



The DEI landscape: challenges and opportunities

Presentation of Research Findings

Bellwether Research



Organization

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Research Objectives

Resource Impact/NxtLevel commissioned Bellwether Research and Hart Research to conduct national research on diversity, equity and inclusion in 2024 and in 2025.

In 2024, the goal was to establish a baseline understanding of how voters viewed diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as a concept, how they defined it in practice, and what role they believed it should play in institutions, workplaces, and public life. We also tested the impact and effectiveness of pro- and anti-DEI messaging.

In 2025, the environment had shifted dramatically. With the Trump administration's highly visible campaign against DEI, the objectives for this year's work were:

- To measure what had changed in public attitudes over the past year.
- To assess how Trump's rhetoric and actions targeting DEI are impacting attitudes.
- To identify the best strategies for communicating about DEI in today's polarized political climate.

Research Scope and Methodology

Quantitative Research

Bellwether Research conducted a representative national survey of 3,012 voters online June 16 - 21 2025. The full sample was balanced to approximate a target sample of U.S. registered voters based on the Current Population Survey (CPS Census). The data was weighted by age, gender, race, education, Hispanic ethnicity, and geographic Census region.

An additional oversample of 200 AAPI voters was obtained between June 20 - 21, 2025. This oversample was balanced to approximate a target sample of AAPI voters in the U.S. based on the CPS Census. The oversample was weighted by age, gender, education, and geographic Census region.

Qualitative Research

Bellwether Research and Hart Research conducted 10 focus groups prior to the national survey. Specifically, we spoke to the following populations:

- White suburban women (2 groups)
- Black men under 40 Latina women
- Latino men (2 groups)
- Men who voted for Biden in '20 and Trump in '24
- White men who listen to the Joe Rogan podcast
- Community college students
- Young men from Northern Virginia

Each firm conducted a Qualboard following the survey. Hart Research participants were men under the age of 45 and Bellwether Research convened independent voters who split their vote between Harris and Trump in '24.

Key Findings

- Voters are much more familiar with the acronym "DEI" than they were in 2024 and a majority have a positive view of it - driven by strong favorable movement among Democrats this year.
- The full phrase - diversity, equity and inclusion - remains very popular.
- When it comes to representing an organization's goals, voters prefer the phrase "equal opportunity" over DEI.
- However, voters do not believe that equal opportunity and DEI are direct synonyms, with many proposing that there are instances of DEI that directly contradict equal opportunity.

Key Findings

Quotes

“DEI is a convoluted "equal opportunity employer" which is clearer.”

White woman

“DEI policies don't create equal opportunity. It divides more. You think you're helping one group, but you're hurting a different group.”

White man

“I think DEI policies provide more opportunity when you consider socioeconomic differences and that talent can come from anywhere. DEI promotes those who don't have the same resources to be considered for education or jobs. It allows for different backgrounds and viewpoints to be heard. Workplaces can make "equal opportunity" happen by promoting fair hiring practices and hiring on merit...while ALSO recruiting in places that may be a bit lower socioeconomically.”

Latino man

Key Findings

- By a two-to-one margin, voters say that focusing on increasing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in various settings is a good thing rather than a bad thing - consistent with 2024.
- Voters are supportive of DEI when companies give additional consideration to qualified candidates who may come from underrepresented backgrounds - but the key is "additional consideration" (not automatically checking a box) and "qualified."
- A challenge is that many voters have a constrained view about DEI. It is seen nearly exclusively through the prism of race and its defining policy is perceived to be hiring or promoting based on race, not qualifications.

Key Findings

Quotes

“I'm going to be honest. I see DEI policies majorly helping those when it comes to race - a race that isn't white or Asian.”

White woman

“I would say DEI has been used more for skin color and gender more than anything because the programs seem to be focused more on them.”

Latino man

“It's not for us. All of us sitting here. We're white guys. That's the facts - it's not.”

White man

Key Findings

- One of the most noteworthy findings in this research is that voters across the political spectrum told us - through the survey and in discussions - that they believe groups facing significant bias and discrimination in hiring today are:
 - People with physical disabilities
 - Older adults over 50
 - People with mental health challenges
- Democrats and younger people - more than Republicans and older adults - also rank LGBTQ and Black adults as experiencing high levels of discrimination.
- DEI is seen as helping Black and LGBTQ adults, but not those with physical disabilities, older adults, or those with mental health challenges.

Key Findings

- DEI is not given credit for positive changes in the workplace. Too often, voters say that enhancements are just a natural evolution - a changing of the times - or something that individual companies or leaders did that was based on common sense.
- In our discussions, the strongest supporters were white Democratic suburban women who supported DEI on behalf of others.
- Unlike issues such as Social Security or Medicare, we found that DEI has an advocate problem. Few of those who may have benefitted are willing to directly step up to say that. We heard them say "who knows," if DEI may have helped them, or more commonly, emphasize their own agency in terms of hard work or qualifications.

Key Findings

Quotes

“You need to be the best. I worked my butt off. Nobody gave it to me.”

Black man

“You could say I got into all the schools because I was Black, but, like, I also had a 3.6 and I did research. I'm someone who really is proud of my merit and I try to make sure that's the first thing that is noticed.”

Black man

“I say no because any of the opportunities that are actually beneficial for me, I've had to seek out on my own. It wasn't provided through schooling (or) by any job or employer to be honest.”

Latino man

Key Findings


- It is widespread knowledge that the Trump administration is against DEI.
- There is a sense that we are on a pendulum - with companies and government "over-emphasizing" DEI during the Biden administration and now, under Trump, moving fast in the other direction. There is a desire for middle ground.
- Voters are divided - certainly by party - about whether Trump's anti-DEI actions have "gone too far" or are "about right."

Key Findings

- Democrats and allies like heated messages that are strongly critical of the Trump administration's motives and actions on DEI, but a more level tone proves more effective with everyone else. And there are arguments that can be made that have bi-partisan support. Among them are these themes:
 - Government should not be telling private companies what to do on DEI. If a company thinks it's good for their business, that's their choice.
 - We can't erase history or only tell a version of American greatness. History is history - we can't learn from our mistakes if we don't acknowledge them.
 - DEI cuts to medical research that focus on specific populations imperil people's health.



Key Findings

- In the final Qualboard discussions, we tested ten messages and both groups (men under 45 and independents divided between Harris and Trump) aligned on the top three:
 - DEI isn't just about race or gender. It helps level the playing field so everyone has a real chance to succeed, including people with disabilities, veterans and those from low income backgrounds.
 - DEI doesn't replace merit. It helps ensure people from all backgrounds get a fair chance to be considered based on their skills.
 - DEI programs aren't perfect. But the solution isn't to get rid of them. It's to improve them so they actually live up to their promise.
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Key Findings

Consistent themes from 2024 to 2025

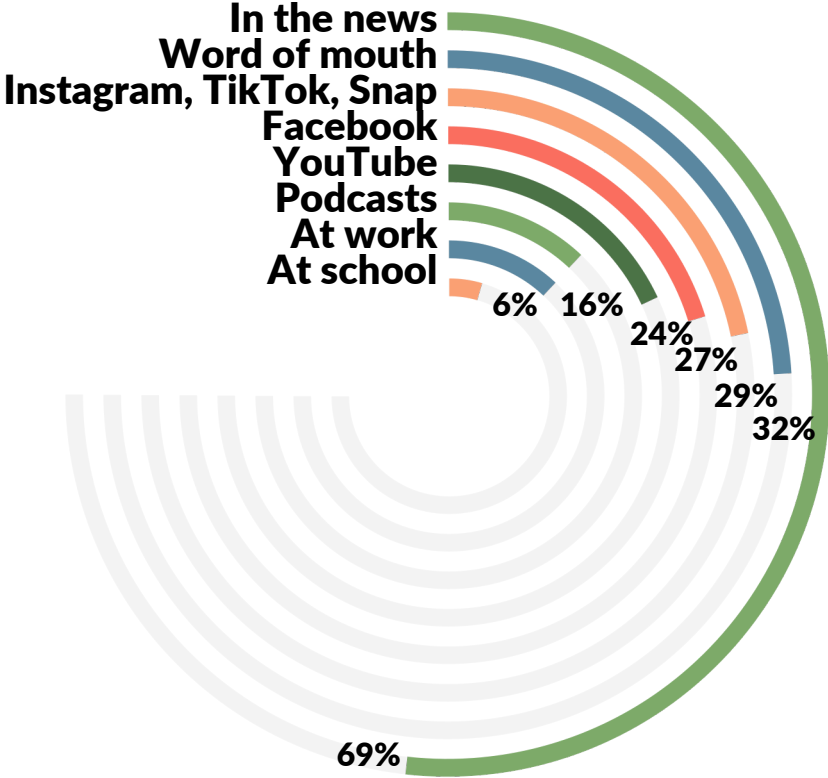
- When voters think of DEI, they typically focus on hiring or promotions and not about what happens after. Talking about respecting and valuing team members as part of the organization's culture consistently tests well.
- An effective message with Republicans has centered around government overreach in both our surveys. They think private companies should be able to decide about implementing DEI policies.
- Messages that highlight social justice or systemic barriers work well with Black voters and test poorly with white voters.
- There can be a danger with rhetorical overreach - like saying the Trump administration's actions border on censorship or that critics of DEI programs want to take us back to the 1950s.

Detailed Findings



Younger voters get much of their information about DEI from social media, YouTube and friends/family.

Where have you heard about diversity, equity and inclusion?



The news is the most important source for Gen X and Boomers, but younger voters rely more on social media, YouTube and friends and family.

Independent voters are least likely to be paying attention to news about DEI. Democrats criticize Trump and defend DEI and Republicans say "good riddance."

