



BUILDING BRIDGES AND BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

*Young adults' insights on the state of leadership and
empowerment in G20 countries*

A collaborative effort between Y2o and the Center for Creative Leadership



What would it look like if young adults around the globe had opportunities to develop the skills, beliefs, and connections they need to become lifelong, empowered leaders?

How can those in positions of power help young professionals begin that journey?



This research was conducted by Stephanie Wormington, Sarah Pearsall, Katya Fernandez, and Emily Hoole at the Center for Creative Leadership.





The world is battling two public health crises in 2020. COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc on our daily lives, economic prospects, and social interactions on local, national, and international levels. At the same time, civil rights movements such as Black Lives Matter have brought renewed attention and scrutiny to the more insidious crisis of social injustice permeating all aspects of society. Both COVID-19 and the spotlight on social injustice have shaped global attitudes and actions in profound and often intersecting ways. Both crises have also been met with varying levels of support and resistance from citizens, leaders, and governments worldwide.

Few young adults (defined here as 18-30 years of age) have experienced events with such pervasive global impact in their lifetime. In such tumultuous times, can they reasonably be expected to navigate everyday challenges in the “new normal” and meaningfully engage in formal or informal leadership roles? By the same token, unprecedented challenges afford opportunities for unprecedented change. The time is ripe to change beliefs about what leadership looks like and who can become a leader. This paper provides insights into young professionals’ current beliefs and hopes for the future. Drawing from the perspectives of over 10,000 young adults in 20 countries, we asked:



10,000
YOUNG ADULTS
FROM 20 COUNTRIES

1

What is empowerment, and why is it important?

2

What is the current state of leadership and empowerment among young adults?

3

Why do young adults choose to engage (or not engage) in formal leadership?

4

How can those in positions of power enable young adults to feel empowered?





Leadership is “a social process that enables individuals to work together to achieve results.”

-Center for Creative Leadership

The following pages highlight what we learned from young professionals participating in surveys, interviews, and interactive working sessions. These young adults provided a broad view on the state of young people’s leadership, and represented different backgrounds, geographic locations, and experiences with formal and informal leadership. Some were first-time leaders, and others held top leadership positions. Some aspired to be formal leaders someday but had not yet stepped into that role. Others did not intend to pursue formal leadership at all.



10,386
YOUNG ADULTS

We conclude with some promising starting points for change. These points were identified based on survey responses from more than 10,000 young adults. Recommendations for how to address these starting points were drawn from both interviews and working sessions, and were informed by foundational knowledge in leadership development.

Ultimately, our recommended approach to enact meaningful change is grounded in the Center for Creative Leadership’s (CCL)® definition of leadership: “a social process that enables individuals to work together to achieve results.” Young adults and those in positions of power both have meaningful roles to play in supporting emerging leaders’ empowerment. By hearing perspectives from others around the globe, young professionals themselves can generate frame-breaking ideas to alter the state of young leadership. By listening to why young adults may (or may not) choose to pursue formal leadership roles, those in positions of power can evolve their approaches to supporting young professionals through systems that support their meaningful involvement. Only by working together hand-in-hand can we achieve our ultimate goal: setting the stage to develop young leaders who, regardless of their background, recognize their potential impact on local, national, and international levels.





WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

■ What is a good leader, and why would young adults choose to be leaders?

Leadership is a field that has garnered enormous attention, with more than 26,000 academic articles published on the topic of leadership at the turn of the century. Leadership can involve many different tasks and responsibilities, depending on whether it is formal or informal and whether it is a solitary or joint pursuit. Ideas about who can be a leader and what a good leader looks like may differ based on the person, field, or context. What does a leader look like in 2020 and what does effective leadership entail? We asked young adults to answer these questions in their own words.



more than

26,000

ACADEMIC ARTICLES
Published on Leadership Development

In general, young adults view leaders in a positive light and recognize a leader's potential to support others. In the survey, young professionals across G20 countries identified the top five characteristics of a good leader as intelligence, strong work ethic, discipline, understanding, and competence. These responses indicate that it is important for leaders to be prepared (competent, intelligent), dedicated (hard-working, disciplined), and attuned to collective needs (understanding). The least frequently selected characteristics suggest that young adults do not believe some past stereotypes associated with being a good leader, including gender (male), physical appearance (tall), or questionable tactics (power-hungry, manipulative).

Interviews with current young leaders reinforced the same themes, particularly with respect to empowering others. Many responses about how to describe a leader (see word cloud on next page) involved themes related to helping others (e.g., empathy, inspires) and bringing people together (e.g., common vision, create culture). Often, this work took the form of enabling others to reach their full potential. As one leader shared, "A leader is someone who can inspire others and help them realize their strengths and maximize their contributions to society."



"A leader is someone who can inspire others and help them realize their strengths and maximize their contributions to society."

Several interviewees also emphasized the importance of empathy and deep understanding of community to truly empower others. For example, one current leader highlighted the benefit of listening to empower others: "A leader is a role, an intention, an attitude of listening to others, of understanding what is needed—what are the pains, which are the opportunities, and bringing what people have inside (their power and strength) to accomplish that opportunity or to solve that issue."



