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The American Promise at 250: *Young Americans on Identity, Values and the Future*



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The American Promise at 250

Research Background & Methodology



FIFTH ANNUAL STUDY

This is the fifth annual Sine Institute survey focused on understanding young Americans' unique perspectives on civic and political engagement.



RESEARCH PARTNERS

Sine Institute • Future Caucus •
Close Up Foundation • American
University Student Advisors



Parallel national survey of all
American adults directed by
Kristin Soltis Anderson, Sine
Institute Fellow and founding
partner of Echelon Insights.



HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

Generation Lab conducted the
online survey through its robust,
proprietary research panel.



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1,031
Respondents



18-34
Age Range



July 23-Aug. 1, 2026
Field Period

A Glimpse of Key Findings

1. A balance of pride & concern

Young Americans have a sober view of the country as it celebrates its 250th anniversary: they are **proud of past accomplishments** and milestones, but have **deep reservations about the state of the country today and its future.**

2. A wide range of views and experiences

Consistently across the findings, **gender, race, party identification, and educational path** are **important factors** in assessing a wide range of measures from patriotism to optimism: women, Hispanic adults, Democrats and those who are not on a college track are less positive in their outlook.

3. Common ground

Still, young Americans reach strong consensus in identifying distinctive American values, specifically around **freedom** and **diversity.**

They also overwhelmingly agree on a core set of unique attributes that comprise what it means to be an American: **treating all people fairly** regardless of their background, demonstrating a commitment to **respect amidst disagreement** and **being honest.**

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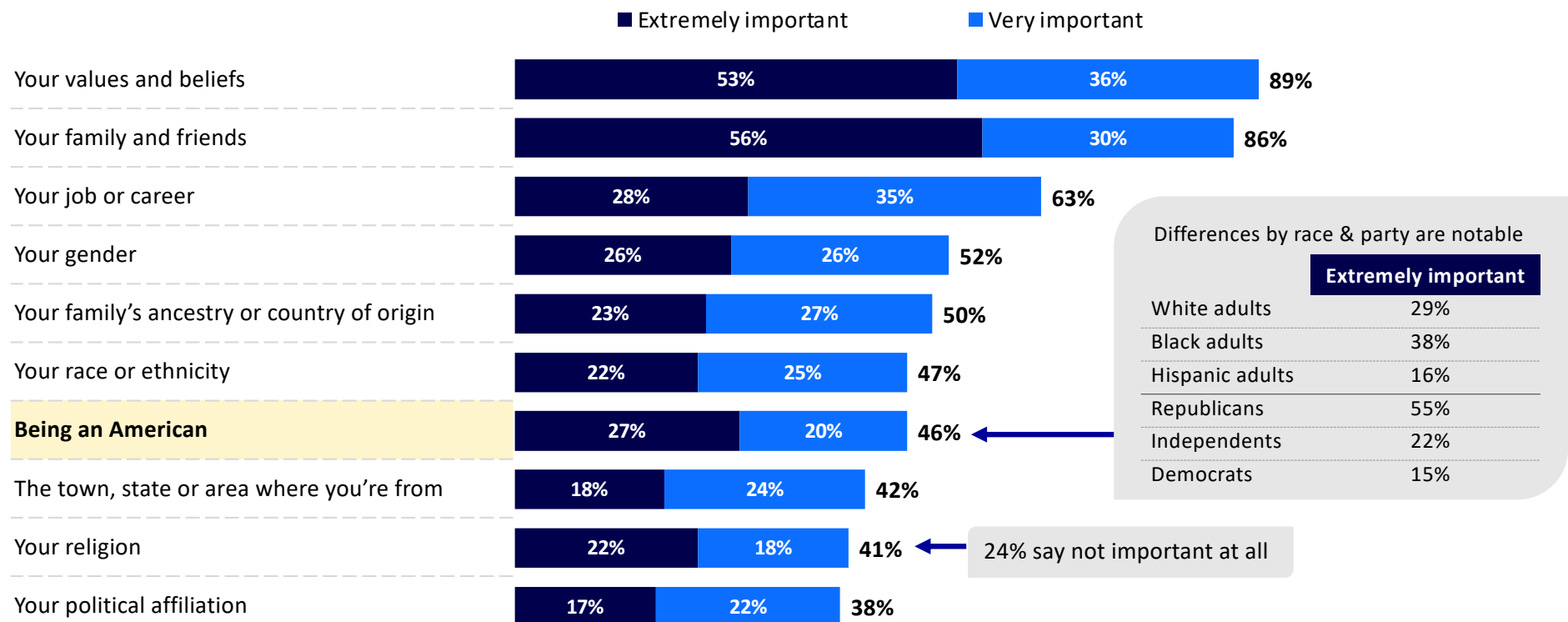
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Defining a Generation: *How Young Americans See Themselves*

The American Promise at 250

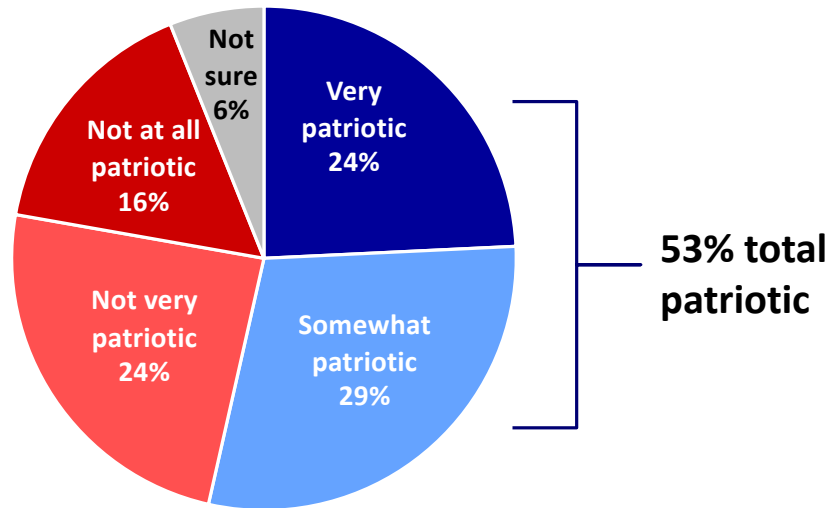
Being an American is one of many components of young people's identity, with notable variations by audience.

Importance of different components to personal identity

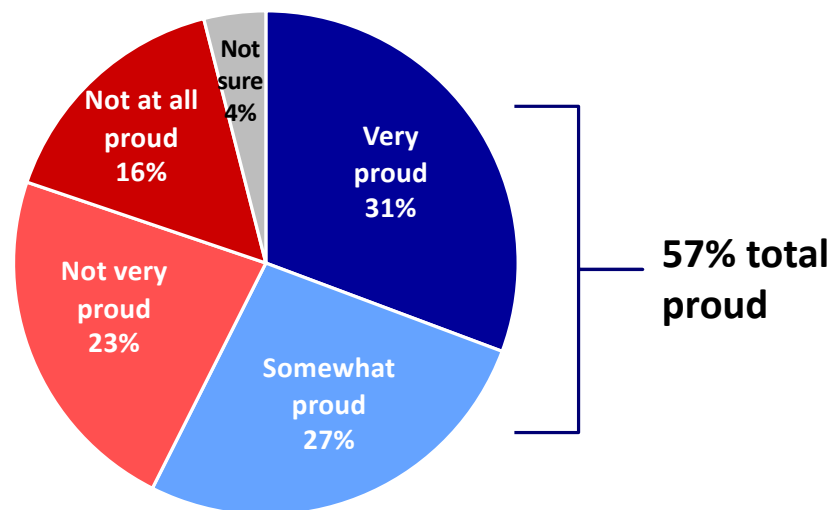


A majority of young Americans describe themselves as 'patriotic,' though slightly more say they are 'proud' to be an American.

