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It's Time to Listen to Young Voters on Climate Action

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March 2022

The climate crisis is already here: In 2021, historic wildfires ravaged millions of acres of land in the West, while thousands of working families experienced flooding from catastrophic hurricanes. Meanwhile, climate action continues to stall in Congress. Young voters — who are increasingly concerned about the impacts of climate change — are deeply cognizant of the federal government’s inaction. Though the clock is winding down, there is still time to address climate change, and young voters are eager to see their leaders take action to ensure our world is sustainable for future generations.

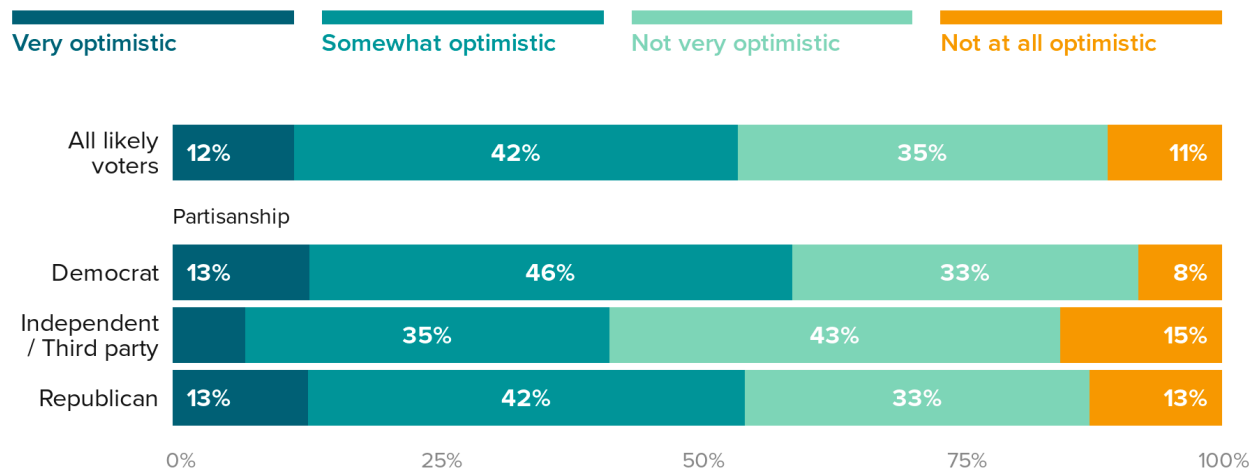
In a December 2021 national survey, Data for Progress and the Sunrise Movement assessed the attitudes of likely voters ages 18-35 toward climate change. We find that young voters express mixed feelings about our lawmakers’ ability to meaningfully address climate change. Moreover, a significant portion thinks the outsized influence of corporations and wealthy donors is to blame for Congress’s inaction. However, despite these lackluster feelings, overwhelming majorities of young voters support ambitious federal climate actions such as an executive order to declare a National Climate Emergency and the Green New Deal.

Young voters, recognizing the influence of outside actors, express doubt about our lawmakers’ ability to meaningfully address climate change.

First, we asked young voters to express their optimism about society’s ability to meaningfully address climate change. Young voters’ opinions are decidedly mixed: While just over half (54 percent) say they are “very” or “somewhat” optimistic, 46 percent say they are “not very” or “not at all” optimistic about society’s capability to handle climate change. Notably, Independents were less optimistic than Democrats and Republicans.

Young Voters Are Lukewarm About Our Society's Ability to Handle Climate Change

How optimistic or not optimistic are you that society can meaningfully address climate change?



