



College Sports at a Crossroads: Insights from Division I Campus Leaders



Knight Commission
On Intercollegiate Athletics

A PROJECT OF THE JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION



ELON
UNIVERSITY

Elon University
Poll

October 9, 2025



NCAA Division I leaders survey

Survey dates: July 29-August 22, 2025

Survey design: Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics
and Elon University Poll

Fieldwork: Elon University Poll

Survey mode: Qualtrics online survey with invitations via
email and hard copy mail

Overall margin of error: +/- 4.4%, with larger margins of error
for subgroups

Executive summary, topline data, methodology and more
available on the survey website: bit.ly/D1leaderspoll





NCAA Division I leaders survey

Respondents

376 Total respondents (26% response rate)

16% University or College presidents and chancellors

25% Athletics directors (ADs)

21% Senior woman administrators (SWAs)

38% Faculty athletics representatives (FARs)

Institution type

63% Public institutions

37% Private institutions

NCAA Division I competitive classifications (2025-2026)

14% Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Autonomy/Power 4 conferences
(ACC, Big 10, Big 12, SEC or Notre Dame)

22% FBS Group of Six conferences and FBS Independents
(American Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West
Conference, Pac-12 Conference, Sun Belt Conference)

34% Football Championship Subdivision

30% Division I basketball centric (no football)

Key findings: Mission, finances and structure of college sports

Is Division I headed in a positive or negative direction?



62% Negative
9% Positive
28% Unsure

What will be the impact of the *House* settlement on Division I sports as a whole?



76% Negative
16% Positive
8% Neither positive nor negative

Importance of academics



98% Important for athletes to be enrolled full-time and taking classes
99% Important for athletes to graduate
95% Important for teams to graduate at least half of athletes to be eligible for postseason competition

Concern about your athletics program's reliance on institutional funds and student fees



86% of presidents/chancellors concerned
80% of athletics directors concerned

Agree or disagree?: "The Division I structure continues to be viable as a single division within the NCAA."



62% of all DI leaders disagree
69% of presidents/chancellors disagree
55% of athletics directors disagree

Ability of your institution to sustain its current competitive classification level



48% of FBS leaders concerned
60% of non-FBS leaders concerned

DI leaders support for this federal legislation:



86% National standards to regulate athlete NIL compensation
78% Laws to prevent college athletes from being classified as employees
77% National rules that supersede conflicting state laws
69% Limits on how much each institution can spend on specific sports or budget categories

Providing university compensation to athletes for playing their sport, separate from NIL payments



(*Current rules don't permit this)

FBS leaders: 45% support 42% oppose
Non-FBS leaders: 27% support 64% oppose

Creation of a new governing entity for Power 4 football teams separate from the NCAA



50% of FBS leaders agree
57% of non-FBS leaders agree

FBS football having a single executive or commissioner to provide unified leadership for the sport, not just for its national championship (the CFP)



FBS leaders:
58% support
26% neither support nor oppose
16% oppose

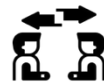
Key findings: Policies on athlete transfer, NIL compensation and seasons of competition

Impact of the transfer portal on Division I



86% Negative
8% Positive
7% Neither positive nor negative

Allowing athletes to transfer between schools as often as they choose with immediate eligibility to compete and no penalty



84% Oppose
11% Support
4% Neither support nor oppose

Enforcing strong penalties for tampering with athletes or providing recruiting inducements before the transfer portal opens



94% Support
3% Oppose

Important to limit athletes to four full seasons of eligibility



77% of all DI leaders agree
90% of presidents/chancellors agree
69% of athletics directors agree

Impact of name, image and likeness (NIL) compensation for athletes on Division I



50% Negative
36% Positive
14% Neither positive nor negative

How should new institutional NIL and revenue-sharing payments be distributed?



Based on how much money an athlete's sport generates or an athlete's marketability

78% Athletics directors
58% FBS leaders
41% Non-FBS leaders

Included with institutional financial assistance and distributed equitably to female and male athletes

9% Athletics directors
26% FBS leaders
33% Non-FBS leaders

Key findings: Women’s and collegiate Olympic sports

Collegiate Olympic sports



- 93% Important for universities to offer sports other than those tied to generating revenues
- 92% Collegiate Olympic sports are important to the success of Team USA
- 82% Favor federal tax or fees on sports gambling operators to support collegiate Olympic sports programs
- 73% Favor federal funds to support collegiate Olympic sports programs

Impact of the *House* settlement on the overall experience of Division I athletes in these sports:



Athletics directors responses:

FBS football	75% POSITIVE	15% negative
Men’s basketball	63% POSITIVE	25% negative
Women’s basketball	50% POSITIVE	33% negative
Non-FBS football	25% positive	49% NEGATIVE
All other women’s sports	7% positive	72% NEGATIVE
All other men’s sports	5% positive	73% NEGATIVE

How have colleges and universities done in providing female athletes with equitable opportunities, financial assistance and treatment?



- 44% Been about right
- 43% Have not gone far enough
- 6% Gone too far
- 8% Unsure

Will female athletes be in a worse or better situation with institution-provided NIL and revenue-sharing and greater scholarships?



- 55% Worse
- 25% Better
- 20% About the same

Division I leaders survey

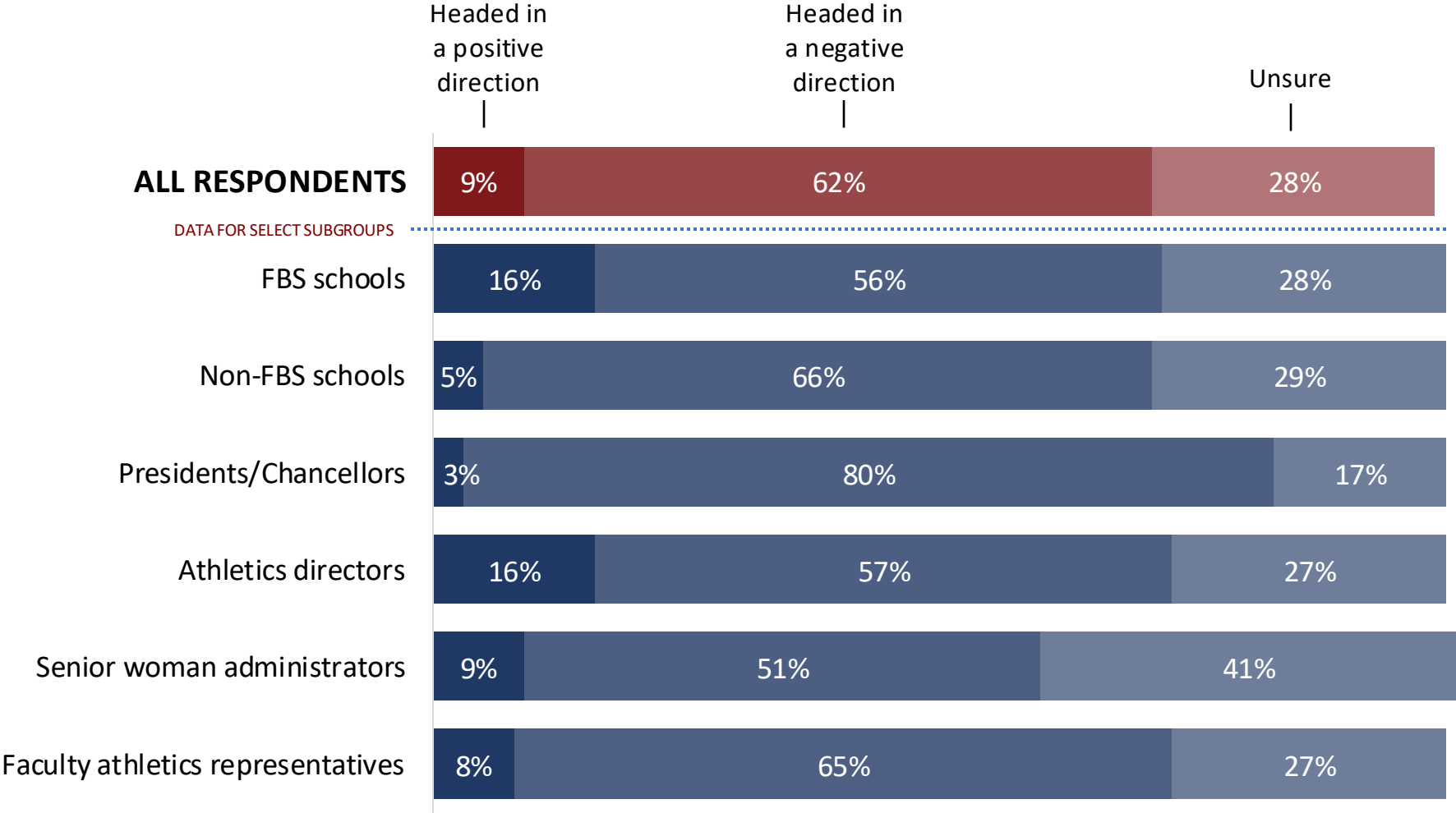
Detailed findings

1. [House settlement reactions and the future of Division I](#)
2. [College sports governance and structure](#)
3. [Finances and operations of college athletics](#)
4. [Athlete eligibility and the importance of academics](#)
5. [Collegiate Olympic sports](#)
6. [Title IX and gender equity](#)
7. [Importance of college sports](#)
8. [Verbatim responses to the survey](#)
9. [Methodology](#)
10. [About this survey](#) and [contact information](#)

Division I leaders survey

House settlement reactions and the future of Division I

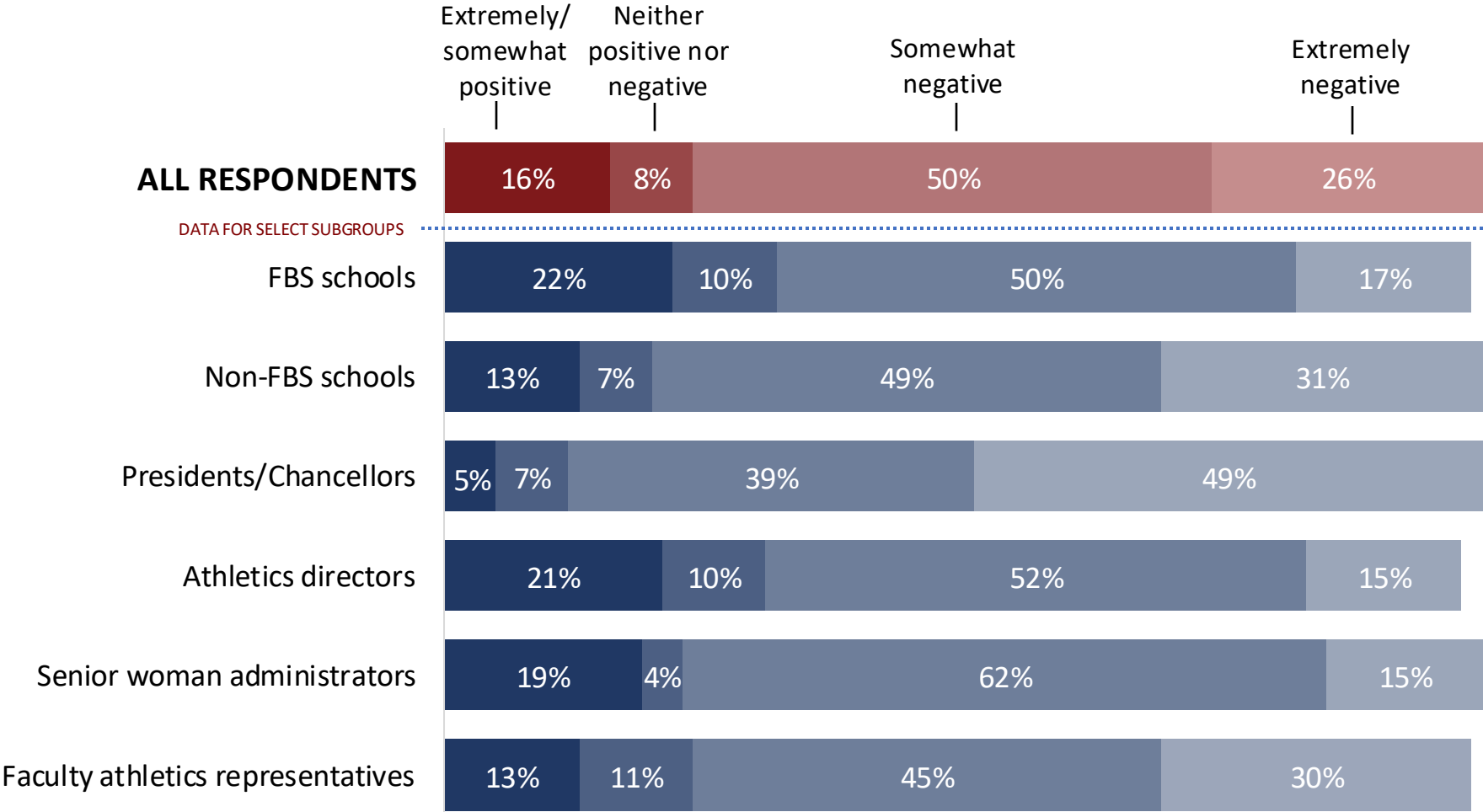
In general, is NCAA Division I headed in a positive direction or a negative direction?



Division I leaders survey

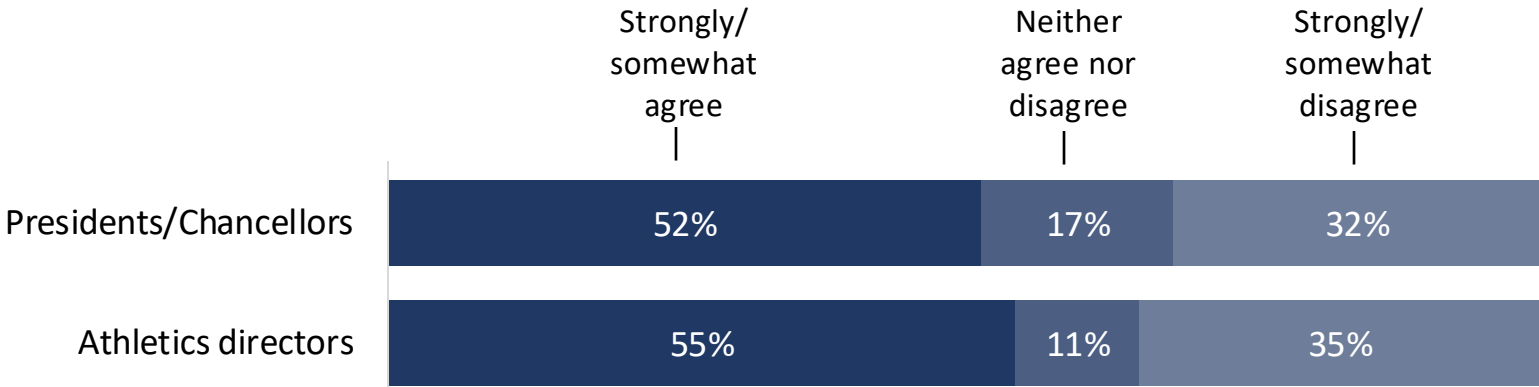
House settlement reactions and the future of Division I

What do you think the impact of the *House* settlement will be on Division I college sports as a whole?



House settlement reactions and the future of Division I

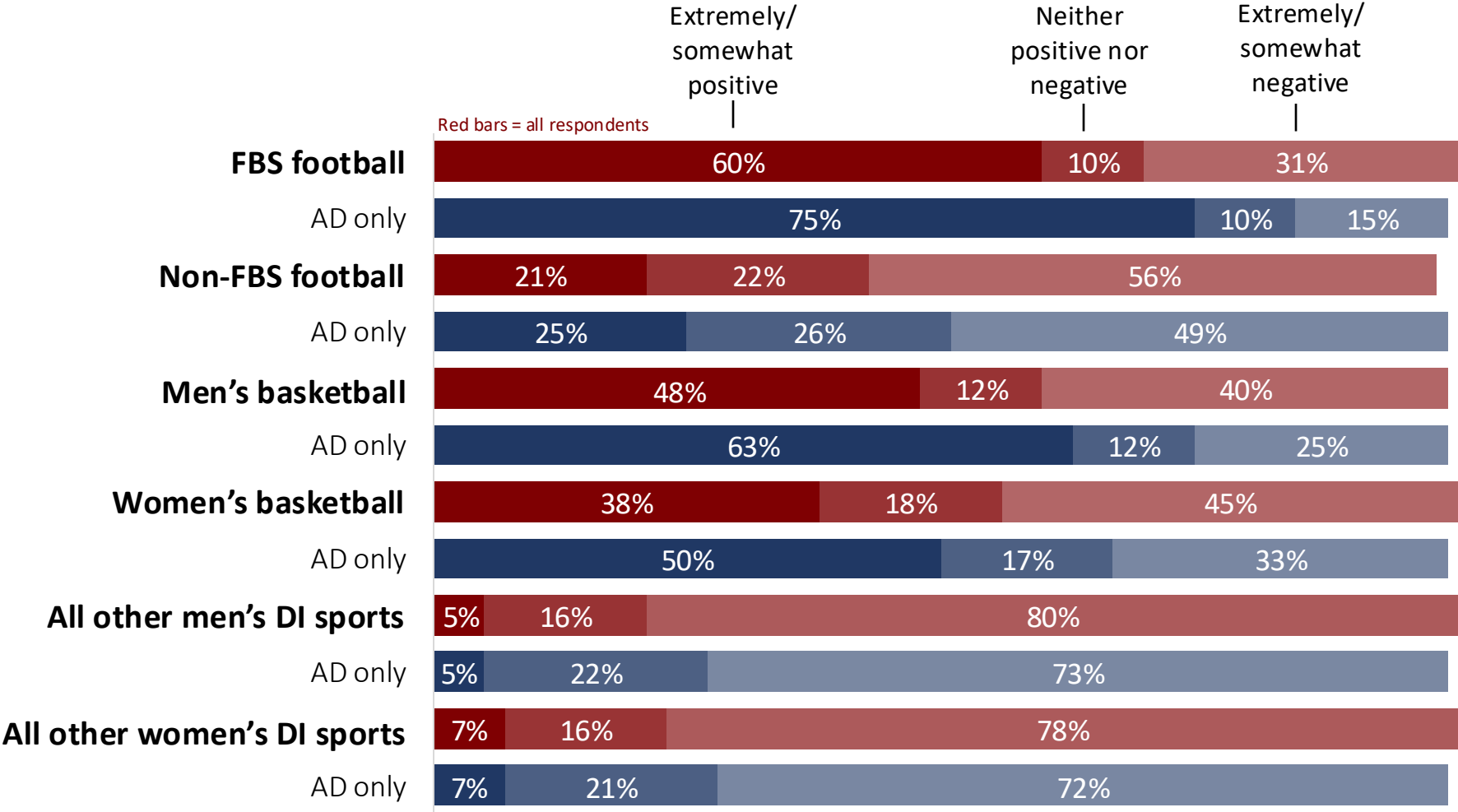
Do you agree or disagree that your institution’s oversight board (Board of Trustees, Board of Regents) is adequately knowledgeable about the *House* settlement terms and its potential impact on your institution?



