

# REACHING YOUNG VOTERS — AND EARNING THEIR TRUST

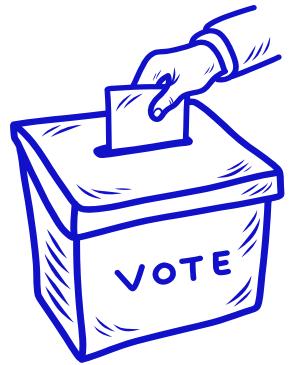
Leela Strong

Newhouse Director, Center for Information & Research  
on Civic Learning and Engagement

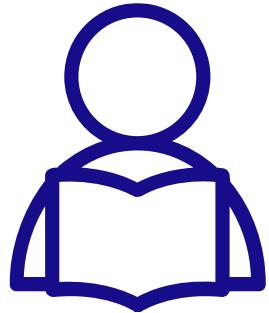
# About CIRCLE

A nonpartisan research center on young people's civic learning and engagement based at Tufts University

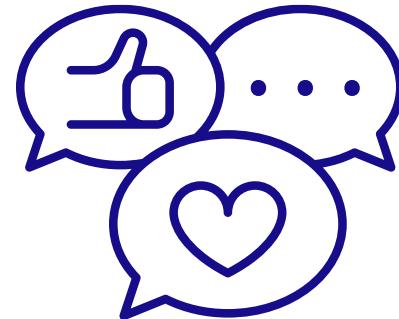
