



GIRLS
GET EQUAL

EQUAL POWER

NOW

GIRLS, YOUNG WOMEN &
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

TECHNICAL REPORT

THE STATE OF THE
WORLD'S GIRLS

2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research is based on a large-scale survey of almost 29,000 girls and young women aged 15 to 24 from 28 countries that span all regions, income levels and civic contexts. It also includes in-depth interviews with 94 girls and young women from across 18 countries.

Please note that the names of the girls and young women have been changed to ensure anonymity.

- 97 per cent of survey respondents thought participating in politics was important
- 83 per cent of girls and young women surveyed had some experience of participating in or engaging with politics
- 24 per cent of those who aspire to participate in politics can see themselves standing for political office
- 63 per cent of survey respondents are involved in some form of group or organisation indicating significant levels of civic engagement and participation
- Only 11 per cent reported that they were generally happy with their leaders' decisions on issues they care about
- One in five have personally been discouraged from engaging with or participating in politics
- One in ten think women are not qualified to be political leaders.
- Only about 50 per cent of girls and young women believed that, in the view of their communities, it was acceptable for girls and young women to engage in political activities.

It is clear from these responses that gender norms, what society and girls themselves see as appropriate for girls and young women, have a strong impact on girls' participation in politics. It is also clear from the findings that girls and young women are not a homogenous group. Their opinions diverge according to location, income, sexual identity, religion, ethnicity and a host of other intersecting factors.

Some participants were put off by the abuse and harassment they saw women in public life experiencing, aware that female politicians are held to higher standards and judged in different ways from their male counterparts. Despite this, girls and young women know that their political participation is important, to bring about improvements in their own lives and to contribute to their communities and countries. A third of activists interviewed also felt that formal modes of participation, engaging directly with the state, were crucial to bringing about lasting political change. Girls and young women are interested in issues that range from poverty and unemployment to the environment and climate change, as well as education and health. However, they do not underestimate the challenges they face, with 94 per cent of survey respondents recognising the barriers in their way. Girls and young women are often condescended to and rarely listened to. Although, in some countries, female representation in parliaments and on local councils has improved, there remains a lack of political role models and, in many contexts, a recent rollback of girls' and women's rights.

Despite these challenges, girls and young women are politically engaged in many ways: from voting and signing petitions, to joining diverse youth movements and participating in school councils. School and family are crucially influential as girls and young women learn about politics and want to take their place as decision-makers. Political participation can seem more accessible at the local level, and, for many, this is where they are active and involved. 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 towards girls' greater political participation:

Decision-makers at all levels must institutionalise 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 towards 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.

UN, governments and civil society should recognise girls' vital and distinct role in civil society and provide accessible resources so that girls' organisations 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 organise and mobilise to ensure that they and their organisations are resilient and fully equipped to play their part in the future of their communities and countries.

“Their decisions have repercussions on the actions and lives of all people, on our relationships of otherness, on the limits we set for ourselves, on the things that are not allowed and the things that are allowed. So, I feel that politics is very important.” Aurora, 20, Ecuador

1 INTRODUCTION

The State of the World's Girls Report is released every year for International Day of the Girl on 11 October. The report contains the annual, signature research for Girls Get Equal (GGE), a Plan International campaign for girls' voice and power, championing their leadership in the drive for gender equality. For girls and young women to lead change themselves, people in power and decision-makers need to be held accountable to ensure girls have equal power and are able to make decisions that affect their lives, have equal freedom to speak up in public, and equal representation, with an end to the harmful gender stereotypes that hold girls back. These three aspects of gender equality – power, freedom and representation – that form the foundation of the GGE campaign are grounded in a human rights approach that stems from international instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and UN Convention on Ending Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

This technical research report sets out detailed findings of a study conducted between February and May 2022 by Plan International. This report forms the basis of the 2022 State of the World's Girls Report (SOTWG).

To support this campaign, the research aims to explore, understand and give voice to girls and young women on their attitudes towards, and experiences of, politics and political participation across a sample of diverse contexts.

1.1 SCOPE AND AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Globally, political participation and representation is highly gendered. Across cultures and throughout history, politics has been the domain of privilege and power for older, male and often wealthy citizens. Progress has undoubtedly been made – until 1960 only half of the world's nations granted women the right to vote but by 2020 no country barred women from voting on account of their sex.¹ Yet, at the current rate of progress, it will take 155 years to attain gender parity in politics worldwide.² Young people are also dramatically under-represented in political decision-making - only 2.6 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are aged under 30, only 40 per cent of whom are female.³

Decisions made within the political sphere affect every aspect of girls' and young women's lives – from whether they are afforded legal protections against child marriage and have their sexual and reproductive rights protected, to the budgets allocated to their education. Not only is it girls' and young women's right to have their voices heard, but their participation is critical for ensuring policy and budget decisions are fair, responsive to and inclusive of their needs and interests, and contribute to greater social justice. Seen in the context of the widespread rollback in girls' and women's rights,⁴

¹ Based on a study of 198 countries and territories. Saudi Arabia and Brunei do not hold national elections, and Hong Kong and Macau do not participate in China's elections. In all four of these jurisdictions, women are able to vote in local elections. Schaeffer, K. 'Key facts about women's suffrage around the world, a century after U.S. ratified 19th Amendment', *Pew Research Centre*, 5th October 2020, retrieved 5th December 2021: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/05/key-facts-about-womens-suffrage-around-the-world-a-century-after-u-s-ratified-19th-amendment/>

² World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report*, World Economic Forum, 2022, retrieved 15th July 2022: [WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022)

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Youth participation in national parliaments*, 2021, retrieved 3rd June 2022: [Youth participation in national parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments)

⁴ J. Birchall, 'Data and evidence on global rollback of women and girls' rights since 2016', *Knowledge, evidence and learning for development: Helpdesk Report*, 2020, retrieved 30th August 2022: <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15886/HDR%20924%20-%20Data%20and%20evidence%20on%20rollback%20of%20women%20and%20girls%20rights%20V3.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>

the need for girls and young women to engage in and influence political decisions is increasingly urgent.

And yet, in most parts of the world, young people's participation in formal political processes and institutions is declining.⁵ Formal political spaces are increasingly hard for young people to access and influence and are rife with youth-unfriendly bureaucracy and legal restrictions, while conventional participation structures for young people often remain ineffective channels for their involvement in decision-making.⁶ Evidence indicates that young people around the world are increasingly disillusioned with politics, expressing a lack of trust in politicians, political parties and institutions.⁷

Girls in particular are subject to additional, intersecting barriers to political participation based on both their age and gender. As children, their political rights are limited, and they may be wrongly dismissed as being insufficiently mature to participate in political processes. They are also subject to entrenched gender norms which keep them out of the public sphere and generate additional obstacles that their male counterparts do not face. Girls and young women who face additional forms of exclusion due to race, class, ethnicity, ability, language, sexual orientation, and gender identity, amongst other identities, are often further marginalised. Yet, despite these barriers, and enabled by new information and communication technologies, girls and young women are increasingly exploring other ways to participate, and we are witnessing a rise in diverse, intersectional and de-centralised youth movements, grassroots activism and collective action.⁸

These challenges to and opportunities for girls' and young women's political participation are set against a wider landscape of a worldwide decline in political rights and civil liberties and the widespread shrinking and reshaping of civic space; 2021 marked the 16th consecutive year of a decline in global freedom, a trend further fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ A growing number of governments are placing restrictions on civil society, particularly groups that monitor and speak out about the conduct of those governments. Meanwhile, socially conservative forces are increasingly claiming civil society space, among them groups which oppose reproductive rights and gender justice.¹⁰

In this context, today's adolescent girls and young women are at a life stage where they are starting to become more politically conscious and interact with social issues and networks. Listening to their views and experiences as they begin to navigate this political landscape is imperative for understanding how best to support them to claim their rights and develop their capacities as political actors.

This study provides an important contribution to the current evidence base on girls' and young women's political participation. Much of the existing research focuses on 'Western democracies' and far less research has been published from other regions and political contexts. Moreover, studies which have aimed to understand girls' own perspectives on politics and political participation have typically been small scale. In contrast, this report provides a global snapshot of girls' and young women's political participation, centred on their voices and perspectives. It provides data from a sample of almost 29,000 girls and young women in all their diversity across a wide range of political, civic and income contexts.

⁵ The Commonwealth, 'Global Youth Development Index and Report', 2026, retrieved 10th December 2021, https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/5023_V3_Book_lores_smaller.pdf

⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Youth participation in national parliaments, 2016, retrieved 13th January 2022. archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf

⁷ T. Chevalier, 'Political trust, young people and institutions in Europe: A multilevel analysis'. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 28:4, 2019: 418-430. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12380>

⁸ FRIDA and AWID, Brave, Creative and Resilient: The State of Young Feminist Organizing' 2016, retrieved 10th January 2022. [Brave, Creative and Resilient: The State of Young Feminist Organizing | AWID](https://brave.creativeandresilient.org/)

⁹ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2021: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule' 2022, retrieved 10th June 2022, [FIW 2022 PDF Booklet Digital Final Web.pdf \(freedomhouse.org\)](https://freedomhouse.org/fiw-2022-pdf-booklet-digital-final-web.pdf)

¹⁰ R. Youngs, 'The Mobilization of Conservative Civil Society', *Carnegie Europe*, 2018, retrieved 10th December 2021, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/10/04/mobilization-of-conservative-civil-society-pub-77366>

The overarching aim of this study was to explore, understand and give voice to girls' and young women's attitudes towards, and experiences of, politics and political participation across a sample of diverse contexts. Specifically, the study aimed to understand:

- How girls and young women conceptualise politics, and which political issues they see as priorities for political action.
- Girls' and young women's views of political leadership and the extent to which they feel represented within political systems.
- How girls and young women perceive gendered norms and barriers surrounding political leadership, and the extent to which this influences their own political participation, including their leadership aspirations.
- Girls and young women's experiences of and views on different modes of political participation, including their preferences for formal or informal modes of participation.
- The factors that influence whether and how girls and young women participate in politics; including social norms and structural barriers; and their levels of knowledge, skills and confidence.

To understand the views and experiences of girls and young women from a diversity of backgrounds and contexts, and with a range of experience levels of political participation, the report has collected and analysed data using 3 different methods:

1. **A large-scale quantitative survey** of almost 29,000 girls and young women aged 15 to 24 from 29 countries that span all regions, country income levels and civic contexts. This sample provides a large data set which gives globally representative insights¹¹ into the views and experiences of girls and young women with a range of demographic characteristics who may or may not have experience of political participation.
2. **Semi-structured, qualitative interviews** with a sample of 78 girls aged 15 to 16 across seven low-income, lower-middle-income and higher-middle-income countries, that span a range of civic contexts. Girls in this sample live in predominantly rural settings (with a few in semi-urban settings) and come from the lowest income households. Girls in this sample may or may not have experience of political participation.
3. **In-depth qualitative interviews** with a sample of 16 girl and young woman activists aged 16 to 24 from 13 countries, spanning all income groups and civic contexts. Girls in this sample were known to be politically active and most are associated with Plan International through involvement in programmes or campaigns.

Throughout the report, the commonalities and differences between data from each of these samples are highlighted, allowing for a nuanced understanding of girls' and young women's views and experiences.

Based on the findings from this report, a set of recommendations is presented, setting out the concrete actions that need to be taken at different levels to ensure that all girls and young women are able to participate in politics and influence decisions that affect them, both as current political actors, as well as into the future.

1.2 KEY DEFINITIONS

The concept of political participation, which sits at the centre of this report, does not have a commonly agreed definition. Most narrowly, political participation covers voluntary activities by citizens which directly address the government, politics or the state and take place within formal political spaces or via established political institutions. These 'formal' types of political participation

¹¹ But may not be fully representative by country – see section 4.1 for more details of sampling.

are often also referred to as 'conventional' or 'institutional', and can include activities like voting in an election, submitting a petition, campaigning for a party or candidate, or engaging in participatory forms of decision-making.

Most definitions do, however, recognise that a broader range of activities may also be considered examples of political participation, depending on their target, motivation, or the broader political context in which they occur. This includes activities targeted at the sphere of government, politics, or the state, such as a demonstration in opposition to a government policy. It also includes apparently non-political activities undertaken in a political context, such as a play staged outside a parliament or framed by reference to a political issue, such as a photo on social media tagged with #BlackLivesMatter; and activities used to express political aims and intentions, for example, when a consumer intends their boycott of a product to influence a government policy. Finally, political participation can include activities aimed at solving collective or community problems. This may, for example, include activities undertaken by civil society or grass-roots organisations.

For the purposes of this report, a broad definition of political participation will be used, which covers all the types of activities described above:

Political participation is the voluntary activities that girls and young women undertake: (i) within formal political spaces or via established political institutions; (ii) to influence such spaces and institutions; (iii) for other political reasons, including solving community problems; or (iv) in a broader context that makes it appropriate to label such activities as political.

It is particularly important to adopt a broad definition of political participation when investigating the participation activities of girls and young women. Firstly, it allows us to recognise and understand the activities most commonly undertaken by girls and young women, which generally take place outside the formal political sphere, often as part of civil society at local or community level. By extension, using a broad understanding of political participation enables us to recognise and value the political knowledge and experience that girls and young women already have. Finally, it enables us to identify recommendations for how to best support girls' and young women's political participation as current, as well as future political actors.

While this report does investigate girls' and young women's relationship with and access to formal political spaces, we also emphasise the ways in which girls and young women *already* participate in politics, in order to challenge beliefs, widely held in some contexts, that 'politics' is not an appropriate activity for girls and young women.

A number of other key terms are used throughout the report, which are defined as follows:

Table 1: Key definitions

Political participation	Voluntary activities that girls and young women undertake: (i) within formal political spaces or via established political institutions; (ii) to influence such spaces and institutions; (iii) for other political reasons, including solving community problems; or (iv) in a broader context that makes it appropriate to label such activities as political.
Formal political participation	Voluntary activities which directly address the government, politics or the state and take place within formal political spaces or via established political institutions. This includes activities which take place as part of, as well as beyond, electoral processes.
Informal political participation	Voluntary activities which take place outside formal political spaces or established political institutions, but which are considered political due to their target, motivation, or the broader political context in which they occur.
Political engagement	The engagement of an individual with political institutions, processes and decision-making. Engagement may involve participatory behaviour but also includes having interest in, or knowledge, opinions, or feelings about political matters without undertaking any action. ¹²
Political representation	The activity of making citizens' and other rights' holders' voices, opinions, and perspectives "present" in public policy-making processes. Political representation occurs when political actors speak, advocate, symbolise, and act on behalf of others in the political arena. ¹³
Political efficacy	Individuals' belief in their own ability to influence the course of politics.
Political socialisation	The process by which individuals crystallise political identities, values and behaviour that remain relatively persistent throughout later life. ¹⁴
Civic space	The environment that enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic and social life of societies, through respect in law and practice for the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression. ¹⁵
Social movement	A loose but broad network of interaction between individuals, groups and other actors across society pursuing and embracing a shared transformative political agenda of change through deliberate, strategic, and collective action'

¹² M. Barrett, and D. Pachi, Youth Civic and Political Engagement. *Routledge*, 2019

¹³ H. F. Pitkin, The Concept of Representation, *Berkeley: University of California*, 1967, Cited in Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, ed. E. N Zalta and U. Nodelman, available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/political-representation>

¹⁴ A. Neundorff and K. Smets, Political Socialisation and the Making of Citizens, 2017, *Oxford Handbook Topics on Politics*, retrieved 02nd September 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.98>

¹⁵ Definition adapted from CIVICUS. See: CIVICUS, What is Civic Space?, no date, available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/whatis-civicspace/>

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to setting out the findings from the study, it is important to recognise that there is a wealth of literature, information and analysis on the issues that the report is investigating. The study went to great lengths not to replicate evidence that is already available, but to fill gaps and supplement the understanding on girls' and young women's political participation through different lenses. Before unpacking the findings from the present study, this section outlines a brief collation of existing evidence and knowledge.

2.1 MACRO TRENDS AFFECTING GIRLS' AND YOUNG WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

It has been widely observed that over recent years a number of trends have been converging that are, on the one hand making girls' and young women's political participation increasingly important, while at the same time constraining and reshaping their opportunities to participate in politics. A global decline in political rights and civil liberties, shrinking civic space and a rollback of girls' and women's rights has been accompanied by the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies and use of social media.

2021 marked the 16th consecutive year of a decline in global freedom, with 60 countries suffering net declines in political rights and civil liberties, and only 25 registering gains. Across all regions, there has been a move towards more authoritarian forms of governance.¹⁶ These trends have had grave implications for civic space, with an increasing number of governments, including democracies and authoritarian states, seeking to constrain civil society.¹⁷

Amnesty International estimated that, by 2019, at least 50 countries had introduced laws constraining the operation of civil society. Beyond introducing new laws, states have used a variety of tactics to close civic space. These have included the selective application of existing laws – often in ways that criminalise political dissent, as well as the selective exclusion of 'troublesome' civil society organisations (CSOs) from public consultations and decision-making processes. In more authoritarian settings, state actors, including the police and security forces, have used intimidation, harassment, and violence against members or civil society.¹⁸ A Plan International study from the Middle East and North Africa described how women-focused CSOs have been subjected to systematic campaigns to both intimidate and curtail their operations, with security forces targeting human rights activists by detaining, torturing, and killing them.¹⁹ Government authorities in the region are increasingly using social media to target gender activists.²⁰

¹⁶ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule*, 2022, retrieved 10th June 2022, [FIW 2022 PDF Booklet Digital Final Web.pdf \(freedomhouse.org\)](https://www.freedomhouse.org/reports/fiw-2022-pdf-booklet-digital-final-web.pdf)

¹⁷ K. Dupuy, L. Fransen, & A. Prakash, 'Restricting NGOs: From Pushback to Accommodation', *Global Policy* 12:S5, 2021 retrieved 02nd September, 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12974>

¹⁸ Amnesty International, 'Laws Designed to Silence: The Global Crackdown on Civil Society Organizations', *Amnesty International*, 21st February 2019, retrieved 8th December 2021: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/9647/2019/en/>

¹⁹ Plan International, *The protection of young women and girls in the Middle East and Northern Africa*, 2021, retrieved 25th June 2022: <https://plan-international.org/jordan/publications/the-protection-of-young-women-and-girls-in-the-middle-east-and-northern-africa/>

²⁰ Amnesty International, *Human Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Review of 2018*, retrieved 25th June 2022: [Human rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Review of 2018 - Amnesty International](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/9647/2019/en/)

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, as state actors in some countries instrumentalised restrictions used to curb the pandemic to suppress opposition groups and curtail space for political debate during elections.²¹

These trends have been accompanied by a well-documented ‘rollback’ of girls’ and women’s rights and gender equality on multiple fronts. Evidence demonstrates that, over recent years, a rise in exclusionary politics, characterised by misogyny and xenophobia, has been an important factor driving the erosion of girls’ and women’s rights.²² Socially conservative forces are also increasingly claiming civil society space, among them groups which oppose reproductive rights and gender justice.²³ The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to reversing many of the gains in gender equality, exacerbating pre-existing gender inequalities as well as other intersecting inequalities. Evidence suggests that some countries that had already begun to roll back the rights of girls and women have used the COVID-19 pandemic to further undermine these rights, as well as those of LGBTQI+ communities.²⁴

Finally, the rapid expansion of social media and internet usage over recent years has played a key role in expanding the opportunities for girls and young women to engage in politics, as well as the ways in which they can do so. As of April 2022, there were almost 5 billion internet users worldwide. 4.65 billion of these (58 per cent of the world’s population) are social media users.²⁵ 2021 saw a 10 per cent growth in global social media use.²⁶ This move online is shifting the landscape of political participation and contributing to a trend of young people in particular redefining what it means to participate in politics, outside the confines of formal political institutions.²⁷ This trend is discussed in more detail in section 3.1.4.

2.2 THE GENDER AND AGE GAP IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION

Globally, political leadership and representation remains heavily male-dominated. Only ten countries have a woman as Head of State, and 13 have a woman Head of Government, and only 21 per cent of government ministers were women.²⁸ While there has been some progress made in women’s participation in national parliaments, in many cases driven by the adoption of gender quotas, globally only 26 per cent of national parliamentarians are women.²⁹ Young women are even further under-represented – of the 2.6 per cent of the world’s parliamentarians aged under 30, only 40 per cent are

²¹ E. Harrison & K. Kristensen, ‘Secondary Impacts of COVID-19: Closing Civic Space in Fragile Contexts’, UNDP Global Policy Network Brief, *Development Futures Series*, 2021, retrieved 02nd September 2022: [Secondary impacts of COVID-19: Closing civic space in fragile contexts | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](https://www.undp.org/publications/secondary-impacts-of-covid-19-closing-civic-space-in-fragile-contexts)

²² UN Women, Gender equality: Women’s rights in review 25 years after Beijing, 2020, retrieved 7th December 2021: [Gender equality: Women’s rights in review 25 years after Beijing | Digital library: Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/gender-equality-women-s-rights-in-review-25-years-after-beijing)

²³ R. Youngs, ‘The Mobilization of Conservative Civil Society’, *Carnegie Europe*, 2018, retrieved 10th December 2021: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/10/04/mobilization-of-conservative-civil-society-pub-77366>

²⁴ UN working group on discrimination against women and girls, Gender equality and gender backlash, *United Nations*, 2020, retrieved 20th January 2022: [Gender equality and gender backlash.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.un.org/en/gender-equality-and-gender-backlash.pdf)

²⁵ Data Reportal, Digital 2022: Global Overview Report, 2022, retrieved 5th June 2022: [Digital 2022: Global Overview Report — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights](https://www.datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report/)

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ A. Keating & G. Melis, ‘Social media and youth political engagement: Preaching to the converted or providing a new voice for youth?’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 9:4, 2017, 877-894, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2f1369148117718461>

²⁸ As of September 2021. UN Women calculation based on information provided by Permanent Missions to the United Nations. Some leaders hold positions of both head of government and head of state. Only elected Heads of State have been taken into account. See: UN Women, Facts and figures: Women’s leadership and political participation, no date, available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#_edn3

²⁹ As of July 2022. Inter-Parliamentary Union, Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments, 2022, retrieved 14th July 2022: [Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](https://www.ipu.org/parliamentary/global-and-regional-averages-of-women-in-national-parliaments)

women.³⁰ At the current rate of progress, it will take 155 years to attain gender parity in politics worldwide.³¹

At local levels, the picture is slightly better: recent evidence from UN Women demonstrates that women, including young women, hold a greater proportion of seats in local government than in national government in almost all parts of the world.³² This suggests that local government may be more accessible and appealing to young women. However, there is still a gender and age gap and women remain less well-represented in local governments than men. Further, young women remain less well-represented than their older counterparts.

Even when women are represented in political office, evidence shows that representation does not automatically translate into influence.³³ The most common policy portfolios held by women in Cabinet roles are those often considered more 'feminine', including environmental, social welfare, women's and family affairs.³⁴ Conversely, women are less likely than men to be assigned portfolios considered to be most 'strategic', such as finance, defence, or foreign affairs.³⁵

Levels of participation of women in political office and in positions of political leadership have been shown to have implications for processes and outcomes of decision-making and for public policy choices. In lower-income countries, for example, increases in women's political representation at all levels is correlated with a better provision of public goods, especially with regard to education and health.³⁶ In higher-income countries, higher representation of women has induced changes in parliamentary deliberations and specific policy choices, such as more public childcare.³⁷ Evidence from more than 125 countries suggests that the presence of women in government is also associated with lower levels of corruption,³⁸ while women's participation in peace processes increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20 percent.³⁹

Levels of women's representation in politics can also be self-reinforcing, influencing levels of political participation amongst girls and women more broadly. Research from Western countries shows that girls and young women are more likely to participate in politics when there are more women in parliament, and when women politicians are more visible in the media.⁴⁰ Some authors have argued that, in political systems where girls and women see few women, and particularly young women, represented, they may perceive the political system as not welcoming of women or interpret that women do not have the characteristics that lead to success in the political arena. Conversely, increased representation of women serves as an indicator that politics is not just a 'man's game'.⁴¹ Others have argued that, in contexts where women politicians are having a substantive influence on

³⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Youth participation in national parliaments, 2021, retrieved 25th June 2022: [Youth participation in national parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments)

³¹ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report*, World Economic Forum, 2022, retrieved 15th July 2022: [WEF GGR 2022.pdf \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022)

³² UN Women, Women's representation in local government: A global analysis, 2022, retrieved 25th May 2022: [Women's representation in local government: A global analysis | Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2022/5/local-government)

³³ A. Franceschet, M. Krook, M. & J. Piscopo, The Impact of Gender Quotas, *Oxford Scholarship Online*, 2012, retrieved 26th May 2022: [Impact of Gender Quotas - Oxford Scholarship \(universitypressscholarship.com\)](https://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi/10.1017/s0022381612000382)

³⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, Women in Politics: 2021, 2021, retrieved 25th June 2022: [Women in politics: 2021 | Digital library: Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/12/women-in-politics-2021)

³⁵ M. Krook & J. O'Brien, 'All the President's Men? The Appointment of Female Cabinet Ministers Worldwide'. *The Journal of Politics*, 2012, 74:3 pp. 840-855, retrieved 5th July 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381612000382>

³⁶ Z. Hessami & M. Fonseca, 'Female political representation and substantive effects on policies: A literature review', 2020, retrieved 25th June 2022: [Female political representation and substantive effects on policies: A literature review - ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/S0950080420300000)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ C. Kumar Jha & S. Sarangi, 'Women and corruption: What positions must they hold to make a difference?', *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization*, 2018, 151 pp. 219–233. retrieved 25th June 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.03.021>

³⁹ UN Women, 'Women's Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political' in *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325*. 2015, retrieved 20th May, 2022: [Women's Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political | Global study on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 \(unwomen.org\)](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/5/global-study-on-the-implementation-of-unsc-resolution-1325)

⁴⁰ D. Campbell & C. Wolbrecht, 'See Jane Run: Women Politicians as Role Models for Adolescents', *The Journal of Politics* 68:2, 2006, 233–47, retrieved 02nd September 2022: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00402.x>

⁴¹ S. Verba, N. Burns & K. Schlozman, 'Knowing and Caring about Politics: Gender and Political Engagement', *Journal of Politics*. 59: 4, 1997, 1051–72, retrieved 02nd September 2022: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2998592>

public policy, particularly in terms of policies which benefit women, this may increase feelings of political efficacy amongst girls and women⁴² and they will be inspired to increase their own political engagement.⁴³

A study by Liu and Banaszak, which interrogated the relationship between women's representation and formal political participation amongst women found evidence that the proportion of women in cabinet has a stronger effect on women's participation than the proportion of women in parliament.⁴⁴ Additionally, a study by Wolbrecht and Campbell, which investigated whether women politicians influenced adolescent girls' future political activities, found that girls were more likely to envision themselves as future political actors when women political role models were depicted in mainstream media, concluding that, an increased number of women politicians could close the gender gap in anticipated political activity between girls and boys.⁴⁵

Where women hold positions of power within political institutions, evidence also suggests that they can, in turn, shape those institutions, promoting changes in institutional norms or practices which make them more conducive to women's participation.⁴⁶ This includes, for example, instituting different management styles or organisational philosophies that are more welcoming to women⁴⁷ and driving changes towards more gender-sensitive parliaments.⁴⁸

2.3 FACTORS AFFECTING YOUNG WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION

A range of intersecting and mutually reinforcing factors have been shown to underpin the gender and age gaps in political leadership and representation. Women, particularly young women and those from marginalised backgrounds, face a host of legal, economic and socio-cultural barriers to running for political office. Young women in positions of political leadership also experience challenges on account of their age and gender.

In many countries, young women are legally barred from running for political office. In 69 per cent of countries, the minimum legal age to hold parliamentary office is higher than the minimum voting age⁴⁹ – a gap which both hinders young people from running for office and being represented in parliament but also sends signals to potential candidates that politics is not a 'business for young people'.⁵⁰ While some countries, including Nigeria and Turkey,⁵¹ have reduced the minimum age of eligibility for parliamentary office, with some positive results, this step alone is insufficient for significantly increasing youth representation. Moreover, the high financial cost of running for office means that

⁴² R. Fox., and J. Lawless, 'Entering the Arena? Gender and the Decision to Run for Office', *American Journal of Political Science*, 48:2, 2004, 264–80, retrieved 02nd September 2022: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0092-5853.2004.00069.x>

⁴³ N. Burns, K.L. Schlozman & S. Verba, S, *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001

⁴⁴ S. Liu & L. Banaszak, 'Do Government Positions Held by Women Matter? A Cross-National Examination of Female Ministers' Impacts on Women's Political Participation', *Politics & Gender*, 13:1, 2017, pp. 132-162, retrieved 15th January 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X16000490>

⁴⁵ C. Wolbrecht, & D. Campbell, 'Leading by Example: Female members of parliament as political role models', *American Journal of Political Science*, 51:4, 2007 pp.921–939, retrieved 02nd September 2022: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4620108>

⁴⁶ S. Liu & L. Banaszak, 'Do Government Positions Held by Women Matter? A Cross-National Examination of Female Ministers' Impacts on Women's Political Participation', *Politics & Gender*, 13:1, 2017, pp. 132-162, retrieved 02nd September 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X16000490>

⁴⁷ N. McGlenn & M. Sarkees, 'Style Does Matter: The Impact of Presidential Leadership on Women in Foreign Policy,' In Borrelli, M. and Martin, J. (eds), *The Other Elites: Women, Politics, and Power in the Executive Branch*, 1997, pp 107–28.

⁴⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Gender Sensitive Parliaments, no date, retrieved 14th June 2022: [Gender-sensitive parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/gender-sensitive-parliaments)

⁴⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Youth participation in national parliaments, 2021, retrieved 25th June 2022: [Youth participation in national parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments)

⁵⁰ Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, 'Youth, peace and security: fostering youth-inclusive political processes' (forthcoming).

⁵¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Youth participation in national parliaments, 2021, retrieved 25th June 2022: [Youth participation in national parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments)

young and women candidates without wealthy families or networks for sponsorship are disadvantaged.⁵²

Studies have also shown that women are less likely than men to think they are qualified to run for political office⁵³ and are more likely to avoid competitive environments⁵⁴ – preferences which are in turn shaped by societal gender norms and socialisation of girls and women. Women who do run for political office also face more barriers than their male counterparts. According to a 2015 survey conducted in 84 countries by the Women in Parliaments Global Forum and the World Bank, women are three times more likely to worry about gender discrimination and twice as likely to fear not being taken as seriously as their male counterparts.⁵⁵ Evidence suggests that these concerns are often well-founded – a study by Esteve-Volart and Bagues found that manipulation of nomination systems in male-dominated political parties was contributing to the low share of women elected, with women candidates being significantly more likely to be nominated when a position was expected to be lost.⁵⁶

Violence and harassment against women in political office, running for office, or otherwise politically active is a global issue.⁵⁷ A 2021 survey on violence against women parliamentarians in Africa, for example, found that 80 per cent of the women interviewed have experienced psychological violence in parliament and 42 per cent have received death threats, rape threats, or threats of beating or abduction, usually online. Women parliamentarians living with disabilities, women under 40, unmarried women and women from minority groups were found to face an even higher incidence of violence.⁵⁸ Evidence from the National Democratic Institute has shown that political parties, which provide a crucial entryway for women's political participation and leadership, often allow and enable violence against women to take place. Surveys of men and women party members in Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Tanzania, and Tunisia showed that women experience high rates of violence within their parties.⁵⁹ While acts of gender-based political violence are usually directed at individual women, they also carry an impact beyond their intended specific target, including deterring girls and women who might consider engaging in politics, and communicating to society that women should not participate in public life.⁶⁰

2.4 PATTERNS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONGST GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

The right to participate in political and public life is important in empowering individuals and groups and is essential to eliminate marginalisation and discrimination.⁶¹ Moreover, inclusion and equal participation is widely recognised as critical for good governance, which in turn is necessary for inclusive and sustainable peace and development.⁶² Political participation of children and young

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ J. Lawless & R. Fox, 'Why Are Women Still Not Running for Public Office?', *Issues in Governance Studies*, 16, 2008, retrieved 5th May 2022: [05_women-lawless-fox.pdf \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/women-lawless-fox.pdf)

⁵⁴ A. Booth & P. Nolen, 'Choosing to Compete: How Different Are Girls and Boys?', *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 81: 2, 2012: 542–55

⁵⁵ Women in Parliaments Global Forum and The World Bank, 'The Female Political Career: Women MPs Still Face Obstacles to Elected Office, 2015, retrieved 8th January 2022: [The Female Political Career: Women MPs Still Face Obstacles to Elected Office \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.womeninparliament.org/publications/the-female-political-career)

⁵⁶ B. Esteve-Volart & M. Bagues, 'Are Women Pawns in the Political Game? Evidence from Elections to the Spanish Senate,' *Journal of Public Economics*, 96: 3–4, 2012, retrieved 02nd September 2022: [10.1016/j.jpubeco.2011.12.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2011.12.004)

⁵⁷ Women Deliver, 'Strengthen Girls' and Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making Power', n.d. retrieved 5th January 2022: [2019-8-D4G Brief Political.pdf \(womendeliver.org\)](https://www.womendeliver.org/publications/strengthen-girls-and-womens-political-participation-and-decision-making-power)

⁵⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa', 2021, retrieved 8th February 2022: [Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/publications/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-africa)

⁵⁹ National Democratic Institute, No Party to Violence: Analyzing Violence Against Women in Political Parties, 2018, retrieved 8th February 2022: <https://www.ndi.org/publications/no-party-violence-analyzing-violence-against-women-political-parties>

⁶⁰ Women Deliver, 'Strengthen Girls' and Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making Power', n.d. retrieved 5th January 2022: [2019-8-D4G Brief Political.pdf \(womendeliver.org\)](https://www.womendeliver.org/publications/strengthen-girls-and-womens-political-participation-and-decision-making-power)

⁶¹ OHCHR, 'OHCHR and equal participation in political and public affairs', n.d., retrieved 6th January 2022: [OHCHR | OHCHR and equal participation in political and public affairs](https://www.ohchr.org/en/our-work/equal-participation-in-political-and-public-affairs)

⁶² Women Deliver, 'Strengthen Girls' and Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making Power', n.d., retrieved 5th January 2022: [2019-8-D4G Brief Political.pdf \(womendeliver.org\)](https://www.womendeliver.org/publications/strengthen-girls-and-womens-political-participation-and-decision-making-power)

people is important not only because it paves the way for their future political participation as adults⁶³ but also in order to ensure that their voices and interests are heard, as current rights holders and political actors.⁶⁴ This second dimension, Emily Bent argues, is often overlooked. Noting that, “because adults classify girls as *future* political subjects, this problematically determines the ways in which, girls can *be* political in the everyday” (emphasis in original).⁶⁵

Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that young people’s engagement in formal modes of political participation, particularly around electoral processes, is lower than that of older adults and is in decline.⁶⁶ In Western democracies, this trend has been observed over many decades, with the percentage of eligible youth who vote in national elections in steady decline since the 1970s.⁶⁷ Yet there is also evidence that this is a more widespread trend. The 2020 Global Youth Development report found that youth participation in formal political processes deteriorated in 102 countries.⁶⁸

However, alongside this retreat from formal modes of political participation, it is also widely recognised that many young people remain active in informal and civic forms of participation. Hence, it is argued, far from declining formal political participation being indicative of political and civic disengagement or apathy, as some authors have suggested,⁶⁹ this trend is a result of young people’s marginalisation and exclusion from the formal political arena. It is suggested that young people are conceptualising the political domain, and the role of alternative forms of participation differently to older generations and are employing different patterns of activism to support the causes that are of relevance and which matter to them.⁷⁰ This present study investigates this trend from the perspective of girls and young women in order to provide more detail on how they are reimagining political participation.

Beneath these broad trends, other studies have unpacked the various ways in which patterns of political participation vary by age, gender and other intersecting characteristics. International studies investigating gender differences in participation amongst adults have found that conventional, and some non-conventional, forms of participation predominantly involve men. Although in many countries women vote at a higher rate than men, men are more likely to be members of political parties,⁷¹ are more inclined to seek direct contact with politicians and tend to engage more in political discussions and political meetings.⁷² Women, on the other hand, have been found to be more likely to engage in more private and resource-efficient forms of protest, such as signing petitions, or boycotting products,⁷³ and are more engaged than men in non-political volunteering, community

⁶³ N. Duke, C. Skay, S. Pettingell, & I. Borowsky, ‘From Adolescent Connections to Social Capital: Predictors of Civic Engagement in Young Adulthood,’ *Journal of Adolescent Health* 44:2, 2009, pp.161–68, available at: DOI: [10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.07.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.07.007)

⁶⁴ E. Bent, ‘The Boundaries of Girls’ Political Participation: A Critical Exploration of Girls’ Experiences as Delegates to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)’ *Global Studies of Childhood*, 3:2, 2013, pp.173-182, available at: <https://doi.org/10.2304/gsch.2013.3.2.173>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ M. Barrett & D. Pachi, ‘Civic and Political Engagement Among Youth: Concepts, forms and factors’ in M. Barrett & D. Pachi, (eds), *Youth Civic and Political Engagement*, Routledge, 2019.

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ As measured by globally available data on participation in formal processes. The Commonwealth, Global Youth Development Index and Report, 2020, retrieved 10th December 2021:

https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/5023_V3_Book_lores_smaller.pdf

⁶⁹ M. Barrett & D. Pachi, ‘Civic and Political Engagement Among Youth: Concepts, forms and factors’ in M. Barrett & D. Pachi, (eds), *Youth Civic and Political Engagement*, Routledge, 2019.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ S. Scarrow & B. Gezgor, ‘Declining Memberships, Changing Members? European Political Party Members in a New Era,’ *Party Politics*, 16 (6), 2010, pp. 823–43.

⁷² S. Marien, M. Hooghe & E. Quintelier, ‘Inequalities in Non-institutionalised Forms of Political Participation: A Multi-level Analysis of 25 Countries,’ *Political Studies* 58:1, 2010: 187–213. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-9248.2009.00801.x>

⁷³ Ibid.

service and local civic organisations.⁷⁴ These differences have led to the observation that men's political activities have a greater influence than women's over policy-making.⁷⁵

The question of when these gender differences in participation emerge, and whether they are present amongst adolescents has been the subject of several studies. In a study of junior high school students in China, Japan, Mexico, and the United States, Mayer and Schmidt found that gender differences regarding political interest were generally small and subtle and that girls value political participation at least as much as boys. However, they also found a widespread perception that 'politics' is a male sphere.⁷⁶ A study by Alozie et al. also found that regardless of race or socio-economic status, girls were more likely to recognise political participation as an important component of everyday life.⁷⁷ Similarly, Booth-Tobin and Han concluded that while girls often reject formal politics, they are highly invested in their communities, interested in solving community problems, and are personally committed to the idea of social change.⁷⁸ Jennifer Taft argues that that girls' conscious distancing of their own activities from 'politics' is partly based on their political disagreements with politicians: "Many U.S. teenage girls' active refusals of politics are a rejection only of the hegemonic practices and policies of the U.S. government and, for some, are part of an oppositional political stance...Some U.S. teenage girls deployed the rejection of politics as a tool for political intervention."⁷⁹

While these findings suggest that girls are as, if not more, likely to be as civically-minded and politically-oriented as boys, a study by Hooghe and Stolle found evidence that the forms of political participation preferred by girls and boys begin to diverge in adolescence. Their study of 14-year-olds in the US concluded that while girls are more interested in 'social movement related activities' including volunteering, boys favour more radical and confrontational actions and those actions that involve more leadership and authority, such as running for office.⁸⁰ These findings should be qualified with the caveat that most of the research to date has focused on Western democracies, in particular the US. It is unclear whether these findings would be applicable in contexts where gender gaps in education and other opportunities emerge earlier in girls' lives.

Girls' rejection of 'formal politics' and consequent absence from formal political structures has, some authors have argued, "compromised their ability to become public, social movement actors and competent political leaders"⁸¹ Gordon consequently asserts that it remains imperative that girls learn how to participate in the formal political sphere, regardless of their outsider status.⁸² Pfanzelt and Spies support this view by arguing that "as long as this pattern of unequal self-selection into institutional politics persists and as long as the monopoly of decision-making rests with parties and political institutions, it will be difficult to establish gender equality of representation in politics"⁸³

⁷⁴ H. Malin, K. Tirri, K. & I. Liauw, 'Adolescent moral motivations for civic engagement: Clues to the political gender gap?' *Journal of Moral Education*, 44:1, 2015, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2015.1014324>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ J. Mayer & H. Schmidt, 'Gendered Political Socialization in Four Contexts: Political interest and values among junior high school students in China, Japan, Mexico, and the United States', *Social Science Journal*, 41, 393–407, 2004, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2004.04.024>

⁷⁷ N. Alozie, J. Simon & B. Merrill, 'Gender and Political Orientation in Childhood', *Social Science Journal*, 40:1, 2003 pp 1–18, available at: [Gender and political orientation in childhood \(fairfield.edu\)](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2004.04.024)

⁷⁸ J. Booth-Tobin & H. Han, 'Motivated by Change: Political Activism of Young Women in the 2008 Presidential Campaign', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 38, no. 1/2 (2010): 115–29. Available at:

https://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/07321562/v38i0001/115_mbcpaowit2pc.xml

⁷⁹ J. Taft, "I'm Not a Politics Person": Teenage Girls, Oppositional Consciousness, and the Meaning of Politics, *Politics & Gender*, 2, 2006: 330. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X06060119>

⁸⁰ M. Hooghe & D. Stolle, "Good Girls go to the Polling Booth, Bad Boys go Everywhere: Gender Differences in Anticipated Political Participation Among American Fourteen-Year-Olds," *Women & Politics* 26: 1-23. 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2004.9971042>

⁸¹ H. Gordon, "Gendered Paths to Teenage Political Participation: Parental Power, Civic Mobility, and Youth Activism", *Gender and Society* 22: 1, 2008: 31-55 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243207311046>

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ H. Pfanzelt & D. Spies, 'The Gender Gap in Youth Political Participation: Evidence from Germany', *Political Research Quarterly* 72:1, 2019: 45. available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1065912918775249>

2.5 FORMAL MODES OF PARTICIPATION

Citizens' actions which directly address the state are the most well-understood and easily recognised modes of political participation. Various referred to as 'formal', 'conventional' or 'institutional' modes of participation,⁸⁴ they include activities such as voting, election campaigning, joining or donating money to a political party, contacting political representatives or standing for political office, along with participation in public policy-making processes through formal channels.

2.5.1 Efforts to increase children's and youth participation in formal political processes

Although some forms of conventional political participation, such as voting and standing for political office are institutionally denied to youth below a particular age, in many countries there have been gradual expansions of the formal political spaces and processes that girls and young women can access. In some cases, this has occurred due to reductions in the voting age. In others, it has been the product of participatory initiatives, often at the local level, such as participatory budgeting. While such legal changes and initiatives have genuinely expanded the formal political spaces accessible to girls, evidence suggests that girls' experiences of those spaces have varied significantly.

While it is still the case that, in the majority of countries, the minimum voting age is 18 in all elections, in a small, but growing number of countries, the voting age has been lowered for some, if not all elections. In most cases these moves have started with local, state or municipal level elections.

Recent analysis of evidence from countries where the voting age has been lowered has shown a number of positive impacts. Enfranchised 16- and 17-year-olds were often more interested in politics, more likely to vote, and demonstrated other pro-civic attitudes, such as institutional trust. In many instances, young people enfranchised earlier were more engaged than those enfranchised at 18. Longer-term research from Austria and Latin American countries suggests that the effect may be retained, at least partially, throughout further years of life, resulting in increases in electoral turnout overall.⁸⁵ While the research on this captures girls' voices and experiences, it lacks a gendered lens in its analysis. A study focused on the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, in which 16-year-olds were able to vote, did, however, find that Muslim girls (who faced even greater barriers to participation than their non-Muslim counterparts) described the referendum as a positive experience which engendered an interest in and engagement with formal politics.⁸⁶

Since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, there has been an increasing policy focus on the rights of young people to participate in civic and political life. Many countries have established participatory mechanisms for young people, such as Youth Councils and Youth Parliaments, and have sought to include children and youth in participatory policymaking and budgeting initiatives. These advances have offered girls and young women increased opportunities to engage in formal political processes in many parts of the world. In general, evidence suggests that youth who participate in these initiatives tend to view them in a positive light, feel empowered by their experiences and gain political skills and knowledge.⁸⁷ In many cases, Youth Councils have allowed youth to shape policies and decisions at the local level.⁸⁸ Youth Parliaments, however, have typically

⁸⁴ J. van Deth, J. A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica*, 49, 2014, pp. 349–367.

⁸⁵ J. Eichhorn & J. Bergh, 'Lowering the Voting Age to 16 in Practice: Processes and Outcomes,' *Compared Parliamentary Affairs*, 74, 2021, 507–521, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/qsab019>

⁸⁶ R. Finlay & P. Hopkins, 'Young Muslim Women's Political Participation in Scotland: Exploring the Intersections of Gender, Religion, Class and Place', *Political Geography*, 74, 2019: 102046, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102046>.

⁸⁷ See for example: S. Patrikios & M. Shephard, 'Representative and Useful? An Empirical Assessment of the Representative Nature and Impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 20:2, 2014: 236–54, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2013.829278>

⁸⁸ M. Collins, A. Augsburg & W. Gecker, 'Youth Councils in Municipal Government: Examination of Activities, Impact and Barriers', *Children and Youth Services Review* 65, 2016: 140–47, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.04.007>

had less direct impact on policy-making;⁸⁹ a comparative study of Youth Parliaments in Europe found that on the whole they do not fulfil their potential as direct channels that aggregate youth voice and transfer it to policy-makers, as the design of Youth Parliaments often turns them into a form of civic education, rather than channels for democratic participation.⁹⁰ The Scottish Youth Parliament does, however, provide a notable exception of where youth representatives have successfully influenced Scottish Government decisions on several issues.⁹¹

Available evidence suggests that selection procedures for Youth Parliaments and Youth Councils mean that they struggle to include diverse youth, which leads to underrepresentation of marginalised communities.^{92 93} It should, however, be noted that literature on formal participatory mechanisms for young people overwhelmingly features examples from democracies in higher-income countries, such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which makes it hard to assess their likely impact in other contexts.

Examples also exist of participatory budgeting initiatives, involving citizens participating directly in making decisions about budget issues, which have been adapted to enable the participation of children and young people. In 2016, a review of global practice on child participatory budgeting by Plan International documented children's experiences of these processes. It found that although 90 per cent of children who had direct experience of participatory budgeting enjoyed the experience, and 80 per cent felt that adults listened to their views – making them feel empowered and valued – only about half reported that changes were made as a result of their contributions. That report also found that although girls and young women were typically included in participatory budgeting initiatives in equal numbers to boys and young men, and that efforts were often made to ensure they had equal opportunities to present their views, it remained unclear whether decision-makers responded to those views in the same way.⁹⁴

Alongside these conventional mechanisms for encouraging participation of children and youth in formal political decision-making, more innovative participatory mechanisms are also being developed, including initiatives which make greater use of digital tools. Some of these initiatives may make it easier to include greater diversity of young people. One such example is the UN Habitat-led 'Her City' toolbox, which incorporates an embedded participatory process that "helps girls with diverse needs to plan and design cities that work for them, and everyone else."⁹⁵ It comprises digital and non-digital tools, and has been successfully implemented in varying contexts, including the Diepsloot informal settlement in Johannesburg.

Plan International's 'Young Citizen Scorecards' is an example of how a participatory accountability tool can be adapted to be child-sensitive, gender-responsive and inclusive and can promote the participation of diverse young people. A review of the implementation of Young Citizen Scorecards in five countries (India, Egypt, Benin, Togo and Uganda) found evidence that these interventions had a positive effect on the confidence of participants, their understanding of their rights, and their decision-making and mobilising skills.⁹⁶ In some cases, there was evidence that interventions had helped to shift power relations between young people and duty-bearers in a positive way. However, the report

⁸⁹ M. Shephard & S. Patrikios, 'Making Democracy Work by Early Formal Engagement? A Comparative Exploration of Youth Parliaments in the EU', *Parliamentary Affairs* 66:4, 2013: 752–71, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gss017>

⁹⁰ Shephard and Patrikios, 767.

⁹¹ Shephard and Patrikios, 765.

⁹² M. Collins, A. Augsberger, and W. Gecker, 'Youth Councils in Municipal Government'; Astraea Augsberger et al., 'Youth Civic Engagement: Do Youth Councils Reduce or Reinforce Social Inequality?', *Journal of Adolescent Research* 33: 2, 2018: 187–208, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558416684957>

⁹³ S. Finlay, 'Carving Out Meaningful Spaces for Youth Participation and Engagement in Decision-Making', *Youth Studies Australia*, 29: 4, 2010: 57, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3316/ielapa.568641998471768>

⁹⁴ L. Lundy, C. Marshall & K. Orr, 'Child-Participatory Budgeting: A Review of Global Practice', 2016, retrieved 20 April 2022: [Child-Participatory Budgeting: A review of global practice | Save the Children's Resource Centre](https://www.save-the-children.org.uk/resources/child-participatory-budgeting-a-review-of-global-practice)

⁹⁵ UN Habitat, 'UN-Habitat's Her City Toolbox Empowers Women to Make Significant Improvements in Urban Development', 7 March 2022, available at: [UN-Habitat's Her City toolbox empowers women to make significant improvements in urban development | UN-Habitat \(unhabitat.org\)](https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-her-city-toolbox-empowers-women-to-make-significant-improvements-in-urban-development)

⁹⁶ E. Babouri & S. Noble, Research on the Transformative Potential of the Young Citizen Scorecards, *Plan International*, 2022.

noted that the broader impact of scorecards was often limited due to the challenge of getting duty-bearers fully 'on-board' with participatory initiatives. These types of participatory mechanisms are also typically harder to scale-up to the national level

2.6 INFORMAL MODES OF PARTICIPATION

Activities such as protests, demonstrations and boycotts, which take place outside the context of political institutions, have long been used by citizens to effect change, to present specific claims and to reject existing social and political arrangements. Such forms of political participation, variously referred to as 'informal', 'non-institutional', 'non-conventional' or 'alternative', encompass actions which may be undertaken collectively or individually and may be legal or illegal across different contexts.⁹⁷

Over recent years, many authors have observed an ongoing expansion of available forms of participation and an increase in 'individualised', 'personalised' and 'creative' modes of participation.⁹⁸ This has meant that political participation has come to encompass what have been termed symbolic or 'expressive' modes of participation, much of which takes place online, the expansion of 'connective action', and the use of non-political activities used for political purposes. Van Deth, for example highlights political consumption and street parties as examples of this latter form of participation.⁹⁹

The expansion and shifting terrain of political participation has been variously attributed to the pervasive use of social media, the blurring of distinctions between private and public spheres, the increasing competences and resources (especially education) of citizens, the availability of an abundance of political information and the increasingly diffuse nature of political decision-making.¹⁰⁰

Alongside the widening repertoire of actions used for political participation, it has also been observed that there has been an evolution of the collective organisations structuring political activity – with political organisations that have grown out of social networks having more fluid memberships¹⁰¹ -- as well as a diversification of the targets that participants seek to influence, to include supranational agents and international bodies.¹⁰²

As noted previously, research suggests that young people are more likely to participate in politics via less formal, non-institutional channels, including through protests and demonstrations, as well as more individualised forms of political action.¹⁰³ This tendency to favour non-institutional forms of participation appears to be particularly pronounced among girls and young women,¹⁰⁴ both because they face greater barriers to participation via institutional channels, as well as because they have a genuine preference for these modes of participation.¹⁰⁵

2.6.1 Online activism/political participation

The rapid expansion of social media and internet usage over recent years has played a key role in shifting the landscape of political participation and expanded the ways in which girls and young women can engage in politics. Ease of communication and networking and individuals' access, and

⁹⁷ J. van Deth, J. A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica*, 49, 2014; 349–367

⁹⁸ J. van Deth, J. 'What Is Political Participation?' *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics*, 2016, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.68>

⁹⁹ van Deth, J. 2014.

¹⁰⁰ van Deth, J. 2016.

¹⁰¹ D. Marsh, T. O'Toole, & S. Jones, S. 'Young People and Politics in the UK: Apathy or Alienation?', *Palgrave Macmillan*, 2006.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ J. Weiss, 'What is youth political participation? Literature review on youth political participation and political attitudes' *Frontiers in Political Science*, 15th May 2020, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2020.00001>

¹⁰⁴ H. Pfanzelt & D. Spies, 'The Gender Gap in Youth Political Participation: Evidence from Germany', *Political Research Quarterly*, 72:1, 2019: 34–48, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918775249>

¹⁰⁵ J. Booth-Tobin & H. Han, 'Motivated by Change: Political Activism of Young Women in the 2008 Presidential Campaign', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 38:1/2, 2010: 115–29., available at: https://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/07321562/v38i0001/115_mbcpaowit2pc.xml

exposure, to political information have vastly increased, while information sources have been diversified and ‘democratised’.¹⁰⁶ As young people are growing up with high levels of engagement in online spaces, understanding the implications of these shifts for young people’s political participation and wider engagement is a growing area of research.

