

September 2023

# The Civic Outlook of Young Adults in America

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



CITIZEN DATA



INSTITUTE FOR  
**CITIZENS &  
SCHOLARS™**

# Citizens & Scholars



## Mission & Vision

- The Institute for Citizens & Scholars cultivates talent, ideas, and networks that develop young people as empowered citizens.
- We envision a strong American democracy and a flourishing civil society where all people can thrive.

## Goal

- By 2026, a majority of today's 14-24-year-olds will be empowered citizens.



**Civically  
Well-Informed**



**Productively  
Engaged**



**Committed to  
Democracy**

# Contents



- Methodology
- Executive Summary
- Civic Preparation
- Gen Z & National Baseline Comparison
- Gen Z & Political Affiliation
- Data Visualizations
- Q&A

# Methodology



Citizen Data conducted a survey of 4,008 respondents aged 18-24 across the United States from August 21-25, 2023 using panel respondents. The margin of error is +/- 1.5 %. Results are weighted on gender, race, education, voter registration status, and political party identification.



# Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

## There is a strong relationship between civic knowledge and civic engagement

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- Regression of civic engagement on civic knowledge found that **each additional correct answer was associated with a statistically significant increase in political engagement**
- Relationship remained even when controlling for education; those who enrolled in or completed higher ed engaged in only slightly more civic activities than those not college-bound

## There is a strong relationship between civic engagement and satisfaction in/commitment to democracy

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- Regression of satisfaction with democracy on civic engagement found that those who are **more civically engaged are more satisfied with U.S. democracy**
- **High community engagement had an even stronger association with democracy satisfaction**; each additional community activity makes an individual more likely to be satisfied with democracy

## The relationship between civic knowledge and democracy satisfaction is complicated

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- Those who indicated higher retrospective levels of civic education had higher levels of democracy satisfaction; *but*
- Those who scored higher on the objective civic knowledge index reported less satisfaction with U.S. democracy



# Civic Preparation

Civic Knowledge

Civic Engagement

Civic Commitment

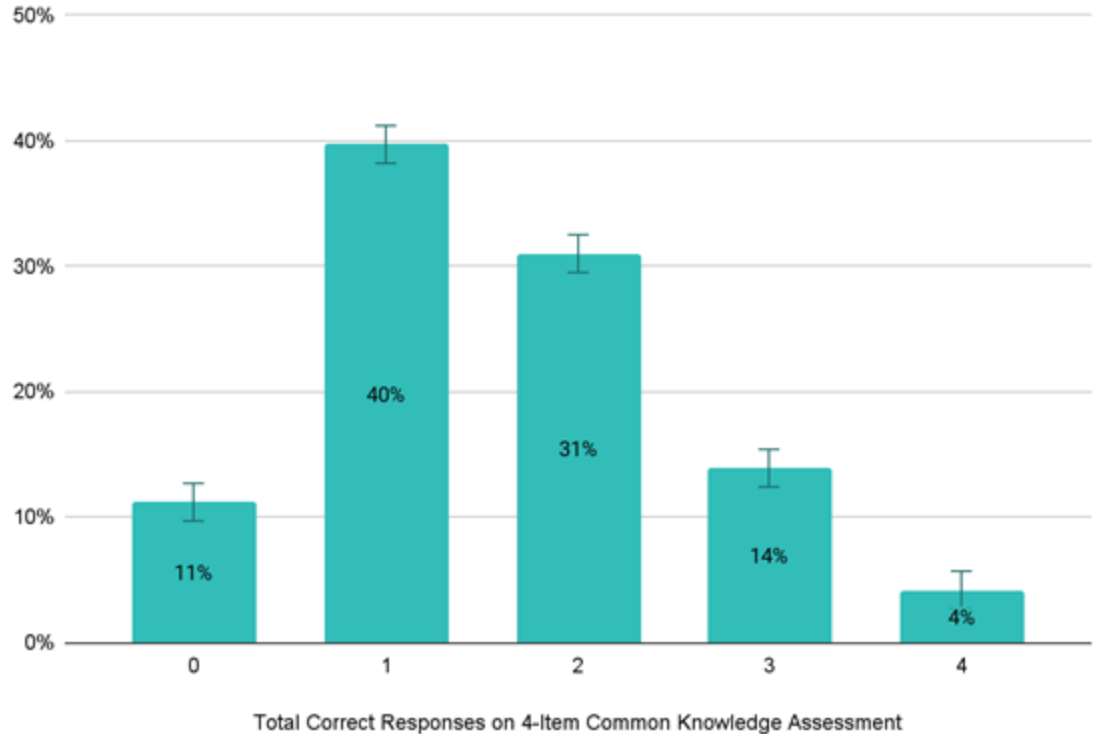
# Civic Knowledge

Equally-weighted (0-4) index on a common knowledge assessment developed to measure civic competence