What have you been hearing about diversity, equity and inclusion? (open end survey question)

- "Trump is trying to trash DEI and is starting with the government and intimidating major corporations to fall in line with his goals." *White Democrat*
- "Trump wants to interfere with companies who promote DEI." *White independent*
- "DEI is being phased out due to its unfairness." *White Republican*
- "How DEI wants fairness for all." *Black Democrat*
- "Businesses and universities are doing away with it." *White independent*
- "Some companies like Target have stopped using this practice and some Black shoppers have stopped shopping there." *Black Democrat*
- "Lately all I hear about DEI is complaining and ignorant comment from the Trump administration. It's become a political football." *White independent*
- "It's a way to level the playing field in many areas. You can have qualified people which are women, people of different cultural backgrounds, with physical disabilities which are more than qualified for the job but without DEI, in the past companies would not have even interviewed." *White Democrat*
- "It's being shoved down our throats. People should qualify for jobs solely based on their experience and qualifications." *Mixed-race Republican*

The phrase "diversity, equity and inclusion's" rating is identical to 2024, while the term "DEI" went from a +8 positive to a +26 positive rating.

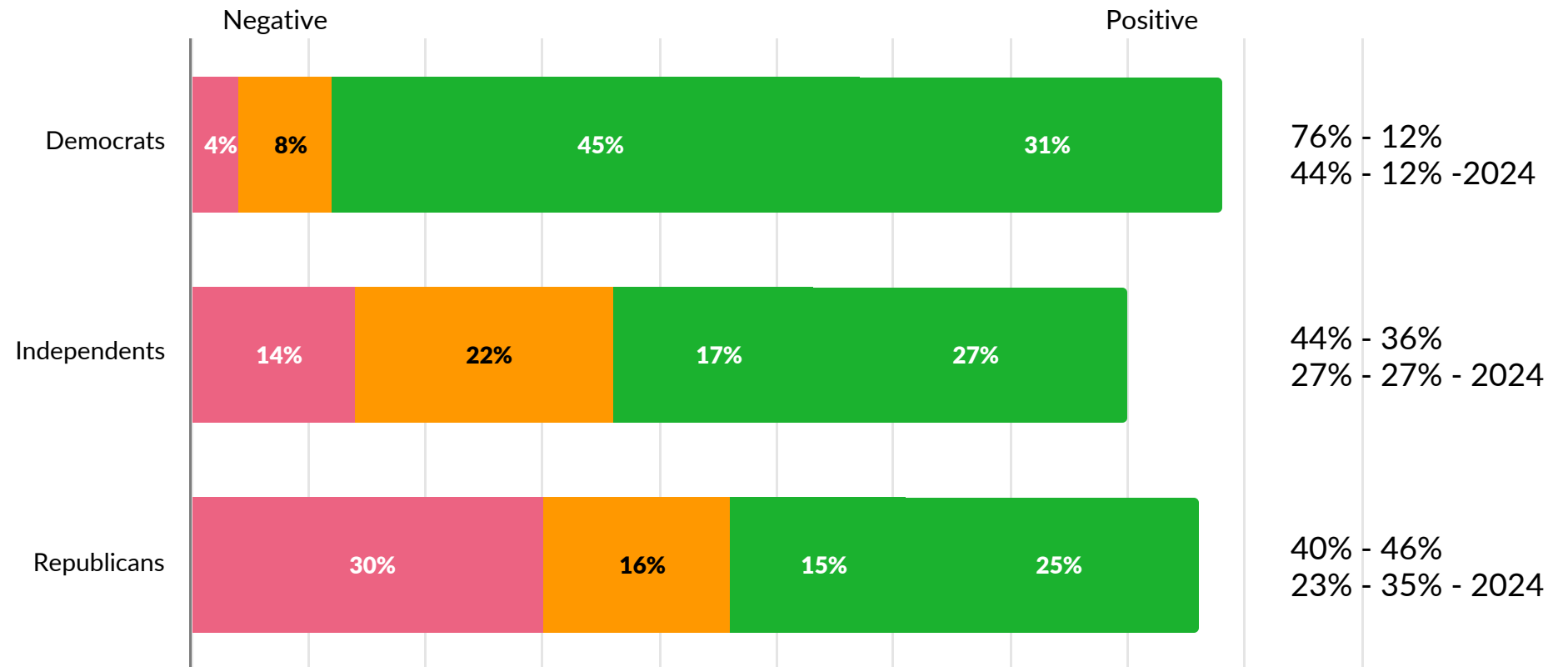
DEI and diversity, equity and inclusion



The reason for DEI's increased positive image is that Democrats have moved from mildly positive to strongly positive in the past year.

The shift in the past year is in intensity among Democrats. They have rallied as this policy has come under attack by the Trump administration.

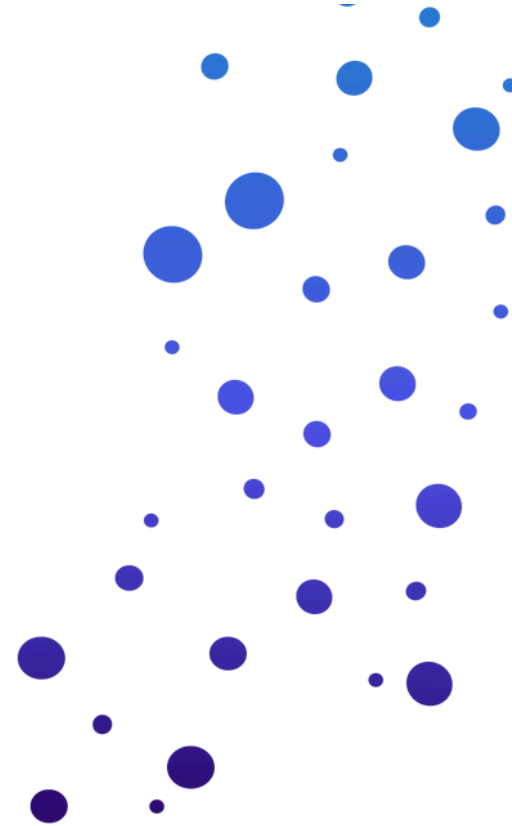
Interestingly, the Republicans who had been more on the sidelines have moved +17 points positive and just +11 points negative although the party overall remains net negative.



● Somewhat Positive ● Very Positive ● Somewhat Negative ● Very Negative

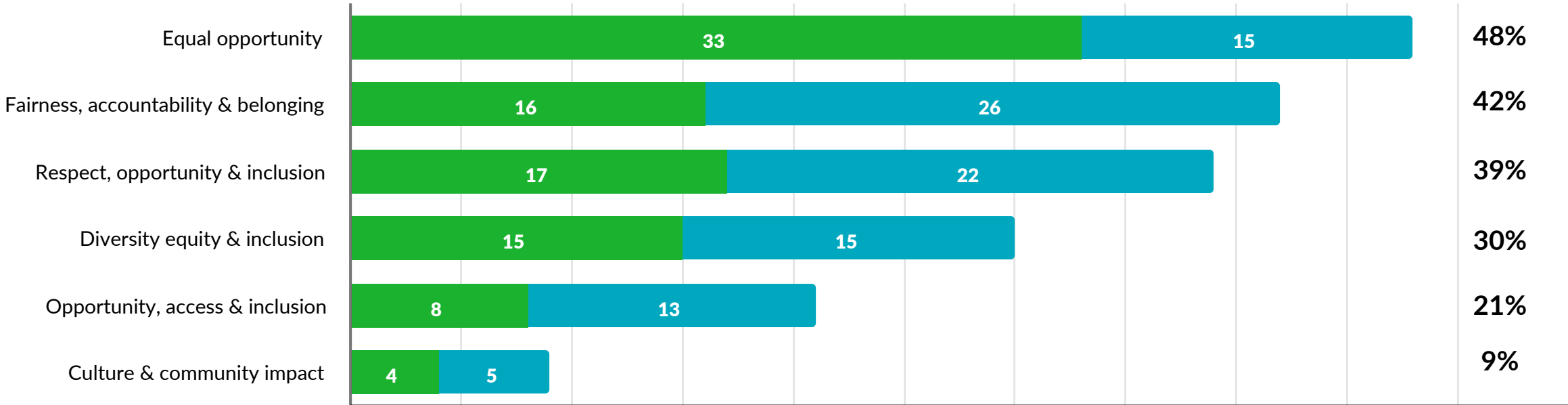
DEI's image is generally good across subgroups.

- Most voters have a more positive than negative view of DEI. The only exceptions are Republicans and men over 60.
- White non-college educated voters were least aware of DEI in 2024 (55% not heard) and have moved to 47% positive - 33% negative.
- Among white college-educated voters, DEI is 62% - 31% - so only a nominal difference between the groups in terms of negative viewpoint - it's just that college-educated individuals say they like it more.



Instead of "DEI," "Equal Opportunity" is voters' top choice to describe organizational goals.

The following are some phrases that could describe a company's organizational goals. Which, if any, do you prefer?

