

Populace Insights: Private Opinion in America

“Ten people who speak make more noise
than ten thousand who are silent.”

— Napoleon Bonaparte

Abstract

What it is:

A national quantitative survey that reveals Americans' private opinions about sensitive topics from a representative sample of 3,334 American adults. It estimates the gap between Americans' privately held beliefs and their publicly vocalized opinions. It was conducted by the think tank Populace, powered by the research data company YouGov.

How it was conducted:

The primary methodology of the survey was a list experiment (also known as item count technique), a survey technique designed to maximize respondents' privacy. Rather than directly asking respondents their opinion on a series of sensitive topics, list experiments conceal respondents' answers as part of the methodological design by aggregating responses to sensitive items with other items, minimizing social desirability and nonresponse biases.

Americans' *private* opinions were contrasted against their *public* opinions on the same sensitive topics by comparing list experiment results to those obtained by traditional public opinion polling methods. See Appendix A for a detailed methodological description of list experiments.

Survey conducted: May 23 - June 8, 2022

About Populace:

Populace is a Boston-based think tank dedicated to building a world where all people have the chance to live fulfilling lives in a thriving society. Populace's private opinion research offers new insights into what Americans actually believe, with polling methodologies that reduce the distorting effects of social influence commonly found in traditional public opinion research.

For more information, visit [Populace.org](https://populace.org).

Key Findings

01 Everyone is feeling social pressure. The pressure to misrepresent our private views — to offer answers on politically and socially sensitive questions that are out of sync with our true beliefs — is pervasive in society today. Across all demographics, every subgroup had *multiple* issues with at least a double-digit gap between public and private opinion.

02 As groups, Hispanics and independents are the *least* comfortable sharing their private views in public. Across demographic groups, Hispanics and Independents have the greatest number of sensitive topics with double-digit gaps between public and private opinion (14 out of 25 issues, although what constitutes “sensitive” is not identical for the groups). In contrast, the groups that have the *fewest* topics with such gaps are Republicans and Democrats (4 of 25).

03 A majority of people say publicly that mask wearing was effective, but they don’t believe it in private. Whereas 59% of Americans publicly agree that wearing a mask was an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19, only 47% percent privately hold that view (a 12-point gap).

04 When it comes to abortion, men are not as supportive as their public opinions would suggest. In public, a majority of men (60%) agree the decision to have an abortion should be left to a woman and her doctor; however, in private that number is only 45%. In addition, most men (52%) publicly say that “abortion should be legal in most cases,” but in private that is not the majority view (48%).

05 An overwhelming majority of Americans do not want CEOs taking public stances on controversial social issues. Only 14% of Americans privately agree that CEOs should take such stances, although twice as many people will say that they support it publicly. Importantly, this view holds broadly in society: there is no demographic where a majority actually wants CEOs taking public stances on controversial issues.

06 For people between the ages of 30 and 44, the two biggest public-private gaps both relate to education. First, the vast majority (74%) of people in this age group *privately* think parents should have more influence over public school curriculums, but only 48% are willing to say so publicly. Second, while in public a majority (60%) say discussing gender identity in public schools is inappropriate for young children (K-3), in private this is not the majority view (only 40% privately agree).

07 Only a third of people privately think that schools are focusing too much on racism. In public, 43% of people say public schools are focusing too much on racism in the U.S. However, in private that number is ten points lower (33%). This trend of greater public agreement than private holds for almost all subgroups.

Introduction

Social pressure to have the “right” opinion is pervasive in America today. In recent years, polls have consistently found that most Americans, across all demographics, feel they cannot share their honest opinions in public for fear of offending others or incurring retribution. This trend is concerning because of the threat that it poses to individual freedoms, community flourishing, and democratic self-government.

One important, but underappreciated, consequence of a culture of censorship is that it can lead individuals not only to self-silence, but also publicly misrepresent their own private views (what scholars call *preference falsification*). It is essential to understand the extent to which people are misrepresenting their views today, because when preference falsification becomes widespread in a society it can result in collective illusions that drive false polarization, erode trust, and hold back social progress.

The aim of this report is to better understand the extent of preference falsification in America by revealing gaps between public and private opinion on some of the most sensitive issues in society today. To accomplish this, we utilized a private opinion method called “list experiment” (also known as item-count technique). Rather than directly asking respondents their opinion, list experiments conceal respondents’ answers by aggregating responses to sensitive items with other items, minimizing both social desirability and nonresponse biases.

In revealing the private opinions of the American public across a range of sensitive topics and surfacing areas where the misrepresentation of private views has established a false consensus in the public narrative, this report aims to contribute to more open and honest political and social discourse.

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We tested a total of 25 statements. Statements are grouped thematically, as outlined below. Read page by page, or use the links below to navigate to a statement of interest.

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Statements on Mental Health

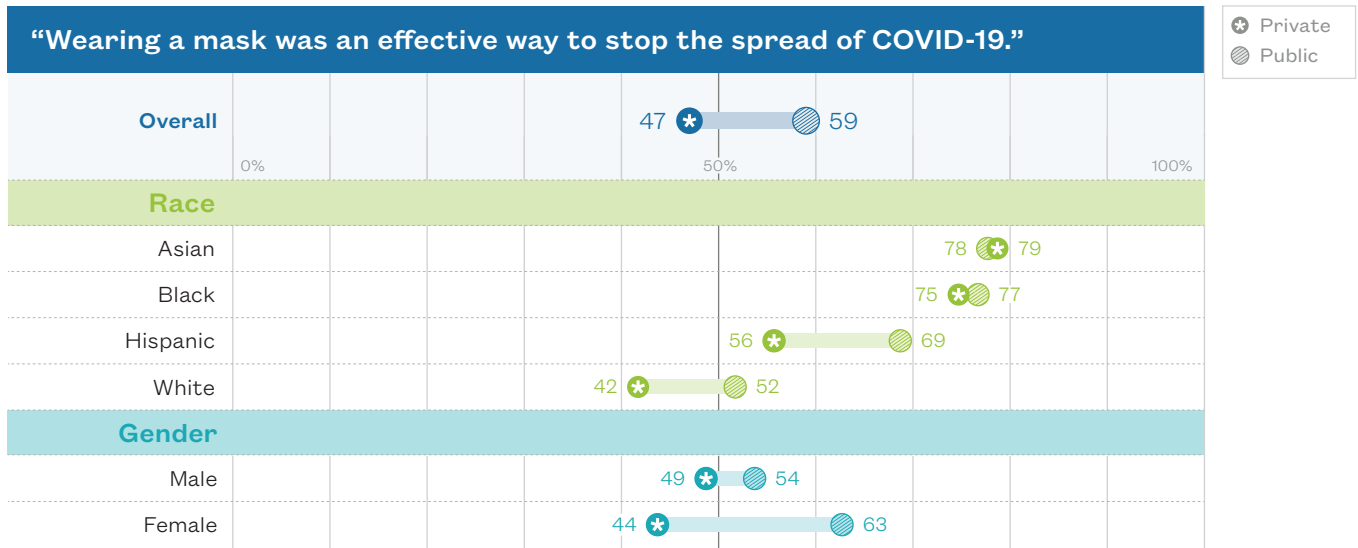
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| 23 | In the past 5 years, I experienced at least one mental health issue. | Page 30 |
| 24 | If I had a mental health disorder, I would not be comfortable disclosing it. | Page 31 |
| 25 | Most mental illness can be overcome by willpower. | Page 32 |

Statement 1

Wearing a mask was an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19

Public opinion polling has consistently demonstrated that a majority of Americans believe masks are an effective way to limit the spread of COVID-19. Despite a steady decline since October 2020, a [March 2022 public opinion poll conducted by Axios](#) revealed a majority of Americans (65%) still believe that masks have been shown to limit the spread of COVID-19 from person to person.

However, *Private Opinion in America* revealed a potentially false consensus. Even though roughly 6 in 10 Americans (59%) publicly agree that wearing a mask was an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19, fewer than half (47%) agree to the same statement when asked privately. The gap between public and private opinion is being driven by several sub-populations of America.



In particular, White and Hispanic Americans are disproportionately more likely to withhold their private opinions. While 69% of Hispanic Americans publicly maintain that masks were an effective preventative measure against COVID-19, only 56% agree in private. The already comparatively low public agreement among White Americans (52%) falls below the 50% threshold when given the opportunity to privately agree (42%).

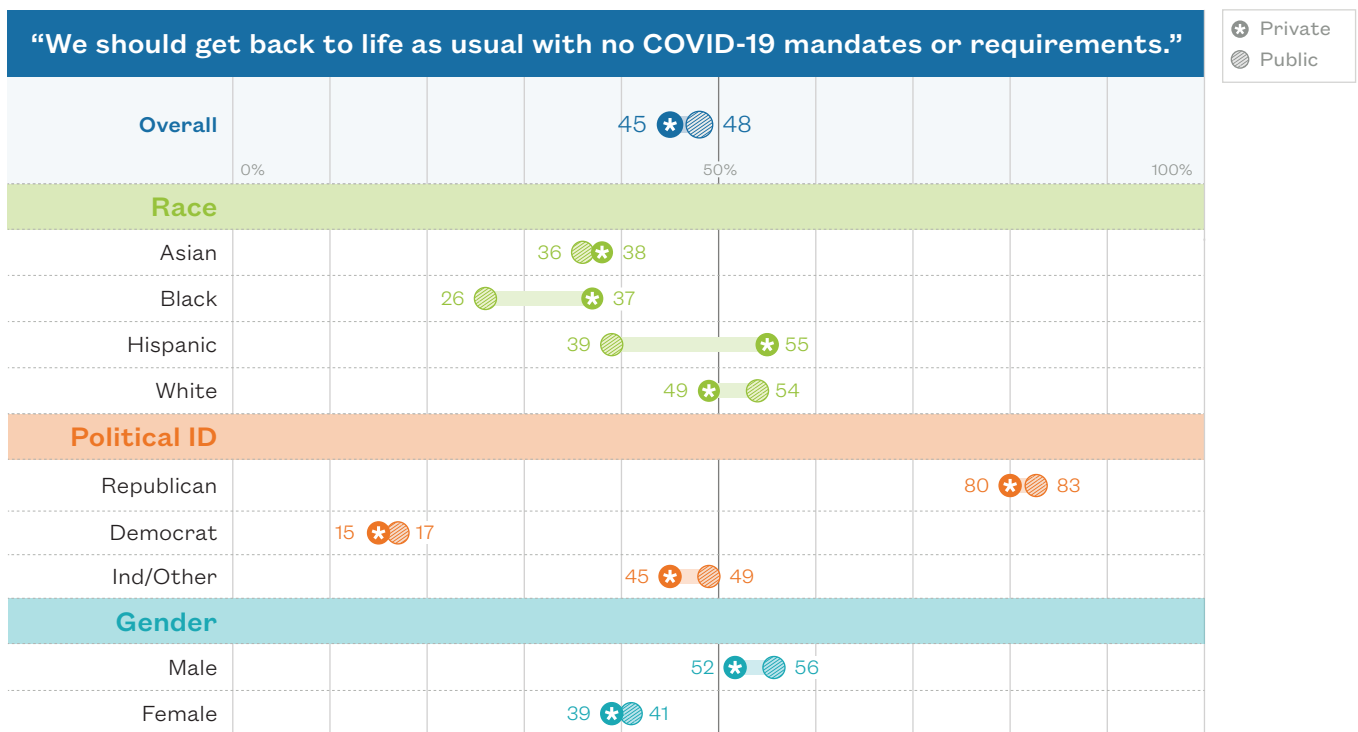
A majority of men and women publicly assert that masks were effective at reducing the spread of COVID-19, yet fewer than half of both men and women agree with the statement in private. The gap between public and private sentiment is particularly pronounced among women, for whom there is a 19-point difference between public (63%) and private agreement (44%).

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Statement 2

We should get back to life as usual with no COVID-19 mandates or requirements

In a late [February 2022 YouGov poll](#), 51% of Americans agreed that we need to learn to live with COVID-19 and get back to normal. Traditional public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America* identified a similar percentage of Americans (48%) who agree that we should get back to life as usual with no COVID-19 mandates or requirements. And while private opinion polling was largely consistent in the aggregate, some sub-populations of America revealed stark differences between their publicly stated and privately held opinions.



In particular, Black and Hispanic Americans were far more likely to privately agree we should get back to life as usual with no COVID-19 mandates or requirements (37% and 55%, respectively) than they were to publicly admit (26% and 39%, respectively).

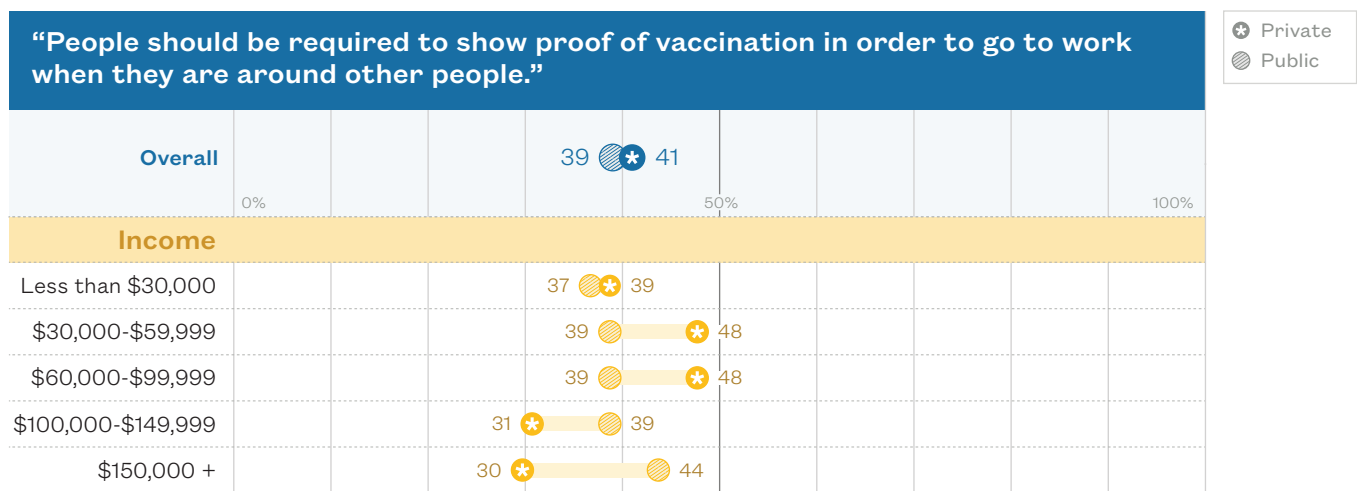
In addition, Republicans and men are the only two demographic groups where a majority support getting back to life as usual with no COVID-19 mandates or requirements in both public (83% and 56%, respectively) and private (80% and 52%, respectively).

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Statement 3

People should be required to show proof of vaccination in order to go to work when they are around other people

In a [March 2022 poll conducted by Monmouth University Polling Institute](#), 44% of Americans supported a requirement to show proof of vaccination in order to go to work around other people. *Private Opinion in America's* traditional public opinion polling revealed similar levels of agreement in June 2022: 39% of Americans agreed people should be required to show proof of vaccination to work around others. Even when offered privacy, results did not differ greatly — 41% of Americans privately agreed.



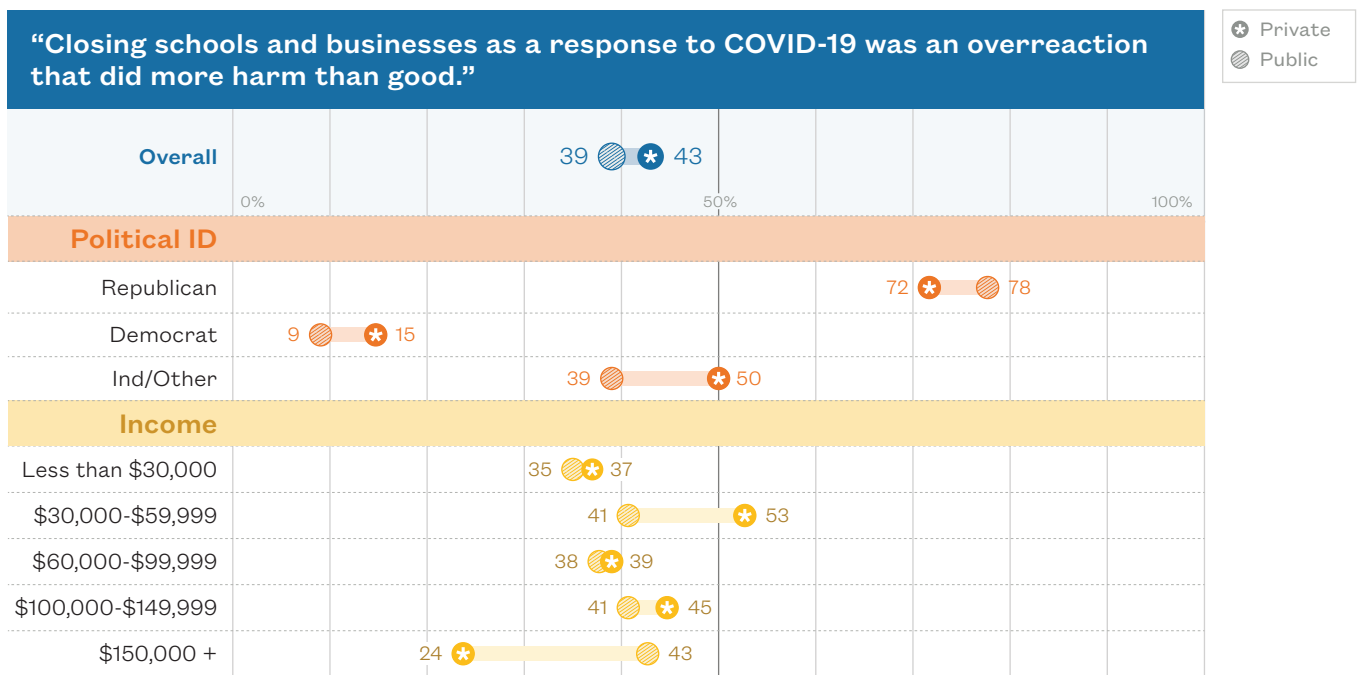
With respect to income, the general trend shows greater private agreement than public agreement, but the trend reversed for those in higher income brackets. Americans living in a household with a combined income of \$100k+ were more likely to publicly agree that people should be required to show proof of vaccination than they were to privately agree.

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Statement 4

Closing schools and businesses as a response to COVID-19 was an overreaction that did more harm than good

A [February 2022 poll conducted by Marquette Law School](#) found that 35% of Wisconsin state voters believed closing schools and businesses as a response to COVID-19 was an overreaction that did more harm than good. Among a nationally representative sample, *Private Opinion in America* found that 39% of Americans agreed the closure of schools and businesses went too far. Private opinion polling revealed a similar sentiment: 43% of Americans saw closing schools and businesses as an overreaction to COVID-19.



Across all demographics, Republicans were the only subgroup to both publicly and privately agree that closing schools and businesses was an overreaction to COVID-19. In addition, people making \$150,000 or more per year had the largest gap between public and private opinion of all demographic groups, with their private opinion being 19 points lower than their public opinion. In other words, less than a quarter (only 24%) of people making more than \$150k per year privately believed that closing schools and businesses did more harm than good, whereas 43% of them agreed with that statement in public.

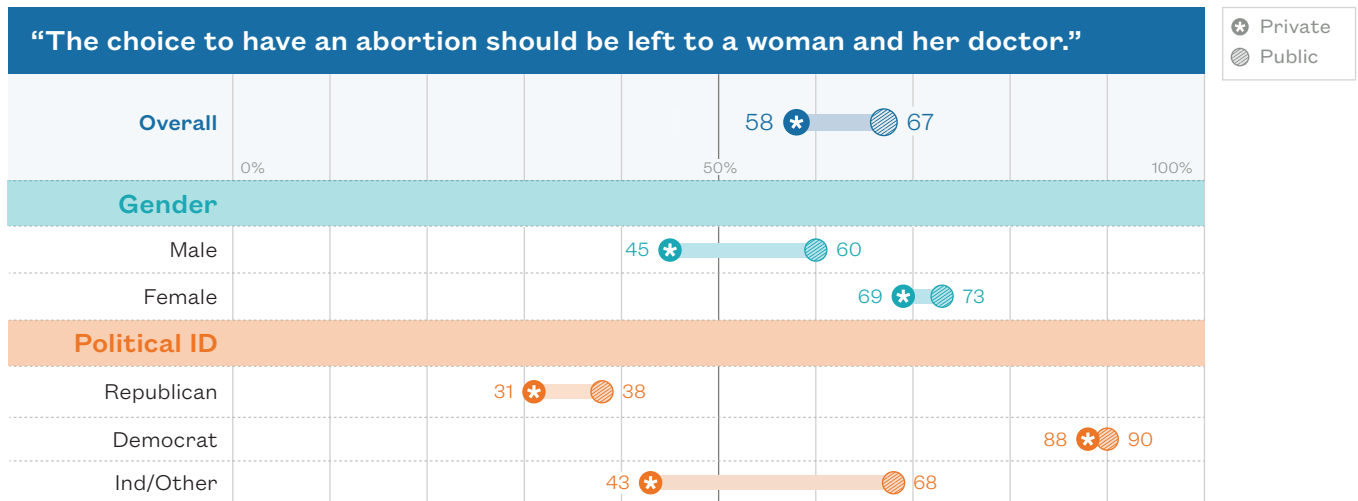
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Statement 5

The choice to have an abortion should be left to a woman and her doctor

Public opinion polls consistently reaffirm Americans’ strong support for a woman’s right to make decisions about her reproductive health. In a recent [May 2022 poll conducted by ABC News and the Washington Post](#), 70% of Americans report believing that the decision of whether a woman can have an abortion should be left to a woman and her doctor.

Using traditional polling techniques, *Private Opinion in America* found a similar result: 67% of Americans agreed that the choice to have an abortion should be left to a woman and her doctor. However, private opinion polling revealed less overall enthusiasm: when given privacy, only 58% of American adults agreed with the statement. So where does the rift between public and private opinion exist?



Even though a large majority of men (60%) publicly agreed that terminating a pregnancy is a decision reserved for a woman and her doctor, fewer than half (45%) agreed when given privacy. In contrast, women’s private support (69%) largely matched their public support (73%).

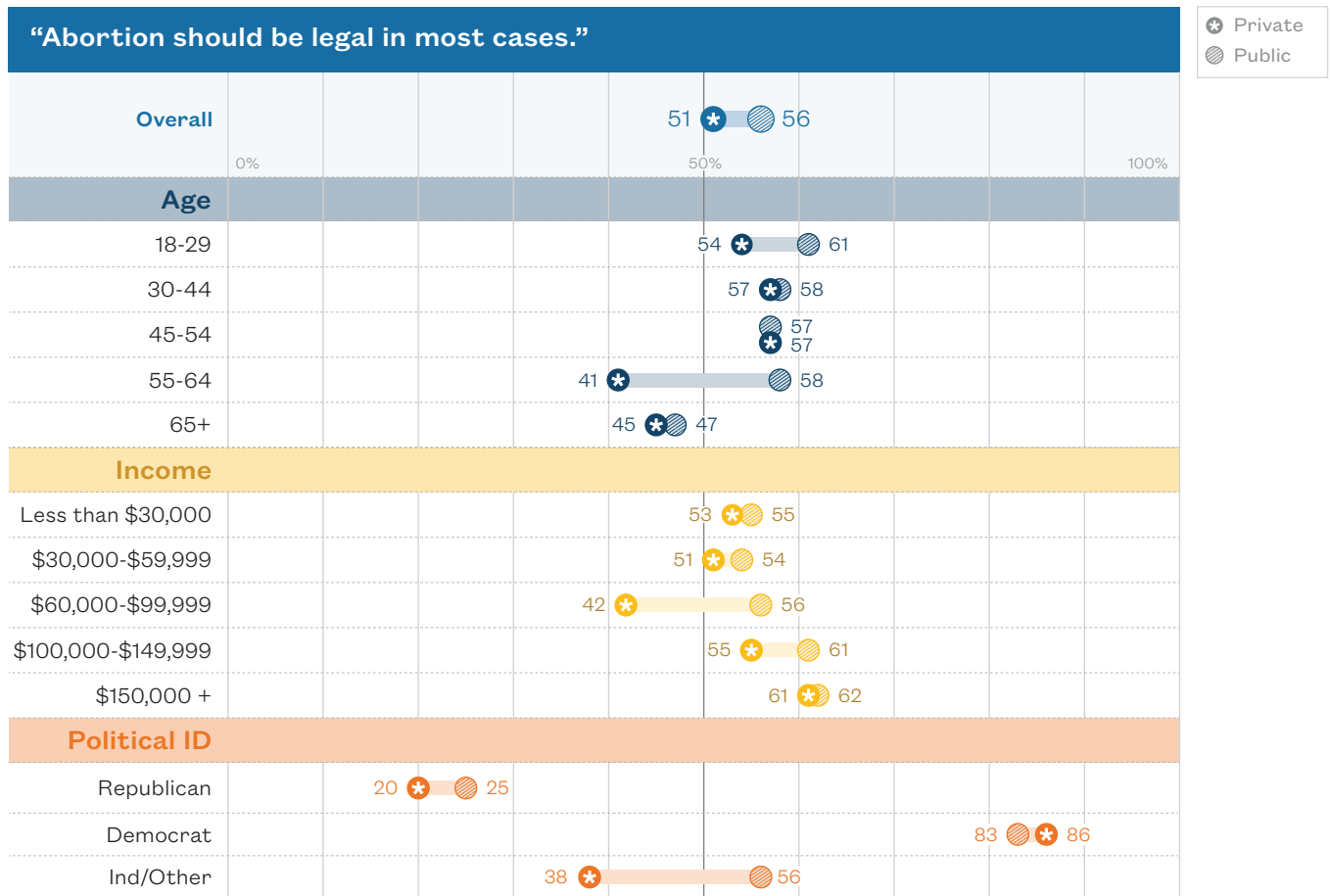
Additionally, a large discrepancy between public and private opinion exists among Americans who don’t identify with either the Republican or Democratic party. Despite two out of three Independents (68%) publicly expressing their support for the statement, fewer than half (43%) express the same support in private.

