

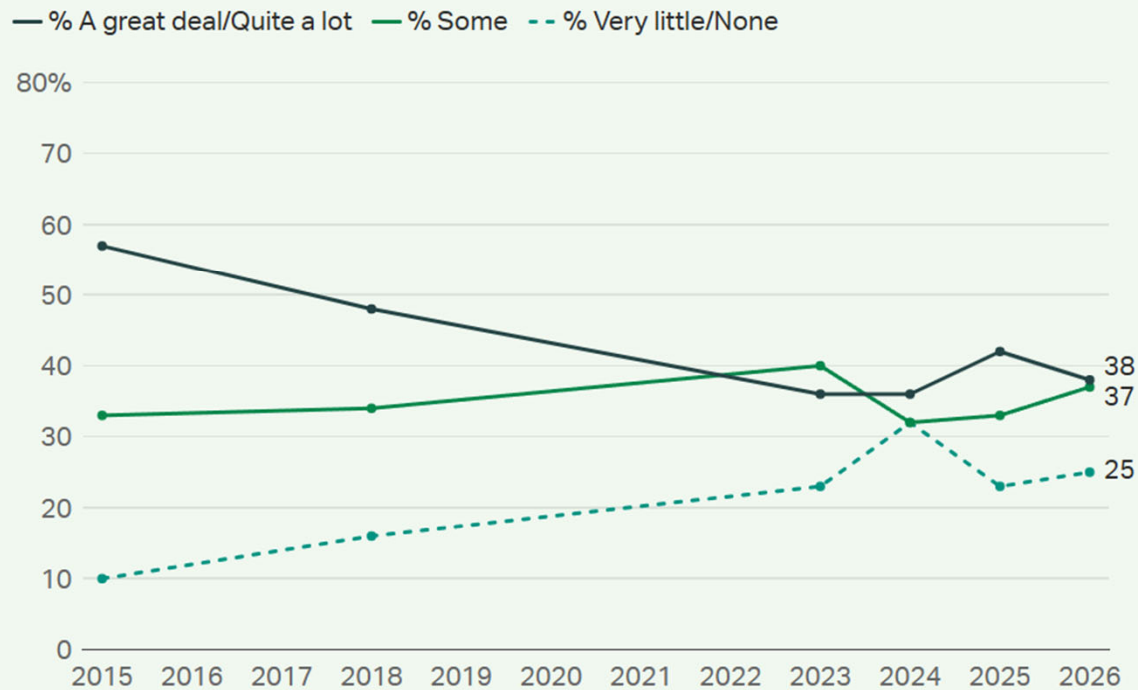
# The State of Higher Education

Trends in American, Consumer and Employer Perspectives  
of Higher Education

Confidence in higher education increased for the first time in 2025; returned in 2026

### Confidence in U.S. Higher Education

*Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in higher education — a great deal, quite a lot, some or very little.*



Confidence in higher education remains in **top quartile of all institutions measured** but has consistently declined overtime despite slight 2025 improvement.

# Confidence in two-year institutions higher than in four-year

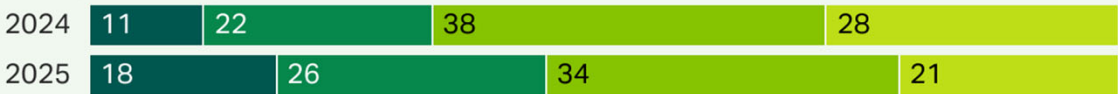
## Americans Are More Confident in Four- and Two-Year Colleges

*Please indicate how much confidence you have in four-year colleges and universities.*

*Please indicate how much confidence you have in two-year colleges or community colleges.*

■ % A great deal ■ % Quite a lot ■ % Some ■ % Very little

### Four-year colleges and universities

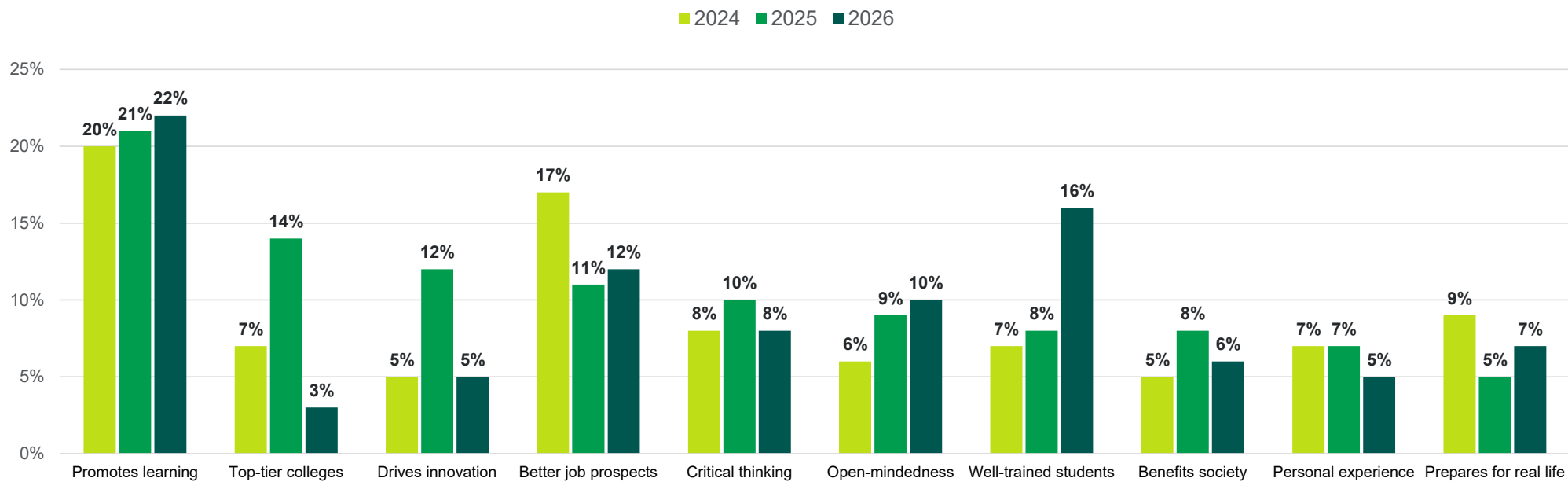


### Two-year colleges or community colleges



# Why Americans are confident in higher education

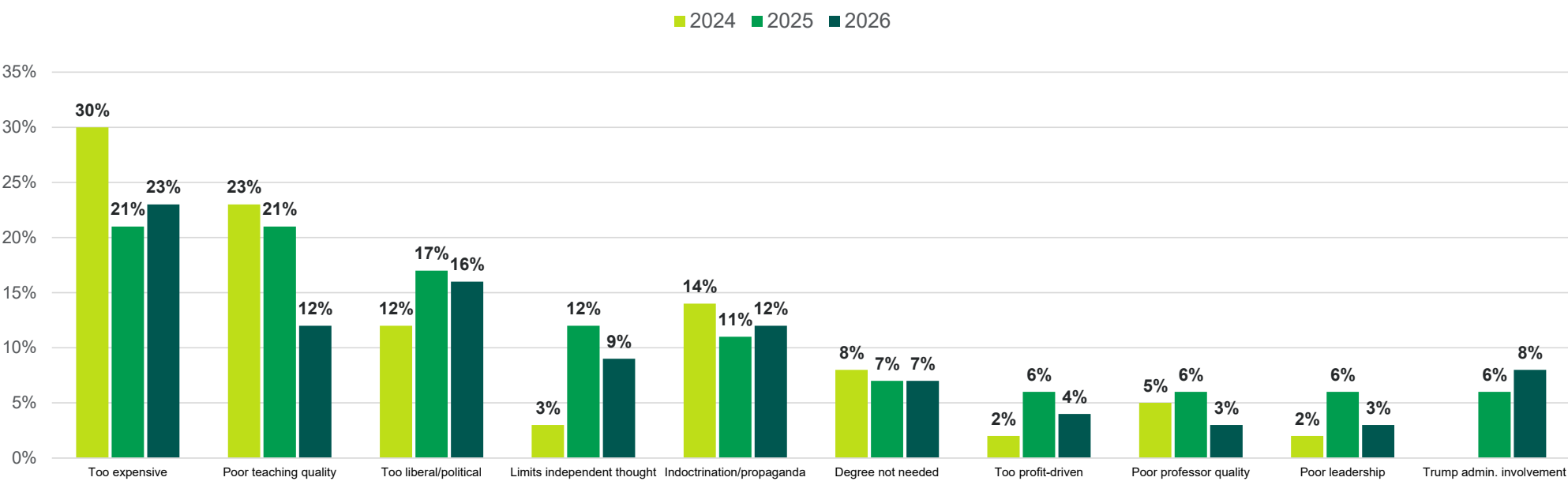
Top 10 Reasons for Confidence in Higher Education



Source: Gallup Poll Social Series, June 2026 (based on adults confident in higher education). L2: "What are some of the reasons why you have a lot of confidence in higher education?" Open-ended; up to two responses coded.

