Cultivating Care

How & Why Young People Participate in Civic Life

Contents

Foreword

Anger. Apathy. All too often, we pigeonhole young Americans into stereotypes of civic participation: wholly disinterested or passionate in ways that feel disruptive or threatening to established systems.

But there's another word for how young people approach social issues and political life: a profound sense of *care*.

When we asked thousands of young people ages 13 to 25 to tell us about politics, we ended up hearing about care. More than conflict, avoidance, and uncertainty, we heard love for neighbor. Concern for one another. Attention to basic needs and human rights. A desire to connect and respect across difference. In short, asking young people how they "do politics" led us to a better understanding of *how to care*.

Care in the context of young people's civic lives extends beyond mere emotion or concern. It means seeking and gaining knowledge, detangling complex identities from narrow labels, safeguarding self and other, and promoting dialogue and action around urgent issues. Young people care *about,* care *for,* care *to,* care *with,* and care *because*.

Springtide's research reveals young people to be neither disengaged nor fanatical but deeply invested in relationships, communities, and the ideals of democracy. Young people tell us how they seek knowledge not just for its own sake but as a tool for informed action. How TikTok can feel more authentic than partisanship. How peers and adults offer emotional backing and clarify allegiances. How trust mediates when, how, and with whom to invest in shared social goods.

Young people are figuring things out—both alone and together with others—because they care.

The stakes are high. The same institutions that young people approach with skepticism—government, organized religion, media, corporations—are among the very foundations of civic life. Will young people's modes of engagement be welcomed as care or dismissed as anger and indifference?

Cultivating care means cocreating pathways for young people to feel heard, respected, and validated. It means reimagining education, connecting passion to action, promoting intergenerational dialogue, and adopting a long-term view. It's an invitation to recognize, amplify, and leverage the care that emerging generations already show.

The strength and resilience of shared communities depend upon it.

Key Findings on Young People & Civic Care

1 Young people's civic identities do not align neatly with traditional political categories. More than half of young people do not identify with either one of the two major political parties. Most prefer flexibility and issue-based engagement over strict partisan affiliation. Many feel jaded by political parties and politicians, seeing politics as performative and divisive.

2 Young people report low levels of trust in political institutions. More than one-third of young people express distrust toward the US presidency. More than one quarter distrust Congress, the Supreme Court, and the election system.

3 Perceptions of partisanship and incivility prevent many young people from calling themselves political. Many young people do not consider politics an important part of their lives. Young people who identify as political tend to feel knowledgeable about social issues, hold an organized set of beliefs that helps them make sense of these issues, engage in behaviors that support their beliefs, and see politics as relevant to their everyday lives.

4 Despite distancing from politics, very few young people report *not* caring about any political issues. Young Americans speak passionately about issues like education, the economy, abortion, and climate change. They explain how relationships, communities, personal experiences, and the media motivate and shape how they care for specific issues.

5 Parents, teachers, and other trusted adults play a crucial role in cultivating young people's civic care. Trusted intergenerational relationships are key to teaching young people to think critically, discuss difficult topics with integrity, and bridge connections to civic institutions. Negative experiences, such as feeling unheard or encountering closed-minded attitudes, can discourage civic participation.

6 Young people look both in and out of institutions to express their civic care publicly. Forms of engagement include civic learning, volunteering, online activism, civil discourse, and voting. Young people activate care within their own networks and communities while moving within complex social and political landscapes that feel farther outside their control.

7 Few young people say that religion should have "a lot" of influence on politics in the US. More commonly, young people prefer that religion have "some" or "no" influence. Young evangelicals are the most likely to say that religion should have "a lot" of influence; non-religious young people are the least likely to agree. Young people are more than twice as likely to count religion among the most important things in their lives than they are politics.

8 Religious and spiritual beliefs shape young people's civic care. Young people are much more likely to report that their religion or spirituality shapes their politics than vice versa. Religion helps to motivate and interpret, clarifying for young people what to care about and how. Many reflect critically on how beliefs intersect with political stances that might undermine freedoms.

We define *civic care* broadly, to capture the range of motivations, activities, and behaviors by which young people participate in the political and communal life of society. This takes account of common forms of civic engagement, such as voting or volunteering time and resources to support a local community or cause. It also includes whether and how young people feel a sense of control over their civic lives, sometimes called civic agency. Young people may experience civic care as empowerment or confidence within shared social structures and communities, seeing themselves as authentic, willing participants.

Introduction

Who *cares?* Patterns of civic care develop long before a person can vote. Whether through volunteering, protesting, or seeing and sharing information on social media, young people form habits now that will affect American civic life for decades to come. Understanding the health and future of democracy requires understanding *civic care* among young people today.

This report does just that, focusing on the complex dynamics that shape young people's civic care. It explores how emerging generations approach civic learning, the influence of moral and religious beliefs, perceptions of politicians and political systems, the relevance of political labels and social identities, relationships with peers and adults, and more.

In the section "Understanding Young People's Civic Care," we explore how Americans ages 13 to 25 identify with and participate in civic care. **Our findings reveal that young people's civic identities, beliefs, and behaviors cannot fit neatly into preexisting notions of partisanship.** Many young people hesitate to identify with a political party at all. The range of their positions often extends beyond affiliation or ideology.

We also find that young people sometimes engage civically but other times choose to opt out. Disillusioned, but far from apathetic, young people exercise their civic care by drawing sharp boundaries around certain issues and ways to talk about them. Young people also offer suggestions for how to treat one another respectfully and participate civilly in social and moral life. Living with widespread division, young people and the adults who care about them need such ideas to develop trust.

"A Closer Look: Religion & Civic Care" shares how civic care arises at the intersection of religion and politics. This special focus continues Springtide's attention to young people's religious and spiritual lives, updating statistics shared in prior *State of Religion & Young People* reports. **We find that many young people view civic care for themselves and others through a lens of religion and spirituality—but are far more critical of beliefs that undermine religious freedom or the right to disagree.**

"Equipping Young People for Civic Care" examines how trusted adults can help young people develop civic care. Parents, teachers, and other nonfamily adults, as well as peers, play starring roles in civic learning and socialization. Young people get much of their information about how to think critically and participate in civic life from the trusted adults in their lives. Trusted adults can teach young people how to discuss (and disagree on) difficult topics with integrity. And young people have much to teach trusted adults about listening well, caring deeply, and respecting others with different identities, beliefs, and experiences. Intergenerational relationships bridge young people to the large-scale institutions they often doubt.

We hope this report helps practitioners, parents, teachers, scholars, and older adults invest in understanding and cultivating care among emerging generations. Care, we learn from young people, lies at the heart of enabling and sustaining our shared democratic society.

We use the term *trusted adults* throughout this report to refer to adults that young people turn to for support and guidance. Trusted adults may include family members, teachers, coaches, mentors, faith leaders, and more. Research on trusted adults, including Springtide's, shows the powerful impact they can make in the lives of young people. Springtide has found that the presence of just one trusted adult in the life of a young person significantly decreases a young person's sense of loneliness and stress.

Understanding Young People's Civic Care

Members of Gen Z, born between 1996 and 2009, make up an increasing share of residents—and eligible voters—in the United States. Together with an emergent Gen Alpha, born in or after 2010, young Americans are on the verge of upholding or transforming political systems and civic life in the United States for decades to come. It's no wonder, then, that their coming of age provokes curiosity about the impact they will have on elections, civic life, and society more broadly.

Headlines often characterize young people as eager liberals at the forefront of today's social movements, both online and in person. Delivered with a hopeful tenor, emerging generations debut as champions of American democracy committed to restoring the rifts caused by partisanship, outdated policies, and "old" politicians. More skeptical takes depict younger Americans as ignorant, distrustful, and angry—ready to burn it all down.

Just what *is* the political character—or *"care"*acter, even—of emerging generations of Americans? Until now, it has been unclear whether or how much young people embody common stereotypes used to describe their civic lives. We've known little about young people's real civic care, or what it implies for the landscape and future of US politics and social institutions.

Our data point to young people's desire for *something different* in politics and in society overall. Close to half (48%) of the thousands of young people we surveyed say that they are unhappy with the direction of US politics overall. A similar proportion (45%) says that they are unhappy with the direction of US society overall.

Close to half of young people are unhappy with the direction of US politics and society overall.

Percentage of young people responding to the question: "How happy are you with the direction of . . . ?"

● Unhappy ● Neutral ● Happy ● I don't know.

US politics overall

48%	28%	11%	13%

US society overall

45%	30%	15%	10%

Percentages are approximate due to rounding.
Note: *For clarity, this graph combines "very unhappy" with "unhappy," and "very happy" with "happy."*
Source: *2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Our data also show that young people report low rates of trust in political institutions. More than one-third (37%) say they do not at all trust the US presidency. More than one-quarter say they do not at all trust Congress (29%), the election system (29%), or the Supreme Court (28%).

About 3 in 10 young people strongly distrust political institutions.

Percentage of young people who indicate distrust in response to the question: "How much do you trust each of the following?"

37%	US president
29%	US Congress
29%	Election system
28%	US Supreme Court

Note: *This graph displays the percentage of young people who chose option 1 ("do not trust at all"), on a scale of 1 to 4. Respondents were also able to indicate that they were "not sure."*
Source: *2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

And for all the media attention paid to young people's participation in street demonstrations on climate change, racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and ending gun violence, our data find that just 7% of young adults between the ages of 13 and 25 say they have participated in a public protest in the past 12 months.

Few Gen Z adults and teens have participated in a public protest in the past year.

Percentage of young people who indicate they have participated in a public protest in the past 12 months

● Young people overall ● Young people ages 18–25
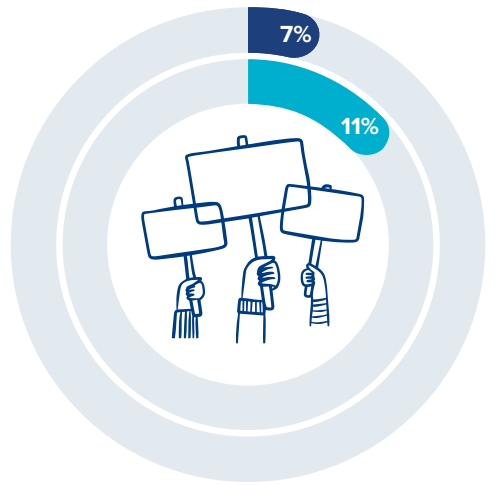
7%

11%

So, we wanted to know: How *do* young people develop and make sense of their civic lives and identities? How do they come to *care* about shared communities and social issues? What social issues matter to young people most, and why? And when do young people choose to act on what they care about by working with neighbors, participating in social movements, posting on social media, discussing political topics with their parents and peers, or voting? Further, what can we learn from young people about caring for one another and the social world we share? And how can we support young people as they interpret and navigate a world marked by political and social incivility? We turn first to what our survey and interview data say about young people's civic identities.

> "
> **It's not a good thought when I think of politics.**
>
> —Marcela, 15

Young People's Civic Identities

Divisiveness. A game. Controversy. Disaster. A power struggle. Debates. Money and power. Genuinely nothing good. Us versus them. One big, giant mess.

These are among the words and phrases young people offered when we invited them to tell us what the word *politics* brings to mind. The very word makes Reagan, 22, "cringe a little bit—I'm not gonna lie." Jake, 25, shares this negative reaction: "It is not really the best word, when I think of it. I don't really care for politicians and things of that nature. It's all mudslinging." Emma, 14, says the word *politics* makes her think of angry disagreements: "I think everyone's entitled to their own opinion, but some people take it a little too far. . . . They'll go start a whole parade or start screaming at other people if they have different opinions. And just being kind of rude about it." Samantha, 25, agrees: It's "a lot of arguing back and forth . . . a lot of 'he said / she said; 'he wants / she wants.'" And, for J.J., 19, "the first thing that comes into my mind when I hear the word *politics* is just an image of Congress, with everyone screaming at each other—and it is so dysfunctional—and everyone is so old."

Our survey and interview data from young people reveal disillusionment when it comes to politics, political identities, and politicians.

Young people tend to characterize politics and politicians as performative, emotional, and divisive. Even the most politically engaged young people we interviewed hold negative associations with politics as a frame for civic life.

Emma and J.J.'s descriptions of people screaming at one another reflects another shared theme: Young people commonly experience others as uncooperative and rigid in their approach to politics. Lisa, 21, tells us:

> I understand that there's obviously many different opinions within the political atmosphere, but it's just such a shame that it—I feel like people can't really talk about it so openly today anymore, because everyone's very judgmental and very sensitive to other people's opinions, even though everyone is entitled to their own opinion.

Rayann, 22, says that she gets "stressed out" thinking about politics at all, because "the culture is really divided in the US, and so people are really quick to cancel each other."

Young people today develop civic identities within environments that feel divisive and unfriendly. The climate of politics can make it harder to care about social and political issues, with consequences for party affiliation and a willingness to identify as political.

Party Affiliation & Ideology

Experiencing politics as "divisive," "controversial," or "just a game" creates distance between many young people and traditional political affiliations and identities.

Our survey shows that **over half of young people (54%) do not identify with one of the two major political parties:** 22% select "Independent," 21% say "I don't know," 9% say "none," and 2% say "other." Teenagers ages (13 to 17) are especially unlikely to identify with a major party (59% do not, compared to 50% among 18-to-25-year-olds).

Among young people who *do* identify with one of the two major political parties, both age-groups are evenly split between Democrat and Republican.
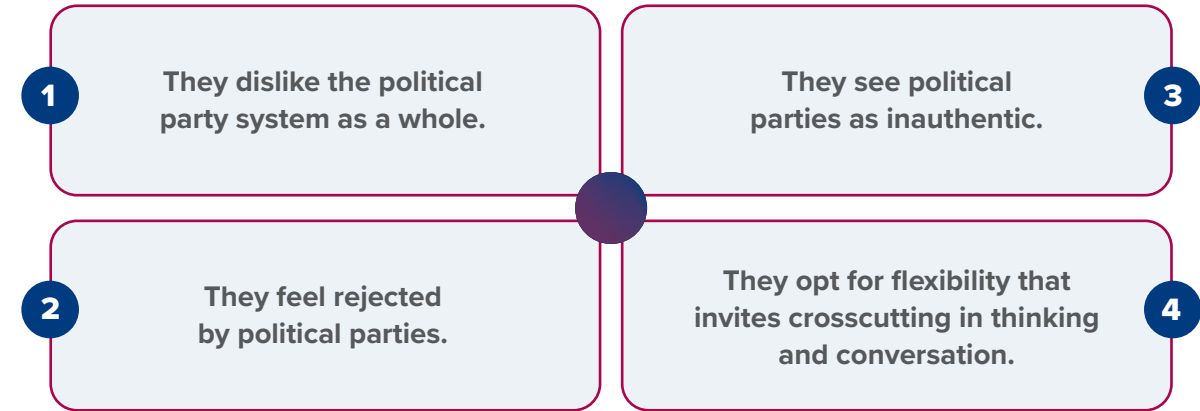
Over half of young people do not identify with a political party.

Percentage of young people responding to the question: "With which US political party are you most closely aligned?"
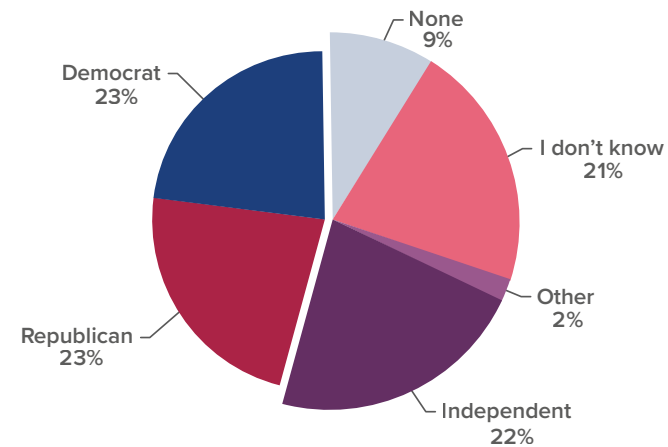
None 9%

I don't know 21%

Democrat 23%

Other 2%

Republican 23%

Independent 22%

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

As for why so many young people do not take on a political party identity, we hear four themes:

1. They dislike the political party system as a whole.

2. They feel rejected by political parties.

3. They see political parties as inauthentic.

4. They opt for flexibility that invites crosscutting in thinking and conversation.

Ava, 22, self-describes as "anti-party," explaining that she's opposed to the general idea of partisanship more than she is any particular party. She "just want[s] to help people" so that "the people have the power"—something that the current system missed. In her view, "when you start to put a title on it, people start to be able to bid on you, and bet on you, and buy your favor." Samantha has a similar view, opting out of political parties to get at the heart of "helping other people . . . making life a little bit easier."

Other young people who distance themselves from political party identities bristle at perceptions of inauthenticity or hypocrisy, especially at the extremes. Noah, 15, describes both parties as "too radical." Rashida, 18, sees in parties little room for exception or disagreement; she also sees a general lack of respect, something she calls "a bit hypocritical." Some young people call out specific party leaders who have tainted party associations. Allison, 22, clarifies that she *votes* Democrat but doesn't *call* herself one, frustrated by the hypocrisy of leaders who do.

Some young people reject identifying with a party because they feel like the parties rejected *them*—or their loved ones—first. Vee, 19, is queer, Christian, and nonbinary, and says, "I don't feel represented" by any party. Ajani, 23, through the lens of her queer, transgender, Black, and disabled identities, believes that "Republicans hate me." Michaela, 20, leans conservative but feels misaligned with political parties when thinking about her LGBTQ+ friends and family members, because "I support them, no matter what."

