

“Kids Grade the Constitution”

National Constitution Center Youth Poll

August 2003

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Overview

- ◆ High school students have an appreciation that the Constitution means something important in their lives
 - ◆ When asked to grade the Constitution, they gave it a solid score of B+
- ◆ Judges and regular citizens are regarded as the best protectors of the Constitution – while the press and politicians were given the lowest grades
 - ◆ Parents, teachers and books are rated best teachers of the Constitution, while lowest marks went to the Internet, TV and movies
- ◆ Students also evaluated the document in terms of its protection of various rights, rating its performance on some (freedom of religion and expression) better than others (freedom of the press)

Overview

- ◆ Student sentiment was in favor of a diminution of individual rights in their own schools and in society at large, in the name of protection, particularly post-9/11
 - ◆ Students are overwhelmingly willing to sacrifice some privacy rights to stop school drug abuse and gun violence. They are willing to give schools the power to search lockers and bags, and to perform drug tests for participation in athletics
- ◆ Suggesting that America's youth are less materialistic than they are sometimes perceived to be, students choose "freedom" and "equality" as the best things about living in America
 - ◆ "Being part of a wealthy country" and "being part of a powerful country" were seen as much less important
- ◆ On civic responsibility, students view more passive duties (such as "obeying the law") as more important to "maintain the way of life we have" than active duties (such as voting)

Overview

- ◆ Students are overwhelmingly supportive of allowing some religious activity in schools, such as allowing after-school religious groups to use school facilities on the same terms as other student groups, and the right to take part in prayer in schools
- ◆ George Washington and Martin Luther King Jr. were given the highest marks as preferred teachers of the Constitution
 - ◆ These historical figures were chosen over modern pop icons like Eminem and J.Lo

Background and Objectives

- ◆ StrategyOne - a full-service research firm with offices in New York, Chicago and Washington DC - was retained by the National Constitution Center to partner in the design, fielding and interpretation of a survey of American youth
 - ◆ The study was designed to provide unique insights into the attitudes of high school students towards the Constitution, as well as related issues, institutions and groups
- ◆ It was designed so that students could give a “report card” on the Constitution, the institutions under it, and groups involved with it
- ◆ This learning is to help inform and promote NCC initiatives, including:
 - ◆ Communications to the public, especially youth
 - ◆ Educational outreach, including the development of programs and materials

Methodology and Analytic Approach

- ◆ The study consisted of a 512-respondent nationally distributed telephone survey, conducted among high school students in 9th through 12th grades
 - ◆ The survey took approximately 15 minutes to administer and made use of CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) programming
 - ◆ The sample was recruited using random digit dialing and callbacks and refusal conversion efforts were used to help ensure survey integrity
 - ◆ The survey was fielded May 16 thru May 23
 - ◆ The survey instrument consisted of closed-ended questions, with two open-ended questions (the source of verbatims quoted in this report)

Methodology and Analytic Approach

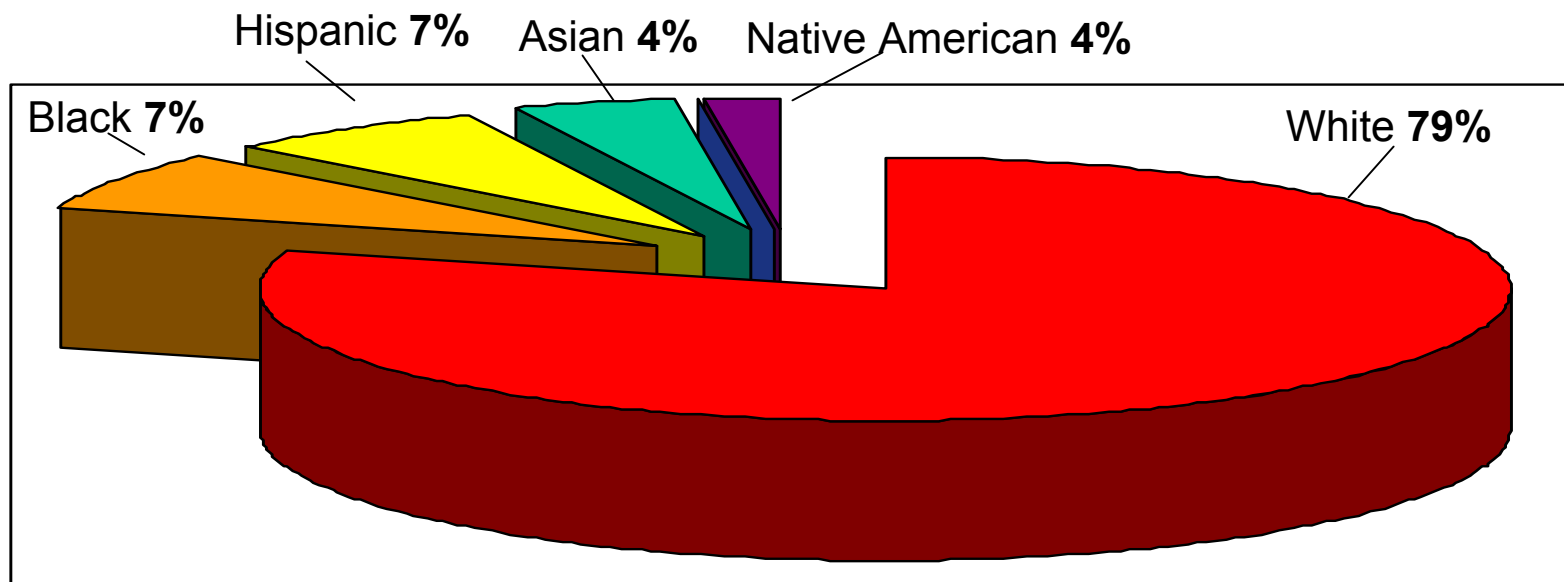
- ◆ Data was analyzed using significance tests at the 95% confidence level
 - ◆ Margin of error for the total sample (n=512) was +/- 4.3%
- ◆ Findings were analyzed to determine whether the following variables had a significant impact on results:
 - ◆ Parents: Income, education, ethnicity, voting history, region of country
 - ◆ Students: Gender, grade, public or private school, interest in voting, grade given to the Constitution
- ◆ Significant variables and major trends are noted in this report

Profile of the Sample

- ◆ A total of 512 high school students were interviewed.
- ◆ Gender was evenly split (49% male, 51% female)
- ◆ Grade was evenly distributed with approximately 125 children each in grades 9 through 12
 - ◆ There was no target for parental ethnicity, but key minority groups were well represented
 - ◆ There was no target for income, thus, a slight overrepresentation of middle class households

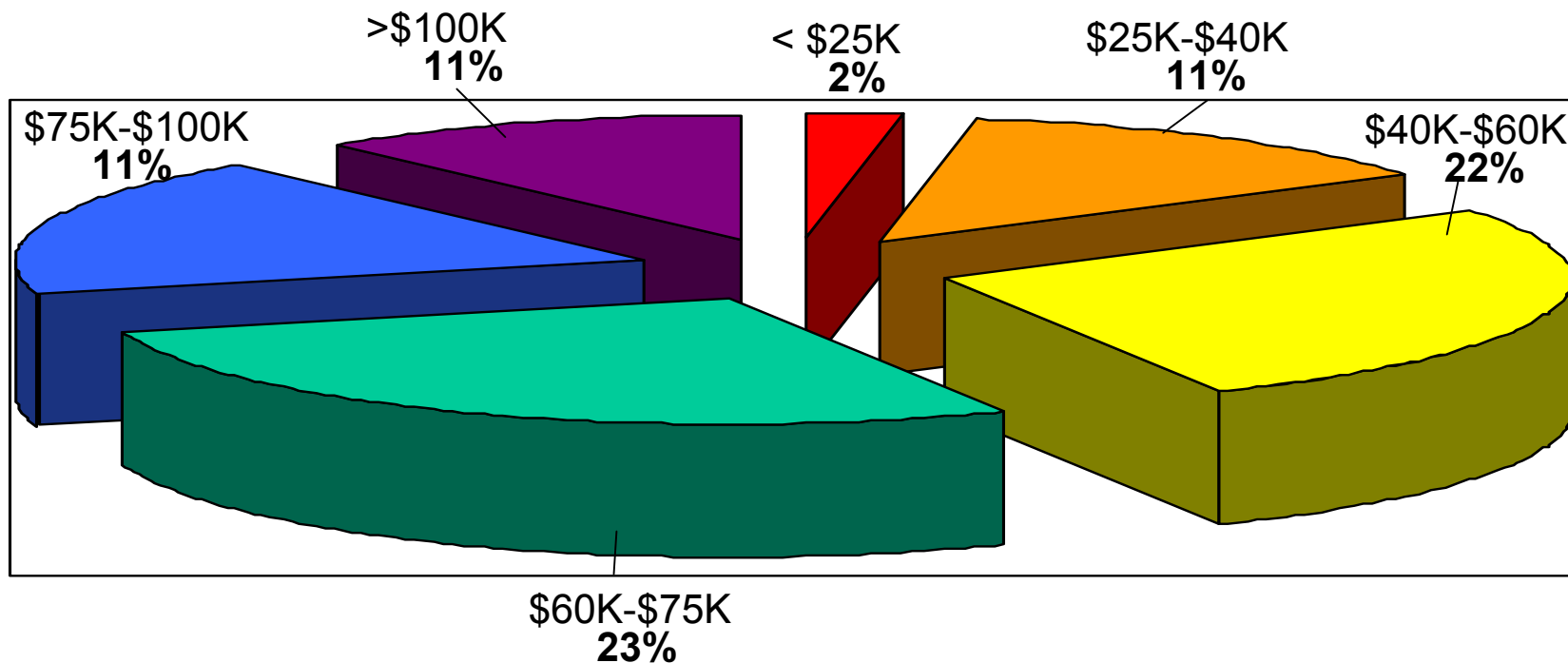
Profile of the Sample

Parental Ethnicity



Profile of the Sample

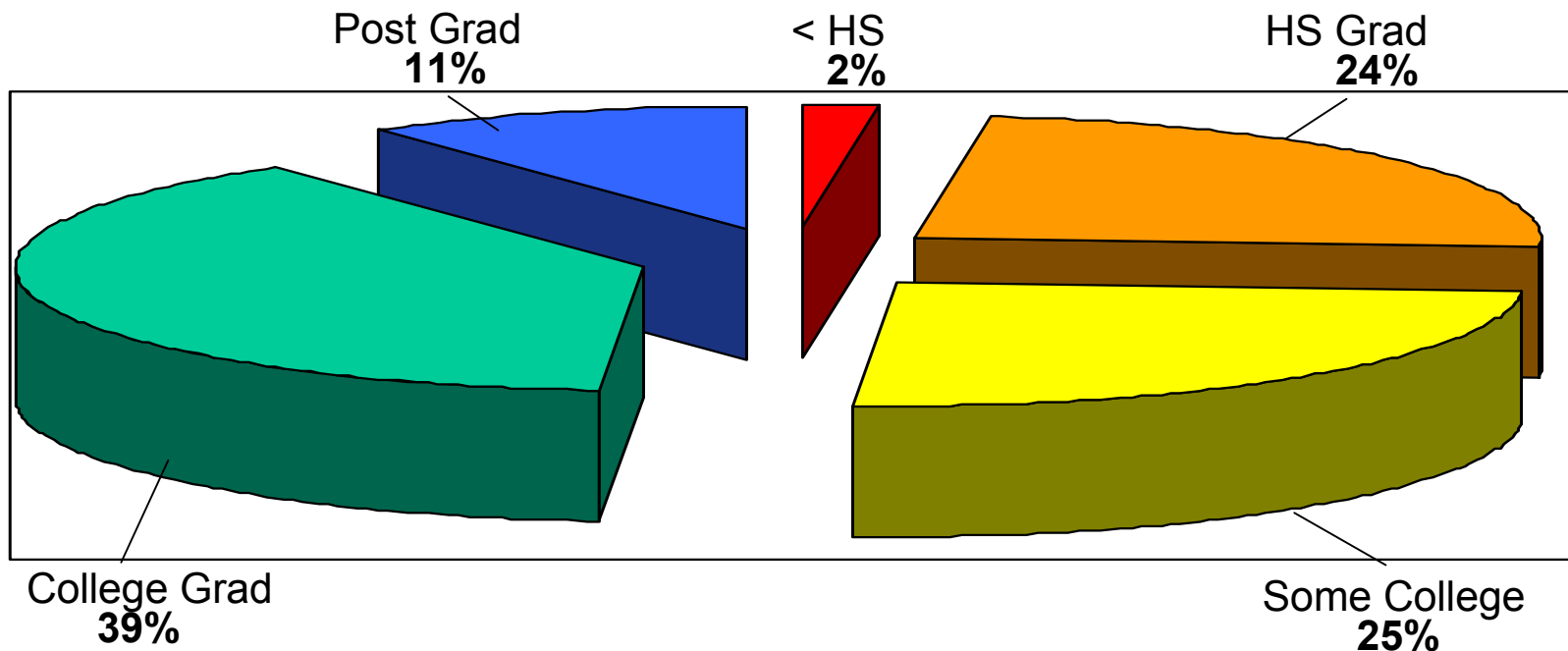
Household Income



Q54. Thinking about your total household income in 2002, before taxes, was it...?

Profile of the Sample

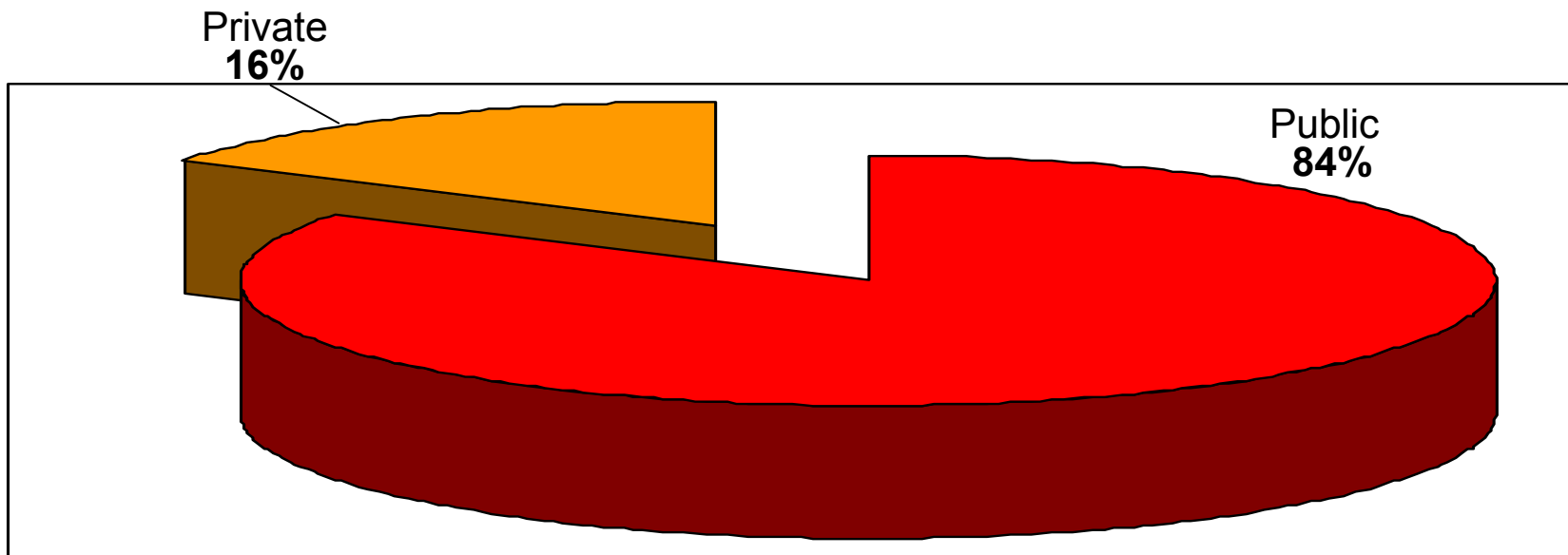
Parental Education



Q53. What was the last year of education that you completed?

