

Pinkston.

  
**RONALD REAGAN**  
**CENTER ON CIVILITY AND DEMOCRACY**

## Better Rivals Survey

### Topline Report

April 30, 2026

**Methodology:** Pinkston conducted an online survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,542 U.S. adults on issues related to sportsmanship, civility and sports engagement. The survey was conducted April 14–24, 2026 and has a margin of error of 2.3%.

Screening questions about watching sports were included to mirror a classification of sports fans developed by FOX Sports. Using this classification, 29% of this sample classifies as "major fans," 39% are "casual fans" and the remaining 34% are "minor fans."

### Respondent Profile:

**Age Groups:** 18-29 (31%), 30-41 (6%), 42-53 (20%), 54-65 (24%), 66+ (19%)

**Gender:** 49% Male, 51% Female

**Race/Ethnicity:** 74% White, 17% African-American, 8% Hispanic/Latino(a), 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% Native American, 1% Other

**Income:** Less than \$30k (19%), \$30k-\$74k (30%), \$75k-\$99k (17%), \$100k-\$149k (19%), \$150k-\$249k (12%), \$250k+ (2%)

**Education:** 3% Some High School, 23% High School Diploma, 12% Associates Degree, 21% Some College, 25% Bachelor's Degree, 16% Post-Graduate Degree

**Marital Status:** 46% Married, 25% Single, 12% Divorced, 10% In a Committed Relationship, 6% Widowed

**Community:** 44% Suburban, 34% Urban, 22% Rural

**Political Party:** 39% Republican, 36% Democrat, 22% Independent, 3% Other

## Major Findings:

**Pessimism Toward Leadership and Discourse:** Only 32% of Americans view the state of civil discourse as healthy, and 60% believe the character and values of elected officials have changed for the worse. Post-graduate degree holders (56%) and urbanites (46%) are more likely to view the state of discourse as healthy.

**Widespread Desire for Bipartisanship:** 51% of respondents strongly agree that they want elected officials to work harder to find common ground. This sentiment is strongest among Democrats (57%), those with higher incomes, and the more educated.

**Comfort in Political Discussion:** 55% of the general public is comfortable discussing politics with those they disagree with. This comfort level increases significantly among high-income earners making \$150k+ (72%), post-graduates (70%), and major sports fans (70%).

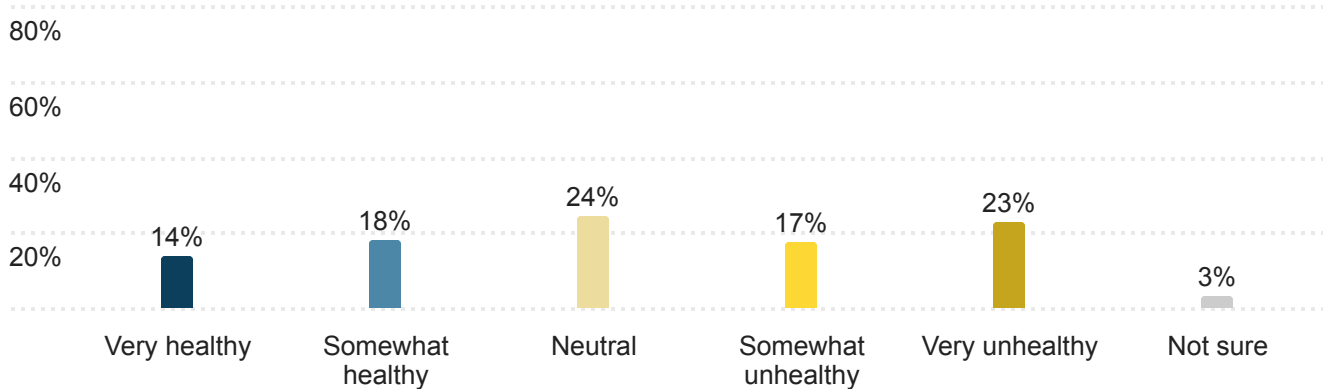
**Sports as a Blueprint for Civility:** Most Americans (64%) believe sports competition teaches people how to manage conflict respectfully, with major sports fans (78%), males (69%), those with higher income and more education being more likely to agree. Additionally, 86% of Americans believe athletes and leagues can be effective in promoting civility.

**Traditional Values of Sportsmanship:** Despite intense competition, 78% of people say it is very important to follow the rules even if breaking them helps you win, and 75% believe it is very important for athletes to show respect toward opponents. Females are more likely to support these values (follow the rules (81%) and show respect toward opponents (78%)).

**Key Demographic Trends:** Males, the more educated (particularly, post-graduate degree holders), higher income earners, and major sports fans report higher levels of optimism regarding the state of civil discourse and the integrity of elected officials – in other words, they do not see as much of a problem. Yet, these groups also stand out for their greater comfort in discussing politics with opposing views and their strong belief that sportsmanship provides a viable model for improving political civility.

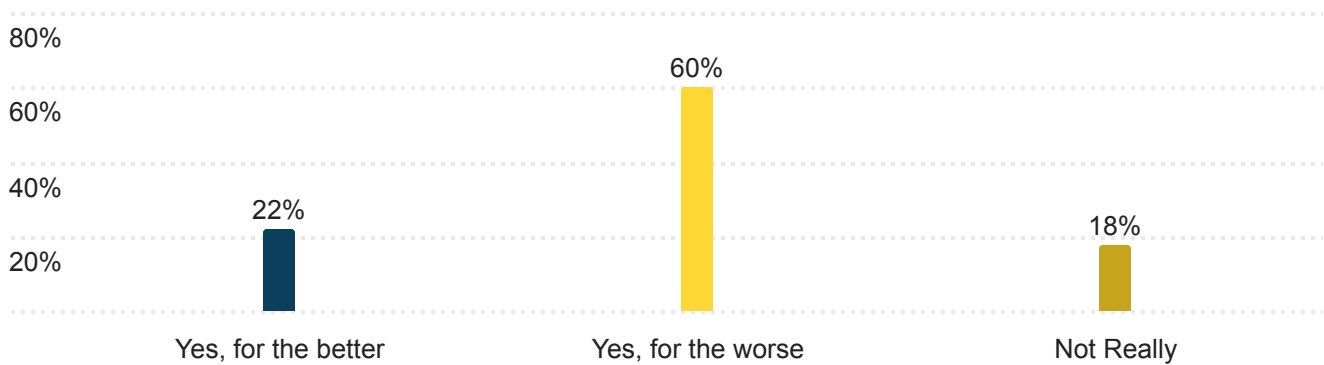
## Civil Discourse

Q27 - How would you assess the state of civil discourse – meaning, civil conversations that are informed, respectful, and bipartisan – in America today?



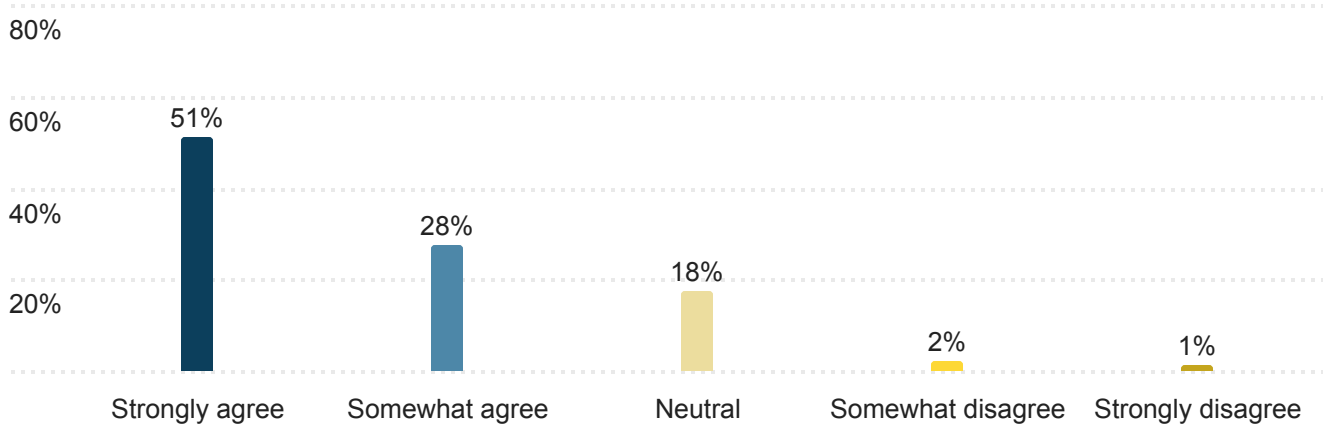
- Males (39%), urbanites (46%), post-graduate degree holders (56%), or major sports fans (43%) are more likely to say the state of civil discourse is healthy.

Q28 - Do you believe the character and values of elected officials have changed?



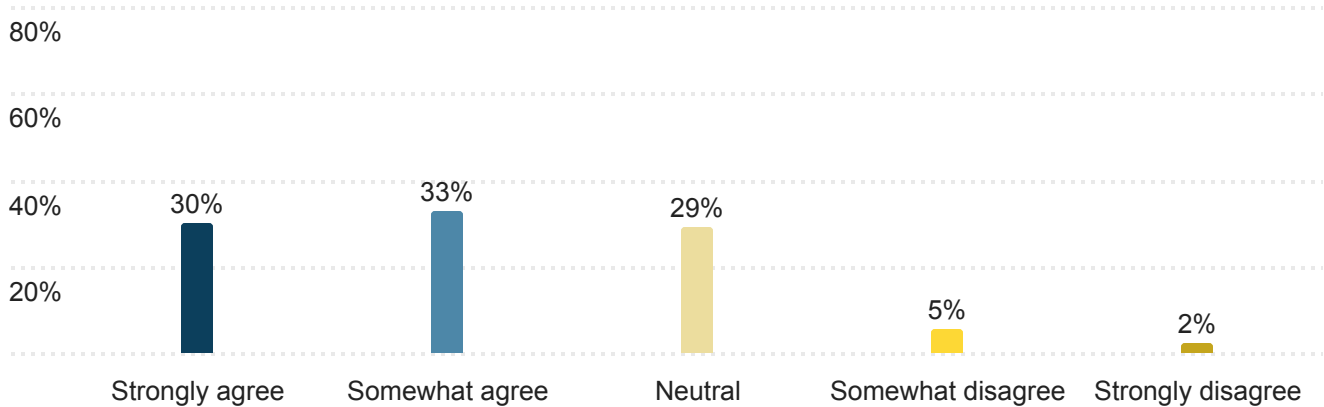
- Males (30%), African-Americans (29%), higher-income, post-graduate degree holders (49%), urbanites (37%), or major sports fans (35%) are more likely to say that the character and values of elected officials has changed for the better.

