U.S. PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON HUMAN GENE EDITING

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of CRISPR-Cas-9, a technology where scientists can more precisely and efficiently edit human genes, has brought on complex and nuanced conversations about the ethics of human gene editing (Drabiak, 2021). The promises of gene editing technologies include the treatment of diseases such as cystic fibrosis, sickle cell, and Huntington's disease (Weisberg et al., 2017). However, with these promises come other ethical quandaries, such as the possibility of selecting certain physical traits for human offspring (Weisberg et al., 2017). Because of their societal and political implications, the ethical problems brought on by CRISPR and human gene editing techniques cannot be solved by science alone and must involve input from the public (Scheufele et al., 2021). Thus, it is essential to understand public attitudes about human gene editing in order to foster more responsible development and use of human gene editing technologies. In general, our report finds that public attitudes toward human gene editing are uncertain. Respondents tend to see both the benefits and drawbacks of human gene editing and approach the topic with ambivalence. Some topics, however, like the morality of human gene editing, who gets a seat at the table for decision-making, and support for research funding, have differences among demographic characteristics such as political ideology, religion, and educational attainment.

This survey was administered by the online survey provider *Bovitz-Forthright* from October 7 to October 16, 2025. The data for this survey were collected from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults aged 18 and older, with a total sample size of $N = 2{,}517$.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In terms of risks and benefits, Americans are more likely to think that the risks and benefits of human gene editing will be felt by the average American or society in general, rather than themselves personally.

- 66% of Americans felt that human gene editing would not be at all/mostly not beneficial to them personally. Only 34% of Americans felt that human gene editing would be at least somewhat beneficial to them.
- Over half of Americans said that human gene editing will be beneficial for the average American (53.3%, ranging from somewhat beneficial to very beneficial), and three in five Americans (60.5%) said that the technology will be beneficial to society.
- In terms of risk, 52.2% of Americans thought that human gene editing would pose risks to them personally, ranging from somewhat risky to very risky.
- Respondents felt that human gene editing would be risky for the average American (74.4%), and 85.7% of respondents felt that the technology would be risky for society as a whole.

When it comes to moral opposition to germline human gene editing, respondents displayed more uncertainty in their stances.

- 69.9% of respondents at least somewhat agreed that human gene editing will have unintended consequences that are harmful. Conversely, only 9.9% of respondents at least somewhat disagreed with this statement.
- Furthermore, Americans had stronger opinions about whether human gene editing would allow humanity to push beyond its current limits. 66.4% of respondents at least somewhat agreed with this statement, while only 13.1% at least somewhat disagreed.
- Respondents express ambivalence when it comes to both the value and danger of human gene editing. The two statements with the highest "neither agree nor disagree" response rate were that human gene editing would make life worse for the average person (33.2%) and that human gene editing would have unintended outcomes that are valuable (32.3%).

Respondents were marginally more supportive of industry funding for research on human gene editing as compared to federal research funding on human gene editing.

- 41.0% of Americans at least somewhat agreed with the statement "I support federal funding that involves human gene editing," (ranging from somewhat to strongly agree), while 42.2% of Americans at least somewhat agreed with supporting industry funding for human gene editing research.
- 41.4% of respondents at least somewhat disagreed with supporting federal funding for human gene editing research (ranging from somewhat disagree to strongly disagree), while 37.7% of Americans at least somewhat disagreed with supporting industry funding for human gene editing research.
- 17.6% neither agreed nor disagreed to support federal funding for human gene editing research, and 20.1% neither agreed nor disagreed to support industry funding for human gene editing research.

When considering what should be focused on in policy related to human gene editing, more people want it to stick to the science.

- Respondents felt that public debate about human gene editing policy should focus more/mostly on the science (50.6%).
- One quarter of respondents (25.0%) thought that public debate should focus on mostly/more public values.
- 24.4% of respondents thought that public debate should equally value public values and science.

Adults in the U.S. have varied perceptions of the importance of different groups in the future development and applications of HGE.

- Entities that the most respondents felt were very/extremely important to include in directing the development of human gene editing were university scientists (61.4%), industry scientists (53.5%), and citizens (50.2%).
- Religious organizations (51.6%), large technology companies (55.2%), and elected officials (48.7%) were more frequently listed as entities that were not at all/mostly not important in developing human gene editing technology.
- Government agencies (38.2%), intergovernmental bodies or agreements (37.8%), and professional organization bioethics commissions (35.8%) were seen as somewhat important in decision-making processes.

When it comes to considering the morality of human gene editing, Americans display more ambivalence than certainty.

- The statement that garnered the most agreement was "Humanity should not have the power to edit the germline," with 47.7% of Americans at least somewhat agreeing.
- Americans were more likely to disagree that humanity has a moral obligation to take advantage of germline human gene editing, with 43.8% at least somewhat disagreeing.
- "Neither agree nor disagree" was the most frequently selected answer for all statements, demonstrating a significant gray area when it comes to considering the morality of human gene editing.

SELECTED BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

Political ideology plays an important role in attitudes toward the benefits of human gene editing.

