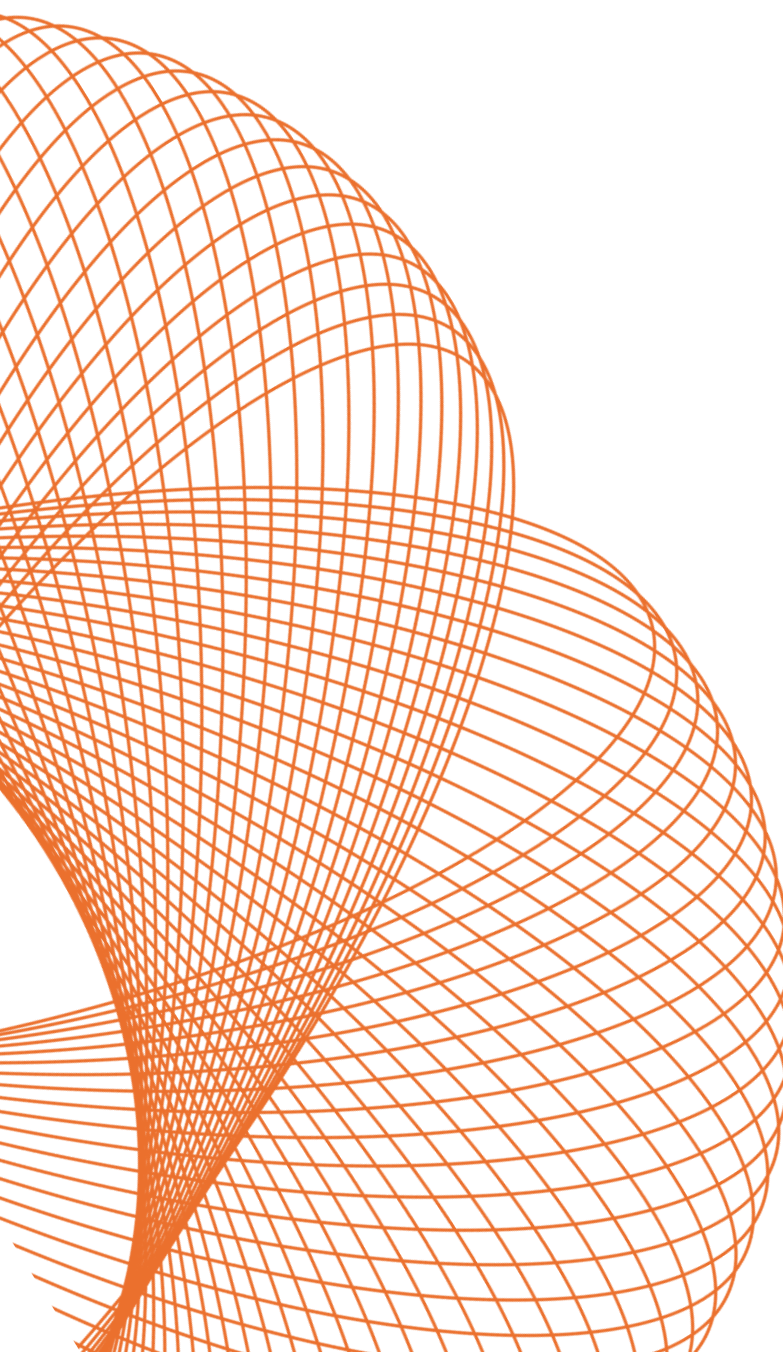


Topline Report

Varying Degrees 2023



Presented by

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Introduction

NORC at the University of Chicago conducted the Varying Degrees 2023 project on behalf of New America using NORC’s AmeriSpeak® Panel for the sample source. This was the seventh annual survey seeking to better understand the general population’s opinions on higher education. This year’s survey examined attitudes and opinions about a variety of areas, including professional preparedness of different degree types, affordability of and financial support for higher education, value of higher education credentials, as well as racial diversity and equity in higher education. The survey was offered in English and Spanish, and it was administered in two modes depending on the preference of the respondent provided during the panel recruitment: 1) self-administered by the respondent online via the Web; or 2) administered over the telephone by a live interviewer. Table 1 provides an overview.

Table 1. Study Overview

Category	Results
Study Target Population	General Population Age 18+
Sample Units	6,686
Completed Units	1,497
Expected Eligibility Rate	100%
Observed Eligibility Rate	100%
Margin of Error	± 3.46 percentage points (pp)
Design Effect	1.86
Survey Field Period	March 23 - May 8, 2023
Median Survey Administration Time	19 minutes

Methodology

Sampling

A general population sample 18 years and older was selected from NORC’s AmeriSpeak Panel for this study. Additional African Americans, Asian/Pacific Islander Americans, and Hispanic Americans were also sampled to hit client-specified targets for these respondent groups. The sample for a specific study is selected from the AmeriSpeak Panel using sampling strata based on age, race/Hispanic ethnicity, education, and gender (48 sampling strata in total). The following bulleted list provides a summary of the sampling strata.

Sample Strata

- Age
 - 18-34
 - 35-49
 - 50-64
 - 65 plus

- Race/Ethnicity
 - Non-Hispanic White
 - Non-Hispanic Black
 - Hispanic, any race
 - Non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander
 - Non-Hispanic Others
- Education Status
 - Less than High School
 - High School Equivalent
 - Some College/Associate's Degree
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Graduate Degree
- Gender
 - Male
 - Female

Sample selection accounts for the expected differential survey completion rates across the sampling strata. The size of the selected sample per stratum is determined such that the distribution of the complete surveys across the strata matches that of the target population as represented by census data. If a panel household has more than one active adult panel member, only one adult panel member is selected at random. When panelists are selected for an AmeriSpeak survey, the selection process, within each sampling strata, favors those who were not selected in the most recent previous AmeriSpeak survey. This selection process is designed to minimize the number of surveys any one panelist is exposed to and maximize the rotation of all panelists across AmeriSpeak surveys.

The outcome measures for the oversamples are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Outcome Measures

Oversample Category	Results
Non-Hispanic African Americans	
Completed Sample Units (n)	268
Margin of Error	± 7.33 percentage points (pp)
Design Effect	1.50
Hispanic Americans	
Completed Sample Units (n)	348
Margin of Error	±6.90 percentage points (pp)
Design Effect	1.72
Non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander Americans	
Completed Sample Units (n)	223
Margin of Error	± 8.93 percentage points (pp)
Design Effect	1.85

Fielding the Survey

A small sample of English-speaking AmeriSpeak web-mode panelists were invited on Friday, March 3, 2023 for a pretest. In total, NORC collected 57 pretest interviews. The initial data from the pretest were reviewed by NORC and delivered to New America. No changes were made before fielding the main survey to collect the survey interviews used for the final data. Pretest interviews are not included in the final data.

For the main survey, a sub-sample of AmeriSpeak web-mode panelists were invited to the survey on Thursday, March 23, 2023 in a soft-launch. The initial data from the soft-launch were once again reviewed to confirm that there are no processing or programming errors. Once reviewed, the remainder of sampled AmeriSpeak panelists were invited to the survey on Monday, March 27, 2023.

In total, NORC collected 1,497 final interviews, 1,422 by web mode and 75 by phone mode. This does not include interviews that may have been removed for data quality purposes (i.e., speeding, high refusal rates, straight-lining). This final collection of survey completers includes specific oversamples of Non-Hispanic African Americans (268 of completions), Hispanics (348 of completions), and Non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander Americans (223 of completions) to ensure adequate sample size of those groups for analysis. These oversampled groups are weighted down to match their respective proportion in the population in the weighting process.

Panel and Survey Sample Performance Measures

To meet requirements in the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, we offer performance outcome measures of both the AmeriSpeak Panel and the sample selected from the panel. The AmeriSpeak Panel is a household panel, so recruitment and retention rates are household rates. The survey sample is an individual-level sample pulled from the AmeriSpeak panel, so those are individual-level rates.

Weighted Household Recruitment Rate (WPrecr): The weighted AAPOR RR3¹ at the household level for AmeriSpeak panel recruitment. A recruited household is a household where at least one adult successfully completed the recruitment survey and joined the panel.

Weighted Household Retention Rate (WPreRet): The weighted percent of recruited households that remain on the panel and are available for sampling for this survey. Unavailable panelists are those who have temporarily or permanently asked to be removed from the panel or from receiving surveys.

Those performance measures are shown in Table 3.

¹ AAPOR RR3 and other response rate calculations can be found here: <https://www.aapor.org/Education-Resources/For-Researchers/Poll-Survey-FAQ/Response-Rates-An-Overview.aspx>.

Table 3. Panel Outcome Measures

Weighted Panel Outcome Measures	
Weighted Household Panel Recruitment Rate (WPrecr)	Weighted Household Panel Retention Rate (WPreRet)
20.6%	79.9%

The performance outcome measures for the selected sample from the panel are Survey Completion Rate and Weighted Cumulative Response rate.

Survey Completion Rate (SurC): The percent of sample members who completed the survey interview. 6,686 panelists were invited to the survey, and 1,497 completed the survey for a 22.4% Survey Completion Rate. As noted earlier, survey completes exclude any cases removed due to data quality concerns.

Weighted Cumulative Response Rate (WCR): The overall survey response rate that accounts for survey response in all phases, including panel recruitment, panel retention, and survey completion. This overall rate is weighted to account for the sample design and differential inclusion probabilities of sample members in all sampling stages and is expressed in the following formula: $WCR = SurC \times WPreRet \times WPreRecr$.

Those statistics are shown in Table 4 for the total select sample including the General Population and Race-Ethnicity Oversamples are combined.

Table 4. Survey Sample Outcome Measures for the General Population and Race-Ethnicity Oversamples

Survey Sample Outcome Measures	
Survey Completion Rate (SurC)	Weighted Cumulative Response Rate (WCR)
22.4%	3.7%

Gaining Cooperation of AmeriSpeak Panelists for the Survey

If invited, AmeriSpeak panelists could take the survey online through the password-protected AmeriSpeak Mobile App, the password-protected AmeriSpeak Web portal, or by following a link in the e-mail invitation sent to them. To encourage study cooperation, NORC sent the initial invitation and email reminders to sampled web-mode panelists on the following dates:

- Thursday, March 23, 2023 (Soft-launch Sample Email Invitation)
- Sunday, March 26, 2023 (Soft-launch Sample Email Reminder)
- Monday, March 27, 2023 (Remaining Sample Email Invitation)
- Thursday, March 30, 2023 (Remaining Sample Email Reminder)
- Sunday, April 2, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Thursday, April 6, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Monday, April 10, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Friday, April 14, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)

- Sunday, April 16, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Thursday, April 20, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Saturday, April 22, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Monday, April 24, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Wednesday, April 26, 2023 (Additional Sample Email Invitation)
- Tuesday, May 2, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Thursday, May 4, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)
- Sunday, May 7, 2023 (Total Sample Email Reminder)

SMS or text messages were sent to those invited panelists who have agreed to receive such messages on the following days:

- Tuesday, April 18, 2023 (Total Sample SMS Reminder)
- Saturday, May 6, 2023 (Total Sample SMS Reminder)

To administer the phone survey, NORC dialed sampled panelists who prefer to take surveys on the phone from Tuesday, March 28 to Sunday, May 7, 2023. Although most panelists who have stated a preference to take the survey on the phone do take them in that mode, they also have the option of taking the survey online via the web portal or the AmeriSpeak App or can ask the interviewer to e-mail them an invite instead. These rare phone-preferred panelists who end up taking the survey online are coded in the data based on the mode they took the survey, not their previously stated mode preference.

Panelists were offered the cash equivalent of \$3 for completing this survey.

Varying Degrees 2023 Instrument

The Varying Degrees instrument collects information about the public's perceptions of a variety of aspects related to U.S. postsecondary education. As such, the information collected must serve two purposes. First, the instrument must be able to illuminate findings that are responsive to current contexts that influence public opinion. Second, the instrument must also be able to collect information about the public's perceptions over time to illuminate trends.

The Varying Degrees 2023 instrument consisted of eight sections:

1. Enrollment and Borrowing Status
2. Employment and Financial Security
3. Attitudes About Affordability, Value, Funding, and Accountability
4. Attitudes About Higher Education Institutions
5. Attitudes About College Admission and Selection
6. Attitudes About Online and In-person Education
7. Attitudes About Higher Education Impact
8. Respondent and Household Demographic Information

With particular attention to the survey’s first purpose, NORC worked with New America to develop new items for the 2023 instrument to measure two areas increasingly prevalent in discourse related to U.S. higher education:

Value-related attitudes. 15 new items were developed (included in Section 3) that measure the public’s attitudes about a variety of benefits associated with undergraduate college credentials (i.e., associate or bachelor’s degrees or undergraduate certificates) compared to those without these. These items measured attitudes about 1) job and economic opportunity for graduates (4 items, $\alpha = .91$); 2) social benefits for graduates (3 items, $\alpha = .88$); and benefits that college graduates offer to their communities (8 items, $\alpha = .89$).²

Equity-related attitudes. 13 new survey items were developed (included in Sections 4 and 5) that measure the public’s attitudes about 1) equity within U.S. higher education (3 items, $\alpha = .79$); 2) responsibility of schools and government to ensure equity (5 items, $\alpha = .83$); and 3) race-based affirmative action in higher education (5 items, $\alpha = .87$).

Both the value- and equity-related items were developed using the Postsecondary Value Commission’s value framework.³ It offers an understanding of the role of postsecondary education in promoting equitable individual and societal outcomes. We used the framework to develop items related to benefits for college graduates (i.e., earnings, opportunities to build wealth, job availability and satisfaction, satisfaction with communities where they live, good health) as well as benefits that college graduates offer to their communities (i.e., workforce and employment, tax revenue, support for local business, civic participation, public health, and cultural participation). The framework was also used to develop items related to equity within U.S. higher education (i.e., equitable access and affordability, equitable support, and equitable completion) and responsibility of colleges, universities, as well as state and federal governments to ensure equity. Items to measure attitudes about race-based affirmative action were developed (i.e., perceived benefits of considering race and ethnicity among other factors in admission decisions, responsibility of schools to prioritize racial and ethnic diversity among students, faculty, and staff). To do this, the survey methodologist drew from literature on the educational benefits and other impacts of diverse higher education contexts.⁴

Political views and attitudes. Given the newly developed items related to value- and equity-related attitudes, that these attitudes are often divided across political party (and other group) membership, and inter- as well as intra-party political divisiveness among Americans, NORC also worked with New America to expand how the 2023 instrument asked respondents about

² Cronbach’s alpha (α) values reflect how closely related the survey items are as a group (i.e., the reliability, or internal consistency, of the items).

³ Postsecondary Value Commission. (2021). *Equitable value: Promoting economic mobility and social justice through postsecondary education*. <https://postsecondaryvalue.org/reports/>

⁴ O’Neil, J. (2023). *The legacy and opportunity of affirmative action*. New York, NY: Thurgood Marshall Institute NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. <https://tminstituteldf.org/redressing-educational-inequality-the-legacy-and-opportunity-of-affirmative-action/>

their political views, party alignment, and political attitudes. Using Pew Research Center’s most recent political typology, we developed five new items to measure 1) political views (i.e., very conservative to very liberal), 2) political party view alignment, and 3) political attitudes around which there is significant division (i.e., the extent that anything needs to be done in the U.S. to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, how to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic background).⁵

The final Varying Degrees 2023 instrument is found in Appendix B with all new or revised items indicated.

Findings

The findings presented in this 2023 topline report are focused on the new value- and equity-related attitude items for which New America requested in-depth analyses.

In reviewing earlier Varying Degrees findings, the general public’s attitudes about the return on the investment in postsecondary education differ and are often divided across group membership (i.e., political party, race, and ethnicity). For instance, over a quarter of 2022 Varying Degrees respondents disagreed that education beyond high school offers a good return on investment for students and for the general population. Additionally, just over half of all 2022 respondents reported that colleges and universities are having a positive effect on the country. In 2022, both Democrats and respondents of color reported significantly more agreement about the return on investment for both students and the general population, and both groups were significantly more likely to report positive effects of college and universities on how things are going in the country. In addition to the general public’s divided attitudes about the value of postsecondary educational credentials, Americans are also divided on their attitudes about issues such as the value of diversity and race-based affirmative action⁶ on college campuses as well as whether anything should be done to ensure equal rights for individuals of all backgrounds.⁷

This year’s analyses sought to understand how Americans’ views on the value of postsecondary educational credentials and equity-related attitudes relate to political views as well as other demographic (i.e., race, ethnicity, educational attainment) and psychographic (i.e., attitudes about various aspects of higher education) characteristics. To do this, NORC used two-step cluster analysis, a procedure that grouped survey respondents together based on their responses to items that asked about their attitudes related to 1) the benefits of postsecondary educational credentials and 2) equity within higher education. Rather than examining separate cross-group differences in respondents’ attitudes—which are largely understood from existing

⁵ Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology. Report available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/>

⁶ Petts, A.L. (2022) Attitudes about affirmative action in higher education admissions. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 63(4), 711-732.

⁷ Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology. Report available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/>

Varying Degrees findings and broader research into these areas—cluster analysis approaches examining attitudinal differences in a more expansive manner.

The cluster analysis unfolded in three parts.⁸ First, the analysis grouped respondents into distinct clusters based solely on their similar responses to the 15 value- and 13 equity-related items (i.e., independent from respondents’ political, demographic, or other psychographic characteristics). Clusters were based on respondents’ item scores for each of the 15 value- and 13 equity-related items. Second, the analysis characterized these groups of respondents in terms of differences in their attitudes (e.g., the proportion of each group that agreed with specific equity-related attitudes). Finally, the analysis characterized these groups of respondents in terms of differences in their political, demographic, and other psychographic characteristics (e.g., the proportion of each group that considers their political views to be very conservative or very liberal, the proportion of each group that agrees that a high-quality education after high school is affordable).

