

January 2026

REACHING YOUNG VOTERS — AND EARNING THEIR TRUST

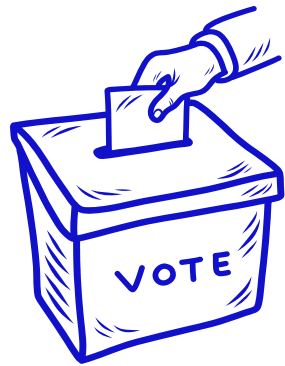
Leela Strong

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

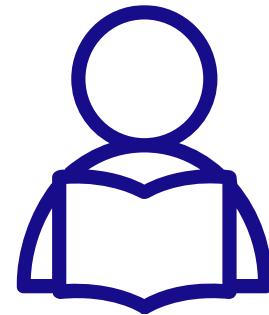
About CIRCLE

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

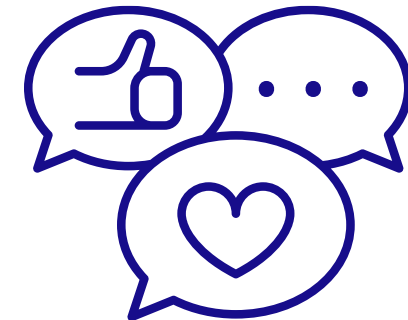