Online or digital activism/political participation encompasses an immense variety of actions. On the one hand, many traditional forms of participation, such as signing petitions, contacting representatives, or belonging to community groups have moved online. Alongside this, there has been a proliferation of new forms of expressive and connective political action. Young people in particular are using social media to develop their political identities and express political stances in creative forms such as through videos and memes¹⁰⁷. In doing so, they are redefining political participation outside the confines of formal political institutions.¹⁰⁸

Data on young people’s online political participation, in all its forms, is limited. A 2018 survey across 14 countries found that young people aged 18 to 29 are more likely to participate in political discussions online than older adults.¹⁰⁹ Another study, of 9 to 17-year-olds across 11 countries, found that between 43 and 64 per cent of children looked for news online, about 19 per cent discussed problems, and about 13 per cent were involved in a campaign or protest. As might be expected, it found that children become more political and engaged in social issues and problems as they reach older adolescence.¹¹⁰

Beneath these headline statistics, other studies have looked at how online forms of participation vary amongst young people, including by gender. For example, research suggests that girls are less likely than boys to visit ‘political’ websites,¹¹¹ mirroring a finding that men are more likely to visit the websites of political parties and political organisations.¹¹² Such findings suggest that girls’ preferences for non-institutional modes of political participation are likely to shape their behaviour online.

Studies looking at how inclusive online forms of participation and engagement are for young people, have drawn mixed conclusions. While there is some evidence that online political participation by youth may be more equitable than traditional forms of participation, this may only hold true in contexts of widespread digital access.¹¹³ Studies focusing on gender inclusion and online participation also paint a mixed picture. One study in Indonesia, for example, found that young Muslim women are joining groups on social media, particularly Instagram, for community and expression as an alternative public sphere, especially since it may not be acceptable for them to engage in the public ‘street politics’ of young men.¹¹⁴ Other authors have highlighted the fact that, in contexts where girls have difficulty accessing the internet due to social norms, and where the political and civic engagement of girls is actively discouraged, unequal participation persists in online spaces.¹¹⁵ A Plan International study of girls’ and young women’s rights in Jordan, for example, revealed prevalent societal taboos around girls’ use of online platforms; it found that many girls and young women are

¹⁰⁶ A. Keating, & G. Melis, ‘Social media and youth political engagement: Preaching to the converted or providing a new voice for youth?’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 19:4, 2017: 877-894, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148117718461>

¹⁰⁷ A. Cho, J. Byrne & Z. Pelter, Digital civic engagement by young people, UNICEF, 2020, retrieved 15th May 2022: [Digital-civic-engagement-by-young-people-2020_4.pdf \(unicef.org\)](https://www.unicef.org/research/digital-civic-engagement-by-young-people-2020-4.pdf)

¹⁰⁸ A. Keating & G. Melis, G. 2017

¹⁰⁹ R. Wikes & A. Castillo, ‘Many around the World Are Disengaged from Politics’, October 17th 2018, retrieved 15th May 2022: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/17/international-political-engagement/>

¹¹⁰ Global Kids Online, Global Kids Online: Comparative Report, UNICEF, 2019, retrieved 15th May 2022: [GKO LAYOUT MAIN REPORT.pdf \(unicef-irc.org\)](https://www.unicef.org/research/global-kids-online-comparative-report)

¹¹¹ R. Fox & J. Lawless, ‘Uncovering the Origins of the Gender Gap in Political Ambition’, *American Political Science Review* 108: 3, 2014: 499–519, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000227>

¹¹² N. Wen, H. Xiaoming & C. George, ‘Gender and Political Participation: News Consumption, Political Efficacy and Interpersonal Communication’, *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 19: 4, 2013: 124–49, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2013.11666168>

¹¹³ A. Cho, J. Byrne & Z. Pelter, 2020

¹¹⁴ A. Yue, E. Nekmat & A. Beta, ‘Digital Literacy Through Digital Citizenship: Online Civic Participation and Public Opinion Evaluation of Youth Minorities in Southeast Asia’. *Media and Communication*, 7:2, 2019: 100–114.

¹¹⁵ A. Cho, J. Byrne & Z. Pelter, 2020

forced to navigate online spaces by creating fake accounts and that they also fear reprisals for using online platforms.¹¹⁶

Gendered differences in online participation are often more pronounced in lower-income countries. In such contexts, gendered experiences of poverty may restrict the ability of girls and young women to access digital devices, and thus to participate in politics online. A global study of girls' mobile phone use found that girls are less likely to own a smartphone than boys and sometimes encountered intense social pressures and moral judgements that constrained their use of mobile phones.¹¹⁷ This suggests that girls in more disadvantaged socio-economic environments may have less access to online channels of political participation than their male counterparts.

At the same time, online participation may be particularly valuable to those girls and young women who experience greater socio-economic disadvantage. Research from Fiji, for example, suggests that online channels of participation are particularly important to individuals whose ability to communicate in other fora is constrained by virtue of their age and/or gender.¹¹⁸ This may also make online participation especially valuable to trans girls, as well as girls who otherwise identify as part of the LGBTQI+ community. Scholars with lived experience have highlighted the value of online spaces to trans youth, who often experience isolation and discrimination, especially where they grow up in rural or remote communities.¹¹⁹

Online forms of political participation are not immune from violence. Indeed, they can leave girls exposed to new kinds of risk. Girl and women activists are disproportionately attacked or 'trolled' online, often with sexualised threats intended to intimidate and prevent them from speaking out.¹²⁰ Online spaces have also given governments new tools for repressing political activism and constraining civil society. This has included the strategic use of internet shutdowns (often around contentious elections), the targeted blocking of social media sites, and the use of digital spaces to gather intelligence on political activists. Recent research on youth civic activism supported by the UN Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth demonstrates that, as young people make more use of digital channels, "the challenges emanating from online restrictions, privacy issues and surveillance are becoming more significant."¹²¹ This suggests that the digital dimension of closing civic space is likely to become increasingly important in shaping the political participation of girls and young women.

A key focus of debate is the relationship between online and offline forms of political participation and, in particular, whether the ease of online engagement is resulting in the replacement of more effective, effortful forms of participation with unproductive 'slacktivism' - a pejorative term for casual, throwaway digital 'activism'.¹²² Studies appear to largely suggest that there is, in fact, a complex and often positive relationship between online and offline forms of participation, which in many cases are complementary and inseparable.¹²³ A study of the Thai student protests of 2020 and 2021, for example, illustrated how social media was used intensively to recruit, organise and mobilise activists.

¹¹⁶ Plan International and the Solidarity is Global Institute – Jordan, The Protection of Women and Girls in Jordan: a women's rights assessment report, 2021, retrieved 15th June 2022: https://plan-international.org/uploads/sites/19/2022/02/a_report_assessing_the_rights_of_girls_and_young_women_in_jordan.pdf p.17

¹¹⁷ Vodafone and Girl Effect, 'Real Girls, Real Lives, Connected', 2018), retrieved 16th May 2022: <http://www.girleffect.org/stories/real-girls-real-lives-connected/>

¹¹⁸ T. Brimacombe, R. Kant, G. Finau, J. Tarai and J. Titifanue, 'A New Frontier in Digital Activism: An Exploration of Digital Feminism in Fiji', *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 5:3, 2018: 508–21, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.253>

¹¹⁹ E. Erlick, 'Trans Youth Activism on the Internet', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 39:1, 2018: 73–92, available at: <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.39.1.0073>

¹²⁰ Amnesty International, 'Toxic Twitter: A Toxic Place for Women', 2018, retrieved 16th May 2022: [Toxic Twitter - A Toxic Place for Women - Amnesty International](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR01/001/2018/01/en/)

¹²¹ R. Izsák-Ndiaye, If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space, *Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth*, 2021: 33. Retrieved 18th June 2022: [UN-A4 NEW.indd](https://www.un.org/en/secretary-general/office-of-the-secretary-general-s-envoy-on-youth/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/UN-A4-NEW.indd)

¹²² A. Cho, J. Byrne & Z. Pelter, 2020

¹²³ H. Grejdanus, C. de Matos Fernandes, F. Turner-Zwinkels, A. Honari, C. Roos, H. Rosenbusch, T. Postmes, 'The psychology of online activism and social movements: relations between online and offline collective action', *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 35. 2020: 49 – 54, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.03.003>

Twitter, for example, became an important space in which protestors built collective narratives about why they were taking action, as well as a critical channel for disseminating movement information.¹²⁴

Moreover, evidence suggests that young people who participate in politics online are much more likely to engage in 'real' offline political participation such as voting,¹²⁵ and there is a documented direct link between internet use by young people, generally, and civic engagement.¹²⁶ Rather than engaging simply in isolated actions, evidence suggests that many young people are in fact adopting a repertoire of online and offline political and civic actions¹²⁷ and view the online/offline dichotomy as false.¹²⁸

There is also evidence that any form of online political or civic participation and engagement has intrinsic value for young people's development as citizens, exposing them to political and civic issues and allowing them to develop a sense of socio-political empowerment.¹²⁹ It has also been argued that 'expressive' forms of participation can be important ways for young people to claim agency that may not be afforded to them in traditional and institutional political spaces. Moreover, some evidence suggests that using voice as an act of expression can be a first step towards participation that is aimed more for instrumental ends (such as changes in law or policy).¹³⁰

2.6.2 Organising amongst girls and young women

Despite the observed rise in individualised modes of political participation, girls' and young women's participation outside formal political channels still often takes place through various forms of collective action; we are witnessing a rise in diverse, intersectional and de-centralised youth movements and grassroots activism in which girls and young women are often at the forefront.

Existing research shows that girls tend to organise in distinct ways. Girl-led organisations typically adopt flatter, less hierarchical structures and are less likely to be formally registered.¹³¹ In some cases, the non-registration of girl-led organisations is the product of a conscious decision, where girls determine that less formal modes of organisation reflect their principles and priorities. In others, it is the product of various barriers, including a lack of financial resources, government restrictions on civil society organisations, or the administrative burden associated with registration. Groups working on issues that are criminalised in their countries, such as LGBTQI+ or abortion rights, are often forced to work in a clandestine or concealed manner;¹³² for such groups, non-registration may be a strategy to mitigate threats to their security. Nevertheless, evidence also suggests that unregistered girl-led groups often rely on support from adult-led organisations that are formally registered. For example, politically active girls may receive training, as well as financial support from other CSOs. CSOs may also help girls to engage in more formal political spaces by helping them to get 'a seat at the table.'¹³³

The Fridays for Future (FFF) climate movement illustrates the forms of political organisation in which girls and young women most commonly engage. Despite the high-profile of Greta Thunberg, FFF has remained a decentralised, grass-roots movement with no formal leaders. In its non-hierarchical structure, and in working outside of established political institutions, FFF provides an example of the apparent tendency of girls to favour less institutionalised modes of political participation and

¹²⁴ A. Sinpeng, 'Hashtag Activism: Social Media and the #FreeYouth Protests in Thailand', *Critical Asian Studies* 53: 2, 2021: 192–205, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2021.1882866>

¹²⁵ C. Cohen and J. Kahne, 'Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth Political Action', *DML Research Hub*, 2012. Retrieved 18th June 2022: [Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth Political Action - DML Hub](https://www.dmlhub.org/participatory-politics-new-media-and-youth-political-action)

¹²⁶ A. Cho, J. Byrne & Z. Pelter, 2020

¹²⁷ E. Middaugh, L. Clark and P. Ballard, 'Digital Media, Participatory Politics, and Positive Youth Development'. *Pediatrics*, 140 (Supplement 2), 2017: 127–S131, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1758Q>

¹²⁸ A. Cho, J. Byrne & Z. Pelter, 2020

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ E. Zuckerman, E. 'New Media, New Civics?' *Policy & Internet*, 6:2, 2014: 151–168. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/1944-2866.POI360>

¹³¹ Mama Cash and FRIDA, 'Girls to the Front: a snapshot of girl-led organising', 2018, retrieved 15th June 2022, available at: <https://www.mamacash.org/en/report-girls-to-the-front>

¹³² FRIDA and AWID, 2016

¹³³ Mama Cash and FRIDA, 2018

organisation. However, it also demonstrates the fact that girls' adoption of non-institutional modes of political participation does not preclude a desire to influence the actions of traditional political institutions.

2.7 FACTORS AFFECTING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONGST GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

There has been considerable research over several decades into the factors related to patterns of political participation among young people, including factors which underpin gender differences in participation. This research has revealed that a range of interrelated factors, including psychological, socio-economic, demographic and macro/contextual factors determine both the level and forms of political participation pursued by individual young people.¹³⁴

Girls' political socialisation

Much of the literature exploring gender differences focuses on the role of political socialisation, and how this differs between genders. Political socialisation refers to the process by which political identities, values and behaviours – which remain relatively persistent throughout later life – are established.¹³⁵ The “impressionable or formative years” between childhood and adulthood are generally believed to be a crucial period during which individuals form the basis of political attitudes and behaviours. During this stage of life, young people have not yet developed political habits and are therefore more easily influenced by external factors.¹³⁶

The family context is often seen as the most important arena for young people's political socialisation – evidence has shown that stable parental political attitudes and frequent contact with political issues through family discussions significantly increases pre-adult awareness and long-term disposition for political participation.¹³⁷ While a study by Cicognani et al. found that parental political participation has a greater impact on girls than on boys,¹³⁸ other studies of gendered socialisation have found evidence that boys and young men are more likely than girls to be socialised by their parents to think about politics as a career path.¹³⁹

Schools are also important settings where girls' political socialisation occurs. Schools can be spaces where girls can access information about political processes, institutions and issues, and can provide them with a safe space to engage in political discussions and activities, fostering their awareness of themselves as political actors and active citizens. Schools can also play a critical role in shaping girls' opportunities to participate in politics beyond the school environment.

In addition to family and school contexts, children's and young people's political socialisation occurs through their peer groups, through their experiences in 'civic activities' including clubs, sports and volunteering, and through their media consumption. Research by Lawless and Fox from the US found that girls and young women's experiences across all these areas expose them to less political information and discussion than is the case for boys and young men.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ M. Barrett and D. Pachi, 'Civic and Political Engagement Among Youth: Concepts, forms and factors' in M. Barrett and D. Pachi (eds) *Youth Civic and Political Engagement*, 2019

¹³⁵ A. Neundorff & K. Smets, 2017

¹³⁶ A. Neundorff & K. Smets, 2017

¹³⁷ S. Schwarzer and D. Connor, 'Political Engagement among the Youth: Effects of Political Socialisation across Europe.' 2013, In *Democracy in Transition: Political Participation in the European Union*, K. Demetriou (ed), 253–72. Berlin: Springer. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolence.2011.10.002>

¹³⁸ E. Cicognani, Z. Bruna, B. Fournier, C. Gavray & M. Born, 'Gender Differences in Youths' Political Engagement and Participation: The Role of Parents and of Adolescents' Social and Civic participation.' *Journal of Adolescence* 35, 2012: 561-576, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolence.2011.10.002>

¹³⁹ R. Fox & J. Lawless, 2014

¹⁴⁰ R. Fox & J. Lawless, 2014

An alternative approach to understanding the political socialisation of girls, which provides a different perspective, has been to study the narratives of girl and young women activists. Through interviews with girl activists in North and South America, Taft's studies have illuminated the ways in which adolescent girls construct activist identities.¹⁴¹ Her insights are echoed in work by Brown, who – drawing on her research with African American girls – highlights the impacts of formal exclusion from politics in girls' political socialisation, observing the role of dissent, counter-socialisation, and the expression of critical beliefs about political and social issues.¹⁴²

Political and wider socialisation of girls and boys not only shapes political identities, values and behaviours, but also influences a range of other politically relevant attitudes and beliefs which are important predictors of an individual's political participation, and also differ by gender.¹⁴³ Studies have commonly found that girls and women have lower levels of political efficacy (i.e. belief in their own ability to influence the course of politics) than boys and men,¹⁴⁴ a finding attributed to gendered socialisation but also linked in part to lower levels of representation of women in political leadership,¹⁴⁵ discussed above. Evidence has also widely pointed to lower levels of political interest amongst girls and women compared to boys and men,¹⁴⁶ although this long held assumption has been challenged by recent studies which argue rather that women's conceptions of politics and issues of interest often differ from those of men and have not been adequately captured in past studies.¹⁴⁷

2.7.1 Unequal access to resources

Socio-economic factors, and in particular unequal access to different types of resources, are also understood to play an important role in influencing levels of political participation and how this varies between genders. Level of education is key in determining participation.¹⁴⁸ While in most higher-income countries the gender gap in education has closed over recent decades, in some lower-income countries, despite significant progress, the gap between girls' and boys' levels of education persists.¹⁴⁹ Evidence also shows that level of income and availability of time are correlated with levels of political participation; the unequal distribution of these resources between genders is thus a commonly cited explanation for lower levels of political participation amongst women.¹⁵⁰

Concerns have been raised about the immediate and longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on socio-economic inequalities, which in turn have implications for girls and young women's political participation. These have included disproportionate increases in poverty among women and girls, the impact of school closures, the growth of gender-based violence and the rising – and unequally distributed – burden of caring for family members affected by COVID-19.¹⁵¹ All of these factors have the potential to erode the social and economic security of girls and young women, and consequently

¹⁴¹ J. Taft, 'Teenage girls' narratives of becoming activists', *Contemporary Social Science*, 12: 1-2, 2016, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2017.1324173>

¹⁴² R. Brown, 'Remembering Maleesa: Theorizing Black Girl Politics and the Politicizing of Socialization,' 2007 In G. A. Persons (ed.), *The Expanding Boundaries of Black Politics* (pp. 121-136). (The National Political Science Review; Vol. 11).

¹⁴³ H. Pfanzelt and D. Spies, 'The Gender Gap in Youth Political Participation: Evidence from Germany', *Political Research Quarterly*, 72:1, 2019, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271065912918775249>

¹⁴⁴ R. Fox & J. Lawless, 'Gendered Perceptions and Political Candidacies: A Central Barrier to Women's Equality in Electoral Politics' *American Journal of Political Science* 55:1, 2011: 59–73, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25766254>

¹⁴⁵ L. Atkeson & N. Carrillo, 'More Is Better: The Influence of Collective Female Descriptive Representation on External Efficacy' *Politics and Gender*, 3:1, 2007, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X0707002X>

¹⁴⁶ M. Fraile & R. Gómez, 'Bridging the Enduring Gender Gap in Political Interest in Europe: The relevance of promoting gender equality'. *European Journal of Political Research* 56:3, 2017: 601–618, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12200>

¹⁴⁷ M. Ferrín, M. Fraile, G. García-Albacete & R. Gómez, 'The gender gap in political interest revisited', *International Political Science Review*, 40:4, 2020: 473-489, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512119860260>

¹⁴⁸ K. Schlozman, N. Burns & S. Verba, 'Gender and the Pathways to Participation: The Role of Resources.' *The Journal of Politics* 56:4, 1994: 963–90, available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2132069>

¹⁴⁹ D. Evans, M. Akmal & P. Jakiela, 'Gender Gaps in Education: The Long View', 2020, *Centre for Global Development, Working paper 523*, retrieved 14th January 2022; [Gender Gaps in Education: The Long View \(cgdev.org\)](https://www.cgdev.org/publication/gender-gaps-in-education-the-long-view)

¹⁵⁰ K. Schlozman, N. Burns & S. Verba, 1994

¹⁵¹ UN Women, 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Women', 2020, retrieved 16th January 2022: [UN Secretary-General's policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on women | Digital library: Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/2020-04-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women)

their ability to participate in politics. However, it will take some time, possibly years, for the full impact of these factors on the political participation of girls and young women to manifest.

2.7.2 Social norms

Social norms and discriminatory beliefs linked to age and gender influence the opportunities available for girls and young women to participate in politics, and the challenges faced by those who do. One of the most important of these is ageism, or more specifically, adultism, which typically manifests as a tendency to dismiss the value of young people's opinions and contributions because of their age. Evidence suggests that adultism is prevalent among many political leaders, colouring their responses to girls who engage in participatory policy-making¹⁵² as well as their responses to girls' participation via non-institutional channels. Adultism can also manifest as excessive praise for politically active girls, who are labelled as 'heroic' or inspirational.¹⁵³ Research with adolescent activists in the US suggested that these excessively positive statements can be experienced negatively by girls because they are interpreted as condescending and implying that most youth are not capable of meaningful political participation.¹⁵⁴

Gendered norms also shape girls' political participation. In many societies, formal political spaces are controlled by, and seen as the domain for, men, and there is a prevailing belief that politics is an inappropriate activity for women – and by extension, girls. Although public attitudes to women's political participation are slowly changing,¹⁵⁵ progress in this area is uneven. Girls in some parts of the world, including the Middle East and Africa, continue to face significant normative barriers to political participation. For example, in such contexts, girls and young women who attend political meetings may find their morality questioned, especially where such meetings occur at night.¹⁵⁶ As such, gendered norms can impose practical constraints on girls' ability to participate in politics. This is true even in higher-income countries. Research from the US, for example, shows that parents typically place greater constraints on the spatial mobility of girls than boys.¹⁵⁷ These constraints limit the ability of girls to participate in social movements.¹⁵⁸

Even in countries that have made greater progress towards gender equality, certain groups of girls may still find that social and cultural norms create significant barriers to their political participation. Finlay and Hopkins' study of Muslim girls' experiences of the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum highlighted the ways in which discriminatory norms, such as sexism and stereotypes about Muslim women, create layered barriers to their political participation.

2.7.3 Violence

Evidence suggests that violence can create substantial barriers to the political participation of girls and young women. A research report commissioned by the UN concluded that "there is strong evidence that shows that young people across regions, gender, racial, ethnic, class and other lines,

¹⁵² L. Perry-Hazan, 'Children's Participation in National Policymaking: 'You're so Adorable, Adorable, Adorable! I'm Speechless; so Much Fun!', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 105-113, 2016

¹⁵³ R. Raby & L. Sheppard, 'Constructs of Childhood, Generation and Heroism in Editorials on Young People's Climate Change Activism: Their Mobilisation and Effects', *Children & Society*, 35:3, 2021: 380–94, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12447>

¹⁵⁴ H. Gordon & J. Taft, 'Rethinking Youth Political Socialization: Teenage Activists Talk Back', *Youth & Society*, 43:4, 2011: 1499–1527, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X10386087>

¹⁵⁵ For example, see Fiji Women's Forum and International Women's Development Agency, Public Perceptions of Women in Leadership, *International Women's Development Agency*, 2014, available at: <https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Public-Perceptions-of-Women-in-Leadership.pdf>

¹⁵⁶ P. Domingo, R. Holmes, T. O'Neil, N. Jones, K. Bird, A. Larson, E. Presler-Marshall & C. Valters, 'Women's voice and leadership in decision-making: Assessing the evidence', ODI, 2014, [Women's voice and leadership: assessing the evidence - - Research reports and studies \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.odi.org/publications/123456789)

¹⁵⁷ A. Best, 'Freedom, Constraint, and Family Responsibility: Teens and Parents Collaboratively Negotiate Around the Car, Class, Gender, and Culture', *Journal of Family Issues*, 27: 1, 2006: 55–84, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X05275422>

¹⁵⁸ H. Gordon & J. Taft, 2011

experience concerning threats, harassment, violence and other forms of human rights violations because of their age and the nature of their civic engagement”.¹⁵⁹

As noted above, there is a growing body of evidence documenting the violence directed towards women in politics, particularly women in positions of political leadership, and its negative impact on their political participation.¹⁶⁰ Although most existing evidence focuses on women, rather than girls, such violence is likely to deter girls and young women from participating in politics. This effect may occur directly, with violence making political participation less appealing to girls and young women, and indirectly, when violence interacts with other barriers that they face. For example, where violence is more prevalent, families are more likely to oppose girls engaging in politics. Young women activists in Myanmar, for example, reported their families often opposed their political activities out of a desire to protect them in a context where political activism was considered risky, both due to government repression and due to broader security concerns.¹⁶¹

It is unclear whether the increased risk of violence associated with participation in formal political processes and institutions (such as elections) contributes to the popularity of less conventional modes of political participation among girls and young women. Indeed, girls and young women who engage in alternative types of participation also face violence and harassment, including online. A study by Plan International found that sexual harassment, both online and offline was the most commonly faced risk reported by child and youth activists, especially amongst girls and young women. Many respondents shared their own and others’ experiences with online sexual harassment and/or sexual violence, such as non-consensual sharing of intimate messages, photos or videos, and unwanted sexual attention intended as tools of coercion and intimidation.¹⁶²

Barriers and challenges to political participation faced by girls and young women are often particularly acute in contexts of restricted civic space, and evidence suggests that in these contexts politically active girls and young women experience actual or threatened violence, including sexual violence.¹⁶³ Although there is a lack of research that expressly examines the impact of closing civic space on the political participation of girls or young women,¹⁶⁴ both women and youth are two of the groups most affected by civic space restrictions. According to the 2021 CIVICUS Monitor, groups advocating for women’s rights and women human rights defenders are the most frequently mentioned in reports of civic space restrictions.¹⁶⁵ Not only are groups working on more sensitive or political topics more likely to be the targets of repression, the ways in which they are targeted are often shaped by – and frequently exploit – their identities. A study examining the effects of closing civic space on woman human rights defenders across 16 countries found that feminist activists were often threatened with rape, while LGBTIQ+ activists were threatened with being ‘outed’ to their parents.¹⁶⁶

2.7.4 Role models

As described in section 3.1.2., levels of women’s representation in politics have been shown to influence levels of political participation amongst girls and women more broadly. Other evidence has suggested that the availability of women role models, within and beyond the formal political sphere, can influence the political participation of girls and young women. A study by Plan International found

¹⁵⁹ R. Izsák-Ndiaye, 2021

¹⁶⁰ S. Dubravka, ‘Violence Against Women in Politics’, United Nations General Assembly, 2018, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/251/00/PDF/N1825100.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁶¹ A. Ma, P. Phyu, & C. Knapman, ‘In the Land of Wise Old Men: Experiences of Young Women Activists in Myanmar’, *Gender & Development* 2:3, 2018: 459–76, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2018.1524422>

¹⁶² Plan International, ‘How to better support children & youth affected by shrinking civic space: approaches to navigate risks with young activists’, n.d. retrieved 15th June 2022: [policy-brief3-children-youth-and-civic-space-eng.pdf \(plansverige.org\)](https://plansverige.org/policy-brief3-children-youth-and-civic-space-eng.pdf)

¹⁶³ OHCHR, ‘Civic space and effects of shrinking space on women human rights defenders in East Africa’, 2017, retrieved 5th June 2022: [WHRDEastAfricaReport.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WomenHumanRightsDefendersEastAfricaReport.pdf)

¹⁶⁴ The latter group, young women, are occasionally mentioned as a subset of women affected by closing civic space, but there are no studies which explore whether they are affected in a distinct or different way.

¹⁶⁵ CIVICUS, ‘People Power Under Attack’ 2021, retrieved 18th January 2021: [2021GlobalReport.pdf \(contentfiles.net\)](https://www.civicus.org/global-report-2021/)

¹⁶⁶ L. Fletcher, ‘Rights Eroded: A Briefing on the Effects of Closing Space on Women Human Rights Defenders’, 2017, *International Human Rights Law Clinic University of California, Berkeley, School of Law*, 2017, retrieved 15th January 2022: [Rights Eroded: A Briefing on the Effects of Closing Space on Women Human Rights Defenders \(berkeley.edu\)](https://www.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2017-01/RightsEroded.pdf)

that having women leaders as role models in their community and in media is crucial for inspiring girls' own leadership ambitions. Girls and young women reported that they were inspired by the courage, determination and fighting spirit shown by these role models, often in difficult circumstances. They also articulated how the presence of women leaders and role models encouraged them to believe and be confident in their own abilities, and their potential to succeed.¹⁶⁷

The Fridays for Future movement illustrates the potential impact of role models within social movements on girls' political participation. Girls were 'overrepresented' at FFF school strikes: surveys conducted at FFF protests in 15 European countries in March and September 2019 indicate that roughly 60 per cent of protestors identified as female, and that school-aged people (14 to 19-years) accounted for a large proportion of attendees.¹⁶⁸ Girls and young women were also particularly visible in media coverage of those protests, as well as other climate actions. In 2019 and 2020, visual representations of climate protests were dominated by images of people who were young and female.¹⁶⁹ Research suggests that the visibility of positive role models, in particular Greta Thunberg, helped to bolster the participation of girls in FFF protests. In the European surveys mentioned above, young people (under 20) and female respondents were most likely to report that Greta Thunberg had made them more interested in climate change and affected their decision to join the protest.¹⁷⁰

However, research also suggests that the impact of role models may not be universal. Rather, the impact of role models may vary depending on the political and social contexts in which girls and young women find themselves. Evidence from Asia, for example, suggests that – where the emergence of women as role models in formal political spaces has not been matched by broader progress in gender equality – they have not had a positive effect on women's political participation.¹⁷¹ Researchers speculated that this was because women perceived those role models as mere 'window dressing.' We should, therefore, expect girls to adopt a critical view of role models, and for those role models to have less influence on the participation of girls where their roles appear to be tokenistic or superficial.

2.8 POLITICAL ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

While much of the literature addresses questions of *how*, and to what extent young people are participating in politics, a related area of enquiry focuses on *what* issues and topics interest them and motivate them to participate. An overarching observation is that young people have moved away from seeing politics and political issues as within the domain of political institutions, parties or classic political ideologies. Instead, they are establishing political orientations based on ethical principles – a result of which is that the political issues and causes that concern young people, as well as the targets of political action, are diversifying, while the actions taken in support of political causes, from their consumer choices to expressive acts on social media, permeate daily life.¹⁷²

A recent survey of young feminist organisations (YFOs) found that girls and young women are organising around a range of issues. While there are differences between regions, the issues of highest priority were found to be gender-based violence, sexual reproductive health and rights, as

¹⁶⁷ Plan International, 'Taking the Lead', 2019, retrieved 16th March 2022: [takingthelead-fullreport-1.pdf \(plan-international.org\)](https://plan-international.org/takingthelead-fullreport-1.pdf)

¹⁶⁸ L. Zamponi et al, 'Protest for a Future II: Composition, Mobilization and Motives of the Participants in Fridays For Future Climate Protests on 20-27 September, 2019, in 19 Cities around the World', 2020, retrieved 15th June 2022: <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-40271>

¹⁶⁹ S. Hayes & S. O'Neill, 'The Greta Effect: Visualising Climate Protest in UK Media and the Getty Images Collections', *Global Environmental Change* 71, November 2021: 102392, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102392>

¹⁷⁰ M. Wahlström & K. Uba, 'Political Icon and Role Model: Conceptualising and Exploring the "Greta Effect" on Climate Activism', Paper presented online at the ESA/ECPR Social Movements Midterm conference "Democratic struggles: contention, social movements and democracy", 7 October 2020

¹⁷¹ S. Liu, 'Are Female Political Leaders Role Models? Lessons from Asia', *Political Research Quarterly* 71: 2, 2018: 255–69, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917745162>

¹⁷² R. Soler-i-Marti, 'Youth political involvement update: measuring the role of cause-oriented political interest in young people's activism', *Journal of Youth Studies* 18:3, 2014, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.963538>

well as political and economic empowerment for women. The same survey found that while YFOs' are campaigning for change within the 'formal' political sphere, their activism on the issues they care about also seeks to effect change in the 'informal sphere' of individual consciousness and social and cultural norms.¹⁷³

2.9 LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS COVERING GIRL'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Girls and young women's rights to political participation are enshrined in numerous international human rights frameworks and standards, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In addition, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and several of the Sustainable Development Goals within Agenda 2030 promote the political empowerment of young people, particularly young women.

Much of the global discourse on children's and young people's right to participation in public life is centred around Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which states that "State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child..." In addition, there are several other relevant articles that protect and promote children's and young people's political empowerment. These include Articles 13 to 17 on Freedom of expression; Freedom of thought, Rights to Association and Privacy; and Right to access to information and mass media. Considering children's evolving capacities, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) protects the civil rights of under 18-year-olds, putting particular emphasis on the principle of their participation. It does not, however, grant children full political rights, that is, the right to vote or stand for elections.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has also published subsequent guidance notes to provide further clarity on considering children's views and promoting their participation in public affairs. In 2009, the Committee on the Rights of the Child published General Comment No. 12 on "the right of the child to be heard",¹⁷⁴ which provides a framework to ensure the promotion of meaningful, safe and ethical participation of children. Within the comment, the Committee recognises that children's ability to express their views is often impeded by long-standing practices and attitudes, as well as economic and political barriers. However, it also stipulates that state parties must assure the right of the child to be heard according to the age and maturity of the child. However, this can have a negative impact on children and limit the opportunities given to them by decision-makers and duty bearers. By adding this condition to the article, state parties have been given the opportunity to deny children their full right to participate by arguing that children are not yet mature or old enough to engage.

Progress has been made at the international level to ensure legal human rights frameworks are in place to support women's participation in political and public life. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the international human rights treaty that focuses specifically on equality between women and men in all areas of life, including within public and private spheres. However, while CEDAW contains several articles which outline the specific responsibilities of states to uphold the right for women to participate in political and public life, there is no explicit reference to girls, meaning that specific barriers that prevent girls from active participation may be overlooked by governments. As a result, girls' age- and gender-specific needs and interests fall through the cracks of international human rights frameworks and standards.

¹⁷³ FRIDA and AWID, 2016

¹⁷⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the child 'General Comment No. 12: The Right of the Child to be Heard', 2009

3 METHODOLOGY

The research collected primary mixed-methods data through a large-scale survey and two sets of qualitative interviews.

3.1 SURVEY

The cross-sectional survey aimed to determine the attitudes, practices and aspirations of girls and young women aged 15-24 in relation to the research questions. The survey provides a snapshot in time of current perceptions across a diverse range of countries and contexts.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire had 15 closed questions; most of them allowed respondents to select multiple answer codes. Questions were structured around three areas: (i) their perceptions of political leaders, issues and effects of decisions; (ii) their perception of girls' and young women's engagement with, and participation in, politics; and (iii) their own engagement with, and participation in, politics.¹⁷⁵

The questionnaire drew upon the International Civic and Citizenship Education Survey.¹⁷⁶

Timeframe: Data was collected from February to April 2022.

Data Collection: Data was collected by two marketing research companies, IPSOS and GeoPoll, on behalf of Plan International. These organisations were responsible for the recruitment of participants, fielding of the survey and data collection, and data cleaning and transfer. Ipsos collected data in 22 countries and GeoPoll in 7 countries. Two different methodologies were used to collect the data (See Table 2 for an overview of methods by country).

- **Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)**, i.e., telephone calls: interviewers conducted telephone interviews in the respective countries. They used GeoPoll's proprietary CATI Mobile Application to record responses. Respondents could opt out of the call or request a call back at another time.
- **Computer Assisted Web-Interviewing (CAWI)**, i.e., online survey: Respondents filled-in an online survey on a dedicated website. The survey was programmed to be filled-in on smart phones or other devices.

The survey was pre-tested by each organisation across all countries, via a sample of between 25 to 30 people per country. Data from the pre-test was included in the final data analyzed.

Quality assurance and data monitoring: During the CATI live calls, supervisors randomly listened to a percentage of the ongoing calls. They monitored enumerator performance daily and checked the data. Any interviews with a below-acceptable length of interview (LOI) – in this case seven minutes – were dropped. CAWI data was also monitored on a daily basis, including checks for completes, terminations, quits, and quotas. Checks were in place to verify participants' identity and to ensure that participants only participated once.

Target population and eligibility criteria: The survey targeted girls and young women (including LGBTQI+ girls) aged 15 to 24. This age range was consistent with that used in previous State of the

¹⁷⁵ The core survey was adapted to ensure sensitivity to country settings. Specifically, in Vietnam, one question (on feelings caused by political leaders' decisions) was removed and in the USA and Australia additional questions were added relevant to the national political context (these additional questions have not been analysed as part of the present report)

¹⁷⁶ See IEA, International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, no date, available at: <https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/iccs>

World's Girls reports, and meant we were able to capture views of persons identifying as girls and women and persons about to reach average voting age (18) as well as those immediately over voting age.

Sampling: The countries listed in Table 2 were purposively sampled for participation in the survey to ensure geographic representation of countries across Plan International's operating regions.

In each country, the target was to collect responses from 1000 girls and young women aged 15 to 24 (with the exception of Switzerland, where there was a target of 500). Non-probability sampling with a quota sampling approach was used. The data collection teams conducted a comparison of population estimates to recent census results, where available, to define the sampling frame. Benchmarks for each country were obtained to select samples with representative distribution of respondents in terms of region and age. Both firms relied on databases, generated via multistage random sampling, of participants who had previously agreed to participate in surveys in a specified mode. For CATI, an automated script/algorithm randomly pulled the appropriate amount of phone numbers needed using known demographic information from GeoPoll's proprietary database of over 250 million users. For CAWI, Ipsos provided quotas to panel providers in the different countries. Where the required sample as per benchmark could not be reached after repeated attempts, data collection was re-opened across other areas, resulting in slight over-sampling among urban populations.

Table 2: Mode, language, survey company, sample size by region and country

Region, Country	Mode	Language	Company	Sample
Africa and the Middle East				
Guinea	CATI	French	GeoPoll	1015
Kenya	CATI	English, Swahili	GeoPoll	1041
Malawi	CATI	English, Chichewa	GeoPoll	1065
Nigeria	CATI	English, English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo	GeoPoll	1008
Togo	CATI	French	GeoPoll	1007
Zambia	CATI	English	GeoPoll	1017
Asia and the Pacific				
Australia	CAWI	English	Ipsos	1000
Bangladesh	CAWI	Bengali	Ipsos	1000
Indonesia	CAWI	Bahasa Indonesia	Ipsos	1000
Japan	CAWI	Japanese	Ipsos	1000
Nepal	CAWI	Nepali	Ipsos	1000
Philippines	CAWI	English, Tagalog	Ipsos	1000
Vietnam	CAWI	Vietnamese	Ipsos	1000
Europe				

Austria	CAWI	German	Ipsos	1000
Belgium	CAWI	French, Dutch	Ipsos	1000
France	CAWI	French	Ipsos	1000
Germany	CAWI	German	Ipsos	1000
Italy	CAWI	Italian	Ipsos	1000
Netherlands	CAWI	Dutch	Ipsos	1000
Spain	CAWI	Spanish	Ipsos	1000
Sweden	CAWI	Swedish	Ipsos	1000
Switzerland	CAWI	German and French	Ipsos	500
UK	CAWI	English	Ipsos	1000
Americas				
Brazil	CAWI	Portuguese	Ipsos	1000
Canada	CAWI	English, French	Ipsos	1000
Colombia	CAWI	Spanish	Ipsos	1000
Ecuador	CAWI	Spanish	Ipsos	1000
Peru	CAWI	Spanish	Ipsos	1000
USA	CAWI	English	GeoPoll	1098

Recruitment: In the case of phone interviews, trained enumerators from GeoPoll approached all potential participants via telephone. Enumerators explained the study to participants and then obtained informed consent for participation. In the case of persons under 18, caregiver consent was requested in addition to assent from participants. In the case of persons over 18, individual consent was recorded.

In the case of online data collection, participants received an electronic invitation to take part in the survey via the contact details provided to IPSOS. All data collection was online and occurred in line with local laws and regulations.

Incentives: CATI participants were compensated with an incentive of USD \$0.50 airtime credit upon successful completion of the questionnaire. CAWI and CATI participants received points for their participation which they can redeem on a dedicated panellists' website for a variety of reward.

Data analysis: Data cleaning, merging and analysis was conducted using Stata 17.0. Descriptive univariate and bivariate analyses of the data were carried out. Inferential analyses were also conducted, whereby we explored the predictors of political participation and political aspirations among girls and young women, specifically focusing on how education and participation in social groups enables or hinders such outcomes. All analyses reported on are complete case analyses.

First, we conducted analyses which would detect differences in response patterns as related to contextual variables. To do this, we augmented the data set with data from:

- The World Bank: country geographic region and income group data¹⁷⁷
- The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU): data on quotas on youth participation and percentage of women in parliament.¹⁷⁸
- The CIVICUS monitor: data on country civic space rating.¹⁷⁹

Countries were categorised into one geographic region and income group using latest available World Bank data.

To enable comparison among countries, we generated data on the percentage of women in parliament, based on latest available data logged by IPU. Specifically, as our hypothesis related to the visibility of women in parliament enabling girls and young women's participation, we identified the latest dataset logged by IPU (March 2022) and noted the highest percentage reported of women in parliament (whichever chamber they may be in) per country. We then categorised this continuous variable into an ordinal variable, noting whether the percentage of women in parliament is up to 10 per cent, 20 per cent, etc., up to above 50 per cent. All categorical and ordinal variables generated this way were then used to conduct bivariate analyses, or in regression analyses. We performed chi-square or Fisher's exact tests where all variables were dichotomous and categorical, and Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney tests where the dependent variable was ordinal.

Secondly, we conducted intersectional analyses of all responses to understand how response patterns may differ between diverse age groups (under 18, over 18), areas of residence (urban vs. rural), minority groups (ethnic and racial vs. religious). We performed chi-square or Fisher's exact tests where all variables were dichotomous and categorical, and Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney tests where the dependent variable was ordinal.

Finally, we generated additional auxiliary data for key variables of interest as per Table 3, and conducted linear, logistic and ordered logistic regression analyses to explore influences on political participation (activities that girls undertake and/or that girls belong to) and political aspirations among girls and young women. Overarchingly, these analyses reinforced findings of the bivariate analyses and as such the report omits unnecessary commentary unless additional relevant insights were gained.

Overall, most of the analyses conducted yielded statistically significant findings at the 0.01 level. Throughout the text, we do not comment on issues of statistical significance (though where a finding is not statistically significant at the 0.01 level we note this) and instead focus commentary on meaningful differences in response patterns (generally differences between groups or findings above 5 per cent effect).

Table 3: Auxiliary variables used in analysis

Auxiliary variable	Definition	Analyses used in
Participation score (activities)	Ranges 0 to12, total sum of activities each respondent participated in	Outcome in linear regression (bivariate and multivariate)

¹⁷⁷ World Bank, Open Data Repository, no date, available at: [World Bank Open Data | Data](https://data.worldbank.org/)

¹⁷⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, For Democracy, For Everyone, no date, available at: [Inter-Parliamentary Union | For democracy. For everyone. \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/)

¹⁷⁹ CIVICUS, Monitor: Tracking Civic Space: How it works, no date, available at: [How it works - CIVICUS - Tracking conditions for citizen action](https://www.civicus.org/monitor/)

Participates in any activity (dichotomous)	Respondent participates in any activity listed	Outcome in logistic regression (bivariate and multivariate)
Participation score (belonging)	Range 0 to 11, total sum of groups or organisations participant can be part of	Outcome in linear regression (bivariate and multivariate)
Belongs to any group (dichotomous)	Respondent belongs to any group listed	Outcome in logistic regression (bivariate and multivariate)
Participation score (future aspirations)	Range 0 to 9, total sum of aspirations for future participation	Outcome in linear regression (bivariate and multivariate)
Aspiration for future participation (ordinal)	For each respondent, categorised according to whether they cannot see themselves participate, are not interested, can see themselves participate	Outcome in ordinal logistic regression (bivariate and multivariate)
Communities' norms score	Range 0 to 6, sum of total activities that are acceptable in the local community	Predictor variable
Communities encouraging of participation (dichotomous)	Community not encouraging participation if norms score (above) under 4	
Negative feelings score as a result of politicians' decisions	Range 0 to 3, sum of total for first three statements on feelings caused by decisions of leaders relating to sad, worried, or anxious, physically unsafe	
Confidence score	Range 0 to 45, sum of individual responses for confidence in carrying out political activities	
Knowledge score	Range 0 to 10, sum of individual responses for knowledge of political system	
Importance score	Range 0 to 7, sum of total response on why important for girls and young women to engage	
Importance of participating (dichotomous)	Whether respondent identifies any reason for why it is important to participate	

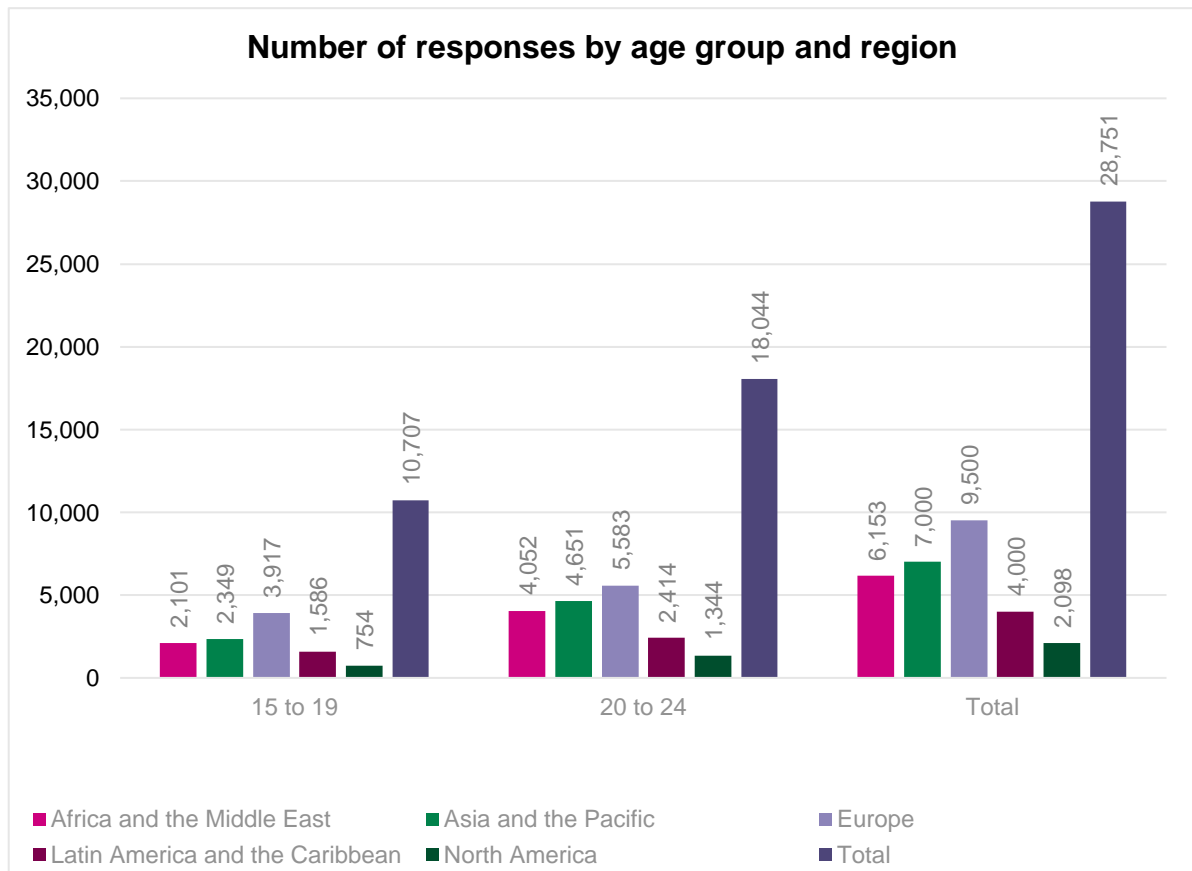
3.2 OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A total of 28,751 girls and young women took part in the survey. Of these, the majority were over the age of 20 (18,044, 63 per cent).

3.2.1 Distribution of respondents by region and country income group

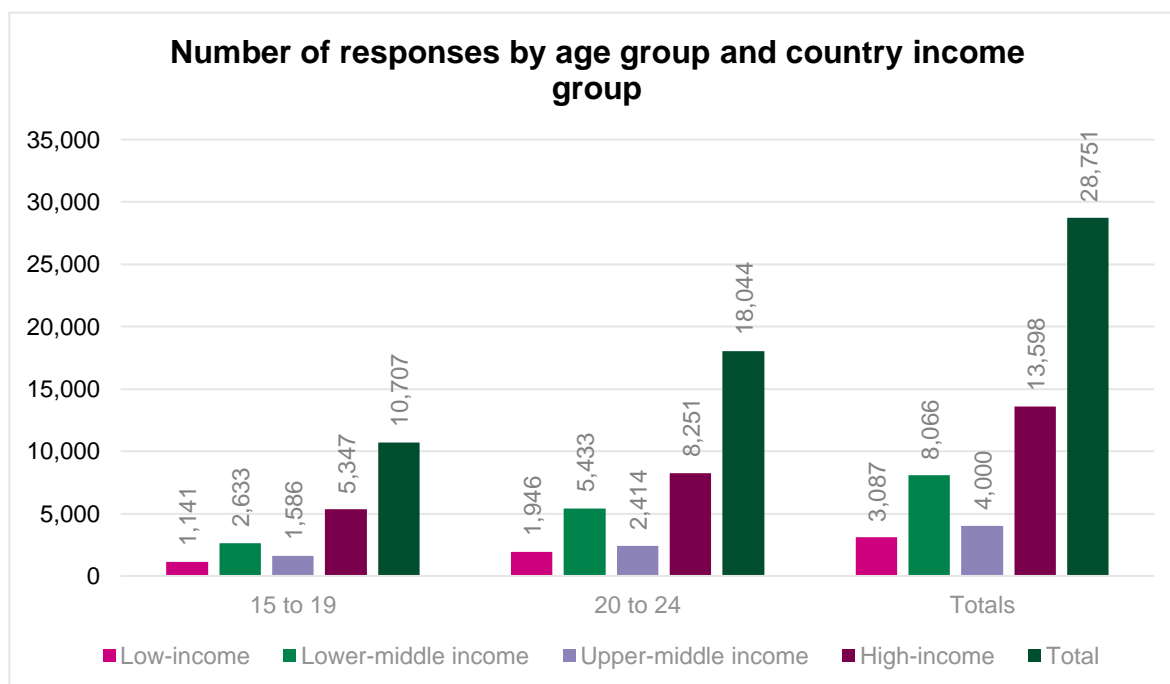
There are significant differences in the geographic spread of responses. Most respondents are from Europe (9,500, 33 per cent). The regions with the lowest number of respondents were Latin America and the Caribbean (4,000, 14 per cent) and North America (2,098, 7 per cent). This pattern is consistent when breaking down the sample by age category (15 to 19 vs. 20 to 24).

Figure 1: Number of survey responses by age group and region



Overall, most respondents live in high-income countries (13,598, 47 per cent) and lower-middle-income countries (8,066, 28 per cent). This pattern remains consistent when breaking down the sample by age category (15 to 19 vs. 20 to 24).

Figure 2: Number of survey responses by age group and country income group



Coverage of respondents by region strongly relates to coverage by country-income level. For example, in Asia and the Pacific the majority of respondents are from lower-middle-income countries and a minority from high-income countries. Respondents from Latin America and the Caribbean and upper-middle-income countries overlap entirely and all respondents in North America and Europe are in higher-income countries. Respondents from Africa and the Middle East are more-or-less evenly split among low- and lower-middle-income countries.

Figure 3: Sampled countries by country income level



Table 4: Number of respondents by region and country income group

Country income group	Number of respondents by region and country income group				
	Africa and Middle East	Asia and Pacific	Europe	Latin America and Caribbean	North America
Low-income	3,087	0	0	0	0
Lower-middle-income	3,066	5,000	0	0	0
Upper-middle-income	0	0	0	4,000	0
High-income	0	2,000	9,500	0	2,098

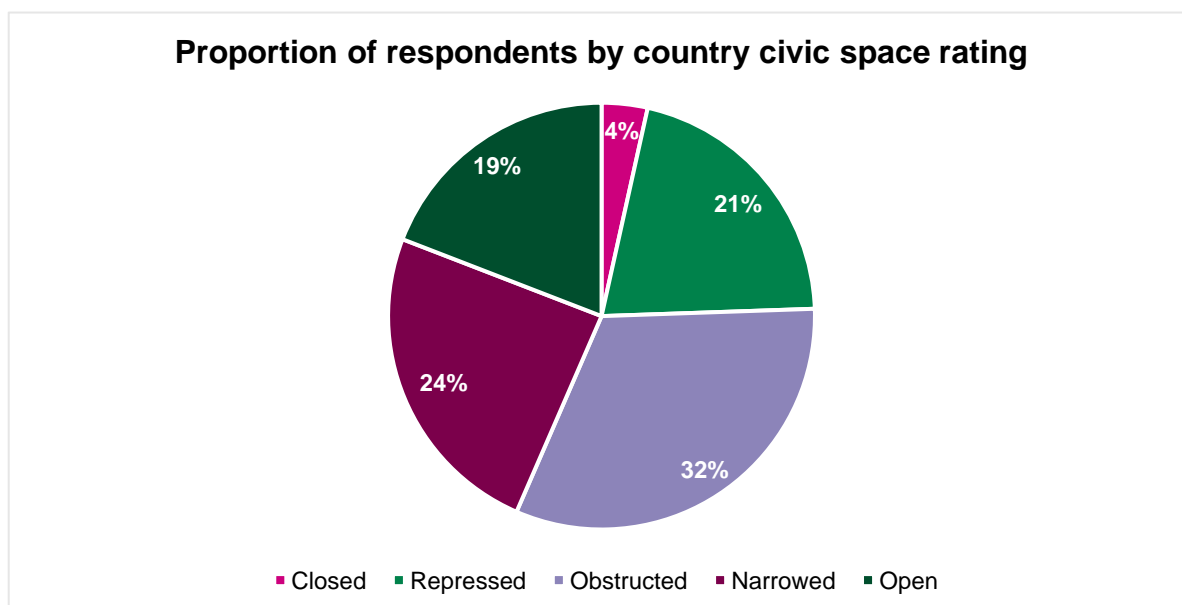
3.2.2 Distribution of respondents by civic space context

The CIVICUS Monitor uses data from a range of sources as the basis for assigning countries a rating on the state of civic space. Countries' civic space contexts are classified as: closed, repressed, obstructed, narrowed or open.

Most survey respondents live in countries rated as having an obstructed (9,221, 32 per cent), narrowed (7,000, 24 per cent) or repressed civic space (6,030, 7 per cent). 4 per cent of respondents live in countries with a closed civic space and as such findings of this group are not generalisable.