Profile of the Sample

School Type



Q52. Does your child, whom I just spoke with, go to public school, private religious school, another type of school, home schooled or something else?

Sentiment for the United States

Voices from the survey....

“I live in the only country in the world that has freedom and is for the people.”

“I am very thankful for all my rights here in America.”

“I love freedom of speech in America.”

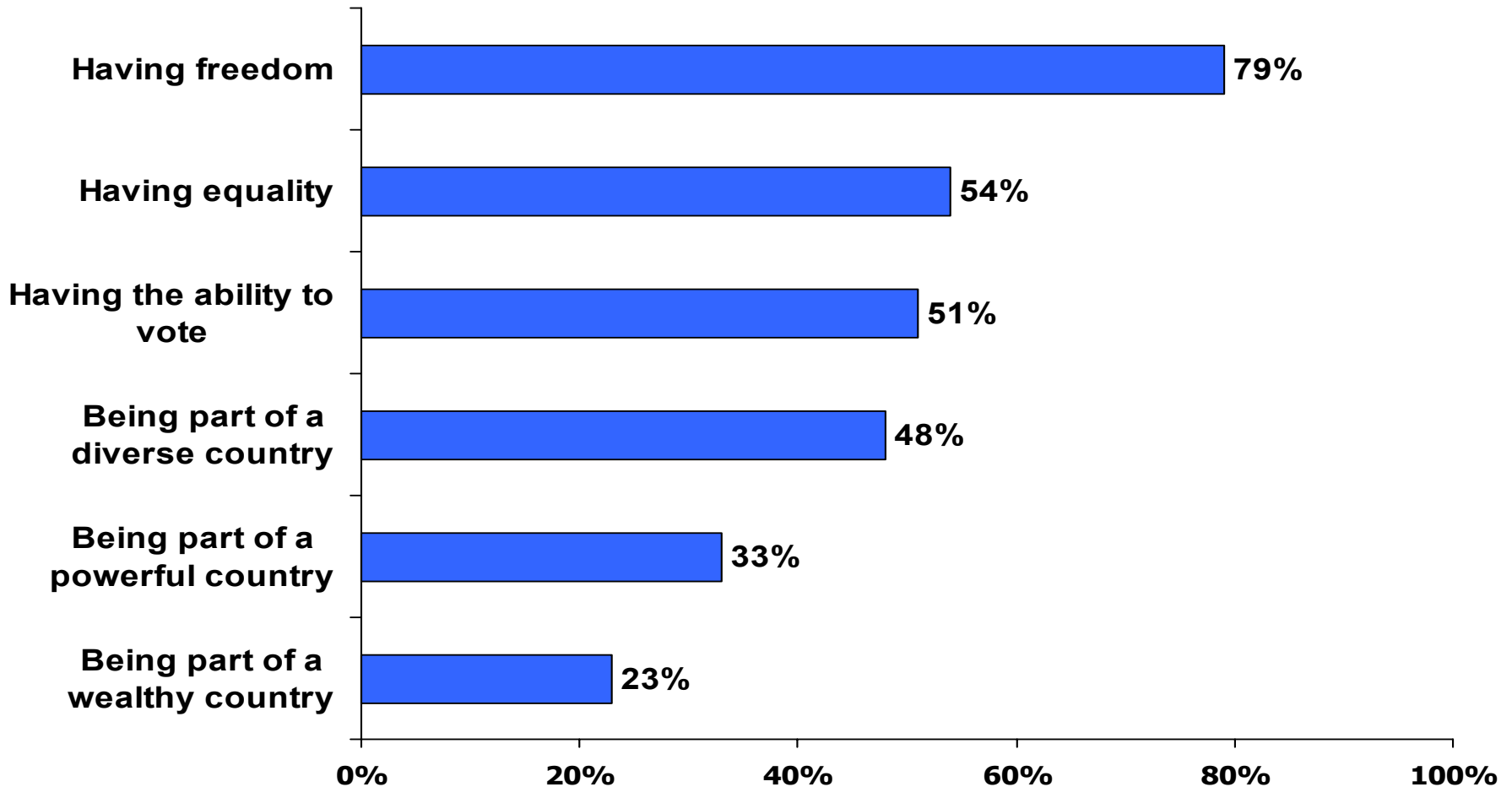
“We are not really very free or morally strong.”

“There are people still living on the street who need help and protection, and they will get it in America.”

Sentiment for the United States

- ◆ “Freedom” – a fundamental principle of the Constitution - is also what students value most about living in America
 - ◆ When asked to choose the best things about living in America from a list, 79% of all students chose “freedom,” followed at a distance by “having equality” (54%) and “having the ability to vote” (51%)
 - ◆ “Being part of a diverse country” was chosen by almost half of students (48%)
 - ◆ “Being part of a wealthy country” was chosen by fewest students (23%), along with “being part of a powerful country” (33%)

Sentiment for the United States

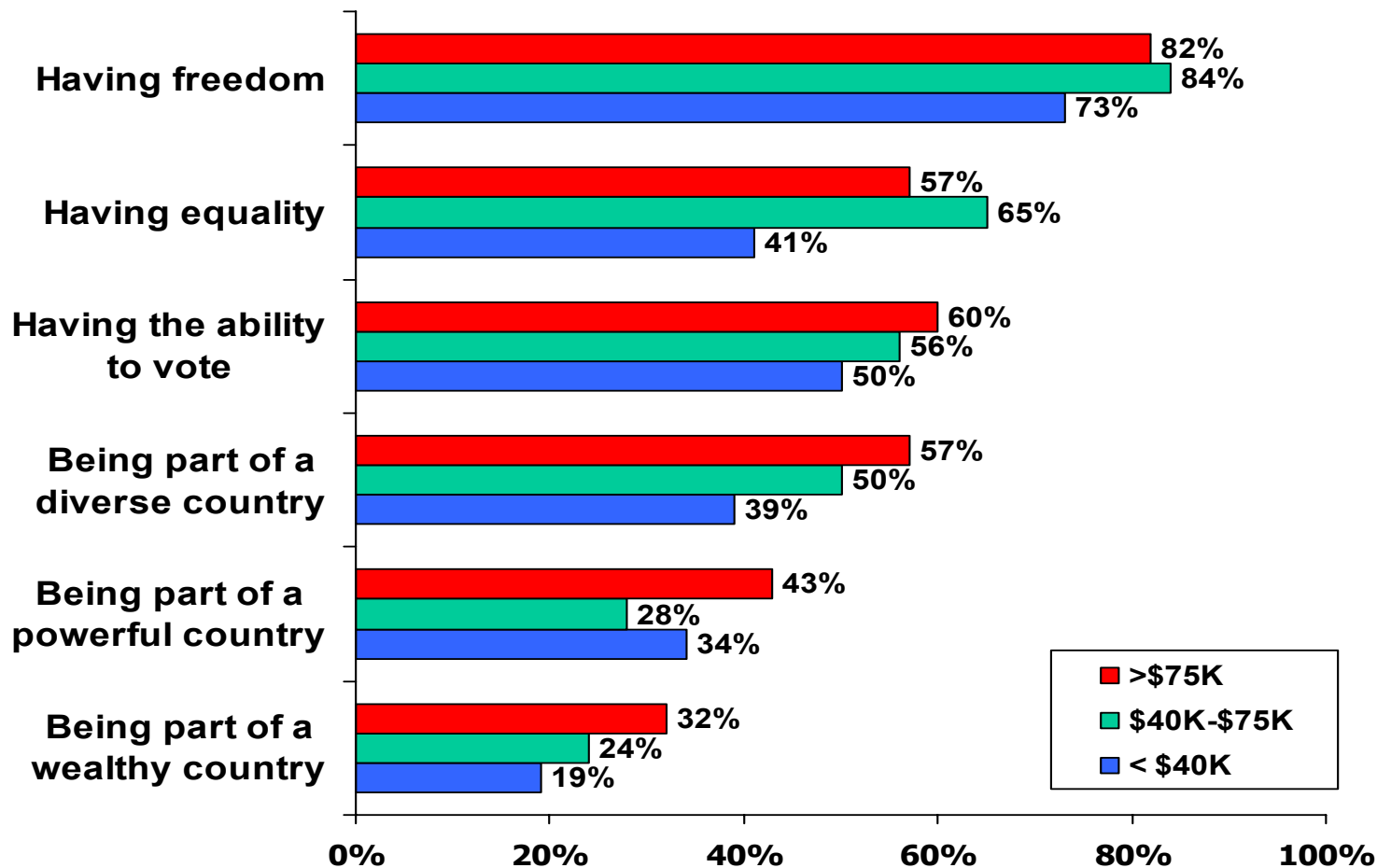


Q38. I am going to read you some statements about what its like to live in America. After I read them, please tell me which of these statements describes the best things about living in America.

Sentiment for the United States

- ◆ Income was the variable which has the most significant impact on what students thought was best about living in the U.S.
 - ◆ While income does not affect how students rate freedom, those with household incomes of \$40K and below are less likely to rate equality, or diversity highly
- ◆ Additionally, those whose parents voted in the last Presidential election were significantly more likely to choose having the ability to vote, and boys were significantly more likely than girls to choose being part of a powerful country

Sentiment for the United States

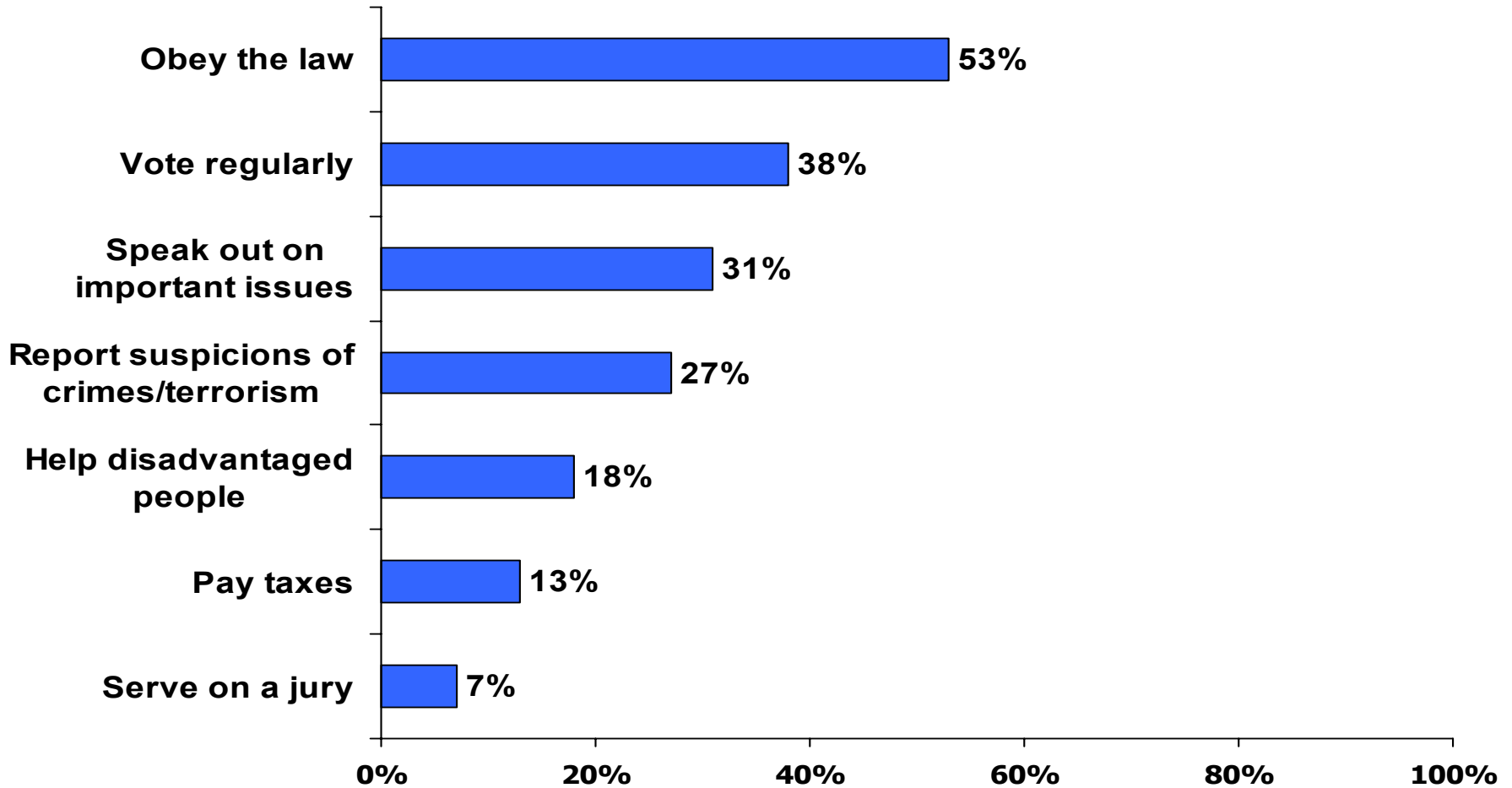


Q38. I am going to read you some statements about what its like to live in America. After I read them, please tell me which of these statements describes the best things about living in America.

Sentiment for the United States

- ◆ When read a list and asked to choose two things which Americans should most do to maintain their way of life, 53% of students chose “obey the law”
- ◆ Students also think that it is important for Americans to “vote regularly” (38%) and “speak out on important issues” (31%) if they want to maintain their way of life
 - ◆ 27% also chose “report suspicions of future crime or terrorist activities” as one of the two things Americans must do to maintain the way of life we have

Sentiment for the United States



Q39. I am going to read you a list of things. After I read them, please tell me which two things you think Americans should do to maintain the way of life we have.

Grading the Constitution...

Voices from the survey...

“The system works to keep people free within bounds and adapts with time.”

“It’s a solid document, but versatile enough for different interpretations.”

“It doesn’t always work the way it was designed to.”

“Some parts are good but some parts are not O.K., like the right to bear arms.”

“The basic document is good, but it is too easily manipulated today.”

“Its not quite as powerful as it was supposed to be.”

“It does a good job of keeping people free and equal.”

Grading the Constitution ...

- ◆ Overall, students grade the Constitution relatively highly on the job it is doing to keep America free and strong (42% give it an A and 49% give it a B)
 - ◆ The average grade for the Constitution is a B+
- ◆ Only 1% of respondents gave the Constitution a failing grade
 - ◆ Kids from middle class families (income of \$40K to \$70K) are significantly more likely than those from lower and higher income families to give the Constitution an A

Grading the Constitution...

- ◆ Students tended to mostly grade the Constitution based on their assessment of its relevance to today, its historical record, its impact on their own lives, and its integrity as a document

“It seems like the perfect balance of power between the people and the government.”

“It’s good and everything, but you have to remember it’s over 215 years old and it needs a tune up.”

