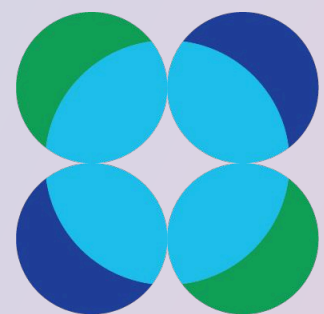


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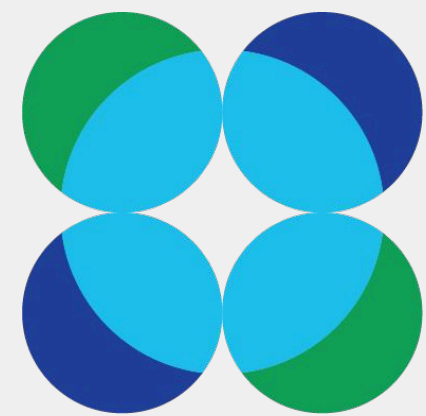
FANS, POLITICS, AND THE POWER OF SPORTS

Why Democracy Needs Sports Fans



More in
Common





**More in
Common**

More in Common seeks to understand the forces driving us apart, find common ground, and help bring Americans together to tackle shared challenges. We work with over 200 groups across civil society, business, education, and philanthropy to conduct actionable research that informs policymakers, community leaders, and the public.

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We would like to thank Irina Wang for her work designing this report.

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Sports fandom is a powerful source of meaning and identity for millions of Americans. Fans are more trusting and more confident in America's core institutions than non-fans. Fandom benefits the individual fan as well: fans are less lonely, more active, and more connected to their families than non-fans.

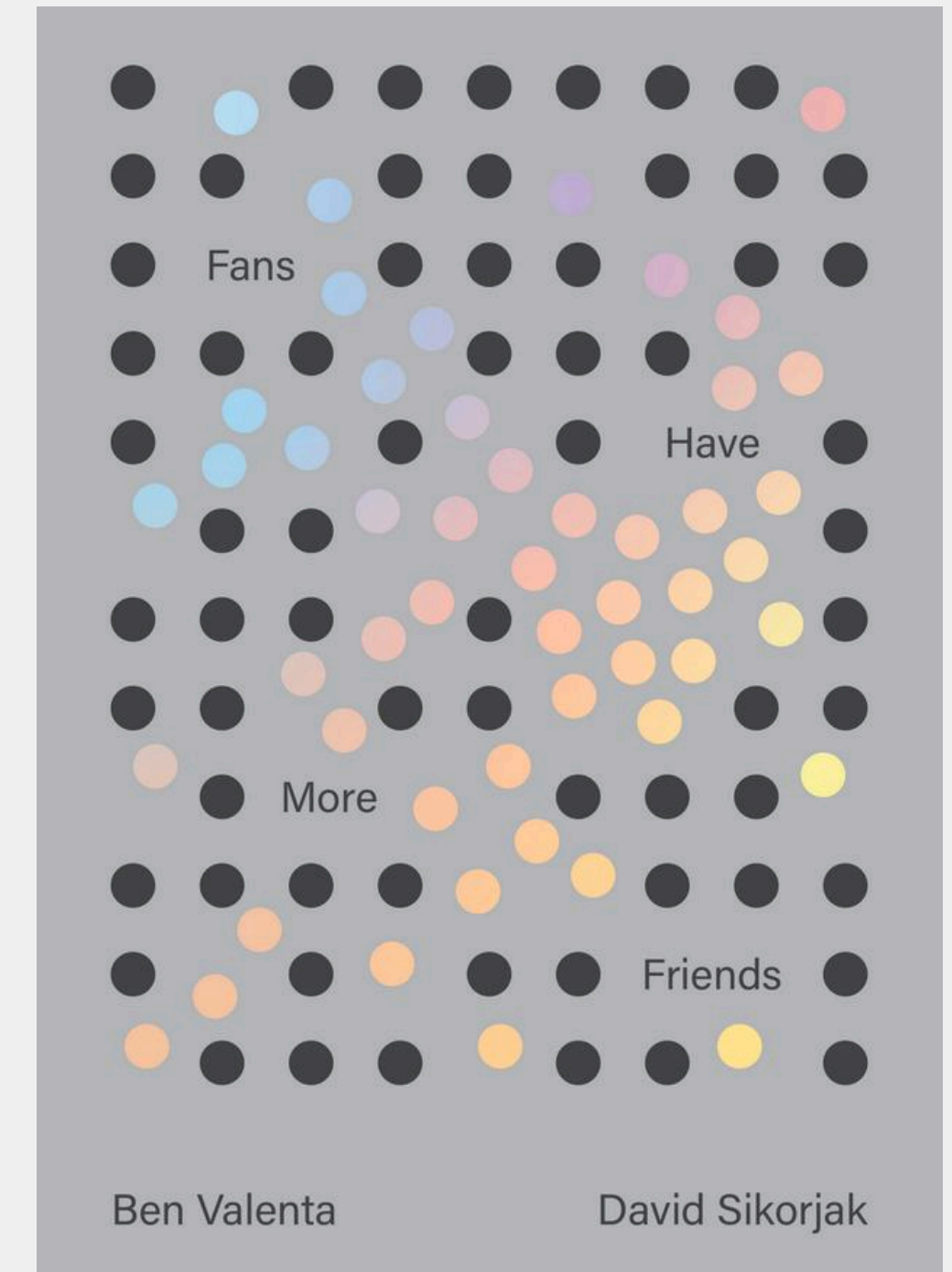
More in Common conducted a study to better understand how these benefits may extend into the democratic sphere. Being embedded in one's community is foundational to civic participation, social trust, and, ultimately, democratic health. This kind of connection is especially critical today, as political polarization continues to fracture society, loneliness remains on the rise, and emerging technologies like AI threaten to further isolate us. Stated more simply: in a country as big and diverse as ours, doing stuff together is really important, and it's more difficult than ever to do.

But entry points to civic participation matter. Through its research over the last seven years, More in Common has consistently found that Americans whose most important identity is a

political one, and who are in turn most politically active, tend to feel the most hostility towards their opposing political party members.

Sports fandom may offer a uniquely durable and scalable entry point to civic participation. Like many important parts of our community life, fandom is often passed down by families through generations; and, unlike many other avenues to connection, rooting for a team is easy and fun. Sports is a space where people from all walks of life can and do participate, transcending backgrounds and identity.

By studying sports fandom, our aim was to shed light on a promising but underexplored source of social cohesion in American life. This study relies on a framework for classifying fandom developed by Ben Valenta and David Sijorak in their 2022 book *Fans Have More Friends*, which distinguishes respondents as Non-Fans (those who don't follow sports at all), Low Value, Mid Value or High Value fans (those who follow sports most closely and most passionately).



Fans Have More Friends
by Ben Valenta &
David Sikorjak (2022)

PAGE 05	Executive Summary
PAGE 09	Chapter I Who are America’s fans?
PAGE 14	Chapter II Fandom & Democratic and Social Engagement
PAGE 23	Chapter III Fandom & Attitudes Toward Democracy
PAGE 30	Chapter IV Fans, Identity, and the Meaning in Sports
PAGE 38	Chapter V Fandom & Attitudes Toward Representation
PAGE 45	Chapter VI Conclusions & Recommendations
PAGE 48	Appendix

1 Fandom takes the edge off of political engagement. Generally, the more politically engaged you are, the more you misunderstand and distrust your opposing political party members. But when your primary team isn't your political team, it's easier to stay engaged without becoming entrenched.

High Value fans are more likely to be registered to vote than non-fans (92% vs. 75%), follow politics more closely than non-fans (53% vs. 29%), and they are more likely to participate in a range of political activities (for example, 64% of high value fans have voted in a local election, compared to 35% of non-fans).

The most passionate fans follow politics more closely and participate in politics more often, yet they are also more likely to be interested in engaging in cross-partisan conversation (68% vs. 46%), in working toward a mutual goal with someone whose politics differs from their own (82% vs. 65%), and are more likely to have engaged in a range of civic actions (12% have attended a political meeting in the past year, compared to 3% of non-fans, for example).

2 Fandom is a low-stakes pathway to engaging men. Many fans see sports as a gendered space—and as one where men, in particular, are free to express themselves. That makes it an important setting for men to connect and have important conversations about masculinity today.

Men are more likely than women to be High Value fans, and nearly 8 in 10 High Value fans say sports are a healthy way for men to express themselves, compared to just 48% of non-fans. High Value fans are also nearly four times as likely to say sports are central to being a man today (48% vs. 13%), and they are more likely to believe society should talk more about the challenges that men face.

3 Fans are more likely to support democratic norms and values.

73% of High Value fans say democracy is “definitely” the best form of government, and 87% want both parties to work together. Fans are also more likely to say “the president should always act within the rules of the Constitution” and that “Americans have more in common than what divides us.”

4 Across party lines, fans embrace the inclusive power of sports.

79% of High Value fans say diversity in sports leadership is important, including both Republican and Democrat fans. They are also more likely to believe that sports transcend identity.

5 Fandom is shaped by who you are and how you participate in civic life.

Men, higher earners, and more educated Americans are most likely to be fans—especially High Value fans. High Value fans are also more likely to participate in community and civic life.

6 Together, these patterns paint a picture of broader societal engagement for fans.

The stronger the fan, the more likely to participate in politics, contribute to civic and community life, connect with others, and uphold democratic values.

1 Nationally representative survey

N=5,205 US adults
June 23–27, 2025

- Weighted on gender, age, race/ethnicity, and political affiliation
- The margin of error is +/- 1.36% for US average and higher for subgroups
- Conducted online by MIC using a participant panel from Dynata
- Numbers in data visualizations are rounded to the nearest whole number. Figures may total to larger or smaller than 100% due to rounding.

2 Americans in Conversation online qualitative research panel

N=206 US adults
May 6–14, 2025

- Panel is broadly representative of the US population
- Panelists were asked open-ended questions about their thoughts on sports fandom
- Quotations from panelists are included in this report. Where provided, names have been changed to protect their privacy. Grammar and punctuation may have been lightly edited for clarity.

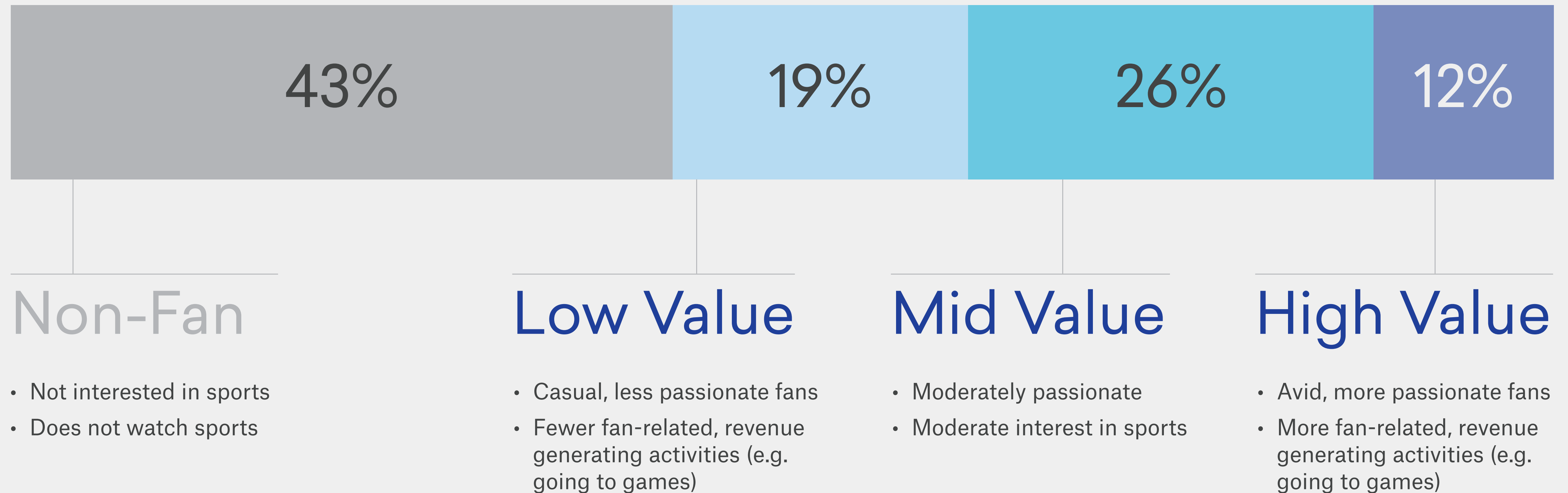
Note: In this deck, we refer to the people that we contacted as “Americans” rather than “respondents.” For the sake of simplicity, “Americans” is intended to refer to anyone age 18 or above who currently resides in the United States. Figures in this deck may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

WHO ARE AMERICA'S FANS?

Understanding who the fans are reveals key demographic, political, and civic patterns.

- Fans are those who have at least some interest in major sports and watch some games, while non-fans have no interest in major sports and do not watch games.
- Overall, the majority of (57%) surveyed Americans are fans. Of those fans, 62% are men, 51% have at least a 2-year college degree, and 62% have a family household income greater than \$50,000.
- Gender, income, and education are the best demographic predictors of fandom.
- When analyzed through the lens of More in Common's Hidden Tribes segmentation, stronger fans are slightly more likely to be Traditional Conservatives and Moderates, and they are less likely to be Politically Disengaged.
- Individuals who engage in democratic activities—such as attending political meetings, being registered to vote, or voting in local elections—tend to have higher fan values.

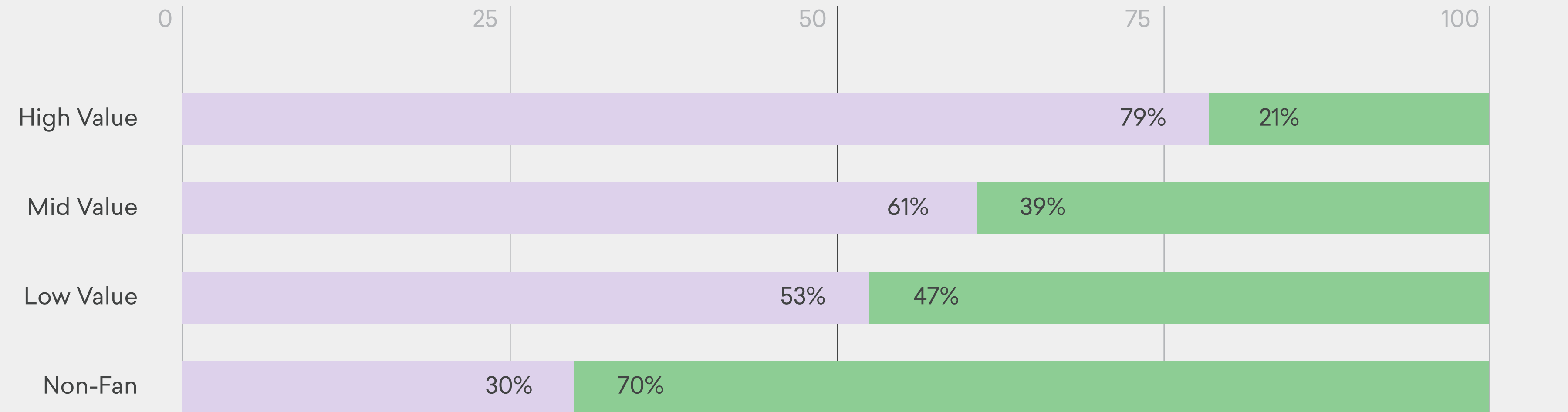
There are three kinds of fans, and fans outnumber non-fans in America.



Fans are more likely to be male and wealthy.

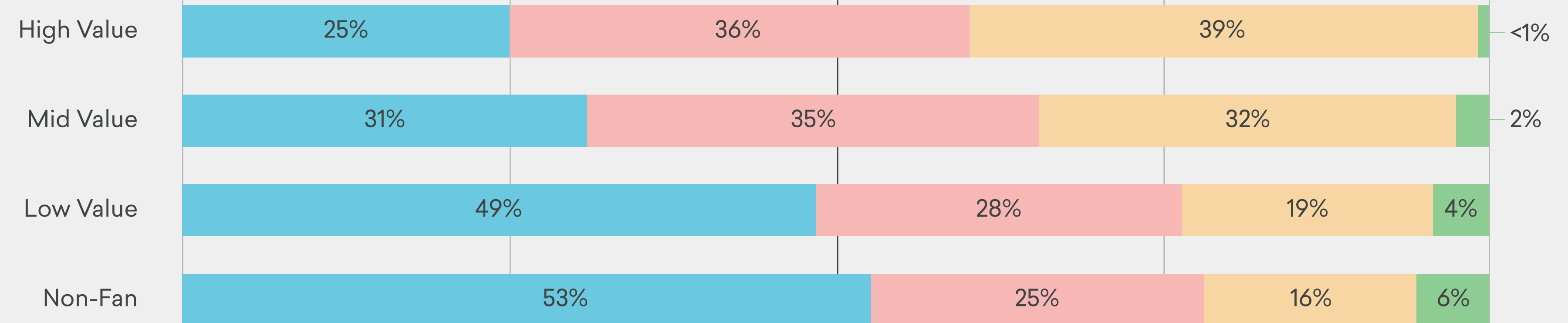
What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other/Non-binary



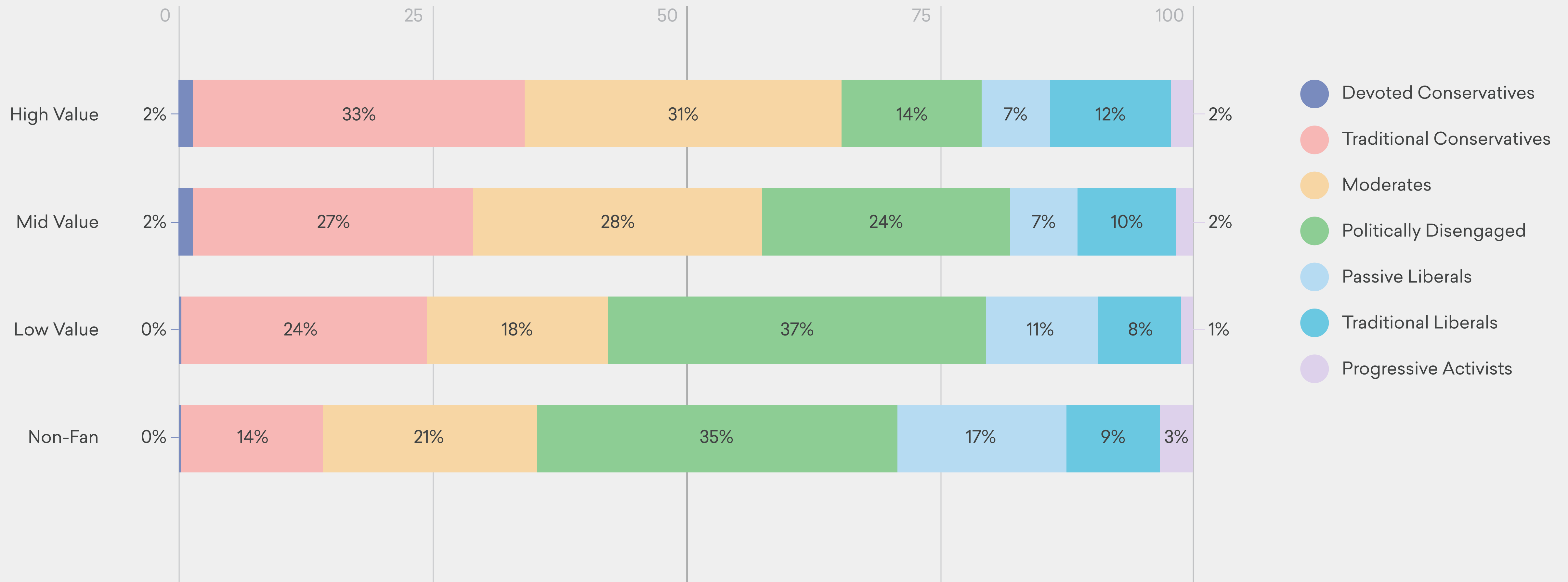
Thinking back over the last year, what was your family or household's annual income?

