



THE MCCAIN INSTITUTE · ARIZONA YOUTH SURVEY
2026

2026 Arizona Youth Survey

A report on the attitudes, priorities, and civic engagement of 18- to 29-year-old Arizonans related to democracy, politics, and government.

AUGUST 2026

SocialSphere, Inc.

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Objective & Approach

- The McCain Institute partnered with SocialSphere to refresh its 2022 benchmark study of young Arizonans, building a current portrait of how 18- to 29-year-old Arizonans relate to democracy, politics, government, and civic life.
- This 2026 wave carries forward many of the 2022 questions to quantify change since the last midterm cycle, examines the issues shaping 2026, and connects identity, information sources, and institutional trust to civic behavior.
- The survey explored:
 - Political background and identity
 - Values and salient issues
 - Perceptions and trust in leaders and institutions
 - Civic engagement beyond voting
 - Information sources
 - Community and wellbeing
- The survey was conducted online April 27 to May 7, 2026, among **1,553** Arizona residents ages 18 to 29, in English and Spanish. Because this is a nonprobability sample, a traditional margin of sampling error does not strictly apply; results carry an approximate 95% uncertainty interval of **±2.5 percentage points**. Results are weighted to reflect the Arizona 18–29-year-old population using iterative proportional fitting (raking). Demographic benchmarks for gender, age, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, and county geography were drawn from the 2024 American Community Survey; voter registration, party registration, and 2024 turnout benchmarks from the April 2026 TargetSmart voter file. Additional calibration adjustments were applied to help reduce the selection and coverage biases common to opt-in online samples.
- Where noted, results are compared with the McCain Institute’s 2022 Arizona Youth Survey, conducted online November 23 to 30, 2022, among **1,502** Arizona residents ages 18 to 29, which carried the same approximate 95% uncertainty interval of **±2.5 percentage points**.
- Estimates for subgroups carry wider uncertainty than the full-sample interval; open-end recodes are shown with unweighted bases. Respondent quotations are drawn verbatim from open-ended responses, lightly edited for spelling and punctuation, and reflect respondents’ own words and perceptions.

Participation has held. Faith in the process has not.

- **They're still showing up.** Civic activity has held since 2022, with young Arizonans taking part in about two civic activities on average. A majority research candidates or issues before voting (52%), and many volunteer their time in their communities (42%).
- **They care about kitchen table issues, and the top of the list has barely moved since 2022.** Cost of living, housing, and healthcare again lead, all rated important by more than nine in ten. Water joins them this wave, and immigration is top of mind for many.
- **They are living these issues.** The agenda comes straight from daily life: more than a third have gone without stable housing in the past five years, and more than four in ten have been touched by immigration enforcement, whether themselves, family, friends, or their community.
- **They want government to act, and don't see it delivering.** By two to one they favor an active government, yet few say government, federal or state, is making a positive difference in their lives. The people they trust sit close to home: family, friends, and teachers. Institutions are not on the list.
- **The path to the ballot is narrowing.** Every barrier to voting is up since 2022, from poor candidate choices to election legitimacy, with new fears over personal safety and immigration enforcement now on the list.

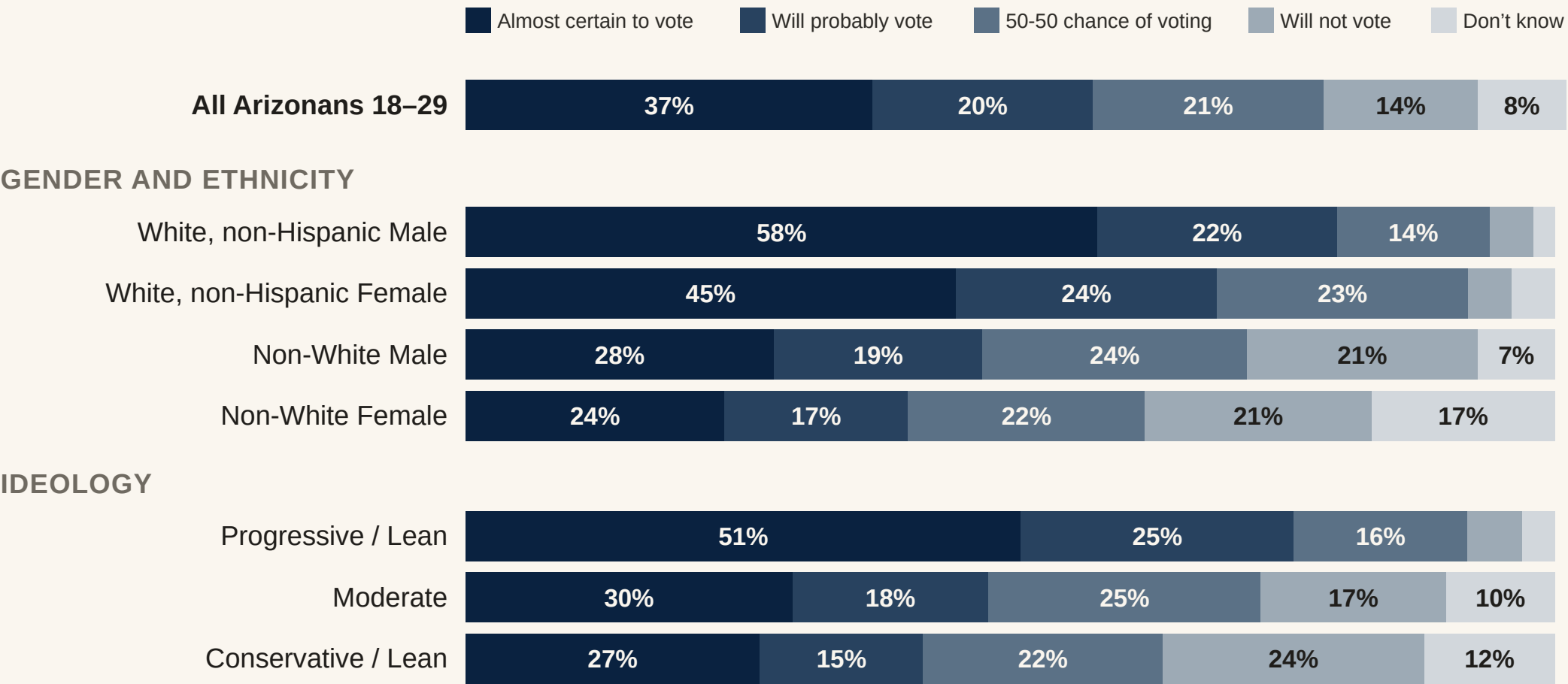
Civic Engagement

Civic activity has held steady since 2022, but just over a third are almost certain they will vote in the midterm ahead. The most active feel the most, hope and outrage alike, even as they are the most burned out.



Just over a third of young Arizonans are almost certain to vote in 2026, and that certainty splits sharply.

White young men and progressives are the most locked in; non-White women and conservatives the least sure.

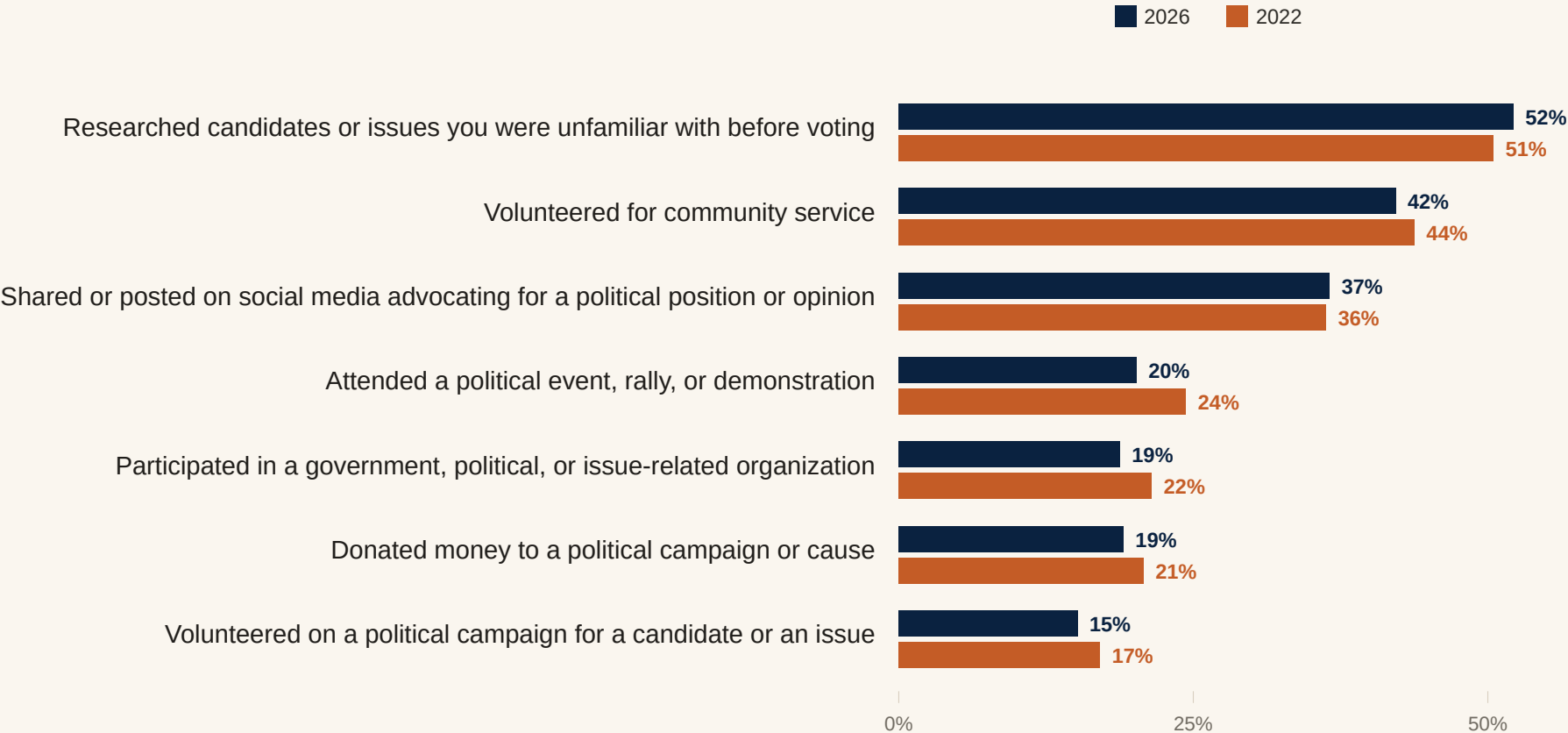


2026 midterm vote likelihood. N=1,553.

Young Arizonans take part in about two civic activities on average, most often researching candidates or issues, or volunteering.

Participation has held steady since 2022 across nearly every activity.