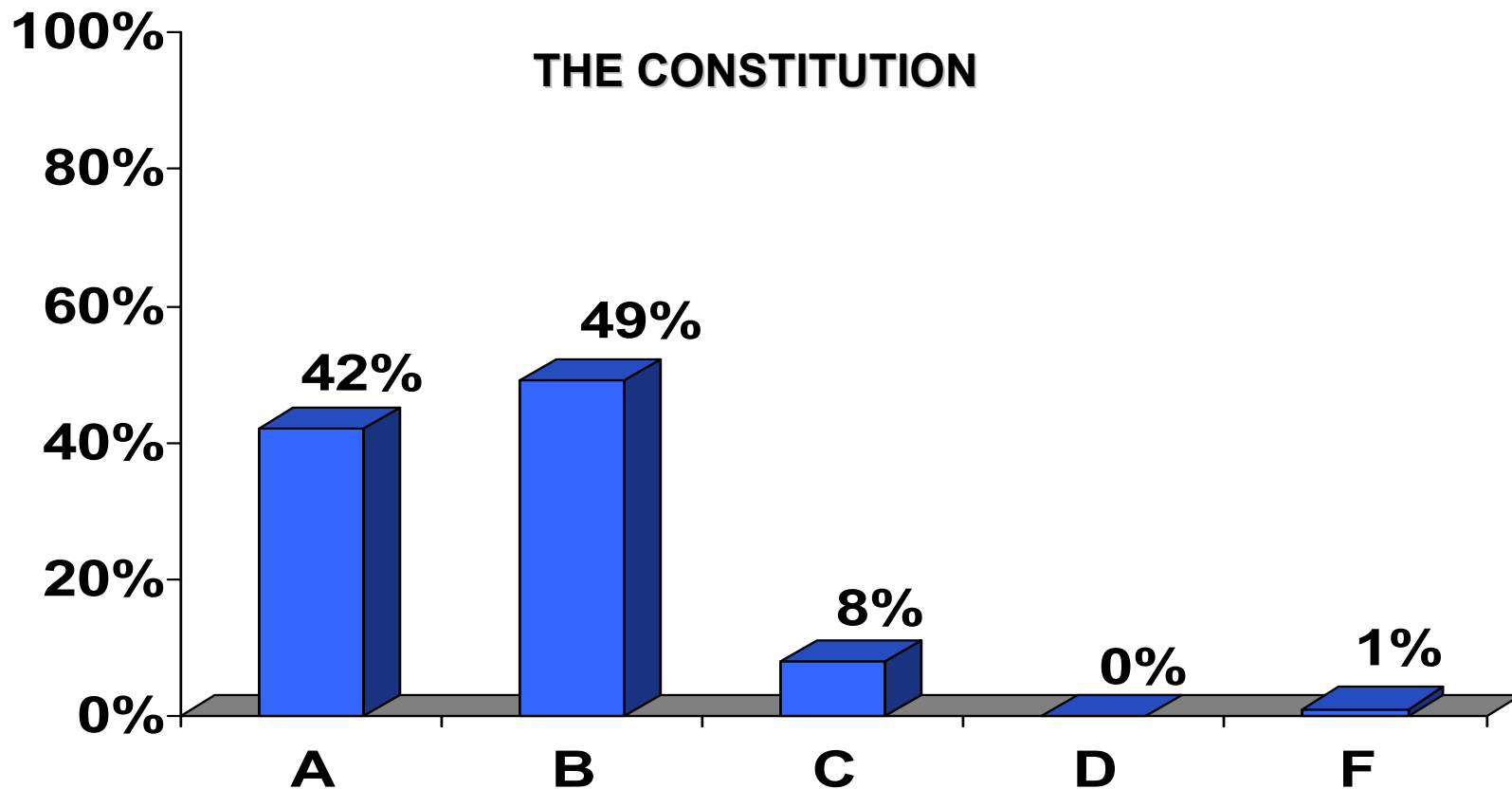
“Sometimes it doesn’t do its job to protect American citizens.”

“I feel it’s doing a decent job despite being such an old document.”

”It protects only some – not all people are truly equal.”

“There are some things that are not clear – like loopholes that let people get away with some things and also let our rights be violated from time to time.”

Grading the Constitution...



Q7. Like a report card in school, I want you to give the Constitution a grade for the job it does in keeping America free and strong.

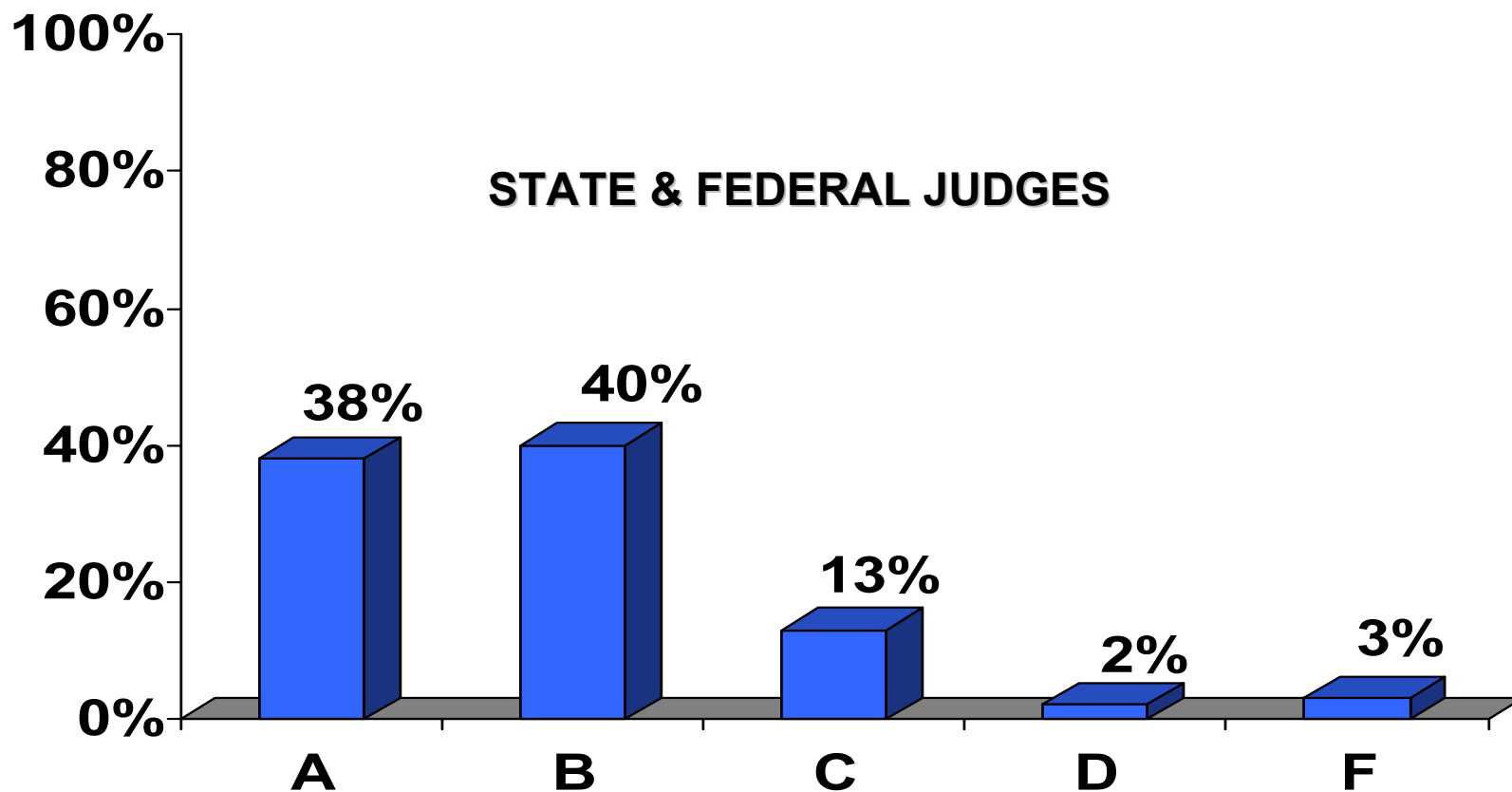
Grading the Constitution... and its Protectors

- ◆ When asked to grade various groups on their performance in protecting and preserving the principles of the Constitution, judges and regular citizens come out on top, but politicians and the press do poorly
- ◆ State and Federal judges earn the highest grades from students for their protection and preservation of the Constitution (38% give them an A and 40% a B), with the average grade being a B
- ◆ Citizens of America also score well, with 26% of students giving them an A and 46% a B, with the average grade being a B
- ◆ However, income is a variable in both of these cases
 - ◆ Children from families earning \$40K a year or less are less likely to give judges an A or B than those from wealthier families and more likely to give citizens an A or B

Grading the Constitution... and its Protectors

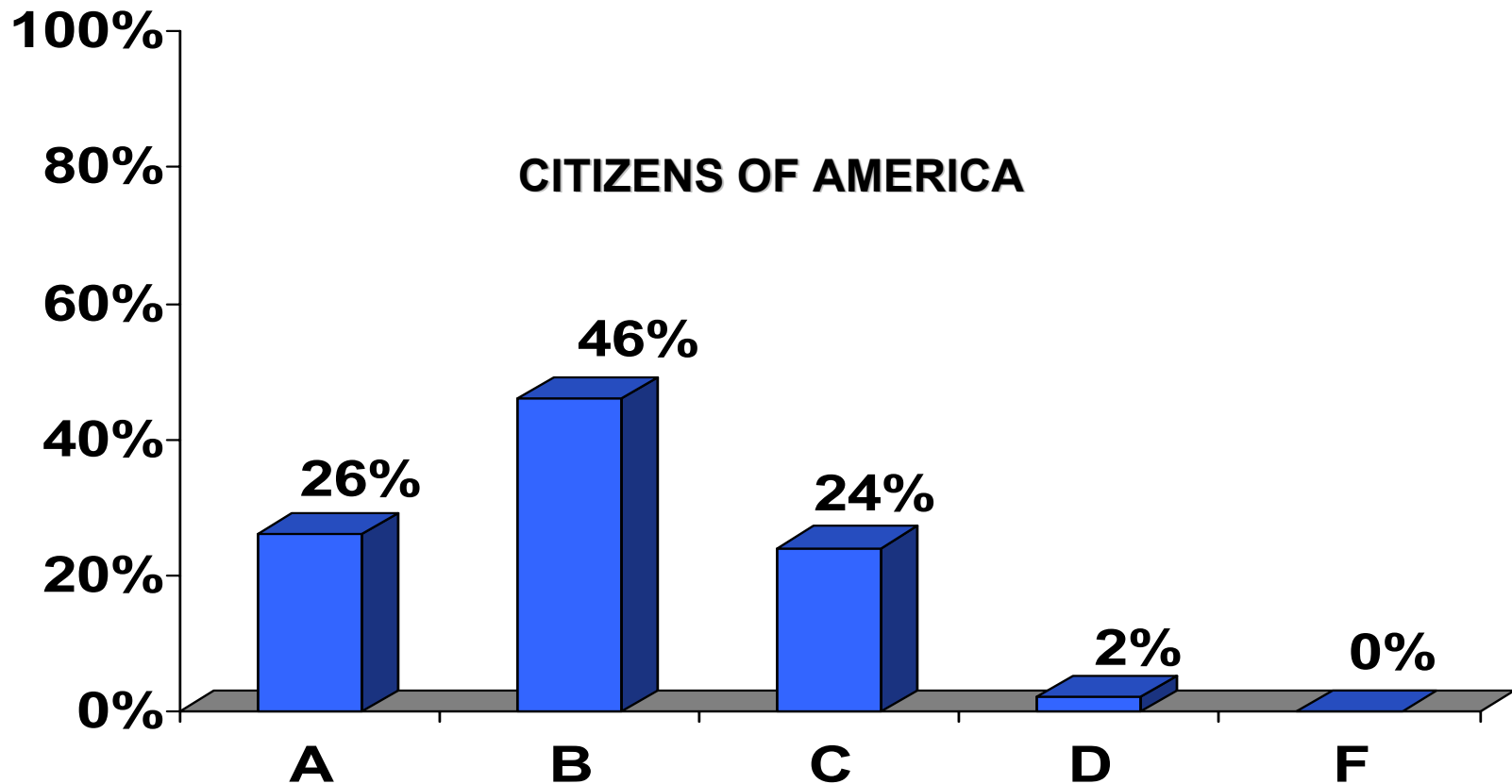
- ◆ Both politicians and the press receive a low grade on protecting the principles of the Constitution
 - ◆ Only 12% gave politicians an A, while 29% gave them a C, with the average grade being a C+
 - ◆ Similarly, only 12% of students gave the press an A, and 36% gave it a C, with the average grade being a C+
 - ◆ Low press scores may reflect a general mistrust of content in the press

Grading the Constitution... and its Protectors



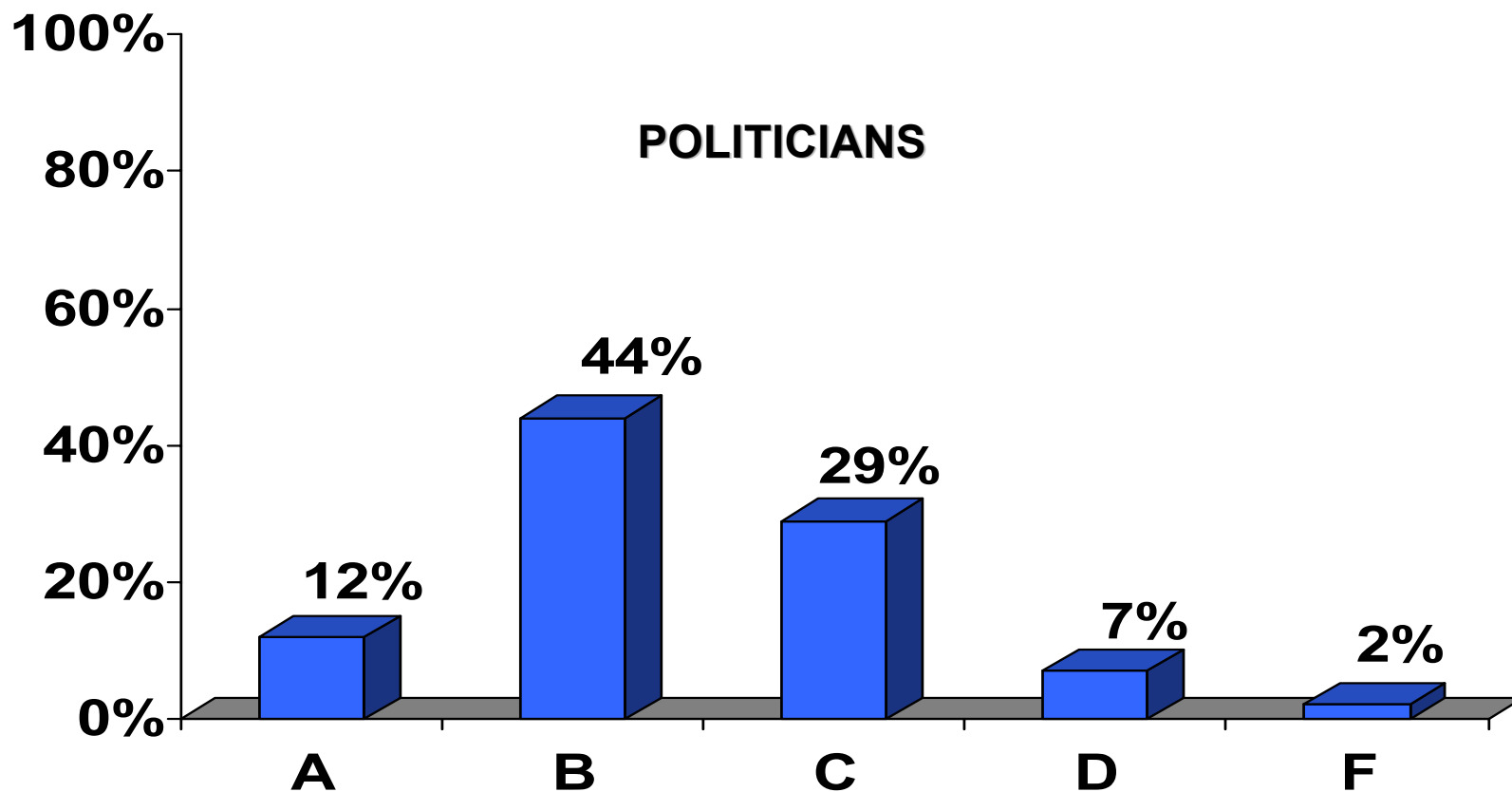
Q9-12. I am going to ask you about a few different groups of people. For each, please tell me how you would grade them on protecting and preserving the principles of the Constitution.

