

Populace Insights:
Private Opinion in America 2025

Populace

“Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must
begin by subduing the freeness of speech.”

—Benjamin Franklin

(from his 1722 writings as Silence Dogood)

Abstract

What it is:

Populace Insights: Private Opinion in America (2025) is a follow-up to the [Populace Social Pressure Index \(2024\)](#) — a large-scale private opinion research study designed to uncover Americans' true views on sensitive issues.

This 2025 report includes insights from a nationally representative sample of over 3,000 American adults, revisiting some statements from the original index to measure changes in public-private opinion gaps, while also introducing contemporary new statements. Using list experiment methodology, this research quantifies the differences between privately held beliefs and publicly expressed opinions. Conducted by the think tank Populace, with methodological and analytical support from Gradient, and fielded by the panel provider YouGov, the study offers updated insights into societal pressures shaping American discourse.

How it was conducted:

The primary methodology of the study was a list experiment (also known as the 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 the biases introduced by social desirability and nonresponse.

The private opinions of respondents were then contrasted against their public opinions on the same sensitive topics by comparing list experiment results to those obtained by traditional public opinion polling methods.

For more information about the list experiment, see the [Methodology section](#).

Survey conducted: March 21, 2025 - March 31, 2025

About Populace:

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

For more information, visit [Populace.org](#).

Key Findings

- 01. A majority of Americans are self-silencing.** In private, 63% of Americans admit to having self-silenced in the last year, although only 52% admit it publicly. Households earning more than \$150,000 a year (82%), Democrats (77%), college graduates (75%), and Gen X (73%) are self-silencing the most, although in each case they underreport it publicly by at least 20 points.
- 02. Independents are changing their minds.** Independents showed some of the biggest year-over-year changes in private opinion across several issues, including declining support for deporting illegal immigrants (from 66% to 46%), reduced social trust (from 51% to 27%), less support for dismantling DEI initiatives (from 49% to 31%), and greater endorsement of political violence (from 2% to 15%).
- 03. Widespread and increased pessimism about the economy.** In private, only 16% of Americans believe the economy is doing well, a 13 point drop from 2024 (29%). The groups with the most pessimistic view also had some of the steepest declines from 2024, including women (from 25% to 8%), Gen X (from 19% to 8%), and Asians (from 30% to 9%). Republicans publicly report the most positive views (44%), however in private that number is 18 points lower (26%). Notably, this sample was taken days before the Trump administration announced sweeping tariffs in April 2025.
- 04. Increase in willingness to engage in political violence.** In private, 12% of Americans endorse the use of violence in order to save the country — this represents a threefold increase since 2024 (4%). The demographic groups with the largest year-over-year increase in private support for violence include Gen X (from 4% to 18%), Independents (from 2% to 15%), and men (from 5% to 15%).
- 05. Trust declines (in private) for key demographics.** While the overall percentage of Americans who privately believe most people can be trusted remained stable (38% in 2024, 37% now), there were substantial declines in key groups such as Asians (64% to 33%) and Independents (51% to 27%). Importantly, the declines amongst these groups are not evident in their public opinions, which remain similar from 2024 to 2025.
- 06. Americans are overstating their support for DOGE.** Americans' approval of the way DOGE is trying to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse in federal spending is lower in private (37%) than it is in public (47%). The trend of public overstatement holds for every demographic group except Republicans, where a majority privately supports the effort (92%).
- 07. Americans are less inclined to dismantle DEI than they publicly admit.** While public support for dismantling DEI efforts remained similar (32% in 2024, 35% in 2025), private support dropped from 40% to 29% from 2024 to 2025. Hispanics are the only demographic group who have greater support for dismantling DEI efforts in private (38%) than in public (27%), and Republicans are the only demographic with majority private support for dismantling DEI (57%).
- 08. (Un)fair society.** Although 35% of Americans publicly express a belief that we live in a mostly fair society, only 11% privately believe it. There are no demographic groups for which a majority privately believes that society is mostly fair. Republicans are the only group where a majority publicly states that society is mostly fair (58%), however, in private only 30% actually believe it. Notably, an overwhelming majority of Americans (74%) also believe that a fair society focuses on equal opportunity, not equal outcomes — a sentiment shared by a majority of all demographic groups.

Contents

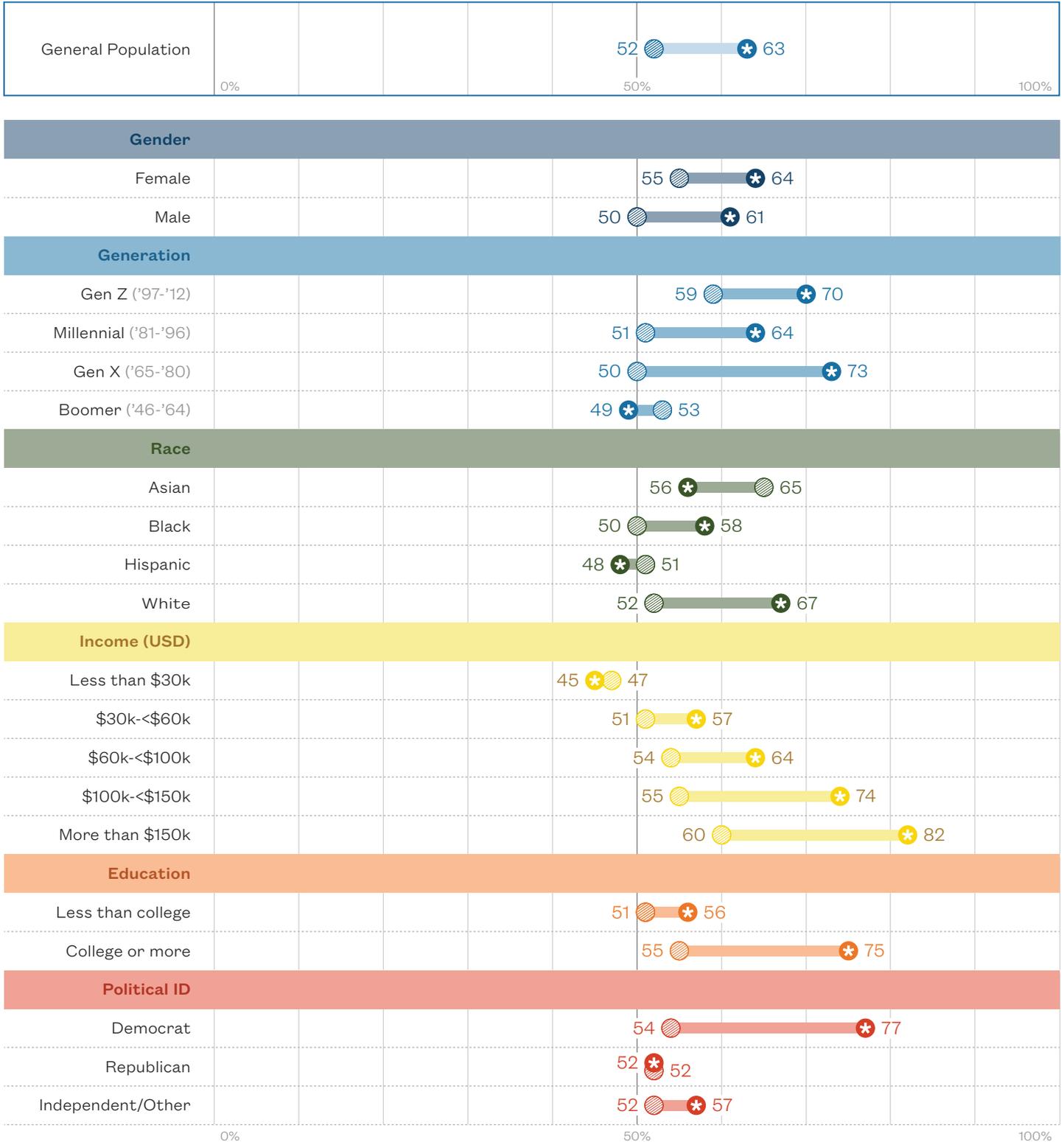
Statements Tested

01	In the past year, I have avoided saying things I believe because others might find them offensive.*	Page 6
02	I trust the government to tell me the truth.	Page 7
03	In general, most people can be trusted.	Page 8
04	We live in a mostly fair society.	Page 9
05	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in schools and companies should be dismantled.	Page 10
06	People who have entered the U.S. illegally should be deported.	Page 11
07	The country is headed in the wrong direction.	Page 12
08	Because things have gotten so far off track, Americans may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.	Page 13
09	The government should restrict the expression of views deemed discriminatory or offensive.	Page 14
10	The American economy is doing well.	Page 15
11	I have confidence in the Supreme Court.	Page 16
12	Society is better off when individuals get to make decisions for themselves rather than having experts make decisions for everyone.	Page 17
13	I am proud to be an American.*	Page 18
14	I approve of the job President Trump is doing.*	Page 19
15	I approve of the way that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is trying to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse in federal spending.*	Page 20
16	A fair society is one that focuses on equal opportunity, not equal outcomes.*	Page 21

Statements marked with an asterisk () were not included in the 2024 Social Pressure Index. They were newly added in this 2025 Insights Report.

Statement 01

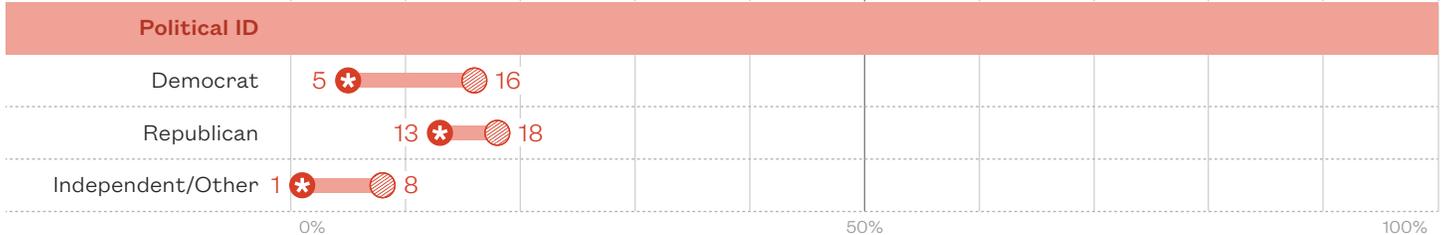
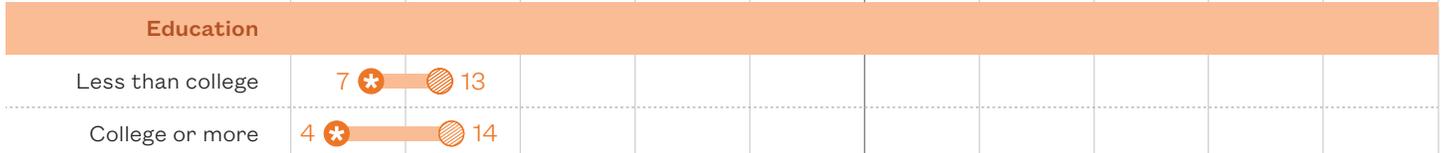
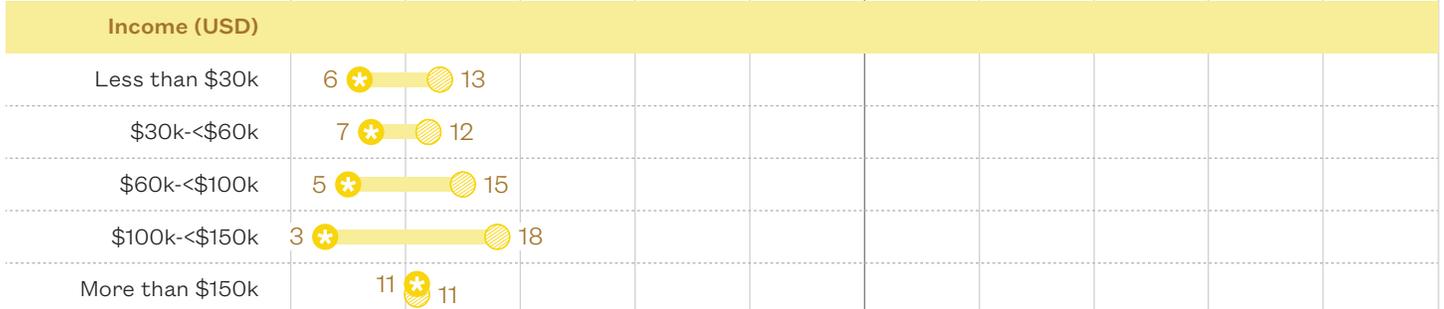
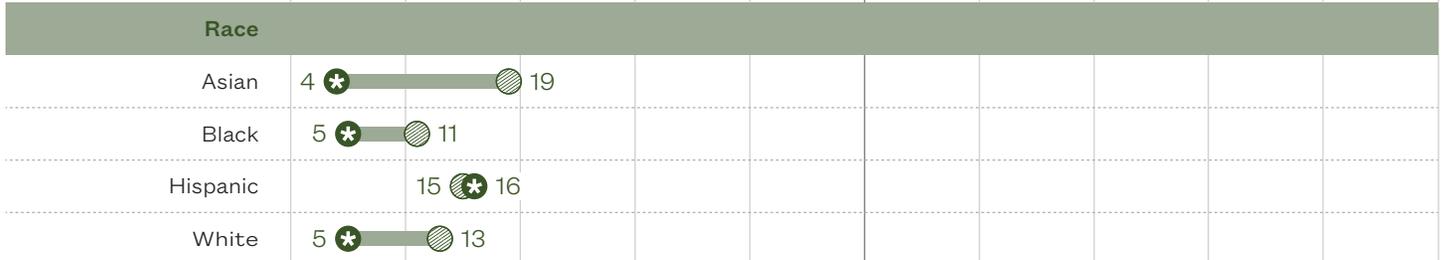
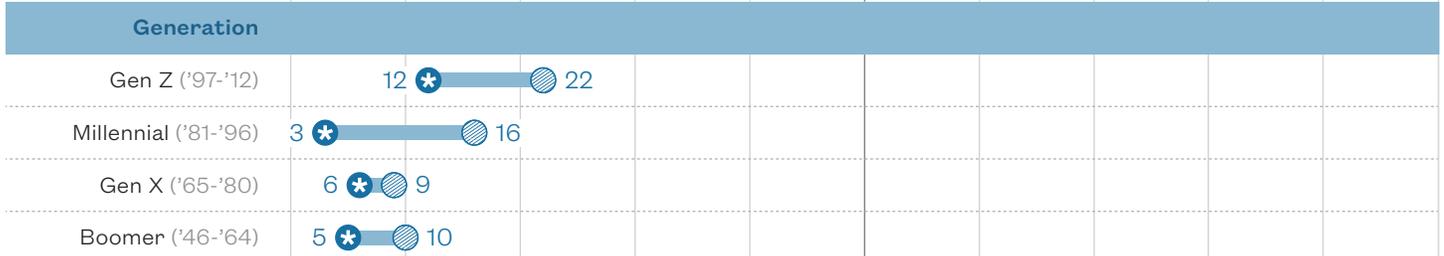
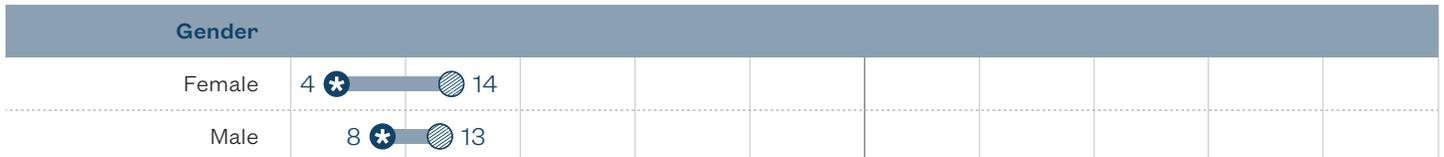
In the past year, I have avoided saying things I believe because others might find them offensive.