VOTER PARTICIPATION



CIVIC EDUCATION



YOUTH AND MEDIA



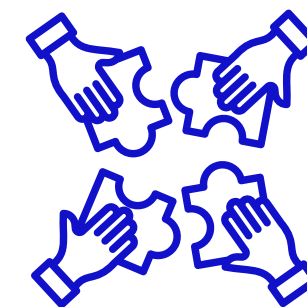
YOUTH POLLING



YOUTH LEADERSHIP



POLITICAL HOMES



About CIRCLE

CIRCLE

Independent research on
equitable youth engagement

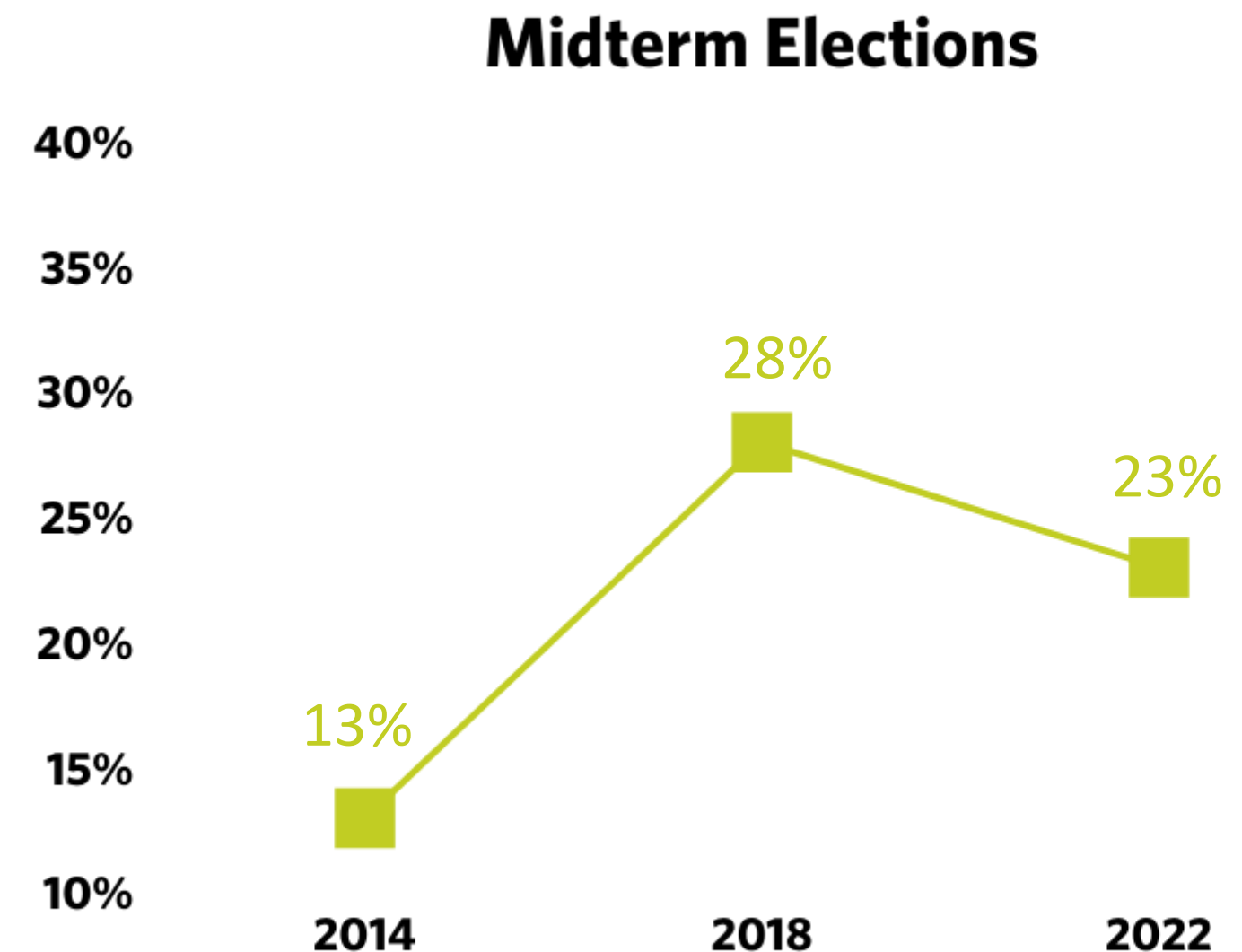
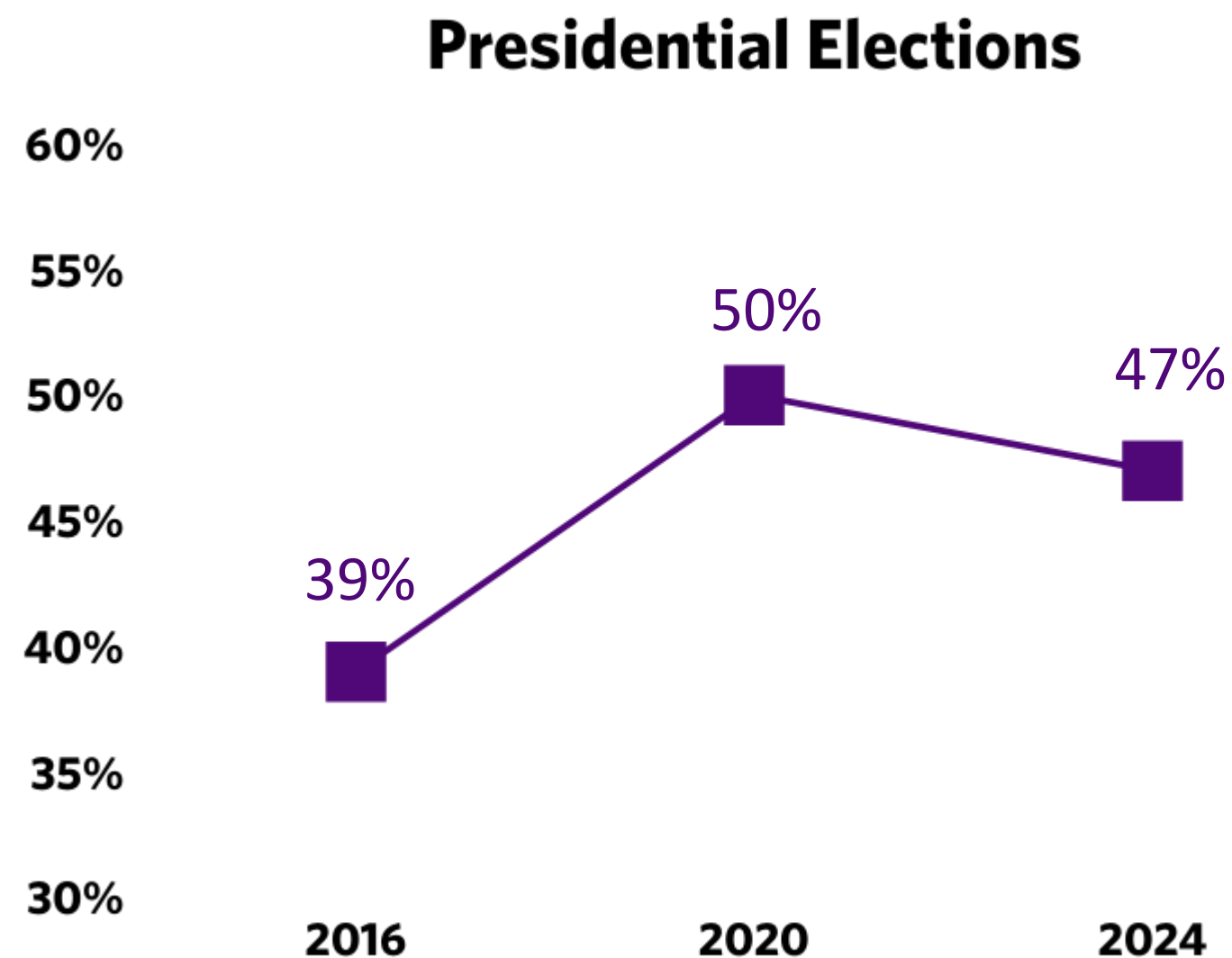


