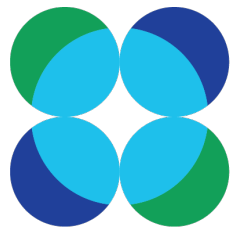


# Is Gen Z Giving Up on Democracy?

Interpreting young Americans' views on government, the Constitution, and the appeal of authoritarian alternatives



**More in  
Common**

The research in this publication was conducted by More in Common US, a nonpartisan research nonprofit that works to understand the forces driving us apart, find common ground, and bring people together to address shared challenges.

Established in 2017, More in Common US is part of a nonpartisan, international initiative aimed at building societies and communities that are stronger, more united and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarization and social division.

More in Common's work is frequently featured in prominent media and used by senior political leaders, governments and leaders in nonprofits, philanthropy, and business.

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# How concerned should we be about young Americans' commitment to democracy?

In recent years, there has been growing concern about Gen Z's relationship with democracy. Headlines warn that "Gen Z is embracing dictatorship," and similar storylines fuel anxiety that this rising generation is turning away from democratic norms altogether.<sup>1</sup>

These alarming narratives prompted us to take a closer look at Gen Z's attitudes toward democracy, which clearly stand in stark contrast to those of older generations. Further questions emerged:

- What are the factors driving the divide?
- Is there a generational split within Gen Z itself, between younger and older Gen Z, shaped by their age and experiences of the COVID pandemic?
- And ultimately, do these attitudes mean that Gen Z is giving up on democracy altogether?

Through further polling and focus group conversations, we find that young Americans are largely *not* inclined towards authoritarianism. Instead, they are *underwhelmed* with what they have seen our country's democracy deliver in their lifetimes.

In their frustration, young Americans are much more likely than older generations to entertain the possibility that the fundamentals of America's government need rethinking. This is still a reason for concern, but it brings the true challenge into focus and clarifies how it might be addressed: not by dismissing Gen Z's doubts, but by delivering democracy's promises for their generation.

<sup>1</sup> PRRI, "A Political and Cultural Glimpse Into America's Future," January 22, 2024; James Bickerton, "Gen Z is Embracing Dictatorships," *Newsweek*, April 5, 2024. <https://www.newsweek.com/gen-z-embracing-dictatorships-1886702>; Andrew Restuccia and Eliza Collins, "How Gen Z Became America's Most Disillusioned Voters," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/story/how-gen-z-became-americas-most-disillusioned-voters-d842ae7a>.

# Key Findings

1. **Most Americans across both political parties support democracy and remain committed to the importance of the Constitution.**
  - 75% of Americans, including 80% of Democrats and 85% of Republicans, say the Constitution should be “widely respected because it has provided stability.”
  - 63% of Americans, including 79% of Democrats and 69% of Republicans, say democracy is “definitely the best” form of government for America.
  
2. **Yet only a minority of Gen Z Americans feel strongly about democracy’s importance, especially when it trades off with economic wellbeing.**
  - A quarter of Gen Z (25%) say they don’t really care about the Constitution.
  - Only four in ten Gen Z Americans (42%) say democracy is “definitely the best” form of government for America.
  - Nearly half of Gen Z Americans (47%) agree that “sometimes it’s okay for leaders to set aside democratic principles (e.g. constitutional checks and balances) to fix the economy” (compared to 29% of Americans on average).

# Key Findings

## 3. Gen Z's attitudes towards democracy are best predicted by a lack of political engagement – not gender, ideology, or older vs. younger Gen Z Americans.

- Just 28% of Gen Z non-voters say that democracy is the “best” form of government, compared to 66% of Gen Z voters.
- Similarly, only 49% of Gen Z non-voters say the constitution should be “respected widely,” far lower than the 72% of Gen Z voters who agree.

## 4. But a disillusionment with democracy's ability to solve problems – rather than a desire for authoritarianism – defines Gen Z's attitudes.

- Conversations with Gen Z reveal that many feel that our system fails to reflect their voices and priorities.
- Their doubts about democracy often stem from frustration with their economic outlook and the government's inadequate response, largely due to partisan conflict, legislative gridlock, and political elites.
- In the words of a 26-year-old Hispanic woman, *"What is the point of voting and choosing different people for us to have a better country? It's a mess. We don't get the attention [...] We don't have a voice for us. What is the point of doing this?"*

# Methodology

More in Common conducted online survey interviews among a representative sample of 1,987 adults, with additional oversamples of 220 Gen Z adults (born in or after 1997), 215 adults who identify as “very liberal,” and 215 adults who identify as “very conservative” from February 21 to 27, 2025 for a total of 2,647 adults. The data was weighted to be representative according to gender/age interlocked, ethnicity, education level, region, and 2024 Presidential vote and turnout. The margin of error (adjusted for weighting) is +/- 2 for the U.S. average and higher for subgroups.

Numbers in data visualizations are rounded to the nearest whole number. Figures may total to larger or smaller than one-hundred percent due to rounding.

