

CIVIC LIFE TODAY: THE STATE OF GLOBAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



POINTS OF LIGHT



APRIL 2022

There are only a few moments in history when the entire world has had a shared experience. While countries across the globe responded to the pandemic uniquely, every individual around the world felt the impact of this experience in some way. Subsequently, the way in which individuals think about and engage in civic action is undeniably one of the changes underway.

In May 2020, Points of Light released its first piece of [research on the state of American civic engagement](#). This year, we're excited to have expanded our report to a global scope. This report evaluated markets in Brazil, India, the United Kingdom and the United States. It helps us understand similarities and differences in engagement around the world and begin a conversation about what we can learn from each other.

The civic actions that dominated around the world were a mix of traditional and non-traditional engagement pathways, demonstrating people's desire to engage in whatever way they could as COVID-19 affected more traditional ways of engagement. Globally, the top three civic actions taken, as defined by [Points of Light's Civic Circle](#), were listening and learning, using your voice and volunteering.

When we added the "Listen & Learn" element to Points of Light's Civic Circle, we did so because we believe the basis of every civic action should be rooted in a deep understanding of the issue. Taking action without listening and learning to the affected communities can do deep harm, while taking action after listening and learning can make your actions more effective.

Though the growth around listening and learning is promising, this report also shows that volunteering is still among the most important civic activities, with 48% of global respondents volunteering by intentionally helping someone within the last 30 days. Markets like Brazil and India in particular show continued energy around and commitment to volunteering. This data confirms our observations from Points of Light's Global Network affiliates and other global convenings that still position volunteering as a cornerstone of civic engagement.

Also notable in this report is the mandate for companies to lead when it comes to social issues in the world today. 90% of respondents in Brazil and 95% of respondents in India expect companies to "do something related to a social issue." Those numbers are essentially representative of the entire population. This expectation cannot be ignored. But

this leadership must be authenticated by companies looking internally and ensuring corporate policies and practices are aligned with external messaging and initiatives.

This global report is accompanied by individual reports for each of the four markets (India, Brazil, the U.S. and the U.K.). Each country report includes a letter from our Global Network affiliate in that country highlighting the work they're doing as well as the context in which that work is happening. We thank them for their partnership, support and continued work helping individuals in their communities find ways to share their light.

As Points of Light releases this report during Global Volunteer Month, we want to celebrate all the people who are doing good in their communities and call upon you to encourage the people in your life to take one action on behalf of a person, cause or community that is important to them.

In Service,



Natalye Paquin, Esq.
President & CEO, Points of Light



INTRODUCTION

Initially facing the same threats and uncertainties of a global pandemic, countries across the world are now entering year three at stages unique to their own circumstances. This research is crucial to understanding the individuality of experience in each nation, particularly among the people who have a deep need to help their fellow citizens recover from the pandemic's many challenges and begin to rebuild.

As Points of Light believes that the most powerful force in the world is the individual who has realized their power to make change happen, this report is intended to reveal a myriad of ways to act effectively – making them easier for individuals to find and organizations to create.

Because right now, according to this new research, the social impact sector is underutilizing the full potential of the everyday individual.

Points of Light created the Civic Circle to help individuals understand that doing good comes in many forms. It is an engagement framework that represents an individual's power to lead, lend support and take action for causes they care about in order to lead a civic life. But what this data shows is that organizations have not yet learned how to appeal to these individuals by using the considerable value they bring to its fullest extent.

Points of Light presents this report to help leaders of organizations apply the thoughts, behaviors and needs of the people looking to join them through the Civic Circle to create opportunities and relationships for satisfying and sustainable change.

Whether you are a business leader hoping to mobilize employees, a nonprofit or NGO leader hoping to connect individuals to your cause or an individual hoping to support the community you care about, this report and Points of Light's Civic Circle can help inform how to engage a broader cross-section of society in civic action – because we can't be impactful alone.



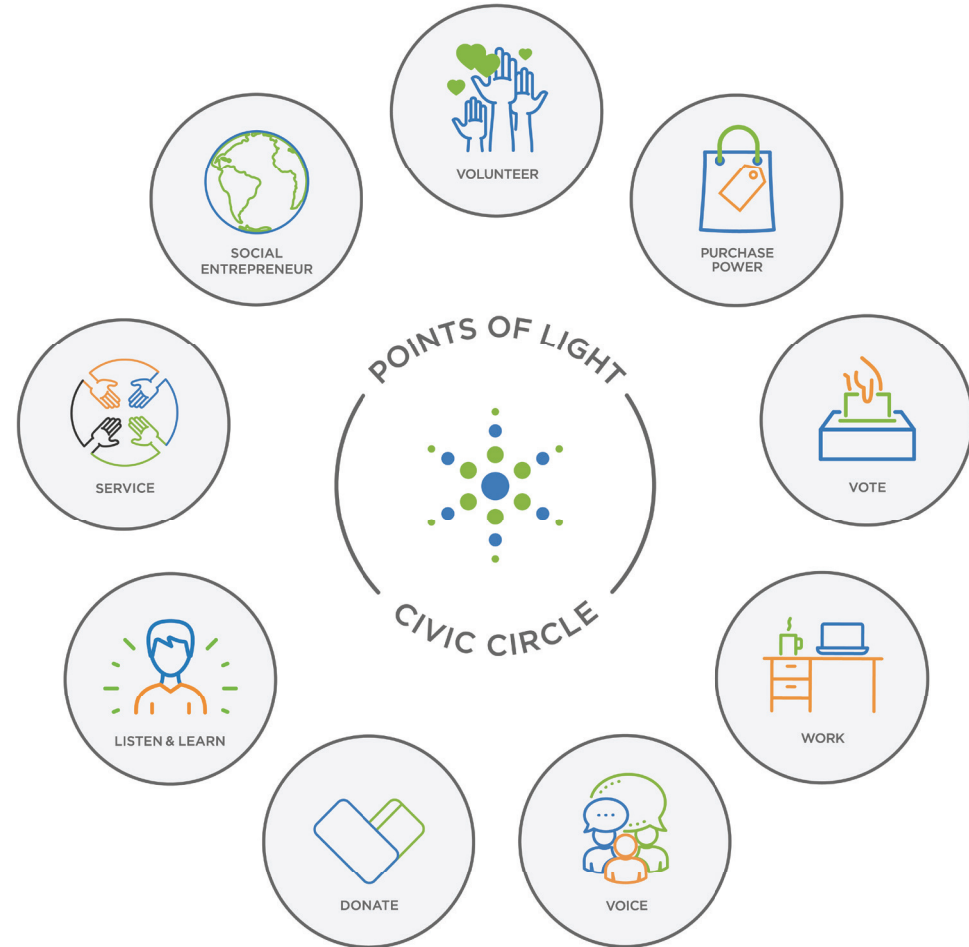


THE POINTS OF LIGHT CIVIC CIRCLE OFFERS A FRAMEWORK FOR REBUILDING THE WORLD.

Points of Light created the Civic Circle to help individuals understand that acting for the betterment of their defined community comes in many forms and to help them connect with opportunities to influence social issues. Concurrently, this framework helps organizations identify pathways to involve the community in their cause.

The Civic Circle is a framework through which individuals can express their desire for change and their stance on social issues. The goal for organizations and companies is to use this framework to create and share opportunities that effect change, thereby allowing every individual to find a way to act – through the organization or company – and create meaningful change in the issues they care most about.

This study will enlighten others on how the Civic Circle is being applied – how and why specific actions within the Circle are perceived as the most influential today, and which actions have the least involvement now but can create opportunities for growth tomorrow.



METHODOLOGY

Points of Light commissioned INFLUENCE|SG to design and execute this year's global research study to identify opportunities to help the world recover and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic and learn how individuals in disparate countries get involved in their communities and neighborhoods to address the issues they care about.

The research team took a quantitative approach with a 10-minute, mobile-optimized online survey of a national/countrywide representative sample of adults (ages 18-65) in the United States, the United Kingdom, India and Brazil. Sample sizes were the U.S. n=1,500, the U.K. n=1,000, India n=2,000 and Brazil n=1,500. Samples were based on ethnic and demographic composition. For all segments and responses shared in this report, the research team defined the aggregate (global) as well as 5% variances from a country as worth noting. For demographic data-gathering, researchers asked respondents to self-identify their gender and race/ethnic identity.