3.2.3 Distribution of respondents by women's representation in parliament

Figure 4: Proportion of respondents by country civic space rating



Across contexts, there is wide variation in how well women are represented in politics (see Table 5). For example, across the countries sampled in Africa and the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean, countries differ in terms of the percentage of women in national parliaments, while the picture is more consistent in Asia and the Pacific and Europe. This may directly impact how girls and young women feel about politicians, the acceptability of engaging and participating in politics and may further influence their actual participation.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by women's representation in parliament

Percentage of women in parliament	Number of countries by region falling into each category				
	Africa	Asia and Pacific	Europe	Latin America and Caribbean	North America
under 10 per cent	1	0	0	0	0
between 10 and 19 per cent	2	0	0	1	0
between 20 and 29 per cent	1	4		1	1
between 30 and 39 per cent	1	2	4	1	0
between 40 and 49 per cent	0	0	6	1	1
over 50 per cent	0	1	0	0	0
Total countries	5	7	10	4	2

3.2.4 Distribution of respondents by demographic variables

Most survey respondents identified as living in an urban area (14,418, 50 per cent). 6,267 respondents (22 per cent) identified as living in a rural area. The proportion of respondents who identified either of these options is relatively similar among the two age categories studied.

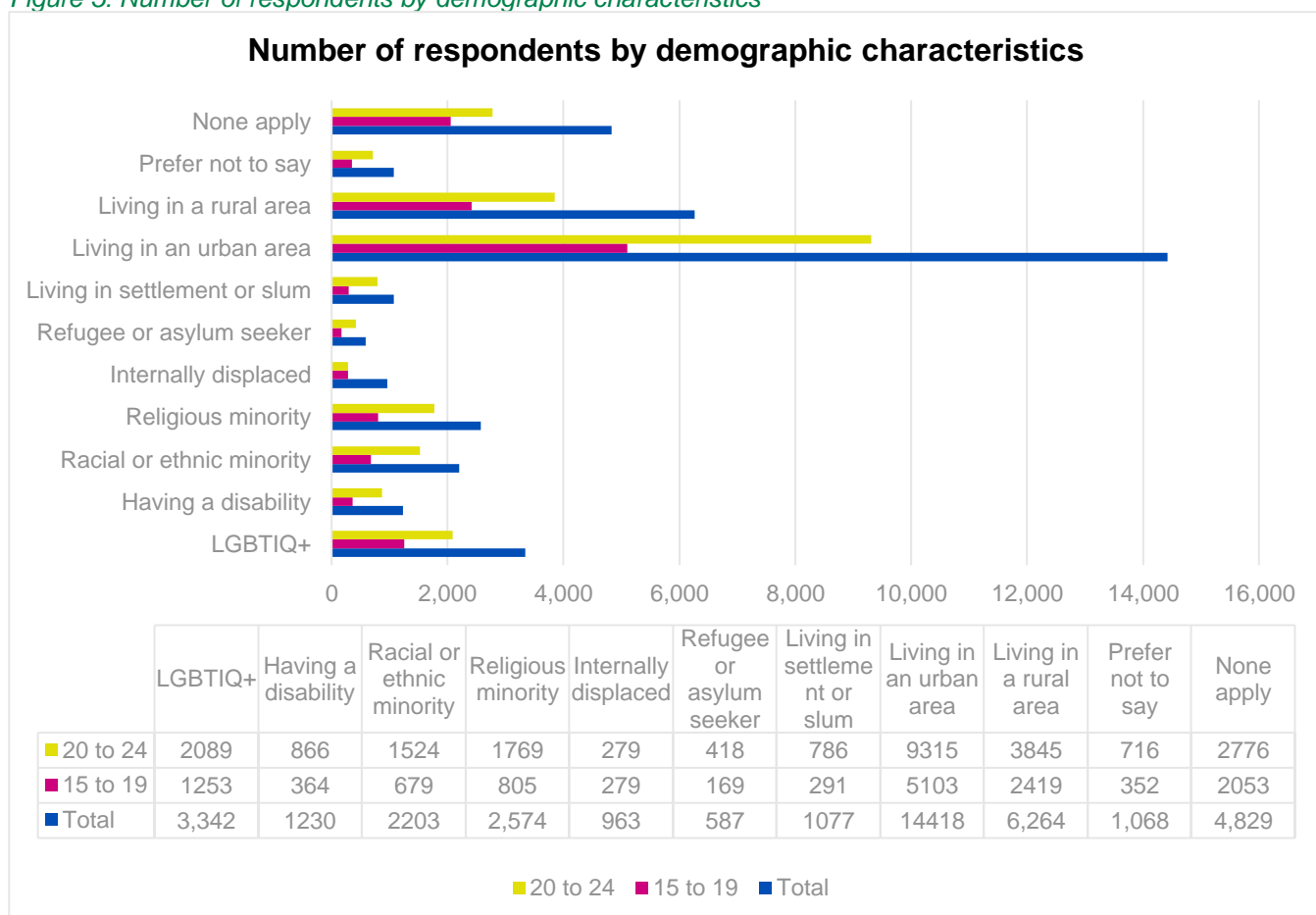
3,342 (12 per cent) of respondents identified as LGBTQI+. The proportion of girls identifying as such among the 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 age-groups is similar. The highest percentage of girls and young women identifying as such was recorded in North America (27 per cent) and high-income countries (18 per cent). Only 85 respondents in the African region, and 15 respondents in low-income countries identified as LGBTQI+.

2,574 (9 per cent) of respondents identified as being part of a religious minority. The proportion of girls identifying as such among the 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 age-groups is similar. The highest percentage of girls and young women identifying as such was recorded in the African region (18 per cent) and lower-income countries (16 per cent).

2,203 (8 per cent) of respondents identified as being part of a racial or ethnic minority. The proportion of girls identifying as such among the 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 age-groups is similar. The highest percentage of girls identifying as such was recorded in North America (22 per cent). The proportion of girls and young women identifying as such is relatively similar across country income groups (average 8 per cent), however substantively lower in upper middle-income countries (4 per cent). Few respondents identified with each of the following options: living in an informal settlement (4 per cent), having a disability (4 per cent), being internally displaced (3 per cent) or a refugee or asylum seeker (2 per cent).¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Please note 352 (4 per cent) of the respondents said they preferred not to disclose any other demographic characteristics. An additional 2,053 (17 per cent) said that none of the listed demographic characteristics applied to them.

Figure 5: Number of respondents by demographic characteristics



3.3 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Two sets of qualitative interviews were conducted in order to understand the perspectives of girls and young women with contrasting levels of experience with political participation:

- Semi-structured qualitative interviews with 78 girls aged 15 to 16 across seven countries enrolled in Plan International's **Real Choices, Real Lives** cohort study. Girls live in predominantly rural settings (with a few in semi-urban settings) and come from the lowest income households (at the time of selection to participate in the study).
- In-depth qualitative interviews with 16 **girl and young woman activists** from 13 countries, known to Plan International through their involvement in programmes or campaigns. These girls and young women come from a variety of backgrounds but were purposively sampled based on the fact that they were known to be politically active.

The two sets of interviews followed a similar structure, and several questions asked were common to both groups. However, due to the anticipated differences in understanding of the topic and experiences of political participation, interviews with the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' girls were more structured, and interviews with girl and young women activists included additional questions exploring their experiences of different types of political participation.

3.3.1 Girls enrolled in 'Real Choices, Real Lives'

Since 2007, the longitudinal and qualitative 'Real Choices, Real Lives' (RCRL) study has been tracking the lives of girls and their families in nine countries (Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam,

Benin, Togo, Uganda, Brazil, Dominican Republic and El Salvador). In 2021, 118 girls,¹⁸¹ and their families were participating in the study which has followed the girls since their births in 2006 and will continue to collect data until December 2024 when they reach the age of 18. Data collection for the study has taken place on an annual basis and is carried out by Plan International Country Office teams that are either working in the communities where the girls live or are able to travel to their areas.

For the 2022 State of the World's Girls Report, seven of the nine countries (Philippines, Vietnam, Benin, Togo, Dominican Republic, Brazil and El Salvador) chose to take part in the additional data collection for this report.¹⁸²

Interview questions: The interview questions were structured into four sections that asked about: 1) Political Issues affecting their community; 2) political representatives and decision-making; 3) girls and women's political leadership; and 4) girls' political participation. The interview questions were conducted in a semi-structured format meaning not every question was asked to all girls to allow space for an open-ended discussion with the interviewee and the ability to be explorative in the exchange.

Data collection: Data was collected between 8th March and 1st April 2022. All interviews, except for the interviews in El Salvador, were conducted face-to-face by Plan staff or researchers employed by the Plan International Country Offices. Interviews in El Salvador were conducted by telephone in order to keep both the girls and their families and the interviewers safe due to presence of gangs in the area where the girls live. Interviews were conducted in French (Benin and Togo), Spanish (Dominican Republic and El Salvador), Portuguese (Brazil), Filipino (the Philippines) and Vietnamese (Vietnam). The country focal points manage the transcription of the interviews, while the translation process varies between countries, Plan Global coordinates translation of data in Spanish and French and country focal points coordinate translation of all other languages.

Sampling: Across the seven countries, Plan Country Offices used purposeful sampling where girls were sampled firstly based on their year of birth (2006) and secondly, the household context was considered with girls selected from among the lowest income households in each country context. A total of 78 girls across the seven countries participated in this report: six in Benin, eight in Brazil, five in the Dominican Republic, 12 in El Salvador, 14 in the Philippines, 14 in Togo and 19 in Vietnam.

Data Analysis: Coding of transcripts and subsequent analysis of the data is carried out by the Plan International Global Hub team working on the study. Qualitative data analysis was undertaken through thematic analysis using NVivo software to conduct the coding. The initial interview template was initially reviewed to make a qualitative codebook which considered possible themes related to the overall sections of the questionnaire.

The transcripts were initially read to get key understandings from the interviews. Using the NVivo software, deductive coding was applied, and transcripts were divided into key themes and interconnected sub-themes in each of the relevant categories. The initial codebook was developed using a hierarchal coding frame to help organise and structure the data and enable key findings, themes and arguments to be identified within and across each node. This codebook was used as a guide for the researchers, then inductive coding was also applied where the codebook was developed and changed as new themes emerged, and codes were either added, deleted, or changed. Coders met on a weekly basis to help guide their coding and prevent any major differences in the consistency of the coding. When initial coding was completed, contents of each node were

¹⁸¹ We recognise gender is a multidimensional concept which influences people's identities and expressions in many ways and that gender identity goes beyond a binary field of male and female (though for the purposes of this study "girls" is used as an umbrella term). In this sense, most participants in the study were assigned female at birth, basing this on their sex characteristics.

¹⁸² Uganda and Cambodia could not participate due to competing priorities in those country offices.

reviewed to ensure consistency, accuracy and minimise the risk of misinterpretation, meaning that, consequently, some content were either removed or re-coded. Overarching memos were written for each theme category to connect and interrelate the data and allow for interpretation and create explanatory accounts.

3.3.2 Activists

Interview questions: The interview questions were structured into four sections that asked about: 1) Political Issues; 2) Politics and political leadership, including girls and women's political leadership; 3) Girls' and young women's political participation.; and 4) Skills and knowledge. The interview questions were conducted in a semi-structured format meaning not every question was asked to all girls to allow space for an open-ended discussion with the interviewee and the ability to be explorative in the exchange.

Data collection: Data was collected between 3rd and 21st March 2022. The interviews were conducted online (via Teams or Zoom) and varied in time but usually lasted around an hour. Interviews were scheduled to fit around the commitments and respective time zones of participants and were conducted in either English, French or Spanish depending on the preferences of the participants. All interviews were led by members of the Plan Global Hub MERL team, with a second Plan colleague present for safeguarding and notetaking purposes. All interviews were recorded.

Sampling: Participants involved a varied global group of young female activists. Interviews were conducted with 16 girls and young women aged between 16 to 24 across 13 countries (Togo, Malawi, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Jordan, Lebanon, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Vietnam, Ecuador and Peru). The girls and young women were purposively selected from a call-out shared with Plan International Country and National Offices through various youth networks in the country. The call-out requested that girls and young women aged between 15 to 24 who identified as activists, advocates or human rights defenders submit a statement of interest. Girls and young women with disabilities, trans girls and young women, indigenous girls and young women and those living in crisis contexts were encouraged to apply. The final sample aimed to include girls from a variety of backgrounds, with a range of experiences of political participation. Whilst it is not possible to differentiate the girls' intersectional characteristics, it is possible to deduce from the content of the interviews that they displayed differences in age, culture and context, ethnicity, race, and religious and social views.

Data analysis: Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed using online transcription services (Rev.com for English recordings, Sonix for non-English) before then being deleted. Transcripts in French and Spanish were then translated into English for the purposes of analysis. The approach to analysis mirrored that used for the 'Real Choices Real Lives' interviews. A common codebook was used for both sets of qualitative interviews. While there were some differences in the questions asked, this approach enabled comparison across the two datasets.

Please note that the names of the girls and young women in this report have been changed to ensure anonymity. For the girl and young women activist respondents, they chose the names they would like to use in this report.

3.4 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

The combination of methods used in this study means that the survey findings are based on a large sample with a spread of responses across a wide range of countries and contexts. Survey data has been triangulated against diverse qualitative data obtained from two unique sources and supplemented by a broad literature review.

However, it is important to recognise that the methods used have several limitations. First, the survey data is not nationally or globally representative. It is important to note that, although efforts were

made to ensure the sample for the survey was representative of underlying populations as far as possible, the two survey companies are likely to have sampled wealthier and higher educated segments of society (who have access to the internet and phone). As such, we do not make claims of generalisability of findings.

The number of participants is not evenly spread across geographic regions, and this means the sample overall is not balanced. High levels of regional variation may directly affect statistical significance when testing for context-related differences. Also, the sample did not include boys.

The report includes comprehensive analyses by geographic region and contextual features, including country income group, country civic space rating and other characteristics (e.g., national representation – percentage of women in parliament). However, these analyses must be carefully interpreted, as each region exhibits very specific contextual features, given diverse historical and development legacies. For example, countries sampled across Africa and the Middle East fall entirely into the low- and lower-middle-income group. These countries have varied levels of representation of women in parliament, but representation is on average lower than in other regions. Similarly, a minority of the survey sample overall is associated with countries which have very little representation of women in parliament or are classified as a closed civic space country.

Different survey data collection methods were used in different countries which may compromise comparability. However, data quality checks were carried out throughout data collection to pre-empt any such issues and monitor performance of the survey via different collection methods. Preliminary analyses of the data also sought to establish significant differences by data collection method: no such differences were identified.

For all online data collection, we cannot be fully certain of the identity of CAWI participants. However, the two contracted survey companies routinely carry out diverse forms of research in the countries surveyed, drawing from large and representative sampling frames, including verification and triangulation of participant personal information and responses with other data sources. This helps establish credibility of the sampling frame and ultimately of the sample used for this survey. Further, the eligibility questions and informed consent of parents and targeted adolescents required by the survey also lower the risk that persons other than those targeted would fill out the survey in error.

Most of the data for the survey and interviews was collected remotely, and only girls and young women who had sufficient access to devices that have internet or phone connection could participate as respondents. This means that girls who do not have sustainable access to the internet or phone connections, often the girls who are the most vulnerable, were not able to share their experiences. For the activist interviews, girls and young women needed access to a mobile phone or other internet enabled device.

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

Even though we know that early adolescence (aged 10 to 14 years) is a critical period in a girl's life, we conducted data collection with girls and young women between the age of 15 to 24 due to ethical and practical considerations.

For the qualitative interviews conducted directly in the chosen language and translated after the point of transcription into English, the original meaning of some concepts that the girls and young women mentioned during the interview might have been lost in translation.

As a multi-country study, it is important to acknowledge that consistency across the RCRL cohort can be limited. This can be due to adaptations made by the in-country research teams to the research tools to ensure that they are relevant as possible to the context.

3.5 ETHICS AND SAFEGUARDING

Research ethics approval was granted from the UK-based Overseas Development Institute's Research Ethics Committee. A full safeguarding risk assessment was conducted to identify potential risks and mitigation measures for all data collection methods.

Survey:

Survey companies signed a code of conduct confirming that they would adhere to Plan International's global Safeguarding Policy. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and from parents/guardians of 15 to 17-year-old participants. The survey form and interview scripts emphasised that participation was voluntary, and that consent could be withdrawn. Participants were provided with contact information in case of questions or concerns about the research. Robust data privacy and security was assured throughout all data handling.

Qualitative interviews:

Informed consent was obtained from all participants and from parents/guardians of girls under the age of 18. Participants, and parents/guardians where relevant, were informed about what participation would involve, that participation was voluntary, and consent could be withdrawn and how the research would be used. Verbal consent was also given to record the interviews. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection, analysis and write up process and robust data security was ensured.

In line with Plan International's ethics and safeguarding procedures, all interviews were conducted by two members of Plan International staff. All staff conducting interviews had completed safeguarding courses and were briefed on safeguarding and referral processes. Researchers involved in the RCRL study are supported with capacity building training each year which covers ethics and safeguarding processes, including related to marginalisation, intersecting inequalities and the power relationships involved in conducting research with girls of the relevant age.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 POLITICS AND POLITICAL ISSUES

4.1.1 Associations with ‘politics’

Insights from qualitative interviews

In order to understand how girls and young women conceptualise politics, participants in both sets of qualitative interviews were asked an open question about what they associate with the term ‘politics’. Overwhelmingly, regardless of context or experience of political participation, girls and young women associated ‘politics’ with the formal political sphere, and many voiced negative associations with the term.

Amongst the RCRL girls who felt able to answer this question,¹⁸³ politics was generally linked to governance and political leaders, including a country’s President, government ministers, and local mayors, and was often discussed in neutral terms. In El Salvador, Benin, the Philippines and Togo, girls discussed politics in relation to elections and voting as well as political candidates that had visited their homes and communities during election periods. In Vietnam, Benin and Togo, girls explained that, for them, politics was the governance or management of societies and communities – with some referring to national-level examples such as government legislation and policy, and others discussing village-level governance. For Tan (16, Vietnam) politics is also related to policing and security on the village-level, while Sen (16, Vietnam) associated politics with the news and being informed about national global affairs. Just one girl – Fezire (16) in Togo – mentioned democracy in her interpretation of politics and linked political parties with “peace”.

“In my humble opinion, politics is democracy; parties are the culture of peace.” (Fezire, 16, Togo)

Responses from the activists were strikingly similar to the cohort girls. Despite their greater experience of a range of types of political participation, they still spoke about ‘politics’ in a narrowly defined way, with reference only to the formal political sphere. Across a diverse range of contexts, the girls and young women referred to politics as being about the affairs of state and government and the act of governing.¹⁸⁴ Zoe from Malawi spoke about how she associated politics with decisions about how resources are shared, while Aurora from Ecuador noted how politicians’ decisions affect everyone’s lives.

Amongst the girls and young women who expressed value judgements about politics, the majority, across both groups, expressed negative associations with the term. Over half of the RCRL cohort girls in the Philippines associated politics with corruption. Reyna (15) and Melanie (15) gave specific examples of practices employed: Reyna spoke about the problem of vote-buying during the election period, while Melanie described how community members can be evicted from their homes if they do not vote how the landowner wants them to. It should be noted that it was an election year in the Philippines, so political issues were at the forefront of community discussions. Rosamie (16) discussed how her area in the Philippines has experienced political-related violence; the province is

¹⁸³ A small number of girls from the RCRL Cohort said that they did not know what politics was or were unable to express their associations with it.

¹⁸⁴ Sofia from Spain, Unique from South Sudan, Minerva from Togo, Min from Vietnam, Naturel from Togo, Zoe from Malawi.

known for armed groups and elections are often marred by violence.¹⁸⁵ Girls in El Salvador and Brazil also linked politics to corruption and discussed cases of vote-buying by political candidates.

“When I hear that word, the first thing that comes to my mind is theft. Because all the people who are elected to represent us end up stealing public money.” (Bianca, 16, Brazil)

Similarly, several of the activists made associations with corruption,¹⁸⁶ and felt that politicians were ‘in it for themselves’ not to do good.¹⁸⁷ Jen from Lebanon mentioned that politics in her country has a divisive impact on society and splits people from each other, while Juliette in Belgium noted increasing polarisation within the political sphere.

Activists from Belgium, Malawi and Germany associated politics with power, power struggles or the act of exerting or expanding power. Anna from Germany observed that politics was a reflection of power structures in society, such as structures of sexism and racism, noting that the most powerful in society also dominate politics, while Sara from Jordan noted that politics is a male domain and that:

“Politics is a privilege not afforded to underprivileged communities.” (Sara, 24, Jordan)

There were, however, some isolated examples of girls and young women making positive associations with politics. Natalia (15), one of the RCRL cohort girls from Brazil, linked politics to “rights”. Similarly, Aurora, an activist from Ecuador, spoke about associations between politics and “justice, fairness and rights”.

Responses to this question provide an important framing for subsequent findings as they reveal that girls and young women generally adopt a relatively narrow definition of ‘politics’. This echoes findings from the literature and suggests that the tendency for girls to associate ‘politics’ with the formal political sphere, observed in the US and other Western democracies, can be observed across other regions and political contexts. This, in turn, may mean that girls and young women may underestimate the true scope of their political participation (broadly defined) or lead them to answer by reference to a particular kind of political leader (i.e., only those occupying formal political office).

4.1.2 Priority political issues

Understanding which political issues are of greatest interest and concern for girls and young women provides an important framing for understanding their political participation. Evidence from the literature suggests that the political issues and causes that concern young people are diversifying, as they establish political orientations based on ethical principles rather than along the lines of parties or classic political ideologies.¹⁸⁸

In order to understand which political issues girls and young women were most concerned about, participants in the survey, as well as the RCRL cohort respondents and the girl and women activist respondents, were asked about which issues they consider to be priorities for political action.

Across all groups of girls and young women, a diverse range of priority issues were identified. Common across all methods and contexts was the prioritisation of poverty and unemployment issues. However, clear differences emerged between regions and demographic groups.

¹⁸⁵ Interview notes.

¹⁸⁶ Jen from Lebanon, Juliette from Belgium, Aurora from Ecuador.

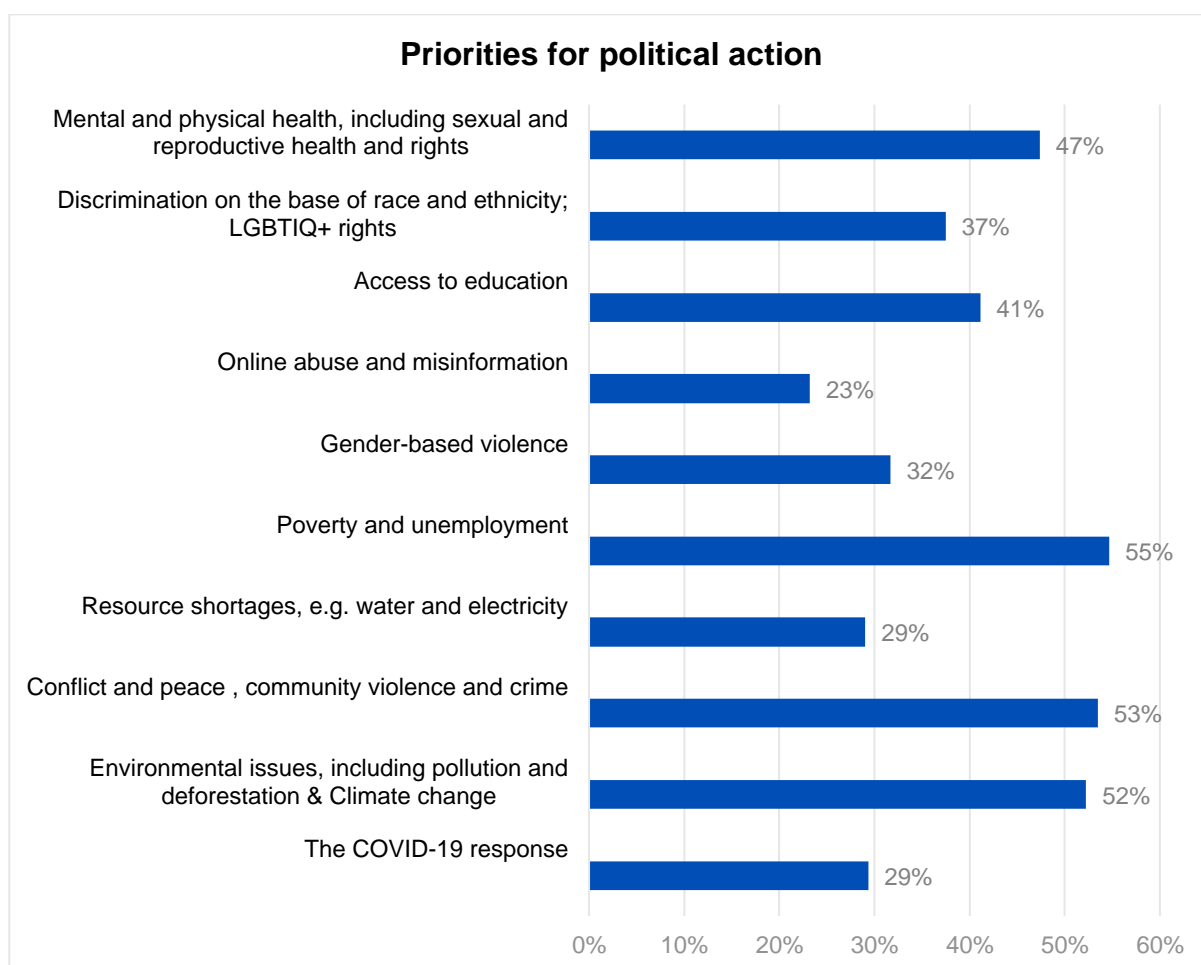
¹⁸⁷ Juliette from Belgium, Aurora from Ecuador.

¹⁸⁸ R. Soler-i-Martí, ‘Youth political involvement update: measuring the role of cause-oriented political interest in young people’s activism’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18:3, 2014, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.963538>

Findings from the survey

Survey respondents were asked to identify five priorities for political action among 15 options.¹⁸⁹ Only 3 per cent (990) of girls did not identify any of the listed issues as priorities for political action. Of those who did select issues from the list, **the top priorities for political action were: poverty and unemployment; conflict and peace, community violence and crime; environmental issues, including pollution and climate change; mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; and access to education.** The issues which received least votes were online abuse and misinformation.

Figure 6: Girls' and young women's priorities for political action¹⁹⁰



The priorities identified for political action were similar among the two age groups that the survey was administered to (15 to 19 vs. 20 to 24). Overall, the response pattern is also similar among participants identifying as LGBTQI+, as having a disability or as belonging to a minority (racial, ethnic, or religious). Priorities for political action differed significantly by context.

Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

Overall, priorities for political action differ by context, and this difference is statistically significant. For example, COVID-19 is not one of the top five priorities in Africa or Europe but emerges as a priority in Asia and the Pacific. Similarly, resource shortages are one of the top five priorities identified by



¹⁸⁹ The 15 options were grouped for the purposes of analysis.

¹⁹⁰ Based on 27,761 responses.

respondents in the African region but are not identified as such in other settings. Priorities relating to discrimination (including LGBTQI+ rights) are most frequently chosen by respondents living in Europe and North America.

Figure 7: Priorities for political action by region ¹⁹¹

	Africa	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America	North America	Global average
The COVID-19 response	37%	42%	19%	19%	30%	29%
Environmental issues, including pollution and deforestation and Climate Change	52%	48%	56%	48%	54%	52%
Conflict and peace, community violence and crime	54%	50%	59%	52%	43%	53%
Resource shortages, e.g., water and electricity	50%	22%	22%	31%	20%	29%
Poverty and unemployment	63%	51%	48%	70%	43%	55%
Gender-based violence	46%	19%	31%	37%	22%	32%
Online abuse and misinformation	23%	26%	28%	11%	19%	23%
Access to education	55%	38%	31%	55%	26%	41%
Discrimination on the base of race and ethnicity; LGBTQI+ rights	25%	34%	45%	36%	55%	37%
Mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights	48%	45%	46%	46%	60%	47%

 Highest ranked
  Lowest ranked

¹⁹¹ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=9,158; Asia and the Pacific: n=6,700; Africa and the Middle East: n=6,102; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3,861; North America: n=1,940

Differences by country income group

Response patterns by country income group are also statistically significantly different. Respondents from low-income countries clearly identify resource shortages among their top five priorities, whereas these issues are no longer identified as a priority as country income level rises.



Environmental issues, poverty and unemployment, and mental and physical health (including sexual and reproductive health and rights) are consistently among the top five priorities listed across countries. While some variation is evident across country income group levels (e.g., environmental issues are most prioritised in low- and high-income countries and poverty and unemployment ranks highest among upper-middle and low-income countries), young women and girls frequently choose these issues as priorities suggesting they are global issues of importance.

Further issues, such as conflict and peace, community violence and crime as well as access to education appear among the top five issues of relevance among most but not all settings.

Issues such as gender-based violence and online abuse and misinformation were not frequently chosen as priorities. Gender-based violence was more consistently identified as a priority for political action in low-income countries (and indeed in Africa and the Middle East).

Table 6: Priorities for political action by country income group¹⁹²

	Low-income	Lower-middle	Upper-middle	High-income	Global average
The COVID-19 response	37%	40%	19%	24%	29%
Environmental issues, including pollution and deforestation & Climate change	60%	45%	48%	56%	52%
Conflict and peace, community violence and crime	48%	54%	52%	55%	53%
Resource shortages, e.g. water and electricity	52%	31%	31%	22%	29%
Poverty and unemployment	59%	58%	70%	47%	55%
Gender-based violence	47%	29%	37%	28%	32%
Online abuse and misinformation	17%	28%	11%	25%	23%
Access to education	53%	48%	55%	30%	41%
Discrimination on the base of race and ethnicity; LGBTQI+ rights	22%	30%	36%	46%	37%
Mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights	52%	43%	46%	49%	47%

 Highest ranked
 Lowest ranked

¹⁹² Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=3,045; Lower-middle-income: n=7,928; Upper-middle-income: n=3,861; High-income: n=12,927

Differences by country civic space rating

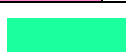
There are statistically significant differences in how girls and young women residing in countries with diverse civic space ratings responded to this question. For example, the COVID-19 response emerges as a top priority only in countries with a closed civic space. Environmental issues, poverty and unemployment and mental and physical health (including sexual and reproductive health and rights) are again consistently chosen as priorities for political action. However, conflict and peace emerges as a top priority for young girls and women in countries with an open civic space rating.

Table 7: Priorities for political action by civic space rating ¹⁹³

	Closed	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global average
The COVID-19 response	62%	31%	33%	26%	21%	29%
Environmental issues, including pollution and deforestation & climate change	58%	51%	46%	57%	57%	52%
Conflict and peace, community violence and crime	52%	52%	52%	53%	59%	53%
Resource shortages, e.g. water and electricity	15%	40%	33%	23%	21%	29%
Poverty and unemployment	47%	65%	58%	49%	46%	55%
Gender-based violence	23%	32%	37%	34%	22%	32%
Online abuse and misinformation	19%	21%	22%	26%	25%	23%
Access to education	32%	54%	48%	28%	34%	41%
Discrimination on the base of race and ethnicity; LGBTQI+ rights	35%	24%	36%	45%	45%	37%
Mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights	54%	44%	48%	48%	49%	47%



Highest ranked



Lowest ranked

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

There are significant differences in the priorities for political action identified by LGBTQI+ respondents compared to the general population of respondents. As might be expected, discrimination based on

¹⁹³ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Open: n=5,278; narrowed: n=6,673; obstructed: n=8,929; repressed: n=5,905; closed: n=976

race and ethnicity and LGBTQI+ rights were the top priorities among this group, followed closely by mental and physical health, including sexual health and reproductive rights. Similarly, for those respondents who identify as having a disability, health issues were chosen as the top priority.

Among girls and young women identifying as a racial or ethnic minority, environmental issues, poverty and unemployment and mental and physical health are all identified as top priorities. Discrimination based on race and ethnicity, as well as LGBTQI+ rights and conflict and peace are the fourth and fifth ranked priorities among this group.

For girls and young women identifying as part of a religious minority, conflict and peace, community violence and crime is the top priority, followed by poverty and unemployment and environmental issues.

Table 8: Priorities for political action by demographic characteristics¹⁹⁴

	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
The COVID-19 response	30%	22%	29%	28%	29%	28%	29%	32%
Environmental issues, including pollution and deforestation & Climate change	53%	56%	53%	51%	53%	52%	53%	51%
Conflict and peace, community violence and crime	55%	42%	54%	47%	54%	49%	53%	56%
Resource shortages, e.g., water and electricity	32%	20%	30%	26%	30%	29%	30%	34%
Poverty and unemployment	57%	45%	56%	45%	56%	52%	56%	52%
Gender-based violence	32%	39%	33%	29%	33%	31%	33%	34%
Online abuse and misinformation	24%	19%	23%	25%	23%	23%	22%	28%
Access to education	45%	31%	43%	35%	43%	40%	43%	43%
Discrimination on the base of race and ethnicity; LGBTQI+ rights	32%	68%	37%	43%	36%	51%	38%	38%
Mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights	46%	58 %	47%	60%	47%	52%	48%	46%

¹⁹⁴ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Identifies as LGBTQI+: n=3,308; Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n= 19,297; identifies as having a disability: n=1,216; Does not identify as having a disability: n=21,389; Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=2,188; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=20,417; Identifies as a religious minority: n=2,551; Does not identify as a religious minority: n=20,054.



Differences by urban or rural areas

There are only two priorities where significant differences can be observed between urban and rural populations. Resource shortages are voted more frequently as a priority among respondents in rural areas (38 per cent compared to 29 per cent in urban areas), and gender-based violence, similarly, is more highly rated among respondents in these areas (37 per cent in rural areas compared to 31 per cent in urban areas).

Insights from qualitative interviews

Responses from the qualitative interviews were, in many ways, similar to the findings from the survey. Girls and young women from both groups mentioned a wide range of political issues that concerned them. In line with the survey, economic issues, including concerns related to poverty and unemployment were commonly mentioned by both groups, and amongst RCRL girls, environmental issues, including the impacts of climate change, were identified as a top priority, also echoing the survey findings.

Amongst the activists, however, issues related to gender equality and girls' and women's rights came through much more strongly as priorities than in the survey or from the RCRL girls. Almost half of the activists highlighted issues related to gender inequality in some form as being priorities¹⁹⁵ and several cited girls' and women's rights as being the most important political issues in their contexts.¹⁹⁶ This was to be expected, as the activists selected had all worked with Plan International in some way, meaning the sample was biased towards girls and young women whose activism is aligned to the organisation's strategic areas of focus. Nevertheless, issues related to gender equality were raised by some of the RCRL girls in the context of talking about other issues. The interview responses provide girls' and young women's explanations of why political issues are a concern for them, how they manifest in their contexts and, in the case of the activists, provide useful insights into what drives them to be politically active.

The most widely mentioned set of issues amongst the RCRL girls related to the environment. A range of environmental issues were raised by girls across all the countries,¹⁹⁷ with concerns about pollution most commonly mentioned. Girls were worried about litter and plastic waste, alongside bad waste management, which made their communities dirty and damaged the surrounding natural environment.¹⁹⁸ Some girls mentioned specific types of pollution such as water pollution, smoke emissions from motorbikes and animal waste. Girls in Benin, Brazil, the Philippines and Togo were concerned with the health consequences of pollution, particularly the spreading of disease within communities. Girls across Benin, Togo, the Philippines, Dominican Republic and El Salvador were also concerned at the rate of deforestation and encouraged the planting of more trees.

A number of girls specifically mentioned climate change when speaking about the environment. Girls in Benin and Togo noted a lack of rain which resulted in poor or delayed harvests. Water scarcity was also mentioned by a number of girls in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador as a key issue in their communities. Girls in the Philippines, on the other hand, most often noted that too much rain,

¹⁹⁵ Naturel from Togo, Sara from Jordan, Zoe from Malawi, Aurora from Ecuador, Anna from Germany, Minerva from Togo.

¹⁹⁶ Jen from Lebanon, Min from Vietnam.

¹⁹⁷ Mentioned by Alice, Thea, Catherine and Annabelle (Benin); Amanda, Natalia and Sofia (Brazil); Christine, Darna, Dolores Jasmine, Maricel, Joceyln, Michelle, Reyna, Rosamie and Rubylyn (Philippines) Fezire, Folami, Ladi, Larba, Lelem, Tene and Nina Rike (Togo); Ly, Sen, Tien (Vietnam); Dariana, Nicol Saidy and Rebeca (Dominican Republic); and Karen, Mariel, Raquel Rebeca, Stephany, Susana (El Salvador).

¹⁹⁸ Annabelle, Catherine, Thea (Benin); Natalia and Sofia (Brazil); Darna, Dolores, Jasmine, Joceyln, Reyna and Rubylyn (Philippines); Fezire, Ladi Larba, Tene (Togo), Sen, Tien (Vietnam), Dariana, Nicol Saidy, Karen, Mariel, Raquel, Valeria (Dominican Republic)

flooding and increased temperatures were leading to a depletion in fish populations. Alice (16) and Thea (16) in Benin were worried about food security issues in relation to climate change, which were causing food costs to rise:

“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)

Maricel, Michelle and Rosamie in the Philippines also referred to food insecurity, specifically a lack of rice.

Economic concerns were the second most commonly raised set of issues amongst the RCRL girls. Economic issues were often raised in relation to rises in household expenses such as fuel, food and other goods. Rosamie (16, Philippines) and Kyla (15, Philippines) and Sharina (16, Dominican Republic) noted the Russian-Ukraine war further adding to the rise in fuel costs. Financial hardships were also raised as having an effect on girls’ schooling in the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Togo and Benin. Economic issues seemed to influence people’s mental health as Juliana (16, Brazil) explains:

“It seems that every year prices go up more, and people get more stressed, with bills, debts...” Juliana (16, Brazil)

Several of the RCRL girls in Benin highlighted the gendered nature of their economic concerns. Annabelle (16) and Catherine (16) mentioned that wives were not allowed to earn their own money, while Thea (16) and Annabelle cited other cases where women were allowed to work but were then required to meet all the household expenses without contribution from the husbands for shared family expenses.

In the Dominican Republic, Togo and El Salvador, the lack of employment for young people was raised as a key issue by a number of the RCRL cohort girls. This was seen as being further impacted by COVID-19. Mahalia (15, Philippines) and Fezire (16, Togo) shared that job losses had added to increased migration.

Several of the activists also highlighted economic issues as priorities in their contexts, discussing their concerns about economic crises¹⁹⁹ and the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, including on food prices and poverty levels.²⁰⁰ Minerva from Togo described how increases in food prices in her community have driven increases in sexual exploitation against girls and young women selling and exchanging sex. Sofia from Spain was concerned about availability of jobs at a time when she is entering the workforce for the first time.

Education, particularly girls’ education, was the most commonly mentioned priority amongst the activists and was highlighted by almost half of the girls and young women in this group. Education also emerged as a key priority in the survey in low- and middle-income countries, where the majority of the activists are from. Activists from Togo, Uganda and Peru discussed their concerns about how school closures during COVID-19 and increased rates of early pregnancy may be widening the gender gap in education,²⁰¹ concerns echoed by Sharina (16), a RCRL girl in the Dominican Republic and four RCRL cohort girls in Togo.

Other activists explained that they see gendered education inequalities impacting other aspects of girls’ and women’s lives, contributing to early marriage and pregnancy, gender gaps in income and economic independence and influencing girls’ and women’s political participation.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Jen from Lebanon, Zoe from Malawi.

²⁰⁰ Minerva from Togo, Rainbow from Uganda.

²⁰¹ Minerva from Togo, Naturel from Togo, Rainbow from Uganda, Valentina from Peru.

²⁰² Juliette from Belgium, Rainbow from Uganda, Janell from Vietnam.

“Let's think of how are girls able to go back to school? And when we talk of girls, let's not forget that during COVID-19, we had girls that got pregnant in that process. How are we going to make sure that even those girls are able to still go back to school and pursue their dreams and their careers?” (Rainbow, 22, Uganda)

Issues related to violence against girls and women were mentioned across both sets of interviews. Amongst the RCRL girls, the lack of safety for girls in their community was highlighted in particular in the Latin America and the Caribbean cohorts and by some of the girls in Vietnam and Benin. In the survey, gender-based violence emerged as a higher priority from Africa and Latin America than in the other regions. Girls from Latin American and the Caribbean countries spoke about the lack of police presence, which contributed to the issue of violence. Stephany (16, El Salvador) explained the onus was currently on girls to protect themselves as once girls reach adolescence they are considered “a woman” and thus have to be more careful of gender-based violence.

“The lack of safety that we, girls and women, have to face. When we go out on the street at night, we are afraid because we're not sure of anything. There are a lot of bad people out there and we feel threatened... afraid of something happening... of a possible rape happening”
(Bianca, 16, Brazil)

Concerns about violence against girls and women, including sexual violence and domestic abuse were also mentioned as priorities by activists from Belgium, Ecuador, Lebanon and Togo. Juliette from Belgium, for example, emphasised that sexual and gender-based violence should be a priority issue across all countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned as a political issue by RCRL girls and activists, although the nature of their concerns differed, with some girls focusing on the impacts of the pandemic itself, while others were more concerned about the response to COVID-19. In Vietnam, the Philippines, Benin and Togo, the COVID-19 pandemic was the key issue raised by the RCRL girls, in many cases because of its impact on the economy. Girls in the Philippines, for example, noted that many people had lost their jobs due to the pandemic. In Vietnam and Togo, COVID-19 was mainly referred to for its impact on family and community health and girls' access to education. Thea (16, Benin) also noted her whole community was very unhappy with government mandated vaccinations and explained that many in the community did not want to get vaccinated but then risked losing their jobs.

As noted above, concerns about how COVID-19 has exacerbated inequalities were also mentioned by activists as they discussed education and economic issues, while Sofia from Spain noted that the response to COVID-19 and protecting public health remained a key political issue in her country.²⁰³

A set of issues raised by several of the activists, although not by the RCRL girls, related to concerns about gender inequality in the political sphere,²⁰⁴ suggesting that for many girls and young women, their activism had made them more cognisant of and concerned about the need for more equal representation and inclusive political systems. They highlighted the lack of access and meaningful participation of girls and young women in political decision-making processes²⁰⁵ and the unequal representation of women in political leadership²⁰⁶ (issues discussed at more length in section 5.2.2) In addition to highlighting issues of unequal representation, some young women also mentioned wider concerns about the functioning of political systems and space for civil society in their countries. Marchessa from Tanzania, for example, described the corruption and lack of transparency she observed within the political system as being important political issues, while Jen from Lebanon

²⁰³ Sofia from Spain.

²⁰⁴ Zoe from Malawi, Anna from Germany.

²⁰⁵ Janell from Vietnam.

²⁰⁶ Anna from Germany, Sara from Jordan, Unique from South Sudan.

expressed her concerns about the lack of civil and political rights and freedoms in her country, particularly constraints on freedom of expression.

Activists living in countries affected by current or recent conflict also stressed that sustainable peace was of primary importance as a political issue and described the shadow cast by conflict over society and politics²⁰⁷ while young women activists in Malawi and Jordan highlighted the issue of religion and religious divisions as being important political issues in their countries.²⁰⁸ Concerns about the conflict in Ukraine were mentioned by activists in both Belgium and Germany, with Anna from Germany noting that:

“The war in Ukraine...has become one of the main political issues...I’m sincerely worried about how we tackle this war. How war in itself is such a patriarchal way of dealing with conflict. How we snap back from one day to another into these old stereotypes of men are going to fight and women are going to flee, and that is the only way on how we are going to resolve this conflict.” (Anna, 23, Germany)

4.2 POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION

4.2.1 Views on political leaders and impacts of political decisions

Understanding the extent to which girls and young women feel that their political leaders act in their interests and on the issues they care about, and are responsive to their concerns, reveals how well represented girls and young women feel, but also provides insights into their views of the formal political sphere more generally and whether they feel it ‘works for them’.

Across each of the three research methods, girls and young women were asked about their views on political leaders, and the extent to which they feel represented within the political system in their context. In the survey, respondents were asked about a range of aspects of representation, including whether they feel that their political leaders/representatives act in their best interests and on the issues they care about, whether they are accessible to girls and young women and responsive to their concerns, and whether leaders are representative of the communities they serve. Additionally, survey respondents were asked about how the decisions of political leaders have made them feel. In both sets of qualitative interviews, girls and young women were asked specifically whether political leaders act in their best interests and on the issues they care about.

Overall, the findings show that girls and young women hold mixed views about their political leaders, although only one in ten reported that they were generally happy with their leaders’ decisions on issues they care about. Notable differences in views emerged between regions, with girls in Latin America being significantly more negative about their leaders than girls in Asia. Girls and young women who identify as LGBTQI+ and those from minority backgrounds were also found to hold more negative views about their leaders. Findings from the qualitative interviews suggest that politically active girls and young women are more likely to express negative views about their leaders than girls who are less politically active, while RCRL girls were more likely than activists to judge their leaders on concrete actions at community level.

Findings from the survey

Perceptions of political leaders

Globally, a mixed picture emerged from the survey in relation to girls’ and young women’s perceptions of political leaders. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed

²⁰⁷ Unique from South Sudan, Jen from Lebanon.

²⁰⁸ Zoe from Malawi, Sara from Jordan.

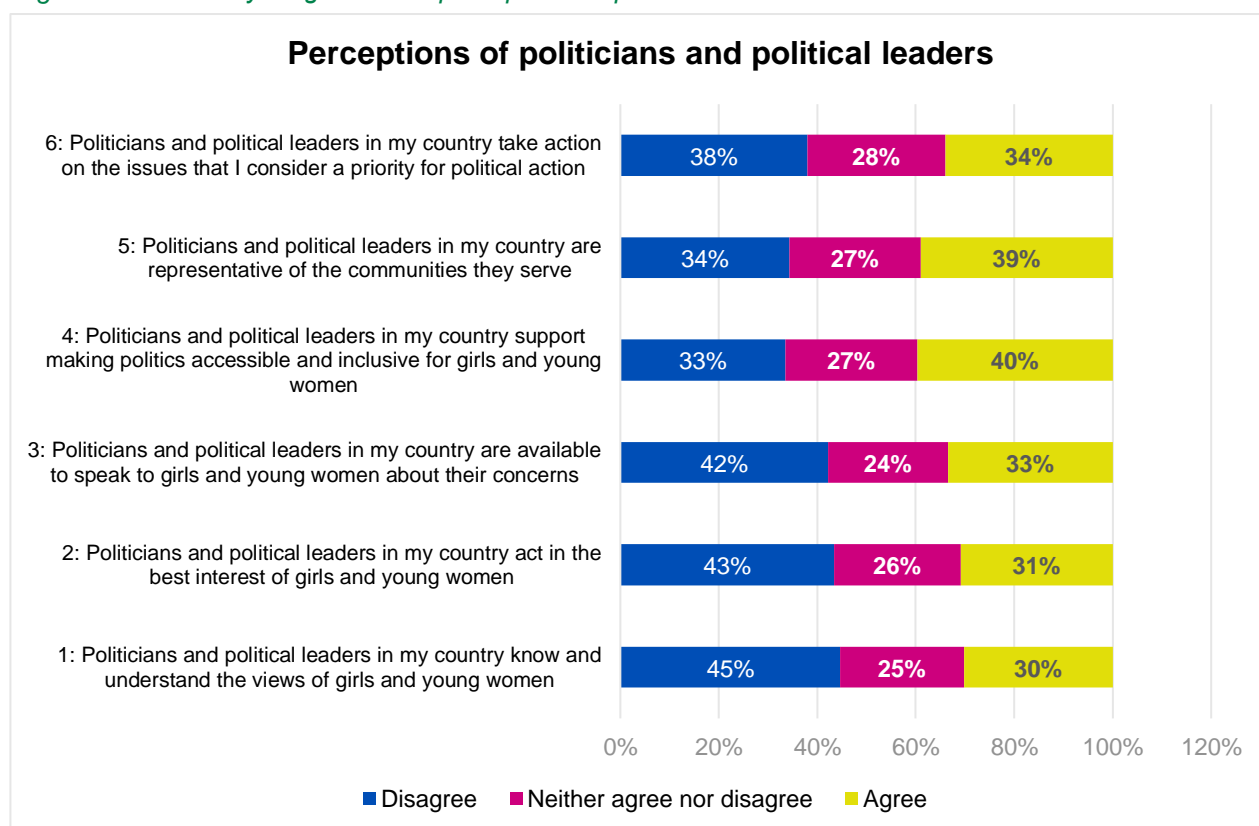
with a series of statements denoting politicians and political leaders' desired behaviors, attitudes and actions (e.g., inclusivity, responsiveness).

On average, 30 percent of girls agreed that politicians and political leaders understand the views of girls and young women, with a similar proportion agreeing with the statements 'politicians and political leaders act in their best interest' and 'Politicians and political leaders are available to speak to girls and young women about their concerns'. However, between 40 to 45 percent of girls and young women also noted that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements, suggesting that girls and young women hold varied perceptions.

40 per cent of girls agreed that politicians and political leaders make politics accessible and inclusive and 39 per cent agreed that politicians and political leaders are representative of the communities they serve. Further, 34 per cent noted that politicians and political leaders take action on issues that young women and girls care about. However, a similar percentage of young women and girls (between 33 per cent to 38 per cent) strongly disagreed or disagreed with these latter statements as well.

Overall, the negative responses noted above are in line with what girls and young women report when asked about challenges they may encounter when trying to engage or participate in politics. In answer to this question, 33 per cent of respondents identified 'politicians not talking about issues affecting women and girls' as a potential barrier to their engagement or participation in politics.²⁰⁹

Figure 8: Girls' and young women's perceptions of political leaders²¹⁰



²⁰⁹ 'Politicians do not talk about issues affecting women and girls' was an item under the question about challenges to participation. Meaningful findings from this item are reported narratively in this section of the report.

²¹⁰ Percentages in the chart below relate to the total sample of 28,751.

Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences


Overall, respondents in Asia and the Pacific are less likely to voice negative views of their politicians and political leaders – i.e., they were likelier to agree or strongly agree with the statements presented (see Table 9). Views expressed by respondents in the Latin America and the Caribbean region were on average more negative than views of respondents in other regions, while views of girls and young women in Africa were polarised. Young women in Africa were most likely to say that politicians did not talk about issues affecting women and girls (43%); respondents in Asia and the Pacific were the least likely to identify this as a challenge (25%).


Table 9: Perceptions of politicians and political leaders by region²¹¹

		Africa	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America	North America	Global average
Politicians and political leaders in my country know and understand the views of girls and young women	Disagree	43%	30%	49%	61%	47%	44%
	Neither	13%	25%	33%	24%	30%	25%
	Agree	44%	45%	19%	15%	22%	30%
Politicians and political leaders in my country act in the best interest of girls and young women	Disagree	46%	28%	47%	57%	46%	44%
	Neither	13%	25%	33%	26%	31%	26%
	Agree	41%	47%	20%	18%	23%	31%
Politicians and political leaders in my country are available to speak to girls and young women about their concerns	Disagree	45%	28%	44%	59%	41%	42%
	Neither	13%	24%	31%	23%	33%	24%
	Agree	42%	47%	25%	18%	26%	33%
Politicians and political leaders in my country support making politics accessible and inclusive for girls and young women	Disagree	39%	24%	32%	45%	36%	33%
	Neither	13%	26%	35%	28%	33%	27%
	Agree	48%	51%	33%	27%	31%	40%
Politicians and political leaders in my country are representative of the communities they serve	Disagree	35%	21%	38%	50%	34%	35%
	Neither	15%	25%	34%	27%	33%	27%
	Agree	51%	54%	28%	23%	33%	39%
	Disagree	43%	23%	40%	52%	37%	38%

²¹¹ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=9,500; Asia and the Pacific: n=7,000; Africa and the Middle East: n=6,153; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=4,000; North America: n=2,098.

Politicians and political leaders in my country take action on the issues that I consider a priority for political action	Neither	16%	26%	36%	27%	36%	28%
	Agree	41%	50%	25%	21%	27%	34%

 Regions with the highest levels of disagreement with statements

 Regions with the highest levels of agreement with statements

Differences by country income group

Generally, respondents in lower-middle-income countries are less likely to express negative views of their politicians and political leaders as compared to respondents living in countries of other income groups.

Table 10: Perceptions of politicians and political leaders by country income level²¹²

		Low-income	Lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	High-income	Global average
Politicians and political leaders in my country know and understand the views of girls and young women	Disagree	40%	31%	61%	49%	44%
	Neither	14%	19%	24%	32%	25%
	Agree	45%	50%	15%	19%	30%
Politicians and political leaders in my country act in the best interest of girls and young women	Disagree	43%	29%	57%	48%	44%
	Neither	14%	20%	26%	32%	26%
	Agree	43%	51%	18%	20%	31%
Politicians and political leaders in my country are available to speak to girls and young women about their concerns	Disagree	40%	31%	59%	45%	42%
	Neither	15%	18%	23%	31%	24%
	Agree	45%	52%	18%	25%	33%
Politicians and political leaders in my country support making politics accessible and inclusive for girls and young women	Disagree	37%	24%	45%	35%	33%
	Neither	14%	19%	28%	34%	27%
	Agree	49%	57%	27%	31%	40%
Politicians and political leaders in my country are representative of the communities they serve	Disagree	36%	22%	50%	37%	35%
	Neither	18%	18%	27%	34%	27%
	Agree	47%	60%	23%	29%	39%

²¹² Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=3,087; Lower-middle-income: n=8,066; Upper-middle-income: n=4,000; High-income: n=13,598

Politicians and political leaders in my country take action on the issues that I consider a priority for political action	Disagree	45%	25%	52%	40%	38%
	Neither	18%	19%	27%	36%	28%
	Agree	37%	55%	21%	24%	34%



Income groups with the highest levels of disagreement with statements



Income groups with the highest levels of agreement with statements

Differences by country civic space rating

Respondents living in countries with an open civic space are generally less likely to voice negative views of their political leaders. Overarchingly, those living in countries with a narrowed civic space are likelier to voice negative views compared to those living in countries with a repressed or obstructed civic space.

