

RESEARCH BRIEFING: BALLOT ROLL-OFF

SISTER DISTRICT ACTION NETWORK
DATA FOR PROGRESS

APRIL 22, 2024





AGENDA OVERVIEW

- Project Background
- Methodology
- Key Findings
- Takeaways + Next Steps
- Q&A



BACKGROUND: QUANTIFYING ROLL-OFF

What Is Roll-Off?

- When a voter ticks the top, but not bottom, of their ballot

How Widespread is Roll-Off?

- State legislative candidates from both major parties often experience ballot roll-off
- But down-ballot Democrats experience roll-off *more frequently and severely* than Republicans
- 2012-2020: across 8 battleground states, contested state legislative Democrats experienced roll-off **80% of the time**, compared to only **37%** for Republicans.*

* [“Downballot Roll-off: Lopsided roll-off among major parties may be linked to downballot losses,”](#) Sister District Report (Sept 14, 2022)



BACKGROUND: QUANTIFYING ROLL-OFF

Does Roll-off Affect Election Outcomes?

- In 2020, Democrats would have gained control of 14 chambers in 9 states by increasing down-ballot votes by 2% or less.*
- Those votes could have come from people who voted for Biden but skipped state legislative candidates.

* [“Votes to Majority: State legislative chambers often decided by narrow margins,”](#) Sister District Report (July 6, 2022)

BACKGROUND: QUANTIFYING ROLL-OFF

Does Roll-off Affect Election Outcomes?

- Examples:
 - AZ House 2020
 - Dems needed 4,451 votes to win the 2 seats needed to flip chamber.
 - 584,000 people voted for Biden but not downballot Democrats.
 - If just 0.8% of them had voted for their Democratic state house candidate too, Democrats would have won the chamber.
 - VA House 2021:
 - Democrats lost majority by ~750 votes across 3 districts.
 - 64,000 more votes cast for Democratic gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe than for state legislative Democrats.
 - If just 1% of them had voted for their Democratic state house candidate too, Democrats would have kept majority.



BACKGROUND: QUANTIFYING ROLL-OFF

Roll-Off: Who Rolls Off + Why?

- Recap:
 - Roll-off is more frequent and severe for Democrats than Republicans
 - Roll-off affects state legislative outcomes at the district and chamber levels
 - Decreasing roll-off by 1-2% would result in massive state legislative gains
- Next Question: *Which voters roll off, and why do they roll off?*

METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE

Focus Groups

- 4 groups, 25 participants
- Grouped by:
 - Ideology – liberal or conservative
 - Behavior – roll-off or down-ballot voter
- States: AZ, CA, FL, MI, NC, PA, WI
- Conducted Oct 2023
- Topics: Awareness & perceptions of state politics; attitudes about voting

Survey

- 5,101 likely voters
- States: AZ, MI, NC, PA, WI
- Fielded Nov 27–Dec 14, 2023
- Sample weighting:

Representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, voting history



SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender: 53% Female | 47% Male

Age: 65% 45 and Older | 35% Under 45

Education: 66% No College | 34% College

Race/Ethnicity: 74% White | 10% Black or African-American | 8% Latino

Partisanship: 34% Democrat | 30% Independent / Third Party | 36% Republican

Ideology: 26% Liberal | 37% Moderate | 38% Conservative

Roll-Off Behavior: 74% Down-ballot Voter | 15% Sometimes DB Voter |
10% Roll-off Voter



ROLL-OFF VOTERS VS. DOWN-BALLOT VOTERS

1. DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS
2. KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOR
3. IDEOLOGY





ROLL-OFF VOTERS VS. DOWN-BALLOT VOTERS: DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS



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DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender: More women roll off than men

- 12% of women are roll-off voters vs. 7% of men
- 68% of women are down-ballot voters vs. 81% of men

Race/Ethnicity: More voters who identify as Black or Latino/a roll off

- 14% of Black voters and 12% of Latino voters roll off vs. 8% of white voters
- 63% of Black voters and Latino voters vote down-ballot vs. 77% of white voters





DEMOGRAPHICS

Age: More voters under 45 roll off

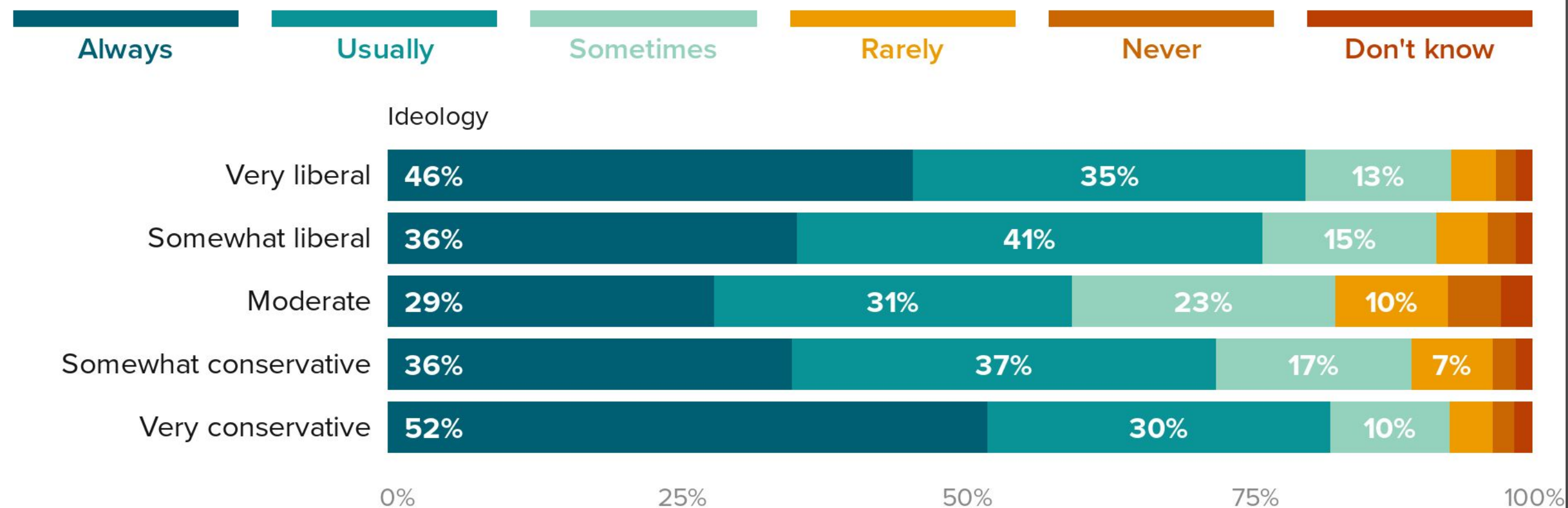
- 17% of younger voters roll off vs. 6% of older voters
- 59% of younger voters vote down-ballot vs. 83% of older voters

Education: More voters without a college degree roll off

- 12% of voters without college roll off vs. 5% of college-educated voters
- 68% of voters without college vote down-ballot vs. 85% of college-educated voters

Election results show that people sometimes don't vote for every race or measure on the ballot.

If you had to estimate, how often do you vote in every race listed on your ballot?



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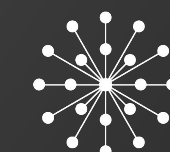
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Ideology

Fewer very liberal voters say that they always vote in every race on the ballot, compared to very conservative voters



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EDUCATION X RACE

Racial differences in roll-off are larger among voters without a college degree

- 16% of Black voters and 16% of Latino voters without college roll off, vs. 11% of white voters without college
- Just 6% of college-educated Black voters and 4% of college-educated white voters roll off





IDEOLOGY X AGE

Ideology appears linked with roll-off among younger voters more than older voters

- Younger voters: 24% of moderates roll off vs. 9% of ideologues (very liberal or very conservative)
- Older voters: Only 9% of moderates roll off vs. 3% of ideologues



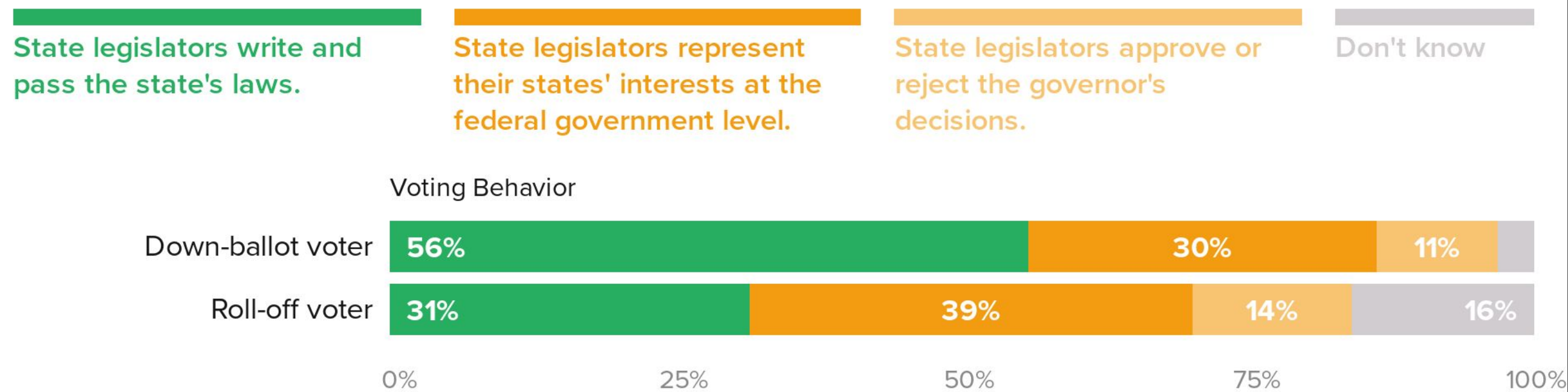


**ROLL-OFF VOTERS VS. DOWN-BALLOT VOTERS:
KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOR**



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Which of the following statements correctly describes the main role or job of state legislators?



