



NEWSLETTER

MONITORING THE FUTURE - NEWS UPDATE

DECEMBER 2020

WE ARE NOW
ONLINE!

YOU CANNOT BE REPLACED!

You were scientifically selected to be included in the follow-up sample so that your responses represent the views of thousands of people your age. If we lose contact with you, no substitution can be made, and the views of adults similar to you will not be as well represented by the study. The success of the study depends upon your willingness to continue to complete and return the questionnaire to Monitoring the Future. For this reason, we work hard to keep track of you and other participants around the country and the world. We are indeed grateful for your cooperation. Please know that your responses are kept completely confidential.

IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN

This newsletter contains results from the follow-up surveys that you completed for the Monitoring the Future study. It represents our commitment to sharing results of the study with our participants. We are also committed to distributing the information we gain from this study to policymakers and the public. Political leaders, influential organizations, and the general public have consistently shown their interest in the attitudes and actions of young adults, and Monitoring the future is an effective means of communicating your viewpoints and experiences to them.

The important study is designed to look at changing behaviors and preferences of young Americans. We believe that studying the way young adults are today will tell us a lot about the way the whole nation will be tomorrow.

This year's newsletter contains updates on some topics that you may have seen in previous newsletters, as well as some new topics.



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A Note from the Study Director



John Schulenberg, MTF Panel
Study Director

Dear Valued MTF Participants:

First, I hope you and yours are hanging in there with the current pandemic and all the challenges it has caused.

Second, I want to thank you for your continued participation in the U.S. national Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys. We could not do what we do without your continued involvement. Each of you represents about 10,000 same-aged people in the U.S., making your participation invaluable and irreplaceable. We are grateful for your time and dedication over the years.

Why do we do what we do? Good social policy regarding health and wellbeing depends on good science. Without valid and reliable national estimates of various health compromising and health enhancing behaviors, social policy is based on opinion, folklore, and guess-work. Thus, the group I work with started this national survey study way back in 1975 (when I was a senior in high school!) to begin to examine a variety of behaviors and attitudes among teens and adults in an effort to let the nation know what its population is experiencing. With continued funding from the National Institutes of Health, we have kept the study going, adding in new high school seniors each year and following many through young and middle adulthood. Our oldest respondents now in their 60s, with age 65 surveys coming soon.

Why do you stay involved? You may ask yourself this on occasion, and we appreciate that you continue to find it important among all else you are doing. We hear from many of you that you like the experience of staying involved and getting the new surveys, with some indicating that they look forward to it because it helps them learn more about themselves. Others let us know that they feel duty-bound to stay in this, their way of giving something back. Please know that your involvement has made a difference and will continue to do so.

What is done with the data? We report aggregate responses in annual publications and press releases, and use the aggregate data for scientific peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and other reports, including these annual newsletters to you. Our findings, again always based on aggregate data, inform the National Institutes of Health and other government agencies. We want to make sure the findings are disseminated to inform the nation regarding trends in our population's health and wellbeing and to advance the science. We have well over a million people in our study now, and each and every participant's identity and personal information are always protected, and thus your confidentiality is assured. We never share your contact information with anyone outside of our study, and we only contact you regarding the study. We are in the midst of changing from mail to online surveys. Because we want to make sure that this change does not interfere with the understanding of historical and age trends in all that we monitor, some of you are now getting online surveys and others are still getting paper surveys in the mail. By 2021, all of you will be encouraged to take the survey online, although paper surveys will be mailed to you if you wish.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. We have learned much from you over the years, and we look forward with your help to continuing our efforts.

With Best Wishes,
John Schulenberg, MTF Panel Study Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Schulenberg".

