

Juneteenth

American Identity Research Project

May-June 2022

INTRODUCTION

Although the United States has always had competing narratives about its national identity, today the competition has transformed into a dangerous fight. A critical piece of moving America towards a healthier, more inclusive democracy will be lifting-up narratives of national identity that can reach and resonate across lines of difference.

Since 2020, More in Common has been studying beliefs and attitudes towards American identity and how they vary across groups in the United States. Beginning in February 2022, More in Common began organizing monthly meetings of a table of non-profits and civil society partners who are similarly invested in the subject of American history and identity, and who want to act from an evidence base to draw Americans together. These partners serve as collaborators and informal advisers on this project.

Throughout 2022 More in Common has also maintained a diverse and representative online community of approximately 250 Americans for ongoing qualitative research activities, including online discussions, open ended questions, content tests and short surveys. A selection of relevant quotes from this community has been included in this report. These responses have been lightly edited for brevity and clarity and pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of participants.

In May and June 2022 More in Common partnered with YouGov to field a national survey to a representative sample of 2,500 adult U.S. citizens. This survey is the first of three that will be fielded in 2022 to explore associations with American identity, figures and events in American history, connections to national holidays, aspirations for our shared future, and more.

The attitudes captured in the data show significant divisions around interpretation of U.S. history and a wide spectrum of strength of attachment to American identity. However, between the points of polarization we see meaningful commonality in seeing the United States with nuance and humility, indicating the potential for American identity to help transcend conflict between groups and bridge lines of political division.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

US Citizen Survey

Results are shown as “U.S. Average”.

More in Common partnered with international polling company YouGov to conduct online survey interviews with n=2,500 adult US citizens from May 17 to June 3, 2022. The data was weighted to be representative of American citizens using propensity scores, with score functions including gender, age, race, education, and region. The weights were then post-stratified on 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (6-category), race (5-category), and education (4-category). The margin of error (adjusted for weighting) is +/- 1.96 for the US average and higher for subgroups.

Americans in Conversation – online research community

Results are shown in selected quotes.

More in Common has recruited and maintained an online research community since February 2022 for ongoing qualitative research activities. The panel includes approximately representative distributions of Americans along lines of gender, age, race, political party, educational level, and geographic region. The relevant exercises to this study include:

- *Juneteenth activity*
 - N = 271 Americans
 - Fielded on May 31 – June 6, 2022

Responses to these activities were aggregated, analyzed, and then reviewed for representative quotes that illustrate key sentiments on the subjects studied.

Where provided, names have been changed to protect the privacy of the respondent.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. There is wide recognition of division, including around U.S. history

Overall, 77% of Americans say the **country feels divided** today, and they are almost 20 times more likely to say that the United States is “very divided” (56%) than that it is “very unified” (3%).

Americans see our divisions as dangerous. Fully 81% believe that the **greatest threats** to the country come “from within the United States”, rather than “abroad from foreign nations” (19%).

Only 10% of Americans think that the United States is unified today on the **topic of U.S. history**. Fully 71% say that we are somewhat or very divided.

2. Today, Juneteenth has low significance to most, except among Black Americans

As America approaches the second year that **Juneteenth is a federal holiday**, the occasion holds significance to relatively few. Juneteenth holds comparable significance to Columbus Day, and far less than MLK Day, 4th of July, or Thanksgiving.

However, **Black Americans** rated Juneteenth with an average of 72 out of 100 in personal significance, more than double the national average, and placing it on near equal footing with Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and Thanksgiving among Black Americans.

Democrats and Gen Z also express high levels of **warmth** towards the new federal holiday, while older generations and Republicans are cooler towards it.

3. However, Americans agree on principles for teaching and dealing with the past

Americans say it is important for students to be taught the history of their own racial backgrounds as well as of Americans of different races. This consensus extends to recognizing the importance of **teaching “the history of racism in America”**.

Meanwhile there is little appetite for shielding students from US history’s uglier chapters. Most agree that “**Books with content that may offend** people should not be removed from schools or libraries, but rather left for students to grapple with.”

Despite divisions and disagreements, **American identity** is important to 3 in 4 (76%), and it is important to at least 60% of Americans spanning across racial groups, generations, and political parties.

Divisions

77%

of Americans say that the country feels either “somewhat” or “very divided” today.

71%

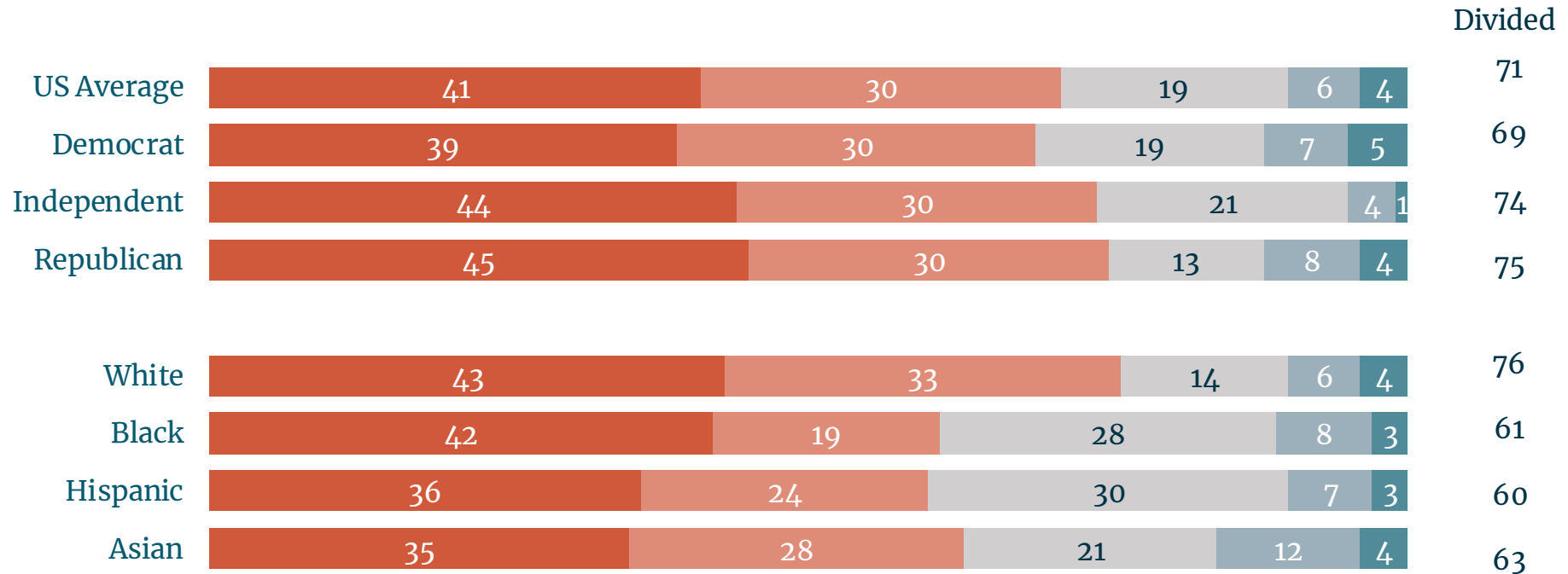
of Americans say that today the country feels either “somewhat” or “very divided” on the topic of U.S. history.

7 in 10 Americans believe that the country is very or somewhat divided on the topic of US history.

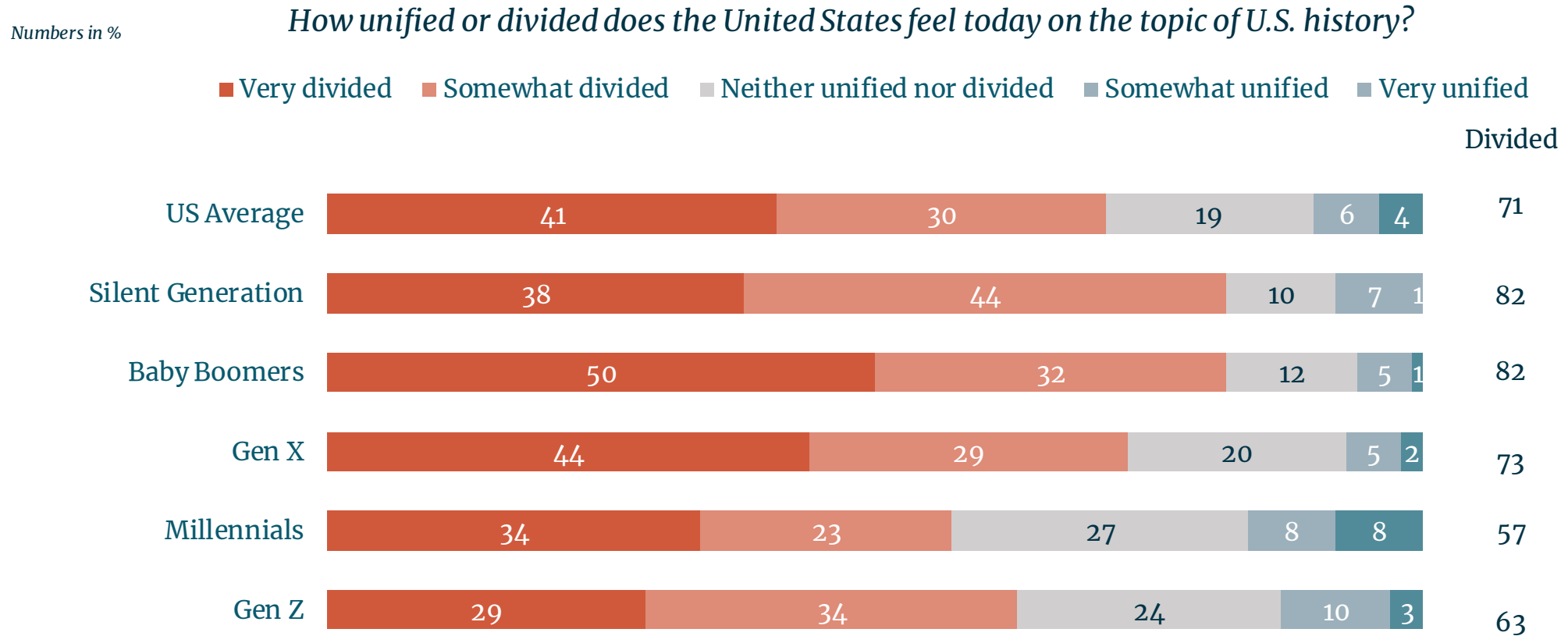
Numbers in %

How unified or divided does the United States feel today on the topic of U.S. history?