Division I leaders survey

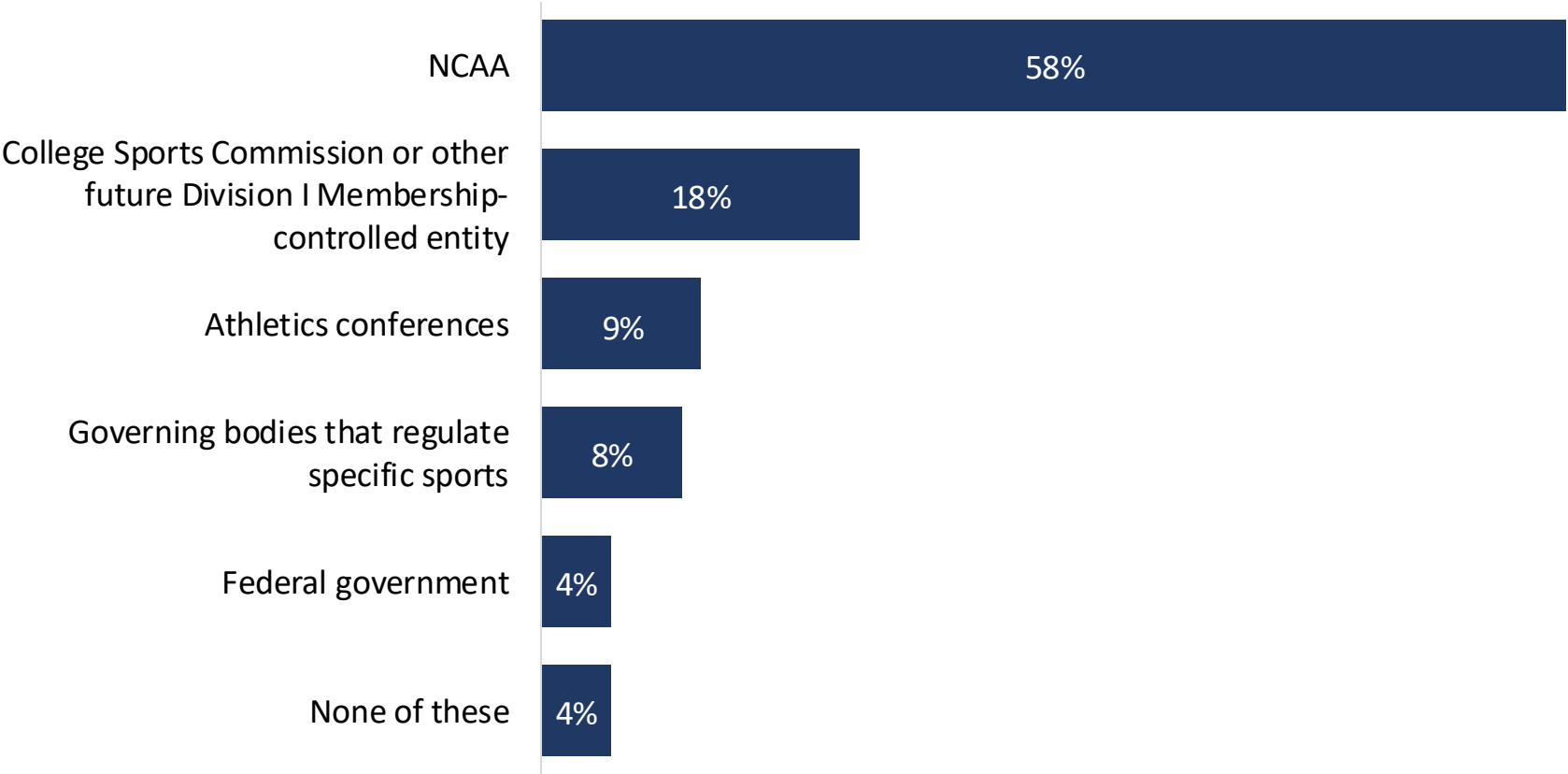
House settlement reactions and the future of Division I

What impact do you believe the *House* settlement will have on the overall experience of Division I college athletes in each of these sports?



College sports governance and structure

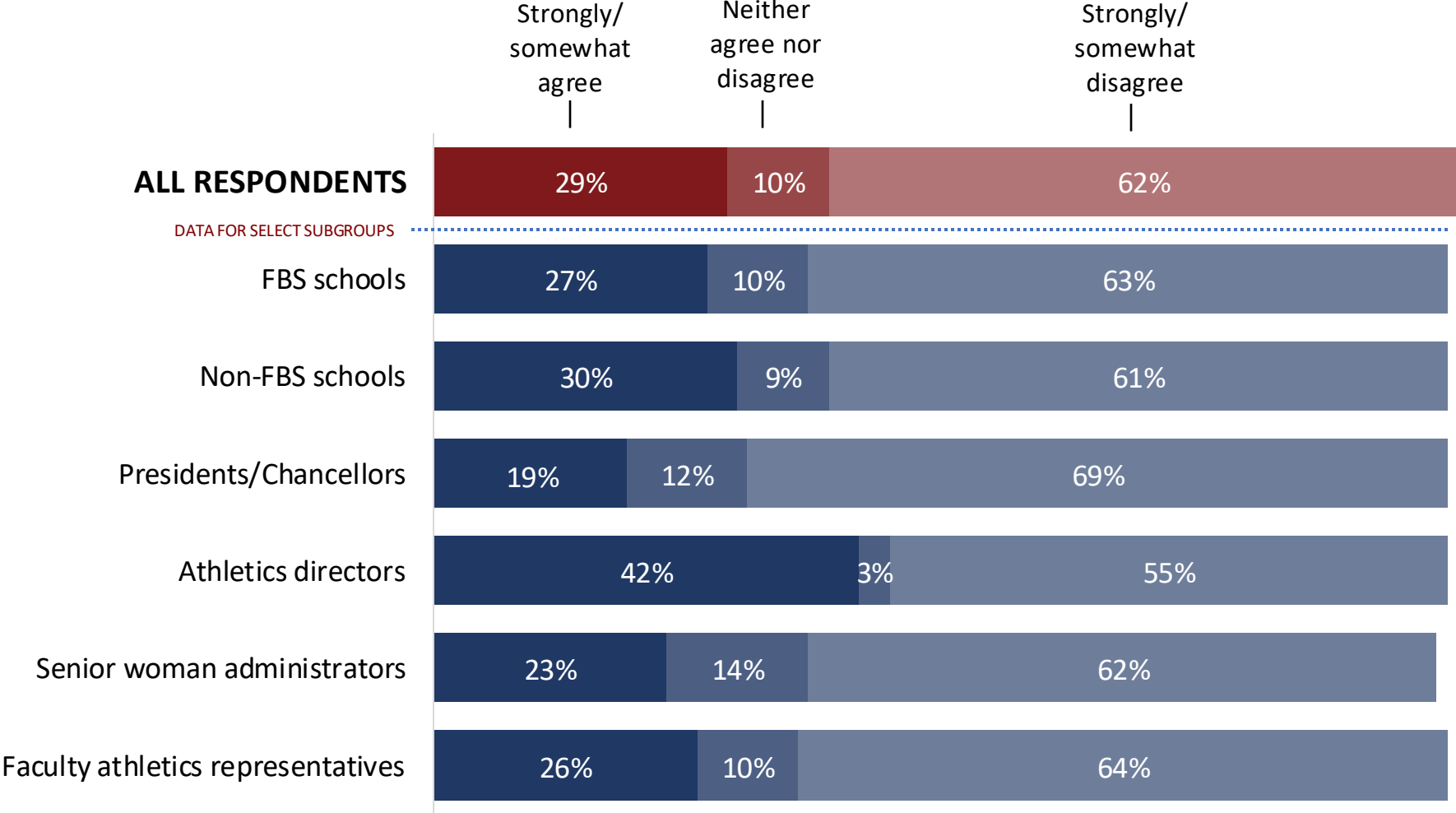
Who should be primarily responsible for regulating Division I college sports?



Division I leaders survey

College sports governance and structure

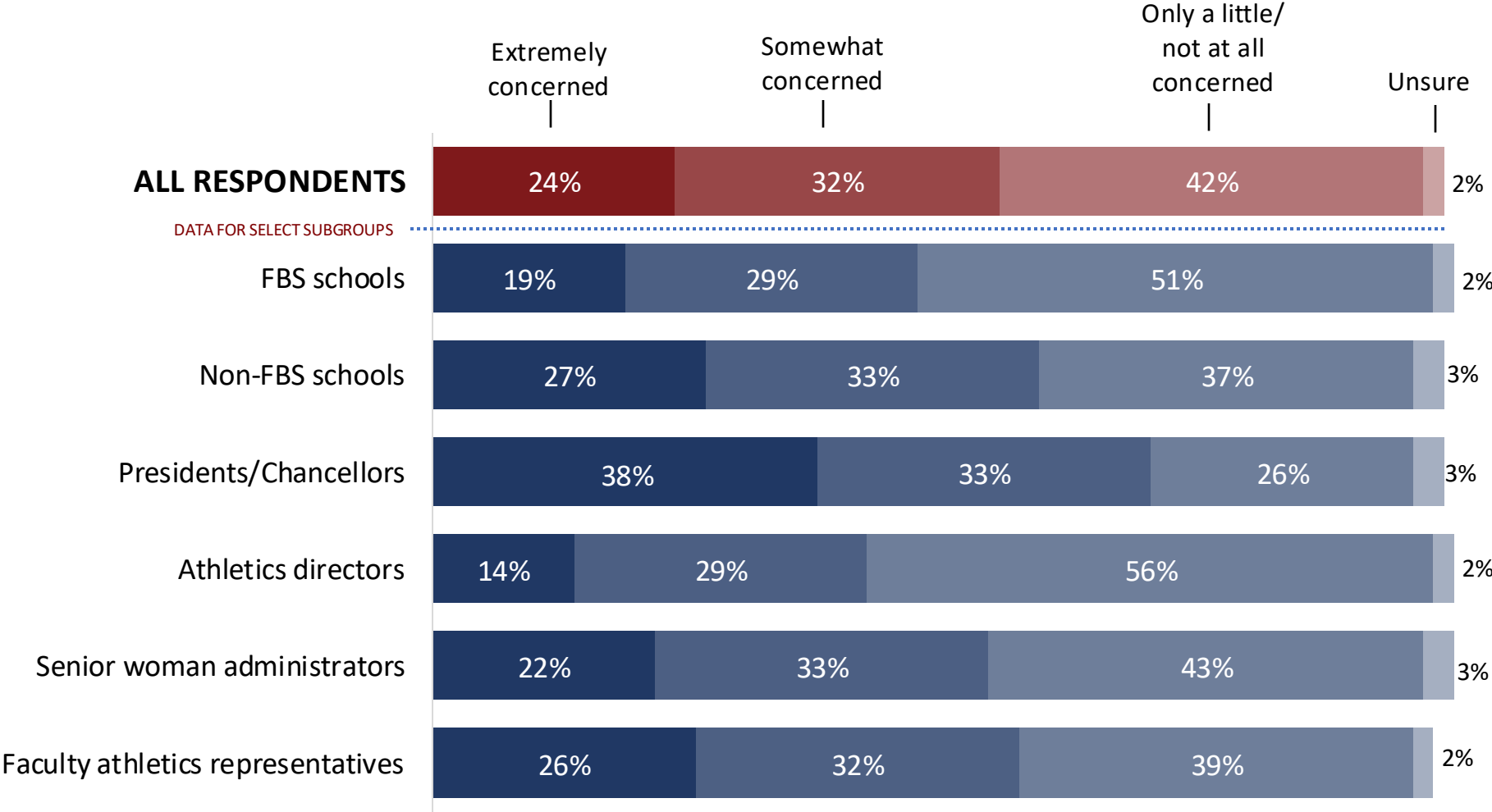
Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement:
“The Division I structure continues to be viable as a single division within the NCAA.”



Division I leaders survey

College sports governance and structure

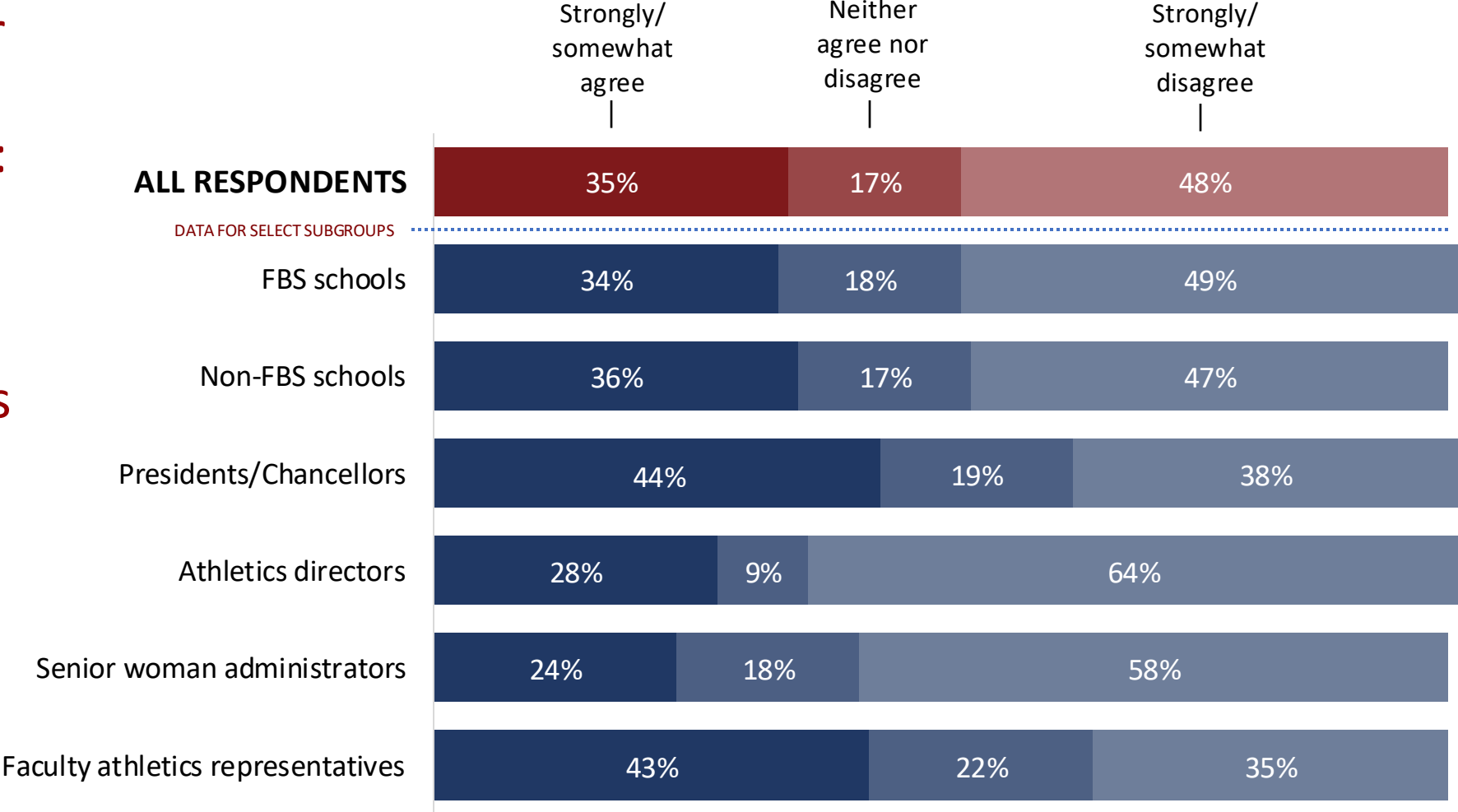
How concerned are you that your institution will not be able to sustain its current competitive classification level (e.g., Autonomy/Power 4, FBS-G6, FCS, DI basketball-centric)?



Division I leaders survey

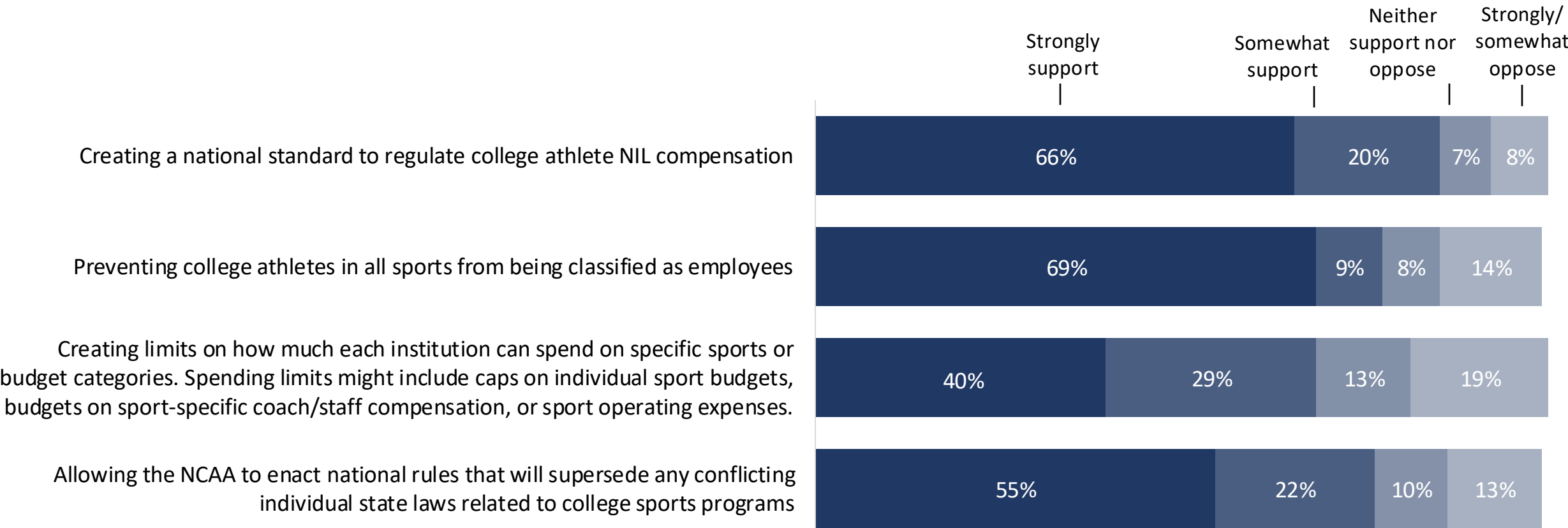
College sports governance and structure

Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: “Division I should have two different national championship levels for certain sports, similar to the championship structure for Division I football.”



