

Public Education Network National Civic Index Analysis



Presented by Celinda Lake, Joshua Ulibarri
and Christopher Panetta
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1726 M St., NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-776-9066
Fax: 202-776-9074
www.lakeresearch.com



1936 University Ave
Suite 300
Berkeley, CA 94704
Phone: 510-286-2097
Fax: 510-704-1920
Info@lakeresearch.com

Summary Description of Methods:

- Interview dates: May 8 - May 14, 2008
- The survey reached 1220 adults nationwide, including a base sample of 1000 adults, an oversample of 100 Latino/as, and an oversample of 100 African-American adults.
- The data were weighted slightly by age, education, race, and party identification in order to ensure that it accurately reflects the demographic configuration of these populations.
- Margin of error for the base sample is +/- 3.1 percentage points. The MOE is larger when quoting data for subgroups.
- This presentation reports from data from 2006. The 2006 data is from the Civic Index poll of 1900 adults with oversamples of 50 African Americans and 50 Latino/as. The report also draws upon data from a 2006 national survey of 1,001 adults conducted for the Give Kids Good Schools campaign.

Regions

- Northeast - Respondents that live in states that are in the New England or Mid-Atlantic regions.
- Midwest - Respondents that live in states that are in the East or North Central regions.
- South - Respondents that live in states that are in the South Atlantic, East South Central or West South Central regions.
- West - Respondents that live in states that are in the Mountain or Pacific regions.

What is the Civic Index?

- The civic index was designed and implemented to measure a community's perception of itself with regard to its public schools.
- The index is made up of many indicators, and those indicators are collapsed into ten categories used as the general measurements of the index.
- The ten index categories are: tolerance and inclusiveness, performance data, active parents, officeholder leadership, youth involvement, business community, media, school board, higher education, and civic organizations.
- The measurements of the community are then used as a guide to fix inequities or problems in community support for the local school system. The civic index survey would be re-administered every two years or so to measure the progress of the community.
- The Civic Index poll was originally developed in 2006. This is the second time it has been conducted with a national sample. In 2006, the Index was completed nationally and in four locations. This year, the Index has been completed nationally and in Paterson, New Jersey, and San Francisco, California.

Key Findings: Public Education

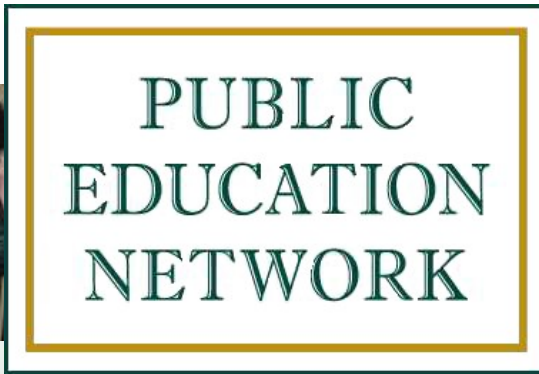
- Nationally, this is a difficult and challenging time for public education. Americans focus on pocketbook issues like rising gas prices (22%) and jobs and the economy (19%) as top tier issues. Education is still important, but it is a second tier issue this year (12%) when in 2006 it was a top tier concern(16%). The goal is to continue to link public education to other top tier issues so that the attention paid to it remains high.
- Adults also say that they are hearing less about education this year than in years past (16% more, 26% less), and they are not hearing enough about this issue in the campaigns (60% not enough, 4% too much). They want to hear more, but as the Index shows, officeholders and the media could be doing more to communicate on this important issue.
- It is not surprising then that Americans are less likely this year than in 2006 to say education is an important issue when deciding their vote. Only 48% say it is either one of the most important or a very important issue when voting for President. A third (35%) say it is somewhat important, but Americans rarely vote on issues that are “somewhat important” to them. Comparatively, in 2006, 56% of Americans said education was one of the most important or a very important vote-issue (asked for Congress).
- In the end, most Americans believe there is little accountability in our political system when it comes to public education. Sixty-three percent believe elected officials are not held accountable on this issue while 29% believe they are held accountable.

Key Findings: Public Involvement

- Americans are also frustrated with public schools. Twenty-six percent say their local schools have improved over the last five years while 32% say they have declined. Similarly, 40% say schools nationally are declining while 15% say they have improved over the last five years. In the 2006 Index test, 26% said schools had improved, and 27% said they had declined locally. Nationally, 26% say schools have improved locally while 32% say they have declined. In 2006, 36% said schools nationally had declined and only 16% said they had improved.
- On the other hand, while Americans are frustrated with public schools and do not feel they are hearing enough about these issues in the campaigns, they give their communities decent ratings for involvement with public schools. Sixty-eight percent say their communities take a lot or some responsibility for public schools, and 59% say they personally have done something in the last year to support public schools. Both ratings are very similar to findings in 2006.

Key Findings: The National Index

- The Index has shown great stability since 2006. The overall rank order is the same with the Tolerance and Inclusiveness category receiving the highest ratings and Officeholders receiving lower ratings.
- There is a noticeable but small decrease in the ratings adults offer for most indicators. It is a small decrease, but it is more meaningful when we look at intensity (those who rate a “5”) and because it is fairly consistent across the indicators and the categories.
- Interestingly, the Tolerance and Inclusiveness category has actually received a bump in its mean to 3.9, up from 3.6. Conversely, five other categories went down slightly and the rest held steady.



The Perception of Public Education

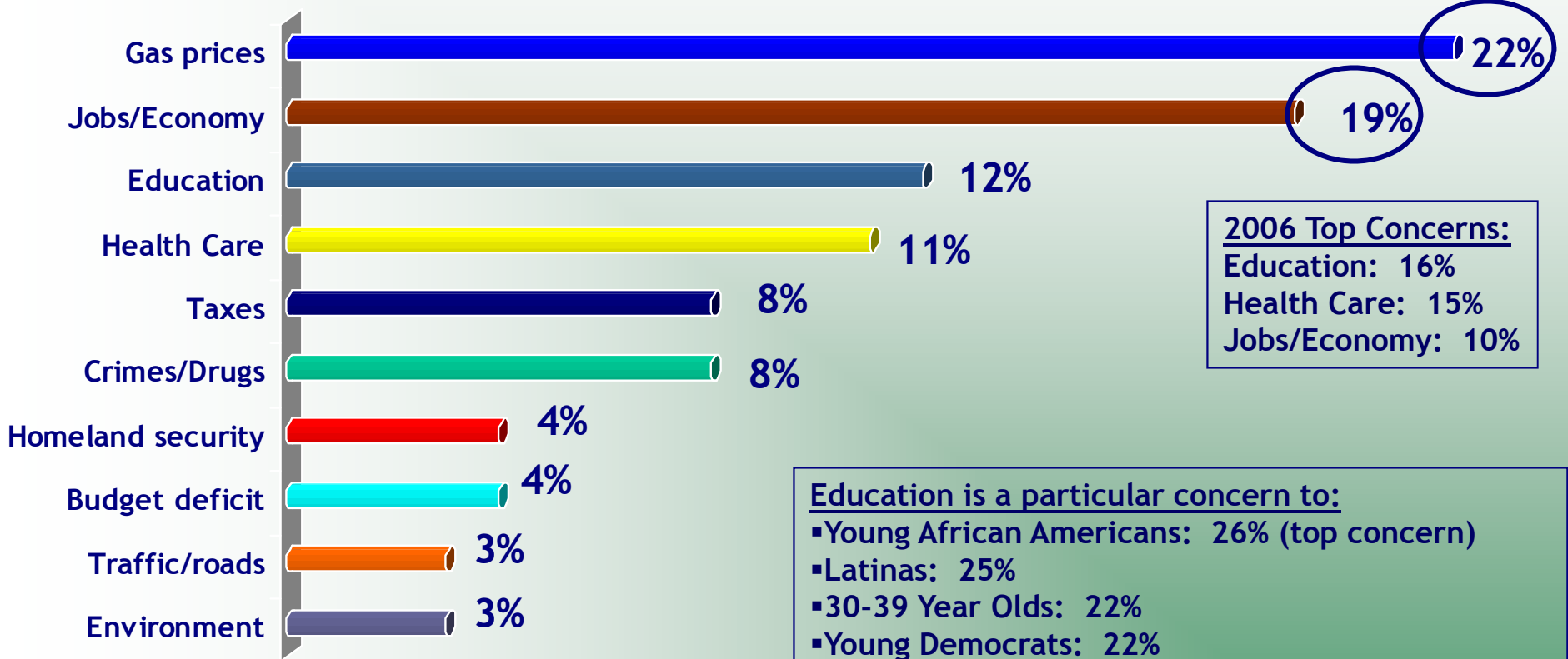


Education has receded as a top of mind issue in this current context when adults focus on soaring gas prices and a slumping economy.





As gas prices continue to rise and the economy worsens, adults focus on pocket book issues. Education was more competitive in 2006, and while it is still a top tier issue, the goal is to continue to tie education to other issues to help broaden its reach as a top of mind concern.



- Education is a particular concern to:**
- Young African Americans: 26% (top concern)
 - Latinas: 25%
 - 30-39 Year Olds: 22%
 - Young Democrats: 22%
 - Pacific region: 22%
 - West region women: 22%

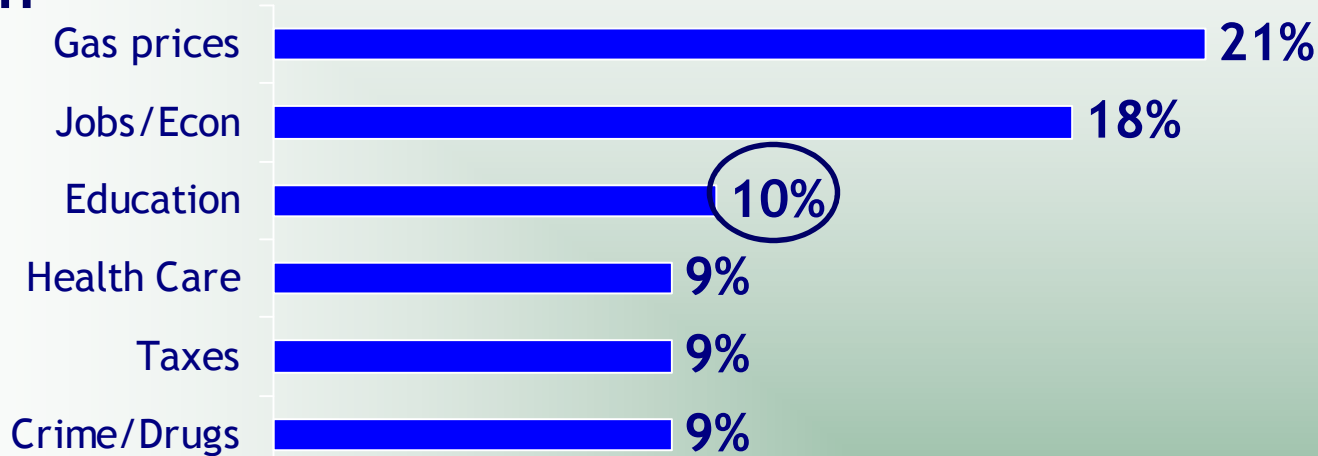


Now, I'm going to read you a list of concerns that some people in this area have mentioned. Please tell me which one you personally most want your LOCAL leaders to do something about?

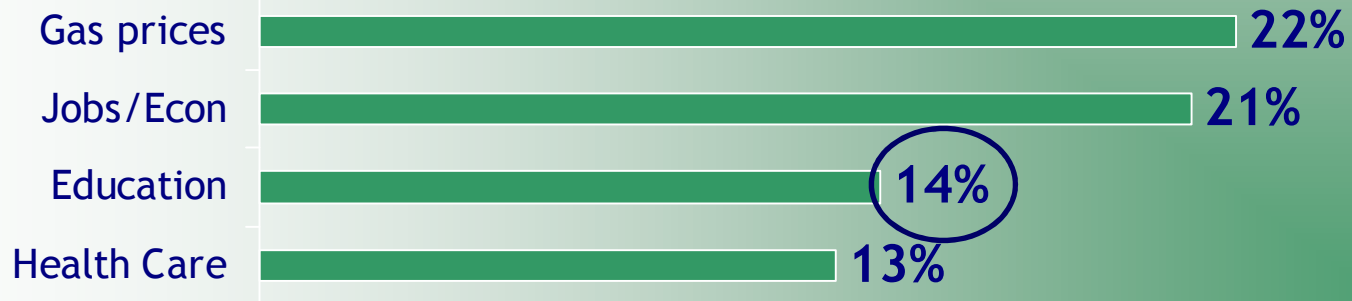


Both men and women are most concerned with gas prices and the economy. Women are slightly more focused on education than men, but even among that audience, it is currently a second tier issue.

Men



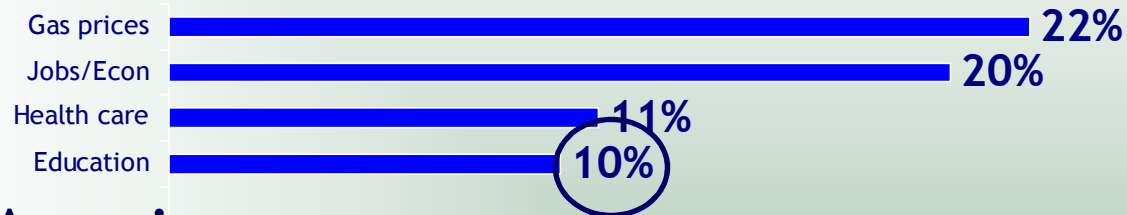
Women



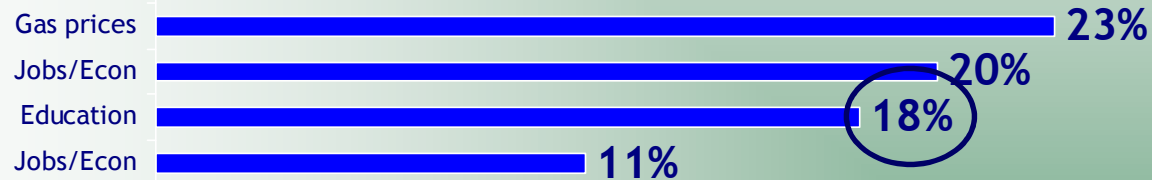


African Americans and Latino/as focus on education to a greater extent than do white adults. For African Americans and Latinos, education does become a top tier issue concern competitive with gas prices and the economy.

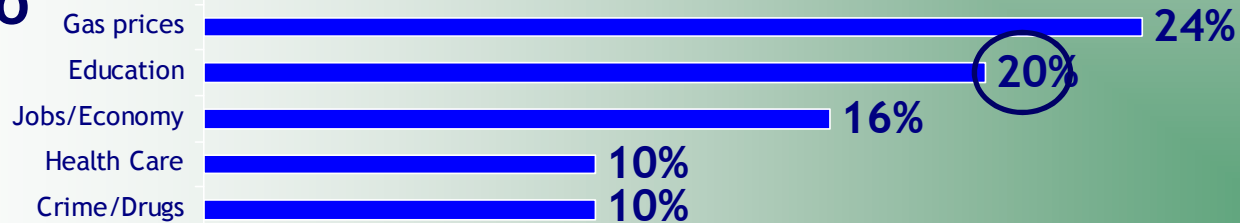
White



African American



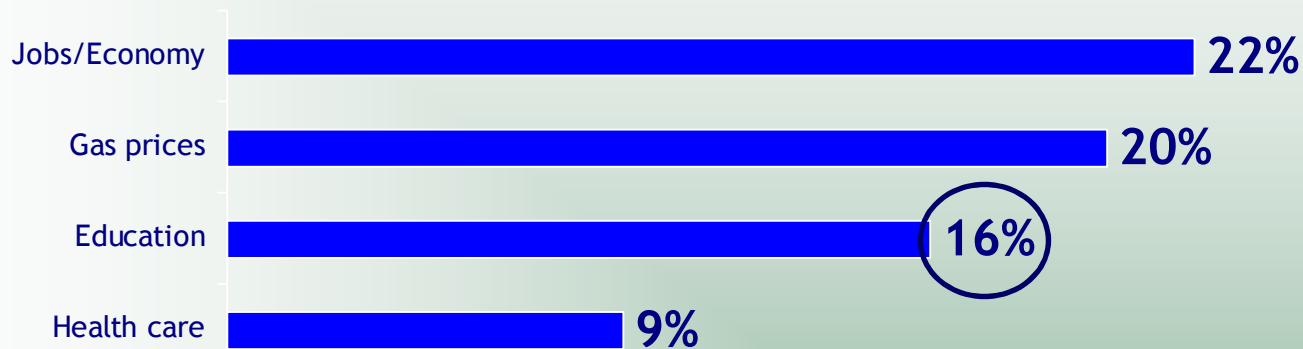
Latino



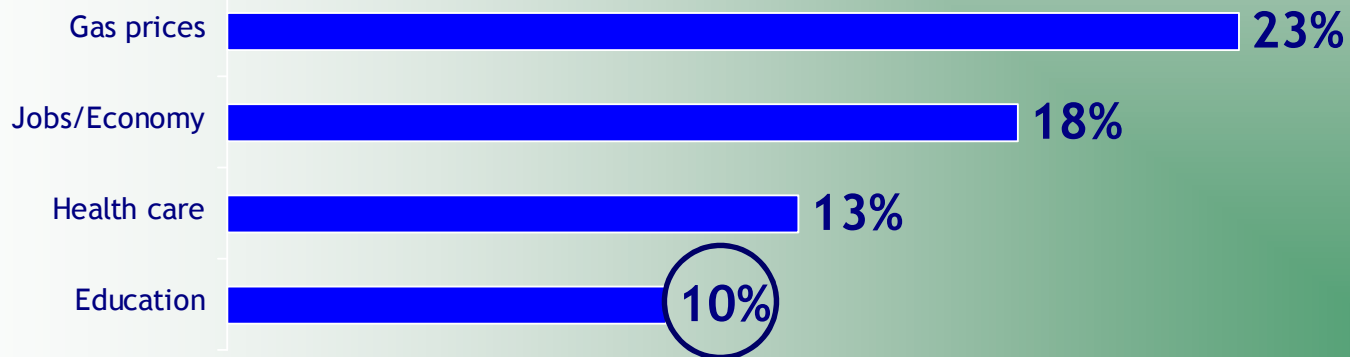


In this environment, even parents are focusing on the issues through an economic lens.