# Why Americans are not confident in higher education

Top 10 Reasons for Lack of Confidence in Higher Education



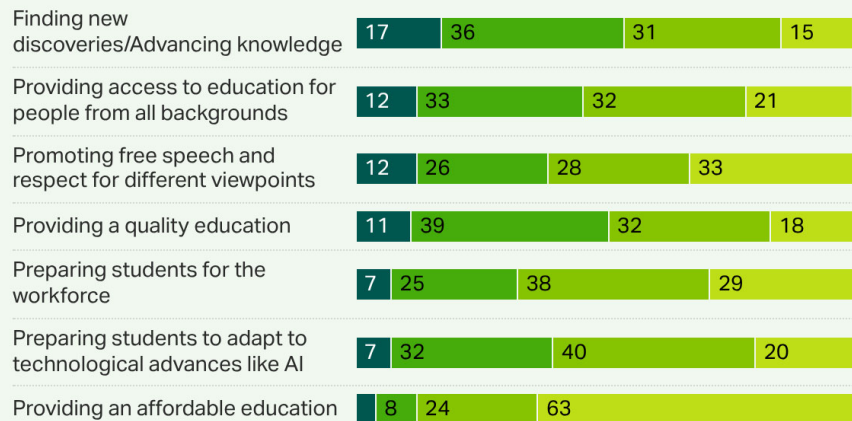
Source: Gallup Poll Social Series, June 2026 (based on adults not confident in higher education). L2A: "What are some of the reasons why you do not have a lot of confidence in higher education?" Open-ended; up to two responses coded.

# Across all factors, colleges score worst on providing an affordable education

## Americans Give Four-Year Colleges Their Lowest Marks on Affordability

How would you rate the job four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. are doing in each of the following areas?

■ % Excellent ■ % Good ■ % Fair ■ % Poor



Lumina Foundation-Gallup Confidence in Higher Education survey

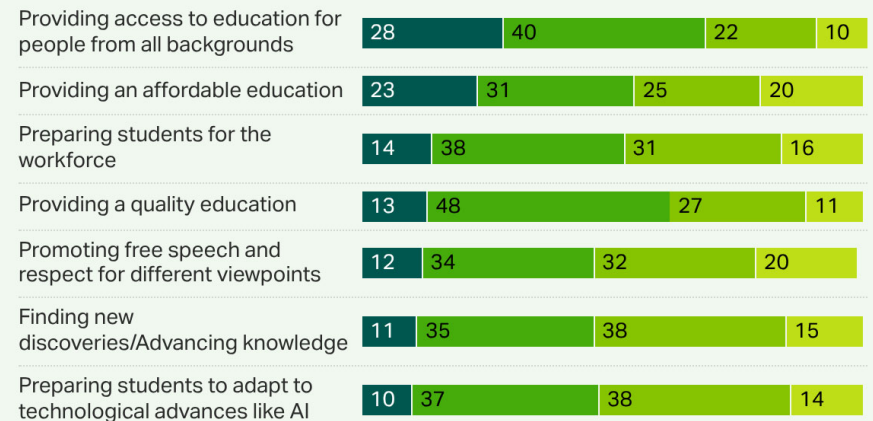
June 1-15, 2026

GALLUP

## Two-Year Colleges Earn Majority-Positive Ratings on Access, Quality, Workforce Preparation and Affordability

How would you rate the job two-year colleges in the U.S. are doing in each of the following areas?

■ % Excellent ■ % Good ■ % Fair ■ % Poor



Lumina Foundation-Gallup Confidence in Higher Education survey

June 1-15, 2026

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# About half say artificial intelligence will negatively impact importance of degrees

## Americans' Views on How Artificial Intelligence Will Affect the Importance of College Degrees

*How do you think artificial intelligence or AI will affect the importance of college degrees in the next five years? Will college degrees be ... ?*

- % Much more important
- % Somewhat more important
- % As important as today
- % Somewhat less important
- % Much less important



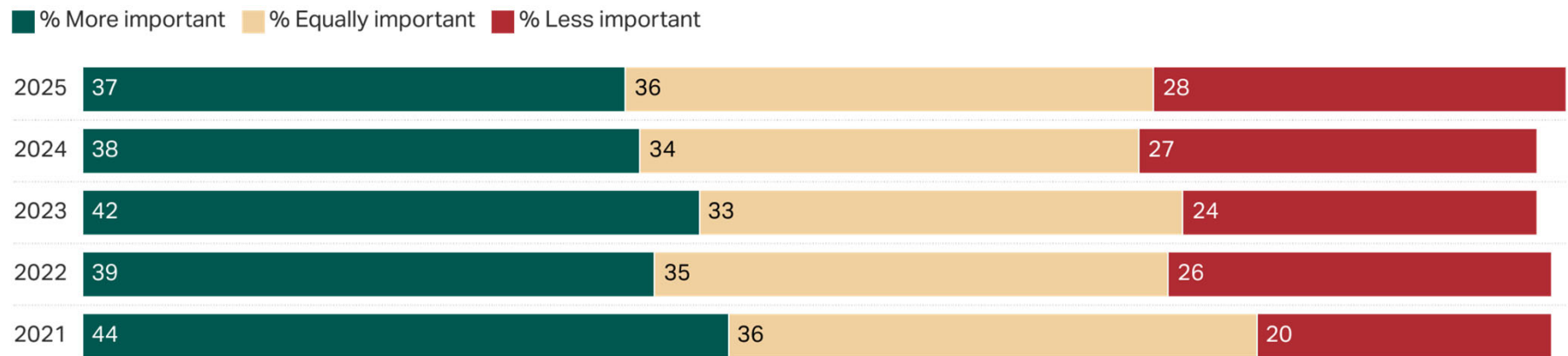
Lumina Foundation-Gallup Confidence in Higher Education survey

June 1-15, 2026

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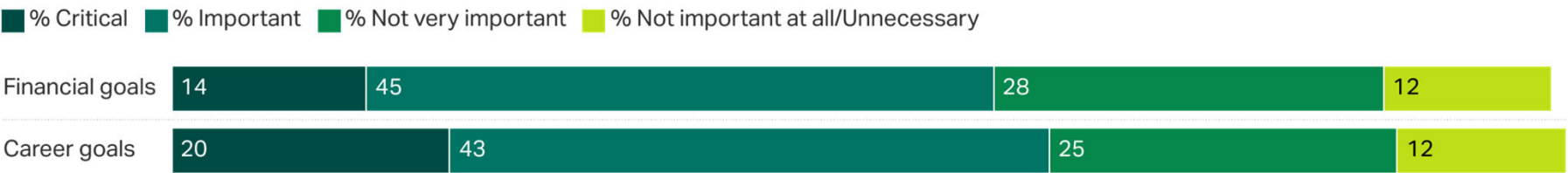
# About three-quarters of adults continue to believe a college education is at least as important to career success as it was 20 years ago

Compared to 20 years ago, how important is it for people today to have a two-year or four-year college degree in order for them to have a successful career?

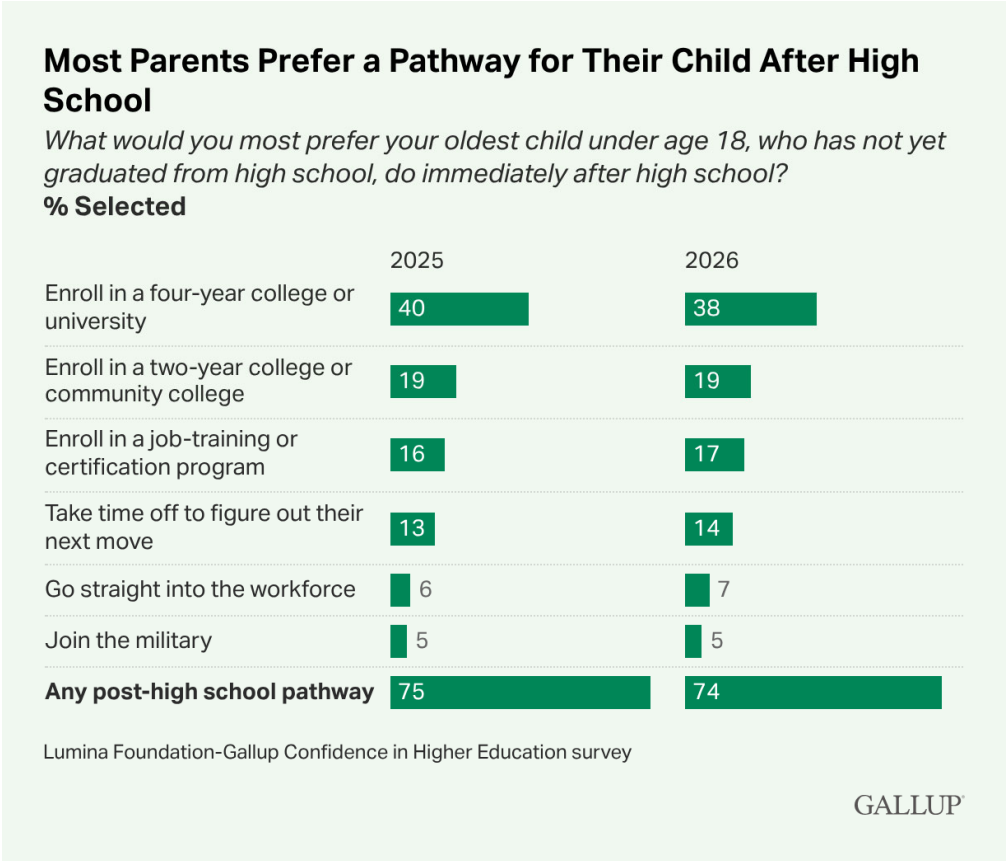


Similarly, about six in 10 adults believe a four-year bachelor’s degree is important to their career and financial goals

How important is a four-year college degree for you to reach your:



# Most parents prefer a postsecondary pathway post high school; income and educational attainment predict preferences

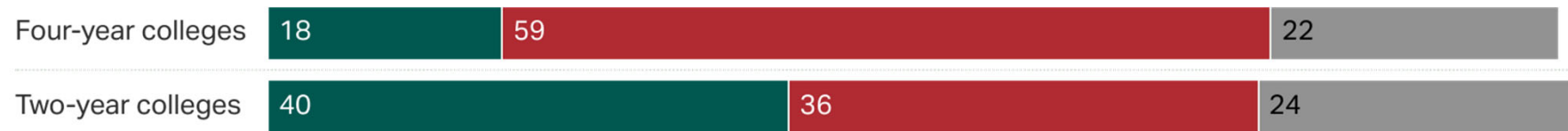


The strongest demographic patterns in parents' preferences for their child after high school are **related to their own educational attainment and household income**. ~9 in 10 parents with a four-year college degree or higher prefer a pathway after high school for their child. Income tracks closely: 86% of upper-income parents prefer a post-high school pathway, compared with 58% of lower-income parents.