## VOTER PARTICIPATION



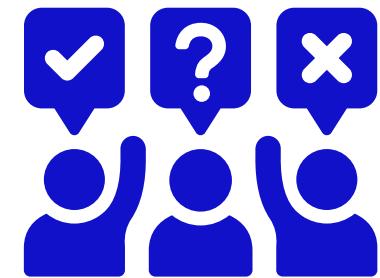
## CIVIC EDUCATION



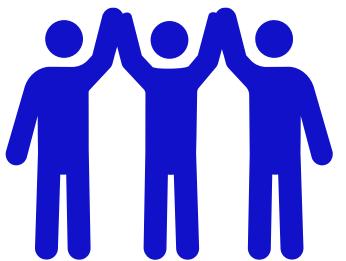
## YOUTH AND MEDIA



## YOUTH POLLING



## YOUTH LEADERSHIP



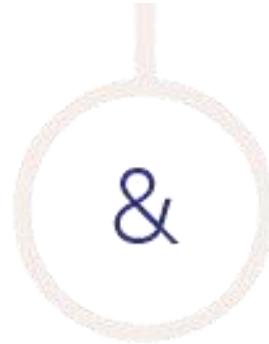
## POLITICAL HOMES



# About CIRCLE

## CIRCLE

Independent research on  
equitable youth engagement



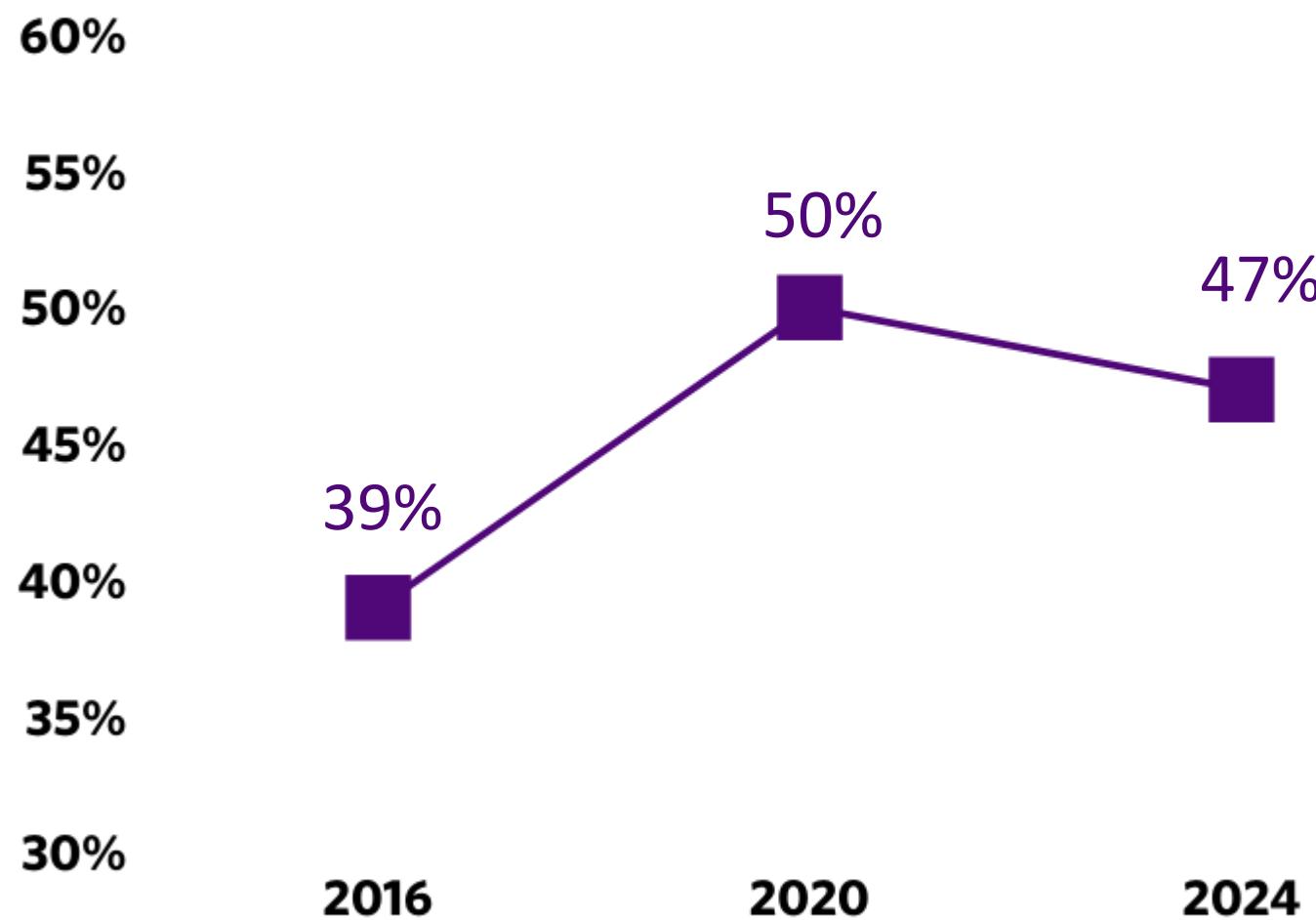