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Statement 6

Abortion should be legal in most cases

A [May 2021 Gallup poll](#) found that 45% of Americans believed abortions should be legal in most or all cases. In June 2022, public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America* revealed majority support among Americans (56%) when the statement was limited to “most cases,” leaving the possibility for some restrictions. Even when offered privacy, a majority of Americans (51%) agreed that abortion should be legal in most cases.



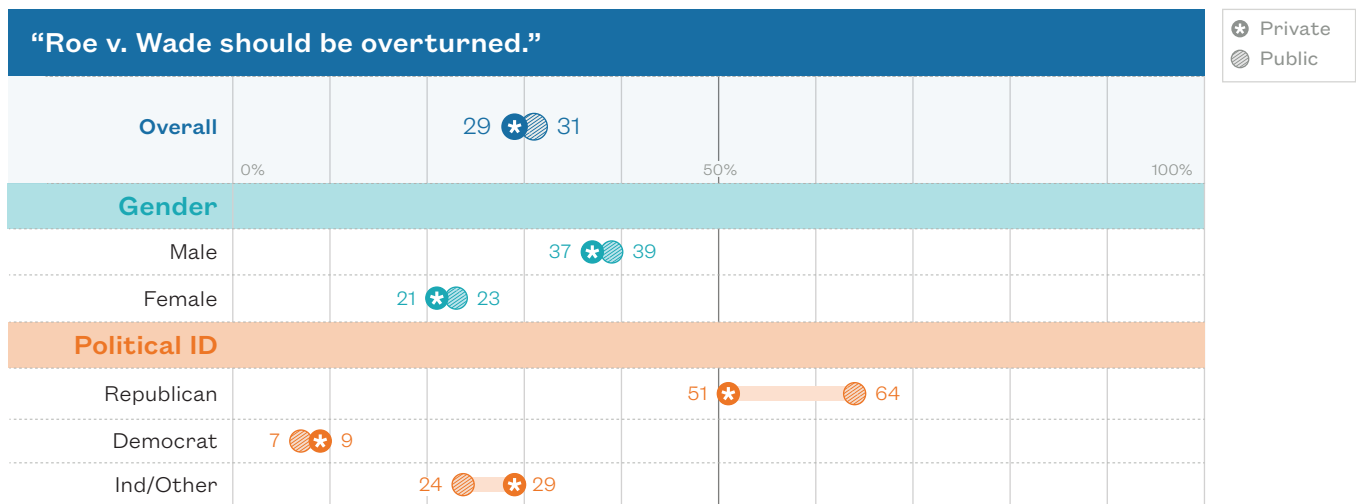
Where gaps between public and private opinion exist on this issue, Americans were more likely to agree publicly than privately. In particular, Americans aged 55-64, those with a household income of \$60k-\$99k, and politically unaffiliated Americans were the most likely to withhold their private opinions publicly.

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Statement 7

Roe v. Wade should be overturned

In a [May 2022 ABC News and the Washington Post poll](#), slightly more than one in four Americans (28%) reported they thought the U.S. Supreme Court should overturn *Roe v. Wade* — nearly identical to the 31% detected in *Private Opinion in America* using public opinion polling. In the aggregate, Americans’ public opinions matches their private opinions: when offered privacy, 29% of Americans agree that *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned.



Unlike opinions regarding a woman’s right to choose, neither men nor women distort their true opinions in a meaningful way regarding the former legal precedent guaranteeing Americans the right to an abortion.

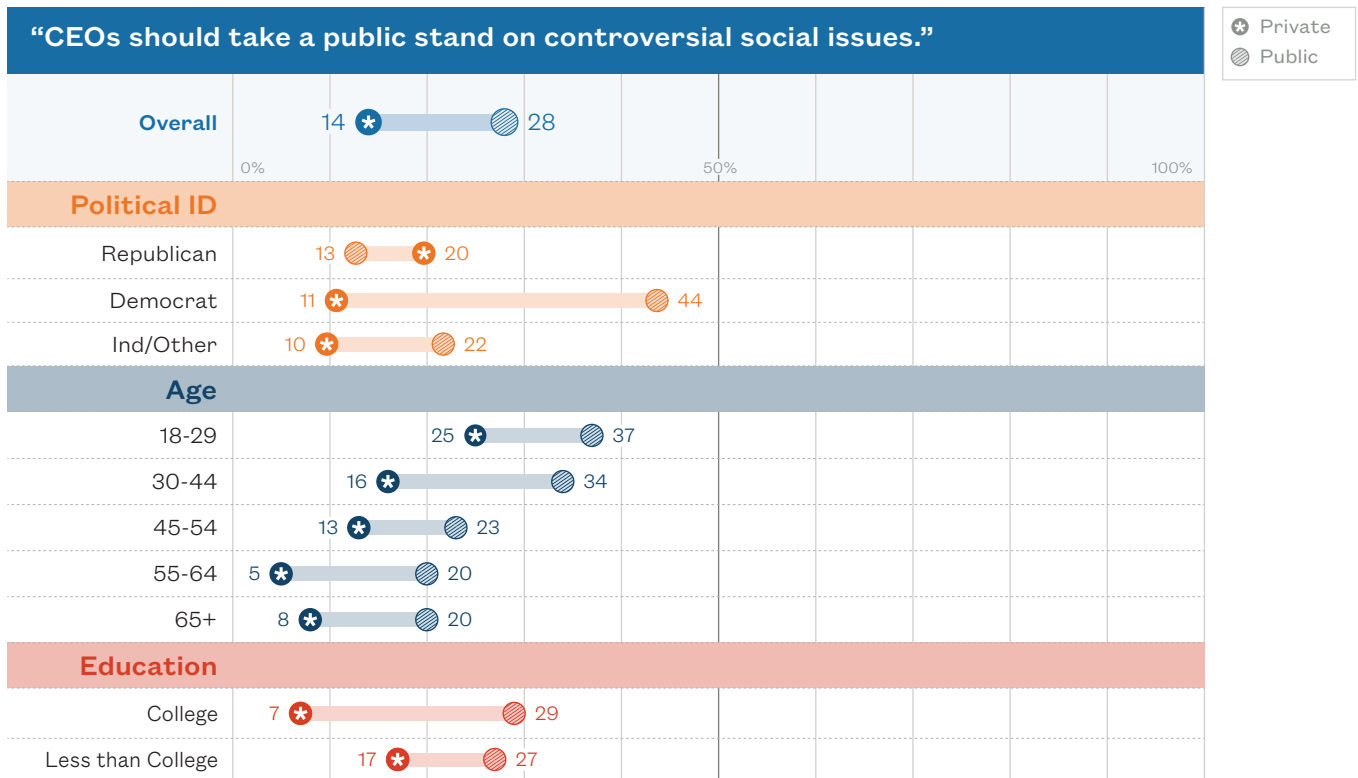
Despite little to no difference between public and private opinion among men and women, there was a large discrepancy among Republicans. Despite large majority public support for overturning *Roe v. Wade* (64%), only about half (51%) privately agreed with overturning the decades-long precedent.

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Statement 8

CEOs should take a public stand on controversial social issues

In the wake of George Floyd’s death, an [October 2020 poll conducted by JUST Capital](#) found a majority of Americans believed CEOs have a responsibility to take a stand on social issues. However, in June 2022 polling from *Private Opinion in America* revealed much lower agreement when the focus is on taking a public stand on *controversial* social issues: Only 28% of Americans publicly agree that CEOs should take such stands, and when given privacy that number is even lower (14%).



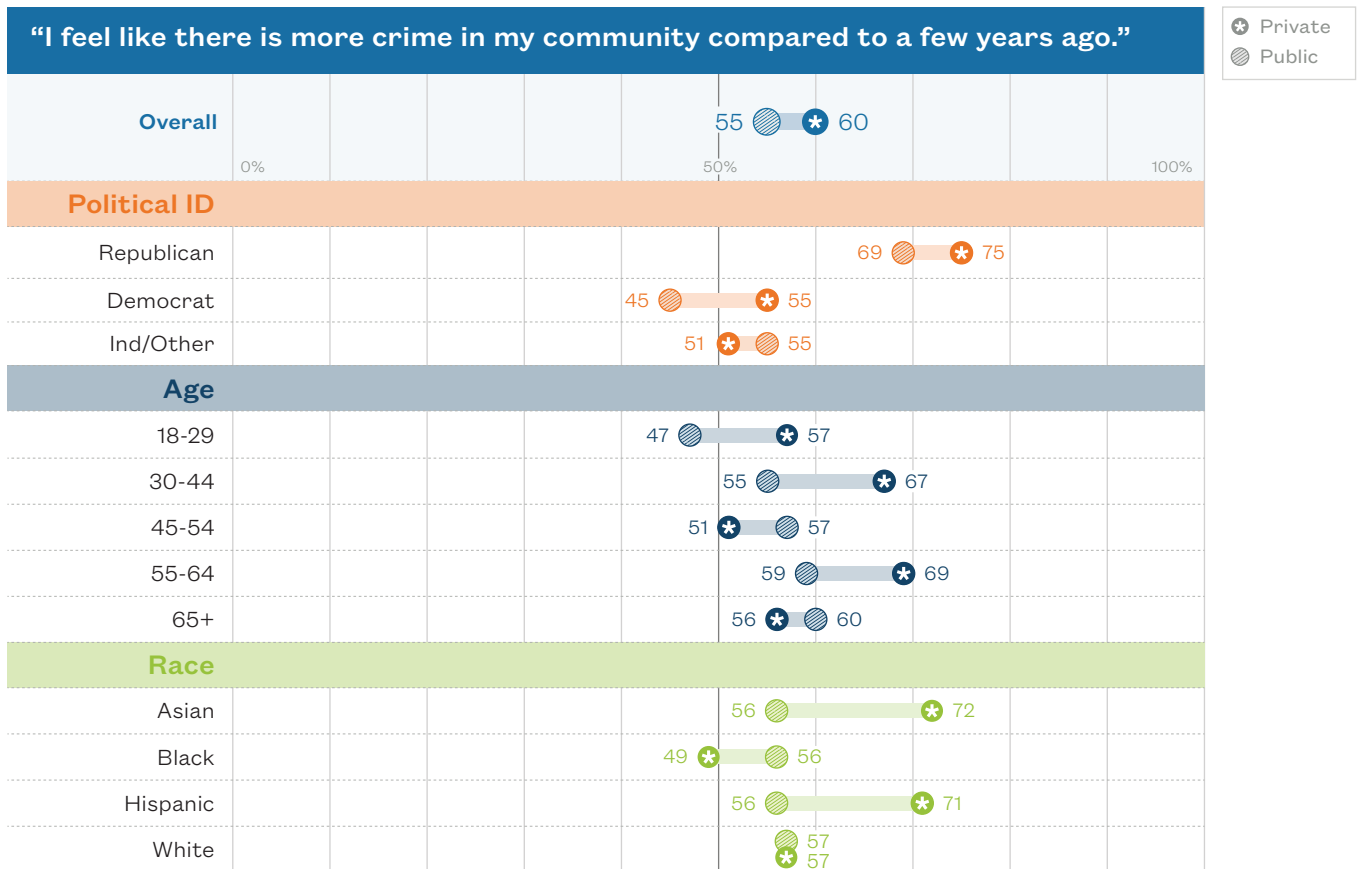
There is no demographic group where a majority of people publicly or privately wants CEOs to take a stand on controversial social issues. With respect to political affiliation, Democrats have the largest gap between public and private opinion on the issue: in public 44% say that they want CEOs to take a stand, but only 11% privately believe it. A similar pattern exists across all age ranges as well: private support is consistently lower than publicly-stated support.

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Statement 9

I feel like there is more crime in my community compared to a few years ago

In a [February 2022 national poll conducted by Suffolk University](#), 55% of Americans reported feeling like there is more crime in their community compared to one year ago — matching the 55% that *Private Opinion in America's* traditional public opinion polling identified. Although slightly more Americans (60%) admit privately that they feel their communities are becoming increasingly unsafe.



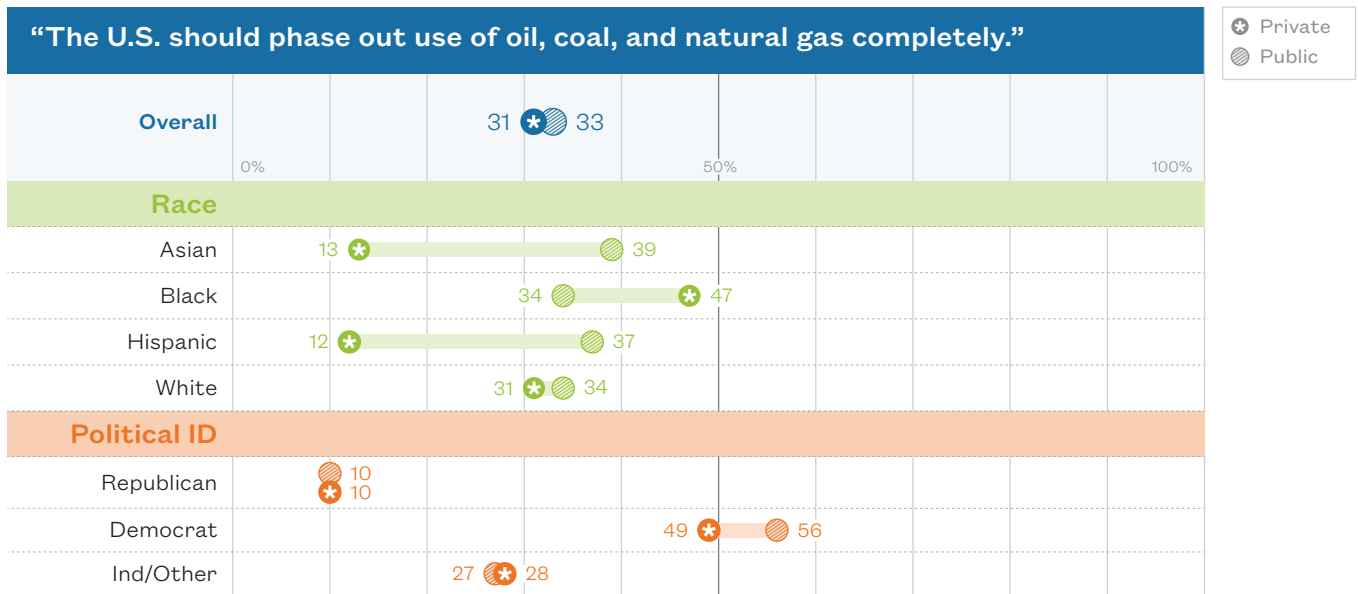
While most Democrats publicly disagree that there is more crime in their community compared to a few years ago, in private a majority (55%) actually agree with the statement. A similar false consensus exists for Americans age 18-29, with 57% agreeing in private but only 47% willing to say so publicly. With regard to race, Asian and Hispanic Americans publicly and privately agree there is more crime in their community, and in both groups a much larger percentage of people are willing to say this in private than in public.

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Statement 10

The U.S. should phase out use of oil, coal, and natural gas completely

In a [January 2022 national poll conducted by Pew Research Center](#), roughly a third of Americans (31%) were in favor of the U.S. completely phasing out fossil fuels. Traditional public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America* revealed similar support in June 2022: 33% of Americans agreed the U.S. should phase out oil, coal, and natural gas. Americans' public and private opinion polling track closely; 31% of Americans privately agreed with the same statement via a list experiment.



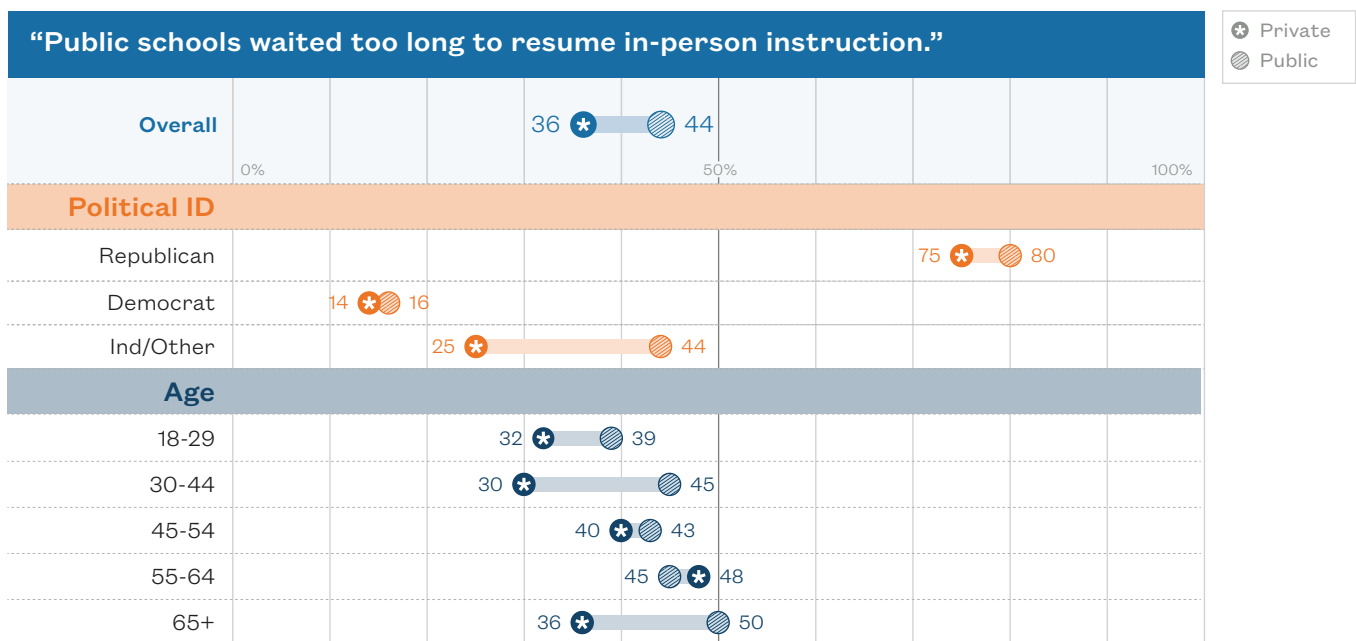
No single demographic group reported majority agreement with the statement privately. Despite slightly higher than average public agreement among Asians and Hispanic Americans, both groups had the lowest private agreement of the subgroups tested (with the exception of Republicans).

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Statement 11

Public schools waited too long to resume in-person instruction

According to a [December 2021 national poll of public school parents](#), 22% of parents believe that schools waited too long to resume in-person instruction. In June 2022, *Private Opinion in America's* traditional public opinion polling of a nationally representative sample (which also included non-parents) found that twice as many Americans (44%) agreed with the statement publicly. However, in private that number was eight points lower: only 36% of Americans agreed that public schools waited too long to resume in-person instruction.



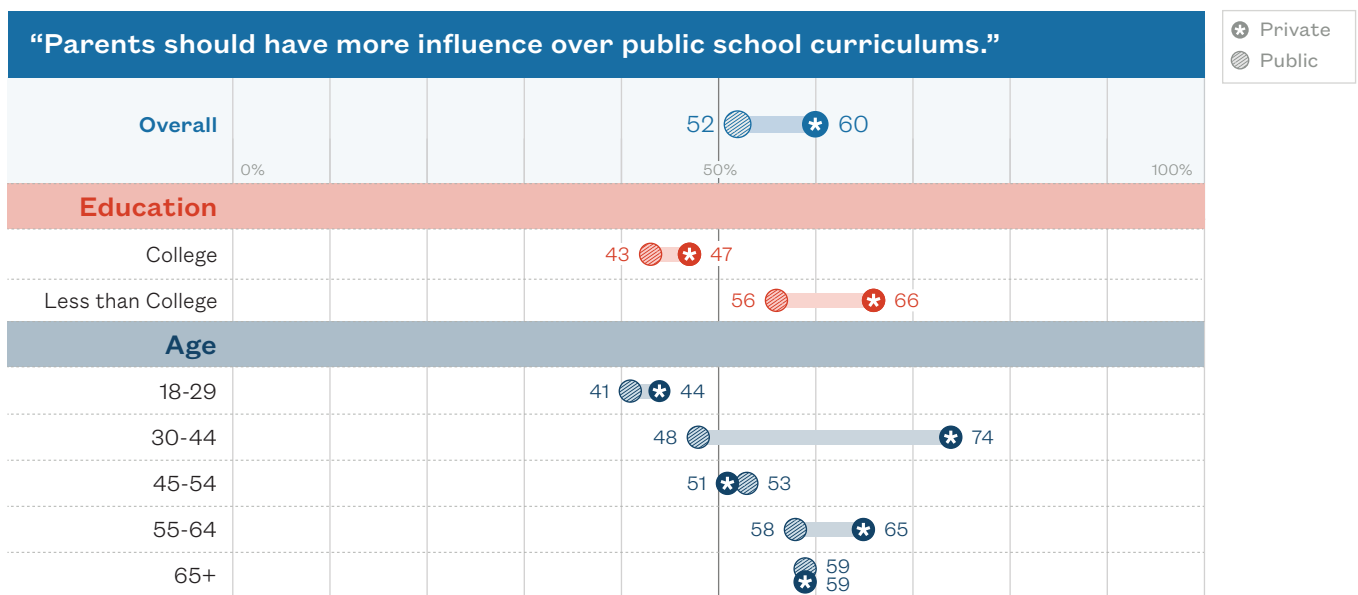
Across all demographics, Republicans were the only subgroup with a majority who privately agreed that public schools waited too long to resume in-person instruction (75%). In contrast, Independents largely disagreed with the statement, although they were less likely to express that disagreement publicly (19-point gap). Similar public-private gaps were noted for people aged 30-44 (only 30% agreed in private, while 45% did so publicly) and those age 65 or older (36% private agreement, 50% public agreement).

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Statement 12

Parents should have more influence over public school curriculums

In a [March 2022 nationwide poll conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#), 50% of Americans reported that parents have too little influence on classroom curriculums. Public polling in *Private Opinion in America* found similar sentiment: 52% of American adults agreed that parents should have more influence over public school curriculums. However, privately the number is eight points higher (60%), suggesting that there is stronger support for parents having more influence over public schools curriculums than public polling would suggest.



The majority of American adults without a college degree (56%) publicly believe parents should have more influence, but when given privacy, that percentage increases to 66%. Meanwhile, fewer than 50% of Americans with a college degree believe that parents should have more influence over public school curriculums both publicly and privately (43% and 47%, respectively).

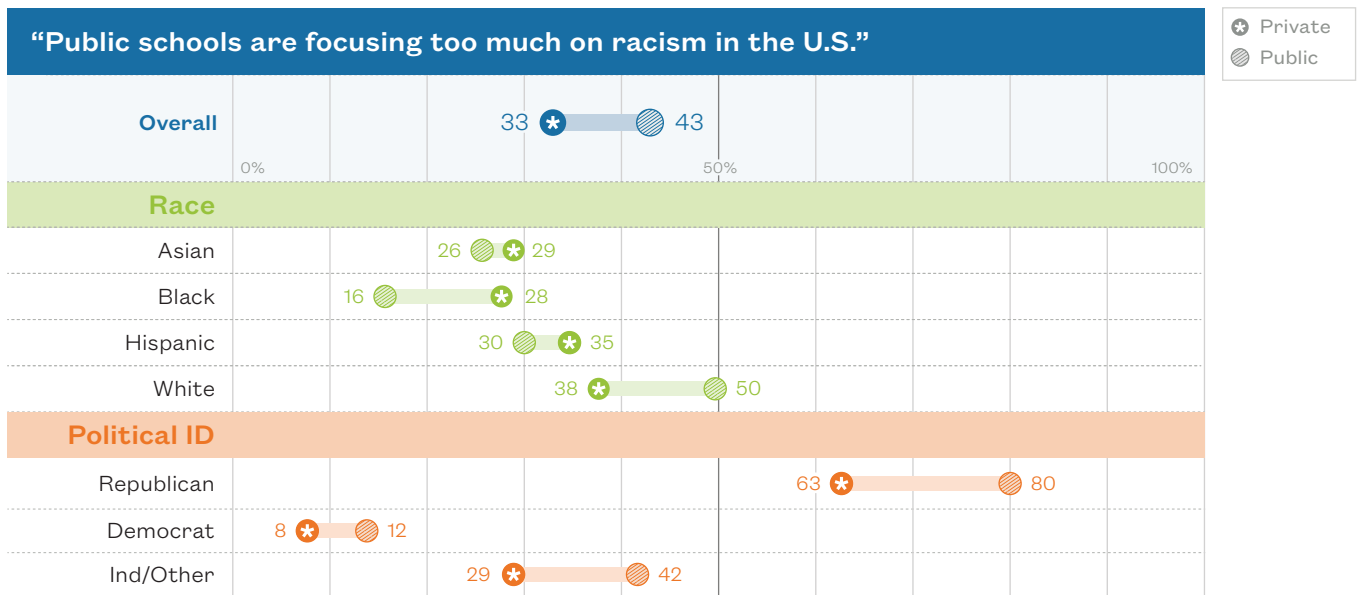
On this issue, people between the ages of 30 and 44 had the largest gap between public and private opinion out of any demographic group (26% difference). This gap creates a misrepresentation of majority opinion: whereas 74% of people in this group privately agree that parents should have more influence over public school curriculums, only 48% are willing to say so publicly.

