

THE STATE OF LEADERSHIP

COMMUNITY, CONFLICT & CHANGE

IN EARLY 2021, more than 4,000 participants from 54 top colleges and universities gathered virtually at annual PossePlus Retreats (PPRs) to discuss the state of leadership in the United States. The retreats explored leadership in the context of current events—from the global coronavirus pandemic to the Black Lives Matter movement to the 2020 presidential election. This report captures notable findings from a survey of PPR attendees. In several places, findings are juxtaposed with U.S. opinion polls to demonstrate how students' attitudes compare to those of the public at large.

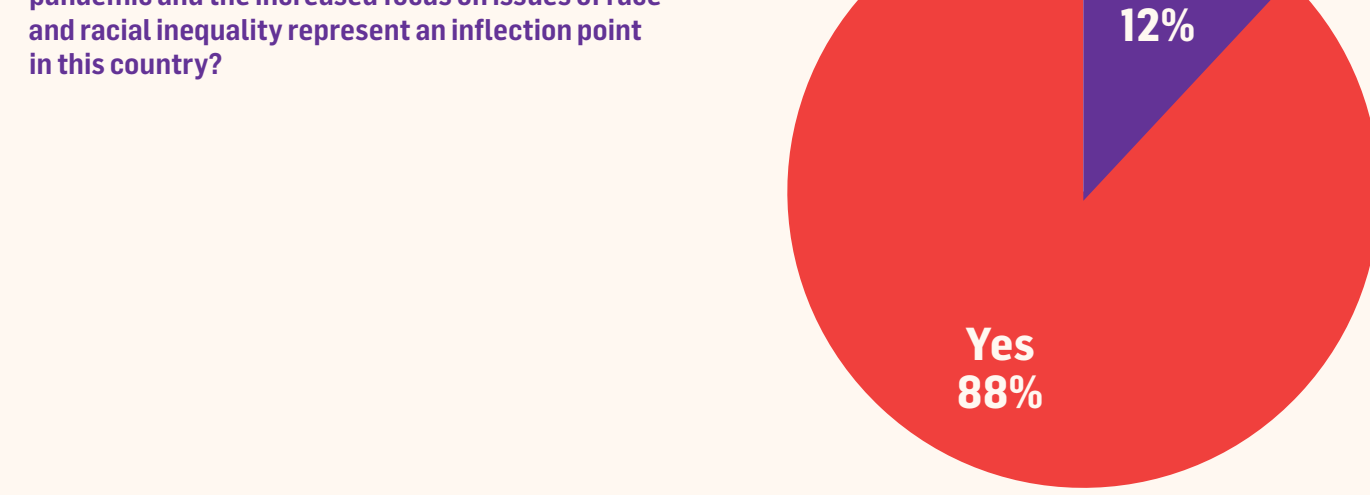
ABOUT THE POSSEPLUS RETREAT

The Posse Foundation, in collaboration with its partner colleges and universities, facilitates annual weekend-long retreats—PossePlus Retreats (PPRs)—attended by members of the larger student body, faculty and administration. With the goal of exploring an important social issue identified by Posse Scholars, PPRs bring together a diverse cross section of the campus community. By creating a safe space for different constituents to interact and exchange ideas, PPRs today have become an important forum for engaging social, cultural and political issues.

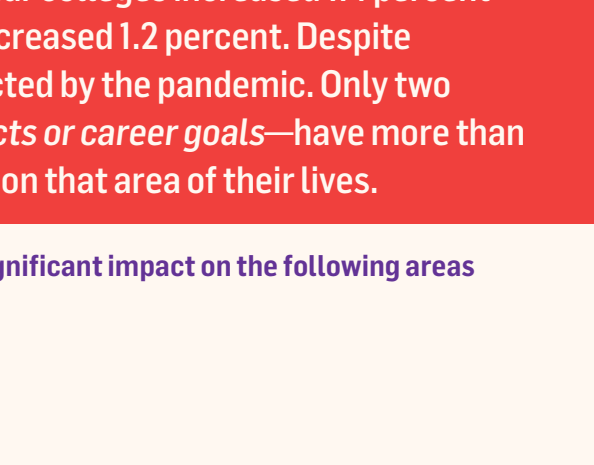
A NEW NORMAL

On the heels of a turbulent year, the 2021 PPRs provided an opportunity for deep reflection and discussion. Students had just experienced one of the most challenging periods in recent memory. Compared to the U.S. public, PPR respondents say they paid close attention to many of the most critical national and global issues. Most believe the events of the preceding year represent an inflection point in our country.