How patriotic do you feel toward the United States?



How proud do you feel about being an American?



Comparative results among all American adults show younger Americans are less likely to use the term 'patriotic' to describe themselves:

44% very patriotic
31% somewhat patriotic
15% not very patriotic
6% not at all patriotic
4% not sure

**Data from Echelon Insights June 2026 National Omnibus poll*

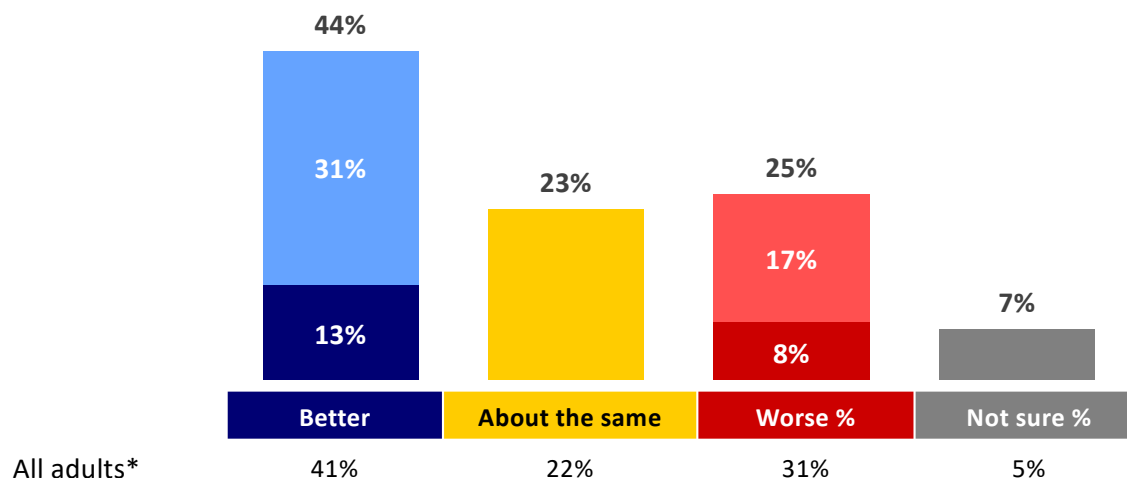
The labels of ‘patriotic’ and ‘proud to be an American’ vary across audience; gender and party identification are important factors.

	Patriotic	Proud to be an American
All	53%	58%
Men	66%	71%
Women	43%	48%
White adults	59%	60%
Black adults	48%	61%
Hispanic adults	46%	48%
Republican	88%	94%
Independent	47%	54%
Democrat	39%	43%
Non-college track	48%	55%
College track	62%	61%
Hetero/cis	66%	69%
LGBTQ+	31%	31%
Urban	53%	58%
Suburban	55%	58%
Rural	54%	59%

Young Americans credit their generation as having a positive impact on the country.

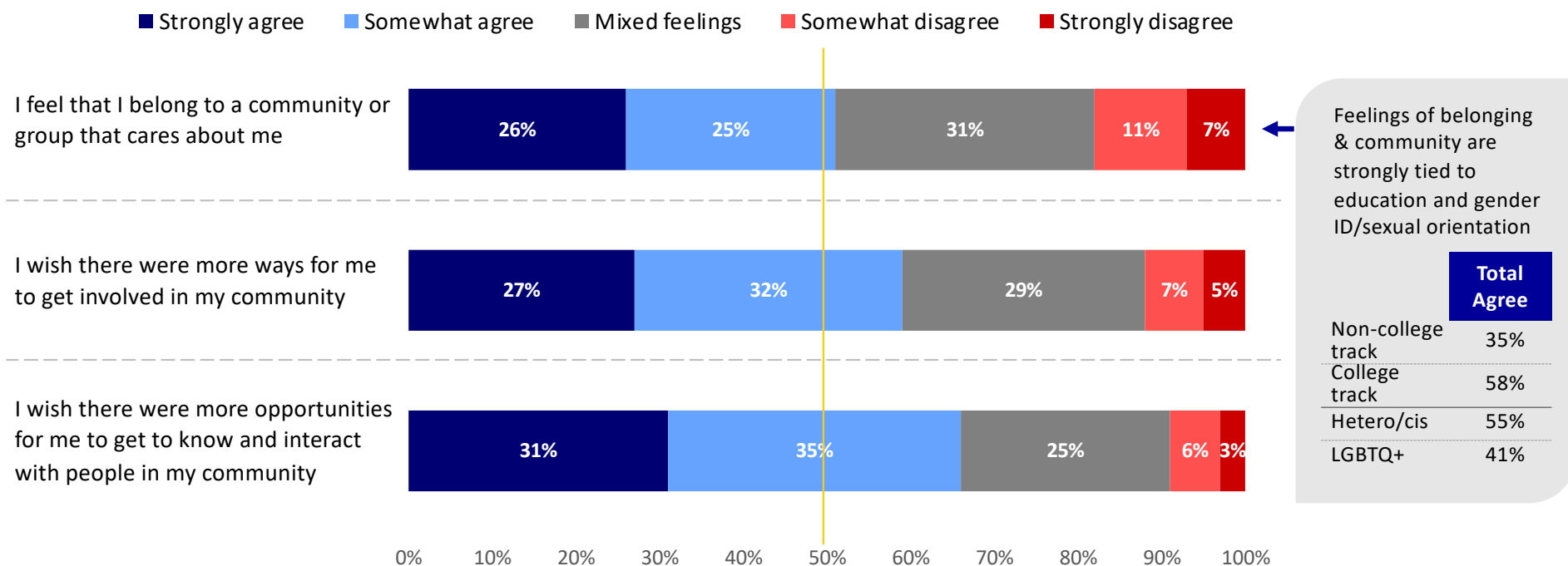
Compared to the generation that came before yours, do you think your generations has made America better or worse?

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Not sure



**Data from Echelon Insights June 2026 National Omnibus poll*

Young Americans lack a strong sense of belonging, but they express a real desire to strengthen ties that build community.



While only half say they belong to a community that cares about them, larger majorities want more opportunities to interact and get involved.

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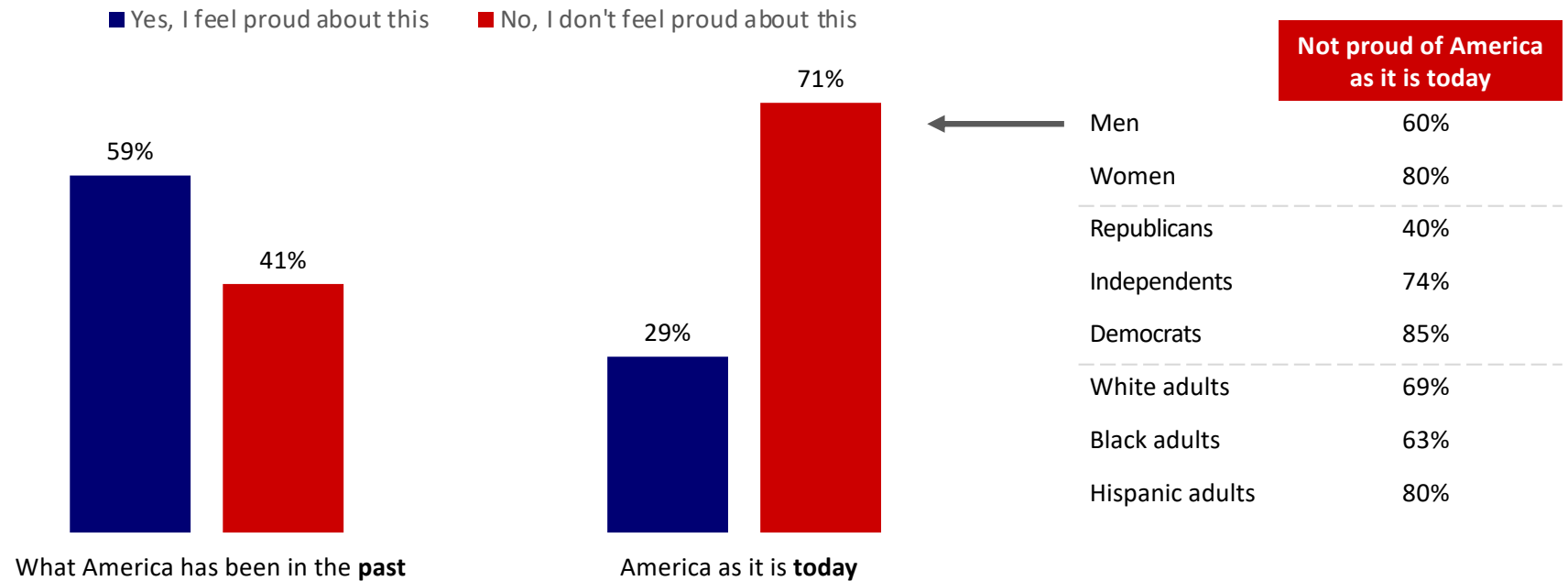
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The State of the Union: *America Through Young Eyes*