Still other young people choose not to assume a political party label for themselves for fear that it closes off opportunities to talk across differences and see the full picture. Marisol, 19, says that parties are "just too divisive." To Cassandra, 20, a party identity feels like a "cage," closing you off from hearing other viewpoints: "You're going to seek that information only and not want to broaden and see what other people say." Maricela, 15, says that claiming a party means that "you start to surround yourself only with people with that same political belief, because the others may not be what you want to hear." Timón, 23, says that being "in the middle" means that "I'll be able to make the right decision."
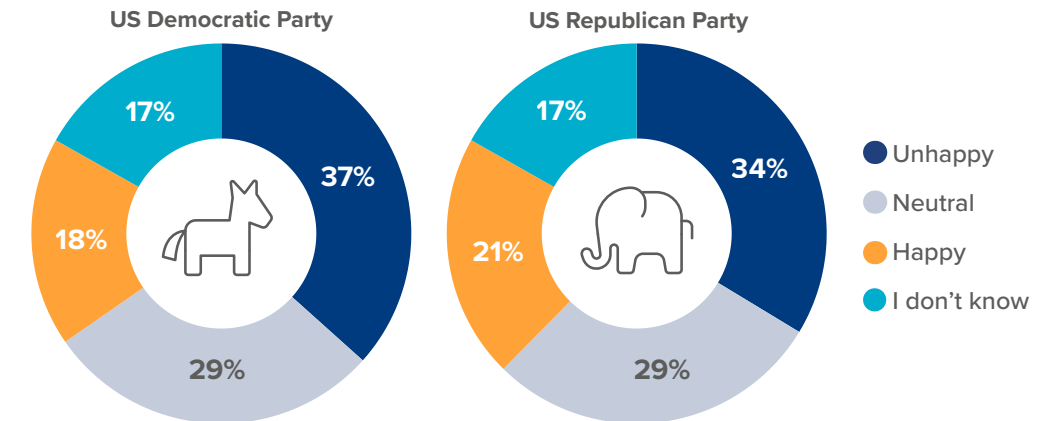
Dealing with issues one by one feels better to some young people than the observed baggage of all-or-nothing partisanship. Several offer alternatives like "independent," "centrist," and "middle-of-the-road," suggesting that they can see "both sides" or switch affinities based on the issue. As Bolin, 21, puts it: "I can see myself thinking as this, and I can see myself thinking as the other one," a flexibility that feels "for the better."

Young people hold different meanings for claiming party neutrality, however. Sofia, 19, self-describes as "very liberal" and says, "I don't want to be part of a 'neutral' stance," despite distancing from any political party. Ileana, 21, on the other hand, owns an identity of "politically neutral" so much so that "I really don't vote." She'd like others to accept that "it's okay to not be focusing on politics."

Even among the 46% of young people who *do* identify as Democrat or Republican, party labels do not imply full agreement with party platforms. Like many Americans, young people tend to use issues like abortion, immigration, the economy, the environment, and gun laws to sort themselves into a party. Large numbers of young people, though, pair that label with words like *lean* (e.g., they *lean* left), or they add critical evaluations of their chosen party. Across all young people surveyed, less than a quarter say they are happy with the direction of the Democratic Party or Republican Party.

More young people are unhappy than happy with the two major political parties.
Percentage of young people responding to the question:
"How happy are you with the current direction of the _____?"

US Democratic Party

- 37% Unhappy
- 29% Neutral
- 18% Happy
- 17% I don't know

US Republican Party

- 34% Unhappy
- 29% Neutral
- 21% Happy
- 17% I don't know

● Unhappy
● Neutral
● Happy
● I don't know

Percentages are approximate due to rounding.
Note: *This graph combines "very unhappy" with "unhappy", and "very happy" with "happy."*
Source: *2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Lisa is a Republican but says, "Nowadays, it's just too extreme for my liking." Daisy, 19, a Republican, dislikes how her party is "harsh towards those who don't believe the same thing," something Caden, 18, a Republican, echoes: "It just becomes hating another side," making them into an "enemy." Olivia, 20, a Democrat, has "never been a blind 'party' person" and is "critical of the party as a whole." Avery, 21, a Democrat, says that her party moves at "a snail's pace" and could "push a little bit harder" on some issues. Marissa, 24, also a Democrat, calls her party out for its "disconnect with young people." Matthew, 24, is "ashamed to say I am a Democrat," criticizing his party for being "truly about the money."

Alice, 21, sees young people's hesitancy to embrace political parties as a cry for authenticity and accountability:

> I think young people, or—at least, speaking for myself—they're less willing to just subscribe to the parties that have been placed in front of them—and being like, "Oh, there's only Republican and Democrat, and you have to support everything that the party says." They're more willing to support specific causes, and then actually call out members of the parties when they will say something but not actually stand up for it. And be like: "You're being a hypocrite. You're not following through."

When invited to imagine what a party of their own making might look like, young people highlight things like open dialogue, access to resources, protection of freedoms, and peace. Lisa says that she would leave labels behind and "just listen to what a majority of the people want and implement that." Jake says it comes down to "helping others and being there for each other." Atticus, 19, would "ignore other countries" to focus on US citizens. Robert, 13, says his party would be "inclusive." Samantha's would help the homeless. Caden's would find "common ground." For Krishna, 22, it's about "whatever brings about the best
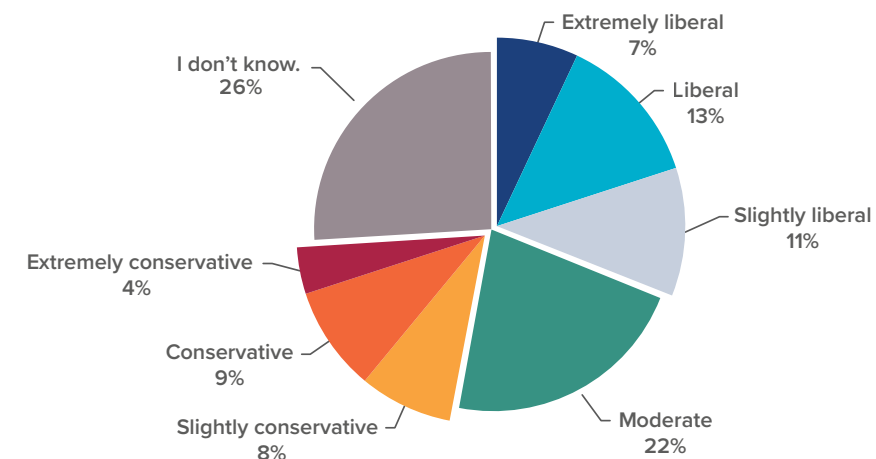
results for the greatest amount of people." James, 21, says that's a "tricky" question because "I don't believe in politics as a solution."

More young people identify as liberal (31%) than as moderate (22%) or conservative (21%). But **large numbers of young people—26%—say that they "don't know" where they fall on the ideological spectrum.** This is especially true for young people under 18, one-third (32%) of whom "don't know" their political ideology, compared to 21% among young adults.

Young people ages 18 to 25 are more likely to identify with the "liberal" side of the ideological spectrum when compared to teenagers under 18 (64% versus 54%).

More young people identify as liberal than as moderate or conservative.

Percentage of young people responding to the question:
"Where would you put yourself on a scale from extremely liberal to extremely conservative?"

- Extremely liberal 7%
- Liberal 13%
- Slightly liberal 11%
- Moderate 22%
- Slightly conservative 8%
- Conservative 9%
- Extremely conservative 4%
- I don't know. 26%

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Young people who place themselves on the ideologically **"conservative"** end of the spectrum define *conservative* as "an emphasis on the values of preservation, tradition, maintenance, and stability." Being conservative is about having "stricter beliefs" (Roxanne, 23), "old values" (Melanie, 20), or "traditional nuclear family values" (Caden). It's "being religious" and "formal" (Michelle, 24), "reserved" (Daisy), "old school" (Mae, 21), or "appropriate" (Ella, 18). To Timón, "being conservative means that you are willing to go the extra mile to try and help." Chloe, 18, says, "I don't necessarily think that we need social change to push forward as intensely as people who are more progressive." Melanie agrees: "Let's not throw everything out."

Self-defined **"progressives"** describe the label as "forward" (Robert), "open-minded" and "respectful" (Marissa), "pro-LGBT, pro-women's rights, pro-everything" (Sofia), "looking to improve" (Zara, 17), "moving forward" (Ximena, 17), "adaptable to change" (Ajani), and "moving with the times" (Amari, 25). To Zara, "there are a lot of things that we did in the past that I feel like we could definitely move away from."

Simon, 23, describes *progressive* this way:

> I see it much more as acknowledging the faults in the current way of things. And saying: "Hey, this might get uncomfortable. This might get very hard for some of you who have benefited from the systems in place." I mean, Lord knows—I am a straight, white, cisgender man in society. I have benefited every single day of my life, and I see it all the time in how people interact with me and talk to me versus others. But I think progressiveness is acknowledging those faults and those critiques and saying: "We can do better. And it's going to hurt to get there, in a societal way, because it's going to be very uncomfortable and cause division and diversion. But we are working towards something greater."

Samuel, 18, says that *progressive* means "working on, like, not just to fix issues but, tackle the underlying problems." Many who identify with progressive values use and prefer terms like *left* and *leftist.*

Descriptions for ideological others are sometimes less generous. Young progressives see conservativism as "a mix of really dangerous nationalism and, sort of false belief in, this mythic American past" (Samuel), "a lack of understanding when it comes to racial issues" (Marissa), "conserving poor ideology" (Ava), and "closed off" (Hayley, 21). Young conservatives and moderates critique progressivism as "in your face—always promoting what they think is right" (Daisy), "overplayed . . . going too far" (Mae), "attacking people that don't resonate with their beliefs" (Lisa), and "abandoning foundational things that maybe shouldn't be abandoned" (Genevieve, 20).

Some young people move away from labels entirely. Marisol opts for a "human rights" approach grounded in care: "I don't know if either *progressive* or *conservative* would be the word. . . . To me, it's quite literally, just, like, basic human rights." Emma also tells us she doesn't identify with either label. When asked if there is a term that better describes her views, she says, "*Open-minded* would be one."

Ill-fitting identity labels might help to explain why so many young people report low political importance: Nearly half of young people (46%) say that politics is "not at all important" or "among the least important things" in their life. Just 2% of young people say that politics is the most important thing in their life, while 16% say politics is among the most important things in their life.

Nearly half of young people say that politics is "not at all important" or "among the least important things" in their life.

Percentage of young people responding to the question: "How important is politics in your life?"

Not at all important	Among the least important things	Neither important nor unimportant	Among the most important things	The most important thing
26%	20%	35%	16%	2%

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Being a Political Person

Our interviews reveal that **most young people hesitate to identify as political.**

Samuel, despite speaking passionately about climate change, gun control, and indigenous populations, does not consider himself a political person because he "feel[s] frustrated" and doesn't have "a huge desire to partake in debates and things like that." Ananya, 20, feels the same: "I would not use the word *political* to describe me. I would say that I'm aware of political issues, but I have friends who are far more activist [and] far more in tune with what's going on on a global scale."

Other young people, by contrast, proudly claim the identity. When asked if she considers herself a political person, Allison responds, "Very much so," without skipping a beat. Nora, 19, says she's "definitely" a political person and "very focused on activism."

What is different about young people who identify as political and young people who do not?

Young people who identify as political see themselves as knowledgeable about social issues and events and have developed a set of organized beliefs about these issues. Many young people are quick to say that they "don't know much" about politics, even while demonstrating knowledge about contemporary social issues, events, and the political system. But young people who self-identify as political claim this knowledge confidently.

For example, Andrew, 22, who says that he "definitely" considers himself a political person, "was listening to the oral arguments this morning, while doing homework, in the Supreme Court case." Rashida explains that she considers herself a political person because she "pay[s] attention to a lot of things that's happening in Congress—of different laws being made."

> **"**_____
>
> One thing I appreciate a lot about with my parents is I think they are very nuanced in their thinking. They're definitely, like, less progressive than I am, for sure. . . . [But] a lot of the political beliefs that I hold now come from them. And really caring about, like, loving and caring well for other people and marginalized groups and being able to think critically and in a nuanced way about things, and get past the political language . . . like, get to the heart of the issue.
>
> —J.J., 19

Young people who identify as political have developed an organized set of beliefs to make sense of issues in relation to one another. An overarching framework—whether religious, moral, partisan, ethnic, or otherwise—helps young people interpret and organize new information and make sense of it in light of what they already take for granted as true. It bridges seemingly contradictory beliefs in a way that avoids confusion or a crisis of character and identity.

For example, J.J. demonstrates high political literacy and identifies as a political person. J.J. feels more Democrat than Republican but is, "in a lot of ways, much more moderate." As a hunter, J.J. supports gun rights. But on other issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and racism, J.J. leans more traditionally left. And, while nonbinary, J.J. doesn't agree with policies that allow children to make permanent, life-changing decisions in the name of gender-affirming care. Holding beliefs that don't fit neatly along partisan lines doesn't feel confusing or bothersome to J.J., however, because they've spent time thinking about these issues and discerning what they believe about them. Two overarching values help J.J. make sense of political issues: (1) "caring well for people" and (2) thinking critically by centering nuance. J.J. credits their parents for instilling these values and recognizes how much their politics have been shaped by their parents.

Clarity around these values—thinking critically and caring well for and loving people—informs a position on the environment, racism, transphobia, war, and more.

Like J.J., young people who identify as political name their values and use them as a framework by which to understand political information and their political beliefs. Henry, 19, uses a faith-based framework to make sense of his own political beliefs: "The thing that influences me most, politically, is my faith. It affects how I view the world and what I think is right and wrong. So I don't think we should deny climate change, because science tells us that it's present, and it's my duty as a Christian to kind of preserve the world that God has given us." Allison uses a "human rights" framework to organize her beliefs: "Reproductive justice is a right. Universal health care is a right. Marriage is a right." Allison goes on to explain that this rights framework has led to disagreements with friends who are Democrats *and* Republicans because "we couldn't agree on the same people who should deserve rights."

Political young people willingly hold opinions that differ from others'— a tension that feels too uncomfortable for nonpolitical young people to tolerate. Political young people feel confident to articulate, defend, and advance their points of view. Simon, for example, says he is constantly talking about the political issues he cares about and actively trying to persuade others to see things his way. He initiates challenging conversations even when they may rupture relationships:

> [What] I try to do is talk to people in my family or friends and really challenge [them] on a lot of hard things. And try to encourage reflection and discussion—which does not always go well. I have been kicked out of many a family affair for voicing opinions, but yeah . . . definitely trying to initiate and mediate conversations.

Many young people who identify as political share stories about arguing with family members and friends about their views. Avery shares a story about her best friend's mom: "Every time I go over to her house, Fox News is on. Every so often, I'll make a little comment, and then we fight about it." Rashida shares a story about "going back and forth" with her friends, disagreeing about the Israel-Hamas conflict: "We're still sticking with our beliefs, but it still gives us a lot to think about."

Ava tells how she grew into political assertiveness by naming issues aloud.

Political young people also see the relevance of politics in their everyday lives. Some young people understand politics as something that happens "out there" between political elites but not something that directly affects them. By contrast, young people who identify as political attach personal meaning to political events and interpret ordinary interactions as having political dimensions. Yejin, 24, explains:

> I think, for me, that [being a political person] means I see—[that] I'm very much aware of the presence of politics—like, the spirit of politics. [In] Christianity . . . we see God. We see God in everything: in every ant, in every person, in every community. I see politics in every ant, in every church, in every [community]. Because politics isn't just, for me, partisanship, or what the Democrats or the Republicans think or don't think it's about. I think politics describes human organizations, human interactions with one another.

Yejin's understanding of politics as human at its core expands its application from mere voting to "everywhere," introducing critical thinking to the politics of race, gender, and more: "I think to be a political person is to be able to interrogate those dynamics and think critically."

Personalizing the political is especially pronounced for young people who hold marginalized identities. Some among this group of young people sense that they do not have a choice in identifying as political people. Marisol says: "Literally every aspect of my being is politicized. So, it's kind of hard *not* to be a political person." Sofia, a Latina, recalls how "for other people it was like, 'whatever,'" but her own fears "felt very real . . . like, 'I'm a little scared now.'" Ajani shares similar feelings.

Political young people are highly civically engaged. This includes participating in online activism, political campaigning, civic learning, protesting in the streets, and talking to others about politics. Many young people clarify that voting alone is insufficient to make someone a political person. Lisa "obviously votes in all the elections" but says she is not political, because voting is different from "engaging in political situations." Reagan draws the same conclusion when asked if she considers herself a political person:

> I would say that I'm a very strong-willed person, but I don't think "political" would be accurate for me. If someone was to bring it up or question me about my views, I would be honest about it. But I'm not someone who's gonna get into political things, I guess, or get into the face of politics. . . . I'm not someone who's gonna go to protests. . . . I'm not that kind of person. I'm gonna go on voting day, and I'm gonna cast my vote and then I'm gonna go about my business. . . . I'm gonna take part but not be, like, public about it, I guess.

Reagan's depiction of "that kind of person" who *is* political builds a caricature of how young people tend to perceive a political person: loud, performative, visible, clashing, and attention-seeking.

