

# LOSING AMERICA'S MEMORY 2.0

## A Civic Literacy Assessment of College Students

JULY 2024

AN ACTA/COLLEGE PULSE REPORT



**ACTA**

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF  
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI



**COLLEGE PULSE**

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Declaration  
of Independence

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

DECLARATION OF

INDEPENDENCE

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# About Us

# About Us

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## **AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI (ACTA)**

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Founded in 1995, ACTA works with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the country to support the study of the liberal arts, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price.

Our network consists of alumni and trustees from over 1,300 colleges and universities, including over 23,000 current board members. Our quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe*, reaches over 15,000 readers.

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

## **COLLEGE PULSE**

College Pulse is a survey research and analytics company dedicated to understanding the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of today's college students. College Pulse offers custom data-driven marketing and research solutions, utilizing its unique American College Student Panel™ that includes over 850,000 college students and recent alumni from more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states.

For more information, visit [collegepulse.com](https://collegepulse.com) or College Pulse's official Twitter account [@CollegeInsights](https://twitter.com/CollegeInsights).

# Methodology

# Sampling Methodology

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This survey was designed and conducted by College Pulse between May 10, 2024, and June 19, 2024. Surveys were completed by a sample of 3,026 undergraduate students in the United States.

The sample was drawn from College Pulse's American College Student Panel™ that includes over 850,000 verified students representing more than 1,500 different colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members are recruited by a number of methods to help ensure diversity in the panel population, including web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university organizations. To reduce the effects of any non-response bias, a post-stratification adjustment was applied based on demographic distributions of the undergraduate, derived from the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS), the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the 2019–20 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The post-stratification weight rebalanced the sample based on the following benchmarks: gender, race and ethnicity, voter registration, financial aid status, and class year. The sample weighting was accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IPF) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables. The frequencies presented in this report, including the gender and political breakdown, are weighted counts to accurately represent the demographic and political composition of the undergraduate population.

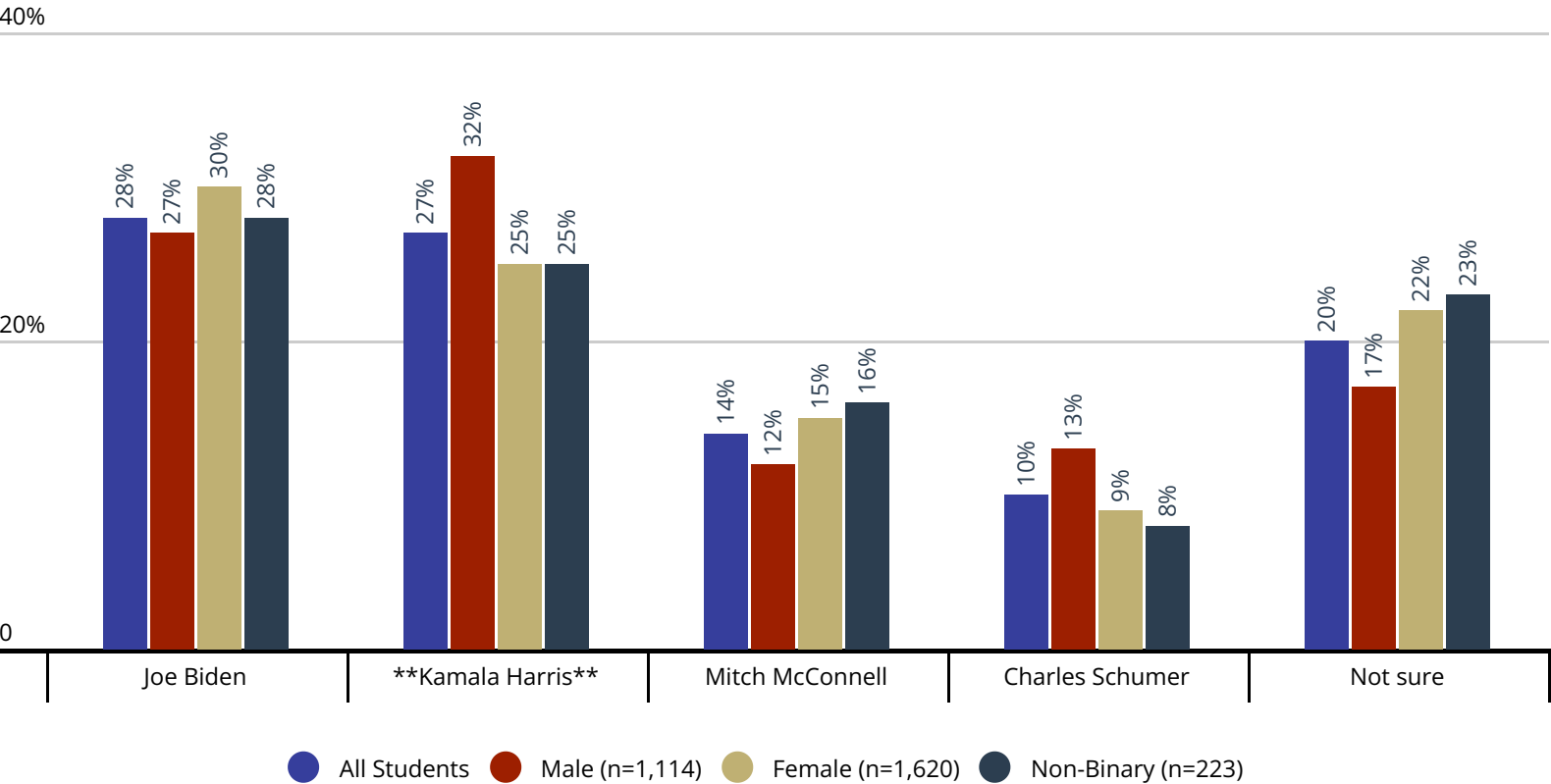
The margin of error for this survey ranges from +/- 2–7 percentage points. Margins of error are typically calculated on probability-based samples and are not technically correct for non-probability online samples. We supply them here to provide a general assessment of error ranges that may be associated with the data.

For more information about our [click here](#), or contact [methodology@collegepulse.com](mailto:methodology@collegepulse.com).

# Highlights

# Most students do not know who the president of the Senate is.

- Just over one-quarter (27%) of students correctly identify Kamala Harris as the president of the Senate.
- Males (32%) are more likely than females (25%) to correctly identify Kamala Harris as the president of the Senate.

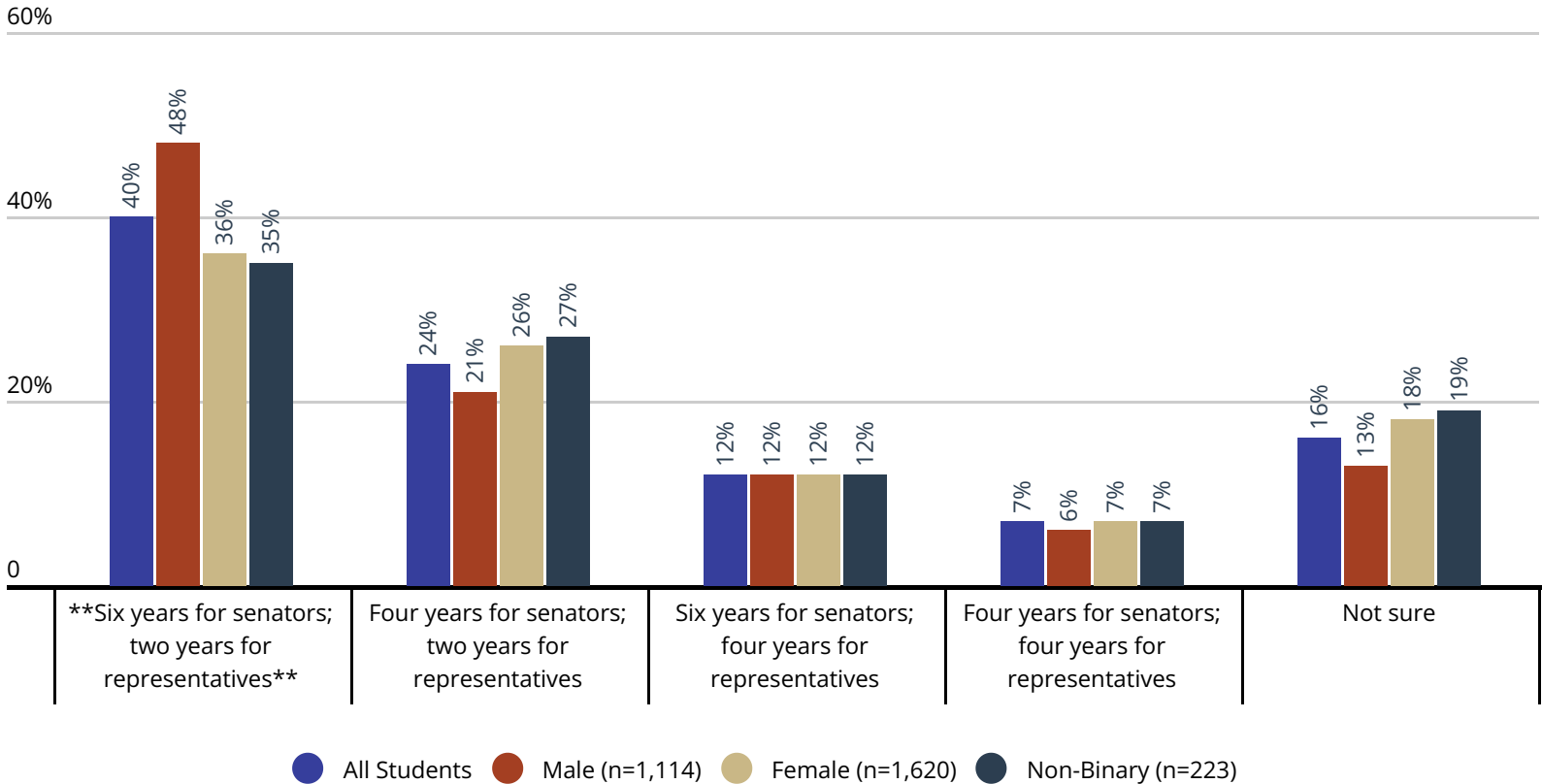


Q1. Who is the current president of the Senate? (n=3,026)



# Almost one-third of students think senators serve a four-year term.

- Less than half (40%) of students correctly answer that Senate terms are six years and House of Representatives terms are two years.
- Males (48%) are more likely than females (36%) to correctly identify the term limits for members of Congress.