Percent who report they paid a lot of attention to the following issues over the past year

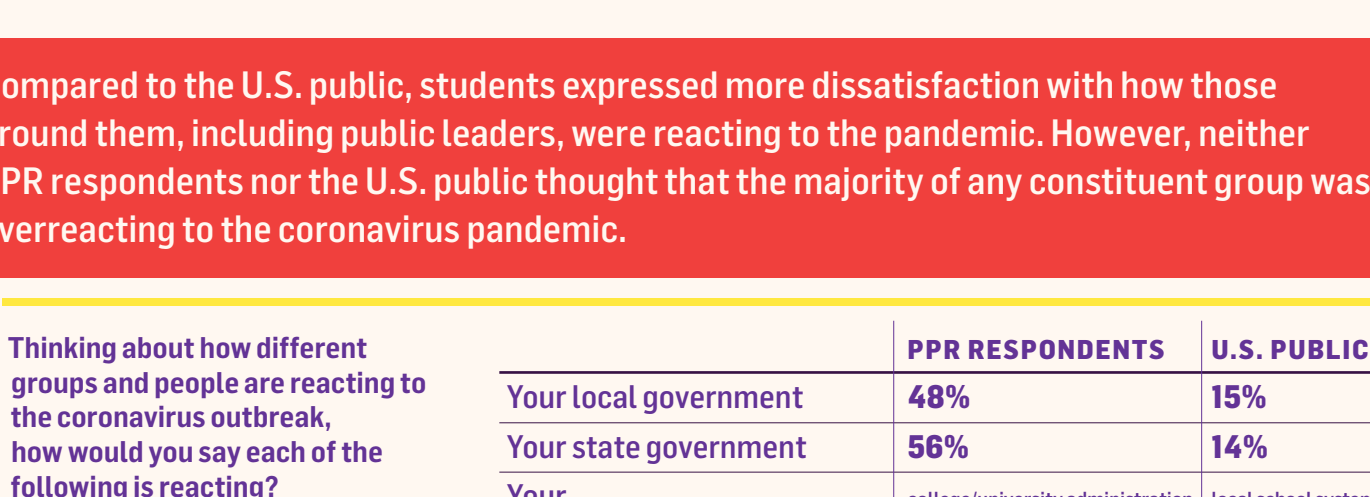


Do you think the events of the past year, including the presidential election, the coronavirus pandemic and the increased focus on issues of race and racial inequality represent an inflection point in this country?



During the pandemic, retention rates at public four-year colleges increased 1.4 percent while at private nonprofit four-year colleges, rates decreased 1.2 percent. Despite their academic resilience, students were greatly affected by the pandemic. Only two categories—your physical health and your job prospects or career goals—have more than 20% of students who say the pandemic had no impact on that area of their lives.

Percent who said the coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on the following areas



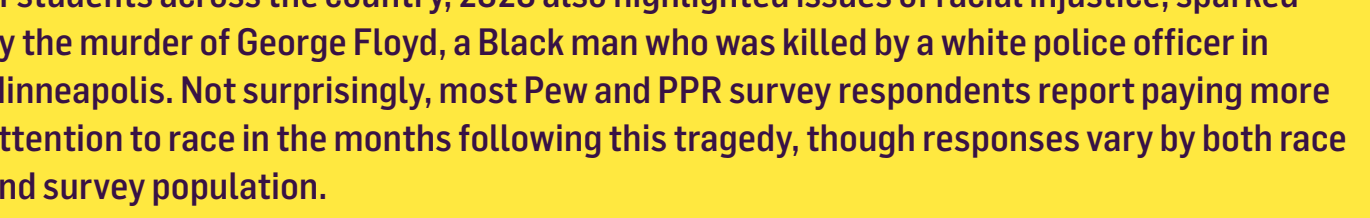
Compared to the U.S. public, students expressed more dissatisfaction with how those around them, including public leaders, were reacting to the pandemic. However, neither PPR respondents nor the U.S. public thought that the majority of any constituent group was overreacting to the coronavirus pandemic.