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Respondents identifying as LGBTQI or as having a disability are generally more likely to express negative views of politicians and political leaders than those not identifying as such. For example, 59 per cent of respondents that identify as LGBTQI+ say they disagree that politicians understand the views of girls and young women. Among those who do not identify as LGBTQI+, only 43 per cent say this. These patterns are similar for response items relating to whether or not politicians act in the best interest of girls (57 per cent among LGBTQI+ vs. 42 per cent among others).

Patterns are similar for respondents who say they have a disability and for those identifying as racial and ethnic minorities. However, differences between those identifying with any of these characteristics and those that do not are smaller overall. For example, 38 per cent of those having a disability disagree that politicians are representative of the communities they serve, compared to 34 per cent of those that do not identify as having a disability. The same is asserted by 36 per cent of those identifying as racial or ethnic minorities, compared to 34 per cent among counterparts.

One response item stands out as an exception: “Politicians and political leaders in my country are available to speak to girls and young women about their concerns”. For this item, both respondents with a disability and minorities generally report more positive or neutral views compared to counterparts.

Overall, respondents identifying as LGBTQI+, as having a disability, or as being part of a minority group, are more likely to agree that politicians not talking about issues affecting women and girls is a barrier to engagement and participation.²¹³

Feelings caused by actions of political leaders

Survey respondents were also asked about how the decisions and actions of political leaders on the issues they care about had made them feel. Respondents were asked to answer yes or not to a series of statements.

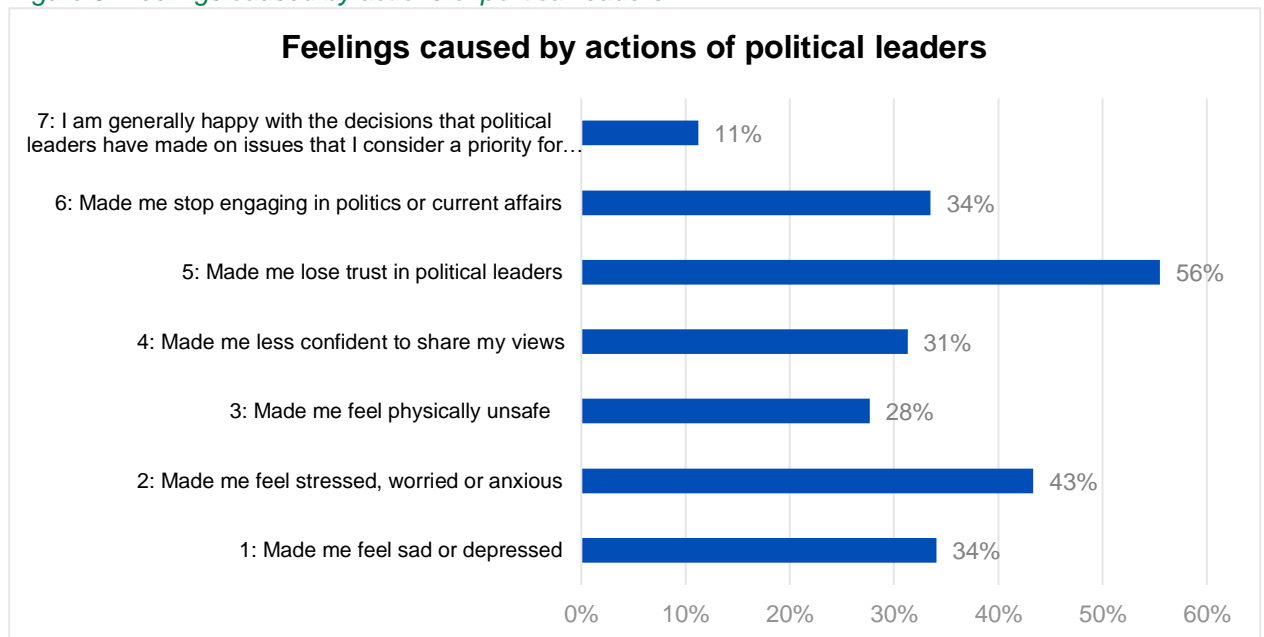
Only 11 per cent of girls and young women said that they were generally happy with the decisions of their political leaders; the majority of respondents indicated that they experienced negative feelings

²¹³ In answer to Q7 on challenges to girls and young women's participation.

as a result of the decisions of political leaders. For example, 62 per cent reported that the actions of their political leaders made them feel sad, stressed worried or anxious or made them feel unsafe. Over half of girls and young women reported that they had lost trust in their political leaders due to the decisions they made on issues they cared about. 43 per cent reported that the decisions made by their political leaders on priority issues (consistent with the priority issues discussed in section 5.1.2) have made them feel stressed, worried, or anxious.

There are significant differences in the views of respondents from different regions, however, there are no meaningful differences in view by age-group. As might be expected, views of girls and young women identifying as LGBTQI+, as having a disability or as being part of a minority group are more negative than those of the general respondent population.

Figure 9: Feelings caused by actions of political leaders ²¹⁴



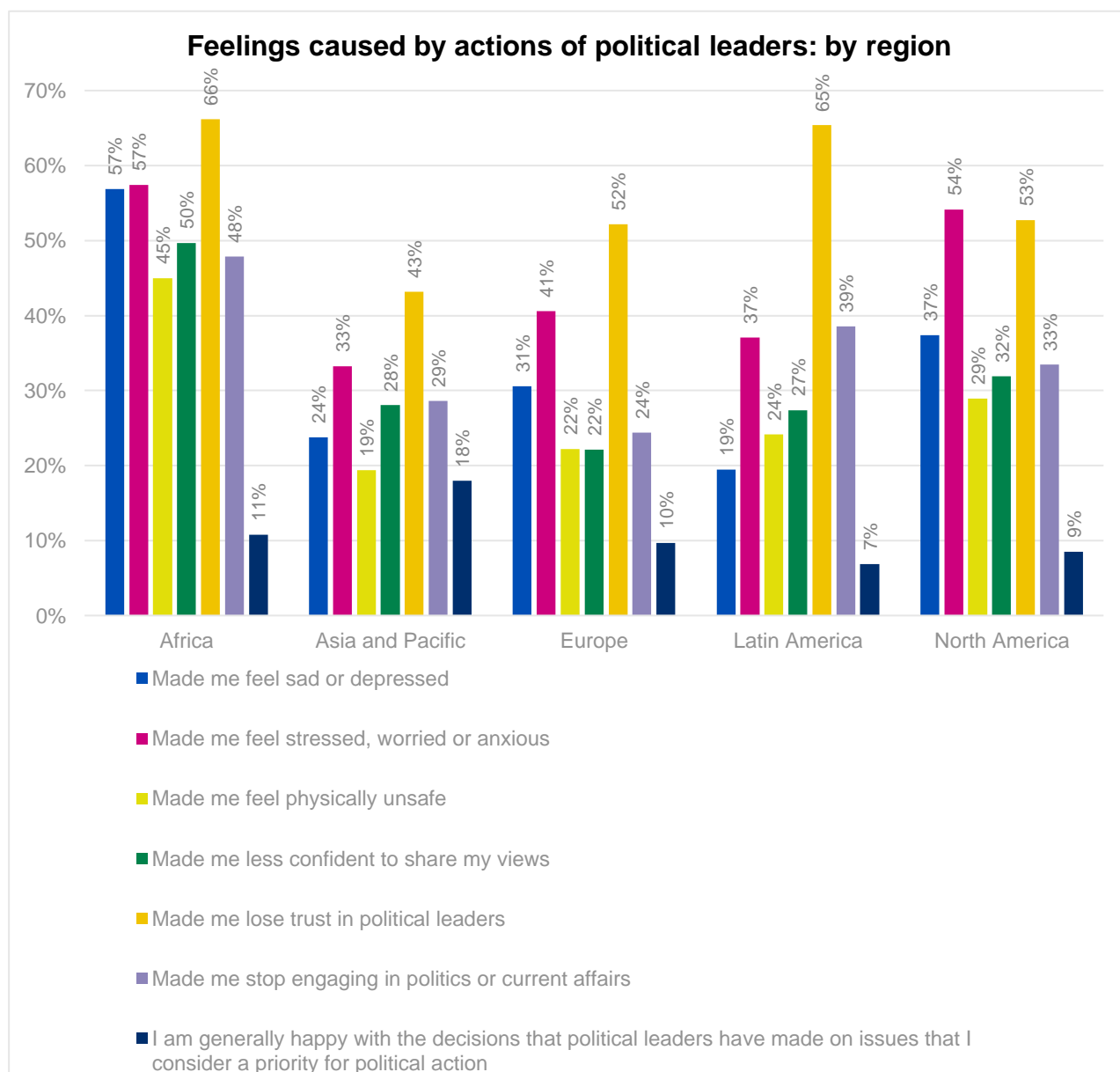
Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

Overall, respondents in the African region were more likely to agree with any of the six statements. This is also the region where girls and young women were most likely to say that the decisions of their leaders made them stop engaging in politics altogether. Views were more mixed in the other regions; however, loss of trust remains the most frequently chosen response option, closely followed by respondents saying decisions of leaders made them feel stressed, worried or anxious.

²¹⁴ Percentages in the chart below relate to 24,913 respondents.

Figure 10: Feelings caused by the actions of political leaders by region²¹⁵

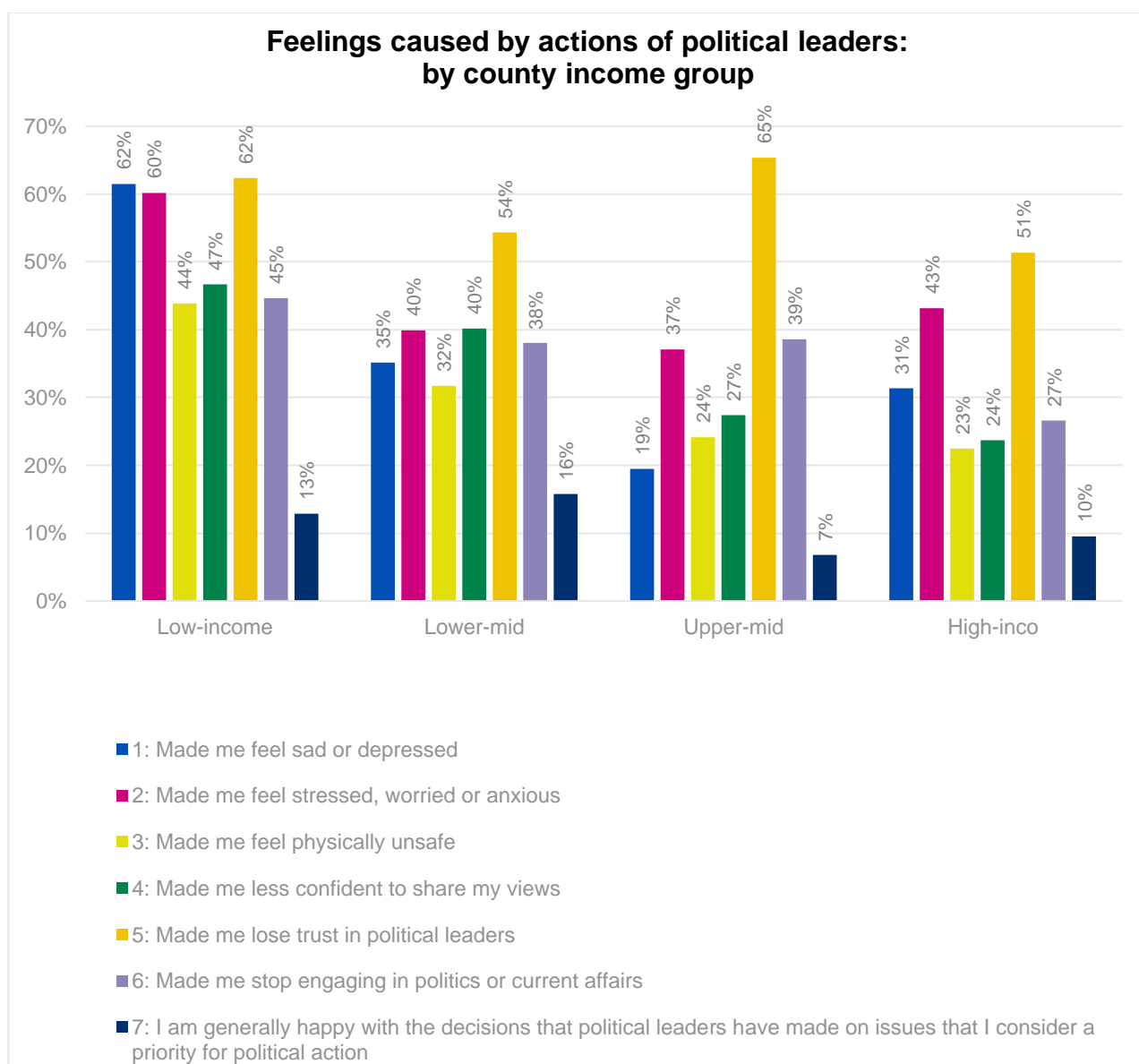


Differences by country income group

Patterns by country income group are generally similar to the regional patterns observed, with girls in low-income countries being the most likely to say that the decisions of their political leaders have caused them negative feelings. Overall, respondents living in upper-middle and high-income countries are less likely to say they experienced negative feelings because of politicians' decisions.

²¹⁵ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=8,292; Asia and the Pacific: n=5,345; Africa and the Middle East: n=5,788; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3,713; North America: n=1,775.

Figure 11: Feelings caused by the actions of political leaders by country income group ²¹⁶



Differences by country civic space rating

Overarchingly, respondents living in countries with an open or narrowed civic space were less likely to report negative effects of politicians' decisions. However, the percentage of respondents noting they felt sad or depressed, or having lost trust in their leaders, is relatively similar across countries with diverse civic space ratings. A minority of respondents note being happy with the decisions of their political leaders, with young women and girls in countries with a repressed civic space noting this more frequently than others, potentially due to desirability bias.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=2,873; Lower-middle-income: n=6,625; Upper-middle-income: n=3,713; High-income: n=11,702

²¹⁷ Note that this survey question was not asked in closed civic space countries due to contextual sensitivities.

Table 11: Feelings caused by the actions of political leaders by civic space rating

	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global average
Made me feel sad or depressed	37%	37%	30%	32%	34%
Made me feel stressed, worried or anxious	41%	47%	43%	41%	43%
Made me feel physically unsafe	31%	33%	23%	19%	28%
Made me less confident to share my views	35%	40%	23%	22%	31%
Made me lose trust in political leaders	53%	62%	53%	50%	56%
Made me stop engaging in politics or current affairs	38%	40%	26%	26%	34%
I am generally happy with the decisions that political leaders have made on issues that I consider a priority for political action	17%	9%	8%	13%	11%

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Overarchingly, respondents reporting to belong to any potentially marginalised group as listed above are more likely to report negative effects compared to the general population and are significantly less likely to say that they are happy with the decisions of political leaders.

Table 12: Feelings caused by the actions of political leaders, by demographic characteristics²¹⁸

	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
Made me feel sad or depressed	36%	40%	36%	46%	38%	25%	36%	44%
Made me feel stressed, worried or anxious	44%	53%	45%	54%	44%	54%	44%	52%

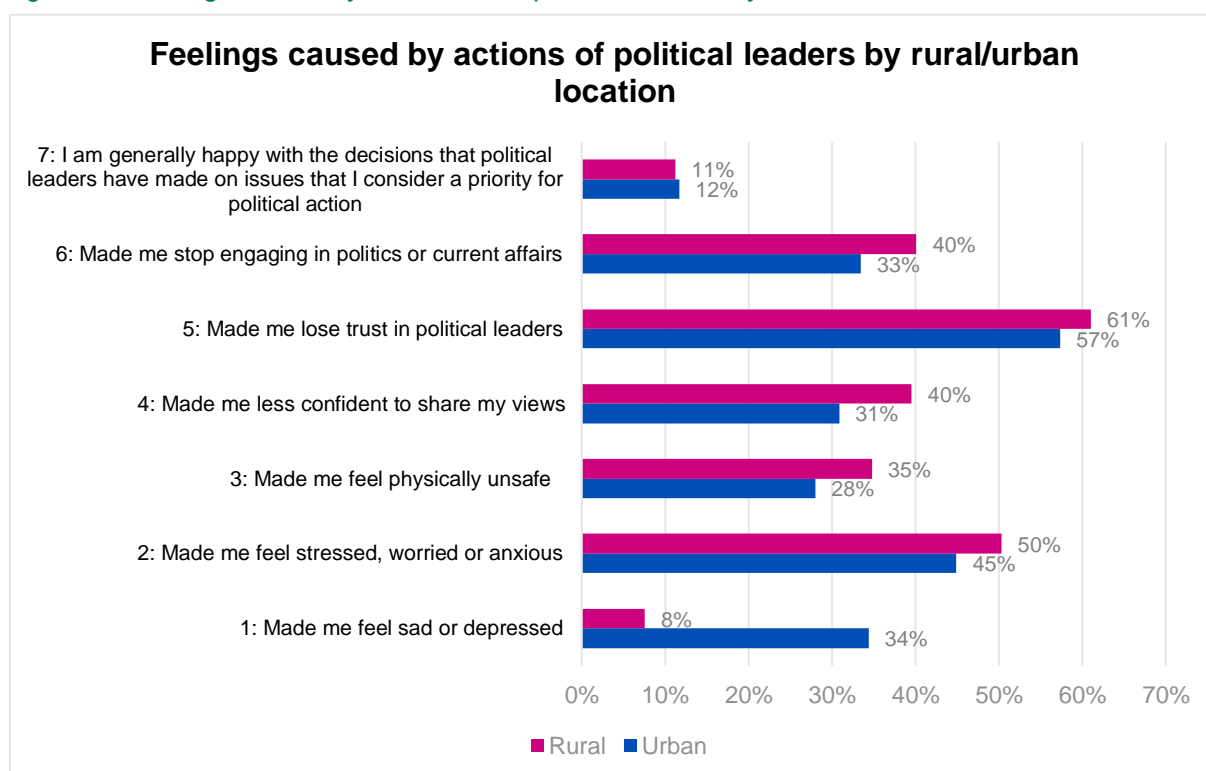
²¹⁸ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Identifies as LGBTQI+: n=3,060; Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n= 17,403; identifies as having a disability: n=1,132; Does not identify as having a disability: n=19,331; Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=2,068; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=18,395; Identifies as a religious minority: n=2,358; Does not identify as a religious minority: n=18,105.

Made me feel physically unsafe	29%	33%	29%	37%	28%	38%	28%	39%
Made me less confident to share my views	33%	31%	32%	39%	32%	40%	31%	42%
Made me lose trust in political leaders	57%	61%	57%	58%	57%	60%	57%	59%
Made me stop engaging in politics or current affairs	35%	32%	35%	36%	34%	43%	34%	44%
I am generally happy with the decisions that political leaders have made on issues that I consider a priority for political action	12%	6%	12%	6%	12%	7%	11%	9%

Differences by urban or rural areas

There are some significant differences in how respondents from rural vs. urban areas report feeling because of decisions by their leaders. For example, 34 per cent of girls and young women living in urban areas report feeling sad or depressed compared to 8 per cent of girls and young women living in rural areas. On average, across other response options, girls in rural areas are slightly more likely to say they have experienced negative feelings as a result of decisions by their political leaders compared to urban counterparts.

Figure 12: Feelings caused by the actions of political leaders, by rural/urban location²¹⁹



Insights from qualitative interviews

Overall, the RCRL girls expressed more positive views than activists about the actions of their political leaders,²²⁰ although this was not a universally held view, and within many of the countries girls expressed mixed views. A common theme across the two sets of interviews was a frustration that commitments made by political leaders were often not translated into action. However, while RCRL girls were more likely to base their views of leaders on concrete actions at community level, the views of the activists were in many cases influenced by wider critiques about political representation in their contexts.

RCRL girls in Benin were particularly positive about their political leaders, with most girls listing positive actions, while in Togo and Vietnam half of the girls had positive examples. For RCRL girls who held positive views of their leaders, these views appeared to be mostly shaped by tangible improvements in their community, with many referencing concrete actions attributed to political leaders. Examples given included repairing roads, building schools, health centres, boreholes, dumpsites for managing household waste and bringing electricity to a village. These types of examples were mainly mentioned in Togo, but Karen (15, El Salvador) and Alice (16, Benin) also shared this type of reasoning. Azia (16, Togo) and Folami (15, Togo) also mentioned the building of 'inclusion centres' for people with disabilities and children who have been orphaned.

"They [political leaders and representatives] educate us on how not to get COVID-19 and they build schools for us to go to school" (Lelem, 16, Togo)

Improvements to education were also cited by girls who held positive views of their political leaders. RCRL girls in Togo and Benin praised their leaders for providing schooling for girls, while Hoa (16)

²¹⁹ Percentages in the figure relate to the following sample distribution: living in urban areas: n=12,781, living in rural areas: n=5,683.

²²⁰ Responses could be addressing political leaders at any level (community, regional, national level).

and Nguyet (16) in Vietnam said their leaders helped children who struggle to attend school. Jocelyn (15, Philippines) and Djoumai (15, Togo) complimented their political leaders for providing free school supplies with Jocelyn stating she had directly benefited from this scheme.

Some RCRL girls also observed how their political leaders responded in times of crises and judged them based on actions taken. Melanie (15, Philippines) and Jocelyn (15, Philippines) held positive views of their leaders based on their responses during disasters, noting that local leaders had developed a public address system to help evacuate during floods, and that the government had also provided food relief and money for household repairs. The government handling of the COVID-19 response also factored into girls' views of their leaders. Girls in the Philippines, Vietnam and Togo viewed their leaders' response to COVID-19 favourably; girls in Togo and Chau in Vietnam noted how leaders helped to raise awareness of COVID-19 containment measurements, which they recognised had helped to protect them, while Maricel (15) in the Philippines and Nhi (16) in Vietnam also praised the government rollout of the vaccination programme. However, in contrast, Annabelle (16, Benin) and Thea (16, Benin) held negative views of their leaders due to the mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations.

RCRL girls in Vietnam and Fernanda (16, Brazil) praised leaders who organised community activities such as festivals and tournaments. The girls who gave this as an example seemed to appreciate having something fun to enjoy with the wider community.

Most of the cohort girls in Brazil, Philippines, El Salvador and Dominican Republic, however, felt negatively about their leaders. Again, their views were mostly based on their experiences at community level. Girls in the Philippines had the least positive things to share about their political leaders, echoing their views on politics more generally. Many girls in the Philippines and Dariana (16, Dominican Republic) complained that nothing concrete was done for them or their community by politicians and that ongoing problems persisted. Christine (16, Philippines) discussed the consequences of leaders still not tending to the road repairs: ***“Most students drop out due to the difficulty of the road and mud especially during the rainy season.”*** Across the Philippines, Brazil and El Salvador there was a feeling amongst RCRL girls that political leaders were not doing enough to help people in their circumstances. Amanda (15, Brazil) shared that they don't ensure girls' safety and that she felt unsafe on the streets.

The activists interviewed were also largely critical of the extent to which political leaders represent their best interests and act on the issues they care about, although these views were often articulated as wider critiques of political representation, rather than in relation to specific issues that affected them directly.

Activists shared concerns about political leaders not converting commitments into action, and several made comments expressing a lack of trust in the actions and intentions of politicians. They highlighted that commitments made during election campaigns, particularly in relation to young people, often did not come to fruition after leaders were elected. It was also noted that political leaders fail to come back to communities they represent after elections to understand the issues that matter.²²¹ Some activists also suggested that political leaders act out of self-interest, for example to sustain, further or enjoy their political careers.²²²

“The politicians, during that campaign, they complain about it. But once they're given the position, they forget about the young people.” (Unique, 23, South Sudan)

“Besides their agendas, when it comes to them making decisions basing on us, there has been a bigger gap, because first of all we do not have a platform where we can meet and talk to the leaders face to face. Most of the time, the leaders, that after them being voted, all they

²²¹ Juliette from Belgium, Unique from South Sudan, Valentina from Peru, Rainbow from Uganda.

²²² Zoe from Malawi, Valentina from Peru, Marchessa from Tanzania, Rainbow from Uganda.

care about is now having that life of being a newly elected person being in office. So, they take little time to come back to the grassroots, to make sure that they get our views, they get our recommendations.” (Rainbow, 22, Uganda)

These views were echoed by some of the cohort girls; both Sharina (16, Dominican Republic) and Darna (16, Philippines) described leaders as self-serving and some of the girls spoke of the frustrations they had with political leaders making false promises during elections and noted problems of corruption.²²³

“Because there are some who only want votes, so that they can have the election, but they don’t take into account that people need them...Because they only think about themselves...they kind of forget about the adolescents. they don’t help them; they only help the people who are most convenient for them.” (Sharina, 16, Dominican Republic)

Some of the activists also highlighted their concerns about political leaders not acting in the interests of everyone they represent, explaining how leaders’ actions may only benefit certain portions of the population. This, for example, included prioritising people in the capital, rather than considering the needs of girls in remote or mountainous regions; prioritising the needs of men; prioritising people who are more powerful in society; or certain tribes.²²⁴ These answers suggest an awareness of societal inequalities and how these may be reflected in political systems. This observation is supported by findings from the survey which suggested that girls and young women from minority backgrounds and other marginalised groups were more likely to feel negatively about their political leaders and the extent to which they felt represented.

“I feel they benefit other groups than others, because sometimes when these politicians are making their decisions, they consider about how long they want to be in power. So, they make decision to embrace certain people who are going to keep them in power, without considering those others, the rest of the group.” (Zoe, 23, Malawi)

“I think that if we talk about politics, then we have a very white male looking for a personal career path view on politics, and that’s why those representatives do represent certain views and topics that are relevant to a very small community that maybe sees politics the same way than they do.” (Anna, 23, Germany)

4.2.2 Perspectives on women political leaders

There is ample evidence that women, and particularly young women, face a host of gendered barriers to becoming political leaders, and that women in leadership positions experience a range of challenges on account of their gender. Evidence also shows that the gender discrimination, harassment and violence against women political leaders sends a message to girls and women that they should not participate in public life and can deter other girls and women from participating in politics.²²⁵

In order to understand how girls and young women perceive these gendered barriers and challenges a range of questions were asked across the three research methods. To understand prevailing gender and age norms surrounding political leadership in different contexts, the survey asked about whether it was acceptable for girls and women to become political leaders at different levels. Survey respondents were also presented with a list of potential barriers and challenges commonly faced by women leaders and asked whether they felt they applied in their context. In both sets of qualitative interviews, girls and young women were asked about whether they see women, and particularly

²²³ Mentioned in Brazil, Philippines and Dominican Republic.

²²⁴ Anyali from Peru, Valentina from Peru, Janell from Vietnam, Zoe from Malawi, Anna from Germany, Sara from Jordan, Unique from South Sudan.

²²⁵ T. DiLanzo, ‘Strengthen Girls’ and Women’s Political Participation and Decision-Making Power: Facts, Solutions, Case Studies, and Calls to Action’, *Women Deliver Policy Brief*, 2019, available at: [2019-8-D4G-Brief_Political.pdf \(womendeliver.org\)](https://www.womendeliver.org/policy-briefs/2019-8-D4G-Brief-Political.pdf)

young women, in positions of political leadership in their communities/countries; the barriers faced by women leaders; and how they thought women leaders were viewed by their communities.

Across the research methods, findings revealed the extent and depth of gender and age norms associated with political leadership. Only half of survey respondents believed that it was acceptable for girls and young women in their community to become political leaders and one in 10 girls themselves believed women were not qualified to be political leaders. Responses from the qualitative interviews provide important context and nuance to these findings. Girls described how notions of leadership are gendered, often in complex ways, and explained how expectations of women in leadership positions differed from those of men.

Findings from the survey

Overall, only one in two 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, indicating a prevalent norm, across contexts, that political leadership is not considered suitable for young women.

When asked about specific challenges that might inhibit girls and young women's political participation, 40 per cent of respondents agreed that female politicians suffer abuse and intimidation, and that they are judged for how they look or dress.

9 per cent of girls and young women agreed with the statement 'I don't think women are qualified to be political leaders'.

Table 13: Overall perceptions of women political leaders

In my community, it is acceptable for girls and young women... ²²⁶		
	n	%
To become local political leaders (e.g., joining local council or leadership).	14,790	57%
To become provincial/state or national political leaders (e.g., members of parliament).	13,774	53%
To become our nation's leader (prime minister, president etc).	12,704	49%
When trying to participate or engage in politics, girls and young women may face the following challenges ²²⁷ :		
	n	%
I don't think women are qualified to be political leaders	2,521	9%
Female politicians suffer a lot of intimidation and abuse	10,712	40%
Female politicians are often judged by the way they look or dress	11,264	42%

²²⁶ Percentages in the table relate to 25,877 eligible responses.

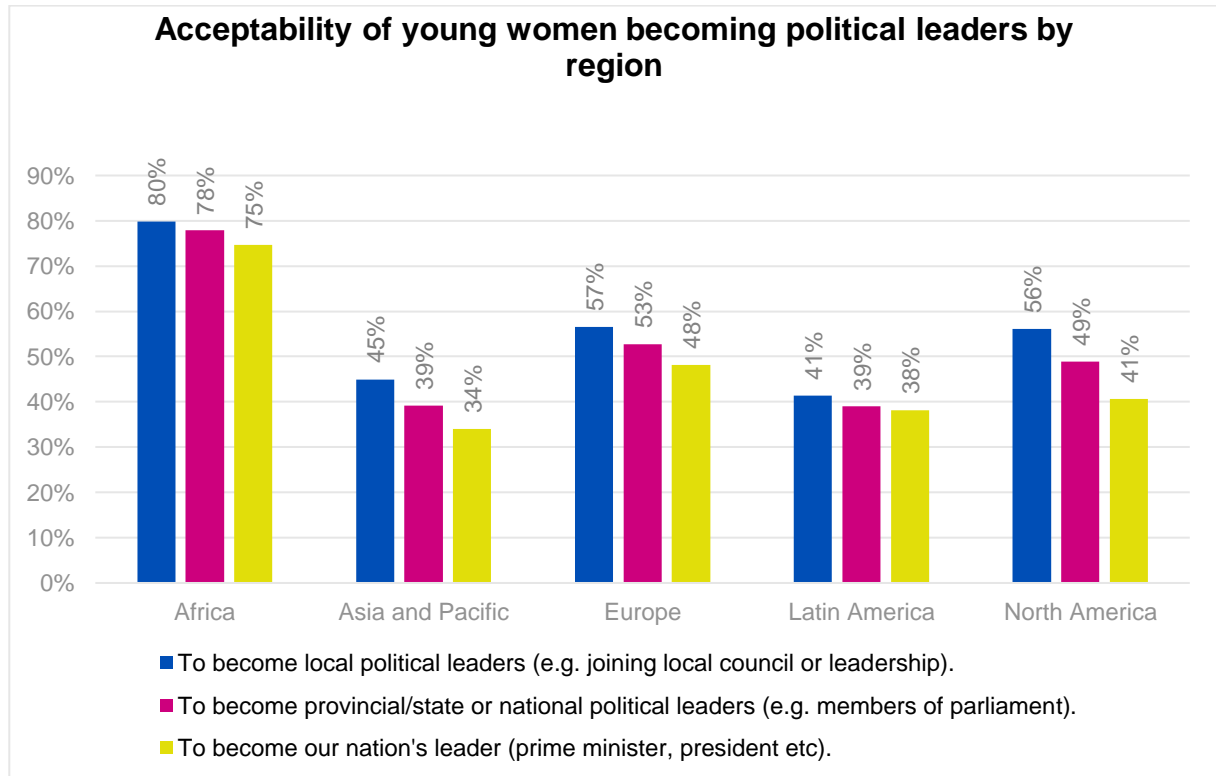
²²⁷ Percentages in the table relate to 26,946 eligible responses.

Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

Responses revealed that girls' perceptions of gender and age norms surrounding political leadership differed between regions. The majority of respondents in the African region (80 per cent) agreed that it would be acceptable for girls and young women in their community to become political leaders. Across other regions, the percentage of girls and young women reporting this is significantly lower, ranging from 41 to 57 per cent.

Figure 13: Acceptability of young women becoming political leaders, by region²²⁸



However, despite high levels of acceptability of young women becoming political leaders, respondents in the African region were also most likely to report that female politicians will face intimidation and abuse or be judged by the way they look or dress, a finding which reflects evidence from the literature.²²⁹

Girls and young women in Africa are also most likely to report that young women and girls are not qualified to be leaders, while respondents from Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean were least likely to say that young women are not qualified to be political leaders.

²²⁸ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=8,446; Asia and the Pacific: n=6,167; Africa and the Middle East: n=6,006; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3,447; North America: n=1,811

²²⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa', 2021, retrieved 8th February 2022: [Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/en/press-and-media/press-releases/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-africa)

Table 14: Challenges faced by women political leaders, by region²³⁰

When trying to participate or engage in politics, girls and young women may face the following challenges:						
	Africa	Asia and South Pacific	Europe	Latin America	North America	Global Average
I don't think women are qualified to be political leaders	22%	10%	4%	3%	6%	9%
Female politicians suffer a lot of intimidation and abuse	64%	29%	30%	41%	43%	40%
Female politicians are often judged by the way they look or dress	55%	32%	39%	42%	46%	42%

Differences by country civic space rating

Overarchingly, openness of civic space does not seem to play a significant role in the acceptability of girls and young women becoming political leaders. Despite variation by civic space rating, the percentage of girls across all countries and categories reporting that it would be acceptable to become a political leader is relatively similar.

However, civic space does seem to influence the presence of specific challenges facing women leaders. Girls and young women in countries with a narrowed or open civic space are least likely to say that women are not qualified to be political leaders, while respondents in countries with obstructed civic space were more likely to agree that female politicians suffer a lot of intimidation and abuse and are often judged by the way they look or dress.

Table 15: Acceptability of young women becoming political leaders, by civic space rating²³¹

In my community, it is acceptable for girls and young women...						
	Closed	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global Average
To become local political leaders (e.g., joining local council or leadership).	64%	58%	57%	55%	58%	57%
To become provincial/state or national political leaders (e.g., members of parliament).	64%	53%	53%	51%	54%	53%
To become our nation's leader (prime minister, president etc.).	50%	55%	48%	45%	48%	49%

²³⁰ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=8,862; Asia and the Pacific: n=6,327; Africa and the Middle East: n=5,948; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3,837; North America: n=1,972

²³¹ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Open: n=4,942; narrowed: n=5,924; obstructed: n=8,435; repressed: n=5,617; closed: n=959,

Table 16: Challenges faced by women political leaders, by civic space rating²³²

When trying to participate or engage in politics, girls and young women may face the following challenges:						
	Closed	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global Average
I don't think women are qualified to be political leaders	10%	17%	11%	4%	5%	9%
Female politicians suffer a lot of intimidation and abuse	29%	42%	49%	36%	28%	40%
Female politicians are often judged by the way they look or dress	21%	40%	46%	43%	38%	42%

Differences by level of female representation in parliament

Overall, there is an inverse relationship between the level of representation of women in parliament and the challenges that respondents identify in relation to participating or engaging in politics. As the table below illustrates, respondents living in countries with over 40 per cent female representation in parliament, are overall less likely to identify any of the listed challenges in comparison to respondents living in countries with low (under 19 per cent) female representation in parliament.

However, it is important to note that while the differences are stark when comparing respondents living in countries at the extremes, the picture is more nuanced when considering only countries with over 20 per cent female representation in parliament. For example, 39 per cent of respondents living in countries with between 20 to 39 per cent female representation in parliament identify female politicians being judged by the way they look or dress as a challenge. This percentage goes up to 42 per cent among respondents living in countries with over 40 per cent female representation in parliament.

²³² Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Open: n=5,141; narrowed: n=6,528; obstructed: n=8,895; repressed: n=5,706; closed: n=676.

Table 17: Challenges faced by women political leaders by level of female representation in parliament²³³

When trying to participate or engage in politics, girls and young women may face the following challenges:				
	Percentage of women in parliament			Global average
	Under 19%	20% to 39%	Above 40%	
I don't think women are qualified to be political leaders	16%	10%	4%	9%
Female politicians suffer a lot of intimidation and abuse	57%	38%	34%	40%
Female politicians are often judged by the way they look or dress	50%	39%	42%	42%

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

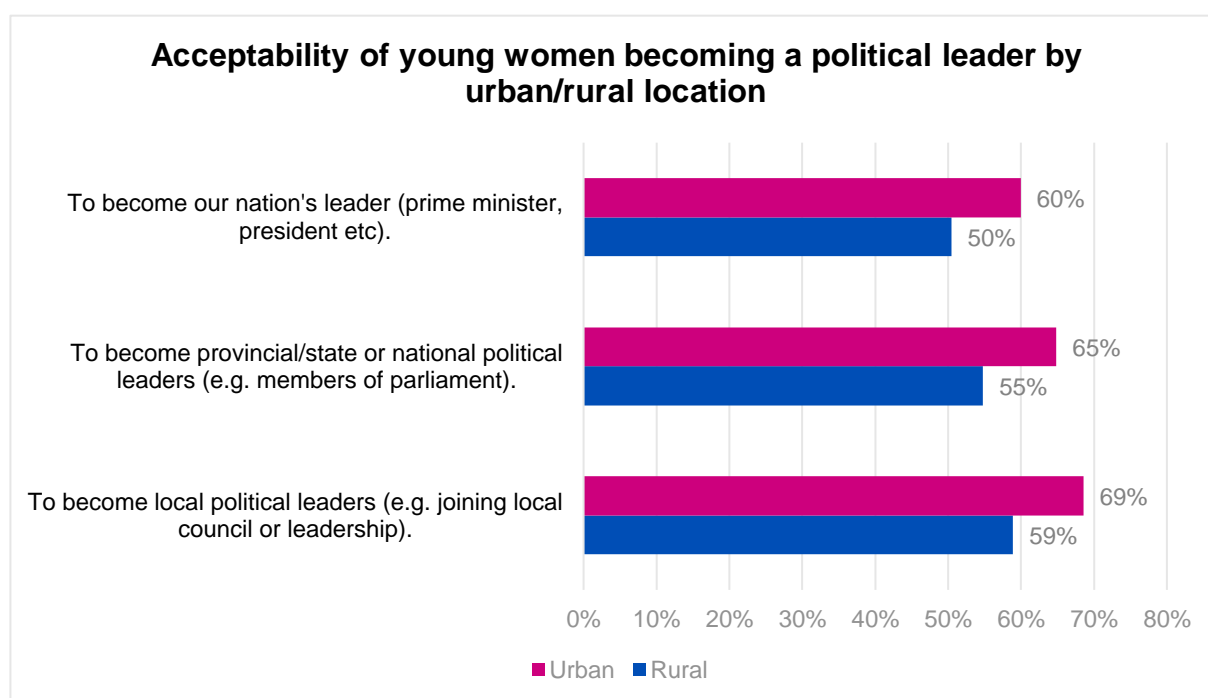
There are no major differences between age groups relating to how acceptable it is for girls and young women to become political leaders. Overall, differences by LGBTQI+, disability or minority status are slight and not likely to have a major influence on the perceptions of girls and young women.

Differences by urban or rural areas

Overall, respondents in rural areas are more likely to report that it is acceptable to become a female leader compared to respondents in urban areas. Differences between groups are statistically significant.

²³³ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Respondents living in countries with: under 19 per cent representation = 3,914; 20 to 39 per cent representation = 14,491; above 40 per cent = 8,043.

Figure 14: Acceptability of becoming a political leader, by rural/urban location ²³⁴



Insights from qualitative interviews

Observations of women in political leadership

When asked whether they saw women in positions of political leadership, most of the RCRL girls were able to give examples of women in positions of political leadership, particularly at community level. Responses from activists to this question were, however, more mixed.

Several of the activists cited examples of women, including young women leaders, and some spoke of women they admired. In some case they referenced women in elected office at different levels; Marchessa from Tanzania mentioned that her country's president was a woman and that she felt that she was a 'very good political leader'; Aurora from Ecuador spoke about two young female assembly members who she felt represented the issues she cares about, particularly sexual and reproductive rights; Anyali from Peru identified her local city mayor as a young woman political leader that she admired.²³⁵ Other respondents mentioned examples of young women activist leaders.²³⁶

"I see two assembly members, for example, who are very young, and they are women at the national level, two assembly members and they are very vigilant, for example, for abortion rights. They are... known here in Ecuador. And I kind of follow their work a lot because I admire them a lot." (Aurora, 20, Ecuador)

Many activists, even those who pointed to examples of young women leaders, observed persistent gender gaps in political leadership at all levels. Young women from Lebanon, South Sudan, Jordan and Malawi were all concerned about the limited representation of women at the national level, particularly in parliament, while Rainbow from Uganda mentioned that while she had seen examples of women trying to enter political processes at a local level, these were minimal compared to those of

²³⁴ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Urban: n=13,427; Rural: n=5,891.

²³⁵ Anyali from Peru.

²³⁶ Anyali from Peru, Min from Vietnam.

men. Juliette from Belgium, however, did acknowledge that in her country, although representation of women is still not equal to men, the situation has improved over time.

Responses from RCRL girls in Benin, Brazil, the Philippines and Vietnam also indicated a clear gender gap in political leadership. Some of the girls noted that men were most often in leadership positions and women engaged less in political matters. Where there were women in political roles, girls often noted that they were the exception, such as the sole woman on a local council otherwise made up of men. In Brazil, Natalia, Sofia, and Fernanda also noted that where there were women that were visible in political leadership positions, they were usually white, highlighting the lack of representation of Afro-Brazilian women²³⁷; ***“it’s hard for us to see a Black woman leading” (Natalia, 15, Brazil).***

Three of the activists raised the issue of gender quotas as a way to increase the numbers of women in leadership positions; all viewed these measures with scepticism. Unique from South Sudan observed that quotas were not fulfilled, whereas Sara from Jordan was concerned that quotas place a limit on the number of women elected. Aurora from Ecuador reported that, although there were more examples of women getting into power to fill quotas, she felt that the women elected may not act on gender issues. Her concerns that women leaders do not always represent the interests of women were echoed by Sofia from Spain, while Sara from Jordan observed that women leaders are subject to the same corrupting influences as men.

Barriers to women entering political leadership

When asked about the reasons why fewer women, and particularly young women, were in positions of political leadership, girls and young women discussed a range of barriers to women entering leadership positions, and challenges faced by women in these roles. Most of their responses focused on the role of gender and age norms around leadership,²³⁸ which are described below, but they also touched on a range of other barriers and challenges, many of which echo findings from the literature explaining the gender gap in political leadership.

Jen from Lebanon and Minerva and Naturel from Togo all noted that women aspiring to leadership faced pressure from their families, or that their families held them back or didn’t support them. Others described how economic factors hold women and young people back from running for political office, noting that campaigning for elections requires resources than many women don’t have.²³⁹ Women’s lower levels of confidence and knowledge of political processes were also mentioned by some activists as being factors of importance.²⁴⁰

Several of the activists also highlighted the challenges and threats faced by women in positions of political leadership. Naturel from Togo and Zoe from Malawi both described the harassment and abuse they have seen women political leaders being subjected to, online and offline. These responses echo findings from the survey, which found that girls and young women from the African region were most likely to agree that women political leaders suffer intimidation and abuse.

How women leaders are viewed

When asked about how they felt women leaders are viewed in their communities, responses diverged significantly between the two interview groups; the majority of RCRL girls reported that women leaders were seen positively, while most of the activists’ responses focused on negative perceptions. However, in both sets of interviews, and across contexts, the role of gender norms in shaping communities’ views of women leaders came through clearly, echoing findings from the survey. Most

²³⁷ Afro-Brazilians make up 50.7 per cent of Brazil’s population.

²³⁸ Jen from Lebanon, Naturel from Togo, Minerva from Togo, Zoe from Malawi, Juliette from Belgium, Sofia from Spain, Anna from Germany, Janell from Vietnam, Marchessa from Tanzania, Rainbow from Uganda, Aurora from Ecuador.

²³⁹ Zoe from Malawi, Rainbow from Uganda.

²⁴⁰ Janell from Vietnam, Rainbow from Uganda.

girls and young women in both groups were highly conscious of how notions of leadership are gendered and how expectations of women in leadership positions differed from those of men. Many also observed that women had fewer opportunities for leadership and faced greater challenges than men. The girls' and young women's responses to this question, therefore, provide important context to the finding from the survey that half of respondents believe it is not acceptable in their community for girls and women to become political leaders.

The majority of RCRL girls across the cohort countries said that female leaders were viewed positively in their communities, and described female leaders being seen as “brave” and “dedicated”. As most of the RCRL girls live in rural areas these responses support the survey finding that girls and young women in rural areas are more likely to believe that it is acceptable to become a female leader compared to respondents in urban areas. RCRL girls reported that women were regarded positively for their contribution to the development of the community, in particular for having an ability to work with and help people. Some responses suggested that the gender gap in political leadership can result in women who are in these positions being seen positively by communities because it is so rare to see women leaders. For example, Larissa (16, Brazil) explained that, if her mother were to run to be a local leader, some people wouldn't like it but, overall, she would be supported as she would be the first woman in the neighbourhood to do it; it is normally only men who run. While the majority of activists spoke about negative community views about women leaders, in a few cases more positive views were also mentioned. Young women from Vietnam and Tanzania, for example, spoke about how women leaders were seen as the ‘chosen ones’ who provide hope and inspiration.

Responses from RCRL girls in the Philippines and Vietnam revealed that while women leaders were seen positively, there is a clear distinction between the qualities that women leaders were expected to possess in comparison with men. In the Philippines, women leaders are seen as “nurturers”; Michelle (15, Philippines) and Reyna (15, Philippines) said female leaders are praised because they are mothers and know what is best for family and youth. Darna (16, Philippines) and Jasmine (15, Philippines) said they were viewed as “kind” and more approachable than men. Girls in the Philippines and Vietnam, in contrast, frequently described male leaders as “strong” and used examples of them being able to resolve disputes and accomplishing more in relation to completing projects and an overall ability ‘to get things done’.

Girls from the Philippines, El Salvador, Togo and Benin also spoke about how the responsibilities of women leaders often differed from those of men, describing how women were responsible for “cleanliness activities” or women's rights issues. These observations echo evidence from the literature that women in Cabinet roles are often assigned policy portfolios considered more ‘feminine’, in contrast to men, whose portfolios are more likely to be those considered most ‘strategic’.²⁴¹

Some responses revealed the sometimes-complex impact of gender norms on community views of women leaders. Hang (16, Vietnam), whose mother was the Chairwoman of the Woman Commune and now holds a senior position in the Youth Commune, explained how her mother encounters both positive and negative opinions from others in the village: ***“I see positive ideas such as ‘that female leader is very excellent’ or ‘though she is female, she is doing a good job’. Of course, I hear some negative ideas such as ‘she is promoted because she is a woman’.”*** Hang also describes the difficulties in the household dynamics when her mother first started her leadership position and was thus challenging traditional gender roles: ***“My father didn't support much in the past. It is said that right after their marriage, my father did not agree with my mother's going to work all the week and my paternal grandmother also criticised. Now my father sometimes is not pleased with her work, he only grumbles a little because he knows that being a cadres of the Youth***

²⁴¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, Women in Politics: 2021, 2021, retrieved 25th June 2022: [Women in politics: 2021 | Digital library: Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

Union is somehow like being a public figure, my mother sometimes has to drink wine and come home late from work.”

In some contexts, girls and young women observed that views of women leaders were changing over time, becoming more positive. RCRL girls in Vietnam often discussed generational changes which had occurred in their communities which had made female leadership more acceptable: ***“In the past, people valued men above women, but it is different now, women are intelligent and can do things well, therefore, they are viewed more positively, not as negatively as in the past”*** (Sen, 16, Vietnam).

This view was echoed by activists from Vietnam and Ecuador, who pointed to differences in views between older and younger generations,²⁴² perhaps indicating that in some contexts social norms surrounding women’s leadership are changing:

“The old world... still sees women as a sexual object and an object of the house, that the woman has to stay here and clean the house, do the other things, take care of the children and the man is the one who has to work. But in these times the old world must understand that here we are, in the middle of an era where all young people are on the internet.”
(Valentina, 19, Peru)

Girls and young women across both interviewee groups that reported that women leaders were seen largely negatively in their communities spoke mostly about the harmful role of patriarchal social norms. They commented on the ways in which these norms shape expected roles for women and men in society and expectations of political leaders. In Brazil, Juliana pointed to ‘machismo’ as the root of negative views towards women leaders and Bianca provided a clear explanation as to why she thinks there are no women leaders in her community:

“Because men don’t allow it and the community doesn’t accept it.” (Bianca, 16, Brazil)

Several girls and women, from both interviewee groups, spoke about how women’s prescribed roles in society differed from men’s, explaining that in many contexts political spaces were seen as the preserve of men, and that being a leader is a ‘man’s role’. Amongst the RCRL girls, Bianca (16, Brazil), Camila (15, Brazil) and Reyna (15, Philippines) shared that people in their community had patriarchal attitudes and believed women should be at home taking care of the household duties. Similarly, activists from Malawi and Uganda described how women were expected to look after the family and can’t also be political leaders. Women who step outside these roles and enter positions of leadership are therefore seen negatively. Rainbow from Uganda explained that, as leadership is seen as a man’s role, women leaders are considered to be disobeying cultural norms, whilst Aurora from Ecuador talks about perceptions of a ‘leader’:

“Whenever a woman wants to stand up and speak... most of the men or the society may perceive it as disrespecting other people. So even though we have women there, they're still struggling to take their place, they're still struggling to show people that women are also more capable like men.” (Rainbow, age, Uganda)

“For generations we have been sold this image... 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 behaviour that we have learnt from generation to generation.”
(Aurora, 20, Ecuador)

²⁴² Min from Vietnam, Janell from Vietnam, Valentina from Peru.

Views around women's capacity to lead were also raised across both sets of interviews. RCRL girls in Benin reported that people often believe that woman cannot lead, while activists from Malawi, Belgium, Togo, Spain and Ecuador all reported a prevailing view that men are thought to be better leaders, while women are considered less capable. Unique from South Sudan noted that in her country women were not seen as being able to lead men:

“They still say that women cannot lead the men. Yeah, that’s what they think about women...”
(Unique, 23, South Sudan)

Several comments referenced the ways in which women's abilities are judged against masculine ideals of leadership. Margaret (16, Benin), who associated leadership with the need to be feared, explained that women were not valued because people were not afraid of them and, therefore, they could not gain respect. Similarly, Marchessa, an activist from Tanzania noted that women and girls were seen as 'weak'. Anna from Germany reflected that masculine notions of how leaders should act resulted in women changing their behaviour to be taken more seriously, for example by acting less emotionally or empathetically, or lowering their voice.

A consequence of women being seen as less capable of leadership than men was that women leaders are often underestimated, and their contributions undervalued or not taken seriously. Marchessa, an activist from Tanzania noted that, even when women are in positions of leadership, they are not listened to, and male leaders think they know better than women. Many of the RCRL girls (Benin, Brazil, Philippines) referenced women also being underestimated.

“Women leaders are underestimated. Many think they won’t be able to make it. That’s the challenge I see.” (Darna, 16, Philippines)

RCRL Girls in the Philippines, Togo and Vietnam and some of the girls in Benin also expressed what they themselves thought of female political leaders and in several cases their views repeated some of the community views and norms around female leadership. In the Philippines and Togo, several girls saw women as less experienced, qualified or interested in politics, echoing the finding from the survey that almost 1 in 10 girls and young women believe that women are not qualified to become political leaders.

Girls and young women from both groups also spoke about how they see women in leadership positions being judged against different standards to men. Juliette from Belgium spoke about how women leaders are held to higher standards than their male counterparts, a view echoed by Hang (16) a RCRL girl from Vietnam:

“If a male leader and female leader make the same mistake, the female leader will be blamed more.” (Hang, 15, Vietnam)

Janell, an activist from Vietnam observed different standards for women's and men's' behaviour, noting that if women act assertively, they are considered aggressive, whereas if men act in this way, it is accepted. In line with responses to the survey, several girls and young women also felt that women leaders, unlike men, faced criticism based on their appearance.²⁴³

²⁴³ Anna from Germany, Sofia from Spain.