Statement 02

I trust the government to tell me the truth.

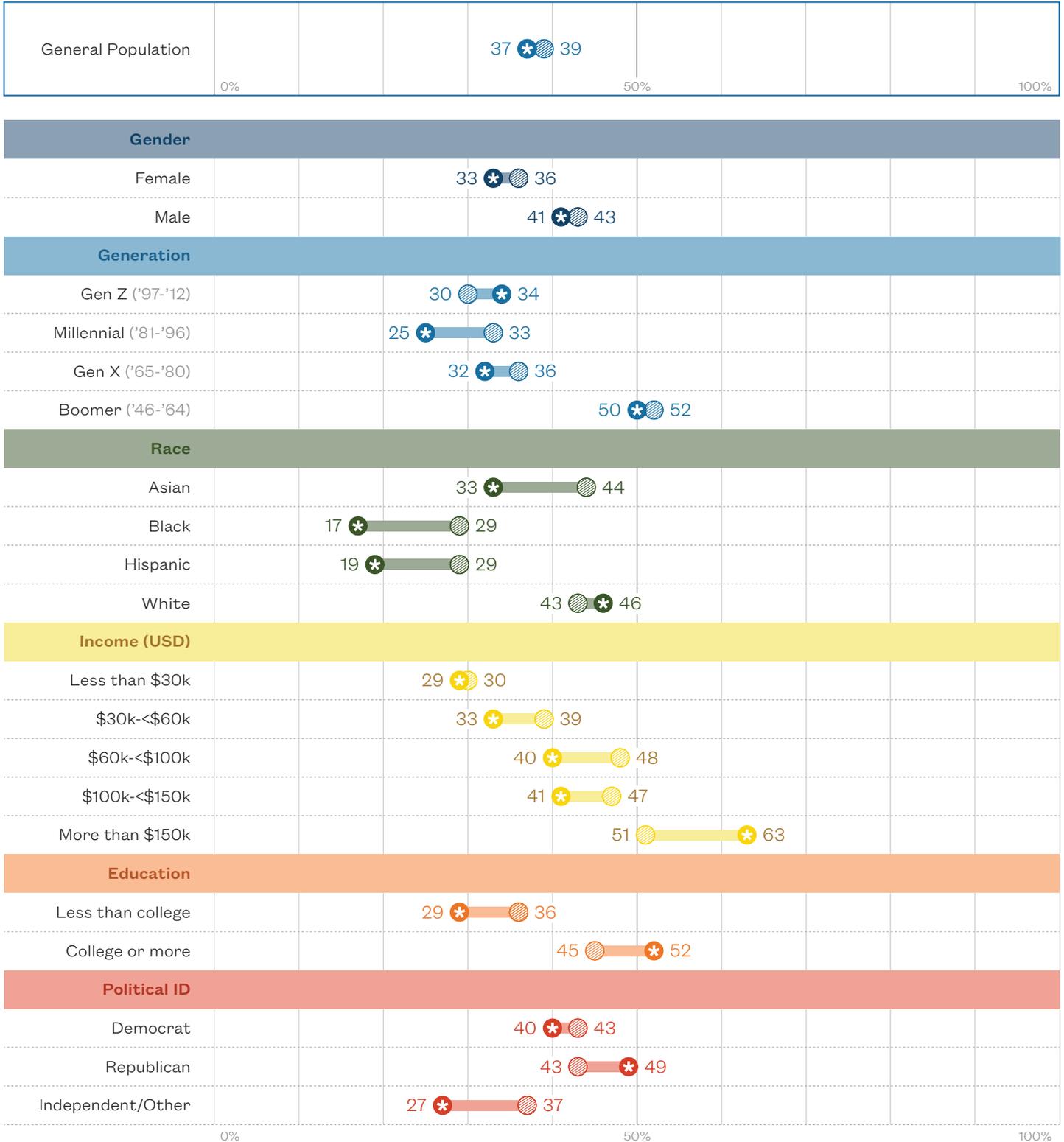
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 03

In general, most people can be trusted.

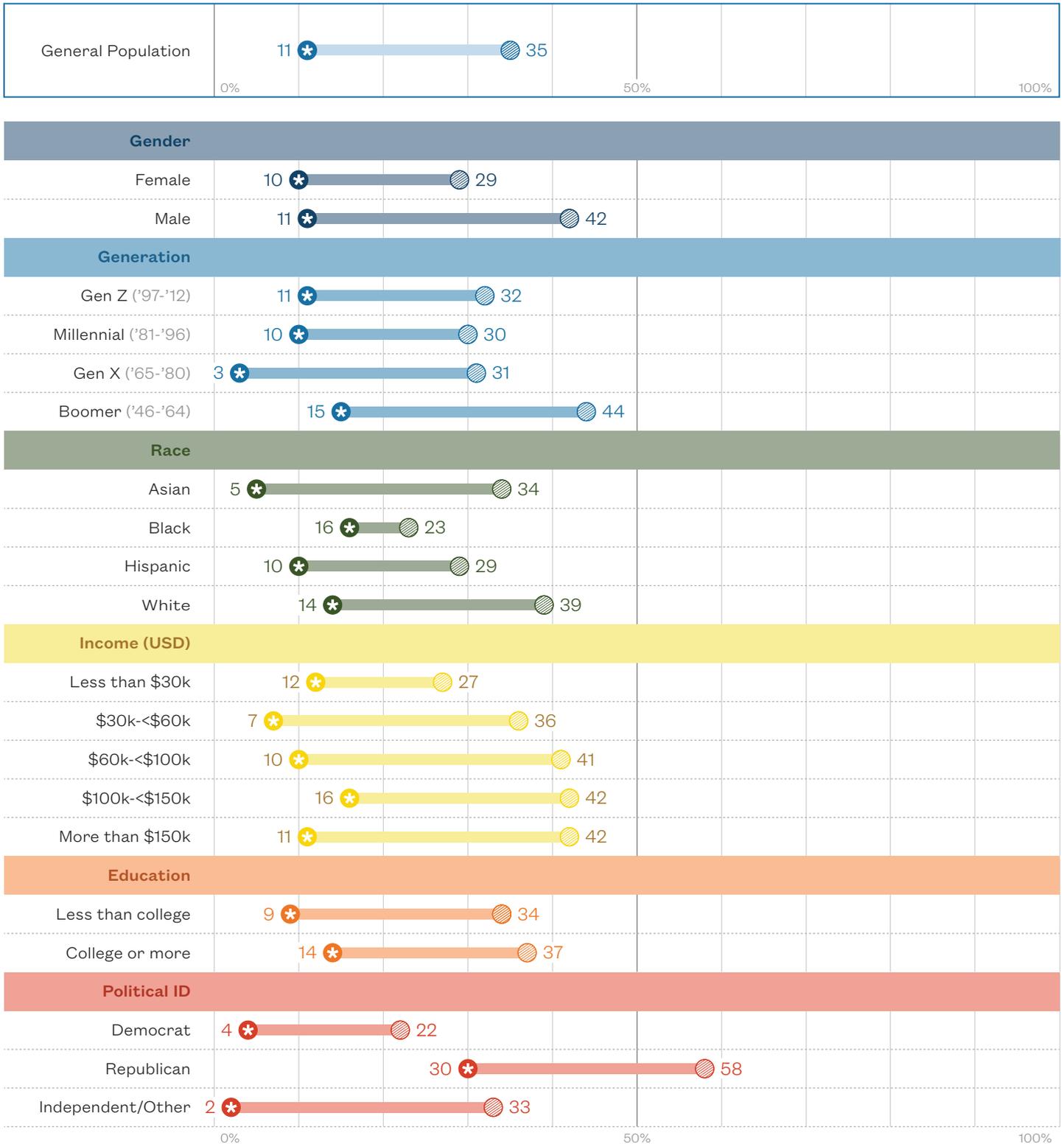
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 04

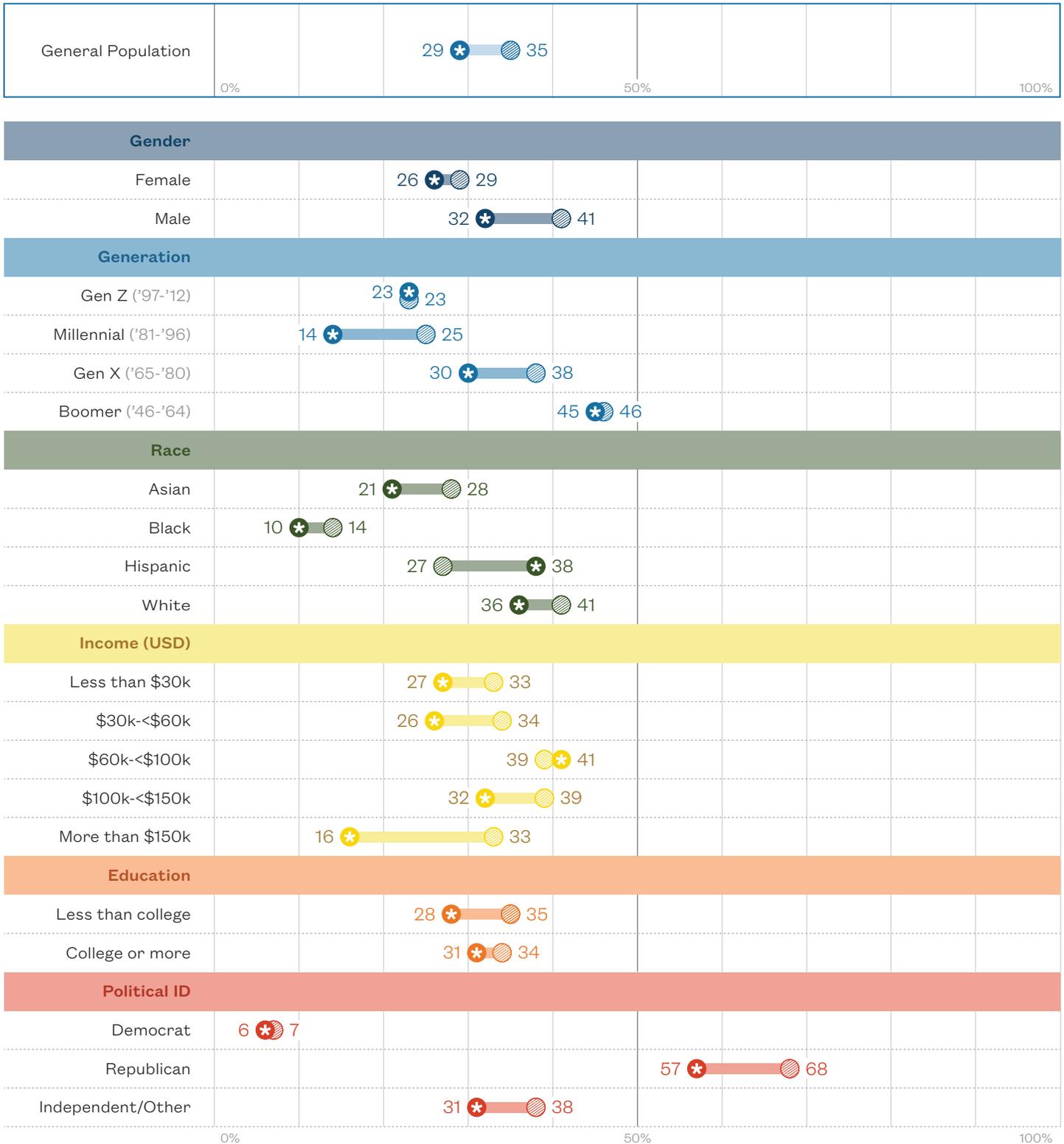
We live in a mostly fair society.

