



ECHO DELTA
Higher Education Marketing & Consulting

ADV

MARKET RESEARCH
& CONSULTING

Politics and College Choice

How Students' Political Views
Influence Where They Enroll

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
About the Survey	8
Respondent Profile	10
Political Affiliation and Engagement	12
How do students describe their political leanings?	13
How politically active are today's students?	16
Political Climate and College Choice	18
How likely are students to eliminate a college or state based on the political environment?	19
How do students weigh political climate against other factors?	20
Perceived Impact	22
Do students think politics will impact their college experience?	23
Which political issues matter most to students?	24
What concerns do students have?	25
Which states are students most concerned about?	26
Gathering Information About Political Climate	30
Where do students find information about a state's political climate?	31
Where do students find information about a college's political climate?	32
Parents' Influence	34
Do parents and students share political views?	35
How much do parents' political views influence college choice?	36
Views on What Colleges Should Do	38
What do students say colleges can do to reassure apprehensive students?	39
Do students support free speech on campus?	40
Do students want colleges to remain neutral on political issues?	41
What issues do students want colleges to take a stand on?	42
How important is political diversity among faculty?	44
Applying These Findings	46
About the Authors	50
About the Sponsors	51

Executive Summary

In recent years, political climate has emerged as a significant factor in students' college selection process. In response to this trend, we launched a study to understand the impact of politics on college decisions. This report examines the extent of students' concerns about campus and state politics, their influence on the college experience, and how these concerns compare to other traditional decision-making factors like academic reputation, financial aid, and location.

Additionally, this study explores parental influence on these choices and strategies institutions might employ to address student apprehensions. While the findings confirm some of our initial theories, they also challenge others, offering new insights into the complex role of politics in college recruitment amid a divisive political landscape.

Political Affiliation & Engagement

- Half of college-bound students identify as moderate; however, there are significant variations along demographic lines like gender and race, in which students identify as liberal, conservative, and moderate. For instance, white students are more politically polarized than their non-white peers.
- While a majority of students engage in some form of political activity, only about 11% of students are highly politically active. Liberal students are notably more active than their moderate or conservative peers.

Political Climate & College Choice

- Political considerations, including state-specific concerns, are a factor in college choice for roughly three out of every four students.
- When placed in context with other factors like cost and academic reputation, the political climate of the state and campus makes up about 20% of the college decision.
- One in four students have concerns about attending college in a specific state based on the state's political climate.
- Liberal-leaning students are the most concerned about attending college in Texas, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and South Carolina.
- Conservative-leaning students are most concerned about attending college in California and New York.

Perceived Impact

- Overall, 52% of students believe the political climate of a college impacts the learning environment. 78% of politically active students and 66% of liberal students affirm this belief.
- When asked about going to college in a state with a political climate different from their own views, students cite fear of discrimination or harassment (32%), fear of not belonging (30%), and concerns for personal safety (29%) as their top three concerns.
- When asked what political issues are most important in evaluating a state's political climate, students cite racial equity (58%), healthcare (56%), and freedom of speech (53%) as their top three concerns. Liberal students show heightened sensitivity to a wide range of issues compared to their moderate and conservative peers.

Gathering Information About Political Climate

- Seven out of eight prospective students (86%) look for information that will help them determine the political environment of a college. 82% also look for information to determine the political environment of the state where a college is located.
- Students primarily use social media, college websites, and personal networks to gauge the political climates of states and colleges, underscoring the influence of digital narratives over firsthand experiences.
- Students appear to rely on a variety of context clues when viewing an institution's website to determine its political climate. These context clues may include elements of the education and student experience, such as student-run clubs and organizations, academic programs, and invited speakers.

Parents' Influence

- Most students' political views align with their parents', though a majority of liberal students describe their parents as conservative.
- Overall, about 25% of students say their parents' political views will influence where they go to college. About 35% of conservative students say this is the case.

Views on What Colleges Should Do

- Students express a desire for colleges to maintain open communication about their political stances and foster an environment supportive of free speech.
- Liberal and politically active students, in particular, prefer institutions to take clear stances on political issues, especially regarding racial equality and freedom of speech.

Methodology

- The survey instrument was collaboratively designed by Echo Delta and ADV Market Research.
- It was distributed on March 4-8, 2024, via online survey and gathered 1,044 responses from U.S. high school students aged 16-18 planning to attend a four-year college within three years.
- Rigorous steps were taken to ensure that our sample mirrors the demographic composition of the target population in order to ensure that our insights are reflective of the population as a whole.
- The survey achieved a $\pm 3.0\%$ margin of error, ensuring representativeness across key demographics. Data analysis included coding of open responses and significance testing at the 0.05 level.

Introduction

For decades, factors like academic reputation, financial aid, and proximity to home have dominated students' college selection process. However, a new criterion has climbed the ranks of consideration—political climate.

In 2023, a surprising number of our clients said they suspected students' political views were starting to play an important role in college choice. For some, this was just a hunch based on a handful of anecdotes; for others, the sudden influence of politics was unavoidable and clear. In one striking example, a client counted no less than 50 students who said they would not be enrolling at his institution, not because of anything they disliked about the college itself, but because of the politics prevailing in the state where the college was located.

Against this backdrop, and with a divisive presidential election ahead, we decided to launch a formal study to better understand this new dynamic entering an already difficult recruitment environment. Our goal was to explore a handful of overarching questions, including:

How widespread are concerns about state and campus politics among prospective students?

In what ways do students think the political climate of a state or campus might impact their college experience?

How do concerns about political climate rank amongst other priorities like cost, academic quality, and student life?

To what extent do parents and their own political leanings influence college choice?

What, if anything, might institutions do to reassure apprehensive students?

This report explores these questions and others. In some cases, the findings largely comport with our pre-existing theories, while other findings challenge our previously held assumptions and force us to reconsider our mental models. While this report does not provide quick and easy answers to institutions attempting to navigate today's minefield of divisive politics, it introduces more clarity and sharper thinking in these challenging times.

About the Survey

The survey instrument was designed collaboratively by Echo Delta and ADV Market Research, based on discussions with higher education professionals, topics cited frequently in higher education news publications, and related surveys conducted either of prospective students or the general population.

All participants we surveyed met the following criteria: they lived in the United States, were between the ages of 16 and 18, and intended to enroll in a four-year college or university in the next one to three years.

With a sample of 1,044 students, we attain a margin of error that is both statistically significant and practically reasonable with a margin of error of $\pm 3.0\%$, ensuring that our findings are precise and reflective of the broader population trends.

Additionally, we have taken rigorous steps to ensure that our sample mirrors the demographic composition of the target population. This includes representation across various age groups, genders, ethnicities, and other relevant demographics, ensuring that our survey insights are genuinely reflective of the population as a whole.

After responses were collected, ADV cleaned and analyzed the data, including coding responses to open-ended questions. For select questions, we applied statistical tests to determine statistical significance. All significance testing was done with a significance level of 0.05.

Respondent Profile

(N=1,044)

GENDER

Female	56%
Male	40%
Non-binary	2%
Prefer to self-describe	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%

INCOME

Less than \$50,000	29%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	28%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	13%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	6%
\$200,000 or more	4%
Don't know	13%
Prefer not to share	8%

RACE/ETHNICITY

White/Caucasian	56%
African American / Black	24%
Hispanic/Latino	21%
Asian	9%
Native American	4%
Middle Eastern	2%
Prefer to self-describe	1%
Prefer not to answer	3%

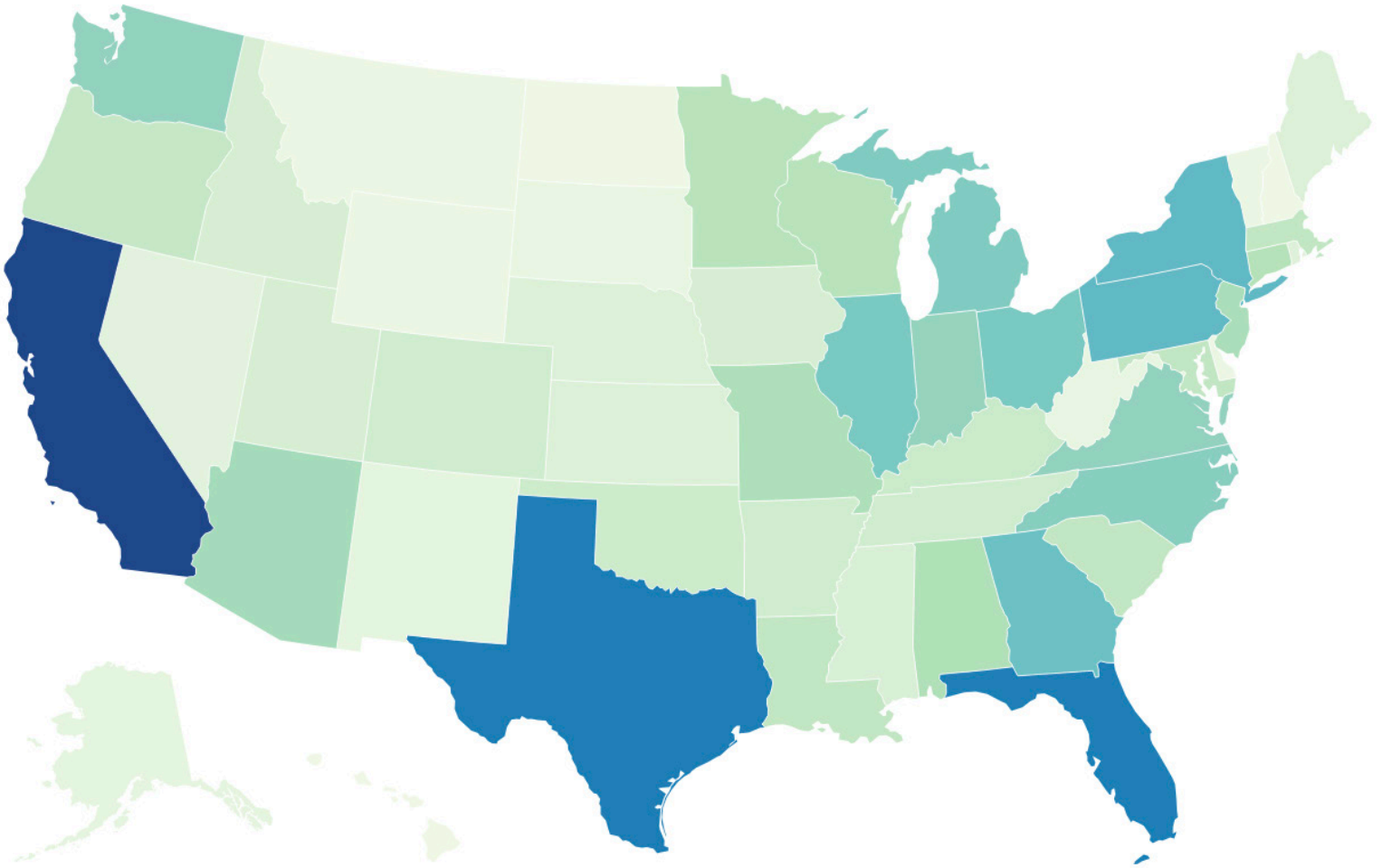
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

No religious affiliation	32%
Protestant/ Non-Catholic Christian	23%
Catholic	22%
Other	9%
Muslim	2%
Jewish	2%
Prefer not to answer	10%

LGBTQ

Member of LGBTQ community	29%
NOT a member	66%
Prefer not to answer	5%

Geographic Distribution of Respondents



Political Affiliation and Engagement

In this section, we explore the political leanings of college-bound high school students and the diversity of political activities they undertake. We also explore the relationship between demographics and political affiliation, including the extent to which high school students' political affiliations appear to have changed over the last 20 years.

How do students describe their political leanings?

Our survey finds that half of today's high school students identify as moderate, with a smaller proportion (29.4%) identifying as liberal and a slightly smaller segment identifying as conservative (20.3%). Almost equal proportions of respondents described their political views as extreme, with 5% of respondents identifying as extremely liberal and 4% identifying as extremely conservative.

Our findings show interesting similarities to and differences from a 2004 study of U.S. teens conducted by Gallup¹. Like our survey, Gallup's research found teens were most likely to identify as moderate (56%).

This makes sense from a developmental standpoint, given high school students are still in the early stages of formulating their own political views, and is supported by a recent survey that found **Gen Z teens are**

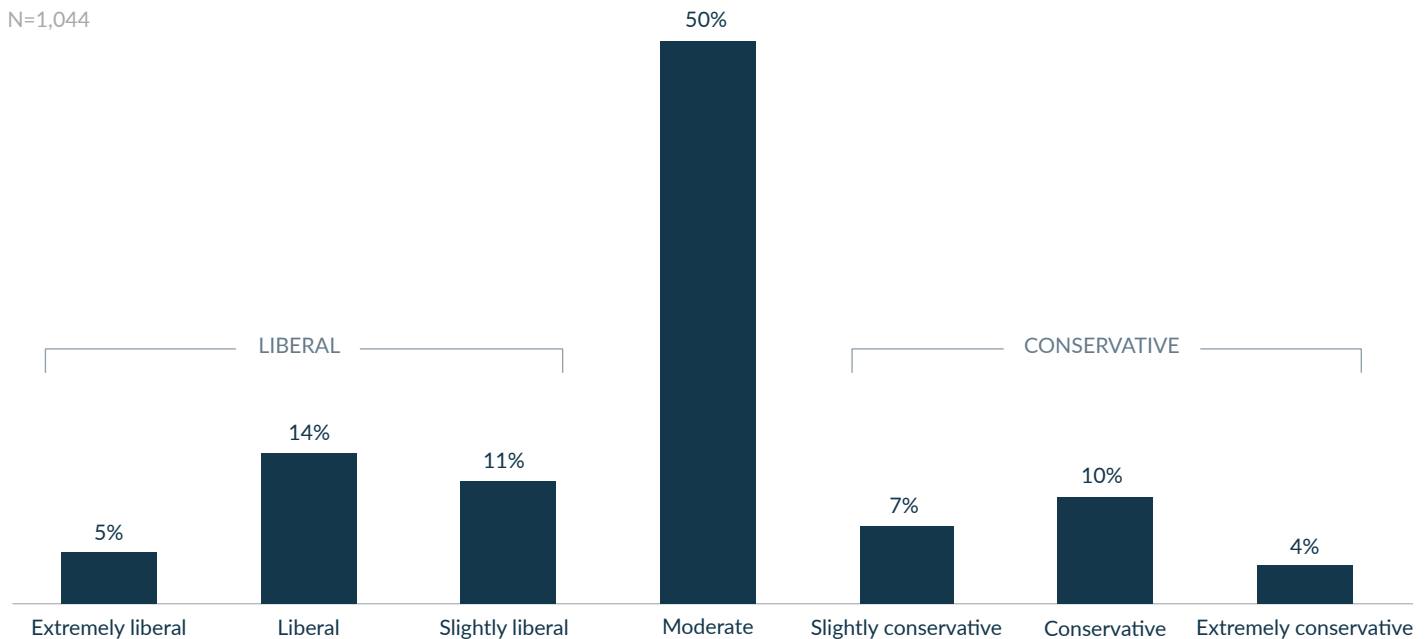
significantly more centrist in their political affiliation than Gen Z adults². When we compare Gallup's 2004 findings to our own survey, we see the proportion of students identifying as conservative and liberal has been effectively swapped. In 2004, 16% of teens identified as liberal while 25% identified as conservative. Today, 29% of teens identify as liberal, and 20% identify as conservative.

As in other similar research, we find female students are more likely than males to identify as liberal (33% vs. 21%), while males are more likely than females to identify as conservative (28% vs. 16%). These findings very closely mirror those from Gallup's 2004 survey, suggesting a somewhat stable and long-standing connection between political affiliation and gender.

College-bound high school students are most likely to identify as politically moderate

Q: How would you characterize your political views?

