

## THE BODY SHOP GLOBAL YOUTH SURVEY

Every day, thousands of important decisions are made about the future of planet Earth and the societies that call it home, but there are billions of young people who have no part in making them. They have no voice, no power and no stake in shaping the world they will inherit. The Body Shop, in partnership with the UN Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY), is on a mission to change that.

Right now, the world is facing unprecedented challenges. It is in dire need of political and public systems that are equipped to face those challenges. The only way societies can truly progress is when systems represent the diversity of the public they seek to serve. The problem is that, currently, they don't.

In the rooms where important decisions are made, a huge proportion of our global community is left out. Almost half the world's population is under 30, yet they make up just 2.8% of parliamentarians\* - those tasked with making decisions on behalf of the communities they represent. The average age of global leaders is 62\*\*. Of all the parliaments in the world, 37% do not have a single MP under 30\*.

The Body Shop has a strong history of driving changemaking activist campaigns. For its new campaign to address the under-representation of young voices in public decision-making, The Body Shop first needed to understand what people of all ages really think about the current systems of representation and public decision-making.

The Body Shop Global Youth Survey is the largest ever survey undertaken by The Body Shop. Carried out in December 2021 across 26 countries. It surveyed 27,043 people in total – 14,160 of whom are below the age of 30, the rest are aged between 30 and 60. The survey encompasses views from a broad range of demographic groups in society. For the purposes of this report, 'young' voices are classified as those between 15 and 29.

The aim of the research was to gain an expansive understanding into people's opinions on the current state of how public decisions get made. Who do they think should be representing the community in public office? What might encourage more young people to participate in civic life? From their personal passions to their faith in those in power, the survey was designed to uncover hopes, fears, beliefs and assumptions about current global political systems. This is insight that can be used to better understand the barriers to young people's participation.

Results from the survey will inspire and inform The Body Shop and OSGEY's campaign: Be Seen, Be Heard.

\* [Data on youth participation | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org)

\*\* [REIGN dataset](#)

**The vote is unanimous. Global political systems are not fit for the future.**

There is a clear lack of trust in our current systems. 8 in 10 people around the world think that current political systems need drastic reforms to be fit for the future. Across the board, 84% of people described politicians as ‘self-interested’ and 75% of people think politicians are corrupt. Three quarters of people under thirty felt that politicians and business leaders have ‘messed things up’ for people and the planet.

The majority of people agree that it’s important that all parts of society are represented in politics – this was overwhelmingly the case for people over 30, with 93% in agreement.

It may come as no surprise that 76% of under 30s think politicians don’t listen to young people (69% over 30) but this number steadily increased in certain countries and was particularly acute in Spain (80%), South Africa (90%) and the UK (80%). However, it isn’t just young people who feel this way. In fact, even 65% of people over 60 agree that politicians aren’t listening to young people.



Q4.1. Below is a list of statements about political leaders and political institutions. Please indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with each statement.

### People of all ages agree - young people must be seen and heard

Optimism about the potential of young people – from people of ALL ages, was a strong thread in the findings.

The majority of people agree that the age balance in politics is wrong and more than two-thirds (69%) of people across all age groups agree that more opportunities for younger people to have a say in policy development/change would make political systems better.