- When compared to Democrats (27.8%) and Independents (39.7%), Republicans (51.4%) were more likely to see human gene editing as not at all or mostly not beneficial.
- A similar pattern follows for the risks of human gene editing, with more Republicans viewing human gene editing as very/extremely risky (64.1%), compared to Independents (50.5%), and Democrats (44.0%). However, it is worth noting that "very/extremely risky" was the most frequently selected category for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans alike.
- Democrats and Independents were more ambivalent about the benefits of human gene editing, with "somewhat beneficial" as the most frequently selected category for respondents of both of these parties.
- Overall, Democrats were more likely to support human gene editing research, regardless of whether it was federal or industry research (53.8% support federal research funding, 53.0% support industry research funding). Independents followed with 37.0% supporting both federal and industry research, and Republicans were least likely to support research, with 32.5% supporting industry funding and 29.1% supporting federal funding.

- Democrats were the most likely to say that future public debates should be focused on the science (62.7%), followed by Independents (50.2%), then Republicans (38.4%). Conversely, Republicans were the most likely to say future debates should focus on the public's values (36.0%), followed by Independents (25.9%), and Democrats (14.4%).

In general, as age increased, respondents tended to be more ambivalent or see fewer benefits of human gene editing.

- Levels of uncertainty were comparable across age groups. Adults aged 65 and older were marginally more likely to perceive human gene editing as somewhat beneficial (42.5%), with similarly high proportions observed among ages 36–64 (41.8%), 26–35 (41.7%), and 18–25 (40.7%).
- Respondents 65+ were more likely than those of other age groups to feel that human gene editing is not at all or mostly not beneficial to society (44.0%).
- However, older age did not always lead to seeing fewer benefits. 37.2% of respondents aged 18-25 saw human gene editing as not at all or mostly not beneficial, compared to those aged 26-35 (32.2%).
- When it comes to the risks of human gene editing, those ages 65+ were most likely to see human gene editing as somewhat risky to society (36.0%).
- Those ages 26-35 were the most likely to support funding for both federal and industry human gene editing research. Conversely, those aged 65+ were most likely to oppose funding for both federal and industry research.

Higher educational attainment was associated with more support for human gene editing research, and a higher likelihood of viewing human gene editing as more beneficial and less risky.

- For respondents whose education was high school or less, just under half viewed human gene editing as not at all/mostly not beneficial (46.1%), compared to those who felt human gene editing would be somewhat beneficial (37.3%), and very/extremely beneficial (16.5%).
- Those with a 4-year college degree or more expressed marginally more uncertainty (44.3% viewed human gene editing as somewhat beneficial) than those with high school or less (37.3%) and those with some college (41.6%). However, more so than their counterparts, they also saw human gene editing as very/extremely beneficial (22.9%, compared to 16.6% of high school or less respondents and 16.1% for some college respondents).
- When it comes to the risks of human gene editing, those with high school or less were more likely to see human gene editing as very/extremely risky (58.3%) compared to those with 4-year college or more (48.3%).

- Those with higher educational attainment tended to support both federal and industry research funding compared to those with lower educational attainment. 49.5% of respondents with a 4-year college degree or more at least somewhat agreed that they support federal research, compared to 36.6% respondents with some college, and 34.4% of respondents with a high school degree or less.
- However, across all levels of educational attainment, respondents believed that public debates about human gene editing should be more focused on the science (HS or less: 46.1%; some college: 47.4%; 4-year college +: 56.5%).

When it comes to religious identity, while there was significant ambivalence among all groups, some identities felt more strongly than others.

- When thinking about the benefits of human gene editing, over half (51.5%) of those who identify as agnostic/atheist thought that human gene editing would be somewhat beneficial to society.
- "Somewhat beneficial" was the most frequently selected category among all religious identities except for "Other Christian,", whose top category was "not at all/mostly not beneficial." This demonstrates that while ambivalence is common among religious groups, Christian religious identities may view human gene editing as less beneficial.
- Those who identify as atheist/agnostic were the most supportive of human gene editing research (59.6% at least somewhat agree), followed by other religions (46.5%), nothing in particular (42.8%), Catholic (41.3%), and other Christian groups (32.3%).
- When it comes to debates about human gene editing, other Christian groups were the least likely to say that debates should be focused on the science, and the most likely to say they should be focused on the public's values. Those who identify as agnostic/atheist felt strongly that debates should focus on the science compared to the other groups (72.6%).

Men and women have differing opinions about human gene editing, with women approaching the topic with more caution.