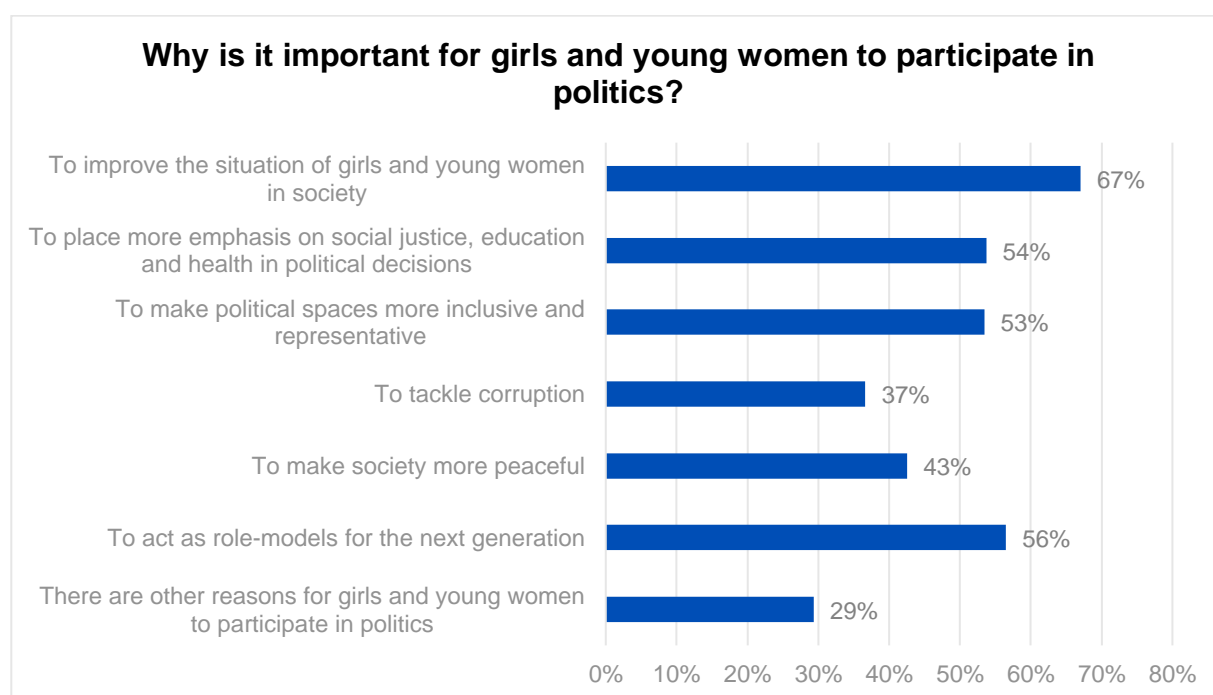
4.3 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

4.3.1 Reasons for participation

In order to understand whether, and why, girls and young women felt that it is important for them to participate in politics, survey respondents were provided with a list of possible reasons for girls' and young women's political participation and asked to select all reasons that applied. Reasons were based on evidence from the literature on the dividends associated with girls' and women's political participation, and included reasons related to potential policy outcomes, symbolic reasons and wider societal benefits.

Only 3 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement 'It is not important for girls and young women to participate in politics'. The most frequently selected reason for why girls' and young women's participation is important was to 'improve the situation of girls and young women in society'; close to 70 per cent of respondents identified this as one of the main reasons for participating in politics.

Figure 15: Reasons why it is important for girls and young women to participate in politics²⁴⁴



Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

Overall, respondents in the African region were more likely to identify any of the options provided as important reasons for girls and young women to participate in politics. Compared to respondents in other regions, respondents in Africa are also much more likely to say girls' and young women's participation is important in order to tackle corruption and make societies more peaceful.

²⁴⁴ Percentages in the chart below relate to the total sample of 27,770 respondents.

Table 18: Reasons why it is important for girls and young women to participate in politics, by region²⁴⁵

	Africa	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America	North America	Global average
To improve the situation of girls and young women in society	88%	56%	64%	64%	64%	67%
To place more emphasis on social justice, education and health in political decisions	77%	47%	47%	48%	48%	54%
To make political spaces more inclusive and representative	75%	43%	47%	55%	52%	53%
To tackle corruption	70%	28%	23%	34%	34%	37%
To make society more peaceful	73%	35%	31%	34%	42%	43%
To act as role-models for the next generation	83%	44%	51%	47%	60%	56%
There are other reasons for girls and young women to participate in politics	53%	22%	23%	20%	31%	29%



Region with highest levels of agreement with statement



Region(s) with lowest level of agreement with statement

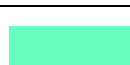
Differences by country income group

Respondents in low-income countries were overall more likely to identify any of the reasons provided as important. Like the regional differences identified, respondents in these settings are also most likely to say that girls' and young women's participation is important in order to tackle corruption and make society more peaceful.

²⁴⁵ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=9103; Asia and the Pacific: n=6763; Africa and the Middle East: n=6064; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3857; North America: n=1983

Table 19: Reasons why it is important for girls and young women to participate in politics, by country income group²⁴⁶

	Low-income	Lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	High-income	Global average
To improve the situation of girls and young women in society	88%	67%	64%	63%	67%
To place more emphasis on social justice, education and health in political decisions	76%	61%	48%	46%	54%
To make political spaces more inclusive and representative	71%	56%	55%	47%	53%
To tackle corruption	74%	44%	34%	25%	37%
To make society more peaceful	69%	50%	34%	34%	43%
To act as role-models for the next generation	80%	60%	47%	52%	56%
There are other reasons for girls and young women to participate in politics	62%	29%	20%	25%	29%



Country income group with highest levels of agreement with statement



Country income group with lowest levels of agreement with statement

Differences by country civic space rating

Overall, respondents in countries with a repressed or obstructed civic space are more likely to choose reasons for why it is important for girls and young women to participate in politics. However, respondents in countries with a closed civic space are least likely to say that participation is important for tackling corruption or to make society more peaceful.

²⁴⁶ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=3,029; Lower-middle-income: n=7,927; Upper-middle-income: n=3,857; High-income: n=12,957.

Table 20: Reasons why it is important for girls and young women to participate in politics, by civic space rating²⁴⁷

	Closed	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global average
To improve the situation of girls and young women in society	68%	71%	69%	63%	65%	67%
To place more emphasis on social justice, education and health in political decisions	53%	60%	60%	44%	49%	54%
To make political spaces more inclusive and representative	47%	54%	62%	47%	48%	53%
To tackle corruption	22%	52%	46%	23%	25%	37%
To make society more peaceful	27%	51%	50%	33%	34%	43%
To act as role-models for the next generation	45%	62%	61%	49%	54%	56%
There are other reasons for girls and young women to participate in politics	42%	39%	28%	21%	29%	29%



Civic space rating(s) with highest levels of agreement with statement



Civic space rating(s) with lowest levels of agreement with statement

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Response patterns among persons identifying as LGBTQI+, as having a disability or belonging to a minority group are generally similar to those of the general population. However, respondents in these groups are generally more likely to say that girls' and young women's participation is important in order to make political spaces more inclusive and representative.

²⁴⁷ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Open: n=5,267; narrowed: n=6,672; obstructed: n=8,972; repressed: n=5,880; closed: n=979.

Table 21: Reasons why it is important for girls and young women to participate in politics, by demographic characteristics²⁴⁸

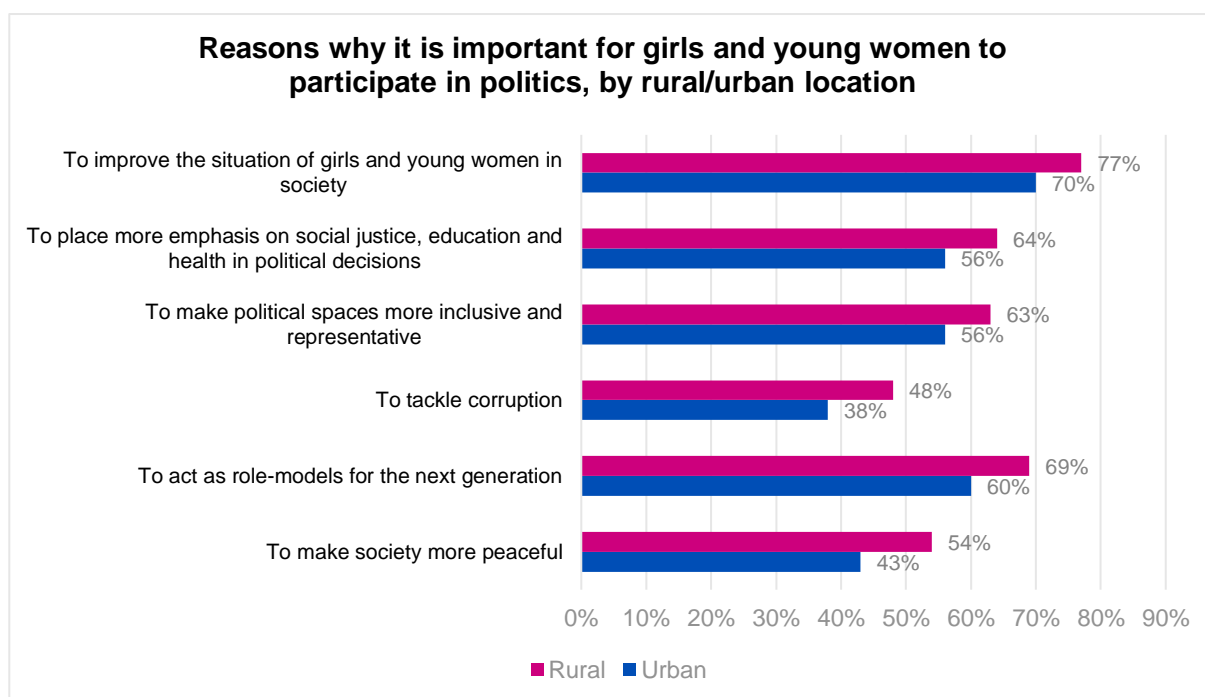
	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
To improve the situation of girls and young women in society	70%	71%	70%	70%	70%	72%	70%	73%
To place more emphasis on social justice, education and health in political decisions	58%	55%	57%	58%	57%	62%	56%	66%
To make political spaces more inclusive and representative	56%	61%	57%	58%	56%	65%	56%	63%
To tackle corruption	41%	34%	39%	43%	39%	46%	38%	50%
To make society more peaceful	46%	39%	45%	50%	45%	48%	43%	57%
To act as role-models for the next generation	60%	59%	60%	64%	60%	67%	59%	68%

Differences by urban or rural areas

Respondents living in rural areas are significantly more likely to identify girls' and young women's political participation as important – across all reasons listed.

²⁴⁸ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Identifies as LGBTQI+: n=3,065; Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n= 18,268; identifies as having a disability: n=1,114; Does not identify as having a disability: n=20,219; Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=2,078; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=19,255; Identifies as a religious minority: n=2,473; Does not identify as a religious minority: n=18,860.

Figure 16: Reasons why it is important for girls and young women to participate in politics by rural/urban location²⁴⁹



4.3.2 Experiences of participation

Understanding girls' and young women's experiences of different forms of political participation provides insights into both their overall level of political participation, but also their preferred modes of participation. As outlined in the literature review, there is widespread evidence, from across contexts, both of young people's declining levels of participation through formal, institutional channels, particularly in electoral processes, as well as their preference for informal modes of participation, often online.

In order to capture a snapshot of girls' and young women's experience of political participation to-date, survey respondents were asked two questions: The first question asked respondents whether or not they had completed any of the 'activities' from a pre-defined list. The 'activities' listed included formal and informal modes of participation, in line with the broadly defined concept of political participation used in this study. They also spanned a range of 'effort' levels, from passive engagement to proactive, effortful forms of participation. The second survey question asked respondents about whether they belonged to diverse types of groups or organisations. To supplement the findings from the survey, both sets of qualitative interviews also asked girls and young women about their experiences of political participation.

Overall, the vast majority (83 per cent) of girls and young women surveyed had some experience of participating in or engaging with politics. Contrary to the assumption that young people are more likely to participate through informal channels, the evidence from the survey shows that formal modes of political participation, notably voting, were more common amongst girls and young women than informal participation activities: 74 per cent of girls and young women reported that they had participated in formal modes of political participation in comparison to 58 per cent reporting participation through informal modes. 63 per cent of girls and young women reported belonging to

²⁴⁹ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Urban: n=13,427; Rural: n=5,891.

some form of group or organisation, indicating significant levels of civic engagement and participation.

Significant differences emerged in girls' and young women's levels and types of political participation between regions. Notably, girls and young women in Africa were more likely to engage with politics, and to belong to political or civic organisations, than girls and young women in other regions.

Findings from the survey

83 per cent of girls and young women said they participated in politics in some form or had engaged with politics, while 17 per cent of respondents said they had never taken part in any political activities.

Survey respondents had, on average, participated in between 2 to 3 activities each, depending on age group. Respondents aged 15 to 19 had participated in an average of 2 activities, whereas those in the older group had participated in an average of 3.

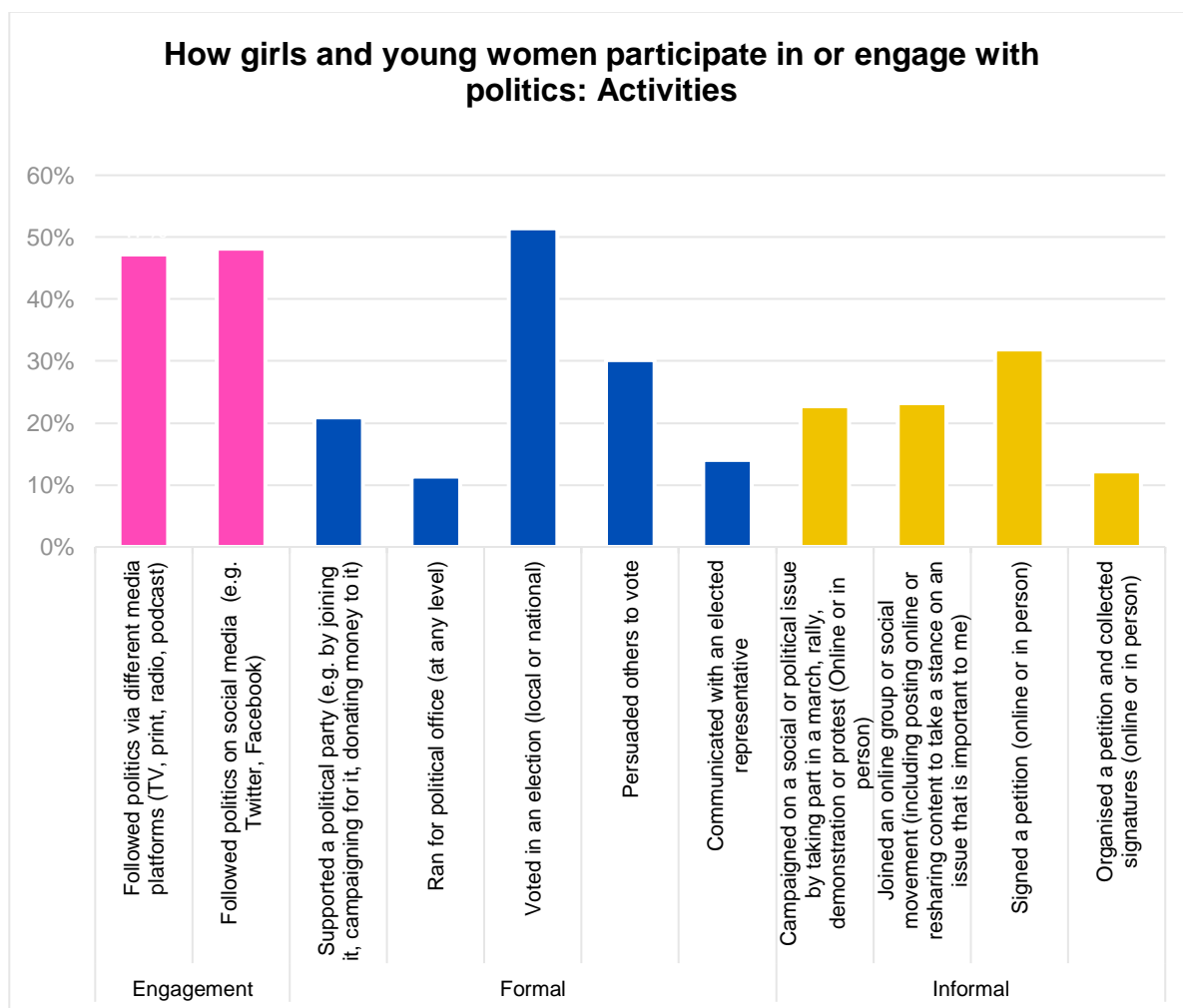
Overall, 51 per cent of girls reported having voted in an election (whether local or national). Of those eligible to vote²⁵⁰, 56 per cent said they had voted. The next most frequently reported activities were following politics via different media or social media platforms, reported by 47 to 48 per cent of respondents.

Activities that girls and young women report having conducted the least are running for political office (11 per cent chose this option), organising a petition to collect signatures (12 per cent) and communicating with an elected representative (14 per cent).

Girls and young women that had participated in any of the activities listed, were more likely to be aware of the challenges that political participation entailed. For example, girls and young women who participated in any activity were two times as likely to say that female politicians suffer abuse and intimidation and that female politicians are judged by the way they look or dress.

²⁵⁰ Based on voting age for taking part in national elections in 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 17: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Activities²⁵¹



In order to analyse the modes of participation, activities were grouped in the following categories:

- **Political engagement** (without participatory behaviour): ‘activities’ which indicate an interest in politics and political issues, but do not involve taking action.²⁵²
- **Formal political participation:** activities which directly address the government, politics or the state, and take place within formal political spaces or via established political institutions²⁵³
- **Informal political participation:** activities which take place outside formal political spaces or established political institutions²⁵⁴

Overall, 74 per cent of girls and young women report that they had participated in formal modes of political participation, most commonly through voting, compared to approximately 58 percent of girls who reported participating through informal channels. 65 per cent of respondents reported they have engaged with politics by following through different media channels, although only 9.7 per cent reported engaging with politics without participating in any other activity.

²⁵¹ Percentages in the chart below relate to the total sample of 23,751 respondents.

²⁵² Followed politics via different media platforms; Followed politics on social media.

²⁵³ Supported a political party; Run for political office; Voted in an election; Persuaded others to vote; Communicated with an elected representative.

²⁵⁴ Campaigned on a social or political issue by taking part in a march, rally, demonstration or protest; Joined an online group or social movement; Signed a petition; Organised a petition and collected signatures.

Table 22: Overview of experience of participation, by mode of participation²⁵⁵

	Number of Responses	% of sample
Political engagement	15,394	65%
Formal political participation	17,613	74%
Informal political participation	13,806	58%

When asked what types of groups and organisations they belonged to, respondents were provided with a list of options. Some of these groups were more explicitly political, both institutional and non-institutional.²⁵⁶ Belonging to these 'political' groups or organisations provides an indicator of collective political participation amongst girls and young women. Other groups were not political in nature,²⁵⁷ but provide an indicator of girls' and young women's wider civic participation. Even where groups are not political in nature, participation in civic or other groups enhances young people's social capital and contributes to young people's political socialisation.

Overall, 63 per cent of girls and young women reported belonging to some form of group or organisation while 37 per cent of respondents said they did not belong to any group or organisation. Larger percentages of respondents reported belonging to non-political civic groups, rather than political groups. The most common response to this question was 'belonging to a social group e.g., a sports group or religious group; 40 per cent of girls and young women reported belonging this type of group, while 33 per cent said they were part of a voluntary group that does something to help the community. While this suggests that girls and young women are more likely to join non-political groups, it does indicate significant levels of civic engagement and participation.

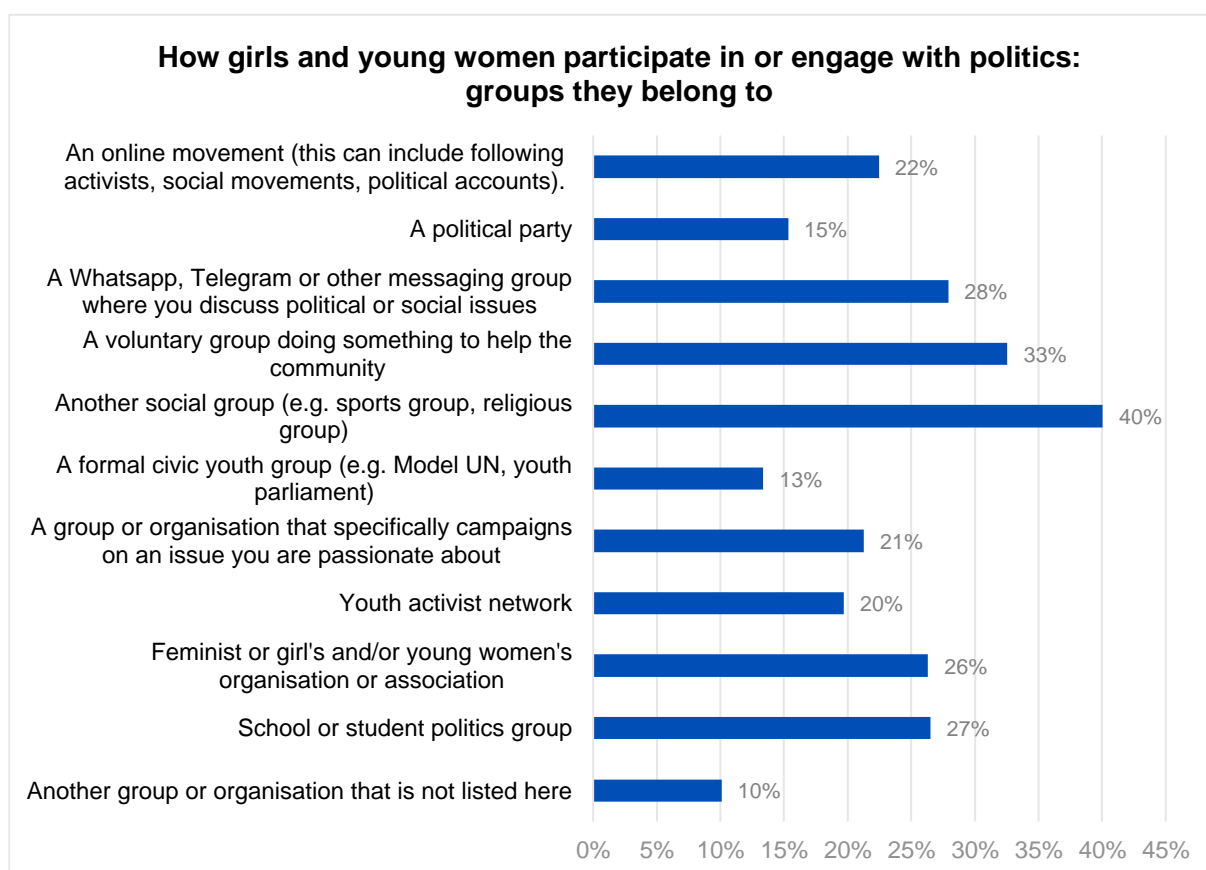
Amongst the more political groups, belonging to messaging groups where political issues are discussed was the most frequently selected response, with 28 per cent of respondents reporting belonging to this type of group. 'School or student politics groups' was the second most commonly selected type of 'political' group, with 27 per cent reporting belonging to this type of group. Girls and young women reported belonging to non-institutional/informal political groups and organisations at a higher rate than institutional/formal groups; only 15 per cent noted they belong to a political party.

²⁵⁵ Figures in the table refer to the total number of respondents/the percentage of respondents who reported participating in any activity in a given category; the total sample: n=23,519.

²⁵⁶ i.e., An online movement; a WhatsApp, Telegram or other messaging group where you discuss political or social issues; a political party; a group which campaigns on an issue you are passionate about; youth activist network; care about; a formal civic youth group; feminist or girls'/young women's association.

²⁵⁷ A voluntary group doing something to help the community; another social group.

Figure 18: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: groups they belong to²⁵⁸



Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

There are statistically significant differences in the types of activities that girls and young women report having undertaken in different regions. For example, more respondents in the African region report engaging with politics compared to the other regions – i.e., following this on diverse media and social media platforms. Further, more respondents in the African region and in Latin America and the Caribbean report having voted compared to the other regions. Signing a petition (whether online or in person) was, in contrast, least reported by girls in the African region.

Respondents from the African region were least likely to say they had never taken part in any political activity: only 9 per cent in comparison to between 16 and 22 per cent across other regions.

²⁵⁸ Percentages in the figure below relate to the total sample of 18,163 respondents.

Table 23: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Activities and modes of participation by region²⁵⁹

	Africa	Asia and Pacific	Europe	Latin America	North America	Global average
Political engagement	79%	62%	60%	60%	58%	65%
Followed politics via different media platforms (TV, print, radio, podcast)	68%	41%	42%	39%	38%	47%
Followed politics on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)	56%	46%	45%	48%	42%	48%
Formal participation	87%	73%	68%	71%	68%	74%
Supported a political party (e.g., by joining it, campaigning for it, donating money to it)	34%	22%	13%	14%	19%	21%
Ran for political office (at any level)	18%	13%	9%	4%	6%	11%
Voted in an election (local or national)	64%	45%	47%	57%	41%	51%
Persuaded others to vote	48%	21%	30%	17%	30%	30%
Communicated with an elected representative	22%	14%	11%	8%	14%	14%
Informal participation	51%	57%	65%	51%	69%	58%
Campaigned on a social or political issue by taking part in a march, rally, demonstration or protest (online or in person)	28%	22%	21%	20%	21%	23%
Joined an online group or social movement (including posting online or resharing content to take a stance on an issue that is important to me)	30%	25%	19%	18%	28%	23%
Signed a petition (online or in person)	15%	27%	46%	29%	46%	32%
Organised a petition and collected signatures (online or in person)	11%	14%	13%	8%	14%	12%

²⁵⁹ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=7,476; Asia and the Pacific: n=5,871; Africa and the Middle East: n=5,596; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3,111; North America: n=1,697.

Other						
I have taken part in another type of political activity	15%	6%	5%	9%	8%	8%

A similar picture emerges when considering the types of groups and organisations that young women and girls belong to across regions. Overall, more girls and young women in the African region report belonging to any type of group or organisation compared to the other regions, and especially Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and North America, where levels of belonging across both 'political' and 'non-political' categories of organisations are much lower. Only 14 per cent of respondents in the African region said they did not belong to any group or organisation, whereas in Europe and Latin America the percentages were 50 per cent and 48 per cent respectively. Membership of social groups, voluntary community groups and feminist/girl and young women groups is notably higher in the Africa region than in other regions, indicating higher levels of civic participation amongst girls and young women in this region.

Table 24: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Groups they belong to by region²⁶⁰

	Africa	Asia and Pacific	Europe	Latin America	North America	Global average
An online movement (this can include following activists, social movements, political accounts)	20%	27%	21%	21%	28%	22%
A political party	20%	19%	10%	6%	15%	15%
A Whatsapp, Telegram or other messaging group where you discuss political or social issues	37%	23%	24%	30%	19%	28%
A voluntary group doing something to help the community	47%	29%	23%	29%	27%	33%
Another social group (e.g., sports group, religious group)	67%	30%	29%	27%	28%	40%
A formal civic youth group (e.g., Model UN, youth parliament)	14%	16%	12%	9%	14%	13%
A group or organisation that specifically campaigns on an issue you are passionate about	32%	22%	14%	11%	18%	21%
Youth activist network	29%	21%	12%	13%	18%	20%

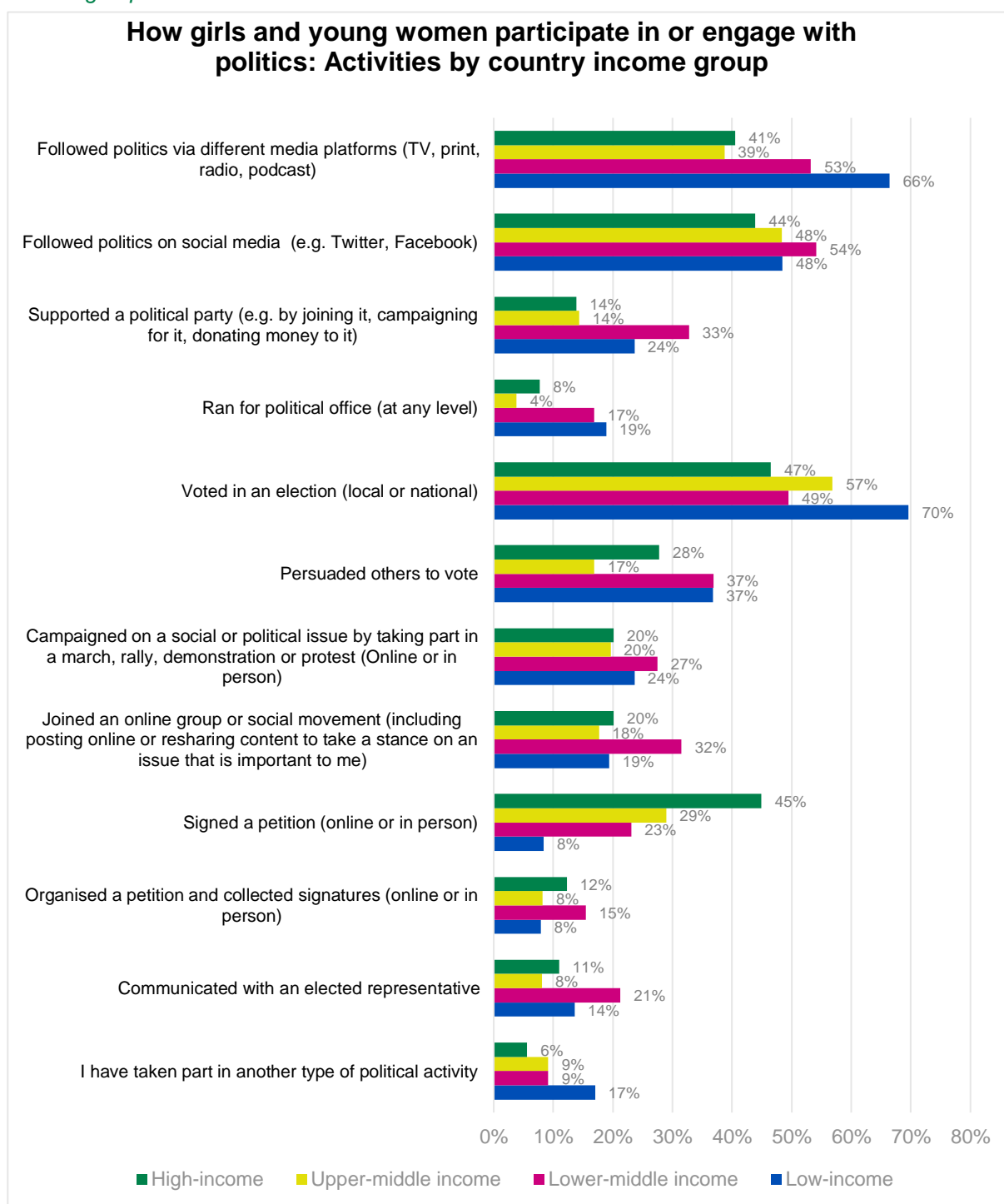
²⁶⁰ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=4,738; Asia and the Pacific: n=4,791; Africa and the Middle East: n=5,278; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=2,067; North America: n=1,289.

Feminist or girl's and/or young women's organisation or association	42%	22%	18%	16%	26%	26%
School or student politics group	31%	33%	15%	25%	27%	27%
Another group or organisation that is not listed here	15	8%	8%	8%	8%	10%

Differences by country income group

Differences in how girls and young women from different country income groups reported participating or engaging in politics were also evident; these differences are statistically significant. Overall, participation appears highest in low-income countries, and seems to decrease on average as country income increases. However, exceptions to this general trend do exist – for example, it is likelier for respondents in high-income countries to sign a petition compared to others.

Figure 19: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Activities by country income group²⁶¹

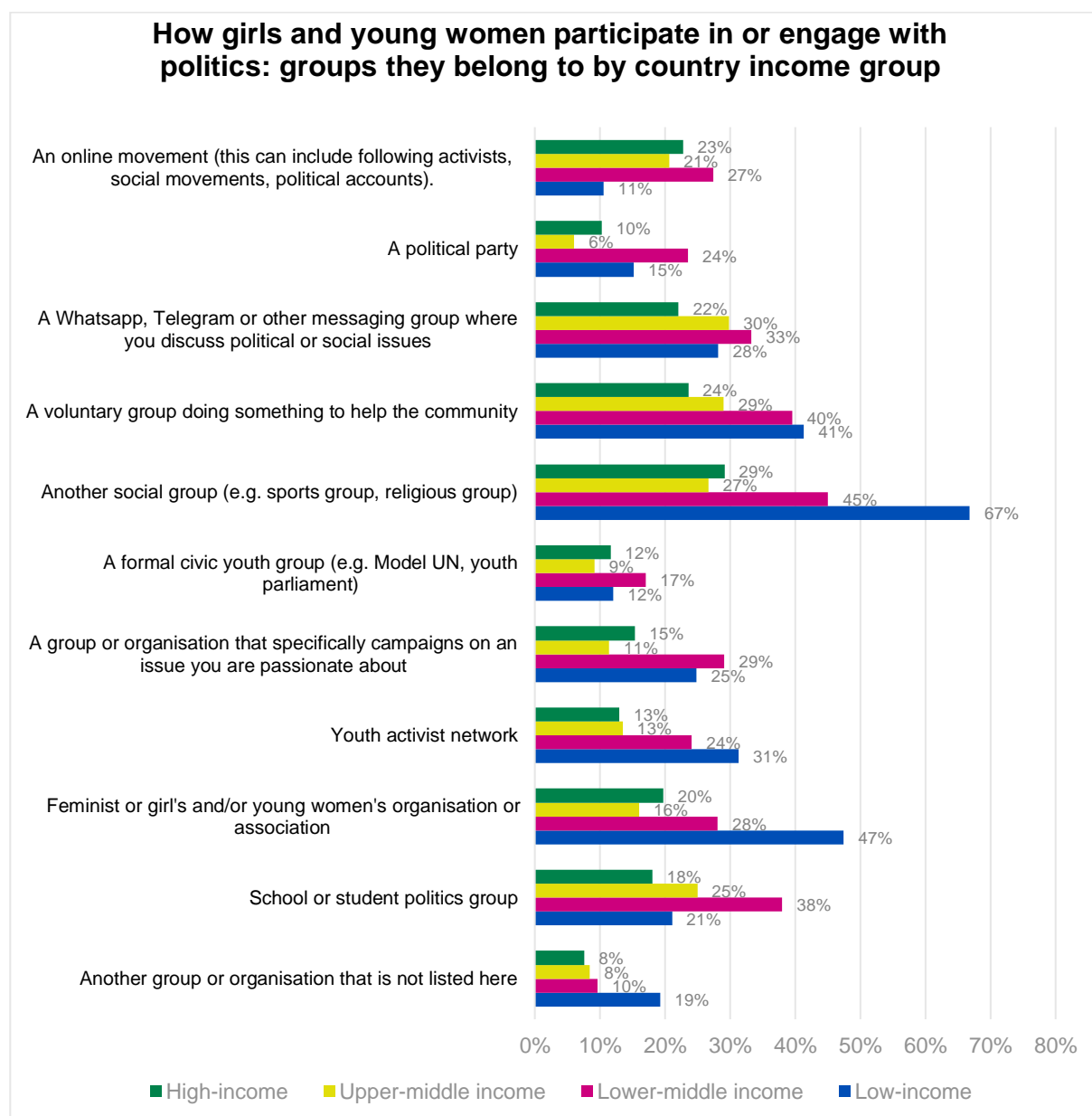


A similar pattern is also evident when considering the types of groups and organisations that young women and girls report belonging to. Overall, those respondents living in low and lower-middle-income countries are more likely to say they belong to groups or organisations overall. Exceptions to this do exist – for example, responses on whether respondents belong to an online messaging group (WhatsApp, Telegram or other) or to a formal civic youth group (e.g., Model UN) are relatively similar across country income groups.

²⁶¹ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=2,757; Lower-middle-income: n=7,295; Upper-middle-income: n=3,111; High-income: n=10,588.

Respondents in upper-middle-income and high-income countries were most likely to say they did not belong to any group or organisation, with 48 per cent and 49 per cent respectively reporting this. On the other hand, only 15 to 18 per cent of respondents in low- and lower-middle-income countries said that they did not belong to any group or organisation.

Figure 20: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: groups they belong to by country income group²⁶²



Differences by country civic space rating

There are some significant differences between responses of girls and young women living in countries with different civic space contexts. Overall, girls and young women living in countries with a narrowed or open civic space are less likely to say they will run for office or belong to a political party.

²⁶² Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=2,609; Lower-middle-income: n=6,608; Upper-middle-income: n=2,067; High-income: n=6,879.

They are more likely to report having signed a petition or activity. Respondents living in countries with a narrowed civic space were most likely to say they had never participated (26 per cent).

Table 25: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Activities by civic space rating²⁶³

	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global average
Political engagement	66%	69%	61%	59%	65%
Followed politics via different media platforms (TV, print, radio, podcast)	49%	52%	41%	41%	47%
Followed politics on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)	49%	51%	45%	44%	48%
Formal participation	78%	78%	65%	72%	74%
Supported a political party (e.g., by joining it, campaigning for it, donating money to it)	24%	26%	11%	15%	21%
Ran for political office (at any level)	16%	12%	6%	10%	11%
Voted in an election (local or national)	55%	54%	46%	50%	51%
Persuaded others to vote	31%	34%	22%	34%	30%
Communicated with an elected representative	14%	18%	10%	12%	14%
Informal participation	51%	56%	61%	66%	58%
Campaigned on a social or political issue by taking part in a march, rally, demonstration or protest (online or in person)	26%	23%	16%	24%	23%
Joined an online group or social movement (including posting online or resharing content to take a stance on an issue that is important to me)	26%	26%	19%	19%	23%
Signed a petition (online or in person)	15%	27%	44%	47%	32%

²⁶³ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Open: n=4,503; narrowed: n=5,208; obstructed: n=7,995; repressed: n=5,106; closed: n=939.

Organised a petition and collected signatures (online or in person)	10%	13%	10%	14%	12%
Other					
I have taken part in another type of political activity	11%	10%	5%	6%	8%

Significant differences were evident among how girls and young women from countries with different civic space ratings answered the question about belonging to groups and organisations. In countries with a closed civic space, respondents are more likely than in other contexts to say they belong to a school or student politics group or a political party. In countries with a narrowed or open civic space, girls and young women are less likely to report they belong to any group or organisation overall.

Table 26: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Groups they belong to by civic space rating²⁶⁴

	Closed	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global average
An online movement (this can include following activists, social movements, political accounts).	21%	20%	25%	23%	21%	22%
A political party	51%	15%	16%	8%	11%	15%
WhatsApp, Telegram or other messaging group where you discuss political or social issues	18%	30%	33%	23%	21%	28%
A voluntary group doing something to help the community	37%	39%	36%	24%	22%	33%
Another social group (e.g., sports group, religious group)	37%	45%	47%	28%	31%	40%
A formal civic youth group (e.g., Model UN, youth parliament)	17%	14%	15%	11%	11%	13%
A group or organisation that specifically campaigns on an issue you are passionate about	26%	26%	24%	14%	15%	21%
Youth activist network	35%	14%	28%	13%	12%	20%

²⁶⁴ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Open: n=2,852; narrowed: n=3,289; obstructed: n=6,875; repressed: n=4,220; closed: n=927.

Feminist or girl's and/or young women's organisation or association	22%	31%	31%	19%	18%	26%
School or student politics group	61%	29%	29%	18%	15%	27%
Another group or organisation that is not listed here	4%	13%	11%	7%	8%	10%

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by age group

Younger respondents (aged 15 to 19) were more likely to say they had never taken part in any political activity: 24 per cent compared to 13 per cent of those aged 20 to 24.

There are no major differences by age group in the types of participation activities respondents have experience of, except, as would be expected, for voting: 37 per cent of those aged 15 to 19 said they voted, compared to above 59 per cent among the older age group.

In relation to the groups or organisations they belong to, only two differences stand out. 19 per cent of the younger respondents said they were part of an online movement, compared to 24 per cent of the older group. Secondly, 29 per cent of respondents aged 15 to 19 said they belong to a student group (this is 25 per cent among the older age group); a difference which may be expected as fewer respondents in the older age group would be expected to be in education.

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Response patterns relating to activities undertaken as part of political participation or engagement among participants who identify as LGBTQI+, having a disability or belonging to a minority are overwhelmingly similar to those of the general sample. However, these participants are, in general, more likely to say they joined an online group or social movement and that they have signed a petition (online or in person).

Respondents identifying as a racial or ethnic minority were less likely to say they had never taken part in any political activity (7 per cent) compared to those not identifying as such (14 per cent).

Table 27: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Activities by demographic characteristics²⁶⁵

	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
Political engagement	67%	68%	68%	65%	67%	69%	67%	70%
Followed politics via different media platforms (TV, print, radio, podcast)	51%	49%	51%	46%	50%	52%	50%	54%
Followed politics on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)	50%	54%	51%	49%	50%	50%	50%	52%
Formal participation	76%	74%	76%	78%	75%	79%	75%	82%
Supported a political party (e.g., by joining it, campaigning for it, donating money to it)	22%	19%	22%	26%	21%	28%	21%	32%
Ran for political office (at any level)	12%	9%	12%	14%	11%	16%	11%	16%
Voted in an election (local or national)	54%	52%	54%	51%	54%	49%	54%	52%
Persuaded others to vote	32%	34%	32%	35%	32%	37%	31%	41%
Communicated with an elected representative	15%	14%	15%	19%	14%	21%	14%	22%
Informal participation	57%	73%	59%	70%	58%	70%	59%	64%
Campaigned on a social or political issue by taking part in a march, rally, demonstration or protest (online or in person)	23%	29%	24%	28%	24%	30%	23%	29%
Joined an online group or social movement	23%	30%	24%	33%	24%	32%	24%	31%

²⁶⁵ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Identifies as LGBTQI+: n=2,936; Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n= 16,809; identifies as having a disability: n=1,088; Does not identify as having a disability: n=18,657; Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=2,039; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=17,706; Identifies as a religious minority: n=2,396; Does not identify as a religious minority: n=17,349.

(including posting online or resharing content to take a stance on an issue that is important to me)								
Signed a petition (online or in person)	29%	52%	32%	43%	32%	40%	33%	28%
Organised a petition and collected signatures (online or in person)	12%	13%	12%	16%	12%	17%	12%	17%

Those identifying as a minority group are more likely to belong to a feminist organisation or association. Further, those identifying as LGBTQI+ are overall less likely to say they are part of a social or voluntary group; those identifying as a religious minority are however more likely to say this.²⁶⁶ Overall, respondents identifying as a racial, ethnic, or religious minority were less likely to say they did not belong to a group or organisation in comparison to the general population.

Table 28: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Groups they belong to by demographic characteristics²⁶⁷

	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
An online movement (this can include following activists, social movements, political accounts).	21%	32%	22%	34%	22%	31%	22%	28%
A political party	16%	11%	15%	18%	15%	19%	15%	21%
A WhatsApp, Telegram or other messaging group where you discuss political or social issues	29%	26%	29%	27%	28%	30%	28%	32%
A voluntary group doing something to help the community	35%	27%	34%	34%	33%	39%	33%	42%

²⁶⁶ Note that in the category of 'Another social group', religious groups were provided as an example.

²⁶⁷ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Identifies as LGBTQI+: n=2,194; Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n= 13,275; identifies as having a disability: n=865; Does not identify as having a disability: n=14,604; Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=1,727; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=13,742; Identifies as a religious minority: n=2,197; Does not identify as a religious minority: n=13,272.

Another social group (e.g., sports group, religious group)	45%	29%	43%	38%	43%	43%	41%	52%
A formal civic youth group (e.g., Model UN, youth parliament)	13%	14%	13%	18%	13%	18%	12%	19%
A group or organisation that specifically campaigns on an issue you are passionate about	23%	20%	22%	28%	21%	30%	21%	30%
Youth activist network	21%	18%	21%	23%	20%	24%	20%	26%
Feminist or girl's and/or young women's organisation or association	28%	30%	28%	31%	27%	33%	27%	34%
School or student politics group	27%	24%	27%	25%	26%	33%	25%	35%

Differences by urban or rural areas

There are significant and meaningful differences between rural and urban areas. Respondents living in rural areas are overall more likely to report having voted or persuaded others to vote (40 per cent compared to 31 per cent). However, those living in urban areas are more likely to say they signed a petition (online or in person).

Table 29: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Activities by rural/urban location²⁶⁸

	Urban	Rural
Political engagement	69%	71%
Followed politics via different media platforms (TV, print, radio, podcast)	50%	57%
Followed politics on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)	53%	50%
Formal participation	75%	81%
Supported a political party (e.g., by joining it, campaigning for it, donating money to it)	21%	27%
Ran for political office (at any level)	12%	14%
Voted in an election (local or national)	54%	59%
Persuaded others to vote	31%	40%

²⁶⁸ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Urban: n=9,411; Rural: n=4,534.

Communicated with an elected representative	13%	18%
Informal participation	62%	55%
Campaigned on a social or political issue by taking part in a march, rally, demonstration or protest (online or in person)	25%	24%
Joined an online group or social movement (including posting online or resharing content to take a stance on an issue that is important to me)	25%	24%
Signed a petition (online or in person)	35%	27%
Organised a petition and collected signatures (online or in person)	13%	12%

Overall, respondents living in rural areas are more likely to belong to any type of group or organisation. In a few cases, this difference is relatively large, for example 28 per cent of respondents living in a rural setting say they belong to a youth activist network compared to 18 per cent of those living in an urban environment. Social groups, feminist or girls and/or young womens associations are also more frequently mentioned by respondents in rural settings.

Table 30: How girls and young women participate in or engage with politics: Groups by rural/urban location

	Urban	Rural
An online movement (this can include following activists, social movements, political accounts).	24%	20%
A political party	15%	18%
WhatsApp, Telegram or other messaging group where you discuss political or social issues	29%	30%
A voluntary group doing something to help the community	34%	39%
Another social group (e.g., sports group, religious group)	40%	55%
A formal civic youth group (e.g., Model UN, youth parliament)	13%	14%
A group or organisation that specifically campaigns on an issue you are passionate about	22%	24%
Youth activist network	18%	28%
Feminist or girl's and/or young women's organisation or association	26%	35%
School or student politics group	28%	28%

Insights from qualitative interviews

Experiences of political participation differed starkly between the activists and the RCRL girls. This was to be expected, as the girl and young women activists were purposively sampled based on their experience of participation. In recognition of these differences, questions about experiences of political participation were posed differently for each group. Activists were asked open questions asking them to describe the types of activities they had been engaged in to push for social change both outside and within the context of formal political processes. The RCRL girls, on the other hand, were shown a list of different types of political participation²⁶⁹ and were asked if they had ever taken part in these activities, or anything similar.

Many of the activists described involvement in multiple activities as part of their activism, with activities spanning both formal and informal political spheres, from community level to national and even international fora. The RCRL girls, in contrast, had much lower levels of experience with political participation, and in most countries very few had experience of participating in formal political processes. However, many of the cohort girls did report engaging in passive activities such as reading about a political issue online or following a political discussion on the news, which suggests that many of the RCRL girls are interested in politics and political participation, even if this interest has not translated into action. This echoes the survey finding that almost half of girls demonstrated interest and engagement with politics and political issues through their media consumption.

“I watched [online] what's going on in our country, political issues about who's the strong contender for the presidency, what 's the status of COVID-19, weather updates if there's a typhoon coming, and what's going on in the war in Russia and Ukraine.” (Chesa, 16, Philippines)

Despite the expected differences between the interviewee groups in their overall level of experience of political participation, some common themes did emerge; girls and young women in both groups reported engaging in community level participation activities, while across both groups the role of school and university-based activities, such as elections were also mentioned.

Experiences of formal political participation

The majority of the girl and young women activists had been involved in electoral processes in some way, most commonly through voting. All but two young women who were eligible and had had the opportunity to vote had done so (see section. 5.3.3 for analysis of girls' and young women's views on voting). Two young women, from Lebanon and Uganda, had been involved in actively promoting elections and encouraging others in their community to vote,²⁷⁰ although none mentioned campaigning on behalf of political parties.

“There wasn't any representation for the girls in my village. So, for that reason during 2016, when I was 16-years-old, I tried to make a small initiative. It was my own initiative. We were having municipality elections, so I made a Facebook account, a group to make the people know more about municipality elections and how to elect far from their family names and from their sects or others - to choose the program that represents them. And I also worked on how the girls and women should be a part of these elections and not to hide or to be afraid to be a part of it.” (Jen, 23, Lebanon)

Amongst those activists who had participated in formal political processes outside elections, four described their involvement in various types of institutionalised bodies or processes designed to

²⁶⁹ Following a political discussion on TV, on the radio, or online; taking part in a march or rally; discussing an issue with others in your community; signing a petition; standing for an election in your school or community; taking part in a campaign; reading about an issue in a newspaper, book, or online.

²⁷⁰ Jen from Lebanon, Rainbow from Uganda.

consult children and young people on government policy at different levels. These included a government youth advisory committee in Vietnam, a Children's Municipal Council in Jordan and a Prefectural Advisory Council for Children in Togo. In some of the cases, participation in these mechanisms involved reviewing and commenting on government policy.²⁷¹

"Recently we had sexual offences bill. It really needed to be passed in Parliament, and I was lucky enough to be one of the young people that were invited to be part of the consultation, taking part and asking our views and what do we really want to see in the Bill? What do we really think are the challenges that really need to be worked upon? So, I was able to be part of that." (Rainbow, 22, Uganda)

"I have a title of 'Head of Youth Advisory Committee', so I have a lot of chances to work with the Youth Union and also the Government...Whenever the Government is having any policy or having any project which has impacts on us, we do advisory on that. We read the proposal, see what is going to be some of the obstacles or what is going to be a restriction, does it support everyone, or does it hurt anyone in the community?" (Janell, 24, Vietnam)

Although in most countries, RCRL girls did not report any experience of participation in formal political processes or institutions, Vietnam was an exception. Girls in Vietnam often reported being members of their local Youth Unions. While these are an institutionalised form of participation for children and young people, the activities undertaken by the girls appeared to be focused on addressing community level issues, and are described below.

Three of the activists mentioned that they had had opportunities to participate in high-level processes or events, in all cases facilitated by international organisations. These included participation in human rights review processes at national level,²⁷² presenting at a national consultation workshop on human rights, and participation in an international conference.²⁷³

Several activists had sought contact with political representatives or other political leaders as part of their activism, reflecting a desire to influence decision-making within the formal political sphere. This contact took the form of meeting with or writing to political leaders/parliamentarians,²⁷⁴ or in three cases involved engaging in discussions with policy-makers on TV or radio.²⁷⁵

Experiences of informal political participation

While several activists, therefore, had experience of participating in processes within the formal political sphere, and a number have targeted policy-makers as part of their activism, much of the experience they described has taken place outside the formal political sphere, often aimed at pursuing change at community level. Across a range of contexts, girls and young women activists spoke about their activities directed towards community level awareness raising and social norm change.²⁷⁶ Min from Vietnam and Marchessa from Tanzania both described workshops and campaigns they have organised or been involved in, while Unique from South Sudan mentioned participating in a radio talk show to raise awareness of issues she campaigns on.

Community level participation was also evident amongst the RCRL girls. Some reported having participated in community action on environmental issues. Saidy (16) in the Dominican Republic and Kieu (16) in Vietnam said they had taken part in community clean-up activities, while Rosamie (16) in the Philippines reported participating in a campaign to protect her local environment.

²⁷¹ Janell from Vietnam, Rainbow from Uganda.

²⁷² Min from Vietnam, Rainbow from Uganda.

²⁷³ Aurora from Ecuador.

²⁷⁴ Unique from South Sudan, Anyali from Peru, Jen from Lebanon, Aurora from Ecuador.

²⁷⁵ Rainbow from Uganda, Janell from Vietnam, Unique from South Sudan.

²⁷⁶ Naturel from Togo, Unique from South Sudan, Min from Vietnam, Marchessa from Tanzania.

Many of the RCRL girls in Vietnam reported participating in community level activities through their local Youth Unions (see above), including, most recently, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hang (16, Vietnam) reported that she was Secretary of her Youth Union and a core cadre of her local Schoolgirl Club, which organises capacity building and advocacy activities for girls from ethnic minorities. She described how her participation in her Schoolgirl Club, makes her feel “very happy and excited”. The club’s work to counter negative stereotypes about girls from ethnic minorities is important to Hang.

“By participating in the club, I learn more deeply about women’s and girls’ rights in general and especially ethnic schoolgirls in particular. Normally, my club holds meetings to discuss the issues of strengthening women’s and girls’ rights by propagandizing other schoolmates, families, villages and communes.” (Hang, 15, Vietnam)

Juliana (16) in Brazil was one of the only girls from the RCRL Cohort that reported participating in collective action on an issue that led to positive change. She joined other students and parents in protest over poor staffing and facilities at her school, taking part in class walkouts until the school director acted.

“We left classes very, very early, because we didn’t have a teacher. It was about the lack of... of water, of snacks, of toilets, of everything. So, we made this protest and went to one of our teachers, the Science teacher, who helped us. And when the director saw it, he got mad about it and decided to do something about it. Over time, things got better.” (Juliana, 15, Brazil)

Few participants, across both sets of interviews mentioned participating in any form of marches, rallies, or street demonstrations. Jen from Lebanon was the only young woman to mention participating in a street protest, specifically the 17th of October Revolution in her country. Other girls and young women reported taking part in marches or rallies on days of national importance. Rebeca, a RCRL girl in the Dominican Republic, for example, reported participating on a march in her community for the country’s Independence Day, which is something that she is involved in every year, while Sofia, an activist from Spain mentioned participating in a demonstration for International Women’s Day.

Finally, several of the activists had participated in activities which, although not connected to formal political processes or state institutions, took place within, or were associated with other institutions or organisations. These included participating in school or university elections,²⁷⁷ serving on organisational youth councils and participating in a ‘Young People’s Parliament’ established by Plan International.²⁷⁸ These forms of participation appeared to serve the function of increasing children and young people’s representation within the decision-making of the respective institution/organisation, while also providing young people with an opportunity to develop skills for political participation.

School-based participation was also described by several of the RCRL girls; girls in all of the countries reported participating in school elections, either by voting for candidates or standing themselves for election. Sharina in the Dominican Republic was elected Secretary of her school council, which was a role that she initially did not want. However, after being elected, she said that she took on the position “responsibly” and felt good about being chosen by her peers.

Strategies and tactics used by activists

When describing the activities that they have participated in outside of the formal political sphere, some common themes emerged. Firstly, several of the activists described using a variety of online platforms for the purposes of mobilisation, awareness raising and campaigning; Facebook,

²⁷⁷ Anyali from Peru, Jen from Lebanon.