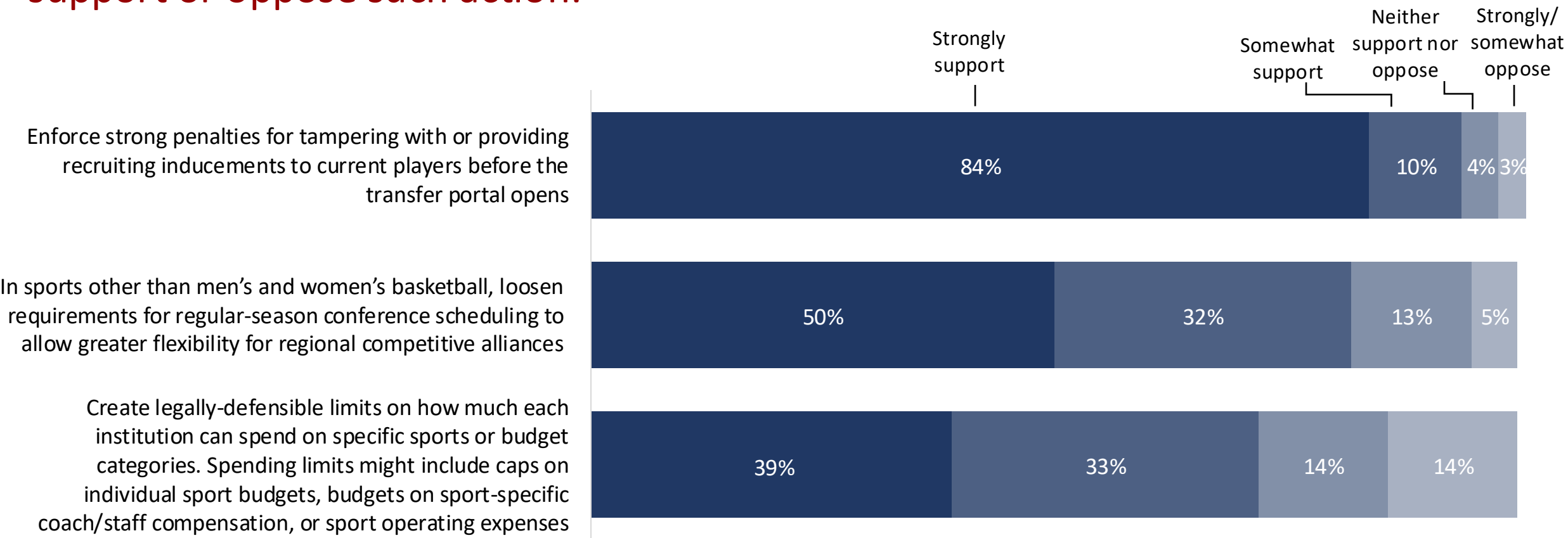
College sports governance and structure

Below is a list of potential actions for **federal legislation** for Division I college sports. Please indicate whether you support or oppose such legislation:



College sports governance and structure

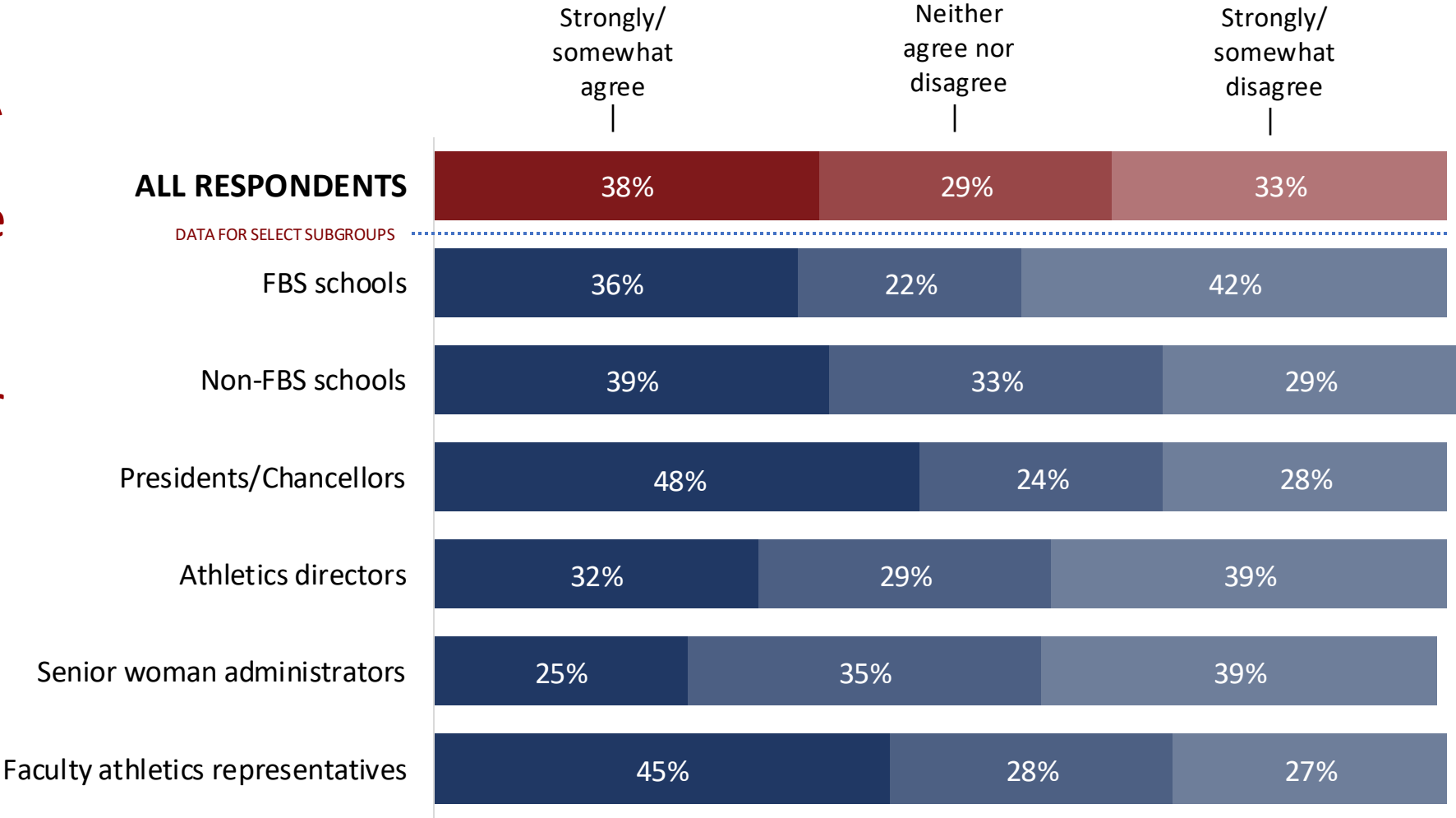
Below is a list of potential actions that could be taken by NCAA, conferences, or institutions **without federal legislation**. For each, please indicate whether you support or oppose such action:



Division I leaders survey

College sports governance and structure

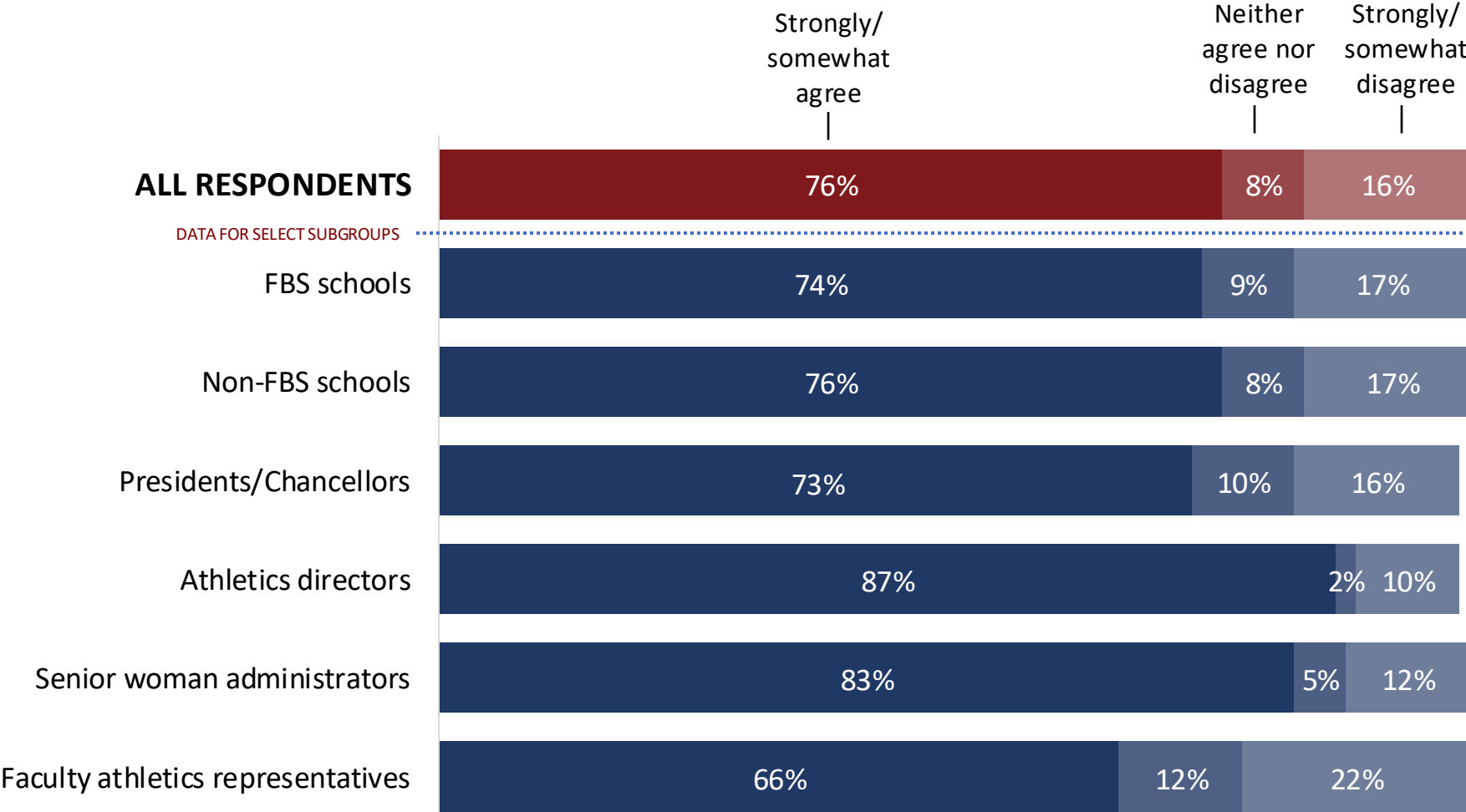
Do you agree or disagree that the NCAA Division I governing board(s) should include independent directors, individuals who must not be employed by (or serve on a governing board for) a member institution, conference, or a media partner of any conference or institution?



Division I leaders survey

College sports governance and structure

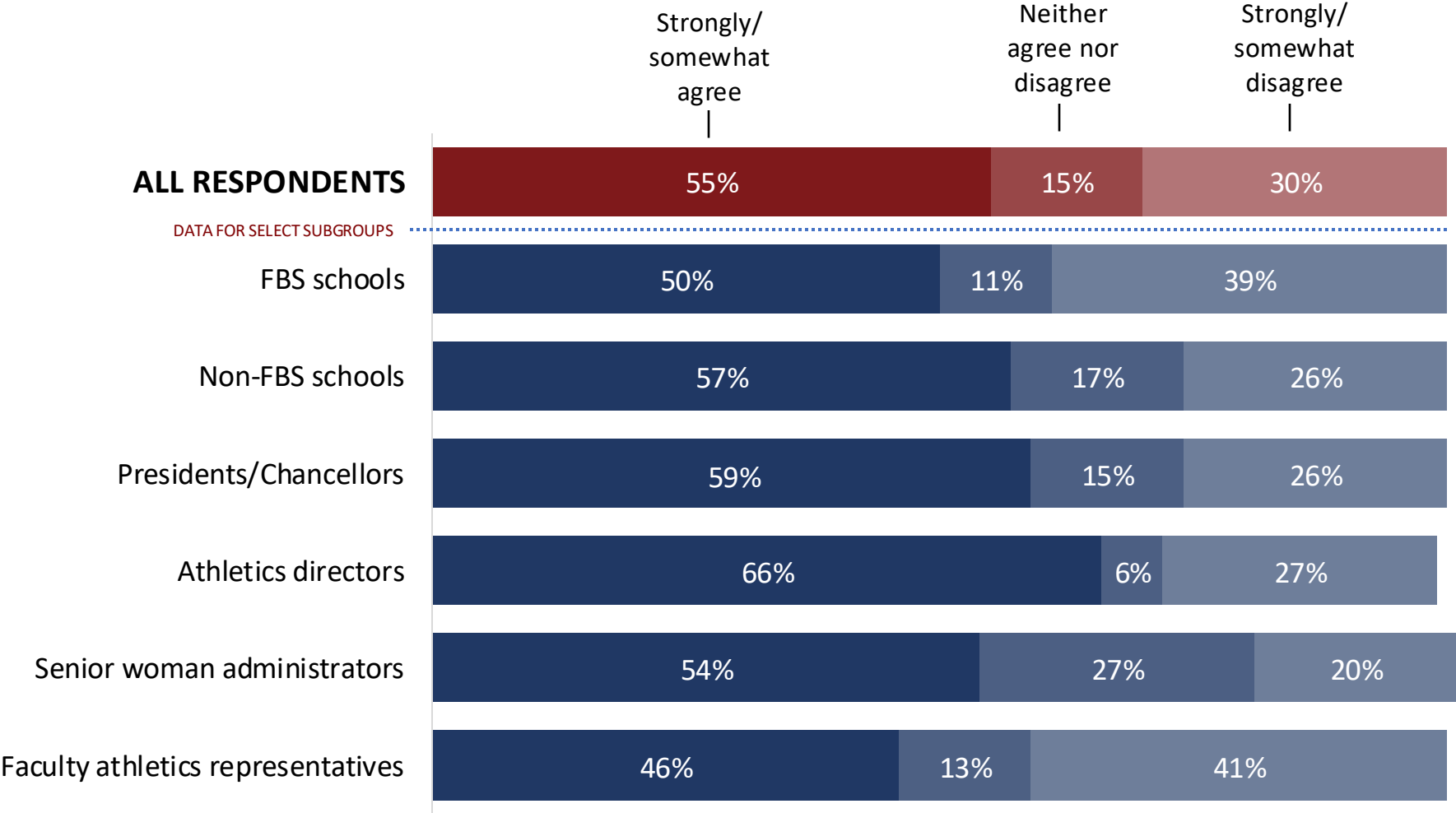
Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: “Keeping all current Division I schools in the same men’s and women’s basketball national championship tournaments (i.e., March Madness) is essential.”



Division I leaders survey

College sports governance and structure

Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: “A new governing entity should be created for **Power 4 football teams** that would operate separately from the NCAA.”



Division I leaders survey

College sports governance and structure

Do you oppose or support FBS football having a single executive or commissioner to provide unified leadership for the sport, not just for its national championship (the CFP)?