Parents of children age 18 and under

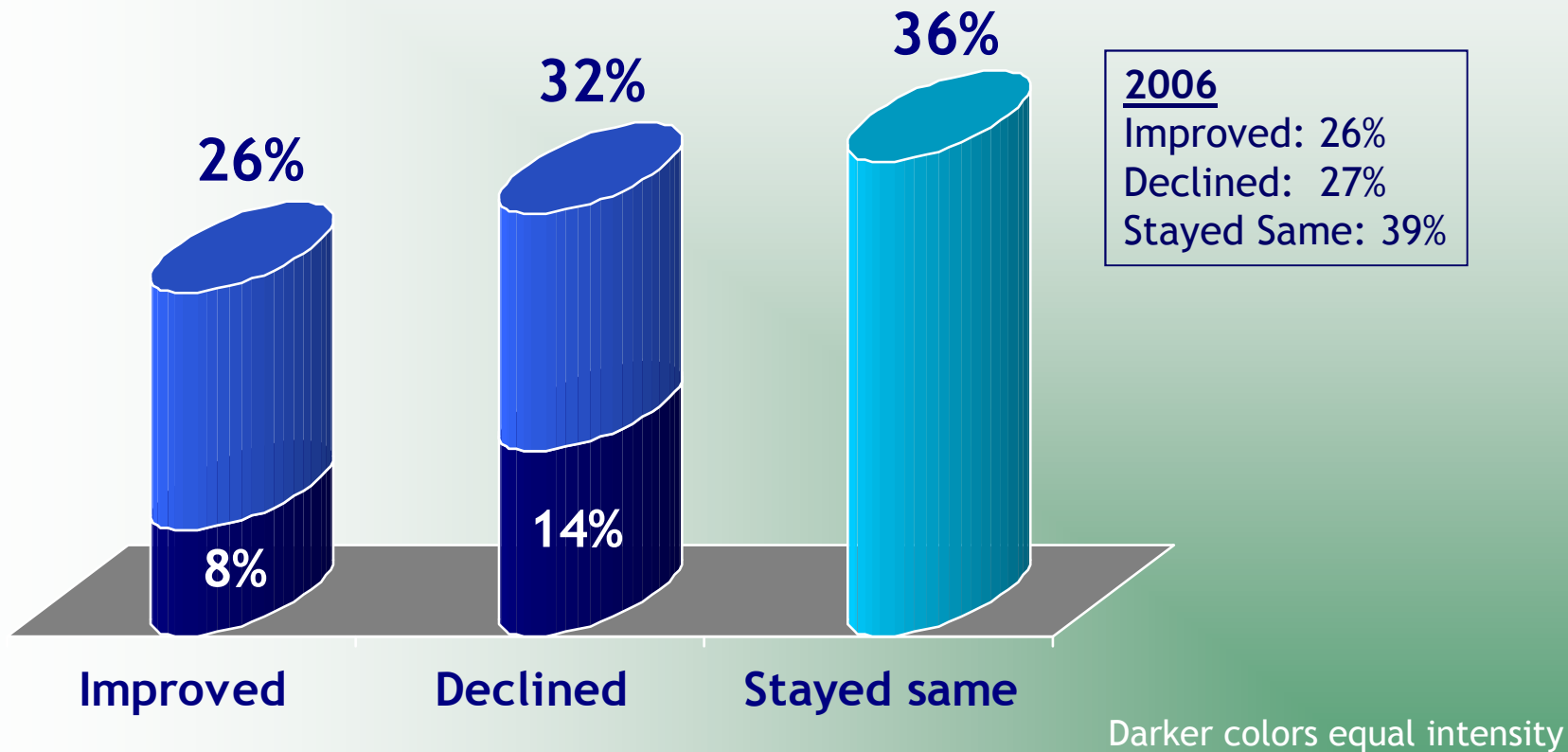


Non-Parents



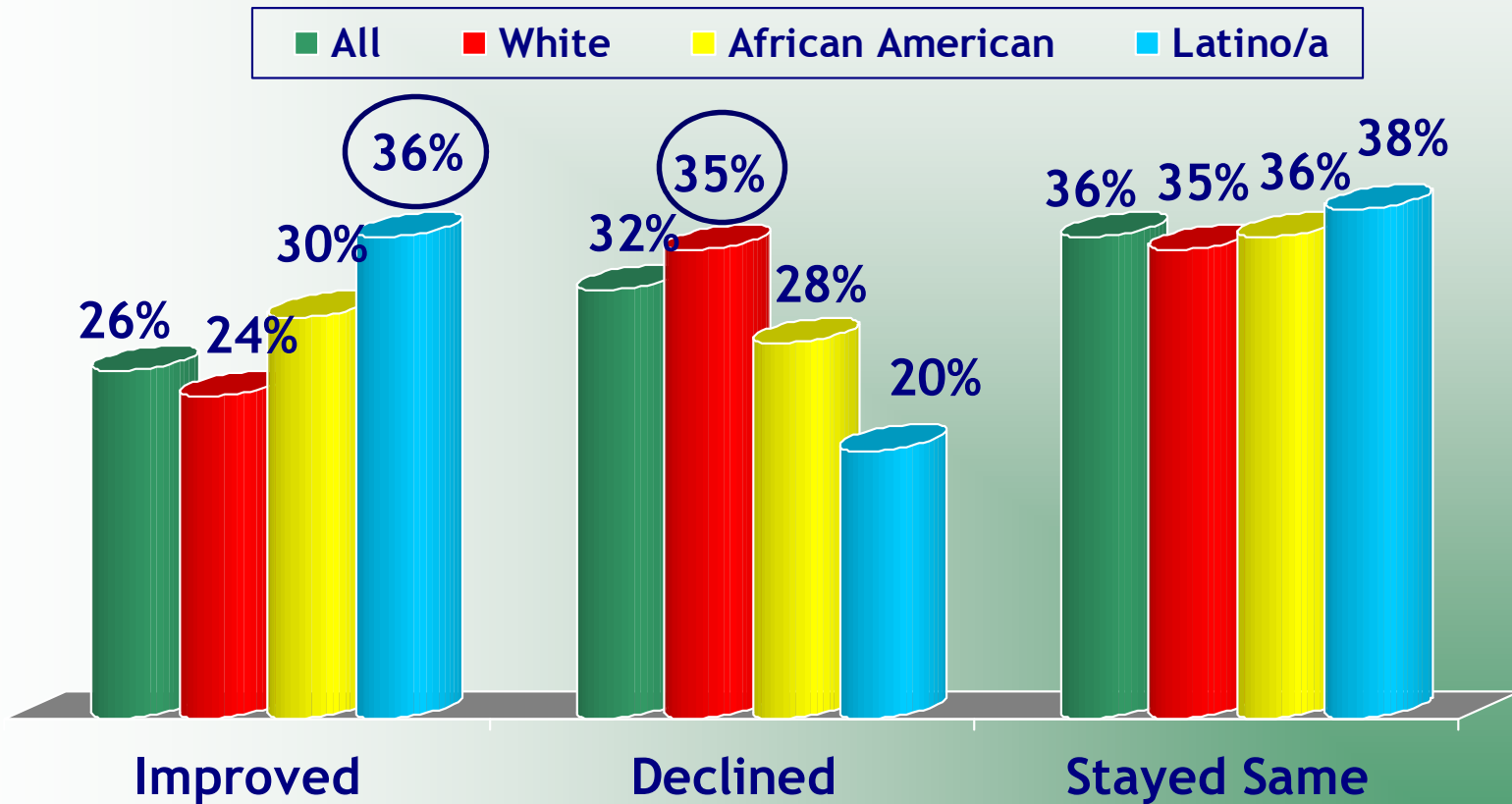


A plurality of voters believe schools in their community have stayed the same over the last few years. But, while attitudes have remained stable since 2006, the trends are ominous with “declined” gaining some traction.

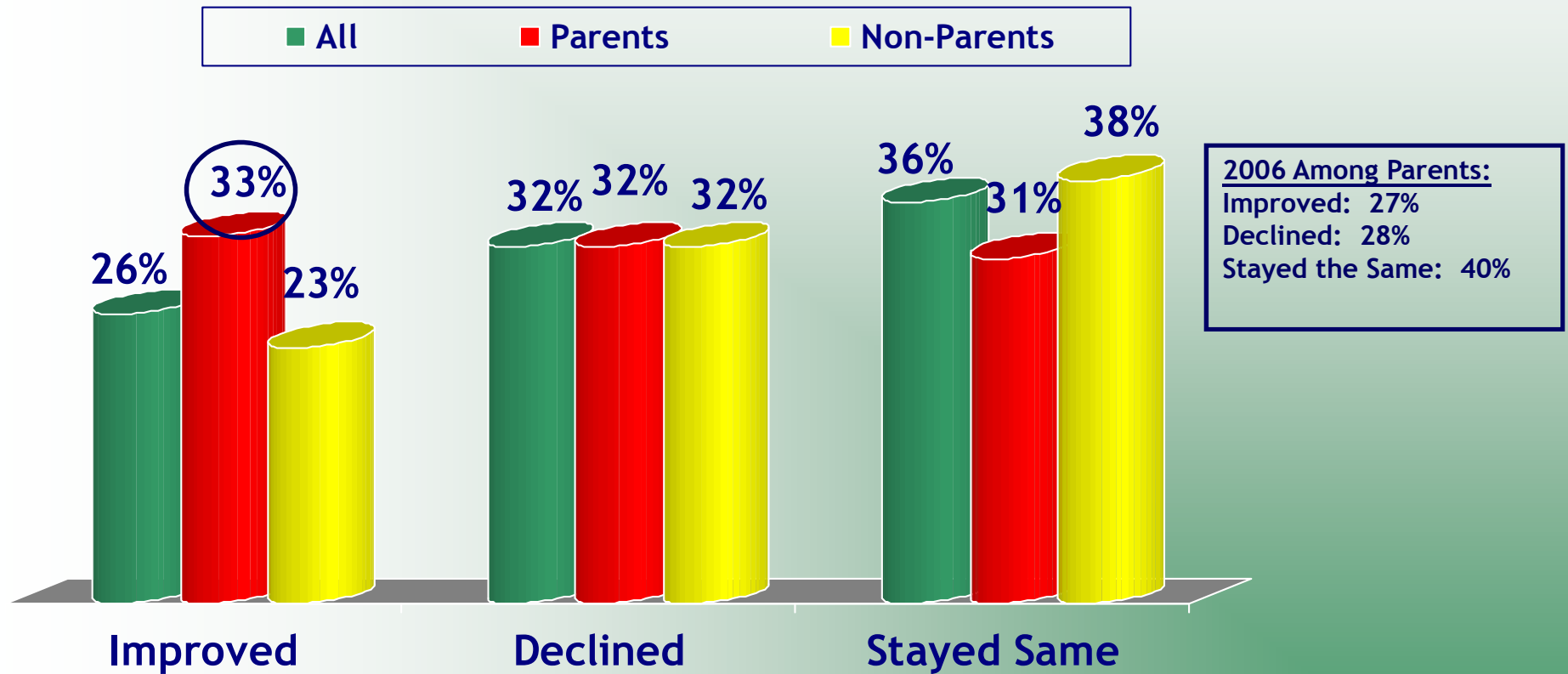


Over the last five years do you think public schools in your community have improved, declined, or stayed about the same?

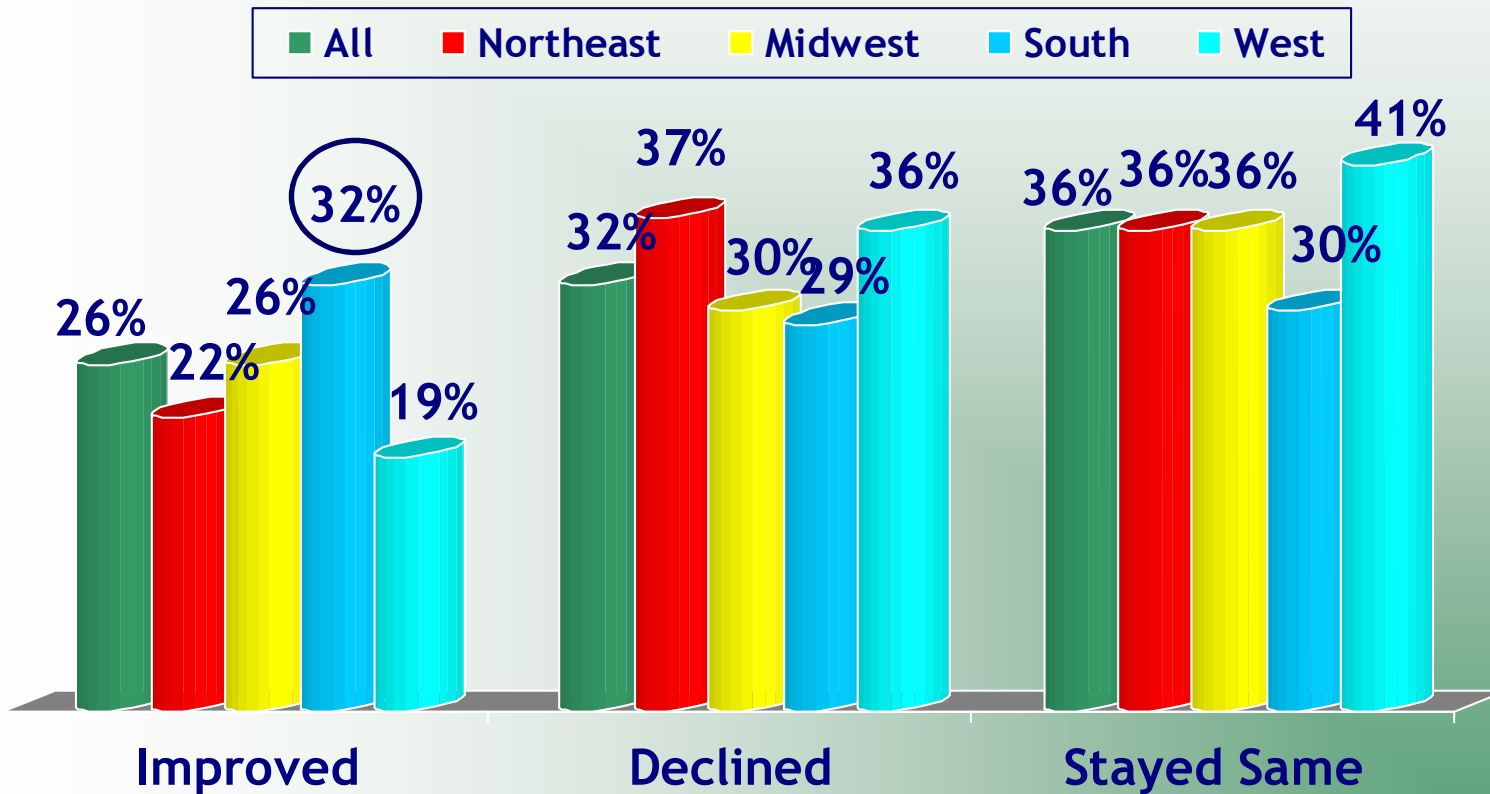
Latinos are most optimistic about the schools in their community, while white adults have more critical attitudes, and African Americans are somewhere in between.



Parents have a more positive view of their public schools than do non-parents. This may be because they have a closer connection to public schools.

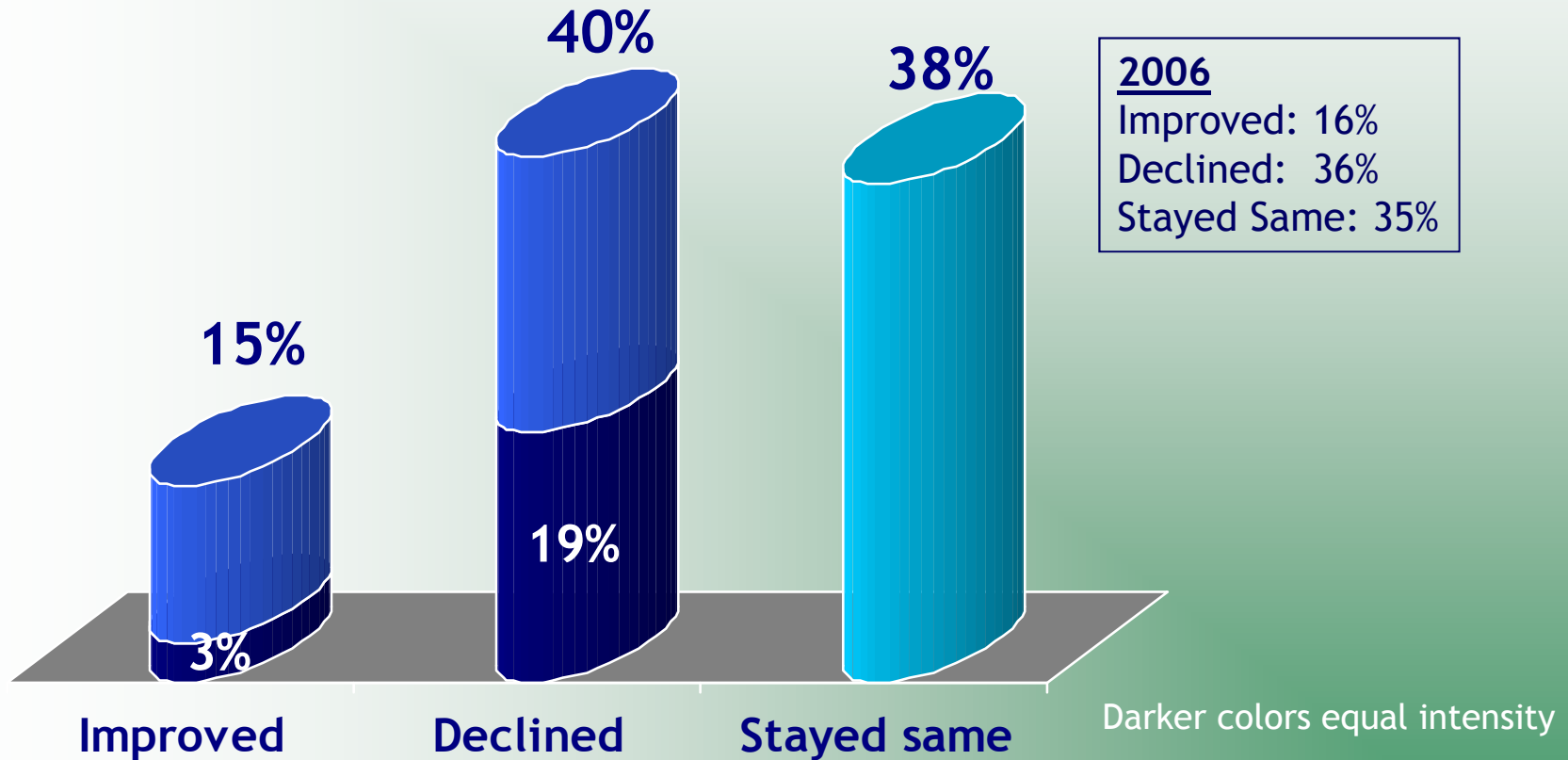


Adults in the South are the only geographic group that are net positive about schools in their community - and even then, they are basically split.



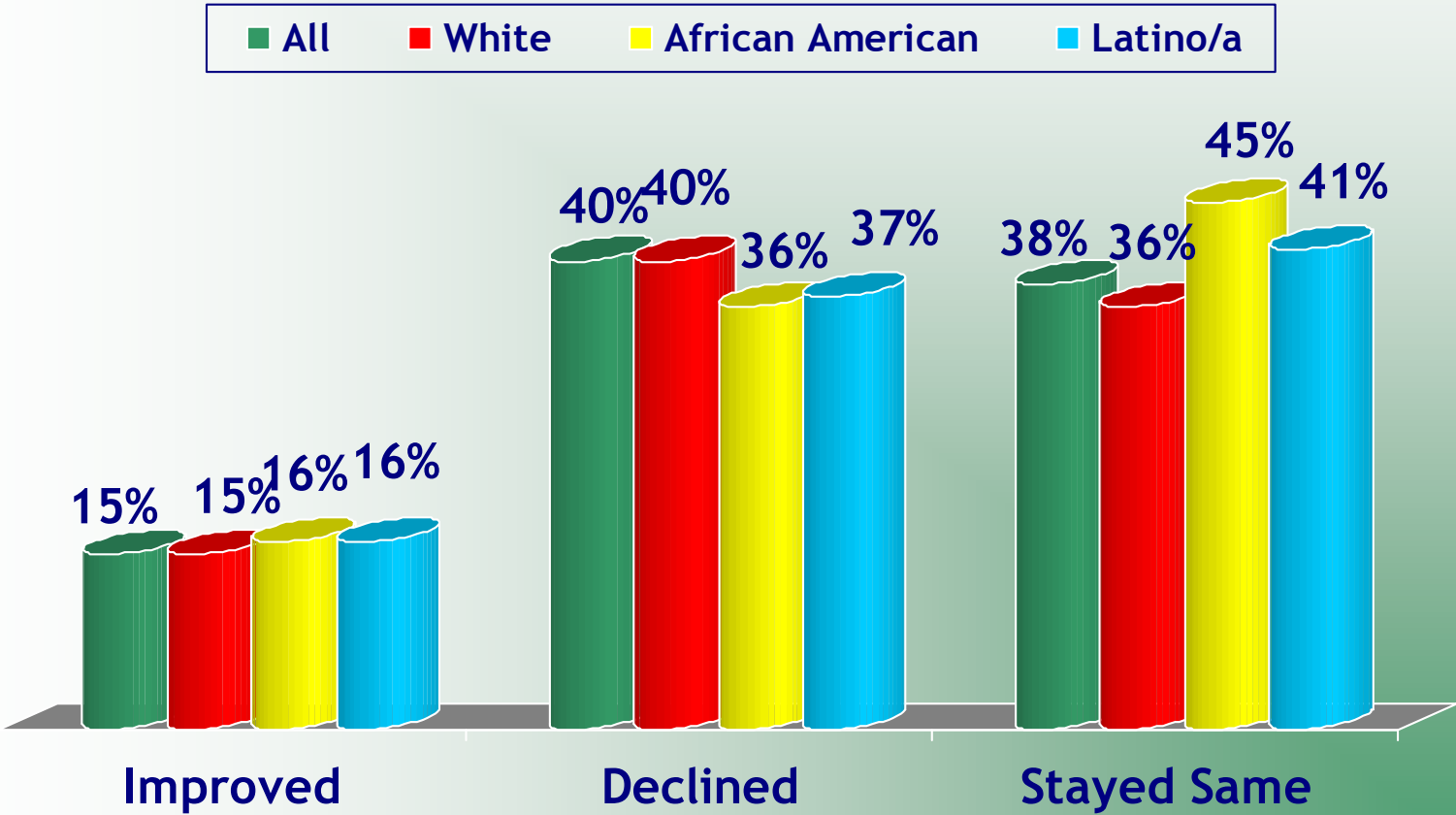


As is typical, adults are more negative toward schools nationally than they are toward their local public schools. Similar to their attitudes toward local schools, the ratings for schools nationally trend negative.