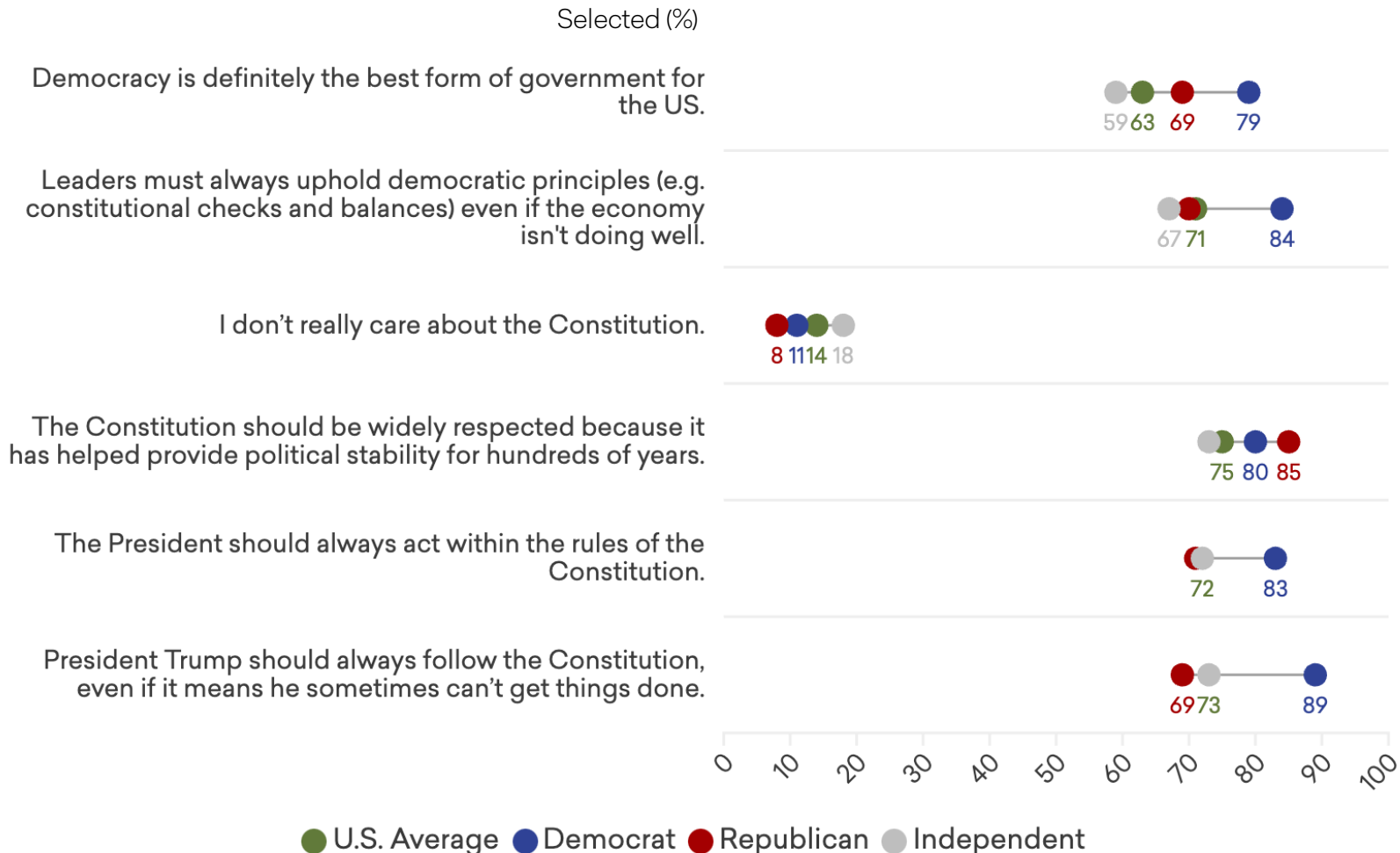
More in Common conducted two focus groups in March 2025 with a total of 14 Gen Z Americans who hold skeptical attitudes towards democracy and the Constitution.<sup>1</sup>

Quotes from focus groups are included throughout the report. Where provided, names have been changed to protect the privacy of the respondent. Quote attributions are based on participants’ own self-reported identification of their race/ethnicity, gender, political party affiliation, and political ideology. Grammar and punctuation have been lightly edited for clarity.

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# **Gen Z's Lukewarm Support for Democracy**

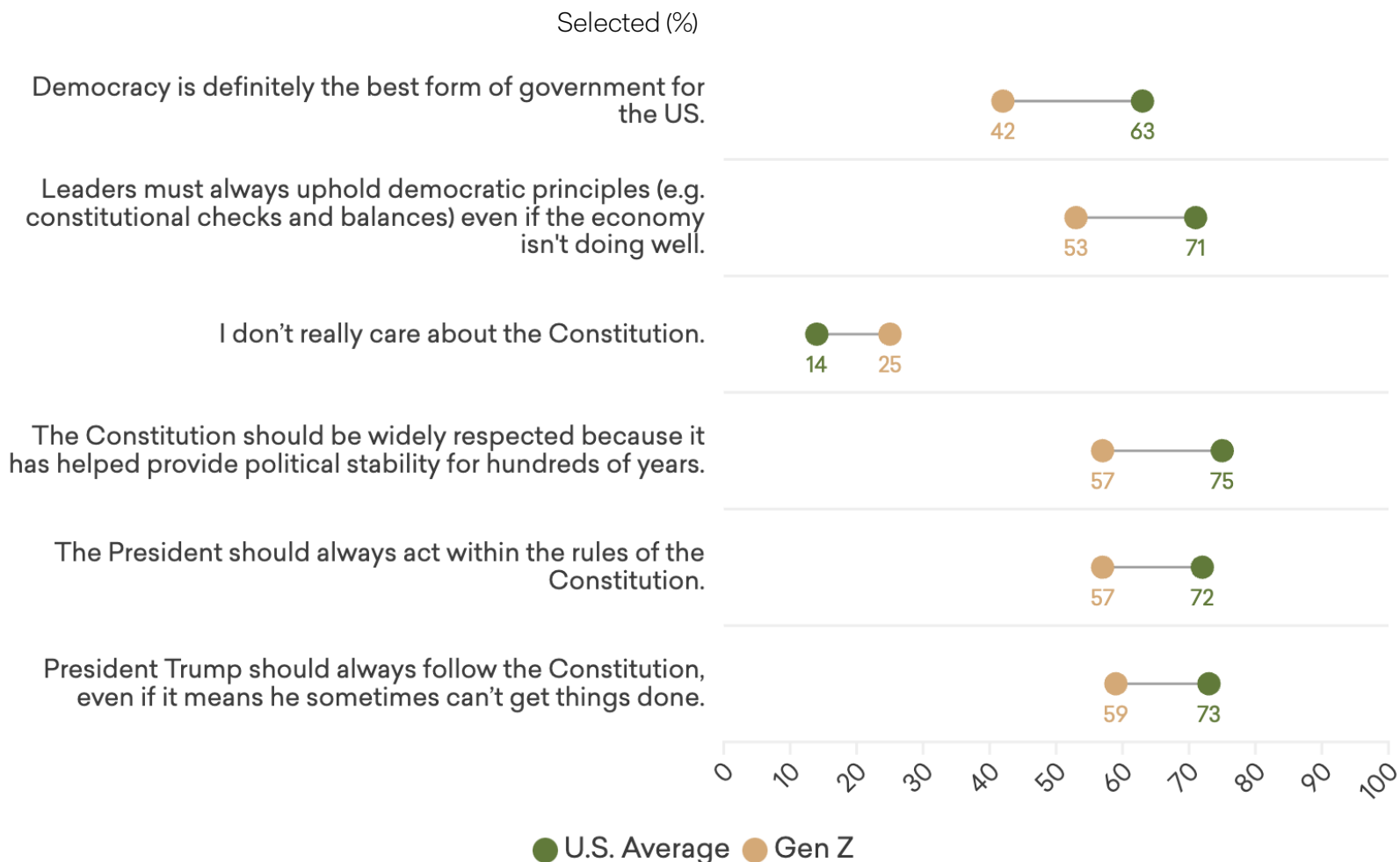
# Most Americans across party lines support democracy and want leaders to uphold the Constitution.