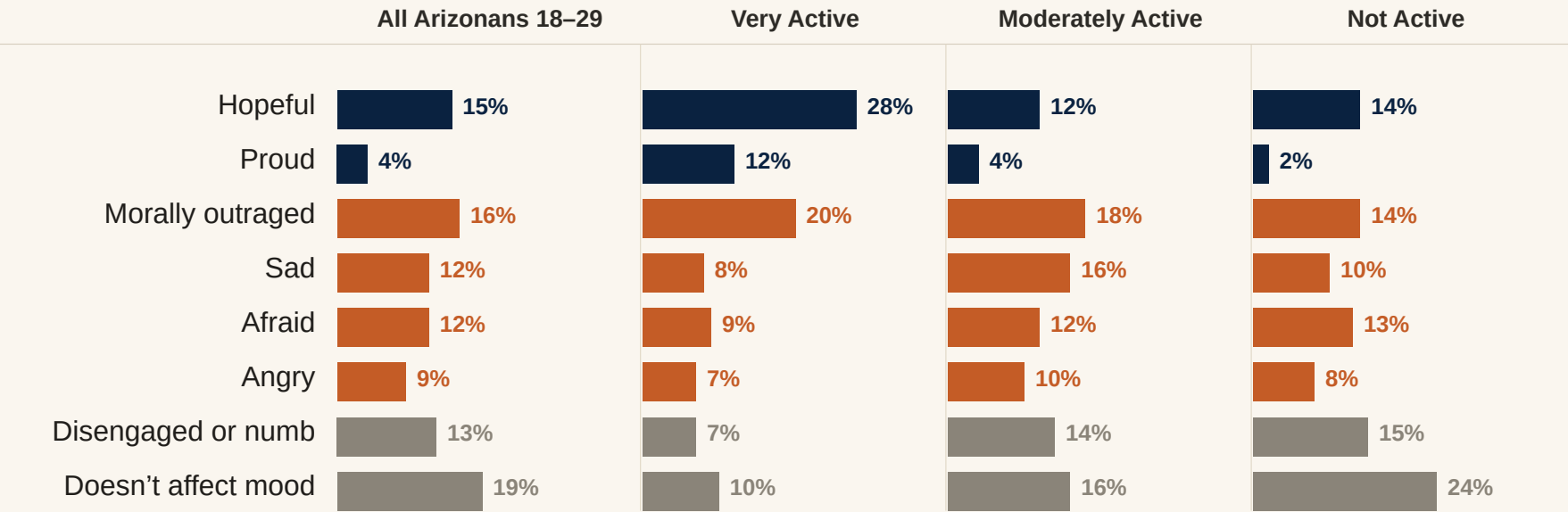
Which of the following activities, if any, have you participated in over the last two years?



The most active are about twice as likely as the least active to feel hopeful about the news, 28% versus 14%.

They are also the most burned out: 71% of the most active feel burned out by politics, versus 61% of the least active.

Which one of the following best describes your reaction to the news and current events you are seeing these days?



Activity levels: Very Active (5+ of 7 activities), Moderately Active (2–4), Not Active (0–1). Activities cover the past two years.

SECTION 3

Issue Priorities

Cost of living, housing, and healthcare lead the agenda, water has emerged as a top concern, and immigration is top of mind for many. These priorities run through young Arizonans' daily lives.



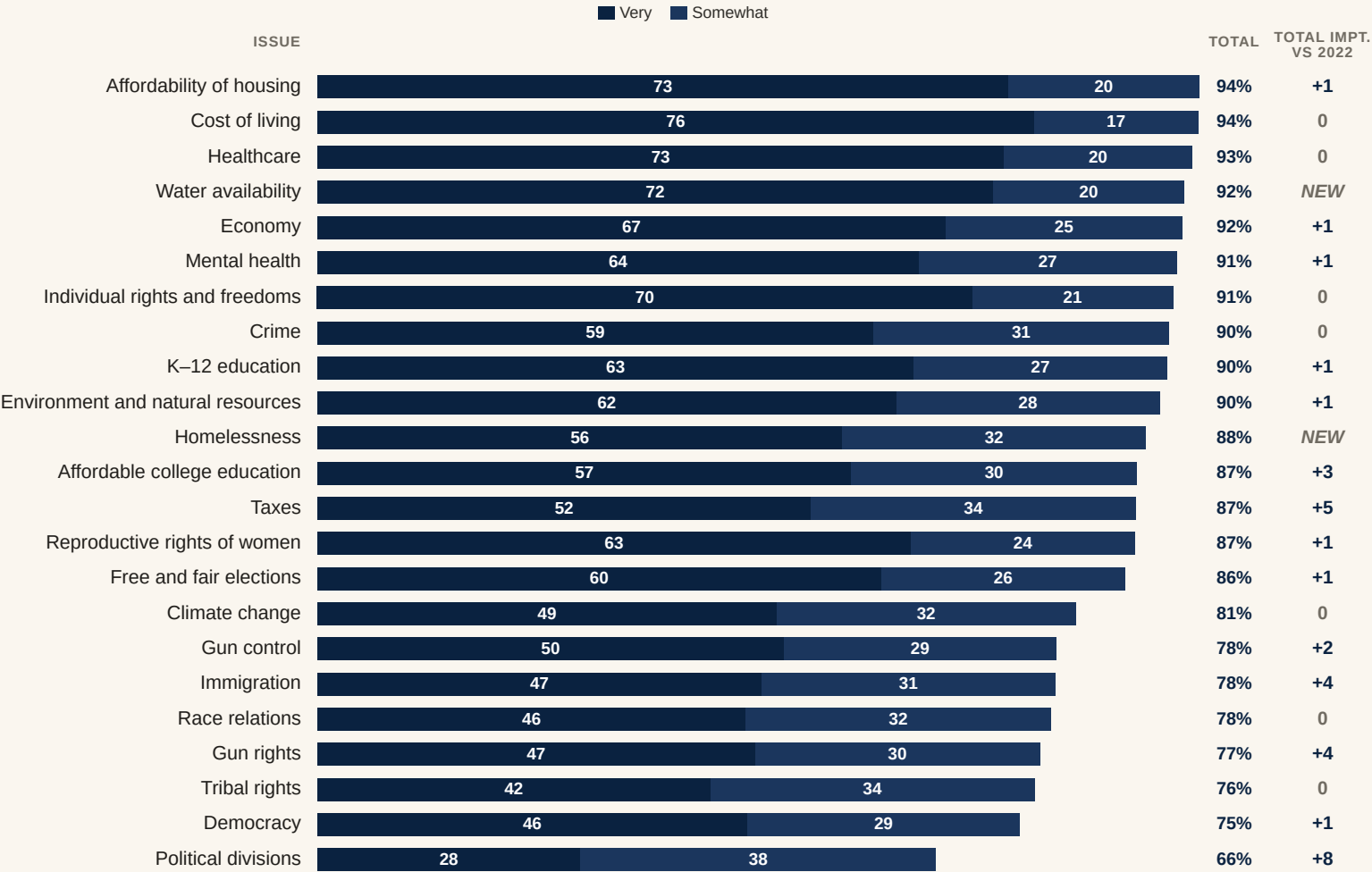
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Cost of living [is the issue that concerns me the most]. I've been wanting to move out of my parent's house and it's basically impossible because an apartment is the same cost of a mortgage payment.

— 27, WOMAN, PIMA COUNTY

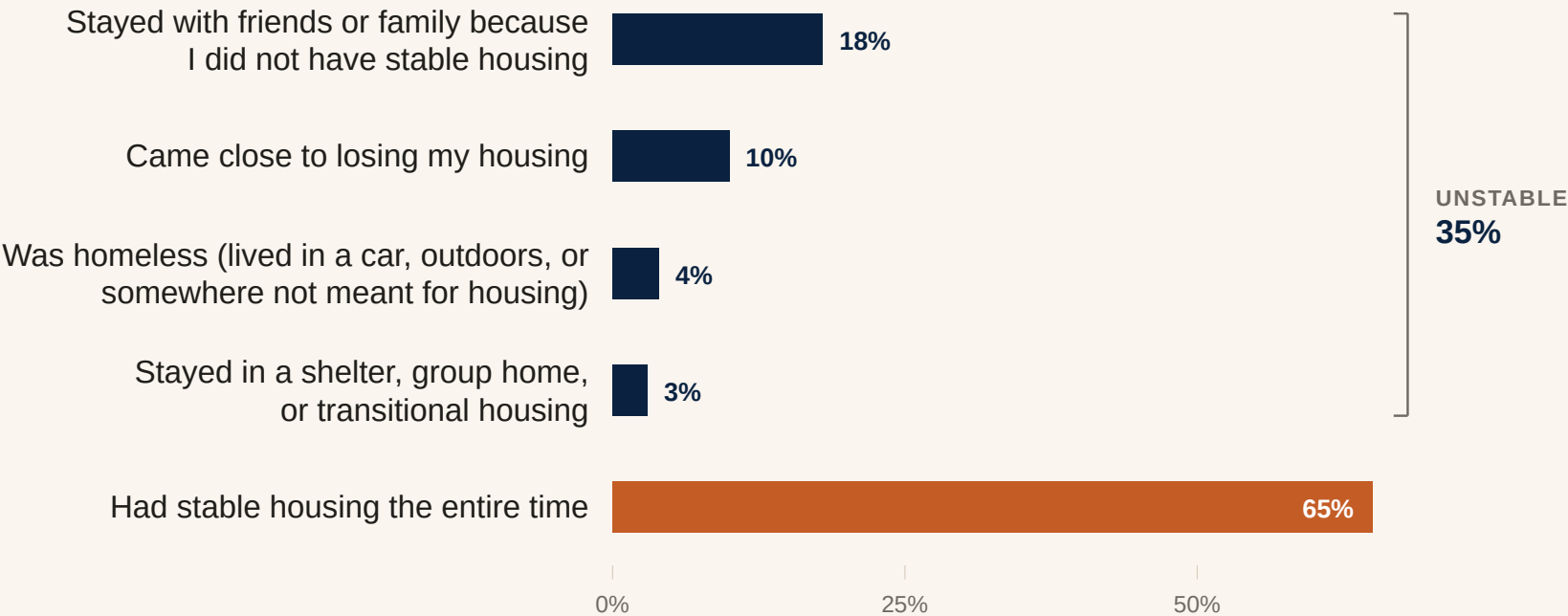
More than seven in ten young Arizonans rate housing, cost of living, healthcare, and water as very important.

When you think about the future of Arizona — how important are the following issues to you?



More than one in three young Arizonans have lived through housing instability in the past five years.

In the past 5 years, which of the following best describes your experience with housing?



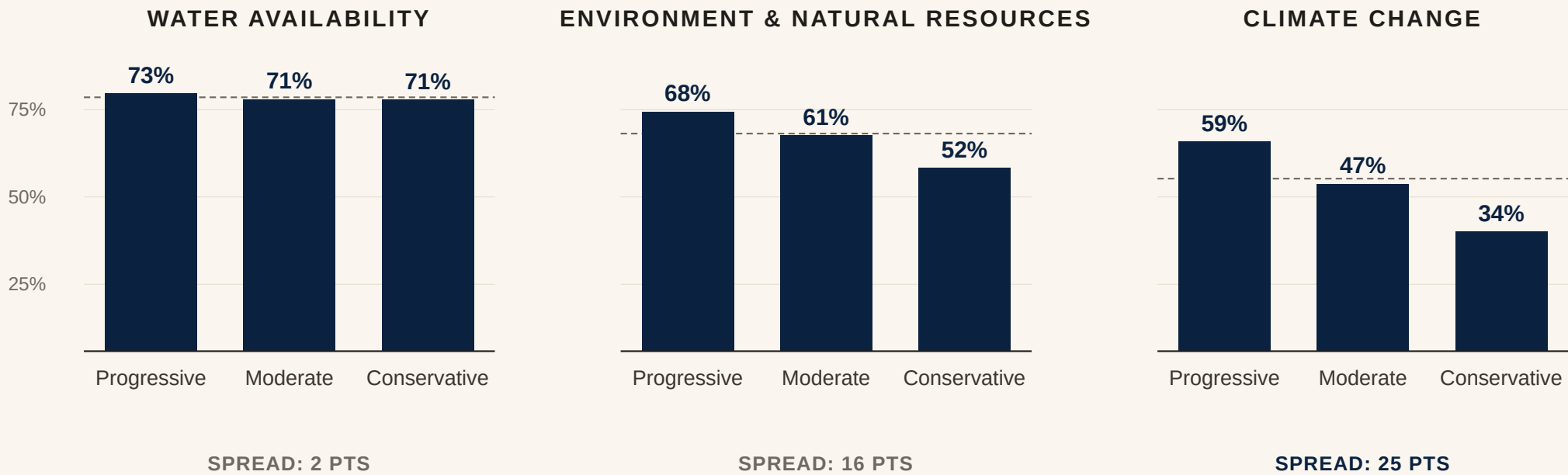
“

My town I currently live in is running out of water and the government currently wants to build a data center.