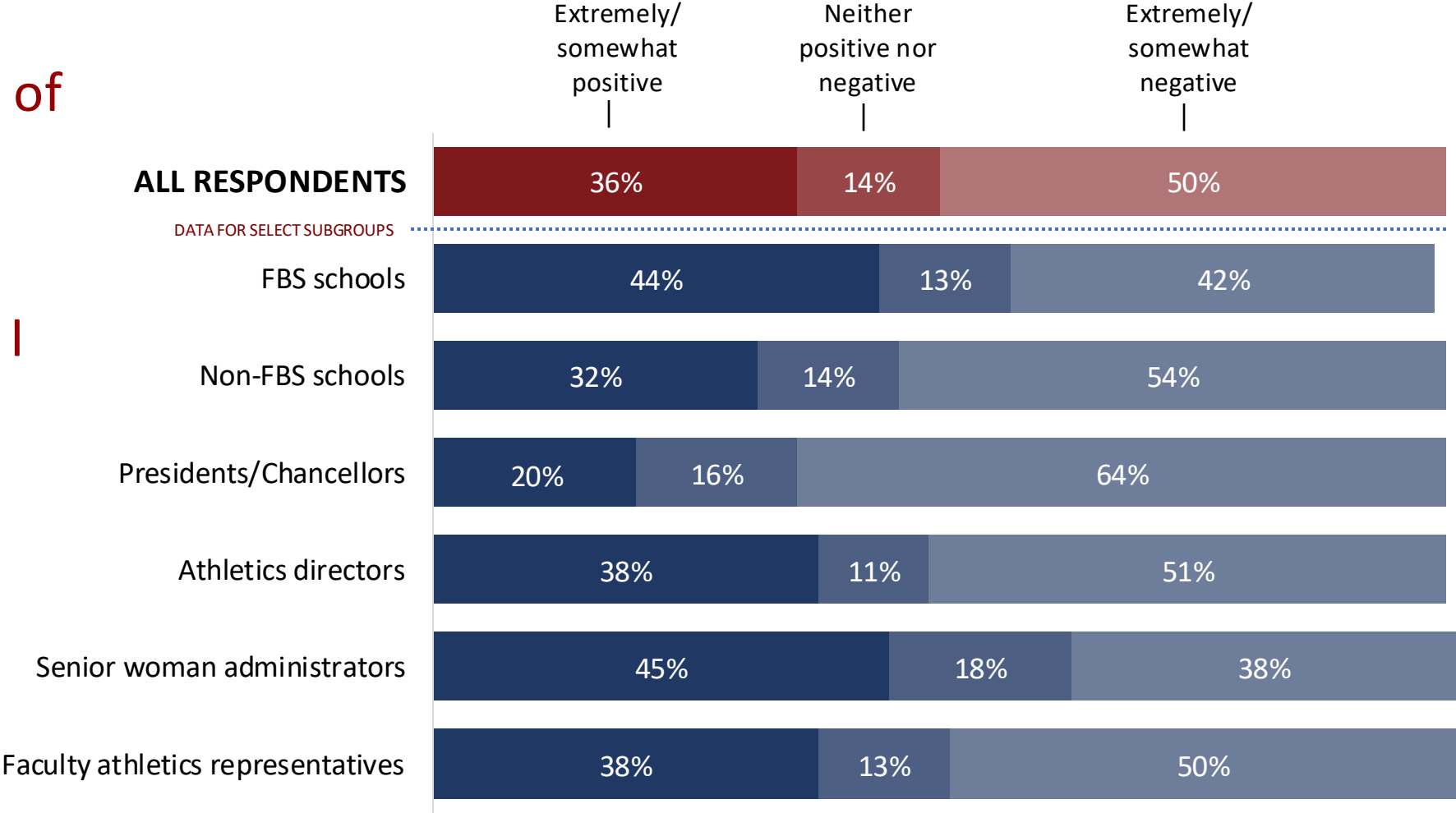
Responses from leaders at FBS schools



Division I leaders survey

Finances and operations of college athletics

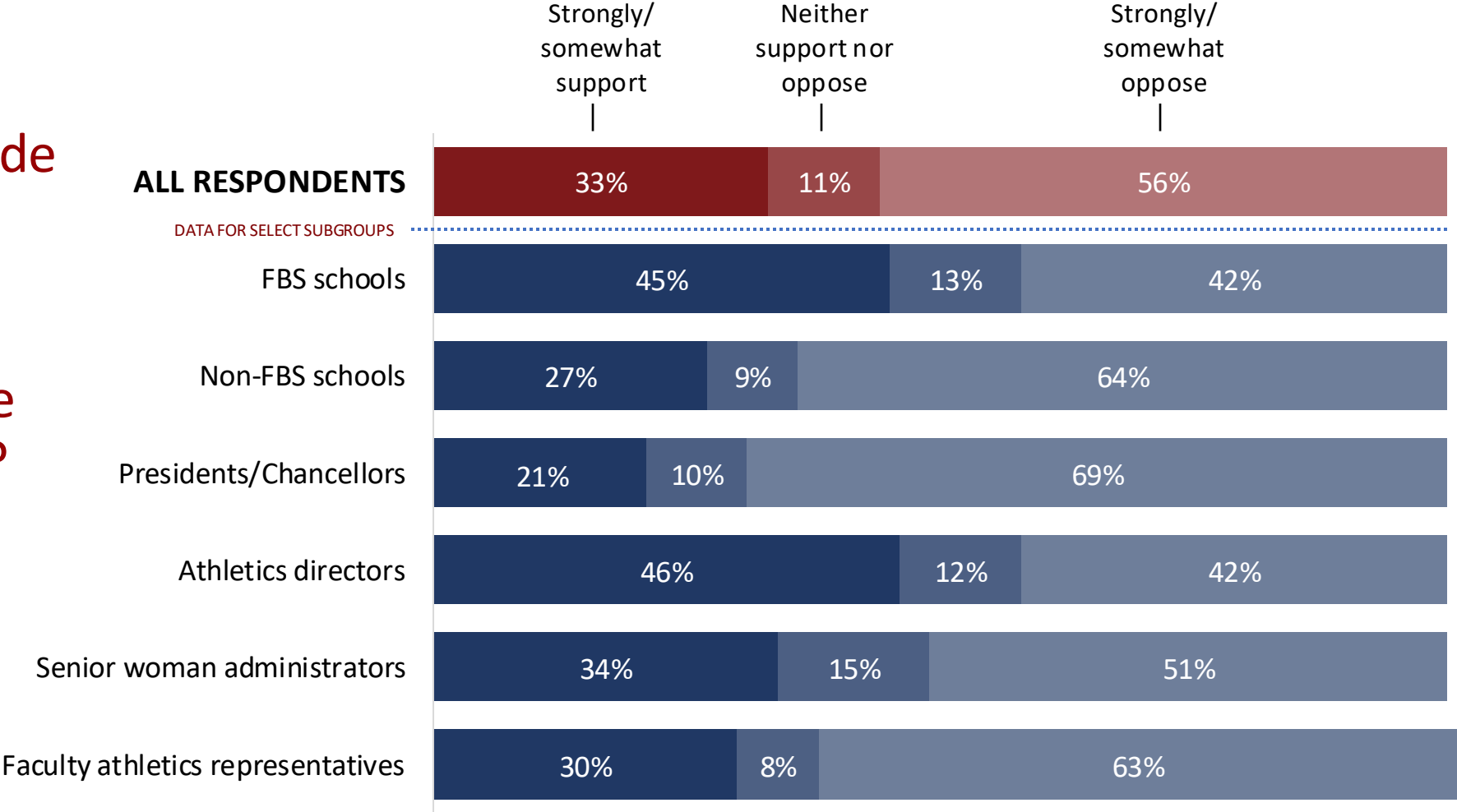
How would you describe the impact of name, image, and likeness (NIL) compensation for athletes on Division I college sports?



Division I leaders survey

Finances and operations of college athletics

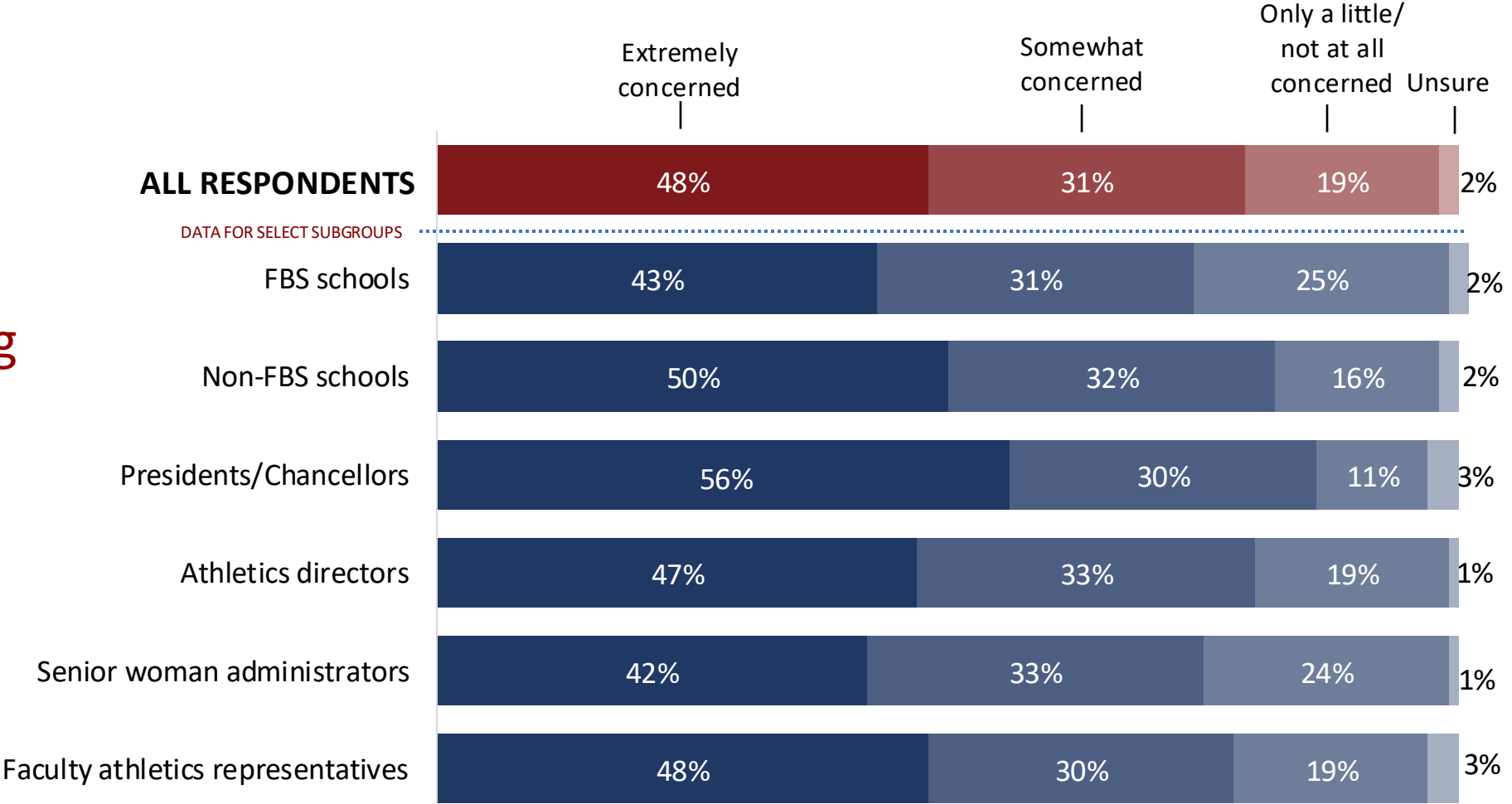
Do you support or oppose allowing universities to provide compensation to Division I college athletes for playing their sport, separate from NIL payments?



Division I leaders survey

Finances and operations of college athletics

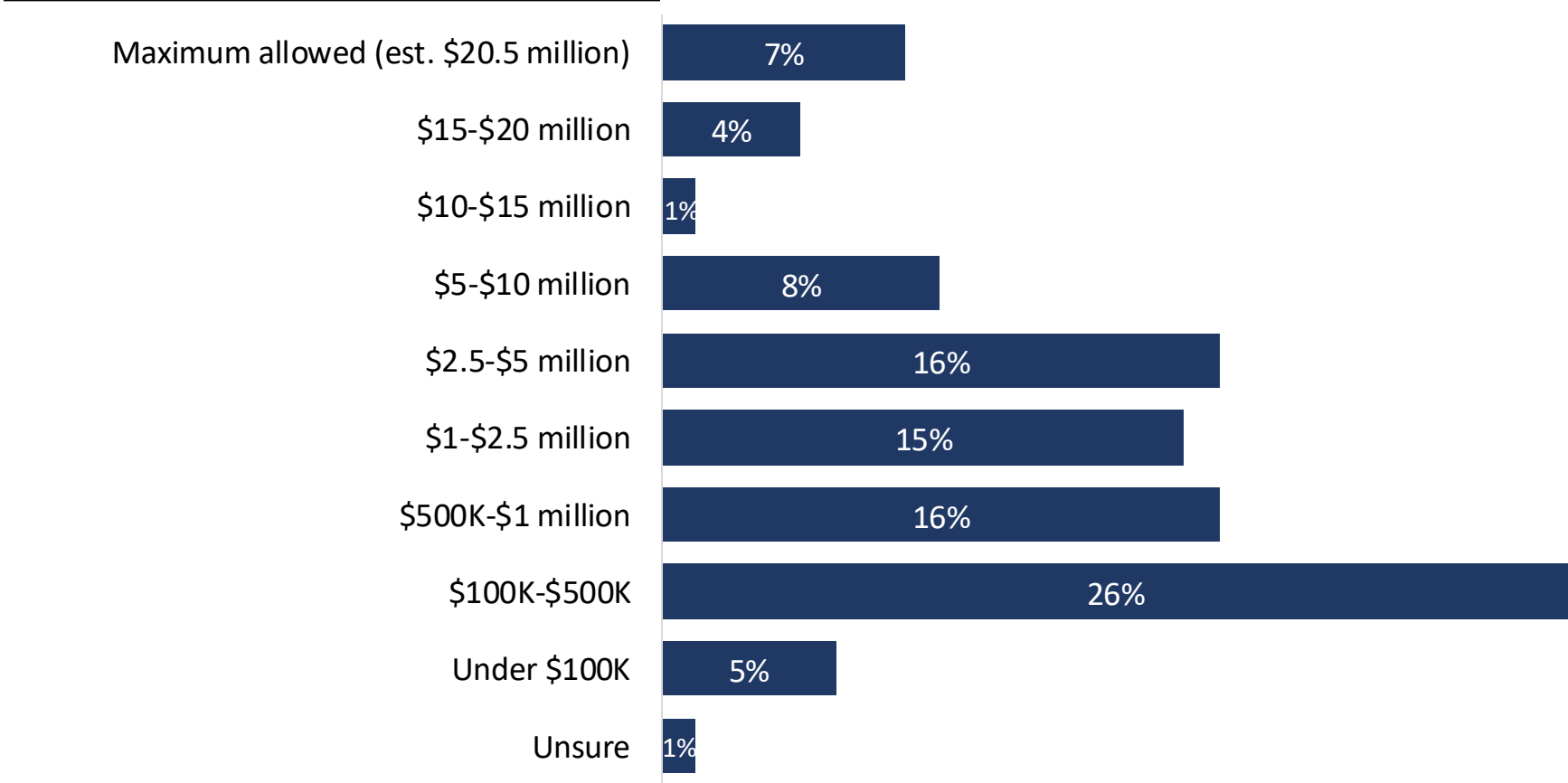
How concerned are you about your athletics program’s current or future level of reliance on institutional funding and student fees to balance its budget?



Finances and operations of college athletics

Please select the budget range for new athlete payments and new scholarships that you anticipate your institution will make this year towards the new institutional athlete benefits cap.

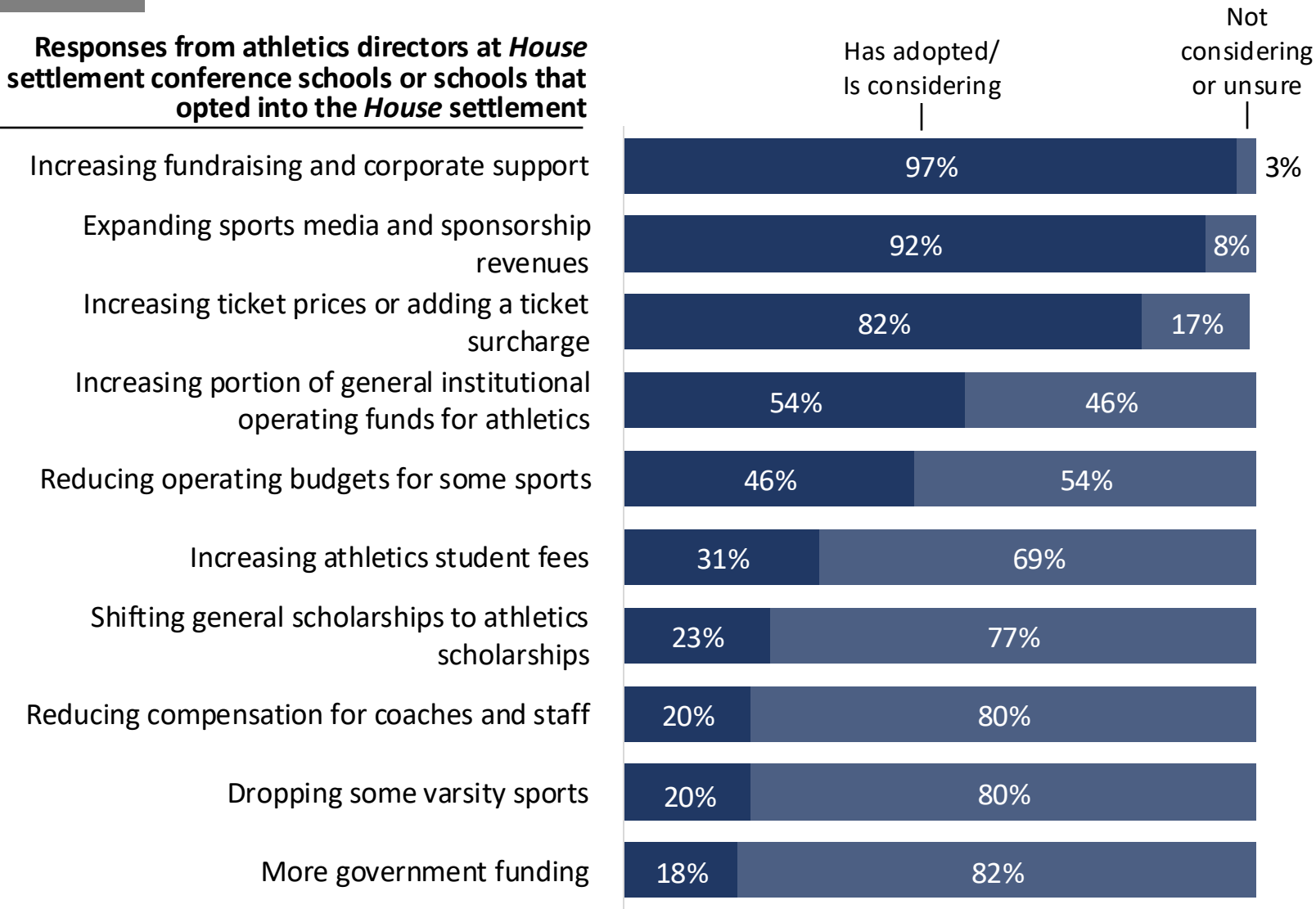
Responses from athletics directors at *House* settlement conference schools or schools that opted into the *House* settlement



Division I leaders survey

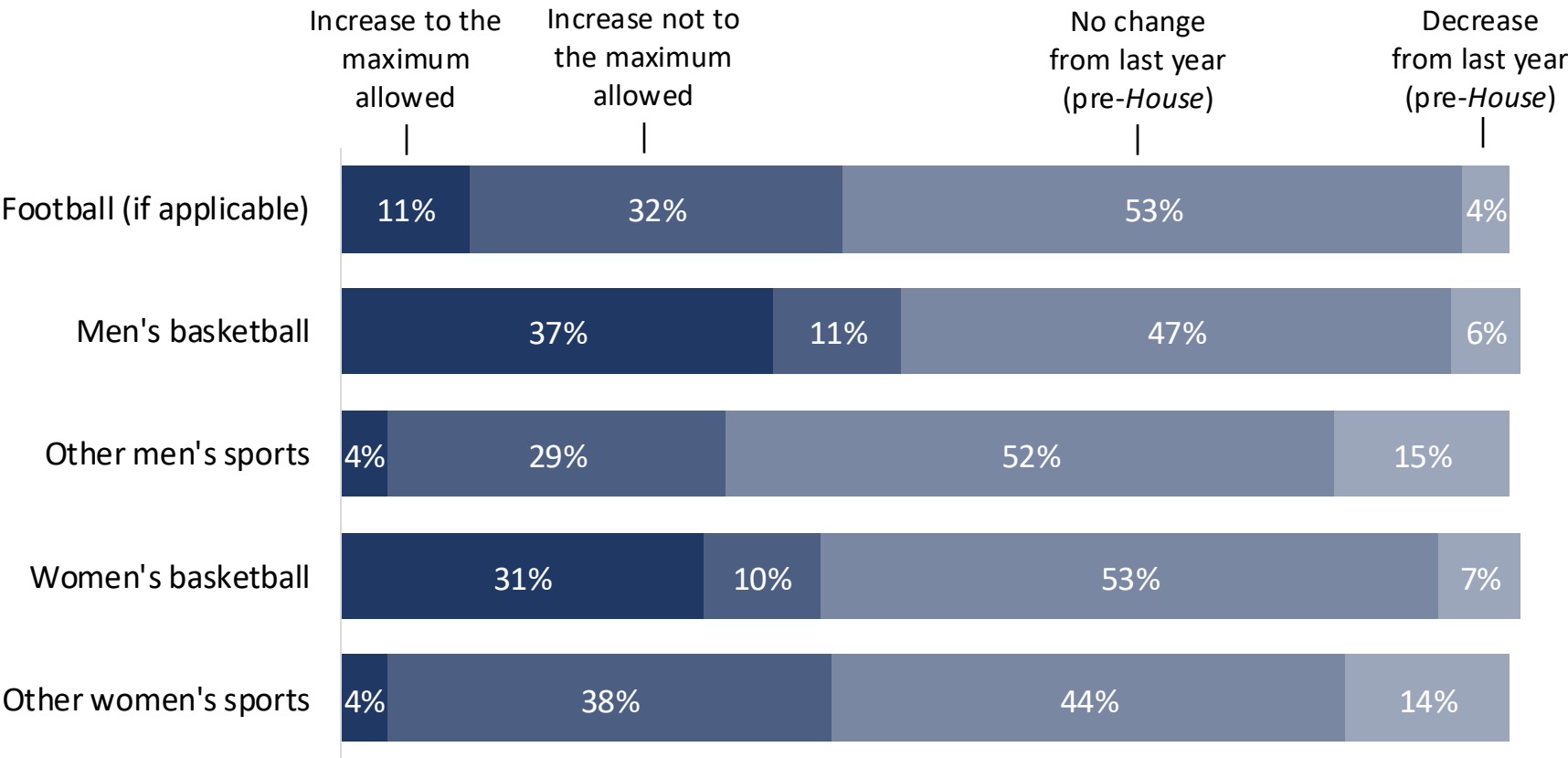
Finances and operations of college athletics

Division I universities face higher costs for athletics because of new rules that allow athletes to be compensated and athletics scholarship limits to be increased. Please indicate whether your campus has adopted, is considering, or is not considering each of the following strategies to cover these new costs.



