



# INFLUENCING **YOUNG AMERICA** TO ACT

## **2022** YEAR IN REVIEW

Research By: Cause & Social  
**Influence**)))



# LETTER FROM **DERRICK FELDMANN**

## LEAD RESEARCHER, CAUSE AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Each year, social issue moments – short-term surges of individual actions inspired by cultural, political or social events – occur and change. In 2022, we saw moments that burst into the nation's consciousness: the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, igniting intense actions on both sides of the issue and dominating media coverage. We also saw moments revive social issue attention: a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, renewing the gun safety and mental health debates. Confirmation hearings for the country's first Black female Supreme Court Justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson, provided focus for racial discrimination actions.<sup>1,2</sup> Record-breaking heat and flooding around the world increased dialogue about climate change. And the U.S. midterm elections gave many the chance to highlight opposing positions between Americans.

Over the last three years of Cause and Social Influence research, the responses of young Americans (18-30) to moments like these seem to reflect the shared values of inclusiveness and support for each other's rights. Regardless of where they are politically and whether they support or oppose an issue or position, young Americans appear to care about the rights of others to hold an opinion different from their own.

As cause leaders, we must recognize that young Americans are not a monolith. We must accept that researchers, political leaders and media outlets do not always study all sides of an issue or explore all points of view. Stereotypes about this age group aren't being proven by behaviors. The best thing we can do is become a trusted source of the authentic, complete and unbiased information young Americans are looking for. In the end, the knowledge and opinions they develop now will shape society for years to come, and the causes and organizations that became their trusted sources of information will be far ahead of those that did not.

With great respect,



**DERRICK FELDMANN**

## SUMMARY RECAP

### Issues:

- Women's rights
- Climate change
- Mental health, Gun safety

### Actions Taken:

- Learning about issues
- Petition signing
- Product purchasing

### Movements:

- Abortion
- Inflation
- Black Lives Matter

## ISSUE SPOTLIGHTS

- Young Americans were divided on how the US should respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *(Spring 2022)*
- Almost half of young Americans wanted more gun control, with the remaining half split among wanting no change, lenient change or uncertainty. *(Summer 2022)*
- 64% of young Americans believed a pregnant person's right to have an abortion should be legally protected. *(Summer 2022)*
- More than two-thirds of young Americans said public gatherings (marches, protests, rallies) related to social issues are very or somewhat effective. *(Fall 2022)*

1. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/24/race-jackson-confirmation-hearing/>

2. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/racial-tension-political-opportunism-color-hearings-ketanji-brown/story?id=83662043>



## INTRODUCTION

Each quarter, Cause and Social Influence tracks the behaviors and motivations of young Americans on today's social issue moments and movements. This, the final report of 2022, presents findings from the final survey of 2022 alongside those from earlier waves in the year for easy comparison. The report also features notable data points on social movements and social movement leaders and findings from the final quarter's area of focus: measuring social movement success. See the previous 2022 reports at [causeandsocialinfluence.com/download-latest-research](https://causeandsocialinfluence.com/download-latest-research).

## METHODOLOGY

Cause and Social Influence researchers took a quantitative approach with online surveys fielded March 26-27, July 9-10, September 23-25 and December 14-15, 2022, of 4,000 young Americans (ages 18-30) (1,000 per quarter) – nationally representative samples based on census-projected ethnic and demographic composition. With the response rate of each survey, the data presented has a 95% confidence interval and 3% margin of error. Researchers asked respondents to self-identify their race/ethnicity and gender identity. Write-in answers and non-answers were accepted. Visit [causeandsocialinfluence.com/2022finalreport](https://causeandsocialinfluence.com/2022finalreport).

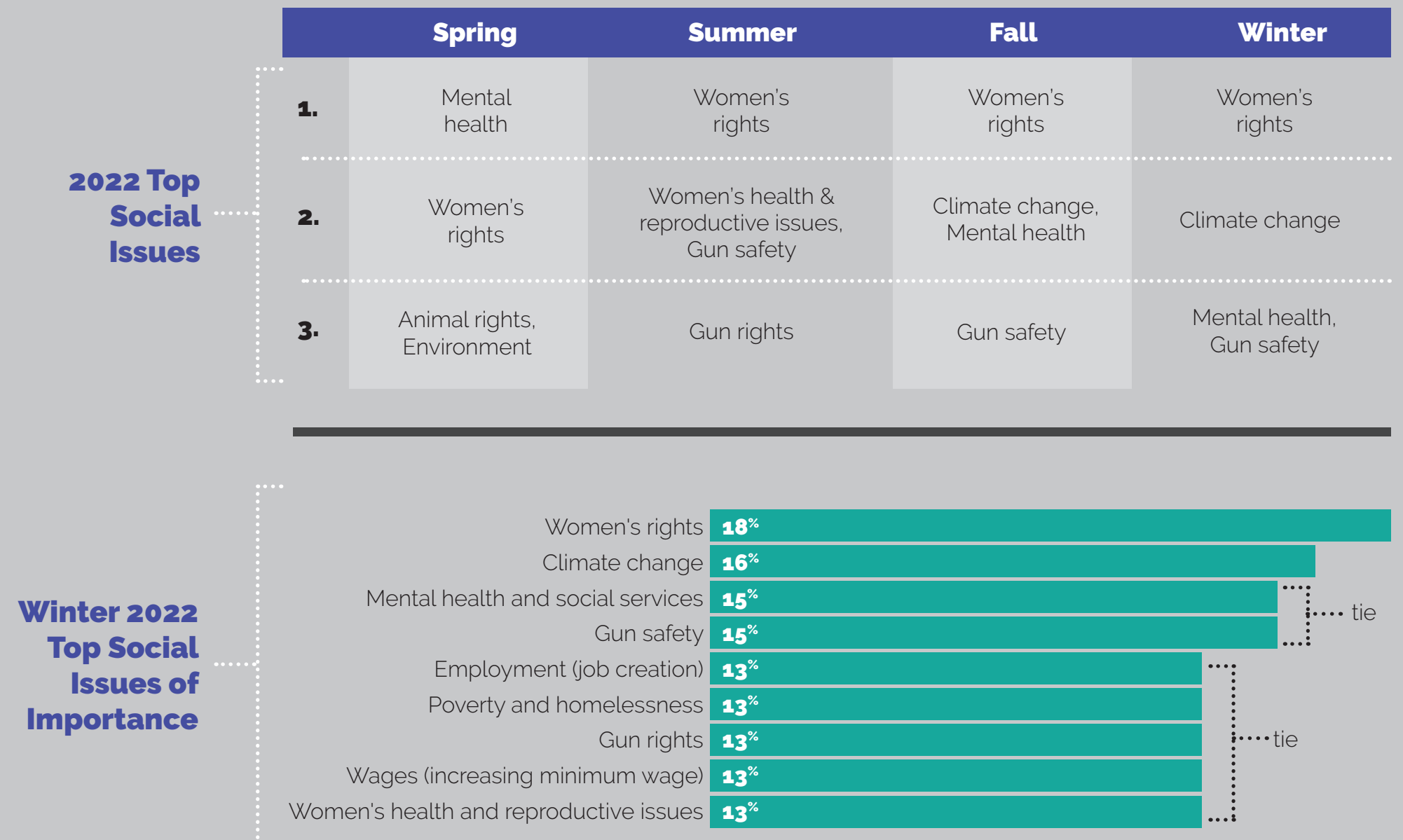
## RESEARCH TEAM

**DERRICK FELDMANN** / Lead Researcher  
**AMY THAYER, PH.D.** / Researcher  
**CASSIE EVARD** / Research Associate  
**CINDY DASHNAW** / Copywriter  
**TYLER HANSEN** / Graphic Designer

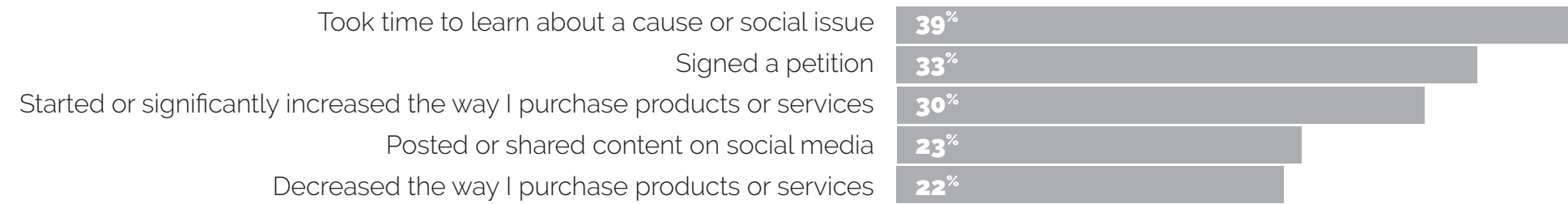
## SOCIAL ISSUES, ACTIONS AND MOVEMENTS

Concern for women's rights dominated 2022 for young Americans. The issue was already nearly tied for first place in the spring with mental health, and when the Supreme Court overturned *Roe* and *Casey* in June, women's rights, health and reproductive issues overtook the news and this cohort's attention. Interest in climate change made a big leap at the same time, pushing gun safety to the bottom of the top three.