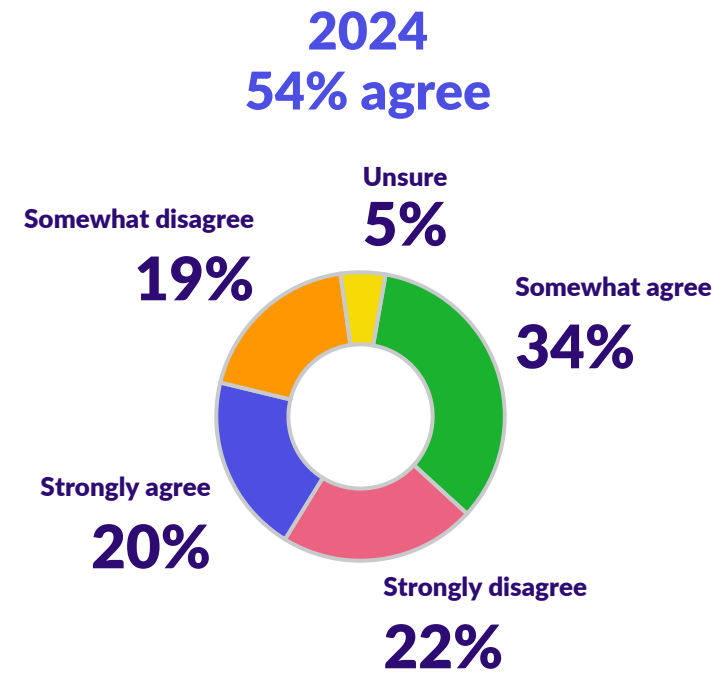
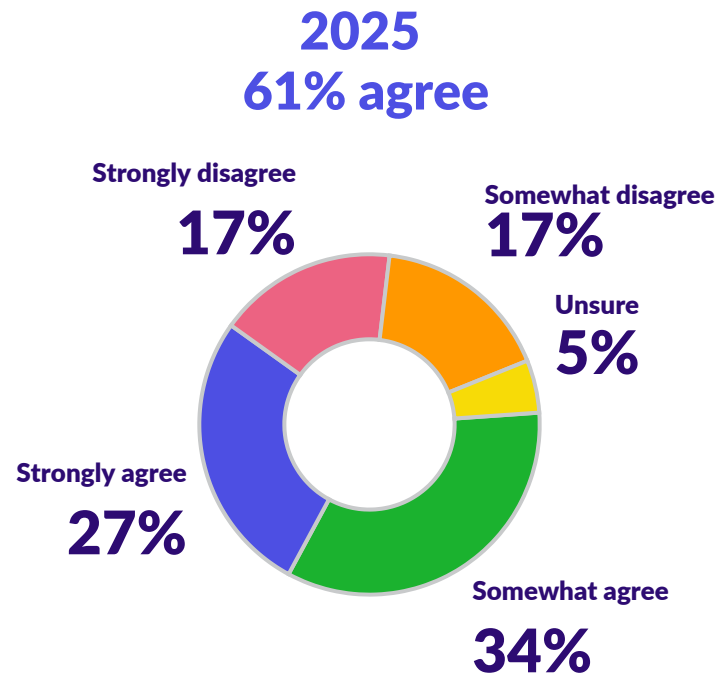


● 1st choice ● 2nd choice

Equal Opportunity has a 89% positive - 10% negative rating.
Liberals are the only group among whom diversity, equity & inclusion is at parity with equal opportunity; all other groups strongly prefer equal opportunity.

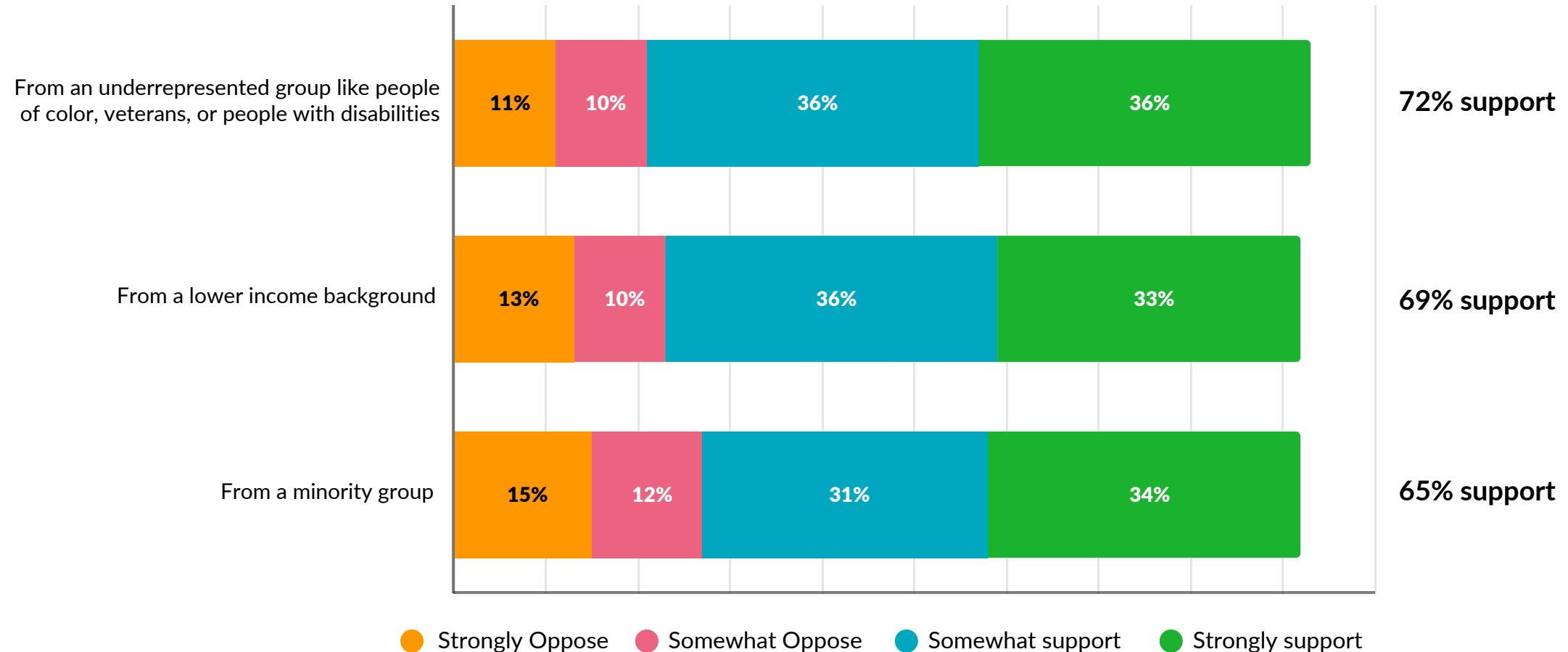
We found more support this year for the practice of "taking a person's background and identities into account."

When it comes to hiring and promotions, companies and organizations should always take a person's background and identities into account, in addition to their qualifications, in order to increase diversity.



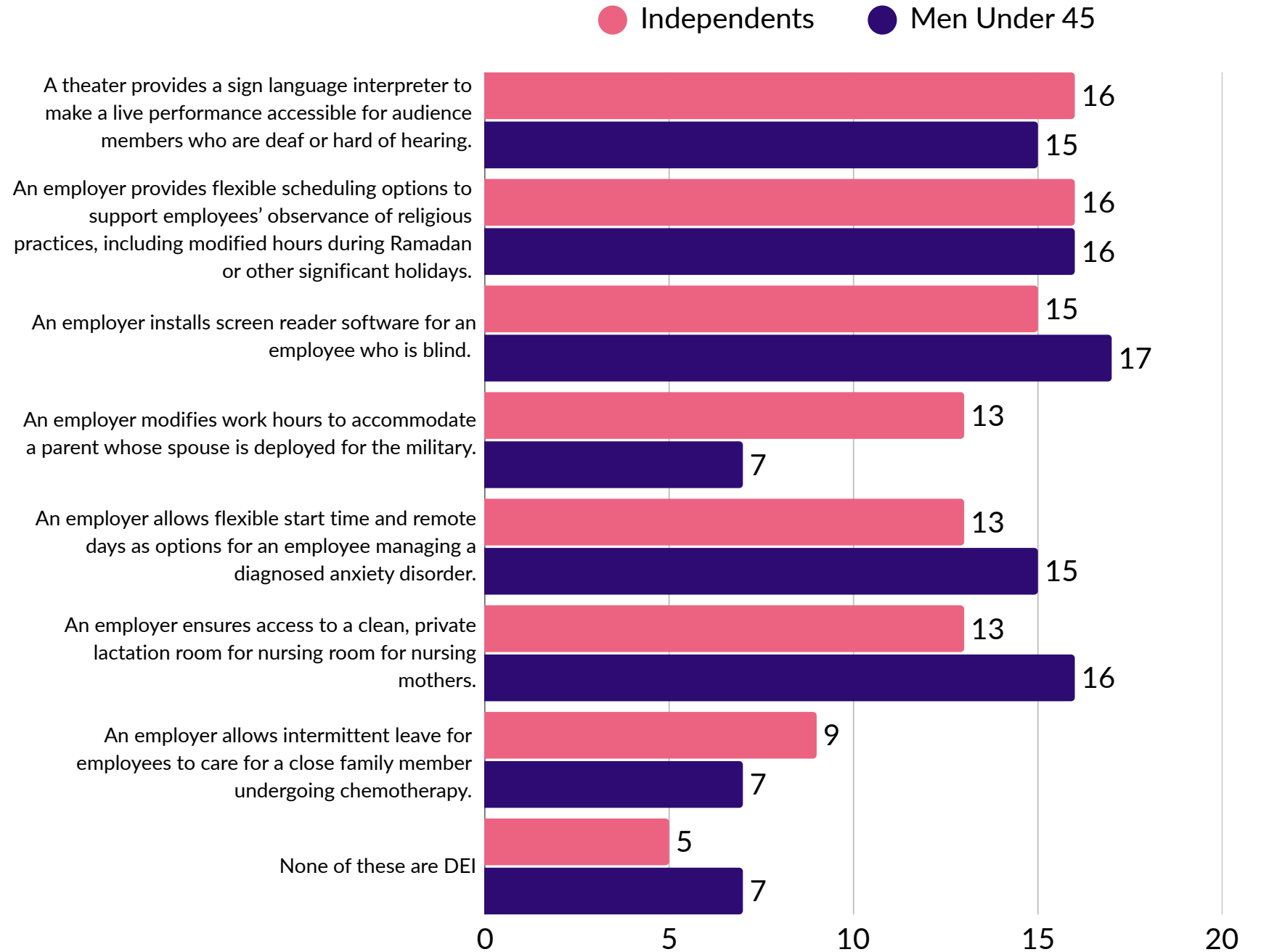
We experimented with "giving additional consideration" to different groups and found that it did not make a big difference.

Do you support or oppose a company giving additional consideration to a qualified candidate...



Voters generally think of DEI programs as race-based hiring and promotions, and tend to dismiss other DEI initiatives as "common sense" or "accommodations."

In the Qualboard, several options were rated as DEI policies, but in discussion, they told us that these things could or might be DEI, but they generally consider them something else.



Many voters dismiss relevant policies as something other than DEI.

“There are all just decent things to do and are rights - rather than targeted policies.”

White man

“There are not DEI policies. These are accommodations for individuals that have specific needs. DEI is a completely different aspect based on what I've seen in every case. These are HR policies, not DEI.”

White man

When asked about Pell Grants

“I do not believe Pell Grants is a DEI policy because poverty can and does affect everyone of all ages and races. Pell Grants should be given to those that deserve it.”