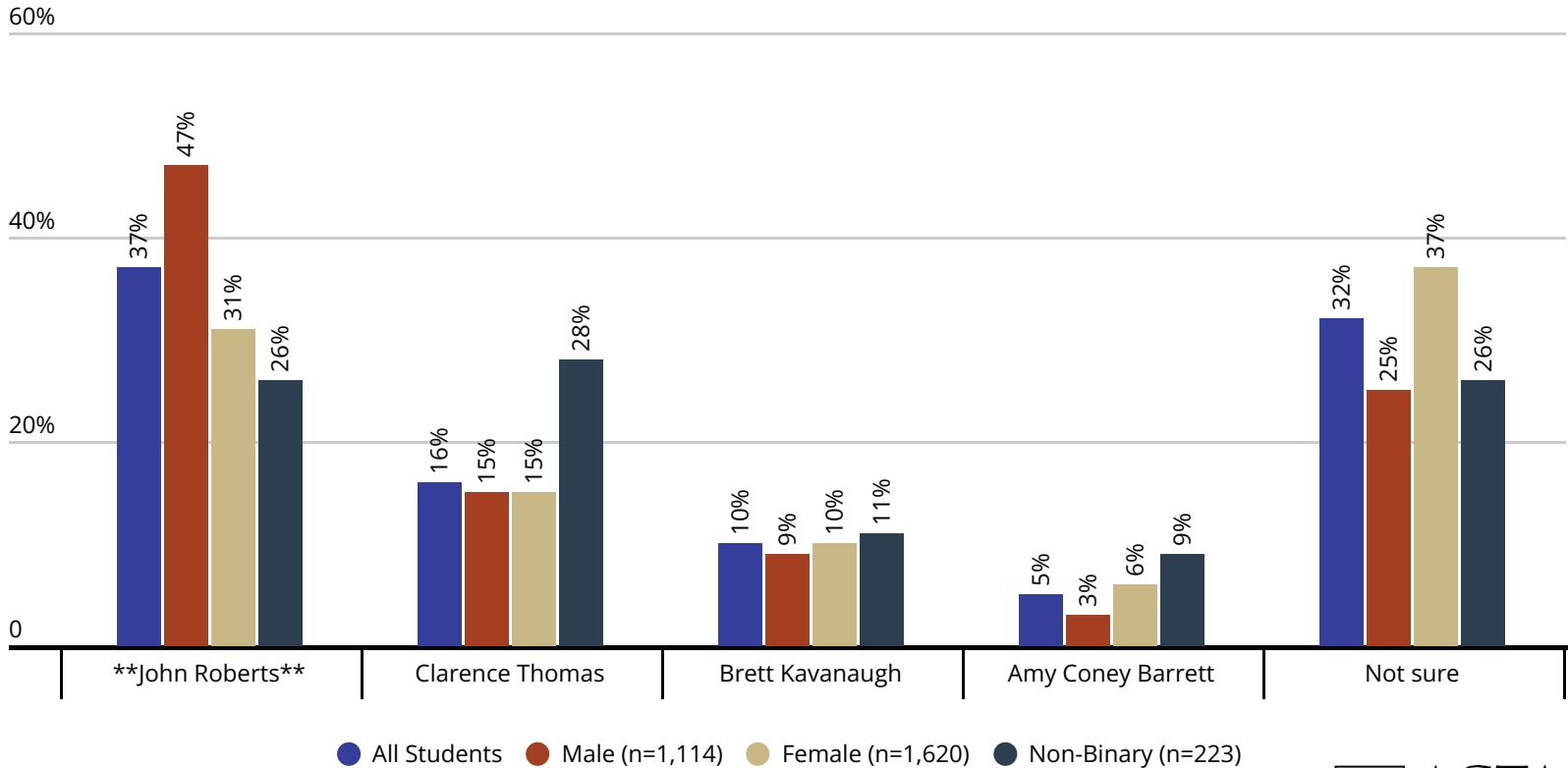


Q2. How long are terms for members of Congress? (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 3

Sixty-three percent of students could not identify John Roberts as chief justice of the Supreme Court.

- Just over one-third (37%) of students correctly identify John Roberts as the chief justice of the Supreme Court.
- Females (6%) are twice as likely as males (3%) to incorrectly identify Amy Coney Barrett as the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

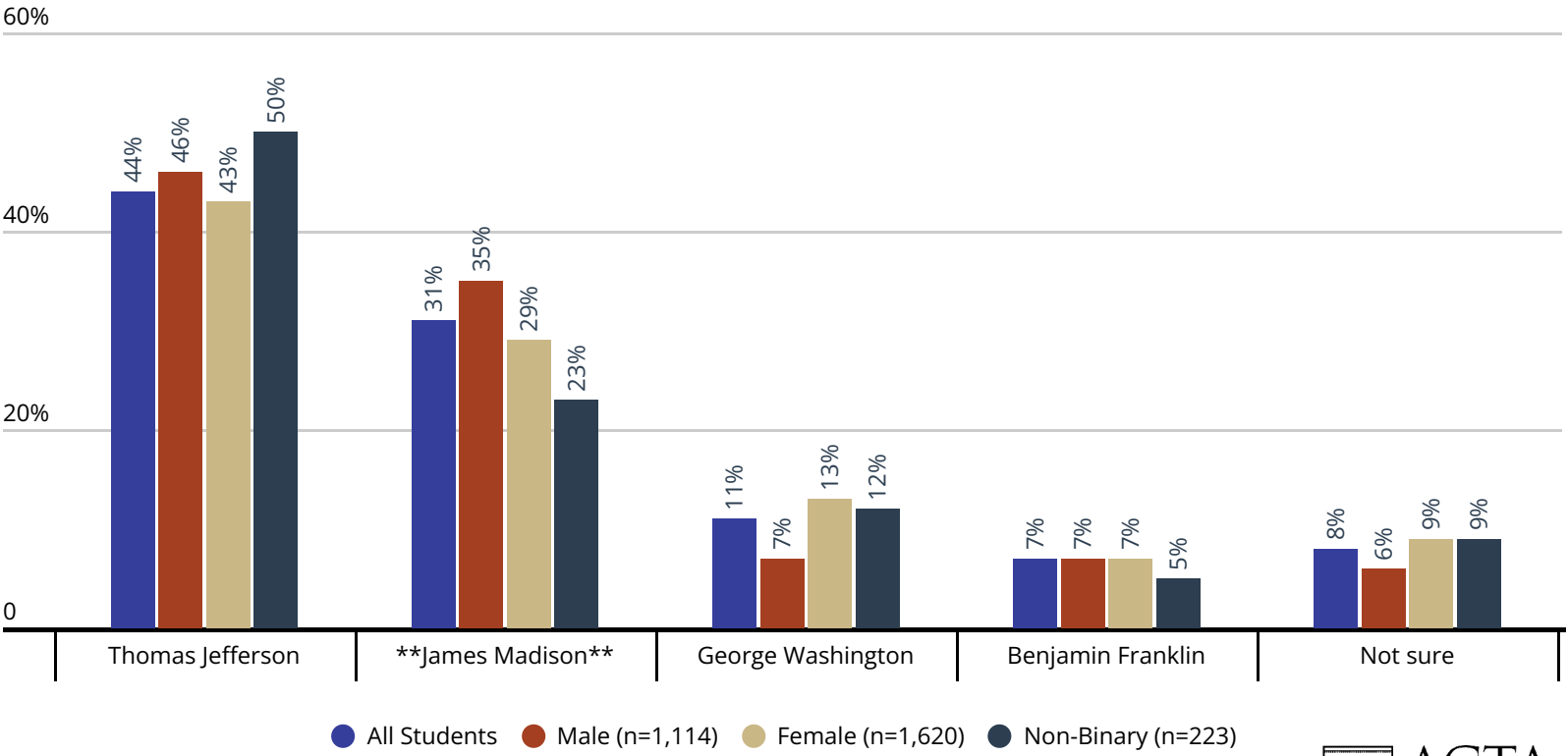


Q5. Who is the chief justice of the Supreme Court? (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 4

# Almost half of students incorrectly identify Thomas Jefferson as the Father of the Constitution.

- Less than one-third (31%) of students correctly identify James Madison as the Father of the Constitution.
- Almost half of both males (46%) and females (43%) incorrectly identify Thomas Jefferson as the Father of the Constitution.

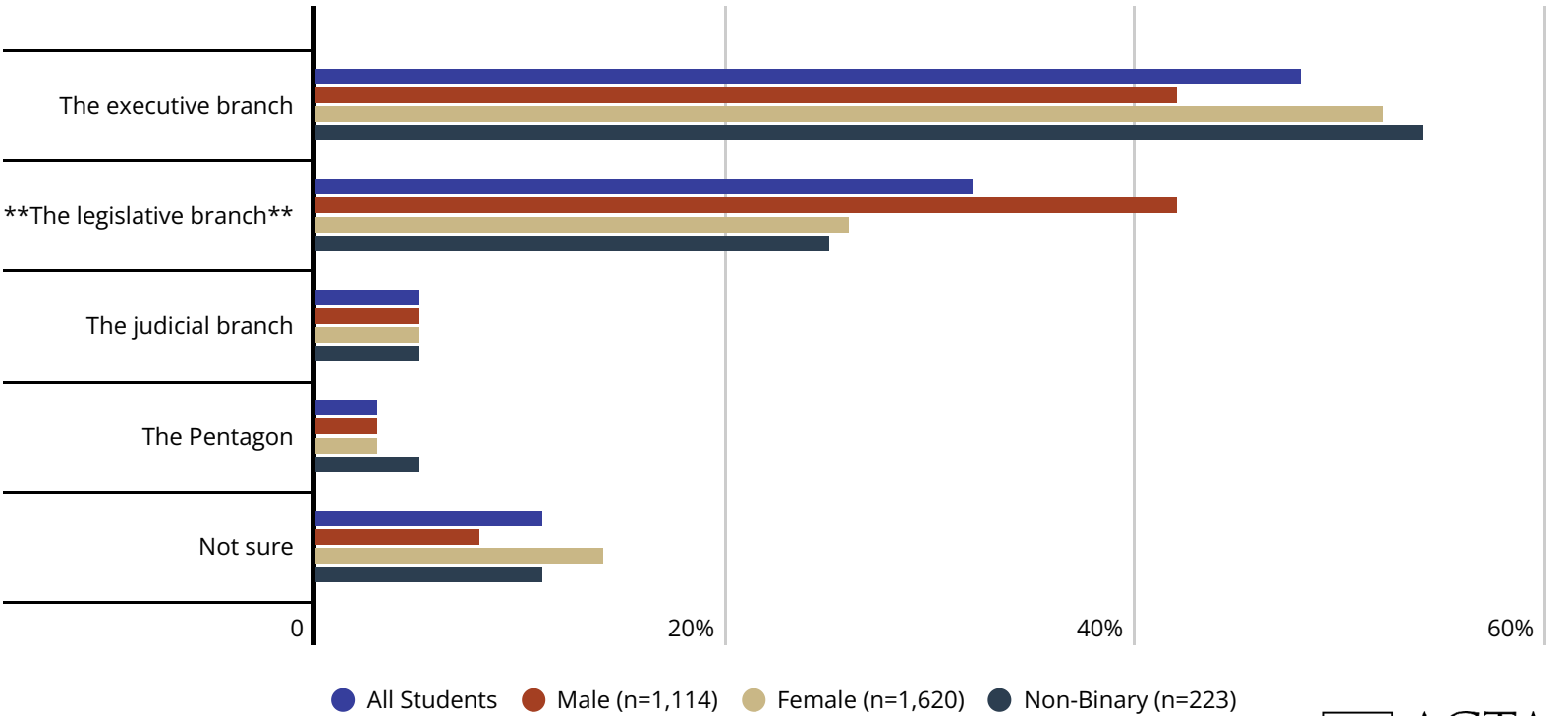


Q7. Who is the Father of the Constitution? (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 5

Less than one-third of students know that the legislative branch has the power to declare war.

- Almost half (48%) of students believe the executive branch has the power to declare war.
- Males (42%) are significantly more likely than females (26%) to identify the legislative branch as having the power to declare war.