— 19, WOMAN, GILA COUNTY

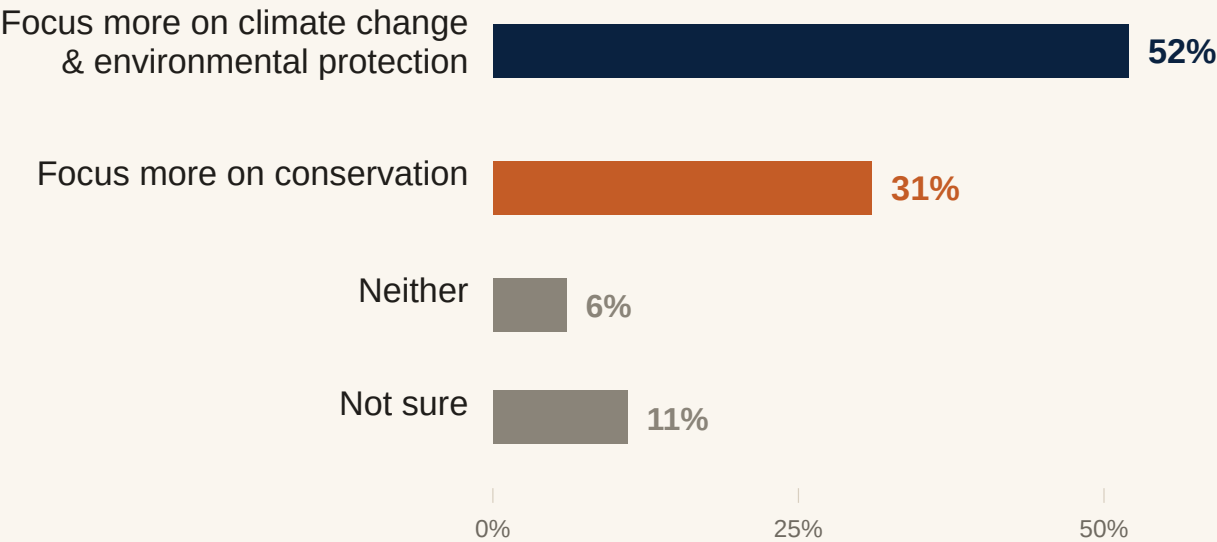
The issue of water unites young Arizonans across ideology, while climate change is more divisive.

Share rating each issue as ‘Very important’, by political ideology.



Given the choice, young Arizonans favor focusing on climate change and environmental protection over conservation, 52% to 31%.

When it comes to Arizona’s land, water, and natural resources, which of the following comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



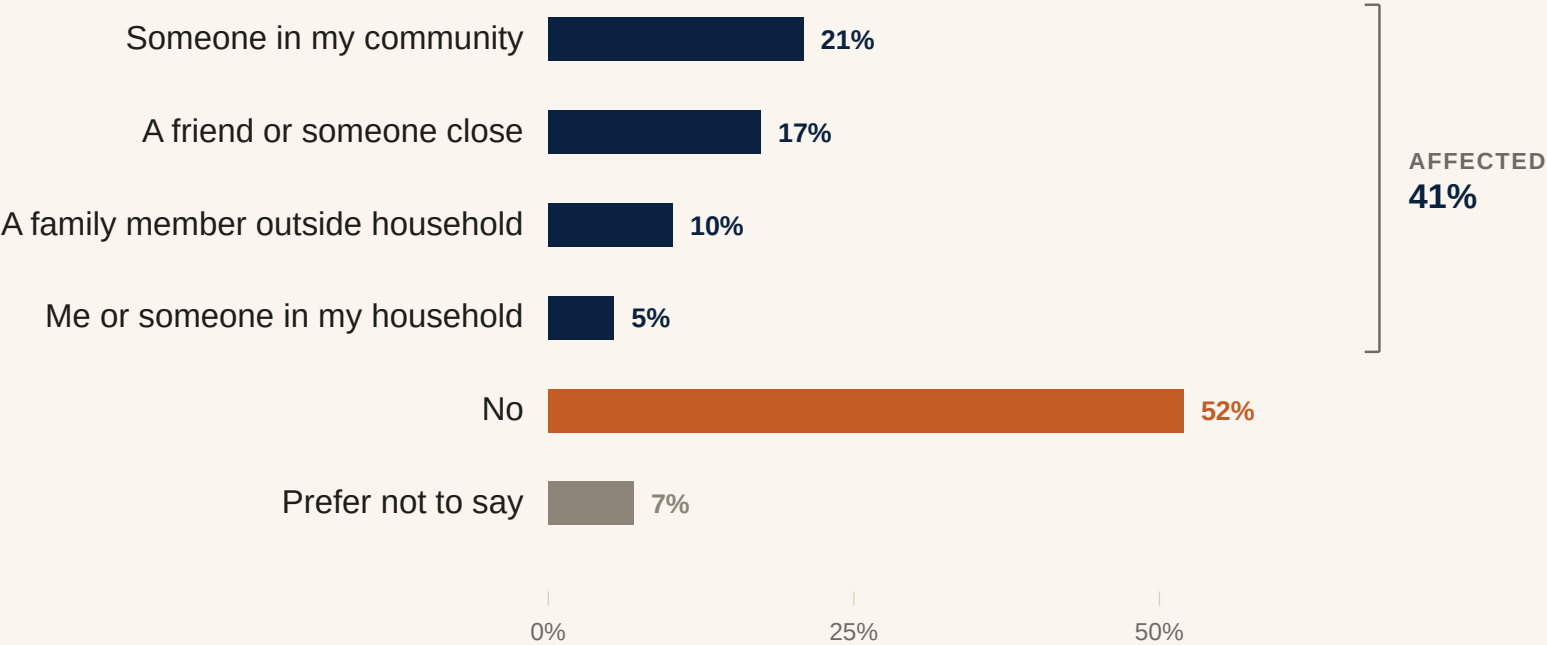
“

Arizona is mainly full of minorities and have built up this state from the ground up. We have Phoenix police officers in the streets fighting with ICE telling them to leave our state alone. As a third generation Mexican American it's scary to know I have to walk around with my ID and SS card or birth certificate to prove I'm an American citizen.

— 27, WOMAN, MARICOPA COUNTY

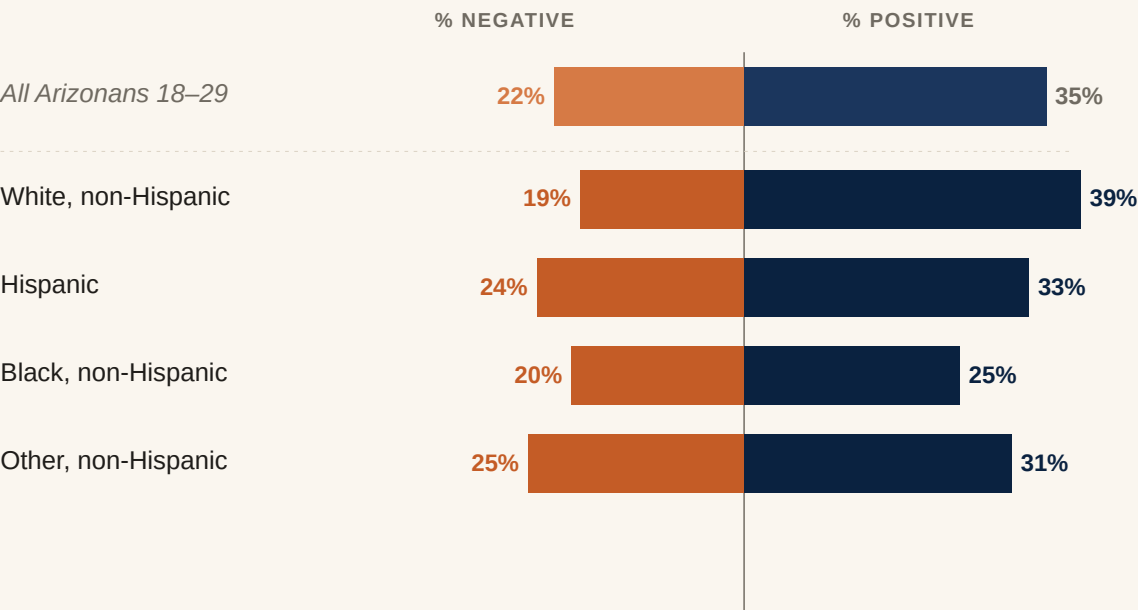
Immigration enforcement is personal for young Arizonans. More than four in ten have been affected: through household, family, friends, or community.

Have you or anyone you know been affected by immigration enforcement, deportation, or related government action? Please select all that apply.

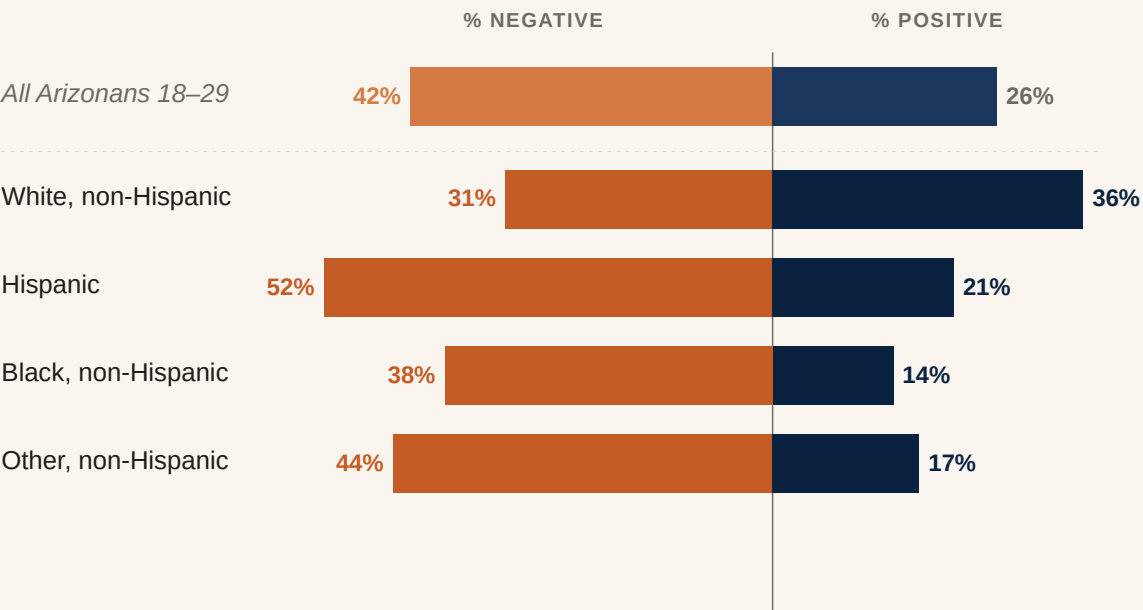


Young Arizonans view immigration more favorably than recent enforcement. White respondents are the most positive on both, and the only group net positive on enforcement.