- Compared to men, women were more likely to view human gene editing as not at all/mostly not beneficial for society (43.9% compared to 34.9%). A similar pattern followed for risks to society, with 88.4% of women seeing human gene editing as at least somewhat risky to society compared to 83.0% of men.
- Both men and women were more likely to think that future public debates about human gene editing should focus on the science.
- Generally, we found that men were more supportive of funding for human gene editing research at both federal and industry levels. For federal funding, 48.1% of men at least somewhat agreed they support research funding, compared to 34.5% of women. For

industry funding, 49.7% of men at least somewhat agreed that they support industry funding, compared to 35.1% of women.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

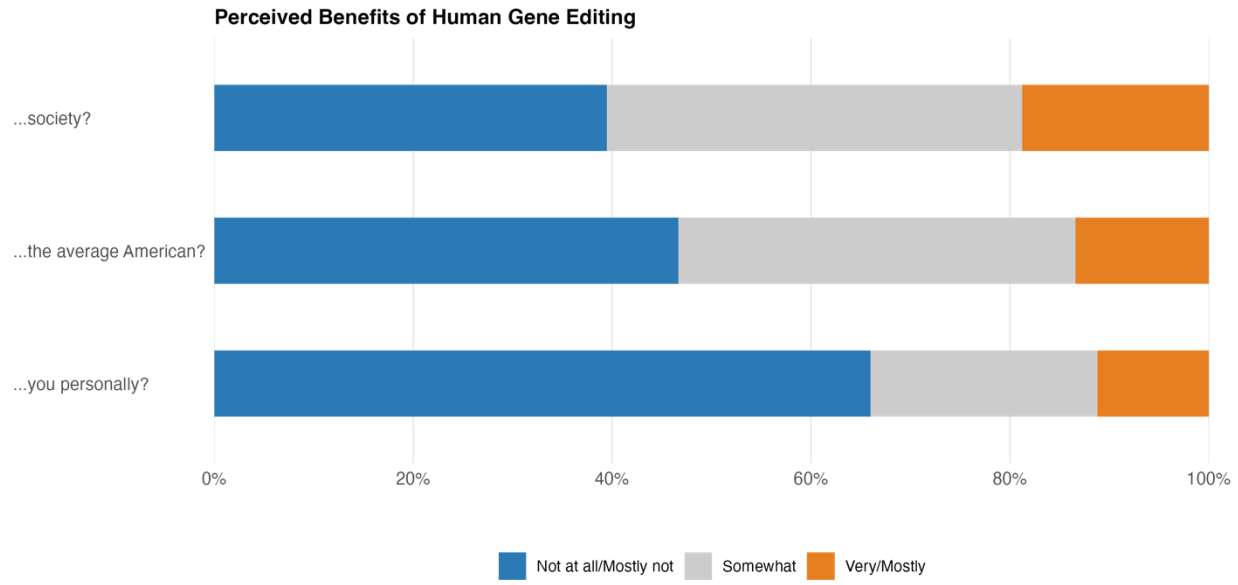
Respondents were provided with the following information before answering questions on the survey about human gene editing: "Genes are what plants, animals, and humans pass on to the next generation. Each gene is made up of a short piece of DNA. DNA is the material that determines how a living thing will look and function.

Human gene editing refers to changing, adding, or removing the DNA in a gene to change people's characteristics. When human gene editing is done in a way that will affect only one existing person, it is called somatic editing. However, when the edits will be automatically passed on to a person's children (and then on to that child's children), then it is called germline gene editing. Germline editing can be used to treat diseases and enhance human traits beyond what they otherwise would be."

Note that some percentages may add up to over 100% due to rounding. Additionally, we had 1,194 men, 1,279 women, and 35 non-binary respondents (1.4%). Because the non-binary group was very small, percentage estimates are not reported.

TOPLINE: APPENDIX

1. How beneficial do you think human gene editing will be for…



	Not at all beneficial	Mostly not beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Mostly beneficial	Very beneficial
…society?	17.6%	21.8%	41.8%	13.7%	5.0%
…the average American?	19.0%	27.7%	39.9%	9.3%	4.1%
…you personally?	38.2%	27.8%	22.8%	7.2%	4.0%