- Less than 50k
- 50k–100k
- More than 100k
- Prefer not to say



Hidden Tribes vary across fandom segment.

Stronger fans are slightly more likely to be Traditional Conservatives and Moderates, and they are less likely to be Politically Disengaged.



FANDOM & DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

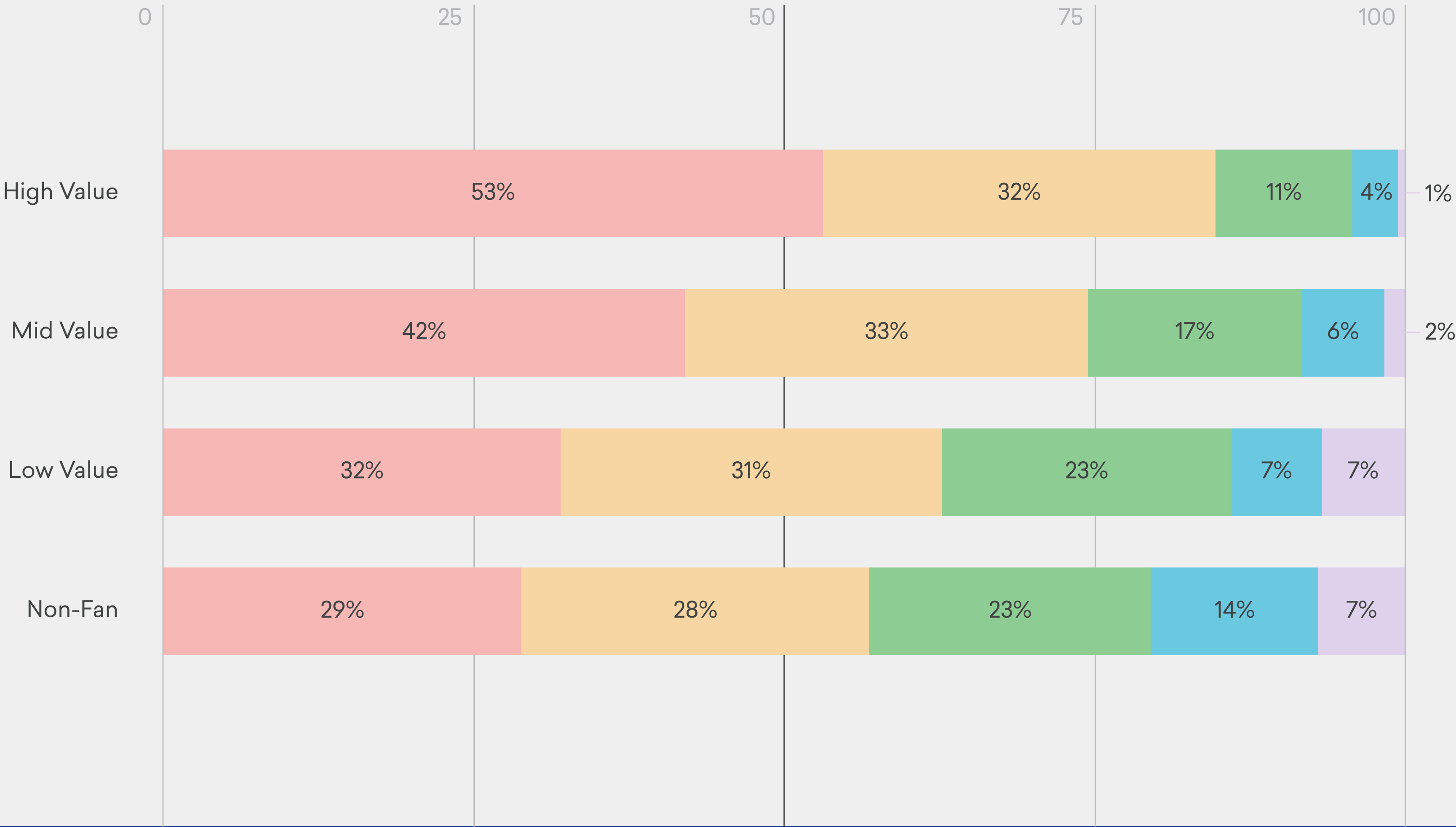
Fans are more engaged —both politically and socially.

- Fans follow politics more closely than non-fans. Over half (53%) of High Value fans and 42% of Mid Value fans say they follow government and public affairs most of the time, compared to just 29% of non-fans.
- High Value fans are also most likely to be registered to vote—Nearly all High Value fans (92%) and 87% of Mid Value fans report being registered to vote, compared to 75% of non-fans.
- High Value fans are more likely to report engaging in both political activities, like voting in local elections (64%), donating to advocacy groups (21%), and attending rallies (15%); and also civic activities, like donating blood (29%) and donating to their place of worship (43%).
- 68% of High Value fans are interested in cross-political conversations and 82% are open to working together across those same divides compared to non-fans (46% and 65%, respectively), and these patterns emerge across the political aisle.

Stronger fandom corresponds with greater political interest.

How often do you follow what's going on in government and public?

- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Only now and then
- Hardly at all
- Don't know

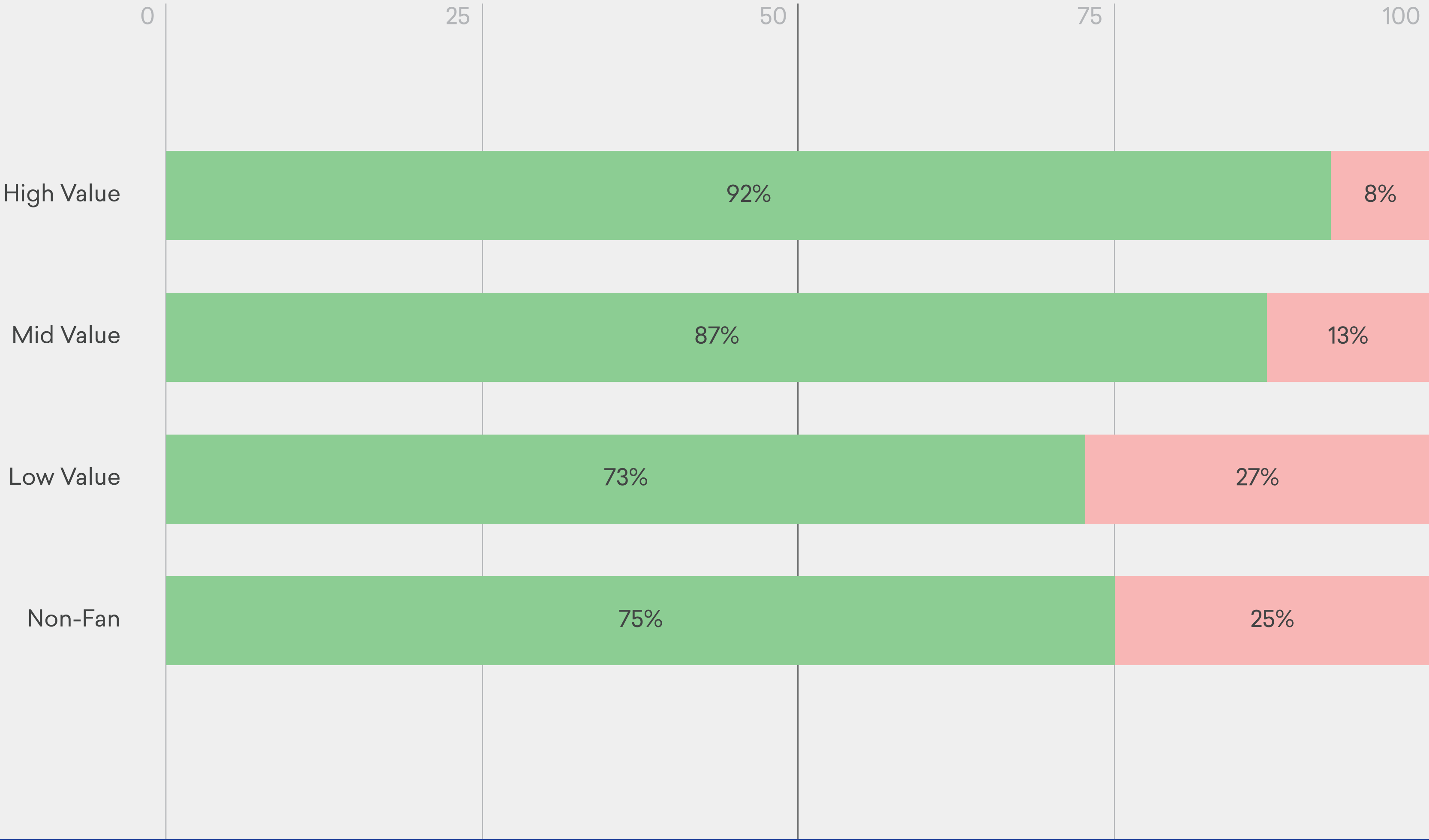


High Value fans are 17 percentage points more likely to report being registered to vote than non-fans.



Are you registered to vote?

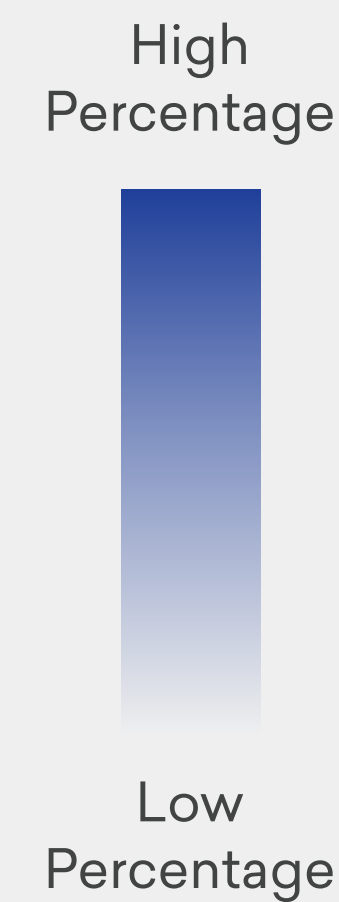
- Yes
- No



Greater fandom is associated with more political, civic, and community engagement.



Here is a list of activities that some people get a chance to participate in and others don't. Which of the following have you taken part in in the past? (% of participants selecting each response)



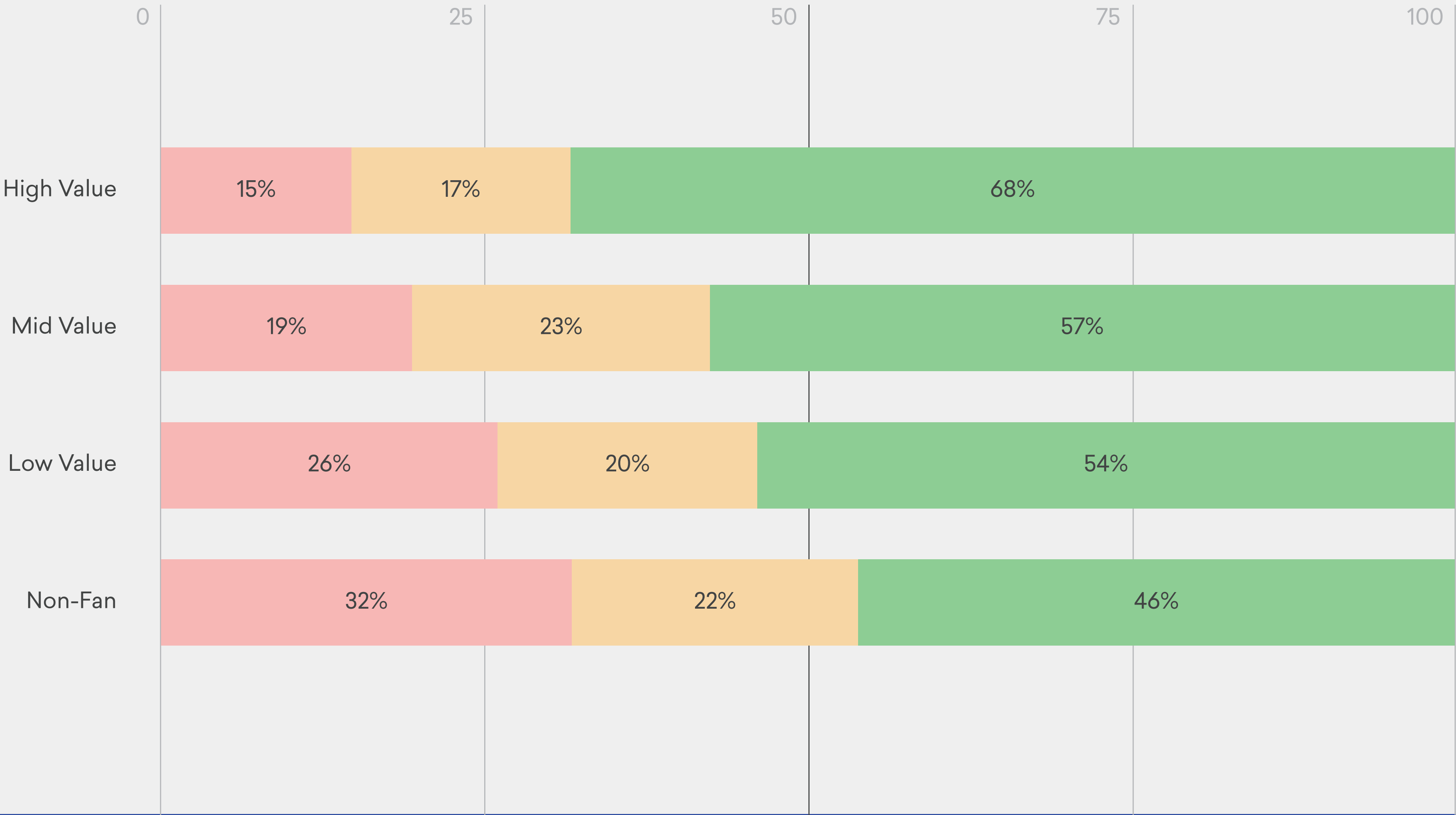
	High Value	Mid Value	Low Value	Non-Fan
Attended a protest, rally, or march	15	12	08	10
Donated money to an advocacy group or political organization	21	16	13	09
Attended a political meeting	12	08	05	03
Called Congress or another political representative	08	12	07	07
Shared political content on social media	34	26	15	17
Voted in a local election	64	53	34	35
Donated blood	29	19	14	12
Donated money to my place of worship	43	32	21	18
None of the above	13	22	38	43

The stronger a fan someone is, the more likely they are interested in engaging across party lines.



Thinking about the near future, how interested are you in talking about politics or political tensions with someone who has political views that are different from yours?

- Not at all interested
- Slightly interested
- More interested*

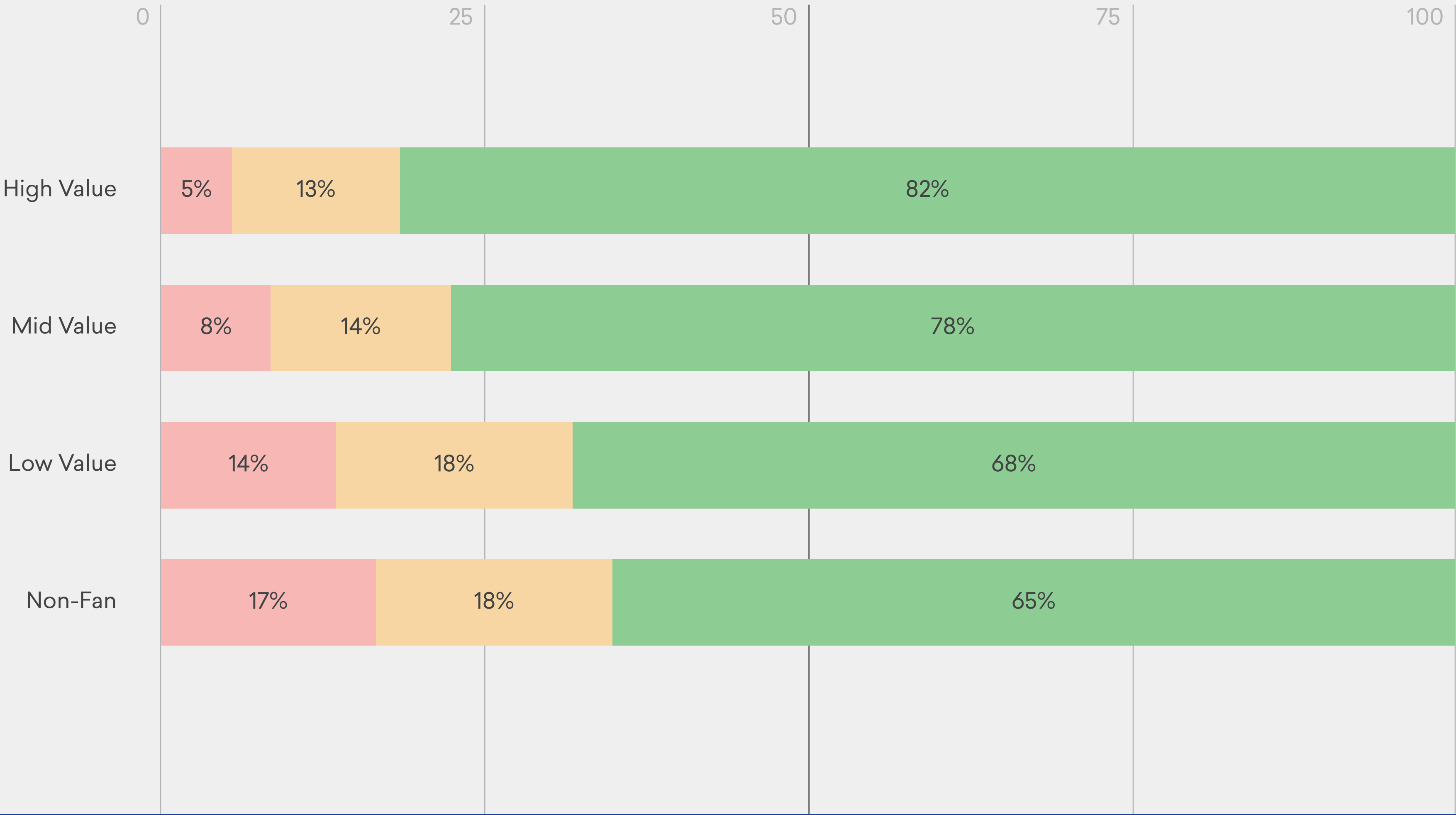


Greater fandom is associated with stronger interest in working toward community goals across political lines.



