

Overview of Civic Engagement at Rutgers University – New Brunswick

Introduction

Universities have historically been centers of civic engagement and political activity, as they have connected young adults with their communities and the larger issues facing the United States by instilling a sense of consciousness in students. Recently, attention has been paid to the extent of which universities encourage students to engage in real-world issues, at both the local and national level. Additionally, the importance of young voter turnout and voting habits in determining the outcomes of recent elections has put more emphasis on trends in students' civic engagement (Galston and Hendrickson, 2016).

Community service, in particular is an important aspect of civic life. Community service often encourages students' sense of moral responsibility and social concern (Soria, Nobbe and Fink, 2013). Research universities have a particular history of and opportunity to boost student participation in community service and other activities that encourage engagement in social issues (Lewis, 2014). Some scholars and higher education professionals would argue that universities have a responsibility to renew their civic mission (Boyte and Hollander, 1999) and foster an engagement culture (Lewis, 2014). As such, it is important that university administrators have a better understanding of the nature and reason for students' involvement in community service.

When coupled with research regarding civic engagement, data on community-based engagement becomes more impactful. Research has demonstrated that community service opportunities can have a positive impact on students' level of engagement in political issues, particularly by increasing their moral-political awareness (Yates and Youniss, 1996). Young adult participation in the American democratic system, through voting, has been in the spotlight following recent elections. Civic engagement data provides university leaders with a better understanding of the ways in which the university can foster the development of social and civic responsibility among students, and ultimately renew young adults' commitment to a participative, democratic society.

Dan Lewis noted that, "university administrators and faculty understand that the American democracy depends on them for leaders. Academic leaders recognize the responsibility to prepare their students to be informed and active citizens. Indeed, it is not controversial to suggest that our democracy needs its very brightest citizens to be involved in the democratic process" (Lewis, 2014, p. 58). With this in mind, it is important for university leaders to remain

informed about the community service and civic engagement trends among the student body so that they can consider the university's role in developing engaged citizens.

Analysis

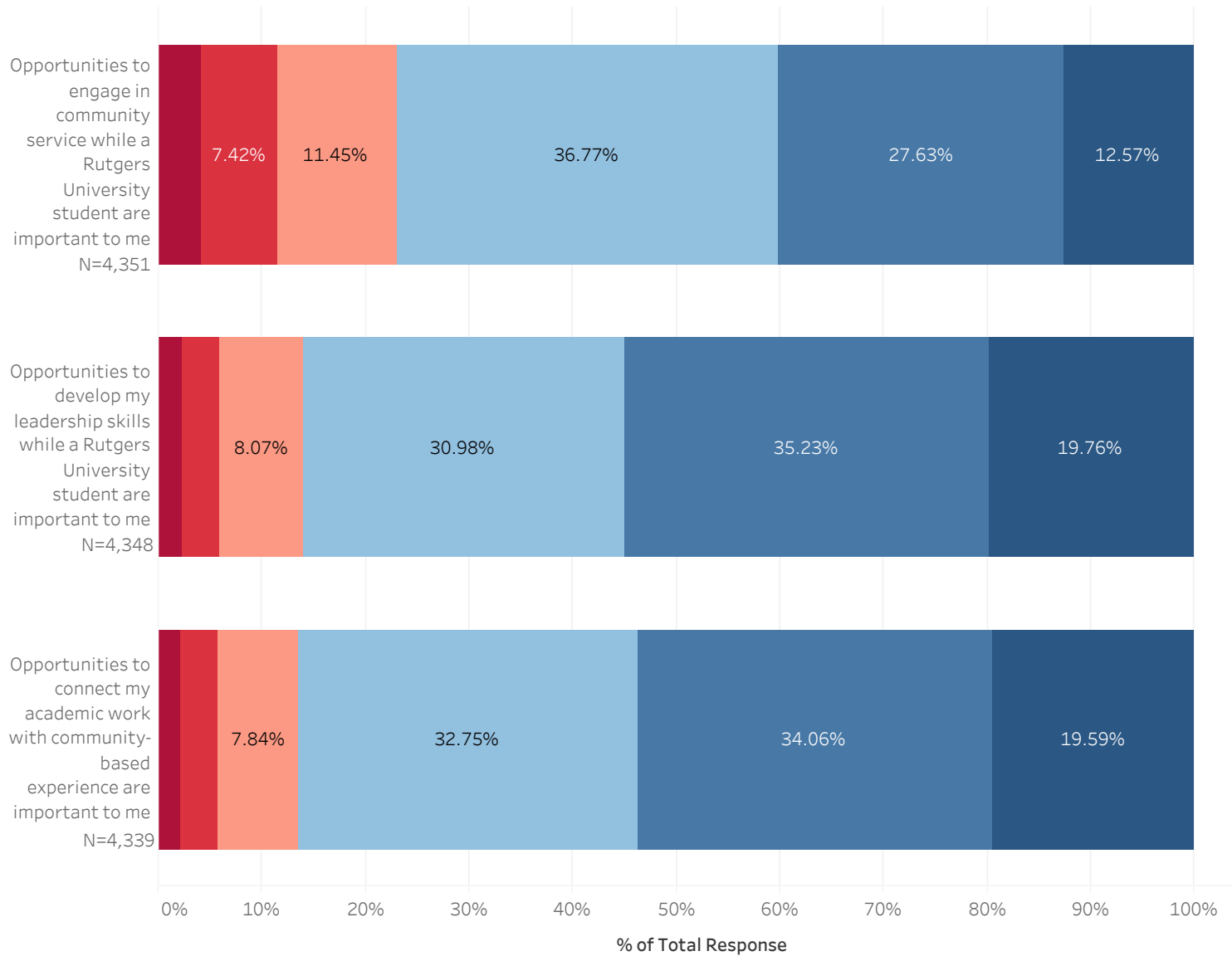
In the 2017 administration of the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey, data was collected that relates to the civic and political engagement of undergraduate students at Rutgers University. While the survey was administered to all undergraduate students, including those at Rutgers- New Brunswick, Rutgers-Newark, Rutgers-Camden, and Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences, this analysis focuses on the responses of Rutgers- New Brunswick students.