N=1,044

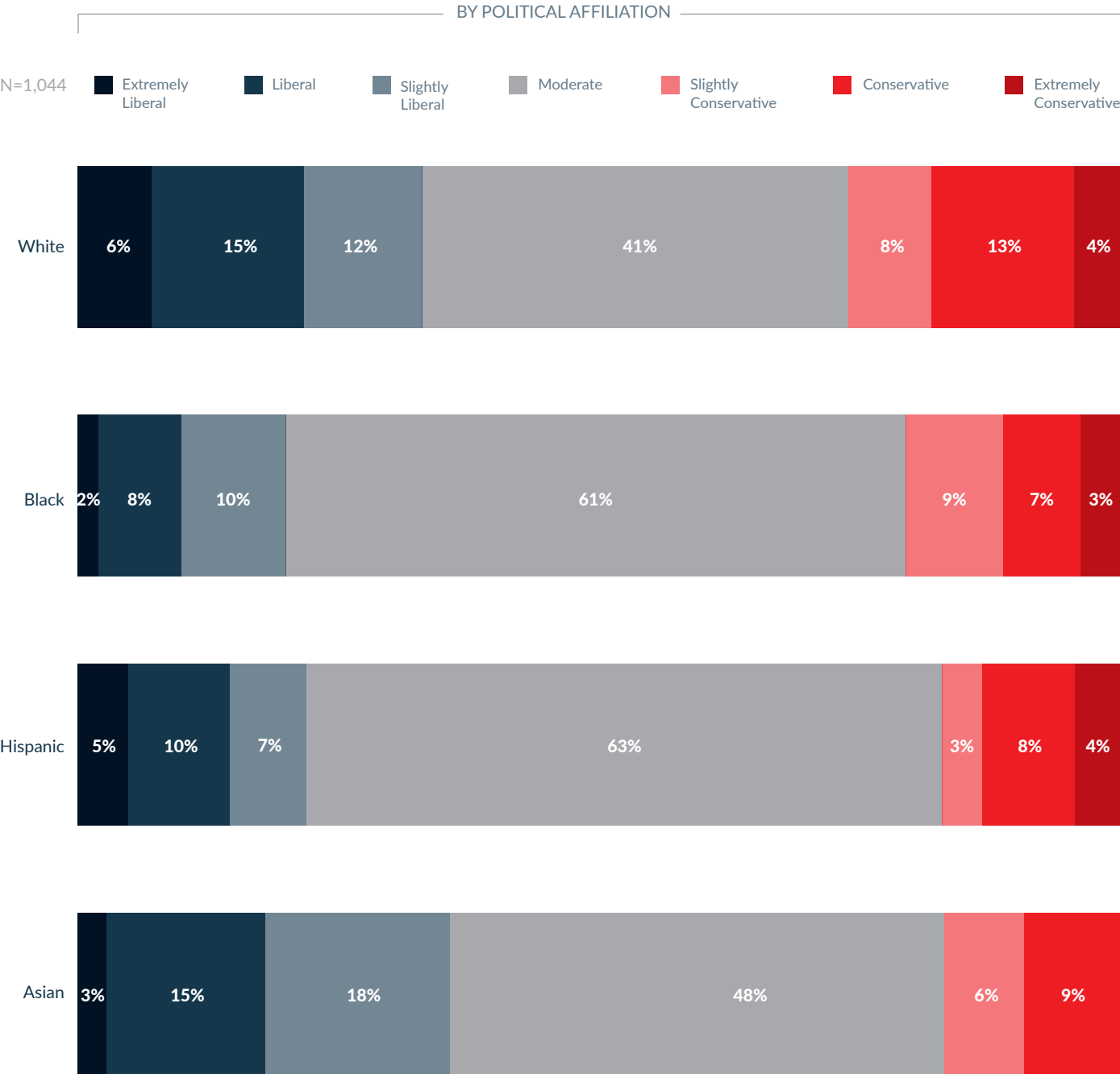


1 Lyons, L. (2004, May 4). Teens Stay True to Parents' Political Perspectives. Retrieved May 10, 2024, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/14515/teens-stay-true-parents-political-perspectives.aspx>

2 (2024). *A Political and Cultural Glimpse into America's Future: Generation Z's Views on Generational Change and the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead*. PRRI.

We find no substantive differences in political affiliation based on household income; however, we do see differences emerge when we examine political affiliation by race and ethnicity. Here we find that **white students are more likely to place themselves on either end of the political spectrum than their non-white peers. This suggests white students are more politically polarized than other groups.**

Asian students are the least likely to be extremely conservative, while Black and Hispanic students are the most centrist in their views.



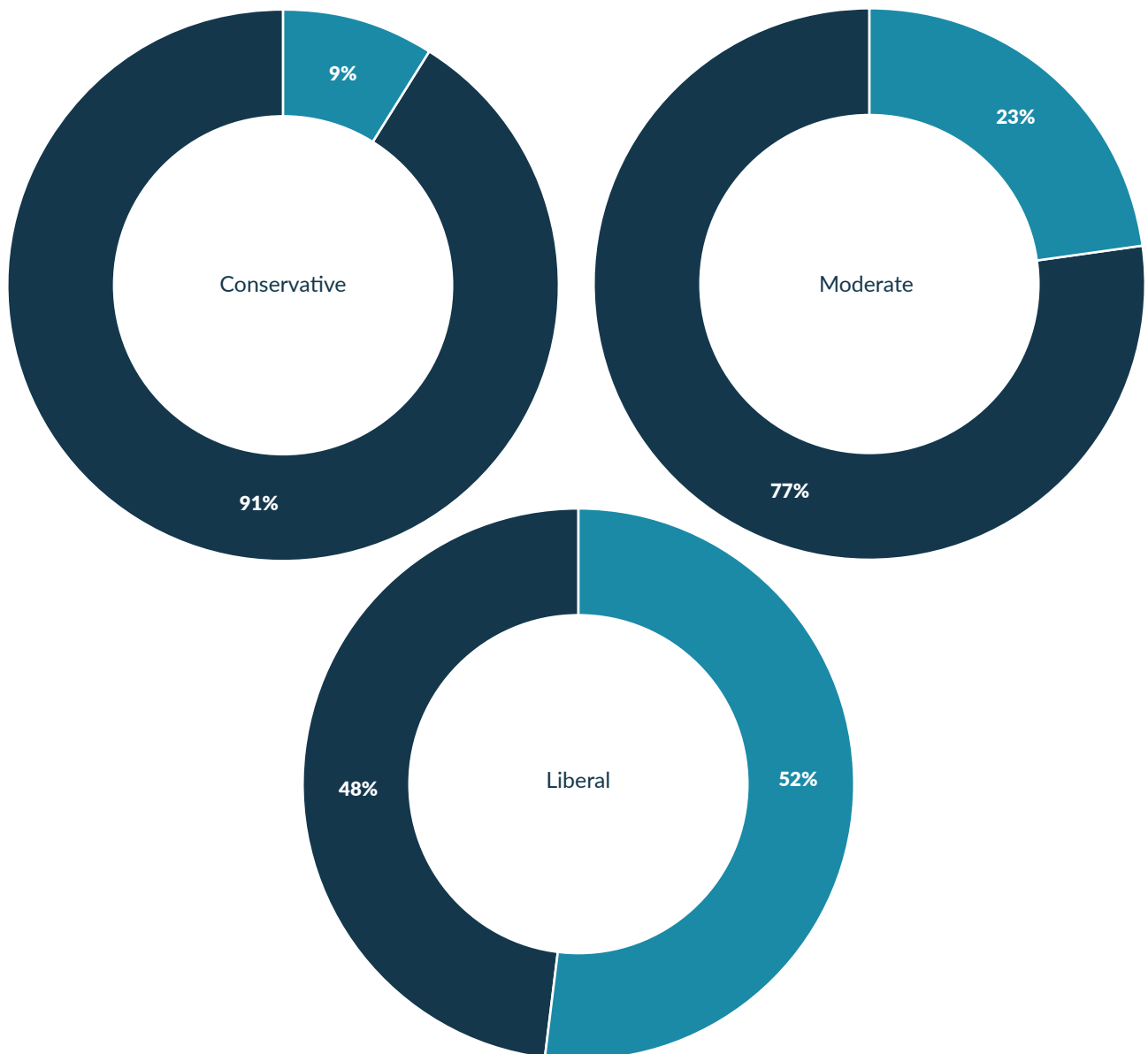
We also see differences when we examine the relationship between political affiliation and sexual orientation. Here we find that 52% of liberal students identify as LGBTQ compared to 23% of moderate students and 9% of conservative students. This will become relevant later in this report when we analyze what issues matter most to students with different political affiliations.

Liberal students are more than twice as likely to identify as LGBTQ as their moderate peers

Percentage of LGBTQ Students by Political Affiliation

N=1,044

● Identifies as LGBTQ ● Does not identify as LGBTQ



How politically active are today's students?

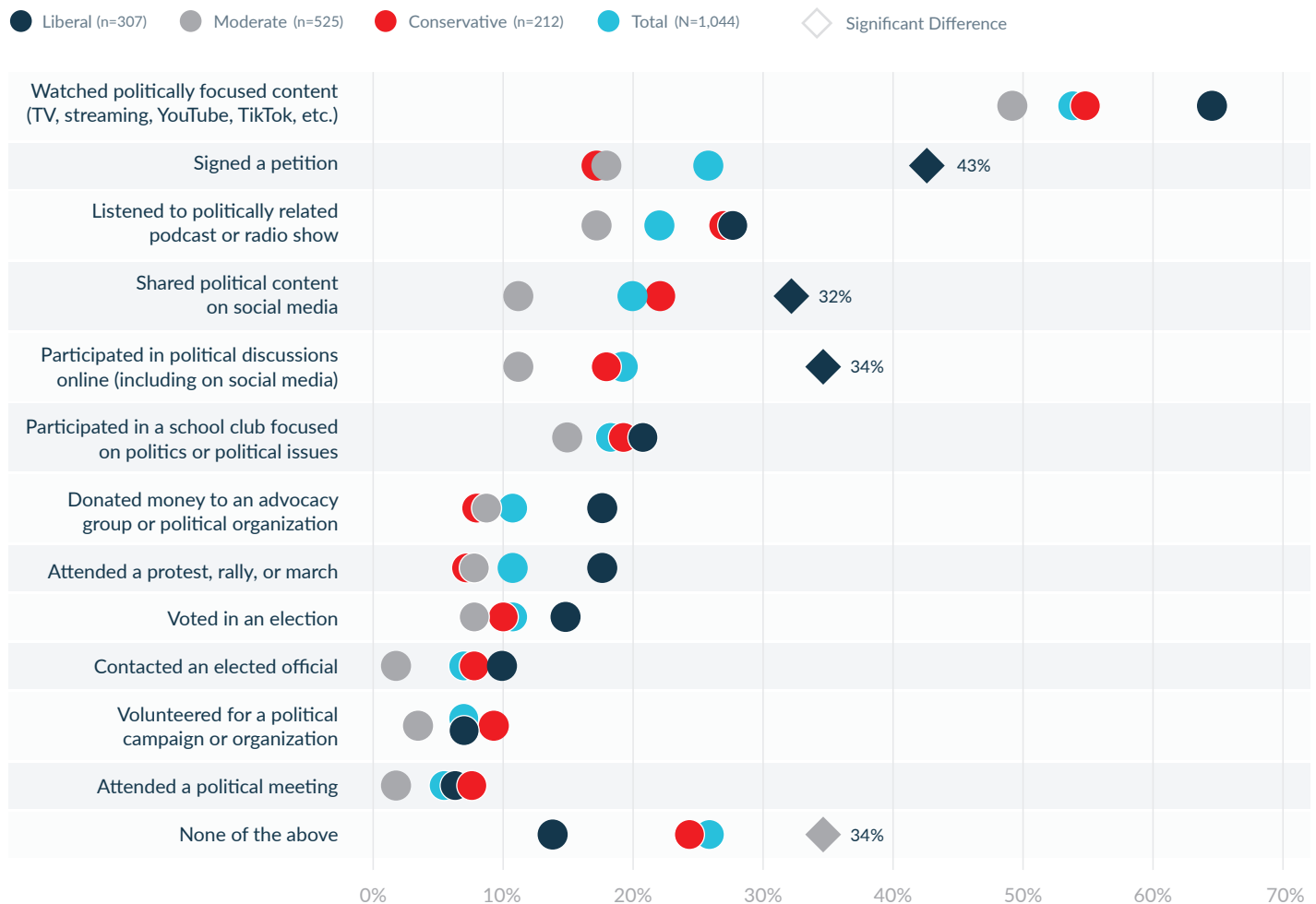
In all, nearly 75% of high school juniors and seniors have engaged in some form of politically related activity within the last year. The most common activity was watching politically focused content (54%), while a smaller proportion of students took a more active role through activities like signing a petition (26%) or participating in political discussions online (19%).

Although we find that some political activity is common, only about one in five students engaged in more than three activities. **Liberal students are significantly more likely than**

conservative and moderate students to be highly politically active and are considerably more likely to have signed a petition, shared political content on social media, or participated in political discussions online. Overall, we see no substantive differences in political activity based on gender, race, or household income. However, when we narrow our focus to those who are the most politically active on either end of the ideological spectrum, some differences emerge.

Three in four students engaged in some form of politically related activity in the past year

Q: Which of the following activities have you taken part in during the past year?

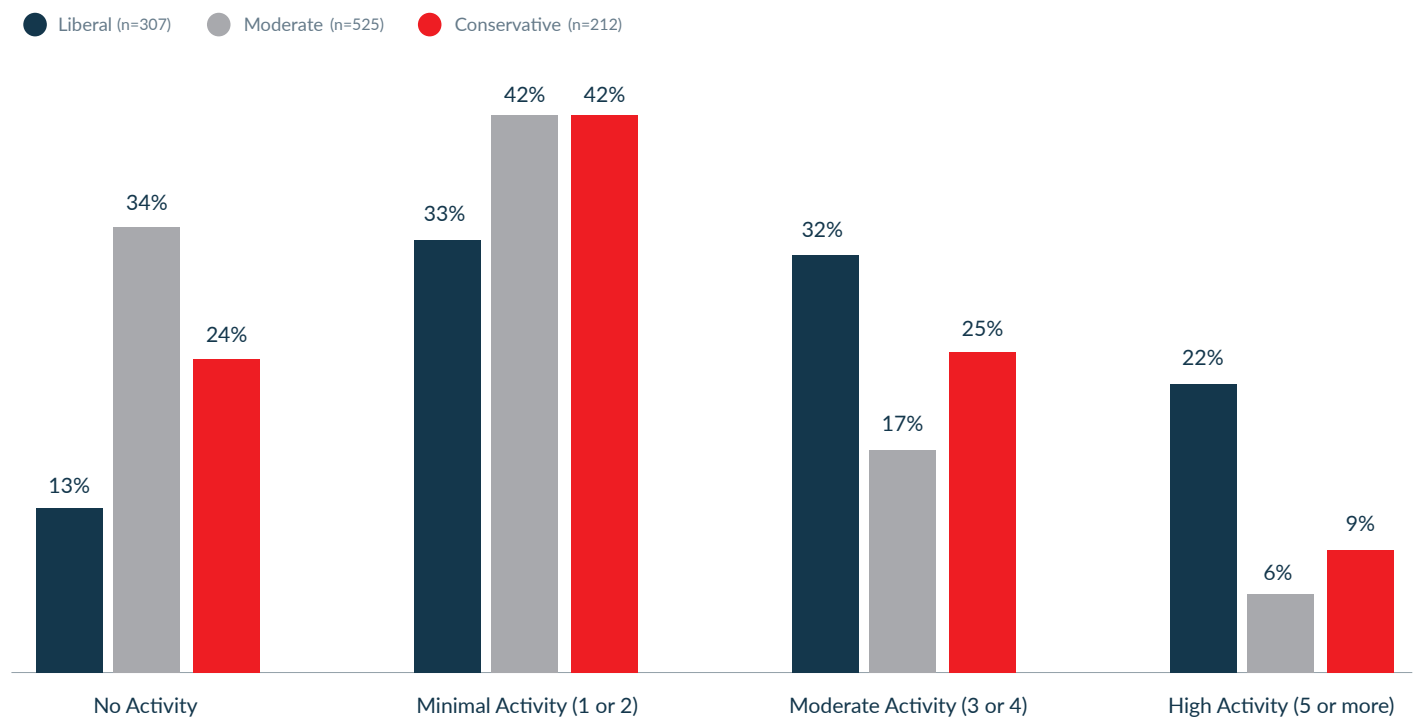


Our research shows that among politically active liberals, a strong majority (71%) are female, while among politically active conservatives, a smaller majority (56%) are male.

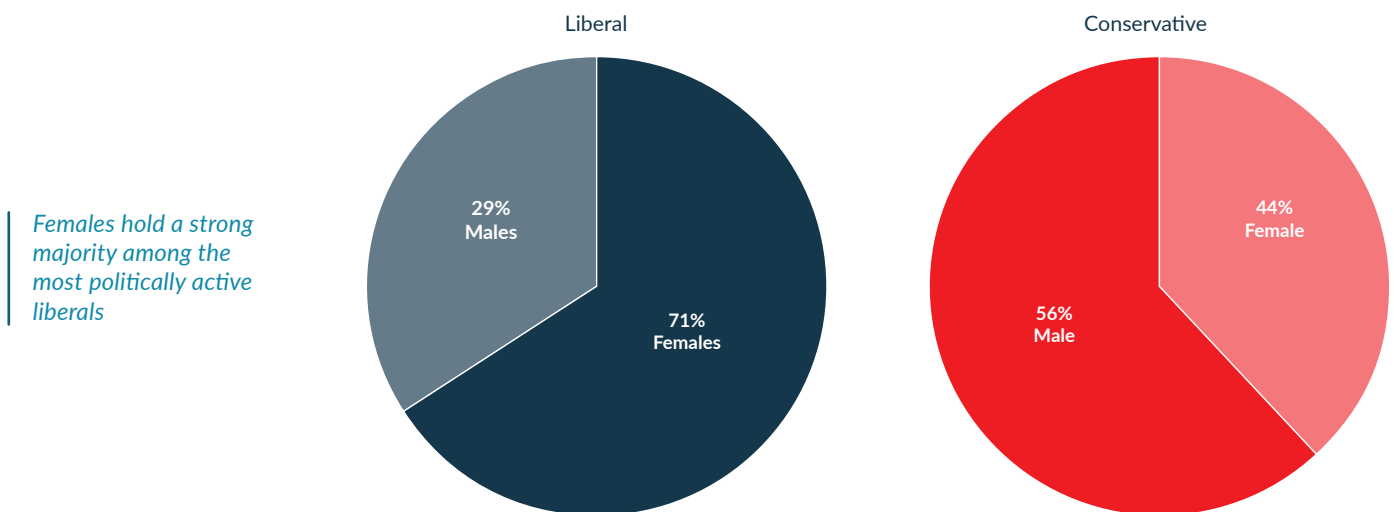
Our findings are broadly in line with other recent polling that finds today's young

women tend to be more politically engaged across a range of key issues than young men³. This suggests that while broader demographic factors may not predict political activity overall, gender plays a role in shaping the intensity and direction of political activism among the most politically engaged students.