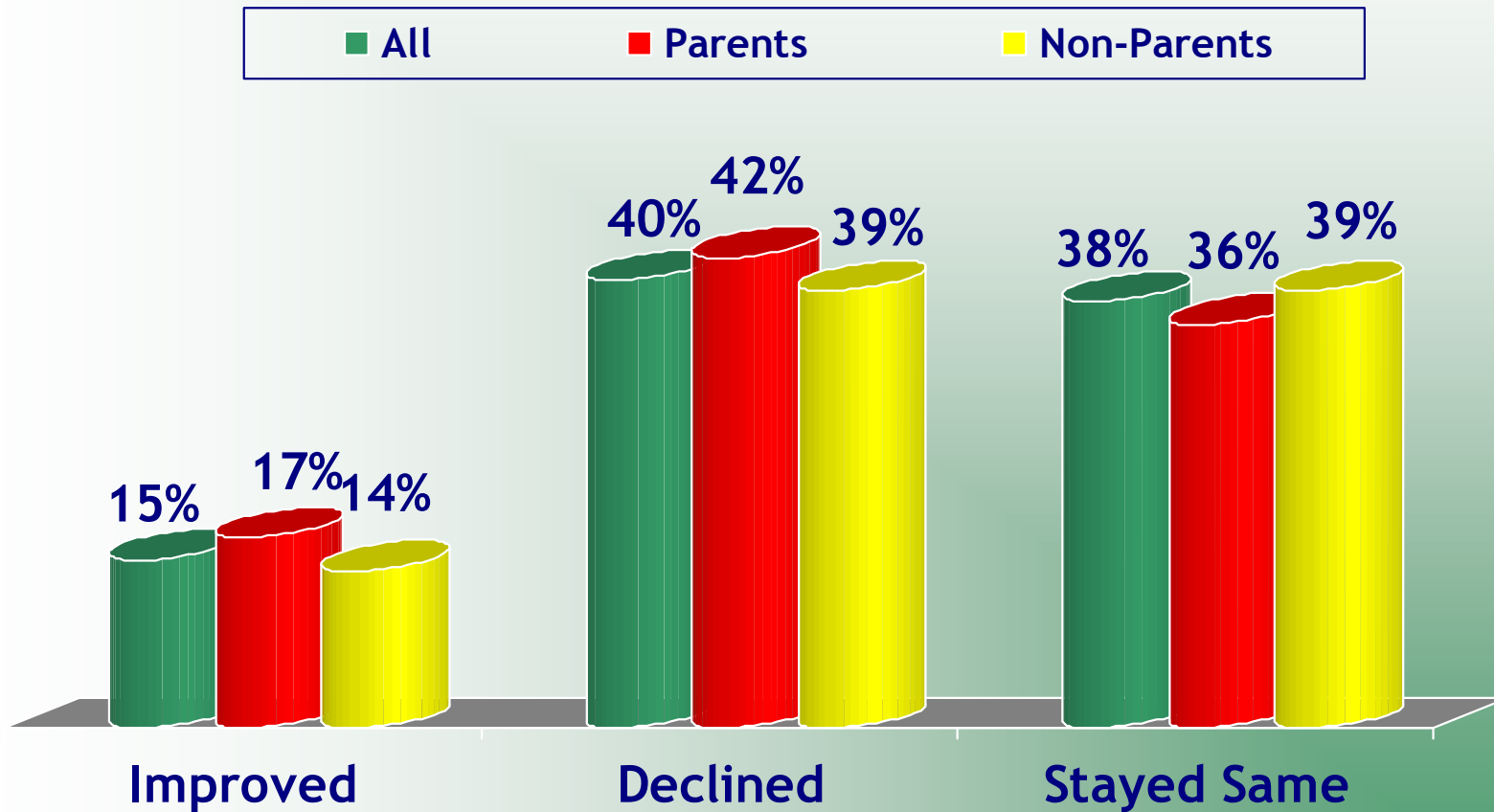


Over the last five years do you think public schools nationally have improved, declined, or stayed about the same?

Latino/as, who are most optimistic about schools locally, believe schools nationally are declining.

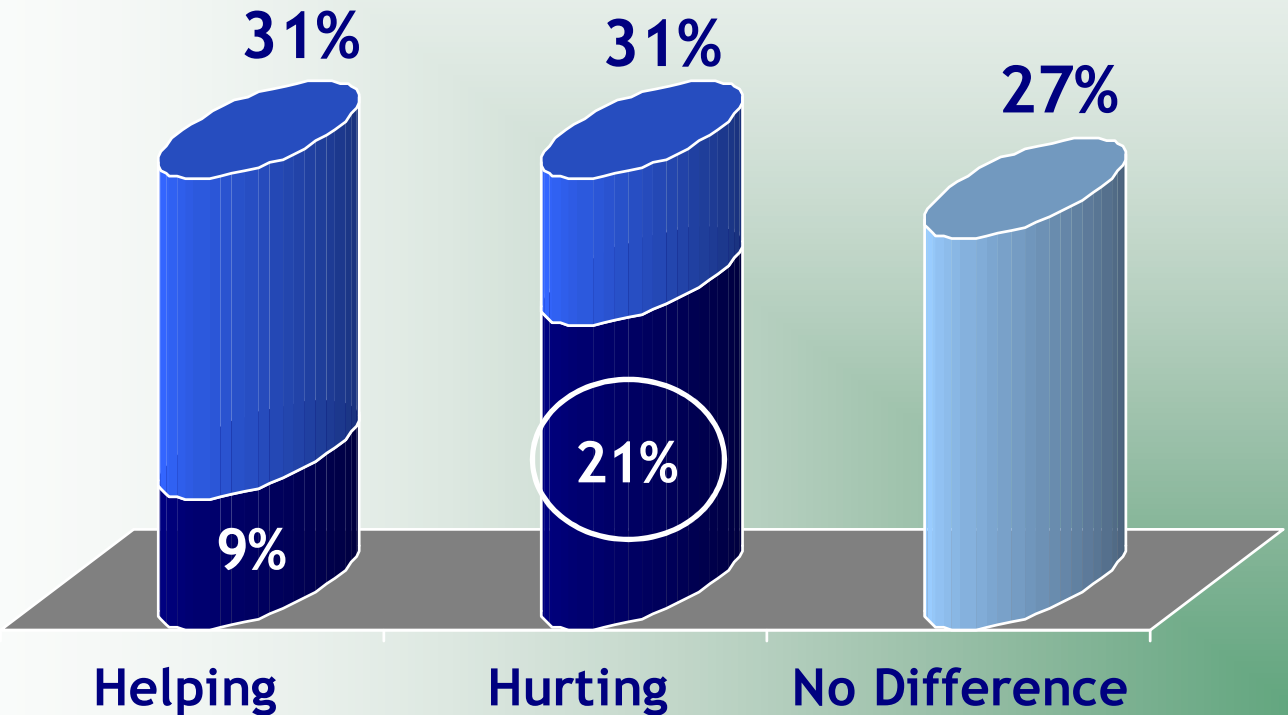


Parents believe schools have improved locally, but they are as likely as non-parents to say schools have declined nationally.





Attitudes toward NCLB are mixed. A quarter believe the program has made no difference to schools in their community while two-thirds split between believing it has hurt schools or helped them. The intensity, however, is with those who think its impact has hurt their local schools.



*Darker colors equal intensity

How would you rate the overall impact of the “No Child Left Behind” program on the public schools in your community? Would you say it was helping, hurting, or making no difference in the performance of local public schools?

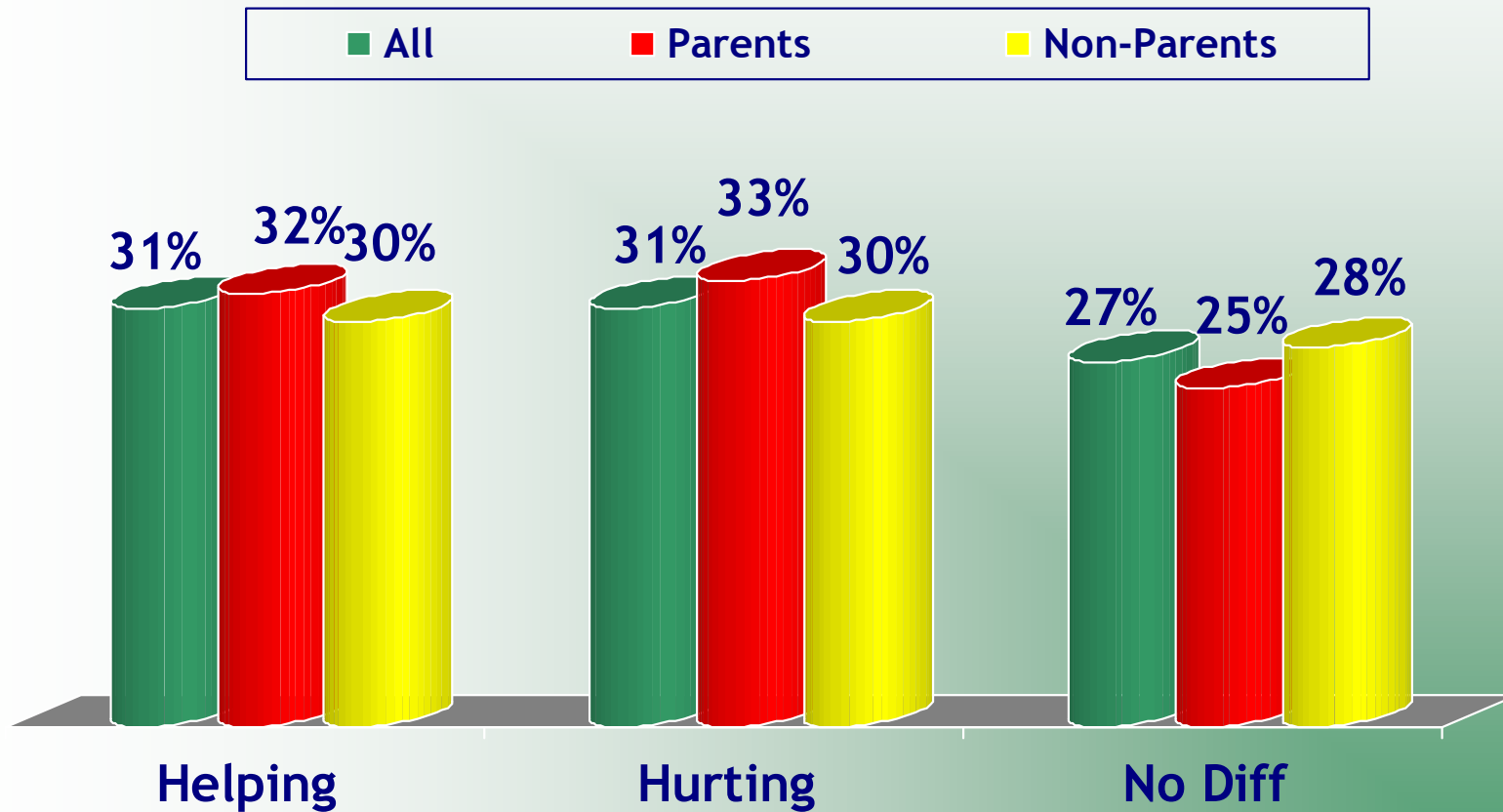




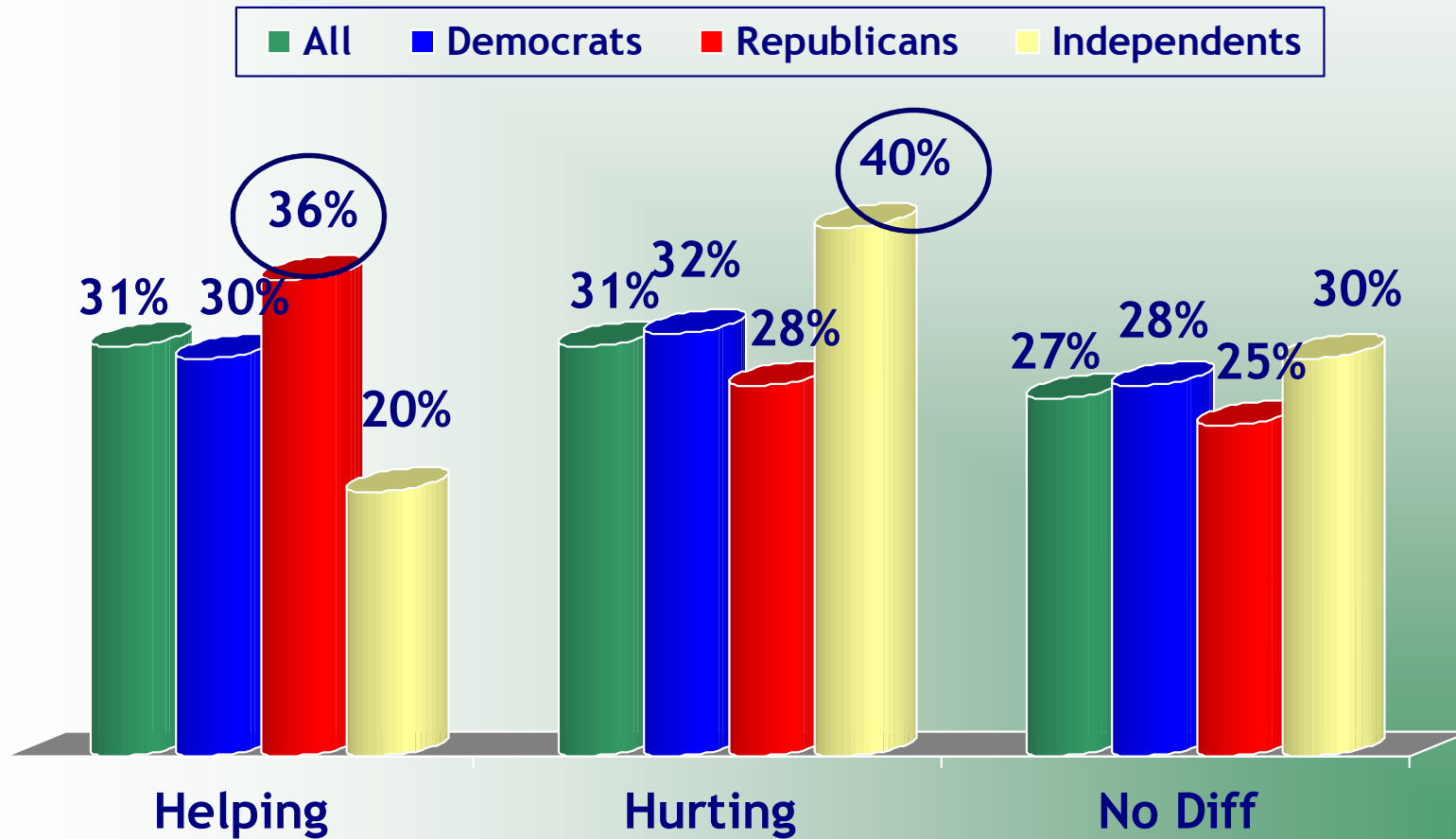
Latinos, who have the most positive outlook on local schools, are tied with African Americans in their belief that NCLB has helped more than hurt, but white adults believe the program has hurt schools.

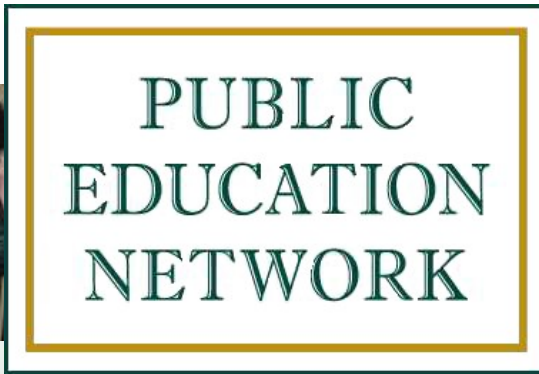
	Total	White	African American	Latino/a
Helping	31%	27%	41%	39%
Hurting	31%	34%	21%	23%
No difference	27%	27%	30%	26%

Both parents and non-parents are divided on NCLB's impact on schools.



Independents are the most likely to feel NCLB is hurting the performance of public schools. Democrats and Republicans are split, with Republicans endorsing the program and Democrats more divided.





Community Involvement in Public Education

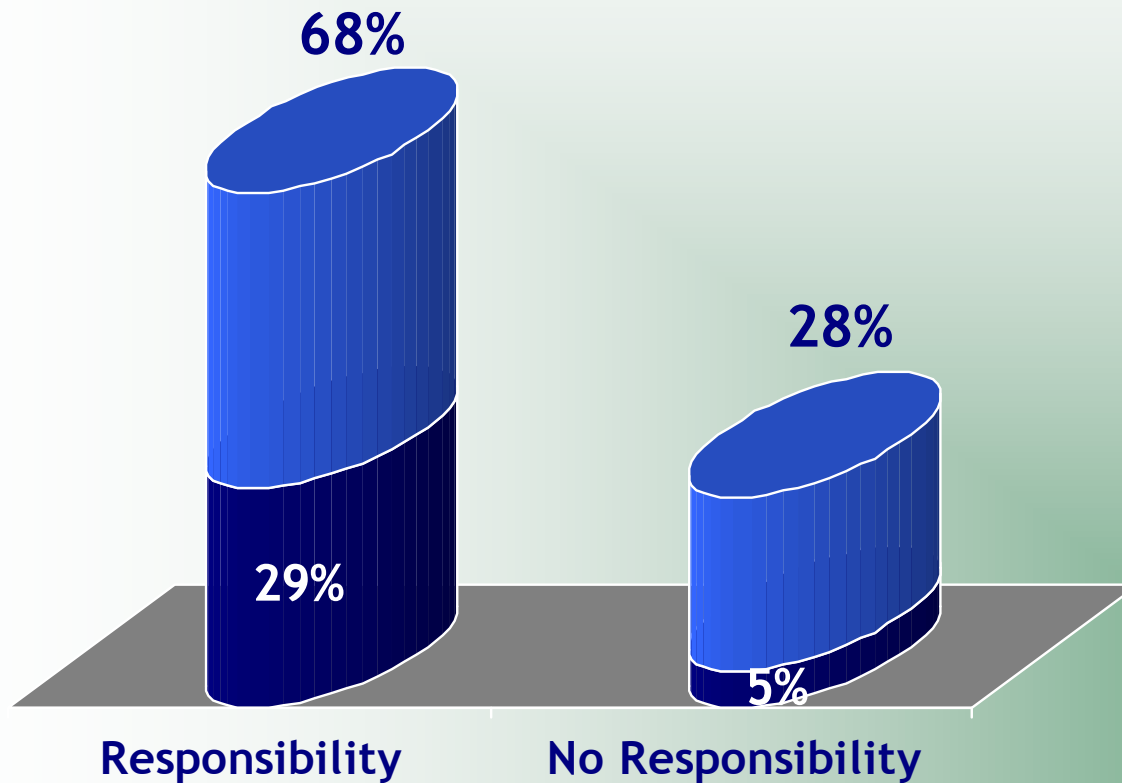


Americans give their communities decent ratings for levels of involvement with public schools.





