

LAUNCH

# STAATUS Index Report 2021

STAATUS INDEX

LEADING . ASIAN .  
AMERICAN .

# LAAUNCH: Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change

## About LAAUNCH

LAAUNCH is a non-profit organization that aims to create a better future for Asian Americans via innovative research, impactful programs, and our entrepreneurial spirit. We are highly collaborative and fully committed to making a difference for our community.

## Our Mission

To engage and empower Asian Americans to fight racism, increase representation, and share community resources.

We envision a society in which Asian Americans are:

- Treated fairly without racism, prejudice, or discrimination;
- Fully represented in politics, media/entertainment, business, legal, sports, arts, music, and other sectors;
- Appreciated for our culture, history, and contributions to society.

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## Executive Summary

May 2021 marks a somber but critical Asian Pacific American Heritage Month after more than a year of significant violence and racism against Asian Americans.

The newly formed organization Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change or LAAUNCH, has conducted a national study to unearth data on the attitudes and perceptions of Asian Americans to address the root causes of racism and discrimination. Named the STAATUS Index (Social Tracking of Asian Americans in the United States), this is one of the first such studies in more than 20 years.

LAAUNCH intends to arm policymakers, educators, business leaders, the media, and other Asian American organizations with this information to help drive actionable insights and solutions to curb the current acts of racism, as well as erase racist stereotypes and myths about Asian Americans.

The STAATUS Index will be conducted annually to track changes in American attitudes toward Asian Americans.

### Top 5 Takeaways from the 2021 STAATUS Index:

- 1 Nearly 80% of Asian Americans say they do not feel respected and are discriminated against in the U.S.
- 2 37% of white Americans say they are not aware of an increase in hate crimes and racism against Asian Americans over the past year, with 24% saying anti-Asian American racism isn't a problem that should be addressed. These numbers are higher for respondents who identify as Republican.
- 3 The classic Asian American stereotypes – "model minority," "perpetual foreigner," and "yellow peril" – persist as toxic myths in the U.S. today.
- 4 While Asian Americans are significantly under-represented in senior positions in companies, politics, and media, nearly 50% of non-Asian Americans believe Asian Americans are fairly or over-represented..
- 5 Americans struggle to name prominent Asian Americans, despite several (e.g., Kamala Harris, Andrew Yang) being in the news this year.

## Introduction

More than a year into a global pandemic, the United States finds itself in a tumultuous period. As of April 20, 2021, official records report over 550,000 deaths across the country<sup>1</sup> involving COVID-19 and the physical, mental, and financial toll of the pandemic has negatively affected millions of Americans. In the wake of a 2020 presidential election that revealed a deeply-divided electorate,<sup>2</sup> the country has also experienced significant social unrest. A challenging outgrowth of this time has been the widely-reported<sup>3</sup> rise in violence, harassment, and racism against Asian Americans. Anti-Asian hate crimes in 16 of America's largest cities increased 145% in 2020<sup>4</sup> with a significant surge in the initial months of the pandemic; New York City reported "as many anti-Asian hate crimes in March and April 2020 as in the previous four years combined."<sup>5</sup>

Asians Americans feel as if they are under siege; 81% of Asian American adults believe violence against them is increasing, and 45% of Asian American adults have experienced an incident tied to their racial or ethnic background since the pandemic began.<sup>6</sup>

## Brief History of Asian Americans

At the same time, this discrimination isn't new. According to the Pew Research Center, the percentage of Asian Americans who say they have personally experienced discrimination because of their race or ethnicity has hovered between 73% and 76% in annual surveys taken since 2019.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the current condition of Asian Americans in the United States is best understood in historical context.

With a population of 23 million<sup>8</sup>, Asian Americans are a diverse group, originating from more than 20

countries in East and Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent<sup>9</sup> and representing varied cultures, languages, ideologies, religious beliefs, and experiences.

The phrase "Asian American" itself is a more recent moniker, created in the late 1960s as a label of self-determination<sup>10</sup> and a response to a shared history as targets of exploitation, racism, and exclusion.<sup>11</sup> Chinese, who arrived in relatively large numbers as laborers in the 19th century, were painted as unfit for assimilation; this xenophobia resulted in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first law in the United States to ban immigration solely on the basis of race. The ban on immigration was eventually extended to all Asian nations by 1924.

Attacks and violations against the rights of Asian Americans have occurred repeatedly in American history, especially during times of crisis.

In 1942, three months after entering World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed an executive order to unjustifiably imprison approximately 120,000 persons of Japanese descent<sup>12</sup> from the West Coast, where long-standing racism and jealousy of the economic success of Japanese Americans had existed for years. In 1982, during the worst year of sales for American automakers in two decades, Vincent Chin, a young Chinese American man, was beaten to death in Detroit by two former auto workers who wrongly blamed him for the increasing economic power of Japanese automobile companies. Sadly, after the 9/11 attacks, several South Asian Americans were wrongly blamed as well and suffered mightily from racist incidents.

## Impact of COVID-19

The rhetoric used by former President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as the "China Virus," "Wuhan Virus," and "Kung Flu,"

has exacerbated the stigmatization of Asian Americans.<sup>13</sup> The World Health Organization noted that "stigma occurs when people negatively associate an infectious disease, such as COVID-19, with a specific population."<sup>14</sup> The Anti-Defamation League reported an 85% increase in negative sentiment on Twitter towards Asians following news that former President Trump contracted the coronavirus.<sup>15</sup> In a peer-reviewed study of Twitter hashtags before and after the use of the term "Chinese virus" by President Trump on March 18, 2020, researchers from UCSF, Harvard, Boston University and UCLA found that the number of anti-Asian hashtags increased 40 times.<sup>16</sup> In short, Trump felt a need to put a face on the pandemic, intentionally choosing an Asian one.

In response, President Joe Biden signed the Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the



United States on January 26, 2021, stating “[t]he Federal Government must recognize that it has played a role in furthering these xenophobic sentiments through the actions of political leaders, including references to the COVID-19 pandemic by the geographic location of its origin. Such statements have stoked unfounded fears and perpetuated stigma about Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and have contributed to increasing rates of bullying, harassment, and hate crimes against AAPI persons. These actions defied the best practices and guidelines of public health officials and have caused significant harm to AAPI families and communities that must be addressed.”<sup>17</sup>

## Stereotypes and Scapegoating

Ever since first arriving in large numbers to the U.S., Asian Americans have been portrayed as the “Yellow Peril” and negatively impacted by long-held racial stereotypes. In the

early 1800s, Chinese workers, labeled “coolies,” a derogatory term for unskilled, low-wage laborers of Asian descent, were brought to the U.S. in large numbers to satisfy the need for manual laborers. As the demand for labor decreased toward the end of the century, Chinese workers were denigrated for stealing jobs and portrayed as unclean carriers of disease. In 1900, San Francisco’s outbreak of the bubonic plague was blamed on the local Chinese community, despite the fact that the source was from overseas. History is repeating itself with COVID-19, where again people of Asian heritage have been scapegoated by politicians and other community leaders for causing the pandemic.

A second, pervasive stereotype of Asian Americans is that of the “perpetual foreigner,” where Asian Americans are not seen or trusted as “real” Americans. Professor Angelo Ancheta of the Santa Clara University School of Law has aptly described

this notion as “outsider racialization.”<sup>18</sup> In addition to the policies of Asian Americans as “aliens ineligible for citizenship,” and outright exclusion, perhaps the most extreme example of this was the incarceration in World War II of Japanese Americans, most of whom were U.S. citizens. Since the 1960s, the stereotype of Asian Americans as the “model minority” has become predominant. Coined by a sociologist in *The New York Times Magazine*,<sup>19</sup> this stereotype brands Asian Americans as law-abiding, industrious, and attaining greater educational and financial success relative to other racial groups.<sup>20</sup> The pitfalls of this stubborn stereotype are manifold. Its mythic quality dehumanizes individuals, it flattens the diversity that exists within the Asian American community, and it renders invisible Asian Americans in discussions of race and prejudice in America and as a community in need of anti-racist programs. In addition, the model minority myth portrays the

success of Asian Americans as evidence that the overall “system” in America is working and pits Asian Americans against other disadvantaged communities, such as Black Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans.<sup>21</sup> This toxic oversimplification of Asian Americans has contributed to why they have been historically overlooked in research, clinical outreach, advocacy,<sup>22</sup> and philanthropy.<sup>23</sup>

## The STAATUS Index Study and Framework

The STAATUS (Social Tracking of Asian Americans in the U.S.) Index is a novel, national assessment of the stereotypes and perceptions that American adults have of Asian Americans. It is one of the first such studies in over 20 years to quantitatively measure the underlying attitudes Americans have about Asian Americans that determine how positively or negatively the community is viewed in the U.S.

To be conducted over multiple years, the STAATUS Index tracks changes in American perceptions of Asian Americans by factors such as race, gender, political affiliation, age, income, region, and education and measures the impact of major events that arise each year, such as COVID-19. It provides critical new data to politicians, corporate and community leaders, the media, and the general public about the status of Asian Americans in the United States and informs the development of specific programs to address racism and other barriers against our community. 2021 is the first year the STAATUS Index has been conducted, and it will be refined with best practices for the future.

The STAATUS Index is based on multiple frameworks from social psychology, including the Stereotype Content Model developed by Professor Susan Fiske in 2002 to analyze how dominant groups use two primary dimensions – competency and sociability – to assess the relative threat of “other” groups. In multiple studies, Asian

Americans, Jews and rich people are stereotyped as high in competence and low in sociability, resulting in a mix of admiration, resentment, and envy.<sup>24</sup>

These dimensions of competency and sociability have been tracked for decades in Asian Americans. In an important study by Professors Katz and Braly that launched stereotype research in 1933, Japanese were seen as intelligent, industrious, progressive, and shrewd (competent), but shy and quiet (unsociable).

Chinese were sly (implying competence), but conservative, tradition-loving, superstitious, and loyal to family (implying a lack of mainstream sociability). An updated version of this study in 2001 showed similar stereotypes: both Chinese and Japanese were seen as especially intelligent, industrious, and scientifically-minded (highly competent), but also loyal to family and reserved (not sociable with dominant group).<sup>25</sup>

History has shown repeatedly that “envious stereotyping” during times of crisis can lead to scapegoating, violence, and even genocide. Tragic examples include the persecution of the Armenians during the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Jews before and during World War II, and the Tutsis during the Rwandan Civil War from 1990–1994.

Professor Peter Glick, who specializes in bias, stereotypes, and discrimination research said in 2002, “When a history of envious prejudice collides with a precipitous decline in a society’s life conditions, successful minorities are at grave risk.”<sup>26</sup> His prediction speaks directly to the racism and violence Asian Americans are facing today.

## Methodology

The results of this report are based on a survey of 2,766 US residents, ages 18 and over, conducted online between March 29 to April 14, 2021 by Savanta Research.

Results are valid within +/-1.9% at the 95% confidence level. This margin of error increases with subgroup analyses.

The sample was weighted using population parameters (race, age, gender, education, and region) from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey for adults 18 years of age or older. The weighted sample reflects the national population.