What do you anticipate will happen to the number of athletics scholarships offered in the following sports at your institution within the next five years?

Responses from athletics directors at *House* settlement conference schools or schools that opted into the *House* settlement



Finances and operations of college athletics

What do you believe will happen to the number of varsity sports offered at your institution within the next five years?

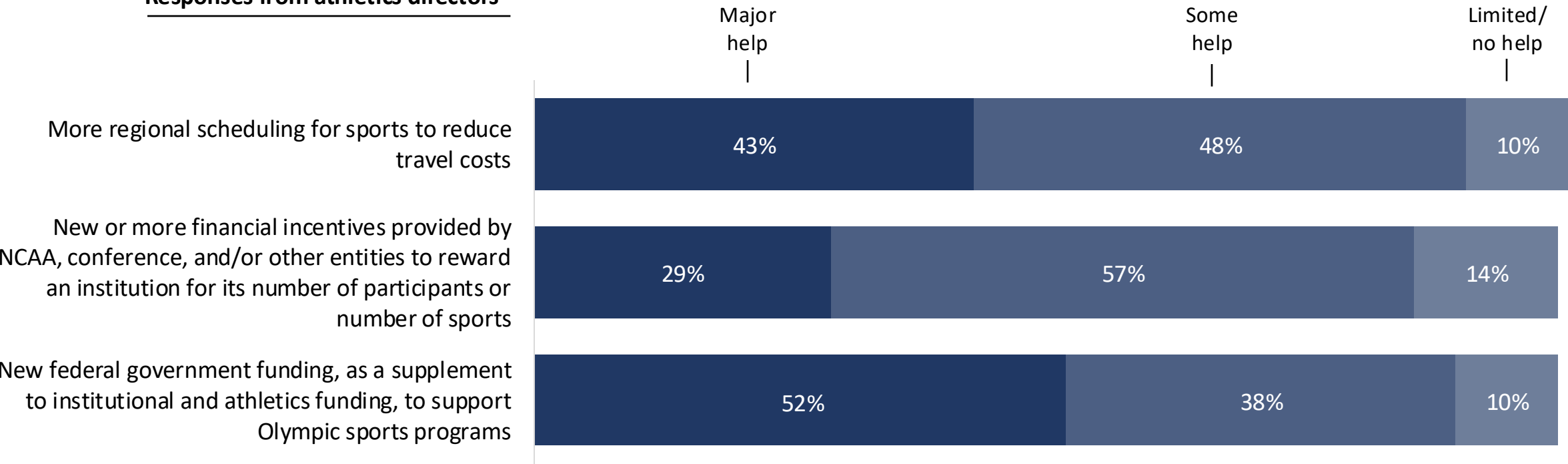
Responses from athletics directors



Finances and operations of college athletics

Here are measures that might help an institution maintain its total number of varsity sports. For each, please indicate how much help these measures would provide.

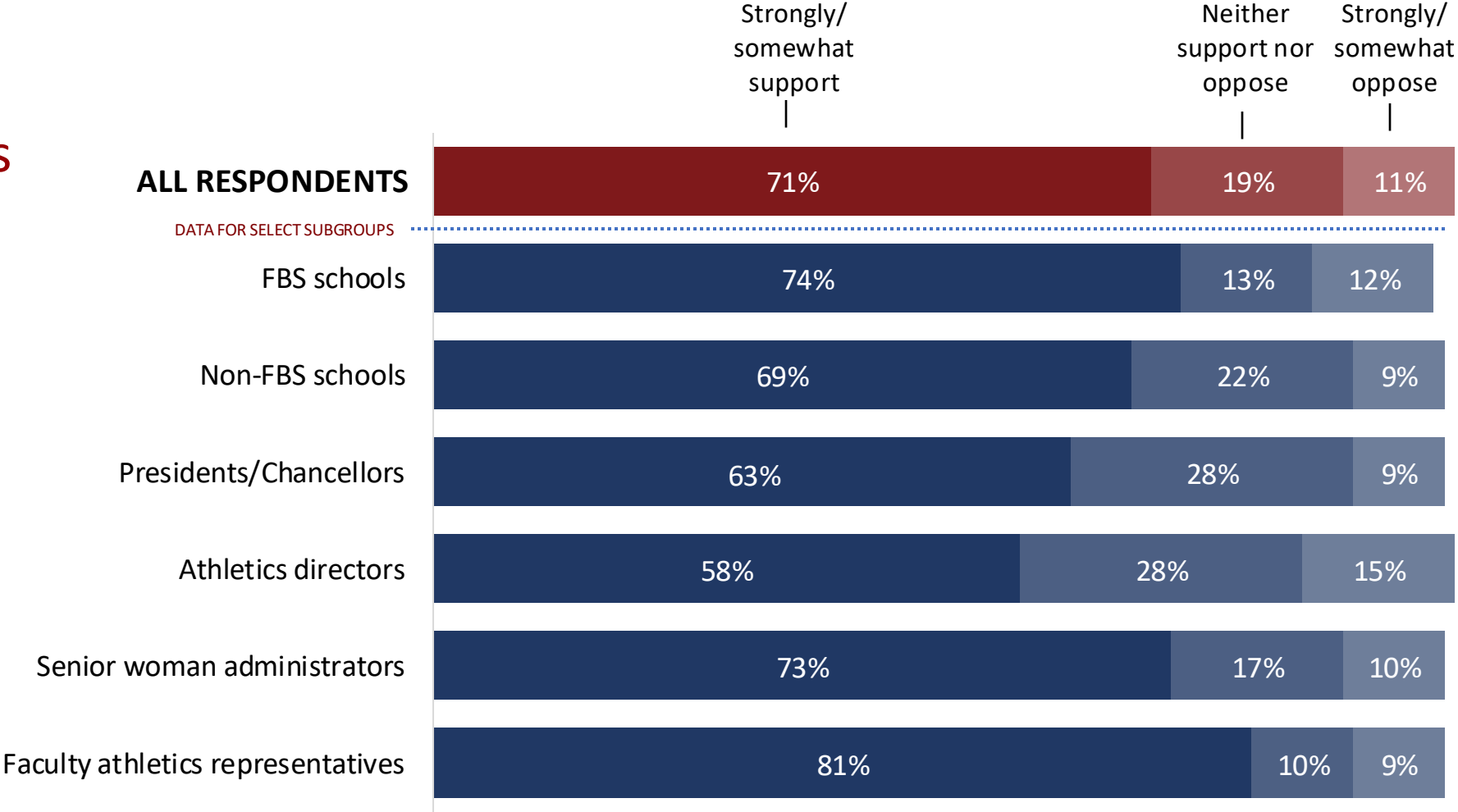
Responses from athletics directors



Division I leaders survey

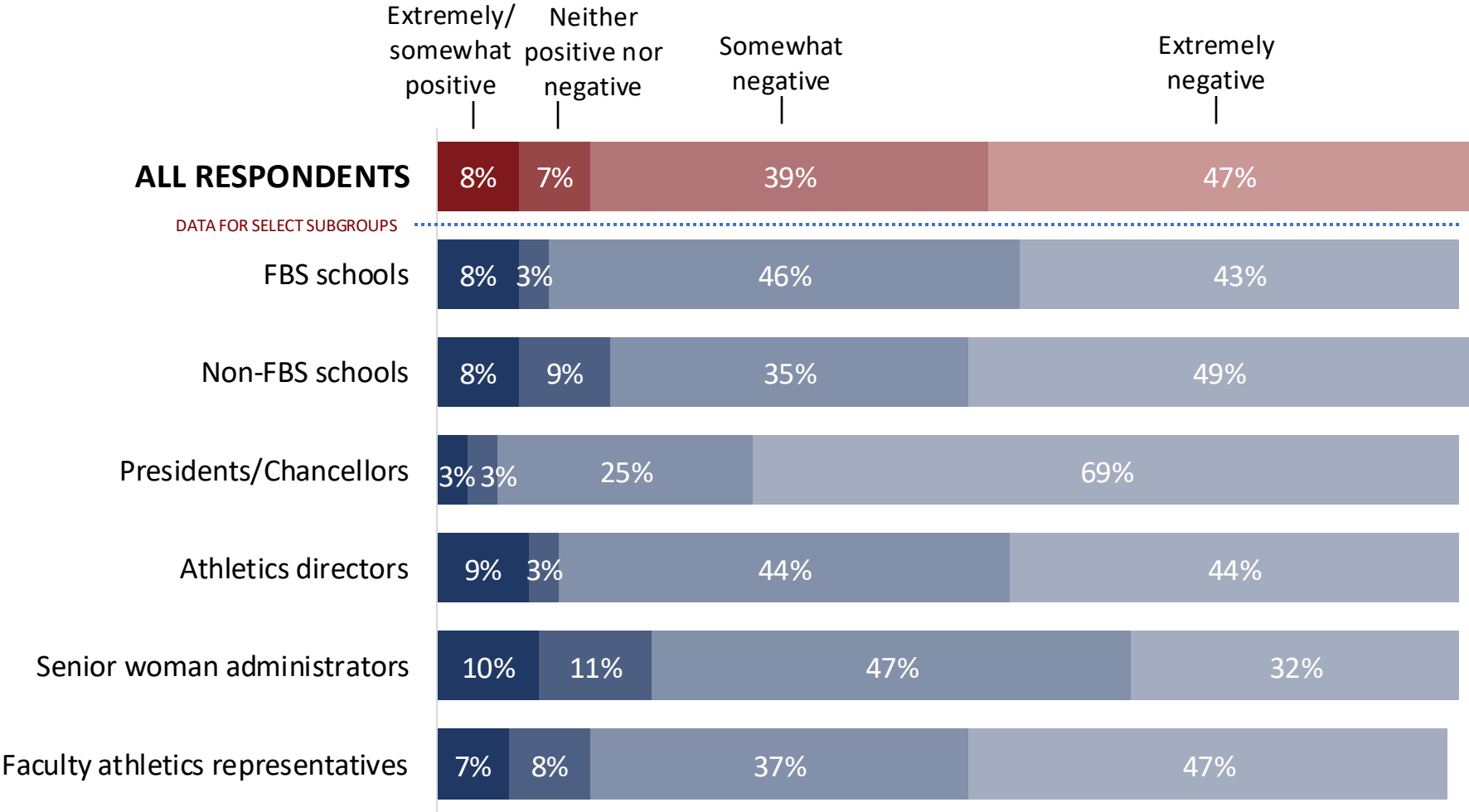
Finances and operations of college athletics

Do you support or oppose requiring college sports coaches to earn a “coach credential” certifying their knowledge and training in areas to support athlete development, mental health, physical health, and safety?



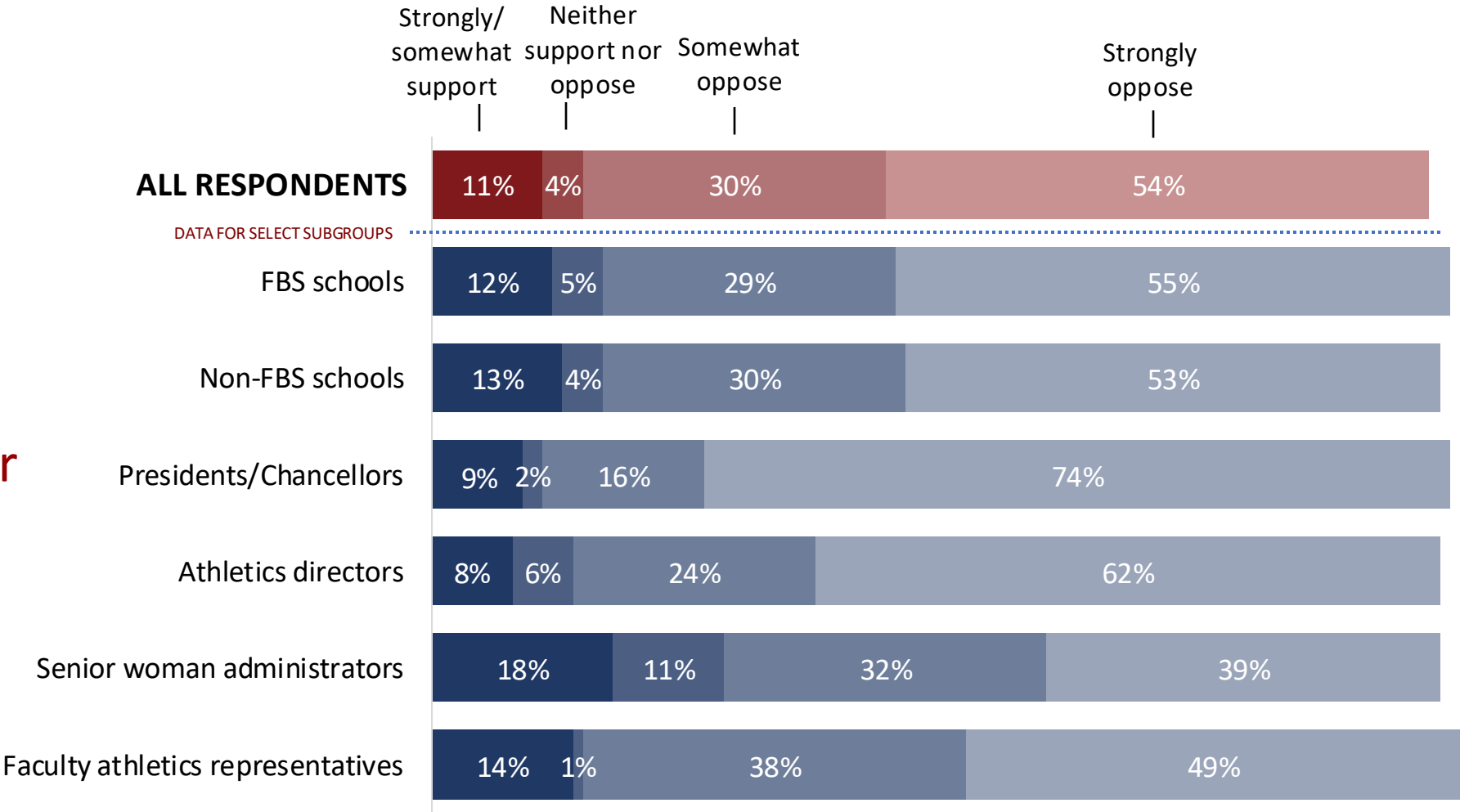
Athlete eligibility and the importance of academics

How would you describe the impact of the transfer portal on Division I college sports?



Athlete eligibility and the importance of academics

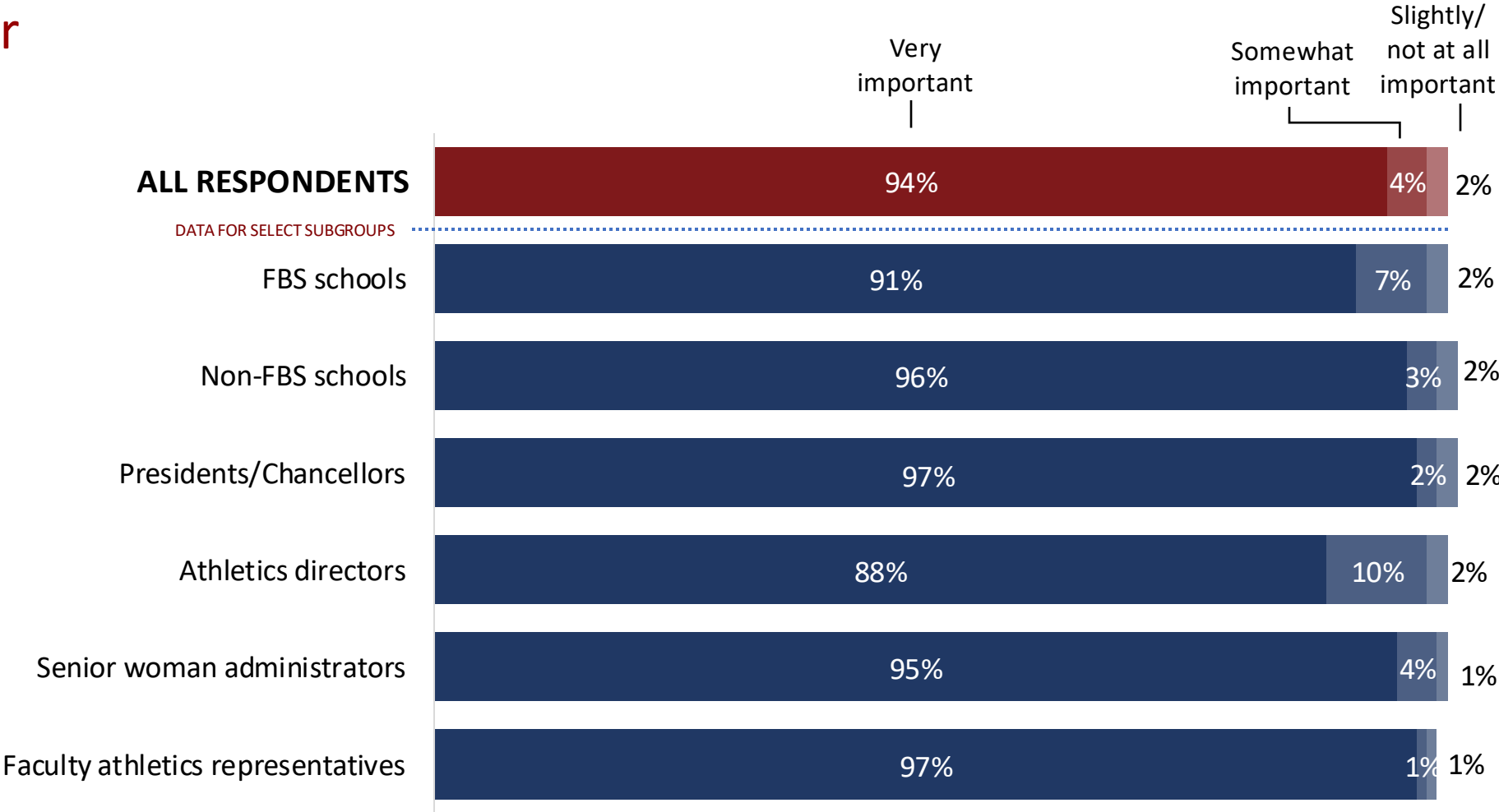
Do you support or oppose current rules that allow college athletes to transfer between schools as often as they choose and be immediately eligible to compete for their new school(s) without penalty?