■ Very divided
 ■ Somewhat divided
 ■ Neither unified nor divided
 ■ Somewhat unified
 ■ Very unified



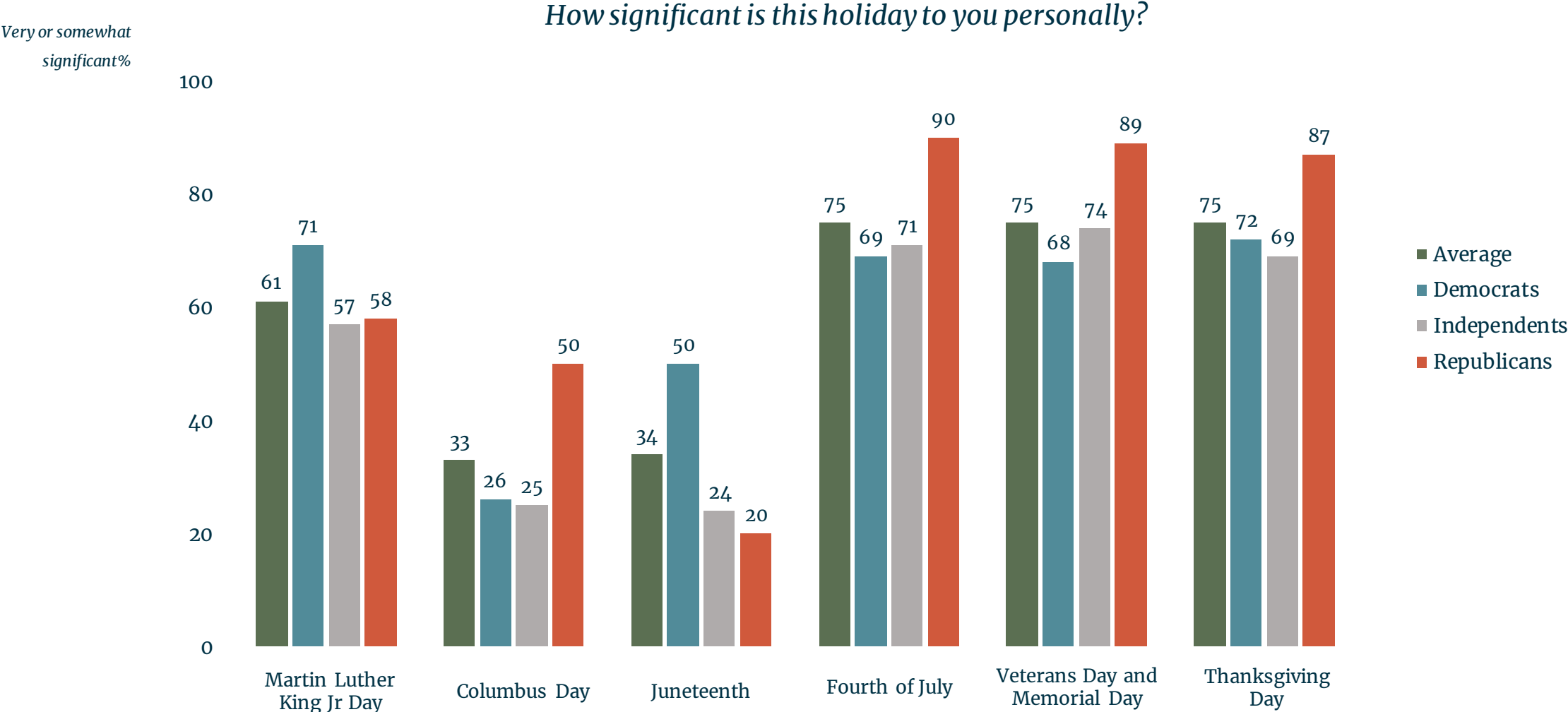
While most Americans in each generation feels the country is divided on the topic of US history, compared to Millennials and Gen Z, Americans from older generations are more likely to say so.



Juneteenth

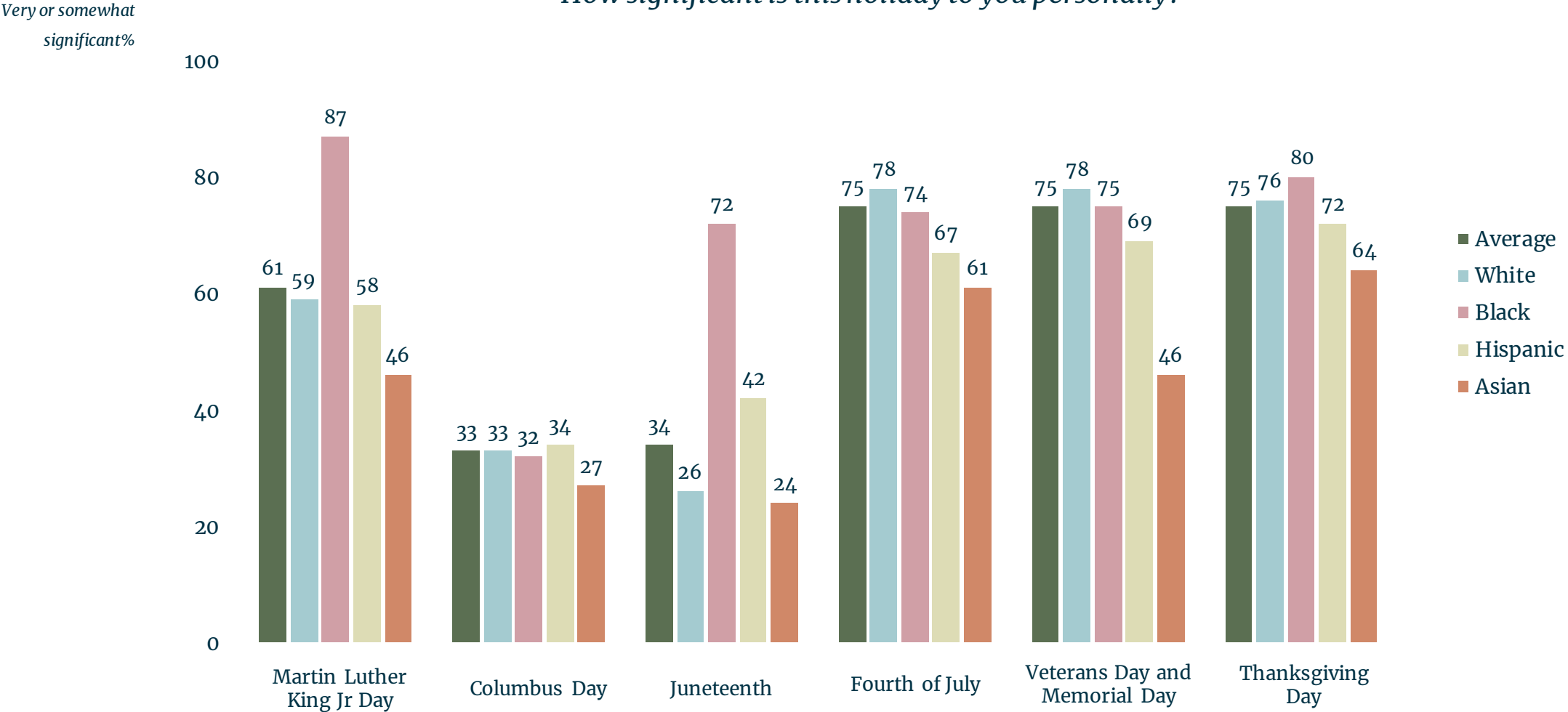
34% of Americans feel that Juneteenth is significant to them personally.

Half of Democrats say that Juneteenth is somewhat or very significant to them personally. 1 in 5 Republicans and 1 in 4 Independents feel the same way.



