



SINE INSTITUTE  
*of* POLICY & POLITICS

# Sine of Things to Come

Youth Perspectives on Policy, Politics,  
and Public Service

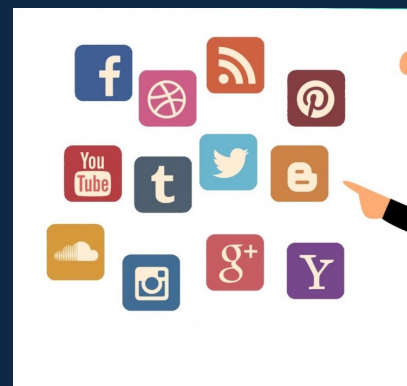
Survey conducted by YouGov  
August 2022

# About the Survey

The Sine Institute's Sine of Things to Come survey was conducted by YouGov between July 30<sup>th</sup> and August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022. YouGov collected information from 3,144 adults aged 18 – 34 on:



**PERSPECTIVES ON  
DEMOCRACY**



**PERSPECTIVES ON  
SOCIAL MEDIA**



**POLICY VIEWS**



**INTRA-GENERATIONAL  
DIVIDES**

# Our Team

## Amy K. Dacey

Amy K. Dacey is Executive Director of the Sine Institute of Policy & Politics at American University. For more than two decades, she managed prominent national organizations, advised leading elected officials and candidates, including President Barack Obama and Senator John Kerry, and counseled a variety of nonprofits and companies. Before joining AU, Amy was President of AKD Strategies, a strategic firm working with non-profits, and Foundations in the progressive policy space. During the 2016 presidential election, she served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Democratic National Committee. During the 2004 elections, she worked for then-Senator John Kerry on his presidential campaign and, following his narrow loss, helped to lead Kerry's political operation. She also managed Rep. Louise Slaughter's congressional campaign in 1998. From 2010 to 2013, Amy served as Executive Director of EMILY's List, the organization dedicated to electing Democratic women to national, state, and local offices, and led the organization's revitalization, restructuring and rebranding efforts.

## Molly O'Rourke

Molly O'Rourke is an Executive in Residence in the School of Communication at American University and also serves as the Director of the MA program in Political Communication. She teaches undergraduate and graduate level courses in Research Methods, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches. She has more than 20 years'

experience in the field of public opinion research, most recently as a partner at Hart Research in Washington, D.C. where she led multiphase research project for dozens of advocacy and nonprofit organizations, political candidates, and media outlets, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Human Right Campaign (HRC) and NBC News.

## Benjamin Bryant

Benjamin Bryant joined the Sine Institute as communications director in June 2022. Prior to his current role, he worked for six years on Capitol Hill, serving as the deputy press secretary for Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) and communications director for Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA). Ben is originally from Rhode Island. He graduated from the University of Connecticut in 2012 and worked for several years in local Rhode Island radio news before coming to Washington D.C. in 2014 to serve as a policy communications extern at Facebook (Meta's) Washington, D.C. office.

## YouGov

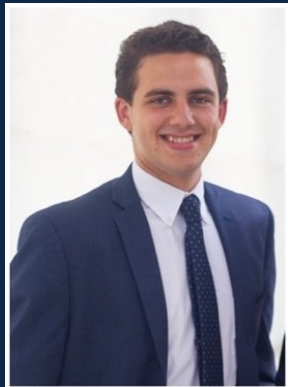
YouGov is an internationally-recognized market research firm specializing in online surveys. Founded in 2000, YouGov has pioneered producing accurate, high quality research, and is trusted in both political polling and market research. YouGov's survey research experience, online survey tools, and digital environment allow us to provide a unique set of products to help our clients achieve their goals.

# Sine Institute Research Student Advisory Committee



**Aidan Levinson** is an undergraduate student majoring in Data Sciences for Political Science at American University's School of Public Affairs. As the former Chair of the Sine Institute Student Advisory Committee, he has additionally worked as a Student Associate to Spring 2020 Fellow Hon. Susan Molinari. With a focus on technology, for over five years, he has consulted for Democratic campaigns, party organizations, and causes.

Working with candidates at the local, state, and federal levels, he is seasoned in Pennsylvania electoral politics. Aidan has served as a Delegate to the Democratic National Convention, on President Biden's 2020 Campaign Student Leadership Council, and is currently serving a four-year term on the Pennsylvania Democratic State Committee.



**Noah Burke** is a senior studying International Relations focusing on East Asia and national security. He has served as President of the AU College Republicans, the Alexander Hamilton Society as well as positions in the Kennedy Political Union and AU Student Government. He served as a student associate to Sine Fellows Suzanne Clark in 2021 and Barbara Comstock in 2022. He is currently interning for an opposition research firm and hopes to have a career in intelligence.



**Kenya Harris** (she/her) recently graduated from The University of Alabama with her B.A. in Political Science and African American Studies. Harris prides herself on centering the voice of oppressed peoples in all of her work, and has previously launched several passion projects and engaged in entrepreneurial endeavors that increased exposure of her public platform centering racial justice. These projects included a podcast that discussed current political discourse and pop culture, and writing several articles for multiple news outlets at

her undergrad. Thereafter she was accepted into the Political Communication Master's program at American University, where she continues to strengthen and refine her advocacy and analytical skills. Harris now balances her time as a full time student and a full time Strategist at a D.C. based fundraising firm that raises money for Democratic PACs and Super PACs. Harris plans to continue crafting intellectual works and think pieces with socially conscious platforms **aftergraduating**.