Thinking about the near future, how interested are you in working to achieve a mutual goal that improves your community with someone who has political views that are different from yours?

- Not at all interested
- Slightly interested
- More interested*

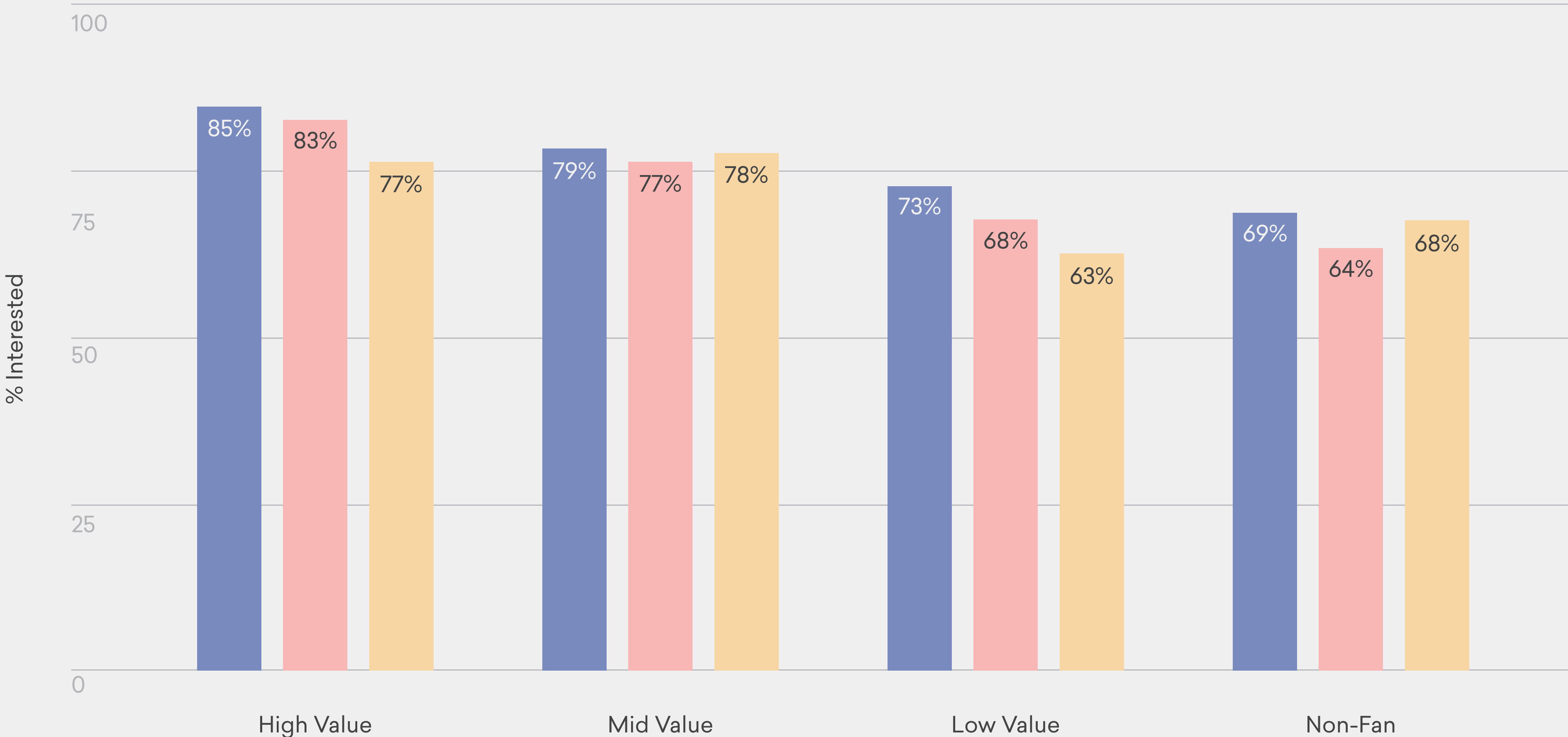


Bigger fans are more interested in engaging across political lines of difference, whether they're Democrats or Republicans.

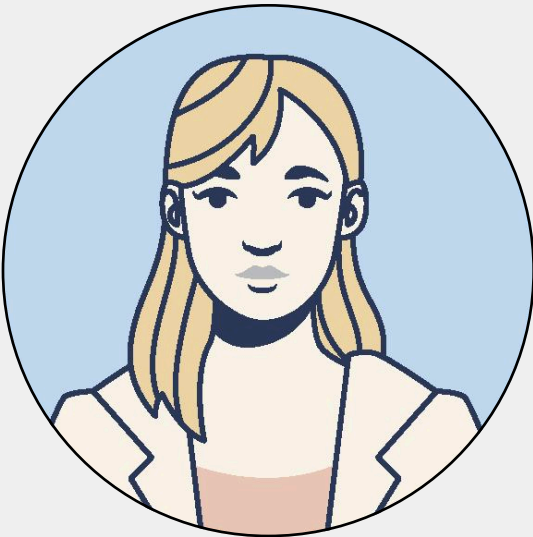


Thinking about the near future, how interested are you in working to achieve a mutual goal that improves your community with someone who has political views that are different from yours?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent



Sports create opportunities for connection with family, friends, and community.



“I live in Nebraska and everyone is basically a Husker fan. I enjoy the socialization and camaraderie but don’t care about the actual game.”

Sophia, 53-year-old white woman, Traditional Liberal, Democrat from Kearney, Nebraska, Non-Fan



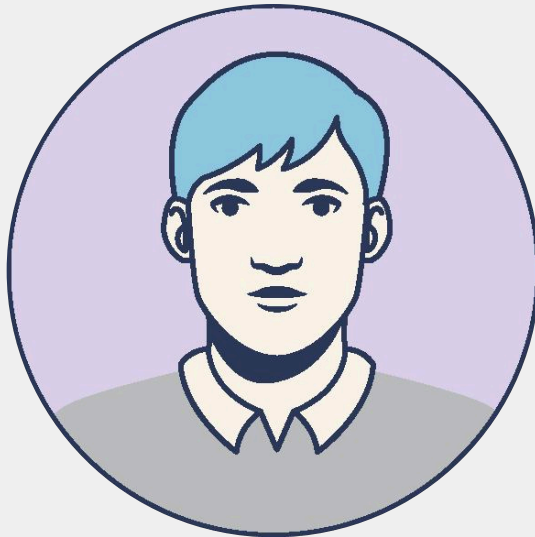
“I live in a community where following our sports team brings us together and my parents were just huge on watching it.”

Lacy, 24-year-old white woman, Traditional Liberal, Democrat from Lancaster, New York, Low Value Fan



“I would rather talk about the game and watch with family or friends, it’s just more fun to do in a group.”

Christopher, 50-year-old white man, Disengaged, Independent from Sussex, New Jersey, Mid Value Fan



“My father introduced me to all sports as he used to be a great sports fan. I grew up just south of [Boston] and we followed all the local teams in every sport.”

Gio, 63-year-old Hispanic man, Devoted Conservative, Republican from Las Vegas, Nevada, High Value Fan

FANDOM & ATTITUDES TOWARD DEMOCRACY

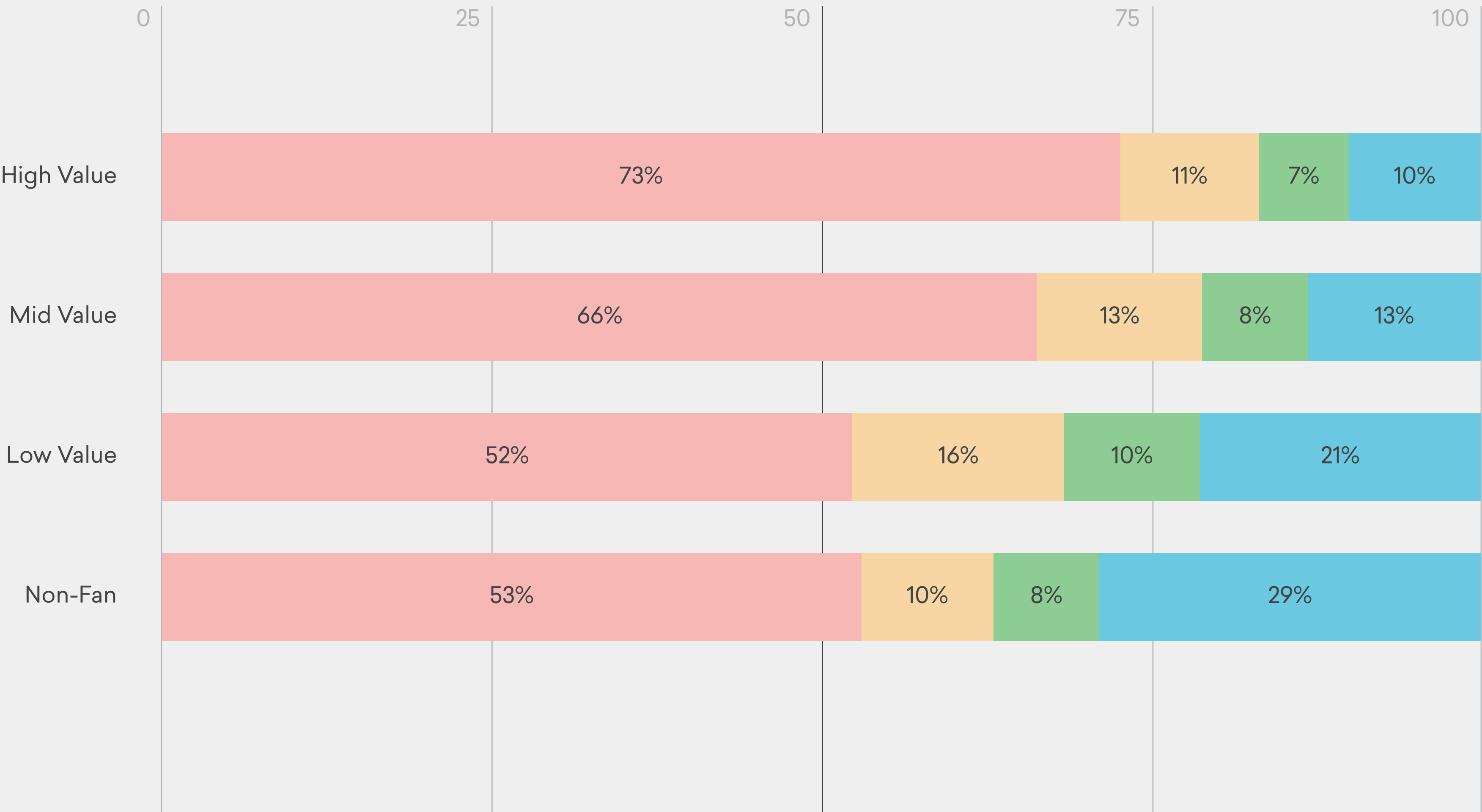
Fans express stronger democratic values.

- 73% of High Value fans say democracy is "definitely the best form of government". This is more than any other group.
- High Value fans are most likely to say the president should always follow the Constitution; non-fans are more likely to say "don't know."
- 63% of High Value fans agree that Americans "have more in common than what divides us."
- 87% of High Value fans want both political parties to work together to solve national problems—higher than all other groups.
- High Value fans are most likely to agree that people should respect those they disagree with politically.

Stronger fandom is linked to stronger democratic commitment.

Which of the following best describes your view?

- Democracy is definitely the best form of government for the United States.
- I am open to non-democratic forms of government in the United States.
- I would prefer a non-democratic government in the United States.
- Don't know

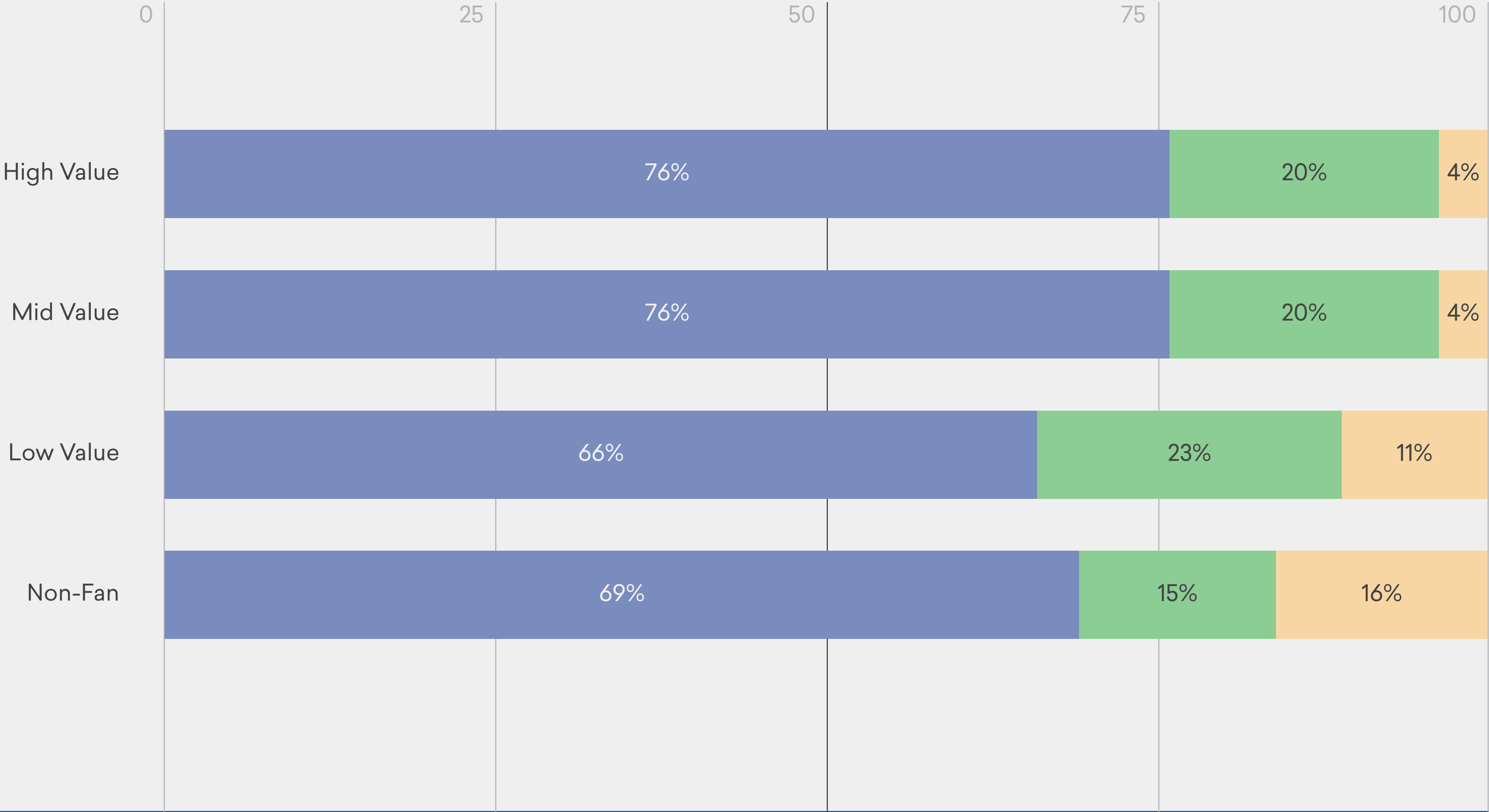


High Value fans are slightly more likely to agree that the president should “always” follow the constitution. Non-fans are more likely to say that they “don’t know.”



Which of the following do you agree with more?