Note: Percentages indicate levels of agreement with the statement.  
More in Common; N=2,637; February 21-27, 2025



# Yet for every question asked, Gen Z display lower levels of support for democratic principles and the Constitution.

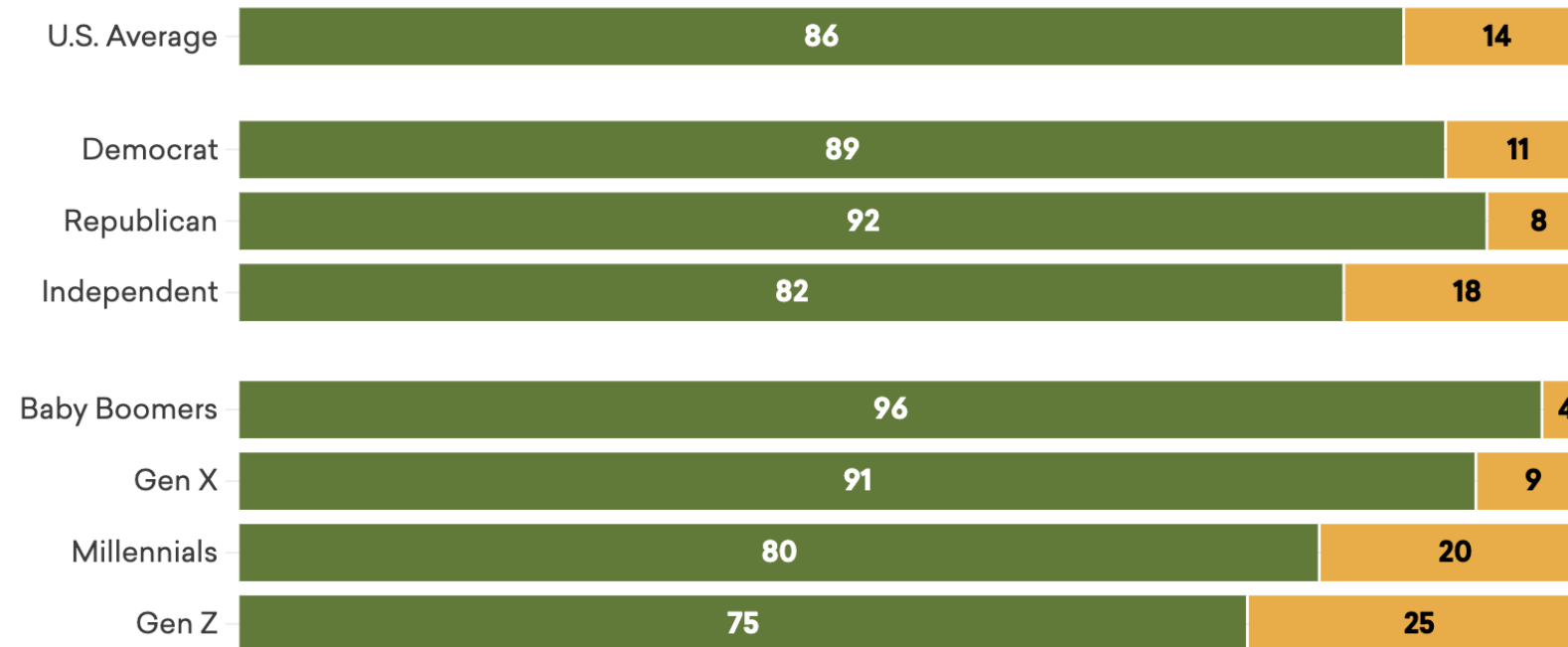


Note: Percentages indicate levels of agreement with the statement.  
More in Common; N=2,637; February 21-27, 2025

# Least reverent: A quarter of Gen Z (25%) say they don't really care about the Constitution.

Which of the following do you agree with more?