OUR PARTNERS

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

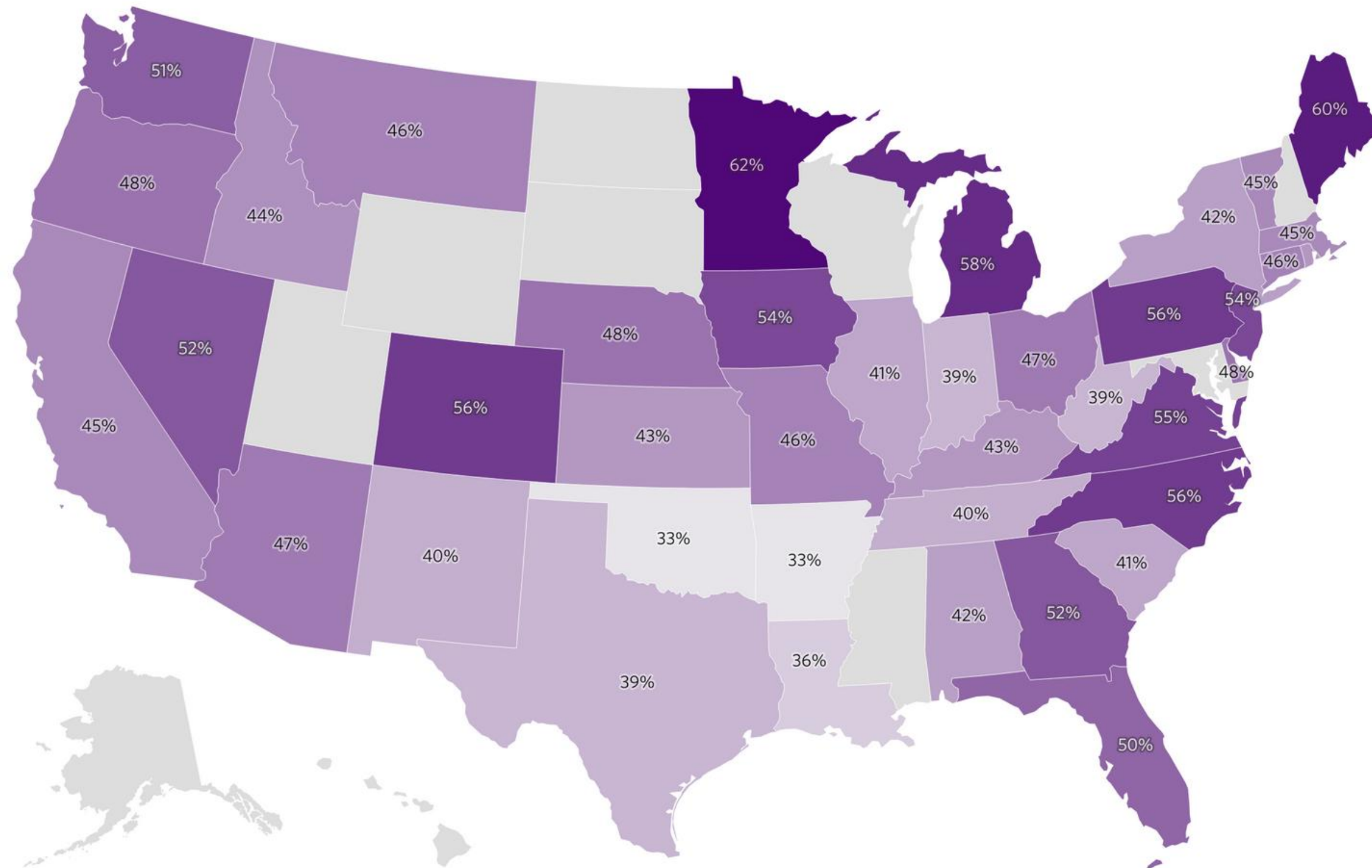


Youth Voter Turnout Has Increased in Recent Elections



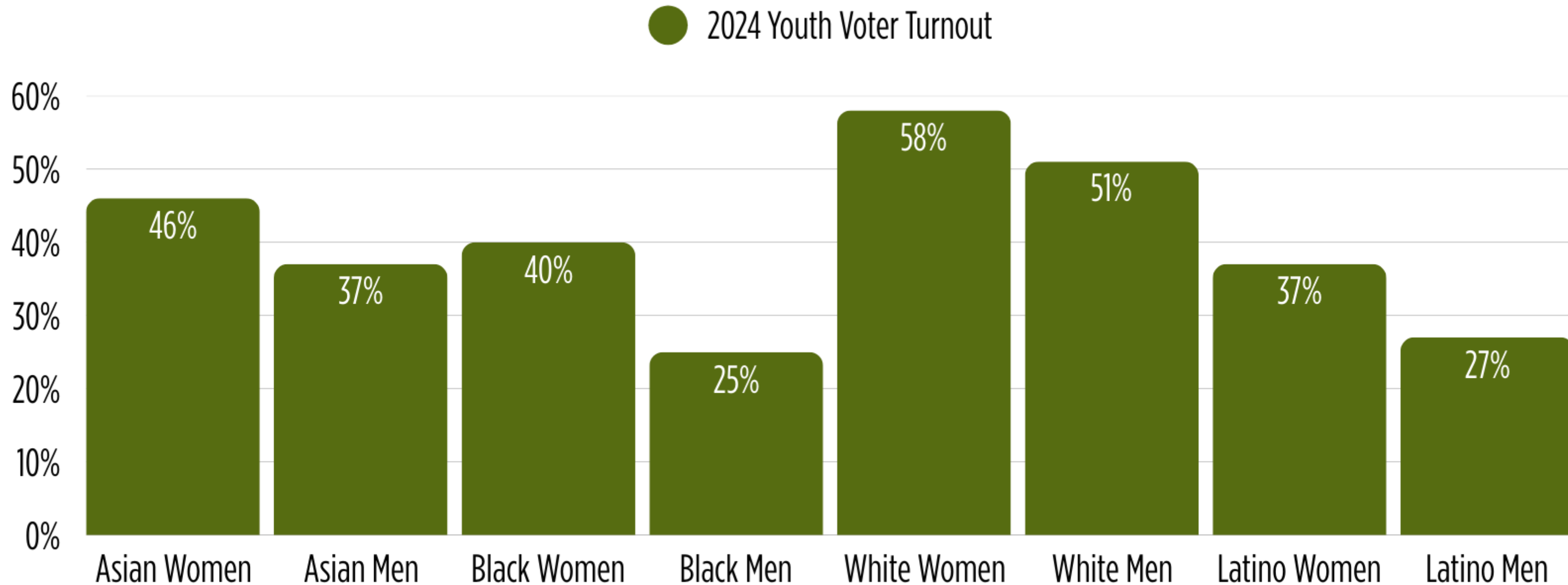
Source: CIRCLE analysis of voter file data aggregated by Catalyst

Inequities Persist: By State



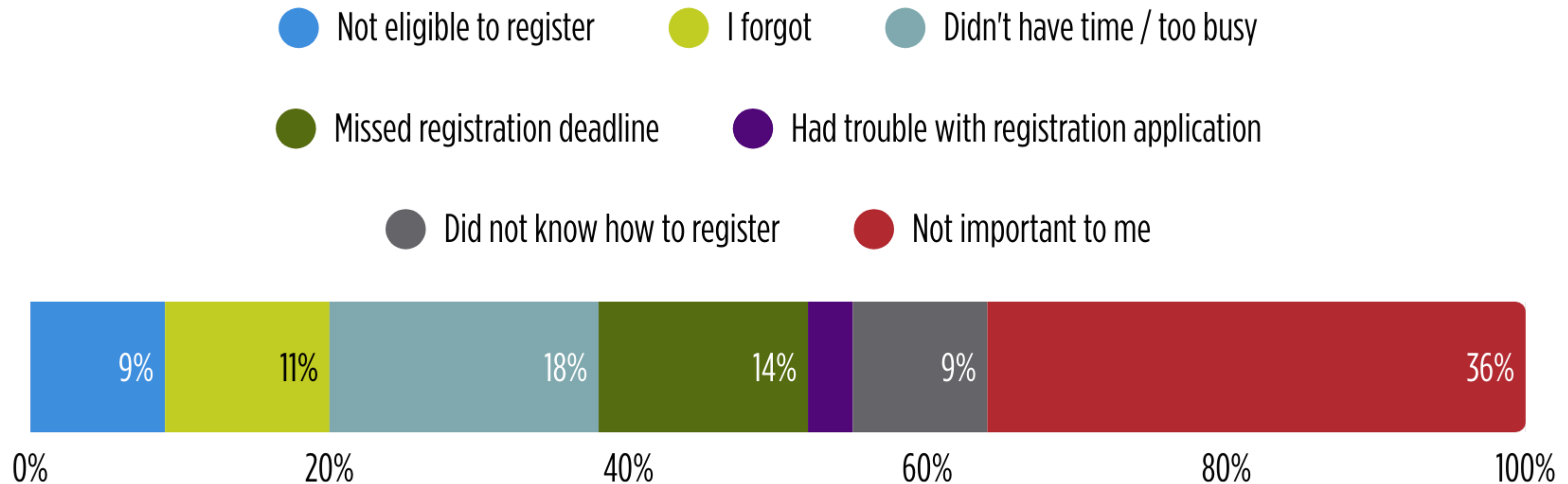
Source: CIRCLE analysis of voter files aggregated by Catalyst