## Topics covered:

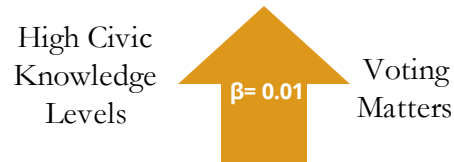
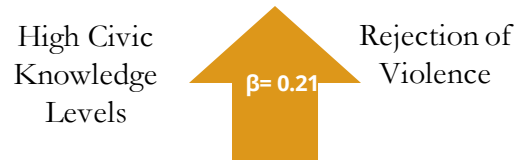
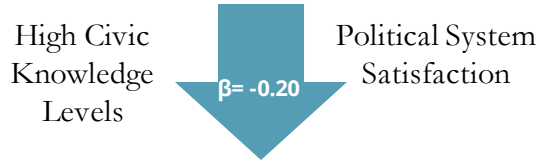
- Constitutional design of U.S. government institutions (2 Qs)
- The Bill of Rights (1 Qs)
- Current events/party control of legislature (1 Q)

Gen Z respondents indicated low levels of civic knowledge.





# High Civic Knowledge Analysis



(not statistically significant)

Above: Gen Z with higher civic knowledge (3+ correct on CKA) when compared to Gen Z with lower levels of civic knowledge (< 3 correct).

# Civic Knowledge Learnings



1

High scoring respondents indicated less pride in an American identity than low scorers.

2

High scoring respondents were more likely to indicate that democracy is defined by traditional components of democracy, such as elections, and rule by/of/for the people than low scorers who were more likely to indicate equality, justice, and fairness.

3

High scoring respondents were more likely to indicate that engagement with those they disagree with is stressful and frustrating than low scorers (44.5 vs 33.8).

4

Low scorers were more likely to indicate engagement with those they disagree with is interesting and informative.

5

High scoring respondents were substantially more likely to indicate an intention to vote in both primary and general elections in 2024 than low scorers.

6

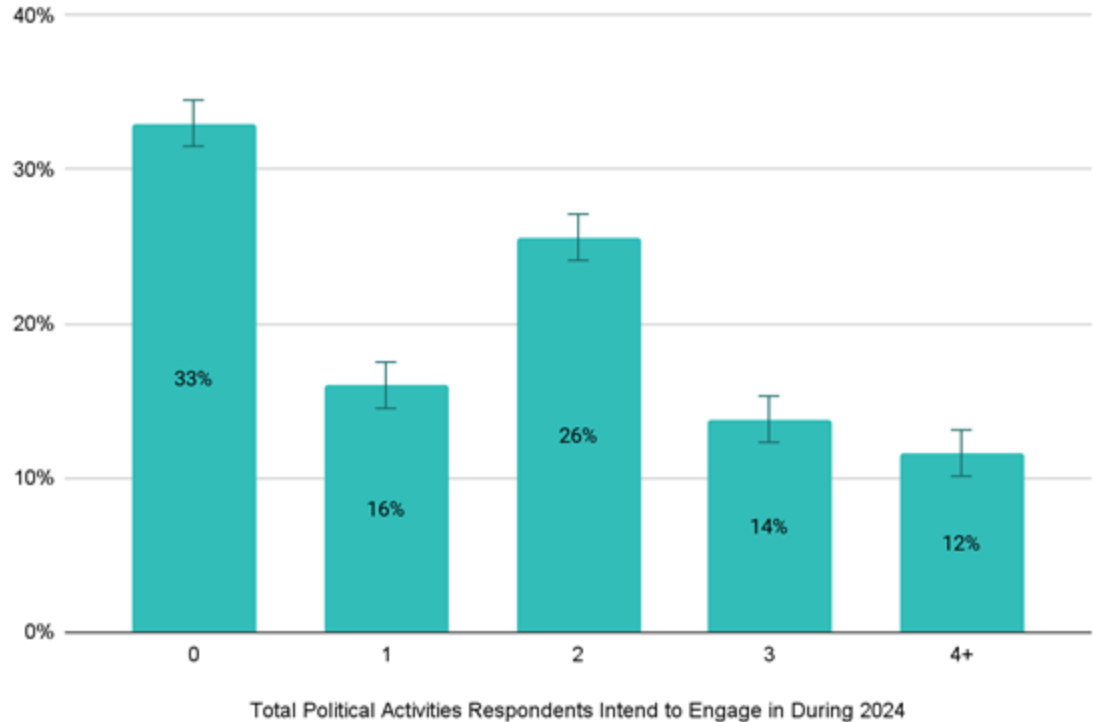
High scoring respondents were more likely to indicate that a lack of time prevents their further engagement. Low-scoring respondents were more likely to indicate that they don't feel informed enough to engage.