Another current leader reinforced this message, stating,

“a leader today should be someone with a great deal of empathy, a great deal of dedication, and someone with a deep knowledge about the community and issues that pertain to that community they hope to lead.”



What is youth empowerment, and why is it important?

Young professionals also emphasized **the importance of young adults feeling empowered in their leadership roles, whether formal or informal**. In a Y2o working session, delegates defined youth empowerment as “understanding, learning, and enabling young adults to take part in shaping the future.” Based on these insights and informed by research, we define empowered young adults as those who are:



Confident that their voice is heard



Involved in important decision-making conversations



Able to make decisions, either on their own or jointly with others



Able to make a positive impact on their group, community, or organization

When young adults are empowered, they can contribute unique perspectives, knowledge, and ideas to important conversations. In particular, young delegates identified involvement in policymaking and design as promising opportunities to have widespread impact.





Recognizing equity, diversity, and inclusion

When discussing empowerment, many young adults emphasized the importance of equitable participation and engaging a diverse cross-section of young adults in leadership to provide a broad perspective. During a working session, young professionals were asked to select an image that reflected youth empowerment. One Y2o delegate selected the image at the bottom of this page and offered the following insight:

"Youth empowerment should be intersectional and for the diversity of youths. In this image, I see Georgette Seabrooke, as a young, Black, woman, artist, empowered by doing what she loves—painting. In the same image, I see how her age, race and gender put obstacles on her path to being recognized and respected for her work. She was the youngest and only women artist to be chosen to paint a mural for a hospital in Harlem, NY. Her mural, titled 'Recreation in Harlem' showed images of the Harlem community, dancing to a choir and enjoying life. Complaints about the mural being "too black" led to the Hospital administration and City of New York asking her to change her painting by adding more white people on the mural. Yet, she raised her voice along with other muralists to protest against this injustice and racism, and in 1937 won, when her original mural was placed in the Children's Pavilion. She reminds us that youth empowerment will occur differently depending on the structural barriers that affect each person from their race, class and gender, and thus, we must address injustices from the roots to reach empowerment for all."

- Eri Kimura Meguro, Y2o Mexico Delegate

Other delegates recognized the potential of empowering those with diverse social identities and life experiences to be leaders. Many highlighted systemic and structural barriers that might prevent those from traditionally marginalized backgrounds from pursuing leadership, and acknowledged the difficulties they face in finding empowerment within systems and structures built by others.





WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT AMONG YOUNG ADULTS?

How has young adults' leadership changed in the face of the current pandemic? To provide a broad picture, we surveyed 10,386 young adults in G20 countries from different perspectives and backgrounds.

Are young adults currently engaged in formal and informal leadership roles?

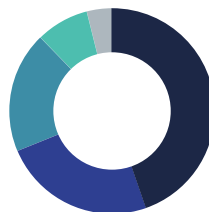


Most young professionals are currently involved in a leadership role or aspire to lead in the future.

We began by asking respondents whether they were currently engaged in a leadership role. Rather than providing a formal definition, we let young adults determine what qualified as a leadership role. Their roles could include appointed, compensated positions or informal, volunteer responsibilities. Overall, responses suggested that **most young professionals are currently involved in a leadership role or aspire to lead in the future.**

More than one-third of those surveyed reported currently holding a leadership role. Nearly half of these current leaders held leadership positions in entrepreneur or for-profit sectors (47%), but a sizable percentage also held leadership roles in education (23%) and the non-profit sector (21%). Fewer served as leaders in government (7%) or political activist domains (3%). Current leaders held positions mostly in middle (32%) and upper-middle management (19%), but also held hourly or first-level (30%) and executive and top-level positions (19%).

Leaders from different sectors:



47% Entrepreneur or for-profit sectors
23% Leadership roles in education
21% The non-profit sector
07% Fewer served as leaders in government
03% political activist domains

Leaders from different leader levels:



32% Leaders held positions mostly in middle
30% Held hourly or first-level
19% Upper-middle management
19% Executive and top-level positions

Are you currently in a leadership role?



22% No
37% Yes
42% No, but I would like to be

Of those not in a leadership role, 65% reported they would like to lead in the future (41% of overall sample). Most of these aspiring leaders planned to pursue a leadership role in the next five years. In contrast, 35% of those not in a leadership role did not intend to pursue one in the future (22% of overall sample). These non-leaders may have been uninterested in a formal position or perceived leadership as an opportunity that was unavailable to them, a point explored later.