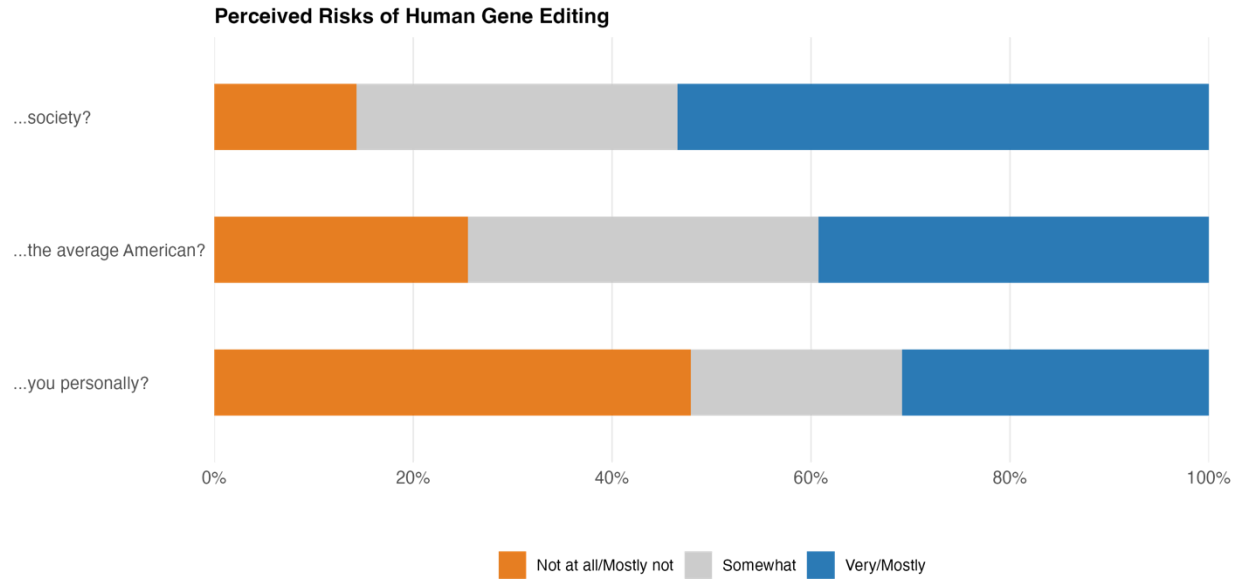
	Party ID			Age				Gender	
Benefits for society	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	18-25	26-35	36-64	65+	Male	Female
Not at all/Mostly not beneficial	27.8%	39.7%	51.4%	37.2%	32.2%	40.7%	44.0%	34.9%	43.9%
Somewhat beneficial	47.1%	45.1%	35.3%	40.7%	41.7%	41.8%	42.5%	42.0%	41.4%
Very/Extremely beneficial	25.1%	15.2%	13.3%	22.1%	26.1%	17.4%	13.5%	23.1%	14.7%

	Education			Cultural Authority of Science[1]		
Benefits for society	HS or less	Some college	4-year college+	Low	Moderate	High
Not at all/Mostly not beneficial	46.1%	42.3%	32.8%	59.7%	34.1%	24.3%
Somewhat beneficial	37.3%	41.6%	44.3%	32.3%	49.9%	43.3%
Very/Extremely beneficial	16.5%	16.0%	22.9%	8.0%	16.0%	32.3%

	Religious Identity				
Benefits for society	Catholic	Other Christian (Protestant/Baptist/Lutheran/Methodist)	Agnostic/ Atheist	Other religions (Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, Russian or Greek Orthodox)	Nothing in particular
Not at all/Mostly not beneficial	38.1%	48.4%	21.3%	36.4%	36.2%
Somewhat beneficial	41.1%	37.6%	51.5%	42.5%	43.0%
Very/Extremely beneficial	20.8%	13.9%	27.1%	21.1%	20.7%

[1] Cultural Authority of Science (CAS) captures how individuals orient toward science as an institution. As operationalized here, CAS is a broad institution-level orientation toward science as a legitimate source of knowledge and social guidance. It brings together three related dimensions: epistemic trust in science as a way of producing reliable knowledge, deference to scientists as appropriate participants in public decision-making, and broader confidence in science and technology as socially beneficial.

2. How risky do you think human gene editing will be for…



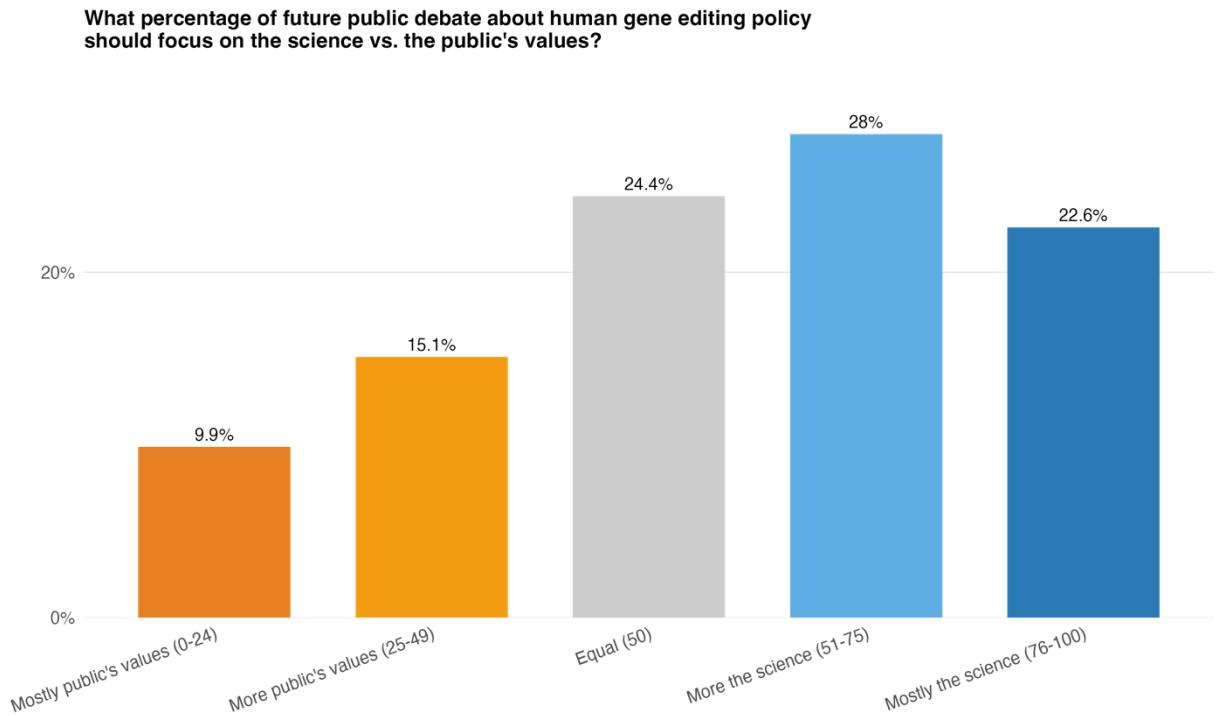
	Not at all risky	Mostly not risky	Somewhat risky	Mostly risky	Very risky
…society?	2.5%	11.8%	32.3%	27.3%	26.1%
…the average American?	5.3%	20.2%	35.2%	20.1%	19.1%
…you personally?	23.9%	24.0%	21.3%	13.5%	17.4%