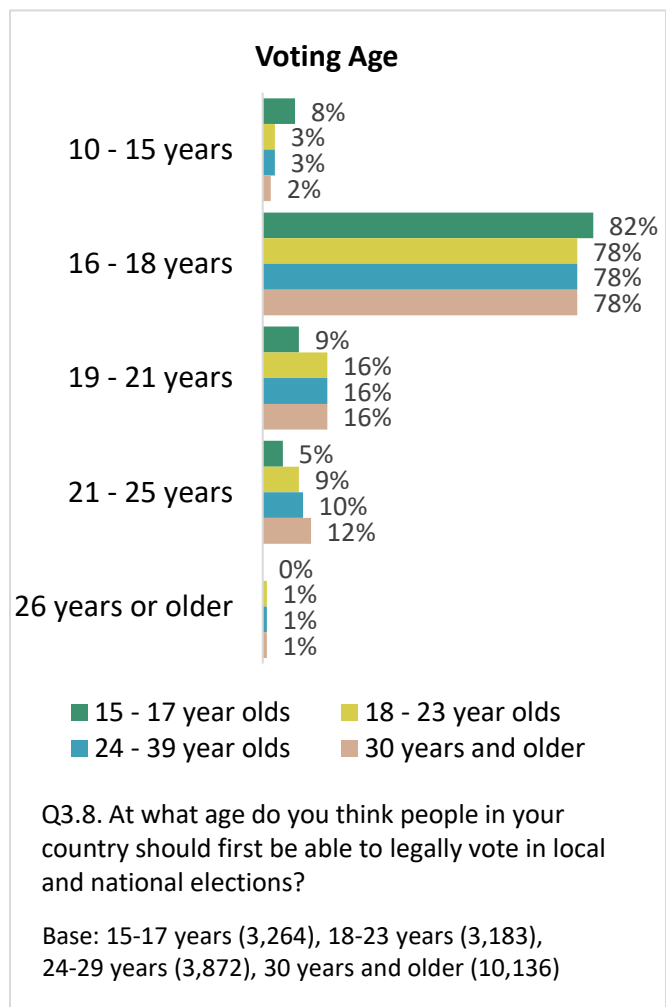
Overall, 73% of under 30s think young generations will change things for the better, as well as 67% of people over 30. The good news? Young people are yearning to be counted and feel a strong sense of their leadership potential. Levels of optimism were particularly high in Indonesia where a whopping 93% of over 30s think younger generations will change things for the better.

### All age groups surveyed think 16-18 is the ideal voting age

8 in 10 people of all ages think the voting age should be 18 or lower, rising to 90% for 15-17 year olds. In terms of the perfect voting age, the most popular age range desired for first-time voting is 16-18. This is across *all* age categories. Of the youngest demographic surveyed (15-17 year-olds) 37% think the voting age should be below 18.

Electoral participation is one key way young people can shape society, but where young people already have the right to vote, disillusionment from the voting system has emerged as a theme. Under 30s gave their three core reasons for not voting, versus the things that would encourage them to vote:

- **Impact.** They currently feel their vote doesn't make a difference but would vote if they felt it made a difference.
- **Representation.** They felt there was no person or party they wanted to vote for but would be more likely to if they saw fresh candidates that resonated with them.
- **Education.** They weren't always interested but would be more likely to cast a vote if they understood the political system better



**Apathy is a myth - young people *are* politically engaged**

It’s official, young people are FAR more engaged than they get credit for. All over the world, young people are already actively engaging in politics, but just not in formal spaces where decisions for society get made. Low youth voter turnout is a global issue and is often used as evidence by commentators that young people aren’t interested in politics. Even though analysts have long dispelled myths that voters ‘don’t care’ by understanding the barriers better. Nevertheless, voting isn’t the only form of civic participation. Young people are extremely engaged both on and offline and The Global Youth Survey demonstrates how they express this in a multitude of ways.

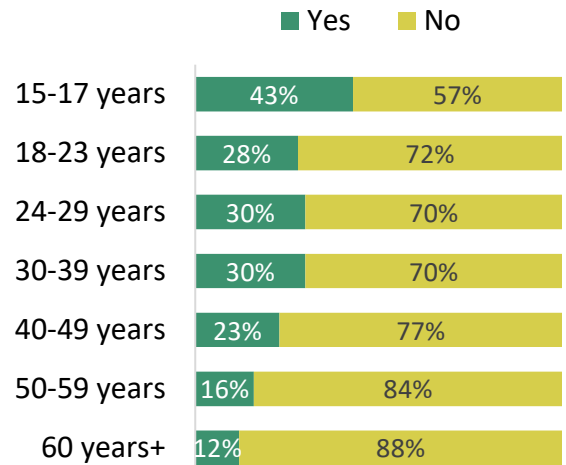
Importantly, a third of all young under 30s surveyed would consider running for office versus only a fifth of over 30s. Young people are also more likely to have engaged in a political activity than over 30s, particularly online activities

- 15-17 year olds are x4.5 times more likely to hold a community leadership position than over 60s
- 15-23 year olds are x4 more likely to have actively taken part in protest movements
- 15-23 year olds are x2 times more likely to be an active member of a political party than over 40s

They may be a generation who have grown up online, but young people are also participating in a rich array of ‘real-world’ activities and have a strong desire to contribute to their communities. Young people aren’t afraid to stand up for what they believe in, either. Under 30s are three times more likely to have participated in a protest movement compared to over 30s and under thirties are twice as likely to have taken an informal or formal public leadership position in their community versus those over 30.

