

## Common Sense Media | SurveyMonkey Poll

### Young Adults Want to Vote, but Will They?

#### *A survey of voting engagement by age*

#### Key Findings

- 1. Americans are deeply skeptical that their votes will be fairly counted.** Only 23% of 18- to 29-year-olds, and 29% of adults overall, said they are "very confident" their vote will be counted fairly.
- 2. Despite questions about fairness, interest in voting among young adults is increasing.** Nearly half of young Americans age 18 to 29 (47%) say their interest in voting in the 2020 election has increased in the past six months, similar to the 48% average among all adults. Among those young adults who are not registered to vote today or are unsure whether they are, 46% plan to register or confirm registration before the election.
- 3. Young adults are less likely than older adults to feel very confident in knowing how to participate in the 2020 election.** Only half (50%) of 18- to 29-year-olds say they are "very confident" they know where to vote, whether in person or by mail, compared with 64% of 30- to 49-year-olds, 78% of 50- to 64-year-olds, and 84% of those 65 and older.
- 4. Young White adults are more likely than young members of other racial/ethnic groups to be very confident in knowing where to vote.** Fifty-four percent of White people age 18 to 29 are "very confident" that they know where to vote, whether in person or by mail, compared to 44% of Black people that age, 48% of Hispanic people that age, and 41% of people of other races/ethnicities that age.
- 5. Young adults are more likely than older adults to say they've taken action on issues related to racial justice/civil rights.** Among young adults age 18 to 29, 38% say they have taken action in the past six months, compared to 23% of adults 30 or older, a 15-percentage point difference.
- 6. Young adults say they have a hard time finding unbiased information about issues and candidates.** Only about a quarter of 18- to 29-year-olds say they are "very confident" about where to get unbiased information about issues (24%) and candidates (25%)—though both of those percentages rise to be about four in 10 among those 65 and older.

7. **Political ads are common on social media, and many Americans across all age groups are exposed to them.** About half (45%) of Americans of all ages have seen them in the last six months.
8. **Younger Americans are more likely to protest and participate in activism on social media; older adults are more likely to vote and donate money.** Adults age 18 to 29 are more likely to protest or demonstrate (19% of 18- to 29-year-olds, compared to 10% of 30- to 49-year-olds, 9% of 50- to 64-year-olds, and 8% of people over 65) and to use hashtags related to political or social causes than older adults (28% of 18- to 29-year-olds, compared to 19% of 30- to 49-year-olds, 13% of 50- to 64-year-olds, and 9% of adults 65 and older). Older Americans were much more likely to vote in the last year (56% of 30- to 49-year-olds, 71% of 50- to 64-year-olds, and 81% of adults 65 and older, compared to 38% of 18- to 29-year-olds) or to donate money to a candidate or campaign (29% of 50- to 64-year-olds, and 40% of adults older than 65, compared to 16% of 18- to 29-year-olds and 18% of 30- to 49-year-olds).

## Summary

### **Young potential voters are engaged but lack confidence.**

Young potential voters are the biggest question mark heading into this year's election season, with 18- to 29-year-olds expressing less confidence—often by wide margins—in their knowledge of how to participate in the democratic process at its most basic level.

Only half (50%) of 18- to 29-year-olds say they are "very confident" they know where to vote, whether in person or by mail, compared with 64% of 30- to 49-year-olds, 78% of 50- to 64-year-olds, and 84% of those 65 and older.

This confidence is higher among White people and people who make higher annual incomes. In terms of race and ethnicity, 54% of White people age 18 to 29 are "very confident" compared to 44% of Black people this age, 48% of Hispanic people this age, and 41% of people of other races/ethnicities this age. In terms of income, 56% of those age 18 to 29 who make \$100,000 or more annually are "very confident" compared to 53% who make between \$50,000 and \$99,999 and 48% who make below \$50,000. This difference in income is less pronounced for the 18-to-29 age group than Americans overall, where 81% of those with the highest income are "very confident" compared to 76% of the middle income group and 59% of the lowest income group.

Only about a quarter of 18- to 29-year-olds say they know where to get unbiased information about issues (24%) and candidates (25%)—though both those numbers rise to be about four in 10 among those 65 and older. Across all ages, confidence about getting unbiased information increases with income. For those age 18 to 29, over three in 10 in the highest income bracket

are "very confident" about getting unbiased information about candidates (37%) and issues (32%) compared to the middle income bracket (25% and 27%) and the lowest income bracket (22% and 21%).