	Party ID			Age				Gender	
Risk for society	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	18-25	26-35	36-64	65+	Male	Female
Not at all/Mostly not risky	19.3%	16.8%	8.4%	13.8%	14.9%	14.4%	13.7%	17.0%	11.6%
Somewhat risky	36.7%	32.7%	27.5%	31.0%	29.5%	31.7%	36.0%	34.5%	30.2%
Very/Extremely risky	44.0%	50.5%	64.1%	55.2%	55.6%	53.9%	50.3%	48.5%	58.2%

	Education			Cultural Authority of Science		
Risk for society	HS or less	Some college	4-year college+	Low	Moderate	High
Not at all/Mostly not risky	11.9%	12.2%	17.8%	7.9%	14.9%	20.2%
Somewhat risky	29.8%	32.0%	33.9%	25.5%	39.3%	32.1%
Very/Extremely risky	58.3%	55.9%	48.3%	66.6%	45.8%	47.7%

	Religious Identity				
Risk for society	Catholic	Other Christian (Protestant/Baptist/Lutheran/Methodist)	Agnostic/ Atheist	Other religions (Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, Russian or Greek Orthodox)	Nothing in particular
Not at all/Mostly not risky	14.1%	9.4%	24.1%	14.9%	18.6%
Somewhat risky	28.9%	30.2%	41.6%	35.1%	31.5%
Very/Extremely risky	57.0%	60.4%	34.3%	50.0%	49.9%

3. What percentage of future public debate about human gene editing policy should focus on the science vs. the public's values?