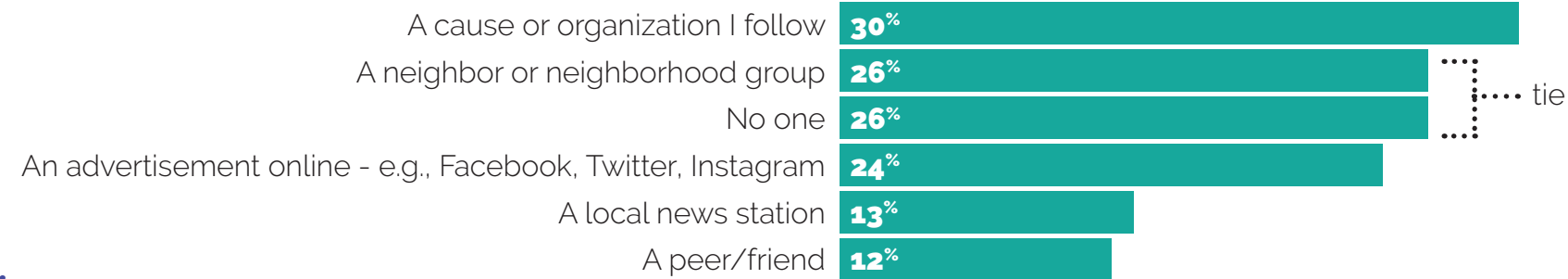
Young Americans remained devoted to learning about social issues and using their buying power to address them. Petition signing stayed popular, and causes/organizations continued to be the top driver of social issue actions.



## Top Actions Taken in the Last 30 Days

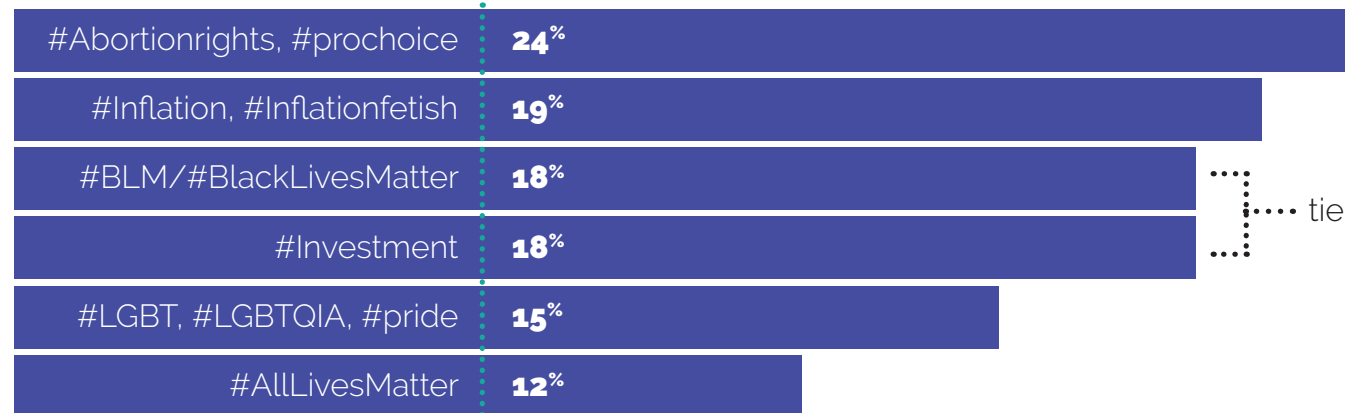


## Who asked you to perform the action?



**SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:** The summer's political climate saw actions taken to support women's movements supplant those for Black Americans; a similar jump in activity around inflation movements likely reflects a summer of high consumer prices and the highest Consumer Price Index since 1981.

## Top Movements and Hashtags Supported by Action in Last 30 Days



## OVERARCHING ISSUES, ACTIONS AND MOVEMENTS FOR 2022

### ISSUES:

Women's rights  
Climate change  
Mental health, Gun safety

### ACTIONS:

Learning  
Petition signing  
Product purchasing

### MOVEMENTS:

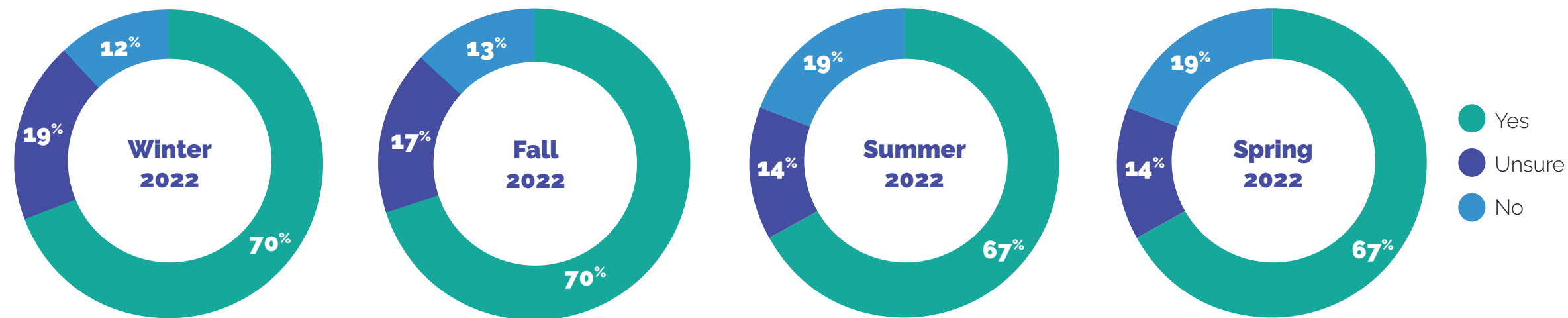
Abortion, pro choice  
Inflation  
Black Lives Matter, Investments



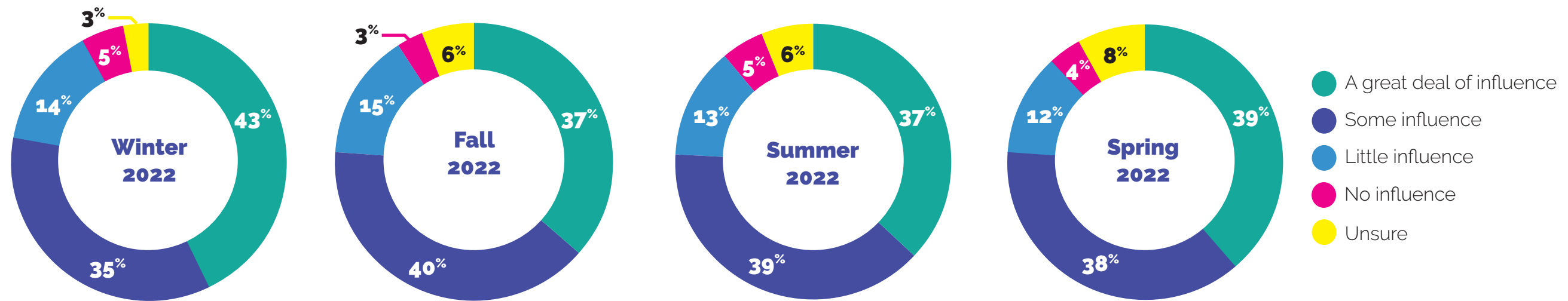
## EXPECTATIONS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT AND BELIEF IN CORPORATE INFLUENCE REMAINED STRONG FOR THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR.

About three-fourths of young Americans held high expectations for company involvement in social issues. Neither these expectations nor this cohort's strong belief in the potential for companies to influence social issues has wavered since March 2020.<sup>3</sup>

### Do you think companies or brands should take a stance on social issues?



### How much influence do you think companies or brands that communicate and share opinions of causes and social issues have on people's attitudes toward issues?



3. See "Consumer Behaviour and Expectations of Corporate Social Issue Engagement Can Contradict Each Other" for additional information. [skollcentreblog.org](http://skollcentreblog.org).

## ISSUE SPOTLIGHT

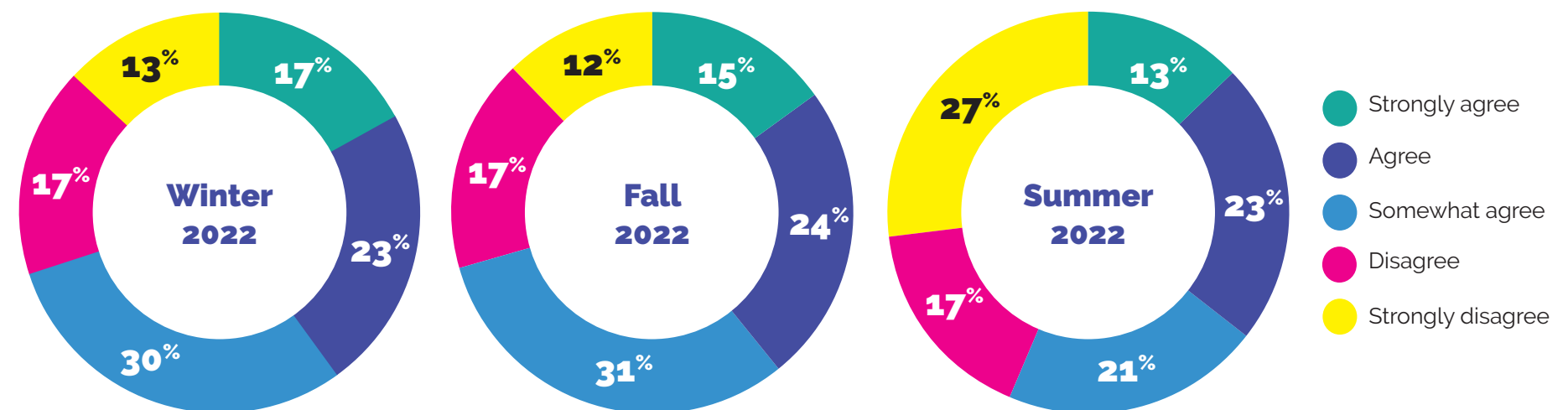
# PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN AND THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY

The upward trend in young Americans' assessment of how well President Joe Biden has kept his campaign promises stayed consistent throughout 2022, ending with 70% rating his performance positively. Even amid what the Associated Press called a "surge of hate crimes," including those targeting Black Americans,<sup>4</sup> respondents' opinions on how well Biden has addressed racial inequality, discrimination and social injustice toward Black Americans were higher than last year.