Thinking about how different groups and people are reacting to the coronavirus outbreak, how would you say each of the following is reacting?

(Percent who said "not taking the outbreak seriously" when asked how different groups and people were reacting to the coronavirus outbreak)

	PPR RESPONDENTS	U.S. PUBLIC
Your local government	48%	15%
Your state government	56%	14%
Your...	college/university administration	local school system
	22%	4%
People in your community	51%	27%
The general public	84%	40%

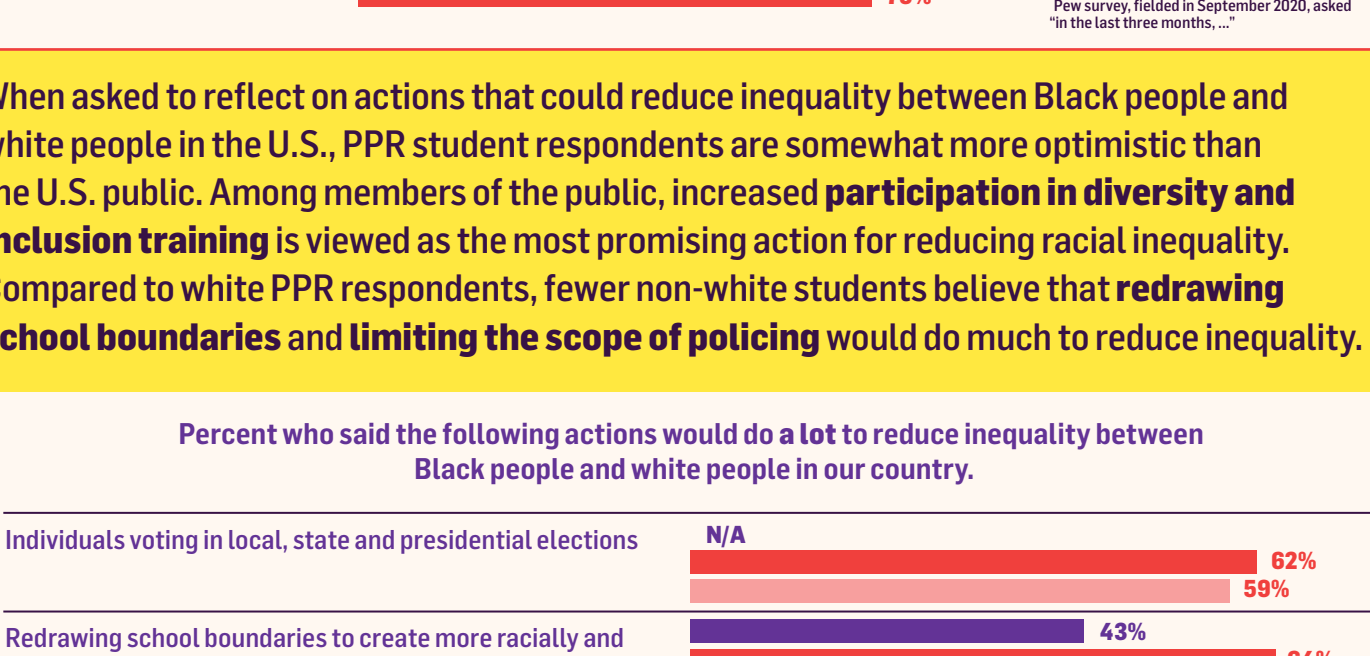
Who the U.S. public and PPR respondents think are overreacting to the outbreak the most



RACIAL EQUALITY: A NATIONAL INFLECTION POINT?