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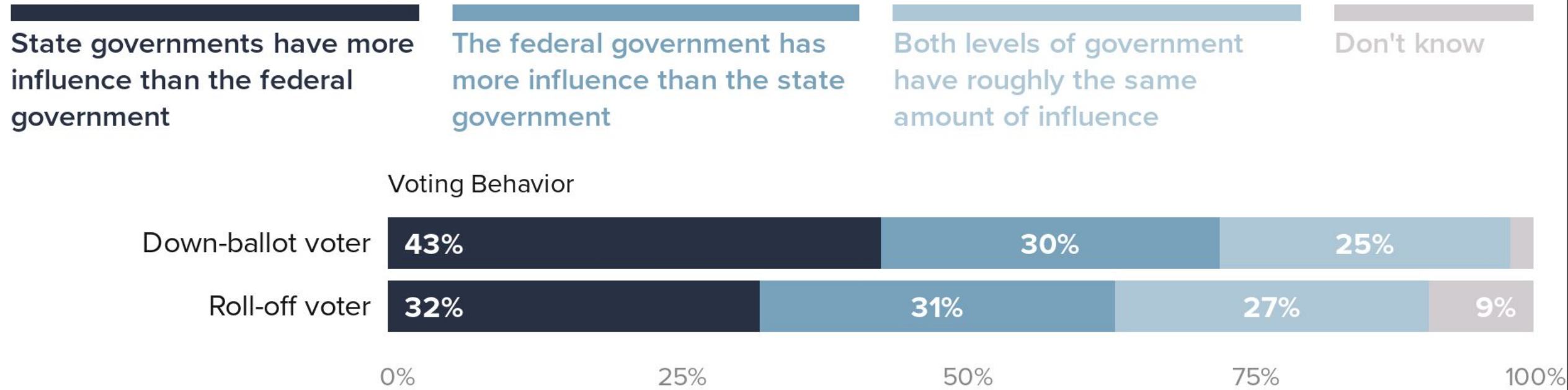
What State Legislators Do

- Knowledge is **low** overall
- **Far fewer roll-off voters** answered correctly, compared to down-ballot voters



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Regarding abortion policy, which level of government do you think has more influence: state governments, the federal government, or both?



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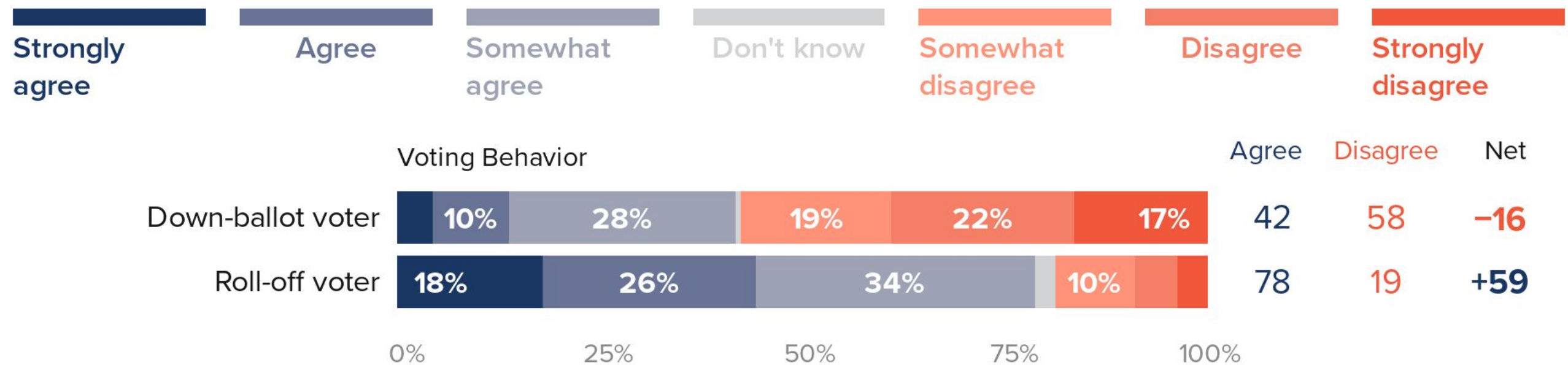
State Influence Over Abortion Policy

Fewer roll-off voters know that state governments have more influence than the federal government



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"When I vote, I **feel like I don't know enough** information to decide between the candidates running in state legislative races."



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Confidence in Knowledge

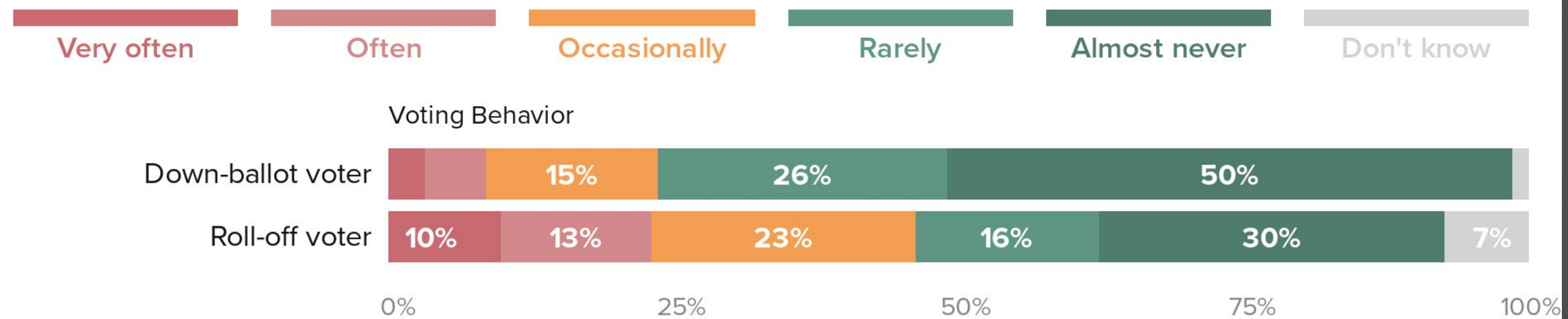
More roll-off voters feel like they don't know enough to vote in state legislative races



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Some people feel it is better to not vote at all than to potentially vote for the "wrong" candidate.

How often, if ever, has concern about voting for the "wrong" candidate prevented you from voting in a state legislative race?



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Voting the "Wrong" Way

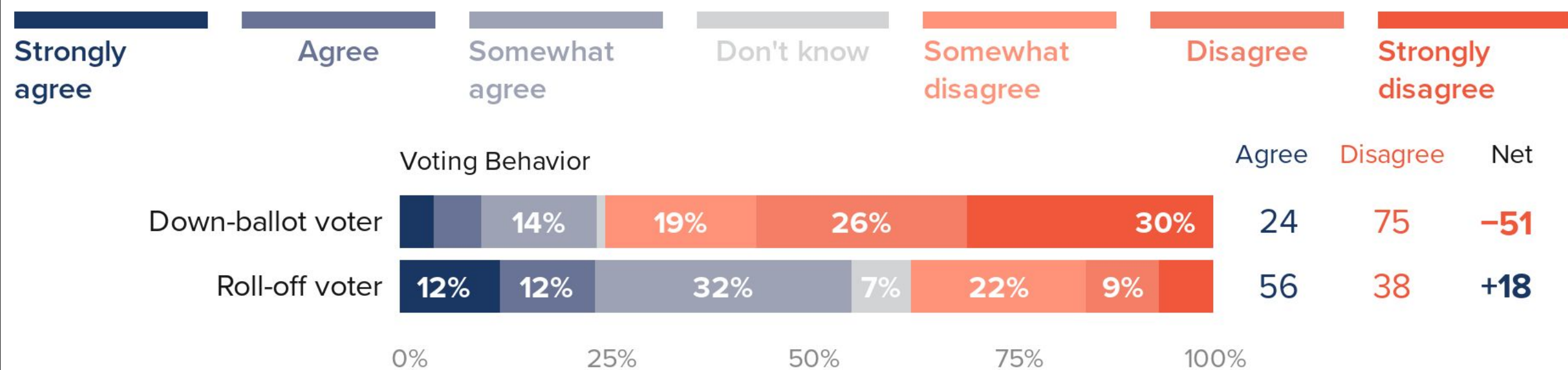
More roll-off voters say that **concern about voting for the wrong candidate** has often prevented them from voting



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

"It doesn't matter whether I vote for a state legislative candidate or not—it won't affect who wins the election."