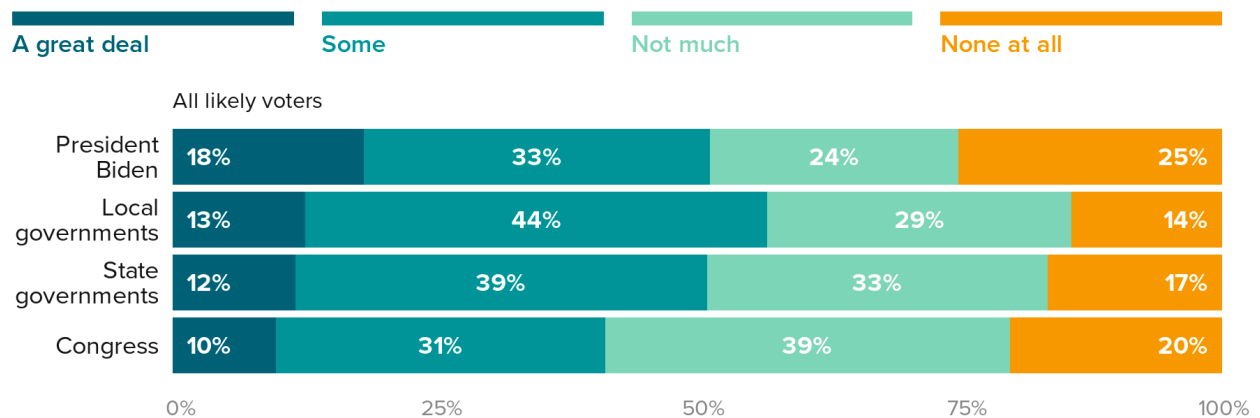
December 2–8, 2021 survey of 855 likely voters



While young voters express a cloudy outlook on society’s ability to address climate change, they also express apprehension about lawmakers’ ability to handle climate change and its impacts, like extreme weather. While over half of young voters put “a great deal” or “some” trust in President Biden, local governments, and state governments to handle climate change and extreme weather, only 41 percent of young voters say the same about Congress. This negative sentiment is notable, especially considering the 2022 midterm elections are quickly approaching.

Young Voters Trust Congress the Least to Handle Climate Change

Below is a list of people and organizations. Please indicate how much trust you have in each when it comes to handling climate change and climate impacts such as extreme weather:



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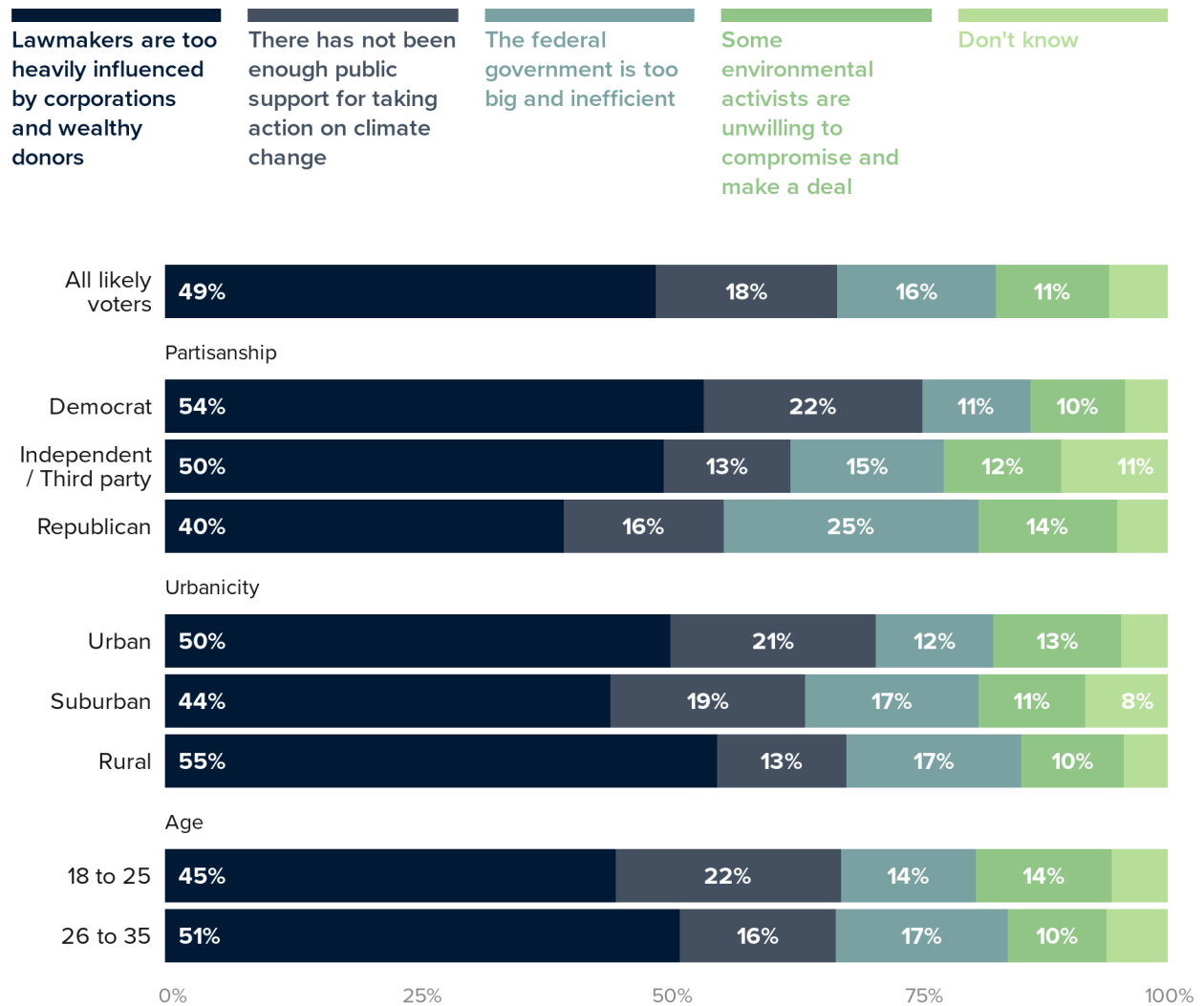
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We then presented voters with a list of options and asked them to choose which they think is the biggest reason that Congress has failed to pass any major legislation on climate change, despite decades of trying. Roughly half of young voters (49 percent) think Congress has failed to pass legislation on climate change because lawmakers are too heavily influenced by corporations and wealthy donors. This view is shared by young voters across party lines, different geographies, and age groups. However, there were some distinctions across geographical and age groups. Rural voters and millennials (voters ages 26 to 35) were the groups that expressed the most blame toward the influence of corporations and wealthy donors. On the other hand, urban voters and Gen Z (voters ages 18 to 25) placed slightly more blame on a lack of public support for climate action.

Young Voters Think Corporations and Wealthy Donors Have Prevented Congressional Climate Action

For decades, Congress has tried and failed to pass major legislation to address climate change.

Which of the following do you think is the **biggest reason** why Congress has failed to pass any major legislation to address climate change?