Division I leaders survey

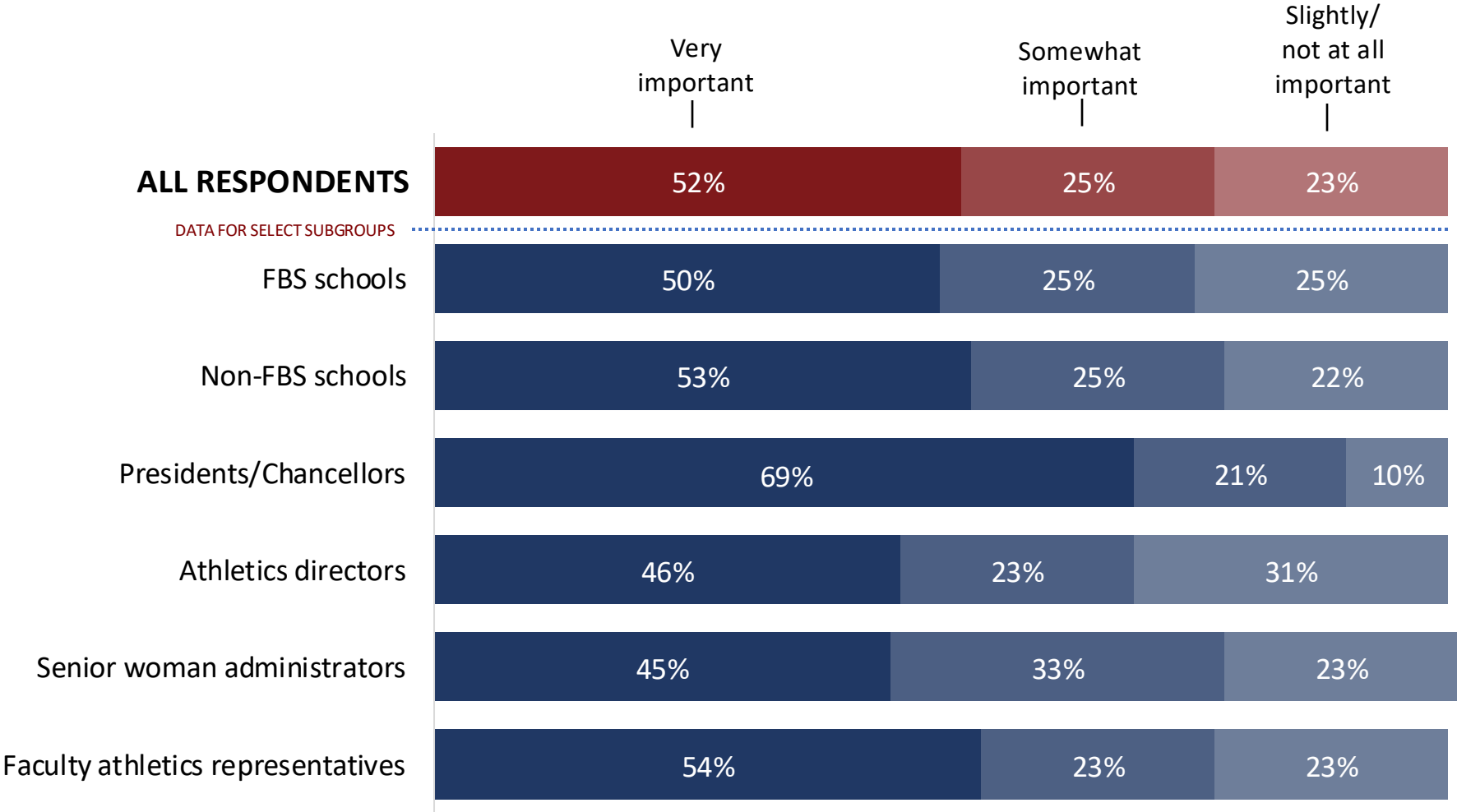
Athlete eligibility and the importance of academics

How important is it for college athletes to be enrolled as full-time students and taking classes at the school for which they are competing?



Athlete eligibility and the importance of academics

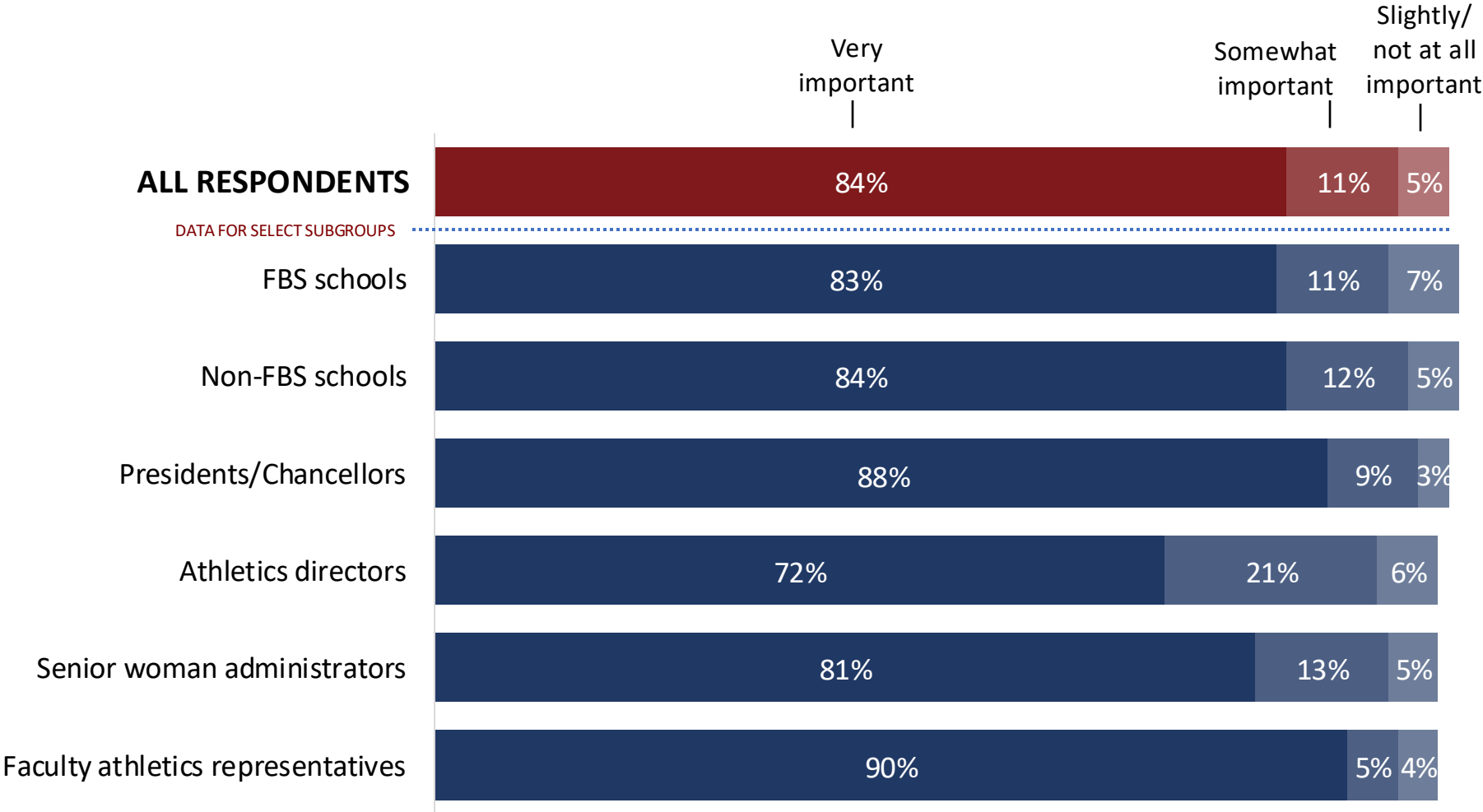
How important is it to limit college athletes to four full seasons of competition eligibility?



Division I leaders survey

Athlete eligibility and the importance of academics

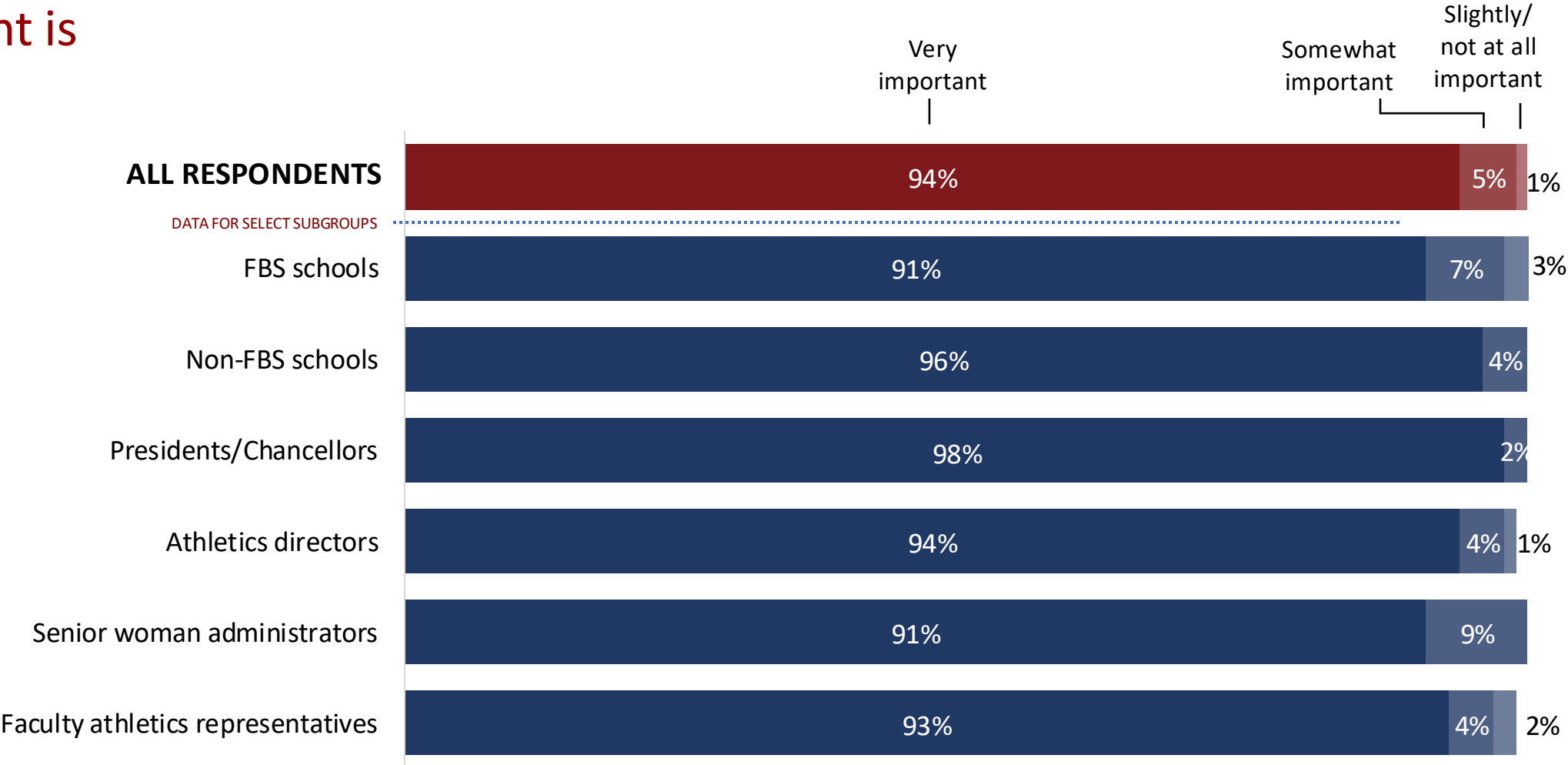
Division I college teams are required to be on track to graduate at least half of their athletes to be eligible for postseason competition (e.g., March Madness, College Football Playoff). How important is this rule?



Division I leaders survey

Athlete eligibility and the importance of academics

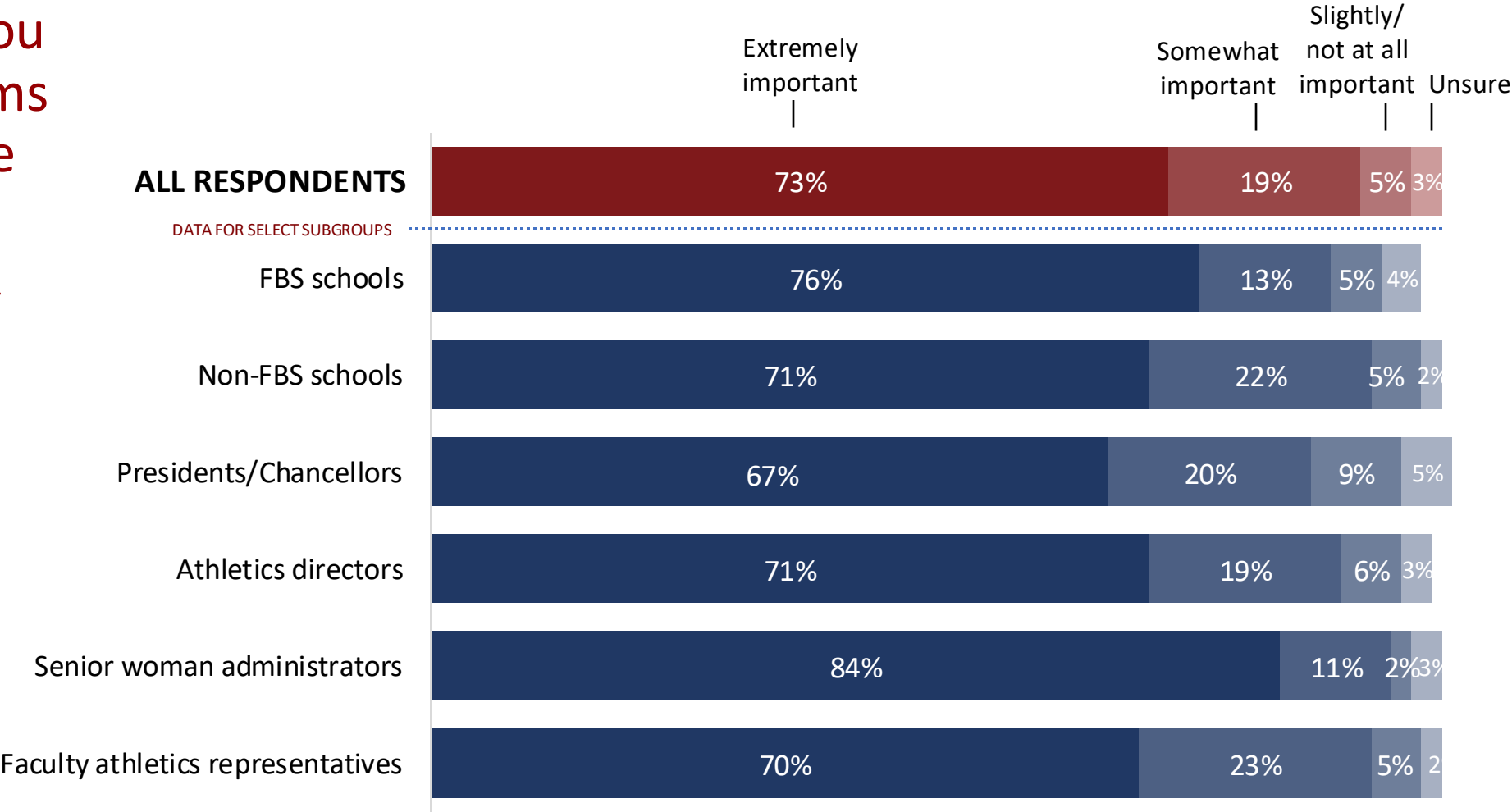
How important is it for college athletes to graduate?



Division I leaders survey

Collegiate Olympic sports

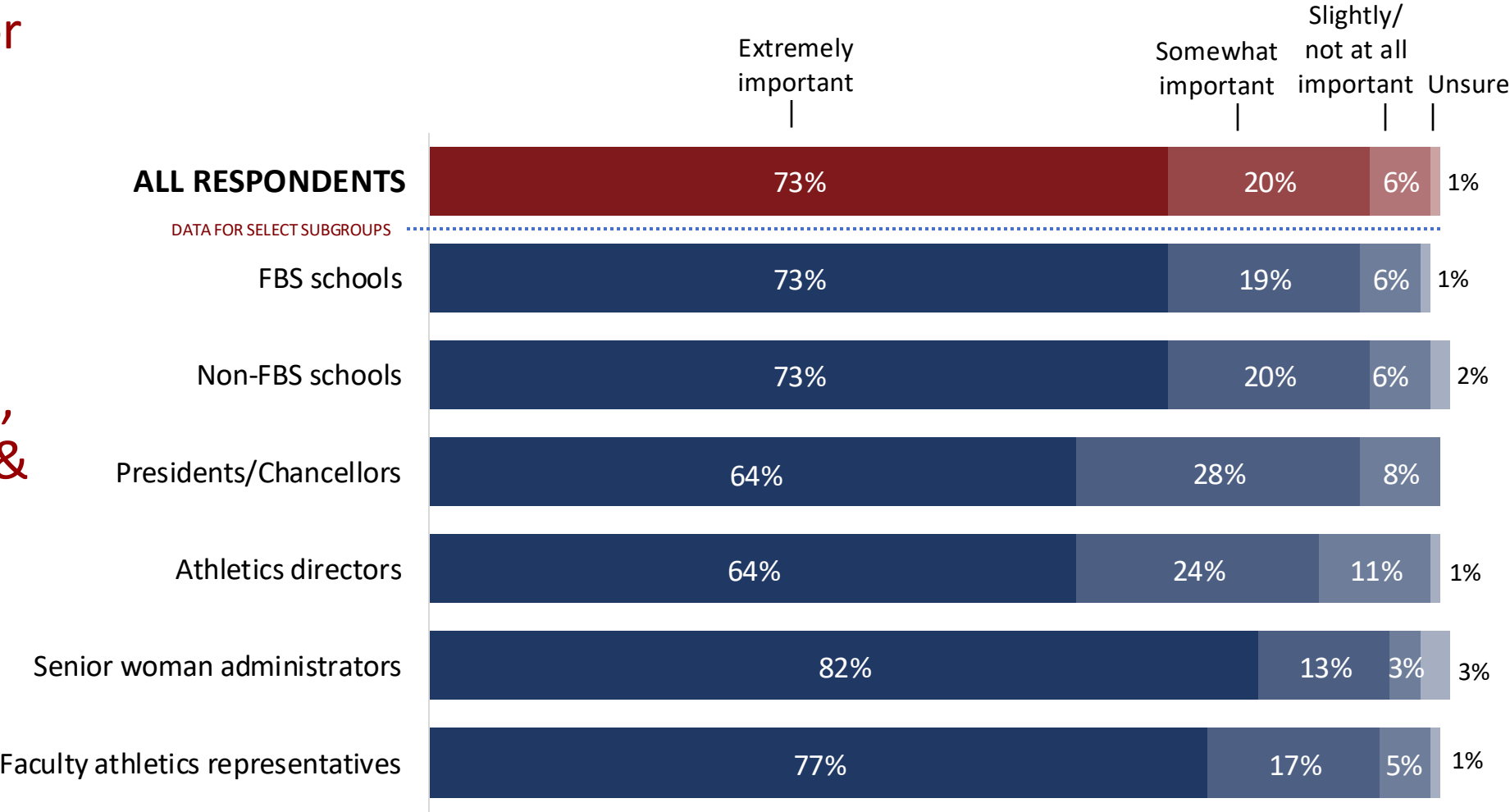
How important do you think college programs in Olympic sports like gymnastics, hockey, swimming, and track & field are to the success of the USA Olympic team in the Summer and Winter Olympic Games?