Grading the Constitution... and its Protectors



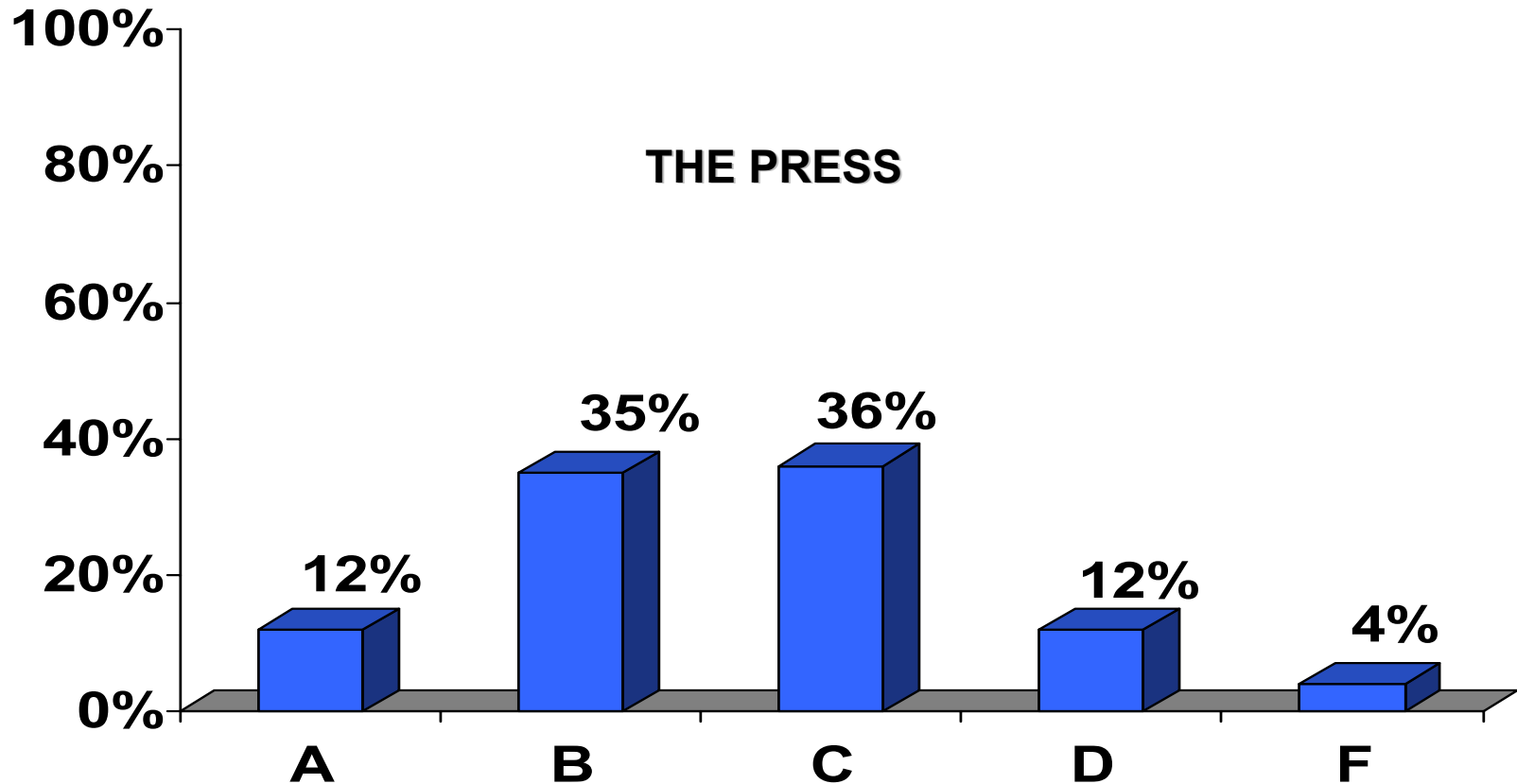
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Grading the Constitution... and its Protectors



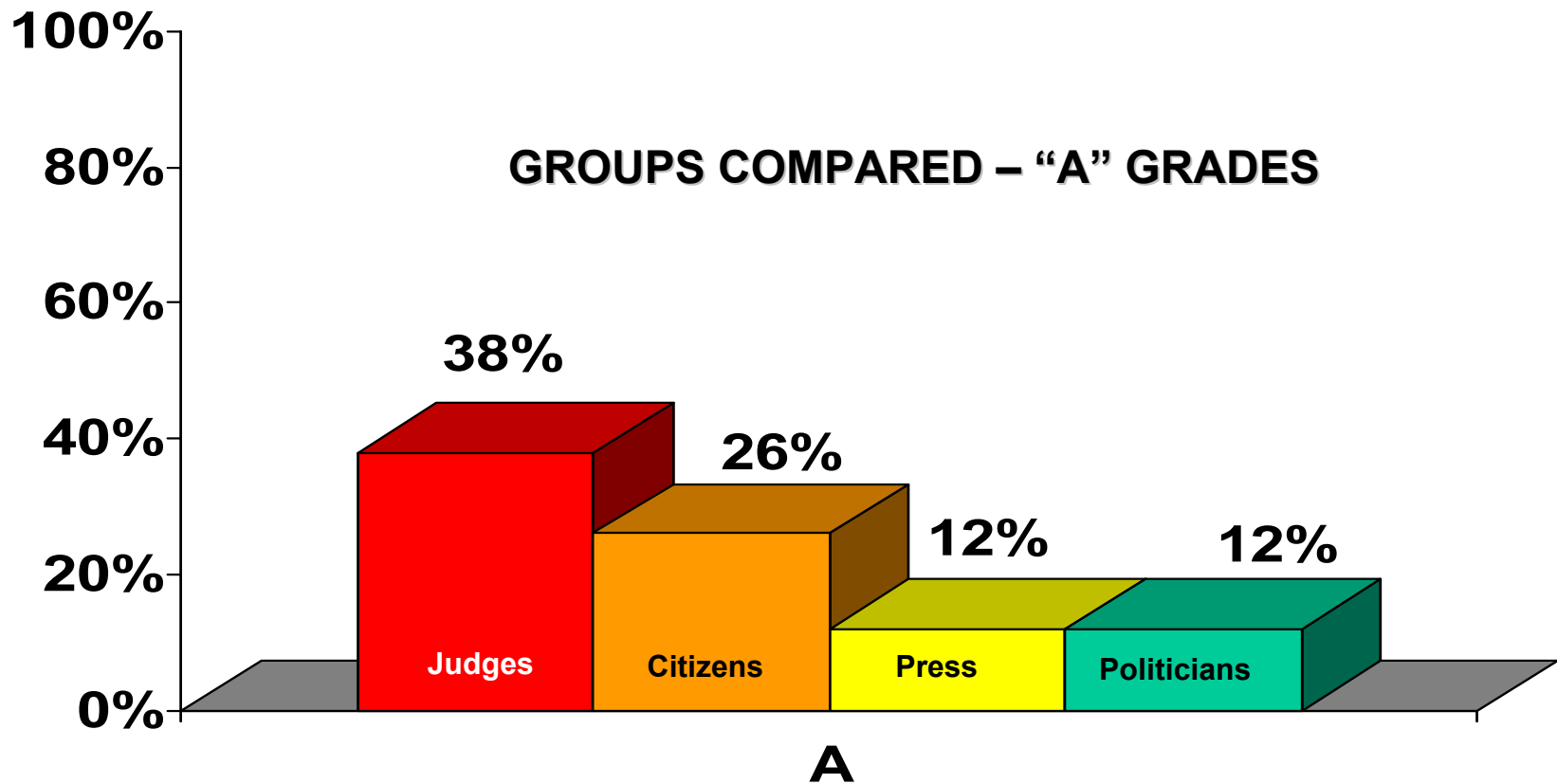
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Grading the Constitution... and its Protectors



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Grading the Constitution... and its Protectors



Q9-12. I am going to ask you about a few different groups of people. For each, please tell me how you would grade them on protecting and preserving the principles of the Constitution.

A grades shown

Grading the Bill of Rights... and its Protectors

Voices from the survey...

“It means freedom and it gives you the right to be whoever you want to be and no one can take that freedom away from you. You are your own person, no matter what color you are.”

“Being a Muslim I feel privileged, people respect other religions.”

“I have the right to speak out on things I don’t agree with.”

“I don’t think it helps with freedom of expression.”

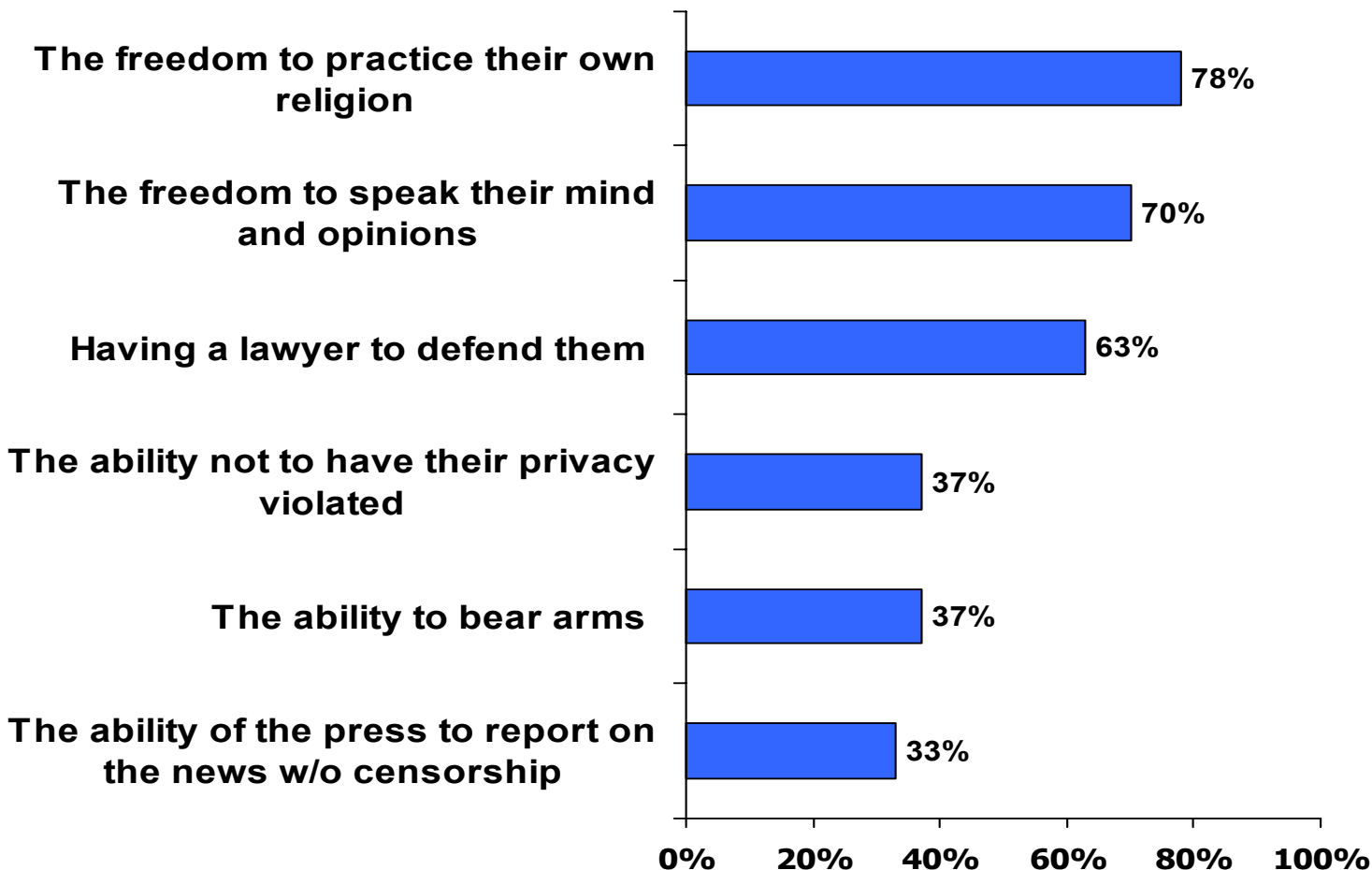
“Not everyone is really considered equal in the country”

“Everything seems pretty fair, however there are some strict new laws that I don’t agree with.”

Grading the Bill of Rights...and its Protectors

- ◆ The Bill of Rights performs well on protecting certain rights for Americans – like freedom of speech and religion - but “needs work” on others – like a free press - according to students

Grading the Bill of Rights and its Protectors



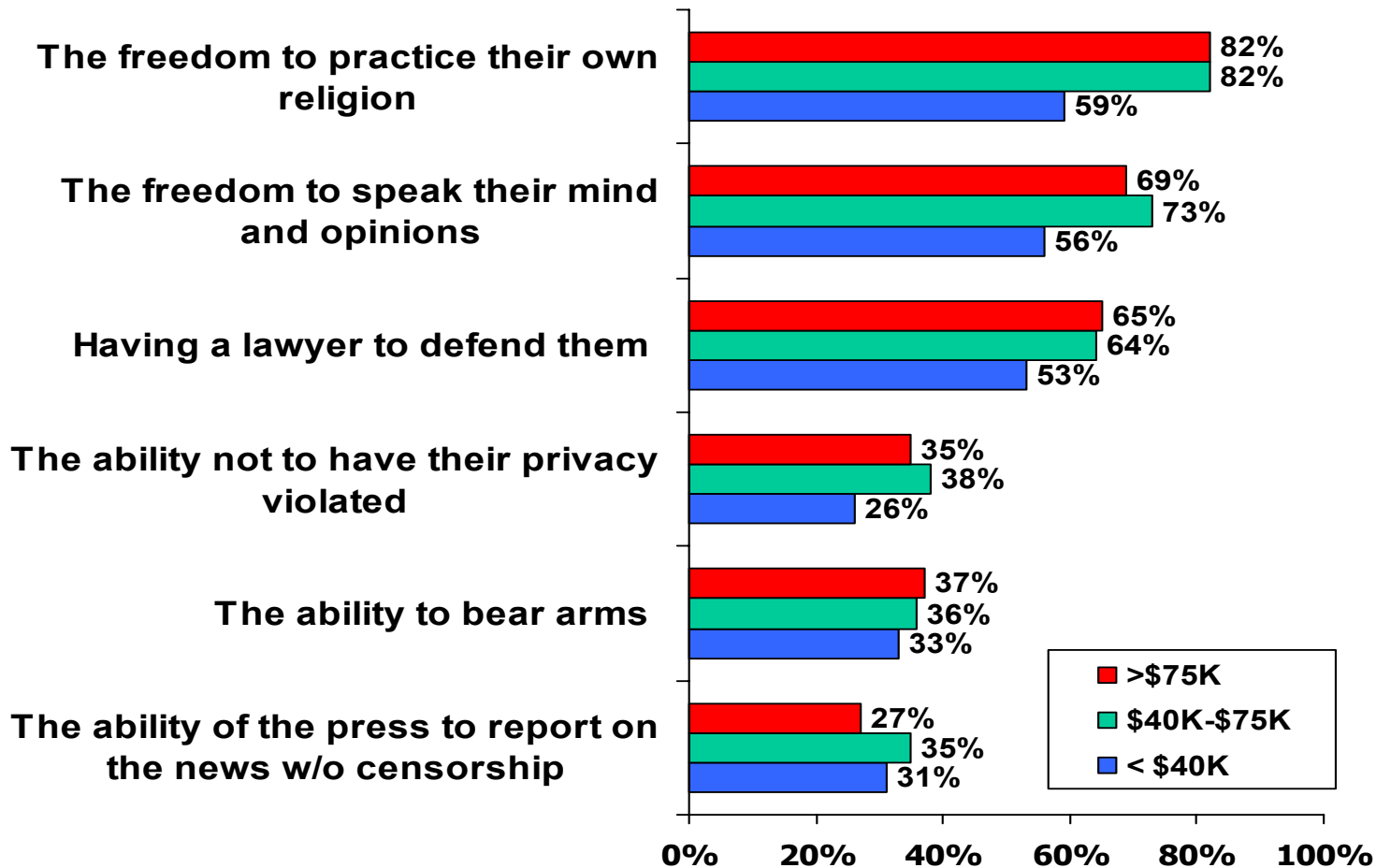
Q13-18. I am going to read you a list of things Americans might want to have or do. For each one I read you, please give the Constitution a grade for the job it does making sure Americans can do or have these things.