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Statement 13

Public schools are focusing too much on racism in the U.S.

In a [March 2022 nationwide poll](#), 27% of Americans reported believing their local public school system is focusing too much on racism in the United States. When given the opportunity to speak to public schools more broadly, public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America* revealed that 43% of Americans believe public schools are focusing too much on racism in the U.S. However, private opinion polling demonstrated that public sentiment may be overstated; only 33% of American adults agreed privately.



The gap between public and private opinion is largely being driven by White Americans. About 1 in 2 White Americans (50%) agrees public schools focus too much on racism in the U.S., but only 38% agree with the same statement when granted privacy through a list experiment. The opposite effect holds true for Black Americans — despite 16% of Black Americans agreeing with the statement publicly, more than one-quarter (28%) agree privately.

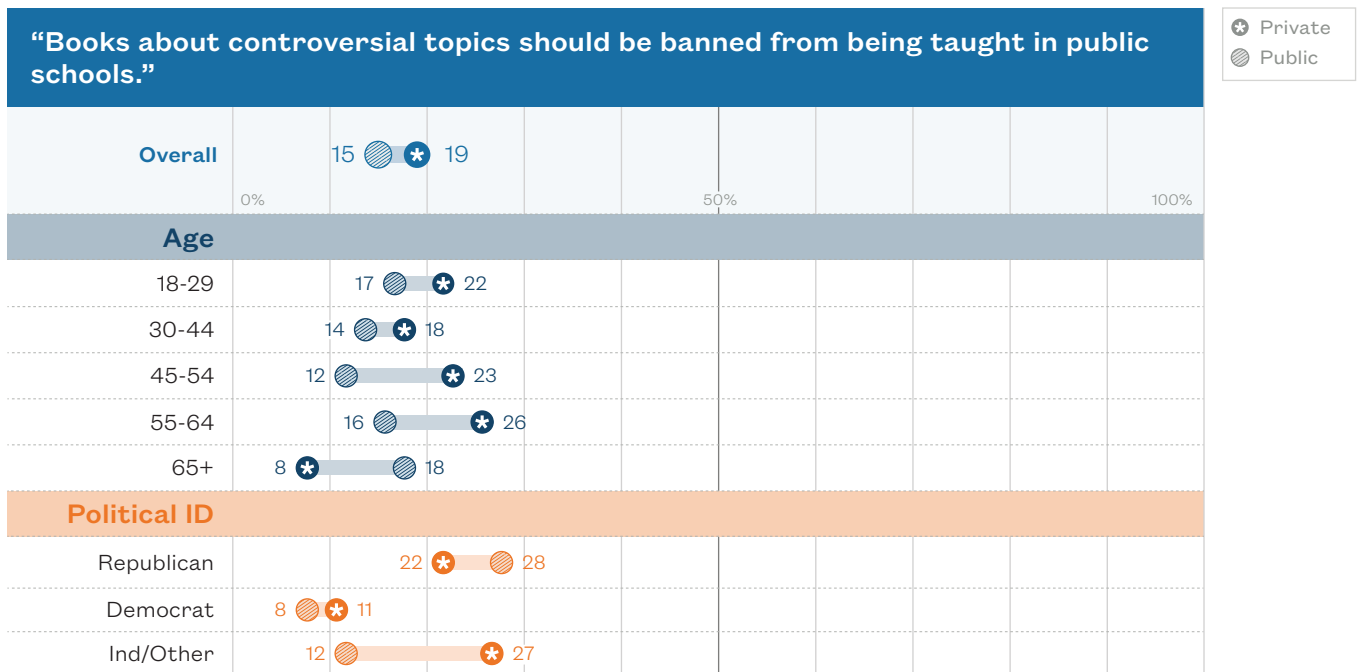
Republicans are the only demographic group where the majority publicly and privately agree that public schools are focused too much on racism in the United States, but even here there is a notable gap between public and private opinion: while 8 in 10 Republicans (80%) publicly agree with the statement, only about 6 in 10 (63%) privately agreed. Additionally, despite mixed public agreement among Independents (42%), a smaller minority (29%) agreed privately.

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Statement 14

Books about controversial topics should be banned from being taught in public schools

In a [March 2022 nationwide poll conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and AP-NORC](#), a mere 12% of Americans supported banning books on controversial topics in public schools. Similar results were found using public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America*: 15% of Americans endorsed censoring books on divisive topics. Based on the results of a list experiment assessing private opinions, Americans’ private beliefs on the topic more or less match their public opinion — only 19% of Americans support book banning.



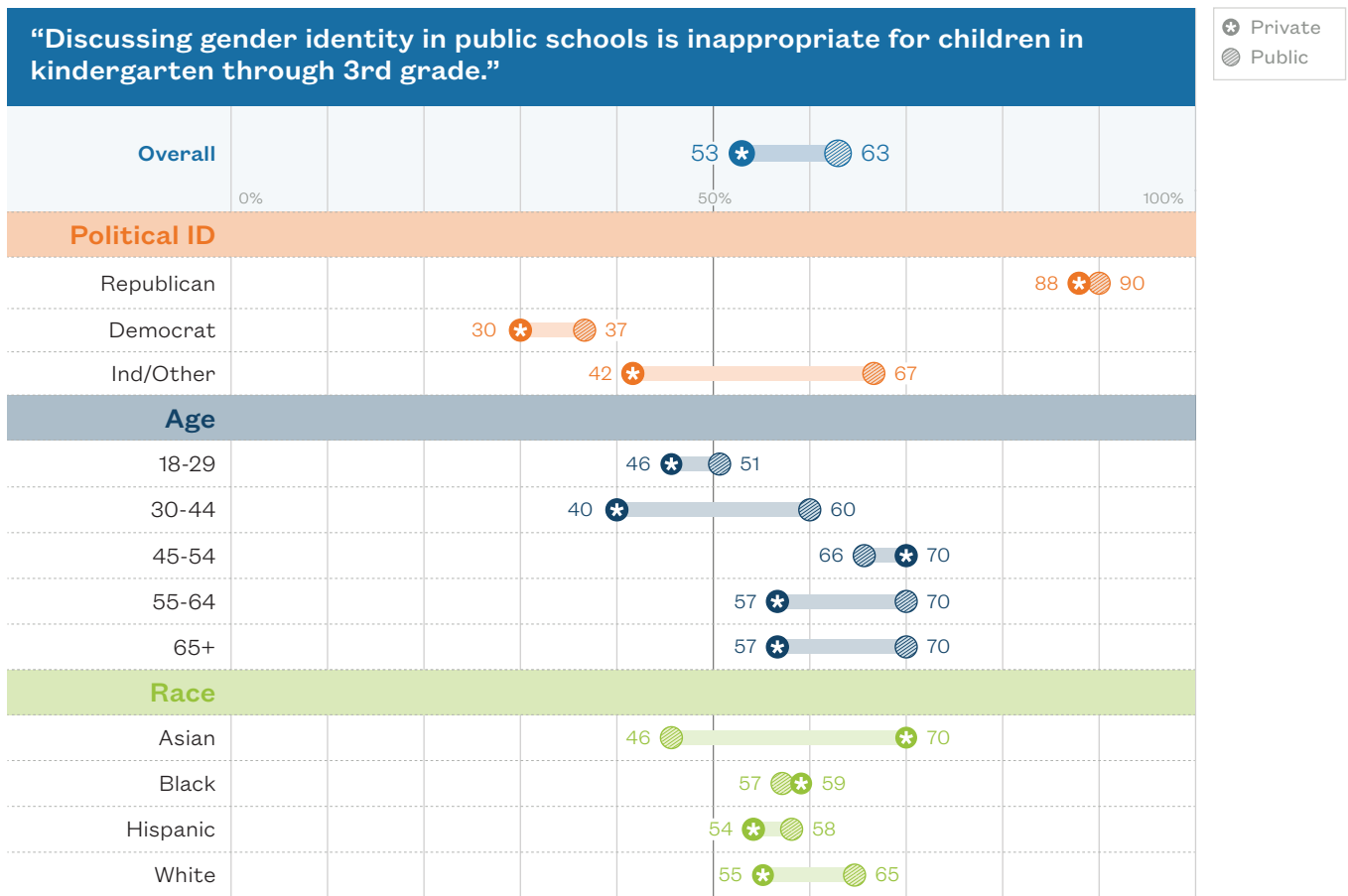
Despite slight differences between public and private opinion across some subgroups of the American population, there is overwhelming opposition to the idea of banning books both publicly and privately. That said, it is notable that in terms of age, with the exception of people age 65 or older, the trend is toward greater support for this in private than in public. In addition, with respect to political affiliation, Independents not only show a large gap between public agreement (12%) and private agreement (27%), in private they show greater support for book banning than either Democrats or Republicans.

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Statement 15

Discussing gender identity in public schools is inappropriate for children in kindergarten through 3rd grade

According to a [March 2022 poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies](#), 61% of registered voters said it is inappropriate to discuss gender identity with children in kindergarten through 3rd grade. Traditional public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America*, based on a nationally representative sample, revealed similar findings — 63% of Americans agreed that discussing gender identity in public schools is inappropriate for children in kindergarten through 3rd grade. However, private opinion polling finds that 10% fewer Americans privately agree (53%).



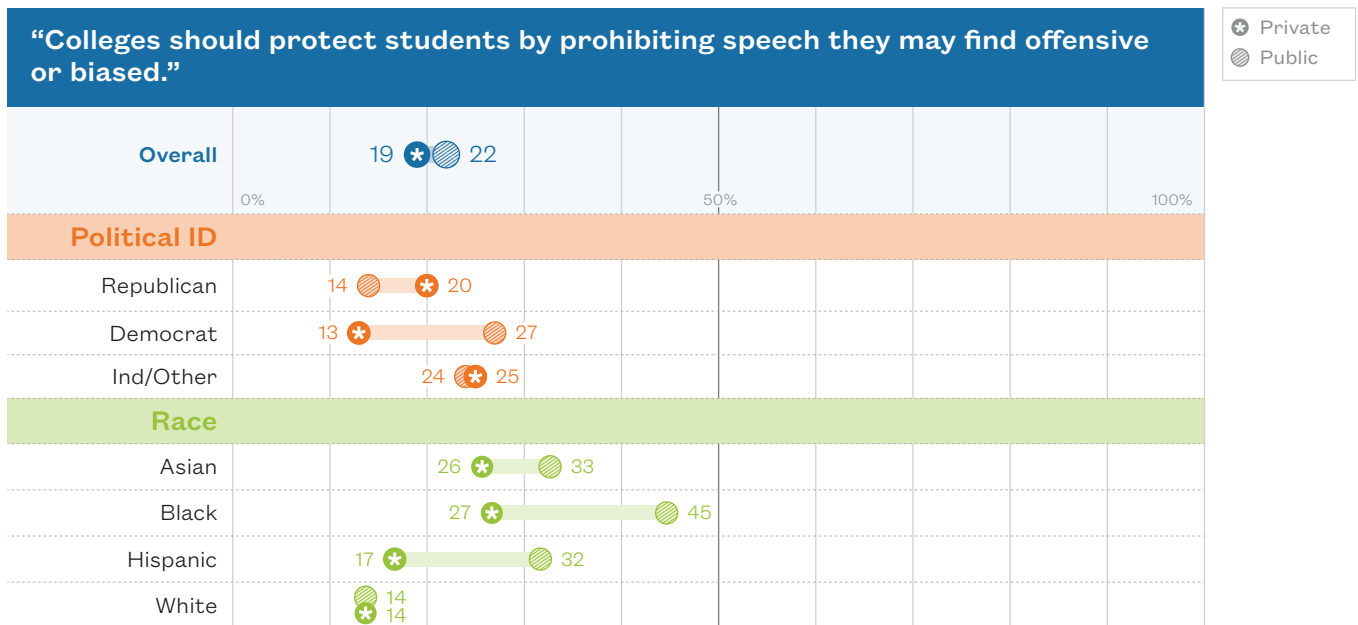
While public opinion polling indicates a strong majority agreement that gender identity is inappropriate to discuss with public school children in the youngest grades, private opinion polling suggests that the American public is more divided. In addition, several groups had such large public-private gaps that they produce a false consensus on this issue, including Independents (25-point gap, with a majority privately disagreeing), Asians (24-point gap, with a majority privately agreeing), and people age 30-44 (20-point gap, with a majority privately disagreeing).

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Statement 16

Colleges should protect students by prohibiting speech they may find offensive or biased

According to a [January 2022 poll conducted by the Knight Foundation and Ipsos](#), 22% of Americans believe colleges should protect students by prohibiting speech they may find offensive or biased. *Private Opinion in America's* public opinion polling replicated the finding — in June 2022, a minority of Americans (22%) agreed that colleges should prohibit offensive or biased speech to protect students. And private opinion polling revealed similar sentiment: only 19% of adults, when granted privacy, agreed that colleges should protect students by prohibiting speech they may find offensive or biased. *Private Opinion in America* revealed both public and private opposition to prohibiting speech at colleges among all American demographic groups.



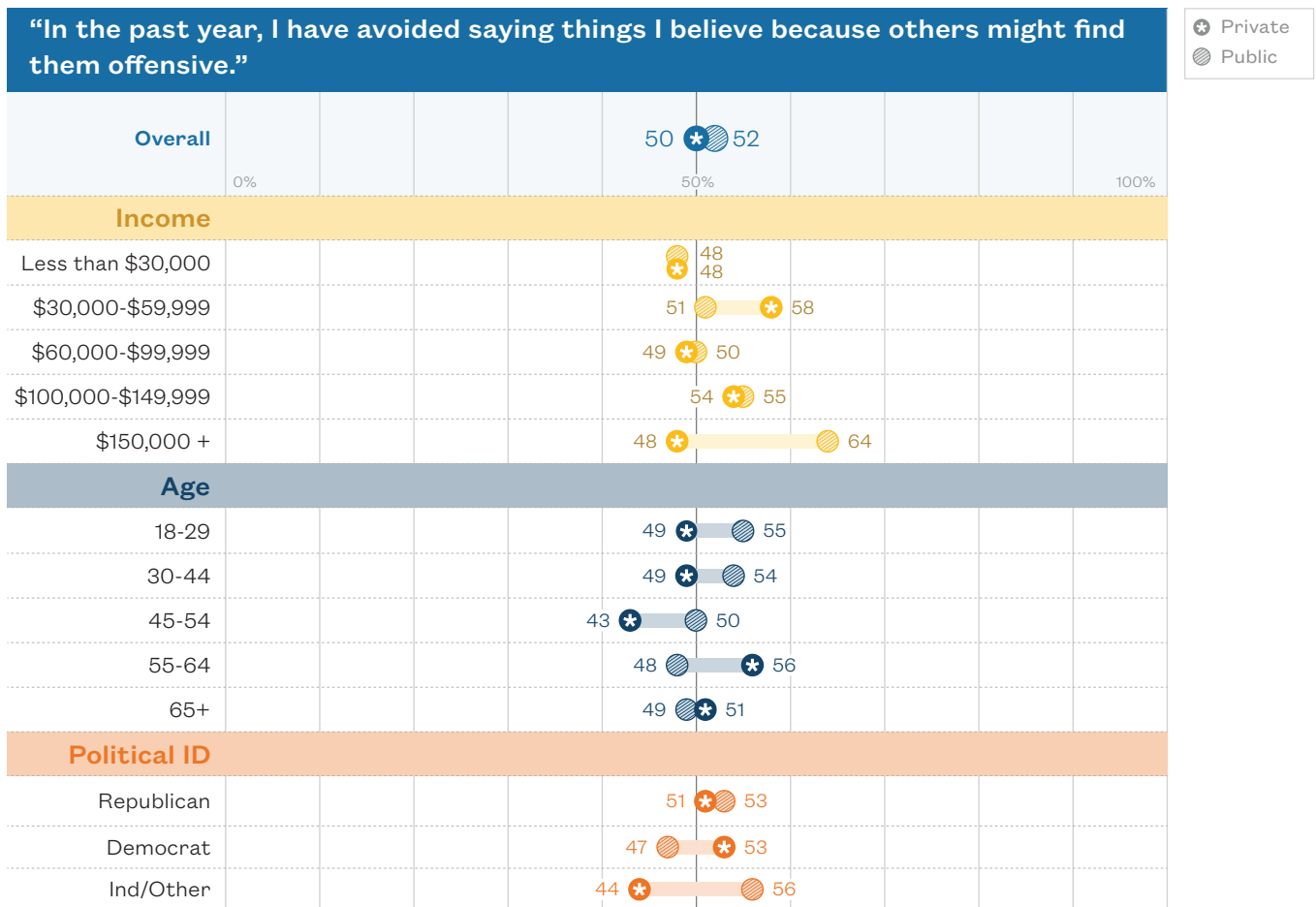
Both Black and Hispanic Americans have large gaps between public and private opinion on the issue. In each case, there was less private support for prohibiting offensive or biased speech than there was in public. And with respect to political affiliation, in public Democrats have the highest level of support for the statement, but in private they actually have lower levels of support (13%) than Republicans (20%) or Independents (25%).

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Statement 17

In the past year, I have avoided saying things I believe because others might find them offensive

In a [July 2020 poll conducted by the Cato Institute in collaboration with YouGov](#), 62% of Americans reported that they avoided saying things they believe due to fears of others finding them offensive. Two years later, traditional public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America* revealed 52% of Americans admitted to self-silencing for fear of offending others. That percentage was similar (50%) when given privacy through a list experiment.



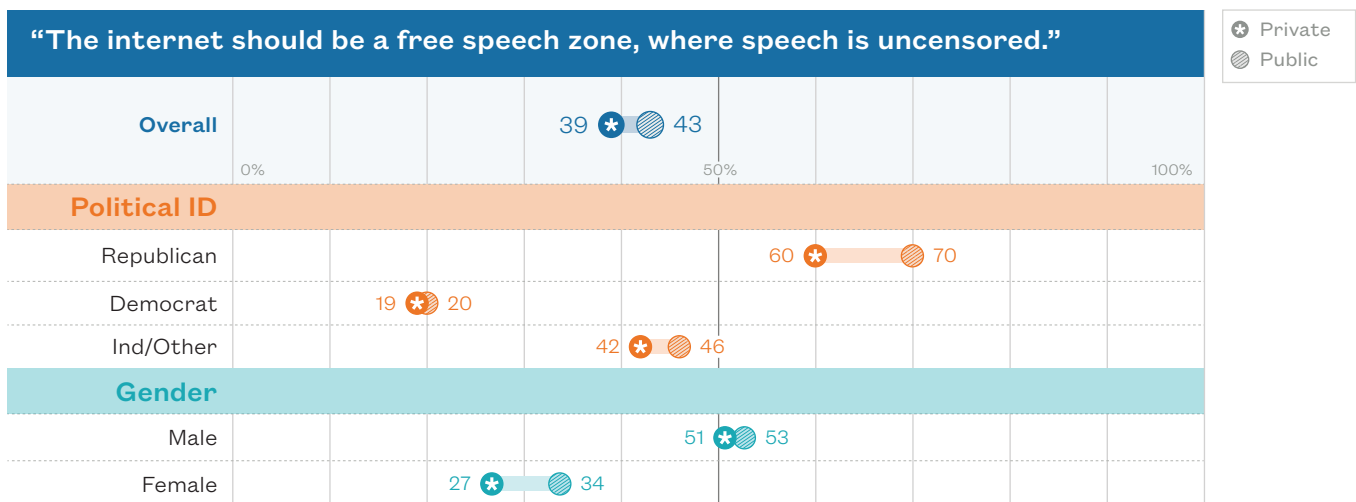
The largest gap between public and private opinion occurred among Americans living in households with incomes greater than \$150k, where in public a majority (64%) report having self-silenced in the past year, but in private this is not the case (48%). A similar pattern exists for Independents (56% agree in public but only 44% agree in private). Conversely, the direction of the false consensus is different for Democrats: a majority privately admit to having self-silenced, but they do not say this in public.

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Statement 18

The internet should be a free speech zone, where speech is uncensored

A [January 2022 poll conducted by Ipsos](#) found that roughly half of Americans (51%) believe the internet should be a free speech zone, where speech is uncensored. About six months later, however, American adults reported less support for the issue: *Private Opinion in America* revealed that fewer than half of American adults (43%) agree that free speech on the internet should not be censored, and private opinion polling revealed a similar sentiment (39%).



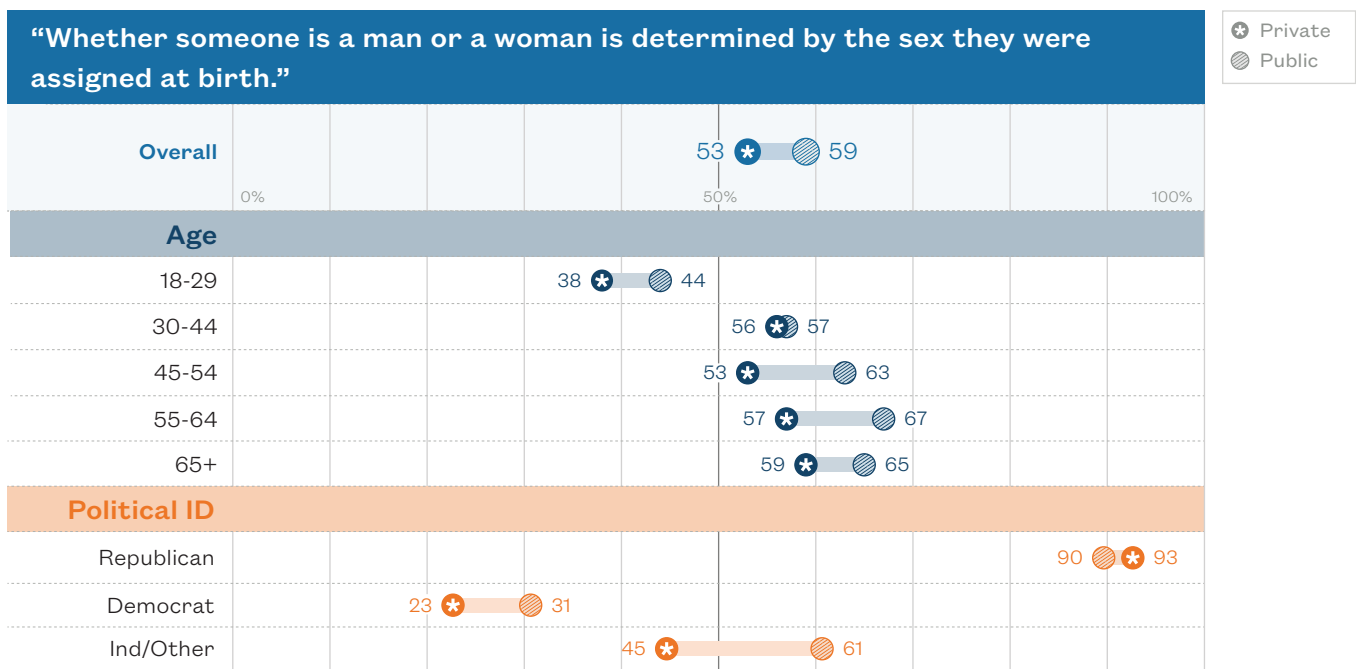
Even despite a 10-point difference in public and private opinion, a majority of Republicans both publicly and privately agreed (70% and 60%, respectively) that the internet should be an uncensored, free speech zone. Men were the only other subgroup with majority public and private agreement.

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Statement 19

Whether someone is a man or a woman is determined by the sex they were assigned at birth

In a [June 2021 Pew poll](#), 56% of American adults reported they believe whether someone is a man or woman is determined by sex assigned at birth. Traditional public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America* suggested a similar percentage of Americans (59%) still hold this belief today. Private opinion polling revealed a similar sentiment: 53% of Americans believe that whether someone is a man or a woman is determined by the sex they were assigned at birth.



However, despite majority public agreement among older Americans, there were large differences for private opinion. Americans aged 45-54 and 55-64 overwhelmingly agreed in public that gender is determined at birth (63% and 67%, respectively), but private agreement was 10 points lower in private (53% and 57%, respectively).

