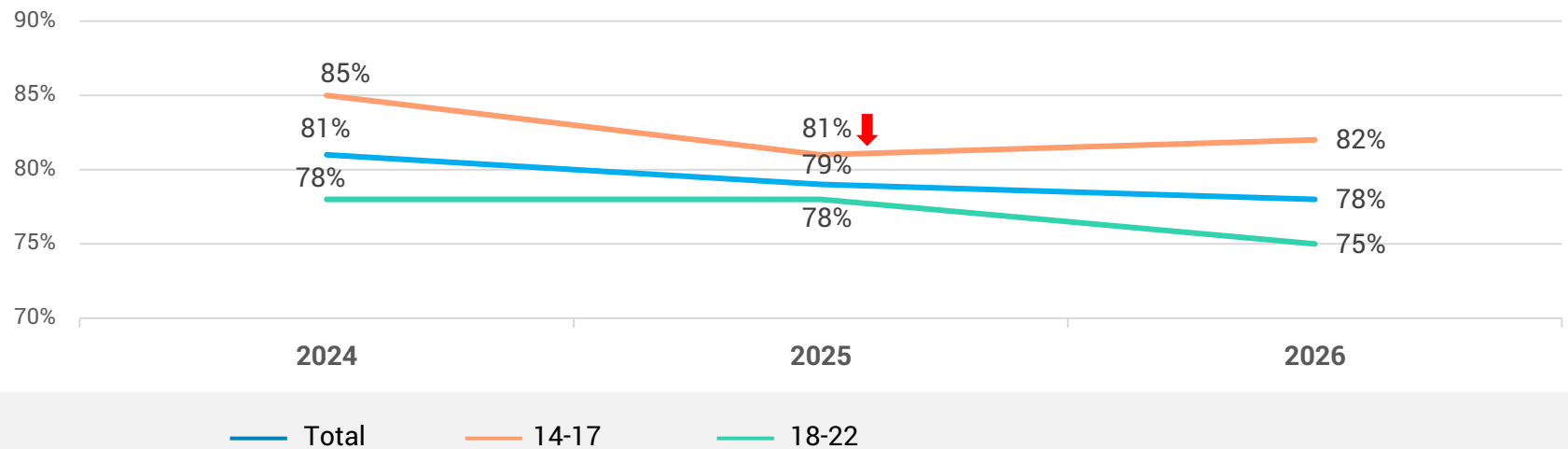


YET FEELING UNHEARD REMAINS ONE OF THE DEFINING BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

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

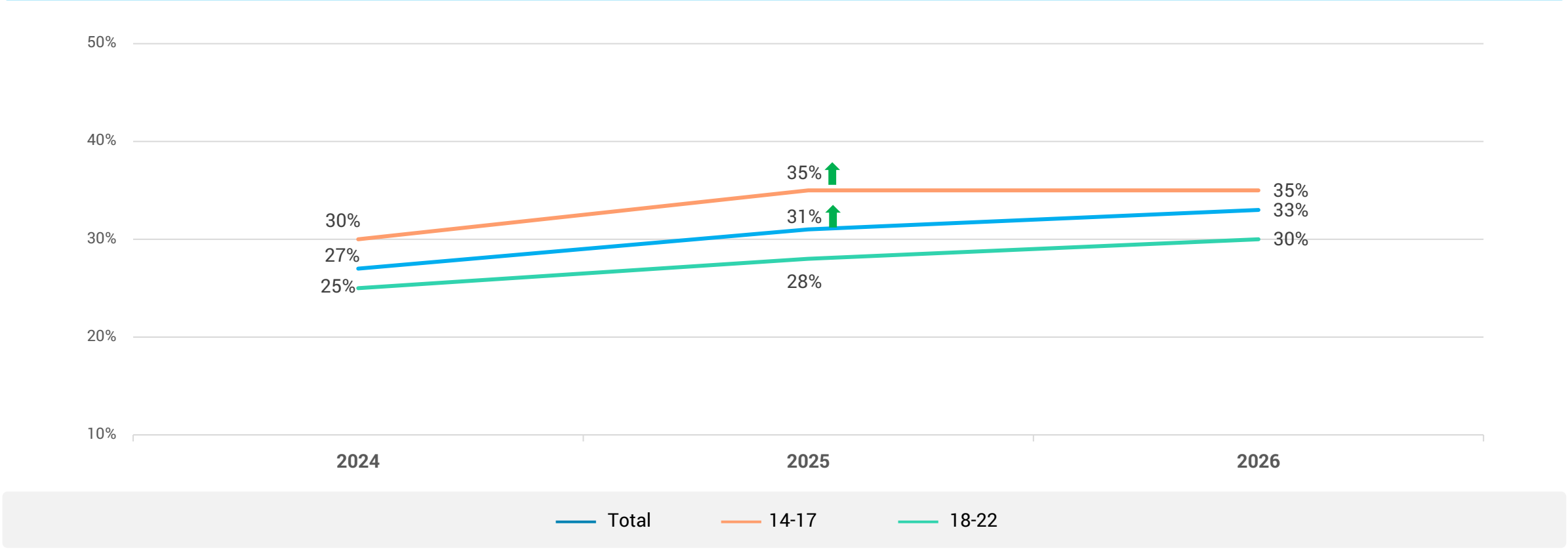


"The people in positions of power don't really care about what people my age have to say."
% Agree



MANY FEEL OVERLOOKED NOT JUST BY LEADERS—BUT BY THEIR COMMUNITIES

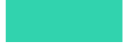
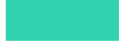
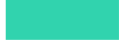
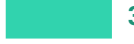
In Your Opinion Do Adults In Your Community Think About The Needs Of People Your Age When Voting?
% Yes



HOWEVER, YOUNG PEOPLE STILL NEED CONFIDENCE THAT THEIR OPINIONS MATTER AND ACTIONS CAN CREATE CHANGE IN ORDER TO ENGAGE

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

Top 10, Among those who find engaging difficult

	Total		14-17		18-22	
	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025
Knowing my opinion is important	 37%	37%	 39%	41%	 35%	34%
If I knew I could actually make a difference	 37% ↓	41%	 38%	40%	 36% ↓	41%
Feeling more educated on the issues	 36%	39%	 36% ↓	41%	 37%	39%
Knowing how to get started	 32%	33%	 31%	33%	 33%	32%
Understanding the political system better	 31%	33%	 29%	32%	 32%	33%
Feeling safer in my community	 28% ↓	32%	 24% ↓	28%	 32%	36%
If it was easier to find ways to get involved	 27%	26%	 23%	22%	 30%	29%
Finding more people who think like me	 27% ↓	31%	 25% ↓	31%	 28%	32%
Knowing my friends were also involved	 25%	27%	 26%	28%	 23%	25%
Having more time to focus on political issues	 22%	24%	 17%	18%	 25% ↓	29%