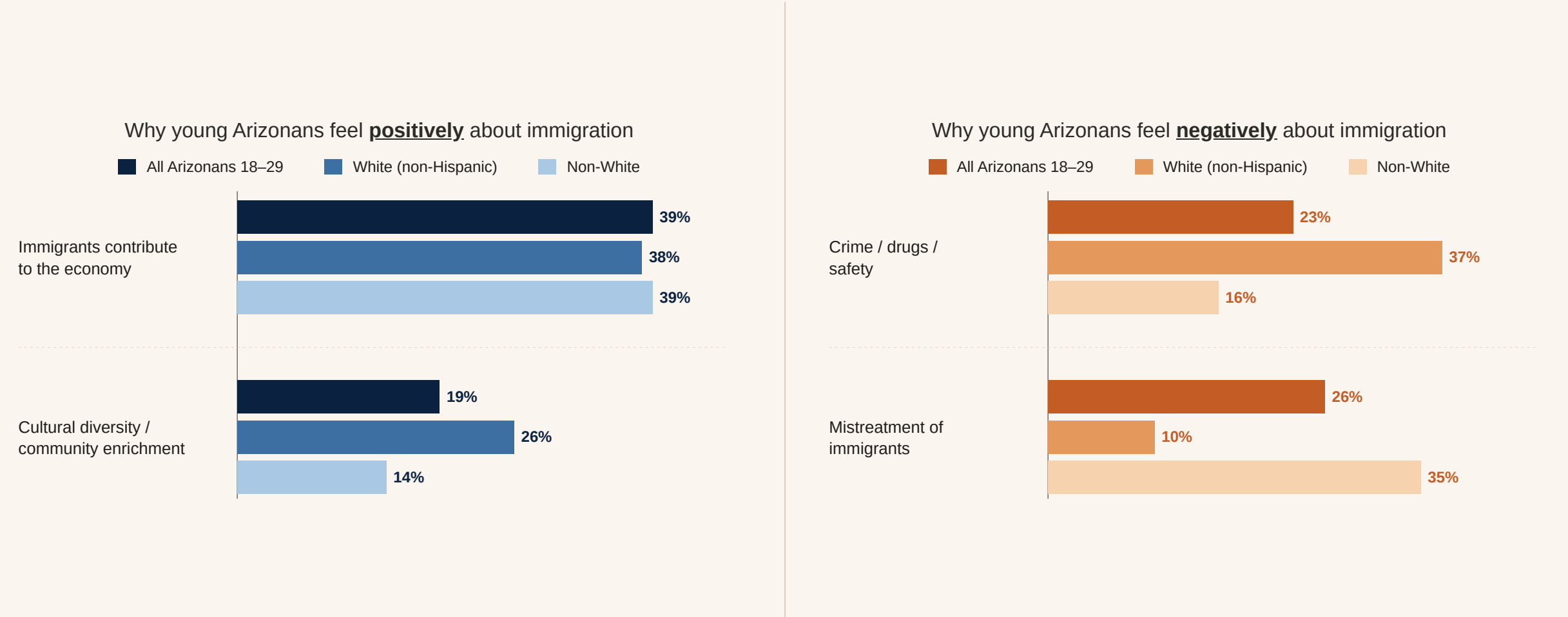
Overall, do you think immigration to Arizona in recent years has had a positive or negative impact on your community?



Overall, do you think recent changes in immigration enforcement have had a positive or negative impact in Arizona?



The economic case for immigration is shared across groups. A negative view means different things by race: White respondents cite crime and safety, non-White respondents the mistreatment of immigrants.



Open-end responses coded into categories. Positive base: respondents who said immigration had a positive impact (n=616 unweighted). Negative base: respondents who said negative impact (n=302 unweighted).

SECTION 4

Government & Institutions

Young Arizonans want government to work better. What they say they receive from it falls short, and their confidence has moved close to home.



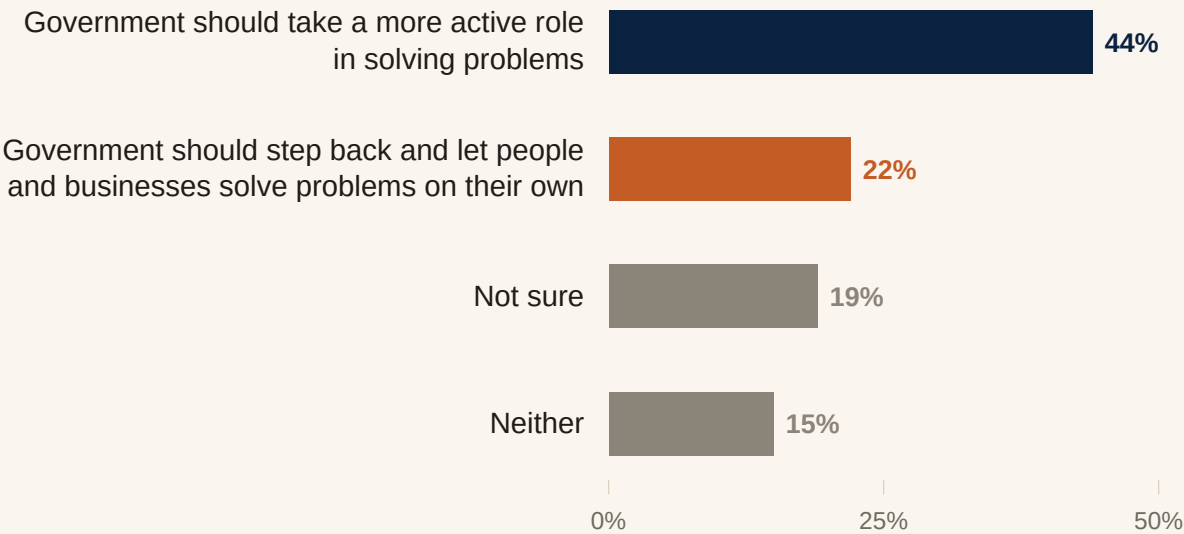
“

We should be able to trust our government, but we can't.

— 24, MAN, YUMA COUNTY

By 2 to 1, young Arizonans want government to take an active role rather than step back.

Which of the following comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



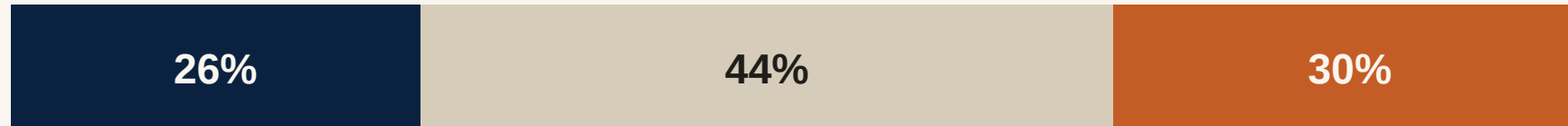
Young Arizonans say the federal government is making a negative difference in their lives; for state government, the most common answer is no difference at all.

■ Positive ■ No difference ■ Negative

Overall, is the federal government making a positive or negative difference in your life?



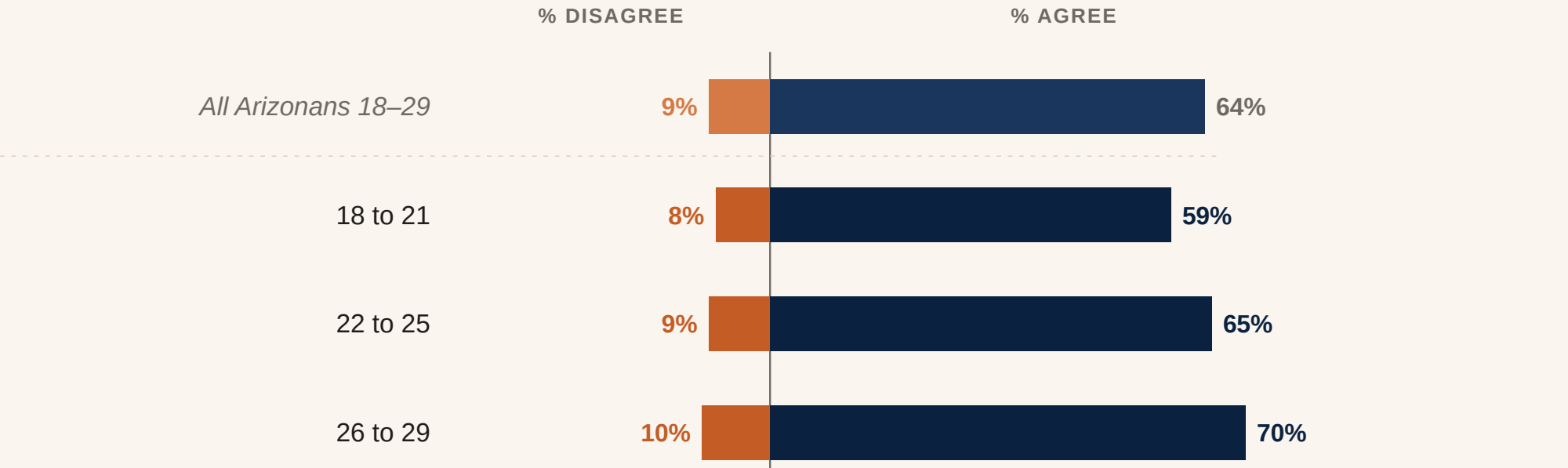
Overall, is Arizona state government making a positive or negative difference in your life?



64% of young Arizonans say elected officials in Arizona are more interested in their own power than in what people like them think.

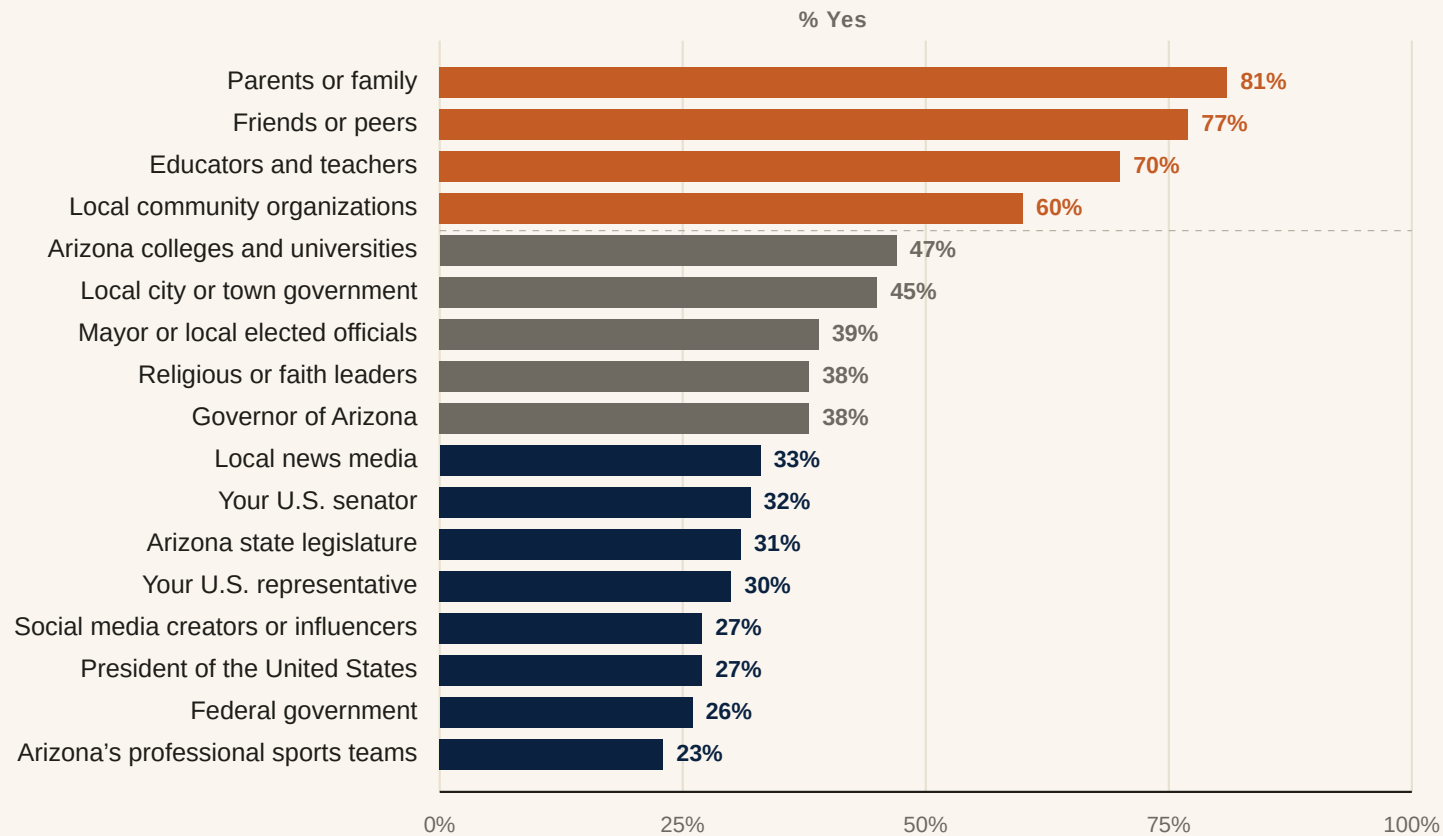
Agreement rises with age: 59% of 18- to 21-year-olds, 65% of 22- to 25-year-olds, and 70% of 26- to 29-year-olds.