✱ Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 05

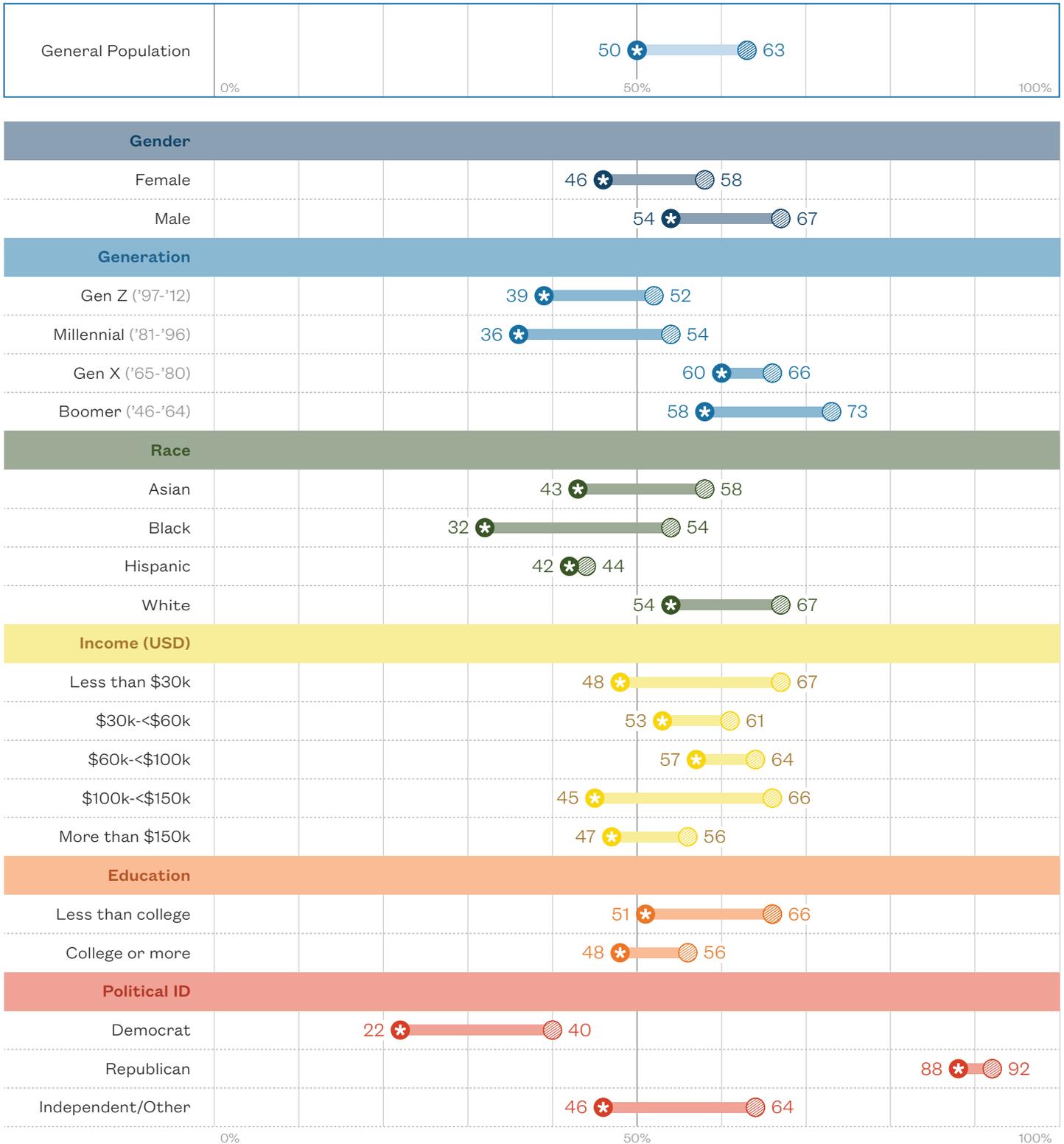
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in schools and companies should be dismantled.



Statement 06

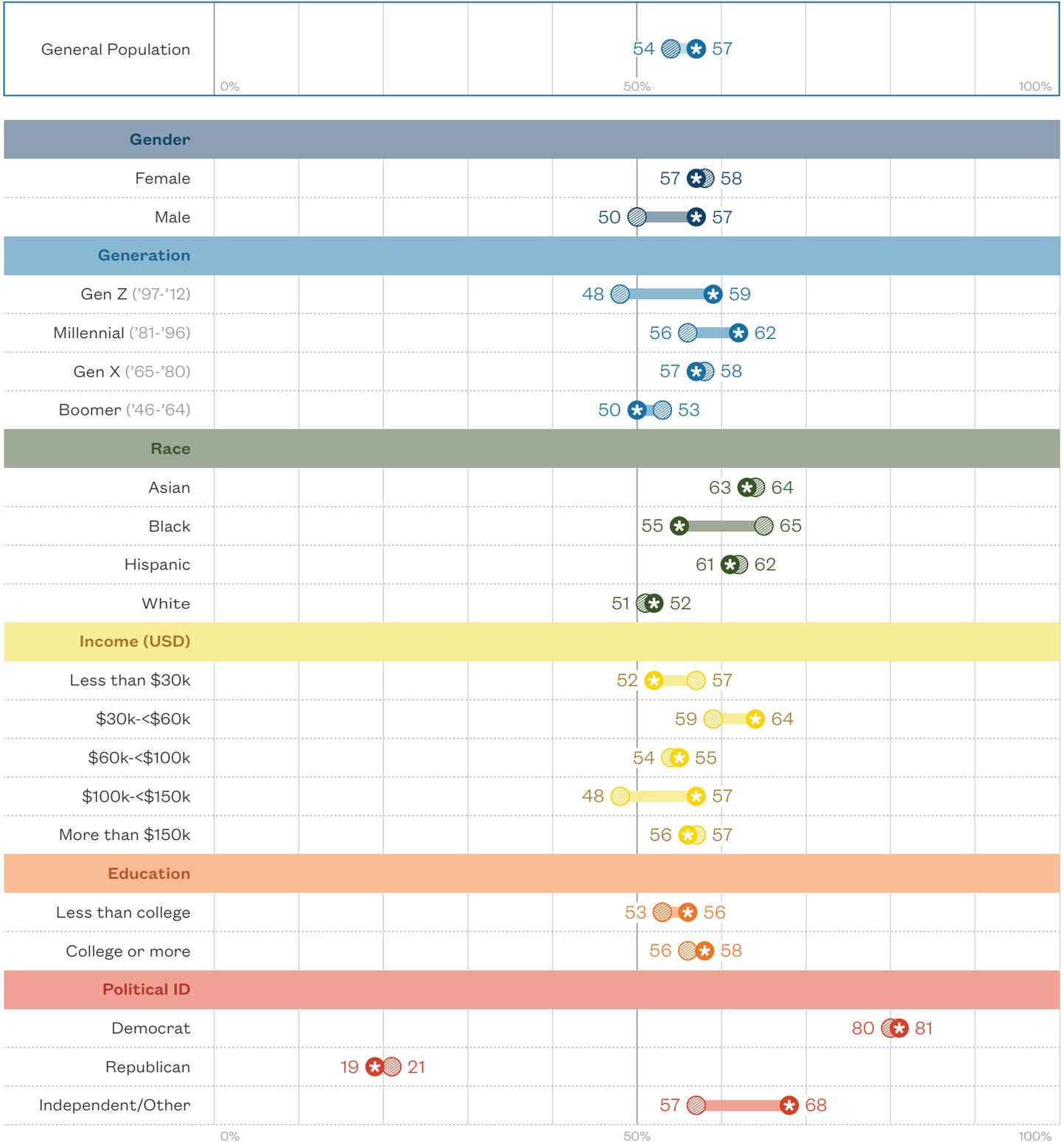
People who have entered the U.S. illegally should be deported.

* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 07

The country is headed in the wrong direction.



Statement 08

Because things have gotten so far off track, Americans may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.



Gender



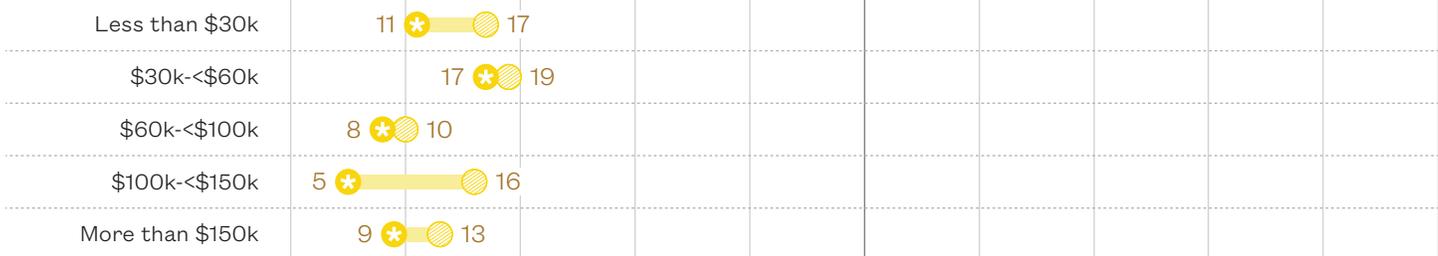
Generation



Race



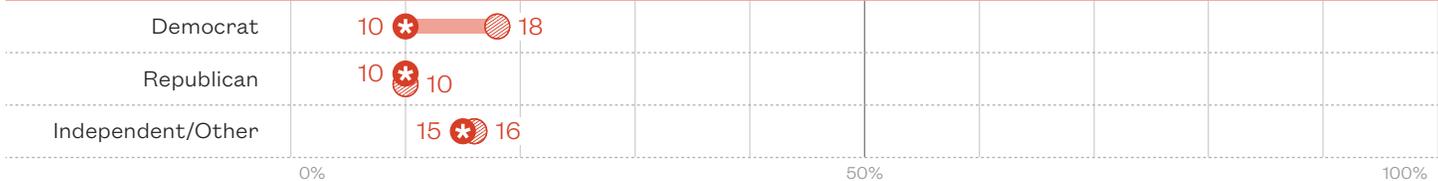
Income (USD)



