



EQUAL POWER

NOW

GIRLS, YOUNG WOMEN &
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year, as the world slowly emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, Plan International's State of the World's Girls report is focused on girls' and young women's political participation. The report is based on a large-scale survey of almost 29,000 girls and young women ages 15-24 from 29 countries spanning all regions, income levels and civic contexts. Additionally, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 94 girls and young women across 18 countries.

Girls are not a homogenous group and their opinions and experiences are as diverse as they are. They vary as individuals and according to location, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation and a host of other intersecting factors. The overarching aim of this research is to explore and understand girls' and young women's attitudes toward, and experiences of, political and civic participation and institutions across these many different backgrounds, looking both at where they differ and what they have in common.

"But as a woman I've noticed that ... you prepare very differently for participating in a political discussion than men and boys do. I feel that men and boys are encouraged just by nature to be in those spaces whereas as a female, you feel that space isn't made for you."

Anna, 23, Germany

FOR A FULL BREAKDOWN OF RESEARCH FINDINGS GO TO: [PLAN-INTERNATIONAL.ORG/EQUAL-POWER-NOW](https://www.plan-international.org/equal-power-now)

WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW

- How do girls and young women conceptualize politics, and which political issues do they prioritize?
- How do they view their political leaders, and do they feel properly represented within the political sphere?
- What influences their decision to participate in politics? What puts them off and what inspires them?
- What strategies and support need to be in place to enable them to become more actively engaged in the issues and campaigns they feel are important?

To make your voice heard and have your opinions, experiences and rights taken into consideration when decisions are made — often far away from the places and people that these decisions will matter to most — is crucially important: important as a right, important to inform policy and programs that seek to improve lives and opportunities, and also critical to promoting gender equality.

“When I hear the term politics, I mean politics in the sense of affairs of state ... I’m going to talk about it in the sense of business, state business. I can say it’s a way of governing. It’s a way of managing the state affairs.”

Minerva, 23, Togo

“People have no money to buy maize to eat. The girls whose house is next door to mine only eat once a day and have to beg for food.”

Alice, 16, Benin

Overall, girls and young women, when asked, defined politics as relating to the more formal affairs of state, but in fact their own political involvement was wide-ranging. Much of their involvement in political issues was at the local level. They were concerned about the environment, poverty and education and about political decisions that affected their communities and everyday lives.

Climate change, poverty, hunger and conflict are impossible to ignore and, as they get older, adolescent girls and young women are starting to become more politically conscious, more interested in social issues and increasingly aware of how decisions made, both locally and nationally, will have an effect on their lives.

“They think we’re too young to talk about it, that we don’t know anything ... because it’s a girl talking, and they’ll think it’s not a priority.”

Amanda, 15, Brazil




WHAT GIRLS ARE SAYING

IT IS CLEAR FROM THE RESEARCH THAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ARE **INTERESTED IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION** AT BOTH LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS.

97% 

of survey respondents **thought participating in politics** was **important**.

Girls and young women are politically active in many different ways, from **voting and signing petitions**, to **joining diverse youth movements** and **participating in school councils**.

83% 

of girls & young women surveyed had some **experience of participating** in or engaging with politics.

FEWER THAN



1 IN 3

girls agreed that **politicians & political leaders understand the views of girls & young women**.

63%

of survey respondents are **involved in some form of group or organization**, indicating significant levels of civic engagement & participation.

They are interested in issues that range from **poverty** and **unemployment** to the **environment, education** and **health**.

GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN DO NOT FEEL PROPERLY REPRESENTED:

11%

reported that they were **generally happy with their leaders' decisions** on issues they care about.

Respondents who identify as **LGBTQIA+** and those from **marginalized backgrounds** were found to hold **more negative views about political leadership**.

24%

of those who aspire to participate in politics can **see themselves running for political office**.

ONLY ABOUT

1 IN 5

girls have **personally been discouraged from engaging** with or participating in politics.

1 IN 10

girls think women are **not qualified** to be political leaders.

50%

of girls and young women believed that, in their **communities' view, it was acceptable** for girls and young women to engage in political activities.

GENDER NORMS STILL HOLD GIRLS BACK AS, FOR SOME OF THEM, DOES THE ABUSE AND HARASSMENT THAT THEY SEE FEMALE POLITICIANS AND ACTIVISTS BEING SUBJECTED TO.

Girls and young women know that political participation is important. However, they do not underestimate the challenges they face, with 94% of survey respondents recognizing the barriers in their way.

“If they make me close my eyes and imagine a political person ... I would have immediately thought of a man with a tie, because those are the images that are thrown at us ... we don’t immediately see a woman or a young woman. So, it’s hard for people to believe that a woman, and I insist that a young woman, can manage to be in these spaces. It’s a kind of behavior that we have learned from generation to generation.”

Aurora, 20, Ecuador

These barriers are structural and individual, ranging from lack of access to decision-making and a perceived lack of knowledge or skills, to ideas from others about what is appropriate for girls and young women. They are often condescended to, rarely listened to and though, in some countries, female representation in parliaments and on local councils has improved, there remains a lack of role models and, in many contexts, a widespread rollback of girls’ and women’s rights.

“Women leaders are underestimated. Many think they won’t be able to make it. That’s the challenge I see.”

Darna, 16, Philippines

Girls and young women have the right at local, national and international levels, **to take part in the decisions that affect their lives.** There are ways to make this happen.

FOUR ROUTES TOWARD GREATER GIRLS’ POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Decision-makers at all levels must institutionalize the meaningful and safe participation of girls and their groups through the adoption of fully resourced and accountable policies, strategies and frameworks.

National and local governments must ensure access to diverse and inclusive pathways toward political participation, including resourcing and strengthening civic education and leadership opportunities and facilitating girls’ inclusion in local decision-making processes.

Governments and social media companies must address the violence experienced by women politicians and girl activists by adopting a zero-tolerance approach to violence. The media can support by promoting positive images and by calling attention to violence experienced in both online and offline spaces.

United Nations, governments and civil society should recognize girls’ vital and distinct role in civil society and provide accessible resources so that girls’ organizations are resilient and sustainable in the face of crises and external threats.

Girls and young women, in all their diversity, **need all the support they can get to organize and mobilize to ensure that they, and their organizations, are fully equipped to play their part in the future of their communities and countries.**

“I won’t be afraid if I’m a part of it, because of course there are many of us. It’s hard if I do it alone.”

Rosamie, 16, Philippines

THE STATE OF THE
WORLD’S GIRLS

2 0 2 2

STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS 2022

U.S. fact sheet

This country fact sheet presents key country-specific findings from the Plan International survey for the 2022 State of the World's Girls report. For the global analysis, qualitative findings and details on the methodology, please refer to the [technical report](#). This document is for internal use only. If you have any questions about this fact sheet please email alison.wright@plan-international.org, aisling.corr@plan-international.org or karin.diaconu@plan-international.org.

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HOW TO READ AND USE THE FACT SHEET INFORMATION

Structure and content

This fact sheet follows the same structure as the State of the World's Girls 2022 global technical report. It includes summary statistics applicable to your country. To help contextualize these, a comparison to the findings of the global technical report is also included.

Understanding limitations and how to interpret the data

It is important to note that limitations apply both to the data within the global report and the conclusions that can be drawn from it, as well as individual country-level data. Below, the most important notes to be considered are summarized:

1. Consider the answer options of the question you wish to interpret carefully

Limitation 1: Some of the survey questions included mutually exclusive answer options: e.g., allowing respondents to say “none of the above apply.” For these questions, the percent corresponding to the number of respondents choosing the “none” or other relevant option is presented and the remaining percentages are calculated based on the number of respondents who do express a view. This may mean that the sample of respondents from which relevant percentages corresponding to other types of answer options are calculated is at times lower than 1,000.

It is important to note that those respondents who choose “none” or similar options are not comparable to the remaining respondents. For example, respondents choosing “none” may be in a hurry or simply wish to skip the question, or they may feel uncomfortable about the other answer options but not have an alternative best-answer choice. As such, no inferences can be made about the respondents choosing these “none” answer options.

Limitation 2: Some of the survey questions did not allow for “other” or “none” type responses: e.g., in one question, respondents were asked to rate how they feel about specific statements about their political leaders, on a scale of 1-5. It is important to note that respondents may have felt uncomfortable with having to choose an answer option and may have therefore been likelier to choose the average answer option.

2. Do not make claims of generalizability

Limitation: The survey data is not nationally representative. While the sample for the survey attempted to be representative of underlying populations as far as possible, given that the companies are likeliest to have sampled wealthier and higher educated segments of society (who have access to the internet and phone), findings cannot be generalized.

3. Social desirability bias may have impacted survey findings: e.g., it is likely girls and young women feel they should report positive views of leaders, particularly in regions where voicing negative views may be discouraged.

OVERVIEW OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

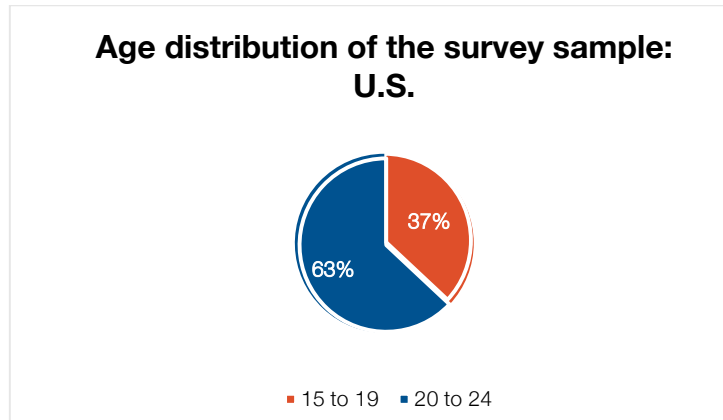
Regions: In the U.S., 1,098 girls and young women participated in the survey.

Table 1: Regional distribution of the sample

State/territory	Number of respondents	%	State/territory	Number of respondents	%
Alabama	21	2%	Oregon	10	1%
Alaska	5	0%	Pennsylvania	47	4%
Arizona	26	2%	Rhode Island	3	0%
Arkansas	19	2%	South Carolina	21	2%
California	128	12%	Tennessee	30	3%
Colorado	16	1%	Texas	81	7%
Connecticut	9	1%	Utah	10	1%
Delaware	6	1%	Vermont	1	0%
District of Columbia	7	1%	Virginia	21	2%
Florida	90	8%	Washington	21	2%
Georgia	47	4%	West Virginia	9	1%
Hawaii	1	0%	Wisconsin	17	2%
Idaho	6	1%	Puerto Rico	1	0%
Illinois	35	3%	U.S. Virgin Islands	1	0%
Indiana	22	2%			
Iowa	9	1%	Total	1,098	100%
Kansas	9	1%			
Kentucky	18	2%			
Louisiana	18	2%			
Maine	2	0%			
Maryland	23	2%			
Massachusetts	18	2%			
Michigan	34	3%			
Minnesota	21	2%			
Mississippi	13	1%			
Missouri	21	2%			
Montana	2	0%			
Nebraska	5	0%			
Nevada	9	1%			
New Jersey	28	3%			
New Mexico	4	0%			
New York	69	6%			
North Carolina	32	3%			
Ohio	39	4%			
Oklahoma	13	1%			

Age: The surveyed girls and young women are between 15 and 24 years old. The majority (63%) are ages 20-24.