Q29 - Do you agree or disagree with this statement? “I want elected officials to work harder to find common ground with officials from different political parties.”



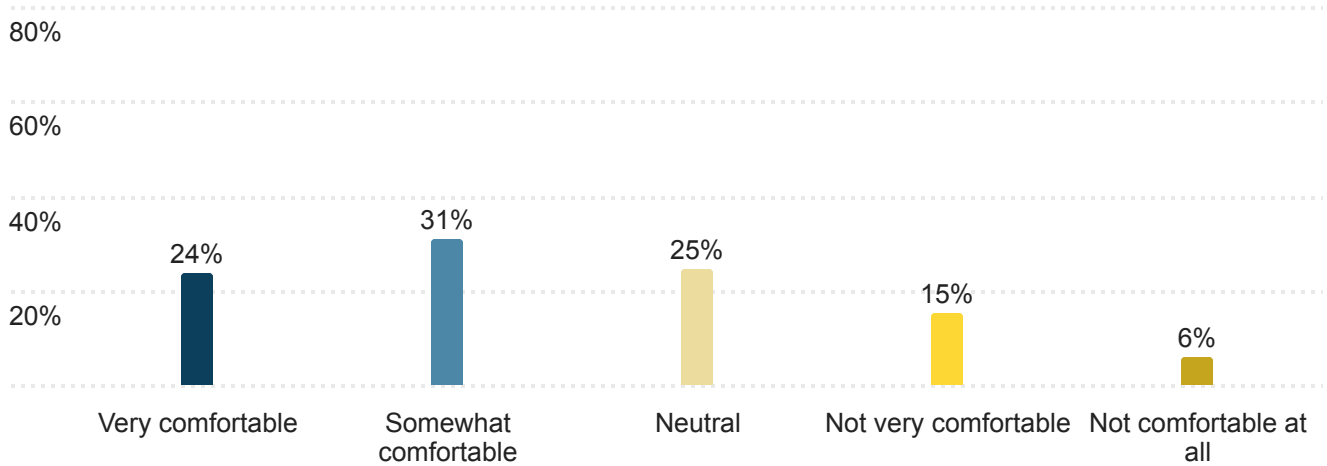
- Major sports fans (56%), white adults (54%), those that are higher-income, more educated, or Democrats (57%) are more likely to “strongly agree” that elected officials work harder to find common ground with officials from different political parties.

Q30 - Do you agree or disagree with this statement? “People who disagree with me politically deserve my respect.”



- Republicans (35%), white adults (33%), or major sports fans (34%) are more likely to strongly agree that people who disagree with them politically deserve their respect.

### Q31 - How comfortable are you discussing politics with those who disagree with you?



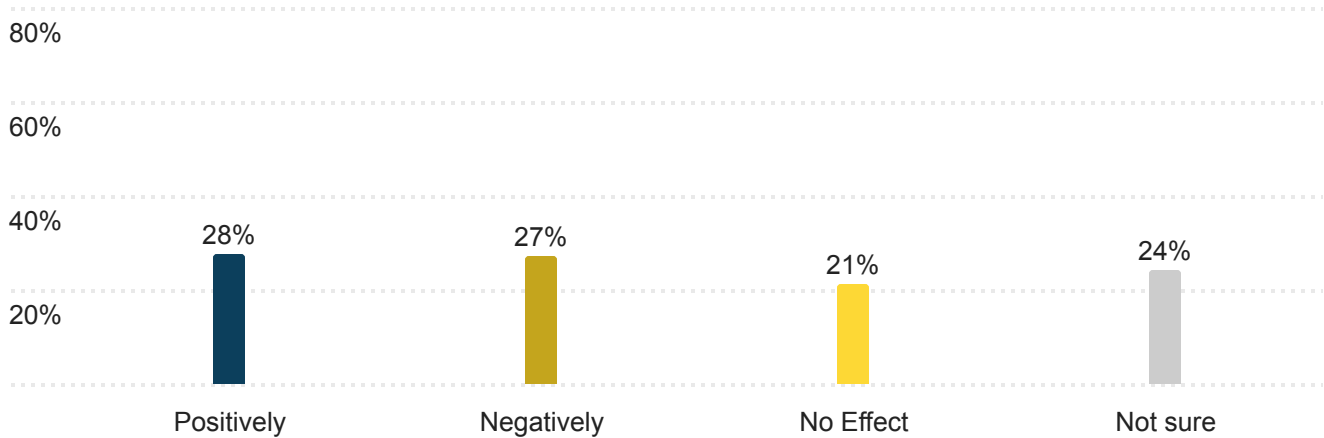
- Major sports fans (70%), males (65%), those making \$150k+ (72%), urbanites (64%), or adults with post-graduate degrees (70%) are more likely to be comfortable discussing politics with those that disagree with them.

### Q32 - When it comes to politics, which matters more to you? On a scale of 1-10, where: 1 = Protecting democratic norms and rules and 10 = Winning political power, where would you place your view?

Field	Mean	Median
What matters more to you	5	5

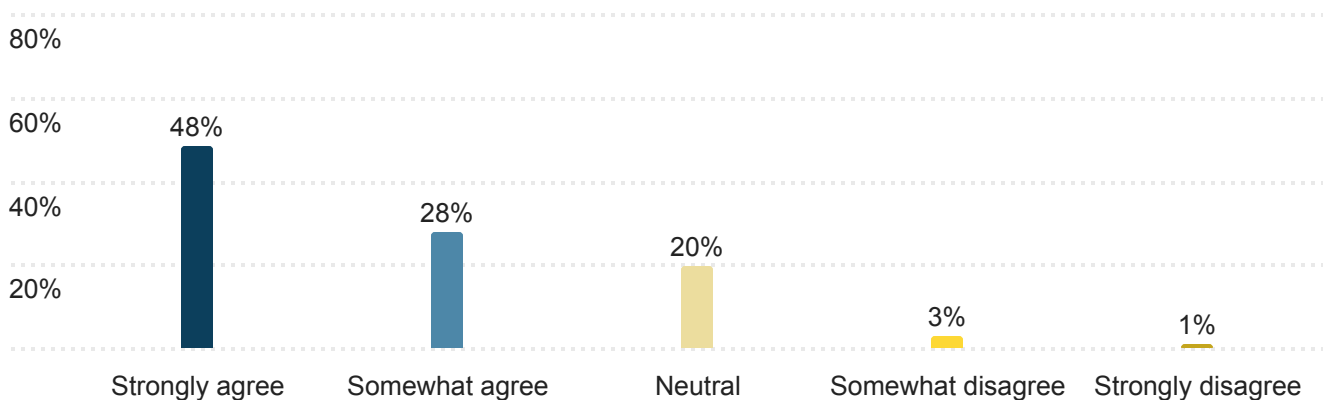
- African-Americans (average of 6), major sports fans (average of 6), or Republicans (average of 6) are more likely to say winning political power matters more to them than protecting democratic norms and rules.

### Q33 - How does being involved in politics affect a person's integrity?



- Males (35%), African-Americans (34%), those with higher incomes, more educated, live in urban areas (42%), or major sports fans (42%) are more likely to say being in politics positively affects a person's integrity.

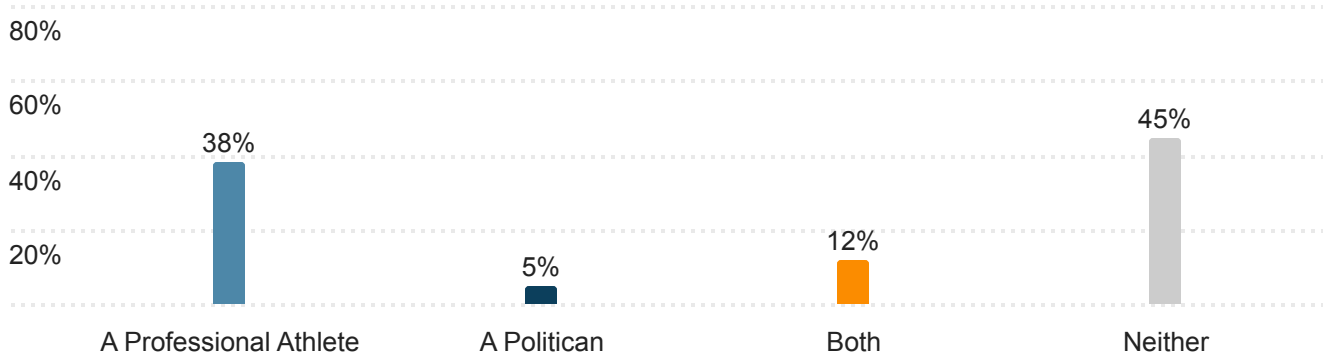
### Q34 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "If the opposing party wins a free and fair election, your party accepts the result."



- Major sports fans (54%), white adults (51%), or those with more education are more likely to strongly agree that if the opposing party wins a free and fair election, your party should accept the result.

