



POLL CALL: THE YOUNG AMERICAN PRIORITY LIST

A national report on what young people want from the new Congress.

Tens of millions of young people cast their ballots in the 2020 election. Youth voter turnout rose to an estimated [52%-55%](#), and we saw record-shattering absentee and early turnout from youth in several states. Young voters (particularly young voters of color) were instrumental to local, state, and national races across the country.

These young people took their anxieties, fears, and (most importantly) hopes for the future and channeled them into a record-setting display of civic action. They made themselves heard at the polls, and now as they face generation-defining challenges, they're trusting you, the newly elected members of Congress, to continue to listen.

We here at [DoSomething.org](#), the largest tech not-for-profit exclusively for young people and social change, are committed to amplifying their voices. That's why we asked our members ages 13-25 from around the country about the top issues they want you, their newly elected officials to tackle when you're sworn into office.

We collected and analyzed **23,774 responses** and consolidated them into this report. Below is a window into the thoughts, concerns, and priorities of your youngest constituents -- the group that powered so many electoral victories in 2020 and will continue to show their impact at the ballot box, in their schools, in the streets, and beyond.



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC RELIEF

Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming number of responses were calling for relief from the virus that's ravaged the country for months. [According to DoSomething Strategic \(DSS\)](#), 70% of 18- to 24-year-old voters listed the COVID-19 outbreak as the top issue behind their votes in the 2020 elections.

Many young people are worried about their health, the health of their loved ones, and the affordability of healthcare in general. They're asking for action to contain the spread of the virus and make treatment more accessible. Many also acknowledge the way [COVID-19 disproportionately impacts people of color](#) (particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities), and spoke to their unique challenges to treatment and prevention.

In a year where young people were some of the [hardest hit](#) by the economic fallout of COVID-19, their concerns also encompassed general financial stress, both now and in the future. While countless young people and their families have been struggling financially amid the pandemic, many also fear their future education, career, and quality of life will suffer long after the immediate threat is gone.

In Their Own Words:

I believe the most pressing issue lawmakers should handle is addressing economic hardship during the pandemic. This issue is important because not only are millions of Americans unemployed and therefore unable to provide for their households, but many Americans are also working unnecessarily simply because they must pay bills. Americans should not need to worry about finances during a pandemic, and the United States government has the resources to protect the citizens it is meant to serve.

DoSomething member Kristian, 18

"The main aspect that the government affects the most in my life is the response to COVID-19. I am a diabetic and I am high risk according to the CDC. So based on how the government responds to this pandemic will be a deciding case on whether I survive or die."

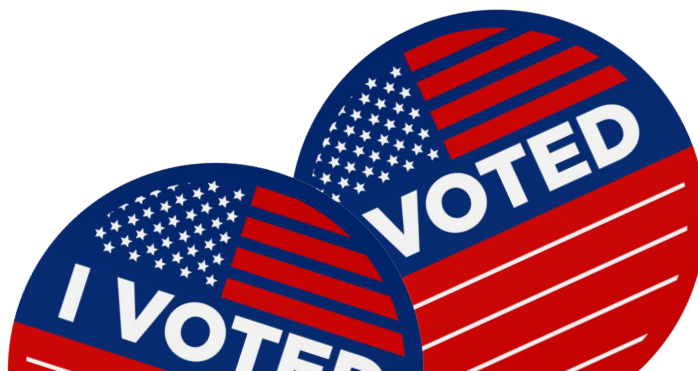
DoSomething member Isaiah, 22

"The COVID-19 pandemic is a very confusing yet worrisome situation to many. An abundant amount of people are anxious about when vaccinations will be available to help lower the rates of the virus and ultimately keep others in our community safe. If the lawmakers are able to solidify a date soon, society can possibly come at ease regarding the terrible situation the world is experiencing."

DoSomething member Pamela, 17

"An economic stimulus package. The virus is in the beginning of the second wave. Starting tomorrow in Chicago our bars and restaurants will be shutting down. I am unable to work my previous job because I have health issues that if I go back there's a chance of me getting the virus again. The American people need help."

DoSomething member Vera



COST OF EDUCATION

The cost of education was among the most discussed subjects for young people -- a long-standing burden only compounded by the coronavirus pandemic. As the national student loan debt reaches [\\$1.68 trillion](#) this year, the cost of their current and future education was top of mind for many young people.

In their responses, they called for immediate action in the form of tuition aid or student loan forgiveness, as well as more systemic change to slow the rapidly rising cost of college tuition. For many, a college education feels more unobtainable than ever, while remote learning makes some call into question the value of programs with such steep price tags.

In Their Own Words:

I believe that the most important issue facing young people right now is our economy's future and debt. College is more expensive than ever and studies show that our generation is also getting paid less than the generation before us. Not a lot of young people know how the economy works because no one ever taught them. It's our job to make sure that our future economy is in good hands.

DoSomething member Megan, 17

"I would like lawmakers to handle student debt more efficiently. Most Americans do not need to be put under the financial stress that higher-levels of education offer in order to receive a decent-paying job that most are not happy working with. Many Americans enter into student debt completely clueless at the age of 17 or 18 which is a very young age to make a major financial decision that will affect the rest of their lives."