## OUR PARTNERS

On-the-ground expertise and  
action that shapes our work

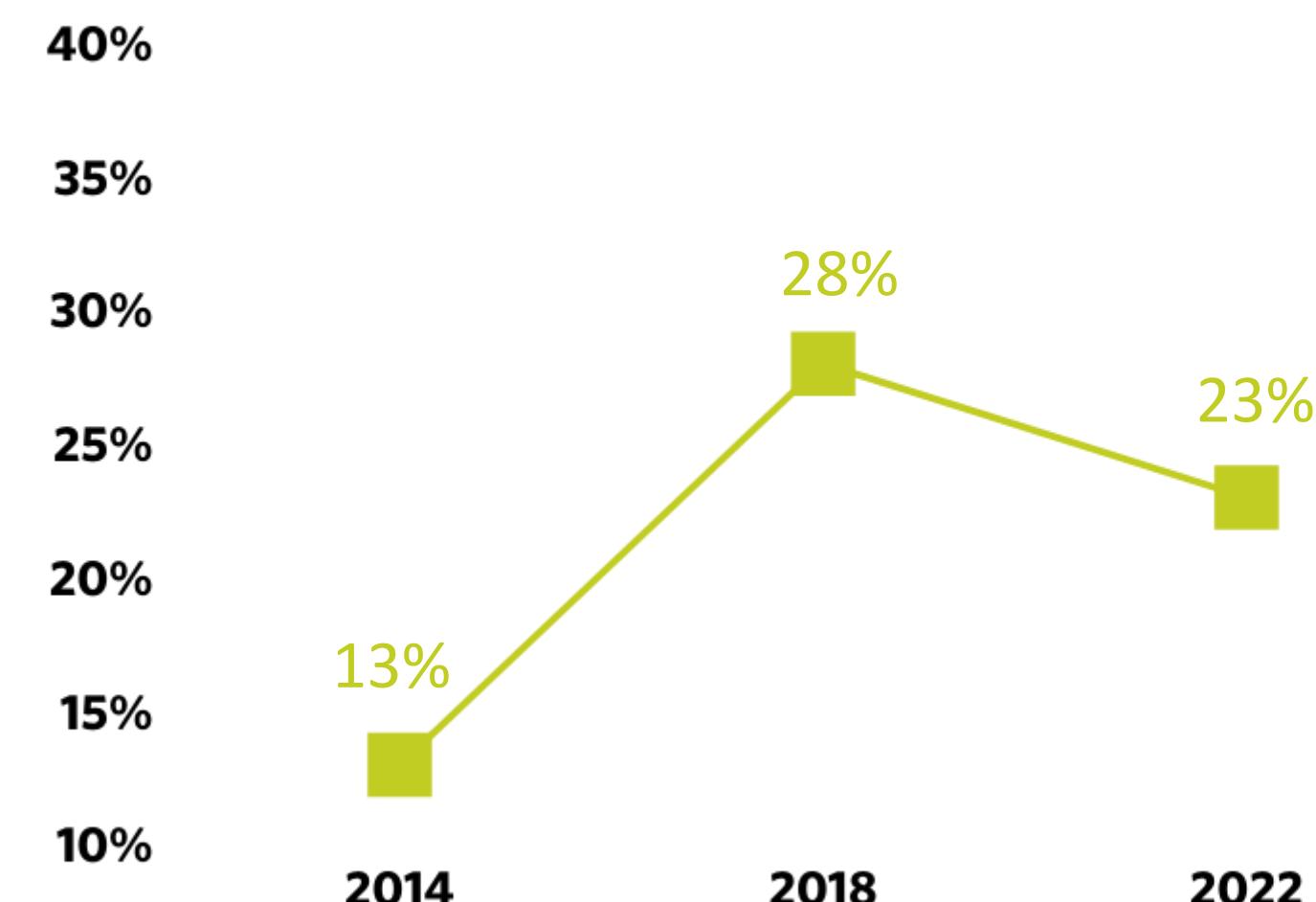


# Youth Voter Turnout Has Increased in Recent Elections

## Presidential Elections

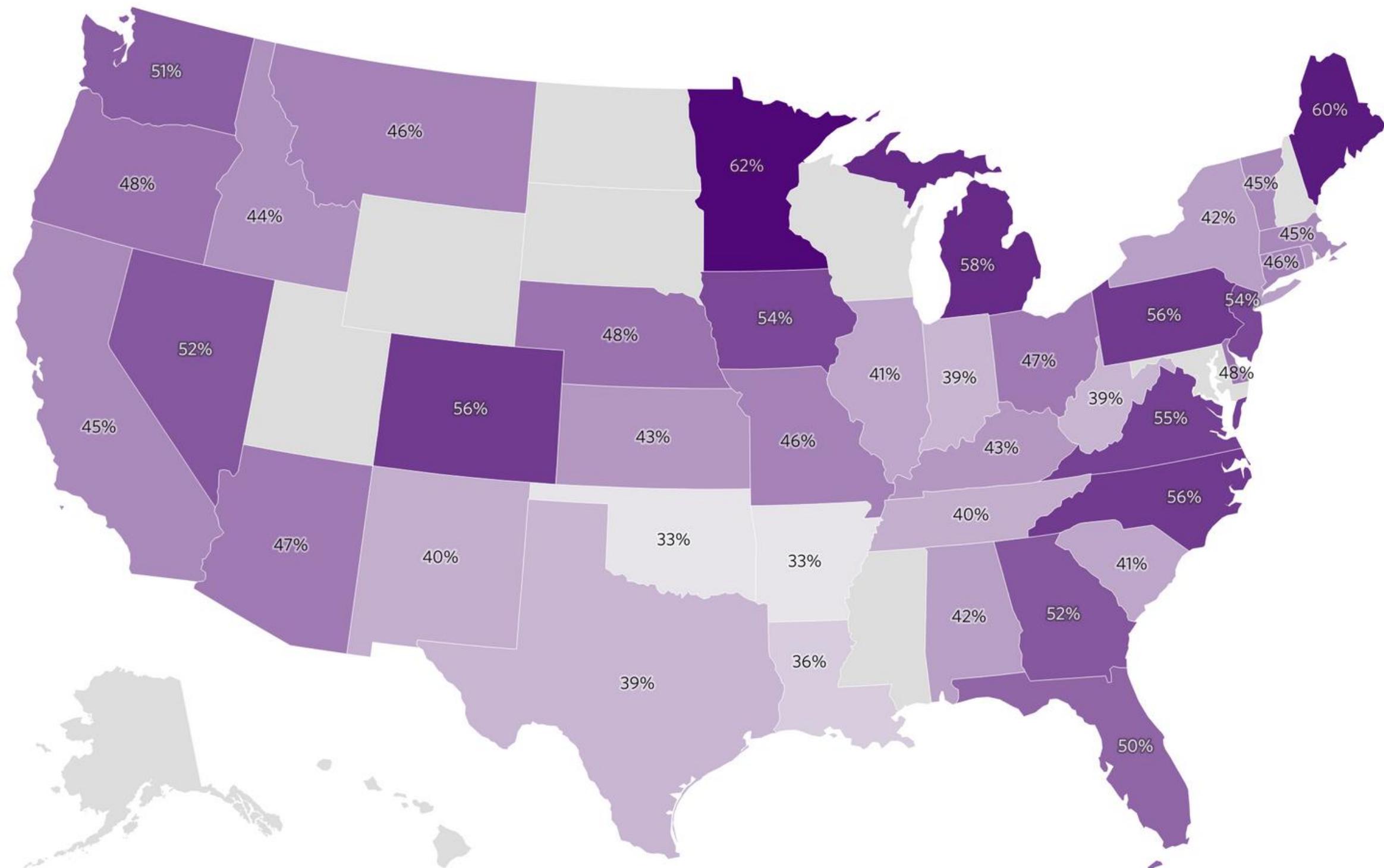


## Midterm Elections



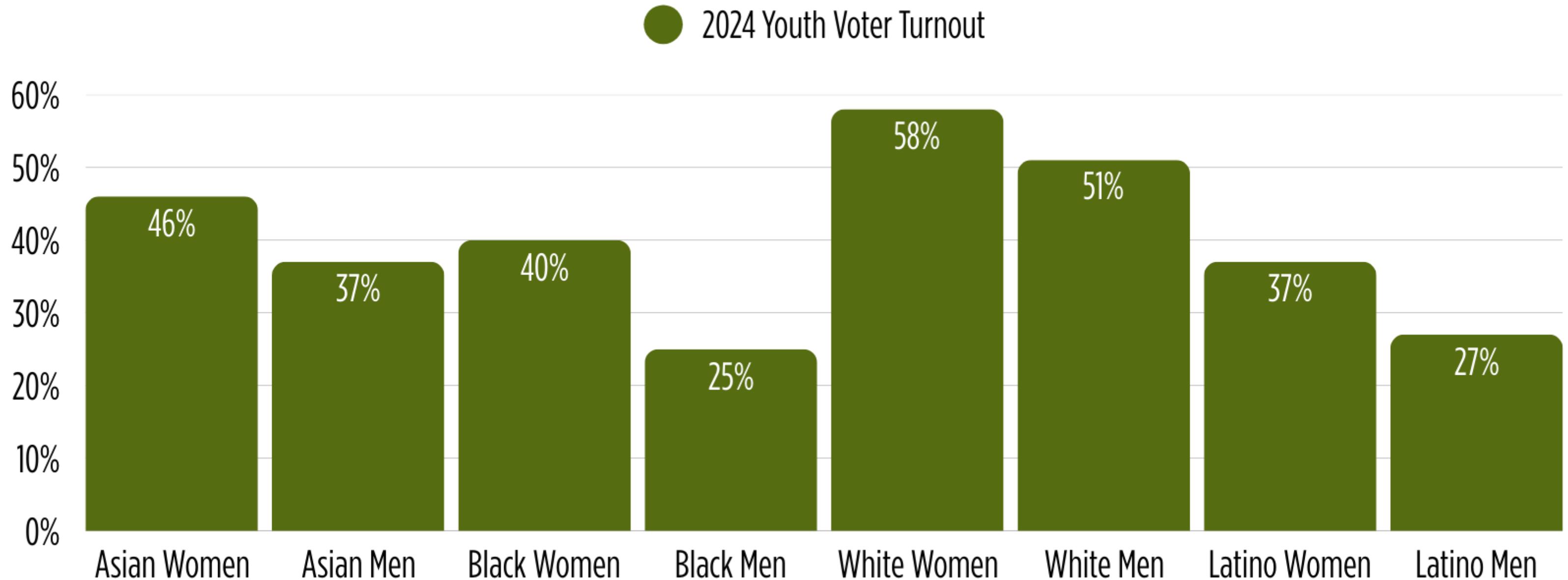
Source: CIRCLE analysis of voter file data aggregated by Catalist