Analyses of students' civic and political engagement were based on responses to two sets of questions.

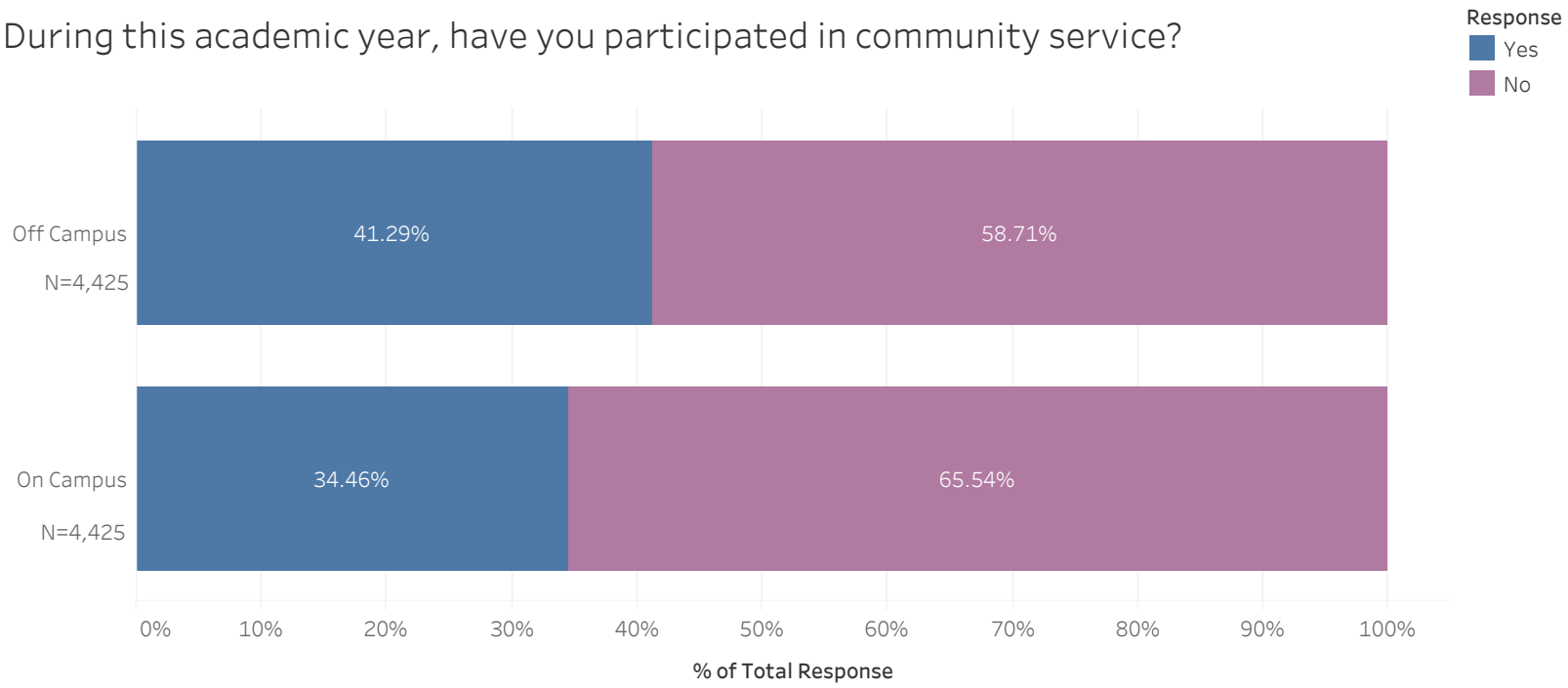
The first module focused on student experiences with civic engagement, particularly focusing on the nature of and motivations for students' self-reported community service activities within the past academic year, amount of time spent on such activities, academic-based participation in community-related activities or service learning, and their awareness regarding social issues and community responsibility.

The second module focused on political engagement, specifically whether or not students voted in the 2016 presidential election. If they did not vote, they were asked why. Those students who reported that they did vote answered questions related to who they voted for, their level of involvement in the campaign process, their sentiments about their knowledge of policy issues and role in the political process, and what issues were most important to them as voters.