This report sets forth findings from the global research while differentiating each country's responses. For a deeper understanding of each country, see complete findings, analysis, recommendations and detailed demographic data in each country's report at pointsoflight.org/civic-engagement-research.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

THE SOCIAL AND PERSONAL ISSUES IMPACTED BY THE PANDEMIC ARE COMMON AROUND THE WORLD.

The same social issues and personal costs have been shared by people everywhere. At the country level, healthcare, education and environment/climate demand attention. On a personal level, the health of others in their community is where the most impact has been felt, followed by an individual's financial and mental health.

INDIVIDUALS MOST WANT THEIR COUNTRIES TO SUPPORT EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHCARE.

India (59%) and Brazil (70%) were most focused on education, the U.K. (52%) on environment/climate and the U.S. (48%) on healthcare. In all countries (globally), these were the top issues of interest.

THREE CIVIC CIRCLE ACTIONS DOMINATED DURING THE PANDEMIC: USE YOUR VOICE, LISTEN AND LEARN, AND VOLUNTEER.

The most common Civic Circle actions taken to support issues of most interest were using one's voice (influenced one's network through social media, advocacy or other form of expression), listen and learn (took time to learn about a cause or social issue) and volunteer (intentionally helped someone else).

VOLUNTEERING IS AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES SINCE THE PANDEMIC BUT BY VARYING DEGREES AMONG COUNTRIES.

Volunteering was the activity ranked third or fourth by every country as important. The two countries with the lowest percentages in this ranking, the U.S. and the U.K., also showed less commitment to increasing how much they volunteer. India and Brazil showed substantially more commitment to increasing volunteerism, and India led the four countries in every Civic Circle action listed.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT ARE UNPRECEDENTED.

Nearly every respondent in India and Brazil and two-thirds of those in the U.S. and the U.K. said they expect companies to address social challenges. Respondents will measure a company's sincerity in its social issue actions by the way it treats its employees.



A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: SHARED EXPERIENCES AND SOCIAL ISSUE INTERESTS



POINTS OF LIGHT

COVID-19 burst into a world where “people were, on average, living healthier, more prosperous and better lives than ever,” according to the United Nations.¹ Since the earliest reported cases of COVID in 2019, governments around the globe have addressed this unanticipated and devastating threat in ways unique to each country. Where some world leaders inspired empathy and cooperation, others sowed confusion and stoked fear. Meanwhile, misinformation, increasing anxiety and depression globally,² and changing recommendations as scientists learned more about the virus added complexity to an already overwhelming issue.

Thus, while citizens of the world have lived through a shared experience, their sense of security and safety and the social challenges arising therefrom have been influenced largely by where they live.

For example, in the countries we studied:



THE U.S.

The U.S. downplayed the threat for months and left the response up to states, yet developed vaccines in record time.³



THE U.K.

The U.K. began with what a House of Commons study called “a policy approach of fatalism about the prospects for COVID in the community: seeking to manage, but not suppress, infection,” then became a world leader in vaccinations.⁴



INDIA

After two brutal surges in COVID cases and deaths, India began containing the virus by keeping people isolated; Community kitchens, mental health services and thousands of health workers delivering groceries and medicines allowed people to stay inside.⁵



BRAZIL

Brazil’s president continues to minimize COVID’s danger, leading a *BBC News* headline to declare, “COVID-19 pandemic: Everything you should not do, Brazil has done.”⁶

The challenges, isolation, losses and acts of heroism have all left their marks on the people and organizations tackling society’s greatest challenges to build a better future. We must take stock of where we are so we can take the best steps forward.

1. United Nations Development Programme. *Why we don't feel safe*. (2022 February 8) Retrieved 20 February 2022 from <https://stories.undp.org/why-we-dont-feel-safe>.

2. World Health Organization. (2 March 2022). *COVID-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide*. Retrieved 15 March 2022 from <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>.

3. *Scientific American*. *How the U.S. Pandemic Response Went Wrong - and What Went Right - During a Year of COVID*. (11 March 2021) Retrieved 20 February 2022 from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-u-s-pandemic-response-went-wrong-and-what-went-right-during-a-year-of-covid/>.

4. Bengali, S., *The New York Times*. *Britain's Covid Missteps Cost Thousands of Lives, Inquiry Finds*. (29 October 2021) Retrieved 21 February 2022 from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/12/world/europe/uk-covid-deaths-inquiry.html>.

5. *BBC News & BBC Panorama*. (22 March 2021) *Covid: The countries that nailed it, and what we can learn from them*. Retrieved 20 February 2022 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-56455030>.

6. Guerin, O., *BBC News* (9 July 2021) *Covid-19 pandemic: Everything you should not do, Brazil has done*. Retrieved 21 February 2022 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57733540>.

THE SOCIAL AND PERSONAL ISSUES IMPACTED BY THE PANDEMIC ARE COMMON AROUND THE WORLD.

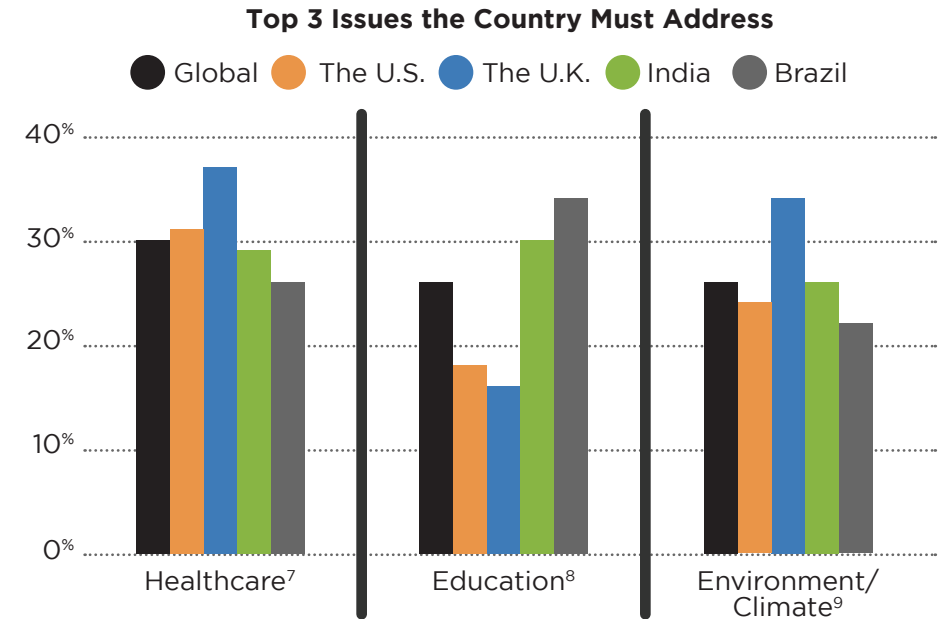
Despite the differing governmental approaches to the pandemic, the same social issues and personal costs have been shared by people everywhere.

At the country level, the top three social issues respondents felt their country should be addressing were healthcare, education and environment/climate.

The U.S. and the U.K. ranked healthcare as the top issue, followed by environment/climate and then education. India and Brazil ranked education first, followed by healthcare and then environment/climate.

However, with both healthcare and environment/climate, the differences between the biggest and smallest percentages by country are relatively small (11% for healthcare, 12% for environment/climate). The countries were more divided over education.

There's a marked difference between the highest and lowest responses ranking education as their country's top priority: The largest percentage (Brazil at 34%) was more than twice the smallest percentage (the U.K.'s 16%). Moreover, the U.S. and the U.K. together were much less likely to point to education than India and Brazil.