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Votes Matter

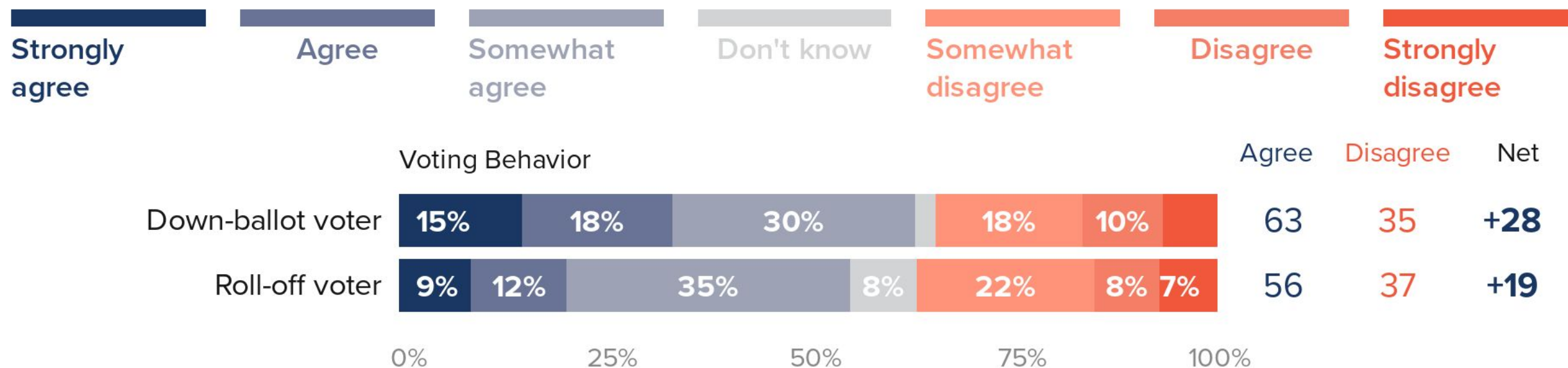
More roll-off voters feel that their votes don't matter and will not affect the outcome of an election



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

"State governments, not the federal government, should have the **most** authority to make laws and decisions about important issues."



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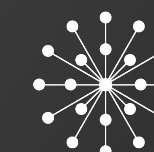


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State vs. Federal Power

- Fewer roll-off voters believe that state governments should have more authority than the federal government over important issues
- Aligns with the ideological divide



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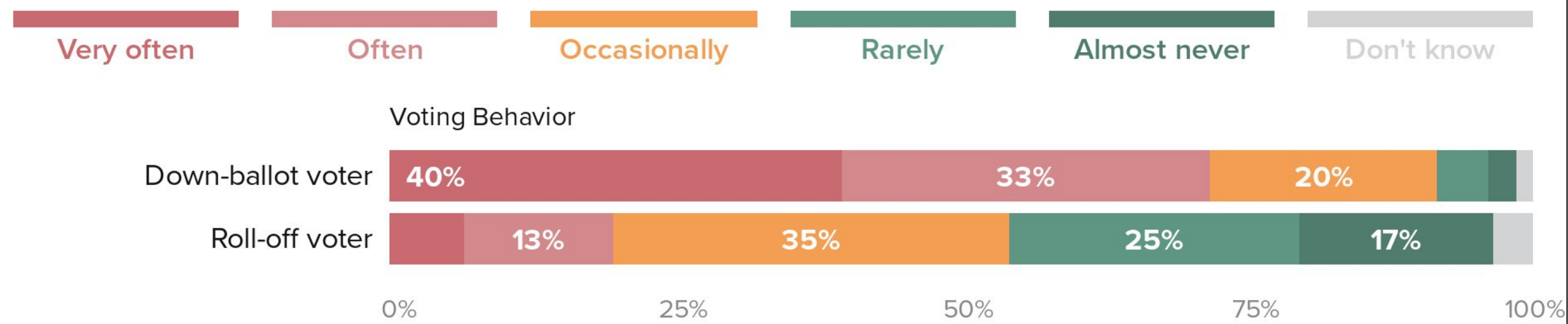


IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT ELECTIONS

Which elections feel most important to you?

- 60% of both roll-off voters and down-ballot voters rank **FEDERAL** elections first
- 22% of roll-off voters and 21% of down-ballot voters rank **LOCAL** elections first
- 18% of roll-off voters and 19% of down-ballot voters rank **STATE** elections first

How often do you follow or pay attention to news about politics?



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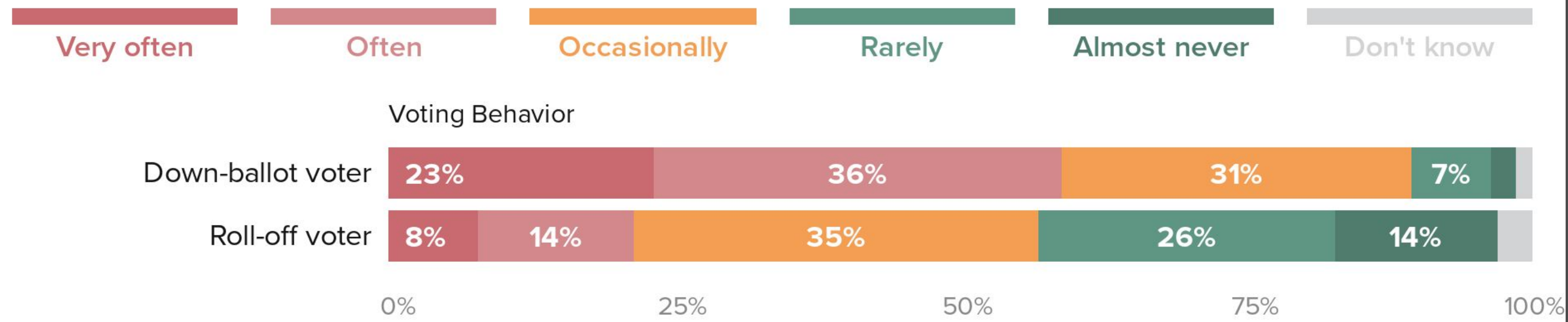
Follow Political News

Very few roll-off voters often pay attention to news about politics, compared to down-ballot voters



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How often do you see or hear news stories about state politics?



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News about State Politics

Roll-off voters do not often see news about state politics specifically



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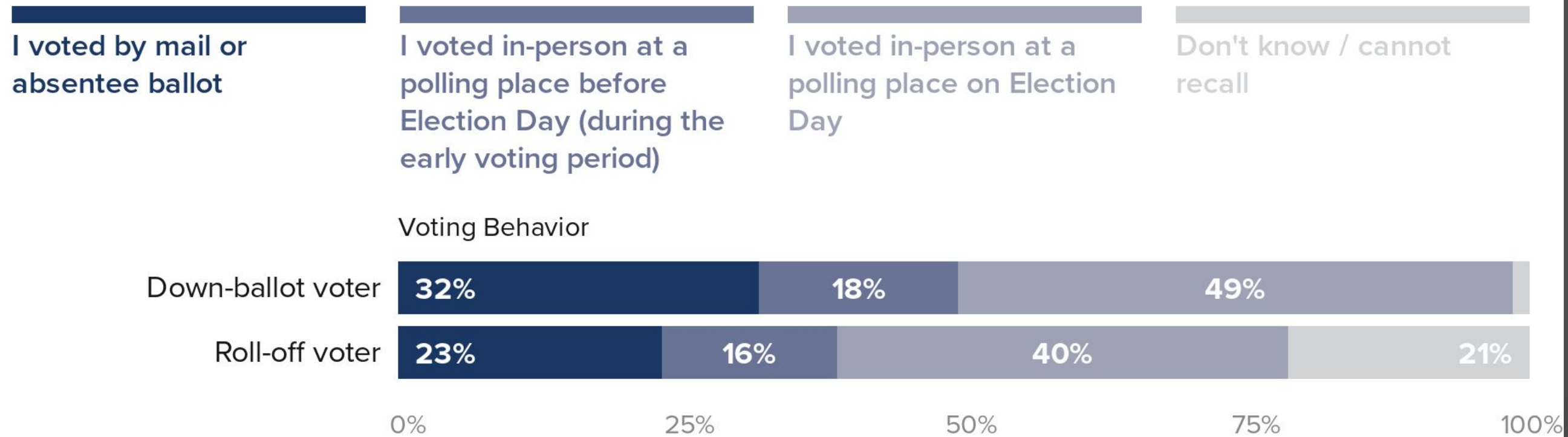


COMMON SOURCES OF NEWS

Which sources have you gotten news from about government & politics in the last week?

- **Down-ballot voters: “traditional” media sources**
 - Local TV news: 49% of down-ballot voters, 30% of roll-off voters
 - Broadcast news: 47% of down-ballot voters, 24% of roll-off voters
- **Roll-off voters: online platforms**
 - Facebook: 35% of roll-off voters, 28% of down-ballot voters
 - YouTube: 29% of roll-off voters, 21% of down-ballot voters
 - TikTok: 22% of roll-off voters, 11% of down-ballot voters

The last time you voted, how did you vote – in person on Election Day, in person before Election Day, or by mail or absentee ballot?