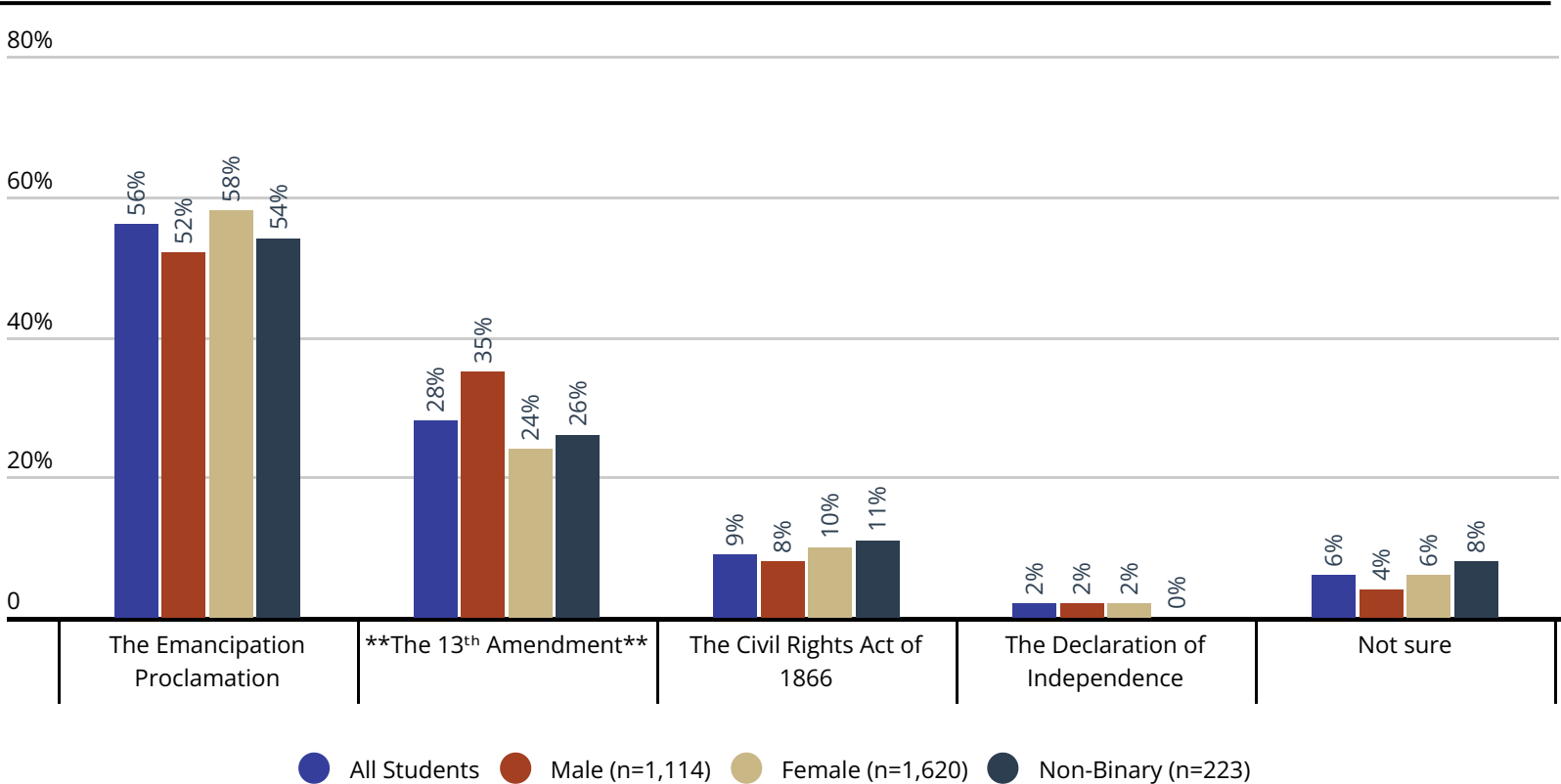


Q8. Which branch of the government has the power to declare war? (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 6

Only one-quarter of students know that the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment freed slaves.

- More than half (56%) of students incorrectly identify the Emancipation Proclamation as the action that freed slaves in the United States.
- Males (35%) are more likely than females (24%) to identify the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment as the action that freed slaves in the United States.

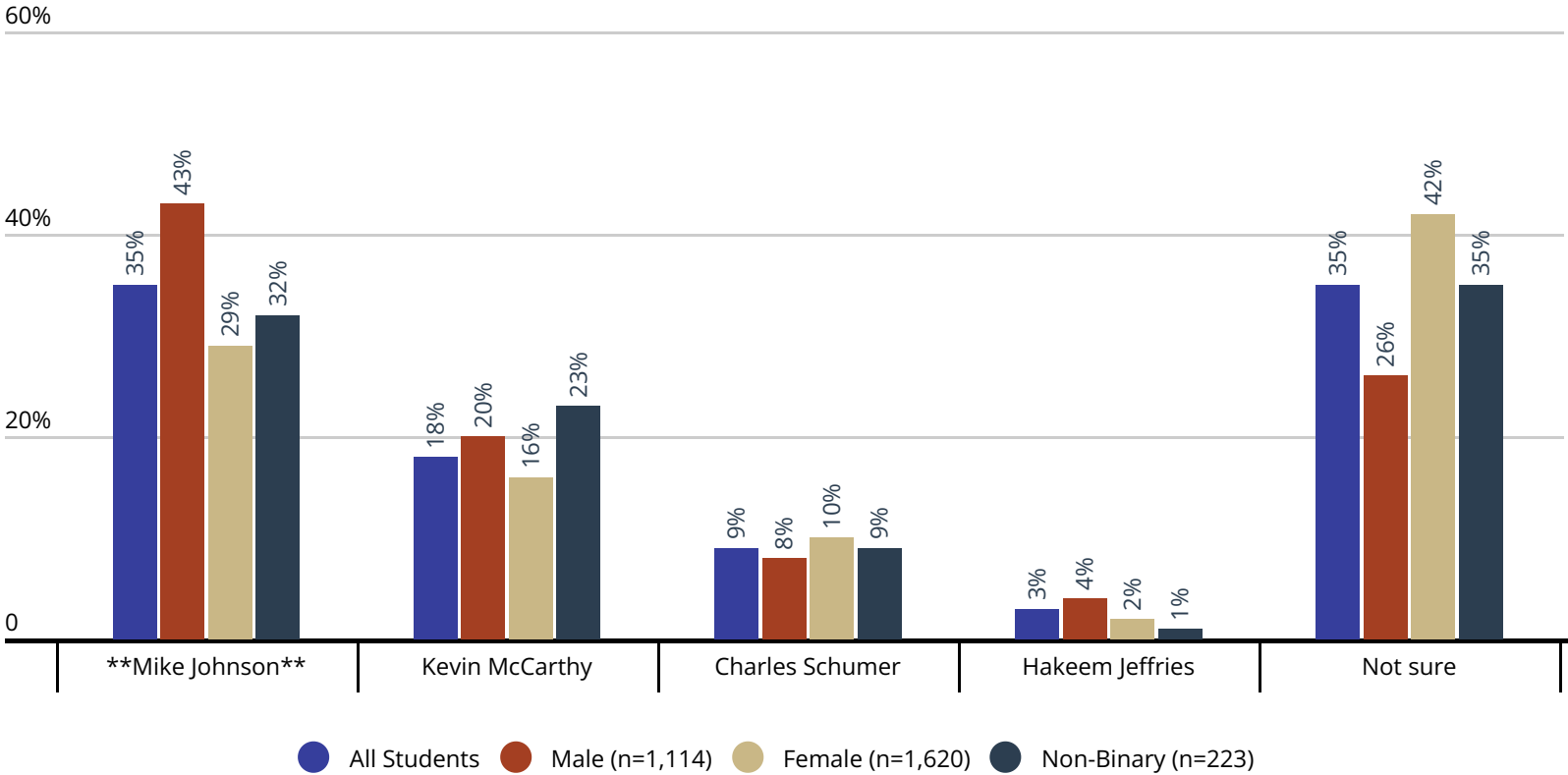


Q11. Which government action freed slaves in the United States? (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 7

# More than one-third of students are not sure who the Speaker of the House of Representatives is.

- Just one-third (35%) correctly identify Mike Johnson as the current Speaker of the House of Representatives.

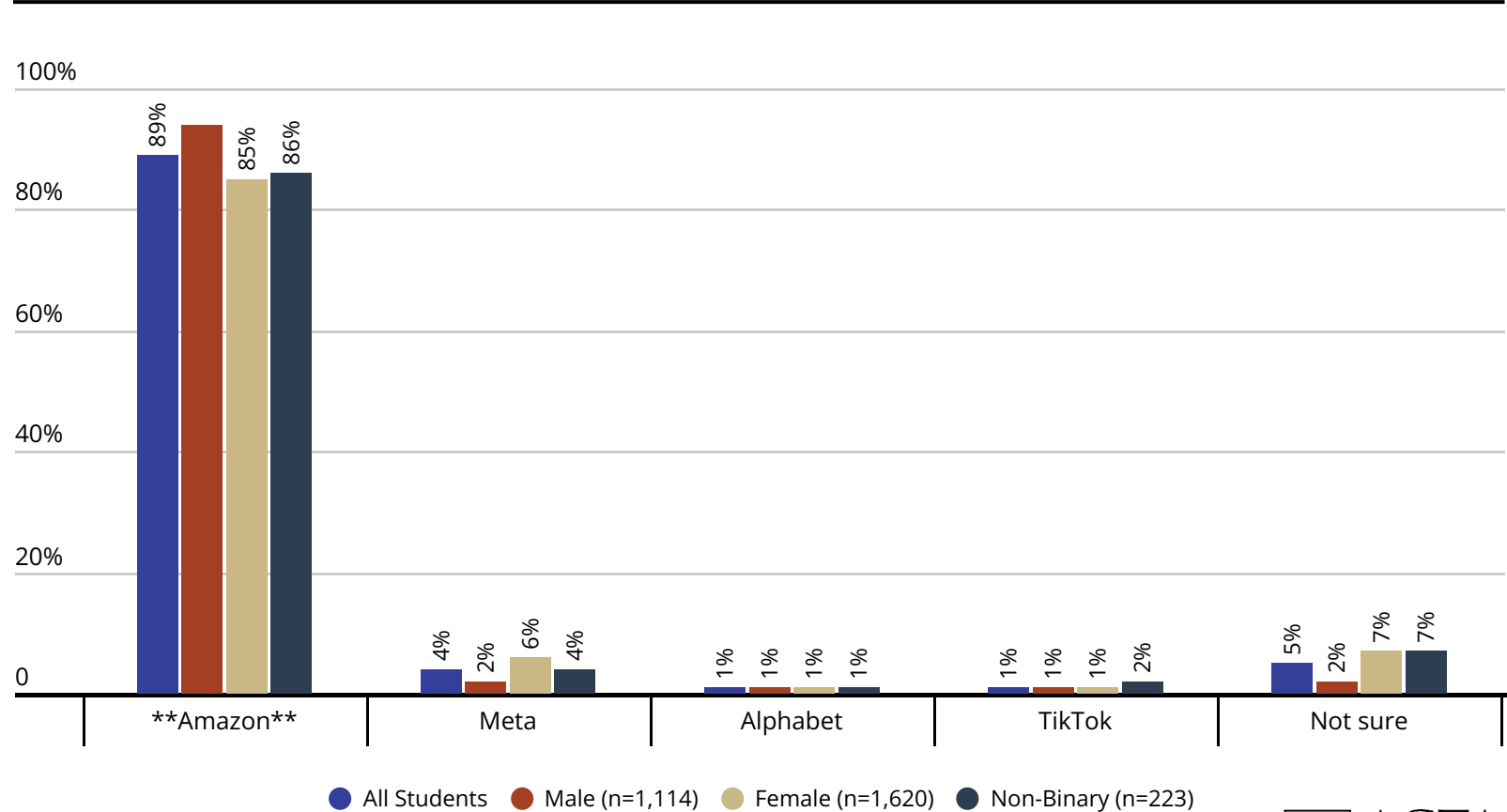


Q12. Who is the current Speaker of the House of Representatives? (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 8

Eighty-nine percent of students know that Amazon is owned by Jeff Bezos.

- Five percent of students are not sure what company is owned by Jeff Bezos.