Across the board, adults of voting age in the U.S. lack confidence that their vote will be counted fairly, with only 29% of all adults and only 23% of 18- to 29-year-olds saying they are "very confident" their vote will be counted fairly. Across all ages, this confidence is higher for those in the highest income bracket compared to those in the lowest income bracket. For 18- to 29-year-olds, 32% of those who make more than \$100,000 a year are "very confident" compared to 22% of those who make less than \$50,000 a year.

| Total <u>very confident</u> that ...  | Total<br>(N = 6,132) | 18-29<br>(n = 634) | 30-49<br>(n = 1,727) | 50-64<br>(n = 2,104) | 65+<br>(n = 1,667) |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| You know where to vote, either in person or by mail.  | 71%                  | 50%                | 64%                  | 78%                  | 84%                |
| You know where to get unbiased information about issues (e.g., ballot initiatives, propositions). | 33%                  | 24%                | 29%                  | 36%                  | 41%                |
| You know where to get unbiased information about candidates.                                      | 33%                  | 25%                | 29%                  | 36%                  | 40%                |
| Your vote will be fairly counted.   | 29%                  | 23%                | 25%                  | 30%                  | 36%                |

Nearly half of young Americans age 18 to 29 (47%) say their interest in voting in the 2020 election has increased in the past six months, nearly matching the 48% average among all adults. The past six months included numerous significant news events including the coronavirus pandemic, Black Lives Matter protests, school closures, and significant economic volatility. Among those young adults who are not registered to vote today or are unsure whether they are, 46% plan to register or confirm registration before the election.

Compared to older Americans, far fewer Americans age 18 to 29 are registered to vote for the presidential 2020 election (64% vs. 83% overall) and far fewer are "absolutely certain" they will vote (55% vs. 78% overall). This number varies when considering race and ethnicity along with income, with people of color and those in the lowest annual income bracket being less likely to be registered and absolutely certain they will vote.

**Q: Some people are registered to vote and others are not. Are you registered to vote where you now live, or aren't you?**

|  |                         |                                     | Age 18-29, by race/ethnicity |                    |                       |                    | Age 18-29, by annual income |                       |                      |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
|  | Total<br>(N =<br>6,132) | Total,<br>age<br>18-29<br>(n = 634) | White<br>(n = 319)           | Black<br>(n = 105) | Hispanic<br>(n = 107) | Other<br>(n = 103) | <\$50K<br>(n = 325)         | \$50-99K<br>(n = 159) | \$100K+<br>(n = 115) |
| Yes, registered to vote at current address | 83%                     | 64%                                 | 73%                          | 57%                | 55%                   | 52%                | 58%                         | 78%                   | 77%                  |
| No, not registered to vote                 | 9%                      | 21%                                 | 19%                          | 16%                | 25%                   | 28%                | 28%                         | 12%                   | 11%                  |
| Don't know                                 | 4%                      | 12%                                 | 7%                           | 22%                | 15%                   | 18%                | 13%                         | 9%                    | 12%                  |
| No answer                                  | 3%                      | 3%                                  | 1%                           | 5%                 | 5%                    | 3%                 | 2%                          | 1%                    | 0%                   |

**Q: What are the chances that you will vote in the November 2020 general election for president?**

|                                |                         |                                     | Age 18-29, by race/ethnicity |                    |                       |                    | Age 18-29, by annual income |                       |                      |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
|                                | Total<br>(N =<br>6,132) | Total,<br>age<br>18-29<br>(n = 634) | White<br>(n = 319)           | Black<br>(n = 105) | Hispanic<br>(n = 103) | Other<br>(n = 107) | <\$50K<br>(n = 325)         | \$50-99K<br>(n = 159) | \$100K+<br>(n = 115) |
| Absolutely certain I will vote | 78%                     | 55%                                 | 62%                          | 44%                | 36%                   | 53%                | 48%                         | 66%                   | 71%                  |
| Large chance I will vote       | 6%                      | 14%                                 | 12%                          | 20%                | 20%                   | 10%                | 13%                         | 11%                   | 19%                  |
| 50-50 chance I will vote       | 5%                      | 11%                                 | 8%                           | 14%                | 16%                   | 11%                | 14%                         | 10%                   | 3%                   |
| Small chance I will vote       | 2%                      | 5%                                  | 5%                           | 6%                 | 8%                    | 3%                 | 7%                          | 3%                    | 1%                   |
| I will not vote                | 6%                      | 13%                                 | 11%                          | 13%                | 18%                   | 16%                | 17%                         | 10%                   | 5%                   |
| No answer                      | 2%                      | 3%                                  | 2%                           | 3%                 | 3%                    | 5%                 | 2%                          | 1%                    | 0%                   |

### In news they trust?

Fewer than three in 10 adults say they are "very confident" that they get unbiased news about several key issues today: racial justice and civil rights, climate change, U.S. politics, local issues, hunger and food insecurity, and COVID-19. On most issues, young adults are slightly less likely to express confidence (saying they were either "very confident" or "somewhat confident") that the news they read, watch, or listen to is based on unbiased facts.