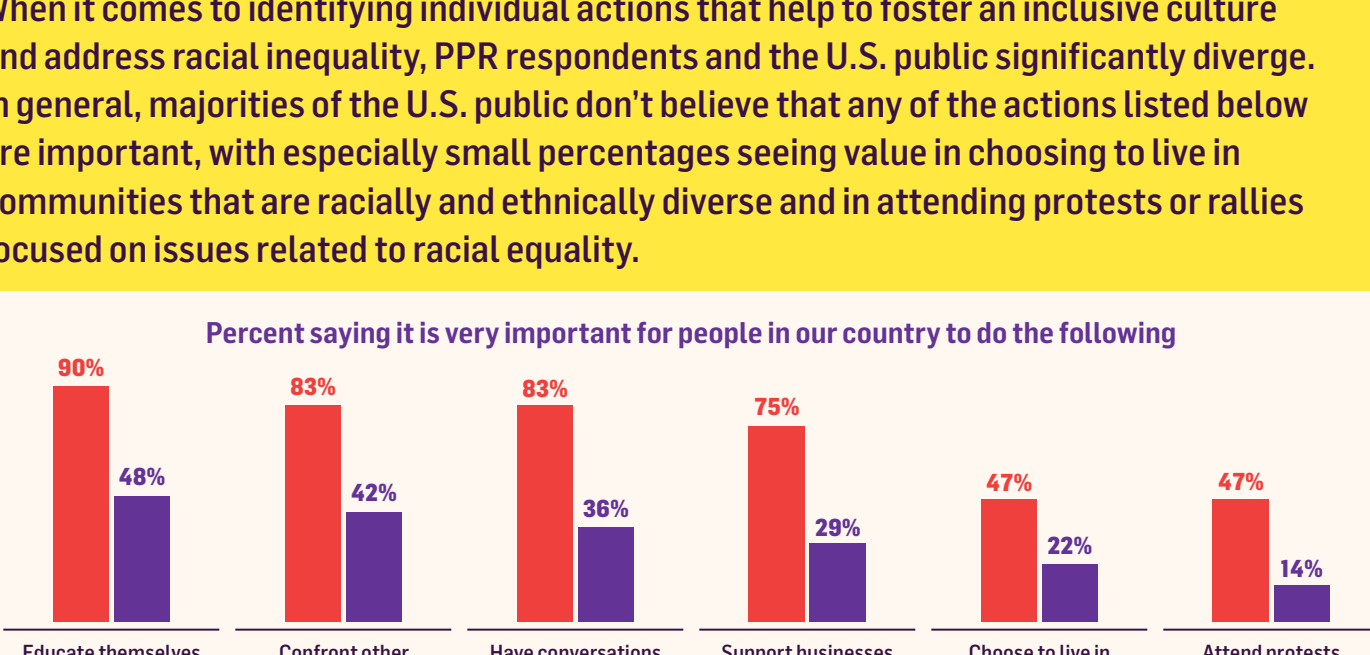
In addition to the global pandemic that disrupted the lives and educational experiences of students across the country, 2020 also highlighted issues of racial injustice, sparked by the murder of George Floyd, a Black man who was killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis. Not surprisingly, most Pew and PPR survey respondents report paying more attention to race in the months following this tragedy, though responses vary by both race and survey population.

In recent months, how much attention have you personally paid to issues of race and racial inequality?



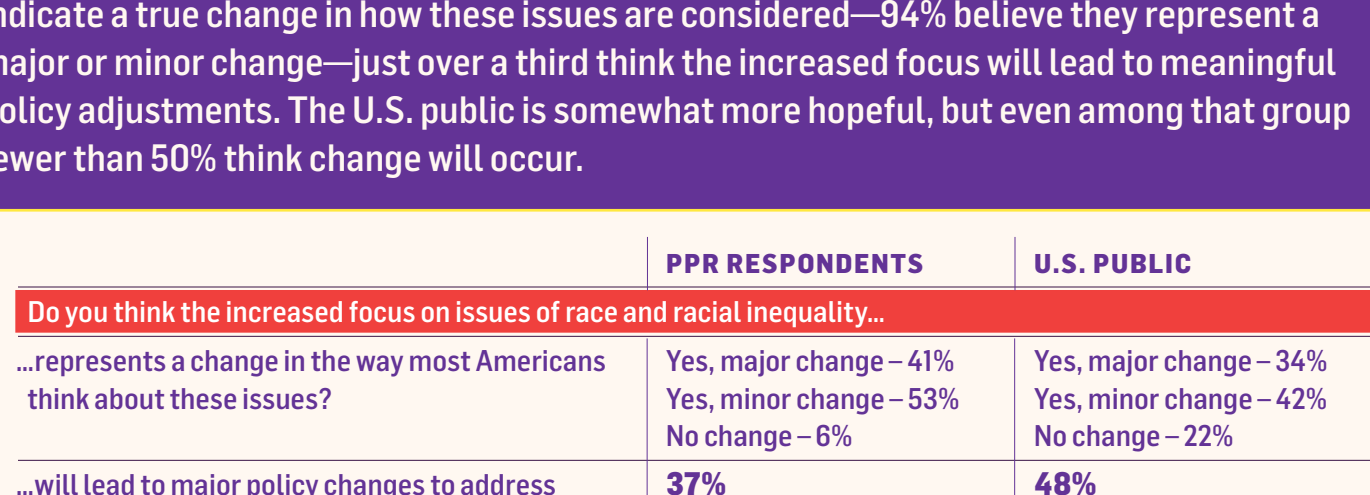
When asked to reflect on actions that could reduce inequality between Black people and white people in the U.S., PPR student respondents are somewhat more optimistic than the U.S. public. Among members of the public, increased participation in diversity and inclusion training is viewed as the most promising action for reducing racial inequality. Compared to white PPR respondents, fewer non-white students believe that redrawing school boundaries and limiting the scope of policing would do much to reduce inequality.

