

SPORTS FANDOM

PATHWAY TO COMMUNITY BELONGING



More in
Common





**More in
Common**

About More in Common

This report was conducted by More in Common US, part of a nonpartisan, international initiative aimed at building societies and communities that are stronger, more united, and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarization and social division. We work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, media, and government to connect people across lines of division.

Griffin Colaizzi, M.S. — Research Fellow

Ashley Fabrizio, Ph.D. — Head of Research

Jordan Wylie, Ph.D. — Research Fellow

Calista Small — Research Manager

Jason Mangone — Executive Director

We would like to thank Laura Mae Creates for her work designing this report.

We would like to thank Sam Hasani, Nathalie Bussemaker, and Adelaide Madary for their contributions to this project.

This report was conducted by More in Common US in partnership with FOX Sports.

Website: www.moreincommonus.com | Email: us@moreincommon.com

**This report
investigates the
relationship between
fandom and
community belonging,
how fandom may
promote belonging,
and how fans might
extend it to the people
around them.**

For many Americans, Sports is one of the few places where people from all walks of life regularly come together. From tailgating football games to March Madness brackets in the office, fandom is a deeply shared cultural ritual.

At the same time, life in the United States feels increasingly fractured. Political institutions are viewed with skepticism, partisan divides feel stronger than ever, and loneliness continues to rise.

Last year, in “[Fans, Politics and Power](#),” we asked what sports fandom has to do with civic life and social connection. We found that passionate sports fans are more civically engaged, more likely to support democratic norms, and more willing to connect across political divides than their non-fan peers. Fans also reported a stronger sense of belonging in their communities.

The chapters that follow trace fandom outward; from the individual fan, to the people around them, and to the communities and social networks that sports touch.



01 Executive Summary

02 Fandom Typology Overview

03 **Chapter I:** *Sports as a place for common ground across political difference*

04 **Chapter II:** *Fans are committed to their community*

05 **Chapter III:** *High Value fans are social hubs*

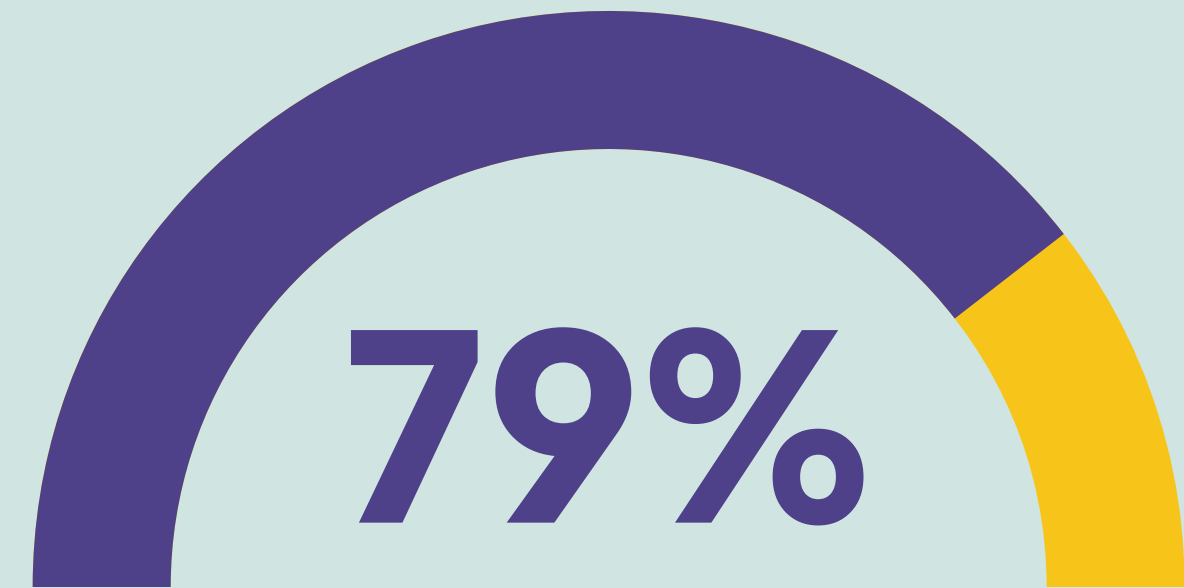
06 **Chapter IV:** *Fandom can be for everyone*

07 Conclusions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

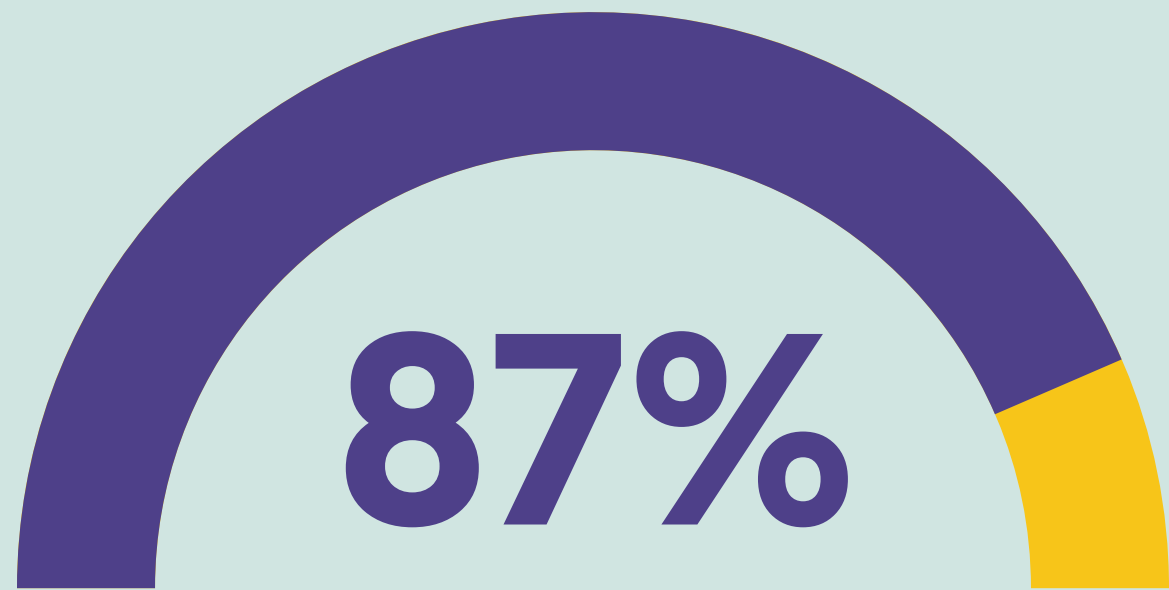
Sports offers a rare space for building trust across political difference, and the stronger the fan, the more they see that potential.

Most major fan bases split evenly across Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Most people, High Value fans especially, see sports as a place to enjoy something alongside those they disagree with politically (79% vs. 52% of Non-Fans).



High Value fans see sports as a place to enjoy something alongside those they disagree with politically

Sports fandom is tightly linked to community connection, and the stronger the fan, the stronger their presence in the community.

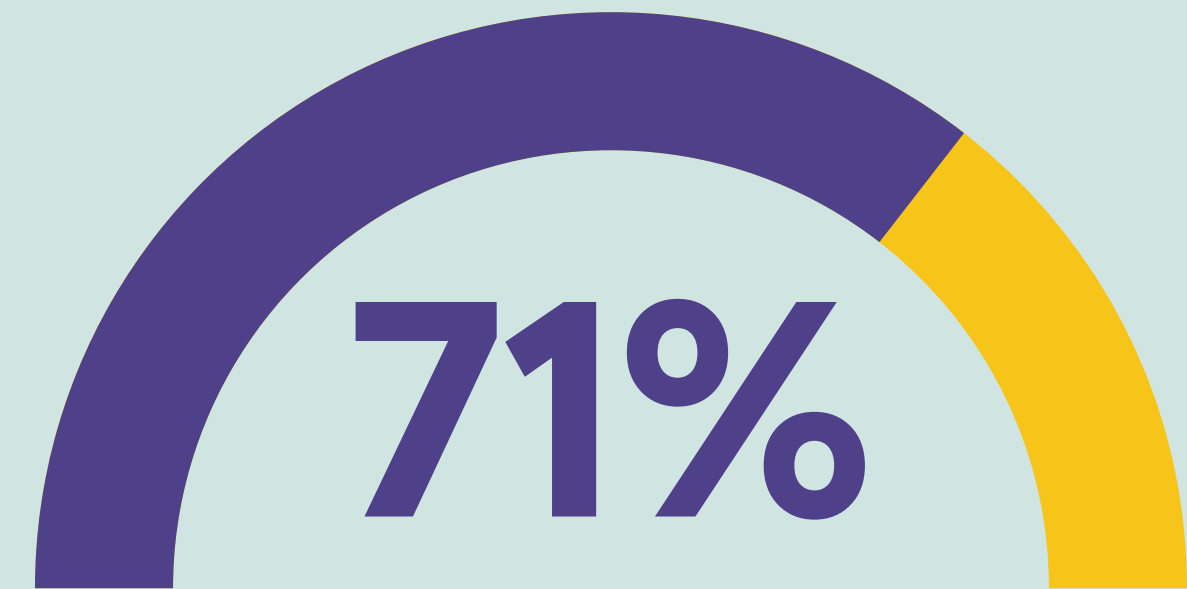


High Value fans feel they belong in their local community

Fandom tracks closely with belonging, trust, and civic life. High Value fans are more likely than Non-Fans to feel they belong in their local community (87% vs. 74%), to trust their local government (61% vs. 45%), and to feel responsible for making a difference where they live. They're also one of the less lonely groups and the most likely to volunteer: helping neighbors (69%), working to improve their community (58%), and volunteering for organizations (49%).

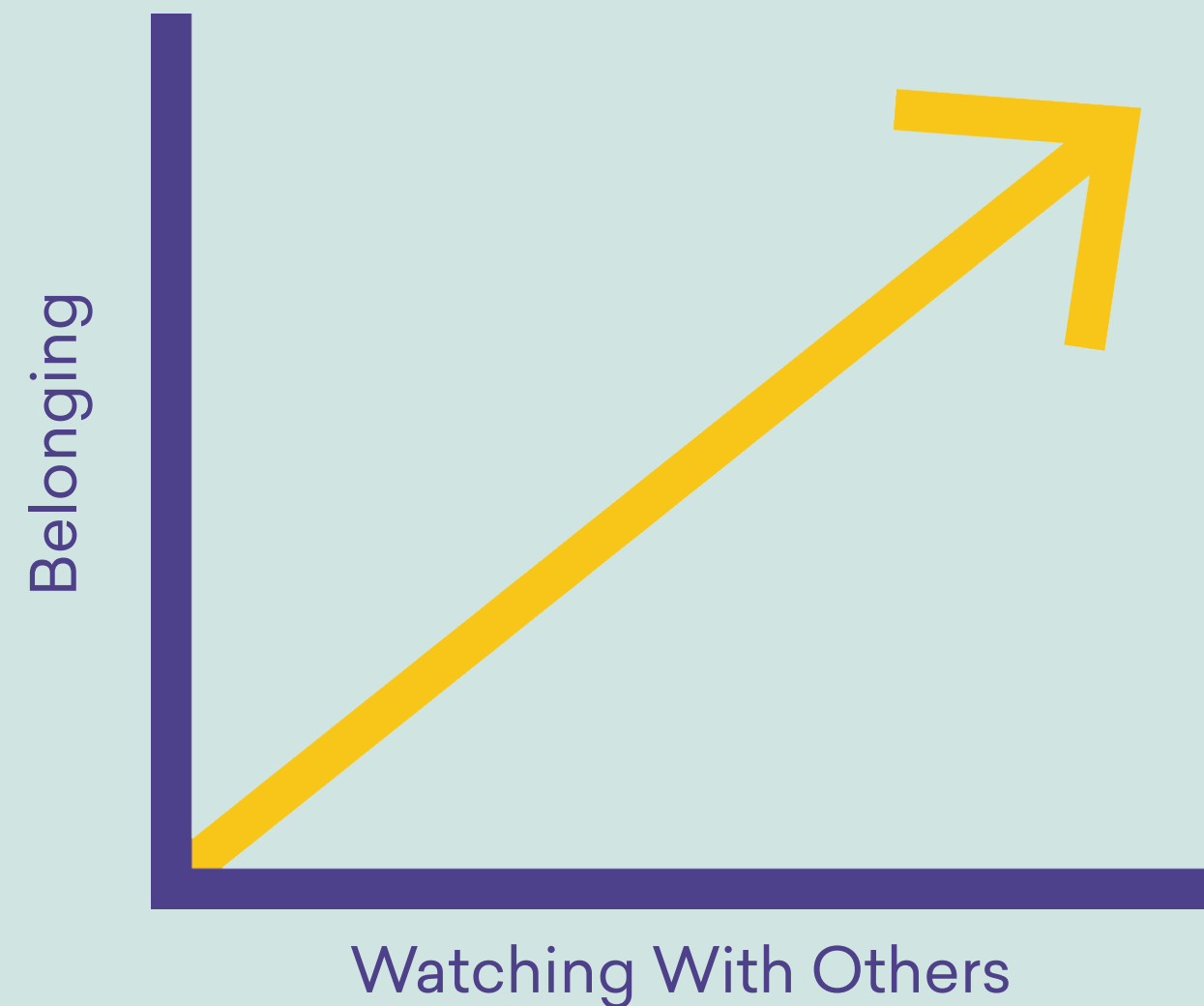
For High Value fans, sports and social connection go hand in hand. They go out to watch, host others, talk about sports, and show up in more shared spaces.

Sports is the single most common way High Value fans start a conversation with someone new (71% vs. 13% of Non-Fans). They also show up more, hosting others to watch sports (46% vs. 14%), frequenting more community spaces, and, unsurprisingly, making more friends through sports (90% have made several, vs. 44% of Non-Fans).



High Value fans use sports to start conversations with new people

Watching sports frequently with others is linked to greater feelings of belonging regardless of venue or fan level.



Connection comes from frequency of co-presence. Watching sports alongside others is linked to a stronger sense of belonging no matter where people watch and regardless of how big of a fan they are. The most cited reason people skip sports gatherings is simply not having someone to go with, pointing to an intervention opportunity.

METHODOLOGY



Nationally representative survey sample

N = 5,572 US adults
May 28 – June 11, 2026

- Weighted on age and gender (interlocked), education, race/ethnicity, Census region, and 2024 presidential vote and turnout
- The margin of error is +/- 1.50% for the US average and higher for subgroups
- Conducted online by More in Common using a participant panel from Rep Data
- Numbers in data visualizations are rounded to the nearest whole number. Figures may total to larger or smaller than one-hundred percent due to rounding

Americans in Conversation qualitative research panel

N = 210 US adults
March 11 – 16, 2026

- Broadly representative of the American population
- Panelists were asked open-ended questions about their thoughts on sports and sports fandom
- Quotations from those respondents 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.