### THE COUNTRY IS ON TRACK AND SHOULD PRIORITIZE THE BUDGET/ECONOMY, IMMIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

Slightly more young Americans now think the country is on track than at any time during 2022 (as compared to pre-election 2020); the same is true for where the country will be a year from now. Young Americans want the country's priorities to be the budget/economy, immigration and climate change (unchanged since Fall 2022).

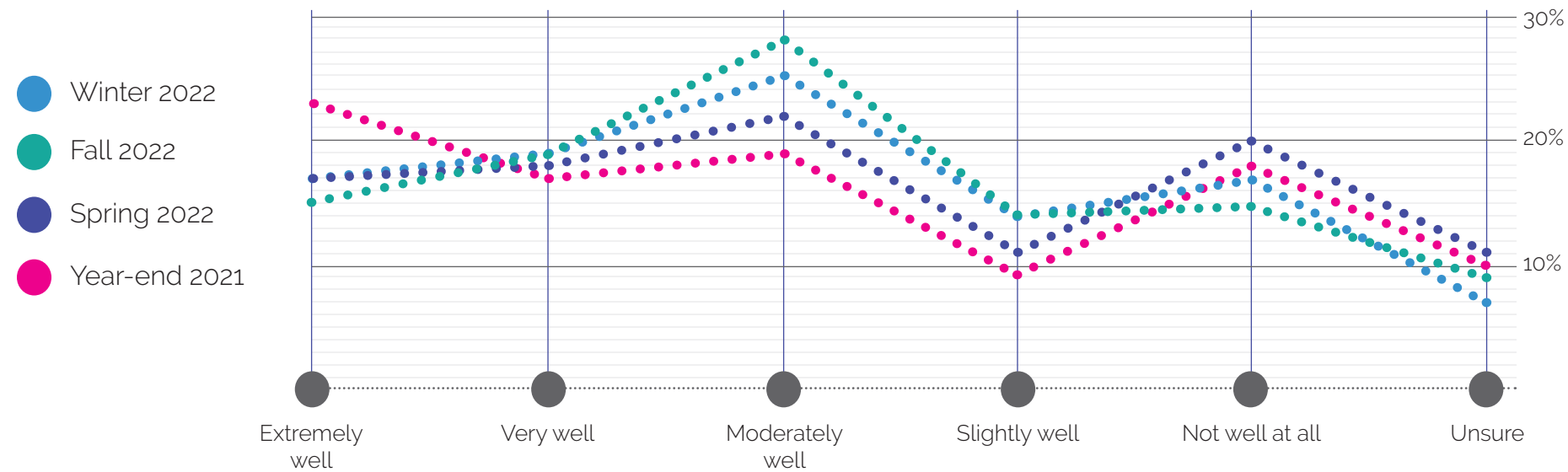
**How much do you agree with the statement, "President Biden has delivered or attempted to deliver on most of his campaign promises"?**



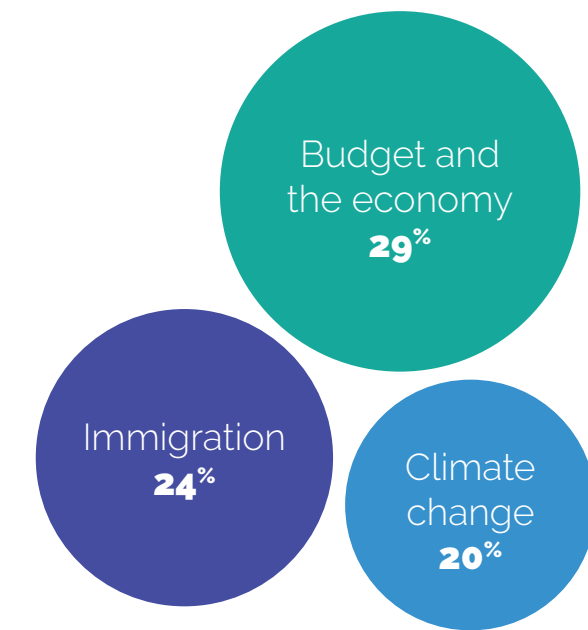
4. <https://apnews.com/article/abortion-ahmaud-arbery-shootings-race-and-ethnicity-racial-injustice-880a65c857bb137665867df6d7b1b5e4>



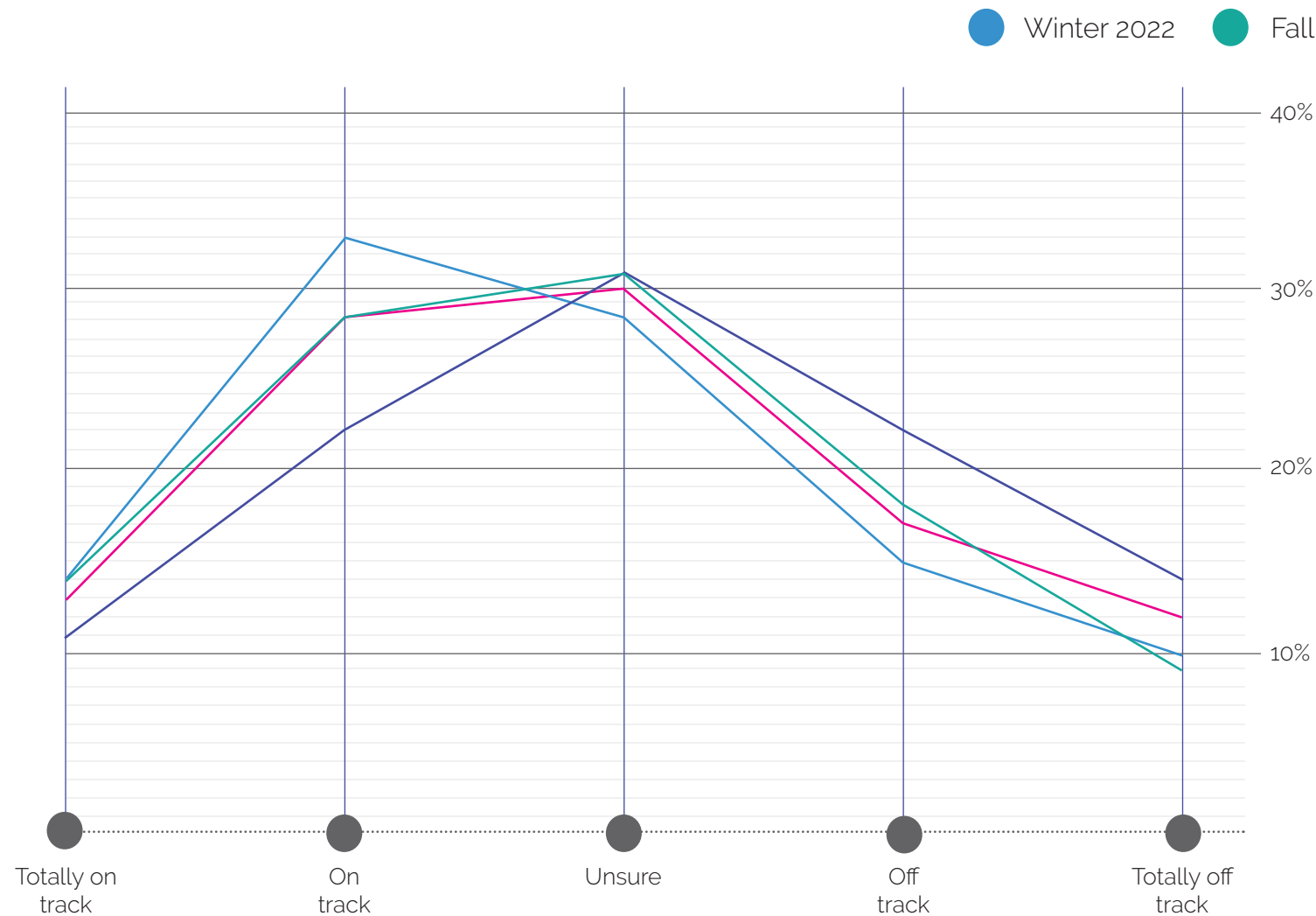
## How well do you think President Biden has addressed racial inequality, discrimination and social injustice toward Black Americans?