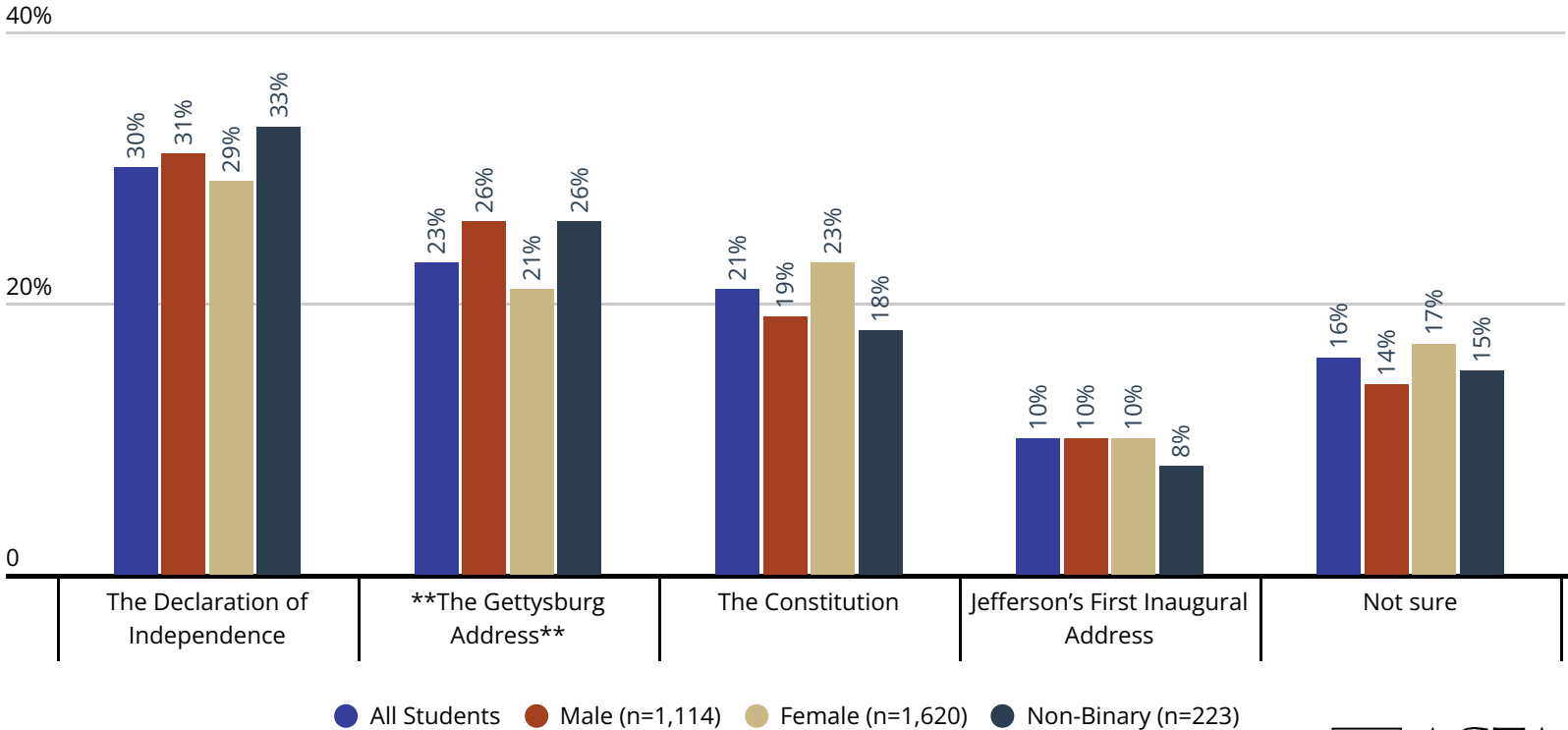


Q16. What company is owned by Jeff Bezos? (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 9

Less than one-quarter of students know that the Gettysburg Address is the source of the phrase, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people."

- Almost one-third (30%) of students incorrectly identify the Declaration of Independence as the source of the phrase.
- Males (26%) are more likely than females (21%) to correctly identify the source of the phrase.



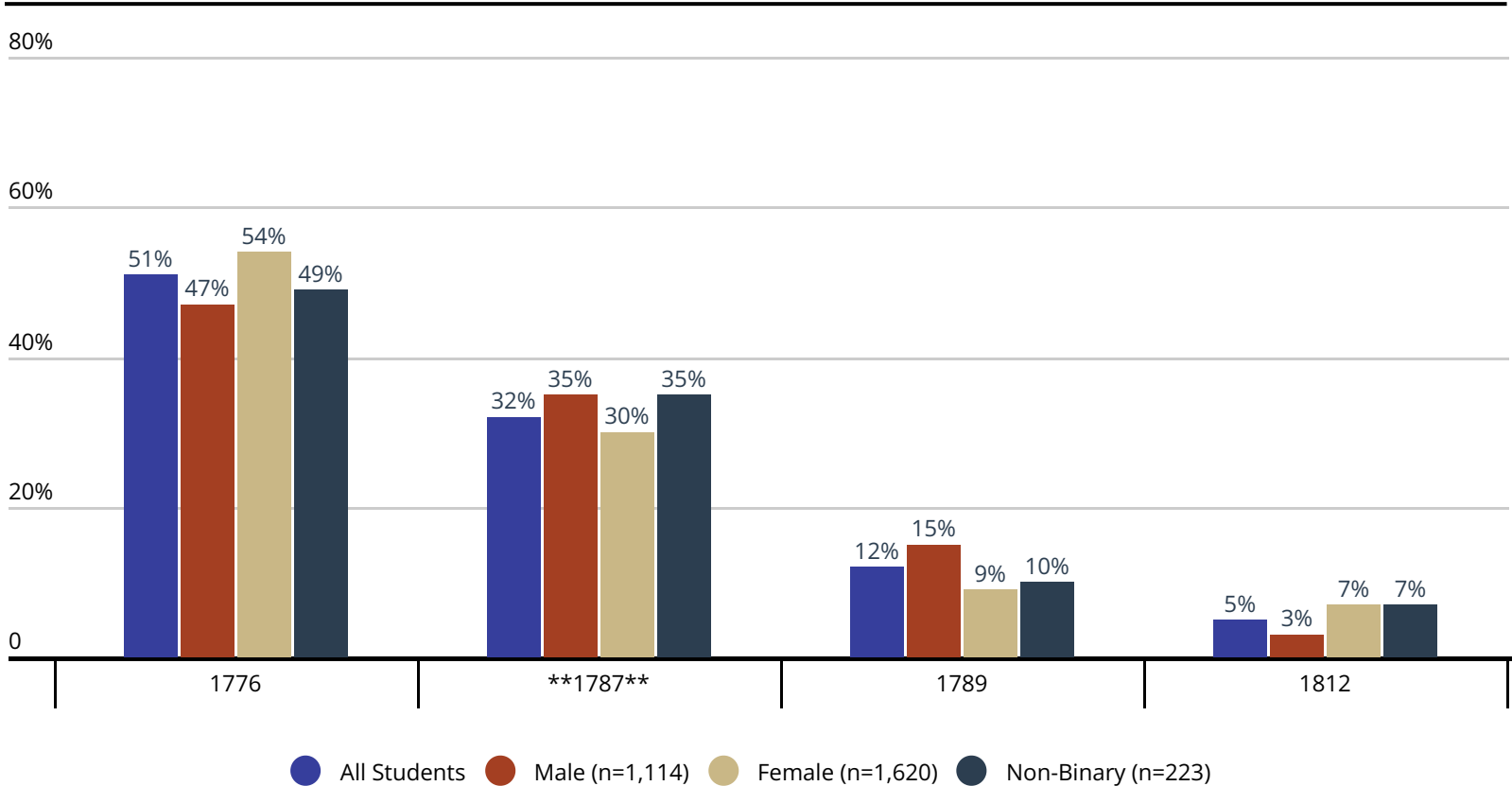
Q17. What is the source of the phrase, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people"? (n=3,026)



HIGHLIGHT 10

Less than one-third of students know when the U.S. Constitution was written.

- More than half (51%) of students incorrectly identify 1776 as the year the U.S. Constitution was written.
- Only 35% of males and 30% of females correctly identified 1787 as the year the U.S. Constitution was written.

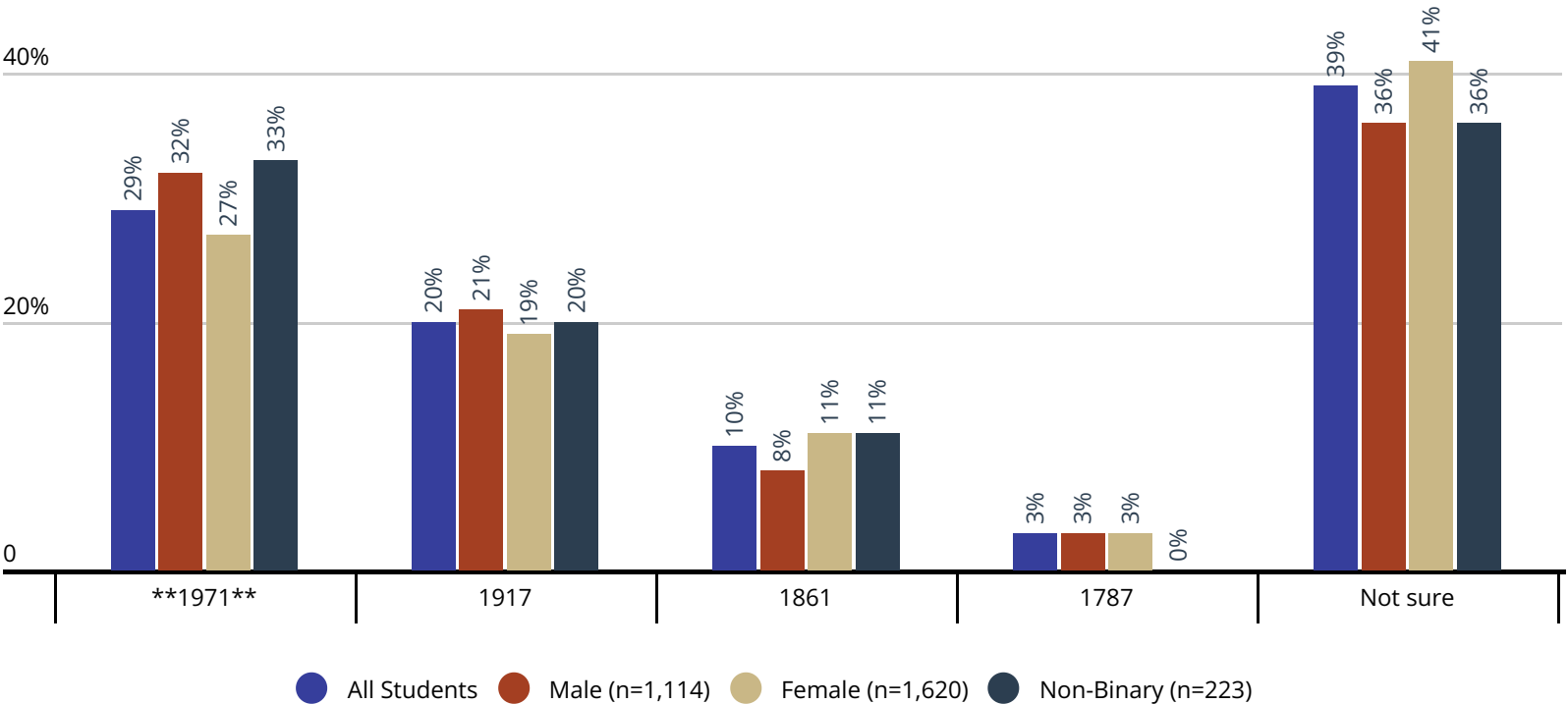


Q20. In what year was the U.S. Constitution written? (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 11

More than one-third of students are unsure when the voting age was set at 18.