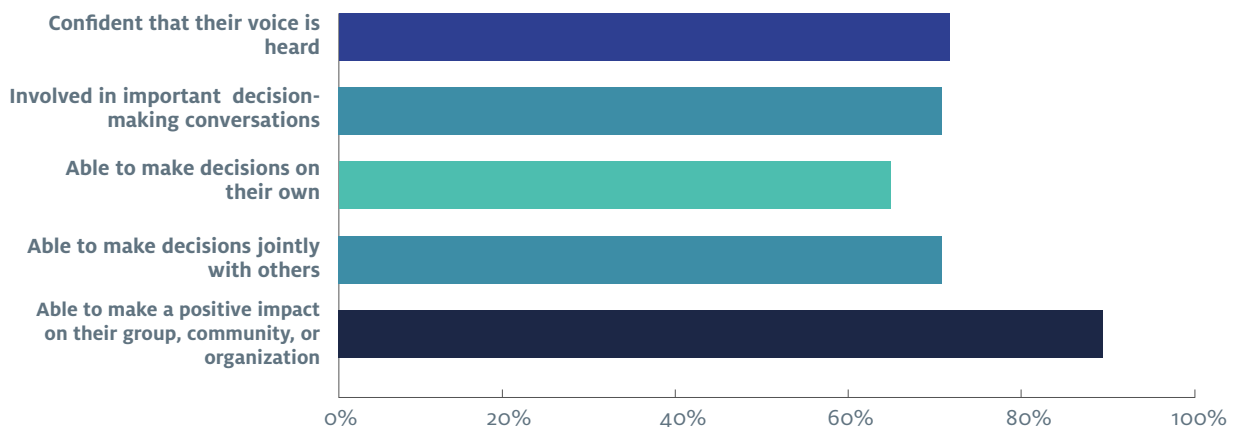


Do current young leaders feel empowered in their leadership roles?

Securing a leadership role does not guarantee that young professionals feel empowered. We asked current leaders to share more about experiences in their present roles. Responses suggested that **most leaders engage in activities that make them feel empowered frequently or almost all of the time**. When asked how often they experienced the following, current leaders reported that they were:



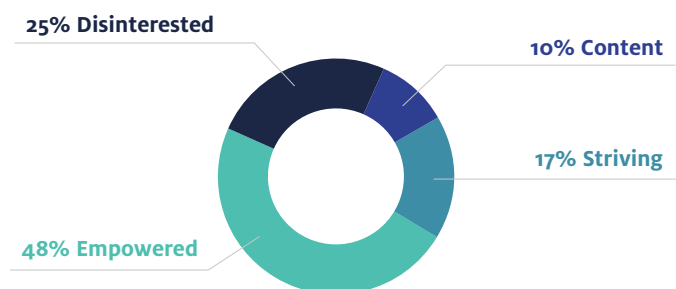
MOST LEADERS ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES THAT MAKE THEM FEEL EMPOWERED FREQUENTLY OR ALMOST ALL OF THE TIME.



When we interviewed current leaders about their own experiences, they shared that feeling empowered enabled them to experience both personal growth and broader societal impact. Some interviewees emphasized that being a leader allowed them to take agency over their personal development. To illustrate, one leader shared that “being a leader made me take ownership of my life, of my actions, and be able to start change.” Others described how feeling empowered shifted their focus toward how to positively impact others, rather than focusing solely on their own development. For example, one leader stated that “once you are responsible, not only for yourself, but also for others, it puts you on a completely different path.”

Is young adults’ involvement in leadership perceived as normative?

The state of young adults’ leadership also involves understanding what role Gen Z and Millennials do and should play in leadership on local, national, and international levels. We asked two questions about the role of young adults in leadership in their country: their current role (“youth play an important role in leadership in my country”) and potential role (“my country would benefit from more youth leadership”).



Current Role:

“Youth play an important role in leadership in my country.”

Potential Role:

“My country would benefit from more youth leadership.”

Responses suggested that young adults are not a monolith, but **hold different perspectives on their age group’s current and potential role in leadership.** Their perspectives align with four general views:

Disinterested

Do not think young adults play an important role in their country’s leadership and do not see any benefit from more involvement. One-fourth of survey respondents held this view and were most likely to be non-leaders (those who do not intend to lead in the future).



of total survey sample.

Content

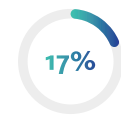
Think young adults are important to their country’s leadership, and do not think their country would benefit from more young leaders. Only 10% of survey respondents held this view.



of total survey sample.

Striving

Do not think young adults currently play an important role in their country’s leadership, but see the potential benefit of greater involvement. As one interviewee described, young adults are often “left out of the conversation.” About 17% of survey respondents held this view and were most likely to be aspiring leaders (those who do not lead but plan to in the future).



of total survey sample.

Empowered

Think young adults are important to their country’s leadership and recognize the potential for greater involvement. One interviewee described this important and untapped potential: “Young people are the key because they have this energy, motivation, innovative knowledge. We should use it in leadership because [young adults] are the ones who are the future and who should take the responsibility for the world we live in.” Nearly half (48%) of survey respondents held this view and were most likely to be current leaders.



of total survey sample.