# Inequities Persist: By State



Source: CIRCLE analysis of voter files aggregated by Catalist

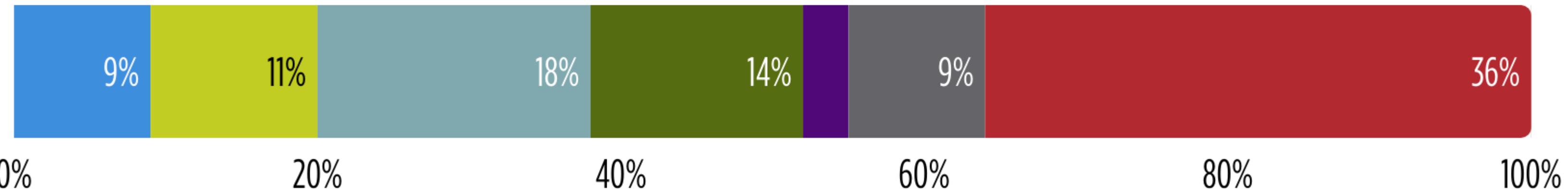
# Inequities Persist: By Race/Gender



Source: CIRCLE analysis of voter files aggregated by Catalist

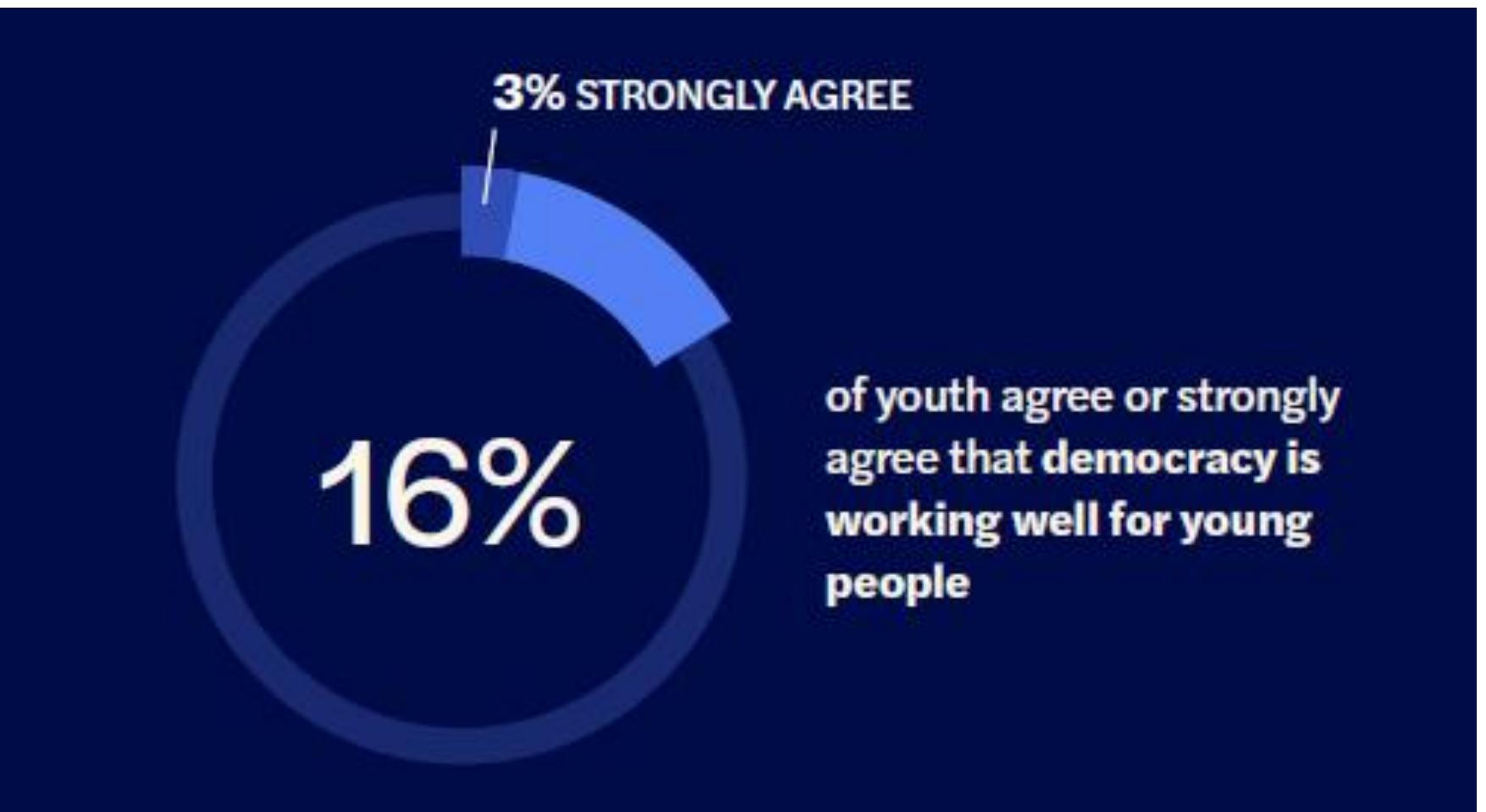
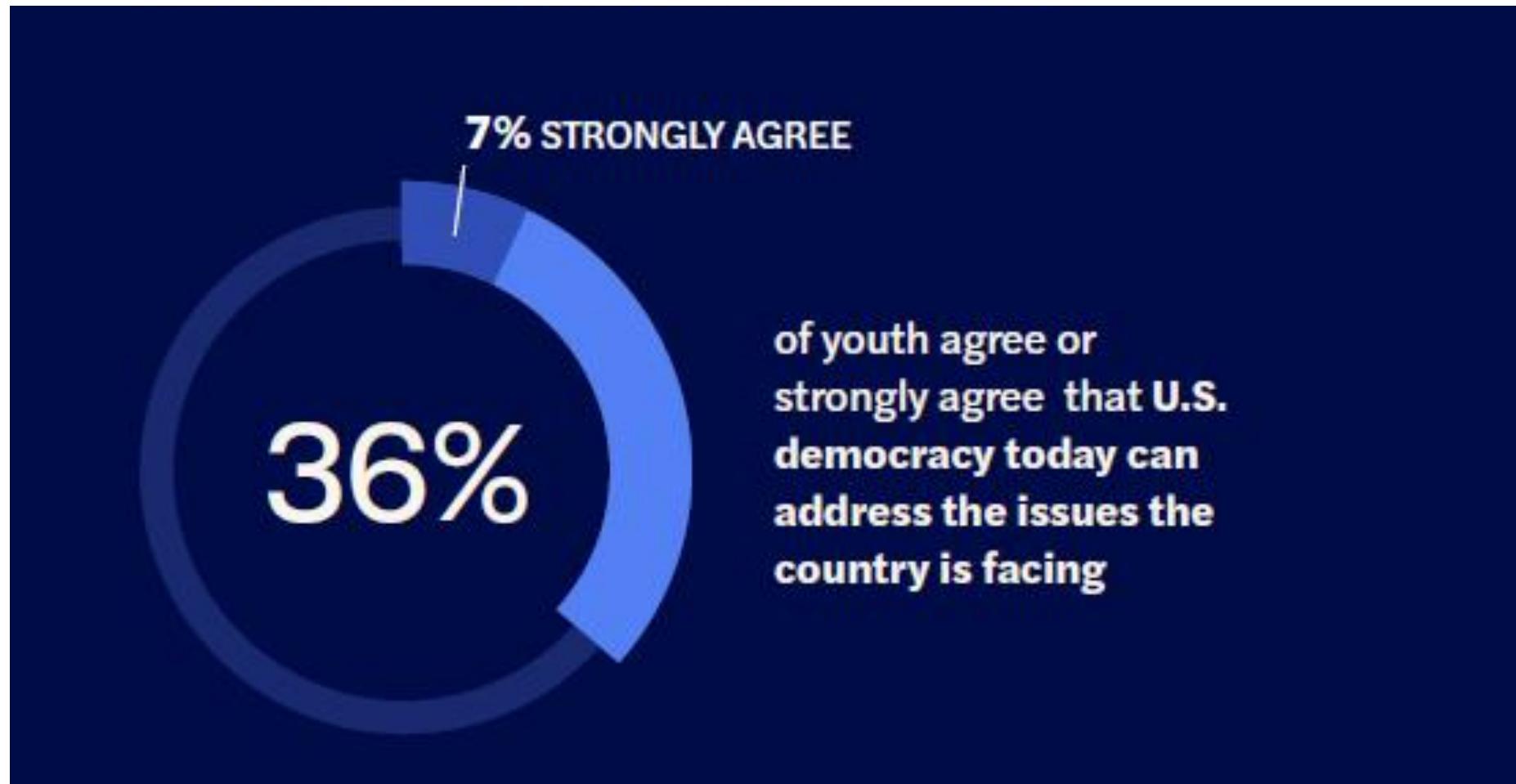
# Logistical and Informational Barriers Still Prevent Participation

