

apolitical foundation

Better Leaders, Better Democracies:

Mapping the Organizations Shaping
21st Century Politicians

May 2022

About this Report

Scope

This report and the research behind it set out to:

- Map the global field of independent political training programs, especially those that are non-partisan, and reveal any gaps in the space.
- Gain an overview of who is in the field and how they function.
- Find out what was being done to attract, retain, nurture, and support more diverse people from traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Share findings.
- Identify promising practices.
- Share considerations that could help strengthen the field's work.

What this report is not:

- A comprehensive overview of what political parties offer in the pre-political and political (once people have been elected) space.
- A deep and scientific analysis of practices and approaches to political training globally.

Methodology

We spent 10 months—June 2021 to April 2022—researching political training organizations around the world and writing this report.

- Mapping 420 political training organizations via desk research.¹
- Sending surveys to 368 organizations, with extensive follow-up and interviews.

- 131 of these organizations were non-partisan. We used desk research to identify, to the best of our abilities, whether an organization was partisan or not.

- Combing through surveys returned from 54 organizations.
 - 36 of which were non-partisan.
 - 45 of which focused on recruiting from underrepresented groups. These organizations were both partisan and non-partisan.
- Surveys by region
 - Former USSR: 46 surveys sent, 5 returned
 - Europe: 132 sent, 17 returned
 - Asia: 16 sent, 2 returned
 - MENA: 28 sent, 2 returned
 - Canada and the US: 50 sent, 8 returned
 - Sub-Saharan Africa: 60 sent, 7 returned
 - Oceania: 12 sent, 3 returned
- Interviewing 62 organizations.
 - 50 were non-partisan.
 - 17 focused exclusively on underrepresented groups. This group was made up of both partisan and non-partisan organizations.

Where possible, this report includes quantifiable data that emerged from our research. It also includes trends that we heard about or saw during the research process.

¹ See Appendix A for how we chose which organizations were included and which were not.

We mapped all types of political training organizations, with the exceptions of political parties and university-degree programs. Though we mapped organizations across the political spectrum, the findings in this report mostly relate to those that are non-partisan.

Audiences

- **Political entrepreneurs and practitioners** running or thinking about starting non-partisan political training programs.
- **Donors and supporters** who currently, or may, fund the space.
- **Political parties and civil society** will likely find certain parts applicable to their work and be inspired to create partnerships. We particularly hope that the report provides more visibility for political training organizations, which are often disconnected from civic education movements and large-scale governance programs focused on serving politicians and political parties.

Feedback

We wholeheartedly welcome feedback on any aspects of the report. This field is growing, and we are excited to explore new ideas with our colleagues. This report is meant as a humble offering to the many organizations working to make democracy stronger by cultivating better political leaders. If you want to be a part of this work in any way, please write to us at lisa@apolitical.foundation.

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Executive Summary

There are more autocratic states than democracies around the world for the first time since 2004.²

The 21st century's biggest problems require urgent and innovative solutions. Climate change, polarization, inequality, and war will not be fixed by carrying out business as usual. Courageous and ethical politicians are key. Political entrepreneurship is the source of renewed energy focused on supporting better politics emerging out of these existential challenges.

Political training organizations, especially the ones we are calling *political leadership incubators* are a source of hope for anyone who believes better politicians are an essential part of improving outcomes around the world. The PLI space is building on momentum, has huge growth and impact potential, and is urgently needed to help democracy face existential threats.

Making change through politicians may seem intimidating until one considers that the world's 46,000 members of parliament could fit in the stands of a football stadium.³ There are close to 6.1 million broader elected officials around the world.⁴ Politicians make up a comparatively small sector of the general population and it goes without saying that they have enormous power. OECD countries spent an average 47 percent of GDP on general government spending in 2020.⁵ This figure is likely higher than previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Supporting them to have the skills, mindset, and knowledge they need for the 21st century could mean big impacts from relatively little investment.

Defining political leadership incubators

Groups in this field have been called political training organizations, but we do not think this term accurately describes them. Many organizations go beyond training to cultivate and support ethical politicians. With this in mind, we have started calling them *political leadership incubators* (PLIs). PLIs can be non-partisan or partisan, but they are not run by political parties. Most currently work with people before they are elected to office, but they would ideally also support leaders with ongoing training, mental health support, peer networks, etc. after they have been elected to office (see p. 15: five waypoints to political leadership). We were warned that some funders could be discouraged by the use of the word "political". After much consideration, we decided not to shy away from one of our core beliefs: fixing the 21st century's biggest problems will require investment in good political leaders. Most PLIs are founded by political entrepreneurs. The word "incubator" is commonly used in entrepreneurial circles.

2. "Democracy Report," Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 3 April, 2022, <https://bti-project.org/en/?&cb=00000>.

3. Inter-Parliamentary Union, *National Parliaments*, 3 April, 2022, <https://www.ipu.org/national-parliaments>.

4. We calculate this number out of UNW's figure of 2.18 million women making up 36 percent of the world's elected officials. *Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation*, UN Women, 3 April, 2022,

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>.

5. OECD Data, *General Government Spending*, <data.oecd.org/gga/general-government-spending.htm>

Growing momentum

The PLI field is seeing renewed energy as people across the world head to the streets fueled by fears for their future. More than half of the organizations that answered our question about program age had programs founded in the last ten years. PLIs offer an opportunity to turn frustration into productive political power by supporting passionate activists and community leaders with the skills and the knowledge they need to be effective politicians. In other words, PLIs help bridge the gap between movement leadership and political leadership.

Equipping politicians for impact

PLIs work with leaders in different ways. We believe in an approach that helps participants strengthen their commitment to ethics and equips them with the policy, leadership, political, and self-reflection skills they need to transform into politicians who serve constituents well. Some PLIs also work to ensure power does not go to politicians' heads once elected and that leaders get the support they need to succeed in office. These PLIs impact the world's biggest issues at the root: the lawmakers that shape societies, lives, economies, and ecosystems.



“Many organizations go beyond training to cultivate and support ethical politicians. With this in mind, we have started calling them political leadership incubators (PLIs).”

Building trust

Politicians face a dangerous trust problem. PLIs can give them some of the skills they need to be more trustworthy leaders. Only 52 percent of respondents included in the Edelman Trust Barometer trusted the government in 2022, and 66 percent thought their country's leaders were purposefully trying to mislead the public.⁶ The situation is so bad that many Europeans want to replace some of their politicians with artificial intelligence, according to a recent study.⁷



The good news is that citizens seem to think that trust can be rebuilt. Eighty-four percent of US adults thought it was possible to increase trust in the federal government in 2019. Sixteen percent said more transparency would improve confidence and 15 percent said improving political leadership and government performance was needed.⁸ These findings are in line with a 2021 Deloitte study which found governments could build and sustain trust by focusing on “humanity, transparency, capability, and reliability”.⁹ And a 2020 study uncovered the fact that citizens who distrust politicians most often cite lack of authenticity as the key factor.¹⁰ Many PLIs help emerging or current politicians cultivate these traits. Training and supporting politicians across the political spectrum,

but not at the extremes, to be more competent and ethical could be a key non-violent way to help remedy distrust.¹¹

We hypothesize that distrust can also be partly explained by a vicious cycle of poor representation, bad outcomes, low identification, and low participation. If this is true, the introduction of better-trained and supported diverse leaders into the system would create a virtuous cycle which fosters trust in the system. There is research indicating that diverse leaders result in better outcomes in business.¹² We would like to see more research into how well-prepared, diverse politicians influence citizens' trust.

6. *Edelman Trust Barometer 2022*, (Edelman, 2022),

https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2022-01/2022%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20FINAL_jan25.pdf.

7. Sam Shead, “More than half of Europeans want to replace lawmakers with AI, study says,” *CNBC*, 27 May 2021,

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/05/27/europeans-want-to-replace-lawmakers-with-ai.html>.

8. Lee Rainie, Scott Keeter, and Andrew Perrin, *Trust and Distrust in America*, (Pew Research Center, 2019),

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/americans-solutions-for-trust-related-problems/>.

9. William D. Eggers, Bruce Chew, Joshua Knight, RJ Krawiec and, Mahesh Kelkar, “Rebuilding trust in government,” 9 March 2021,

<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/building-trust-in-government.html>.