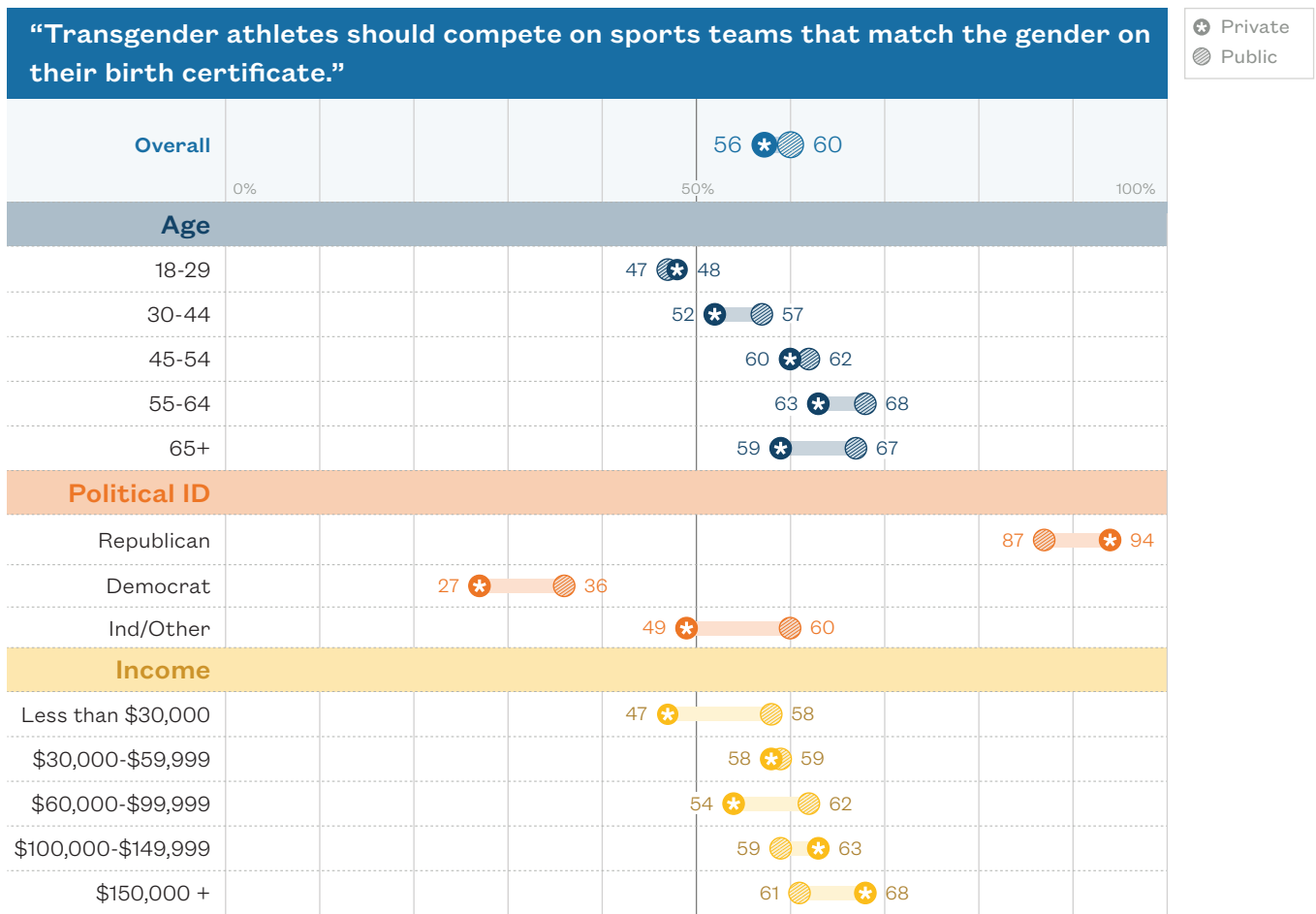
Despite a majority of Independents (61%) publicly agreeing that gender is determined by the sex assigned at birth, fewer than half agree with the same statement privately (45%). Republicans, on the other hand, report high agreement with the statement, both publicly and privately (90% and 93%, respectively).

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Statement 20

Transgender athletes should compete on sports teams that match the gender on their birth certificate

Based on a [March 2022 poll conducted by YouGov](#), 29% of Americans support allowing transgender athletes to compete on sports teams that match their gender identity (rather than their gender assigned at birth), compared to 49% who oppose it. Results from public opinion polling in *Private Opinion in America* reveal a similar pattern: more Americans (60%) agree that transgender athletes should compete on sports teams that match the gender on their birth certificate. Americans' private opinions weren't much different. When guaranteed privacy, 56% of Americans agree the gender on one's birth certificate should determine on what sports teams they can compete.



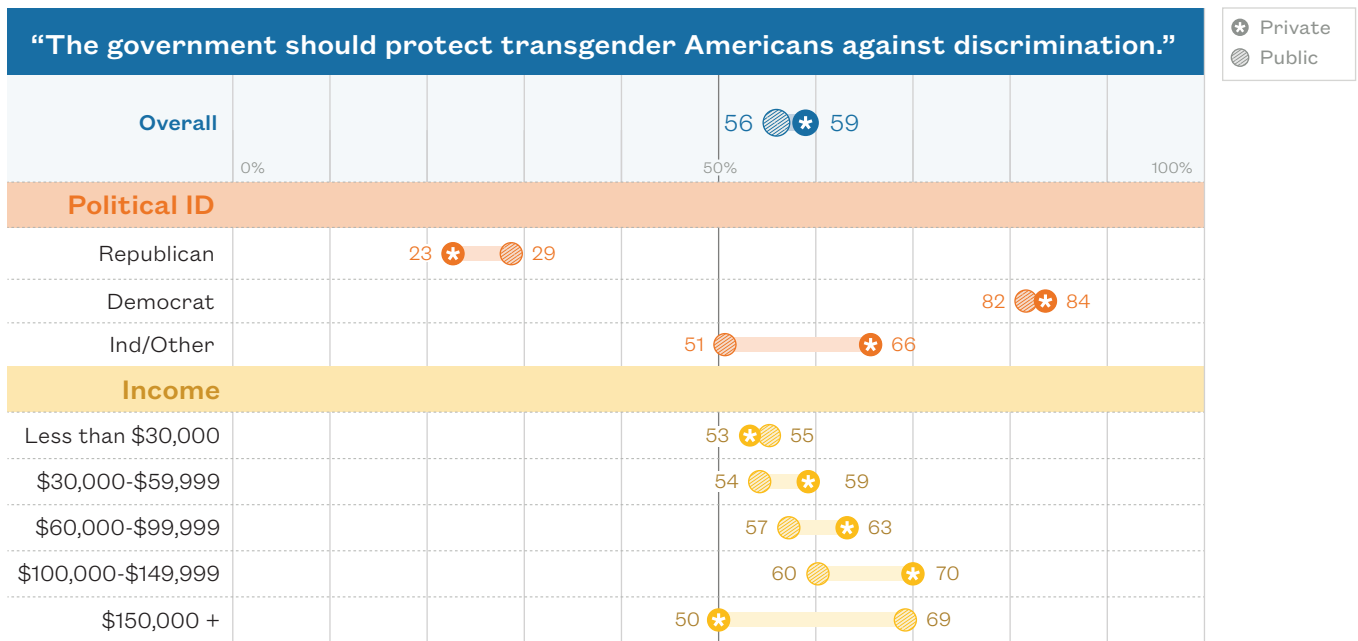
Republicans' and Democrats' views on this issue are highly polarized: whereas 94% of Republicans privately agree that transgender athletes should compete on sports teams that match the gender on their birth certificate, that number is only 27% for Democrats. In addition, people making less than \$30,000 a year were the only income group where a majority disagreed with this statement in private (47% agreement), although they are not willing to say so publicly (58% agreement).

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Statement 21

The government should protect transgender Americans against discrimination

An [April 2021 poll fielded by NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll](#) found that 63% of Americans support the 2021 Equality Act, which would allow the government to protect transgender Americans against discrimination. *Private Opinion in America* revealed similar levels of public support — 56% of Americans agreed that the government should protect transgender Americans against discrimination. Private polling methods revealed similarly strong support for the legal protections of transgender Americans. When guaranteed privacy, 59% of adults believe the government should protect the trans community against discrimination.



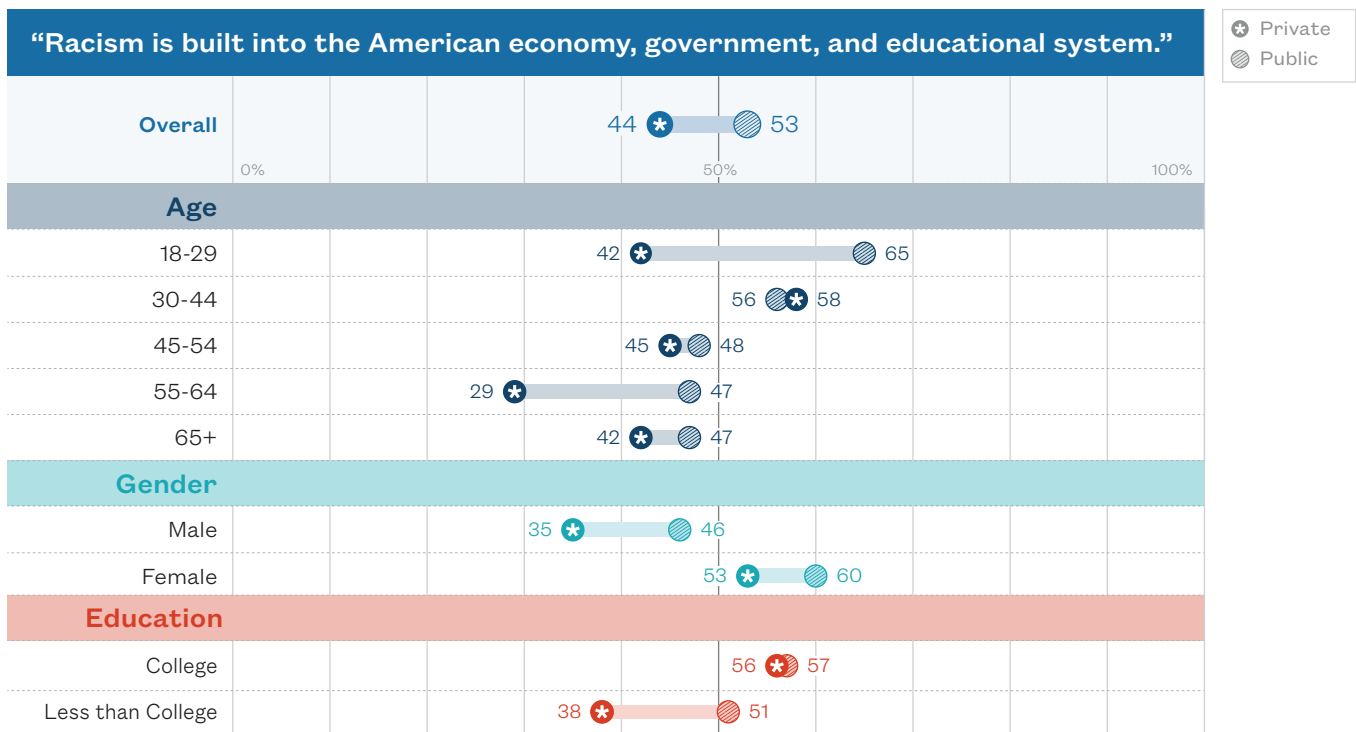
Republicans were the only group where a majority privately and publicly disagree that the government should protect transgender Americans against discrimination, and they had the lowest levels of private support of any group (23%). In addition, with respect to income, people making \$150,000 or more a year have a 19-point gap between public and private opinion: as a group, they are much less supportive of the issue in private (50%) than they are in public (69%).

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Statement 22

Racism is built into the American economy, government, and educational system

Based on a [March 2021 poll conducted by Ipsos](#), a majority of American adults (61%) believed that racism is built into the American economy, government, and educational system. More than one year later, in June 2022, *Private Opinion in America's* public opinion polling revealed a slightly lower majority (53%) of Americans endorsing the belief that racism is ingrained in American institutions. However, private opinion polling revealed a potentially false majority: when guaranteed privacy, only 44% of American adults agree that racism is built into the American economy, government, and educational system.



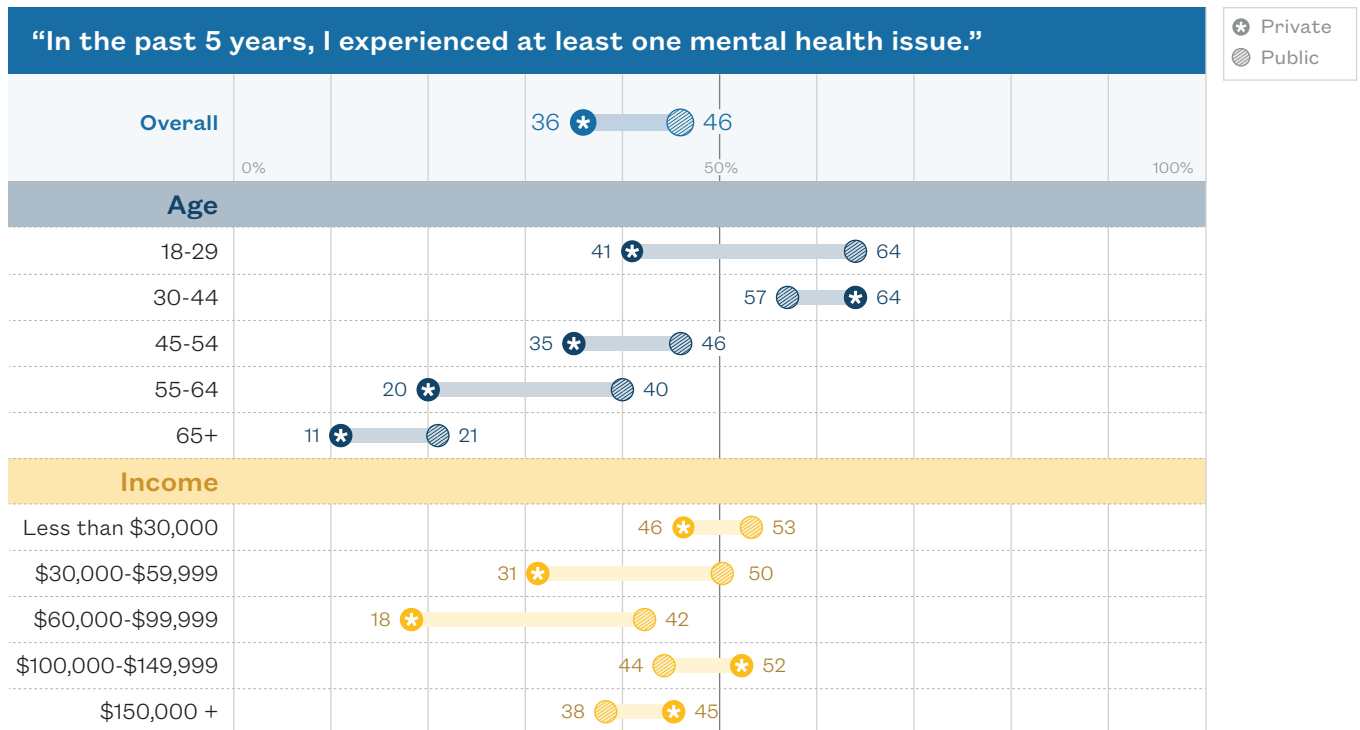
Even though a majority of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 publicly agree that racism is built into the American economy, government, and educational system (65%), only 42% of them agree with it privately. This 23-point gap between public and private opinion crosses the majority threshold, creating a false consensus on the issue for this group. People with less than a college education show a similar pattern, where a majority agree with the statement in public (51%) but not in private (38%). Lastly, men and women have different views on the issue: a majority of men disagree both privately and publicly (agreement is only 35% and 46%, respectively), whereas a majority of women agree with the statement both privately and publicly (53% and 60%, respectively).

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Statement 23

In the past 5 years, I experienced at least one mental health issue

In June 2022, *Private Opinion in America* public opinion polling revealed that nearly half (46%) of Americans say they have experienced at least one mental health issue in the last 5 years. However, when given the opportunity to self-report privately, 36% of American adults agreed with the same statement.



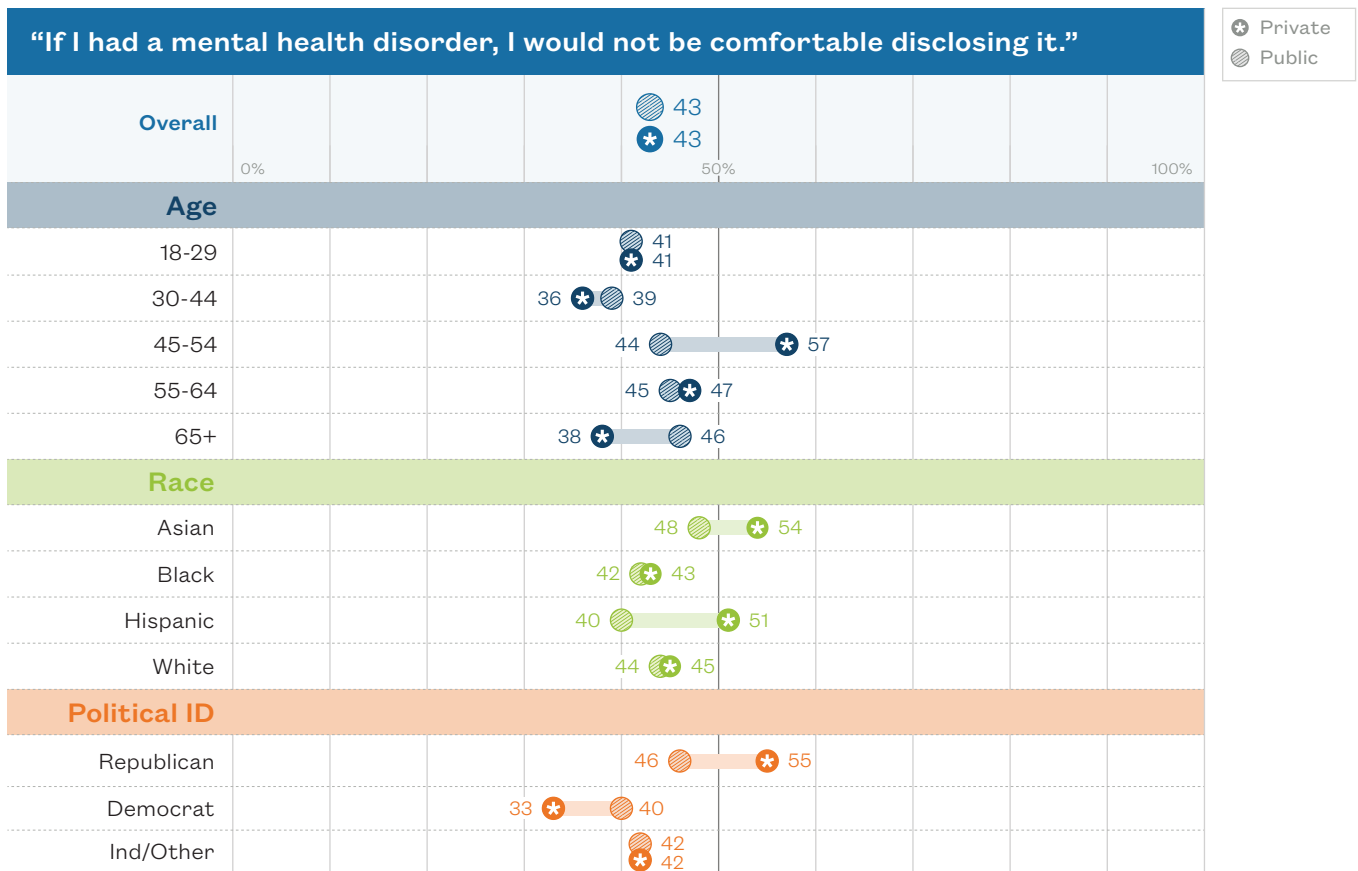
For Americans aged 18-29, there was a 23-point gap between public and private opinion on this issue: whereas 41% privately reported having experienced at least one mental health issue in the past 5 years, that number was 64% in public. A similar, though less pronounced, pattern of greater public agreement was present among Americans aged 45 and older, as well as for people making less than \$100,000 a year. Conversely, people making more than \$100,000 a year were more likely to underreport mental health issues publicly.

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Statement 24

If I had a mental health disorder, I would not be comfortable disclosing it

According to a [May 2019 survey conducted by the Harris Poll on behalf of the American Psychological Association](#), 87% of American adults said that “having a mental health disorder is nothing to be ashamed of.” However, *Private Opinion in America* polling of a nationally representative sample found that 43% of adults — publicly and privately — said that they would not be comfortable disclosing a mental health disorder if they had one.



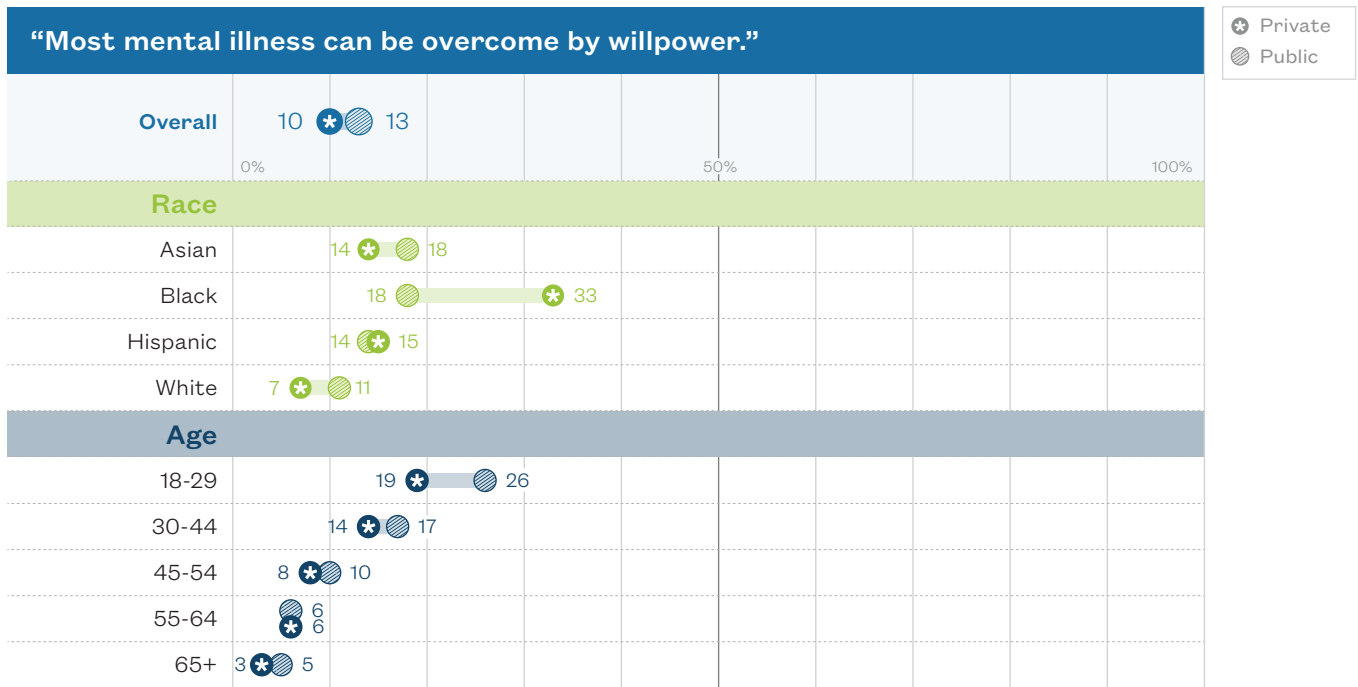
Even though a majority of Americans age 45-54 publicly said that they would be comfortable disclosing a mental health disorder, they do not actually agree with it in private (57% would not be comfortable disclosing). A similar false consensus is seen for Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Republicans.

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Statement 25

Most mental illness can be overcome by willpower

In an [October 2019 survey conducted by SRSS in partnership with CBS news poll](#), 7% of Americans reported believing that taking medication for a mental illness to be a sign of weakness, and 5% held similar views about seeking a therapist for a mental condition. In June 2022, *Private Opinion in America's* public opinion polling revealed that 13% of Americans believe most mental illness can be overcome by willpower. A similar percentage (10%) endorsed this statement when given privacy.



Across demographic groups, Black Americans had the highest level of private agreement that most mental health can be overcome by willpower (33%), along with the largest public-private gap, with public opinion being 15-points lower than private opinion on the issue. In addition, in terms of age, the youngest group (ages 18-29) had the highest level of public and private agreement with this statement (26% and 19%, respectively) compared with other age groups.

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Appendices: Methodology and Results

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Appendix A: Methodology

Appendix B: Full Results

Appendix C: Complete Crosstabs

Appendix A: Methodology

The *Private Opinion in America* survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 3,334 American adults recruited from YouGov's panel and weighted according to gender, age, race, education, and geographical region based on U.S. Census data.