LEVEL OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT BY POLITICAL AFFILIATION



Gender Differences Among Highly Politically Active Liberals and Conservatives



³ Cox, D. A. (2023, June 15). Are Young Men Becoming Conservative? Retrieved May 10, 2024, from <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/newsletter/are-young-men-becoming-conservative/>

Political Climate and College Choice

In this section, we explore the impact of political climate on choice and how it stacks up against other critical decision-making factors like cost, reputation, and academic quality. We also analyze how students' levels of political activity can impact their college selection process.

How likely are students to eliminate a college or state based on the political environment?

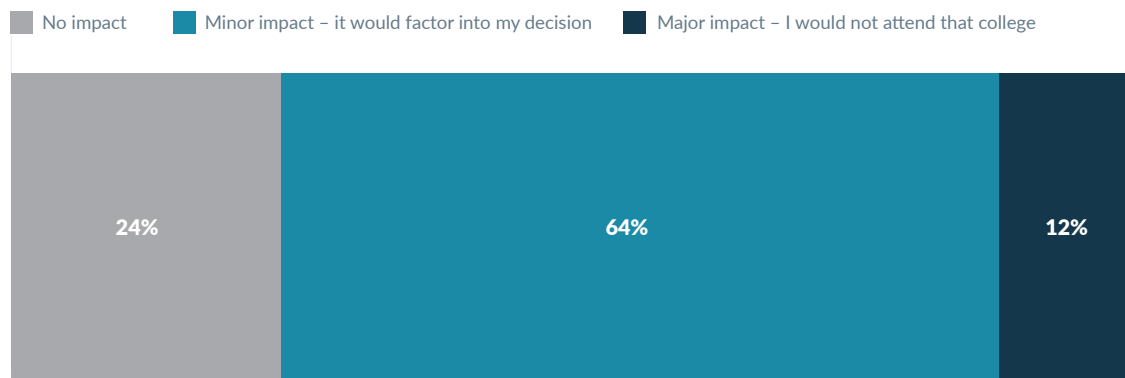
Our research shows that differences between an institution's or state's political climate and the students' political beliefs are a major consideration for about 12% of students, and that these students are more likely to be liberal and highly politically active.

While the proportion of students who view political climate as a critical factor is small, only about one in four students indicate a college's or state's political climate is not a consideration at all.

12% of students say a political climate that differs from their own is a major consideration in where they go to college

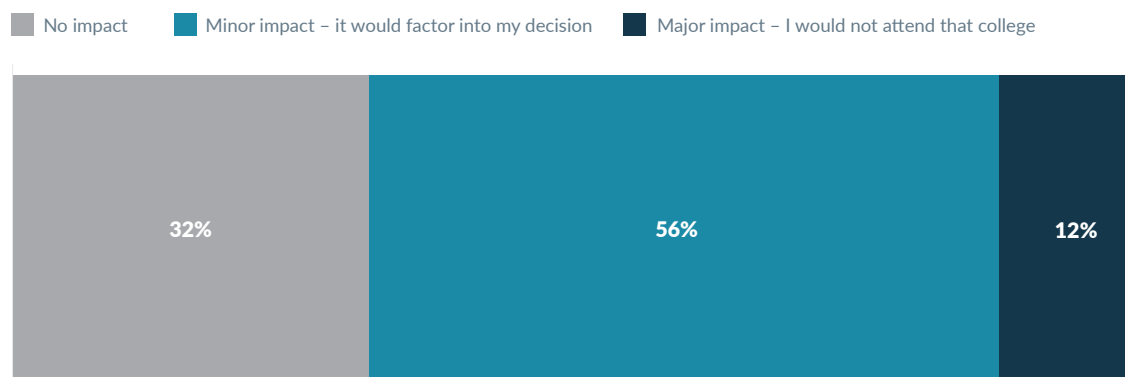
Q: *If the political climate of the college differed significantly from your own, how would this impact your decision to attend?*

N=1,044



Q: *If the political climate of the state where the college is located differed significantly from your own, how would this impact your decision to attend?*

N=1,044



How do students weigh political climate against other factors?

When placed in context with other factors like cost, reputation, and academic quality, we find that the political climate of the institution and state where it's located accounts for about 20% of the college decision. It is a testament to the politicization of U.S. society today that **the political climate of a campus or state accounts for one-fifth of a student's college choice.**

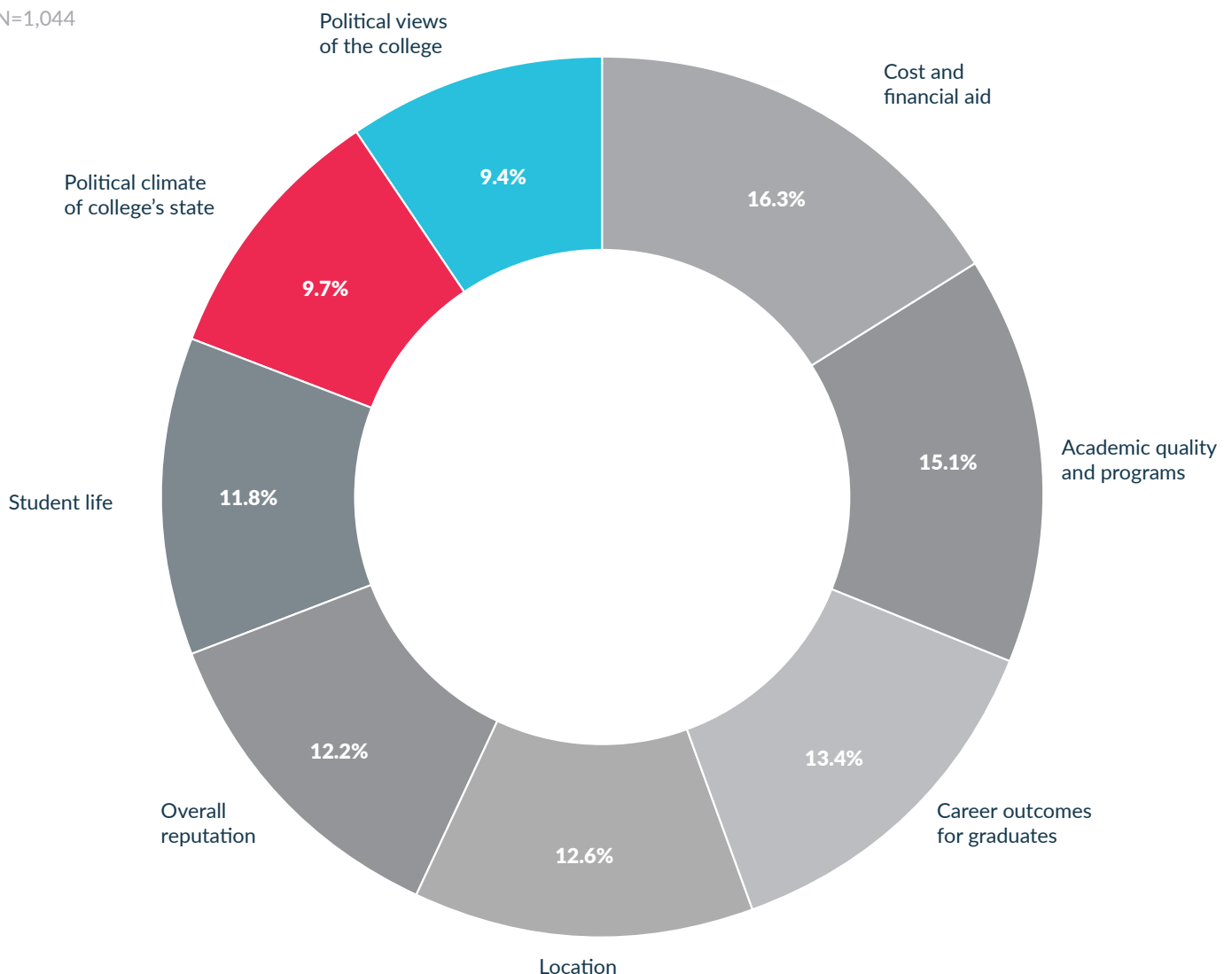
While we see no meaningful differences across political affiliation, household income,

or race and ethnicity, the level of importance students place on political climate increases with their level of political activity.

Taken together, our findings indicate the political climate of an institution and the state where it's located is a consideration for the majority of students; however, for most, it is one among several other equally or more important factors.

Q: How much of your college decision will be based on each of these factors?

N=1,044

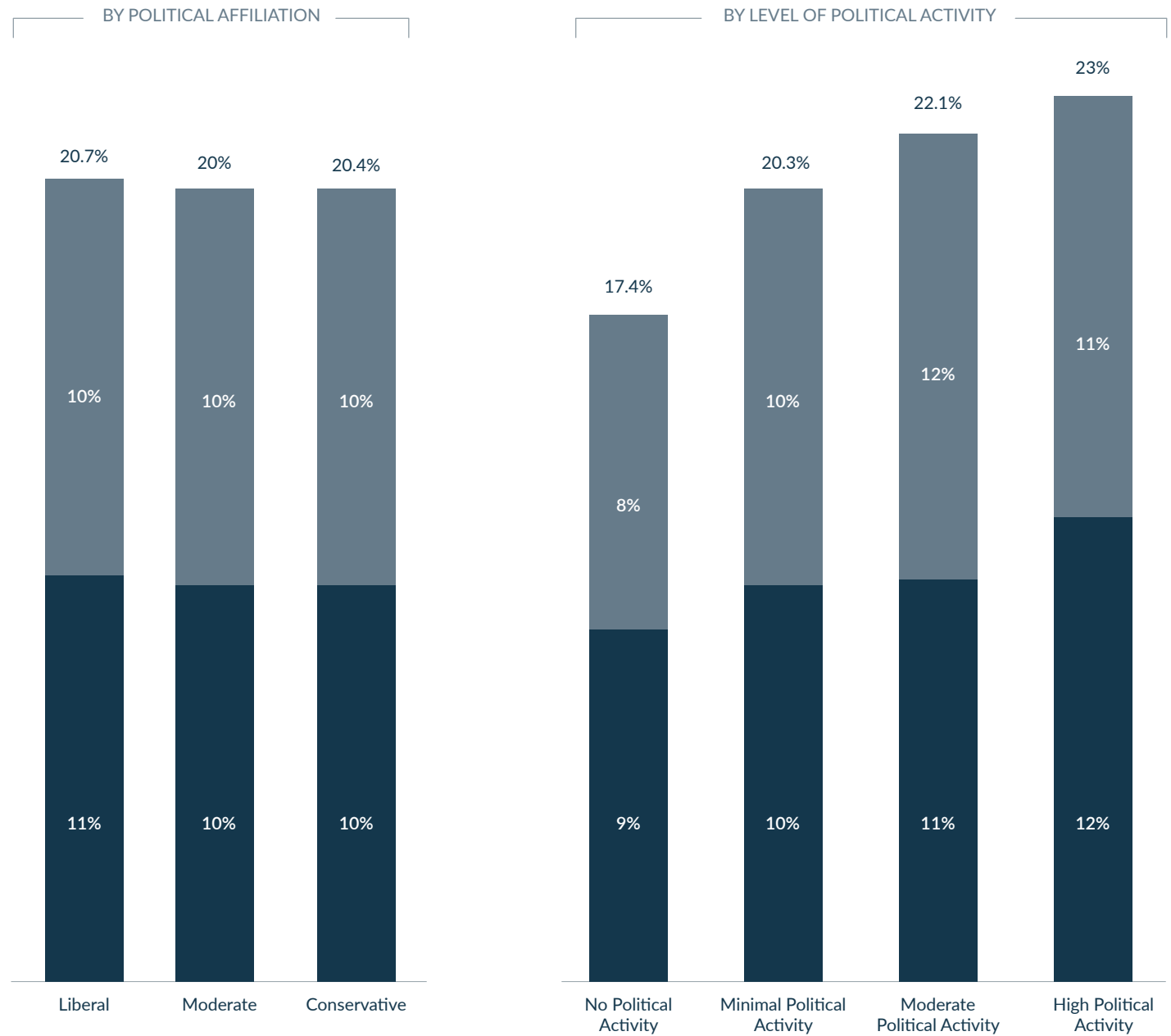


The Importance Students Place on the Political Climate of a College or College's State

The importance students place on politics in their college decisions varies based on students' level of political activity.

N=1,044

Political views of the college are important
 Political views of the college's state are important



Perceived Impact

In this section, we investigate whether students believe politics will influence their college experience, which political issues are of greatest concern, and specific concerns about attending college in politically contrasting states. We also examine the specific states students are most likely to be concerned about and the likelihood that students would leave their home state for a more amenable political climate.

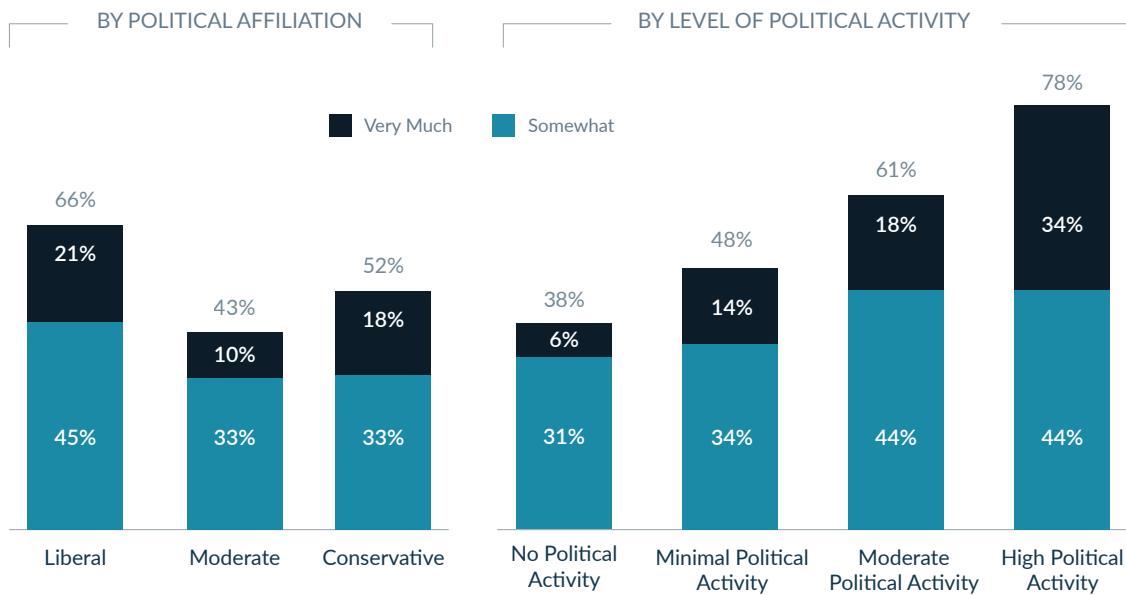
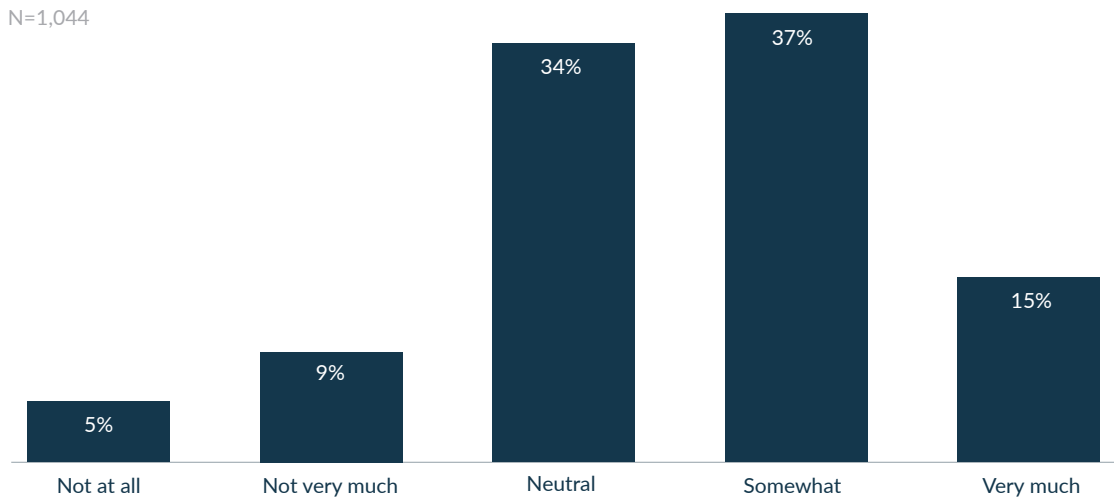
Do students think politics will impact their college experience?