# America's Racial Crisis

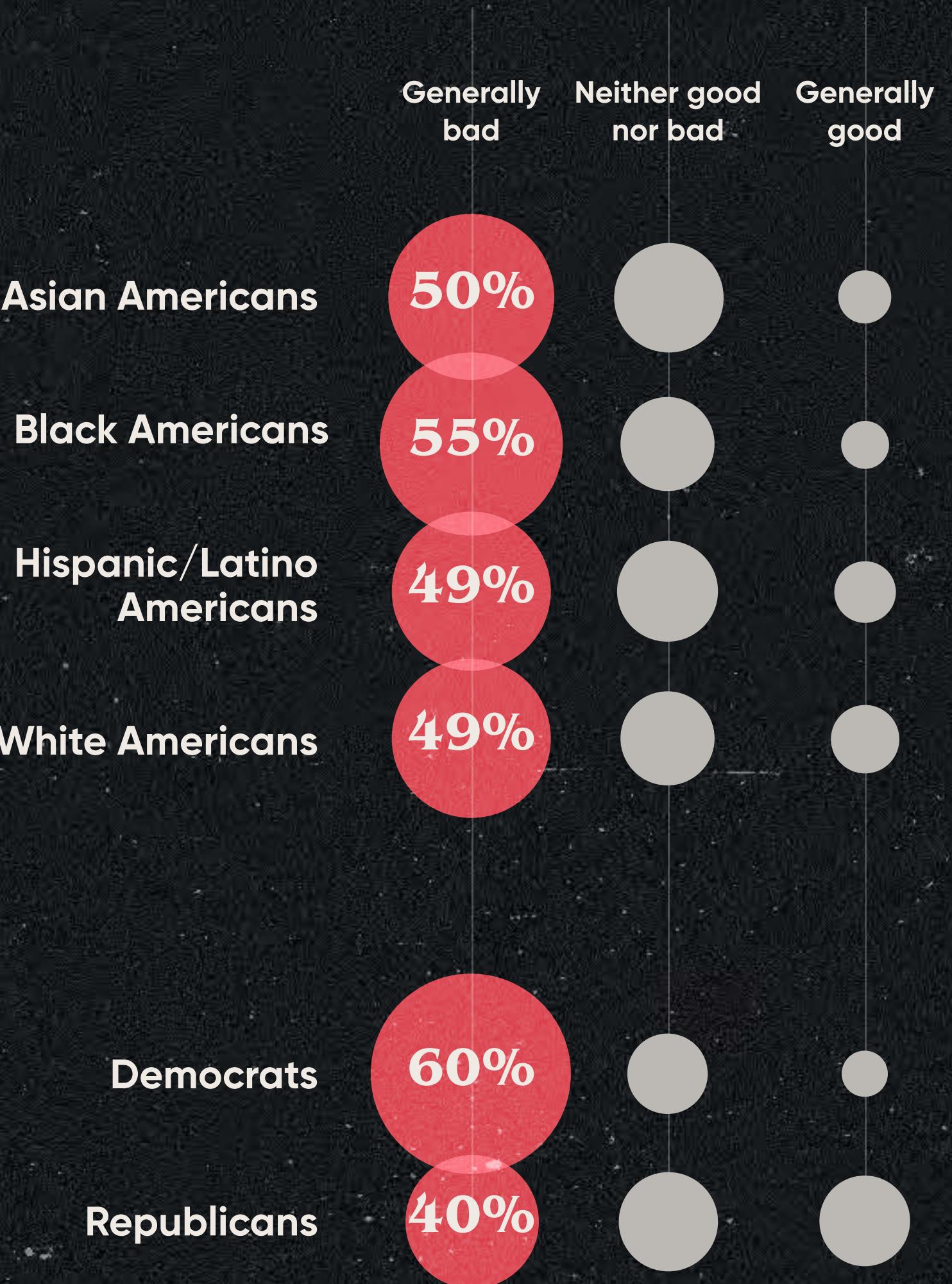


AMERICANS  
ASIAN

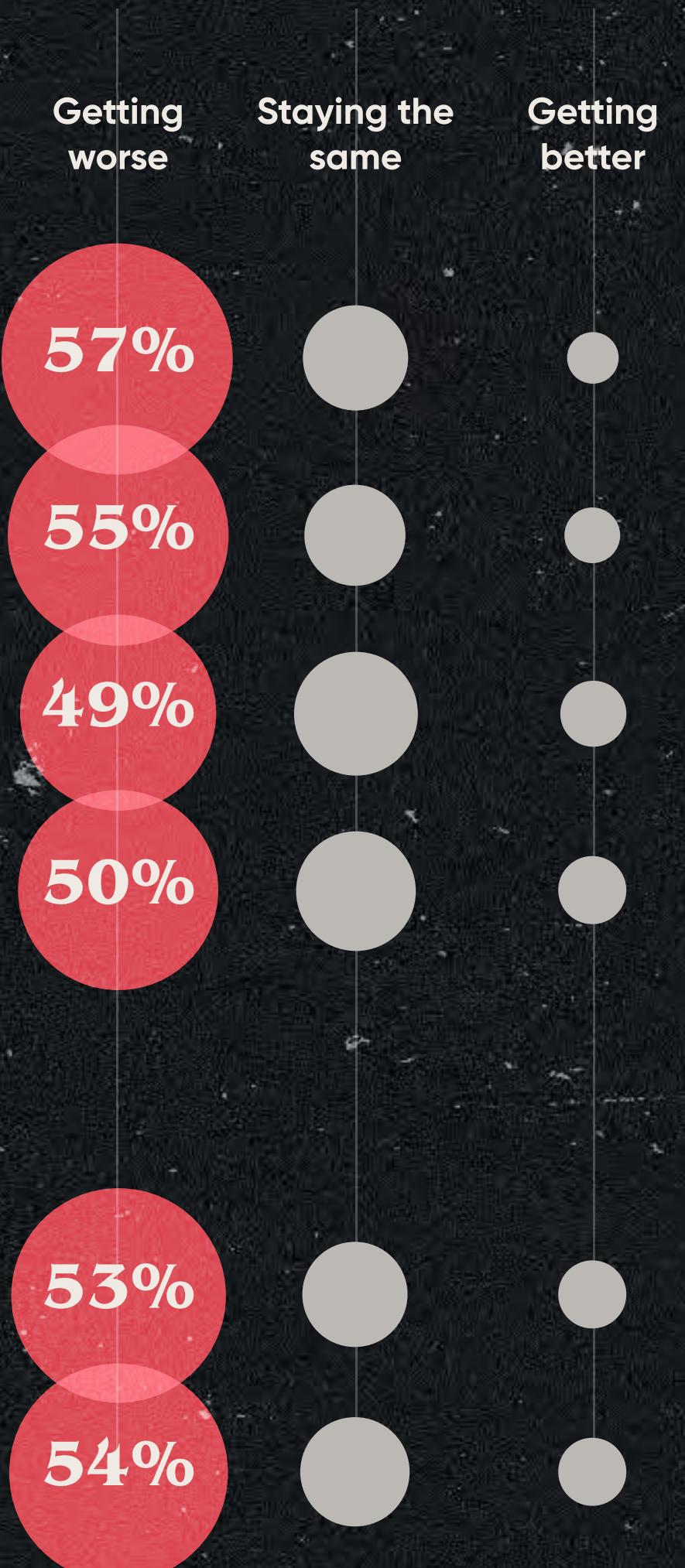
## America's race relations are in a crisis

America is awakening to its longstanding and unresolved racial issues. A majority of all racial groups and a majority of Democrats agree that the country's race relations are "bad." A majority of all groups, including Republicans, say race relations are "getting worse."

How would you consider current race relations in America?



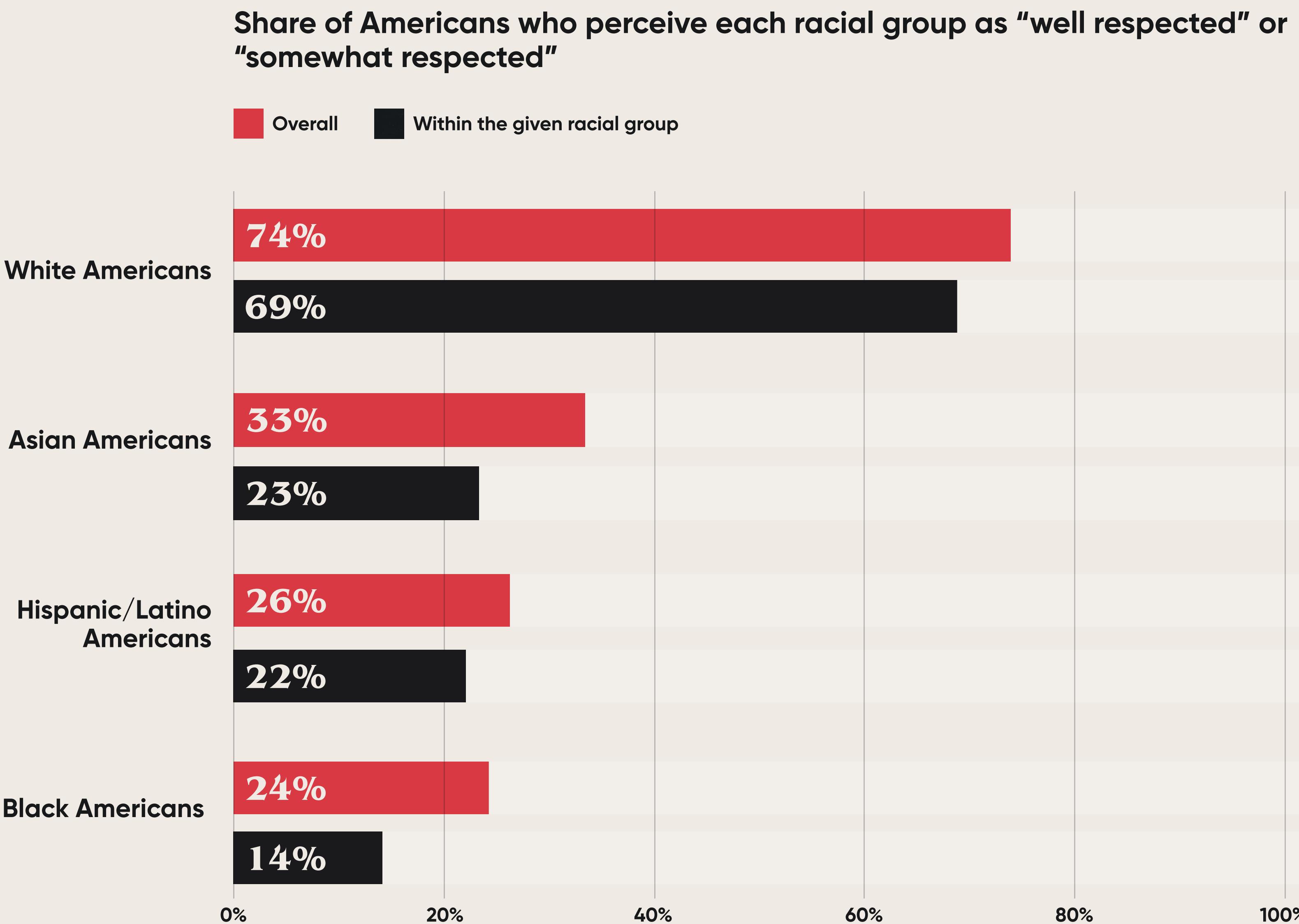
How would you describe current race relations in America?



## White Americans are the most respected racial group in the U.S. by far

Nearly 75% of Americans overall say white Americans are "well respected" or "somewhat respected." By contrast, only 33% of Americans say Asian Americans are respected in the U.S.

When asked about their own racial group, three times more white Americans feel respected compared to Asian Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans, and nearly five times more compared to Black Americans. Fewer than one in four Asian Americans feels respected in their own country.



# 90%

of Black Americans say  
they are discriminated  
against in the U.S.

## Non-white Americans experience high levels of racism in America

According to the survey, 90% of Black Americans,  
80% of Asian Americans and 73% of  
Hispanic/Latino Americans say they are  
discriminated against in the U.S.

# 73%

of Hispanic/Latino Americans  
say they are discriminated  
against in the U.S.