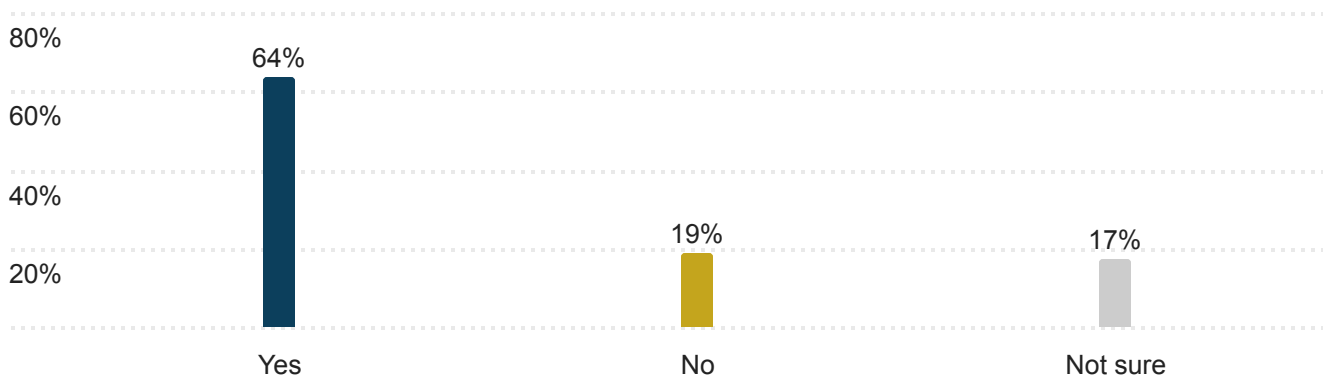
## Impact of Sports on Society

Q26 - If they were delivering you an important message, which of these would you trust?



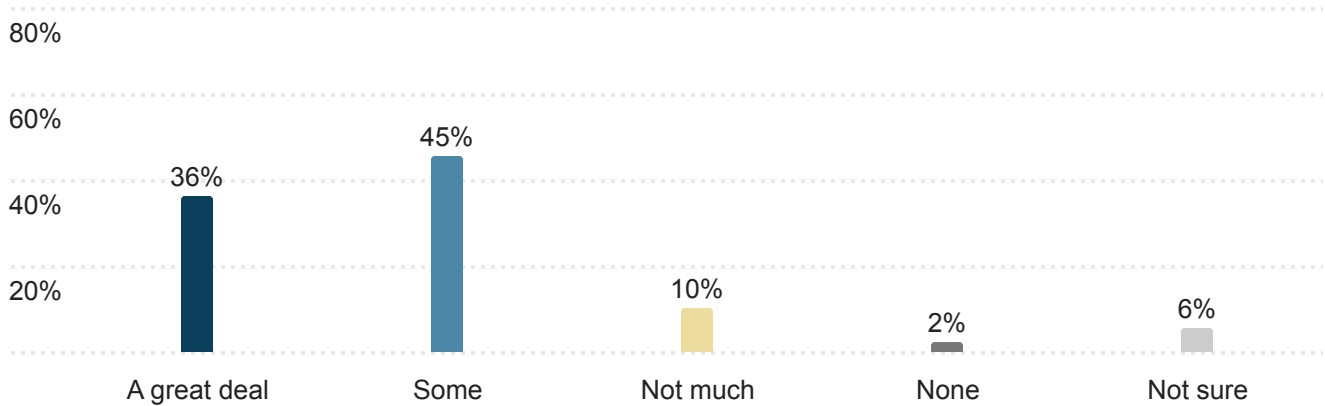
- Males (7%) or those in urban areas (8%) are more likely to say they would trust a politician to send an important message.
- Hispanics (48%), major sports fans (44%), or urbanites (43%) are more likely to say they would trust a professional athlete.

Q35 - Do you think sports competition teaches people how to manage conflict respectfully?



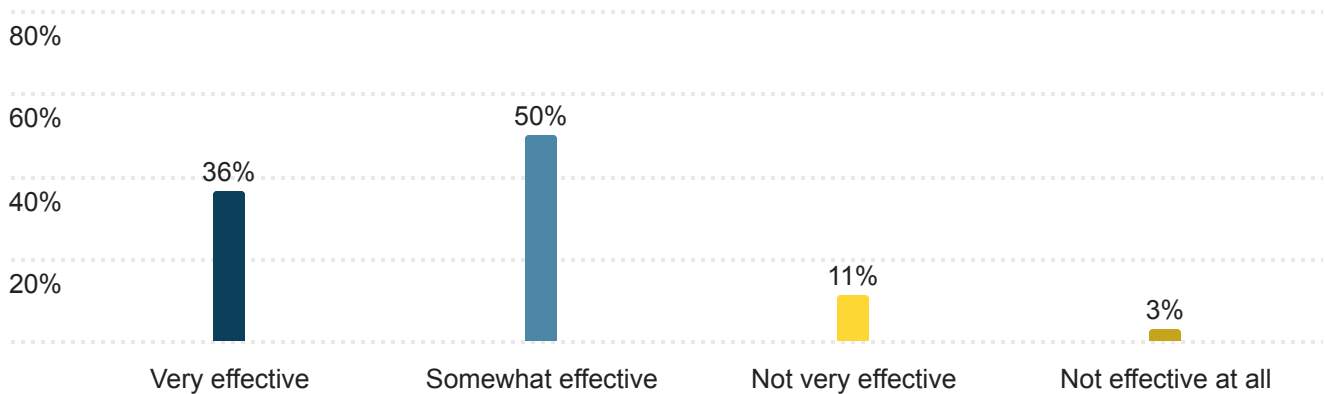
- Major sports fans (78%), males (69%), those with higher incomes, more education, or live in urban areas (68%) are more likely to say that sports competition teaches people how to manage conflict respectfully.

### Q36 - How much influence does sports have on American values?



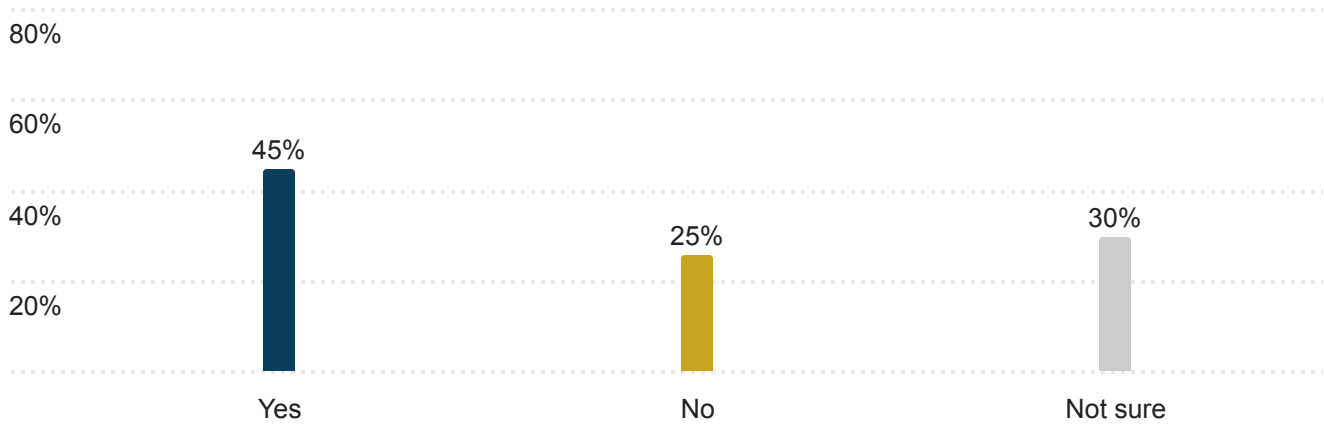
- Post-grad degree holders (42%), major sports fans (45%), those in urban areas (44%), or Republicans (41%) are more likely to say that sports has a great deal of influence on American values.

### Q37 - How effective do you believe athletes and leagues can be in promoting civility?



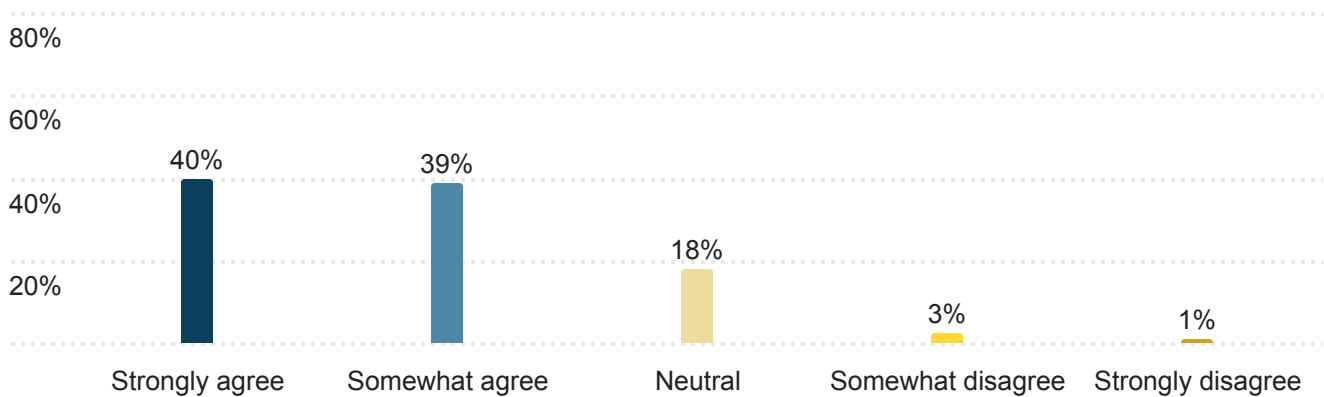
- Post-graduate degree holders (47%) or those in urban areas (45%) are more likely to say athletes and leagues are very effective in promoting civility.

Q38 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
 "Treating political rivals like sports rivals can improve our politics."