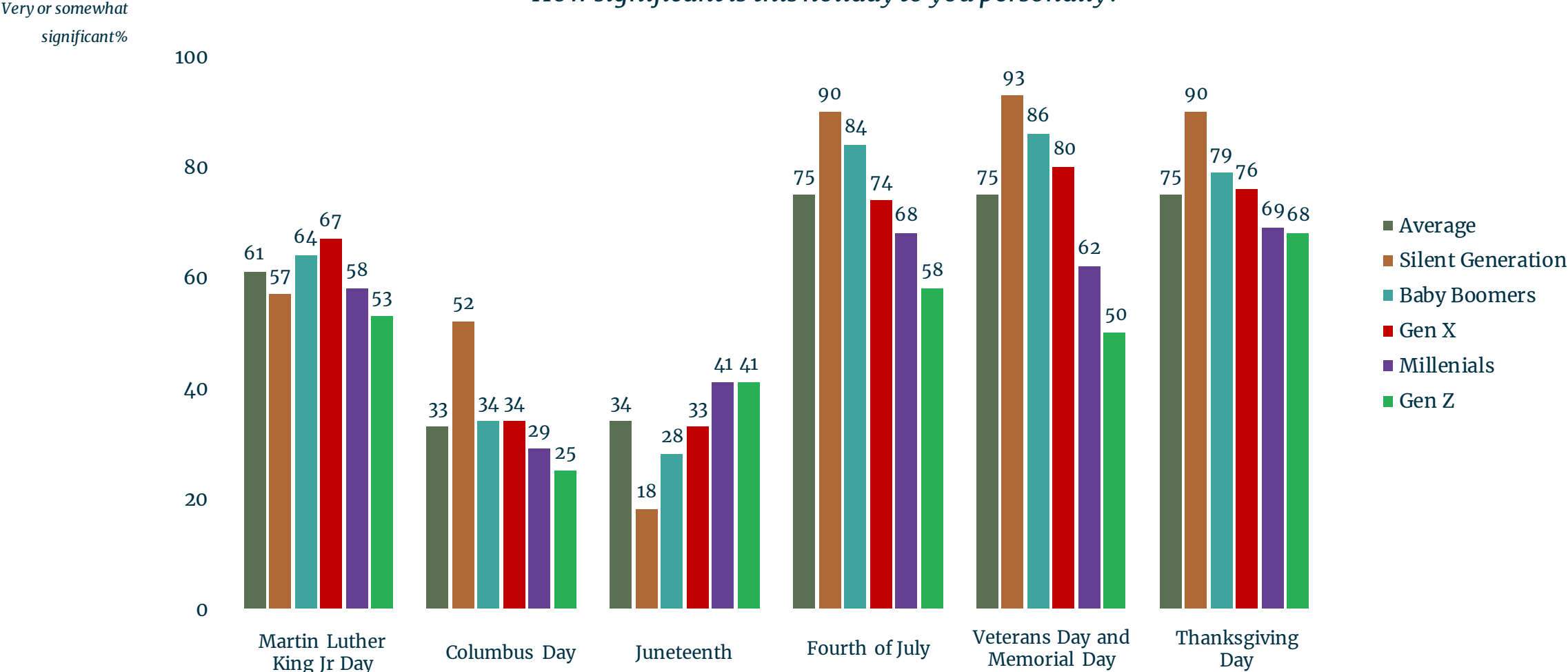
Fully 7 in 10 Black Americans view Juneteenth as somewhat or very significant personally, whereas less than one third of white and Asian Americans feel the same way.

How significant is this holiday to you personally?



About 4 in 10 Millennial and Gen Z respondents say Juneteenth is significant to them, compared to less than one in five in the Silent Generation.

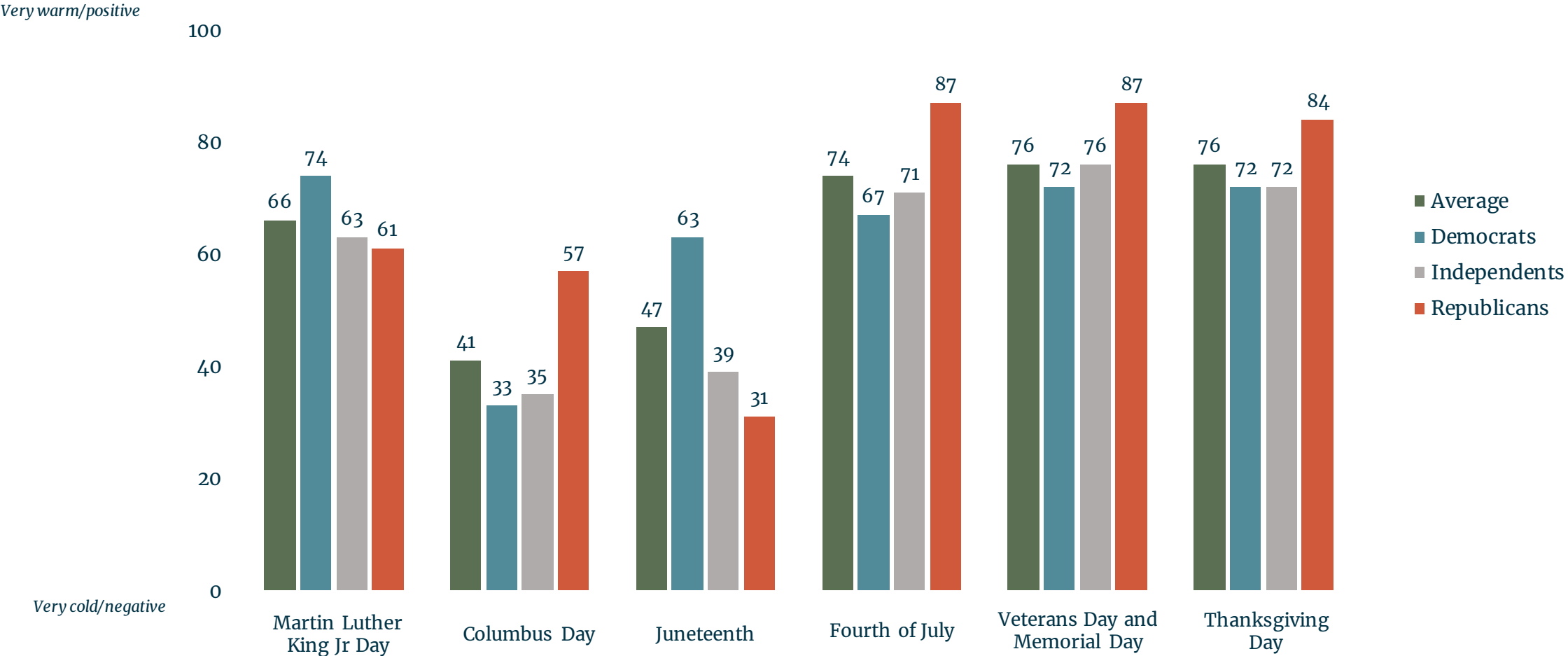
How significant is this holiday to you personally?



Americans in general feel lukewarm towards Juneteenth, compared to other holidays.

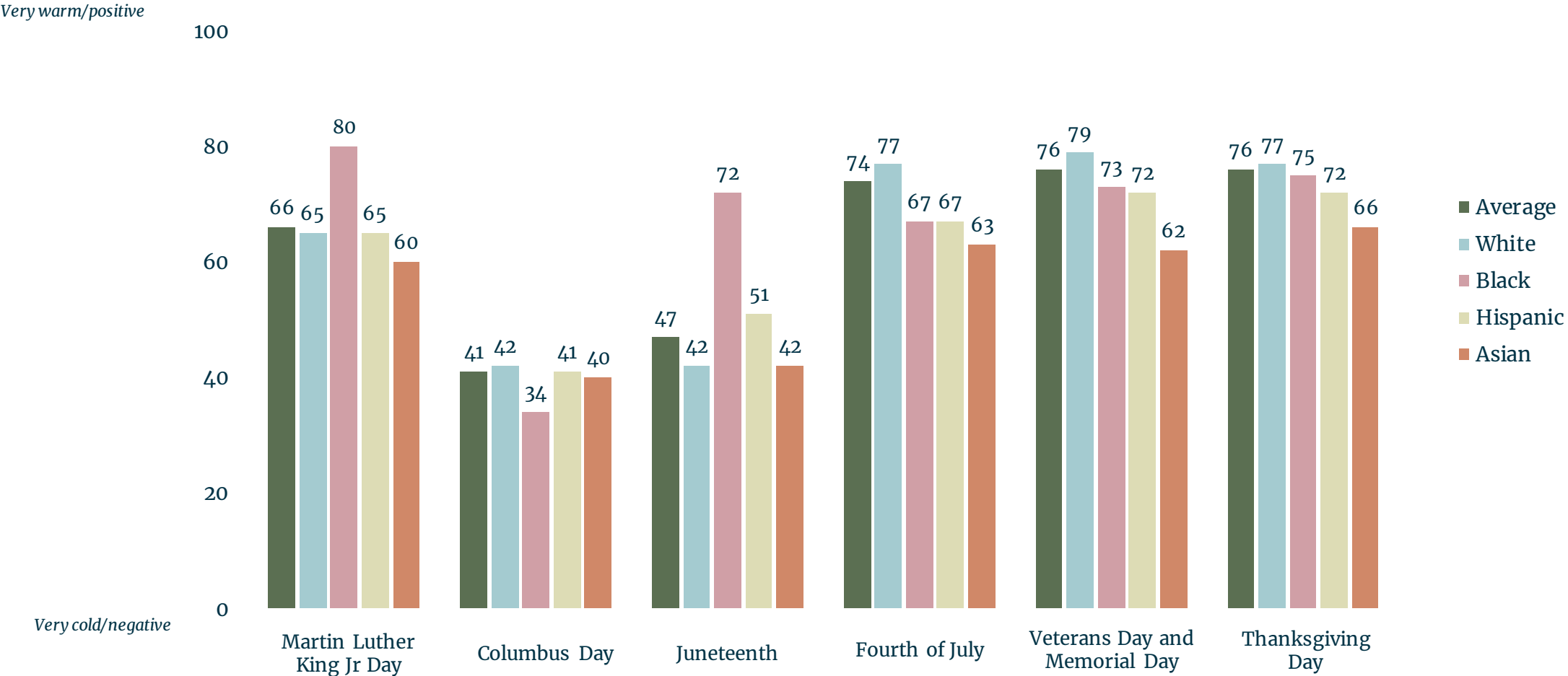
Democrats, Black Americans, and younger Americans are more likely to feel warmer towards Juneteenth.

