

Social variables as determinants of perception about sustainability and the Environment



Maureen Botoman

Barbara Whitten

Colorado College Environmental Science
Program

Why is the study of gender and the environment important?

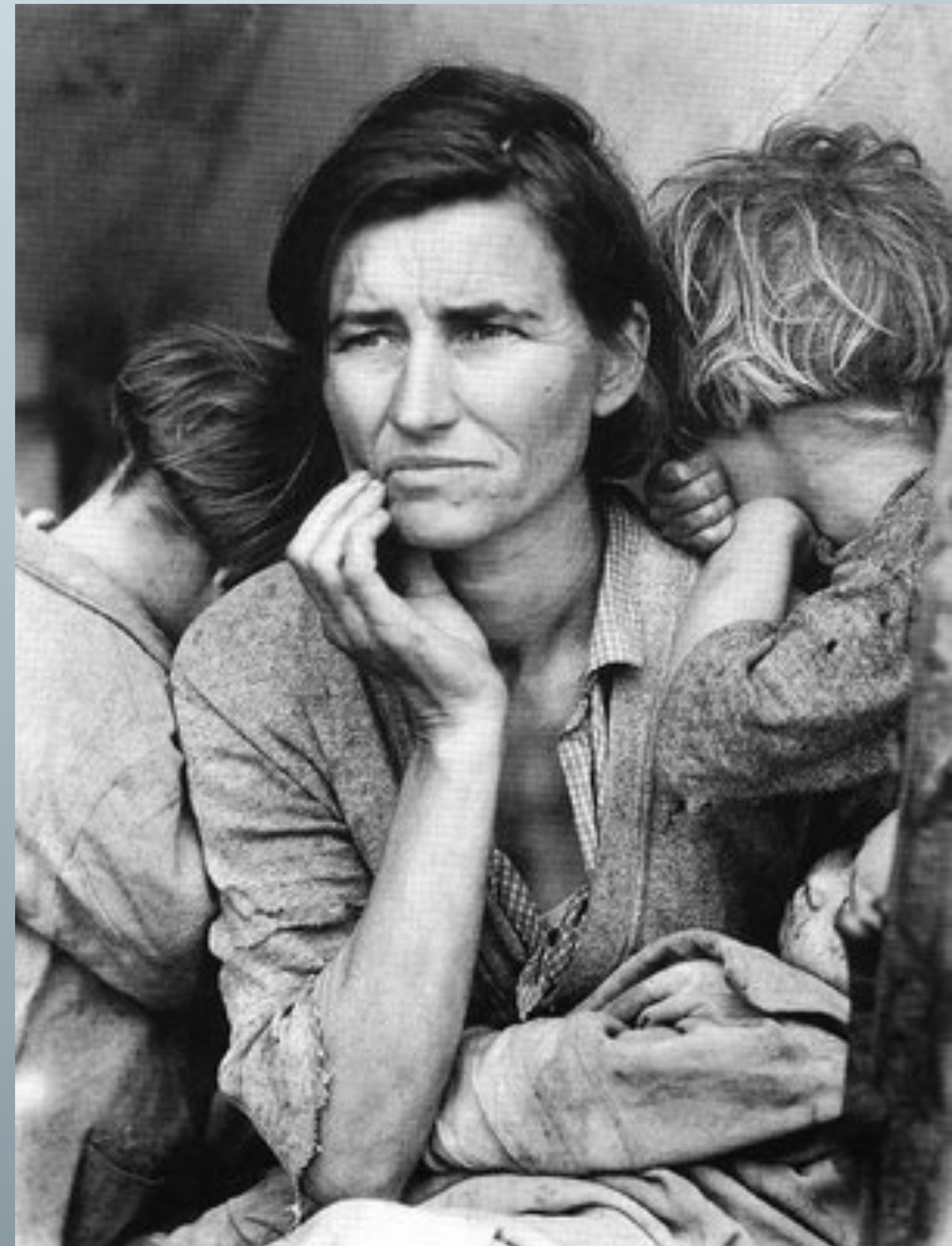
- Climate science is a field that is dominated by white men from the Global North. According to the NSF, only 18.2% of employed PhD level earth scientists are women and 88.8% are white.
 - Of 2007 doctoral recipients in the field 42.6% were women and 83.2% were white.¹
- Women are also heavily under-represented at political negotiations regarding climate change.
 - At the Kyoto protocol negotiations, “women clearly were, and still are, under-represented as formal delegation heads.”²



- “Women’s networking strength needs to be harnessed even more strongly...with the aim of preventing climate change as far as possible, and adapting to it where necessary.”²

Social variables do matter

- Public perceptions regarding climate change are rarely broken down by gender or other social variables.
 - Different social roles lead to different perceptions as well as different vulnerabilities.
- Attention to discrepancies between social groups will create more equitable and effective policies.
- “One billion of the earth’s 6 billion inhabitants use 75 per cent of all energy.”³
- A study was recently conducted in the US to assess public perceptions regarding climate change and sustainability efforts. The study, which is commonly called ‘Six Americans’ examined the factors that guide public perception, ranging from media exposure to social affiliations. ⁵



