Reimagining Political Leadership
A Toolkit for Understanding What Young Americans Look For in Leaders

Background

Like other Americans, **many young adults are dissatisfied with the country's political leadership**.

Studies show plummeting levels of confidence in Congress and other institutions and disappointment with candidates for public offices.

Now, **the Sine Institute of Policy and Politics** at American University presents a **new study of young Americans** that goes beyond confirming their frustrations to **understand what they look for in their leaders**—and to offer ideas for officeholders, candidates, leaders, and organizations to **build trust with young adults** and encourage them to engage in the democratic process.

The Study

Sine's **survey of 1,214 Americans aged 18-34** employed innovative methodologies focused on exposure to different leadership traits.

The Sine research team gathered ideas from an advisory group of students and looked to social science research about leadership traits that build trust.

The results identified **four winning leadership traits** for leaders to consider when building trust with young people.

1,214
Americans polled ages
18-34

A <u>Winning Combination</u> of Leadership Traits

Young Americans highly value a leader's policy positions, but also look at and judge the **motivations and leadership styles** of candidates and elected officials.

The survey tested eight leadership traits: **Authenticity**, **Compassion**, **Competence**, **Compromise**, **Decisiveness**, **Idealism**, **Inclusiveness**, and **Integrity**.

The traits ranked "very" or "extremely" appealing in a leader by more than 40% of the sample include **Integrity**, **Authenticity**, **Inclusivity**, and **Compassion**.

> **Recorded pitches ranked "very " or "extremely" appealing by 4 in 10 (40%) or more respondents:**

Integrity:

51%

"I'm running because we need honest leaders with integrity who will serve others, not themselves. I'll always do what's right for the people I'm elected to represent, whether you voted for me or not."

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Authenticity:

47%

"I'm running because we need leaders who are willing to tell hard truths and be real with people. I won't just say what you want to hear. I'll give you my honest opinion, even if it's unpopular, and if I make a mistake, I'll own up to it."

Inclusivity:

46%

"I'm running to make sure our government serves everyone equally. Every voice matters. America works best when it works for all, with no one left out or left behind."

Compassion:

44%

"I'm running because I care about people. Good leaders are compassionate, active listeners. I want to make people's lives better by truly understanding your concerns and focusing on what we have in common as human beings."

7 out of 10 young adults surveyed (72%) reported that "**there often are not candidates running who I am excited to support.**" Developing and demonstrating traits like those above might help candidates and current leaders **build more trust among young people.**

Actions Leaders Can Take

Young adults are looking for actions from officeholders and candidates that **align with their aspirations**. The survey tested a variety of activities that would give young adults a **"somewhat"** or **"very positive"** impression of a leader:

1. **Form a youth advisory council and meet regularly with young people**
2. **Participate in community events with constituents**
3. **Engage in regular dialogue with someone from the opposite party**
4. **Regularly spend a day "shadowing" an "average" person**
5. **Share a meal regularly with "average" families to understand their lives**
6. **Talk about a mistake or something they've done that they regret**
7. **Talk about adversity or challenges they've faced**

Reported Barriers to Political Participation

"There are **not often candidates who I am excited to support**." **72%**

"It's hard to get **information** that's **trustworthy and reliable**." **69%**

"It's hard to get **information** that is **relevant to me**." **57%**

"**I don't feel informed enough** to be confident in my decision." **52%**