7. Includes: Mental health and social services. Healthcare premiums/healthcare reform.

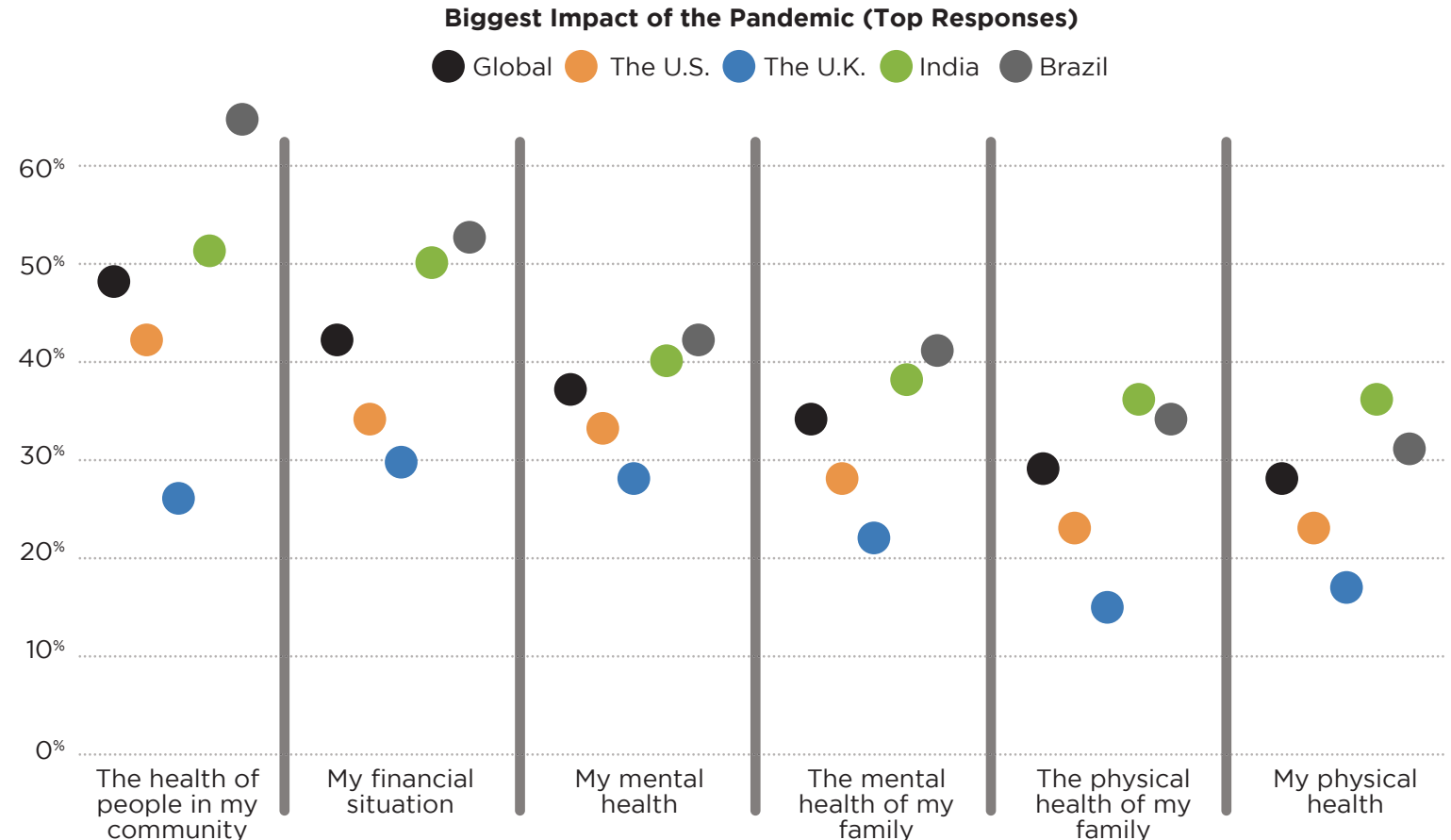
8. Includes: Education. College/post-secondary education. Early education. Literacy. Student loan forgiveness.

9. Includes: Environment. Climate change.

At the individual level, the pandemic has impacted almost every facet of life. Globally, nearly half of respondents said the biggest impact they saw from COVID-19 was on the health of those around them – not surprising in light of the world’s 446 million cases of COVID and 6 million deaths. This is especially true in Brazil (64%), where prevention and containment measures have been the most lax among the four countries studied.¹⁰ The U.K. stood out for being much lower (26%) in its concern for the health of others in the community than every other country (42% The U.S., 51% India and 64% Brazil).

Instead, the biggest impact from COVID for the U.K. respondents was on their own mental health. Globally, “my mental health” and “the mental health of my family” were the third- and fourth-largest impacts. (See “Top 5 Causes of Interest and Associated Civic Circle Actions — Last 30 Days” later in this report for more mental health data.)

The next-highest ranking globally was the pandemic’s financial impact on individuals, though this impact appears to have been felt more strongly in India and Brazil (half or more) than the U.S. and the U.K. (a quarter to a third). (See “Top Reasons for Lack of Social Issue Involvement” for more insights into COVID’s financial effects.)

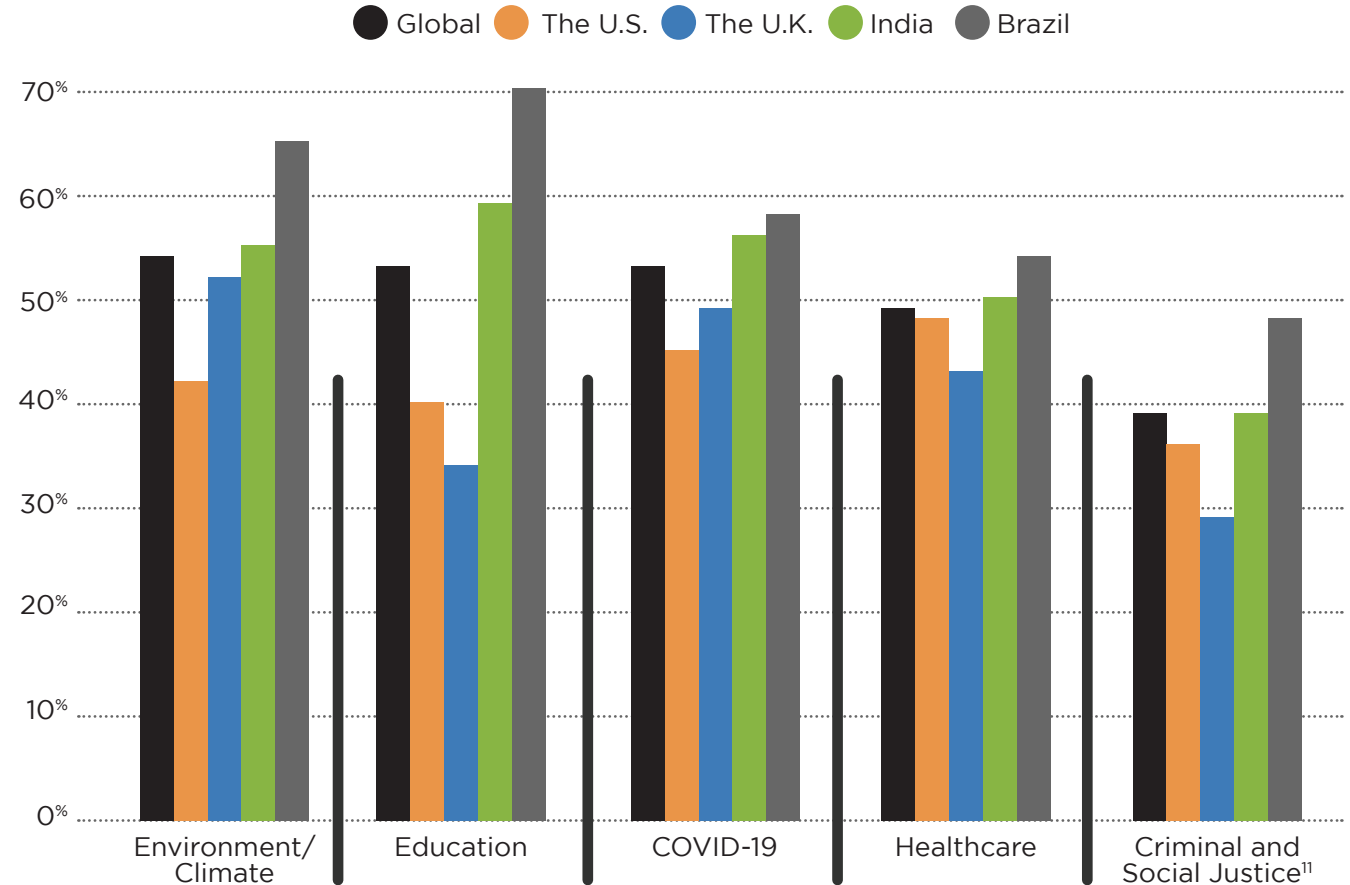


INDIVIDUALS MOST WANT THEIR COUNTRIES TO SUPPORT EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHCARE.

The causes of most interest to individuals varied between countries: Education was of the most interest in India and Brazil (59% and 70%, respectively), environment/climate in the U.K. (52%) and healthcare in the U.S. (48%).