Inequities Persist: By Race/Gender



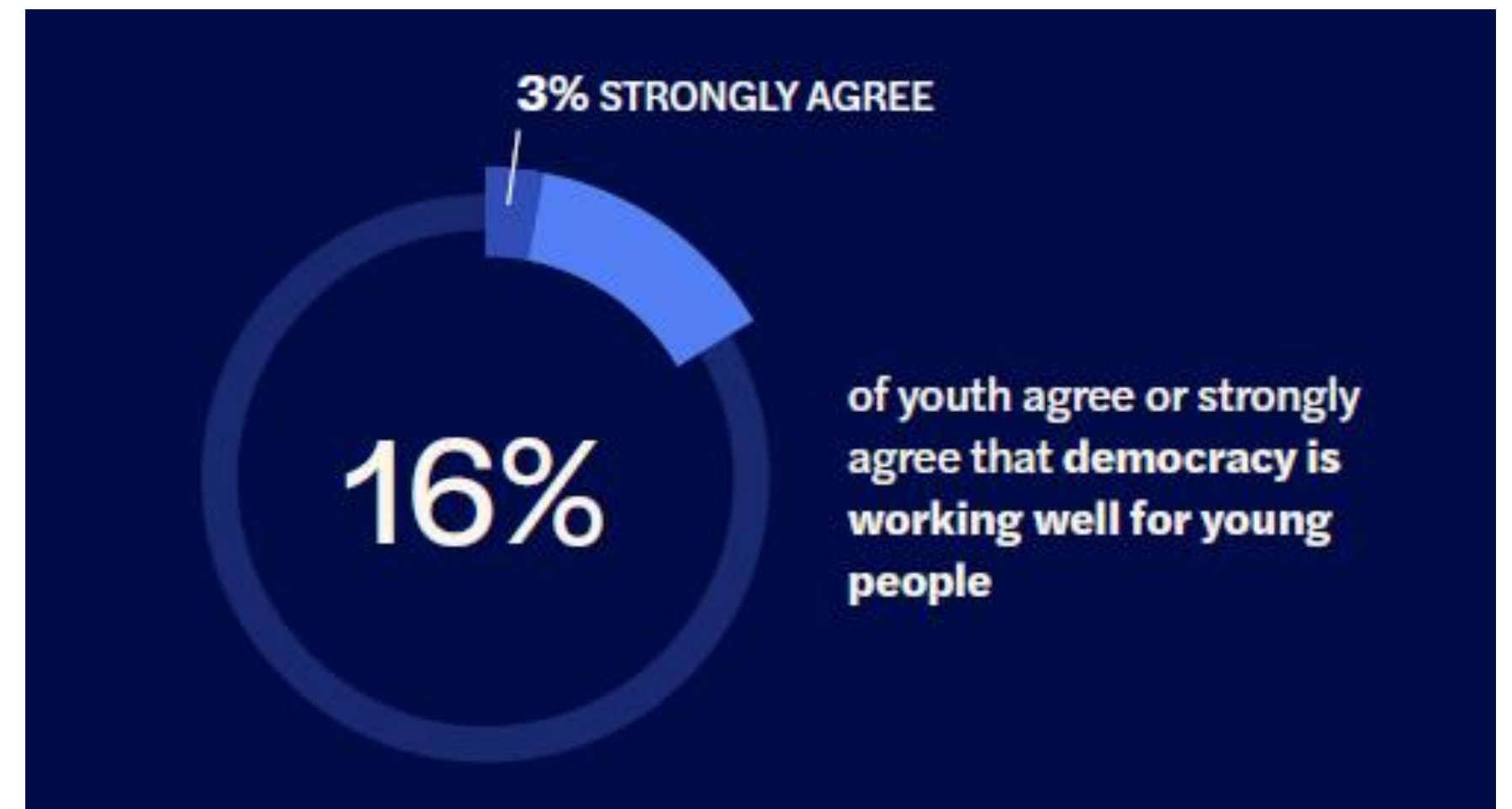
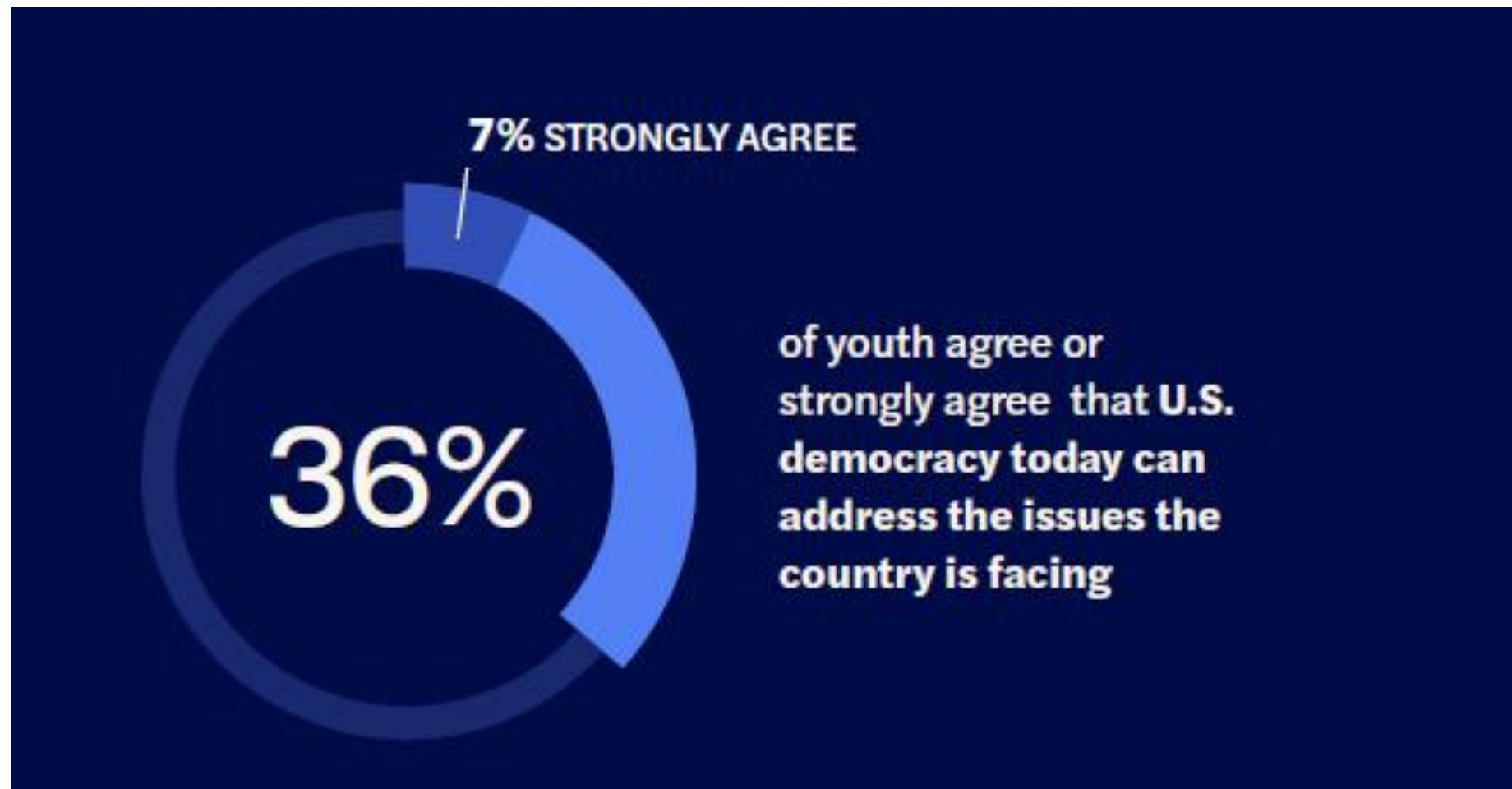
Source: CIRCLE analysis of voter files aggregated by Catalyst