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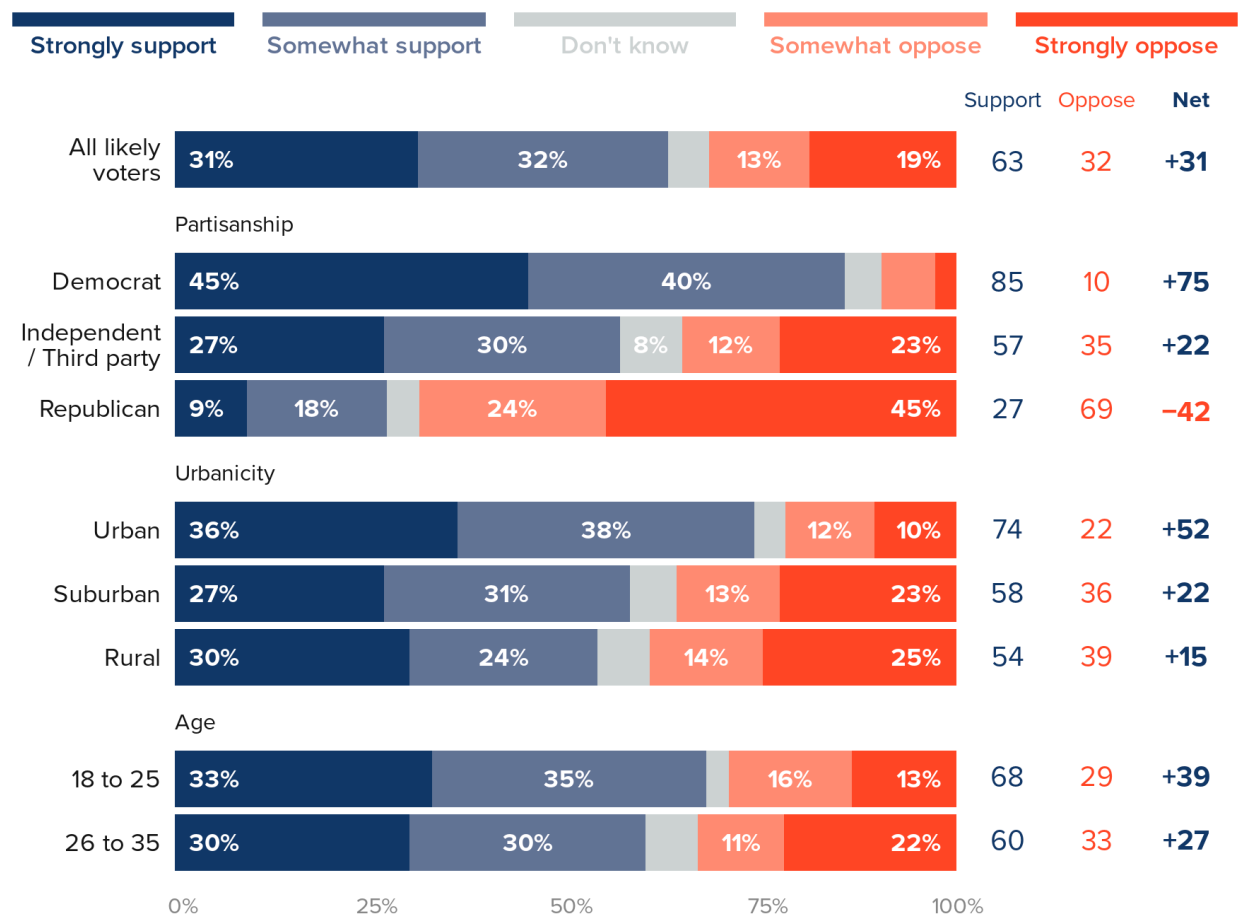
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Young voters support bold federal actions to tackle climate change.

Next, we asked young voters several questions about different federal actions to address climate change. Overall, nearly two-thirds of young voters (63 percent) would support President Biden issuing an executive order to declare a National Climate Emergency that would allow the government to reallocate federal resources and establish regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This executive order enjoys a +75-point margin of support among Democrats and a +22-point margin of support among Independents, though it is strongly opposed by Republicans. Meanwhile, the proposal enjoys support from majorities of urban, suburban, and rural voters. Notably, Gen Z voters would support the declaration of a National Climate Emergency significantly more than millennials: Among Gen Z, the margin of support is +39 points, while among millennials, the margin of support is +27 points.

A Majority of Young Voters Would Support an Executive Order Declaring a National Climate Emergency

Would you support or oppose President Biden issuing an executive order to declare a National Climate Emergency that would allow the government to re-allocate federal resources and establish regulations to reduce emissions that contribute to climate change?