Education



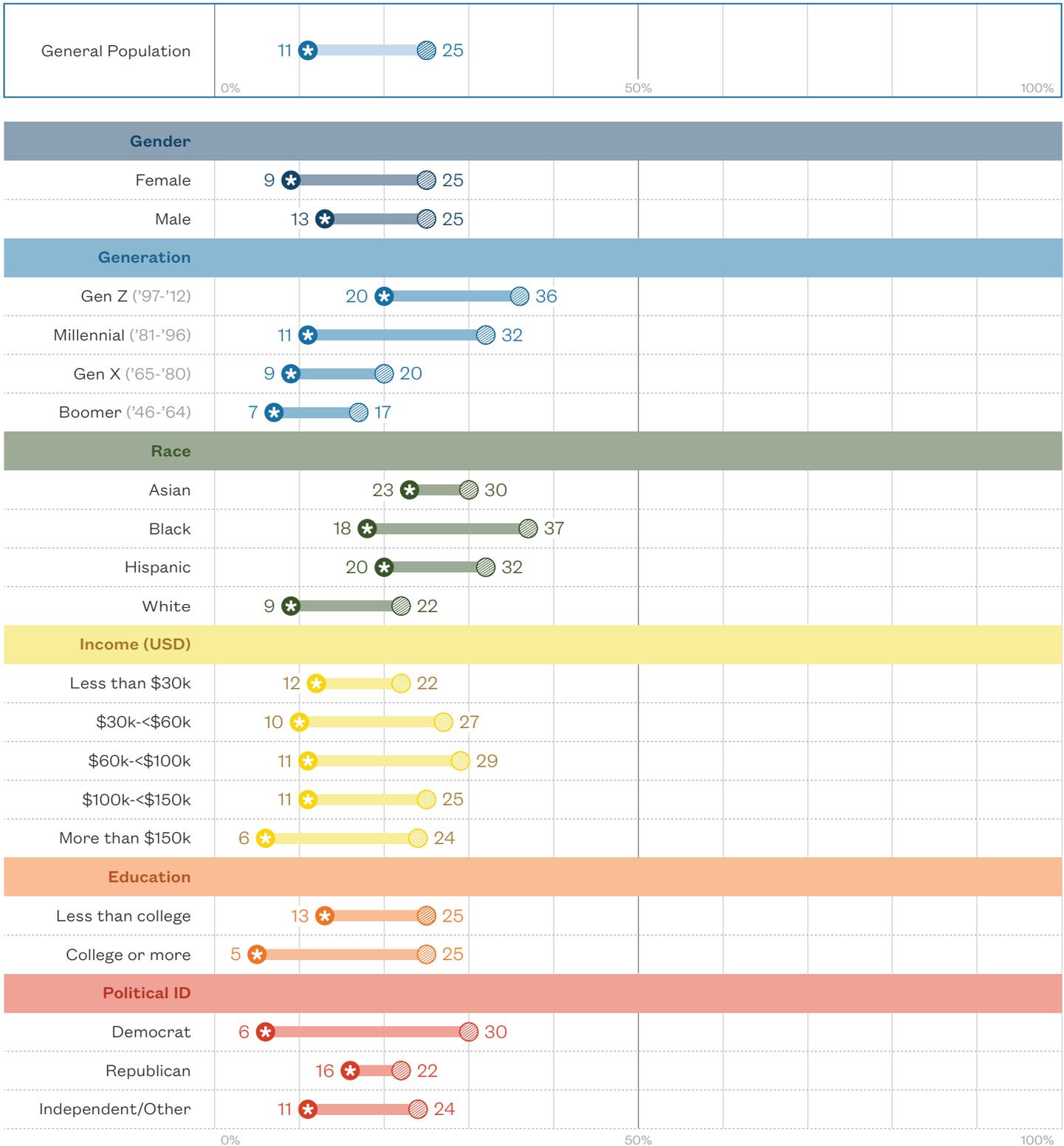
Political ID



Statement 09

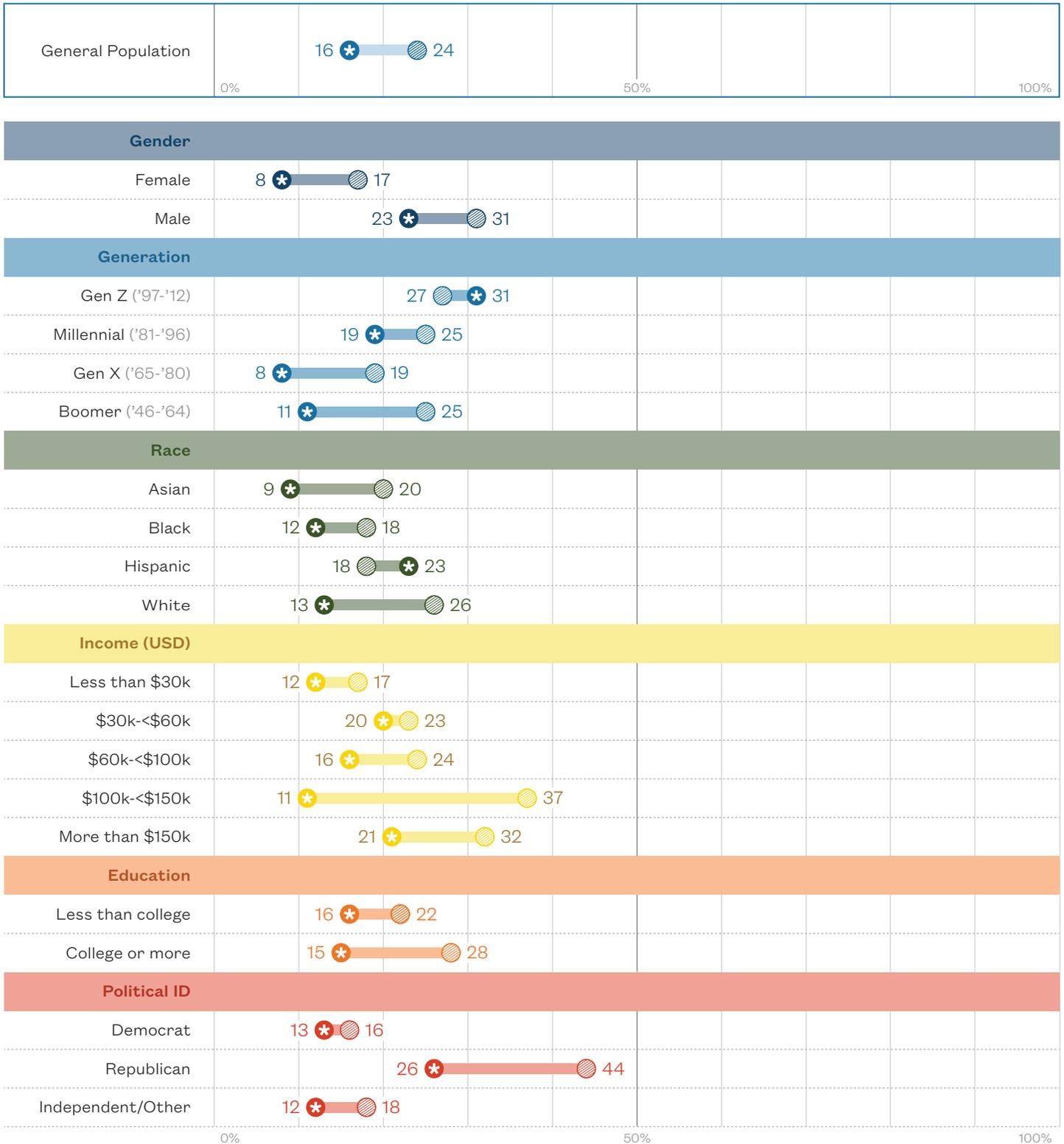
The government should restrict the expression of views deemed discriminatory or offensive.

* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 10

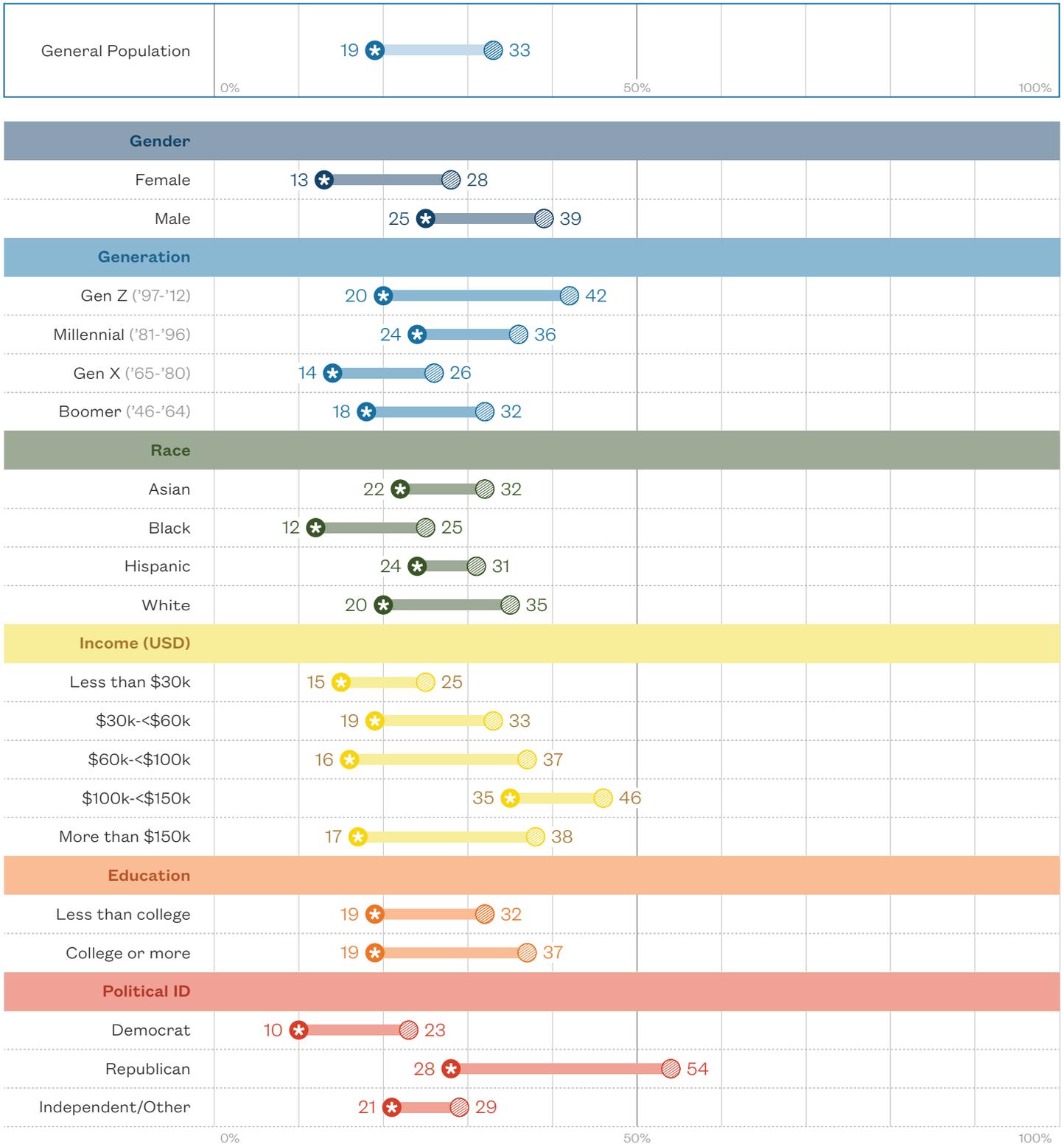
The American economy is doing well.



Statement 11

I have confidence in the Supreme Court.

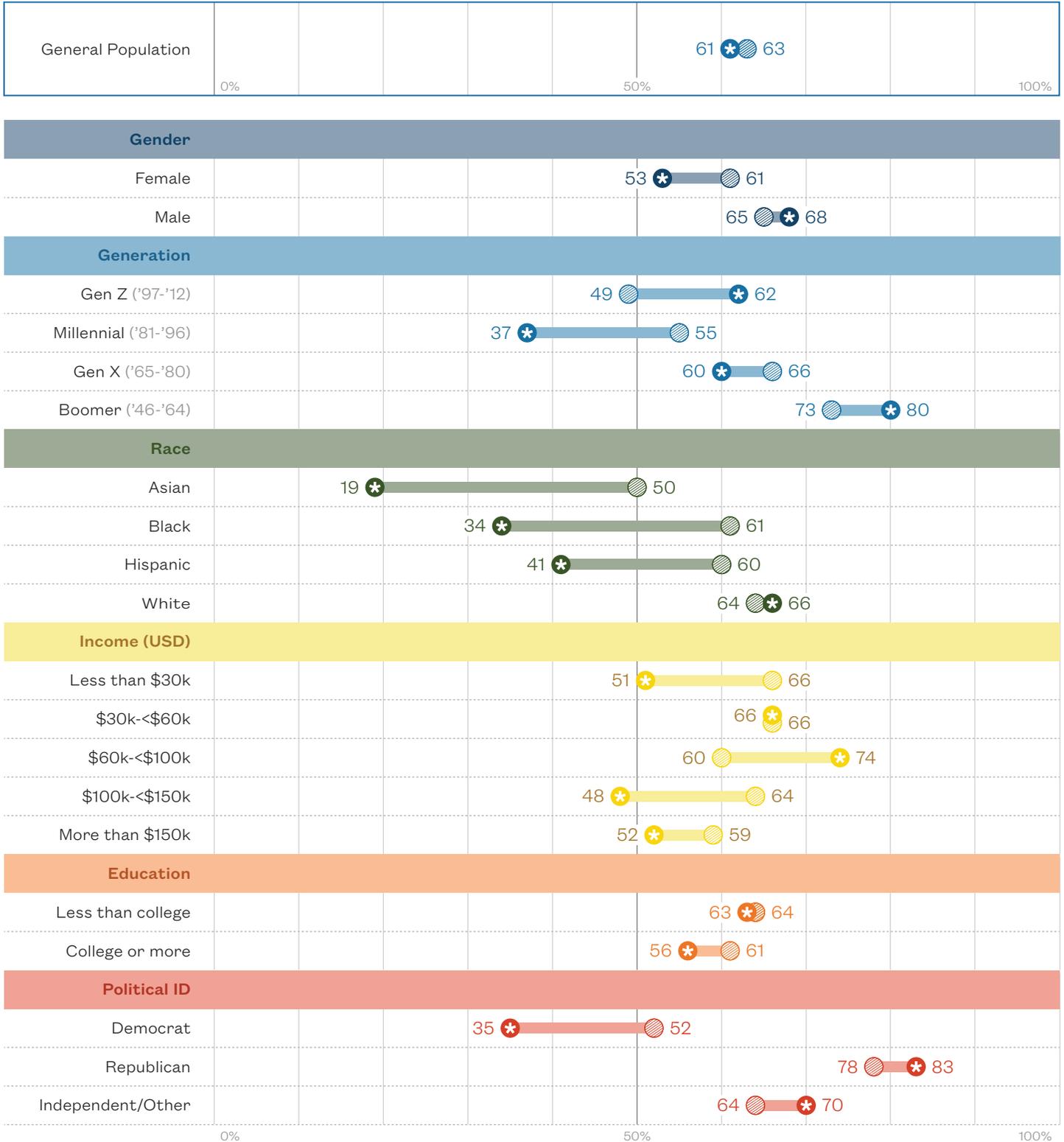
✱ Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 12

Society is better off when individuals get to make decisions for themselves rather than having experts make decisions for everyone.

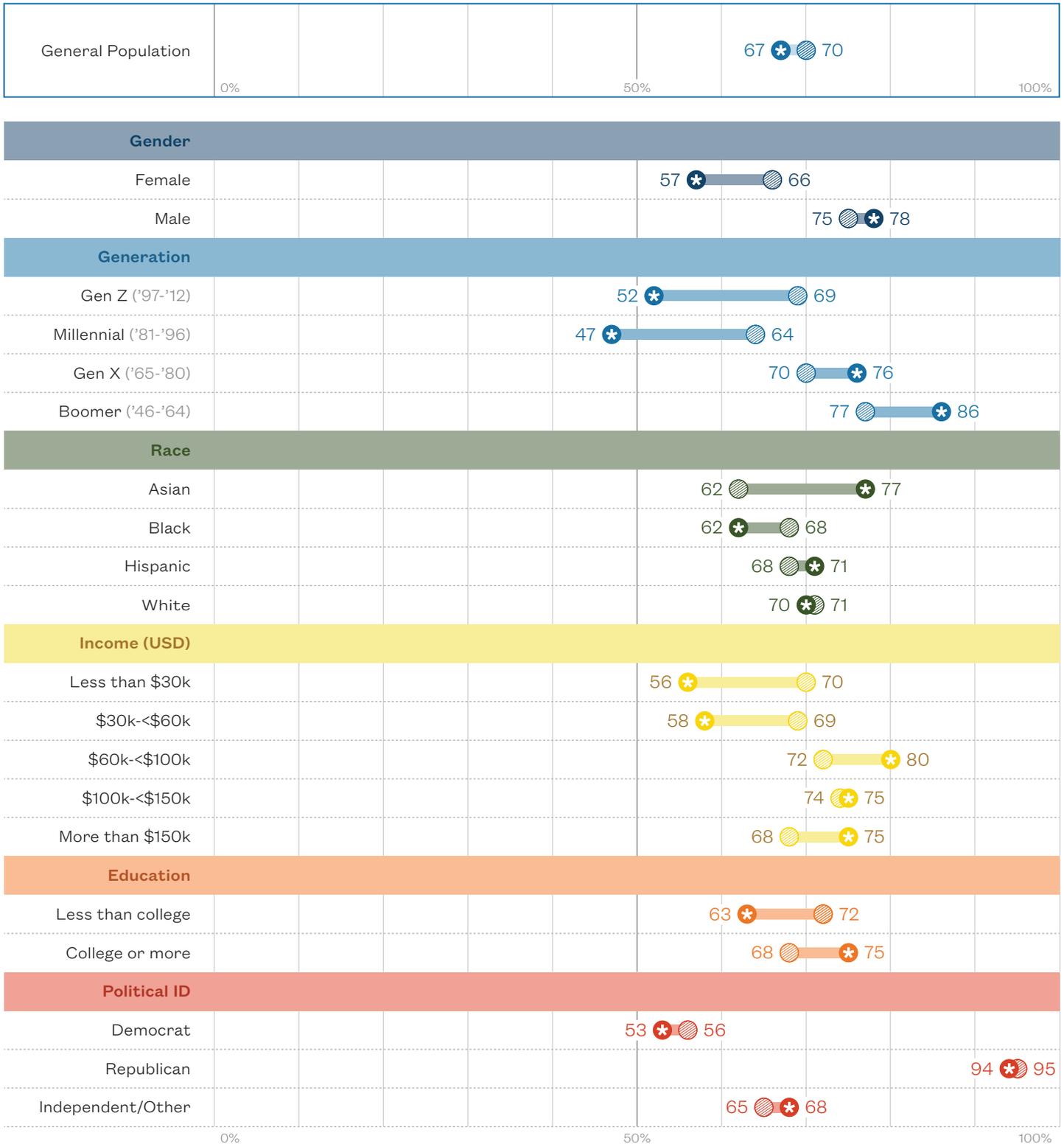
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 13

I am proud to be an American.