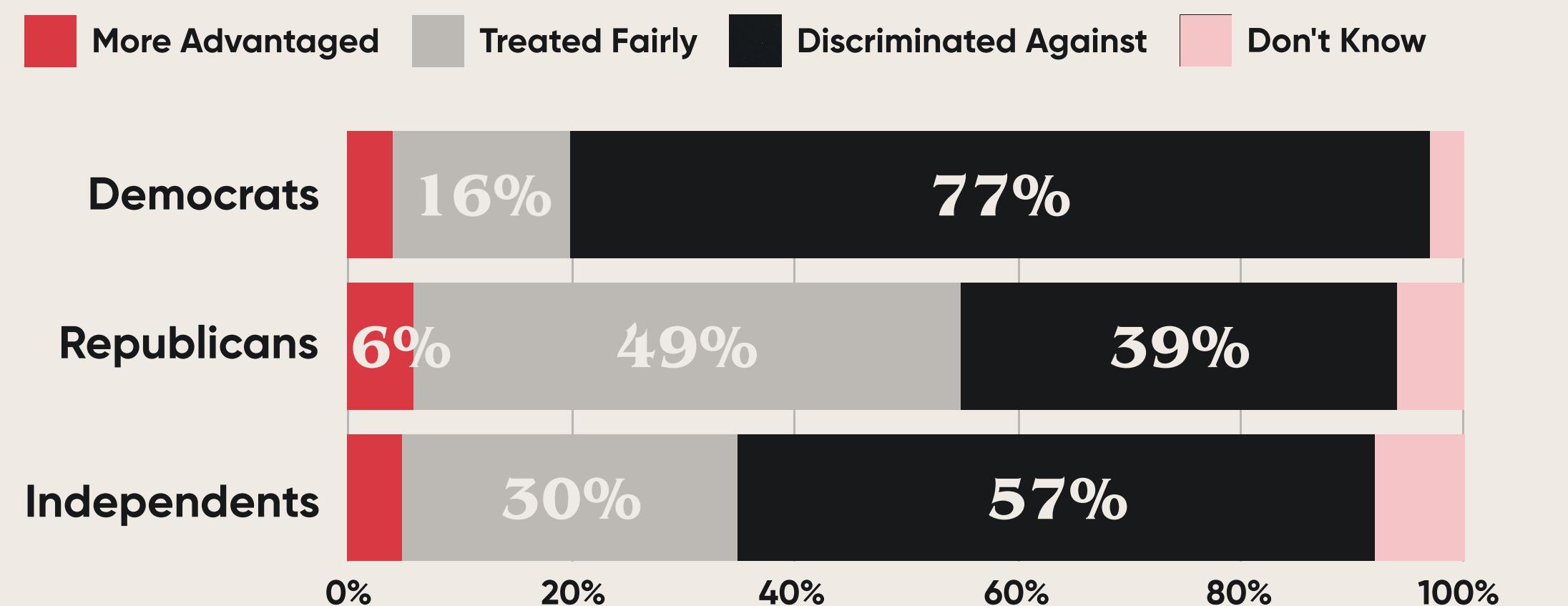
# 80%

of Asian Americans say  
they are discriminated  
against in the U.S.

## Wide perception gaps by political affiliation

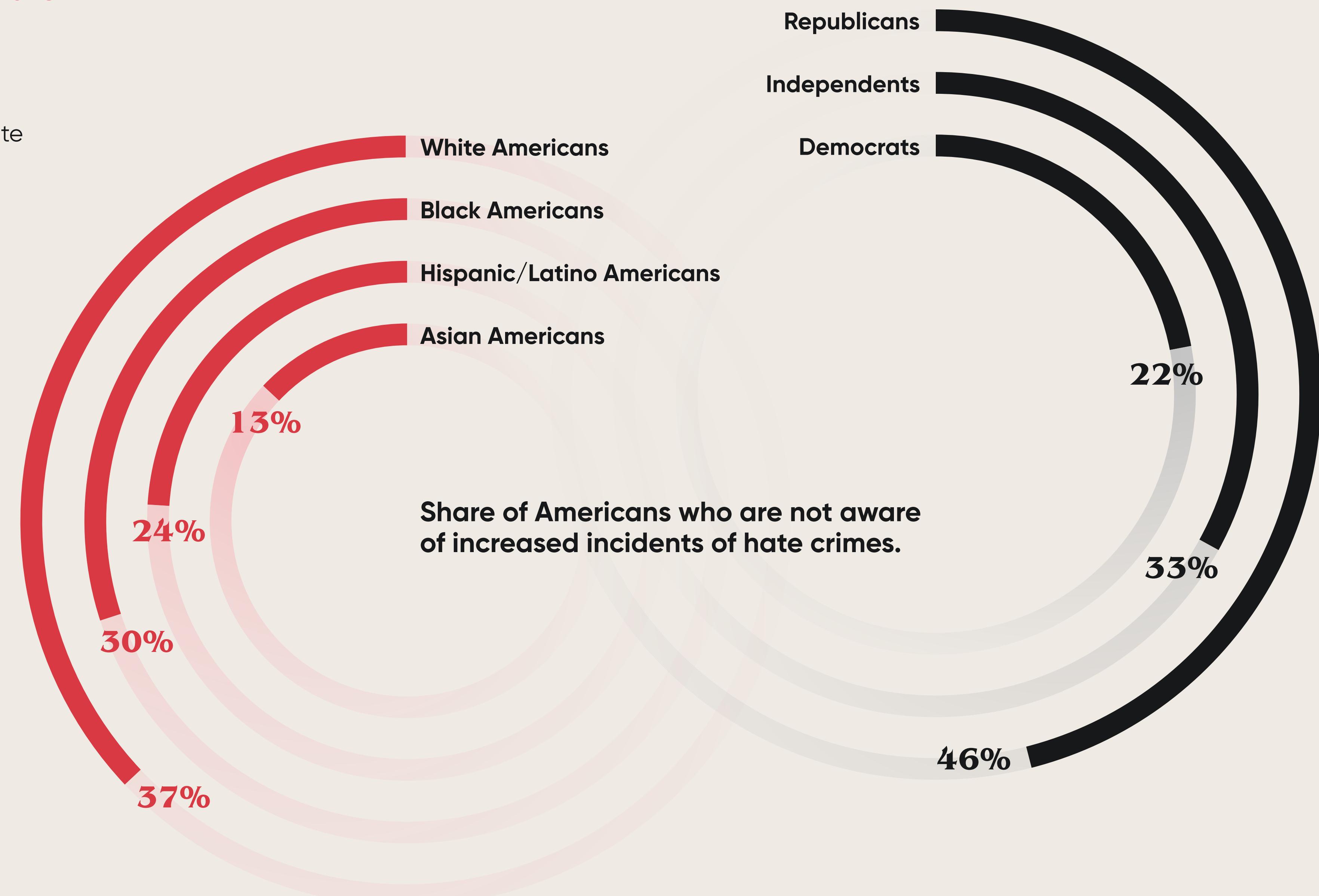
Nearly twice as many Democrats are aware of discrimination against Asian Americans as Republicans. 55% of Republicans believe that Asian Americans are treated fairly or more advantaged.

### Share of Americans who believe Asian Americans are...



## Significant numbers of Americans are unaware of increased attacks against Asian Americans

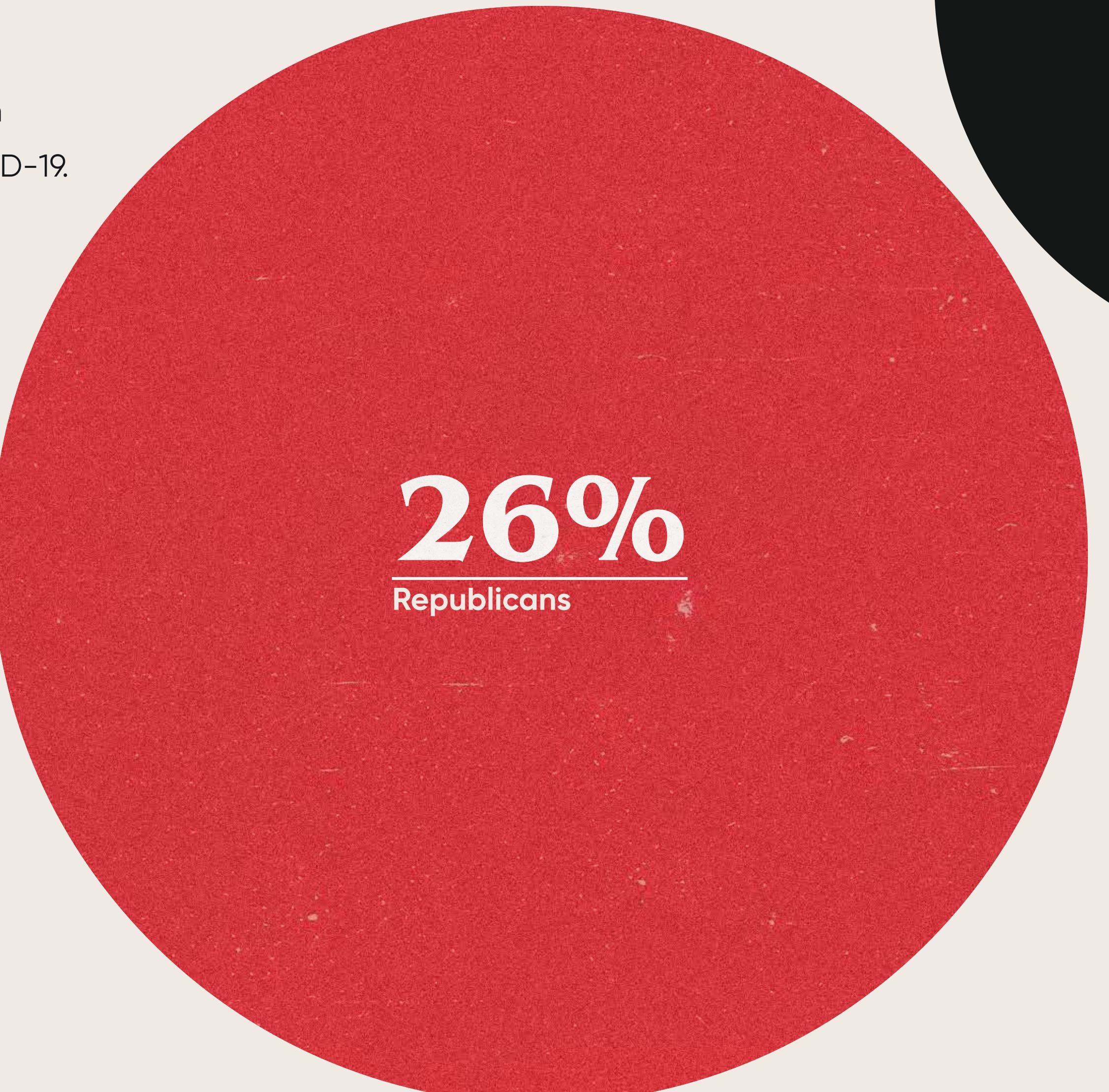
Despite the recent news coverage, 37% of white Americans, 46% of Republicans, and 22% of Democrats remain unaware of the increase in assaults, hate crimes, or other forms of racism against Asian Americans during the past 12 months.



## Scapegoating of Asian Americans for COVID-19 continues into 2021

Over 25% of Republicans vs. 6% of Democrats believe that terms used by the Trump Administration, such as "China Virus," "Wuhan Virus," or "Kung Flu," are appropriate for COVID-19.