Americans think people in their communities take responsibility for ensuring quality public schools. Attitudes have held steady since 2006. There is not as much intensity as there could be, but overall, the attitudes are positive.



2006:
A lot/Some 70%
Little/None: 26%

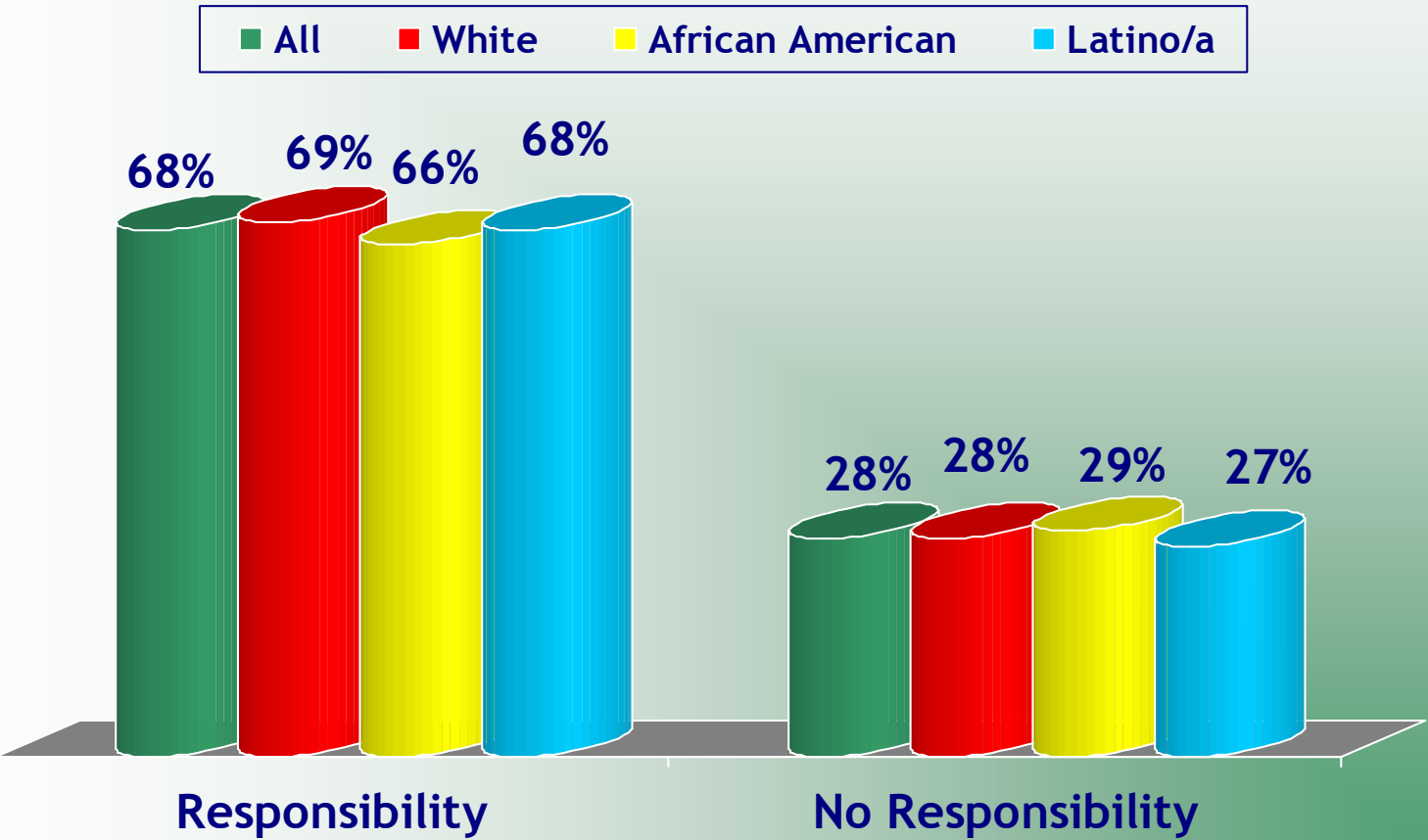
*Darker colors equal intensity

How much responsibility do you think people in your community take for ensuring there are quality public schools in your community - a lot, some, a little, or none at all.



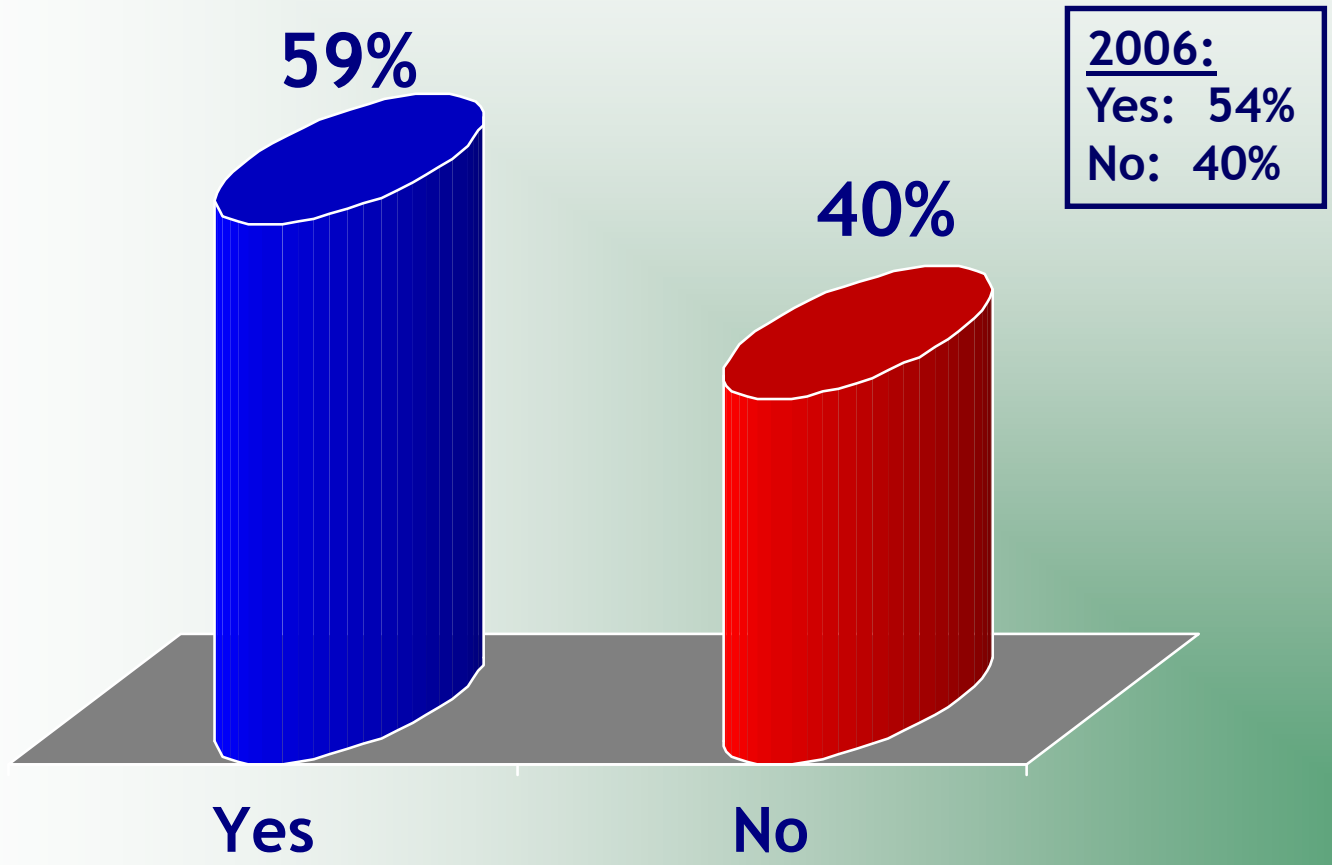


There is little difference in how African Americans, Latinos, and white adults see their community. Nearly seven in ten people think adults take responsibility for public schools in their community.





Similarly, respondents say that in the past year they have done something to support public schools in their area. In fact, slightly more adults say they have done something this year compared to 2006.

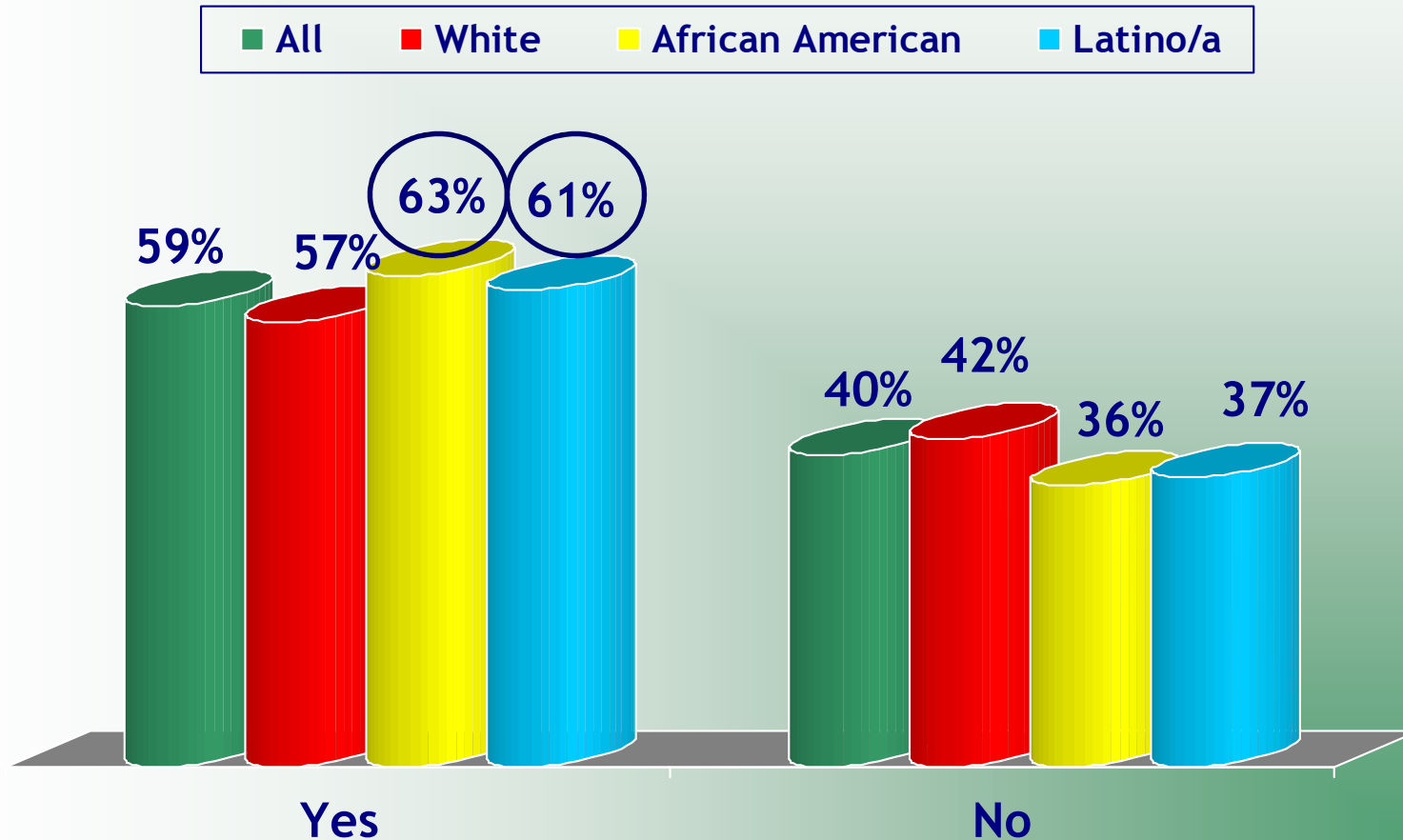


In the past year, have YOU personally done anything to support public schools in your local area?

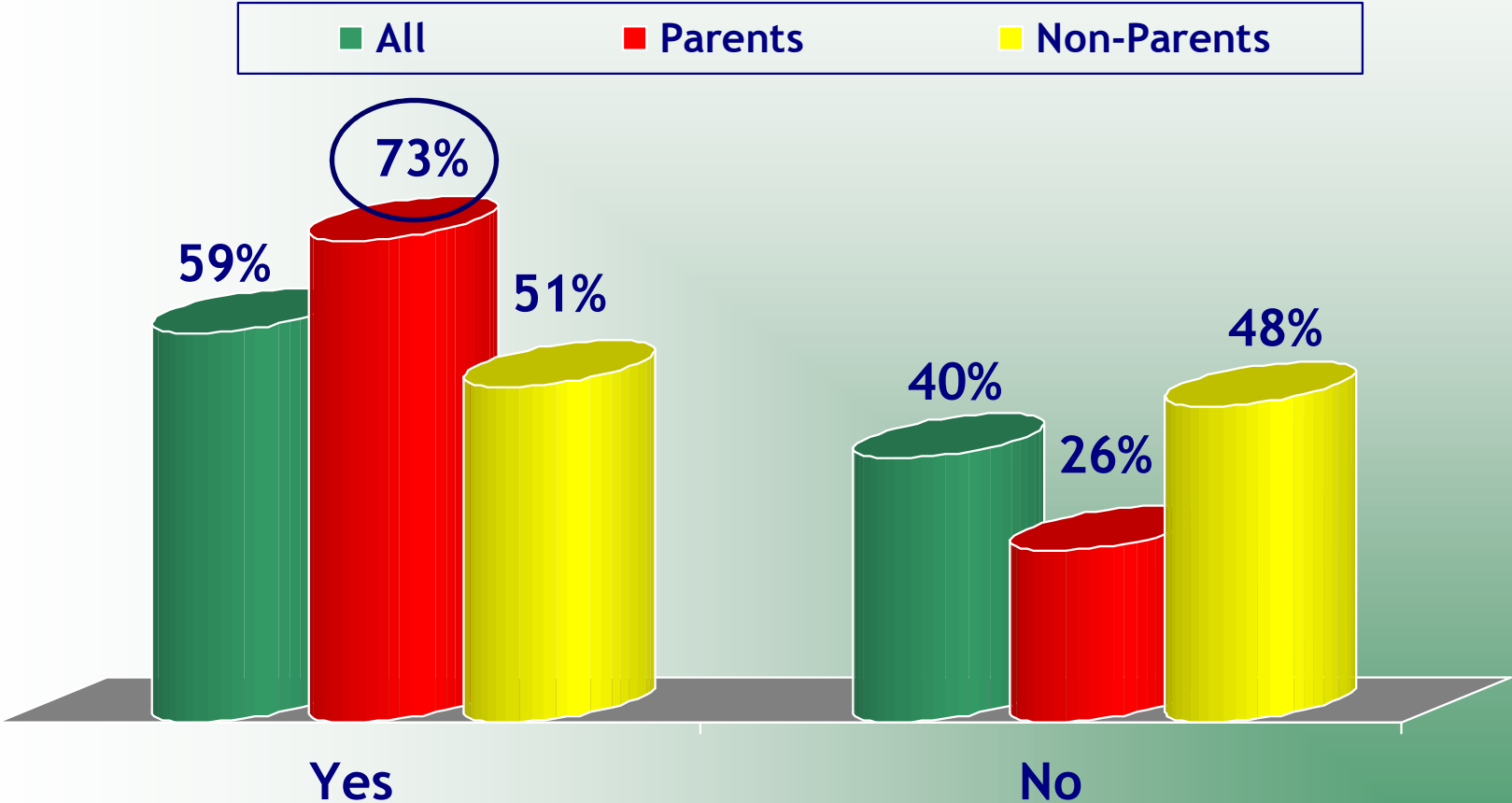




African Americans and Latino/as report doing the most personally to support public schools. African Americans and Latinos are more likely to be parents in this survey, which drives these numbers.

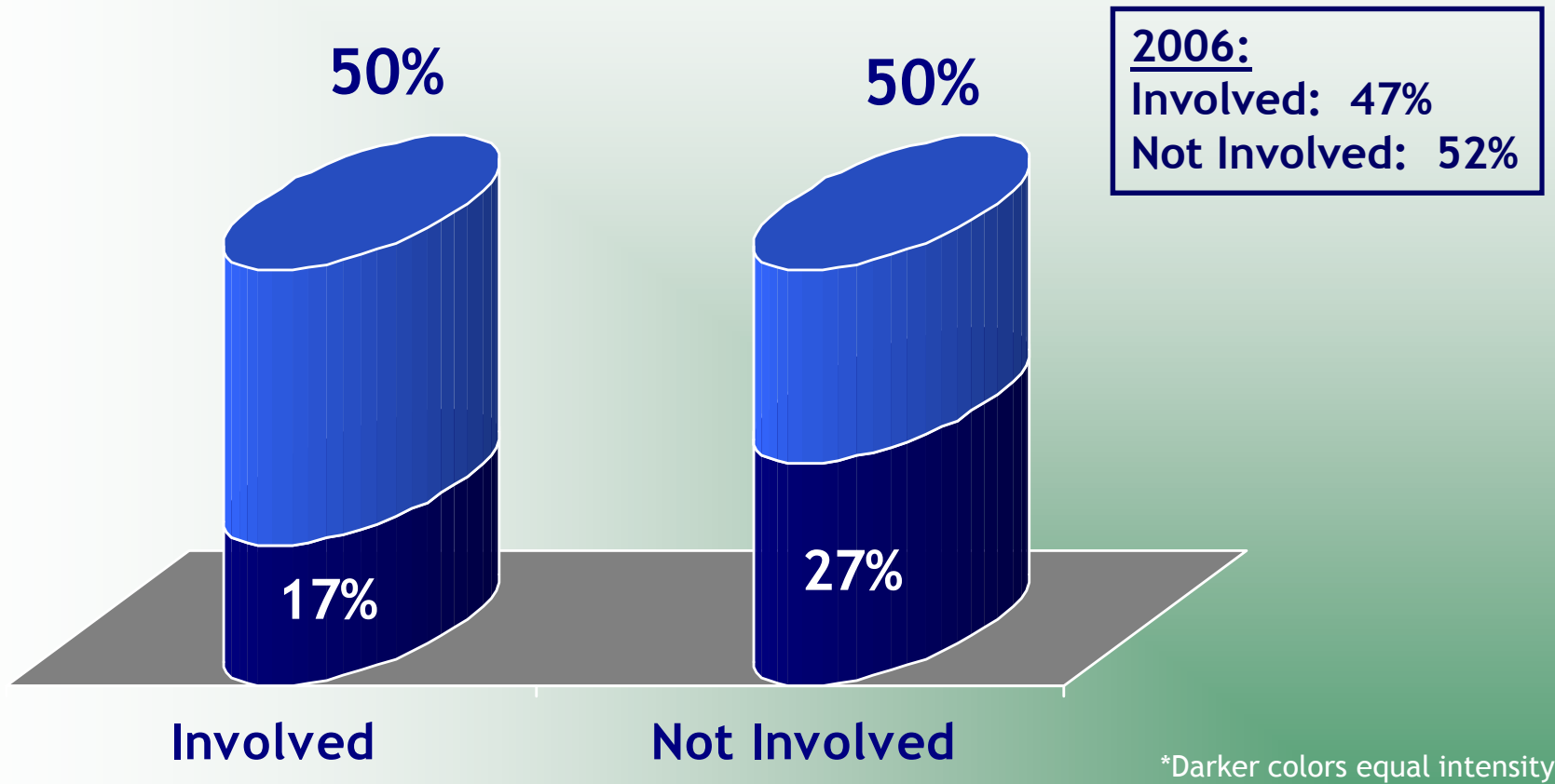


Not surprisingly, three-quarters of parents report doing something to support public education, compared to about half of non-parents.