Elected officials in Arizona are more interested in their own power than in what people like me think.



Asked who has their best interests in mind, young Arizonans name the people closest to them. The political institutions seeking their participation rank near the bottom.

When it comes to the issues you care about, do you think each of the following generally has the best interests of people like you in mind?



SECTION 5

Barriers to Voting

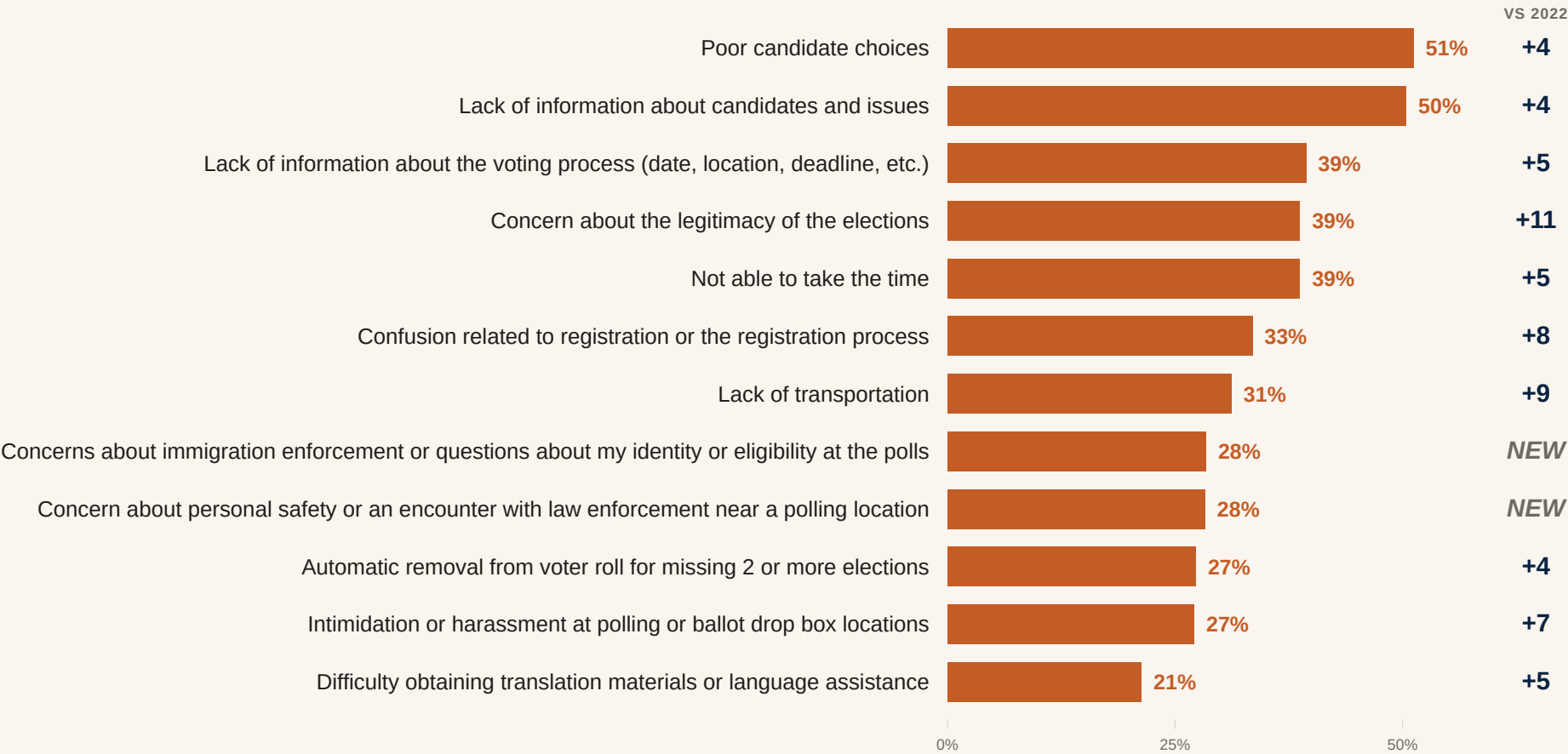
Young Arizonans report more barriers to voting in 2026 than in 2022, and a wider range of them. Doubt about the elections themselves carries the highest price.



Every barrier to voting is higher than in 2022, and doubt about election legitimacy is up the most, by 11 points.

On average, young Arizonans cite about 4 of these 12 barriers.

Below is a list of reasons some people give for not voting in every statewide and local election in Arizona.
Have any of the following been reasons that prevented you from voting in these elections?



“

The system is biased and rigged. No matter who you chose it's all just for show.

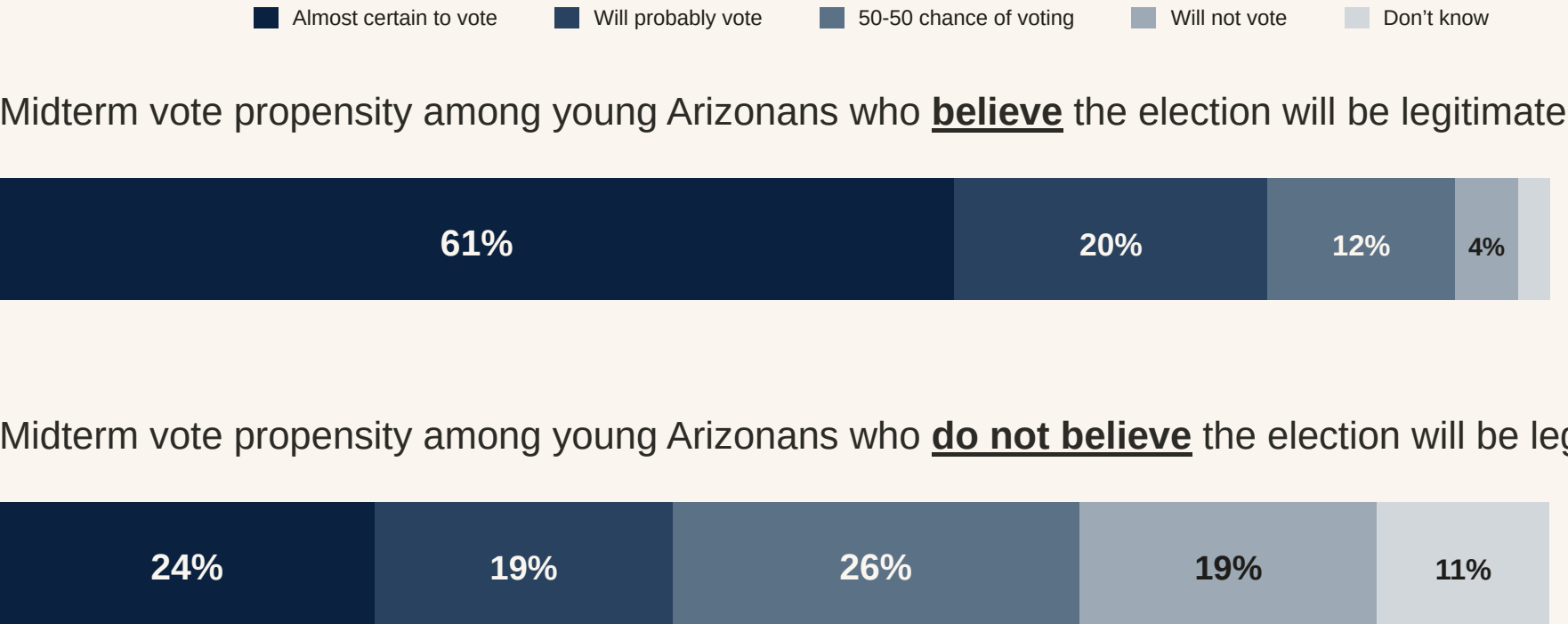
— 25, WOMAN, PIMA COUNTY

Belief in election legitimacy has fallen since 2022. Just 36% call the 2024 presidential election legitimate, down from 50% who said the same of the 2022 election.

Share of young Arizonans who say each election was or will be legitimate



Legitimacy doubt tracks intent to vote. 61% of those who believe the 2026 election will be legitimate are almost certain to vote, versus 24% of those who don't.



Self-reported likelihood of voting in the 2026 midterm, by belief that the 2026 election will be legitimate.

Doubt that voting matters is broadly shared, holding near half across gender, race, and party.

“It does not matter whether I vote or not, nothing much will change.”

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
All Arizonans 18–29	50%	22%	28%
GENDER AND ETHNICITY			
White, non-Hispanic Male	52%	21%	27%
White, non-Hispanic Female	52%	17%	31%
Non-White Male	48%	24%	27%
Non-White Female	49%	26%	25%
PARTY ID			
Democratic	45%	18%	37%
Republican	51%	17%	32%
Independent/unaffiliated	50%	27%	22%
Don't know	54%	23%	23%
2026 MIDTERM VOTE LIKELIHOOD			
Almost certain to vote	42%	14%	44%
Will probably vote	55%	26%	19%
50-50 chance of voting	51%	32%	17%
Will not vote	56%	25%	19%
Don't know	57%	25%	18%

SECTION 6

Five Civic Mindsets

Young Arizonans hold five civic mindsets, each a different mix of belief, burnout, and detachment. Together they explain who votes, who wavers, and who has checked out.



How the segments were built

PURPOSE

To look beneath demographics, we built a segmentation model based on young Arizonans' attitudes toward voting, government, and civic life. Using factor analysis and k-means clustering, we identified five distinct civic mindsets, a deeper view of how young Arizonans relate to civic participation than party or background alone can offer.

Building on prior cycles and the issues shaping 2026, we fielded a battery of attitudinal statements about the efficacy of government, politics, and voting. The goal was to map the attitudinal structure underlying civic engagement among young people in the state.