Latino man

“I feel Pell Grants aren't really DEI policy, but then again, it does help low income families, so that is being inclusive because it does include different incomes. It's aimed toward low income families which is part of an inclusive group, but at the same time, it's not catered toward a certain type of person.”

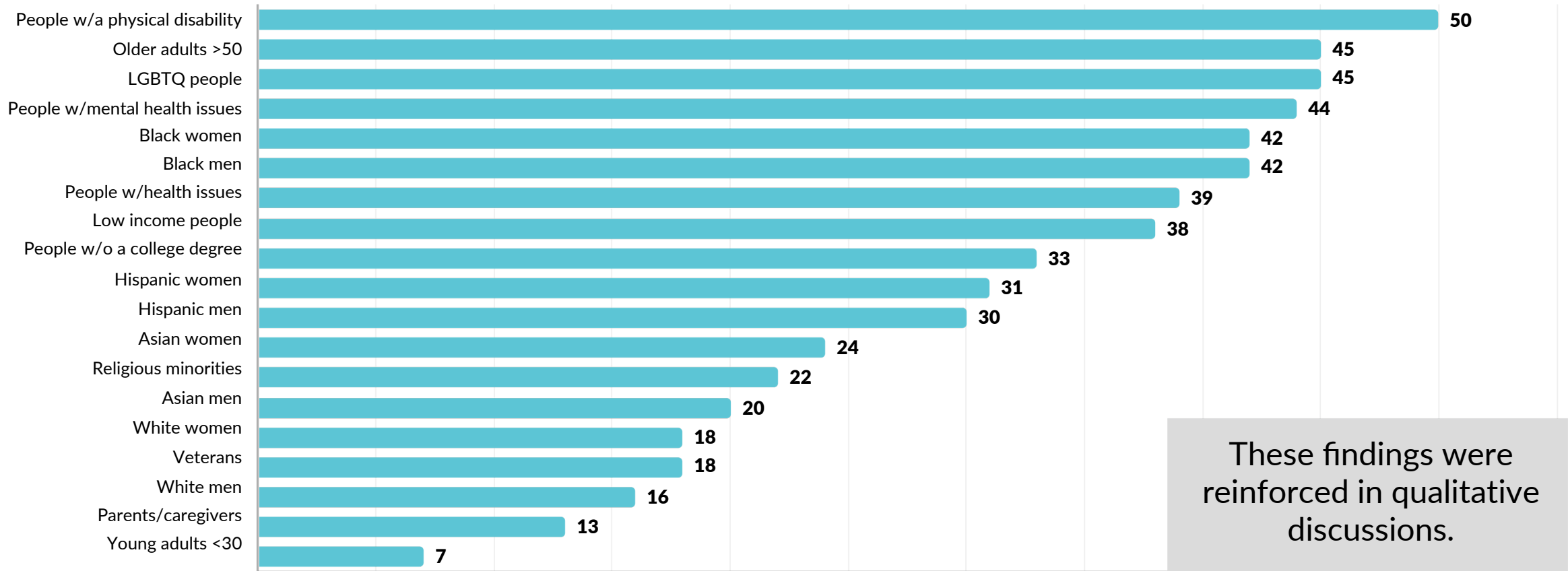
Black woman

Targets of Discrimination



Fascinating results for who faces the most bias

Which of the following groups - if any - do you think face bias or discrimination in hiring in the United States today?



"People with a physical disability" ranks at the top among all but Black voters

Top 3 choices for those facing most bias or discrimination by subgroup

White voters

- 51% - people w/a physical disability
- 48% - adults >50
- 45% - people w/mental health issues

Black voters

- 69% - Black men
- 64% - Black women
- 50% - low income people

Hispanic voters

- 47% - people w/a physical disability
- 43% - LGBTQ people
- 39% - people w/mental health issues

AAPI voters

- 46% - people w/a physical disability
- 43% - LGBTQ people
- 42% - Black men

Democrats list LGBTQ people, but independents and Republicans do not

Top 3 choices for those facing most bias or discrimination by subgroup

GOP men

- 37% - older adults > 50
- 33% - white men
- 32% - people w/a physical disability

GOP women

- 49% - people w/a physical disability
- 45% - older adults >50
- 38% - people w/mental health issues

IND men

- 35% - Black men
- 32% - people w/a physical disability
- 31% - people w/mental health issues

IND women

- 57% - people w/a physical disability
- 53% - people w/mental health issues
- 46% - people w/health issues

DEM men

- 59% - Black men
- 58% - LGBTQ people
- 56% - Black women

DEM women

- 68% - LGBTQ people
- 66% - people w/a physical disability
- 66% - Black women

Gen Z and Millennials differ from older voters

Top 3 choices for those facing most bias or discrimination by subgroup

Gen Z

- 52% - Black women
- 50% - LGBTQ people
- 48% - Black men

Millennial

- 45% - people w/a physical disability
- 45% - Black men
- 42% - LGBTQ people

Gen X

- 54% - people w/a physical disability
- 50% - adults >50
- 46% - people w/mental health issues

Boomers

- 61% - adults >50
- 54% - people w/a physical disability
- 48% - people w/mental health issues

The largest gaps between perceived bias and help provided by DEI are for: older adults and those with physical/mental issues

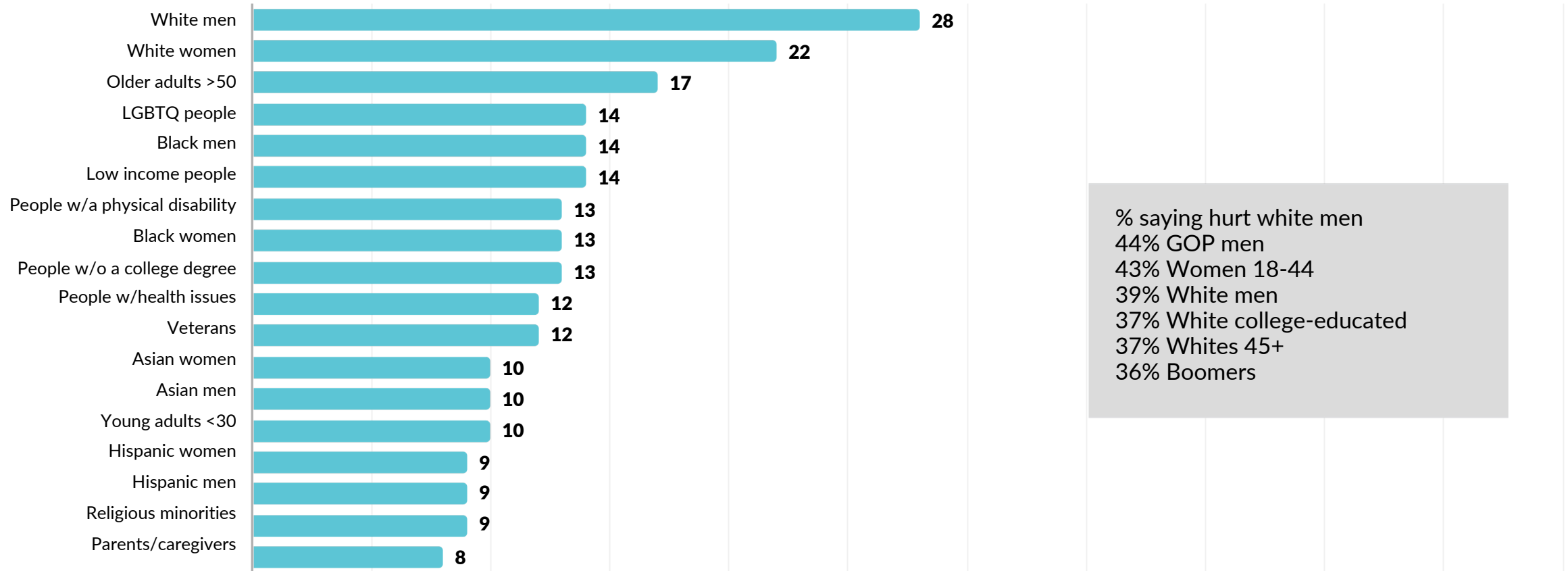
When thinking about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies, which of the following groups-if any-do you think they help?

Group	% Say Faces Bias/Discrimination in Hiring	% Say DEI Helps	Gap (Bias - Help)
Older adults over 50	45%	20%	25
People with mental health issues	44%	21%	23
People with health issues	39%	20%	19
People with a physical disability	50%	32%	18
People without college degrees	33%	17%	16
Low-income people	38%	26%	12
White men	18%	11%	7
Religious minorities	22%	18%	4
LGBTQ people	45%	41%	4
Parents or caregivers	13%	10%	3
Young adults under 30	11%	11%	0
White women	18%	18%	0
Veterans	18%	19%	-1
Black men	42%	44%	-2
Hispanic women	31%	33%	-2
Black women	42%	45%	-3
Hispanic men	30%	33%	-3
Asian women	24%	27%	-3
Asian men	20%	25%	-5

These findings were reinforced in qualitative discussions

White men are perceived to be hurt most by DEI.

When thinking about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies which, if any, of the following groups do you think they hurt?

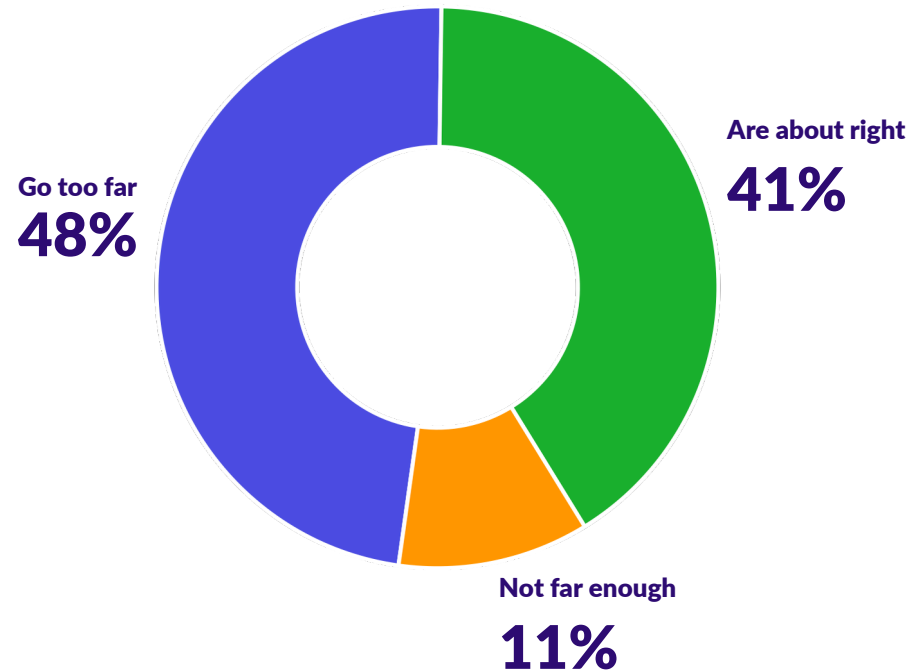


DEI and the Trump Administration



Voters are divided about Trump administration DEI policies.