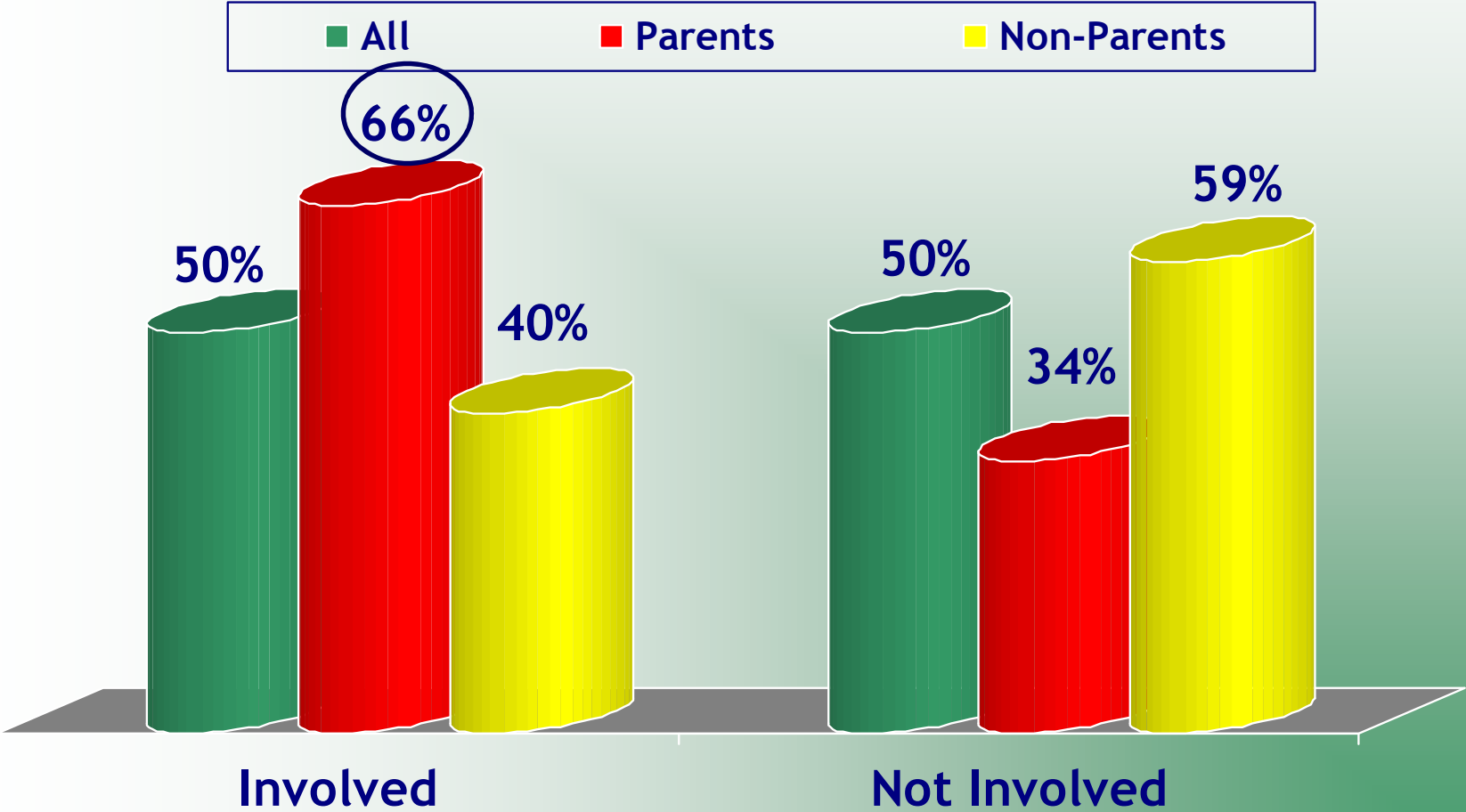


Adults, however, make careful distinctions. Fifty-nine percent say they have done something to support public schools in their community, but only half say that means they are personally involved - a share that is up somewhat since 2006.

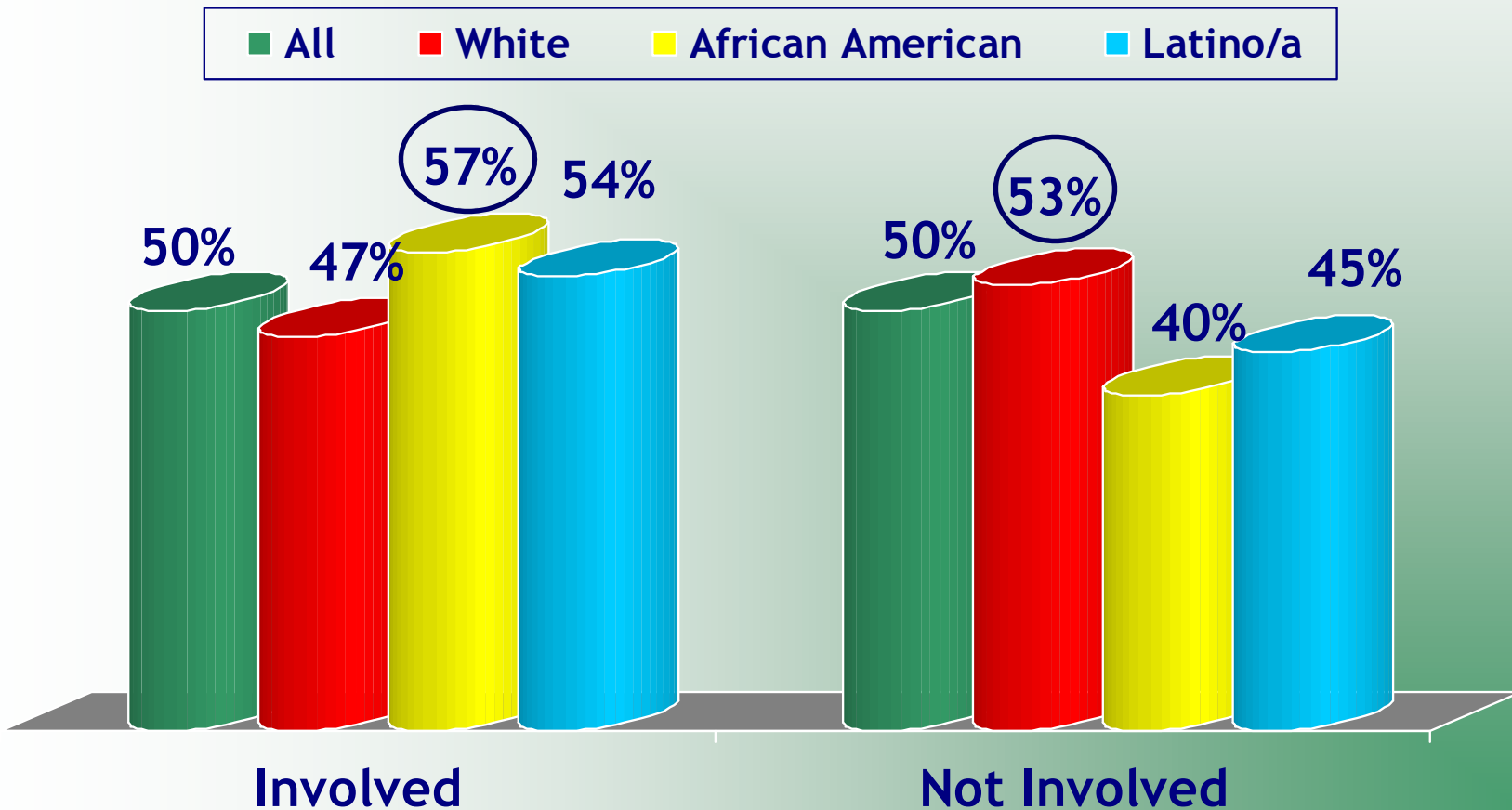


Honestly, how involved would you say you are in helping to make public schools better - very involved, somewhat involved, not too involved, or not involved at all?

Parents are also more involved than non-parents, but they, too, are more likely to say they have done something in the last year than to say they are personally involved.

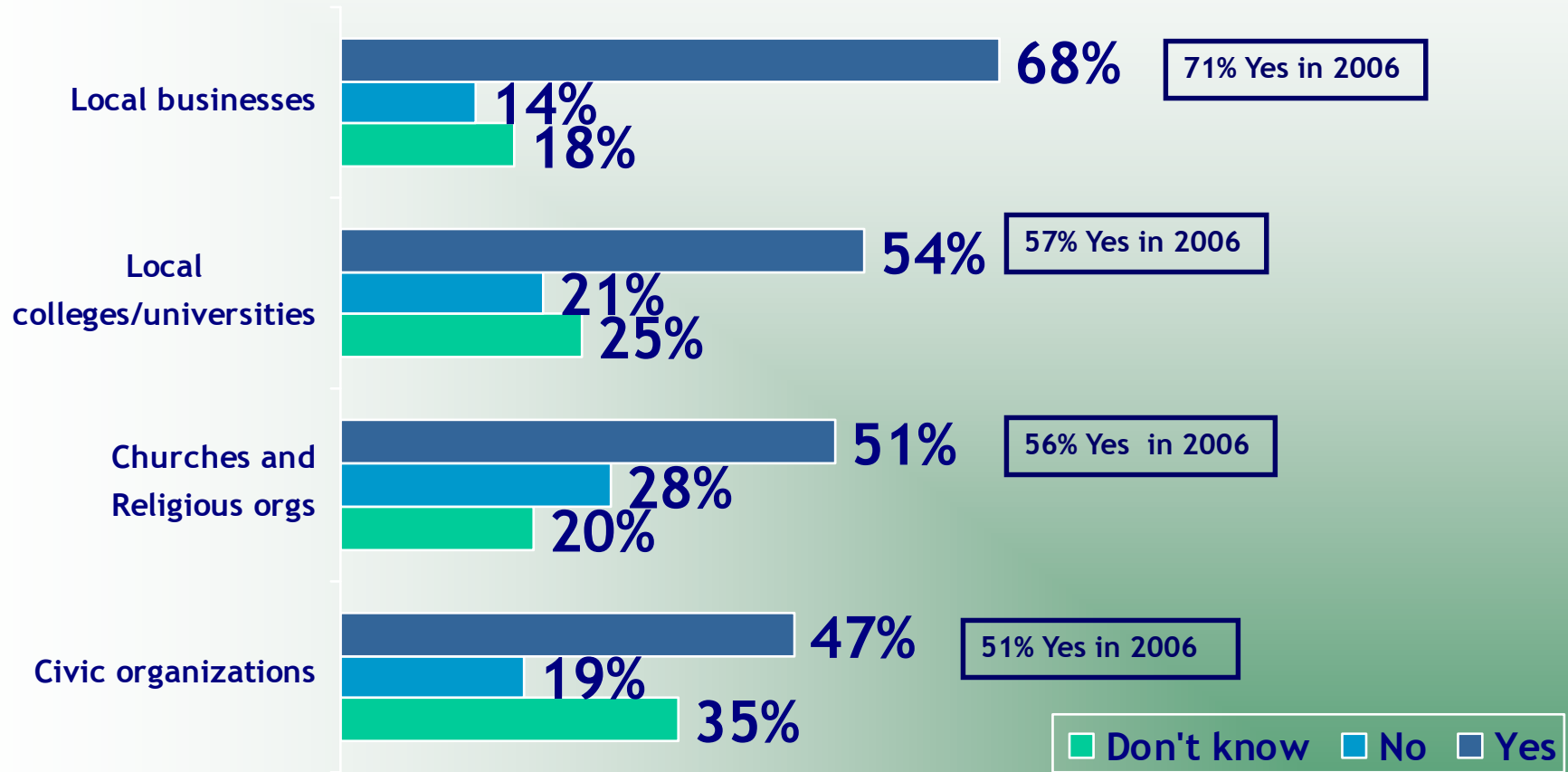


African Americans say they are the most personally involved in helping to make public schools better. Whites report the lowest levels of involvement.





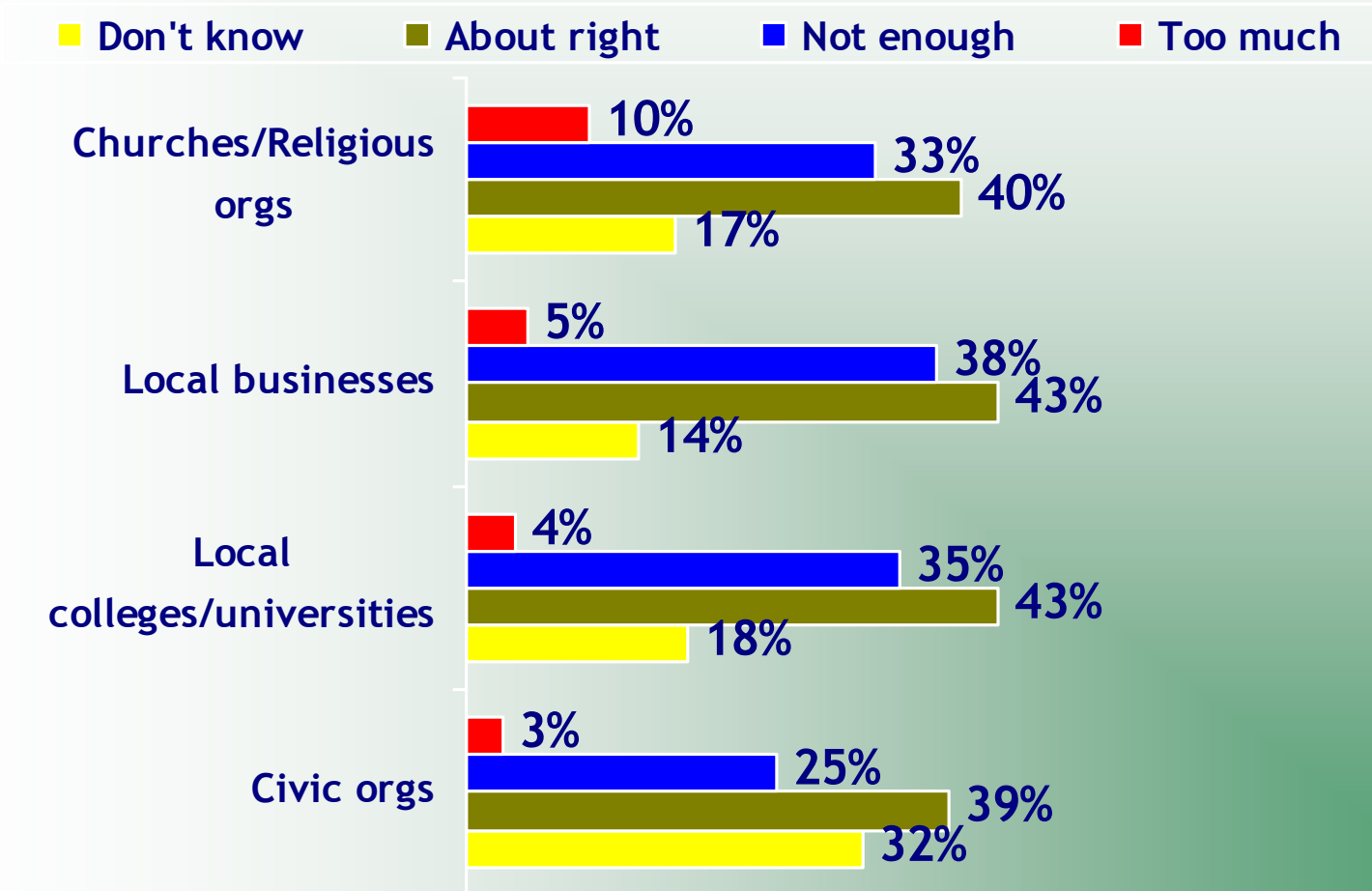
Americans believe local businesses are involved in public schools, but ratings for businesses, local colleges, churches, and civic organizations are down somewhat from the first Index test. This could be a reflection of the general environment where education is less of a priority, but it does warrant monitoring the relationship.



Please tell me if the following are involved in your local public schools?

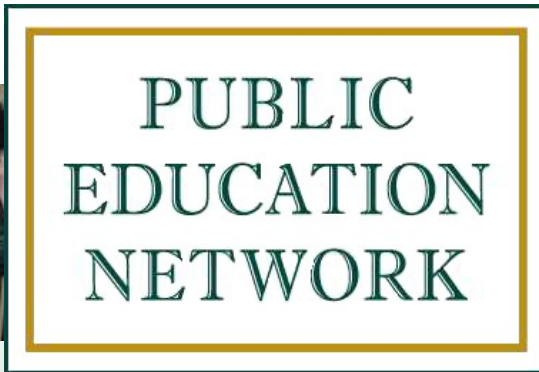


Asked a different way, adults demonstrate some confusion on what that involvement might look like. Hardly any adults believe these groups are too involved, but many don't know if they are involved or not.



Here are some groups and organizations that may or may not be involved in your local public schools. For each one, please tell me if that group is involved too much, not enough, or about right?





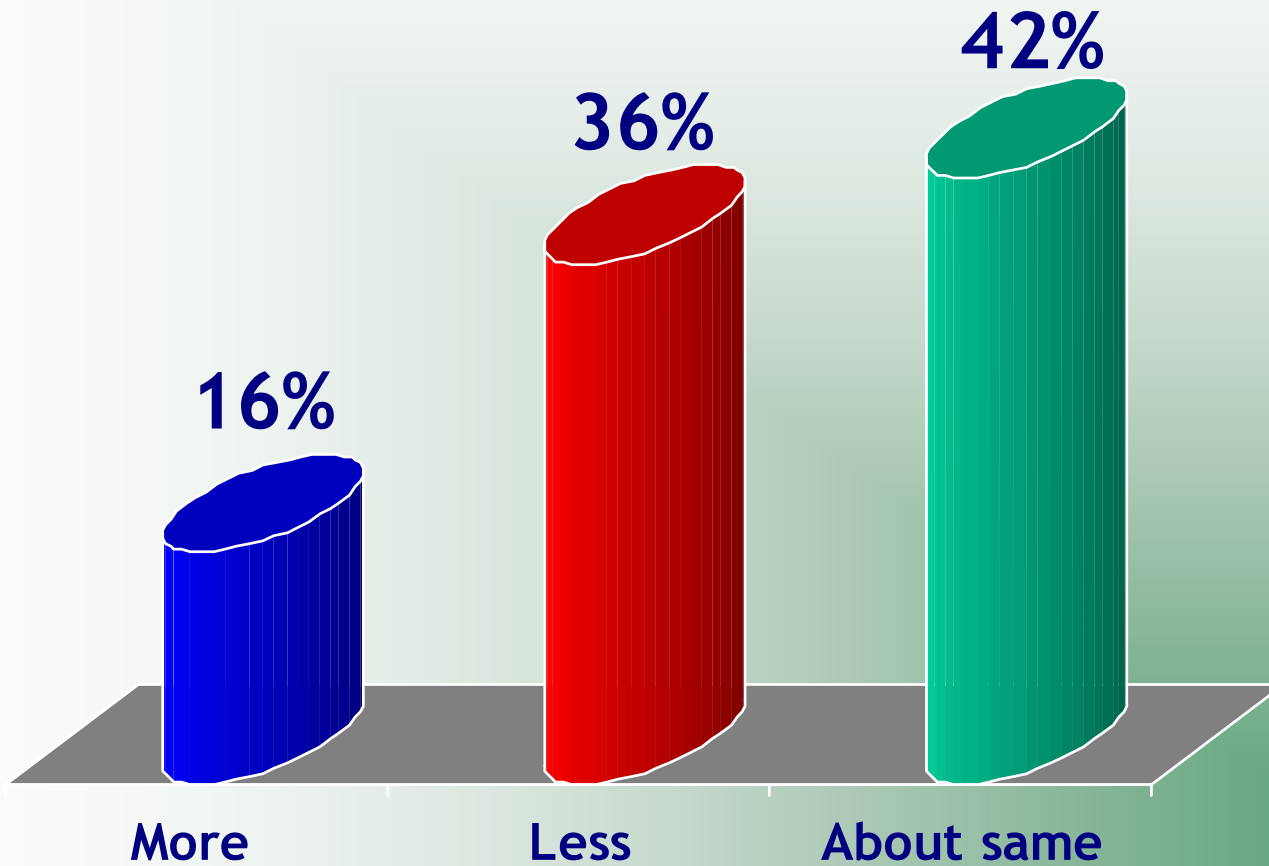
Information about Candidates and Public Officials



Americans have not heard enough about public education in this year's campaigns. They think they have heard less than in years past.