The largest differences between the countries were in the rankings of education, which ranged from the highest level of interest in Brazil at 70% to a low of 34% in the U.K.

Top 5 Causes of Interest (After Grouping by Similarity)



THREE CIVIC CIRCLE ACTIONS DOMINATED DURING THE PANDEMIC: USING YOUR VOICE, LISTEN AND LEARN, AND VOLUNTEER.

Over the last 30 days, three Civic Circle actions dominated how respondents supported the issues they were most interested in. They (i) influenced one's network through social media, advocacy or other form of expression (**using your voice**), (ii) took time to learn about a cause or social issue (**listen and learn**) and (iii) intentionally helped someone else (**volunteer**).



With every issue, India dominated the use of social media, while the U.S. and the U.K. had lower use than both Brazil and India. The biggest disparities occurred when posting about climate change. Data shows a 30%-33% gap between respondents in the U.K. and those in India using social media for environment/climate change awareness.



Taking time to learn about an issue (any issue) has continued to be popular throughout the pandemic. India dominated interest in this action no matter what the cause by a wide margin. For instance, 48% of India's respondents took time to learn about the environment/climate, compared to 27% and 26% for the U.S. and the U.K., respectively.

The effort to learn begs the question: When respondents seek to learn about an issue, are they turning to nonprofits and causes for information – and are they receiving the information they need?



Intentionally helping someone else was among the top actions for every issue, though people seem most likely to choose it for more immediate personal issues (poverty, homelessness, mental health) than broader issues (environment, climate change).

Of the four countries, interest and actions taken in regard to mental health were lowest in the U.S. and the U.K. – somewhat incongruous, since U.K. respondents named “my mental health” as the biggest impact of the pandemic. This lack of activity may be discouraging in light of two recent reports: A U.S. study¹² reported that “more than half of young Americans are facing mental health challenges or know someone who is – and [they believe] everyone shares responsibility,” and a U.K. study reported that “depression rates have doubled since the COVID-19 pandemic began.”¹³

No matter what the action, India was consistently more engaged than the other three countries studied, whereas the U.K. was most often the least involved. For instance, looking at specific Civic Circle actions, 46% of respondents from India applied for a job specifically because of the potential employer's social issue stance compared to 16% of U.K. respondents. In another example, the 18% of U.K. respondents who intentionally helped someone else with the issue of poverty and homelessness was 20%-24% below the others.

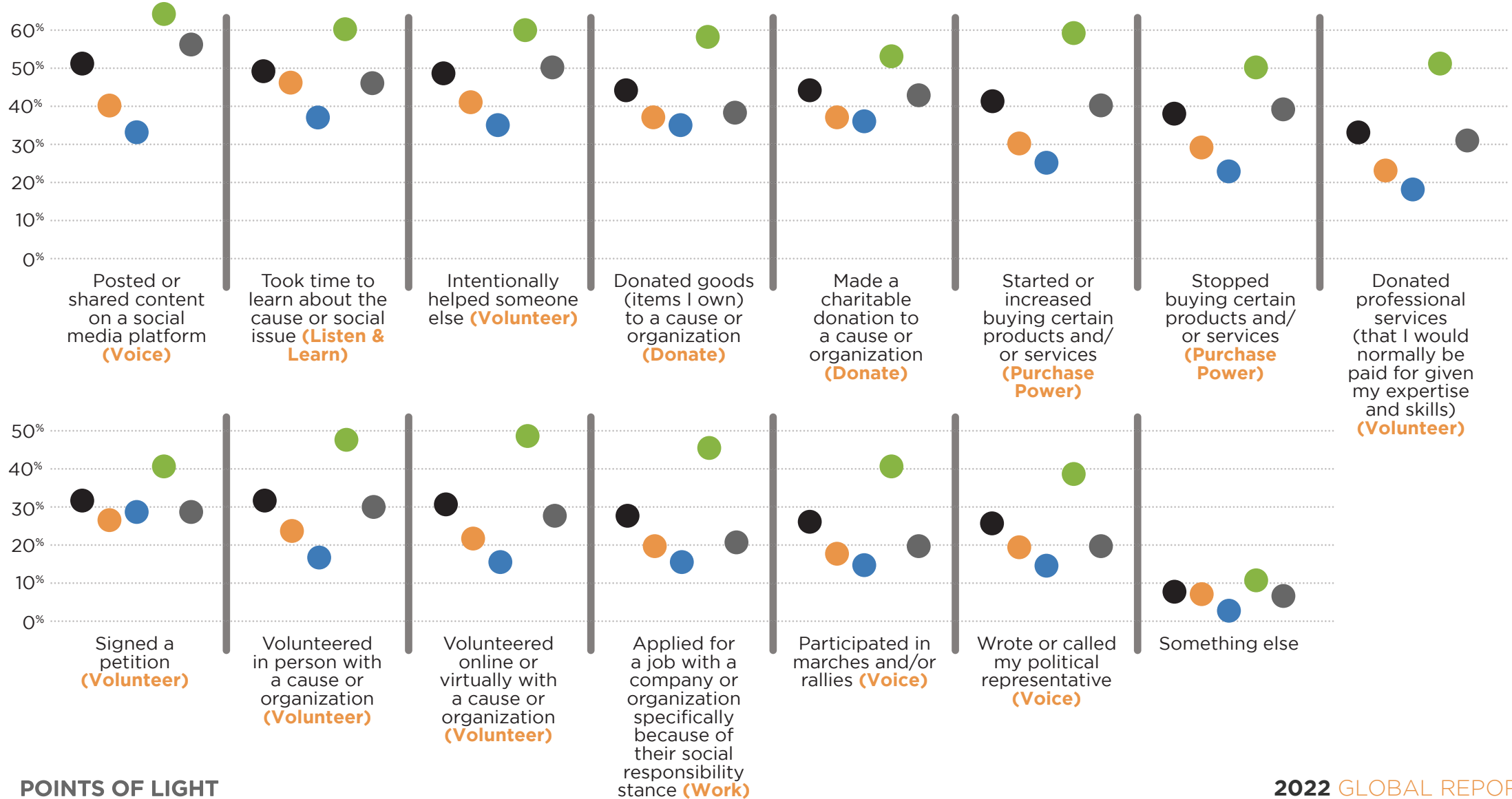


12. Cause and Social Influence. *Influencing Young America to Act: 2021 Year in Review*. Published 2021 by INFLUENCE|SG.

13. The Health Foundation. *Latest data highlights a growing mental health crisis in the UK*. (22 August 1970) Retrieved 21 February 2022 from <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/news/latest-data-highlights-a-growing-mental-health-crisis-in-the-uk>.