A grades shown

Grading the Bill of Rights... and its Protectors

- ◆ Income is an important variable in students' grading of the Bill of Rights
 - ◆ Students from households with an income of \$40K or less, are significantly less likely than students from wealthier households to give an A on protecting freedom of speech, and freedom of religion
 - ◆ However, they do give mostly Bs, indicating that there is “room for improvement,” but not a perception of being failed by the Constitution

Grading the Bill of Rights and its Protectors

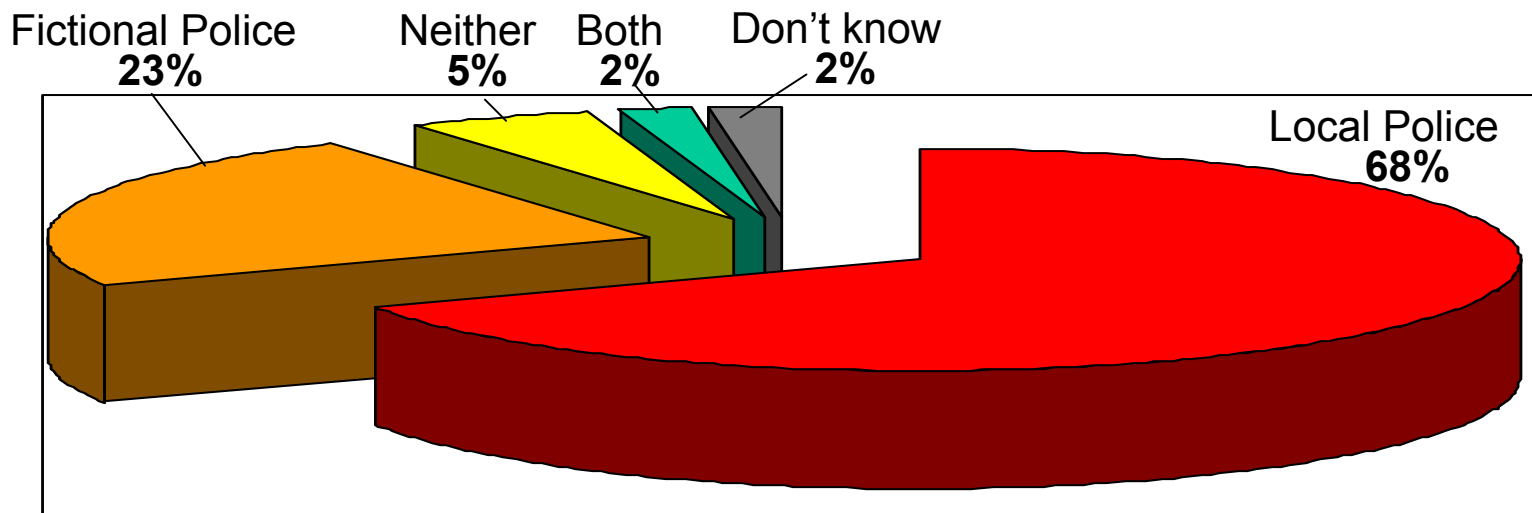


Q13-18. I am going to read you a list of things Americans might want to have or do. For each one I read you, please give the **Constitution** a grade for the job it does making sure Americans can do or have these things.

A grades shown

Grading the Bill of Rights... and its Protectors

- Police in local communities are seen as doing a much better job of protecting the rights of those arrested than fictional police in television programs, indicating a relatively high level of trust in the “real life” version

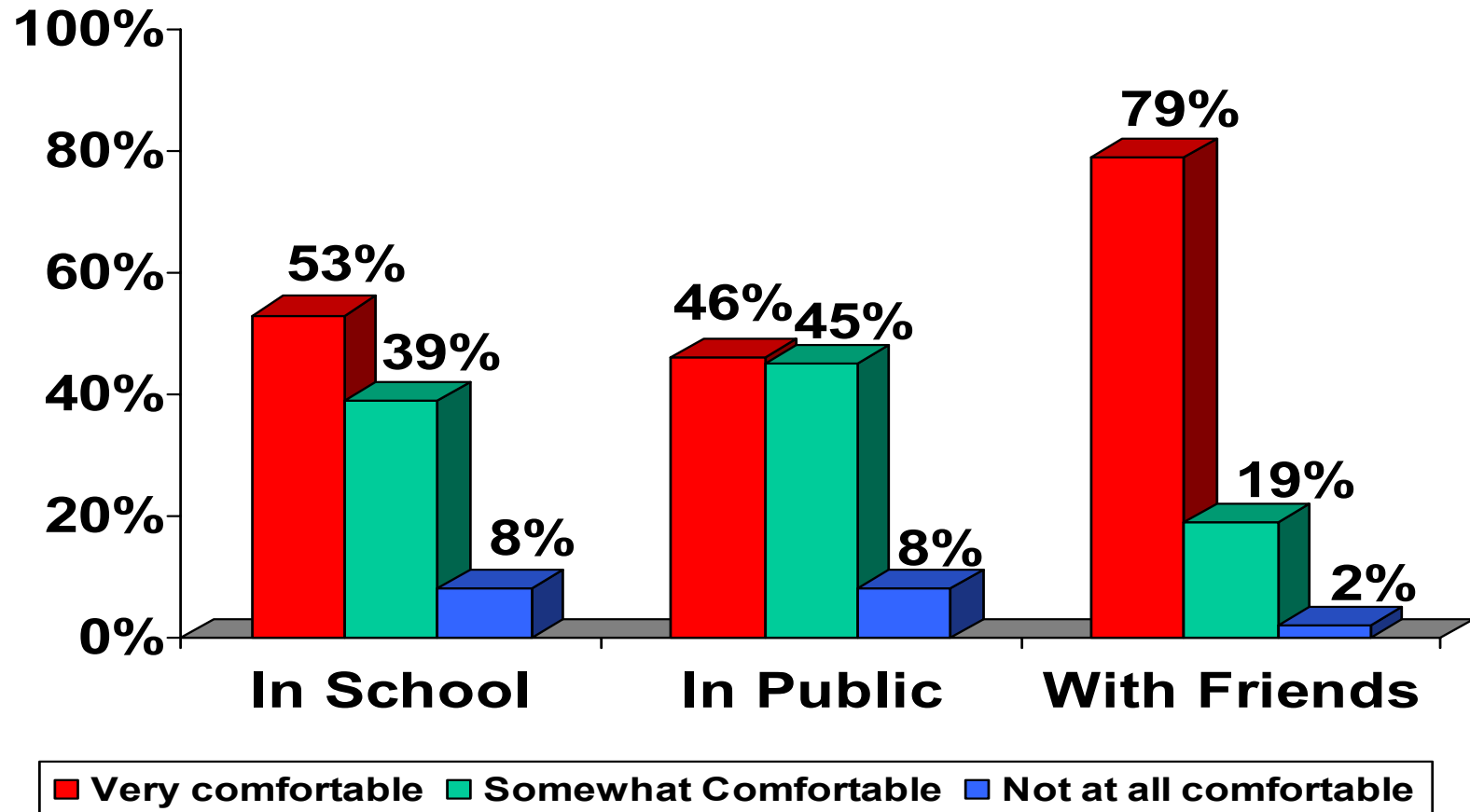


Q25. Who does a better job of respecting the rights of people arrested and charged with crimes... the police in your local community or the fictional police on television programs?

Grading the Bill of Rights and its Protectors

- ◆ Students generally feel their personal First Amendment rights are protected in their schools, in public, and among their friends
 - ◆ 92% say they are “very” or “somewhat” comfortable speaking out about their beliefs (including religious beliefs) in their schools, 91% in public, and 98% with their friends
 - ◆ Students whose parents voted in the last Presidential election are more comfortable speaking out overall

Grading the Bill of Rights and its Protectors



Q26-28. How comfortable do you feel speaking out about your opinions and beliefs, including your religious beliefs, in the following places?

Rights and 9/11

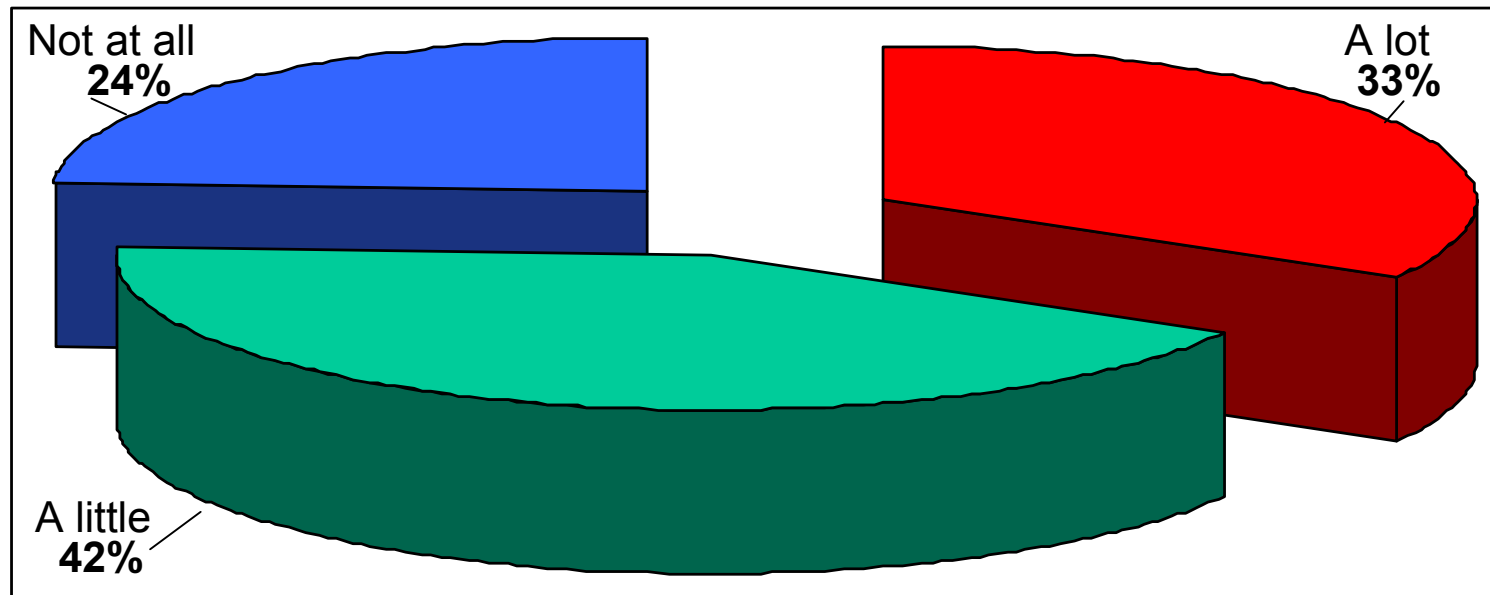
- ◆ Students' attitudes towards the protection of rights post- 9/11, reflects the sentiment that attacks inside the United States may warrant some suspension of rights
 - ◆ 33% “strongly agreed” with the statement, “now that terrorists are attacking Americans here in the U.S., we need to violate some people’s rights in order to protect ourselves”
 - ◆ 42% agreed “a little” and 24% did not agree “at all”
 - ◆ Those from high income households (\$70K and above) were significantly more likely than others to disagree with the statement

”It seems it has been pushed out of the way a bit since 9/11, it doesn’t mean much anymore.”

“After 9/11, it became an even more important part of our lives.”

Rights and 9/11

Now that terrorists are attacking Americans here in the U.S., we need to violate some people's rights in order to protect ourselves

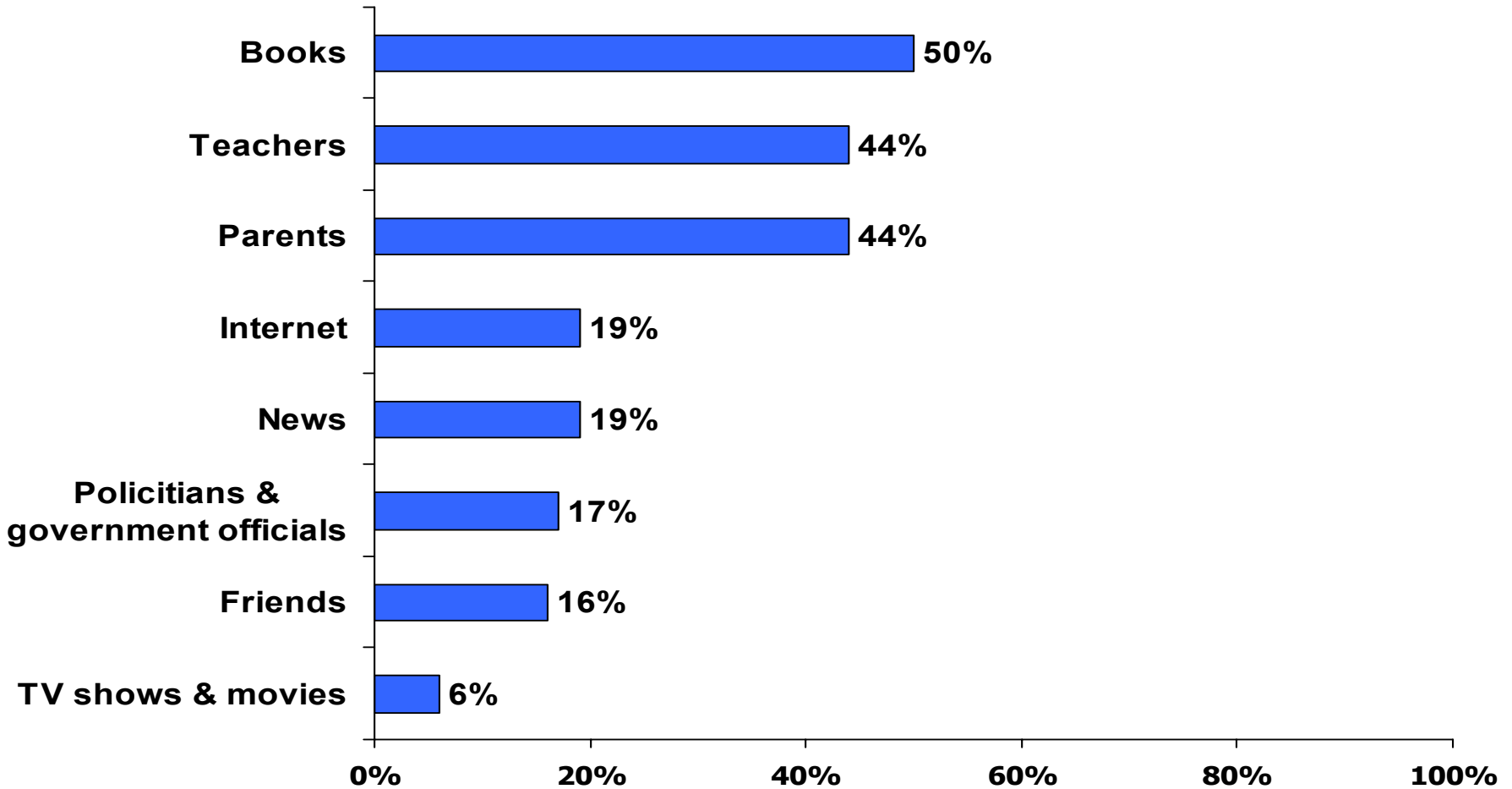


Q50. I am going to read you a few statements. Please tell me if you agree a lot, a little or not at all with each statement.