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

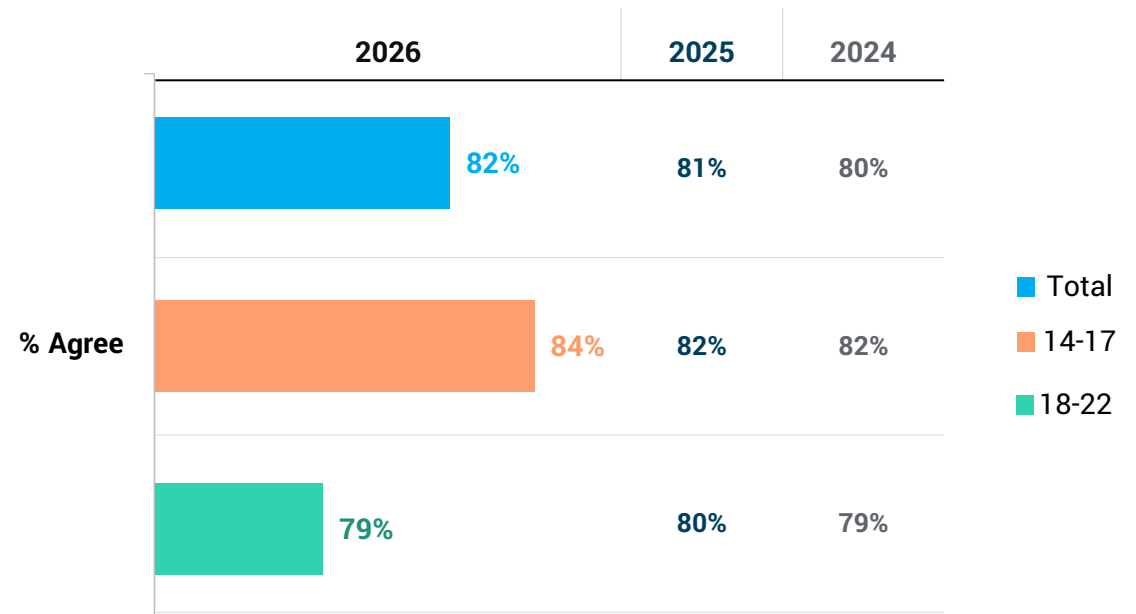
SOLUTIONS, BY YOUNG PEOPLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



for every child

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

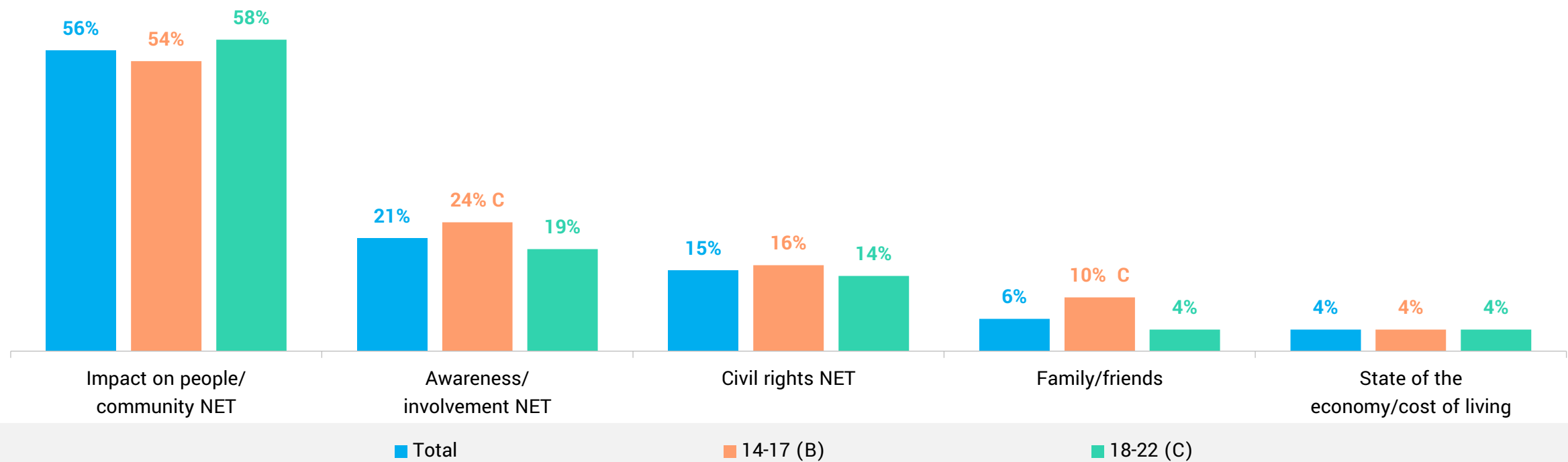
82% OF YOUNG
PEOPLE AGREE.



↑↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE OVERWHELMINGLY 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.
B/C Denotes Stat Testing at 95% confidence interval*

RESPONSIBILITY AND THE DESIRE FOR CHANGE CONTINUE TO MOTIVATE FUTURE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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

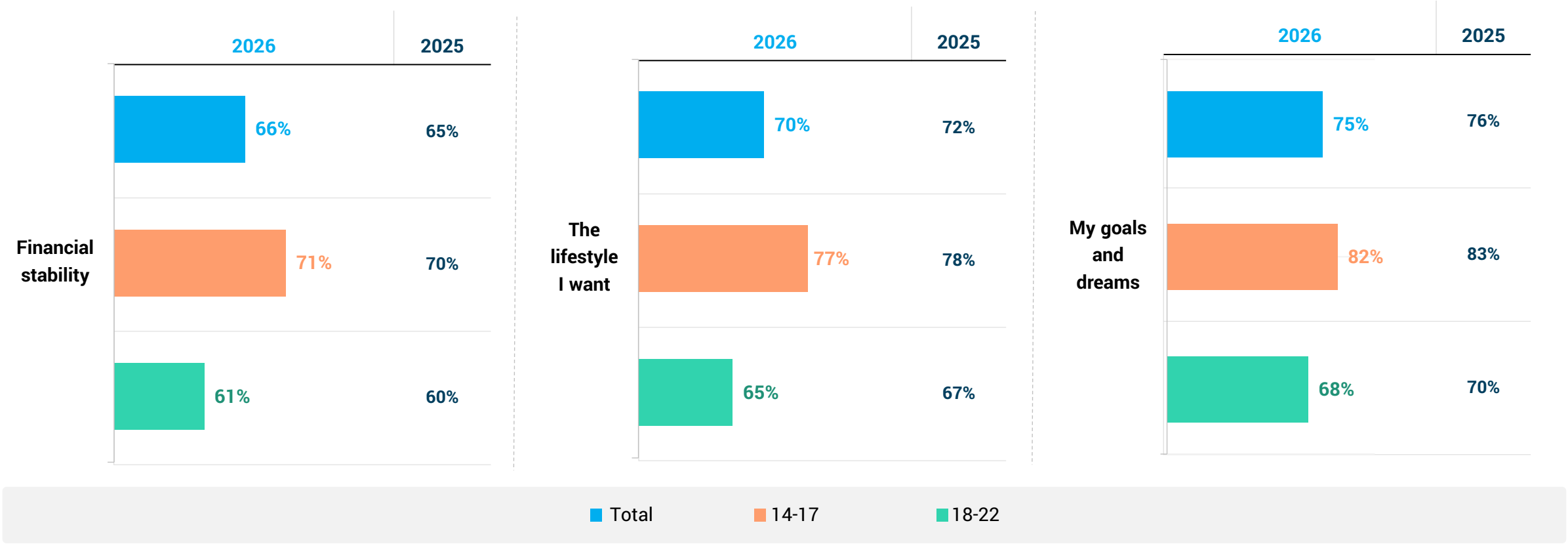
	Total		14–17		18–22	
	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025
It's my responsibility to vote	45%	43%	51% ↑	45%	40%	40%
I feel like I'm making a difference	42%	40%	48%	44%	37%	37%
I feel passionate about the issues	37%	37%	35%	33%	37%	40%
I believe in American democracy	36%	35%	41%	40%	31%	31%
I feel proud that I have the opportunity to vote	35%	34%	40%	37%	32%	31%
My opportunity to support those who will best represent me	32%	34%	35%	33%	30% ↓	35%
I want to set an example for others	27% ↓	30%	29%	30%	26% ↓	31%
Voting has the most impact on politics compared to other activities	25%	25%	23%	26%	28%	25%
I want to be as politically engaged as possible	25%	24%	21%	21%	28%	26%
I want to prove that our political system works	20%	21%	22%	22%	18%	21%



 Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

YOUNG PEOPLE CONTINUE TO HAVE SOFT CONFIDENCE ABOUT THEIR FUTURE, PARTICULARLY YOUNG ADULTS

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



↑↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

YOUNG PEOPLE CONTINUE TO THINK BEING PRIORITIZED WILL INCREASE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND REPRESENTATION

What Benefits Would You See If Elected Officials Prioritized The Opinions Of Young People?

