

Following The Youth Vote: An in-depth look at the issues animating young people in the 2020 presidential election

Savannah Charles
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Amber Wichowsky, Political Science

Research Questions

- What issues are important to young voters?
- When it comes to these issues, do young and old voters want different things from government?
- How are the candidates talking about these issues in their campaign messages?
- Do these issues do more to mobilize young voters?

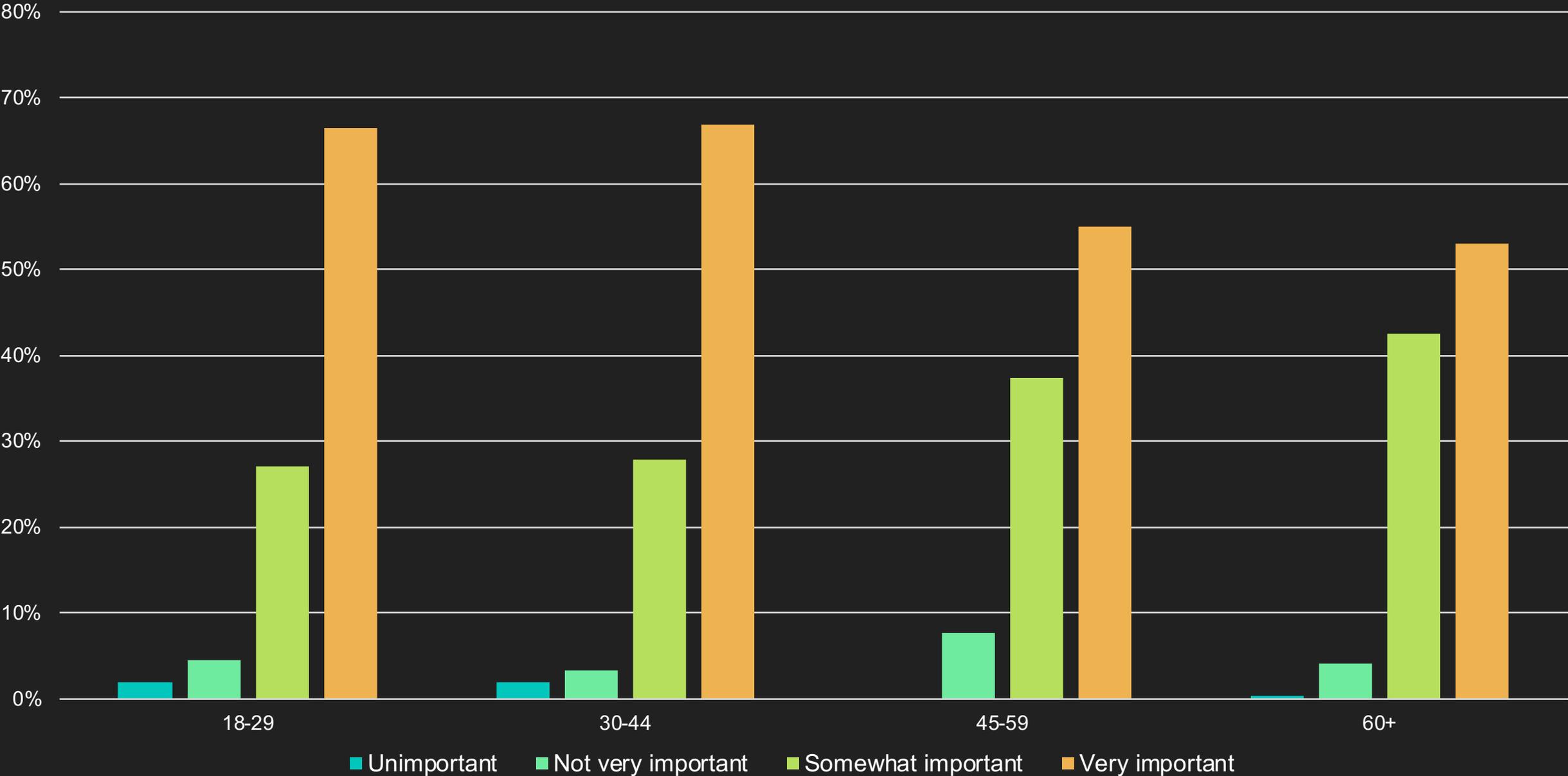
Expectations

- Three issues have become increasingly important to young voters: Climate Change, Gun Control, and Education
- According to Graf, Igielnik, and Parker (2019), Generation Z and millennials are more likely to see the relationship between human activity and climate change
- 57% of voters between ages 18-29 – higher than any other age group – felt that stricter gun legislations should be an immediate top priority for Congress (Santhanam 2018)
- Over half of voters ages 18 to 29 supported free public four-year colleges and universities (Harvard Kennedy School 2019)
- 90% of adults ages 18-29 used at least one social media account in 2018 (Pew Research 2019)
- Young voters ages 18 to 24 who received election information through both traditional forms *and* social media were the likeliest to vote (CIRCLE 2018)