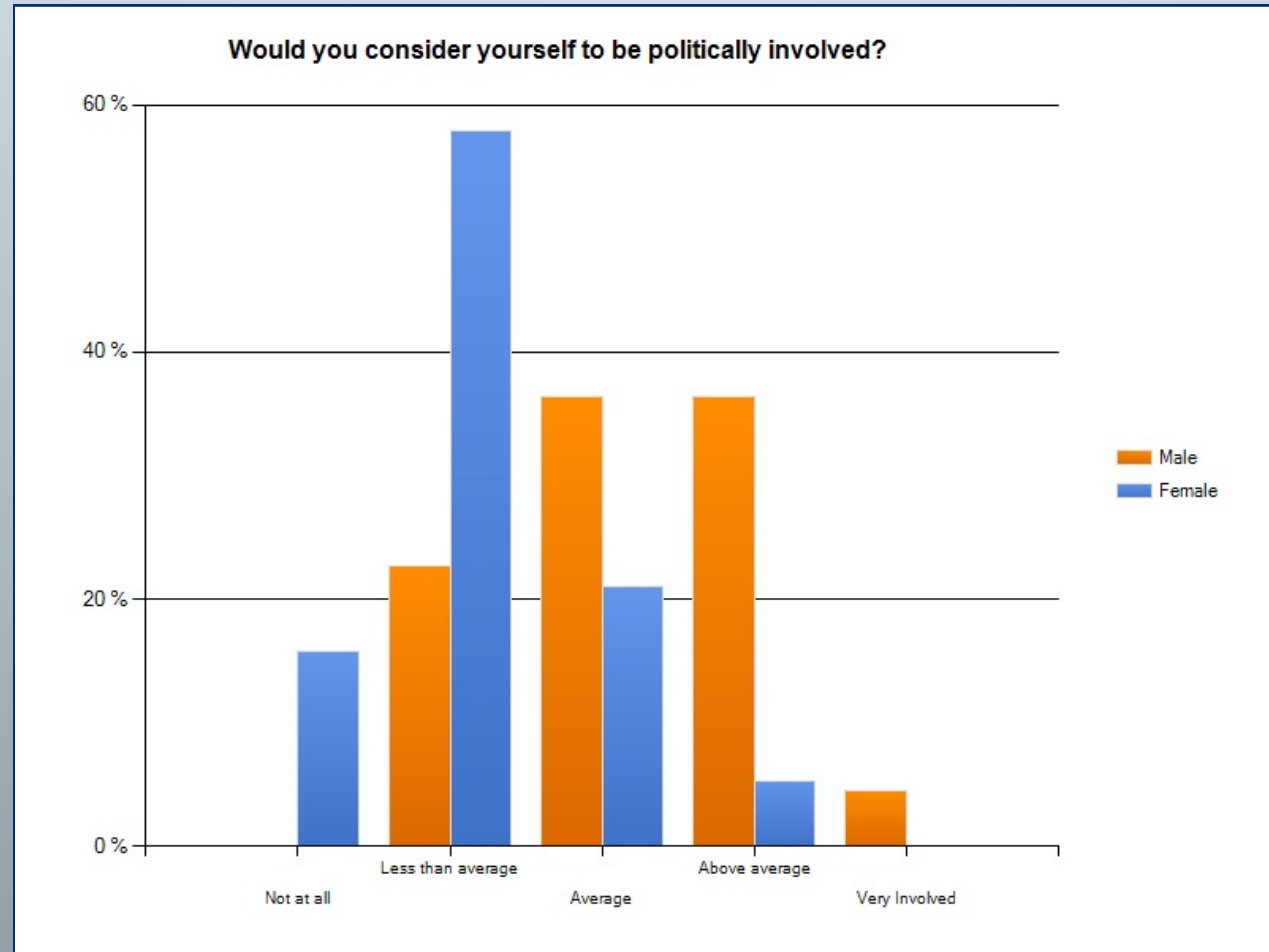
Methods

- The survey was distributed confidentially by email using Survey Monkey to the graduate students in atmospheric science at CSU and to the SOARS program students through UCAR. IRB approval was obtained through Colorado College and through CSU.
- The survey consisted of 25 questions: 22 multiple choice and 3 short answer.