Learning About the Constitution

- ◆ Books are doing the best job of teaching students about the Constitution, with 50% grading them an A
 - ◆ A close second are teachers and parents, who each get an A from 44% of students
- ◆ Politicians and government officials perform very poorly, earning an A from only 17% of students
 - ◆ Students appear universally disappointed in their elected officials, with no distinctions in scoring based on income, gender, grade or school type
- ◆ Bottom of the class are TV shows and movies, earning an A from only 6% of students
 - ◆ Also performing poorly are friends, the internet and the news

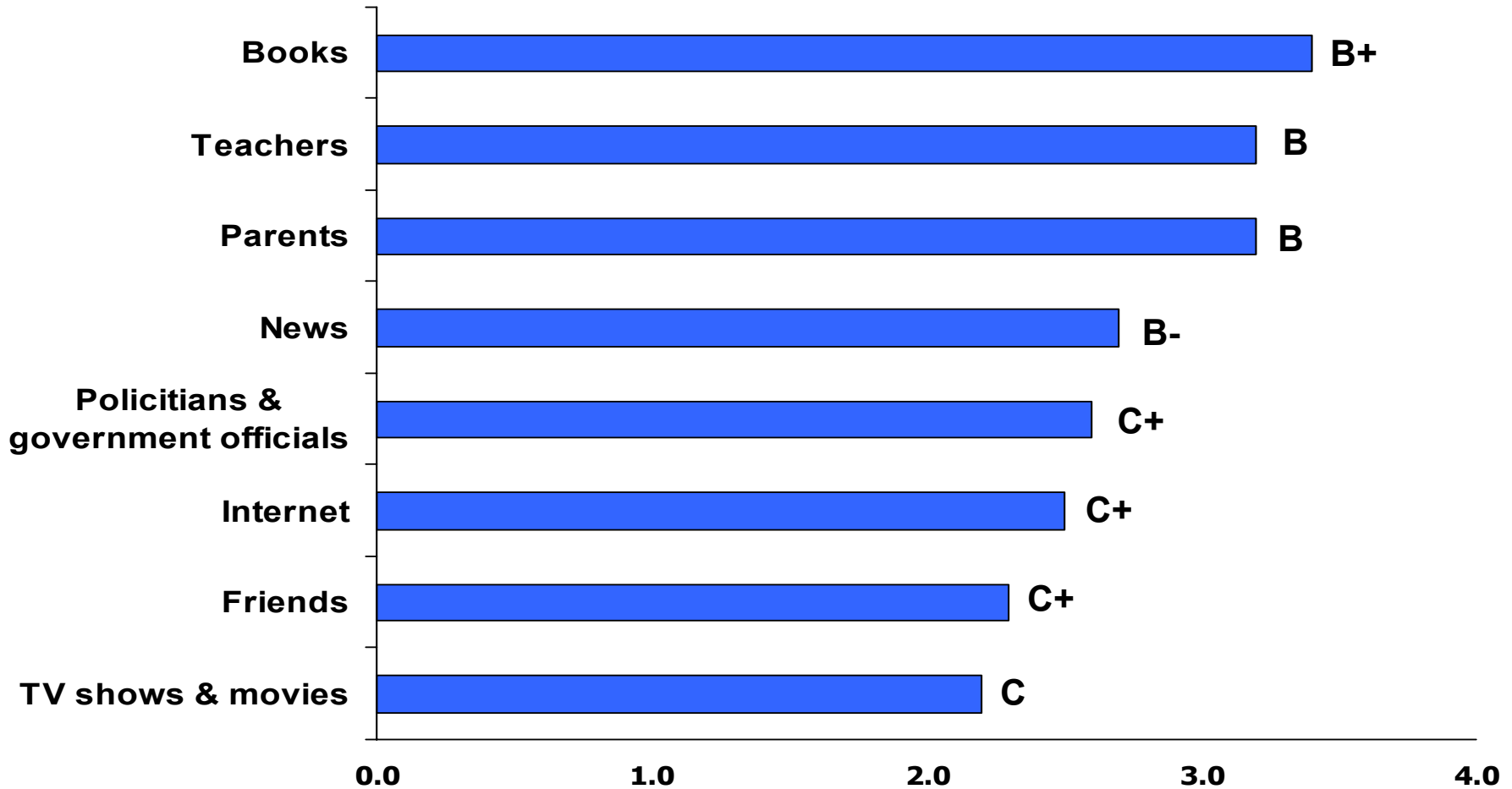
Learning about the Constitution – A grades only



Q29-36. People learn about things in different ways. I'm going to read you a list of people and things that might teach you about the Constitution and your role in it. Please grade them, using an A through F.

A grades shown

Learning about the Constitution – Average Grade



Q29-36. People learn about things in different ways. I'm going to read you a list of people and things that might teach you about the Constitution and your role in it. Please grade them, using an A through F.

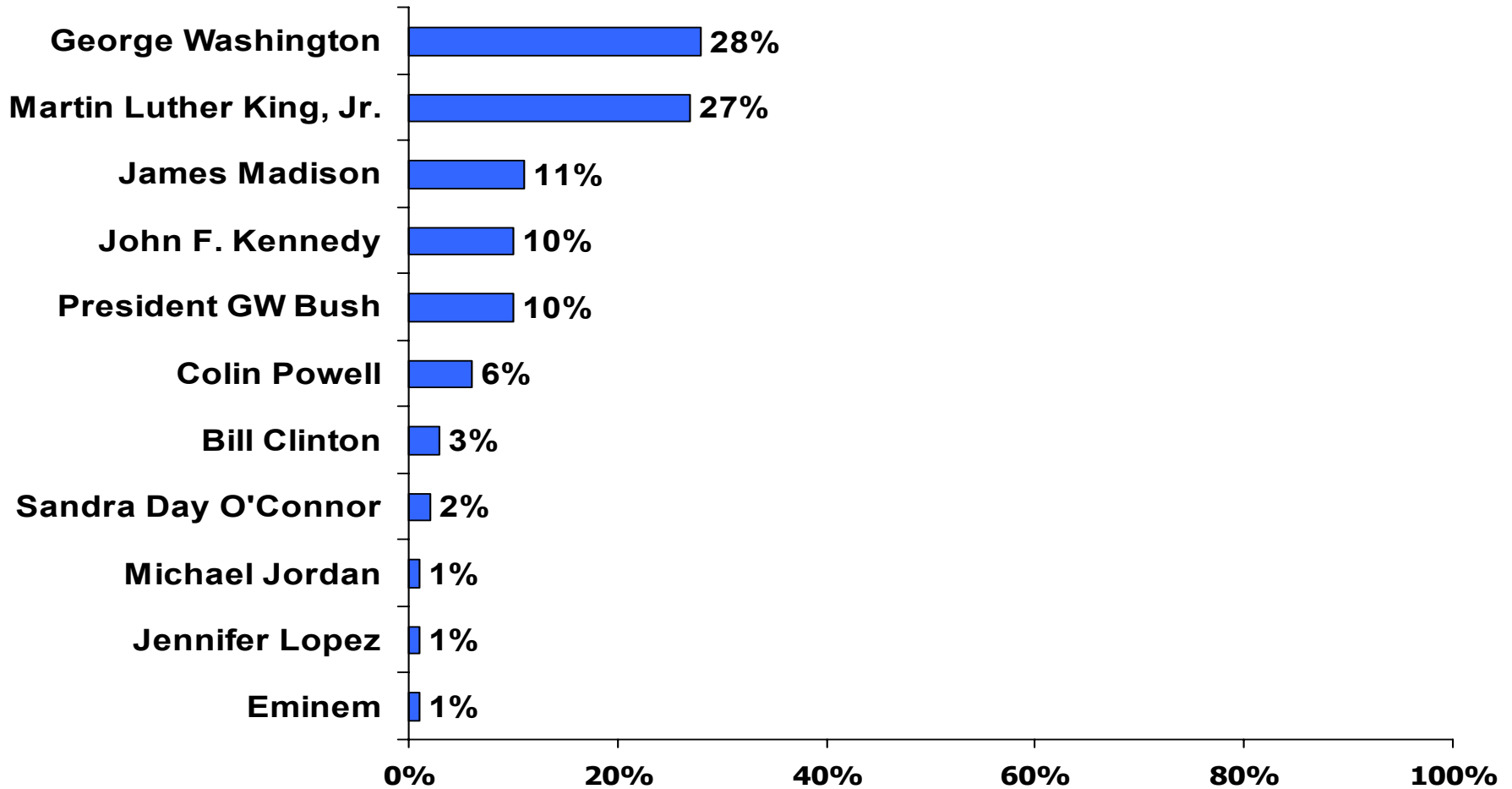
Learning about the Constitution

- ◆ Proving that he is still the father of the nation in the eyes of the youth, George Washington is students' favorite pick to teach their class about the Constitution

“Our Founding Fathers were geniuses.”

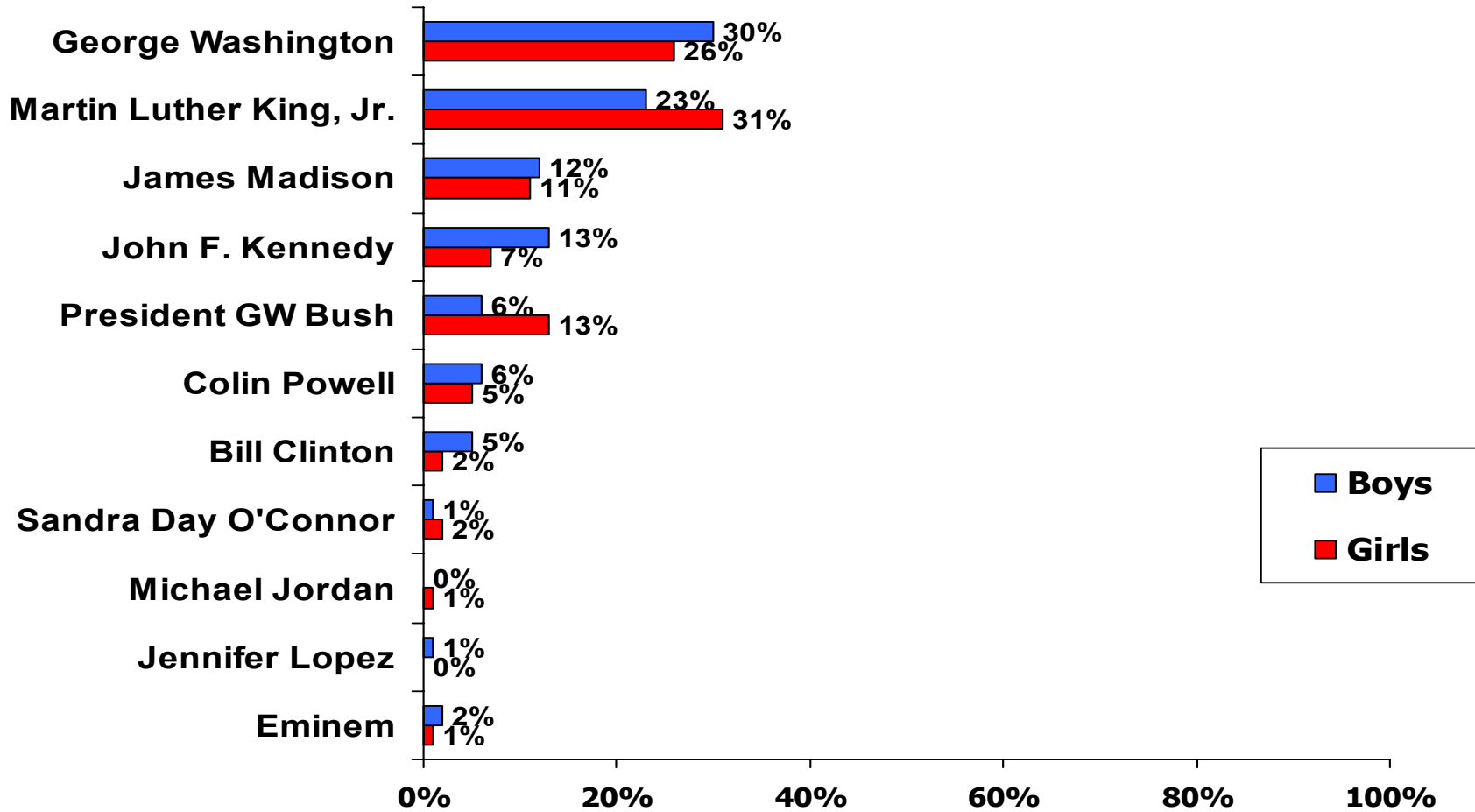
- ◆ Martin Luther King Jr. – who fought to make the words of the Founders a reality for all Americans – comes in a close second, by one percentage point (28% vs. 27%)
 - ◆ He is also the number one choice among girls
- ◆ Least appealing as teachers of the Constitution are three popular icons, Eminem, Michael Jordan and Jennifer Lopez

Learning About the Constitution



Q37. I'm going to read you a list of influential people of today and from the past. Which one would you pick to teach your class about the Constitution?

Learning About the Constitution

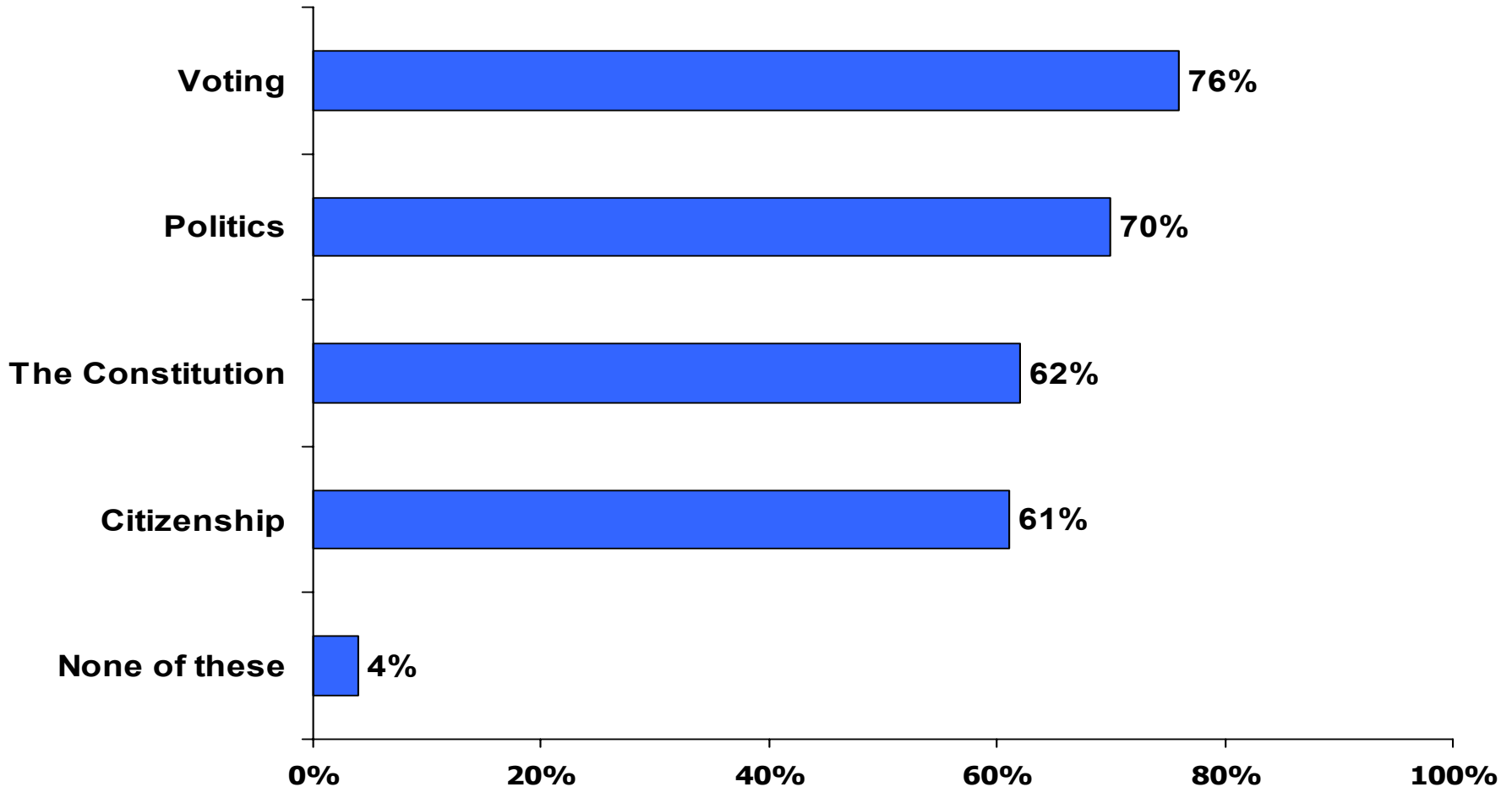


Q37. I'm going to read you a list of influential people of today and from the past. Which one would you pick to teach your class about the Constitution?