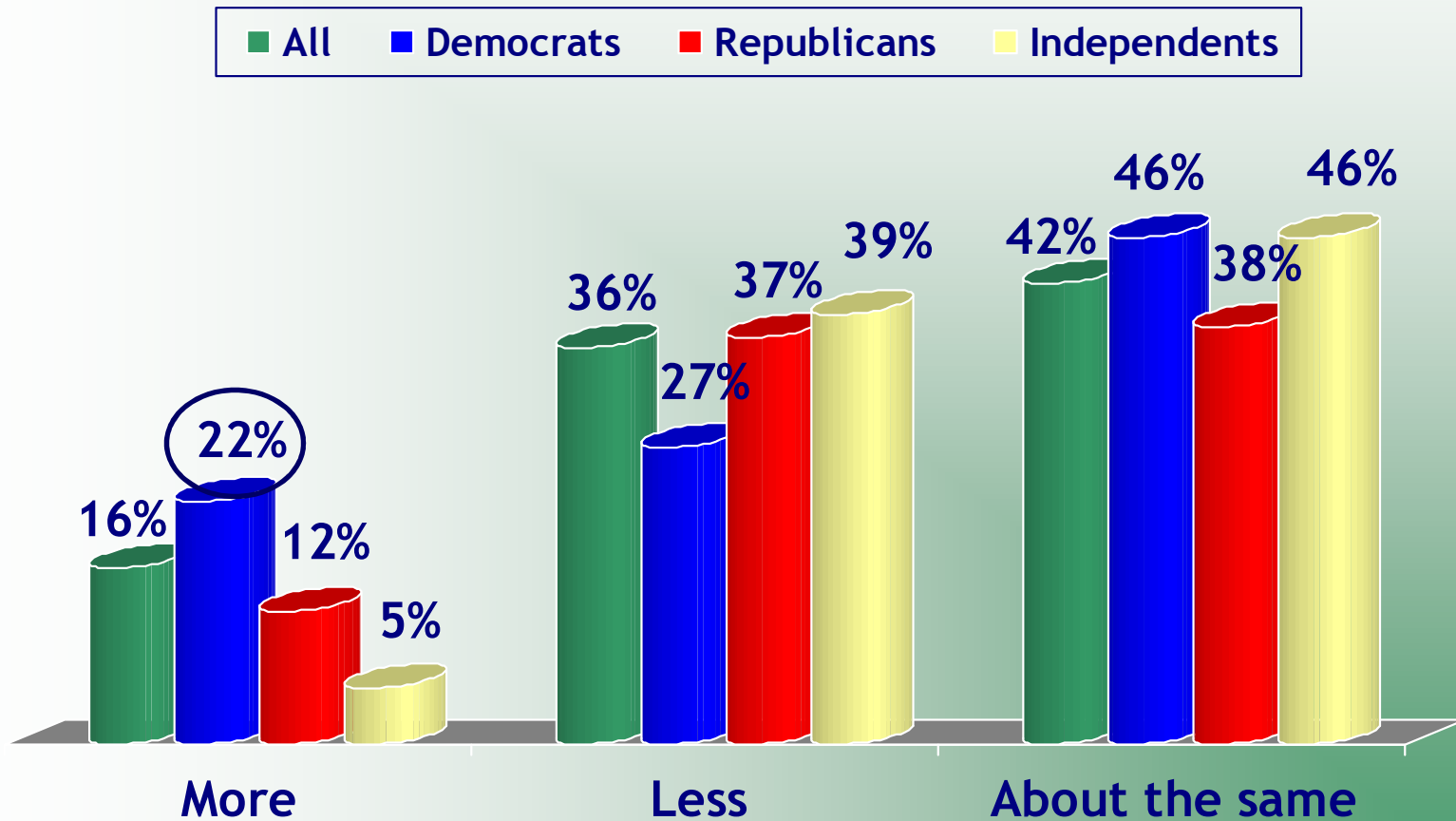
Americans think they are hearing less about education this year than they have in past election years.



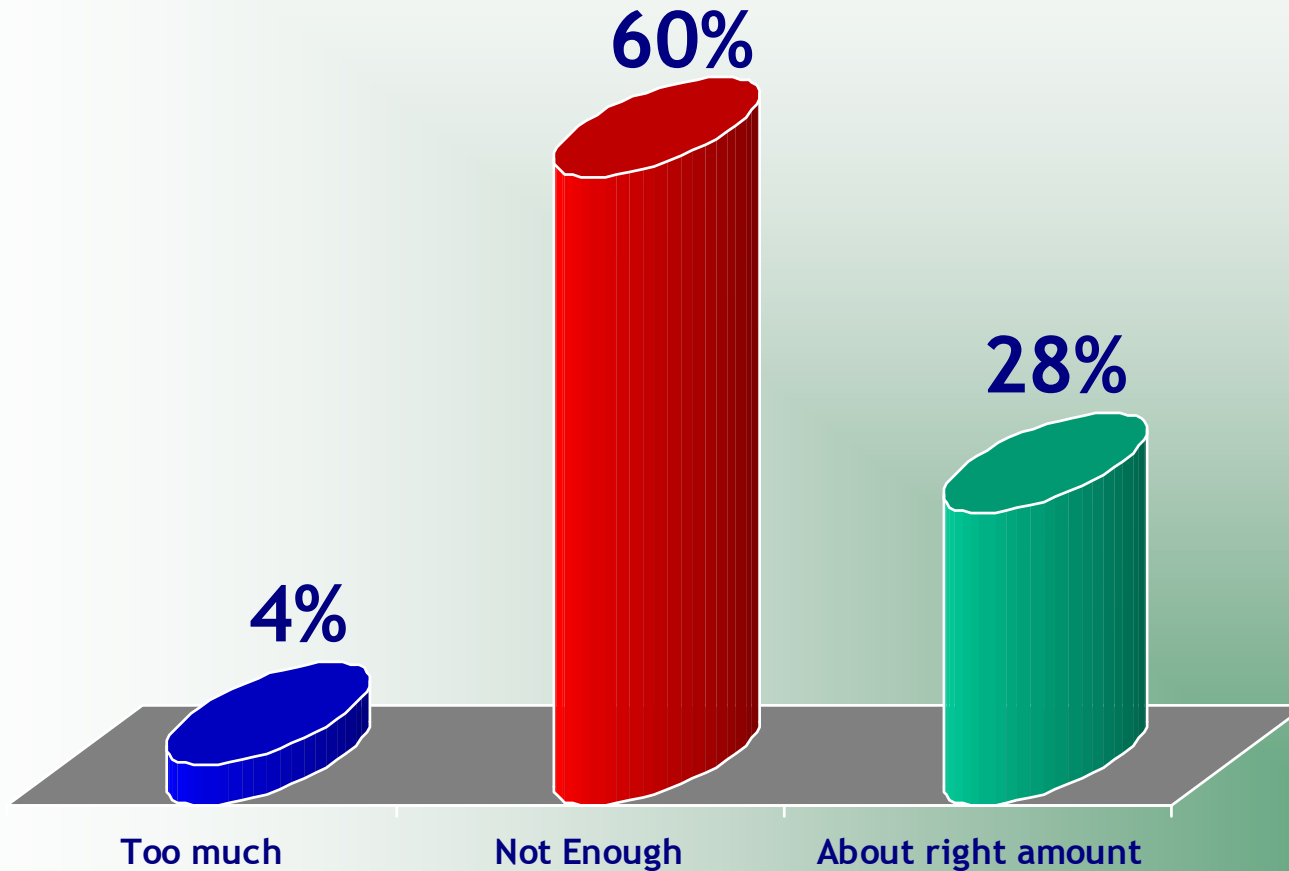
During the election campaigns this year, have you heard or seen more, less, or about the same amount on public education as you have in past years? (Asked of half the sample)



Democrats are more likely than Republicans or independents to say they have been hearing more from candidates about education this year than years past, but still, only two in ten Democrats say they have heard more while seven in ten have heard less or about the same.



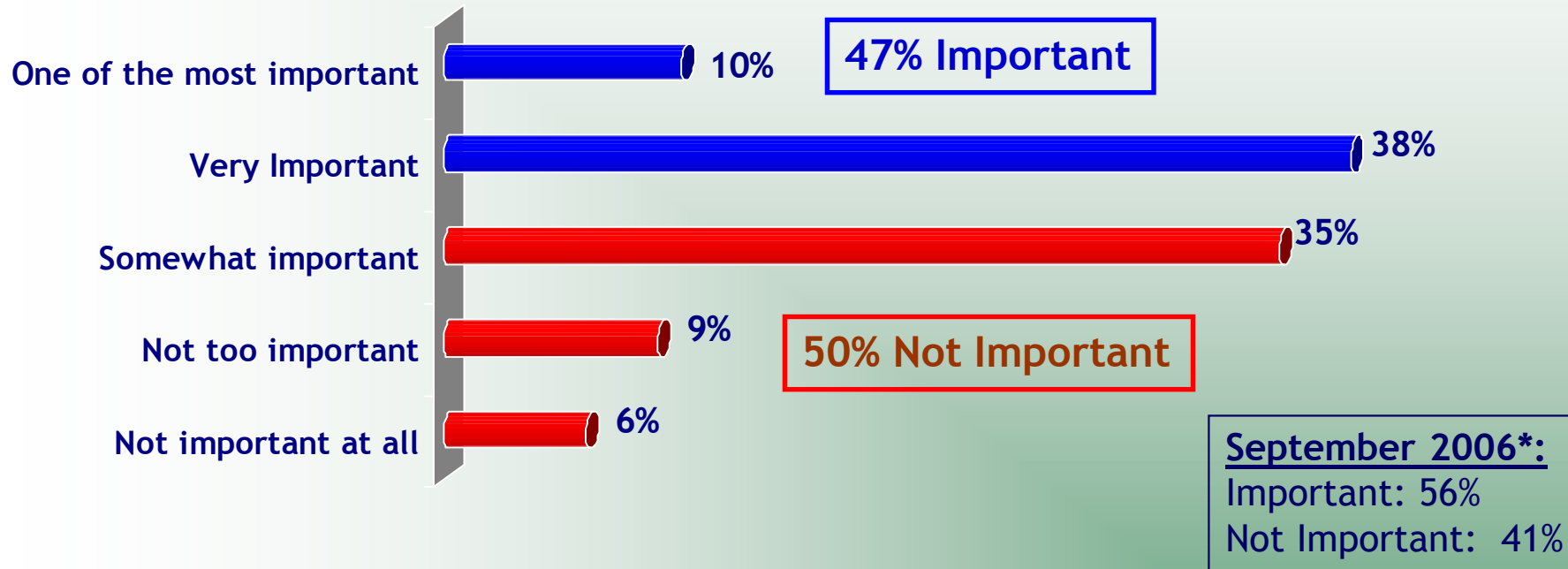
Similar to hearing less from candidates than in previous years, adults say they have not heard enough about public education this year and they want to hear more.



During the election campaigns this year, do you think the candidates are focusing too much, not enough, or about the right amount of attention on public education? *(Asked of half the sample)*



Reflecting their overall focus on pocketbook issues, only half of Americans say that public education is an issue that is important to them as they cast their ballots for President. A third say it is “somewhat” important, but Americans do not often act on priorities that are only “somewhat” important to them.



Among adults who say education is top issue:
Important: 62%
Not Important: 36%

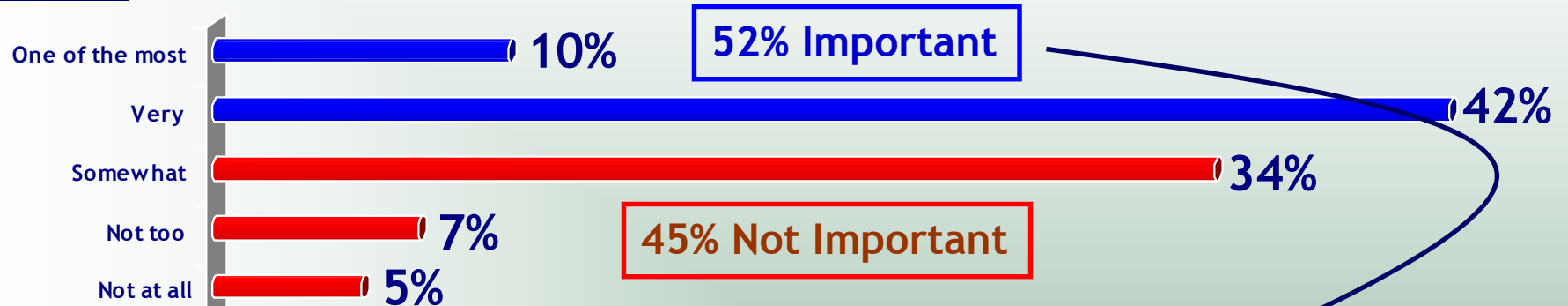
*PEN's Give Kids Good Schools National Survey



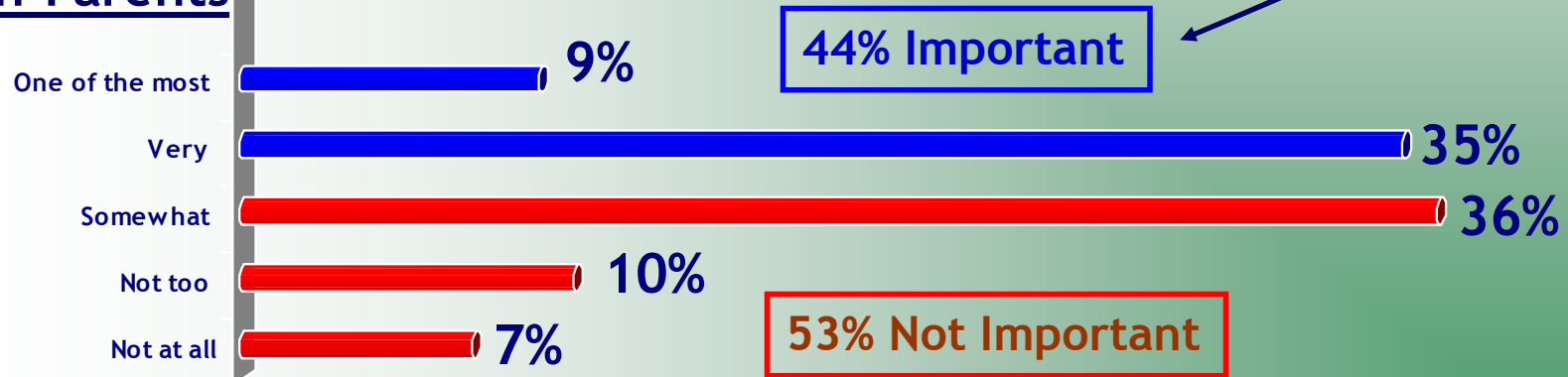
Thinking about the Presidential election. Of all the issues that come up in the election, how important are the candidates' positions on education in helping you decide which candidate to vote for?

Education is an important issue to parents, while non-parents are less likely to use it in their vote criterion.

Parents

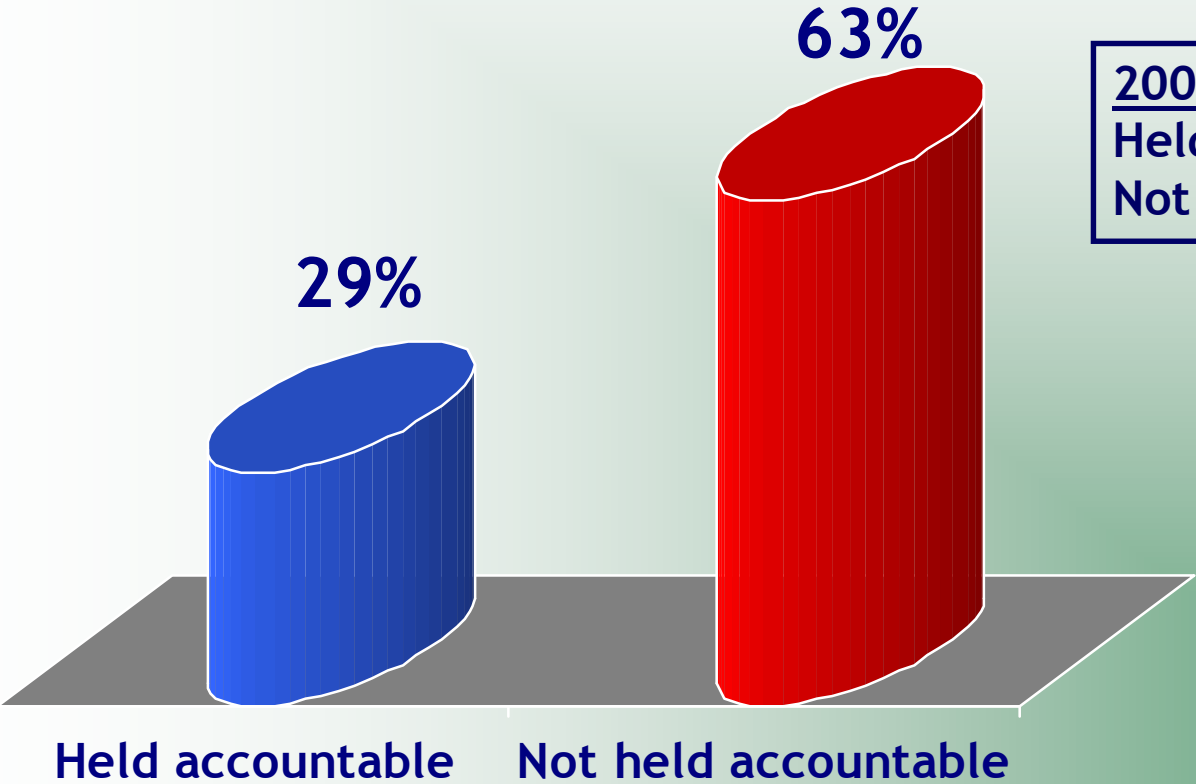


Non-Parents





Americans believe there is a lack of accountability in the political system when it comes to public education. By two-to-one they believe elected officials are NOT held accountable.