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Most young Americans say they are proud of the country's past, but this sentiment shifts dramatically when they describe how they feel about America today.

When thinking about the United States, do you feel proud about our country when it comes to...?



Overwhelmingly, young Americans offer negative characterizations about the state of the country today.

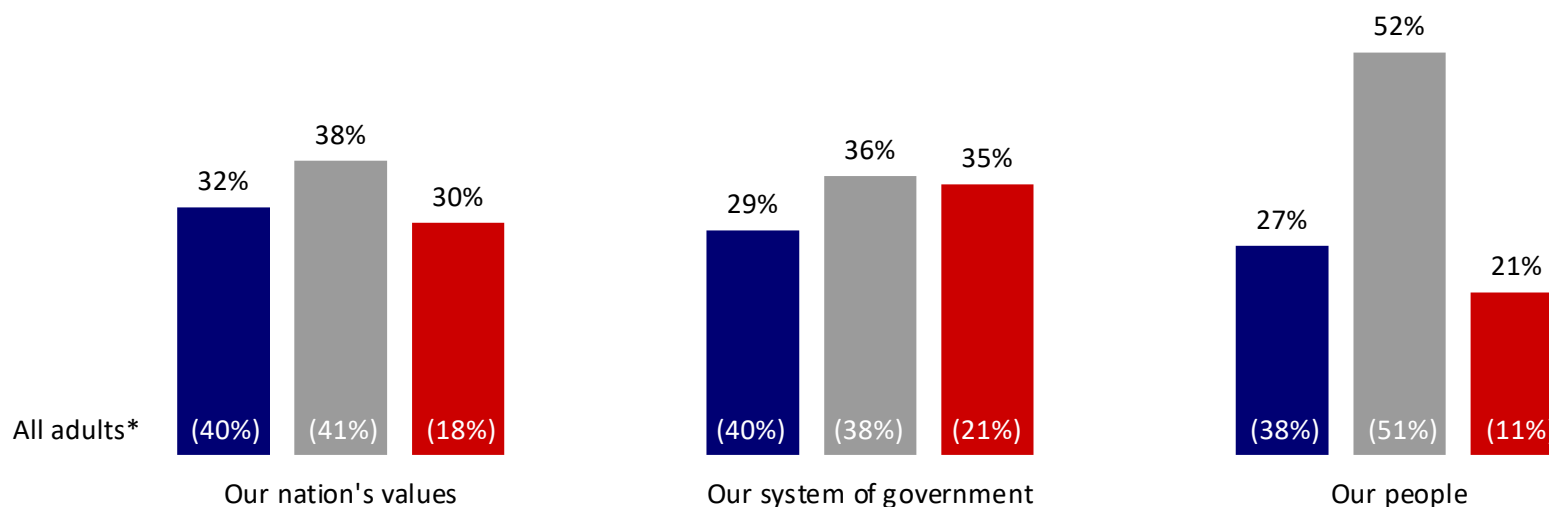
What one word would you use to describe America today? (coded open end)

Changing/evolving
Corrupt/unjust
Chaotic/unstable
Positive/strong/free
Broken/bad
Divided/polarized
Declining/struggling
Fearful/anxious/uncertain

Young Americans pushback on the traditional view of ‘American exceptionalism.’

In thinking about the United States, how do you feel about each of the following compared to the rest of the world?

■ We are better than most countries ■ We are about as good as other countries ■ We are worse than most countries

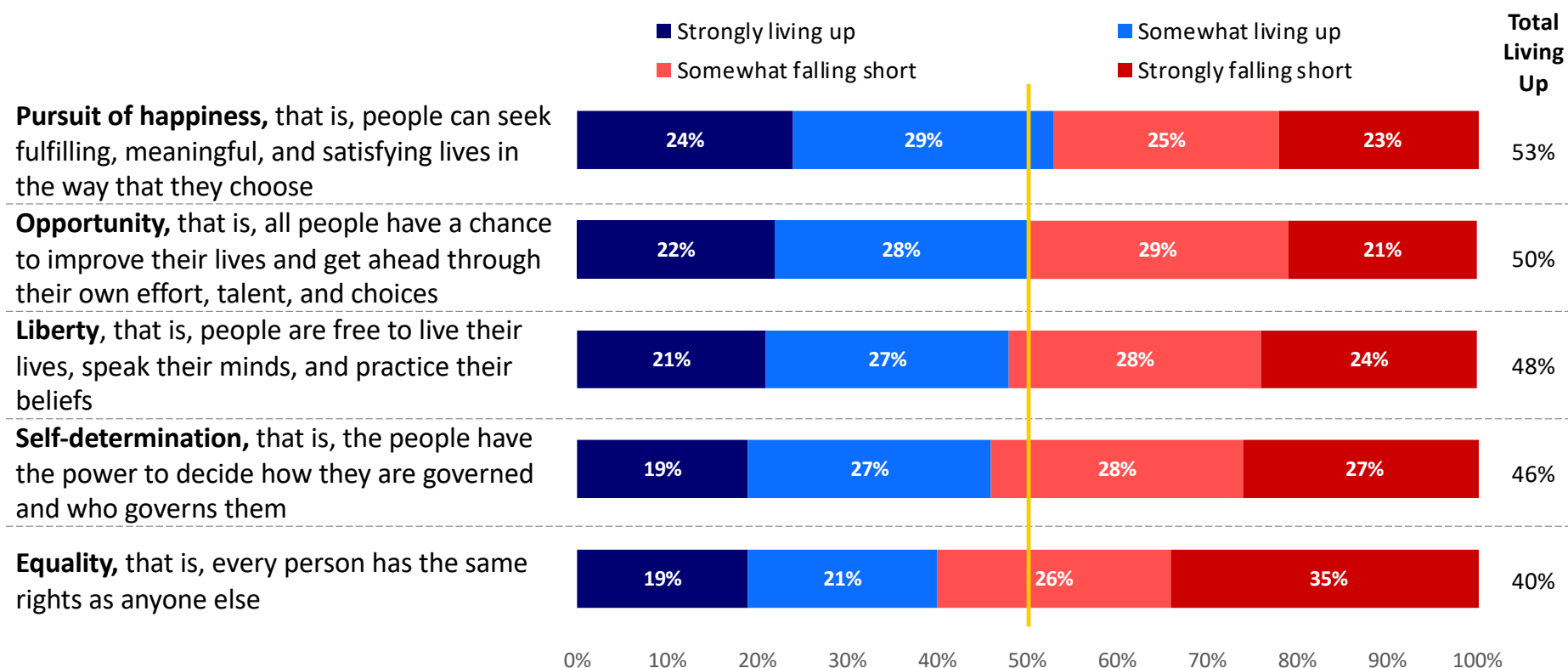


On each of these three measures, the plurality of young Americans say the U.S. is ‘about as good’ as other countries, not ‘better.’