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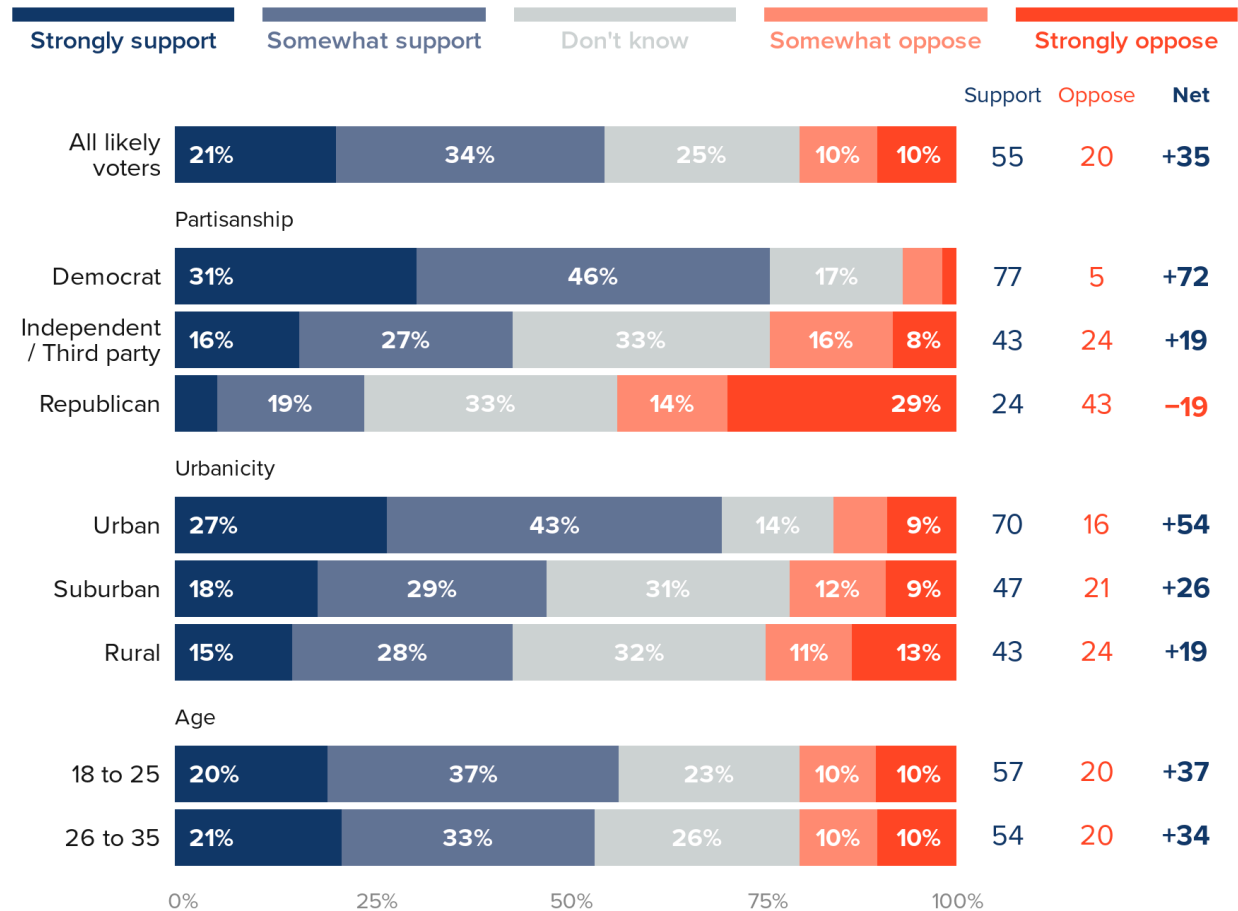


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We then asked young voters several questions about the Green New Deal. Without any additional information, young voters support the Green New Deal by a +35-point margin (55 percent support, 20 percent oppose).

With Minimal Information, Over Half of Young Voters Support the Green New Deal

Based on what you know, do you support or oppose the Green New Deal?