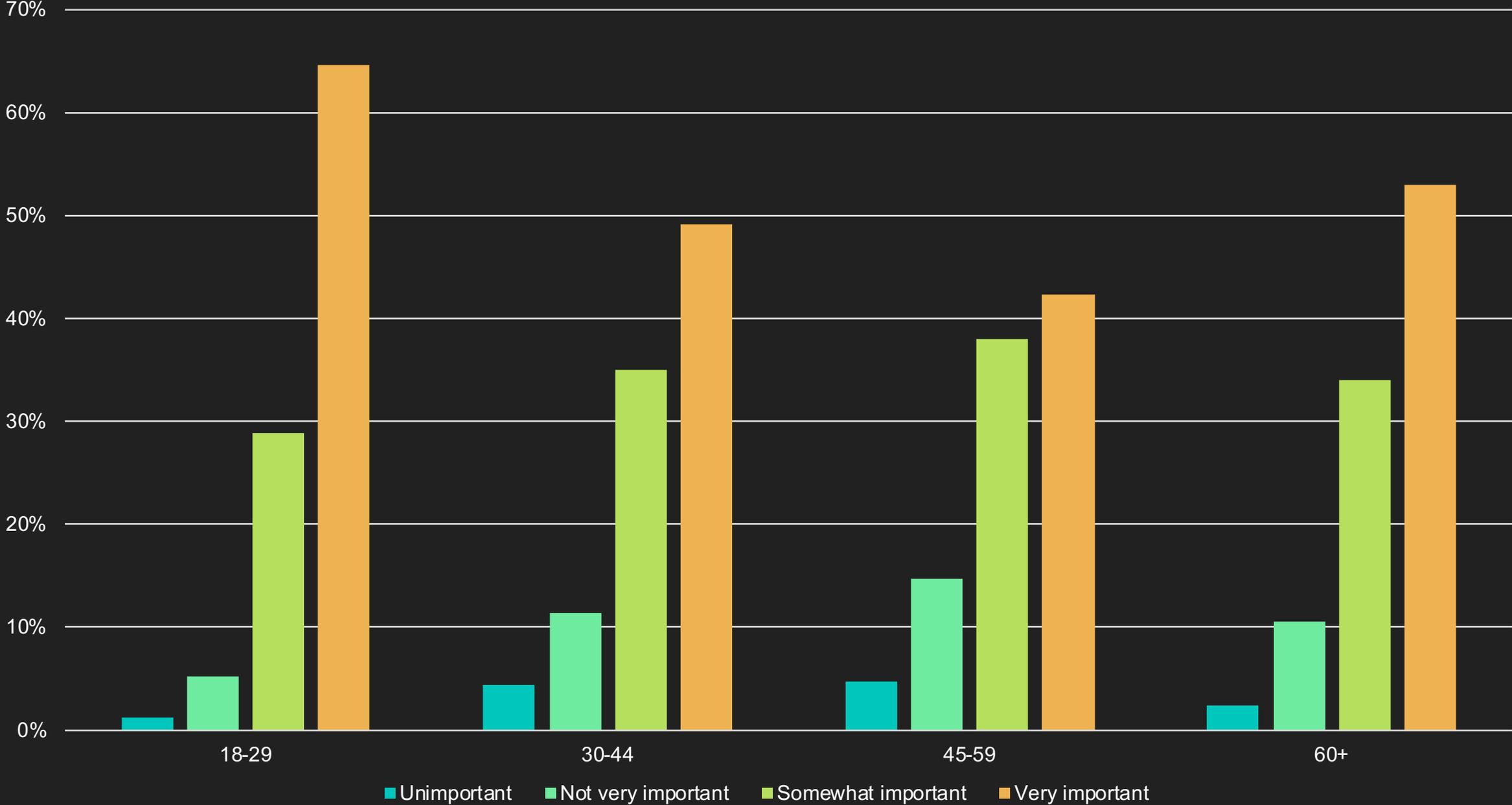
Data and Methods

- Data come from the Elecurator Survey, a nationally representative opinion poll of Americans in the 2020 presidential election
- Respondents asked to rank the importance of issues (1=Unimportant, 2=Not very important, 3=Somewhat important, 4=very important)
- Explored issue prioritization of Climate Change, Education, and Gun Control (SPSS)
- Respondents also asked open-ended questions:
 - What is the most important issue to you in this election?