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Voting By Mail or In-Person

- Fewer roll-off voters say they vote by mail or absentee
- Roll-off voters have difficulty recalling how they voted



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LIBERAL VS. CONSERVATIVE **ROLL-OFF** VOTERS



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DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

Liberal roll-off voters are more likely to be women; conservative roll-off voters are more likely to be men

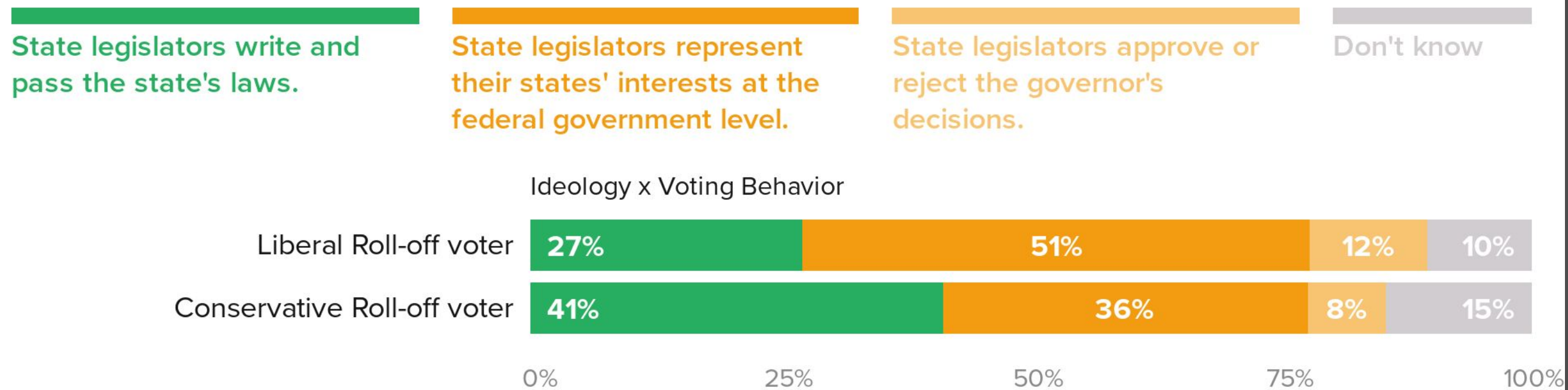
Race/Ethnicity

Liberal roll-off voters are slightly more likely to identify as a race other than white

Age

Liberal roll-off voters are more likely to skew younger than conservative roll-off voters

Which of the following statements correctly describes the main role or job of state legislators?



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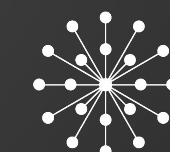


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What State Legislators Do

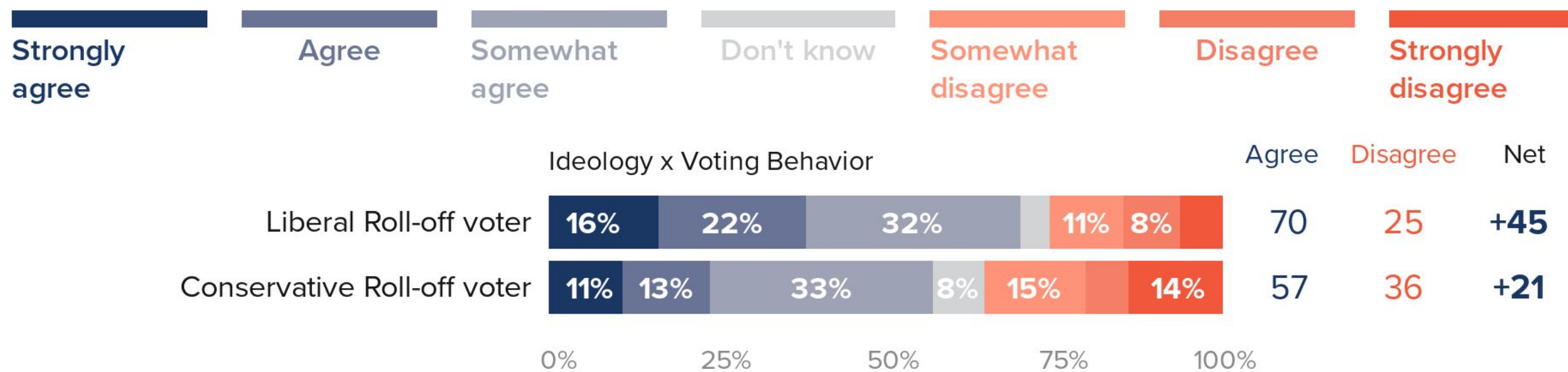
Fewer liberal roll-off voters answered correctly, compared to conservative roll-off voters



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

"It is my civic duty to **only** vote in races I am informed about, even if I have to skip voting in some races on the ballot."



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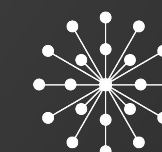
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Civic Duty & Voting in Every Race

More liberal roll-off voters agree that it's their civic duty to vote only in races where they feel informed



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KEY + ACTIONABLE THEMES

1. Demographics

- Most likely to roll-off:
 - Women
 - Voters of color
 - Young voters



KEY + ACTIONABLE THEMES

2. Knowledge Gaps

- Voters in general not knowledgeable about what state legislators do, but far lower for roll-off voters
- Voters in general not knowledgeable about state authority over abortion, but far lower for roll-off voters



KEY + ACTIONABLE THEMES

3. Confidence / Agency

- Roll-off voters:
 - Feel they don't know enough to vote for state legislative candidates
 - Feel concerned about voting for the “wrong” candidate
 - Feel their votes in state legislative elections don't matter





KEY + ACTIONABLE THEMES

4. State Legislative “Donut Hole”

- State Leg Last – Majority of voters rank federal elections most important, then local elections, and state legislative elections last.
- News Coverage – Very few roll-off voters say they often see news about state politics



KEY + ACTIONABLE THEMES

5. Voting Method

- Roll-off voters less likely to vote by mail/absentee

KEY + ACTIONABLE THEMES

6. Ideology

- Voters often don't know what state legislators do, but conservatives vote anyway
- Voters often don't know about their state legislative candidates, but conservatives vote anyway
- Knowledge about state legislators is lower for liberal roll-off voters than conservative
- Conservatives feel an urgency about state legislative elections (qual + quant)
- Beliefs and Values – State vs Federal Power:
 - Conservatives believe state level is where most power *should* be placed
 - Liberals believe federal level is where most power *should* be placed
 - States rights vs underdeveloped connection to states



NEXT STEPS

Message Development + Testing + Deployment

- Identifying and testing messages that will *empower and excite* liberals to vote for state legislative candidates
- Deployment in partnership this fall
 - Get in touch, we'd love to partner with you





Q&A

Please reach out if you have questions:

gaby@sisterdistrict.com

jillian@sisterdistrict.com

isa@dataforprogress.org



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ADDITIONAL SLIDES



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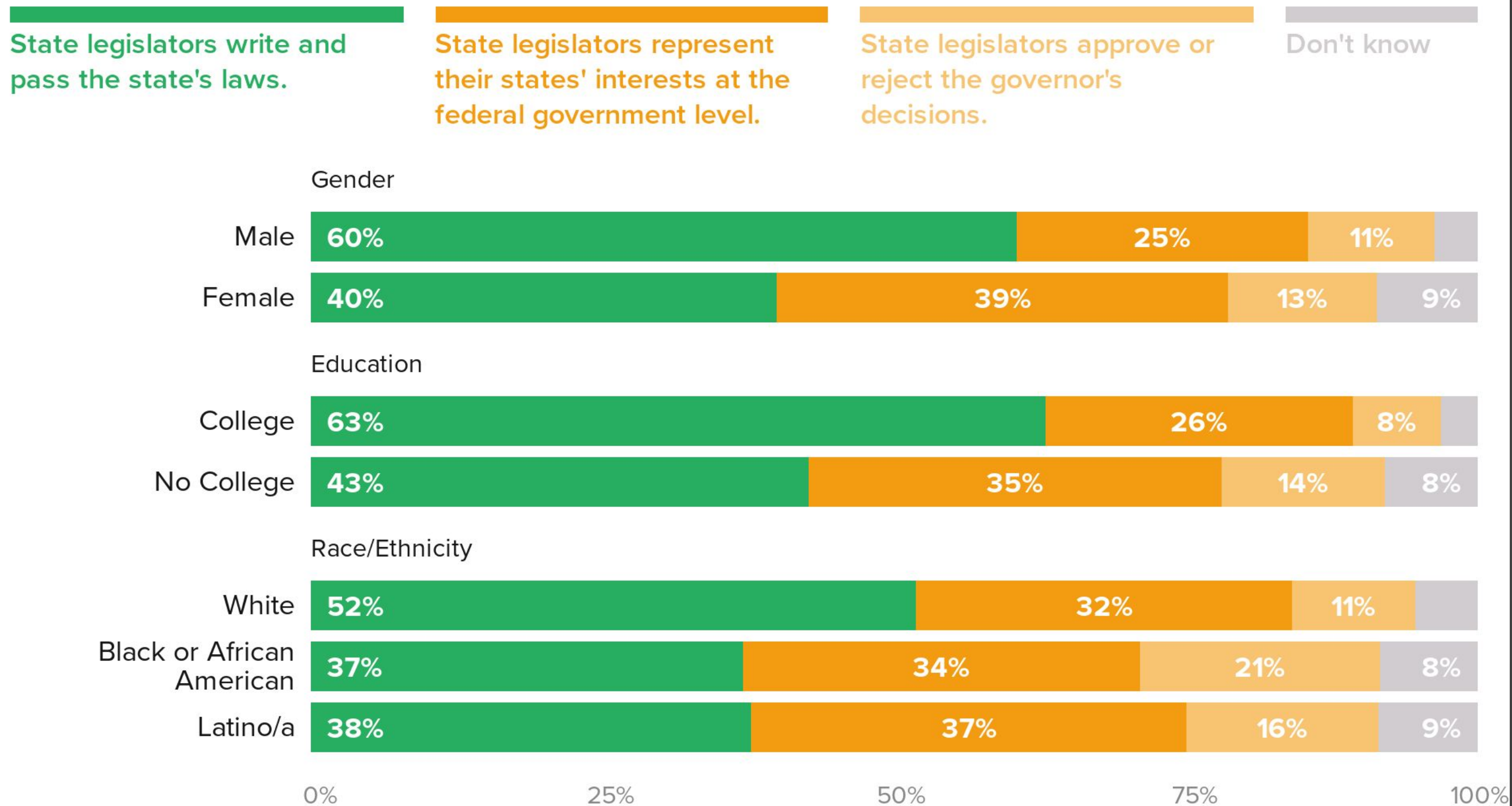


KNOWLEDGE & ATTITUDES IN THE OVERALL SAMPLE



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Which of the following statements correctly describes the main role or job of state legislators?



