

# The Civic Outlook of Young Adults in America

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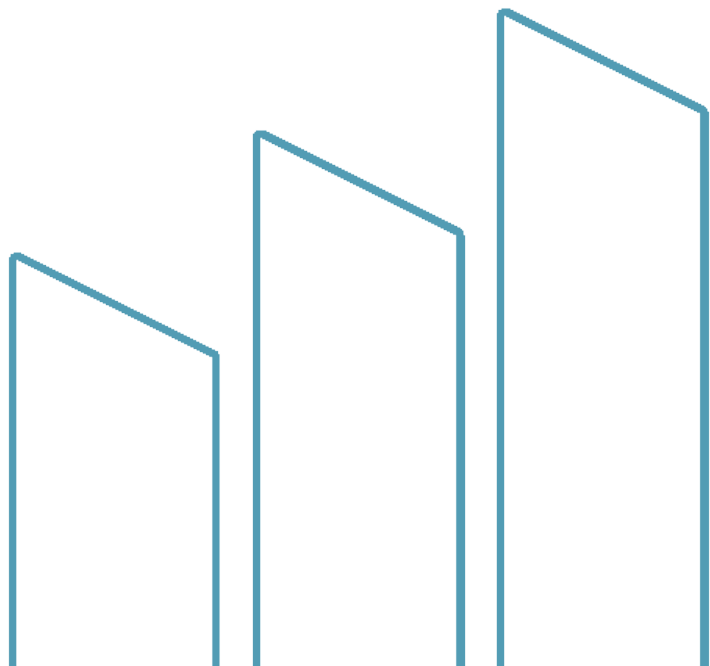
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## The Civic Outlook of Young Adults in America Fact Sheet September 21, 2023

### About the Research

- [The Civic Outlook of Young Adults in America](#), a national survey of 18 to 24-year-old Americans, sheds light on their civic knowledge, civic engagement, and commitment to democracy—the three building blocks of civic readiness.
- Commissioned by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars and conducted by Citizen Data, the first-of-its-kind poll surveyed 4,008 young adults across the country.
- It is part of a multi-year research initiative to measure youth civic readiness in the U.S.

### Summary

- Young adults' pessimism about the U.S. political system and their low civic knowledge are warning signs for American democracy.
- Reasons for optimism include their pride in being American, opposition to political violence, shared values orientation toward democracy, openness to hearing other views, and the correlation between more civic knowledge and greater civic engagement.
- Young adults have the ability and interest to strengthen democracy as empowered citizens, but they must be engaged in meaningful ways.

### How civically informed are young adults?

- *40% are able to correctly answer only one out of four standard civics questions. Only 4% answer all four questions right.*
- *35% say they do not feel informed enough to participate politically.*

### How civically engaged are young adults?

- *33% of respondents indicate no intention to participate civically in 2024. This could include voting, political volunteerism, donating, event attendance, and digital content creation.*
- *33% of respondents say they are not currently engaged in community activities, such as sports, hobbies, volunteerism, and faith groups.*
- *48% of respondents intend to vote in the 2024 general election, significantly lower than the nationwide baseline of 68%.*

### How civically committed are young adults?

- *57% are dissatisfied with how the political system is functioning in the U.S.*
- *40% are pessimistic about the future of our democracy compared to about a quarter who are somewhat or very optimistic.*
- *52% report no trust at all or very little trust in government institutions.*

- 51% oppose the use of violence to suppress dissent.
- 68% believe their vote matters.
- 70% are somewhat, very, or extremely proud to be American.

### Where do young adults stand politically?

- *61% do not identify with either major political party.* Of those, 29% identify as independent, nonpartisan, or other party, and 33% are unsure or do not identify politically in any way. Only 22% identify as Democrat and 17% as Republican.
- 51% describe their ideology as at or near the ideological middle—moderate, somewhat conservative, or somewhat liberal. Only about one in four (27%) identifies as very conservative or very liberal.
- 66% state they are registered to vote.

### Where do we see opportunities?

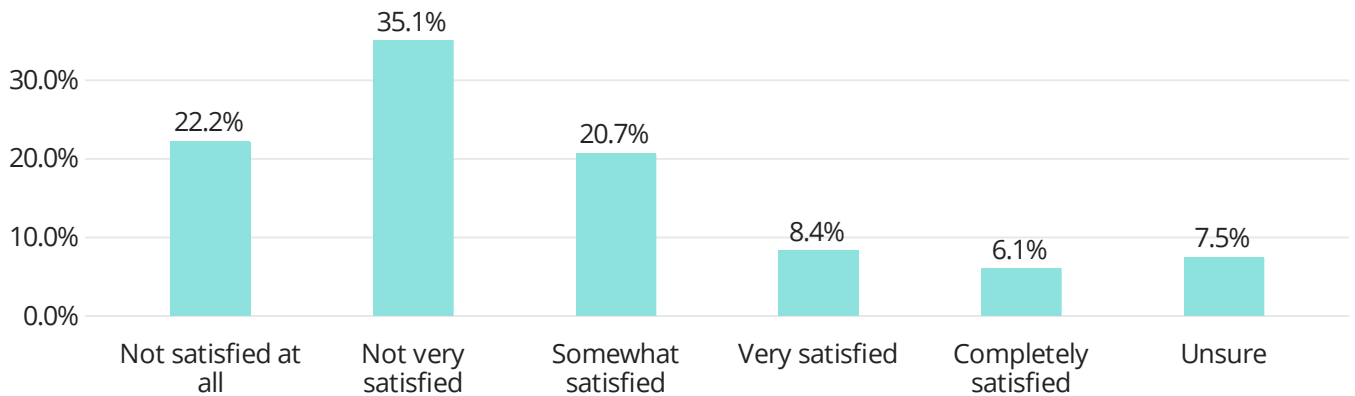
- **Gen Z could reshape our civil discourse.** 37% find conversations with those who have different views to be interesting and informative. By contrast, only 22% of Americans of all ages find those conversations interesting and informative, while 41% of Americans of all ages found such discussions to be stressful and frustrating.
- **Gen Z can help tackle polarization.** There is potential to coalesce around shared values, as young adults say American democracy means equality (55%), justice (51%), and fairness (49%). They agree regardless of background, education, or ideology. Republicans and Democrats alike chose these values and in the same order.
- **Schools play an important role but cannot close the civic knowledge gap alone.** Given that 78% of young adults express trust in academic institutions, schools have a responsibility to play a leading role in empowering young adults to help strengthen our democracy. Community organizations, faith-based institutions, and employers should also help close the gap by incorporating foundational civic education into their programming.
- **Increasing civic knowledge could drive greater civic engagement.** 80% of respondents who score high on civic knowledge plan to engage in at least one civic activity during 2024 versus 40% of low civic knowledge scorers.
- **Civic engagement is more than voting.** Civic and community groups should work to engage the 33% of young adults who are not active in any community organizations.
- **Political parties and candidates have an opportunity to attract new supporters.** 61% of young adults do not identify with either major political party. Only 22% identify as Democrat and 17% as Republican.

*[The Institute for Citizens & Scholars](#) cultivates talent, ideas, and networks that develop young people as effective, lifelong citizens. We unite the left, right, and center to develop breakthrough solutions that create stronger citizens in our country, and we bring these solutions to life by forming strategic partnerships with an intentionally diverse group of young people, scholars and education leaders, and civic and business leaders—including the 27,000 world-leading Fellows in our network. Together, we're on a mission to ensure that Americans everywhere are civically well-informed, productively engaged, and committed to democracy.*

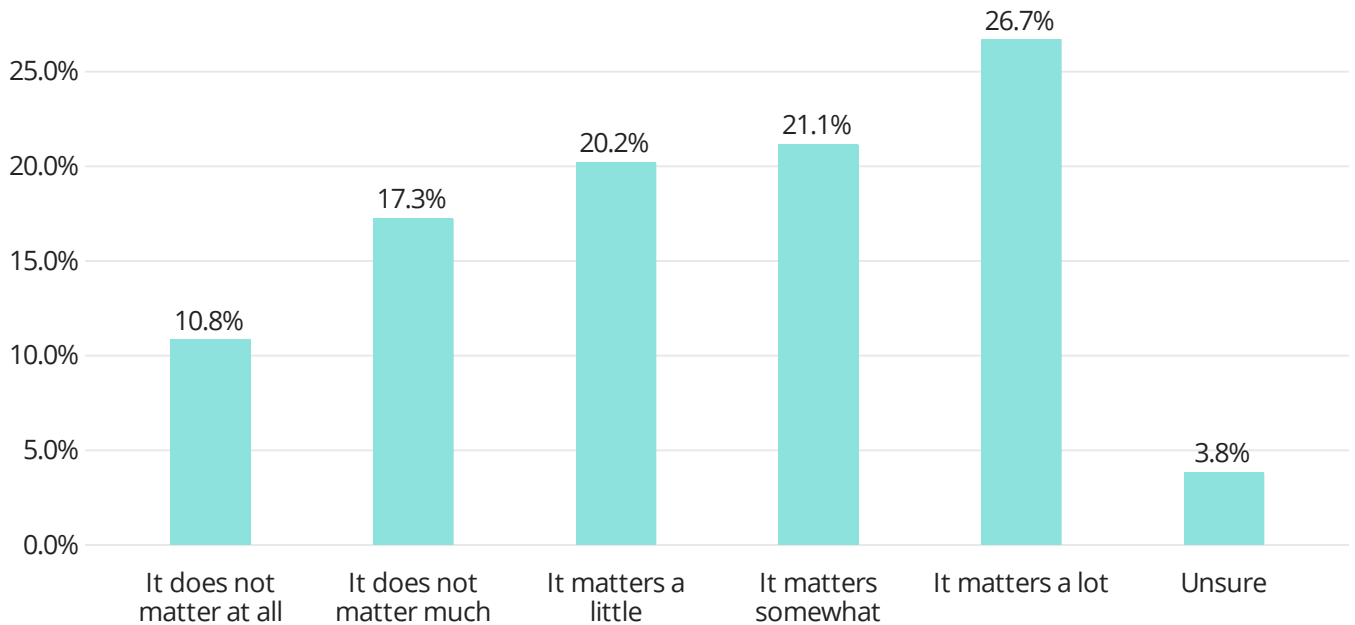


On behalf of the Institute for Citizens & Scholars, Citizen Data sampled N = 4,008 Americans aged 18-24 from August 21-25, 2023. The margin of error is +/- 1.5%. Results are weighted on gender, race, education, voter registration status, and political party affiliation.