Americans in general feel warmer towards 4th of July, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving and MLK Day than Juneteenth. Democrats feel significantly warmer than Republicans towards Juneteenth.



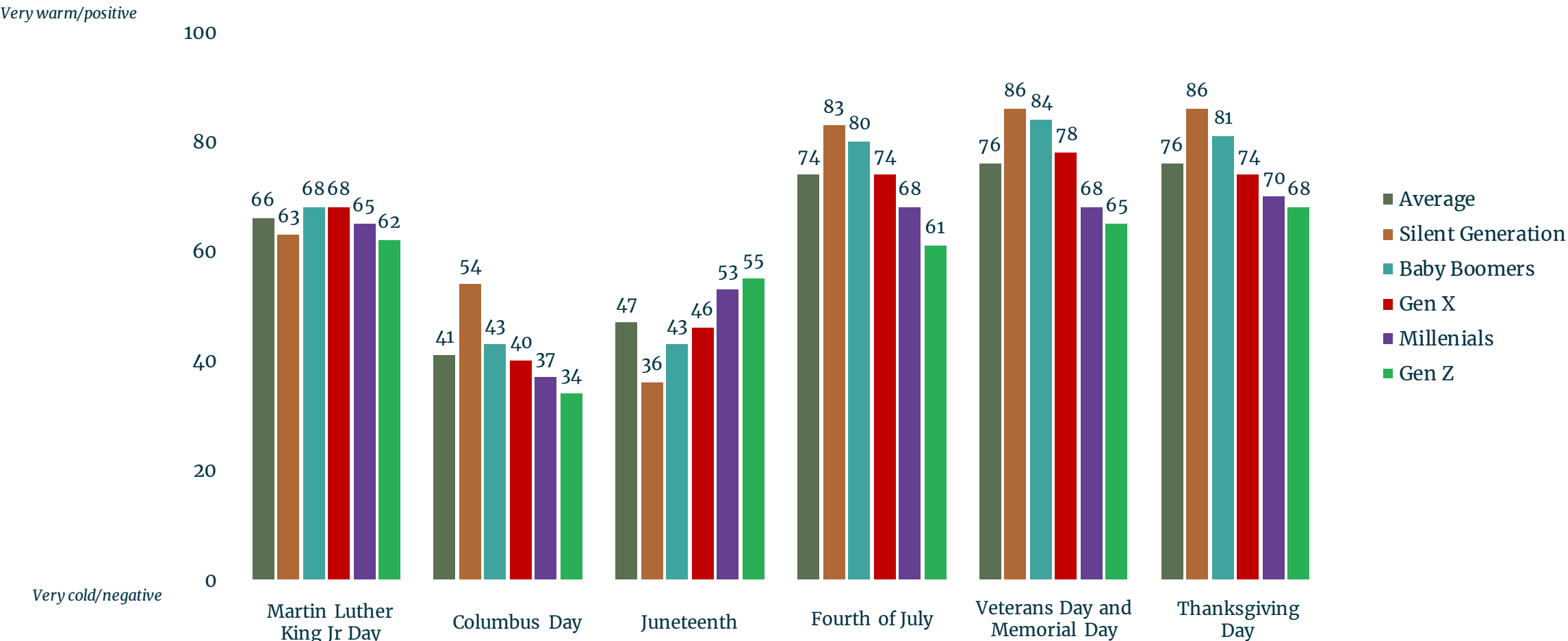
Survey question: On a scale from 0 to 100, how cold or warm do you feel towards the following? [Showing averages]

Compared to other racial groups, Black Americans feel significantly warmer towards MLK Day and Juneteenth.



Survey question: On a scale from 0 to 100, how cold or warm do you feel towards the following? [Showing averages]

Younger generations feel more warmly towards Juneteenth. Older generations feel more warmly towards Columbus Day, Fourth of July, Veterans/Memorial Day, and Thanksgiving.



Survey question: On a scale from 0 to 100, how cold or warm do you feel towards the following? [Showing averages]

Some believe that compared to other historical events Juneteenth is not significant enough to warrant national celebration; a few feel that there is too much emphasis on race and making Juneteenth a national holiday is exclusionary to other racial groups.

“I don't think the country should celebrate this day. It is a relatively insignificant day in history. For instance, shouldn't we as a nation celebrate the day the emancipation proclamation was signed and put in force. That impacted the entire nation. June 19th impacted Galveston, TX.”

– Victor, age 55-64 White male, Devoted Conservative, California

“I think they should celebrate but it has proven to be exclusionary and clearly established as a ‘black’ holiday that instead of celebrating progress and something positive, it is used as a club to make others feel bad. It is the only race-based holiday and seems to be the way people want to celebrate it.”

– Bill, age 35-44 White male, Traditional Conservative, Ohio

Survey question: How do you think the country should celebrate Juneteenth?

Many believe that the country should celebrate Juneteenth by officially recognizing its significance, organizing gatherings and educational events. Others are less sure how to celebrate the holiday appropriately.

Community events and celebration

“General community gatherings, cultural/educational events, readings, art activities and performances, parties/cookouts/picnics, decorations.”

– Kyle, age 35-44 Black male, Progressive Activist, Pennsylvania

“They should plan some outdoor activities, open museum when citizens can see a video/audio visual about the Juneteenth and why it is important to the US.”

– Simon, age 35-44 Asian male, Traditional Conservative, California

“I think it should be a national day of education, so that everyone understands the significance of this holiday. We should also use the day to do acts of service aimed at helping those in our communities who were directly impacted by slavery.”

– Marion, age 35-44 White female, Traditional Liberal, Kentucky

Uncertainties around celebrating Juneteenth

“Not sure, as a middle-aged liberal white woman, if I should be celebrating or not. I DO NOT want to be politically incorrect.”

– Nora, age 45-54 White female, Progressive Activist, New York

“Unsure what we would do other than honor it.”

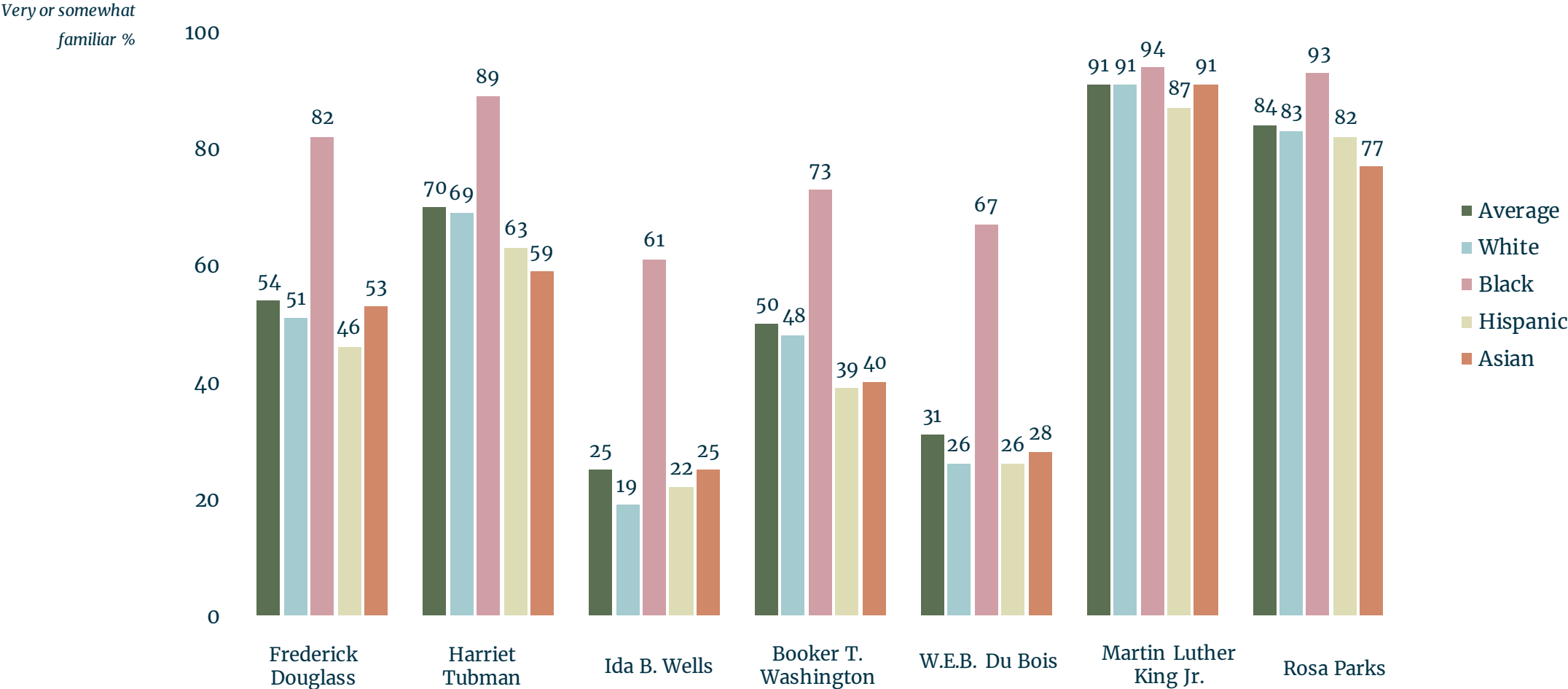
– Caroline, age 45-54 White female, Traditional Conservative, California

Survey question: How do you think the country should celebrate Juneteenth?