- The President should always act within the rules of the Constitution.
- The President should be able to do good things for the country regardless of whether they fit the rules of the Constitution.
- Don't know

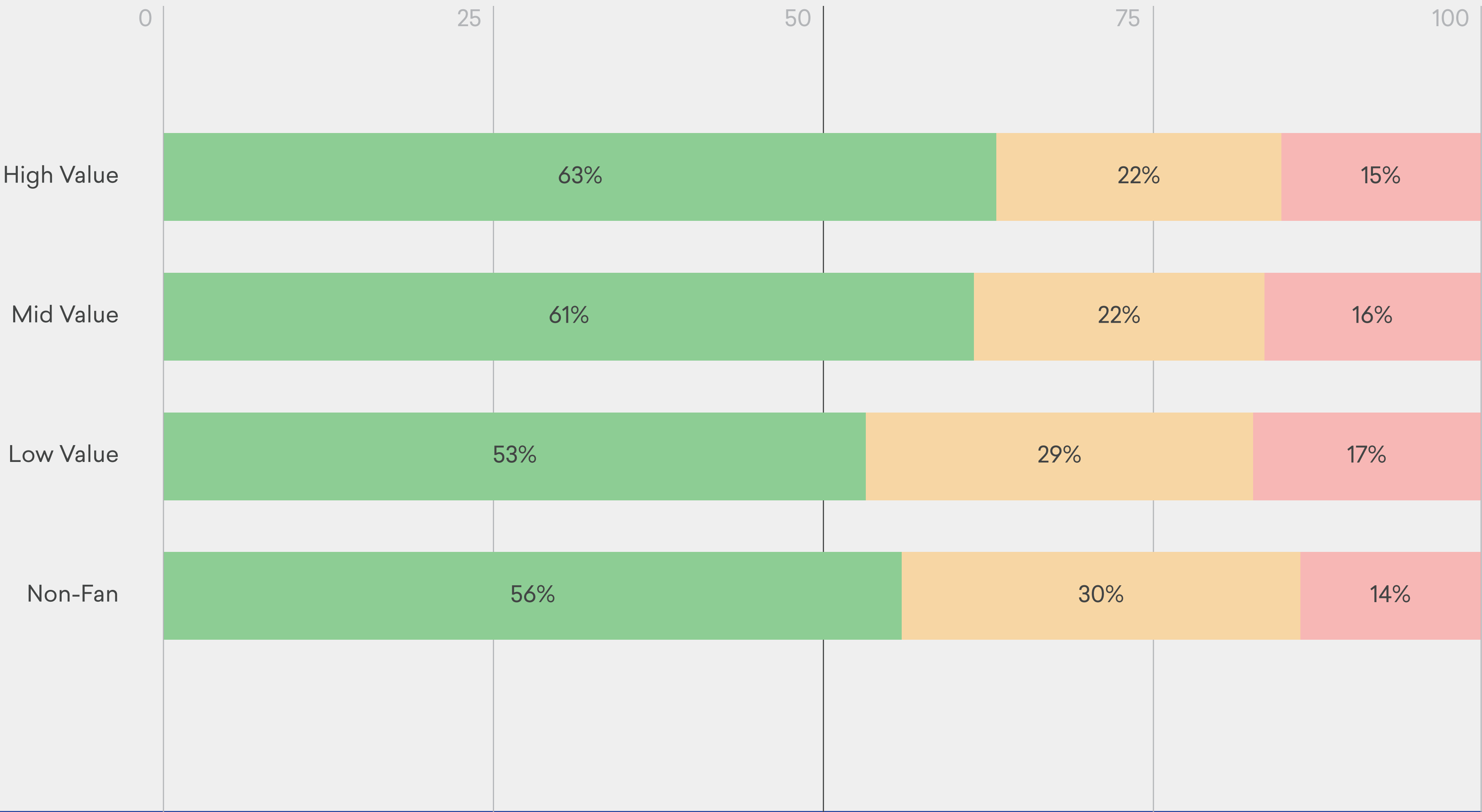


High Value fans are slightly more likely to agree that “Americans have more in common than what divides us.”



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:
“Americans have more in common than what divides us.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*



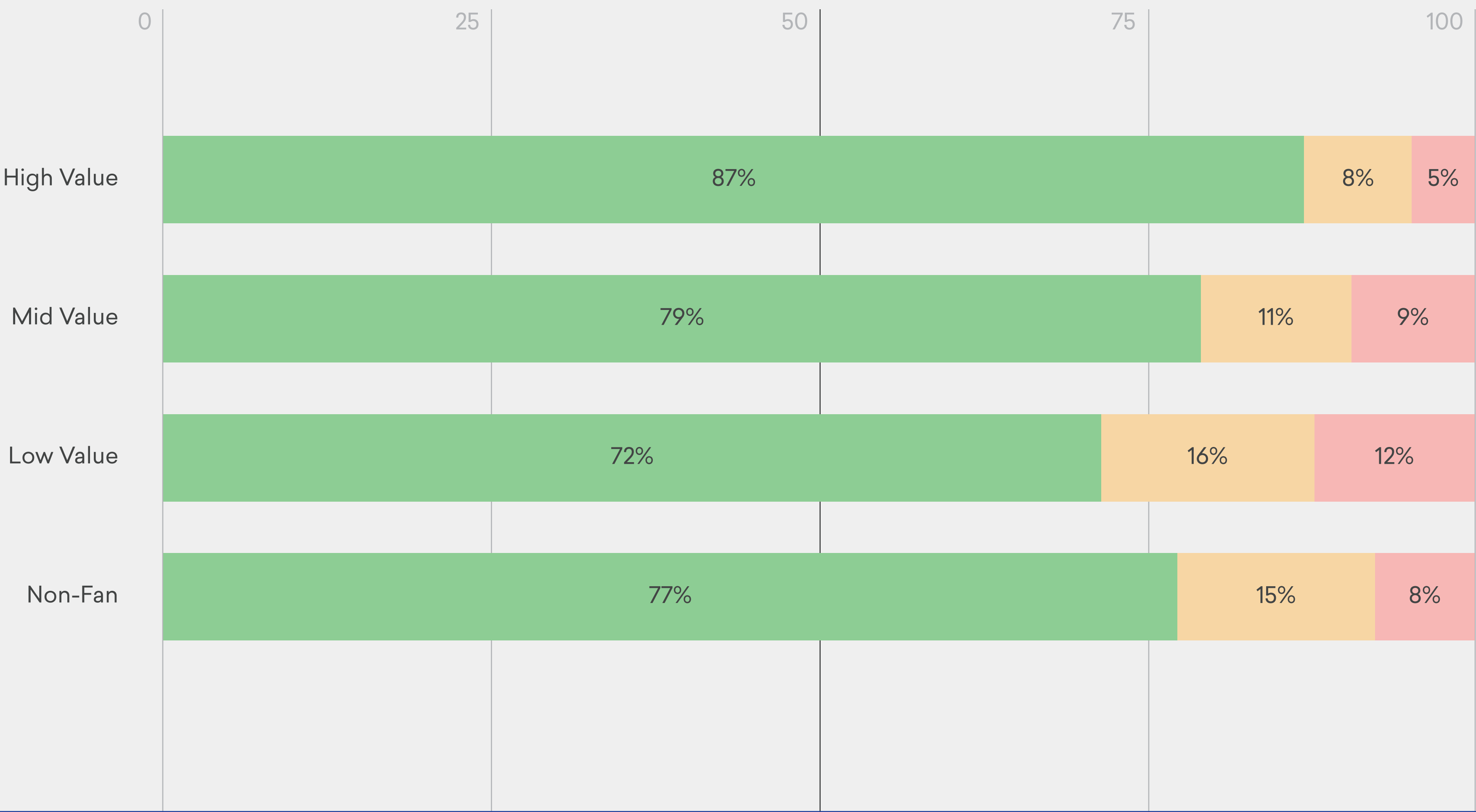
High Value fans are most likely to agree that both political parties should work together to solve problems in the country.



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

“I want both political parties to work together to solve problems for our country.”

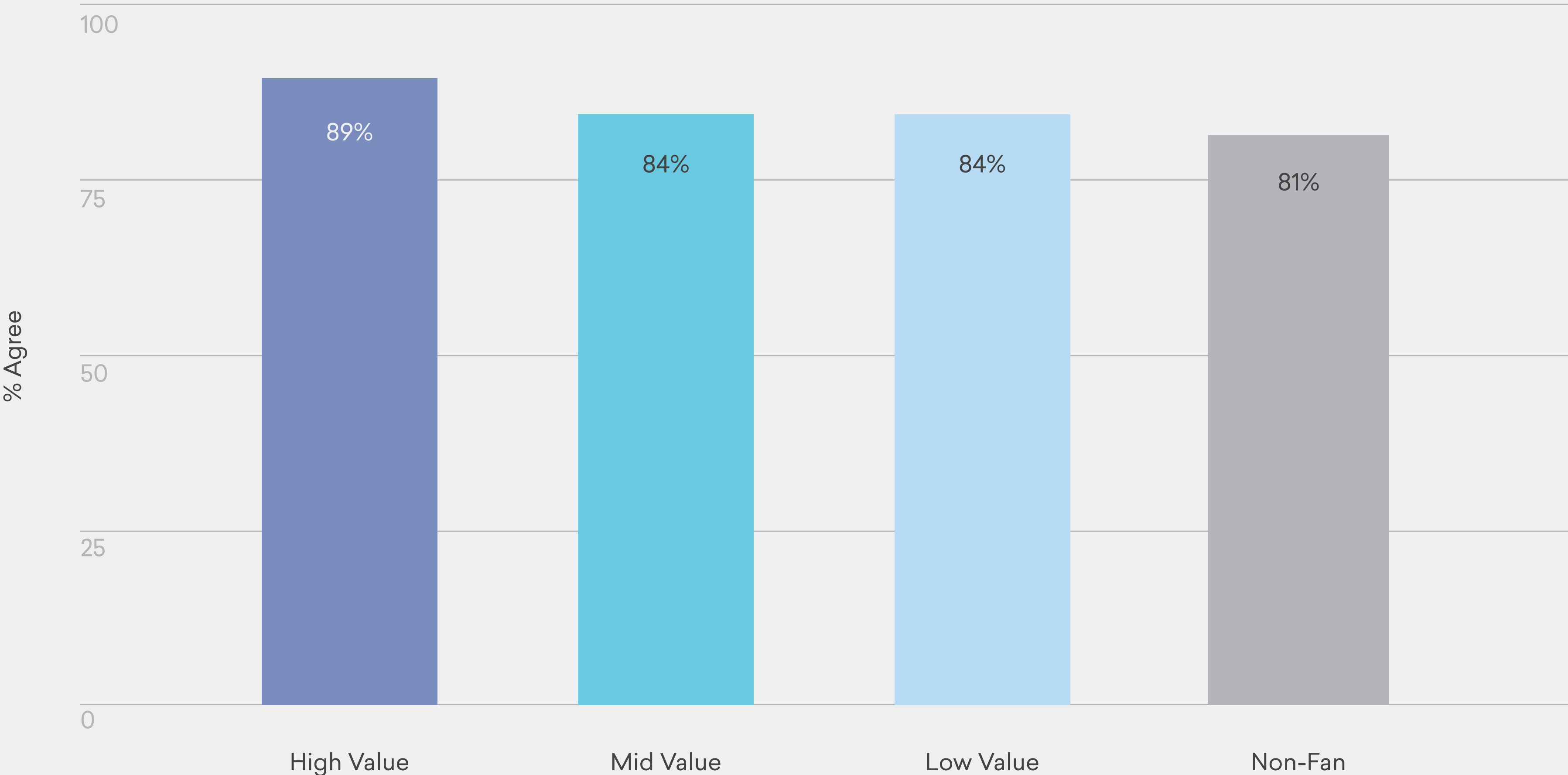
- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*



Fans are more likely to agree that people should respect those they disagree with politically.



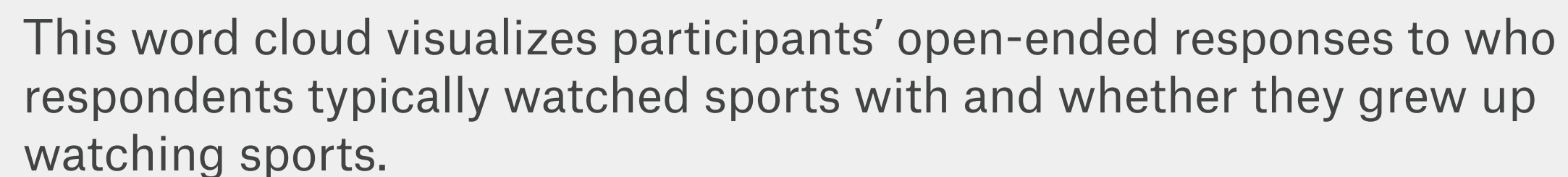
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
“It is important to respect those you disagree with politically.”



FANS, IDENTITY, AND THE MEANING IN SPORTS

Sports fandom provides the structure and shared interest that can make connection and expression easier, especially for men.

- 77% of High Value fans agree that sports are a healthy way for men to express themselves—compared to just 48% of non-fans. This is true both among fans who are women and those who are men.
- 48% of High Value fans agree that playing or following sports is an important part of being a man today, nearly four times the rate of non-fans (13%).
- A majority (54%) of High Value fans believe boys face more pressure to succeed in sports than girls, compared to just 39% of non-fans.



The most frequently mentioned words include **“family,” “dad,” “friends,” “games,” “growing up,”** and **“football,”** highlighting that for many, sports are deeply tied to early memories, family traditions, and a sense of connection.

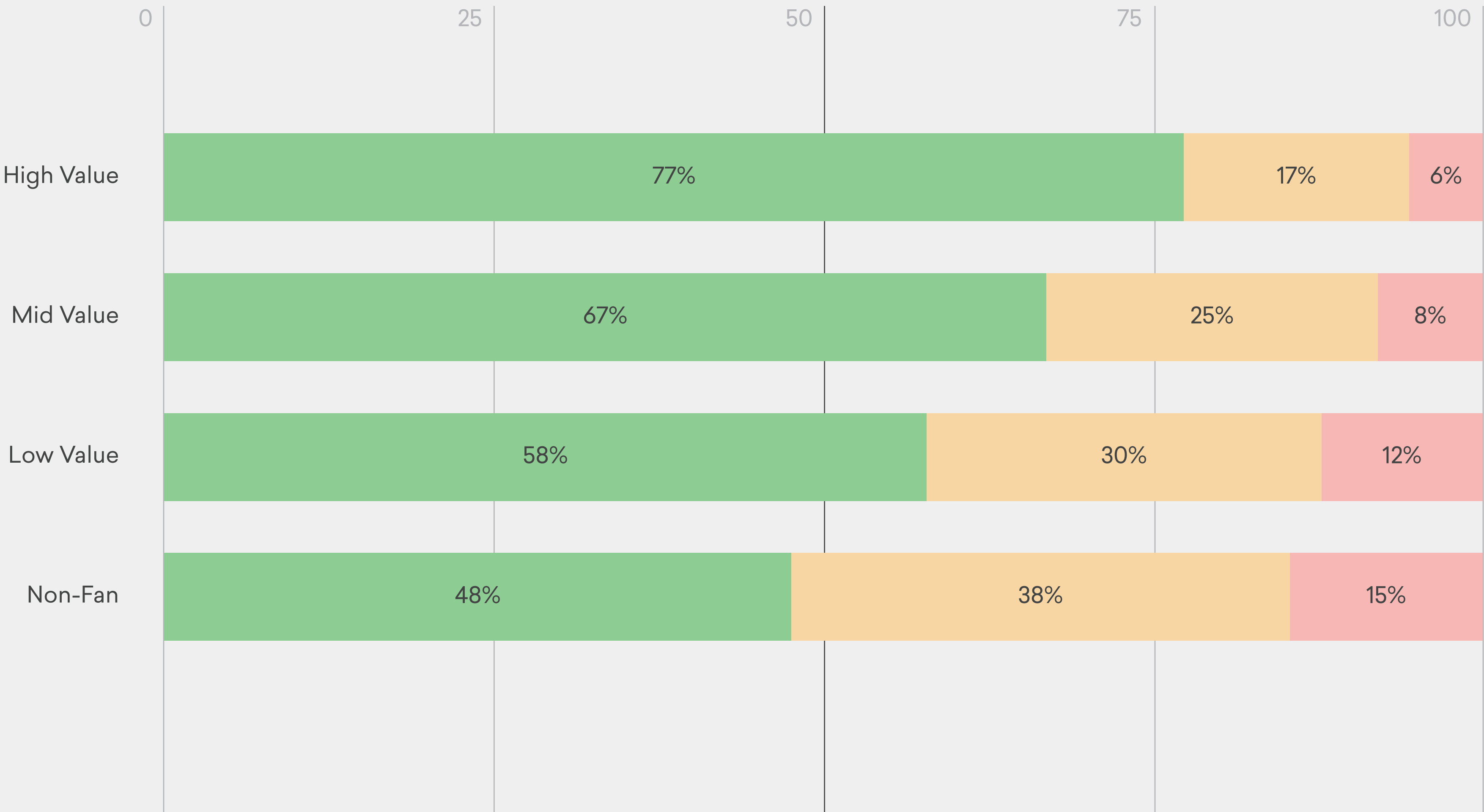
The links from sports fandom to masculine identity are especially strong: Fans are more likely to see sports as a healthy outlet for male expression, compared to non-fans.