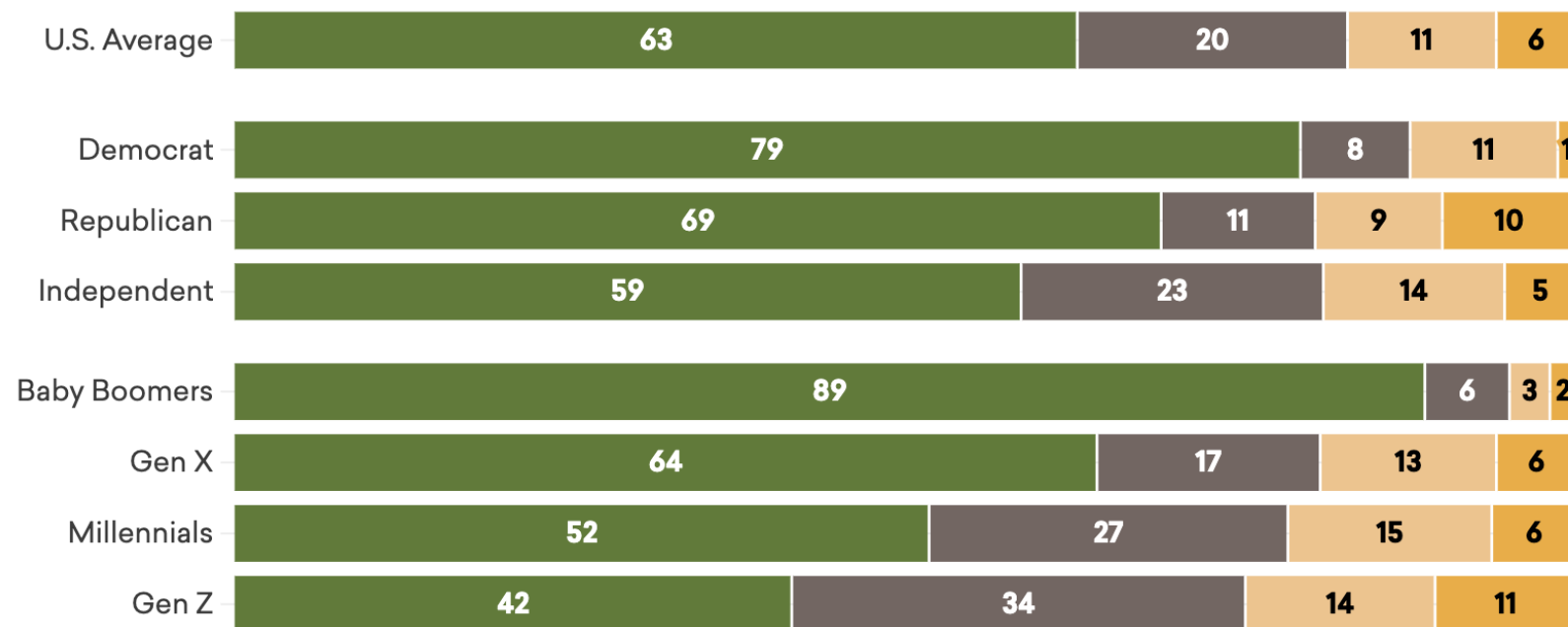
● The Constitution matters to me. ● I don't really care about the Constitution.



# Unconvinced: Only 4 in 10 Gen Z say democracy is “definitely the best” form of government for America.

Which of the following best describes your view?

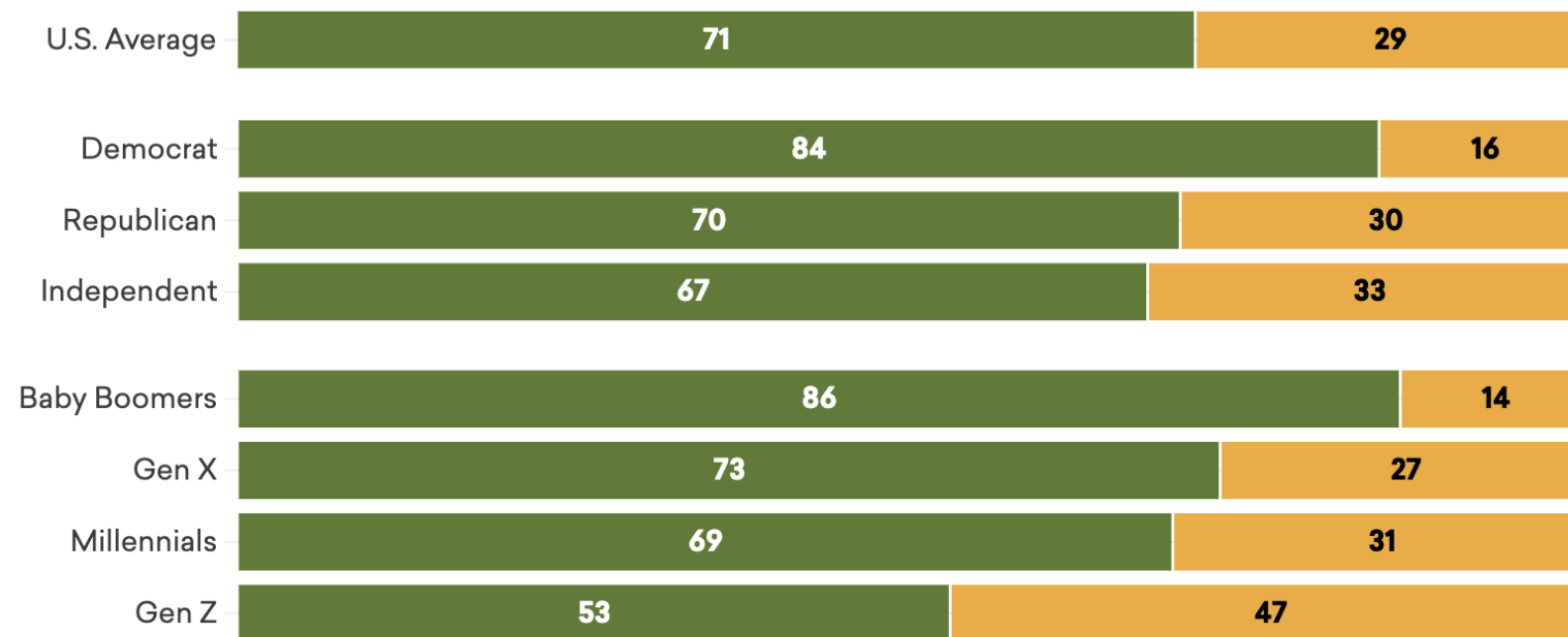
- Democracy is definitely the best form of government for the United States.
- Don't know
- I am open to non-democratic forms of government in the United States.
- I would prefer a non-democratic government in the United States.



# Rule benders: Nearly half of Gen Z (47%) could tolerate leaders setting aside democratic principles to fix the economy.

Which statement do you agree with more?