# Civic Engagement

Equally weighted (0-8) index of 2024 civic engagement intentions. Included:

- Voting (primary and general)
- Political volunteerism, donation intentions, event attendance, signage
- Digital political content creation and content sharing

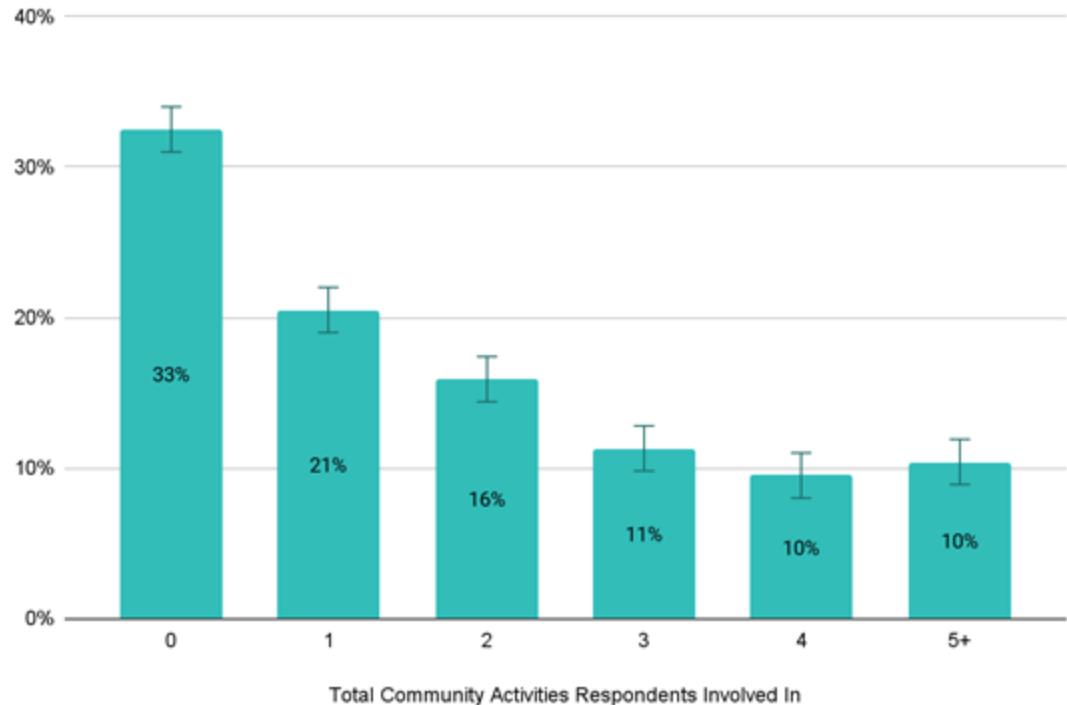
Those who plan to engage civically were most likely to report their intention to vote



# Civic Engagement: Community

Equally weighted (0-8) index of common community activities. Included:

- Sports, hobbies, volunteerism, committees, religious/faith groups
- One or more leadership positions in any of the above



# Civic Engagement Learnings



1

Respondents engaging in zero civic activities are more likely to be open to violence.

2

Higher civic engagement levels translate into more trust across the board, though the distribution was the same comparing “some” and “no” levels of civic engagement.

3

Those reporting no civic engagement activities are less likely to have clearly formed definitions for democracy across the board (meaning they checked multiple different response options), but have a greater likelihood of prioritizing liberty.

