

Sikhism in the United States: What Americans Know and Need to Know

*Key Findings from Focus Groups and Survey
Conducted July-September 2014
for*

**NATIONAL SIKH
★ CAMPAIGN ★**

Methodology

■ Qualitative Research

- Three focus groups conducted July 2014
 - One group in Iselin, NJ, among whites with mixed levels of education
 - Two groups in Chicago, IL: one group among whites without a college degree, one among whites with a college degree)

■ Quantitative Research

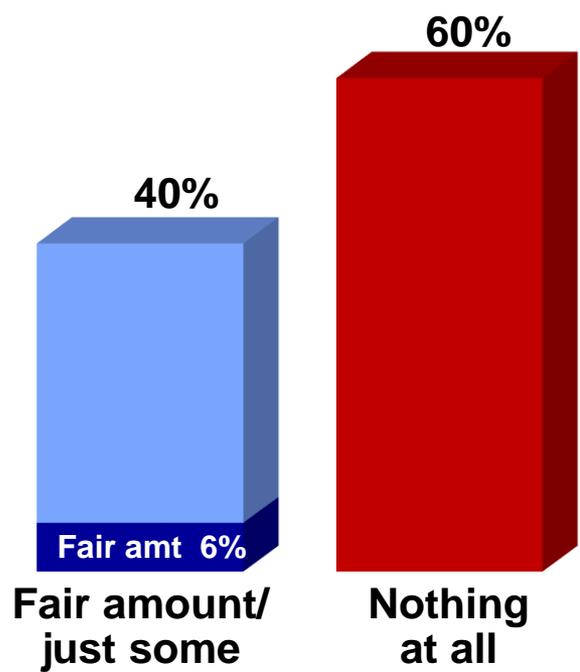
- Online survey among 1,144 non-Asian Americans*
 - 239 interviews conducted August 29 to September 3, 2014 (test run of the survey)
 - 905 interviews conducted September 23 to September 28, 2014

* Characteristics of the survey sample can be found in the Appendix.

Most Americans are a blank slate concerning Sikhs; a majority admit they know nothing at all.

How much do you feel you know about Sikh Americans?

Know at least some about:
 Jewish Americans 86%
 Muslim Americans 76%
 Hindu Americans 62%

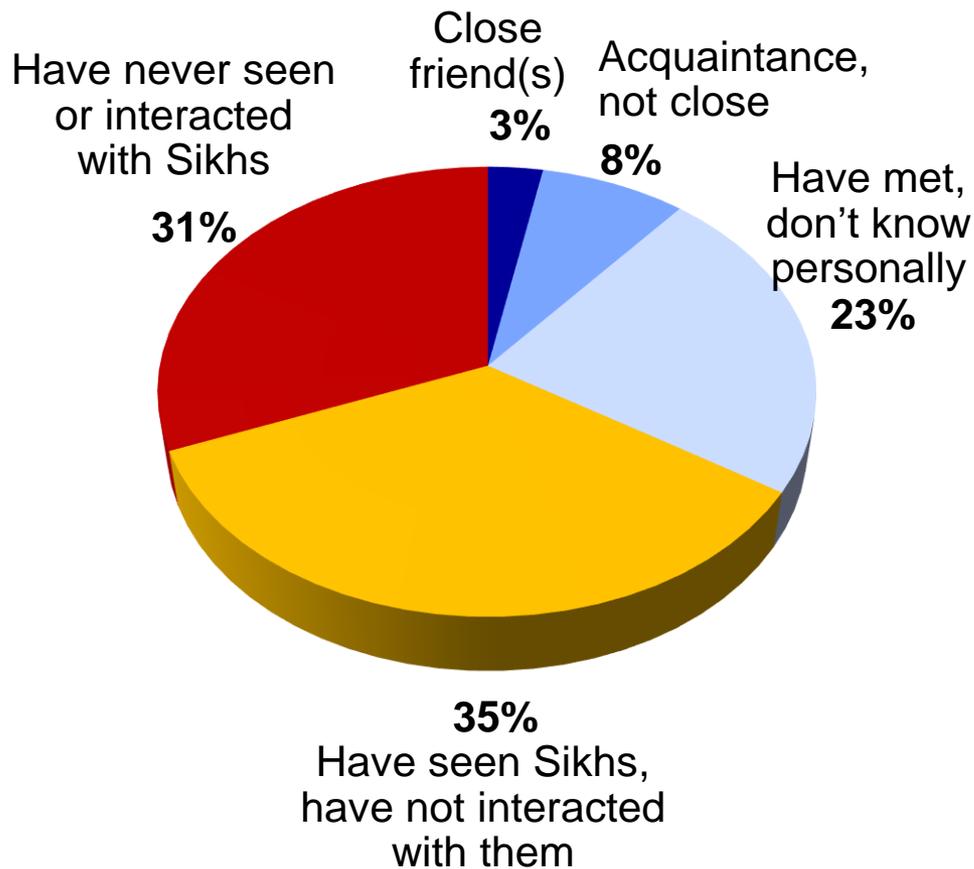


Know great deal/fair amount/just some

Men	45%
Women	35%
Age 16 to 34	47%
Age 35 to 49	40%
Age 50 to 64	35%
Age 65/over	35%
High school grad/less	30%
Some college	34%
Four-year college grad	49%
Postgraduate education	59%

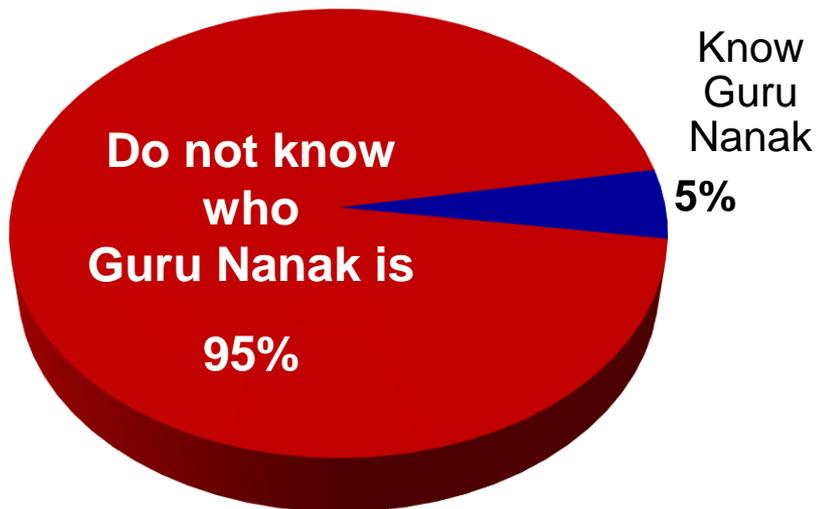
Few Americans have had direct, personal contact with Sikhs.

Which best describes your experiences interacting with Sikhs?



	Close friend/ acquaintance/ have met
All adults	34%
Men:	
Non-college grads	33%
College grads	52%
Women:	
Non-college grads	23%
College grads	37%
Urban	43%
Suburban	36%
Small town/rural area	25%
Northeast	40%
Midwest	31%
South	24%
West	45%

The overwhelming majority of Americans have never heard of Guru Nanak.