FANDOM TYPOLOGY OVERVIEW

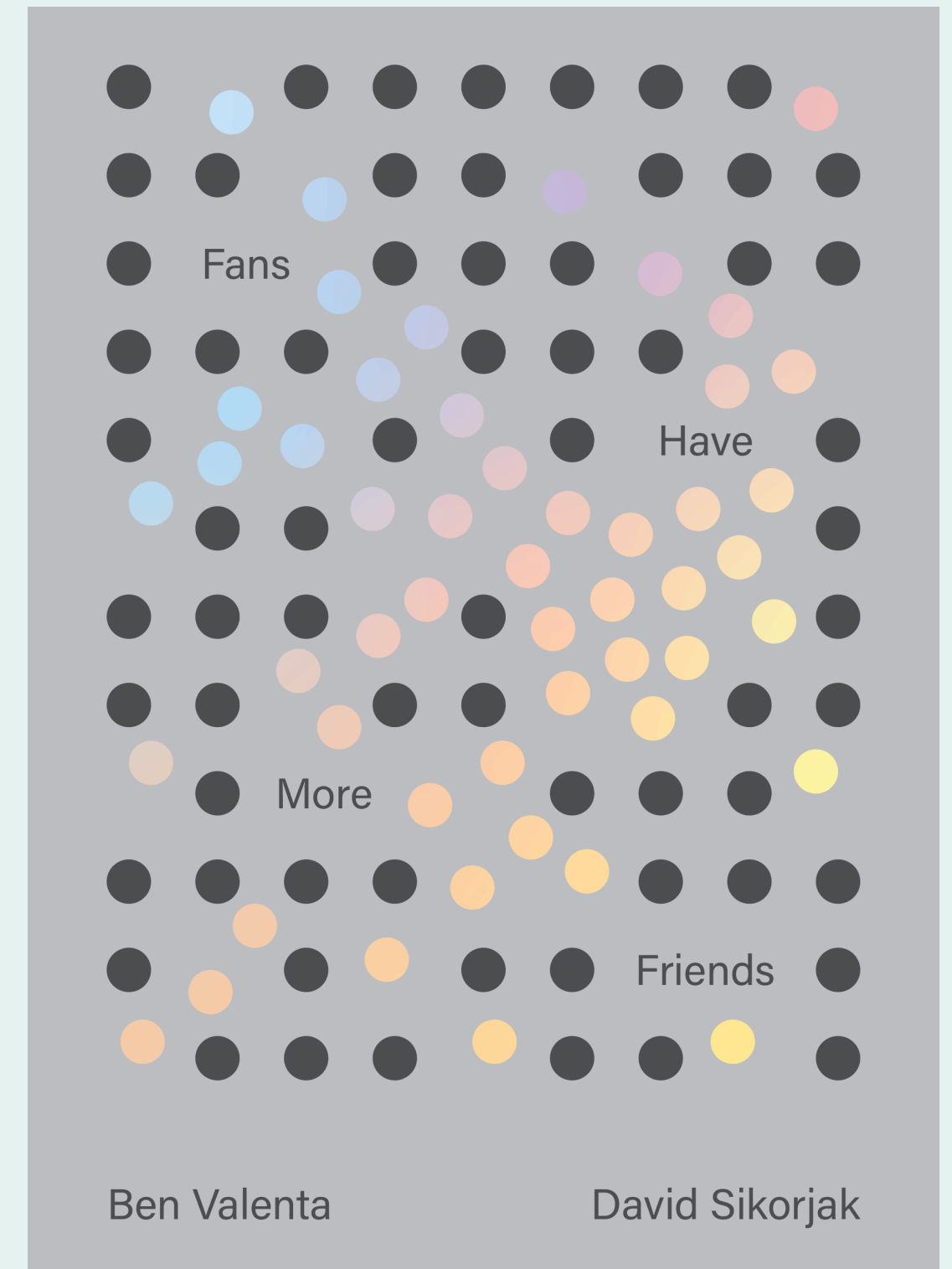


HOW WE MEASURE FANDOM

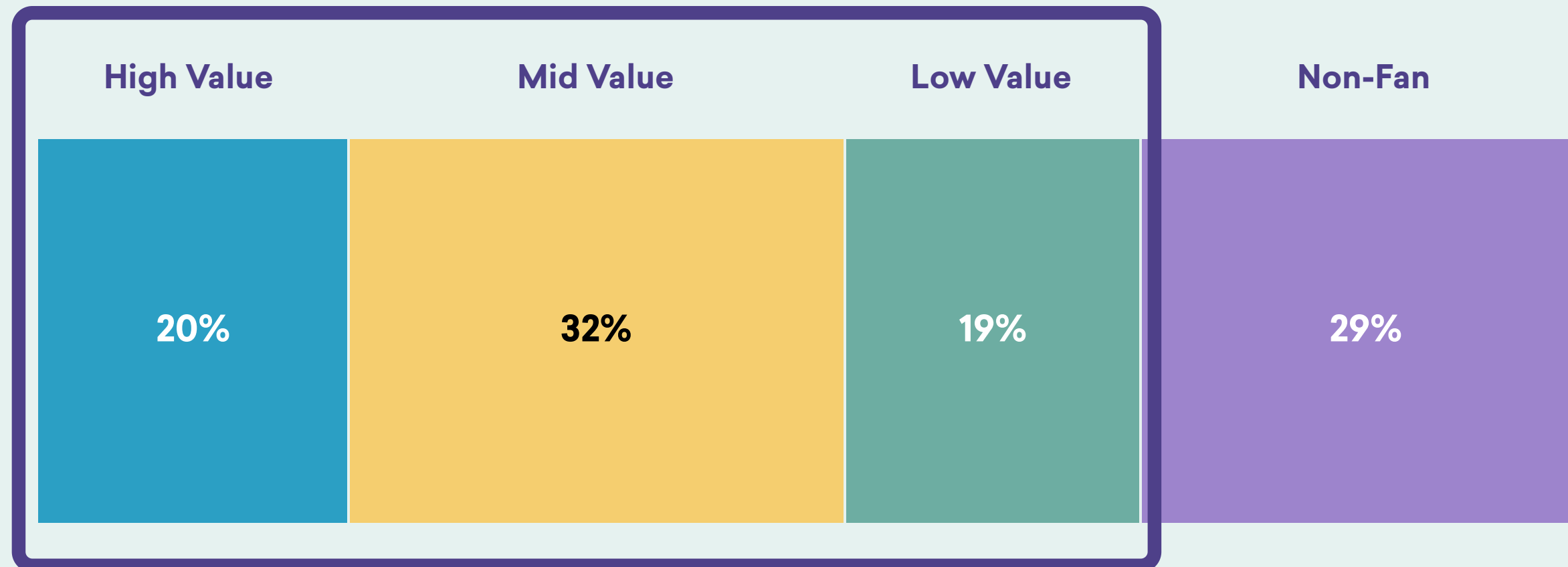
To classify fandom, this study uses the framework Ben Valenta and David Sikorjak introduced in their 2022 book *Fans Have More Friends*. It sorts respondents into four groups: Non-Fans, who don't follow sports at all, and Low Value, Mid Value, and High Value fans, with High Value fans following sports most closely and most passionately.

The typology grew out of FOX Sports' ongoing research into how Americans experience fandom, and treats fan value as a stable measure of a person's overall relationship to sports rather than a snapshot of one team or season.

Valenta and Sikorjak's work argues that fandom is a source of belonging and social connection. This report examines where those connections happen.



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



Fandom Value

● High Value

Avid, more passionate fans
More fan-related activities
(e.g. going to games)

● Mid Value

Moderately passionate
Moderate interest in sports

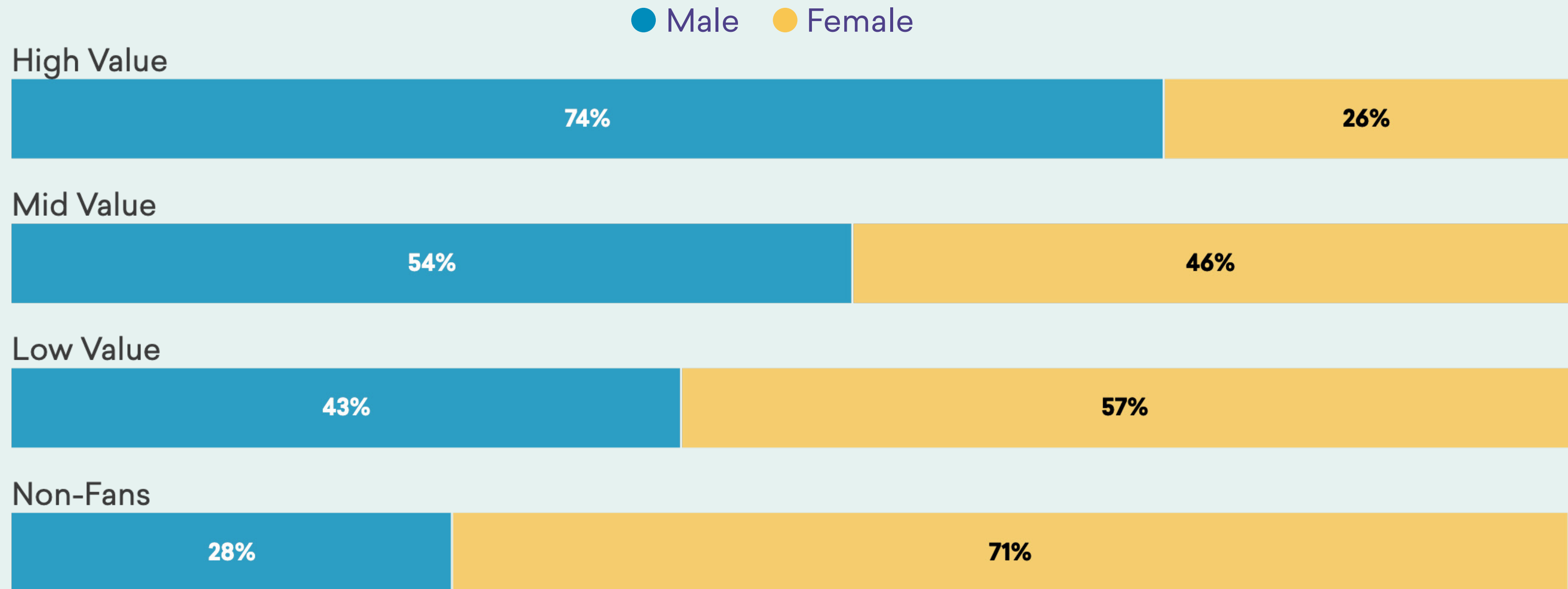
● Low Value

Casual, less passionate fans
Fewer fan-related activities
(e.g. going to games)

● Non-Fan

Not interested in sports
Does not watch sports

High Value fans are more likely to be male.



And more likely to be Millennial.

● Baby Boomer ● Gen X ● Millennial ● Gen Z

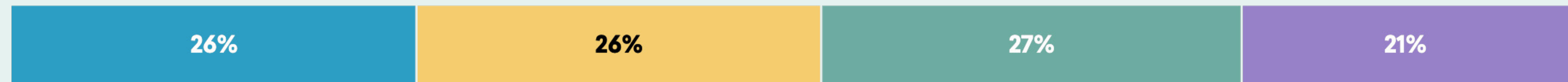
High Value



Mid Value



Low Value



Non-Fans



Democrats and Republicans have a nearly identical spread of fandom types.

● High Value ● Mid Value ● Low Value ● Non-Fans

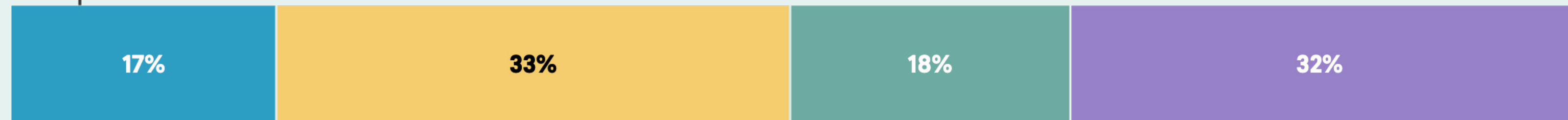
Democrats



Republicans



Independents



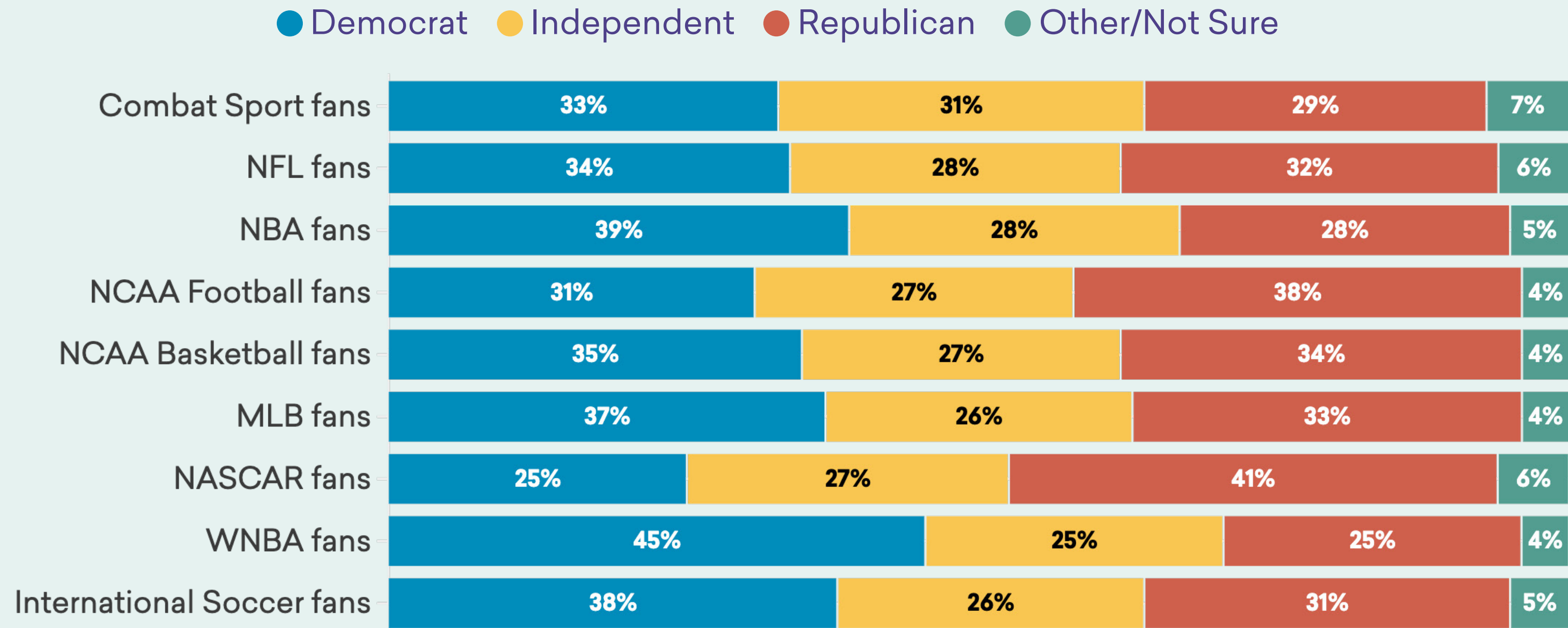
CHAPTER ONE

SPORTS AS A PLACE FOR COMMON GROUND ACROSS POLITICAL DIFFERENCE

Sports is a rare space where people across the political spectrum still show up together. Stronger fans see sports' potential to build trust across this difference.