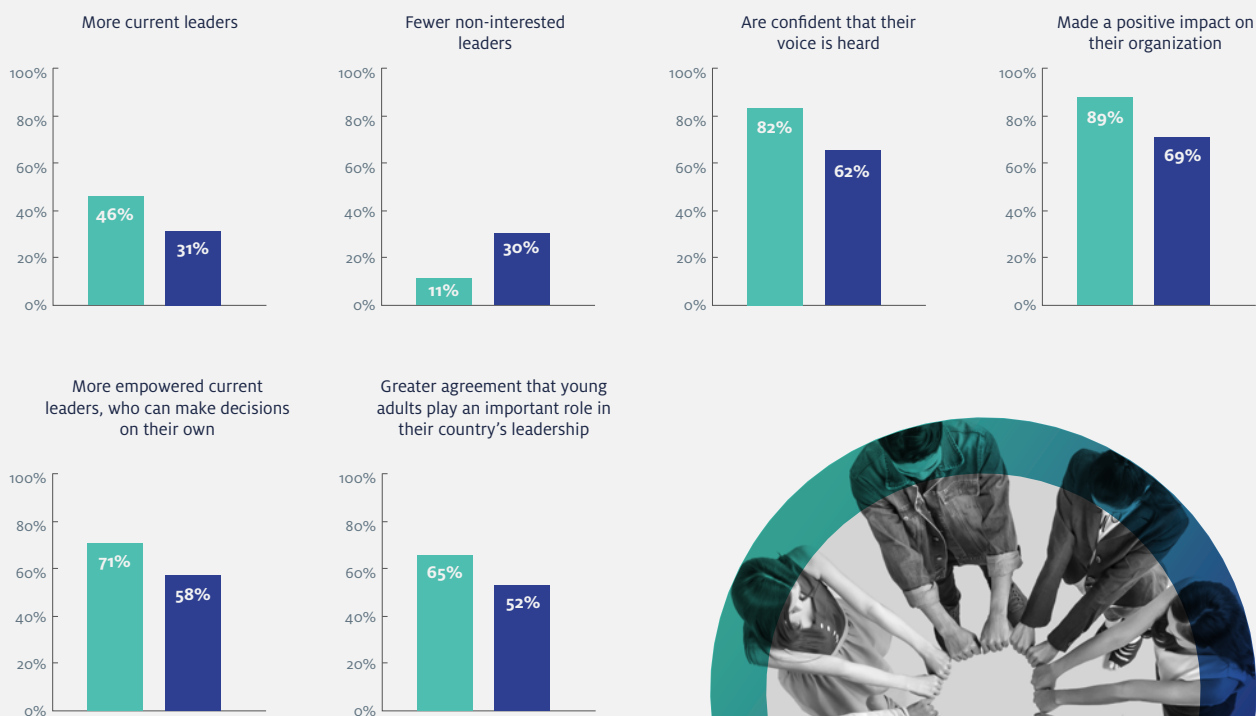
Taken together, the current state of Gen Z and Millennials’ leadership indicates a strong starting point for engagement and empowerment, as well as momentum for even greater involvement. Most young adults we heard from were either involved in leadership or plan to lead in the future, and most current leaders felt empowered in their roles. Over half of survey respondents recognized the important role of young adults in their country’s leadership currently, and more than half highlighted potential for even greater future impact of young leaders in their country.





Do young adults' leadership and empowerment vary across countries?

One benefit of hearing from young professionals in 20 different countries is the potential to explore geographic differences. When comparing responses from survey respondents in emerging and advanced countries (according to the International Monetary Fund ranking), we found that young adults in emerging countries lead more often and feel more empowered. Based on responses to our survey, emerging countries had:



Young adults in emerging countries also reported more positive supports for leadership, including more leadership opportunities, greater motivation to be a leader, and more support from their family, adults, and country overall. We explore these reasons to engage in a leadership role next.

■ Emerging Countries
■ Advanced Countries





WHY DO YOUNG ADULTS CHOOSE TO ENGAGE (OR NOT ENGAGE) IN LEADERSHIP ROLES?

In attempts to empower and encourage young leaders, world leaders, experts, and organizations have devoted significant time to understanding underlying reasons that might drive or prevent young adults from pursuing leadership. In the face of unprecedented global crises, what reasons do young professionals report as most salient for choosing (or deciding not) to lead?

We asked a comprehensive range of questions to learn more. These questions centered around three basic motivational questions identified by researchers:

Can I be a leader?

Do young adults have opportunities, support, and role models they need to be successful leaders?

Do I want to be a leader?

Why is being a leader important or useful to young professionals?

What is preventing me from being a leader?

What are barriers—either personal, structural, or cultural—that might discourage young adults from engaging in leadership?



These questions align with research on factors that support or hinder young leader. They also provide promising starting points for how to empower potential leaders.

Can I be a leader?