- Not eligible to register
- I forgot
- Didn't have time / too busy
- Missed registration deadline
- Had trouble with registration application
- Did not know how to register
- Not important to me



Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

# Youth Participate Despite Skepticism of Democracy



Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

# Three Profiles of Gen Z Relationship with Democracy

PROFILE 1

## Passive Appreciation

63% of youth 18-29

- ① High support for democratic principles and practices, and high levels of trust in civic institutions
- ② Enjoys strong support for civic engagement and high levels of internal political efficacy
- ③ Low levels of taking political action, perhaps due to complacency with the status quo

PROFILE 2

## Dismissive Detachment

31% of youth 18-29

- ① Below average scores on every facet of positive democratic attitudes
- ② Low civic skills and lack of support for civic development may be root causes of detachment from democracy
- ③ Sense that democracy is failing to address their challenges may be driving their dismissal of democracy

PROFILE 3

## Hostile Dissatisfaction

7% of youth 18-29

- ① Defined by their endorsement of political violence and negative views of “the other side”
- ② Believe in democracy in principle, but very disappointed with democracy in practice
- ③ Highly skilled and engaged group of youth that is ready and willing to take political action for major change

Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

# How To Reach Youth? Understand They Are Issue-First Voters

The percentage of young people, ages 18-34, who chose each option as one of their top-three reasons for voting in the 2024 election.

To support a candidate who will do something about the issues I care about

46%

Because voting is a duty and responsibility as a citizen

40%

To express my opposition to a candidate on the ballot

21%

To impact who is making decisions in my local community

20%

To make it more likely that legislation to help people like me will get passed

19%

To express my support for a candidate that was on the ballot

19%

Because people have made sacrifices so that I am now able to vote

15%

Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

# Youth Are Focused on Both the Economy And Social Issues

The percentage of young people (ages 18-34) who chose each option as one of their top-three issues in the 2024 election.