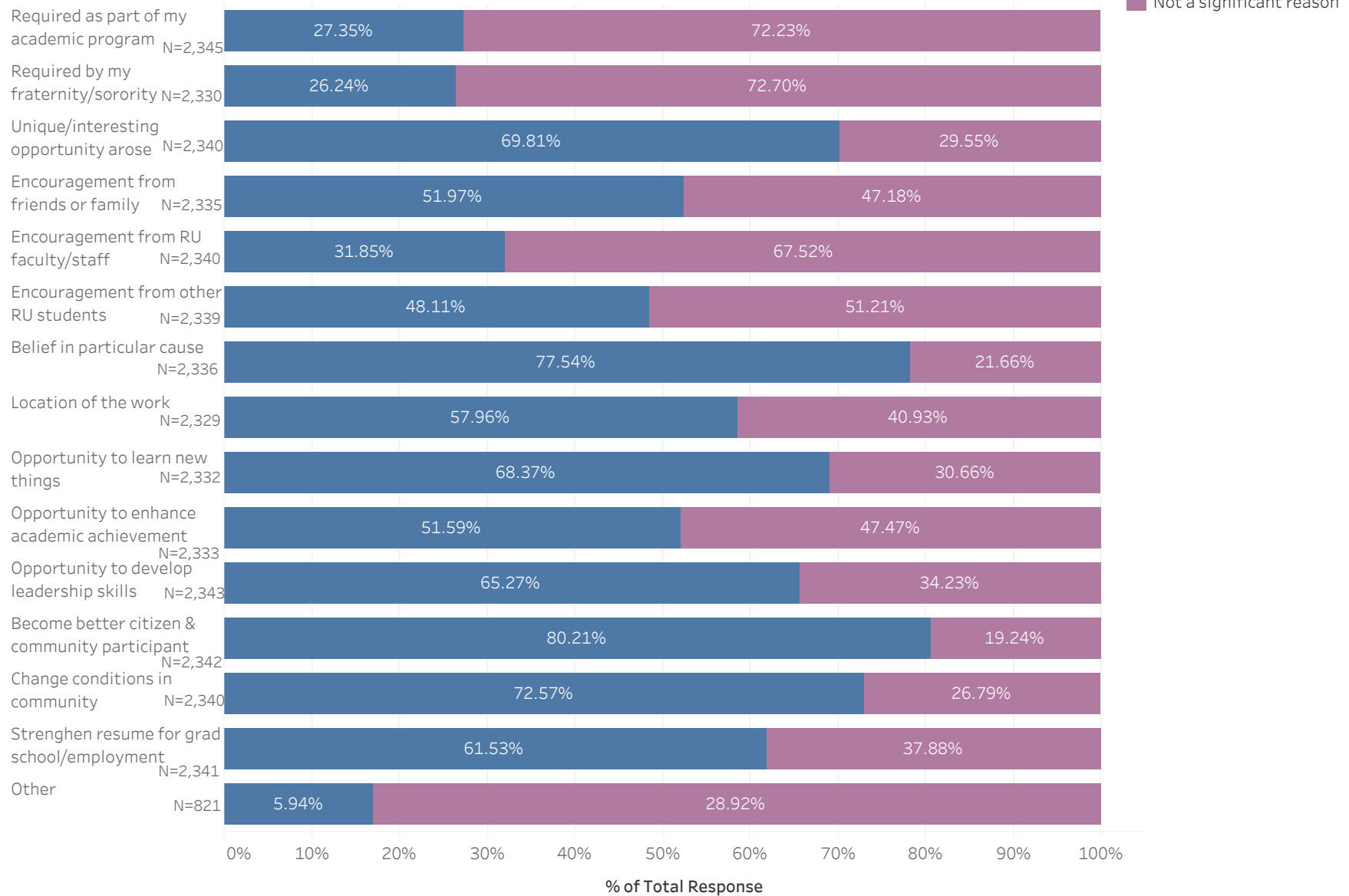
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



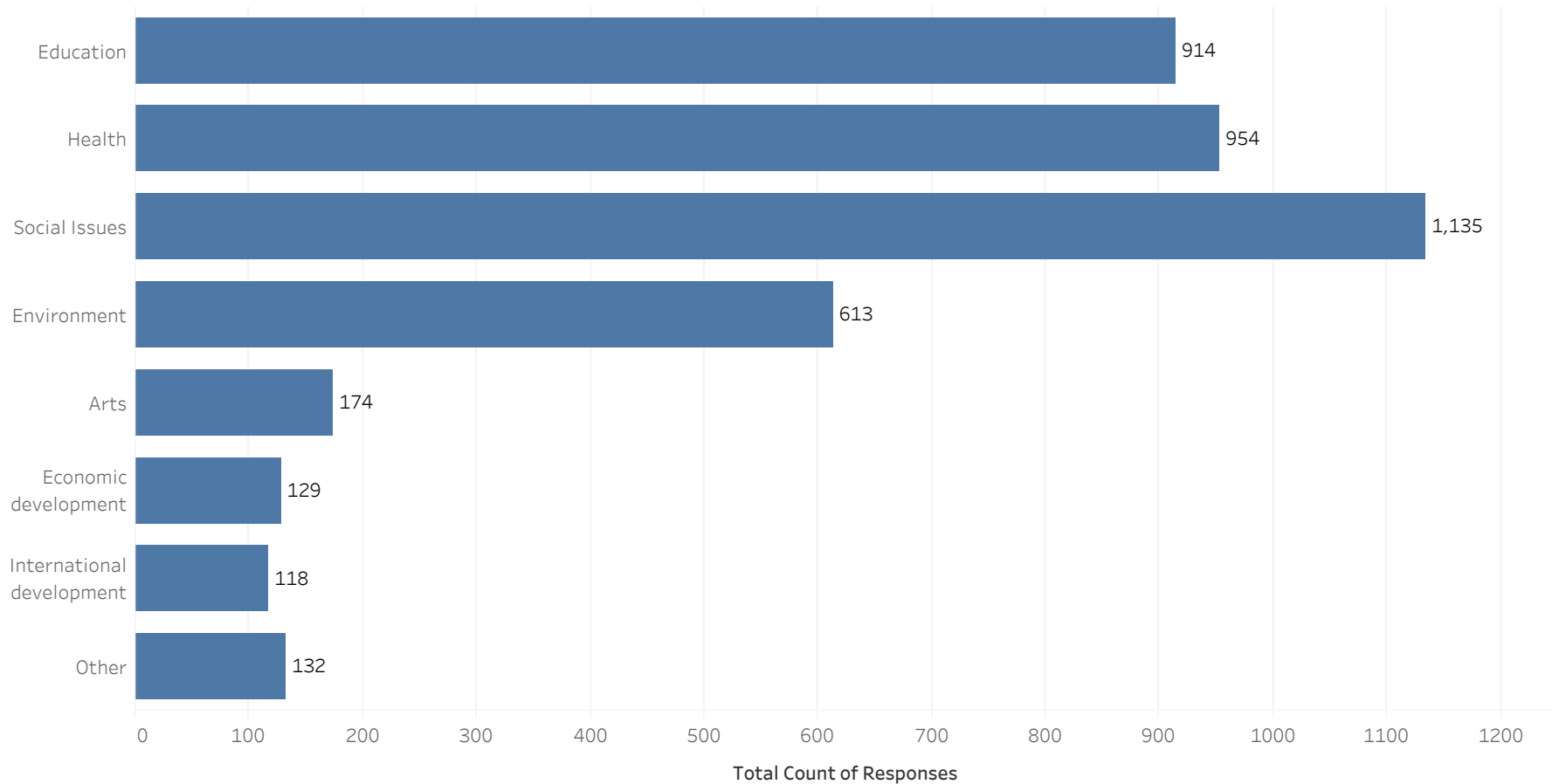
During this academic year, have you participated in community service?



Which of the following were significant reasons for getting involved in community service?