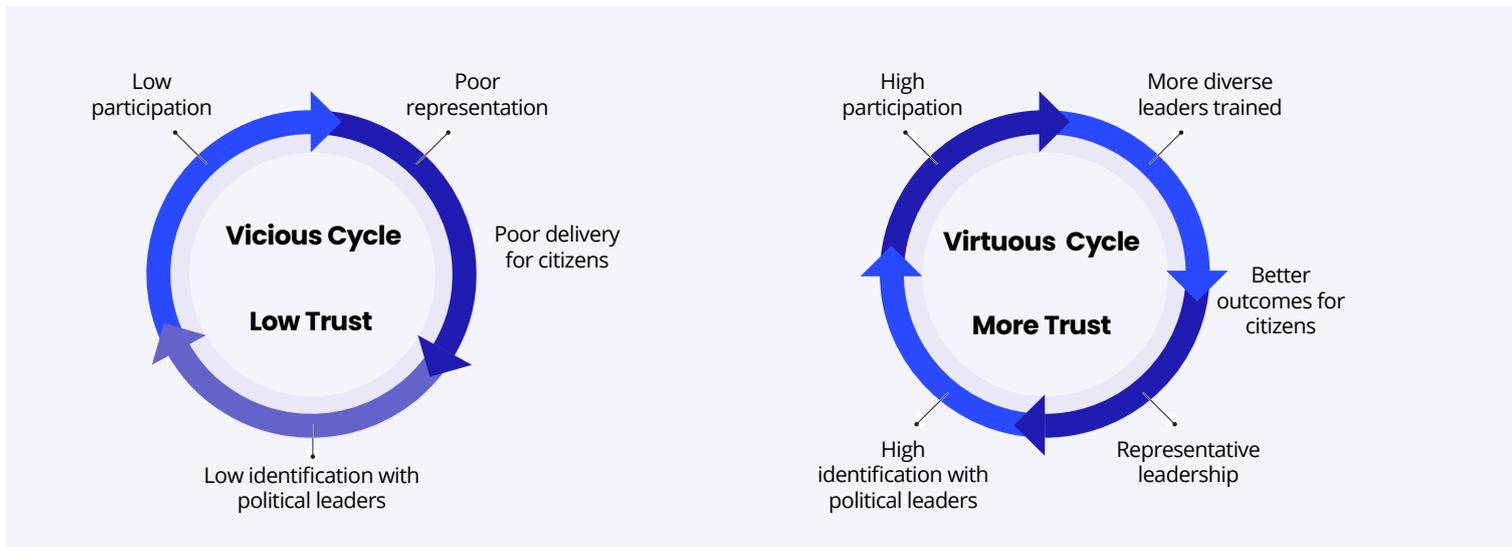
10. Valgarðsson, Viktor Orri, Nick Clarke, Will Jennings, and Gerry Stoker, “The Good Politician and Political Trust: An Authenticity Gap in British Politics?”

Political Studies 69, no. 4 (November 2021): 858–80, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0032321720928257>.

11. Extremism has different meanings depending on who you talk to. We think about it as “a political term which determines the activities that are not in accordance with norms of the state, are fully intolerant toward others, reject democracy as a means of governance and the way of problem solving and also reject the existing social order”. See: <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/Mesko/208033.pdf>.

12. Vivian Hunt, Lareina Yee, Sara Prince, and Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, *Delivering through diversity*, (McKinsey, 2018),

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity>.



An antidote to polarization?

Done right, we think non-partisan PLIs may serve as an antidote to polarization because participants train and build relationships with people across political divides. We want more research to be done in this area. Finding commonality and gaining insight into the values and identities of those you may not agree with are proven approaches to reducing polarizing attitudes.¹³ Being less partisan was listed as one of the top behavioral changes that Americans thought could help increase trust between one another.¹⁴

Evidence of impact

Some PLIs told us that they collected data on how many graduates go into public or political leadership positions, and we heard anecdotes about graduates' policy success. We did not hear of more formal measurements, nor did we find any longer-term research with approaches like random control trials cited by groups to support their approach. Nearly every group we heard from was hungry for more information and funding to do more impact measurement.

Promising research from Pakistan shows how emphasizing the “pro-social” aspects of public office can attract new types of people to politics, get better policy outcomes, and improve trust in a short amount of time.¹⁵ We need more studies like this on existing programs and approaches, and we will work, ideally with others, to fund more.

No silver bullets for systems change

We are well aware that PLI alumni who enter politics are getting into a system that needs serious updating. Most countries have 18th century style politics and 19th century style institutions in the 21st century. Democratic reform must be taken up by the PLIs, and the PLIs must do their work within the democracy-strengthening system. Better politicians are not a silver bullet but a critical lever to systems change.

“Most countries have 18th century style politics and 19th century style institutions in the 21st century.”

¹³ Wojcieszak, Magdalena & Warner, Benjamin. (2020). “Can Interparty Contact Reduce Affective Polarization? A Systematic Test of Different Forms of Intergroup Contact,” *Political Communication*, 37, 1-23. 10.1080/10584609.2020.1760406.

¹⁴ “Americans’ solutions for trust-related problems,” *Pew Research Center*, 22 July, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/americans-solutions-for-trust-related-problems/>

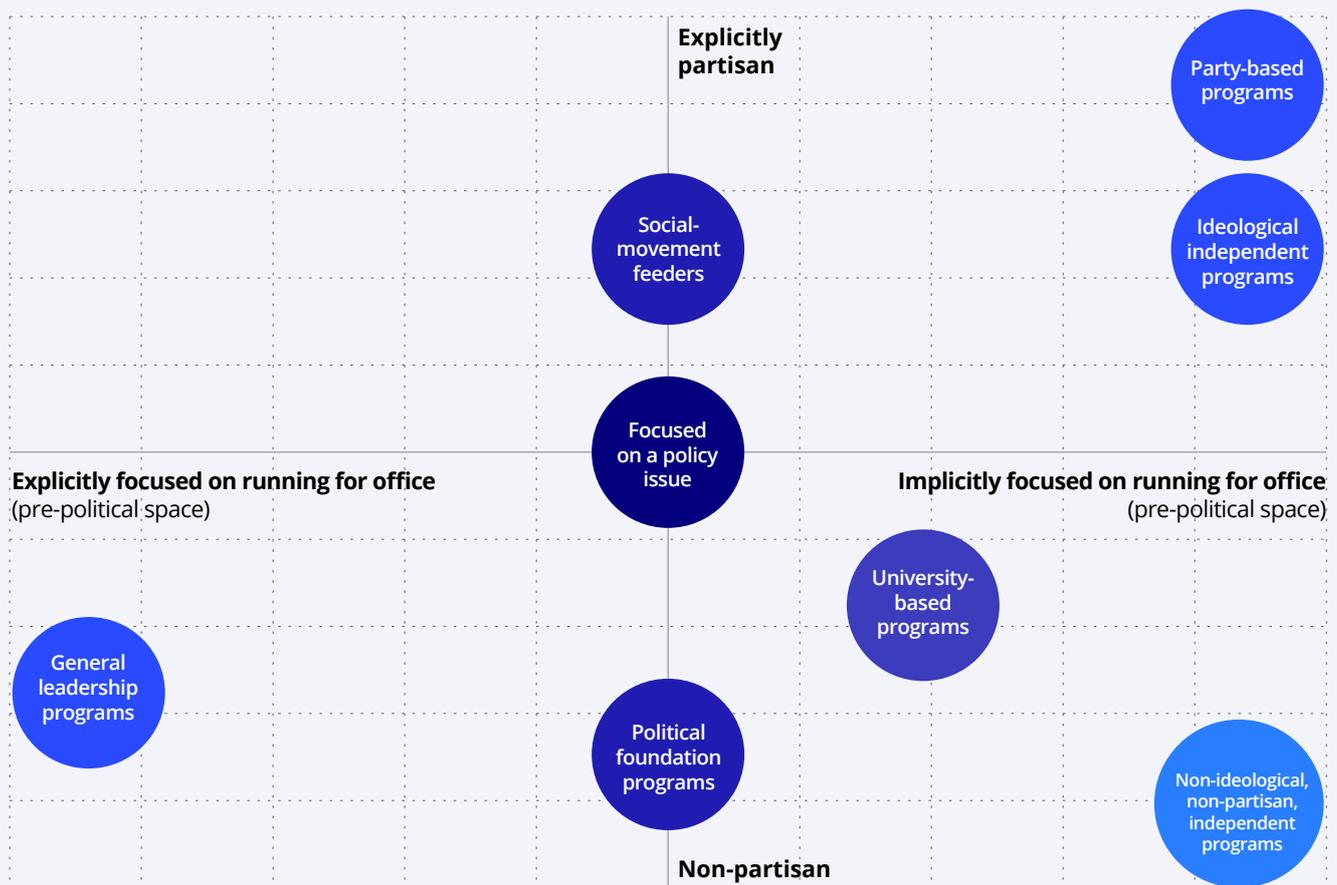
¹⁵ Saad Gulzar and Muhammad Khan, “Good Politicians’: Experimental Evidence on Motivations for Political Candidacy and Government Performance,” *SSRN* 20 February 2021, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3826067>.