Percent who said the following actions would do a lot to reduce inequality between Black people and white people in our country.



When it comes to identifying individual actions that help to foster an inclusive culture and address racial inequality, PPR respondents and the U.S. public significantly diverge. In general, majorities of the U.S. public don't believe that any of the actions listed below are important, with especially small percentages seeing value in choosing to live in communities that are racially and ethnically diverse and in attending protests or rallies focused on issues related to racial equality.

Percent saying it is very important for people in our country to do the following



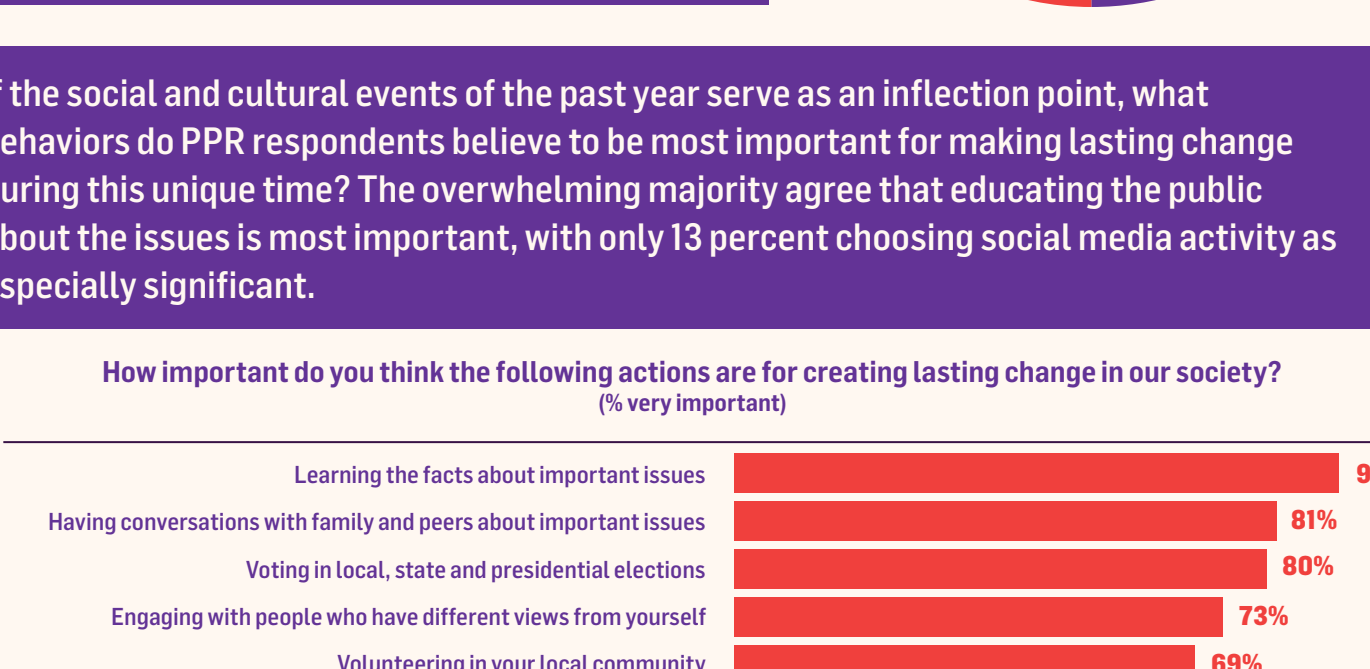
MAKING CHANGE

Increased attention is one thing; meaningful, lasting policy change is quite another. While more PPR respondents than members of the U.S. public believe that the events of 2020 indicate a true change in how these issues are considered—94% believe they represent a major or minor change—just over a third think the increased focus will lead to meaningful policy adjustments. The U.S. public is somewhat more hopeful, but even among that group fewer than 50% think change will occur.