	Total		14–17		18–22	
	2026	2024	2026	2024	2026	2024
More people my age would be encouraged to become more politically active or engaged	53%	55%	55%	55%	51% ↓	55%
I would feel more represented	51%	54%	53%	56%	50%	52%
The political decisions made would better reflect the needs of my community	40%	40%	39%	36%	41%	44%
Elected officials would include more points of view when making decisions	37%	39%	36%	36%	38%	42%
The political decisions made would be more inclusive	37%	37%	35%	33%	39%	42%
Other	1%	1%	*	1%	1%	1%
I'm not sure	7%	9%	7%	8%	8%	9%

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STILL THRIVES ONLINE, THOUGH DOWN SOME SINCE 2025

What Activities Have You Done In The Past 12 Months?

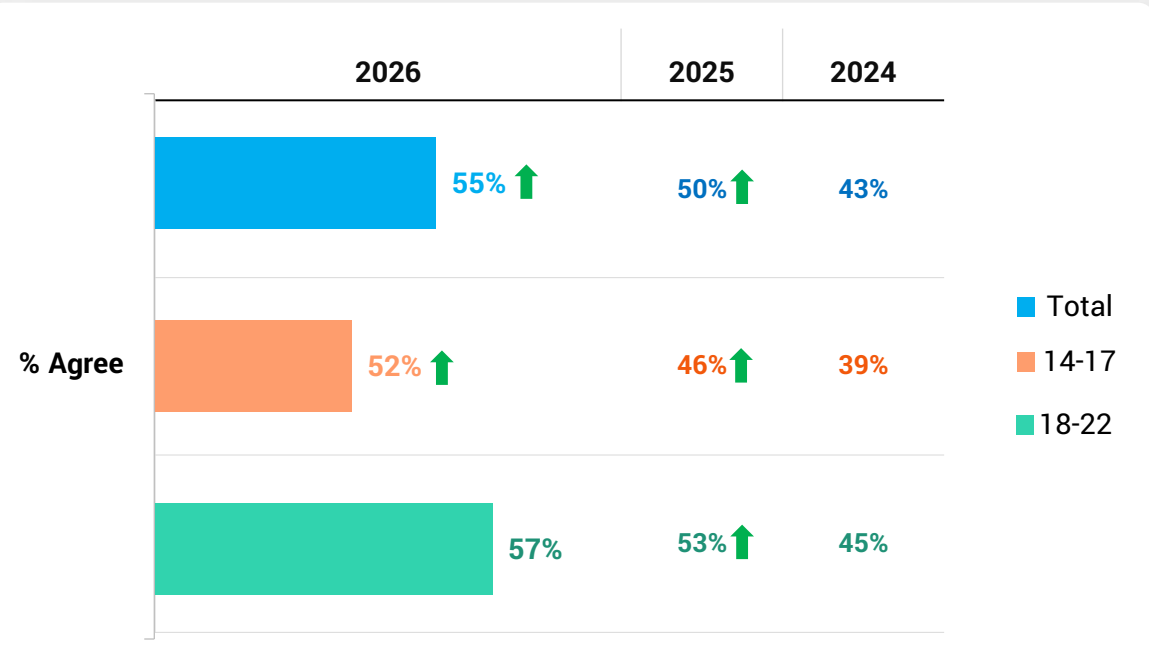
Top 10 Activities by Total

	Total			14-17			18-22		
	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024
Created online content	40% ↓	43%	41%	36% ↓	41% ↑	37%	43%	45%	44%
Volunteered	34%	34%	35%	34%	37%	34%	34%	32%	35%
Regularly consumed other news media	31% ↓	34% ↑	31%	29%	31%	30%	32% ↓	38% ↑	32%
Discussed or commented online about local, state, or national issues	26%	28%	26%	23%	26% ↑	22%	28%	29%	28%
Signed a petition	21%	-	-	11%	-	-	28%	-	-
Regularly read local and national publications	21%	23% ↑	19%	20%	21%	20%	21% ↓	24% ↑	19%
Donated money or helped raise money for a cause or organization	17%	-	-	14%	-	-	21%	-	-
Attended a public meeting on town or school affairs	13%	13% ↑	11%	13%	14% ↑	10%	14%	12%	12%
Attended a political rally, speech, or organized protest	11%	11% ↑	7%	7%	9% ↑	4%	15%	13% ↑	9%
Served as a member of school council^	10%	10%	9%	10%	10%	9%	-	-	-

↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval
^Among those 14-17

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

55% OF YOUNG
PEOPLE AGREE.



↑↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

YOUNG PEOPLE PLAN TO DEEPEN THEIR POLITICAL FOOTPRINT

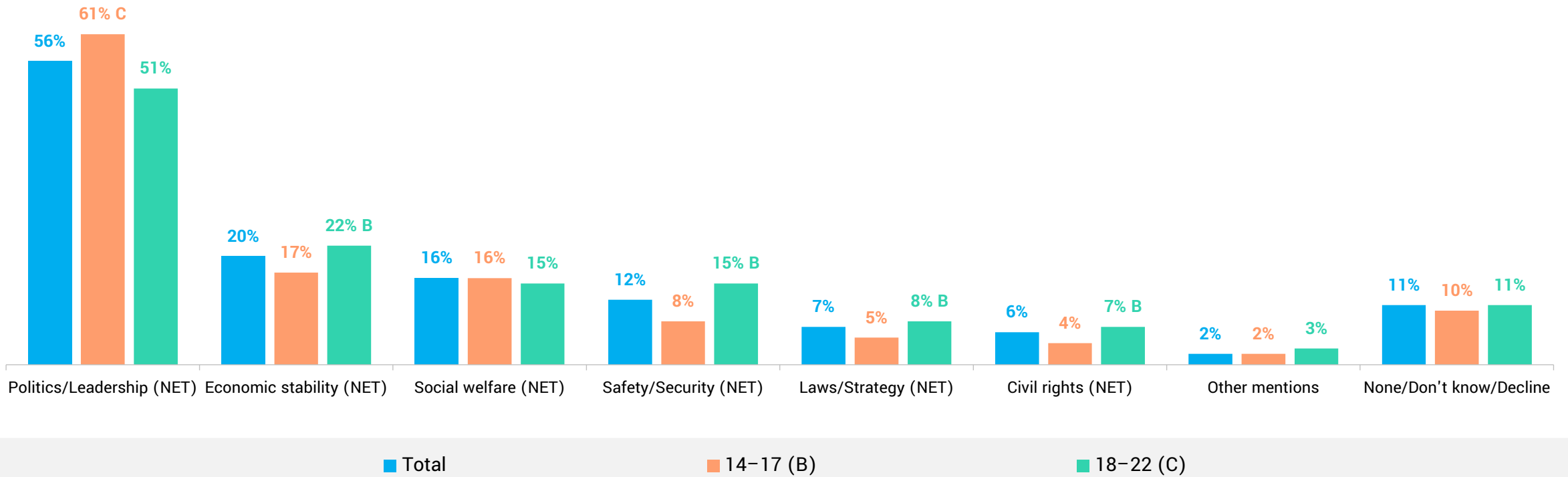
Whether through voting, activism, or social media, young people are preparing to amplify their voices

In Which Ways Do You Plan To Become More Politically Involved? Among Those Who Were Encouraged to be More Politically Involved, Top 10 by Total