Our two-step cluster analysis results suggest that Americans divide into two distinct groups related to their attitudes about the benefits associated with undergraduate college credentials: 1) Higher Education Believers and 2) Higher Education Skeptics. Additionally, our results suggest that Americans divide into four distinct groups related to their attitudes about equity and race-based affirmative action within U.S. higher education: 1) Equity Devotees, 2) Equity Moderates, 3) Equity Realists, and 4) Equity Skeptics. Table 5 includes an initial, brief definition of each group, while the findings that follow include in-depth findings that characterize differences in these groups’ attitudes as well as differences in these groups’ political, other demographic, and psychographic characteristics.

Table 5. Group Definitions

Groups based on attitudes about the benefits associated with undergraduate college credentials	Definition of Group
Higher Education Believers	Nearly all see a variety of economic and social benefits for college graduates and for the communities where they live.
Higher Education Skeptics	Most do not see economic and social benefits for college graduates, <i>but</i> they do see some benefits for the communities where graduates live.

⁸ Don’t Know, Skipped, and Refused responses were removed from the value- and equity-related attitude items before cluster analysis. All grouping and characterizing, therefore, considers only those who provided a substantive response to these attitude items. Note: the results provided by AmeriSpeak in the custom banner tables did not remove Don’t Know/Skipped for their analyses, and thus there may be differences between the AmeriSpeak tables and the results presented in this report.

Table 5 (cont'd). Group Definitions

Groups based on attitudes about equity and race-based affirmative action within U.S. higher education	Definition of Group
<p>Equity Devotees</p>	<p>Nearly all agree that colleges, universities, as well as state and federal government have a responsibility to ensure equity. Nearly all agree that higher education pathways (i.e., affordability, opportunity to enroll and complete programs) are equitable. Nearly all agree with race-based affirmative action practices and that these help reduce broader racial and ethnic inequalities.</p>
<p>Equity Moderates</p>	<p>Most think that schools and government have a responsibility to ensure equity. Most do not think that education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it. However, most think that those who want to pursue and finish education beyond high school have equal opportunities to do so. Most agree with race-based affirmative action practices but agree less about the benefits of these practices in terms of addressing broader societal inequalities.</p>
<p>Equity Realists</p>	<p>Nearly all agree that schools and government have a responsibility to ensure equity. However, very few think that higher education pathways (i.e., affordability, opportunity to enroll and complete programs) are equitable. Nearly all agree with race-based affirmative action practices and that these help reduce broader racial and ethnic inequalities.</p>
<p>Equity Skeptics</p>	<p>Most think that those who want to pursue and finish education beyond high school have equal opportunities to do so. Almost half thinks that education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it. Very few think that schools should admit more students or hire more faculty and staff of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Very few think that race-based affirmative action practices help address broader racial and ethnic inequalities.</p>

Americans Divided: Higher Education Believers and Skeptics

The findings suggest Americans divide into two distinct groups related to their attitudes about the benefits associated with undergraduate college credentials; Table 6 summarizes key differences between these groups. The 2023 Varying Degrees survey asked respondents about these attitudes in two ways (i.e., benefits for graduates as well as benefits for graduates’ communities).

Table 6. Two Groups of Americans Based on Their Attitudes About the Benefits of Undergraduate Credentials

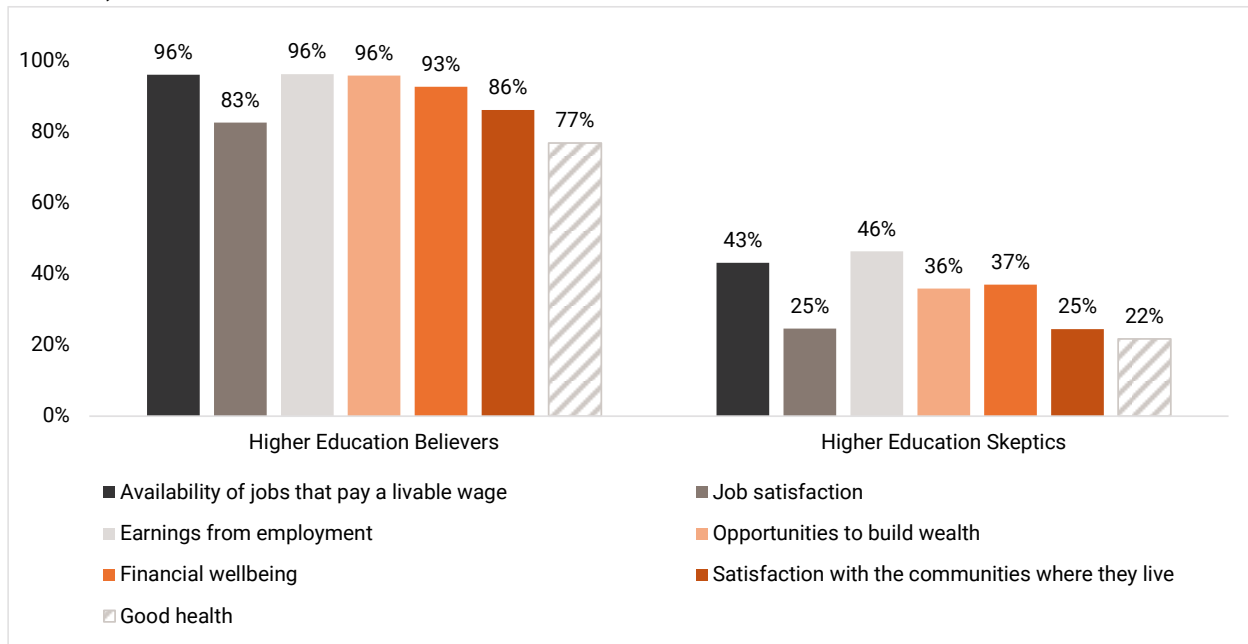
Higher Education Believers (52% of Americans)	Higher Education Skeptics (48% of Americans)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly all think graduates benefit more economically <i>and</i> socially compared to those without credentials. Nearly all also see economic, employment, and social benefits that graduates contribute to their communities. More Democrats (though nearly half have moderate political views) Higher educational attainment Most think colleges and universities are having a positive impact on the country. View higher levels of educational attainment as necessary in order to ensure financial security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most do not see economic benefits for graduates compared to those without credentials. Very few think there are social benefits for graduates compared to those without credentials. Think a skilled workforce is the biggest benefit that graduates provide their communities Most see additional economic, employment, and social benefits that graduates contribute to their communities. More Republicans (though nearly half have moderate political views) Split in terms of thinking that colleges and universities are having positive or negative impacts on the country

Value for graduates. Respondents were asked to rate⁹ a total of seven items that measured their attitudes about the benefits of an associate or bachelor’s degree or undergraduate certificate for individuals who have completed these programs compared to those without these credentials. Four of these items measured job and economic opportunity for graduates (i.e., availability of jobs that pay a livable wage, job satisfaction, earnings from employment, and opportunities to build wealth). The remaining three items measured social benefits for graduates (i.e., satisfaction with communities where they live, good health, and financial wellbeing).

⁹ The items’ 5-point response scale included: Much Worse, Somewhat Worse, About the Same, Somewhat Better, and Much Better.

Figure 1 shows the percent¹⁰ of respondents in the two groups who reported *at least some benefit* for individuals who have completed these undergraduate credentials (compared to those without credentials).¹¹

Figure 1. Percent of Higher Education Believers and Skeptics that report individuals do somewhat or much better from earning an undergraduate credential (compared to those without)



Nearly all Higher Education Believers think undergraduate credentials benefit those who complete these programs in a variety of ways compared to individuals without such credentials. Virtually all in this group (96%) think the availability of jobs that pay a livable wage, earnings from employment, and opportunities to build wealth are *at least somewhat better* than for individuals without credentials. In fact, almost half of Higher Education Believers (between 47% and 48%) think these same three outcomes are *much better* for individuals with undergraduate credentials compared to their counterparts without these.

While improved job and economic opportunity for graduates were the highest rated benefits among Higher Education Believers, most of this group also thinks social benefits for graduates (compared to their counterparts without credentials) are also better. Over three-fourths of Higher Education Believers think satisfaction with the communities where graduates live (86%) and good health (77%) are *at least somewhat better* for individuals with undergraduate credentials.

¹⁰ These analyses reflect weighted percentages.

¹¹ These values represent the combined percentages of respondents who answered Somewhat Better and Much Better to this survey item.

The Higher Education Skeptics group thinks much differently about the benefits conferred to those who complete undergraduate programs compared to those who do not. Less than half of Higher Education Skeptics think individuals with undergraduate credentials *at least somewhat benefit* in the variety of ways the survey asked. Like Higher Education Believers, these respondents rated the availability of jobs that pay a livable wage (43%) and earnings from employment (46%) for graduates as *at least somewhat better* compared to those without credentials. However, these rates are markedly lower than the Higher Education Believers.

Good health, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with the communities where they live were the lowest rated benefits for graduates across both groups. However, the two groups also diverged *the most* related to attitudes about these particular benefits. Higher Education Believers rated all three of these outcomes as *at least somewhat better* for graduates at about three times the rate of Higher Education Skeptics.

Value for communities. Respondents were also asked to rate¹² a total of eight items that measured how much, if at all, they think individuals who complete an associate or bachelor's degree or undergraduate certificate offer different types of benefits to their communities. These eight items measured economic (i.e., increased public tax revenue, support for local businesses), employment (i.e., skilled workforce, range of employment opportunities, low unemployment rates), and social benefits (i.e., increased civic participation, cultural participation and opportunities, and improved public health).

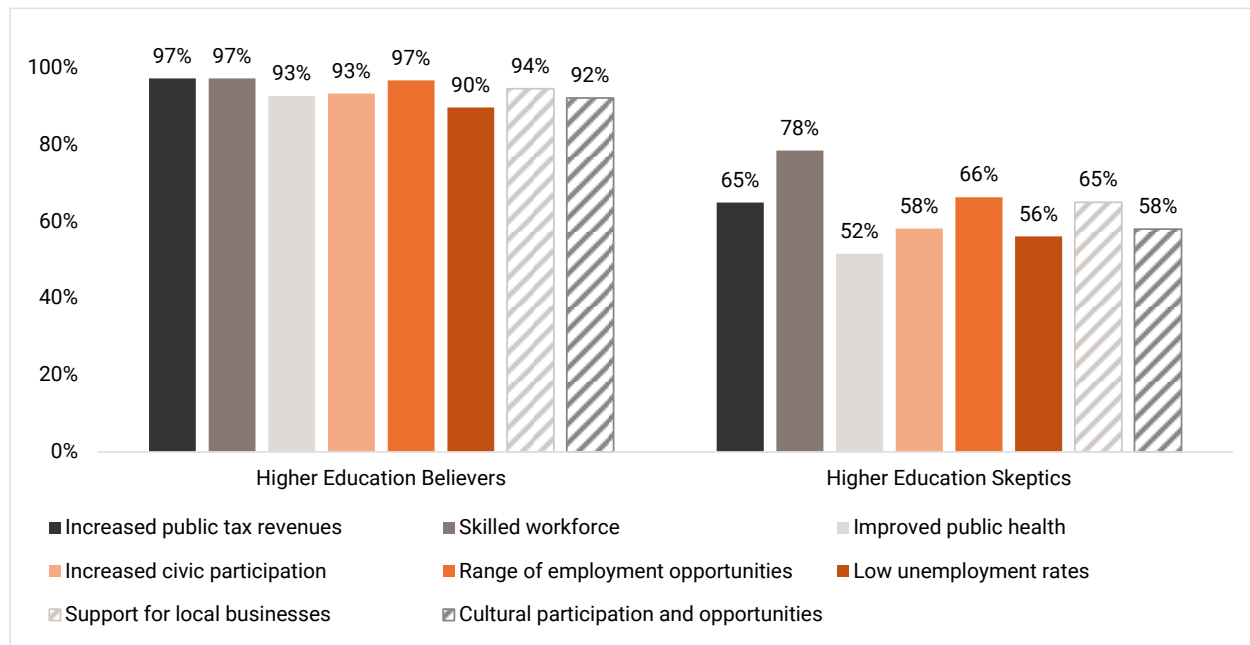
Figure 2 includes the percent of respondents in the two groups who reported that individuals with undergraduate credentials *at least somewhat* offer these benefits to their communities.¹³

Regarding the perceived community-level benefits of individuals with undergraduate credentials, Higher Education Believers reported comparable ratings compared to how they perceived the benefits of undergraduate credentials for graduates. Almost all Higher Education Believers also reported that individuals with these credentials *at least somewhat* offered these benefits to communities. Virtually all Higher Education Believers think that graduates offer *economic* benefits to their communities, including increased public tax revenue due to their higher wages (97%) and support for local businesses (94%). Almost all of these respondents also think that graduates offer their communities *employment-related* benefits, including a skilled workforce (97%), range of employment opportunities (97%), and low unemployment rates (90%). Higher Education Believers also think that graduates offer their communities *social* benefits, including increased civic participation (93%), cultural participation and opportunities (92%), and improved public health (93%).

¹² The items' 4-point response scale included: Not at All, Very Little, Somewhat, and Very Much.

¹³ These values represent the combined percentages of respondents who answered Somewhat and Very Much to this survey item.

Figure 2. Percent of Higher Education Believers and Skeptics that report individuals with undergraduate credentials contribute the following benefits somewhat or very much to their communities



While relatively fewer Higher Education Skeptics thought that undergraduate credentials provided benefits directly for graduates themselves, a majority of this group reported that individuals with these credentials *at least somewhat* offered these benefits to their communities. Though comparatively lower than Higher Education Believers, the Higher Education Skeptics group thinks that graduates offer the most benefits to their communities in terms of a skilled workforce (78%), range of employment opportunities (66%), increased public tax revenues from higher wages (65%), and support for local businesses (65%). So, while nearly all Higher Education Believers think there are numerous benefits of undergraduate credentials for graduates themselves as well as for their communities, Higher Education Skeptics view far less value for graduates compared to the value these graduates offer their communities.¹⁴

In addition to characterizing these two groups in terms of differences in their attitudes about the value of postsecondary educational credentials, it is useful to understand the respondents in

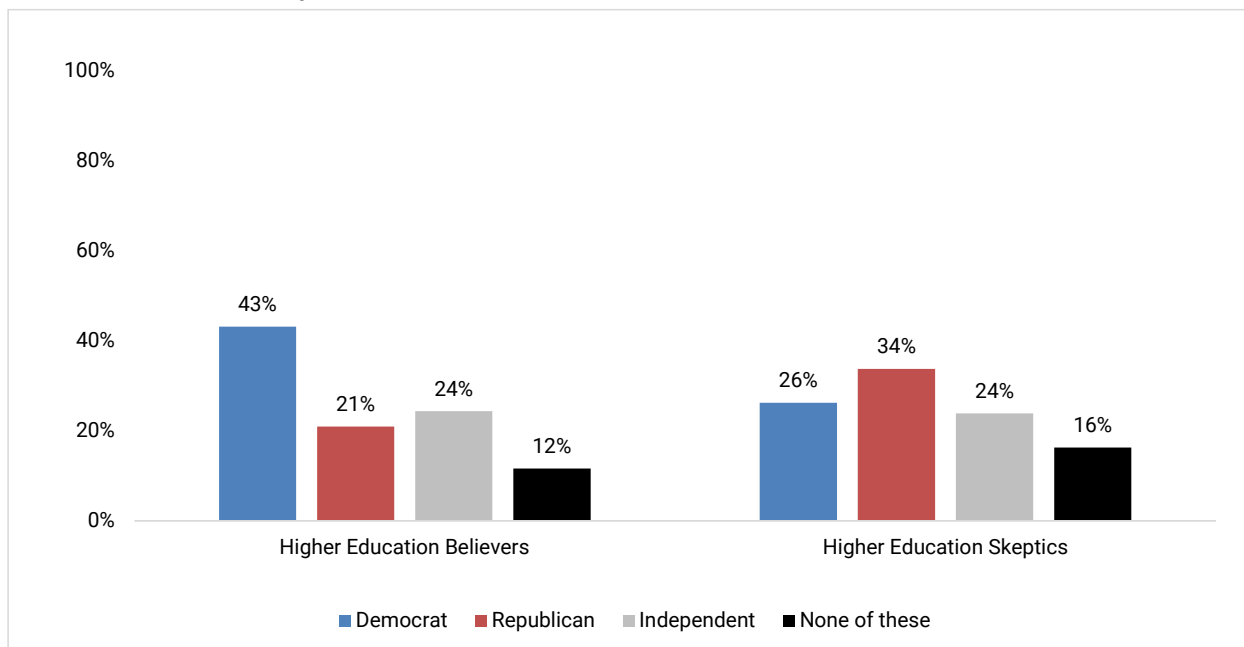
¹⁴ The items that measured attitudes about benefits for graduates and those that measured benefits for graduates' communities asked respondents about these in different ways. In reporting their attitudes about the benefits of undergraduate credentials for graduates, respondents were asked, **Compared to those who have not completed an associate or bachelor's degree, or an undergraduate certificate, how do you rate the following for individuals who have completed these undergraduate credentials?** This item was *comparative*, asking respondents to compare the benefits for graduates to individuals without undergraduate credentials. By contrast, in reporting their attitudes about the benefits that individuals with undergraduate credentials provide to their communities, respondents were asked, **How much, if at all, do you think individuals who complete an undergraduate program, such as an associate or bachelor's degree or certificate, offer the following to their communities?** This item was *not comparative*.

each group in terms of differences in their political, demographic, and other psychographic characteristics. The findings that follow summarize key differences among these two groups.¹⁵

Attitudes About Credentials and Political Party and Views

In terms of the groups' reported political party and political views, we observe differences (see Figure 3). Higher Education Believers are comprised of a larger proportion of Democrats (43%), while the Higher Education Skeptics group has a larger proportion of Republicans (34%).