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

“Sports are a healthy avenue for men to express themselves.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*



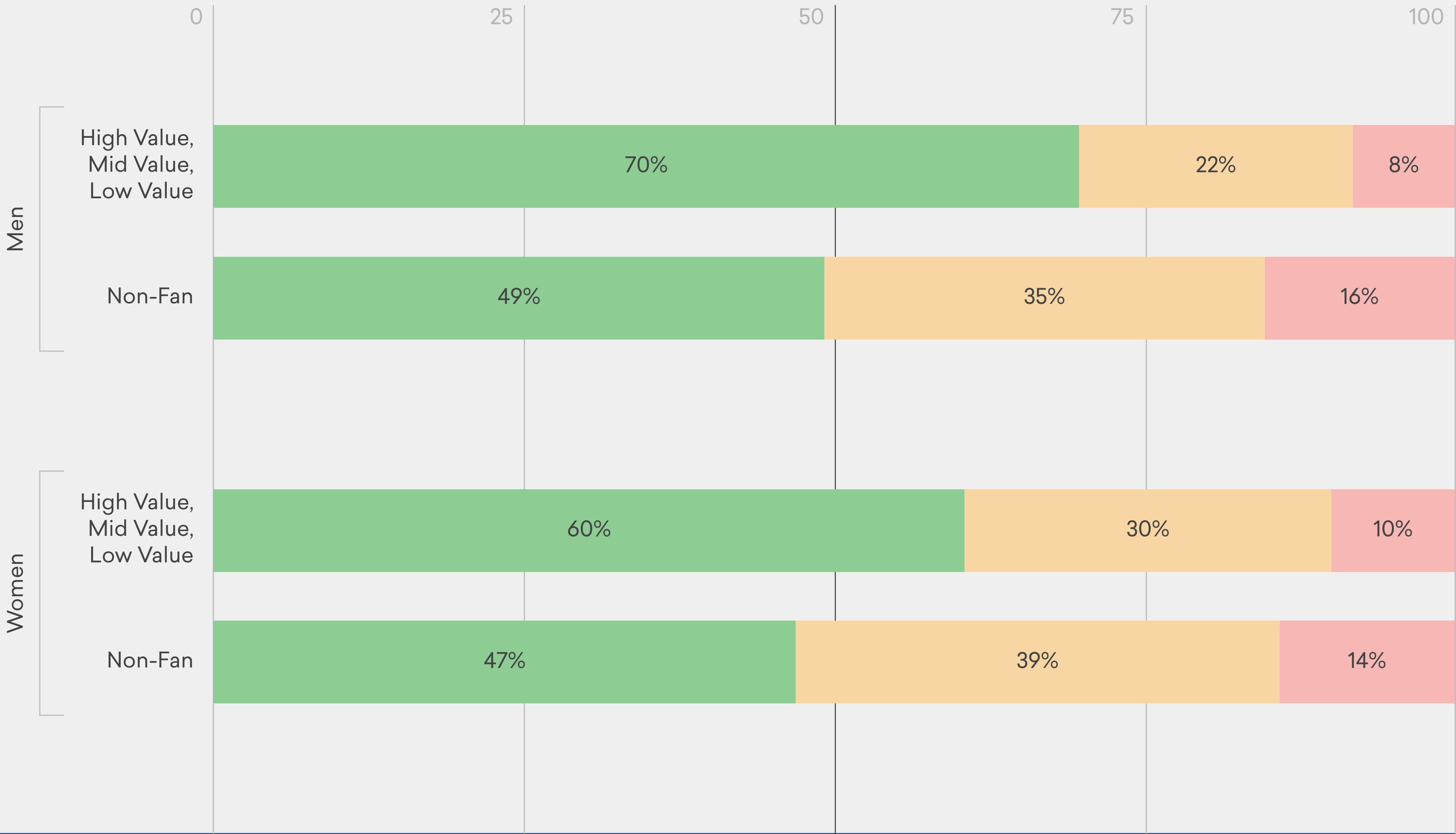
Women and men fans alike see sports as a healthy avenue for male expression.



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

“Sports are a healthy avenue for men to express themselves.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*

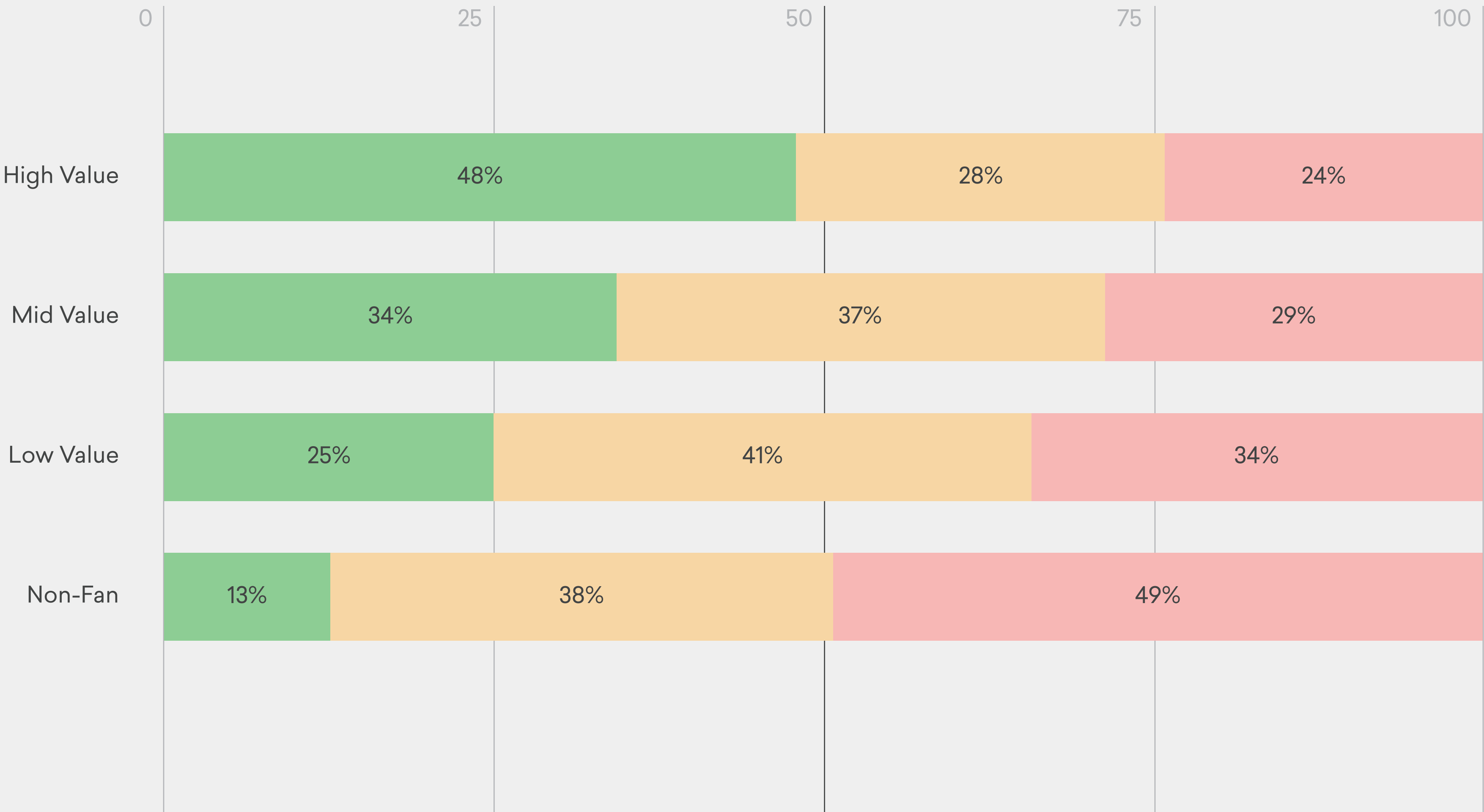


Nearly half of High Value fans believe sports are “an important part of being a man.”



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:
“Playing or following sports is an important part of being a man today.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*



Sports create opportunities for connection with family, friends, and community.



“I started getting interested in my teens watching college football with my father, I always loved watching the Georgia bulldogs and then I became interested in the NBA and started watching the Atlanta Hawks regularly and then around the same time I became a huge fan of the Atlanta falcons pro football team. I still follow those plus watch other games involving each sport.”

Alex, 45–54-year-old white man, Republican, Mid Value Fan



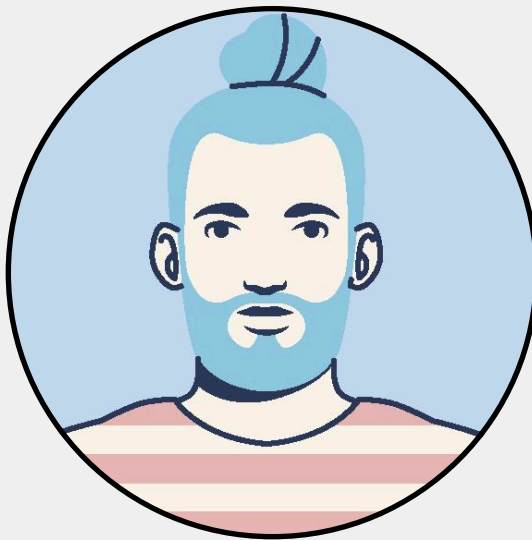
“I used to watch football and baseball because my dad and brother were into it. I was serious about the '86 Mets but that's about it.”

Katherine, 53-year-old Hispanic woman, Moderate, Republican from Cape Coral, Florida, Non-Fan



“Sports is part of who I am and is a hobby I bond with others over.”

Jacob, 38-year-old white man, Disengaged, Democrat from Appleton, Wisconsin, Mid Value Fan



“My dad always had golfing, racing, football, and baseball on. I would watch on occasion, but never was interested. We went to some ball games as a kid and I played soccer, but I never cared to watch others play sports for enjoyment. I went to many college football games, and that can be enjoyable, but I really don't care that much.”

James, 39-year-old white man, Progressive Activist, Independent from Roswell, Georgia, Non-Fan

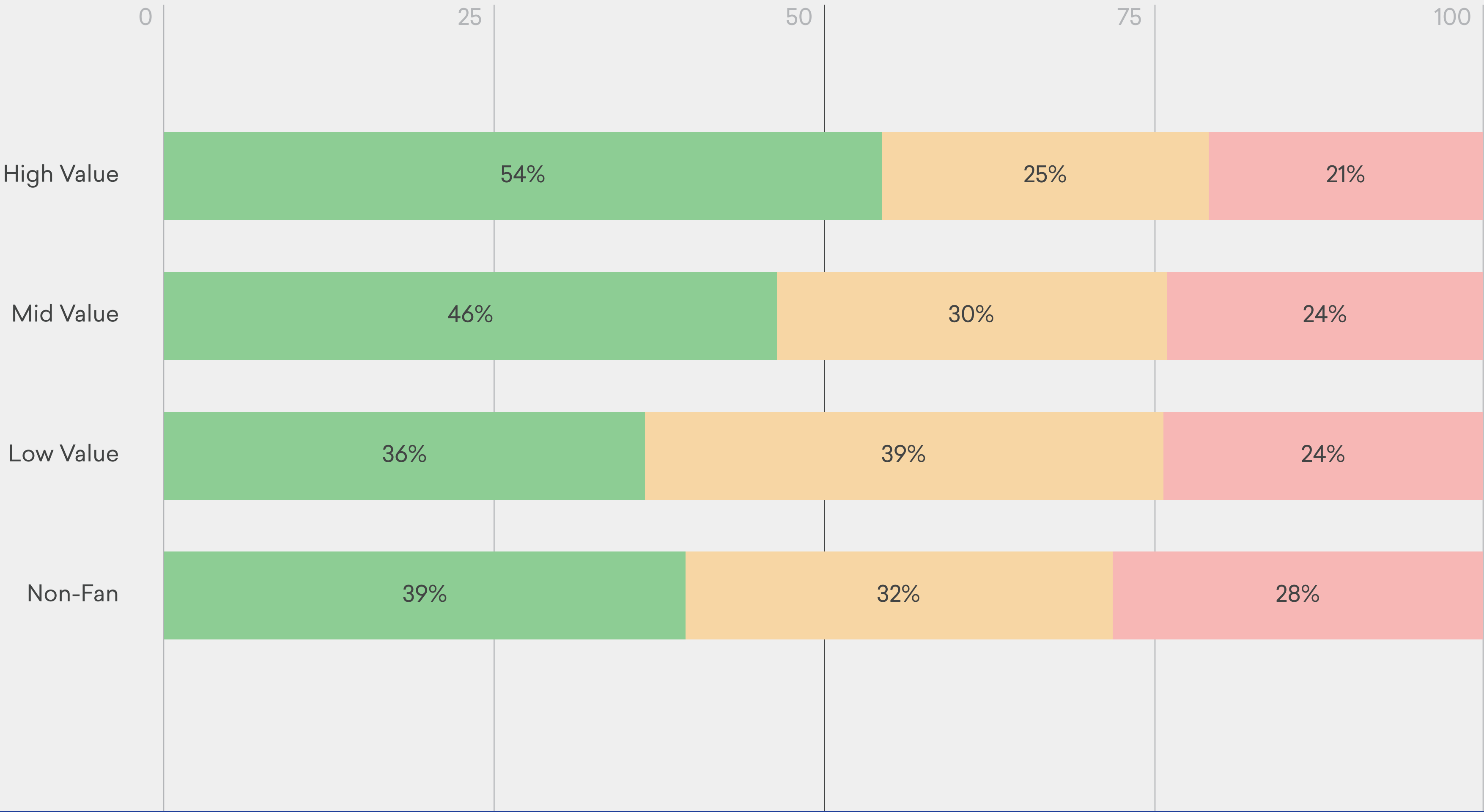
High Value Fans are most likely to believe “boys face more pressure” in sports than girls.



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

“Boys face more pressure to succeed in sports than girls.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*



FANDOM & ATTITUDES TOWARD REPRESENTATION

Fans see sports as a force for both unity and representation.

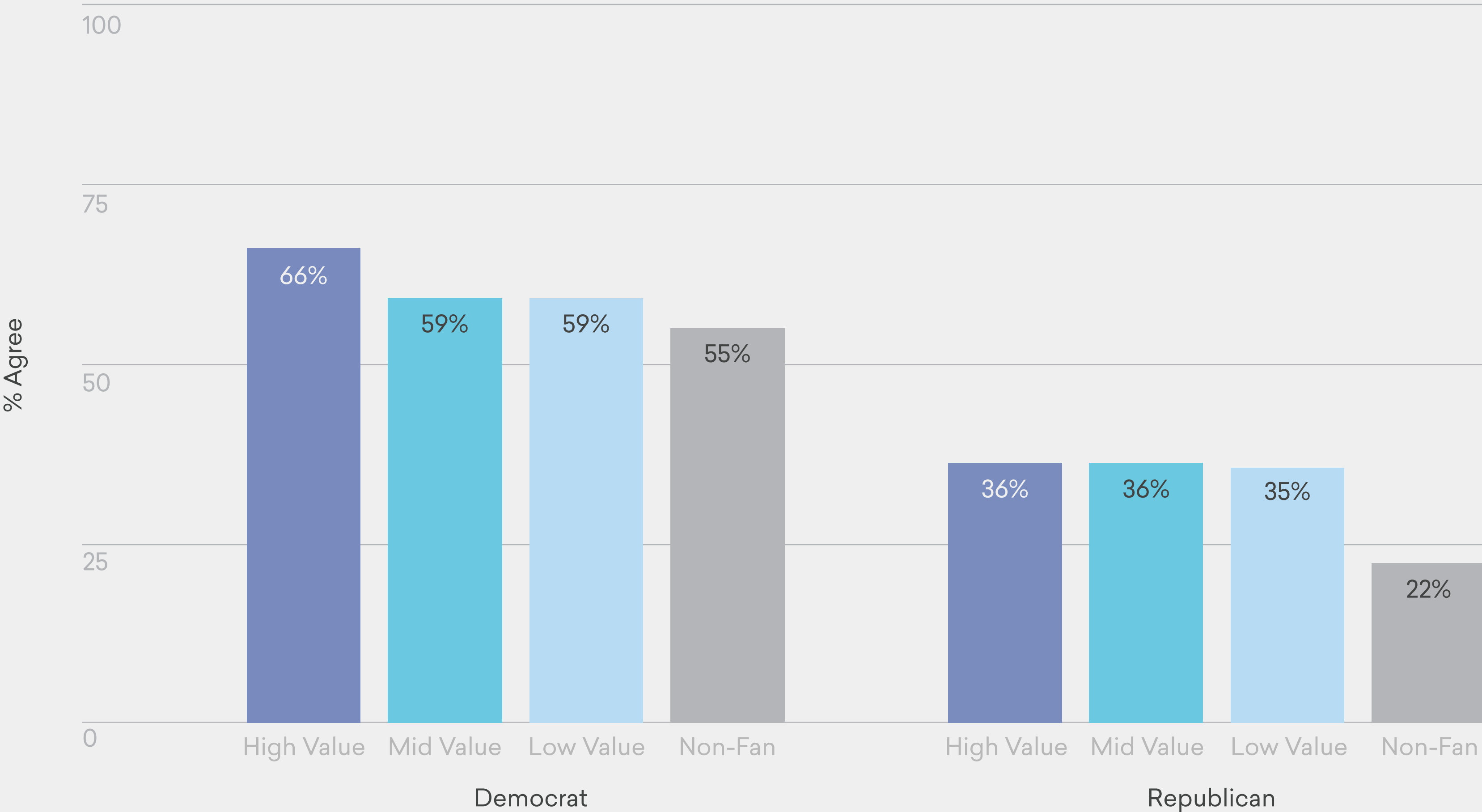
- A greater proportion of fans see sports as a valid space for expressing one's views than non-fans, a pattern which emerges across political parties.
- 79% of High Value fans say it's important for sports leadership (e.g. coaches, GMs) to reflect the diversity of America—compared to just 70% of non-fans. This pattern is consistent among both Democrats and Republicans.
- 76% of High Value fans agree that sports are great because identity and background “don’t matter”—compared to just 43% of non-fans.
- The view that sports can cut across social boundaries strengthens with fandom intensity—underscoring the dual role fans see for sports: both inclusive and unifying.

While partisan differences remain, fandom strengthens support for political and social self-expression on the field.



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"It is appropriate for athletes to use sports events to express their views on social or political issues."