	Know who Guru Nanak is
All adults	5%
Knowledge of Sikhs:	
Know at least some	10%
Know nothing	2%
Experience with Sikhs:	
Know personally	12%
Have met, don't know	8%
Never met/heard of	3%

When they see a Sikh person, most Americans assume the person is from India or the Middle East; only men with turbans are associated with Sikhism.

If you saw this person on the street, what could you tell by looking at him/her?

(aggregated volunteered comments)



India, of Indian descent	35%
Middle Eastern	28%
Muslim	20%
Hindu	13%
Sikh	11%

India, of Indian descent	19%
Middle Eastern	24%
Muslim	17%
Hindu	7%
Sikh	6%

India, of Indian descent	40%
Middle Eastern	20%
Muslim	2%
Hindu	3%
Sikh	0%

India, of Indian descent	35%
Middle Eastern	20%
Muslim	17%
Hindu	10%
Sikh	2%

Most don't feel they have much in common with Sikhs in images, but liberals are most likely to feel commonality.

Proportions who feel they have a great deal/fair amount in common with each
 (6-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = have a great deal in common)



All adults	18%	All adults	29%	All adults	16%
Liberals	27%	Liberals	42%	Liberals	22%
Middle-of-roads	17%	Middle-of-roads	27%	Middle-of-roads	16%
Conservatives	18%	Conservatives	27%	Conservatives	16%

Whites who have a college degree feel more in common with Sikhs than those who do not have a degree.

Proportions who feel they have a great deal/fair amount in common with each
 (6-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = have a great deal in common)



All whites	18%	All whites	28%	All whites	16%
Non-college grads	15%	Non-college grads	23%	Non-college grads	14%
College grads	24%	College grads	39%	College grads	22%

Most Americans know too little to have an impression of Sikh Americans; some admit wariness around Sikhs, but many try to keep an open mind.

“I don’t know anything about the Sikh. It’s the first time I’ve ever heard that word. And I’m judgmental about it, and I’ll admit it.”

Chicago focus group participant

“Sometimes their appearance may make me feel a little bit wary . . . but I feel pretty awful for the initial reaction.”

Survey respondent

“I’ll say it, you know, just, you think that they’re Muslim. I do.”

Chicago focus group participant

“I do not believe I have ever met a Sikh American and I do not know anything about them. I feel that all cultures and races should be welcome in America and would not judge them by their race.”

Survey respondent

“It sounds racist, but ever since 9/11, I’m just a little cautious around Middle Eastern people. . . . But that’s not Sikhs, per se. . . . I’m just talking Middle Eastern in general, that’s where the caution comes in.”

Iselin focus group participant

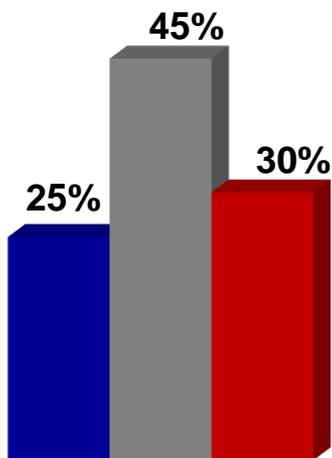
Without much knowledge to form attitudes, Americans rate their feelings toward Sikh Americans as generally neutral.

How warm or cold do you feel toward this group?



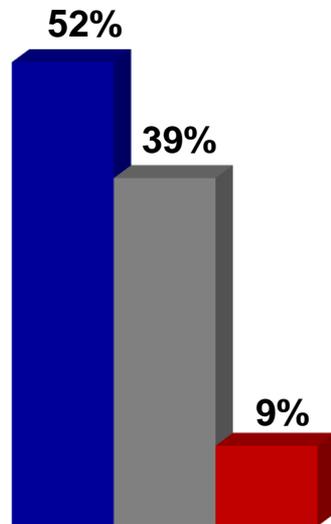
Muslim Americans

*Mean = 48.6**



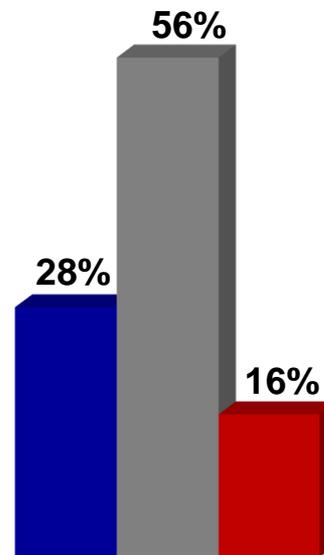
Jewish Americans

*Mean = 65.6**



Sikh Americans

*Mean = 54.1**



Feelings toward Sikh Americans: mean ratings

Age 16 to 34	60.1
Age 35 to 49	53.3
Age 50 to 64	52.2
Age 65/over	47.6
Liberals	60.6
Middle-of-roads	53.3
Conservatives	51.0
Knowledge of Sikhs:	
Know at least some	62.4
Know nothing	48.6

* Ratings on zero-to-100 scale, 100 = extremely warm, 50 = in the middle/neither warm nor cold, 0 = extremely cold

The perception that Sikhs do not make enough effort to integrate emerges in focus groups.

“It’s not that they’re anti-American, but I think their own country, their own purpose, their own cause, their own agenda, their own religion takes so much priority that I don’t think they would ever uphold American patriotism.

Chicago focus group participant

“Being a Sikh comes first to them, even above being an Indian. The Sikhs seem to be pretty separatist.”

Chicago focus group participant

“They tend to keep to their communities.”