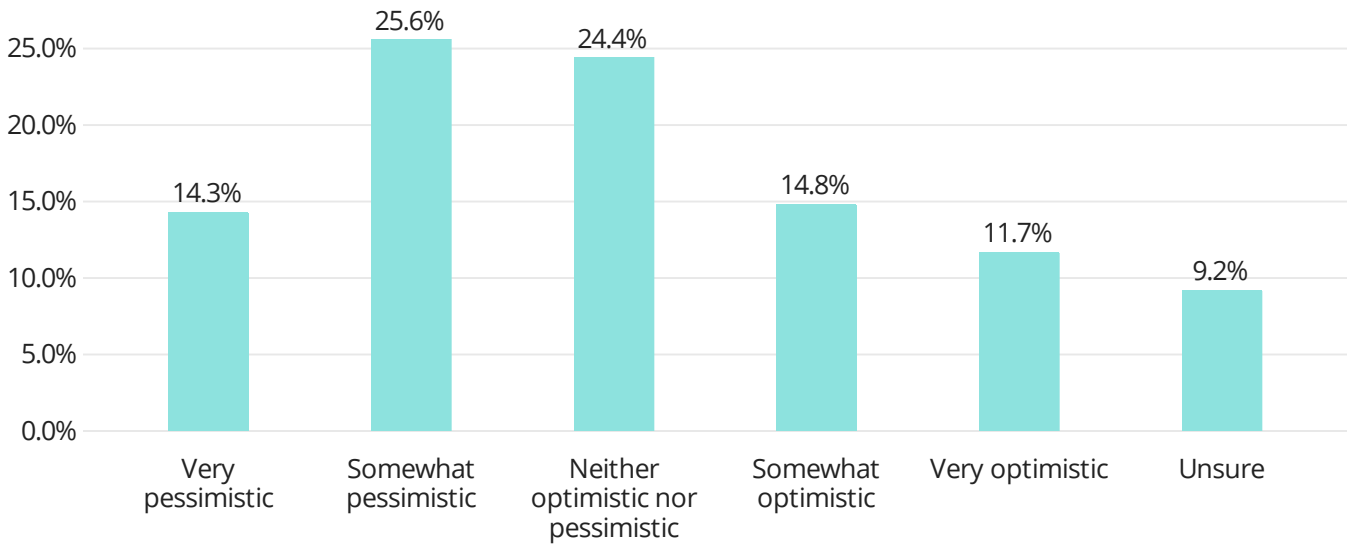
These first few questions ask you to share your opinion with us about how the United States is being governed and how it should be governed. First, how satisfied are you with how the political system is functioning in the United States these days?



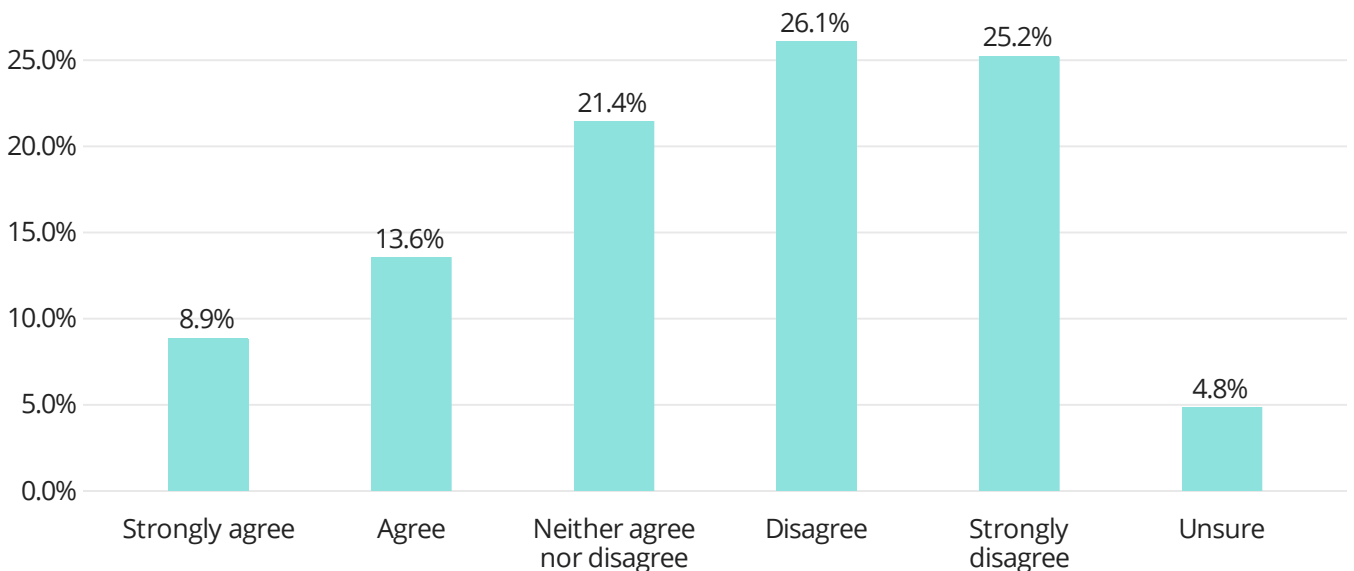
To what degree do you feel as if your vote matters?



## How optimistic or pessimistic are you about the future of American democracy?



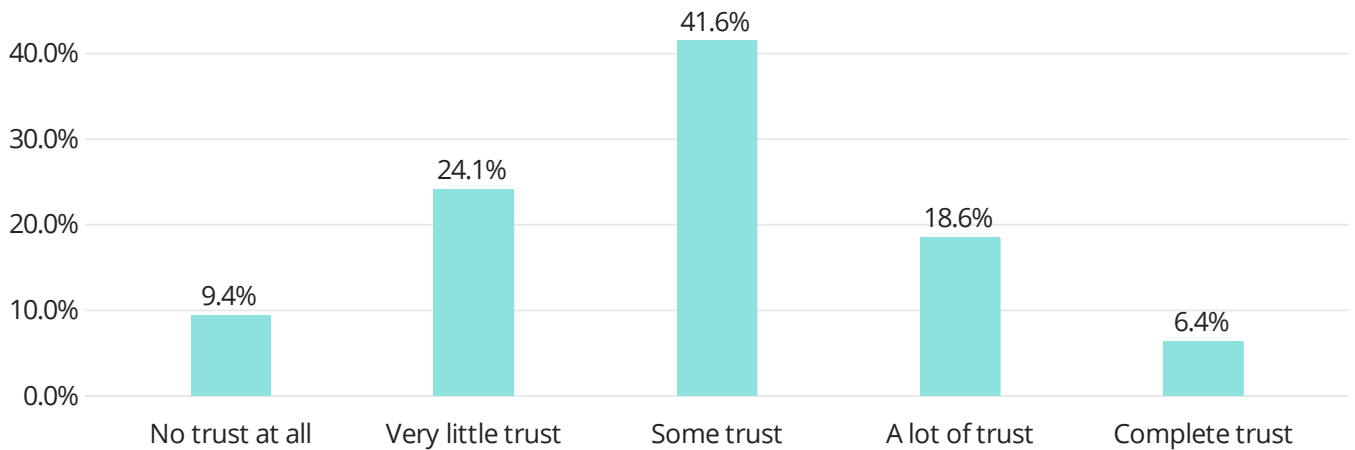
## Do you agree or disagree that it is acceptable to use force or violence to maintain order and stability in society, even if it means suppressing dissent or opposition?



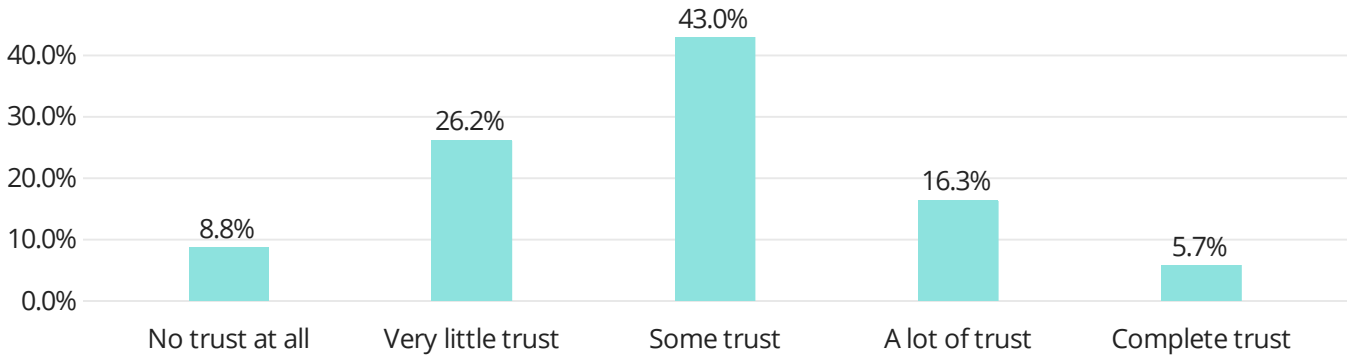
## How much trust, if any, do you have in the following persons and institutions? (Average trust on 1-5 likert scale)

Field	Mean
Academic institutions, such as universities, schools, libraries, or museums	2.2
Members of my own generation (ie "Generation Z").	1.9
Members of older generations (ie "Baby Boomers," "Generation X," and "Millennials").	1.8
Religious institutions, such as churches, temples or mosques	1.7
Government institutions, such as federal, state or local agencies.	1.5
News and media institutions, such as major newspapers, news networks or news websites	1.4