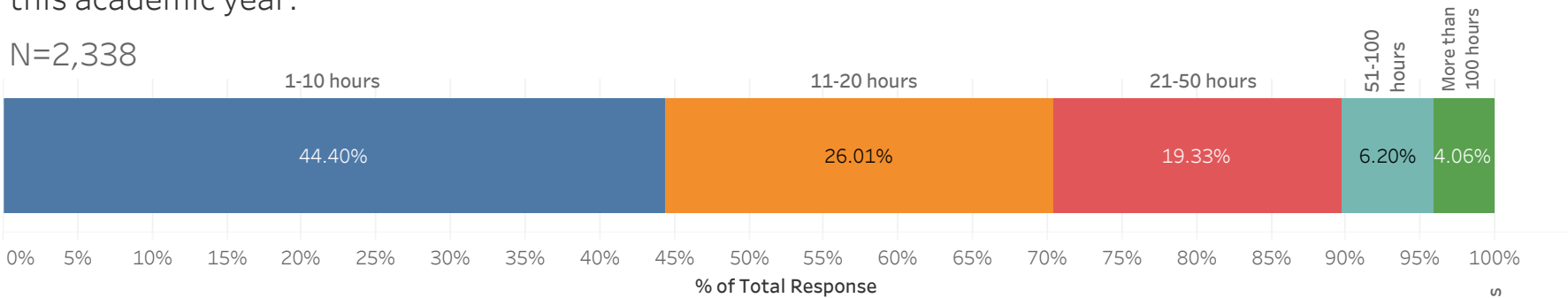


What was the focus of the organization where you did this community service?
(Select all that apply)



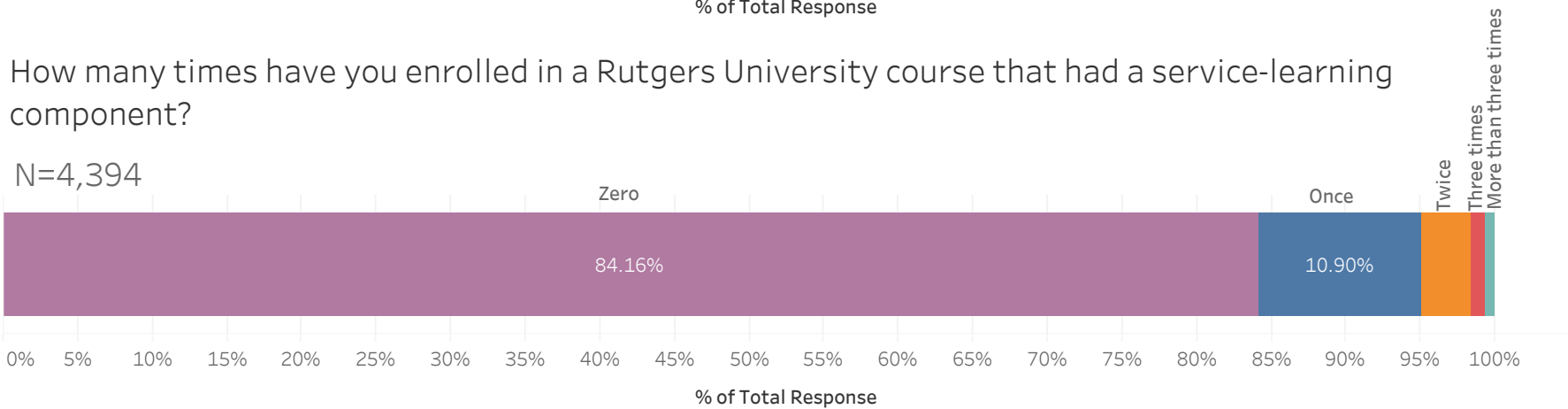
Thinking about your participation in all forms of community service, which includes service through clubs, courses, and one-time events, please estimate how many total hours of service you completed this academic year:

N=2,338



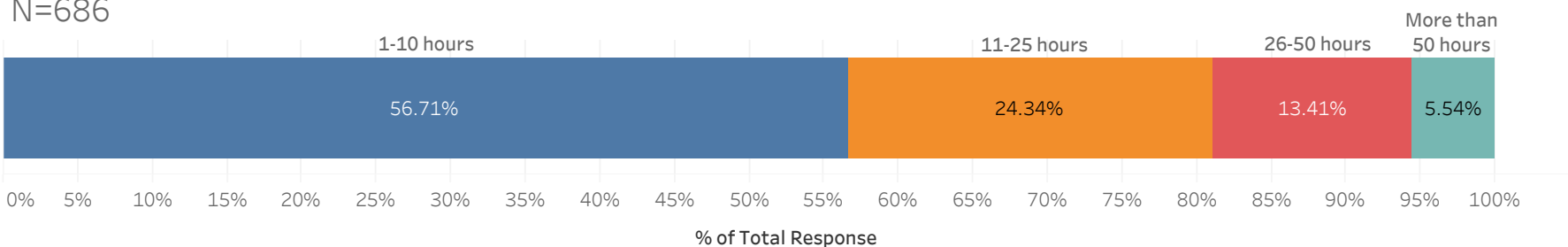
How many times have you enrolled in a Rutgers University course that had a service-learning component?