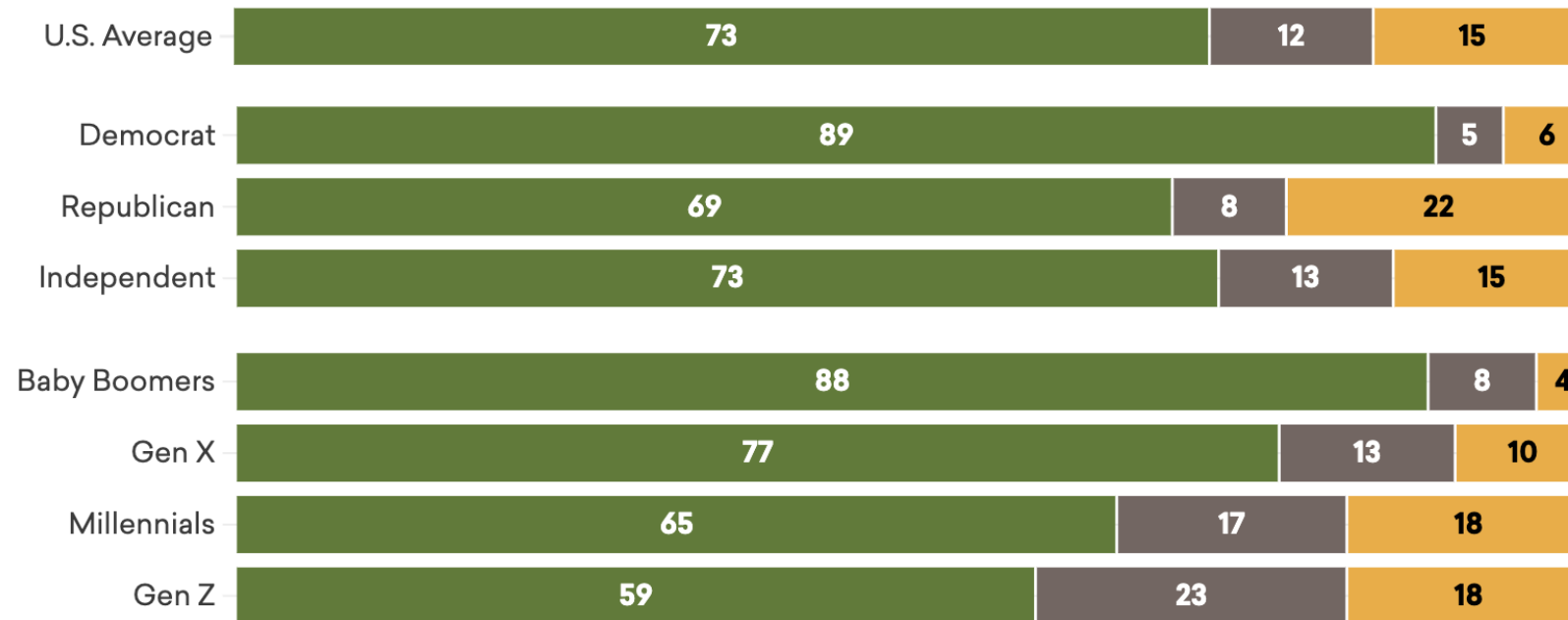
- Leaders must always uphold democratic principles (e.g. constitutional checks and balances) even if the economy isn't doing well.
- Sometimes it's okay for leaders to set aside democratic principles (e.g. constitutional checks and balances) to fix the economy.



# Unsure: Gen Z is least likely to believe that President Trump should always follow the Constitution.

With regards to the Constitution, how do you think President Trump should govern?

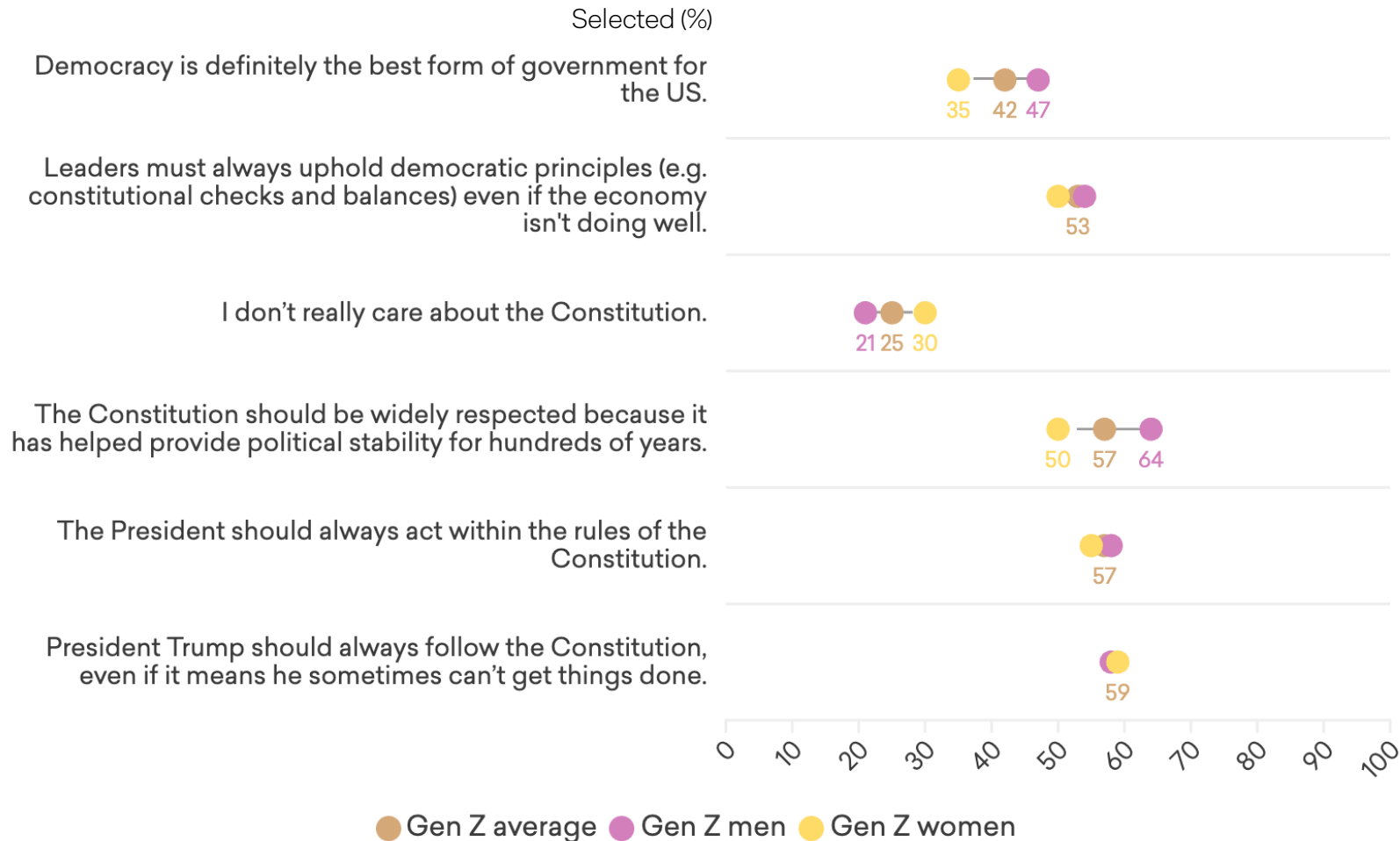
- He should always follow the Constitution, even if it means he sometimes can't get things done.  
● Don't know ● He should get things done, even if it means sometimes ignoring the Constitution.