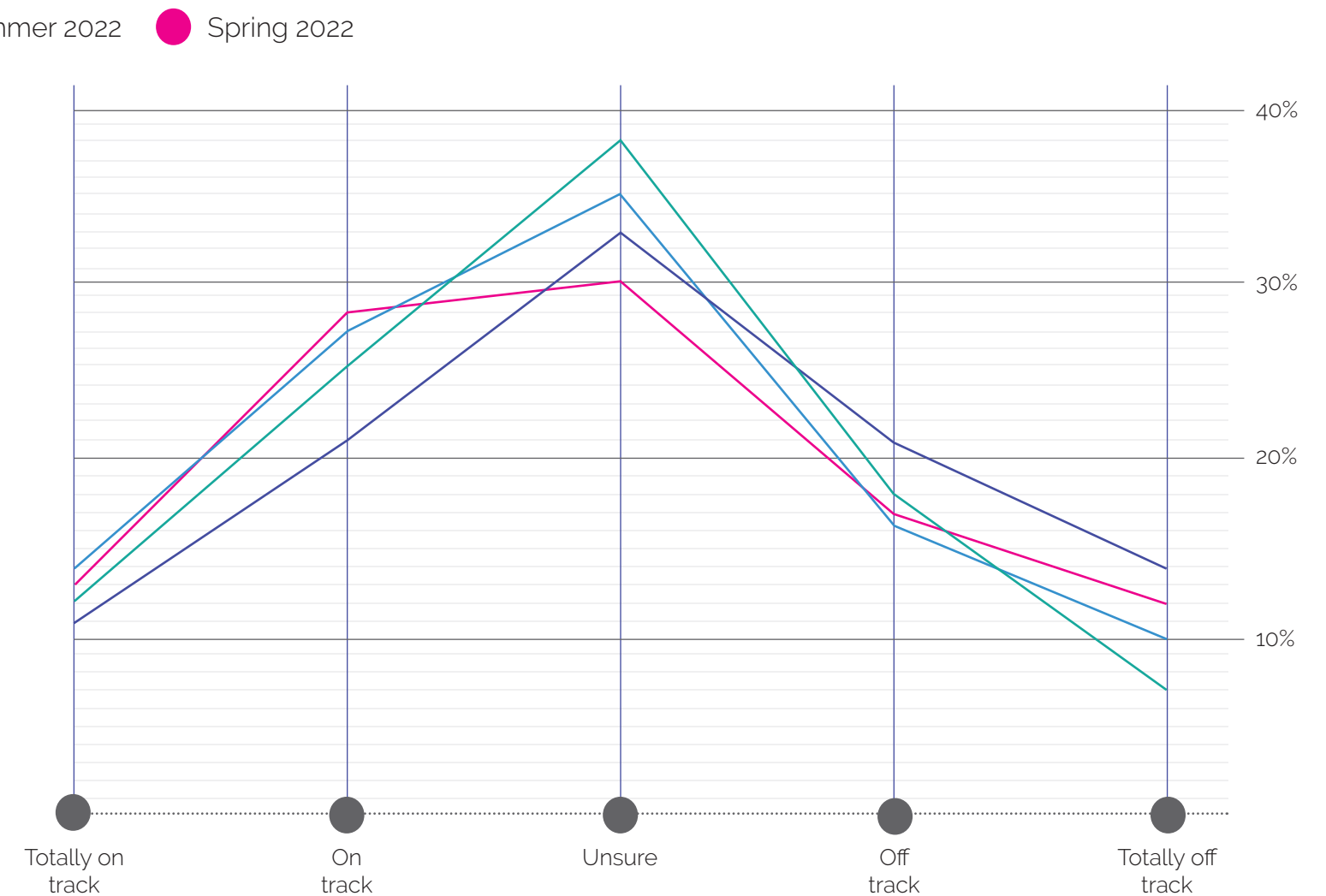
## Top three issues Biden administration should prioritize



## How would you rate the state of our country now as compared to where it was before the November 2020 presidential election?



## Where will our country be one year from now?



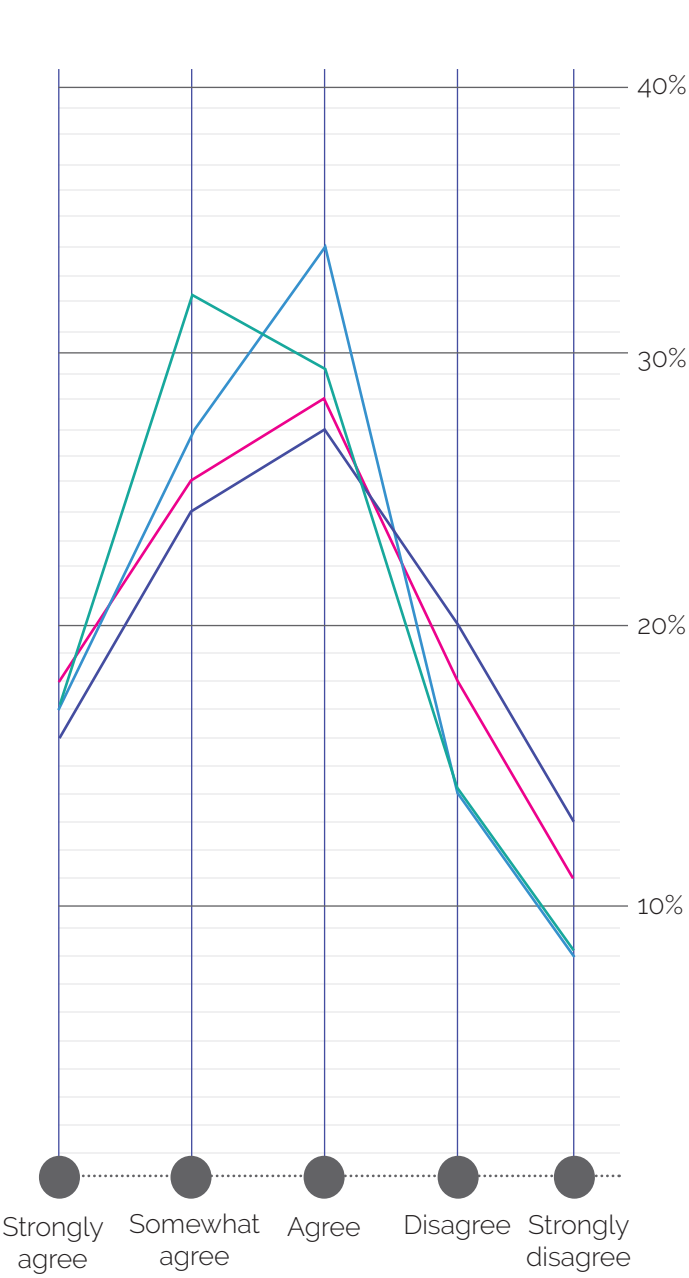
# ISSUE SPOTLIGHT

# GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL ISSUES

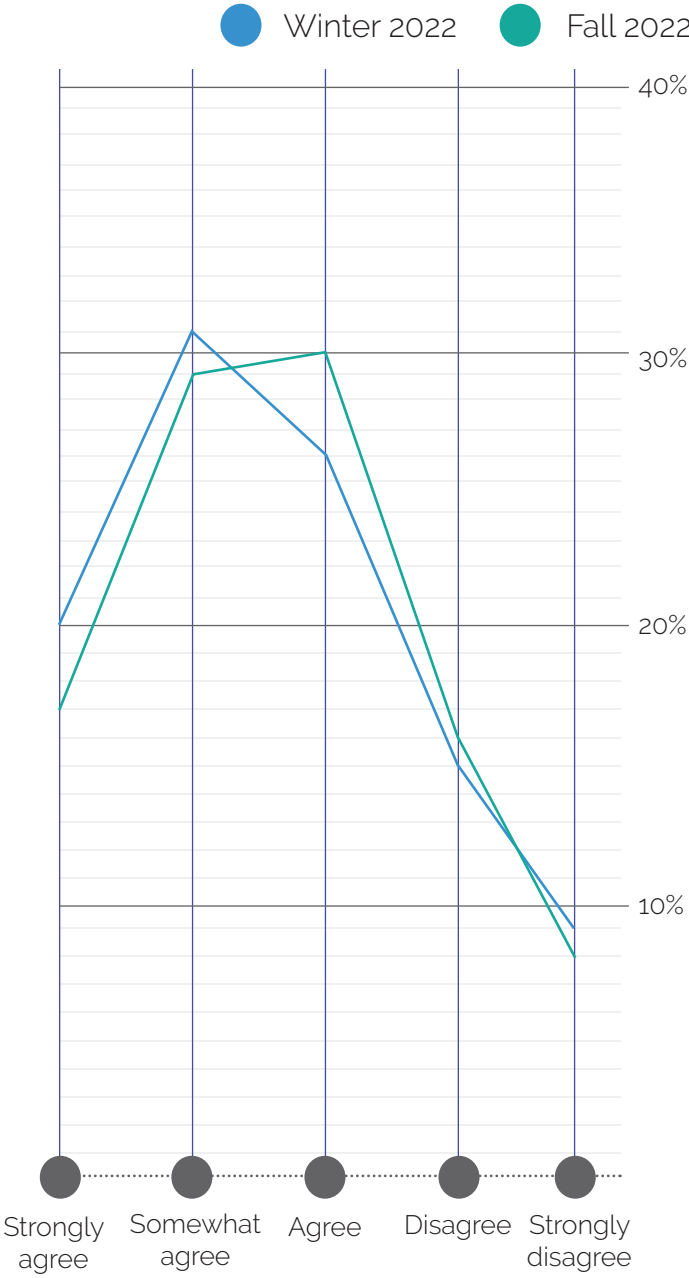
## YOUNG AMERICANS' OPINIONS ON GOVERNMENT IMPROVED SLIGHTLY AFTER MIDTERMS.