Logistical and Informational Barriers Still Prevent Participation



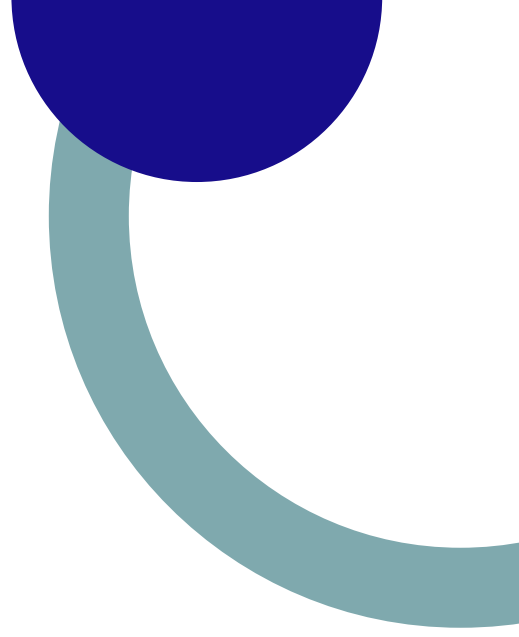
Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

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%

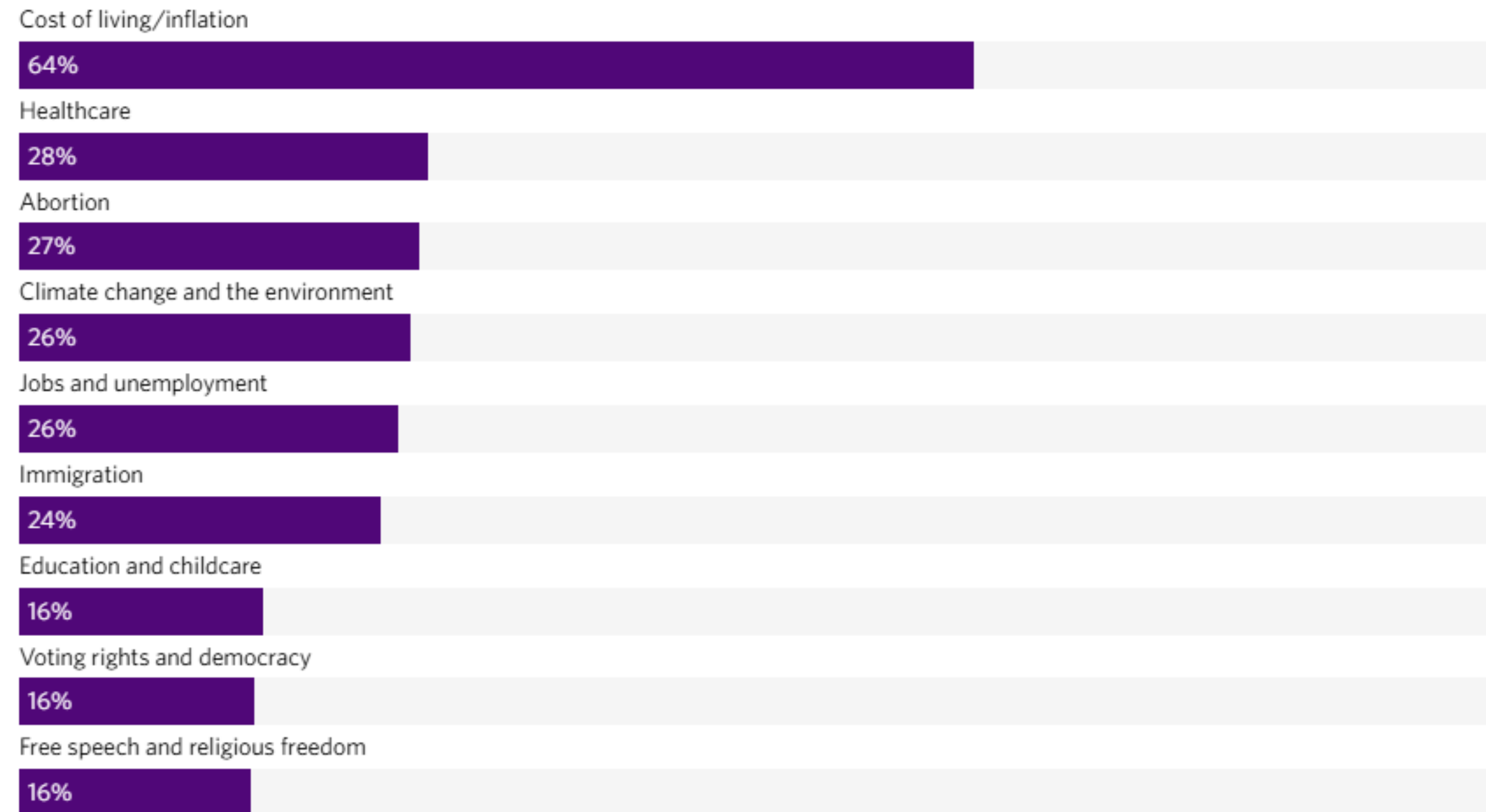
Because people have made sacrifices so that I am now able to vote