N=4,394



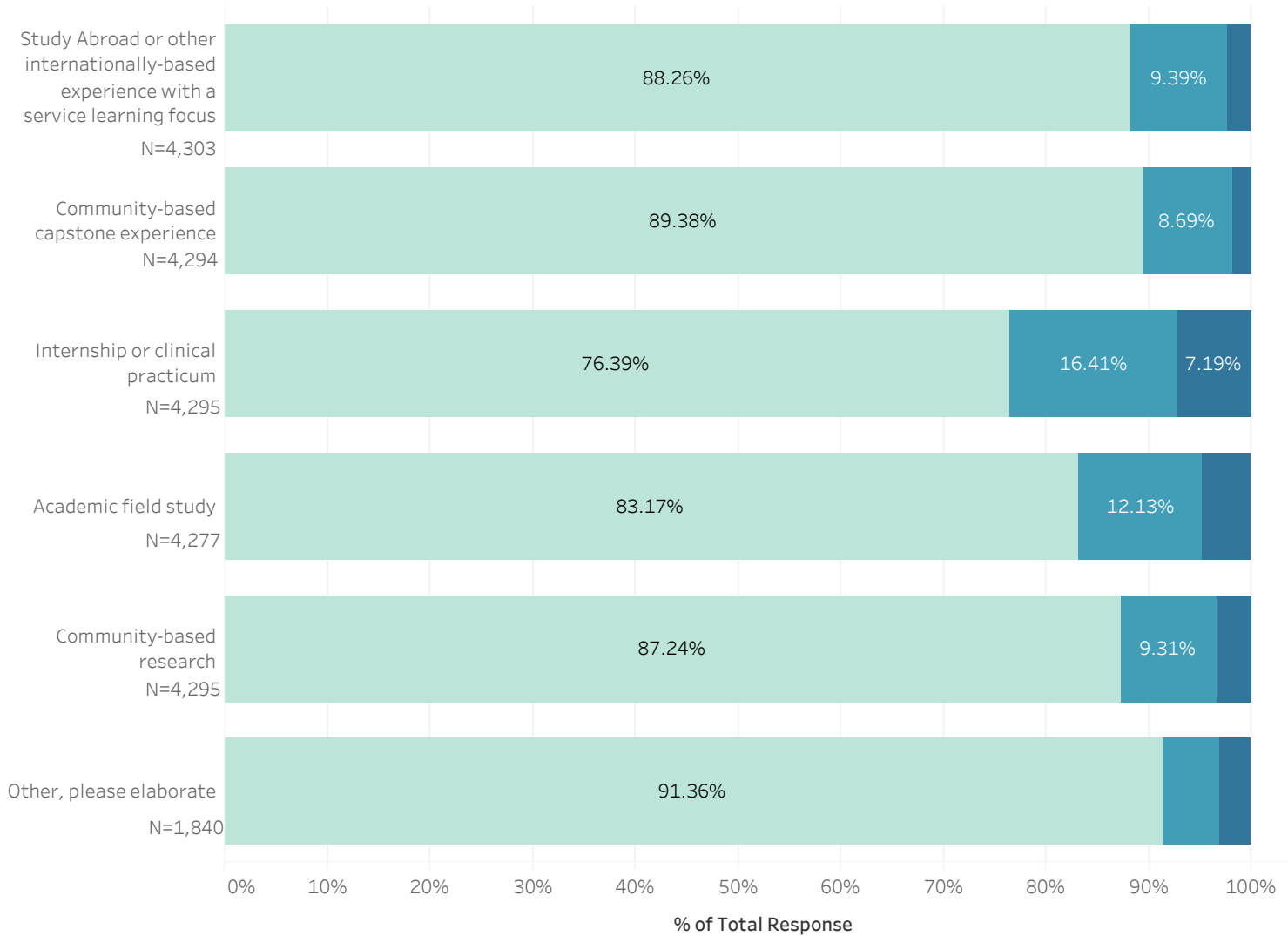
In considering all of the service-learning courses you took, what was the average number of hours of service you completed for a course?

N=686



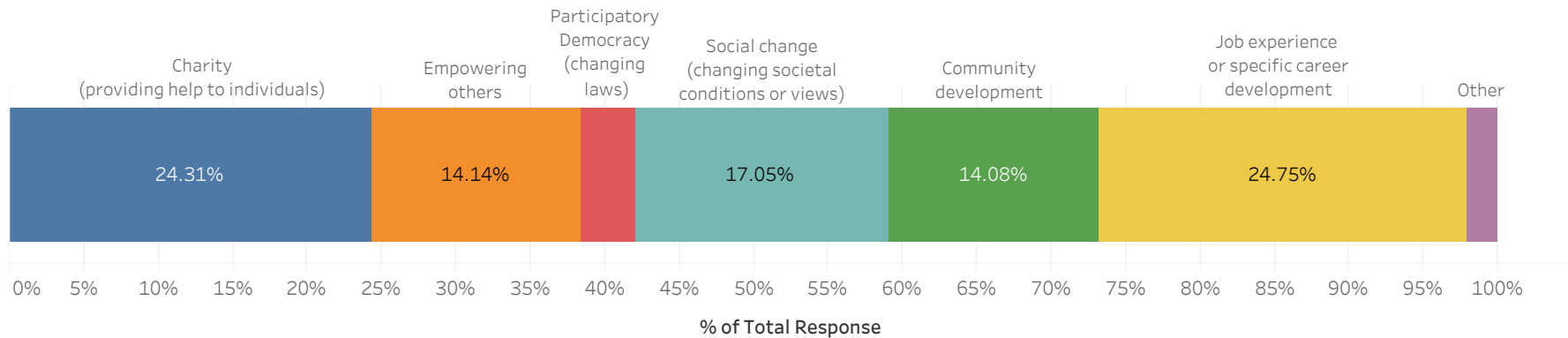
To what extent have you been involved in the following community-focused experiences during this academic year or last summer?

Responses:
■ Not at all
■ Once
■ More than Once



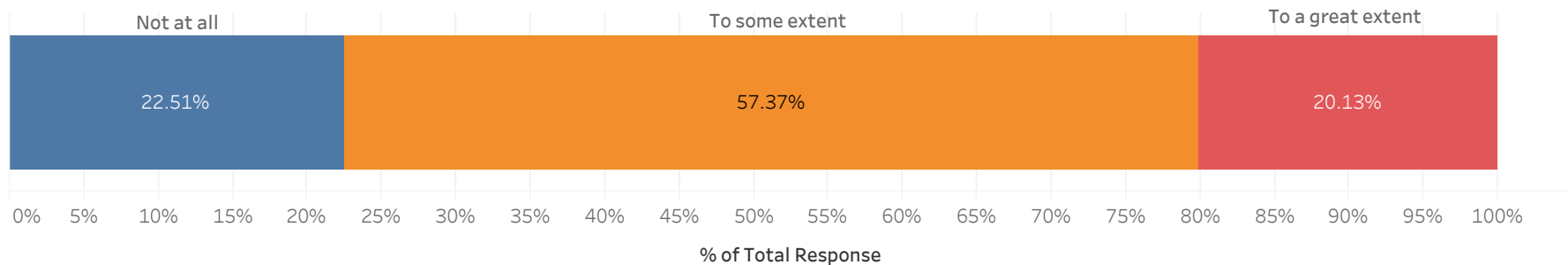
In considering your overall experience(s) with community-focused learning activities during this academic year, which of the following best characterizes the purpose of those experience(s)?