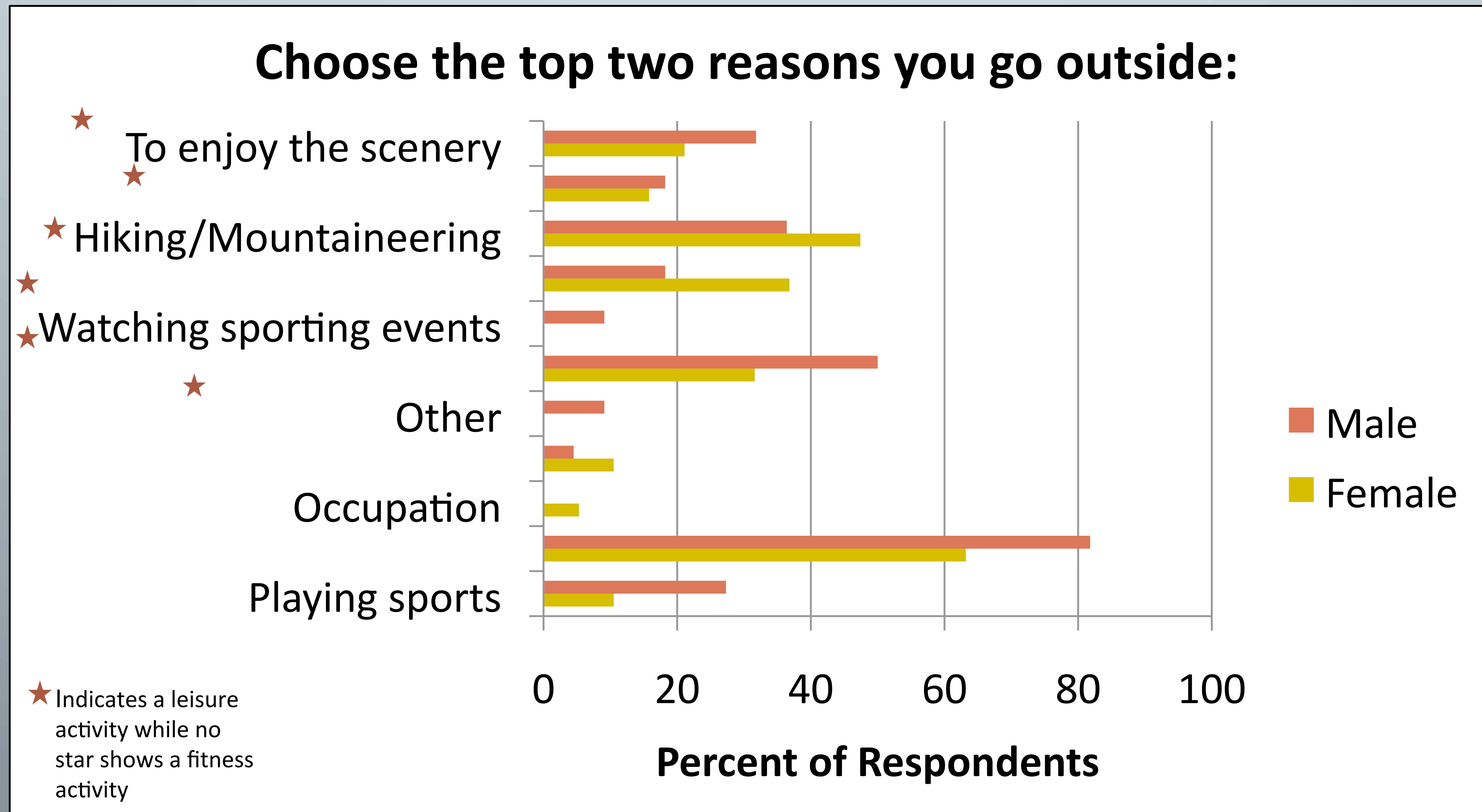
- The survey questions were grouped in to the following categories:
 - Personal and perceived relationships with the environment
 - Housing
 - Transportation
 - Sustainability efforts
 - Outdoor experiences
 - Political preferences
 - Opinions about climate change
 - Demographic information