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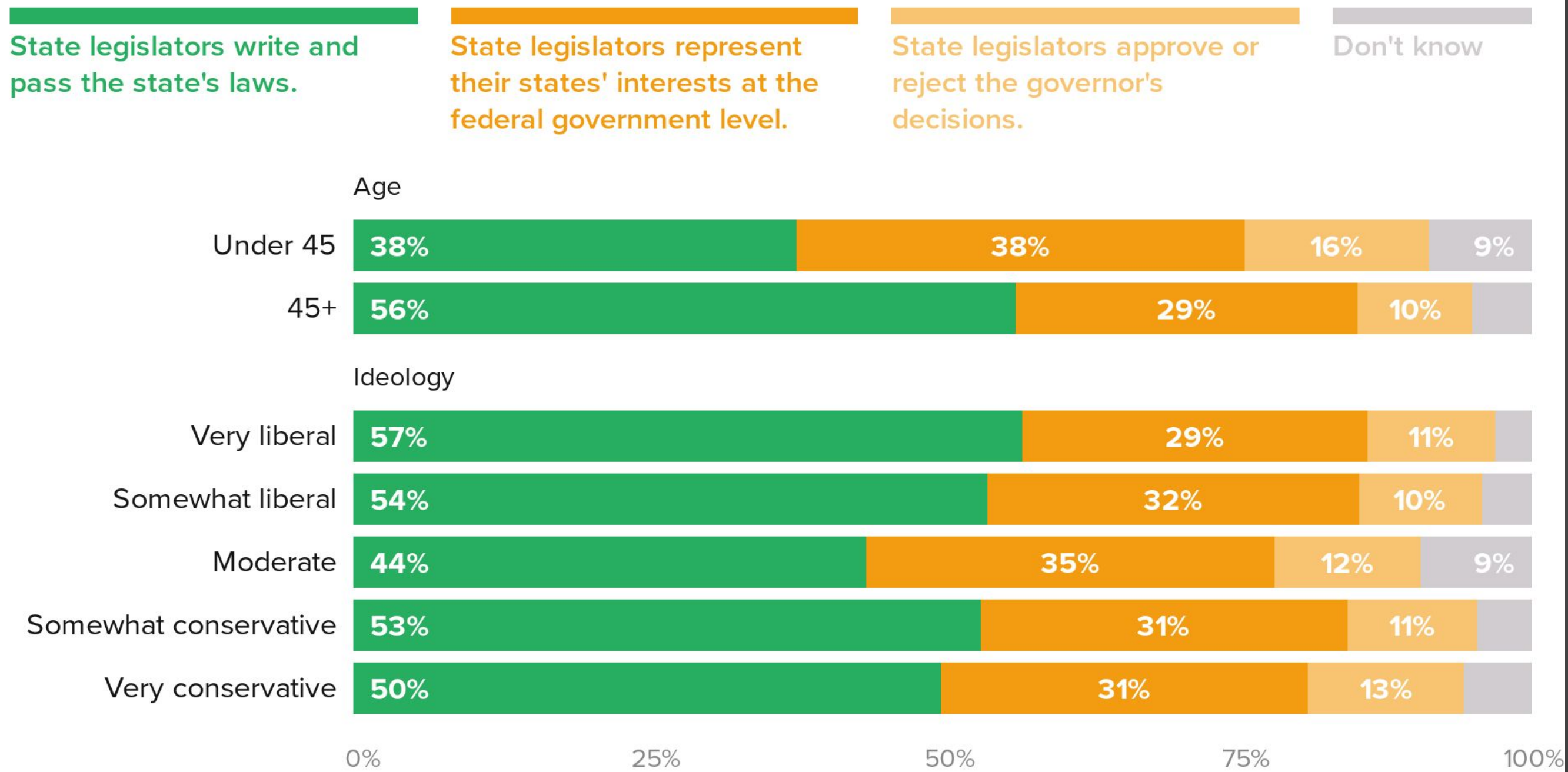
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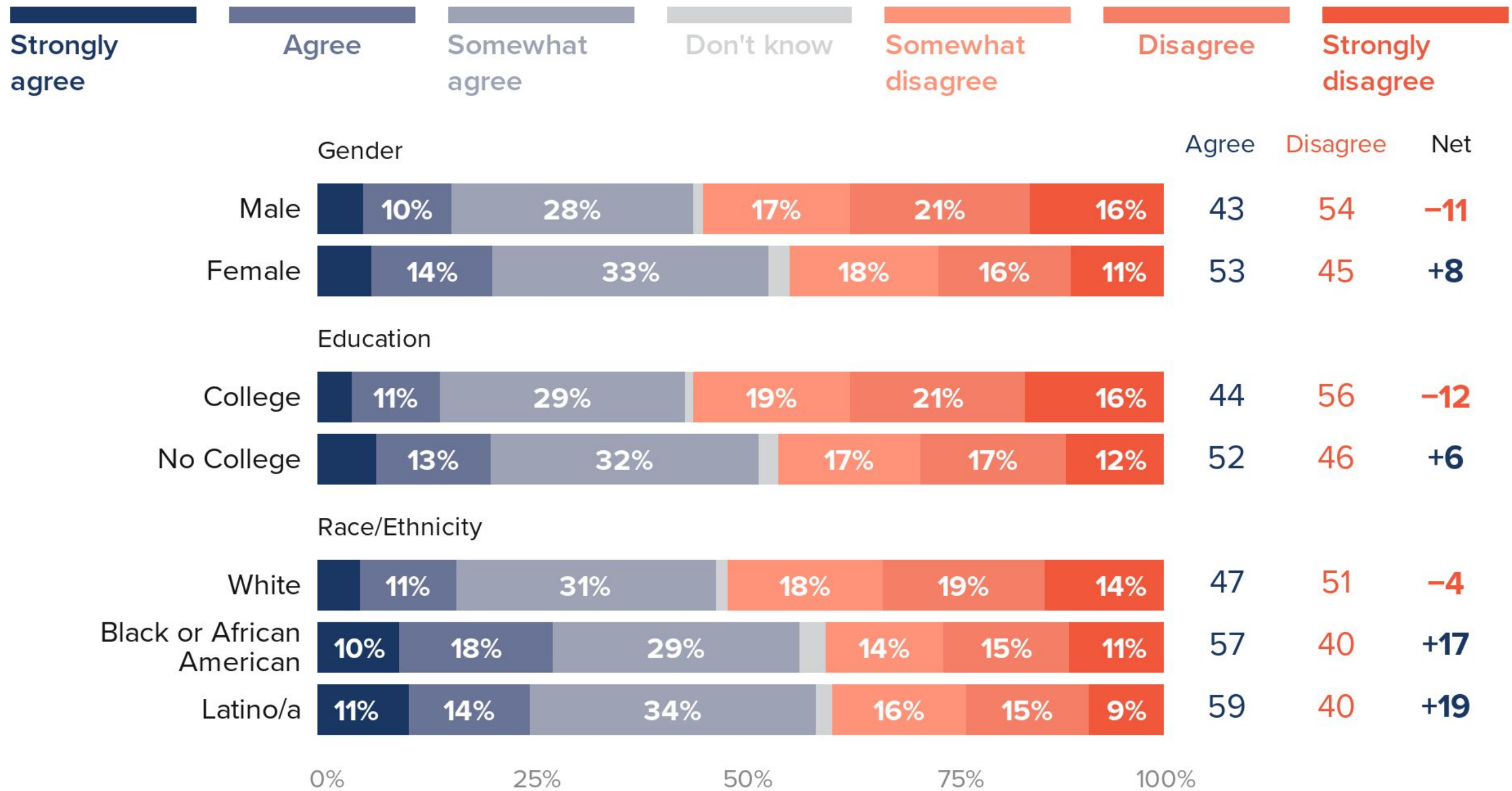
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Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"When I vote, I feel like I don't know enough information to decide between the candidates running in state legislative races."