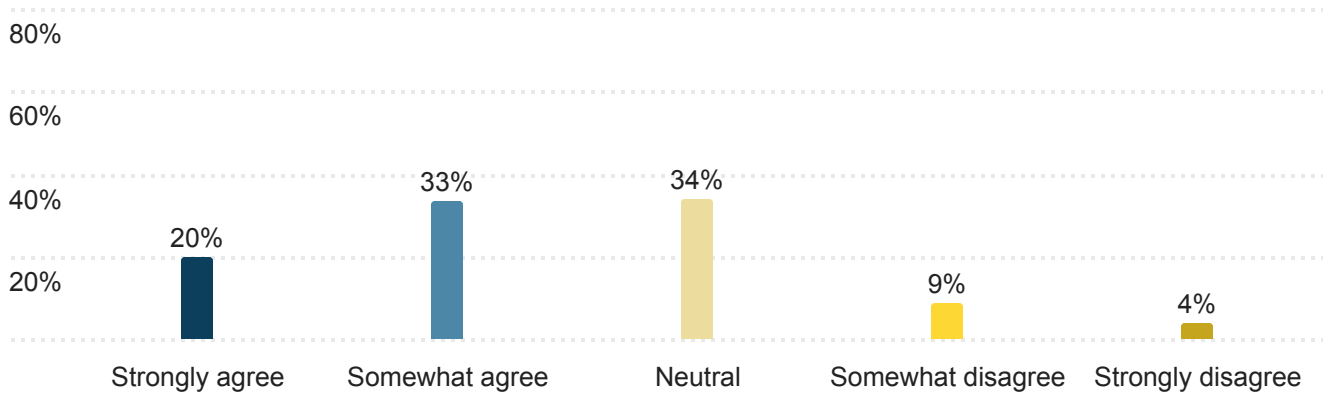
- Males (52%), major sports fans (58%), those that have higher income, are more educated (particularly post-graduate degree holders, 65%), or urbanites (55%) are more likely to believe that treating political rivals like sports rivals can improve our politics.

Q39 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
 "Sports bring people of different beliefs together."



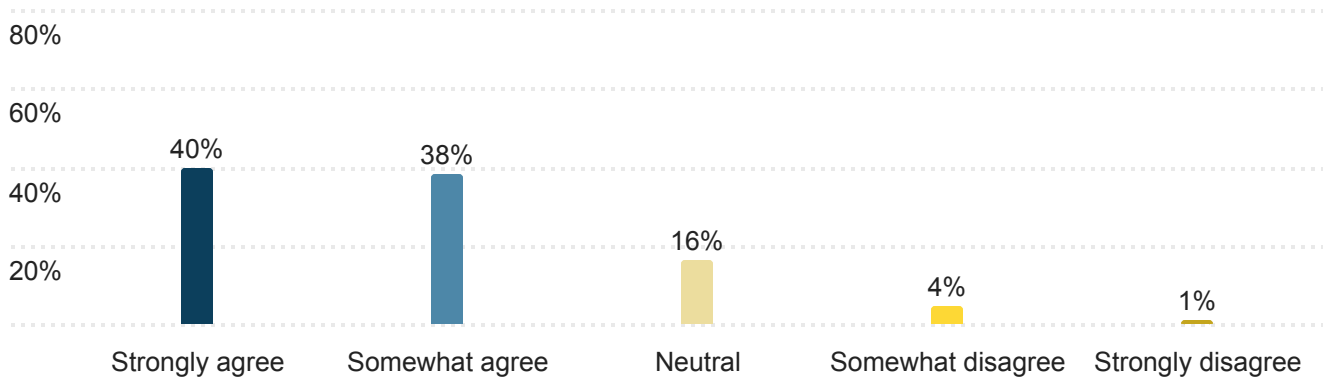
- Major sports fans (55%), males (43%), those with post-graduate degrees (46%), or in an urban area (45%) are more likely to strongly agree that sports brings together people of different beliefs.
- White adults (42%) are significantly more likely to strongly agree than non-whites (35%).

Q40 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
 "Sports competition can model political disagreement."



- Males (25%), major sports fans (30%), those with higher-income, post-graduate degree holders (31%), or urbanites (29%) are more likely to strongly agree that sports competition can model political disagreement.

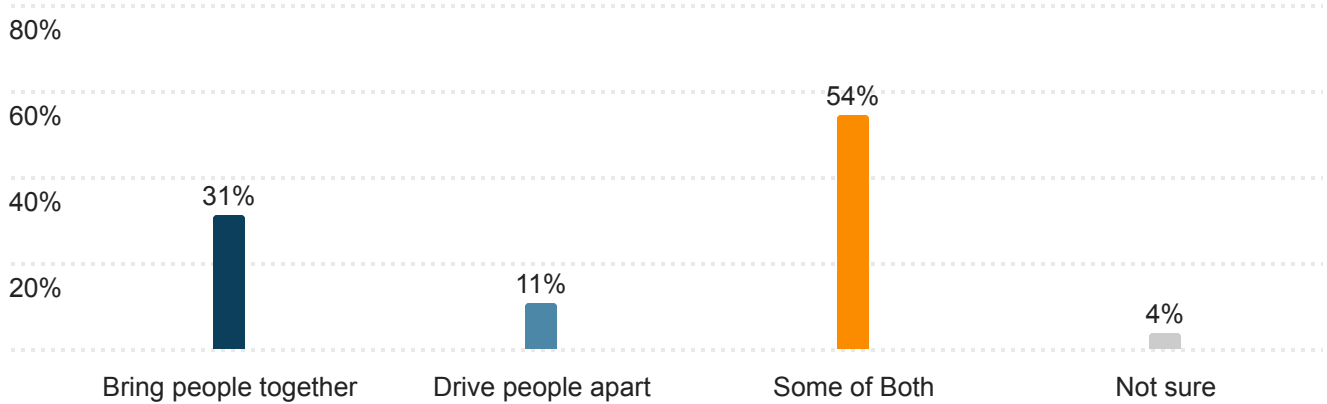
Q41 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Being a good sport is similar to being a good citizen."



- Post-graduate degree holders (46%) or major sports fans (43%) are more likely to strongly agree that being a good sport is similar to being a good citizen.
- African-Americans (33%) are significantly less likely to strongly agree.

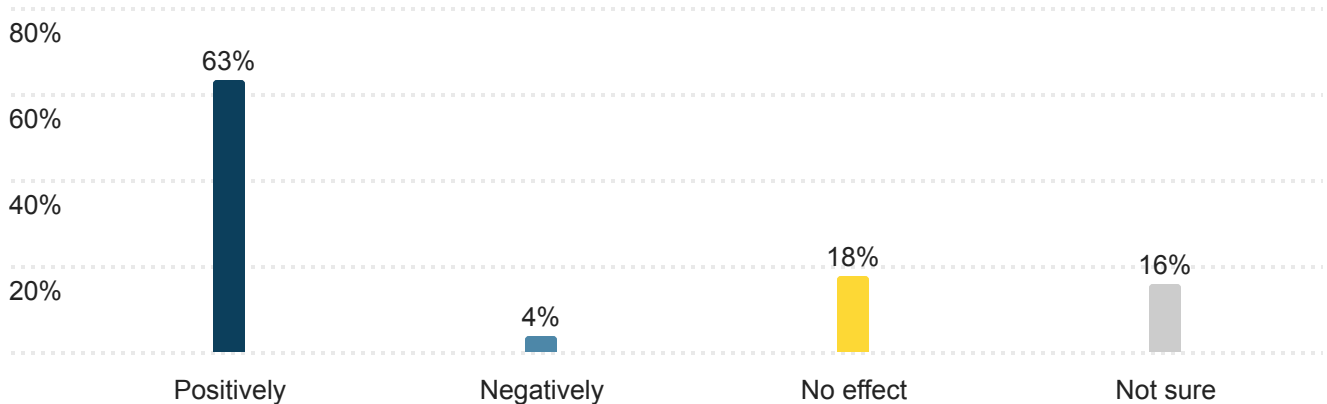
## Sports Rivalries / Competition

Q22 - Would you say that sports rivalries...



- Males (36%), African-Americans (38%), higher-income, more educated, urbanites (37%), or major sports fans (42%) are more likely to say that sports rivalries bring people together.

Q23 - How does being involved in athletics affect a person's integrity?



- Males (69%), those with higher-income, more educated, in an urban area (71%), or major sports fans (80%) are more likely to say that being involved in athletics positively affects a person's integrity.

Q24\_1 - When it comes to sports, people sometimes debate what matters most: preserving the integrity of the game or winning. On a scale from 1 to 10, where: 1 = Protecting the integrity of the game is most important and 10 = Winning is most important, where would you place your view?

Field	Mean	Median
What matters most	5	5

- Males (average of 6), African-Americans (average of 6), or major sports fans (average of 6) are more likely to say that winning is most important when it comes to sports.
- Females (average of 5) are more likely to say that protecting the integrity of the game is most important.

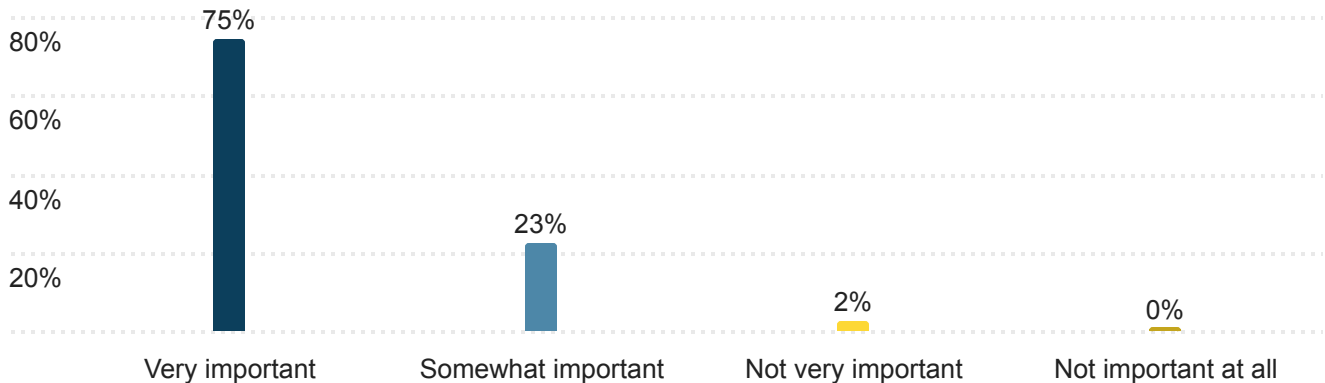
Q25\_1 - When it comes to sports, people have different opinions about how rival teams and their fans should treat each other: competing fiercely but showing respect to each other, or engaging in insults or “trash talk” as just part of the game. On a scale from 1 to 10, where: 1 = Rivals should show respect and 10 = Insults are part of the game, where would you place your view?