Just based on what you have seen or heard about the Trump administration's actions related to ending DEI do you think they...



In the Qualboards, independent voters and men under 45 split evenly about whether Trump's policies go "too far" and or are "about right."

In the survey, one-in-five Republicans, three-in-four Democrats and roughly half of independents say Trump's anti-DEI actions "go too far."

- **Older Black voters are significantly more likely than younger Black voters to say the administration's anti-DEI policies "go too far"**
 - There is a much smaller age gap among white voters and virtually no difference among Hispanics
- **There is no difference between white and Hispanic voters on this question - a 54% majority of both groups say the policies are "about right" or "don't go far enough"**
 - Men in both cohorts are more likely to be aligned with the anti-DEI actions than women
- **AAPI and Black voters are more likely to say the administration's actions "go too far" and in both groups, women are more likely to say this than men**

Which specific actions go too far? We tested 15 actions in the Qualboards.

One Trump voter in the Qualboard said, "I feel that medically, DEI is essential. Different races and sexes have different needs and they should all be addressed."

ACTION	# of independents	# of men under age 45
Made significant cuts to federal programs that focus on women's health issues, including chronic and infectious disease, mental health, genetic disorders, and substance use.	16	18
Erased thousands of historical references to women, LGBTQ people, and racial minorities from National Smithsonian Museum exhibits.	13	18
Pressured Paramount to cancel its internal DEI programs in order to get government approval from the FCC for a corporate merger.	13	16
Pressured the Washington Commanders to bring back the "Redskins" name or lose funding for their new stadium.	13	13
Launched Department of Justice investigations into law firms offering DEI fellowships and hiring initiatives that support underrepresented talent.	12	16
Blocked \$783 million in medical research funding for the National Institute of Health (NIH) because the projects were related to DEI.	12	13
Issued executive orders targeting DEI programs, that resulted in West Point leadership preemptively shutting down all cadet groups for minorities, LGBTQ+ students, and women.	12	12
Banned companies with government contracts from considering diversity or DEI in hiring.	11	16
Launched federal investigations into over 50 universities for having DEI programs, threatening to cut funding if they don't eliminate them.	11	15
Ordered the Department of Justice to investigate private companies for using DEI in hiring or promotions and encouraged whistleblowers to report DEI programs to federal investigators.	11	15
Eliminated all DEI programs, offices, and staff, and training across government agencies.	11	14
Banned teachers from using students' pronouns or discussing gender identity or face criminal prosecution.	11	7
Ended federal recognition of transgender people and banned gender identity on official documents.	10	4
Ended federal oversight from the Department of Justice that made schools and police work to reduce racial segregation.	9	12
Dismantled hiring programs at the CIA that focused on recruiting and promoting racial and ethnic minorities, particularly as field officers, in favor of a "color blind approach" to hiring.	9	9
None of these have gone "too far"	4	1

Message-testing

Section 1: Public Sector (federally funded programs
and research)



About the message scoring

The Maxdiff technique was used to rank the messages in this survey.

MaxDiff analysis is a survey-based research technique used to quantify how important a given item is relative to others in a given list. Voters were shown a randomized group of messages seven different times and each time they were asked to choose **the most convincing and least convincing** message. At the end, each message receives a score--a higher score indicates a more convincing message (most convincing--least convincing). A negative score is the margin of least convincing or most convincing.

It is important to note that a lower score does not necessarily mean that the message is not effective, it is just relatively less persuasive than some of the messages with a higher score.

Introduction to message testing

Section 1: Government, Education, History, Research, Science, Health category

As you may have heard, President Trump issued a series of executive orders designed to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion. The impact has been wide- ranging from ending federal programs and federally funded research to impacting what schools and universities, museums and the military can do or say.

There are some people who argue the actions go too far. Please select the argument below that you find MOST convincing and the one you find LEAST convincing.

Section 1 messages ranked

Most effective messages - ranked among all voters

Maxdiff
score

We can't just tell a version of history that reflects only American greatness. Telling the truth isn't anti-American. History is history - the good, bad and ugly - and our children need to learn the truth so they don't risk making the same mistakes.	0.09
We should not try to whitewash our history by eliminating the stories of people like Jackie Robinson or Harriet Tubman. They did achieve something important and the color of their skin was part of that. The government is trying to erase whole groups of people - women, people of color, LGBTQ people and native Americans who have made history or served our country and that is wrong.	0.06
The United States is known as the world's leader in scientific research. The work from universities or federal labs on everything from cancer to climate change is in jeopardy because it may include words like "race" or "gender" or "diversity" which could trigger a funding cut in an effort to root out DEI. We can't wage a war on DEI that hurts science and research.	0.06
DEI initiatives in education, research, and public health help ensure that programs are tailored to the specific needs of all populations, including women, racial and ethnic minorities, low-income people, rural communities, veterans and people with disabilities. If this work is ended, it will impact everyone's health and well-being.	0.05
Academic freedom means universities and scientific research should function without government interference. It is a fundamental American value and part of why we are such a successful and innovative country. If this administration can go after things it doesn't like, the next administration could target different things.	0.04
DEI initiatives at our universities foster a sense of belonging and support - particularly for students who may be the first in their families to go to college, who may have physical or mental health challenges, come from a racial or religious minority or another situation where they may feel out of the place. DEI helps all students feel valued and included which is directly linked to higher academic achievement, retention and graduation rates.	0

Section 1 messages ranked

Less effective messages - ranked among all voters

Maxdiff score

<p>The Trump administration's focus on DEI is a distraction from the real problems of our country - like the cost of living and the economy. It's petty and a waste of time to try to erase words and groups of people from websites or exhibits. We have more important things to focus on.</p>	-.04
<p>This administration seems to think that if you're a woman or a Black person then you are somehow less qualified. Trump has blamed disasters on people - a woman pilot, a Black mayor, or a company which must have made a DEI hire. And Trump has replaced military leaders - most of whom have been women or Black men - with white men. This isn't about merit. It's about returning to a world where white men are in charge.</p>	-.09
<p>The Trump administration's actions border on censorship. Diversity is what makes our country special and our museums, schools and universities should decide how they want to tell that story.</p>	-.18

Sanitizing history or museum exhibits is a line too far for all voters.

Top Message

"We can't just tell a version of history that reflects only American greatness. Telling the truth isn't anti-American. History is history - the good, bad and ugly - and our children need to learn the truth so they don't risk making the same mistakes.



“Jackie Robinson, the Enola Gay, Tuskegee Airmen - they were scrubbed from websites. They were restored, but in their rush to get rid of things, they took them down.

In American history there are divisive aspects - but tell our story. Some parts of our history are great, some are not. The promise of America is inclusion.

”

White man

“I think it goes too far. I think we should be exposed to history; it should not be taken away.

You can't just pick and choose what you want a museum to have. I think it's ridiculous.

”

Latina woman

Messages ranked by race and ethnicity

Government, Education, History, Research, Science, Health category

Most convincing rank	All voters	Black voters	White voters	Latino voters	AAPI voters
History is History	0.09	-.01	0.11	0.02	0.06
Don't whitewash History	0.06	0.12	0.07	0	-.01
World's leader in scientific research	0.06	0.01	0.07	0.05	0.06
Need programs for specific needs	0.05	0.07	0.04	0.10	0.08
Academic freedom	0.04	-.02	0.05	-.01	0.06
University DEI fosters belonging	0	0.04	0	0.06	0.04
Distraction from real problems	-.04	-.07	-.03	-.03	-.05
Trump thinks non whites less qualified	-.09	0.07	-.12	-.03	-.14
Trump actions censorship	-.18	-.20	-.18	-.16	-.10

Messages ranked by age

Government, Education, History, Research, Science, Health category

Most convincing rank	All voters	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomers
History is History	0.09	-0.04	0.03	0.08	0.15
Don't whitewash History	0.06	0.03	0.00	0.06	0.11
World's leader in scientific research	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.08
Need programs for specific needs	0.05	0.09	0.06	0.05	0.03
Academic freedom	0.04	0.07	0.02	0.04	0.05
University DEI fosters belonging	0	0.06	0.06	0.01	-0.05
Distraction from real problems	-0.04	-0.07	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04
Trump thinks non whites less qualified	-0.09	-0.01	-0.02	-0.10	-0.14
Trump actions censorship	-0.18	-0.19	-0.15	-0.17	-0.21

Messages ranked by gender and education

Government, Education, History, Research, Science, Health category

Most convincing rank	All voters	Men	Women	Non-College	College
History is History	0.09	0.10	0.07	0.10	0.07
Don't whitewash History	0.06	0.05	0.08	0.07	0.08
World's leader in scientific research	0.06	0.08	0.04	0.07	0.06
Need programs for specific needs	0.05	0.01	0.09	0.05	0.05
Academic freedom	0.04	0.08	0	0.03	0.06
University DEI fosters belonging	0	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.01
Distraction from real problems	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04
Trump thinks non whites less qualified	-0.09	-0.10	-0.07	-0.10	-0.07
Trump actions censorship	-0.18	-0.17	-0.19	-0.17	-0.20