N=1,584

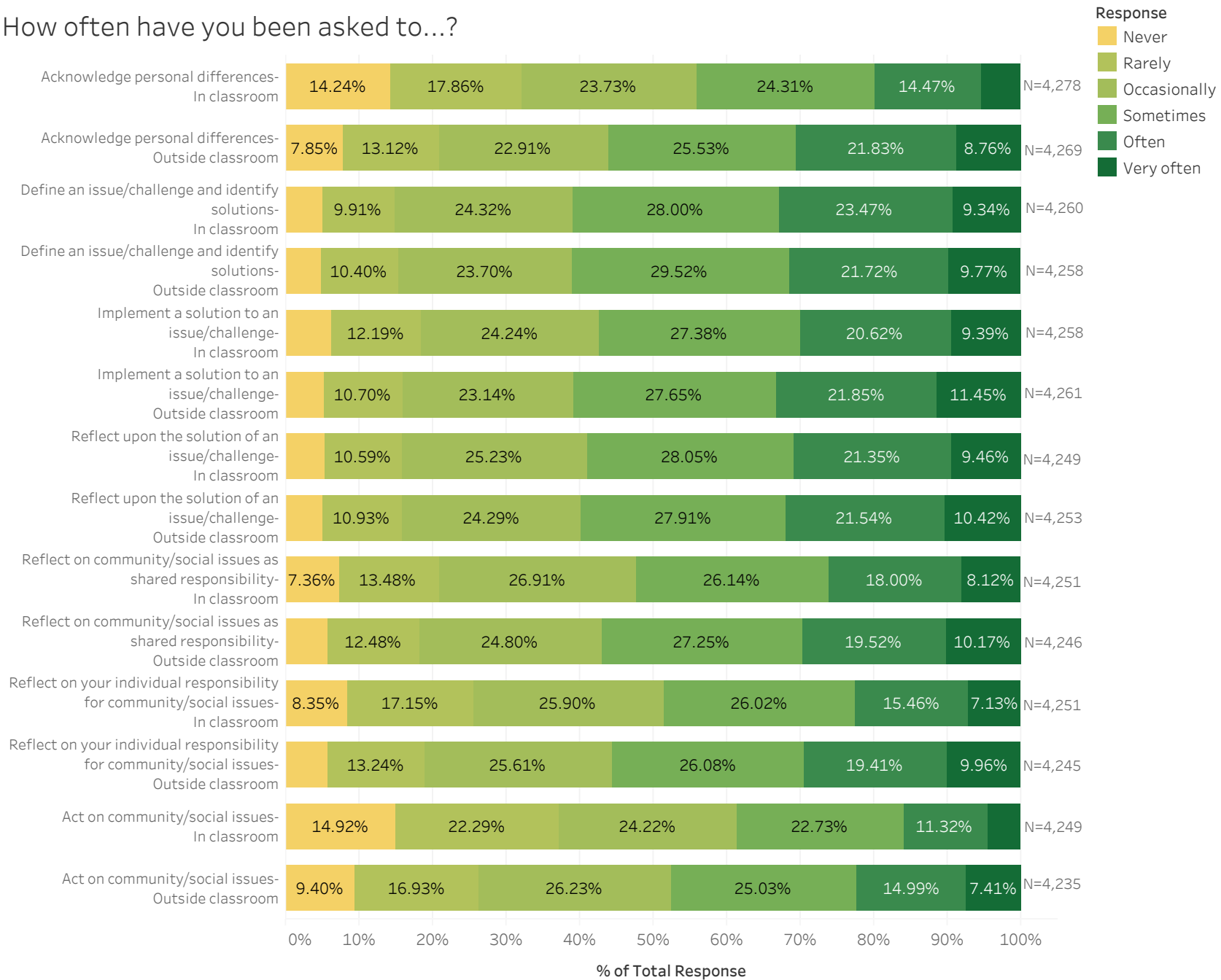


To what extent has your participation in community-based activities at this campus influenced your desire to continue community-focused activities after you graduate?

N=1,595

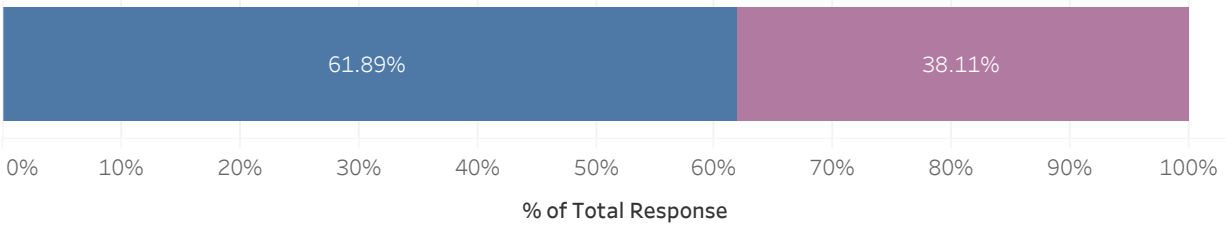


How often have you been asked to...?