Generally, young Americans thought Congress, the Supreme Court and state and local governments were better by year's end (after midterm elections), at addressing the social issues of most concern, with Congress and the Supreme Court showing the largest gains.

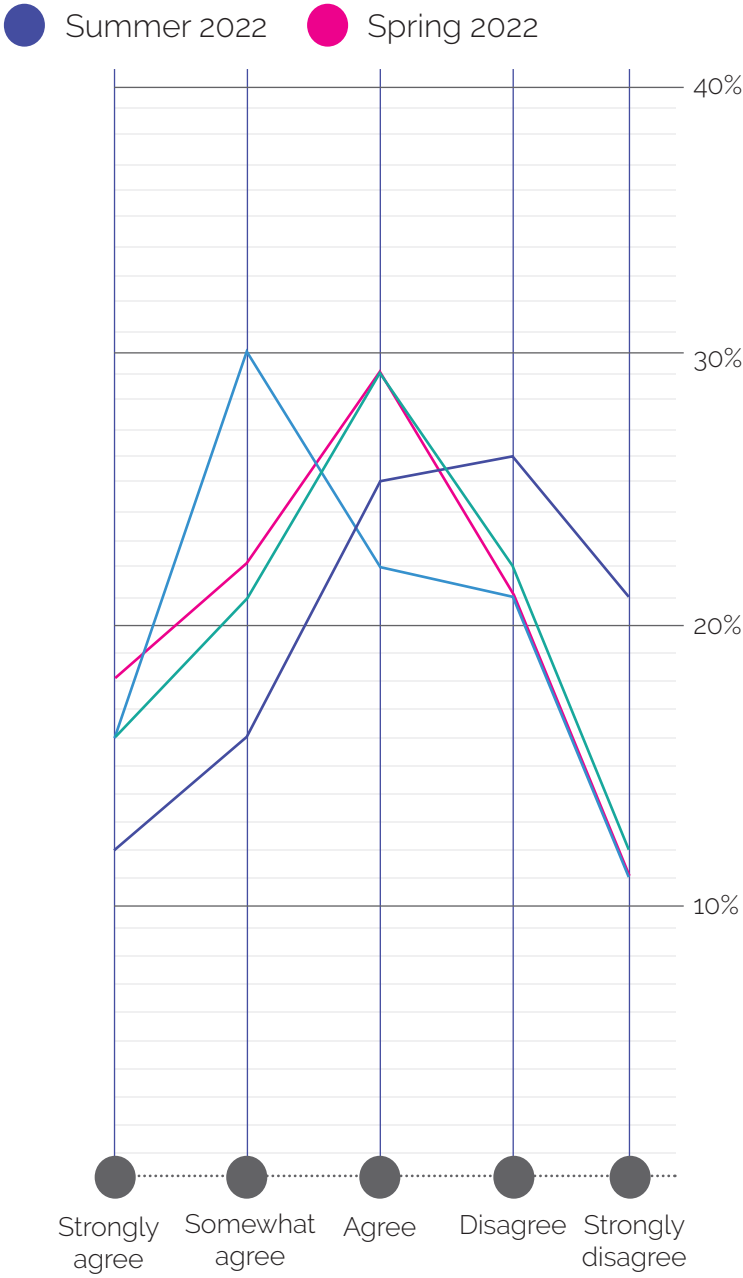
How much do you agree with the statement, "State government is addressing the issues of most concern to me today"?



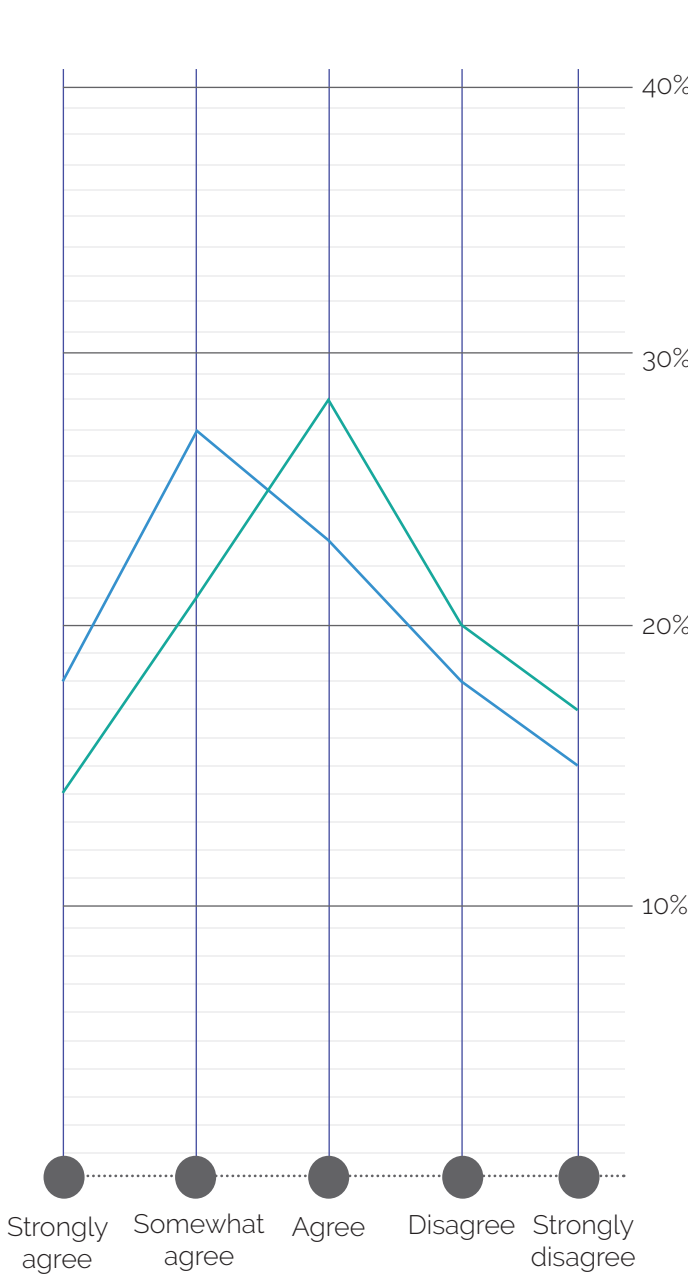
How much do you agree with the statement, "Local government is addressing the issues of most concern to me today"?



How much do you agree with the statement, "Congress is addressing the issues of most concern to me today"?



How much do you agree with the statement, "The Supreme Court is addressing the issues of most concern to me today"?





## ISSUE SPOTLIGHT

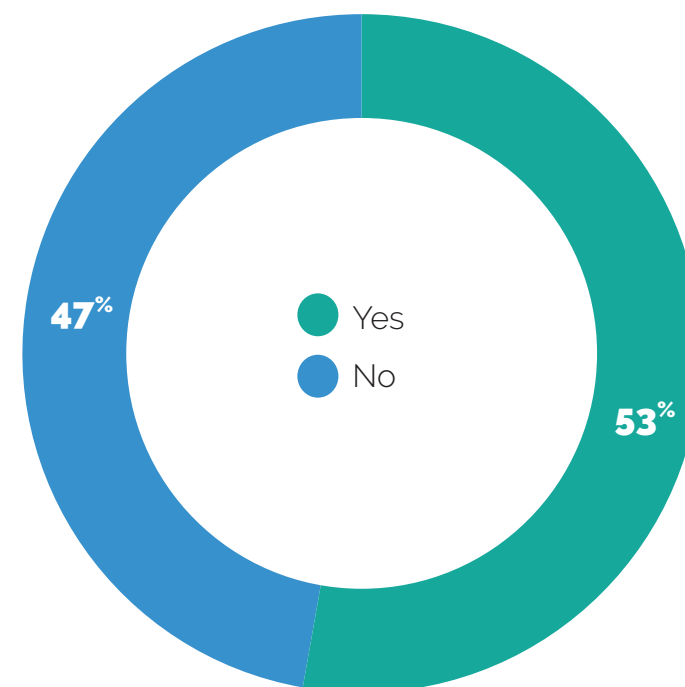
# MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Cause and Social Influence researchers sought to discover how young Americans measure a social movement's success – information that's key to a movement leader's ability to maintain engagement and support.