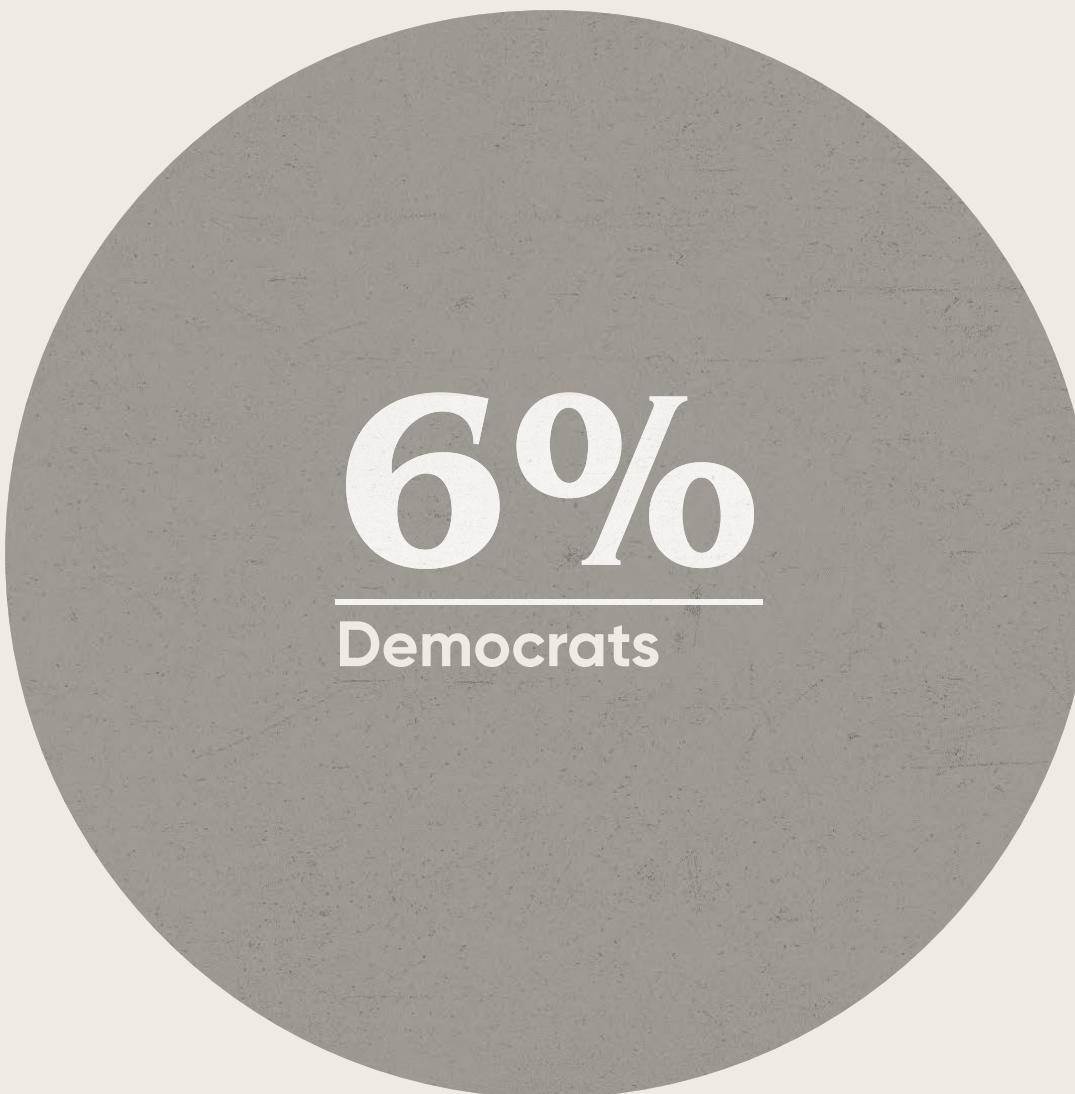
**Share of Americans who think the term "China Virus" is appropriate to describe COVID-19**



**26%**  
Republicans



**13%**  
Independents

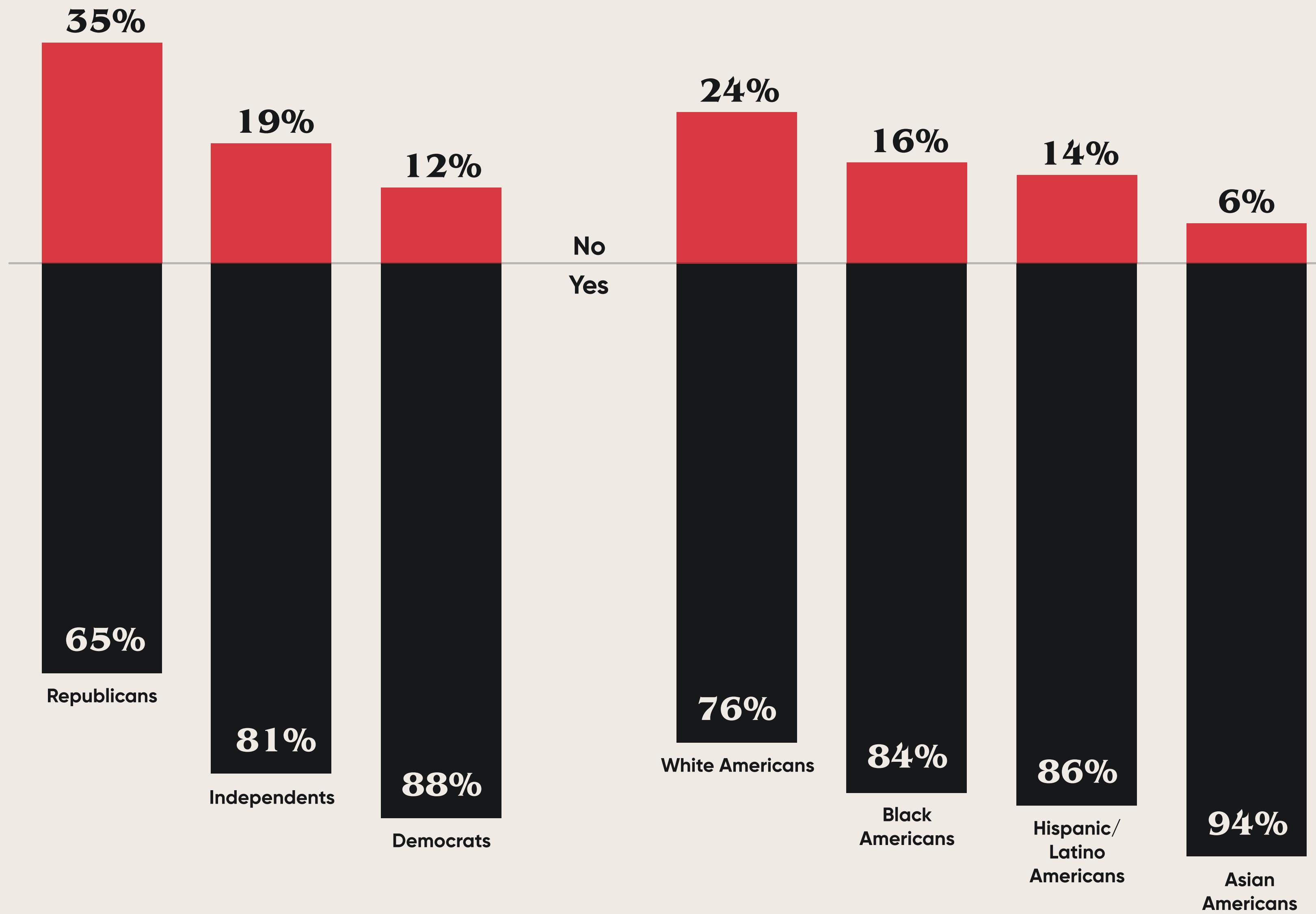


**6%**  
Democrats

## Do you think anti-Asian American racism is a problem that should be addressed?

**Anti-Asian American racism isn't viewed as a problem by all Americans**

Nearly a quarter of white Americans and over a third of Republicans do not believe anti-Asian American racism is a problem that should be addressed. Conversely, 88% of Democrats agree that anti-Asian American racism needs to be dealt with.



# (Mis)perceptions of Asian Americans

ASIAN · AMERICANS · LEADING



## Perceptions of Asian Americans heavily influenced by stereotypes

When asked to provide three adjectives to describe Asian Americans, the leading answers from respondents were "Smart/Intelligent," "Hard-Working," and "Kind/Nice/Thoughtful" – all highly consistent with stereotypes from the model minority myth that have been used to describe Asian Americans for over 50 years. Other frequently-mentioned descriptions for Asian Americans included references to certain countries (e.g., "China" or "Chinese"), "Small/Short/Petite," and "Calm/Quiet." Compared to other racial groups, Asian Americans were least thought of as "Entitled/Privileged," "Strong/Confident/Brave," and "Racist."

Intelligent/Smart

Hard-working

From a certain country

Kind/Nice/Thoughtful

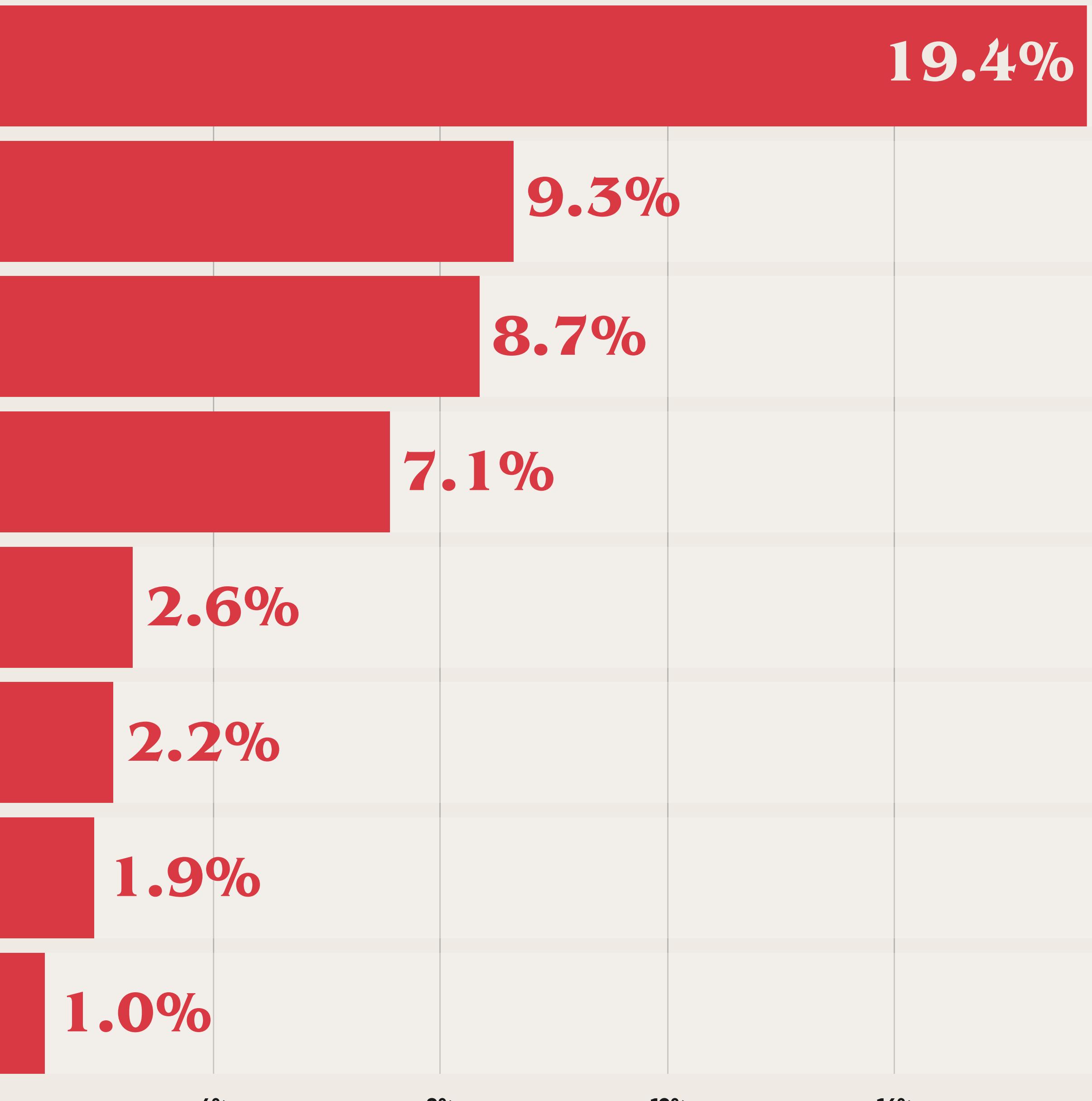
Oppressed/Bullied

Small/Short/Petite

Calm/Quiet

Loud/Obnoxious/Rude

Share of Americans who described Asian Americans as...