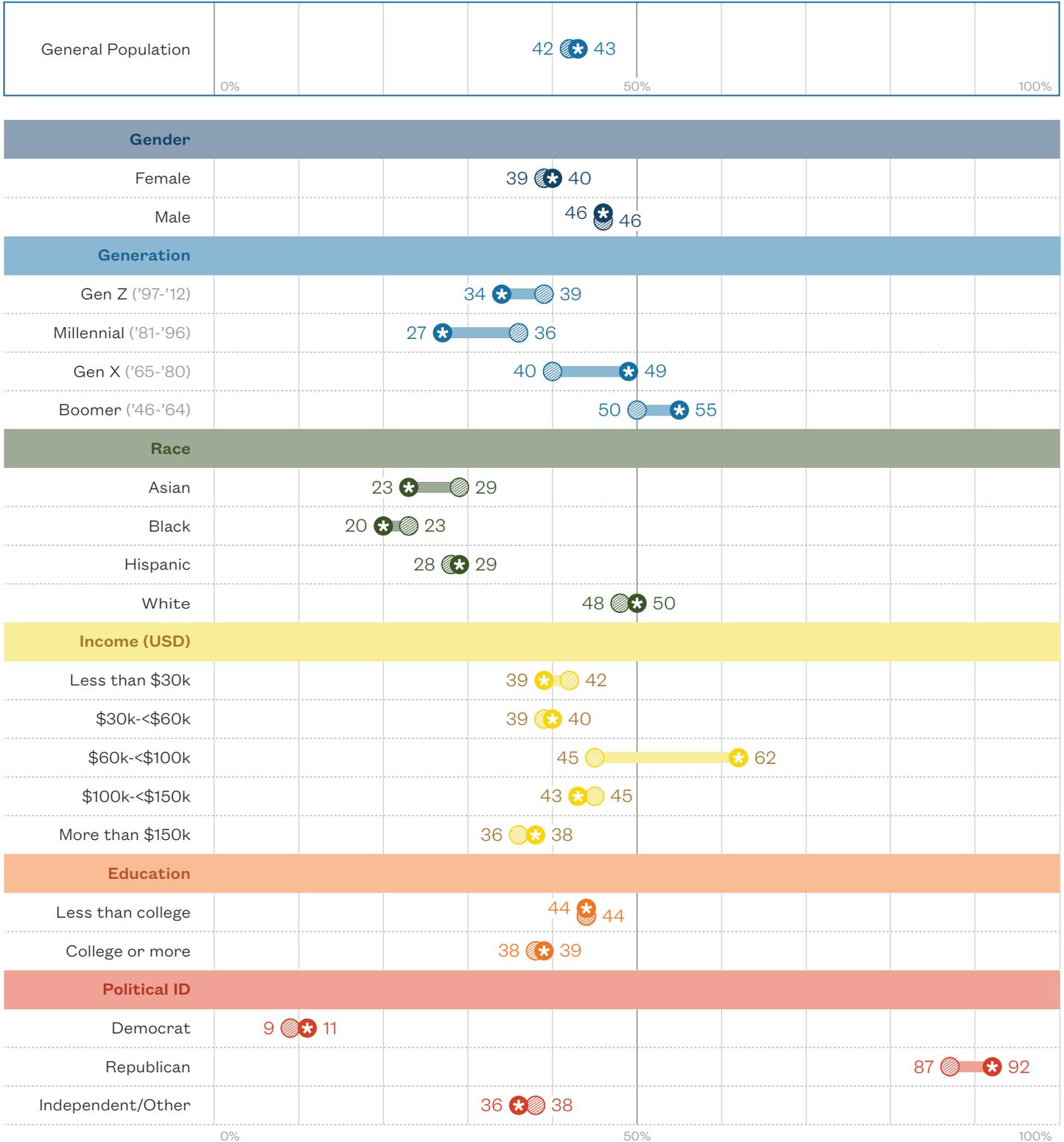
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 14

I approve of the job President Trump is doing.

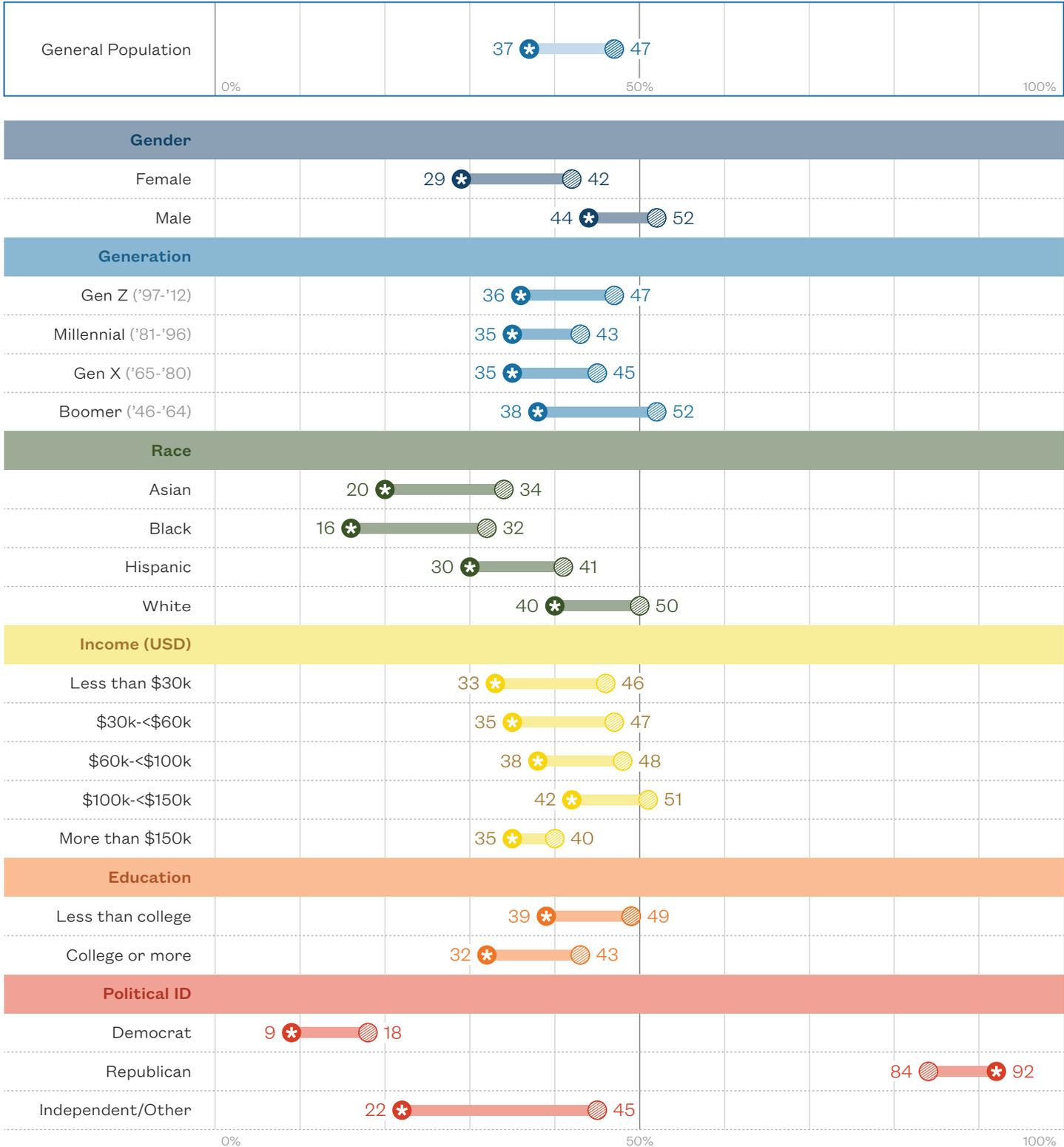
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 15

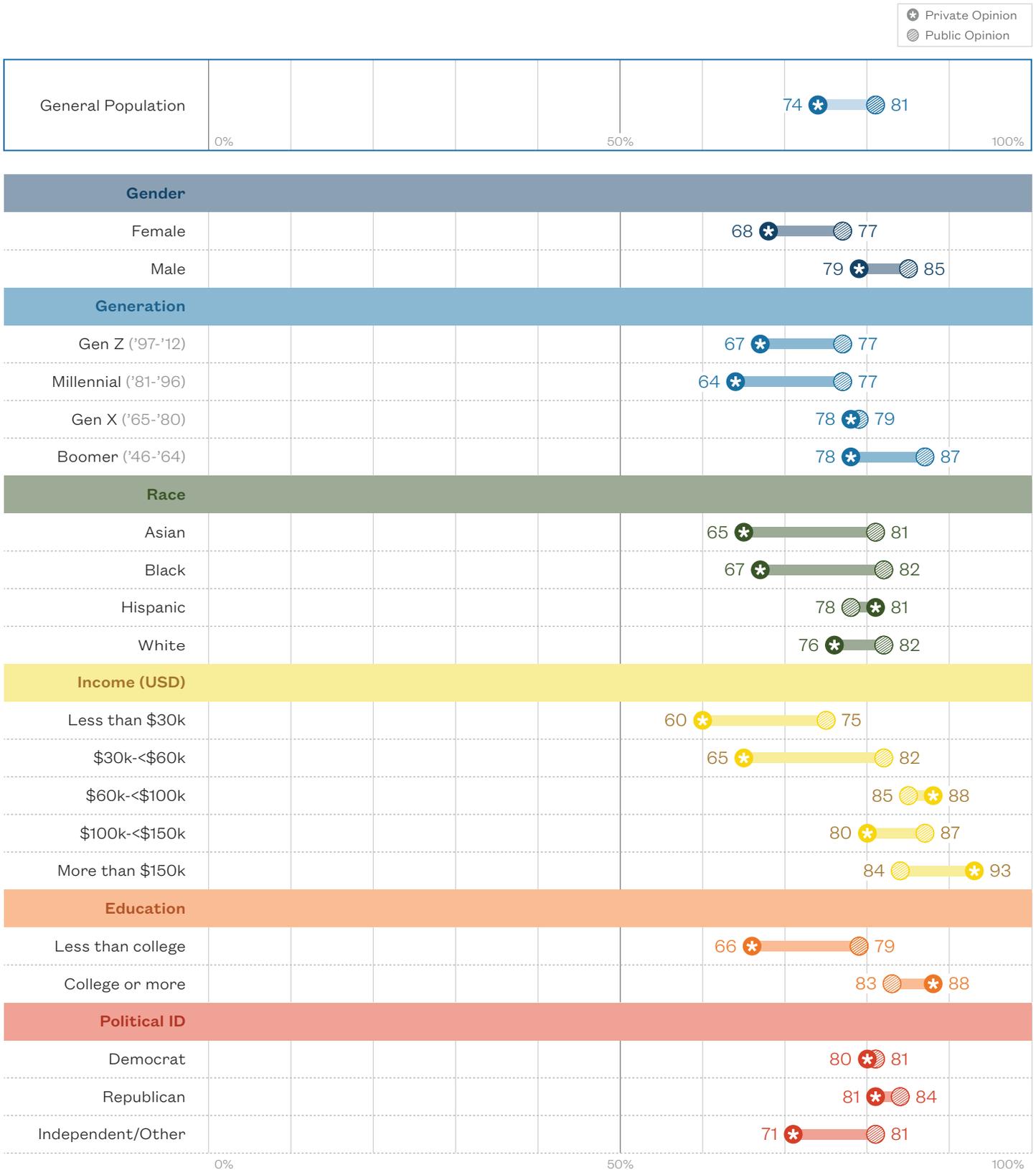
I approve of the way that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is trying to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse in federal spending.

* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 16

A fair society is one that focuses on equal opportunity, not equal outcomes.



Methodology

Integrity Statement

The *Populace Insights: Private Opinion in America (2025)* instrument was fielded from March 21, 2025 to March 31, 2025. The survey is based on 3,046 interviews conducted by YouGov on the internet, comprising a base sample of US adults (N = 2,040). Additionally, low-incidence groups were over sampled to improve the precision of private opinion estimates. In addition to the base sample of 2,040, the *Populace Insights: Private Opinion in America (2025)* survey was administered to oversamples of Asian respondents (N = 409), Black respondents (N = 280), and Hispanic respondents (N = 317).

The base sample and demographic oversamples were weighted according to gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, registered voter status, and US Census region based on voter registration lists, the U.S. Census American Community Survey, and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, as well as 2020 Presidential vote. Respondents were selected from YouGov to be representative of the general population in the United States, as well as of each demographic group represented in each oversample.

Four separate weights were calculated: a base sample weight where 2,040 respondents were weighted to the aforementioned general population targets, and then three oversample weights for each of the demographic oversamples (Black, Hispanic, and Asian) where respondents from each oversample and the base sample who fit in the demographic category were weighted together. The sample size for the weighted base sample is n = 2,040, while the weighted racial samples are as follows: 500 Asian respondents, 520 Black respondents, and 509 Hispanic respondents. The base sample weights range from 0.33 to 2.95 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.33. The Black oversample weights range from 0.22 to 2.46 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.42. The Hispanic oversample weights range from 0.32 to 3.67 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.55. The Asian oversample weights range from 0.24 to 5.06 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.59.

Sample Overview	N=3,046	Margin of Error (MOE)
General population (base sample)	2,040	2.3%
Asian adults oversample	500	5.1%
Black adults oversample	520	4.7%
Hispanic adults oversample	509	5.0%

About List Experiments

Populace Insights: Private Opinion in America (2025), like its predecessors [Social Pressure Index \(2024\)](#) and [Private Opinion in America \(2022\)](#), elicited Americans’ private opinions 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 3 to 4 statements 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 3 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.