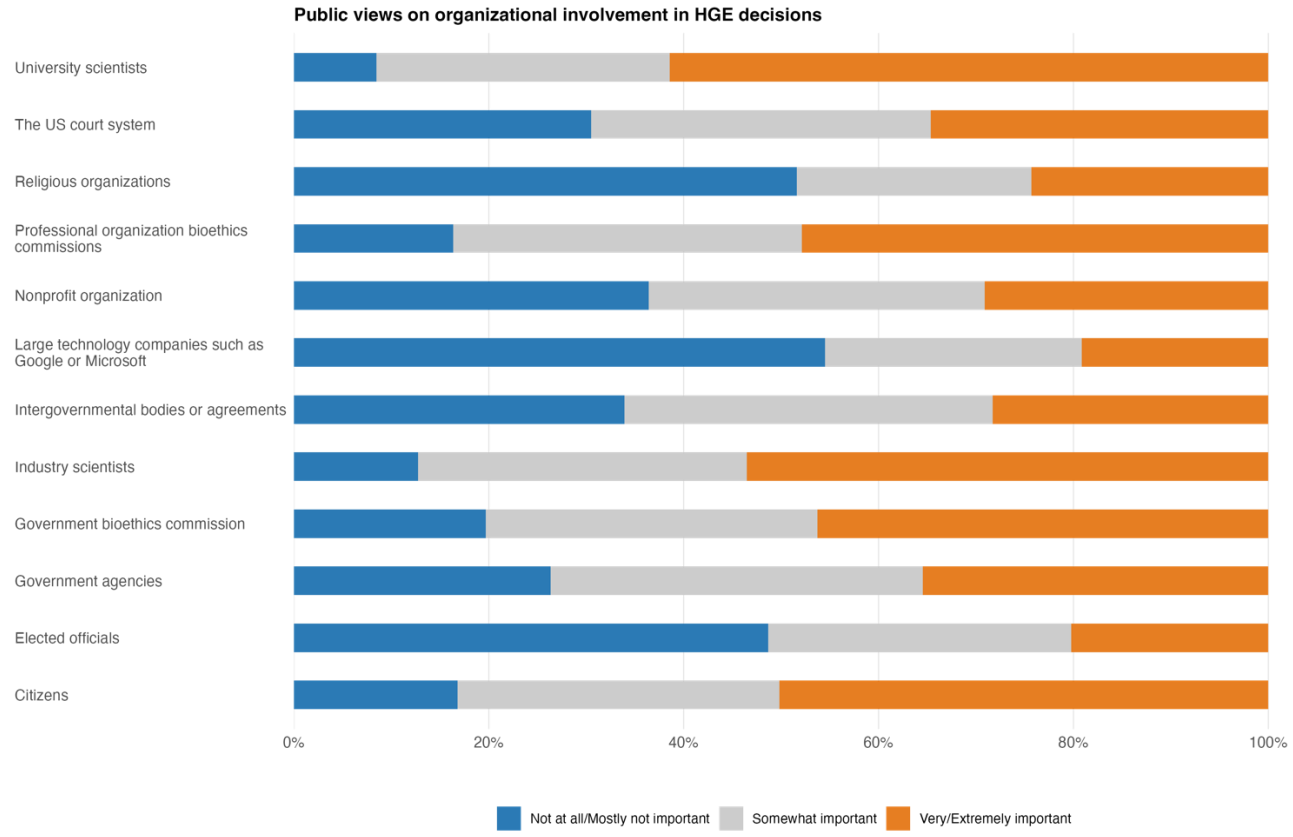


Future public debate focus	Party ID			Age				Gender	
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	18-25	26-35	36-64	65+	Male	Female
More focused on public's values (0-49)	14.4%	23.9%	36.0%	22.1%	25.9%	25.0%	25.6%	26.4%	23.9%
Equal (50)	22.9%	25.9%	25.6%	27.9%	25.2%	23.1%	26.5%	23.0%	25.9%
More focused on the science (51-100)	62.7%	50.2%	38.4%	50.0%	48.9%	51.9%	47.9%	50.6%	50.2%

Future public debate focus	Education			Cultural Authority of Science		
	HS or less	Some college	4-year college+	Low	Moderate	High
More focused on public's values (0-49)	25.9%	26.1%	23.2%	46.7%	17.1%	11.2%
Equal (50)	27.9%	26.5%	20.3%	25.4%	27.4%	20.3%
More focused on the science (51-100)	46.1%	47.4%	56.5%	27.9%	55.5%	68.5%

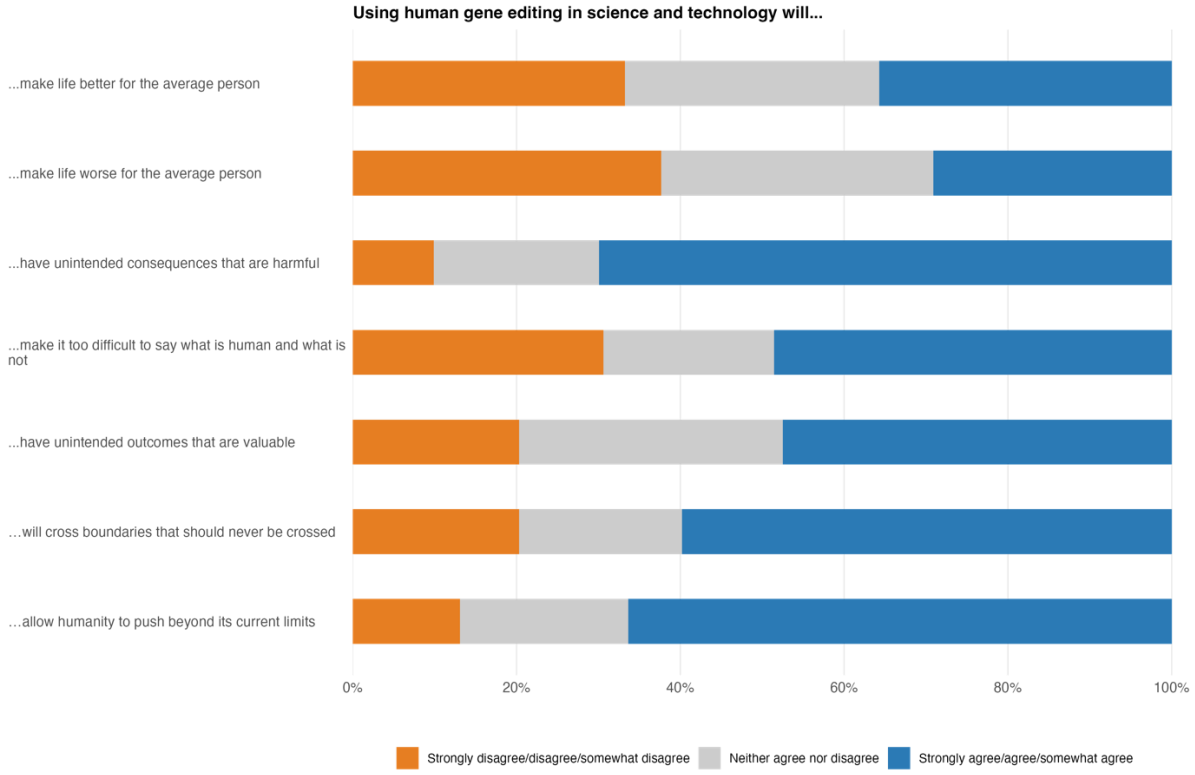
Future public debate focus	Religious Identity				
	Catholic	Other Christian (Protestant/Baptist/Lutheran/ Methodist)	Agnostic/ Atheist	Other religions (Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, Russian or Greek Orthodox)	Nothing in particular
More focused on public's values (0-49)	23.6%	34.0%	10.8%	18.0%	19.4%
Equal (50)	25.4%	25.4%	16.6%	25.9%	27.8%
More focused on the science (51-100)	51.0%	40.6%	72.6%	56.1%	52.8%

4. How important is it to have each of these groups involved in the future development and applications of human gene editing in the United States?



