

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

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# 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?



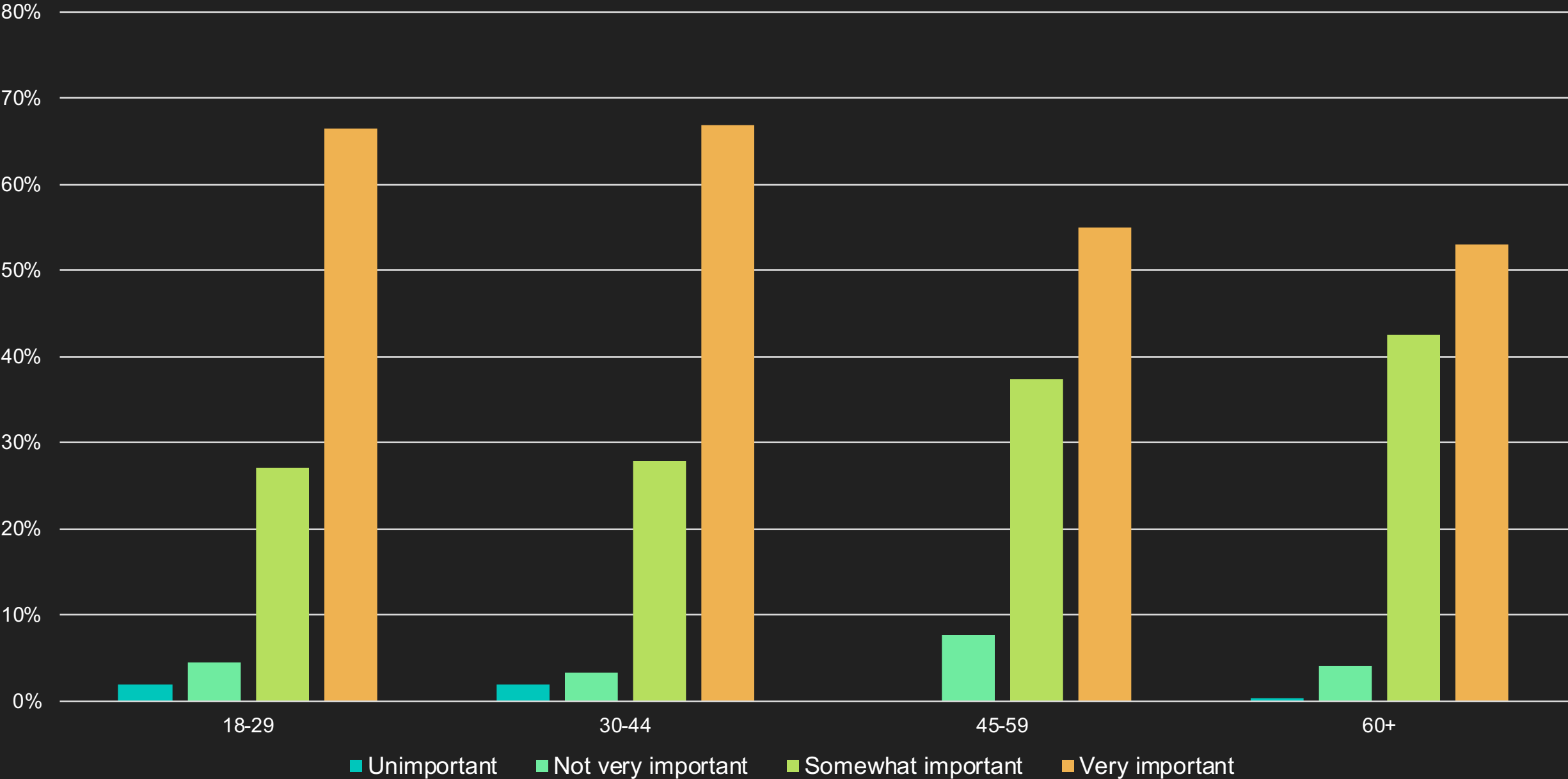
# Expectations

- 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)