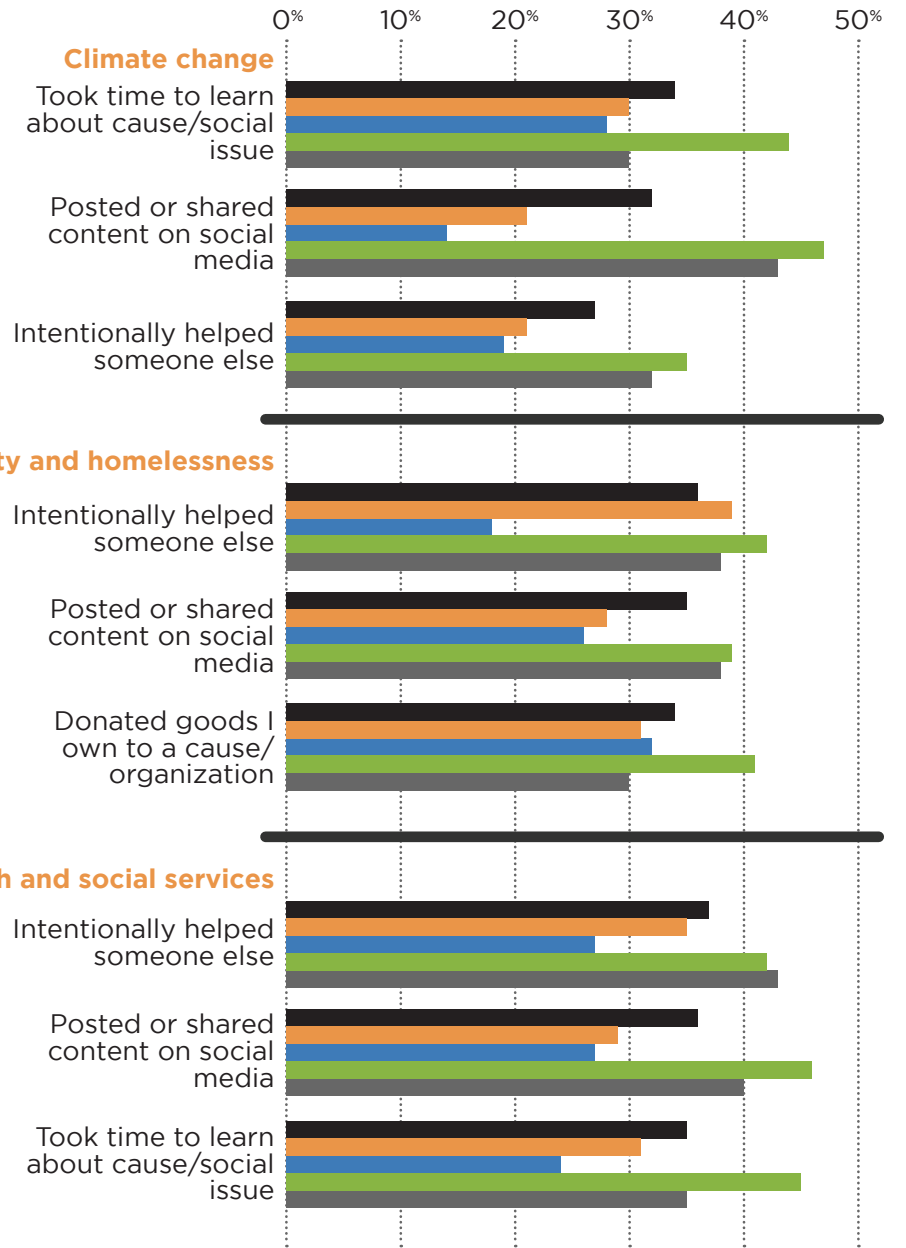
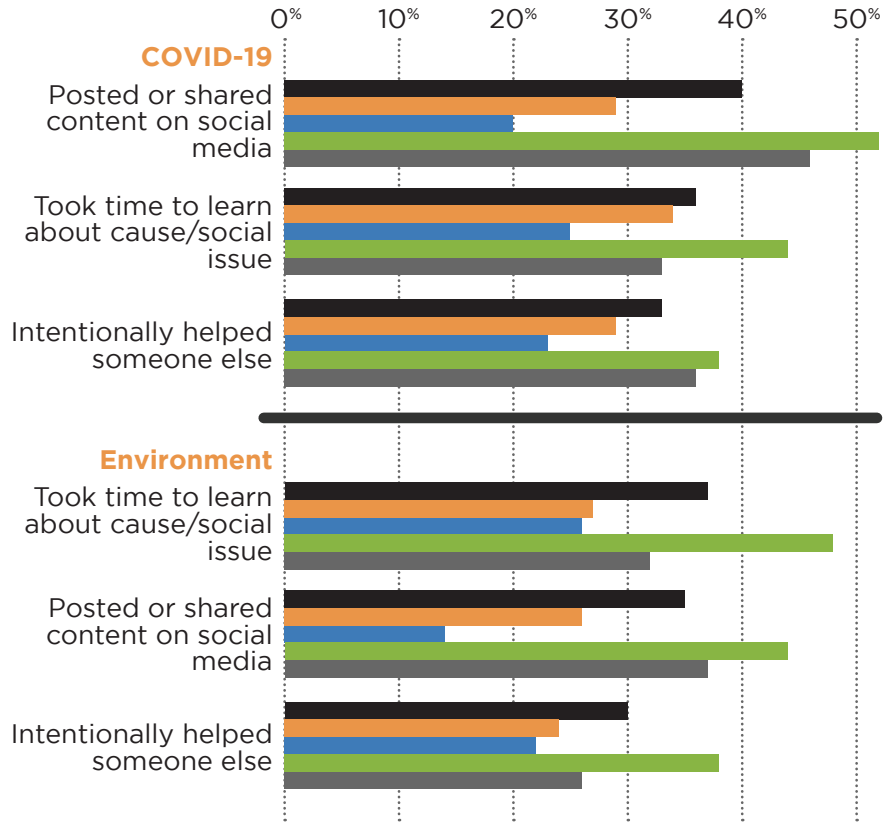
Actions Taken in Support of Any Issue/Cause — Last 30 Days

● Global ● The U.S. ● The U.K. ● India ● Brazil



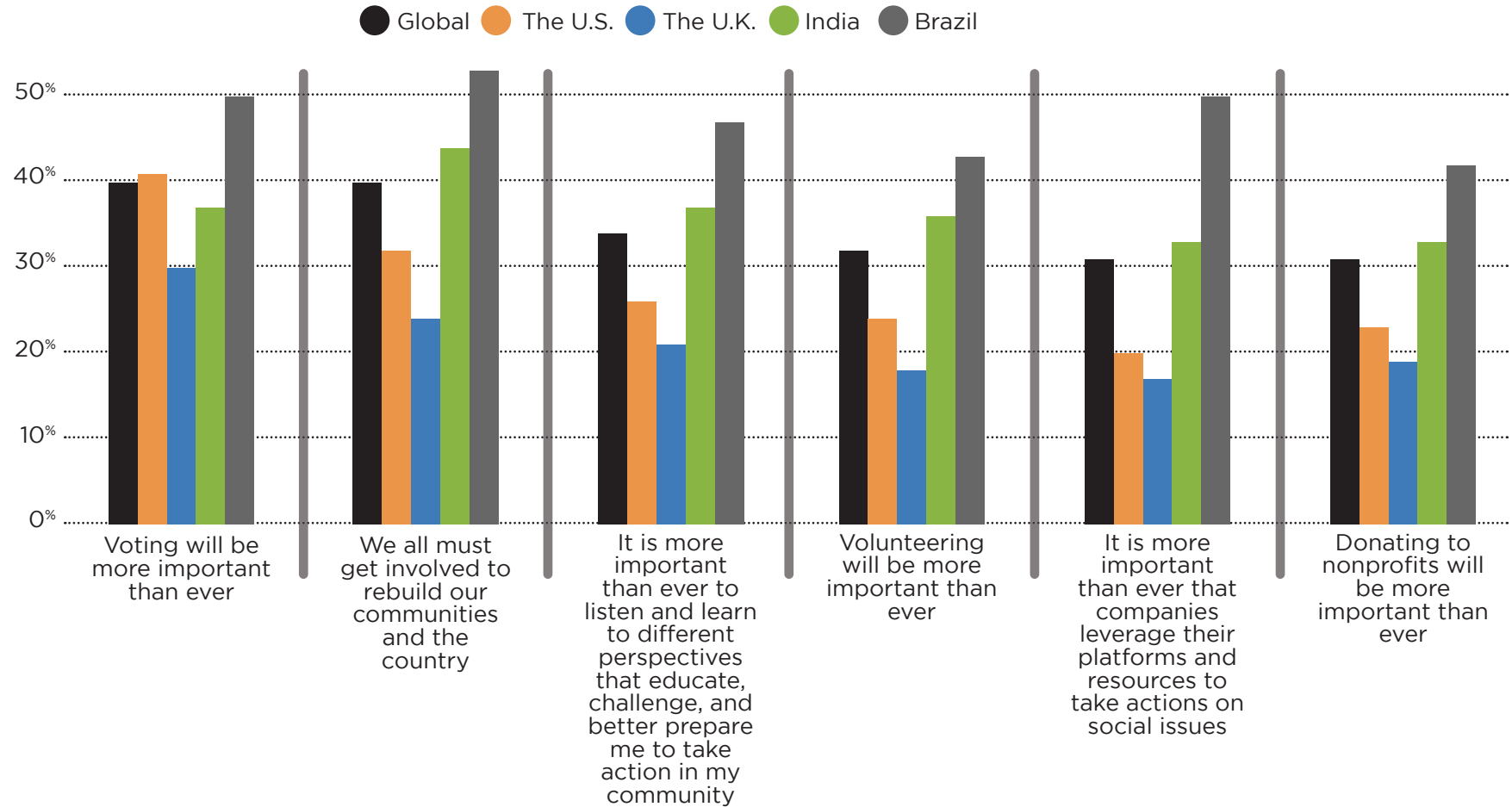
Top 5 Causes of Interest and Associated Civic Circle Actions — Last 30 Days