- High Value
- Mid Value
- Low Value
- Non-Fan



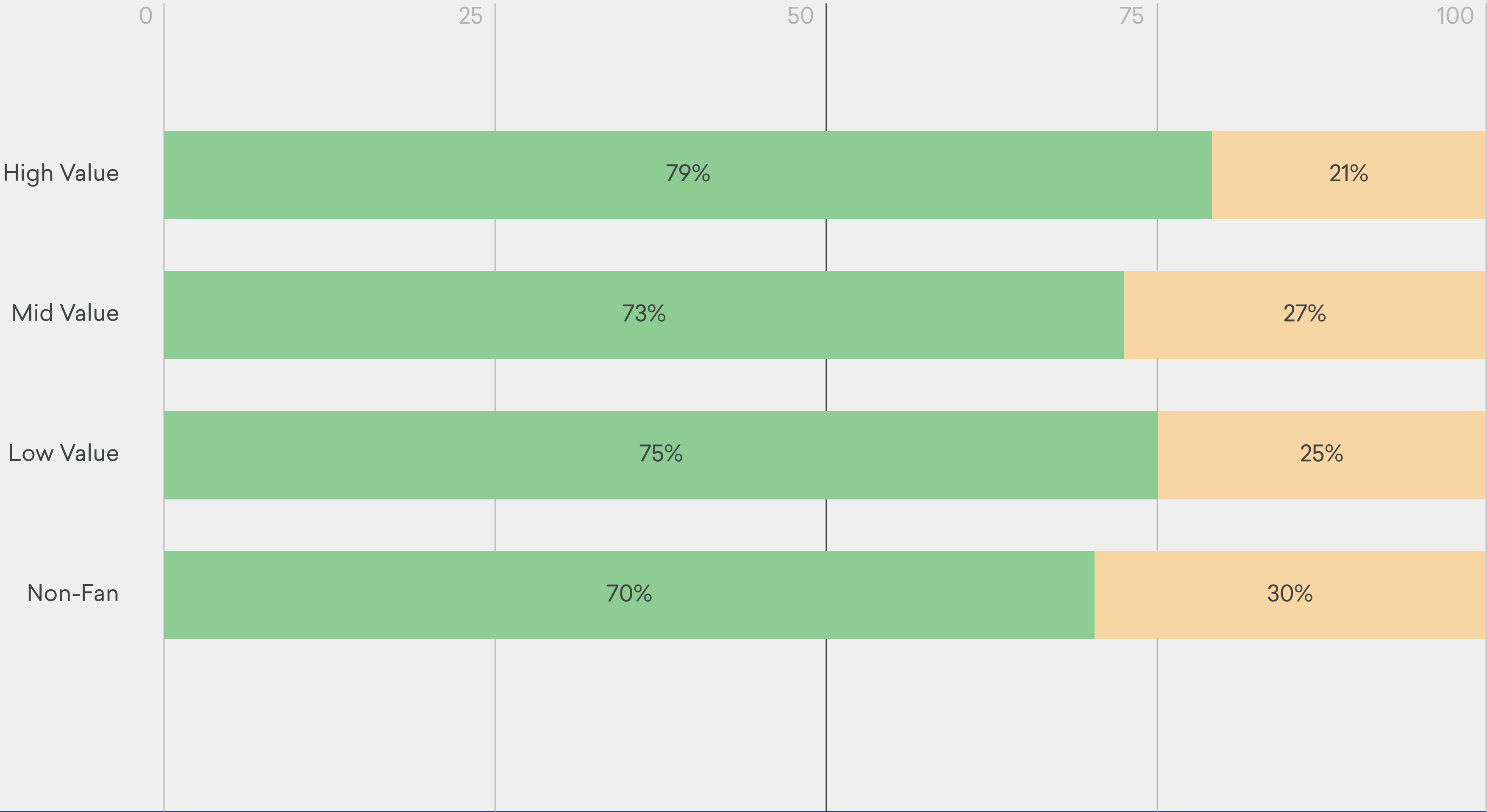
A majority of Americans believe leadership in sports should reflect the diversity of America. High Value fans are most likely to believe this.



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How important do you think it is for leadership in sports (e.g. general managers, head coaches) to reflect the diversity of America?

- Important*
- Not important**

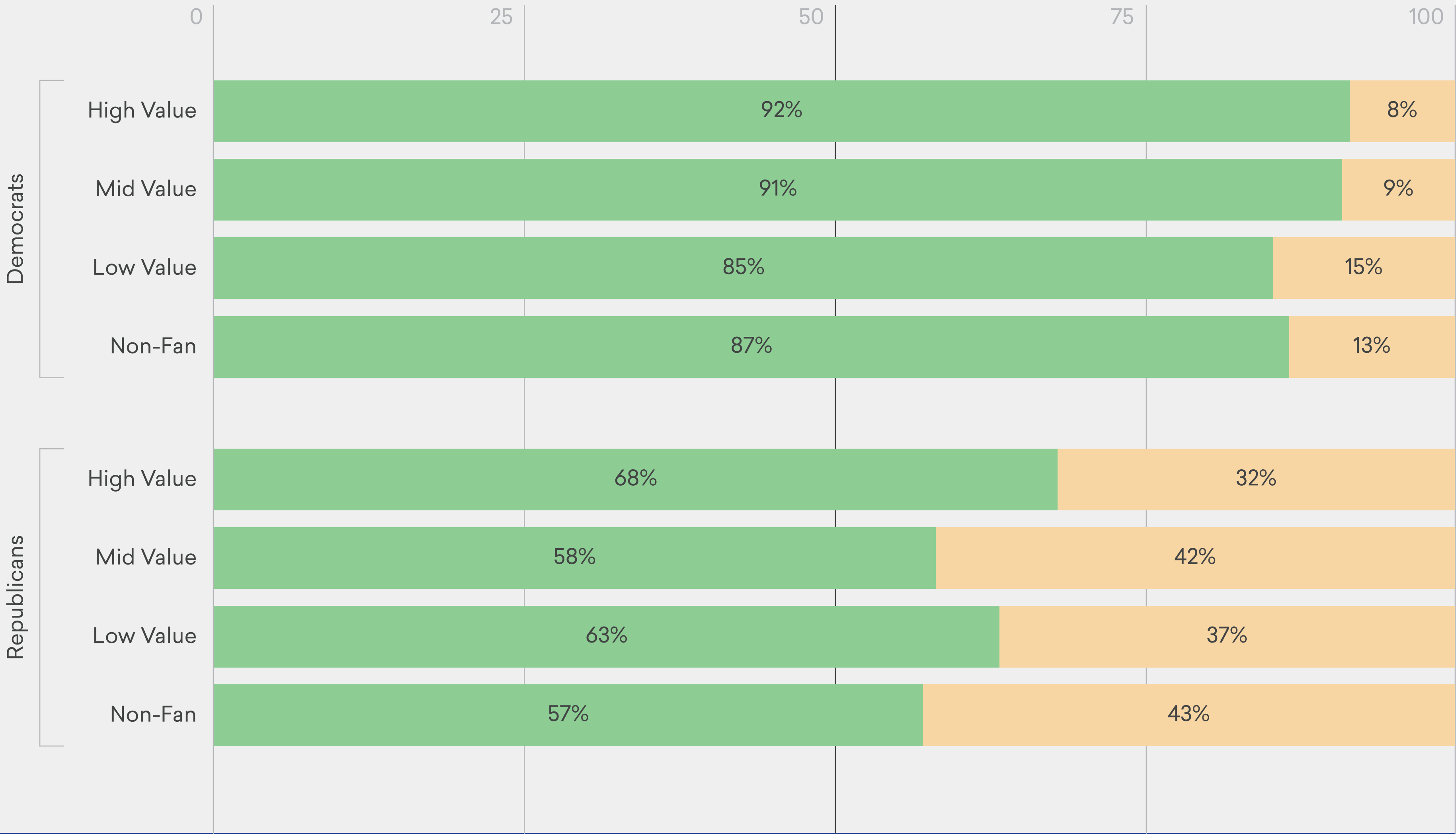


A majority of Americans support diversity in sports leadership. High Value fans of both parties express most support.



How important do you think it is for leadership in sports (e.g. general managers, head coaches) to reflect the diversity of America?

- Important*
- Not important**



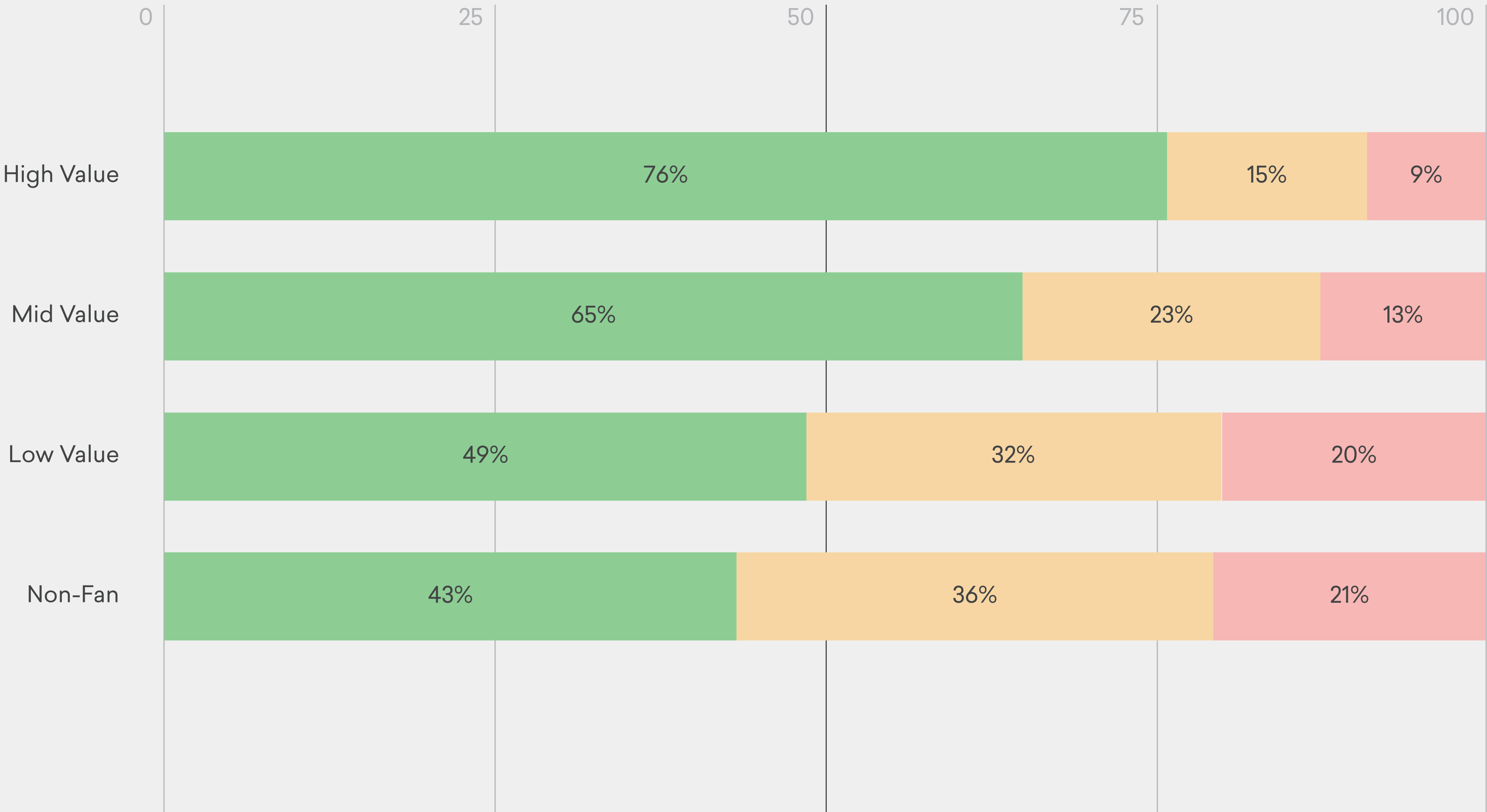
Greater fandom is linked to a stronger belief that sports transcend identity and background.



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

“Sports are great because your identity and background don’t matter.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*



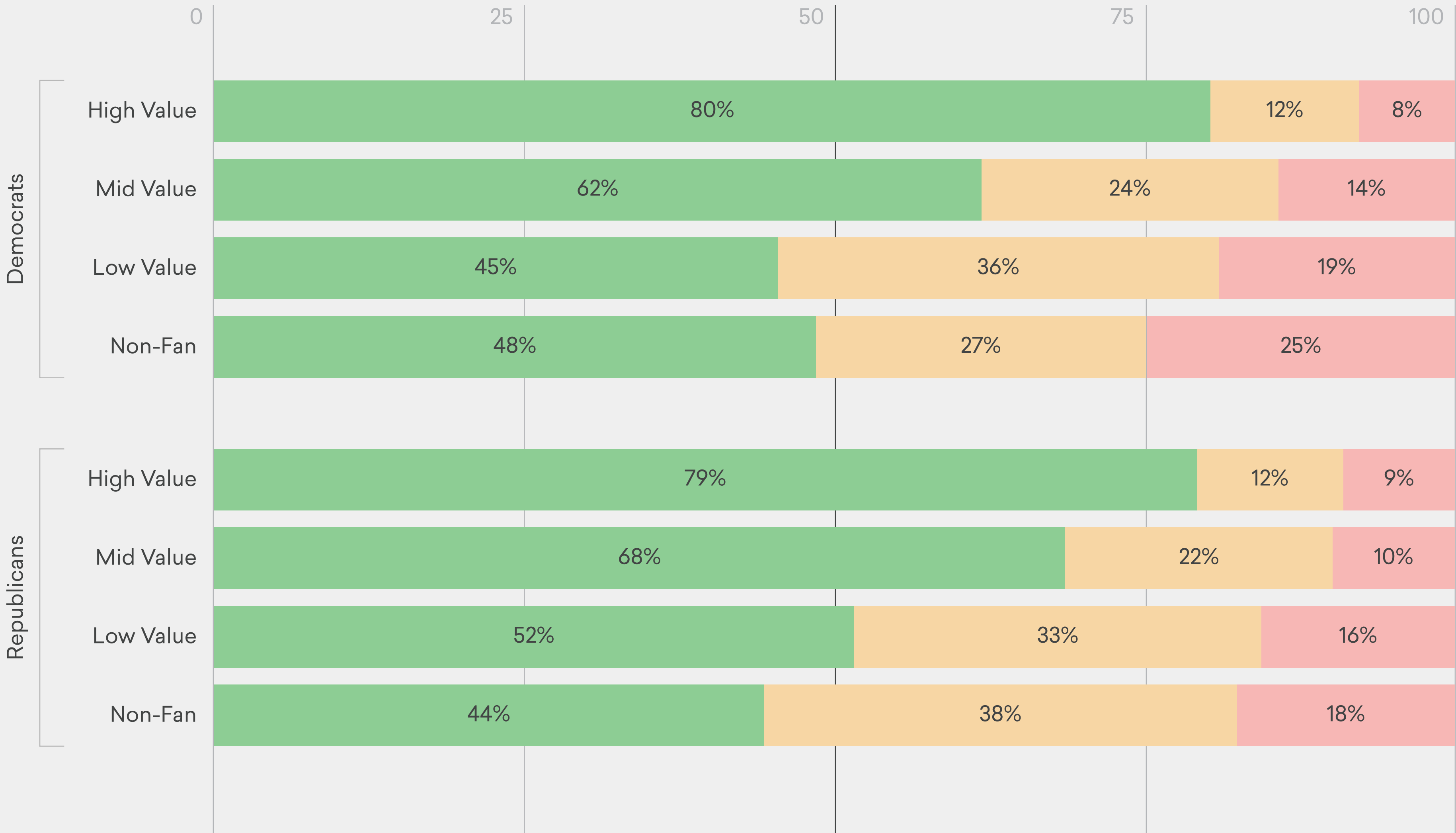
Across party lines, High Value fans embrace the idea that sports transcend identity and background.



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

“Sports are great because your identity and background don’t matter.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sports fandom is associated with greater civic engagement and democratic participation. High Value fans are more likely to be registered to vote, follow politics, and take part in local civic and political activities. They are also more open to working across lines of difference.
- Critically, these patterns emerge across partisan lines. High Value fans—Democrats and Republicans alike—are more likely than non-fans to believe Americans "have more in common than what divides us," and to want both parties to work together to solve national problems.
- This suggests that if more Americans become bigger fans, it could help to soften some of the hard edges of political partisanship.

- Sports fandom also offers a powerful entry point into conversations about what it means to be a man today. Sports remains one of the most culturally acceptable spaces for emotional expression among men.* The opportunity for emotional openness may be one reason why sports are special.
- Engaging men through sports may be key to building broader social connection. Unlike other civic efforts that might feel formal or forced, sports offer a natural, enjoyable setting where conversations about identity, difference, and belonging are already taking place.
- For those invested in deepening their understanding of what it means to be a man today, sports represent a rare space where men already show up.