METHODOLOGY

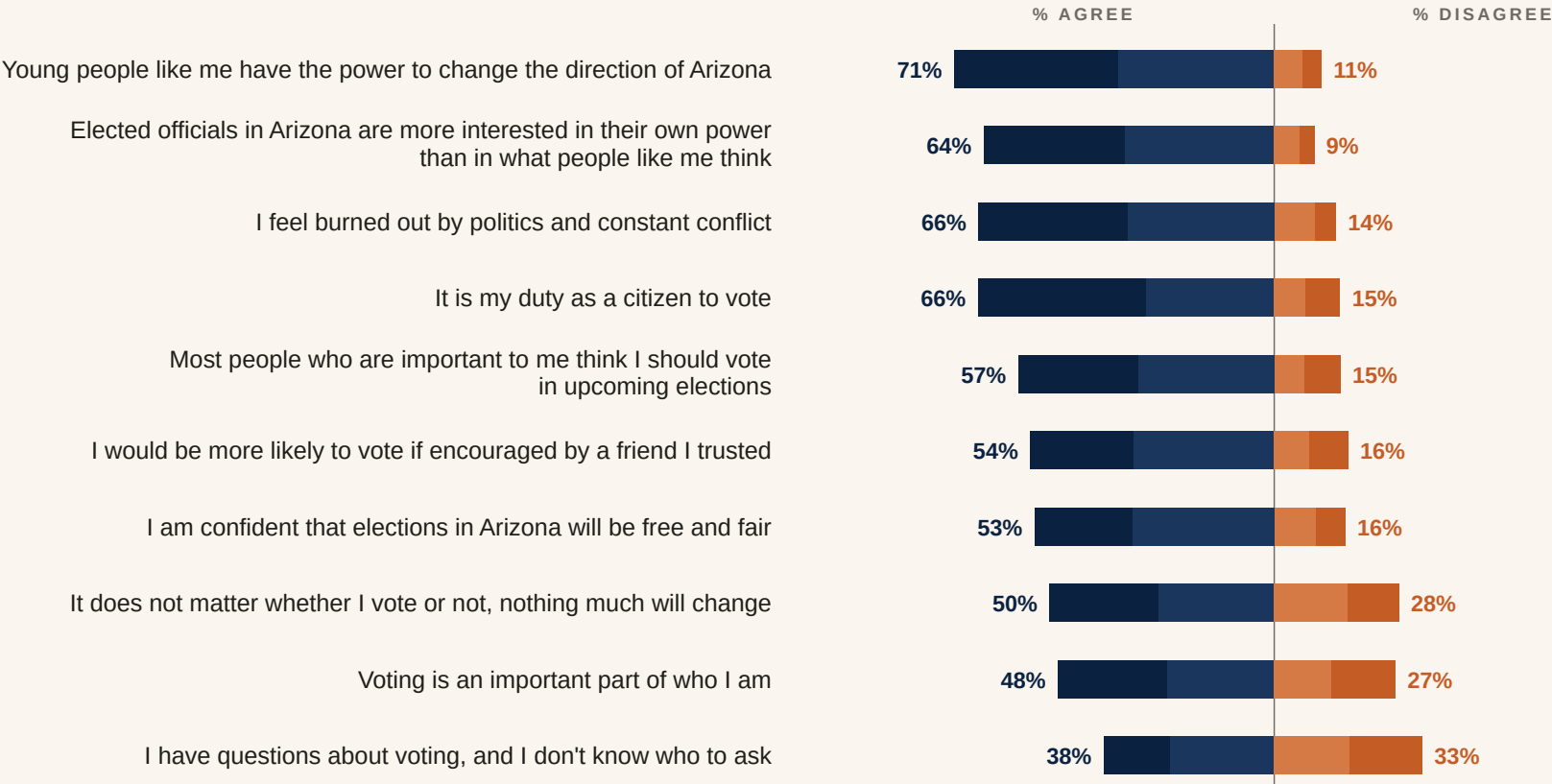
We grouped respondents in two steps. A factor analysis first distilled the ten attitude statements into three underlying dimensions: Pro-Civic Engagement (duty, identity, efficacy, and trust in elections), Process Detachment (a sense that voting is pointless or confusing), and Burnout and Elite Cynicism (exhaustion with politics and distrust of those in power). A k-means clustering analysis then sorted respondents by where they fell on those dimensions, producing five segments.

We tested solutions from three to eight segments and chose five because it drew the clearest, most meaningful distinctions. Because civic attitudes shade into one another, the five are best read as a useful way to organize a continuum rather than as sharply bounded types.

The five segments come from these 10 civic attitude statements.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

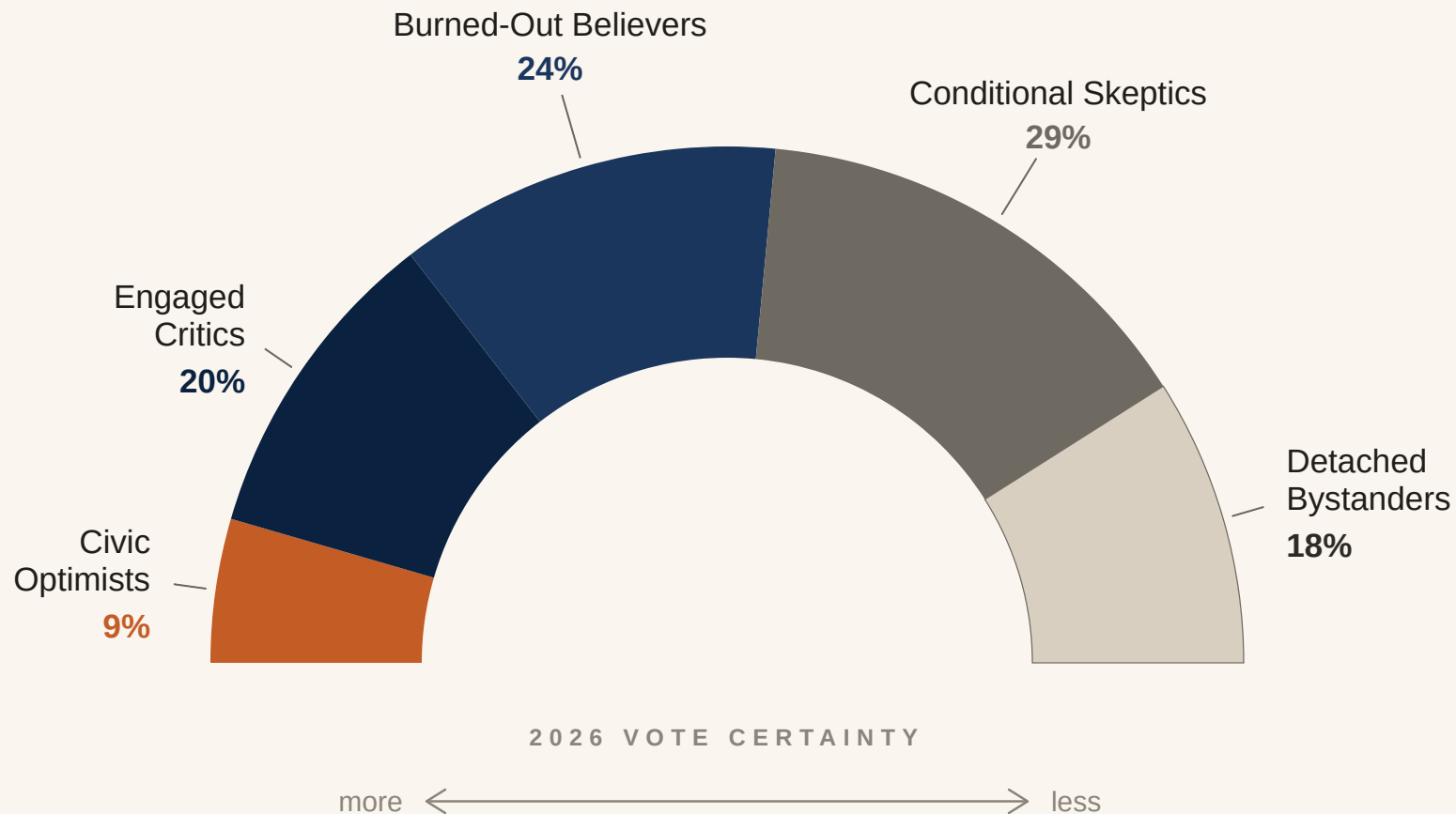
Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree



Items ordered by net agreement. Bars do not sum to 100; the remainder is “neither agree nor disagree.”

Five distinct civic mindsets.

Statistical clustering of the civic attitudes battery sorts young Arizonans into five segments, each combining efficacy, institutional trust, election legitimacy, and political voice in a different way. *Ordered by 2026 vote certainty.*



Factor analysis and k-means clustering of the civic attitudes battery · N=1,553

What the five segments believe.

Mean agreement with each statement on a 1 to 5 scale, by segment. Shaded by deviation from the 18-29 population.

	All Arizonans 18–29	Civic Optimists	Engaged Critics	Burned-Out Believers	Conditional Skeptics	Detached Bystanders
PRO-CIVIC ENGAGEMENT						
“Young people like me have the power to change the direction of Arizona”	3.93	4.42	4.52	4.45	3.45	3.12
“It is my duty as a citizen to vote”	3.81	4.54	4.59	4.48	3.17	2.73
“Most people who are important to me think I should vote in upcoming elections”	3.61	4.10	4.35	4.35	3.04	2.49
“I would be more likely to vote if encouraged by a friend I trusted”	3.52	3.71	3.88	4.29	3.14	2.63
“I am confident that elections in Arizona will be free and fair”	3.53	4.23	3.73	4.19	3.03	2.88
“Voting is an important part of who I am”	3.31	4.32	3.99	4.22	2.44	2.29
PROCESS DETACHMENT						
“It does not matter whether I vote or not, nothing much will change”	3.35	2.15	2.20	4.23	3.95	3.10
“I have questions about voting, and I don’t know who to ask”	3.03	2.11	2.18	4.25	3.20	2.59
BURNOUT & ELITE CYNICISM						
“I feel burned out by politics and constant conflict”	3.80	2.20	4.30	4.32	4.19	2.72
“Elected officials in Arizona are more interested in their own power than in what people like me think”	3.84	2.84	4.10	4.38	4.09	2.89

Mean rating on a 1 to 5 scale (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). Segment columns are weighted. Cells shaded by deviation from the 18-29 population. N=1,553.

Who the five segments are.

	All Arizonans 18–29	Civic Optimists	Engaged Critics	Burned-Out Believers	Conditional Skeptics	Detached Bystanders
GENDER						
Male	51%	66%	47%	53%	46%	53%
Female	47%	32%	49%	46%	53%	44%
RACE AND ETHNICITY						
White, non-Hispanic	40%	56%	44%	48%	37%	23%
Hispanic	41%	33%	38%	33%	45%	52%
Black, non-Hispanic	5%	4%	3%	5%	4%	8%
Asian, non-Hispanic	4%	1%	7%	3%	5%	4%
Other, non-Hispanic	10%	6%	8%	10%	10%	13%
AGE						
18-21	37%	29%	36%	29%	43%	42%
22-25	32%	33%	29%	37%	30%	31%
26-29	31%	38%	35%	34%	27%	27%
PARTY ID						
Democratic	24%	16%	40%	33%	15%	11%
Republican	19%	51%	16%	23%	13%	12%
Independent/unaffiliated	39%	26%	38%	33%	50%	39%
Don't know	18%	7%	6%	11%	22%	38%
FINANCIAL SITUATION						
Comfortable	24%	49%	15%	43%	15%	15%
Getting by	33%	32%	41%	27%	34%	30%
Strained	38%	16%	39%	28%	48%	45%
EDUCATION						
Bachelor or higher	13%	11%	22%	13%	10%	6%
Some college	14%	13%	17%	11%	15%	12%
High school or less	30%	14%	17%	25%	36%	50%
High school/college student	44%	62%	44%	52%	38%	32%
VOTER REGISTRATION						
Registered	70%	84%	83%	77%	64%	50%
MIDTERM VOTE PROPENSITY						
Almost certain to vote	37%	68%	65%	48%	17%	9%

Each segment cell is shaded by its difference from all 18- to 29-year-olds: blue above the population, orange below. Shares are column percentages. N=1,553. Voter registration and 2024 turnout were statewide weighting targets; the all-Arizonans figures on those rows reflect imposed benchmarks, while differences across segments are survey-measured.

Civic Optimists

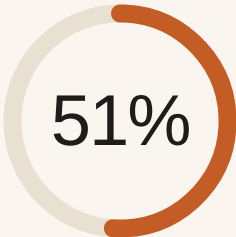
Civic Optimists are the **small, system-confident corner** of Arizona’s youth population: the only segment with a Republican majority, the highest institutional trust of any segment, the most consistent voters, and the most active in community service.