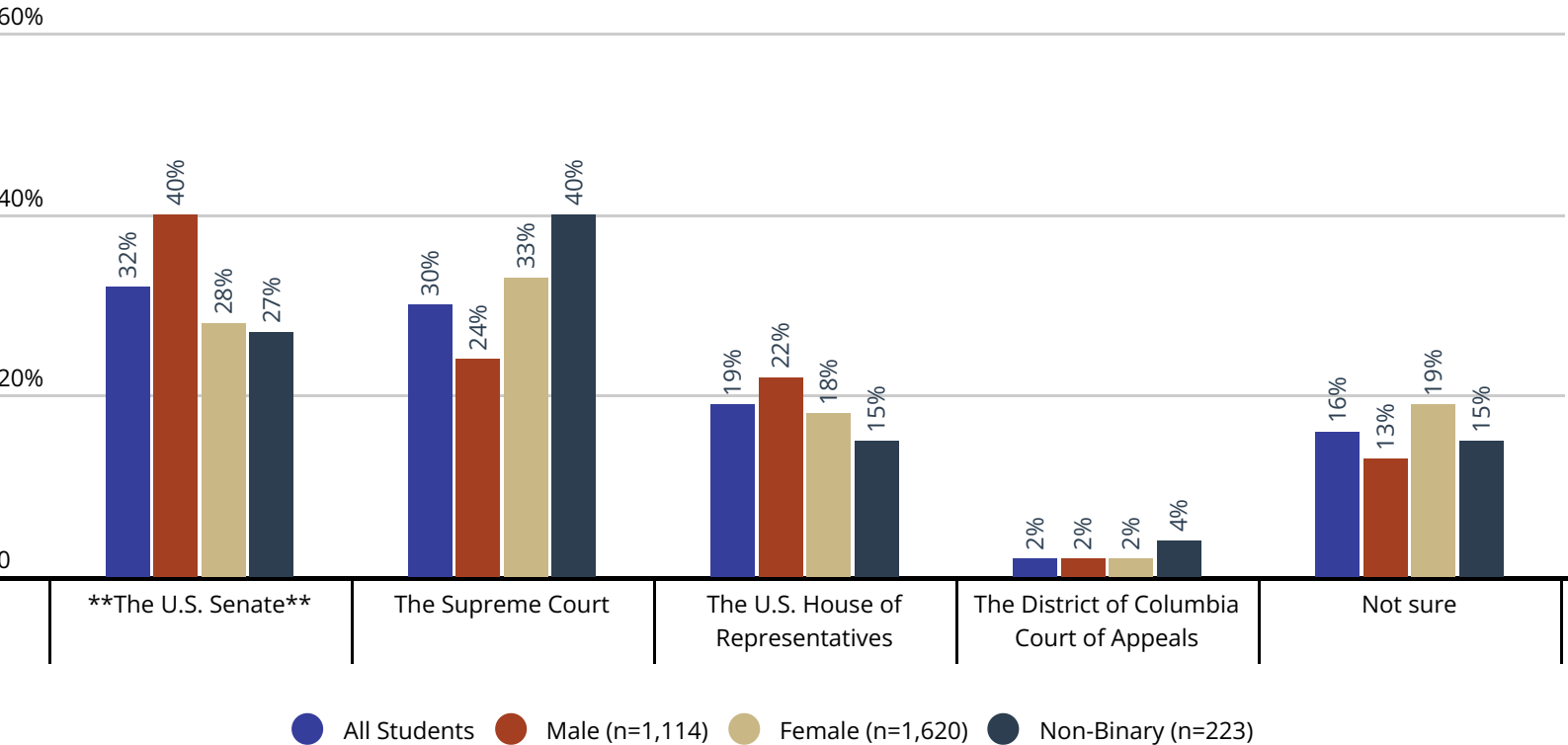
- Less than one-third (29%) of students correctly identify 1971 as the year the voting age was set at 18.
- Males (32%) are more likely than females (27%) to identify 1971 as the year the voting age was set at 18.



Q22. In what year was the voting age set at 18? (n=3,026)

# Students are equally likely to say that the Supreme Court and the U.S. Senate facilitate the impeachment of a U.S. president.

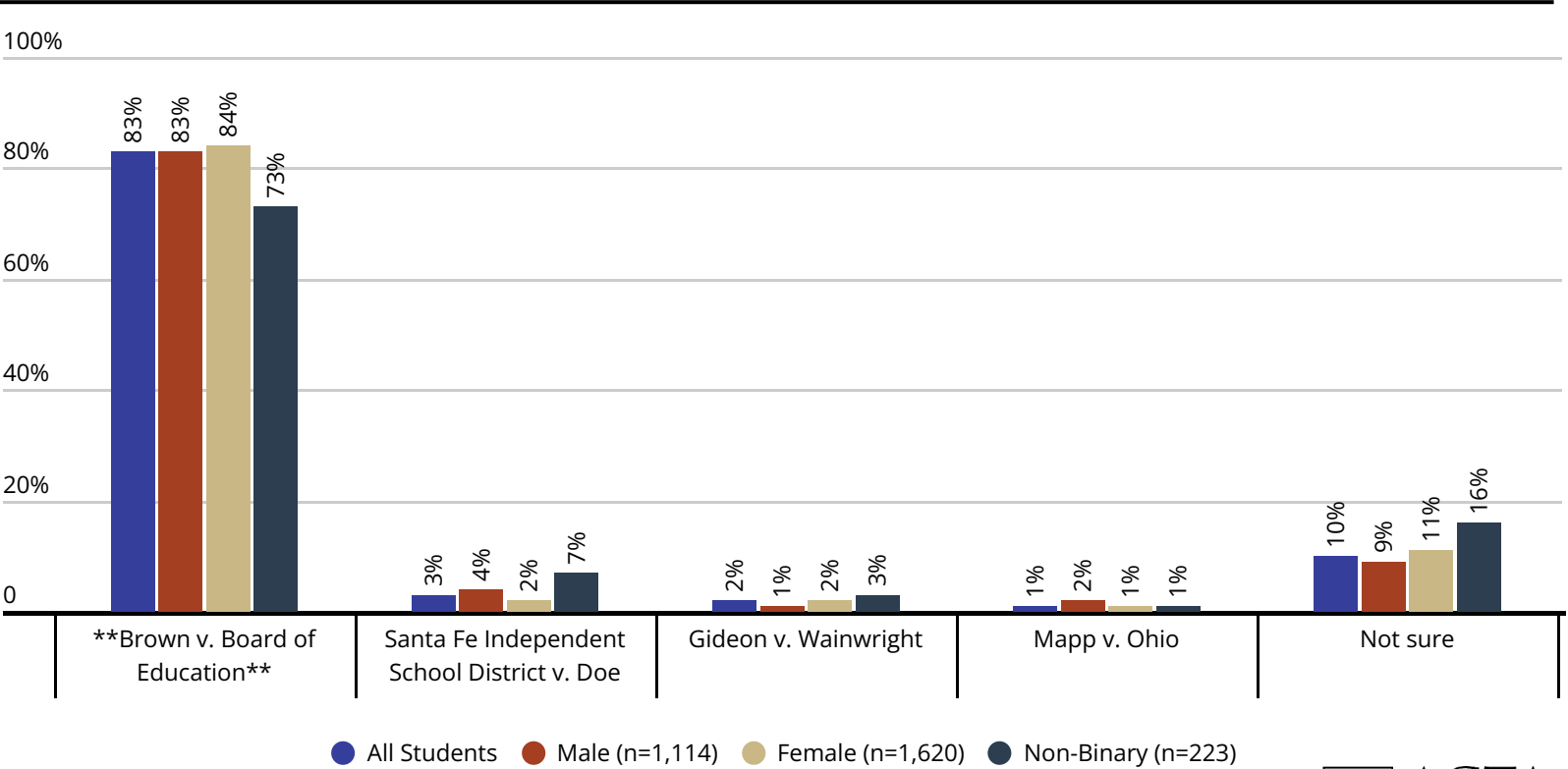
- Almost one-third (30%) of students believe that a trial of impeachment of a U.S. president takes place before the Supreme Court, while one-third (32%) of students believe the trial takes place before the U.S. Senate.



Q23. A trial of impeachment of a U.S. president takes place before which body?  
(n=3,026)

# Most students correctly identify which case ended racial segregation in public schools.

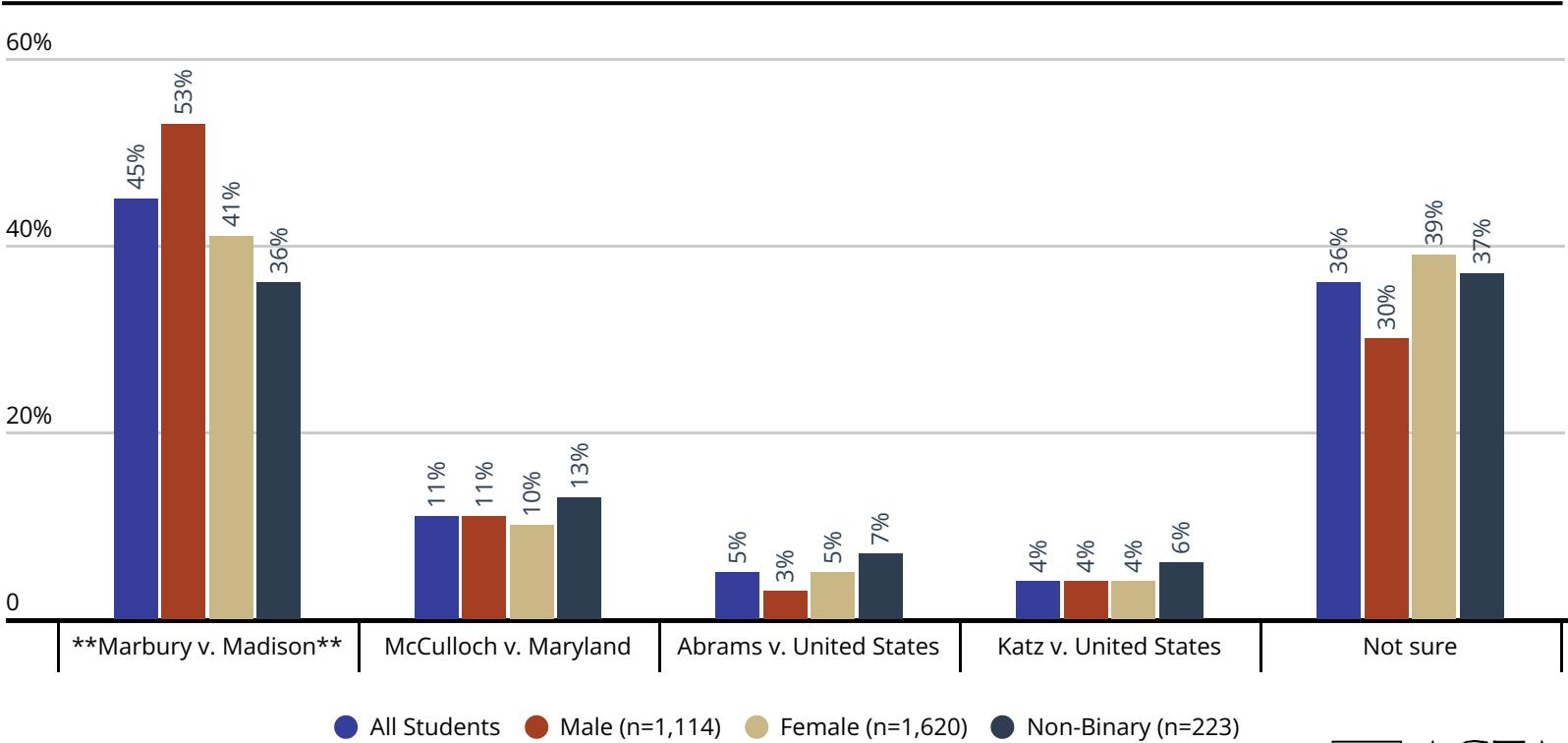
- Males (83%) and females (84%) are equally likely to correctly identify *Brown v. Board of Education* as the Supreme Court case that ended racial segregation in public schools.