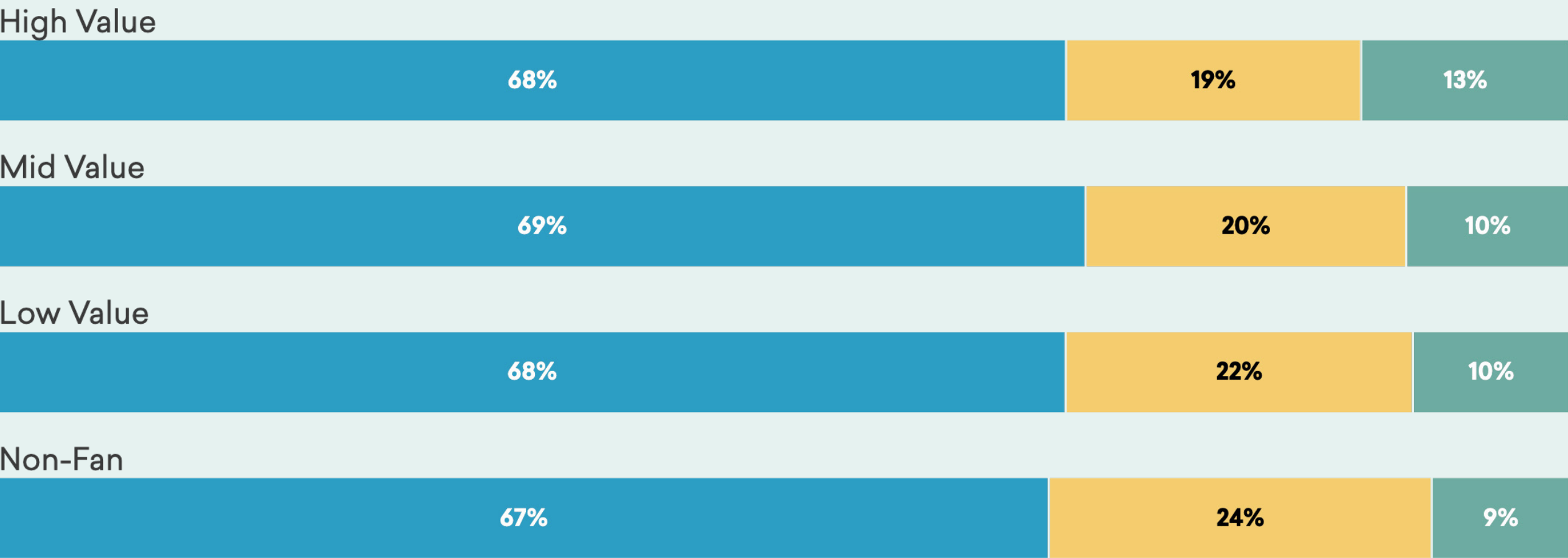
- 01** The fan bases of most major sports are split evenly across Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.
- 02** Most people — and High Value fans especially — see sports as a place to enjoy something alongside people they disagree with politically (79% of High Value fans, versus 52% of Non-Fans).
- 03** There's broad consensus across all fan levels to keep sports and politics separate (roughly two-thirds in every group).
- 04** Bigger fans are more likely to see sports as providing civic infrastructure. High Value fans are more likely to say athletes should promote voter participation (49% agree) than Non-Fans (29% agree).
- 05** The stronger the fan, the more interested they are in working across the aisle: 72% of High Value fans want to pursue a shared community goal with someone whose politics differ, versus 49% of Non-Fans.

The fan bases of most major sports are generally split across Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.



"Fans" of each sport are respondents who selected that sport in response to: "Which of the following sports do you watch at least a few times a year? Select all that apply."

For all Fan levels and Non-Fans alike, there is broad consensus to keep sports and politics separate.



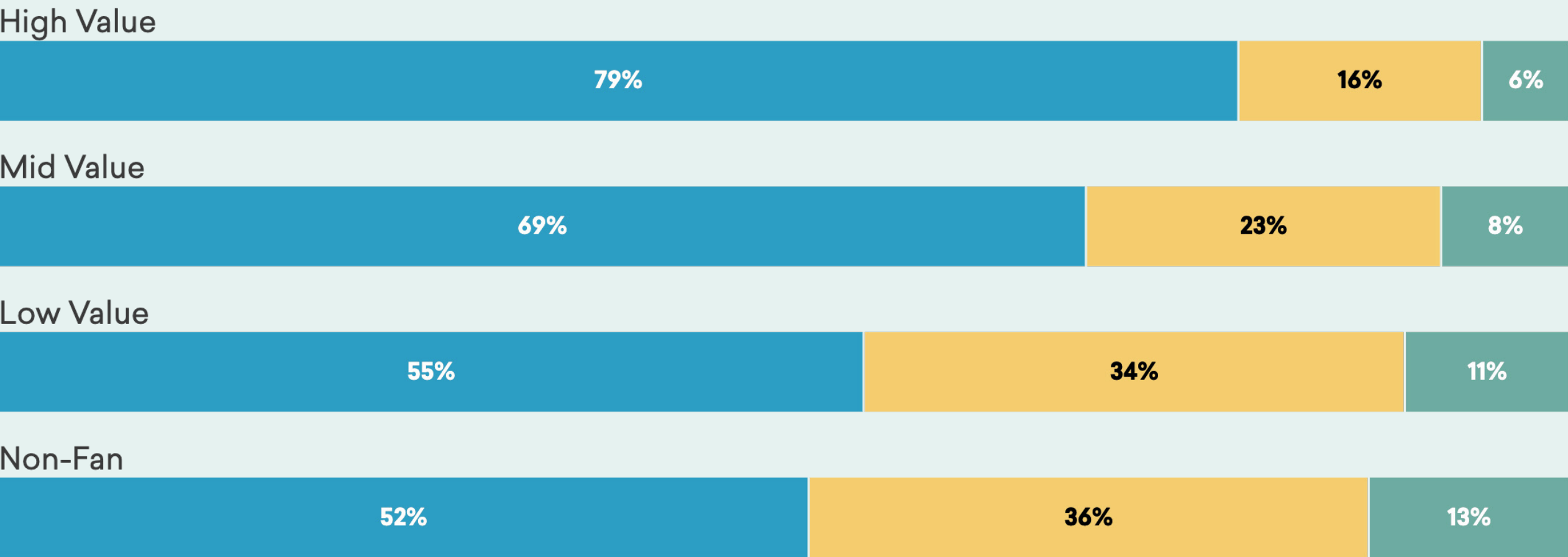
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

“Sports should be kept separate from politics entirely”

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree

Agree and Disagree both include “Strongly” and “Somewhat”

But stronger fans also see the connective potential of sports. Stronger fans view sports as a rare space for common ground across political divides.



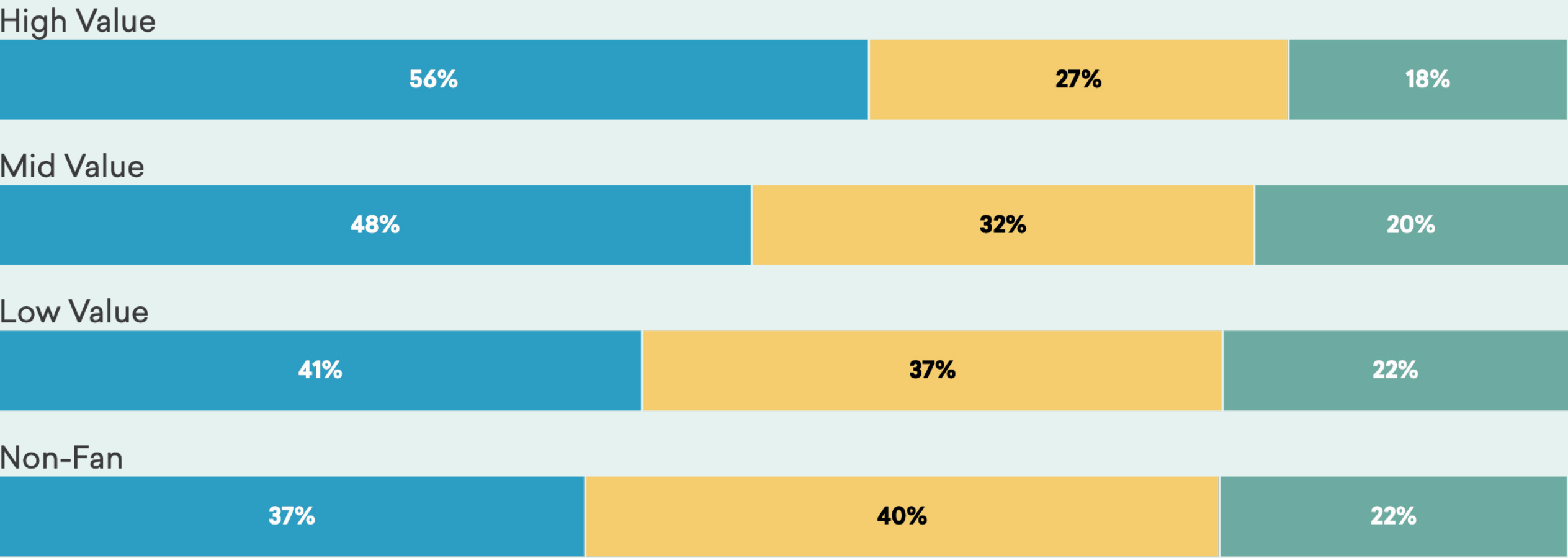
Agree and Disagree both include “Strongly” and “Somewhat”

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

“Sports is one of the few places where I can enjoy something alongside people I disagree with politically”

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree

In fact, these fans see sports as a place with less political division relative to other areas in life.



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

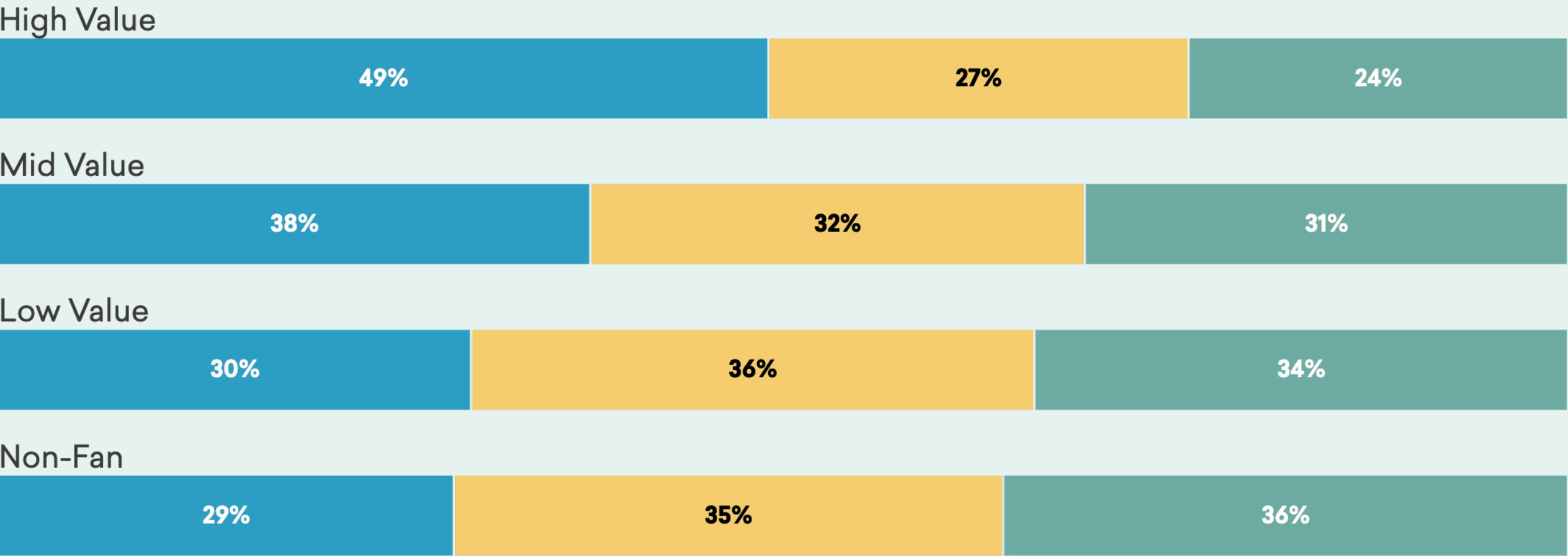
“Sports are less politically divided than other areas of life”

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree

Agree and Disagree both include “Strongly” and “Somewhat”

Stronger fans also see sports as providing civic infrastructure.

Stronger fans are more likely to say athletes should promote voter participation.



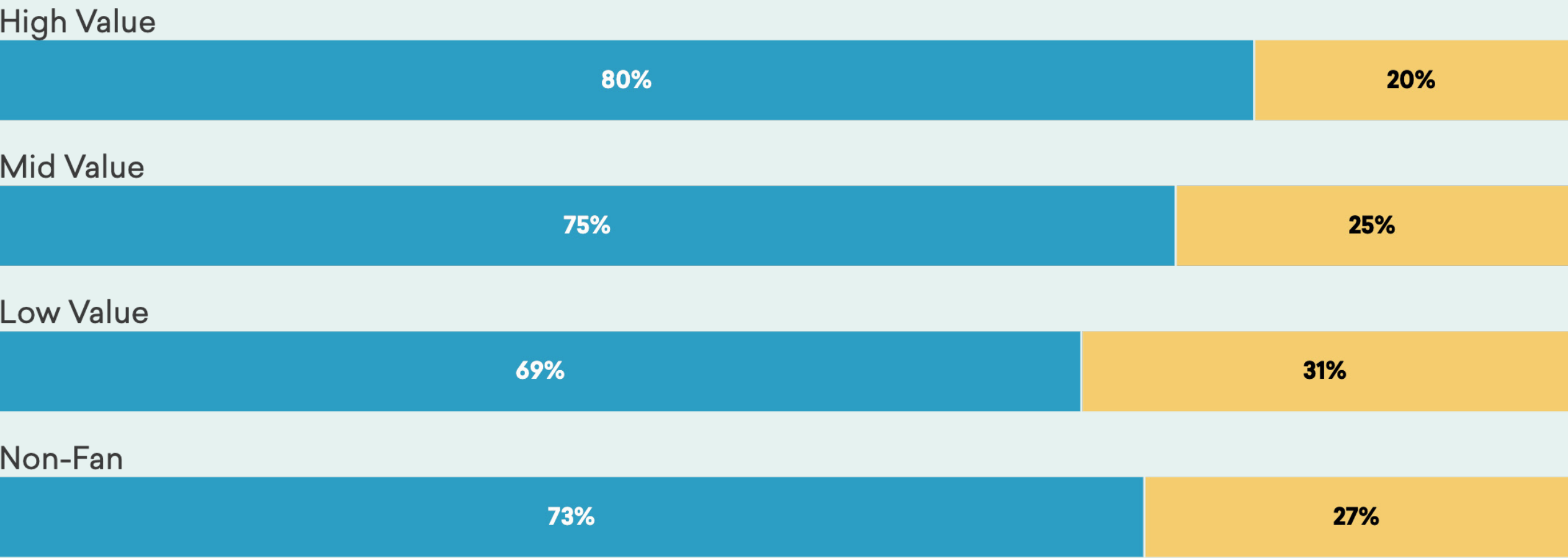
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

“Athletes should use their platforms to promote voter participation”

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree

Agree and Disagree both include “Strongly” and “Somewhat”

High Value fans are also more likely to support using stadiums and arenas as polling places.