Gender and Political Involvement



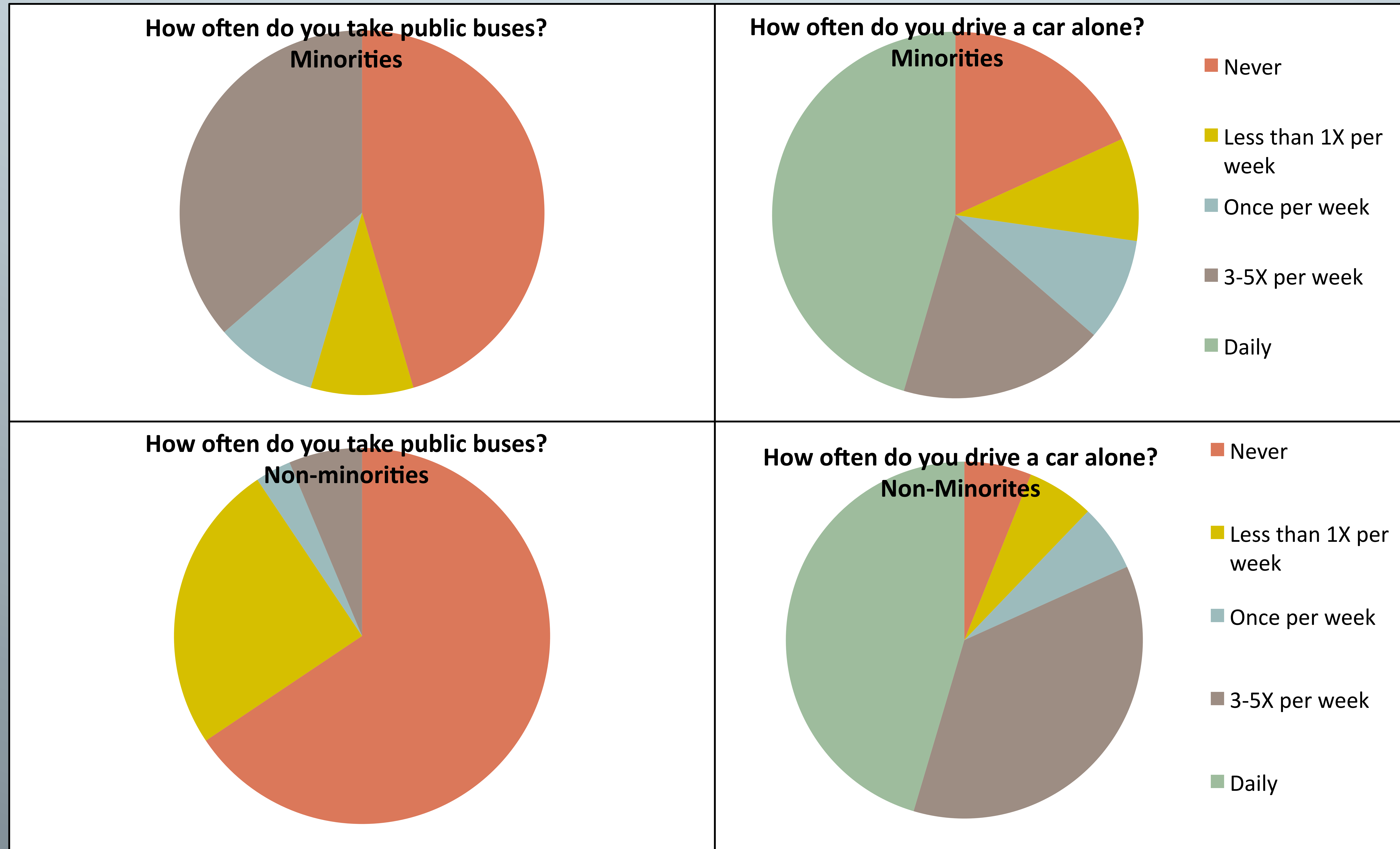
People in the US shy from political involvement and activism overall. The ‘Six Americans’ study found only “16% of Americans say they pay “ a lot” of attention to information about global warming.”⁵ Our study found that women consider themselves to be significantly less politically involved than their male peers.

Gender and Recreation



Men were more likely to go outside for fitness related activities while women would go outside for social and leisure activities. Minu Hemmati posits that women may have a lower carbon footprint than men because “women spend their leisure time in the neighborhood, while men may travel to sports arenas at some distance from their homes.”³

Ethnicity and Transportation



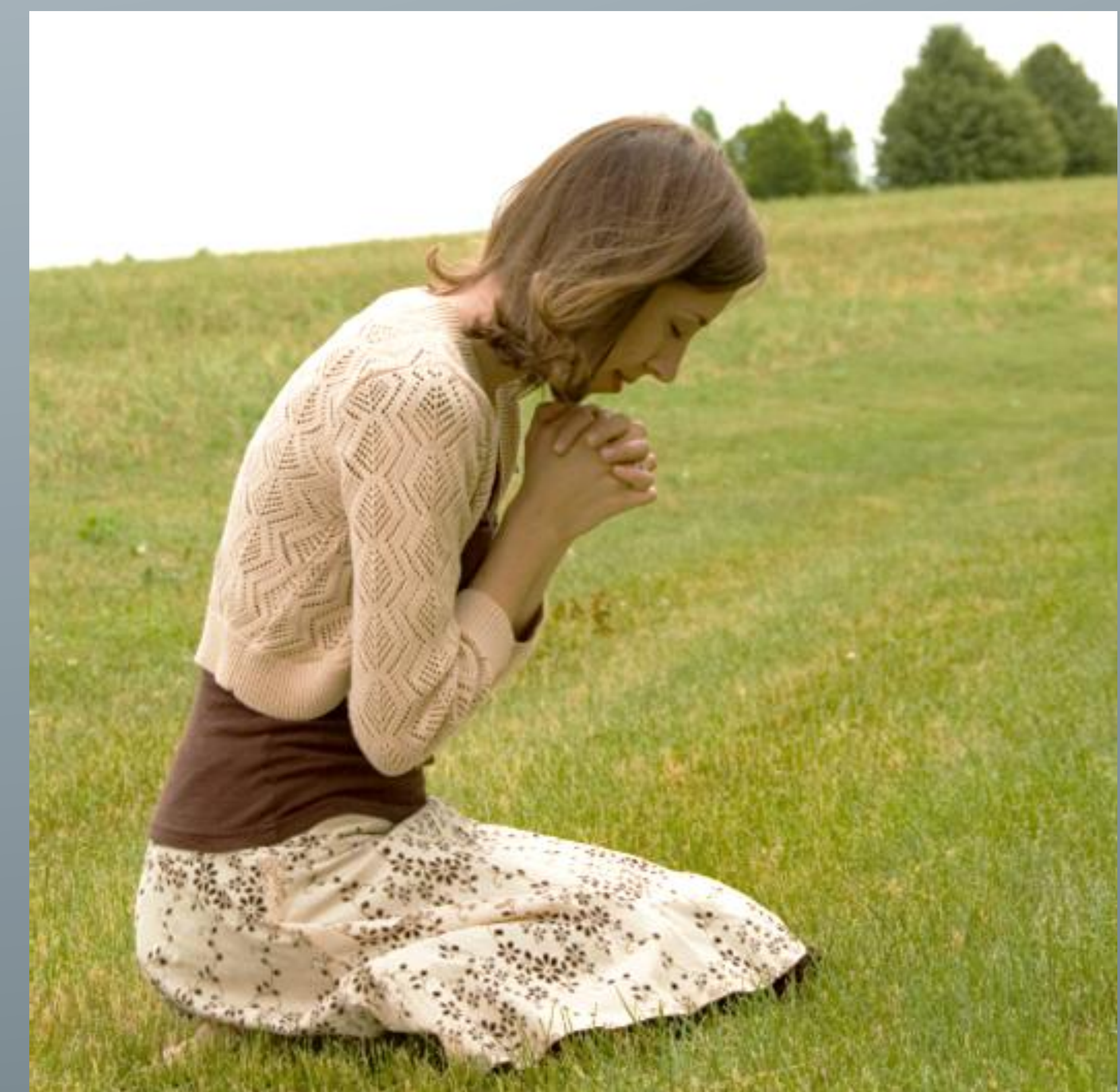
Minorities overall were more reliant on public transportation, and though the same percentage of minorities as non-minorities drove a car alone daily, a much greater percent of minorities drove alone either never or less than once per week. Public transportation is under-utilized in the US. According to the ‘Six Americans’ study, 40% of Americans never “take public transportation or carpool.”⁵