● Global ● The U.S. ● The U.K. ● India ● Brazil

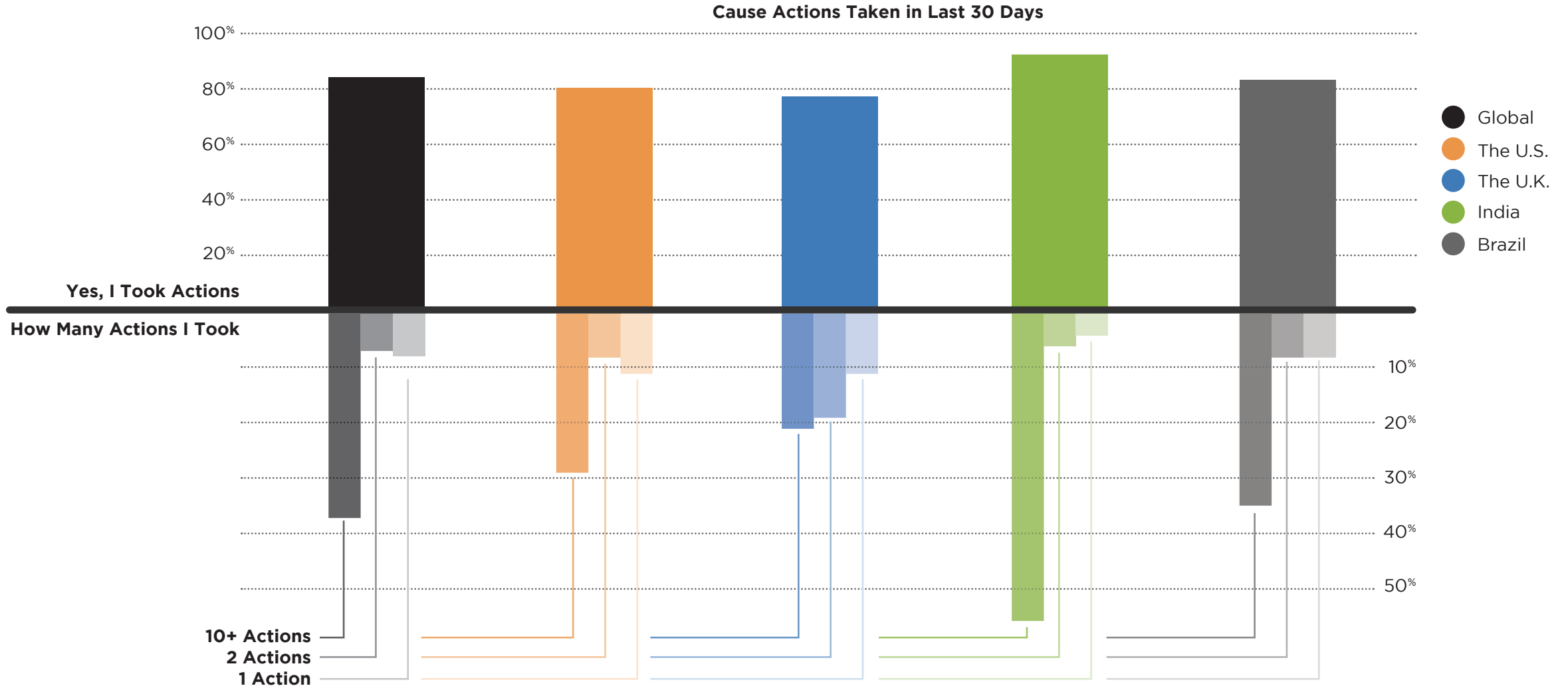


Respondents in the U.S. and the U.K. ranked another Civic Circle action, voting, as the most important activity they could take to support social issue change in their country. A larger percentage of Brazil's respondents (50%) said voting would be more important than ever; they ranked companies taking action as equally important and getting involved to rebuild as slightly more important.

Most Important Activities Since the Pandemic (Top Responses)

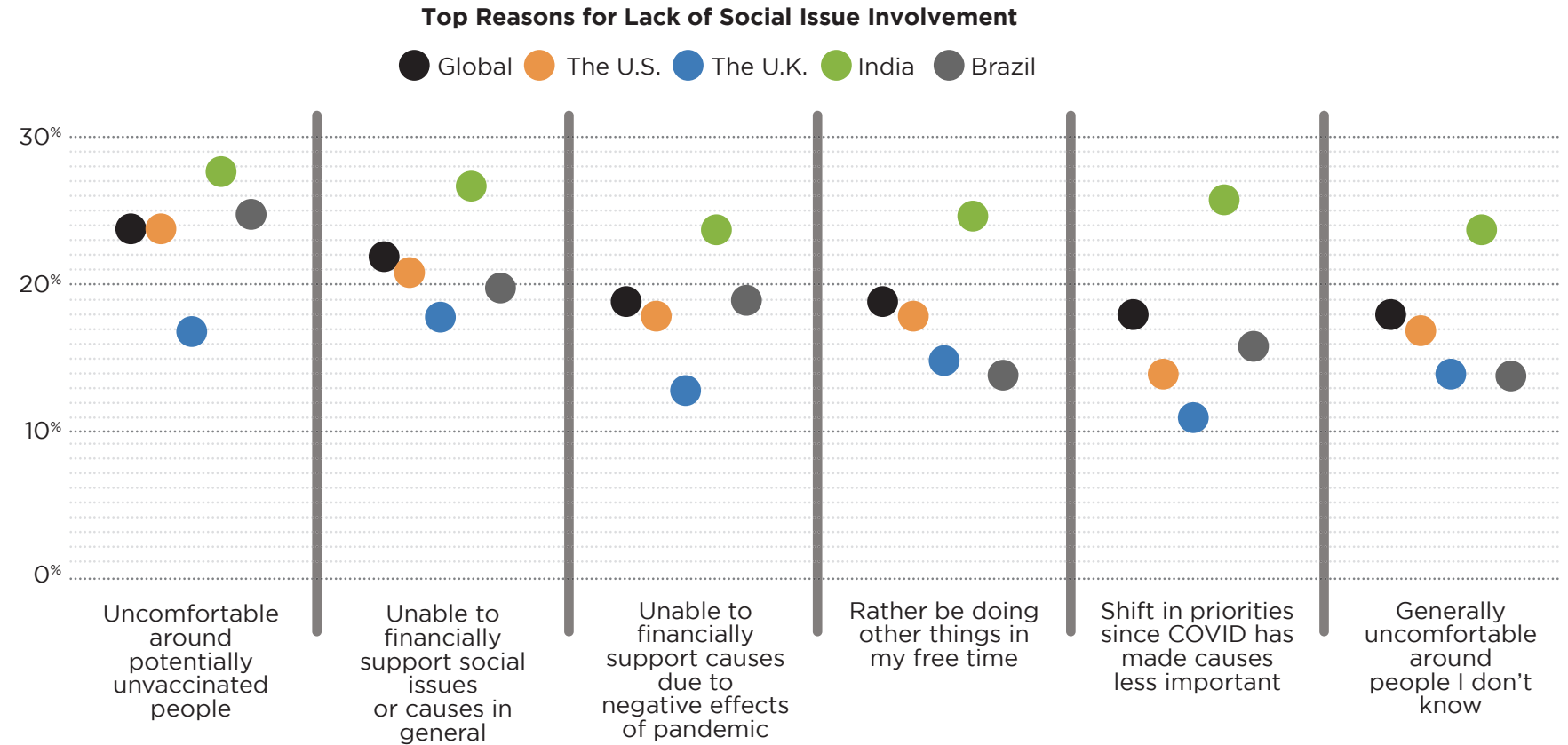


Researchers found that when respondents in any country acted in support of a social issue, many of them tended to take 10 or more actions instead of just one or two. For instance, more than half of those acting in India in the last 30 days took 10 or more actions.



The top reason given for not supporting social issues (discomfort around the unvaccinated) may speak to a lingering fear of COVID. Virtual volunteer opportunities can help address these by allowing people to participate from the safety of the homes.

Most notable, though, is that two out of the top three reasons involve the inability to financially support causes. This reflects the public's continued perception that being involved with a cause or nonprofit means giving money. It means that organizations have much work to do in educating current and potential audiences about the many ways they can influence change.