Teaching history

While most Americans agree that it is important for students to learn about the history of racial groups other than their own, non-Black Americans are much less familiar with Black historical figures, except for MLK and Rosa Parks.

How familiar are you with ...



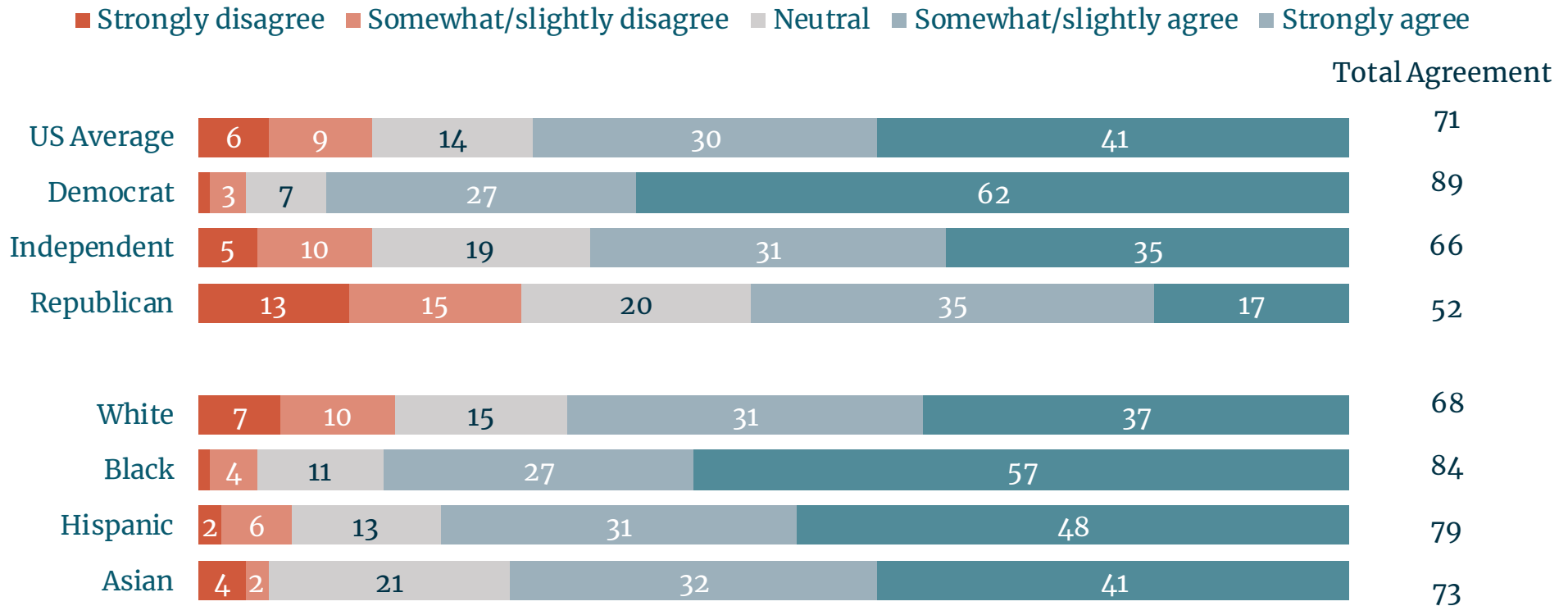
71%

believe that it's important to teach the history of racism in America.

Most Americans agree that it is important to teach students the history of racism, albeit with some partisan differences.