	Total		14–17		18–22	
	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025
Voting in elections	48%	47%	40%	35%	55%	57%
Supporting causes I believe in	48%	46%	45%	46%	50%	46%
Following social media accounts related to where I live	41%	42%	42%	45%	40%	40%
Posting on social media about things happening in my community or around the country	34%	37%	34% ↓	41%	34%	34%
Following charities or advocacy groups on social media	29%	30%	28%	31%	29%	29%
Following government officials on social media	28%	29%	31%	30%	26%	28%
Volunteering for charities or advocacy groups	28%	27%	29%	30%	26%	25%
Engaging in political protests	28%	28%	23%	20%	32%	33%
Donating to charities or advocacy groups	24%	21%	22%	20%	26%	23%
Participating in boycotts	23% ↓	29%	15% ↓	22%	29% ↓	35%

YOUNG PEOPLE OVERWHELMINGLY 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 EXPLAIN THEIR FIRST LINE OF ACTION IF THEY WERE IN CHARGE

Politics/Leadership



"I would set an age limit on government official posts. This would reduce the amount of people in power that are older and more detached from the current state of events. It would also avoid people who are more prone to illnesses and can complete their duty at 100 percent during their whole term."

– 18-year-old Asian man, War on Iran

"If it were possible, I would try to get rid of the two party system, because it doesn't work and all it does is divide us between us versus them. Most people when they go to the polls aren't voting for the right reasons in my area and talking points and rude phrases instead of ever addressing any points that matter to people who can actually vote it's hard to watch."

– 15-year-old white boy, Inflation

Social Welfare



"I would give more scholarships and grants to college students. I would make healthcare more affordable. I would attack the problem of homelessness."

– 18-year-old Black woman, War

"I would make sure healthcare was free for every one and making sure there is no student debt."

– 14-year-old Hispanic girl, Health care

Economic Stability



"I would try and help reduce inflation."

– 21-year-old white man, Inflation

"Making sure that things were more affordable for families. The middle class families are no longer middle class. People are struggling everyday with bills and making ends meet."

– 15-year-old white girl, Gender roles

Safety/Security



"I would change the immigration laws to only deport actual criminals with criminal background not families or Hispanic people. And I would make guns illegal to own."

– 20-year-old Hispanic woman, Cost of living

"Stop war zone situations and focus more on citizens safety and education."

– 15-year-old Asian girl, Economy

WHILE YOUNG PEOPLE STILL PRIORITIZE LISTENING AND INCLUSION, ENTHUSIASM FOR THESE SOLUTIONS HAS SOFTENED IN THE PAST YEAR

How Can Political Leaders Best Support Young People In Making You Feel Heard?
Top 5 by Total

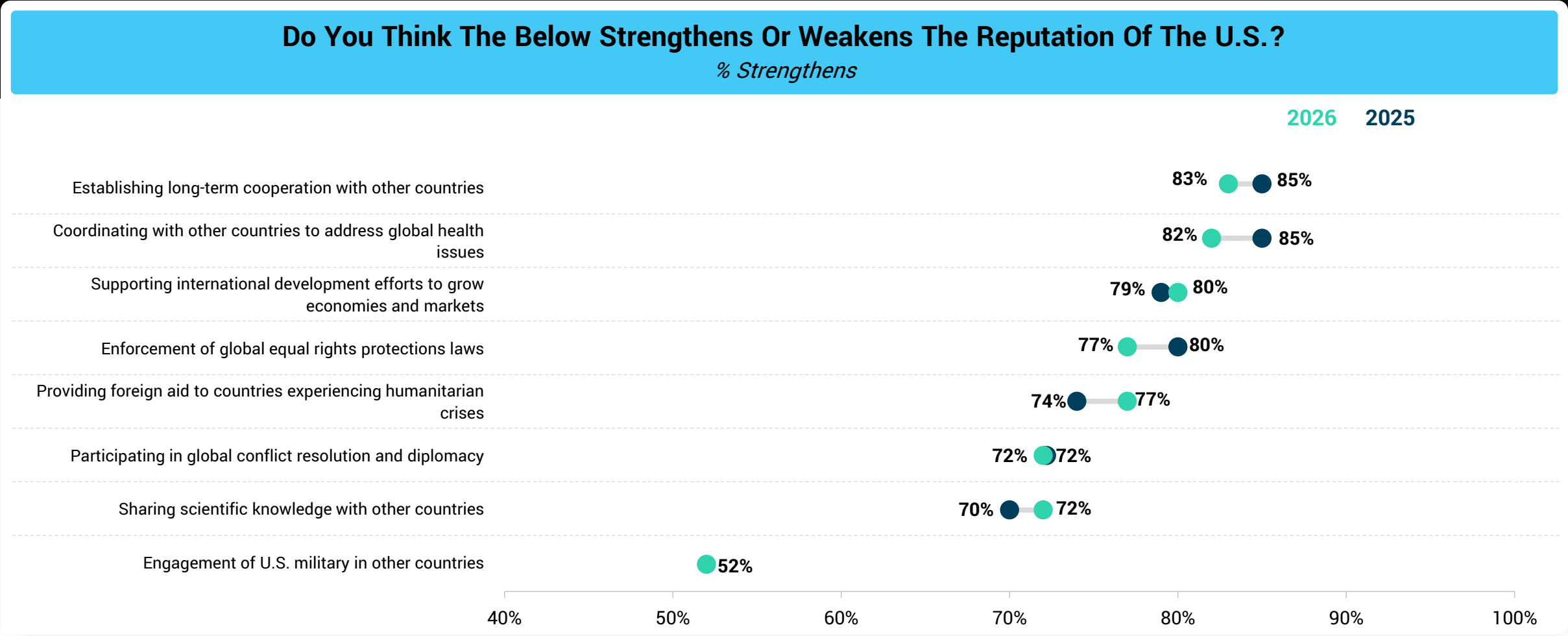
	Total			14–17			18–22		
	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024
Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues	44% ↓	48%	48%	45%	47%	46%	43% ↓	48%	49%
Consider how young people are impacted by legislation	43% ↓	47%	45%	44%	47%	45%	43%	46%	44%
Engage in honest dialogue with younger generations	42% ↓	45%	46%	46%	48%	48%	39%	43%	45%
Allow younger people to be a key part of decision-making and developing solutions	42%	42%	43%	41%	40%	40%	42%	44%	45%
Make room for younger people to be in political power	38% ↓	41%	44%	35%	35% ↓	39%	39% ↓	46%	47%