4

Those who are more engaged are more likely to place elections relatively higher in their definitions of democracy than those with no civic engagement activities.

5

Those engaging in no civic activities are more likely to view politics as boring/ pointless or unsure than those reporting some civic engagement.

6

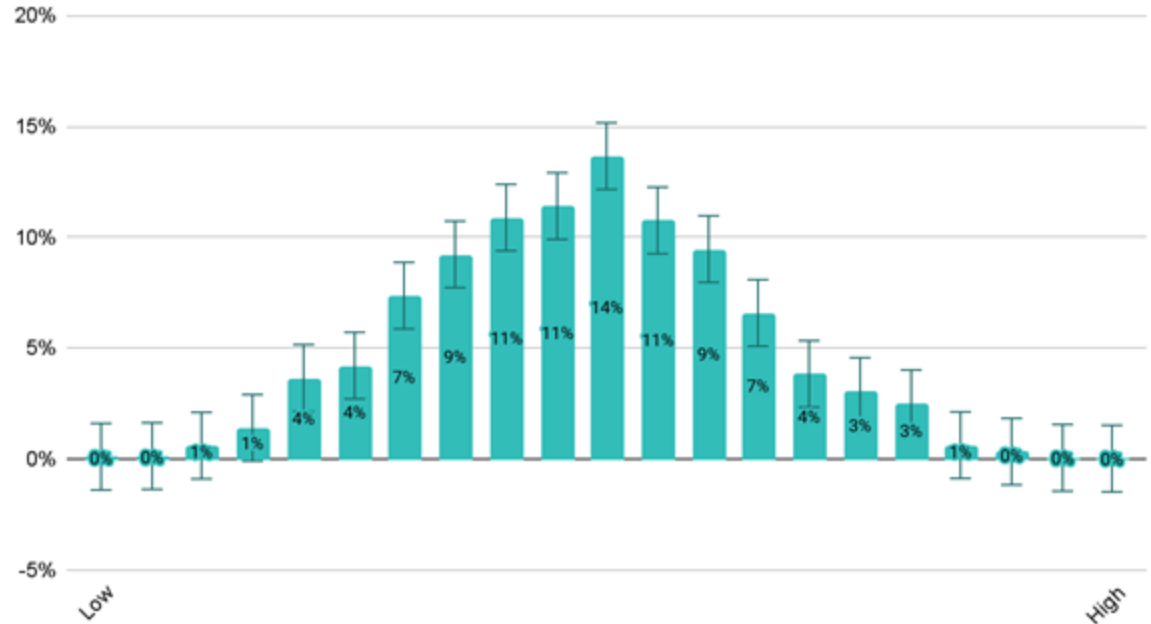
Respondents reporting no civic engagement reported more community engagement. This is why there is no correlation between civic engagement (perhaps perceived as being more political in nature) and community engagement.

# Civic Commitment

Index (0-20) of responses to attitudinal measures of:

- satisfaction with U.S. political system
- political agency/voting efficacy
- optimism in the future of U.S. democracy
- trust in gov't institutions
- rejection of violence to maintain social order at the cost of suppressing dissent

Gen Z feels skepticism; satisfaction with U.S. democracy averages at middling levels



Level of Satisfaction and Engagement in US Democracy on Equal-Weighted 5-Item Index

# Civic Commitment Learnings



1

Lower democracy satisfaction is coupled with lower trust in other generations, while the trustworthiness of institutions is the same for any satisfaction level.

2

Lower satisfaction levels are coupled with lower American pride.

3

Across all democracy satisfaction levels, the respondents' definitions of democracy: equality, justice, and fairness; are largely the same.

4

Respondents with high satisfaction are more likely to find conversations with those they disagree with more interesting/informative; while those with low satisfaction find it more stressful/frustrating.

5

Less satisfied respondents report a higher likelihood of voting than those with higher satisfaction. Those with higher satisfaction report more plans to engage in non-voting political activities than those who are less satisfied.

6

Less satisfied respondents report they don't participate in politics because people don't listen to each other. Those with high satisfaction say they don't feel informed enough and don't have enough time to participate.