Half of students believe a college's political environment somewhat or very much affects its learning environment. While this belief varies somewhat by students' political affiliation, it is most strongly correlated with students' level of political activity. Here we find that **among highly politically active students, a strong majority (78%) believe the campus's political climate somewhat or very much affects its learning environment**, compared to 38% of students who engaged in no political activity.

It's important to note that we did not ask students if they felt the impact on the learning environment would be positive or negative. Whether students see it as a net positive or net negative may depend on the students' political views and the prevailing political climate on campus. It's also possible that students' concerns may be more personal and small scale. For instance, some students may be concerned that they could be penalized for holding different views than their professors.

Q: How much do you believe the political climate of a college affects its learning environment?

One in two students believes a college's political climate affects its learning environment



Which political issues matter most to students?

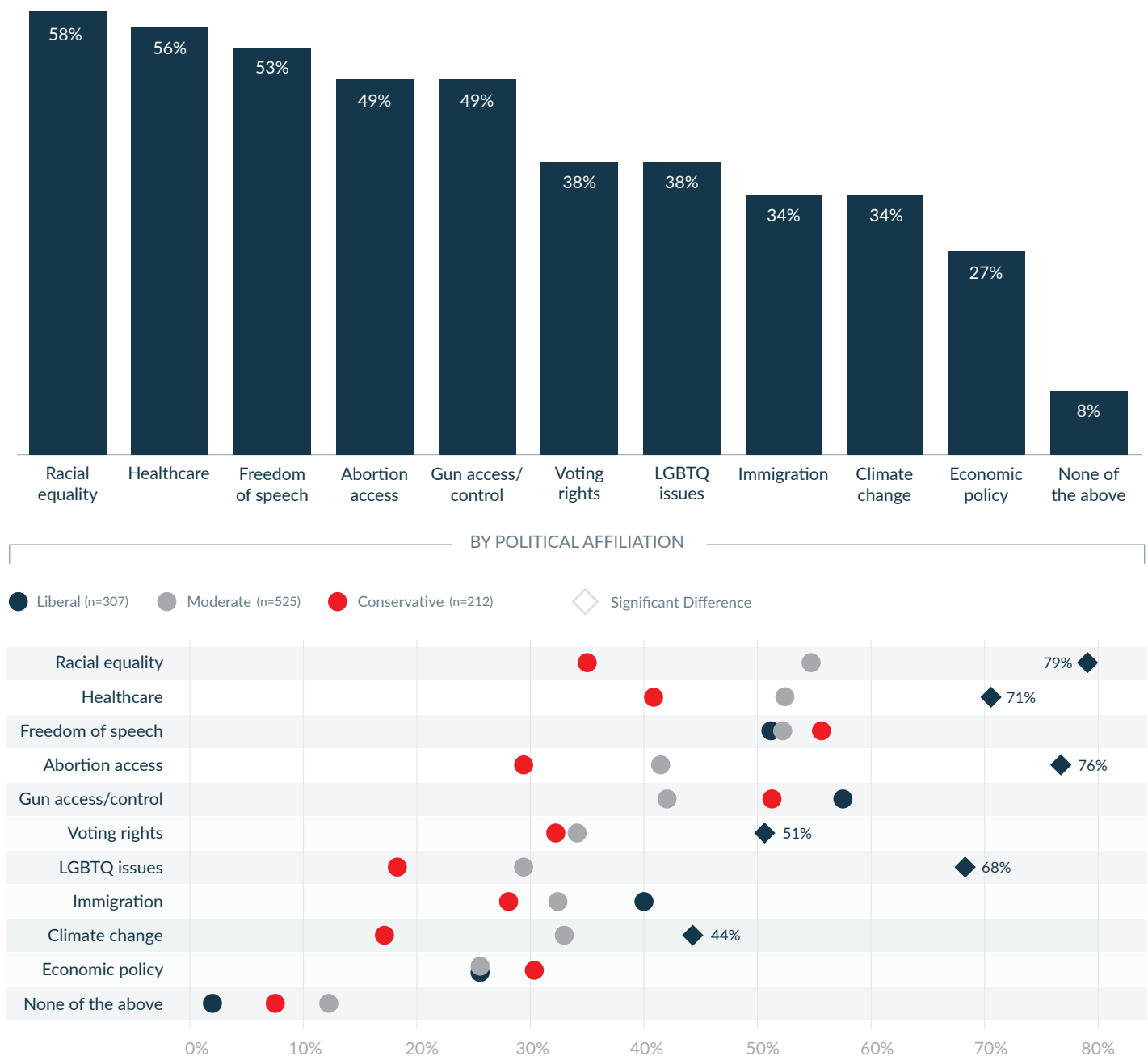
Students' top concerns when evaluating a state's political environment are racial equality, healthcare, freedom of speech, abortion access, and gun control. Liberal-leaning students are significantly more concerned about each of these and other issues than moderate or conservative students. White students are more likely

than other students to place importance on abortion access and LGBTQ issues, while students of color are more likely than white students to place importance on immigration and racial equity. We find that freedom of speech is the only issue recognized by most students, regardless of political affiliation.

Across all students, racial equity, healthcare, freedom of speech, abortion access, and gun control are top concerns

Q: Which political issues are most important to you when it comes to evaluating a state's political climate?

N=1,044



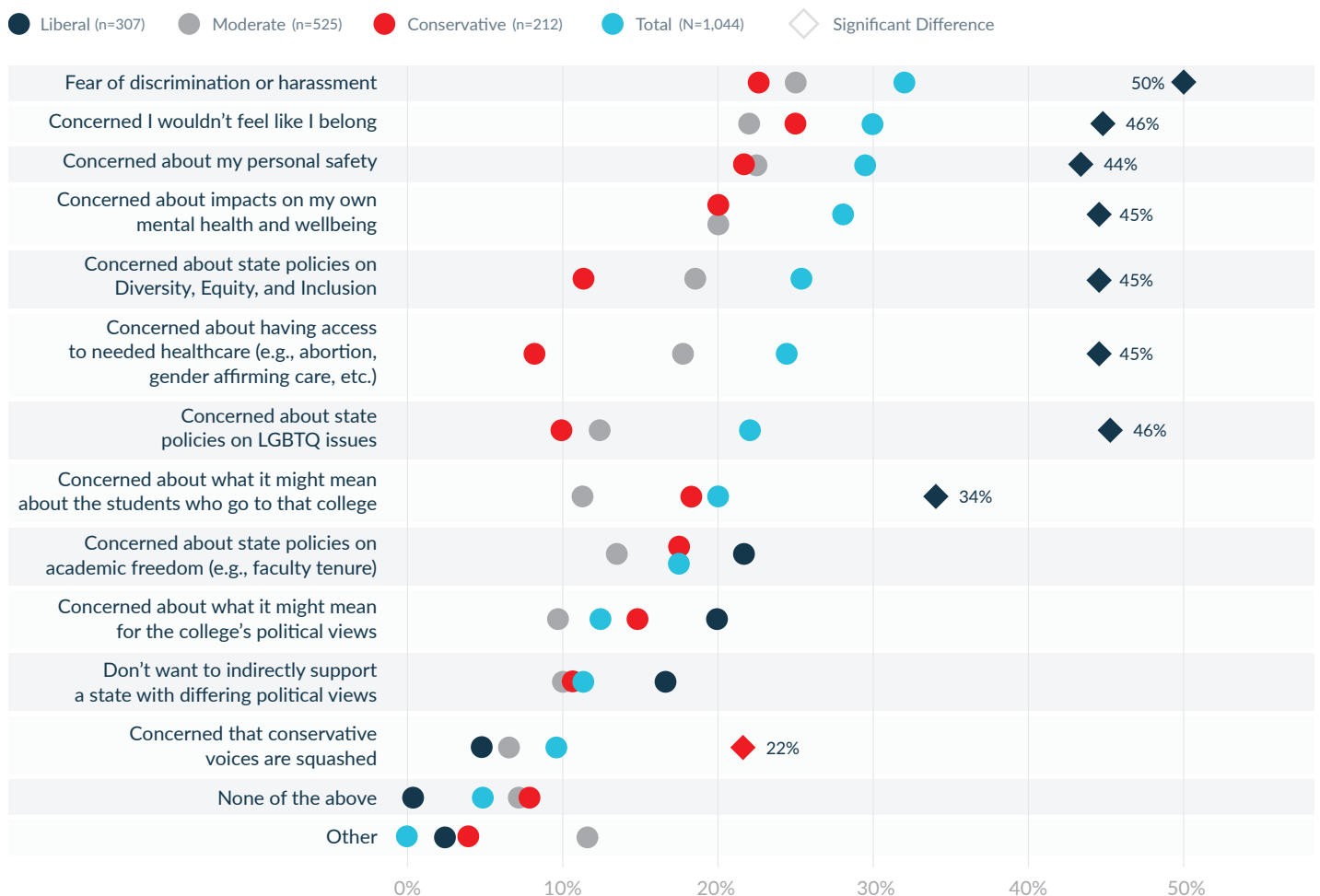
What concerns do students have?

Students considering attending college in a state that differs from their own political views are most concerned about harassment and lack of belonging. As in other parts of our survey, we find significant differences across political affiliations, with liberal students being significantly more concerned about a range of issues, from personal safety to mental health and access to healthcare. We also find differences across race and household income. White students are more likely than students of other races to express concerns about state policies on LGBTQ issues and concerns about what the state's political climate might mean about the students attending college there. In contrast, non-white students were more likely than white students to select "none of the above," suggesting these students have

a lower overall level of concern about going to college in a state with a differing political climate than white students. Additionally, students with household incomes above \$100,000 are more likely than less wealthy peers to express concerns about the college's political views, about what the state's political climate might mean about students attending the college, and about the state's policies towards diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Taken together, these findings suggest that **concerns about attending college in a state that differs from students' political views are more of a concern for wealthy, white, liberal students.** The only single issue where conservative students were more concerned than their liberal peers was a concern that conservative voices might be squashed on campus.

Liberal students are more concerned about harassment, belonging, safety & wellbeing than others

Q: What are your specific concerns about going to college in a state with a political climate different from your views?



Which states are students most concerned about?

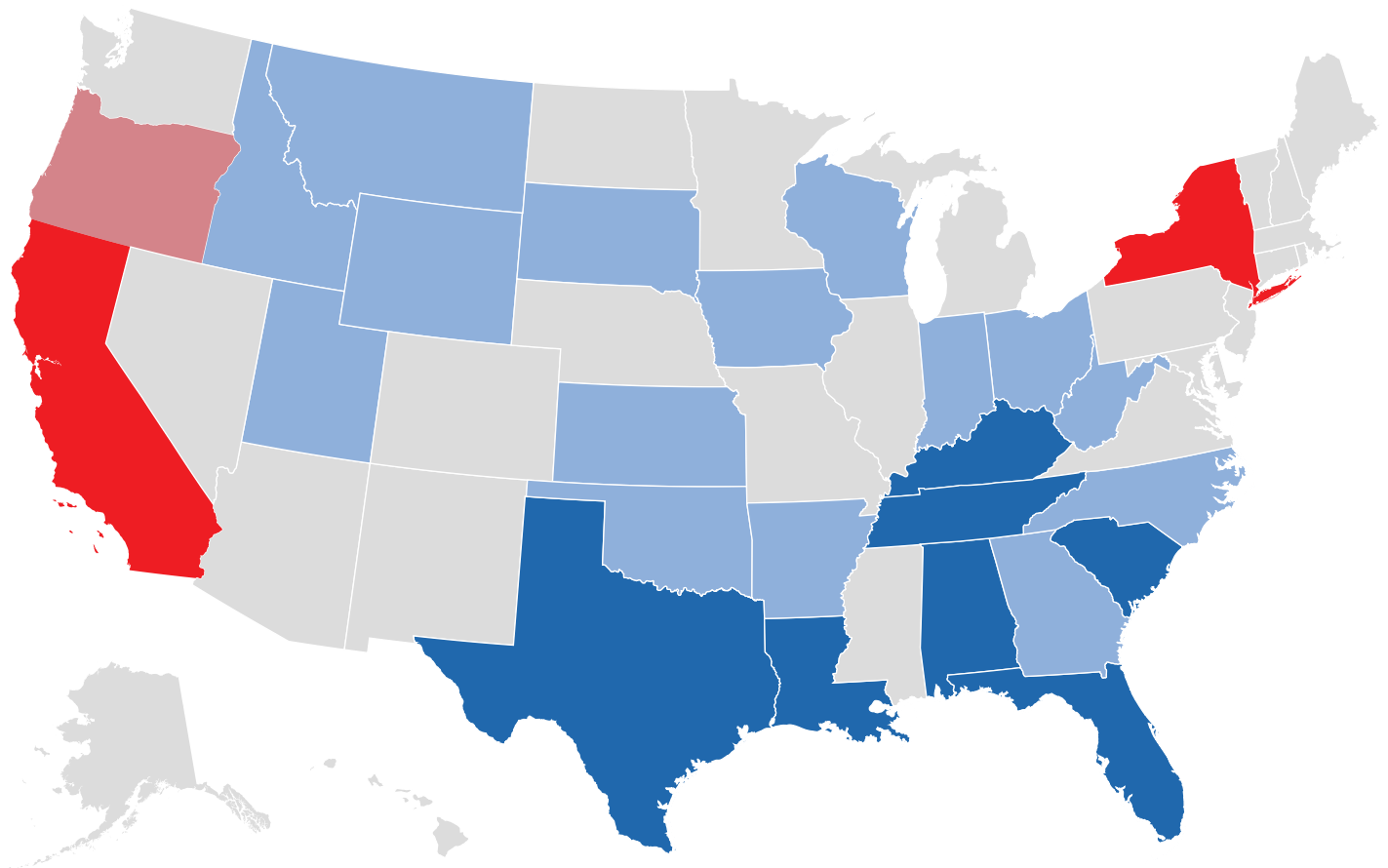
One in four students have concerns about attending college in at least one state based on political concerns. Conservative students are most likely to be concerned about attending college in California (33%) and

New York (25%). In contrast, liberal students are most concerned about attending college in Texas (50%), Alabama (48%), Florida (38%), Louisiana (25%), Kentucky (25%), Tennessee (22%), and South Carolina (20%).

Q: Which states would you have concerns about going to college in because of their political climates?

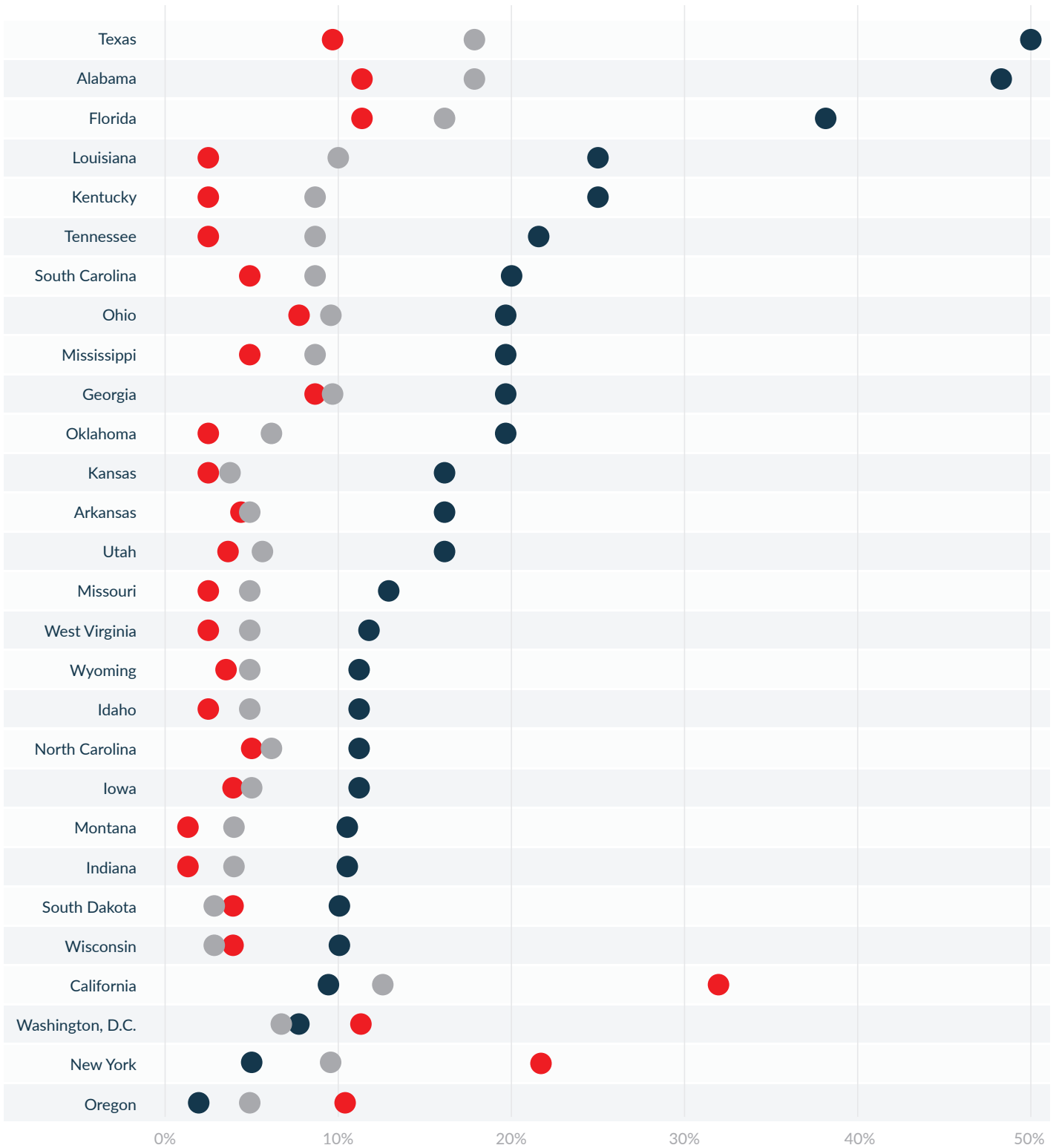
Liberal students have concerns about going to Southern states; conservatives are concerned about going to California and New York

N=1,044 ● Liberal (>20% have concerns) ● Liberal (>10% have concerns) ● Conservative (>20% have concerns) ● Conservative (>10% have concerns)



BY POLITICAL AFFILIATION

● Liberal (n=307) ● Moderate (n=525) ● Conservative (n=212)



Q: Which states would you have concerns about going to college in because of their political climates?