Additionally, low incidence groups were over sampled to improve the precision of private opinion estimates. In addition to the base sample of 3,334, the *Private Opinion in America* survey was administered to 500 Asian, 314 Black, and 263 Hispanic adults. Low-incidence groups from the base sample were combined with oversamples and given a group weight according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

The survey was fielded from May 23, 2022 – June 8, 2022.

MOE for the base sample = 2.0%

MOE for the Black oversample = 4.6%

MOE for the Hispanic oversample = 5.6%

MOE for the Asian oversample = 5.2%

List Experiment

Private Opinion in America elicited Americans' private opinion using a list experiment for a series of sensitive political, social, and cultural issues salient among the American population today. List experiments (also called the item-count technique) are a form of indirect questioning developed to minimize social desirability and nonresponse bias by concealing respondents' answers to sensitive items. Privacy is maintained by aggregating responses to sensitive items with other items.

In a list experiment, respondents are randomized into either a control or experimental condition. Both groups read a list of 4 to 5 items and report the number of items with which they agree. However, respondents never specify which statements with which they agree. Respondents in both the control and experimental conditions read and respond to 4 identical items, but the experimental condition also reads and rates one additional statement: the statement of interest. The mean difference of items reported across the two groups is equal to the prevalence of that private opinion.

Illustrative Example:

Control Group	Experiment Group
<p>Please read each statement carefully before answering the question below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. should rely solely on renewable energy. • Recessions are a natural part of a properly functioning economy. • Public schools should be required to teach the core principles of Christianity. • There should be a cap on how much an elected official can spend on their campaigns. 	<p>Please read each statement carefully before answering the question below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. should rely solely on renewable energy. • Recessions are a natural part of a properly functioning economy. • Public schools should be required to teach the core principles of Christianity. • There should be a cap on how much an elected official can spend on their campaigns. • The internet should be a free speech zone, where speech is uncensored.
<p>How many statements do you agree with?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4</p>	<p>How many statements do you agree with?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5</p>

Despite ensuring privacy for individual respondents, it is still possible to make conclusions about the likelihood of certain subpopulations, in aggregate, endorsing sensitive statements. Using multivariate regressions, we calculated the extent to which demographic characteristics and political party affiliation predicts endorsement of sensitive items.

Appendix B: Results

List experiment results in order of absolute delta between overall public and private opinion.

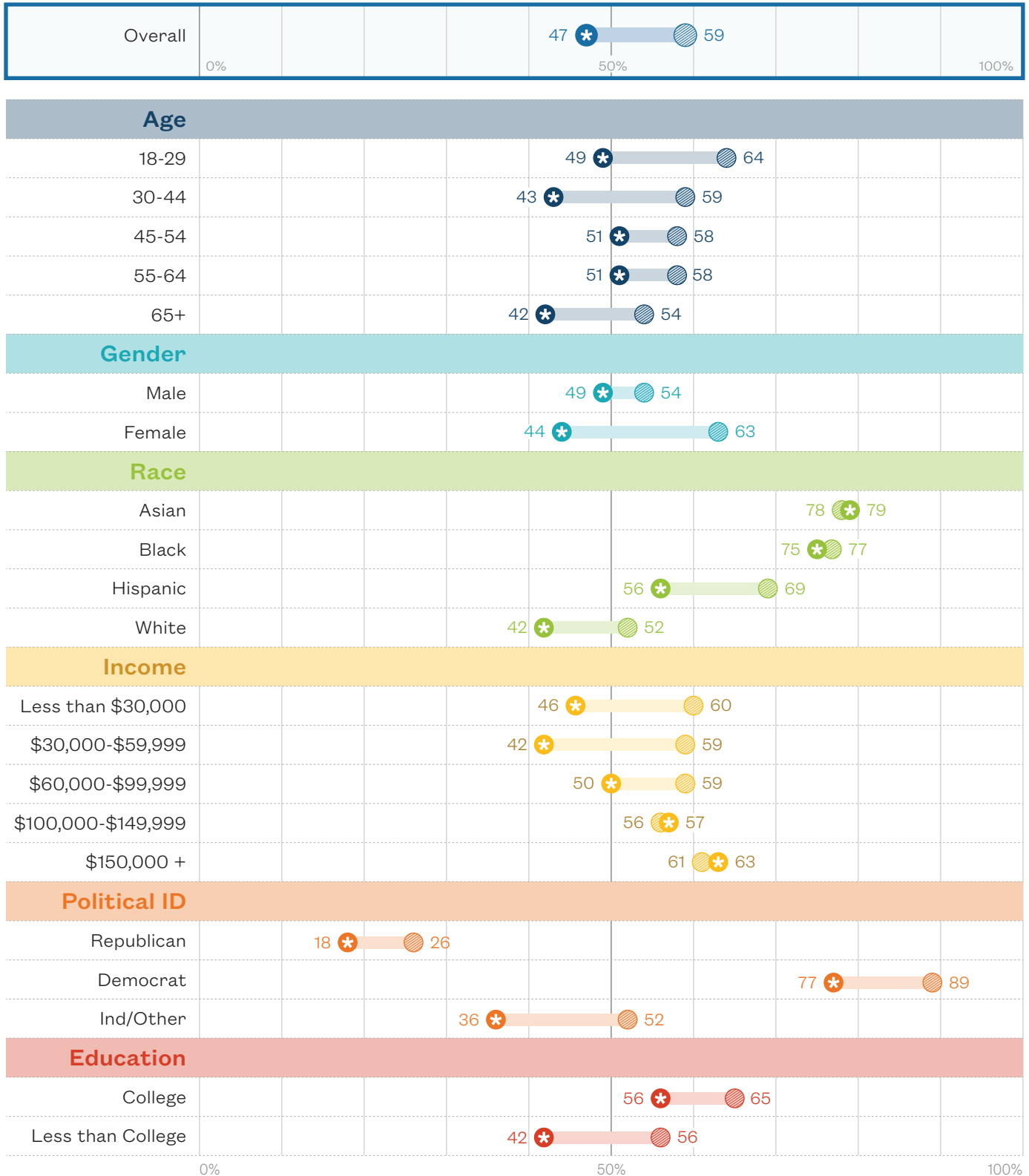
(Table 1/2)	Private Opinion	Public Opinion	Delta
CEOs should take a public stand on controversial social issues	14%	28%	14%
Wearing a mask was an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19	47%	59%	12%
Public schools are focusing too much on racism in the U.S.	33%	43%	10%
Discussing gender identity in public schools is inappropriate for children in kindergarten through 3rd grade	53%	63%	10%
In the past 5 years, I experienced at least one mental health issue	36%	46%	10%
The choice to have an abortion should be left to a woman and her doctor	58%	67%	9%
Racism is built into the American economy, government, and educational system	44%	53%	9%
Parents should have more influence over public school curriculums	60%	52%	-8%
Public schools waited too long to resume in-person instruction	36%	44%	8%
Whether someone is a man or a woman is determined by the sex they were assigned at birth	53%	59%	6%
Abortion should be legal in most cases	51%	56%	5%
I feel like there is more crime in my community compared to a few years ago	60%	55%	-5%

(Table 2/2)	Private Opinion	Public Opinion	Delta
The internet should be a free speech zone, where speech is uncensored	39%	43%	4%
Transgender athletes should compete on sports teams that match the gender on their birth certificate	56%	60%	4%
Books about controversial topics should be banned from being taught in public schools	19%	15%	-4%
Closing schools and businesses as a response to COVID-19 was an overreaction that did more harm than good	43%	39%	-4%
Colleges should protect students by prohibiting speech they may find offensive or biased	19%	22%	3%
Most mental illness can be overcome by willpower	10%	13%	3%
The government should protect transgender Americans against discrimination	59%	56%	-3%
We should get back to life as usual with no COVID-19 mandates or requirements	45%	48%	3%
The U.S. should phase out use of oil, coal, and natural gas completely	31%	33%	2%
People should be required to show proof of vaccination in order to go to work when they are around other people	41%	39%	-2%
In the past year, I have avoided saying things I believe because others might find them offensive	50%	52%	2%
Roe v. Wade should be overturned	29%	31%	2%
If I had a mental health disorder, I would not be comfortable disclosing it	43%	43%	0%

Appendix C: Crosstabs

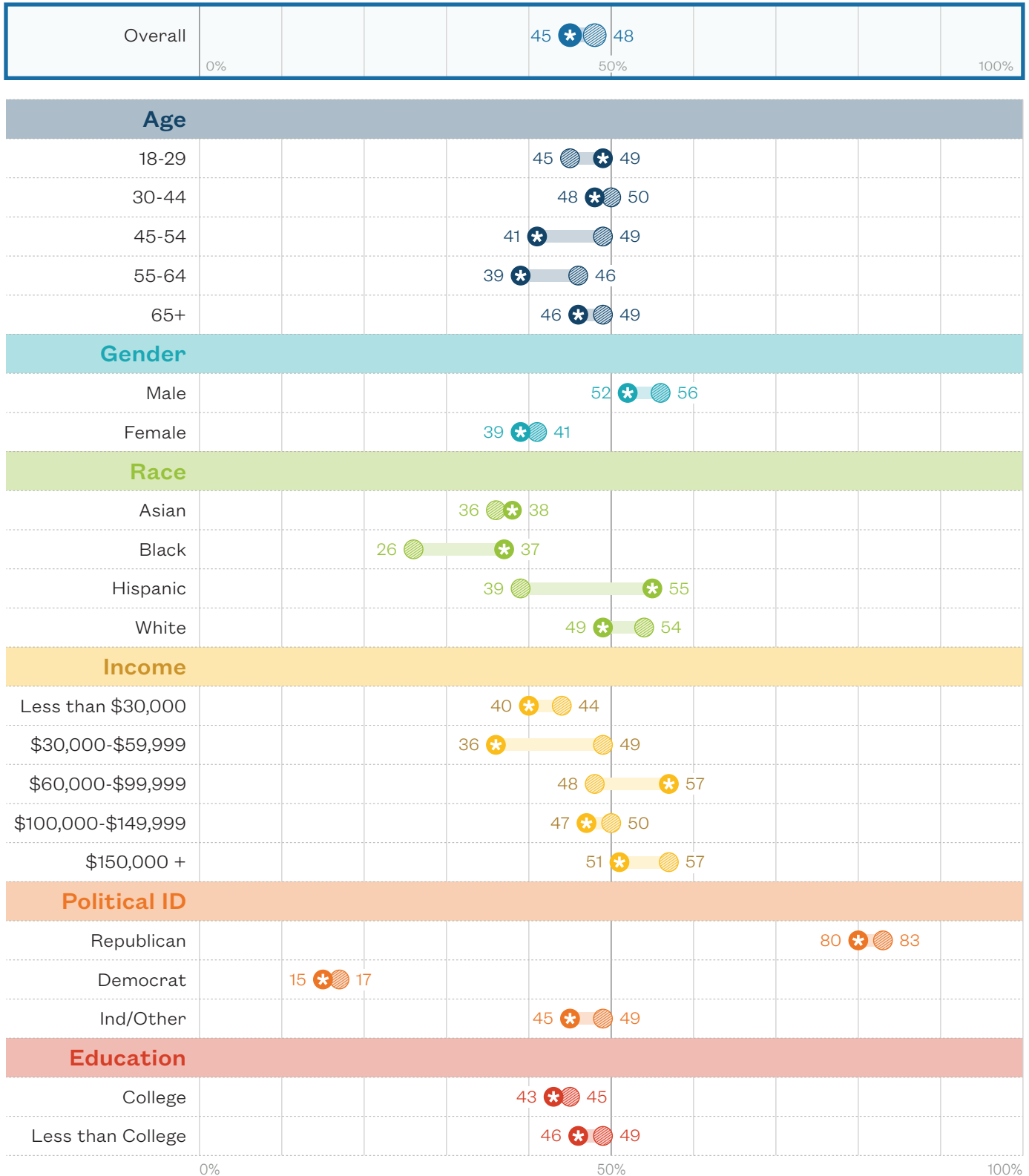
Statement 01. Wearing a mask was an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19.

* Private
● Public



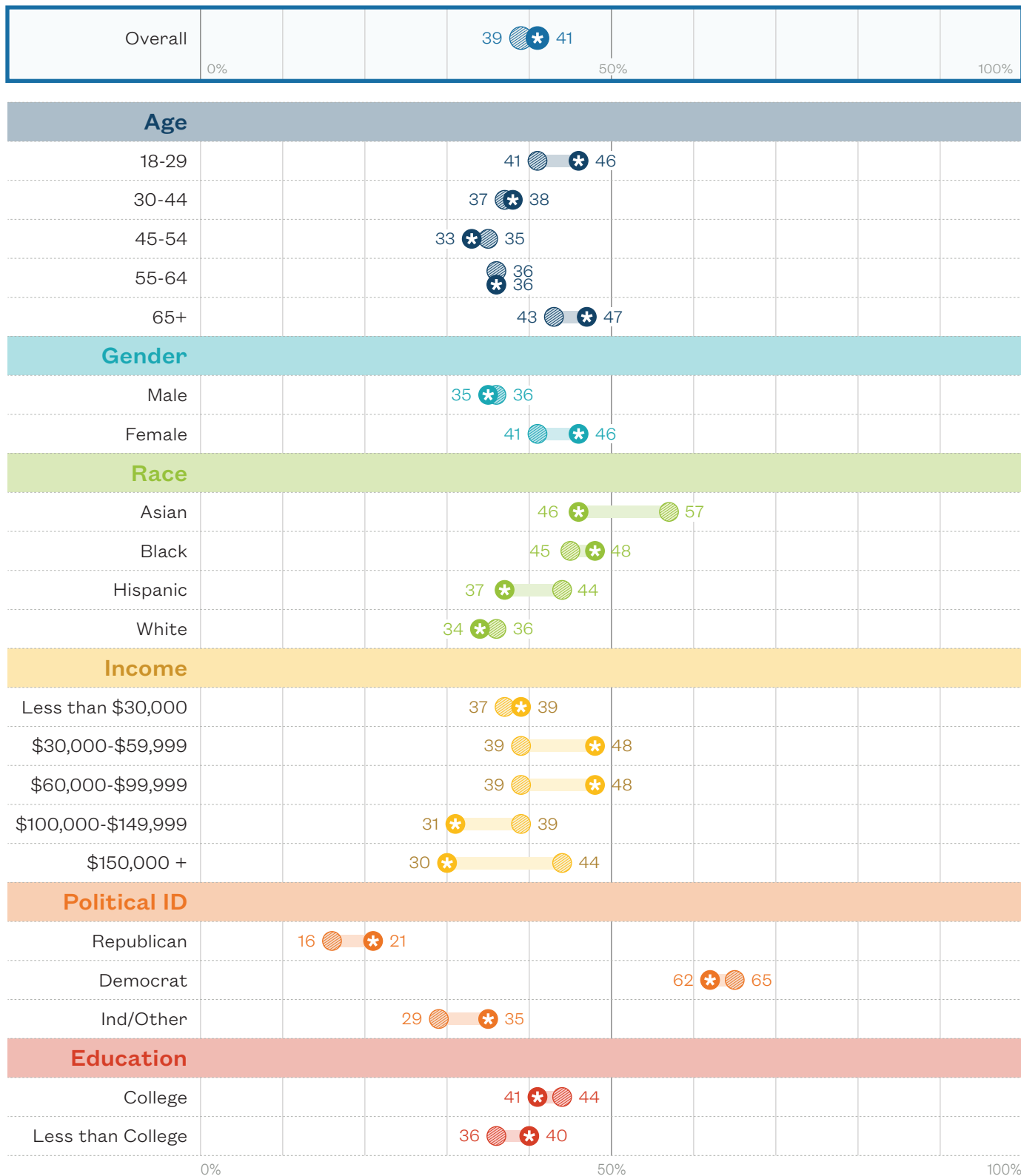
Statement 02. We should get back to life as usual with no COVID-19 mandates or requirements.

* Private
● Public



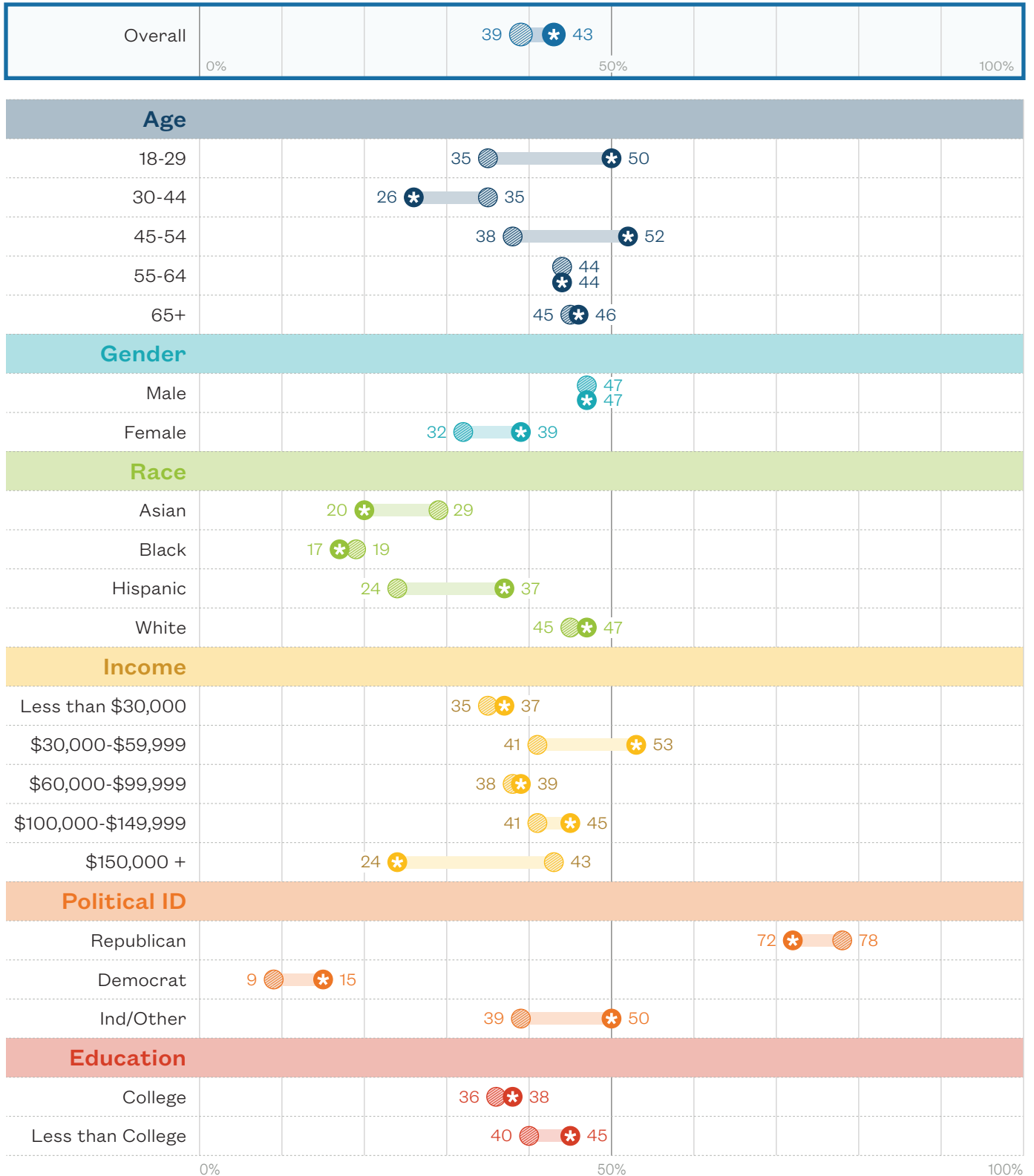
Statement 03. People should be required to show proof of vaccination in order to go to work when they are around other people.

* Private
● Public

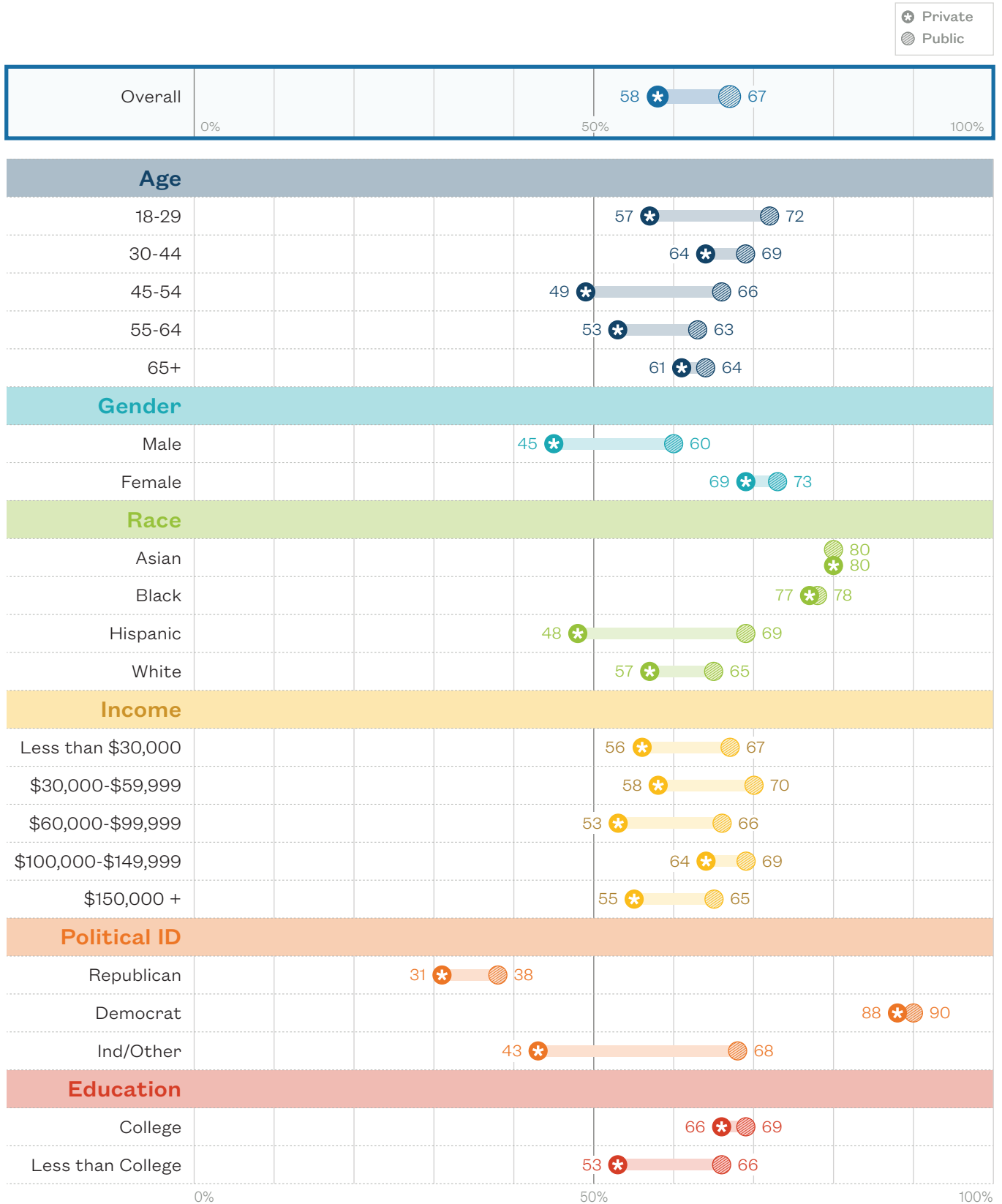


Statement 04. Closing schools and businesses as a response to COVID-19 was an overreaction that did more harm than good.