Adults without a degree are twice as likely to say two-year colleges charge fair prices as they are to say the same of four-year colleges

Do you think \_\_\_\_ charge fair prices for what they offer students and graduates?

■ % Yes ■ % No ■ % Unsure

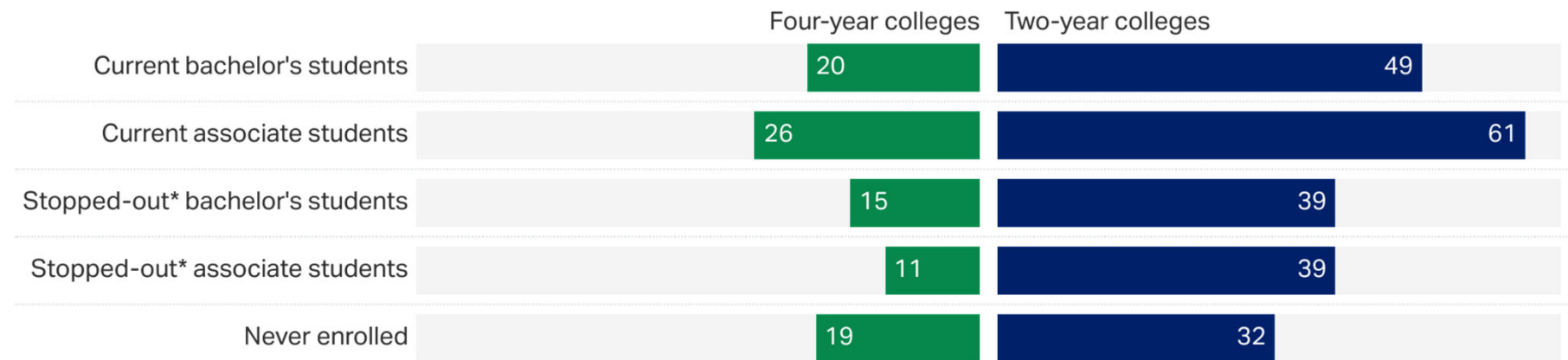


Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100% +/- 1%

# Just 20% of current bachelor's degree students believe four-year colleges charge fair prices for degrees; 61% of associate degree students who say the same of community colleges

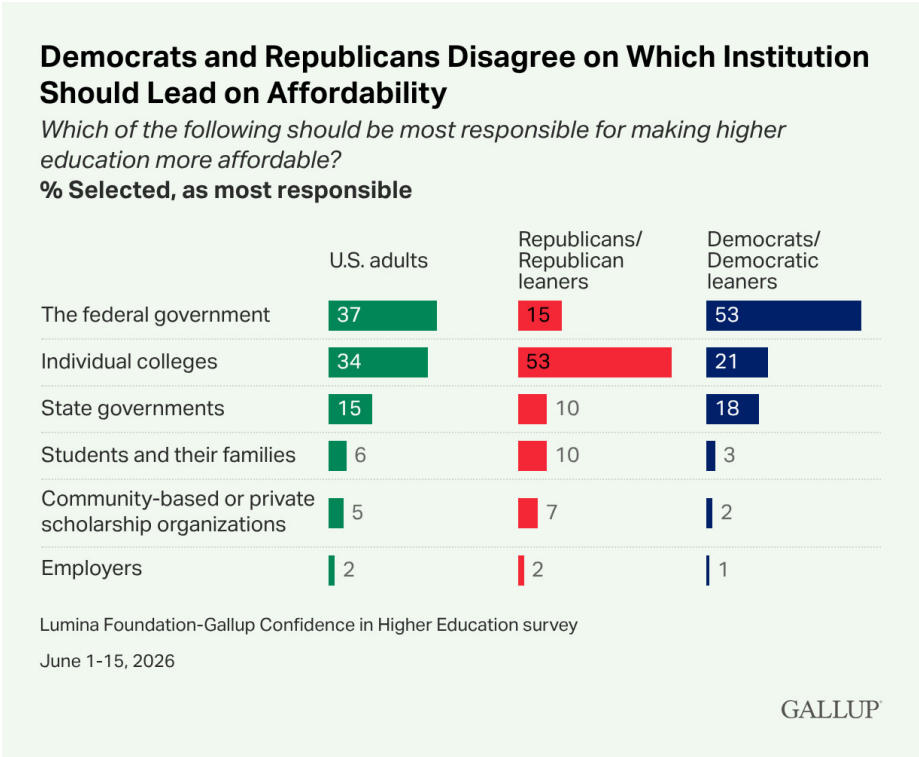
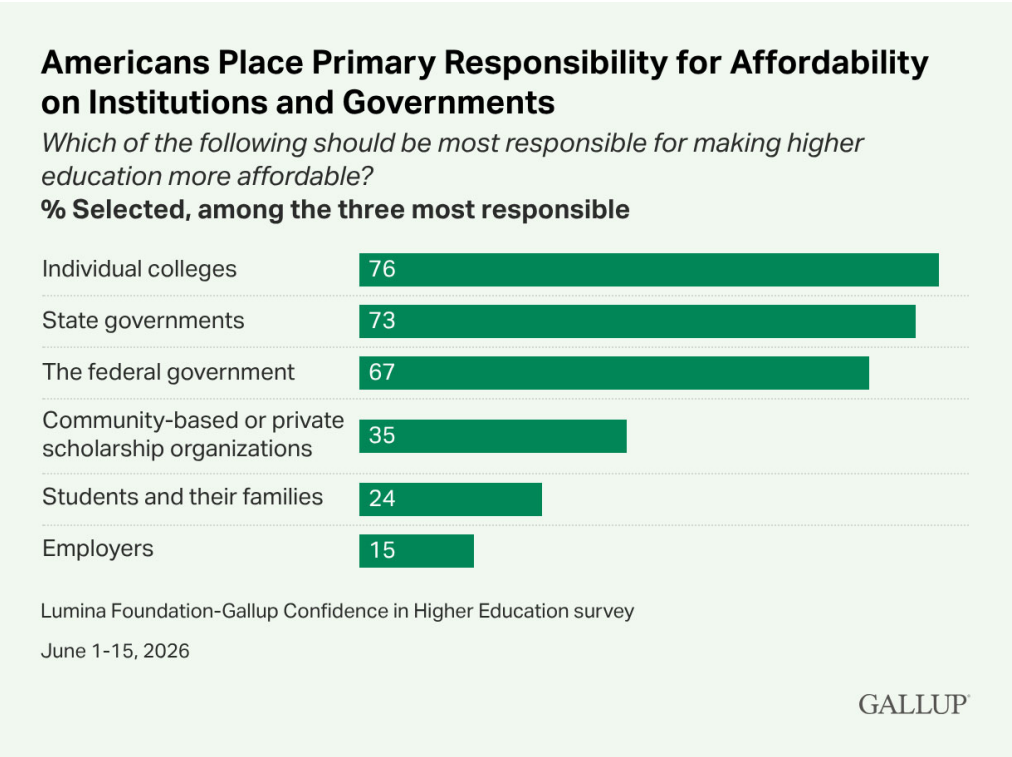
Do you think \_\_\_\_ charge fair prices for what they offer students and graduates?

% Yes



\*Stopped-out students refer to those students who enrolled in a program, but stopped attending the program before completing it.

# Americans say colleges and state/federal government equally responsible for addressing affordability



## Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways does this confirm what you already knew/believed to be true?
2. In what ways does this build upon/change/push your prior views on the topic?
3. What should leaders take from these findings?