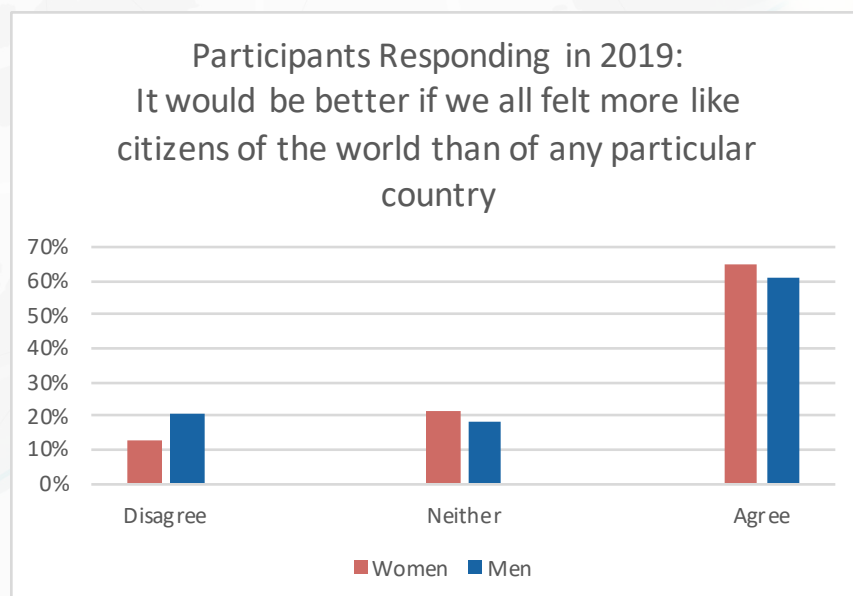
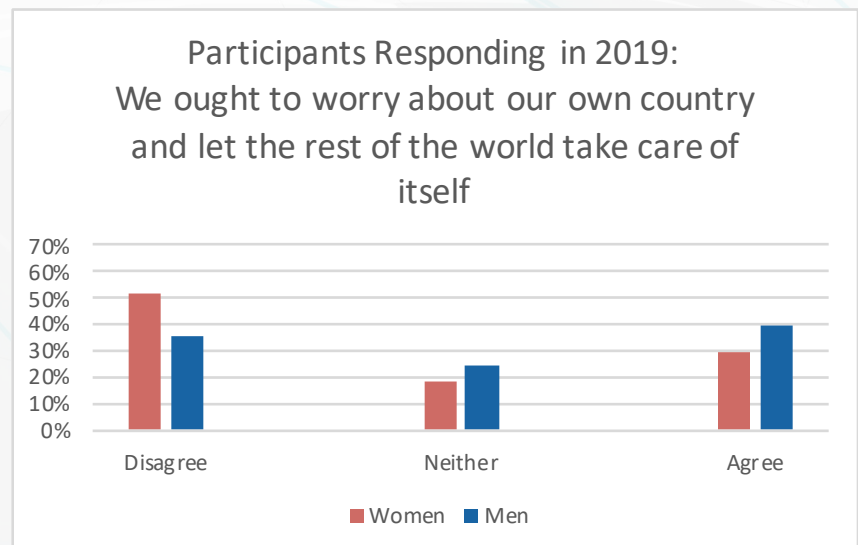
Global Concerns: Our Role in the World Revisited

In our 2015 Newsletter, we shared responses that our participants in 2014 gave to questions focusing on whether or not we should concern ourselves mostly with our own country, and if it would better if we saw ourselves primarily as citizens of the world. At the end of that Newsletter, we said that we wanted to see what might change—if anything—in participant answers over time. Five years later, we now want to revisit the same questions. How much has changed? Do men and women differ in their responses? Are the world views of people living in large cities different from those living rural areas? To find the answers, we looked at how much participants ages 19-30 who completed the questionnaire

in the Spring of 2019 agreed or disagreed with two specific statements: “We ought to worry about our own country and let the rest of the world take care of itself,” and “It would be better if we all felt more like citizens of the world than of any particular country.” Participants could respond “disagree”, “mostly disagree”, “neither”, “mostly agree”, or “agree”. We combined participants who answered either “disagree” or “mostly disagree” into one group which we refer to as disagree from here on, and also combined those who answered “mostly agree” or “agree” into another group which we refer to as agree from here on.

Concerned About Our Own Country

As Figure 1 shows, less than half of our age 19-30 participants agreed that we should be more concerned about our own country and let other countries take care of themselves, but men were more likely to agree than women: 40% percent of men agreed compared to just 29% of women. This level of agreement is lower than it was five years ago when 58% of men and 43% of women agreed in 2015. In both 2015 and 2019, women were more likely to disagree with this statement than men, but the percentage of both women and men disagreeing with this statement was higher in 2019 than in 2015.