Many distance themselves from outward involvement with politics as a result. *Politics* makes *care* sound and feel different. Uncomfortable. Young people write themselves out of a version of care that does not sound or feel like care.
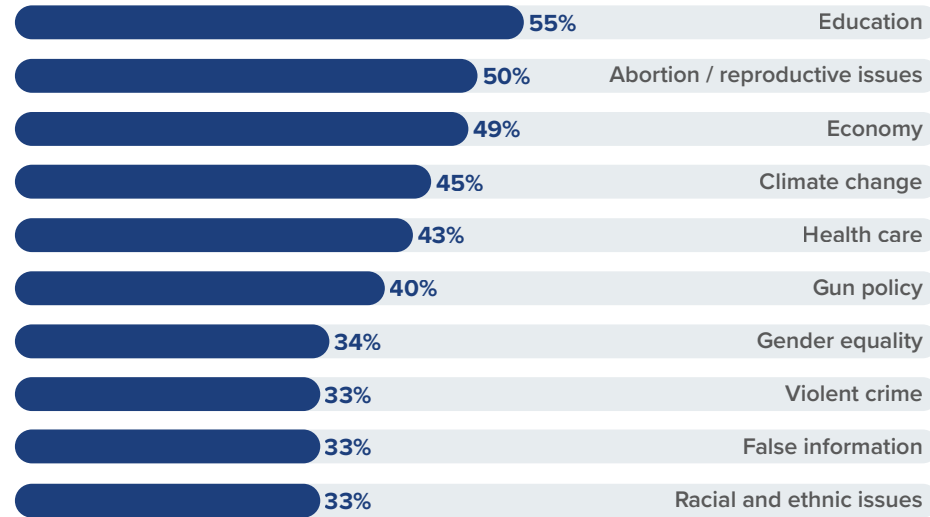
Caring about Social Issues

While few young people see politics as highly important in their lives, large majorities express *care* about political and social issues. Care abounds. Young people commonly report caring about education (55%), abortion / reproductive issues (50%), the economy (49%), and climate change (45%). Health care and gun policy are not far behind (43% and 40%, respectively). Just 6% of young people report *not* caring about any political issues.

Young people rank education, abortion / reproductive issues, and the economy as the top issues they care about.

Percentage of young people selecting the following issues in response to the question: "Which of the following issues do you care about?"

Issue	Percentage
Education	55%
Abortion / reproductive issues	50%
Economy	49%
Climate change	45%
Health care	43%
Gun policy	40%
Gender equality	34%
Violent crime	33%
False information	33%
Racial and ethnic issues	33%

Note: *Respondents were given a list of options to choose from and asked to select all that apply. Respondents could also write in an option not listed. The graph above presents the 10 most common issues selected by respondents.*
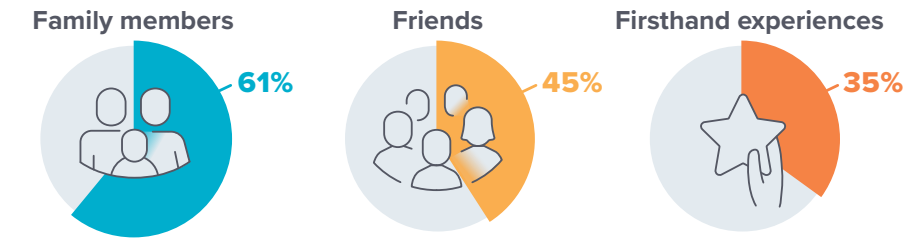**Source:** *2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Young people talk passionately and confidently about the issues they care about.

Camila, 23, cares deeply about women's rights issues because "growing up, just, like, seeing the power dynamics between men and women and how that works and how that functions—I think it's something that's very hard to ignore." That care has only grown for Camila over time, even as she acknowledges that she still has a lot to learn: "I'm very new, like [a] baby to the political world, but I think it only grows in the amount that I care, the more that I learn about it." Simon is passionate about what he admits is "not a hot topic" among others his age: data privacy and technology. Citing a Supreme Court case about governmental access to cell phone location data, Simon shares, "I'm very, very, very passionate about privacy and really protecting the privacy of both the internet and just everyday personal boundaries in space."

But how and why do young people come to care about social issues in the first place? From our interviews, we found five central influences on young people's civic care: (1) relationships with family and friends, (2) firsthand experiences, (3) social contexts and communities, (4) political events, and (5) social and news media. This finding is supported by our survey data—most commonly, young people report political influence from:

Family members	Friends	Firsthand experiences
61%	45%	35%

Note: *See question wording and full survey responses in the topline survey results.*
Source: *2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

From our interviews, we found five central influences on young people's civic care:

- Relationships with family and friends
- Firsthand experiences
- Social contexts and communities
- Political events
- Social and news media

Relationships with family and friends powerfully shape young people's care for social issues. Relationships give otherwise abstract issues a human face, one that young people already know and love.

This is the case for Zara, who tells us that transgender issues would be central to a political party that truly represented her. Zara shares that she has an older brother who is transgender: "Even if I would [have] cared [about transgender issues] beforehand, I care even more now because it's, like, personal, I guess." David, 17, says that his care for reforming the immigration system stems from caring for his immigrant mother: "It's kind of a personal thing to me, 'cause my mom is an immigrant. I haven't experienced it, but [from] what she's told me, it sounds like it's pretty rough going from one country to another." As a result of his mother's story, David is in favor of "keeping [immigration] strict" but helping "people who really, genuinely need to come to the US for better living conditions. Make it less harsh on them and more of a human process. But then also trying to protect ourselves from people smuggling stuff over." For both Zara and David, hearing about the struggles of their loved ones makes the political *personal,* inviting a sense of empathy that informs their perspectives.

While relationships expose young people to social issues indirectly, **other young people come to care through firsthand experience.**

For example, when we asked Olivia if the environment is something she has always cared about, she said, "When I was a kid, it wasn't something that I thought about much." But once in middle school, she started to hear and also experience strange weather patterns." Olivia explains that "things like that . . . started to impact our daily lives—where it'd be like, okay, why is it 60 degrees in February? Like, that's not right." Her *personal* started to feel political.

Explaining why he cares about gun violence, Vee shares that he experienced a bomb threat at his school on the first day of his senior year:

> I remember just hiding in the computer lab, and I remember thinking, "I can't believe it only happened to me now," because I really thought it was gonna happen to me so much more frequently. I've been doing gun drills since before I could remember that. I've been doing those since I was in preschool. And that's just not right. We shouldn't have to live scared that our kids are gonna get shot while they're trying to learn times tables and sh**.

Young people's social contexts (like school or a job) and communities (like a church or an affinity group) also pave the way to caring about a given social issue. Educational experiences can do this via coursework and projects that require young people to learn about and research social issues they knew little to nothing about before. This was the case for Genevieve, who shares that learning about mental health in high school led her to not only care about this issue but also volunteer for organizations focused on improving the well-being of other young people. Noah shares that ahead of the 2020 presidential election, his middle school history teacher created an assignment around "keep[ing] updated with current events." This led Noah to watch the Republican debates, where one candidate spoke about the opioid crisis. Though he still does not identify as a political person, Noah counts the opioid crisis among the issues he cares about.

College experiences also activate care, in part by exposing young people to others with different backgrounds. Yejin grew up in South Korea, in what she describes as a "very conservative religious household." When Yejin went to college, she started to question her long-held beliefs about abortion. By becoming friends with people who were taking premed classes, Yejin learned about new perspectives on reproductive health that led her to change her views and join an activist organization. Kirsten, 22, who grew up in a predominantly white high

school, says she "didn't really ever think of [racial] issues" until college, when she "started to become friends with people of color. I definitely started to learn more things, and I definitely try to watch what I say and, like, [am] more conscious of what I'm doing. . . . I just try to be more open-minded on things." Jaden, 20, reflects on one of his favorite history professors leading him and his peers on a trip abroad that powerfully shaped Jaden's care for the conflict between Israel and Palestine: "It was a really good experience, [and] I built a lot of relationships during that time." As such, Jaden wishes for a political party that "cares more about Palestine."

Young people in the workforce, particularly those in social service professions, confront social issues as practical matters. Young people in such scenarios talk of holding responsibility for addressing in real life social issues that are otherwise discussed only theoretically. Jake, an elementary school behavioral specialist, feels impacted by having to help young children practice active shooter drills. "I don't know what's freakier—the [kiddos] that are so used to it and aren't affected by our drills, or the ones that are sitting there bawling their eyes out. Like, both sides of the coin are sad and scary." While Jake says he is "a full supporter of the Second Amendment," his work experiences have led him to qualify that support. "I do think there need to be mental health checks. Things of that nature should be part of the federal background checks. There's kids dying in our schools, consistently, and that's not something that happened 30 years ago."

Other young people learn to care about social issues through the communities to which they belong. Reagan, whose church leads short-term mission trips to Latin America, had heard about mission trips before but had a negative view of what those trips were like: "Missionaries had always been, like, people who go and live in the jungles with the tribes and all that stuff." She never felt compelled to go. But when a church connection told her more about the trips, Reagan had a change of

heart. "I was sitting there listening, [and] I just fell in love with it. I was like, 'I love this. I really wanna do this. I care a lot about this,'" she recalls. Since then, she has gone on several short-term mission trips through her church and feels she's found her purpose. >

Like Reagan, Amari came to care about a social issue through belonging in her community. For Amari, this social issue was racial justice, and her community was a college affinity house for students from minoritized racial groups. An international student from Zimbabwe, Amari says she "definitely learned a lot" through this community about being Black in the US, and "was able to get so many different resources through them," including "connecting with people who do social justice as their work." It's here that Amari learned about "different issues that affect minority groups in the US." She became passionate about building bridges in the Black community across differences and "remind[ing] people that—as much as we're like, I don't know, 15 Black students on campus—you belong here. You're not just here to meet a quota or whatever; you belong here. [And] there's so much more you can do."

> "
> I may not be a long-term missionary . . . but maybe [God] did create me for short-term missions. Maybe that's a strength of being able to go [to] a lot of different places, [and] into a lot of different cultures and be able to talk to people and serve people and just be able to connect with people that way.
> —Reagan, 22

Most young people (97%) report using social media at least 1–2 hours per day, most often to gain knowledge (47%). While only about one-third of young people on social media (35%) say that they use these platforms as a source for news, most encounter political issues there anyway. Fifty-seven percent report viewing political information on social media at least a few times a month.

"How often do you view information related to politics on social media?"
Percentage of young people responding to the question

- Never
- Rarely
- A few times a month
- At least once a week
- At least once a day

14%
30%
22%
19%
16%
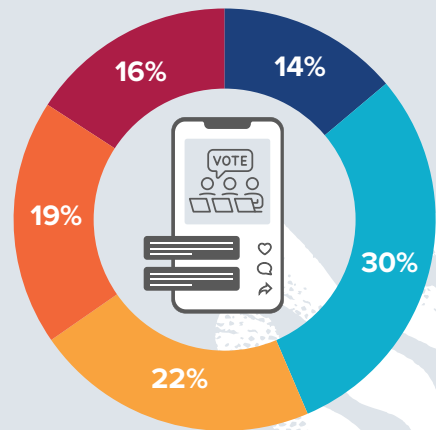
Note: Young people who reported using social media zero hours per day are not included in this graph.
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Political events themselves—policy changes, elections, or widely covered news stories—can also bring social issues onto young people's caring radar. Ximena, Lisa, and Nora are among those who say they began to care about the issue of abortion when they heard about the 2022 US Supreme Court overturning of Roe v. Wade. Other respondents recall how the election of Donald Trump led them to start caring about issues like immigration (Lisa), racism (Marisol), foreign policy (Caden), and local politics (J.J.). The Israel-Hamas conflict produced moral outrage in young people like Camila and Michelle, who scrolled social media posts about the conflict as it unfolded.

News and social media coverage of events draws awareness to social issues, making those issues seem worthy of attention and care. Jaden says that social media helps him gain "awareness about different things, things that I should care about, [and] ways that I can be involved." Ethan, 25, shares that most of the things he sees about political events are online:

> I can get online right now and see something about either somebody that's the president, [or] a governor or mayor did this or did that. And if I didn't have social media, maybe I might not know they committed a crime or they did something underhanded. But now I do; I have access to everything people are saying and doing.

As compared to those ages 13 to 17, young people ages 18 to 25 are more likely to encounter political content on social media, and they report seeing it more often than those ages 13 to 17.

"How often do you view information related to politics on social media?"
Percentage of young people by age responding to the question

- Never
- Rarely
- A few times a month
- At least once a week
- At least once a day

13-to-17-year-olds

19%	34%	18%	17%	13%

18-to-25-year-olds

10%	26%	25%	22%	18%

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Encountered via social media, a barrage of social issues compete for airtime, all claiming equal importance and urgency. Numerous and opposing claims can leave young people feeling overwhelmed and confused about *what* to care about, what side is "right" or "fake," and how to evaluate competing claims. Ajani puts it this way: "Everything is 'breaking news.' Everything is monumental. Everybody constantly has to be talking about everything 24/7. And if you just ignore people, it dies down. It just seems fake." When asked if she believes that social media has impacted her political views, Krishna says: "It's so overwhelming sometimes, hearing so many different opinions. It can be a lot."

How Young People Activate Civic Care

When and how does a young person's care about an issue move into active engagement with that issue through civic participation? **Our data show that young people bridge care to action through civic learning, volunteering, engaging in online activism, taking part in civic conversation, and voting.** These activities can work as both causes *and* effects of care, opening young people's eyes to what needs their attention and offering pathways to do something about it. Institutions such as nonprofit organizations and schools emerge as places where young people activate their civic care. At the same time, young people commonly approach their civic participation creatively and outside of formal institutions, such as through online mobilization or informal relationship building. Most treat the movement inside and outside of formal institutions as a core characteristic of what it means to care in an online and offline world.

Civic Learning

Our data show that many young people see civic learning as an active form of civic participation. Civic care invites civic learning as a first step. Young people share that it is important or necessary to learn about how our society is organized and governed.

Our data identify the top two ways that young people engage civically as (1) developing an opinion about a political issue and (2) developing an opinion about a political candidate.

Ajani explains: "I think it's important to be educated and informed. Whatever you decide to do, that is up to you. So, vote, don't vote, run for office, don't run for office. But if you don't know what's going on, then you don't have all of the tools at your disposal to make change. To not be politically informed is to

implicitly give consent to others to make decisions that affect your life for you." Allison believes that "being politically informed" is one of the most important ways outside of voting that people can engage. She adds, "I don't know every policy in play, but like, I know what's going on or who we're at war with. Those kinds of things—I think they're kind of a baseline." Robert doesn't feel strongly about whether people should participate in civic life, but he does think people "need to know the baseline of what's going on." Chloe puts it this way:

> **"**
> It's important we have a politically literate society in order to vote properly. That's just part of democracy. You have a civil responsibility to know what's going on.
> —Chloe, 18

As so-called digital natives, many young people develop political opinions by way of online resources, like social media and online news articles and websites. Avery follows her state senator on TikTok. Jennifer, 19, researches candidates for local elections online: "Usually I'll search their name, and then I'll try to, like, go through their campaign website. If I'm not finding enough information, I'll try to see if there's any other articles about them."

David shares that he likes to "follow up on what's going on" in our country by "follow[ing] unbiased social media, like news-sharing profiles that give me news about stuff that's happening in the world or in the US." Marwa, 23, says: "I should be like, 'Oh, yeah, scholarly sources help [me] make my decisions.' But social media really helps impact how I see the world." She says that she follows "a bunch of pages

on TikTok where they show the current events or what's going on every day in the world." She explains that "she wouldn't have known" about issues like health care or climate change without learning about these issues online.

Online platforms for civic learning give young people constant and immediate access to information on political issues and candidates, allowing them to become and stay informed. It's a kind of knowledge that feels crucial for making educated decisions about how communities are and should be governed.

Speaking about the internet, Ethan says:

> I have access to everything people are saying and doing. If we only had TV, we would only see what's on TV and we wouldn't have any idea. We might go vote for somebody that we shouldn't have voted for.

Online sources, and social media platforms in particular, provide access to diverse perspectives on political issues not otherwise present in young people's lives or traditional news media. Through sources like Instagram or TikTok, young people find videos and posts by people who offer firsthand accounts of their experiences with various social problems. Young people tell us how such accounts help them better grasp complex issues and develop empathy for people—strangers, otherwise—who are dealing with these issues. Jake likes that he "get[s] to learn about different ways of life" online, including "how politics can affect people. I think it's a really good thing [to] put yourself in others' shoes."

About one-third of young people (35%) say that they **use social media as a source of news and information**.

About a quarter of young people (26%) say that **social media influences their opinions on political issues**.

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

At the same time, young people say that they can feel overwhelmed by the information overflow of media. It can be challenging to make sense of opposing views on a topic or to figure out the credibility of sources. About his online interactions, Atticus shares: "Sometimes I just can't believe what I see. And that's what's really hard. I'm like, 'Is this even real?'" Daisy laments that it "feel[s] like the news stations make it hard because everybody's pushing out what they think is right. You watch one news station [and] they're saying one thing. You watch another news station [and] they're saying a completely different thing."

As a result, many young people seek to verify their learning by comparing various sources. Kailyn, 18, explains that if she sees something interesting on social media, she thinks to herself, "Oh, let me research that before I talk about it." She does this by viewing "articles online, cycl[ing] through a lot of them" so that she can "see if the information matches up."

Olivia shares that if she is scrolling through her social media page and "hear[s] something and it might seem crazy," she "look[s] into this in a more formal setting," like more traditional news sources. Like Kailyn, Olivia "like[s] to check multiple places to see what's being said, if the same thing is being said, or if it's being said at all."

Volunteering

Engaging in a form of community service, according to our survey data, is the next most common way young people come to participate in civic life. Nearly one-third (32%) of young people say that they have volunteered in the past 12 months, outpacing the roughly one-quarter of Americans who report the same in regular tracking by the US Census. Some young people add that they have worked with others in the community to solve a problem (14%), helped register others to vote (7%), organized an event for a cause in their community (6%), or volunteered for a political cause (4%).

Motivation to serve comes from a mix of personal and family experience, education, and local contexts and opportunities. Marwa's lived experience as a recipient of social services inspired her to give back: "I grew up [as] someone who benefited from social welfare . . . [and] seeing others struggle to get on welfare when they really needed it." Getting into college led Marwa to get "more involved in actually helping and volunteering." She chose refugee work and immigrant grassroots volunteering, causes that felt urgent in her area. "The work mattered, I felt."