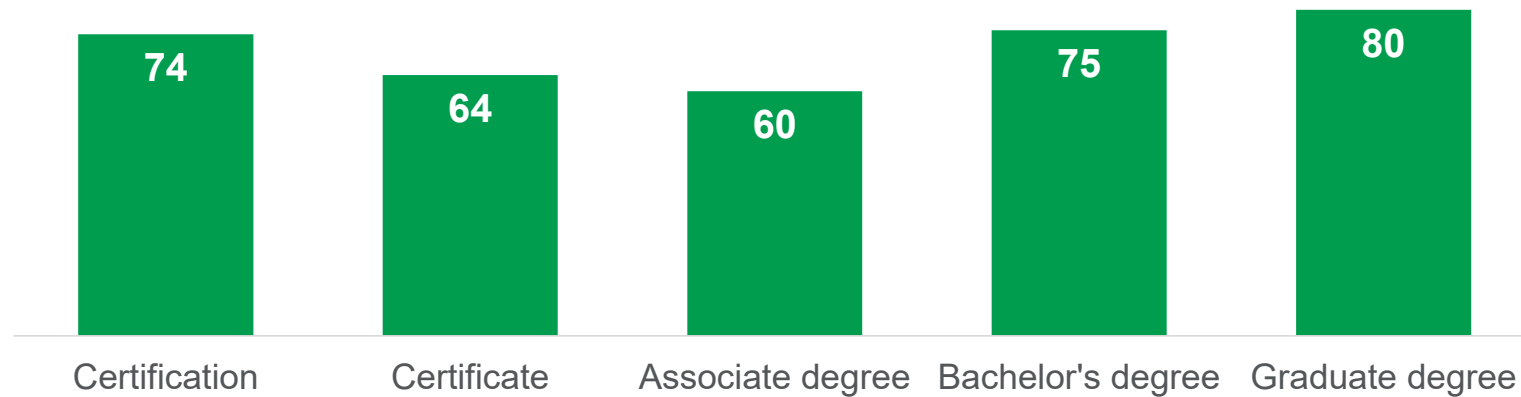


# Enrollment Decisions

## Majorities of those without a degree/credential value all higher ed levels

**In general, how valuable are each of the following types of degrees/credentials?**

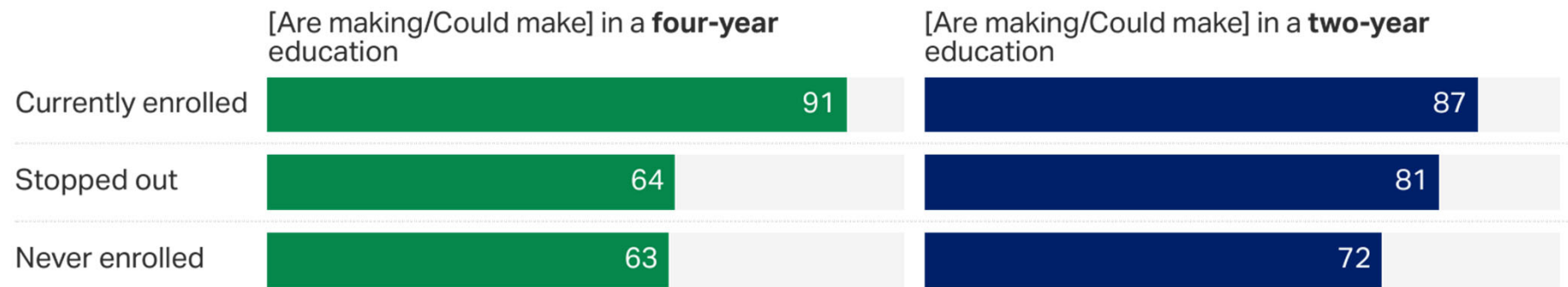
*(% Extremely/Very Valuable)*



## About two-thirds of stopped-out students still feel a two- or four-year degree would be worth the investment

Generally speaking, do you think the investment you \_\_\_\_\_ [is/would be] worth it for you?

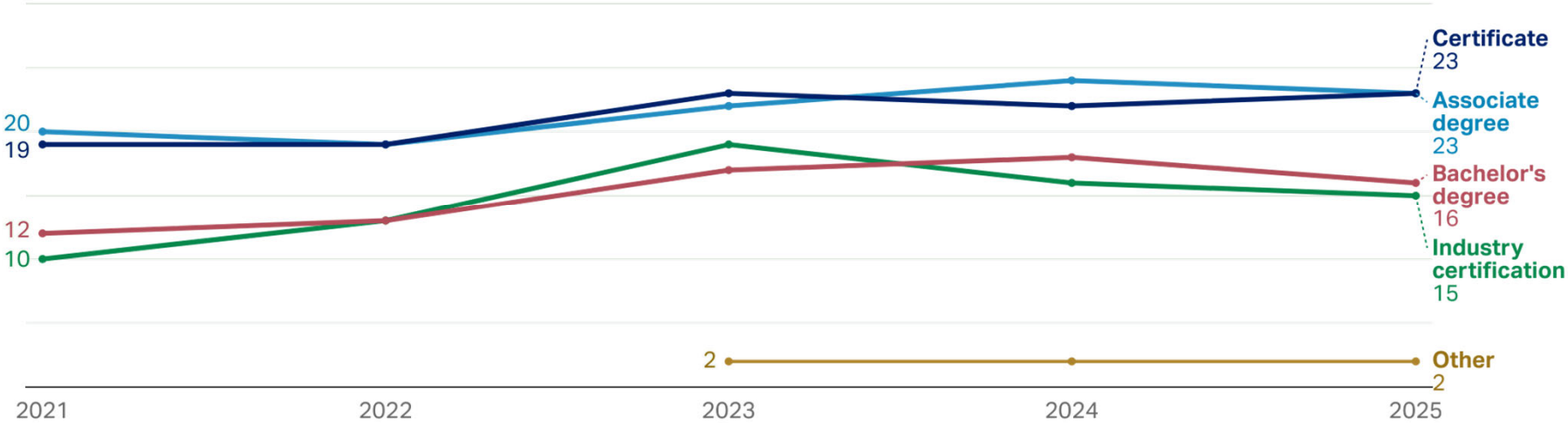
**% Yes, worth it**



Currently enrolled figures reflect students who are currently enrolled in the respective programs; stopped out figures reflect adults who have stopped out of any postsecondary program.

Over half of unenrolled adults (58%) have considered pursuing at least one postsecondary credential within the past two years.

Which of the following, if any, have you considered pursuing in the past two years? *Select all that apply.*  
**% Considered**

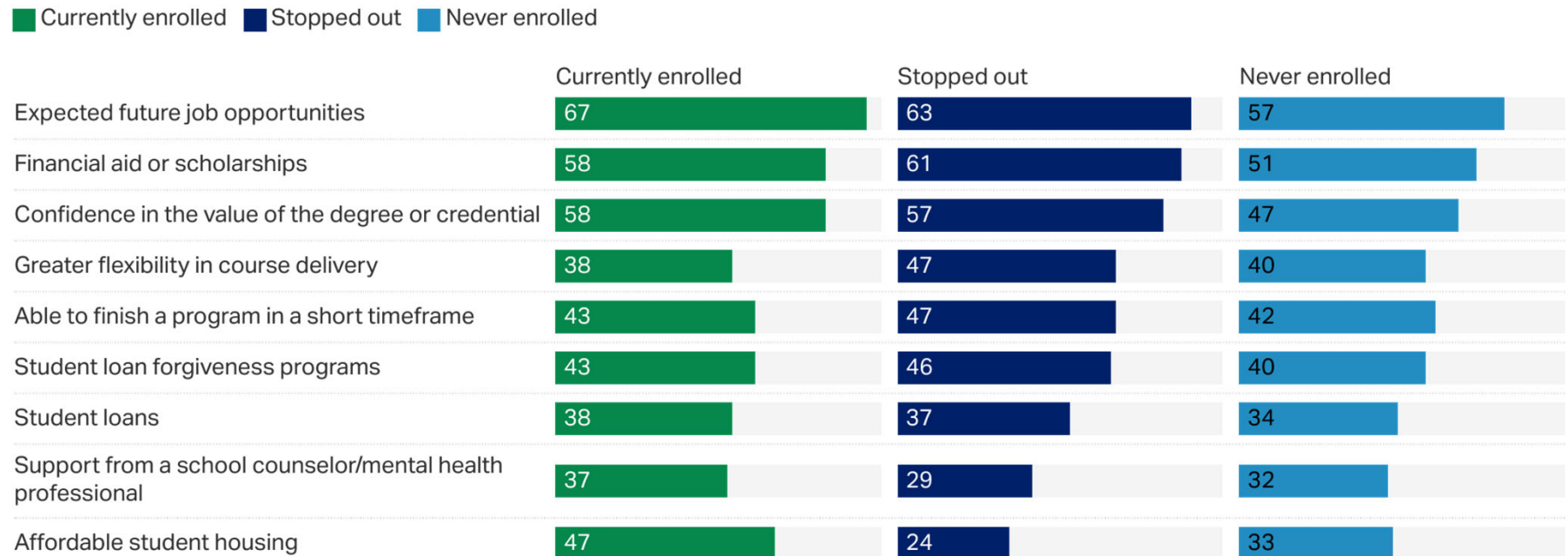


Among adults not currently enrolled in a postsecondary education program

# Job opportunities are the primary consideration in deciding whether to enroll, while program length and flexibility are particularly important to unenrolled adults

How important [are/would] each of the following [be] in [your being able to remain enrolled/getting you to enroll] in [your/a] program [in the next 12 months]?