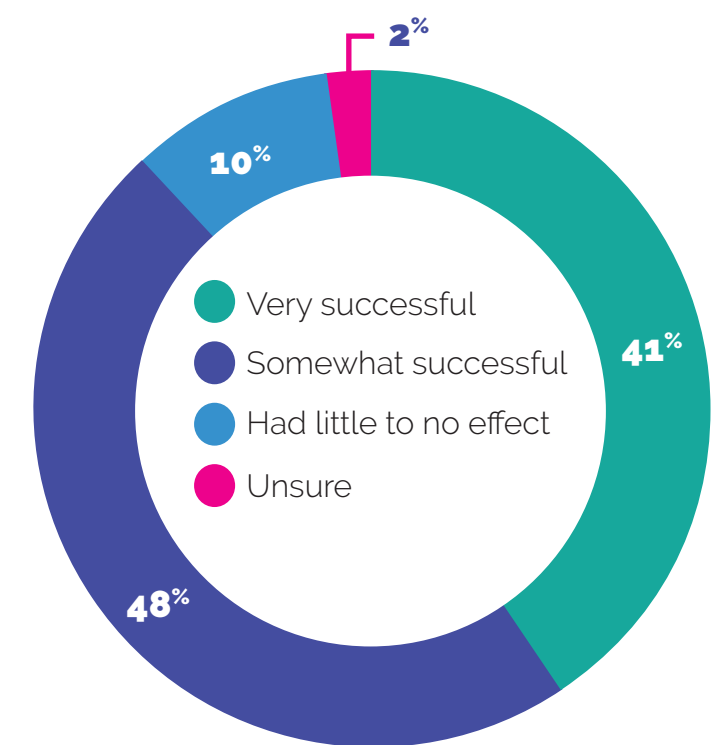
**SLIGHTLY MORE THAN HALF OF YOUNG AMERICANS BELIEVE THEIR SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION LED TO SUCCESS.**

Of those, they were fairly evenly split between assessing their actions as very and somewhat successful. Respondents involved in animals/animal rights issues were the most positive about their success.

**Have you participated in activities (marches, protests, rallies, petitions, speaking out, buying/not buying products, etc.) for social movements during the past three months that you think were successful?**

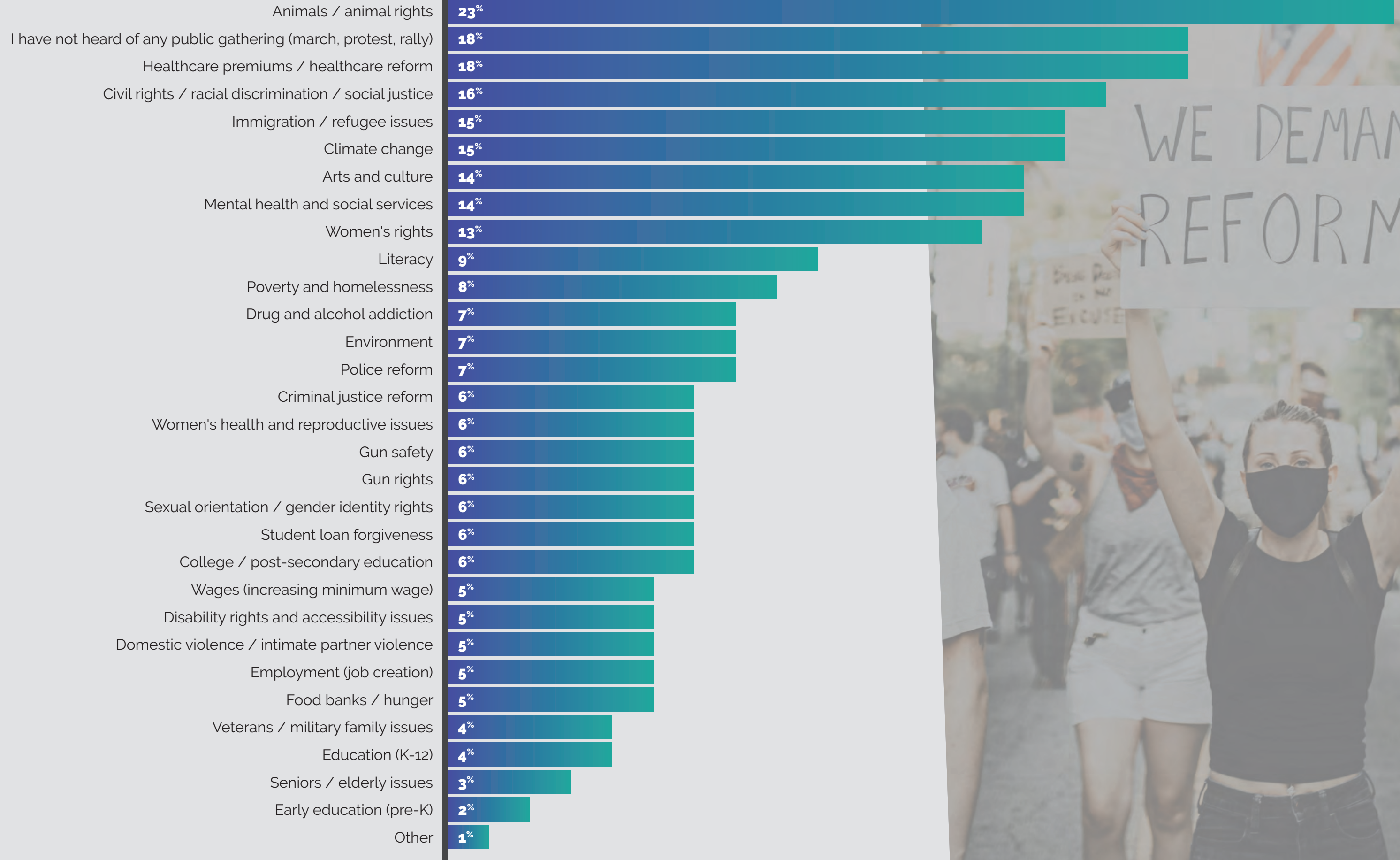


**How successful do you think those activities were?**





## What were the social movements for which you think your activities in the last 3 months were successful? (Select all that apply)

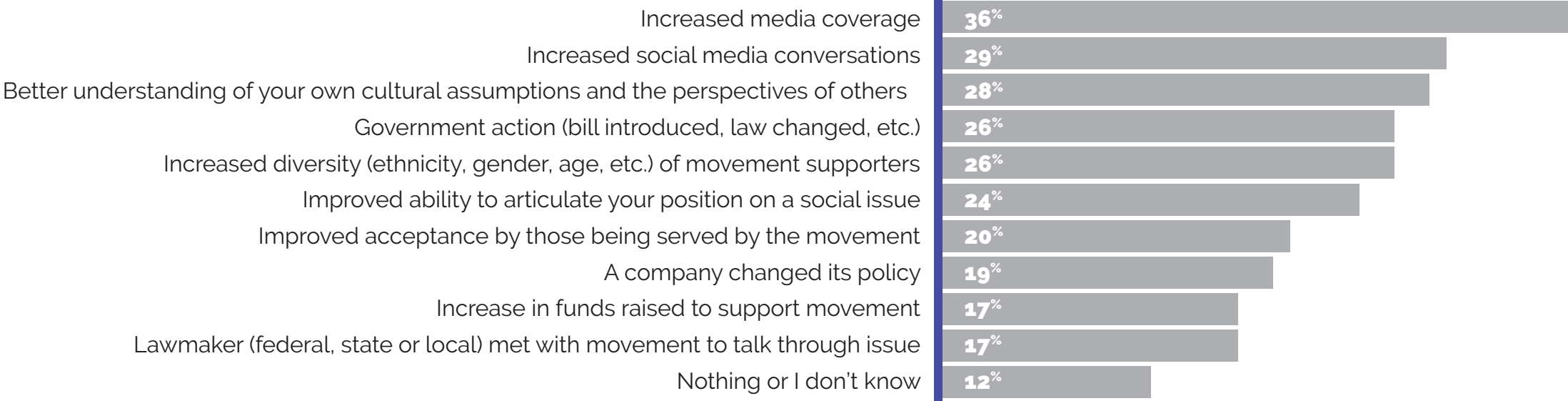




**MEDIA COVERAGE IS MOST-VALUED MEASURE OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT'S SUCCESS.**

Young Americans prefer to see increased media coverage for the issue over government action, company policy shifts and increased funding.

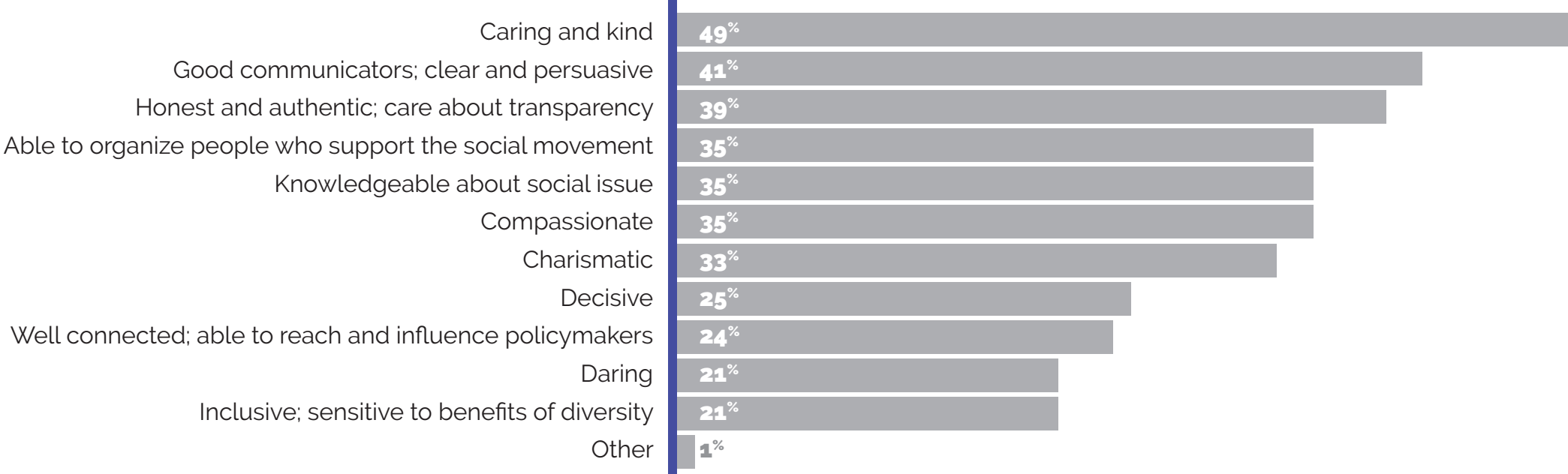
**Which of the following outcomes would indicate that actions taken on behalf of the social movements you care about were successful? (Select all that apply)**