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# **Gender, COVID, Engagement: Evaluating Explanations of the Generational Divide on Democracy**

# Gender: We do not observe a strong gender split among Gen Z.

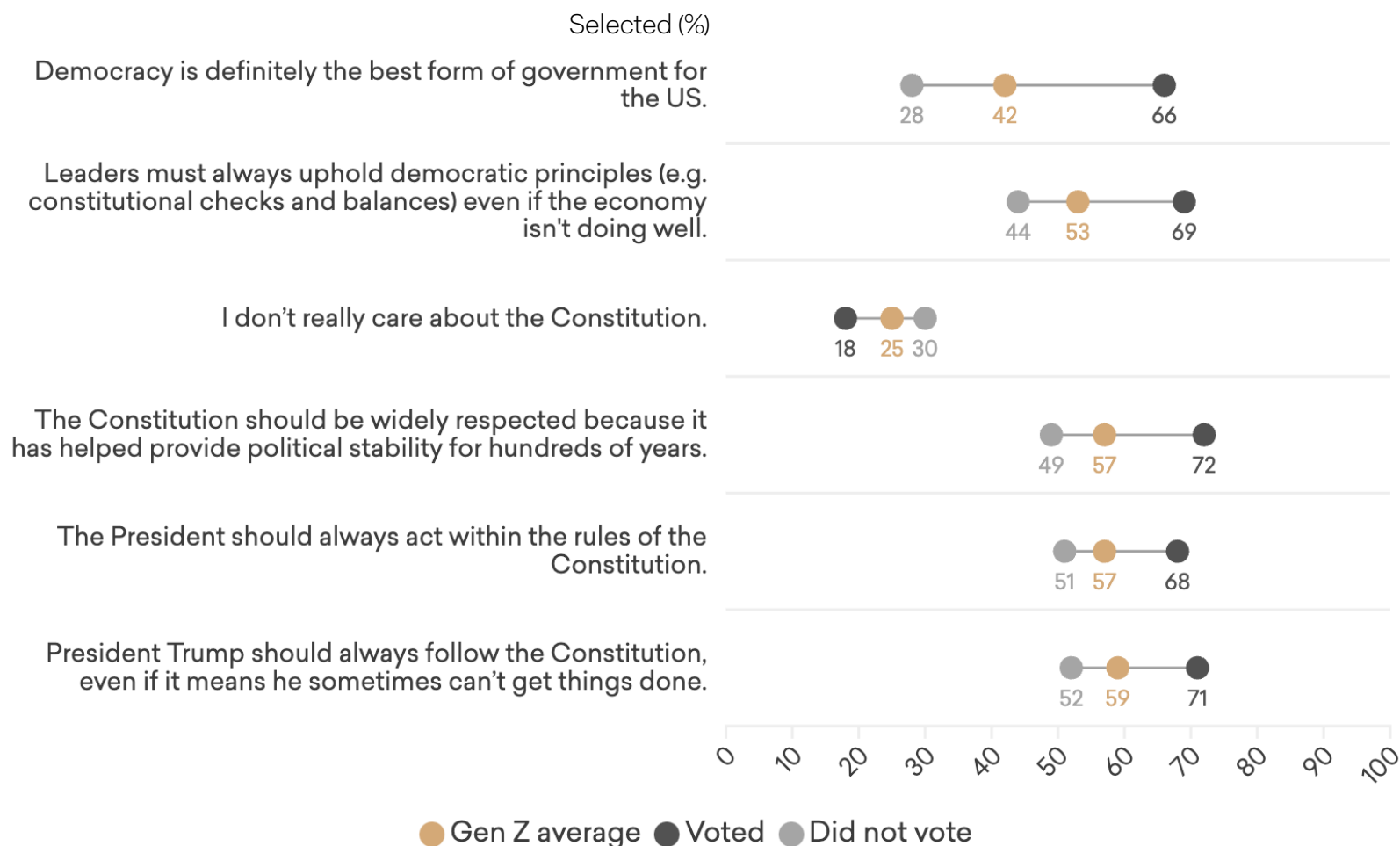


# Gen Z convey the same doubts about democracy regardless of whether they were at home during the pandemic.

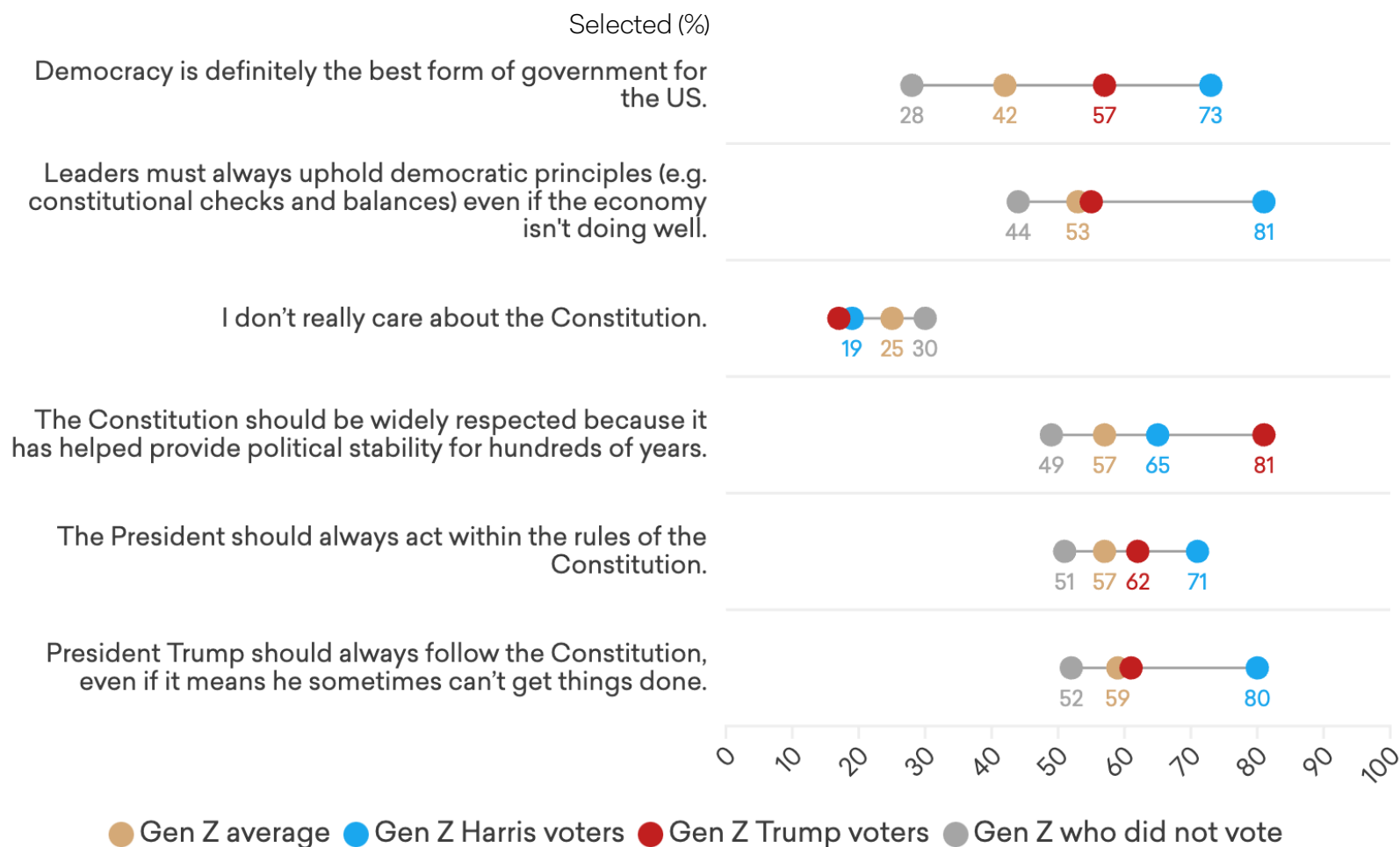




# Engagement matters: Low political involvement is a strong predictor of Gen Z's anti-democratic attitudes.



# Gen Z Trump and Harris voters slightly differ, but are more committed to democracy than their non-voter counterparts.



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# **Disillusioned and Underwhelmed: Insights from Conversations with Gen Z Democracy Skeptics**

# A skepticism rooted in disillusionment

Existing research points to various explanatory factors for skepticism towards democracy: distrust in institutions, fatalism, heightened exposure to social media, increased rates of depression and anxiety, and shifting historical reference points.<sup>1</sup>

But in our conversations with Gen Z who are most skeptical of democracy,<sup>2</sup> one theme consistently stood out: *disillusionment*. Many express distrust in political elites, a belief that the current political system doesn't serve people like them, and a yearning for more unity and responsiveness in government.

While some express a superficial interest in the order and unity they associate with non-democratic systems, few articulate what such alternatives would look like in the US, and even fewer see authoritarianism or dictatorship as acceptable options. Their doubts about democracy are rarely about embracing authoritarianism and much more about alienation with a political system they perceive as broken, polarized, and unresponsive to their needs.