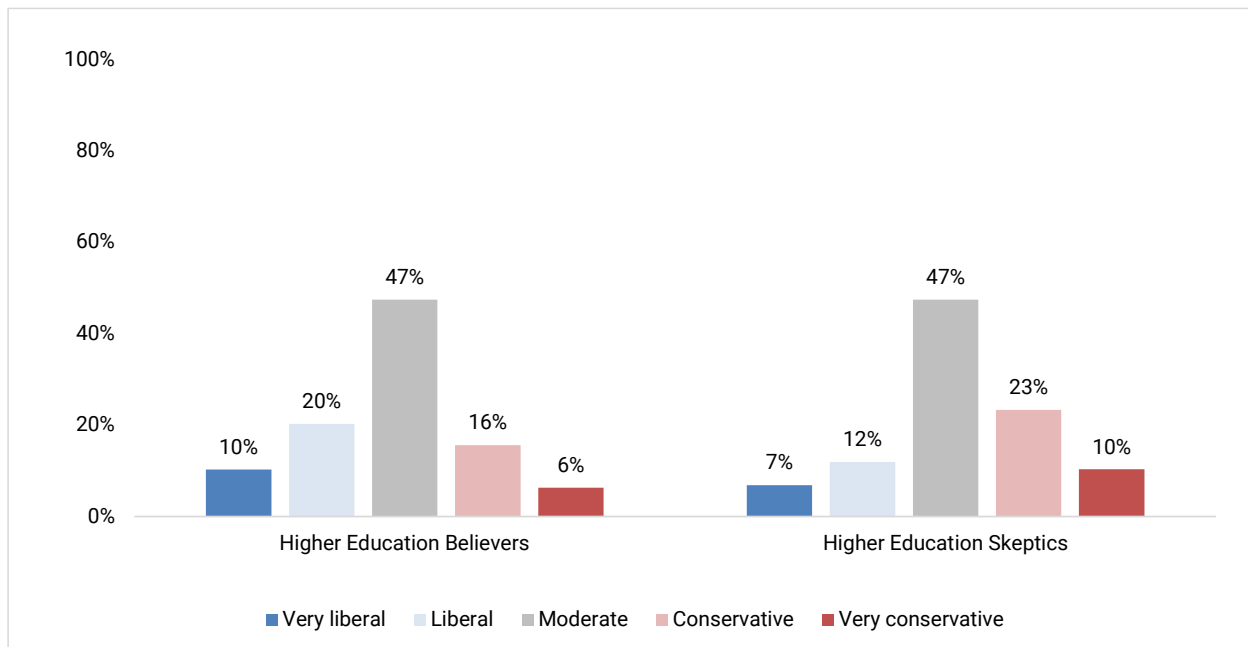
Figure 3. Political party identification for Higher Education Believers and Skeptics



In terms of the groups' political views, both groups largely described themselves as politically moderate (47% of both groups; see Figure 4). However, Higher Education Believers described their views as more liberal, with these respondents indicating either liberal (20%) or very liberal (10%) views. A third of Higher Education Skeptics described their views as either conservative (23%) or very conservative (10%). In terms of the groups' alignment with the two major political parties, most Higher Education Believers (71%)—the more Democratic and liberal group—reported that the Democratic party represented their political views at least somewhat well. In terms of the more Republican and conservative Higher Education Skeptics, this group reported less alignment with the Republican party, with about half (49%) reporting that the party represented their political views at least somewhat well.

¹⁵ These analyses reflect weighted percentages.

Figure 4. Political views for Higher Education Believers and Skeptics



Relationships Between Value-related Attitudes and Other Characteristics

The two groups also differ in terms of additional characteristics. Higher Education Believers reported higher levels of educational attainment (see Figure 5). For instance, while under a third of Higher Education Believers (30%) reported having a high school diploma (or its equivalent) or less, nearly half of Higher Education Skeptics (47%) reported this. Higher Education Believers also reported over twice the rate of post-graduate study or professional degrees (21%) compared to Higher Education Skeptics (10%).

Relatedly, the two groups also differ in terms of annual household income (see Figure 6). The highest proportion of Higher Education Believers (35%) reported an annual household income of over \$100,000, while the highest proportion of Higher Education Skeptics (29%) reported an annual household income between \$30,000 and \$60,000.

Figure 5. Educational Attainment for Higher Education Believers and Skeptics

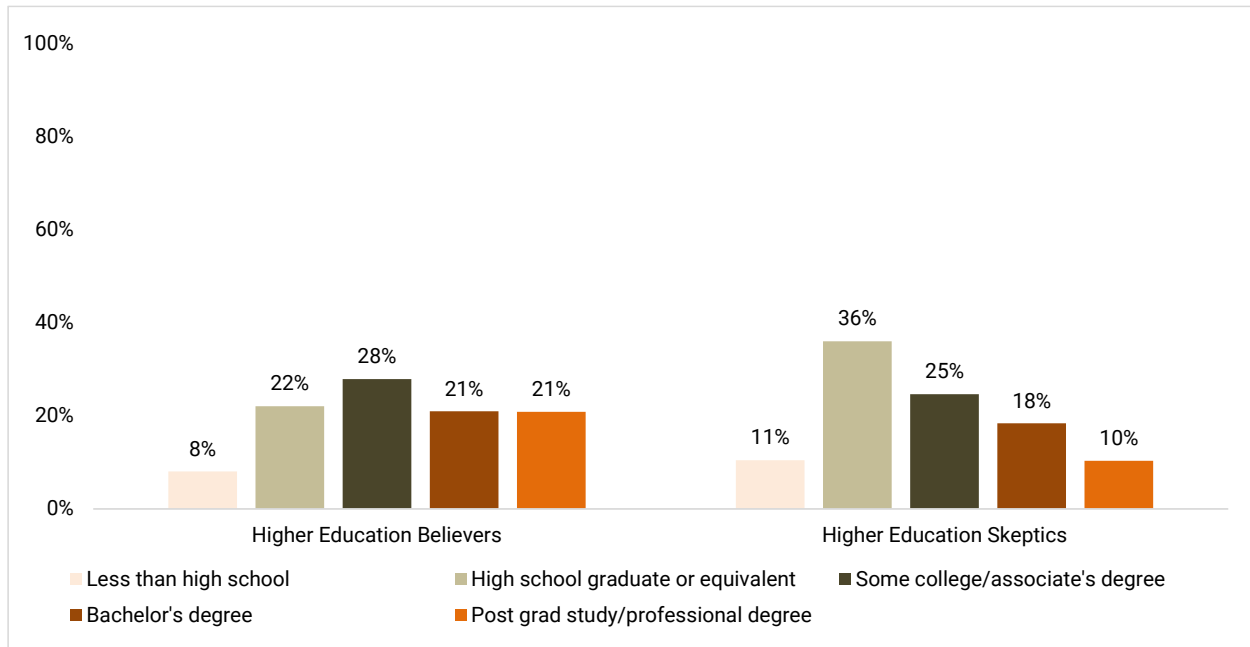
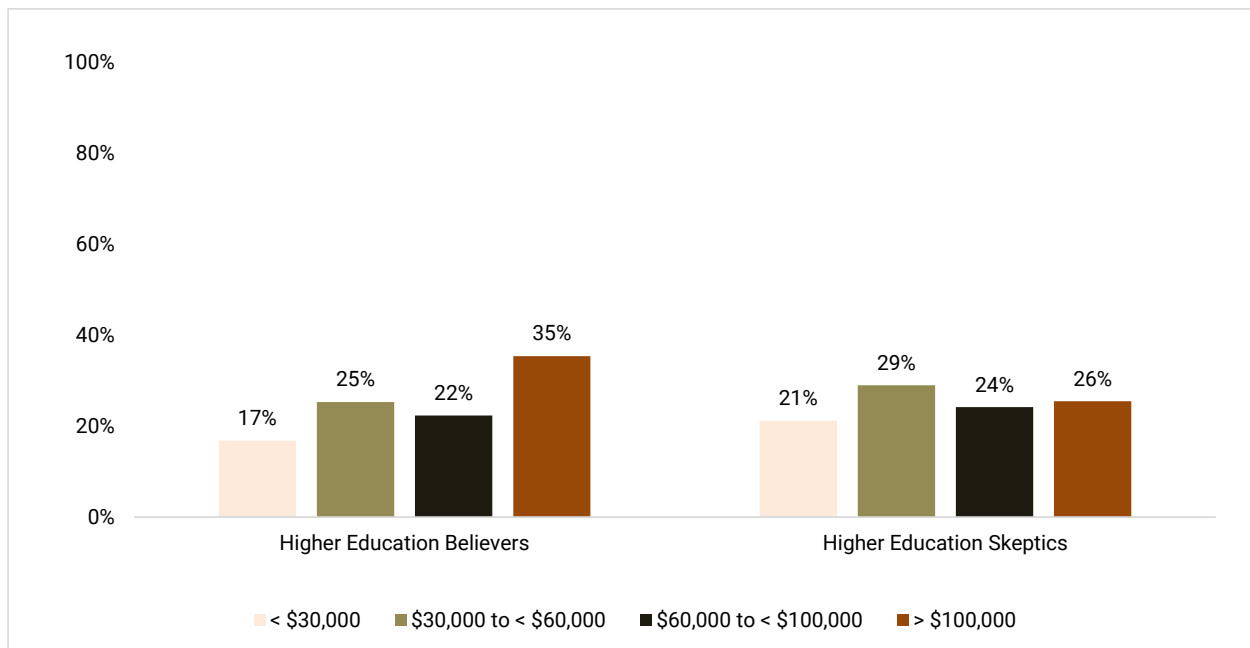


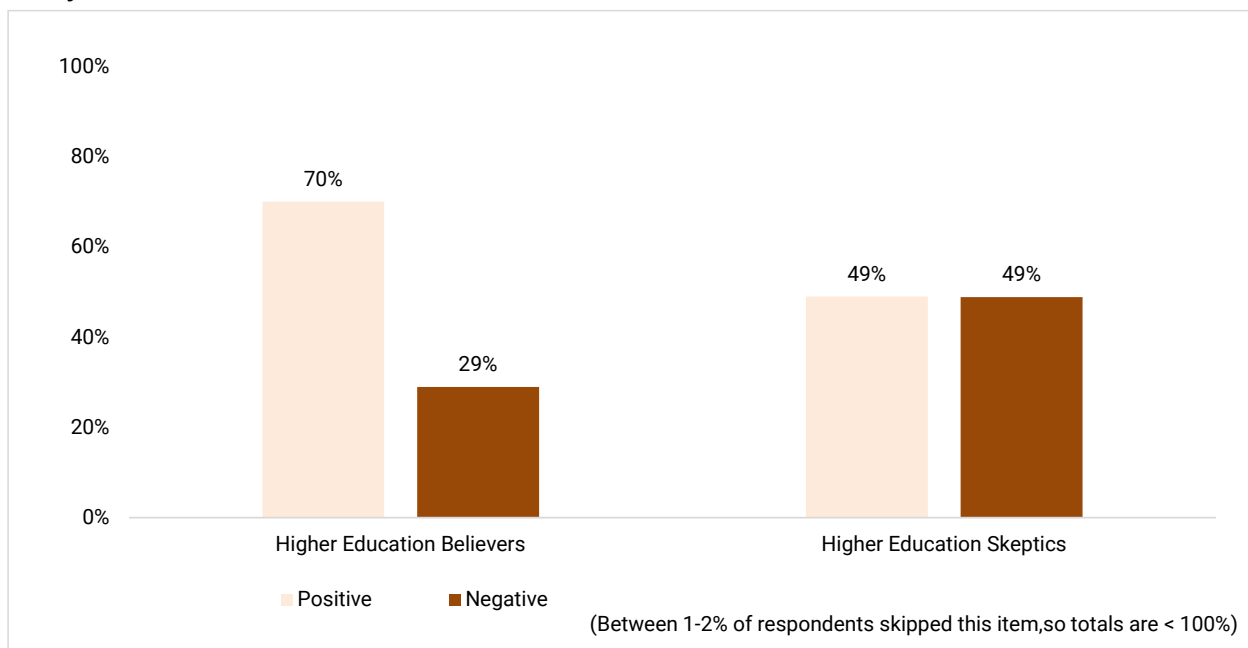
Figure 6. Annual Household Income for Higher Education Believers and Skeptics



In terms of the groups' other demographic characteristics, we observed that relationships between value-related attitudes do not follow divisions along gender, age, race and ethnicity, or student loan borrowing status; we observed similar proportions in both groups. However, we did observe that relationships between value-related attitudes do follow divisions along respondents' other psychographic characteristics.

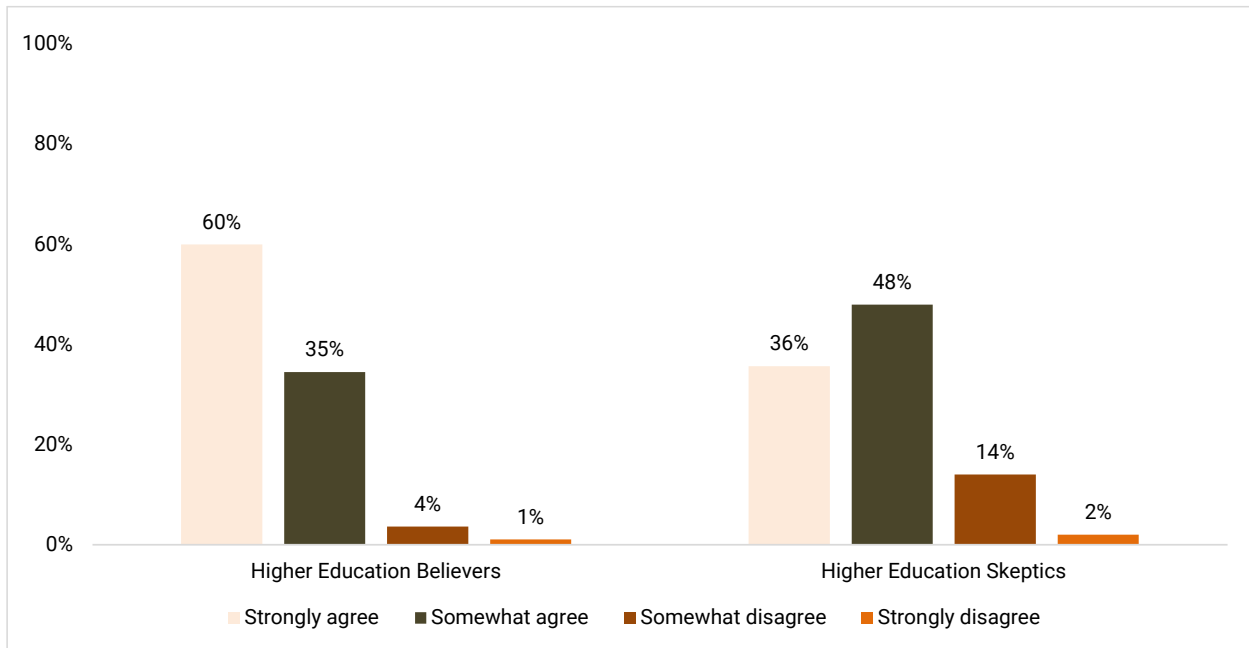
For instance, we observed a striking difference between the groups' attitudes about whether they more broadly thought colleges and universities are having a positive or negative effect on the way things are going in the U.S. today (see Figure 7). Most Higher Education Believers (70%) think colleges and universities have a positive effect, while Higher Education Skeptics are nearly evenly split between thinking colleges and universities have positive (49%) and negative (49%) effects.