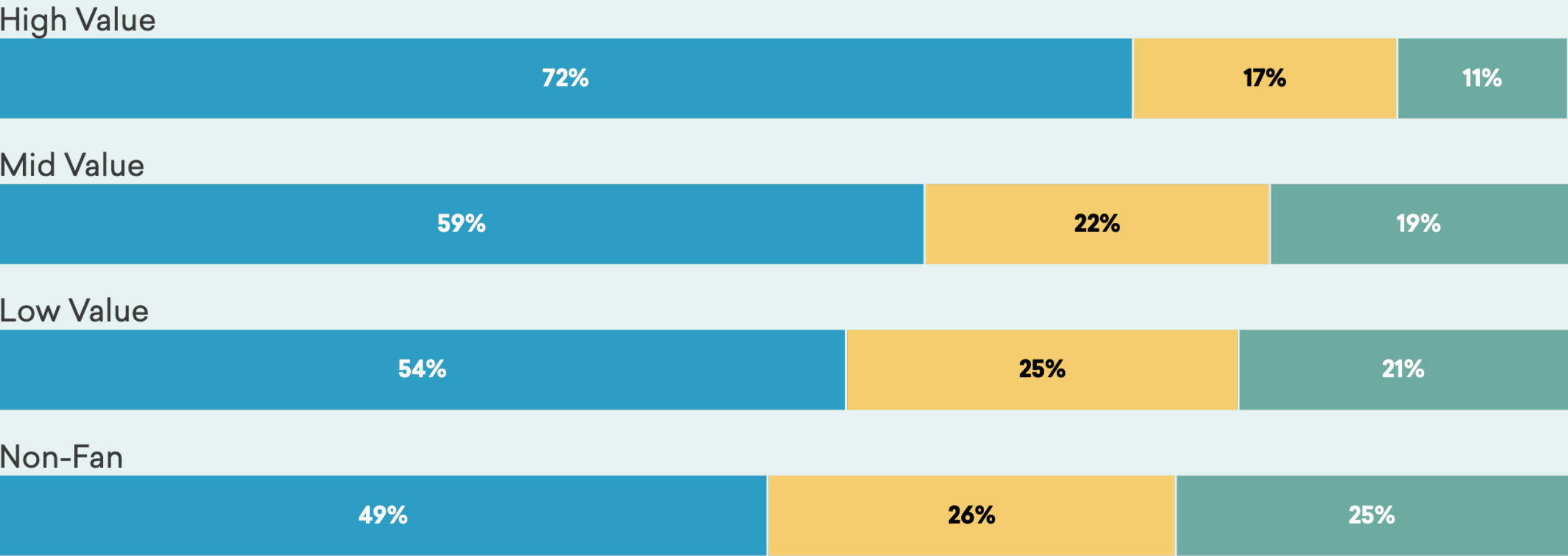


Do you support or oppose using sports stadiums and arenas as polling places for voting?

- Support
- Oppose

Support and Oppose both include “Highly” and “Somewhat”

The connective values of fandom extend beyond sports. Replicating results from our first report, the stronger the fan, the more interested they are in working across the aisle.

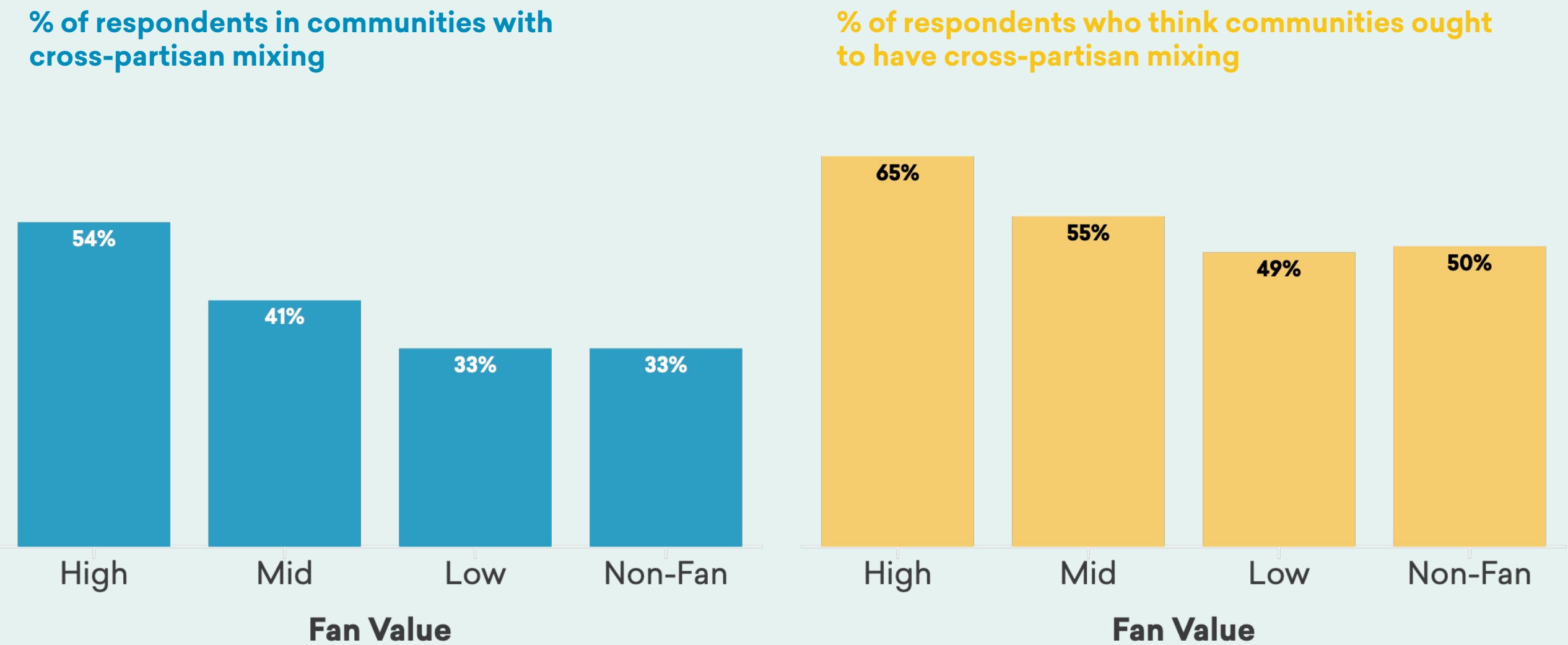


How interested are you in working to achieve a mutual goal that improves your community with someone who has a political viewpoint that is different from yours?

- More interested
- Slightly interested
- Not at all interested

More interested includes: Extremely interested, Very interested, Moderately interested

In fact, the strongest fans are more likely to see their communities mixing across politics and endorse mixing across politics.



Charts show respondents who “Somewhat agree” and “Strongly agree”

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

- “People in my local community often spend time with people who have different political viewpoints than them.”
- “If given the choice, people should spend time with people who have different political viewpoints than them.”

FANS VALUE CONNECTING ACROSS DIFFERENCE THROUGH SPORTS



Evan — Mid Value Fan
45-year-old White man
Republican
Frederic, Michigan

“Sports fandom does bring people of all races, beliefs, creeds and religions together.”



Harriet — Low Value Fan
65-year-old Black woman
Democrat
Indianapolis, Indiana

“I enjoy the random comments common Joes make [about sports] in the setting of strangers. I feel safe sharing views with people I don't know about a common thread we share.”



Eric — High Value Fan
49-year-old White man
Republican
Rayland, Ohio

“There is a lot of trash talking when I watch sports with others. Current events and politics are sprinkled in but it's mostly about the game.”



Ford — Mid Value Fan
23-year-old White man
Republican
Cincinnati, Ohio

“I've connected with a lot of people about watching sports (especially football) whom I don't know if I would have had similar interests or connections with outside of talking about sports.”

CHAPTER TWO

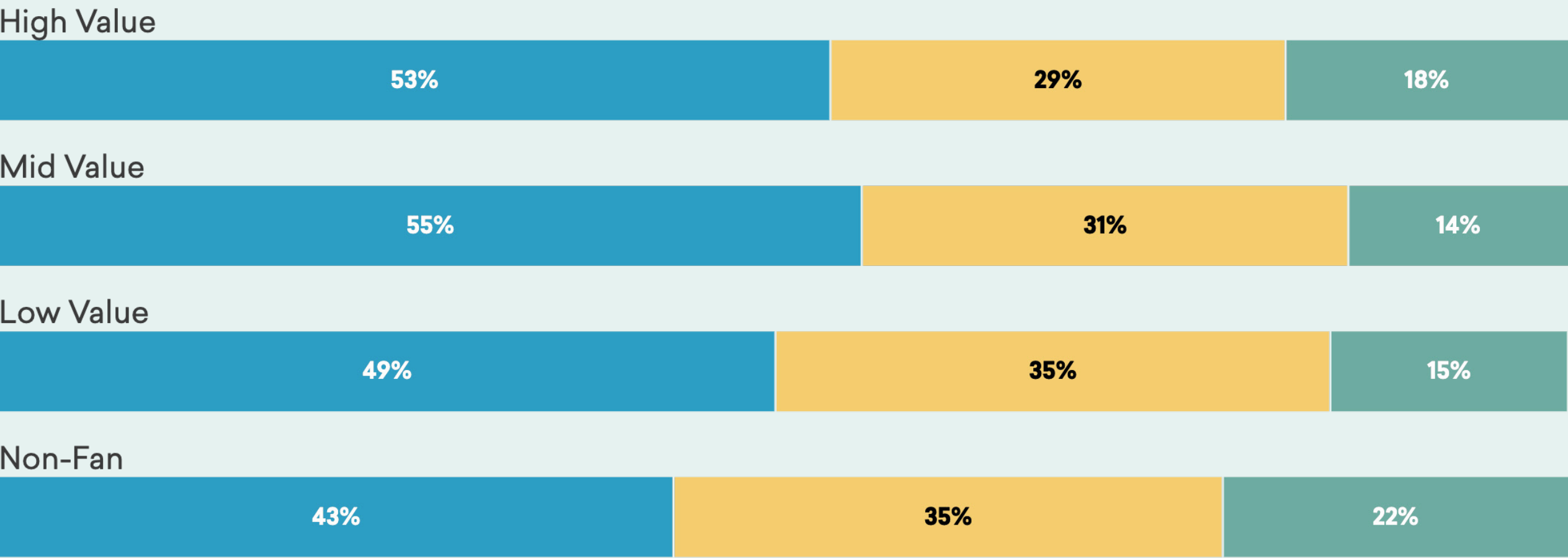
FANS ARE COMMITTED TO THEIR COMMUNITY



The stronger the fan, the more connected they are to their community.

- 01** Belonging rises steadily with fandom: 87% of High Value fans agree they belong in their local community, versus 74% of Non-Fans.
- 02** High Value fans connect with friends and family more often: 77% do so weekly, compared to 61% of Non-Fans.
- 03** High and Mid Value fans are the least lonely groups; 43% of Non-Fans feel lonely infrequently, versus 55% of Mid Value fans.
- 04** High and Mid Value fans report more trust in their local government (61% and 58%) than Low Value fans and Non-Fans (46% and 45%).
- 05** Bigger fans feel more responsible for their communities and more compelled to make a difference in them.
- 06** High Value fans are the most likely to volunteer their time working to improve the community (58%), volunteering for an organization (49%), and helping neighbors (69%).

High and Mid Value fans are less lonely than Low Value and Non-Fans.

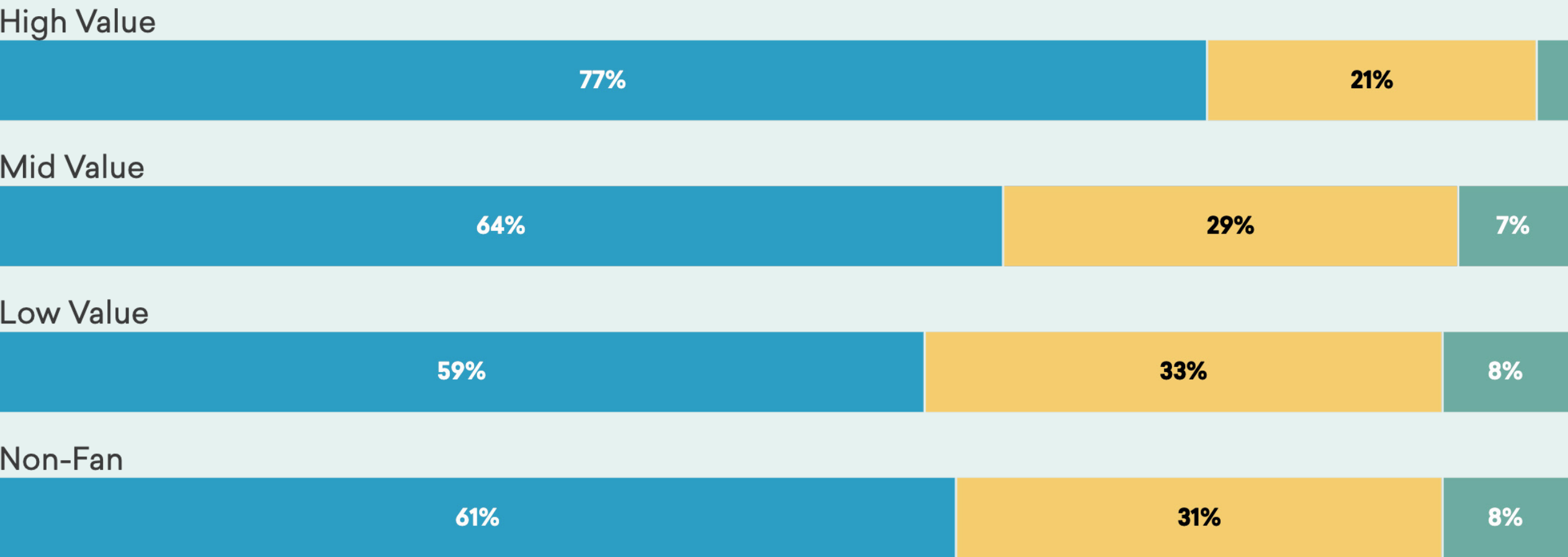


How often do you feel lonely?

- Infrequently
- Sometimes
- Frequently

Infrequently includes “Never” and “Rarely”; Frequently includes “Often” and “Always”

High Value fans tend to connect with friends and family more frequently.

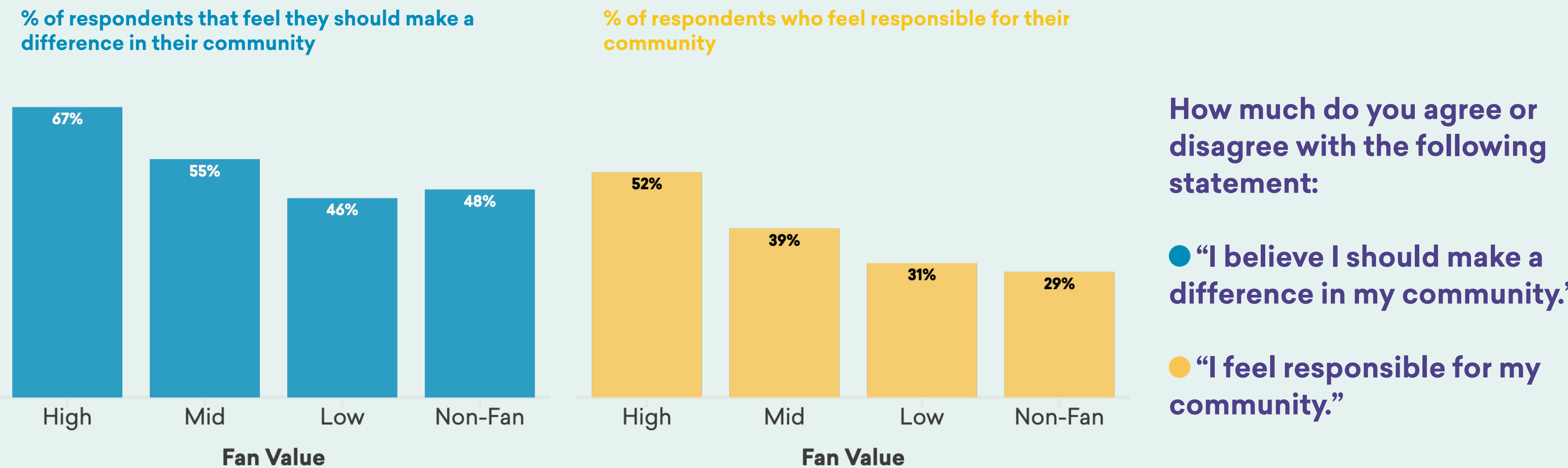


In the past 12 months, how often did you talk or spend time with friends or family?