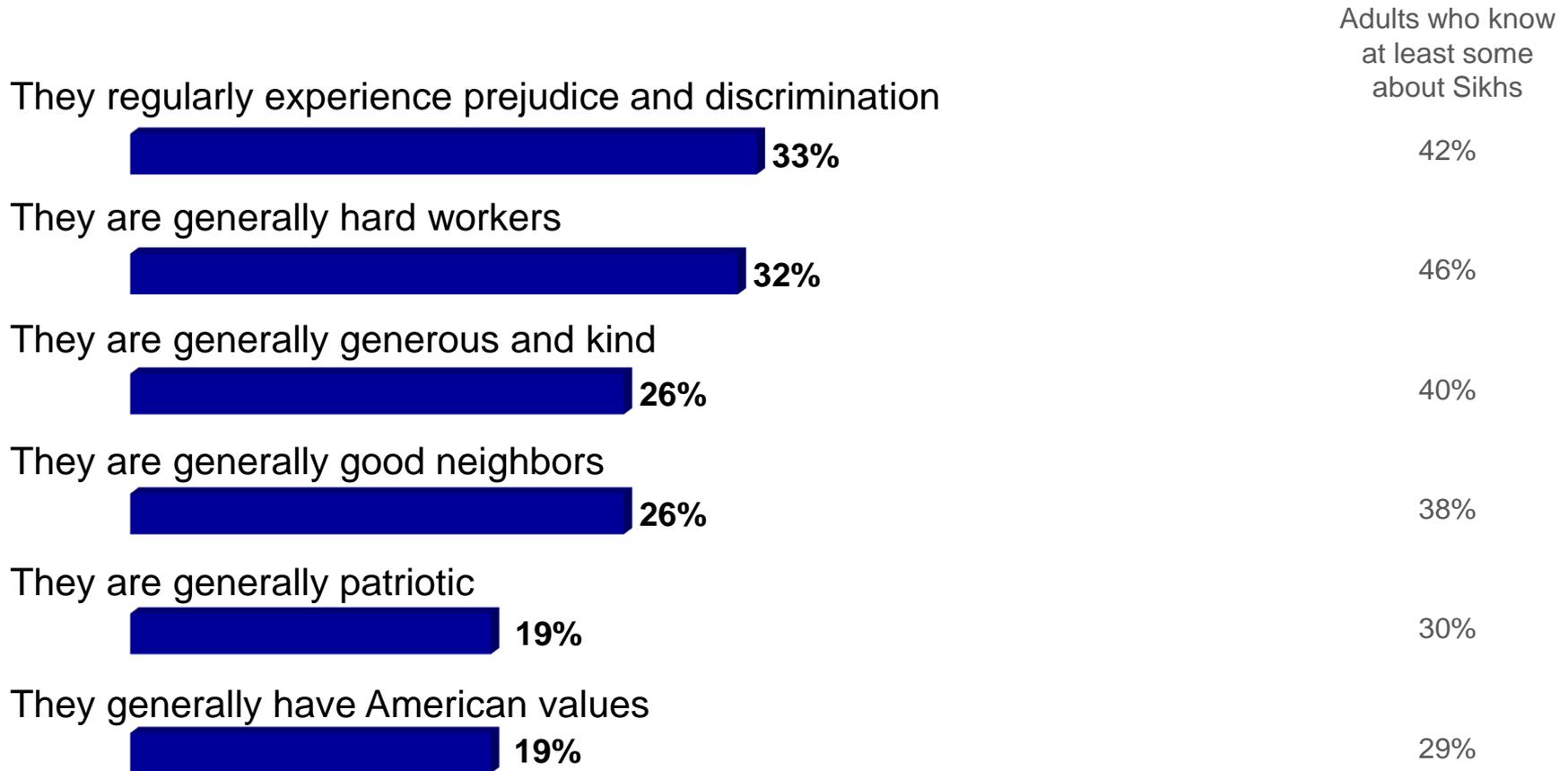
Iselin focus group participant

“Having lived in England, I found them unwilling to integrate into their host country's culture. They move into a town and slowly establish their own culture.”

Survey respondent

Few Americans know enough to associate positive qualities with Sikh Americans.

Proportions who feel that each describes Sikh Americans well
(8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = describes extremely well)



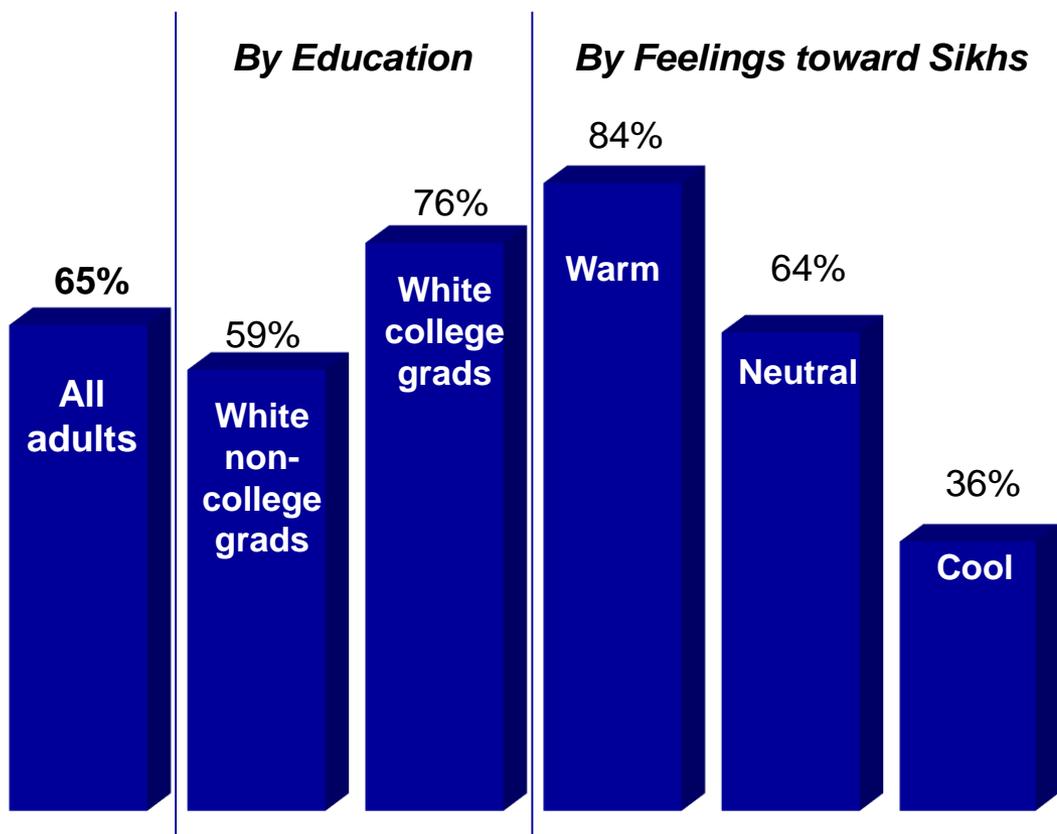
Younger and more educated Americans are more likely to associate positive qualities with Sikh Americans.

Proportions who feel that each describes Sikh Americans well
 (8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = describes extremely well)

	All age 16 to 34	All age 35 to 64	All age 65/over	White non-college graduates	White college graduates
They are generally good neighbors	33%	24%	21%	22%	33%
They are generally patriotic	21%	18%	18%	17%	24%
They generally have American values	23%	18%	16%	17%	24%

A description of the Sikh religion and Sikh Americans evokes a positive reaction; those with initially warm feelings toward Sikhs react the most favorably.

Proportions who favorably rate description of Sikh religion and Sikh Americans
(8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = description gives me an extremely favorable impression)



Summary of Description*

- from Northern India, fifth-largest organized religion, over 25 million Sikhs, half million in US
- 500 years ago, Nanak walked South Asia teaching all paths lead to One God, all people equal, each can experience freedom through loving and serving others
- means Seeker of Truth
- faith rooted in love; equality of women and men, denounces discrimination in gender, race, caste, creed, color
- three core tenets: meditation on/devotion to Creator, truthful living, service to humanity; values of honesty, compassion, generosity, humility, integrity, service, spirituality
- prayer ends with wish for welfare of all mankind; place of worship welcomes all faiths/backgrounds
- many wear five articles of faith to express commitment to values, incl. long hair, turban
- lived in America over 150 years, helped build Transcontinental Railroad, served in every major world war, at forefront of civil rights struggles, first responders on 9/11

* Full text in Appendix

The focus on equality stands out as one of the most positive aspects of the Sikh religion.