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES & SOLUTIONS



for every child

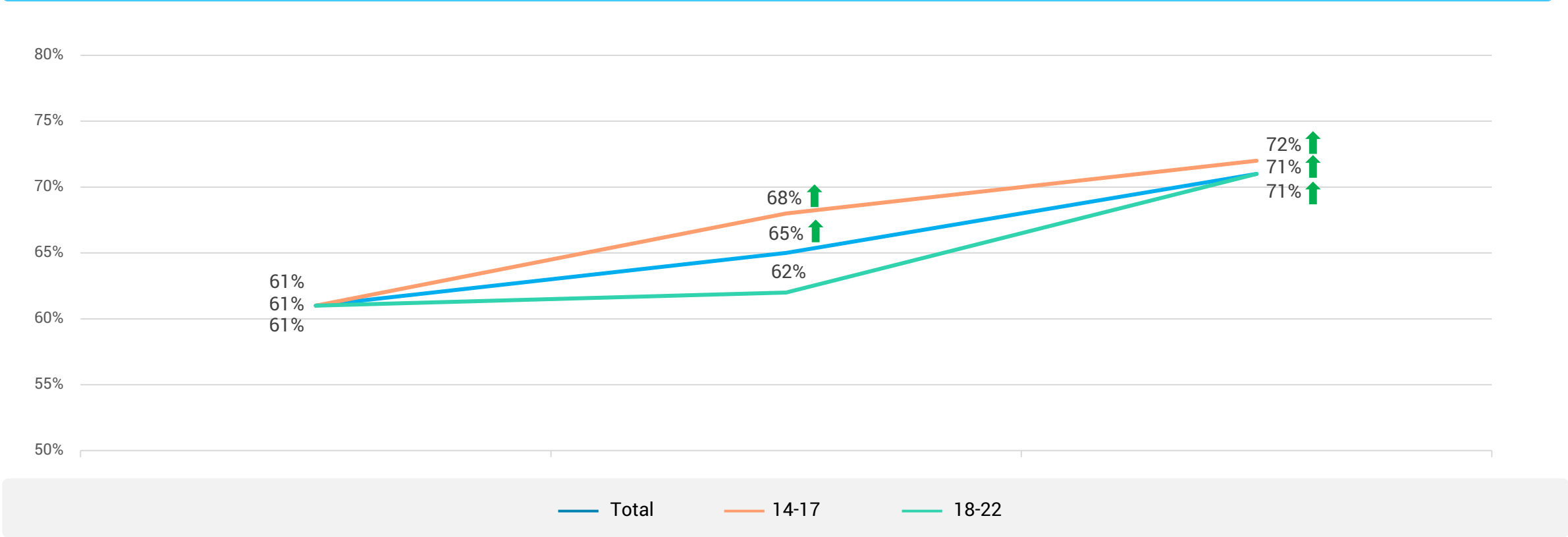
GLOBAL COOPERATION INCREASINGLY SEEN AS SOMETHING THAT STRENGTHENS PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S.



AMERICA'S YOUTH SUPPORT A GLOBAL ROLE FOR THE U.S., UP SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

"The U.S. should have a role in supporting other countries (e.g., economically, foreign aid, etc.)"

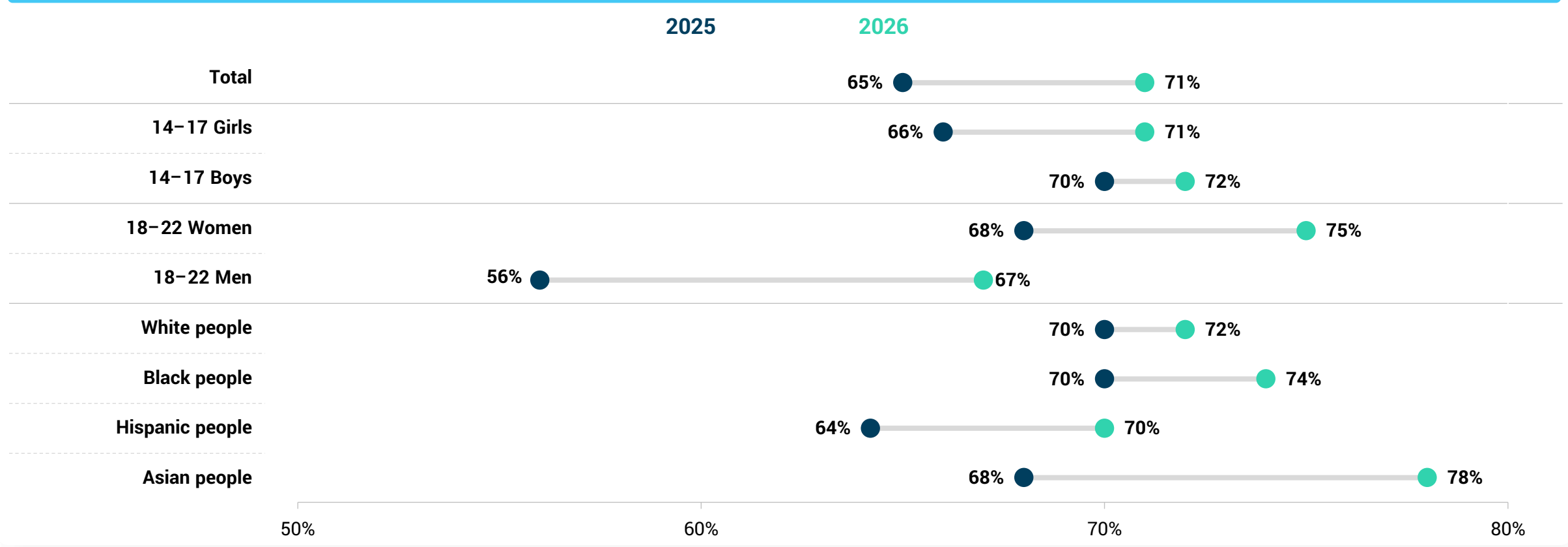
% Agree



SUPPORT FOR AN ACTIVE U.S. ROLE IN THE WORLD HAS GROWN ACROSS NEARLY EVERY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP

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

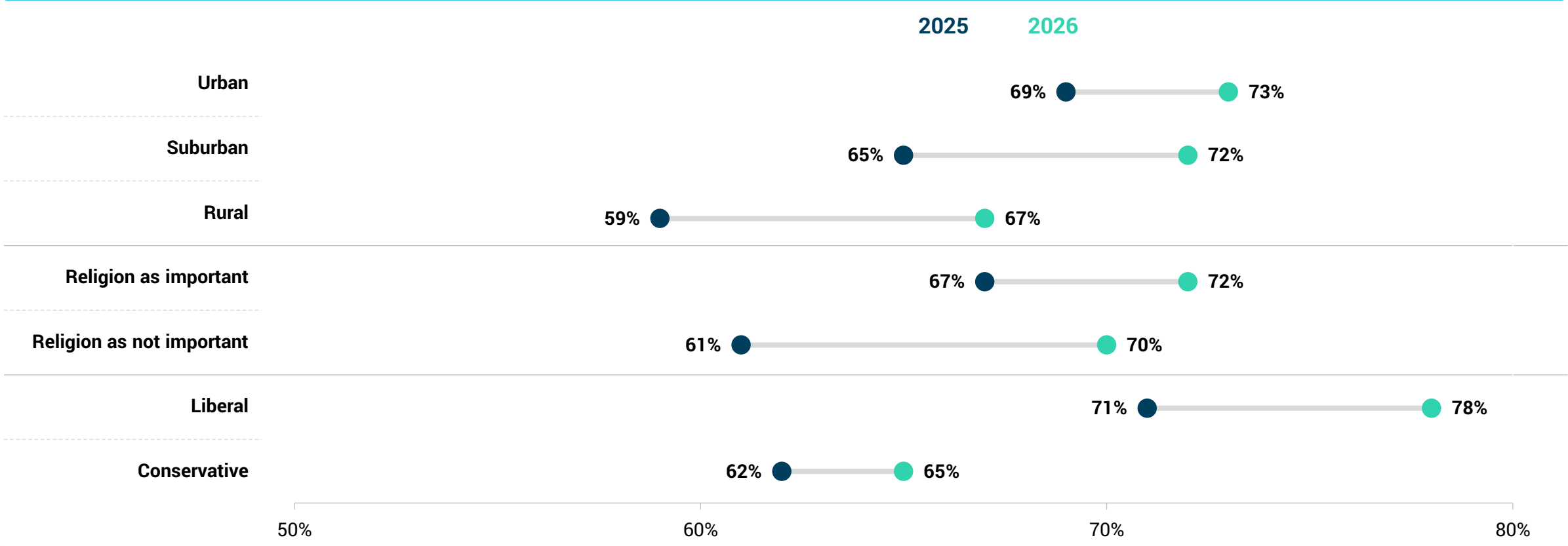
% Agree, Trended by Subgroups



SUPPORT FOR U.S. GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT EXTENDS ACROSS GEOGRAPHY, FAITH, AND IDEOLOGY

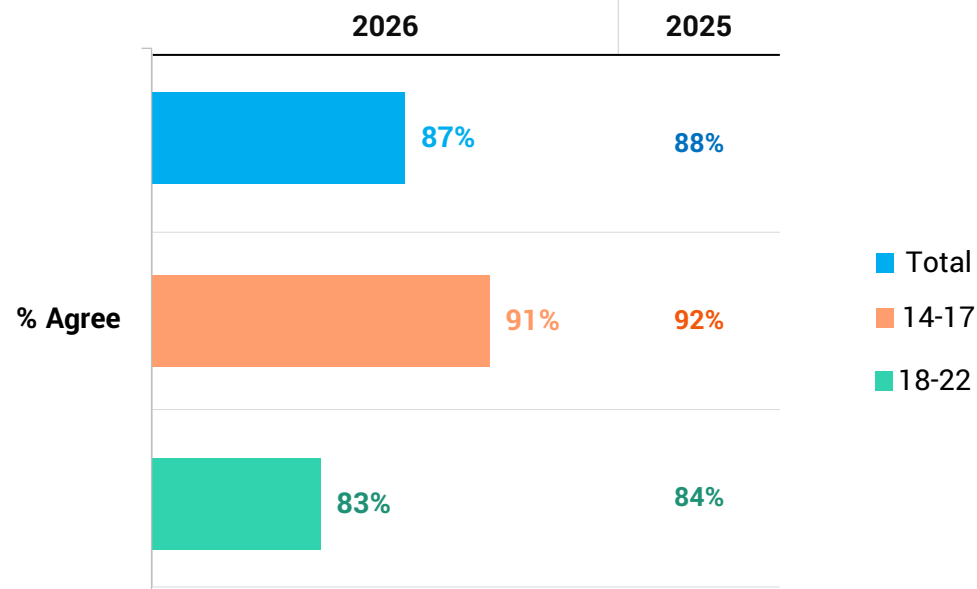
“The U.S. should have a role in supporting other countries (e.g., economically, foreign aid, etc.).”

% Agree, Trended by Subgroups



**"THE U.S. SHOULD
BUILD AND MAINTAIN
POSITIVE
RELATIONSHIPS WITH
OTHER COUNTRIES AS
AN IMPORTANT
PRIORITY."**

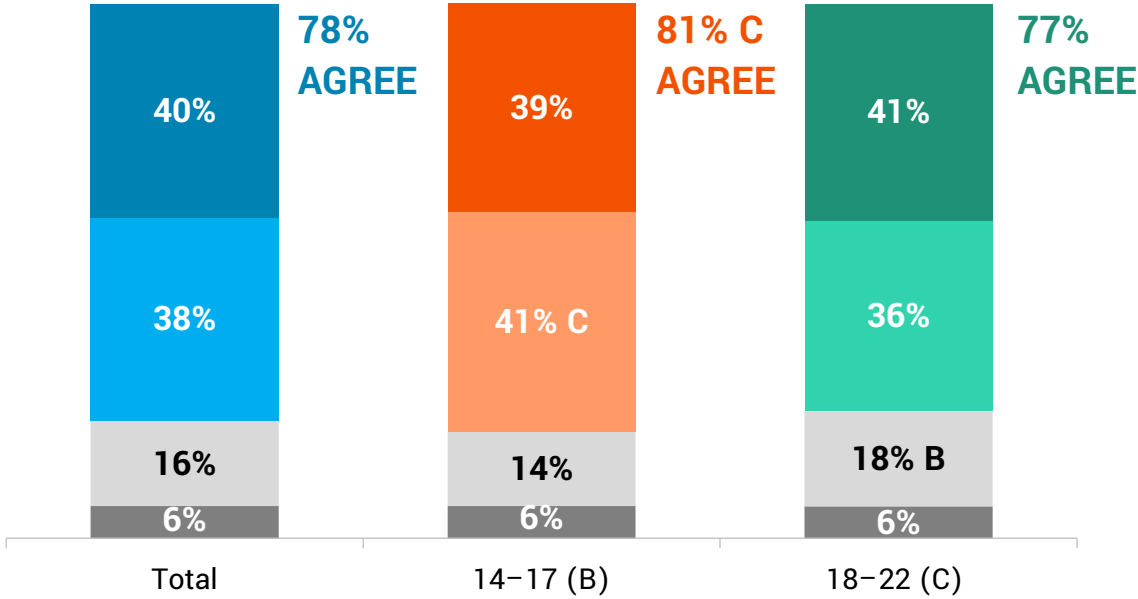
87% OF YOUNG
PEOPLE AGREE.



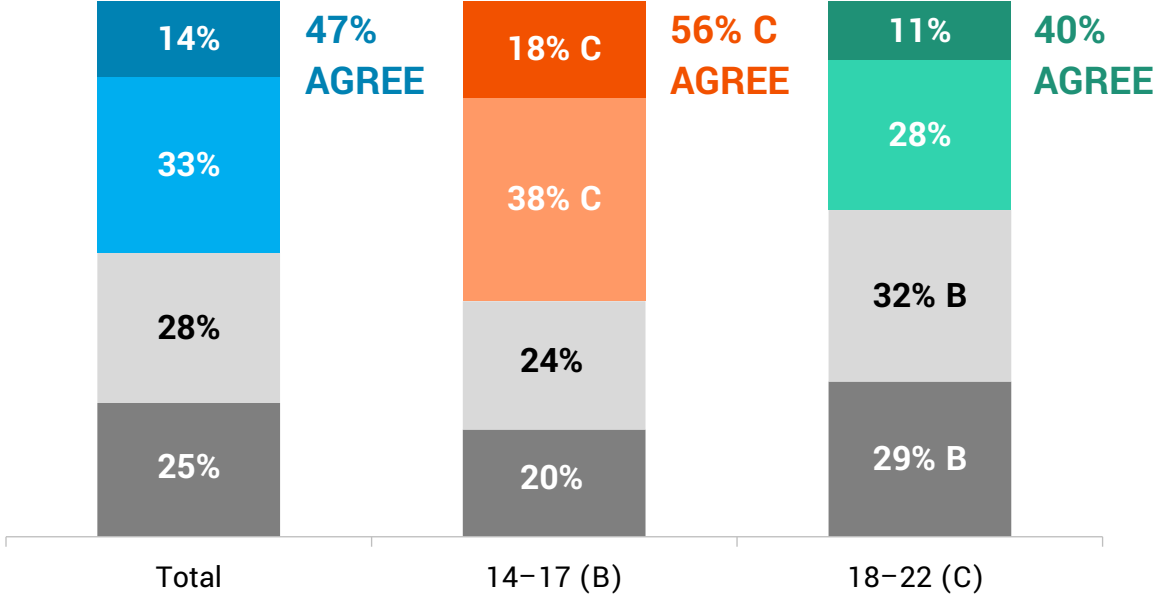
↑↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, SUPPORT FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT COEXISTS WITH CONCERNS ABOUT NATIONAL SECURITY

“I am concerned the way the U.S. is currently engaging with other countries is causing a national security risk at home.”



“I believe that the way the U.S. is currently engaging with other countries globally is justified to protect our national security.”



Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

AUDIENCE PROFILES



for every child

DEMOGRAPHICS

Race/Ethnicity			
	Total	14-17	18-22
White	49%	52%	47%
Hispanic	26%	26%	26%
Black	13%	14%	13%
Asian	6%	6%	6%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	*	*	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	*	*	-
Another Race or Multi-Race	5%	2%	7%

Household Size			
	Total	14-17	18-22
1	7%	-	12%
2	12%	6%	17%
3	20%	19%	21%
4	28%	33%	23%
5+	33%	41%	26%

Gender			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Man/Boy	50%	51%	50%
Woman/Girl	48%	49%	48%
Other	1%	*	2%

LGBTQ+ Status			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Member of LGBTQ+ community	14%	5%	22%
An ally	33%	34%	32%
Neither	49%	59%	41%

Importance of Religion			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Somewhat/Very Important	67%	74%	61%
Not Too/Not Very Important	33%	26%	39%

Engagement			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Engaged Youth	25%	21%	28%
Unengaged Youth	75%	79%	72%

Urbanicity			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Urban	30%	29%	31%
Suburban	48%	44%	51%
Rural	22%	28%	18%

Political Lean			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Democrat	34%	29%	37%
Republican	24%	30%	20%
Independent	28%	22%	33%
Other	2%	1%	3%
I'm not sure	12%	18%	7%

Political Philosophy			
	Total	14-17	18-22
Conservative	24%	27%	22%
Liberal	33%	26%	38%
Moderate	32%	34%	31%
Not Sure	11%	13%	9%

14-17 ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Age	
14	23%
15	24%
16	26%
17	26%

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

Academic Grade	
8 th	12%
9 th	22%
10 th	23%
11 th	24%
12 th	16%
Graduated	3%

Type of School Attended	
Homeschool	8%
Public school	79%
Private school	11%
Religious school	1%
Not sure	1%

Plan After Graduation	
Work	23%
Vocational/trade school	11%
2/4-year university	57%
Military	2%
Something else	7%

Parent's Education	
Less than high school degree	4%
HS degree to less than 4-year college degree	47%
4-year college degree or more	48%

18-22 ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

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

Household Income	
Less than \$35K	33%
\$35K to \$49,999	8%
\$50K to \$74,999	15%
\$75K to \$99,999	14%
\$100K to \$149,999	15%
\$150K to \$199,999	4%
\$200K or more	5%
I don't know	6%

Work Status	
Employed	53%
Not employed but looking for work	15%
Not employed and not looking for work	2%
Unable to work	2%
Student	27%
Stay-at-home partner	2%

Education Type	
Undergrad	66%
Graduate	7%
Doctoral	2%
Vocational	2%
Technical	3%
Seminary	*
None	20%

APPENDIX



for every child

YOUTH PARTICIPATION EXTENDS WELL BEYOND THE BALLOT BOX, AND SHOWS UP OFTEN THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Do You Currently Do Any Of These Politically Focused Actions?
Top 10 Activities by Total

	Total			14-17			18-22		
	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024	2026	2025	2024
Vote in elections [Among those 18+]	37%	39% ↑	33%	-	-	-	37%	39% ↑	33%
Follow social media accounts related to where I live (e.g., my town, my state, etc.)	35%	36% ↑	31%	34%	37% ↑	31%	36%	35%	32%
Support causes I believe in (e.g., advocating, petitioning, etc.)	24% ↓	27%	25%	19% ↓	24% ↑	20%	27%	29%	30%
Post on social media about things happening in my community or around the country	23%	25%	22%	23%	26%	22%	22%	24%	22%
Follow government officials on social media	20%	22% ↑	16%	17% ↓	21% ↑	13%	22%	22% ↑	18%
Follow charities or advocacy groups on social media	17%	18%	17%	16%	18%	15%	18%	18%	19%
Volunteer for charities or advocacy groups	16%	14%	15%	17%	18%	17%	15% ↑	11% ↓	14%
Donate to charities or advocacy groups	15%	15%	14%	13%	14%	12%	16%	16%	15%
Participate in boycotts	12% ↓	14%	-	6% ↓	10%	-	17%	18%	-
Engage in political protests (e.g., walkouts, marches, rallies, etc.)	12%	12% ↑	7%	9%	9% ↑	4%	15%	14% ↑	9%

KEY DATA COMPARISON: TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

	Total	Teens 14–17 (B)	Young Adults 18–22 (C)
Feel Included in U.S. Political Process % Yes	30%	26%	33% B
<i>My opinion doesn't matter to elected officials.</i> % Agree with more	63%	64%	63%
<i>I think people my age can make a difference.</i> % Agree	82%	84% C	79%
% Do Any Politically Focused Actions	71%	61%	79% B
<i>I think what happens in other countries has or will have an impact on my life.</i> % Agree	74%	78% C	72%
Top Way Political Leaders Can Make Young People Feel Heard	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues (44%)	Engage in honest dialogue with younger generations (46%)	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues, and Consider how young people are impacted by legislation (43% each)
Shading denotes statistical significance at 95%			

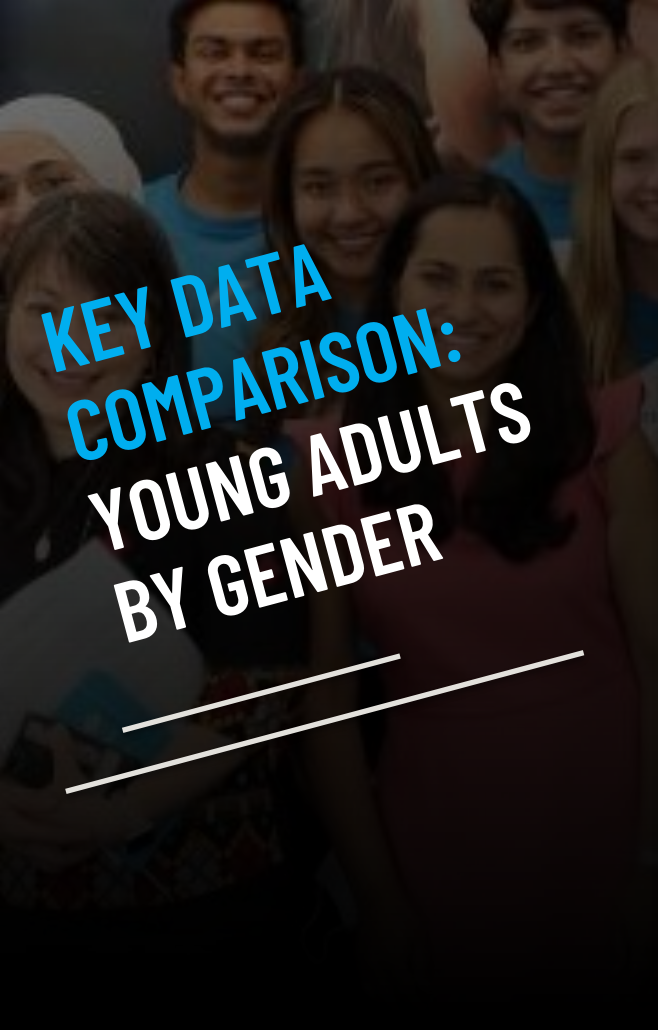
B/C Denotes Stat Testing at 95% confidence interval

KEY DATA COMPARISON: TEENS BY GENDER

	Teen Boys 14–17 (A)	Teen Girls 14–17 (B)
Feel Included in U.S. Political Process % Yes	29% B	22%
<i>My opinion doesn't matter to elected officials.</i> % Agree with more	59%	68% A
<i>I think people my age can make a difference.</i> % Agree	84%	84%
% Do Any Politically Focused Actions	62%	61%
<i>I think what happens in other countries has or will have an impact on my life.</i> % Agree	77%	79%
Top Way Political Leaders Can Make Young People Feel Heard	Engage in honest dialogue with younger generations (46%)	Engage in honest dialogue with younger generations, and Consider how young people are impacted by legislation (45% each)