Appendix

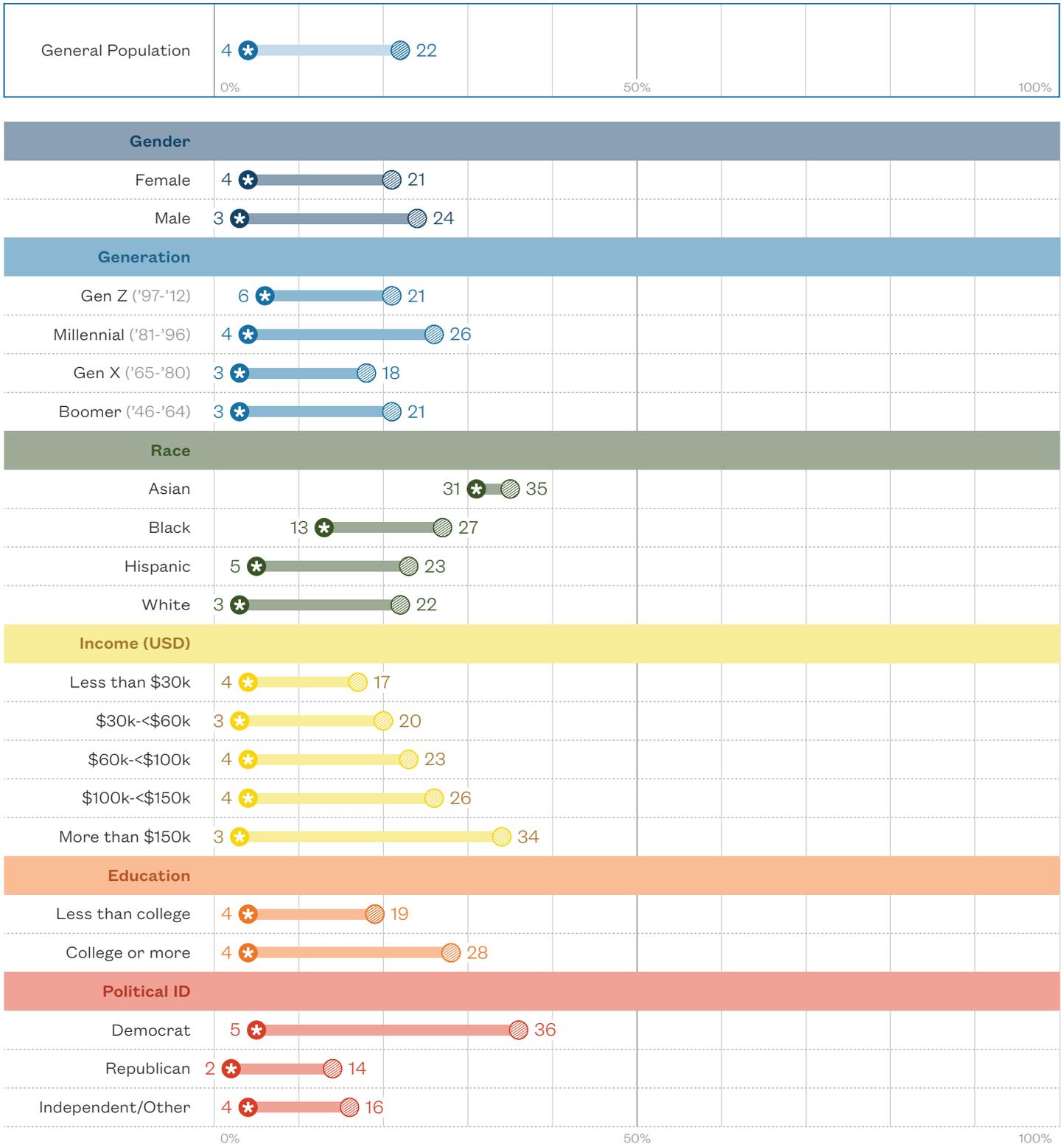
2024 Results

02	I trust the government to tell me the truth.	Page 24
03	In general, most people can be trusted.	Page 25
04	We live in a mostly fair society.	Page 26
05	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in schools and companies should be dismantled.	Page 27
06	People who have entered the U.S. illegally should be deported.	Page 28
07	The country is headed in the wrong direction.	Page 29
08	Because things have gotten so far off track, Americans may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.	Page 30
09	The government should restrict the expression of views deemed discriminatory or offensive.	Page 31
10	The American economy is doing well.	Page 32
11	I have confidence in the Supreme Court.	Page 33
12	Society is better off when individuals get to make decisions for themselves rather than having experts make decisions for everyone.	Page 34

Statement 02

In general, I trust the government to tell me the truth.*

* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion

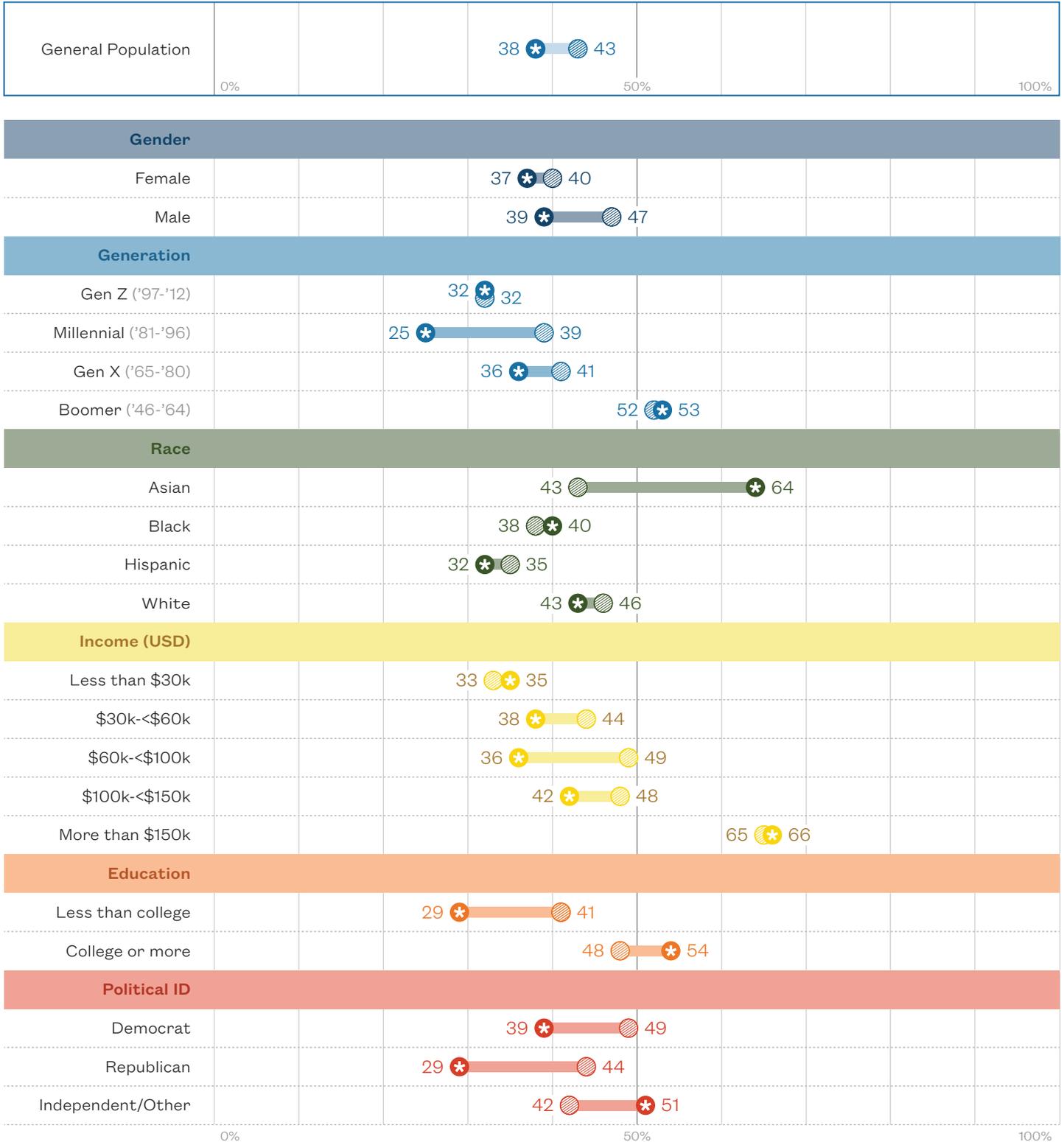


*In 2025, this statement was shortened to "I trust the government to tell the truth." The 2024 data is shown here for reference, however direct year-over-year comparisons of this statement are not recommended.

Statement 03

In general, most people can be trusted.

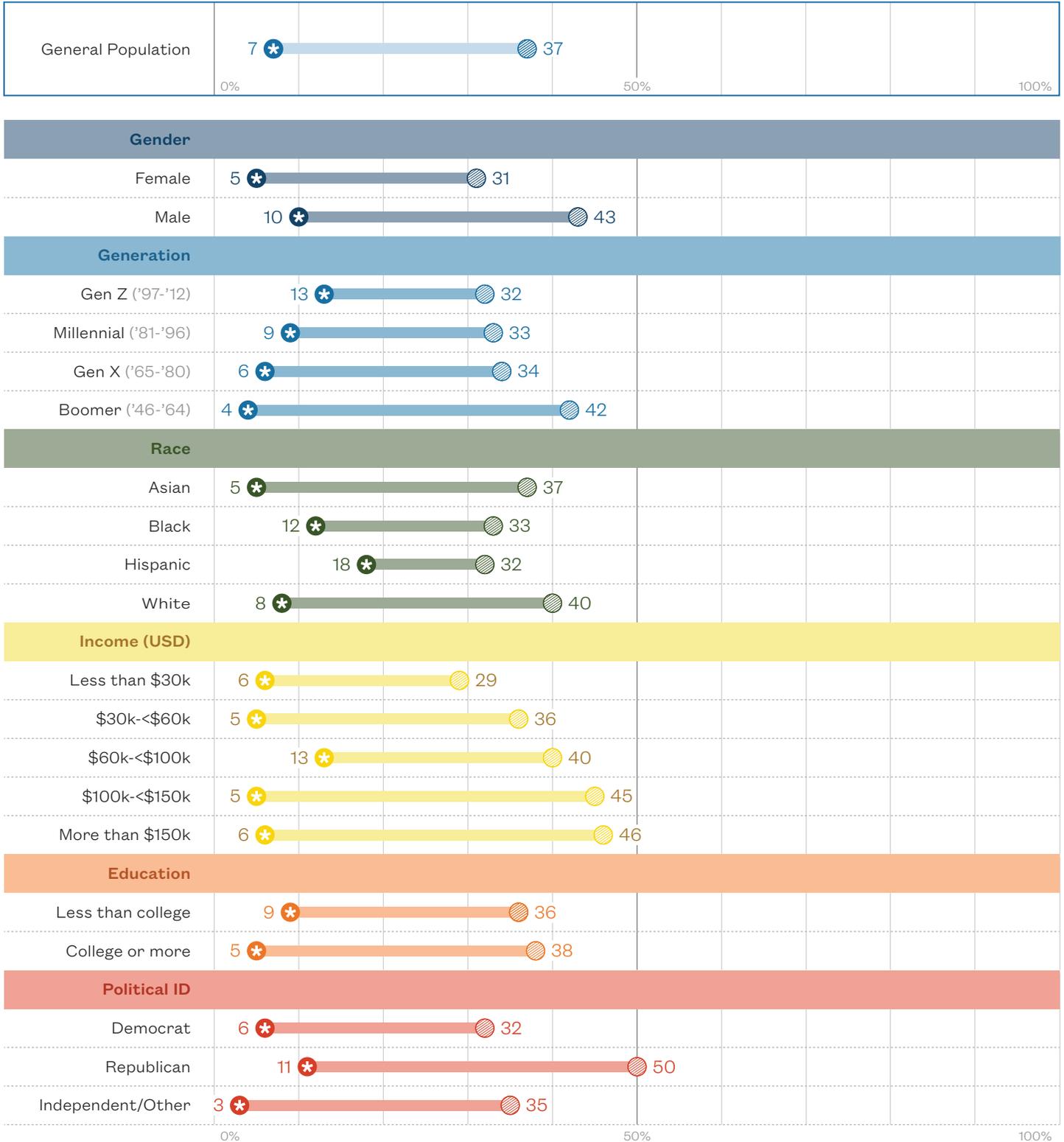
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 04

We live in a mostly fair society.

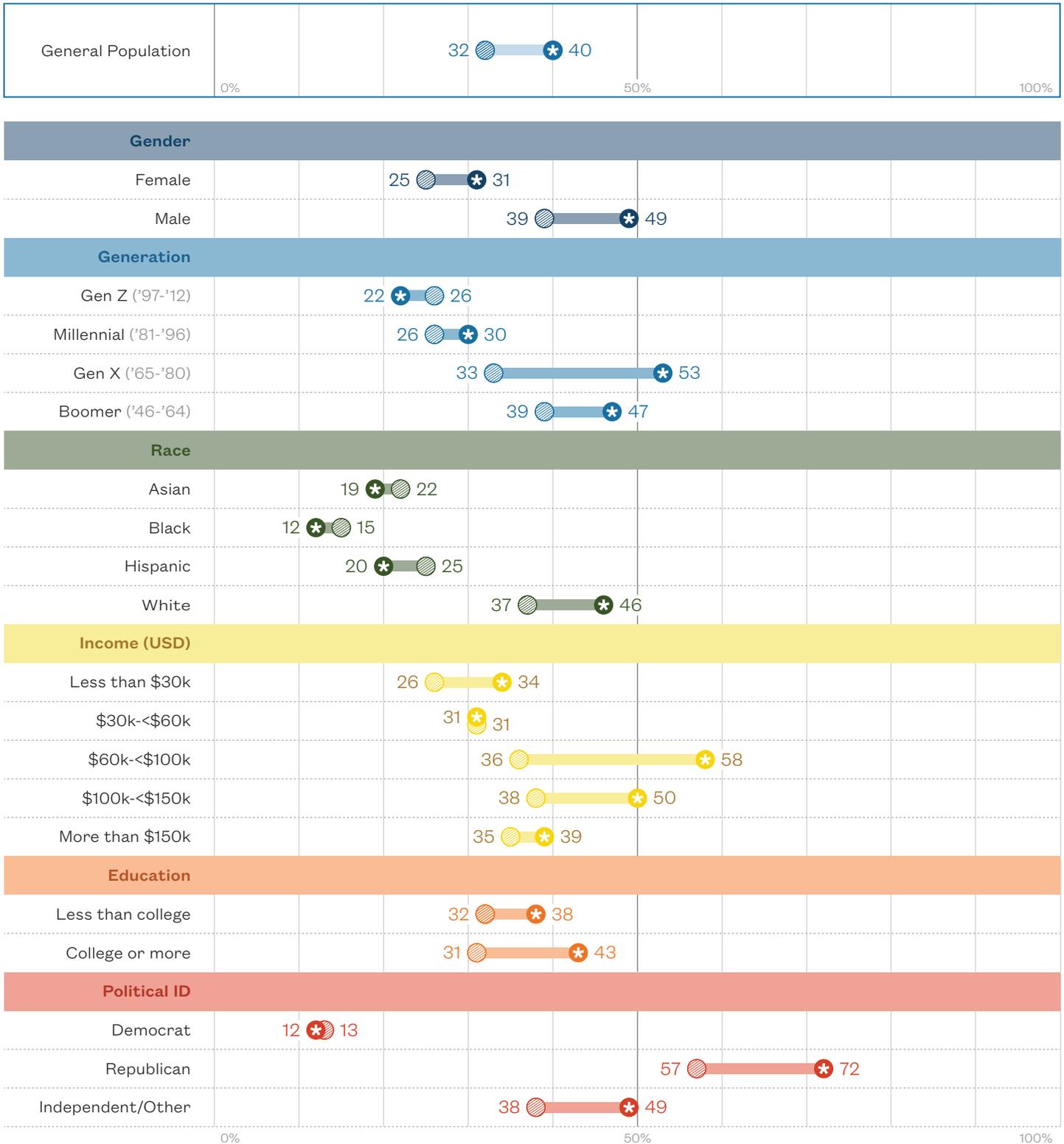
✱ Private Opinion
 ● Public Opinion



Statement 05

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in schools and companies should be dismantled.