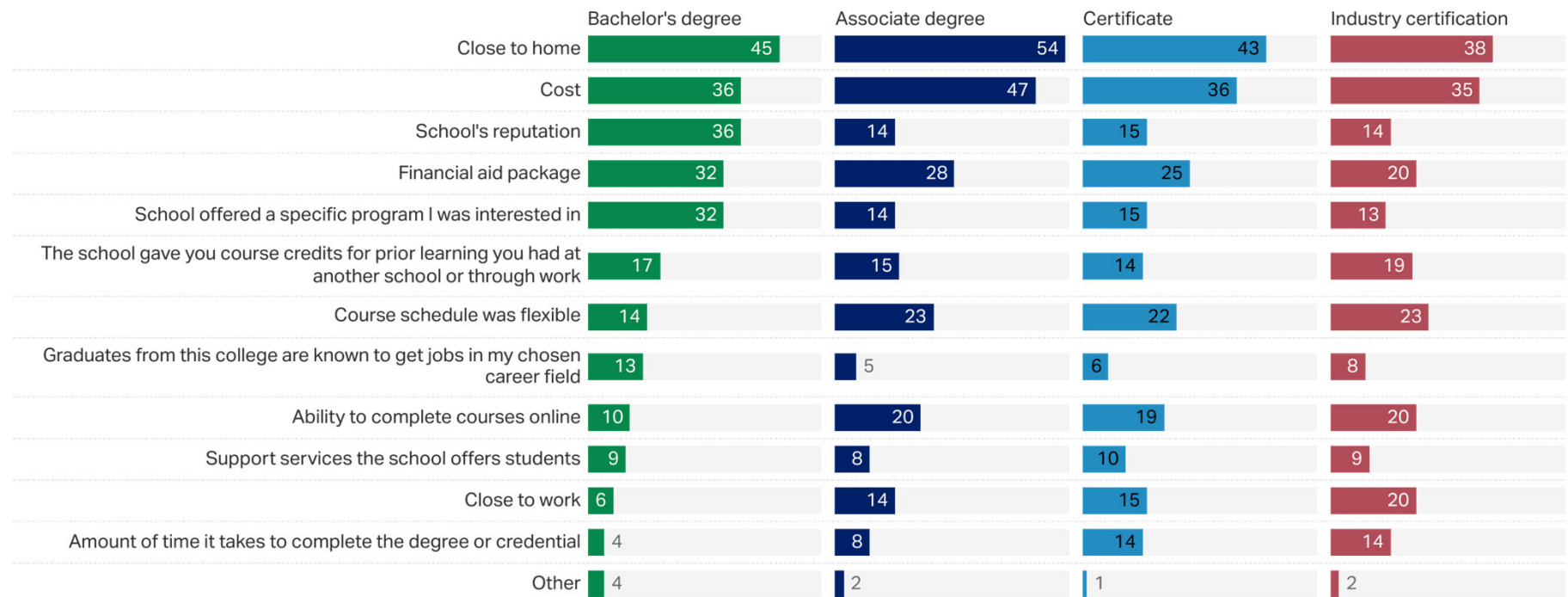
% Very important



## Cost and proximity are the most important factors when students are deciding between programs; for bachelor's degree students, a school's reputation is also a notable factor.

Which of the following describe the main reason(s) you chose to enroll at [Institution]? *Select up to three reasons.*

% Selected

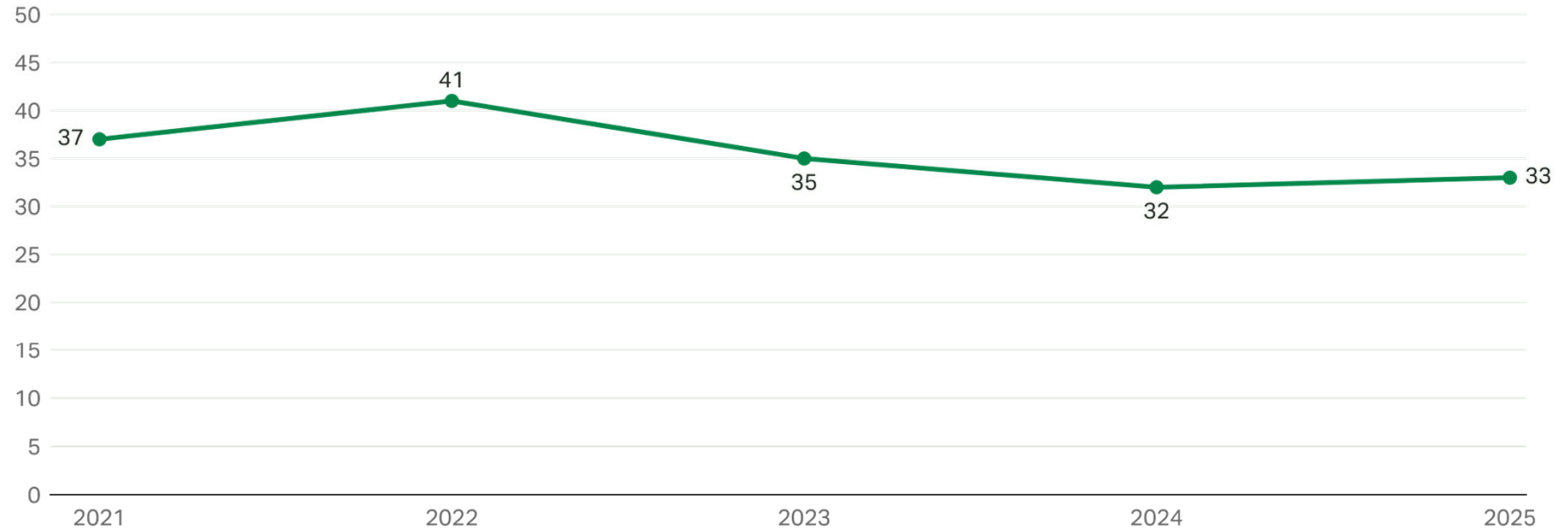


\*Among currently-enrolled students

## One in three students has recently considered stopping out of their program, a trend that has held steady following the Covid-19 pandemic

In the past six months, have you considered stopping your coursework?

% Yes



# Caretakers, first generation students, and those struggling financially are at a higher risk of stopping out.

In the past six months, have you considered stopping your coursework?

% Yes

## Program



## Gender



## Caretaking responsibilities



## First generation student



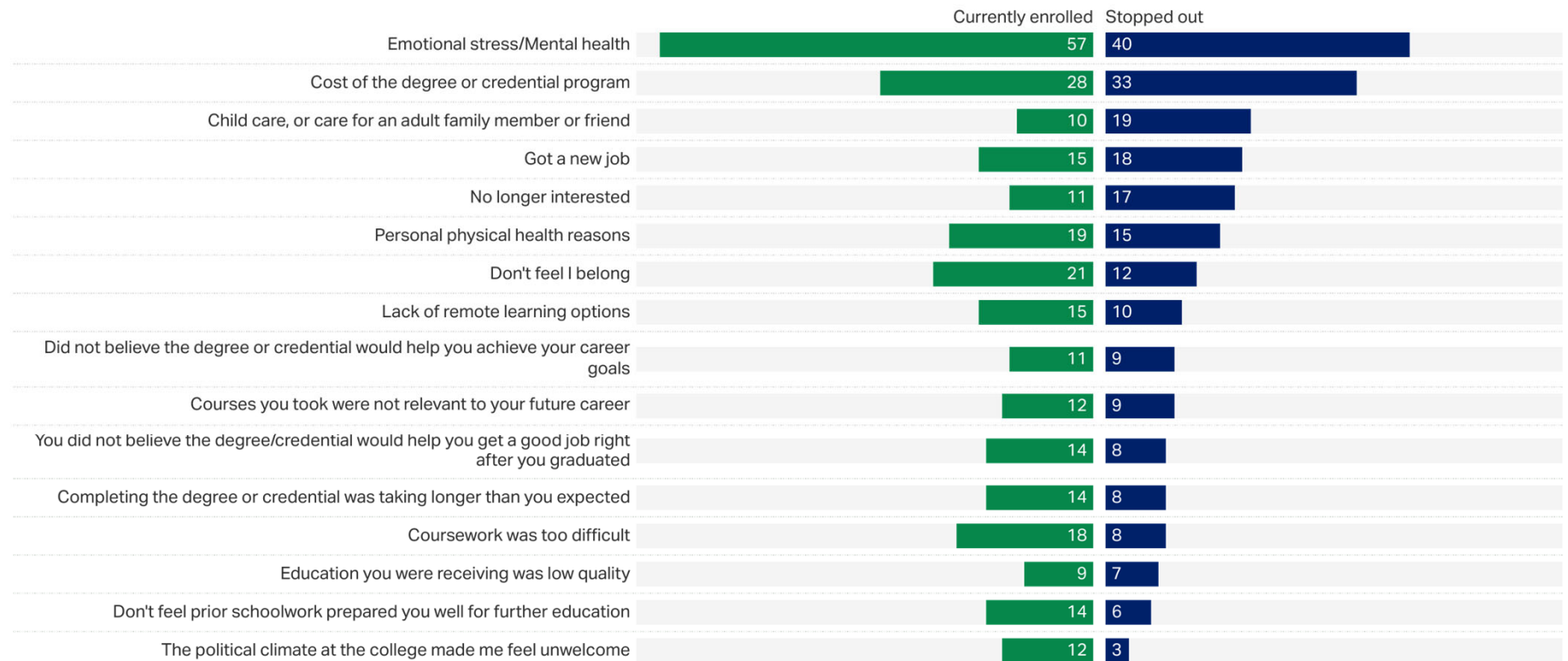
## Subjective income



## Emotional stress continues to be the primary reason for students stopping out or considering doing so; however, cost is nearly as pervasive an issue among those who did stop out.