Conceptual framing

This report is the first global mapping of the PLI field as far as we know. We have developed a few concepts that we hope will help practitioners and donors understand the space.

Political leadership incubators: As mentioned above, we have called organizations in this space PLIs because we think that the term reflects work to cultivate and support politicians.

Field landscape: We have outlined a landscape of political training organizations. Our analysis does not disaggregate based on what level of government each program targets.



The five waypoints to political leadership:

This approach, which was developed by us and discussed during interviews with organizations, highlights the need for PLIs to broaden their thinking beyond training and into recruitment, activation, and support for political leaders. It suggests that PLIs work with leaders well after they have been elected to office, for example by offering mental health support, access to peer networks, ongoing training, etc. PLIs who do not continue to teach, support, and hold accountable elected alumni risk losing their investment.

One incubator does not need to cover all aspects of the journey. Incubators may be able to collaborate, with each specializing in a certain aspect or waypoint. Few of the PLIs we interviewed or surveyed were taking a holistic journey approach like the five waypoints to political leadership.

“PLIs who do not continue to teach, support, and hold accountable elected alumni risk losing their investment.”

Five Waypoints to Political Leadership



‘Seeds, soil, and gardeners’ approach.

When planting seeds (newly trained political leaders), PLIs must consider where the soil of political systems is fertile and find gardeners within the system or party to help nourish and grow talent. PLIs can plant great potential politicians, but impact will be limited if people within the political system, especially the parties themselves, are not open to receiving and caring for them. Political talent needs long-term tending, both by parties and, ideally, PLIs. The care from non-partisan

PLIs should be limited and apolitical: filling the gaps parties struggle to, and helping parties find people they normally would not. Gardeners hold both formal and informal power to keep the ground fertile and nourish the talent. But the very nature of politics means that they can become antagonistic if seedlings start to pose an existential threat. We would like to see more research into how seeds, soil, and gardeners currently interact, and which areas require further cultivation.



Seeds

New political talent



Soil

Fertile ground for new people and ways inside the political system/parties



Gardeners

People within political parties who help nourish and grow the talent (seeds)

Three gears for democracy:

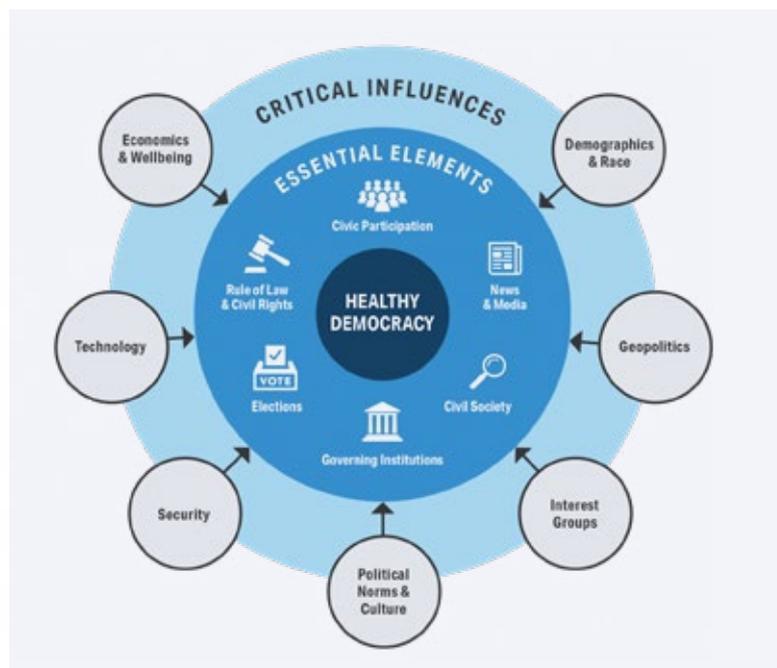
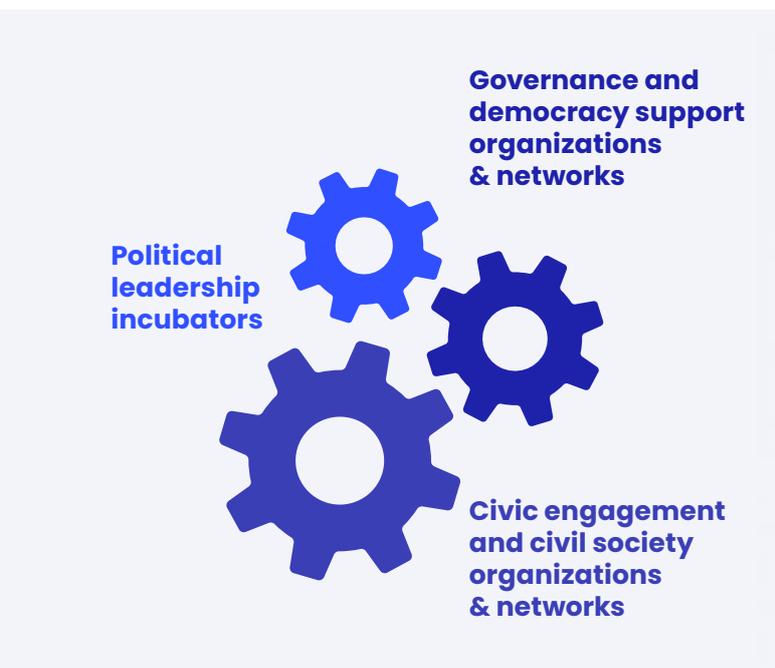
We find it helpful to think about this work as a system. The democracy building space, as we currently understand it, can be thought of as a machine with three gears:

1. Civic engagement and civil society organizations (participant pipeline)
2. Governance and democracy-support organizations (content and programming)
3. PLIs.

We think the ‘three gears’ idea could help others visualize how each is needed to help the democracy-

building machine run well. Supporting collaborations between the three gears could lead to further impact from previous, and sometimes quite large, philanthropic investments and shared learnings.

Interestingly, the ‘Healthy Democracy Framework’ below, created by the Democracy Fund in the US, does not include politicians or elected officials.¹⁶ We hope that writing this report will lead to politicians, and PLIs, being more explicitly included.



¹⁶ Democracy Fund, “Healthy Democracy Framework”, democracyfund.org/who-we-are/healthy-democracy-framework/

Top 10 Findings

This report includes in-depth findings, promising practices, and considerations, mostly for non-partisan PLIs and donors. You will find chapters on each of the five waypoints to political leadership as well as funding, impact, charging participants, and collaboration further on in the report. We have pulled out 10 top findings that we consider especially important. We saw a lot of great and promising work during our interviews with PLIs. In the spirit of impact, most of these findings focus on how things can be improved.

<p>1</p> <p>Global mapping: we have plotted PLIs around the world for the first time and found growing momentum.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Desirable political traits: the field needs to get clearer on what they are looking for in participants.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Training gaps: there is room for PLIs to work on urgent issues like climate, democratic reform, and technology.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Evidence-driven approaches: PLIs could benefit from proven adult learning and pedagogical approaches.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Party collaboration: few PLIs are currently working with political parties.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Underrepresented groups: a surge of organizations have been created to address underrepresentation, but more needs to be done.</p>	<p>7</p> <p>Gender gap: a subset of PLIs work on closing the political gender gap but they are still too few for the scale of the problem.</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Mental health and mindfulness: 21st century leaders need mental health support to make good decisions and build resilience in the face of threats.</p>
<p>9</p> <p>Missed opportunity: donors are missing the impact and investment opportunities that PLIs present.</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Field coordination: PLIs want to work together. We are building a network of PLIs to share information and practices.</p>		

1.