*What in particular did you learn in this description that gives you a **favorable impression** of the Sikh Religion and Sikh Americans?*

(aggregated volunteered comments)

Stand for equality, equality for all	26%	women 32%, men 19%
Against discrimination	12%	
Caring, compassionate, generous	10%	
Have been here for a long time, came to America over 100 years ago	10%	
Care about people, ready to serve people, humanity	9%	
Welcome all religions, people all faiths	7%	
First responders on September 11	6%	

A number of messages about Sikhs' history in America, patriotism, and values help Americans connect.

Proportions rating each as helping them connect with/understand Sikh Americans
(8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = makes me feel a strong connection, helps me understand Sikhs/Sikh culture)

- 53% AMERICAN STORY.** Sikhs embody the quintessential American story. Like the Irish, Italians, and Chinese before them, Sikhs immigrated to this country seeking a chance to build a better life for their families through hard work. Today, Sikhs serve on their local PTAs and in Boy Scout troops, run small businesses and local charities, and sing our national anthem with pride. They are part of the fabric of their communities in every corner of this nation. They know that the United States is the greatest country on earth, and they are proud to call themselves Americans.
- 52% PATRIOTISM.** Sikhs have a long history of serving in the U.S. armed forces with honor, including World War I and II. More than 80,000 Sikh soldiers died fighting for Allied forces during the wars, and their service to the United States continues to this day, with Sikhs serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 49% BULLYING.** A 2014 research study found that more than half of Sikh children endure bullying in schools, and the numbers are worse for children who wear turbans. Two in three turbaned children report being bullied in schools, more than double the national average for all children. In May 2007, a student wrestled down a Sikh boy at a New York City public school, forcibly cut his hair, and flushed it down the toilet, and the next year in New Jersey a Sikh boy's turban was set on fire by another student. Bullying is a serious problem that affects kids nationwide, and all Americans play an important role in helping to stop bullying for all children.
- 48% PARALLEL WITH AMERICAN HISTORY.** If the American Revolution had started out as a spiritual movement instead of a political movement, it would look a lot like the Sikh religion. Just as the Founding Fathers of the United States put together a Bill of Rights that protected the fundamental rights for all US citizens, Sikhs also share a core set of beliefs that focuses on the rights of all people to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Sikhs believe that all men and women are created equal and that the right to practice religion freely is encoded in Sikhs' founding documents. For hundreds of years, Sikhs have fought, and many have given their lives, to protect the rights of others--including Hindus, Christians, and Muslims--to practice their own religions.

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A number of messages about Sikhs' history in America, patriotism, and values help Americans connect.

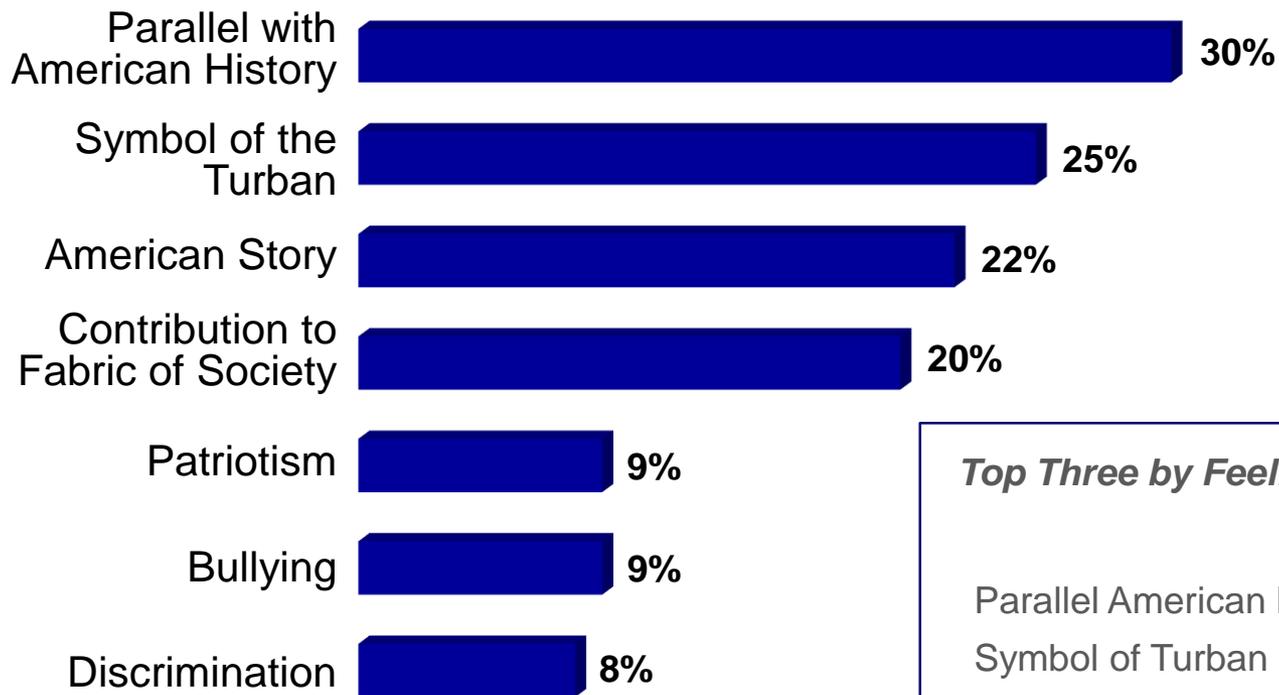
Proportions rating each as helping them connect with/understand Sikh Americans
(8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = makes me feel a strong connection, helps me understand Sikhs/Sikh culture)

(continued)

- 44% DISCRIMINATION.** Since September 11, 2001, there has been a dramatic increase in hate-based violence against Sikhs. Four days after the attacks, a Sikh man was shot and killed while planting flowers in front of his store in Mesa, AZ. In 2012, a man fatally shot six people and wounded four others at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. It was the biggest act of violence against a faith community in the United States since the 1963 church bombing in Birmingham that took four little girls. Many Sikh Americans report that these violent acts are only the tip of the iceberg. Many experience daily encounters with discrimination and hate incidents that go unreported and unrecognized by the general public.
- 44% CONTRIBUTION TO FABRIC OF SOCIETY.** Like many immigrant communities in America, Sikhs came to this country to work hard and seek a better life for their families. The first Sikhs immigrated to the United States over 150 years ago, most of them settling in California as farmers. And they've strengthened America--from inventing fiber optic technologies to creating businesses that employ thousands of American workers. Today, Sikhs are leaders in business and their communities--from the most prominent peach farmers to the CEO of MasterCard--distinguishing themselves in fields from medicine to technology to public service.
- 42% SYMBOL OF THE TURBAN.** Today, and for the last 500 years, many Sikhs around the world have worn the turban as an expression of their faith and their commitment to serve humanity. Throughout history, Sikhs have worn the turban to signal their readiness to protect all people against injustice, regardless of faith, gender, caste, or color. Today, a Sikh American who wears a turban signals that he or she is always ready to put him- or herself forward to serve the community's needs. It represents their commitment to the equality, unity, and service that are at the heart of the American ethic.

Connecting Sikhs to American values and explaining the meaning of the turban top the list in giving people better understanding, though “Turban” is driven by those who already feel favorable toward Sikhs.

Which one of these statements is the most important and gives you the greatest understanding of Sikh Americans?