More than half believe both the 2024 election and the 2026 midterm are legitimate; they are also the most likely segment to say government is making a positive difference in their lives.

Against the broader pattern of rising strain, Civic Optimists are the segment for whom **civic life still feels functional**. At 9%, they are the smallest of the five.

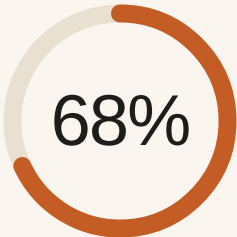
9% OF YOUNG ARIZONANS

REPUBLICAN



The only segment with a Republican majority.

ALMOST CERTAIN TO VOTE IN 2026



Highest 2026 turnout intent of any segment.

BELIEVE BOTH 2024 & 2026 ELECTIONS LEGITIMATE



Highest of any segment by more than 20 points.

VOLUNTEERED FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE



Highest of the five segments.

■ Engaged Critics

Engaged Critics are the **politically attentive, Democratic-leaning core**: highly informed, highly active, and deeply dissatisfied.

They lead the population on information consumption and are the most likely segment to say what happens in Congress and Arizona state government affects their lives. Their strain is institutional: 69% say elected officials in Congress do not value their views, and moral outrage is their dominant reaction to the news.

They are the segment that **channels distrust into sustained engagement**: close attention to institutions they do not trust.

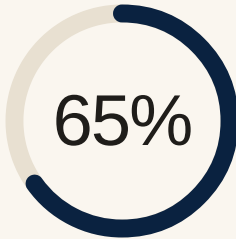
20% OF YOUNG ARIZONANS

DEMOCRAT



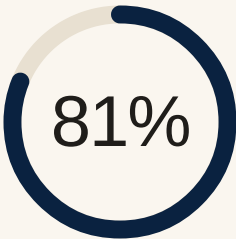
The most Democratic-leaning segment by 7 points.

ALMOST CERTAIN TO VOTE IN 2026



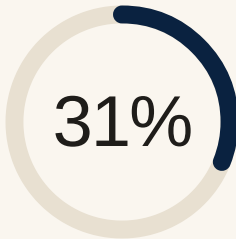
Second-highest 2026 turnout intent of any segment.

RESEARCHED CANDIDATES BEFORE VOTING



Highest of any segment by 18 points; the information segment.

BELIEVE BOTH 2024 & 2026 ELECTIONS LEGITIMATE



Engagement through critique: half the rate of Civic Optimists.

■ Burned-Out Believers

Burned-Out Believers are the **politically mixed, action-oriented segment**: believing enough to keep showing up, even as the cost climbs. They lead the segments in hands-on political activity: donating, participating in political organizations, and volunteering for campaigns. And 29% describe their reaction to the news as hopeful, more than any other segment. They have stayed in.

But the cost of staying in is steep. They cite more barriers to voting than any other segment. 85%, the highest of any segment, now say their vote will not change anything. And the largest drop-off between 2024 turnout and 2026 midterm certainty sits here.

Their strain is exposure: 10% say someone in their household has been affected by immigration enforcement, the highest of any segment. At 24% of the population, they are the **second-largest segment, where high engagement meets high cost**.

24% OF YOUNG ARIZONANS

DROP-OFF: VOTED IN 2024 →
ALMOST CERTAIN TO VOTE 2026



Largest drop-off of any segment: 81% voted in 2024; only 48% almost certain about 2026.

MEAN CIVIC ACTIVITIES (OF 7)



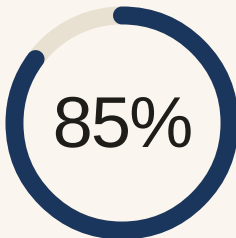
Most active of the five segments. Politics as work.

MEAN BARRIERS TO VOTING CITED
(OF 12)



Highest of any segment, engaged despite friction.

AGREE THEIR VOTE WILL NOT
CHANGE ANYTHING



Highest agreement of any segment. The strain made explicit.

■ Conditional Skeptics

Conditional Skeptics are the **largest segment and the clearest expression of conditional civic attachment**.

They are the most likely to identify as Independent and are among the most financially strained, with 48% reporting their financial situation as stressed, struggling, or in crisis. Their strain is institutional: only 24% say the 2024 election was legitimate, and only 19% expect the 2026 midterm to be.

They remain unconvinced by institutions, and their engagement stays provisional, between absence and commitment.

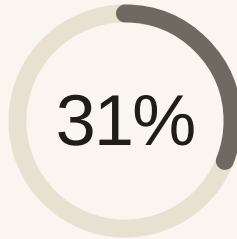
29% OF YOUNG ARIZONANS

INDEPENDENT OR UNAFFILIATED



Most likely to identify as Independent, by 11 points.

DONOTBELIEVE 2024 ELECTION WAS LEGITIMATE



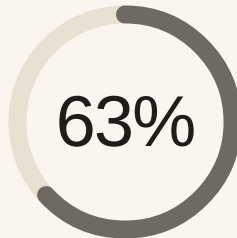
Highest active disbelief of any segment.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MAKES A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THEIR LIFE



Highest of any segment. Institutional strain made personal.

MILD-TO-SEVERE ON PHQ-9 DEPRESSION SCALE



Highest of any segment. Statewide PHQ-9 severity was a weighting benchmark; differences across segments are survey-measured.

■ Detached Bystanders

Detached Bystanders are **furthest from the civic conversation**. They are least likely to vote or register, and their political views are the least formed.

Their strain is upstream of politics: only 45% have had stable housing in the past five years. Their distance reads as absence: 41% say the news does not really affect their mood.

They sit **further out than the persuadable middle**. Civic life has not yet entered the foreground for them.

18% OF YOUNG ARIZONANS

ALMOST CERTAIN TO VOTE IN 2026



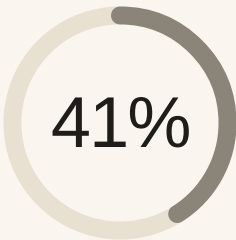
Lowest of the five segments by 8 points.

MEAN CIVIC ACTIVITIES (OF 7)



Lowest of the five segments. Outside civic life.

BELIEVE YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE ARIZONA



Lowest agreement of any segment. Absence of efficacy.

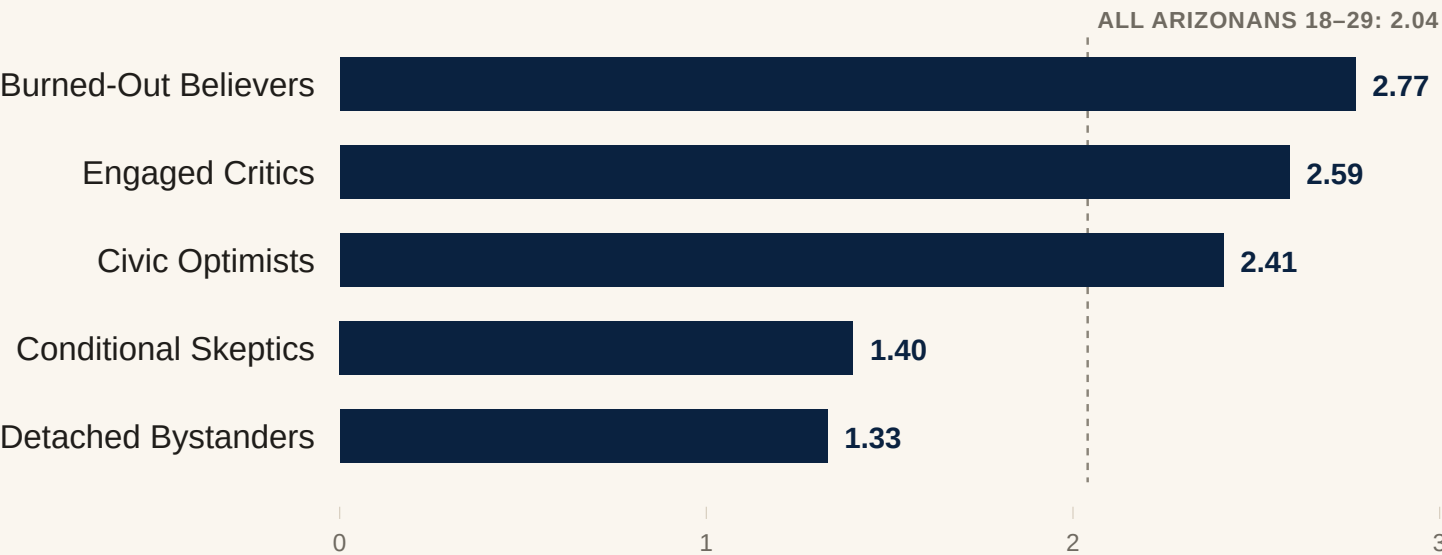
HAVE NOT HAD STABLE HOUSING THE ENTIRE PAST 5 YEARS



Highest of any segment. Strain upstream of politics.

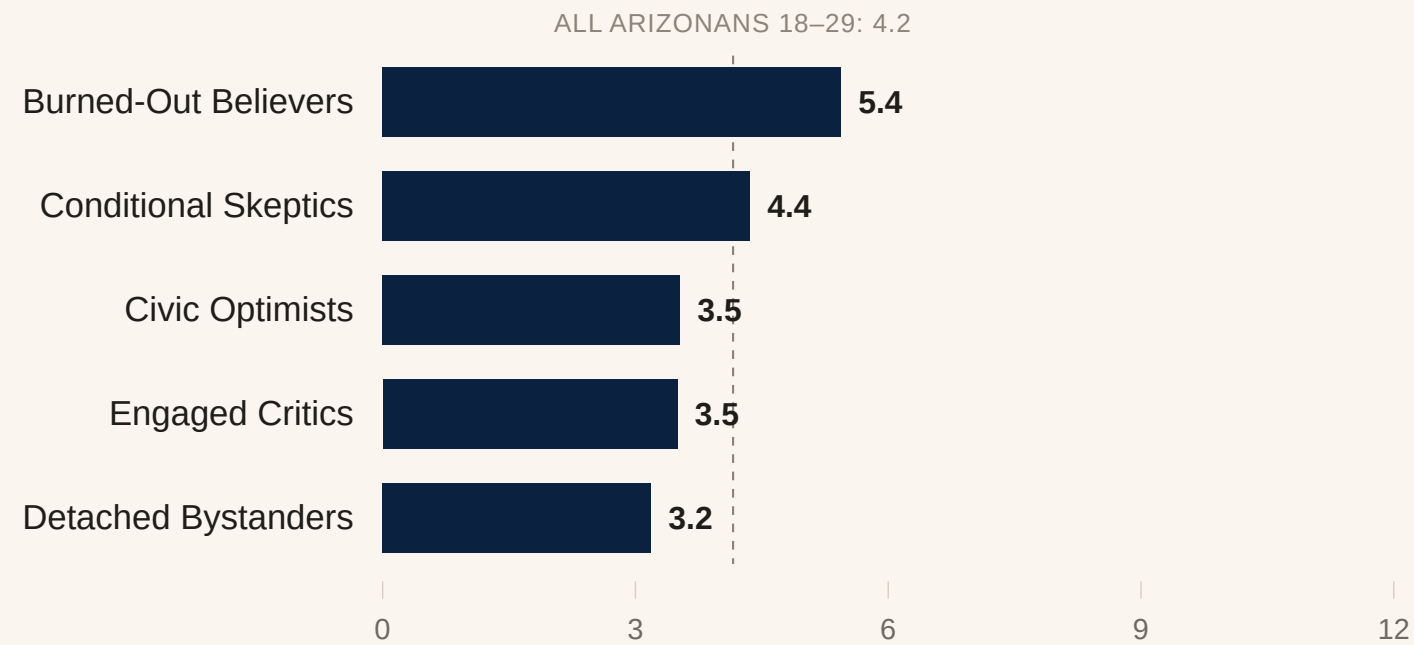
The three most active sit well above the cohort’s 2.04 average and the two least active fall well below, with Burned-Out Believers the most active of all.