*Note: In person activities may be lower than typical due to Covid.*

**Interest in becoming a politician**



Q4.3A. Would you ever consider running for office or becoming a politician?

Base: 15-17 years (3,264), 18-23 years (3,183), 24-29 years (3,872), 30-39 years (1,856), 40-49 years (1,453), 50-59 years (1,712), 60 years and over (3,103)

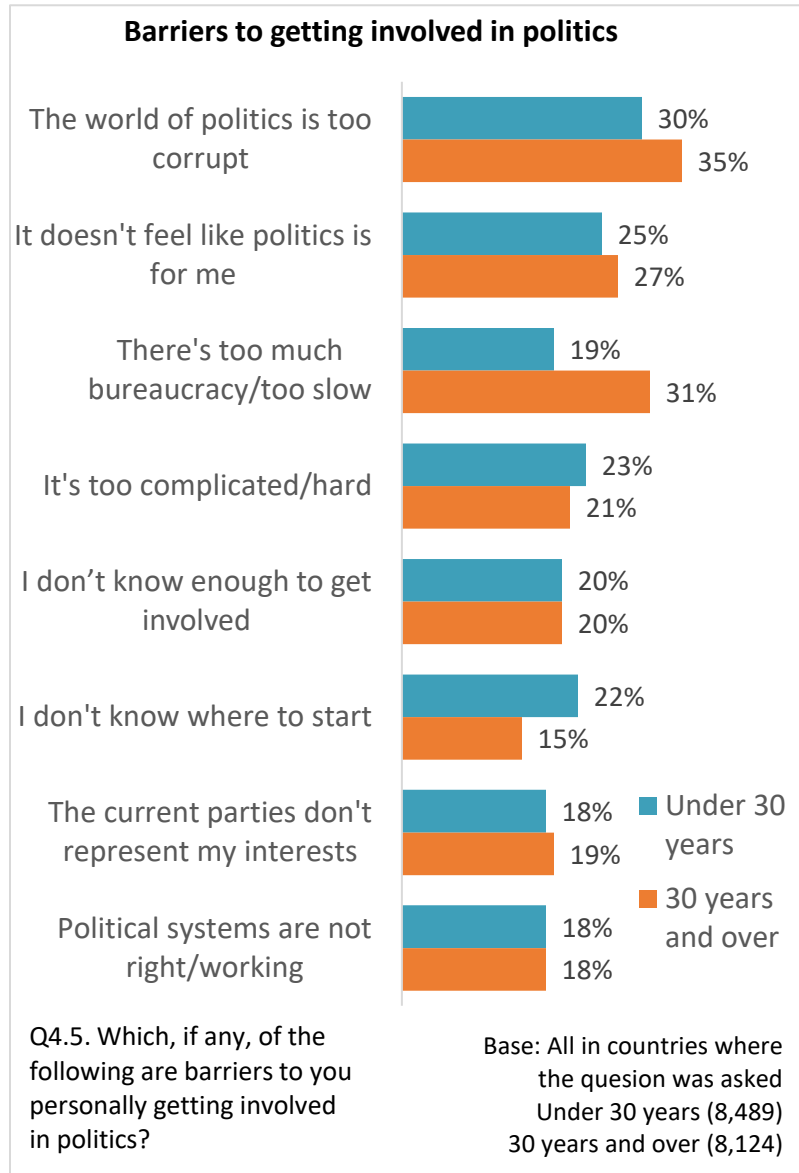
**People want to be changemakers, but there are barriers**

78% of young people say they want to make positive changes in the world but don't know where to start. In some countries this is even higher, for example, in South Africa, 89% of people under 30 wanted to make changes, but say they don't know how.

People want to participate but feel there are barriers or lack of opportunities to take part in political systems. In fact, a whopping 9 out of 10 people globally see barriers to entering politics. These barriers are varied, but for young people they include politics being too corrupt (30%), bureaucratic (19%), and complicated (23%).

Some differences were geographical. For example, people under 30 who live in rural locations are less likely to have participated in political activity in the past year, figures that may have been impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic.