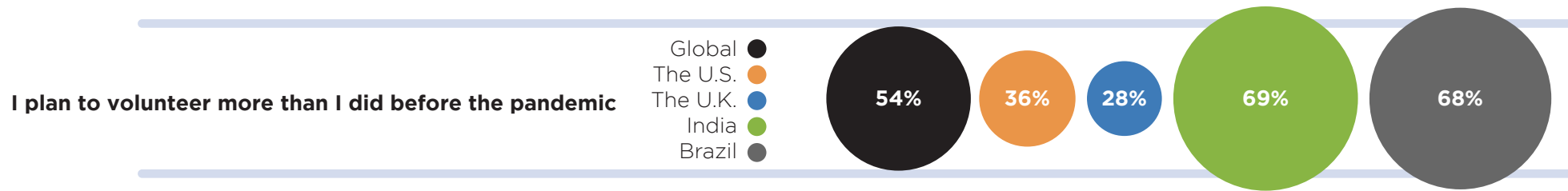


VOLUNTEERING IS AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES SINCE THE PANDEMIC BUT BY VARYING DEGREES AMONG COUNTRIES.

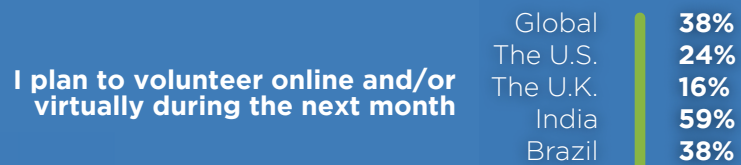
From the viewpoint of the Civic Circle, the isolation, illness and fear generated by the pandemic seem to have affected not only how often people have volunteered but also their attitudes toward doing so.

Volunteering was ranked third or fourth by every country as an important activity relevant to social issues since the pandemic – behind voting, getting involved in rebuilding, listening to/learning from different perspectives and, in Brazil’s case, companies taking action on social issues.

The U.S. and the U.K. had the lowest percentages of respondents who saw volunteering as important, particularly the U.K.’s 18%, which was less than half the highest figure, Brazil’s 43%. That lesser level of enthusiasm carried over when they were asked if they plan to volunteer more now than they did pre-pandemic. U.S. and U.K. respondents showed markedly less commitment to increasing how much they volunteer since the pandemic.



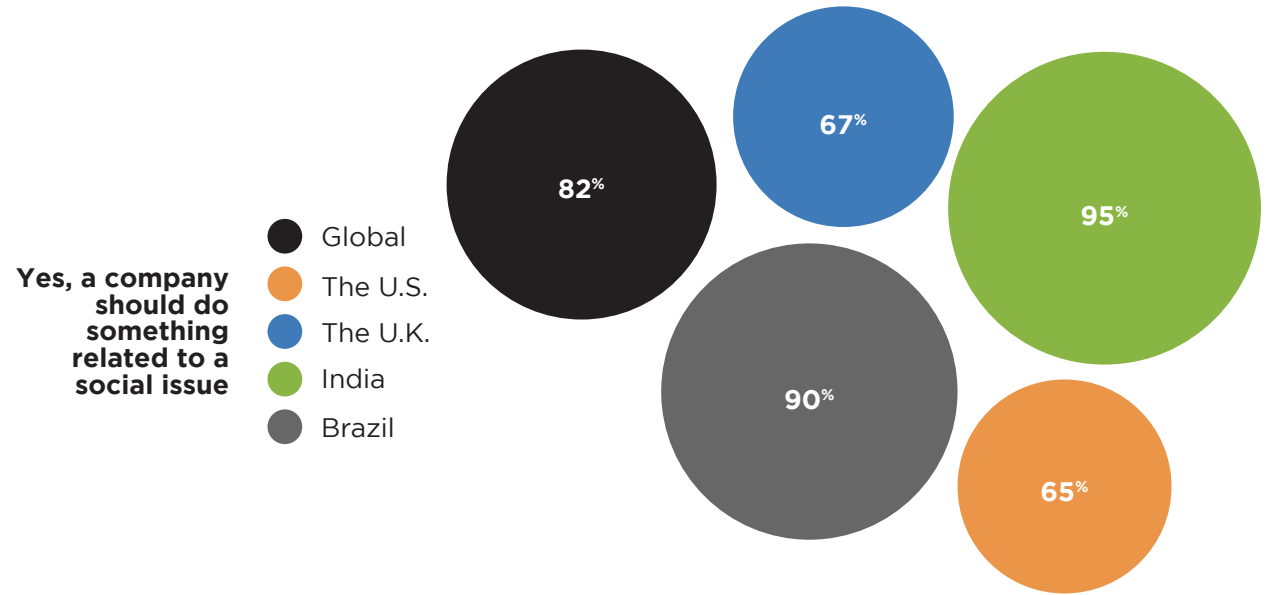
The people who volunteered within the last 30 days are the same people who said they plan to volunteer within the next 30 days. Of those, the vast majority intend to do so primarily via virtual opportunities. The physical, mental and financial tolls of COVID-19 may have played a role in their decision, as might an increased availability and acceptance of virtual volunteering. In the 2018 *Points of Light Global Volunteerism Journey Report*,¹⁴ respondents said opportunities were not accessible and they lacked the time to volunteer in person. Today, with the increased usage of virtual platforms due to the pandemic, individuals may expect chances to volunteer virtually to be abundant.



HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT ARE UNPRECEDENTED.

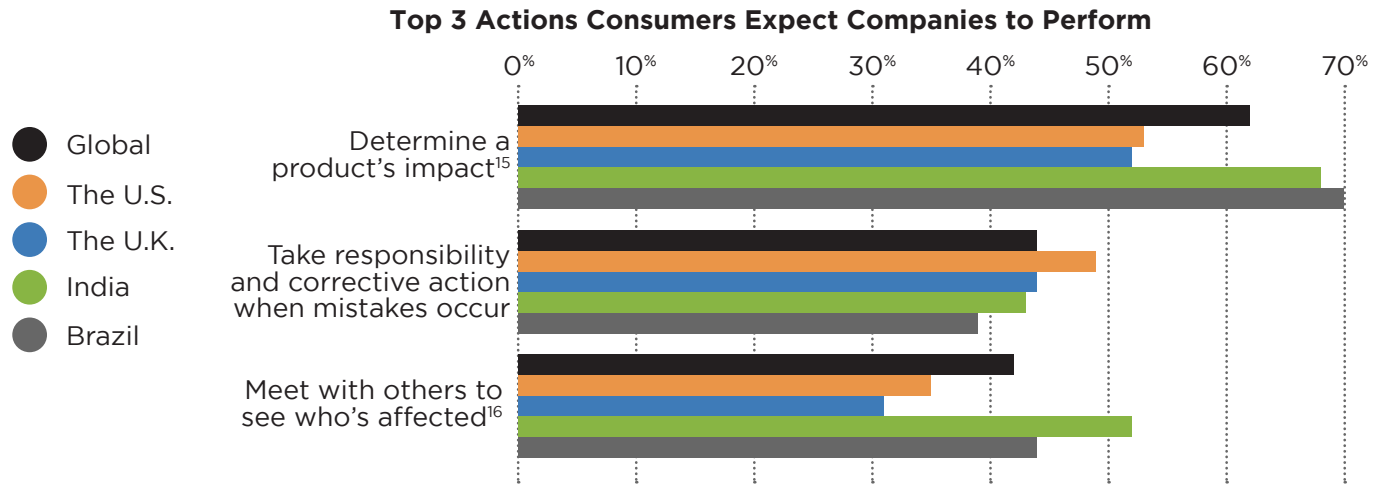
Points of Light has often shared research to help companies assume a strong role in addressing societal challenges through the Civic Circle. Some companies participate for humanitarian reasons, some to fulfil their role in society, and some simply because their customers expect it. Never have those expectations been stronger than they are now.

Nearly every respondent in India and Brazil said they expect companies to address social challenges, compared to two-thirds of U.S. and U.K. respondents who said the same. Globally, then, more than 80% of respondents expect companies to address the social ills in their countries. These responses are unprecedented in Points of Light research.



Consumers also have strong ideas on how companies should act to avoid and, if necessary, respond to a social issue. Overall, the biggest percentage of respondents said that companies should determine a product’s impact before implementing it, though they don’t necessarily believe companies should meet with external professionals or people in the community for this purpose.

While higher percentages of respondents in the U.S. and the U.K. said companies should take corrective action over meeting with others to see who is affected by something they’ve done, it’s the opposite for India and Brazil. They expect companies to find out who has been harmed.