Ethnicity, Religion and Personal Relationships with the Environment

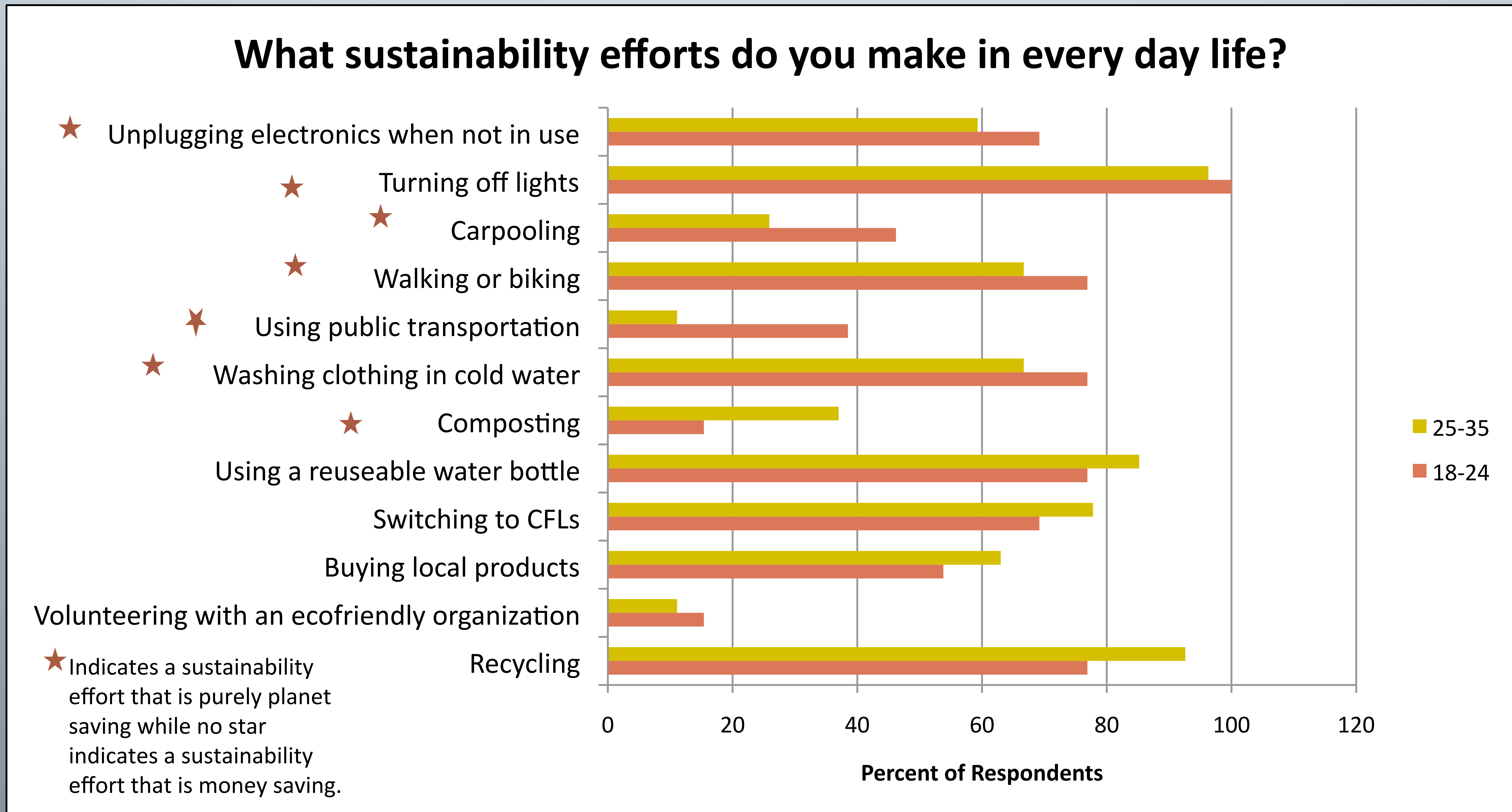


- In addressing the question, “How might aspects of your identity affect your relationship with the environment?”, the Hispanic respondents frequently addressed a need to prove themselves and a connection or responsibility to family.
 - One respondent says the discrimination she faces as a Hispanic in the sciences, “motivates [her] even more to step up [her] game... and hopefully make some positive contribution to the environment.”

- Though the study did not ask about religion explicitly, two respondents described themselves as people of faith in the short answer questions. Both of these respondents stated their role as a “steward of the Earth.”