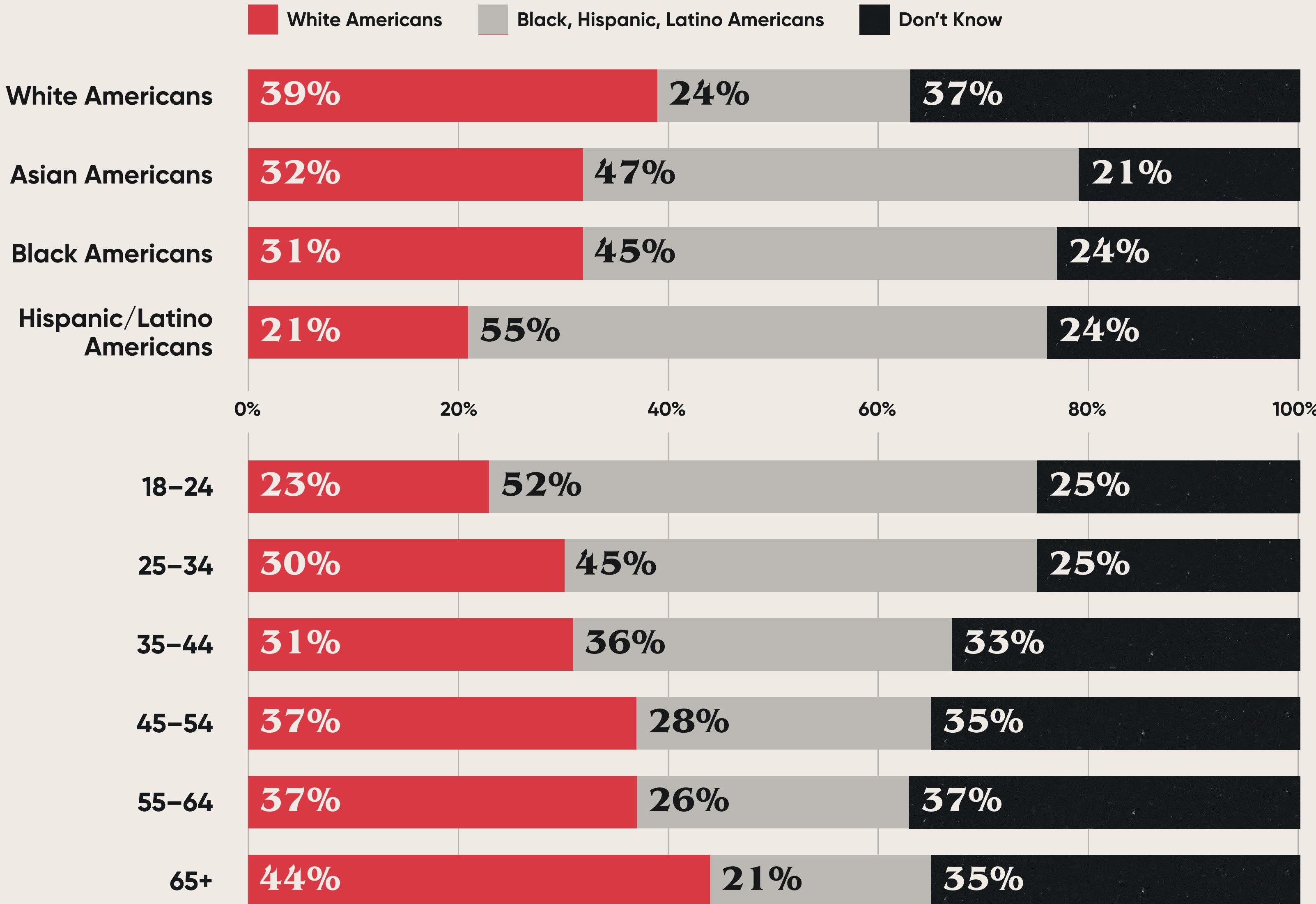


## Other racial groups associate Asian Americans with their own

Historically, the model minority stereotype has perpetuated Asian Americans as “white adjacents,” associating Asian Americans more with white Americans than with other racial groups. In our survey, white Americans indeed do associate Asian Americans with themselves. On the other hand, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian Americans also associate Asian Americans with themselves, as people of color.

Interestingly, when broken down by age, older Americans associate Asian Americans more with white Americans, whereas younger Americans see Asian Americans more as people of color. This may indicate an evolving position for Asian Americans on the racial spectrum in the U.S.

Share of Americans who associated Asian Americans more with...



## Americans recognize contributions of Asian Americans

A majority of Americans agree that Asian Americans contribute to the economic prosperity of the U.S. and that Asian immigrants make the country better overall, especially in food/music/arts, economy, and social and moral values.

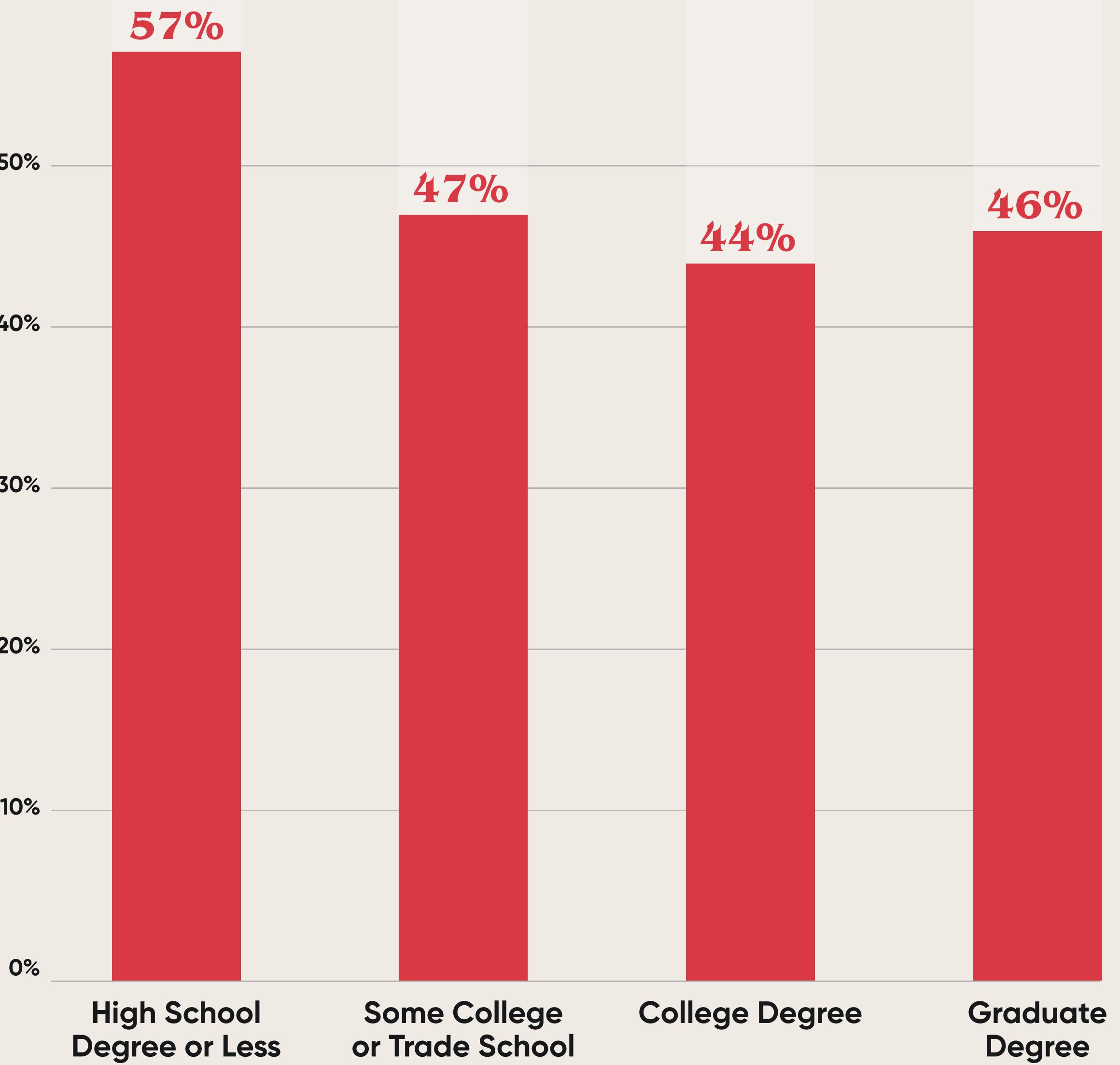
**Americans were 19 times more likely to say Asian immigrants make food/music/arts "better" than "worse." What about other things?**



## Americans incorrectly believe that Asian Americans are fairly or overly represented in leadership positions

When asked how represented Asian Americans are in senior (high-level) positions in companies, politics, media, etc., approximately half of respondents in our study, including those with higher-level educations, say that Asian Americans are fairly represented or over-represented in leadership positions. However, according to data from The New York Times, Asian Americans are actually severely under-represented in these power positions, holding only about 2.6% of leading positions despite comprising 6.8% of the population.<sup>27</sup>

Share of Americans who say Asian Americans are overrepresented or fairly represented in senior positions within American companies, politics, media, etc.





**50%**

Agree or Completely Agree



**39%**

Neutral

**Consistent with the Stereotype Content Model, Asian Americans are viewed as an envied subgroup by a significant number of Americans — highly competent but less sociable in certain situations**

The survey asked Americans about the competency and sociability of Asian Americans. Half of them agreed with the statement that "Asian Americans are more competent in their work" compared to other Americans.



**11%**

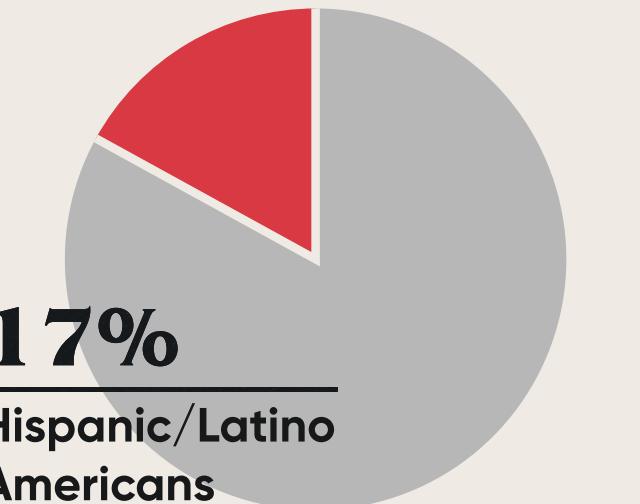
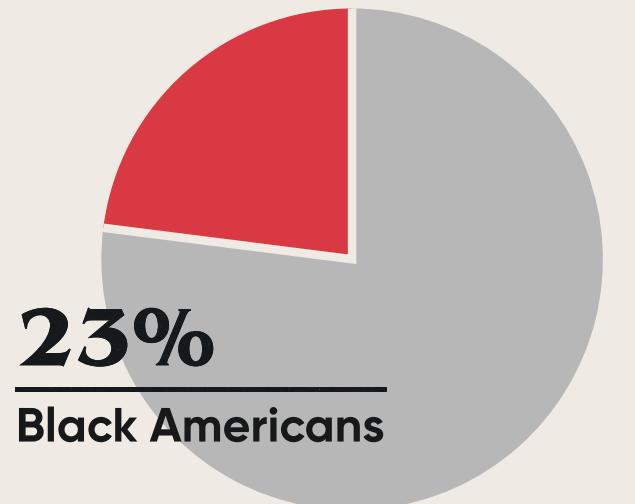
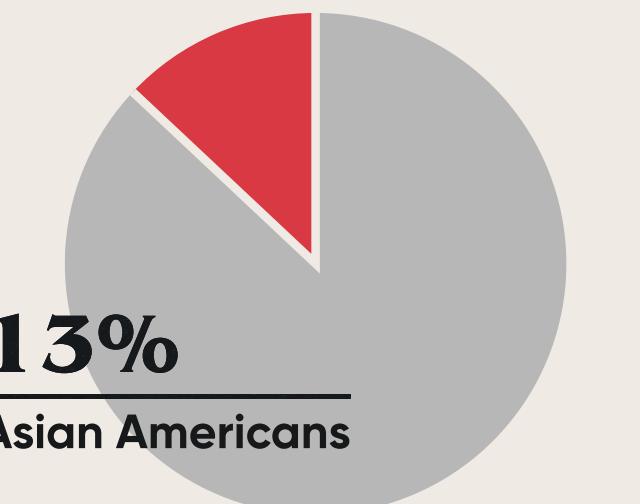
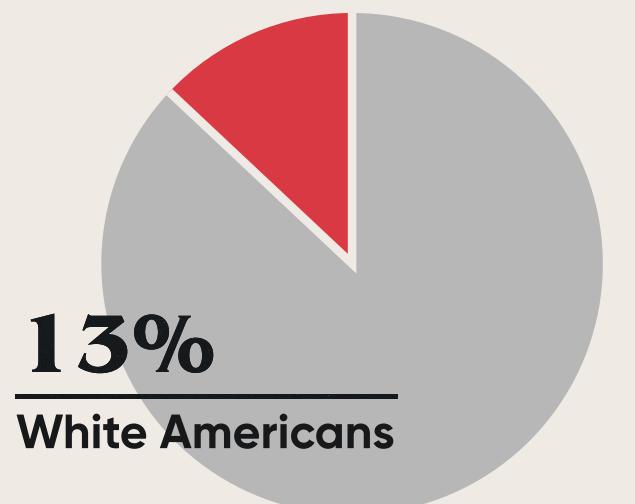
Disagree or Completely Disagree