Figure 1: Age distribution of the sample, based on 1,098 total responses



Residence: The majority (68%) of survey participants (743) are from urban areas, 204 (19%) are from rural areas and 39 (4%) identify as living in an informal settlement or slum.

Intersectional characteristics:

- 30% identify as LGBTIQIA+.
- 21% identify as belonging to a racial or ethnic minority.
- 10% identify as belonging to a religious minority.
- 10% identify as having a disability.
- 4% identify as a displaced person.
- 3% identify as a refugee.
- 36% identify as none of the above.
- 9% preferred not to say.

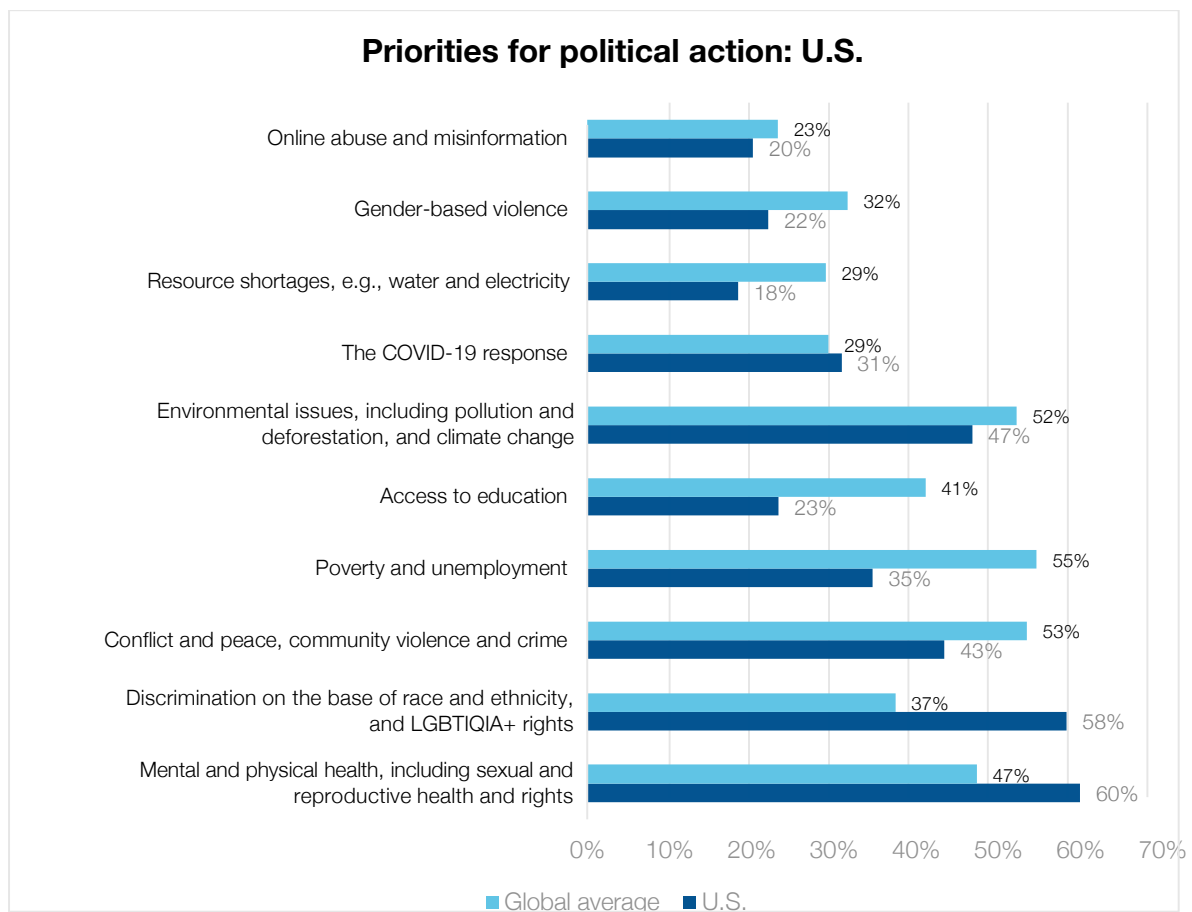
PRIORITIES FOR POLITICAL ACTION

Survey respondents were asked to identify five priorities for political action among 15 options.¹ Globally, only 3% of girls did not identify any of the listed issues as priorities for political action; in the U.S., this figure was higher at 11%.

Of those who did select issues from the list, the top priorities for political action among girls and young women globally were: poverty and unemployment (55%); conflict and peace, community violence and crime (53%); environmental issues including pollution and climate change (52%); mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (47%); and access to education (41%).

While there was some overlap with the top global priorities, the priorities for political action among girls and young women in the U.S. who selected an issue differed from the global average. The top issues were mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (60%); discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity and LGBTIQIA+ rights (58%); environmental issues, including pollution and deforestation, and climate change (47%); conflict and peace, community violence and crime (43%); and poverty and unemployment (35%). The issues that received the fewest votes were resource shortages (18%); online abuse and misinformation (20%); and gender-based violence (22%).

Figure 2: What do girls and young women identify as priorities for political action?



Based on 976 responses.

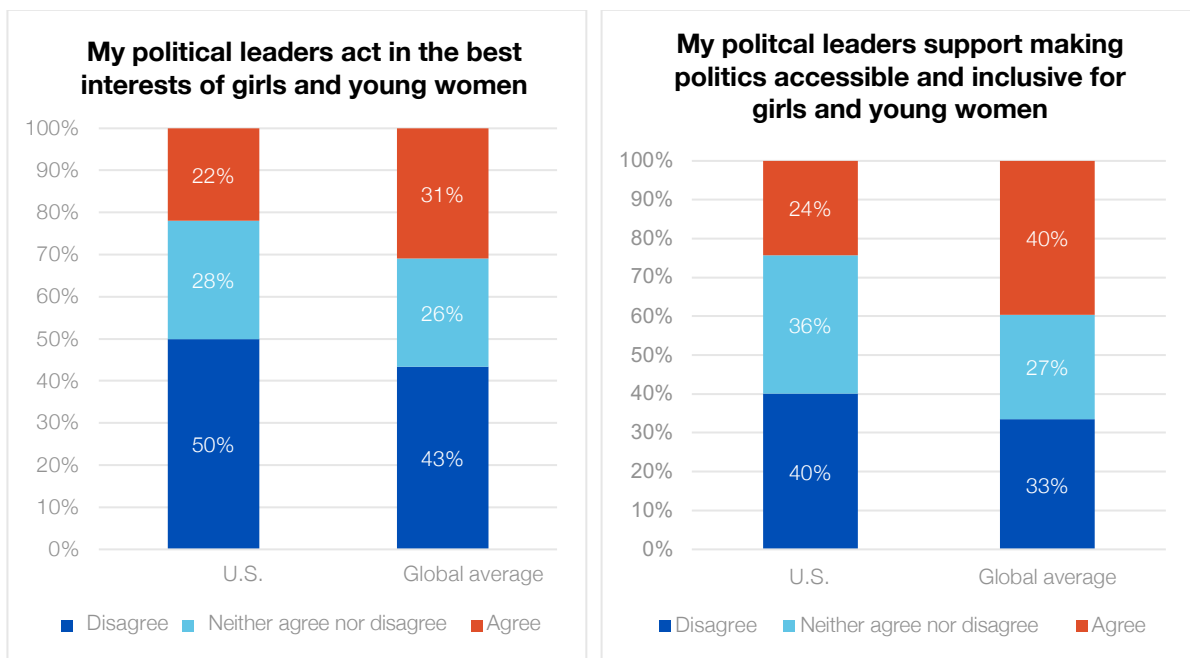
¹ The 15 options were grouped for the purposes of analysis.

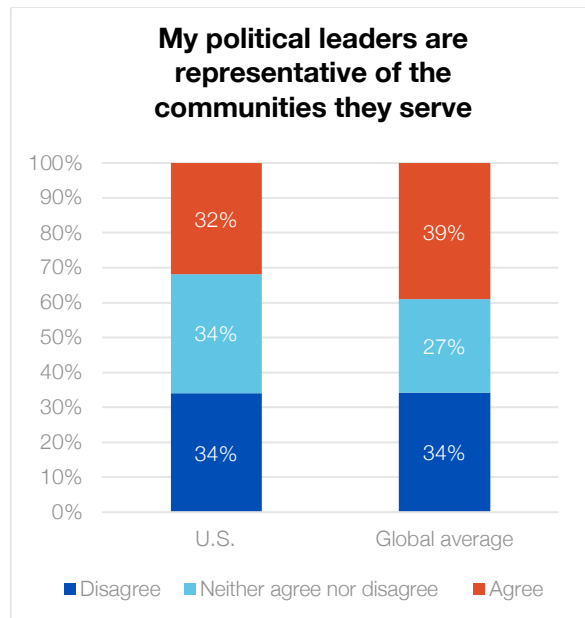
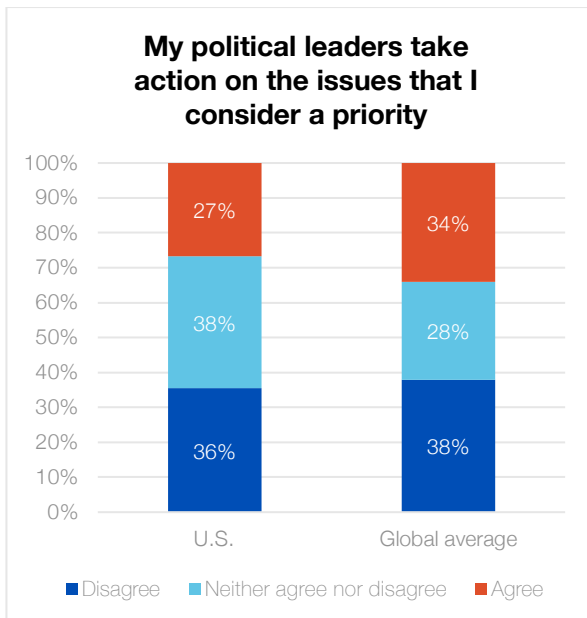
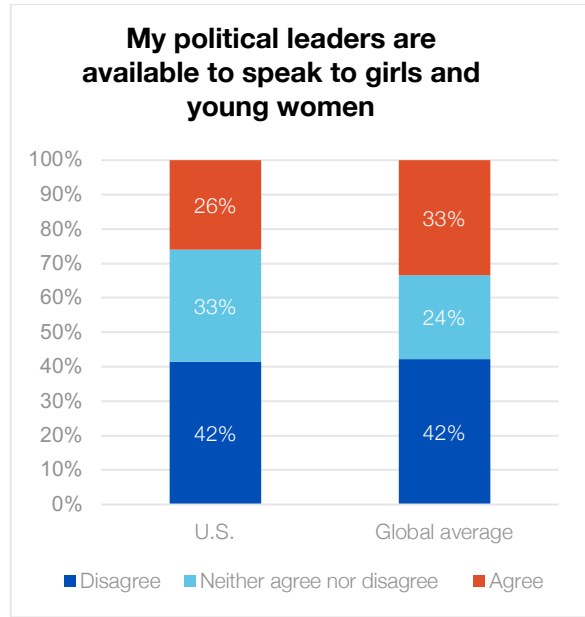
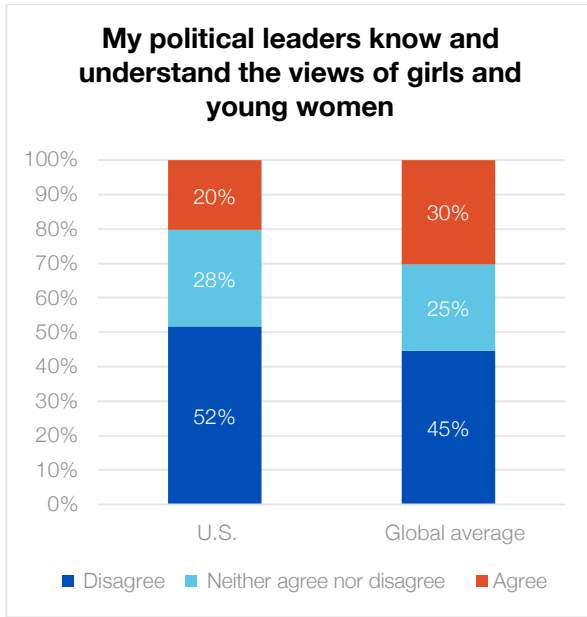
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION

Perceptions of political leaders

Globally, a mixed picture emerged from the survey in relation to girls' and young women's perceptions of political leaders. In the U.S., perceptions of political leaders were overall more negative than the global average. A higher proportion of girls and young women disagreed with the positive statements about political leaders and a smaller proportion agreed. For example, 52% of respondents in the U.S. disagreed that political leaders know and understand the views of girls and young women (compared to 45% globally), and 50% disagreed that political leaders act in the best interests of girls and young women (compared to 43% globally).

Figure 3: Girls' and young women's perceptions of political leaders





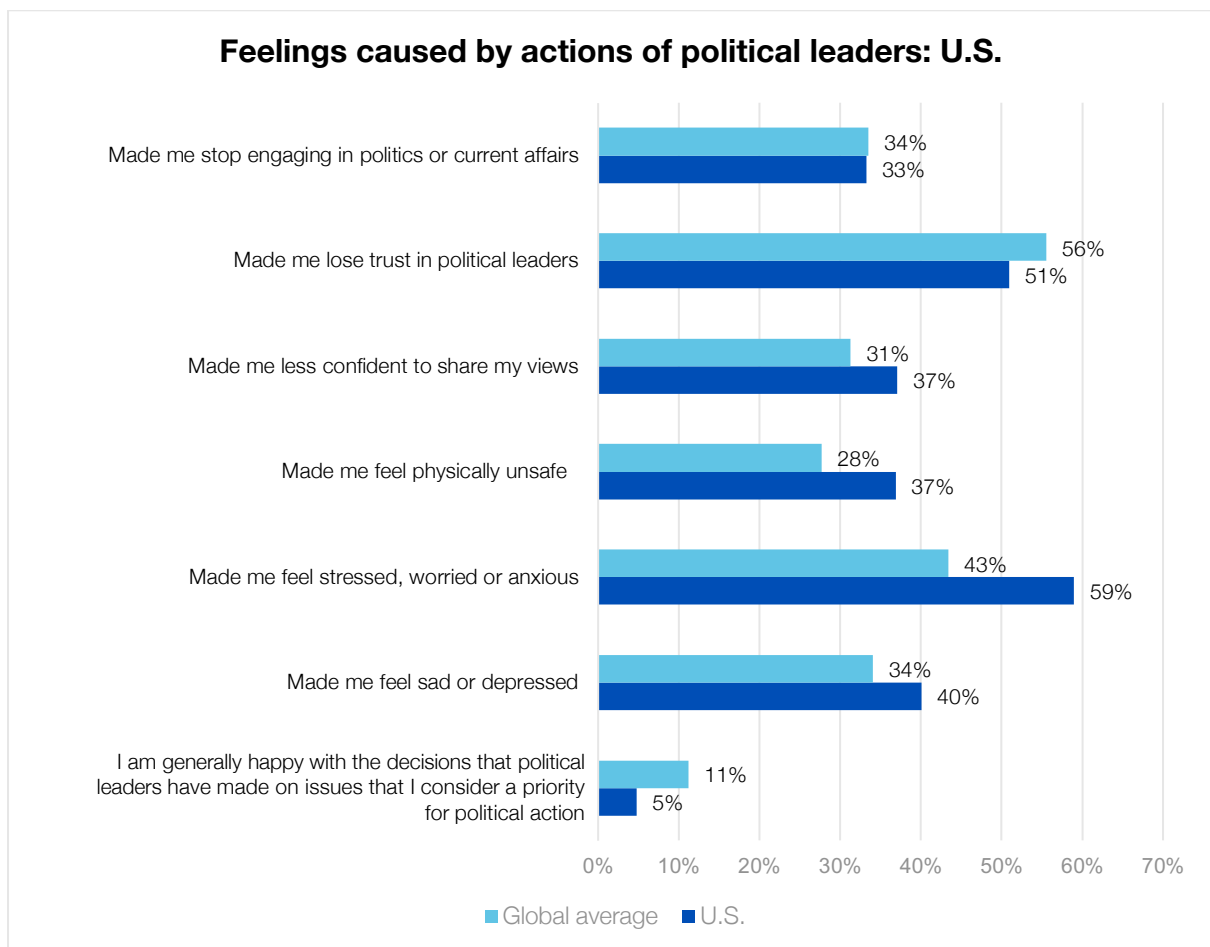
Based on 1,098 responses.

Feelings caused by actions of political leaders

Globally, only 11% of girls and young women said that they were generally happy with the decisions of their political leaders, whereas in the U.S., this figure was lower at 5%.

Globally, the majority of respondents indicated that they experienced negative feelings as a result of the decisions of political leaders, whereas in the U.S., girls and young women who expressed a view shared more negative feelings than the global average. For example, 59% said they had felt stressed, worried or anxious due to the actions or decisions of political leaders (compared to 43% globally), 51% had lost trust in political leaders (compared to 56% globally) and 40% had felt sad or depressed (compared to 34% globally).

Figure 4: Feelings caused by the decisions and actions of political leaders



Based on 882 responses.

Perspectives on women political leaders

Globally, 1 in 2 survey respondents believed that it was acceptable for girls and young women in their community to become political leaders at local, provincial/state or national levels, or to become the nation's leader. Views in the U.S. were slightly more negative than the global average; for example 34% of respondents in the U.S. believed it would be acceptable for girls and young women to become a national leader (e.g., president) compared to 49% globally.

Globally, 40% of respondents who expressed a view agreed that female politicians suffer abuse and intimidation, and 42% agreed that they are judged for how they look or dress. These percentages are the same in the U.S. (40% and 42%).

Globally, 9% of girls and young women agreed with the statement, "I don't think women are qualified to be political leaders." This percentage is the same in the U.S. (9%).

Table 2: Overall perceptions on female political leaders

In my community, it is acceptable for girls and young women ... *	U.S.		Global average
	#	%	
To become local political leaders (e.g., joining local council or leadership).	427	48%	57%
To become provincial/state or national political leaders (e.g., members of parliament).	354	40%	53%
To become our nation's leader (prime minister, president, etc).	308	34%	49%
When trying to participate or engage in politics, girls and young women may face the following challenges:**			
	#	%	
I don't think women are qualified to be political leaders.	97	9%	9%
Female politicians suffer a lot of intimidation and abuse.	415	40%	40%
Female politicians are often judged by the way they look or dress.	435	42%	42%

* Based on 896 responses.

** Based on 1,030 responses.

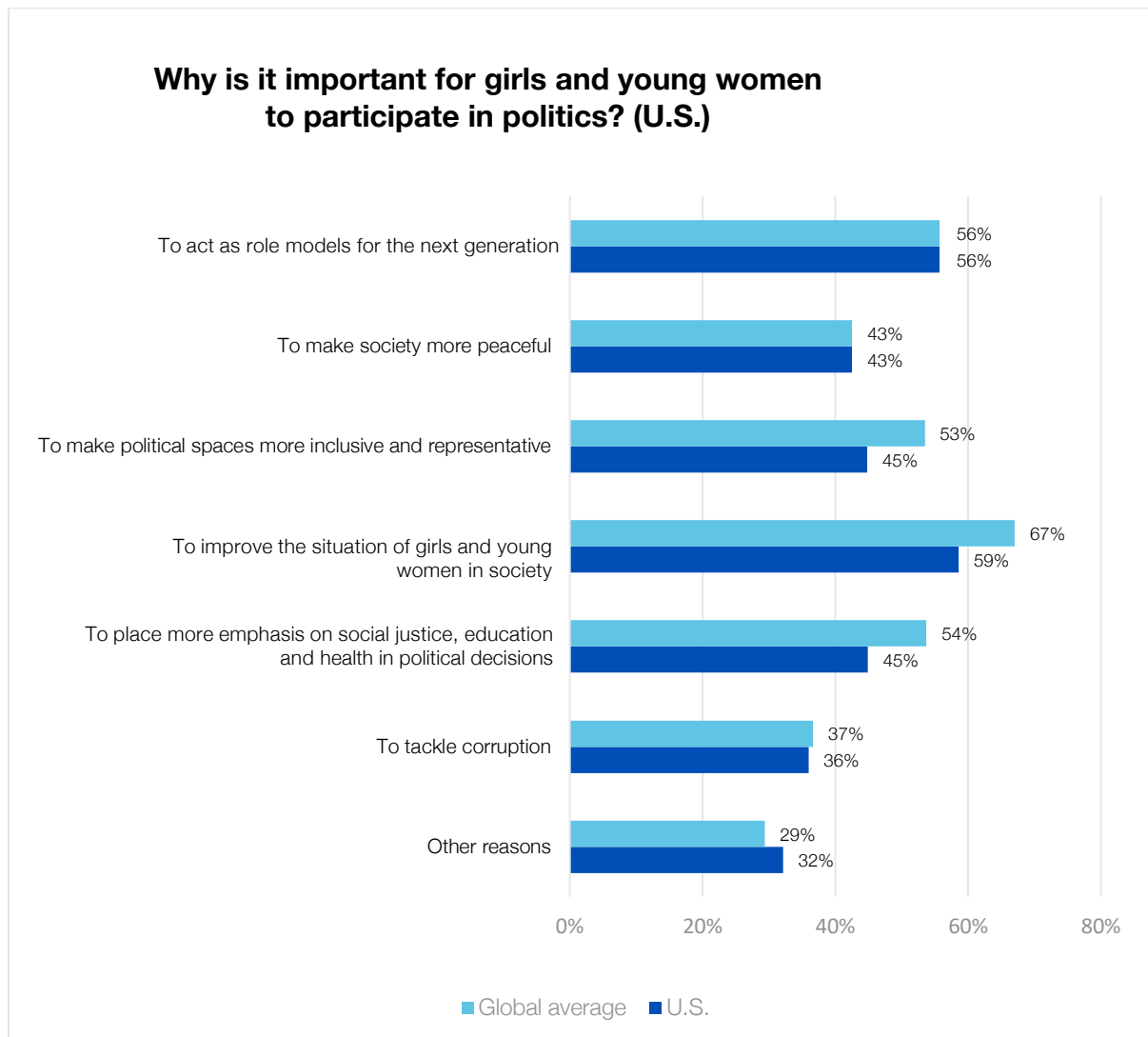
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Reasons for participation

Globally, only 3% of respondents agreed with the statement, “It is not important for girls and young women to participate in politics,” whereas in the U.S. this figure was 7%.