 - One respondent said she believes, “that God put man as caretaker [to the Earth] so that while we are to enjoy His Creation, we are also responsible for the way we use it.”

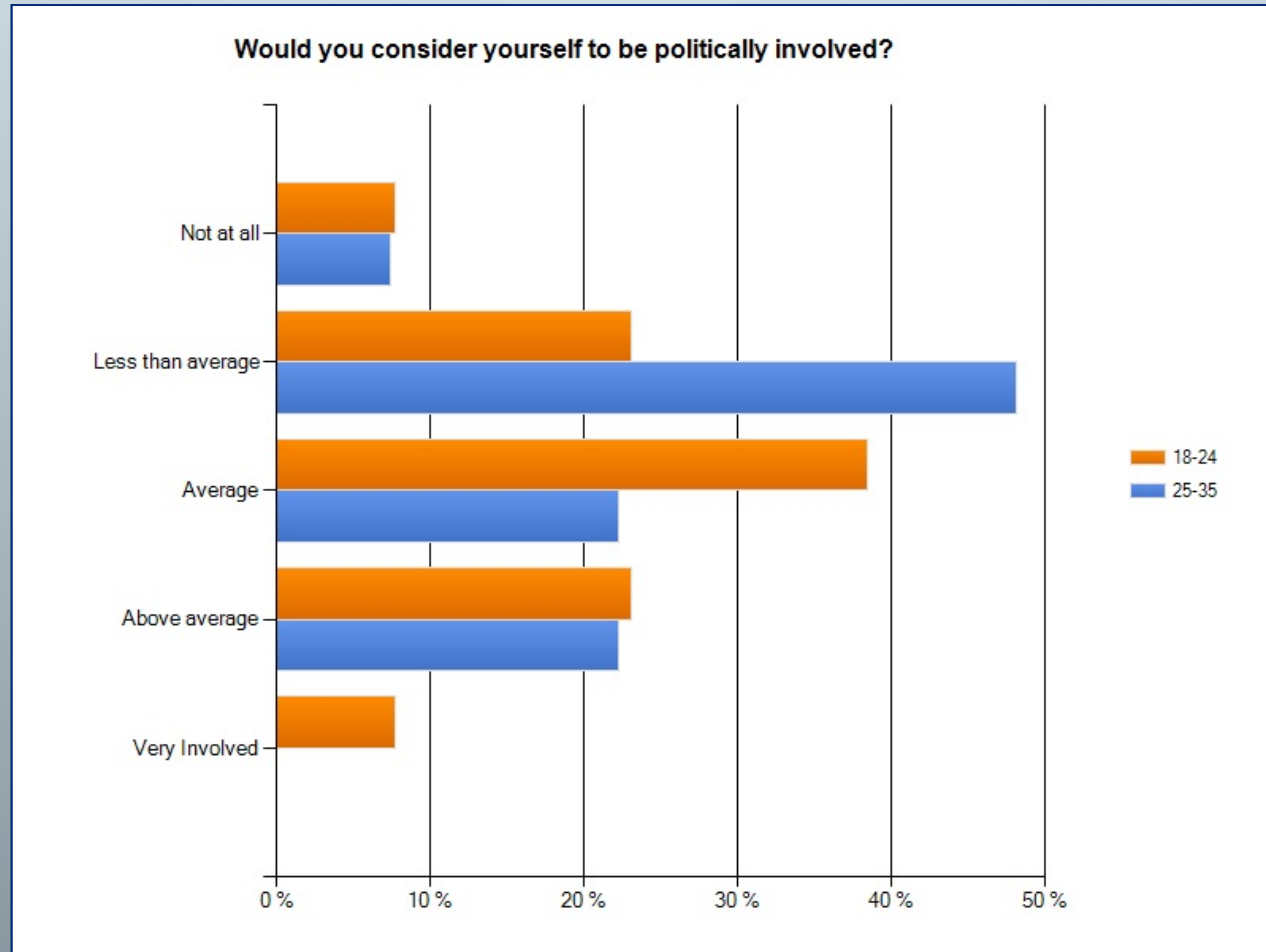


Age and Sustainability



The younger population (predominately undergraduates) in the study were more likely to participate that saved money while the older population participated in more purely planet saving efforts. According to the 'Six Americans' study, only 57% of Americans always "turn off lights when they are not needed," 20% of Americans always "carry [their] own re-usable beverage container" and 7% of Americans always "walk or bike, instead of driving."⁵