Q26. Which Supreme Court case ended racial segregation in public schools?  
(n=3,026)

# Almost half of students correctly identify which case established the doctrine of judicial review.

- More than one-third (36%) of students are not sure which Supreme Court case established the doctrine of judicial review.
- Males (53%) are more likely than females (41%) to correctly identify *Marbury v. Madison* as the case that established the doctrine of judicial review.

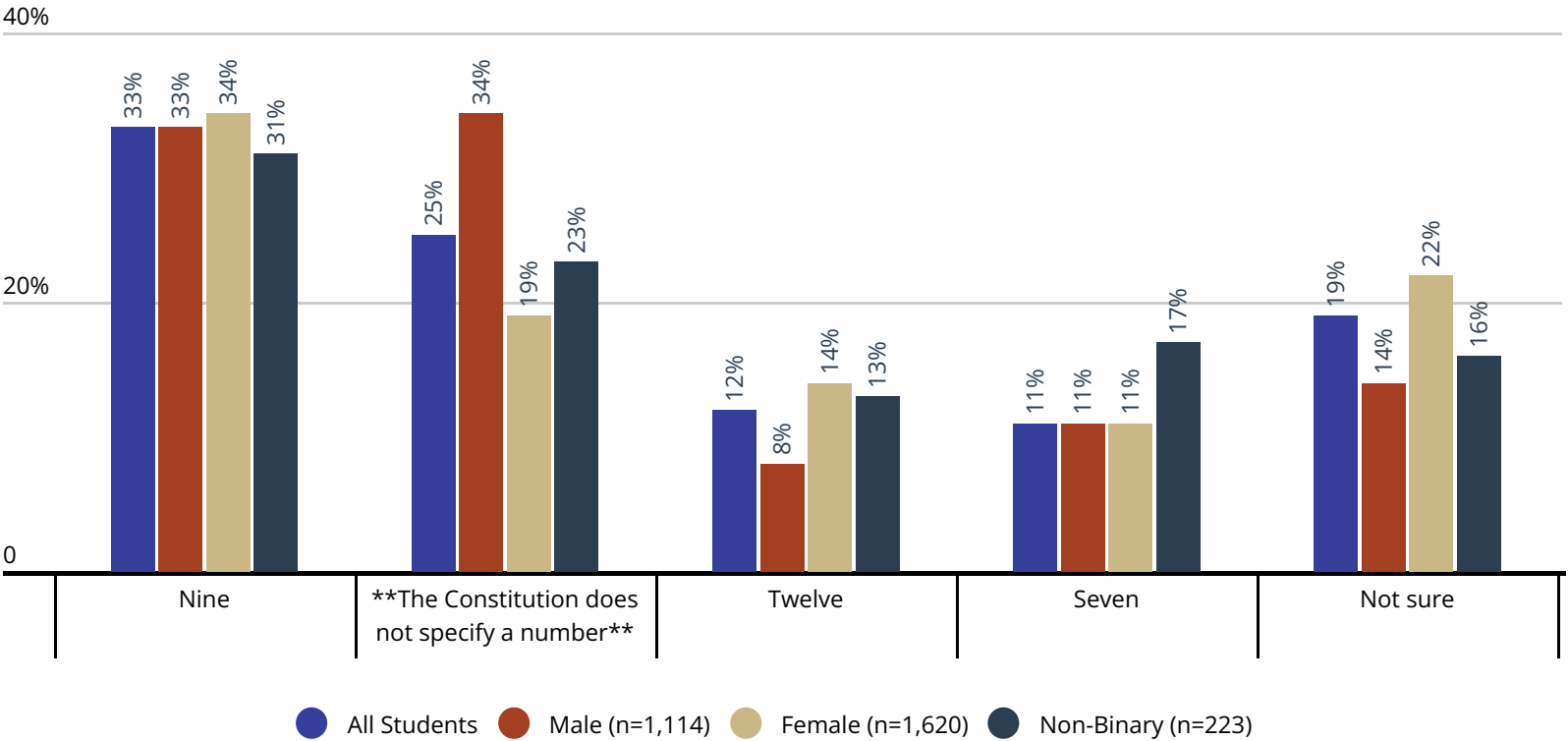


Q27. Which Supreme Court case established the doctrine of judicial review?  
(n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 15

One-third of students incorrectly believe the Supreme Court must have nine justices.

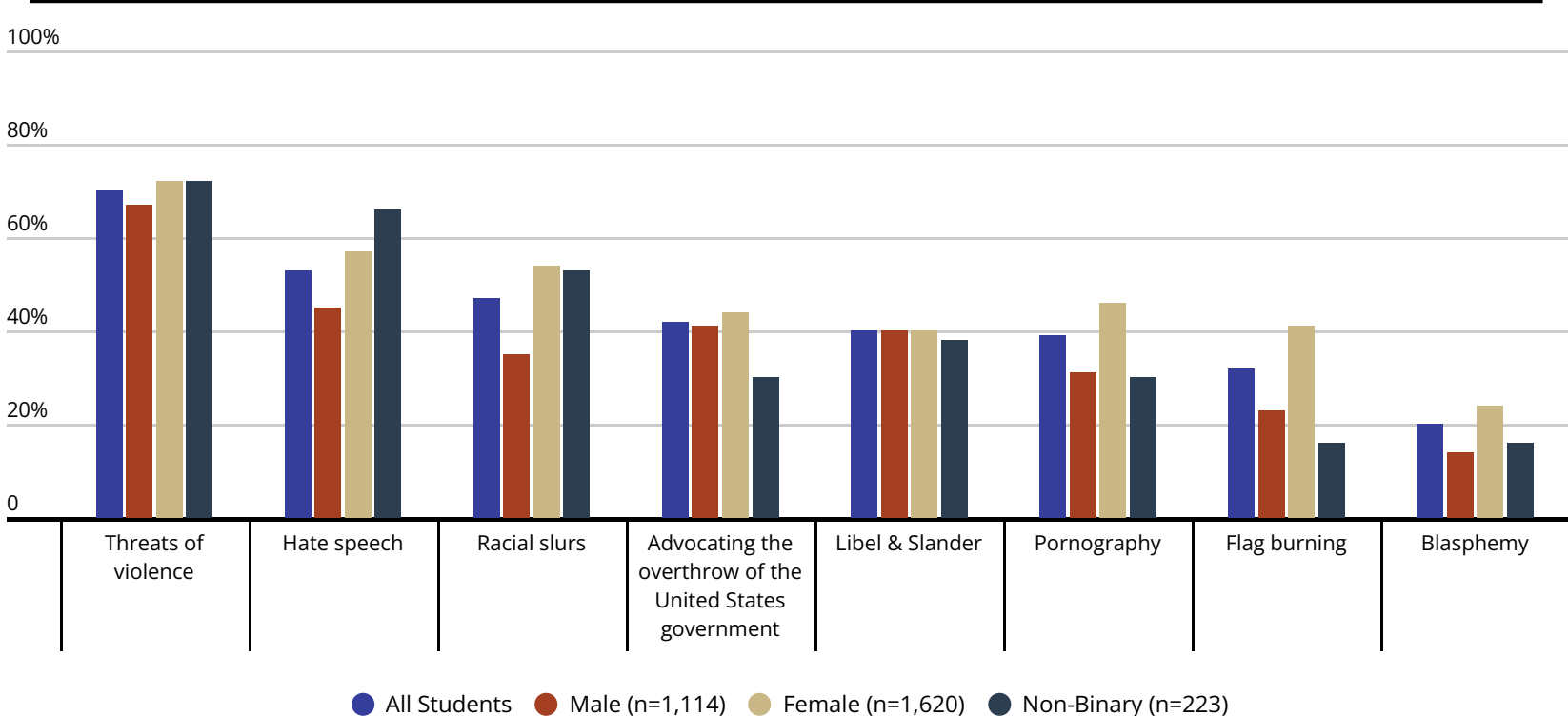
- Only one-quarter (25%) of students know that the Constitution does not specify the number of justices that must sit on the Supreme Court.
- Females (14%) are more likely than males (8%) to say that 12 justices must sit on the Supreme Court.



Q28. How many justices must sit on the Supreme Court, according to the Constitution? (n=3,026)

# Almost three-quarters of students believe threats of violence should be censored by the government.

- Students are most likely to say that threats of violence (70%) should be censored by the government.
- Females are more likely than males to say that blasphemy, flag burning, hate speech, pornography, and racial slurs should be censored.

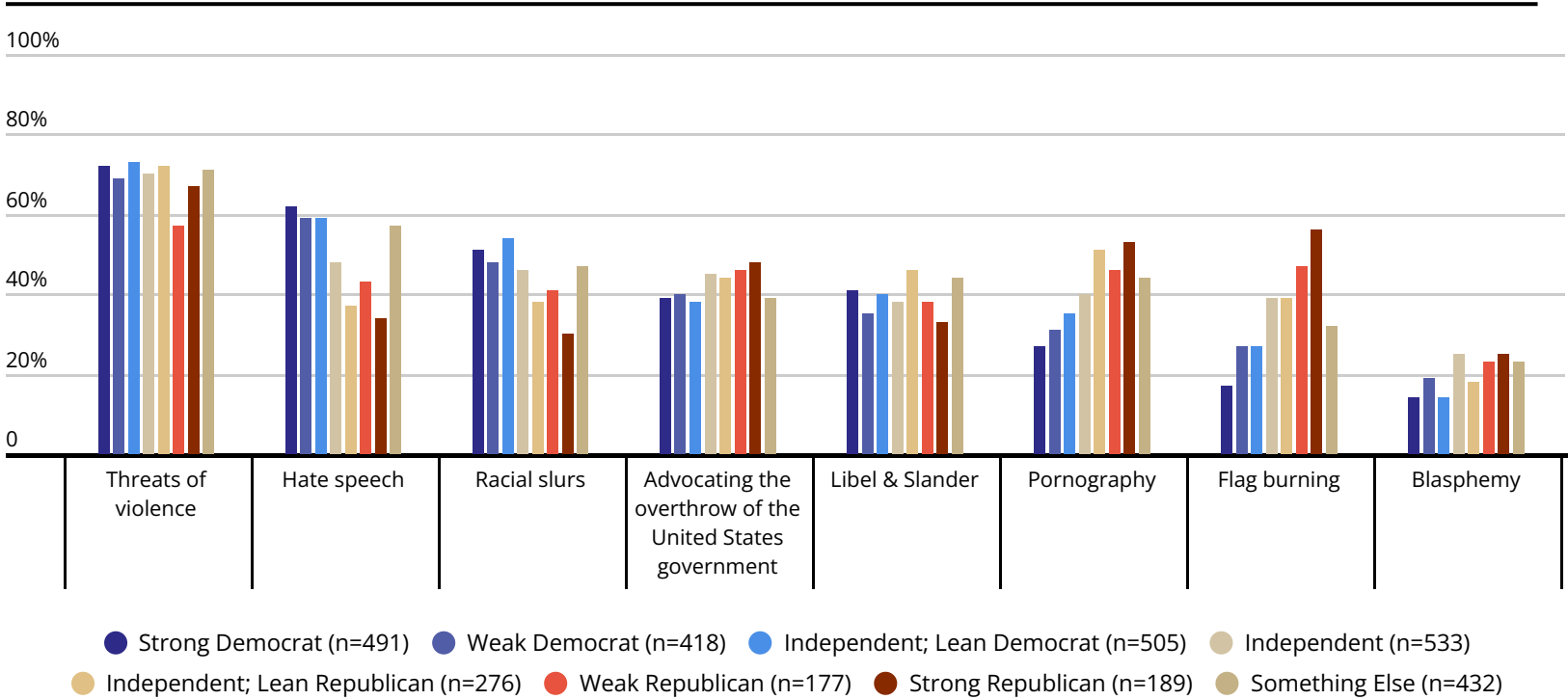


Q31. Which sorts of expression should the government be allowed to censor or punish? Click all that apply. (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 16B

Almost three-quarters of students believe threats of violence should be censored by the government.