Leadership development opportunities, role models, and support

78%

of young adults surveyed have participated in leadership development activities

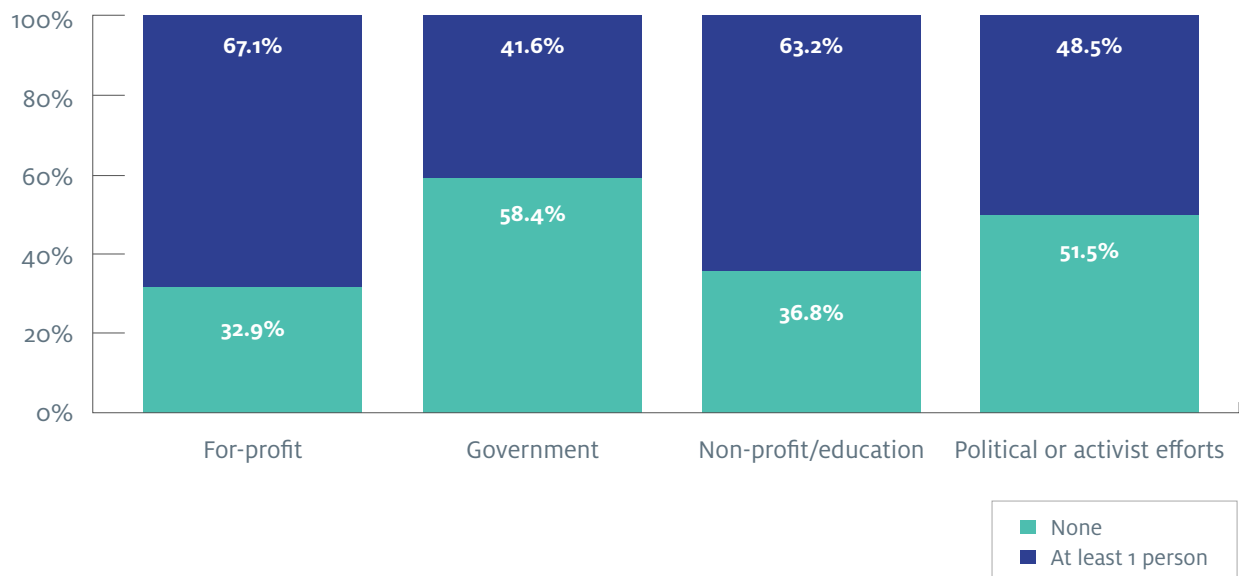
Many sources emphasize the need for leadership development experiences through school and in the early stages of young leaders' careers. However, Y2o delegates named lack of opportunities and experiences as key challenges to empowerment in their working session. Our survey suggested that most young adults have participated in leadership development activities (78%). These experiences were both formal (e.g., apprenticeship) and informal (e.g., volunteer). Current leaders we interviewed shared experiences ranging from informal summer programs to formal leadership courses. However, most young leaders perceived opportunities to lead in their country as inequitable (65%).



In line with the interviews, surveys suggested that **most young professionals had an adult who encouraged them or told them they could become a leader (70%)**. Many adults were family, but also included formal supervisors or informal mentors from youth activities. In contrast, **only half (49%) of young adults received support to be leaders from their family or country**. One interviewee voiced this as too few leaders “tell us youth have the power to make change and to be the change.”

70%

of young adults surveyed were encouraged or told they could become a leader



Young adults know at least one other young leader, especially in for-profit and non-profit/education. However, less than half know a young leader from their country in government or politics.

Aside from adult support, young adults may be more encouraged to pursue leadership themselves if they have a role model. We asked young adults who they know who lead in different domains. Responses suggested that **young adults know at least one other young leader, especially in for-profit and non-profit/ education**. However, **less than half know a young leader from their country in government or politics**. This response aligns with the reality that, despite representing over half of the world’s population, young adults only hold 2% of government positions.





■ Do I want to be a leader? Perceived value and reasons to lead

Professionals are more likely to engage in formal leadership (and feel empowered in that leadership role) if they perceive it as important, relevant, and worthwhile. When we asked young professionals why they are a leader (for current leaders) or might consider being a leader (for aspiring and non-leaders), they emphasized potential for personal development and helping others. Regardless of their current involvement in leadership, young adults identified their top five reasons to engage in leadership as:

- 1 Make a contribution to society
- 2 Support myself financially
- 3 Learn things that will help me make a positive impact in the world
- 4 Gain skills that I can use in a job that helps others
- 5 Prepare for a future career.

These reasons echo sentiments from interviews and working sessions on the dual emphasis on growing as an individual and contributing to society. As additional support, most survey respondents agreed that being a leader was important to their current life and future career. Fewer agreed that being a leader was an important part of their identity.

■ What is preventing me from being a leader? Barriers to formal leadership

Both young adults and those in positions of power have given considerable attention to the reasons that young adults may opt to not engage in formal leadership. Challenges identified in working sessions and interviews included lack of intergenerational trust, lack of confidence, ageism and stigma against young leaders, generational or situational poverty, and lack of initiative from young adults. From surveys, most young people named psychological safety, followed by stress/worry associated with being a leader, as personal barriers. Many did not think it was safe to take risks or make mistakes in leadership, two factors associated with psychological safety. About one-third of those surveyed also agreed that being a leader would stress them out or make them worry too much. Fewer respondents were concerned with the amount of time involved in being a leader or having to give up other pursuits.



Most young people named psychological safety, followed by stress and worry associated with being a leader, as personal barriers.





How do current, aspiring, and non-leaders differ?

Current, aspiring, and non-leaders vary based on actual and intended leadership engagement. How might they differ in their reasons to lead? We compared responses across these groups:

% agree/strongly agree	Current Leaders	Aspiring Leaders	Non-Leaders
Can I be a leader?			
My country offers opportunities to lead	Mod (52%)	Low (36%)	Low (30%)
Know 1+ young leader (across sectors)	High (61-81%)	Mod (32-64%)	Low (26-42%)
Supported/encouraged by 1+ adult to lead	High (85%)	High (71%)	Mod (42%)
Family supports me leading	Mod (61%)	Mod (42%)	Low (22%)
My country supports youth leadership	Mod (61%)	Mod (47%)	Low (31%)
My country has equitable opportunities to lead	Mod (50%)	Mod (36%)	Low (31%)
Do I want to be a leader?			
Useful to my everyday life	High (74%)	Mod (63%)	Low (31%)
Useful for my future career	High (78%)	High (73%)	Low (39%)
Important part of who I am	High (69%)	Mod (57%)	Low (28%)
What is preventing me from being a leader?			
Takes too much time	Low (19%)	Low (21%)	Low (15%)
Have to give up too much	Low (29%)	Mod (35%)	Low (23%)
Stresses me out too much	Mod (36%)	Mod (37%)	Low (17%)
Worry too much about it	Mod (34%)	Mod (40%)	Mod (32%)
Not safe to make mistakes (psych. safety)	Mod (52%)	Mod (46%)	Low (30%)

*High/mod/low based on trichotomous split. Percentage in parentheses=% agree/strongly agree.