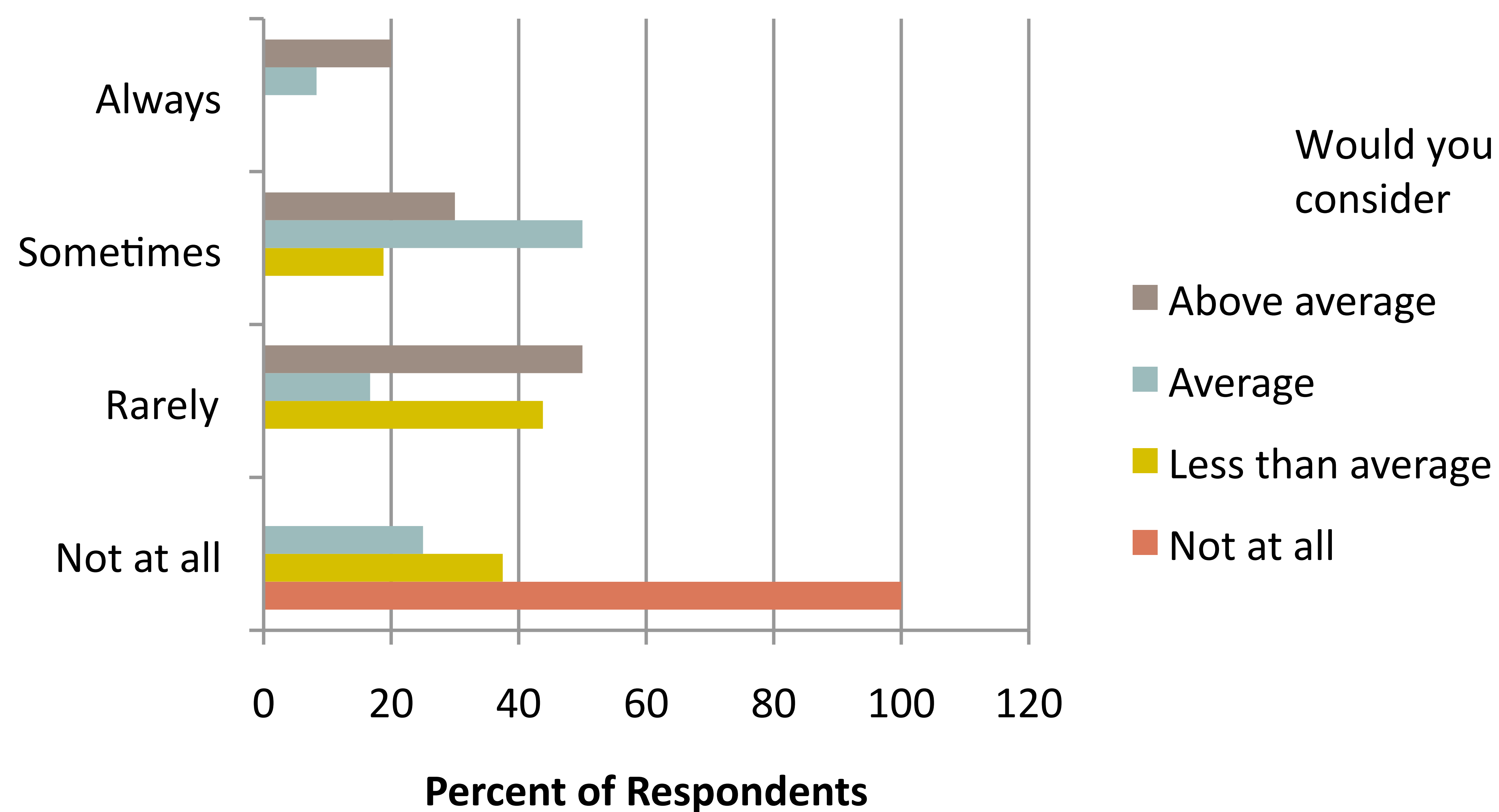
Age and Political Involvement



In our survey, the younger group (18-24) perceived themselves to be far more politically involved than the older demographic. According to 'Six Americans' in the US only 83% are registered to vote, and only 5% of Americans often "discuss global warming with [their] friends and family" 30% occasionally do.⁵