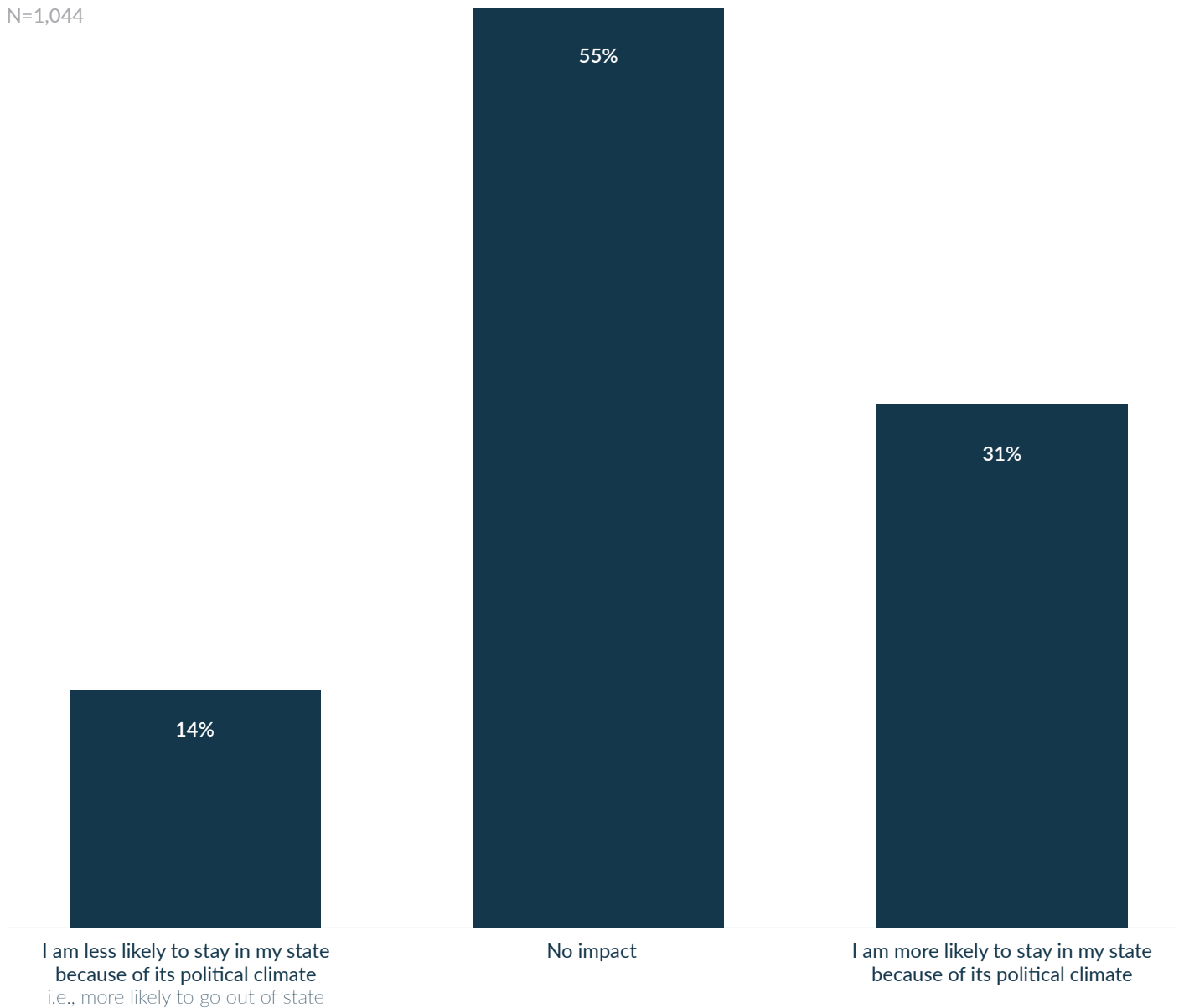
We also find that students are more inclined to stay in their home states based on those states' political climates. The one exception is Arizona, where over twice as many students said they were more likely to leave the state based on its political environment than stay in-state.

One possible explanation for this outlier result is Arizona's relatively small number of colleges and universities combined with its close proximity to liberal-leaning California, providing convenient options for Arizona students seeking other college options.

Q: How has the political climate of your own state impacted where you will go to college?

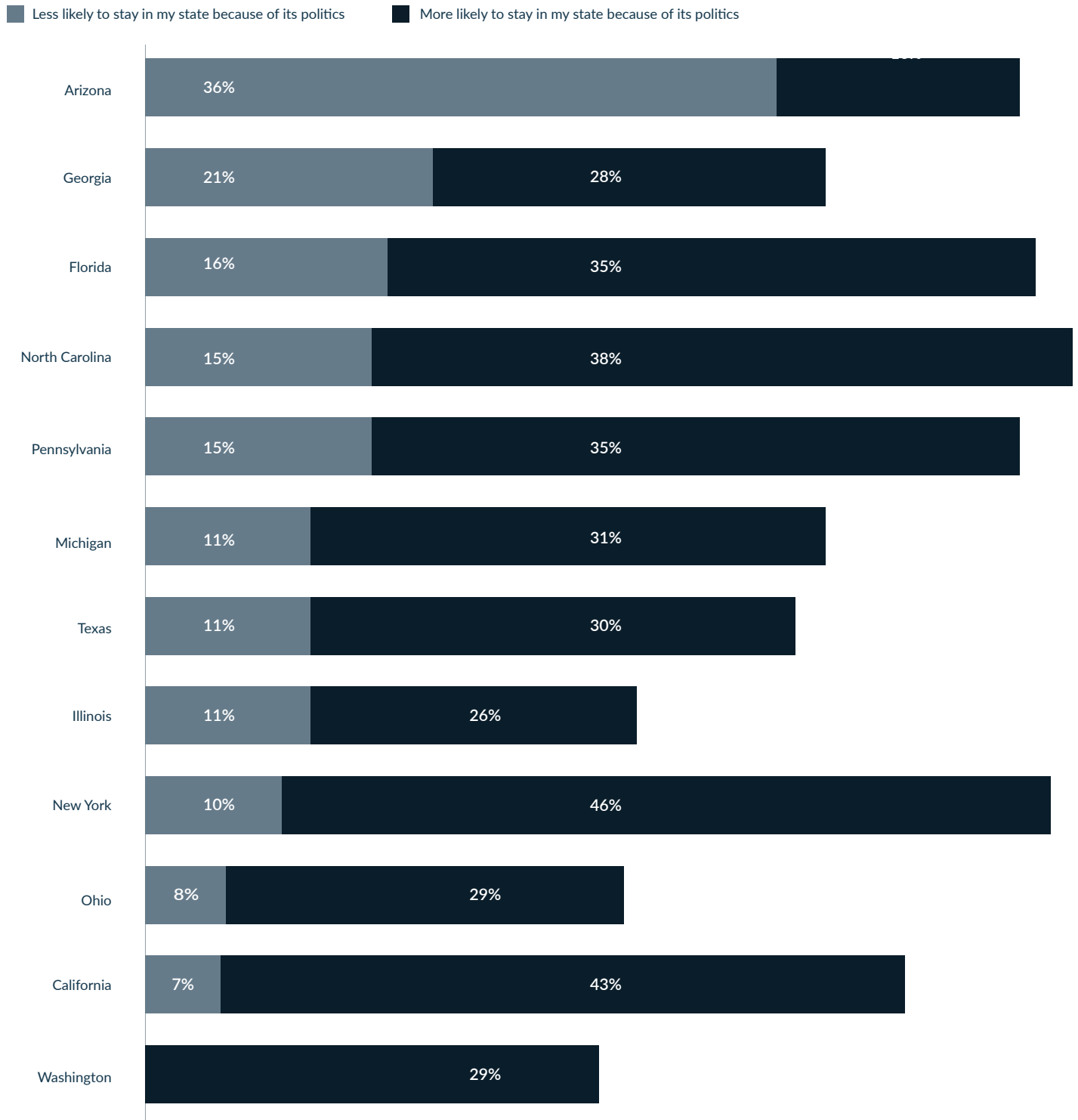
Students are more inclined to stay in their home states than leave based on their states' political climates

N=1,044



N=1,044

BY STATE



Q: How has the political climate of your own state impacted where you will go to college?

Gathering Information About Political Climate

In this section, we ask students about the specific sources of information they use to gauge the political climate of states and individual colleges. We find that students typically rely on word-of-mouth, followed by the school's website and campus visits.

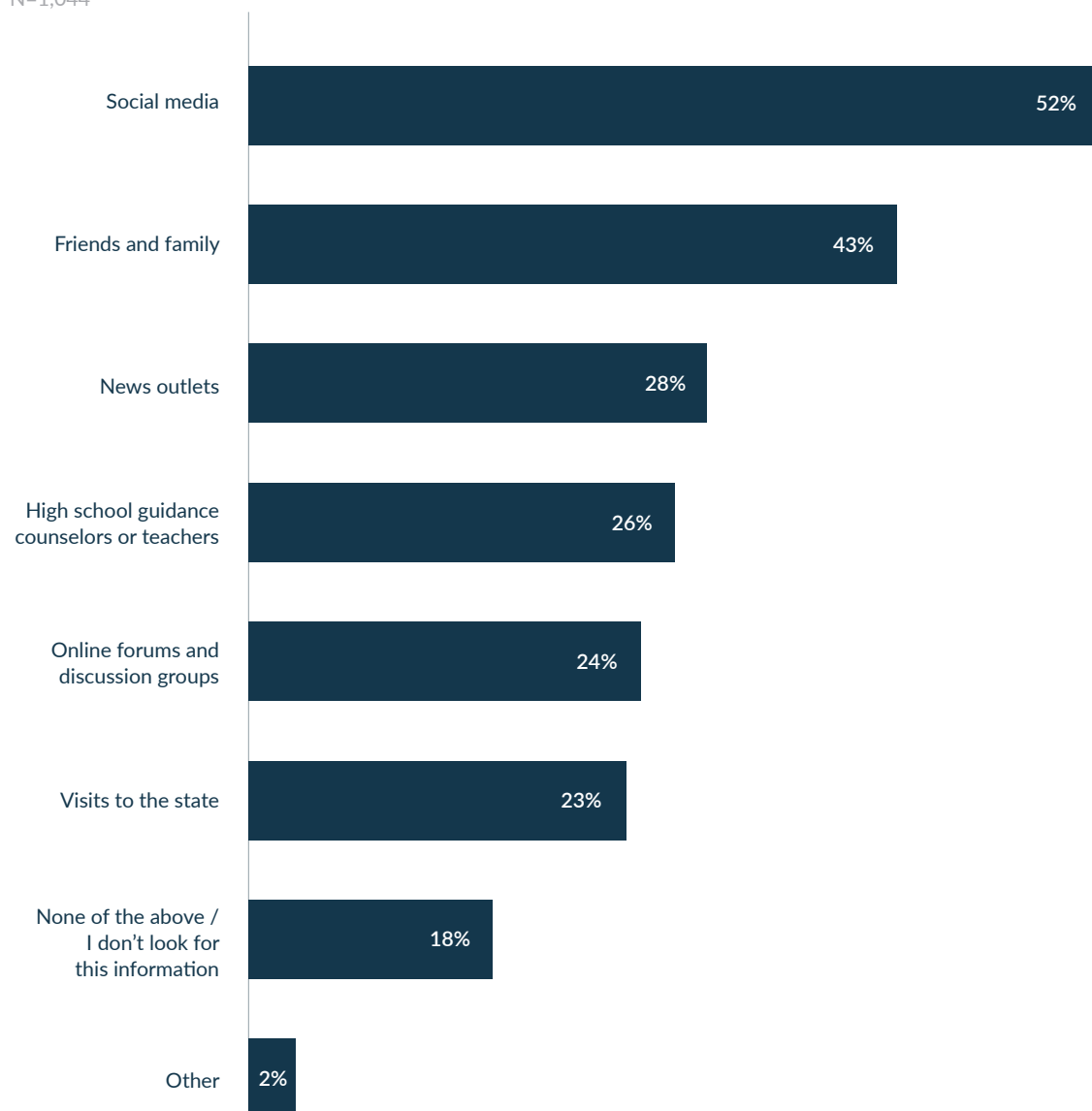
Where do students find information about a state's political climate?

When students evaluate a state's political climate, they rely primarily on social media (52%), followed by friends and family (43%). In comparison, visits to the state in question are cited much less frequently (23%).

This suggests **students' perceptions of a state's political environment are largely driven by the narratives they encounter through social connections and online** rather than firsthand experience.

Q: *Where do you primarily get your information about the political climate of states where colleges are located?*

N=1,044



Where do students find information about a college's political climate?

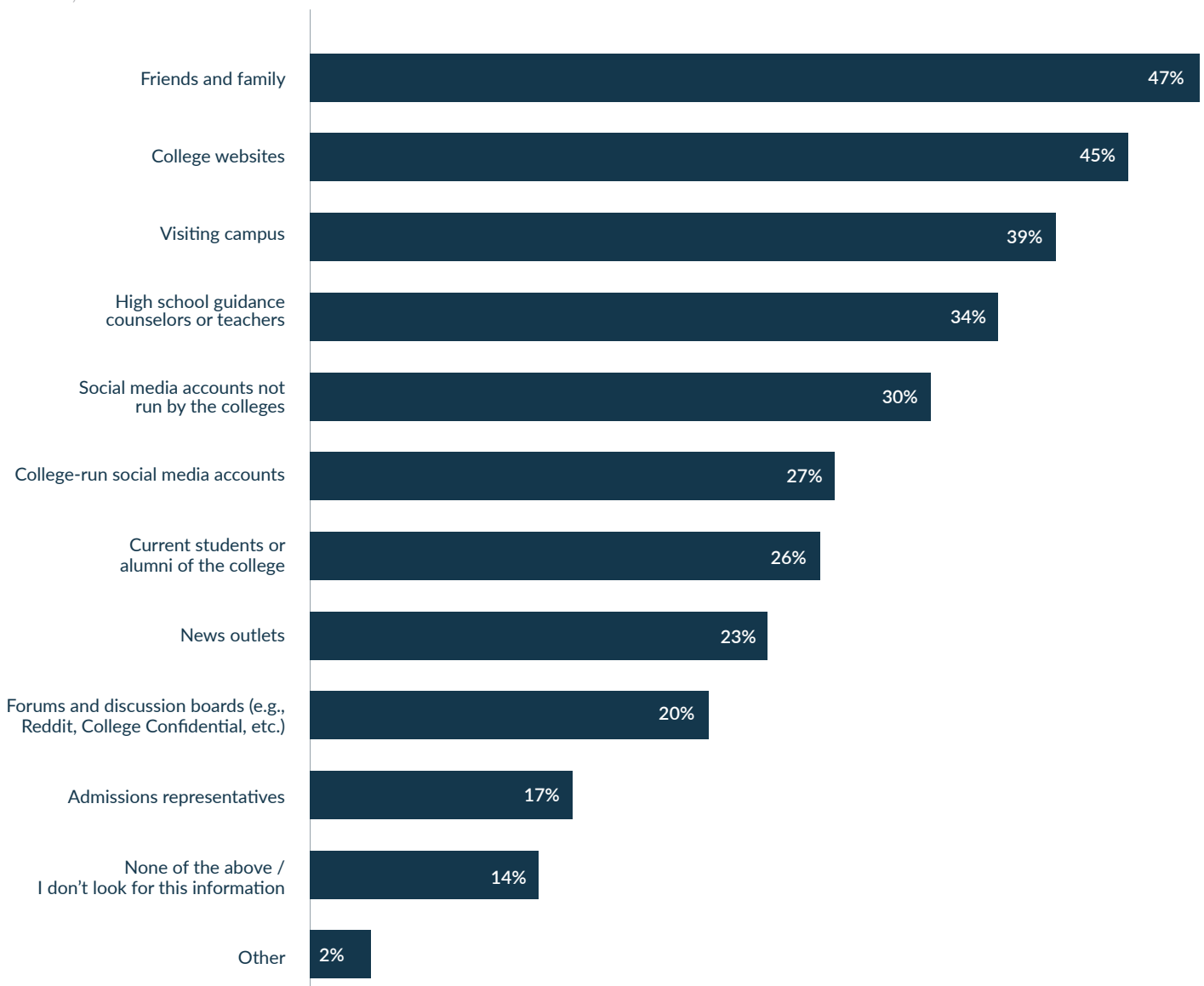
When gauging a college's political environment, students rely heavily on friends and family (47%), closely followed by the college's website (45%). This raises interesting questions given that most institutions do not publish their views on divisive political topics or explicitly address the prevailing political climate on campus. In our view, this suggests

that **when students visit a college's website, they rely on subtle context clues that might reveal the institution's political leanings.**

These may include photos of students, campus events, invited speakers, clubs and organizations, and the presence or absence of degree programs like women's or gender studies.