Field	Mean	Median
How to treat each other	5	5

- Males (average of 5), African-Americans (average of 5), post-graduate degree holders (average of 5), urbanites (average of 5), or major sports fans (average of 5) are more likely to say insults are part of the game when it comes to sports.
- Females (average of 4) or those in rural areas (average of 4) are more likely to say rivals should show respect.

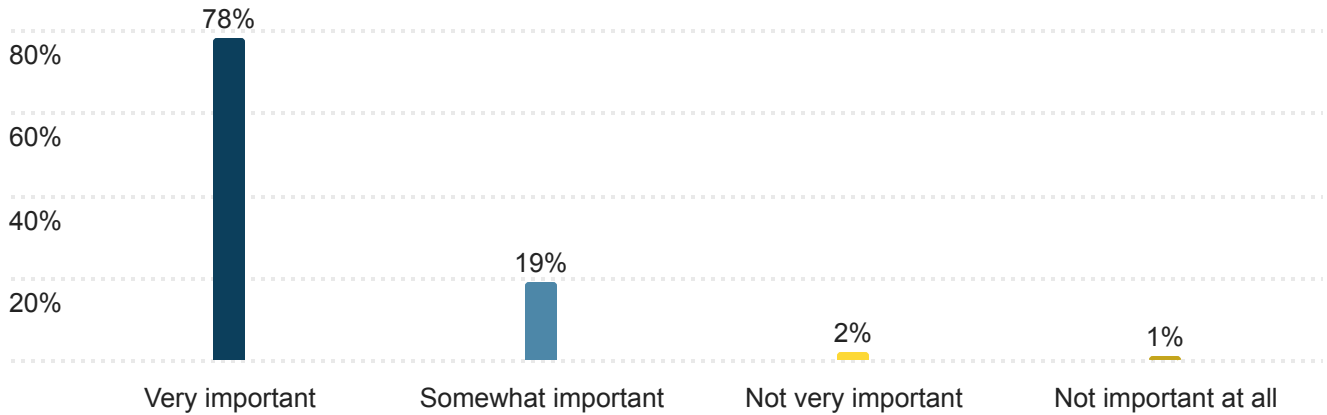
## Sportsmanship

Q18 - How important is it for athletes to show respect toward opponents?



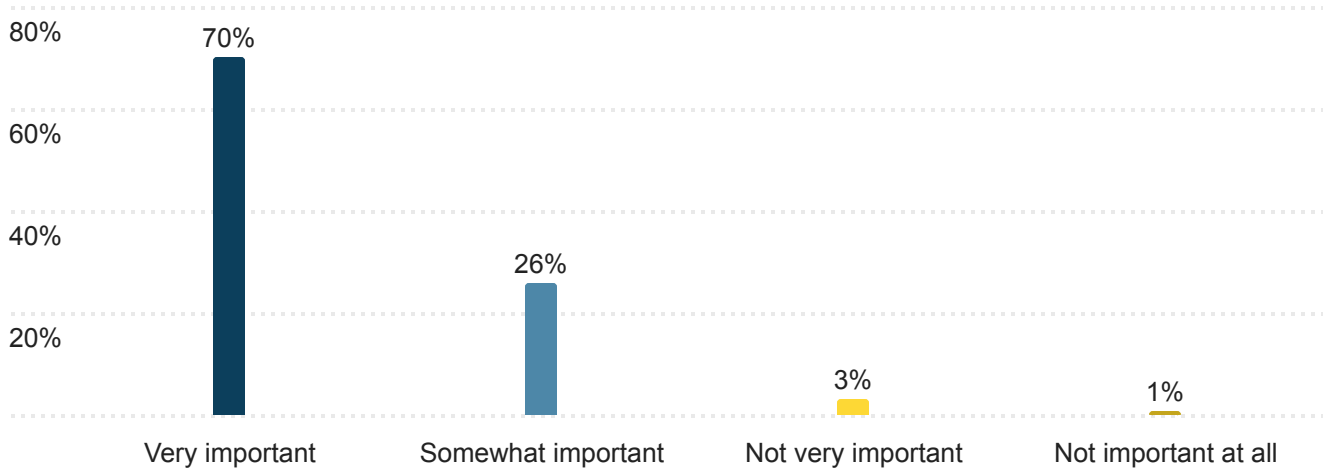
- Females (78%) and white respondents (77%) are more likely to say it is very important for athletes to show respect toward opponents.

### Q19 - How important is it to follow the rules, even if breaking them helps you win?



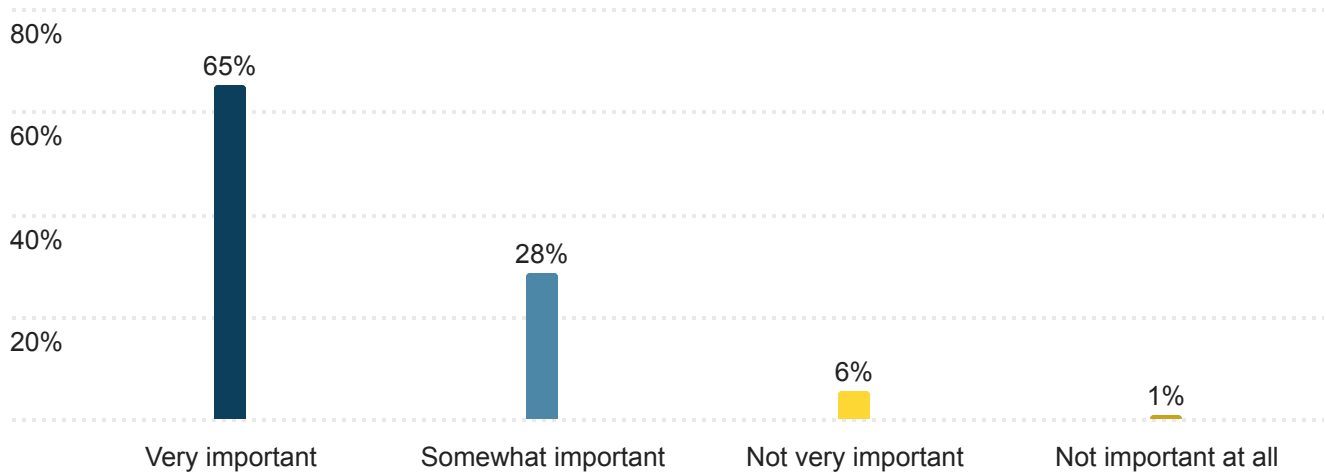
- Females (81%) and white respondents (81%) are more likely to say it is very important to follow the rules, even if breaking them helps you win.

### Q20 - When your team wins, how important is being gracious?



- Females (77%) are more likely to believe it is very important to be gracious if their team wins.
- White adults (72%) are significantly more likely than non-whites (66%) to support such civil behavior.

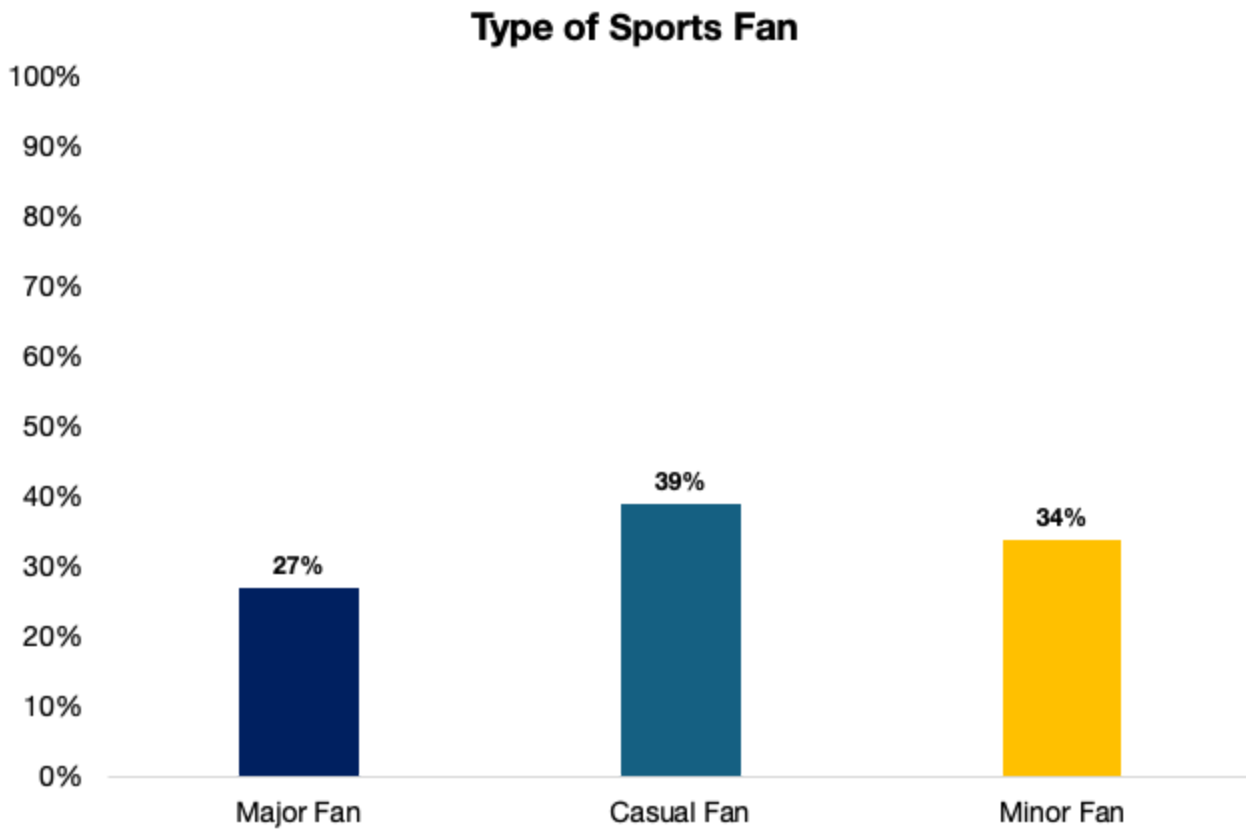
## Q21 - When your team loses, how important is congratulating the winner?