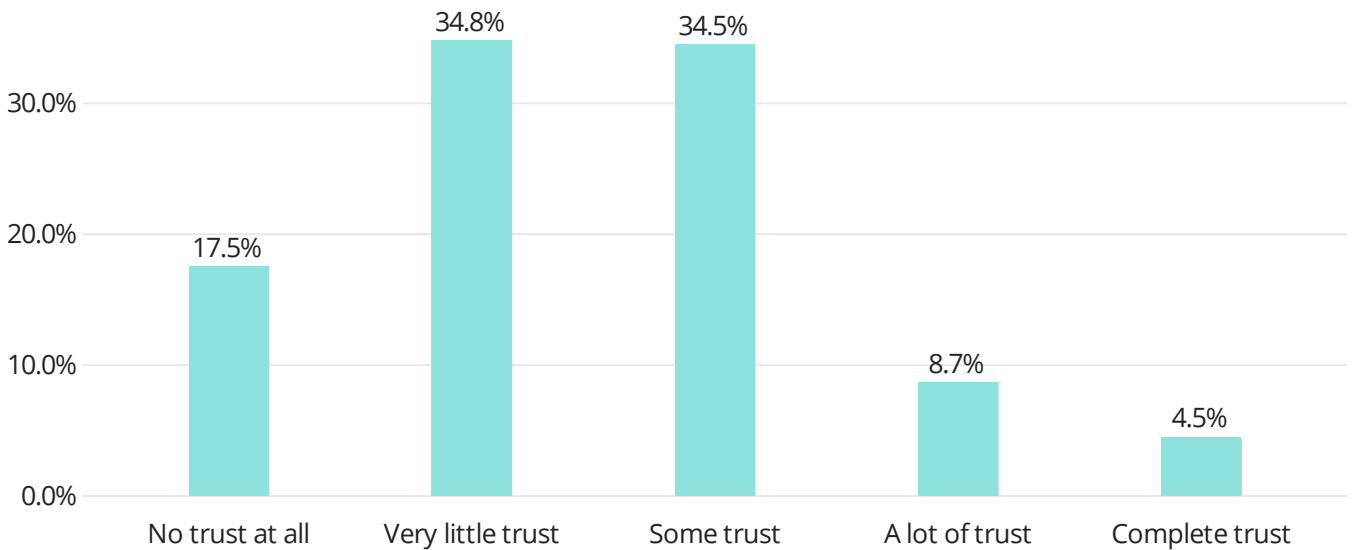
## How much trust, if any, do you have in the following persons and institutions? Members of my own generation (ie "Generation Z").



How much trust, if any, do you have in the following persons and institutions? Members of older generations (ie “Baby Boomers,” “Generation X,” and “Millennials”).

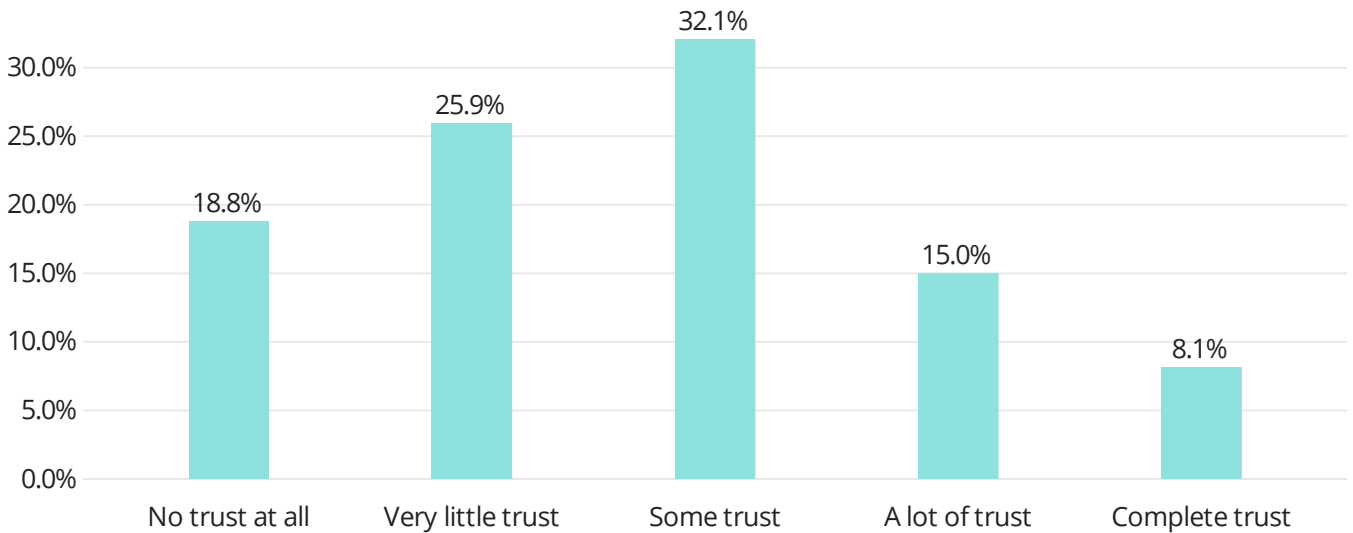


How much trust, if any, do you have in the following persons and institutions? Government institutions, such as federal, state or local agencies.

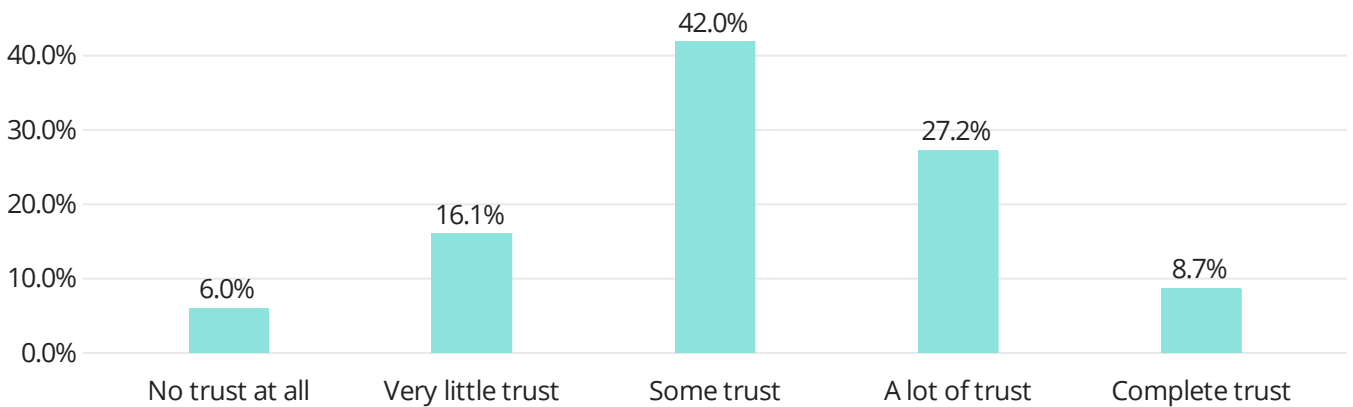




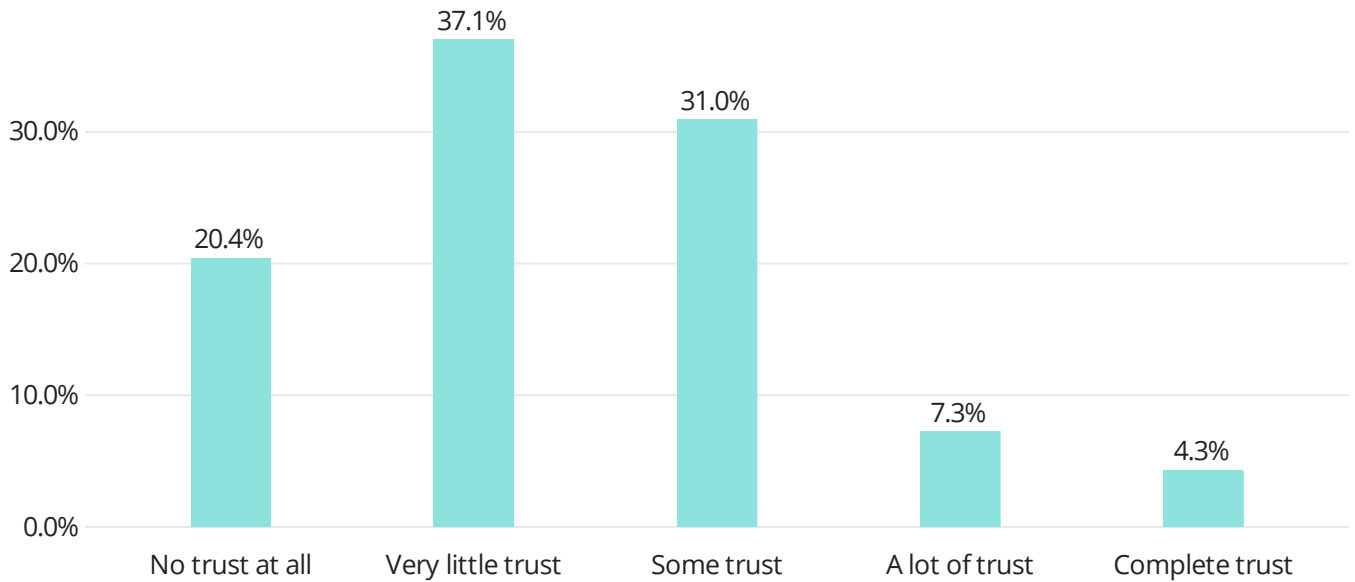
How much trust, if any, do you have in the following persons and institutions? Religious institutions, such as churches, temples or mosques