- At least weekly
- At least monthly
- Rarely

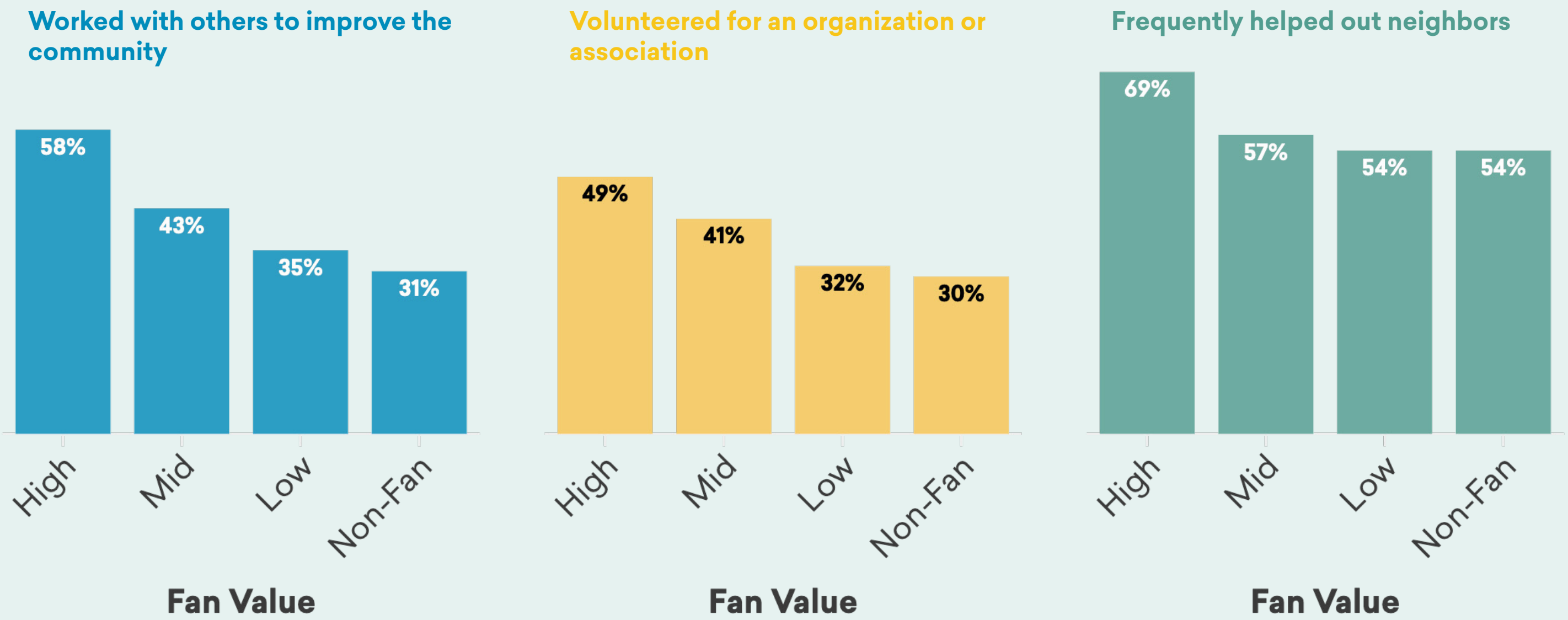
At least weekly includes "Basically every day" and "A few times a week"; At least Monthly includes "A few times a month" and "Once a month"; Rarely includes "Less than once a month" and "Not at all".

Stronger fans value community connection. These fans feel more responsible for their communities and want to make a difference.



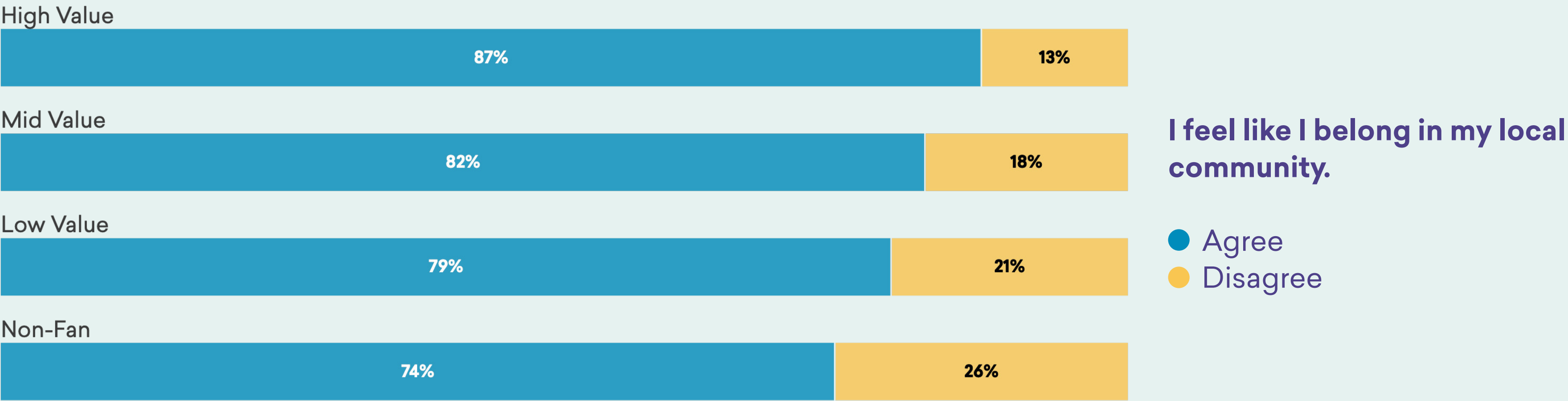
Charts show % of respondents who selected “Somewhat” and “Strongly” Agree.

These stronger fans tend to follow through: High Value fans are the most likely to volunteer time to help others in their communities.



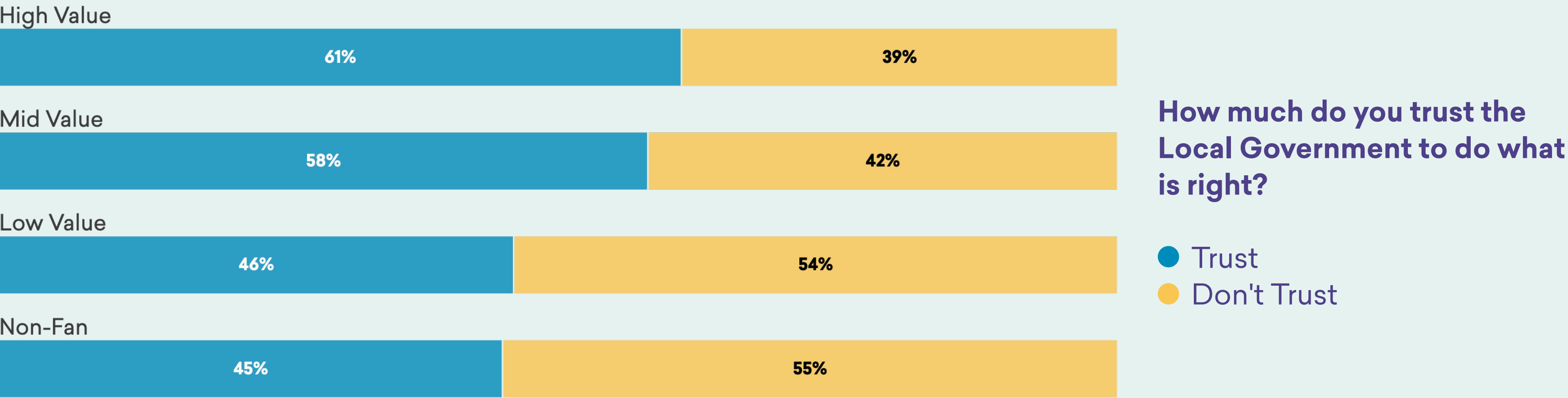
Left to right. “In the past 12 months, did you get together with other people from your neighborhood or community to do something positive for your neighborhood or the community?” | “In the past 12 months, did you spend any time volunteering or helping out for any organization or association?” Charts show % of respondents who answered “Yes.” | “In the past 12 months, how often did you and your friends, family, or neighbors do favors for each other such as house sitting, watching each other’s children, lending tools, and other things to help each other?” Chart shows % of respondents who answered “Basically every day,” “A few times a week,” or “A few times a month.”

These stronger fans are also more likely to feel like they belong in their local community.



Agree and Disagree include “Strongly” and “Somewhat”

Community belonging extends into trust. High and Mid Value fans show greater trust in their local government.



Trust includes “A lot” & “Some”; Don't Trust includes “Not too much” & “Not at all”

FANS FIND COMPANY AND COMMUNITY IN FOLLOWING A TEAM



Nancy — Low Value Fan
57-year-old White woman
Independent
San Antonio, Texas

“When I first moved to San Antonio in August of 2001, the Spurs were doing really well and I remember how it was a big deal in the community. Everyone was always talking about them, you saw people wearing their jerseys, and I always knew when the next game was going to be played.”



Jeremy — Mid Value Fan
56-year-old Asian man
Republican
Nanakuli, Hawaii

“Following my favorite sports teams over the years has been like the holidays. Seasonally the schedule has been a part of my lifestyle and gives me something to share with friends and family. I enjoy the camaraderie.”



Dana — Mid Value Fan
49-year-old White woman
Independent
Apex, North Carolina

“I was recently at a hockey game with my partner, surrounded by a number of fans who became friends immediately. We had a lot of fun [singing] all the same chants and doing all of the songs together.”



Cierra — Low Value Fan
59-year-old Hispanic woman
Independent
Covina, California

“When you're with other people, you are cheering for the same team that most everyone wants to win and you get to celebrate together. Being alone, it is just you and no one to share the joy with. Here in LA you can go to bars or restaurants to watch the game and just enjoy the atmosphere.”

CHAPTER THREE

HIGH VALUE FANS ARE SOCIAL HUBS



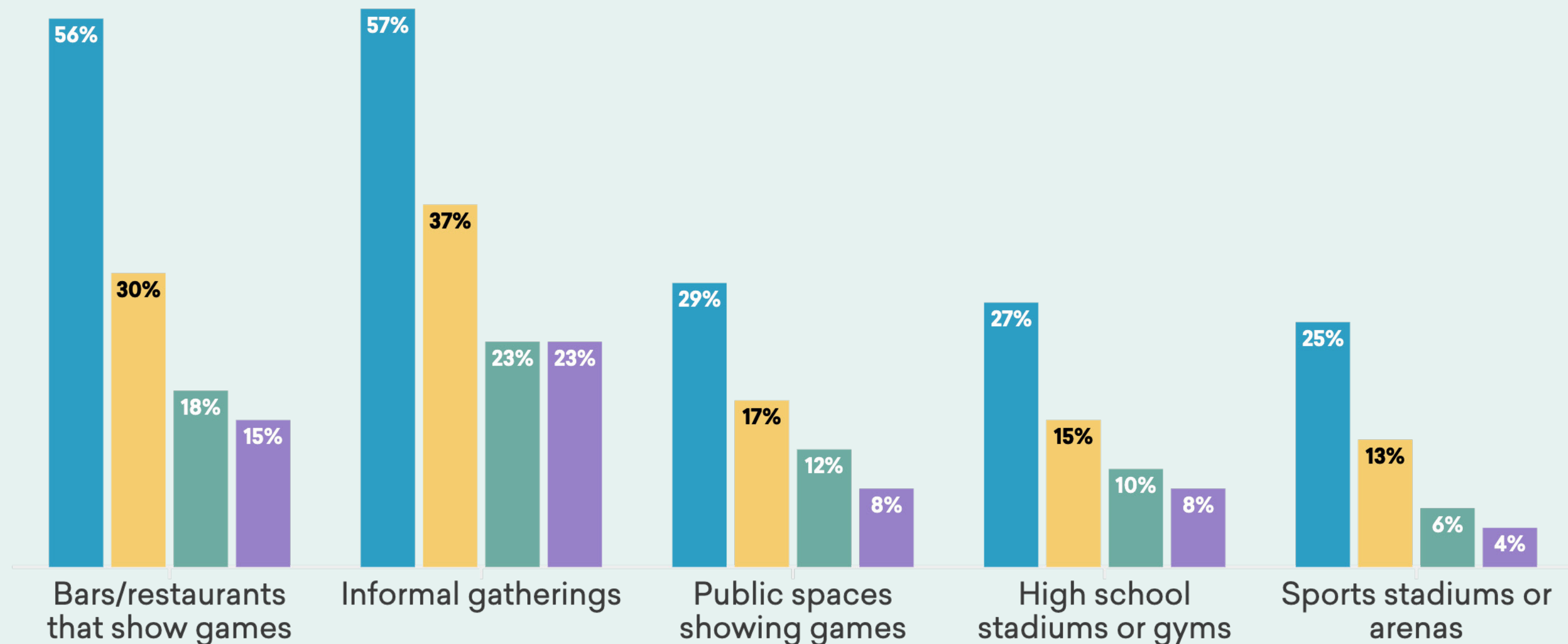
High Value fans can act as social hubs, making connections and drawing others into shared spaces.

- 01** Sports is the top way High Value fans connect with someone new: 71% use it as a conversational entry point, versus 13% of Non-Fans.
- 02** High Value fans talk about sports far more across nearly every setting, from workplaces to gyms to family gatherings.
- 03** High Value fans go out to watch sports more often, whether at bars and restaurants (56%), informal gatherings (57%), or public spaces (29%).
- 04** They're much more likely to host others at home to watch sports (46%, versus 14% of Non-Fans).
- 05** They frequent more community spaces overall — an average of 9.8 places, versus 8.3 for Non-Fans.
- 06** Unsurprisingly, the bigger the fan, the more friends made through sports: 90% of High Value fans have made several, versus 44% of Non-Fans.

High Value fans are more likely to go out at least monthly to watch sports.

How often do you go to each of the following to watch sports?