Cost of living/inflation

64%

Healthcare

28%

Abortion

27%

Climate change and the environment

26%

Jobs and unemployment

26%

Immigration

24%

Education and childcare

16%

Voting rights and democracy

16%

Free speech and religious freedom

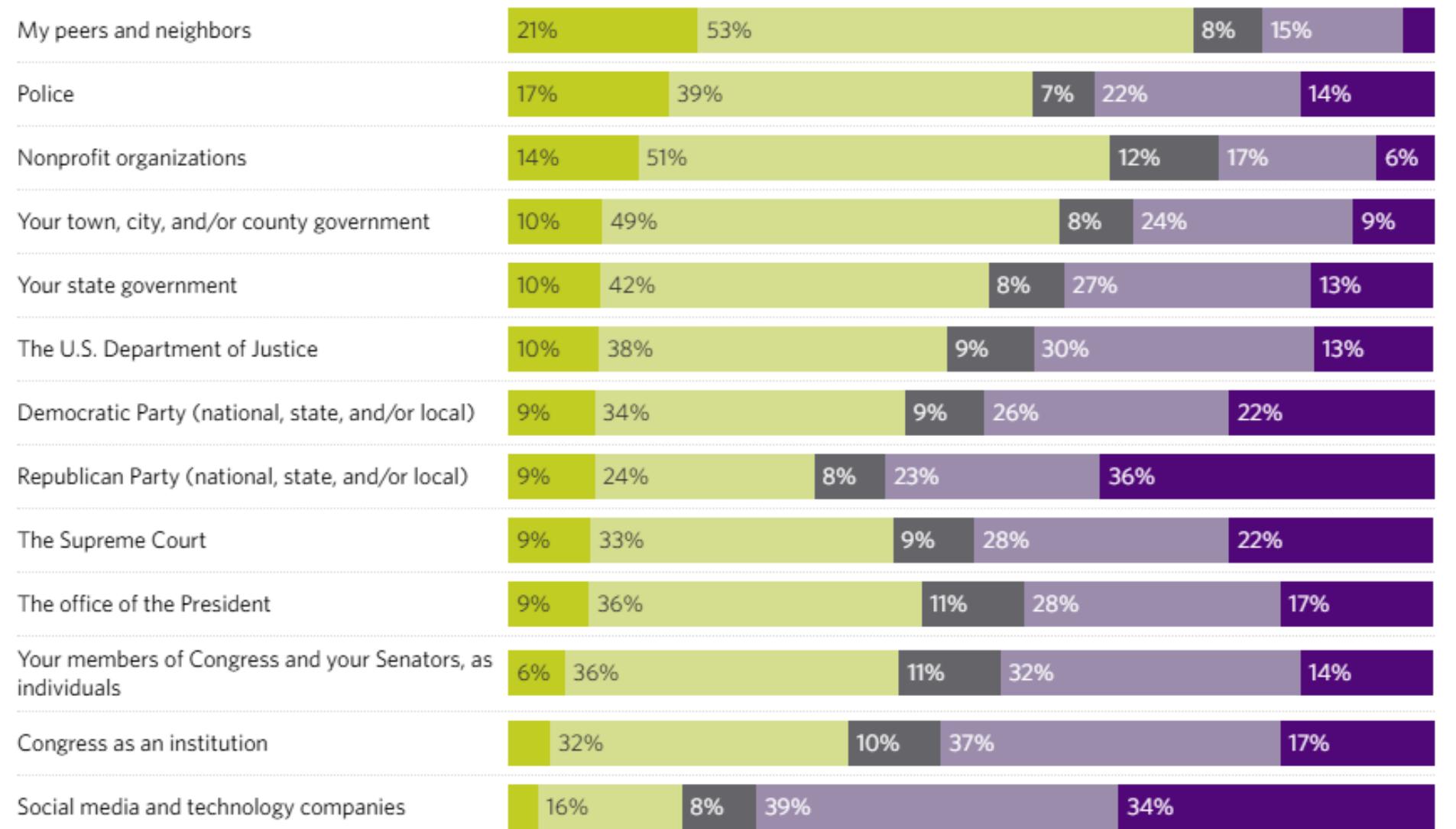
16%

Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

# How to Reach Youth? Connect with Who They Trust

Institutional trust among young people ages 18-34.

■ A great deal of trust ■ Some trust ■ Not sure ■ Very little trust ■ No trust at all

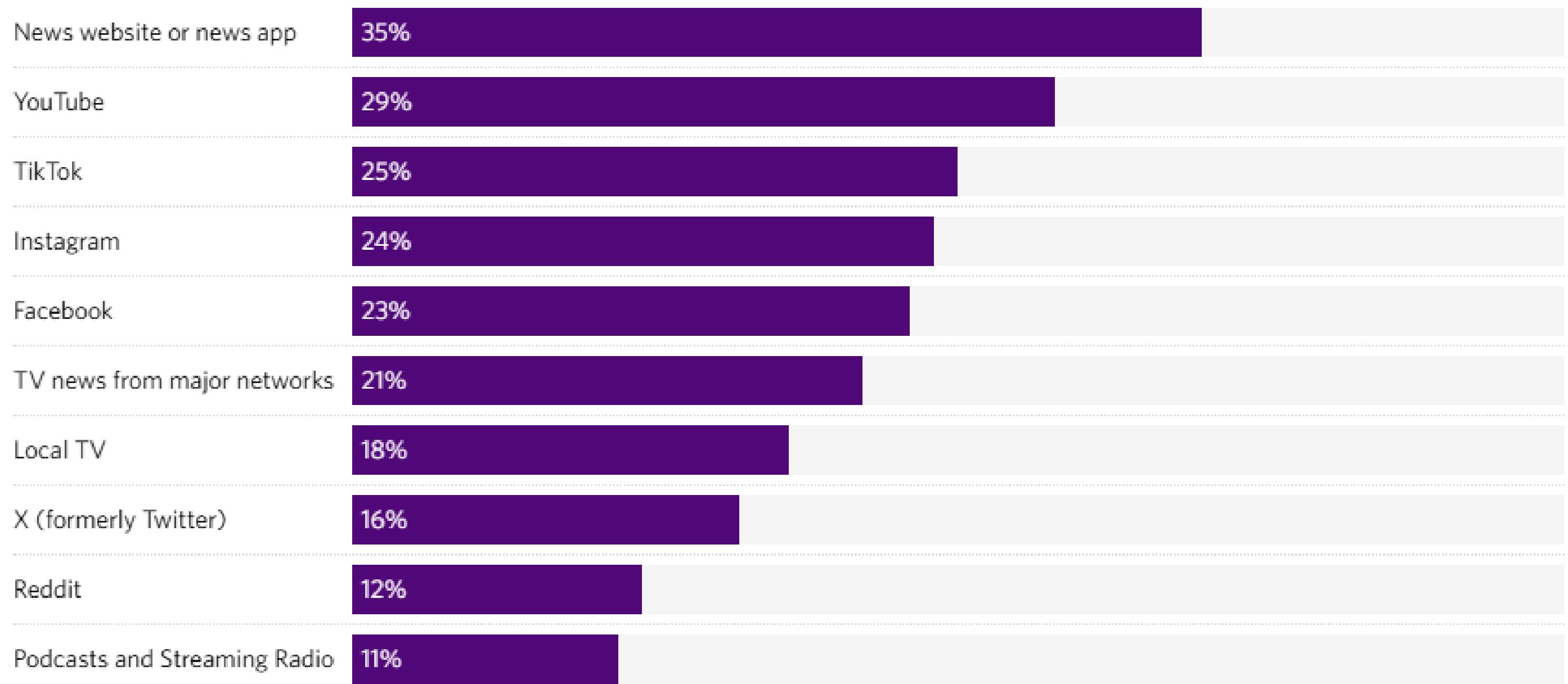


Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

Our government is increasingly run by people who will not live [to] see the consequences of their implemented policies. As well as people who have never, or have forgotten what it's like, to live as an average citizen with financial needs and pressures.