- Females (72%) are more likely to say that it is very important to congratulate the winner when their team loses.

## Sports Engagement

Based on a segmentation from FOX Sports, respondents were given a value score based on their answers to certain questions such as how often they watch sports, how big of a sports fan they are, and what sports activities they engage in, etc. The results are shown below.



Q7 - How many hours of TV programming across devices do you watch on a typical week? Enter a numeric response.

Field	Mean	Median
Hours	19	15

- The average amount of hours watched on TV per week is 19.
- Asians (average of 13), Hispanics (average of 16), or those making between \$150K-\$249K (average of 16) watch less hours of TV on average in a typical week.

Q8 - Of those hour(s), how would you typically divide them among the following programming categories?

### Q8\_1 - News

Field	Mean	Median
News	4	3

### Q8\_2 - Entertainment

Field	Mean	Median
Entertainment	10	6

### Q8\_3 - Sports

Field	Mean	Median
Sports	3	2

- The average amount of hours watched per week for sports is 3 hours.
- Males (average of 4 hours per week) are more likely to watch sports than females (average of 2 hours per week).
- Higher-income earners are more likely to watch sports for more hours per week (average of approximately 4 hours).
- Major sports fans are more likely to watch sports for more hours per week (average of 5 hours per week).

### Q8\_4 - Other

Field	Mean	Median
Other	2	0

Q9 - Of those hours you would spend on sports, how much do you spend in the following areas?

### Q9\_1 - Live Games

Field	Mean	Median
Live Games	2	1

- Those making less than \$30K are less likely to watch live games (average of 1 hour per week).

### Q9\_2 - Highlight Shows (e.g., Sports Center, Baseball Tonight, etc.)

Field	Mean	Median
Highlight Shows (e.g., Sports Center, Baseball Tonight, etc.)	1	0

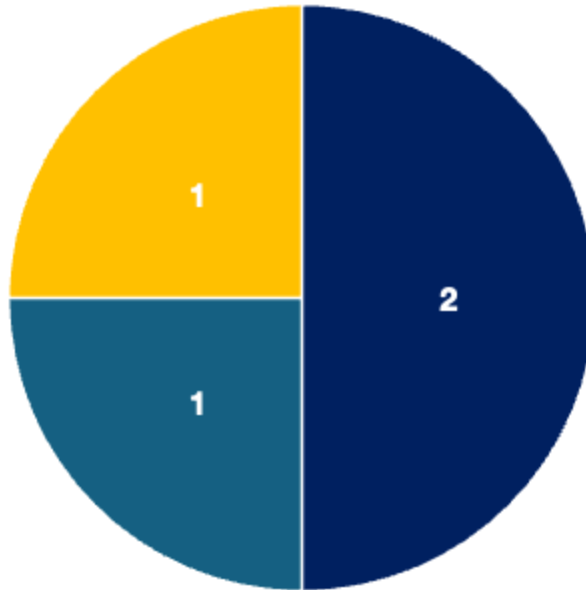
### Q9\_3 - Documentary/Original Series (e.g., 30 for 30, Outside the Lines)

Field	Mean	Median
Documentary/Original Series (e.g., 30 for 30, Outside the Lines)	1	0

### Q9\_4 - Analysis & Debate Shows (e.g., First Take, PTI, Undisputed, etc.)

Field	Mean	Median
Analysis & Debate Shows (e.g., First Take, PTI, Undisputed, etc.)	0	0

### Time Spent in the Following Areas in Hours



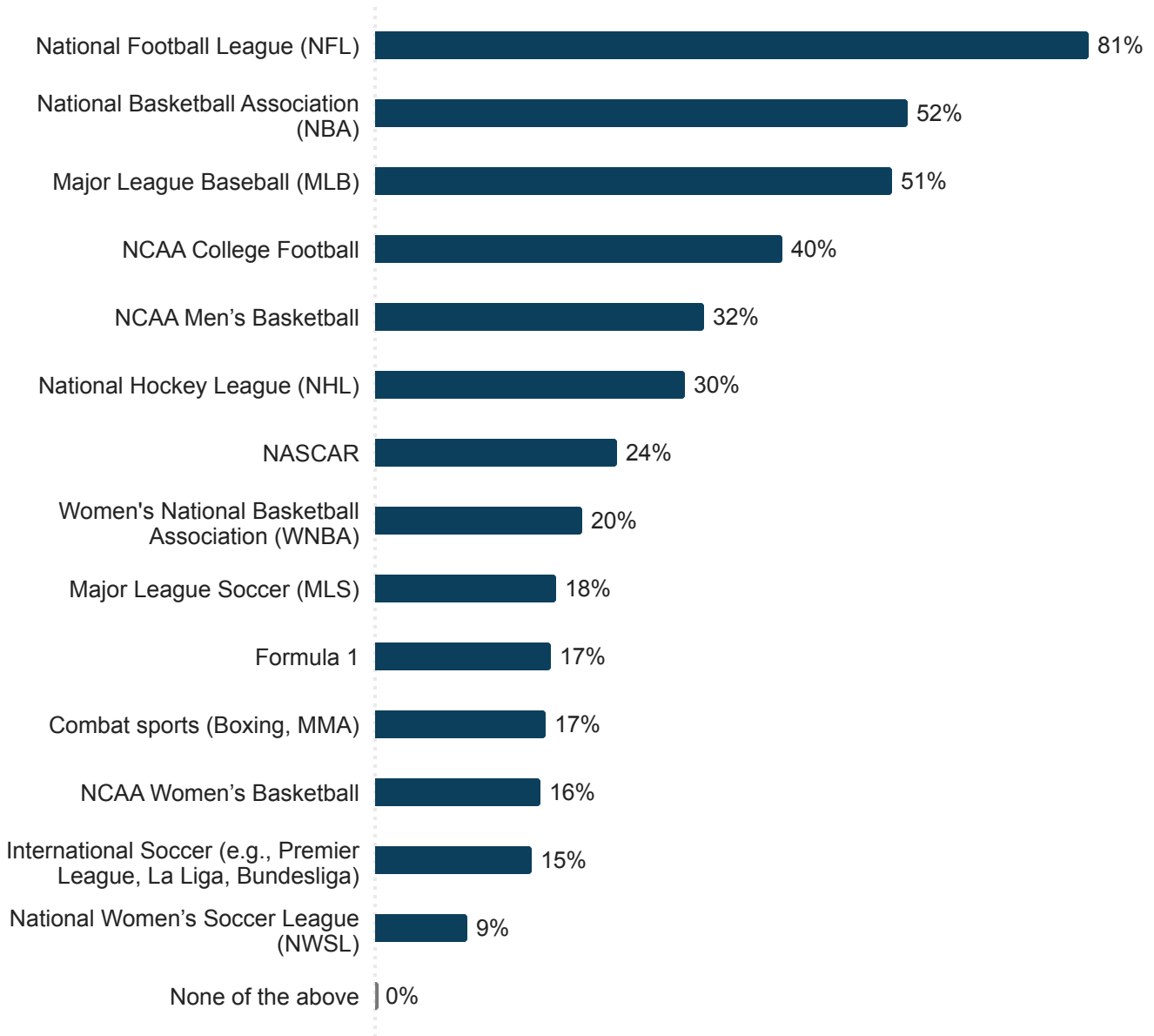
■ Live Games

■ Documentary / Original Series

■ Highlight Shows

■ Analysis & Debate Shows

Q10 - Which of the following sports do you watch at least a few times a year? Select all that apply.



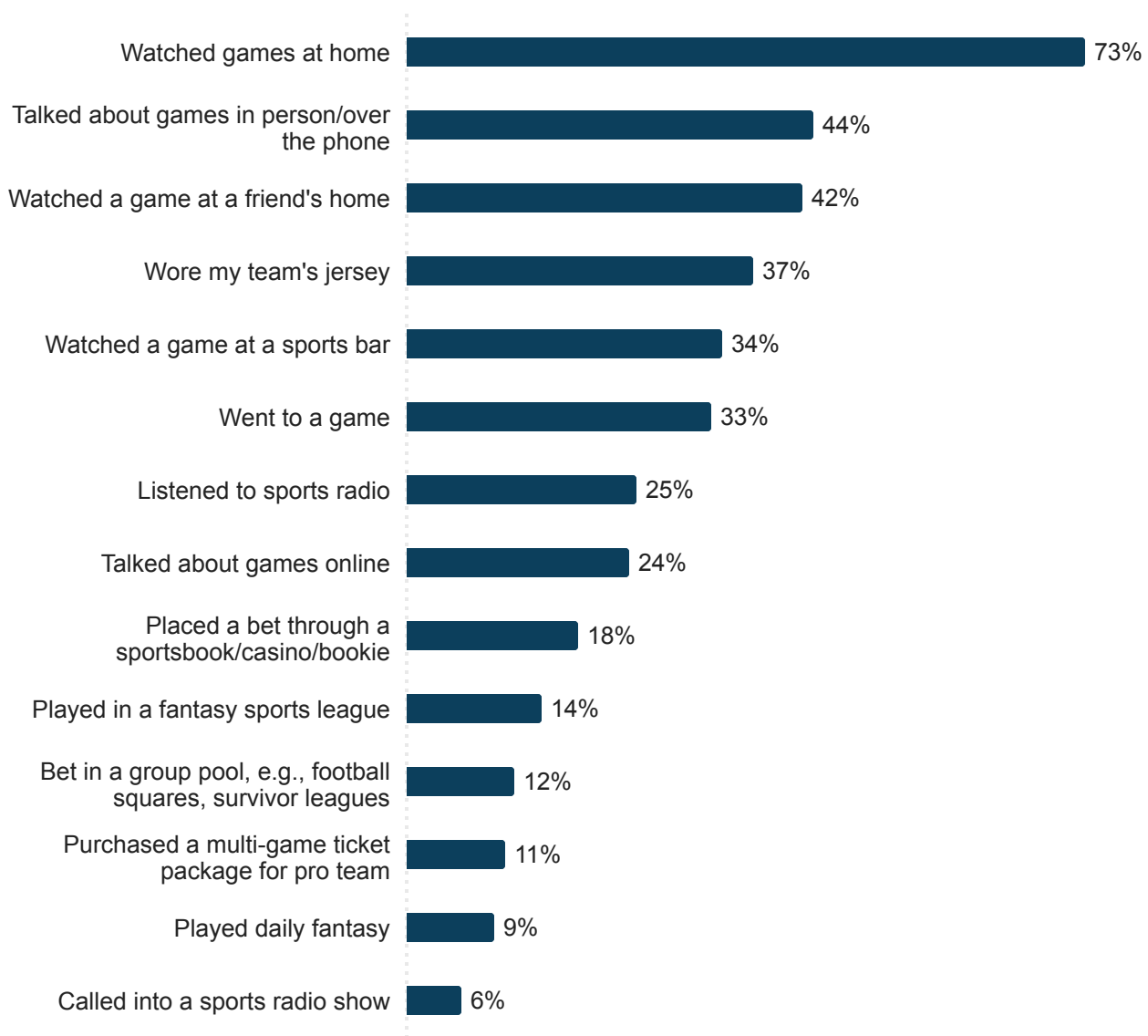
- Males are more likely to watch most of the sports that involve men at least a few times per year: MLB, NBA, NFL, etc.
- Those who are lower income or less educated are less likely to watch sports at least a few times per year.
- Major sports fans are significantly more likely to have watched all of the sports at least a few times per year.