Figure 7. Higher Education Believers' and Skeptics' attitudes about whether colleges and universities are having a positive or negative effect on the way things are going in the U.S. today



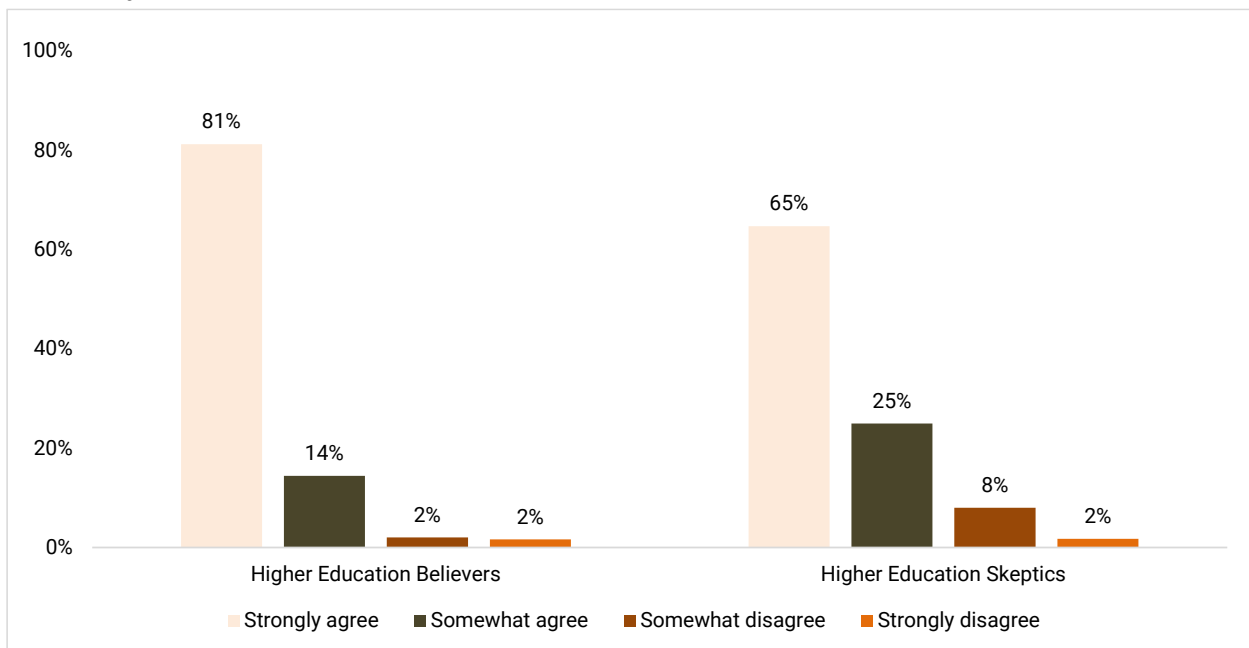
Additionally, we observed differences in the two groups' attitudes about the benefit of various undergraduate (and graduate or professional) credentials relative to securing a well-paying, stable career and to ensuring financial security. We see more pronounced differences as the educational attainment level increases. For instance, nearly all of both Higher Education Believers (89%) and Higher Education Skeptics (77%) at least somewhat agree that an associate's degree makes it easier for individuals to secure such a career. However, we start to observe a pronounced divide among these groups when they were asked about the role of other, more advanced credentials relative to securing a well-paying, stable career. Both Higher Education Believers and Higher Education Skeptics generally reported that it is easier to find such a career as individuals receive higher-level credentials. However, the proportions of these groups that more strongly agreed (and also disagreed) look different across groups. A majority of Higher Education Believers (60%) strongly agreed that a bachelor's degree makes it easier to find a well-paying, stable career, compared to only 36% of Higher Education Skeptics (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Higher Education Believers' and Skeptics' attitudes about whether it is easier to find a well-paying, stable career if one receives a bachelor's degree



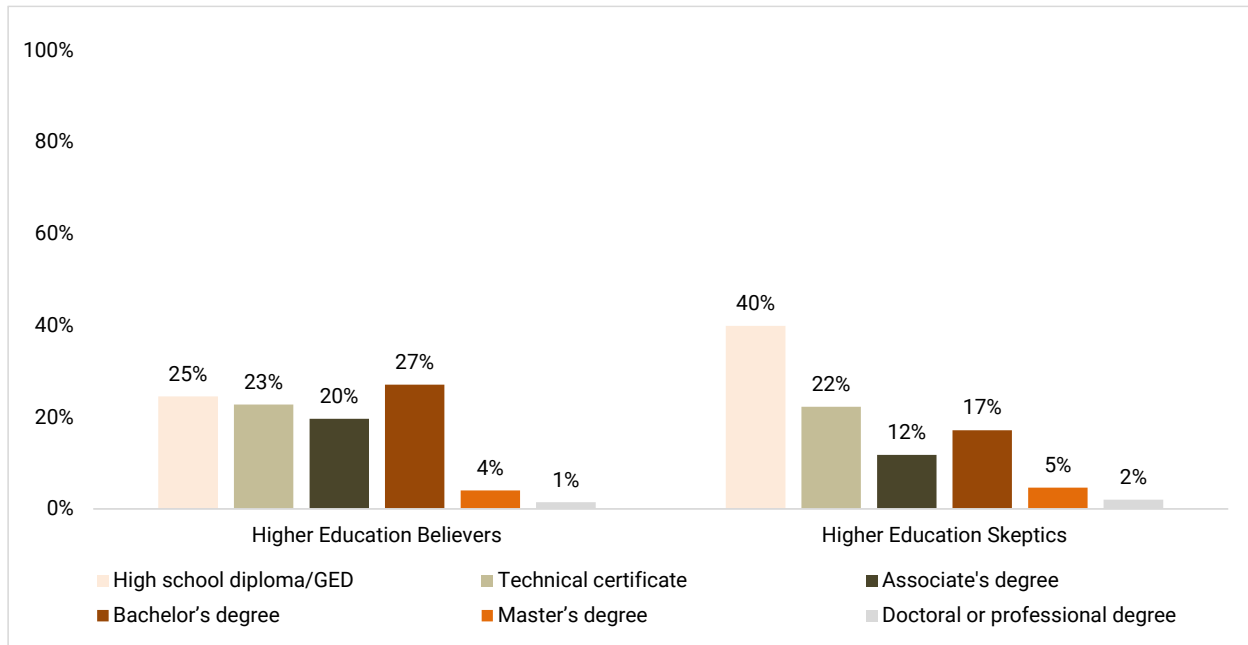
Even more Higher Education Believers (81%) strongly agreed that a graduate or professional degree makes it easier to find such a career, compared to 65% of Higher Education Skeptics (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Higher Education Believers' and Skeptics' attitudes about whether it is easier to find a well-paying, stable career if one receives a graduate or professional degree



Finally, we observed that these two groups also view educational credentials differently relative to more general financial security (see Figure 10). In general, we observed the biggest differences related to the threshold between high school and postsecondary educational attainment. Many more Higher Education Skeptics (40%) think that a high school diploma (or its equivalent) is the minimum level of education required for adults living in this country to ensure financial security, compared to almost half that proportion of Higher Education Believers (25%).

Figure 10. Higher Education Believers' and Skeptics' attitudes about the minimum level of education that they believe adults living in the U.S. need to ensure financial security



Americans Divided: Four Groups of Individuals Based on Their Attitudes About Equity and Race-based Affirmative Action in U.S. Higher Education

Our results suggest that Americans divide into four distinct groups related to their attitudes about equity and race-based affirmative action in U.S. higher education; Table 7 summarizes key differences between these four groups. The 2023 Varying Degrees survey asked respondents about these attitudes in two different ways (i.e., attitudes about equitable higher education pathways and responsibility for equity as well as attitudes about practices and benefits associated with race-based affirmative action).

Equity-related attitudes. Respondents were asked to rate¹⁶ a total of eight items that measured their agreement with attitudes about equity within U.S. higher education. Three of these items measured respondents' attitudes about equitable postsecondary educational pathways (i.e., opportunity to enroll, affordability, and opportunity to complete programs of study). Five of these items measured respondents' attitudes about the responsibility of schools and government to ensure equity (i.e., ensuring funding, quality of programs, admitting more students from historically underrepresented groups, ensuring adequate support services).

Figure 11 shows the percent of respondents in the four groups who agreed¹⁷ with the eight equity-related attitudes.

¹⁶ The items' 4-point response scale included: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, and Strongly Agree.

¹⁷ These values represent the combined percentages of respondents who answered Somewhat Agree and Strongly Agree to this survey item.

Figure 11. Percent in all groups who somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the following equity attitudes

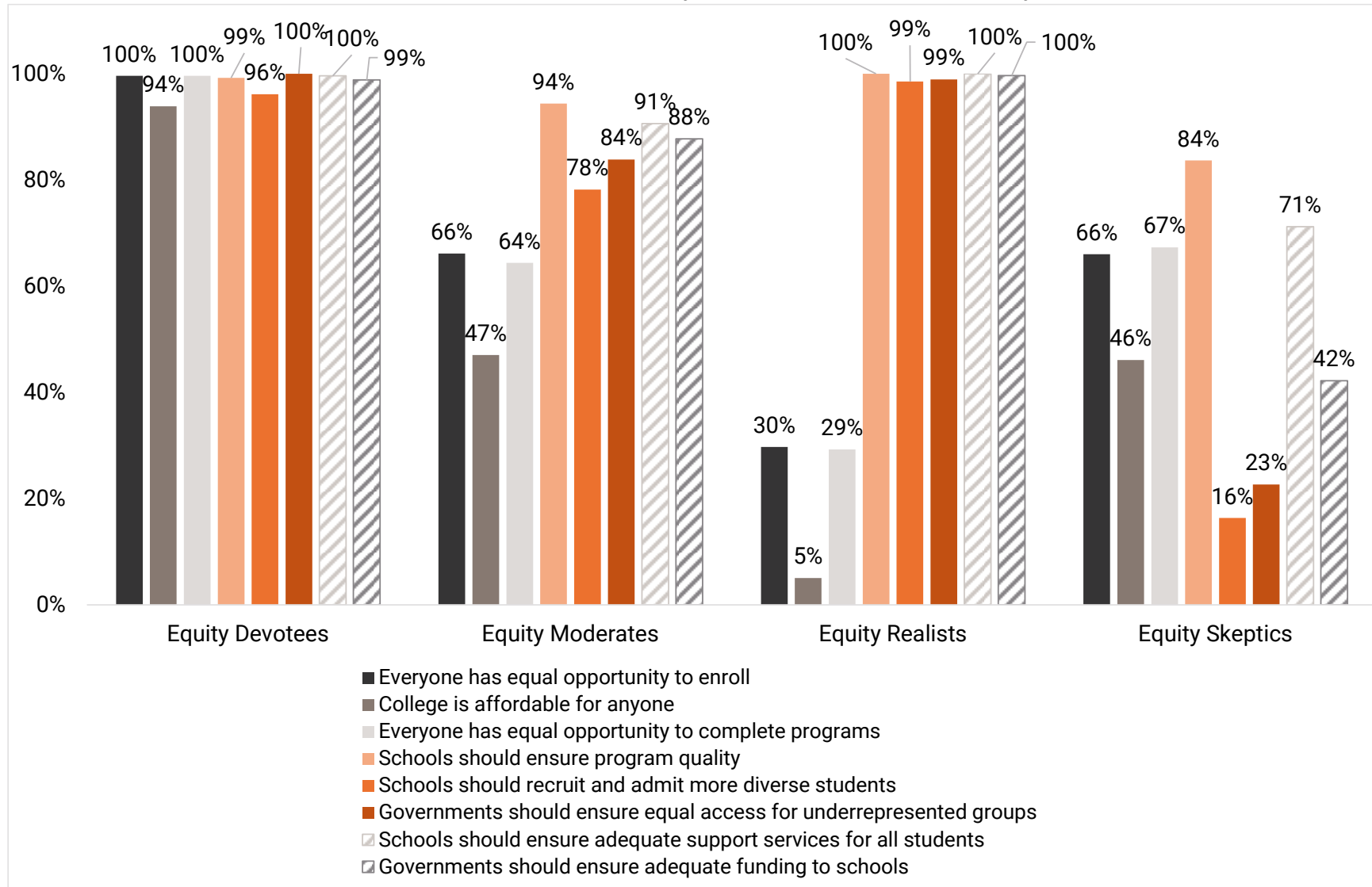


Table 7. Four Groups of Americans Based on Their Attitudes About Equity and Race-based Affirmative Action in U.S. Higher Education

Equity Devotees (22% of Americans)	Equity Moderates (42% of Americans)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly all think there are currently equitable higher education pathways (i.e., affordability, opportunity to enroll and complete programs). • Nearly all think that colleges, universities, as well as state and federal government have a responsibility to ensure equity. • Nearly all think that schools should admit more students and hire more faculty and staff of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. • Nearly all think that when schools consider students' race and ethnicity among other factors in admission decisions, this practice helps address broader societal inequalities. • Half are Democrats (and about a third have liberal or very liberal political views). • Most racially and ethnically diverse of the groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most do not think that education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it. • Most think that those who want to pursue and finish education beyond high school have equal opportunities to do so. • Most think that schools and government have a responsibility to ensure equity. • Most agree with race-based affirmative action <i>practices</i> but agree less about the <i>benefits</i> of these practices in terms of addressing broader societal inequities. • Younger than other groups
Equity Realists (21% of Americans)	Equity Skeptics (15% of Americans)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very few think there are currently equitable higher education pathways, in particular around affordability. • Nearly all think that schools and government have a responsibility to ensure equity. • Highest level of agreement that schools should admit more students and hire more faculty and staff of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds • Highest level of agreement that employing race-based affirmative action helps address broader societal inequalities • Most are Democrats (and most have liberal or very liberal political views). • Almost all think a lot needs to be done in the U.S. to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. • Most think colleges and universities are having a positive impact on the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost half thinks that education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it. • Most think that those who want to pursue and finish education beyond high school have equal opportunities to do so. • Very few think that schools should admit more students or hire more faculty and staff of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. • Very few think that race-based affirmative action practices help address broader societal inequalities. • Most are Republicans (and most have conservative or very conservative political views). • Older than other groups • Most think colleges and universities are having a negative impact on the country.

Nearly all Equity Devotees *at least somewhat agreed* that colleges, universities, as well as state and federal government have a responsibility to ensure equity in U.S. higher education. For instance, virtually all Equity Devotees think that colleges and universities should recruit and admit more students from groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education (i.e., individuals from lower-income families, those who are the first in their families to attend college, those with disabilities, and those from racial and ethnic minorities; 96%); colleges and universities should ensure that adequate support services are provided to all students who need them (100%); and all colleges and universities should ensure the quality of their educational programs so that graduates achieve desirable outcomes (99%). All Equity Devotees (100%) also at least somewhat agreed that state and federal governments should ensure that groups who have been historically underrepresented at colleges and universities have access to education beyond high school. And 99% of Equity Devotees at least somewhat agreed that state and federal governments should ensure that they are providing adequate funding to colleges and universities for student support services. Nearly all Equity Devotees also think there are currently equitable pathways into and through U.S. higher education. All of these respondents (100%) *at least somewhat agreed* that everyone who wants to enroll in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to do so and that everyone who enrolls in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to complete their program of study. Nearly all Equity Devotees (94%) think that education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it.

Like Equity Devotees, the Equity Moderates also think that colleges, universities, as well as state and federal government have a responsibility to ensure equity in U.S. higher education. For instance, most Equity Moderates also think that colleges and universities should ensure that adequate support services are provided to all students who need them (91%) and that all colleges and universities should ensure the quality of their educational programs so that graduates achieve desirable outcomes (94%). Nearly all Equity Moderates (88%) also at least somewhat agreed that state and federal governments should ensure that they are providing adequate funding to colleges and universities for student support services. However, compared to Equity Devotees, fewer Equity Moderates at least somewhat agreed that colleges and universities should recruit and admit more students from groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education (i.e., individuals from lower-income families, those who are the first in their families to attend college, those with disabilities, and those from racial and ethnic minorities; 78%). And 84% of Equity Moderates at least somewhat agreed that state and federal governments should ensure that groups who have been historically underrepresented at colleges and universities have access to education beyond high school. Unlike Equity Devotees, Equity Moderates reported much less agreement that there are currently equitable pathways into and through U.S. higher education. Less than half (47%) of Equity Moderates at least somewhat agreed that education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it. About two-thirds of Equity Moderates at least somewhat agreed that everyone who wants to enroll in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to do so (66%) and that everyone who enrolls in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to complete their program of study (64%).

At first glance, Equity Realists appear the most similar to Equity Devotees in terms of their high levels of agreement about many of the equity-related attitudes. Nearly all respondents in both

groups think that colleges, universities, as well as state and federal government have a responsibility to ensure equity in U.S. higher education. However, Equity Realists differ drastically from Equity Devotees in terms of their attitudes about the current state of affairs related to equitable postsecondary educational pathways. While nearly all Equity Devotees think there are currently equitable pathways into and through U.S. higher education, far fewer Equity Realists viewed these pathways as equitable. For instance, only 5% of Equity Realists at least somewhat agreed that education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it. Additionally, under a third of Equity Realists at least somewhat agreed that everyone who wants to enroll in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to do so (30%) and everyone who enrolls in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to complete their program of study (29%).