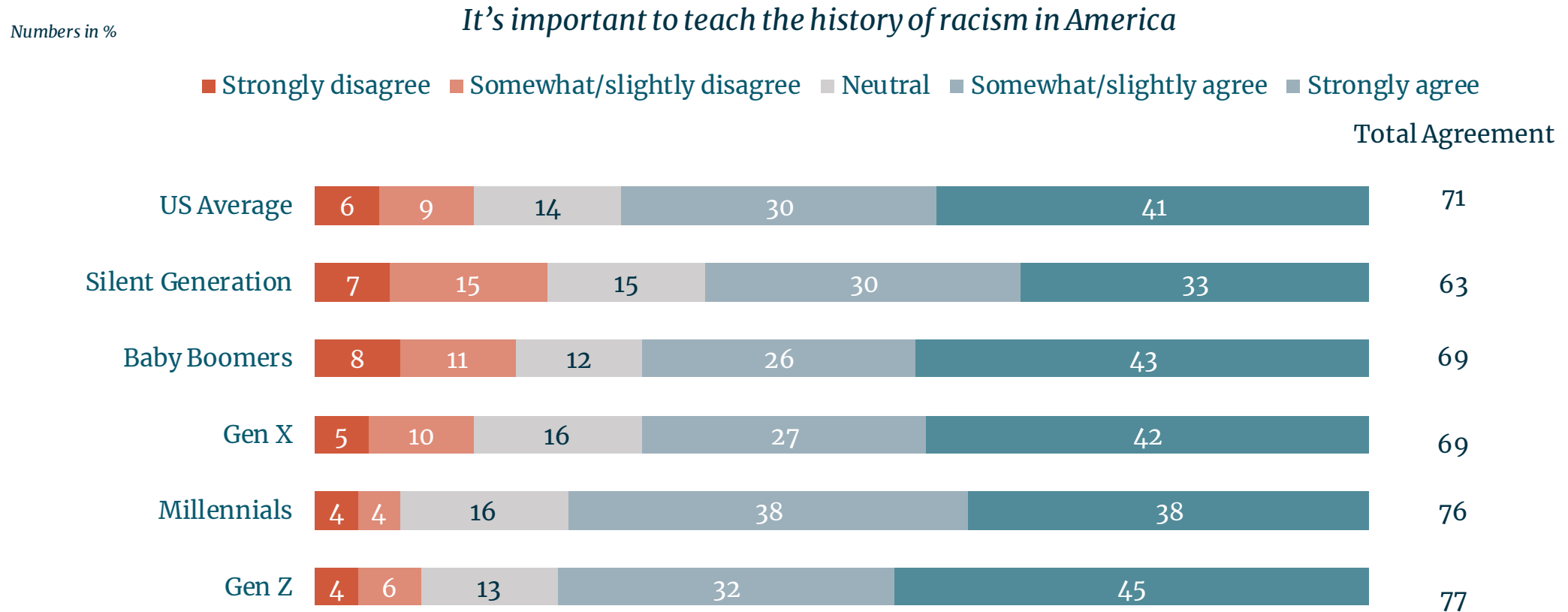
Numbers in %

It's important to teach the history of racism in America



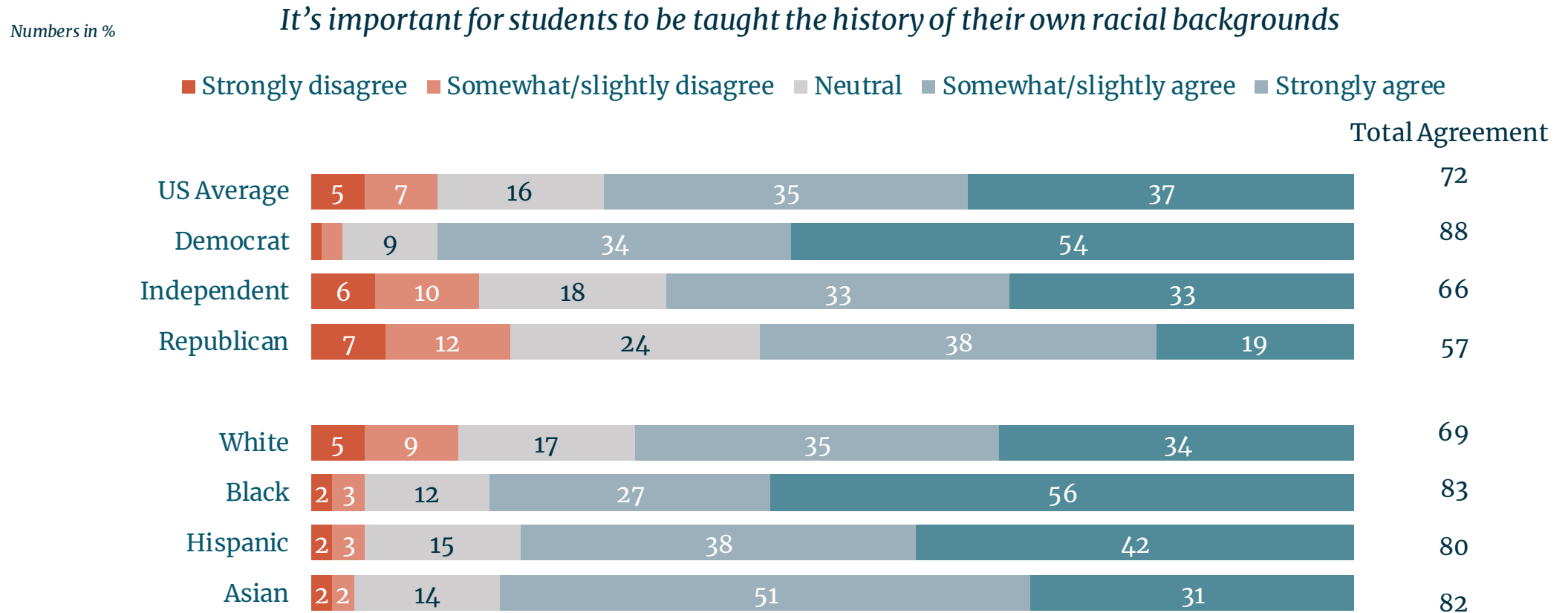
Survey question: How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Across generations, most Americans think it is important to teach the history of racism in America.



Survey question: How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Most Americans also agree that it is important to teach students the history of their own racial groups; slightly over half of Democrats and Black Americans strongly agree.



Survey question: How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

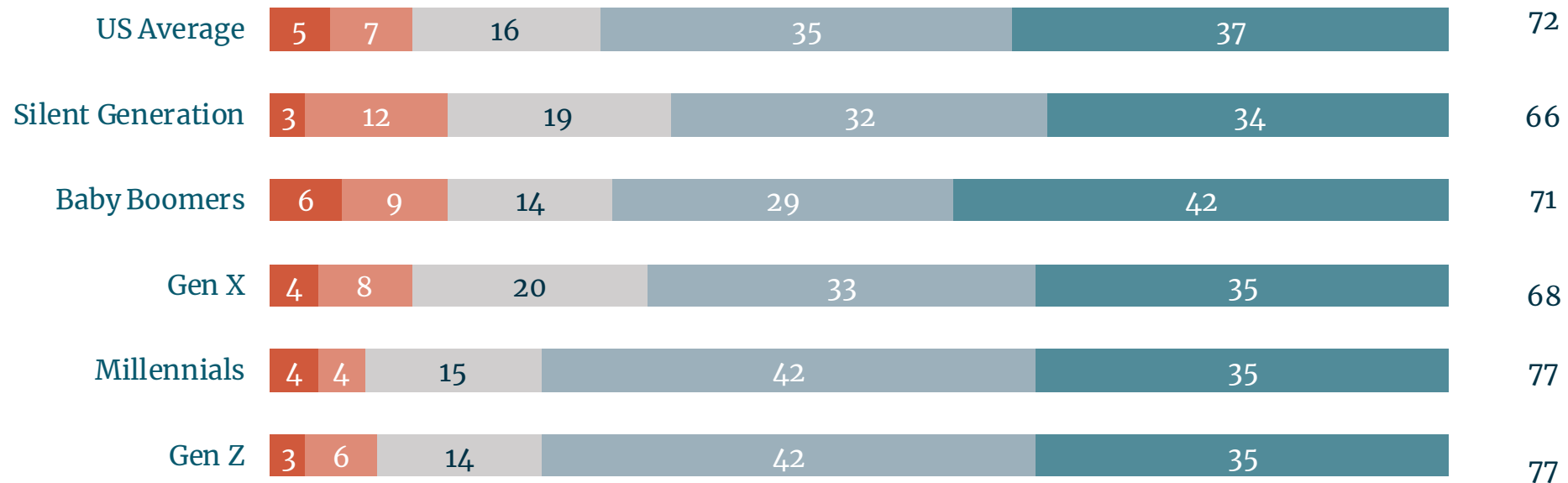
Across generations, most Americans think it is important that students be taught the history of their own racial backgrounds.

Numbers in %

It's important for students to be taught the history of their own racial backgrounds

■ Strongly disagree ■ Somewhat/slightly disagree ■ Neutral ■ Somewhat/slightly agree ■ Strongly agree

Total Agreement

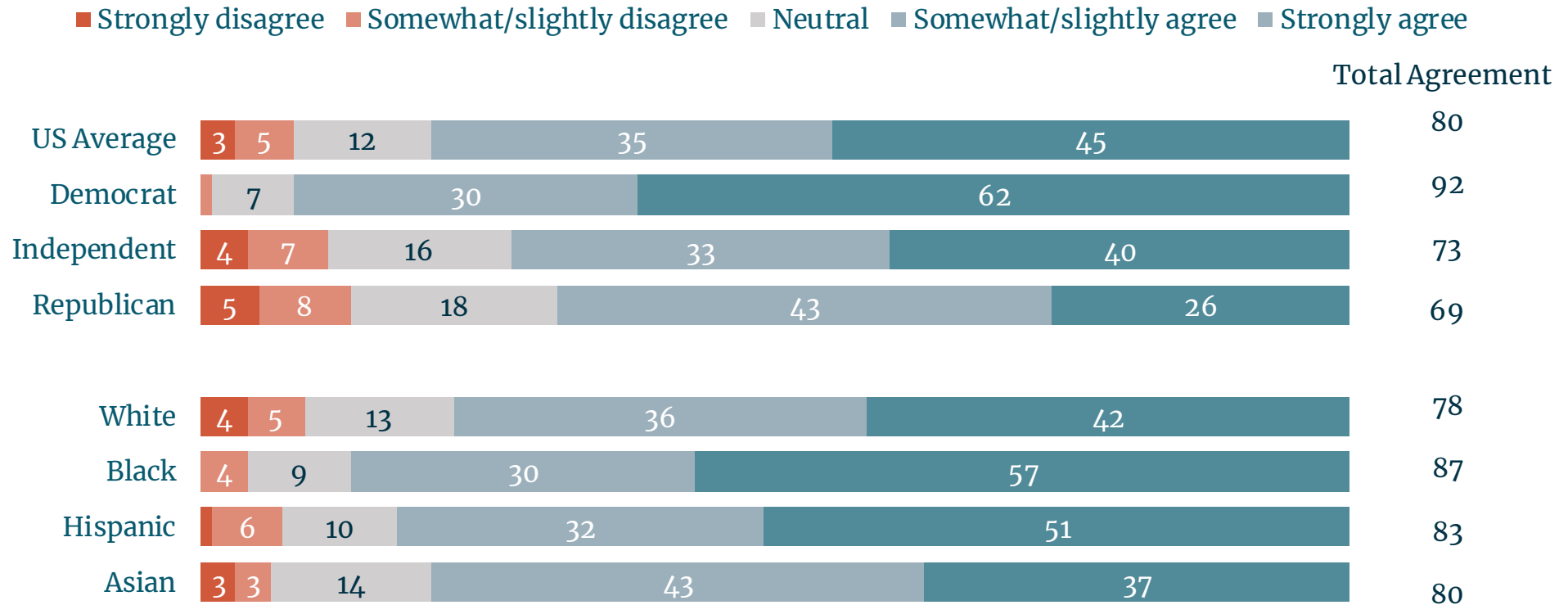


Survey question: How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Most Americans, regardless of political affiliation and racial backgrounds, agree that it is important for students to learn the history of Americans whose racial backgrounds are different from their own.