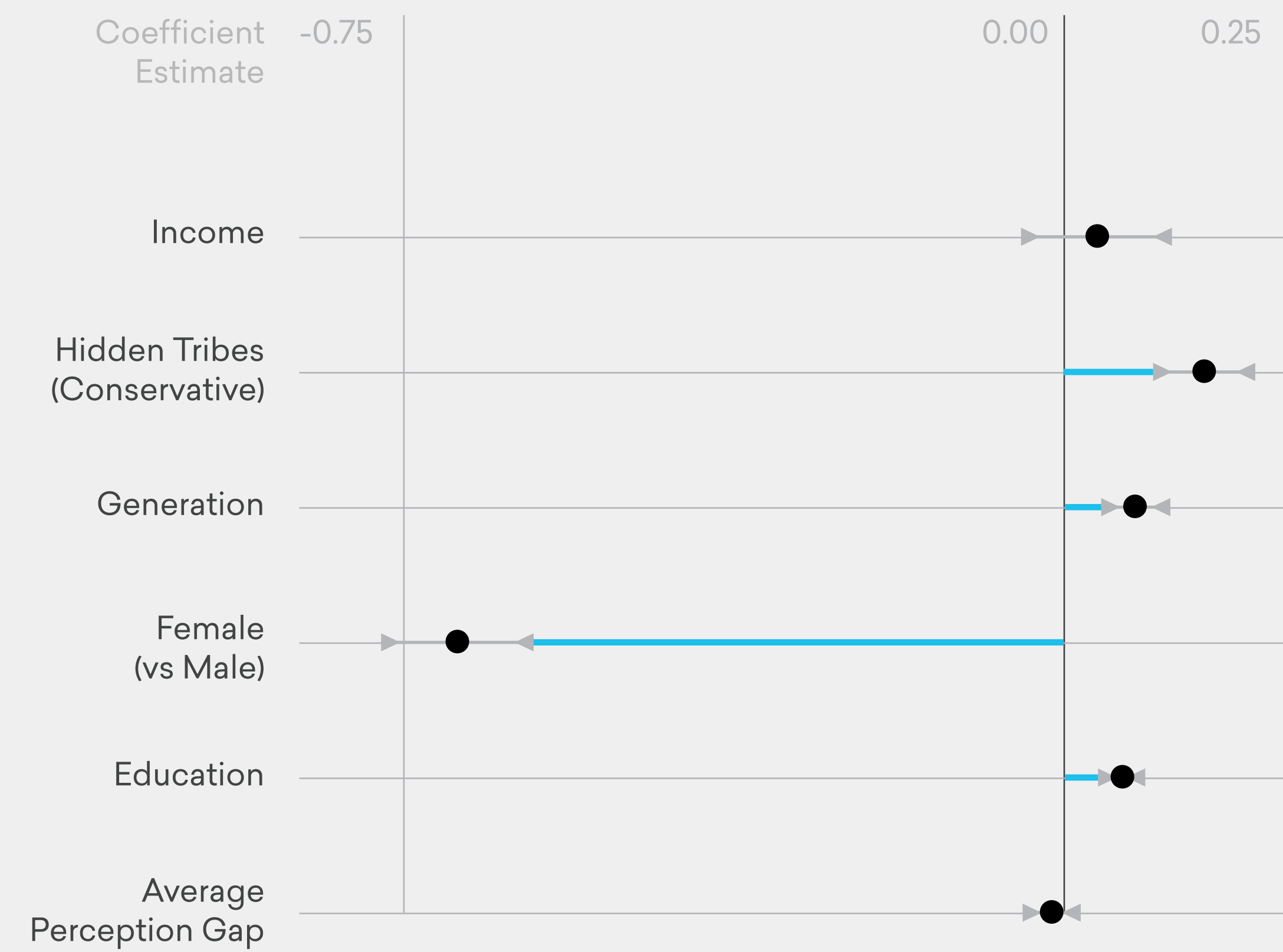
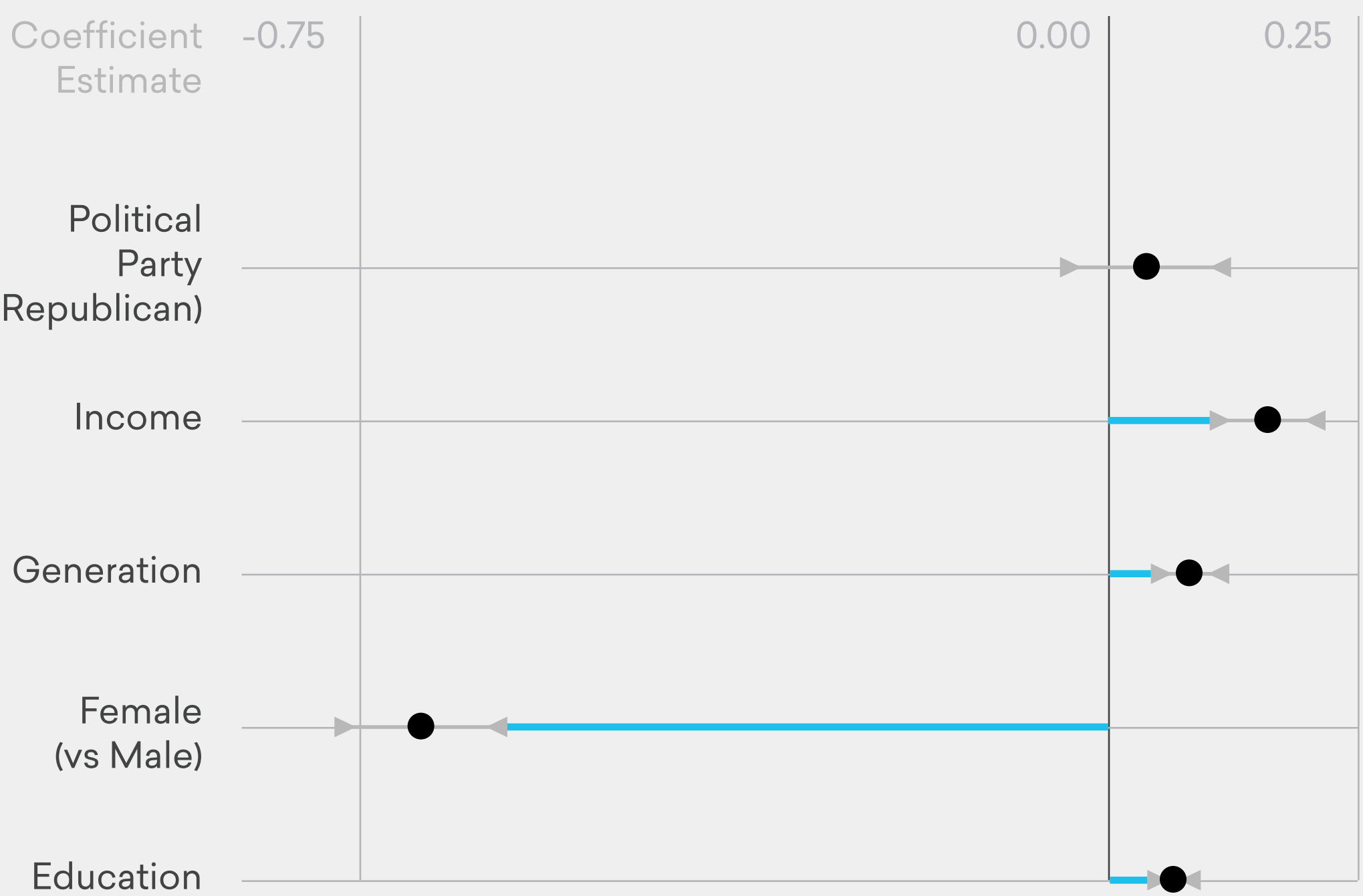
*Messner, M. A. (2002). Taking the field: Women, men, and sports (Vol. 4). U of Minnesota Press.

APPENDIX

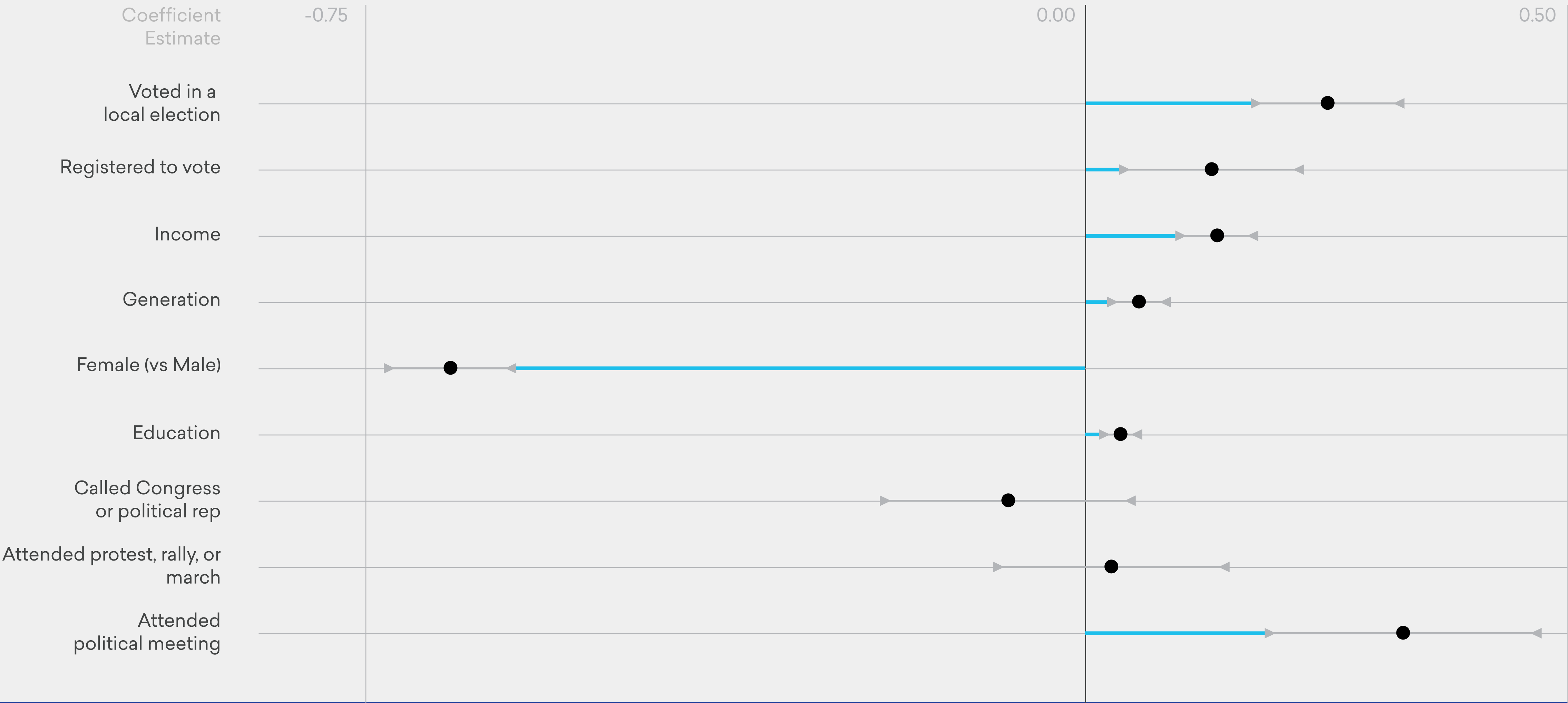
Fandom is shaped by identity, income, age, and ideology.

Both models highlight consistent predictors of stronger fandom: being male, younger, higher income, and politically conservative.

The charts below show the strength of various predictors in determining someone’s fandom categorization. Positive values indicate a stronger positive influence (i.e., more passionate fan), while negative values suggest an inverse relationship (i.e., less passionate fan).



Fandom is associated with core tenets of political participation, especially voting.



Fans and non-fans have similar perception gaps and feelings toward out-party members.

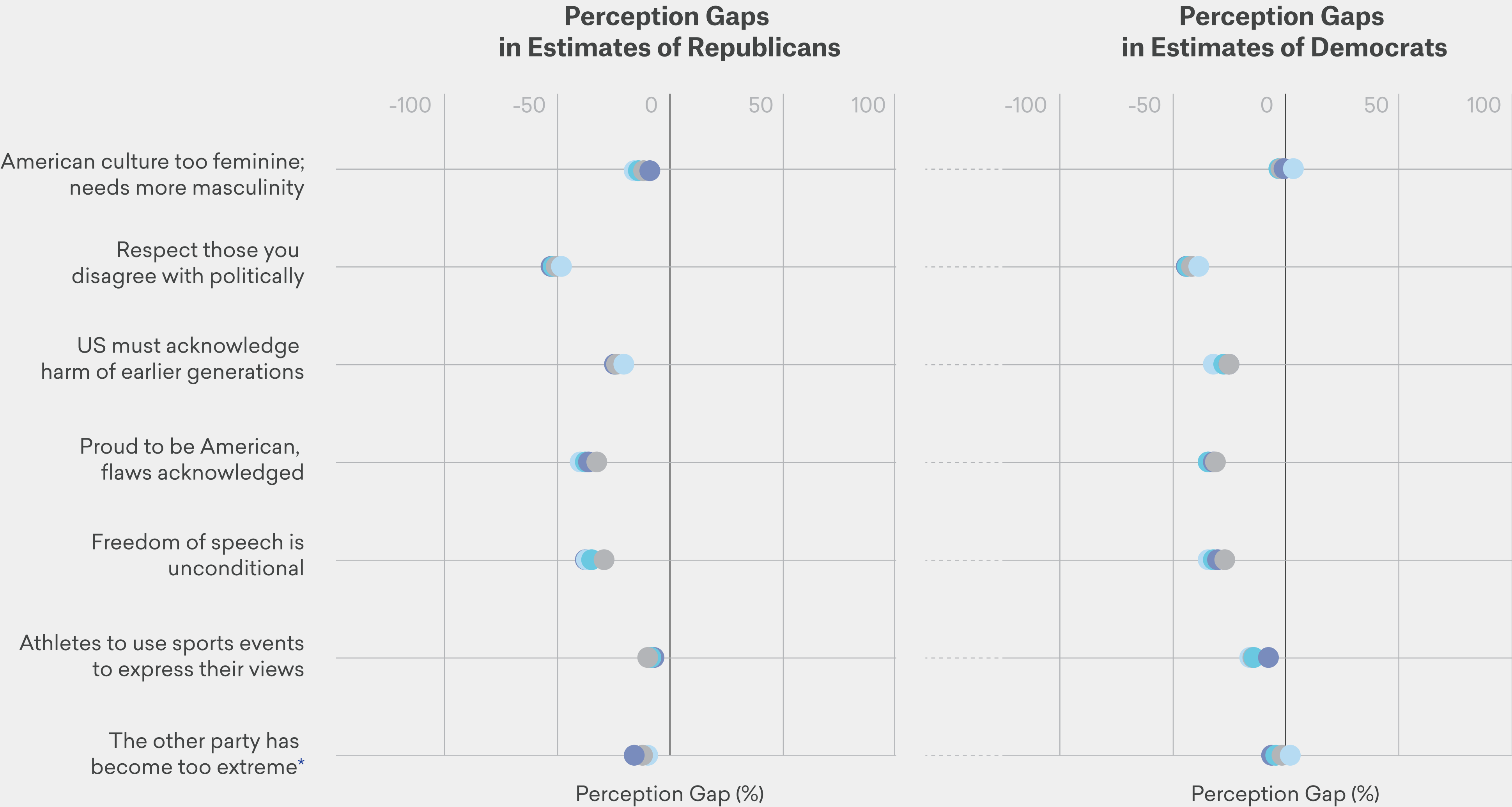
- A perception gap is the difference between what one party (e.g. Democrats) *thinks* the other party (e.g. Republicans) believes, and what the other party *actually* believes. More in Common has identified perception gaps between Democrats and Republicans across a range of topics ([learn more here](#)).
- Past More in Common [research](#) has found that more politically engaged adults have larger perception gaps. However, even though High Value fans are more politically engaged, they do not differ from non-fans in magnitude of their perception gaps, or in the warmth they feel toward out-party members.

Perception gaps are similar across fan values for both parties.

**Positive =
Overestimation**

**Negative =
Underestimation**

- High Value
- Mid Value
- Low Value
- Non-Fan

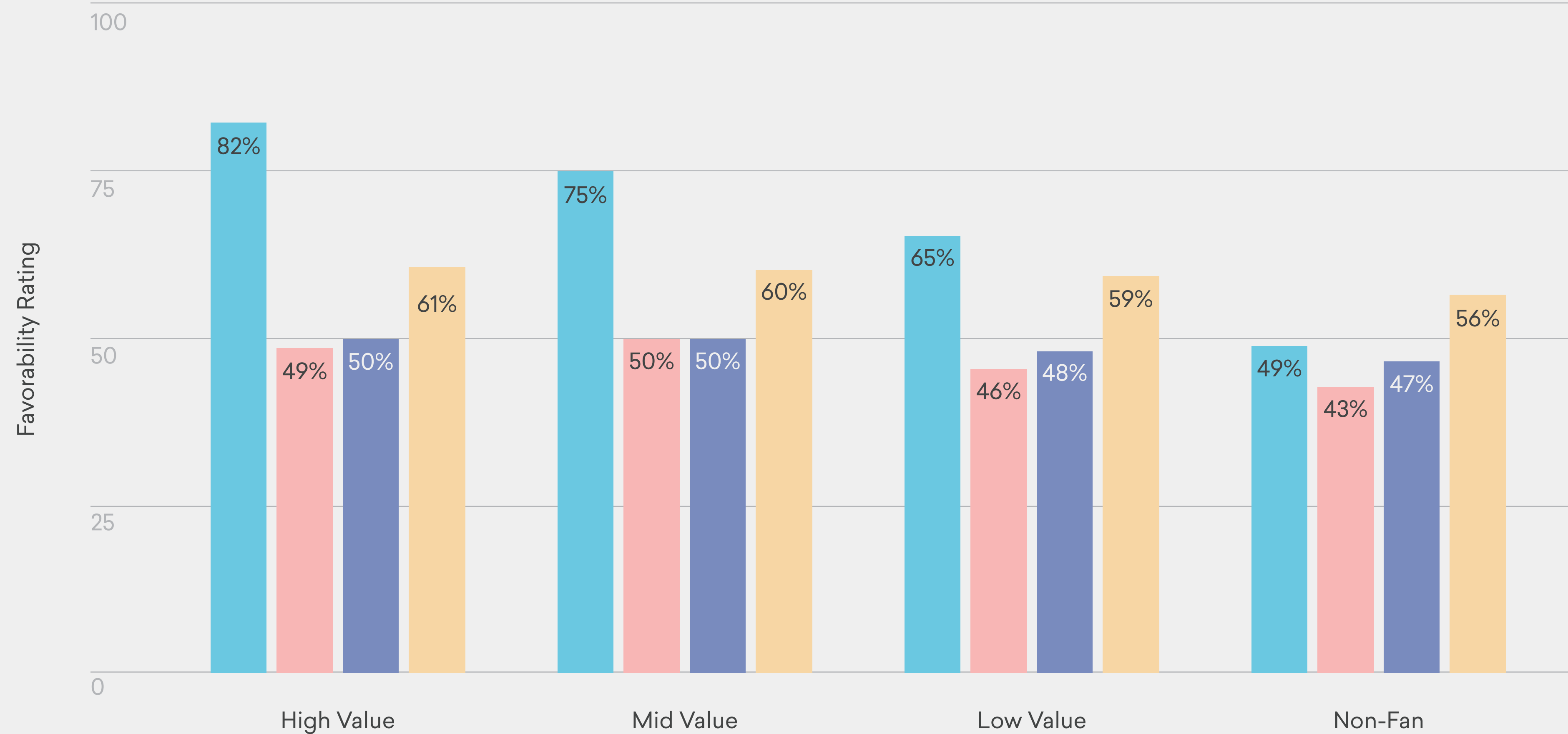


Fans feel favorable towards other fans.

On a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means very cold and 100 means very warm, how cold or warm do you feel towards the following people?