Which of the following describes why you [considered stopping/stopped] your coursework? *Select all that apply.*

**% Selected**



## Questions for Discussion

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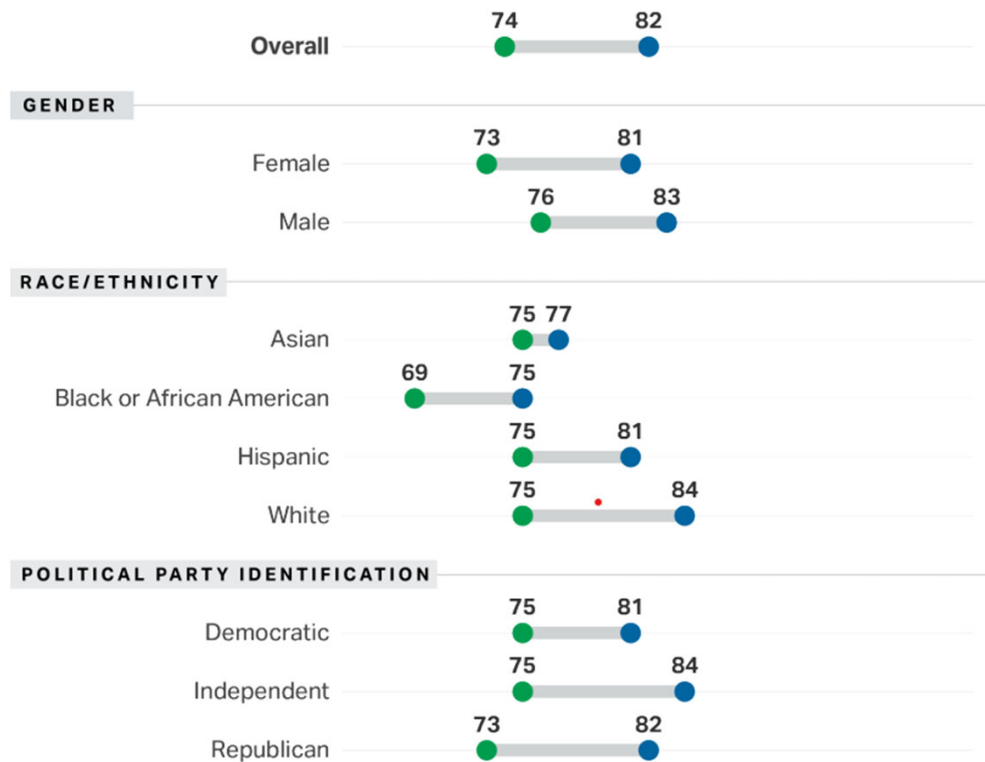
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# The Student Experience

# Majority of bachelors students feel respected on campus

% Strongly agree + Agree

- You are treated with respect **by other students** at [Institution].
- You are treated with respect **by faculty members** at [Institution].



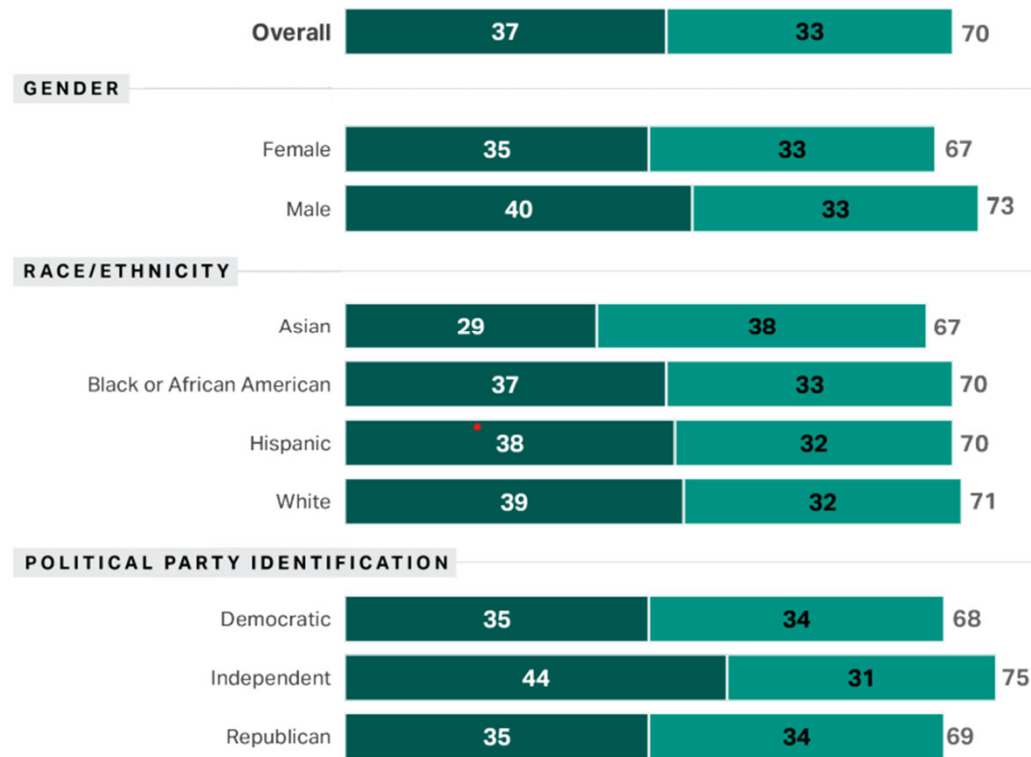
**Majority of all groups feel their faculty and other students respect them.**

Black students are slightly less likely than their peers to feel respected by other students and faculty.

# Majority of bachelor's students feel as if they belong at their institution

**You feel like you belong at [Institution].**

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree



Majority of **all groups** feel like they belong at their institution.

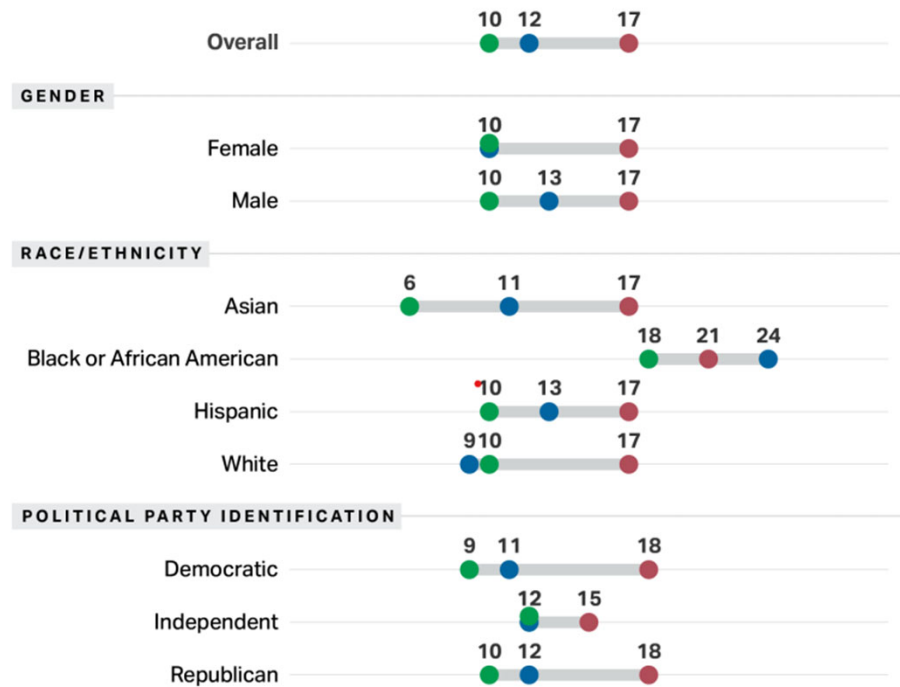
**Female and Asian students** slightly less likely to feel like they belong.

# About 1 in 10 have been harassed or discriminated against

How often, if ever, do you feel any of the following at [Institution].

% Frequently + % Occasionally

● Harassed ● Discriminated against ● Disrespected



**Black students** are far more likely than their peers to report being treated with disrespect, harassed or discriminated against.

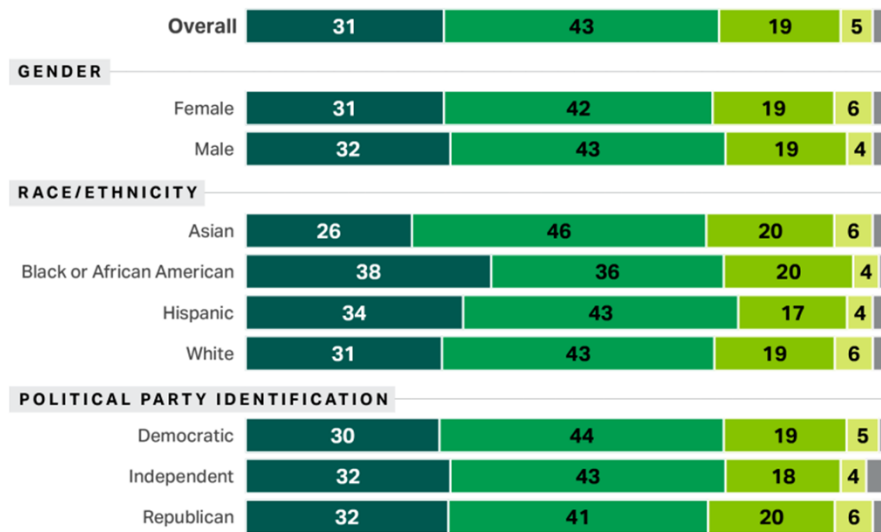
Female and male students, as well as students from different political backgrounds about as likely to report negative experiences.

# Majority of currently enrolled students rate institution positively on free speech

## How would you rate your institution in each of the following areas:

Promoting free speech

■ % Excellent ■ % Good ■ % Only fair ■ % Poor ■ % Does not apply

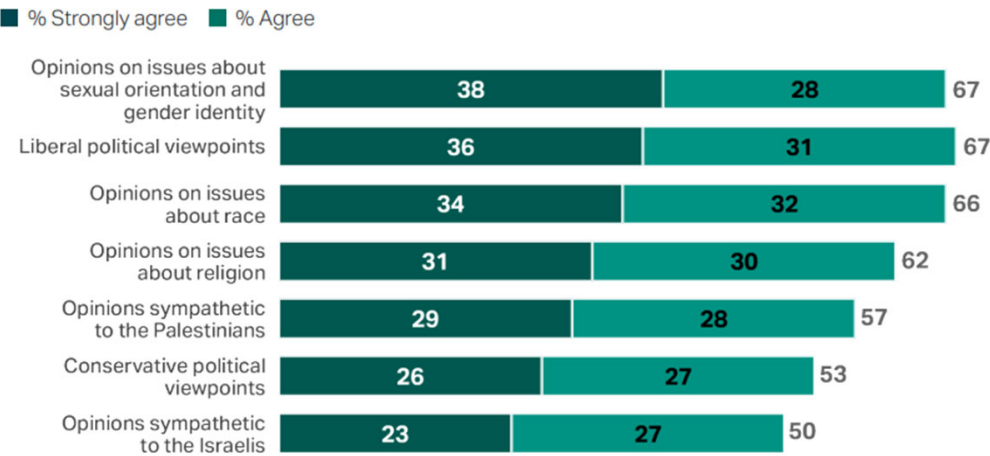


Note: Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1%; Percentages under 4% are not displayed.