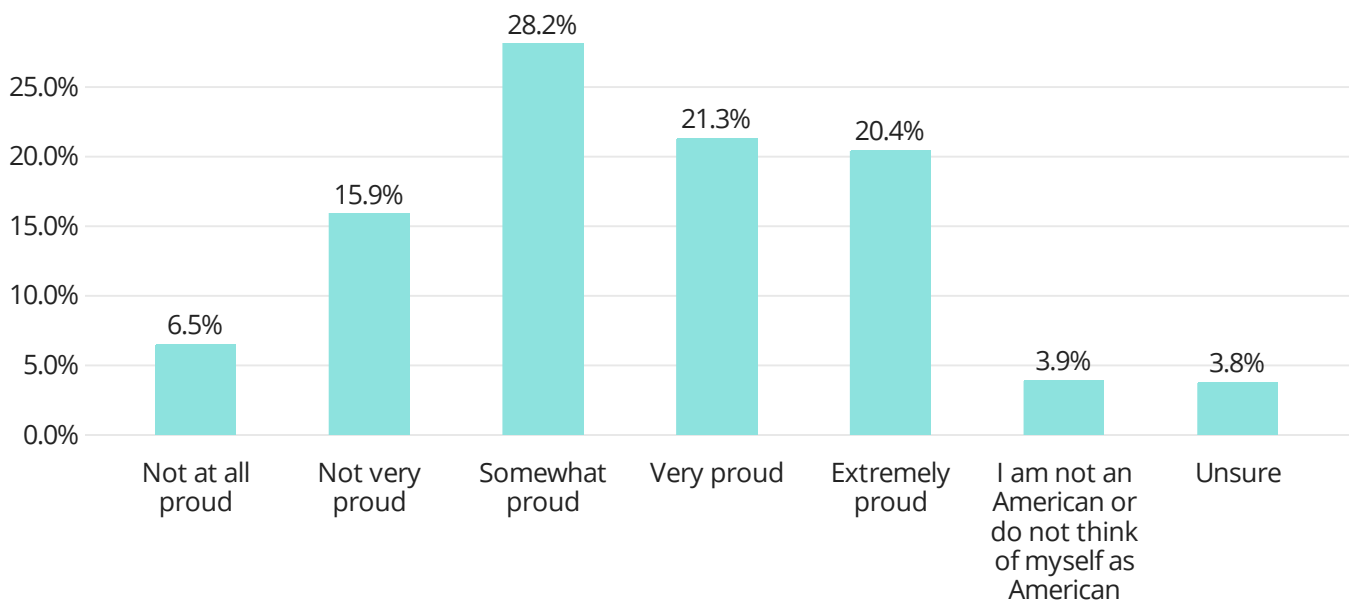
How much trust, if any, do you have in the following persons and institutions? Academic institutions, such as universities, schools, libraries, or museums



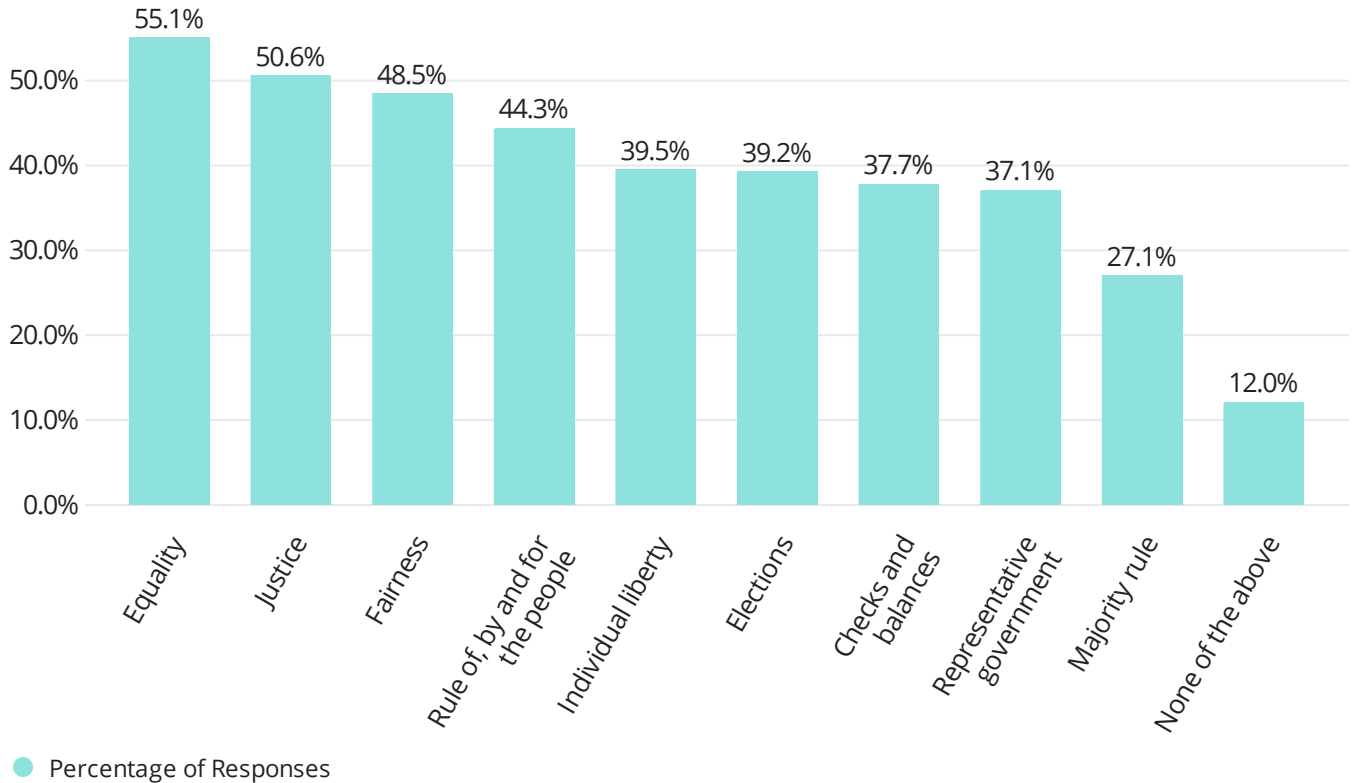
How much trust, if any, do you have in the following persons and institutions? News and media institutions, such as major newspapers, news networks or news websites



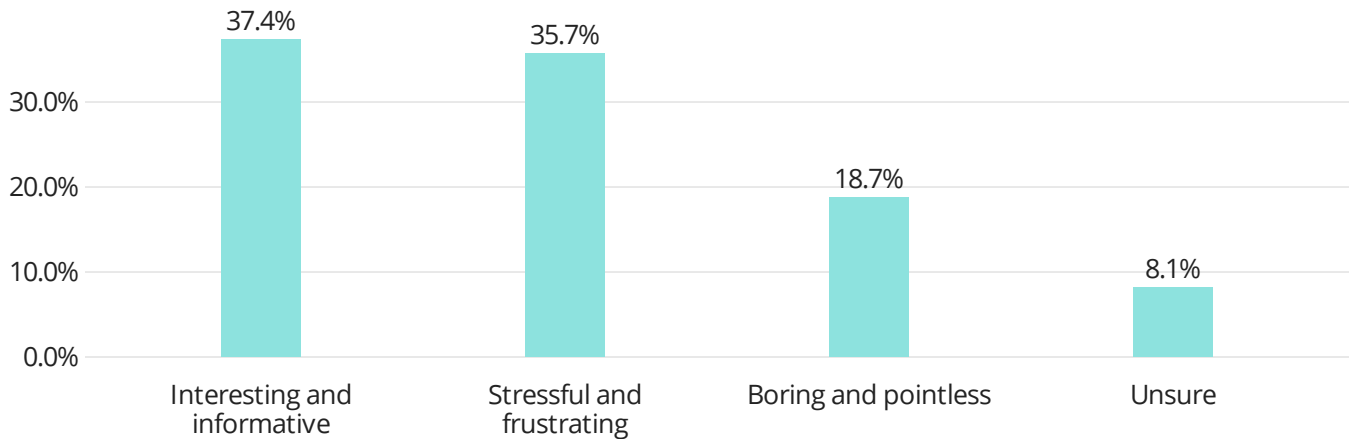
How proud are you to be an American?



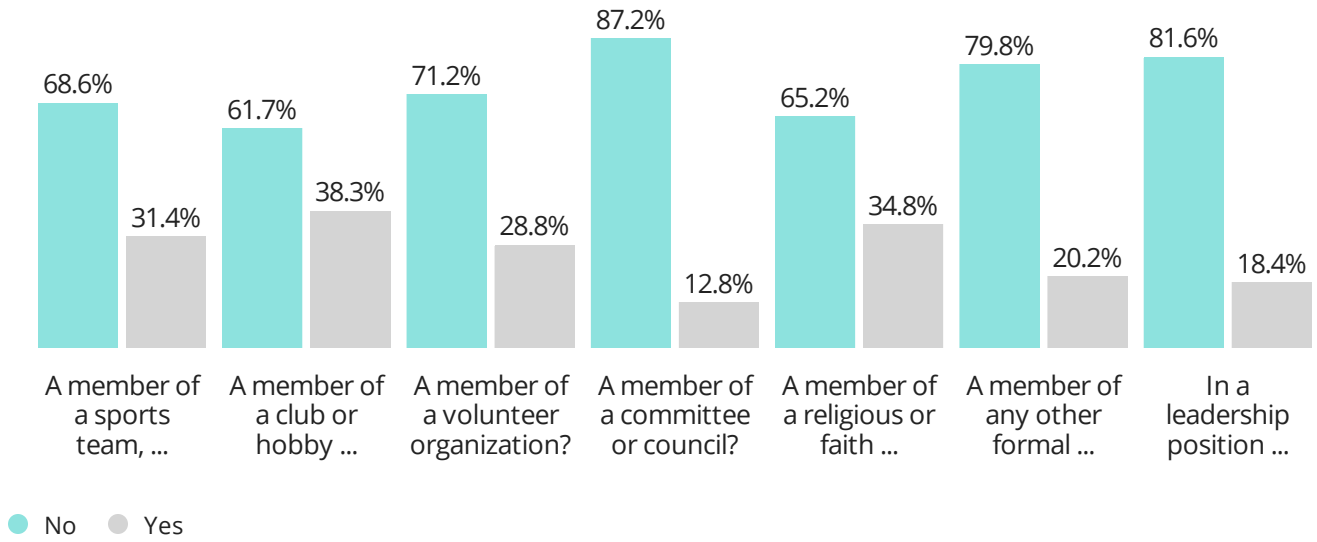
Which of the following best describes what American democracy means to you? Please select all that apply, or none of the above.