- A majority of Americans believe they can trust news on local issues (62% overall, 58% among 18- to 29-year-olds). Yet, only 14% of young adults are "very confident."
- Just under half of Americans overall (49%) and of young adults (48%) are confident that the news they get about COVID-19 is unbiased. Among them, only 21% of 18- to 29-year-olds are "very confident."

| <b>Q: Thinking about the following topics, how confident are you that the news you read, watch, or listen to is based on unbiased facts?</b> |                              |                            |                              |                              |                            |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Total <u>confident</u> ("very" or "somewhat") ...</i>   | <b>Total<br/>(N = 6,132)</b> | <b>18-29<br/>(n = 634)</b> | <b>30-49<br/>(n = 1,727)</b> | <b>50-64<br/>(n = 2,104)</b> | <b>65+<br/>(n = 1,667)</b> |
| Local issues   | 62%                          | 58%                        | 59%                          | 62%                          | 66%                        |
| Hunger/Food insecurity   | 56%                          | 56%                        | 53%                          | 53%                          | 61%                        |
| Climate change   | 50%                          | 53%                        | 46%                          | 49%                          | 52%                        |
| COVID-19   | 49%                          | 48%                        | 45%                          | 49%                          | 54%                        |
| Racial justice/Civil rights  | 45%                          | 46%                        | 40%                          | 44%                          | 51%                        |
| U.S. politics  | 40%                          | 39%                        | 35%                          | 40%                          | 46%                        |

- The least amount of confidence exists around news related to U.S. politics and racial justice/civil rights. Majorities of young adults are *not* confident (either "not too confident" or "not at all confident") that what they consume about U.S. politics (58%) and racial justice/civil rights (50%) is unbiased.

## Motivated to act

Seven in 10 Americans have been motivated to act in the past six months on important issues.

Young adults age 18 to 29 are more likely than older adults to say they've taken action on issues related to racial justice/civil rights (38% among those 18 to 29 vs. 25% among those 30 to 49, 23% among those 50 to 64, and 21% among those 65+). Young adults of all racial backgrounds are about equally likely to say they've taken action on racial justice/civil rights in the past six months: Thirty-eight percent of White 18- to 29-year-olds, 40% of Black 18- to 29-year-olds, 35% of Hispanic 18- to 29-year-olds, and 37% of 18- to 29-year-olds of another race say they have done so. Among older adults, the racial differences here are more significant: For example, only 27% of White 30- to 49-year-olds, 16% of Hispanic 30- to 49-year-olds, and 17% of 30- to 49-year-old people of another race have participated in racial justice/civil rights issues, compared with 40% of Black 30- to 49-year-olds.

| <b>Q: Have you taken action on any of the following issues in the past 6 months? (Select all that apply.)</b> |                          |                        |                        |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|   | <b>Total (N = 6,132)</b> | <b>18-29 (n = 634)</b> | <b>30+ (n = 5,498)</b> |
| COVID-19  | 42%                      | 44%                    | 42%                    |
| U.S. politics   | 28%                      | 26%                    | 29%                    |
| Racial justice/Civil rights   | 26%                      | 38%                    | 23%                    |
| Local issues  | 23%                      | 17%                    | 24%                    |
| Hunger/Food insecurity  | 21%                      | 17%                    | 21%                    |
| Climate change  | 14%                      | 19%                    | 13%                    |
| Other (please specify)  | 4%                       | 3%                     | 4%                     |
| None of the above   | 31%                      | 30%                    | 32%                    |
| No answer   | 5%                       | 7%                     | 4%                     |

### Social media for social issues

Young adults age 18 to 29 are more likely than older groups to say they've increased their use of social media to get involved with political or social issues in the past six months (36% among those 18 to 29 vs. 26% among those 30 to 49, 28% among those 50 to 64, and 27% among those 65 and older).