Shading denotes statistical significance at 95%

A/B Denotes Stat Testing at 95% confidence interval



KEY DATA
COMPARISON:
YOUNG ADULTS
BY GENDER

	Young Adult Men 18–22 (A)	Young Adult Women 18–22 (B)
Feel Included in U.S. Political Process % Yes	40% B	26%
<i>My opinion doesn't matter to elected officials.</i> % Agree with more	58%	67% A
<i>I think people my age can make a difference.</i> % Agree	78%	81%
% Do Any Politically Focused Actions	77%	80%
<i>I think what happens in other countries has or will have an impact on my life.</i> % Agree	68%	75% A
Top Way Political Leaders Can Make Young People Feel Heard	Allow younger people to be a key part of decision-making and developing solutions (39%)	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues (49%)

Shading denotes statistical significance at 95%

A/B Denotes Stat Testing at 95% confidence interval

KEY DATA COMPARISON: RACE/ETHNICITY

	White Respondents (A)	Black Respondents (B)	Hispanic Respondents (C)	Asian Respondents (D)	Multiracial Respondents (E)
Feel Included in U.S. Political Process % Yes	30%	28%	34% BDE	26%	24%
<i>My opinion doesn't matter to elected officials.</i> % Agree with more	64% BC	57%	57%	62%	72% BC
<i>I think people my age can make a difference.</i> % Agree	83%	80%	82%	81%	86%
% Do Any Politically Focused Actions	71% D	69%	75% D	65%	73%
<i>I think what happens in other countries has or will have an impact on my life.</i> % Agree	77% B	69%	75% B	81% B	81% B
Top Way Political Leaders Can Make Young People Feel Heard	Consider how young people are impacted by legislation (47%)	Allow younger people to be a key part of decision-making and developing solutions (48%)	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues (42%)	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues (47%)	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues, and Consider how young people are impacted by legislation (54% each)

Shading/lettering denotes statistical significance at 95%

A/B/C/D/E Denotes Stat Testing at 95% confidence interval

KEY DATA COMPARISON: URBANICITY

	Urban (A)	Suburban (B)	Rural (C)
Feel Included in U.S. Political Process % Yes	35% BC	28%	27%
<i>My opinion doesn't matter to elected officials.</i> % Agree with more	55%	64% A	72% AB
<i>I think people my age can make a difference.</i> % Agree	84%	80%	81%
% Do Any Politically Focused Actions	75% C	72% C	62%
<i>I think what happens in other countries has or will have an impact on my life.</i> % Agree	75%	75%	73%
Top Way Political Leaders Can Make Young People Feel Heard	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues (46%)	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues, and Engage in honest dialogue with younger generations (43% each)	Consider how young people are impacted by legislation (47%)

Shading/lettering denotes statistical significance at 95%

A/B/C Denotes Stat Testing at 95% confidence interval

KEY DATA COMPARISON: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

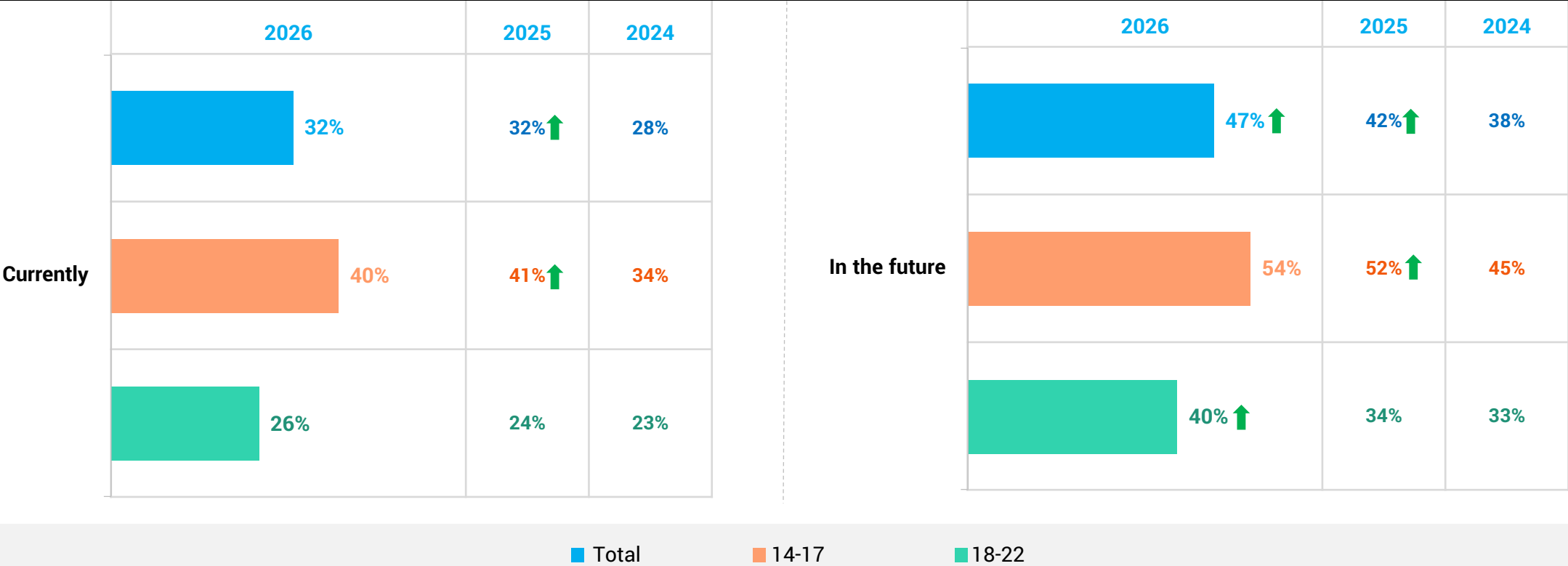
	Liberal (A)	Moderate (B)	Conservative (C)
Feel Included in U.S. Political Process % Yes	31% B	25%	45% AB
<i>My opinion doesn't matter to elected officials.</i> % Agree with more	66% C	65% C	52%
<i>I think people my age can make a difference.</i> % Agree	84% B	79%	82%
% Do Any Politically Focused Actions	84% BC	65%	75% B
<i>I think what happens in other countries has or will have an impact on my life.</i> % Agree	81% BC	71%	73%
Top Way Political Leaders Can Make Young People Feel Heard	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues, and Consider how young people are impacted by legislation (53% each)	Make an effort to understand how young people view political and social issues, and Engage in honest dialogue with younger generations (40% each)	Consider how young people are impacted by legislation (43%)

Shading/lettering denotes statistical significance at 95%

A/B/C Denotes Stat Testing at 95% confidence interval

YOUNG PEOPLE'S OUTLOOK ON SOCIETY TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

What Is Your Overall Outlook On Society... ? *% Good*



↑ ↓ Arrows represent significant differences from the previous year at a 95% confidence interval

METHOD STATEMENT

To be included in all materials for public release

- The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf UNICEF USA among 3,204 teens/young adults, including 1,577 ages 14–17 who were recruited and given permission to participate by their parent or legal guardian and 1,627 ages 18–22, with 532 Black, 715 Hispanic, and an oversample of Asian for a total of 314. The survey was conducted April 23-May 19, 2026.
- Data for ages 14–17 are weighted where necessary by parents' highest level of education, their own age by gender, race/ethnicity, region, size of household, location of school, and internet usage to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.
- Data for ages 18–22 are weighted where necessary by education, age by gender, race/ethnicity, region, and employment status to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. To ensure the total sample was representative, the data were initially weighted separately by cohort (14–17 and 18–22) and then combined into a total age 14–22 group.
- Data for Black, Hispanic, and Asian ages 14–22 were weighted as needed by age by gender, region, education, and employment status.
- Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within ± 2.1 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.
- The sample data for the Black sample is accurate to within ± 4.8 percentage points, the Hispanic sample to within ± 4.1 percentage points, and the Asian sample within ± 6.1 percentage points using a 95% confidence level.
- All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.