Mean number of civic activities participated in by segment.



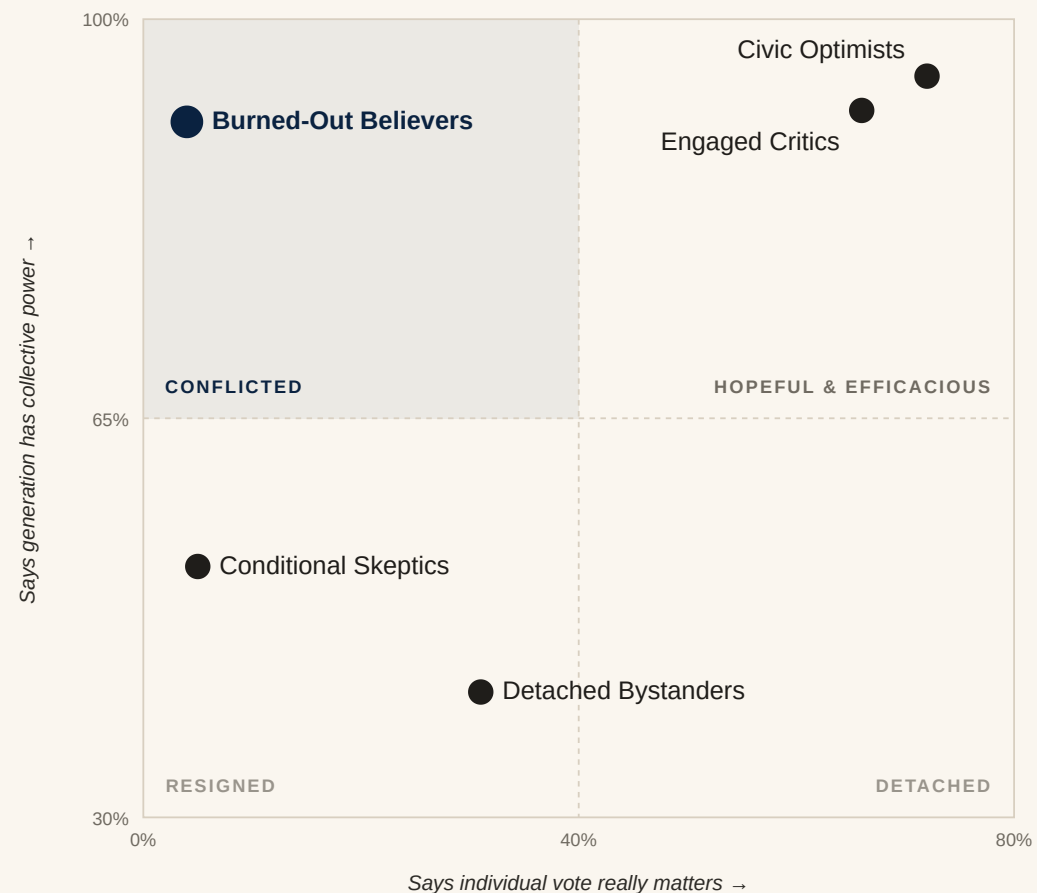
Burned-Out Believers report the most barriers and are also the most active. Conditional Skeptics report the second most, despite being among the least active.

Average number of twelve possible barriers each segment cited as personally preventing them from voting.

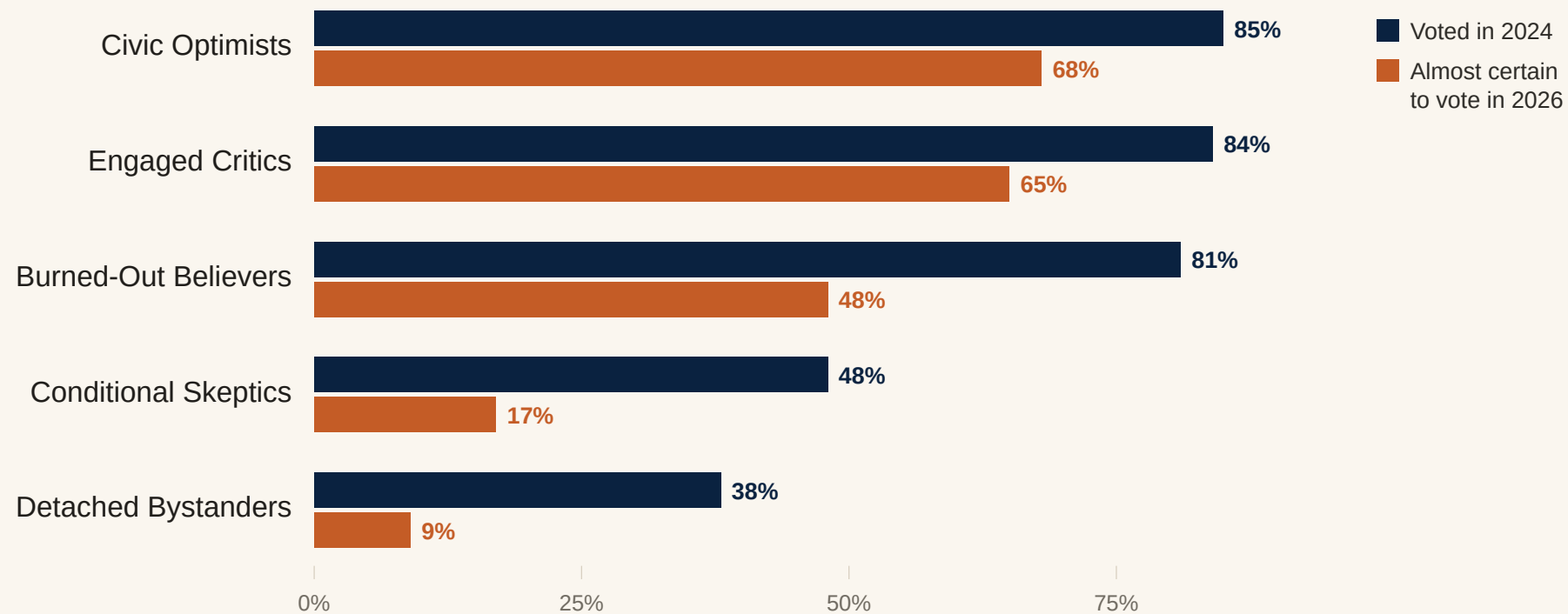


Sustained participation takes two beliefs at once: that your generation holds collective power, and that your own vote matters. It takes both to carry a voter past lost faith in institutions and the barriers in their way.

Segments by collective and individual political efficacy.



The two segments that believe in both collective power and individual efficacy show the smallest gap between self-reported 2024 turnout and 2026 vote certainty. The segments missing one or both drop much further, whether from the barriers in their way or the faith they have lost.



SECTION 7

Conclusions



01

Civic activity has held, but more now stands in the way of voting. Activity is steady across nearly every measure since 2022, while belief in election legitimacy has fallen and every barrier to voting is higher than it was.

02

Election doubt tracks with lower intent to vote. Among young Arizonans who believe the 2026 election will be legitimate, 61% are almost certain to vote. Among those who doubt it, just 24% are.

03

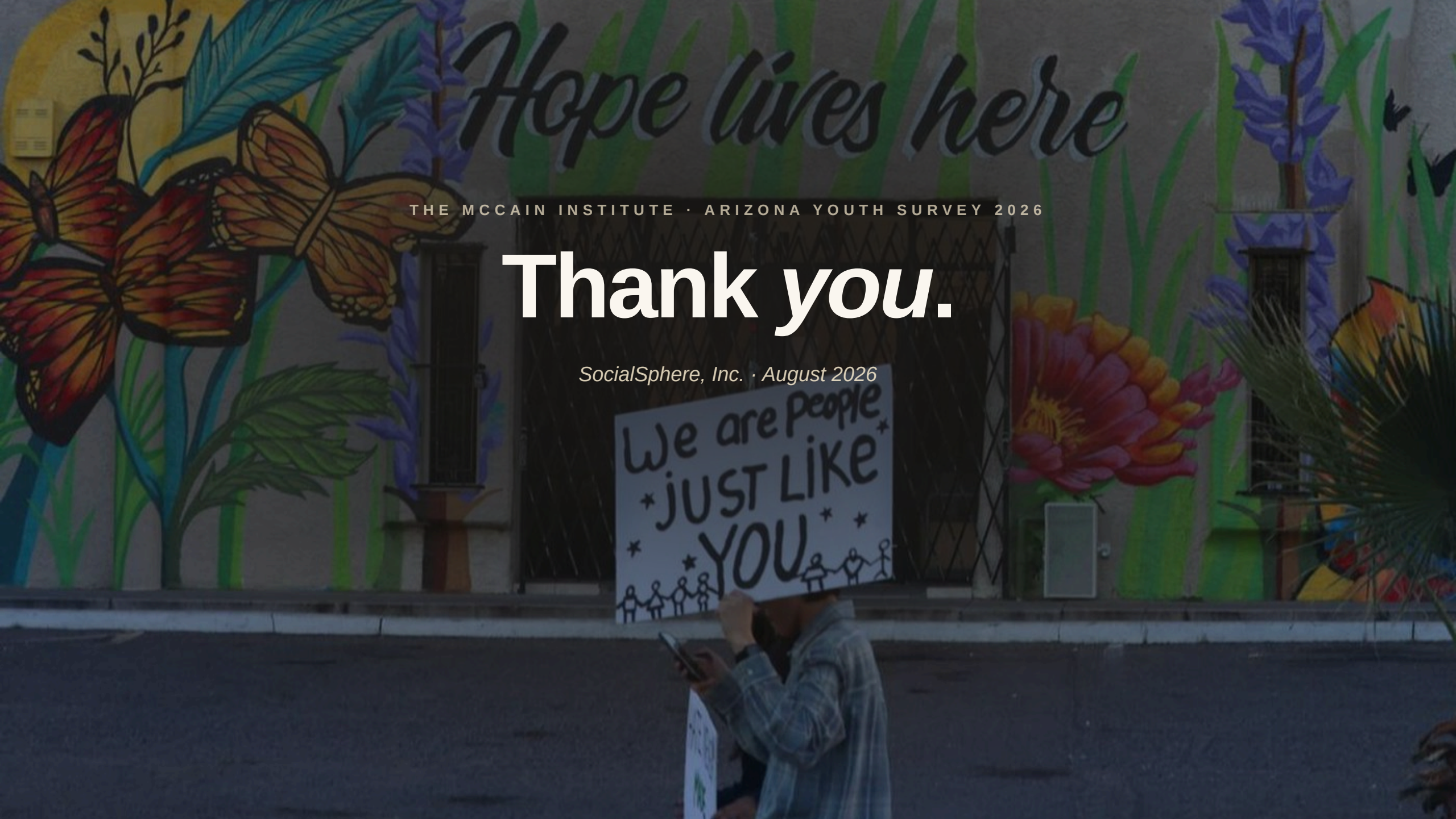
The issue agenda is felt firsthand. Cost of living and economic issues top young Arizonans' concerns, and immigration is top of mind for many. The pressure on both is concrete: more than one in three has faced housing instability, and four in ten have been touched by immigration enforcement.

04

Distrust coincides with a desire for active government. By 2 to 1, young Arizonans want government to take an active role rather than step back; the frustration is that institutions are not working.

05

Confidence is personal. Parents, friends, and educators lead the list of who young Arizonans believe acts in their best interests. The institutions asking for their participation sit near the bottom.



Hope lives here

THE MCCAIN INSTITUTE · ARIZONA YOUTH SURVEY 2026

Thank you.

SocialSphere, Inc. · August 2026

We are people
* JUST LIKE *
* YOU *
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