Omitted variables: growth mindset, perceived youth involvement, future youth involvement.



Most young adults report being encouraged by an adult to be a leader and participating in leadership development opportunities.

Examining common trends across all groups highlights existing strengths (i.e., areas where all groups responded positively) to build from. It also shows opportunities to improve (i.e., areas where all groups responded somewhat negatively). For existing strengths, **most young adults report being encouraged by an adult to be a leader and participating in leadership development opportunities.** When considering opportunities to improve, **many did not perceive opportunities for young people to lead in their country, nor did they view those opportunities are equitable. They also reported high worry and low psychological safety in leadership.**

Separating the groups also allows us to pinpoint opportunities to support leadership engagement and empowerment for current, aspiring, and non-leaders differently **The two factors that most differentiated groups were knowing another young leader and perceiving leadership as useful** to their everyday life and identity. Current leaders knew more young leaders and perceived greater value to leading than aspiring leaders, who knew more young leaders and perceived greater value to leading than non-leaders. Aside from these factors, one additional difference between current and **aspiring leaders was that aspiring leaders perceived having to give up more to be a leader.**



Many young professionals did not perceive opportunities for young people to lead in their country, nor did they view those opportunities are equitable.

One Y2o delegate illustrated the importance of both role models and persisting through barriers for young leaders' empowerment:

"I see youth empowerment as a process that takes time and can be achieved through different paths, just like climbing a mountain. It takes a lot of preparation, determination and strength. Sometimes you meet obstacles and you can't always see the summit. At the same time, you usually walk paths that have been traced by others before you, so this makes it easier. When you get to the top of the mountain, however, the view is amazing and you forget about the tiredness and the struggles of the climb."



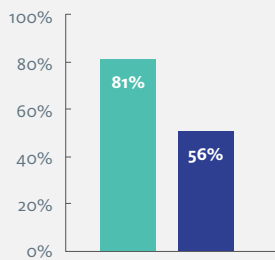


Do reasons to lead vary based on social identities?

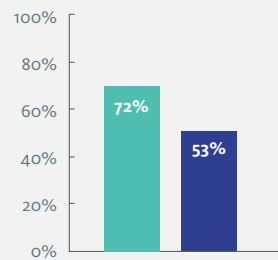
Individuals' reasons to lead are influenced by their unique life experiences and social identities. When we looked at surveys across individuals from different backgrounds, there were virtually no differences between Gen Z and Millennials. The only differences by gender were that men were more likely to know other young leaders, receive support, and perceive leadership opportunities as equitable in their country than women or those who identified as non-binary.

However, we saw consistent differences based on individuals' financial security. Young professionals reported their financial status from "I cannot make ends meet" to "I do not have to worry about money." The higher they rated their financial security, the more likely they were to perceive opportunities to lead, perceive those leadership opportunities as equitable, and receive support from adults and family. They also felt more empowered. Compared to current leaders who "cannot make ends meet," those who "do not have to worry about money" were more:

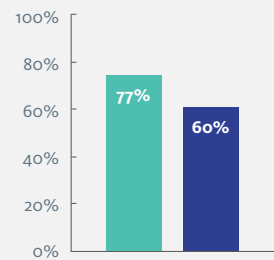
Confident that their voice is heard



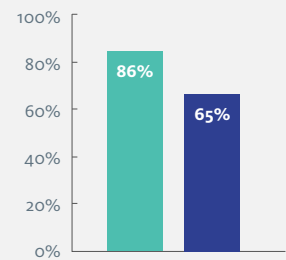
Able to make decisions on their own



Able to make decisions with others



Able to make a positive impact on their organization





HOW CAN THOSE IN POSITIONS OF POWER ENABLE YOUNG ADULTS TO FEEL EMPOWERED?

From government-funded youth programs to professional development, there is significant investment in developing young adults' leadership skills and confidence. However, these efforts do not always equate to results. At a point when time and resources are scarce, supporting high-leverage efforts is more critical than ever. What are the most impactful ways to empower young adults now and set the stage for sustained, meaningful engagement? How can these efforts be informed by young professionals' lived experiences and developed alongside emerging leaders?

We provide ten starting points for how to empower emerging leaders, inspired by young adults and informed by research. Some recommendations are directed at all young professionals, while others are tailored to current leaders, aspiring leaders, and those who do not plan to pursue a formal leadership role. They focus on unique areas where the young adults we heard from voiced a need for additional support or incentives.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, as there are dozens of different approaches to address each point, and no solution is likely to be effective across contexts. The list is, however, intended to provide a starting point for conversations centered around and led by young adults. What do they have to say about how to address these challenges? Where do established leaders see the greatest opportunities for change? How can these groups work together to empower tomorrow's leaders?