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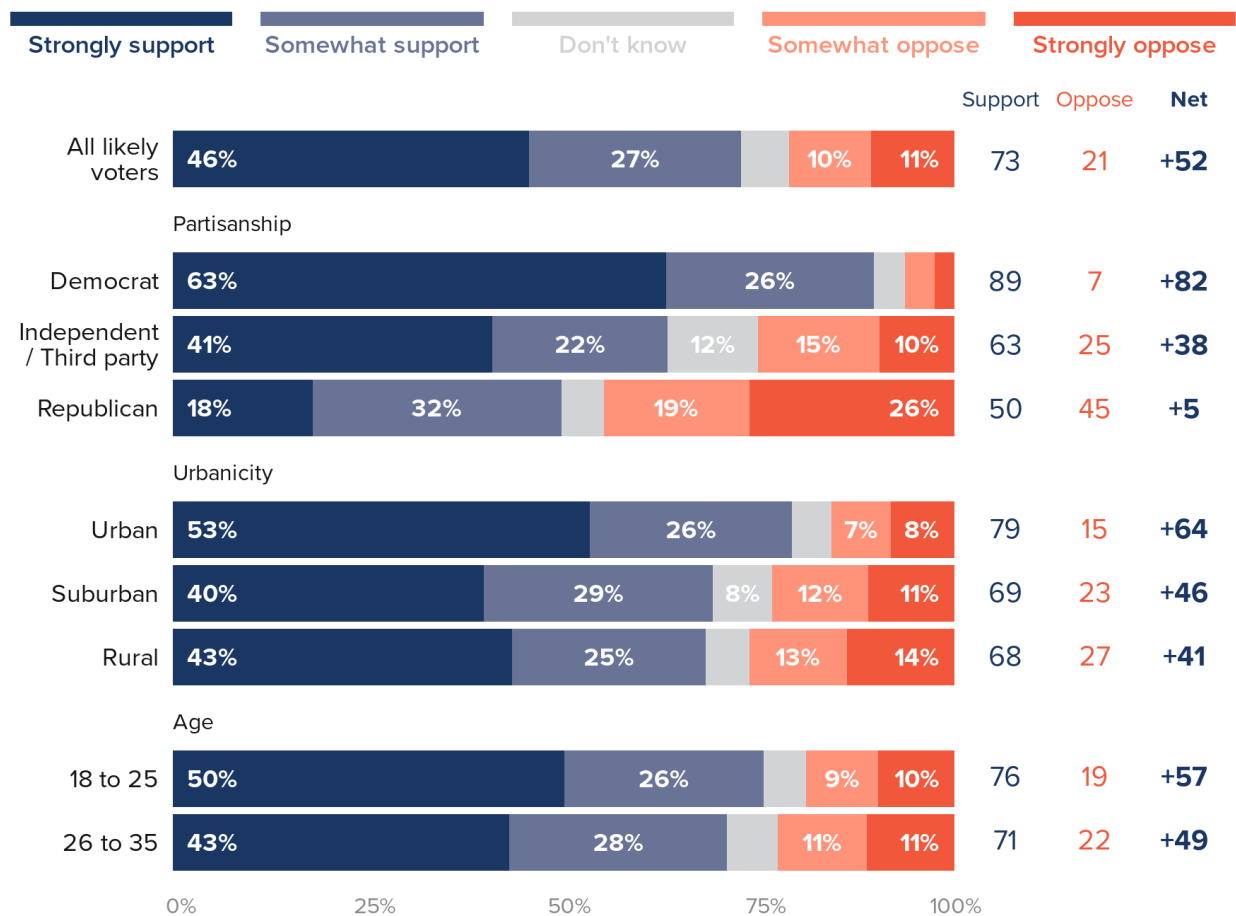
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However, after informing voters of the Green New Deal’s main policy goals, support jumps to a +52-point margin (73 percent support, 21 percent oppose). Notably, support jumps 20 points among Independents (43 percent to 63 percent) and 26 points among Republicans (24 percent to 50 percent). An overwhelming majority of urban voters (79 percent) support the Green New Deal, and suburban voters and urban voters express nearly equivalent levels of support (69 percent and 68 percent, respectively). Meanwhile, the Green New Deal enjoys a notably higher margin of support among Gen Z voters (+57 points) compared to that of millennials (+49 points).

Young Voters Overwhelmingly Support the Green New Deal When Informed of Its Policy Goals

The Green New Deal is a proposal to put millions of people to work in good-paying, union jobs accelerating America’s transition to clean energy and combating the climate crisis. The Green New Deal would put an emphasis on supporting communities that have lost manufacturing and fossil fuel jobs, communities that are disproportionately impacted by extreme weather and pollution, and communities struggling with poverty such as rural, Black, and immigrant communities.

Knowing what you know now, do you support or oppose the Green New Deal?