Global mapping

We plotted where PLIs were situated around the world via desk research. As far as we know, this is the first time the global PLI field has been mapped. It is important to note that programs and approaches vary greatly in scope, goals, length, depth, and focus. Momentum is growing in the space, and new programs are being founded. Of the survey respondents who answered this question, more than half had programs founded in the last ten years..

By far the most PLIs were found in Europe (158); 27 of these were non-partisan. We found 39 in the former USSR countries, 15 of which were non-partisan. Twenty PLIs were found in Asia, despite the region's large population. Canada and the US and Sub-Saharan Africa had almost the same number: 64 and 65, respectively. We found 32 PLIs in Latin America, and 28 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Fourteen PLIs were found in Oceania, the least populous of all regions mapped. A few organizations, like the LGBT Victory Institute, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) and Apolitical Academy Global, worked globally. We tried our best to capture the entire field but know that we may have missed some PLIs.

2.

Desirable political traits

PLIs need to know what traits make a good politician in order to know which participants to select. It is important that PLIs are very clear about what they are looking for. Research on what skills and mindsets make a good 21st century politician seems to be limited. In contrast, there are thousands of published papers about business leadership traits. More academic and practical exploration of this topic would help the PLI field. We have included some of the research we did find on this topic in Appendix G. We suggest developing an academic council to advise PLIs on the evidence base related to this and other issues.

In addition, we believe that recruiting people who are driven by intrinsic values and who have the potential to be effective politicians is critical to getting the right people into politics. When intrinsically motivated people do enter the system, they may lack the skills, mindset, and connections to survive and deliver for the people. Research indicates that many political leadership problems may come from the supply side and that intrinsically motivated candidates can win when supported.¹⁷ Most of the programs we spoke to focused much more on the training aspect of their programs than the recruitment and selection parts.

“Of the surveyed organizations that answered this question, more than half had programs founded in the last ten years.”

¹⁷ Gulzar and Khan, “Good Politicians,” 20 February 2021.

3.

Training gaps

Few PLIs reported covering climate, technology, or democratic reform as policy topics. This result surprised us, given the urgency of these issues. Out of the 420 PLIs mapped, only one is focused exclusively on climate, and it appears that not many have it as a big part of their curriculum. Few if any focus largely on technology and democratic reform. These seem like big gaps for future politicians.

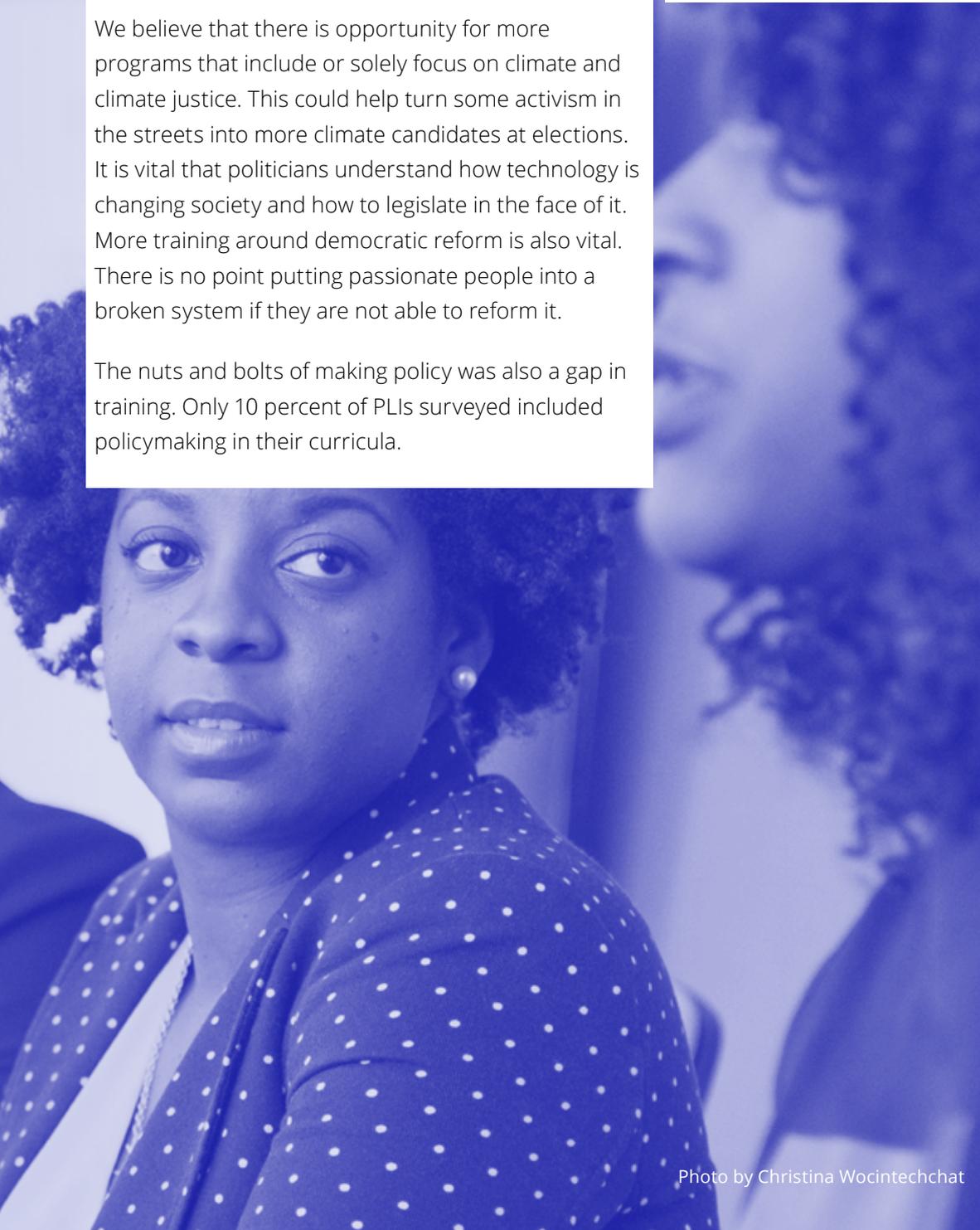
We believe that there is opportunity for more programs that include or solely focus on climate and climate justice. This could help turn some activism in the streets into more climate candidates at elections. It is vital that politicians understand how technology is changing society and how to legislate in the face of it. More training around democratic reform is also vital. There is no point putting passionate people into a broken system if they are not able to reform it.

The nuts and bolts of making policy was also a gap in training. Only 10 percent of PLIs surveyed included policymaking in their curricula.

4.

Evidence-driven approaches

While all organizations want to do world-class work, many have limited experience with evidence-based adult learning techniques and few had stated pedagogical approaches that they used in shaping and delivering their curriculum. This will limit program effectiveness. More focus and information sharing in this space is critical, and we believe even a little more focus on this will have outsized returns.



5.

Party collaboration

We found that very few non-partisan PLIs work closely with parties. This lack of collaboration may limit impact (see p. 15: the ‘seeds, soil, and gardeners’ approach). Less than five percent of people around the world claim party affiliation.¹⁸ PLIs could serve as great recruitment grounds for candidates.

Non-partisan PLIs should consider finding ways to work with political parties across the political spectrum. Most alumni will need to enter parties to have a large impact and transform systems. PLIs will be served by researching what parties are looking for, and by having a better understanding of how they “think”, what they want from programs, and their blind spots. This work needs funding for exploration and to pilot win-win solutions.

6.

Underrepresented groups

The political training field has seen a surge of organizations created to address underrepresentation, but much more needs to be done. Of the groups we surveyed, 24 percent said they intentionally recruited people from ethnic minorities, while 12 percent said they recruited people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQI+ community. Women were the most considered group, with 61 percent of survey respondents intentionally recruiting them. Twenty-nine percent said they intentionally recruited young people.