● High Value ● Mid Value ● Low Value ● Non-Fans

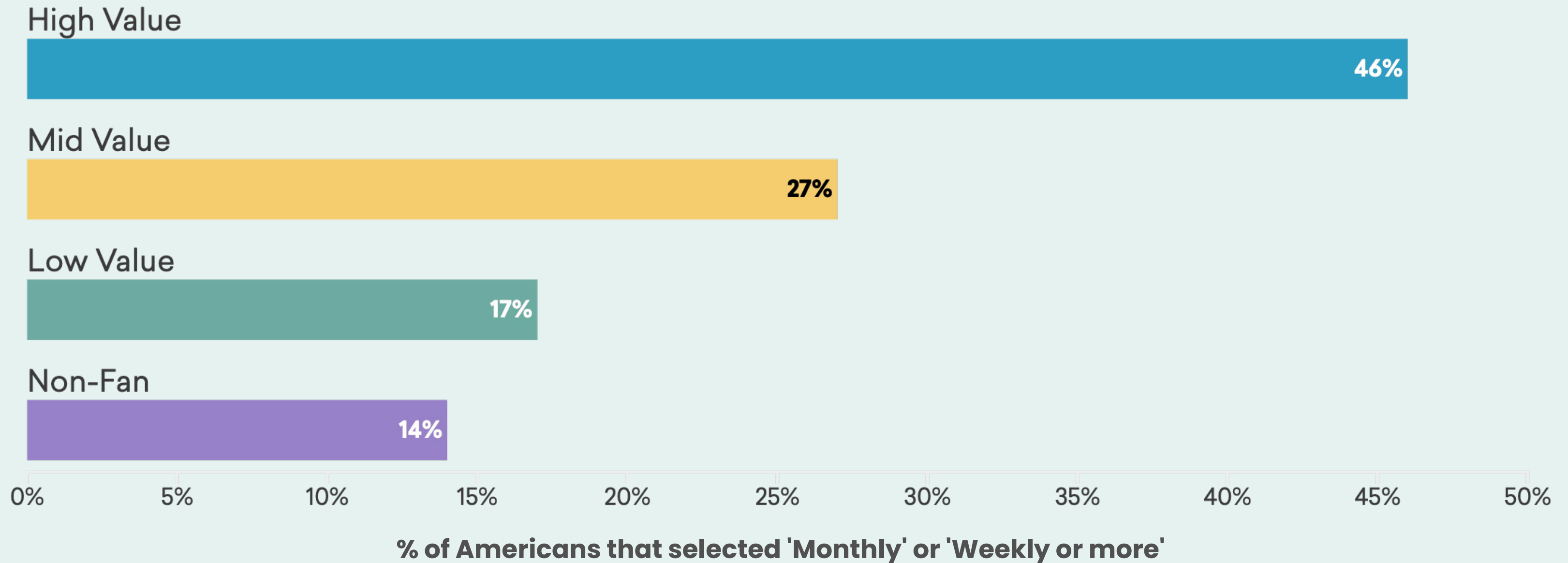


% of Americans that selected 'Monthly' or 'Weekly or more'

These fans are also much more likely to host gatherings to watch sports.

How often do you host others at your house to watch sports?

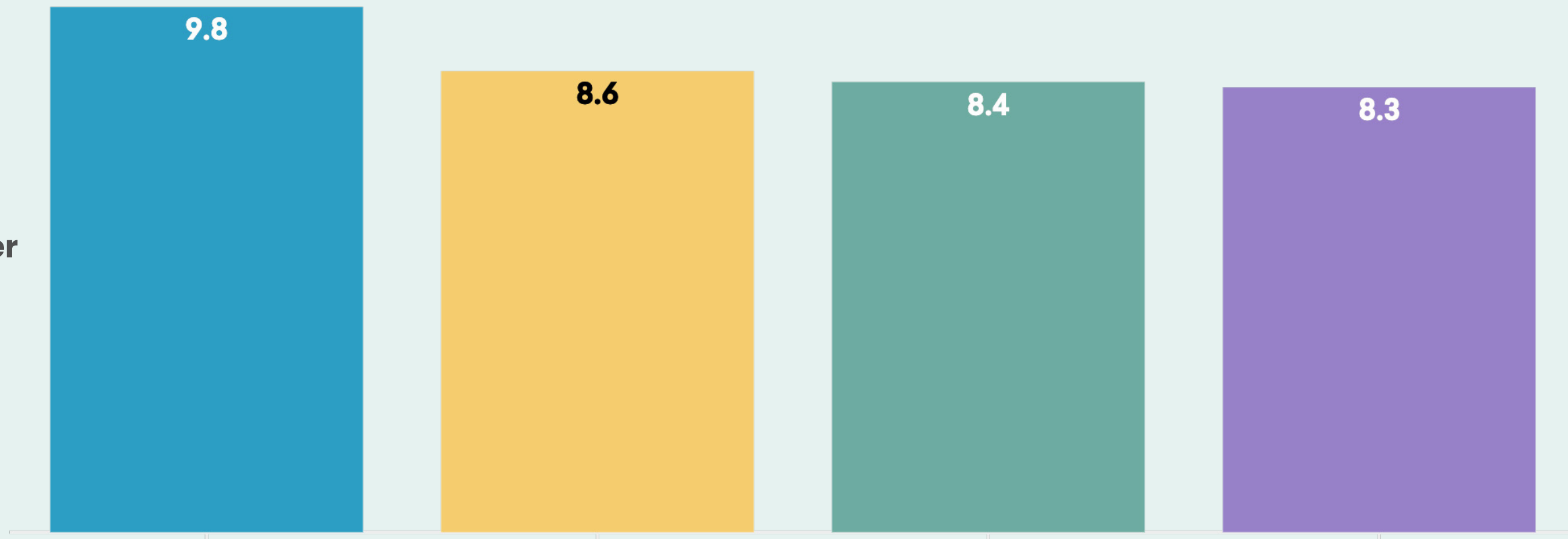
● High Value ● Mid Value ● Low Value ● Non-Fans



High Value fans are social, and not just in sports bars. These fans tend to visit more types of places in the community in general.

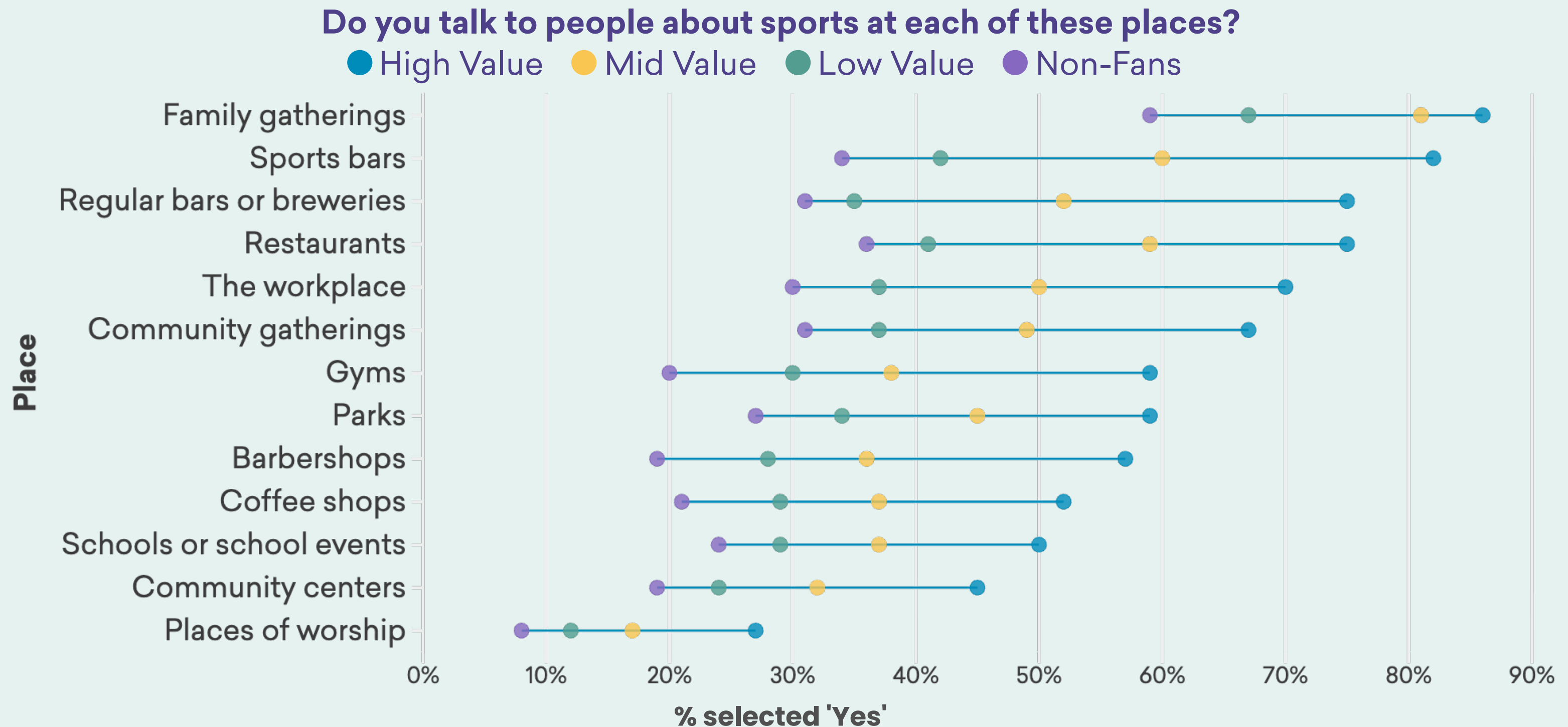
● High Value ● Mid Value ● Low Value ● Non-Fans

Average number
of place types

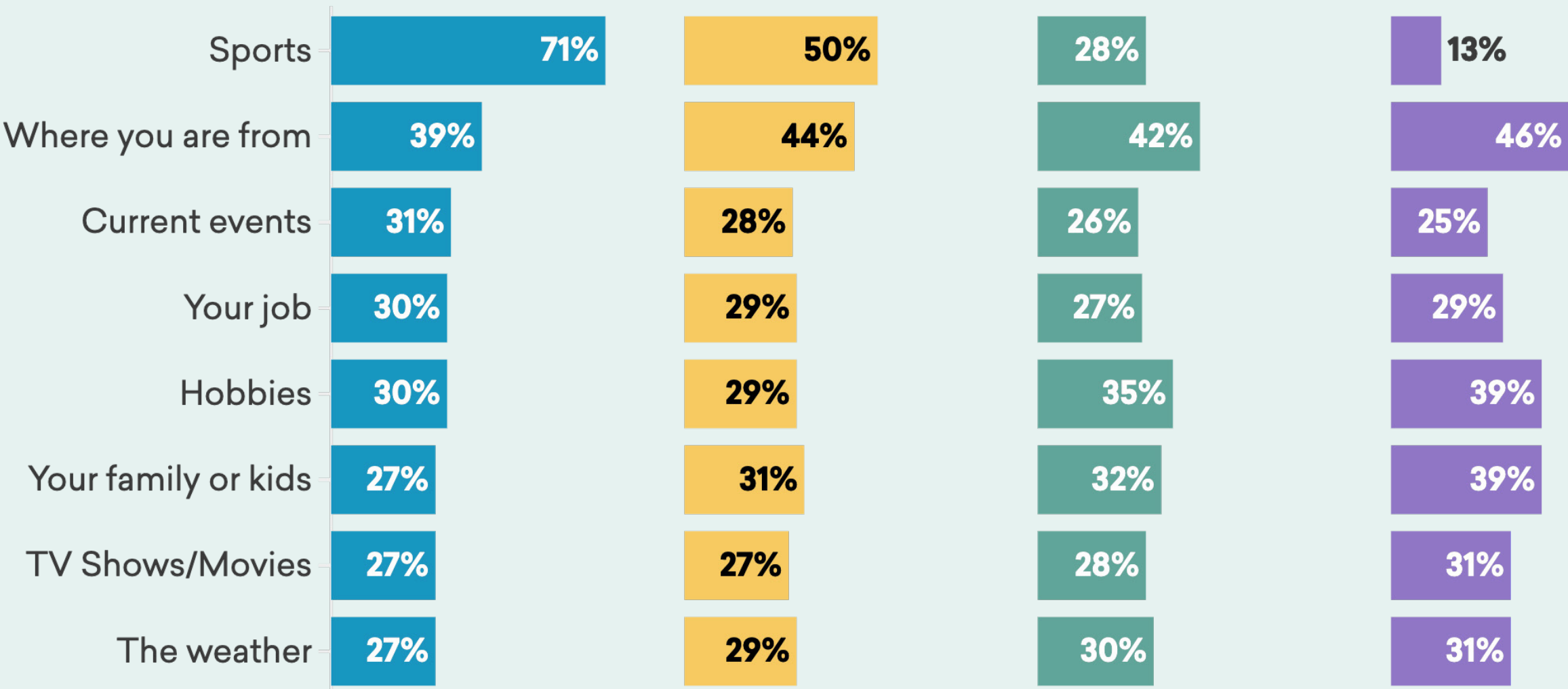


Places include: community centers; parks or public plazas; neighborhood or community gatherings; schools or school events; bars or breweries; restaurants or diners; coffee shops or cafés; the workplace; family gatherings; barbershops or hair salons; gyms, fitness studios, or recreational leagues; places of worship (12 total). Sports bars excluded to show effect.

When out in the community, High Value fans are much more likely to talk to others about sports.



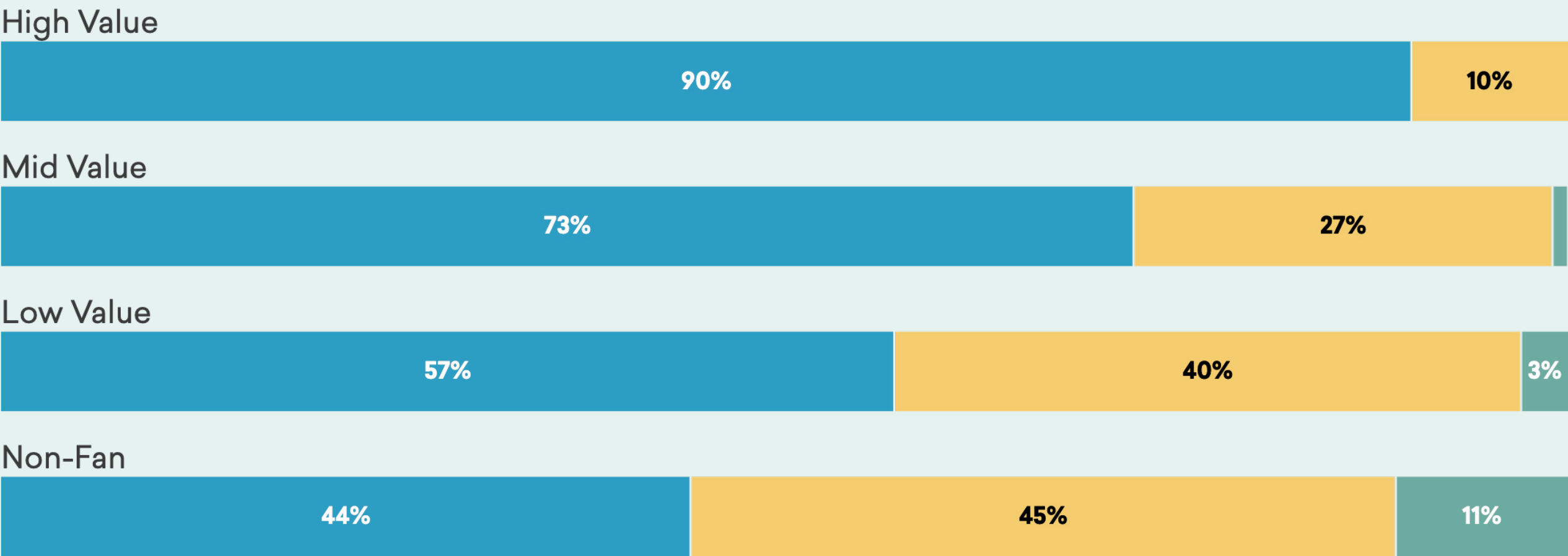
High Value fans are much more likely to connect over sports topics when meeting someone new.



When you're meeting someone new or making conversation with someone you don't know well, which of these topics are you most likely to use to connect with the other person?

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

Social connection around sports may pay off. Replicating foundational research, the bigger the fan, the more friends made through sports.



How many friends have you made watching or participating in sports?

- Several
- Few or None
- Don't watch or play sports

Several includes “many” and “some”; Few or none includes “one or two” and “None”

The pattern holds across gender. Men lead slightly at each level, but fan value consistently matters more.