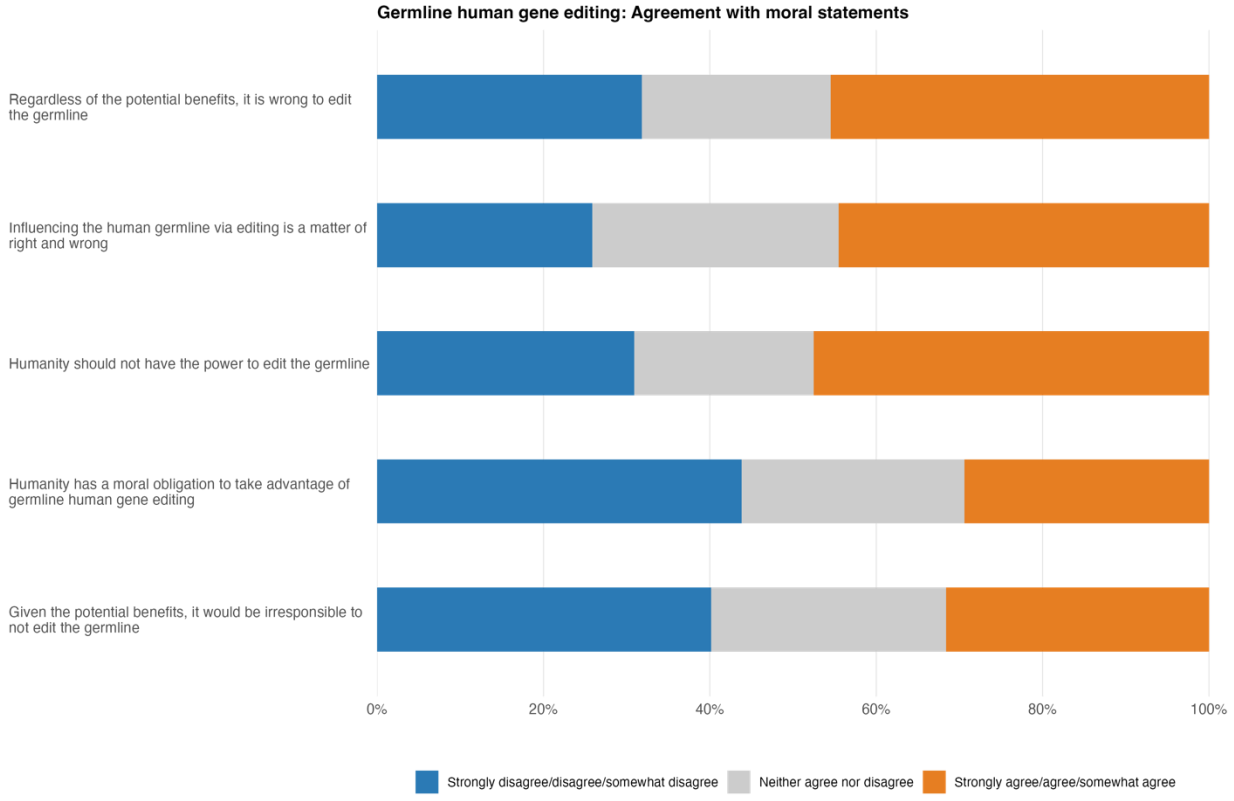
	Not at all important	Mostly not important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important
University scientists	4.2%	4.3%	30.1%	36.4%	25.0%
The US court system	13.8%	16.7%	34.8%	22.5%	12.1%
Religious organizations	32.5%	19.1%	24.1%	13.3%	11.0%
Professional organization bioethics commissions	7.0%	9.4%	35.8%	29.1%	18.8%
Nonprofit organization	14.8%	21.6%	34.5%	18.2%	10.9%
Large technology companies such as Google or Microsoft	29.2%	25.3%	26.3%	13.3%	5.8%
Intergovernmental bodies or agreements	14.4%	19.5%	37.8%	19.6%	8.7%
Industry scientists	4.8%	8.0%	33.7%	34.2%	19.3%
Government bioethics commission	9.0%	10.7%	34.0%	28.8%	17.5%
Government agencies	10.2%	16.1%	38.2%	24.9%	10.6%
Elected officials	22.4%	26.3%	31.1%	14.1%	6.2%
Citizens	5.3%	11.5%	33.0%	28.8%	21.4%