²⁷⁸ Naturel from Togo, Anna from Germany, Unique from South Sudan.

WhatsApp, TikTok and YouTube were all mentioned.²⁷⁹ However, it should be acknowledged that online activism was not universally embraced, with young women in Germany and Belgium expressing their reluctance to engage through social media (see section 5.3.3).

Secondly, use of creative activities as a means of organising, promoting awareness and expressing political views was mentioned by several of the activists. These included organising festivals and the use of cinema, theatre or public performances;²⁸⁰ a radio soap opera to raise awareness on gender equality;²⁸¹ and handing out balloons and condoms in the street as part of a campaign.²⁸²

Thirdly, when describing their activities, most girls talked about working collectively with their peers, either with groups that they had set up themselves or groups, organisations or networks they had joined, for example at university or groups facilitated by NGOs.²⁸³

The issues of focus for girls' and young women's activism, as might be expected, closely mirrored those identified by this group as priority political issues. Gender equality was mentioned by five of the activists,²⁸⁴ with four specifically mentioning work on gender-based violence/violence against women and girls.²⁸⁵ Other commonly mentioned issues of focus were early pregnancy and child, early and forced marriage and unions,²⁸⁶ girls' education,²⁸⁷ and political participation of girls and women.²⁸⁸

4.3.3 Views on types of participation

In addition to capturing a snapshot of how girls and young women have participated in politics, the qualitative interviews were used to understand, in more depth, how they feel about different types of participation; based on both their experiences, and their views on how effective they feel different modes of participation are. This section is based primarily on the responses from activists, who were specifically asked about their views on different types of participation, although also includes some insights from RCRL girls.²⁸⁹

Overall, the girls and young women reported largely positive views on the importance of voting as a mode of political participation, with some exceptions. The findings suggest that girls and young women may be deterred from voting early in life when they perceive that electoral systems are not conducive to meaningful representation or see electoral processes as corrupt. Responses also indicate that other formal channels for young people's political participation outside elections are widely seen by girls and young women as ineffective and tokenistic.

With some exceptions, activists were generally positive about the role and impact of social movements with many seeing social movements and formal political processes as complementary as well as both being necessary for change to occur. The girls and young women were also largely positive about online activism, although some did express concerns and reservations about participating online.

²⁷⁹ Zoe from Malawi, Aurora from Ecuador, Jen from Lebanon, Naturel from Togo, Janell from Vietnam.

²⁸⁰ Jen from Lebanon, Unique from South Sudan, Sofia from Spain.

²⁸¹ Valentina from Peru.

²⁸² Valentina from Peru.

²⁸³ Anyali from Peru, Jen from Lebanon, Rainbow from Uganda, Anna from Germany, Aurora from Ecuador.

²⁸⁴ Min from Vietnam, Unique from South Sudan, Zoe from Malawi, Marchessa from Tanzania, Rainbow from Uganda.

²⁸⁵ Anyali from Peru, Min from Vietnam, Naturel from Togo, Aurora from Ecuador.

²⁸⁶ Naturel from Togo, Valentina from Peru, Aurora from Ecuador, Unique from South Sudan.

²⁸⁷ Unique from South Sudan, Marchessa from Tanzania, Aurora from Ecuador.

²⁸⁸ Jen from Lebanon, Zoe from Malawi, Rainbow from Uganda.

²⁸⁹ Answers from RCRL girls about their views on voting are also included in this section. RCRL were not asked directly about their views on other types of participation.

4.3.3.1 Formal political participation

Girls and young women in both groups were asked about their views on voting, while the activists, who had more experience of political participation, were also asked about their experience of, and views on, other channels of participation in the formal political sphere.

The majority of activists were eligible to vote and all but one of those who had had the opportunity to vote reported having done so, with around half of the activists expressing mostly or entirely positive views on voting. To varying extents, they valued the fact that voting afforded them some level of political influence, albeit limited.²⁹⁰ Some noted that it was a way to feel involved in state affairs²⁹¹, and to 'choose part of your future' (through electing leaders).²⁹²

“I want to think that [voting] is useful, no? Because yes, if you stop trying, especially so young it's useless... In the end I know that my individual vote doesn't have much weight because there are a lot of people who vote and so on. But, of course, if everyone thinks that their vote is useless, then in the end we all stay at home and the only ones who win are those who think it is.” (Sofia, 24, Spain)

Aurora from Ecuador spoke about voting being an introduction to political life which had made her more aware of and engaged in politics, but also stressed, along with Juliette from Belgium, that it was important to research candidates before voting and that people should be informed and make conscious choices. Juliette also expressed largely positive views about compulsory voting in Belgium, noting that she felt it increases turnout, particularly among excluded communities who may not otherwise vote and hence increases the chance that the needs of all parts of society will be addressed by politicians. The only young woman who mentioned concerns about the voting age was Jen from Lebanon, where the voting age is 21.

Amongst the young women who expressed ambivalence about voting, concerns were raised about limited choices on the ballot paper, and in particular about having to choose between candidates who may not be in line with their views or represent their interests.²⁹³ Sara from Jordan expressed the most negative view of voting, explaining that although she had voted in the past she now intended to abstain as an act of protest, hoping that low turnout would prompt change.

Almost all of the RCRL Cohort girls (aged 15 and 16 when interviewed) stated that they intend to vote when they turn 18. Brazil is the anomaly amongst RCRL countries; since 1988, the legal voting age in Brazil has been 16 and all the Cohort girls will be eligible to vote in the national elections that are due to take place in October 2022. It is notable that while the girls in Brazil were aware that they were old enough to vote, few expressed a clear intention to vote in the upcoming elections. Larissa (16) and Fernanda (16) stated that they want to wait until voting is mandatory (when they turn 18), while Juliana (16) and Natalia (15) mentioned needing to wait until they receive their voting card.

Overall, girls across the Cohort countries viewed voting as important and expressed similar views to the activists. In Vietnam, Togo, and the Philippines all the girls stated that they plan to vote and regard it as a citizen's duty and a way to help their communities. For the girls in Togo, voting was linked to progressing and developing their country, while in Vietnam and the Philippines the cohort girls emphasised the importance of being able to choose their leaders. In El Salvador, girls' views on voting were mixed, Gladys (15) indicated that her main motivation to vote was out of concern for how other people use their vote, possibly demonstrating an awareness of the impacts that abstaining from voting can have on a country's governance. Stephanie (16) also expressed a carefully considered view that citizens should use their vote to elect a “good” person. However, most of the girls who said

²⁹⁰ Aurora from Ecuador, Marchessa from Tanzania, Minerva from Togo, Anna from Germany, Juliette from Belgium, Sofia from Spain.

²⁹¹ Minerva from Togo.

²⁹² Marchessa from Tanzania.

²⁹³ Anna from Germany, Valentina from Peru.

they do not plan to vote were from El Salvador. Nicol (16) in the Dominican Republic had negative views on voting that appear to be influenced by instances of vote buying by candidates in her community.

“If they want to vote, let them vote and if not, don't vote, but don't give them money.” (Nicol, 16, Dominican Republic)

Amongst the activists who had been involved in formal political processes beyond elections, such as policy consultations and youth advisory bodies, the majority expressed generally negative views about their experience. Activists from Peru, Jordan and Vietnam all described not feeling listened to, not being taken seriously by decision-makers and felt that their opinions were not taken on board.²⁹⁴ Valentina from Peru felt that she had been invited to meetings out of ‘political lip service’, while Rainbow from Uganda felt that the impact of her engagement in a policy consultation on a sexual offences bill was minimal as she has been invited to participate too late in the process.

Only one young woman, Min from Vietnam, felt like her voice was heard, although others spoke about how the experience was positive for them personally, and allowed them to gain skills and knowledge.²⁹⁵

Activists were also asked about how effective they see formal modes of political participation in achieving change on the issues they care about, even if they haven't had personal experience of participating through these channels. The girls and young women expressed mixed views in response to this question. Around a third felt that formal modes of participation were essential to achieving the changes they were seeking, with some seeing it as an important complement to the collective action they were involved in (as highlighted in the quote from Aurora in Ecuador below).²⁹⁶ Juliette from Belgium reflected that young people need to work with and through organisations in order to get politicians to listen, as organisations have credibility that young people don't.

“Yes, it is necessary, and I think it is the indispensable complement to ... the collective, social struggle, the social collectives, and then to move on to formality so that it is written down, so that there are precedents, so that the new generations can adapt it to their reality.” (Aurora, 20, Ecuador)

Mixed sentiments were also expressed about the likelihood and speed of change happening through formal political processes. Min from Vietnam expressed her hope that she would see change over time, and that ‘small actions can add up to bigger changes’. In contrast, Sara from Jordan was already disillusioned with the prospect of change happening, stating that she had given up participating (in formal processes) because she hasn't seen changes.

“Yeah, of course I participated, and I've been participating for like three or four years. And then I stopped because I saw that we are giving our opinions, but they are not considered. It's as simple as that.” (Sara, 24, Jordan)

Some girls, who were more sceptical of the potential for influencing change through formal processes, pointed to the barriers to access and other flaws in the formal spaces for political participation. Anna from Germany, for example, explained that formal politics is not an effective tool for change as it is filled with barriers and limited participation for women. She contrasted this with social movements, which she saw as more accessible. Valentina from Peru and Min from Vietnam also commented on the formal spaces established for children and youth participation in politics, reflected that these ‘don't work’ and are not taken seriously by decision-makers.

²⁹⁴ Valentina from Peru, Sara from Jordan, Janell from Vietnam.

²⁹⁵ Aurora from Ecuador, Sara from Jordan.

²⁹⁶ Aurora from Ecuador, Marchessa from Tanzania, Minerva from Togo.

“In Vietnam, we have the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union and the children's council for youth and children to speak up...to share their perspective and share their views and opinion about politics or something about their life. But I think that this doesn't really work.” (Min, 20, Vietnam)

4.3.3.2 Social movements

Activists were also asked about their views on how effective they felt social movements were in achieving change on the issues they care about. In response, many of the girls and young women expressed ambivalent, and often nuanced views. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that understandings of ‘social movements’ varied significantly amongst the girls and young women interviewed. Some spoke about global or national movements that they had participated in or were aware of, citing specific examples including the Fridays for Future climate movement;²⁹⁷ pro-choice movements;²⁹⁸ the 17th October Revolution in Lebanon;²⁹⁹ and the 50/50 campaign (for equal representation of women in cabinet in Malawi).³⁰⁰ However, other participants, when asked about social movements, spoke mainly about local, community level organising³⁰¹ and one young woman, from South Sudan, was not familiar with the concept of social movements.

The RCRL girls generally regarded the most effective forms of participation to be collective action in the form of marches and demonstrations, campaigning, signing petitions, and community dialogue on issues. For girls in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Brazil, Benin, and Togo taking part in community dialogue on key issues was appealing not only from a learning perspective, as a way to build their knowledge on important topics, but also as a more effective way to address problems in their communities than individual action.

“When we discuss a problem with others, we can quickly and easily find solutions because everyone will bring their own ideas to help solve the problem.” (Lelem, 16, Togo)

In the Philippines in particular, girls felt that there was power in uniting in protest to express grievances to leaders who would have to listen. Jocelyn (15) explained that she had seen the effectiveness of rallies in the Philippines via social media and referred to the People Power Revolution³⁰² as an example of how collective action had brought about change in her country. For others, even though they were not completely sure how or if rallying would influence political outcomes, it was still something that they were curious to try. On the local level, Christine (16) viewed rallying as a method of holding leaders to account and ensuring they act in community interests.

“To express our thoughts and to let the barangay³⁰³ captain know our needs and to remind him of the promises that he must keep.” (Christine, 16, Philippines)

The area where some of the girls in the Philippines Cohort live has a history of political violence which may have impacted the views of Maricel (15) and Rosamie (16) who both said that the idea of participating in a march or rally was “scary”. Rosamie explained that few people in her community participate in rallies because they are afraid, however, she still thinks that this is an effective way to influence change and would join a rally if others did too.

“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'll do it alone.” (Rosamie, 16, Philippines)

²⁹⁷ Anna from Germany, Juliette from Belgium.

²⁹⁸ Anna from Germany, Aurora from Ecuador.

²⁹⁹ Jen from Lebanon.

³⁰⁰ Zoe from Malawi.

³⁰¹ Minerva from Togo, Min from Vietnam, Rainbow from Uganda.

³⁰² A series of popular nonviolent demonstrations in the Philippines in 1986 that led to the end of Ferdinand Marcos' 20-year dictatorship and the reintroduction of a democratic government.

³⁰³ In the Philippines, a barangay is a small, territorial and administrative district. It is the most local level of government.

In addition to the power that marching, or rallying has due to strength in numbers, girls also highlighted that this is a way for young people, who are unable to vote because of their age or whose voices are not generally heard or listened to, to express their views to their leaders.

“Participating in a march or rally because the authorities do not receive young people when they go to their homes to present their problems.” (Anti-Yara, 16, Togo)

Several of the activists felt that social movements were influential in achieving change. Some could point to examples of legal and policy change because of social movements, such as changes to abortion laws in Germany.³⁰⁴ Others pointed to changes at community level as a result of their own activism with their peers, such as discernible increases in gender equality.³⁰⁵ Aurora from Ecuador spoke of longer-term changes in her country which have occurred as a result of the feminist movement.

However, other girls and young women expressed more negative or ambivalent views about social movements. Jen from Lebanon for example, felt that in her experience, social movements are not effective as they often don't have a strategy or planning. Similarly, Minerva from Togo noted that although social movements can have a positive impact, a lack of focus or clear objectives can mean that they may result in negative or no impact. Juliette from Belgium also felt that youth-led movements were not taken seriously; citing the example of Fridays for Future school strikes, she reflected that more effort from authorities went into stopping the protests than listening to the young people protesting.

Several girls and young women reflected on the need for movements to connect with formal political processes so that the changes they seek are institutionalised and sustained. Aurora from Ecuador, for example, felt that movements have limited effect on their own, and that if demands are not supported by those in power, then legal and policy change won't happen, while Juliette from Belgium observed the need for social movement actors to have connections or work through organisations to convert demands into policy change. Similar to answers given in response to the question about the effectiveness of formal processes, many activists saw social movements and formal political processes as complementary, with both being necessary for change to occur. Social movements were seen as valuable for uniting people around a cause, and for triggering discussions about an issue.

4.3.3.3 Online political participation

The majority of activists expressed largely positive views about the role and impact of online political participation, although some did highlight a range of concerns. Most of the girls and young women felt that online movements can have a positive impact as they reach more people and/or are noticed by political leaders.³⁰⁶ Sofia from Spain also described how social networks allows her to connect with likeminded people that she might not otherwise meet, while Minerva from Togo described how young people's wider online engagement may lead them towards more political types of engagement and participation:

“Online activism is...a factor in contributing to change, in the sense that now the internet is already accessible to everybody. When a person is on social media, sometimes it's for entertainment or sometimes it's to talk about important things. Everyone has their own reasons for going on the internet, but when you go on the internet and you come across a movement, you can feel touched a little bit, feel interested. And I think that if people are active on social networks and talking about women's leadership issues and so on, it can help a lot of

³⁰⁴ Anna from Germany.

³⁰⁵ Rainbow from Uganda, Janell from Vietnam.

³⁰⁶ Zoe from Malawi, Sofia from Spain, Min from Vietnam, Naturel from Togo, Minerva from Togo, Rainbow from Uganda, Marchessa from Tanzania, Aurora from Ecuador.

young girls and young men to find their way. And I also think that this is the easiest way today to reach people quickly, a large number of people.” (Minerva, 23, Togo)

A few of the girls were more sceptical about the impact of online movements.³⁰⁷ Juliette from Belgium, for example, noted that while sharing material online was necessary for spreading awareness about issues, she was concerned that people think they have ‘done their bit’ by sharing, although it is notable that she was the only young woman to touch on the idea of ‘slacktivism’.

Several other concerns about online participation were also raised: Sofia from Spain mentioned that while the internet was useful for learning about issues, it is important to be aware of misinformation; two young women felt that social media companies applied their policies differently depending on the political issue in question;³⁰⁸ while concerns were also raised by activists in German and Jordan about digital footprints – as highlighted by Sara’s comments:³⁰⁹

“My friends share a lot of things about the Jordanian context and the Jordanian political issues. But when they try, for example, to travel outside of the country or to be employed by a new employer to find a new opportunity, they delete the tweets or they untweet it because it's a little bit risky” (Sara, 24, Jordan)

4.4 INFLUENCES ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Evidence from the literature demonstrates that a range of factors are associated with girls’ and young women’s political participation. Whether or not girls and young women decide to participate in politics, and the modes of participation they choose, have been shown to be influenced by both societal and personal factors. These include, for example, social norms around political participation; fear of violence, abuse or harassment, accessibility and inclusiveness of political systems and processes; presence or absence of role models; political interest; confidence; and level of knowledge and skills. Many of these factors interact in complex ways.

This section explores a selection of the factors known to have an influence on girls’ and young women’s political participation. Across the three methods, a range of questions were asked which sought to uncover insights about the factors which might enable or inhibit participation. The section firstly presents findings on girls’ and young women’s perceptions of which challenges to their participation they feel are most significant in their context. It then, in turn, presents findings related to the societal level factors influencing girls’ and young women’s participation, and the individual level factors influencing their participation.

Both societal and individual factors may have an influence on girls’ and young women’s sense of political efficacy (i.e., their belief in their own ability to influence the course of politics), which in turn is a key predictor of willingness to participate in politics.³¹⁰ Findings which suggest an impact on political efficacy are highlighted throughout this section.

³⁰⁷ Jen from Lebanon, Juliette from Belgium, Anna from Germany.

³⁰⁸ Sara from Jordan, Sofia from Spain.

³⁰⁹ Anna from Germany, Sara from Jordan.

³¹⁰ I. R. Sarieva, ‘How to measure perceived political efficacy? A three-component scale’, *Psychology, Journal of the Higher School of Economics*, 15:3, 477-490, available at: [How to measure perceived political efficacy? a three-component scale \(cyberleninka.ru\)](https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kak-izmerit-politicheskuyu-effektivnost)

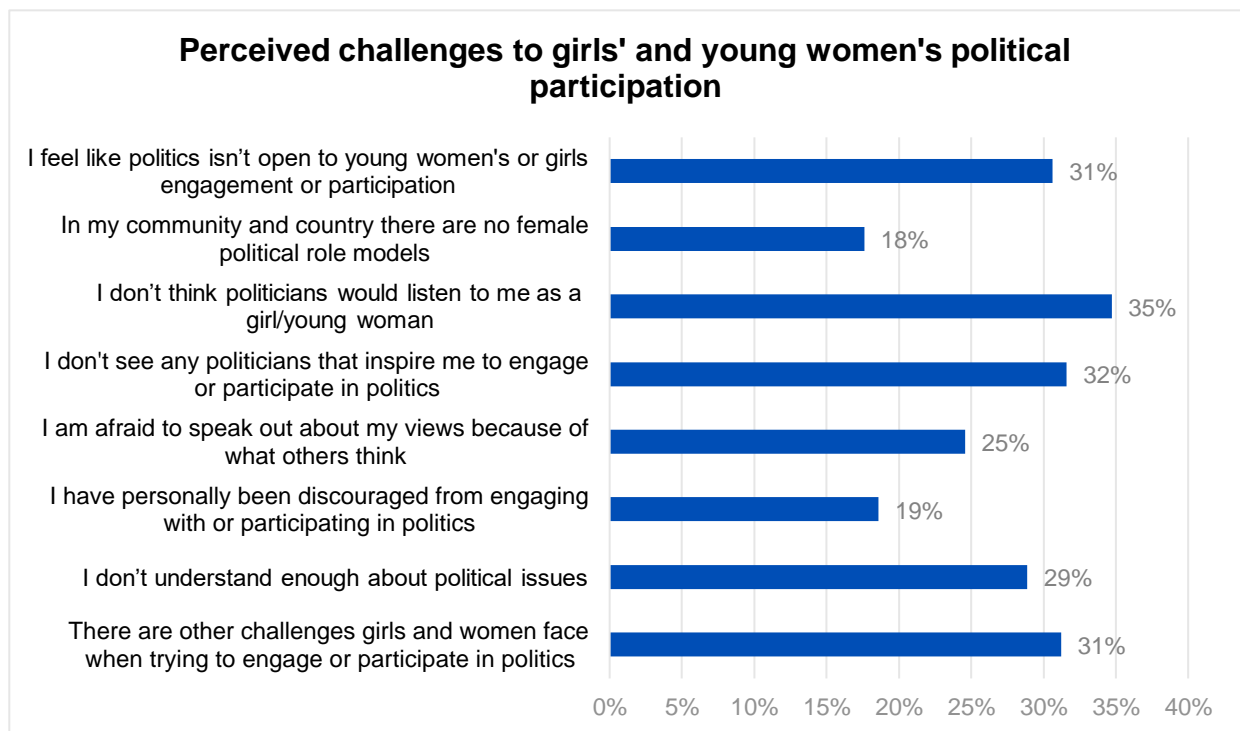
4.4.1 Girls' and young women's views of key challenges to their political participation

In order to identify which factors girls and young women are most likely to perceive as inhibiting their political participation, survey respondents were provided with a list of challenges and asked to select all that they felt applied.

94 per cent of survey respondents identified that girls and young women may face diverse challenges when trying to participate in politics.³¹¹ Among the options listed, the top challenges chosen by respondents relate to politicians not listening to girls and young women, a lack of politicians to inspire engagement and politics not being open to young women or girls' participation. 70 per cent of respondents who say that politics is not open to young women or girls' participation also report that they feel sad, stressed, worried or anxious or physically unsafe due to the decisions of their political leaders.

19 per cent of respondents said that they have personally been discouraged from participating. 77 per cent of respondents who have been personally discouraged from participating also report that they feel sad, stressed, worried or anxious or physically unsafe due to the decisions of their political leaders.

Figure 21: Perceived challenges to girls' and young women's political participation³¹²



Analysis by contextual differences

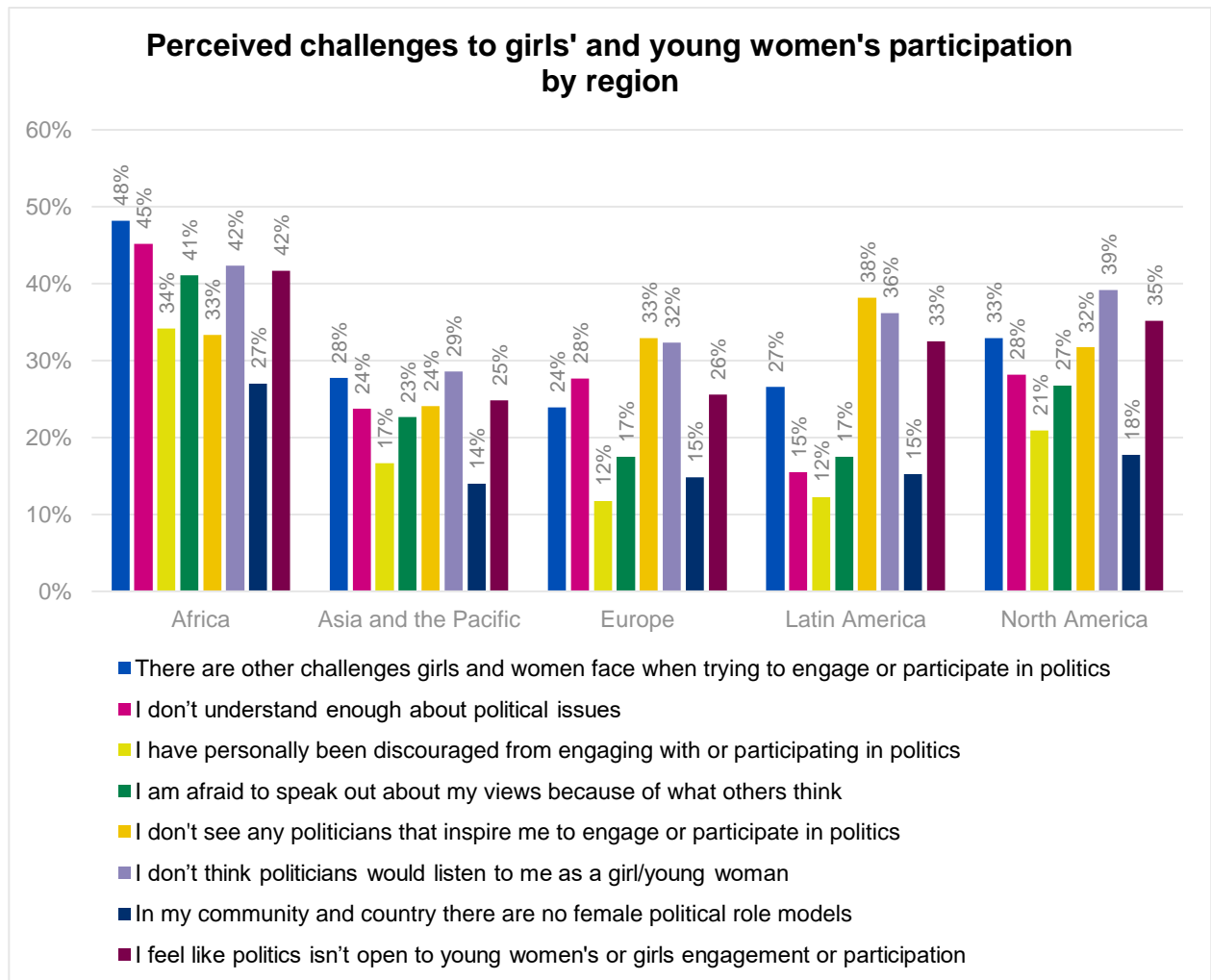
Regional differences

³¹¹ Only 6 per cent of respondents said that they experienced no challenges to participation, remaining respondents all identified at least one challenge.

³¹² Percentages in the chart below relate to 26,946 respondents.

Overall, challenges to participation are mentioned more frequently by respondents from the Africa and the Middle East and North American regions compared to respondents from Europe, and Asia and the Pacific, suggesting that the overall level of challenges is greater in some regions than others. However, response patterns vary by question. Respondents from Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, were more likely than those in other regions to report that they don't see any politicians that inspire them to participate, a finding that reiterates the negative perceptions of political leaders expressed by girls in this region (see section 5.2.1) and indicates that these perceptions may be discouraging girls and young women from participating.

Figure 22: Perceived challenges to girls' and young women's participation by region³¹³



Differences by country income group


Overall, a mixed picture emerged relating to patterns in responses by country income group. For example, the percentage of girls and young women reporting politics as inaccessible is relatively similar across all income groups, however girls in low- and lower-middle-income countries are the


³¹³ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=8,862; Asia and the Pacific: n=6,327; Africa and the Middle East: n=5,948; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3,837; North America: n=1,972.

most likely to report being personally discouraged from participating in politics. 52 per cent of girls in low-income countries also report that other challenges to the ones listed may impact on participation.

Table 31: Perceived challenges to girls' and young women's participation by country income group ³¹⁴

Statements	Low-income	Lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	High-income	Global average
I feel like politics isn't open to young women's or girls' engagement or participation	32%	34%	33%	28%	31%
In my community and country there are no female political role models	25%	19%	15%	16%	18%
I don't think politicians would listen to me as a girl/young woman	35%	35%	36%	34%	35%
I don't see any politicians that inspire me to engage or participate in politics	29%	27%	38%	33%	32%
I am afraid to speak out about my views because of what others think	36%	32%	17%	20%	25%
I have personally been discouraged from engaging with or participating in politics	30%	27%	12%	13%	19%
I don't understand enough about political issues	45%	31%	15%	28%	29%
There are other challenges girls and women face when trying to engage or participate in politics	52%	35%	27%	25%	31%

 Country income groups with the highest levels of agreement with statements

 Country income groups with the lowest levels of agreement with statements

Differences by country civic space rating


Similarly, a mixed picture emerges when considering response patterns by country civic space rating. Generally, challenges are more frequently mentioned by girls and young women in repressed and


³¹⁴ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=2,943; Lower-middle-income: n=7,467; Upper-middle-income: n=3,837; High-income: n=12,699.

obstructed civic spaces. In some cases, responses recorded in countries with a closed civic space mimic those of respondents in countries with narrowed or open civic spaces-

Table 32: Perceived challenges to girls' and young women's participation by civic space rating³¹⁵

	Closed	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global average
I feel like politics isn't open to young women's or girls' engagement or participation	30%	33%	34%	29%	25%	31%
In my community and country there are no female political role models	13%	21%	19%	15%	16%	18%
I don't think politicians would listen to me as a girl/young woman	25%	33%	38%	34%	32%	35%
I don't see any politicians that inspire me to engage or participate in politics	19%	30%	32%	34%	33%	32%
I am afraid to speak out about my views because of what others think	27%	29%	28%	19%	19%	25%
I have personally been discouraged from engaging with or participating in politics	19%	26%	22%	12%	14%	19%
I don't understand enough about political issues	25%	34%	27%	26%	30%	29%
There are other challenges girls and women face when trying to engage or participate in politics	41%	37%	35%	23%	27%	31%

 Civic space contexts with the highest levels of agreement with statements

 Civic space contexts with the lowest levels of agreement with statements

³¹⁵ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Open: n=5,141; narrowed: n=6,528; obstructed: n=8,895; repressed: n=5,706; closed: n=676.

Differences by level of female representation in parliament

Overall, there is a relationship between the percentage of women in national parliaments and the number of girls and young women identifying specific challenges to participation. On average, the lower the representation of women in parliament, the higher the percentage of girls and young women that note challenges to participation. However, while there are significant and meaningful differences between having almost no representation of women in parliament (i.e., under 20 per cent of women in parliament) versus having more than this, the differences become smaller as representation increases. For example, while 43 per cent of respondents living in countries with less than 20 per cent of women in parliament say that politics is not open to young women's or girls' engagement, 30 per cent say this in countries with 20 to 39 per cent of women in parliament and 26 per cent say this in countries with above 40 per cent of women in parliament. It is important to note that even in settings with high levels of representation, challenges persist. For example, a similar percentage of respondents report not understanding enough about political issues across countries with 20 to 39 and above 40 per cent of female representation in parliament.

Table 33: Challenges by percentage of women in parliament³¹⁶

	Percentage women in parliament			Global average
	Under 19%	20% - 39%	Above 40%	
I feel like politics isn't open to young women's or girls' engagement or participation	43%	30%	26%	31%
In my community and country there are no female political role models	24%	17%	16%	18%
I don't think politicians would listen to me as a girl/young woman	40%	33%	35%	35%
I don't see any politicians that inspire me to engage or participate in politics	34%	29%	35%	32%
I am afraid to speak out about my views because of what others think	35%	25%	19%	25%
I have personally been discouraged from engaging with or participating in politics	29%	18%	14%	19%
I don't understand enough about political issues	37%	27%	28%	29%
Other challenges	47%	30%	26%	31%

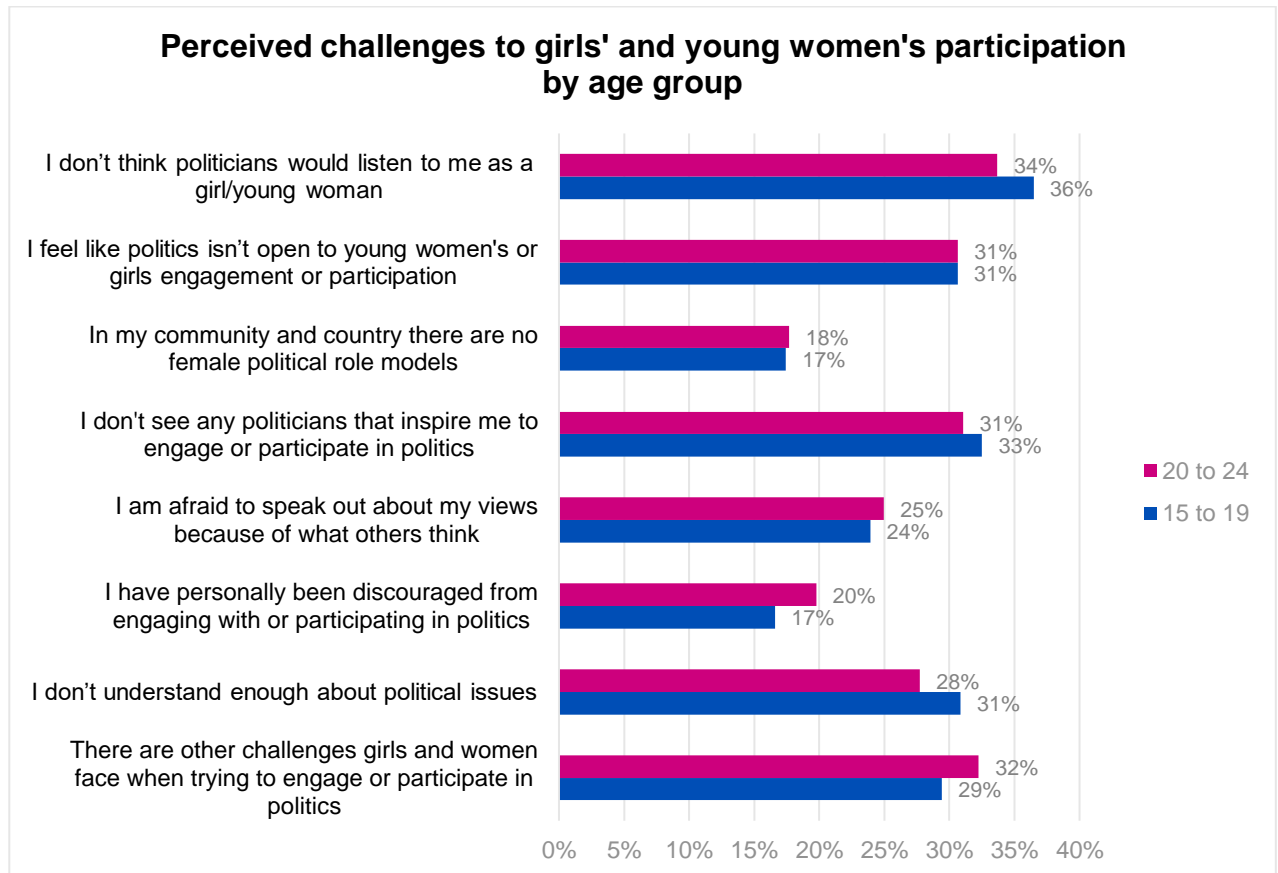
Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by age group

³¹⁶ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Respondents living in countries with under 19 per cent of women in parliament: n=3,914; in those with between 20 to 39 per cent of women in parliament: n=14,989; in those with over 40 per cent of women in parliament: n=8,043.

Overall, younger respondents (in the 15 to 19 age group) are more likely to report concerns about not being listened to as a potential challenge to participation (36 per cent compared to 10 per cent among those aged 20 to 24). On the other hand, older respondents (aged 20 to 24) are more likely to say they do not see politicians which inspire them, admit they are afraid to speak out about their views for fear over what others may think and say they have been personally discouraged from engaging with or participating in politics.

Figure 23: Perceived challenges to girls' and young women's participation by age group³¹⁷



Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Overall, respondents identifying as any of the characteristics above are more likely to perceive challenges to their participation compared to the general population of respondents. Specifically, these respondents are more likely to perceive politics as a space which is not open to girls' or young women's participation, that they do not see politicians that inspire them to engage, that they are afraid to speak out for fear of what others may think and that they have been personally discouraged from participating in politics. Compared to the general population, participants among all groups described above are also more likely to say they do not understand enough about political issues.

³¹⁷ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: 15 to 19: n=9,968; 20 to 24: n=16,978 .

Table 34: Perceived challenges to girls' and young women's participation by demographic characteristics³¹⁸

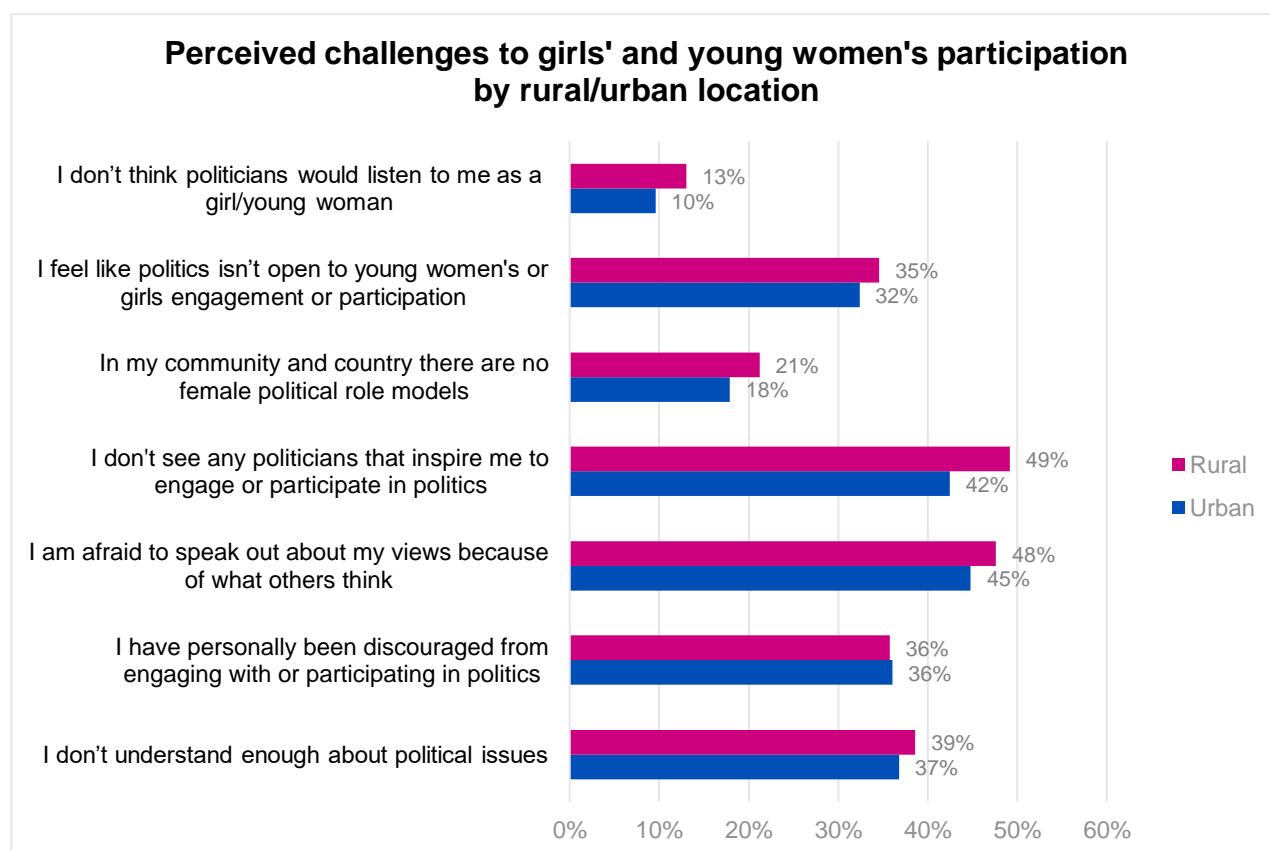
	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
I feel like politics isn't open to young women's or girls' engagement or participation	32%	37%	32%	35%	32%	38%	31%	39%
In my community and country there are no female political role models	18%	18%	18%	23%	18%	22%	18%	24%
I don't think politicians would listen to me as a girl/young woman	11%	6%	10%	12%	10%	13%	9%	17%
I don't see any politicians that inspire me to engage or participate in politics	42%	48%	43%	47%	42%	50%	42%	51%
I am afraid to speak out about my views because of what others think	43%	54%	44%	51%	44%	52%	44%	48%
I have personally been discouraged from engaging with or participating in politics	34%	42%	35%	41%	34%	42%	35%	40%
I don't understand enough about political issues	35%	44%	36%	43%	36%	42%	36%	42%
Other challenges	34%	35%	34%	33%	34%	35%	34%	37%

Differences by urban or rural areas

³¹⁸ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Identifies as LGBTQI+: n=3,212; Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n= 18,479; identifies as having a disability: n=1,192; Does not identify as having a disability: n=20,499; Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=2,159; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=19,532; Identifies as a religious minority: n=2,478; Does not identify as a religious minority: n=19,213.

Challenges to participation are generally more likely to be expressed by girls and young women living in rural areas. The exception to this is where girls and young women report having been personally discouraged from engaging or participating – this is 36 per cent among both urban and rural populations.

Figure 24: Perceived challenges to girls' and young women's participation by rural/urban location³¹⁹



4.4.2 Societal barriers to girls' and young women's political participation

Responses to the previous question provide clear evidence that girls and young women perceive a range of societal level barriers that present challenges to their participation. To better understand these societal barriers, participants across all three methods were asked a range of additional questions.

Firstly, in order to provide an indication of the prevailing social norms surrounding girls' and young women's political participation, survey respondents were asked about how acceptable they believed it was for girls and young women in their community to participate in a range of activities. They were also asked whether they believed it was easier or more difficult for girls and young women to participate in politics compared to older generations of women in their community. This question was intended to provide insights into whether challenges and norms around girls' participation had changed over time. In both sets of qualitative interviews, participants were asked open questions about barriers and challenges to girls' and young women's political participation, and about whether they feel they can influence the decisions of their political leaders. Responses from these questions which relate to societal level factors are presented in this section.

³¹⁹ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Urban: n=13,618; Rural: n=5,979.

Overall, the findings in this section show that social norms which discourage girls' and young women's political participation are pervasive. While the majority of survey respondents believe that it has become easier for girls to participate in politics over time, insights from qualitative interviews reveal how norms linked to both age and gender create barriers for girls' participation. In line with the findings from the previous survey question, not being listened to or not being taken seriously is the most common concern for girls and results in a diminished sense of political efficacy.

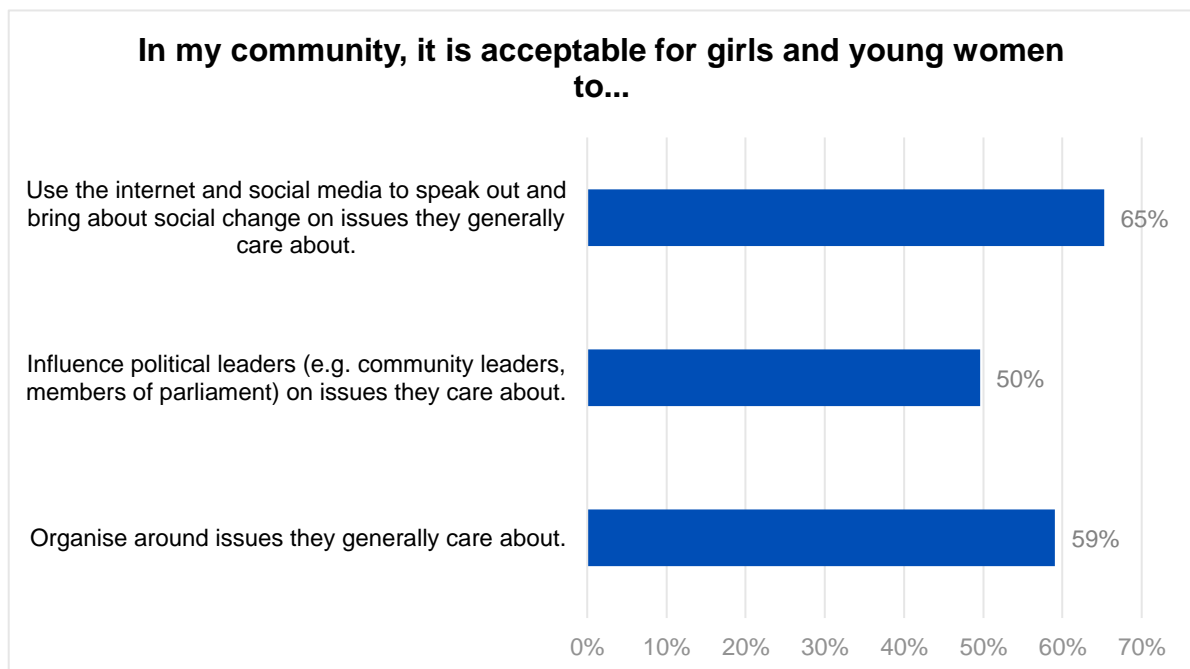
The findings from the qualitative interviews also show that girls and young women are deterred from participating by fear of violence, harassment, or abuse, and by political systems and mechanisms for participation which are neither inclusive nor accessible. Finally, the responses from activists also reveal the myriad ways in which restrictions on civic space are presenting barriers and challenges for politically active girls and young women.

Findings from the survey

4.4.2.1 Social norms surrounding girls and women's political participation

Overall, only around 1 in 2 girls and young women report that their communities view it as acceptable for them to participate and engage in politics in diverse ways.³²⁰ The most acceptable 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 per cent of respondents said would be acceptable, while 59 per cent reported that it would be acceptable for them to organise around issues they cared about. Only 50 per cent reported that it is acceptable for girls and young women to influence political leaders.

Figure 25: Acceptability of girls and young women's political participation³²¹



Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

³²⁰ Note that responses answer options related to acceptability of girls and young women becoming a political leader are analysed in section 5.2.2 under political leadership.

³²¹ Responses in the below figure relate to a total eligible sample: n=25,877.

Overall, acceptability of girls and young women participating in the activities listed was reported to be highest in the African region: more respondents from this region identify actions as acceptable in their communities. Acceptability appears to be lowest overall in Asia and the Pacific and Latin America, however this pattern differs according to response item.

Table 35: Acceptability of girls and young women's political participation by region ³²²

	Africa	Asia and Pacific	Europe	Latin America	North America	Global Average
To organise around issues they care about.	81%	48%	58%	42%	58%	59%
To influence political leaders (e.g., community leaders, members of parliament) on issues they care about.	67%	44%	48%	32%	52%	50%
To use the internet and social media to speak out and bring about social change on issues they generally care about.	83%	55%	62%	60%	65%	65%



Region with the lowest level of acceptability of actions



Region with the highest level of acceptability of actions

Differences by country income group

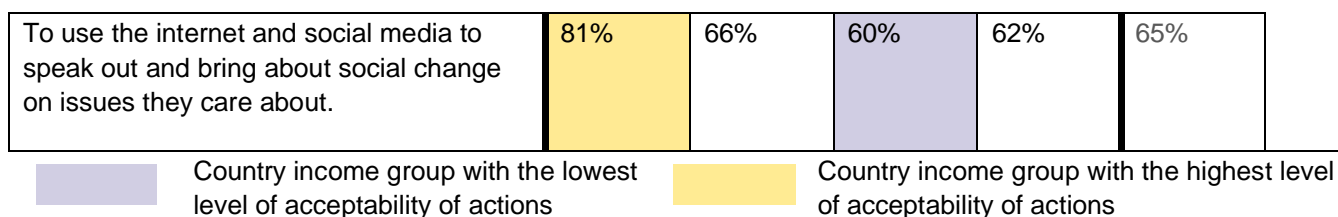
Acceptability of engaging in different political actions appears to generally decline from low, to lower-middle and upper-middle-income countries, but lower-income and high-income countries appear similar. Respondents from low- and lower-income countries generally report the highest levels of acceptability of engaging or participating in politics in the ways set out; respondents in upper-middle-income countries are least likely to report that engagement or participation in politics is acceptable.

Table 36: Acceptability of girls and young women's political participation by country income group ³²³

	Low-income	Lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	High-income	Global average
To organise around issues they generally care about.	83%	60%	42%	57%	59%
To influence political leaders (e.g., community leaders, members of parliament) on issues they care about.	68%	53%	32%	48%	50%

³²² Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=8,446; Asia and the Pacific: n=6,167; Africa and the Middle East: n=6,006; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3,447; North America: n=1,811.

³²³ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=3,007; Lower-middle-income: n=7,661; Upper-middle-income: n=3,447; High-income: n=11,762.



Differences by level of female representation in parliament

Associations between what girls and young women report as locally acceptable and the overarching representation of women in parliament are challenging to interpret. Our data suggests that on average, as representation of women in parliament increases, the percentage of girls and young women reporting that participating and engaging in politics is accepted in their communities decreases.

Table 37: Acceptability of girls and young women's political participation, by percentage of women in parliament³²⁴

	Percentage of women in parliament			Global average
	Under 19%	20 to 39%	Above 40%	
To organise around issues they care about.	74%	56%	58%	59%
To influence political leaders (e.g., community leaders, members of parliament) on issues they care about.	58%	48%	49%	50%
To use the internet and social media to speak out and bring about social change on issues they care about.	80%	62%	64%	65%

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Respondents identifying as LGBTQI+ are statistically significantly less likely to say that it is acceptable for them to participate or engage in politics. Differences between the percentage reporting this as compared to the general population are, however, low. The pattern is relatively similar for participants identifying as having a disability.

Participants identifying as a minority are slightly more likely to say that it is acceptable for them to participate or engage in politics when compared to the general population.

The only item where acceptability seems to be similarly high among all groups and comparable or higher to the general population is related to the use of internet and social media to speak out and bring about social change.

³²⁴ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: under 19 - n=3,813; middle n=14,491; above is n=7,573.

Table 38: Acceptability of girls and young women's political participation by demographic characteristics³²⁵

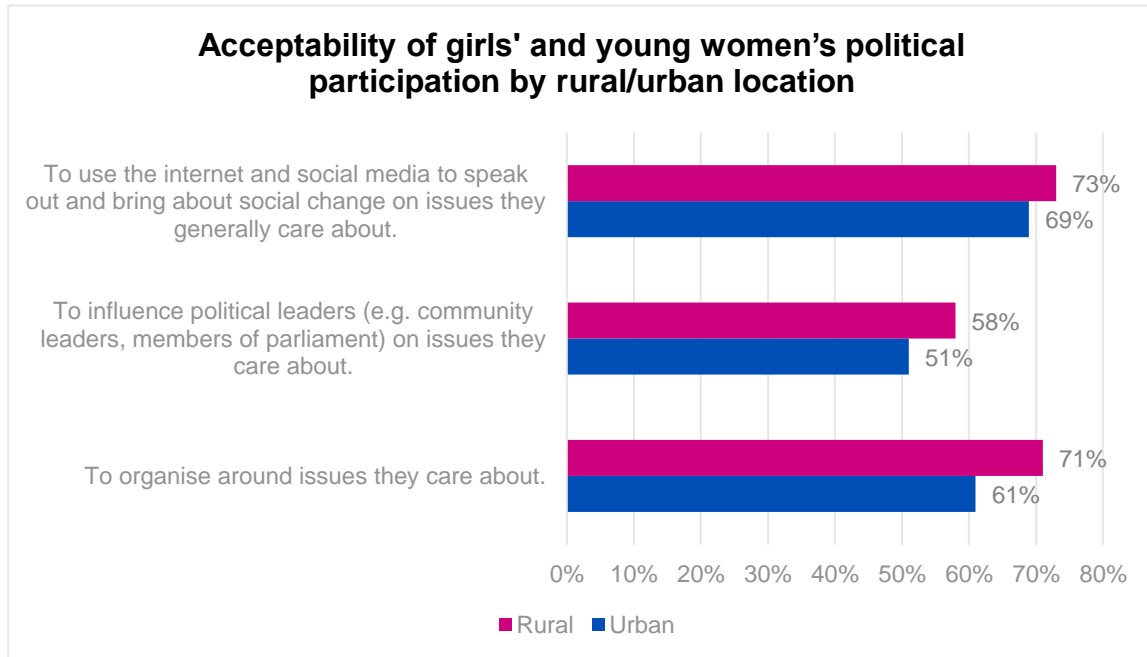
	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
To organise around issues they generally care about.	63%	59%	62%	60%	62%	65%	62%	65%
To influence political leaders (e.g., community leaders, members of parliament) on issues they care about.	52%	48%	51%	52%	51%	54%	51%	55%
To use the internet and social media to speak out and bring about social change on issues they care about.	68%	68%	68%	65%	68%	69%	68%	71%

³²⁵ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Identifies as LGBTQI+: n=3,065; Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n= 18,268; identifies as having a disability: n=1,114; Does not identify as having a disability: n=20,219; Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=2,078; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=19,255; Identifies as a religious minority: n=2,473; Does not identify as a religious minority: n=18,860.

Differences by urban or rural areas

Overall, respondents living in rural areas are statistically significantly more likely to say that it acceptable for them to engage or participate in politics in the ways set out above.

