

EQUAL POWER

NOW

GIRLS, YOUNG WOMEN & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year, as the world slowly emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, Plan International's State of the World's Girls report is focused on girls' and young women's political participation. The report is based on a large-scale survey of almost 29,000 girls and young women aged 15-24 from 29 countries spanning all regions, income levels and civic contexts. Additionally, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 94 girls and young women across 18 countries.

"But as a woman I've noticed that... you prepare very differently for participating in a political discussion than men and boys do. I feel that men and boys are encouraged just by nature to be in those spaces whereas as a female, you feel that space isn't made for you."

ANNA, 23, GERMANY

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Girls are not a homogenous group and their opinions and experiences are as diverse as they are. They vary as individuals and according to location, ethnicity, religion, sexual identity and sexual orientation and a host of other intersecting factors. The overarching aim of this research is to explore and understand girls' and young women's attitudes towards, and experiences of, political and civic participation and institutions, across these many different backgrounds, looking both at where they differ and at what they have in common.

WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW

- How do girls and young women conceptualise politics, and which political issues do they prioritise?
- How do they view their political leaders and do they feel properly represented within the political sphere?
- What influences their decision to participate in politics? What puts them off and what inspires them?
- What strategies and support need to be in place to enable them to become more actively engaged in the issues and campaigns they feel are important?

To make your voice heard and have your opinions, experiences and rights taken into consideration when decisions are made — often far away from the places and people that these decisions will matter most to — is crucially important. Important as a right, important to inform policy and to design programmes that seek to improve lives and opportunities and also critical to promoting gender equality.

"When I hear the term politics, I mean politics in the sense of affairs of state... I'm going to talk about it in the sense of business, state business. I can say it's a way of governing. It's a way of managing the state affairs..."

MINERVA, 23, TOGO

Overall girls and young women, when asked, defined politics as relating to the more formal affairs of state but in fact their own political involvement was wide-ranging. Much of their involvement in political issues was at the local level. They were concerned about the environment, poverty and education and about political decisions which affected their communities and their everyday lives.

"People have no money to buy maize to eat. The girls whose house is next door to mine, only eat once a day and have to beg for food."

ALICE, 16, BENIN

Climate change, poverty, hunger and conflict are impossible to ignore and, as they get older, adolescent girls and young women are starting to become more politically conscious, more interested in social issues and increasingly aware of how decisions made, both locally and nationally, will have an effect on their lives.


"... they think we're too young to talk about it, that we don't know anything... because it's a girl talking, and they'll think it's not a priority"

AMANDA, 15, BRAZIL




WHAT GIRLS ARE SAYING


IT IS CLEAR FROM THE RESEARCH THAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ARE INTERESTED IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AT BOTH LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL.

97% 

of survey respondents **thought participating in politics** was **important**

83% 

of girls & young women surveyed had **some experience of participating** in or engaging with politics

63% 

of survey respondents are **involved in some form of group or organisation** indicating significant levels of civic engagement & participation

Girls and young women are politically active in many different ways: from **voting and signing petitions**, to **joining diverse youth movements** and **participating in school councils**.

FEWER THAN

1 ^{IN} 3

agreed that **politicians & political leaders understand the views of girls & young women**.


They are interested in issues that range from **poverty and unemployment** to the **environment, education and health**.

GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN DO NOT FEEL PROPERLY REPRESENTED:

 11%

reported that they were **generally happy with their leaders' decisions** on issues they care about


Respondents who identify as **LGBTIQ+** and those from **minority backgrounds** were found to hold **more negative views about political leadership**.

24% 

of those who aspire to participate in politics can **see themselves standing for political office**

1 ^{IN} 5 

have **personally been discouraged from engaging** with or participating in politics

1 ^{IN} 10 

think women are **not qualified** to be political leaders

Only about

50% 

of girls and young women believed that, in their **communities' view, it was acceptable** for girls and young women to engage in political activities.

GENDER NORMS STILL HOLD GIRLS BACK AS, FOR SOME OF THEM, DOES THE ABUSE AND HARASSMENT THAT THEY SEE FEMALE POLITICIANS AND ACTIVISTS BEING SUBJECTED TO.

Girls and young women know that political participation is important. However, they do not underestimate the challenges they face, with 94 per cent of survey respondents recognising the barriers in their way.

"... if they make me close my eyes and imagine a political person... I would have immediately thought of a man with a tie, because those are the images that are thrown at us...we don't immediately see a woman or a young woman. So, it's hard for people to believe that a woman, and I insist that a young woman can manage to be in these spaces. It's a kind of behaviour that we have learnt from generation to generation."

AURORA, 20, ECUADOR

These barriers are structural and individual, ranging from lack of access to decision-making, a perceived lack of knowledge or skills, to ideas from others about what is appropriate for girls and young women. They are often condescended to, rarely listened to and though, in some countries, female representation in parliaments and on local councils has improved, there remains a lack of role models and, in many contexts, a widespread rollback of girls and women's rights.

*"Women leaders are underestimated.
Many think they won't be able to make it.
That's the challenge I see."*

DARNA, 16, PHILIPPINES

Girls and young women have the right, at local, national and international levels, **to take part in the decisions that affect their lives.** There are ways to make this happen.

FOUR ROUTES TOWARDS GIRLS' GREATER POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

➔ **DECISION MAKERS AT ALL LEVELS**

must institutionalise the meaningful and safe participation of girls and their groups through the adoption of fully resourced and accountable policies, strategies and frameworks.

➔ **NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

must ensure access to diverse and inclusive pathways toward political participation: including resourcing and strengthening civic education and leadership opportunities and facilitating girls' inclusion in local decision-making processes.

➔ **GOVERNMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES**

must address the violence experienced by women politicians and girl activists by adopting a zero-tolerance approach to violence. The media can support by promoting positive images and by calling attention to violence experienced in both online and offline spaces.

→ UN, GOVERNMENTS,
AND CIVIL SOCIETY

should recognise girls' vital and distinct role in civil society and provide accessible resources so that girls' organisations are resilient and sustainable in the face of crises and external threats.

Girls and young women, in all their diversity, **need all the support they can get to organise and mobilise to ensure that they, and their organisations, are fully equipped** to play their part in the future of their communities and countries.

ROSAMIE, 16, PHILIPPINES

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS

2022