**YOUNG AMERICANS RESPOND TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEADERS WHO EXHIBIT TRAITS OF KINDNESS, PERSUASION AND TRANSPARENCY.**

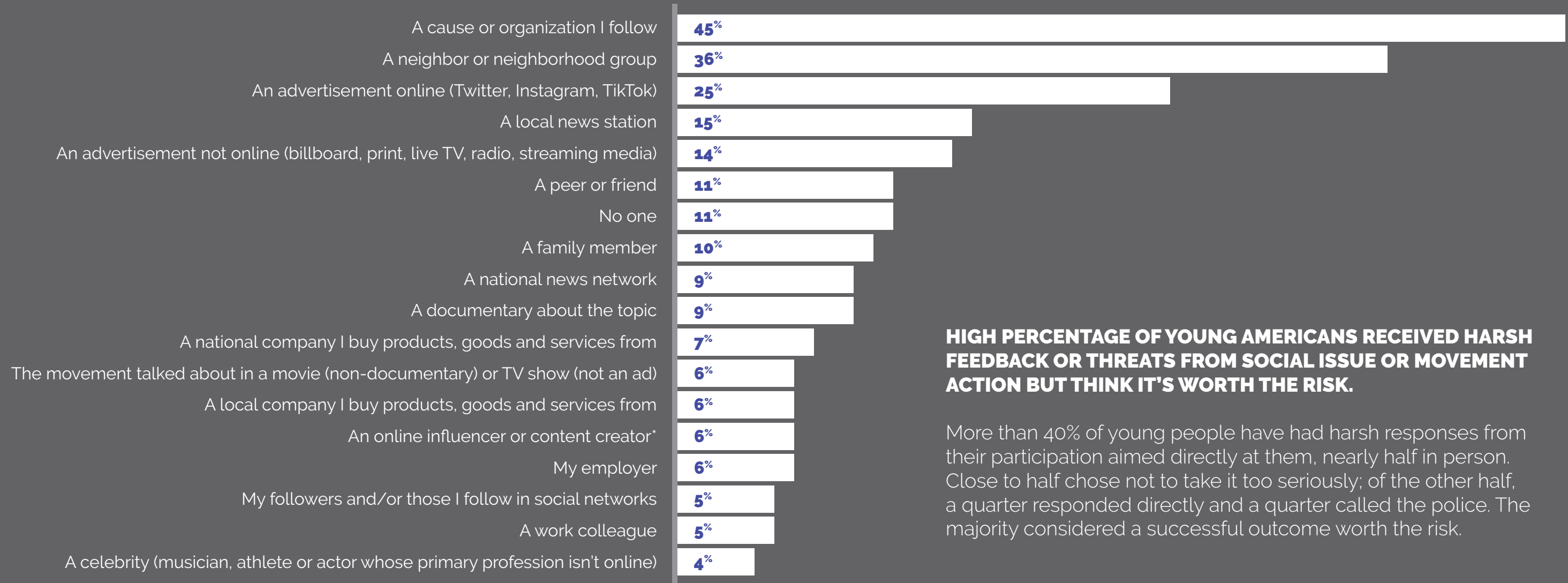
Since late 2021, young Americans have supported social issues in response to movements they follow. Among movement leaders, being well connected and inclusive was seen as far less important to success than authenticity.

**The most successful social movement leaders are: (Select all that apply)**





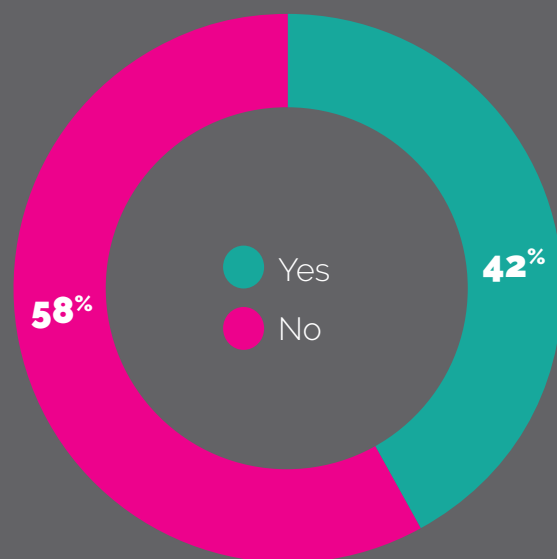
## Who asked or encouraged you to participate in the public gathering (march, protest, rally) for a social issue?



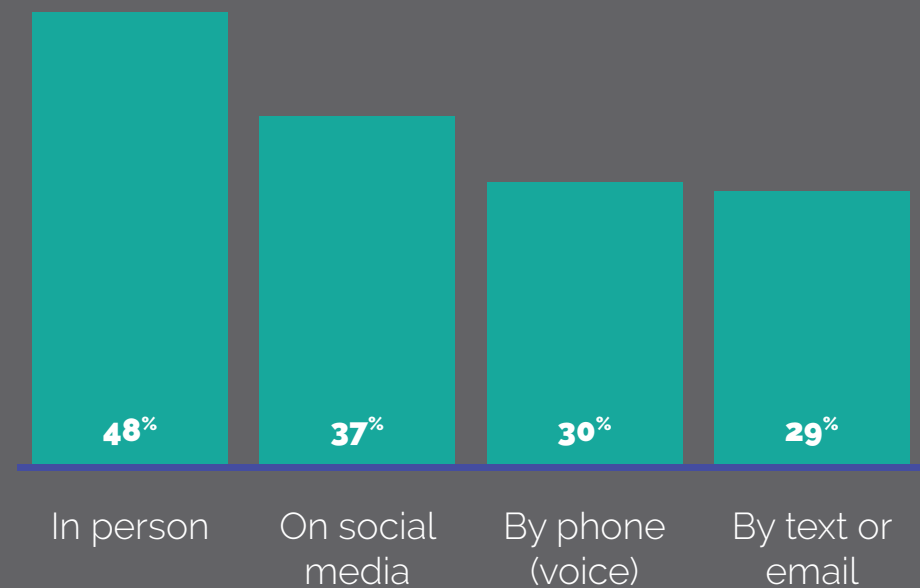
### HIGH PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG AMERICANS RECEIVED HARSH FEEDBACK OR THREATS FROM SOCIAL ISSUE OR MOVEMENT ACTION BUT THINK IT'S WORTH THE RISK.

More than 40% of young people have had harsh responses from their participation aimed directly at them, nearly half in person. Close to half chose not to take it too seriously; of the other half, a quarter responded directly and a quarter called the police. The majority considered a successful outcome worth the risk.

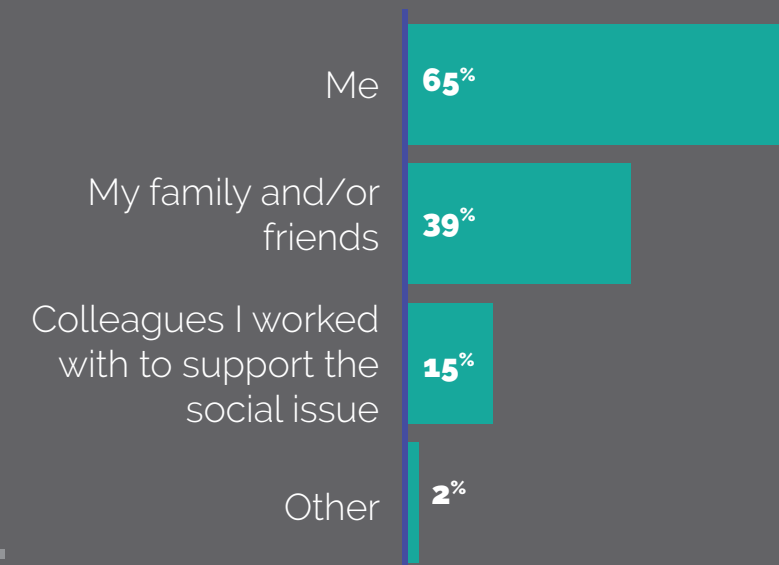
### Have you ever been threatened, harassed or received harsh negative feedback for participating in social movements important to you?