2006:
Held accountable: 21%
Not held accountable: 72%

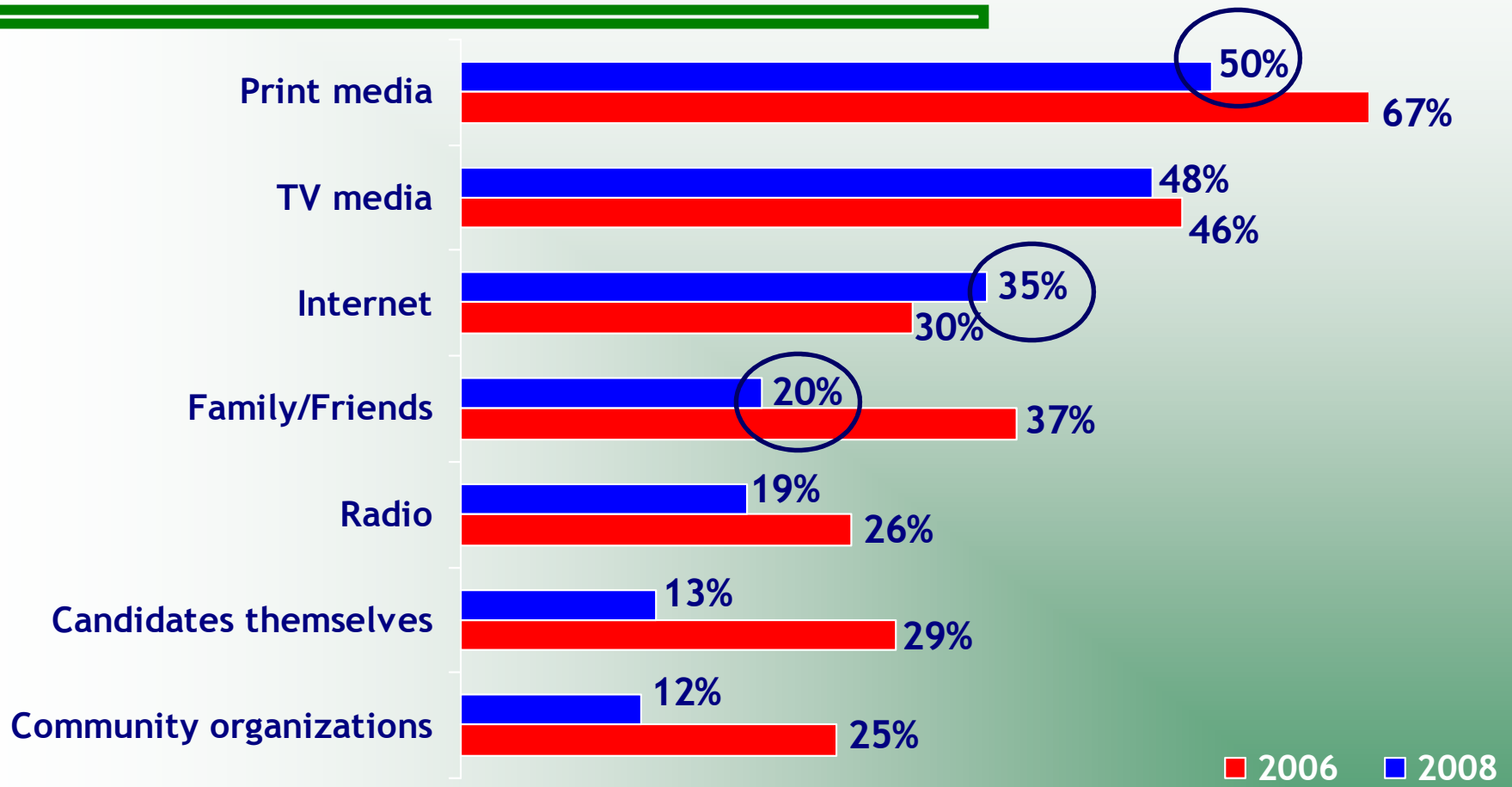
*PEN's Give Kids Good Schools National Survey



Do you think most elected officials are held accountable for their actions on public education or they not held accountable?



Voters have many sources of information when it comes to learning about a candidate's stance on public education. Print media and television dominate, but they are down from 2006. The Internet has risen in that time as a main source of news. However, the most interesting finding is the decline in most other categories, which is a reflection of the overall lowered volume around public education this year.



From which of the following sources are you able to learn information about a candidate's stance on public education? [Multiple responses]





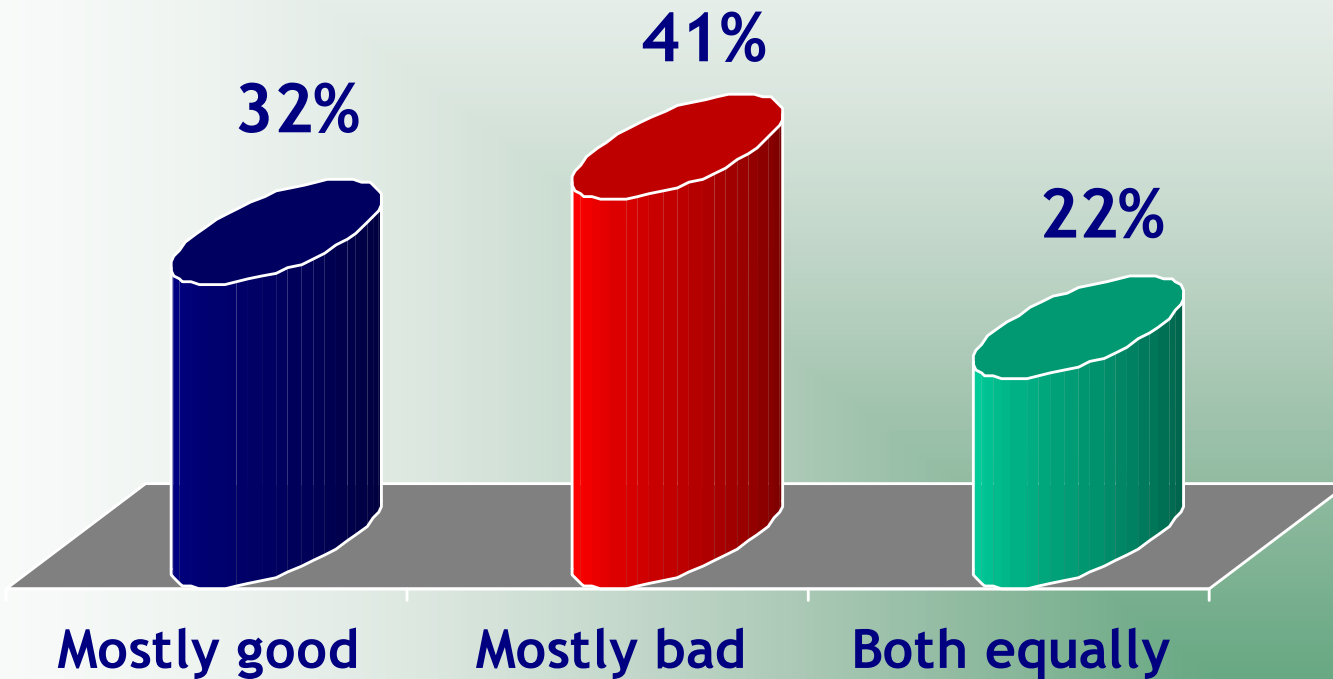
African Americans and Latino/as turn to TV for information about candidates. Whites use print media more than television news.

	Total	White	African American	Latino/a
Print Media	50%	52%	43%	42%
TV Media	46%	42%	61%	50%
Internet	35%	35%	28%	41%
Family/Friends	20%	20%	21%	21%
Radio	19%	19%	20%	19%
Candidates Themselves	13%	13%	16%	14%
Community Org	12%	11%	14%	12%

In 2006, 35% of Latinos turned to the Internet



Americans have mixed reactions when it comes to the type of education stories that appear in news reports. Four in ten think the stories are mostly bad, but a third thinks they are mostly good.



When you think about news reports regarding your local public schools - both on television and in print - do you think the information mostly reports on the good things happening in your public schools or mostly reports on the bad things happening in your local public schools?



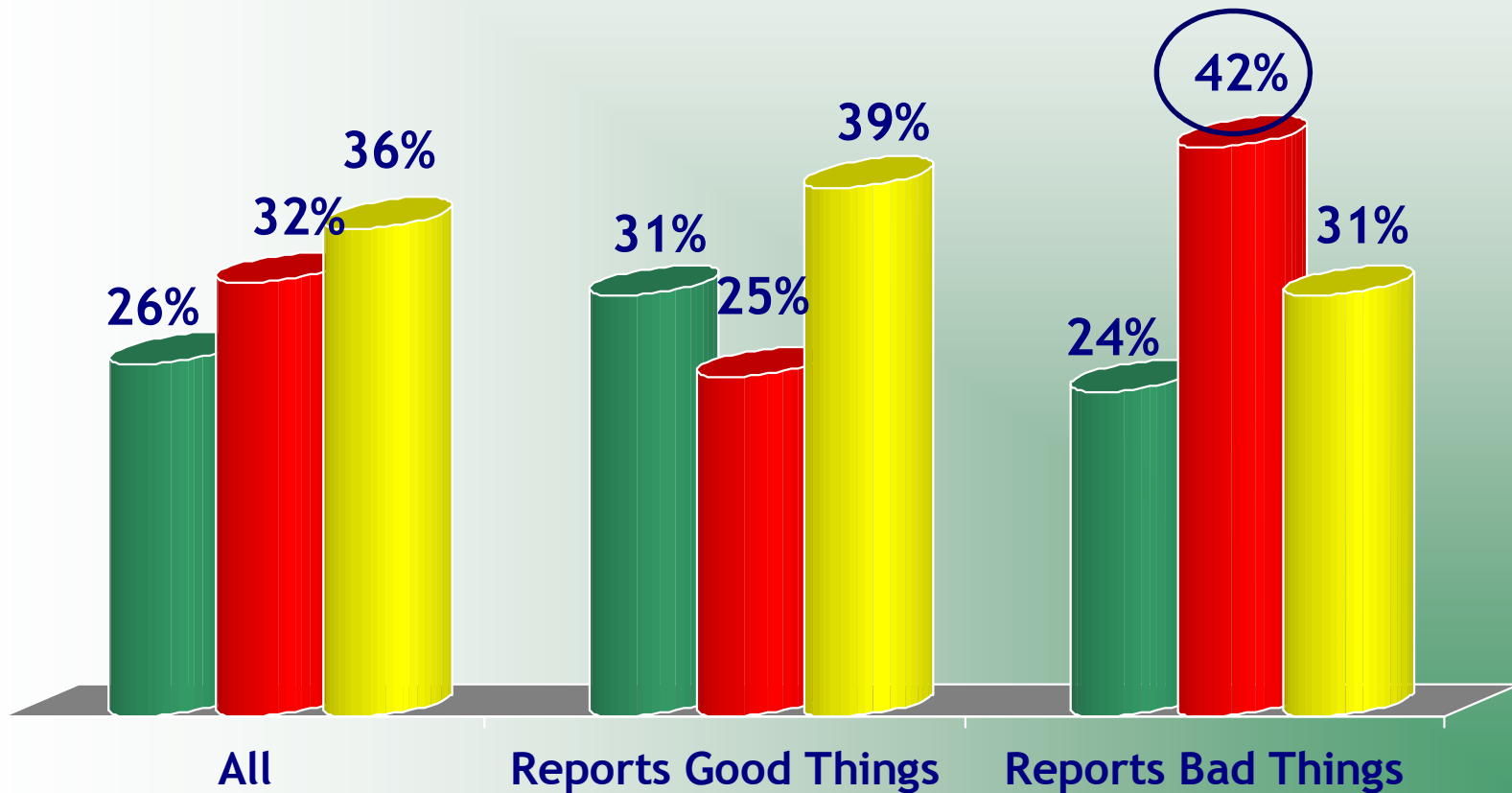


African Americans believe most of the news reports focus on the negative things happening in public schools. Latinos and whites agree, but not with the same depth.

	Total	White	African American	Latino/a
Good things	32%	33%	27%	31%
Bad things	41%	39%	50%	43%
Both equally	22%	23%	20%	20%



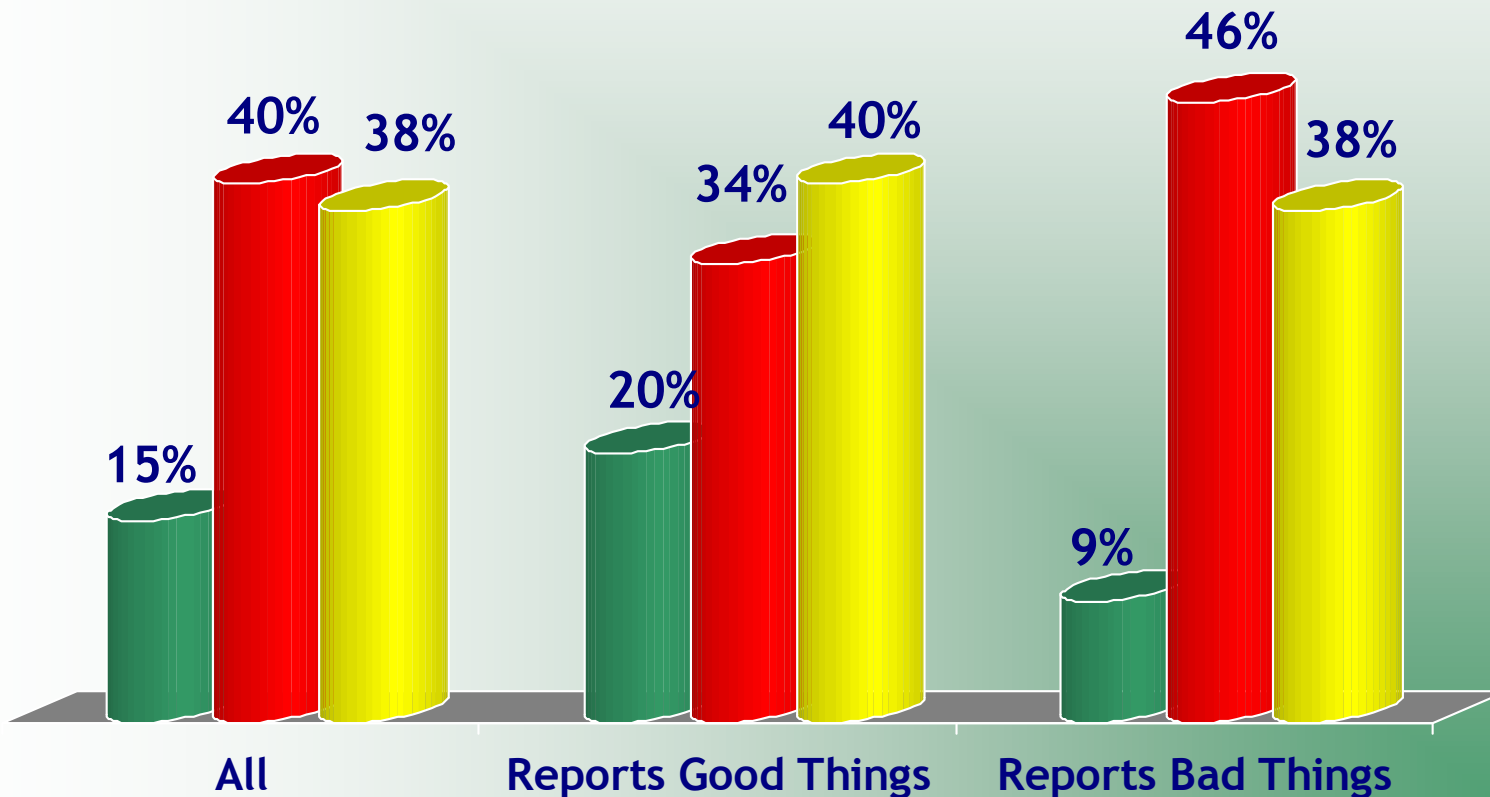
There is a correlation between how adults perceive media reports about their local schools and how they perceive public schools themselves. Adults who believe the media mostly reports on the bad things that are happening with public schools are 17-points more likely to say the schools have declined than adults who feel the media mostly reports on good things.



Over the last five years do you think public schools in your community have improved, declined, or stayed about the same?



When looking at schools nationally, there is a similar correlation. However, more adults who feel the media reports mostly on the good things feel schools have declined nationally than they do locally.



Over the last five years do you think public schools nationally have improved, declined, or stayed about the same?



PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK



The Index

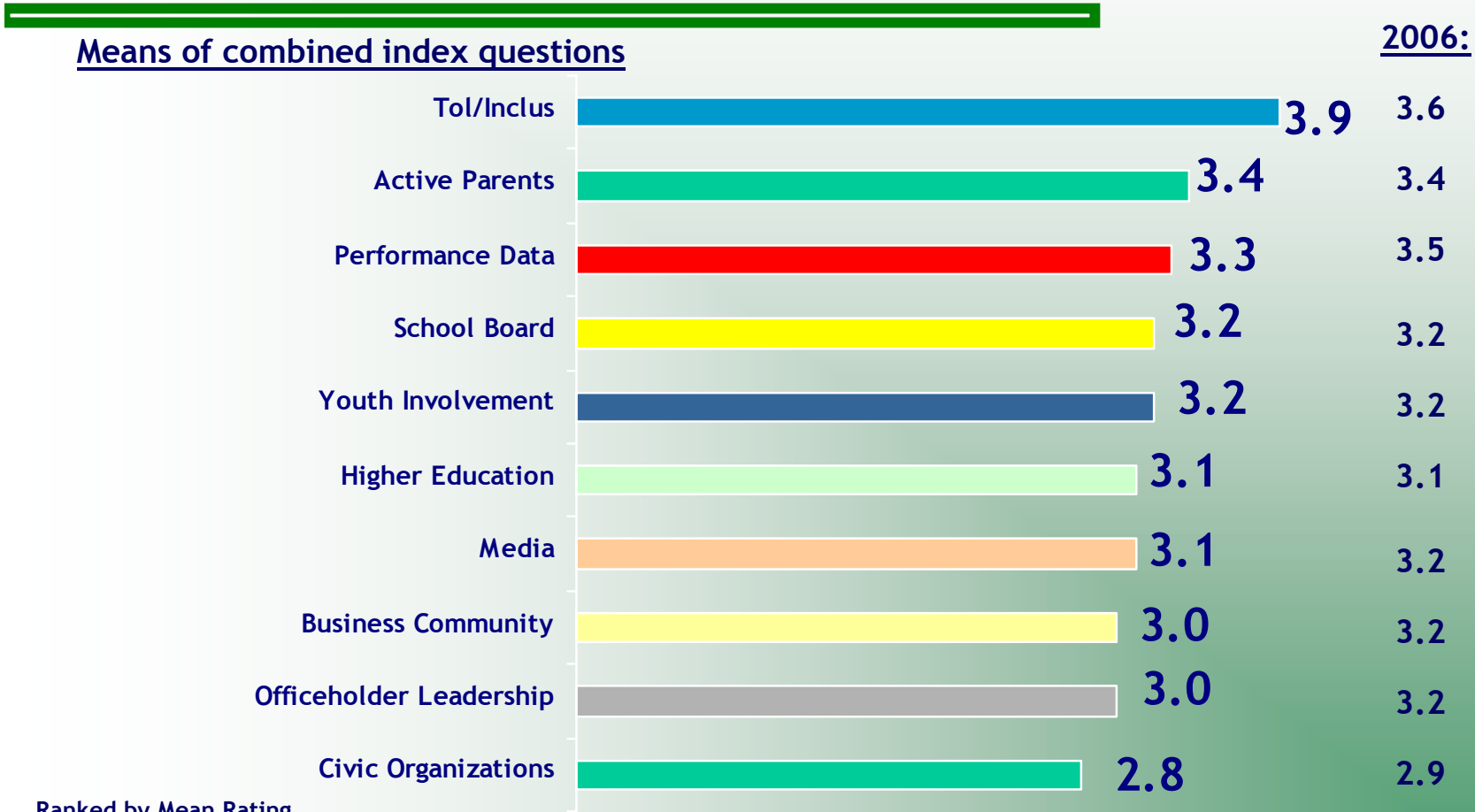


The Index is remarkably stable compared to two years ago. The rank order of the categories is the same, and the means are relatively stable. There has been a slight decline in ratings across the board, but this is probably reflective of the overall lower emphasis on education this year than in years past.





Tolerance and Inclusiveness is the strongest Index category, just as it was in 2006. The rank order of each category is similar to 2006. Most categories have seen a slight drop in overall ratings, but the Tolerance and Inclusiveness category has actually improved.