Political Involvement, Actions and Activism

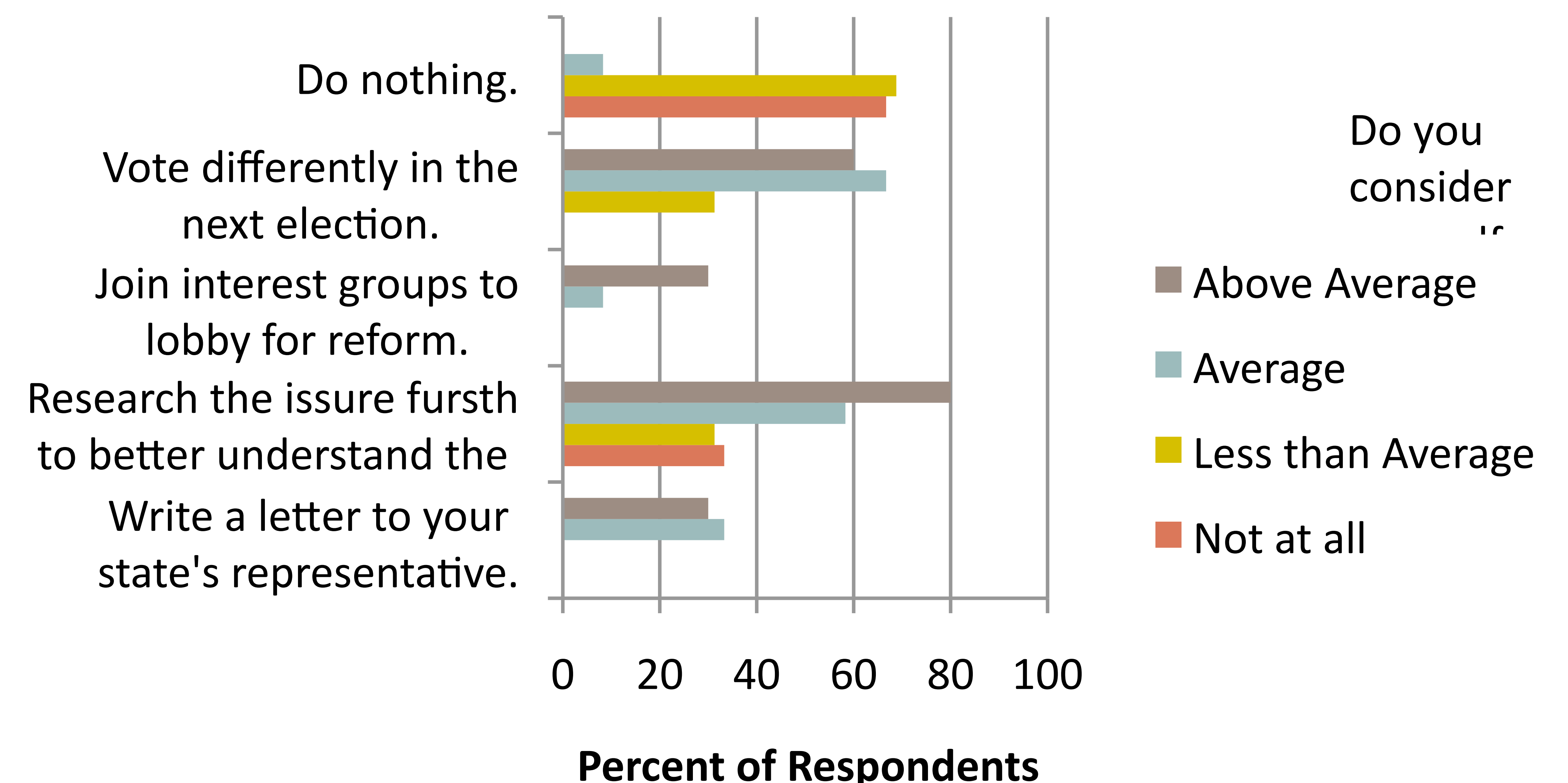
Do you consider yourself to be an activist?



Not surprisingly, the more politically involved a person perceives themselves as, the more they see themselves as activists. People were more likely to label themselves as politically involved than they were to call themselves activists. According to 'Six Americans' 16% of Americans have volunteered with an eco-friendly organization at least once in the past year.⁵

People who consider themselves to be more politically involved are also more likely to actively oppose a government decision that they disagree with. 10% of Americans have written to government officials at least once in the past year about global warming and 72% of those people urged, "then to take action to reduce global warming." 45% of Americans think "humans could reduce global warming, but it's unclear at this point whether we will do what's needed."⁵

When the government makes a decision you disagree with, you:



Bibliography

- 1: Women, minorities and persons with disabilities in Science and Engineering. NSF report 09-305CEF, nsf.gov/statistics/wmpd
- 2: Villagrasa, Delia (2002) 'Kyoto Protocol negotiations: reflections on the role of women', *Gender & Development*, 10:2, 43.
- 3: Hemmati, Minu (2003) 'Gender-Specific Patterns of Poverty and (Over-) Consumption in Developing and Developed Countries', *Society, Behaviour, and Climate Change Mitigation*, 8, 174.
- 4: de Mello e Souza, Cecilia (2008) 'Grassroots leadership in the network of healthy Communities in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: a gender perspective', *Gender & Development*, 16:3, 482.
- 5: Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., & Roser-Renouf, C. & Smith, N. (2010) "Global Warming's Six Americas", June 2010. Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change.