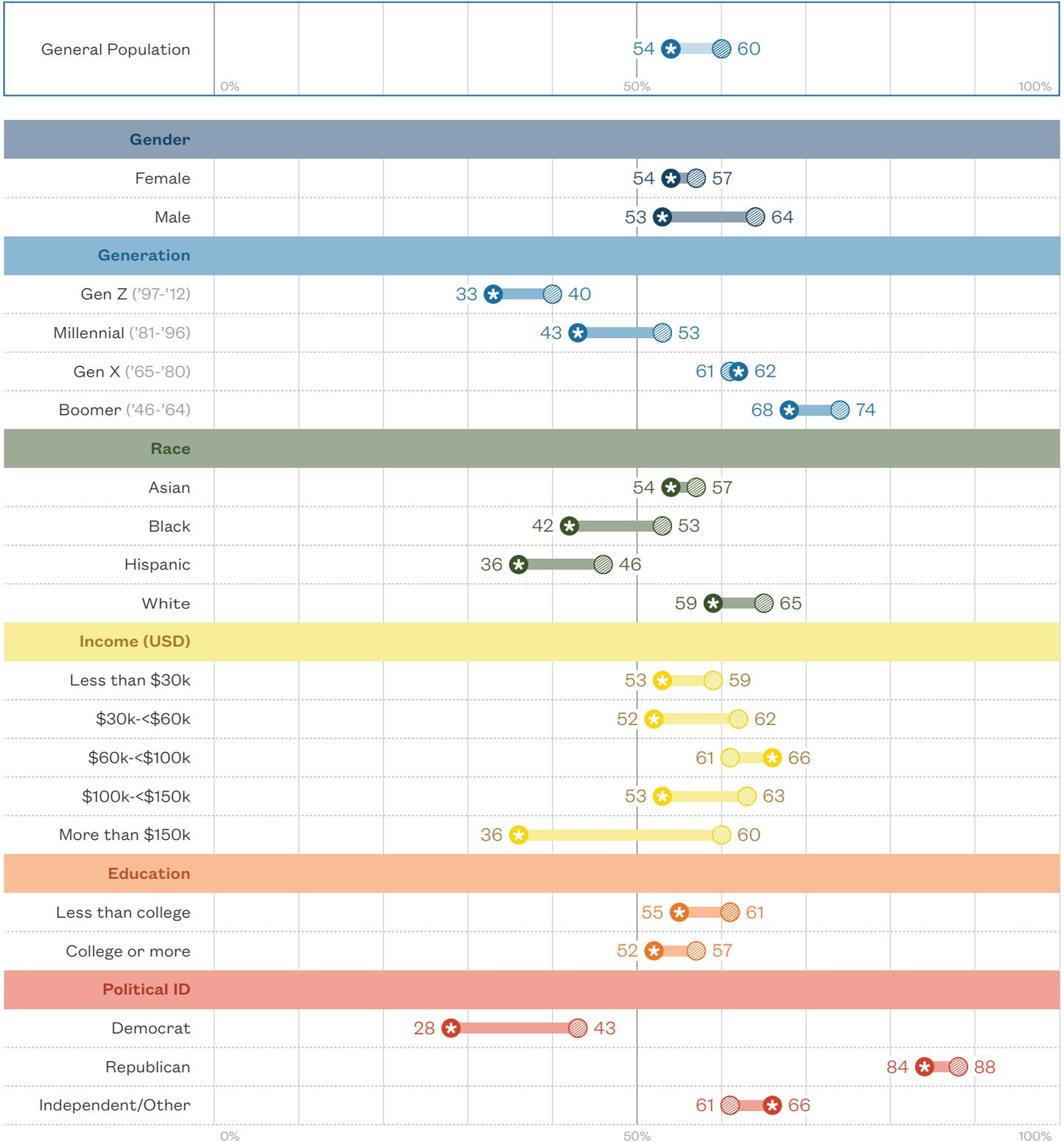
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 06

People who have entered the U.S. illegally should be deported.

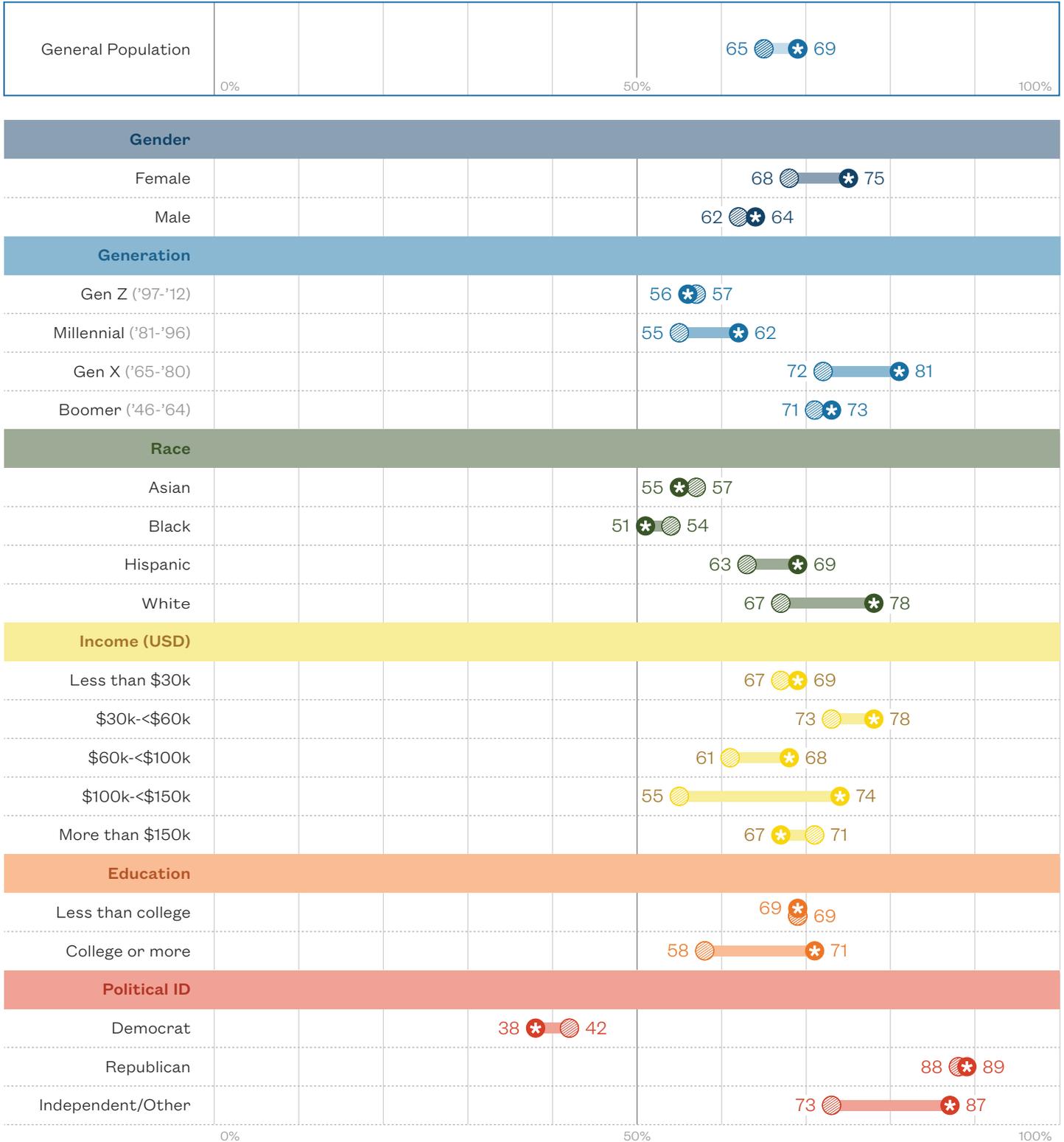
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 07

The country is headed in the wrong direction.

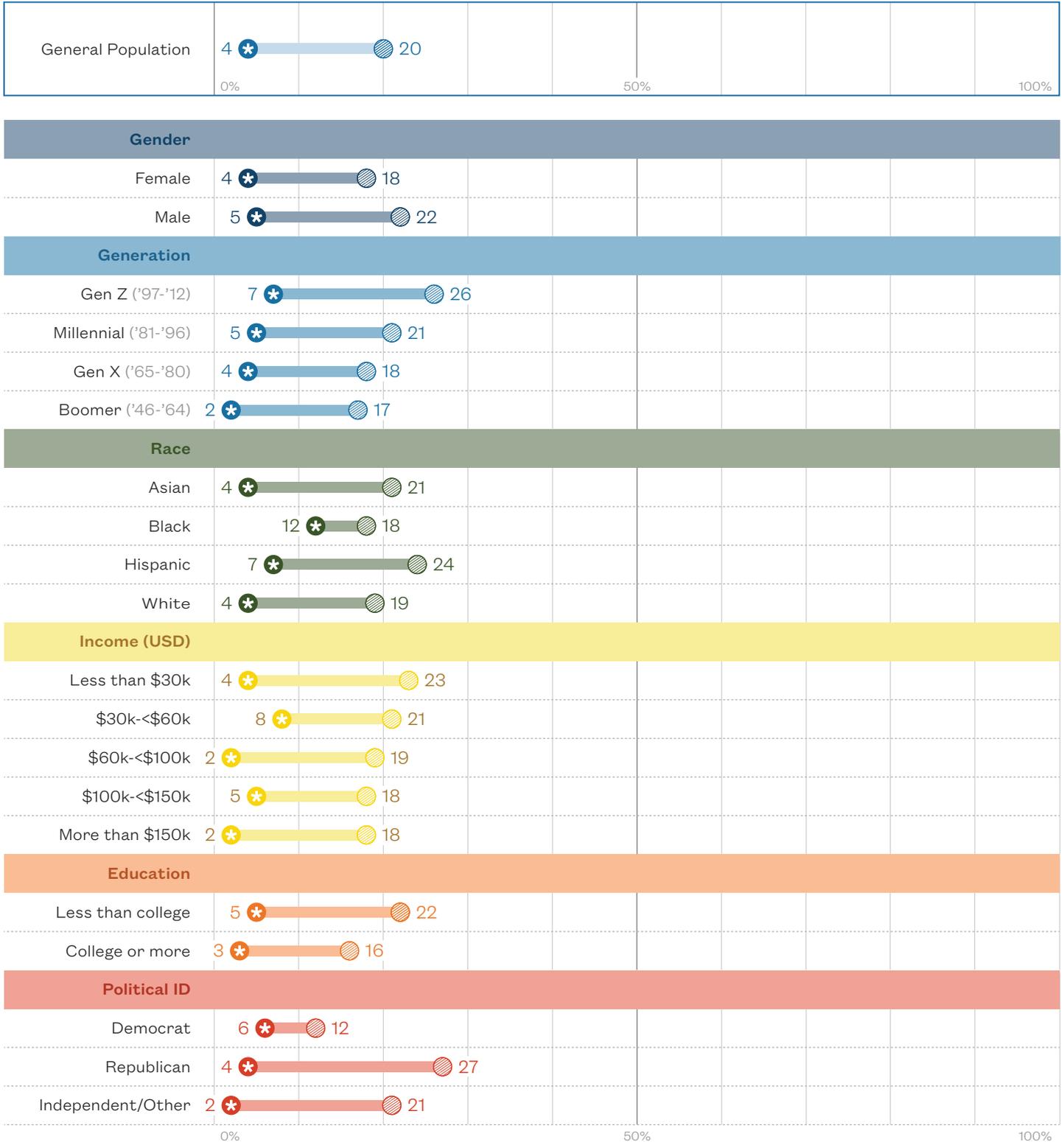
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 08

Because things have gotten so far off track, Americans may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.