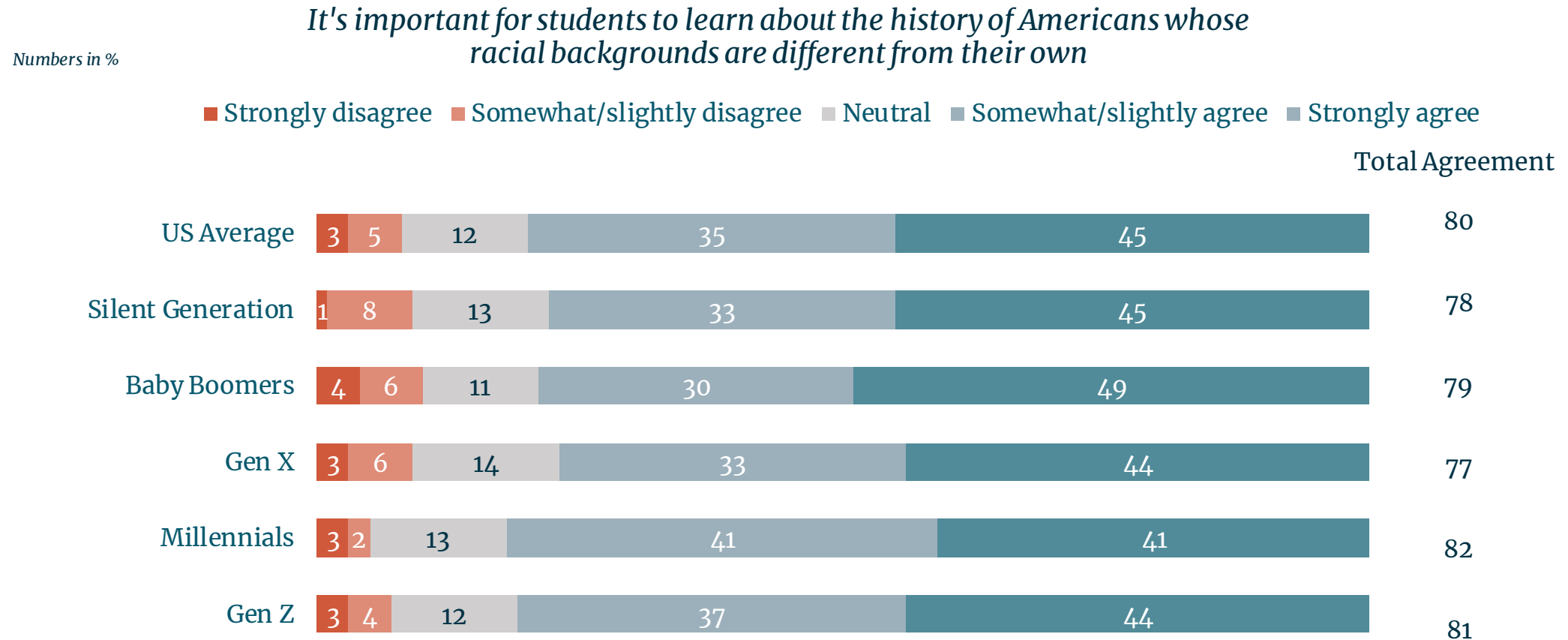
It's important for students to learn about the history of Americans whose racial backgrounds are different from their own

Numbers in %



Survey question: How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Americans across different generations overwhelmingly believe that it is important for students to learn the history of Americans whose racial backgrounds are different from their own.



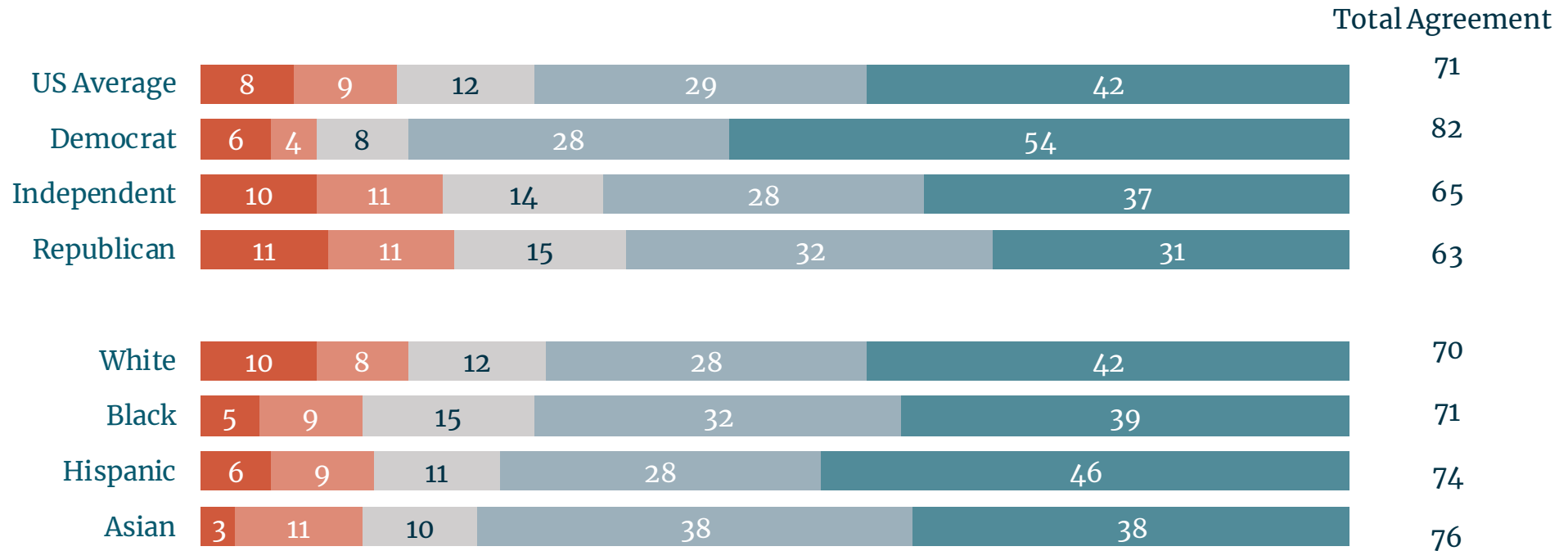
Survey question: How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Most Americans agree that books with offensive content should be left for students to grapple with instead of removed from schools.

Numbers in %

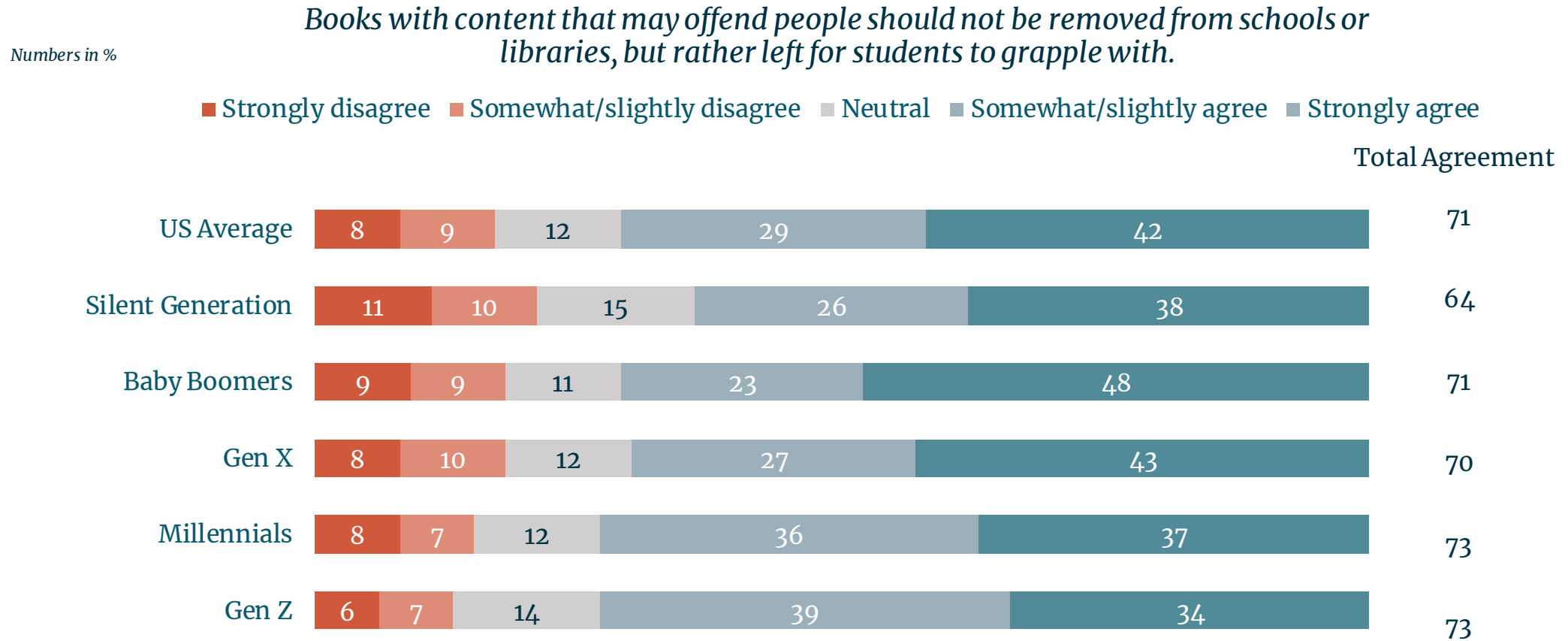
Books with content that may offend people should not be removed from schools or libraries, but rather left for students to grapple with.

■ Strongly disagree
 ■ Somewhat/slightly disagree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Somewhat/slightly agree
 ■ Strongly agree



Survey question: How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Generational agreement exists that books with offensive content should be left for students to grapple with instead of removed from schools.