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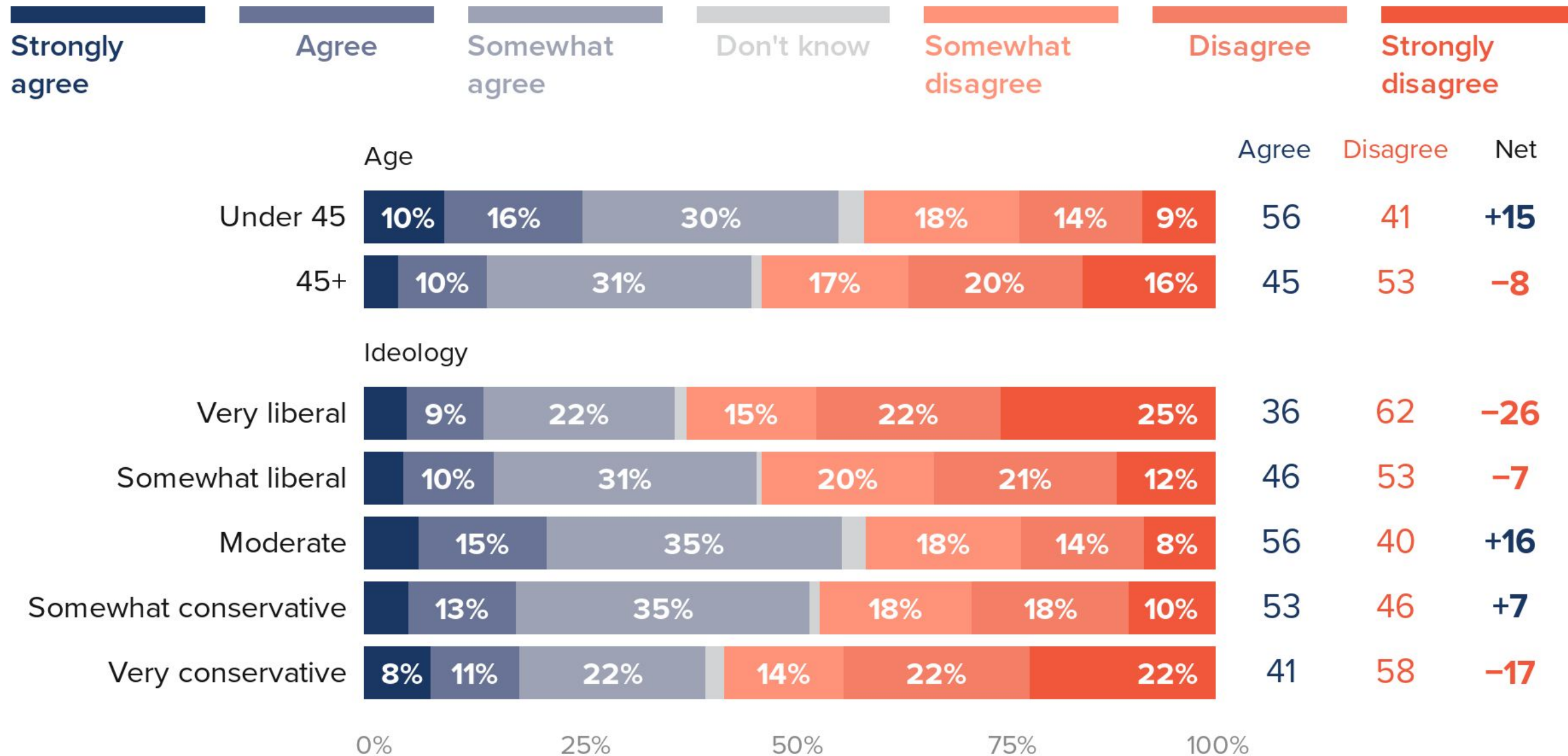


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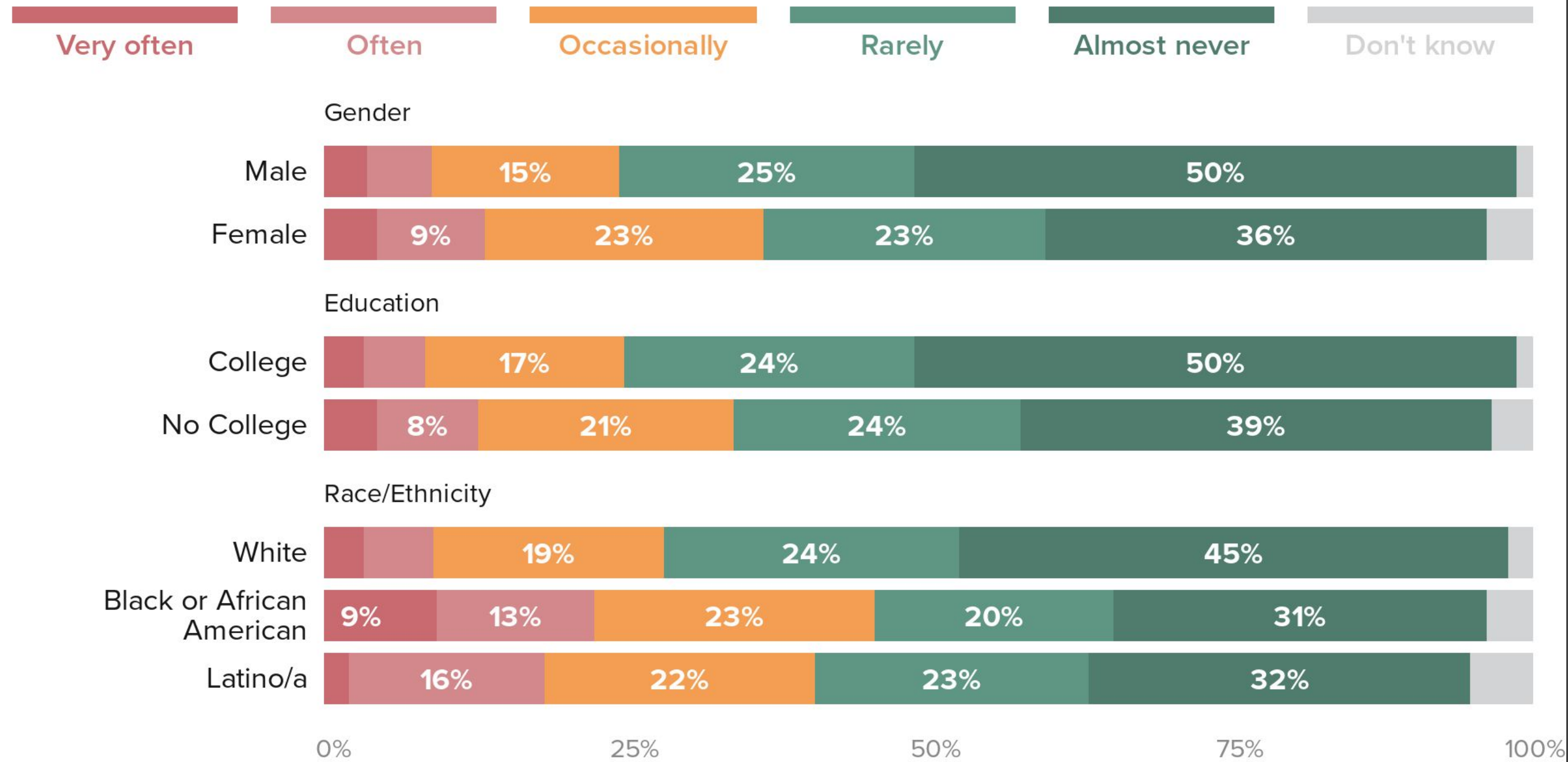
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Some people feel it is better to not vote at all than to potentially vote for the "wrong" candidate.

How often, if ever, has concern about voting for the "wrong" candidate prevented you from voting in a state legislative race?