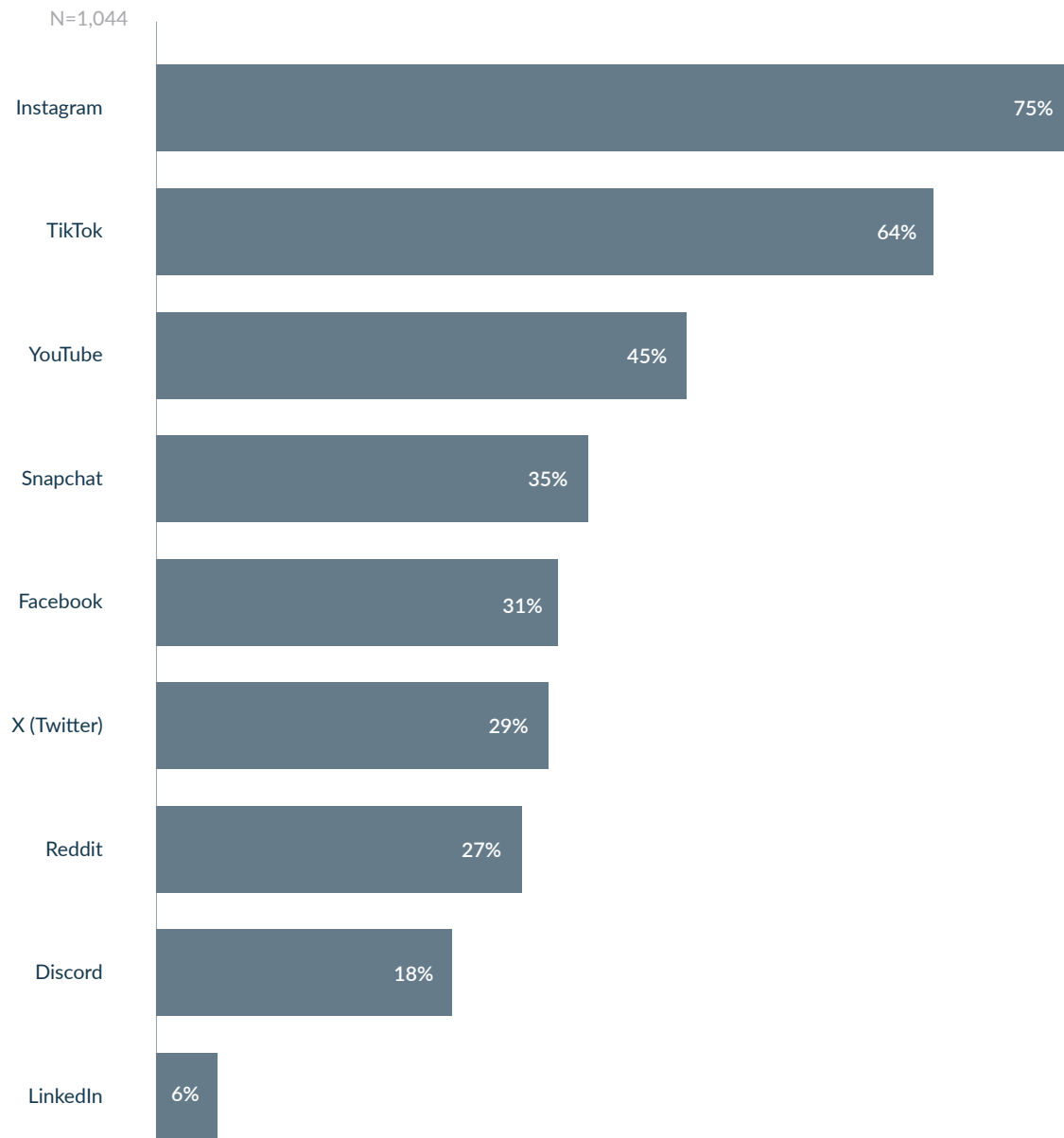
Q: *Where do you primarily get your information regarding the political climate of the colleges you are considering?*

N=1,044



While social media is less frequently used, students gather information from both college-run and other social media accounts. Instagram (75%) and TikTok (64%) are significantly more likely to be used than other channels.

Q: *Specifically, which social media platforms do you use to get information about political climates at colleges?*



Parents' Influence

In this section, we explore the parent-student relationship and the extent to which their political views align. We also examine how much students think their parents' political views will impact where they ultimately decide to attend college—and find a surprising change from past research on the topic.

Do parents and students share political views?

There is a rich body of research examining the parent-child relationship and its role in the formation of political and social beliefs. On the whole, this research suggests that children tend to adopt the political views of their parents⁴. While our results largely align with these findings, we also see an intriguing departure.

Our research finds that 64% of conservative students and 66% of moderate students

report sharing their parents' political affiliations. However, we did not find the same pattern among liberal students. Instead, we find **the majority of liberal students (61%) report having conservative parents**. This finding underscores the complexity of the parent-child relationship and the variety of influences that contribute to the development of teens' political attitudes.

Liberal students are less likely to share their parents' political affiliation than conservative and moderate students

Q: How would you characterize your parents'/guardians' political views?

Liberal (n=307) Moderate (n=525) Conservative (n=212)

	Liberal Students	Moderate Students	Conservative Students
Liberal Parents	28%	17%	13%
Moderate Parents	12%	66%	23%
Conservative Parents	61%	17%	64%

4 Degner, J., & Dalege, J. (2013). The apple does not fall far from the tree, or does it? A meta-analysis of parent-child similarity in intergroup attitudes. *Psychological Bulletin*, (139). <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031436>

How much do parents' political views influence college choice?

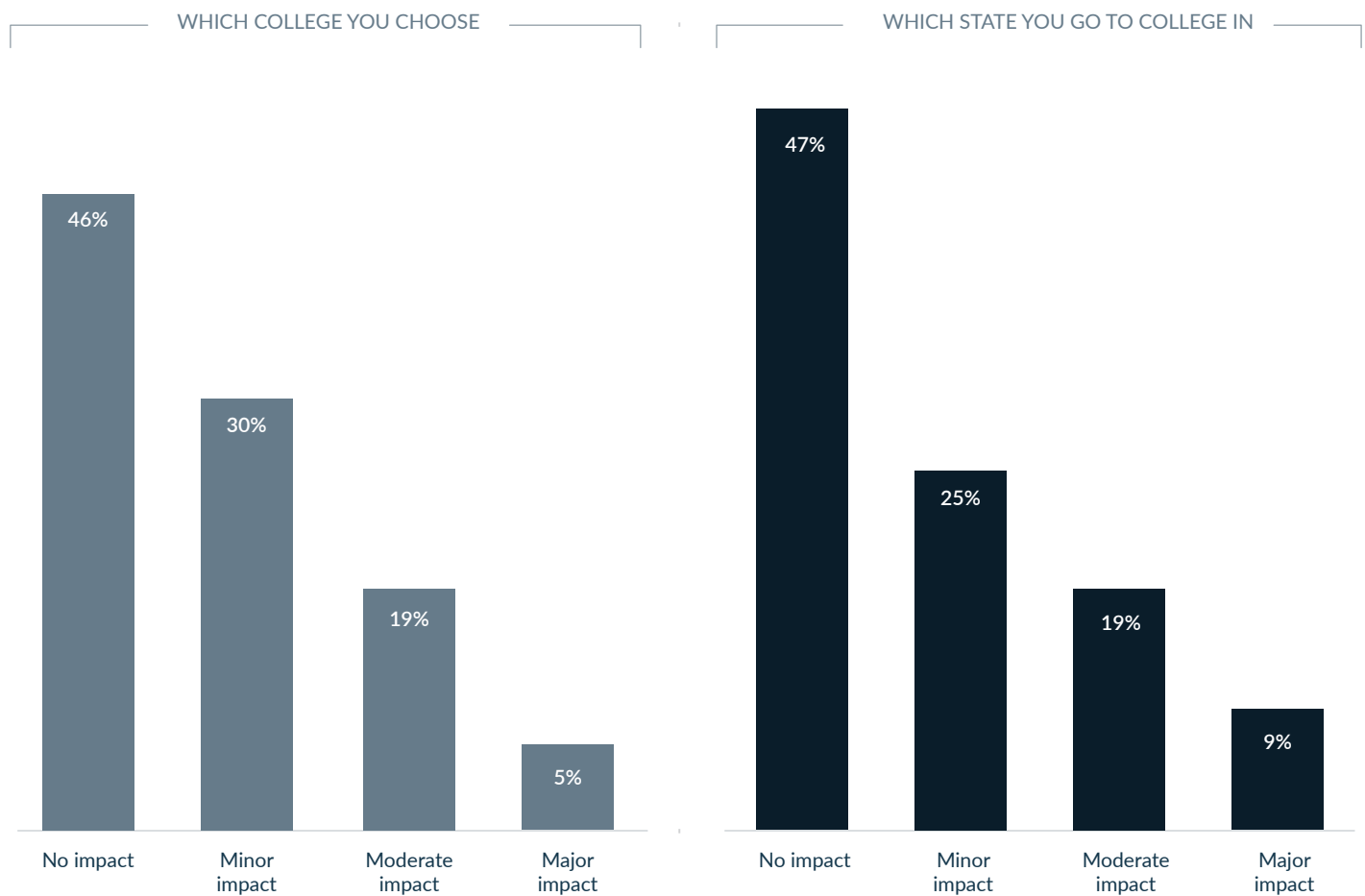
About one in four students report that their parents' political views will have a moderate or high impact on where they choose to enroll. **Parents' political leanings are most influential among conservative students,**

who are about 1.5 times more likely to say their parents' political views will have at least a moderate impact on their college decision.

For one in four students, parents' political persuasions have a moderate or major impact on where they go to college

Q: To what extent do your parents' political views impact the following?

N=1,044



Q: To what extent do your parents' political views impact the following?

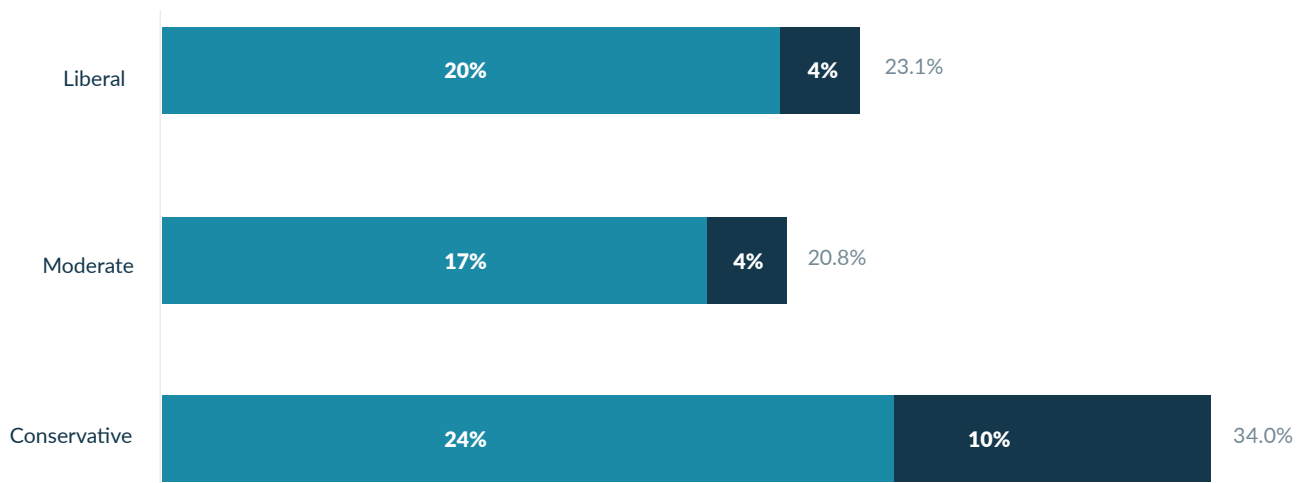
Parents' political leanings are more likely to impact where conservative students go to college

N=1,044

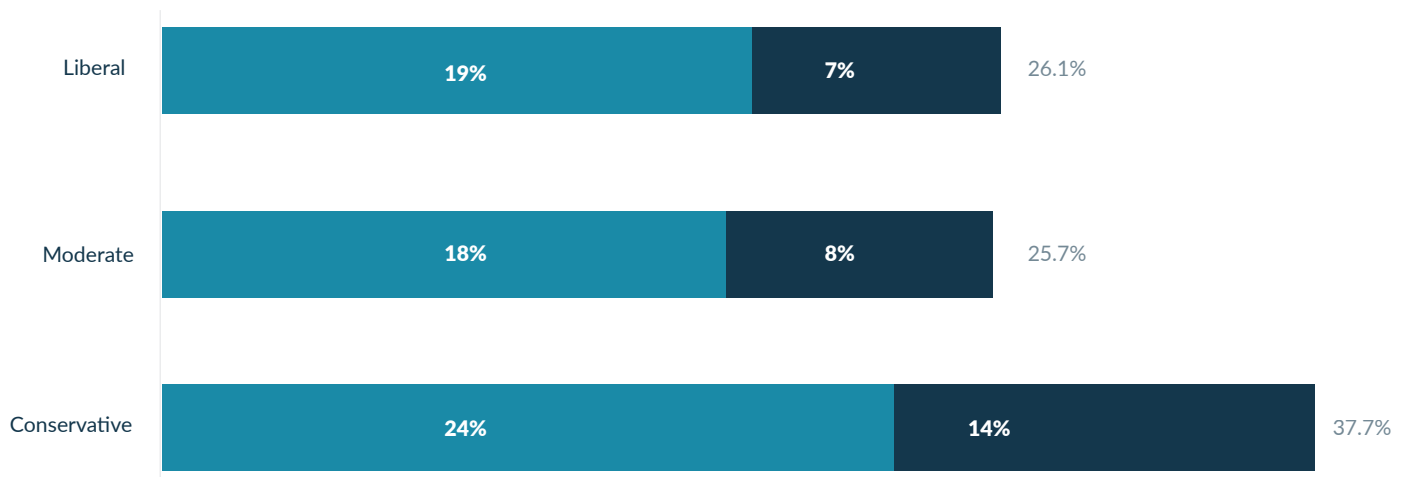
BY POLITICAL AFFILIATION

Moderate Impact Major Impact

WHICH COLLEGE YOU CHOOSE



WHICH STATE YOU GO TO COLLEGE IN



Views on What Colleges Should Do

In this section, we ask students how they feel colleges could reassure them if they are concerned about the political climate of the campus or state. Additionally, we examine students' views on freedom of speech, whether or not colleges should remain neutral on political issues, and the level of importance students place on faculty diversity.