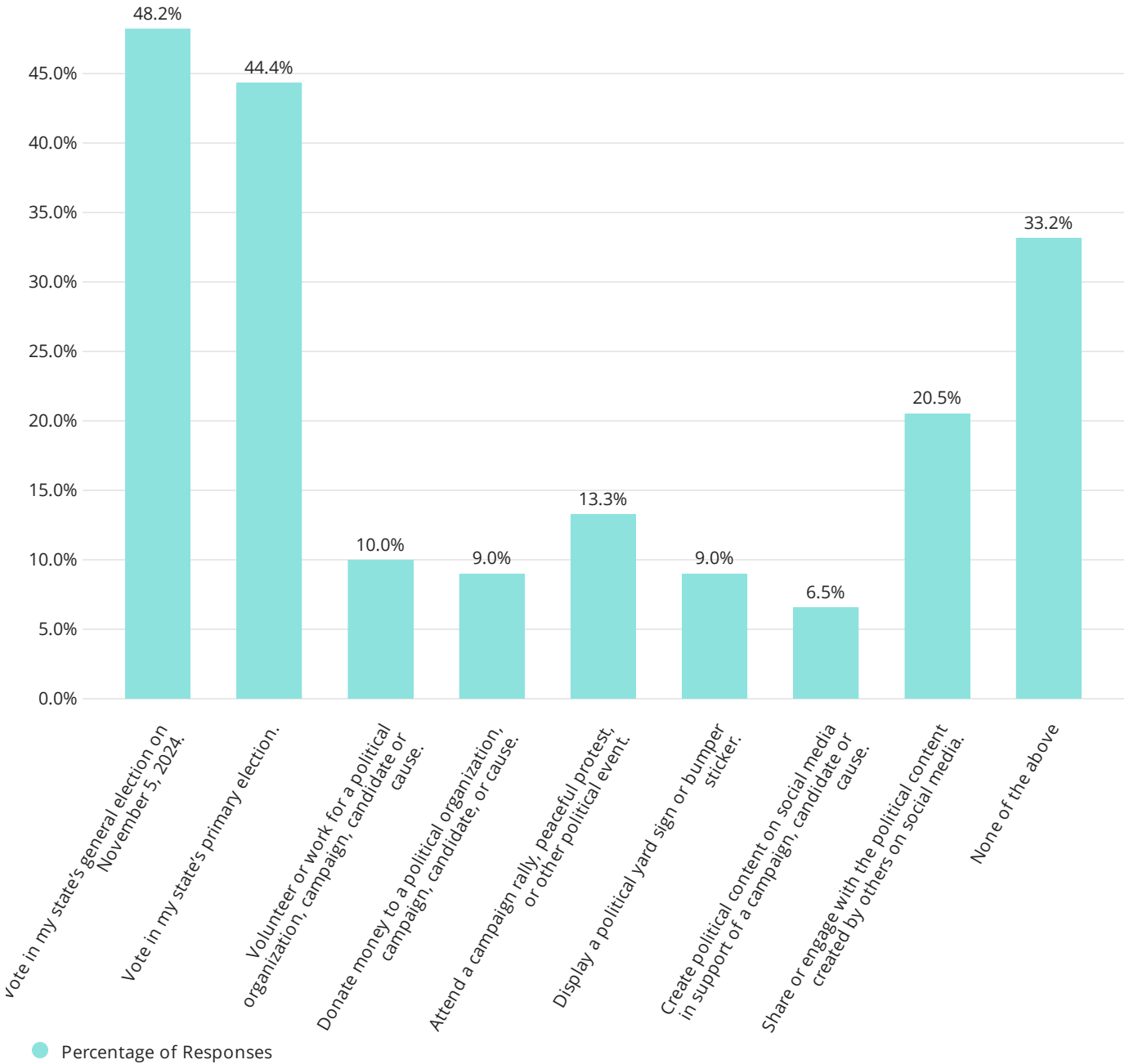
In your experience, when you talk about politics with people who you disagree with, do you generally find it to be...



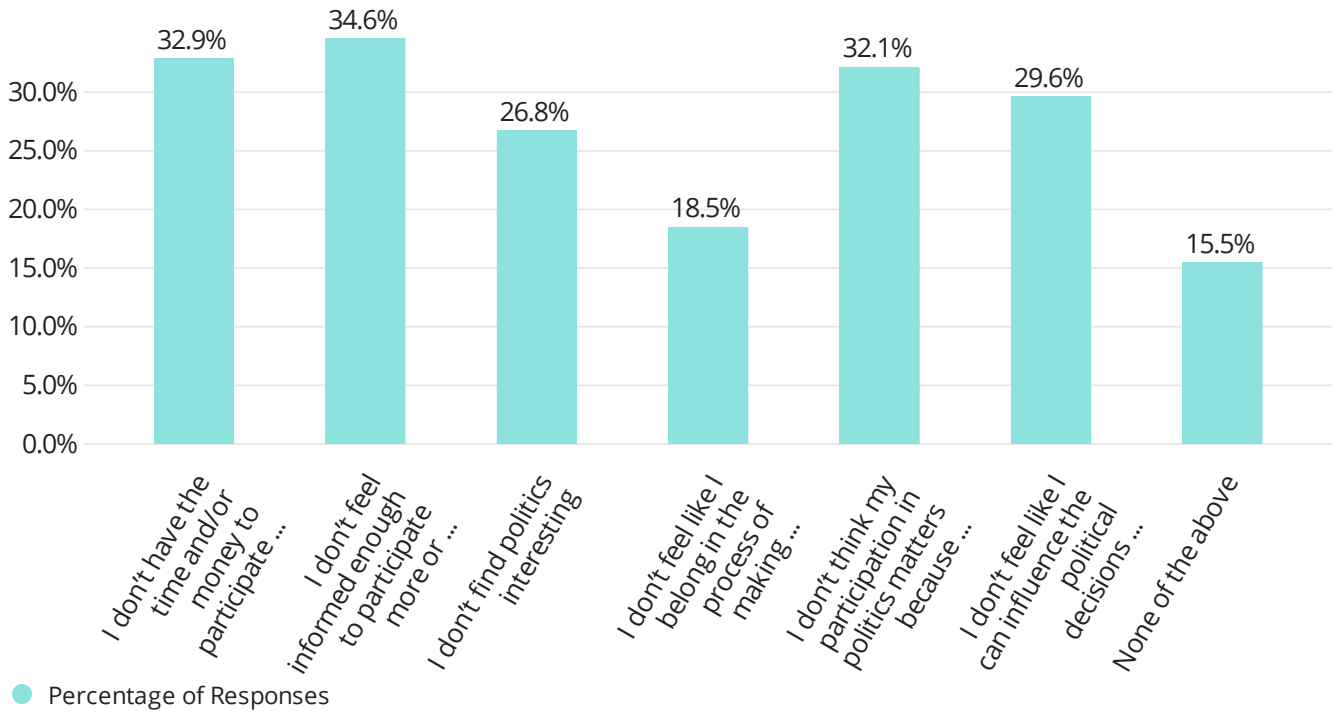
### In your community, are you...



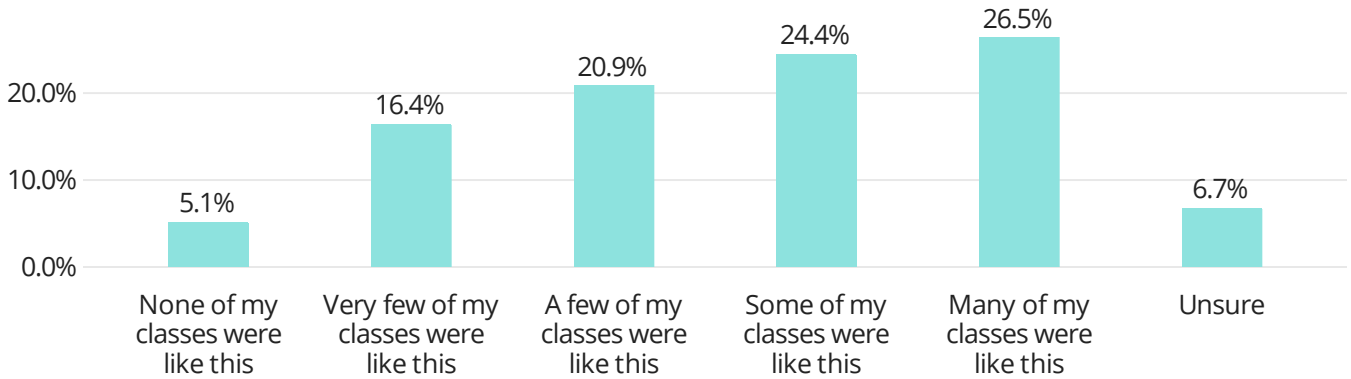
Which of the following, if any, do you plan on participating in next year (2024)? Please select all that apply. If you think you will not participate in any, please select “none of the above.”



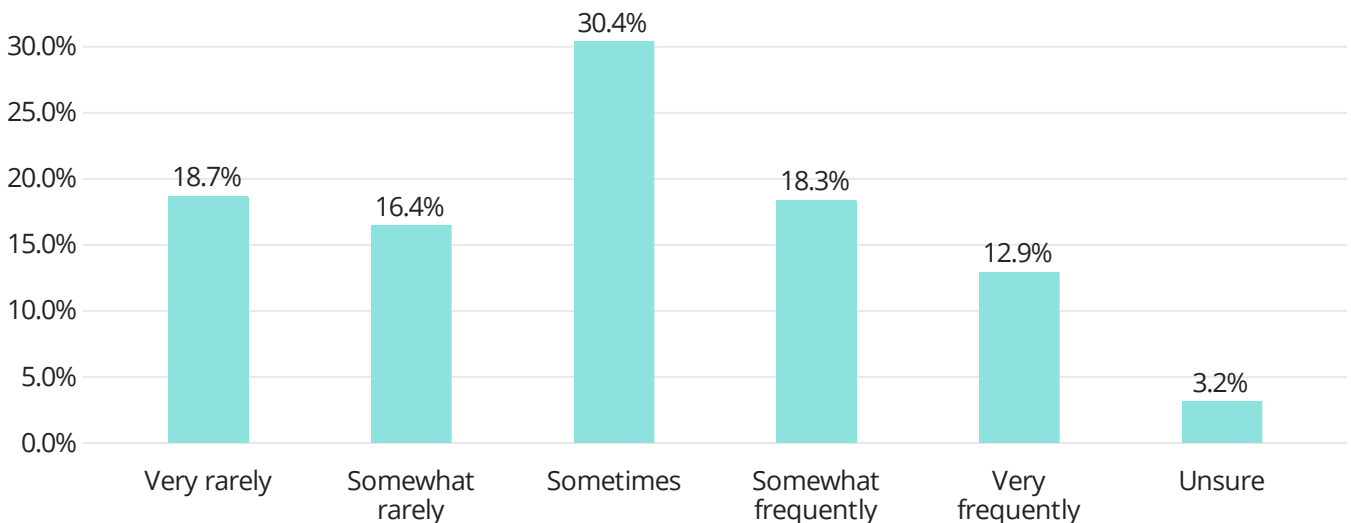
Consider your own participation in politics. This might be at a local, state or national level. Which of the following, if any, prevents you from getting more involved than you currently are? Please select all that apply, or choose none of the above.