	PPR RESPONDENTS	U.S. PUBLIC
Do you think the increased focus on issues of race and racial inequality...		
...represents a change in the way most Americans think about these issues?	Yes, major change—41% Yes, minor change—53% No change—6%	Yes, major change—34% Yes, minor change—42% No change—22%
...will lead to major policy changes to address racial inequality?	37%	48%

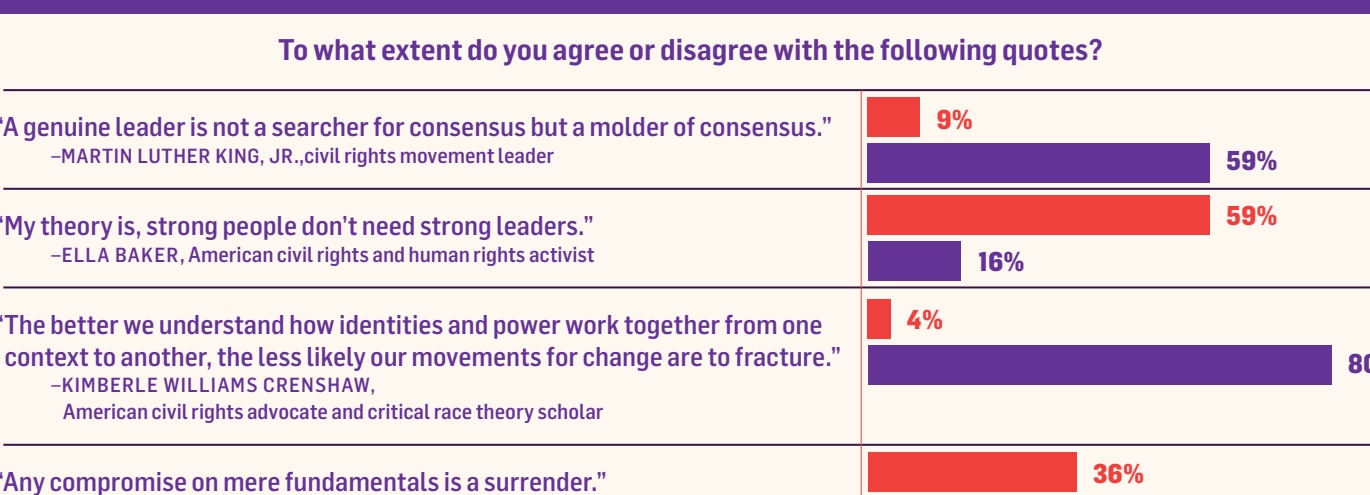
To close the survey, PPR participants were asked a series of questions about leadership in the face of change.

In your view, what is the single most important quality for a leader to possess? (top eight qualities shown in order of frequency chosen)