Majority of **all groups** rate **their institution positively**, with few differences by political party, race/ethnicity and gender across all 4-year campuses.

# Majority feel they can express themselves freely on campus

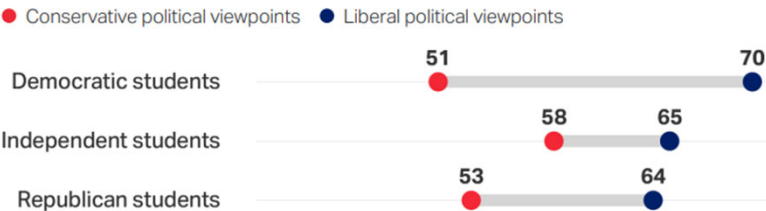
## [Institution] is a place where students can freely express:



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may sum to ±1 percentage point.

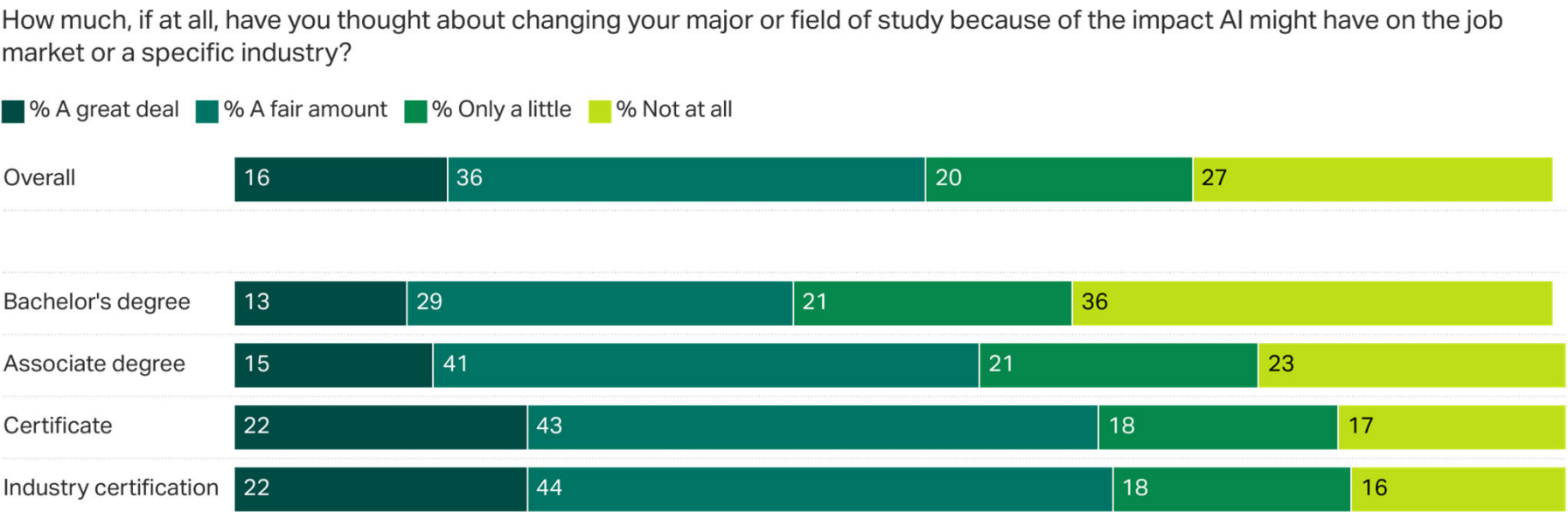
## [Institution] is a place where students can freely express:

% Strongly agree + Agree



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may sum to ±1 percentage point.

# Just over half of students (52%) say AI has caused them to consider changing their major due to AI’s effects on the job market



# About one in three students say the impact of AI has caused them to change their major; this is especially true of students struggling financially

Have you changed your major or field of study because of the impact AI might have?

% Yes



## Questions for Discussion

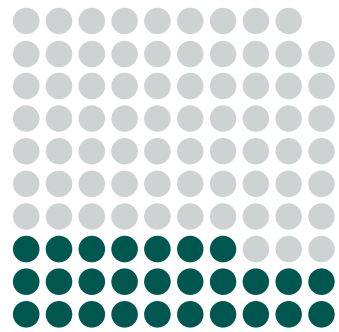
1. In what ways does this confirm what you already knew/believed to be true?
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# The Employer Perspective

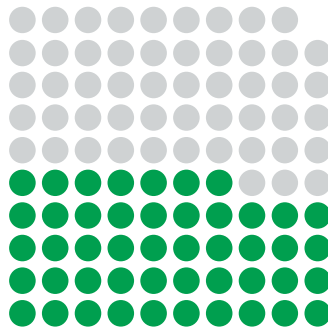
# Majority of employers say college degree/credential will be more/equally important in next 5 years

In your opinion, in the next 5 years, how important will it be to have a college degree or credential to get a good job at your organization?



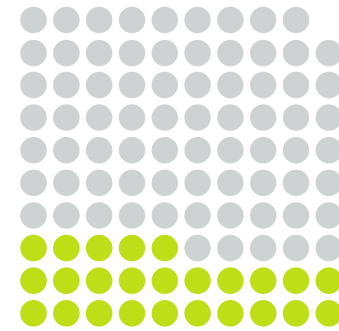
27%

More  
important



47%

As important  
as it is now



25%

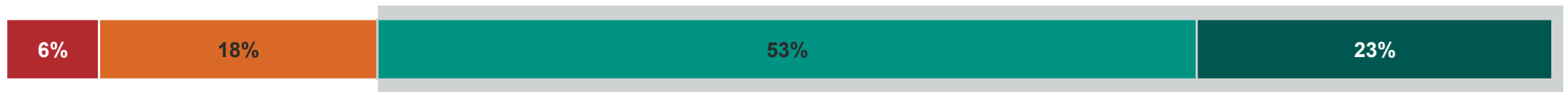
Less  
important

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

## Over 7 in 10 employers report preference for a bachelor's or associate degree regardless of requirements

Regardless of whether or not the roles you're often hiring for **require a bachelor's degree**, which of the following best describes your preference regarding a candidate's education background?

- Strongly prefer they do not have at least a bachelor's degree
- Prefer they do not have at least a bachelor's degree
- Prefer they have at least a bachelor's degree
- Strongly prefer they have at least a bachelor's degree



Regardless of whether or not the roles you're often hiring for **require an associate degree**, which of the following best describes your preference regarding a candidate's education background?

- Strongly prefer they do not have at least an associate degree
- Prefer they do not have at least an associate degree
- Prefer they have at least an associate degree
- Strongly prefer they have at least an associate degree



# About half say most jobs at their business require a degree for success

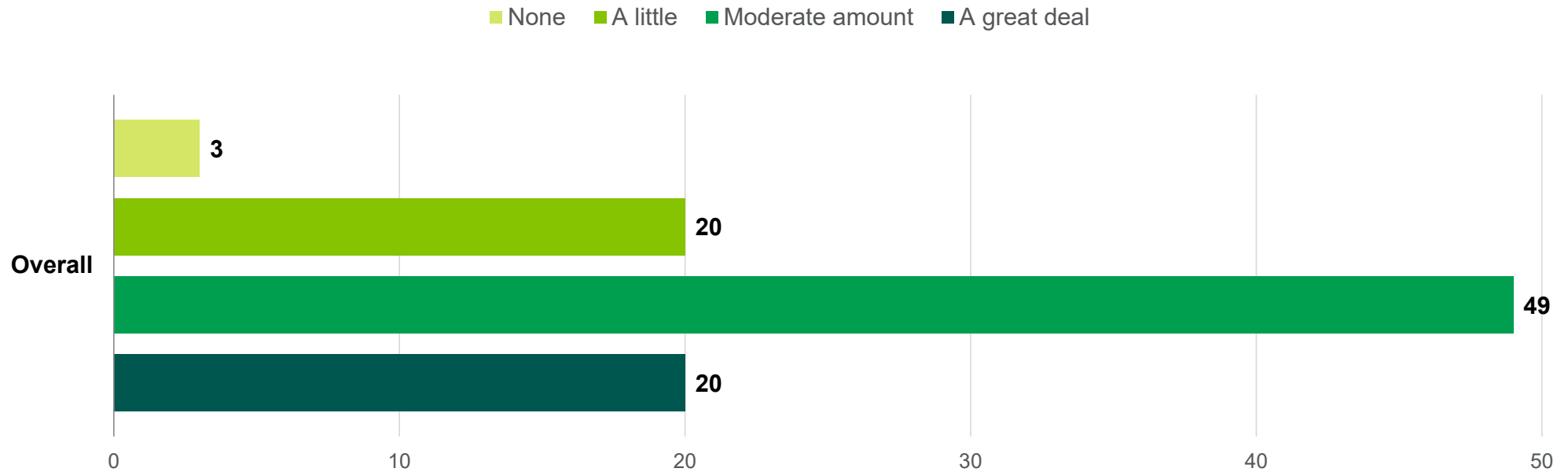
Most jobs at my business require a college degree to be successful.