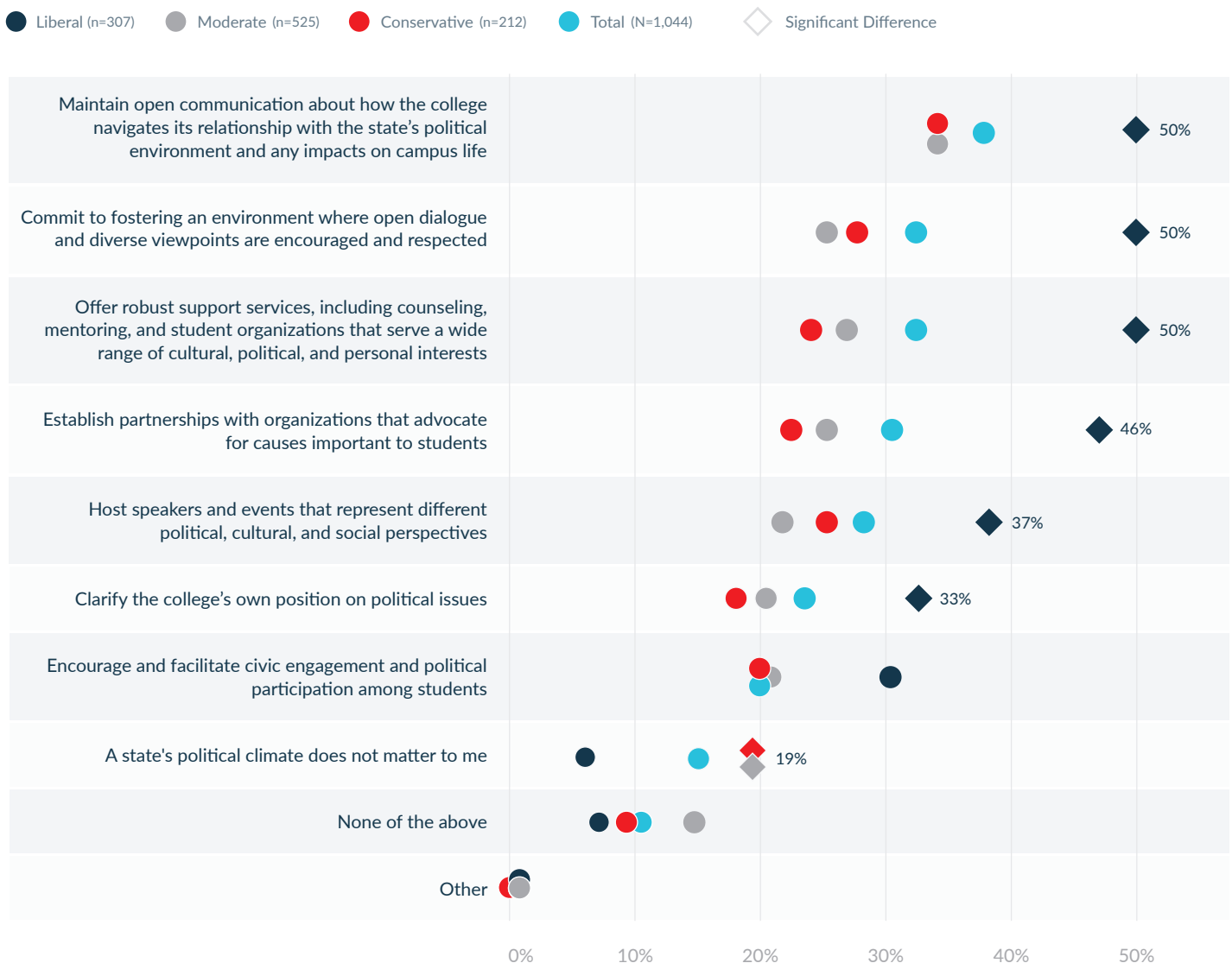
What do students say colleges can do to reassure apprehensive students?

We asked students what colleges could do to encourage them to consider attending, even if the college is located in a state with a political climate that differs from their own views. We find liberal and politically active students want colleges to take more actions than their conservative, moderate, or less politically active peers. In some cases, students' suggestions—like fostering an environment of open dialogue or offering robust support services—are well-aligned with what many institutions are already

working to accomplish. In other cases, they are not. For instance, the most common request from students was for institutions to maintain open communication about how the college is navigating its relationship with the state. Students also expressed a desire for schools to clarify their position on political issues. Given the highly charged political environment college leaders find themselves in, this is likely the last thing most institutions would do if they could avoid it.

Liberal students are more likely to want colleges to take a variety of actions than their moderate or conservative peers

Q: What actions could a college take to encourage you to consider attending, even if it is located in a state with a political climate that differs from your own views?



Do students support free speech on campus?

Our research shows that **a strong majority of students (77%) believe it's important for all voices to be heard** even if they offend others. We find this view holds steady across political affiliations and levels of political activity.

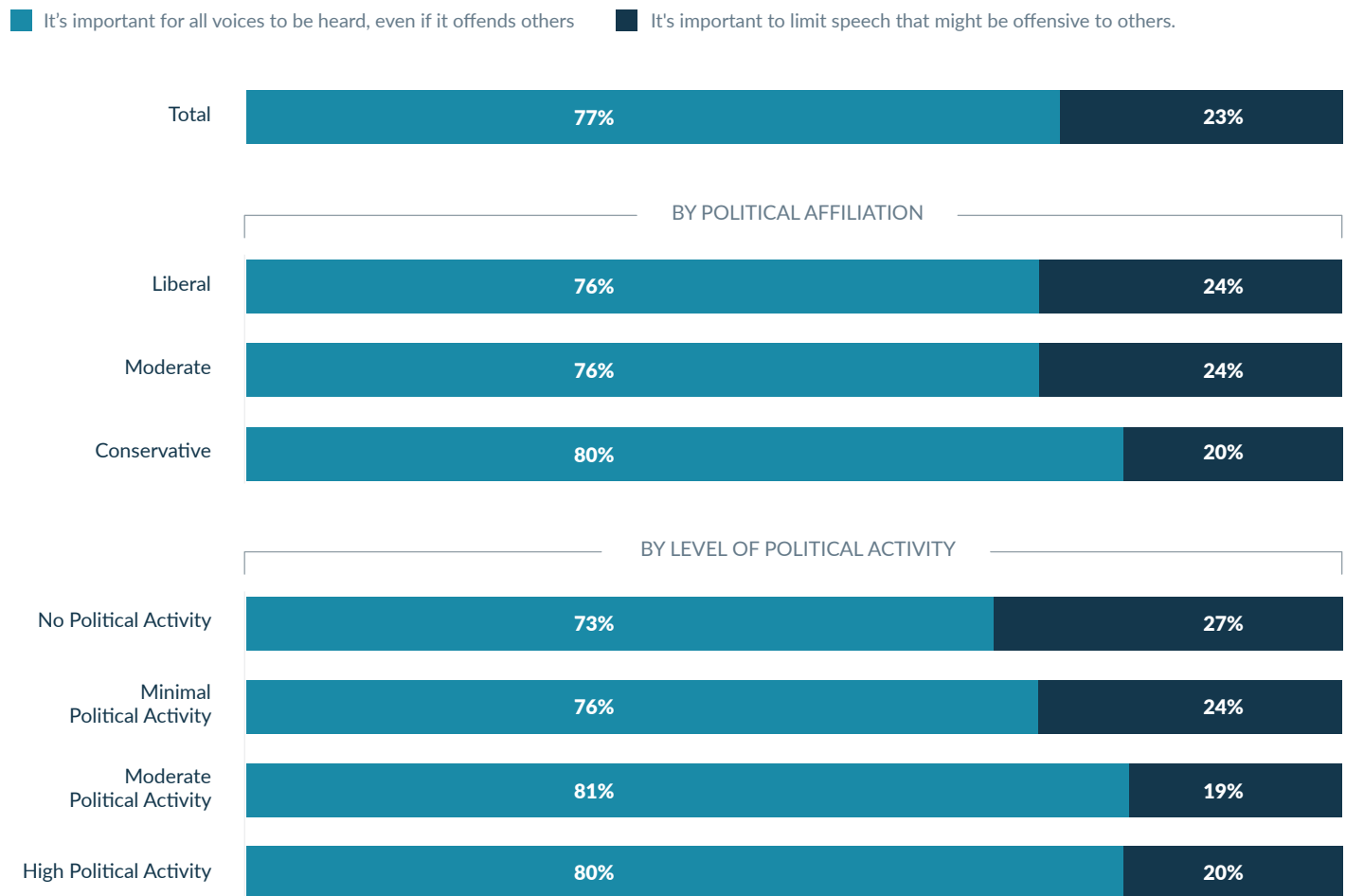
While these findings may be encouraging to those who promote free speech on campus, college staff and faculty everywhere are keenly aware of the complexity and nuance surrounding this issue. For instance, there's evidence that today's students are more likely to support censoring particular kinds of

speech more than previous generations⁵ and that liberal students are especially selective in the kinds of speakers they would allow on campus⁶. However, our research also shows liberal students are the most likely to want colleges to foster an environment of open dialogue where diverse viewpoints are encouraged and respected. Taken together, these findings underscore the complexity of free speech on campus and the vital role of institutions in cultivating a culture of productive civil dialogue among today's young people.

Regardless of political leaning or political activity, most students agree it's important for colleges to foster free speech

Q: Which of the following statements do you agree with more?

N=1,044



5 McMurtrie, B. (2017, September 17). A Free-Speech Divide. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved May 1, 2024, from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-free-speech-divide>

6 (2024). 2024 College Free Speech Rankings. College Pulse / FIRE. Retrieved May 1, 2024, from <https://speech.collegepulse.com/>

Do students want colleges to remain neutral on political issues?

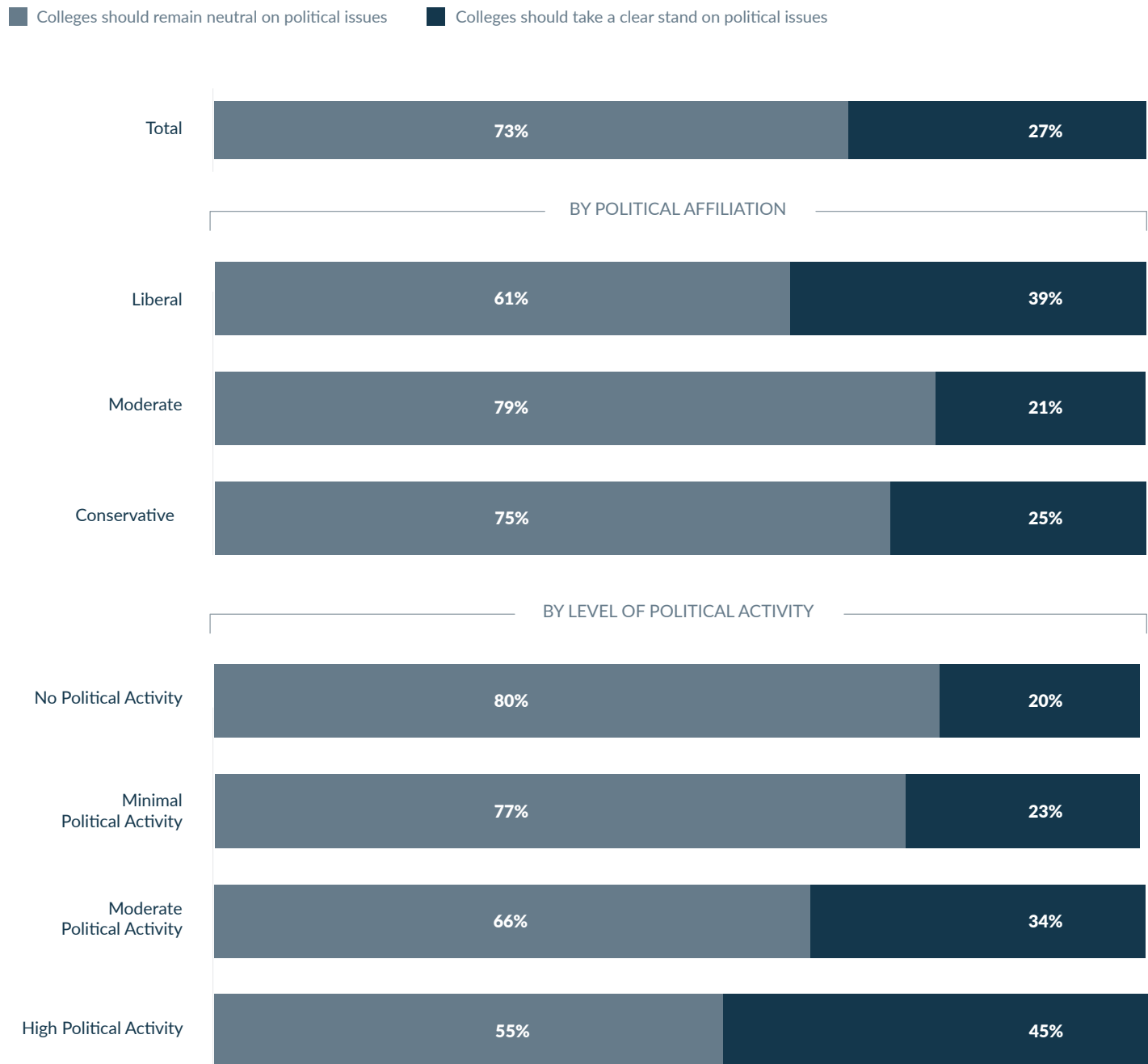
While a number of prominent institutions have taken public stands on divisive political issues, we find **the majority of students (73%) believe colleges should remain neutral on political issues.** As in other parts of our

survey, we find differences across political affiliation and level of activity, with liberal students and politically active students more likely to want colleges to take a stand on political issues than other groups.

Liberal students and politically active students are more likely to want colleges to take a stand

Q: Which of the following statements do you agree with more?

N=1,044

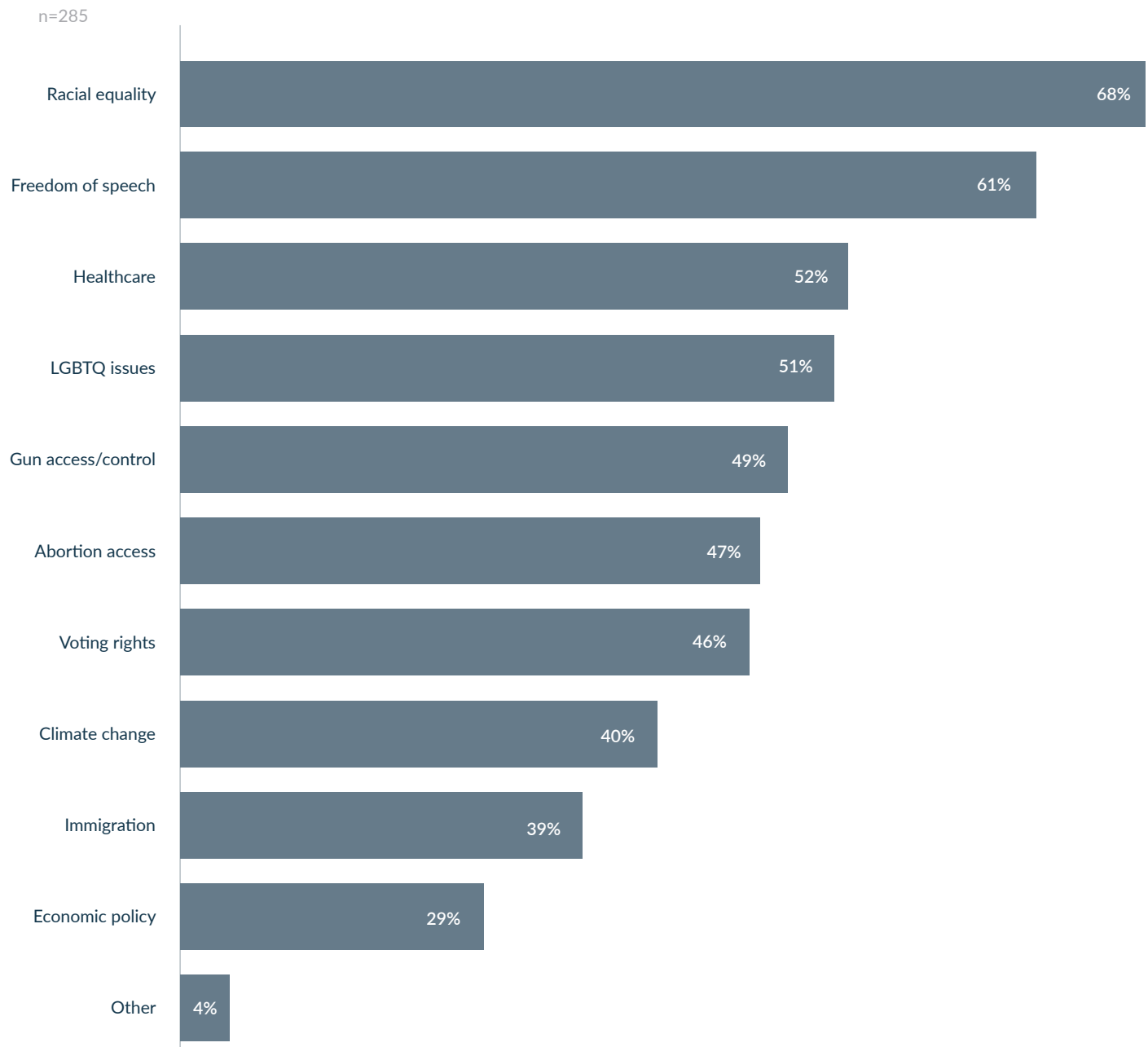


What issues do students want colleges to take a stand on?