Top Three by Feelings toward Sikh Americans

	Warm	Neutral	Cool
Parallel American History	29%	33%	23%
Symbol of Turban	33%	24%	16%
American Story	24%	21%	26%

Important regional and age differences emerge on preferred messaging.

Which one of these statements is the most important and gives you the greatest understanding of Sikh Americans?

	Age 16 to 34	Age 35 to 49	Age 50 to 64	Age 65/over	North- east	Mid- west	South	West
Parallel with American History	27%	31%	31%	32%	29%	33%	30%	28%
Symbol of the Turban	36%	22%	22%	13%	29%	21%	21%	31%
American Story	17%	26%	24%	25%	28%	21%	26%	16%
Contribution to Fabric of Society	12%	21%	19%	33%	9%	19%	23%	26%
Patriotism	6%	11%	11%	11%	12%	11%	8%	7%
Bullying	9%	5%	8%	13%	11%	7%	11%	7%
Discrimination	7%	8%	9%	6%	6%	10%	8%	6%

Values and equality resonate in the “Parallel with American History” message.

PARALLEL WITH AMERICAN HISTORY

(highlighting exercise*)

If the American Revolution had started out as a spiritual movement instead of a political movement, it would look a lot like the Sikh religion. Just as the **Founding Fathers** of the United States put together a **Bill of Rights** that protected the **fundamental rights for all US citizens**, **Sikhs also share a core set of beliefs that focuses on the rights of all people to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”** Sikhs believe that **all men and women are created equal** and that the **right to practice religion freely** is encoded in Sikhs’ founding documents. For hundreds of years, Sikhs have fought, and many have given their lives, to **protect the rights of others--including Hindus, Christians, and Muslims--to practice their own religions.**

* Respondents were asked to highlight specific words, phrases, or sentences that stand out to them.

Key: The larger and darker the font, the more respondents highlighted the phrase.

Equality resonates as well in the “Symbol of the Turban” message.

SYMBOL OF THE TURBAN

(highlighting exercise*)

Today, and for the last 500 years, many Sikhs around the world have worn the turban as an expression of their faith and their commitment to serve humanity. Throughout history, Sikhs have worn the turban to signal their readiness to protect all people against injustice, regardless of faith, gender, caste, or color. Today, a Sikh American who wears a turban signals that he or she is always ready to put him- or herself forward to serve the community’s needs. It represents their commitment to the equality, unity, and service that are at the heart of the American ethic.

* Respondents were asked to highlight specific words, phrases, or sentences that stand out to them.

Key: The larger and darker the font, the more respondents highlighted the phrase.

While the patriotism message rates as less important overall, Sikhs' history of service makes an impact.

PATRIOTISM

(highlighting exercise*)

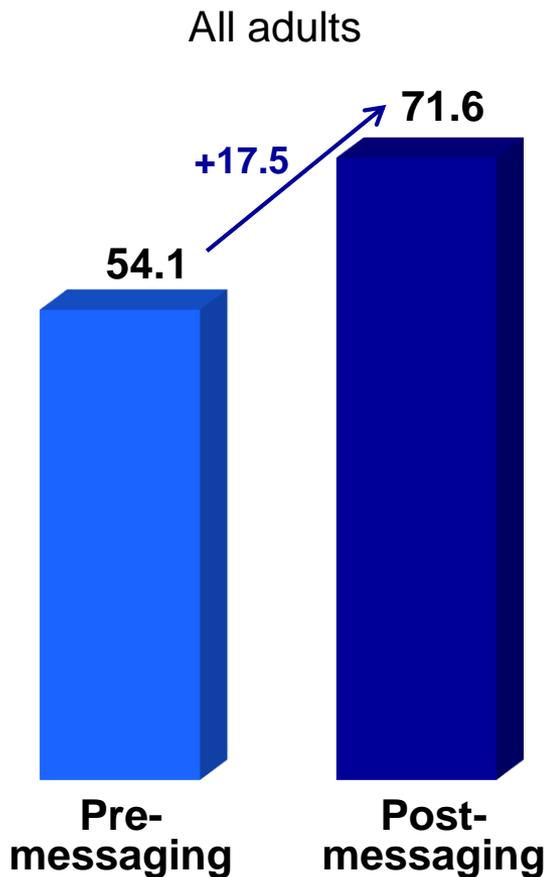
Sikhs have a long history of servicing in the U.S. armed forces with honor, including World War I and II. More than 80,000 Sikh soldiers died **fighting** for Allied forces during the wars, and their **service** to the **United States** continues to this day, with Sikhs serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

* Respondents were asked to highlight specific words, phrases, or sentences that stand out to them.

Key: The larger and darker the font, the more respondents highlighted the phrase.

Warm feelings toward Sikh Americans increase substantially after extensive information and messaging.

Mean ratings* of feelings toward Sikh Americans



Pre- to Post-Messaging Increase by Key Subgroups

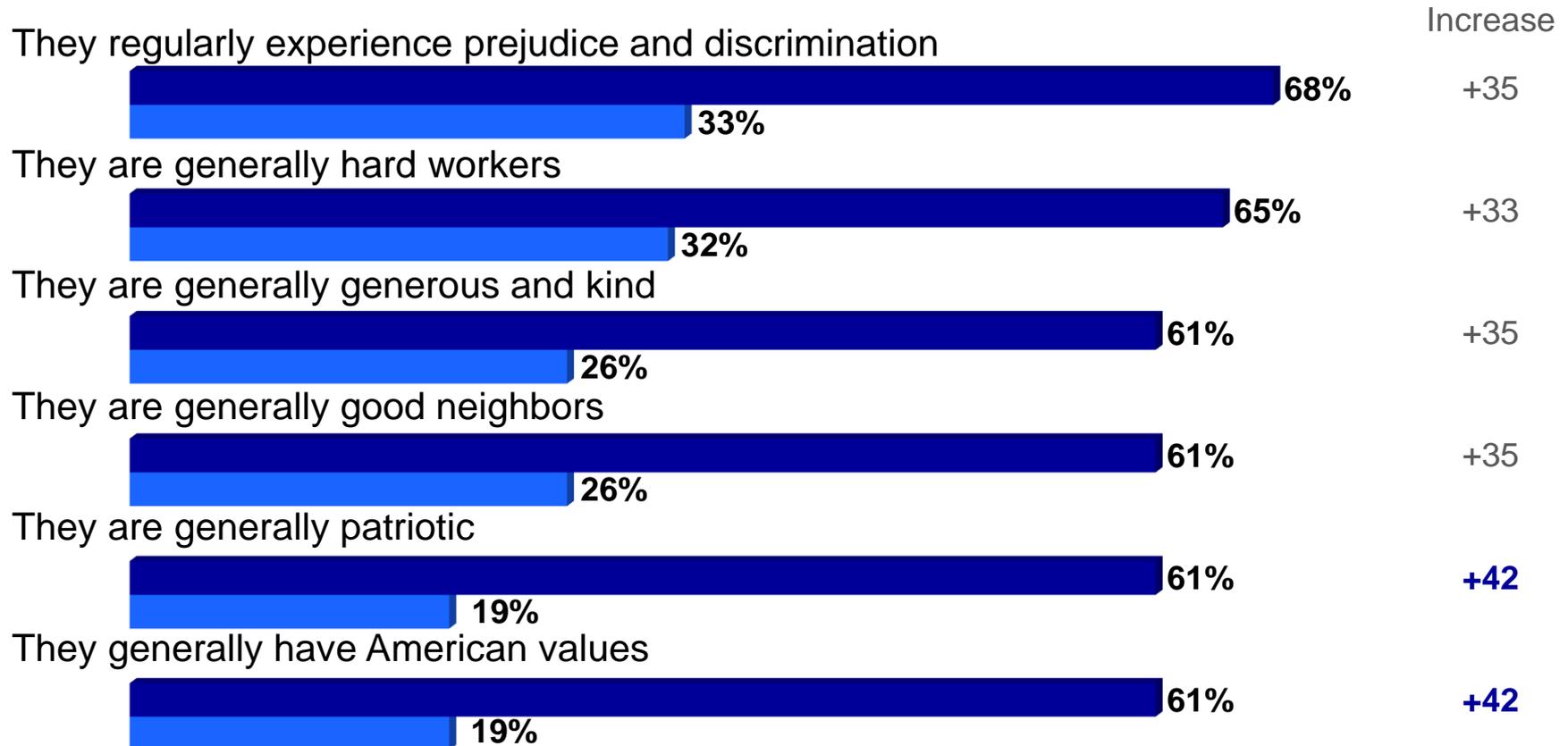
Men	+15.5	Evangelicals	+18.6
Women	+19.4	Mainline Protestants	+20.0
		Catholics	+17.5
Age 16 to 34	+15.6	No religion	+15.6
Age 35 to 49	+14.9		
Age 50 to 64	+19.6	Democrats	+17.6
Age 65/over	+21.9	Independents	+13.6
		Republicans	+21.7
High school grad/less	+19.6		
Some college	+16.2	Knowledge of Sikhs:	
Four-year college grads	+17.4	Know at least some	+14.2
Postgraduate education	+15.4	Know nothing	+19.7