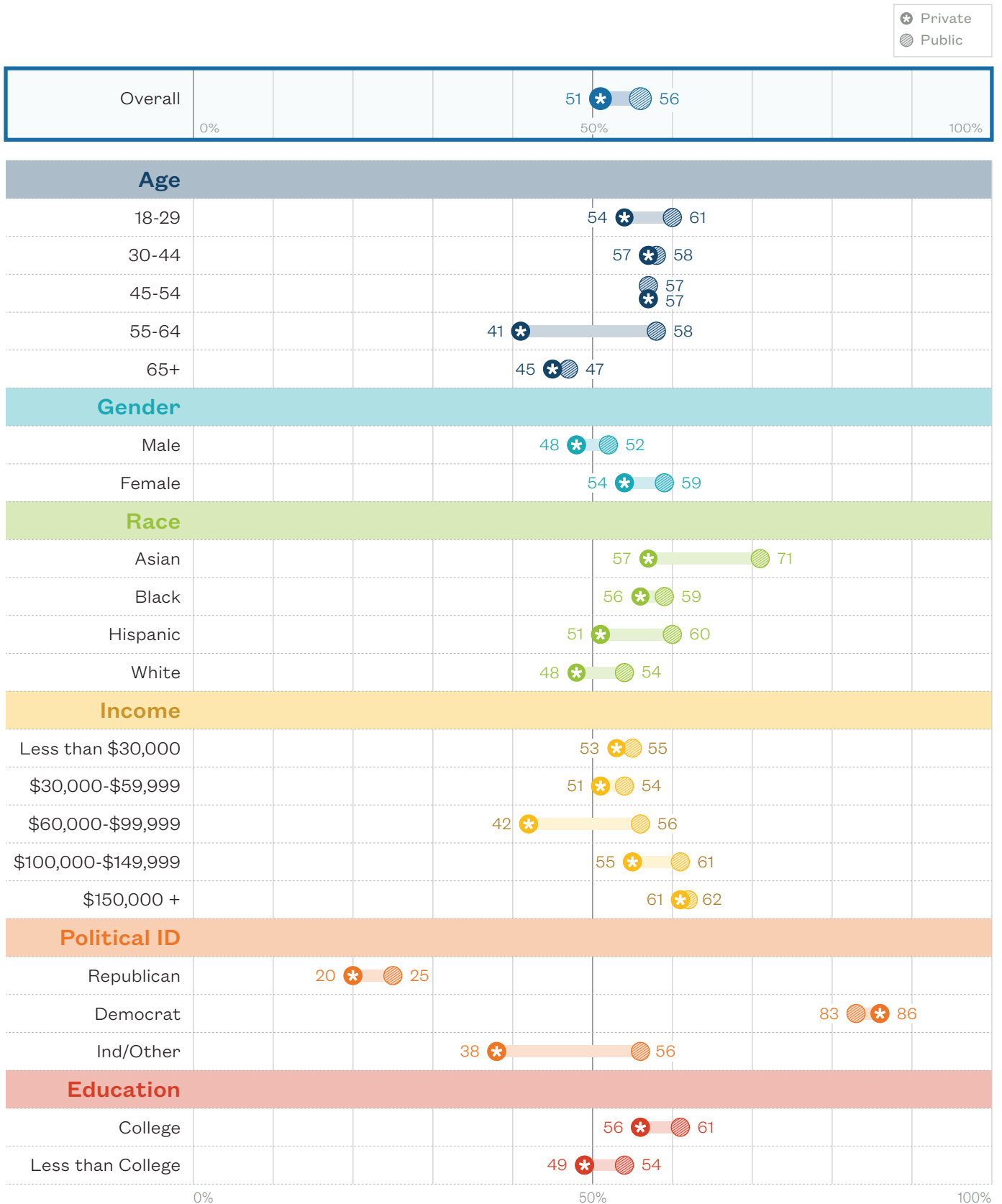
* Private
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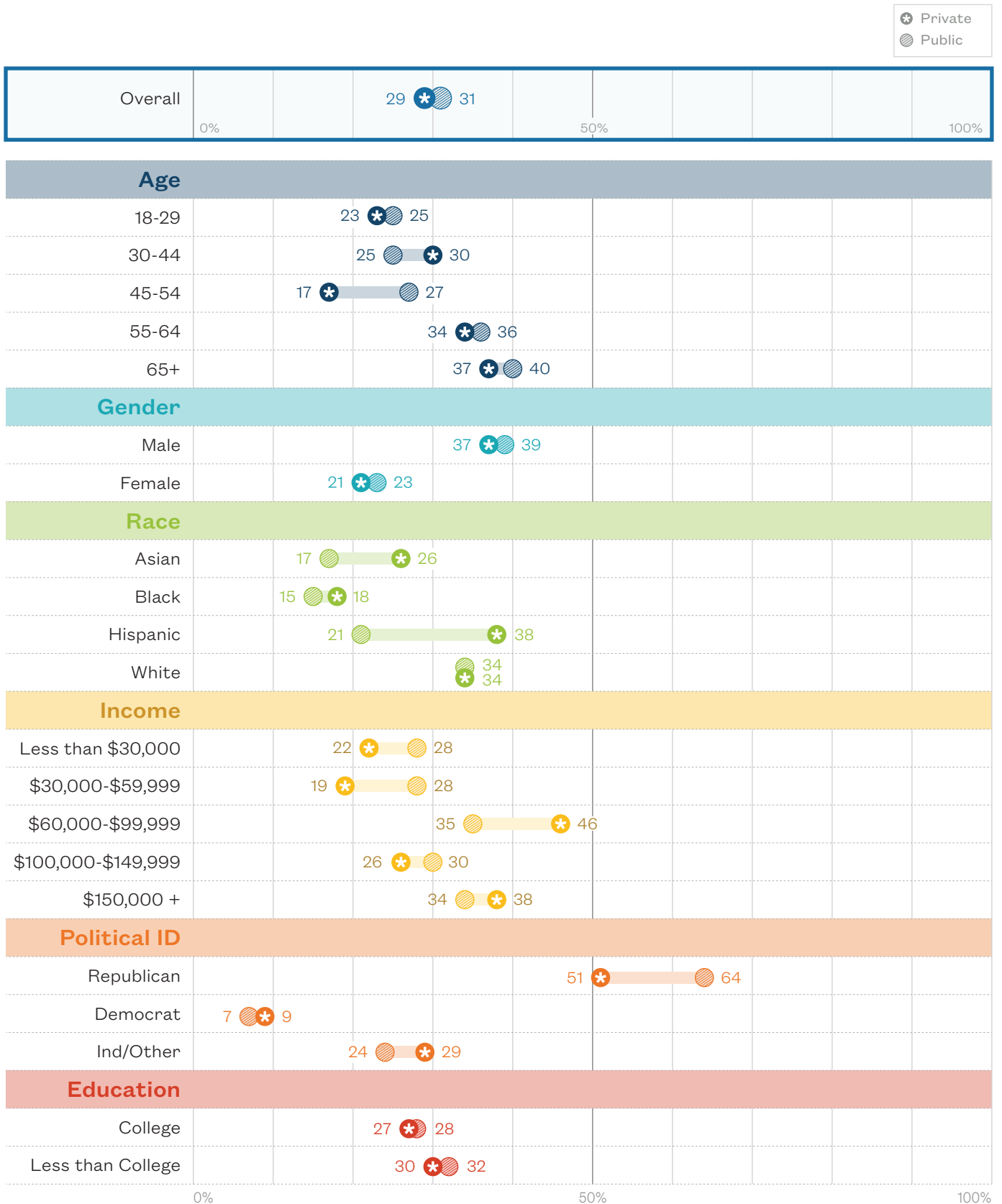
Statement 05. The choice to have an abortion should be left to a woman and her doctor.



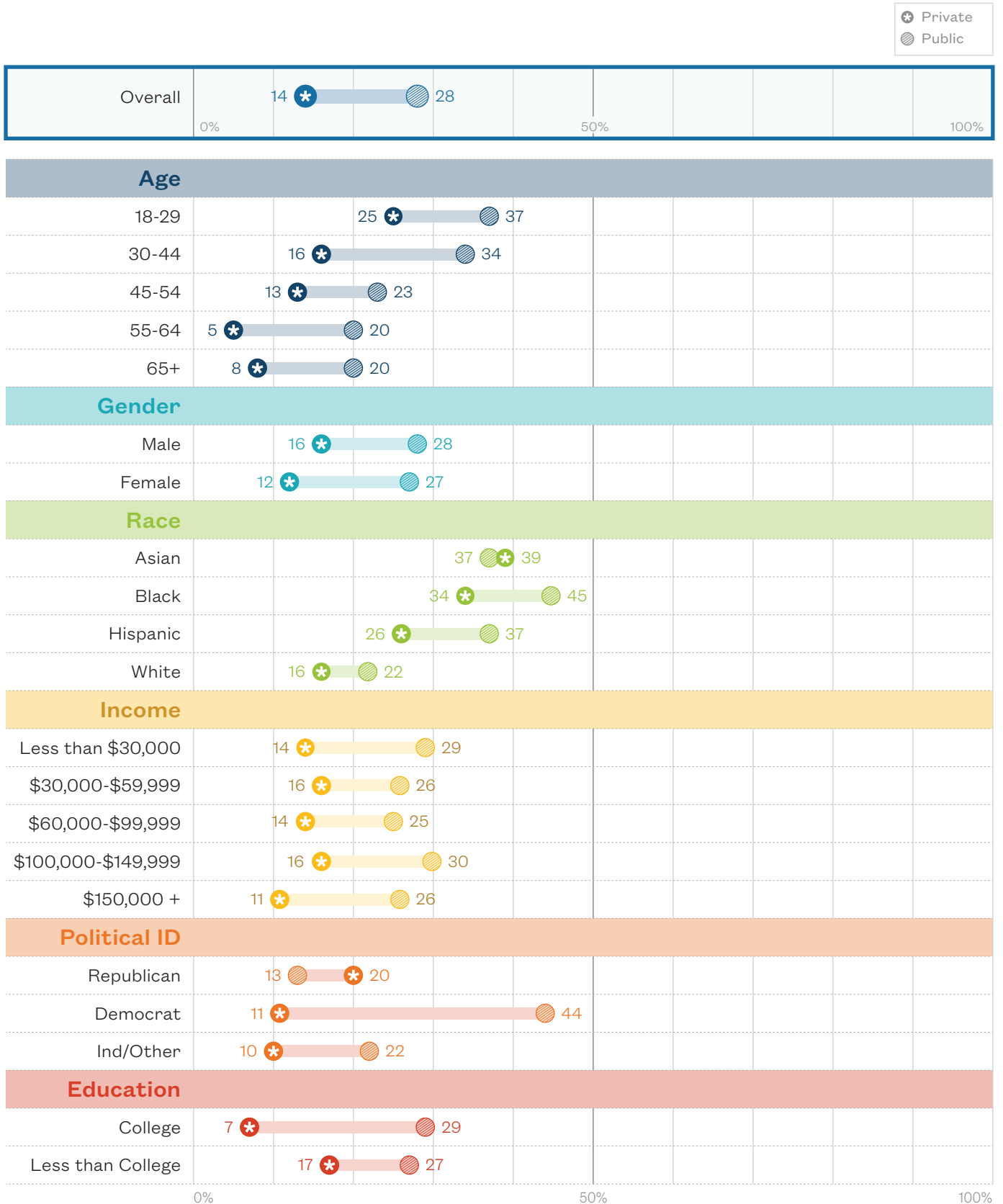
Statement 06. Abortion should be legal in most cases.



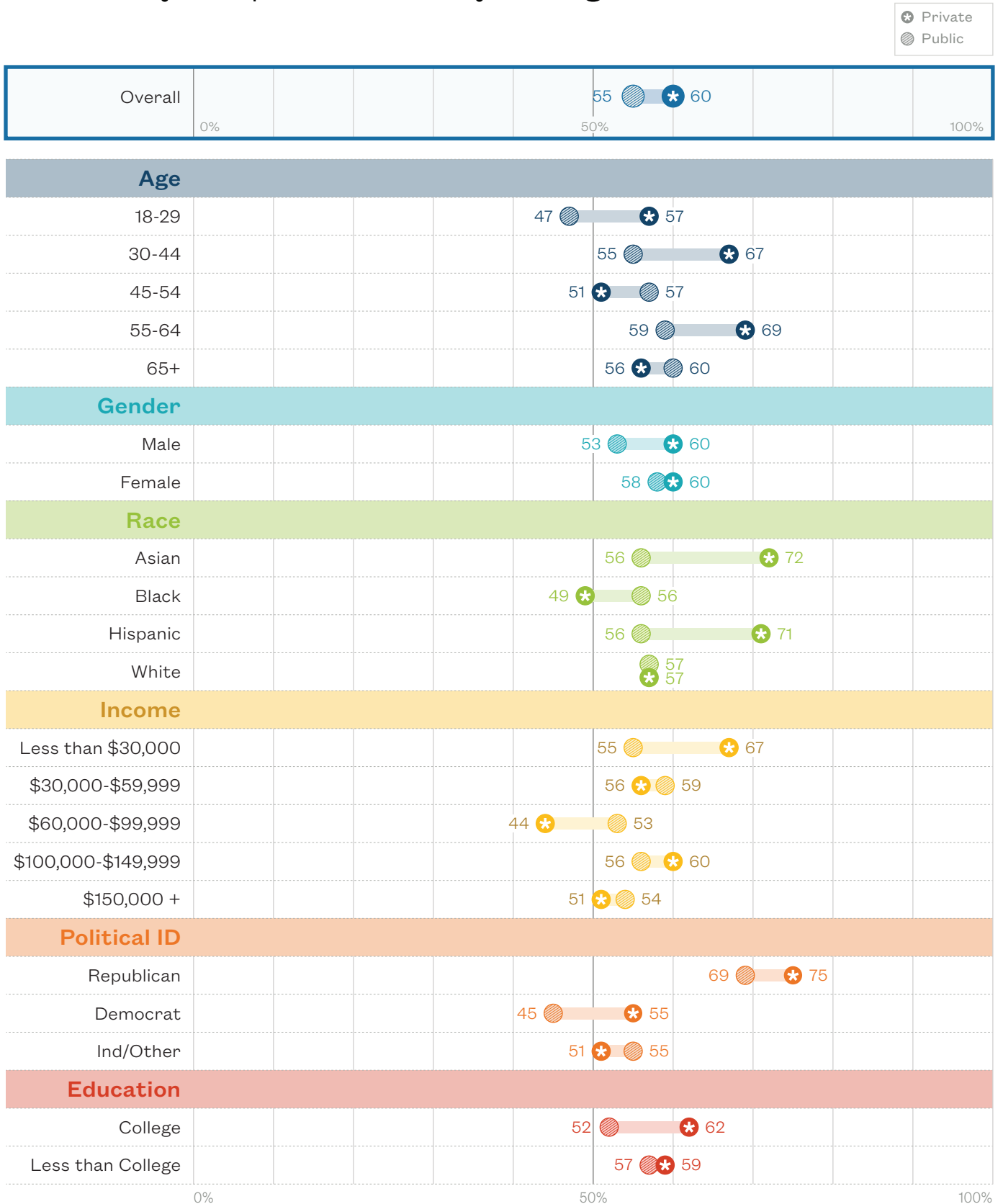
Statement 07. Roe v. Wade should be overturned.



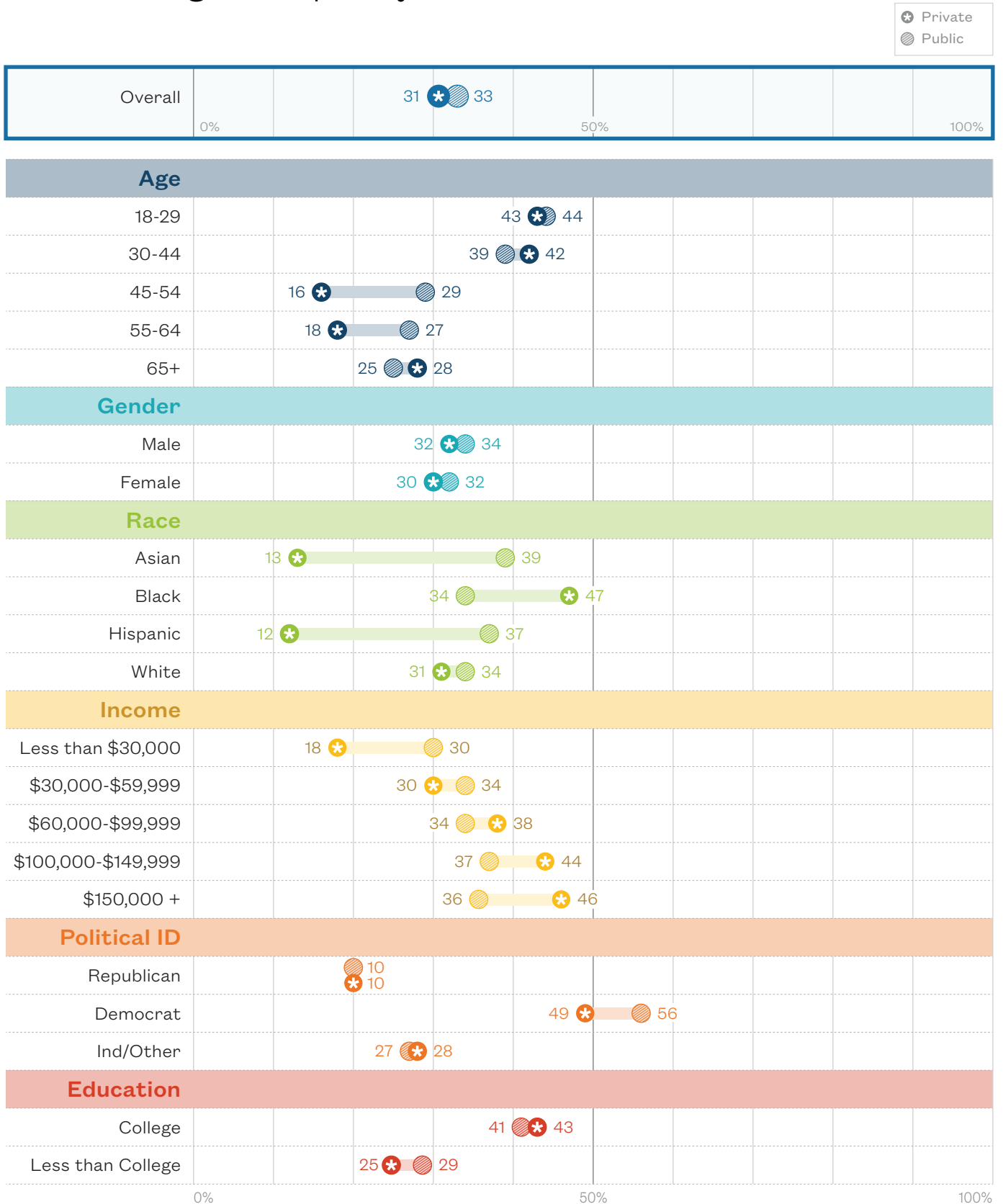
Statement 08. CEOs should take a public stand on controversial social issues.



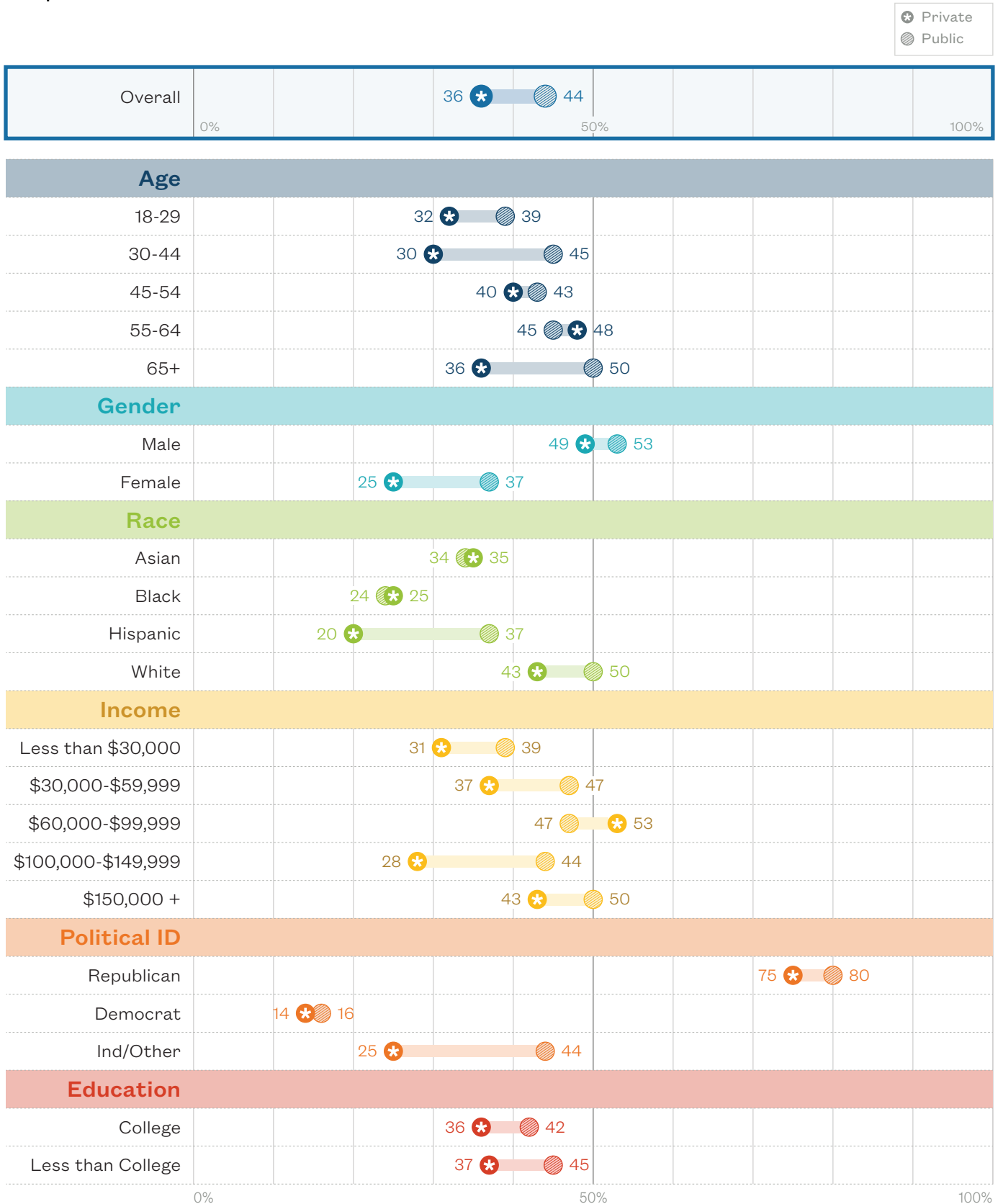
Statement 9. I feel like there is more crime in my community compared to a few years ago.



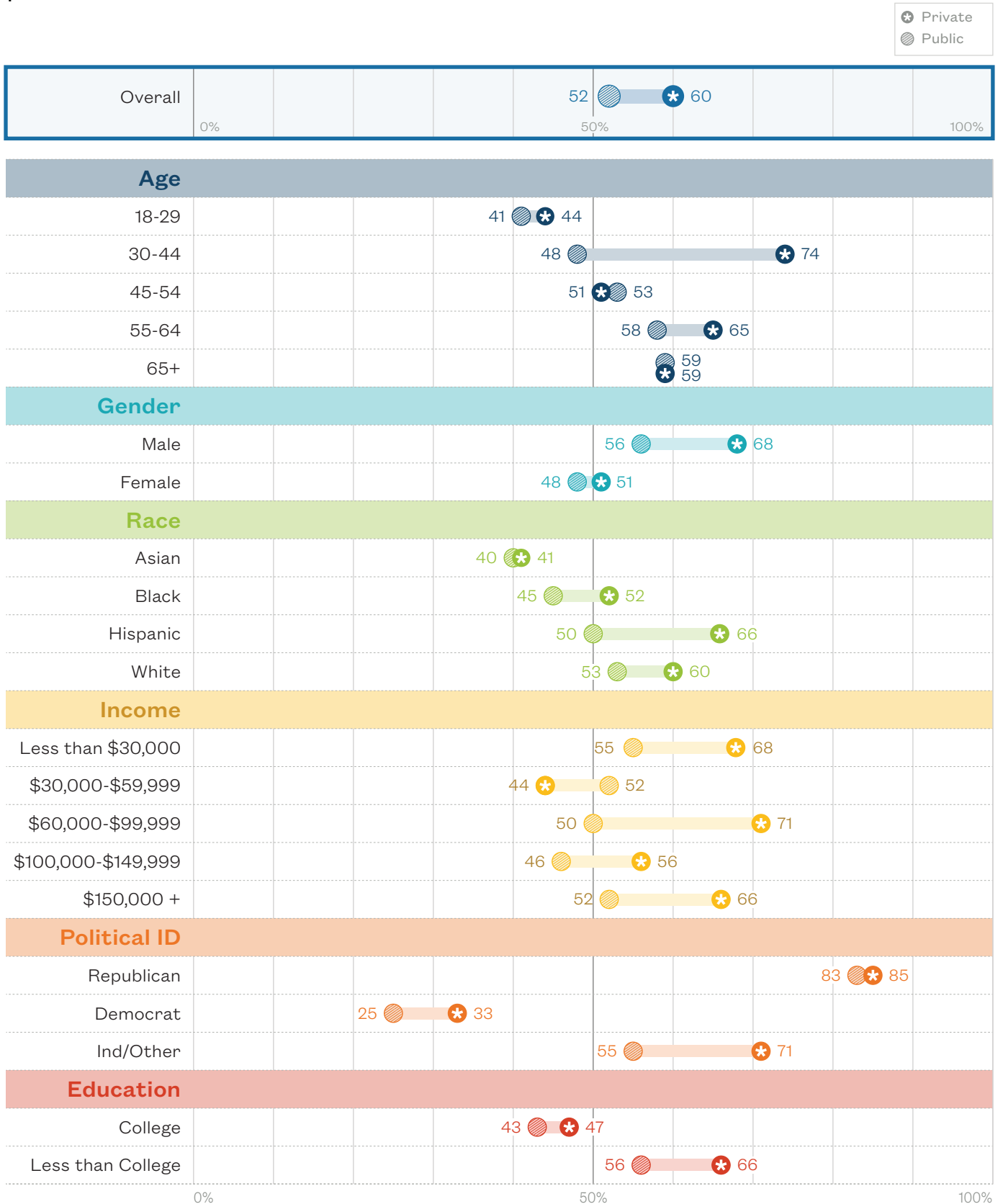
Statement 10. The U.S. should phase out use of oil, coal, and natural gas completely.