Students who believe colleges should take a public stance on political issues are most passionate about racial equality (68%) and freedom of speech (61%). Additionally, liberal students are significantly more likely than moderate and conservative students to want

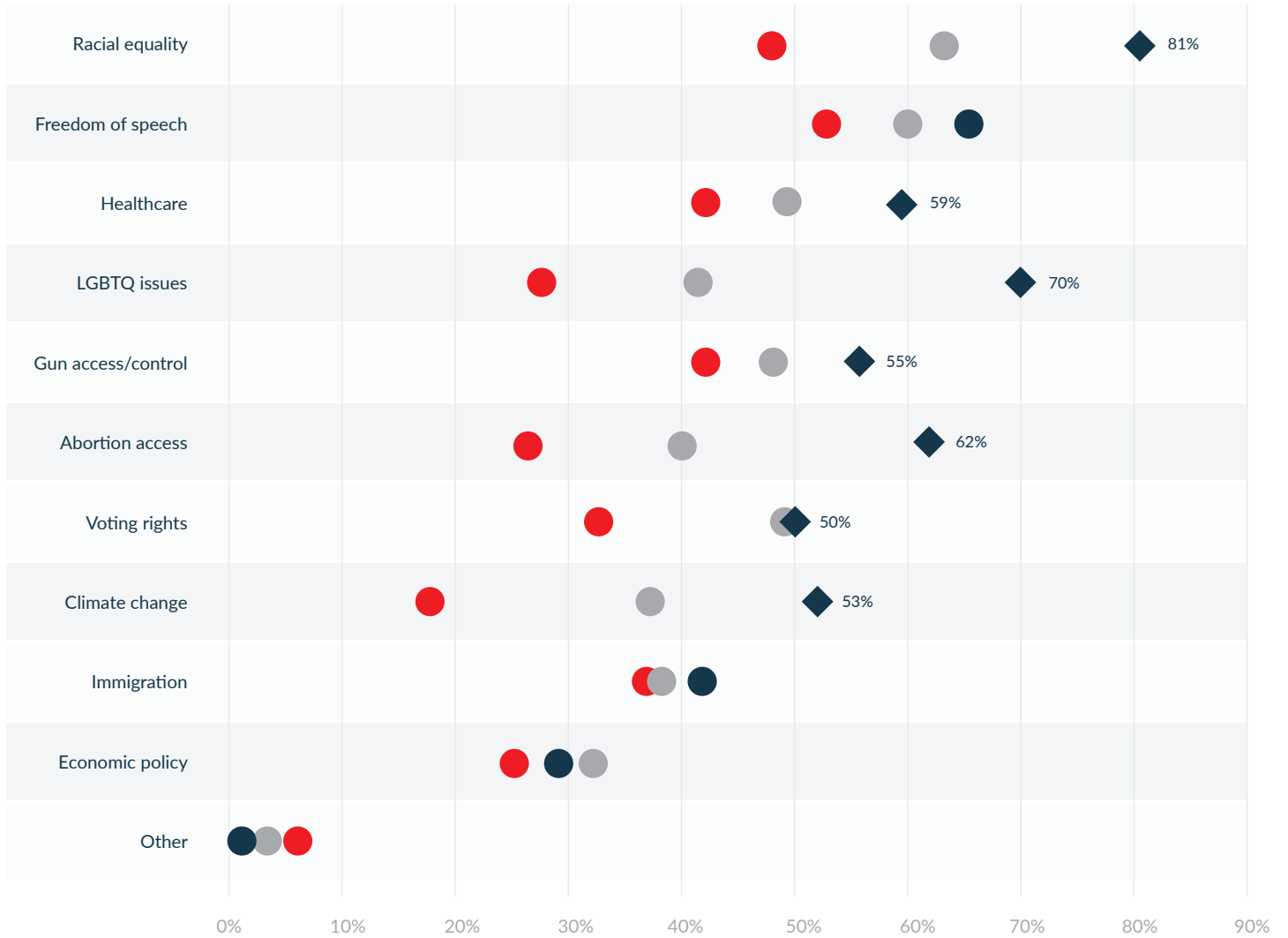
colleges to take a stand on a wide range of issues. Notably, we find that **freedom of speech is the single issue that a majority of students support regardless of political affiliation.**

Q: Which political issues are most important for a college to take a stand on?



BY POLITICAL AFFILIATION

● Liberal (n=120) ● Moderate (n=112) ● Conservative (n=53) ◇ Significant Difference



Q: Which political issues are most important for a college to take a stand on?

How important is political diversity among faculty?

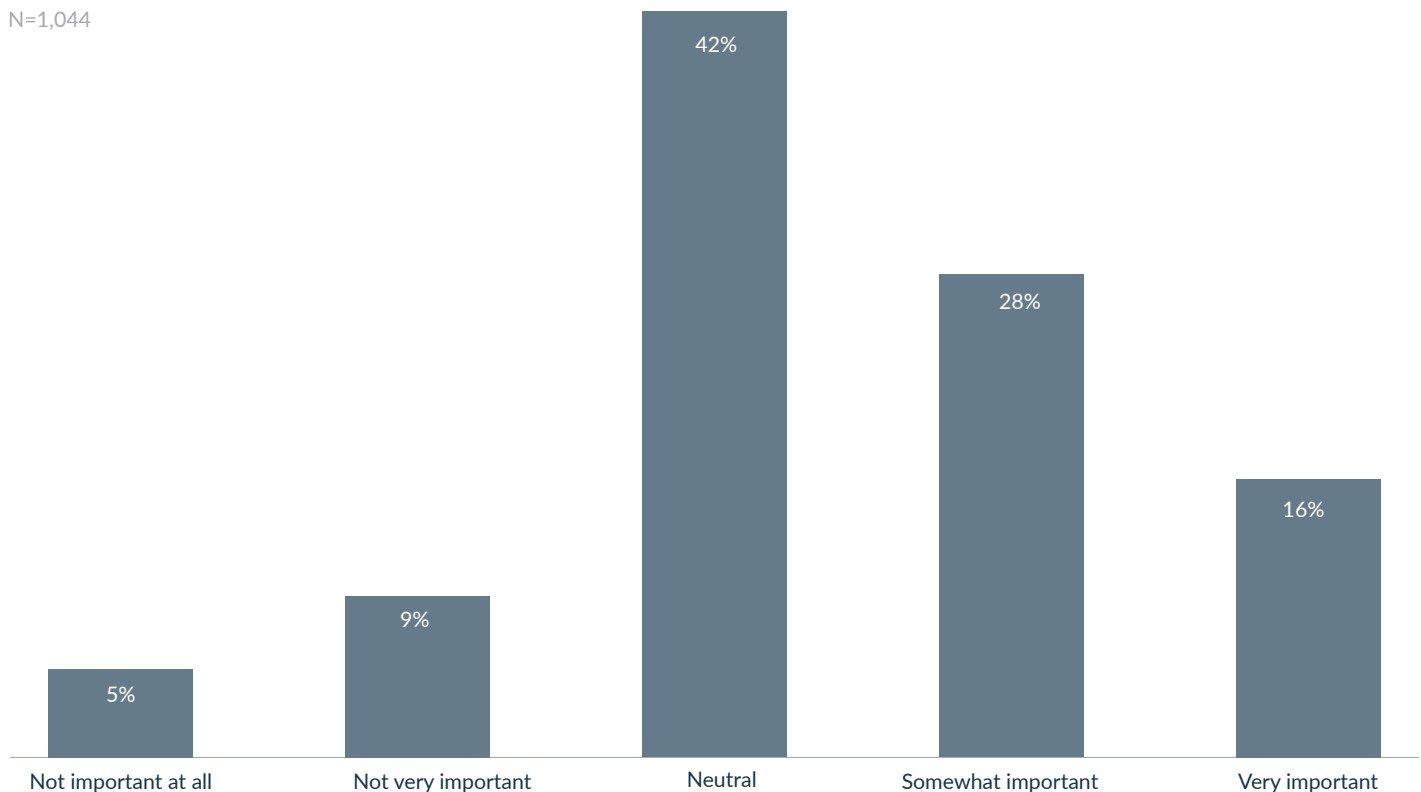
A plurality of students are neutral on the importance of political diversity among college faculty. Again, we find significant differences based on political affiliation and level of political activity, with strong majorities of liberal and highly politically active students indicating faculty diversity is somewhat or very important. Similar to our discussion of free speech, we're cautious

about drawing conclusions based on these findings. For instance, while it's possible liberal-leaning students want a greater number of conservative voices on campus, it may also be the case that liberal students want a more diverse range of progressive voices on campus, or some combination of the two.

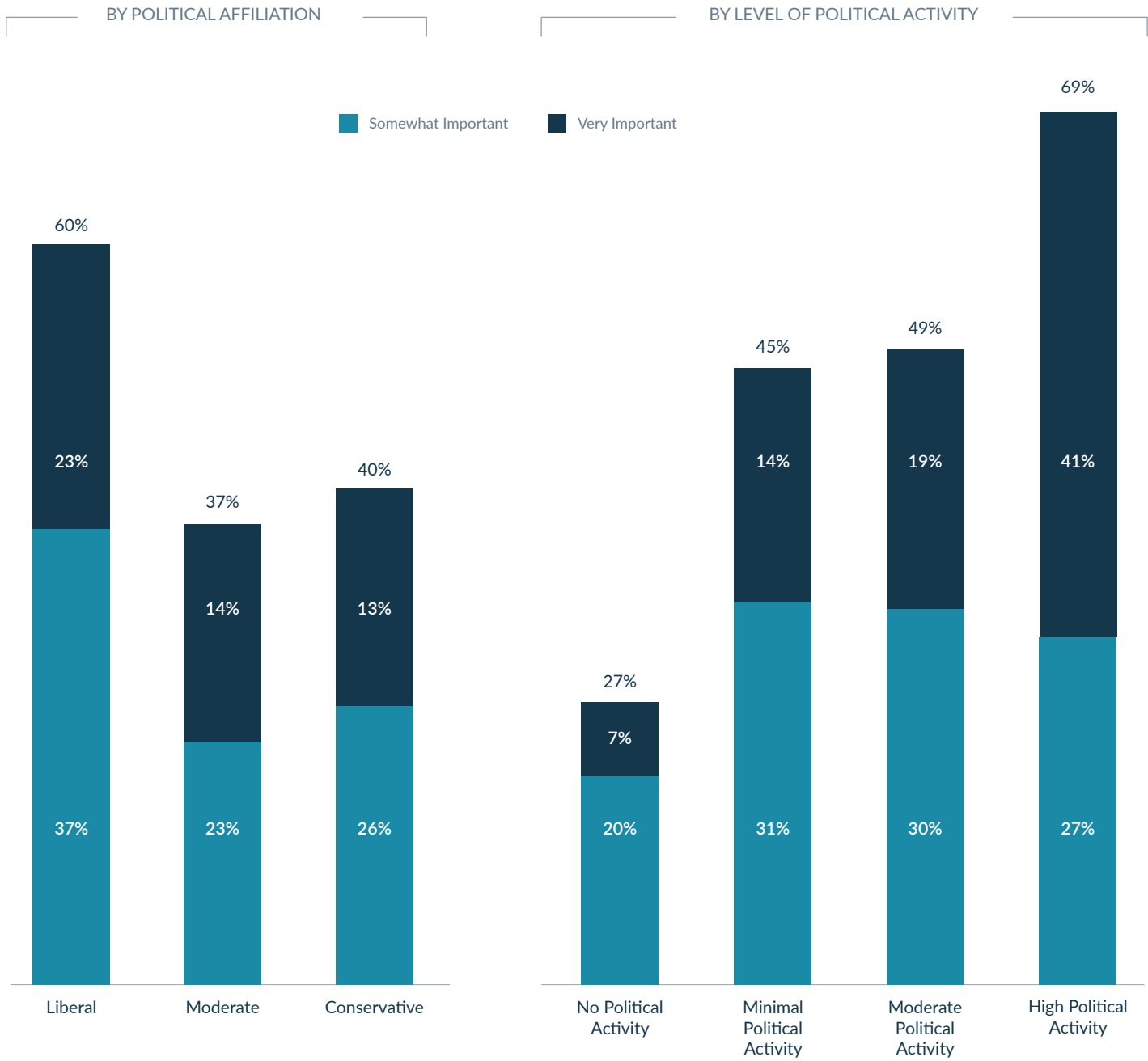
Q: How important is it for you that there is political diversity among a college's faculty?

Less than half of students believe it is important that a college's faculty has diverse political views

N=1,044



N=1,044



Q: How important is it for you that there is political diversity among a college's faculty?

Applying These Findings

We hope this report has provided new insights on how future students perceive the political climate of both colleges and states. Based on these findings, we have compiled four ways you can apply these findings to your own institution to inform, encourage, and lead prospective students as they make their college decisions.

1 Recognize the Importance of Political Climate

Our research shows that the overwhelming majority of students seek out information that will help them gauge the political environment of colleges themselves and the states where they're located. While individual institutions can do little to change perceptions of a state or region, our research suggests it's prudent for admissions teams to be sensitive to students' concerns. Using this research, admissions counselors may be able to anticipate many of the specific questions and concerns prospective students may have surrounding political climate.

2 Lead with Belonging

When it comes to state and campus political climates, one of students' most common concerns is the fear of feeling like they won't belong. While the precise definition of belonging and the factors that influence it are the subject of ongoing research and debate, studies show a strong connection between measures of belonging and a host of outcomes like persistence, academic achievement, and even well-being. We see an interesting overlap between our findings and the strategies current research suggests institutions could adopt to cultivate greater belonging. These include:

Support Services and Student Organizations

Robust support services and a diverse range of student organizations emerged as an important factor in our survey. This aligns with research on belonging that finds these structures help students form meaningful connections with peers who share similar interests and backgrounds.

Localize to Your Campus

No institution can single-handedly change the political climate of its state, nor can it easily sway perception of it. But when we tease out students' concerns about going to college in a state with a political climate that differs from their own beliefs, we find students are most worried about physical safety, harassment, and feeling like they're not welcome. This is where colleges can take action. Clearly declaring—and demonstrating—a commitment to supporting students and fostering productive discussions tells prospective students what the institution stands for. In so doing, colleges communicate to students that they belong on campus, regardless of what may be happening outside of it.

Inclusive and Welcoming Campus Climate

The need for a welcoming and inclusive campus environment was a prominent theme in our survey and is strongly supported by research. Efforts to cultivate an inclusive climate help ensure that students feel valued and respected regardless of their identities or political beliefs.

Fostering an Environment of Open Dialogue and Diverse Viewpoints

Both our survey results and current research underscore the importance of an institutional culture that promotes open dialogue and respects diverse viewpoints. Implementing policies and programs that encourage respectful discussion and exposure to a variety of perspectives not only supports engagement but also deepens students' sense of inclusion and connection to the campus community.

3 Evaluate Your Context Clues

When investigating the political climate of an institution, the website is among the most popular resources students use, second only to friends and family. Given that institutions rarely, if ever, publish statements about the prevailing political climate on campus or their stance on controversial issues, this suggests students base their impression largely a variety of context clues, like the number and type of clubs and interest groups on campus, presence or absence of specific degree programs like gender studies, support services, photos and videos across the website, and the kinds of speakers and events on campus.

Institutions would be well-served to evaluate the impressions these elements might intentionally or unintentionally convey to prospective students. For instance, does the website show how students from a wide range of backgrounds and lived experiences succeed at the institution? What does it convey about the culture and norms around civil discourse on campus or the kinds of views students are likely to encounter on campus?

4 Don't Forget About Your Current Students

While this research focused on the viewpoints of prospective students, institutions must also consider the perspectives of their current students in determining how to act in a highly charged political environment. As current students already have a stake in your institution, it is important, at a minimum, to understand their perspectives on current-day political issues, their concerns, and their hopes for how the institution responds.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jarrett Smith

SVP OF STRATEGY, ECHO DELTA

Jarrett is Echo Delta's Senior Vice President of Strategy and a partner at the firm. A cross-disciplinary marketer with expertise in research, web design, media, and analytics, Jarrett works to continually advance Echo Delta's offerings to ensure they deliver exceptional value and exceed clients' expectations. Jarrett is also the host of Echo Delta's popular Higher Ed Marketing Lab Podcast, where he engages with some of the brightest minds in higher ed and the broader world of marketing.

Grant De Roo

FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL, ADV MARKET RESEARCH

As ADV's Founder and Principal, Grant leads all research ADV conducts for colleges and universities around the nation. Prior to founding ADV, Grant was the research director at a large national agency and formerly served as the Associate Director of Admissions at Elon University where he learned how to collect, analyze, and act on data in recruitment and enrollment. Today, Grant's work includes extensive research on institutional brand perception, program demand, enrollment modeling, program modality, pricing and marketability, and competitive analysis. Grant is a frequent presenter at industry conferences and holds an MBA in Data Analytics from Elon University.

ABOUT THE SPONSORS



Echo Delta helps colleges and universities drive enrollment, increase yield, and attract right-fit students through full-funnel integrated marketing and enrollment consulting. From launching a one-of-a-kind recruitment campaign to modernizing your campus visit to shaping your next class, Echo Delta works as an extension of your team, delivering data-backed insights and custom solutions tailored to your unique needs.

[ECHODELTA.CO](https://echodelta.co)



ADV is a higher education market research and brand strategy firm specializing in customized research to solve challenges related to enrollment, marketing, and strategy. Our expertise spans from small liberal arts colleges to large research universities, ensuring that every institution receives the personalized attention and innovative strategies they need to thrive. ADV's understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities within higher education enable us to help our clients enhance their brand strength, increase enrollment, and achieve long-term success.

[ADVMARKETRESEARCH.COM](https://advmarketresearch.com)

HOW TO CITE THIS REPORT

Echo Delta, ADV Market Research (2024).

Politics and College Choice: How Students' Political Views Influence Where They Enroll

All material in this document is copyright © 2024 by Echo Delta. Permission is required to distribute information from Echo Delta either in electronic or print form.

For legal, copyright, or usage questions relating to this research report, please reach out to info@echodelta.co.