15%

Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

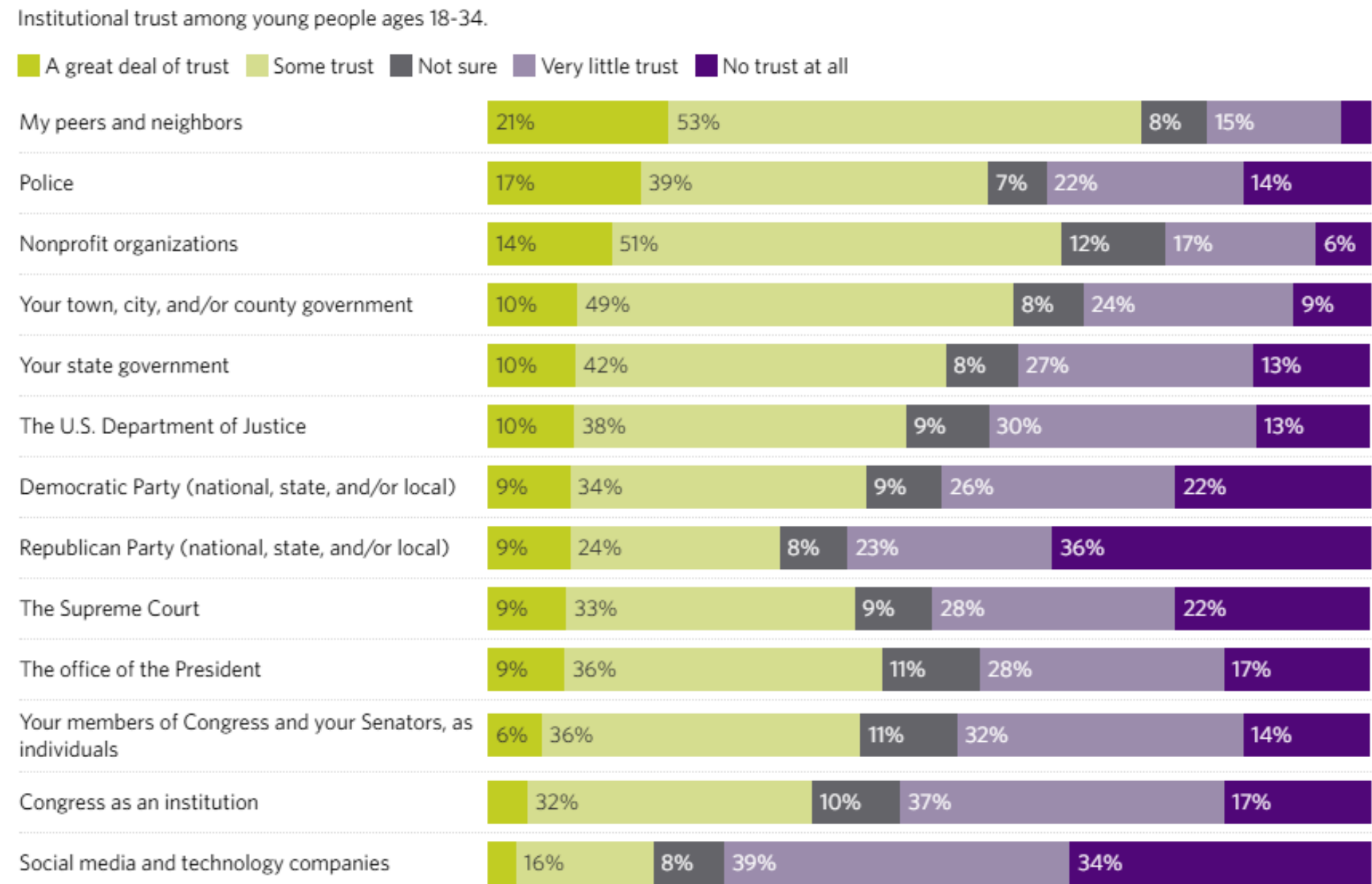
Youth Are Focused on Both the Economy And Social Issues