While a majority (54%) disagreed with the statement that Asian Americans as a group are "much less friendly to non-Asian Americans," a significant percentage of Black Americans (23%) and Hispanic/Latino Americans (17%) did feel that Asian Americans were less sociable.

**"In general, Asian Americans as a group are much less friendly to non-Asian Americans"**

● Agree or Completely Agree

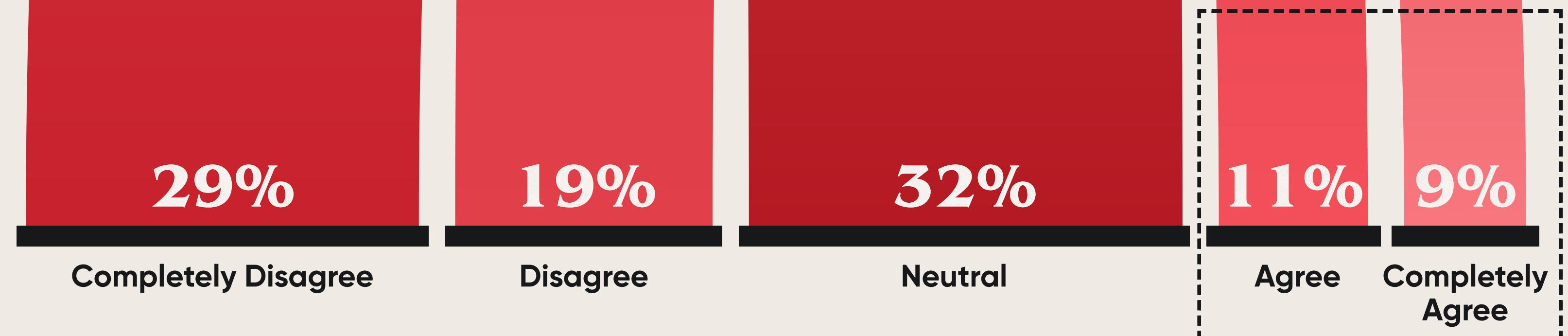
● Neutral or Disagree



## Asian Americans continue to be seen as perpetual foreigners

Although 48% of respondents disagreed with the statement that Asian Americans as a group are "more loyal to their countries of origin than to the U.S.," 32% were neutral, and 20% of respondents agreed or completely agreed. This reflects a significant portion of the U.S. population who questions the patriotism of Asian Americans.

"In general, Asian Americans as a group are more loyal to their country of origin than to the United States..."

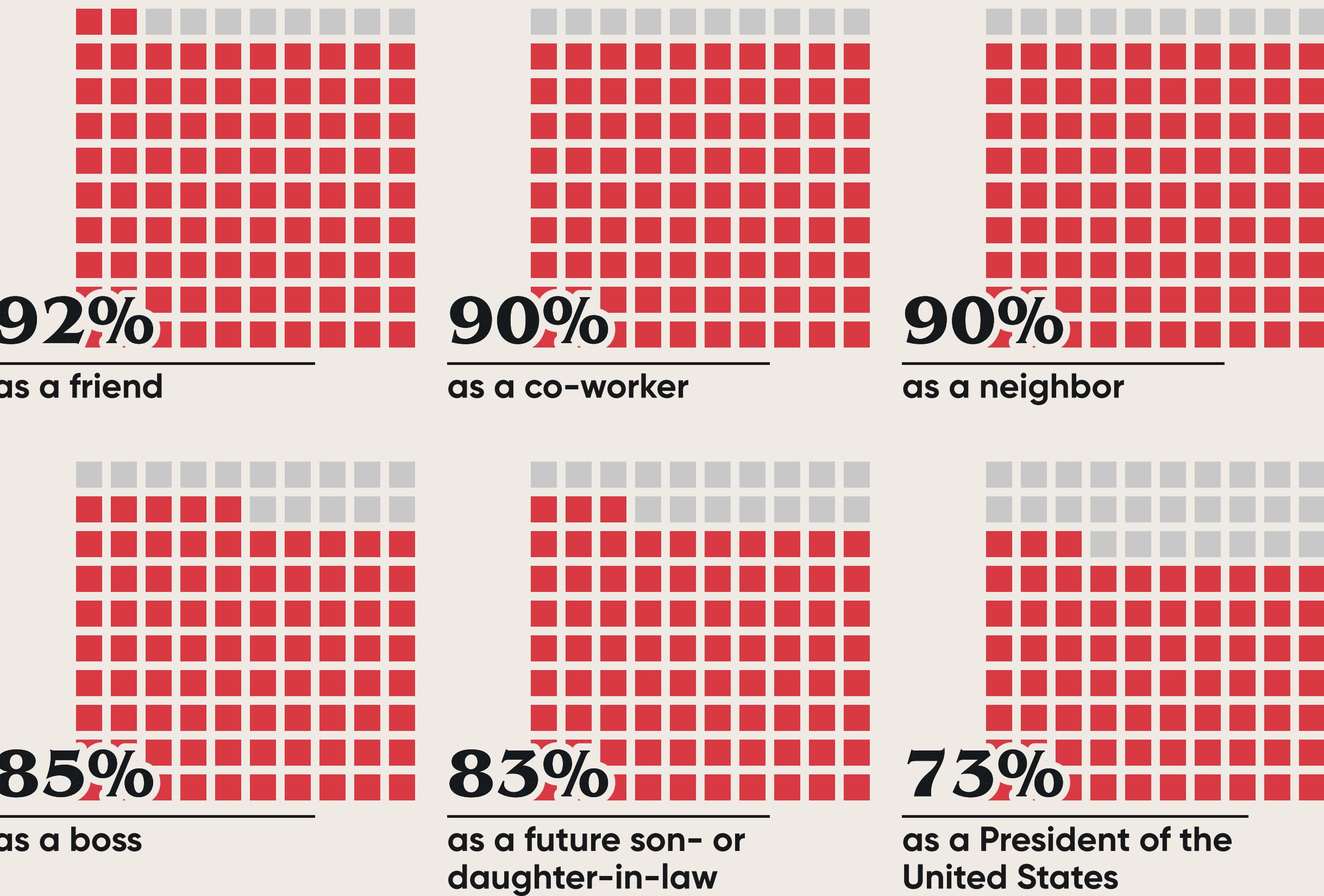


## Americans are comfortable with Asian Americans as doctors, friends, and neighbors; less so in more authoritative roles.

Social distance theory examines the perceived "social distance" among racial groups by assessing an individual's comfort level when interacting with members outside of one's racial group. It has been used to study prejudice among racial groups and attitudes toward different racial groups.

To understand better how Asian Americans are perceived in America, we asked how comfortable respondents are with Asian Americans in several different types of roles in society.

Share of Americans who said they were "extremely comfortable" or "somewhat comfortable" to have an Asian American...



The survey revealed

# 65%

of Republicans would be comfortable with  
an Asian American president, compared to

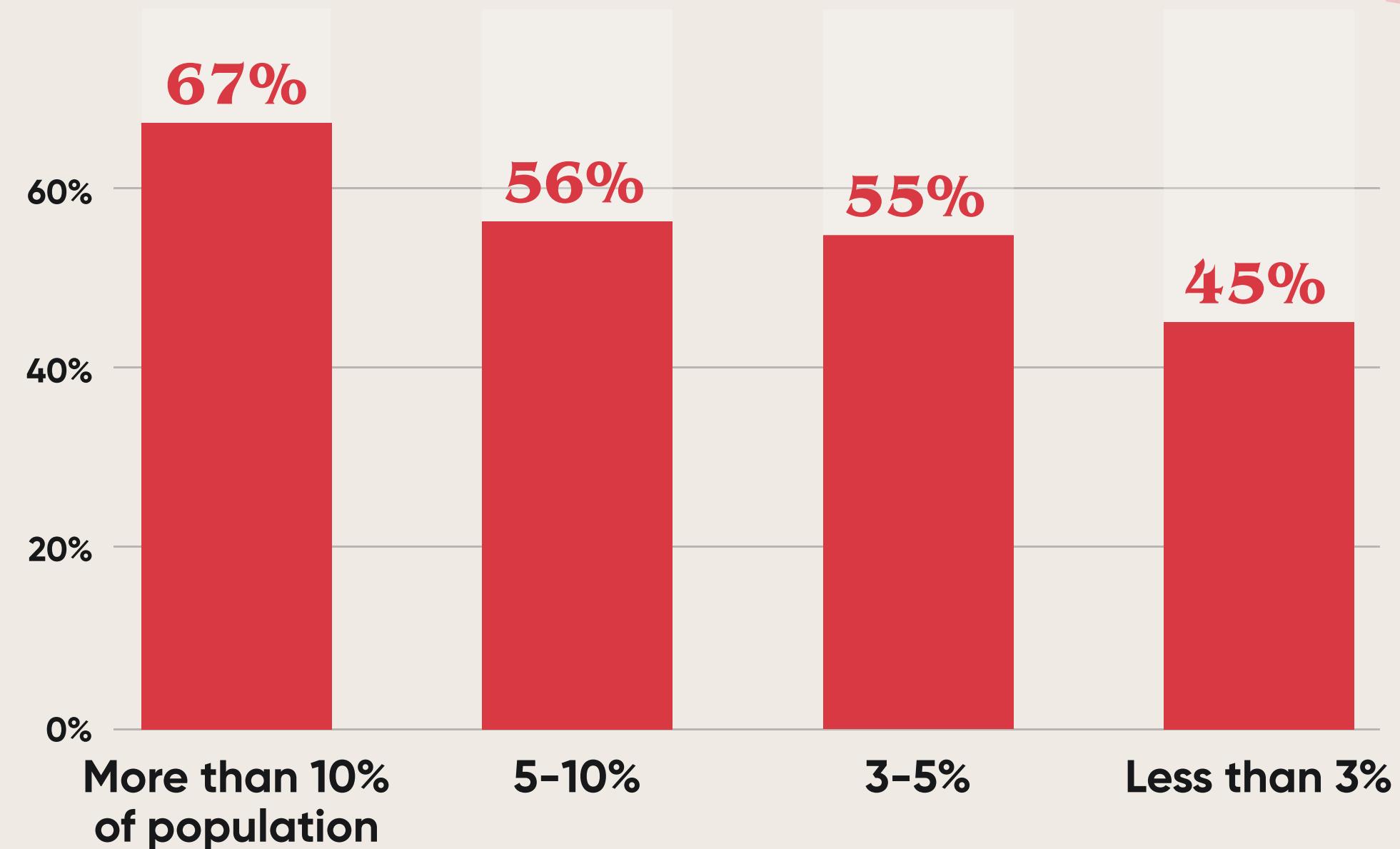
# 80%

of Democrats.