2016 Election- During 2016 national election did you vote for President?

N=4,317

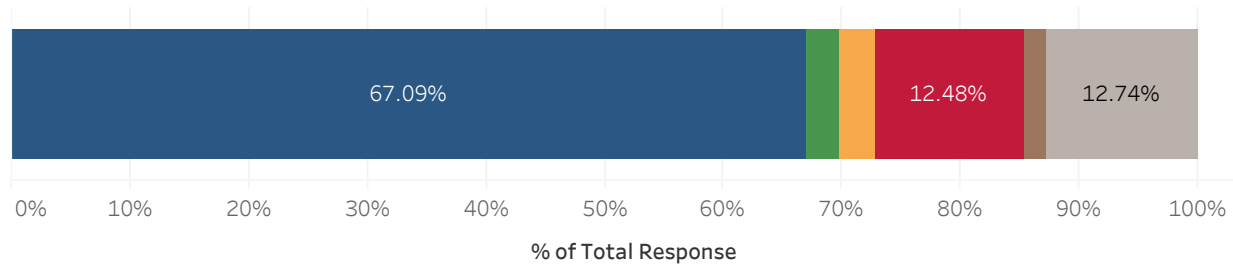


Responses:

- Yes
- No

2016 Election- Which candidate did you vote for?

N=2,652

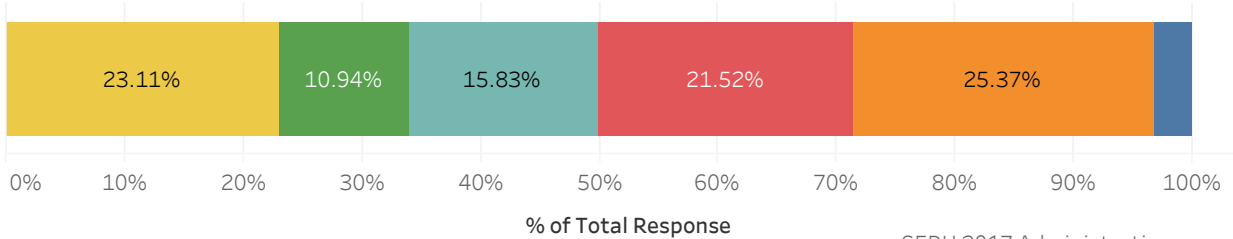


Responses:

- Darrell Castle- Constitutional
- Hillary Clinton- Democrat
- Jill Stein- Green
- Gary Johnson- Libertarian
- Donald J. Trump- Republican
- Other
- Decline to State

2016 Election- Why did you not vote?

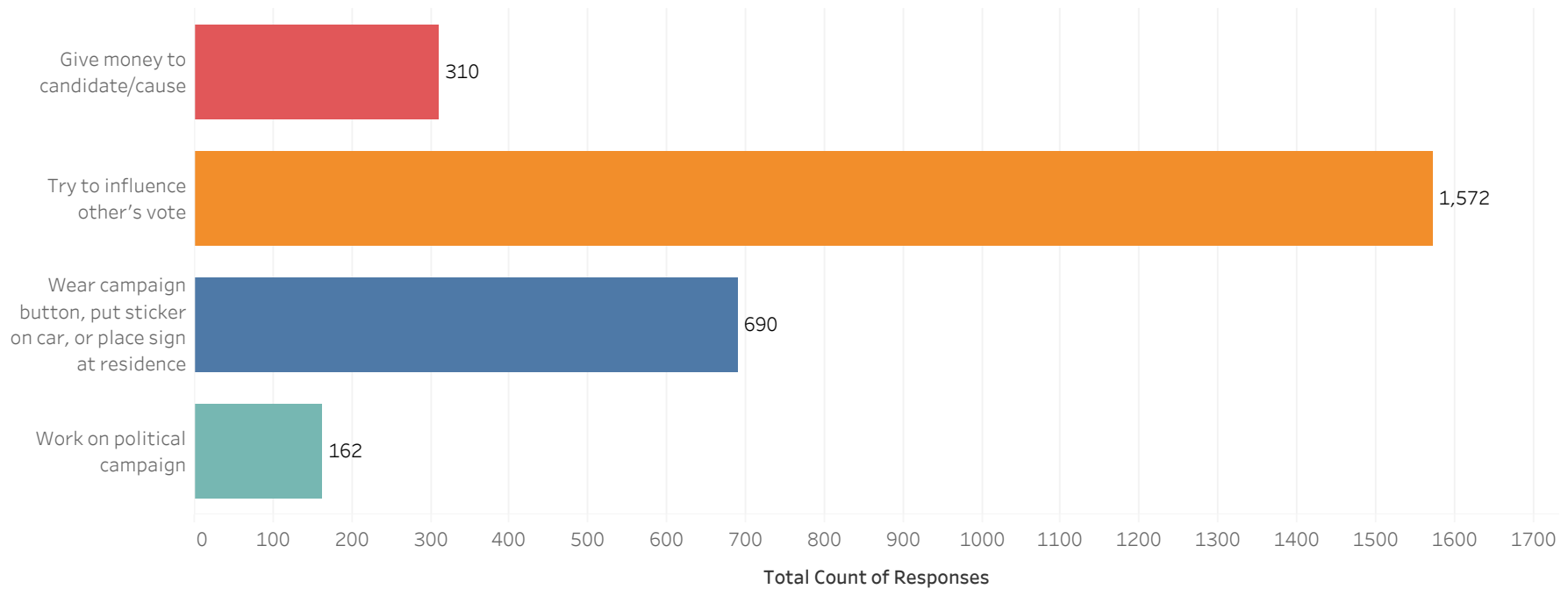
N=1,636



Responses:

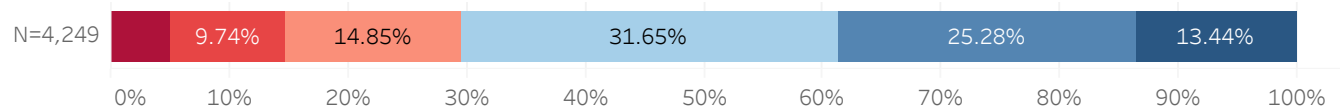
- I was eligible to vote but chose not to vote
- I was eligible and intended to vote but ran out of time
- I was registered but not where I go to school
- I was not registered
- I am not a US citizen
- I was not 18 at the time of the election

2016 Election-
During the last national political election did you...
(Select all that apply)



Level of Agreement-

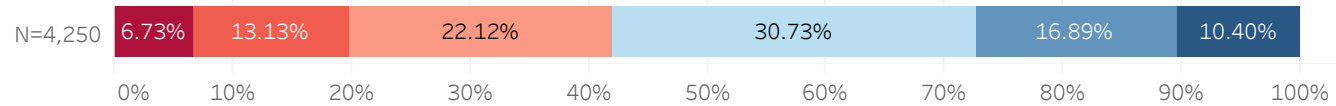
I have a role to play in the political process...