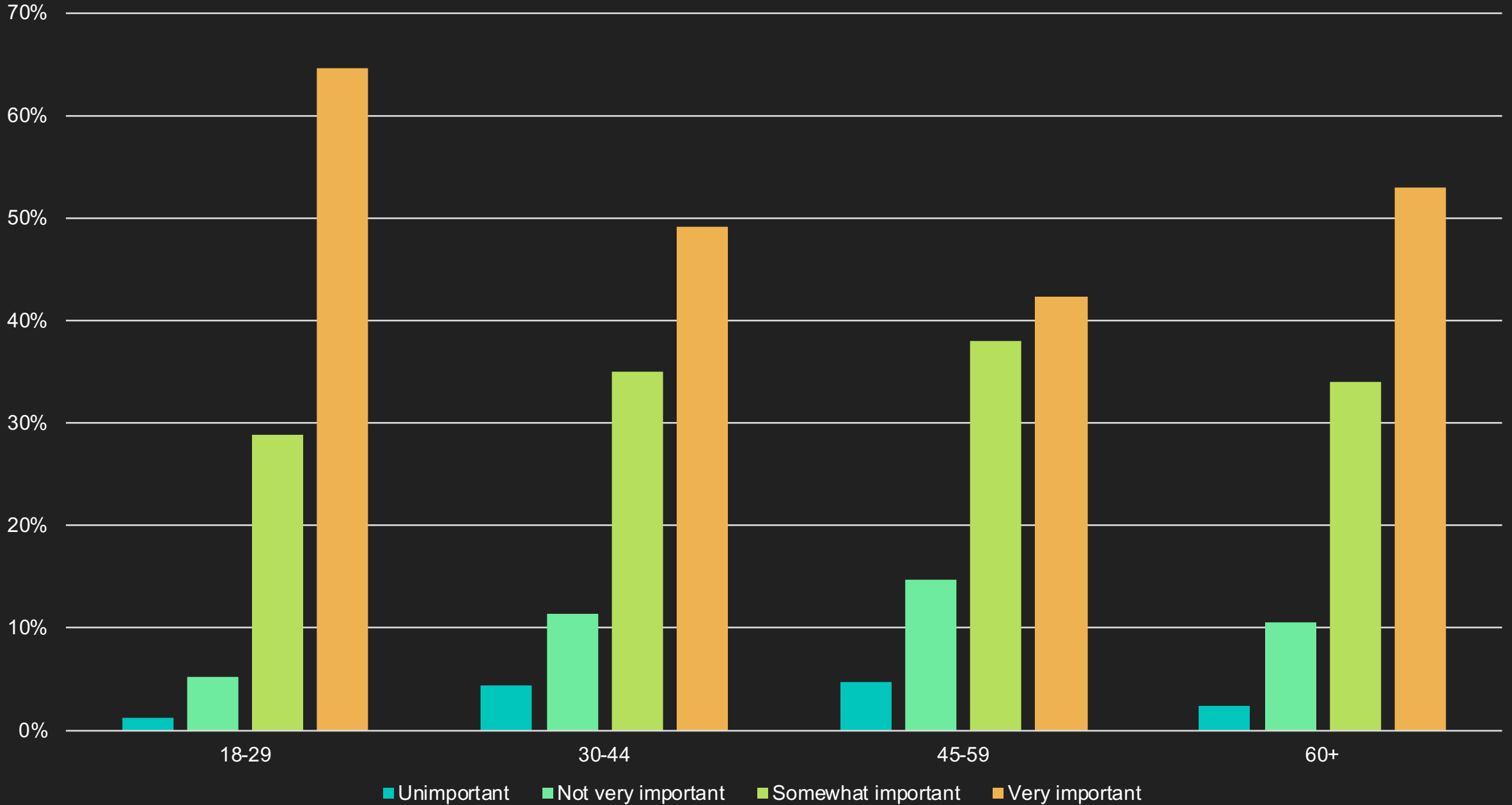
# Data and Methods

- 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

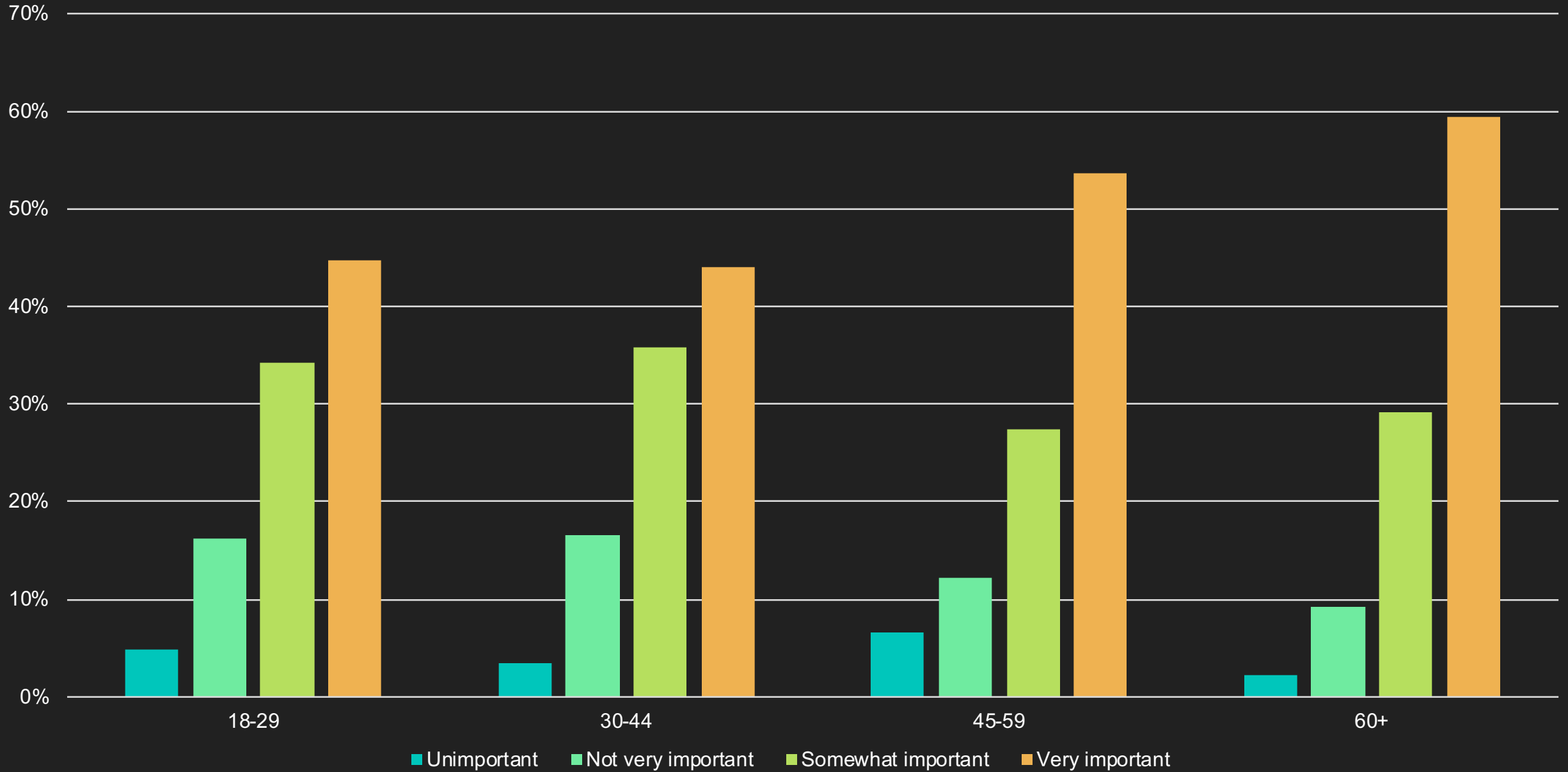
# How important to you is the issue of education in the upcoming presidential election?



# 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and October 25<sup>th</sup>, 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 10<sup>th</sup> and September 13<sup>th</sup>, 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?