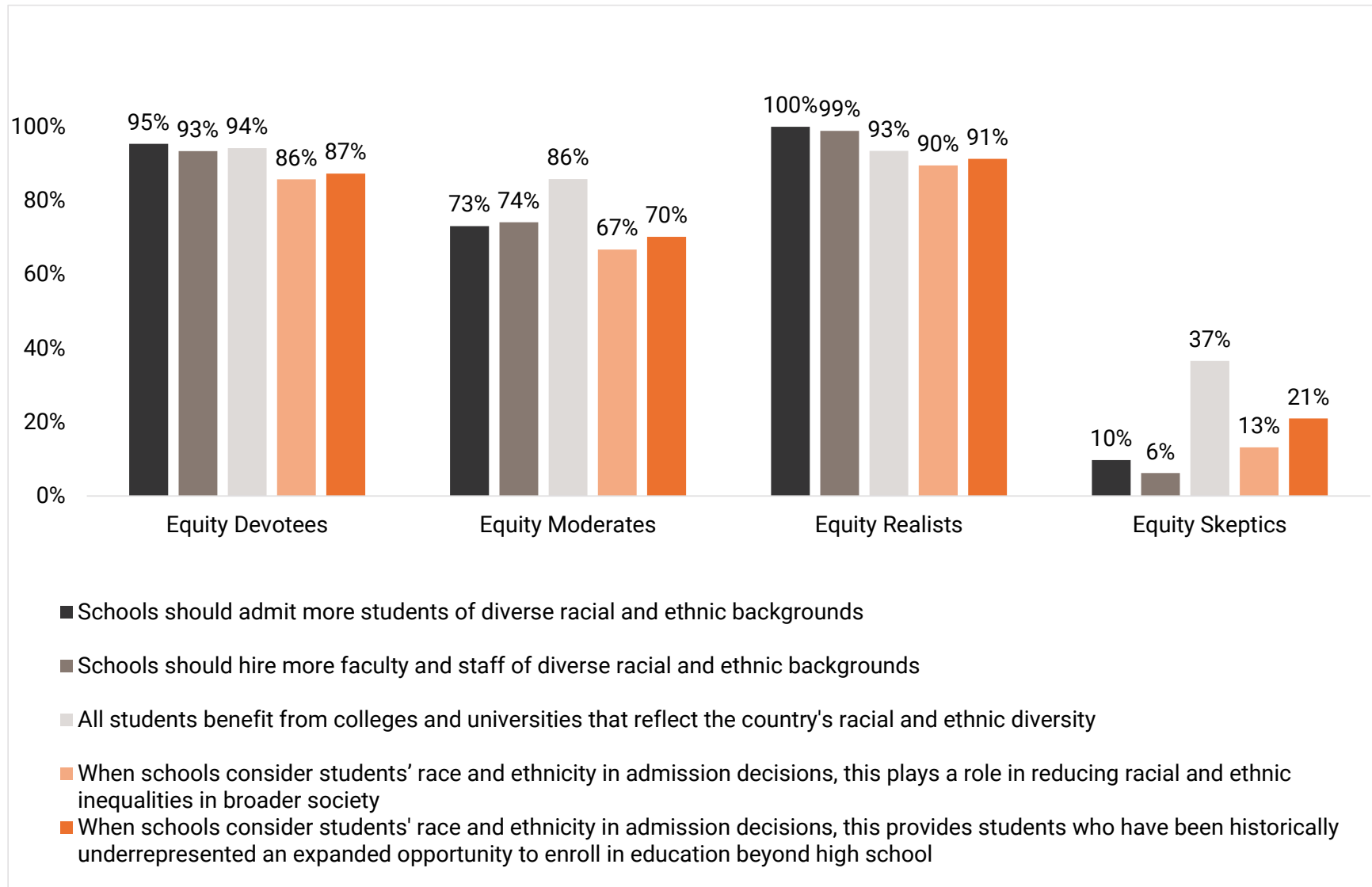
Equity Skeptics and Equity Moderates also show similarities but also important differences. In terms of how both groups perceive equitable postsecondary educational pathways, both groups at least somewhat agreed to a more moderate extent about equality as it relates to affordability of postsecondary education as well as opportunity to pursue and complete education beyond high school. However, these two groups differ in terms of their attitudes about the role of colleges, universities, as well as state and federal government in ensuring equity within higher education. For instance, while over three-fourths (78%) of Equity Moderates agreed that colleges and universities should recruit and admit more students from groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education, far fewer Equity Skeptics (16%) felt the same. And while 84% of Equity Moderates agreed that state and federal governments should ensure that groups who have been historically underrepresented at colleges and universities have access to education beyond high school, less than a quarter (23%) of Equity Skeptics felt the same. Compared to Equity Moderates, far fewer Equity Skeptics at least somewhat agreed that state and federal governments should ensure that they are providing adequate funding to colleges and universities for student support services (42%).

Affirmative action-related attitudes. Respondents were also asked to rate¹⁸ a total of five items that measured their agreement with attitudes about race-based affirmative action in U.S. colleges and universities. Three of these items measured respondents' attitudes about the benefits of race-based affirmative action (i.e., all students benefitting from educational contexts that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the country, reducing racial and ethnic inequalities in broader society, providing students who have been historically underrepresented an expanded opportunity to enroll in education beyond high school). Two of these items measured respondents' attitudes about the responsibility of colleges and universities to prioritize racial and ethnic diversity (i.e., admitting more students as well as hiring more faculty and staff of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds). Figure 12 includes the percent of respondents in the four groups who *at least somewhat agreed*¹⁹ with the five race-based affirmative action-related attitudes.

¹⁸ The items' 4-point response scale included: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, and Strongly Agree.

¹⁹ The items' 4-point response scale included: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, and Strongly Agree.

Figure 12. Percent in all groups who somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the following race-based affirmative action attitudes



Equity Devotees (between 86% and 95%) and Equity Realists (between 90% and 100%) reported the highest levels of agreement with all five race-based affirmative action items. Nearly all of both groups at least somewhat agreed that colleges and universities should admit more students—as well as hire more faculty and staff—of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. In terms of the perceived benefits of race-based affirmative action, nearly all of both groups at least somewhat agreed that when colleges and universities consider students’ race and ethnicity among other factors in admission decisions, this practice helps address broader societal inequalities.

A majority of Equity Moderates (between 67% and 86%) also agreed with all five race-based affirmative action items, albeit at comparatively lower rates than Equity Devotees and Equity Realists. While comparatively lower than Equity Devotees and Equity Realists, nearly three-fourths of these respondents at least somewhat agree that colleges and universities should admit more students (73%)—as well as hire more faculty and staff (74%)—of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Equity Moderates also differ from Equity Devotees and Equity Realists in terms of how these respondents think about the benefits of race-based affirmative action. While nearly all Equity Moderates (86%) think that all students, regardless of race and ethnicity, benefit from colleges and universities that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the general U.S. population, fewer in this group agree that race-based affirmative action helps to address broader societal inequalities. Compared to nearly all of both Equity Devotees and Equity Realists, only about two-thirds of Equity Moderates at least somewhat agreed that when colleges and universities consider students’ race and ethnicity as one factor among others in admission decisions, this plays a role in reducing racial and ethnic inequalities in broader society (67%) and that when colleges and universities consider students’ race and ethnicity as one factor among others in admission decisions, this provides students who have been historically underrepresented an expanded opportunity to enroll in education beyond high school (70%).

Equity Skeptics differed dramatically from the other three groups in terms of their race-based affirmative action attitudes. At least three-fourths of the other three groups at least somewhat agreed that colleges and universities should admit more students—as well as hire more faculty and staff—of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. However, very few Equity Skeptics felt that colleges and universities should admit more students (10%) or hire more faculty and staff (6%) of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Equity Skeptics also view the benefits of race-based affirmative action quite differently compared to the other three groups. Very few Equity Skeptics at least somewhat agreed that when colleges and universities consider students’ race and ethnicity as one factor among others in admission decisions, it plays a role in reducing racial and ethnic inequalities in broader society (13%) and provides students who have been historically underrepresented an expanded opportunity to enroll in education beyond high school (21%).

In addition to characterizing these four groups in terms of differences in their attitudes about equity within U.S. higher education and race-based affirmative action, it is useful to understand the respondents in these groups in terms of differences in their political, demographic, and

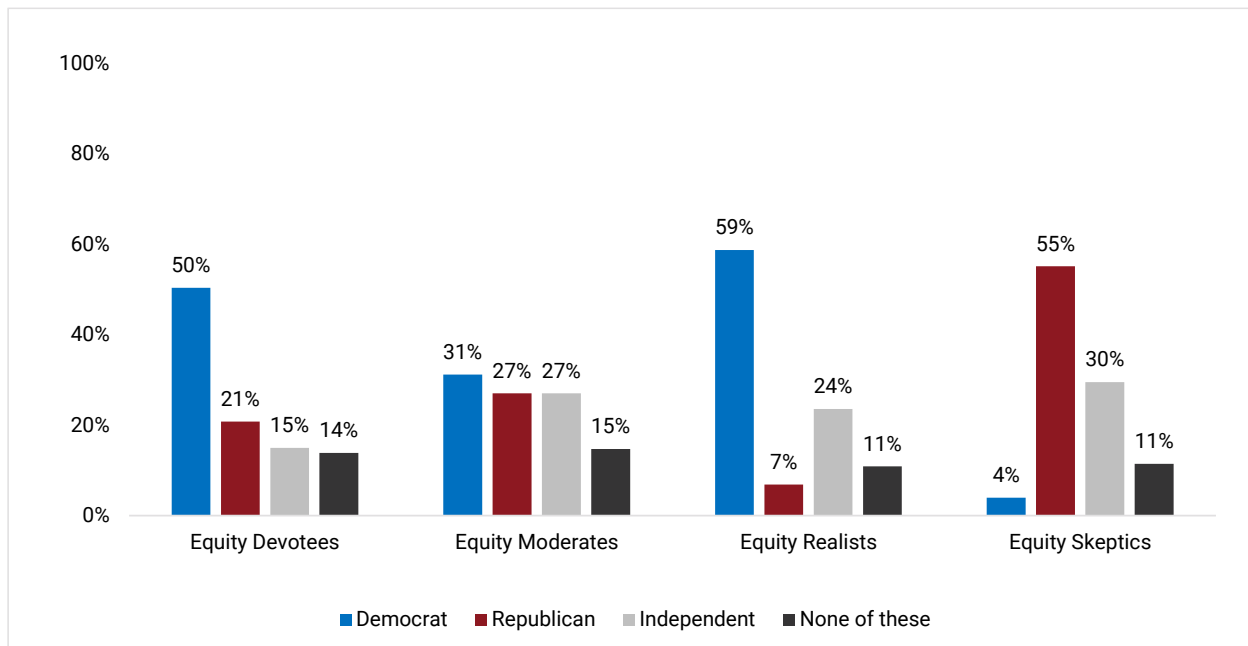
other psychographic characteristics. The findings that follow summarize key differences among these four groups.²⁰

Equity- and Race-based Affirmative Action Attitudes and Political Party and Views

In terms of the four groups' political party and political views, we observe differences (see Figure 13). Half (50%) of Equity Devotees identify as Democrats, while the remaining half is comprised of a mix of Republicans (21%) and Independents (15%). Also a majority of Democrats (59%), Equity Realists are comprised of far fewer Republicans (only 7%) and more Independents (24%). Equity Moderates are the most heterogenous group, political party-wise, with nearly equal proportions identifying as Democrats (31%), Republicans (27%), and Independents (27%). Most of Equity Skeptics (55%) identify as Republicans, while 30% identify as Independents and 4% as Democrats.

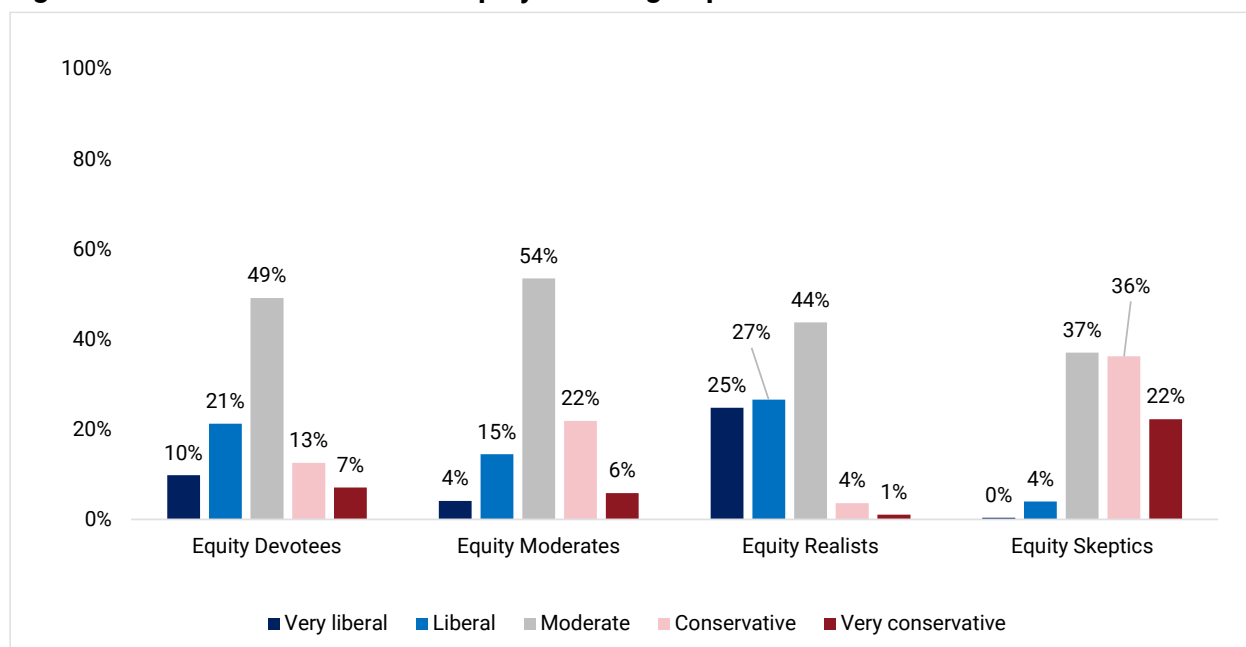
In terms of the four groups' political views, we observe important differences (see Figure 14). For instance, though about half of both Equity Devotees and Equity Realists identified as Democrats, their political views look different. Just under a third of Equity Devotees (31%) report liberal/very liberal political views. However, over half (52%) of Equity Realists report liberal/very

Figure 13. Political party identification for four equity-related groups



²⁰ These analyses reflect weighted percentages.

Figure 14. Political views for four equity-related groups



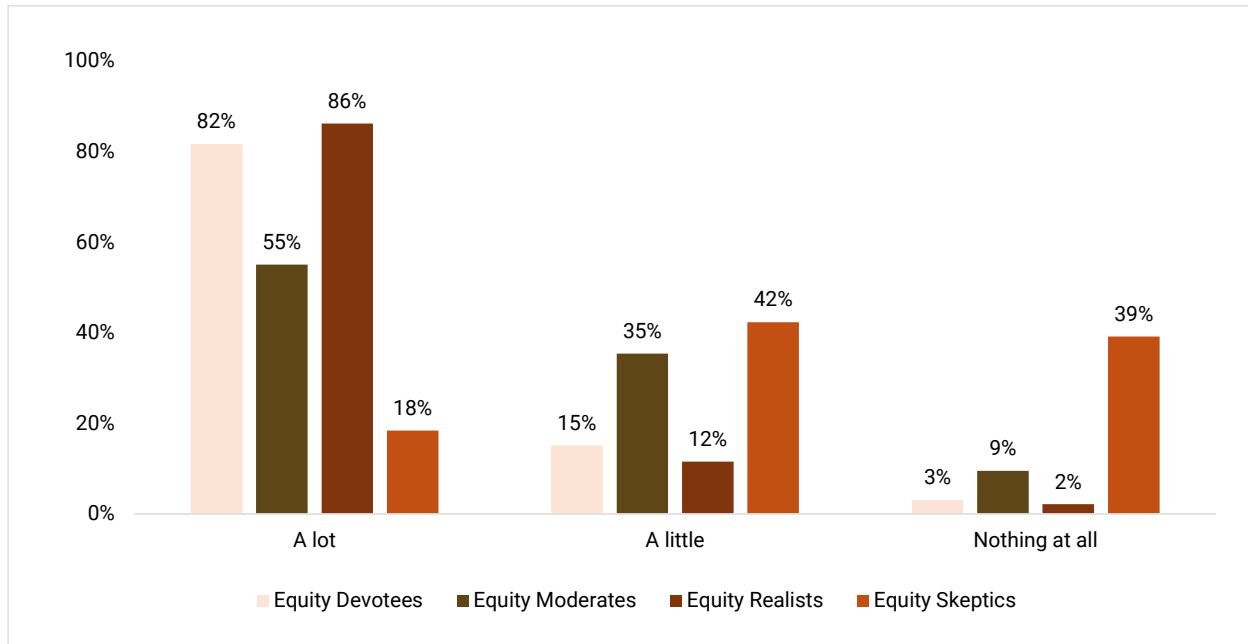
liberal views. All four groups report a relatively large proportion of politically moderate views. Over half of Equity Skeptics (58%) report conservative/very conservative views. Over half of Equity Moderates (54%) report moderate political views, with 19% reporting liberal/very liberal views and 28% reporting conservative/very conservative views. Equity Devotees and Equity Realists—the groups with the highest proportions of Democrats and liberal/very liberal political views—feel similarly in terms of their alignment with the Democratic party. Over three-fourths of Equity Devotees (76%) and Equity Realists (78%) think that the Democratic party represents their views at least somewhat well. This is somewhat surprising, given the two groups’ different political views (i.e., Equity Realists reported a much higher proportion of *very liberal* views). Two-thirds of Equity Skeptics (67%)—the group with the highest proportions of Republicans and conservative/very conservative political views—thinks that the Republican party represents their views at least somewhat well.

Varying Degrees 2023 asked respondents two items about political attitudes around which there is significant division among both the general public and across inter- and intra-political party lines.²¹ The first item asked all respondents about the extent, if at all, that anything needs to be done in the U.S. to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. For respondents who responded *A lot* to this item, they were then prompted to answer what best describes what they think should be done in the U.S. to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic background. They could select from two responses: 1) Completely overhaul most U.S. laws and major institutions because they are biased against

²¹ These items were adapted from the Pew Research Center’s revised political typology and methodology, detailed in *Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology*. Report available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/>

some racial and ethnic groups, or 2) Work within current systems to address most U.S. laws and major institutions because they are biased against some racial and ethnic groups.