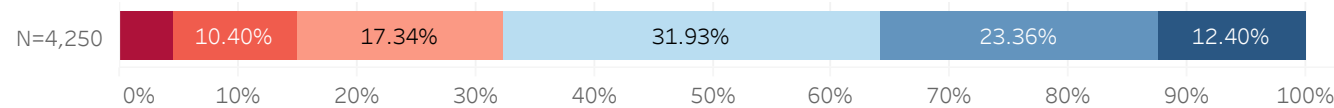
Responses:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree somewhat
- Agree somewhat
- Agree
- Strongly agree

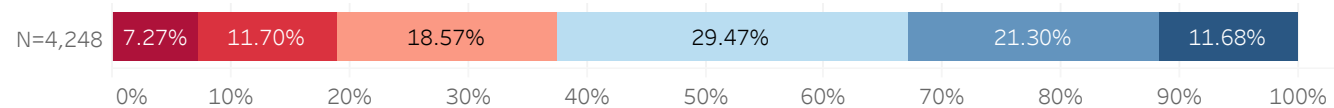
I am better informed about politics/government than most people...



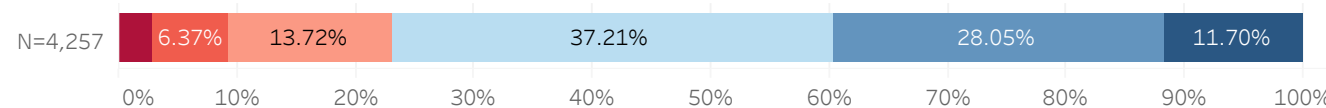
When policy issues are discussed, I have something to say...



I am well qualified to participate in the political process...



I have a good understanding of political issues facing the country...

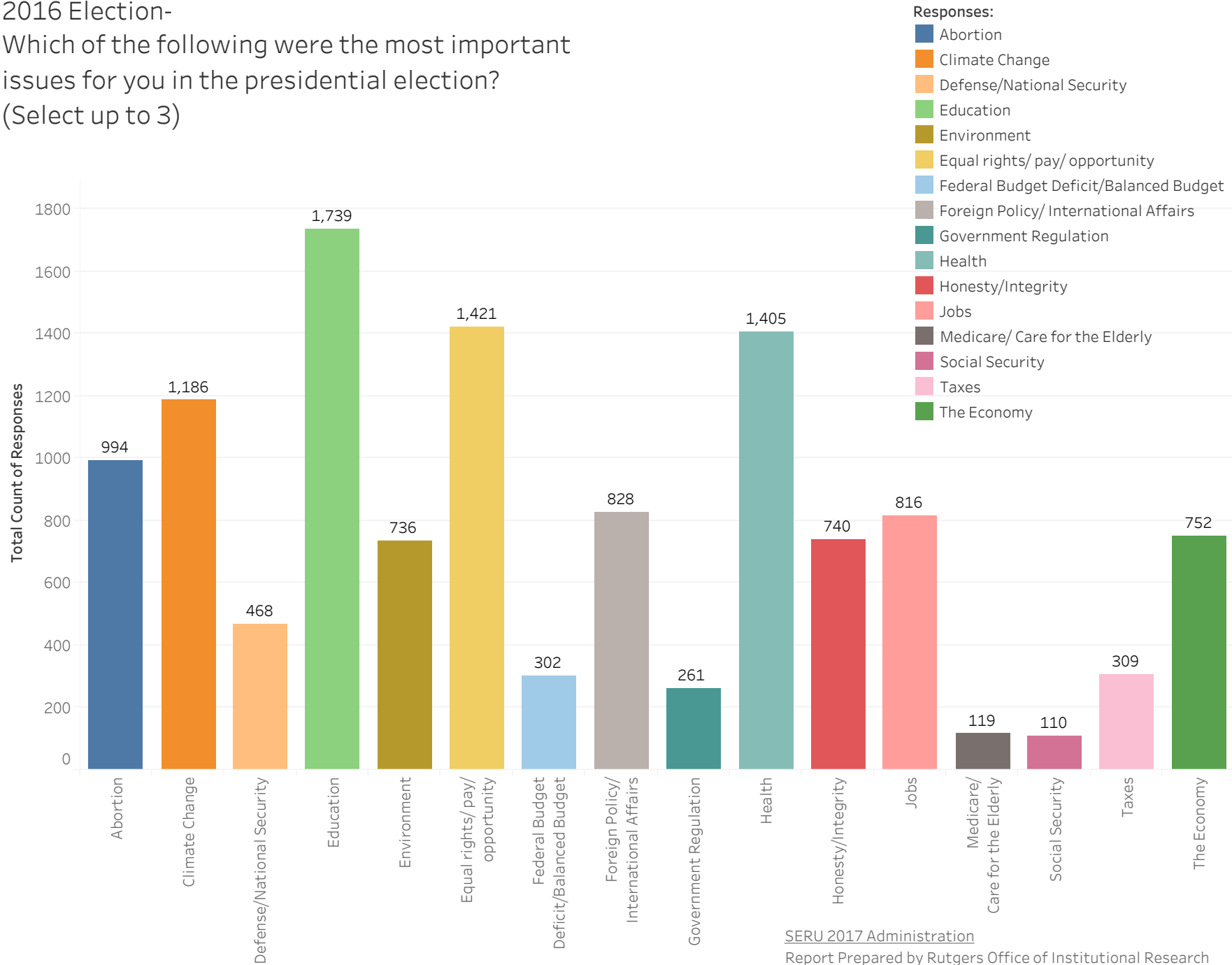


% of Total Response

SERU 2017 Administration

Report Prepared by Rutgers Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning

2016 Election-
 Which of the following were the most important
 issues for you in the presidential election?
 (Select up to 3)



SERU 2017 Administration

Report Prepared by Rutgers Office of Institutional Research
 and Academic Planning

References

Boyte, H., & Hollander, E. (1999). *Wingspread declaration on renewing the civic mission of the American research university*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

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