DoSomething member Amanda, 18

"The most important issue facing young people today is the cost of education. This affects if people can or cannot join post secondary education, and creates a massive rift between economic classes. This also has an effect on minorities and widens a gap between tiers and classes within society."

DoSomething member Sara, 22

"Currently, I am a college student struggling to support my education. I have to rely on my parents to cosign a loan who are not able to because their credit score is bad. I do not understand why my education is based on their poor financial planning that I had nothing to do with. There should be cheaper education or more funding so everyone has the opportunity to learn."

DoSomething member Ciara, 19





DISCRIMINATION AND EQUALITY

The events of the summer of 2020 spurred thousands of young people into action, igniting a global movement fiercely defending the lives and dignity of Black Americans. The protests are still fresh in many young people's minds even months later, as reflected in their responses, several of whom mentioned by name the Black Americans who lost their lives at the hands of police last year.

[According to DoSomething Strategic \(DSS\)](#), racial justice also topped the list for 18- to 24-year-old voters, with 69% saying it was a key motivating factor in the 2020 election. In their responses, many young people highlighted their support of police reform, including use-of-force restrictions and increased accountability for police misconduct.

Though racial inequality was especially high on their list of concerns, young people called for action against discrimination of all kinds -- along gender, sexuality, class, immigrant status, and more. There was a general sentiment that those in power must recognize and reform the historic systems that disadvantage underserved and marginalized Americans, particularly Black Americans.

In Their Own Words:

"As an African American male, there are many situations where my life can be in danger due to racial profiling. Almost everyday, I must take my identity in consideration for mundane things, which makes policing policy considered heavily because of how it impacts many Black Americans' lives. Police reform and policy could save or cost the lives of many people in my community. We vote for elected officials to push for racial equality, inequality, and police reform because our lives depend on it."

DoSomething member Christopher, 17

"I want new lawmakers to implement laws that will protect our American brothers and sisters regardless of their age, race, religion, gender, disability, or sexual orientation. The laws currently in place state the purpose of these laws to protect these individuals, however the laws are often rooted in systemic bias. I would like to see laws that protect the basic human rights of all individuals, not just those who are of a specific race or background."

DoSomething member Tali, 17

"I want lawmakers to enforce respect for human rights to life, liberty, and happiness through prison reform and education reform. There will never be freedom or equality as long as there is no upward mobility through education and as long as there is a monetary incentive to imprison poor Americans."

DoSomething member Axel, 19

I would love for them to tackle the issues with the injustice and inequality in this country. We need a system that is set up to support all people equally. The constitution says... 'justice for ALL.' We need lawmakers who are going to be fair to all people and holding those who are wrong accountable for their actions no matter who they are.

DoSomething member Kenitha



CLIMATE CHANGE

While the coronavirus has certainly taken the spotlight in the past year, young people have not forgotten about the other global threat that still remains: climate change. Many young people stated climate was their top priority, calling on lawmakers to pass legislation aimed at environmental conservation and sustainability.

In the responses, there was also an emphasis on larger, systemic changes needed to truly tackle a challenge of this size and importance. Several mentioned an urgency to invest in clean, renewable energy rather than non-renewable resources and hold corporations accountable for their environmental impact.

In Their Own Words:

“The most important issue facing the youth right now is preserving the environment . The executive branch now has a leader who believes in climate change, which will impact the youth in a positive trajectory. If action is not taken and a huge cultural shift to reducing one’s carbon footprint isn’t stressed, the habitable status of earth will surely shift. Young people have the responsibility to uphold sustainable actions and start a new generational precedent to be renewable and sustainable.”

DoSomething member Darius, 18

“America is one of the top countries contributing to climate change but we are removing the restrictions to help stop it. Lawmakers need to take a strong stance on climate change; we cannot afford to compromise with opposing sides anymore. Our livelihood is no longer up for debate. If we don’t make some changes, cities will soon be underwater, hurricanes and tornadoes will become more frequent, and oxygen will become scarce. If you live on earth this should be important to you.”

DoSomething member Jackinia, 18

“The government mostly affects my life for something in the long run. The environmental issues in our country are often put on the back burner, but if they are continually ignored the issues will worsen until it is the main issue facing our country. The United States is behind many other countries in introducing sustainable practices throughout the country. Gen Z will have to tackle these issues in the future, especially if headway is not made by current lawmakers.”

DoSomething member Abrianna, 17

“The use of nonrenewable resources needs to be first addressed. Soon fossil fuels will pollute all the air and water on the planet, and we need to make rapid changes to prevent this. There are plenty of renewable energy sources like sunlight, wind energy, and hydropower. We need to implement these energy sources in all aspects of life, but especially large factories and manufacturing plants.”

DoSomething member Torin, 16



Thank you in advance for heeding the call of these young and future voters and taking action to support them in their concerns. As we’ve witnessed in the past year alone, young people (and young voters especially) can be trusted to continually hold their lawmakers accountable to making impactful and lasting change for the communities they represent. We look forward to what that change looks like in the coming years.

Want to get in touch? Reach out to us at adele@dosomething.org.