* Ratings on zero-to-100 scale, 100 = extremely warm, 50 = in the middle/neither warm nor cold, 0 = extremely cold

Messaging significantly increases positive attributes associated with Sikh Americans.

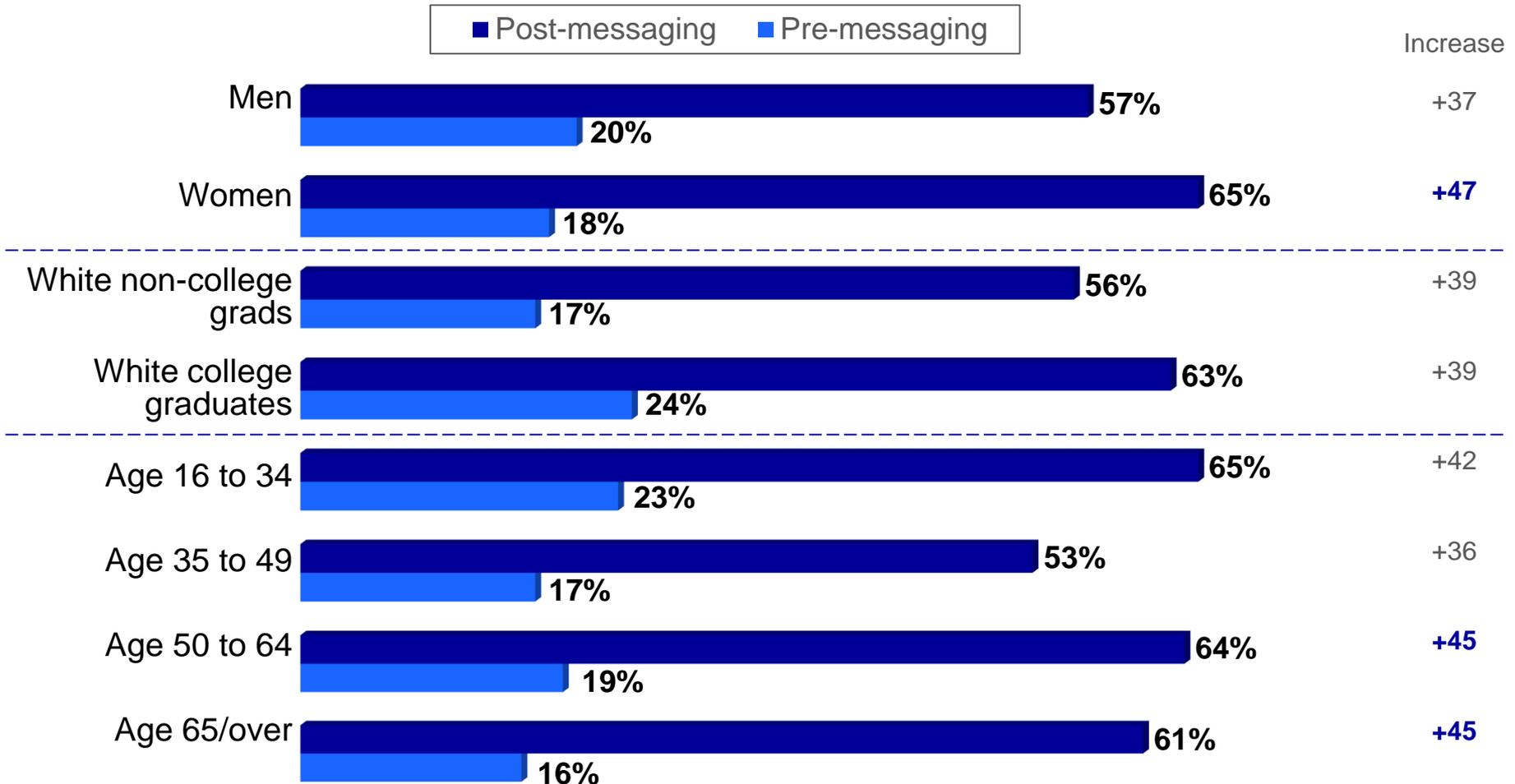
Proportions who feel that each describes Sikh Americans well
(8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = describes extremely well)

■ Post-messaging ■ Pre-messaging



Women and older adults show the greatest increases in perceptions of Sikhs as having American values.