Globally, the most frequently selected reason for why girls’ and young women’s political participation is important was to “improve the situation of girls and young women in society” with almost 70% of respondents identifying this as one of the main reasons for participating in politics. Similarly in the U.S., the main reason for why girls’ and young women’s political participation was considered important was to improve the situation of girls and young women in society (59%), followed by to act as role models for the next generation (56%).

Figure 5: Reasons why it is important for girls and young women to participate in politics



Based on 1,018 responses.

Experiences of participation: What activities girls and young women take part in

Globally, 83% of girls and young women said they participated in politics in some form or had engaged with politics. Of those who reported participating, survey respondents globally had, on average, participated in 2.7 activities each. In the U.S., the overall level of political participation was similar to the global average; 80% of girls and young women said they participated in politics in some form or had engaged with politics. However, respondents in the U.S. had participated in fewer activities each than the global average (average of 1.6 activities each).

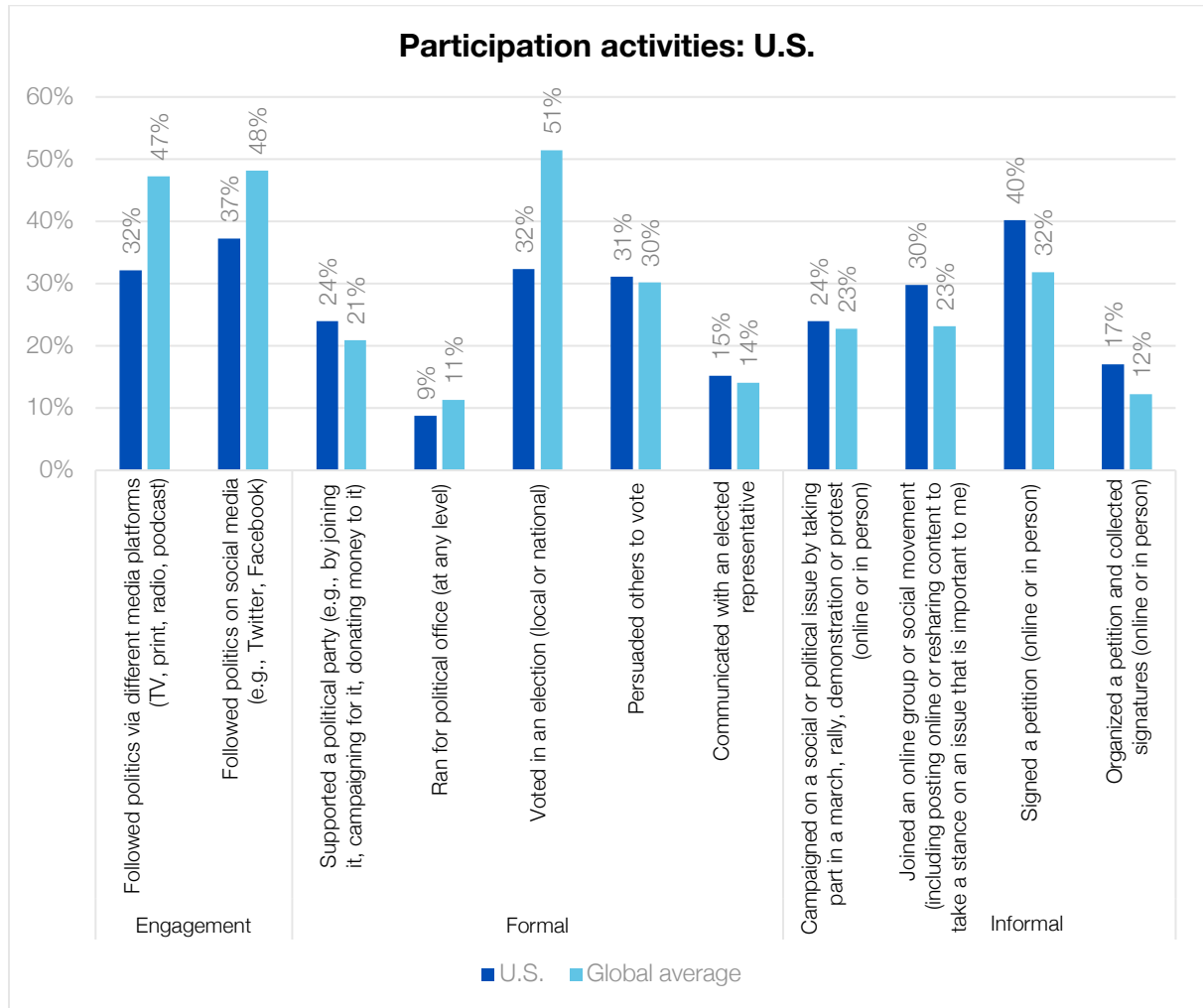
Globally, the most common participation activity was voting; 51% of girls globally who had participated in at least one activity reported having voted in an election (whether local or national). Of those eligible to vote,² 56% said they had voted. While voting was one of the more common participation activities in the U.S. (32%), the most common activities were signing a petition online or in person (40%), and following politics on social media (37%).

Globally, the activities that girls and young women reported having conducted least were running for political office (11%), organizing a petition to collect signatures (12%) and communicating with an elected representative (14%). Similarly, in the U.S., the least common activities girls and young women reported having conducted were running for political office (9%), communicating with an elected official (15%) and organizing a petition to collect signatures (17%).

Globally, 74% of girls and young women reported that they had participated in formal modes of political participation, most commonly through voting, compared to approximately 58% of girls who reported participating through informal channels; 65% of respondents reported they have engaged with politics by following different media channels. In the U.S., 69% reported participating in formal modes, 70% reported participating through informal channels and 51% reported they have engaged with politics by following different media channels.

² Based on applying minimum legal voting age in national level for each country. Note that in some countries different legal voting ages apply at different levels of administration. Not all girls and young women who have the right to vote will have had the opportunity since becoming enfranchised.

Figure 6: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Activities



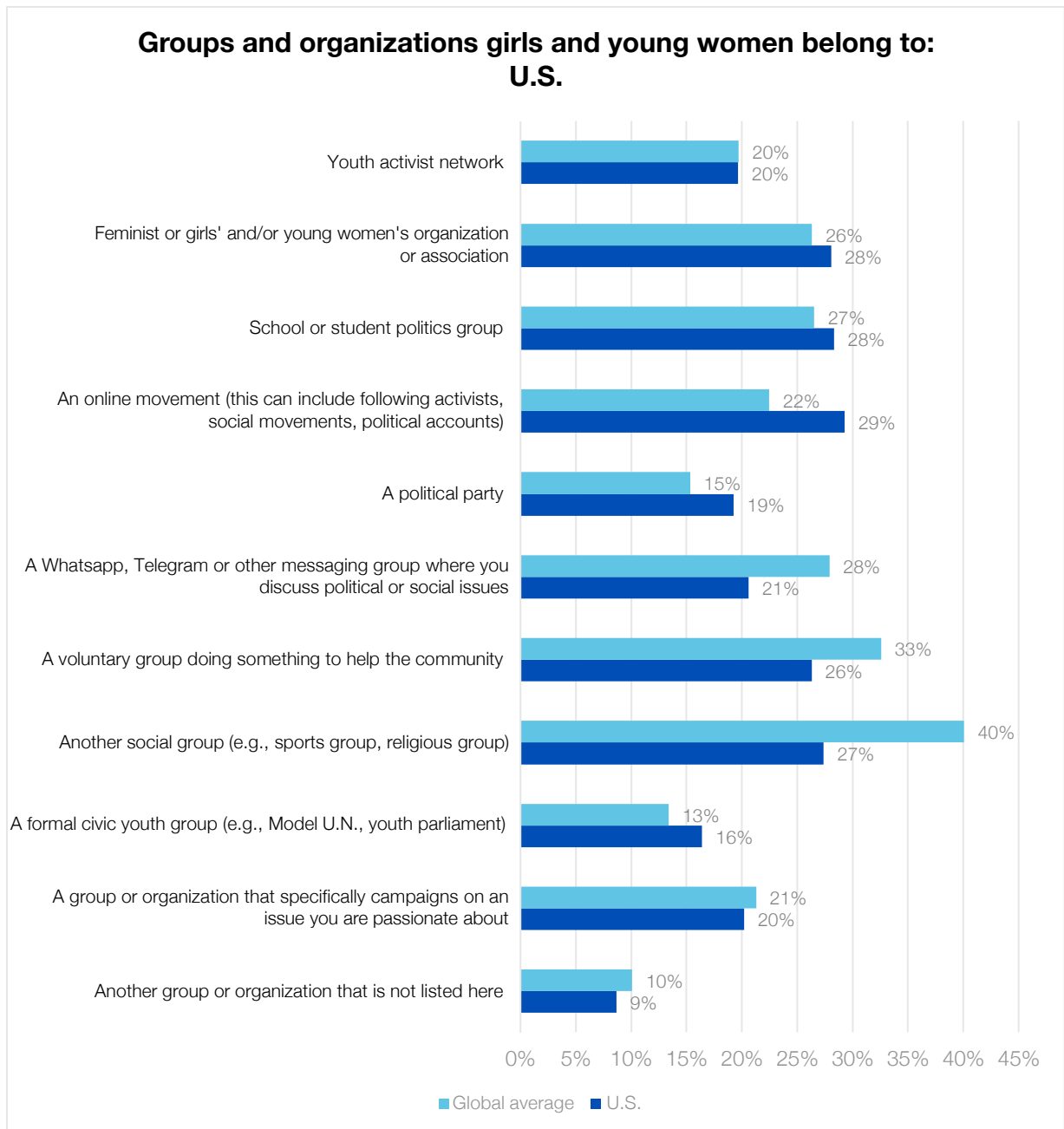
Based on 877 responses.