Q11 - How much of a fan are you of the following sports? Please rate on a scale of 1-6. Base: Each sport is shown that they watched at least a few times a year

Field	Mean	Median
NFL	5	5
NBA	5	5
College Football	5	5
Men's College Basketball	5	5
MLB	5	5
NHL	4	5
International Soccer	5	5
MLS	5	5
Combat Sports	5	5
NASCAR	4	5
Formula 1	5	5
Women's College Basketball	4	5
WNBA	5	5
NWSL	4	5

- Males and those that are higher income are more likely to be “obsessed fans” of the sports.
- Those who are major sports fans are more likely to be “obsessed fans” of the sports.

Q12 - Thinking of the last year, which of the following activities have you done in conjunction with the sports you follow? Select all that apply.



- Males, those that are higher income, more educated, or who live in urban areas are more likely to go to a game or watch a game at a sports bar.
- Those who are major sports fans are more likely to partake in the following activities.

Q13 - Which of these statements comes closest to how you typically engage with the **NFL**? Select one response. Base: Showing those who watch the NFL at least a few times per year



Q13\_2 - Which of these statements comes closest to how you typically engage with the **NBA**? Select one response. Base: Showing those who watch the NBA at least a few times per year



Q13\_3 - Which of these statements comes closest to how you typically engage with **College Football**? Select one response. Base: Showing those who watch College Football at least a few times per year



Q13\_4 - Which of these statements comes closest to how you typically engage with **Men's College Basketball**? Select one response. Base: Showing those who watch Men's College Basketball at least a few times per year



Q13\_5 - Which of these statements comes closest to how you typically engage with the **MLB**? Select one response. Base: Showing those who watch the MLB at least a few times per year

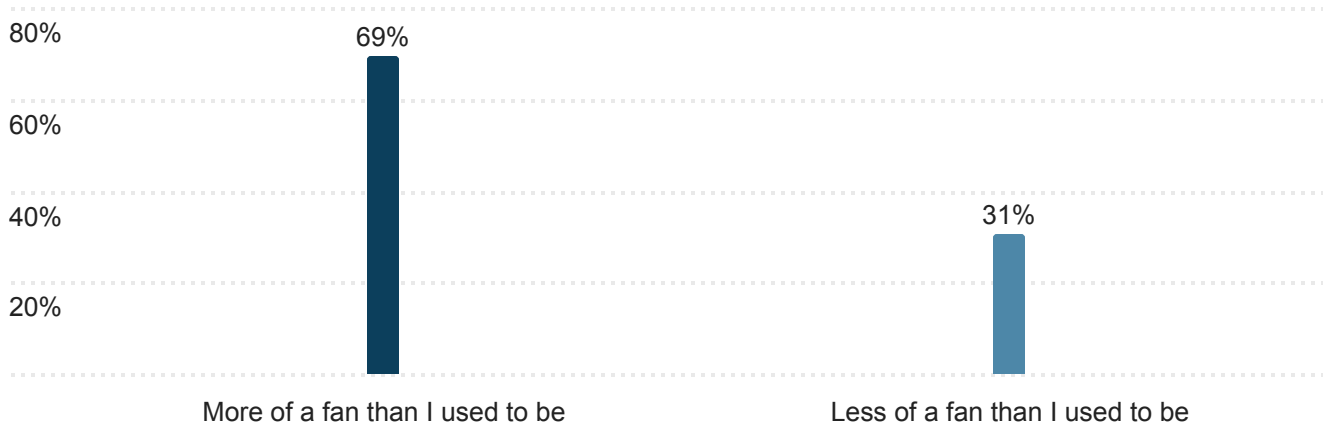


Q13\_6 - Which of these statements comes closest to how you typically engage with the **NHL**? Select one response. Base: Showing those who watch the NHL at least a few times per year



- Males and those in urban areas are more likely to watch any games, no matter who is playing.
- Females are more likely to watch a game only if their team is playing.
- Major sports fans are significantly more likely to watch any games, no matter who is playing.

Q14\_1 - For the **NFL**, are you more of a fan or less of a fan than you used to be? Select one response per row. Base: Showing those who watch the NFL at least a few times per year



Q14\_2 - For the **NBA**, are you more of a fan or less of a fan than you used to be? Select one response per row. Base: Showing those who watch the NBA at least a few times per year



Q14\_3 - For **College Football**, are you more of a fan or less of a fan than you used to be? Select one response per row. Base: Showing those who watch College Football at least a few times per year



Q14\_4 - For **Men's College Basketball**, are you more of a fan or less of a fan than you used to be? Select one response per row. Base: Showing those who watch Men's College Basketball at least a few times per year



Q14\_5 - For the **MLB**, are you more of a fan or less of a fan than you used to be? Select one response per row. Base: Showing those who watch the MLB at least a few times per year

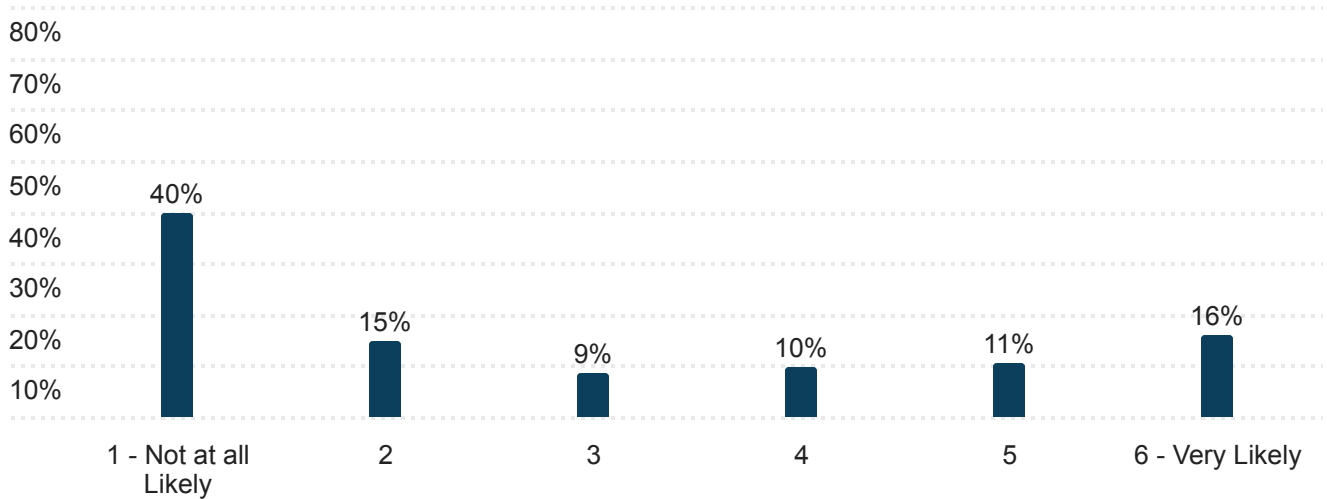


Q14\_6 - For the **NHL**, are you more of a fan or less of a fan than you used to be? Select one response per row. Base: Showing those who watch the NHL at least a few times per year

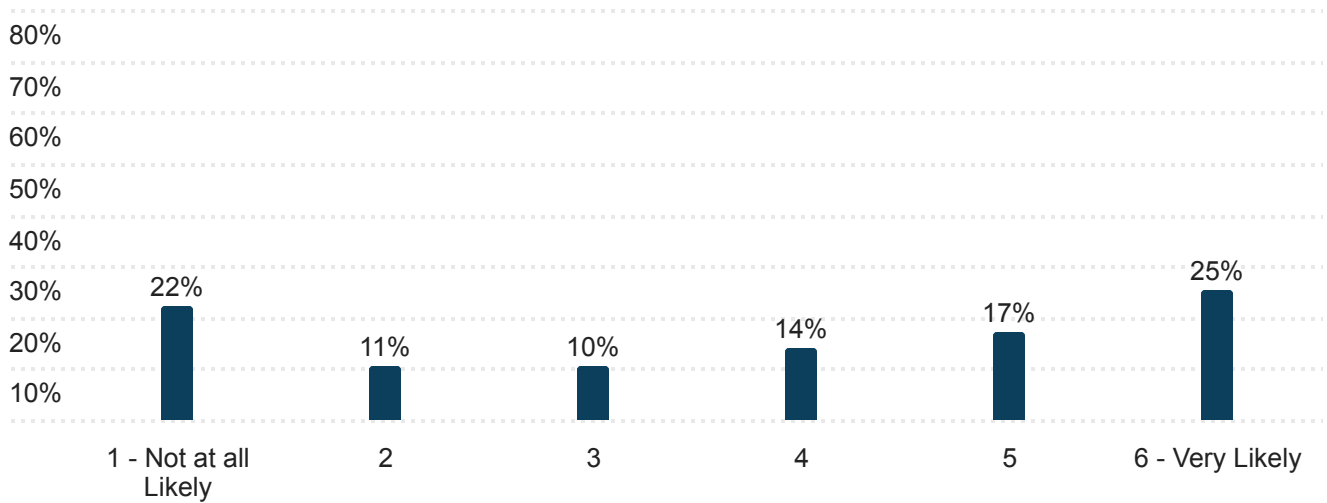


- Males or those in urban areas are more likely to be more of a fan of most of the sports that they used to be.
- Major sports fans are significantly more likely to be more of a fan of the following sports than they used to.