**Data in parentheses in each column shows the results among all Americans from Echelon Insights June 2026 National Omnibus poll*

Young Americans give the country mixed grades in delivering on core principles of the Declaration of Independence.

Please indicate whether you think America is living up to or falling short on each of these principles.



14

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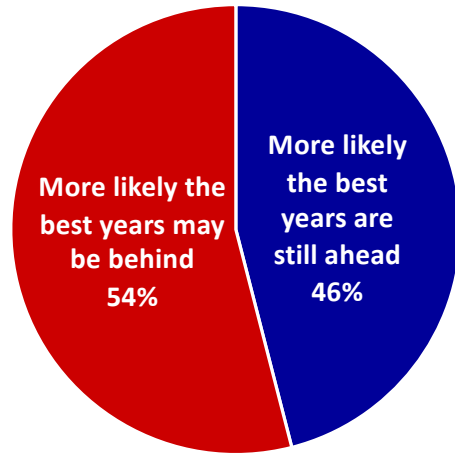
Hope, Doubt & the Road Ahead: *Young Americans Look to the Future*

The American Promise at 250

15

Young Americans are divided as they look to the future, but a majority say it's more likely the country's best years are behind us, not in front of us.

When you think about the future for America, do you feel it's more likely that America's best years are still ahead of us, or do you feel it's more likely that America's best years may already be behind us?



	Best years likely ahead
Men	52%
Women	41%
Non-college track	38%
College track	54%
Republicans	64%
Independents	40%
Democrats	41%
White adults	49%
Black adults	54%
Hispanic adults	42%



Those who express less optimism include women, non-college track, independents & Democrats and Hispanic young adults,

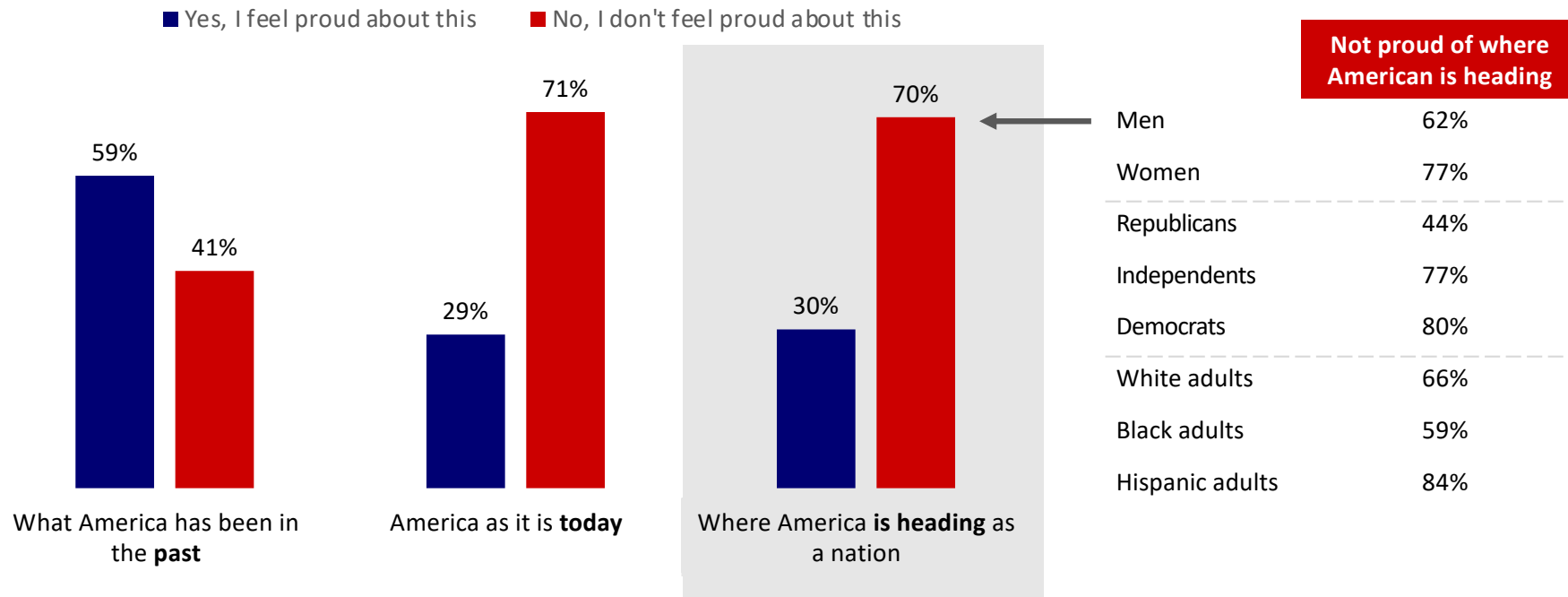
Young Americans hope for a future filled with opportunity, progress, and equality.

Describe your greatest hope for America's future (coded open end).



Young Americans are proud of the country's past, but not of the present or future.

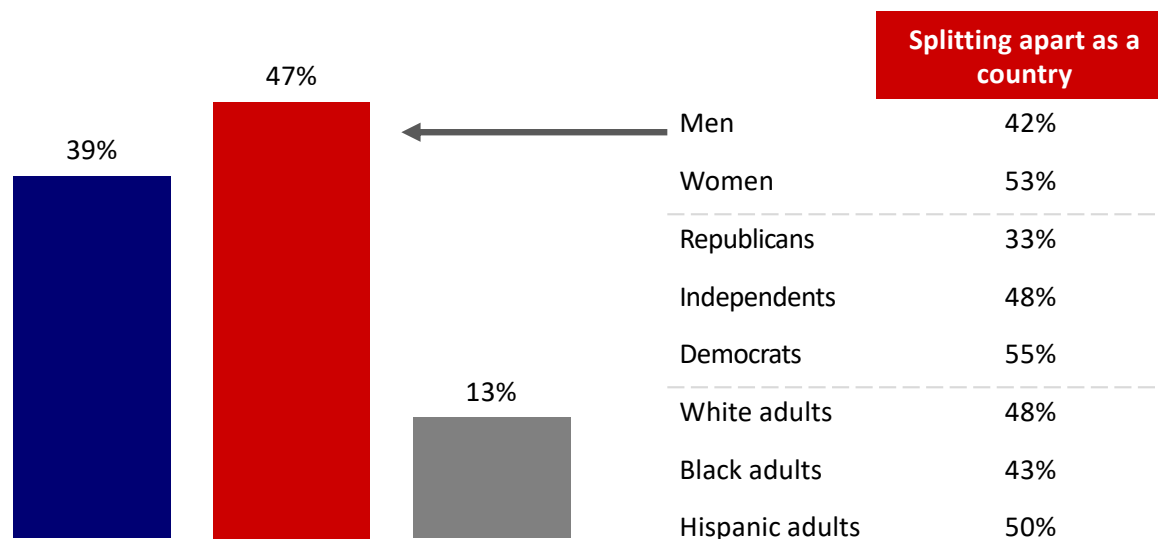
When thinking about the United States, do you feel proud about our country when it comes to...?



Young Americans see current divisions as more of a harbinger for the future.

Indicate which statement you agree with more.