**Dalia Habiby** recently received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science at American University and is currently pursuing her Master of Science in Data Science. She recently interned for Senator Booker's Washington, DC Office conducting legislative research. As a part of 314 Action's development department, she prospected donors for STEM professionals running for elected office. She has also collected data on relations between immigration nonprofits, government, and ICE with Professor Khaldoun AbouAssi. Dalia is currently researching genetic trends of polyploid organisms with Professor David Gerard at American University.



**Julieta Marino** is an Argentine MS Student at the Justice, Law and Criminology program at the SPA at American University. She works primarily on climate change through different organizations and grassroot movements, and is a part of the Coordination Committee of the Youth and Children Constituency to the UNFCCC, content lead at the ENACT Earth Foundation, COP27 Lead for Care About Climate and She is currently organizing the first ever YOUNGO endorsed Local Conference of Youth in the United States. She is passionate about law, politics and communications, and her goal is to share the climate message and empower young people to act through education and capacity building.



Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, **Ethan Wong** is a senior in the School of International Service pursuing a Bachelor's degree in International Studies with a concentration in National Security and Foreign Policy and a regional focus in Europe. He is also minoring in Data Science. Ethan interns at The Arctic Institute, where he provides analysis on Arctic issues and current events for their weekly news analysis publication, *The Arctic This Week's Take Five*. He is also a member of the Agora Think Tank in the UK, where he contributes to their Security and Defence Programme. Previously, Ethan served as a member of the Sine Institute Student Advisory Committee and as a Sine Institute Student Associate for President Kolinda Grabar. He was also an Olson Scholar and studied abroad at the University of Oxford, where he read International Relations with a focus on Arctic security and Polar studies.

# Methodology

The Sine Institute's Sine of Things to Come survey is based on 3,144 interviews conducted by YouGov on the Internet of adults between the ages of 18 and 34.

The sample was weighted according to gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and U.S. Census region based on voter registration lists, the U.S. Census American Community Survey, and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, as well as the 2020 Presidential vote.

Respondents were selected from YouGov to be representative of adults between the ages of 18 and 34. The sample was weighted according to gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and U.S. Census region based on voter registration lists, the U.S. Census American Community Survey, and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, as well as 2020 Presidential vote.

Respondents were selected from YouGov to be representative of adults between the ages of 18 and 34. The weights range from 0.34 to 3.82 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.4.

SAMPLE N = 3.144 ADULTS AGED 18 – 34

# Taking the Reins: Understanding Young Americans' Engagement in Policy, Politics and Social Change

We know the assumptions about young people and politics: they don't care and are disengaged; they're naïve and think know all the answers; they want to wave a magic wand instead of doing the hard work; they're completely conditioned by social media - oh, and they don't even show up to vote.

The Sine Institute's groundbreaking research on young people refutes these tropes utterly. By creating a poll shaped with young people's input about young people's experiences and values, our research shows a very different reality of the next generation's political attitudes. In place of a disengaged, 'magic thinking', short-termist generation, we found young people to be a strikingly mature electorate with a savvy understanding of the nature of political power in today's America who have a clear-eyed view of the problems we face and a powerful theory of change for action from the person to the national to the global.

This is seen in our data underpinning two big questions: where is America today and where do we go from here?

## Where is America Today? (Key Findings)

- \* Young Americans are generally dissatisfied with our democracy - and almost half say they are very dissatisfied. (Q7)
- \* 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%) and big corporations (the second-ranked at 14%). (Q10)
- \* Young Americans think the system is against them - they believe that politics is designed to make it difficult for their generation to change things (at 74%). (Q1)
- \* Young Americans put their trust in community leaders, not politicians or businesses – and (contrary to conventional wisdom) they particularly trust their teachers even as they distrust social media (81% think misinformation is rife on social media). (Q9, Q56)
- \* Young Americans say their lives have been shaped by gun violence and the pandemic – more than half of young people identify these events (from a list of 17) as "very impactful." (Q13)

# Where Do We Go From Here?

\* Resilient - despite feeling discouraged at many levels, young Americans remain more optimistic than pessimistic about their own lives and share a widespread belief that there can be meaningful political change if their generation unites to fight for its values. (Q34, Q1)

\* Serious about serious reforms - young Americans particularly want to increase accountability over electoral access, the judicial system, corporations, and Congress; strong majorities support a wide-ranging series of proposals from imposing term limits to reducing the power of money in politics. (Q11)

\* On a policy front, young Americans find more agreement where older Americans find more division - most young people, including large majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, want to restore the right to abortion access, to forgive at least some student loan debt, to support gun safety, and to better regulate large companies and social media platforms. (Q44, Q47, Q49)

\* Young Americans believe change happens BOTH by their own actions AND by the ballot box - young Americans believe in the power of their personal networks (both in-person and those formed on social media) to organize for change and believe that voting in elections will help achieve change. (Q3, Q4)

The implications of these results are profound. This is a generation that grasps nuance, complexity and power. Whilst previous generations have remained too divided to meet the challenges of our time, our research gives us a more reasoned faith that the next generation can bring about a more united America and a more perfect Union.



# About the Sine Institute

**The Sine Institute** at American University is a laboratory for university-wide collaboration and an incubator for policy innovation, convening the best and brightest in the public, private, academic, and nonprofit sectors, as well as journalism.

The Sine Institute harnesses AU's capital city location at the nexus of government and a growing international business center to connect diverse perspectives from around the country and around the world with our world-class academics and research, experienced practitioners in international and domestic views, leaders in business, nonprofits, and government, and one of the most politically-active student bodies in the US to make real, lasting change in policy and politics.

Learn more about The Sine Institute:



Stay in the loop! Sign up to follow our newsletter for our latest updates:



SINE INSTITUTE  
*of* POLICY & POLITICS

Stay connected with Sine!



@AUSineInstitute