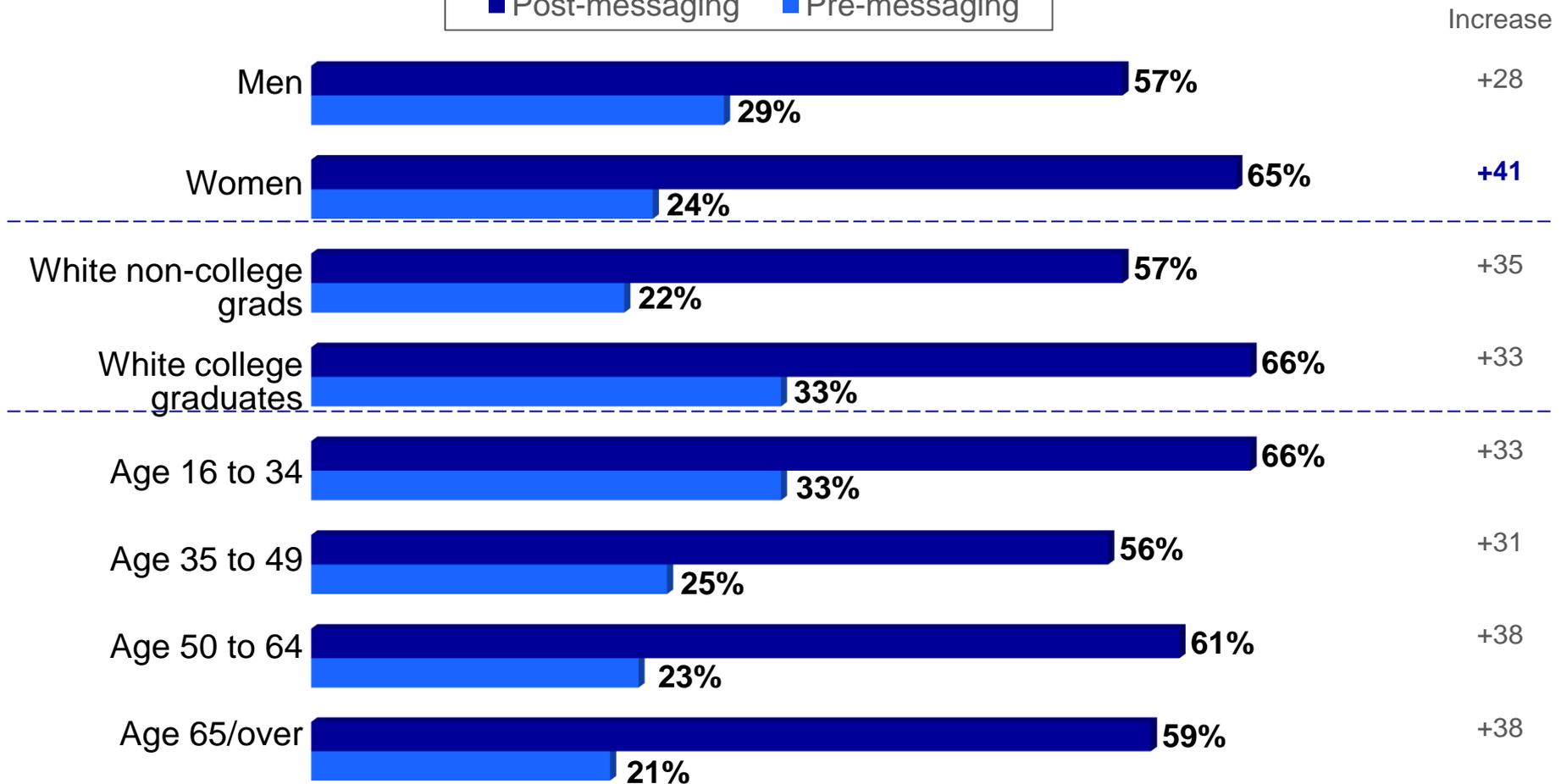
Proportions who feel that “they generally have American values” describes Sikh Americans well
 (8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = describes extremely well)



Women in particular increase in their perception that Sikhs are good neighbors after learning more about Sikh history and culture.

Proportions who feel that “they are generally good neighbors” describes Sikh Americans well
 (8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = describes extremely well)

■ Post-messaging ■ Pre-messaging



Americans explain that Sikh values, especially the focus on equality, influence their perceptions of Sikh Americans in a positive way.

“The fact that Sikh Americans stand for equality and for individual rights stands out to me in a positive way. I feel more positive toward Sikh Americans knowing they have the same ideals as our Founding Fathers.

Survey respondent

“They’re going to protect all people against all injustices. What sticks out to me is the fact that, whether you’re black, white, whatever, they’re not going to discriminate against you.”

Chicago focus group participant

“One of the most important things I learned was that they look at everyone as equals. That is awesome!”

Survey respondent

“They are normal Americans. They may dress different, but their beliefs are very similar.”

Survey respondent

(continued)

Americans explain that Sikh values, especially the focus on equality, influence their perceptions of Sikh Americans in a positive way.

(continued)

“What I found surprisingly shocking is that—and not all religions do this . . . they welcome people of all faiths and backgrounds. And I thought that was something particularly important.”

Iselin focus group participant

“I think that their core values and beliefs are wonderful. I would be proud to call them family, friend, neighbor, etc. . . . I think that they are misunderstood, and it saddens me that people including myself were unaware of their amazing values and core beliefs. I had no idea what a Sikh was until now.”

Survey respondent

“They’re proud to call themselves Americans; they came here to be Americans. They didn’t come here just for what this country offers, but they wanted to be part of the work in progress.”

Chicago focus group participant

“The fact that they are just like me: they have the same core American values as I do!”

Survey respondent

Certain segments of Americans are especially receptive to messaging; several messages are effective across these targets.

Messages and themes that resonate across target audiences

Most Receptive Targets

- Millennials
- Women ages 50 and older
- College educated
- Mainline Protestants
- Democrats
- West