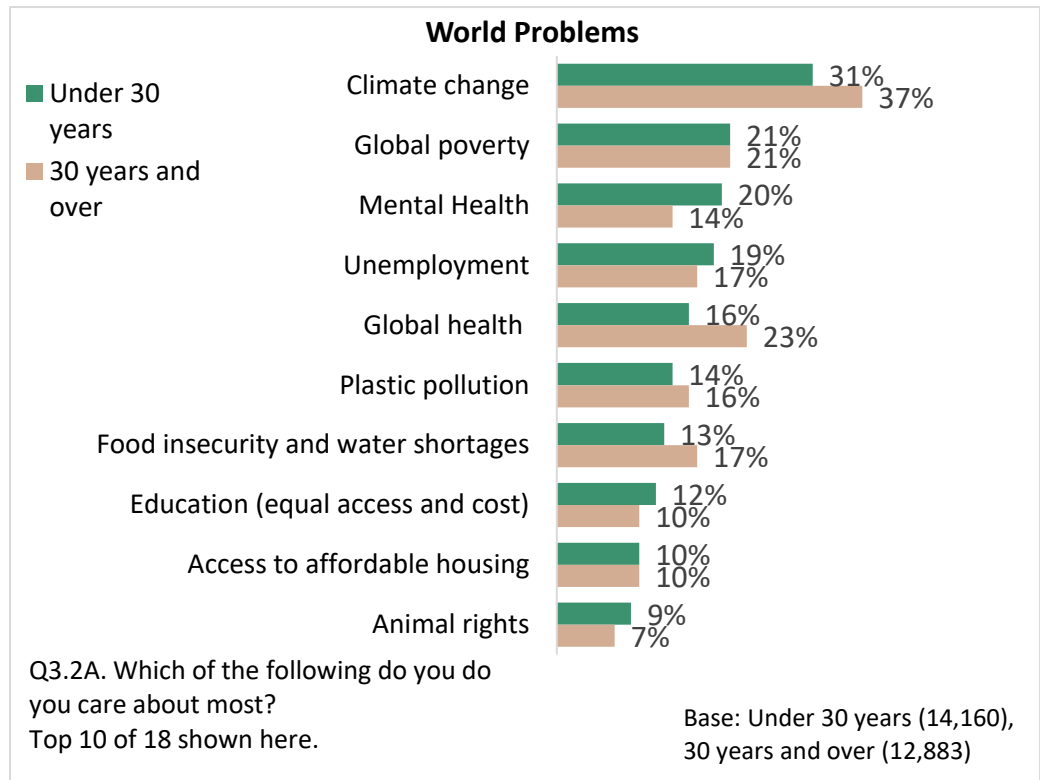
Different societies also had different levels of confidence in their own qualifications for office. Japan, France and Canada were the least likely countries to believe they could do a better job than current politicians.