Family connections prompted Olivia's service and eventual passion for social and political causes. With her mom serving in an elected office, Olivia grew up "going to community meetings with [Mom] or being in parades . . . attached at my mom's hip as the youngest attending all these things." Civic engagement was a family activity: "Even in COVID, on election day in the morning, we volunteered at polls. We masked up, we put on our winter coats, and we handed out sample ballots, me and my mom. . . . I couldn't vote yet, but I handed out sample ballots in the morning." In high school, Olivia started to develop her own interest in it, volunteering with voter registration and even celebrating a jury summons. "I'm just so passionate about it. . . . I love civic duty-type things like that."

Education plays a role too. Allison's Sociology of Citizenship class led her to reimagine civic duty as community involvement. What she once thought of as "voting and jury duty," she now sees as "being involved in your community, being a leader . . . the privileges you get and those different things." Monica, 19, had a school requirement for community service that awakened in her a commitment to environmentalism and combatting climate change.

Monica's awareness rose through this simple act of service. She then came to realize that "in my home city, the water's so contaminated that we can't go to the beach. We have to go an hour away. And that is so frustrating, because we have this amazing source of water that we are not using just because people are throwing things that way." Monica also came to link the issue to broader social concerns, including individualism, convenience, car culture, and how water systems are designed: "It's just crazy how individual the society is and how they don't care about what's gonna happen next."

> "We had to go clean the beaches, and one of the beaches that we went to clean was next to a neighborhood. . . . All of the litter from that [neighborhood] went to the beach. We cleaned it three times, like three weeks in a row, and I can't explain how many bags of trash we got outta it. . . . And I remember the guy just told us, "We don't clean the beach just for the beach to be clean, because next week's gonna be the same. We just clean it so that you know how important it is to not throw something in the street. Like— dispose your garbage."
>
> **—Monica, 19**

Volunteering acts as both a cause and an effect of civic care for young people. Service experiences can be formative, helping young people understand social issues and develop positions on those issues.

Volunteering amplifies civic care. Young people who report having volunteered in the past year tend to have slightly higher trust for institutions overall, including political institutions; care about more political issues; have more frequent conversations about politics with trusted adults and friends; and feel that politics is more important in their lives. Those who have volunteered are also more likely to report voting in the past and having intentions to vote in the next election. And, as young people volunteer and engage in civic care, they bring new energy and ideas about how to do so and what needs are most pressing.

Online Activism

Another way young people say they engage civically is by posting political content on their social media platforms. Although this is the fourth most common mode of civic engagement reported by young people, it is still relatively uncommon: fewer than one in five young people (17%) report having posted political content in the past 12 months. An even smaller percentage (7%) say they use social media to persuade others to join causes they are passionate about.

Just **7%** of young people say they **use social media to persuade others to join a cause**.
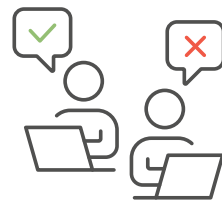
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Interviews with young people surface two main motivations for posting political content online: (1) to raise awareness about social causes and (2) to partake in activism that doesn't require being in person.

Ava says that she uses her TikTok page to share news stories with her followers and prompt them to reflect on the stories' implications. She explains that she "tr[ies] to find news articles of things that she feels like people would not have seen otherwise" and "ask[s] them a question so that they can come to their own conclusion." Daisy shares content with her followers that she believes they may not otherwise be exposed to, even when it prompts disagreement. When explaining when and why she chooses to repost this kind of content, Daisy says: "I feel like if it's something that I want others to see, then I feel like others would, like, not 'enjoy' seeing [it], but [they] would benefit from seeing it. I'll repost it."

Young people see online activism as an easy and more accessible alternative to, say, attending a protest in person. Sofia explains that "it's so easy just reposting something, showing something you're donating to, showing why something's happening, and, you know, just a little, 'Hey, if you guys can donate to this, or spread awareness about this.'" For Olivia, who couldn't attend the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests because she "lived with a medically compromised person, and that would've been dangerous for them," reposting awareness-raising infographics to her social media page allowed her to support the movement safely from home. Timón sees online activism as a better alternative to street protests, which might lead to "people coming together and doing something stupid, like going up and probably tipping over a car because they're mad at that person."

While these young people see online activism as an effective tool for raising awareness and changing hearts and minds, many warn against posting on social media in a "performative" manner. Performative online activism happens when people don't, in Allison's words, "actually back it up" in substantive ways or with substantive change. Both Allison and Avery use the example of posting about an issue on social media while continuing to patronize businesses that contradict that stance. Online activism is also performative, young people say, when conducted without sufficient knowledge about an issue, policy, or cause; to maintain or gain social benefits; or approached superficially to avoid making "enemies."

Other young people—most, in fact—do not post political content online.

Just **17%** of young people say that they have **shared a political post on social media within the past year**.

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Young people we interviewed disagree about the effectiveness of online activism and struggle to see it as anything *but* performative. Many young people also see online activism as too emotionally charged, with the potential to cause social rifts that extend beyond the screen into their day-to-day lives.

Lisa describes online activism as "ridiculous," explaining that "posting on your Instagram story is not gonna change the world. You're not gonna solve world hunger or end wars with a post on an Instagram story." While Monica has seen social media posts effectively crowdsource resources for a cause ("I've seen people's posts help Gaza"), she believes that even a far-reaching post doesn't usually reach people with the power to effect real change. She contends that "the people that need to make the change are not gonna be changed by a post or something. No one important is gonna see it."
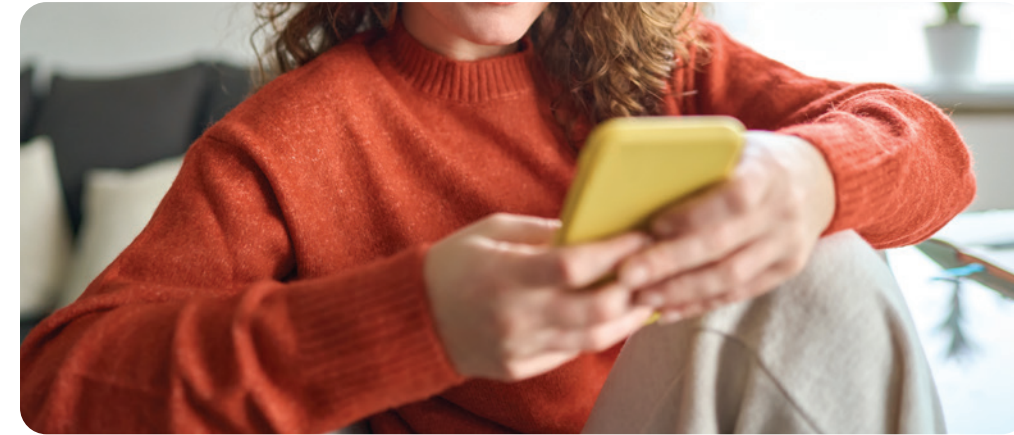
Others choose not to engage politically on social media because they do not want to create tension between themselves and their followers. Noah shares: "If I repost [something], everybody who I follow or follows me could see that. And I'm not trying to deal with someone who's like, you know, mad at me because I don't support their political opinion." Bridget, 24, says she doesn't want to "stir the pot" because she is "friends with people who are on both ends of the extreme." While Bridget says she wants to "get over [her] fear of conflict," posting her political opinions online is not something that she plans for the near future.

Social friction can feel like an inevitable part of online activism. Chloe often sees people "being really riled up about some political issue" on social media.

> **It's just emotion, emotion, emotion, emotion, and not much logic. So, I wouldn't partake necessarily in online activism because so often, to me, it seems like the intent is to emotionally rile people up, not actually inform them on the facts of an issue.**
>
> **—Chloe, 18**

Jennifer posts political content online, but "would try to do a little bit more than that" by taking action and starting conversations in person too.

> ❝
> **I would try to speak up when I knew things were happening that weren't right, that I feel like wasn't brought to people's attention yet.**
>
> **—Jennifer, 19**

She bemoans that some people "will repost something on their Instagram story, but then they don't do anything about it. They don't talk about it again. If they don't show it in how they go about their lives, that's pretty telling."
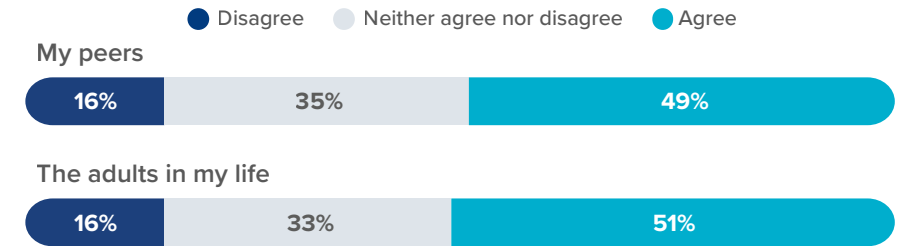
Civic Conversation

Accounts of incivility in political conversations are widespread. From heated policy arguments to accusations of immorality, it can seem impossible to talk politics or have civil conversations with others. Far from immune to this climate, young people approach their conversations with adults and peers carefully. Avoidance can be as strategic as participation.

About half of young people report feeling comfortable sharing their thoughts about politics with adults or peers in their lives. They are just as likely to report comfort talking with adults in their lives as with peers, but say they engage in these conversations more often with trusted adults.

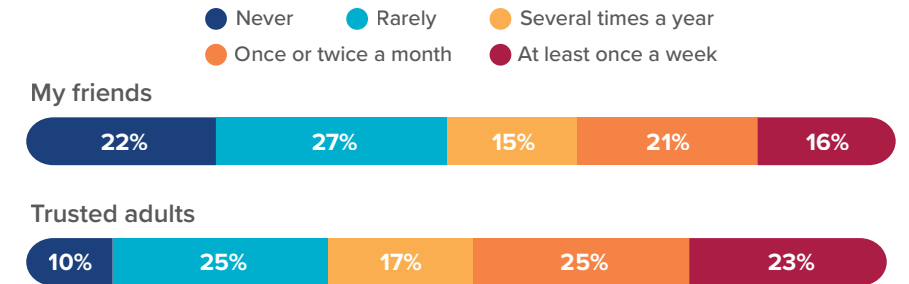### Half of young people feel comfortable sharing their political thoughts with peers and adults.

Percentage of young people responding to the statement: "I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts about politics with _____."

● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree

My peers

16%	35%	49%

The adults in my life

16%	33%	51%

Note: The graph combines "strongly disagree" with "disagree" and "strongly agree" with "agree." Respondents were also able to indicate that they were "not sure."
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Young people talk more frequently about politics with trusted adults than with friends.

Percentage of young people responding to the question: "How often do you have conversations with _____ about politics?"

● Never ● Rarely ● Several times a year
● Once or twice a month ● At least once a week

My friends

22%	27%	15%	21%	16%

Trusted adults

10%	25%	17%	25%	23%

Percentages are approximate due to rounding.
Note: The graph combines "strongly disagree" with "disagree" and "strongly agree" with "agree." Respondents were also able to indicate that they were "not sure."
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Talking Politics

Young people tend to talk about politics with those who *share* their political views. Those who report more frequent conversations with trusted adults about politics also report higher levels of agreement with the trusted adults they engage in conversation. The same is true for political conversations with friends and religious leaders—the more agreement, the more frequent the conversation.

"Thinking of the _____ you discuss politics with most often, to what extent do you agree on political views?"
Percentage of young people responding to the question

● Disagree ● Neutral ● Agree ● Not sure
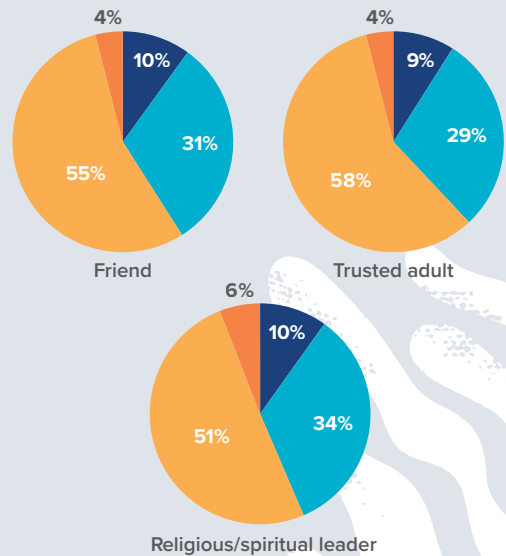
Friend
4%
10%
31%
55%

Trusted adult
4%
9%
29%
58%

Religious/spiritual leader
6%
10%
34%
51%

Note: The graph combines "strongly disagree" with "disagree" and "strongly agree" with "agree." Respondents were also able to indicate that they were "not sure."
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

When asked about what civil conversations look like—including those marked by political *disagreement*—young people tell us that those conversations demonstrate humility, charity, openness, and respect.

Ethan shares that he enjoys conversations about politics "when we'll actually come to an agreement and maybe even learn something from each other's perspective. Like, 'Okay, I see why you were saying that.' And, 'Okay, I see where I could be wrong, or maybe I could pay a little bit of attention to things like that.' Just opening each other's mind a little bit more, rather than just trying to get our point across."

Armani, 18, tells a story about how she and her friend disagree about issues:

> I'm okay with you having different views as me, as long as we're allowed to listen and engage in civil discourse, and be open to changing your mind, because I'm open to changing my mind. I change my mind quite often.

Like Ethan and Armani, many young people express a desire to learn from and find things in common with friends and family who hold opposing political opinions and identities. Very few young people express that they will not maintain relationships with people who have different political views. James says that it isn't necessary for the people in his life to agree with his political views. He shares: "I don't care about that at all. I think what's more important is your ability to respect the other person and to understand them and how they think."

Lisa says:

> It would be great if people can find common ground. But I think sometimes it's okay if people have differing opinions. . . . I find myself saying, "Let's just agree to disagree." Because, again, we live in America; everyone is entitled to their own opinions. So, if yours is different from mine, I'm not gonna attack you for it. I just hope you're educated about it. But I'm just gonna agree to disagree with you. And that's okay.

The majority of young people we surveyed (58%) agree that it is possible to have a close relationship with someone who does not agree with them on political issues. Fewer than one in five young people (17%) would stop speaking to someone who strongly opposed their political views.
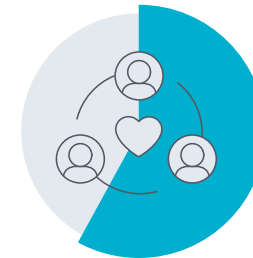
58% of young people **agree that it is possible to have a close relationship with someone with whom they disagree politically**.

52% of young people **disagree that they would stop speaking to someone who strongly opposed their political views**.

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

About half of young people (49%) say that people should try to discuss their political differences openly. An even higher percentage of young people (68%) say that it is important to try to understand both sides of a political issue.

Most young people see value in discussing and understanding different political perspectives.

Percentage of young people responding to the statements:

● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree
● Agree ● Strongly agree

"People should try to discuss their political differences openly."

| 5% | 10% | 36% | 37% | 12% |

"It's important to try to understand both sides of a political issue."

| 6% | 24% | 43% | 25% |

3%

Percentages are approximate due to rounding.
Note: *The graph combines "strongly disagree" with "disagree" and "strongly agree" with "agree."*
Source: *2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Young people's hopes about how conversations about politics *should* go, however, do not always reflect the lived experience of these conversations. Some young people express that they have had too many conversations that feel uncooperative, irrational, and rigid. As a result, these young people choose to opt out of talking politics with others.

Lisa, for example, shares a story about a disagreement she once had with a classmate:

> She had the complete opposite opinion from me. And I was like, "Oh, this is what I think." And she started attacking me for what I think. And I started crying, because I just took it so offensively, 'cause she was so mean and aggressive about it. And I was like, "Okay, I, from this day forward, I do not wanna be like these people."

Chloe tells us that despite agreeing politically with her mom and dad, she doesn't talk to them about politics "a whole ton." When she does talk politics, she prefers to do so with her dad instead of her mom because her mom is "very, like, emotionally led and emotionally riled up. So, I don't really care for that, like, hyperemotional side of politics." Monica explains that she avoids political conversations because "the moment you do that, you encounter, like, a thousand enemies. People are so triggered . . . and it shouldn't be like that because I have the right to have my own views, and you have the right to have yours."

And Jake shares that "most of [his] views are pretty typical—standard." Yet, Jake says: "People can get so upset and obnoxious about it. I try to avoid it [politics] with people I don't, like, know exactly where they're at."

In these cases, avoiding political talk becomes a way to maintain relationships. **Perceptions of—and experiences with—polarization and incivility prevent conversations.**

Voting

Young people see voting as one of the most important public expressions of civic care. **Forty-nine percent of Gen Z adults (those between the ages of 18 and 25) we surveyed say they have voted in a federal, state, or local election.**

About half of young adults (ages 18 to 25) have voted in an election.
Percentage of young people ages 18–25 responding to the question:
"Have you ever voted in a federal, state, or local election?"
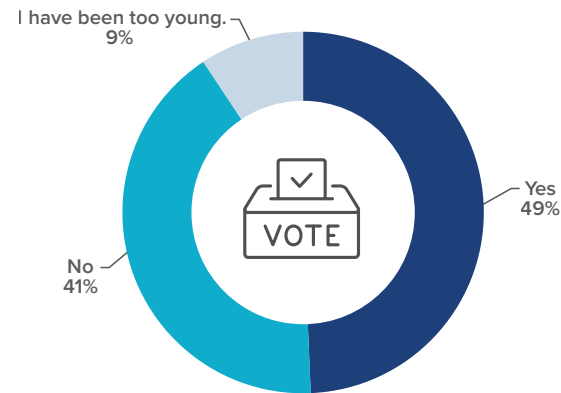
I have been too young.
9%

Yes
49%

No
41%

VOTE

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

According to the young people we interviewed, voting is important because it is (1) a civic duty, (2) a powerful way to use your voice to effect social change, and (3) a privilege that not everyone has.

Several young people we interviewed understand **voting as a responsibility that comes with membership in our society**. That membership requires upholding and advancing the community, with voting as a central way to do that.