Learning about Constitutional Issues

- ◆ Many students think that their parents are doing a good job of talking to them about civics issues, with 41% of respondents saying that their parents had spoken to them about voting, the Constitution, politics and citizenship
 - ◆ Students whose parents had a high school education or less and/or an income of \$40K or below were significantly less likely to have covered all these issues
- ◆ Overall, “voting” was the subject most discussed (by a total of 76% of parents), followed by “politics” at 70%

Learning about Constitutional Issues



Q46. I'm going to read you a few subjects. After I read them, please tell me which of these your parents have ever talked to you about?

Rights in Schools

Voices from the survey...

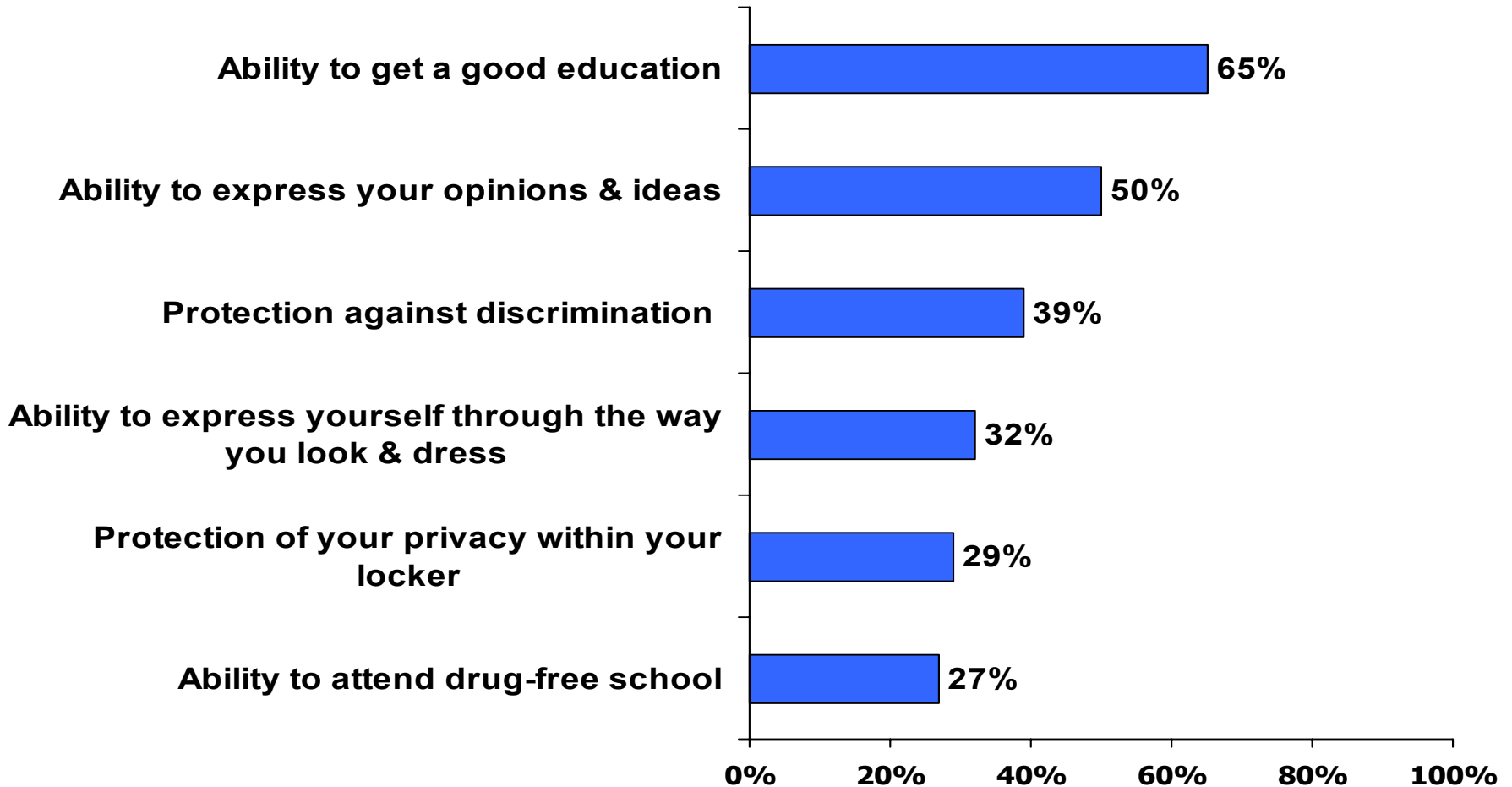
“Minor’s rights should be a little more defined.”

“I never actually thought about [the Constitution] because it doesn’t affect minors as much as adults.”

Rights in Schools – Best Job of Protecting

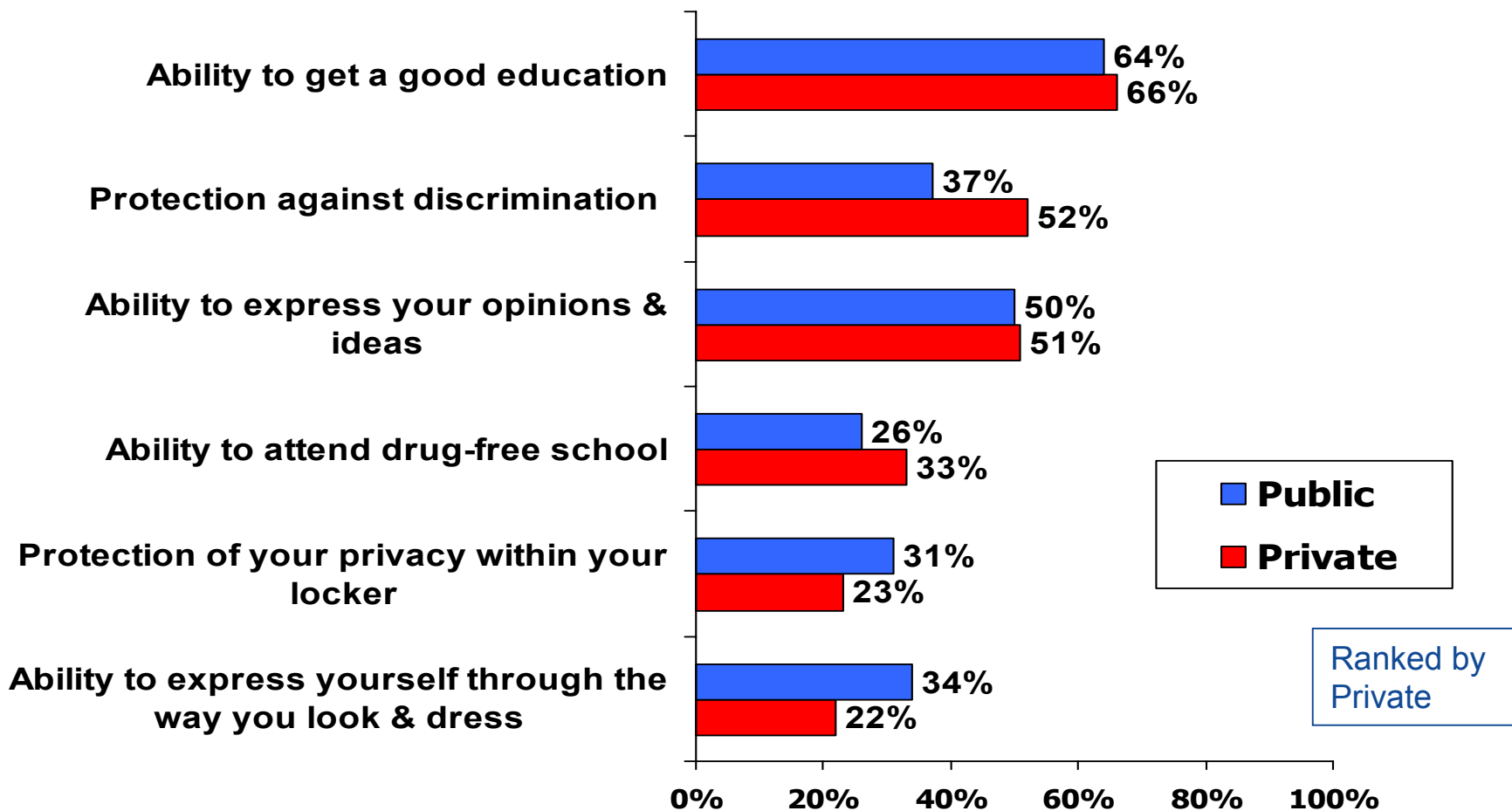
- ◆ When asked to rate which rights (or those things that students may perceive as rights) schools did best at protecting, students give the highest rating to “ability to get a good education,” followed by freedom of speech, and protection against discrimination
 - ◆ But public school children are significantly less likely than private school children to feel they are protected against discrimination
- ◆ Students do not think their schools do a good job of protecting the privacy of their lockers and providing a drug-free environment

Rights in Schools – best job of protecting for students



Q40. I'm going to read you a list of rights that you might have in school. After I read the list, please tell me which rights your school does the best job of protecting for students.

Rights in Schools – best job of protecting for students

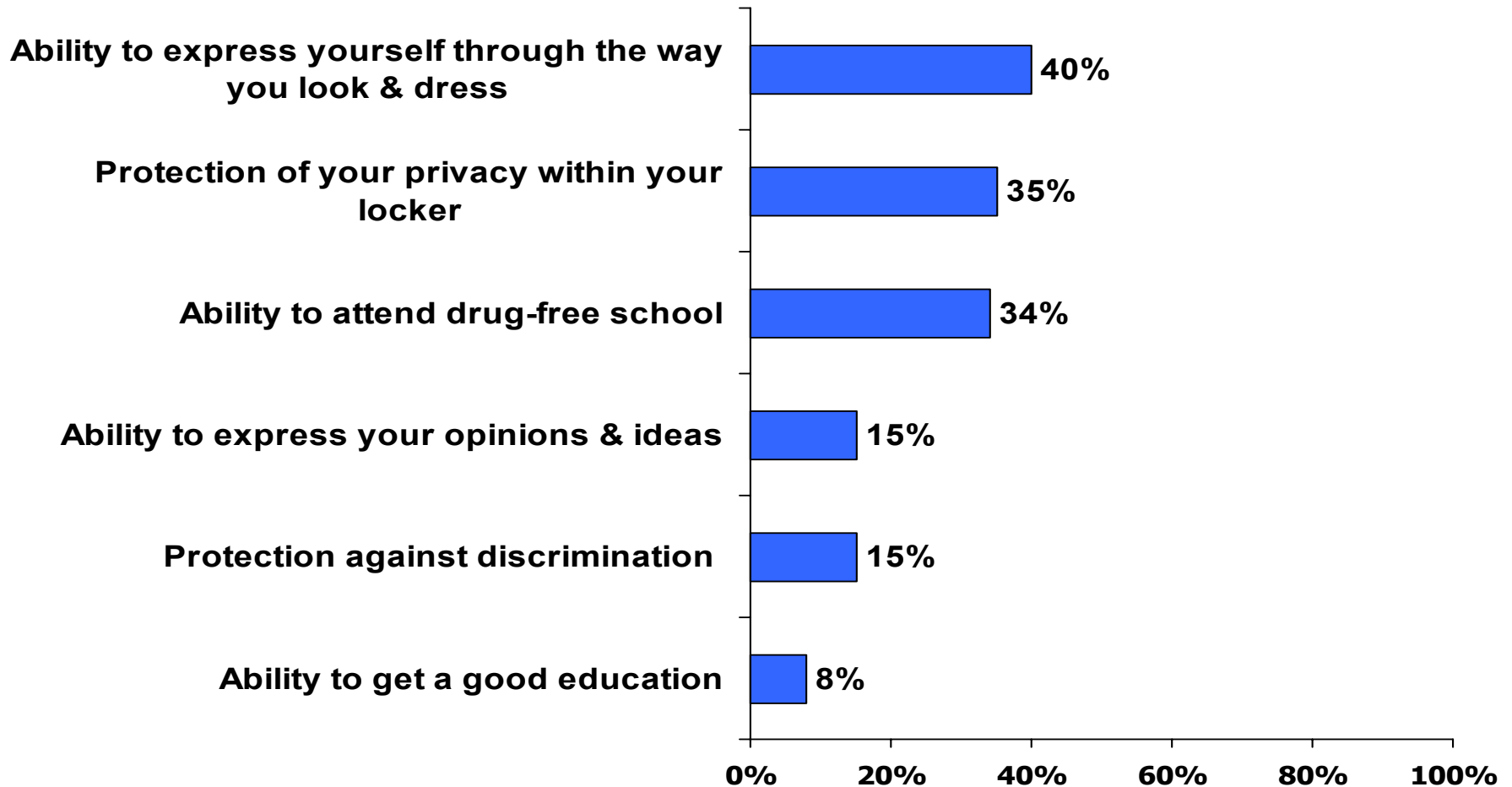


Q40. I'm going to read you a list of rights that you might have in school. After I read the list, please tell me which rights your school does the best job of protecting for students.