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



Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

How to Reach Youth? Connect with Who They Trust

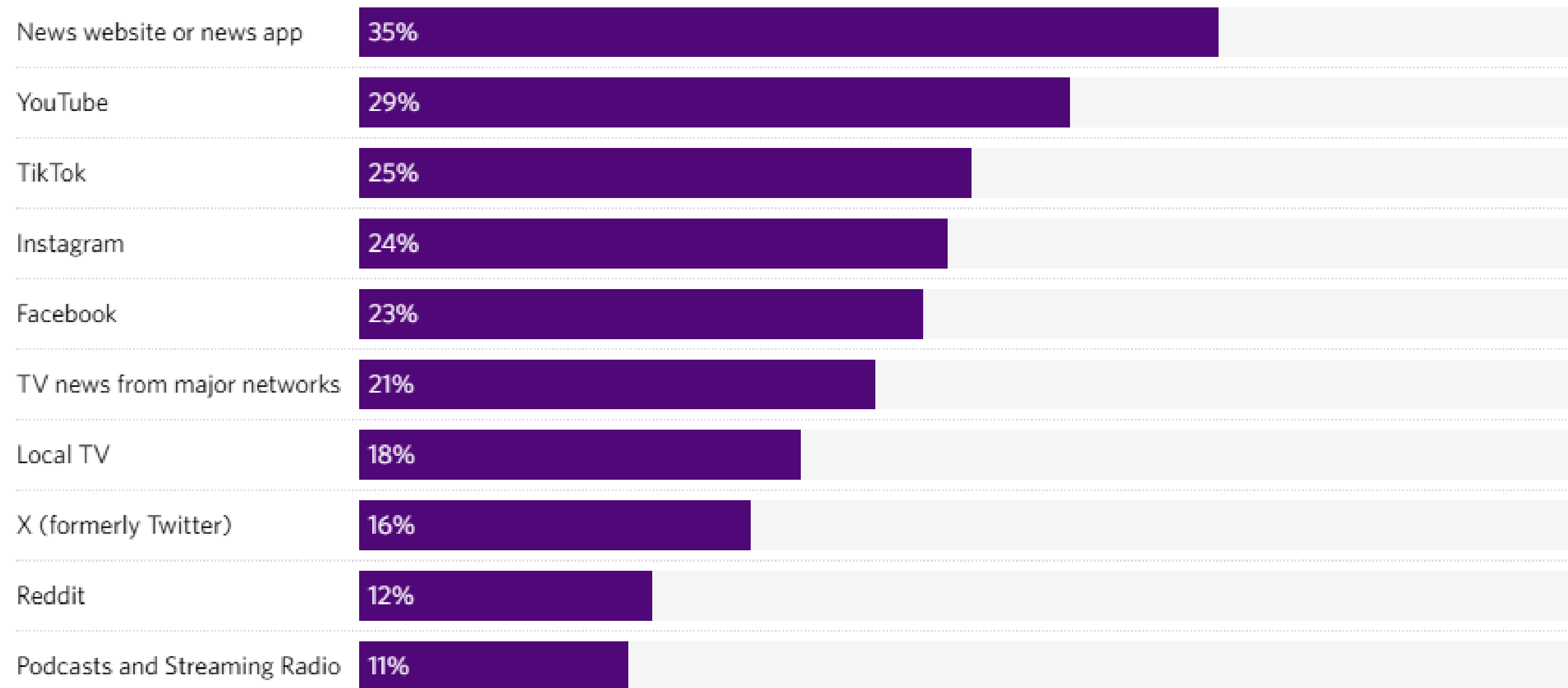


Our government is increasingly run by people who will not live [to] see the consequences of their implemented policies. As well as people who have never, or have forgotten what it’s like, to live as an average citizen with financial needs and pressures.

Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

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.



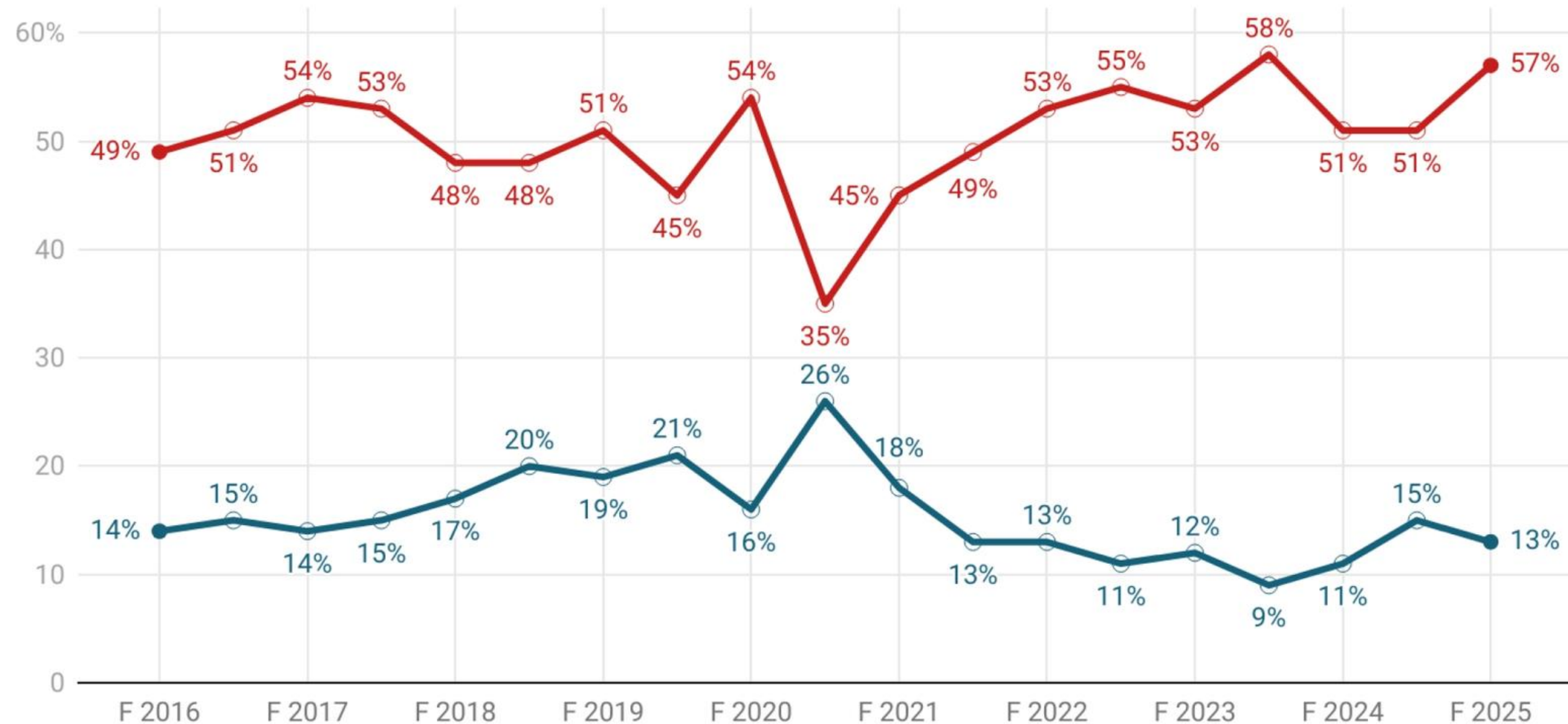
Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll

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.

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

Support the implementation of facilitative election policies in your state.