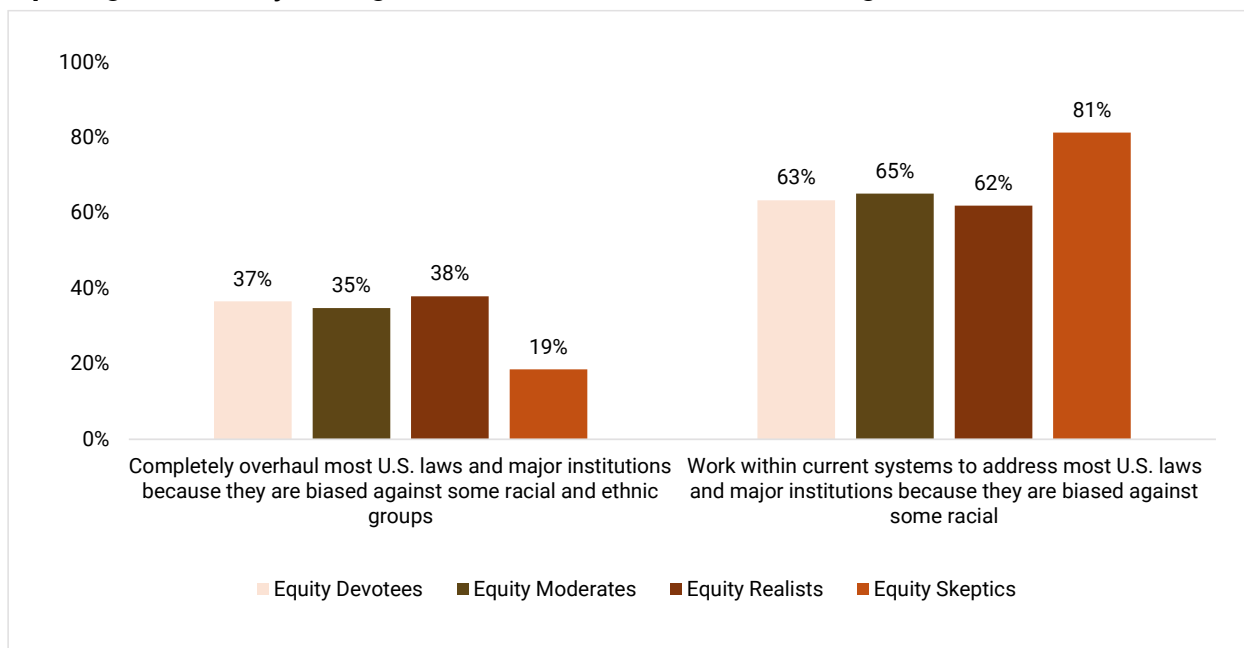
Figure 15. Equity groups’ attitudes about the extent, if at all, that anything needs to be done in the U.S. to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds



We observed striking differences across the four groups in terms of their political attitudes related to the first item (see Figure 15). Nearly all Equity Devotees (82%) and Equity Realists (86%) think a lot needs to be done in the U.S. to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. A little over half of Equity Moderates (55%) and only 18% of Equity Skeptics reported the same thing.

For any respondents who answered *A lot* in the earlier, item, they were presented a follow-up item. In a somewhat surprising finding, we observed similar responses across Equity Devotees, Equity Moderates, and Equity Realists (see Figure 16). Just over a third of all three groups thought the U.S. should *completely overhaul* most U.S. laws and major institutions because they are biased against some racial and ethnic groups. The roughly two-thirds remaining across all three groups reported that they wanted to *work within current systems*—instead of overhaul them—to address most U.S. laws and major institutions. This was a surprising finding given the differences in these groups’ political views. In particular, one might expect Equity Realists—with the highest proportion of *very liberal* political views—to be more inclined to report that the U.S. should completely overhaul most U.S. laws and major institutions because of their biased nature.

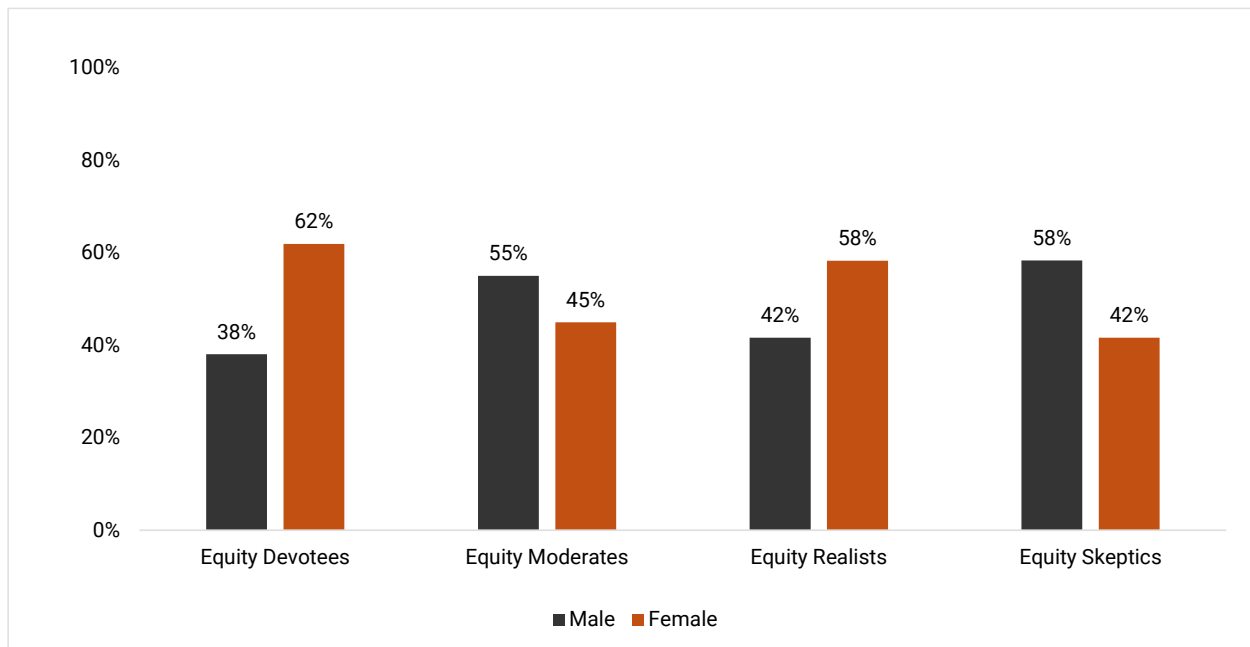
Figure 16. Equity groups’ attitudes about what they think should be done in the U.S. to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic background



Relationships Between Equity- and Race-based Affirmative Action Attitudes and Other Characteristics

The four groups also differ in terms of additional characteristics. We observed a majority of women in the Equity Devotees (62%) and Equity Realists (58%) group and more men in the Equity Moderates (55%) and Equity Skeptics (58%) groups (see Figure 17). We also observed differences in respondents’ age groups across the four groups (see Figure 18). For instance, Equity Moderates had the highest proportion of younger age groups, while Equity Skeptics had the highest proportion of the oldest age groups.

Figure 17. Gender for four equity-related groups



In terms of differences in respondents’ race and ethnicity across the four groups (see Figure 19), Equity Devotees was the only group where a majority of respondents (52%) identified as people of color, making it the most racially/ethnically diverse group of the four. Just under half of this group (48%) identified as non-Hispanic White, almost a quarter (22%) identified as Hispanic (any race), while 17% identified as non-Hispanic Black, 11% as non-Hispanic Asian, and 2% as non-Hispanic multi-racial. The other three groups were comparatively less racially/ethnically diverse. All three remaining groups had between 13% and 18% Hispanic respondents, while Equity Moderates and Equity Realists had between 10% and 16% Black respondents.

Figure 18. Age for four equity-related groups

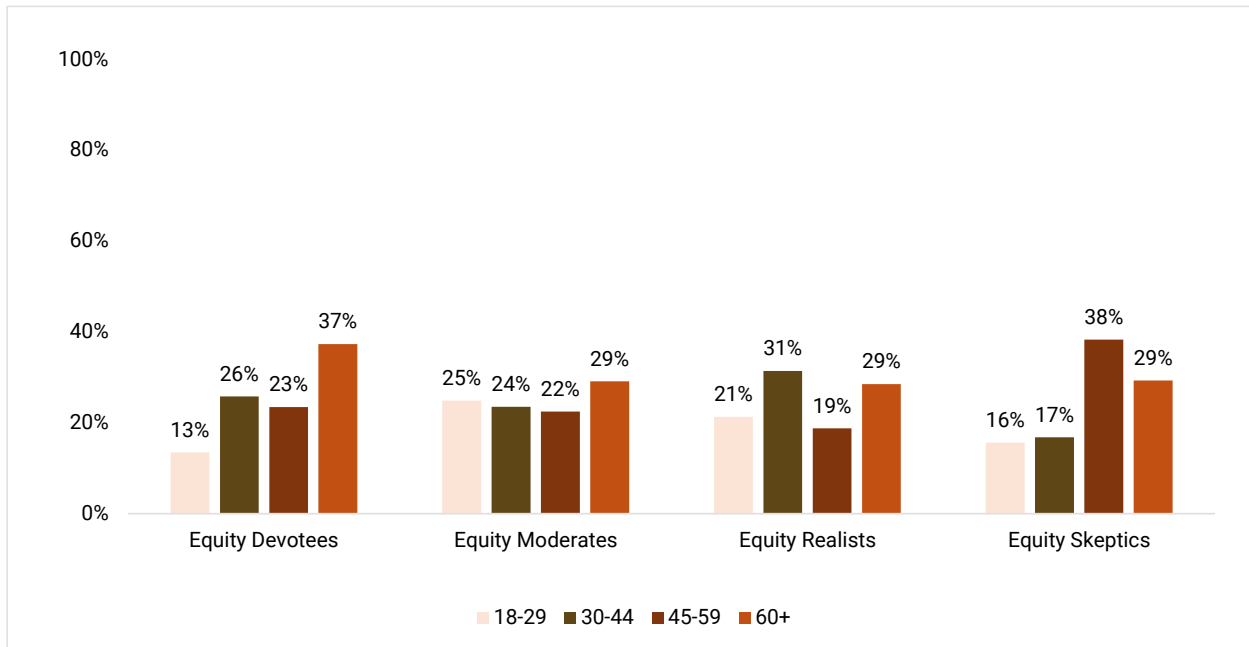
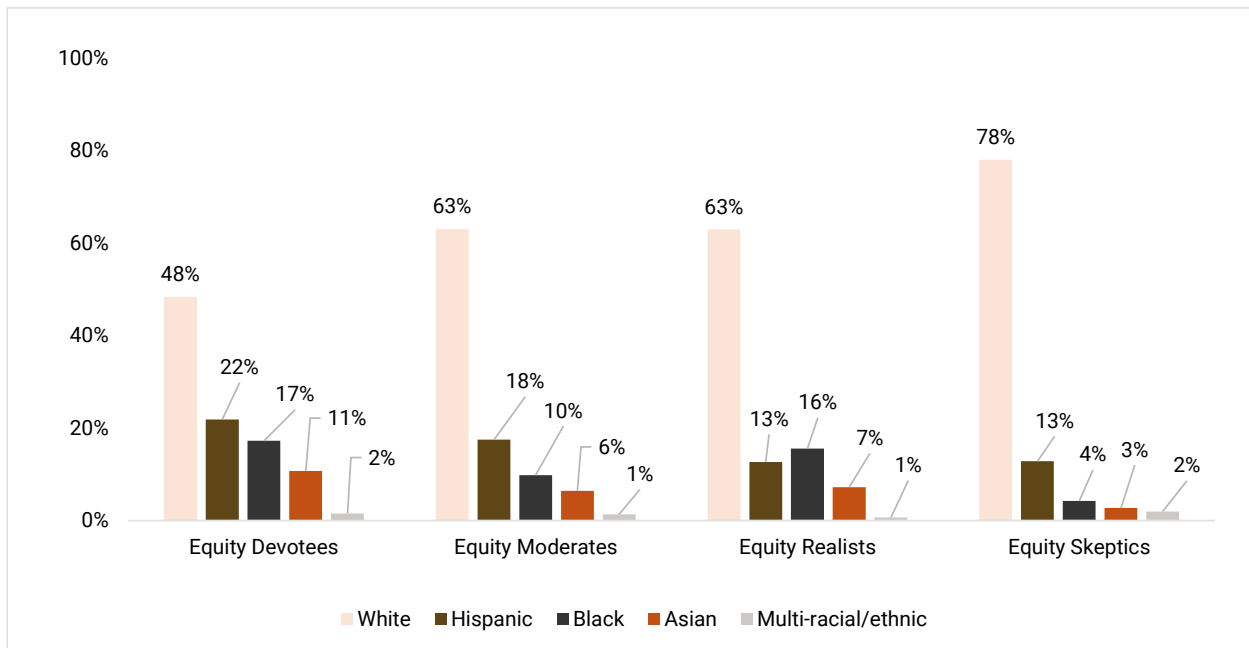
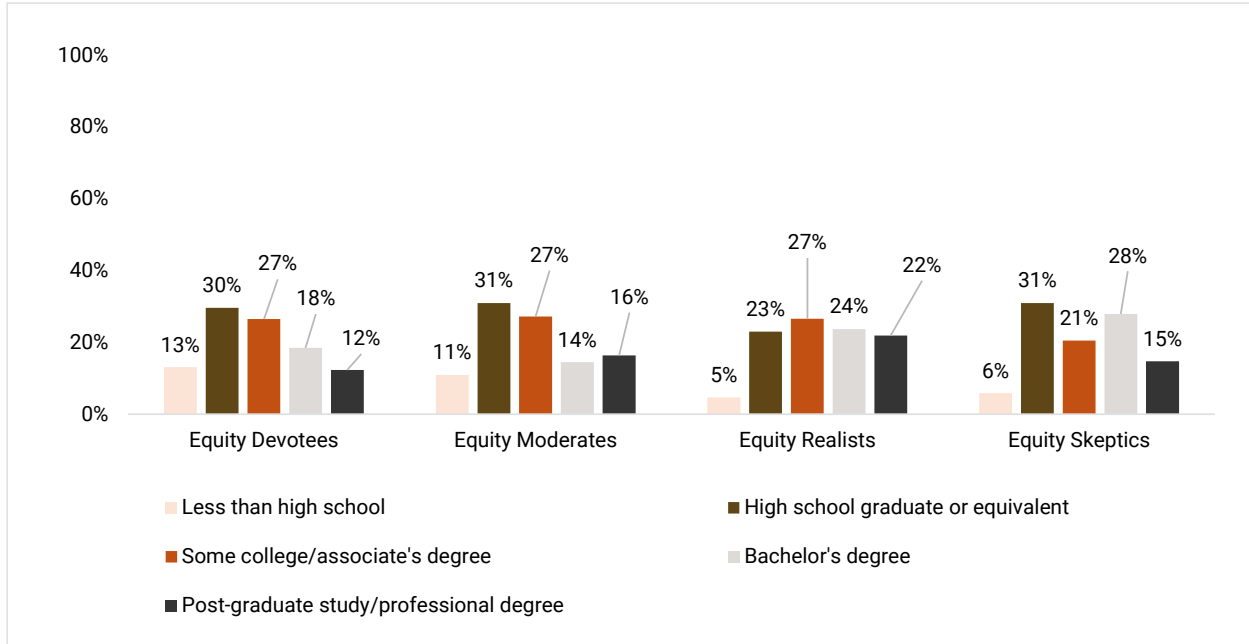


Figure 19. Race and ethnicity for four equity-related groups



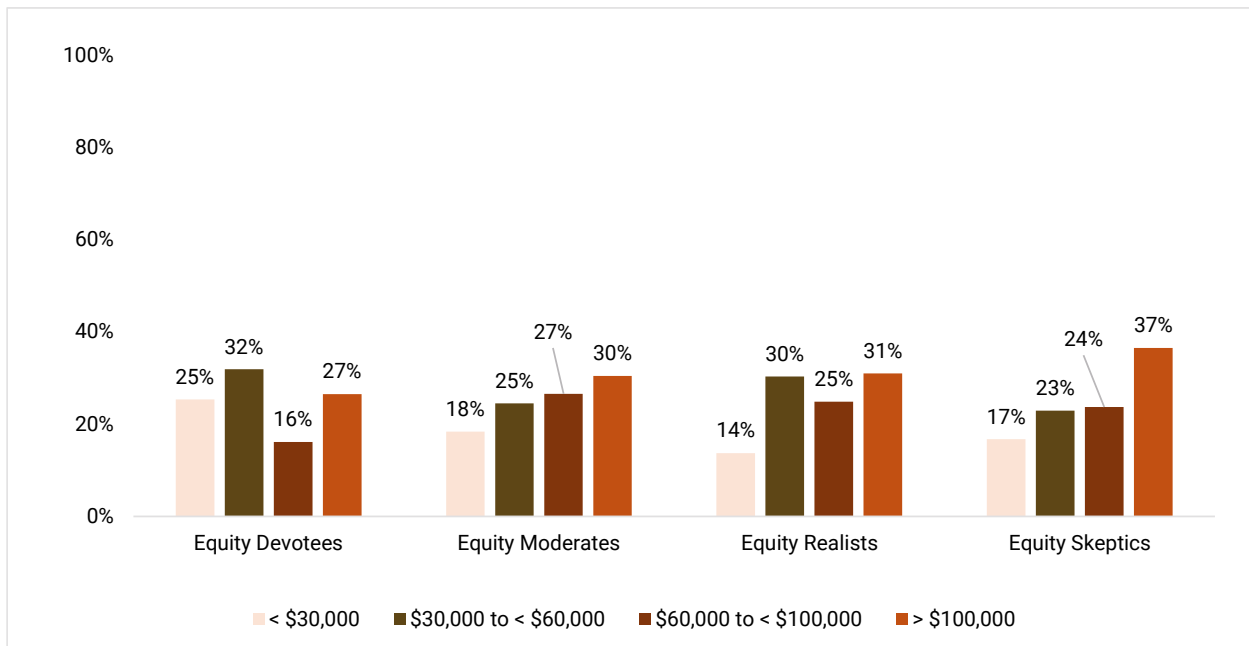
We did not observe marked differences in terms of different levels of educational attainment across the four groups (see Figure 20). Equity Realists (24%) and Equity Skeptics (28%) reported the highest proportions of bachelor’s degree recipients, while Equity Realists (22%) reported the highest proportion of post-graduate study or professional degrees.