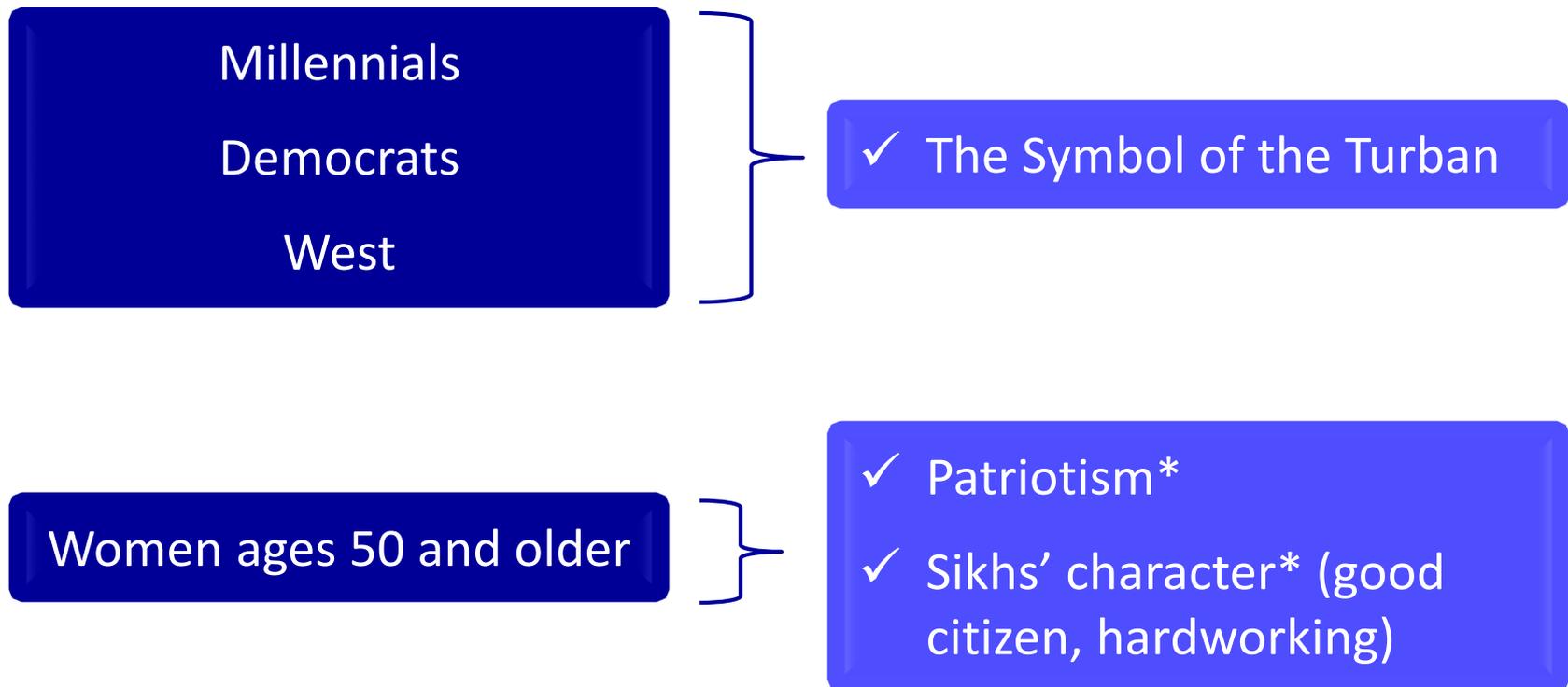
Messaging

- ✓ American story
- ✓ Parallel with American History
- ✓ Sikhs' focus on equality*

*Equality consistently appeared in open-ended responses about what information about Sikhs stood out in a positive way and was one of the most popular words in the message highlighting exercise.

In addition to the themes that resonate across groups, specific target groups also respond especially positively to certain messages.

Additional themes/messages to emphasize with specific target groups



*Women ages 50 and older described Sikhs' patriotism and character traits as especially important in response to an open-ended question at the end of the survey about what stood out to them in a positive way from the messaging.

Reactions to SALDEF PSA

Two focus groups in Chicago viewed and reacted to a SALDEF PSA about Sikh Americans. While the opinions expressed in focus groups provide an important perspective, observations from this kind of qualitative research should not be interpreted as representative of the larger public.

- Chicagoans responses to the PSA were generally positive. However, although many said they felt the ad was “a good start,” it left them wanting more.
 - Several participants commented that they wanted to see more images of Sikhs integrated within communities. For example, they suggested it would be better to show a Sikh Boy Scout with his entire troop of diverse scouts, rather than standing alone.
 - In the college educated group, some Chicagoans noted that they wanted more information. They wished Waris Ahluwalia had said that his parents had emigrated from India and explained a little why he wears a turban.

APPENDIX

Characteristics of the Sample

Men	49%	Whites	73%
Women	51%	African Americans	12%
		Hispanics	13%
Age 16 to 34	32%	Northeast	21%
Age 35 to 49	26%	Midwest	23%
Age 50 to 64	23%	South	33%
Age 65/over	19%	West	24%
High school grad/less	34%		
Some college	28%		
Four-year college grads	23%		
Postgraduate education	15%		

Information about Sikh Religion and Sikh Americans (full text)

“Sikhism comes from Northern India and is the world’s fifth-largest organized religion. There are more than 25 million Sikhs throughout the world and approximately half a million in the United States. Sikhism was founded 500 years ago when a man named Nanak walked the South Asian sub-continent teaching that all paths lead to One God, all people are equal, and each of us can experience freedom through loving and serving others. The word “Sikh” means “Seeker of Truth.” As a faith rooted in love, Sikhism stands for the equality of women and men and denounces any discrimination pertaining to gender, race, caste, creed, or color. There are three core tenets of the Sikh religion: meditation upon and devotion to the Creator, truthful living, and service to humanity. Sikhs are meant to uphold the values of honesty, compassion, generosity, humility, integrity, service, and spirituality on a daily basis. Sikh prayer ends with a wish for the welfare for all mankind. A Sikh place of worship welcomes people of all faiths and backgrounds. Many Sikhs wear five articles of faith to express their commitment to these values, including long hair that men and some women wrap in a turban. Sikhs have lived in America for more than 150 years, helped build the Transcontinental Railroad, served valiantly in every major world war, stood at the forefront of civil rights struggles, and were first responders on 9/11.”

Impact of messaging across subgroups

Subgroup	Pre-messaging feelings (Mean)	Post-messaging feelings (Mean)	Pre- to Post-message increase in feelings	Best message(s)
All	54.1	71.6	+17.5	Parallel with American History
Men	54.9	70.4	+15.5	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban American Story
Women	53.4	72.8	+19.4	Parallel with American History
16-24 years old	59.4	74.8	+15.4	Symbol of the Turban
25-34 years old	60.8	76.4	+15.6	Symbol of the Turban
35-49 years old	53.3	68.2	+14.9	Parallel with American History
50-64 years old	52.2	71.8	+19.6	Parallel with American History
65+ years old	47.6	69.5	+21.9	Parallel with American History Contribution to Fabric of Society
Women 18-49	55.8	72.4	+16.6	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban
Women 50 and older	50.0	73.4	+23.4	Parallel with American History
Men 18-49	58.4	72.1	+13.7	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban
Men 50 and older	50.3	68.1	+17.8	Parallel with American History Contribution to Fabric of Society American Story

Subgroup	Pre-messaging feelings (Mean)	Post-messaging feelings (Mean)	Pre- to Post-message increase in feelings	Best message(s)
Whites	53.8	71.4	+17.6	Parallel with American History
African Americans	56.2	70.7	+14.5	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban Contribution to Fabric of Society
Hispanics	52.5	73.9	+21.4	Symbol of the Turban Contribution to Fabric of Society
Men without a college degree	52.0	69.1	+17.1	Symbol of the Turban
Men with a college degree	59.3	72.4	+13.1	Parallel with American History American Story
Women without a college degree	51.5	70.5	+19.0	Parallel with American History
Women with a college degree	56.6	76.9	+20.3	Parallel with American History
Northeast	56.7	72.3	+15.6	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban American Story
Midwest	54.1	69.3	+15.2	Parallel with American History
South	49.7	70.5	+20.8	Parallel with American History American Story
West	57.9	74.9	+17.0	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban

Subgroup	Pre-messaging feelings (Mean)	Post-messaging feelings (Mean)	Pre- to Post-message increase in feelings	Best message(s)
Urban	55.9	72.1	+16.2	Symbol of the Turban
Suburban	56.1	73.4	+17.3	Parallel with American History
Small town/rural	50.6	69.4	+18.8	Parallel with American History
Democrats	58.0	75.6	+17.6	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban
Independents	54.4	68.0	+13.6	Parallel with American History
Republicans	49.8	71.5	+21.7	Parallel with American History American Story
Evangelical Protestants	50.9	69.5	+18.6	Parallel with American History
Mainline Protestants	54.1	74.1	+20.0	Parallel with American History
Catholics	52.2	69.7	+17.5	Parallel with American History American Story
No religious affiliation	56.2	71.8	+15.6	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban
Know at least something about Sikhs	62.4	76.6	+14.2	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban
Know nothing about Sikhs	48.6	68.3	+19.7	Parallel with American History