 - What issue are you not hearing enough about from the presidential candidates?
- Qualitative data coded for issue categories (NVivo)
- Prominence of issues in candidates' campaign messages:
 - Coded candidates tweets (Brandwatch)
 - Issues in campaign ads (Wesleyan Media Project/Elecurator)
- Regression analysis of Elecurator survey data

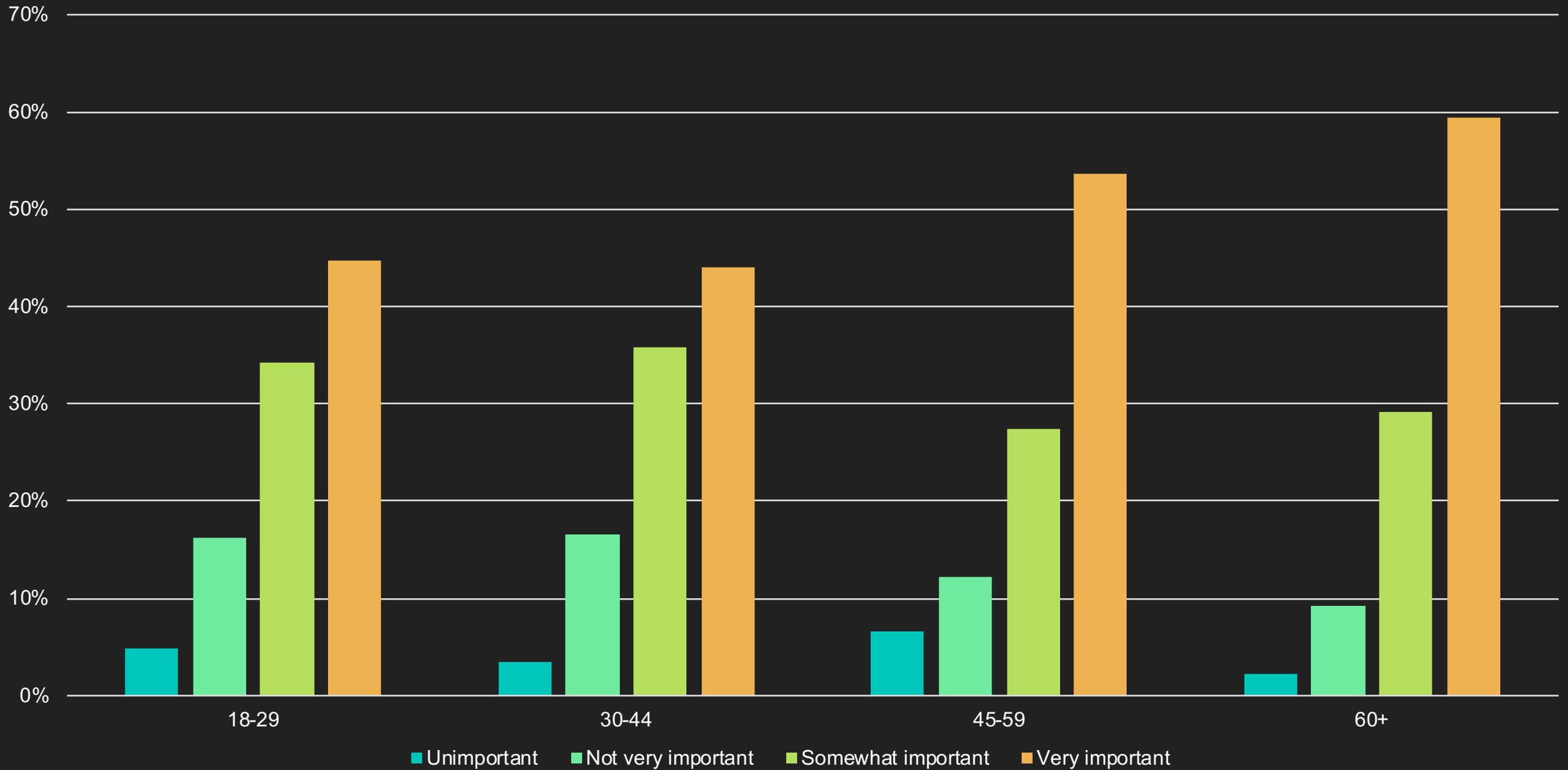
How important to you is the issue of education in the upcoming presidential election?