FOR ALL YOUNG ADULTS:

1 Systematically develop opportunities that invite and increase young adults' representation in decision-making processes.

Many young adults reported not being aware of opportunities for leadership in their country. To address this concern, young professionals may benefit from access to meaningful leadership opportunities. These opportunities are likely to be most effective if they are offered to young professionals early (so they can develop and practice leadership skills), frequently (so they can have a consistent impact on decisions), consistently (so their voices are represented in all sectors and on all issues), and sincerely (so they feel genuinely invited to participate). To move beyond tokenism, opportunities should empower young leaders to actively participate and impact outcomes. One current leader suggested that governments create a framework clearly outlining roles and responsibilities for young people and those in power. Another suggested federal and foundation funding to support developing young innovators.





2

Commit to and emphasize equitable access to leadership and leadership development.

One of young adults' most consistent comments was around inequitable representation in opportunities for leadership roles and leadership development. Efforts to create inclusive environments are most likely to be effective if they address equity and diversity broadly. This includes considering salient identities beyond gender and race, such as financial security or urban versus rural locations. It might also involve examining leadership representation, recruiting diverse voices, and developing culturally relevant development opportunities. One young leader advocated for governments investing in rural-based development programs.

One

Emerging leader suggestion:

Create hubs for young adults in every village or city.

3

Spotlight current young leaders and develop infrastructure for young professionals networks.

One key differentiator between current, aspiring, and non-leaders was whether they knew another young leader in their country. Providing a high-visibility platform for young leaders to share their experiences and leadership journey could be a powerful means to change beliefs around who can be a leader. Young leaders could share how being a leader has impacted their personal development and allowed them to give back to their community, two themes we heard from surveys, sessions, and interviews. Developing infrastructure for young professionals to connect with one another in meaningful ways may also be powerful. One current leader suggested creating hubs in every village nationwide to encourage idea exchange and local resource sharing. As another example, Y2o has provided formal platforms for young adults to collectively address challenges and share recommendations directly with policy makers.



FOR CURRENT LEADERS:

4 **Normalize risk-taking and mistakes as an important part of leadership**

Many young people may consider failure as unacceptable in leadership, preventing them from trying innovative approaches or pursuing leadership roles altogether. Changing the narrative around the role of risk-taking and mistakes in leadership could reduce a salient barrier to empowerment. Young professionals may benefit from scaffolded development experiences that are supportive and challenging. Having established leaders share their own challenges can also normalize failure. One innovative example from academia is an established researcher who published an article in *Nature* on his CV of failures. By recording and sharing rejections, leaders can make their mistakes visible and help younger leaders not equate setbacks with failure.

5 **Provide opportunities to acknowledge, process, and explore sources of stress.**

Stress and worry are salient themes during the pandemic and are especially relevant for leaders in times of crisis. Several young adults we interviewed recommended mindfulness practices to examine sources of stress and reduce its negative side effects. One leader advocated for mindfulness to be built into primary schools, and articles have outlined how to bring mindfulness to your company's leadership. Additionally, providing opportunities to strengthen overall resilience may help young leaders respond adaptively to challenges, including those that manifest from systemic barriers or inequities. Collectively examining reasons for stress can help identify the root cause of young leaders' stress and worry, which will suggest avenues to alleviate them.

One

Emerging leader suggestion:

Add mindfulness to primary schools



6

Facilitate meaningful cross-generational discussions and create accountability for young adults' involvement in decision-making.

Cross-generational discussions open the door for productive conversations about where generations' perspectives align on young adults' leadership and empowerment, and where they diverge. They also provide opportunities for innovation around how newer and more established leaders can collaborate to empower young leaders to engage in politics. Current leaders noted benefits for both parties to engage in discussions, with established leaders hearing new perspectives and insights and young professionals gaining agency to make meaningful change. Cross-generational discussions are most likely to be effective if policies provide young adults a seat at the table and compensate all participants for their time and efforts. Suggestions from current young leaders included establishing conversations between students and established organizations or including young leaders on important boards or task forces.





FOR ASPIRING LEADERS:

7

Encourage young professionals to pinpoint personal relevance of leading.

One main difference between current and aspiring leaders is whether they saw being a leader as important to their current lives or identity. Providing opportunities for aspiring leaders to identify their own personal reasons to be a leader may help encourage them to pursue a leadership role and feel empowered in that position. From card sorts to writing prompts, there are numerous activities developed for young adults to help them explore reasons to be a leader. These activities are most likely to be effective if young professionals can identify their own connections (rather than being told why they should be a leader) and engage in frequent reflection (so they can reinforce reasons for pursuing a leadership position). One example from CCL is the Values Explorer Card DeckTM, which prompts young professionals to reflect on different reasons to lead and discuss which are meaningful to them.

8

Reduce and reframe potential barriers to leadership and teach coping strategies.