To Mae, "Being a citizen means you hold a stake in how the country is going, and so the most fundamental thing would be definitely to vote." Greg, 23, says that while "we shouldn't have a system where voting is compulsory, . . . society runs better when everyone's politically engaged." For Pete, 21, voting is "very important for the continuation of our system." And Reagan says that voting is a way to "take part in our government," which is a responsibility for citizens "because, in theory, our government is run by the people."

For other young people, **voting is important because it is empowering**. Voting provides an opportunity to publicly use one's voice. Through voting, young people express their values and participate in the decision-making process of the democratic project. Daisy explains: "I think it's really important to vote, 'cause that's how you get your voice out and get what you want—you get to be heard." When asked how important voting is, Ximena replies:

> If it was on a scale of 1 to 10, [voting] is like an 11. If you want your voice to be heard, then you should say it. My history teacher said that if you don't vote, your voice isn't heard, which means if you complain about what's happening in the world, your voice doesn't matter 'cause you didn't voice it.

By voting, young people say that they exercise their power to influence change. Adalyn, 19, says, "That's what directly changed the policies and laws that we see today." Ajani adds, "If you're unsatisfied with your situation, or the conditions of the society that you're living in, the only way to change that is to become engaged."

Voting is also important because it is a privilege, some young people say. These young people recognize that not everyone has the ability to participate in the electoral system. Allison peaks to voting as a privilege. >

We are very lucky that we even have the ability to vote. There are so many people outside of America that can't vote. But, also, there are so many people in America—and this is their home country—who can't vote, either because of being immigrants, or because of unconstitutional voter ID laws, or how so many people with disabilities aren't able to vote. There [are] so many reasons [why] we should vote, because that is a privilege that we have.

—Allison, 22

Melanie agrees: "Not everyone around the world can vote. There [are] dictators in other countries around the world who [don't] let you vote. So we have a really special privilege here." Voting recognizes and exercises that privilege.

While most young people affirm the value of voting within a democracy, some are less convinced of its political efficacy. Zack, 18, for example, shares that he has "always thought that voting is not a super huge thing." He asks himself: "My vote . . . what's it going to change? If you vote for one candidate over the other, what are you actually doing? It doesn't seem like it's that much, to me." James recognizes that voting "has surface-level impacts" but he ultimately doesn't think that voting "will bring any deep or meaningful change." He adds, "It isn't addressing root problems."

Concerns about the effectiveness of voting lead some young people to feel apathetic about going to the polls. Robert is not yet old enough to vote but plans to when he turns 18. Even so, he says: "I don't think I will be super, like, 'Oh wow, I did something great today.' I think it'll just be an activity." Samuel explains that while he personally thinks that "voting is key" and that "people should respect that our generation might feel some political apathy because we've, over the course of our lives, seen so little change and care for our generation, and I think a lot of us feel stuck." As a Jehovah's Witness, Ileana will not vote, for religious reasons. But she shares: "I think even if I didn't have the religious beliefs I have, I still don't think I would really care too much, or I'd be kind of apathetic about it if I did vote. I don't really see any change actually happening."

Others feel disillusioned by political candidates and processes they see as unfair, dishonest, or out of touch. Ava reflects: "Is it important for people to vote? We weren't even founded on a system where everybody could vote. So, honestly, I don't know." And Olivia—who says she is "obviously" going to vote because she "think[s] that voting matters a ton"—shares, "I'm going to do the lesser of the evils, in my opinion, but I am not feeling good about my options right now." Vee similarly finds himself disenchanted with the political candidates available to him, pushed to choose between unfavorable options. He laments: "I don't want to [vote]. I know I'm supposed to be excited about it. I'm supposed to be doing my civic duty and whatever, but it just doesn't feel right."

Gen Z young adults of voting age (between the ages of 18 and 25) select abortion / reproductive issues (34%), the economy (27%), and education (20%) as the top three most important issues to consider *when voting*. While only 13% of young people ages 18 to 25 report having voted in the past 12 months, 49% say that they have voted in at least one federal, state, or local election. Even more (61%) say they plan to vote in the next US presidential election.
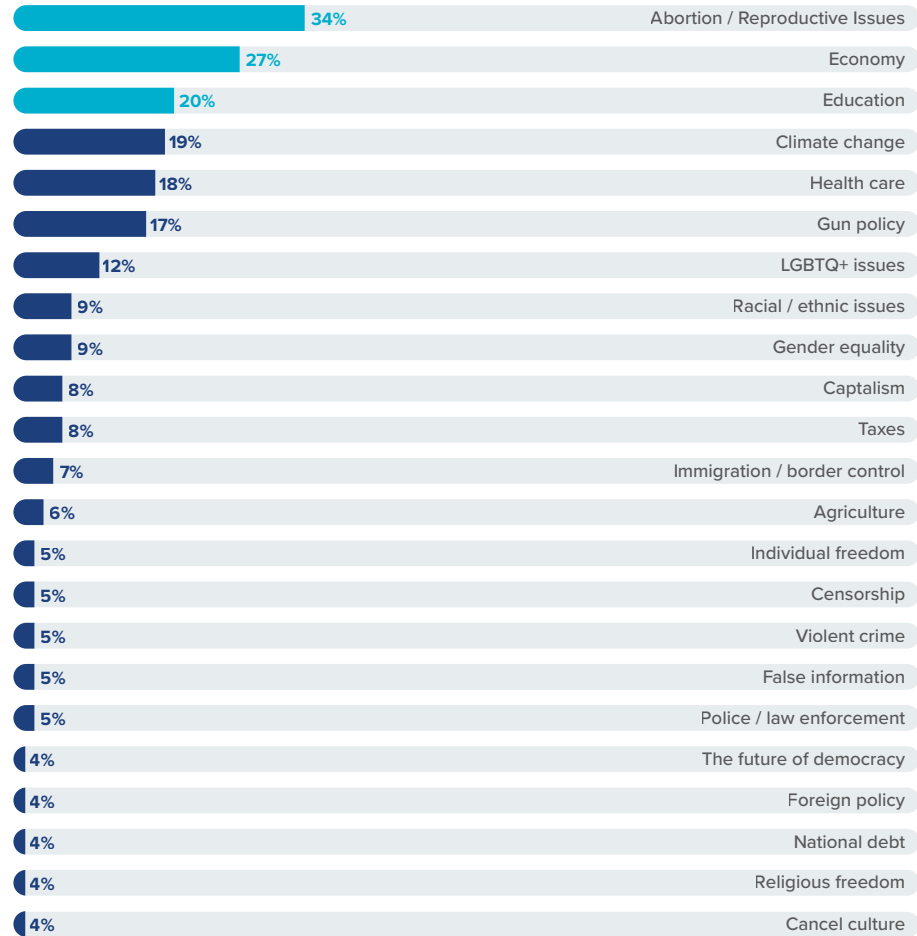
See question wording and full survey responses in the topline survey results.

Note: *Young people were asked to respond to the question "Which of the following issues do you care about?" They were given a list of options to choose from and asked to select all that apply. A follow-up question asked young people to choose, from the issues they had previously indicated they care about, their top three issues to consider when voting.* **Source:** *2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Young adults of voting age rank abortion, the economy, and education as the top three issues to consider when voting.

Percentage of young people ages 18 to 25 selecting the following issues in response to the question: "Which issues are the top three most important to consider when voting?"

Issue	Percentage
Abortion / Reproductive Issues	34%
Economy	27%
Education	20%
Climate change	19%
Health care	18%
Gun policy	17%
LGBTQ+ issues	12%
Racial / ethnic issues	9%
Gender equality	9%
Capitalism	8%
Taxes	8%
Immigration / border control	7%
Agriculture	6%
Individual freedom	5%
Censorship	5%
Violent crime	5%
False information	5%
Police / law enforcement	5%
The future of democracy	4%
Foreign policy	4%
National debt	4%
Religious freedom	4%
Cancel culture	4%

The Paradox of Civic Care

Exploring the data on young people's civic identities and approaches to civic care uncovers a seeming paradox: heartfelt care experienced within environments and categories ill-fit or even hostile to owning and acting upon that care.

On the one hand, young people report caring deeply about contemporary social issues. Americans ages 13 to 25 from diverse backgrounds, faith traditions, regions, and ages speak passionately about issues like education, the economy, abortion, and climate change. Many long for a shared world in which they and others can coexist and flourish. Their stories illustrate how they come to care for one another and for a shared society, drawing from lived experience, relationships, opportunities, education, research, and their own communities—those who care for them and those for whom they care.

On the other hand, partisanship and the cost of conflict weigh heavily on young people's minds. Feeling disillusioned and overwhelmed, many young people choose to protect their peace and their relationships by disengaging from more public expressions of civic care. They sometimes do this by refusing to identify with labels like Democrat, Republican, or political person, and avoiding talk of politics in the cafeteria, with family, and online. The desire to do civic care peacefully can work against doing civic care at all.

Listening to young people describe civic care for themselves unpacks or unwinds some of what we think we "know" about younger Americans. Gen Z is not altogether hyperliberal or hyperengaged politically. Most aren't turning their social media accounts into public political platforms. Most aren't "canceling" friends and family with whom they disagree.

What their civic care looks like, instead, crosses the ideological spectrum and is, for many, still in development. Young people tell us about how they are trying to better understand issues they care about and figure out who they can count on to address those issues with them into an uncertain future. They are still putting together a framework through which to make sense of things. Yes, many would rather not talk about politics at all than lose a relationship with a loved one, but young people desire civil conversations with others about issues they feel are important—conversations characterized by humility, charity, integrity, and respect. **Cultivating care is not just about an end result, but about the way together toward that end result.**

Religion & Civic Care

Where and how do religion and civic care overlap for young people in the US today? We learned in previous sections that young people use an organized set of beliefs as one way to make sense of the social issues they encounter and care about. We also heard from young people that this set of beliefs doesn't always look or feel fully coherent, finished, or known.

In this section, we take a closer look at how religion and spirituality—expressed through belief, identity, community, and practice—fit into the ways young people consider and express civic care. We find that religion shows up as a kind of interpretive filter and motivating impulse in young people's approaches to civic care. But we start with a more basic question: How much relevance do religion and spirituality carry in the lives of emerging generations of Americans?

Belief & Identity

Despite popular narratives of disbelief—especially about young people—most 13-to-25-year-olds express belief in a higher power. Large percentages of young people express *undoubting* belief in a higher power: 42% tell us, "I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it." About half as many young people (20%) "don't believe" or doubt "more than I believe."

Most young people believe in a higher power.

Percentage of young people responding to the question: "Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your belief in a higher power?"

"I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it."

42%

"I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt."

30%

"I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe."

11%

"I don't believe in a higher power."

9%

"I don't know what I believe about the existence of a higher power."
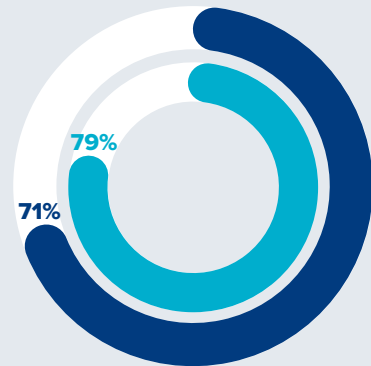
9%

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Young people describe that higher power in different terms, reflecting an array (or absence) of religious affiliations. To Bridget, 24, a Christian, a higher power is "more of a friend—definitely a welcoming place and not necessarily an authority figure, but somebody who's alongside of me and fighting that battle with me." Yingling, 19, a Buddhist, sees a higher power "separated into multiple gods, because, in my opinion, I don't think God can be that powerful to be all in one." Simon, 23, who identifies as agnostic, looks to a higher power but away from "religion":

> [A] joke with my girlfriend is that I pray more than her—because I do believe in some form of higher power. I just don't know if it is the God described in the books of faith. I'm not sure what it is, but I do believe in it and believe in the power of petitioning it and prayer and that kind of spiritual practice of self-reflection, meditation, and allowing the universe to kind of move through you.

Continuing a trend observed in prior Springtide studies, large shares of young people identify as religious or spiritual.

- Young people who say that they are at least **"slightly" religious**
- Young people who say that they are at least **"slightly" spiritual**
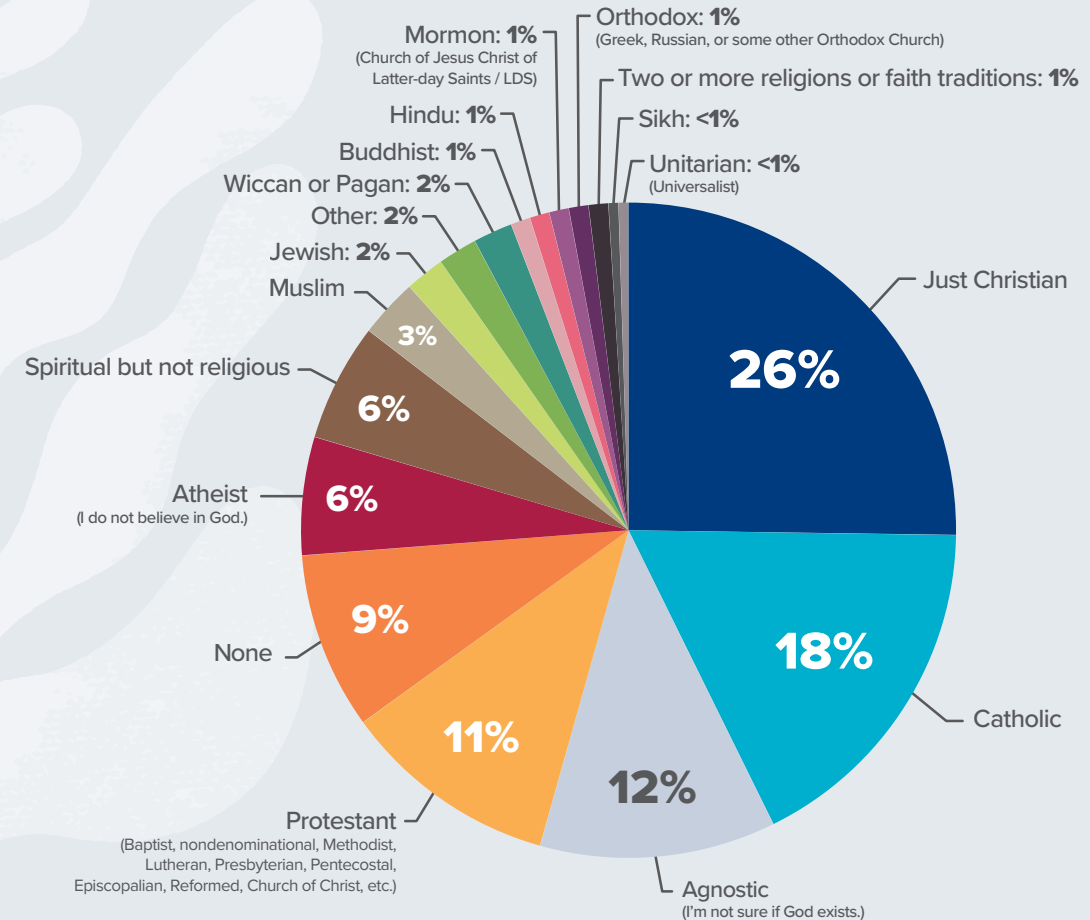
79%
71%

About four in ten (41%) agree that **"I do not feel like I need to be connected to a specific religion."**

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Three-quarters identify with a specific religion, tradition, or worldview, including "spiritual but not religious." A quarter do not, whether "atheist," "agnostic," or "none." ❯

"Which of the following religions, traditions, or worldviews do you most identify with?"
Percentage of young people responding to the question

Mormon: **1%** (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints / LDS)
Orthodox: **1%** (Greek, Russian, or some other Orthodox Church)
Hindu: **1%**
Two or more religions or faith traditions: **1%**
Sikh: **<1%**
Buddhist: **1%**
Unitarian: **<1%** (Universalist)
Wiccan or Pagan: **2%**
Other: **2%**
Jewish: **2%**
Muslim **3%**
Spiritual but not religious **6%**
Just Christian **26%**
Atheist (I do not believe in God.) **6%**
Catholic **18%**
None **9%**
Agnostic (I'm not sure if God exists.) **12%**
Protestant (Baptist, nondenominational, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ, etc.) **11%**

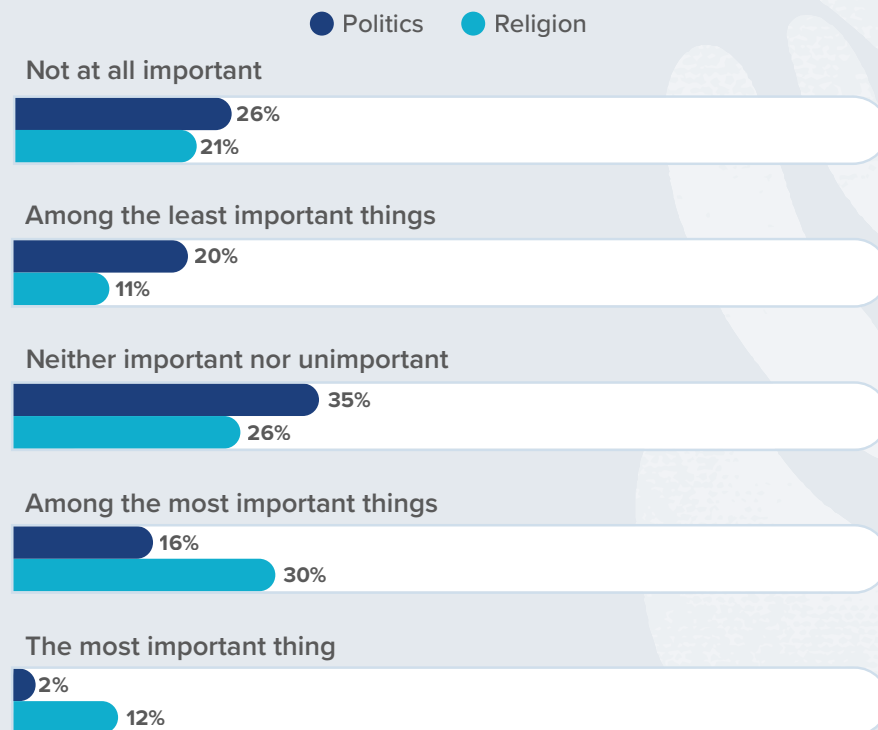*Percentages are approximate due to rounding.*
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Where Religion Meets Civic Life

When comparing the importance of *religion* to that of *politics* in young people's lives, we find that **young people are more than twice as likely to evaluate religion as among the most important things in their lives (42%)** than they are to evaluate politics as such (18%).