- Students are most likely to say that threats of violence (70%) should be censored by the government.
- Strong Democrats (62%) are more likely than strong Republicans (34%) to say hate speech should be censored by the government.

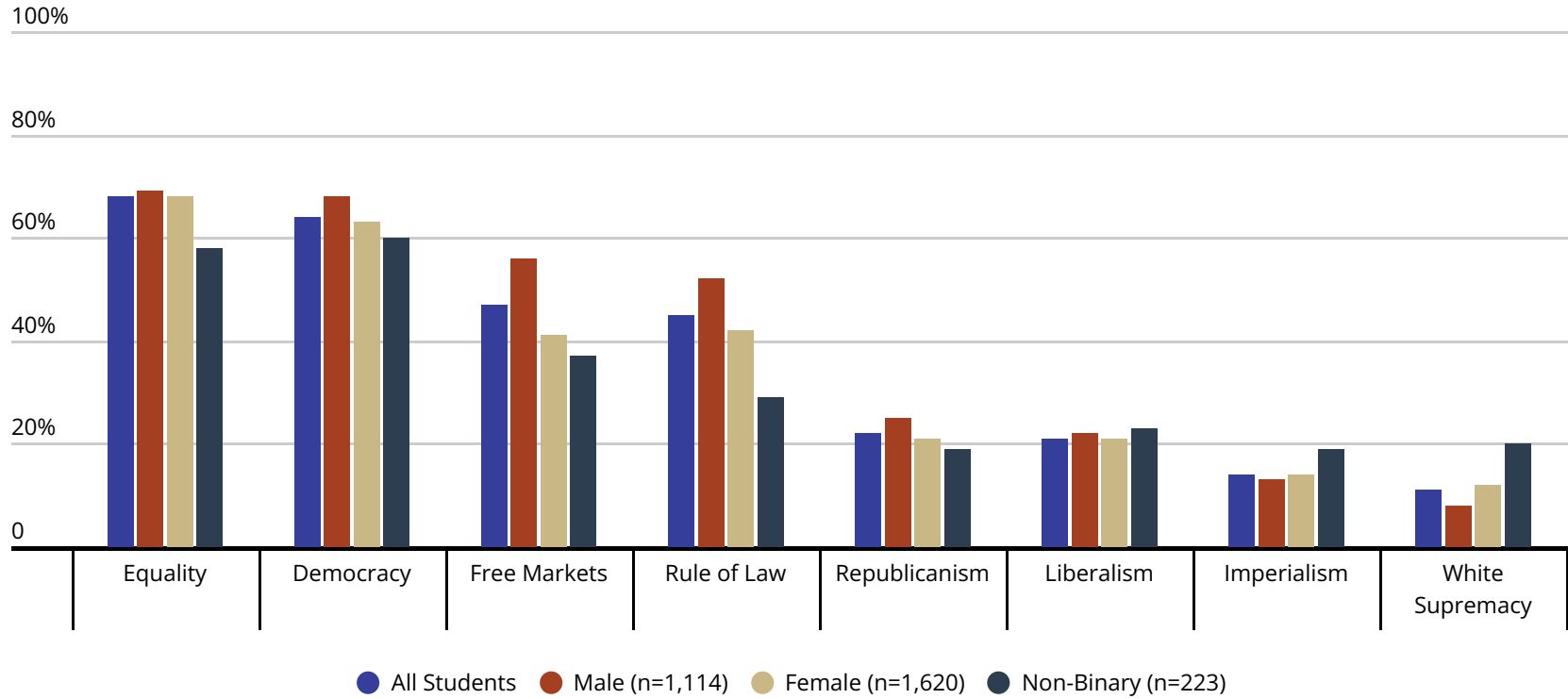


Q31. Which sorts of expression should the government be allowed to censor or punish? Click all that apply. (n=3,026)



# Only 22% of students identify Republicanism as a core principle of American civic life.

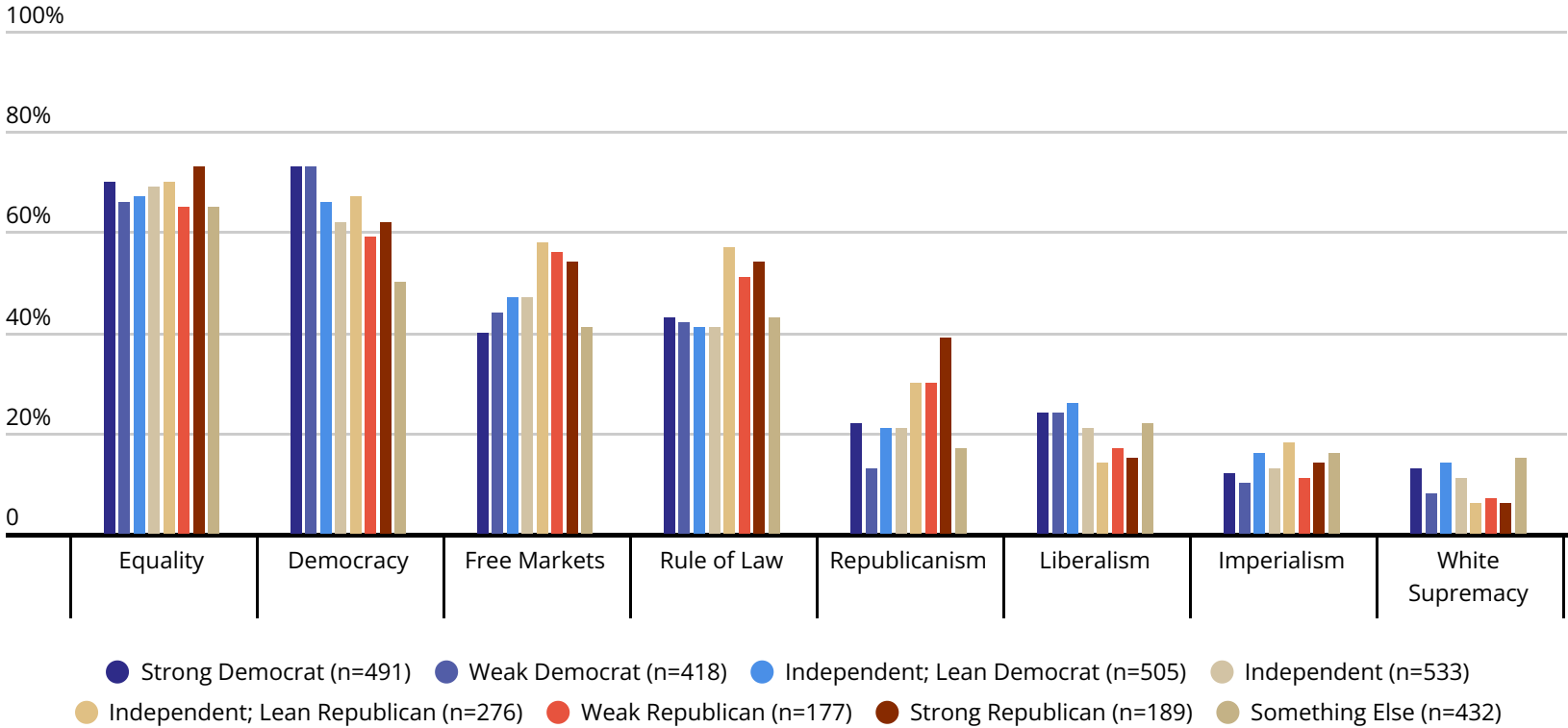
- Females (12%) are more likely than males (8%) to identify white supremacy as a core principle of American civic life.



Q32. Which of the following would you identify as core principles of American civic life? Click all that apply. (n=3,026)

# Only 22% of students identify Republicanism as a core principle of American civic life.

• Strong Democrats (43%) are less likely than strong Republicans (54%) to say the rule of law is a core principle of American civic life.

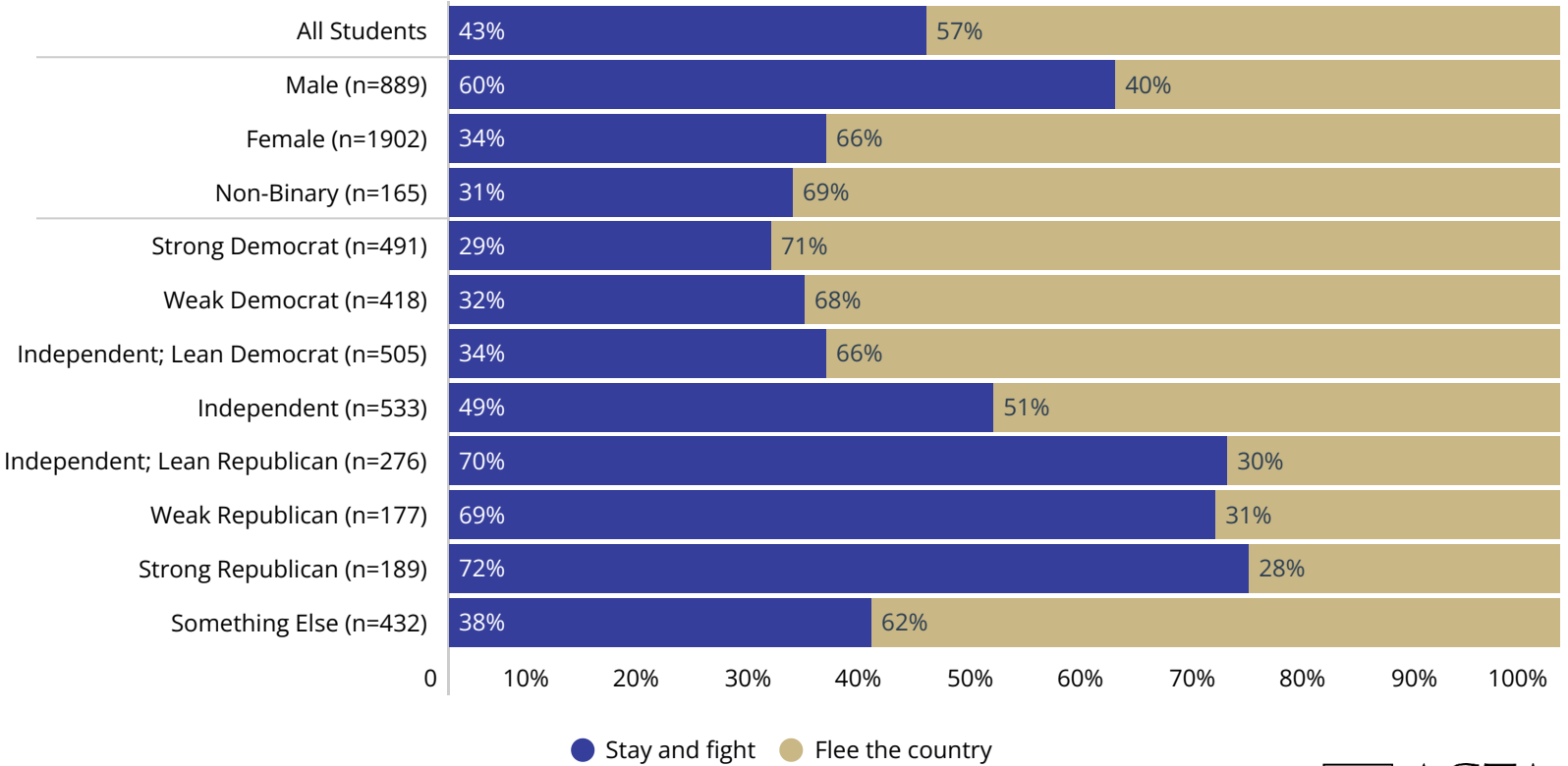


Q32. Which of the following would you identify as core principles of American civic life? Click all that apply. (n=3,026)

HIGHLIGHT 18

More than half of students would flee the country if the United States were invaded.