People from underrepresented groups likely need different and additional support to enter and stay in politics. Many do not see politicians that look like them and may feel intimidated, unwelcome, or oppressed by the system. Underrepresented groups also face extra pressure, such as racist or sexist threats, once in office. For example, four in five female politicians report being victims of psychological or physical violence, which includes hostile behavior that causes fear or psychological harm.¹⁹ Women congressional candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to receive threats than white women during the US 2020 elections.²⁰ Interestingly, men of minority ethnic backgrounds received similar amounts of abuse as white men, though the abuse they did receive was more likely to be racialized.²¹ While heated political rhetoric impacts all politicians, these studies suggest that women, and especially women from ethnic minorities, bear the brunt of abuse. While we have uncovered some excellent best practices while researching, the political leadership incubator space could further work on supporting underrepresented groups in an intersectional way.

¹⁸ UN-DES, *World Youth Report*, (United Nations, 2016).

¹⁹ Guest Blogger for Women Around the World, “Violence Against Female Politicians,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 11 July 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/article/violence-against-female-politicians>.

²⁰ Cécile Guerin and Eisha Maharasingam-Shah, “Public Figures, Public Rage: Candidate abuse on social media,” (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2020), <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Public-Figures-Public-Rage-4.pdf>.

²¹ Guerin and Maharasingam-Shah, “Public Figures, Public Rage,” (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2020).

7.

Gender gap

A number of PLIs have been created to close the gender gap in politics, but they are still too few for the scale of the problem. This gender finding could have been included under underrepresented groups, but we pulled it out because of how often the topic, mostly as it related to women, came up during our research. The World Economic Forum estimates that it will take more than 145 years to reach gender parity in politics at current rates of progress. Twenty-six percent of 35,500 parliamentary seats across the world were held by women in 2021, and only 22.6 percent of 3,400 ministers were women.²² Fifteen percent of the total 420 organizations we mapped had programs exclusively for women. Sub-Saharan Africa, the US and Australia seemed to be hotspots for programs focusing exclusively on women. Fifty-nine percent of African-founded PLIs in Sub-Saharan Africa—that is excluding programs run by big international foundations like the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung — were exclusively for women. Forty-eight percent of all PLIs in the US had programs exclusively for women and many of these were well known in the field. Five of the nine PLIs in Australia (56 percent) were exclusively for women.

The only PLI we found explicitly working with people beyond the gender binary was LGBTQ Victory Institute, which offers political training in partnership with local, mostly rights-based, trans and gender-diverse groups.

8.

Mental health and mindfulness

Being a politician is a tough job. Twenty-first century leaders need mental health support to make good decisions and build resilience in the face of threats. Few of the programs we spoke to addressed mental health at all. More research needs to be done into how to best support politicians' mental health, whether within PLI training or once leaders have been elected to office. Mindset and mental health support cannot stop once training is over. PLIs risk losing their investment in leaders if they do not open channels for mental health support after election. Additionally, programs that focus on mindfulness and self-reflection are critical to making sure power does not go to leaders' heads. Deloitte's 2021 study on building trust found that it is not enough for governments to be competent. They also need to have good intent and should work on humanity and transparency to build and sustain trust.²³

²² Global Gender Gap Report, (World Economic Forum, 2021), https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

²³ Eggers, Chew, Knight, Krawiec and Kelkar, "Rebuilding trust in government," <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/building-trust-in-government.html>.

9.

Missed opportunity

All the PLIs we talked to said it was difficult to get funding. Philanthropic donors may be shying away because they think this work is too political, even though most PLI work happens before leaders are elected. Making sure that politicians across the political spectrum are capable and trustworthy when they get into office is fundamental to the future of our democracies. Non-partisan PLIs could be a good option for donors concerned about funding political projects because they are not aligned with any party, nor do they engage in elections.

Based on conversations with people in the field, we have estimated that roughly \$40 million is spent on training people in civil society, civil services and social movements on governance and democracy-related topics per year, and \$15 million of that is going to non-partisan PLIs. It would be helpful to the field if we had a more accurate number. This is a research question that should be pursued. In contrast, \$83 billion is spent on corporate training in the US yearly.²⁴ Addressing the world's problems is going to have to involve a push of investment in quality politicians. A donor collaborative is needed to figure out how to bring more money into the space. The newly formed

Reimagine Politics is working on this in Europe, and the Ascend Fund is a good example of this approach in the US. Ascend is a collaborative fund dedicated to accelerating the pace of change toward gender parity in US politics. Nothing exists yet globally.

Investing in political leaders should not just be the job of political philanthropists and civil society. Governments and the private sector, which is recognizing more and more the economic downsides to political instability, should also fund this space.

Another reason why funding PLIs may be hard is because PLIs have trouble measuring impact, generally and in ways that fit donors' expectations. A large portion of philanthropy has moved to data-driven outcomes. Political leadership outcomes are often difficult to package into neat measurements, especially in the short term. Investments in PLIs can sometimes take a long time to see returns, but they can be significant. PLIs need to come together to discuss impact-measurement best practices. The proposed academic council suggested in Finding 2 above could help with this.

²⁴ "Total training expenditures in the United States from 2012 to 2020," *Statista*, 4 April 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/788521/training-expenditures-united-states/>.

10.

Field coordination

Nearly all the PLIs we spoke to expressed interest at the idea of sharing information and practices to increase their capacity and impact. The space is mostly siloed and could achieve more, better, and faster if PLIs worked together. There is evidence that the most successful political movements have groups to convene, attract funders, provide collective care, and share learnings.²⁵ The Apolitical Foundation recently released the “28 Non-Partisan Political Leadership incubators to Watch” to begin to catalyze a movement (see Appendix E). We have also put together a list of organizations that have expressed interest in joining a global network (see Appendix B).



“Investing in political leaders should not just be the job of political philanthropists and civil society. Governments and the private sector, which is recognizing more and more the economic downsides to political instability, should also fund this space.”

²⁵ Laurie Laybourn-Langton, Harry Quilter-Pinner and Nicolas Treloar, *Making Change: What Works?*, (Institute for Public Policy Research and Runnymede, 2021), <https://www.ippr.org/files/2021-11/making-change-what-works-october21.pdf>.

15 Promising Practices and Innovations from Political Leadership Incubators

01. Work on diversity through design councils.

Getting truly diverse candidates requires intentionality. One approach used is to build a design council of people from similar backgrounds to those a PLI wants to reach and who can advise how to reflect diversity of all types. Love Politics is doing this as they plan their new program in the DACH (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) region.

02. Go big on data.

RenovaBR and IGNITE both have full-time data analysts who bring a data-driven mindset to the organization. ElectHER Nigeria provides an array of data points that capture key races for women in local politics.

03. Use the screening process as a civic education lesson.

RenovaBR requires applicants to take a basic civic education quiz via WhatsApp. This helps to screen out those who do not take the time to complete it, while optimizing the application process as a learning opportunity.

04. Assess how applicants act when they think nobody is looking.

Futurelect screens applicants' egos and character traits during "assessment days". Receptionists and logistics staff at the venue become a part of the evaluation team. Even applicants with the best CV and performance during group exercises can be rejected for patronizing or narcissistic behavior shown to staff.

05. Use conversational techniques informed by neuroscience.

Neuroscientific research shows that people operate differently during a "threat" versus "reward" state. A few programs prepare participants to have "brain-based conversations," which increases their awareness of when they might put an audience in a threat state and thereby reduce a message's impact. This training can also help leaders work in a less polarizing way.

06. Prepare politicians for threats.

Active Collective and Elect Her in the UK partner with Glitch to help participants understand how to address online threats and harassment. Netri has a vision for establishing a protective network around newly elected women politicians.

07. Provide work experience opportunities.

Several programs pair participants with alumni who are now working politicians. Alumni open doors, mentor, and provide a reality-check regarding what being a politician entails.

08. Integrate a personal reflection practice.

Journaling, mindfulness, and meditation are built into some programs. The Indian School of Democracy grounds their program in the teachings of Gandhi. This encourages people to go deep into their values and motivation for being a politician. The hope is that this reflective practice stays with alumni when they are in office.

09. Gamify learning.

Research shows that play is an important element in learning, even for adults. While policy and politics are serious business, preparing for a political life does not have to be. Apolitical Academy Global has developed 'The Road to Political Office' game (see Appendix D), modeled off the children's game snakes and ladders. It is a fun and creative way to think through and share participants' pathways to politics.