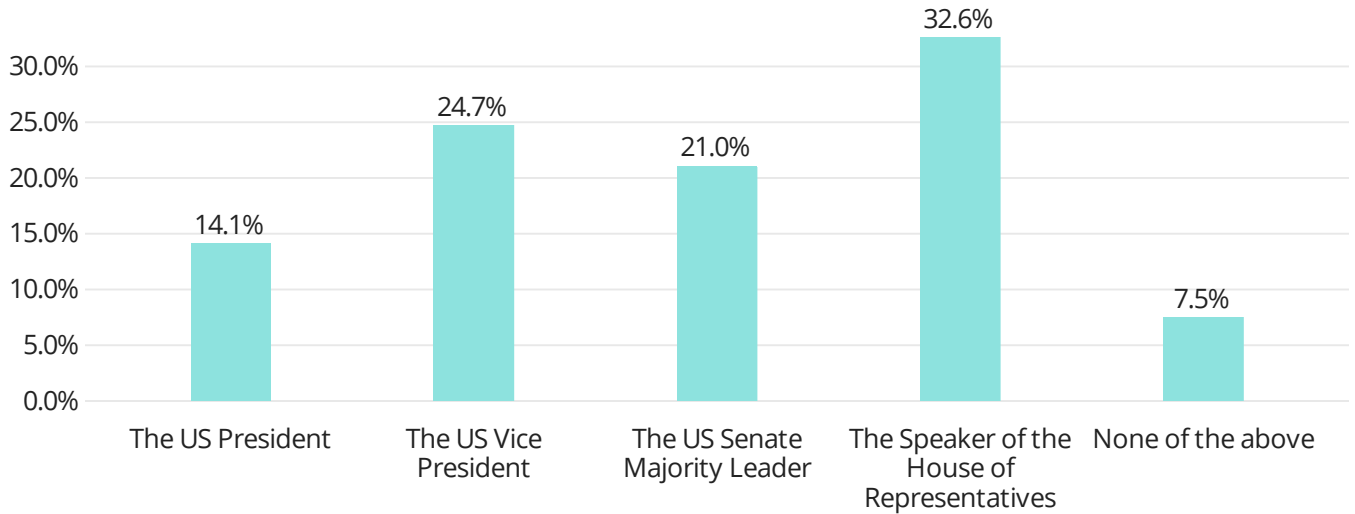
Thinking about your formal education to this point, including both high school and any post-high school education such as college-level, graduate-level, trade or professional schooling, about how many of your classes asked you to think about questions that might have many different possible answers, where one answer isn't always better than the others?



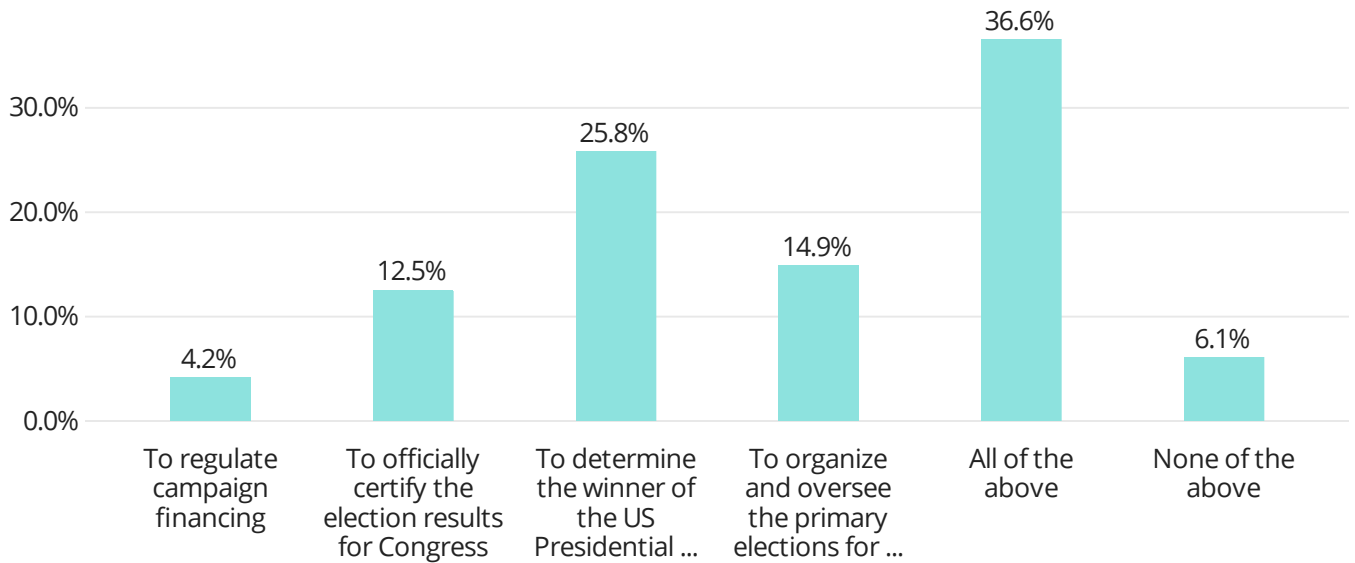
Still thinking about your formal education to this point, about how frequently or rarely did your classes ask you to read the news and learn about current events in the United States?



We will now ask you a few questions about how the US government works. Please answer them to the best of your ability. First, in the US Senate, who casts the deciding vote in the event of a tie?

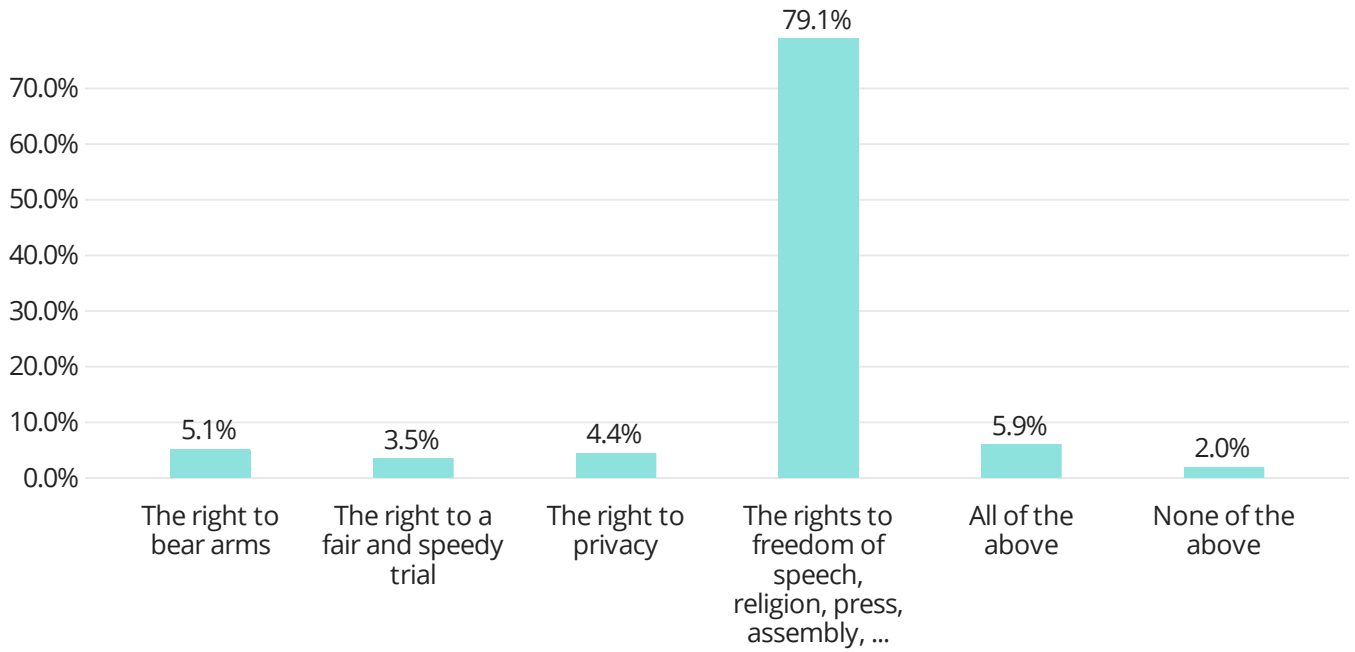


What is the primary purpose of the US Electoral College?