# Gen Z & National Baseline Comparison



# Gen Z v. National Baseline

Nationwide Baseline	Gen Z
43% Satisfaction with democracy	35% Satisfaction with democracy <b>-8%</b>
68% Plan to vote in the general	48% Plan to vote in the general <b>-20%</b>
63% Plan to vote in primary	44% Plan to vote in primary <b>-19%</b>
12% Plan to protest	13% Plan to protest <b>+1%</b>
9% Plan to volunteer politically	10% Plan to volunteer politically <b>+1%</b>
13% Don't plan to participate	33% Don't plan to participate <b>+20%</b>
22% Find discourse interesting	37% Find discourse interesting <b>+15%</b>

SOURCE: Similar questions in Citizen Data surveys from 07/29/22 - 08/05/22 among a random sample of 2105 registered voters with a +/-2.1% margin of error, and 09/2023 among a random sample of 1003 registered voters with a +/-3.1% margin of error. Note that comparison is impacted by the timing, sample and content of the poll.

# Gen Z Paradox

## Perception

**57%** 

Dissatisfied with democracy.

**40%** 

Pessimistic about democracy.

Compared to 50% baseline

SOURCE: Similar question in Citizen Data survey from 09/2023 among a random sample of 1003 registered voters with a +/-3.1% margin of error. Note that comparison is impacted by the timing, sample and content of the poll.

## Participation

**48%** 

Plan to vote in 2024.

**35%** 

Don't feel informed enough to participate more.

Compared to 50% baseline

SOURCE: Similar question in Citizen Data survey from 07/29/22 - 08/05/22 among a random sample of 2105 registered voters with a +/-2.1% margin of error. Note that comparison is impacted by the timing, sample and content of the poll.

## Belief

**70%** 

Are proud to be American.

**68%** 

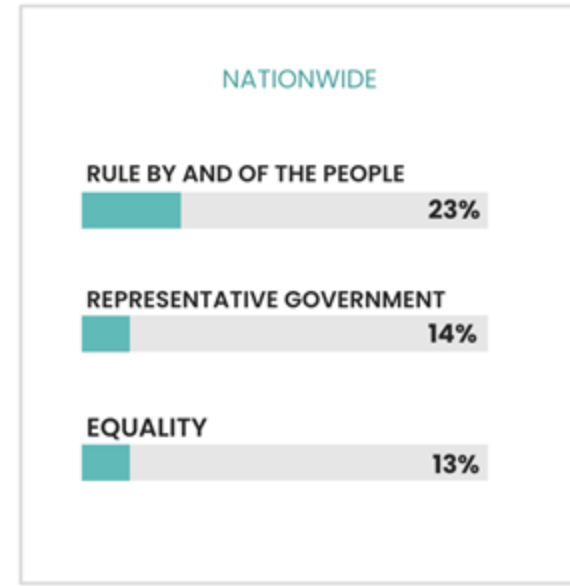
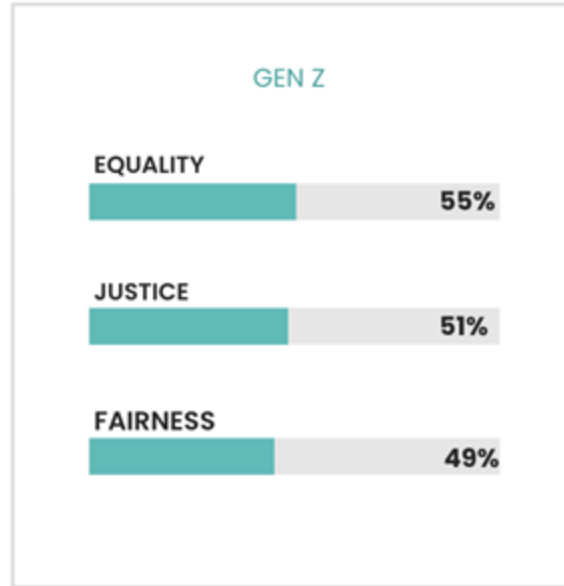
Believe their vote matters.

**51%** 

Are opposed to violence.