How important to you is the issue of the environment in the upcoming presidential election?



How important to you is the issue of gun control or gun rights in the upcoming presidential election?



Perceived Issue Neglect

- Is there issue neglect from the campaign as perceived by voters?
- Are there age differences in the issues that Americans say they're not hearing enough about?

Survey 2 Findings

- 100/794 (12.6%) reference climate change, although there was no clear age difference; 45-59 year-olds look distinctive
 - Age 18-29: 13/138 (9.4%)
 - Age 30-44: 26/295 (8.8%)
 - Age 45-59: 37/223 (16.6%)
 - Age 60+: 24/305 (7.9%)
- 27/794 (3.4%) referenced education*
- 14/794 (1.8%) referenced gun control (9) or 2nd amendment rights (5)*

* Education and gun control were mentioned too infrequently to examine significant age difference

Survey 3 Findings

- 87/670 (13.0%) referenced climate change; this time, younger voters are slightly more likely to say that they're not hearing enough about climate change from the presidential candidates
 - Age 18-29: 10/105 (9.5%)
 - Age 30-44: 27/229 (11.8%)
 - Age 45-59: 21/175 (12%)
 - Ages 60+: 29/250 (11.6%)
- 26/670 (3.9%) referenced education*
- 15/670 (2.2%) referenced gun control (8) or 2nd amendment (5)*

* Education and gun control were mentioned too infrequently to examine significant age difference

Is it true? Are candidates not talking about climate change?

- Brandwatch Twitter Data: Tweets mentioning the issues of climate change, guns, and education posted between September 29th, 2020 and October 25th, 2020
- Climate Change: 8% (10) of Joe Biden's tweets compared to 2% (6%) of Donald Trump's tweets
- Guns: 0% (0) of Joe Biden's tweets compared to 12% (39) of Donald Trump's tweets
- Education: 5% (6) of Joe Biden's tweets compared to 2% (7) of Donald Trump's tweets

Is it true? Are candidates not talking about climate change?

- The Wesleyan Media Project collected data from candidate-sponsored ad airings only one broadcast television and national cable between August 10th and September 13th, 2020
- According to the Wesleyan Media Project, former Vice President Joe Biden mentioned climate change and global warming a total of 6,123 times, for a total of 4.7% of all issues mentioned
- President Trump mentioned energy policy – the most closely related topic to the environment and climate change – a total of 136 times, for a total of 0.3% of all issues mentioned

Younger Voters' Likelihood of Voting

- Older voters, more highly educated, partisans, and those with greater political interest are more likely to say that they will vote in 2020
- Individuals who say that climate change is an important issue are also more likely to say that they will definitely vote in 2020
- However, the mobilizing impact of climate change on vote likelihood is *greater* for younger citizens

Conclusion

- Climate change is an especially important issue among young voters
- Young voters want to hear more from the candidates about climate change
- Climate change is an important issue for mobilizing the youth vote, as voters who placed a greater importance on climate change were more likely to say they would definitely vote in the presidential election
- Based on the youth turnout in the 2020 presidential election, we can ask: Should either of the candidates make climate change and the environment a higher priority to achieve a greater percentage of the youth vote?