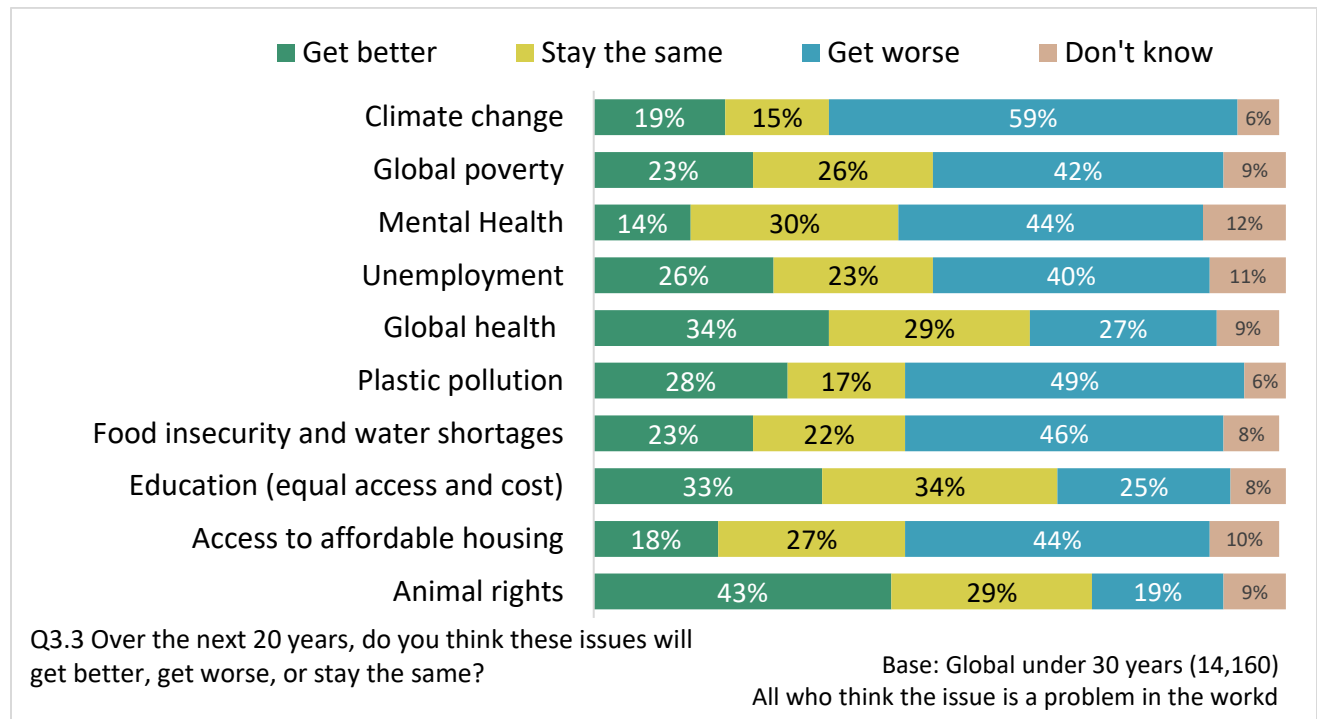
**Young people lack political power but worry things are going to get worse**

Young people care about a wide range of issues. The top issues they care about are 1) climate change, 2) global poverty and 3) mental health.

Importantly, more than half of young people think climate change will get worse in the next 20 years, which makes youth representation in politics an even more urgent issue.



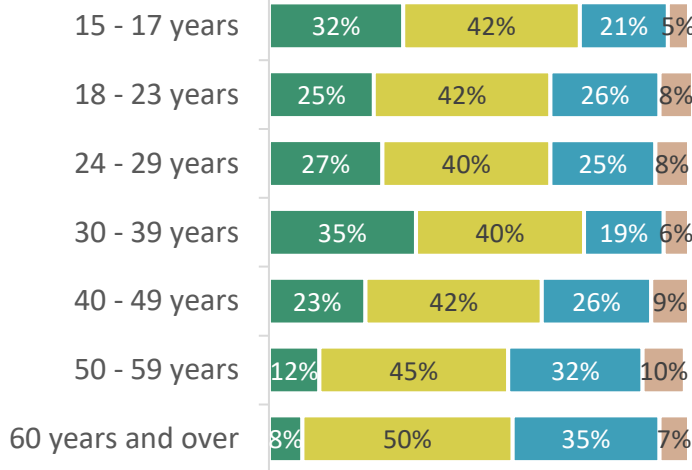
*The Covid-19 pandemic was excluded from the list of world problems as this study is focused on challenges the world will face, long after the Covid-19 pandemic has ended.*



**Young people are the most hopeful about the future**

**I feel positive about the future**

■ Strongly agree      ■ Tend to agree  
■ Tend to disagree      ■ Strongly disagree



Q3.1. Below is a list of statements about yourself and the world, please indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with each statement.

Base: 15-17 years (3,264), 18-23 years (3,183), 24-29 years (3,872), 30-39 years (1,856), 40-49 years (1,453), 50-59 years (1,712), 60 years and over (3,103)

The good news for the next generation of changemakers is that, despite their worries about global issues, 67% of people across all age categories feel broadly positive about the future. The group most positive about the future were 15–17-year-olds. People in Indonesia feel the most positive about the future (92%) followed by China (90%) and India (90%). On the other hand, people from Japan and Belgium feel the least positive about the future (56%) and Japan are also the most depressed about the future (81%).

Globally, people living in cities felt more positive about the future (71%) versus 60% of those living in rural areas. Interestingly, men are slightly more likely to feel positive about the future.

For many people, change is already underway, which is felt across all generations. The same number of over and under thirties (66%) say they have already started to make a difference in the world.