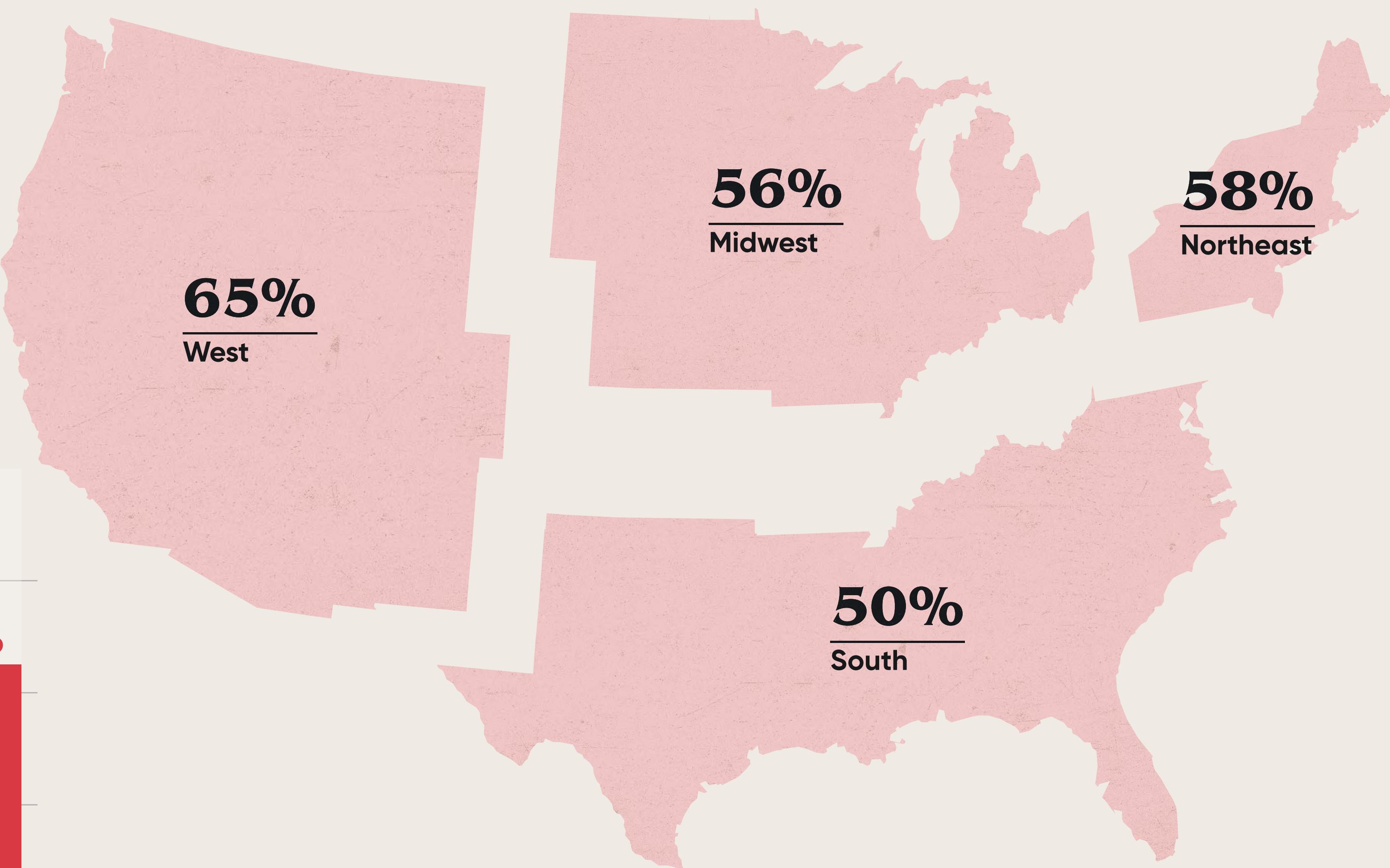


## Americans are less comfortable with an Asian American as their boss or President of the United States

Comfort with an Asian American president varies significantly by region, with only 50% of responders in the South saying they are "extremely comfortable" with an Asian American president compared to 65% in the West. The comfort level of respondents for an Asian American president also declines in states with lower percentages of Asian Americans.



## Share of Americans who reported being "extremely comfortable" with an Asian American president by region



## Americans misperceive what religions Asian Americans practice

When survey respondents were asked "What religions do you believe Asian Americans practice?", 35% believed that Asian Americans practice Buddhism, and 19% believed that Asian Americans practice Christianity.

According to the respondents in our survey, the most common religion practiced by Asian Americans, like most Americans overall, is Christianity (38%). Only 8% of Asian American respondents say they practice Buddhism.

**35%**  
of Americans believe Asian Americans practice Buddhism

**8%**  
actually do

**19%**  
of Americans believe Asian Americans practice Christianity

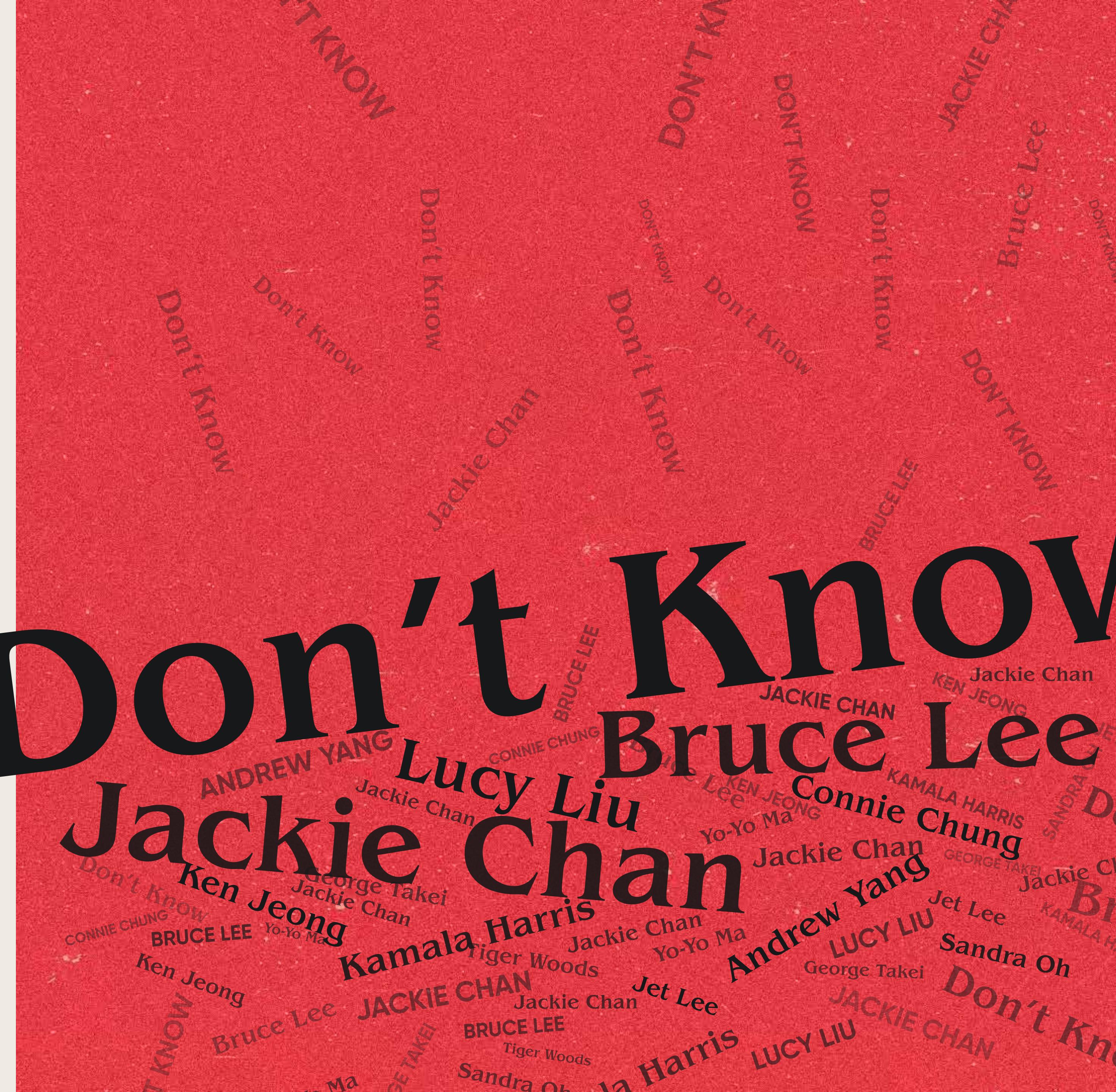
**38%**  
actually do

# (In)visibility of Asian Americans



**Asian Americans have low visibility in the media, and many Americans have difficulty naming a prominent Asian American.**

In our final section, we asked Americans to name prominent Asian Americans that come to mind. Despite the high profile of Asian Americans like Kamala Harris, Andrew Yang, Sanjay Gupta, Jeremy Lin, and Tiger Woods, the most commonly cited answer was "Don't know" (42%), followed by "Jackie Chan" (11%), a Hong Kong actor and martial artist who appeared in mainstream American films between 1998–2008, and Bruce Lee (9%), an Asian American actor and martial artist who died in 1973. Lucy Liu (5%) was the most frequently mentioned Asian American woman, followed by Connie Chung (2%). Only 2% of Americans cited Kamala Harris, our country's first Asian American, first Black American and first female vice president.