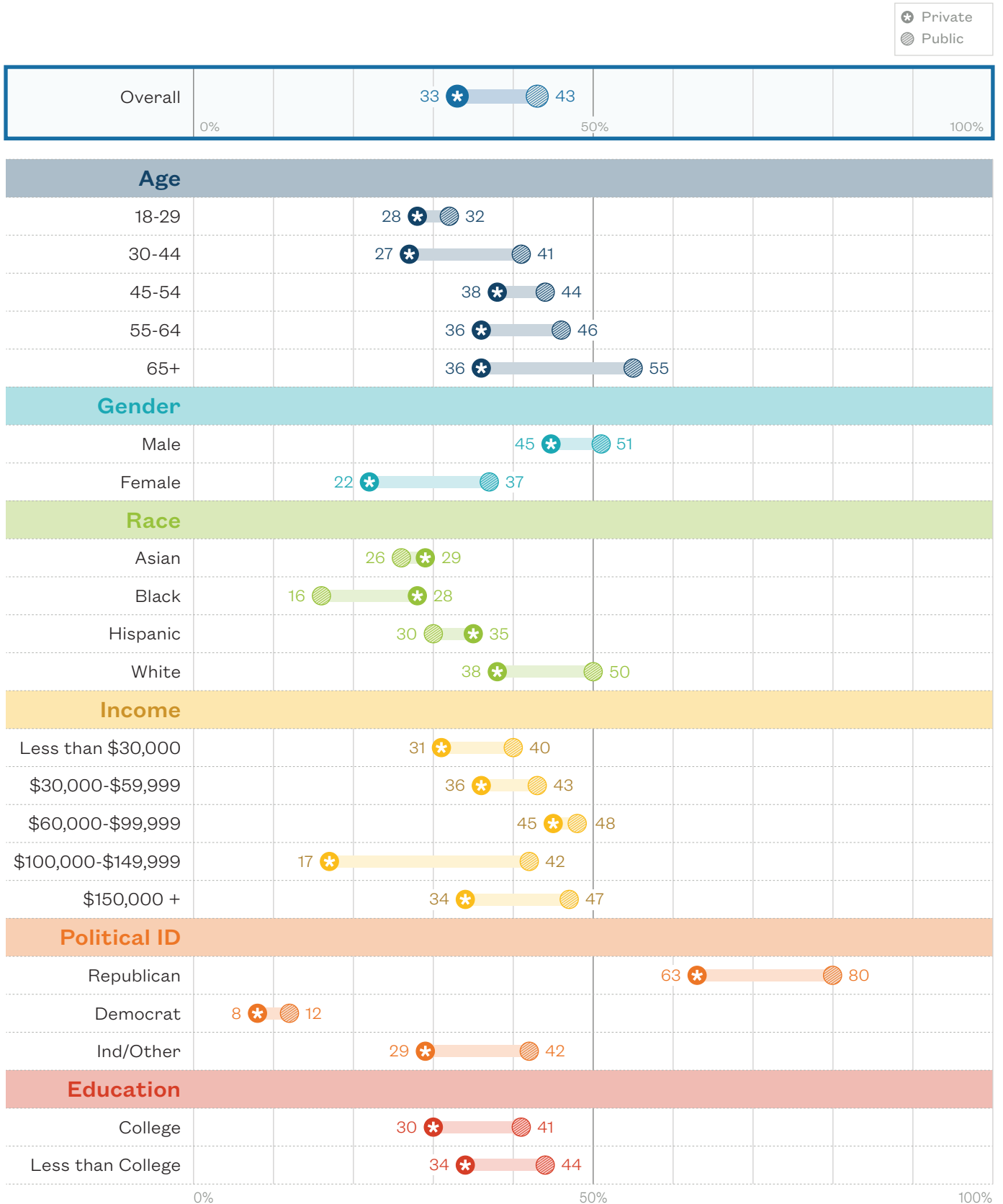
Statement 11. Public schools waited too long to resume in-person instruction.



Statement 12. Parents should have more influence over public school curriculums.

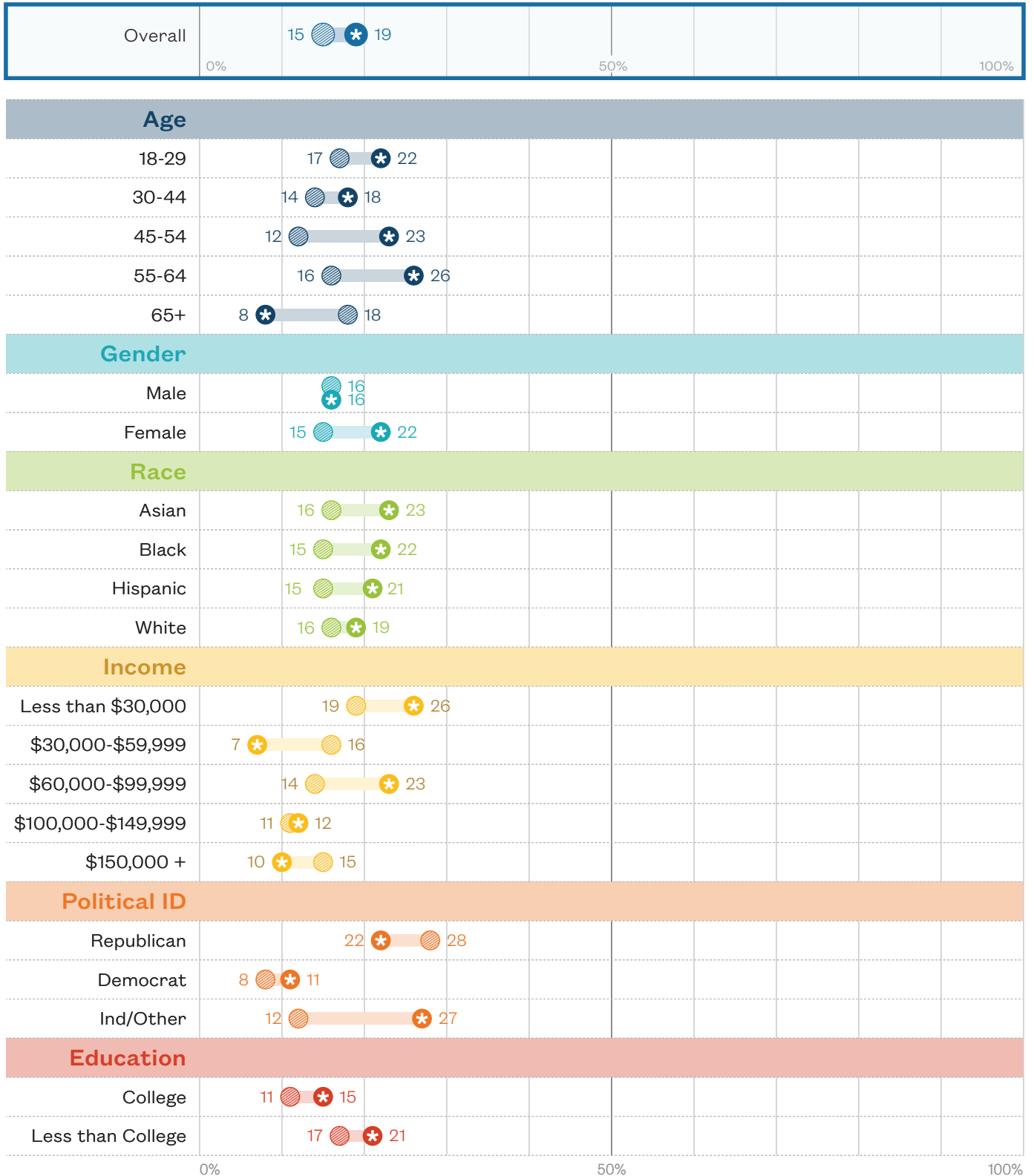


Statement 13. Public schools are focusing too much on racism in the U.S.



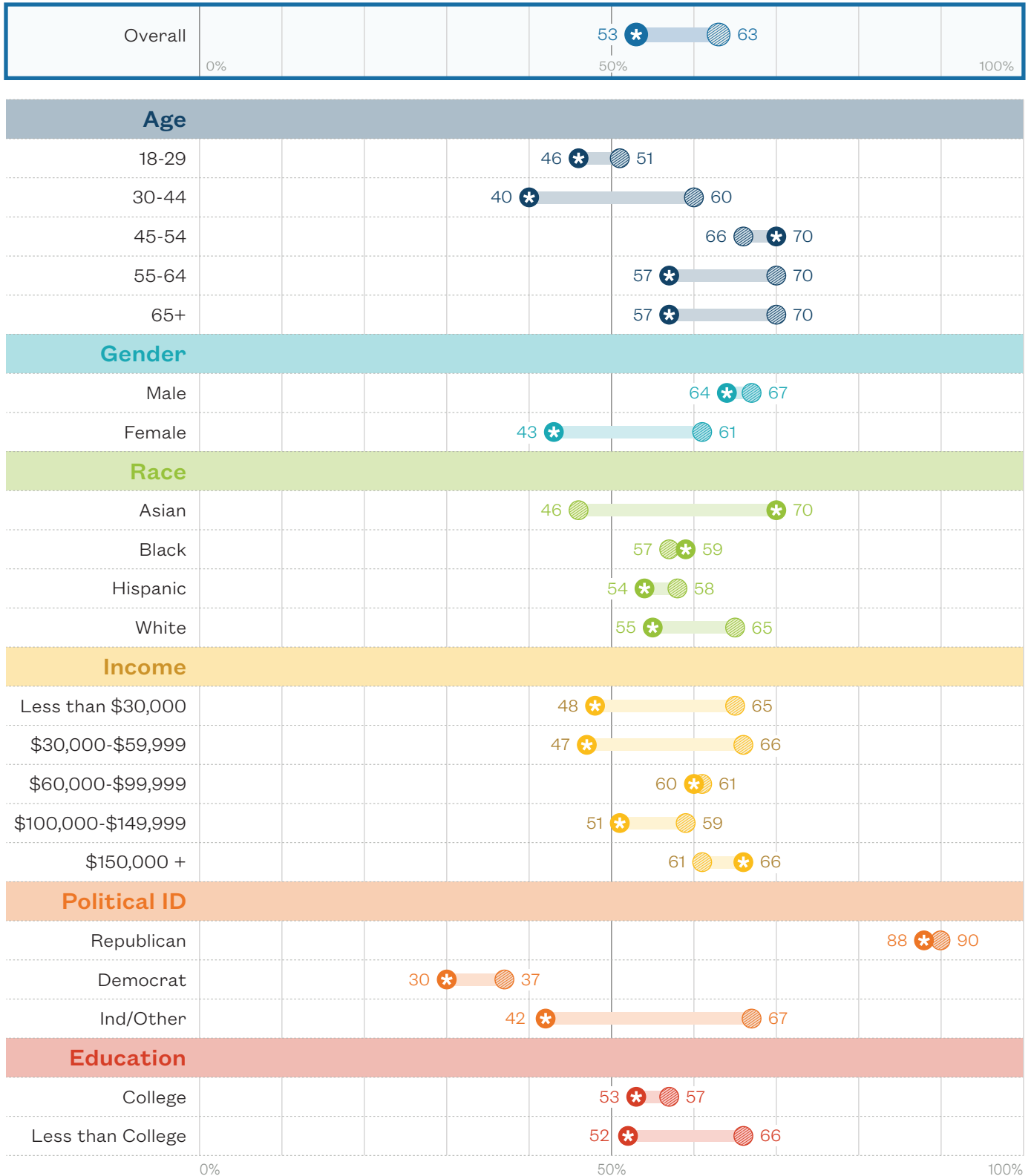
Statement 14. Books about controversial topics should be banned from being taught in public schools.

* Private
● Public



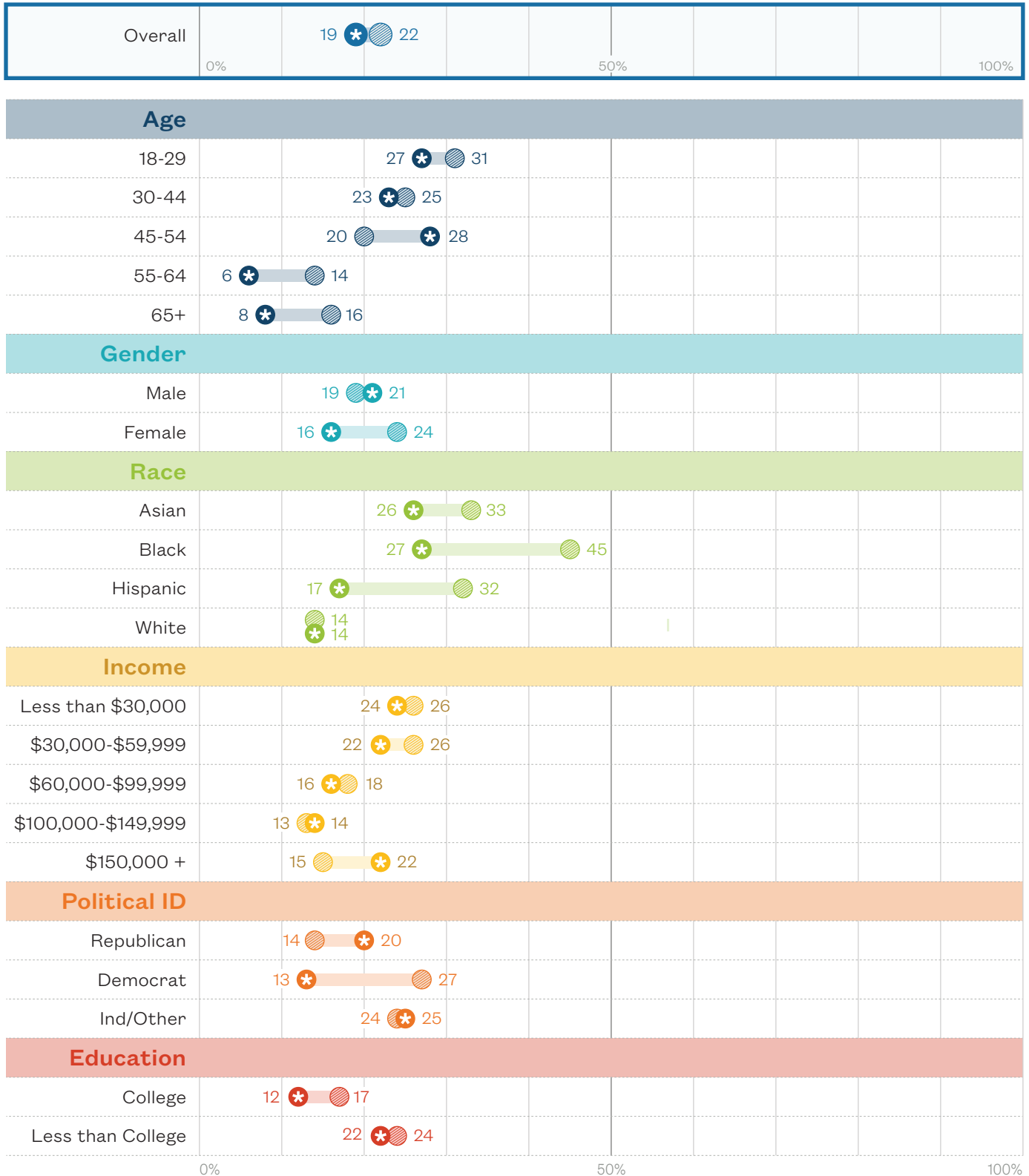
Statement 15. Discussing gender identity in public schools is inappropriate for children in kindergarten through 3rd grade.

* Private
● Public



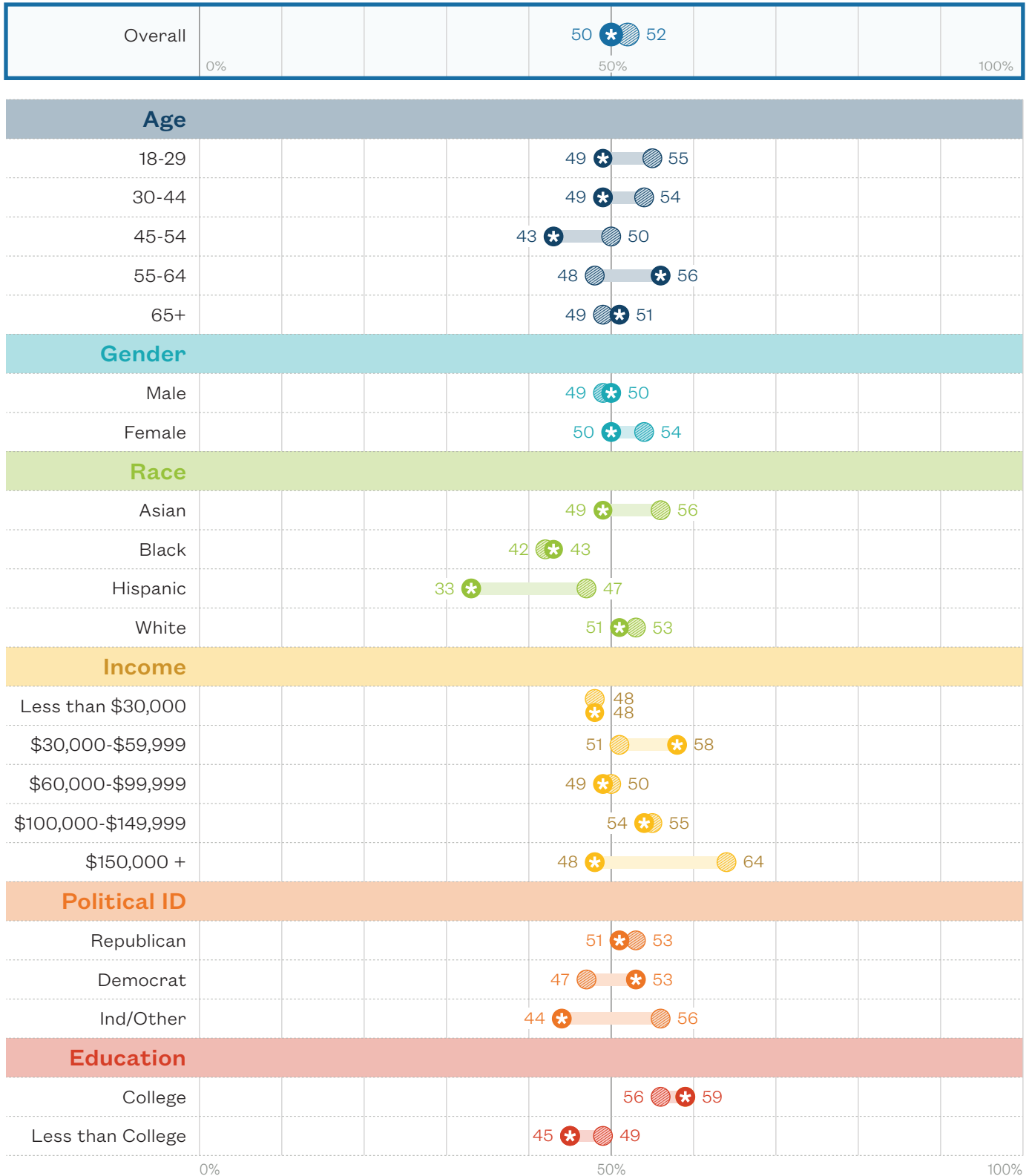
Statement 16. Colleges should protect students by prohibiting speech they may find offensive or biased.

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● Public

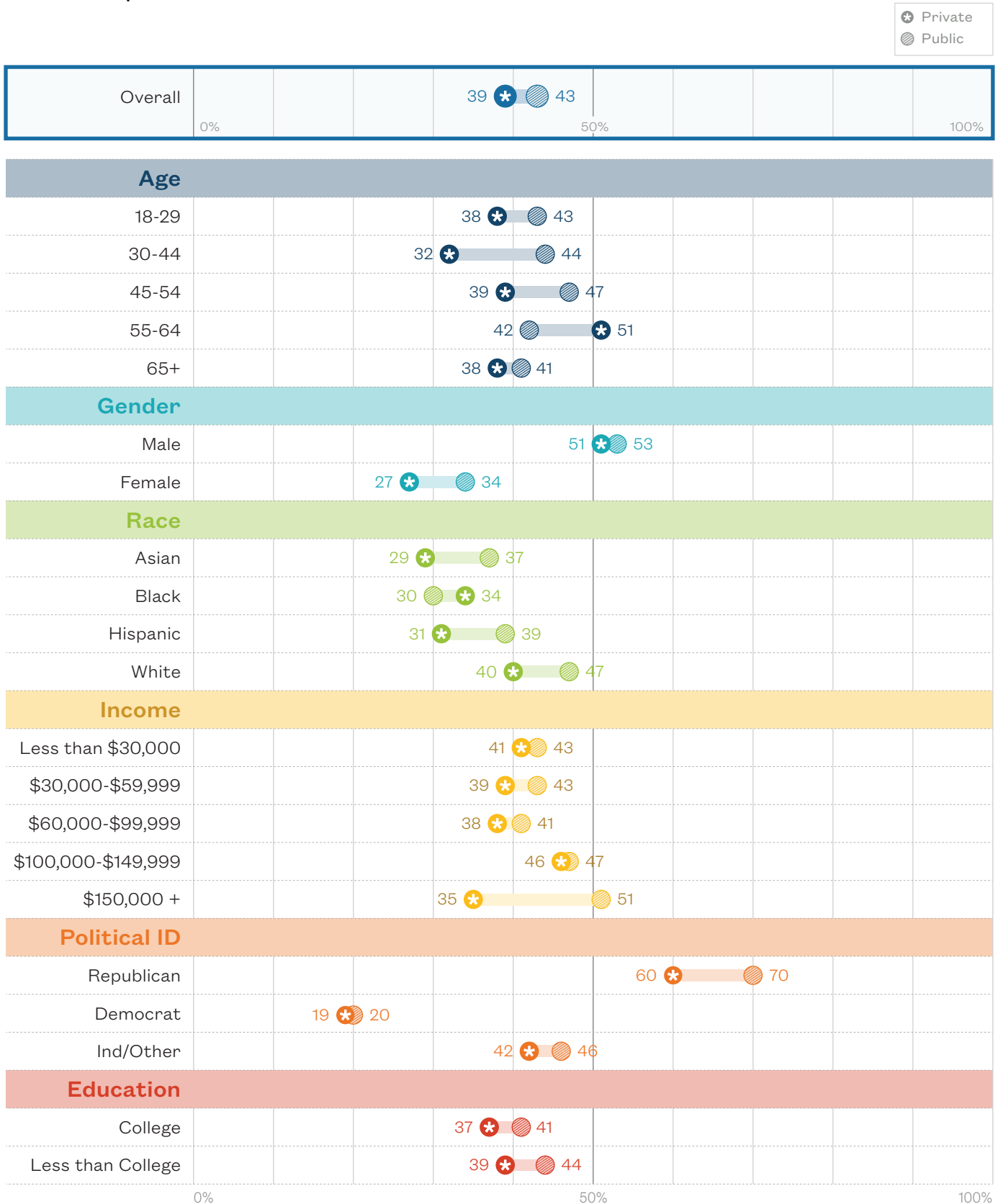


Statement 17. In the past year, I have avoided saying things I believe because others might find them offensive.