Messages ranked by race and gender

Government, Education, History, Research, Science, Health category

Most convincing rank	All voters	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Latino men	Latina women	AAPI men	AAPI women
History is History	0.09	0.14	0.11	0.02	-.04	0.06	-.01	0.06	0.06
Don't whitewash History	0.06	0.06	0.09	0.12	0.14	-.04	0.03	-.04	0.02
World's leader in scientific research	0.06	0.10	0.05	0	0.01	0.09	0.03	0.10	0.02
Need programs for specific needs	0.05	-.02	0.08	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.13	0.09	0.07
Academic freedom	0.04	0.10	0.02	0.01	-.05	0.04	-.04	0.09	0.02
University DEI fosters belonging	0	-.03	0	-.01	0.07	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.02
Distraction from real problems	-.04	-.03	-.03	-.08	-.12	-.02	-.04	-.03	-.08
Trump thinks non whites less qualified	-.09	-.15	-.12	0.08	0.10	-.06	-.01	-.13	-.14
Trump actions censorship	-.18	-.17	-.20	-.19	0.21	-.18	-.15	-.19	0

Messages ranked by party

Government, Education, History, Research, Science, Health category

Most convincing rank	All voters	GOP	IND	DEM
History is History	0.09	0.22	0.12	-0.05
Don't whitewash History	0.06	0.03	0.06	0.10
World's leader in scientific research	0.06	0.09	0.03	0.04
Need programs for specific needs	0.05	0.05	0.02	0.06
Academic freedom	0.04	0.09	0.09	-0.02
University DEI fosters belonging	0	0.01	-0.02	0.01
Distraction from real problems	-0.04	-0.07	-0.03	-0.01
Trump thinks non whites less qualified	-0.09	-0.26	-0.10	0.08
Trump actions censorship	-0.18	-0.15	-0.17	-0.21

Message summary: Public Sector

- **The "history is history" message resonates with audiences that are challenging to reach on DEI - Boomers, Republicans and white men.**

"We can't just tell a version of history that reflects only American greatness. Telling the truth isn't anti-American. History is history - the good, bad and ugly - and our children need to learn the truth so they don't risk making the same mistakes.
- **Democrats and Black voters like the history message that is more pointed and specific.**

"We should not try to white wash our history by eliminating the stories of people like Jackie Robinson or Harriet Tubman. They did achieve something important and the color of their skin was part of that. The government is trying to erase whole groups of people - women, people of color, LGBTQ people and native Americans who have made history or served our country and that is wrong."
- **Men were more likely to respond to a message about DEI cuts threatening scientific research, while women were more persuaded by cuts to medical research which focus on specific populations.**

In the Qualboard discussions, participants were most likely to say cuts to medical research for specific groups is an example of the Trump administration's attacks on DEI going too far.

Message-testing

Section 2: Private Sector



Introduction to message testing

Section 2: The private sector

In the private sector, some companies have committed to continuing their diversity, equity and inclusion policies. Please select the argument below that you find **MOST** convincing and the one you find **LEAST** convincing for continuing these policies.

Section 2 messages ranked

Most effective messages - ranked among all voters

Maxdiff score

<p>The U.S. is diverse and so are the customers of many businesses. If a company wants to appeal to different types of customers, then it makes sense for their team to be diverse too. This is why successful large corporations like Apple, Walmart and Costco say their DEI programs help them compete and it's why their shareholders have overwhelmingly rejected proposals to eliminate these policies.</p>	<p>0.12</p>
<p>Our company focuses on inclusion - making sure everyone is given consideration in hiring and promotions and when they are part of our team, that they feel valued and respected. As a result, our employees are more engaged, satisfied, and likely to stay with the company.</p>	<p>0.06</p>
<p>It is in a company's best interest to hire a diverse team. Diverse teams bring together different perspectives and experiences, leading to more creative problem-solving and innovative solutions.</p>	<p>0.01</p>
<p>Companies should get to decide what they want to do without government interference. If a company wants to have diversity, equity and inclusion programs that's fine, but it's also fine if a company chooses not to. Businesses know their employees and customers best, not the government.</p>	<p>0</p>

Section 2 messages ranked

Less effective messages - ranked among all voters

Maxdiff score

The choice isn't between merit and diversity. Our culture of diversity, equity and inclusion is based on merit - one where hard work, talent, and contributions drive success, and barriers to opportunity are removed.	-.01
Systemic barriers and conscious or unconscious bias have prevented qualified people from having equal access to jobs and opportunities in the past. Despite progress, barriers and bias still exist today and so we need to keep working on it.	-.04
Our company focuses on "ROI" in two ways: Respect, opportunity and inclusion (ROI) which creates a happier and more productive workplace that generates a better Return on Investment (ROI). Our people are happy and our company makes money.	-.06
There is enough room at the table for everyone. Gains for one group doesn't mean another group loses. DEI is about expanding access, addressing talent shortages and increasing innovation that benefits everybody.	-.08

Private corporations should be allowed to engage in DEI as they see fit.

“At the end of the day, if they're able to stay profitable while being a proponent of DEI, they'll probably stay with it.”

Black man

“If DEI makes a company more money, keep doing it.
If DEI makes a company less money, stop it.”

Mixed race man

“If a private company wants to use DEI practices, that should be up to them, not the government”

White woman

Messages ranked by race and ethnicity

The private sector

Most convincing rank	All voters	Black voters	White voters	Latino voters	AAPI voters
Customers are diverse -Makes sense that team is too	0.12	0.15	0.11	0.09	0.20
Our company focuses on inclusion - feel valued, respected	0.06	0	0.07	0.07	0.05
Companies best interest to hire diverse team	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.02
Companies should get to decide	0	-.05	0.01	0	0.02
Choice isn't between merit & diversity	-.01	-.05	0	0	-.02
Systemic barriers & bias prevented equal access	-.04	0.04	-.06	-.03	0
Our company focuses on ROI in two ways	-.06	-.10	-.06	-.06	-.14
Enough room at the table - Gains for one not loss for other	-.08	-.03	-.08	-.08	-.13

Messages ranked by age

The private sector

Most convincing rank	All voters	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomers
Customers are diverse -Makes sense that team is too	0.12	0.10	0.13	0.13	0.11
Our company focuses on inclusion - feel valued, respected	0.06	0.04	0.06	0.03	0.08
Companies best interest to hire diverse team	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.04	-0.01
Companies should get to decide	0	-0.04	0	0.01	0
Choice isn't between merit & diversity	-0.01	-0.06	-0.05	-0.03	0.03
Systemic barriers & bias prevented equal access	-0.04	-0.01	-0.02	-0.04	-0.06
Our company focuses on ROI in two ways	-0.06	0	-0.08	-0.06	-0.06
Enough room at the table - Gains for one not loss for other	-0.08	-0.05	-0.04	-0.08	-0.10

Messages ranked by gender and education

The private sector

Most convincing rank	All voters	Men	Women	Non-college	College
Customers are diverse -Makes sense that team is too	0.12	0.10	0.14	0.09	0.15
Our company focuses on inclusion - feel valued, respected	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.06
Companies best interest to hire diverse team	0.01	0	0.01	0.02	-.01
Companies should get to decide	0	0.03	-.02	0.01	-.01
Choice isn't between merit & diversity	-.01	0	-.02	-.03	0.02
Systemic barriers & bias prevented equal access	-.04	-.05	-.03	-.04	-.04
Our company focuses on ROI in two ways	-.06	-.05	-.07	-.05	-.08
Enough room at the table - Gains for one not loss for other	-.08	-.07	-.08	-.07	-.08

Messages ranked by race and gender

The private sector

Most convincing rank	All voters	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Latino men	Latina women	AAPI men	AAPI women
Customers are diverse - Makes sense that team is too	0.12	0.09	0.14	0.17	0.15	0.05	0.12	0.20	0.21
Our company focuses on inclusion - feel valued, respected	0.06	0.04	0.09	0	0	0.05	0.08	0.08	0.01
Companies best interest to hire diverse team	0.01	0	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.04
Companies should get to decide	0	0.04	-0.02	-0.07	-0.07	0.07	-0.05	0	0.04
Choice isn't between merit & diversity	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.07	-0.04	0.03	-0.03	-0.04	0
Systemic barriers & bias prevented equal access	-0.04	-0.06	-0.05	0.02	0.08	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02	0.03
Our company focuses on ROI in two ways	-0.06	-0.05	-0.07	-0.06	-0.13	-0.05	-0.06	-0.11	-0.17
Enough room at the table - Gains for one not loss for other	-0.08	-0.07	-0.09	0	-0.04	-0.13	-0.04	-0.11	-0.16

Messages ranked by party

The private sector

Most convincing rank	All voters	GOP	IND	DEM
Customers are diverse -Makes sense that team is too	0.12	0.01	0.12	0.22
Our company focuses on inclusion -feel valued, respected	0.06	0.08	0.03	0.05
Companies best interest to hire diverse team	0.01	-.04	0	0.05
Companies should get to decide	0	0.09	0.06	-.10
Choice isn't between merit & diversity	-.01	0.03	-.02	-.05
Systemic barriers & bias prevented equal access	-.04	-.09	-.03	0.01
Our company focuses on ROI in two ways	-.06	0	-.02	-.13
Enough room at the table - Gains for one not loss for other	-.08	-.08	-.14	-.05

Message summary: Private Sector

- **"Customer Diversity" is the top message for center-left audiences, across race, gender, and age. Right-leaning adults rank it as mid-tier. Private companies are expected to pursue profit and diversity makes sense if it drives returns.**

"A lot of companies want to market to the people who consume their products and who better to market to them than people who understand them culturally."

- **"Let Companies Decide Without Interference" is the strongest message with Republican audiences but doesn't resonate with Democrats.**

"Let companies run the way that they want to...Nobody should be required to keep it, or required to have it."