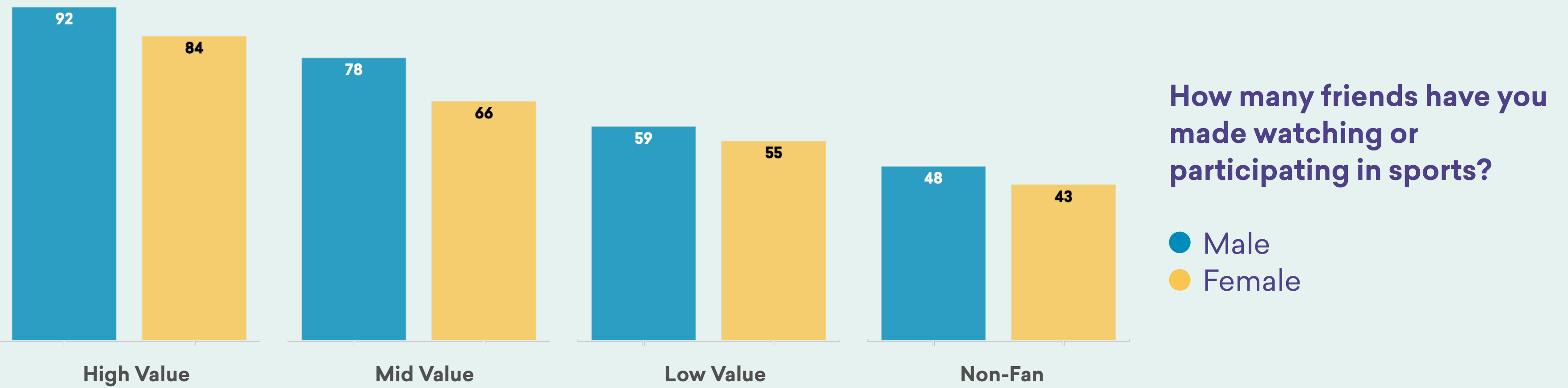
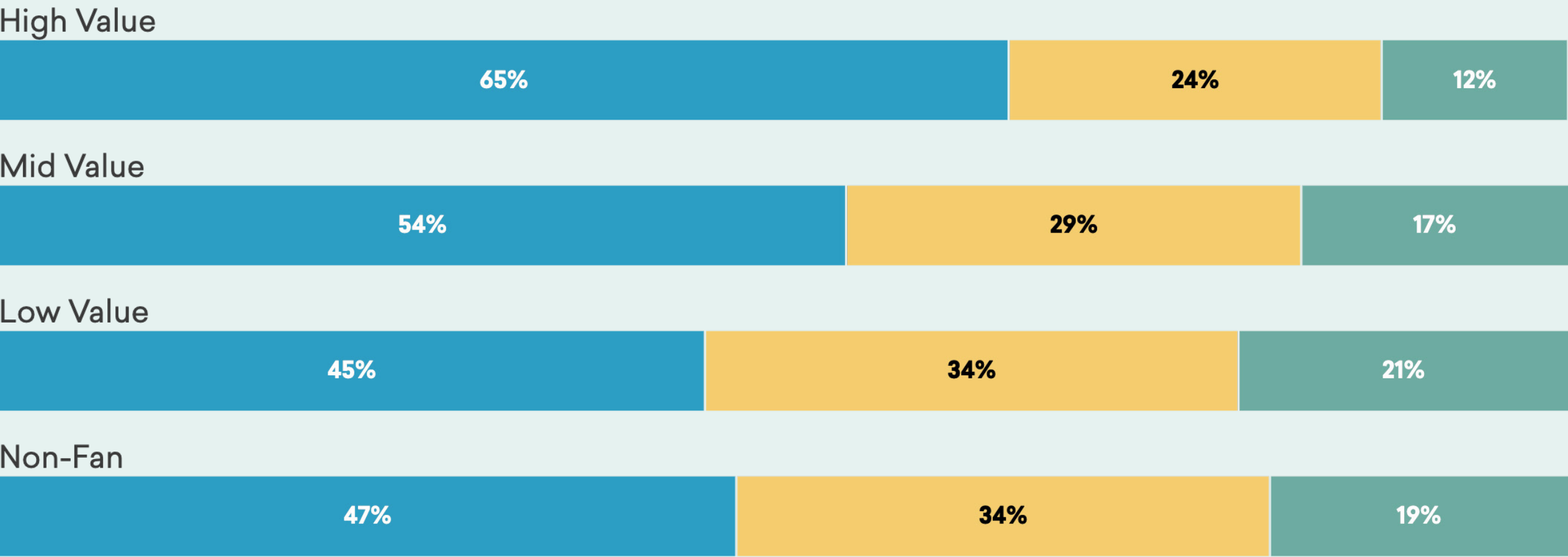


Chart shows % selected “many” or “some”

Bigger fans also see sports as a judgment-free space for men's emotions.



Agree and Disagree include "Strongly" and "Somewhat"

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

“Sports are one of the few spaces where men can show strong emotions without judgment.”

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree

SPORTS BRING AMERICANS TOGETHER ACROSS MANY TYPES OF SETTINGS



Harper — Mid Value Fan
62-year-old Native
American woman
Independent
Fayetteville, North Carolina

“When taking public transportation, I sometimes strike up a conversation with someone who follows the same sports teams I do.”



Elijah — High Value Fan
62-year-old White man
Republican
Willard, Ohio

“I would say [there are] several people who I have met only and solely because we were brought together at a place for sports. I probably would never have met them otherwise, but we were brought together because of a common element which was sports.”



Scott — Mid Value Fan
72-year-old White man
Independent
North Tonawanda, New York

“Just your average Joe that would sit down next to me at the bar and watching the game. He or she may say something about the game or player, and before you know it you get into a conversation with the person.”



Callie — Mid Value Fan
30-year-old White woman
Republican
Havelock, North Carolina

“I have connected and bonded with several people through playing and watching sports. It can create an instant friendship and bond when you meet somebody that’s wearing your team’s favorite jersey. Sports is something everybody can be passionate about and share a sense of belonging.”

CHAPTER FOUR

FANDOM CAN BE FOR EVERYONE

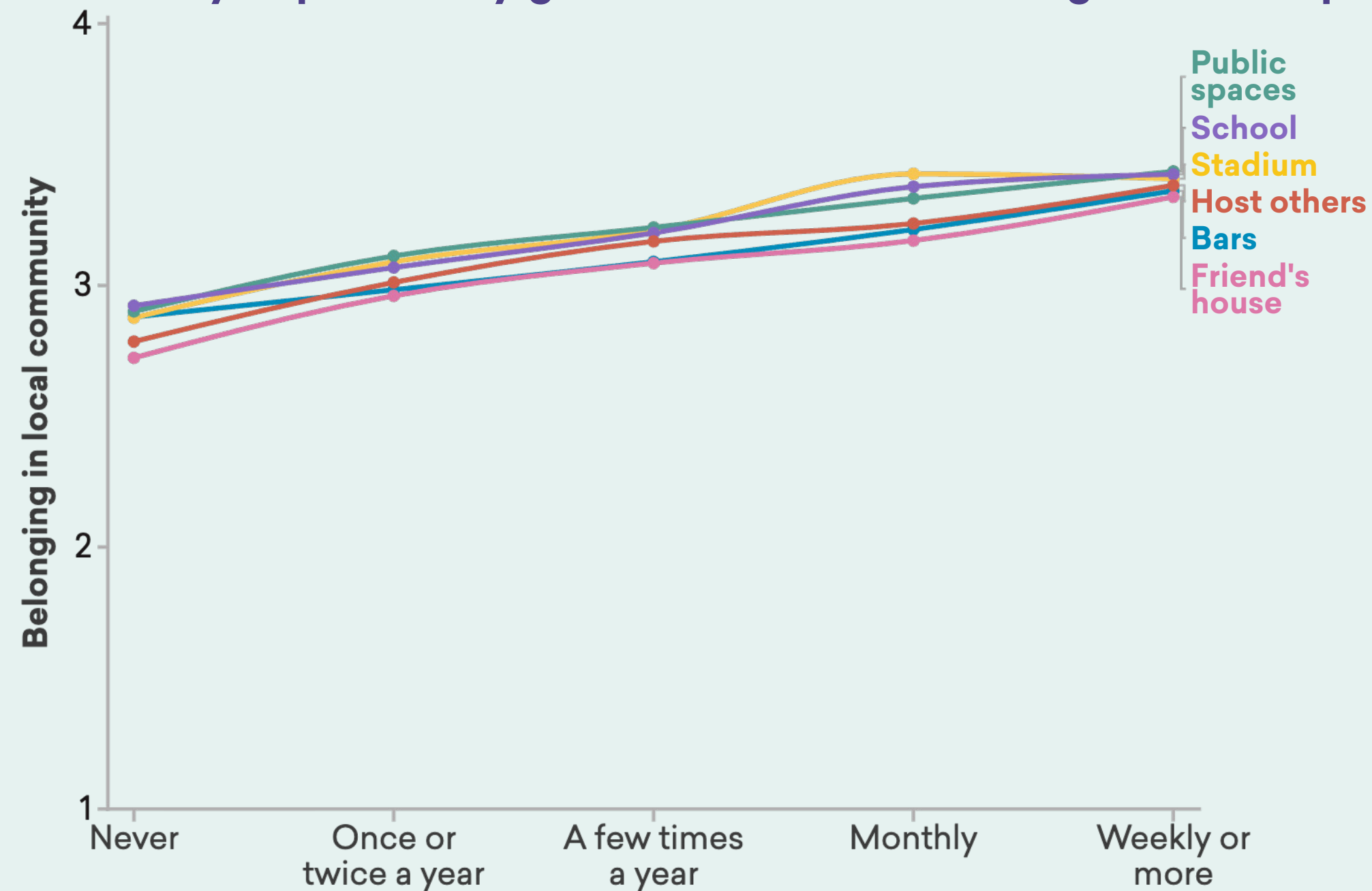


**Belonging grows
with fandom
participation.
Watching sports
alongside others
builds belonging at
every level of
fandom.**

- 01** Watching sports with others frequently is linked to a stronger sense of belonging, no matter where people watch — bars, stadiums, a friend's house, or public places.
- 02** That connection holds regardless of fan level: even Non-Fans tend to feel greater belonging when they attend alongside others more frequently.
- 03** The most cited reason Non-Fans and lower-value fans skip sports gatherings is simply not having someone to go with.
- 04** Both fans and Non-Fans feel a stronger sense of belonging when they see sports as important to their town's identity.

Watching sports frequently with others is linked to a stronger sense of belonging, no matter where you watch.

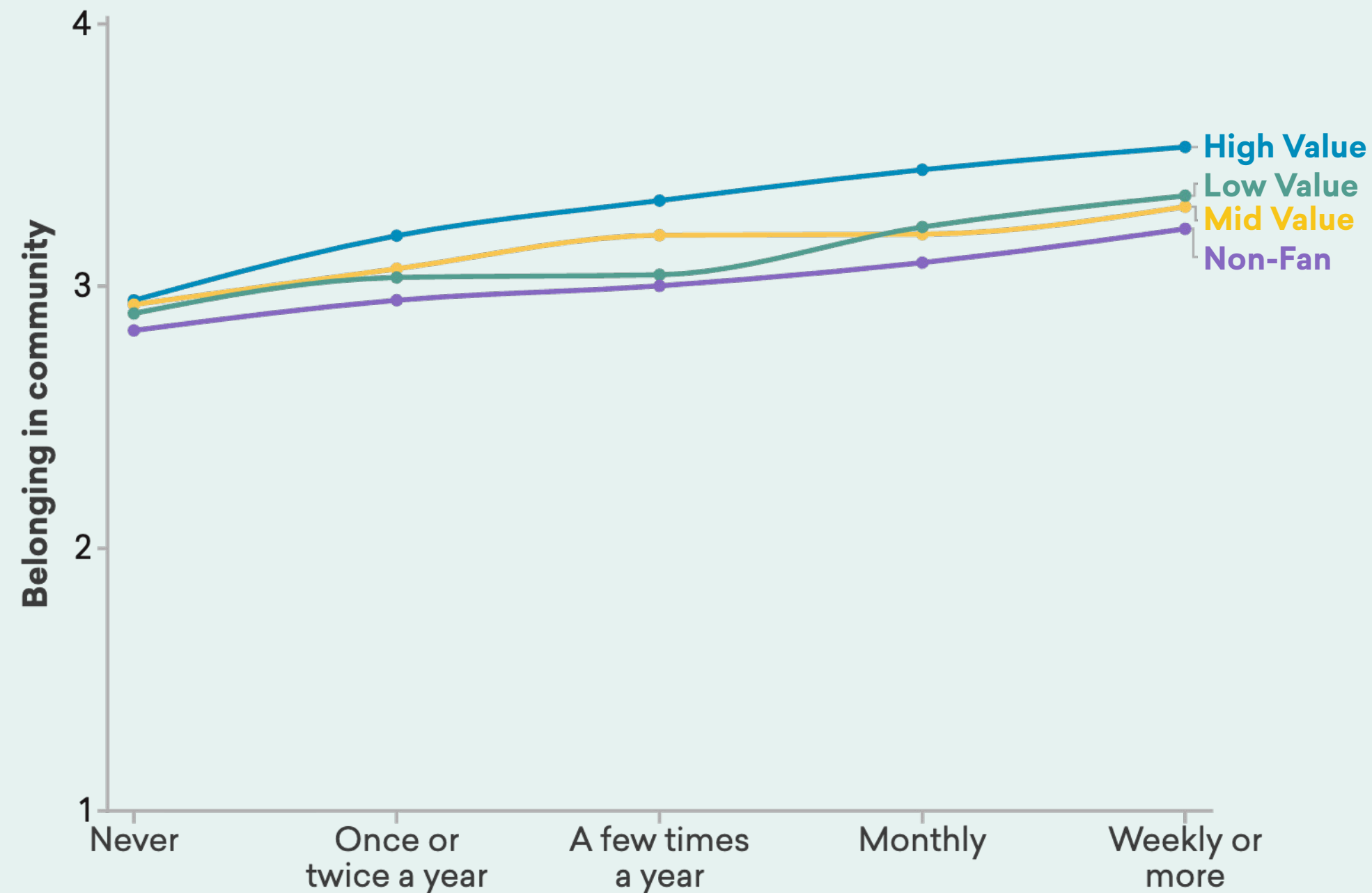
How often do you personally go to each of the following to watch sports?



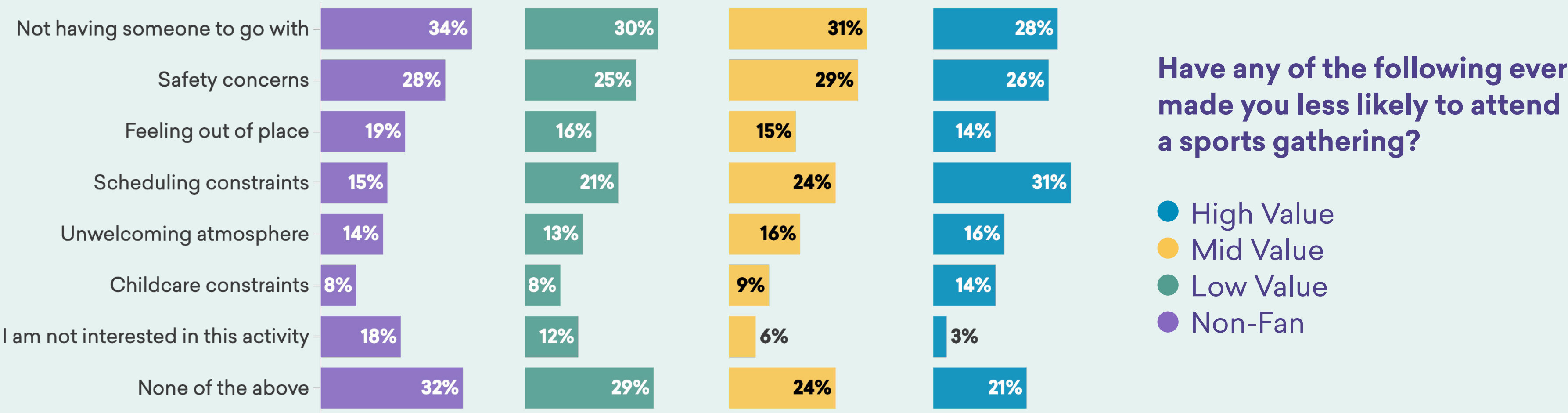
Community belonging score calculated by agreement with statement, "I feel like I belong in my local community." 1 = "Strongly disagree"; 4 = "Strongly agree".