- Americans are becoming more divided, but there's still more that unites us
- Americans are becoming more divided, and we are splitting apart as a country
- Americans are not more divided now than in the past



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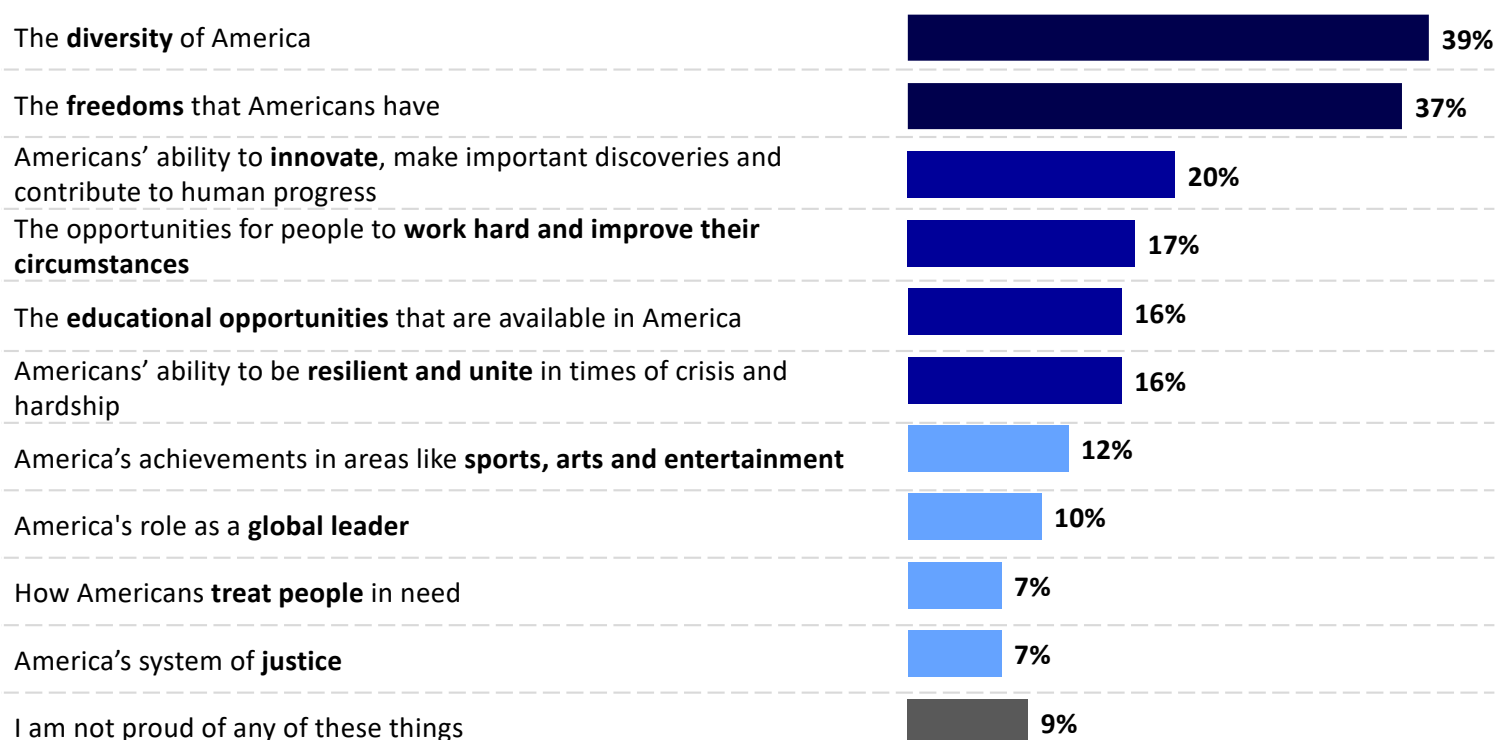
What Makes an American: *Young People's Perspective*

The American Promise at 250

20

Young Americans pinpoint two clear hallmarks of American society: diversity & freedom.

Please select the **two** items that make you most proud to be an American.

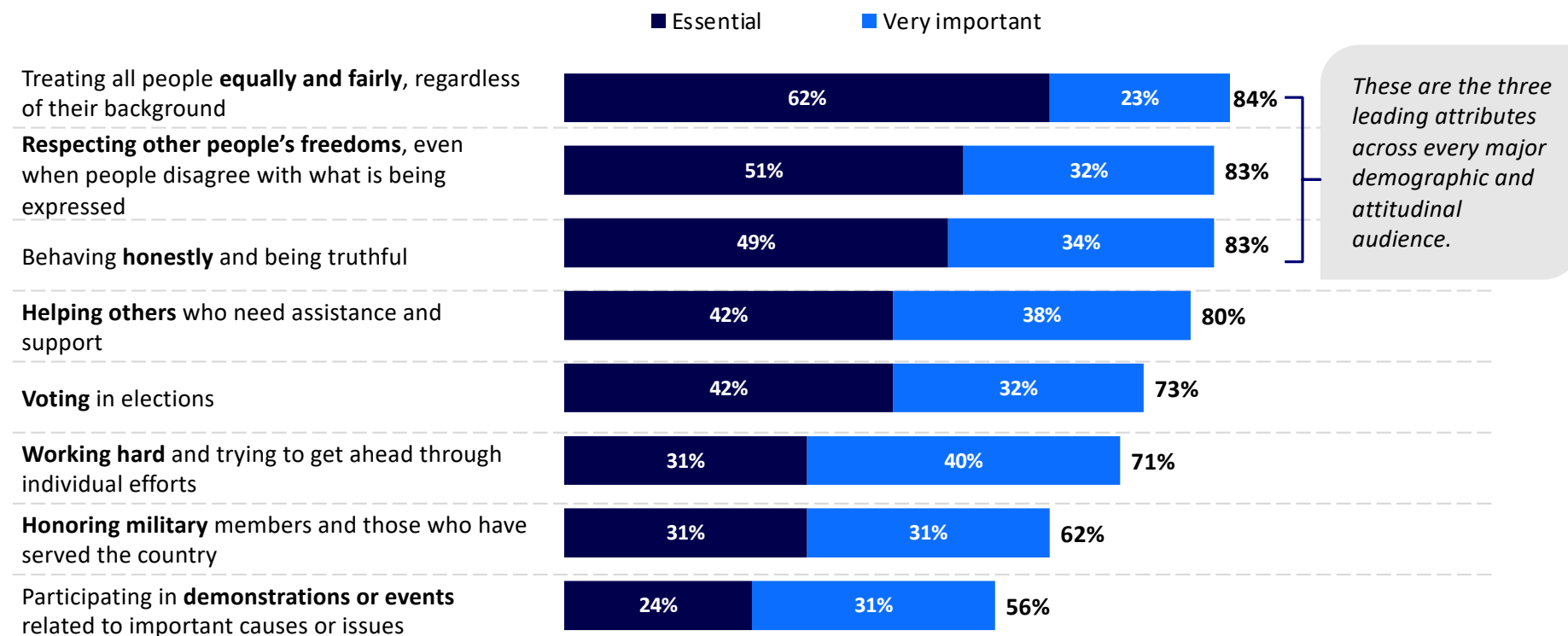


Consensus on these two principles is so strong that they are the leading attributes across gender, race, education, sexual orientation, and area type.

The only exception is partisanship: for Republicans, freedom is preeminent followed by hard work, resilience & unity and innovation.