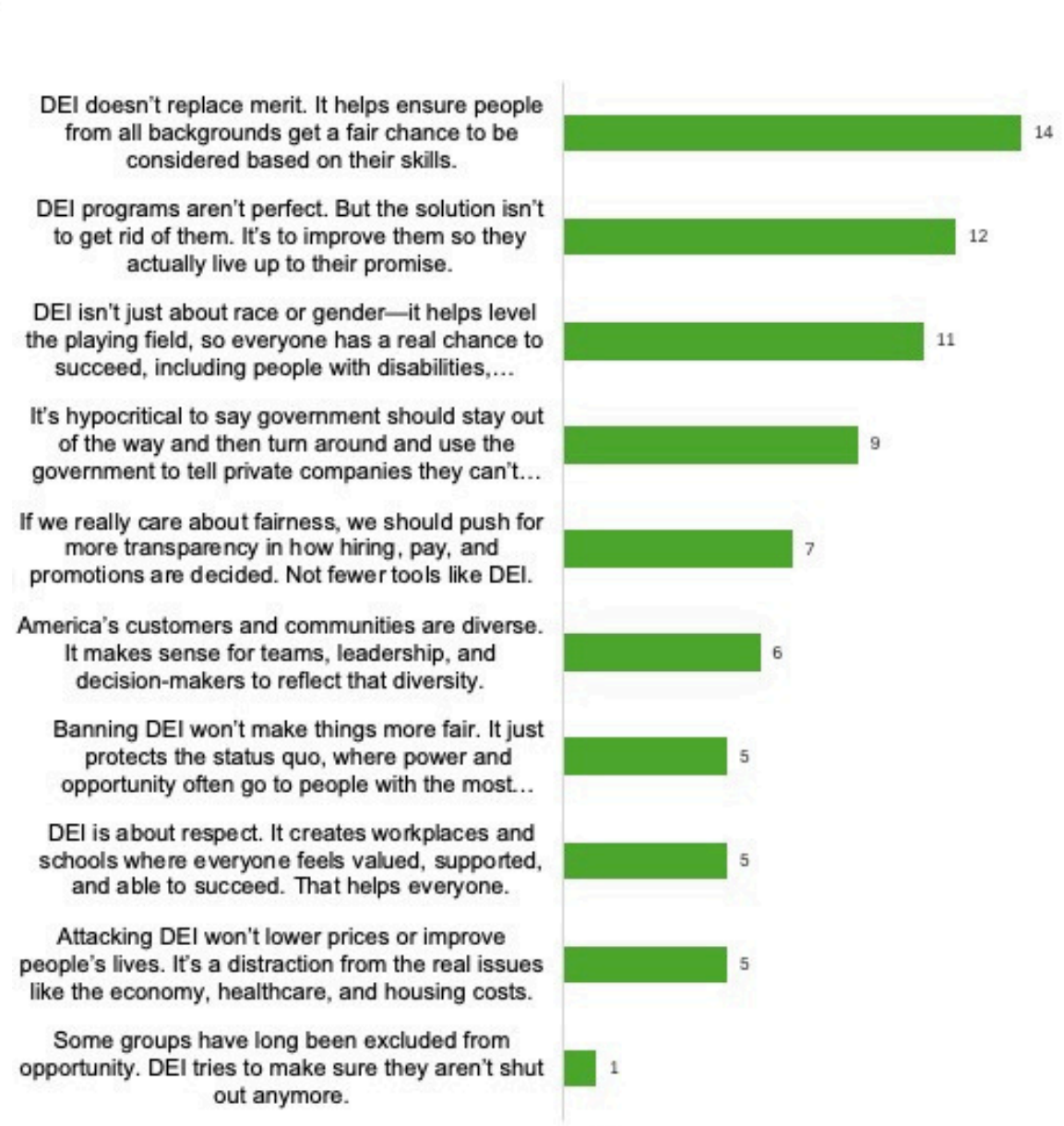
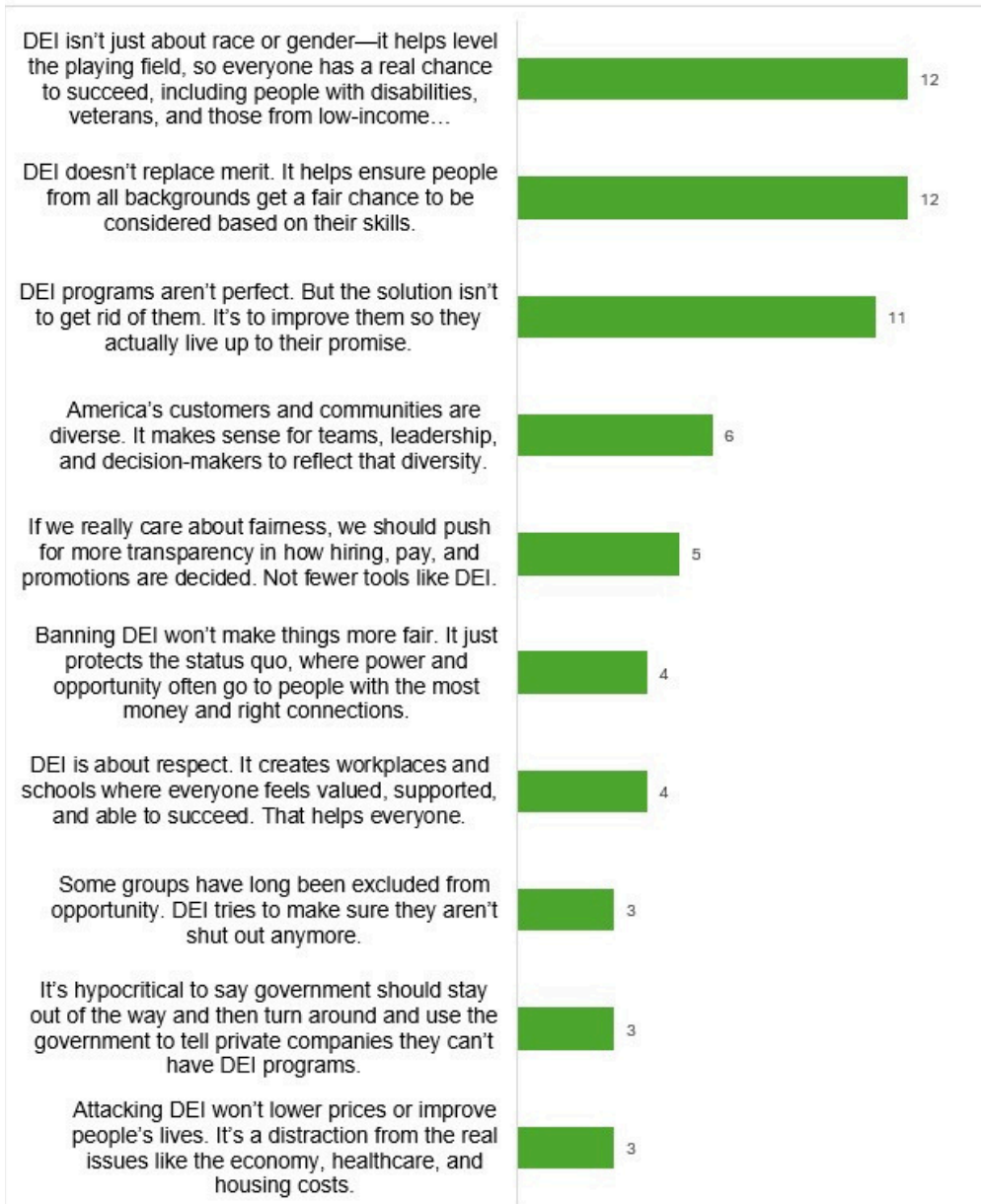
- **Some messages fall flat and should be avoided:**

"There's room for everyone" is one of the lowest testing message and may feel tone-deaf in a tough job market.

Messaging on systemic barriers and unconscious bias triggers backlash from Republicans and is only neutral with Democrats.

Messages tested in Qualboards

Independents



Qualboard Message Summary

- **The top testing messages in the Qualboards address concerns about DEI straight on - by saying these policies aren't just about race or gender and that they don't ignore merit.**

DEI doesn't replace merit. It helps ensure people from all backgrounds get a fair chance to be considered based on their skills.

DEI isn't just about race or gender—it helps level the playing field, so everyone has a real chance to succeed, including people with disabilities, veterans, and those from low-income backgrounds.

DEI programs aren't perfect. But the solution isn't to get rid of them. It's to improve them so they actually live up to their promise.

- **These messages are similar to a top-testing message from our 2024 survey.**

DEI doesn't determine who gets hired or who gets admitted -- that is based on qualifications. It just helps make sure the door is open wide enough so that people who have traditionally had less access to opportunities get the chance to be considered and, if chosen, feel comfortable and supported once they are there.

Message-testing

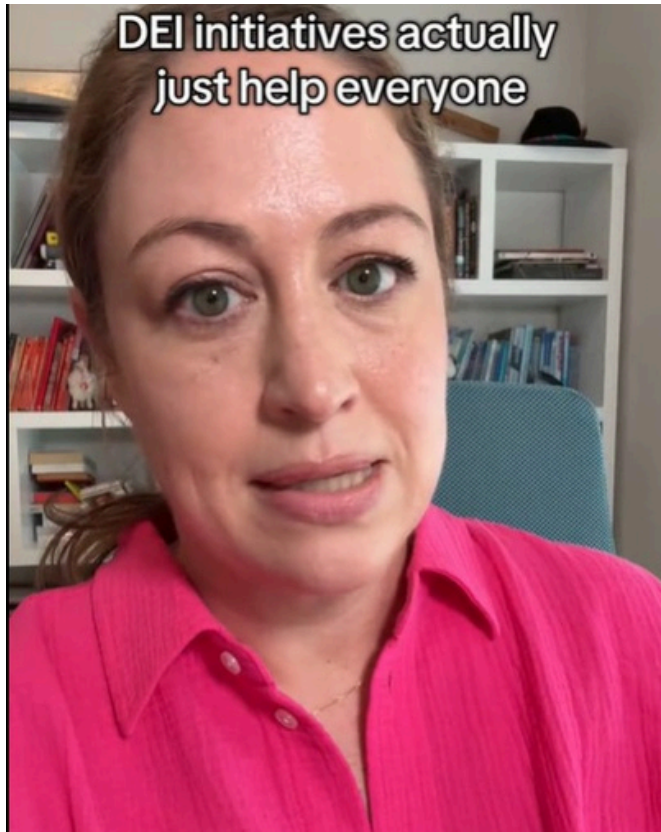
Section 3: Messages and Messengers



Effective messengers speak authentically from experience

- **Personal experience builds trust.** Real stories and practical examples help audiences connect and see the messenger as credible.
- **Tone is critical.** Swing voters are especially sensitive to emotional tone. If a speaker sounds angry or resentful, the message can feel like a personal vendetta and get dismissed as a "rant" or "bitterness."
 - Avoid speculating on others' motives. Saying things like "my boss was jealous" can sound petty and distract from core message.
 - On emotional content, messengers should stick to what happened and how it affected them to keep the message grounded and relatable.
- **Connect to bigger picture.** Use data, statistics, or examples of how others are affected to show it's not an isolated incident. This helps the audience see relevance and scale of issue.