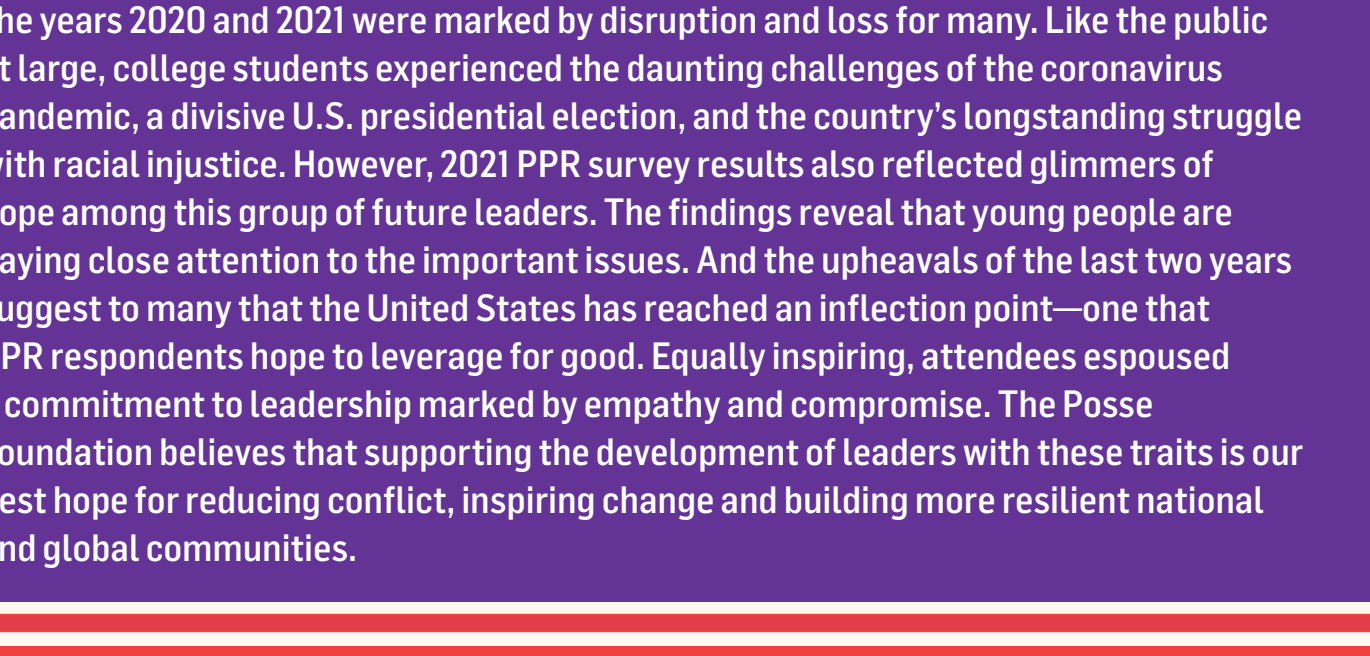
If the social and cultural events of the past year serve as an inflection point, what behaviors do PPR respondents believe to be most important for making lasting change during this unique time? The overwhelming majority agree that educating social media activity as especially significant.

How important do you think the following actions are for creating lasting change in our society? (% very important)



Finally, PPR participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with five quotes on leadership and compromise. To encourage unbiased responses, quote attributions were not included in the survey.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following quotes?