Strongly disagree 2 3 4 Strongly agree



About 7 in 10 employers say recent graduates need a moderate or great deal of additional training to be effective in their roles; consistent across states

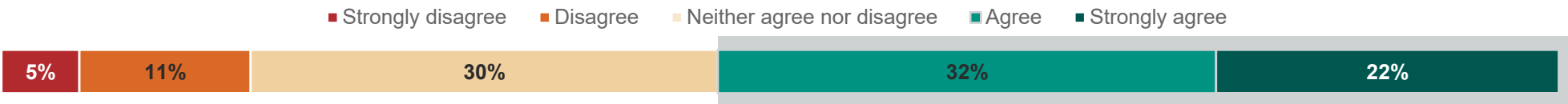
**Thinking about recent college graduates your organization has hired in the past 12 months, how much additional training or skills development did they require to perform effectively in their roles?**



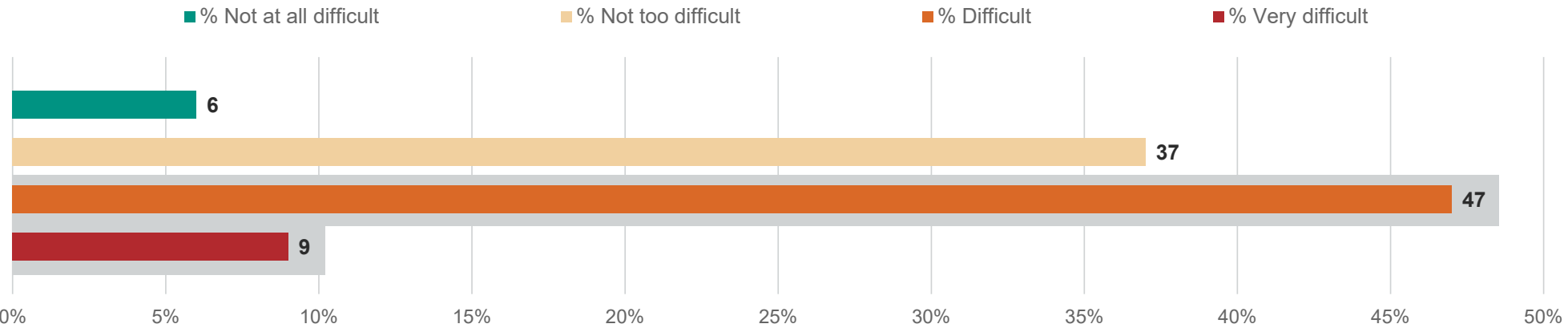
Note. Percentages do not add to 100% due to the exclusion of a fifth item response option: "Haven't hired recent graduates", who represented between 9%-10% of the overall, FutureReady states, and Non-FutureReady states samples.

About half say it is difficult to find the right candidates; only half say U.S. colleges and universities are graduating students with the skills/competencies their business needs

Colleges and universities in the United States are graduating students with the skills and competencies that MY business needs.

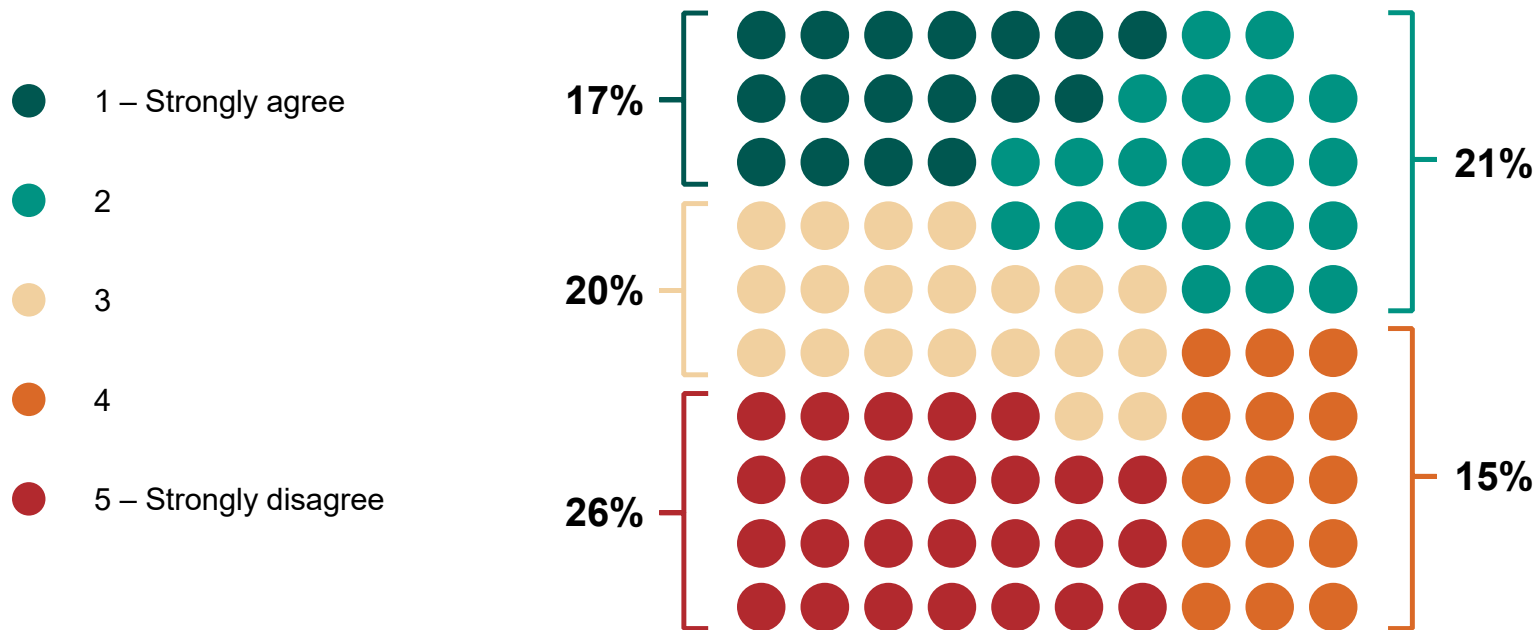


Thinking of the jobs you most often make hiring decisions for, how difficult, if at all, is it right now to find candidates with the right skills for these jobs?



# About one in 3 employers say they rely upon foreign-born workers due to shortage of American workers with necessary skills

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement.  
**Our business must hire foreign-born workers due to a shortage of American workers with the skills we need.**



## Questions for Discussion

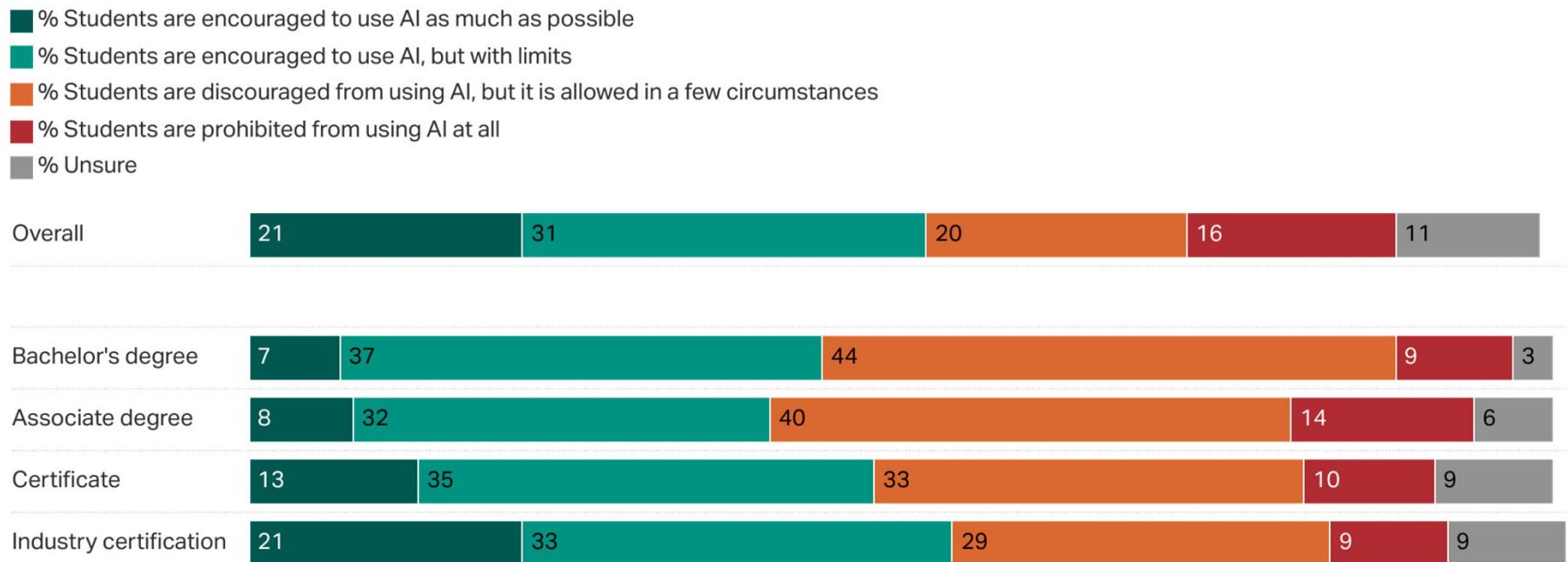
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2. In what ways does this build upon/change/push your prior views on the topic?
3. What should leaders take from these findings?

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# Questions?

[stephanie\\_marken@gallup.com](mailto:stephanie_marken@gallup.com)

Two- and four-year colleges are more likely to discourage or prohibit their students from using AI than they are to encourage its use in the classroom.



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