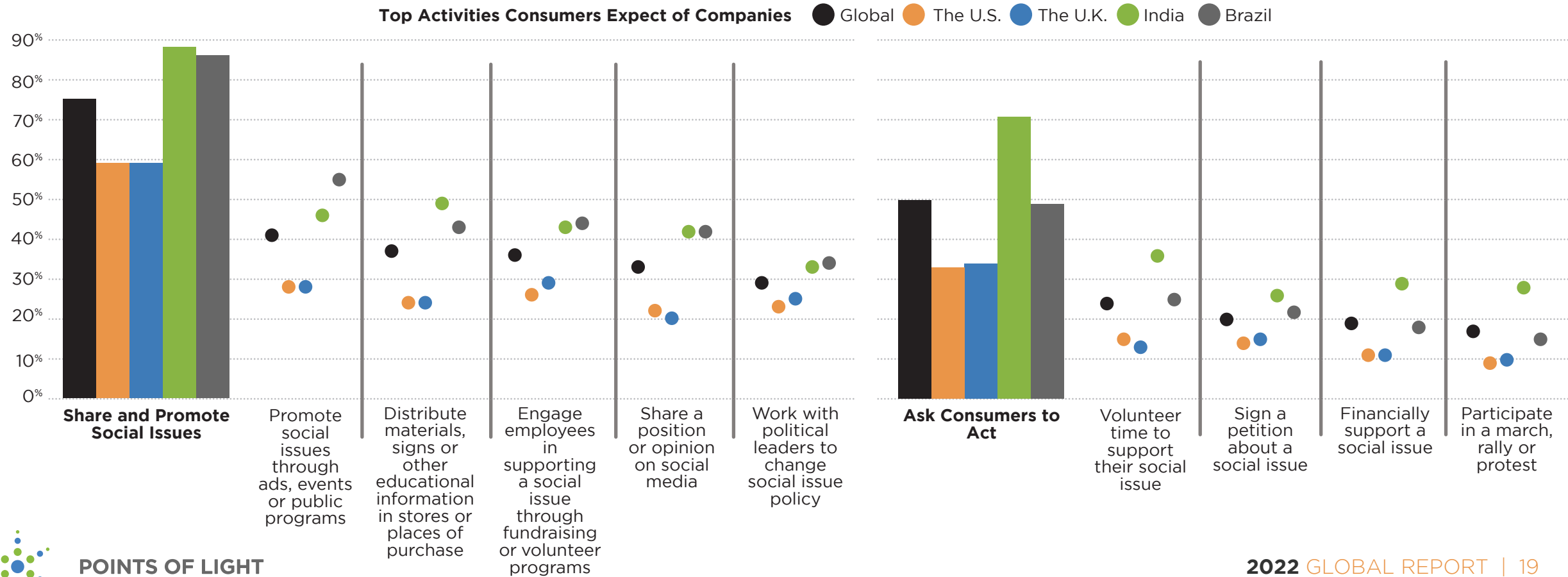


¹⁵ Includes: Determine whether the product or service will impact the environment. Study how the product or service will positively or negatively affect the local workforce. Study how the product or service will impact employees.

¹⁶ Includes: Meet with consumers like you to determine whether their product or service will affect you or your family. Meet with local leaders to determine how product/service will affect the local neighborhood, city and/or state of residence.

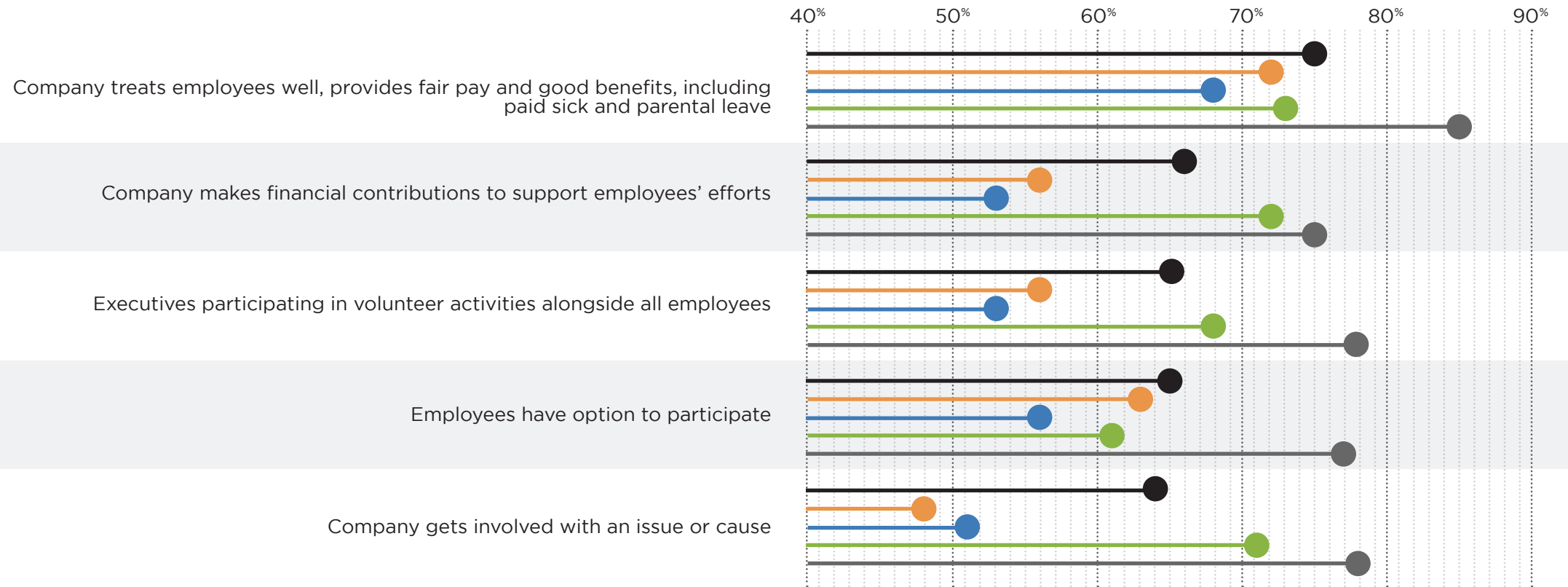
Globally, there's a tremendous difference (around 30%) in how many U.S. and U.K. respondents expect companies to share and promote social issues vs. how many respondents in India and Brazil. However, the same two actions are ranked first or second by each country: promote social issues through advertising and distribute materials in stores.

There's an even bigger difference globally (almost 40%) in how many U.S. and U.K. respondents expect companies to ask consumers to take some action vs. how many respondents in India and Brazil expect the same. India is out in front here with a much stronger expectation that companies will ask consumers to do something, especially if that something is to volunteer their time to support a cause.



Often, a company's efforts addressing social issues can be viewed as self-serving. Respondents said they would measure a company's sincerity in its social issue actions by the way it treats its employees.

Top Activities That Help Consumers Trust a Company's Social Issue Efforts ● Global ● The U.S. ● The U.K. ● India ● Brazil



CONCLUSION

Every country around the globe is navigating a way to live with COVID. An opportunity of this scope will likely not occur again in this lifetime. How will the world respond?

For companies:

Consumers expect corporations to actively participate in making change happen and to determine how their products and services will impact the people and environments around them. While these expectations have existed for several years, they have increased significantly since the pandemic.

This report is a global call for companies to seize an opportunity: the chance to influence and effect meaningful change by staying focused on their own messages, actions, policies and impact. As evidenced by the data, companies can do more than they have in response to social issues by mobilizing internally as an organization, before reaching out to consumers.

For causes, nonprofits and NGOs:

As shown through this report, people who want to do good or create change are gravitating toward nontraditional forms of engagement. This includes educating oneself more deeply on social issues, using one's voice to share support for social issues or organizations and helping each other in more direct ways than through organizations such as nonprofits.

To capture this energy, nonprofits should consider how they can incorporate listening and learning in their program offerings, make it easier for supporters to use their voice to amplify the organization's message and mission, and promote the non-financial pathways available to support their cause.

For individuals:

As the pandemic follows its own path in each country, so too will individuals find their own level of comfort with cause engagement. Those who want to help should first take time to assess the needs of their community, the causes they care about and their own well-being and readiness to engage in today's world.

Those already engaged are the ones most likely to continue to be so. These individuals should consider who they could encourage to join them, as people who want change are ready to be nudged. Using the Civic Circle to nudge them in new directions can help them realize their power.





POINTS OF LIGHT