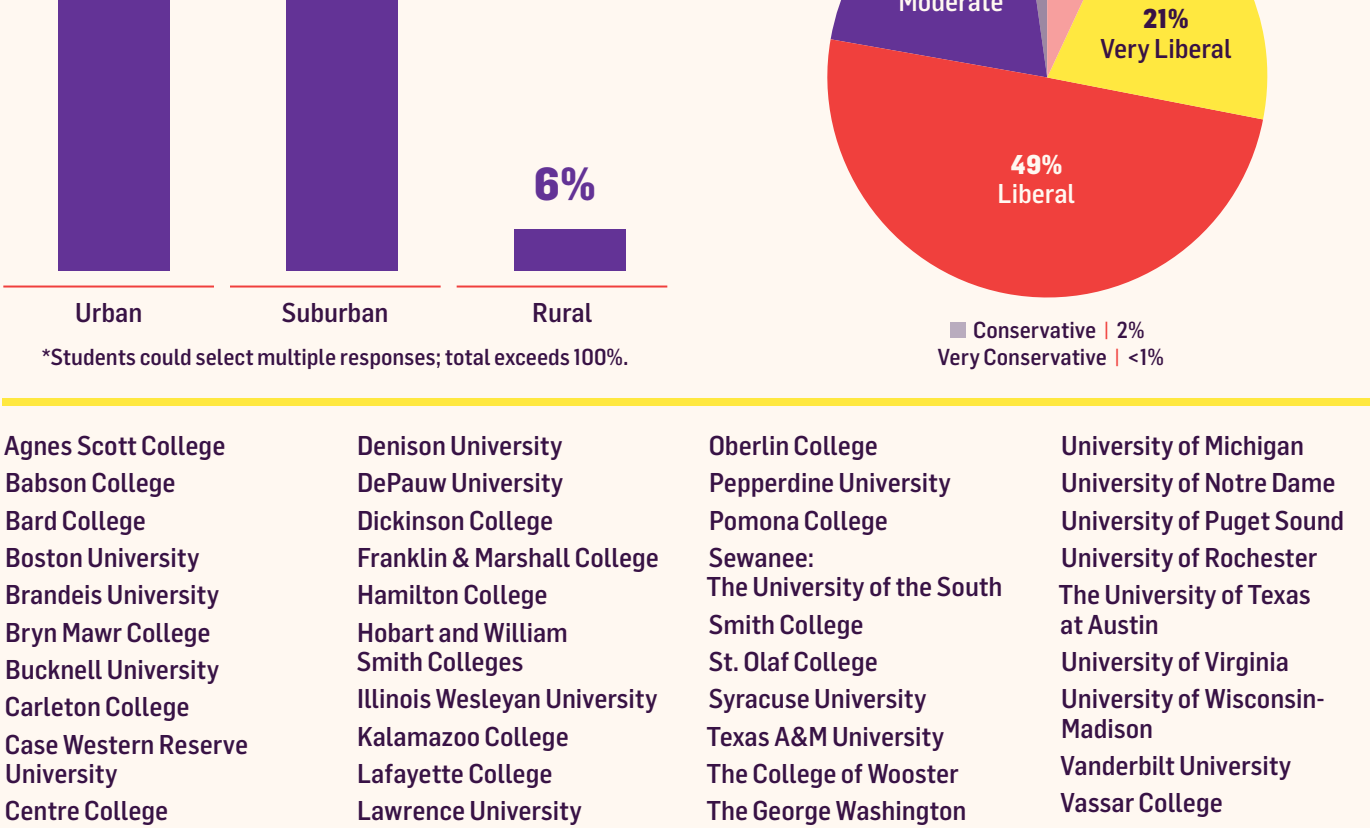


IN CONCLUSION

The years 2020 and 2021 were marked by disruption and loss for many. Like the public at large, college students experienced the daunting challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, a divisive U.S. presidential election, and the country's longstanding struggle with racial injustice. However, 2021 PPR survey results also reflected glimmers of hope among this group of future leaders. The findings reveal that young people are paying close attention to the important issues. And the upheavals of the last two years suggest to many that the United States has reached an inflection point—one that PPR respondents hope to leverage for good. Equally inspiring, attendees espoused a commitment to leadership marked by empathy and compromise. The Posse Foundation believes that supporting the development of these traits is our best hope for reducing conflict, inspiring change and building more resilient national and global communities.

PPR RESPONDENT GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

Average Age: 20 | Posse Scholars: 75.0%



Agnes Scott College, Babson College, Bard College, Boston University, Brandeis University, Bryn Mawr College, Bucknell University, Carleton College, Case Western Reserve University, Centre College, Colby College, Connecticut College, Cornell University, Davidson College, Denison University, DePauw University, Dickinson College, Franklin & Marshall College, Hamilton College, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Illinois Wesleyan University, Kalamazoo College, Lafayette College, Lawrence University, Lehigh University, Middlebury College, Mount Holyoke College, Northwestern University, Oberlin College, Pepperdine University, Pomona College, Sewanee: The University of the South, Smith College, St. Olaf College, Syracuse University, Texas A&M University, The College of Wooster, The George Washington University, Trinity College, Tulane University, Union College, University of Michigan, University of Notre Dame, University of Puget Sound, University of Rochester, The University of Texas at Austin, University of Virginia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Vanderbilt University, Vassar College, Villanova University, Wellesley College, Wesleyan University, Wheaton College

Data is from 2021 PPR Student participants unless otherwise noted. All U.S. public opinion comparison data is from the following resources: Pew Research Center. (2020, October 6). Amid National Reckoning, Americans Divided on Whether Increased Focus on Race Will Lead to Major Policy Change. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/10/06/amid-national-reckoning-americans-divided-on-whether-increased-focus-on-race-will-lead-to-major-policy-change/>; Pew Research Center. (2020, March 26). Worries About Coronavirus Surge, as most Americans Expect a Recession—or Worse. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/03/26/worries-about-coronavirus-surge-as-most-americans-expect-a-recession-or-worse/>; College Board. (2021, June). College Enrollment and Retention in the Era of Covid. Retrieved from <https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/enrollment-retention-covid2020.pdf>
A total of 1,740 participants, including 1,175 students and 563 faculty members/administrators (two respondents left this question blank), completed the survey for a response rate of approximately 51%.