Religion is more important than politics in the lives of young people.

Percentage of young people responding to the question: "How important is _____ in your life?"

● Politics ● Religion

Not at all important
26%
21%

Among the least important things
20%
11%

Neither important nor unimportant
35%
26%

Among the most important things
16%
30%

The most important thing
2%
12%

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Relatively few young people (14%) say that religion should have "a lot" of influence on politics in the United States. More commonly, young people prefer that religion have "some" (40%) or "no" (46%) influence.

4 in 10 young people say religion should have "some" influence in US politics.

Percentage of young people responding to the statement: "When it comes to politics in the United States, religion should have _____ influence."

A lot
14%

No
46%

Some
40%
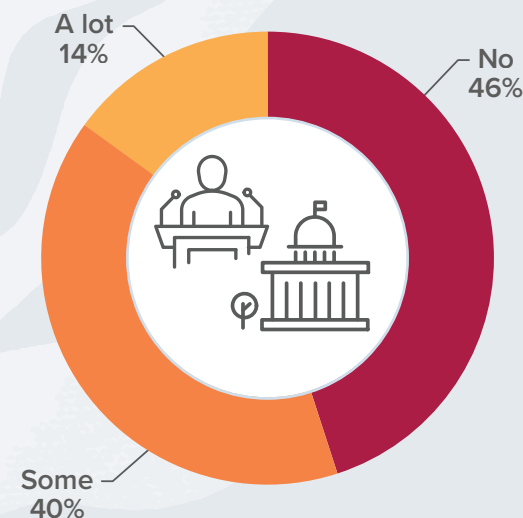
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

When describing what this looks like in practice, young people tend to position religion as a kind of interpretive filter and motivational impulse, clarifying what deserves their care and how to approach the act of caring.

Chloe, 18, who describes herself as "a Bible-believing Christian," explains that "my religion is what informs my political decisions," meaning that "I'm going to side with truth that originates from Scripture and whatever is closest to that." Hayley, 21, while not "religious" herself, likens religion to "a moral code of conduct that I feel is very universal to everybody—just about how people should basically be treated. . . . Like, love everybody." To Rashida, 18, a Muslim, "It doesn't matter what religion anyone is from or if they don't believe in their religion, that's completely fine—it's just, like, having a faith can really help you with your life because it gives you that extra hope to carry on." Emma, 14, says that her Catholic faith is "pretty important for the way I live my life, because I rely on God [to] just, like, help me through things."

Religious and nonreligious young people alike express ideas about what is "good" that guide their decisions around care. Jake, 25, agnostic, dismisses religion as the sole "pilot for those kinds of things" while nonetheless unpacking the "values" that motivate different approaches to social issues.

J.J., 19, also agnostic, says that religion was formative to their political socialization:

> I think definitely the place where I first learned how important it was to love your neighbor and have good community was tied to my religion. And I think that that is still very important to me. That is no longer why I feel that way, and that doesn't necessarily inform those things, but I think—just that general love and care and emphasis on community.

Most young people express the feeling that religion (or "morals," "values," and "beliefs") can be appropriately applied at a _personal_ level but should not be "forced" on a society-wide or government level. Layla, 21, who self-describes as agnostic, thinks that "every religion has its own place in people's hearts, in their own lives," just not "making policy" or "running the world." Marissa, 24, says that Christianity "helps me be a loving person" but shouldn't "be going into certain decisions about education, about women's rights, or really anything else for that matter." Atticus, 19, is Christian and conservative but wants religion kept "totally separate . . . because the Bible don't have anything about government."

The idea of separating personal beliefs from public imposition prompts many to reinforce the values of religious freedom, "respect" for others' beliefs, and the long-standing US tradition of governing apart from religion.

Ananya, 20, a Hindu, uses the example of cultural attire and norms around what's "appropriate" to conclude that "there's no one religion. And because of that, it's—I think it's partly unfair to base entire systems on a majority religion if it's not like 100% of the country feeling that way." Samantha, 25, a Christian, highlights how "everyone's different. Everyone has their different beliefs. So, something I believe in, you might not believe in." She concludes that the "right" to hold that different view "should be kept separately."

In this way, **young people tend to locate religion as an impulse to care within individuals rather than within shared communities or society as a whole.** It can be hard to draw a line between personal and social application though, young people say. Trusting individuals with _how_ to apply religion to politics can feel risky. Bridget dislikes how "a lot of people misrepresent the gospel." Henry, 19, a Protestant, admits that "there's a whole slew of disagreements about what that means and what the Bible actually teaches. But I think that's the biggest thing that influences my life—how I interpret the Bible and how I should apply that to life."
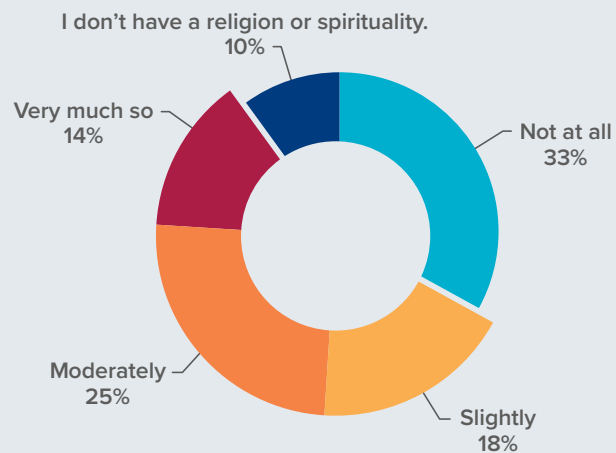
Most young people see room for personal moral commitments—including religiously informed commitments—that guide what someone cares about, why, and what to do about it *for themselves* (at the ballot box or otherwise). Young people tend to see these two interpretations as compatible, even while they may appear to contradict: a personal religious view that informs someone's own decisions but stays "out" of government and allows for disagreement.

Young people are much more likely to report that their religion or spirituality shapes their politics than vice versa.

Countering this dominant theme, **evangelical young people (especially those who say they are "evangelical in every way") are more likely to want religion to have "a lot" of influence on US politics, to place a higher level of importance on politics in their lives, and to report that their politics shapes their religion**. They are also more likely to say that their religious/spiritual community *should* be involved in US politics and to agree with the political stances of their religion and religious community.

Over half of young people say their religion at least slightly shapes their politics . . .

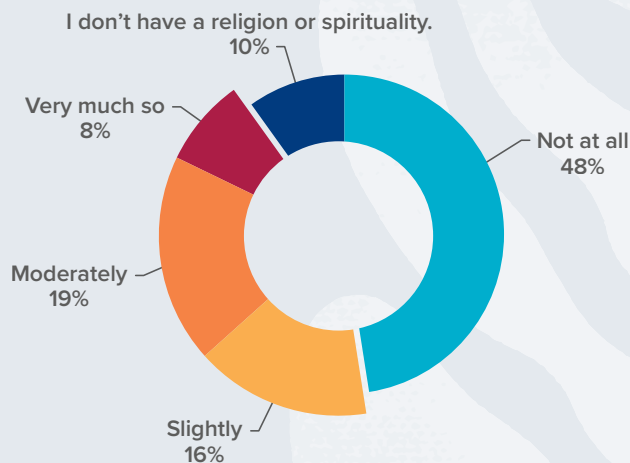*Percentage of young people responding to the question: "How much does your religion or spirituality shape your politics?"*

I don't have a religion or spirituality.
10%

Very much so
14%

Not at all
33%

Moderately
25%

Slightly
18%

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

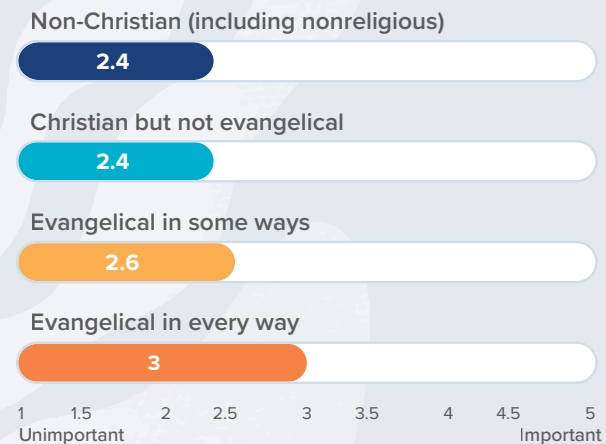### . . . while under half of young people say their politics shapes their religion.

Percentage of young people responding to the question: "How much do your politics shape your religion or spirituality?"

I don't have a religion or spirituality.
10%

Very much so
8%

Not at all
48%

Moderately
19%

Slightly
16%

Evangelical young people place more importance on politics than do nonevangelicals.

Average response by religious identity to the question: "How important is politics in your life?"

Non-Christian (including nonreligious)
2.4

Christian but not evangelical
2.4

Evangelical in some ways
2.6

Evangelical in every way
3

| 1 | 1.5 | 2 | 2.5 | 3 | 3.5 | 4 | 4.5 | 5 |

Unimportant   Important

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

3 in 10 evangelical young people say religion should have "a lot of" influence on US politics.

Percentage of young people responding "a lot of" to the statement: "When it comes to politics in the United States, religion should have _____ influence."

Evangelical Christians
30%

Non-Christian religiously affiliated
18%

Nonevangelical Christians
12%
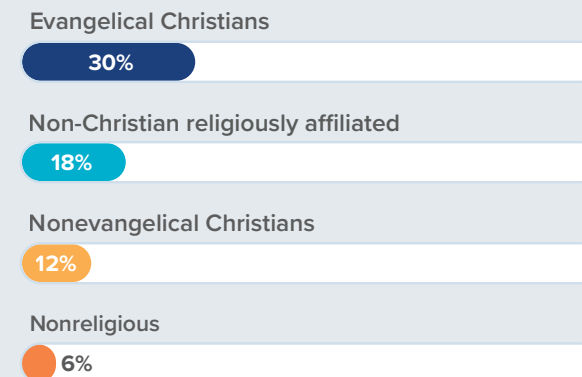
Nonreligious
6%

Note: We did not find a statistically significant difference in opinion about religion's influence on politics between nonevangelical Christians and respondents with other non-Christian religious affiliations.
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Some young evangelicals incorporate language associated with Christian nationalism, blending and defending "Christian" and "American" identities in civic care: Elizabeth, 21, says, "I feel that the Bible really advocates for Christians to be in government"; Timón, 23, says, "America was—the country was made for God, and I believe

it should have stayed that way, instead of separating the schools from church and all of that." To Reagan, 22—for whom Christianity is "the lens that I see the world through—just because not everyone is Christian doesn't mean the country shouldn't retain its foundational Christian identity:

> I think as a country we have gotten very—I think cancel culture has just affected everything, including religion. And I think that when it comes to politics, I mean, quite honestly, our nation was founded on faith. Like, when you look at our founding fathers and our national documents, and you really look at the history of how we were started, we were founded on faith. . . . I mean, every coin in our currency says, "In God We Trust." . . . Like, you can't debate that. We were founded on faith. So I think that trying to say that there shouldn't be any faith in politics, when that was what we were founded on . . . ?

Other young evangelicals share that separating religion and politics feels impossible. To Mae, 21: "If you hold a religious view, it *should* affect your life, in the sense that there are certain political things that you cannot see without your religious views coming into play. Things that are necessarily intertwined together." Hope, 21, lays this out:

> It sounds so nice to have [religion and politics] be separate—it just sounds great and easy. But I don't think that it can be. I don't think that's how it works. 'Cause politics has to do with: Who do you want leading the country? And how do you want decisions to be made in this country? My decisions are made based off of Scripture and, you know, religion, my relationship with God. And so I don't know how I could ever think about those decisions without bringing Him into it.

In our interviews with young people, **nonevangelicals— and especially young people who do not identify with a particular religious affiliation—are more likely to distinguish between applying religious and moral views to themselves versus applying those same views to someone else who may hold a different (or non)religious view.** Avery, 21, who is agnostic, concedes that it's "okay" when religion "informs their moral compass," but "unfortunately, a lot of that time, that means that someone's moral compass is a little bit tainted because they are thinking about it in a way that's, like, restrictive."
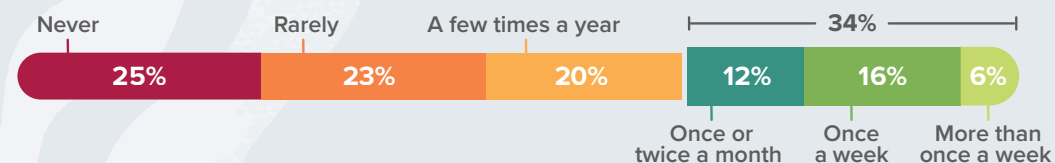
Melanie, 20, a conservative Christian, wants to "make sure my faith informs every aspect of my life," politics included. But she, like many others, doesn't see this as closing her off to different perspectives: "I'm definitely always open to learning from people who know more than me."

The Role of Faith Communities in Cultivating Care

Continuing a trend observed in prior Springtide studies, young people are about equally as likely to **currently** belong to an organized religious or spiritual community (35%) as they are to have **never** belonged to one (34%). The remainder (31%) **used** to belong. This means that more young people than not have some experience in religious or spiritual communities.

About one-third of young people attend religious or spiritual services at least monthly.
Percentage of young people responding to the question:
"Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious or spiritual services?"

Never	Rarely	A few times a year	34%		
25%	23%	20%	12%	16%	6%
			Once or twice a month	Once a week	More than once a week

Percentages are approximate due to rounding.
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

When asked whether they feel like they **"need" a religious or spiritual community**, over one-third of young people (36%) agree.

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Among young people who participate in religious or spiritual communities, many celebrate the values of community, worship, friendship, and belonging they experience there. Most report feeling "accepted" and feeling like they "belong" there.

How does civic care come up in young people's religious or spiritual communities? Interviewees offer stories of *active engagement* as well as *avoidance*.

The church Jaden, 20, attended worked on increasing public transportation to support people with disabilities and the elderly. He was also given space to talk "about my time in Palestine . . . gave a Sunday school in front of everyone about it. . . . I was talking about how there should be an end to the occupation and stuff." Jaden felt encouraged that "people seemed to be generally receptive about it, or at least wanna hear why I thought that."

Melanie's church hosted a speaker from a pro-life pregnancy center. Marissa's congregation flies an LGBTQIA flag out front. Reagan's pastor offered a sermon on why their church won't allow an LGBT person to be in a leadership role, because "we believe that that's wrong and it's not okay." Several college-aged respondents mention groups on campus that fuse a religious and political focus.

Sometimes it's a pastor or a key cultural event that prompts political conversation in a young person's religious or spiritual community. Genevieve, 20, says, "My church is less, I would say, politically active, but our pastors will comment sometimes on political issues, especially if there's something big happening—kind of just as a reminder of like, this is what we believe and this is how we ought to respond to this in love and truth." Caden, 18, says that his church offered prayers after the death of George Floyd.

Yejin, 24, attended a church for a while where "partisan politics" came up so much that she eventually stepped away from it. "I was so tired of politics entering the discussion. . . . It might not come from the pulpit, but it was definitely coming from within the congregation." In time, she decided that "doesn't really serve me spiritually" and "ghosted my church."

Other young people say that their religious and spiritual communities actively *avoid* addressing political issues. Communities might adopt neutrality to avoid controversy, young people speculate. Some communities opt to focus exclusively on "religious" matters. Very few young people report having had conversations with a religious or spiritual leader about politics, though such conversations are more common among evangelicals.

About 2 in 10 young people (22%) say **their religious community isn't as politically engaged as they'd like it to be**.

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Young people point out how avoidance can be strategic, to prevent difficult discussions or disagreement that may feel off-putting to congregants. Ayla, 20, explains that political conversations happen "not at all" in her church, an avoidance that feels mutually—if implicitly—agreed upon, given that Ayla felt "traumatized from those conversations" in the past and now "I stay away from it." Elizabeth approaches it the same way: "I mean, obviously as peers in my church community, we talk about things that are important to us, and those include politics sometimes. But I wouldn't intentionally ever start a conversation about it. It's just too polarizing." Timón agrees: "When it comes to church, I like to try and keep quiet so that I can actually keep attending church."
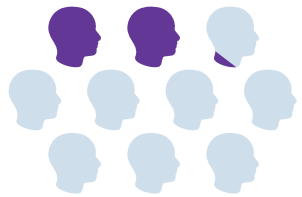
About one-third of young people dislike hearing about politics in their religious community.

Percentage of young people responding to the statement:
"I dislike it when my religious or spiritual community talks about politics."

Strongly agree 8%
Strongly disagree 7%
Disagree 21%
Agree 26%
Neither 38%

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

For many young people and the religious communities to which they belong, silence on political issues keeps the peace. This implies that direct conversation might surface disagreement.

One in ten young people who currently belong to a religious or spiritual community say that they *disagree* with the statement "In general, I agree with the political stances of my religious or spiritual community." When asked a similar question about their religion as a whole, about the same proportion (11%) say that they disagree with those political stances.