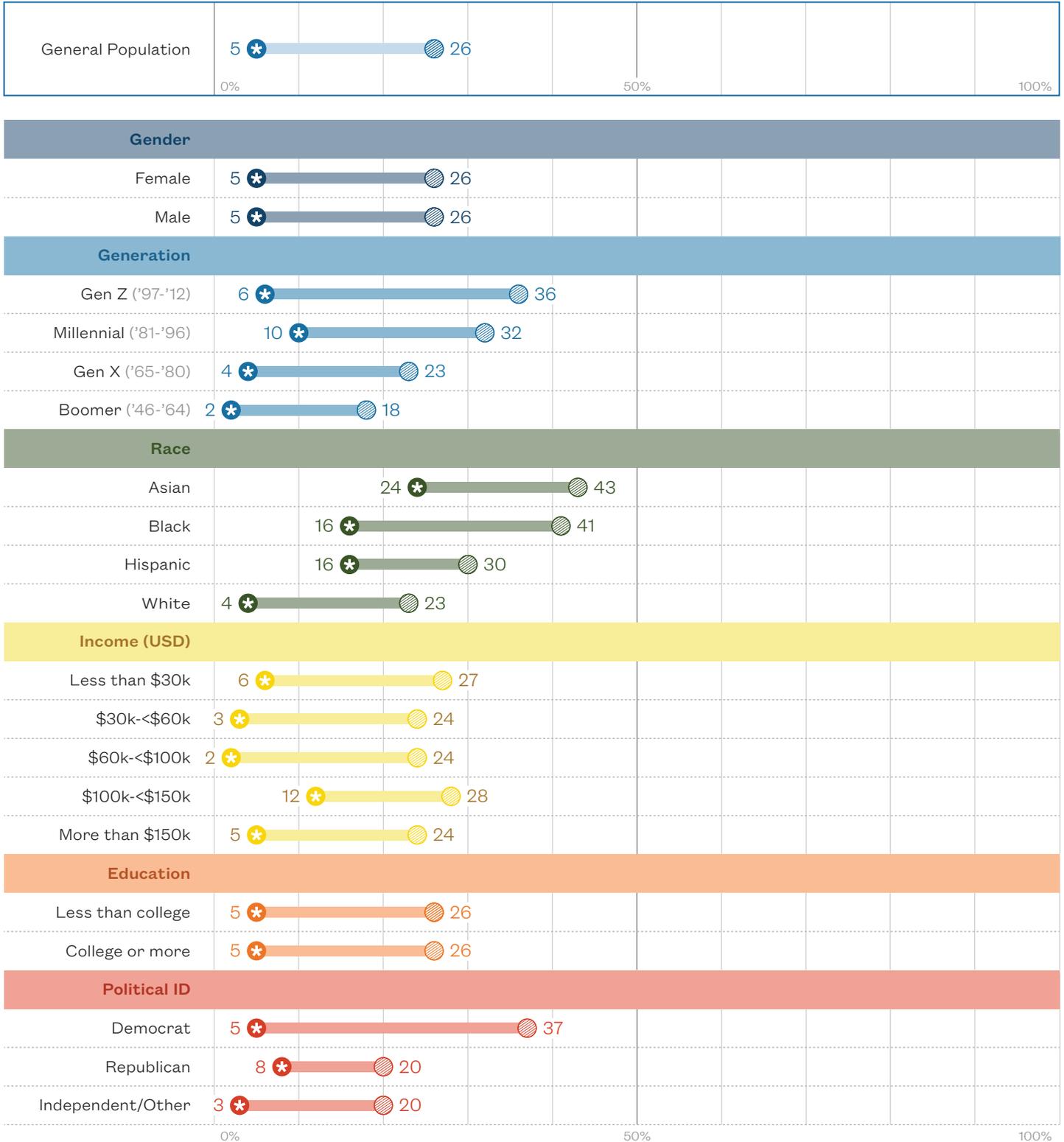
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 09

The government should restrict the expression of views deemed discriminatory or offensive.

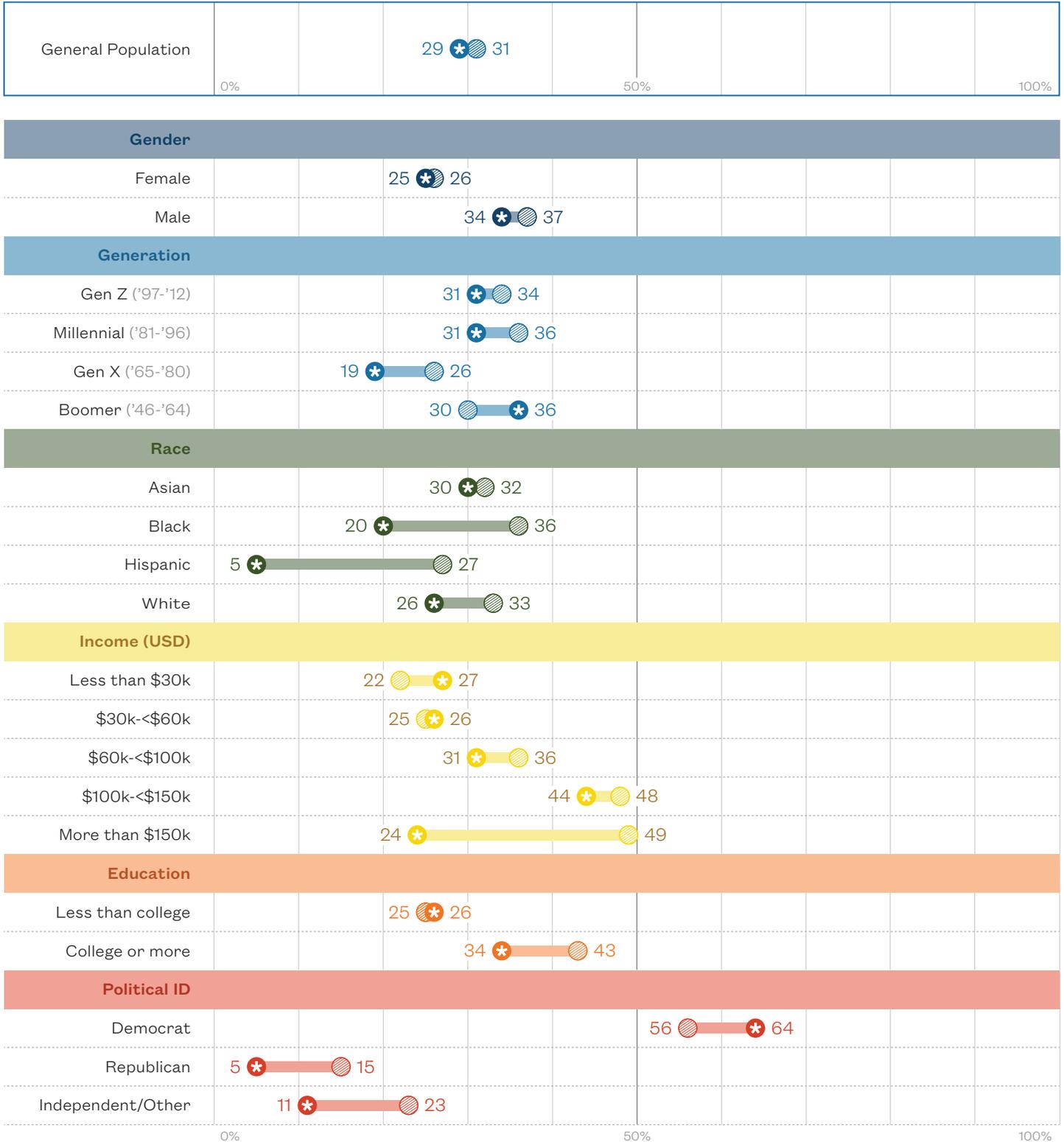
* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Statement 10

The American economy is doing well.

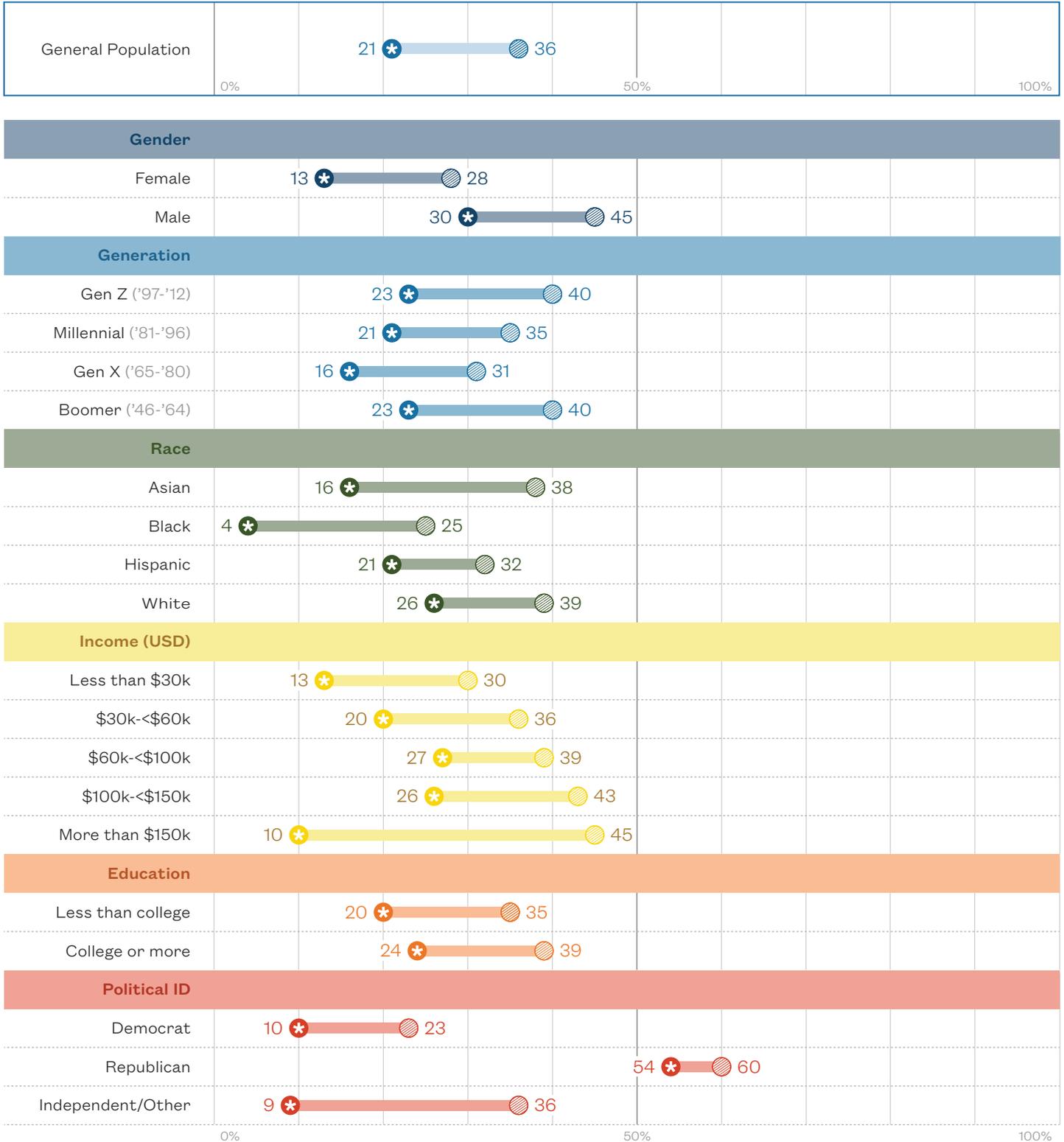
* Private Opinion
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Statement 11

I have confidence in the Supreme Court.

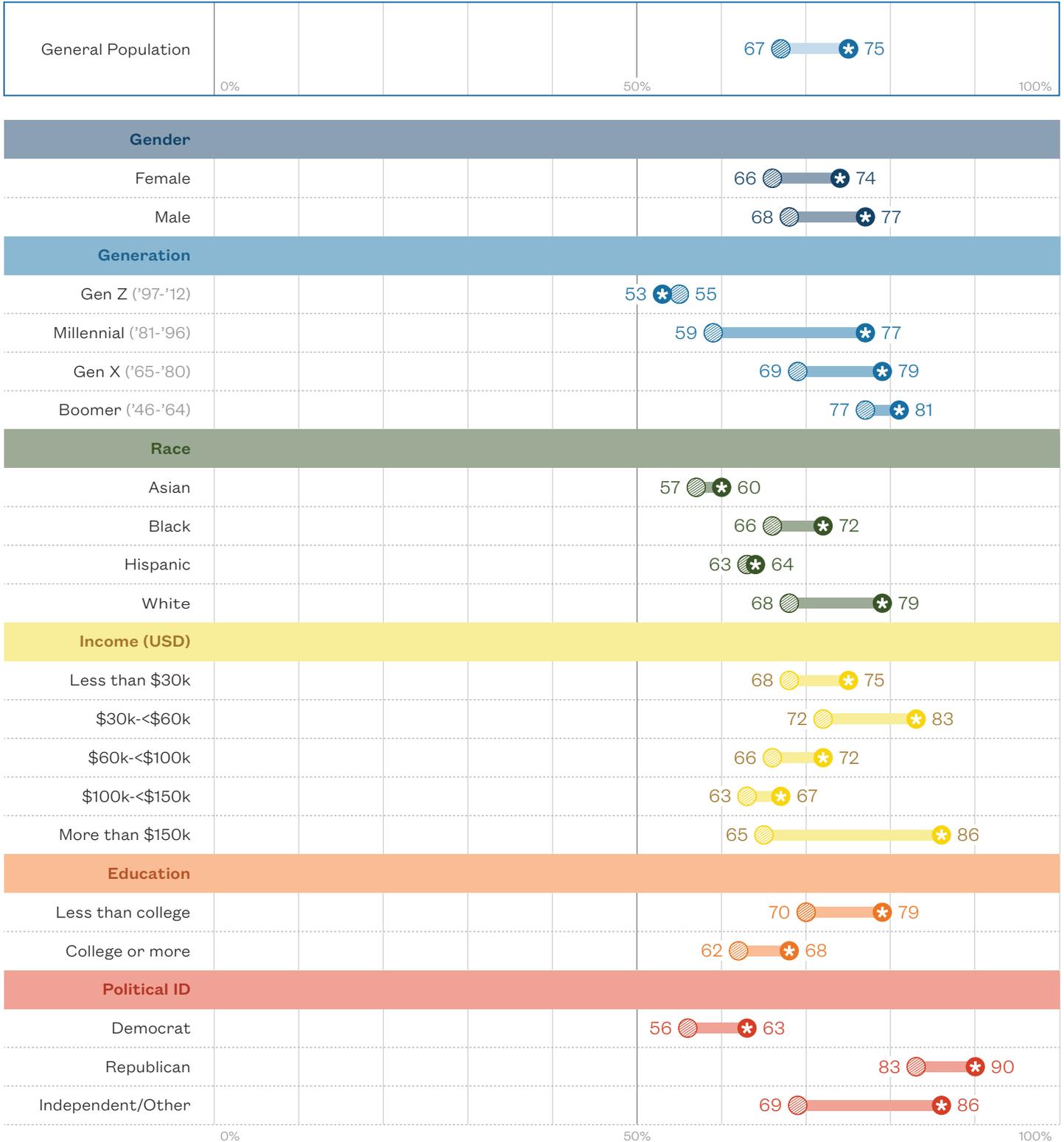
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Statement 12

Society is better off when individuals get to make decisions for themselves rather than having experts make decisions for everyone.

* Private Opinion
● Public Opinion



Populace