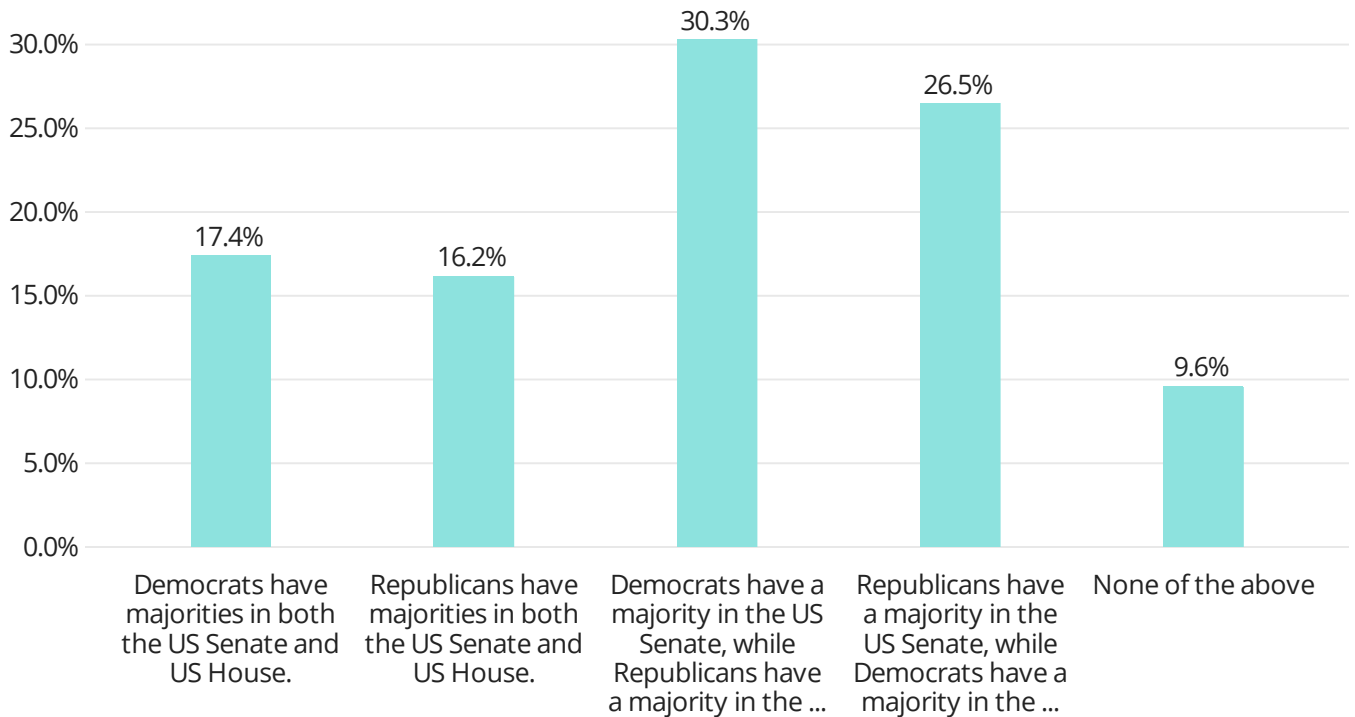




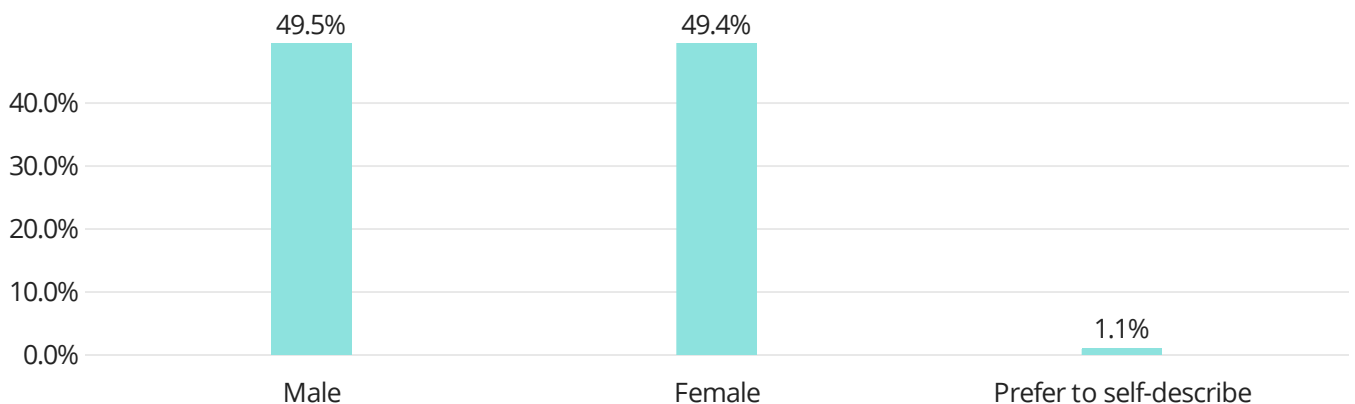
### The First Amendment guarantees which of the following rights?



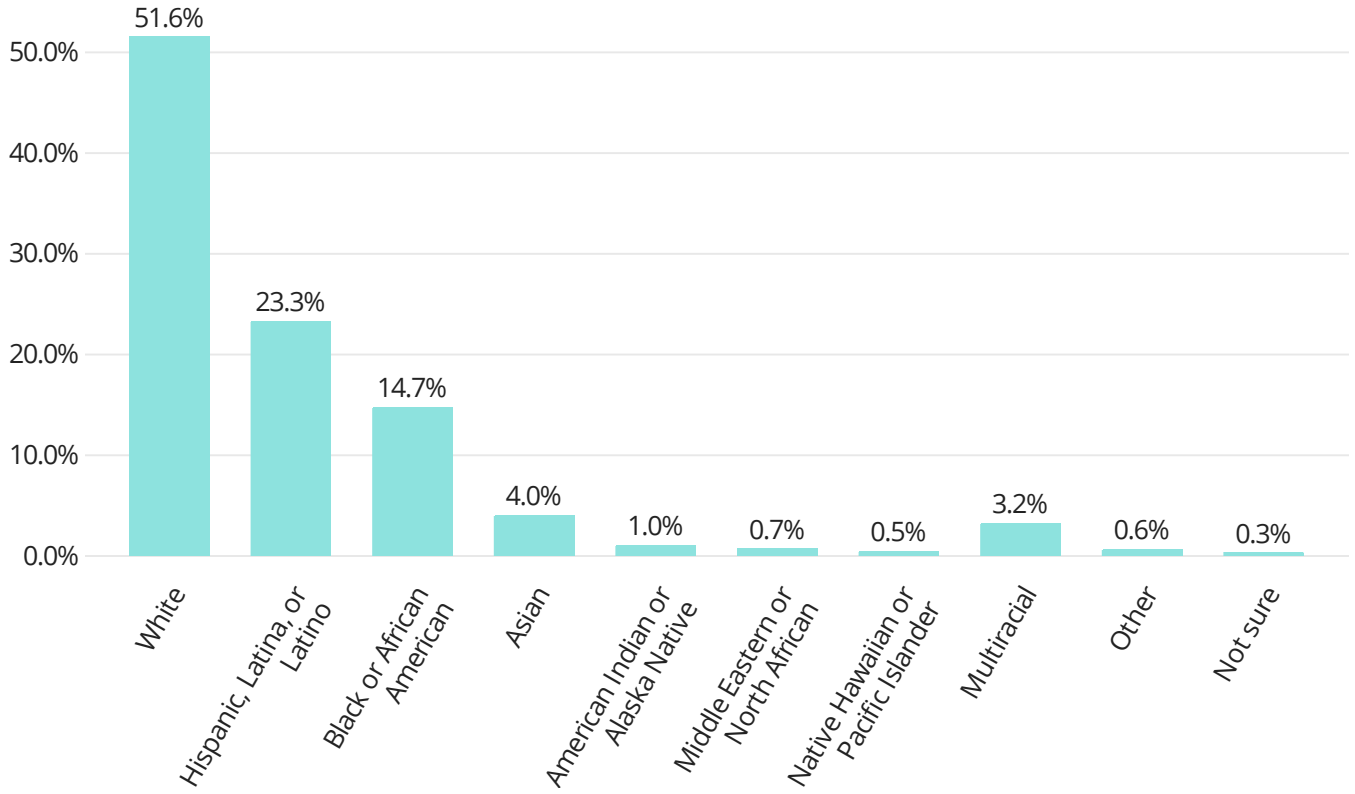
## Which political parties currently hold the majorities in the US Senate and US House of Representatives?



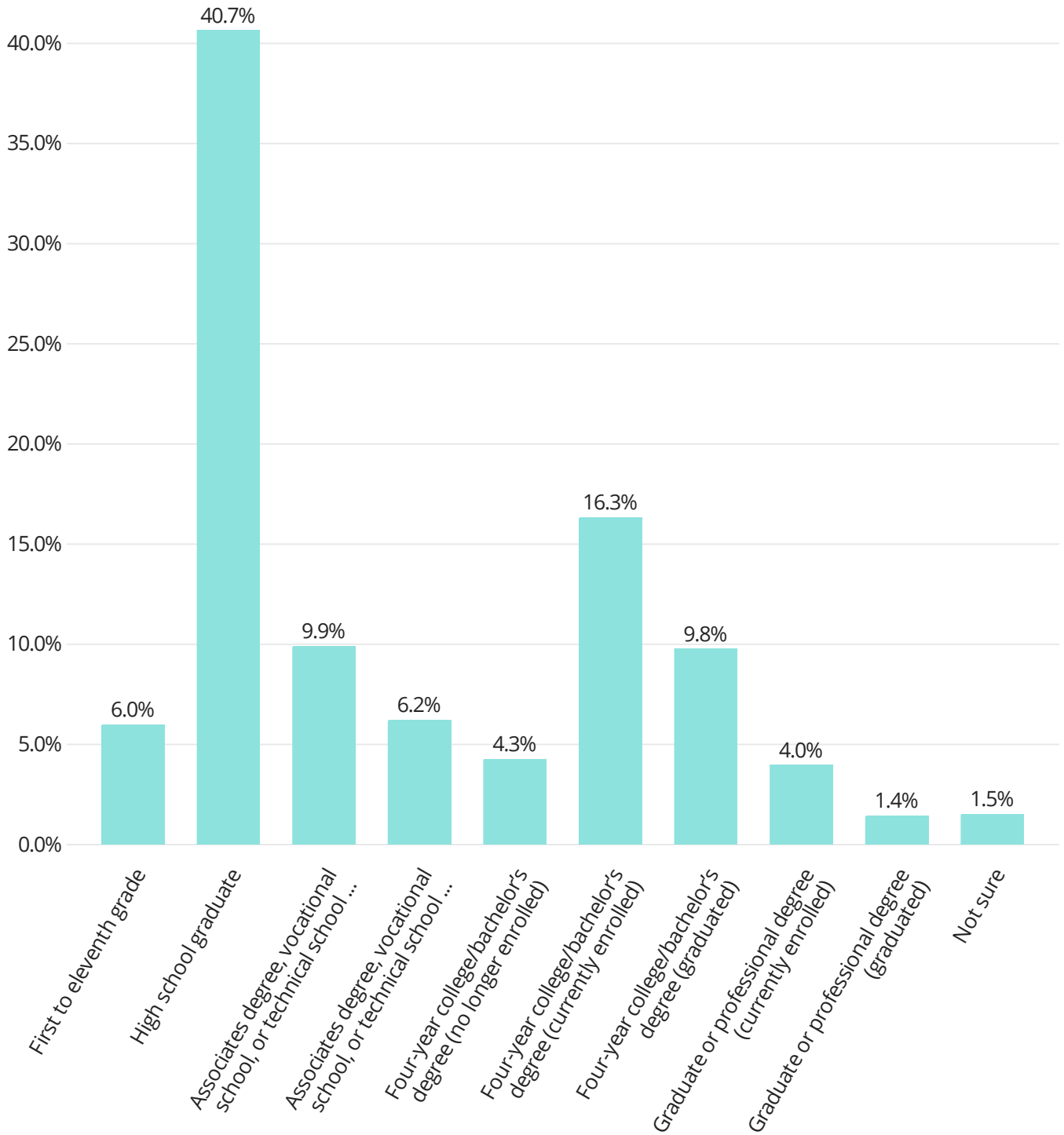
This last block of questions is for statistical purposes alone to help us better understand American voters. First, Which of the following best describes you?