We also asked young people, hypothetically, if they would join a religious community that shared their political views. Some were intrigued. Some were put off by the very idea of having political discussions inside a religious community. Some reiterated resistance to any organized religion.

So, how big of a role do faith communities play in cultivating care about social and political issues? For many young people, not a big role, absent direct contact with or direct conversation within those communities.

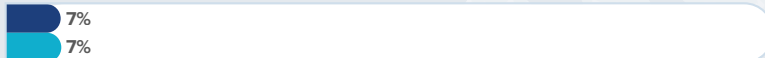**"In general, I agree with the political stance of my _____."**

Percentage of young people responding to the statement

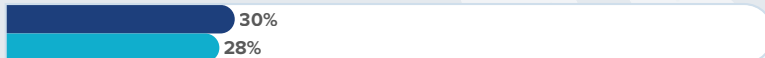● Religious or spiritual community   ● Religion as a whole
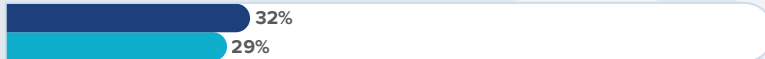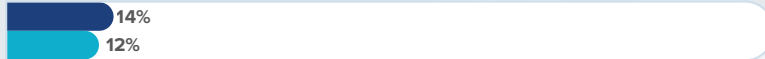
Strongly disagree
3%
4%

Disagree
7%
7%
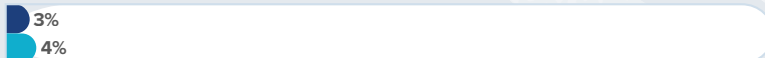
Neither agree nor disagree
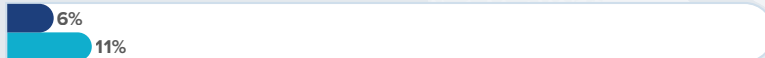30%
28%

Agree
32%
29%

Strongly agree
14%
12%

I don't know.
6%
11%

Note: This graph does not display the 8% and 9% of young people who said that their religious or spiritual community or religion as a whole, respectively, does not take political stances.
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, *conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024*

Most young people describe moral meaning making around civic care as an individual project rather than a communally organized one. Marwa, 23, who is Muslim, names the comparative ease of isolation alongside its downsides:

> We can find more similarities than differences if we just take the time to do that. But nowadays people don't do that. It's so easy to block people. It's so easy to cancel or dox them than actually have a conversation. . . . People don't wanna go through the patience and the time to do that.

Relationships—including religious and interreligious ones—help to cultivate care, young people tell us. Simon shares the profound impact of a trusted adult praying for him, even though he does not consider himself religious:

> I had a very, very powerful human experience in my freshman year of high school. A very important adult figure in my life, who was the leader of a local club, pulled me aside and asked me very kindly if he could, if I would take the time and he could pray for me. And we just sat in a room on two chairs, and he put his hand on my shoulder and prayed for me. And I had a really big moment of realizing what it meant for someone to petition the highest power they could think of

on my behalf. And from there, I have taken every opportunity I can to respect and give back to those who have a religious affiliation that they believe in. Because, in that moment, I got to see a peek of what that means to want to have a relationship with a higher power that you believe in from the bottom of your heart and believe it in a way that allows for doubt and allows for going and returning.

For Marissa, bridging faith to civic care means going "back to my political beliefs of just caring about everybody. I think that the basis of [religion] is really important. . . . It does help me remain steadfast about respecting everybody and respecting myself and trying to do what's best for humanity."

Where religion meets civic care, we heard from young people deep thinking, change, uncertainties, and negotiation, like Michelle, 24, who shared: "I come from a very conservative background . . . so, [I am] trying to figure out, like, being a Christian . . . how I want to vote and how my beliefs affect that. I'm still figuring it out." Jake reminds us: "We're all just here learning, trying to do better. Nobody knows everything." Henry echoes this when he admits, "I don't have all the answers."

Equipping Young People for Civic Care

Young people's expressions of civic care repeatedly circle back to the kinds of relationships and interactions they have with peers and adults in their lives. Presented in earlier sections, our data reveal that young people are more likely to care about civic issues and engage in a greater number of civic activities when they:
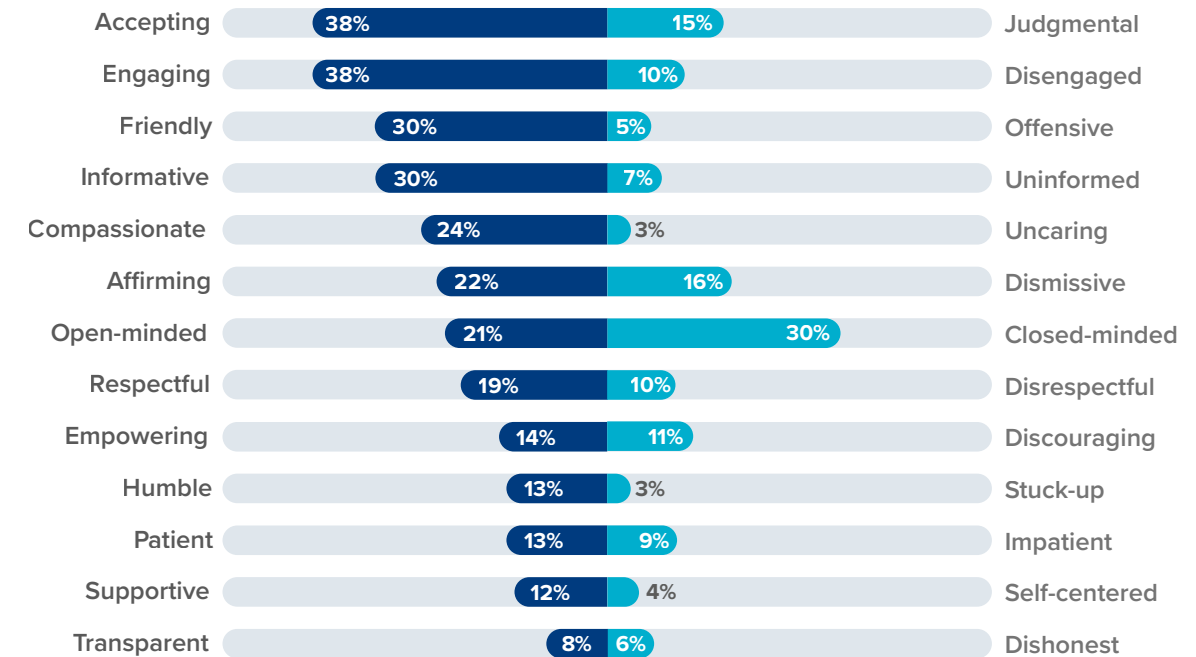
- Have *more frequent* political discussions with friends and trusted adults
- Have *more positive* civic conversations with adults
- Find *agreement* among trusted adults, friends, and religious leaders
- Encounter *disagreement* safely and civilly with the freedom to learn, question, and grow

Yet Springtide's in-depth interviews with young people also reveal just how challenging it can be to discuss (let alone agree upon) complex and contentious social issues. When young people encounter exchanges that feel uncooperative or reactionary, they feel less free to express their care authentically, if at all. And while agreeing with loved ones about political issues is linked to care, young people tell us that *how others disagree* also opens or closes doors to civic care.

The good news is that many young people already have these kinds of conversations with trusted adults in their lives. When describing the adults in their lives with whom they discuss politics, words like *accepting* and *engaging* rank high. Young people also use the words *friendly, informative,* and *compassionate* to characterize these adults.

Characteristics of Adults Who Talk Politics with Young People

Percentage of young people describing adults who talk politics with them as _____:

	Positive	Negative	
Accepting	38%	15%	Judgmental
Engaging	38%	10%	Disengaged
Friendly	30%	5%	Offensive
Informative	30%	7%	Uninformed
Compassionate	24%	3%	Uncaring
Affirming	22%	16%	Dismissive
Open-minded	21%	30%	Closed-minded
Respectful	19%	10%	Disrespectful
Empowering	14%	11%	Discouraging
Humble	13%	3%	Stuck-up
Patient	13%	9%	Impatient
Supportive	12%	4%	Self-centered
Transparent	8%	6%	Dishonest

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

What more can those who care for and about young people—and about civic life for all—do to cultivate healthy, collaborative civic care among emerging generations of Americans?

Drawing from what we have learned by listening to thousands of young people through our survey and interviews, we offer specific suggestions on how to cultivate CARE among young people.

When asked what others can do to promote these kinds of civil conversations about political issues—conversations that feel accepting, engaging, friendly, and informative—young people share things like:

> **"By actually listening. And wanting to listen. And actually working on it."**
> **—Ethan, 25**

> **"Being able to admit that you're wrong, or just admitting the possibility of being wrong."**
> **—Simon, 23**

> **"I would say, like, taking in what you have to say, giving you really great feedback, and just challenging your ideas sometimes."**
> **—Ayla, 20**

> **"Be more neutral."**
> **—Robert, 13**

> **"Be very open to new ideas . . . even if you're not willing to accept them; just be willing to sit down and have a nonaggressive conversation."**
> **—Caden, 18**

> **"[When] they understand my point, and they don't shame me for the point."**
> **—Ximena, 17**

To see more responses from young people about how to engage in civil conversations, scan the QR code to read the Data Drop on the Springtide blog.

Cultivating CARE

How can trusted adults help to *cultivate care* in young people, thereby strengthening the future of shared communities? Using Springtide data on young people and civic care, we have created the CARE framework. Cultivating CARE will support all those committed to healing division and enriching society by nurturing a deep and lasting sense of civic care among young people.

Captivate
Activate
Relate
Educate

C Captivate

Young people come to care about issues that captivate their attention and resonate with their experiences and values. Create and introduce opportunities to expose young people to social and political issues through practices such as mealtime conversation, volunteer work, classroom lessons, online resources, and documentaries. Provide forums to reflect on personal identities and experiences. Introduce young people to others whose identities and experiences differ from their own. Create moments to spark curiosity with specific examples, moving issues from abstract to personally relevant. Remember that while capturing attention is necessary, it is just the first step. Continued engagement and deeper understanding are essential to cultivating care.

R Relate

Young people explore how to care within the context of trustworthy relationships characterized by humility, empathy, respect, and active listening. Enter conversations with young people with a sense of curiosity, and refrain from interrupting. Don't assume that you know what they are going to say. Be vulnerable by acknowledging the limits of your viewpoint. When disagreements arise, identify shared goals and values. Offer emotional support. Prepare young people for feelings of disappointment and jadedness when change feels slow or invisible. Serve as a role model. Connect young people with mentors to build networks of support and to create organizational connection points. Validate their knowledge and personal experiences to encourage a sense of belonging and respect. Show genuine interest, promote open conversations, and demonstrate empathy to form relationships and encourage long-term engagement.

A Activate

Young people act on their care when linked to networks and organizations that enable them to do so. To translate young people's awareness into action, provide opportunities as well as connections to people and organizations already invested in urgent issues. Encourage and explain voting, volunteering, raising awareness, making lifestyle changes, and mobilizing local action. Offer guidance on how to move from passive or performative gestures to more active forms of involvement and impact. Renew trust within organizations and institutions by implementing transparency and accountability. Create ways for young people to collaborate, have a say, and lead. Empower them to voice opinions and transform their neighborhoods and schools. Help them find meaningful ways to implement both short-term and long-term actions, emphasizing the purpose and meaning behind those actions.

E Educate

Caring requires knowing. With so many sources of information available, young people can feel overwhelmed trying to sort fact from fiction. Accompany them as they learn and decode information. Increased knowledge prompts concern, familiarity, confidence, and willingness to engage with civic issues. Teach, learn, share, and grow with young people. Explore different perspectives. Help young people build a set of values and beliefs through which to interpret new information. Introduce links between knowledge and morals. Encourage critical thinking to navigate complex issues and make informed decisions. Inspire a lifelong commitment to learning, ensuring that young people are well equipped to participate in peaceful civic action. Educating for civic life means not only passing along knowledge but also modeling, inspiring, and accompanying young people on a shared journey toward active, informed citizenship.

Springtide Ambassadors Talk about Civic Care

The Springtide Ambassadors Program (SAP) invites young people ages 13 to 25 to participate in cohort collaboration, personal reflection, and content contribution that directly impacts and influences Springtide national research projects and publications. Here's what our Springtide Ambassadors had to say about civic care.

Springtide Ambassadors on What Civic Care Looks Like for Their Generation

"To see other perspectives, hear other lived experiences, and have an understanding of what other people have to live with. . . . It really helps me be aware of what my actions do to other people. It helps me recognize that it's important to give everyone a seat at the table, to voice their opinions, to voice their struggles, and feel validated. And not feel like I am alone. I am not all by myself."

—Jonathan, 16

"The people around you do have passions to try and make the world better. And safer. And just knowing that even though we might be fighting different fronts, we're all fighting for something together. That's really stabilizing and hopeful."

—Kate, 21

"We're looking for leaders who promise unity, but we're not always able to define what exactly unity will look like."

—Gabriella, 18

"We are not afraid to stand up for what we believe is right and what is wrong."

—Mya, 17

"Vocalization of our generation's needs is gonna help build a better society."

—Serafeim, 17

Springtide Ambassadors on How They Express Care for a Social or Political Issue

"The mental health of young athletes is something that I talk to a lot of my peers and my teammates about all the time. I work with some younger girls playing basketball, and I make it a point to address that. I definitely feel as though it's not talked about enough: the importance of mental health in general and being aware of it is something that I am super, super, super passionate about."

—Mya, 17

"I'm taking a wide view of things. If we don't have a clean and healthy planet to live on, a lot of other things start to fall away a little bit. Even small things, like being aware of how much of different things I'm consuming. Like not using a paper towel every time you use the restroom—just something small like that."

—Aimee, 23

"I made some little films with my brother in East Africa with some really cool organizations that are helping people in different ways. The work that I can do right now is to try and produce those and platform them so that people can be exposed to—and hopefully raise funds for—these programs. That's what I am able to do right now. That's the work that I'm doing."

—Joe, 19

"Access to health care and fighting health disparities in the country is a huge social issue that I care about. I was recently able to gain hands-on experience in the medical field at my internship, and my site was located in a pretty rural and non-English-speaking community. There was difficulty navigating the language barrier through the health care providers and their patients. Being knowledgeable on these types of issues and learning about the problems happening around our communities is how I can further find ways to express care. And I would love to provide them with quality health care in the future when I also become a doctor."

—Sunny, 17

Expert Insights

Bridging the Gap between Data & Practice

Springtide's Research Advisory Board informs our research design, data gathering, and approach to sharing findings with wide audiences. The collective wisdom and range of perspectives from our research advisors help us to recognize young people as individuals who are also a part of specific communities and national trends. The diverse and practical backgrounds of our advisors help to ensure that our research is authentic and actionable.

We invited our advisors to reflect on snapshots of data from this report. Their answers to our questions offer insights into how practitioners might apply Springtide findings to cultivate care among the young people in their lives.

1 **We learned that young people are especially likely to care about education, the economy, abortion / reproductive issues, climate change, health care, and gun policy. In what ways have you seen that demonstrated in your communities and settings? How can trusted adults show their care, shared support, and collaboration around these and other important issues with the young people in their lives and communities?**

Dr. Onnie Rogers

Our church launched a community garden and composting system. The garden is now part of our food pantry, and all goods at the church are green and eco-friendly. We have sermons on being caretakers of the environment and practical ways to reduce our collective carbon footprint.

Dr. Vijay Satnarine

Most of these topics are discussed openly in the Hindu Dharma traditions. In households and institutions where epistemological westernization has not occurred, there is usually space for a variety of perspectives on these topics. The key is the first generation of young adults born in the US, because they play the role of interpreter between generations. Institutions that have handed over visible control to this generation—while retaining an advisory role—seem to allow for these important issues to be worked on.

Dr. Melinda Denton

My church regularly offers book studies or classes related to these issues. The "Green Team" is one of the church ministry groups devoted to helping the church reduce its environmental impact and encourage environmental stewardship among the congregation. The church hosts a weekly medical clinic for unhoused individuals in the community. While these efforts are primarily aimed at adults, I think it is valuable for the young people to see the adults in the congregation prioritizing these issues and taking practical steps to engage with them.

Rabbi Julia Appel

Among the various kinds of Jewish institutions, there is generally a big emphasis on civic engagement, including the importance of voting and volunteering as well as advocacy efforts around social issues like education, equity, health care, and more. Creating opportunities for modeling respectful and relational dialogue, even with panels of people who may disagree, can have a profound effect on young people especially. Dialogue around difference, for me, is what is most important in civic engagement right now given the polarization of political life in America.

Rev. Kenji Kuramitsu

I believe trusted adults can show their sincerity and care about issues by talking openly about them with young people, acknowledging the limits of our own understandings, and inviting curiosity and engagement rather than insisting on simplistic or reductionistic narratives. An organization called COLAGE, on whose board I serve, works to empower youth raised in LGBTQ-parented families. To accomplish this, multiple structures are in place to ensure youth participation through governance and leadership in every aspect of the institution.

2 **Some BIPOC young people and LGBTQ young people share that their very identity feels political. How might adults and community leaders demonstrate care and foster a sense of safety so that all may engage in dialogue, especially when that might feel risky?**

Dr. Onnie Rogers

Acknowledge that we are all political and politicized—the question is where power is situated and how it is utilized. For those whose politicized bodies are granted status and value and power, there is an obligation to protect, preserve, and promote the value of others. None of us escapes the political; we must be mindful and intentional about how our political positionality is used, for whom, and for what purposes.

Dr. Vijay Satnarine

Community leaders must do better to understand the politics of each demographic and, rather than choose a side that is "comfortable" to them, must instead choose representatives of all sides, and foster forums in which they can discuss and find a system to allow those views to be represented authentically at the larger table.