Division I leaders survey

Collegiate Olympic sports

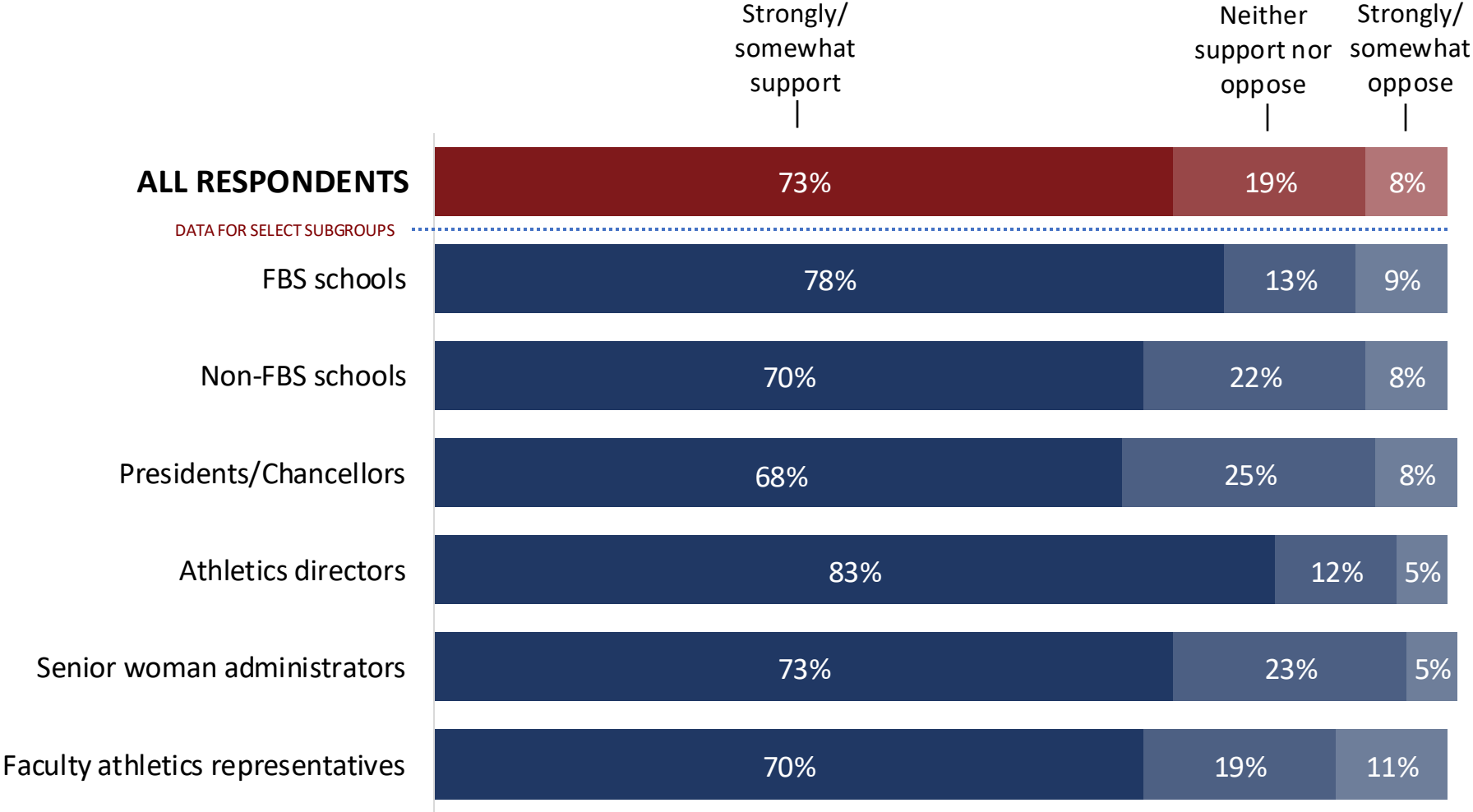
How important is it for NCAA DI universities to offer opportunities for students to participate in collegiate Olympic sports like gymnastics, swimming, and track & field (sports other than those tied to generating revenues like football and basketball)?



Division I leaders survey

Collegiate Olympic sports

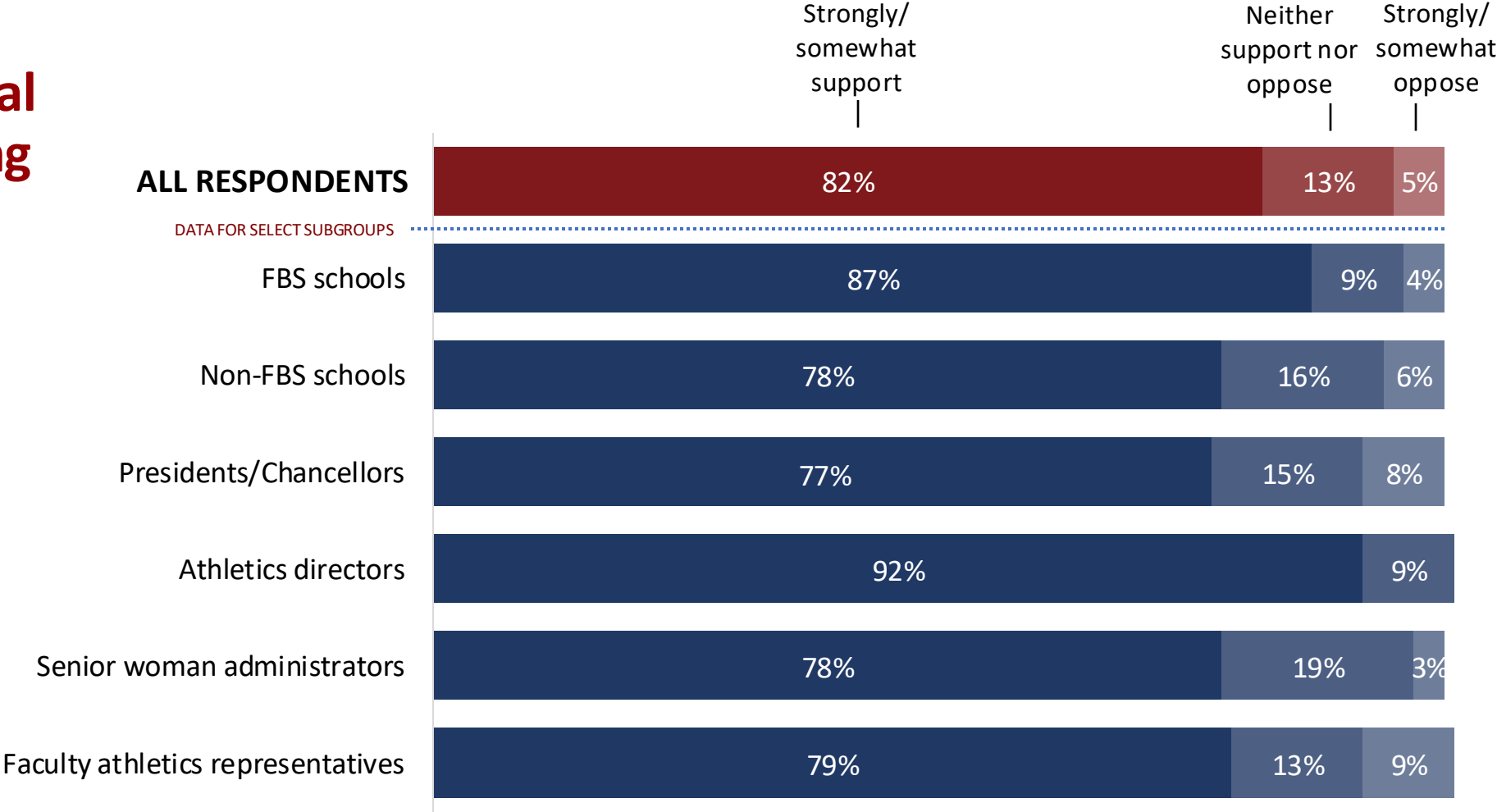
Do you support or oppose using **any federal funds** to help finance collegiate Olympic sports programs and scholarships that develop USA Olympic national team members?



Division I leaders survey

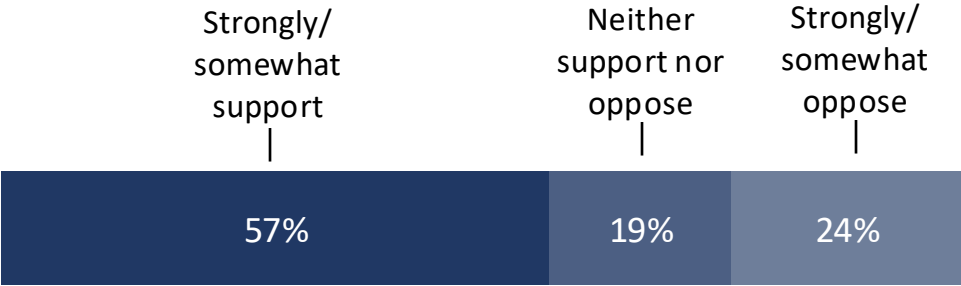
Collegiate Olympic sports

Do you support or oppose a **fee or federal tax on sports gambling operators** to create a national fund to help finance collegiate Olympic sports that develop USA Olympic national team members and provide broad-based sports opportunities?



Do you oppose or support a new fund being created through a portion of the College Football Playoff revenues to reward CFP/FBS college sports programs for developing USA Olympic national team members and offering broad-based sports opportunities?

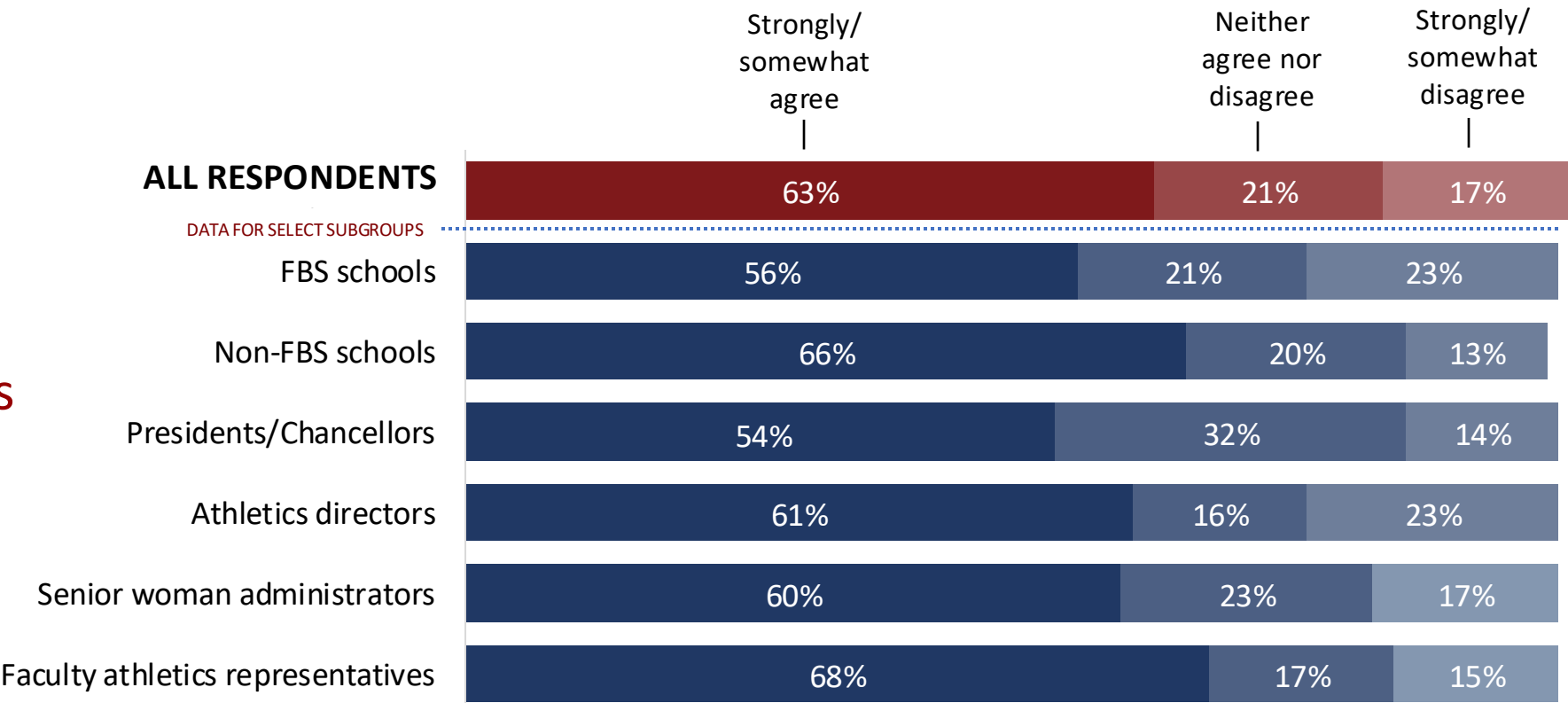
Responses from leaders at FBS schools



Division I leaders survey

Collegiate Olympic sports

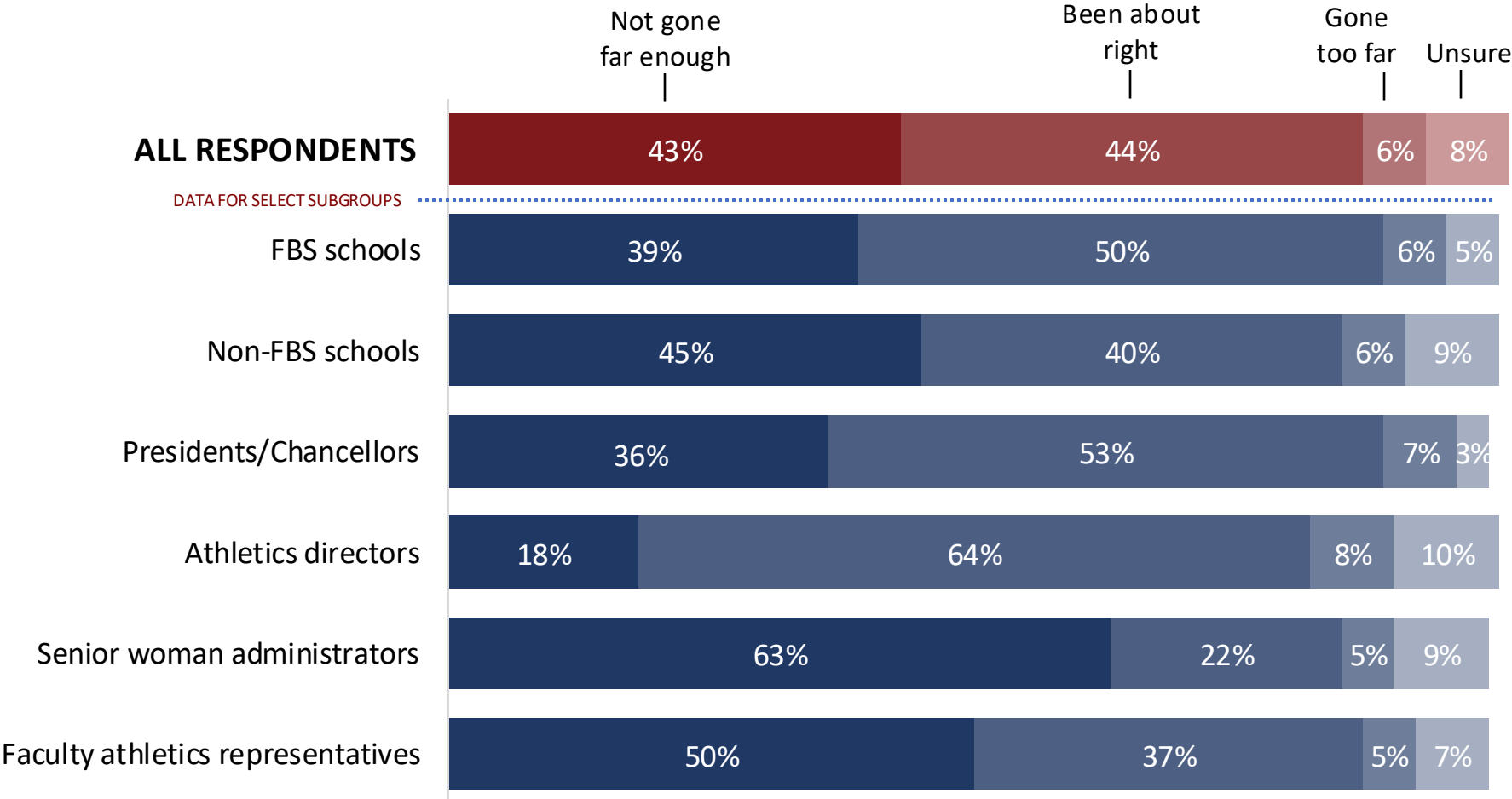
Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: “The NCAA should alter its revenue distribution formula to increase incentives to institutions for offering athletics scholarships in sports other than football and basketball and for offering more sports than the minimum required for DI.”



Division I leaders survey

Title IX and gender equity

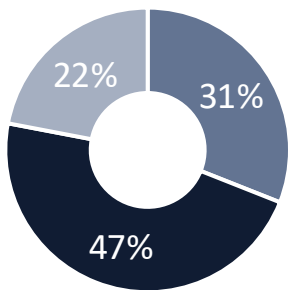
When it comes to providing female college athletes with equitable opportunities, financial assistance, and treatment compared to male college athletes, do you think colleges and universities have not gone far enough, have been about right, have gone too far or are you unsure?