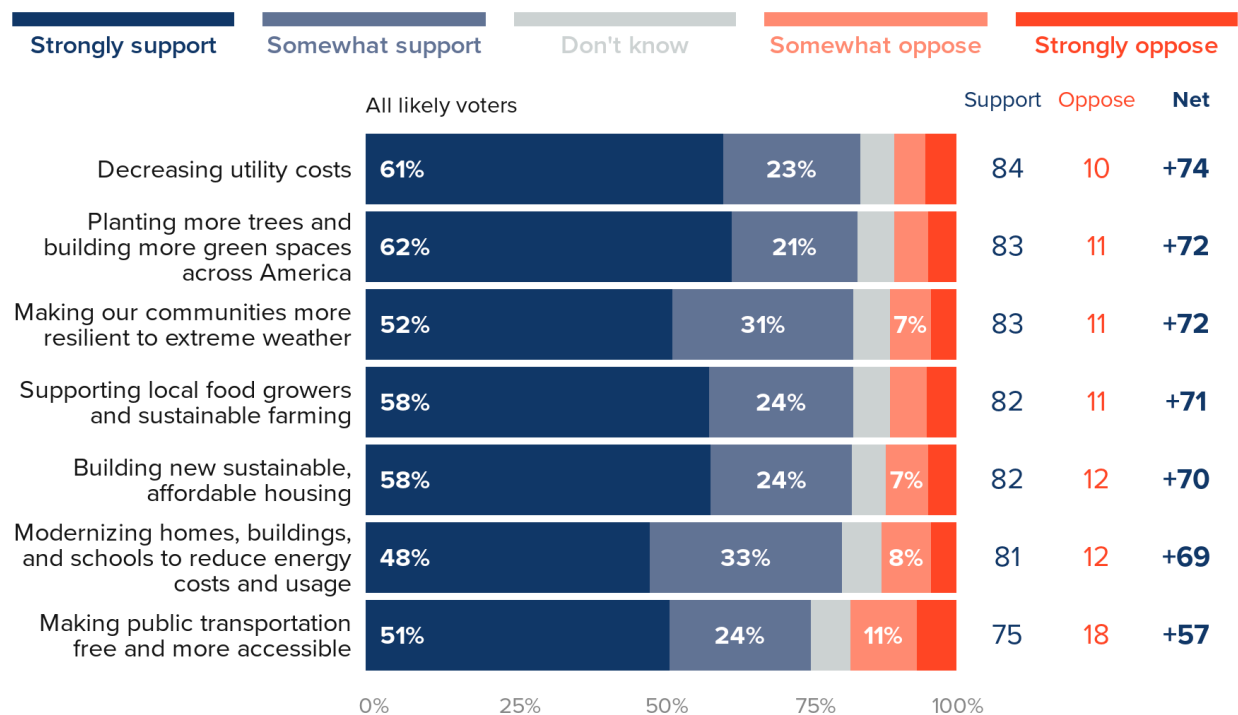
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Finally, we asked young voters whether they support or oppose several of the Green New Deal’s main policy pillars. We find that young voters overwhelmingly support all of them, especially decreasing utility costs (+74 points), planting more trees and building more green spaces across America (+72 points), making communities more resilient to extreme weather (+72 points), supporting local food growers and sustainable farming (+71 points), and building new sustainable, affordable housing (+70 points).

Young Voters Overwhelmingly Support the Policy Pillars of the Green New Deal

The Green New Deal includes the following policies. Please indicate whether you support or oppose each of these policies:



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It is clear that young voters want federal lawmakers to act ambitiously and tackle climate change. After years of failing to pass major legislation to address the climate crisis, young voters are significantly disillusioned with a lack of federal action and their trust in our institutions is waning. President Biden and lawmakers in Congress should feel confident acting decisively and swiftly to enact bold climate solutions, as both their success in the 2022 midterms — and the fate of our planet — may depend on it. It is time for challengers and incumbents in Congress to listen to young voters and boldly run on the popular Green New Deal.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY:

From December 2 to 8, 2021, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 855 likely voters ages 18-35 nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.