Experiences of participation: Groups that girls and young women belong to

Globally, 63% of girls and young women reported belonging to some form of group or organization. In the U.S., this figure was slightly higher than the global average at 67%.

Globally, the most common type of group that girls and young women reported belonging to was a social group, e.g., a sports group or religious group (40%), followed by a voluntary group that does something to help the community (33%). In the U.S., respondents who belonged to a group most commonly reported belonging to an online movement (29%), followed by school or student politics groups (28%) and feminist or girls' and/or young women's organization or associations (28%).

Figure 7: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Groups they belong to



Based on 738 responses.

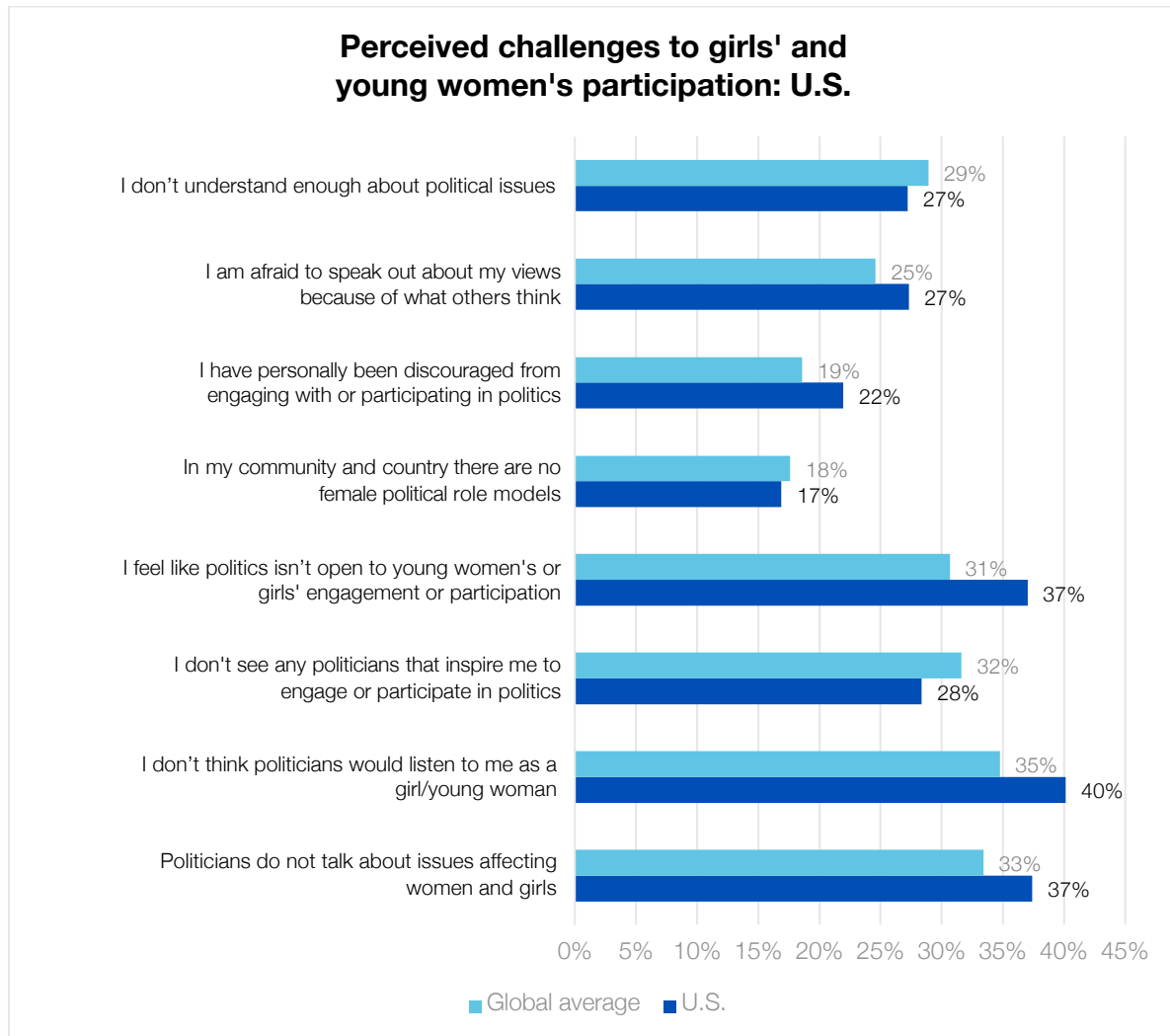
INFLUENCES ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Views of key challenges to political participation

Globally, 94% of survey respondents identified that girls and young women may face challenges when trying to participate in politics.³ Similarly, in the U.S., this figure was 94%.

Among the options listed, the top challenges chosen by respondents globally were: politicians not listening to girls and young women (35%), a lack of politicians to inspire engagement (32%) and politics not being open to young women or girls' participation (31%). Similarly, in the U.S., the top challenges were politicians not listening to girls or young women (40%), politicians not being open to young girls' or women's engagement or participation (37%) and politicians not talking about issues affecting girls and young women (37%).

Figure 8: Perceived challenges to girls' and young women's political participation



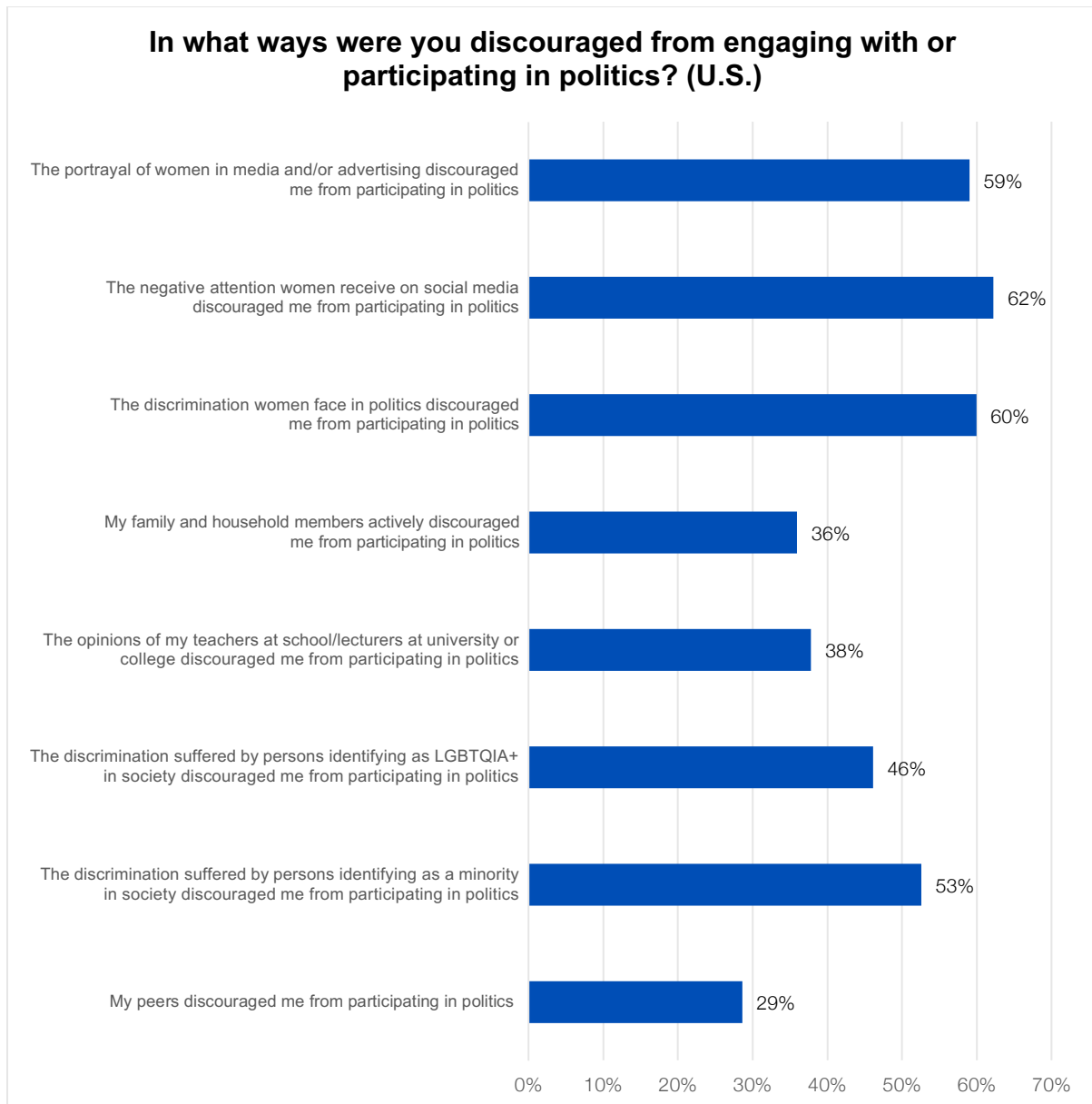
Based on 1,030 responses.

³ Only 6% of respondents said that they experienced no challenges to participation; remaining respondents all identified at least one challenge.

Personal discouragement from participation

Respondents who indicated that they had been personally discouraged from participating in politics (see previous question) were asked a follow up question about the ways in which they had been personally discouraged. The most common reason for being personally discouraged was the negative attention women receive on social media (chosen by 62% of respondents who answered this question), followed by discrimination faced by women in politics (62%).⁴

Figure 9: In what ways were you personally discouraged from engaging with or participating in politics?



Based on 217 responses.