Talking about how DEI benefits everyone was effective in expanding how participants think about DEI



Bonnie Dilber - TikTok

“DEI is broader than I initially thought - and that is on me. I think more knowledge is needed to give those, like me, the ability to understand the whole of DEI and not just what we have seen in the news or heard from others”

White woman

“It is different. Before I thought DEI was more like affirmative action, but I can see that it's about inclusivity.”

White woman

Speaking from personal experience and data are both effective ways to discuss ageism.



“I think the left-hand video was more convincing because she shared her own personal experiences with ageism in the work place and how it impacted her.”

Black man

“I really like the right-hand video better as it goes beyond personal feelings and quotes statistics and data that is hard to disprove.”

AAPI man

Exposing voters to personal stories of its positive impact is a powerful tool to destigmatize DEI.



Joy Reid

“She was given a chance to attend a school that she probably wouldn't have the chance to otherwise. Although the initial reason was due to affirmative action, it was her skill and knowledge that sealed the deal. That's what I respect. Base it on skill and knowledge.”

Black man

“I think she is honest about how she got to college. She is thankful about it because otherwise, she would have never been picked to go to such a prestigious college like Harvard. I think in this scenario, DEI is important, because it gave someone who deserved to go to such a school a chance to actually get picked to go. Sometimes only certain minorities or schools get chosen because of tradition or just former experience on sending people to those colleges than those people that live in rural places who might not get picked.”

Latino man

Concrete examples of how DEI does not supersede organizational goals strongly resonate.



Amy McGrath

“I think she made a good point. She stated that the removal of inappropriate images did not affect the outcome of the mission(s). To me, she's stating that the little changes to make the workplace more professional/comfortable were all that were needed”

Black man

“I think she makes a good point. I think a lot of folks feel like DEI means sacrificing the core values of a company's mission. Her point is you can address DEI and keep a company's core values in check at the same time.”

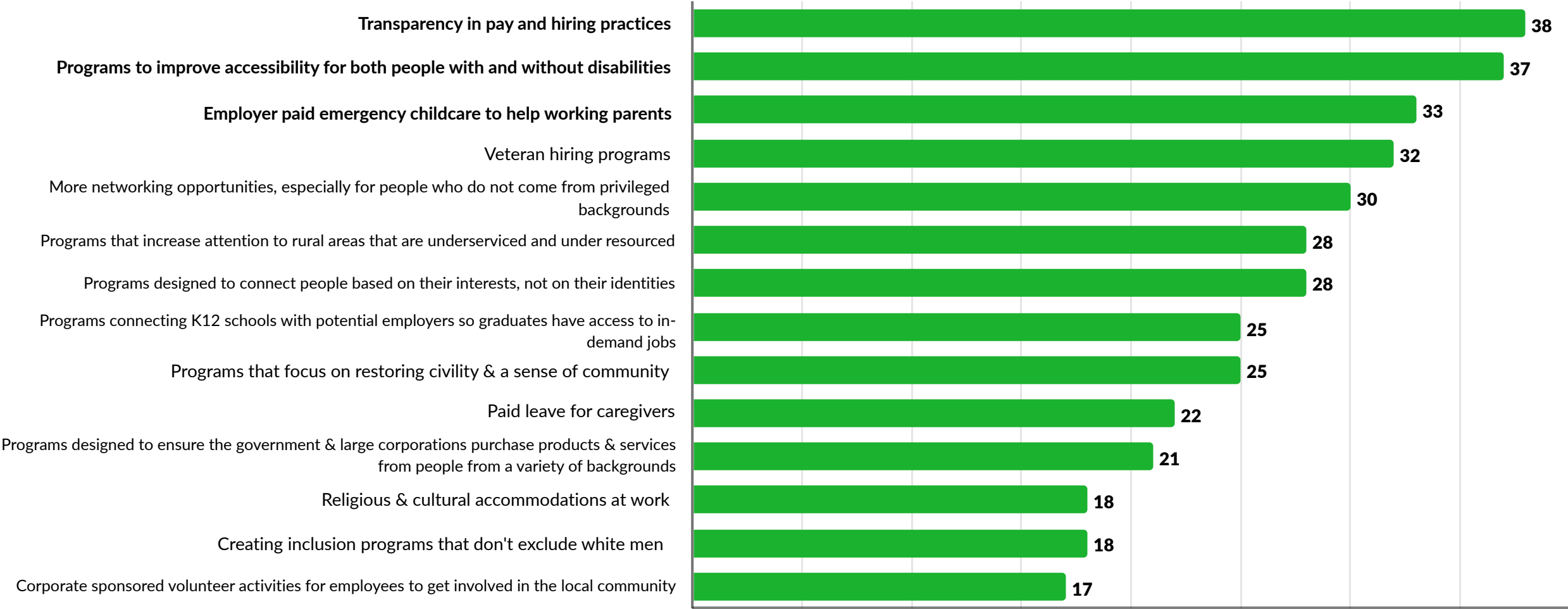
White man

The Future of DEI



What do voters want to see prioritized in the future?

The future of diversity, equity & inclusion doesn't have to look like the past. Here is a list of ideas. "Select the following options that you think would be most important for companies, organizations or schools to adopt."



Transparency in pay and accessibility are key with all groups.

Top 3 choices by subgroup

White voters

- 39% - transparency in pay
- 38% - programs to improve accessibility
- 36% - veteran hiring programs

Black voters

- 36% - transparency in pay
- 35% - employer paid emergency child care
- 35% - programs to improve accessibility

Hispanic voters

- 37% - employer paid emergency child care
- 37% - programs to improve accessibility
- 33% - transparency in pay

AAPI voters

- 42% - transparency in pay
- 37% - networking opportunities
- 35% - programs to improve accessibility

What does transparency mean? We asked participants in our Qualboards

- **Transparency and respect go hand in hand.**

Companies that are open about hiring, promotions, compensation, are seen as more trustworthy, and earn people's respect.

"A company that is transparent is more likely to gain my respect. It helps me feel like I am being treated fairly and that they are not afraid to show what their values and goals are."

Employees also *feel* more respected when companies are more transparent around strategic decisions (like profitability, downsizing, or budget cuts).

For young men, information is power. They say clear goals and expectations help them make better decisions and perform better.

- **But transparency has limits.** Independents worry that sharing individual salaries can cause resentment and hurt team morale.

"I don't think employees should know what others earn...I am respected more because they know I will not share information that is private or confidential."

Other key priorities are veteran hiring programs for GOP, emergency childcare for DEMs and rural programs for INDs.

Top 3 choices by subgroup

GOP men

- 35% - transparency in pay
- 35% - veteran hiring programs
- 31% - programs to improve accessibility

GOP women

- 39% - veteran hiring programs
- 38% - transparency in pay
- 35% - programs to improve accessibility

IND men

- 30% - transparency in pay
- 30% - programs to improve accessibility
- 30% - programs for rural areas

IND women

- 43% - transparency in pay
- 43% - programs to improve accessibility
- 30% - programs for rural areas

DEM men

- 41% - transparency in pay
- 37% - programs to improve accessibility
- 36% - emergency child care

DEM women

- 45% - programs to improve accessibility
- 40% - emergency child care
- 40% - transparency in pay

Younger voters prioritize emergency childcare programs.

Top 3 choices by subgroup

Gen Z

- 35% - emergency child care
- 34% - programs to improve accessibility
- 32% - networking opportunities

Millennial

- 37% - emergency child care
- 36% - programs to improve accessibility
- 34% - networking opportunities

Gen X

- 39% - transparency in pay
- 38% - programs to improve accessibility
- 34% - veteran hiring programs

Boomers

- 46% - veteran hiring programs
- 45% - transparency in pay
- 40% - programs to improve accessibility

Conclusions & Recommendations



Recommendations

- **Allies should lean in and push back on Trump's DEI attacks. Right now, what voters are hearing isn't balanced - it's mostly anti-DEI. Many of these anti-DEI efforts are seen as overreach with the most egregious examples being:**
 - Cutting federal research on women's health
 - Erasing historical references to women, LGBTQ, and minority contributions from museums
 - Pressuring private companies to drop DEI
- **Defending DEI requires different strategies for different arenas.**

Against public sector attacks: messages about "history is history" work with center-right audiences, while base supporters respond to stronger language calling out whitewashing.

Against private-sector attacks, companies can argue this is their decision - and not the government's. They can credibly argue that a diverse team allows them to target diverse customers. A profit motive is seen as believable. And an "anti-government interference" argument is particularly strong with conservatives.

Recommendations

- **Challenge DEI myths about who benefits and merit. Counter the idea that DEI is only about race or gender or that it lowers standards.**
 - Redefine who benefits. Personal stories from people with disabilities, older adults, and others outside the usual frame show DEI helps far more people than critics admit.
 - Address merit and standards head on. Emphasize that DEI ensures equal opportunity to compete based on skills.
- **Transparency isn't the same as DEI, but pairing them may make DEI stronger.**

People want greater transparency and respect and want organizations to be clear about the criteria for hiring, promotion, and pay. Linking DEI to this kind of transparency has the potential to reinforce that high standards and merit remain central while advancing inclusion.
- **Rely on everyday spokespeople who can expand the idea of who is helped by DEI. It can be effective to tie their stories to the bigger picture by using facts and statistics.**



Thank You!

*For access to the full findings, please visit
<https://the-nxtlevel.com/>*

Bellwether Research