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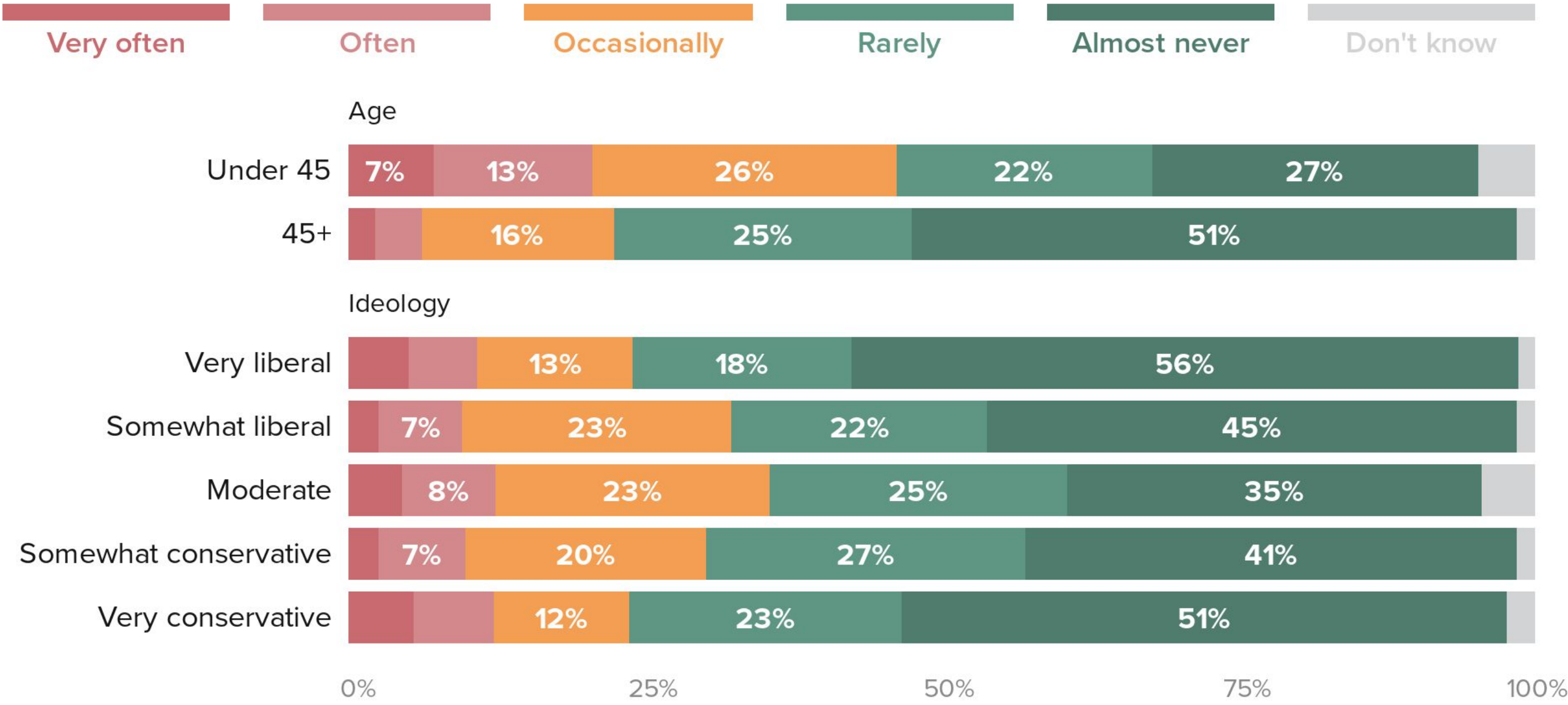
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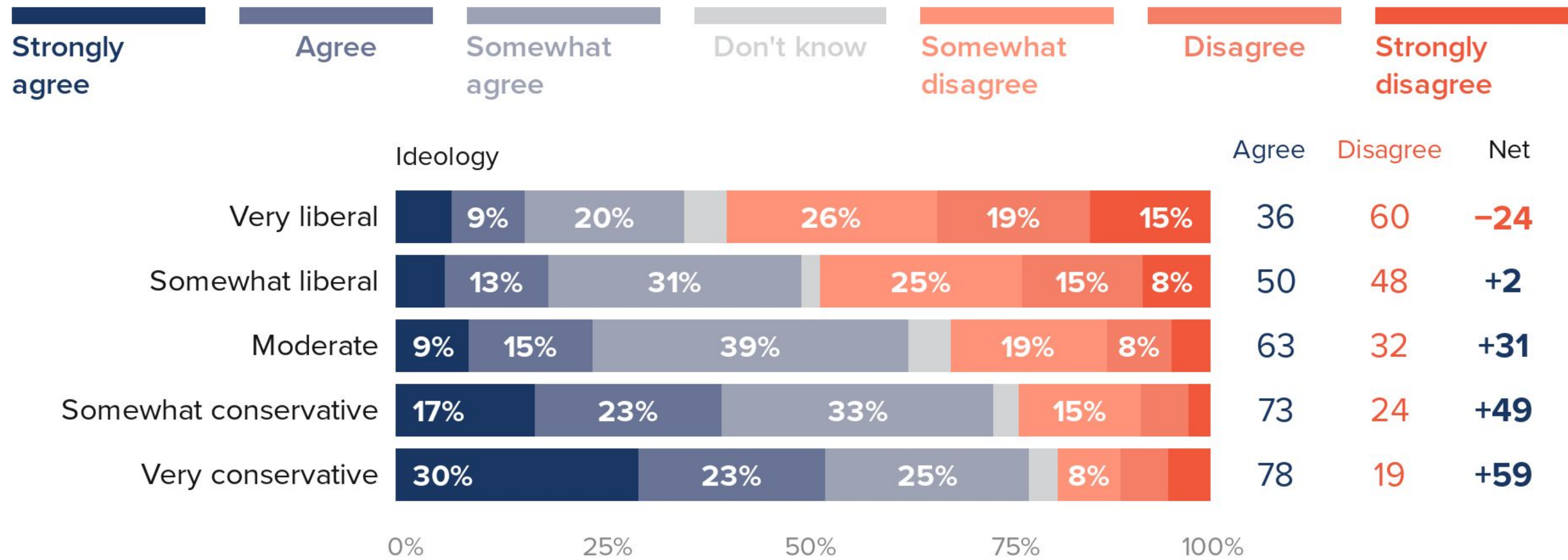


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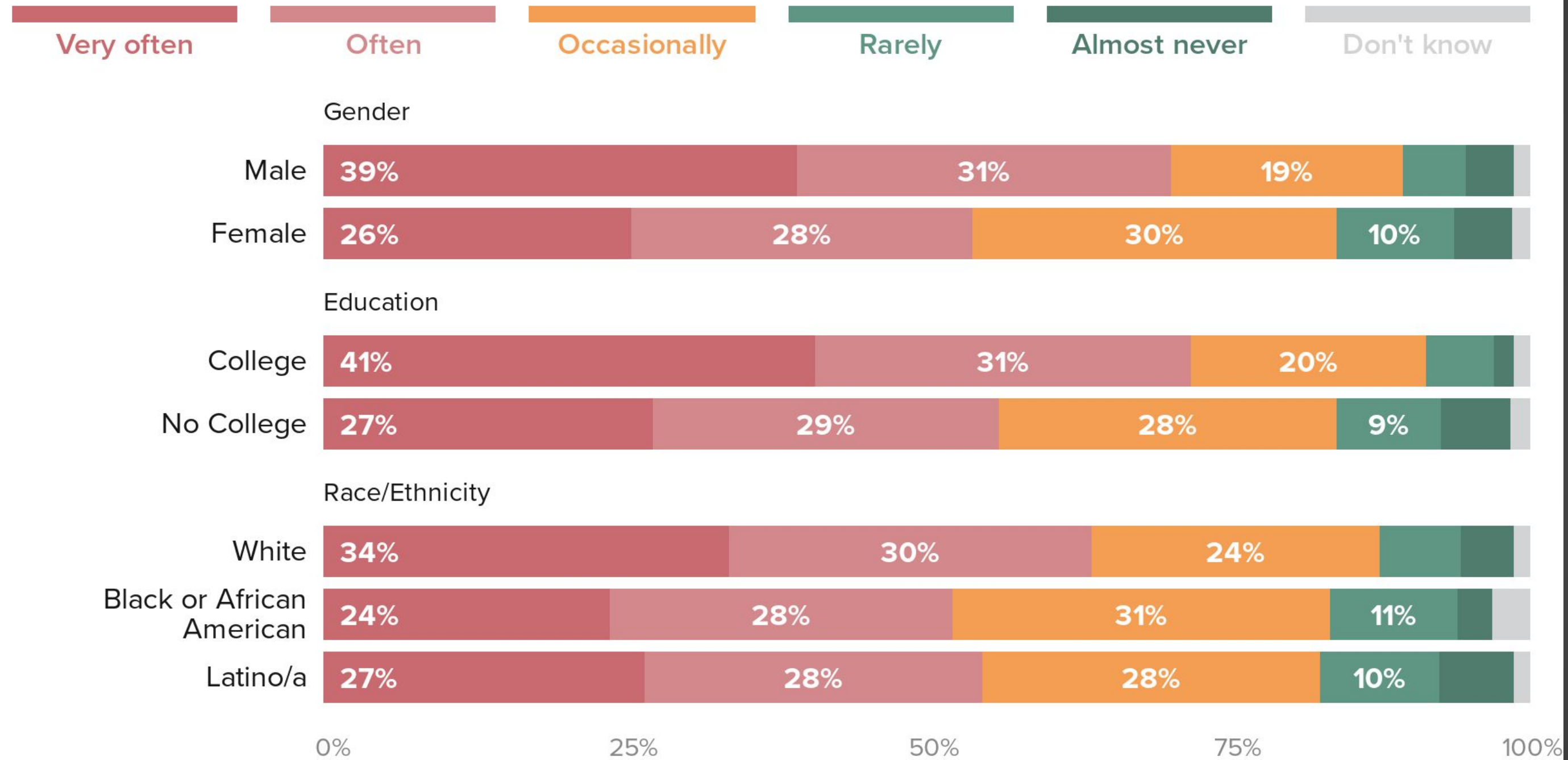
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How often do you follow or pay attention to news about politics?