This belonging benefit applies to all levels of fans and Non-Fans.

How often do you personally go to each of the following to watch sports? [Data collapsed across venue]

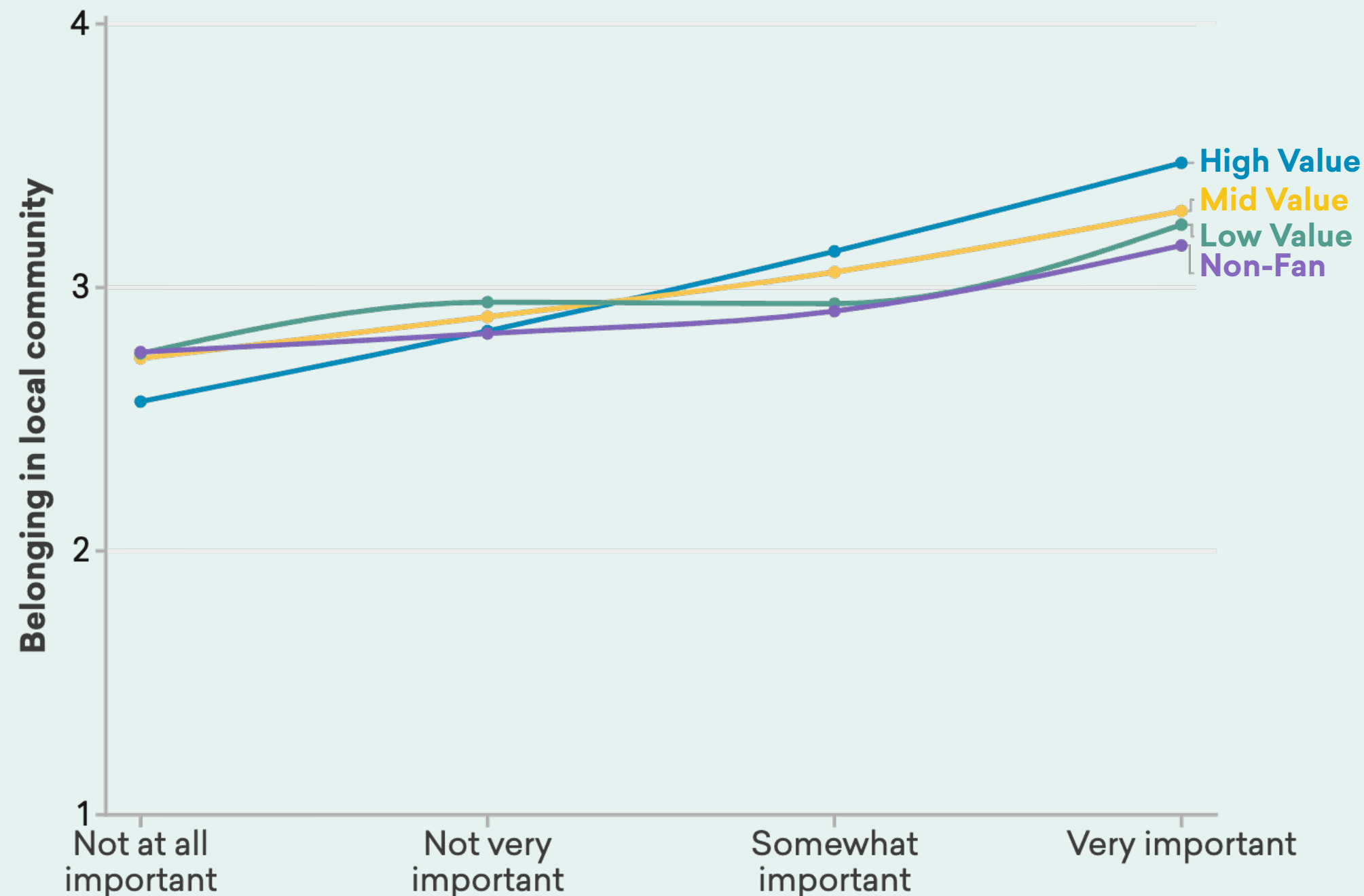


Less engaged fans may just need an invitation. The most selected reason Non-Fans, Low Value, and Mid Value fans skip sports gatherings is not having someone to go with.



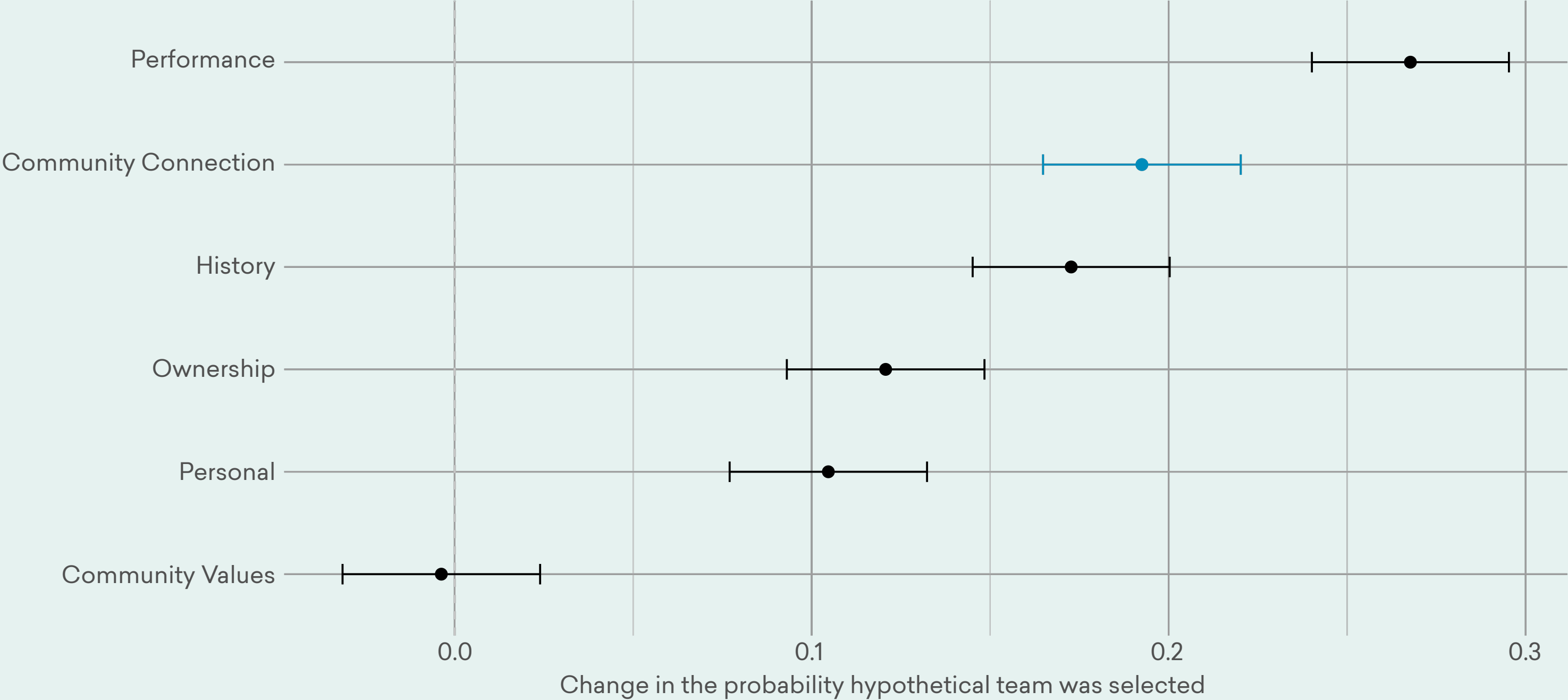
People can feel fandom in their community. When sports feel central to a town, people report higher feelings of belonging. This relationship is stronger for High Value fans.

How important are sports (professional, college, or local) teams to the identity of your city or town?



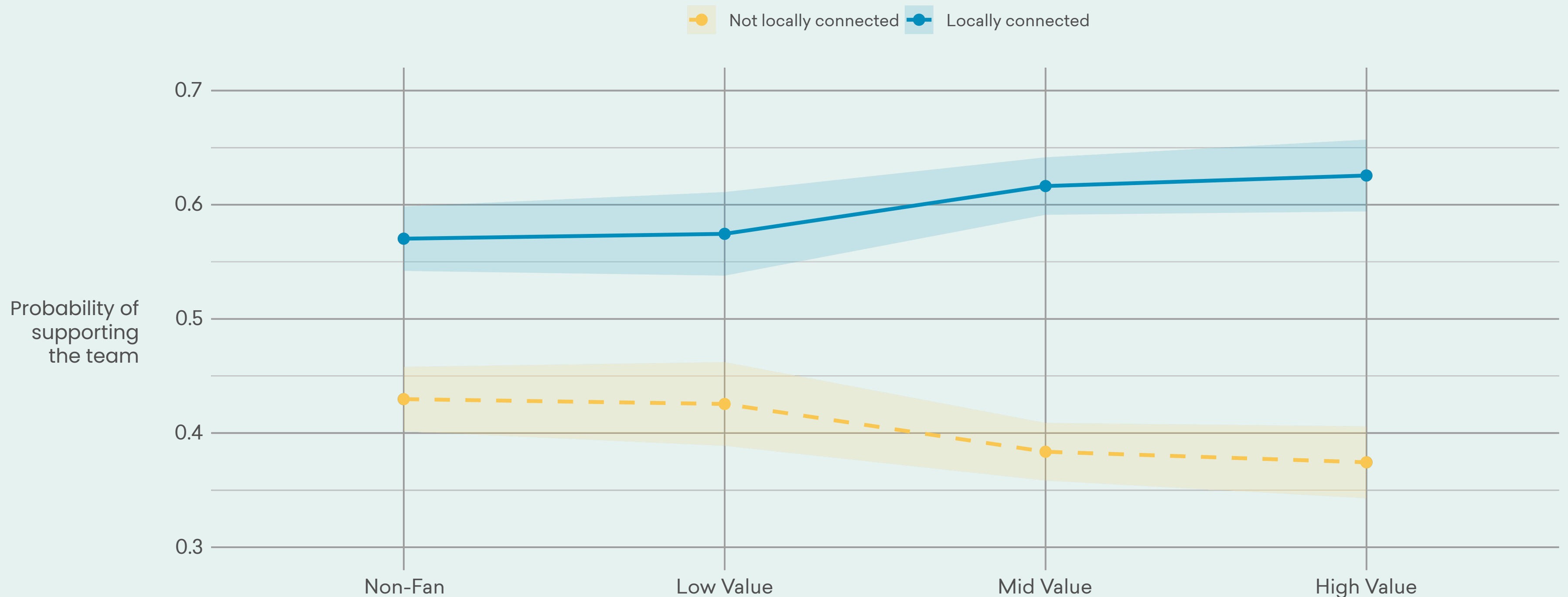
Community belonging score calculated by agreement with statement, "I feel like I belong in my local community." 1 = "Strongly disagree"; 4 = "Strongly agree".

Connection to a town matters, too. When asked which hypothetical sports team is more favorable, the team’s geographic connection to the community is on par with its history and behind only the team’s performance.



In a conjoint experiment, respondents chose which of two hypothetical teams, each with six randomly assigned attributes, they would be more likely to follow closely. Points show the change in a team's probability of being selected for each attribute level relative to its reference (in parentheses). 95% CIs shown. Performance: winning (vs. losing); Community connection: geographically connected to local community (vs. not); History: long-established (vs. new); Ownership: well-liked (vs. controversial); Community Values: speaks out on social issues (vs. avoids); Personal: friends/family root for the team (vs. neutral).

In the same hypothetical, we found that the team's geographic connection to the community matters most to High and Mid Value fans.



Predicted probabilities from the conjoint experiment (slide 54), from a model interacting community connection with Fan Value level. Lines show the probability a team is selected when locally connected (blue) vs. not (yellow); the gap between them is the effect of connection for that tier. Shaded bands show 95% CIs.

FANS AND NON-FANS FIND COMMUNITY AND TRADITION AROUND SPORTS



Ford — Mid Value Fan
23-year-old White man
Republican
Cincinnati, Ohio

“I had people over to watch the Super Bowl recently. It was very enjoyable! Even though none of us were big fans of either team playing, we still got to talk about the game a lot and connect over other things too.”



Dave — Low Value Fan
34-year-old White man
Republican
Sandusky, Ohio

“Most of the people in my area like the same teams, so it makes our community feel more connected.”



Paige — Non-Fan
32-year-old White woman
Independent
Everett, Washington

“I started to get into watching soccer and meeting people at my local soccer bar. That community was unexpected.”



Trina — Mid Value Fan
67-year-old White woman
Independent
Bearsville, New York

“Living in a rural community, the kids around here have little else to do other than sports, so they are very important. Everybody comes out for the football games especially, and there is real school and community spirit.”

CONCLUSIONS



CONCLUSION

Sports is one of the last places Americans can connect across the aisle. The fan bases of most major sports are split evenly among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. There is broad consensus to keep politics out of sports. However, **stronger fans tend to also see the cross-partisan connective potential of sports.** High Value fans see sports as a place to enjoy something alongside others they may disagree with politically. They are also more likely to think people in their communities ought to spend time with those they disagree with politically, are more interested in working on a community project with someone on the other side of the aisle and are more likely to endorse athletes using their platforms to promote voter participation. At a moment when Americans have fewer and fewer places to just be around people who vote differently, **sports is a rare space, and a low-stakes way to build a little trust across difference.**

The bigger the fan, the more connected they are. High Value fans feel more like they belong in their communities, trust local government more, are less lonely, and are the most likely to volunteer and pitch in where they live. **They also can serve as community builders via sports fandom.** They start conversations with strangers about sports, host people to watch games, show up in more community spaces, and make far more friends through sports than Non-Fans do.



CONCLUSION

Watching sports with others is a low-stakes entry point to the social benefits of fandom. When it comes to community belonging, what matters most is watching alongside other people. **Feelings of belonging are higher among people who watch sports with others, no matter where they watch or how into the game they are.** Inviting less passionate and Non-Fans into sports fandom spaces is an opportunity to build connection in one's community. In fact, the top reason those groups skip sports gatherings is not having anyone to go with. High Value fans could serve as the connective force in their communities, pulling those around them into the benefits of sports fandom.

Fandom participation builds on itself. Watching sports with others creates shared experiences, which can grow into repeated outings, rituals, and traditions. Each of these gives people another reason to gather, and each one pulls them a little further into fandom. As that pattern repeats, **a person's connection to the people around them tends to grow.** Over time, the game and the community are both what can keep people coming back.





**More in
Common**