Rev. Kenji Kuramitsu

It feels important for adults to demonstrate that we can create safe and supportive environments where young adults can take risks in exploring themselves and their views on the issues that shape our world. Practicing our own emotional regulation and distress tolerance, even when we are most activated, and acting in ways congruent with our highest values will communicate a sense of containment that invites dialogue across challenges.

Dr. Melinda Denton

In my own faith community, inclusion is a core mission and identity. It is explicitly stated at every gathering and consistently modeled. The leadership team includes BIPOC adults and LGBTQ adults, whose voices are valued and prominent. The church regularly participates in civic engagement activities in the larger community—volunteering, Pride parades, community social events, outreach events, etc. These activities are always inclusive of all ages, with youth included alongside the adults. This contributes to an environment where inclusion is more than words; it is the very heart of the church body, and the foundation for all the dialogue that takes place.

Chaplain Seher Siddiqee

In many of the community spaces connected to religious institutions I have been a part of, they tend to talk about young people's identities rather than engage with them in conversation. They seem to include topics concerning young people but do not include leaders or organizers who are young people. Too often, I see token spaces for young people or a "youth liaison" position on a board. This feels more like a checkbox than actual engagement. In the instances when young people have engaged in deeper conversations, I don't know how seriously they are taken.
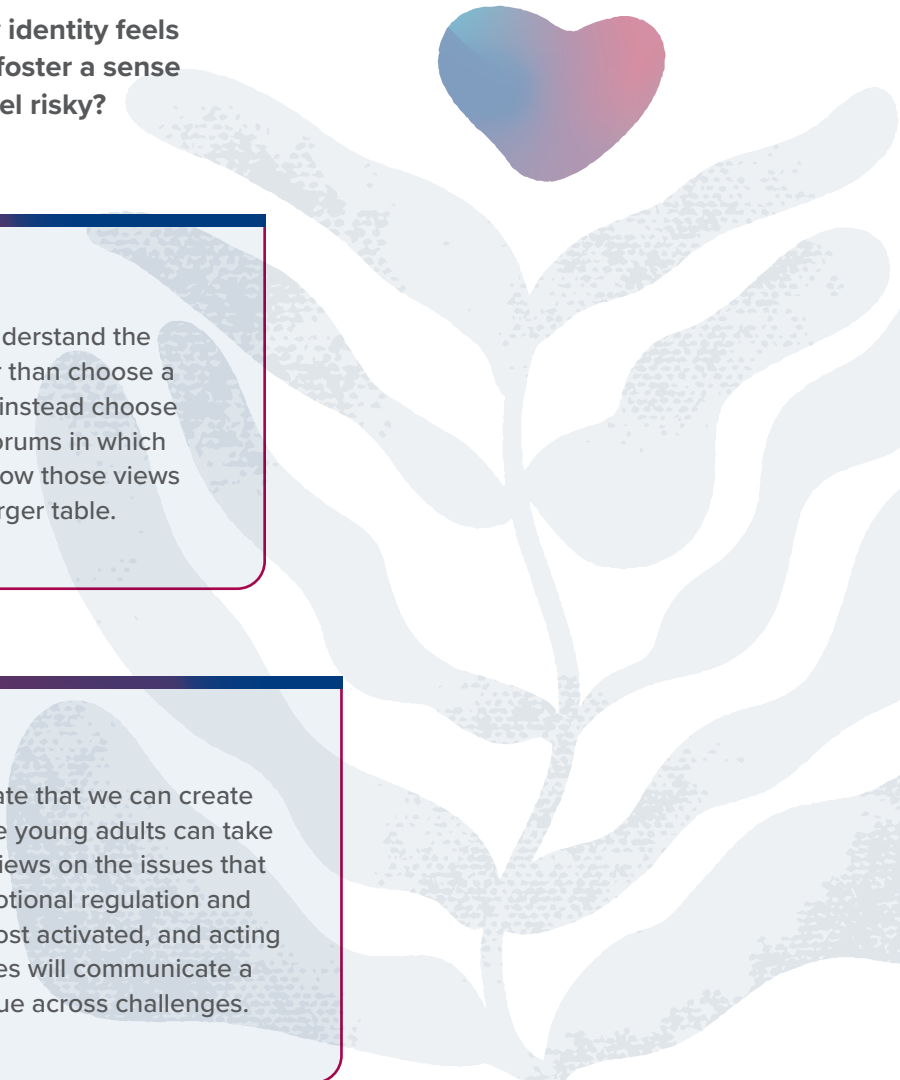
3 **Our research finds that 45% of young people feel as though religious institutions care "only a little" or "not at all" about things that matter to most young people. How might faith-based organizations convey common concern for young people and the issues that matter to them?**

Dr. Melinda Denton

Young people value authenticity. Faith-based organizations can use various means to communicate concern for the issues that matter to young people. I think, however, that what resonates most with young people is when faith-based organizations embrace and live out those concerns as an authentic mission central to their identity as an organization, not just as a means to connect with young people.

Dr. María Del Socorro Castañeda

True dedication requires consistent engagement from organizational leaders. Young individuals must witness this dedication firsthand and feel confident that their thoughts and aspirations are genuinely respected. Organizational leaders should be present—attending youth-organized events, initiating conversations, and actively seeking their perspectives. A brief visit by a director or pastor can profoundly impact the youth, as they will remember and interpret it as a meaningful gesture of care and commitment.

Dr. Onnie Rogers

The best way for faith-based and religious organizations to convey their concern for issues that matter most to young people is to demonstrate care through action—showing up, speaking out, giving to, and serving alongside the communities and issues that are often ignored and marginalized. Young people today are no longer impressed by words or value statements; action is the priority.

Rev. Kenji Kuramitsu

Faith-based communities, at their best, offer a uniquely intergenerational context for relationship building. Fostering civic engagement across age divides—a rare opportunity in a very atomized Western society—may be a meaningful way of creating the kind of energetic and faithful institutional memory that compels participation in making a better world.

Dr. Vijay Satnarine

The formation of young people cannot be constricting; it should create the safe space young people need to make mistakes. It should do so in a way that the institution retains its integrity without sacrificing its ability to take young people seriously. Hollow celebrations are not appreciated by the youth. What young people do appreciate is the ability to look with satisfaction upon something of systemic import that they were able to institute.

Contributing Research Advisory Board Members

Rabbi Julia Appel

Rabbi Julia Appel serves as Director of Innovation for Clal, creating and leading Jewish community training programs in innovation and entrepreneurship. While at Hillel at the University of Toronto and previously as Assistant Rabbi of Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom and of Congregation Dorshei Emet in Montreal, Rabbi Appel brought programming to new demographics and created novel approaches to Jewish community. She has integrated community organizing, diversity and inclusion, and relational engagement throughout her career.

María Del Socorro Castañeda, PhD

Dr. María Del Socorro Castañeda is an independent researcher and Chief Education Officer and cofounder of Becoming Mujeres. Founded with her teenage daughter Lupita Castañeda-Liles, the organization focuses on the mental health of Latina teens and their female caregivers. As a sociologist of religion and a mother to a teen girl, Dr. Del Socorro Castañeda is deeply committed to the mental health of young people.

Melinda Denton, PhD

Dr. Melinda Denton is a professor of sociology at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where she examines the intersection of religion and family life in the United States. She served as a co-investigator on the *National Study of Youth and Religion*, a longitudinal study of the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents and young adults.

Rev. Kenji Kuramitsu, MDiv, LCSW, CGP

Rev. Kenji Kuramitsu is a licensed clinical social worker living in Chicago. He has served as an adjunct professor at McCormick Theological Seminary and as a community-care chaplain for the Obama Foundation. In these roles and others, he provides direct mental health and spiritual care for diverse populations in medical, educational, and corporate settings.

Onnie Rogers, PhD

Dr. Onnie Rogers is a developmental psychologist and an associate professor of comparative human development at the University of Chicago, where she teaches courses on social and emotional development. As Director of the Development of Identities in Cultural Environments (DICE) Lab, Dr. Rogers conducts research on youth identity development with a focus on how young people make sense of and resist social inequalities and stereotypes related to race, gender, and social class.

Vijay Satnarine, PhD

Dr. Vijay Satnarine serves as Director of Education for the Hindu American Foundation, creating resources for the US Hindu community and the broader American society. He is passionate about and involved in the standardization of professional spiritual care, the research and implementation of decolonial methodologies, and bringing compassionate ancestral techniques to difficult discussions.

Chaplain Seher Siddiqee, MA

Chaplain Seher Siddiqee is a pediatric staff chaplain at a hospital in Oakland, California. She previously served as Assistant Director of Spiritual Life and Advisor for Muslim Affairs at the University of Chicago, where she worked with religious student groups and communities. She also served as a Chaplain in Residence at Georgetown University, where she completed a Clinical Pastoral Education residency.

Conclusion

Springtide research on young people and civic life cautions against interpreting young Americans' institutional distrust and disconnection as apathy. On the contrary, young people show and tell how they care—deeply—about a multitude of social and political issues. We call this *civic care*. Young people share that they want that care to be informed, heard, respected, and acted upon. The challenge lies in how all of us, together, can sustain and activate civic care through channels of supportive relationships, dialogue, communities, organizations, and civic institutions.

Fostering civic care in emerging generations requires captivating young people's attention and activating their sense of agency and reciprocity. They tell us that this happens through humble, empathetic, and trustworthy exchanges that bridge generational divides and make young people feel seen and valued. Education and opportunity play a vital role in readiness for civic conversation and purposeful action. Critical thinking, media and social media literacy, and an understanding of democratic processes pave the way to co-responsible leadership into the future.

The current climate of polarization, partisanship, and distrust invites new models of civic care that rely less upon labels and more upon authentic relationships. Parents, teachers, peers, and civic leaders can all invest in the kinds of relationships that enable civic care. Emerging generations infuse new energy, experiences, ideas, and critical insights born of frustration into our shared democratic processes. Our collective democratic future is entrusted to today's young people. Cultivating care could not be more vital.

Learn more from Springtide data.

The Springtide blog highlights insights from Springtide data in short, accessible articles. Our blog posts weave Springtide data together with discussions of current events and the lived experiences of young people. Our Data Drops provide snapshots of findings from our datasets, focusing on specific survey and interview questions.

With each update, you'll discover more about young people to better inform yourself and your work. Scan the QR codes to find relevant insights from our most popular blog posts.

BLOG POSTS

"Gen Z and Politics: A Conversation"

"Gen Z and Politics: More Conversation"

"Be Yourself: The Importance of Affirming Young People's Identities"

DATA DROPS

"When It Comes to Political Issues, Young People Both Value and Distrust Social Media"

"Low Confidence in US Institutions—Especially Political Institutions—among Young People"


"LGBTQ+ Young People Experience More Discomfort Sharing Political Views with Adults"

The Voices of Young People Podcast

Season 9 of *The Voices of Young People Podcast* is titled "Cultivating Care." It features a variety of ways that teens and twentysomethings view politics as well as their interest and involvement in civic life. Throughout six episodes, hear 12 different young people from across the US in conversation with one another and with Springtide's Head of Community Engagement, Marte Aboagye. Featured guests describe who or what has shaped their ideas about civic engagement, highlight particular political or social issues they especially care about, and offer tips on ways that trusted adults can start these same conversations with young people in their sphere.

EPISODE 1
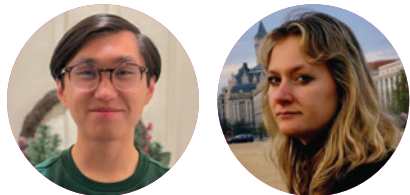
Jonathan, 16, in CA & Kate, 21, in DC

EPISODE 2

Joe, 19, in CA & Mya, 17, in MN

EPISODE 3

Peyton, 15, in FL & Sunny, 17, in CO

EPISODE 4

Brendan, 22, in NE & Lupita, 17, in CA

EPISODE 5

Gabriella, 18, in WA & Mirelia, 16, in CA

EPISODE 6

Aimee, 23, in CA & Christian, 25, in TN

The Voices of Young People PODCAST

Find the latest episodes on our website by scanning the QR code, or find us on Apple Podcasts, Anchor, Google Podcasts, or Spotify.

Acknowledgments

Created by the publishing team of Springtide Research Institute

Printed in the United States of America

5946

ISBN 978-1-64121-230-4

Research Methodology

Springtide Research Institute's *2024 Study of Young People and Civic Life* was a mixed-methods research study conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024. The study explored young people's civic identities and engagement using two primary data sources.

First, Springtide surveyed a sample of 6,669 young people between the ages of 13 and 25 residing in the US. The survey was open from January 4 to February 25, 2024, and consisted of 72 questions regarding political identities, behaviors, and engagement as well as religious identities, beliefs, and practices.

Springtide used an online panel provider, Alchemer, to administer the survey. Alchemer crowdsources panels through several online suppliers for a total of about 2 million panelists in the US between the ages of 13 and 25. To participate in a panel, individuals must create a user profile requiring yearly verification and updates. Alchemer distributed the survey to a random subsample of these panelists, guided by quotas to match census demographics for age, gender, and region. Springtide added parental consent as a requirement for minors.

Though Alchemer's panel is nationally representative, it and all online opt-in samples can suffer from phony respondents motivated by cash incentives. To offset this risk and maximize data quality, Springtide eliminated all identifiable phony responses from the dataset using various techniques. First, we excluded responses from individuals with IP addresses outside the US. Second, we excluded responses from those who completed the survey too quickly (speeders), who responded with nonrandom patterns (straightlining), or who offered gibberish for the survey's open-ended questions. Third, we asked a set of "red herring" questions to identify and exclude disengaged respondents (e.g., those who said they had no pets but later said they had three pets). Finally, we made logic-based exclusions, such as removing responses from those who reported being 14 years old and having full-time employment or a graduate degree.

Survey Respondent Demographics

Age	
13 to 17	48%
18 to 25	53%

Gender	
Female	51%
Male	46%
Nonbinary	3%
Other	1%

Race or Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Asian	5%
Black or African American	13%
Hispanic or Latino	14%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	< 1%
White	61%
Two or more races/ethnicities	3%
Other	1%

Region	
Midwest	22%
Northeast	17%
South	40%
West	21%

The sample margin of error is +/-1.2%. Standard errors may be higher than estimated in statistical models because we do not use a simple random sample.

To see the full list of our survey questions, answers, and demographics, please visit *springtideresearch.org/civic-life-topline*.

Second, Springtide conducted in-depth interviews of 76 US residents ages 13 to 25. Interview questions explored understandings of civic life, identity, engagement, and conversation as well as the intersection of religion and politics. To recruit interviewees, we employed three strategies:

- A mailer sent to 10,000 households providing a link to an informed consent form and screening survey online. To capture political diversity, informed by voting patterns from the last presidential election, we randomly selected zip codes from "blue" and "red" counties across 20 states in the continental US and Washington, DC—five states from each census-designated region (Northeast, Midwest, West, and South). Age-targeted mailers were sent to a randomly selected sample of 250 households per zip code—125 households with teens ages 13 to 17 and 125 households with young adults ages 18 to 25.

- Ads on social media targeting young adults ages 18 to 25 and parents of teens ages 13 to 17 describing the study's purposes, inclusion criteria, compensation information, and link to an online screening survey.

- Panel recruitment via RepData, in which respondents to a brief screener were invited to share contact information to participate in an interview.

In total, Springtide interviewed 76 participants on Zoom between December 2023 and March 2024. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently coded using ATLAS.ti.

Interview Respondent Demographics

Age	
13 to 17	11%
18 to 25	89%

Gender	
Female	71%
Male	26%
Nonbinary	3%

Race or Ethnicity	
Asian	11%
Black or African American	13%
Hispanic or Latino	9%
White	51%
Two or more races/ethnicities	14%
Other	1%

Region	
Midwest	29%
Northeast	25%
South	34%
West	12%

An external institutional review board (IRB) called Sterling IRB reviewed and approved this study on October 6, 2023 (IRB ID#1348). Sterling IRB operates under federal regulations established by the US Department of Health and Human Services to protect the rights of research participants.

Across all methods, Springtide secured parental consent for minors.

This study was funded solely by Springtide Research Institute, founded in 2019 under the umbrella of Lasallian Educational and Research Initiatives (LERI), a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) member organization in the State of Minnesota, whose publishing roots date back to 1943. LERI is an expression of the Christian Brothers of De La Salle, or the Lasallians, a Catholic lay religious congregation founded by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the patron saint of teachers and a fierce advocate of the young. Our work draws inspiration from De La Salle's passion for building communities oriented toward the good of young people, especially those on the margins. Our research findings and conclusions are never altered to accommodate other interests, including those of the Christian Brothers, churches, or governmental bodies and officials.

Bring our experts on young people to your next event.

Springtide has the data and understanding to equip you with the insights you need to help emerging generations flourish. Our national speakers bring unique perspectives, areas of expertise, and skills.

Dr. Angela Patterson
Head Writer & Editor

Dr. Hannah Evans
Research Associate

Dr. Jaclyn Doherty
Research Associate

Dr. Kari Koshiol
Senior Project Manager

Marte Aboagye
Head of Community Engagement

Dr. Nabil Tueme
Senior Research Associate

Dr. Tricia Bruce
Director

Springtide Ambassadors Program (SAP)
Young People Panels

Learn more about our national speakers, and book Springtide for your next speaking engagement at *springtideresearch.org/speaking*.

A little data makes a *big difference.*

Empirical data informs and inspires. It helps guide your next move. It strengthens your plan. Serving young people starts with knowing who and where they are.

From educators and faith leaders to parents and policymakers, our data empowers you to take the next steps, backed by social science.

Learn more about our offerings:
springtideresearch.org/services

SERVICES

- ✓ Consulting
- ✓ Focus Groups
- ✓ Interviews
- ✓ GIS Mapping
- ✓ Surveys
- ✓ On-site Research
- ✓ Program or Grant Evaluation
- ✓ Reports & Presentations
- ✓ Speaking & Workshops