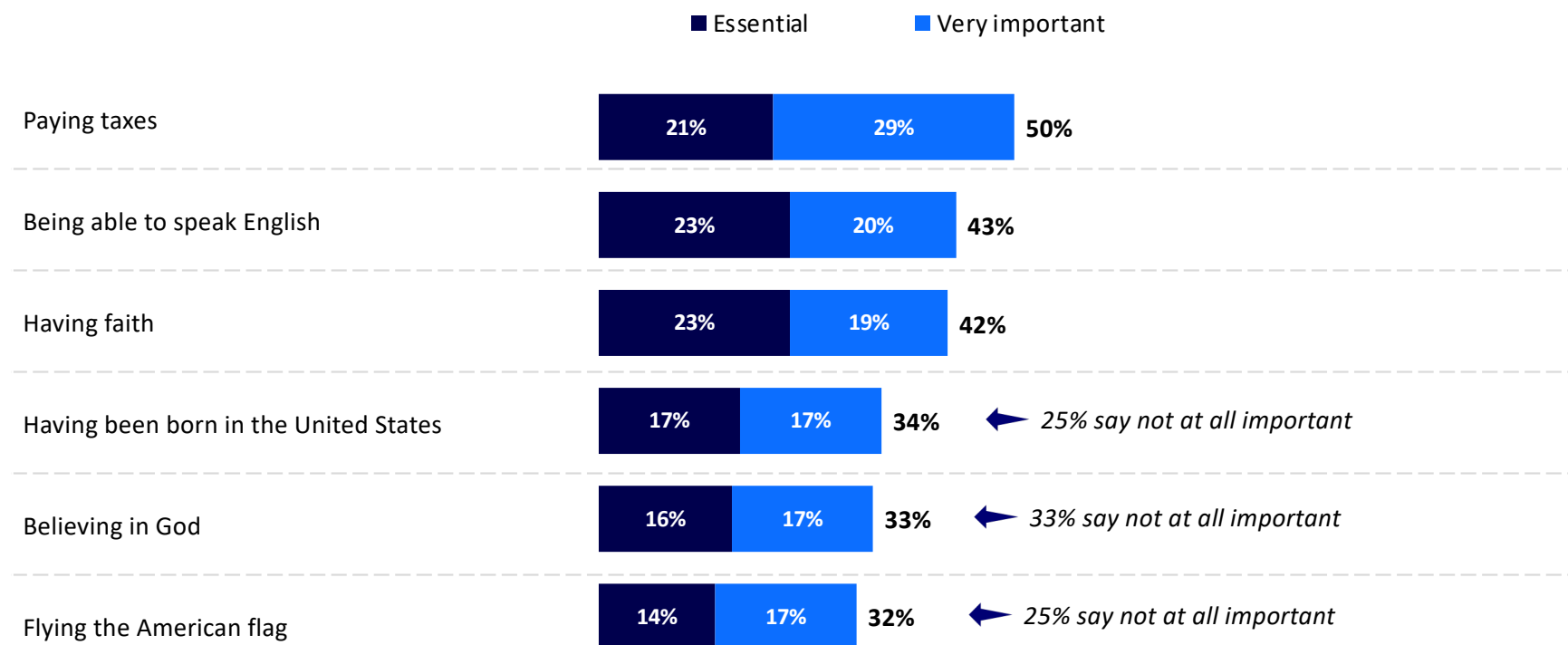
Above all, being an American means treating people with fairness, showing respect amidst disagreement and being honest.

Please rate how important you consider each to be in terms of being an American



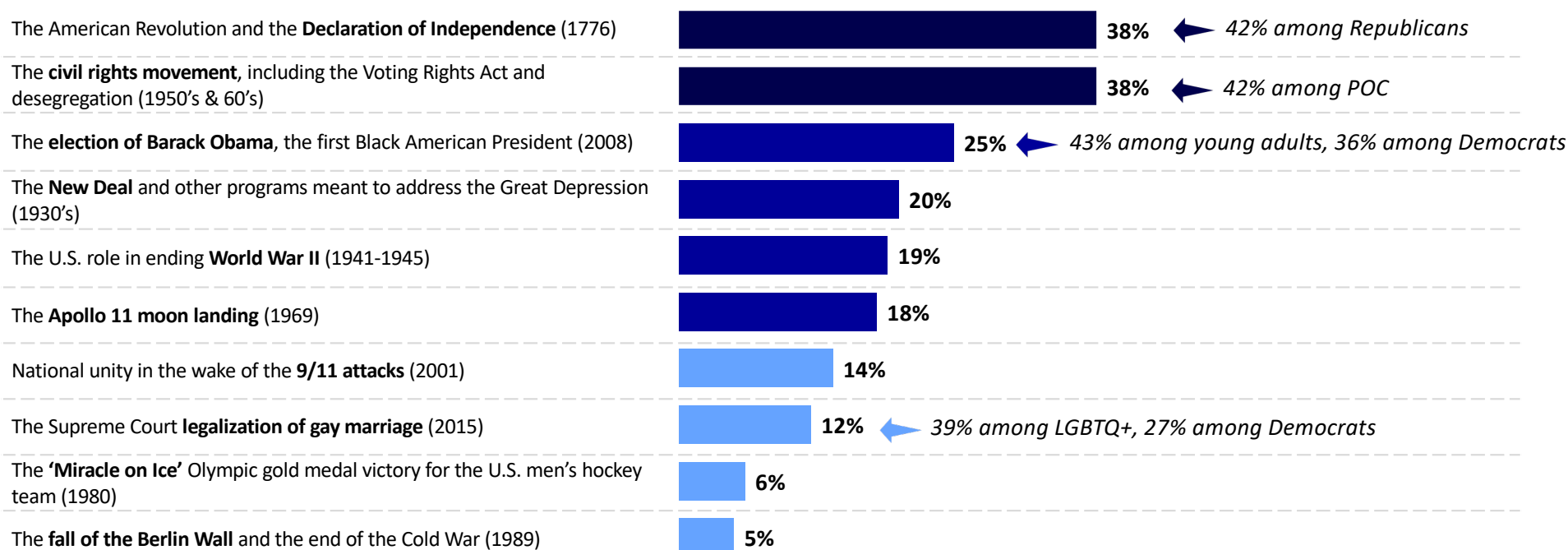
By comparison, young people place lower priority on other traditional attributes when it comes to defining what it means to be an American.

Please rate how important you consider each to be in terms of being an American



Notably, the Declaration of Independence & the civil rights movement stoke the greatest feelings of pride for young Americans.

Please select the **two** items that make you most proud to be an American.



Images that make young Americans feel most proud focus largely on service, taking action, and building relationships.

*Rate how each one captures what makes you feel special or proud about being an American
(mean ratings on a 10-point scale).*



Mean = 7.6

49% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 7.4

45% (9-10 rating)



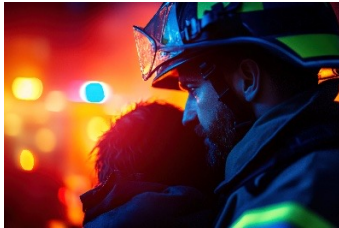
Mean = 7.4

40% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 7.4

42% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 7.3

38% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 7.2

43% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 6.9

34% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 6.8

35% (9-10 rating)

** 1= This does NOT at all capture why I feel proud to be an American; 10 = This closely captures why I feel proud to be an American*

Other images have some, but less traction in expressing young Americans' feelings of pride.