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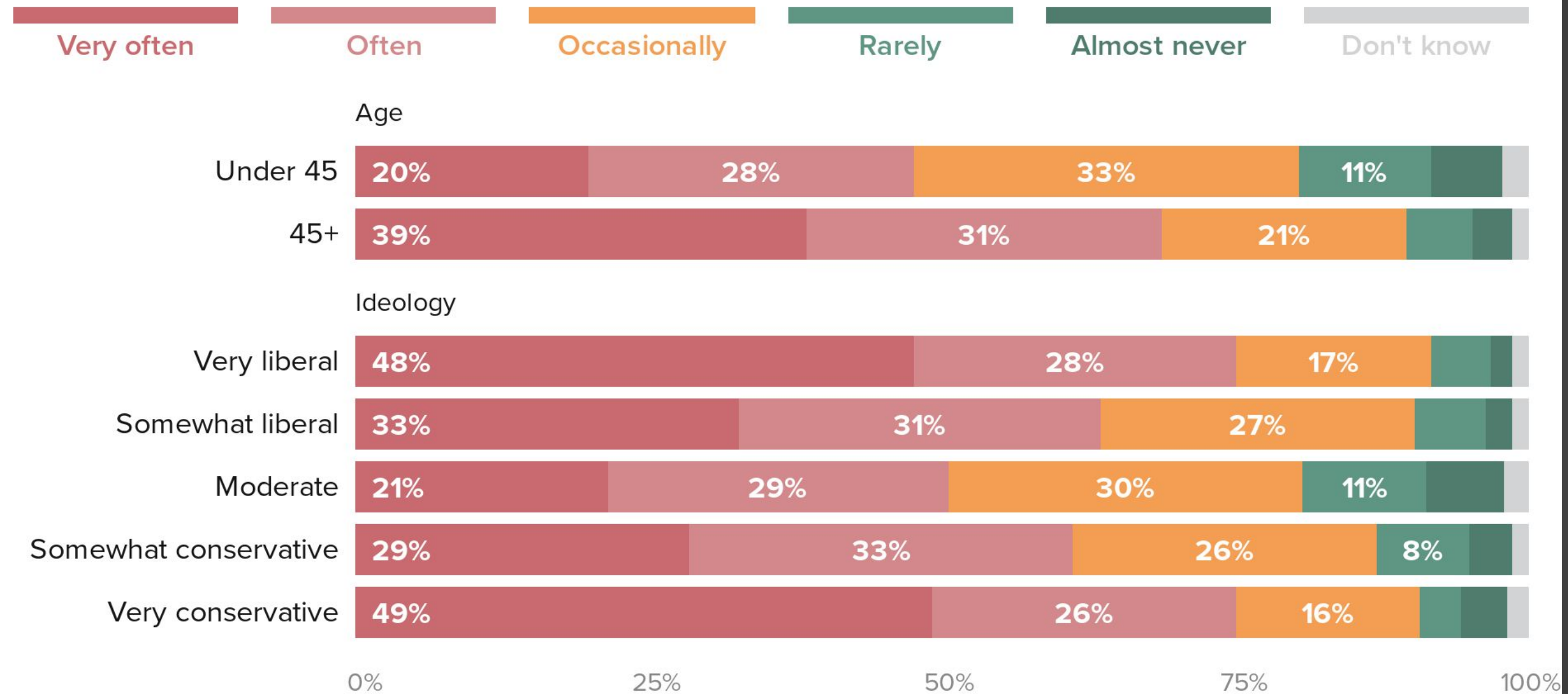
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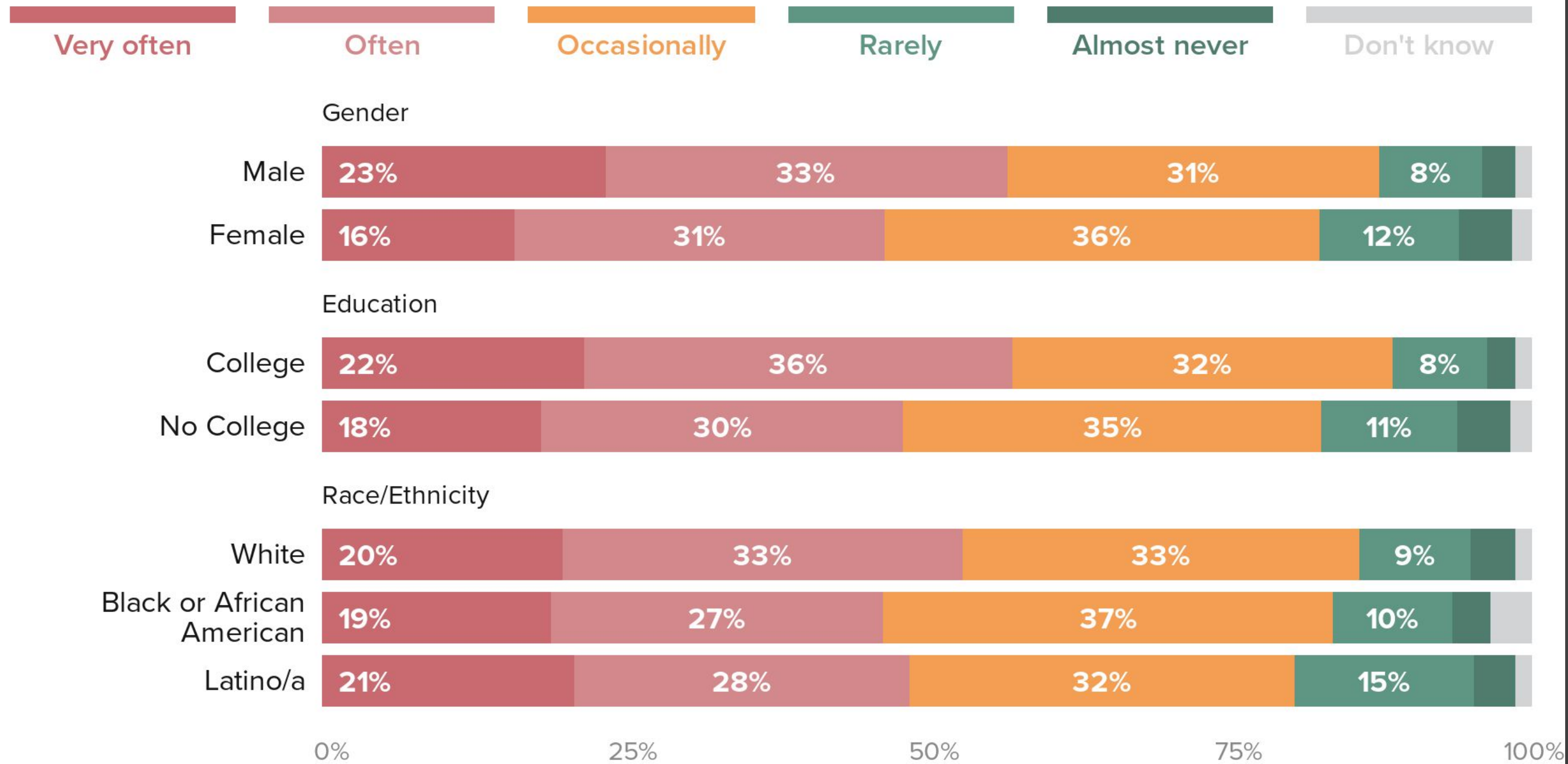
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How often do you see or hear news stories about:
 — State politics



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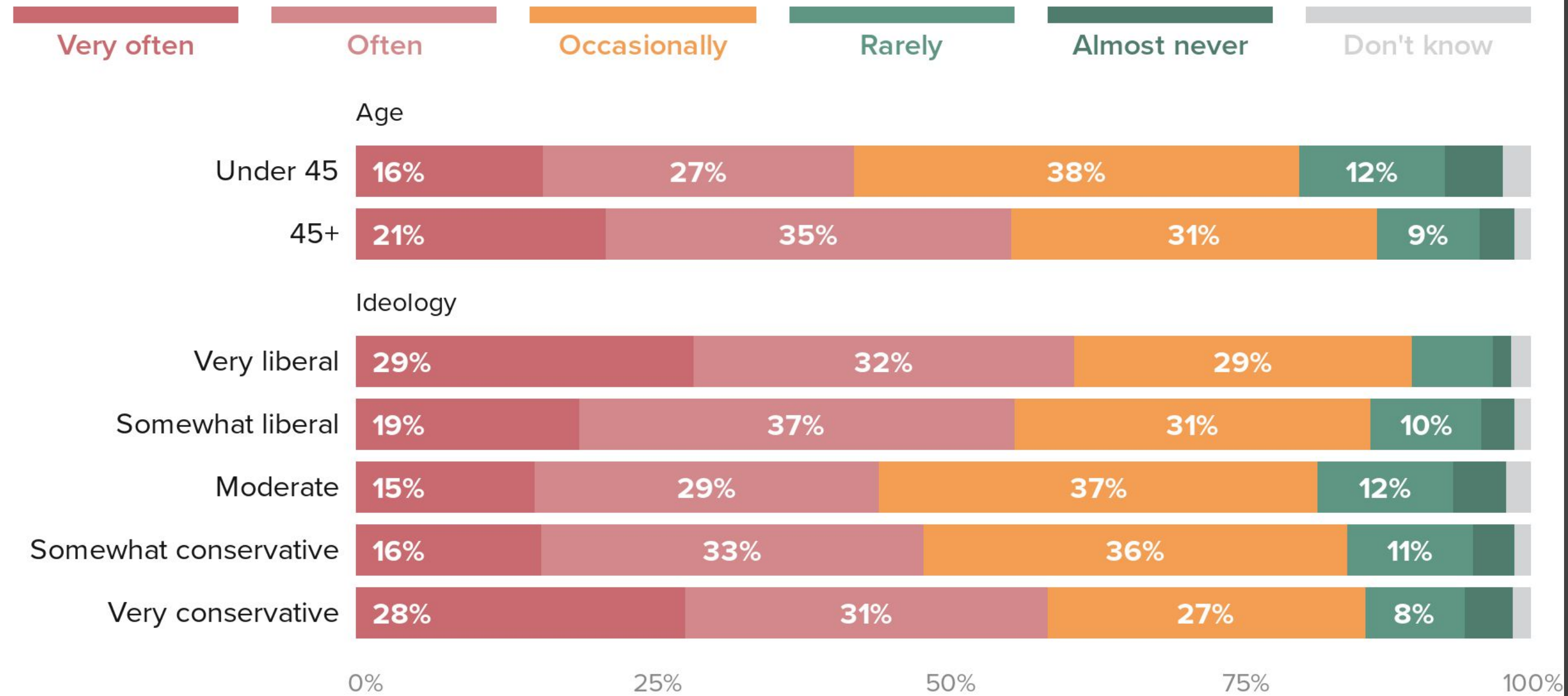
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How often do you see or hear news stories about:

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