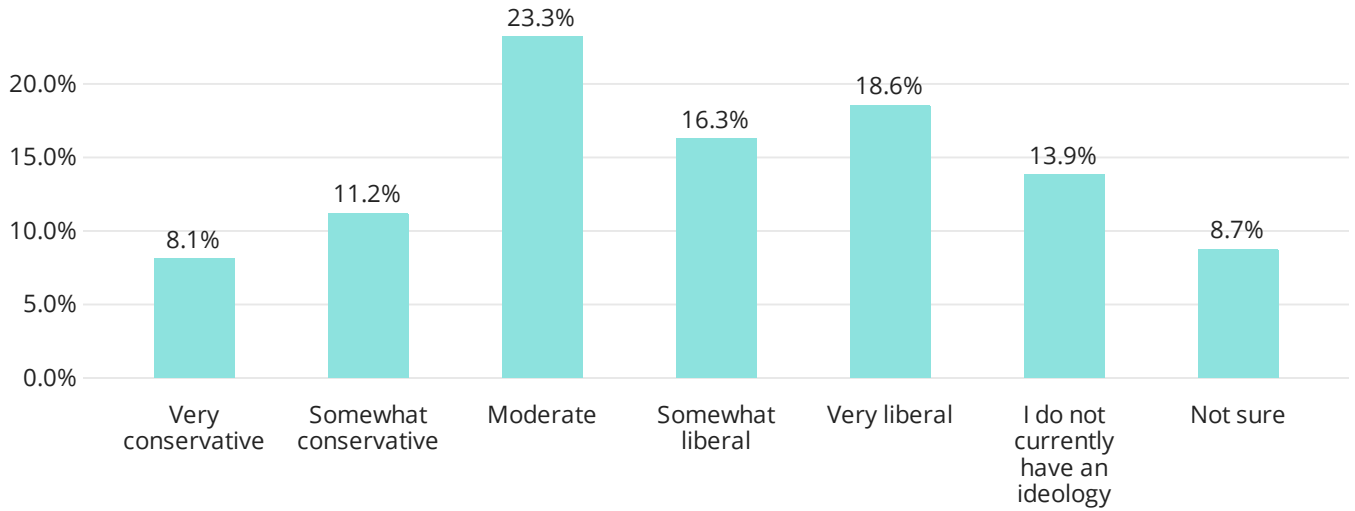
### Which of the following would you use to describe yourself?



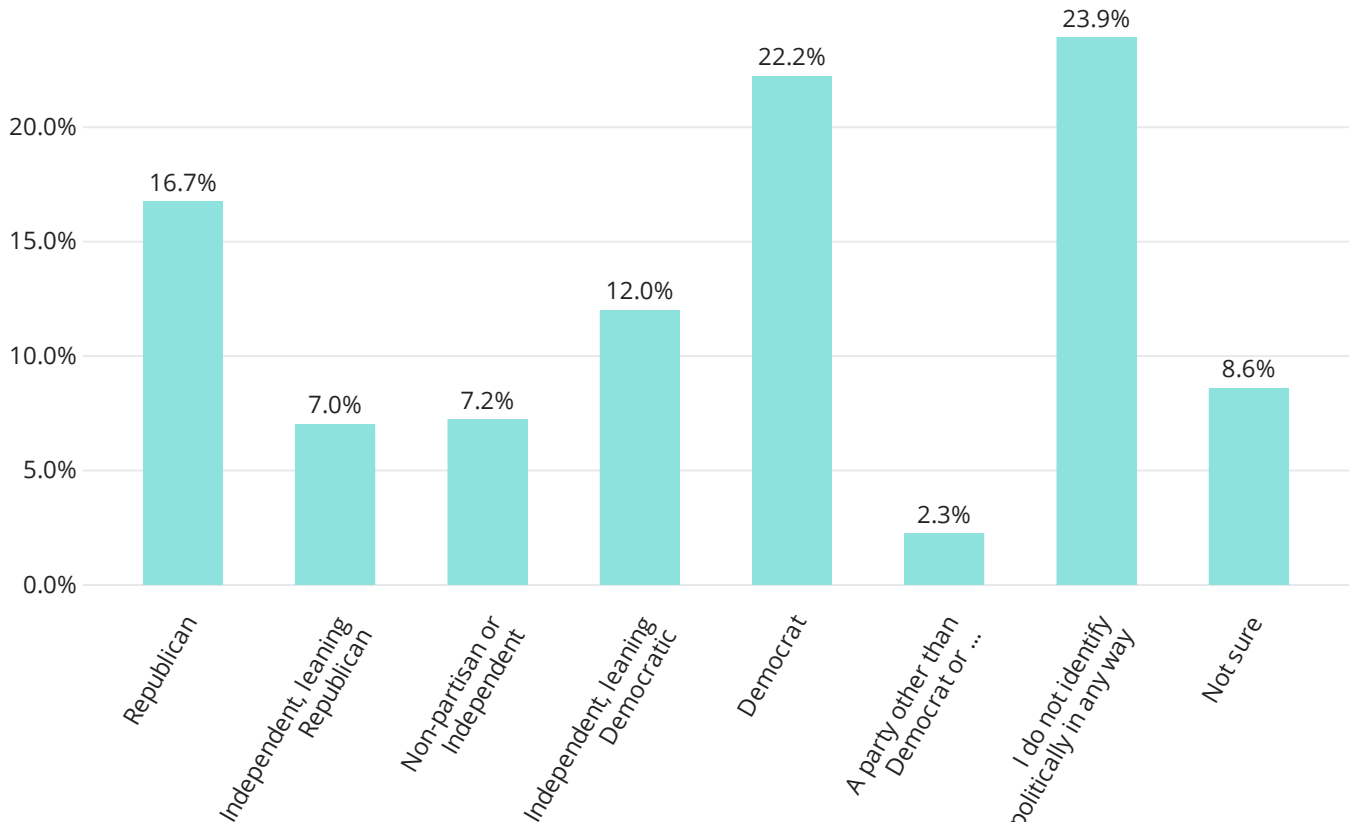
## What is the last year of schooling that you have completed?



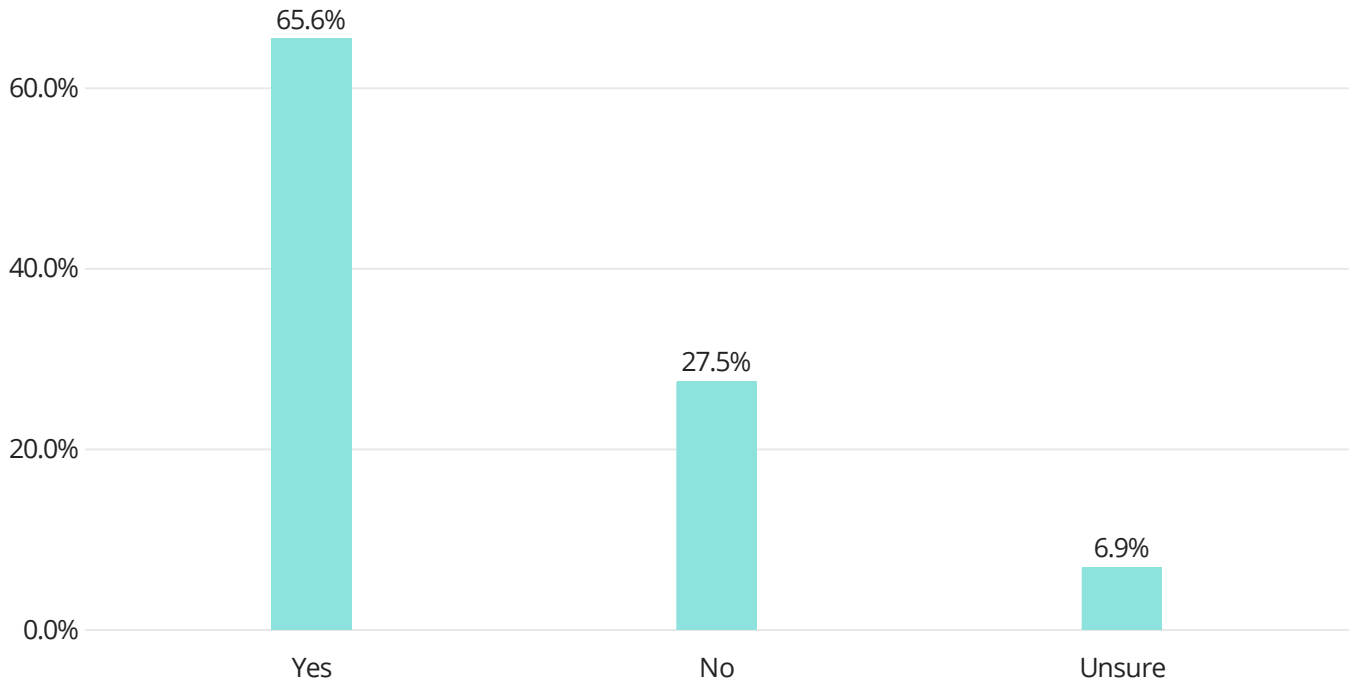
### Which best describes your ideology?



### How do you identify politically?



### Are you registered to vote?



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