### How did you receive the threat, harassment or harsh feedback? (Select all that apply)



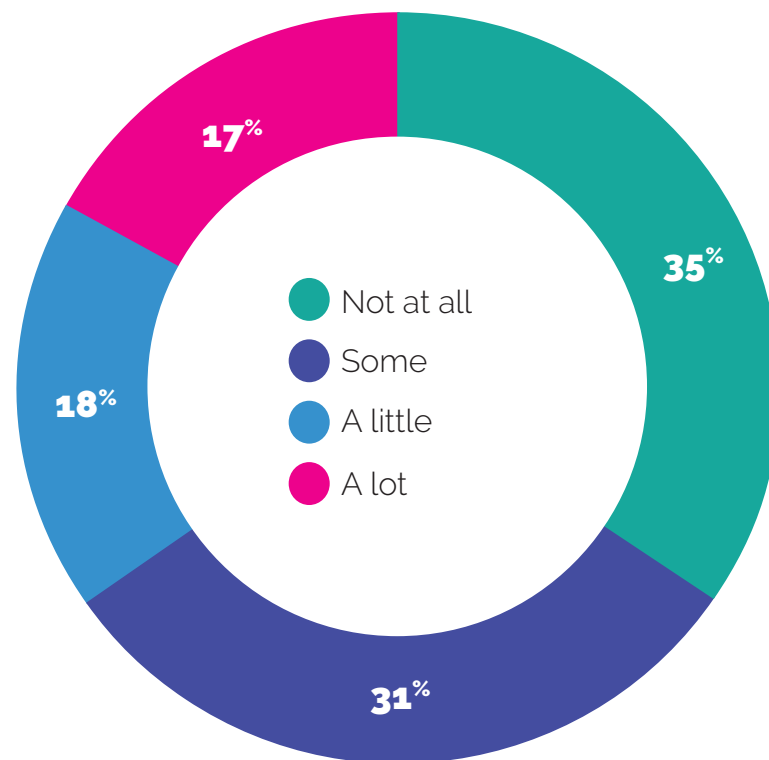
### Who or what was the target of the threat, harassment or harsh feedback? (Select all that apply)



\*A person, not a brand or group, who grew their audience/followers by creating content online and now uses their online presence as a primary profession



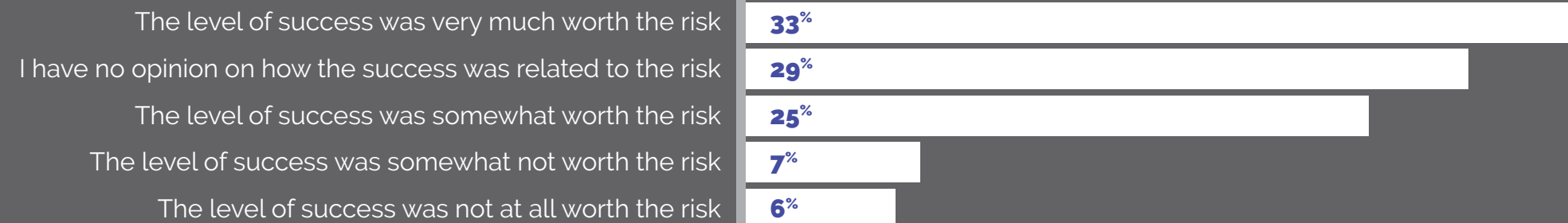
### How seriously did you fear danger from the threat, harassment or harsh feedback?



### What action(s) did you take in response? (Please select all that apply)



### What action(s) did you take in response? (Please select all that apply)



## CONCLUSION

# 2022 SUMMARY

- Concern for racial discrimination, high since 2020, dropped while concern for women's rights and reproductive health soared to and remained at the top.
- This group still prefers to gather more knowledge than to take any other action in response to a social issue moment or movement, continuing a multi-year trend.
- Young Americans hold high expectations of corporate social involvement in social issues and belief in corporate influence, continuing a multi-year trend.
- Governments and President Biden reflected higher ratings after the midterm elections than last year, with Congress and the Supreme Court showing the most gains.
- Slightly more than half of young Americans believe their social movement participation will lead to success, and they measure success by media coverage more than by government action, company policy shifts or increased funding.
- Despite almost half receiving harsh responses from their social issue moment or movement participation, most aren't dissuaded. They follow social movement leaders who exhibit traits of kindness, persuasion and transparency. They're looking for authenticity much more than being well-connected.

## LOOKING AHEAD.

What does this all mean for 2023? It means causes and organizations cannot rely on assumptions and past strategies if they want to resonate with young people today.

When Cause and Social Influence first began writing about millennials, researchers cautioned that popular assumptions at the time – millennials were entitled and uncaring – were untrue. Today, assumptions are being made about Gen Z and younger vs. older millennials, assumptions that shouldn't be considered for strategy when it comes to social issue actions. Young Americans today populate both sides of every social issue and comprise the large moveable middle still making up their minds. The best way to help your cause is to offer verifiably true and complete information to people who are eager to hear and act on it.





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## Key Findings

### Young Americans Ranked Women's Rights, Climate Change, and Mental Health/Gun Safety as Top Issues in Winter 2022, Making Women's Issues the Top Issue of Concern for the Year.

When the Supreme Court hinted they'd overturn *Roe* and *Casey* in a leaked May 2022 letter, women's rights, health and reproductive issues took hold of this cohort's (18-30) attention and kept it through the end of the year. Interest in climate change rose, pushing gun safety to the bottom of the top three.

Young Americans remained devoted to learning about social issues and using their buying power to address them. Petition signing prompted by causes was the top driver of social issue actions.

		Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
2022 Top Social Issues		Mental health	Women's rights	Women's rights	Women's rights
	2.	Women's rights	Women's health & reproductive issues. Gun safety	Climate change. Mental health	Climate change
	3.	Animal rights Environment	Gun rights	Gun safety	Mental health. Gun safety

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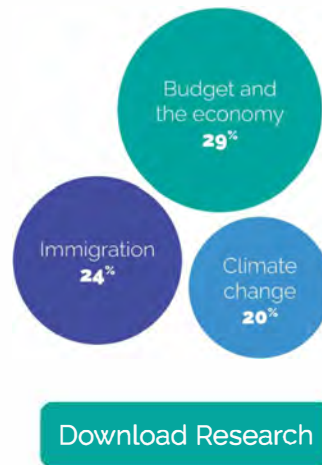
### The Country Should Prioritize the Budget/Economy, Immigration and Climate Change.

The upward trend in young Americans' assessment of how well President Joe Biden has kept his campaign promises stayed consistent throughout 2022.



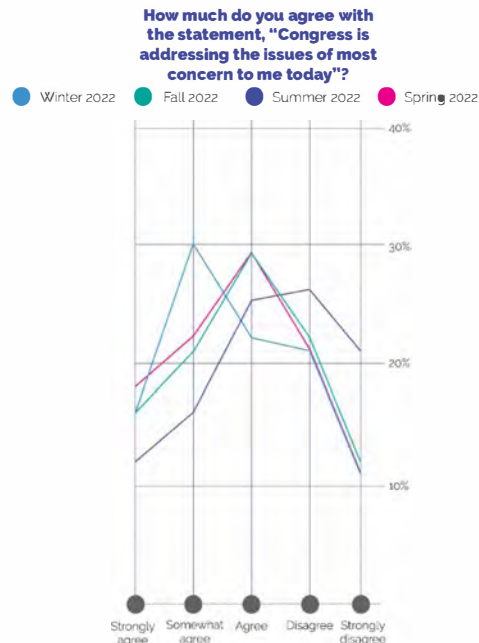
ending with 70% rating his performance positively. More young people think the country is on track and will be on track a year from now (compared to pre-election 2020). They want the country's priorities to be the budget/economy, immigration and climate change.

### Top three issues Biden administration should prioritize



### Young Americans' Opinions on Government Improved Slightly After Midterms.

Generally, young Americans thought Congress, the Supreme Court and state and local governments were better by year's end (after midterm elections) at addressing the social issues of most concern, with Congress and the Supreme Court showing the largest gains.



**Slightly More Than Half of Young Americans Believe Their Social Movement Participation Led to Success, and Media Coverage is the Most Valued Measure.**



Knowing how young Americans measure a social movement's success is key to a movement leader's ability to maintain engagement and support. More than half of respondents had participated in activities for social movements during the prior three months they considered very or somewhat successful.

Young Americans prefer to see increased media coverage for the issue over government action, company policy shifts and increased funding.

**Which of the following outcomes would indicate that actions taken on behalf of the social movements you care about were successful?** (Select all that apply)

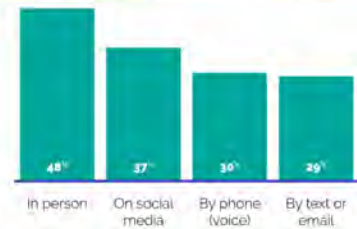


More than 40% of young Americans have been threatened, harassed or received harsh negative feedback for participating in social movements, yet most believe it's worth the risk.

**Have you ever been threatened, harassed or received harsh negative feedback for participating in social movements important to you?**



**How did you receive the threat, harassment or harsh feedback?** (Select all that apply)



[Download Research](#)

#### About the Cause and Social Influence Initiative:

The Cause and Social Influence Initiative, a research program of INFLUENCE|SG, delivers insights into how young Americans (18-30) are moved to action for today's social issues and movements by companies and causes. By analyzing the movements, moments and campaigns that engage young Americans, leaders of brands and causes can have a greater influence on the issues affecting the largest generation in America.

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