Figure 20. Educational attainment for four equity-related groups



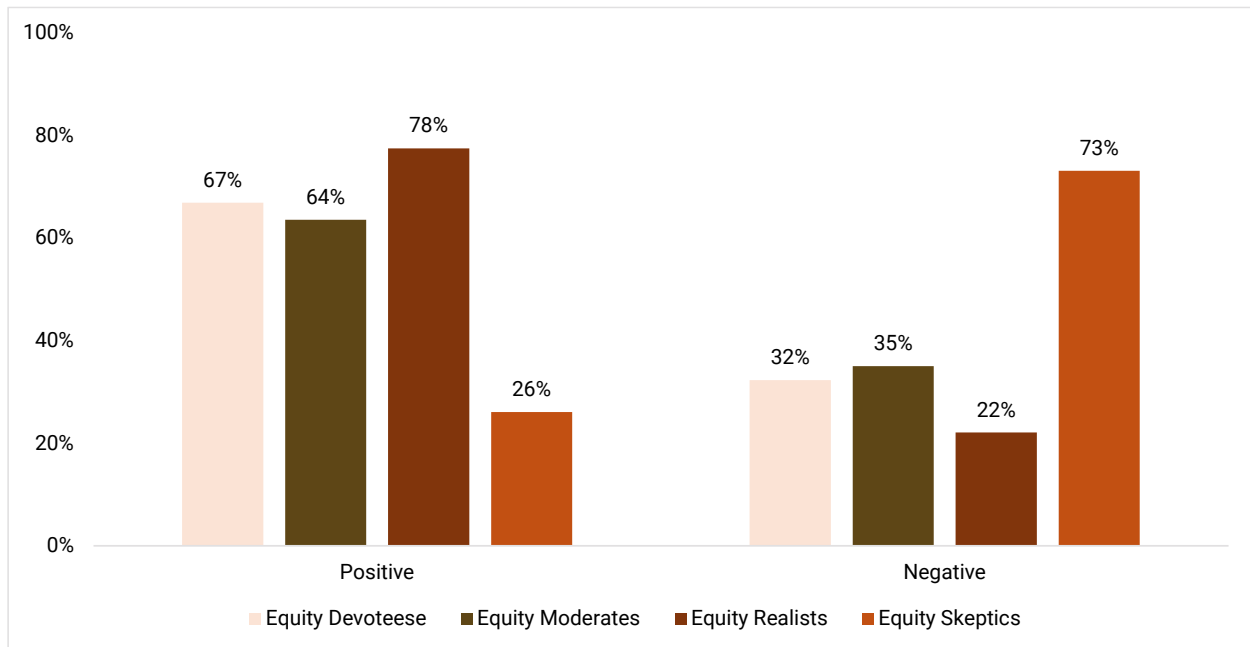
In terms of annual household income across the four groups, we observed some differences (see Figure 21). For instance, Equity Devotees was the only group where over half of respondents (57%) reported annual household income less than \$60,000. Conversely, Equity Skeptics had the highest proportion of respondents (37%) who reported annual household income of over \$100,000.

Figure 21. Annual household income for four equity-related groups



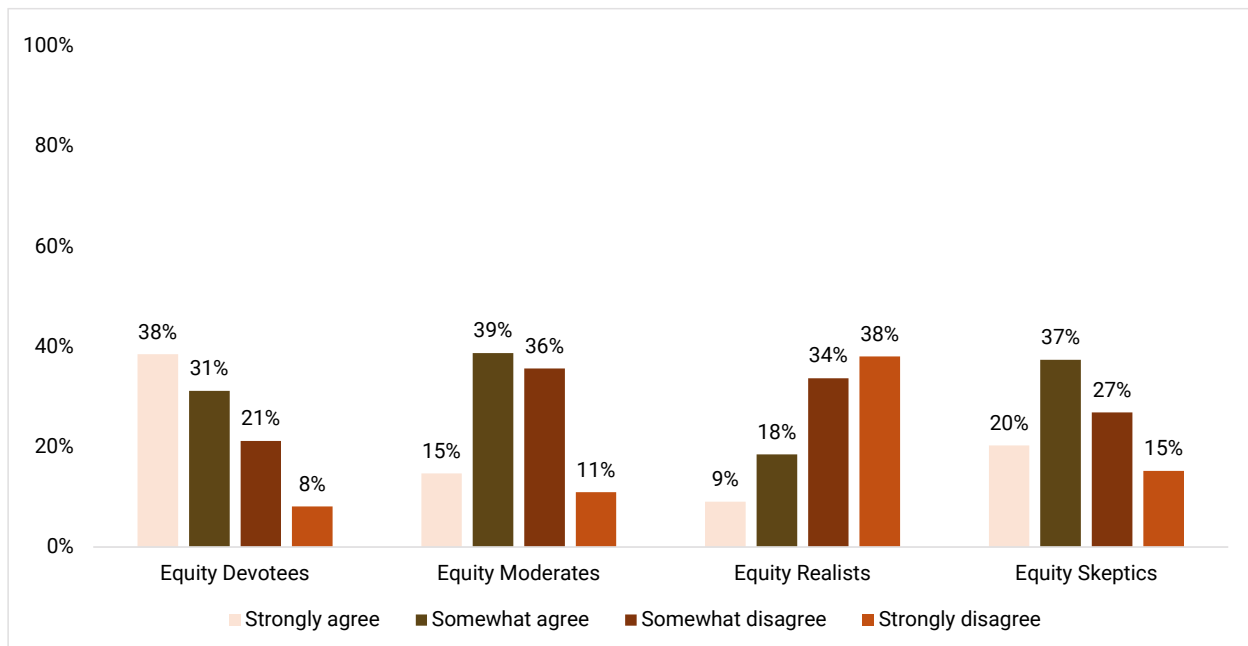
Relationships between equity-related attitudes follow divisions along respondents' other psychographic characteristics. For instance, there are marked differences in attitudes about whether colleges and universities are having a positive or negative effect on the way things are going in this country today (see Figure 22). About two-thirds of Equity Devotees (67%) and Equity Moderates (64%) and over three-fourths of Equity Realists (78%) reported positive effects of colleges and universities. However, only about a quarter of Equity Skeptics (26%) felt the same.

Figure 22. Equity-related groups' attitudes about whether colleges and universities are having a positive or negative effect on the way things are going in the U.S. today



In terms of attitudes about affordability of education beyond high school, we observed differences across the four groups (see Figure 23). Equity Devotees reported the highest proportion of agreement (69% at least somewhat agreed) that Americans can get a high-quality education beyond high school that is affordable. Over half of Equity Moderates (54%) and Equity Skeptics (57%) felt the same. Equity Realists was the only group where a minority of respondents (only 27%) felt that a high-quality education beyond high school was affordable. Additionally, Equity Realists also had the highest proportion of respondents (38%) who strongly disagreed with this item.

Figure 23. Equity-related groups’ attitudes about whether Americans can get a high-quality education after high school that is also affordable



Conclusion

The findings from the Varying Degrees 2023 survey suggest Americans divide into distinct groups related to their attitudes about the benefits associated with undergraduate college credentials as well as their attitudes about equity- and race-based affirmative action in higher education. The key findings are summarized here.

Americans are nearly equally divided about the benefits of educational credentials for college graduates. Just over half of respondents (52%) are Higher Education Believers. This group overwhelmingly thinks that undergraduate credentials (i.e., certificates as well as associate’s and bachelor’s degrees) provide graduates a variety of both economic and social benefits compared to those without these credentials. The remaining respondents (48%) are Higher Education Skeptics. Most of these skeptics do not see economic benefits for graduates, and very few see social benefits for graduates compared to those without credentials.

Americans share more consensus around the benefits that college graduates contribute to their communities. Both the Higher Education Believers and the Higher Education Skeptics think that graduates offer a variety of benefits to their communities. However, while virtually all Higher Education Believers (between 90% and 97%) think graduates offer economic, employment-related, and social benefits to their communities, comparatively fewer Higher Education Skeptics feel the same (between 52% and 78%). The findings suggest that Higher Education Skeptics might understand and seem to regard the collective, community-related value of

postsecondary educational credentials differently from the benefits conferred directly to graduates themselves.

Attitudes about the value of educational credentials may be more related to educational attainment and other attitudes rather than politics. While there are more Democrats who are Higher Education Believers (and more Republicans who are Higher Education Skeptics), almost half of *both* groups are comprised of individuals who describe their political views as moderate. However, Higher Education Believers are different from Higher Education Skeptics in other ways. Higher Education Believers have higher levels of educational attainment, view higher levels of educational attainment as necessary for ensuring financial security, and many more think that higher education positively impacts the country.

Americans are divided about how equitable they think pathways into and through U.S. higher education are right now. Most Americans think anyone who wants to pursue and complete education beyond high school can do so; they mostly perceive equitable pathways into and through higher education. Only one of the four equity-related groups (the Equity Realists)—which comprises 21% of the population—generally viewed postsecondary educational pathways (i.e., opportunity to enroll, affordability, and opportunity to complete programs of study) as inequitable. Only 5% of Equity Realists think that education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it. Additionally, less than a third of this group thinks that everyone who wants to enroll in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to do so (30%) and everyone who enrolls in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to complete their program of study (29%).

Americans seem the least divided about the affordability of postsecondary education. A majority of three equity-related groups thinks postsecondary education is not affordable for everyone who wants to pursue it. The exception is the Equity Devotees group, as 94% of them think that postsecondary education *is* affordable for everyone.

Most Americans think colleges and universities have a responsibility to ensure equity. Nearly all Equity Devotees and Equity Realists as well as most Equity Moderates think that colleges and universities should 1) ensure that adequate support services are provided to all students who need them, 2) ensure the quality of their educational programs so that graduates achieve desirable outcomes, and 3) recruit and admit more students from groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education. While most of the Equity Skeptics also think that schools should take the first two approaches (i.e., ensure adequate support services and ensure program quality), very few Equity Skeptics think that schools should recruit and admit more students from historically underrepresented groups in higher education.

Most Americans also think that state and federal governments have a responsibility to ensure equity. All Equity Devotees as well as nearly all Equity Realists and Equity Moderates think state and federal governments should 1) ensure that they are providing adequate funding to colleges and universities for student support services, and 2) ensure that groups who have been historically underrepresented at colleges and universities have access to education beyond high

school. However, less than half the Equity Skeptics agreed about the first approach (i.e., ensuring adequate funding), and less than a quarter of Equity Skeptics agreed about the second approach (i.e., ensuring access to higher education for historically underrepresented groups).

Most Americans agree that colleges and universities should admit more students—and hire more faculty and staff—of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Nearly all Equity Devotees and Equity Realists think colleges and universities should do this. Nearly three-fourths of Equity Moderates feel the same. However, very few of the Equity Skeptics think schools should admit more students (10%) or hire more faculty and staff (6%) of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Most Americans also agree about some of the benefits of race-based affirmative action. Nearly all Equity Devotees and Equity Realists think all students benefit from educational contexts that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the country. Additionally, nearly all of these two groups think that when colleges and universities consider students' race and ethnicity among factors in admission decisions, this 1) plays a role in reducing racial and ethnic inequalities in broader society and 2) provides students who have been historically underrepresented an expanded opportunity to enroll in education beyond high school. While nearly all Equity Moderates think all students benefit from diverse educational contexts that reflect the country's demography, they more moderately agree about the other two benefits of race-based affirmative action. A little over a third of the Equity Skeptics also think all students benefit from diverse educational contexts. However, very few of this group agree about the other benefits of race-based affirmative action (i.e., reducing broader racial and ethnic inequalities and providing expanded opportunities for historically underrepresented students).

Equity and race-based affirmative action attitudes may be somewhat related to politics. A majority of both Equity Devotees and Equity Realists are Democrats. The Equity Skeptics are a majority Republican. And the Equity Moderates group has the most heterogenous political party identification, with nearly equal proportions of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. So at first glance, political party affiliation seems to relate to these race-based affirmative action attitudes. However, the groups' political views and political attitudes convey a different story. The Equity Devotees and Equity Realists—though both majority Democrat—have different political views. Just under a third of Equity Devotees have liberal/very liberal political views, compared to over half of Equity Realists. Over half of the Equity Skeptics report conservative/very conservative views. However, all four groups report a relatively large proportion of politically moderate views.

The groups' politically moderate views may be influencing their broader equal rights-related attitudes. In terms of these groups' political attitudes, nearly all Equity Devotees and the Equity Realists think a lot needs to be done in the U.S. to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds (compared to a little over half of the Equity Moderates and less than a fifth of the Equity Skeptics groups). However, of these respondents who felt like a lot needs to be done, just over a third of Equity Devotees, Equity Realists, and Equity Moderates thought the U.S. should completely overhaul most U.S. laws and major institutions because they

are biased against some racial and ethnic groups. The roughly two-thirds remaining across these three groups reported that they wanted to work within current systems—instead of overhaul them—to address most U.S. laws and major institutions. This was a surprising finding given the differences in these groups’ political views. In particular, one might have expected Equity Realists—with the highest proportion of *very liberal* political views—to be more inclined to report that the U.S. should completely overhaul most U.S. laws and major institutions because of their biased nature.

Equity-related attitudes are also related to other characteristics. There are some differences in terms of the four equity-related groups’ other demographic and psychographic characteristics. For example, the Equity Devotees was the only group where a majority of respondents (52%) identified as people of color, making it the most racially/ethnically diverse group of the four. The Equity Devotees were also the only group where over half reported an annual household income less than \$60,000. Conversely, over a third of the Equity Skeptics group reported an annual household income of over \$100,000. Finally, there are marked differences in attitudes about whether colleges and universities are having a positive or negative effect on the way things are going in this country today. About two-thirds of the Equity Devotees and Equity Moderates and over three-fourths of Equity Realists reported positive effects of colleges and universities. However, only about a quarter of Equity Skeptics felt the same.

Closing

This year’s analyses of the Varying Degrees 2023 survey focused on understanding how Americans’ views on the value of postsecondary educational credentials and equity-related attitudes relate to political views as well as other demographic and psychographic characteristics. The above summary includes 11 conclusions drawn from select 2023 Varying Degrees measures. The general public’s attitudes about the return on the investment in postsecondary education differ and are often divided across a variety of characteristics. Americans are also divided on their attitudes about issues such as the value of diversity and race-based affirmative action on college campuses, but the specific issues around which they disagree are nuanced. The recent U.S. Supreme Court’s decision on race-conscious admissions will likely spur more discussions about the role of colleges and universities in promoting postsecondary success *for all*. As such, there continues to be a need to measure the attitudes of those in our nation to understand their views on the value of postsecondary educational credentials and equity-related attitudes, regardless of legal precedent.

Appendix A: About AmeriSpeak

Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. These sampled households are then contacted by US mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. While most AmeriSpeak households participate in surveys by web, non-internet households can participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by telephone. Households without conventional internet access but having web access via smartphones are allowed to participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by web. AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of governmental agencies, academic researchers, and media and commercial organizations.

Appendix B: Varying Degrees 2023 Instrument



Survey Questions 2023 New America Varying Degrees Survey

Conducted for:	New America
Conducted by:	NORC at the University of Chicago
Sample Source:	AmeriSpeak Probability-Based Panel
Sampled Population:	General Population Age 18+ w/Race & Ethnicity oversamples
Date Fielded:	03/27/2023–05/08/2023

WINTRO_1.

This survey is about higher education – or education beyond high school. This includes any formal education and/or training, including apprenticeships, technical education, vocational education, and coursework applicable to an associate, bachelor’s, or advanced degree.

Section 1: Enrollment and Borrowing Status

D4.

Are you currently enrolled in any education beyond high school? Education beyond high school includes any formal education and/or training, including apprenticeships, technical education, vocational education, and coursework applicable to an associate, bachelor’s, or advanced degree.

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Yes, I am enrolled at the undergraduate level (e.g., associate or bachelor’s degree program, undergraduate certificate program, other undergraduate-level courses)
2. Yes, I am enrolled at the graduate or professional level (e.g., master’s, doctoral, or professional degree programs, graduate-level certificate program, other graduate-level courses)
3. No

[SHOW IF D4=1]

D5.

Which of the following best describes the type of school you are currently attending for undergraduate study, which includes study for an associate degree, bachelor's degree, or sub-baccalaureate credential (such as a certificate program)?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Public 2-year college
 2. Public 4-year college or university
 3. Private non-profit 2-year or 4-year college or university
 4. Private for profit 2-year or 4-year college or university
 5. Other (Specify): [TEXTBOX]
 6. Attending more than one school
 7. Don't know
-

S1A.

Do you currently have student loans you borrowed for yourself and are responsible for paying? This is debt you may have taken out to pay for community college, university, or vocational schools -- even if you haven't finished your degree.

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Yes
 2. No
-

[SHOW IF S1A = 1]

D3A.

Are the student loans you borrowed for your own education for undergraduate, graduate education, or both?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Undergraduate education only
 2. Graduate education only
 3. Both undergraduate and graduate education
-

S1B.

Do you currently have student loans that you borrowed or co-signed for someone else and are responsible for paying? This is debt taken out to pay for community college, university, or vocational schools -- even if the student hasn't finished their degree.

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Yes
 2. No
-

Section 2: Employment and Financial Security

Q1.

How much do you agree or disagree that there are lots of well-paying, stable jobs that people can find with only a high school diploma or GED?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
 2. Somewhat agree
 3. Somewhat disagree
 4. Strongly disagree
-

Q3

How much do you agree or disagree with the idea that, in general, it is easier to find a well-paying, stable career if you received the following levels of education compared to having no education beyond high school?