Figure 26: Acceptability of girls and young women's political participation by rural/urban location³²⁶

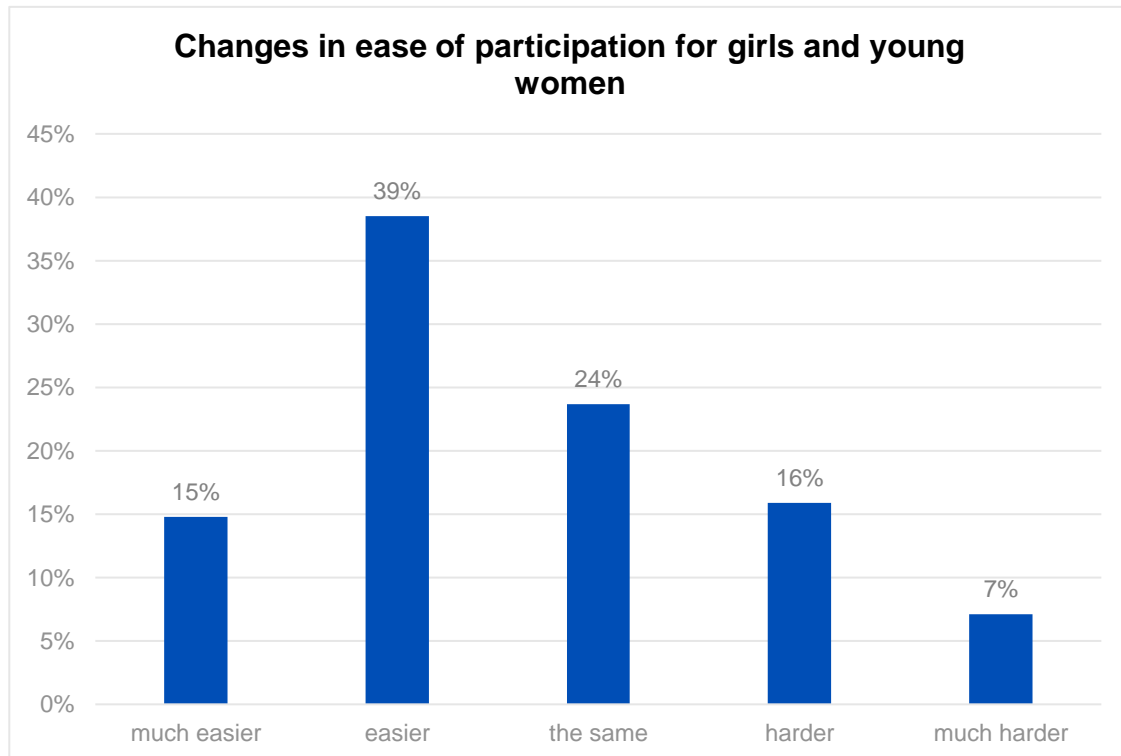


4.4.2.2 Changes to norms and barriers over time

Despite the challenges and pervasive norms limiting girls' and young women's participation evidenced in responses to previous questions, 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. This suggests that norms around girls' participation have shifted over time, and/or barriers and challenges to participation have lessened and opportunities to participate have increased.

³²⁶ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Urban: n=13,427; Rural: n=5,891.

Figure 27: Changes in ease of political participation for girls and young women³²⁷



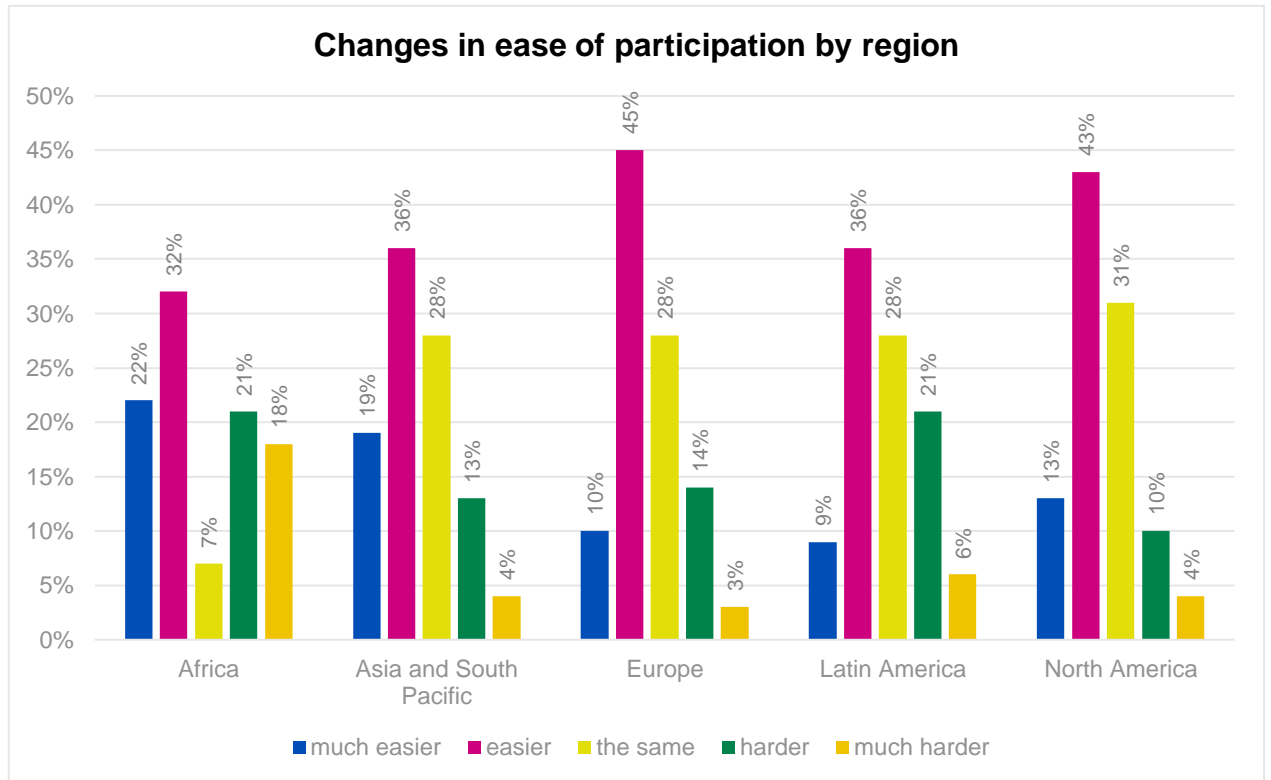
Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

Overall, respondents across all regions report participation becoming easier compared to older generations. However, respondents in the African region are more likely to choose either extreme (harder vs. easier) compared to respondents in other regions, where a relatively high percentage of respondents report things staying the same or becoming easier.

³²⁷ Percentages in the chart below relate to the total sample of 28,751 respondents.

Figure 28: Changes in ease of political participation by region³²⁸

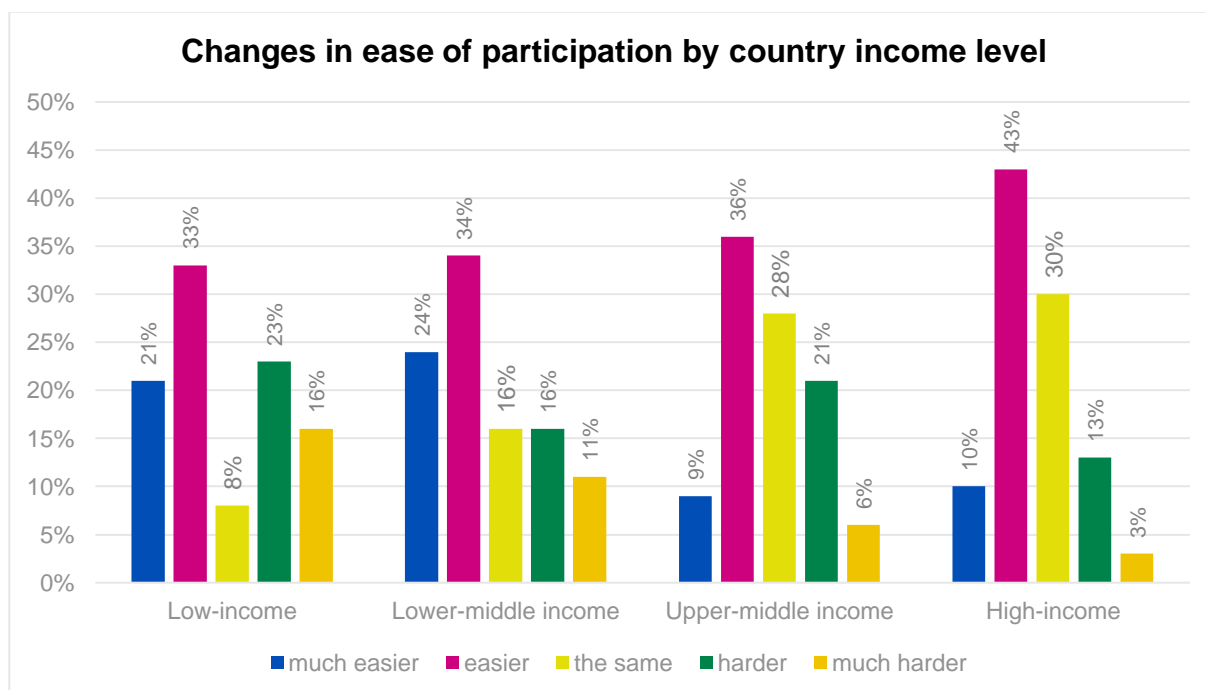


Differences by country income group

Overall, respondents across all country income groups report it is becoming easier to participate in politics. However, respondents are likelier to say that ease of participation has stayed relatively the same compared to older generations in upper-middle and high-income countries.

³²⁸ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=9,500; Asia and the Pacific: n=7,000; Africa and the Middle East: n=6,153; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=4,000; North America: n=2,098.

Figure 29: Changes in ease of political participation by country income level³²⁹



Differences by country civic space rating

Overall, respondents across all civic space country groups report that it is becoming easier to participate in politics.

Table 39: Changes in ease of political participation by civic space rating³³⁰

	Closed	Repressed	Obstructed	Narrowed	Open	Global average
much easier	38%	21%	15%	9%	11%	15%
easier	47%	28%	37%	44%	44%	39%
the same	8%	18%	21%	32%	28%	24%
harder	6%	18%	20%	12%	14%	16%
much harder	1%	16%	8%	3%	3%	7%

³²⁹ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Low-income: n=3,087; Lower-middle-income: n=8,066; Upper-middle-income: n=4,000; High-income: n=13,598.

³³⁰ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Open: n=5,500; narrowed: n=7,000; obstructed: n=9,221; repressed: n=6,030; closed: n=1,000.

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Overall, responses are relatively similar or slightly more favourable among those identifying with any of the above characteristics and the general population.

Table 40: Changes in ease of political participation by demographic characteristics³³¹

	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
much easier	17%	12%	16%	14%	16%	18%	16%	18%
easier	39%	45%	40%	41%	40%	43%	40%	40%
the same	20%	26%	20%	24%	21%	19%	21%	17%
harder	17%	14%	16%	14%	16%	14%	16%	17%
much harder	8%	4%	8%	6%	8%	6%	7%	8%

Insights from qualitative interviews

When discussing the barriers and challenges to their political participation and their own feelings of influence over political leaders' decisions, girls and young women described a range of societal level barriers; these focused particularly on challenges linked to social norms, fear of violence, harassment and abuse, unresponsive political systems, and challenges posed by limited civic space.

Social norms

A common theme, which stood out in both sets of interviews, was that social norms associated with both age and gender contribute to the challenges girls face. Many of the barriers mentioned in the context of girls' and women's political participation echo the barriers and challenges girls perceive women leaders facing (see section 4.2.2). This suggests that these barriers apply across girls' and women's political participation, and do not only confront those aspiring to political leadership. It also indicates that girls' and young women's early experiences of political participation are often marred by similar challenges to those faced by older women and are compounded by their age.

Across both groups of girls and young women, the challenge of 'not being listened to', or 'not being taken seriously' was frequently mentioned, in line with the survey finding that, across all contexts, this

³³¹ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Identifies as LGBTQI+: n=3,342; Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n=19,512; identifies as having a disability: n=1,230; Does not identify as having a disability: n=20,651; Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=2,230; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=20,651; Identifies as a religious minority: n=2,574; Does not identify as a religious minority: n=20,280.

is the greatest challenge to girls' and young women's political participation. This was the main barrier to participation faced by the RCRL girls, and was cited by girls in Brazil, Philippines, Togo and Vietnam. Activists from Uganda, Germany and Peru also mentioned this as a key challenge. Respondents from both groups attributed this challenge to their age and/or gender.

"I remember that in an interview that talked about the rights of children and adolescents, we were the guests and the interviewer told us not to participate because she preferred to speak to a professional, because we don't know the subject very well and it was just to talk about the reality of children and adolescents." (Aurora, 20, activist, Ecuador)

Some of the girls and young women spoke about this challenge mostly in terms of their age, referring to politics being seen as 'adult business'. Larba (16) and Anti-Yara (16), RCRL girls from Togo, said they would face active criticism or discouragement due to their age, while Amanda from Brazil felt that she wasn't being heard because:

"... they think we're too young to talk about it, that we don't know anything." (Amanda, 15, RCRL girl, Brazil)

Other girls felt that they weren't listened to because of their gender. Sofia (15, Brazil), Sharina (16, Dominican Republic) and Jasmine (15, Philippines) described how gender norms in their community dictated that political issues were "male business". Yen (16, Vietnam) also alluded to issues around gender and people not caring about girls' issues, stating that ***"nobody cares about my opinion."*** Larissa (16, Brazil) explained that this challenge resulted from a combination of both age and gender.

Several of the responses provided a clear indication that the experience or fear of not being listened to by decision-makers, and by adults more generally, has a direct impact on their sense of political efficacy. When asked if they felt they would be able to influence the decisions of political leaders, many of the RCRL girls felt they were too young to have influence: ***"It's a no for now...I don't think I'd be able to do it without a companion. Maybe the mayor won't listen, it's just embarrassing...They might think that I'm still young and that I haven't talked to them before."*** (Darna, 16, Philippines). Amanda (15, Brazil) and Juliana (16, Brazil) suggested that gender as well as age also played a role in not being able to influence politics in their communities:

"No, because it's a girl talking, and they'll think it's not a priority." (Amanda, 15, Brazil)

"I don't think so, because our community is a very sexist community." (Juliana, 16, Brazil)

Several of the activists interviewed also cited norms around age and gender when describing a range of ways in which their participation has been discouraged or opposed. Sara from Jordan and Jen from Lebanon both mentioned opposition to their activism from within their family due to their gender, while young women from Malawi, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, and Ecuador all described community resistance to their activism on account of their age and gender.

"There was a time we went to a place...talking about how women can participate in being leaders in the society. We got several opinions like, 'Do you even know what you're doing? You are very young. So I'm pretty sure you don't know.' People ignore you because of your age." (Marchessa, 22, activist, Tanzania)

Activists in Malawi and South Sudan additionally noted that community members were resistant to their efforts to campaign on issues such as gender equality or child marriage as they were seen as going against social norms.

"It's very difficult for the communities to perceive the information that the girls and young women are sharing. We have some staunch Muslims in the communities...I'm also a Muslim, but I'm trying to make sure that you talk to them about issues of gender equality, of giving

girls equal opportunities, of letting girls continue with their studies, instead of forcing them into early marriages. It's a very tricky thing... to talk to this person about the things that they have been considering normal for a long period." (Rainbow, 22, Uganda)

Fear of violence, harassment, or abuse

Girls and young women from both groups described how they have observed violence, harassment or abuse against women political leaders, including against activists, which in some cases has discouraged their participation. Anna from Germany mentioned her fear of sexual harassment for speaking out publicly, particularly online, mentioning that she felt hesitant to openly put forward her views online.³³² Jen from Lebanon additionally noted that in her context it is difficult to find safe spaces for girls and women to meet and organise, while Juliette from Belgium expressed concerns about the potential for sexual assaults against girls and young women at street demonstrations. However, none of the other activists identified challenges within social movements on account of their gender or age.

Fear of violence, harassment and intimidation was also raised by some of the RCRL girls; Ladi (16) and Fezire (16) in Togo raised concerns that girls may be subject to violence for raising issues with authorities in their community, while Darna (16), a RCRL girl from the Philippines described being intimidated by male peers. In her role as secretary of her school's supreme council, this intimidation meant that she struggled to assert her authority among her classmates. Darna also spoke about being "blamed" and "scolded" by her teacher for making a mistake during her duties, which had discouraged her participation.

"When I was the leader of our classroom, it was hard because others don't follow, especially the boys. I was scared because they might punch me [laughs].... When I think of the time my teacher scolded me, I felt like I don't want to be a leader." (Darna, 16, Philippines)

Accessibility and inclusiveness of political systems

Across both groups, girls and young women spoke about how political systems are structured in ways which limit their ability to voice their opinions and demands, which in turn affects their sense of political efficacy. Barbara (16, Benin) and Margaret (16, Benin) referred to the hierarchal structures in place which created difficulties for them to influence and thus meant they could not go to the authorities with their issues. Similarly, some of the activists spoke about how they didn't feel that they had equal access to political processes.

In some cases, responses from RCRL girls suggested that the mechanisms through which girls can have influence are opaque; girls in Latin America and the Caribbean and Tene (16) in Togo for example said they did not know or felt that they would not know how to go about influencing their leader. Other girls, however, did talk about channels they had where they were able to influence their leaders. Across most countries, girls said they would bring issues to their local leaders through formal community mechanisms; girls described going to the barangay captain (Philippines), Youth Commune (Vietnam) and the village chief (Togo). Some girls in Togo and Vietnam described going to a trusted person that would act on their behalf, such as an Imam or teachers.³³³ While the presence of, and girls' awareness of, such mechanisms may contribute to a feeling of political efficacy, most confirmed neither they, nor any girls they knew, had used these mechanisms to raise concerns in practice raising questions about how open these mechanisms are to girls' opinions and concerns in reality.

Only one girl mentioned that she had attempted to raise an issue with local leadership, and the experience was not positive. Christine (16, Philippines) described an example of how she had

³³² Aurora from Ecuador, Anna from Germany, Rainbow from Uganda, Minerva from Togo, Zoe from Malawi.

³³³ Nana-Adja (Togo) and Hoa and Nhi (Vietnam) mentioned teachers and Azia (Togo) referred to an imam.

brought her concerns about the poor roads to school to the barangay captain. However, he had not acted on her request, and she recalled being scolded by another government employee for speaking out. She expressed why she had the courage to speak out: ***“When I know I’m right, I don’t cry. I also learned from my parents because if you cry, you will be repeatedly oppressed, and you should have the courage to defend yourself to other people.”***

Other RCRL girls expressed a broader view that their political leaders don’t listen or care; a view which appears to reflect a wider disillusionment with the political system:³³⁴ ***“Because no matter what we say, they won’t listen. For example, when someone came to complain, nothing happens...”*** (Reyna, 15, Philippines).

Restrictions on civic space

A final set of barriers mentioned by the activists, although not by any of the RCRL girls, related to civic space restrictions; these were mentioned by almost half of the activists. In some cases, young women had been personally targeted, threatened or investigated by authorities. Jen from Lebanon vividly described one of her experiences after she screened a movie:

“I made some movies, but the municipality just tried to stop me. They ask the security to come and arrest me. They say that I’m trying to make porn videos. And they said a lot of things that wasn’t right. I was 17 years here. So, they called me from the security in Lebanon and asked me to go to the office in order to investigate me... I said that I have a paper that allows me to make this activity in this school. And I presented everything... So, they said, ‘How old are you?’ I said that I’m 17-years-old, only... And I continue the activity, and nothing happened with me, but they tried to talk about me, on the social media [they said] a lot of bad things, that I’m a big, bad girl. And I was trying to present porn videos for kids in the country” (Jen, 23, Lebanon)

Min from Vietnam also described being approached by police after making a presentation in a public forum and explained how she felt uncomfortable that speaking out had brought her to the attention of the authorities.

“After presenting at that workshop, there was a policewoman, she reached to me, and she just wanted to have my contact. So, it’s just like ... how to explain that? She was a policewoman and if they wanted to have your contact, it means that they want to pay more attention to you just because you just presented something about human rights between so many people.” (Min, 20, Vietnam)

Other activists, from a wide range of countries, described the various ways in which restrictions on civil society affect their own activism and that of others in their context. These ranged from the threat of jail for activists;³³⁵ to clampdowns by authorities on street protests³³⁶ and restrictions on filming police officers³³⁷ to legal restrictions which limit their ability to organise or mean that they require approval from authorities for their activities.³³⁸ Two girls, from Vietnam and Peru noted that restrictions put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19 had also presented a challenge, preventing them from meeting other activists in person or running campaigns in communities.³³⁹

Min from Vietnam, Sara from Jordan and Jen from Lebanon all described their concerns about the lack of rights to freedom of expression in their contexts, while Juliette from Belgium expressed

³³⁴ Spoken about in El Salvador, Brazil and the Philippines.

³³⁵ Min from Vietnam.

³³⁶ Juliette from Belgium.

³³⁷ Sofia from Spain.

³³⁸ Min from Vietnam, Sara from Jordan, Rainbow from Uganda.

³³⁹ Anyali from Peru, Janelle from Vietnam.

frustration at hostile media coverage surrounding young people's activism.

“...you cannot organise a group of more than 10 people without you getting, let's say, a letter from police for them to understand what you're trying to do. So that, too, is a very big challenge. So, there is a gap between the young people, the community, and then the police trying to make sure that we both understand each other, and we both understand our agendas.” (Rainbow, 22, Uganda)

4.4.3 Confidence and capacity to participate

In addition to societal level factors, evidence shows that girls' and young women's likelihood of participating in politics is strongly influenced by individual level factors, which shape their political identities, values and behaviours and affect their feelings of political efficacy.

In order to understand the individual level factors which may influence girls' and young women's willingness to and likelihood of participating in politics, participants across the three methods were asked a range of questions. Firstly, in order to assess girls' and young women's feelings of political efficacy, survey respondents were asked to rate how confident they feel doing a range of participation activities,³⁴⁰ while both sets of qualitative interviews asked participants whether they felt they could influence the decisions of their political leaders.

Secondly, in order to gain insights into girls' and young women's political socialisation, survey respondents were asked two questions about political knowledge. Firstly, they were asked to rate their levels of knowledge about a range of topics related to the political system (formal and informal). They were then asked a subsequent question about where they had obtained this knowledge. As part of the qualitative interviews, participants were asked about how and with whom they discuss or hear about political issues. Girls and young women were also asked whether they have observed differences in how girls and women discuss political issues, in comparison to men and boys.

Finally, participants in the qualitative interviews were asked what skills and knowledge they feel would enable them to better participate in politics.

4.4.3.1 Confidence and feelings of political efficacy

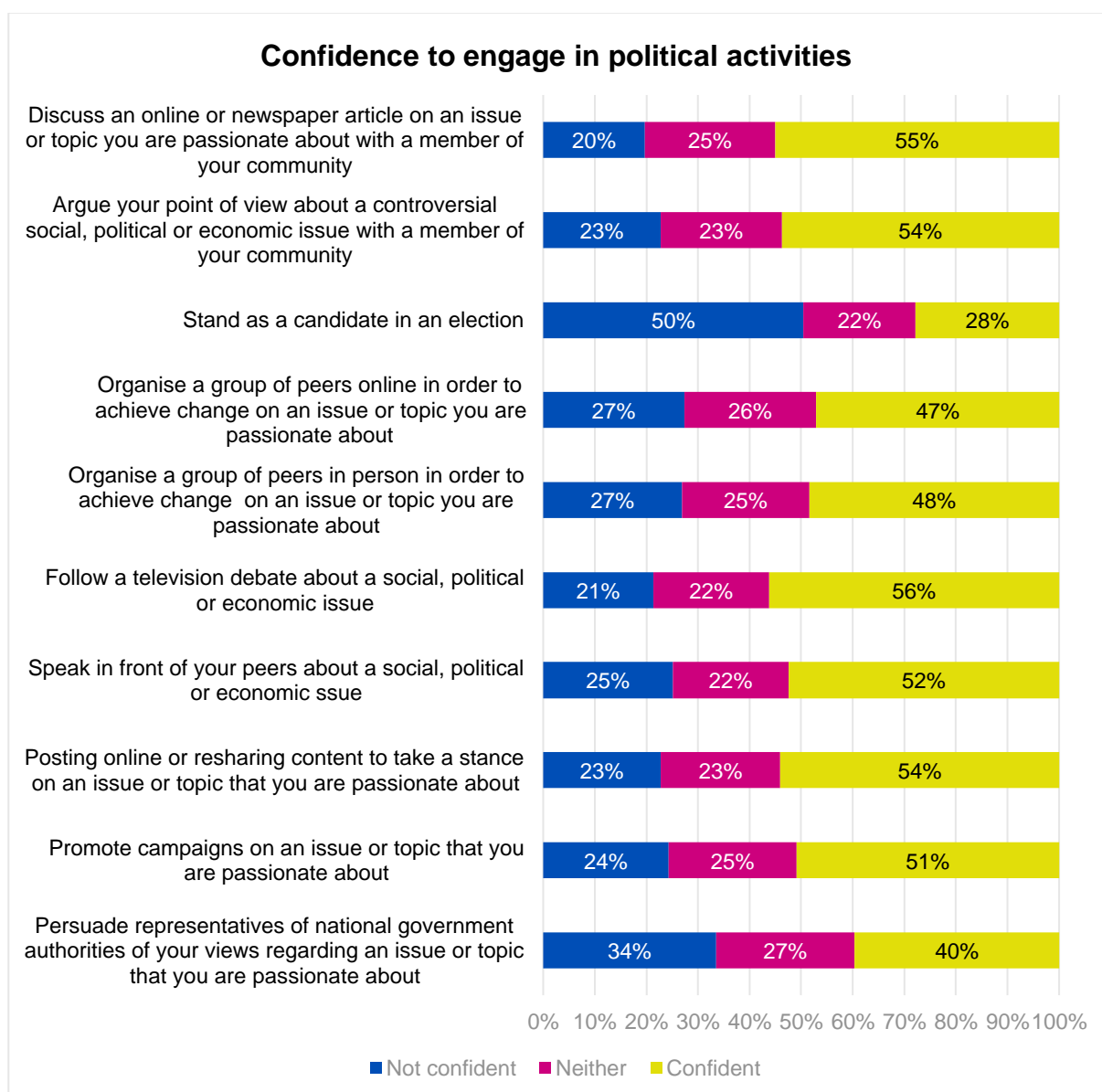
Findings from the survey

Overall, just under half of survey respondents reported being not confident or unsure about their confidence in carrying out diverse political participation or engagement activities.

Respondents report that they are least confident about standing as a candidate in an election, or persuading representatives of national governments or authorities of their own views regarding a topic they are passionate about; both 'higher effort' activities within the formal political sphere.

Respondents were most confident in carrying out activities such as following a television debate about a social, political, or economic issue; discussing an online or newspaper article on an issue they care about; arguing their point of view about a controversial issue; posting or resharing content online to take a stance on an issue they care about.

³⁴⁰ Political efficacy has both external and internal dimensions. This question assessed girls' and young women's internal political efficacy (i.e their perception of their own or their group's abilities to influence politics). This question was based on the International Civic and Citizenship Education Survey and the Perceived Political Self Efficacy Scale.

Figure 30: Confidence to engage in political activities³⁴¹

Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

Overall, there are limited differences in responses according to geographic region. Respondents across the African region are overall most likely to say they are confident in carrying out the diverse types of activities listed. Respondents in Europe are least likely to say they are confident to stand as a candidate in an election, or to organise groups of peers online or in person. Similarly, respondents from Europe and North America are least likely to say they are confident in speaking out in front of their peers about a social, economic, or political issue.

³⁴¹ Percentages in the chart below relate to the total sample of 28,751 respondents.

Differences by country income group

Respondents in low- and lower-income groups are overall more likely to report being confident in activities listed compared to respondents in other country income groups.

Differences by country civic space rating

Respondents in countries with a repressed and obstructed civic space are overall more likely to report being confident in activities listed compared to respondents in other civic space country groupings.

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Respondents identifying as LGBTQI+, or as having a disability are overall less likely to report being confident across activities listed. This is in contrast to respondents identifying as a racial, ethnic or religious minority. These respondents are overall slightly more likely to report feeling confident in carrying out activities listed as compared to the general respondent population.

Insights from the qualitative interviews

When asked about whether they felt they could influence the decisions of their political leaders, girls and young women across both groups spoke about individual-level factors which affected their sense of political efficacy, including their confidence and levels of knowledge and skills. Their responses paint a mixed picture of whether they feel confident in their own abilities to influence political leaders, but also point to some ways in which girls' feelings of political efficacy can be increased.

Responses from some of the RCRL girls suggested a lack of confidence deters their participation. Many girls in the Philippines mentioned that girls' lack of confidence was a key barrier, sharing that they were too shy or embarrassed to speak with those in positions of leadership or power: **"I'm embarrassed. I might not be heard"** (Michelle, 15, Philippines). Some of the activists on the other hand expressed high levels of confidence in their own abilities; indeed, those activists who appeared to feel most politically efficacious spoke in terms of belief in their own abilities, rather than structural factors.³⁴²

"Yes, I know I can...when I get a chance in expressing about the issues ... given a chance to address issues." (Marchessa, 22, Tanzania)

Amongst the RCRL girls, knowledge of their rights, and seeing themselves as rights-holders, appeared to increase their feelings of political efficacy. All girls who spoke about themselves as rights-holders said that they could influence their leaders or representatives. This language was used mainly by girls in Vietnam, although Thea (16) in Benin also used rights-based rhetoric to explain why she had the ability to influence. Hang (16, Vietnam) said she knew that children had rights to express their views and ideas from her civic education classes. Thea also highlighted that she learned this concept at school: ***"Yes, at school we were taught that we also have rights. So, I can go to the delegate to give my opinion on a decision we have to take. I can write a letter to the district chief and the mayor. If I go to the delegate and he has not listened to me, I can look for my fellow students who have the same worries as me and we will go together to the head of the district."*** In contrast, girls who believed they lacked rights expressed lower feelings of efficacy. Michelle (15, Philippines) believed because she was young, she had no rights and therefore could not attempt to influence those in power.

³⁴² Minerva from Togo, Naturel from Togo, Marchessa from Tanzania, Unique from South Sudan.

Several of the activists also spoke about how working collectively increased their feelings of political efficacy. Young women from Belgium, Vietnam, Peru and Ecuador all spoke about how they were more likely to be able to influence decisions when they worked with others, or with an organisation. Aurora from Ecuador, when sharing an example of successfully influencing political leaders' decisions in the context of an abortion law being amended, emphasised that this was achieved through civil society working collectively.³⁴³ Juliette from Belgium noted that, in addition to working collectively, the ability to influence was affected by political connections:

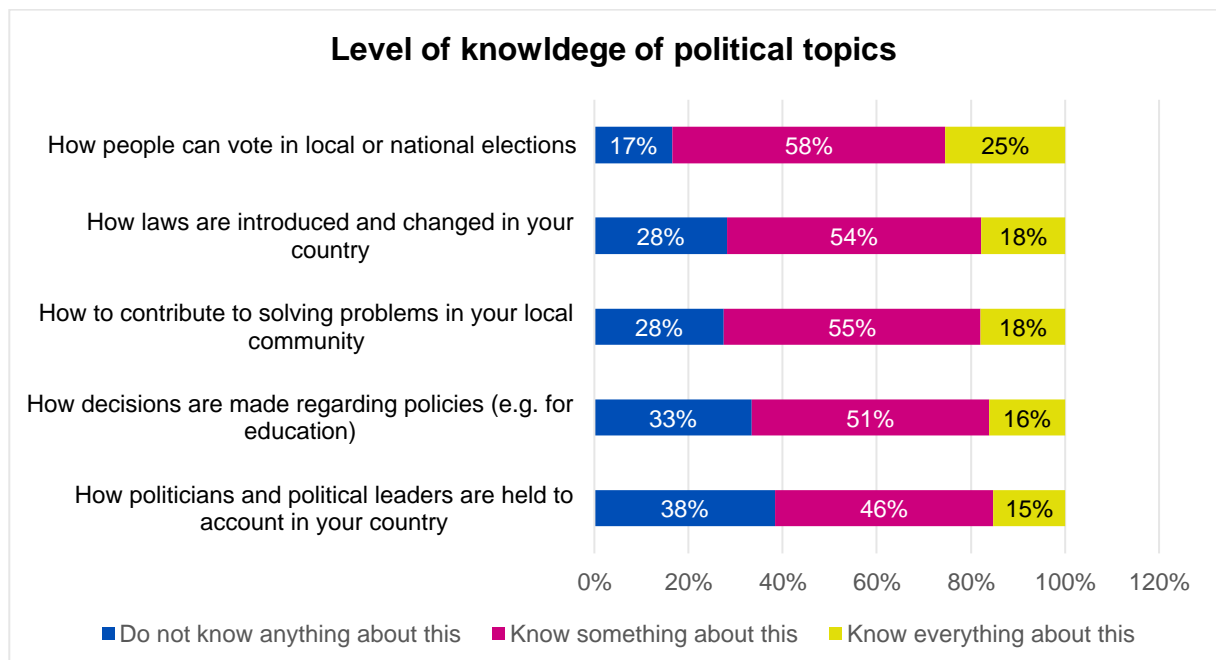
“I think as an individual, I'm not [able to influence]. I think the only reason that I feel that sometimes I might have some influence is through Plan International... So I feel that's the only way for me to sometimes get in contact with politicians and this way to influence their decision-making or to have a little voice or to represent, not necessarily myself, but just the ideas that me and the other young people stand for... And I think even if you come together with a big group, I think it's still not possible unless you know the right people or have the right connections or go through an organisation” (Juliette, 21, Belgium).

4.4.3.2 Girls' and young women's political socialisation

Findings from the survey

When asked about their levels of political knowledge, the majority of the survey respondents reported knowing at least something about diverse topics associated with political participation. Knowledge of how people can vote in local or national elections appears to be highest overall, with respondents reporting knowing least on how politicians and political leaders in their country can be held to account. This aligns with the finding that voting was the most common participation activity overall for survey respondents.

Figure 31: Level of knowledge of political topics³⁴⁴



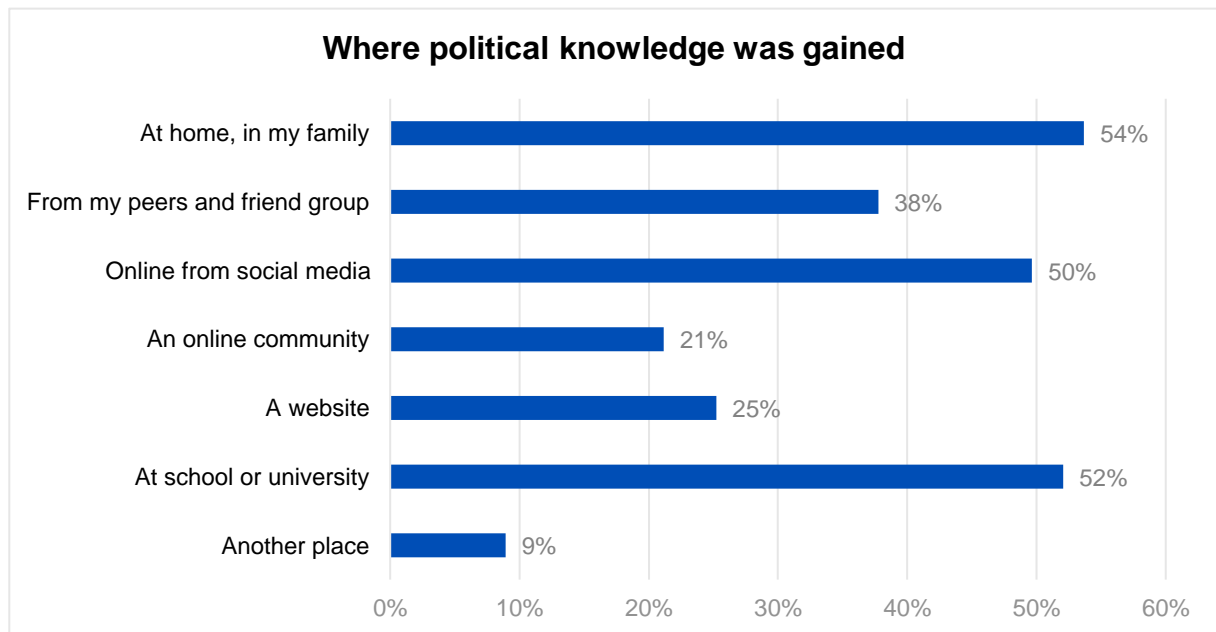
When asked where their knowledge on these diverse topics was gained, approximately 54 per cent of respondents said they had gained this at home in their family, 52 per cent said they had gained it at

³⁴³ Aurora from Ecuador.

³⁴⁴ Percentages in the chart below relate to the total sample of 28,751 respondents.

school or university and 50 per cent said they gained it online from social media. This finding echoes findings from the literature that the family is the most significant domain for children's political socialisation, followed by school. The proportion of girls and young women obtaining knowledge relevant to political participation from social media is noteworthy. As evidence shows that young people's political participation increasingly takes place online, this finding is perhaps unsurprising, yet the widespread use of social media as a source of political information may increase the chances of girls and young women being exposed to misinformation and disinformation about political participation.

Figure 32: Where political knowledge was gained³⁴⁵



Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

There are significant differences in how respondents from different regions answered this question. For example, over 50 per cent of respondents in the African region reported not knowing anything about how laws are introduced and changed in their countries, how decisions are made regarding policies or how political leaders can be held to account. Respondents in Asia and the Pacific are more likely to report knowing everything on most of the topics listed above. In contrast, respondents in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and North America are most likely to say they know something on these topics.

³⁴⁵ Percentages in the chart below relate to respondents who responded that they know something or anything about any of the political topics listed in question 12 (n=26,973).

Table 41: Level of knowledge of political topics by region³⁴⁶

		Africa	Asia and Pacific	Europe	Latin America	North America	Global average
How people can vote in local or national elections	Do not know anything	28%	11%	15%	13%	19%	17%
	Know something	52%	53%	64%	61%	59%	58%
	Know everything	20%	36%	21%	27%	21%	25%
How laws are introduced and changed in your country	Do not know anything	52%	19%	23%	21%	28%	28%
	Know something	39%	55%	58%	66%	55%	54%
	Know everything	9%	26%	19%	14%	17%	18%
How to contribute to solving problems in your local community	Do not know anything	31%	19%	33%	23%	30%	28%
	Know something	55%	51%	54%	60%	56%	55%
	Know everything	14%	29%	13%	17%	14%	18%
How decisions are made regarding policies (e.g., for education)	Do not know anything	52%	21%	33%	26%	34%	33%
	Know something	39%	51%	54%	59%	53%	51%
	Know everything	9%	28%	13%	15%	13%	16%
How politicians and political leaders are held to account in your country	Do not know anything	56%	28%	38%	32%	38%	38%
	Know something	35%	46%	50%	54%	48%	46%
	Know everything	8%	26%	12%	15%	14%	15%



Regions with the lowest levels of knowledge of topics

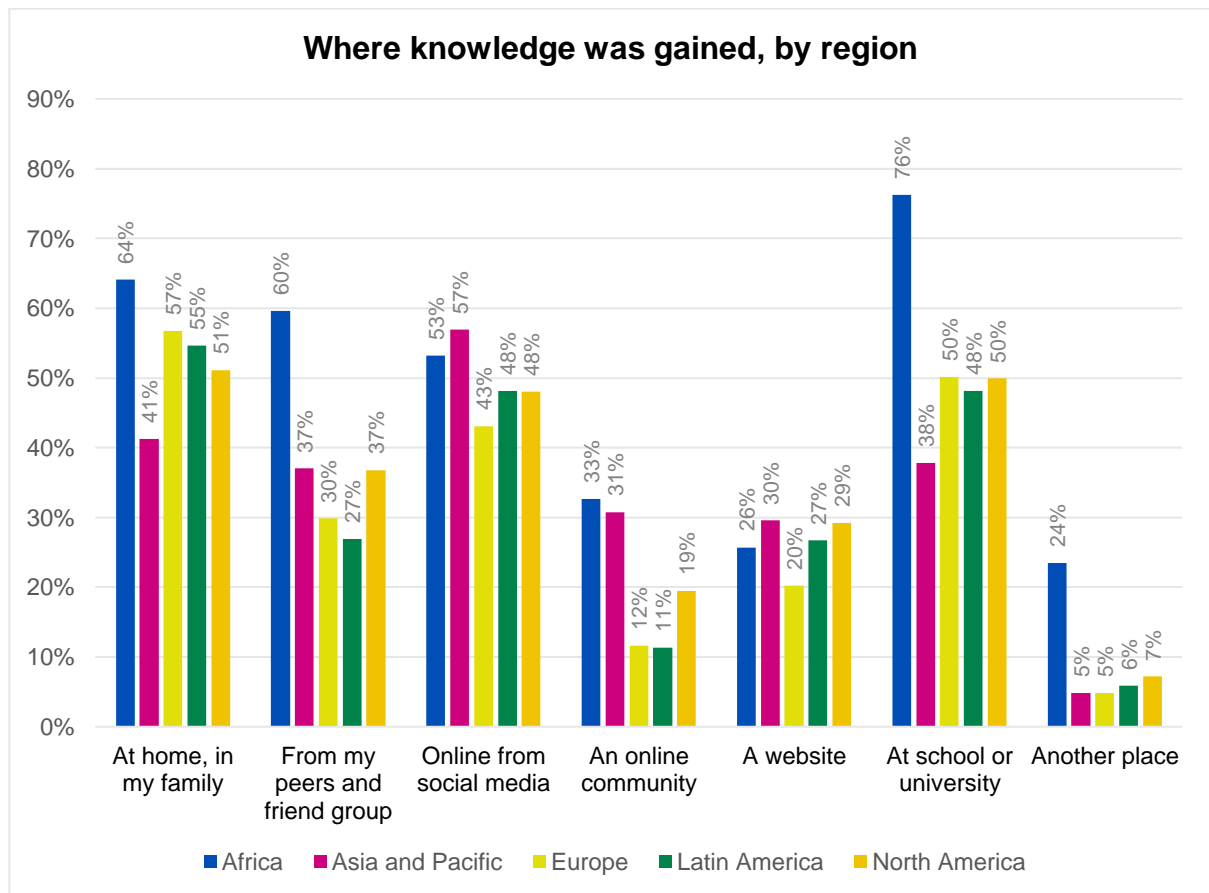


Regions with the highest levels of knowledge of topics

³⁴⁶ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=9,500; Asia and the Pacific: n=7,000; Africa and the Middle East: n=6,153; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=4,000; North America: n=2,098.

When asked where they gained their knowledge, respondents across different regions answered this question differently. Respondents in Africa were most likely to say they gained knowledge at school or university. Across all regions, differences in proportion of respondents identifying online social media as a place of learning are small, suggesting this is a universally used and accepted channel for learning. Online communities are instead preferred primarily in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and North America.

Figure 33: Where knowledge was gained, by region³⁴⁷



Differences by country income group

Similar to the above, respondents in low-income settings are most likely to say they do not know anything about the topics listed. Over 60 per cent of respondents in these regions say they do not know how laws are introduced and changed in their country, how decisions are made regarding policies and on how to hold politicians and political leaders to account.

Respondents in lower-middle-income countries are more likely to say they know everything about all topics listed, with respondents in upper-middle and high-income countries being most likely to choose the 'know something' option for all questions.

Overarchingly, the response pattern on where knowledge was gained by income group is similar to that by region. Respondents in low-income countries are most likely to say they gained knowledge at

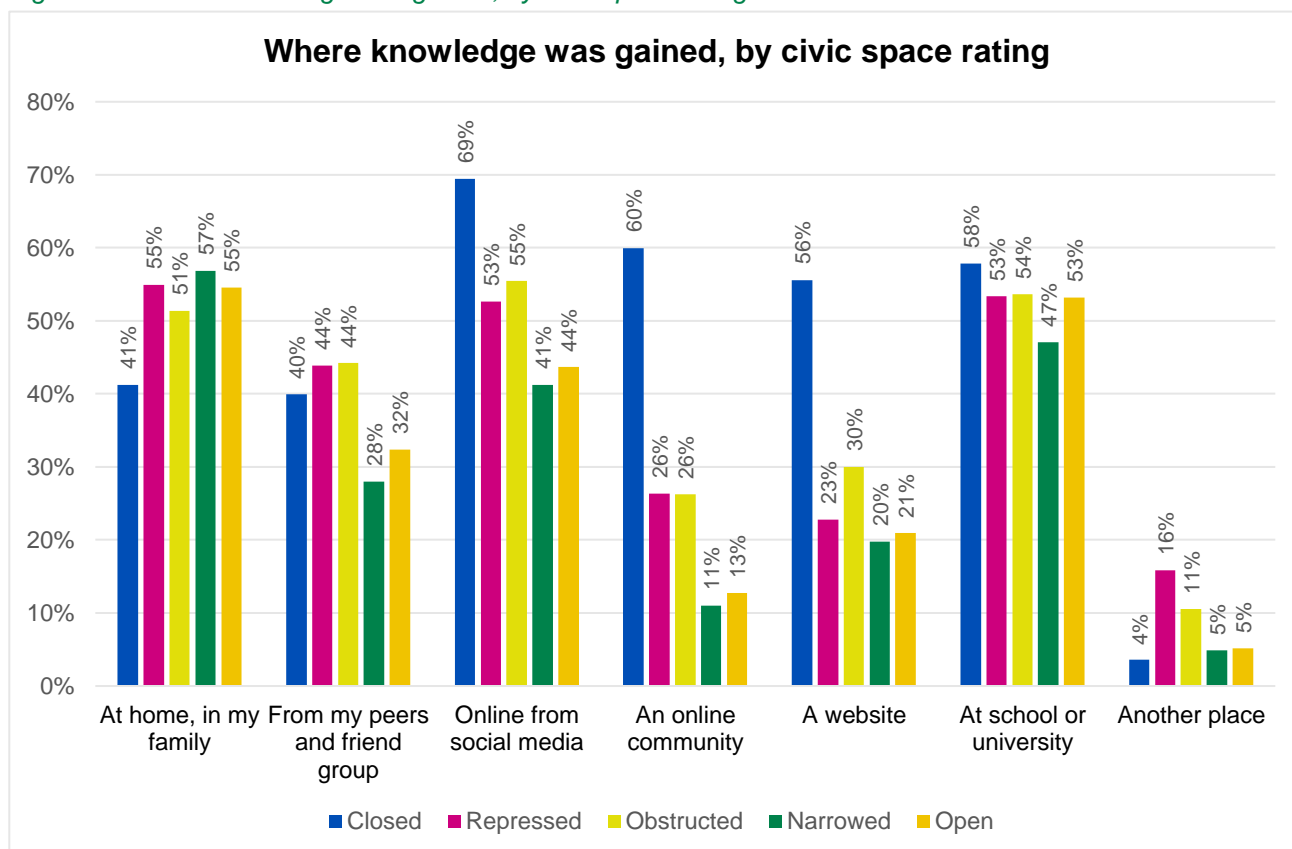
³⁴⁷ Percentages in the chart below relate to the following sample distribution: Europe: n=9,013; Asia and the Pacific: n=6,706; Africa and the Middle East: n=5,478; Latin America and the Caribbean: n=3,827; North America: n=1,949.

school or university, and respondents in upper middle- and high-income countries are least likely to say they gained knowledge in an online community.

Differences by country civic space rating

Respondents in countries with a closed civic space are most likely to say they know everything about the topics listed. Respondents in countries with a narrowed or open civic space are least likely to say they know everything on topics listed.

Figure 34: Where knowledge was gained, by civic space rating³⁴⁸



Respondents in countries with a closed civic space are most likely to say they gained knowledge online from social media, an online community, school or university, or a website. The percentage of respondents gaining knowledge online steadily decreases as the civic space becomes more open.

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

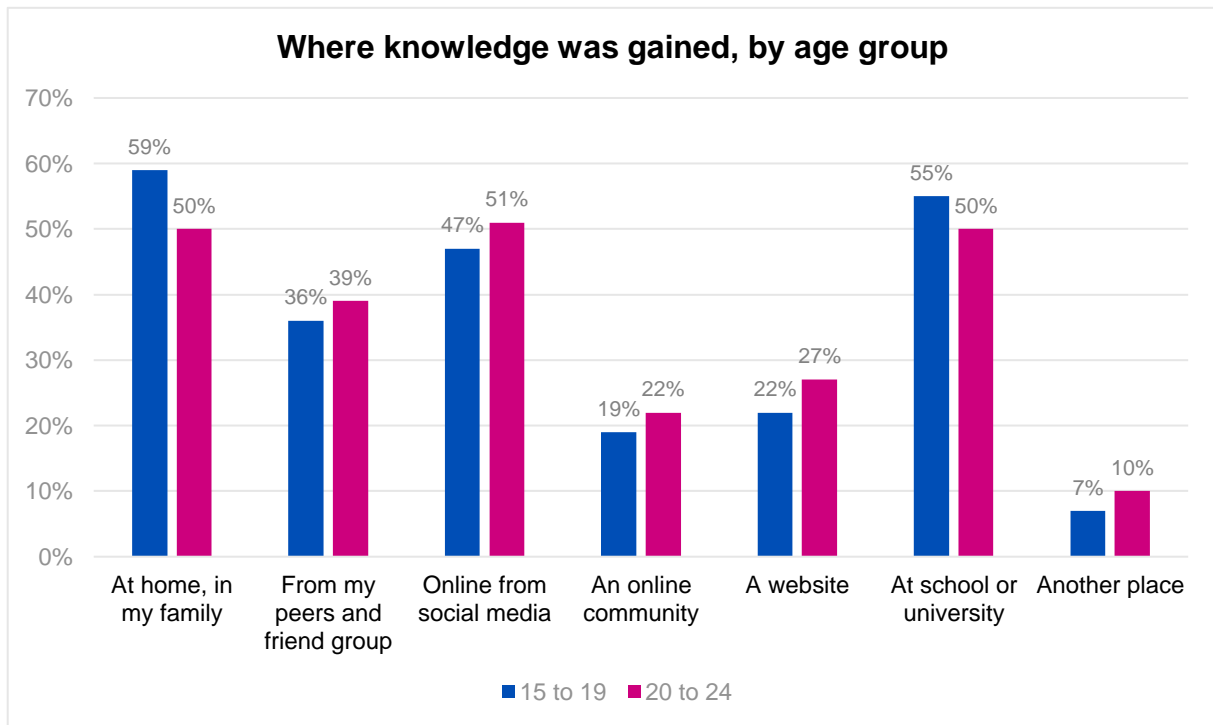
Differences by age group

There are no meaningful differences in how respondents of different age groups answered the question on knowledge held relating to diverse political participation topics. However, differences in how respondents gained this knowledge are evident by age group.

Younger participants are more likely to say they gained knowledge in the home, school or university, and overall, less likely to say they gained knowledge online (via any form) or from their peers.

³⁴⁸ The figure below refers to the following sample sizes, with respondents in countries with: an open civic space: n=5,300; narrowed civic space: n=6,469; obstructed civic space: n=8,738; repressed civic space: n=5,484; closed civic space: n=982.

Figure 35: Where knowledge was gained, by age group³⁴⁹



Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

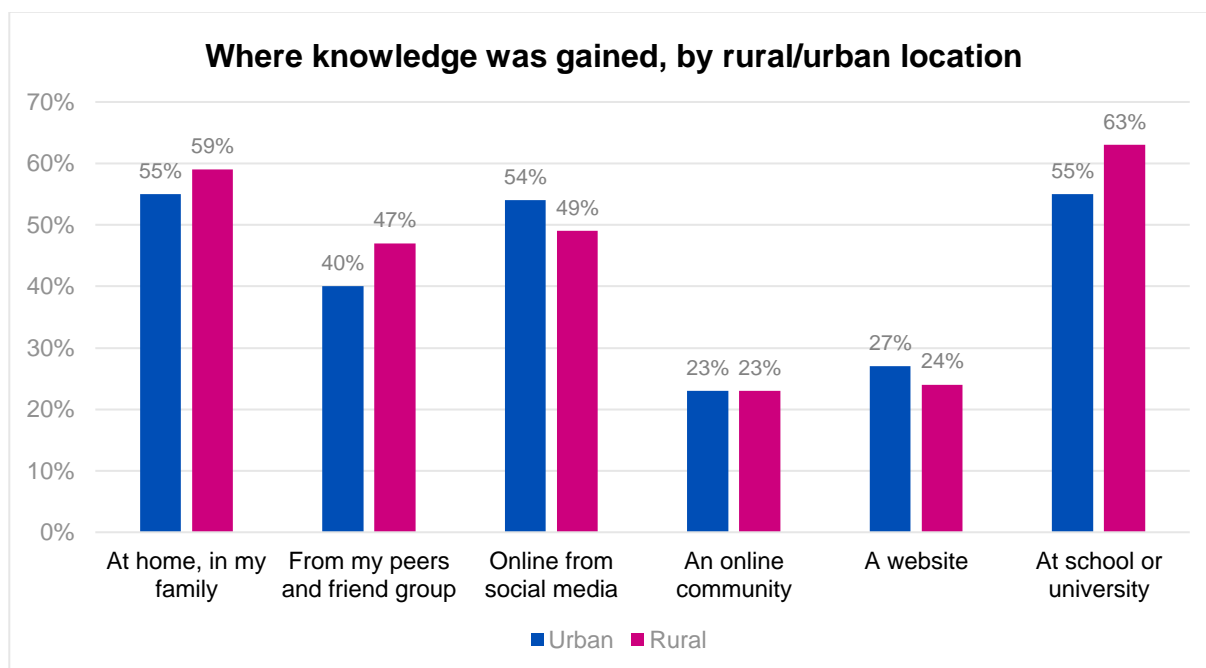
Respondents identifying as LGBTQI+ or as having a disability are generally more likely to say they know something or everything on the topics listed. Respondents identifying as racial or ethnic minorities are instead more likely to say they know nothing of these topics, or only some things. However, the difference in proportion identifying these answer options, compared to the general population, are not large, suggesting that respondents in any of these groups are overwhelmingly similar to the general population.

Respondents belonging to any of the above categories are slightly less likely than respondents in the general population to gain their knowledge at home from their family, however they are more likely to gain knowledge online (primarily websites or social media).

Differences by urban or rural areas

Respondents in rural areas are significantly more likely to say they do not know anything on the topics listed. There are significant differences in where respondents report having gained knowledge, with respondents in rural areas being more likely to identify peers and friends as a source of knowledge, and less likely to identify online sources.

³⁴⁹ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: 15 – 19: n=9,891; 20 – 24: n=17,082.

Figure 36: Where knowledge was gained, by rural/urban location³⁵⁰

Insights from the qualitative interviews

When asked about how, and with whom, they discuss political issues, the activists overall reported engaging much more actively in political discussions than RCRL girls. This suggests either that politically active girls have been subject to higher levels of political socialisation, or that their interest in political issues and consequent activism exposes them to more political discussions. Common across the groups, however, was the observation that discussion of political issues amongst girls and women differed to that amongst boys and men, supporting the finding from the literature that political socialisation of girls and boys differs.