# Gen Z v. National Baseline

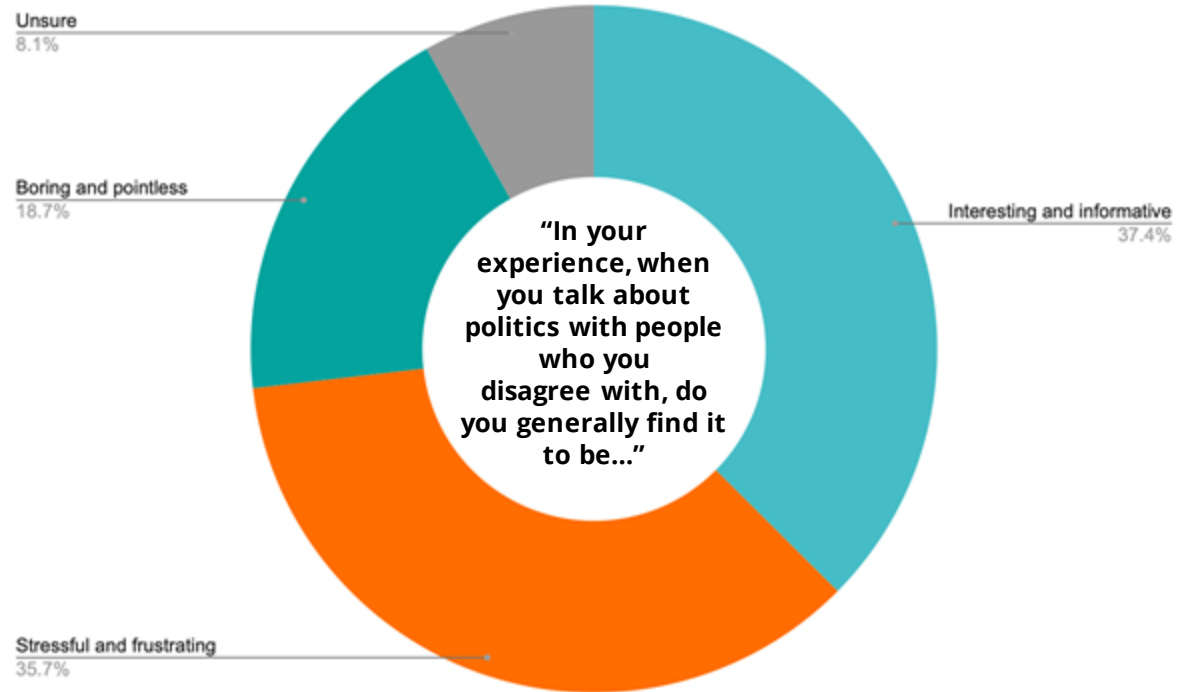
- Democracy is perceived in value terms with **bipartisan consensus** around:
  - Equality, justice and fairness
- Deviation from the nationwide baseline\*
  - where rule by and of the people and representative government rose to the top
- Resonates with Gen Z's strong commitment to democracy and their lower levels of civic knowledge and engagement



\*SOURCE: Similar question in Citizen Data survey from 04/10/22 - 04/24/22 among a random sample of 4010 registered voters with a +/-1.5% margin of error. Note that comparison is impacted by the timing, sample and content of the poll.

# Gen Z Could Reshape our Civil Discourse

- Plurality (37.4%) of Gen Z find conversing across lines of difference to **be interesting and informative**
- Nationwide, the plurality responded “**stressful and frustrating**”
  - One in five respondents nationwide said “interesting and informative”
- Gen Z is positioned as the generation who can begin to overcome polarization and division



\*SOURCE: Similar question in Citizen Data survey from 07/29/22 - 08/05/22 among a random sample of 2105 registered voters with a +/-2.1% margin of error. Note that comparison is impacted by the timing, sample and content of the poll.



# Gen Z & Political Affiliation

# Zooming in on the Politically Disengaged

- 24% of Gen Z respondents told us that they “do not identify politically in any way”
- **Understanding this group’s disaffection is a key part of activating Gen Z’s commitment to democracy**

Total Gen Z	Politically Disengaged Gen Z
35% Satisfaction with democracy	26% Satisfaction with democracy <b>-9%</b>
68% Feel vote matters	50% Feel vote matters <b>-18%</b>
27% Optimistic about democracy	13% Optimistic about democracy <b>-14%</b>
51% Opposed to violence	56% Opposed to violence <b>+5%</b>
70% Proud to be American	61% Proud to be American <b>-9%</b>
48% Plan to vote	27% Plan to vote <b>-21%</b>
27% Uninterested in politics	43% Uninterested in politics <b>+16%</b>

SOURCE: Similar questions in Citizen Data surveys from 07/29/22-08/05/22 among a random sample of 2105 registered voters with a +/-2.1% margin of error. Note that comparison is impacted by the timing, sample and content of the poll.

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