<sup>1</sup> Protect Democracy and CIRCLE at Tufts University, "How Does Gen Z Really Feel About Democracy?," April 6, 2025; Erin Heys, "Cultural Evolution: Measuring Differences in Generational Values," *Berkeley Institute for Young Americans*, June 26, 2024; Jean M. Twenge, "The Death of American Exceptionalism," *The Atlantic*, October 25, 2024; Gimbrone et al., "The politics of depression: Diverging trends in internalizing symptoms among US adolescents by political beliefs," *SSM – Mental Health*.

<sup>2</sup> Please see the appendix for more information on the recruitment criteria of Gen Z "democracy skeptical" focus groups.

**Some Gen Z feel that the Constitution, while important, is outdated and needs revisions to better reflect the current context and needs of everyday people.**

**“I believe the Constitution should be still there**, at least the part about freedom or checks and balances. But there should be some amendment maybe to keep it more up to date. I don't know how to make those changes like to make everybody like happy, but **definitely there should be some sort of amendment.**”



Wyatt, 28-year-old Asian man, moderate Democrat and 2024 Trump voter from California

**“The Constitution is the basis of what this country was built on.** But as time changes, I think that it should also be updated. Maybe people don't want to really change anything in the Constitution because it is too important to look at.”



Brenda, 27-year-old Hispanic woman, slightly conservative (did not vote in 2024) from Texas

**Gen Z Americans who are skeptical of democracy share deep dissatisfaction with national division and a sense that the system is not working for them.**

“I'd say no it's not working for people like me, because **it causes too much of a divide**. I mean, **people fight every day about politics**. And, like, even in my own family, people fight about politics. This is not the point of life. It destroys relationships. I feel like there should be more than just two political parties.”