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

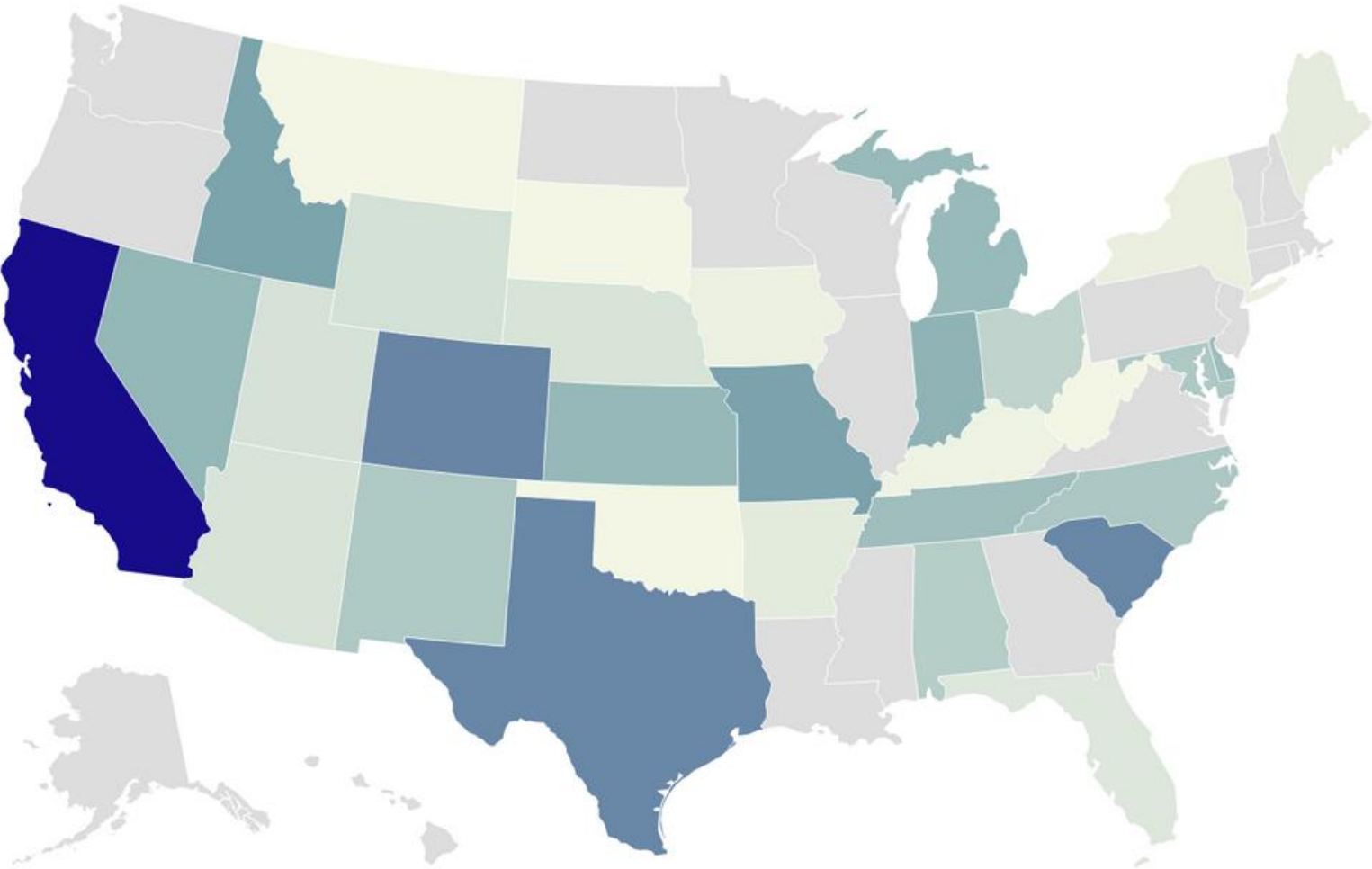
Work and partner locally: build trust with youth by connecting with those they already trust.

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

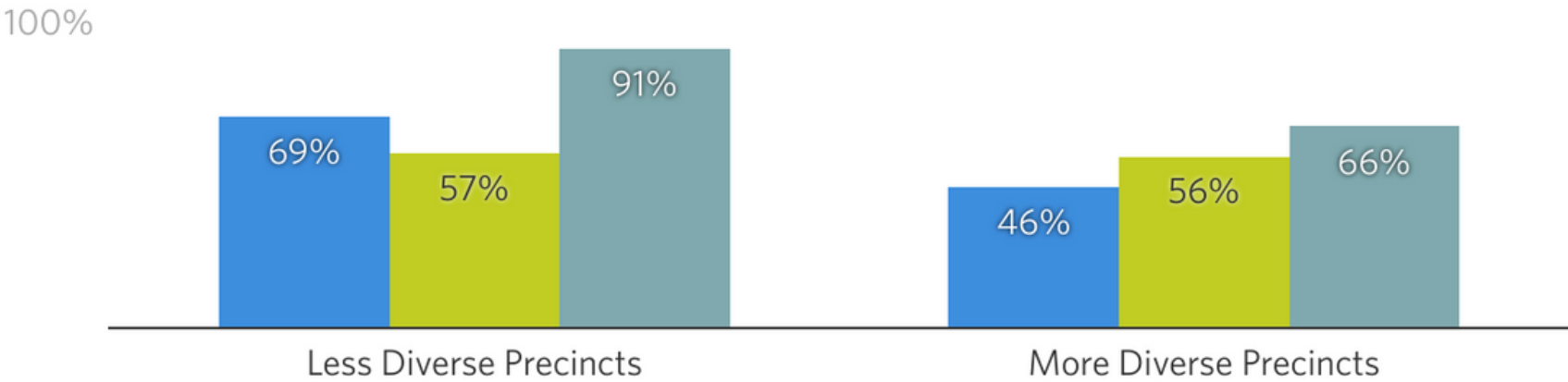


Note: No age-specific data available for states in gray

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.

0-1 Student Election Judges 2-3 Student Election Judges 4+ Student Election Judges



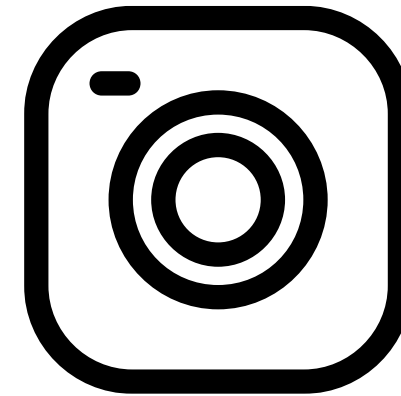
Notes: "More diverse" precincts are defined as those where 40% or more of the population is nonwhite.

Stay In Touch!



circle@tufts.edu

leela.strong@tufts.edu



@civicyouth



circle.tufts.edu



/ciclereasearch