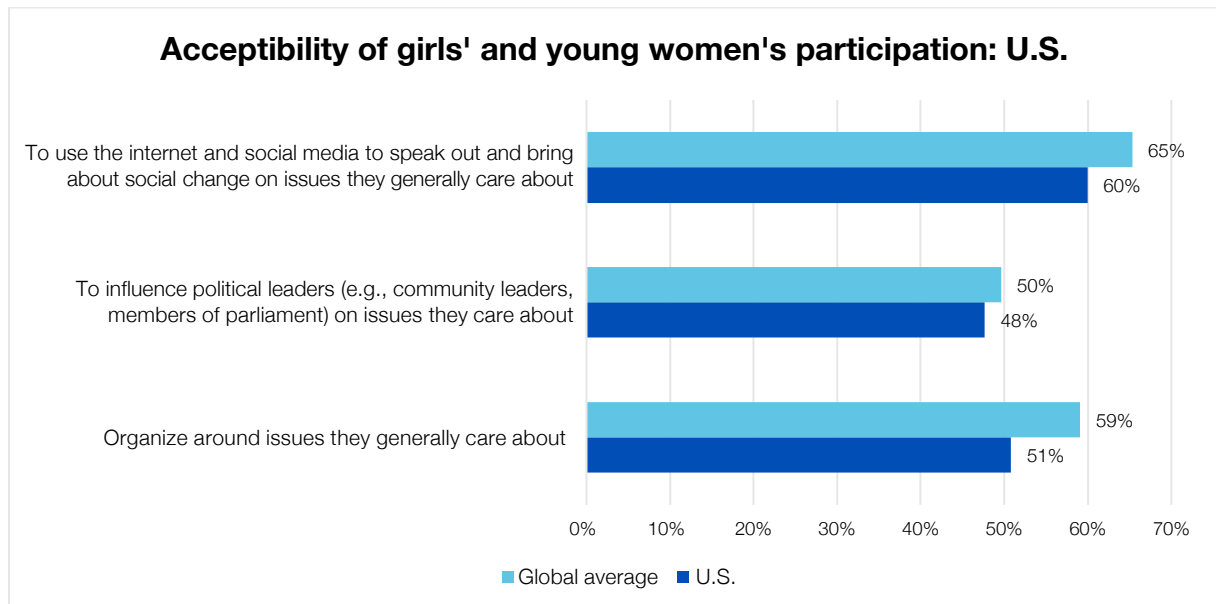
⁴ This question was not asked in all countries and was not analyzed for the global report. A global comparison is therefore not available.

Social norms surrounding girls' and young women's participation

Globally, around 1 in 2 girls and young women reported that their communities view it as acceptable for them to participate and engage in politics in diverse ways. Overall, in the U.S., acceptability of girls' and young women's participation was in line with the global average.

Globally, the most acceptable participation activity was reported as being “to use the internet and social media to speak out about an issue they care about in order to bring about social change,” which 65% of respondents say would be acceptable. Similarly, in the U.S., the most acceptable participation activity for girls and young women was reported to be using the internet and social media to speak out and bring about social change on issues they generally care about (60%), while the least acceptable participation activity for girls and young women was reported to be influencing political leaders (48%).

Figure 10: Social norms surrounding girls' and young women's political participation

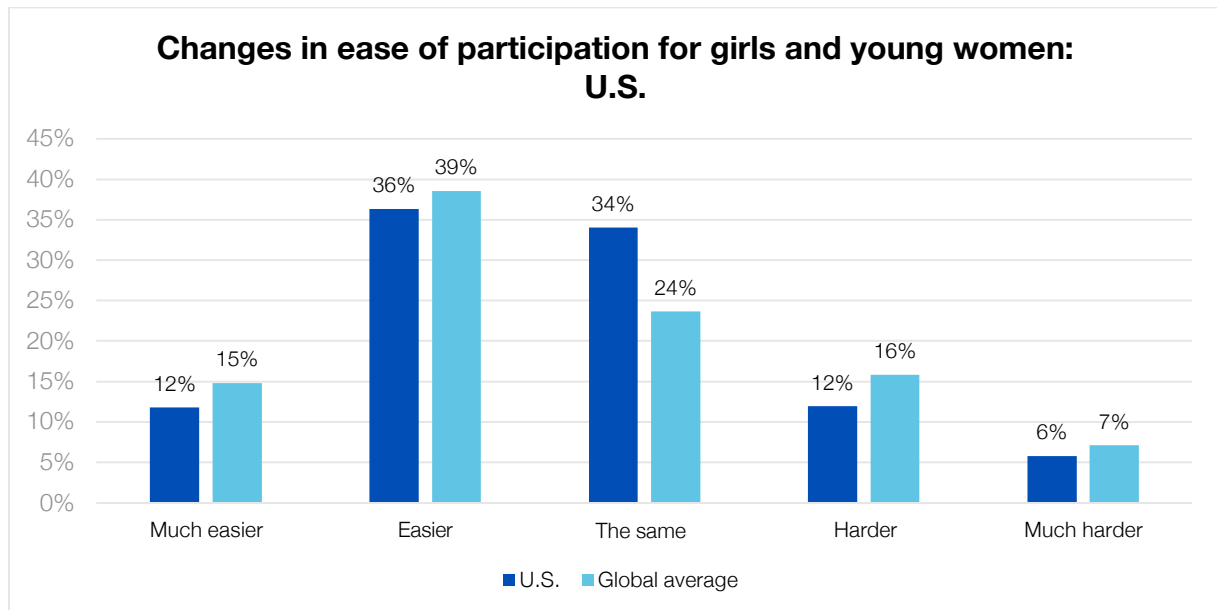


Based on 896 responses.

Changes to norms and barriers over time

Globally, the majority of survey respondents believe that it has become easier for girls to participate in politics when compared to the situation of older women in their communities. Similarly, in the U.S., the majority (48%) of respondents believed it had become “easier” or “much easier” for girls and young women to participate in politics when compared to the situation of older women in their communities.

Figure 11: Changes in ease of participation for girls and young women



Based on 1,098 responses.