Tessa, 28-year-old white woman, moderate Independent and 2024 Trump voter from Indiana



“What is the point of voting and choosing different people for us to have a better country? It's a mess. We don't get the attention. Like, it's something like what I see from my point of view. **We don't have a voice for us. What is the point of doing this?**”

Kelly, 26-year-old Hispanic woman, moderate Independent and 2024 Harris voter from Arizona

## Many “democracy skeptical” Gen Z are frustrated with the two-party system, polarization, and partisan division.

“I don't even know why we have, like, **Democrat, Republican and all that** blah, blah stuff. Really. **Everybody really in the world's just paying bills**, you know, like cars, all that, and getting better jobs, lowering prices on some things. I just think we just need the daily essentials. They need to crack down on all of that stuff instead of worrying about all these different things. That's just useless for us.”



Riley, 23-year-old Black woman, moderate Independent and 2024 Harris voter from South Carolina



“I just think the way that we go about it today, it's becoming less about benefiting societal as a whole. **It's more of like entertainment now with different agendas.**”

Alex, 23-year-old Hispanic man, moderate Independent and 2024 Trump voter from Tennessee

**Many feel unheard and that the political system is rigged, benefiting the wealthy and powerful rather than the average citizen.**

“I definitely think it's rigged. I personally don't vote. Because I do think that **our votes don't count when we're voting for somebody to be in office or government. I don't know who it's meant to benefit.** Probably the richer people who are rich, like Trump or Elon Musk maybe.”



Kayla, 27-year-old white woman, moderate Independent (did not vote in 2024) from Ohio



“You have to have money. **If you don't have the money, then your voice isn't being heard.** You're not even getting looked at..”

Catherine, 27-year-old white woman, moderate Independent (did not vote in 2024) from Oklahoma



**While a few are drawn to the sense of order and unity they perceive in non-democratic countries, most are uncertain or doubtful about whether alternative forms of government can address their frustrations.**



“I feel like we could try [non-democratic forms of government] but I’m **not really sure how that will look like or if that will actually benefit us in the long run.**”

Brenda, 27-year-old Hispanic woman, slightly conservative (did not vote in 2024) from Texas



“I think a government that is **focused on unifying the people**, that is a form of government that I think I would be open to, if not democracy.”

Dylan, 28-year-old white man, conservative Republican and 2024 Trump voter from Missouri

**Overall, despite disappointment in the current political system, most “democracy skeptical” Gen Z do not see non-democratic alternatives as a viable path forward for the country.**

“The great thing about living in the United States is that we, **we get the opportunity to express ourselves** and that's what's so different from other countries. I just **couldn't imagine like bringing any non-democratic ideals to the United States.**”

Kayla, 27-year-old white woman, moderate Independent (did not vote in 2024) from Ohio



“For me, **I wouldn't look at any country and say, “oh, this country is doing great economically [so I prefer that].’** I think there are loopholes in any kind of systems. I can't really think of anything, any governance that is working out very well for the particular country. We don't know what's happening there on a deep level internally.”

Ahmed, 26-year-old Asian man, slightly conservative Independent and 2024 Harris voter from California



**What changes in the political system would Gen Z democracy skeptics like to see? Some call for greater unity and less polarization, while others emphasize transparency and collective wellbeing.**



“I wish things in the government would be more transparent. We don't know what's going on really. There's a bunch of different news sources to go to and you'd never know which one's telling the truth. **I'd like to know more transparently so us regular people can understand what's going on in the government.**”

Kayla, 27-year-old white woman, moderate Independent (did not vote in 2024) from Ohio



“I feel like right now the two party are kind of divided. I feel like if there's something I would change, I wanted to be **more focusing on to like solving the issue of like people rather than just like having their own show.**”

Wyatt, 28-year-old Asian man, moderate Democrat and 2024 Trump voter from California

# What now? The path from skepticism to empowerment

Gen Z grew up hearing that democracy was their voice, their power, their future. But for many, that promise has fallen flat. Many talk about voting, but from the perspective of many Gen Z Americans, many have yet to believe democratic systems are delivering on meeting their needs, expectations and policy priorities. Leaders should start by listening and acknowledging Gen Z's frustration over broken systems and their sense that no one in power is really trying to, or at least able to, deliver on their needs.

Gen Z's distrust of democracy isn't a rejection of values—it's a hunger for them. Their demands for transparency and responsiveness echo the very ideals democracy promises but too often fails to deliver. The more leaders speak to those values in action—not theory—the more credible they become.

To reframe democracy as a vehicle for positive change, leaders must connect the dots between policies and lived experience. Clear, relatable messages about how democratic systems can deliver effective, sustainable outcomes that directly impact Americans' well-being can shift it from an abstract system to a tool that matters. And when young people learn what life under authoritarian rule really looks like—from censorship to forced conformity—they gain a sharper sense of what democracy protects, and what they could lose.

**Protect Democracy's report** on Gen Z and democracy also outlines actionable strategies from investing in democratic reforms to providing young people access to meaningful civic engagement.



**More in  
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# Appendix

## Recruitment Criteria for “Democracy Skeptical” Gen Z Focus Groups

Participants qualified if they met at least 3 of the following 6 criteria:

1. Selected either:
  - “I am open to non-democratic forms of government in the United States”
  - OR
  - “I would prefer a non-democratic government in the United States”
2. Selected “Somewhat agree” or “Strongly agree” to: “I appreciate that our government is set up to prevent one person from enforcing their will.”
3. Selected: “The Constitution should not be given too much weight because it was written in a completely different period of history.”
4. Selected: “The President should be able to do good things for the country regardless of whether they fit the rules of the Constitution.”
5. Selected: “Sometimes it’s okay for leaders to set aside democratic principles (e.g. constitutional checks and balances) to fix the economy.”
6. Selected “Somewhat agree” or “Strongly agree” to: “I feel that violence is sometimes needed to advance political causes in the U.S. today.”