Ranked by Mean Rating

For each one, I want you to think about your local community and how well it achieves these goals. I would like you to use a scale from ZERO to FIVE where ZERO means your community does not achieve that goal at all and FIVE means your community achieves that goal completely.





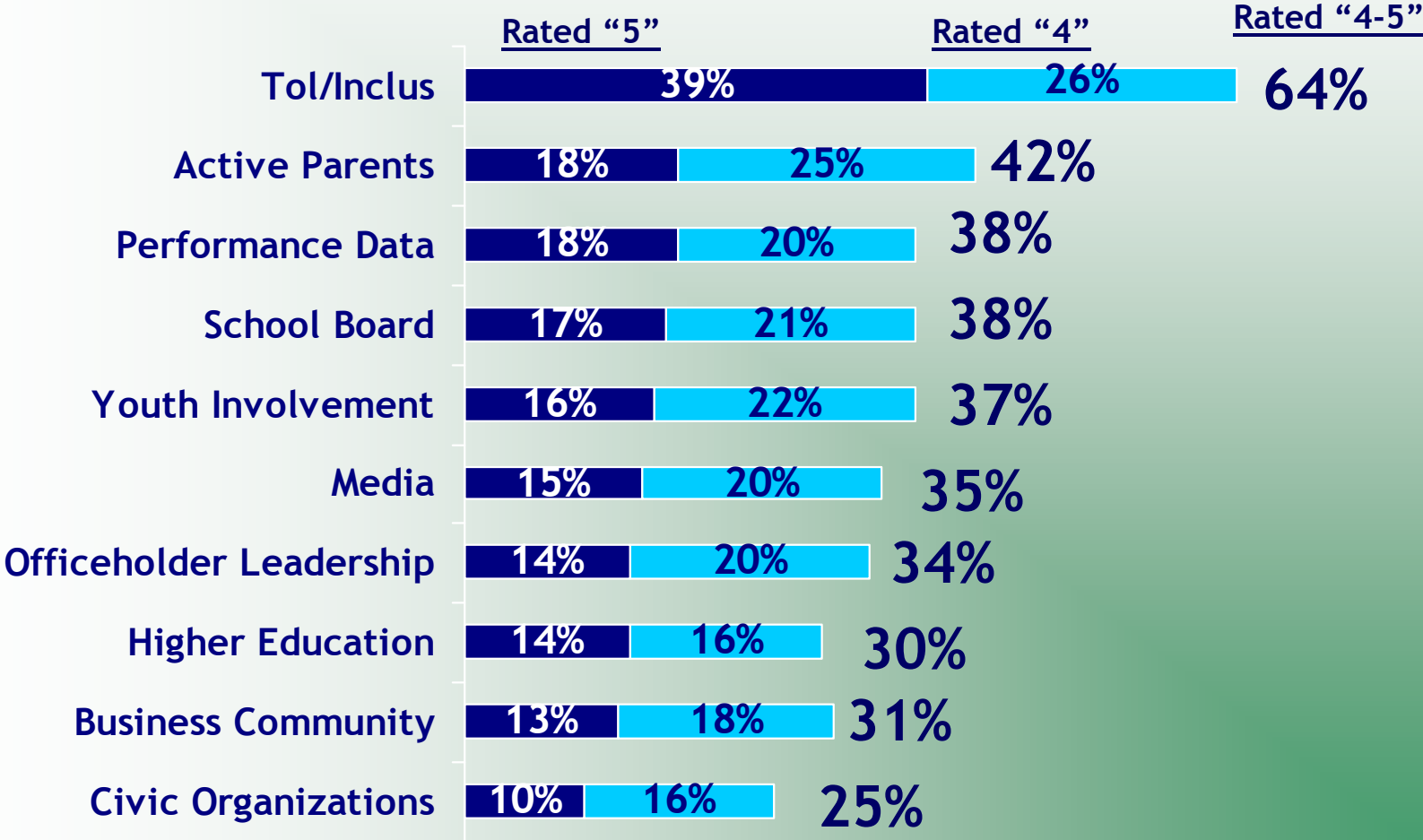
In the combined Index ratings, there are few differences by race or ethnicity. African Americans offer slightly higher ratings for parents in their communities, while Latinos are slightly more positive toward elected leaders. Whites tend to follow the overall trends.

	Total	White	African American	Latino/a
Tolerance and Inclusiveness	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.9
Active Parents	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.3
Performance Data	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4
School Board	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.1
Youth Involvement	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.3
Higher Education	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.3
Media	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.1
Business Community	3.0	3.0	2.8	3.0
Officeholder Leadership	3.0	2.9	3.0	3.2
Civic Organizations	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.9



Tolerance and Inclusiveness has more intense ratings than the other categories, as two-thirds of voters rate this category either a “4” or “5.”

Ratings of combined index questions

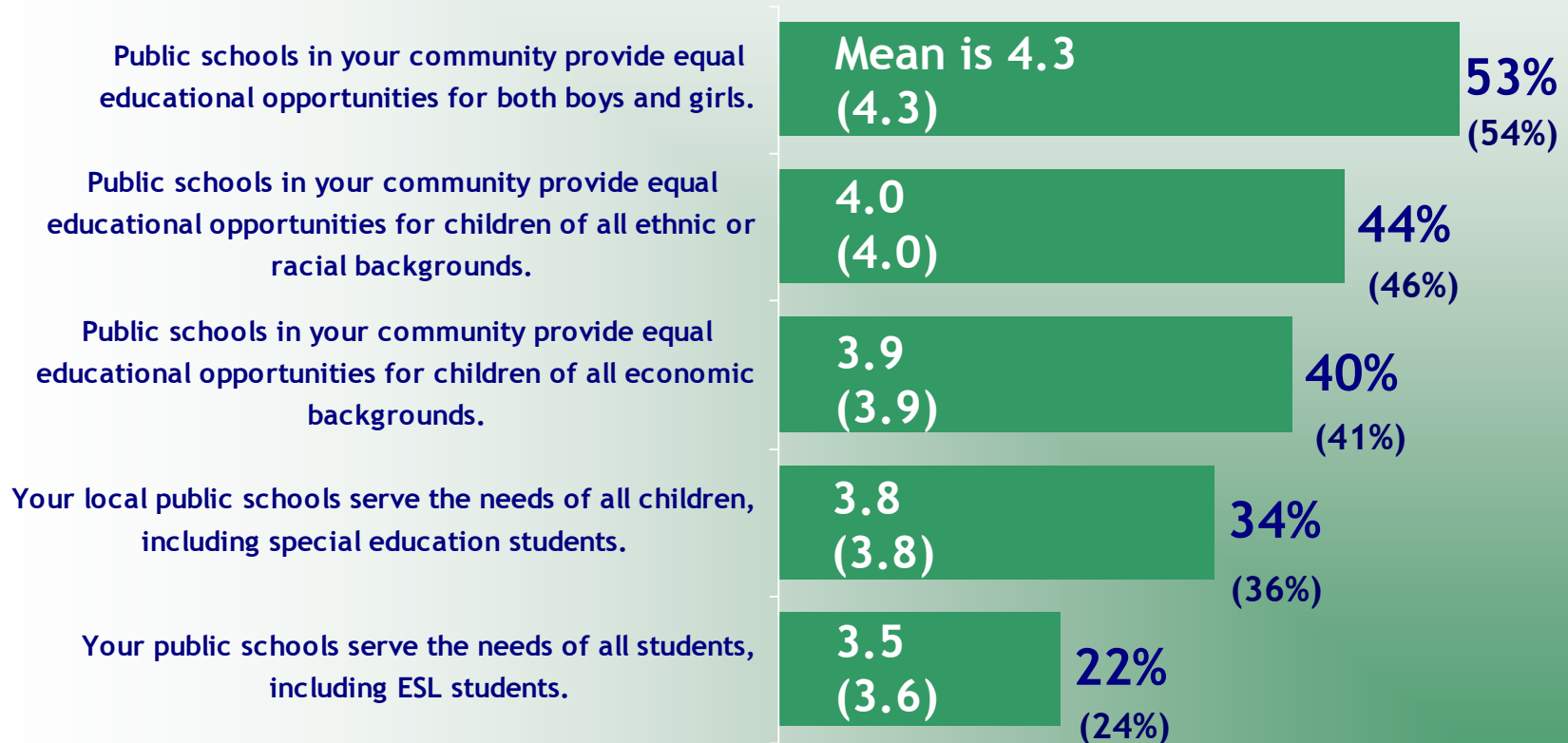




Gender, racial, and economic equality are the highest rated indicators. Americans do make some distinctions - 53% rate gender equality a “5” - but 44% say their community achieves a “5” on equal opportunities across race.

TOLERANCE/INCLUSIVENESS

Ranked by % Rated “5”
(2006 Data)





African Americans are the most hesitant to say that public schools completely achieve the goal of ensuring equal racial educational opportunities, with just over one-third giving their community the highest rating of “5.”

Public schools in your community provide equal educational opportunities for children of all ethnic or racial backgrounds

(Rated on 0-5 scale)	All	White	African American	Latino/a
Mean	4.3	4.1	3.7	4.0
Rated 5	53%	47%	36%	41%



Women and men hold very similar attitudes when it comes to gender equity in public schools in their communities.

Public schools in your community provide equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls

	All	Men	Women
Mean	4.3	4.3	4.3
Rated 5	53%	53%	53%



Across racial and ethnic groups, whites and Latino/as give the highest marks for providing equal opportunities for children of all economic backgrounds, while African Americans give the lowest ratings.

Public schools in your community provide equal educational opportunities for children of all economic backgrounds.

	All	White	African American	Latino/a
Mean	3.9	4.0	3.5	3.9
Rated 5	40%	42%	30%	40%



Parents receive decent marks this year. Adults think schools in their communities do a good job encouraging parental involvement, but offer slightly lower ratings for parents actually participating. The distinction is small, but it is there.

ACTIVE PARENTS

Ranked by % Rated "5"
(2006 Data)

Your local public schools encourage parents to participate and contribute ideas on what it takes to improve education.

Mean is 3.4
(3.5)

21%
(24%)

Parents in your community participate in school related organizations like the PTA and similar organizations that encourage parental involvement.

3.4
(3.4)

17%
(18%)

Parents in your community stay informed about key education issues.

3.3
(3.4)

16%
(19%)

Parents in your community participate actively in their children's education by working with them on homework and other educational activities

3.3
(3.4)

16%
(18%)





Parents give other parents slightly better ratings for staying informed compared to the ratings non-parents offer for that indicator.

Parents in your community stay informed about key education issues.

	All	Parents	Non-Parents
Mean	3.3	3.3	3.2
Rated 5	16%	21%	14%



The overall mean for making sure data on test scores is easily available is relatively high, but there is not much intensity behind that opinion.

PERFORMANCE DATA

Ranked by % Rated "5"
(2006 Data)

There is easily available data on the test scores and graduation rates of your local high schools and how they compared to other schools in your area

Mean is 3.6
(3.7)

25%
(28%)

Voters in your community heavily weigh the issue of public education when they decided which candidates to support for public office.

3.1
(3.2)

11%
(14%)





The public gives voters in their community better marks for voting in the school board elections than paying attention to what the school board is doing - but that could have spiked because of this year's high-turnout Presidential primaries.

SCHOOL BOARD

Ranked by % Rated "5"
(2006 Data)

Members in your community not only vote in Presidential elections, but also vote in local school board elections

Mean is 3.5
(3.3)

22%
(16%)

Voters in your community pay attention to what the school board is doing, by attending school board meetings, watching school board meetings on TV, or reading about the school board in the newspaper or other print media

3.0
(3.1)

11%
(13%)

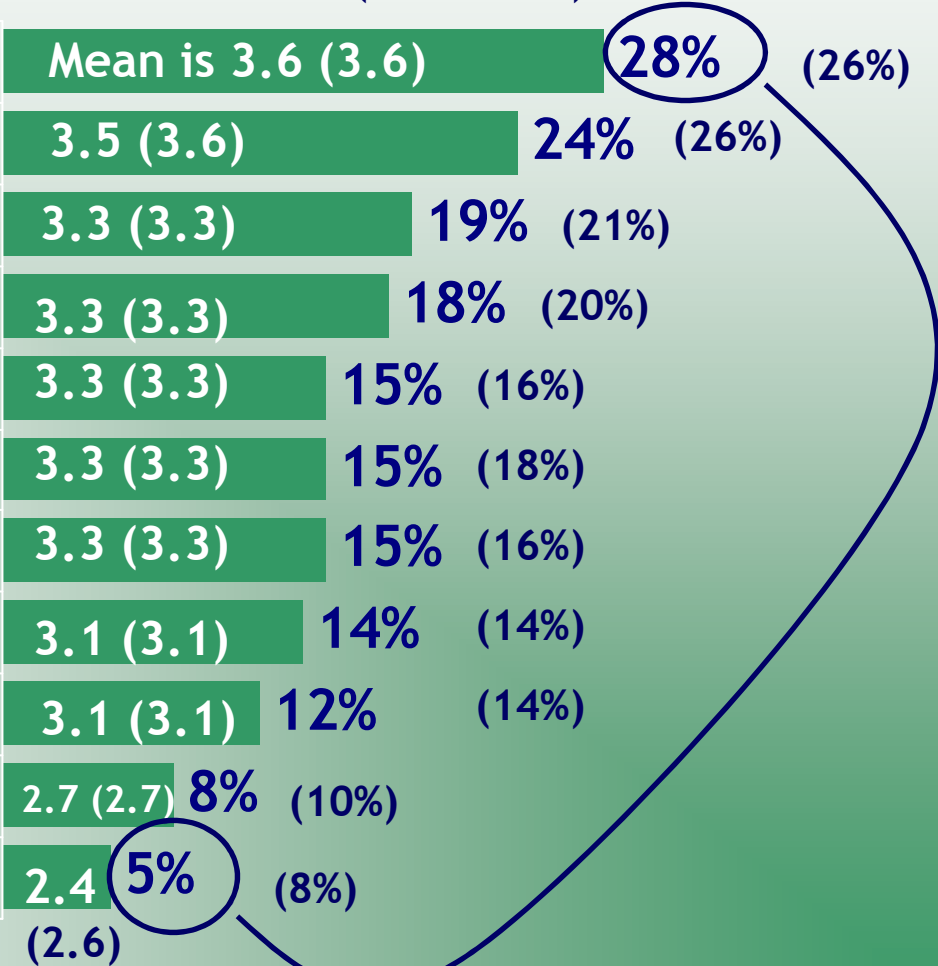


Adults believe the youth in the community are an asset, but they do not believe children are given a real say in their education.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Ranked by % Rated "5"
(2006 Data)

- Your community believes and reinforces that young people are an asset to the community.
- Your local public schools offer students counseling and other services when necessary so that schools meet student needs emotionally, not just academically.
- Your local public schools encourage students to participate in civic activities outside of school, such as getting involved in the community and volunteering their time.
- Your local area has community youth associations that encourage and support young people to participate in civic activities.
- Your schools teach skills and civic values necessary for participating in your community.
- Your local community has organizations that provide resources such as mentors and social and health services that help ensure young people are supported.
- Your local public schools encourage students to discuss important current public issues and to discuss the issues from different points of view.
- Local colleges and universities assist the local public schools by encouraging their college students to volunteer in public schools.
- Your local public schools teach young people the skills and values necessary to effectively participate in the political and electoral process.
- Organizations in your community gather young people's input on what it would take to improve a young person's education experience.
- The public schools in your area give students a real say in decision-making on the school board and on advisory councils about how their schools should operate.





The media fares decently in this year’s National Index, but it is not an overwhelming endorsement. Remember, these adults think they hear less than they want to hear on candidates’ education positions and they weigh that in the ratings they give to the media and officeholders.

MEDIA

Ranked by % Rated “5”
(2006 Data)

Your local news media, including TV and print media, reports on the educational platforms of candidates when they run for state and local office*

Mean is 3.3
(3.4)

20%
(22%)

Your local news reporting, including TV and print media, helps the public understand the public education issues by regularly reporting in-depth on public school issues.

3.1
(3.2)

15%
(18%)

Your local news media, including TV and print media, reports on the voting record of elected officials when it comes to public education and the extent of which elected officials keep their campaign promises in regards to public education*

2.7
(3.0)

9%
(15%)



*Asked of half the sample



The business community also receives decent overall marks, but again, there is little intensity. As we learned earlier, there is a lot of confusion over how businesses are or might become involved in public schools.

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Ranked by % Rated "5"
(2006 Data)

Local businesses in your community support and advocate for public schools by offering resources like internships, financial support, and other assistance that helps student achievement

Mean is 3.1
(3.2)

13%
(15%)

Local businesses offer time off and compensation to their employees when employees need to attend public school related events such as parent-teacher conferences

2.8
(2.8)

12%
(11%)



Some of this may stem from the public’s attitude that elected leaders do not communicate with them. Officeholders receive some of the lowest overall ratings in this year’s Index, not surprising when most adults think there is little accountability in the system.

OFFICEHOLDER LEADERSHIP

Ranked by % Rated “5”
(2006 Data)

The voting record of your local officials regarding public education is easily available.

Mean is 3.3
(3.4)

18%
(22%)

Your locally elected officials demonstrate commitment to public education by voting for or seeking adequate financial support for public schools.

3.3
(3.4)

14%
(18%)

Elected officials in your community consistently communicate with their constituents regarding public education by sponsoring mailings on education or by hosting public meetings with constituents.

2.7
(2.8)

9%
(12%)

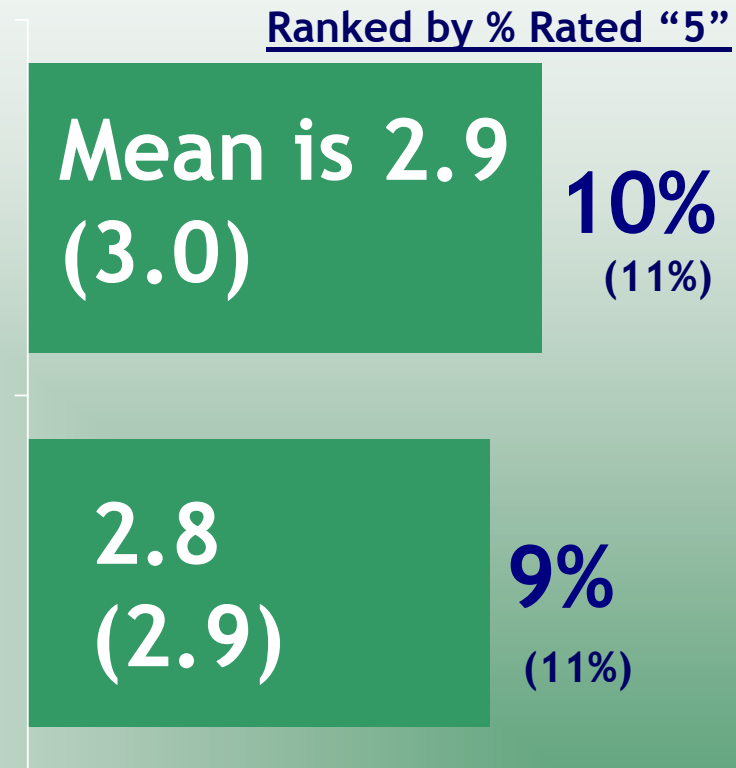


Civic organizations also receive lower ratings, perhaps because there is lingering confusion on what constitutes a civic organization. The language may need tweaking in future research.

CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations in your community make attempts to gather information about the area's public schools and share that information with parents in the community.

Local organizations work to improve low-performing schools.





**PUBLIC
EDUCATION
NETWORK**



1726 M St., NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-776-9066
Fax: 202-776-9074
www.lakeresearch.com



1936 University Ave
Suite 300
Berkeley, CA 94704
Phone: 510-286-2097
Fax: 510-704-1920
Info@lakeresearch.com