When asked about the characters Asian Americans play on TV or in the movies, only

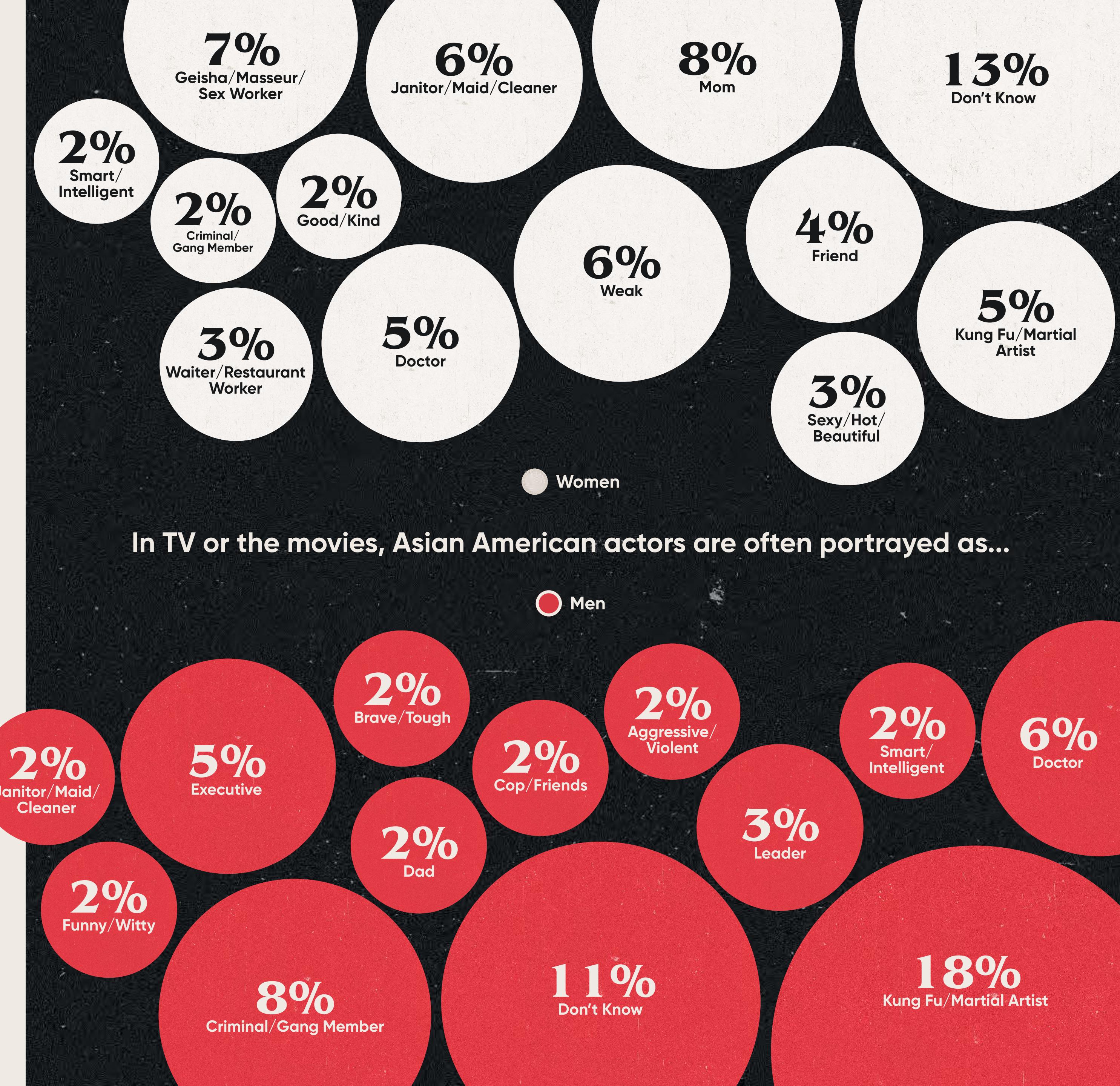
# 14%

of Americans said they saw Asian Americans in lead roles.



## Asian American actors remain limited to highly stereotypical roles

Similarly, when Americans were asked what specific character roles Asian Americans play on TV or in the movies, the top answer for female actors and second most for male actors was "Don't know." Other popular answers – kung fu/martial arts expert, criminal/gangster (for men), mom/dad, geisha/masseuse/sex worker (for women), janitor/maid/cleaner (for women), and doctor – reflected stereotypical roles for Asian American actors.

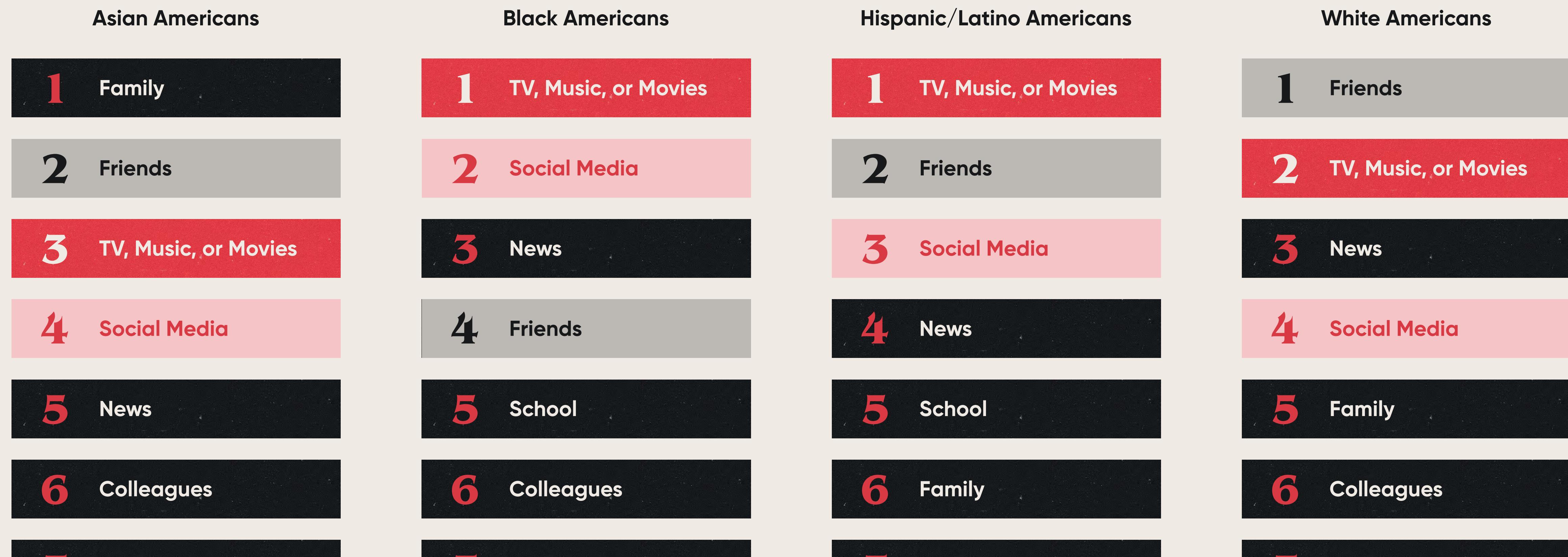


## TV/movies/music are influential sources of information about Asian Americans

When asked where they get their information and knowledge about Asian Americans, non-Asian Americans cited friends, TV/movies/music, news, and social media.

TV/movies/music are the top source for Black Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans. White Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans cite friends as another significant source of information about Asian Americans.

### Where do you get most of your perceptions or knowledge about Asian Americans?



**In terms of culture, Americans are most familiar with food from Asian countries**

Over 75% of Americans say they are familiar with food from Asian countries, but significantly fewer are familiar with customs (44%) and music/arts (37%).



# Potential Solutions



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**20%**

---

More kindness/respect/  
love/tolerance/equality

**15%**

---

Greater awareness/communication  
+ Education (via media coverage/  
social media)

When survey respondents were asked  
what could be done to address racism  
against Asian Americans, they provided a  
wide range of potential actions:

**14%**

---

Education (in general/unspecified)  
+ Education (in schools/younger  
children/Asian American history)

**22%**

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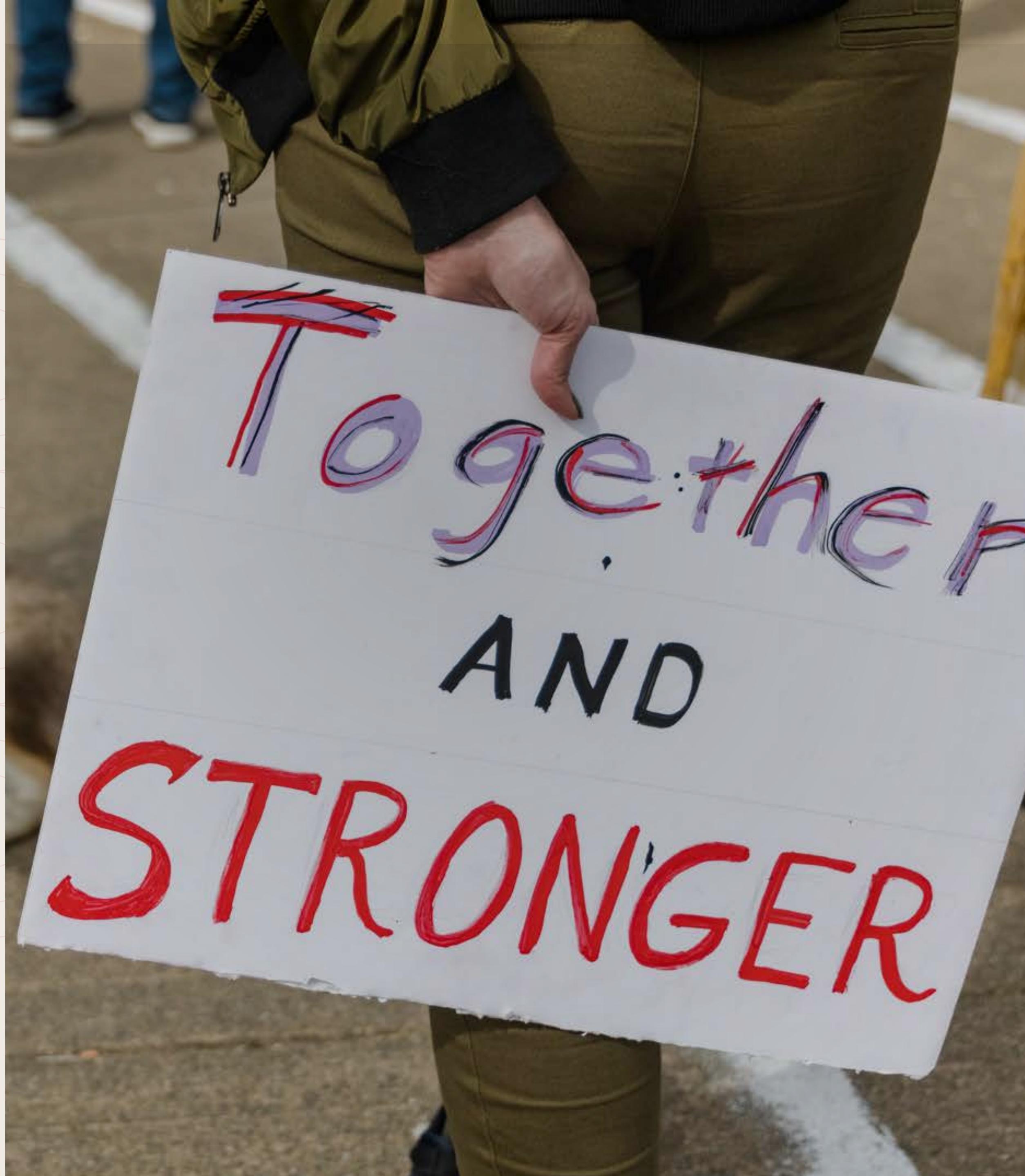
More punishment + More/  
harsher laws

## Conclusion

The inaugural STAATUS Index takes a critical look at race and bias in the United States and is especially important given not just the dearth of comprehensive data on attitudes towards the Asian American community, but also the alarming escalation of anti-Asian American sentiment and violence.

While the STAATUS Index does not capture every nuance in the complex dynamics that govern relationships between and among racial communities, it serves as a powerful reminder that simplistic generalities and stereotypes reinforce harmful and dangerous biases that lead to violence.

Despite differing perceptions over the status of Asian Americans in this country from respondents, we strongly believe that this data can be used to better understand the causes and consequences of various forms of discrimination and create concrete solutions to combat anti-Asian American racism.



## Recommendations and Actions

Based on the results of the 2021 STAATUS Index survey, we will be doing the following:

- 1** Sharing our data via traditional and social media, on our website, and a dedicated minisite to provide new insights and information on perceptions of Asian Americans that lead to prejudice, discrimination, racism, and violence;
- 2** Collaborating with the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) and other political organizations to create more awareness and support for legislation to address anti-Asian American hate crimes and attacks;
- 3** Reaching out to non-profit organizations in the Asian American, Black American, Hispanic/Latino American, and other communities to build relationships, impactful programs and solidarity to address systemic racism in America;
- 4** Partnering with educational organizations to develop and distribute innovative curricula on Asian American history to school districts and educators around the country;
- 5** Partnering with influential media organizations to raise the visibility and change the perceptions of Asian Americans in media and entertainment;
- 6** Collaborating with leading research organizations to share data about non-Asian American attitudes towards our community; and
- 7** Reviewing and refining the STAATUS Index survey to repeat again in 2022 and beyond to measure and track changes in the status of Asian Americans in the U.S.



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