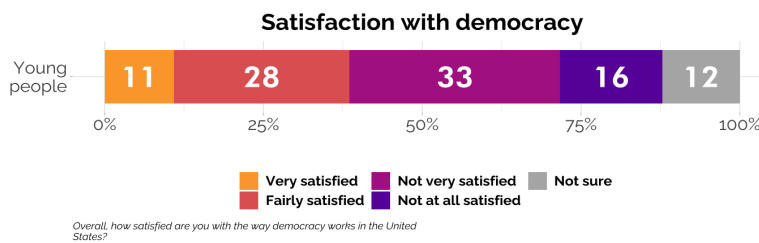


## How Young Americans Engage with Politics, Policy, and Social Change

*Young Americans are dissatisfied with democracy - and almost half say they are very dissatisfied.*

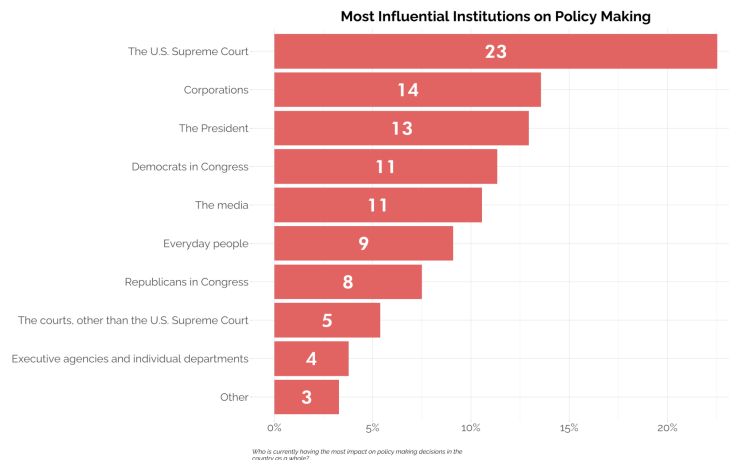
Right now, young people are dissatisfied with the current state of U.S. democracy by a 49 percent-39 percent margin. In particular, young people who identify as LGBTQ+ are dissatisfied with democracy by a 25 percent-66 percent margin. Women also report being particularly dissatisfied with democracy by a 31 percent-55 percent margin, compared to men who are split on this question by a 47 percent-42 percent margin.<sup>1</sup>



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*Young Americans believe politics is controlled by powerful, unaccountable forces. They are especially concerned about the role of the Supreme Court (the top-ranked culprit for the political status quo at 23 percent) and big corporations (the second-ranked at 14 percent).<sup>2</sup>*

Among the reasons for this is that young people worry that our current system is controlled by a small number of institutions that voters do not choose directly. For young Americans, the influence of the U.S. Supreme Court looms large. Given the recent highly impactful rulings the Court has made, it is no surprise that young people believe the Court holds a great deal of power when it comes to deciding the rules here in the United States.



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<sup>1</sup> For more, refer to question 7 of the survey documentation.

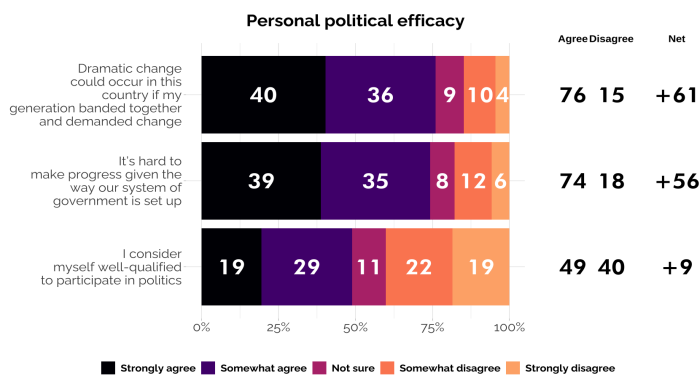
<sup>2</sup> For more, refer to question 14 of the survey documentation.

*Young Americans think the system is against them - they believe that politics is deliberately designed to make it difficult for their generation to change things (at 74 percent).*

While a common stereotype is that young people believe they have all the answers, we find that young people are actually quite humble in recognizing the preparation and skills required to meaningfully participate in the political system. Young people are split by a 49 percent-40 percent margin over whether they are well-qualified to participate in politics. A large majority - 74 percent - believe our system is deliberately designed to stymie political change.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, an equal share believes in the *possibility* of generational change. The following chart shows that just as many young people believe that “Dramatic change could occur in this country if my generation banded together and demanded change” as believe “It’s hard to make progress given the way our system of government is set up.” As much as young people believe there are profound challenges ahead, they believe it is possible for their generation, through solidarity, to achieve its goals.

*Togetherness matters for this generation. Young Americans express a general sense of optimism and 76 percent hold the widespread belief that there can be meaningful political change if their generation unites to fight for its values.*



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Another myth dispelled by this data is that young people favor radical change and are looking for major disruption and complete upending of the status quo. To the contrary, our results show that young people are fairly split between wanting large scale change and preferring slow but steady change. When asked if they would prefer political candidates who would make “large and rapid change” versus “steady but slower changes” to our system, young people were split 52 percent-47 percent between large and rapid and steady but slower change.<sup>4</sup>

Nor are young Americans naive about the plausible mechanisms that could achieve change: 46 percent of young people believe voting is an effective way to pursue change to laws and policies, more than any other political action. But they also identify a range of other forms of engagement that they both believe in and actively participate in: a quarter of young people also say that activities including calling and writing to elected officials (24 percent), protesting (23 percent), and signing petitions (23 percent) can be effective ways to make their voices heard. About 20 percent identified the importance of talking to friends about issues they care about, and 15 percent said they thought posting content on social media would also be an effective way to change things they disagree with. Only about 13 percent cynically believe there is “no way” to change laws or policies they disagree with.

<sup>3</sup> For more on each of the “Personal political efficacy” items discussed here, refer to question 1 of the survey documentation.

<sup>4</sup> For more, refer to question 41 of the survey documentation.