# How To Reach Youth? Where They Turn To For Information

The percentage of young people (ages 18-34) who selected each source or platform as one of the top three places where they saw or heard political information in 2024.



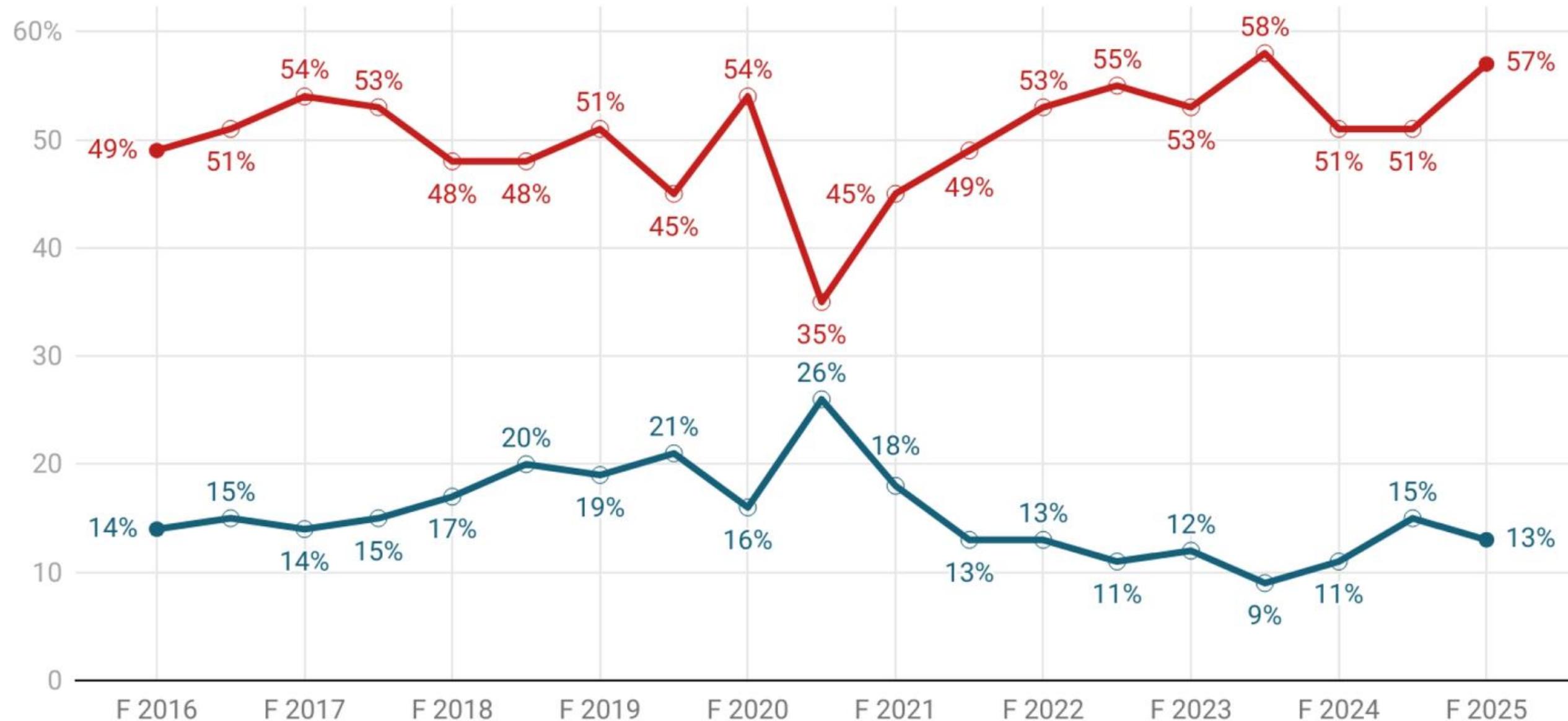
Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

# Looking Ahead: A Challenging Year

All in all, do you think that things in the nation are...

Right Direction

Wrong Track



F = Fall poll release; others are Spring poll release

Source: Harvard Youth Poll • Created with Datawrapper

# Recommendations for Action

Youth are not a monolith: focus on inequities among youth of color, non-college youth, etc.

Support the implementation of facilitative election policies in your state.

Work and partner locally: build trust with youth by connecting with those they already trust.

Don't just inform: inspire. Communicate that voting turns to action on big issues.