10. Simulate the job.

Many PLIs take participants through campaign simulations. Several organizations take this further and provide simulations of what the job of a politician is, e.g., making policy decisions, citizen engagement, addressing constituents, and working with other parties.

11. Address power.

PLIs should consider community and political power: who has it, how to get it, and what can be done with it ethically. The DiverseCity Fellows Program and Higher Heights focus on what power means practically for diverse people and women of color. They tackle how to start the process of shifting power.

12. Act like a movement.

Tous Elus & IGNITE are highly effective at getting diverse young people excited about transitioning from activist leadership to political leadership through movement-like approaches. Brand New Bundestag publishes a list of 50 diverse candidates to watch. Académie Des Futurs Leaders recruits people who have successfully organized large movements.

13. Screen out the idealogues.

This is especially relevant for non-partisan programs. Høj Røsten and others put applicants in scenarios where they need to interact with others with different political views. It is often easy to see which applicants can listen, negotiate, or compromise: skills that are much needed in polarized political environments.

14. Recognize current politicians who are doing a good job.

Patchwork Foundation makes inroads with the political system by engaging with non-partisan political offices, such as the Office of the Speaker, during their program. It also hands out annual awards to sitting MPs to cultivate partnerships.

15. Provide seed capital.

JoinPolitics provides seed capital to courageous and promising political talent, entrepreneurs, and innovations.

Next Steps

We invite donors and PLIs to review the considerations in this report, activate them, and share their feedback and insights.

We are setting up a Building Better Politics Network of PLIs out of this research.

We plan to talk to other PLIs and donors about what ideas, innovations, and opportunities this report sparks.

We will put the full list of mapped PLIs online and make it open source.

Political Leadership Incubators in Numbers

Most results are from 54 surveys.

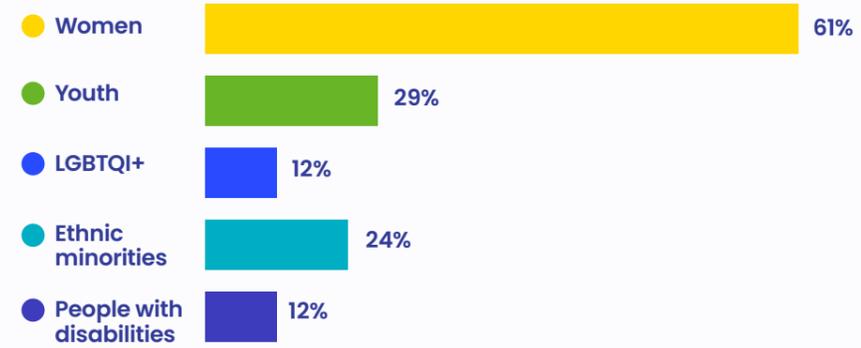
* Figures drawn from 54 survey respondents plus interviewees who made statements about the topic.

** Figures drawn from a mix of interviews, surveys, and desk research.

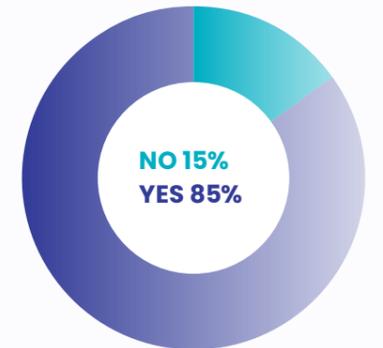


Recruitment from underrepresented groups

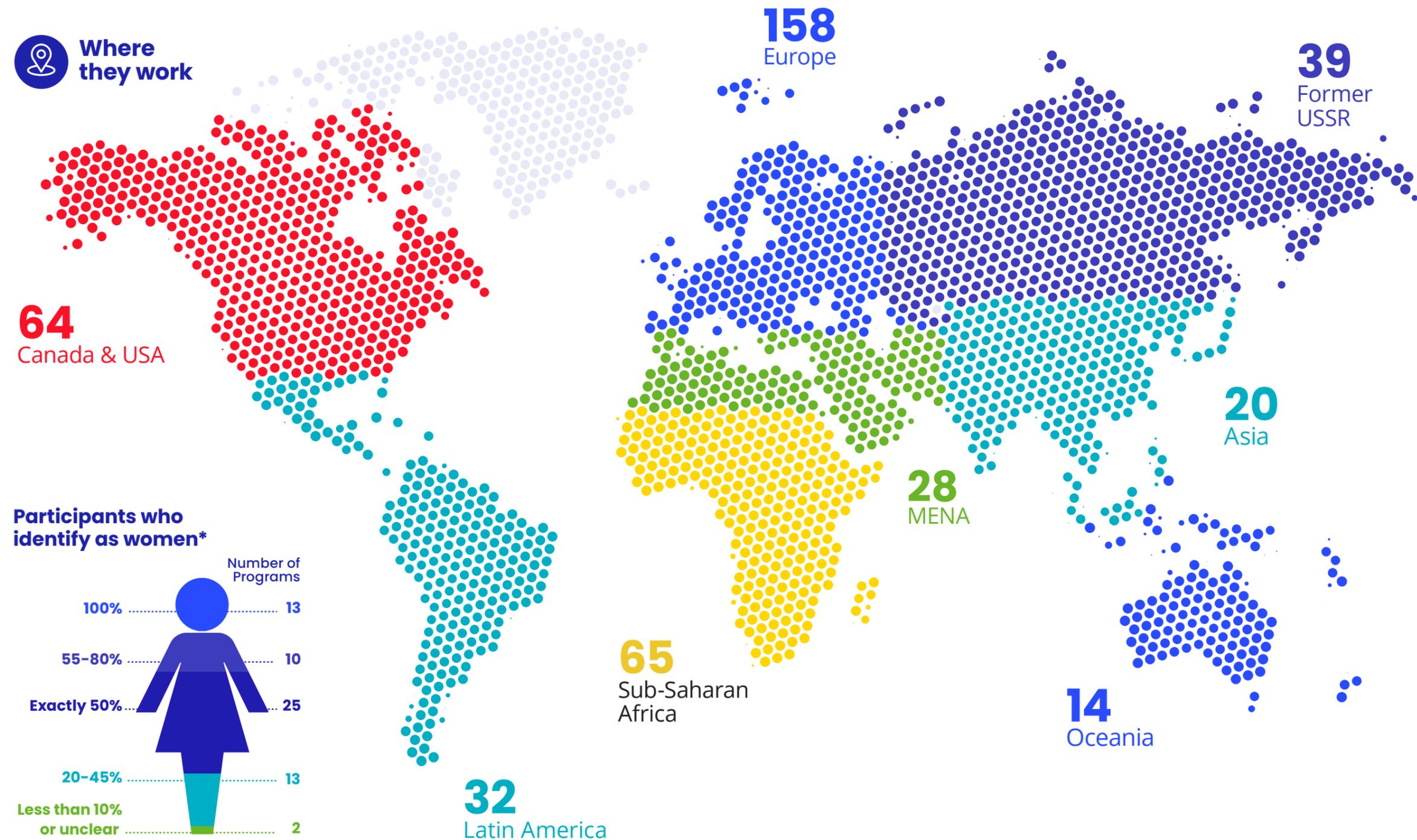
The % of organizations intentionally recruiting from the following groups



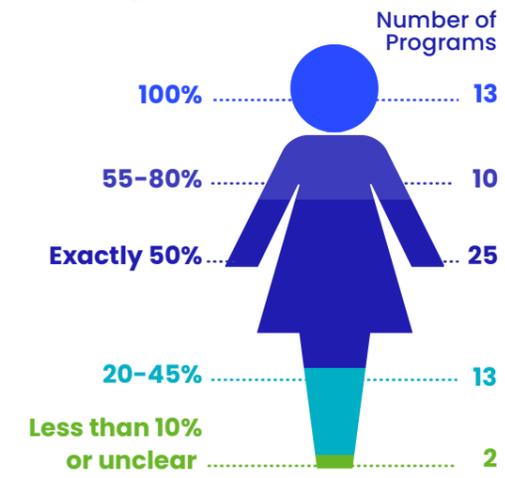
Intentionally recruiting from underrepresented groups