Another difference between current and aspiring leaders is that aspiring leaders perceived more barriers to engaging in leadership. Activities that help potential leaders reframe these barriers may help reduce worry, stress, and the perception of having to give up other valued activities. Fostering coping strategies such as how to achieve work/life balance or strengthen resilience might also benefit young professionals. One young leader recommended education as an ideal means to accomplish this goal, suggesting that schools should teach children how to meditate and talk about emotions, as well as foster soft skills that would enable them to be better students (and ultimately better leaders). Several others shared their own journeys of reframing leadership-related difficulties so that the struggles felt “worth it” in the end.





FOR YOUNG ADULTS WHO DO NOT PLAN TO PURSUE A FORMAL LEADERSHIP ROLE (YET):

9 Provide informal opportunities for them to engage in meaningful decision-making.

Other global surveys suggest that young people lack access to most of the processes through which adults can articulate their concerns. This challenge is exacerbated for young people who choose not to pursue a formal leadership role. Creating opportunities to voice concerns outside of formal leadership is critical. One leader we interviewed advocated for creating a platform where young adults can share their perspectives and concerns on important issues. Numerous social media platforms also provide this opportunity. Investing in such efforts and ensuring that they are shared with those in positions of power can help elevate young voices.

10 Change the narrative around who can be a leader and what leadership looks like.

There are established ideas about who can and should be a leader. For those who do not perceive value in leading or feel supported in pursuing a leadership role, there could be benefit in challenging cultural narratives around what a leader looks like. One young leader we interviewed recommended that world leaders move away from traditional views of leadership that involve power and influence because they may discourage young adults from pursuing a leadership role themselves. Challenging the definition of what leadership entails could also be powerful. In this work, we asked young adults to define a leadership role themselves. If some young people equate leadership with holding a formal role, it could be beneficial to expand the definition of leadership to include the rich tapestry of potential ways to lead. From informal positions to supporting important causes to contributing to the community or society more broadly, leadership and empowerment can take many forms.



In the Survey, Young Adults Said...

To Support Empowerment, Those in Positions of Power Can...

For All Young Adults

65%

Believe that young adults in their country have opportunities to be a leader.

Systematically develop opportunities that invite and increase young adults' representation in decision-making processes.

60%

Do not agree that leadership opportunities for young people are equitable.

Commit to and emphasize **equitable access** to leadership and leadership development.

58%

Do not know a young leader in government or parliament.

Spotlight current young leaders and develop infrastructure for young professional networks.

For Aspiring Leaders

37% / 43%

Do not think being a leader is: useful in their everyday life/ an important part of who they are.

Encourage young adults to **pinpoint personal relevance** of leading.

46%

Perceive significant barriers to being a leader, especially stress and worry.

Reduce and reframe potential barriers to leadership and teach coping strategies.



In the Survey, Young Adults Said...

To Support Empowerment, Those in Positions of Power Can...

For Current Leaders

48%

Do not think it is safe to take risks or make mistakes in a leadership role.

Normalize **risk-taking and mistakes** as important parts of leadership.

36%

Believe that being a leader is too stressful for them.

Provide opportunities to acknowledge, process, and **explore sources of stress**.

27%

Do not feel confident that their voice is heard in their leadership role.

Facilitate **meaningful cross-generational discussions** and **create accountability** for young adults' involvement in decision-making.

For Young Adults Who Do Not Plan to Pursue a Formal Leadership Role (Yet)

22%

Are not interested in pursuing a leadership role.

Provide informal opportunities for engaging in meaningful decision-making.

24%

Believe that young adults in their country are treated with respect (regardless of their background).

Change the narrative around who can be a leader and what leadership looks like.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Survey sample

Sample size

10,386

young adults

Age

18-30

Race

44% White

25% Asian

8% Black

9% Hispanic/Latinx

4% Indigenous

4% Multiracial

2% Other

4% Prefer not to say

Gender Identity

49% Men

50% Women

0.6% Non-binary

Generational Status

52% Millennial

48% Gen Z

Country

5%

sample from each G20 country (including European Union)

Personal Education

0.6% No formal education

2% Primary school

39% Secondary school

43% Bachelor's degree or equivalent

13% Master's degree or equivalent

1% Doctorate

Personal Education

2% No formal education

7% Primary school

38% Secondary school

32% Bachelor's degree or equivalent

15% Master's degree or equivalent

4% Doctorate

SES (subjective)

8% cannot make ends meet

19% are barely making it

27% are breaking even

30% have extra money after paying the bills

12% do not have to worry about money

Setting

41% urban

11% rural

13% small town

20% small city

15% suburban

Number of Children

71% no children

20% 1 child

8% 2 children

2% 3 children

0.6% 4 or more children





Interview sample (current leaders)

Spoken Languages

- 76%** monolingual
- 24%** multilingual
- 46%** English not native language
- 54%** English is native language

Leader Level (for current leaders)

- 10%** hourly
- 20%** first level
- 32%** middle manager
- 19%** upper middle
- 19%** executive/top

Sample size

- 21**
- Current leaders

Age

- 18-29**

Gender Identity

- 33%** Men
- 62%** Women
- 5%** Non-binary

Generational Status

- 67%** Millennial
- 33%** Gen Z

Country

- 1**
- current leader interviewed from each G20 country (including European Union)

Leader Level (for current leaders)

- 10%** hourly
- 52%** first level
- 14%** middle manager
- 10%** upper middle
- 14%** executive/top