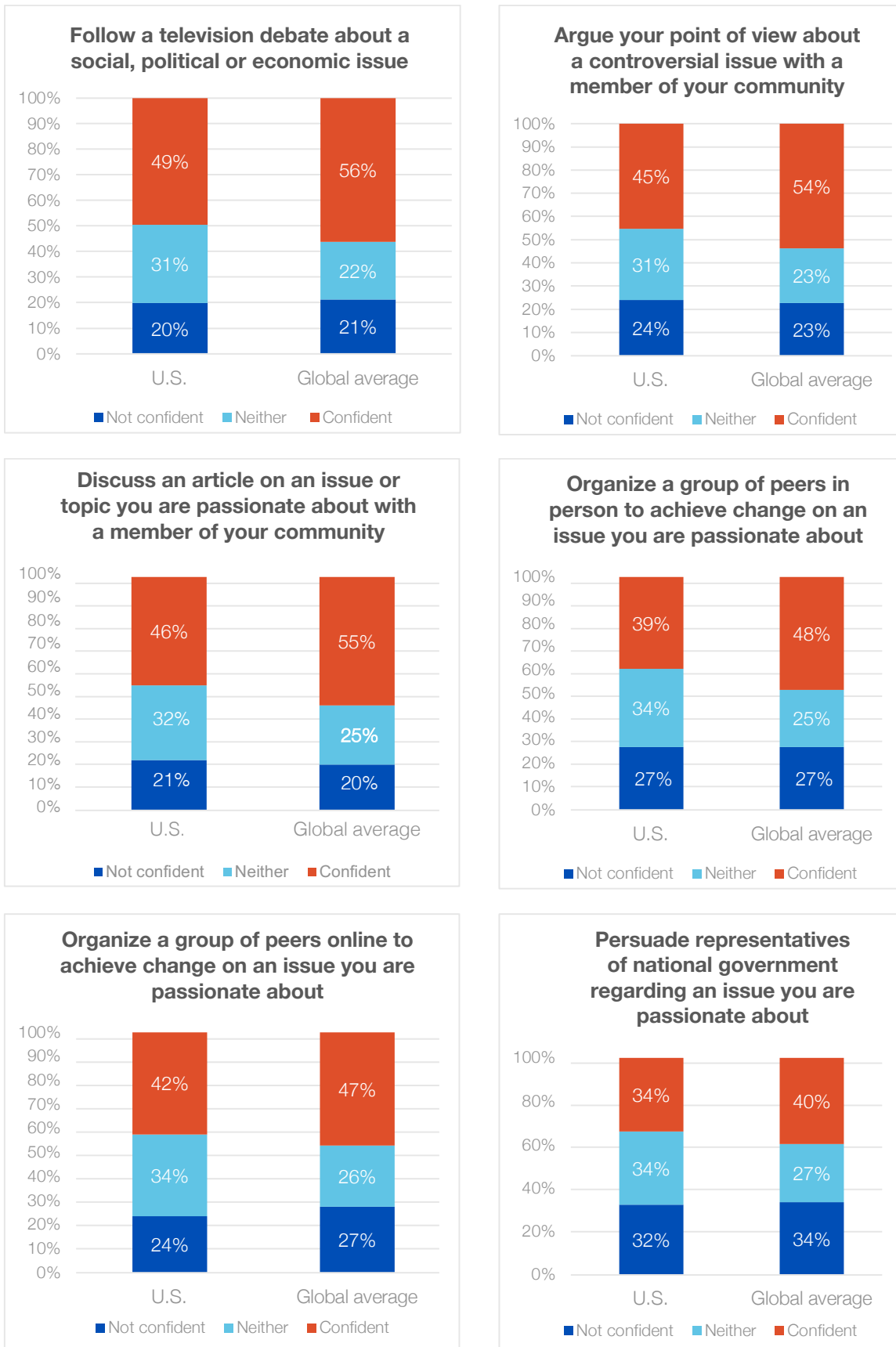
Confidence to participate in politics

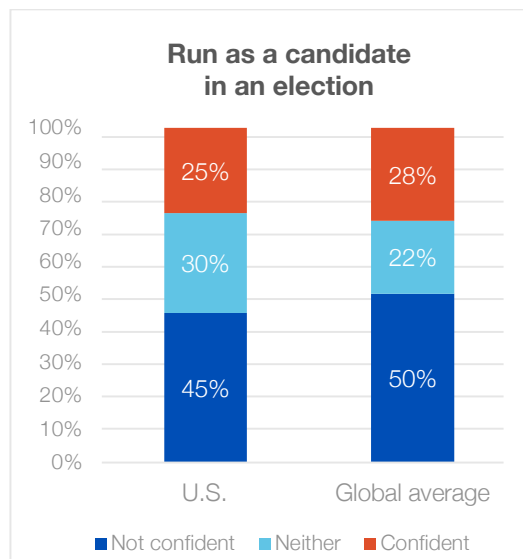
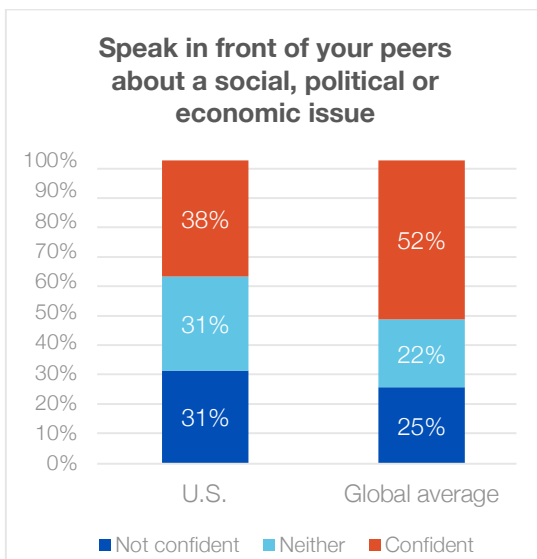
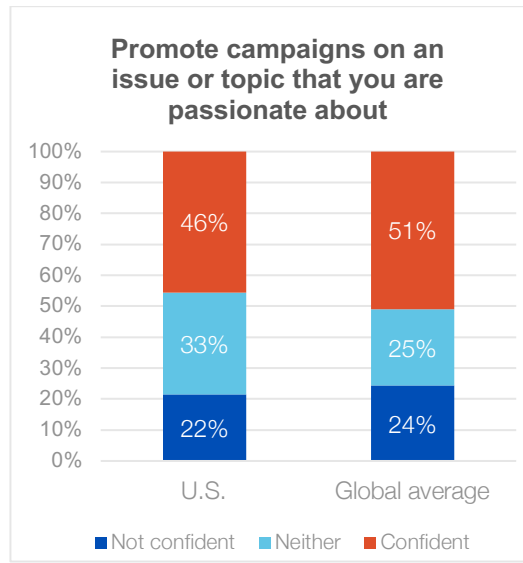
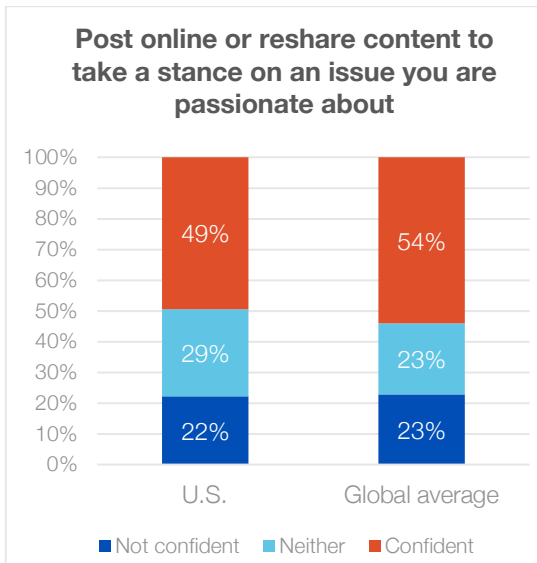
Globally, just under half of survey respondents reported not being confident or being unsure about their confidence in carrying out diverse political participation or engagement activities. Girls and young women in the U.S. overall expressed similar levels of confidence as the global average.

Globally, respondents report that they are least confident about running as a candidate in an election (50% not confident) or persuading representatives of national governments or authorities of their own views regarding a topic they are passionate about (34% not confident). Similarly, in the U.S., respondents were least confident about running as a candidate in an election (45% not confident) and persuading representatives of national governments on issues they are passionate about (32% not confident).

Globally, respondents were most confident in following a television debate about a social, political or economic issue (56% confident) and discussing an online or newspaper article on an issue they care about (55% confident). In the U.S., respondents were most confident about following a television debate about a social, political, or economic issue (49% confident) and posting online or resharing content to take a stance on an issue they care about (49% confident).

Figure 12: Confidence to engage in political activities





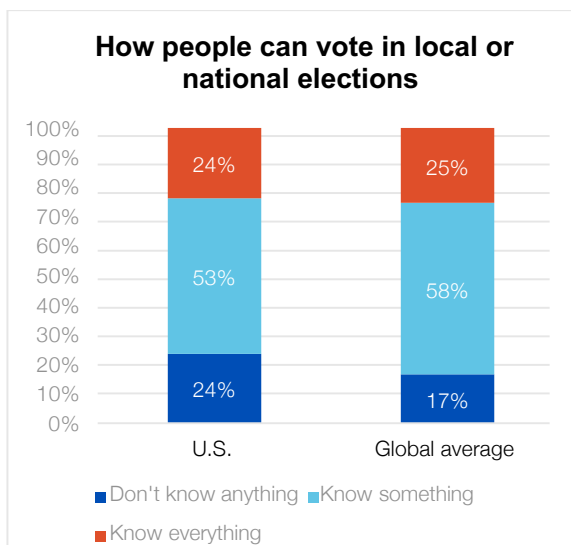
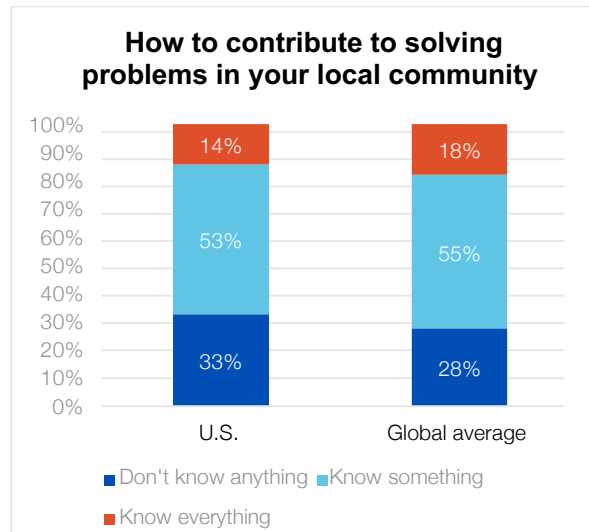
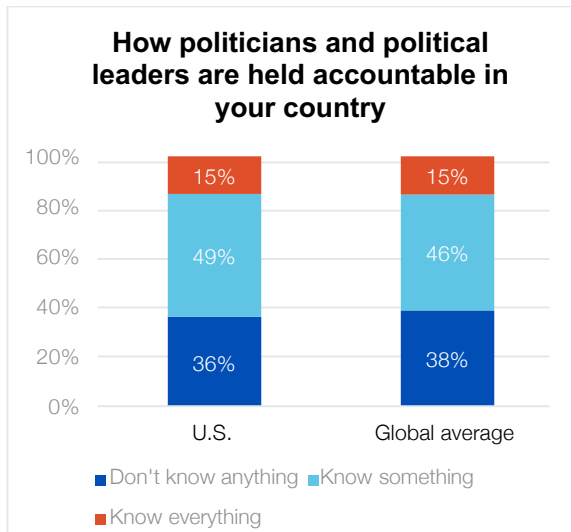
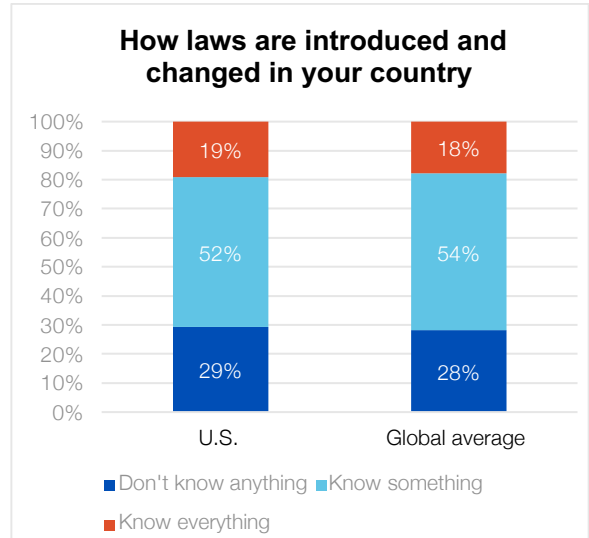
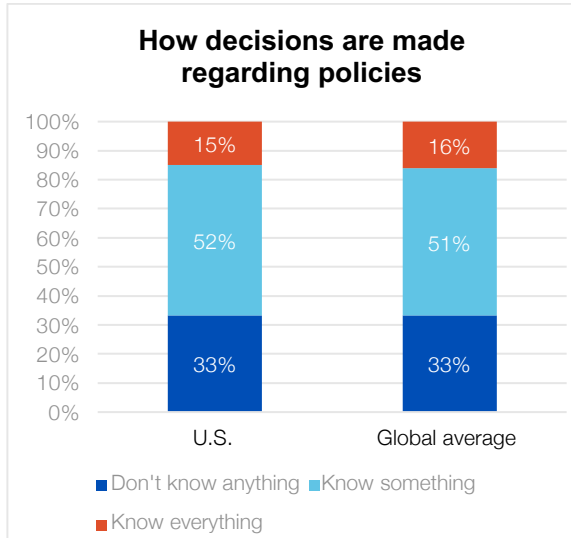
Based on 1,098 responses.

Knowledge of political topics and where this was gained

Globally, the majority of the survey respondents report knowing at least something about diverse topics associated with political participation. Knowledge of how people can vote in local or national elections was highest overall, with 83% of respondents reporting knowing everything or something about this. Overall, in the U.S., levels of knowledge on political topics were in line with the global average. Similarly, knowledge of how to vote in an election was highest overall among girls and young women in the U.S., with 77% of respondents reporting knowing everything or something about this.

Globally, respondents reported knowing least about how politicians and political leaders in their country can be held accountable (38% knew nothing about this). Similarly, knowledge of how politicians and political leaders can be held accountable in their country was lowest overall among girls and young women in the U.S., with 36% of respondents reporting knowing nothing about this.

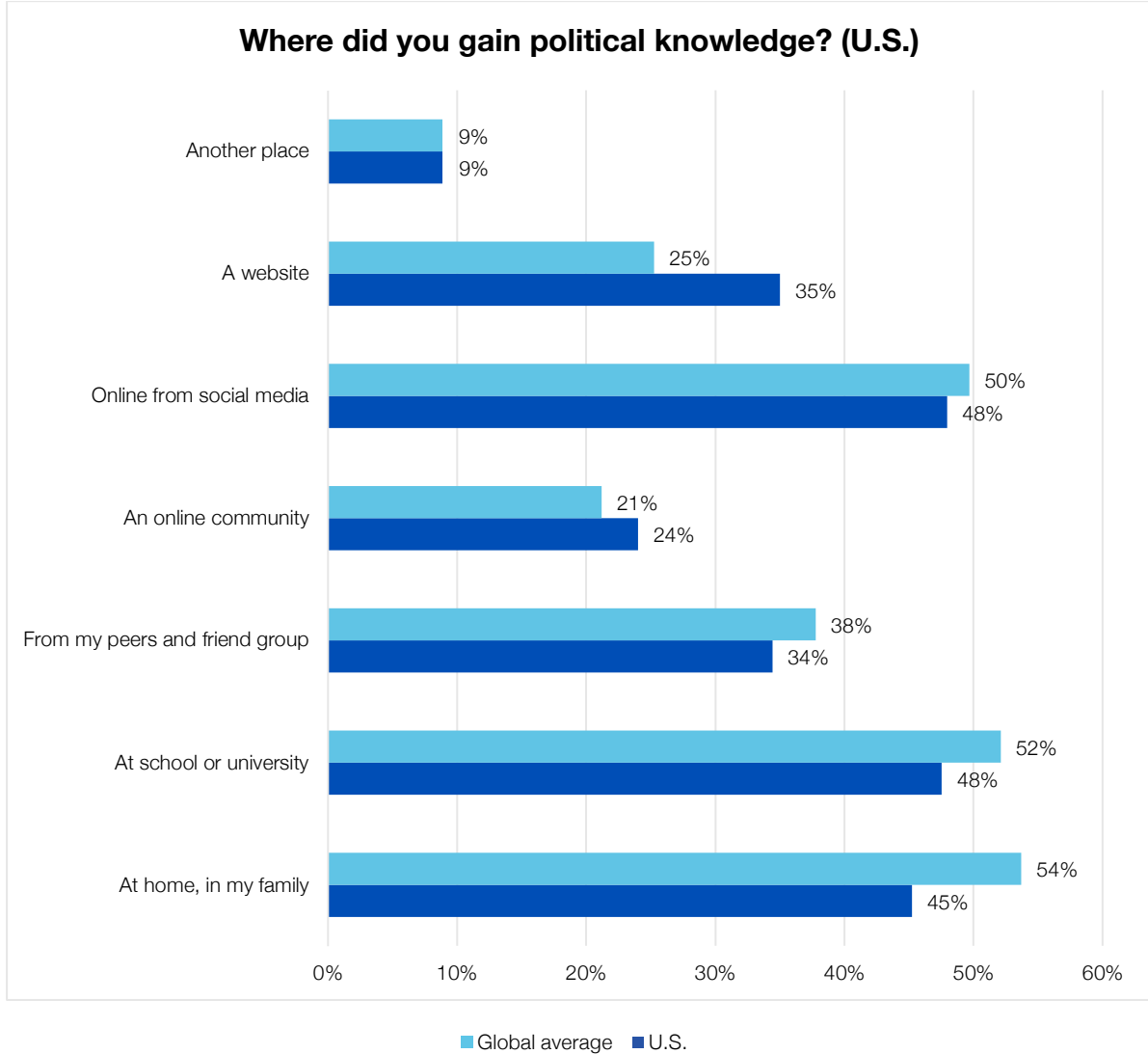
Figure 13: Level of knowledge of political topics