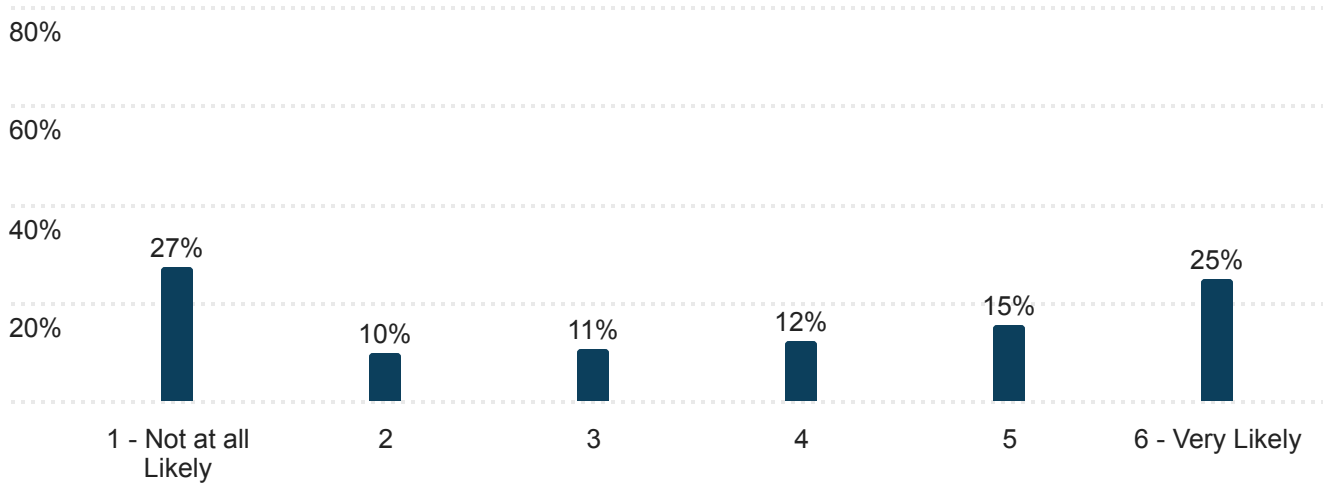
### Q15\_1 - How likely are you to watch these upcoming sporting events in 2026? **World Cup**



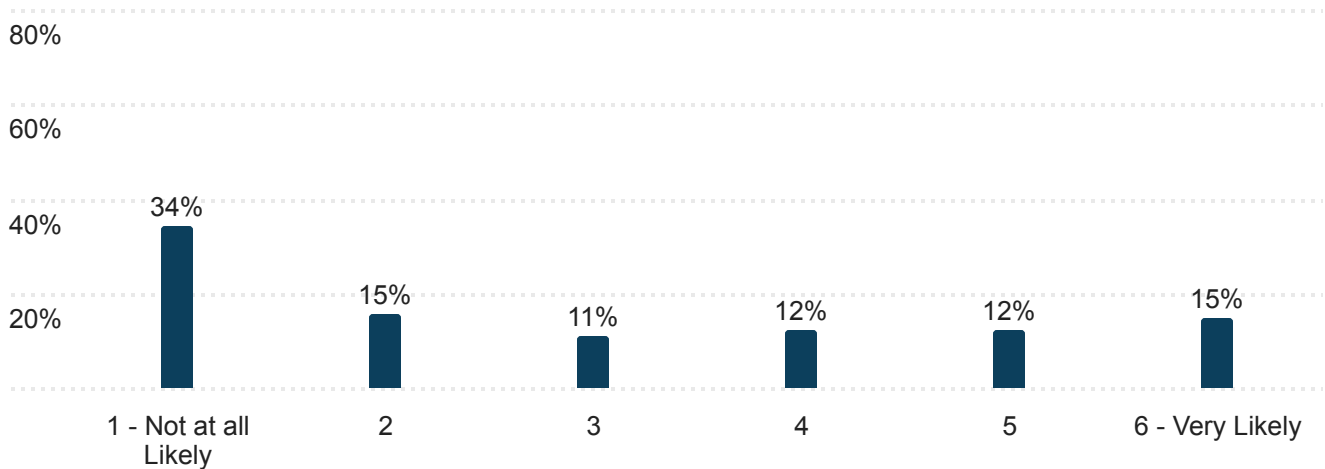
### Q15\_2 - How likely are you to watch these upcoming sporting events in 2026? **MLB World Series**



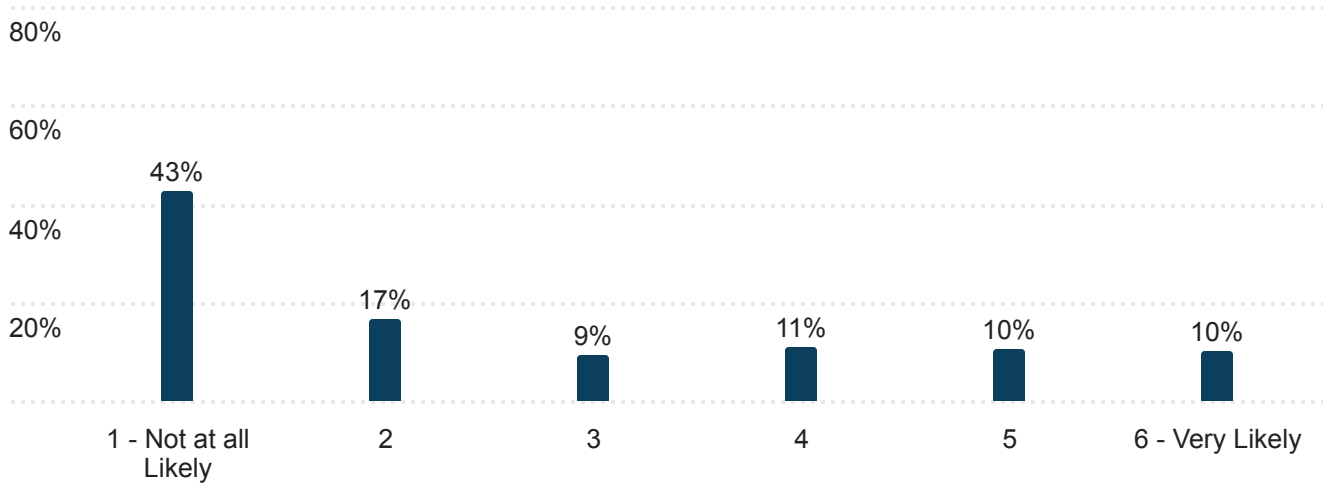
### Q15\_3 - How likely are you to watch these upcoming sporting events in 2026? **NBA Playoffs**



### Q15\_4 - How likely are you to watch these upcoming sporting events in 2026? **Stanley Cup Playoffs**

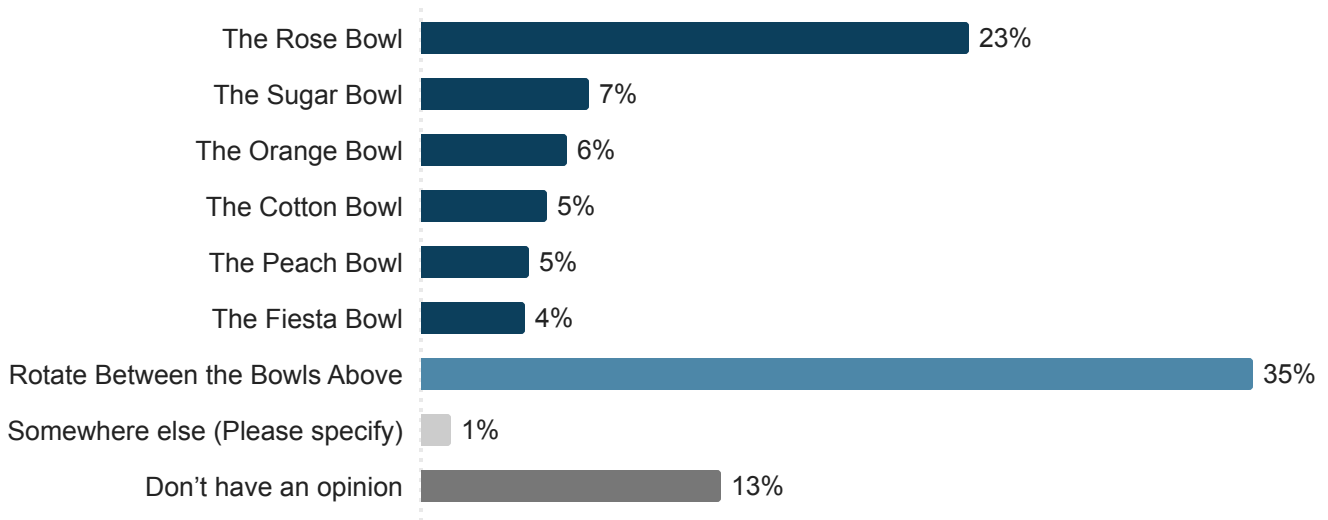


### Q15\_5 - How likely are you to watch these upcoming sporting events in 2026? Wimbledon



- Males, those in urban areas, have higher incomes, more educated, or major sports fans are more likely to watch these upcoming sports events.

Q16 - The 2026-2027 college football season marks the third year of the 12-team College Football Playoff. The National Championship Game's first two seasons were held at non-traditional bowl venues. If the playoff committee were to choose a permanent host(s) from the 'New Years Six' major college football bowl games (below), **where do you think the National Championship Game should be played?** Base: Those who say they watch college football at least a few times a year



- Those living in urban areas are more likely to prefer the Rose Bowl (29%) as a venue.