Feelings towards:

-  Sports Fans
-  Republicans
-  Democrats
-  Independents



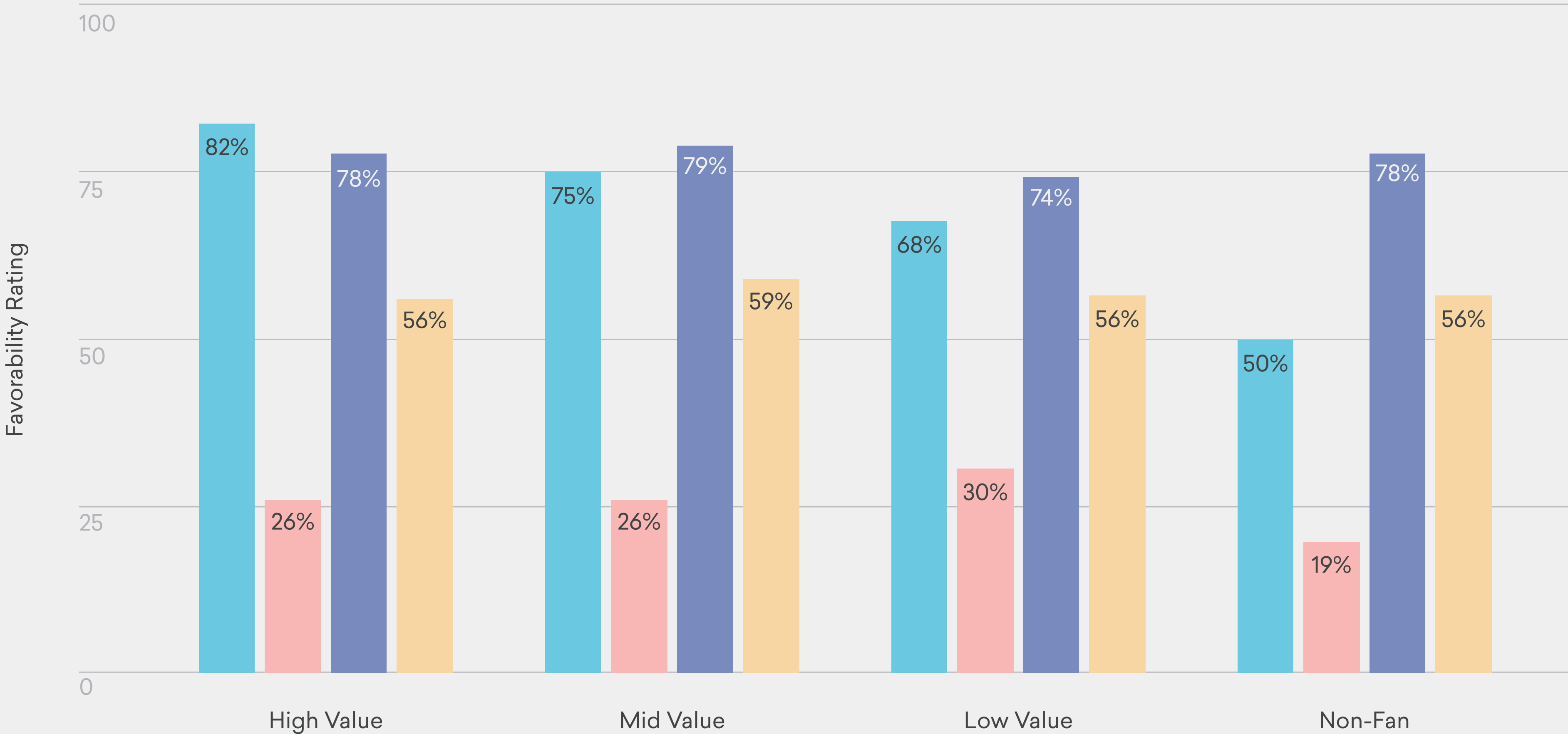
Democrat sports fans in general have higher thermometer ratings towards Republicans. But Low Value Democrat sports fans have the highest ratings towards Republicans.



On a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means very cold and 100 means very warm, how cold or warm do you feel towards the following people?

Democrat feelings towards:

- Sports Fans
- Republicans
- Democrats
- Independents



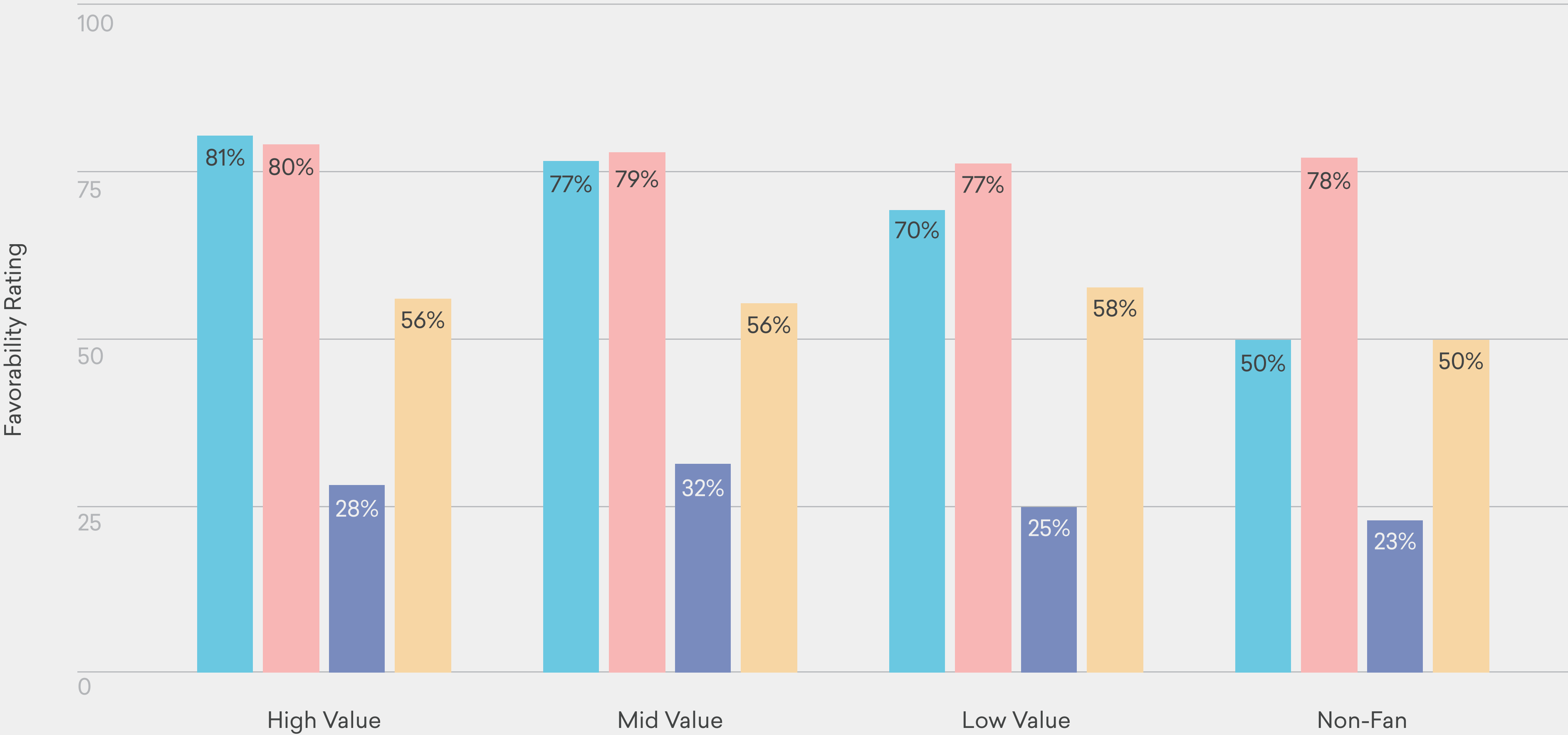
High and Mid Value Republican sports fans have higher thermometer scores towards Democrats than Low Value and Non-fans.



On a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means very cold and 100 means very warm, how cold or warm do you feel towards the following people?

Republican feelings towards:




- Sports Fans
- Republicans
- Democrats
- Independents

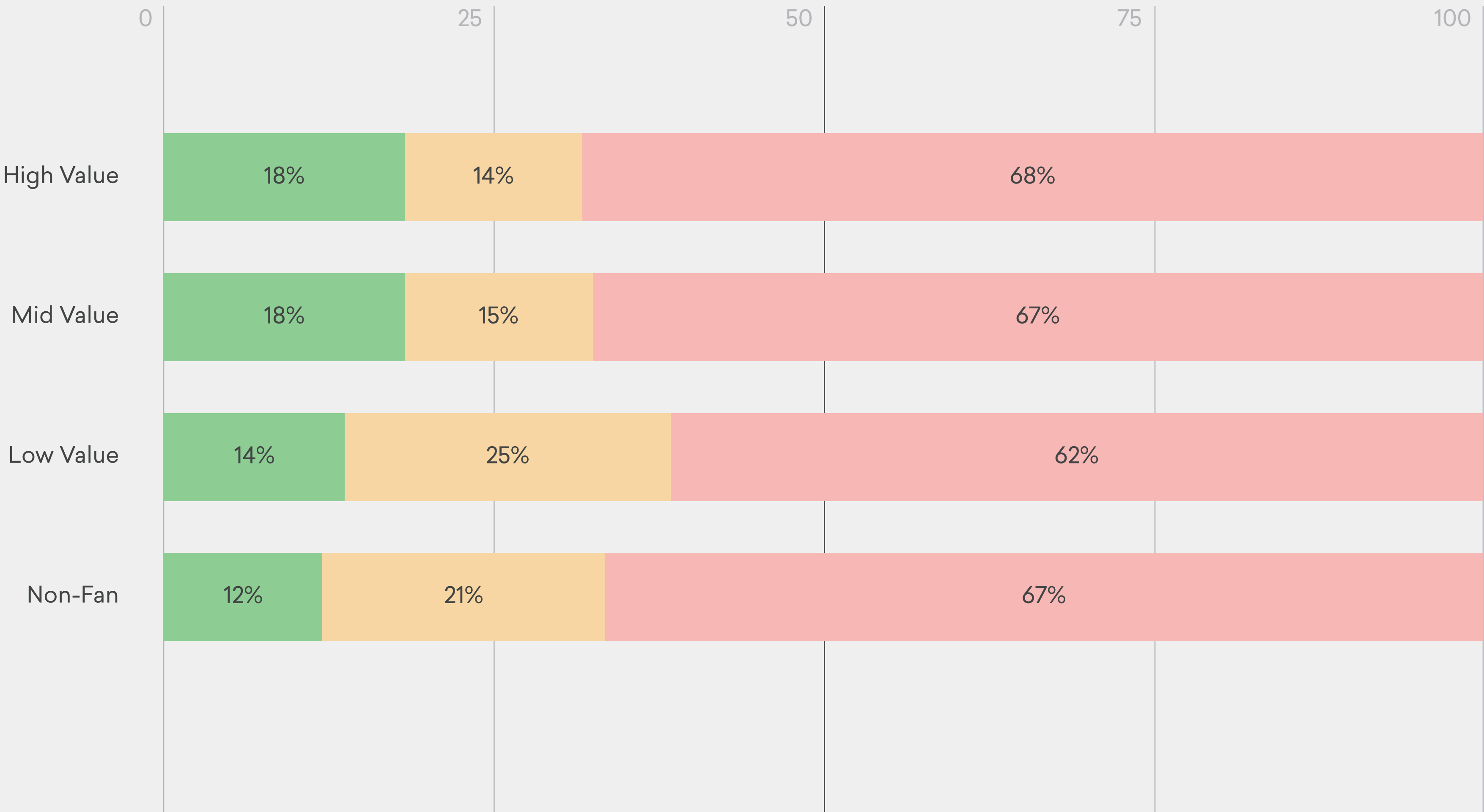


Non-fans are slightly less likely to endorse political violence.

How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

“I feel that violence is sometimes needed to advance political causes in the US today.”

-  Agree*
-  Neither agree nor disagree
-  Disagree*



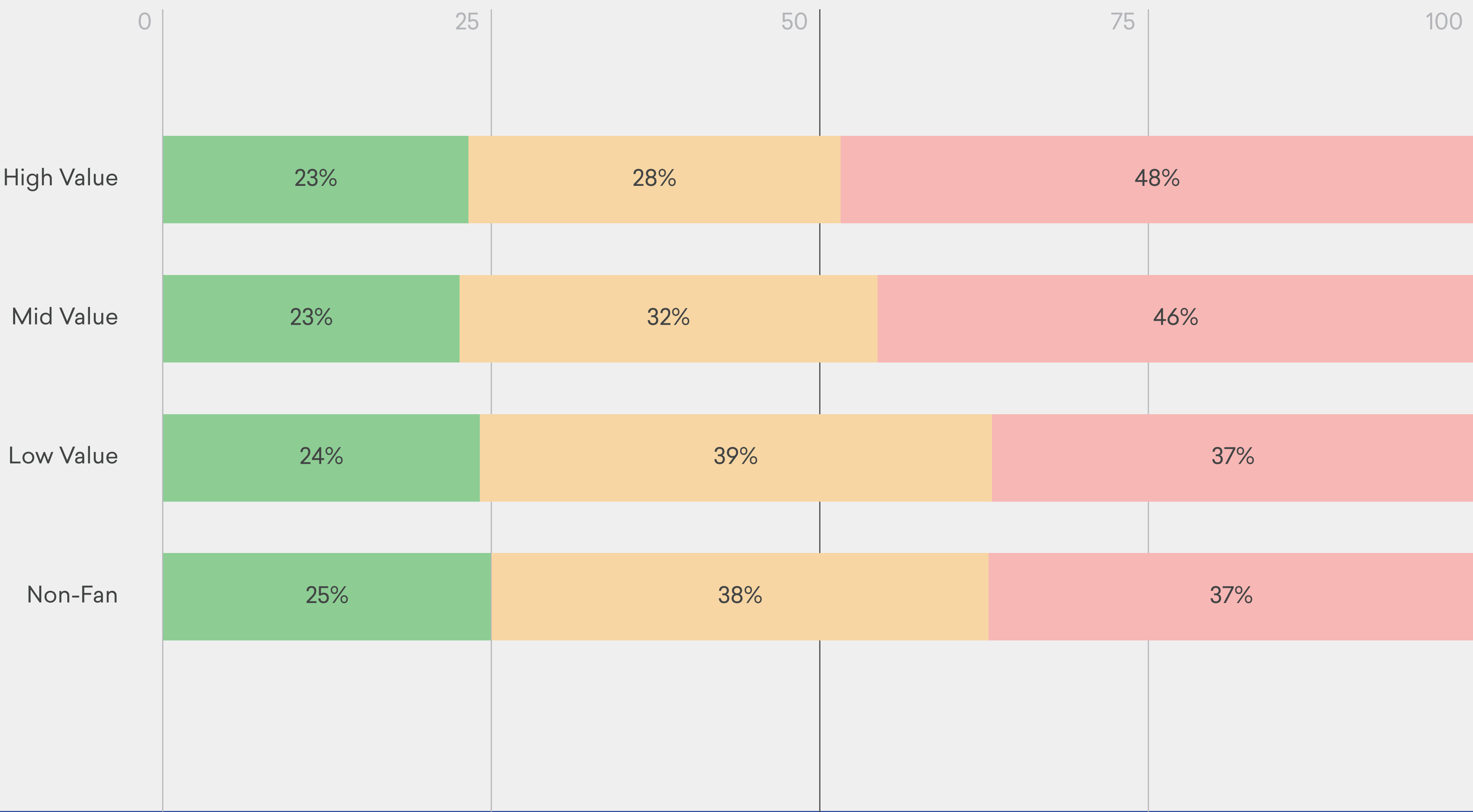
Fandom relates to feeling at least some kind of community belonging.



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

“There is no community where I feel a strong sense of belonging.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*

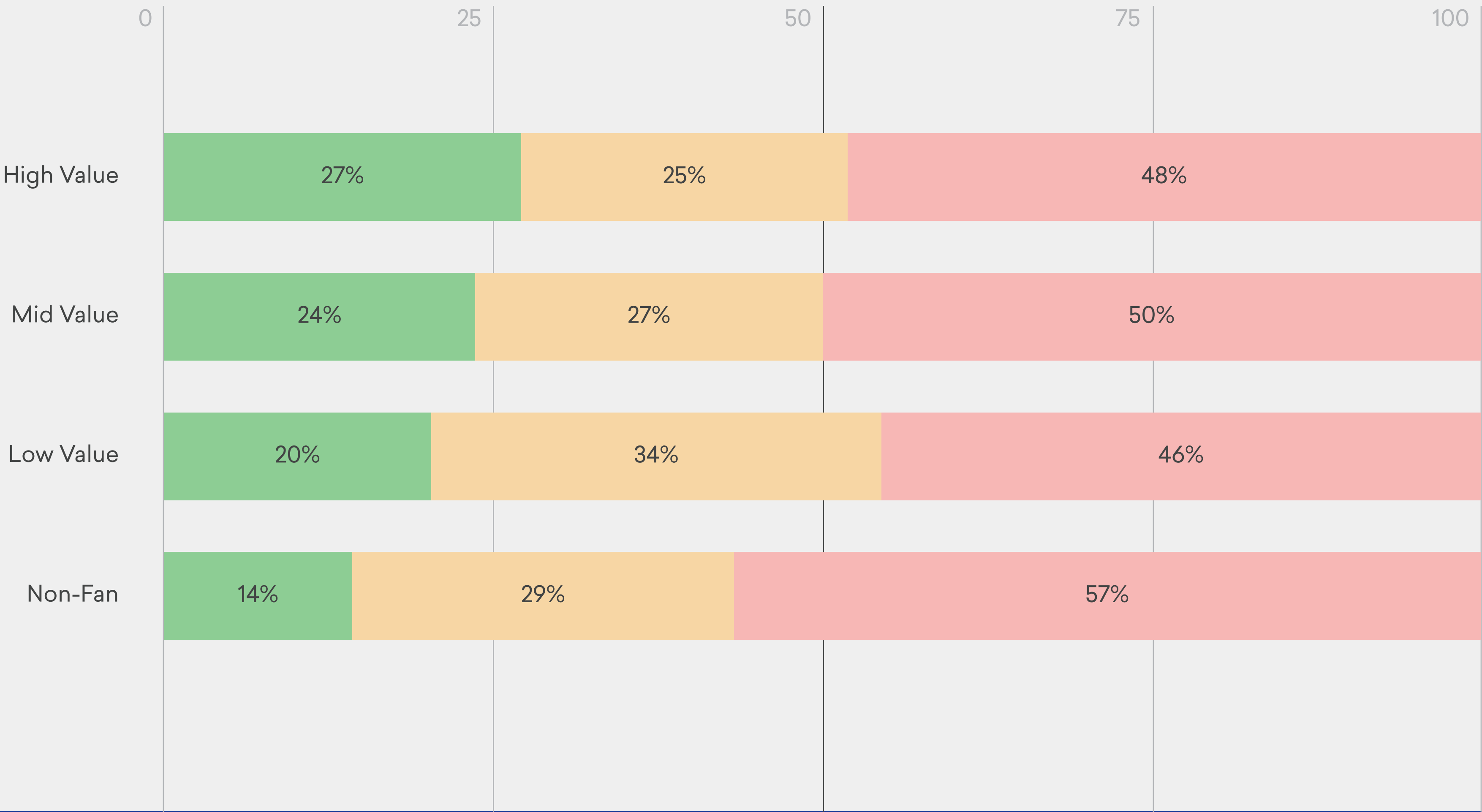


Fans are more likely to think sports are a more natural fit for boys than girls.



How much do you agree or disagree about the following statement:
“Sports are a more natural fit for boys than for girls.”

- Agree*
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree*



Mid and High Value fans endorse hard work and effort more than Non-fans.



Which of the following played a greater role in getting you where you are today?

- Luck and circumstance
- Hard work and effort