Where they work



Participants who identify as women*

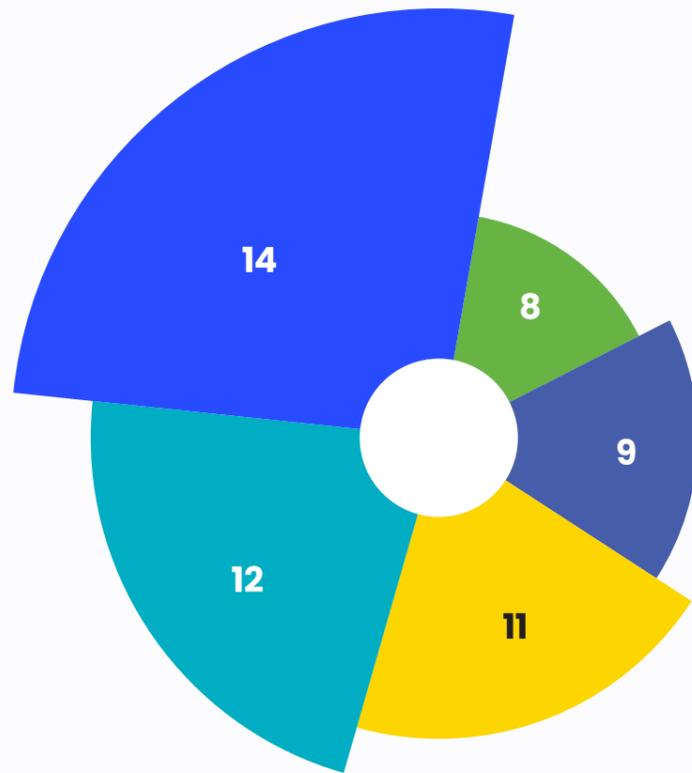


Applicants per program, per year



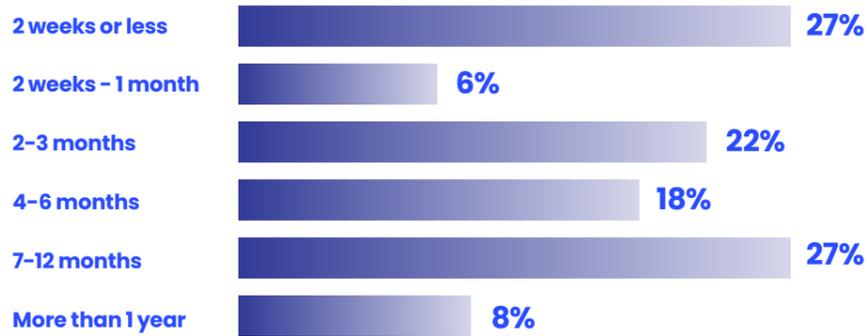


Time since founding of programs



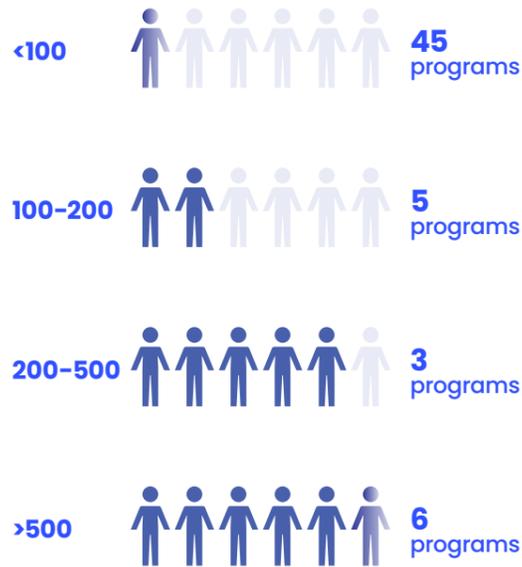
- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16+ years
- Did not specify

Average program length



*Some organizations offer programs in more than one category, hence the sum exceeds 100%

People trained per year



MBAs versus political training

13,000 business schools

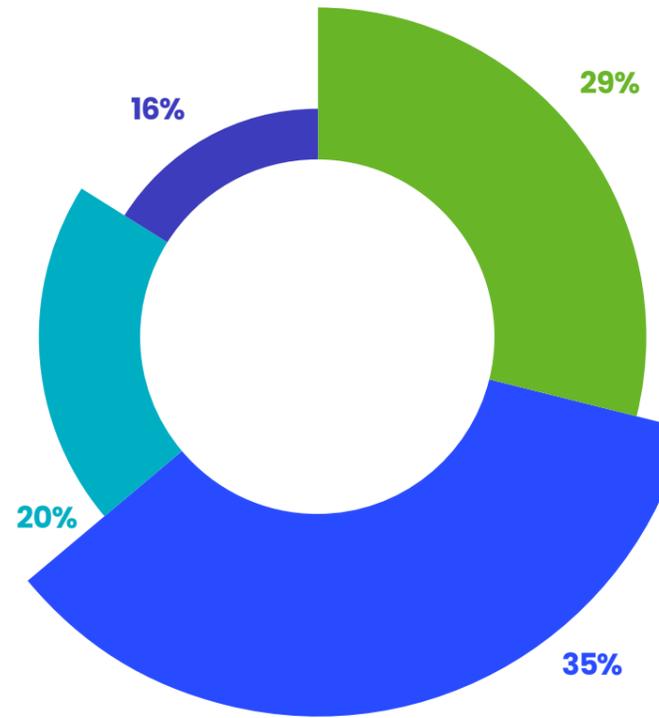
420 non-party political leadership incubators found in our mapping

Executive MBA **\$60k**

Expensive political leadership incubator program **\$12k**

(Note we found one program that had a per participant cost of \$50k)

Main purpose of program



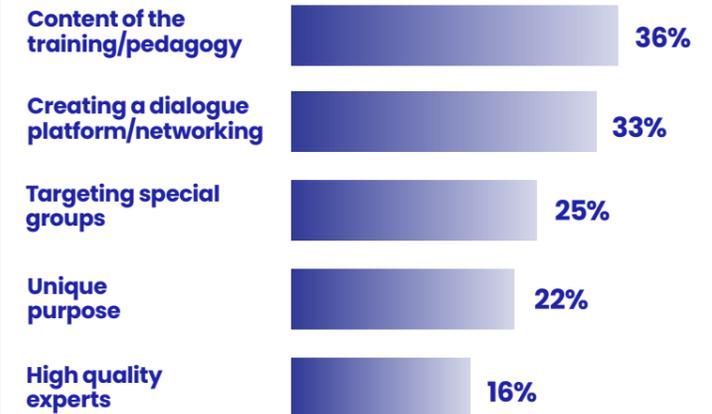
- To prepare citizens to run for office
- To provide leadership skills
- To strengthen policymaking skills
- Other

Fewer than 10% focus on deep policymaking skills that will be required on the job.

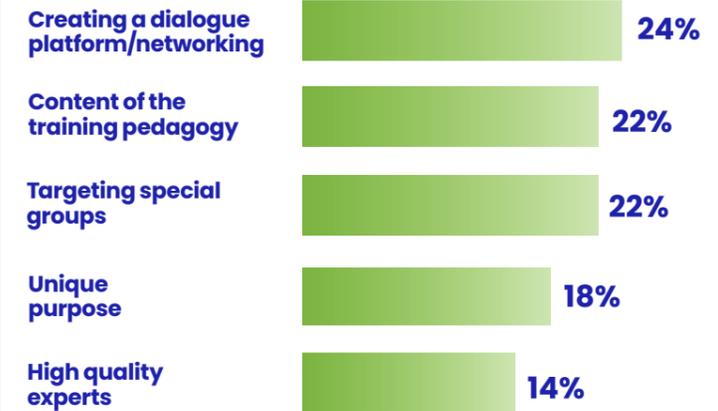
Less than 5% focus deeply on 'personal leadership' skills.