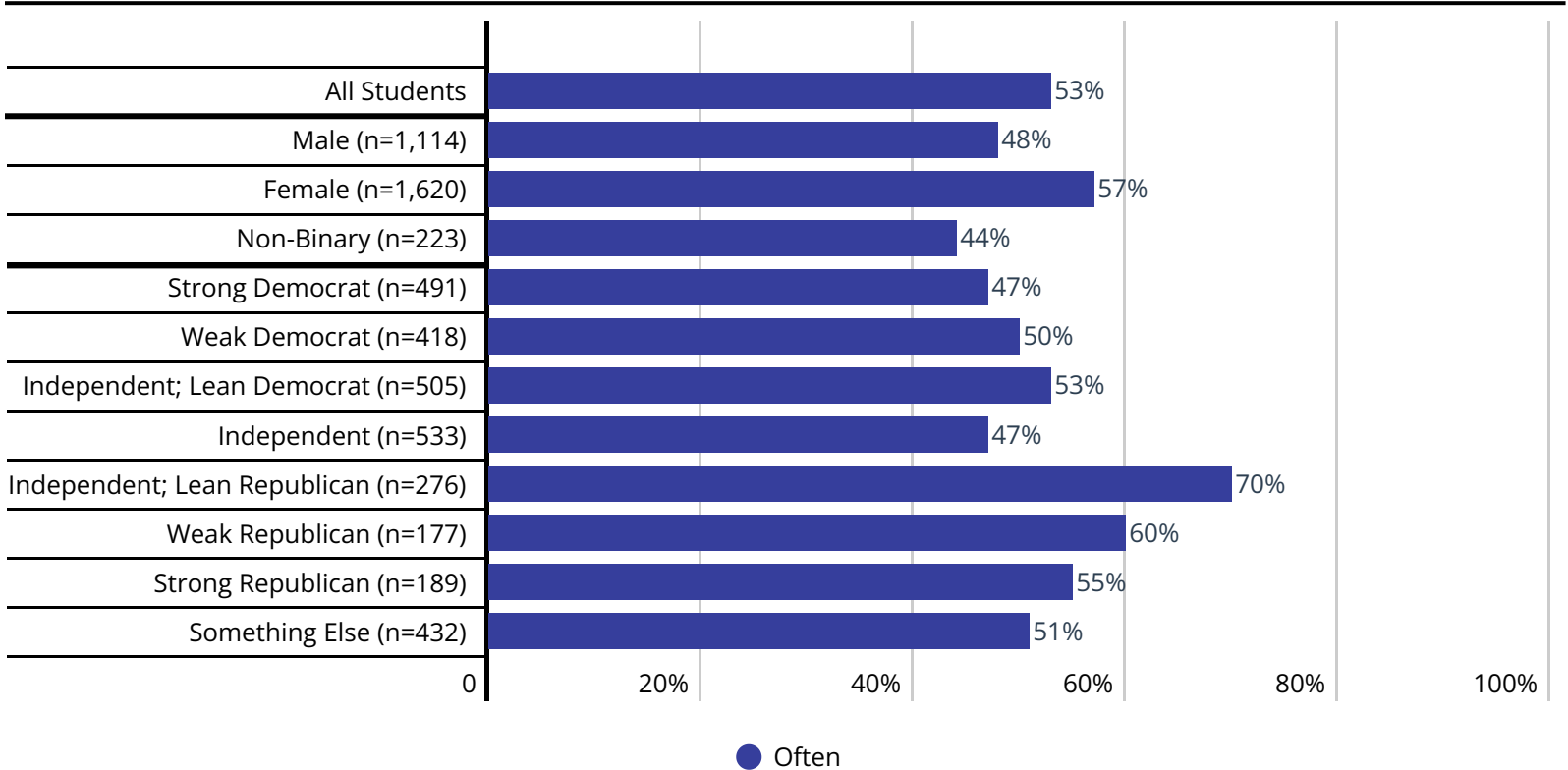
- Males (60%) are significantly more likely than females (34%) to say they will stay and fight if the United States were invaded.
- Strong Republicans (72%) are significantly more likely than strong Democrats (29%) to say they will stay and fight if the United States were invaded.



Q33. If the United States were invaded by Russia as Ukraine has been, what would you do? (n=3,026)

# More than half of students often self-censor when discussing social and political issues with their peers.

- Republicans are generally more likely than Democrats to say they often self-censor when discussing social and political issues with peers.
- Females (57%) are more likely than males (48%) to say they often self-censor.



Q34. How often do you self-censor when discussing social and political issues with your peers? (n=3,026)

# Survey Topline

# Survey Results

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## Q1. Who is the current President of the Senate?

14% Mitch McConnell  
10% Charles Schumer  
**27% Kamala Harris**  
28% Joe Biden  
20% Not sure

## Q2. How long are terms for members of Congress?

24% 4 years for senators, 2 years for representatives  
**40% 6 years for senators, 2 years for representatives**  
12% 6 years for senators 4 years for representatives  
7% 4 years for senators, 4 years for representatives  
16% Not sure

## Q3. What is the Electoral College?

9% A group of government officials who monitor the election process  
**79% A body of state officials who cast their vote to decide who will be elected President and Vice President of the United States**  
2% A government agency that oversees political campaign donations  
1% A school for political candidates  
8% Not sure

## Q4. Who becomes President if both the sitting President and Vice-President die, become incapacitated, resign or are removed from office by impeachment?

**53% Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives**  
23% U.S. Secretary of State  
2% Runner-up from the previous election  
10% President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate  
12% Not sure

## Q5. Who is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?

10% Brett Kavanaugh  
16% Clarence Thomas  
**37% John Roberts**  
5% Amy Coney Barrett  
32% Not sure

## Q6. Which of the following freedoms is NOT protected by the First Amendment?

3% Freedom of Speech  
30% Right to petition the government for redress of grievances  
4% Right to assembly  
**52% Right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury**  
11% Not sure

# Survey Results

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## Q7. Who was the “Father of the Constitution”?

44% Thomas Jefferson  
**31% James Madison**  
11% George Washington  
7% Benjamin Franklin  
8% Not sure

## Q8. Which branch of the government has the power to declare war?

48% The Executive  
**32% The Legislative**  
3% The Pentagon  
5% The Judicial  
11% Not sure

## Q9. What government action guaranteed to women the right to vote?

12% The Equal Rights Amendment  
12% The Voting Rights Act  
**64% The 19th Amendment**  
4% Title IX of the Civil Rights Act  
8% Not sure

## Q10. Which of the following is required for ratification of a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution?

38% A two-thirds vote from the Senate and Presidential ratification  
**26% A ratification by three-fourths of the states**  
9% A two-thirds majority vote in a national referendum  
6% A favorable majority opinion by the Supreme Court  
21% Not sure

## Q11. Which government action freed all slaves in the United States?

56% The Emancipation Proclamation  
2% The Declaration of Independence  
9% The Civil Rights Act of 1866  
**28% The 13th Amendment**  
6% Not sure

## Q12. Who is the current Speaker of the House of Representatives?

18% Kevin McCarthy  
9% Charles Schumer  
3% Hakeem Jeffries  
**35% Mike Johnson**  
6% Not sure

## Q13. To whom is Jay-Z married?

1% Taylor Swift  
**75% Beyonce**  
6% Rihanna  
1% Miley Cyrus  
17% Not sure

## Q14. The purpose of the authors of the “Federalist Papers” was to:

**47% Gain ratification of the U.S. Constitution**  
3% Confirm George Washington’s election as first president  
7% Win foreign approval of the Revolutionary War  
21% Establish a strong, free press in the colonies  
13% Not sure

# Survey Results

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**Q15. Which document establishes the division of powers between the states and the federal government?**

22% The Articles of Confederation  
5% The Declaration of Independence  
**56% The Constitution**  
3% The New Deal  
13% Not sure

**Q16. What company is owned by Jeff Bezos?**

4% Meta  
1% TikTok  
1% Alphabet  
**89% Amazon**  
5% Not sure

**Q17. What is the source of the phrase, “Government of the people, by the people, for the people”?**

21% The Constitution  
30% The Declaration of Independence  
**23% The Gettysburg Address**  
10% Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address  
16% Not Sure

**Q18. Article I of the U.S. Constitution describes the powers of which branch of government?**

22% The Executive  
**36% The Legislative**  
8% The Judicial  
35 The Bureaucracy  
32% Not sure

**Q19. The Fourth Amendment of the Constitution protects against what?**

15% Cruel and unusual punishment  
5% The establishment of a state religion  
**55% Unreasonable search and seizure**  
5% Self-incrimination  
19% Not sure

**Q20. In what year was the U.S. Constitution written?**

51% 1776  
**32% 1787**  
12% 1789  
5% 1812

**Q21. Which amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects against “unreasonable bail” and “excessive fines”?**

1% The First  
10% The Third  
**50% The Eighth**  
9% The Seventeenth  
29% Not sure



# Survey Results

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## Q22. In what year was the voting age set at 18?

3% 1787  
10% 1861  
20% 1917  
**29% 1971**  
39% Not sure

## Q23. A trial of impeachment of a U.S. President takes place before which body?

2% The District of Columbia Court of Appeals  
**32% The U.S. Senate**  
30% The Supreme Court  
19% The U.S. House of Representatives  
16% Not sure

## Q24. What does the writ of habeas corpus protect against?

**32% Illegal imprisonment**  
19% Cruel and unusual punishment  
9% Capital punishment  
11% Taxation without representation  
28% Not sure

## Q25. Which of the following are U.S. States NOT allowed to do under the Constitution?

2% Tax their citizens  
7% Prescribe the time, place, and manner of congressional elections  
**65% Coin their own money**  
6% Regulate environmental quality  
19% Not sure

## Q26. Which Supreme Court case ended racial segregation in public schools?

2% Gideon v. Wainwright  
3% Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe  
1% Mapp v. Ohio  
**83% Brown v. Board of Education**  
10% Not sure

## Q27. Which Supreme Court case established the doctrine of judicial review?

11% McCulloch v. Maryland  
4% Katz v. United States  
**45% Marbury v. Madison**  
5% Abrams v. United States  
36% Not sure

## Q28. How many justices must be on the Supreme Court, according to the Constitution?

11% Seven  
33% Nine  
12% Twelve  
**25% The Constitution does not specify a number**  
19% Not sure

# Survey Results

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**Q29. NATO is an acronym that stands for \_\_\_\_\_:**

- 25% North American Trade Organization
- 2% North American Teachers' Organization
- 2% Next American Truth Organization
- 64% North Atlantic Treaty Organization**
- 7% Not sure

**Q30. Which of the following is NOT a qualification for becoming U.S. president?**

- 4% At least 35 years of age
- 6% Natural born citizen of the United States
- 15% 14 years of residency within the United States
- 65% Membership in a national political party**
- 10% Not sure

**Q31. Which sorts of expression should the government be allowed to censor or punish? *Click all that apply.***

- 70% Threats of violence
- 47% Racial slurs
- 42% Advocating the overthrow of the United States government
- 53% Hate speech
- 32% Flag burning
- 39% Pornography
- 20% Blasphemy
- 40% Libel/Slander

**Q32. Which of the following would you identify as core principles of American civic life? *Click all that apply.***

- 64% Democracy
- 21% Liberalism
- 22% Republicanism
- 68% Equality
- 45% Rule of Law
- 47% Free Markets
- 11% White Supremacy
- 14% Imperialism

**Q33. If the United States were invaded by Russia as Ukraine has been, what would you do?**

- 43% Stay and fight
- 57% Flee the country

**Q34. How often do you self-censor when discussing social and political issues with your peers?**

- 16% Very Often
- 37% Somewhat Often
- 33% Seldom/Not Often
- 14% Never

**Q35. How likely are you to pursue a career in public service?**

- 10% Very Likely
- 25% Somewhat Likely
- 31% Somewhat Unlikely
- 35% Very Unlikely



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