*Rate how each one captures what makes you feel special or proud about being an American
(mean ratings on a 10-point scale).*



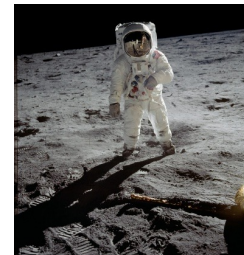
Mean = 6.7

32% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 6.6

36% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 6.5

33% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 5.9

27% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 5.7

25% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 5.7

19% (9-10 rating)



Mean = 5.6

26% (9-10 rating)

** 0 = This does NOT at all capture why I feel proud to be an American; 10 = This closely captures why I feel proud to be an American*

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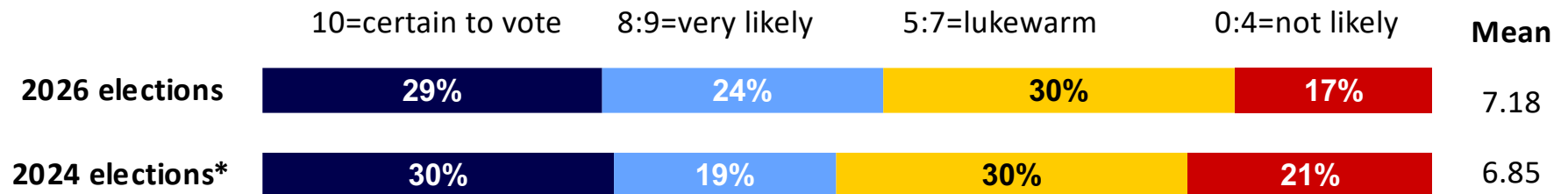
Young Americans & Political Participation: *Looking toward the 2026 Midterm Elections*

The American Promise at 250

27

Young Americans are approaching the November midterms with modest commitment to voting but plenty of room for more engagement.

Likelihood of voting on 10-point scale



Certain/very likely to vote			
All young Americans	53%	White adults	56%
Men	53%	Black adults	52%
Women	40%	Hispanic adults	53%
Republicans	57%	Non-college track	38%
Independents	41%	College track	67%
Democrats	59%	Registered to vote	58%
Did not vote in 2024	39%	Not registered to vote	15%

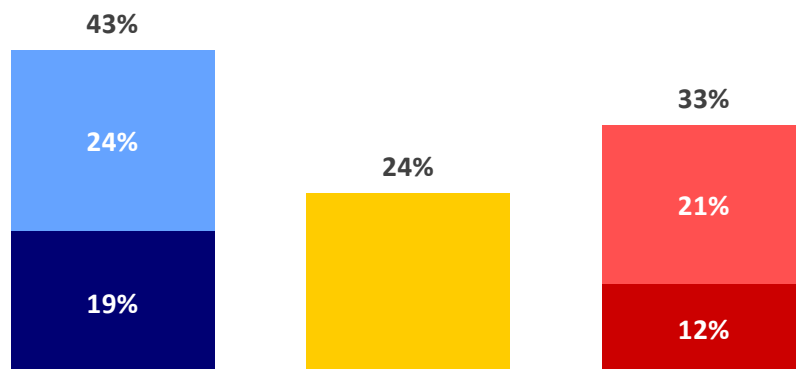
* Trend data from 2024 Sine survey

28

As we approach the midterms, young Americans have reservations about election integrity.

How confident are you that, across the country, the votes will be accurately cast and counted in this year's election?

■ Very confident ■ Fairly confident ■ Just somewhat confident ■ Not too confident ■ Not at all confident



Hispanic adults and Democrats have the least confidence:

Not too/not at all confident

White adults	32%
Black adults	26%
Hispanic adults	39%
Republicans	21%
Independents	35%
Democrats	39%

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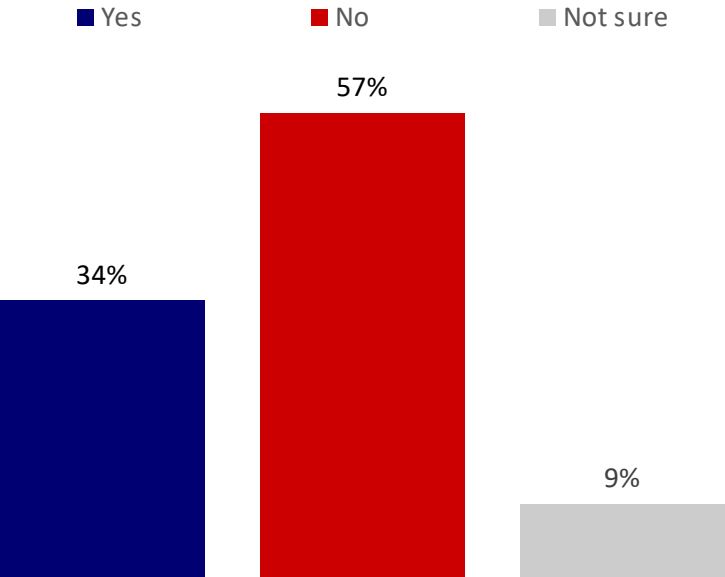
The Care Generation: *Young Americans as Caregivers*

The American Promise at 250

30

More than one in three young Americans report they are involved in regular caregiving.

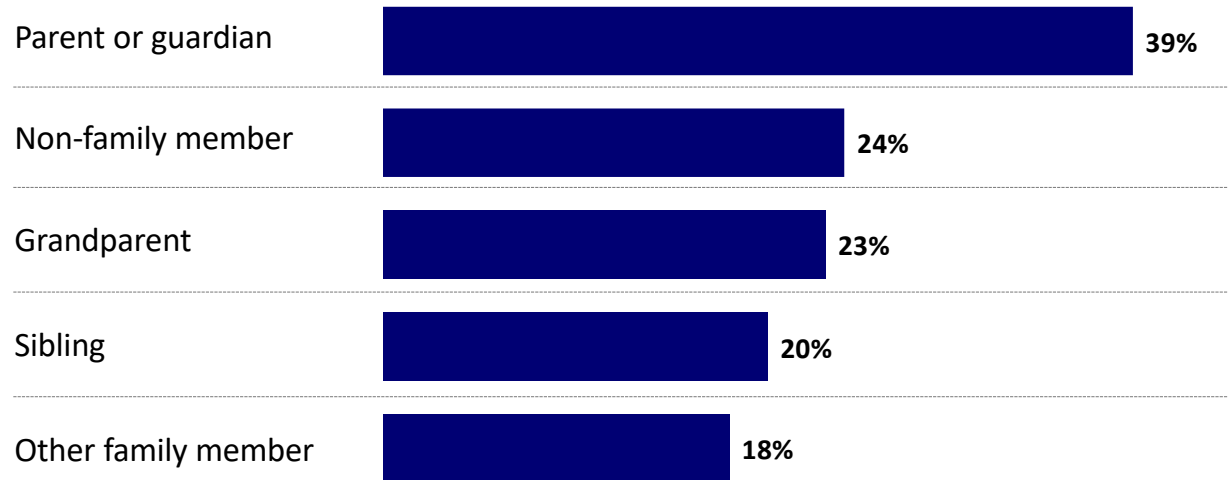
In the past year, have you provided regular care or support for someone with a health condition, disability, injury, or mental health need?



	Yes
Men	29%
Women	38%
White adults	33%
Black adults	43%
Hispanic adults	29%
Non college track	44%
College track	31%

While parents are the center of attention, almost one in four young Americans provide care to non-family member.