### Actions on social media

Many Americans (45%) say they have seen political ads on social media in the past six months, and nearly four in 10 (36%) 18- to 29-year-olds are taking action by posting pictures to show their support for a cause, 16 points greater than those age 65 and older (20%). In addition, close to three in 10 (28%) have used hashtags related to a political or social issue, amounting to an almost 20-point difference compared to people age 65 and older (9%).

| <b>Q: Now thinking specifically about the past 6 months, in which of the following ways have you been involved in politics or causes on social media?</b> |                              |                            |                              |                              |                            |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
|   | <b>Total<br/>(N = 6,132)</b> | <b>18-29<br/>(n = 634)</b> | <b>30-49<br/>(n = 1,727)</b> | <b>50-64<br/>(n = 2,104)</b> | <b>65+<br/>(n = 1,667)</b> |
| Seen political ads  | 45%                          | 46%                        | 43%                          | 46%                          | 45%                        |
| Posted a picture to show your support for a cause   | 28%                          | 36%                        | 29%                          | 28%                          | 20%                        |
| Used hashtags related to a political or social issue  | 16%                          | 28%                        | 19%                          | 13%                          | 9%                         |
| None of the above   | 24%                          | 24%                        | 26%                          | 24%                          | 20%                        |
| I don't use social media.   | 19%                          | 13%                        | 17%                          | 19%                          | 27%                        |
| No answer   | 2%                           | 2%                         | 3%                           | 2%                           | 2%                         |

## A time of civic engagement

While fewer 18- to 29-year-olds participated in politics or causes last year compared to Americans overall, actions taken in the last six months are on par with Americans overall.

Taking stock of what activism Americans participated in this past year shows that the top two cited actions were voting in elections (64%) and encouraging others to vote (51%). For young adults age 18 to 29, voting themselves and encouraging others to vote are the top actions taken (38%). Sharing opinions on social media was popular for over a third (36%).

Nearly one in five (19%) 18- to 29-year-olds protested, marched, or demonstrated this past year, about twice the overall average (10%).

| <b>Thinking about LAST YEAR, which, if any, of the following ways were you involved in politics or causes in your community? (Select all that apply.)</b> |                              |                            |                              |                              |                            |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
|   | <b>Total<br/>(N = 6,132)</b> | <b>18-29<br/>(n = 634)</b> | <b>30-49<br/>(n = 1,727)</b> | <b>50-64<br/>(n = 2,104)</b> | <b>65+<br/>(n = 1,667)</b> |
| Voted in elections  | 64%                          | 38%                        | 56%                          | 71%                          | 81%                        |
| Encouraged other people to vote   | 51%                          | 38%                        | 47%                          | 56%                          | 56%                        |
| Signed petitions  | 35%                          | 34%                        | 32%                          | 36%                          | 39%                        |
| Shared opinions on social media   | 34%                          | 36%                        | 32%                          | 36%                          | 34%                        |
| Encouraged other people to take action on a political or social cause or issue that is important to you   | 30%                          | 33%                        | 26%                          | 30%                          | 33%                        |
| Donated money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization   | 27%                          | 16%                        | 18%                          | 29%                          | 40%                        |
| Wrote members of Congress   | 18%                          | 7%                         | 14%                          | 20%                          | 28%                        |
| Put up a political sign (such as a lawn sign or bumper sticker)   | 16%                          | 11%                        | 14%                          | 17%                          | 21%                        |
| Protested, marched, or demonstrated   | 10%                          | 19%                        | 10%                          | 9%                           | 8%                         |
| Attended local political meetings   | 9%                           | 5%                         | 9%                           | 10%                          | 11%                        |
| Worked for a candidate or campaign  | 4%                           | 3%                         | 2%                           | 4%                           | 7%                         |
| None of these   | 16%                          | 30%                        | 20%                          | 13%                          | 8%                         |
| No answer   | 2%                           | 1%                         | 4%                           | 1%                           | 1%                         |

## Methodology

This SurveyMonkey poll was conducted online August 13–20, 2020, among a total sample of 6,132 adults age 18 and over living in the United States. Respondents for these surveys were selected from more than 2 million people who take surveys on the SurveyMonkey platform each day. The modeled error estimate for the full sample is plus or minus 2 percentage points. Data has been weighted for age, race, sex, education, and geography using the Census Bureau's American Community Survey to reflect the demographic composition of the United States age 18 and over.