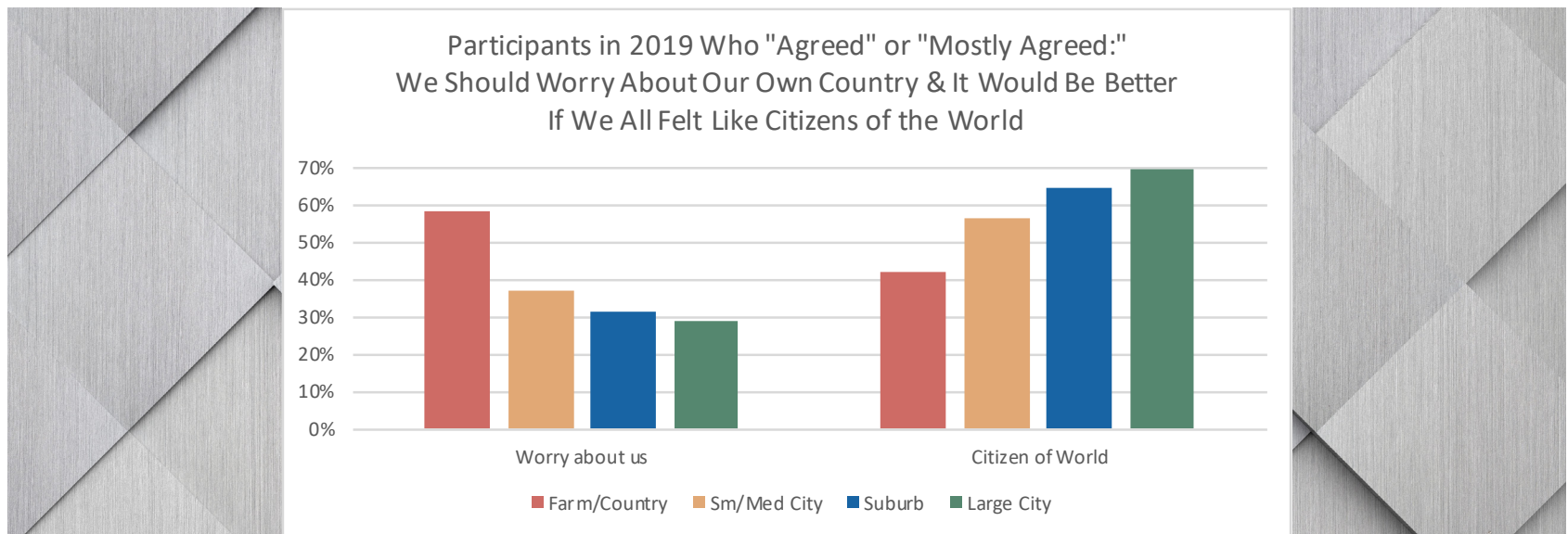
Citizens of the World

As shown in Figure 2, approximately 2 out of 3 participants in 2019 agreed with the idea that it would be better to think of ourselves as citizens of the world (vs. any particular country): 65% of women and 61% of men. These levels of agreement with thinking globally were higher than those seen in 2015 for both women (58%) and men (47%). Disagreement with thinking globally was markedly lower in 2019 than in 2015. Nearly 13% of women and 20% of men disagreed with this statement in 2019, compared with 20% of women and 30% of men in 2015.

Type of Community

In addition to the gender differences we have described above, the type of community in which people live seems to be a strong factor in how people feel on these issues. As shown in Figure 3, the response to the statement “We should worry about our own country and let the rest of the world take care of itself” had a 29 percentage point difference in agreement between participants in rural areas compared with those in large cities : over half (58%) of those living on farms or in the country agreed with this statement compared to less than one-third (29%) of those living in large cities. In other words, as the population density of the communities where participants lived increased, their agreement with the statement decreased. This difference in agreement changed in both strength and definition over

time. In 2015, 67% of those living on farms or in the country agreed with this statement, but participants in all other types of communities had lower—and very similar—levels of agreement (averaging 47%). Type of community also was associated with responses to the statement, “It would be better if we all felt like citizens of the world than of any particular country” but in the opposite direction. In this case, as the population density of the communities where participants lived increased, so also did their agreement with the statement: 42% of rural participants agreed with this statement versus 69% of large-city dwellers. In comparison, in 2015, agreement levels were very similar for those living in farm/country and small/medium cities (43%) compared with those living in suburbs/large cities (57%).



In 2019, participants age 19-30 were more likely to agree with thinking globally than to agree with thinking that we should primarily worry about our own country, but women were more likely to agree with a global perspective while men were more likely to agree with focusing on our own country.

Primary concern for our own country was highest among rural residents, while global concern was highest among those in large cities. We will continue to monitor these questions in subsequent surveys and share with you what those responses look like in the future.