Most of the RCRL girls explained that they find out about political issues through listening or overhearing what family and other community members are discussing, mirroring findings from the survey. Girls in Benin and Philippines, for example, said that they would sometimes overhear discussions on which electoral candidate adults in the village would vote for but wouldn't actively take part.

“We girls don't understand politics, that's why we can't talk about it.” (Margaret, 16, Benin)

Some RCRL girls in Vietnam, Togo and the Philippines referred to discussing political issues with their friends, although active discussion was mentioned most frequently in the Philippines due to the then upcoming national election in May 2022; girls said they were discussing presidential candidates with their friends.

Across the cohort countries, a number of girls noted discussing political topics at school, although this was less common than with family, friends and neighbours.

“I hear about these problems in my community, in my family and even at school the teachers talk about it; me and my friends also often discuss these problems.” (Nana- Adja, 16, Togo)

³⁵⁰ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Urban: n=13,694; Rural: n=5,784.

Media was also an influencing factor in how RCRL girls learned about and discussed politics, with girls in all countries (except Benin) noting the influence of TV and radio. While girls in Vietnam and Brazil and Sharina in the Dominican Republic mentioned using the internet and social media.

Some of the RCRL girls in Vietnam explained why it's not easy to discuss these issues directly, Sen, for example, explained that adults do not talk about these issues with "children" and Thi (16) noted that adults were busy with work and her and her sister with school therefore they didn't often have time to talk about social and political issues. Jocelyn (15, Philippines) noted some concerns she had about actively discussing these issues: ***"I'm shy because the issue I see may not be an issue or a problem for them. I'm also afraid that others may react negatively."***

Girls in Benin noted the presence of specific groups through which community members can discuss and resolve community issues. Thea (16, Benin) explained that her mother belongs to a women's group where they discuss the economic issues the community is facing. Alice (16, Benin) also noted the presence of self-help groups which enable community members to solve issues, for example, helping to contribute funds to other members going through economic hardship. Hang (16, Vietnam) also mentioned the benefits of being part of a schoolgirl club for discussing women's rights issues.

Only four RCRL girls (in Brazil, El Salvador and the Philippines) mentioned not discussing or hearing about political issues from anyone. Hillary (15, El Salvador) clarified that politics wasn't taken seriously in her community, so family and community members do not discuss it.

Amongst the girl and young women activists, almost all reported that they do actively engage in discussion of political issues. Similarly, to the RCRL girls who actively discussed political issues, the activists most commonly reported discussing political issues with their friends,³⁵¹ or with other activists.³⁵² The one school-aged girl in the sample reported discussing political issues at school,³⁵³ but none of the other young women mentioned education settings when asked where they discuss political issues.

Only two activists reported that they discuss political issues with parents or other family members.³⁵⁴ Similarly to some of the RCRL girls, some of the activists spoke about how it can be difficult to talk to adults about political issues; Sofia from Spain and Valentina from Peru noted that adults tend to talk amongst themselves and made them feel that their views and opinions are not valued. This finding, common across both groups, indicates that, while adults, particularly family members, may be a source of political information for girls and young women, girls feel more comfortable discussing issues with their friends and peers.

"I feel that many times adults... they prefer to talk among adults, because they are rarely the ones who take an interest in an adolescent, because many times, they say 'no, what are adolescents going to know about politics?'" (Valentina, 19, Peru)

Several young women reported that they discuss political issues online, using channels including Facebook messenger, WhatsApp groups and on Twitter, with some noting that this was particularly the case during the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁵⁵ However, Anna from Germany explained that while social networks allow her to connect with people with similar views, as girls and women face backlash for engaging in political discussions online she prefers to discuss one-to-one or in small groups rather than in open fora.

³⁵¹ Jen from Lebanon, Juliette from Belgium, Min from Vietnam, Sofia from Spain, Minerva from Togo, Rainbow from Uganda.

³⁵² Anna from Germany, Aurora from Ecuador.

³⁵³ Naturel from Togo.

³⁵⁴ Jen from Lebanon, Naturel from Togo.

³⁵⁵ Min from Vietnam, Minerva from Togo, Sara from Jordan, Aurora from Ecuador, Anna from Germany).

Two young women, both from more restricted civic contexts, noted a reluctance, on the part of themselves or their peers, to talk about political issues. They described how political issues were seen as sensitive in their context.³⁵⁶

“For example, three days ago, I was discussing with someone, a friend, about how politics are going in Jordan. And he said, ‘I just don’t want to discuss politics or participate in these things because I don’t want problems getting my life.’” (Sara, 24, Jordan)

Across both groups, girls and young women noted differences between the issues discussed by girls and women and those discussed by boys and men, and gender differences in the way issues are discussed.³⁵⁷ Some of the activists observed that boys and men don’t talk about gender equality issues³⁵⁸ while another noted the gender differences in backlash received for discussing political issues.³⁵⁹

“I feel women or girls, we are limited to talking about certain issues. The way men would talk about it, it’s a little bit different from how females talk about it... I feel males are allowed to talk about everything that they want to, whereas females, it’s not like that, female groups are restricted to certain things.” (Zoe, 23, Malawi)

“I think that I have known a lot of friends of mine who are boys and men, and they talk about political issues more than women and girls. But not about gender equality, something bigger, I don’t know, maybe about economics or something bigger.” (Min, 20, Vietnam)

Similar observations were made by some of the RCRL girls. A few of the girls in the Philippines, Sen (16, Vietnam) and Juliana (16, Brazil) explained that women often discussed more community-oriented issues, or issues related to household expenses and rising prices while the men discussed national politics and the wider economy.

“Men are the ones I see active when it comes to political matters here in our area.” (Mahalia, 15, Philippines)

“Because men... they like to be more informed, and women almost don’t care about it. I’m not saying that women... they don’t have anything to say, but...they don’t talk much... we don’t talk much about it. Because... the men are the ones who keep arguing, ‘ah, let’s vote for this one, because that one is no good, and that one won’t do anything for our city’. They keep arguing about it, and the women don’t even care, they just talk.” (Juliana, 16, Brazil)

4.4.3.3 Skills and knowledge required for political participation

Insights from the qualitative interviews

In both sets of qualitative interviews, girls and young women were asked about the types of skills and knowledge that would help them to participate in politics.³⁶⁰ Despite the different levels of experience of political participation, responses across the two groups were markedly similar. In some cases, despite being prompted that, as in other questions, girls should think about a broad concept of

³⁵⁶ Min from Vietnam, Sara from Jordan.

³⁵⁷ Aurora from Ecuador, Anna from Germany, Marchessa from Tanzania, Rainbow from Uganda, Minerva Togo, Min from Vietnam, Unique from South Sudan, Zoe from Malawi.

³⁵⁸ Min from Vietnam, Naturel from Togo, Sofia from Spain.

³⁵⁹ Anna from Germany.

³⁶⁰ The RCRL Cohort girls were asked this question in slightly different ways across the countries. In El Salvador, the Dominican Republic and Brazil the girls referred to the list of activities provided during discussion of their own experience of political participation, whereas the girls in Vietnam, Philippines, Benin, and Togo answered the question without prompt from the activity list.

political participation, many of the responses suggested that they were defaulting to thinking about 'participating in politics' as being akin to becoming a political leader.

A common theme across both interview groups was the importance of communication skills. These skills were commonly mentioned amongst RCRL girls from Vietnam, the Philippines, Benin, and Togo. This was particularly the case in Vietnam, where girls articulated informed understandings of the skills they felt were needed to be a political leader, including eloquence, being able to deliver a speech, and the ability to build trust with people. While some of the girls said that they had had the opportunity to develop some of these skills through their roles as class monitors and elected secretaries, overall, the girls made it clear that they felt they would need to work on these skills much more to be sufficiently prepared to participate.

Communication skills were also commonly mentioned amongst the activists. They discussed the importance of having the ability and confidence to speak up effectively, having 'rhetorical presence'; skills in talking to different people, including government officials, and foreign language skills.³⁶¹ Also mentioned was ability to argue effectively, and being able to articulately put forward well-founded and backed up opinions that they could defend.³⁶²

"I think that first and foremost, that the communication skill is very important" (Min, 20, Vietnam)

"When you say something, I think you have to be sure of yourself. You have to have the sources and the means to be able to defend your idea." (Minerva, 23, Togo)

Participants from both groups also mentioned various types of knowledge that they felt would help them to better participate in politics. In the Philippines, RCRL girls said that knowledge of key legislation was necessary to be able to fight for their rights, while cohort girls in Vietnam highlighted the need to have knowledge on a broad range of political issues. Amongst the activists, knowledge and understanding of important issues was also raised by several young women,³⁶³ along with the importance of being educated on politics generally,³⁶⁴ and developing a knowledge of policies, political systems and processes.³⁶⁵ The importance of education more generally was also highlighted by activists in Uganda and Togo, who stressed that this was a foundational block to political understanding and skills.³⁶⁶

"Personally, I believe that education is the foundation. So, if most of the girls are uneducated, then a lot of them are going to be left behind... School is where you learn how to work with others, where you learn what is happening in the world... Most of the girls don't even know that when you want to vote for a leader, do they have a manifesto? And those manifestos, do they really talk about issues that you would like them to represent you? And if not, can you leave that person and go to a person who is going to represent your views? Most of the girls do not know that." (Rainbow, 22, Uganda)

Finally, girls and young women in both groups mentioned a range of personal characteristics that they felt were needed for political participation. Amongst the activists in particular the characteristics mentioned were frequently those associated with 'strength' and 'bravery', perhaps reflecting their perceptions of the qualities needed for women to succeed in male-dominated political spheres. Characteristics such as courage,³⁶⁷ confidence,³⁶⁸ empowerment,³⁶⁹ assertiveness,³⁷⁰ or

³⁶¹ Min from Vietnam, Unique from South Sudan, Rainbow from Uganda, Anna from Germany, Janell from Vietnam.

³⁶² Juliette from Belgium, Minerva from Togo, Anna from Germany.

³⁶³ Juliette from Belgium, Sara from Jordan, Aurora from Ecuador.

³⁶⁴ Min from Vietnam, Valentina from Peru.

³⁶⁵ Minerva from Togo, Marchessa from Tanzania.

³⁶⁶ Rainbow from Uganda, Minerva from Togo.

³⁶⁷ Jen from Lebanon, Marchessa from Tanzania.

³⁶⁸ Anna from Germany, Rainbow from Uganda, Unique from South Sudan.

³⁶⁹ Rainbow from Uganda.

³⁷⁰ Unique from South Sudan.

perseverance³⁷¹ were mentioned. RCRL girls cited similar characteristics, with girls from Togo, Benin, Vietnam, and the Philippines mentioning personal qualities such as self-confidence and courage. However, they also highlighted characteristics such as wisdom and friendliness, which were not mentioned by activists. Just Alice (16, Benin), indicated that having existing connections in politics would aid participation.

Anna, an activist from Germany, did, however, problematise the idea that girls and women should require an extensive skill set to participate in politics, and alluded to the higher standards to which girls and women are held:

“It’s pretty funny, because I think about all those skills, things that people tell me that I should be able to do in order to be able to participate. It’s like you need to be this and you need to be rhetorically very present, and you need to be able to voice your opinion and say that and not be interrupted and be strong and be a little bit cold, but not too cold... We teach women that they need a whole three pages of skills before they even can get to it.” (Anna, 23, Germany)

4.5 ASPIRATIONS FOR FUTURE PARTICIPATION

The majority of this report has intentionally concentrated on girls and young women as current, rather than future political actors. However, this final section presents insights into how girls and young women envisage their potential future political participation and their level of aspiration. Survey respondents were asked whether they could see themselves engaging with or participating in politics by doing any of a list of activities. Participants in both sets of qualitative interviews were asked specifically whether they would like to become a political leader.

Findings from the survey

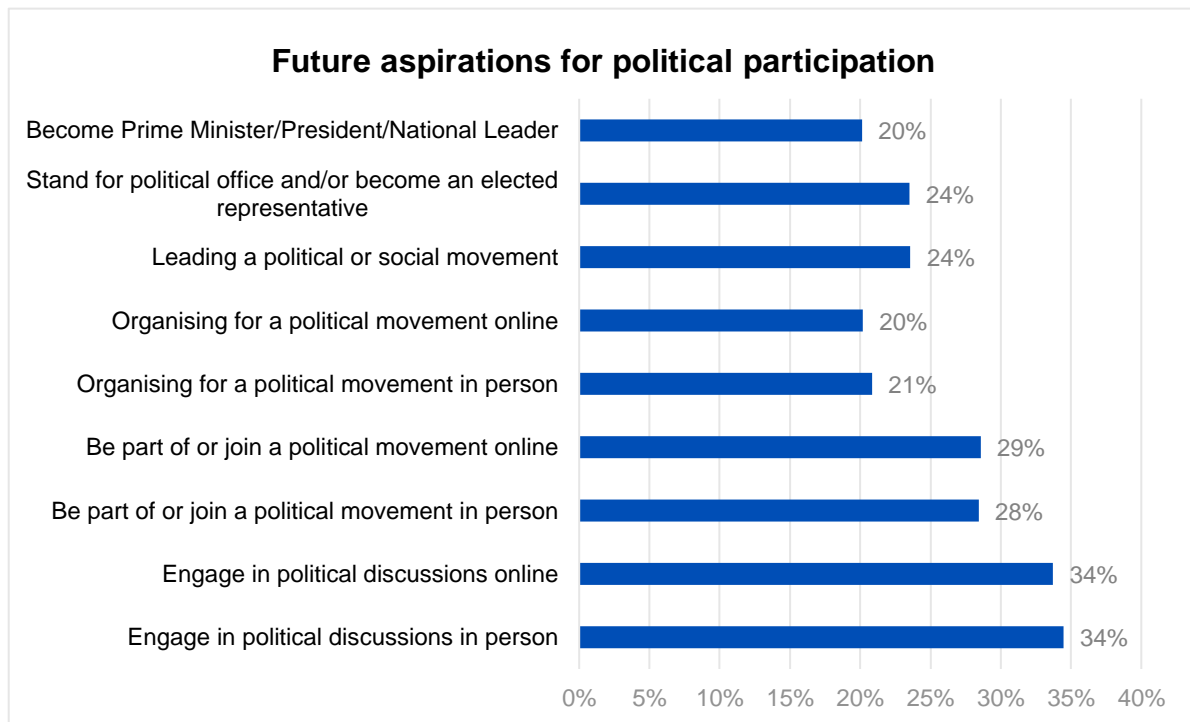
21 per cent of survey respondents reported not being interested in engaging or participating in politics at all in the future, indicating that a notable proportion of girls and young women are already disengaged from politics. 15 per cent are not interested in engaging in any of the ways listed.

Of the remaining sample, respondents primarily indicated an interest to engage with but not actively participate in politics (i.e., prioritising engaging in discussions online or in person). A similar percentage of respondents further say they would join a political movement or organise for one – with preferences for online and in person engagement being very similar.

24 percent of respondents indicated wanting to lead a political or social movement or to stand for political office, with 20 per cent further saying they would wish to become prime minister/president or a national leader.

³⁷¹ Valentina from Peru.

Figure 37: Future aspirations for political participation³⁷²



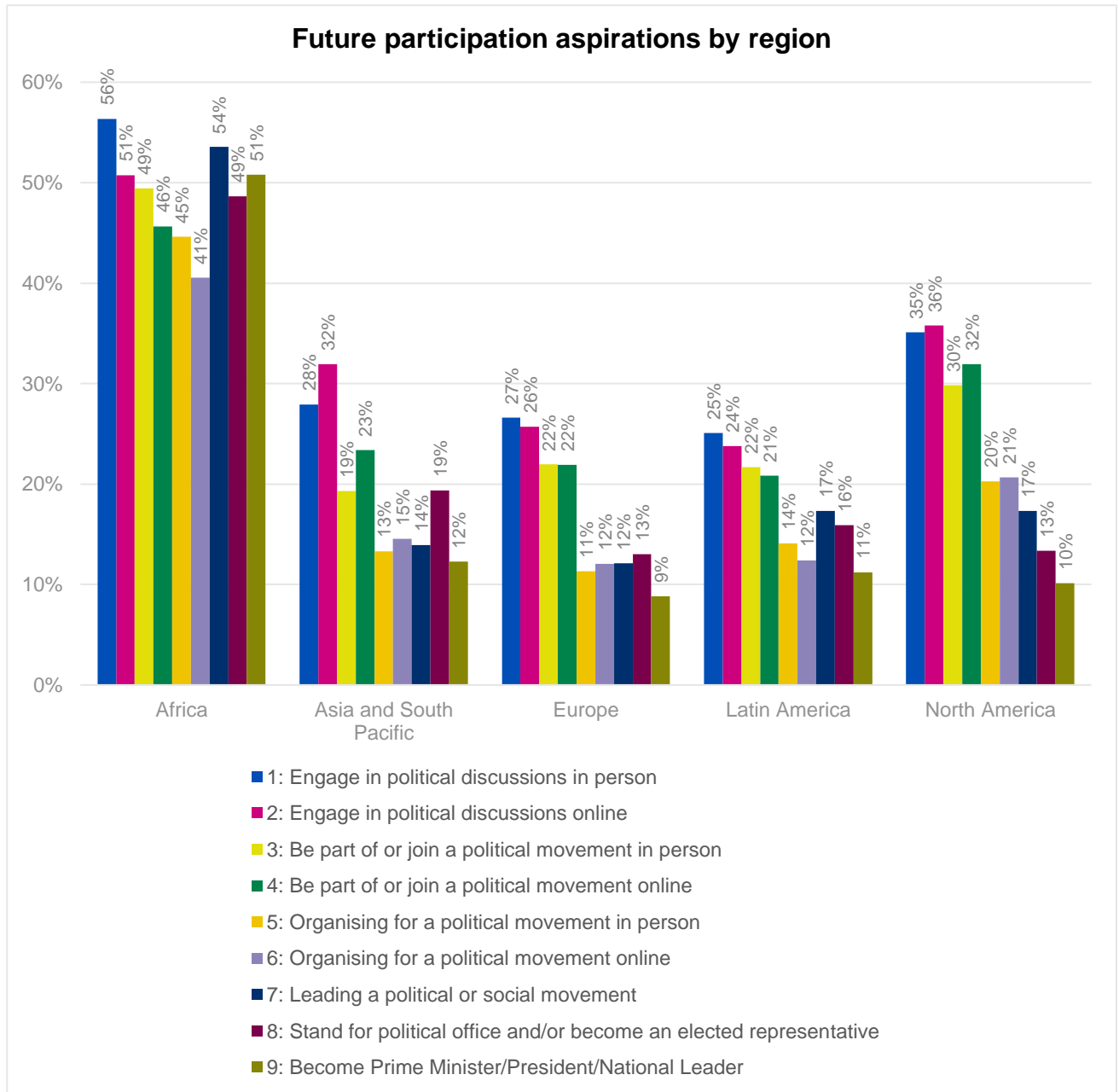
Analysis by contextual differences

Regional differences

Overall, aspirations for political engagement are highest among respondents from the African and North American Region, and generally lowest in Asia and the Pacific and Europe.

³⁷² The graphic below refers to a total sample of 24,323 respondents.

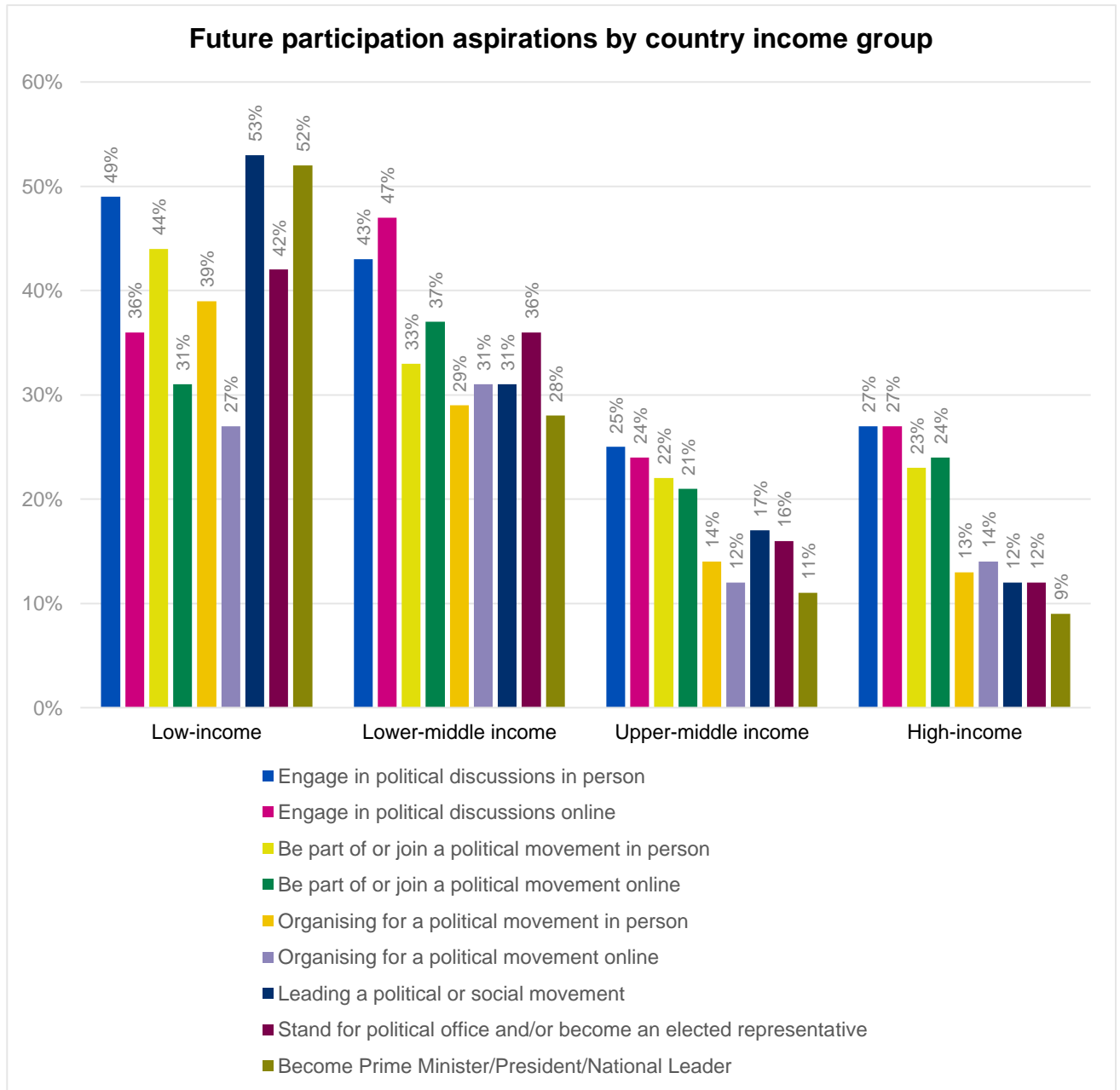
Figure 38: Future aspirations for political participation, by region



Differences by country income group

Similar to regional differences, respondents in low- and lower-middle-income countries are more likely to say they wish to engage in any of the ways listed compared to counterparts in other country income groups.

Figure 39: Future aspirations for political participation, by country income group³⁷³

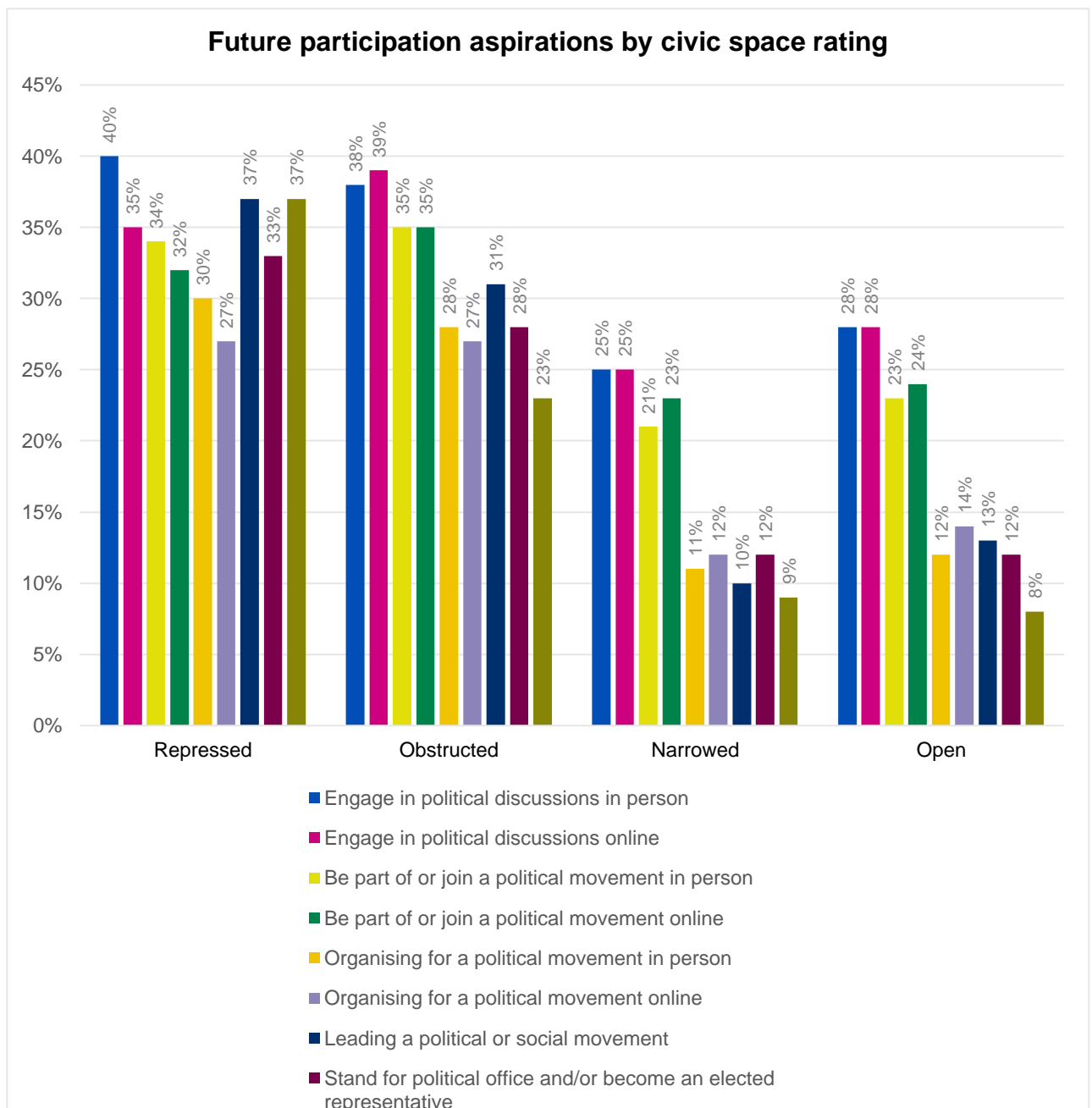


Differences by country civic space rating

Overall, aspirations for future participation are significantly lower in countries with a narrowed or open civic space compared to those with a repressed or obstructed civic space. Similar to findings on challenges, this may suggest that girls and young women most aware of restrictions are the likeliest to want to participate.

³⁷³ The below graphic refers to the following sample of respondents living in: low-income countries: n=2,881; Lower-middle-income countries: n=7,381; upper-middle-income countries: n=3,368; high-income countries 10,693.

Figure 40: Future aspirations for political participation, by civic space rating³⁷⁴



Differences by level of female representation in parliament

Similar to the inverse relationship noted between higher representation of women in parliament and what girls and young women report is locally acceptable regarding political participation and engagement, we identify an inverse relationship between the percentage of women in parliament and aspirations for future political leadership. Our data suggests that, as female representation in parliament increases, the percentage of young women and girls wishing to lead decreases.

³⁷⁴ The below figure refers to the following sample of respondents living in countries with: open civic space: n=4,287; narrowed civic space: n=5,392; obstructed civic space: n=8,287; repressed civic space: n=5,513; closed civic space: n=844.

Table 42: Future aspirations for political participation, by percentage of women in parliament³⁷⁵

	Percentage of women in parliament			Global average
	Under 19%	20% - 39%	Above 40%	
Engage in political discussions in person	49%	34%	27%	34%
Engage in political discussions online	48%	34%	26%	34%
Be part of or join a political movement in person	42%	28%	22%	28%
Be part of or join a political movement online	43%	27%	24%	29%
Organise for a political movement in person	38%	21%	12%	21%
Organise for a political movement online	38%	19%	13%	20%
Lead a political or social movement	43%	23%	13%	24%
Stand for political office and/or become and elected representative	43%	23%	13%	24%
Become Prime Minister/President/national leader	43%	19%	9%	20%

Analysis by demographic and intersectional characteristics

Differences by LGBTQI+, disability and minority status

Respondents identifying as LGBTQI+ are overall slightly more likely to see themselves being part of a political movement (particularly online), less likely to envisage organising for a political movement (particularly in person) and significantly less likely to want to lead a political or social movement, to stand for office or become a national leader.

Respondents identifying as having a disability are overall more likely to wish to take part in most listed activities, except for leading a political movement, standing for office or becoming a national leader where they are similarly likely to want these things as someone not reporting a disability.

Respondents belonging to any minority group are significantly more likely to wish to take part in the majority of listed activities.

³⁷⁵ Percentages in the table below relate to the following sample distribution: Respondents living in countries with: under 19 per cent representation = 3,914; 20 to 39 per cent representation = 14,491; above 40 per cent = 8,043.

Table 43: Future participation aspirations by demographic characteristics³⁷⁶

	Does NOT identify as LGBTQI+	Identifies as LGBTQI+	Does NOT identify as having a disability	Identifies as having a disability	Does NOT identify as a racial or ethnic minority	Identifies as a racial or ethnic minority	Does NOT identify as a religious minority	Identifies as a religious minority
Engage in political discussions in person	38%	37%	38%	39%	37%	44%	37%	45%
Engage in political discussions online	37%	39%	37%	42%	36%	44%	36%	47%
Be part of or join a political movement in person	31%	32%	31%	36%	30%	40%	30%	41%
Be part of or join a political movement online	31%	34%	31%	40%	30%	40%	30%	40%
Organising for a political movement in person	24%	18%	23%	27%	22%	30%	21%	36%
Organising for a political movement online	23%	20%	22%	27%	21%	29%	21%	34%
Leading a political or social movement	28%	17%	26%	25%	26%	31%	25%	39%
Stand for political office and/or become an elected representative	27%	17%	26%	25%	25%	28%	24%	37%
Become Prime Minister/President/National Leader	24%	12%	23%	22%	22%	26%	21%	35%

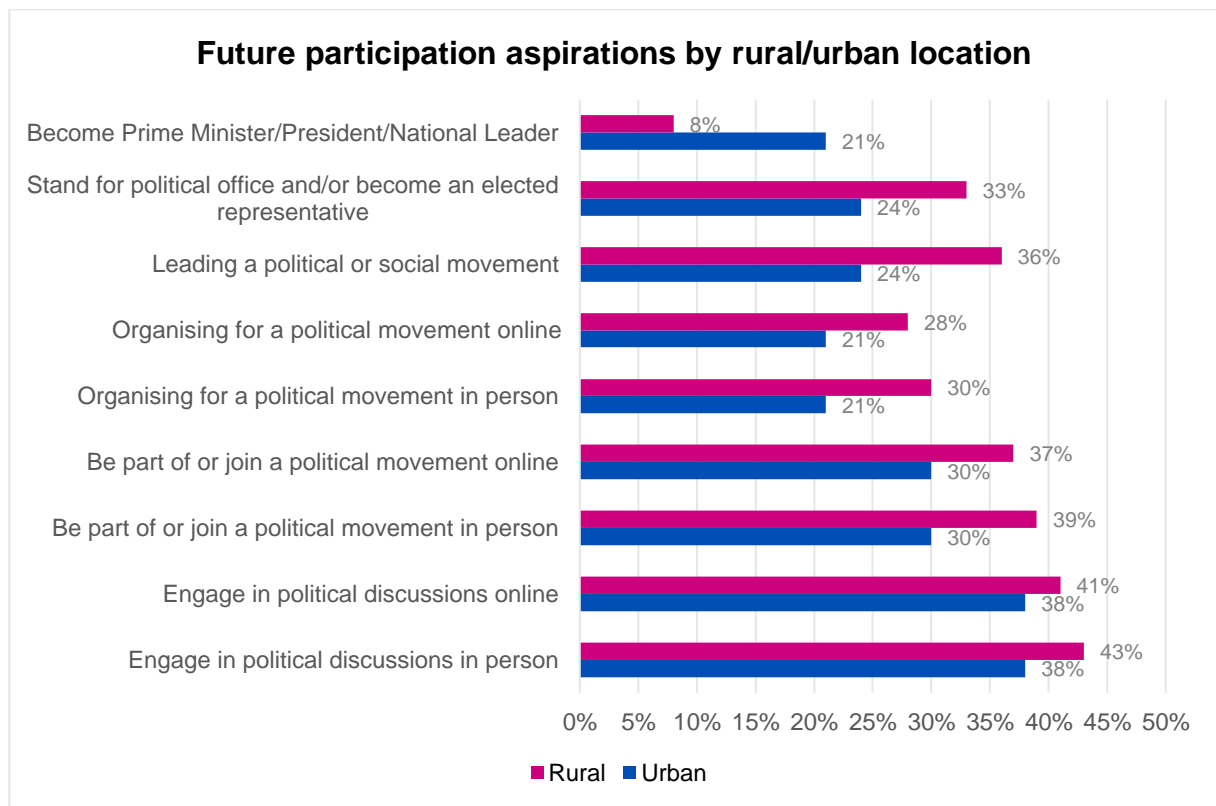
Differences by urban or rural areas

Overall, respondents in rural areas are significantly more likely to wish to take part in any of the listed activities in comparison to urban counterparts. This is especially notable relating to leading a political or social movement where 36 per cent of respondents living in rural areas say this compared to 24 per cent of respondents in urban areas. The exception to the trend overall is for becoming a national

³⁷⁶ The below table refers to the following sample of respondents: Does not identify as LGBTQI+: n=16,690; identifies as LGBTQI+: n=2,859; Does not identify as having a disability: n=18,475; identifies as having a disability: n=1,074; Does not identify as a racial or ethnic minority: n=17,552; identifies as a racial or ethnic minority: n=1,997; does not identify as a religious minority: n=17,196; identifies as a religious minority: n=2,353.

leader where rural respondents are half as likely to wish to do this in comparison to urban respondents.

Figure 41: Future participation aspirations by rural/urban location³⁷⁷



Insights from qualitative interviews

When asked if they would like to become a political leader in the future, clear differences were seen between the two groups interviewed. The majority of the RCRL Cohort girls in all countries apart from Togo said that they would not like to become a political leader, whereas most of the activists said that they would like to, or would consider it, seeing this as an extension of their current activism and a way to continue to effect change.³⁷⁸

Amongst the girls and young women who did aspire to political leadership, the reasons given were strongly aligned with the survey findings on the importance of girls' and women's participation; the activists who expressed a desire to become political leaders spoke about wanting to be a role model, to increase women's representation in politics and to give voice to girls;³⁷⁹ others wanted to make a difference to their communities, increase chances for young women and champion gender equality.³⁸⁰

In contrast to the rest of the Cohort, most of the RCRL girls in Togo said that they would like to become political leaders and generally linked this to the benefits that they would be able to bring to their families, communities, or countries from being in a position of power. Contributing to progress or

³⁷⁷ The figure below refers to the following sample sizes: persons living in urban areas: n=12,308; persons living in rural areas: n=5,370.

³⁷⁸ Aurora from Ecuador, Janelle from Vietnam, Anna from Germany, Marchessa from Tanzania, Rainbow from Uganda, Jen from Lebanon, Unique from South Sudan.

³⁷⁹ Unique from South Sudan.

³⁸⁰ Minerva from Togo, Rainbow from Uganda, Janell from Vietnam

to the evolution of the country was often a key motivation, and for Essohana (16) a woman leader's contributions were particularly important:

“To help my community and to make my country evolve; and because when a woman takes the lead in something, it always works out well and it's good to know, she is valued and respected.” (Essohana, 16, Togo,)

For the few girls in the other Cohort countries that expressed interest in becoming future leaders, solving specific community issues such as lack of housing and healthcare were among the main drivers of their aspirations (mainly El Salvador, Dominican Republic and the Philippines). However, in Benin and Vietnam the salary and social standing that politicians are awarded was also a motivator.

Amongst the RCRL girls who did not aspire to political leadership, a range of reasons were given, which echo findings from elsewhere in the report. For some girls, the association of leaders with public speaking was an issue as they felt they would be too shy or embarrassed to do this. In Vietnam in particular, girls discussed not having the required skills or knowledge to take on this role and referred to the challenges they had faced in school-level positions of responsibility as a marker of their abilities to lead. These responses suggest that discouraging early experiences of participation, together with lack of confidence and a low level of political efficacy can dampen girls' future aspirations.

“Because I find out that when I am a leader, I make a lot of mistakes. Comparing with other monitors, I think they are doing much better than I am.” (Trinh, 16, Vietnam)

While this suggests that the girls lack confidence in themselves as leaders, it also appears that the public critique of politicians they have witnessed in their communities has contributed to their hesitancy to take on this level of responsibility. Jocelyn (15) in the Philippines said she would be “afraid to make a mistake”, while Karen (15) in El Salvador said they would “criticise you a lot and I wouldn't like that”. For Susana (15, El Salvador) and Chesa (16, Philippines) the burden of responsibility was what deterred them most from becoming a leader, though for Chesa this did not mean that she is not interested in addressing problems in society:

“It's hard because I know there are a lot of responsibilities to be a leader. That's not what I want. What I want is to be a police officer to catch the corrupt.” (Chesa, 16, Philippines)

In Benin, Catherine (16) and Margaret (16) discussed violence related to political leaders as a reason for not wanting to become involved in politics, including politically motivated killings and instances where leaders were reportedly “bewitched” by rivals.

Similarly, several of the activists who did not want to go into positions of political leadership explained how they were put off by their perceptions of what politics is like, and fear of backlash or negativity within political systems towards women.³⁸¹ Juliette from Belgium acknowledged if these considerations discouraged her, they were likely to also deter many other young women who wanted to make a difference from entering the formal political sphere. These responses provide further evidence that the treatment of women political leaders has a direct bearing on the aspirations of girls and young women to follow in their wake.

³⁸¹ Anna from Germany, Min from Vietnam, Juliette from Belgium, Sofia from Spain.

5 CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

This report aimed to explore, understand, and give voice to girls' and young women's attitudes towards, and experiences of, politics and political participation across a diverse range of contexts.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that a majority of girls are interested in politics and political issues, and many are actively engaged in pursuing change on the issues they care about. **While girls and young women have concerns about, and prioritise action on, a wide range of issues, poverty and unemployment and the environment and climate change are consistently ranked as top priorities.** The findings suggest that for girls and young women with intersecting identities, who are more likely to experience marginalisation, experience of discrimination shapes their political priorities: discrimination and LGBTQI+ rights were top priorities amongst girls identifying as LGBTQI+.

However, when asked about their political leaders, over half of girls and young women reported that they had lost trust in their political leaders due to the decisions they made on issues they cared about and **only 1 in 10 reported that they were generally happy with their leaders' decisions on issues they care about**; 62 per cent reported that the actions of their political leaders made them feel sad, stressed worried or anxious or made them feel unsafe. Moreover, many girls and young women do not feel their views and interests are represented within the political sphere: **fewer than 1 in 3 girls agreed that politicians and political leaders understand the views of girls and young women**, with a similar proportion agreeing that politicians and political leaders act in their best interest.

How girls and young women are participating in politics

Overall, **the vast majority – 83 per cent – of girls and young women surveyed have already had some experience of participating in or engaging with politics in some form.** This means that political participation among girls and young women is, on average, high. However, the survey findings also suggest that a minority of girls and young women are already disengaged with politics; **1 in 5 survey respondents reported not being interested in engaging or participating in politics at all in the future.**

Despite widespread evidence in the literature, from across contexts, of young people's declining levels of political participation through formal channels – particularly in elections – and their preference for informal modes of participation, our evidence presents a more mixed picture. **The girls and young women we surveyed reported participating in formal modes of participation, in particular voting, at a higher rate than in informal modes.** While voting is in some contexts mandatory and was viewed by many girls as a 'minimum' level of participation, in most contexts girls and young women hold generally positive views about the right to vote. Insights from qualitative interviews do, however, suggest that girls may be deterred from voting early in life when they perceive that electoral systems are not conducive to meaningful representation.

More generally, many girls and young women who are politically active feel that formal modes of participation are essential to achieving the changes they seek, with some seeing it as an important complement to the collective action they are involved in. Together, this evidence suggests that girls and young women are, to varying extents, invested in formal political processes.

However, across both sets of qualitative interviews, girls and young women spoke about how political systems are structured in ways which limit their ability to voice their opinions and demands. Girls and young women who had had experiences of **formal channels for political participation outside elections told us that these are often ineffective and tokenistic** and only 40 per cent of survey respondents felt that politicians make spaces accessible and inclusive for them. Girls and young

women described not feeling listened to, not being taken seriously by decision-makers, and feeling that their opinions were not taken on board. In contrast, many spoke in positive terms about the role and impact of social movements and other forms of collective action, although emphasised the need for movements to connect with formal political processes so that the changes they seek are institutionalised and sustained. These insights point to a need for formal spaces for girls and young women's participation in policymaking to be more inclusive, accessible and meaningful, and for policy-makers to better connect with girls and their groups.

Barriers and challenges to girls' and young women's political participation

The report findings, therefore, paint a picture of how, where and in what forms girls and young women participate in politics, but they also shed light on the barriers and challenges they face in doing so. Throughout the findings, the significant role of both age and gender norms in shaping girls' and young women's opportunities for, perspectives on and experiences of political participation stood out clearly. Even though most respondents believe that girls' and young women's political participation has become easier over time, **only around 1 in 2 girls and young women reported that their communities view it as acceptable for them to participate and engage in politics.** Insights from across both sets of interviews illustrate how girls and young women feel the force of social norms at all levels – within their families, at school, online, in their communities and when interacting with decision-makers.

The findings reveal how pervasive social norms present challenges to girls' and young women's political participation. In both sets of qualitative interviews, participants described how they are not listened to and not taken seriously by decision-makers and other adults because of their age and gender – experiences which knock their confidence and reduce their willingness to participate. **'Politicians not listening to girls and young women' was the most commonly identified challenge to participation amongst survey respondents; 1 in 3 girls and young women agreed that this was a challenge.**

When they look to their political leaders, girls and young women recognise the ways in which notions of leadership are gendered, and how expectations of women in leadership positions differed from those of men. **Only half of survey respondents believed that it was acceptable for girls and young women in their community to become political leaders and 1 in 10 girls themselves believed women were not qualified to be political leaders.**

Evidence from the qualitative interviews also reveals how some girls' and young women's experience of participating in politics is shaped by their fear of violence, harassment, or abuse, challenges that echo those they see women in political leadership facing: **2 in 5 survey respondents agreed that female politicians suffer abuse and intimidation.** While the qualitative interviews revealed how girls and young women's perceptions of the negative experiences faced by women leaders can dent their own leadership ambitions, these challenges do not always appear to deter girls' and young women's wider political participation – indeed, the findings show that awareness of challenges is highest amongst girls and young women with the most experience of political participation.

While the research expected to find strong evidence for how restrictions on civic space inhibit girls' and young women's political participation, the findings suggest that a more nuanced relationship exists between openness of civic space and girls' perceptions and actions. For example, while girls and young women living in more repressed civic contexts were more likely to report that female politicians suffer abuse and intimidation and are judged by how they look, they were also more likely to participate, particularly through formal modes, and to belong to political and civic groups and organisations. Nevertheless, the interviews also illustrated the myriad ways in which restrictions on civic space are presenting barriers and challenges for politically active girls and young women. Activists described how restrictions which limit political rights and civil liberties curtail their ability to organise, and in some cases have resulted in them being personally targeted. This evidence points to

a need for politically active girls and young women and their groups to be supported and protected and their roles as vital civil society actors recognised and strengthened.

Enablers of girls' and young women's political participation

Despite the clear evidence of the challenges to girls' and young women's political participation, the findings also point to opportunities to support and enable girls and young women as they begin to develop their political identities, values and behaviours. Firstly, the report findings illustrate the critical role of schools in girls and young women's political socialisation; **1 in 2 survey respondents identified school or university as a main source of political knowledge**, while the qualitative interviews suggested that girls who had been taught about their rights at school, and who saw themselves as rights holders felt more politically efficacious. Findings from the interviews also showed that girls' early experiences of participation activities often take place at school, whether through elections, student councils or leadership opportunities. Girls see these activities as important for developing skills and gaining experiences. These findings point to the importance of harnessing the potential of schools to provide spaces and opportunities for girls to develop skills and experience for political participation.

The findings also demonstrate that in many contexts, girls' and young women's early, formative experiences of political participation occur at local and community levels. Both sets of qualitative interviews illustrated how many girls and young women, even those who don't identify as being politically active, are involved in activities outside the formal political sphere, often directed towards addressing community problems, community level awareness raising and social norm change. Finding from the survey also revealed that **girls and young women show high levels of civic engagement and participation in their communities; 1 in 3 girls and young women reported belonging to a voluntary group that does something to help the community** and 2 in 5 belong to social groups.

Through participation in activities at community level, girls and young women develop skills and gain experience of participation; they learn to work collectively and are often able to contribute to concrete changes in their community. Yet the findings also illustrate that **participation at community level can be a positive or negative experience for girls and young women, depending on whether they are supported and how their attempts to participate are received**, particularly by decision-makers. These findings suggest that supporting and enabling girls' and young women's organising at community level is important for building their capacity and confidence as current rights holders and as fledgling political actors.

Differences by region

Despite many common, global themes emerging, the findings also reveal significant differences in the views and experiences of girls and young women between regions. The picture painted by these regional variations is complex and nuanced. For example, the political issues considered priorities by girls and young women differed between regions, with **respondents in Europe and North America being more concerned about discrimination and equal rights in contrast to respondents in Africa, who prioritised resource shortages**. Girls and young women in some regions, particularly in Africa, reported notably higher levels of political participation and wider civic engagement than in other regions, as well as greater levels of aspiration to participate.

While it is beyond the scope of this report to explain these differences, analysis of other contextual factors suggests that a combination of country income levels, political and civic contexts, history and culture may all play a role. Whatever the reasons behind these differences, this complexity points to a need for measures intended to support girls' and young women's political participation to be context-specific.

Differences by intersectional characteristics

Finally, the findings suggest some ways in which intersectional characteristics may influence girls' and young women's views and experiences of politics and political participation. Across all sections of the report, the findings show that girls and young women who identify as LGBTQI+, as a racial or ethnic minority or as a religious minority in particular report more negative feelings towards their political leaders, and experience greater barriers to political participation. **59 per cent of girls and young women who identify as LGBTQI+, for example, disagreed that politicians understand the views of girls and young women, compared to 43 per cent of respondents who do not identify as LGBTQI+**, while girls and young women across all minority groups were less likely than other survey respondents to feel happy with the decisions of political leaders.

Girls and young women from minority groups were also more likely to perceive challenges to political participation; in particular being more likely to feel that politics is not open to them, and that there are no politicians who inspire them. The findings also suggest that girls and young women who identify as part of a minority group are more likely to prefer online forms of participation and were more likely to say they joined an online group or social movement than other survey respondents.

The issues identified as priorities for political action by girls and young women identifying with minority characteristics also differed from those of other respondents; amongst respondents identifying as LGBTQI+, as a racial or ethnic minority or as a religious minority, discrimination based on race and ethnicity, and LGBTQI+ rights were the top priorities, followed closely by mental and physical health, including sexual health and reproductive rights. Similarly, for those respondents who identify as having a disability, health issues were chosen as the top priority.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations build on the ideas, experiences and opinions of the girls and young women taking part in this research.

- **To build trust and facilitate genuine participation power holders must open formal, safe and inclusive space for girls and their networks to enable their meaningful contribution to decision-making at all levels.**

Calls to Action

1. **Governments** must **fulfil their commitments** including the Sustainable Development Goals and international obligations under CRC, CEDAW, and ICCPR to provide legal guarantees for girls' and young women's participation in decision-making processes at the national and sub-national level.
2. **Governments, including ministries and relevant agencies, to meaningfully involve girls** and their networks in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of public policies, budgets and legislation and put strong accountability mechanisms in place to track the impact of girl's participation.
3. **Governments to reform, and resource national youth councils, youth parliaments and other relevant formalised structures** so that they are gender-transformative and their leadership is representative of girls and youth in all their diversity. Strong safeguarding mechanisms need to be in place, linked with local networks including girl-led and girl-serving organisations.
4. **Donors, UN agencies, and governments** to introduce or update and fund their youth strategies and policies so that they prioritise girls' and young women's political socialisation and participation and support them with the necessary resources and institutional mechanisms to facilitate both effective implementation and monitoring and evaluation.
5. **Governments and the humanitarian community must remove the barriers to participation faced by girls in humanitarian settings** to ensure systematic and meaningful participation of girls in all phases of humanitarian action. Girls face a unique set of risks during humanitarian crisis but often their needs fail to be prioritised. **As the global hunger crisis escalates**, governments and the UN have an obligation to include girls and young women in their response and ensure their involvement in decisions that affect them.

- **Starting at the local level, increase girls' access to diverse, inclusive and accessible pathways towards political participation.**

Calls to Action

6. **Governments must allocate resources to the sub-national levels** aimed at **increasing young women's representation and access** to local government positions via special measures, traineeships and adult-youth partnerships for shared learning, and building mutual trust and respect.

7. **Local Government Ministers or equivalent to** set a strategy with allocated resources to support local governments to **meaningfully include girls in all local decision-making**: strengthening their role and capacities to engage in participatory budgeting, social audits and planning.
 8. **Local governments to partner with community-based organisations to reach girls, including the most marginalised, by providing diverse opportunities to engage**: investing in participatory mechanisms including digital innovations, working through school structures and linking girl-led groups and their networks with formal decision-making processes.
- **Provide civic education, acknowledging that knowledge and skills are foundational in girls' political socialisation and a pathway to political participation.**

Calls to Action

9. **Education ministries must ensure civic education is gender-transformative and is included in national school curricula.** It should include the depiction of women leaders as role models, human rights, gender-sensitive voting information, understanding decision-making processes and the role of civil society. It should provide opportunities to practise political discourse and promote diverse forms of participation, including pathways towards political leadership.
 10. **UN Agencies, donors and INGOs to support the development of gender-transformative civic education tools and activities** including teacher training resources.
 11. **School stakeholders (teachers, councils, and parents) to provide students, especially girls, with opportunities to practise their leadership**: supporting leadership skills-development, and access to decision-making opportunities within school governance structures, such as school councils and elections.
 12. **Governments and donors to fund comprehensive, community-based, non-formal education programmes** that equip girls, particularly the most marginalised and out of school girls and young women, with the agency, skills and civic knowledge, to support their full political socialisation.
- **Build positive gender and social norms within families and communities to enable and promote girls' and young women's political participation**

Calls to Action

13. **Programme providers to invest in holistic approaches, including the engagement of the wider community** on the importance of opening spaces for girls and young women and for their inclusion in community-level decision-making.
14. **International organisations including UN bodies, partnerships and INGOs to invest and support long term programmes, including mentoring**, that provide early opportunities and sustained support for those young women pursuing positions of political leadership.
15. **The media and journalists to combat negative stereotypes of women in leadership** by promoting positive and diverse images of women's political leadership and girls and young women's activism, while ethically and sensitively bringing public attention to incidences of gender-based violence in politics.

16. **Social media companies must take responsibility for creating a safe online environment for girls and young women** by creating stronger, more effective, transparent and accessible reporting mechanisms, specific to online gender-based violence, that hold perpetrators to account and are responsive to girls' needs and experiences.
17. **Parliaments, public institutions and political parties to put in place zero-tolerance policies on violence and sexual harassment** and respond to the heightened risks of violence experienced by young women and particularly those overlapping with marginalised and minority groups, by providing inclusive and accessible reporting mechanisms and safe spaces.
 - **Support girls to organise and mobilise, starting at community level, and ensure their organisations are resilient and sustained.**
18. **UN, donors and governments must** support girls' collective action and organising: **recognising and strengthening their vital and distinct role as civil society actors**, by providing accessible resources (both financial and non-financial), capacity strengthening and safe spaces, to foster their political efficacy and their resilience in the face of crises and external threats.
19. **Women's rights organisations and civil society to recognise and value** the unique and vital contribution of girls' and young women's organisations, by **providing intergenerational leadership and mentoring** and facilitating their participation in wider civil society processes.
20. **International, regional and intergovernmental bodies to introduce protective mechanisms and structures** in order to monitor, mitigate and respond to risks posed to girl human rights organisations and activists.



GIRLS GET EQUAL

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We strive for a just world, working together with children, young people, supporters and partners. Using our reach, experience and knowledge, Plan International drives changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels. We are independent of governments, religions and political parties. For over 85 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children and we are active in more than 80 countries.

GIRLS GET EQUAL

Plan International has been campaigning for girls' rights for over a decade and the current Girls Get Equal campaign aims to ensure girls and young women have power over their own lives and can help shape the world around them. Promoting leadership and amplifying girls' voices is central to the campaign. Ensuring girls access to power holders and their involvement in the decisions that help shape their lives is crucial to upholding their rights. Their engagement in politics needs to be supported at all levels and the barriers to their political participation must be recognised and removed.

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