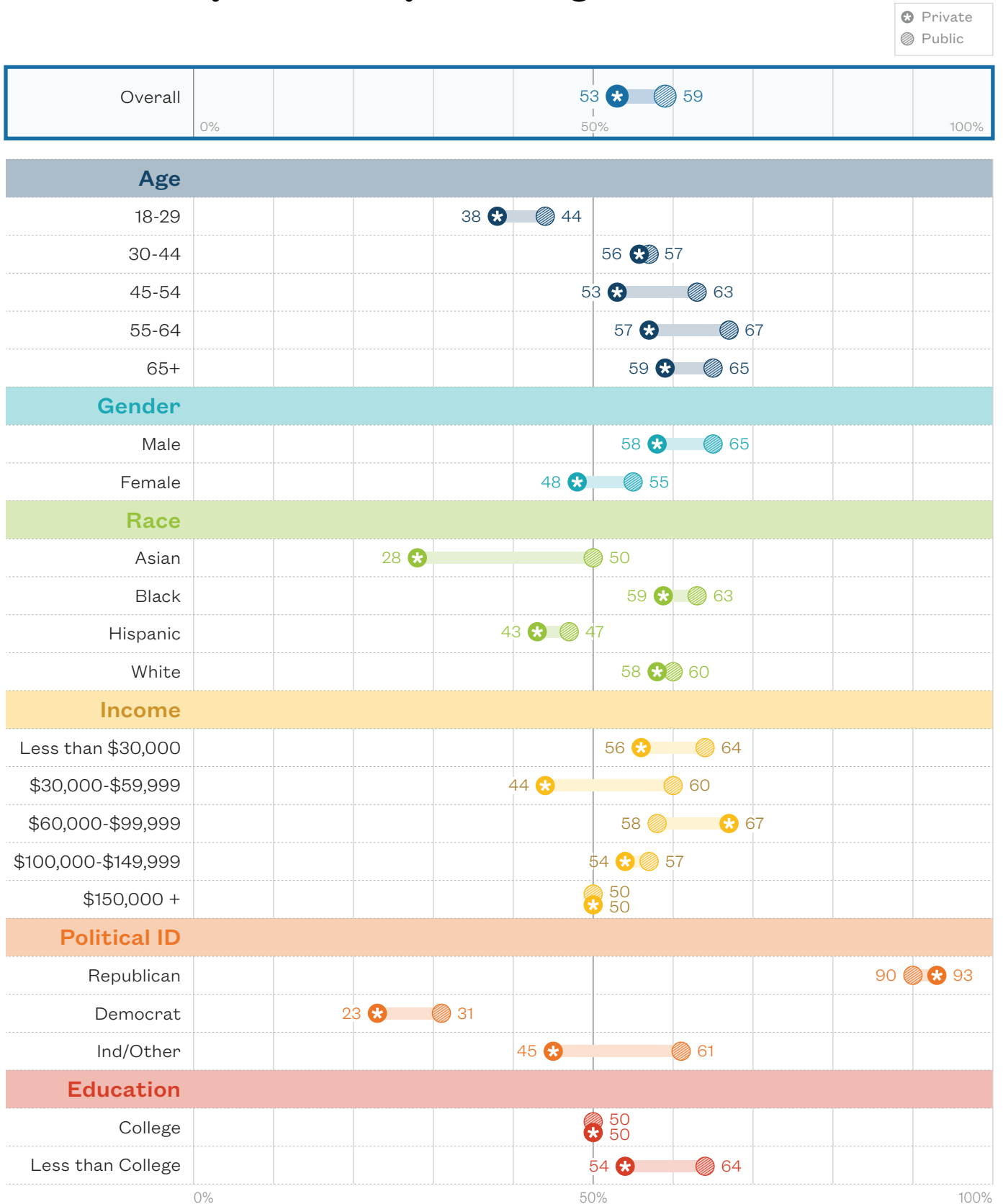
* Private
● Public



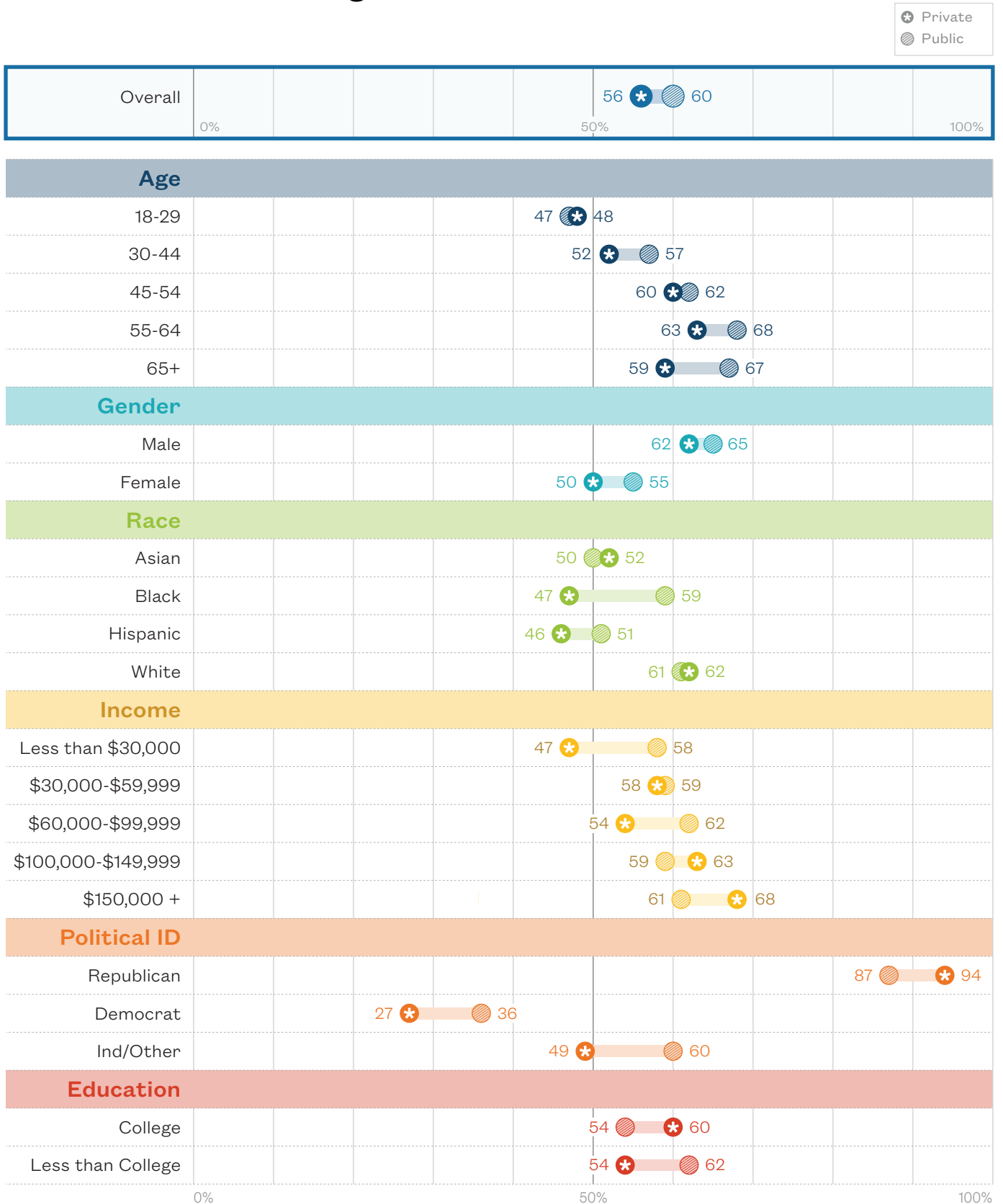
Statement 18. The internet should be a free speech zone, where speech is uncensored.



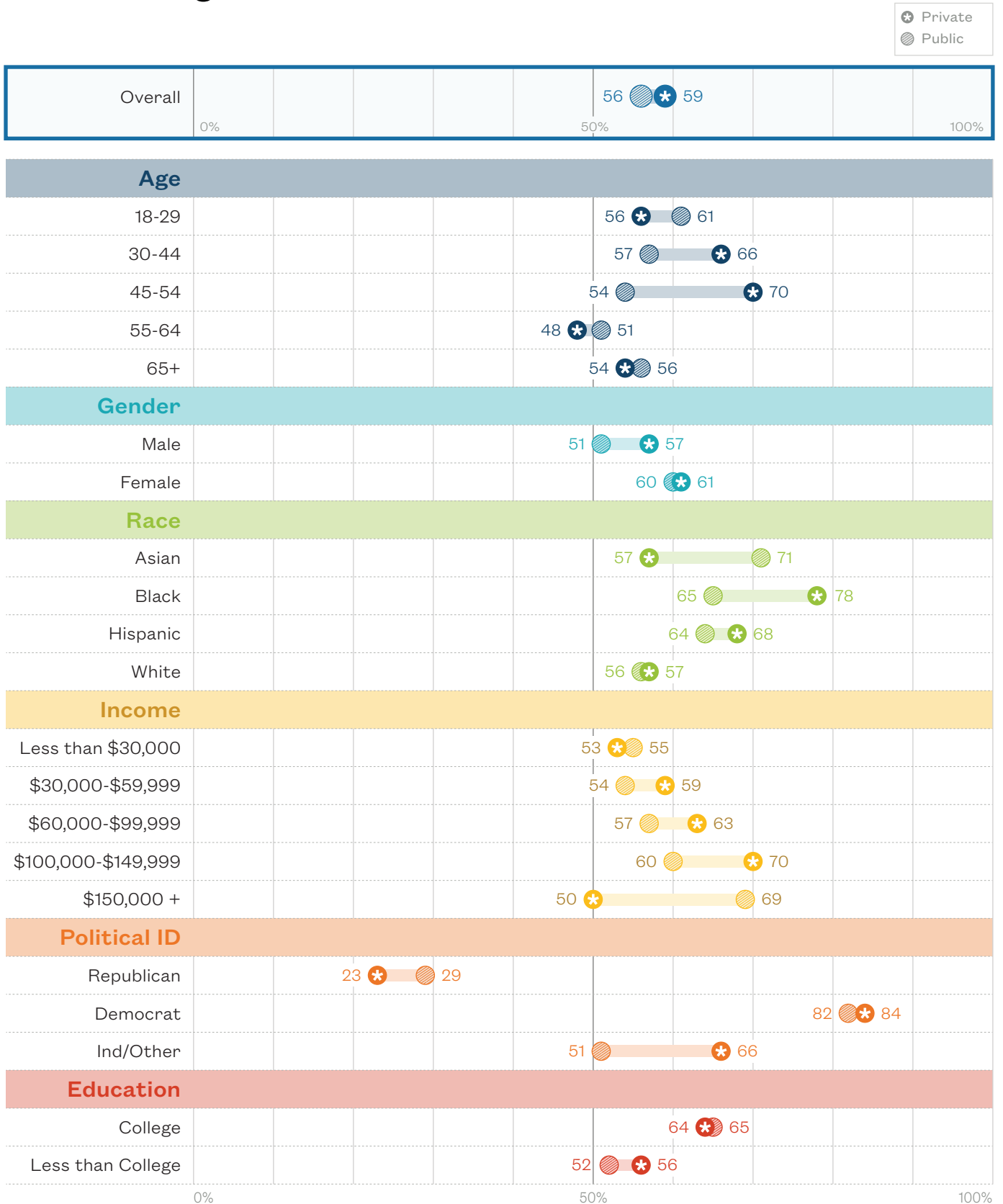
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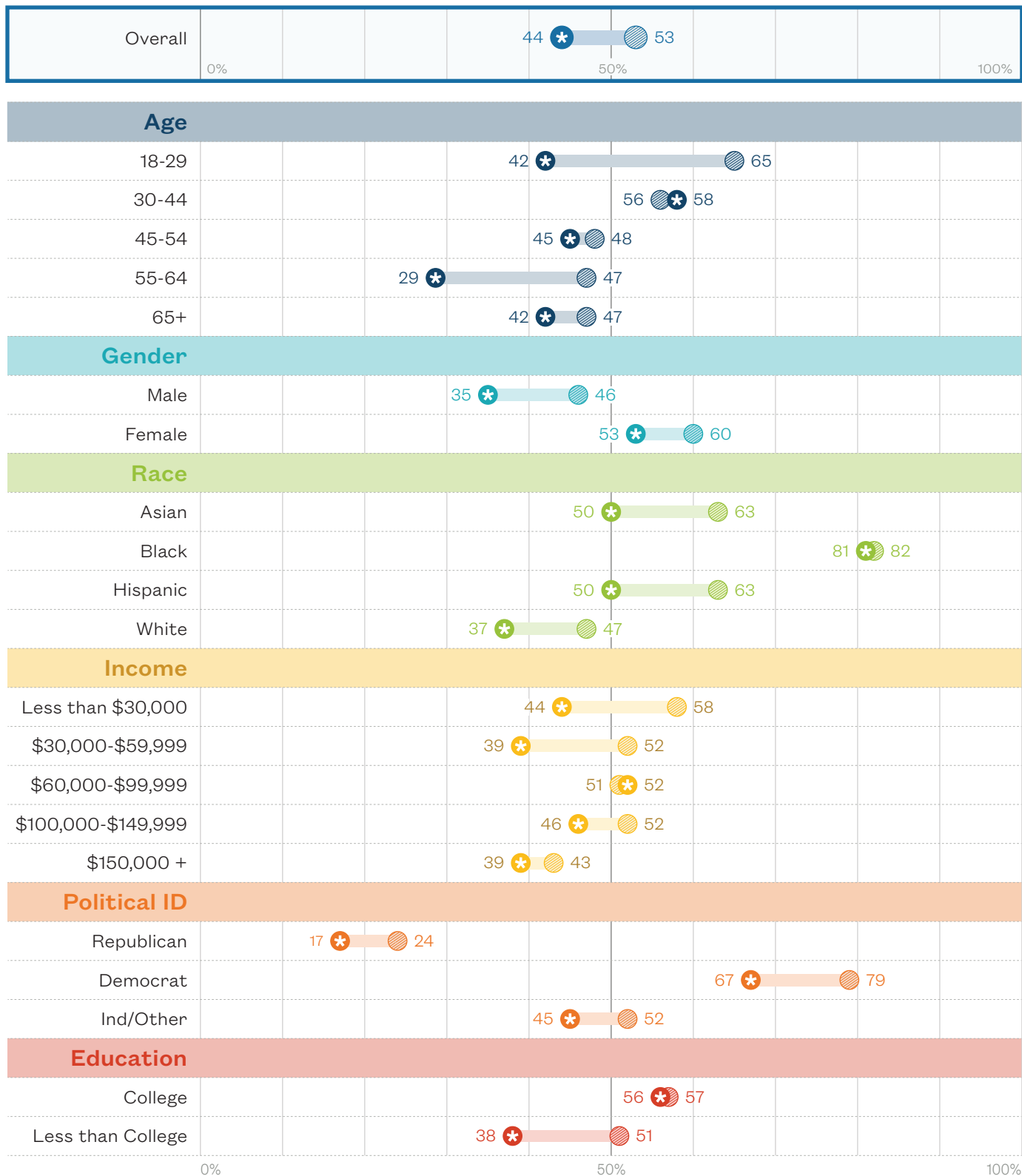


Statement 21. The government should protect transgender Americans against discrimination.

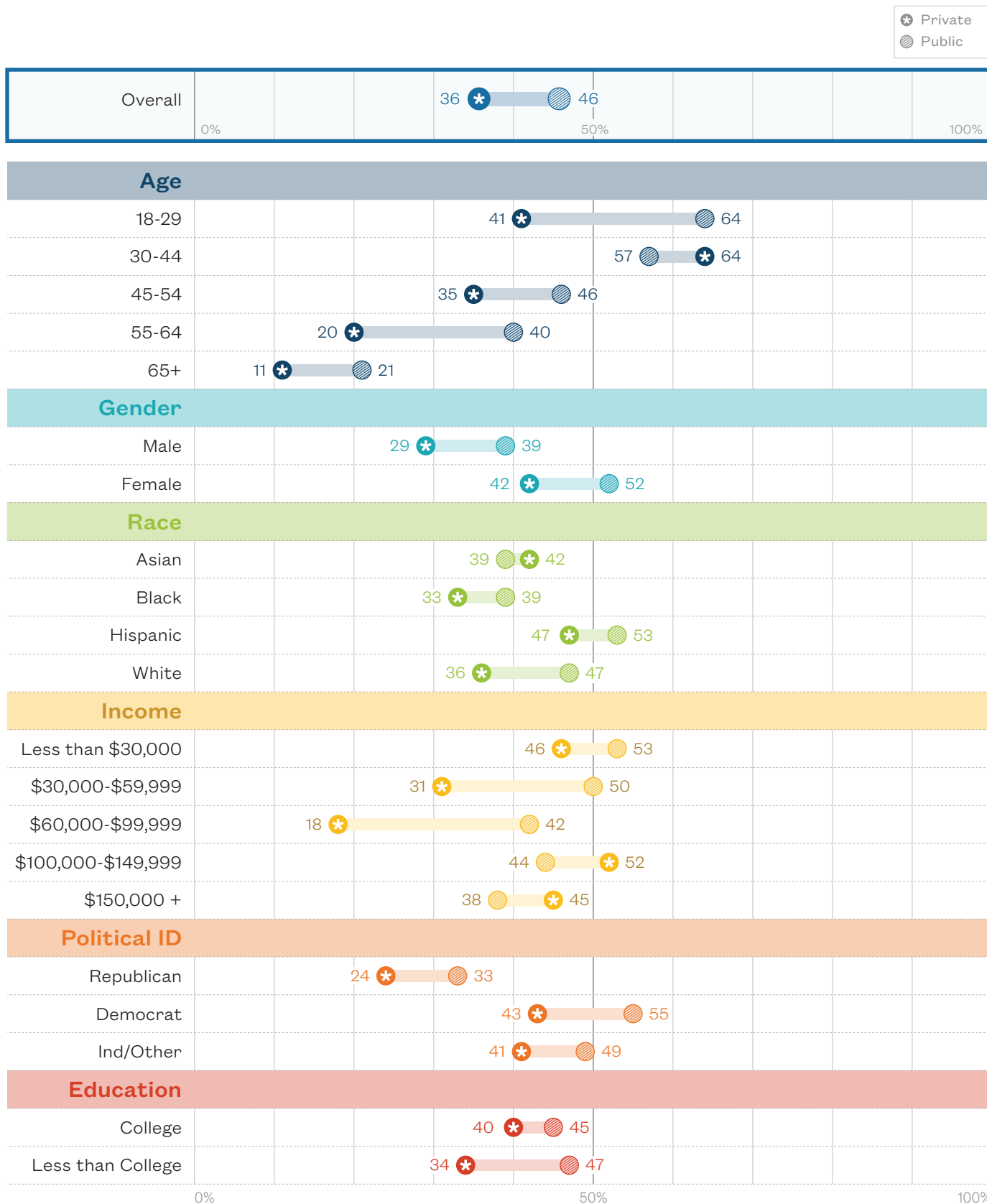


Statement 22. Racism is built into the American economy, government, and educational system.

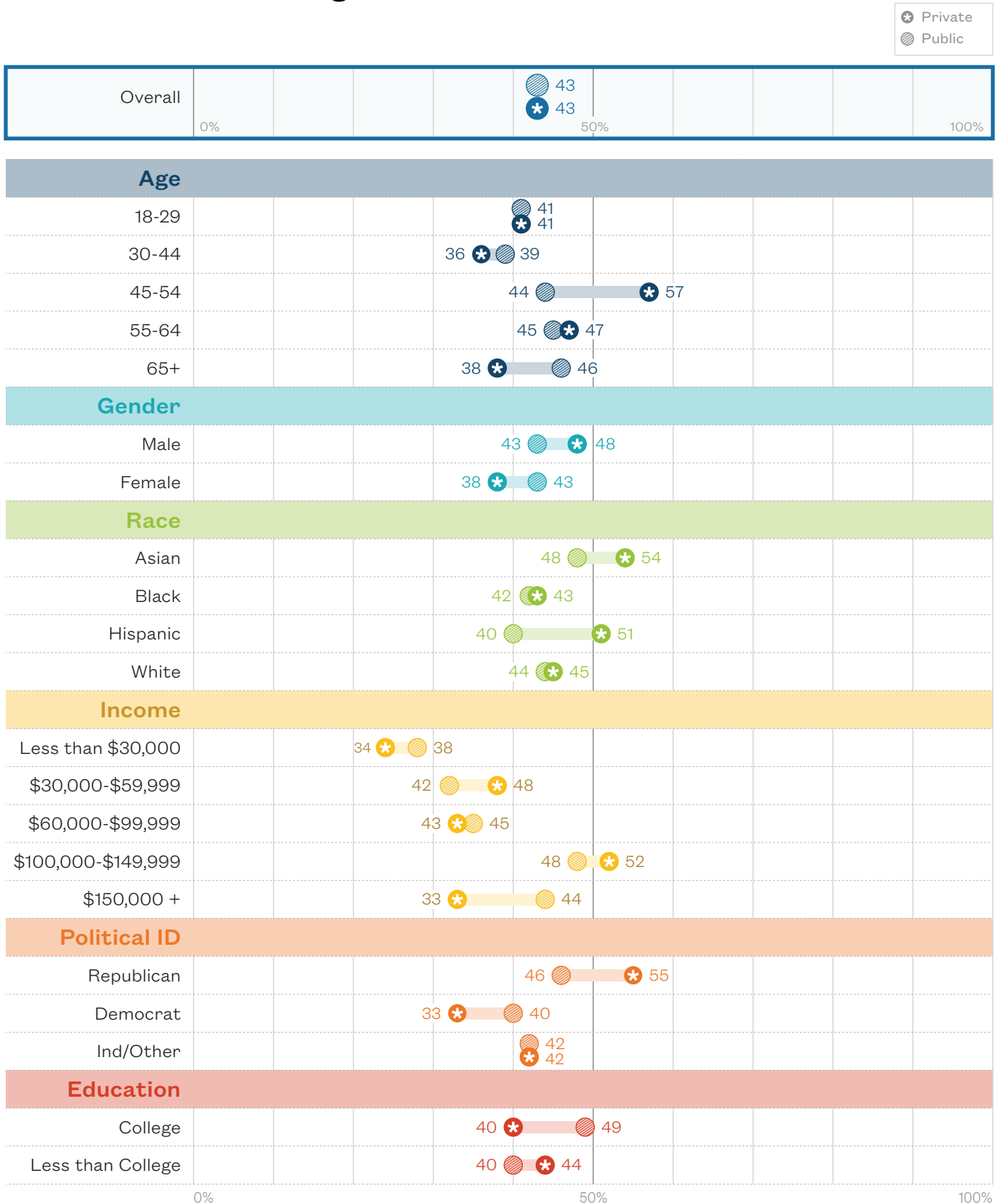
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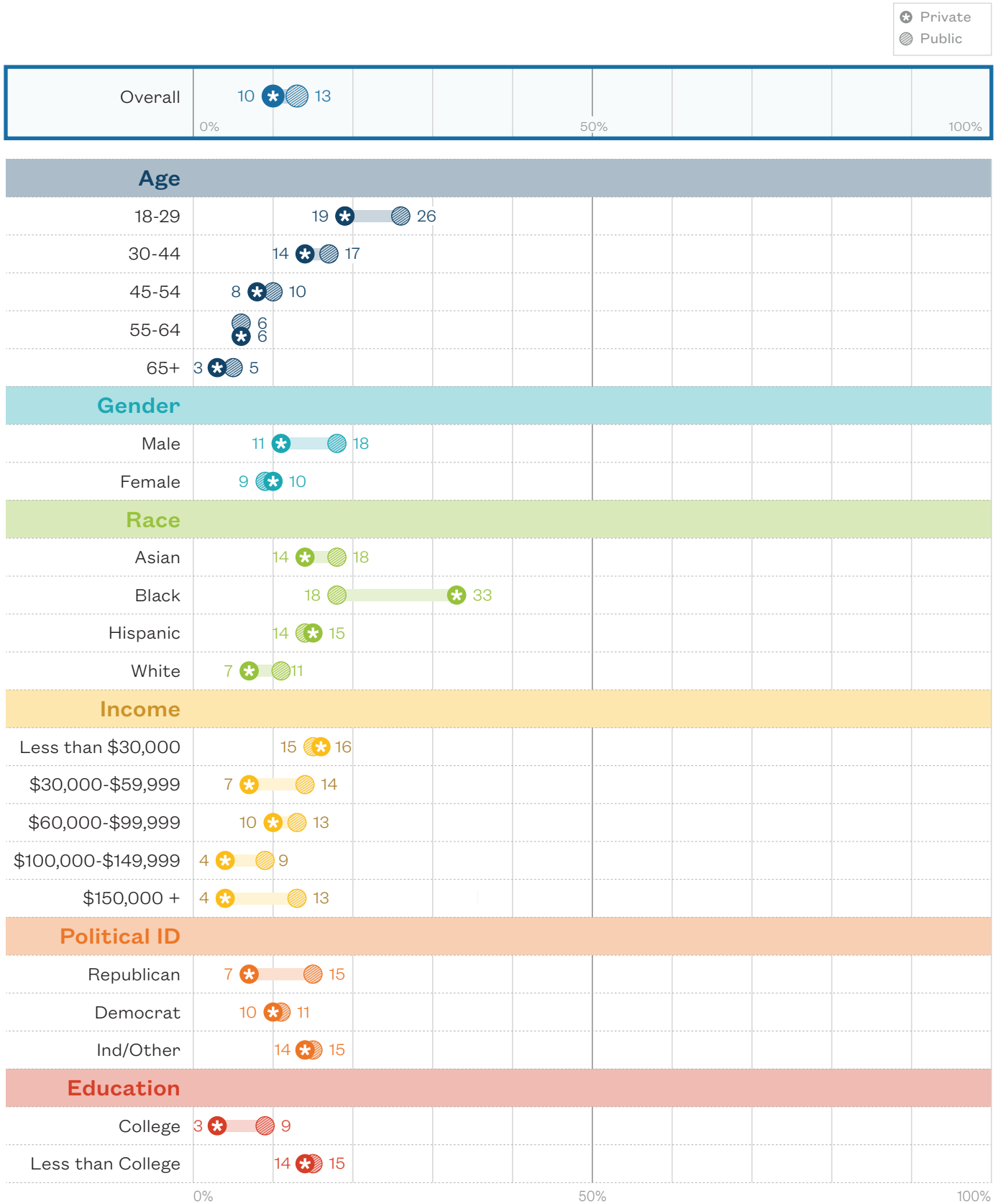
Statement 23. In the past 5 years, I experienced at least one mental health issue.



Statement 24. If I had a mental health disorder, I would not be comfortable disclosing it.



Statement 25. Most mental illness can be overcome by willpower.



Populace