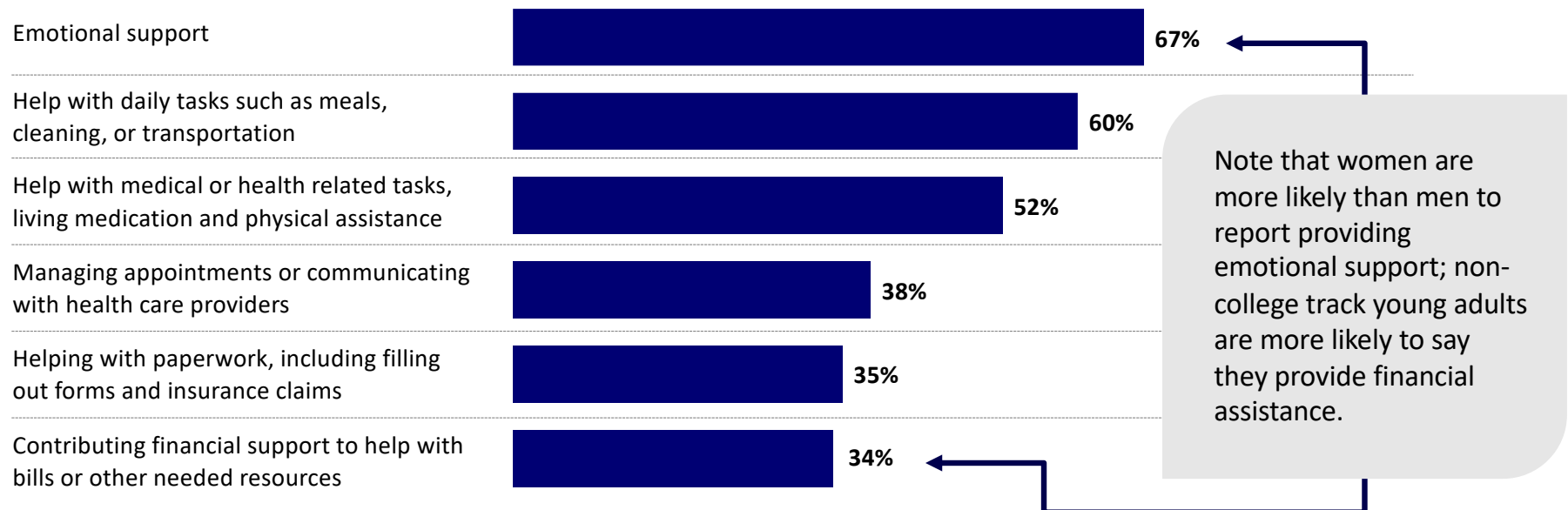
Please indicate who you have provided care or support to in the past year. Select all that apply.



Note that women are especially likely to provide care for parents; Black and Hispanic young adults are more likely to be involved in family (rather than non-family) caregiving.

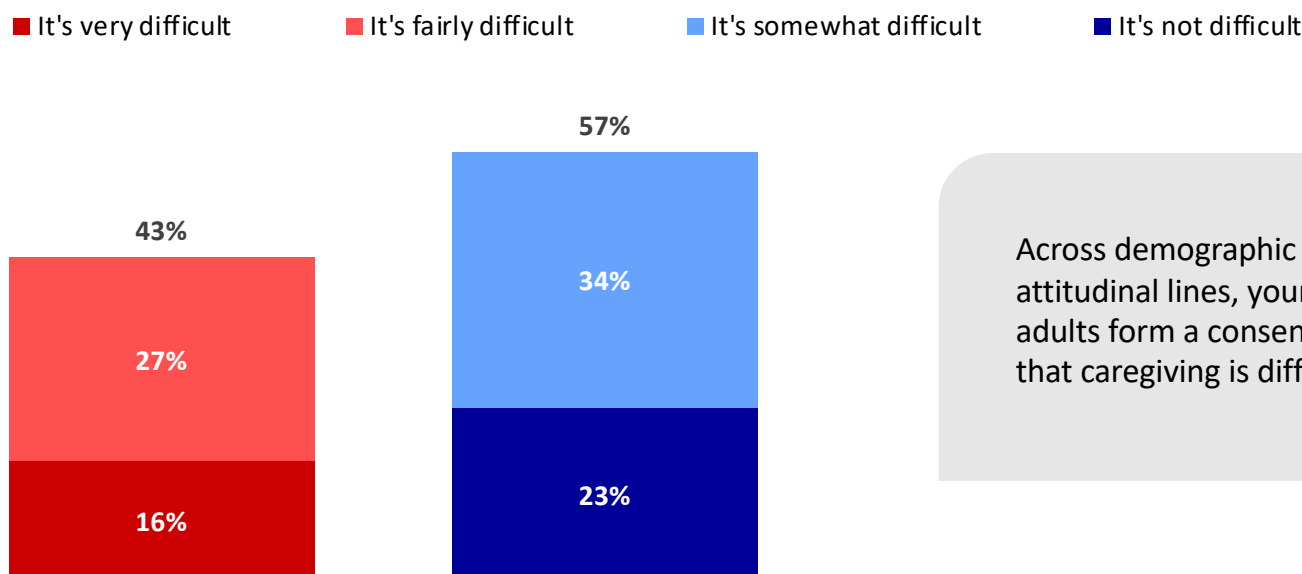
Notably, the least visible and tangible form of support leads the list: two in three caregivers report providing emotional support.

Please indicate what types of support you have provided in the past year. Select all that apply.



Young Americans describe caregiving as challenging – fewer than one in four say it's not difficult.

How would you describe your ability to balance the caregiving and support role you perform while also fulfilling your responsibilities at school or at your job?



Across demographic and attitudinal lines, young adults form a consensus that caregiving is difficult.

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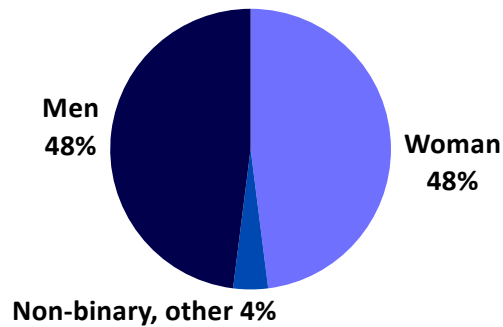
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Methodology: *Survey Respondent Profile*

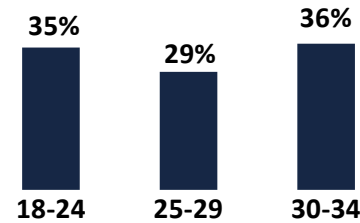
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Demographic Profile

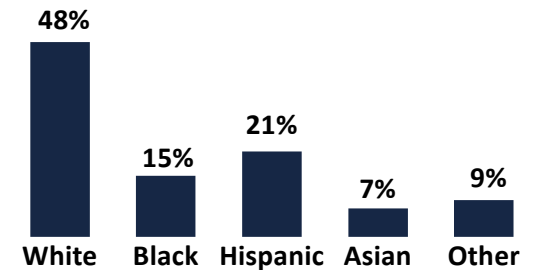
GENDER



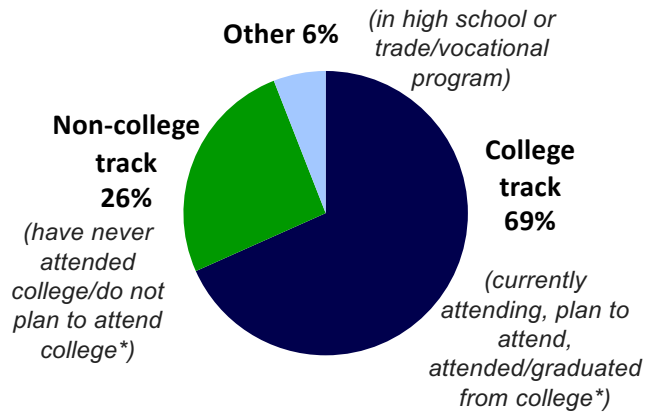
AGE



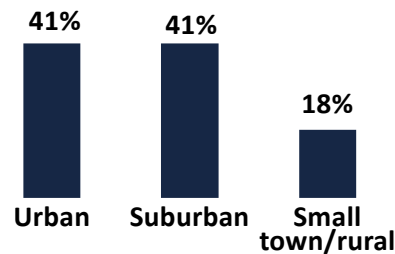
RACE



EDUCATION



AREA



PARTY ID