GRID ITEMS

- A. Some technical education or college, but no certificate or degree
- B. Technical certificate
- C. Associate degree (usually a two-year degree in a technical or liberal arts discipline)
- D. Bachelor's degree (usually a four-year degree)
- E. Advanced degree (e.g., master's or doctoral degree)
- F. Professional degree (e.g., degree in dentistry, law, medicine, pharmacy, or veterinary medicine)

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
 2. Somewhat agree
 3. Somewhat disagree
 4. Strongly disagree
-

Q8B.

What is the minimum level of education that you believe your immediate or close family members need to complete to ensure financial security?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. High school diploma/GED
 2. Technical certificate
 3. Associate degree (usually a two-year degree in a technical or liberal arts discipline)
 4. Bachelor's degree (usually a four-year degree)
 5. Master's degree (e.g., Master of Business Administration, Master of Arts, Master of Science)
 6. Doctoral or professional degree (e.g., Ph.D. or degree in dentistry, law, medicine, pharmacy, or veterinary medicine)
-

Q8C.

What is the minimum level of education that you believe adults living in the United States need to complete to ensure financial security?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. High school diploma/GED
 2. Technical certificate
 3. Associate degree (usually a two-year degree in a technical or liberal arts discipline)
 4. Bachelor's degree (usually a four-year degree)
 5. Master's degree (e.g., Master of Business Administration, Master of Arts, Master of Science)
 6. Doctoral or professional degree (e.g., Ph.D. or degree in dentistry, law, medicine, pharmacy, or veterinary medicine)
-

Section 3: Attitudes About Affordability, Value, Funding, and Accountability

Q9.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. Americans can get a high-quality education after high school that is also affordable
- B. States should spend more tax dollars on education opportunities after high school to make them more affordable
- C. The federal government should spend more tax dollars on education opportunities after high school to make them more affordable

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
 2. Somewhat agree
 3. Somewhat disagree
 4. Strongly disagree
-

Q10.

Compared to those who have not completed an associate or bachelor's degree, or an undergraduate certificate, how do you rate the following for individuals who have completed these undergraduate credentials?

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. Availability of jobs that pay a livable wage
- B. Job satisfaction
- C. Earnings from employment including salaries or wages
- D. Opportunities to build wealth
- E. Financial wellbeing
- F. Satisfaction with the communities where they live
- G. Good health

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Much better
 2. Somewhat better
 3. About the same
 4. Somewhat worse
 5. Much worse
-

Q11.

Compared to those who have completed a bachelor's degree, how do you rate the following for individuals who have completed a graduate-level postsecondary degree such as a master's, doctoral, or professional degree?

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. Availability of jobs that pay a livable wage
- B. Job satisfaction
- C. Earnings from employment including salaries or wages
- D. Opportunities to build wealth
- E. Financial wellbeing
- F. Satisfaction with the communities where they live
- G. Good health

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Much better
 2. Somewhat better
 3. About the same
 4. Somewhat worse
 5. Much worse
-

Q12.

How much, if at all, do you think individuals who complete an undergraduate program, such as an associate or bachelor's degree or certificate, offer the following to their communities?

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. Increased public tax revenues due to higher wages of graduates
- B. Skilled workforce
- C. Improved public health
- D. Increased civic participation such as voting, volunteering, or other involvement within their communities
- E. Range of employment opportunities
- F. Low unemployment rates
- G. Support for local businesses
- H. Cultural participation and opportunities

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Very much
 2. Somewhat
 3. Very little
 4. Not at all
-

Q28.

Who should be more responsible for funding higher education?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. The government, because it is good for society
 2. Students, because they personally benefit
-

Q55.

Do you agree or disagree that colleges and universities should be required to repay the federal government for outstanding student loans that were canceled because these colleges misrepresented information about their programs of study and student outcomes?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
 2. Somewhat agree
 3. Somewhat disagree
 4. Strongly disagree
-

Q43.

How important is it for colleges and universities to provide publicly available data on key indicators of quality, such as graduation rates, graduates' employment rates, and earnings?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Very important
 2. Somewhat important
 3. Not very important
 4. Not important at all
-

Q44.

How much do you support or oppose the idea that colleges and universities should lose some access to taxpayer dollars if they have...

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. low graduation rates
- B. high default rates for student loan repayments
- C. low rates of graduates paying down their student loans
- D. low rates of graduates earning a living wage
- E. high rates of graduates earning less than the average high school graduate
- F. high student loan debt relative to their earnings

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly support
 2. Somewhat support
 3. Somewhat oppose
 4. Strongly oppose
-

Q45.

Vocational programs in certified occupations at colleges and universities are generally at for-profit institutions or are non-degree awarding programs at non-profit public or private institutions. How much do you support or oppose the idea that these vocational programs should lose eligibility for federal financial aid if these programs have...

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. consistently failed to help graduates earn more than those who completed only high school
- B. consistently left students deeply in debt relative to their earnings

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Strongly support
 - 2. Somewhat support
 - 3. Somewhat oppose
 - 4. Strongly oppose
-

Section 4: Attitudes About Higher Education Institutions

Q21.

How much, if at all, do students attending colleges and universities need support or services from their schools in the following areas?

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE AND RECORD:

- A. Financial aid
- B. Academic support, such as course and major selection
- C. Career-related support, such as career exploration, securing internships, and finding jobs
- D. Health services
- E. Mental health services
- F. Secure housing
- G. Food security
- H. On-campus childcare
- I. Transportation expenses

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Very much
 - 2. Somewhat
 - 3. Very little
 - 4. Not at all
 - 77. Don't know
-

Q29.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. Everyone who wants to enroll in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to do so
- B. Education beyond high school is affordable for anyone who wants to pursue it
- C. Everyone who enrolls in education beyond high school has an equal opportunity to complete their program of study
- D. All colleges and universities should ensure the quality of their educational programs so that graduates achieve desirable outcomes
- E. Colleges and universities should recruit and admit more students from groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education, such as individuals from lower-income families, those who are the first in their families to attend college, those with disabilities, and those from racial and ethnic minorities
- F. State and federal governments should ensure that groups who have been historically underrepresented at colleges and universities, such as individuals from lower-income families, those who are the first in their families to attend college, those with disabilities, and those from racial and ethnic minorities have access to education beyond high school
- G. Colleges and universities should ensure that adequate support services are provided to all students who need them
- H. State and federal governments should ensure that they are providing adequate funding to colleges and universities for student support services

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Strongly agree
 - 2. Somewhat agree
 - 3. Somewhat disagree
 - 4. Strongly disagree
-

RANDOMIZE ORDER OF Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, and Q26

Q22.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding public community colleges:

Public community colleges...

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. are for people like me
- B. are worth the cost
- C. contribute to a strong American workforce
- D. are institutions I am comfortable supporting with my tax dollars
- E. spend money wisely
- F. run efficiently
- G. are underfunded by state and federal government

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Somewhat agree
- 3. Somewhat disagree
- 4. Strongly disagree
- 77. Don't know [ONLY DISPLAY FOR ITEMS E, F, & G]

Q23.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding public four-year colleges or universities:

Public four-year colleges or universities...

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. are for people like me
- B. are worth the cost
- C. contribute to a strong American workforce
- D. are institutions I am comfortable supporting with my tax dollars
- E. spend money wisely
- F. run efficiently
- G. are underfunded by state and federal government

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Somewhat agree
- 3. Somewhat disagree
- 4. Strongly disagree
- 77. Don't know [ONLY DISPLAY FOR ITEMS E, F, & G]

Q24.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding private, non-profit colleges or universities:

Private, non-profit colleges or universities...

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. are for people like me
- B. are worth the cost
- C. contribute to a strong American workforce
- D. are institutions I am comfortable supporting with my tax dollars
- E. spend money wisely
- F. run efficiently
- G. are underfunded by state and federal government

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Somewhat agree
- 3. Somewhat disagree
- 4. Strongly disagree
- 77. Don't know [ONLY DISPLAY FOR ITEMS E, F, & G]

Q25.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding for-profit colleges or universities:

For-profit colleges or universities...

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. are for people like me
- B. are worth the cost
- C. contribute to a strong American workforce
- D. are institutions I am comfortable supporting with my tax dollars
- E. spend money wisely
- F. run efficiently
- G. are underfunded by state and federal government

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
 2. Somewhat agree
 3. Somewhat disagree
 4. Strongly disagree
 77. Don't know [ONLY DISPLAY FOR ITEMS E, F, & G]
-

Q26.

Minority Serving Institutions in the U.S. include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding Minority Serving Institutions:

Minority Serving Institutions...

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. are for people like me
- B. are worth the cost
- C. contribute to a strong American workforce
- D. are institutions I am comfortable supporting with my tax dollars
- E. spend money wisely
- F. run efficiently
- G. are underfunded by state and federal government

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
 2. Somewhat agree
 3. Somewhat disagree
 4. Strongly disagree
 77. Don't know [ONLY DISPLAY FOR ITEMS E, F, & G]
-

Section 5: Attitudes About College Admission and Selection

Q42.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. Colleges and universities in this country should admit more students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
- B. Colleges and universities in this country should hire more faculty and staff of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
- C. All students, regardless of race and ethnicity, benefit from colleges and universities that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the general U.S. population
- D. When colleges and universities consider students' race and ethnicity as one factor among others in admission decisions, this plays a role in reducing racial and ethnic inequalities in broader society
- E. When colleges and universities consider students' race and ethnicity as one factor among others in admission decisions, this provides students who have been historically underrepresented an expanded opportunity to enroll in education beyond high school

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Strongly agree
 - 2. Somewhat agree
 - 3. Somewhat disagree
 - 4. Strongly disagree
-

Q49.

What type of role, if any, should the following factors play when colleges and universities make admission decisions?

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. High school (or previous college) grades
- B. ACT/SAT test scores
- C. Being the first in one's family to attend college
- D. Whether a family member attended the school
- E. Race and ethnicity
- F. Gender
- G. Athletic ability
- H. Veteran status
- I. Applicant or family's income

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Major role
 - 2. Minor role
 - 3. No role
-

Section 6: Attitudes About Online and In-Person Education

Q57.

Compared to fully in-person programs, do you think that fully online programs in higher education have made the following better, the same, or worse?

GRID ITEMS, RANDOMIZE:

- A. Access to education beyond high school for all students
- B. Access to education beyond high school for those who have been historically underrepresented at colleges and universities, such as individuals from lower-income families, those who are the first in their families to attend college, those with disabilities, and those from racial and ethnic minorities
- C. Geographic convenience of academic offerings
- D. Flexibility of academic offerings
- E. Affordability of education beyond high school
- F. Time it takes to complete a higher education program
- G. School-life balance
- H. Students' learning
- I. Students' communication and collaboration skills
- J. Quality of instruction
- K. Employability of those who complete these programs

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Better
 - 2. The same
 - 3. Worse
-

Q27A.

Do you believe that online education programs after high school should be less expensive, cost the same, or be more expensive than in-person programs?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Less expensive
 - 2. Cost the same
 - 3. More expensive
-

Q53.

How much do you agree or disagree with the idea that, in general, it is worthwhile for borrowers to take out loans for education after high school that is a predominantly online program?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
 2. Somewhat agree
 3. Somewhat disagree
 4. Strongly disagree
-

Q56

How much do you agree or disagree with the idea that, in general, it is worthwhile for borrowers to take out loans for education after high school that is a predominantly in-person program?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
 2. Somewhat agree
 3. Somewhat disagree
 4. Strongly disagree
-

Section 7: Attitudes About Higher Education Impact

Q9AA.

Overall, do you think colleges and universities are having a positive or negative effect on the way things are going in this country today?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Positive
 2. Negative
-

Q9BB.

Overall, do you think colleges and universities are having a positive or negative effect on the way things are going within your local community today?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Positive
 2. Negative
-

Q6.

As a reminder, higher education includes any formal education and/or training, including apprenticeships, technical education, vocational education, and coursework applicable to an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree. How much do you agree or disagree that higher education in America is fine how it is?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Somewhat disagree
4. Strongly disagree

Section 8: Demographics

D1.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

The quality of my home internet currently meets the needs of my household.

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Somewhat disagree
4. Strongly disagree

D1A.

How many people are regularly using the internet in your home during typical weekday work and school hours, which are typically between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

0. 0
1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5
6. 6+

D2.

How many dependents age 17 or younger do you care for at least 50 percent of the time?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

0. 0
 1. 1
 2. 2
 3. 3
 4. 4
 5. 5
 6. 6+
-

PID1.

Do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent or none of these?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Democrat
 2. Republican
 3. Independent
 4. None of these
-

PID2.

Do you consider your political views to be...

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Very liberal
 2. Liberal
 3. Moderate
 4. Conservative
 5. Very conservative
-

[SHOW IF PID1=1, 3, 4, 77, 98, 99]

PIDD1.

The Democratic party represents my political views...

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Very well
 2. Somewhat well
 3. Very little
 4. Not at all
-

[SHOW IF PID1=2, 3, 4, 77, 98, 99]

PIDR1.

The Republican party represents my political views...

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Very well
 2. Somewhat well
 3. Very little
 4. Not at all
-

PLAT1.

How much, if anything, needs to be done in the United States to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. A lot
 2. A little
 3. Nothing at all
-

[SHOW IF PLAT1 = 1]

PLAT2.

Which of the following best describes what you think should be done in the United States to ensure equal rights for everyone regardless of their racial or ethnic background?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Completely overhaul most U.S. laws and major institutions because they are biased against some racial and ethnic groups
 2. Work within current systems to address most U.S. laws and major institutions because they are biased against some racial and ethnic groups
-

Demographic Profile:
Additional questions asked of panelists prior to this survey
and are included with the survey data

Variable	Values
Gender	1 = Male
	2 = Female
Age	Age in years
Age (7 categories)	1 = 18-24; 2 = 25-34; 3 = 35-44; 4 = 45-54; 5 = 55-64; 6 = 65-74; 7 = 75+
Age (4 categories)	1 = 18-29; 2 = 30-44; 3 = 45-59; 4 = 60+
Education (5 categories)	1 = Less than HS
	2 = HS graduate
	3 = Vocational/tech school/some college/associates
	4 = Bachelor's degree
	5 = Post grad study/professional degree
Race/Ethnicity	1 = White, Non-Hispanic
	2 = Black, Non-Hispanic
	3 = Other, Non-Hispanic
	4 = Hispanic
	5 = 2+ races, Non-Hispanic
	6 = Asian/Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic
Housing Type	1 = A one-family house detached from any other house
	2 = A one-family house attached to one or more houses
	3 = A building with 2 or more apartments
	4 = A mobile home or trailer
	5 = Boat, RV, van, etc.
Household Income (18 categories)	1 = Less than \$5,000 2 = \$5,000 to \$9,999
	3 = \$10,000 to \$14,999 4 = \$15,000 to \$19,999
	5 = \$20,000 to \$24,999 6 = \$25,000 to \$29,999
	7 = \$30,000 to \$34,999 8 = \$35,000 to \$39,999
	9 = \$40,000 to \$49,999 10 = \$50,000 to \$59,999
	11 = \$60,000 to \$74,999 12 = \$75,000 to \$84,999
	13 = \$85,000 to \$99,999 14 = \$100,000 to \$124,999
	15 = \$125,000 to \$149,999 16 = \$150,000 to \$174,999
	17 = \$175,000 to \$199,999 18 = \$200,000 or more
Household Income (9 categories)	1 = Less than \$10,000
	2 = \$10,000 to \$19,999
	3 = \$20,000 to \$29,999
	4 = \$30,000 to \$39,999
	5 = \$40,000 to \$49,999
	6 = \$50,000 to \$74,999
	7 = \$75,000 to \$99,999

Variable	Values
	8 = \$100,000 to \$149,999
	9 = \$150,000 or more
Household Income (4 categories)	1 = Less than \$30,000
	2 = \$30,000 to \$59,999
	3 = \$60,000 to \$99,999
	4 = \$100,000 or more
Marital Status	1 = Married
	2 = Widowed
	3 = Divorced
	4 = Separated
	5 = Never married
	6 = Living with partner
Metropolitan Statistical Area Status	0 = Non-Metro
	1 = Metro (as defined US OMB Core-Based Statistical Area)
Home Internet Access	0 = No
	1 = Yes
Telephone Service	1 = Landline telephone only
	2 = Have a landline, but mostly use cellphone
	3 = Have cellphone, but mostly use landline
	4 = Cellphone only
	5 = No telephone service
Ownership of Living Quarters	1 = Owned or being bought by you or someone in your household
	2 = Rented for cash
	3 = Occupied without payment of cash rent
Region 4 (US Census)	1 = Northeast
	2 = Midwest
	3 = South
	4 = West
Region 9 (US Census)	1 = New England
	2 = Mid-Atlantic
	3 = East-North Central
	4 = West-North Central
	5 = South Atlantic
	6 = East-South Central
	7 = West-South Central
	8 = Mountain
	9 = Pacific
State	State of residence
Household Size	Total number of members in household
HH members, age 0-1	Number of household members in age group

Variable	Values
HH members, age 2-5	Number of household members in age group
HH members, age 6-	Number of household members in age group
HH members, age 13-	Number of household members in age group
HH members, age	Number of household members in age group
Current Employment Status	1 = Working - as a paid employee
	2 = Working - self-employed
	3 = Not working - on temporary layoff from a job
	4 = Not working - looking for work
	5 = Not working – retired
	6 = Not working – disabled
	7 = Not working – other
Oversample	1 = Gen Pop
	2= Oversample
Race/Ethnicity Oversample	1 = AA/Black Oversamples
	2 = Asian American Oversamples
	3 = Hispanic/Latino Oversamples
	4 = Not Race/Ethnicity Oversamples