## Toplines

**Thinking about LAST YEAR, which, if any, of the following ways were you involved in politics or causes in your community? (Select all that apply.)**

|   | Total N = 6,132 |
|---|-----------------|
| Voted in elections  | 64%             |
| Encouraged other people to vote   | 51%             |
| Signed petitions  | 35%             |
| Shared opinions on social media   | 34%             |
| Encouraged other people to take action on a political or social cause or issue that is important to you | 30%             |
| Donated money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization                                       | 27%             |
| Wrote members of Congress   | 18%             |
| Put up a political sign (such as a lawn sign or bumper sticker)   | 16%             |
| Protested, marched, or demonstrated   | 10%             |
| Attended local political meetings   | 9%              |
| Worked for a candidate or campaign  | 4%              |
| None of these   | 16%             |
| No answer   | 2%              |

**Now thinking specifically about the past 6 months, in which of the following ways have you been involved in politics or causes on social media?**

|  | Total N = 6,132 |
|--|-----------------|
| Seen political ads                                   | 45%             |
| Posted a picture to show your support for a cause    | 28%             |
| Used hashtags related to a political or social issue | 16%             |
| None of the above                                    | 24%             |
| I don't use social media                             | 19%             |
| No answer  | 2%              |

**Compared to 6 months ago, would you say your use of social media to get involved with political or social issues that are important to you has increased, decreased, or remained about the same for you?**

|                         |                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
|                         | Total N = 6,132 |
| Increased               | 28%             |
| Decreased               | 13%             |
| Remained about the same | 54%             |
| No answer               | 5%              |

**Compared to how you felt 6 months ago, how prepared do you feel to make a difference in your community?**

|                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
|                     | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very prepared       | 27%             |
| Somewhat prepared   | 47%             |
| Somewhat unprepared | 15%             |
| Very unprepared     | 8%              |
| No answer           | 3%              |

**Thinking about the following topics, how confident are you that the news you read, watch, or listen to is based on unbiased facts?**

#### **Racial justice/Civil rights**

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 19%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 26%             |
| Not too confident    | 22%             |
| Not at all confident | 30%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

#### **Climate change**

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 20%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 30%             |
| Not too confident    | 22%             |
| Not at all confident | 25%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

#### **U.S. politics**

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 15%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 25%             |
| Not too confident    | 24%             |
| Not at all confident | 34%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

### Local issues

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 17%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 44%             |
| Not too confident    | 20%             |
| Not at all confident | 15%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

### Hunger/Food insecurity

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 19%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 37%             |
| Not too confident    | 24%             |
| Not at all confident | 18%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

### COVID-19

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 20%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 29%             |
| Not too confident    | 22%             |
| Not at all confident | 27%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

### Have you taken action on any of the following issues in the past 6 months? (Select all that apply.)

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
|                             | Total N = 6,132 |
| COVID-19                    | 42%             |
| U.S. politics               | 28%             |
| Racial justice/Civil rights | 26%             |
| Local issues                | 23%             |
| Hunger/Food insecurity      | 21%             |
| Climate change              | 14%             |
| Other (please specify)      | 4%              |
| None of the above           | 31%             |
| No answer                   | 5%              |

Thinking about voting this November, how confident are you about the following ... ?

**Your vote will be fairly counted.**

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 29%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 35%             |
| Not too confident    | 20%             |
| Not at all confident | 13%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

**You know where to vote, either in person or through mail.**

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 71%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 16%             |
| Not too confident    | 5%              |
| Not at all confident | 5%              |
| No answer            | 3%              |

**You know where to get unbiased information about candidates.**

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 33%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 34%             |
| Not too confident    | 17%             |
| Not at all confident | 13%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

**You know where to get unbiased information about issues (e.g., ballot initiatives, propositions).**

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
|                      | Total N = 6,132 |
| Very confident       | 33%             |
| Somewhat confident   | 35%             |
| Not too confident    | 17%             |
| Not at all confident | 11%             |
| No answer            | 3%              |

**Some people are registered to vote and others are not. Are you registered to vote where you now live, or aren't you?**

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
|  | Total N = 6,132 |
| Yes, registered to vote at current address | 83%             |
| No, not registered to vote                 | 9%              |
| Don't know                                 | 4%              |
| No answer                                  | 3%              |

**If "No" or "Don't know," do you plan to register or confirm that you are registered before the November 2020 general election?**

|           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
|           | Total N = 542 |
| Yes       | 43%           |
| No        | 54%           |
| No answer | 3%            |

**What are the chances that you will vote in the November 2020 general election for president?**

|                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
|                                | Total N = 6,132 |
| Absolutely certain I will vote | 78%             |
| Large chance I will vote       | 6%              |
| 50-50 chance I will vote       | 5%              |
| Small chance I will vote       | 2%              |
| I will not vote                | 6%              |
| No answer                      | 2%              |

**Compared to 6 months ago, would you say your interest in voting in the 2020 election has increased, decreased, or remained about the same?**

|                         |                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
|                         | Total N = 6,132 |
| Increased               | 48%             |
| Decreased               | 5%              |
| Remained about the same | 44%             |
| No answer               | 3%              |