Based on 1,098 responses.

Globally, knowledge of political topics was gained primarily at home or from family (54%), at school or university (52%) or on social media (50%). The main sources of knowledge for girls in the U.S., who reported knowing something about at least one political topic, were similar to the global average with 48% gaining knowledge online from social media, 48% at school or university and 45% at home or from family.

Figure 14: Where political knowledge was gained



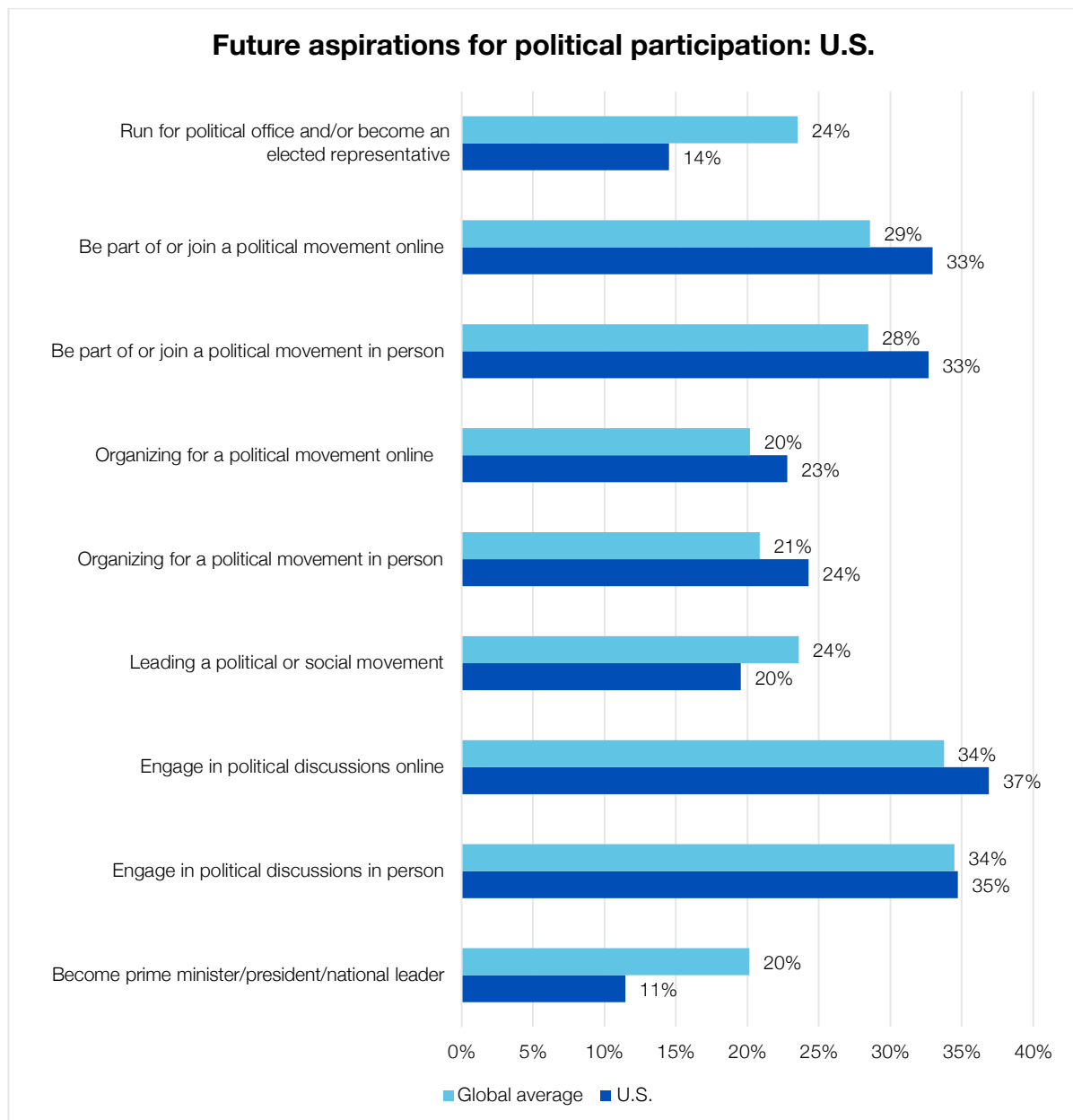
Based on 991 responses.

Aspirations for future participation

Globally, 21% of survey respondents reported not being interested in, engaging or participating in politics at all in the future. In the U.S., this figure was slightly lower at 18%.

Globally, the most popular options for future participation were engaging in discussions online (34%) or in person (34%), and being part of or joining a political movement online (29%) or in person (28%). In the U.S., girls and young women who could see themselves participating in the future had similar aspirations to the global average, which included engaging in political discussions online (37%), engaging in political discussions in person (35%) and being part of or joining a political movement in person (33%) or online (33%).

Figure 15: Future aspirations for political participation

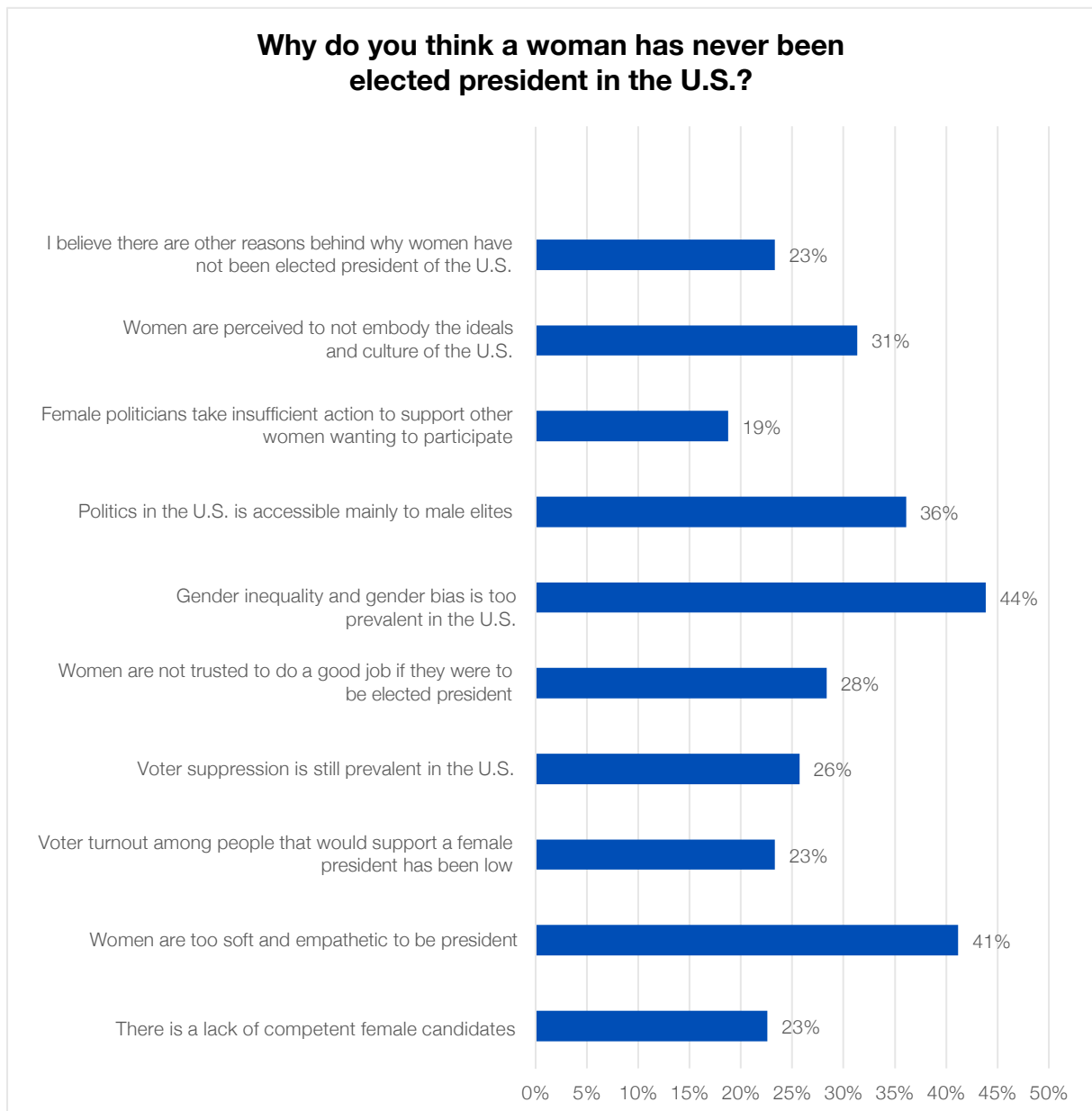


Based on 1,014 responses.

Additional U.S.-specific question

In the U.S., girls and young women were asked why they think a woman has never been elected president. The most common responses included gender inequality and bias being too prevalent in the U.S. (44%), women being considered too soft and empathetic to be president (41%) and politics in the U.S. being accessible mainly to male elites (36%). This was a stand-alone question asked to respondents in the U.S. only, and therefore there is no global comparison to be drawn.

Figure 16: Why do you think a woman has never been elected president in the U.S.?



Based on 1,098 responses.