Rights in Schools – the Worst Job

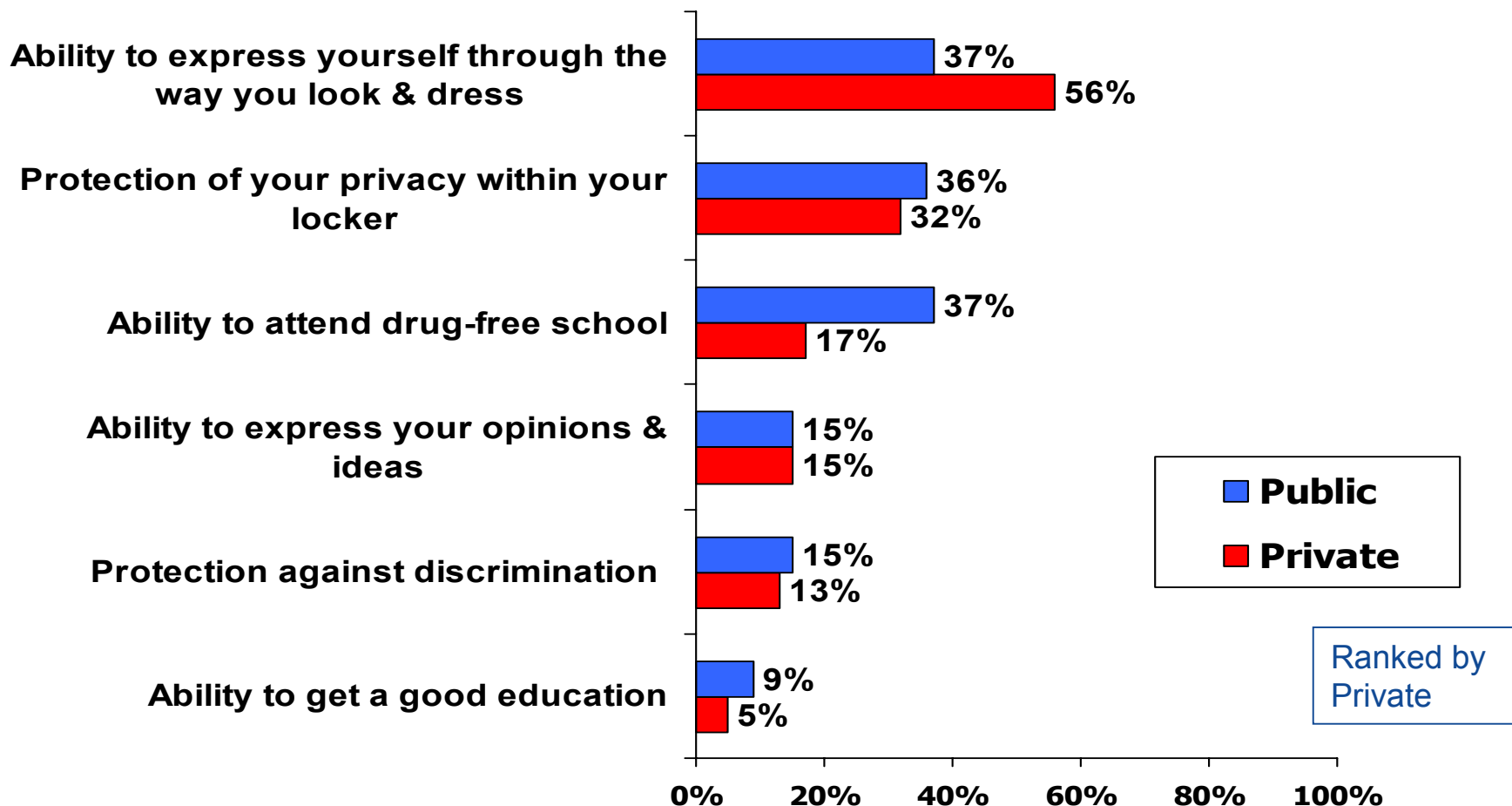
- ◆ When asked to select rights from a list that their schools did the worst job of protecting, the top two choices were “express yourself through the way you look and dress,” (40%) and “privacy within your locker” (35%)
 - ◆ Private school students are particularly disappointed in their school’s protection of their ability to express themselves through look and dress (56%)
- ◆ The “ability to attend a drug-free school” also ranked high on the “worst” list (34%), particularly for public school students

Rights in Schools – worst job of protecting for students



Q41. I'm going to read you a list of rights that you might have in school. After I read the list, please tell me which rights your school does the worst job of protecting for students.

Rights in Schools – worst job of protecting for students

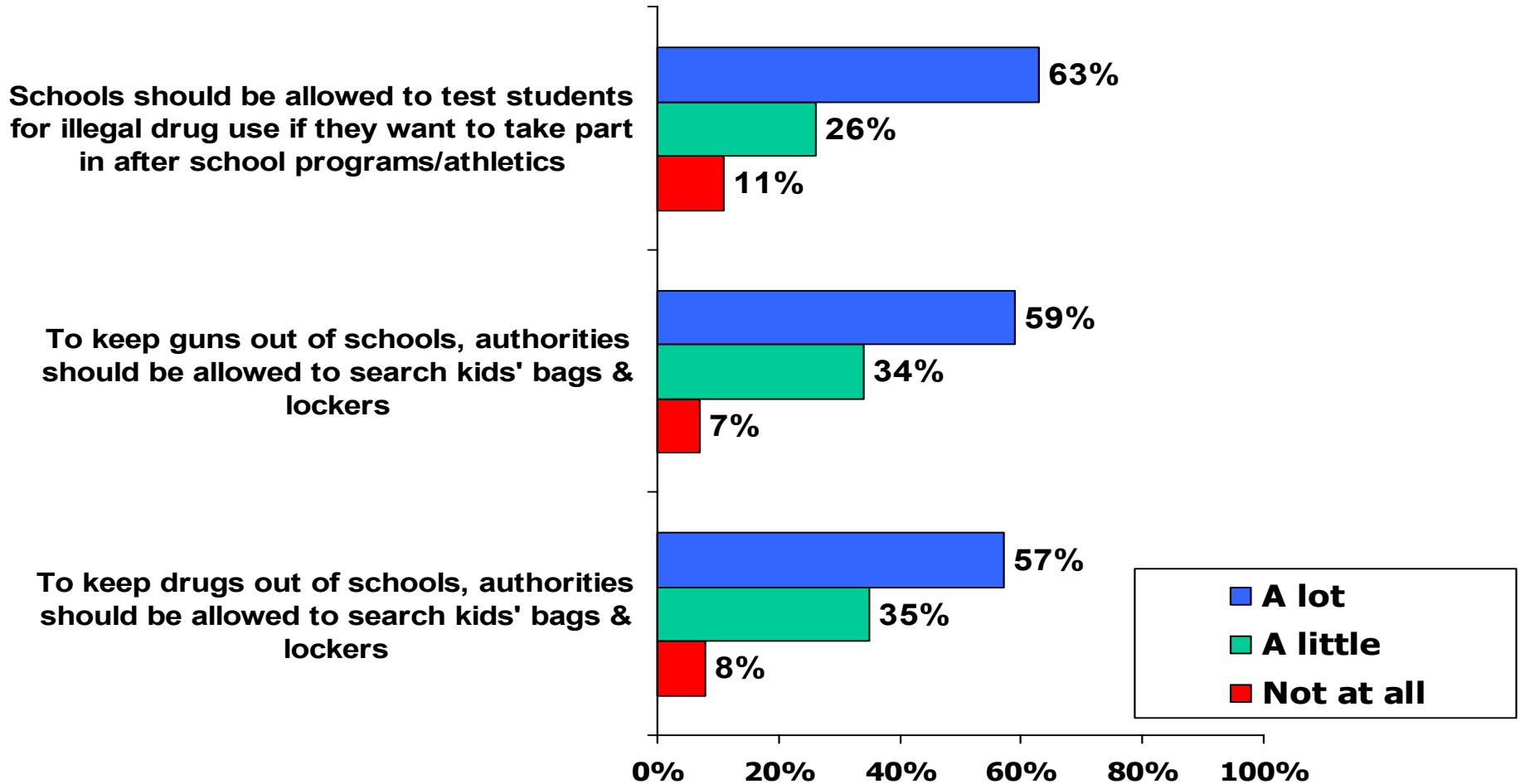


Q41. I'm going to read you a list of rights that you might have in school. After I read the list, please tell me which rights your school does the worst job of protecting for students.

Rights in Schools

- ◆ Students are overwhelmingly prepared to accept significant limitations on their rights in schools for their own protection
 - ◆ We see well over half of all of students strongly supporting searches of lockers and bags by authorities to keep guns and drugs out of school, and drug tests for admittance to after-school and athletics programs
 - ◆ These are opposed by 10% or less of students
- ◆ **It appears that “protection” from drugs or guns within the school environment, would motivate students to sacrifice more of their privacy in terms of locker searches**

Rights in Schools

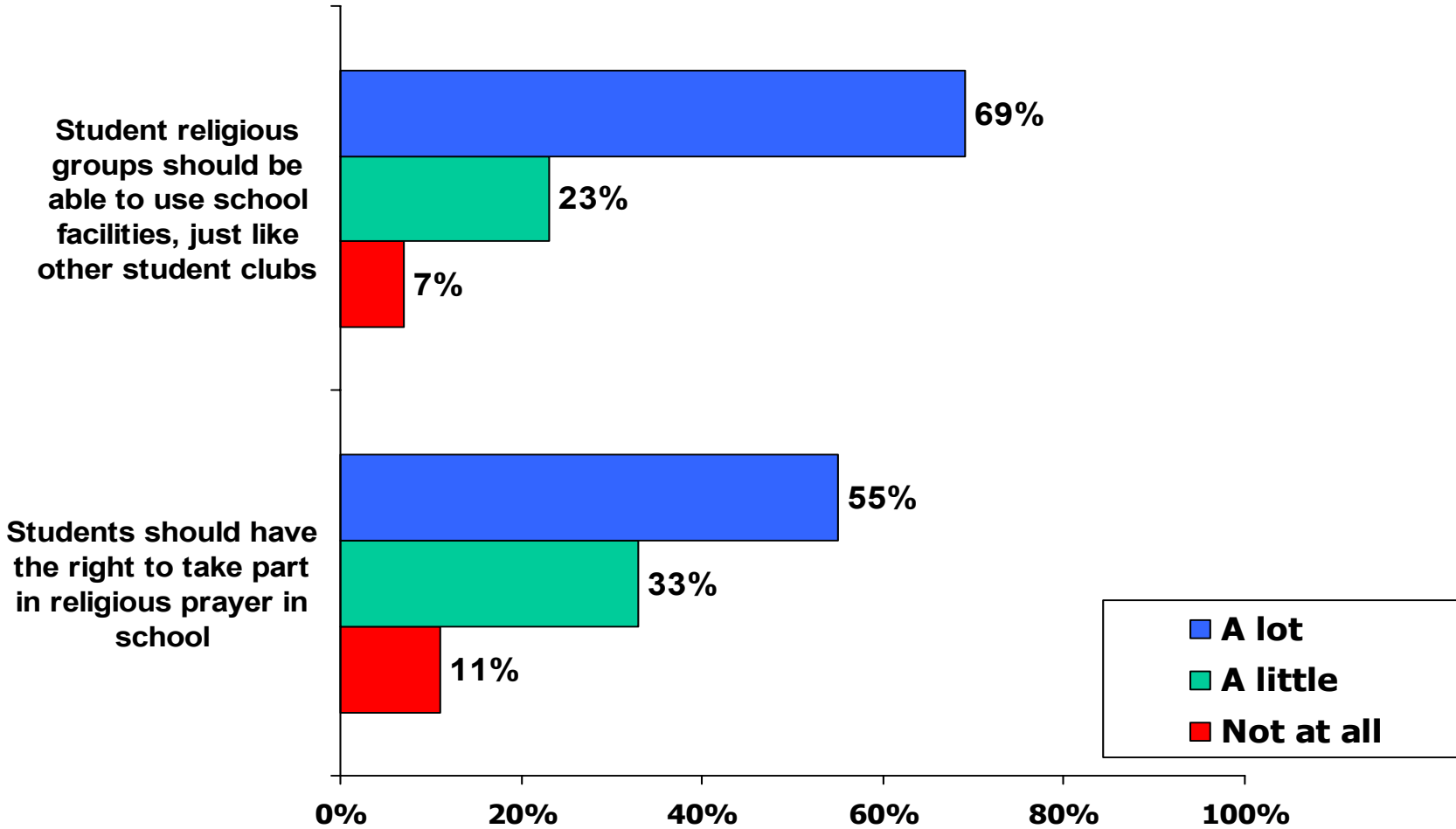


Q42-44. I am going to read you a few statements. Please tell me if you agree a lot, a little or not at all with each statement.

Rights in Schools

- ◆ Free exercise of religion is important to high school students, as reflected in their thinking on prayer and religious groups in schools
- ◆ Over 90% of students agreed (69% strongly) that religious groups should be able to use school facilities, just like other student clubs
 - ◆ However public school students are less supportive of this position than private school students, which tend to be private religious school students
- ◆ On the issue of prayer in schools, 55% of students strongly support the right to take part in prayer in schools, with only 11% opposing it

Rights in Schools

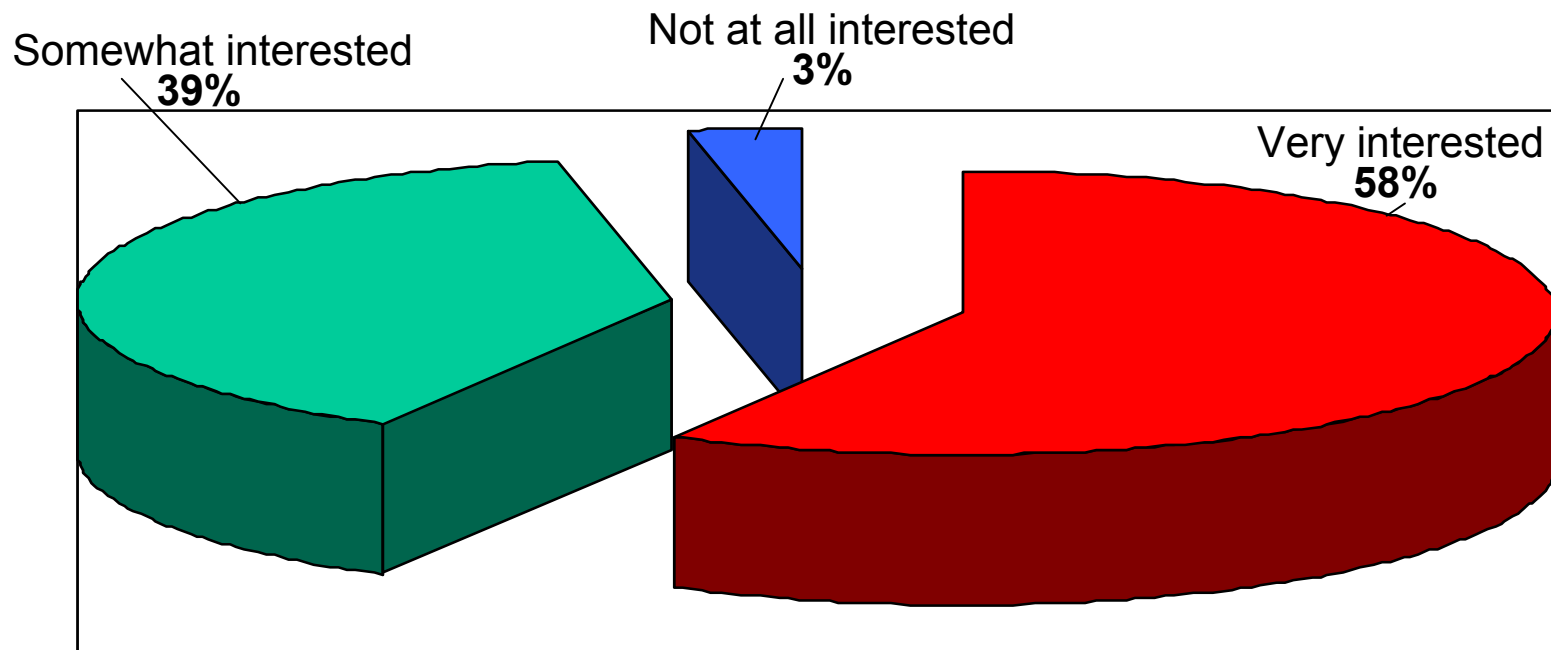


Q45 & Q49. I am going to read you a few statements. Please tell me if you agree a lot, a little or not at all with each statement.

Attitudes Towards Voting

- ◆ Well over half (58%) of all students are very interested in voting, with 39% being somewhat interested
 - ◆ Girls, private school students, and those whose parents vote, are all significantly more likely to be “very interested” in voting than others

Attitudes Towards Voting



Q47. How interested are you in being able to vote? Would you say you are very, somewhat or not at all interested in being able to vote?

StrategyOne Contact Information

- ◆ For more information on this study or other StrategyOne research and consulting services contact:
 - Jennifer Scott, Ph.D
 - Tel: 212-704-8286
 - jennifer.scott@strategyone.net