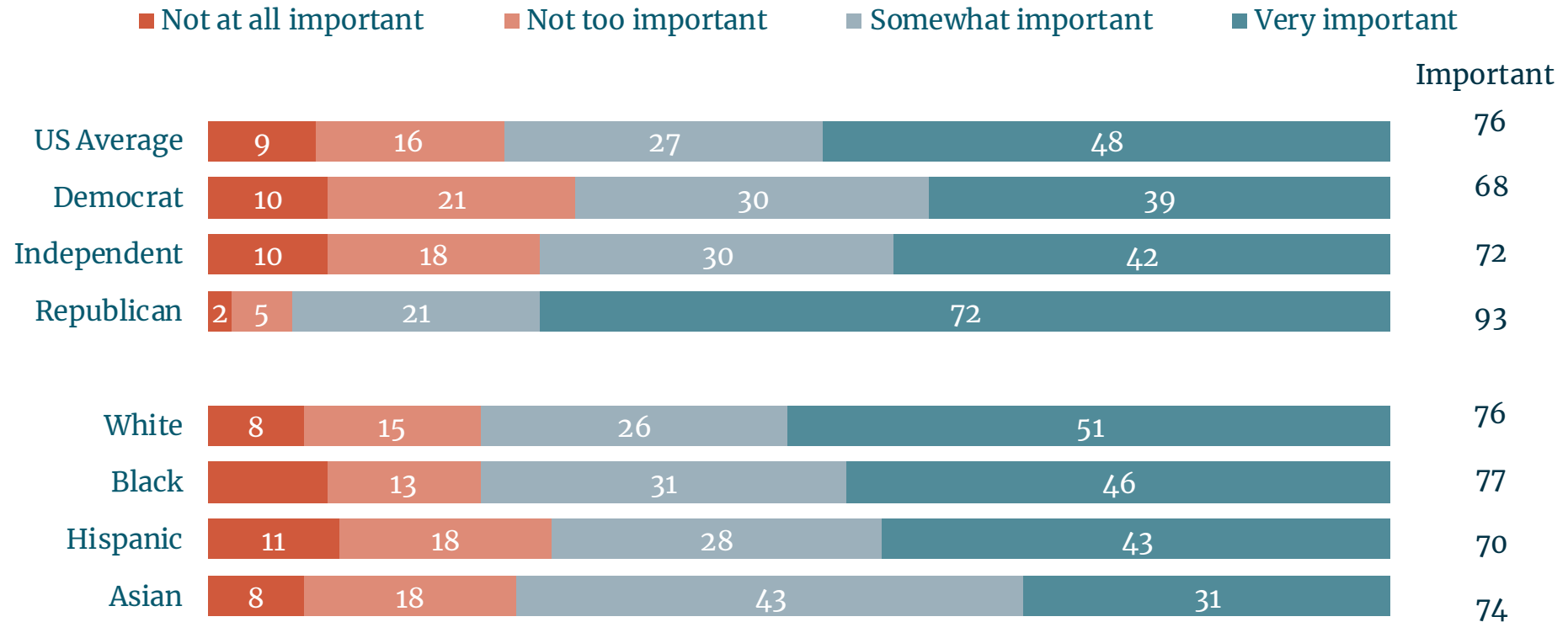
Survey question: How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

76% say that American identity is important to them.

While American identity is important across parties, it is far more important to Republicans than Democrats or Independents.

Numbers in %

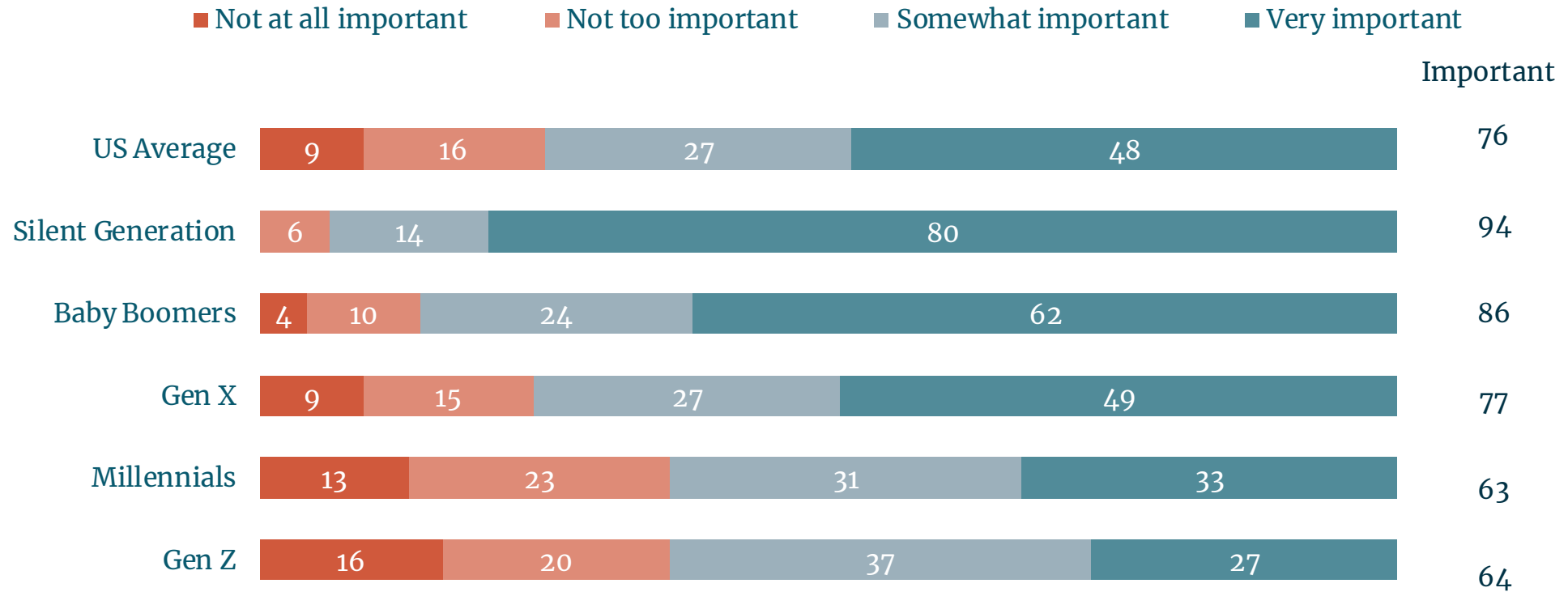
How important is your American identity to you?



American identity is of increasingly less importance to younger generations.

How important is your American identity to you?

Numbers in %



CONCLUSION

Together with about 4 in 5 Americans, More in Common is concerned about political division and declining social cohesion in the United States today. Discord, hostility, and dysfunction prevent our country from collaborating across parties and perspectives to solve immediate and long-term challenges. Of late, the conflict between ideological perspectives appears to have grown into a more fundamental clash between competing realities—from whether vaccines are safe to who won the 2020 election. The conflict encompasses our common identity too, as concepts of what America is as a nation become politicized, and legislators argue over what our children should learn about it. This tension and other factors help explain why just 10 percent of Americans are confident that our best days are “definitely ahead of us”.

However, the American Identity research project helps to capture a reality that too often does not emerge in our political discourse. Rather than fighting for either an unapologetically positive representation of the country or a solely critical one, a majority sees the need for a nuanced, critical and transparent depiction of American history. Most see the need for the history of racism to be taught, together with education about the unique histories of different racial groups. Far from being an exercise in self-loathing, Americans that span parties, races and generations recognize that our shared identity is important.

Juneteenth is a profoundly significant and important holiday, and it's an opportunity for Americans to come together around shared values of liberation, freedom, and equality. The recognition of Juneteenth as a federal holiday presents a new opportunity to reflect on lessons of the past and weave more Americans' histories into our shared identity. As the American Identity project proceeds, we will continue to explore the landscape of this conflict with rigor and candor, while remaining committed to finding the principles, beliefs, and values that can help the country to build from a place of commonality to greater collaboration.

Appendix

Most participants in MIC's online research community learned about Juneteenth as an adult, from news media, social media, and friends or family.

"I learn about it as an adult. I just keep wondering why Juneteenth wasn't that famous to begin with."

– Allen, age 35-44 Black male, Disengaged, New York

"I learned of it in college in my intro to Black Psychology class. I think it helped me understand my own struggles as Puerto Rican woman. I remember feeling like I didn't know my own history and feeling frustrated at not seeing resources readily available. I remember asking fellow African American students in my class and I remember being told that my time would come when our history would take center stage. I am still waiting."

– Jean, age 45-54 Hispanic female, Traditional Liberal, Massachusetts

"I learned about it as a teen on social media. Since then, I have become more aware of the historical context and current importance of this holiday. It is not widely celebrated where I live, so I have not had any significant experiences, but I do see its importance each year in little ways online and reflected on smaller news sources."

– Janice, age 18-24 White female, Traditional Liberal, Arizona

"As an adult and only in the last 10 years I have been vaguely aware. I would appreciate more education and understanding. We started attending events commemorating Juneteenth in the last 3 years."

– Billie, age 55-64 White female, Moderate, Indiana

Survey question: If you have heard of Juneteenth, where did you learn about it? Did you learn about it as a child or as an adult? Have there been any significant experiences that have shaped your understanding of this day?

Some participants plan to celebrate Juneteenth with friends and family or by learning more about the history, while the majority will not celebrate.

Celebrate with family and friends

“I will probably watch tv shows or movies with this type of theme. I will also go on social media to celebrate with family and friends.”

– Evelyn, age 35-44 Black female, Moderate, New York

“Just spending time with family and loved ones and appreciating the day.”

– Delbert, age 18-24 Black male, Passive Liberal, Pennsylvania

Celebrate by learning

“Maybe take the opportunity to learn a little more about it.”

– Walter, age 45-54 White male, Traditional Liberal, Pennsylvania

“Not sure probably just try and teach my loved ones about it because most people I know don't know about it.”

– Jorge, age 25-34 Hispanic male, Moderate, Texas

Survey question: How do you think the country should celebrate Juneteenth?