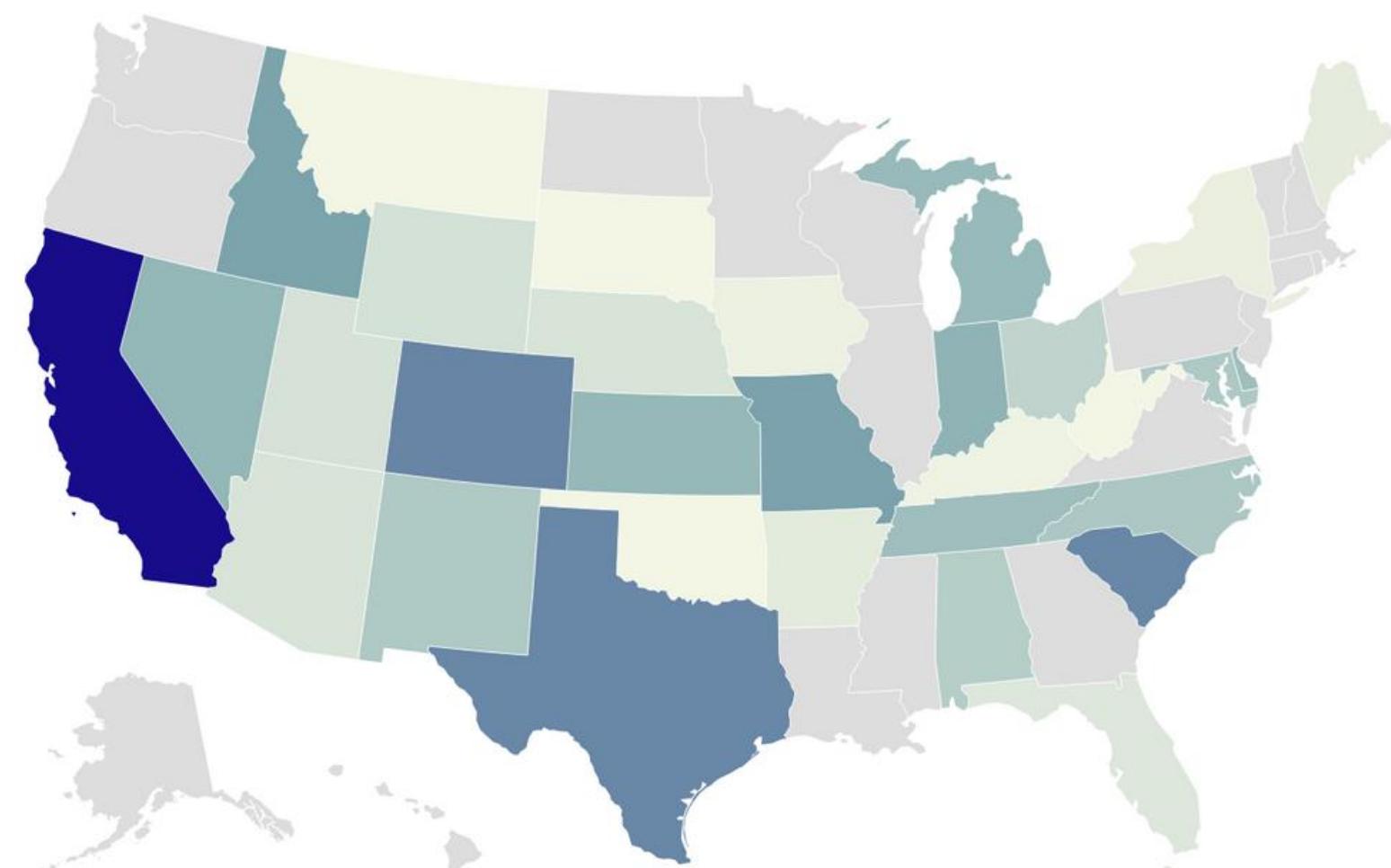
Wield social media as a tool, but don't treat it as the be-all end-all for reaching youth.

Start now: Our studies of voter registration show that work early in the cycle is effective.

# One Final Recommendation: Hire Young Poll Workers!

## Only a Handful of States Had More than 5% of Poll Workers Under Age 18 in 2020

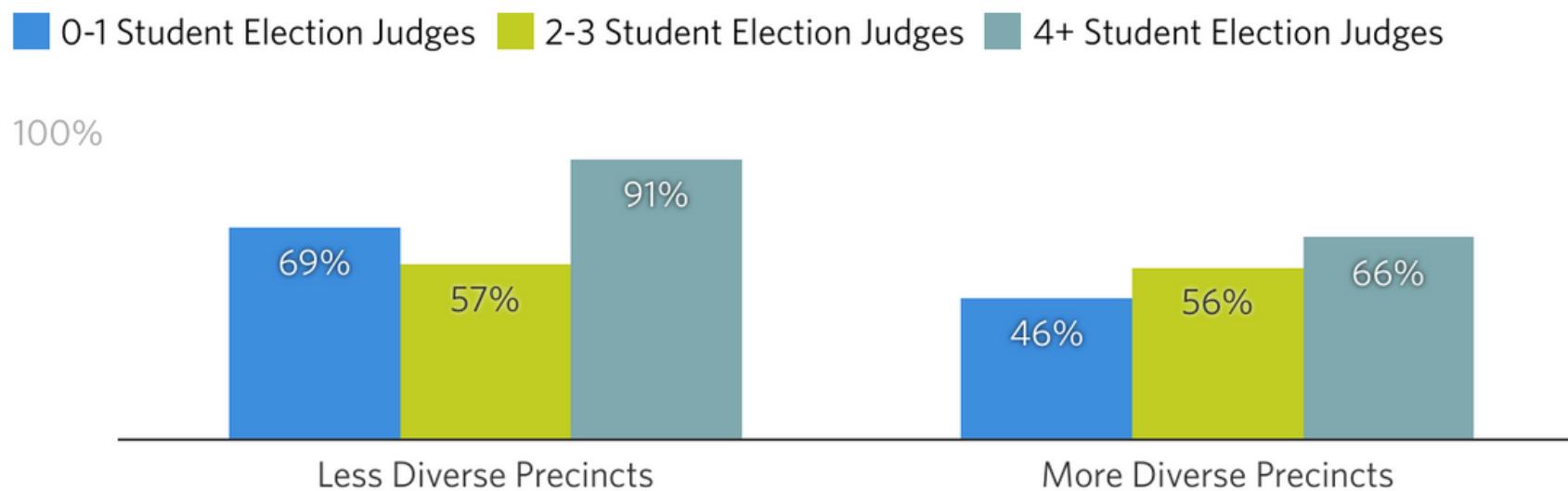
The percentage of under-18 poll workers in each state that reported county-level age-specific data



Note: No age-specific data available for states in gray

## Youth Voter Turnout Was Highest in Minneapolis Precincts with More Student Election Judges

CIRCLE estimates of the average youth voter turnout (ages 18-24) in precincts, based on population demographics and the number of student poll workers in each precinct.



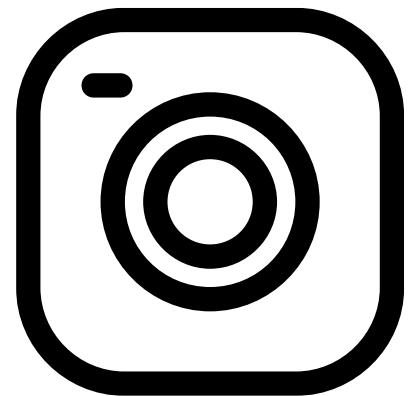
Notes: "More diverse" precincts are defined as those where 40% or more of the population is nonwhite.

# Stay In Touch!



circle@tufts.edu

leela.strong@tufts.edu



@civicyouth



circle.tufts.edu



/circleresearch