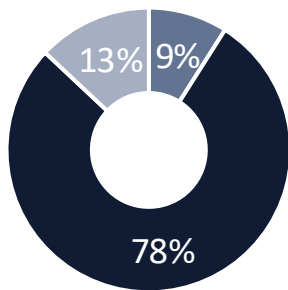
Division I leaders survey

Title IX and gender equity

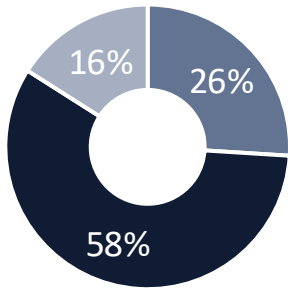
Considering Title IX, which of the options below better captures your opinion about how Division I institutions should allocate new types of payments to athletes—like name, image, and likeness (NIL) compensation and new “revenue-share” payments?



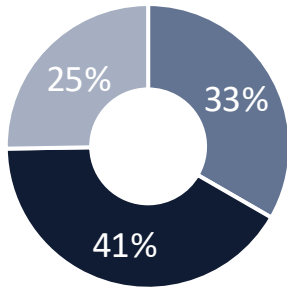
All respondents



Athletics directors



Leaders at FBS schools



Leaders at Non-FBS schools



New athlete NIL and “revenue share” payments should be considered separately from other institutional financial assistance and **distributed based on how much money an athlete’s sport generates or an athlete’s marketability**



New athlete NIL and “revenue share” payments should be included in the total amount of all institutional financial assistance (e.g., athletics scholarships) and **distributed equitably to female and male athletes**

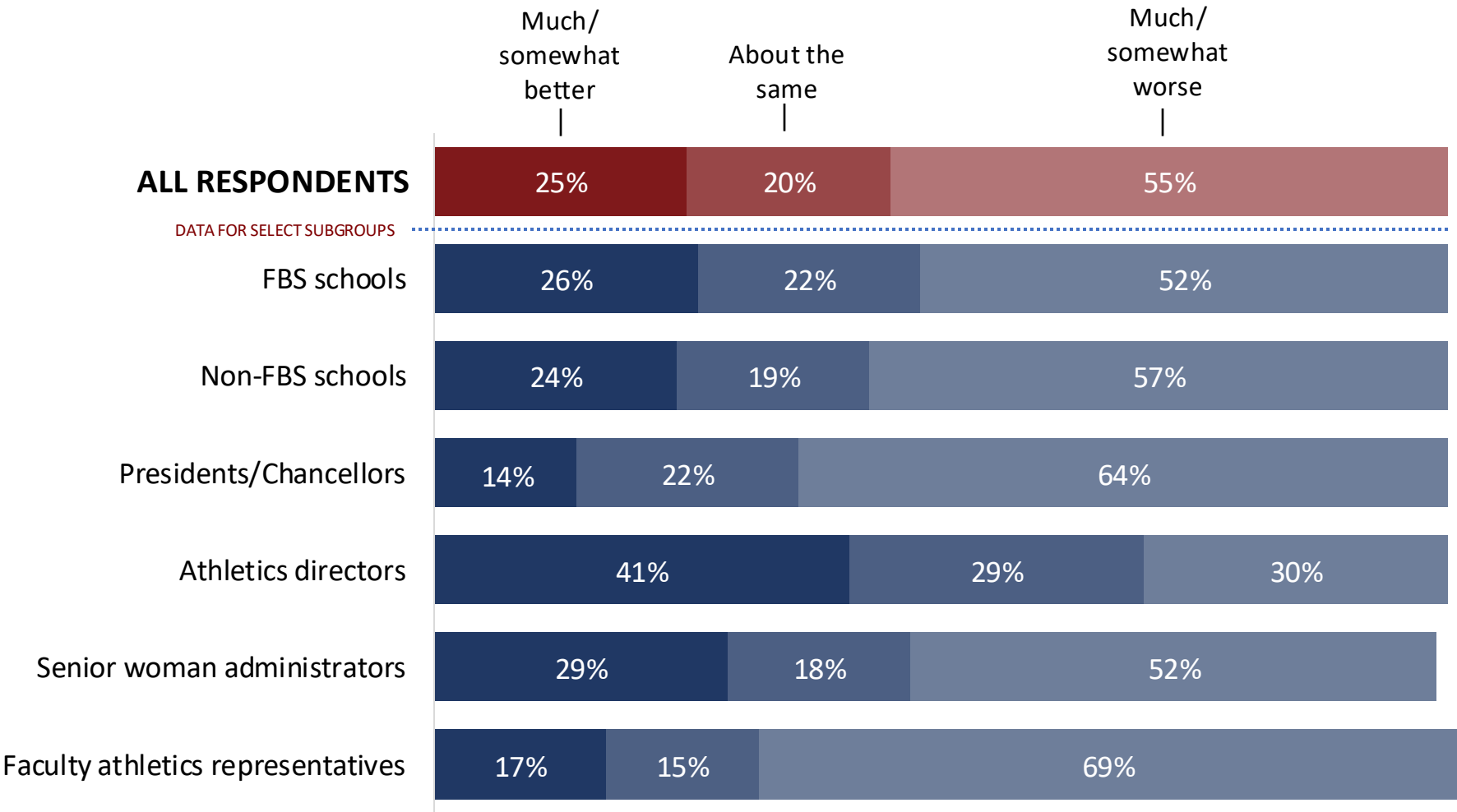


Unsure

Division I leaders survey

Title IX and gender equity

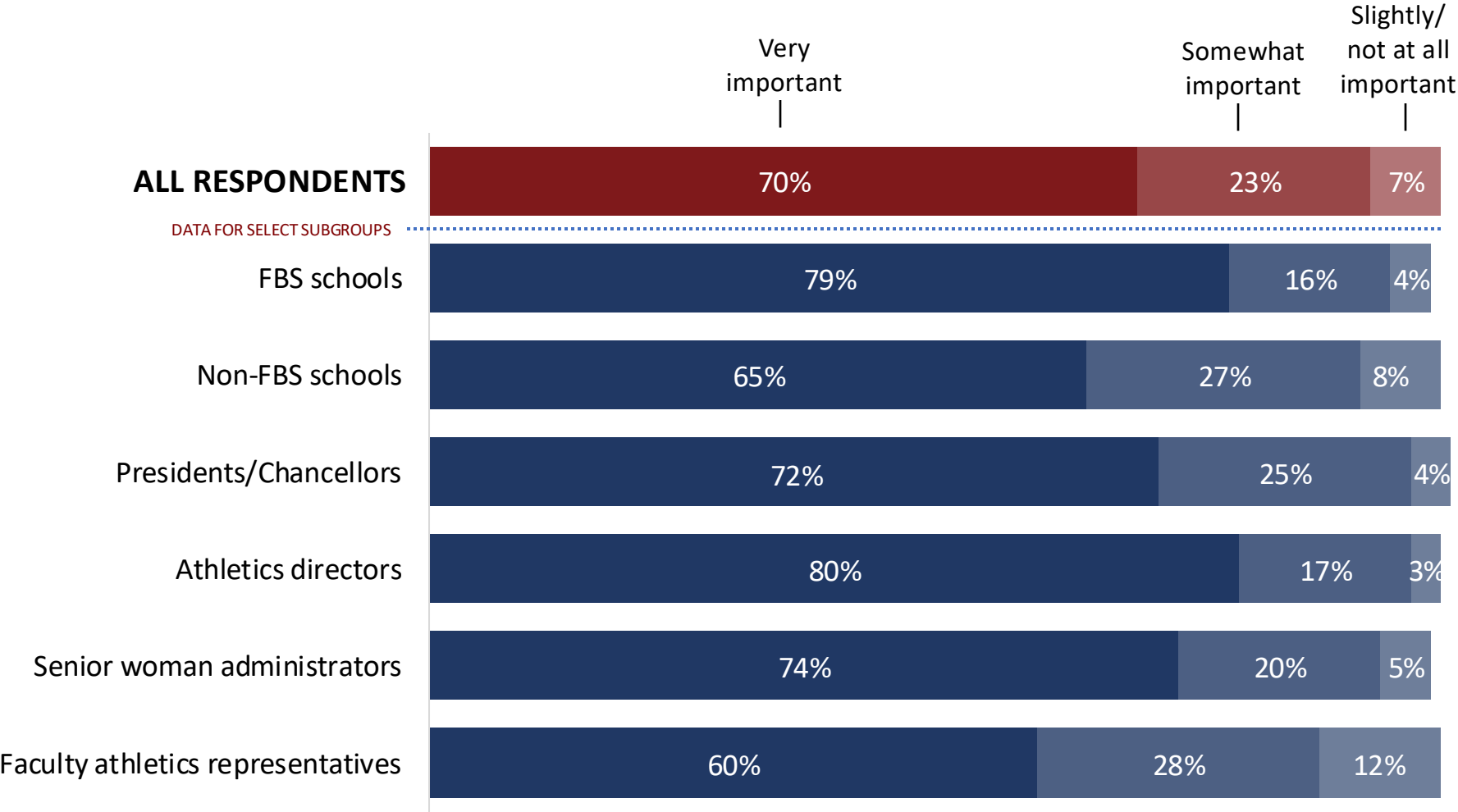
Will female college athletes overall be in a worse or better situation from new rules that allow institutions to pay athletes through NIL and revenue-sharing, and increased athletics scholarships?



Division I leaders survey

Importance of college sports

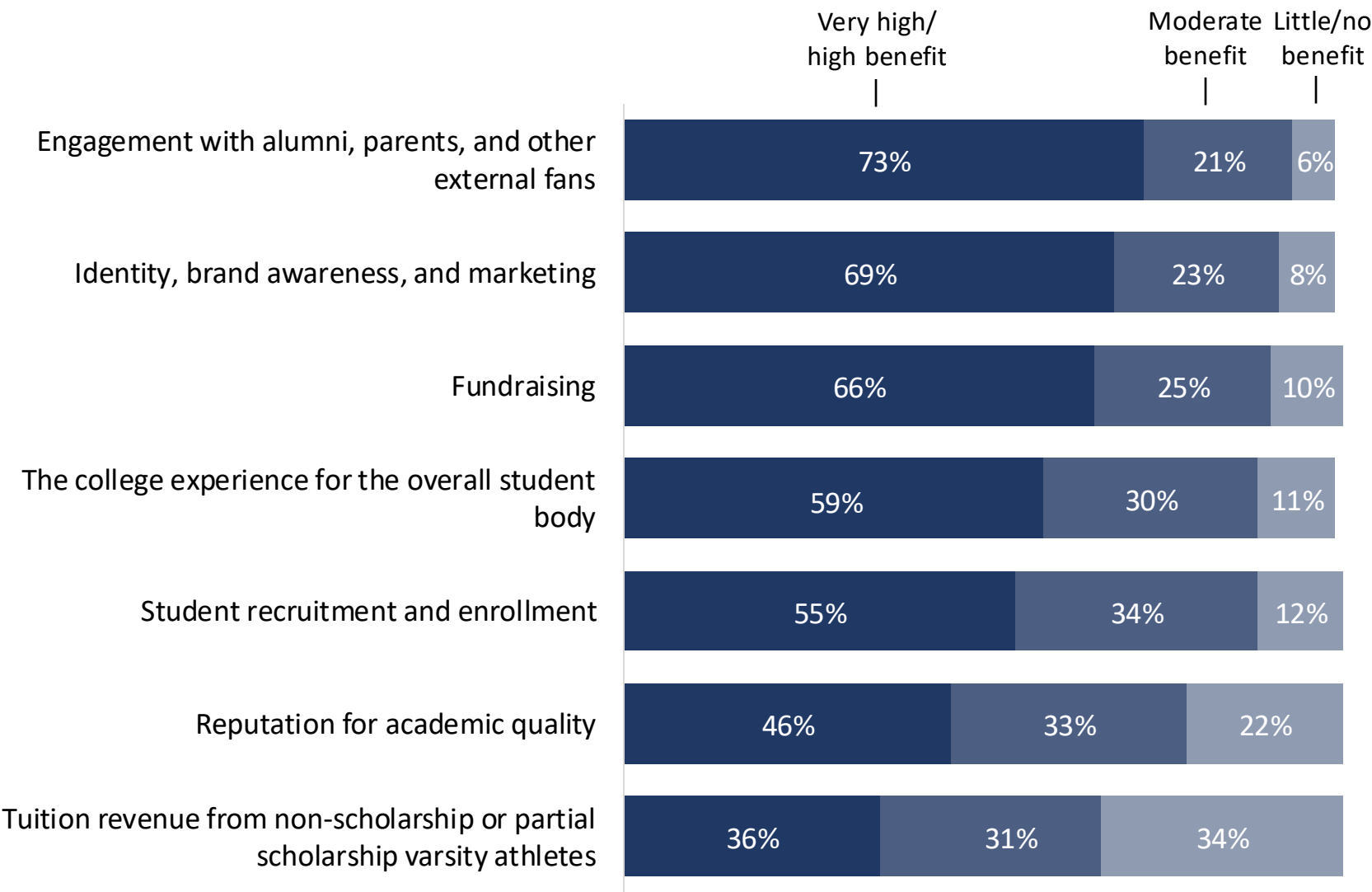
How important is the presence of Division I sports to your institution?



Division I leaders survey

Importance of college sports

How much benefit does Division I college sports contribute to your campus in each of the following areas?



Division I leaders survey

Select responses

Nearly 300 survey respondents added comments on this question:
“What is the single most significant issue to address in college sports?”

“The fully open nature of the portal is creating a challenging marketplace for college athletics, where many athletes in the revenue sports can make more than they would in professional athletics. It also discourages (and might punish) a focus on athlete development.”
– President/Chancellor

“The NIL and Transfer Portal are jokes and are destroying college athletics. The most important issue is that the NCAA is ineffective, out of touch and only listens to the Power 4/5.”
– President/Chancellor

“The combination of the transfer portal/NIL Revenue Sharing is a deadly combination for mid-majors and is going to threaten a lot of mid-majors ability to stay Division I. We have all become a farm system for the next highest level to recruit right off of each other’s rosters.”
– Director of Athletics

“College Athletics needs real leaders. Campus presidents and ADs turn over too fast and have too much self-interest to preserve the best interest of college sports at large. We need leaders who will look out for the greater good of college sports.”
– Director of Athletics

“Let the P4 make their own league and let the rest of us go on our own with STUDENT-athletes. Let them be the minor league programs and let us get back to having college athletics be what it should be.”
– Senior Woman Administrator

“NIL and the transfer portal have sorely corrupted the very idea of college athletics....paying student athletes is fine, but the disparity created by the market value of players has ruined the concept of team.”
– Senior Woman Administrator

“The thousands of student-athletes, primarily women and those competing in non-revenue sports, who will be ‘left behind’ in this new world. The mid-majors can’t compete in this new world. It’s all about money and it’s sad.”
– Faculty Athletics Representative

“Olympic sports are being (or will be) decimated by the demand for funds to support the revenue sports, at the expense of women and those men in non-revenue sports.”
– Faculty Athletics Representative

[Full verbatim responses at:
bit.ly/D1leaderspoll](https://bit.ly/D1leaderspoll)

Division I leaders survey

Methodology

Sponsoring organizations and questionnaire design: Elon University Poll and the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics

Interview dates: July 29 – August 22, 2025; **Release date:** October 9, 2025

Survey mode: Online Qualtrics survey

Target population: NCAA Division I presidents and chancellors, athletics directors, senior woman administrators, faculty athletics representatives

Number of respondents: 376 (26% response rate)

Overall margin of error: +/- 4.4%; larger margins of error for subgroups

Crosstab groups as percentage of total respondents: presidents/chancellors – 16%, athletics directors – 25%, senior woman administrators – 21%, faculty athletics representatives – 38%

This survey was developed by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and the Elon University Poll. It was fielded by the Elon University Poll as a Qualtrics, web-based, self-administered survey between July 29 and August 22, 2025. The total number of respondents was 376 (26% response rate), including 61 presidents and chancellors, 94 athletics directors, 79 senior woman administrators and 142 faculty athletics representatives. The respondents included 51 individuals from Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Power 4/autonomy conferences, 83 from the FBS Group of Six conferences and FBS Independents, 128 from the Football Championship Subdivision and 114 from Division I basketball centric (no football) schools. The overall margin of error for this poll is +/-4.4%, with larger margins of error for subgroups.

The population of interest consisted of all NCAA Division 1 university leaders in the following roles: (1) President, Chancellor or other head of institution title, (2) Director of

Athletics or other equivalent title, (3) Senior Woman Administrator, and (4) NCAA recognized Faculty Athletics Representatives. Names and contact information for each member of the population were obtained from both public and non-public sources (approximately 365 contacts for each of the four roles). In cases in which a role was vacant at an institution, the survey was sent to the interim leader in that role.

Between July 29 and August 18, 2025, each contact address received up to three email invitations to complete the survey- up to two using unique links for each invitee and up to one final email with a non-unique link sent by well-known individuals within the D1 sports community. Each response was inspected by the survey director for validity (e.g. non-sensical open-ended responses or “straightlining”). No responses were removed from analysis following that inspection. Respondents did not receive any financial compensation for their voluntary participation. Data were collected so that respondent-identifying information were not fields within the response dataset.

To increase response rates, the survey was announced in multiple communications from the Knight Commission. Additionally, a physical letter was mailed to institution presidents encouraging them to respond to the email invitations. The email survey was conducted using Qualtrics. Data were analyzed using Stata and SPSS. Cross-tabulations are not reported beyond one level (e.g. institution type or role only) to protect privacy of respondents and to avoid over-interpretation of small samples.

Results published here are unweighted. However, results were analyzed using raking weights calculated based on known population parameters for institution type (FBS Power 4, FBS Group of 6, FCS, Basketball-Centric) and the four respondent roles above. Weighted and unweighted results differed on average of 1% within each topline cell.

Access the full report, charts, survey topline and methodology at: bit.ly/D1leaderspoll.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional methodology and poll topline information is available at: bit.ly/D1leaderspoll

LICENSING

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ABOUT

The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics is an independent group with a legacy of leading reforms that strengthen the educational mission of college sports. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation formed the Commission in October 1989 to recommend a reform agenda in response to highly visible athletics scandals and low graduation rates for college football and men's basketball players that threatened the integrity of higher education. The Commission is composed of current and former university presidents and chancellors, university trustees and former college athletes, as well as nationally-regarded thought leaders from organizations with ties to or involvement in higher education or college sports.

knightcommission.org

The Elon University Poll was established in 2000 as a public policy research initiative. The Elon University Poll conducts North Carolina and national surveys on important issues, sharing the results with media, citizens and public officials to facilitate informed public policy making through the better understanding of citizens' opinions and attitudes. The poll is fully funded by Elon University and is a charter member of the Transparency Initiative, a program created by the [American Association for Public Opinion Research](https://www.aapor.org/). www.elon.edu/elonpoll

Division I leaders survey

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Knight Commission On Intercollegiate Athletics

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