Organizations' selling points (self-assessment)

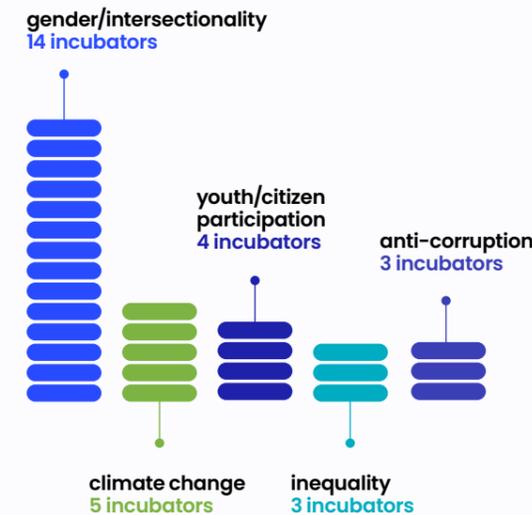
Elements making up PLIs' unique service propositions (USPs) (Between 1 and 5 elements per organization)



Most important element of organizations' unique service propositions (USPs)



Most common policy topics covered in training



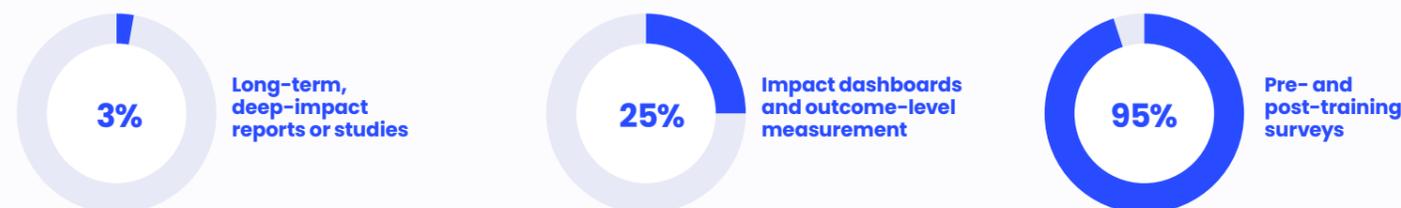
18 respondents did not identify a topic.

Other policy topics reported include human rights, transparency and accountability, service delivery, national security, cybersecurity, economic policy, environmental policy, energy policy, natural resource management (extractive industries) policy, urban development, rule of law, migration policy, inclusion/diversity policy, global challenges/international policy, pluralism, democratic culture, just transition, media freedom, European norms, and conflict transformation.

6.1 million is the number of estimated elected politicians in the world or **0.8%** of the global population.²⁵

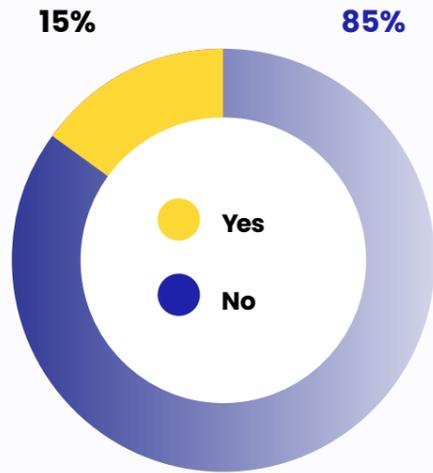
²⁵ We got this through UNW data from early 2020, which stipulates that women (in 133 countries) make up 2.18 million and 36 percent of all elected members in local deliberative bodies. Given the above, we get the total number of elected members in these local governments to be 6.05 million. To this, we add the total of legislative seats held in 134 countries (ranging from hybrid to full democracies as defined by the Economist Intelligence Unit) estimated to be 29,663. The total figure rounded off comes to 6.085 million elected officials.

Tracking impact

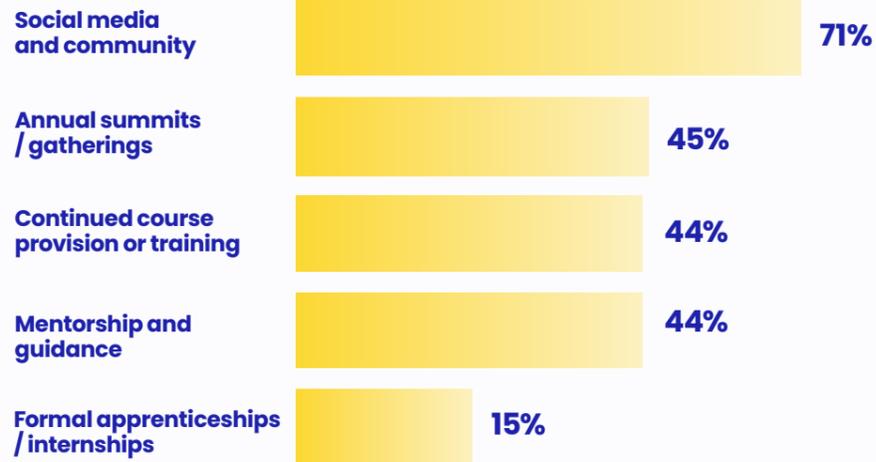


Alumni engagement

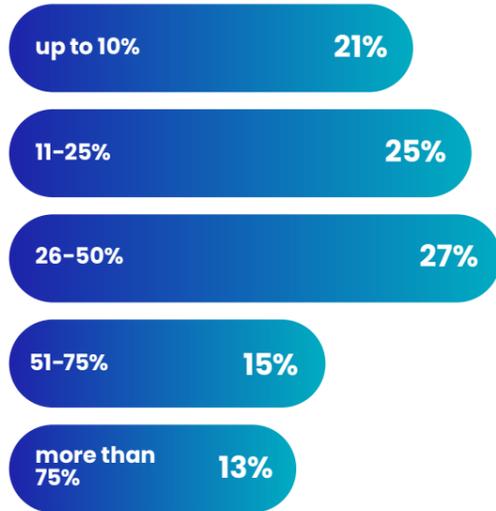
Formal alumni network in place



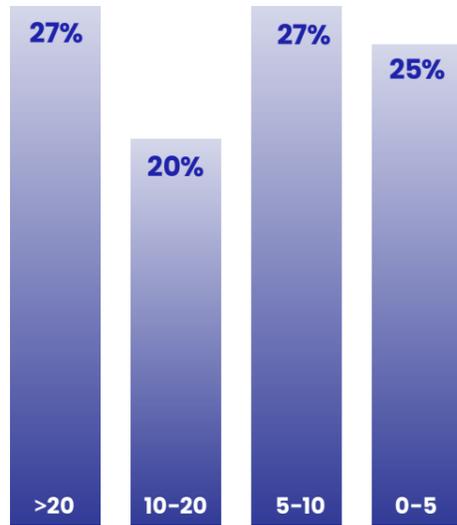
Types of alumni engagement
(Organizations could choose all relevant answers)



% of program alumni running for public office



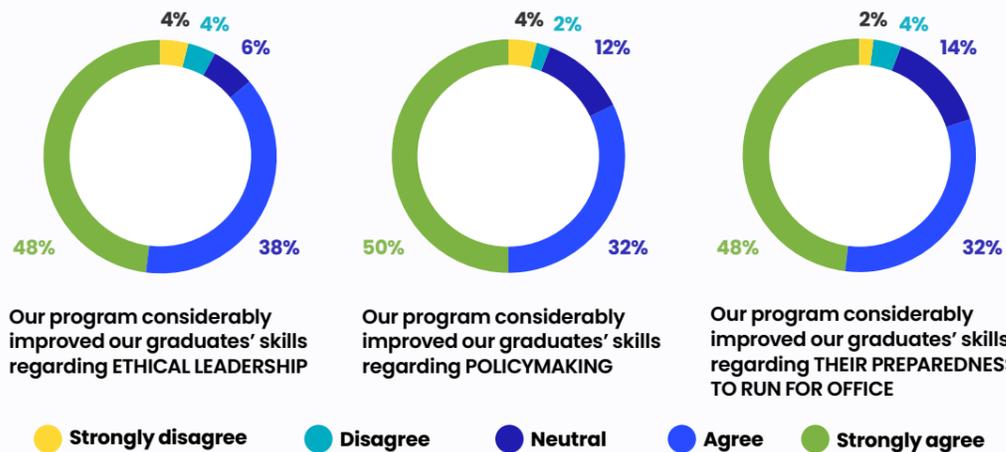
Number of facilitators



Staff*



Do you agree with the following statements?



Program fees*



“Addressing the world’s problems is going to have to involve a push of investment in quality politicians.”

apolitical foundation

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