5. Using human gene editing in science and technology will…



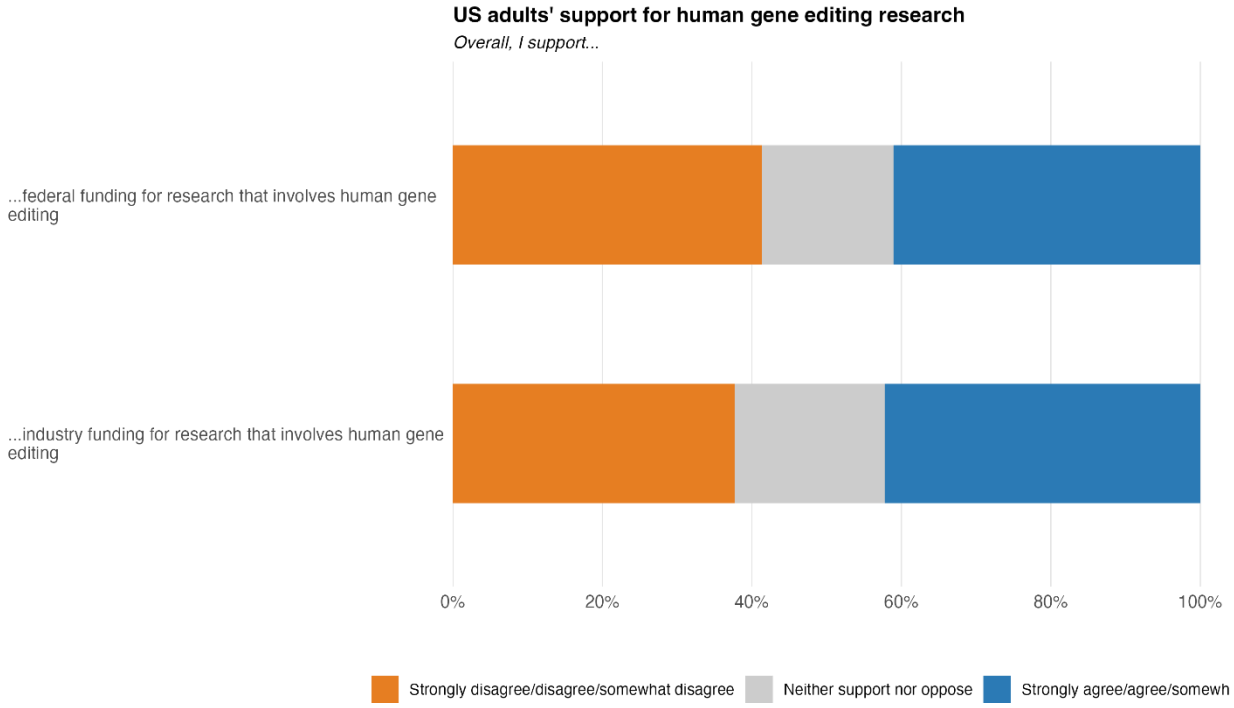
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
…make life better for the average person	10.1%	10.6%	12.6%	31.0%	21.2%	9.7%	4.8%
…make life worse for the average person	7.6%	14.9%	15.1%	33.2%	11.6%	8.3%	9.2%
…have unintended consequences that are harmful	1.4%	3.3%	5.2%	20.2%	28.1%	19.7%	22.1%
…make it too difficult to say what is human and what is not	8.0%	11.9%	10.7%	20.9%	20.1%	14.2%	14.2%
…have unintended outcomes that are valuable	6.4%	5.7%	8.2%	32.2%	28.3%	13.2%	6.0%
…will cross boundaries that should never be crossed	4.6%	6.7%	9.1%	19.9%	21.1%	15.9%	22.7%
…allow humanity to push beyond its current limits	4.2%	4.1%	4.8%	20.5%	31.2%	22.1%	13.1%

6. Below are some statements people have made about germline human gene editing. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. Using human gene editing in science and technology will…



	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Regardless of the potential benefits, it is wrong to edit the germline	7.8%	12.4%	11.6%	22.7%	14.9%	12.0%	18.5%
Influencing the human germline via editing is a matter of right and wrong	6.6%	9.7%	9.6%	29.6%	17.1%	14.5%	13.0%
Humanity should not have the power to edit the germline	7.3%	11.6%	12.0%	21.6%	14.1%	12.4%	21.2%
Humanity has a moral obligation to take advantage of germline human gene editing	17.6%	13.2%	13.0%	26.8%	16.2%	8.9%	4.3%
Given the potential benefits, it would be irresponsible to not edit the germline	15.4%	12.8%	11.9%	28.2%	18.0%	8.9%	4.7%

7. Overall, I support…



	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
…**federal funding** for research that involves human gene editing	19.9%	11.4%	10.1%	17.6%	20.4%	13.4%	7.2%
…**industry funding** for research that involves human gene editing	17.8%	10.9%	9.0%	20.1%	20.9%	13.7%	7.6%

Support for federal research	Party ID			Age				Gender	
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	18-25	26-35	36-64	65+	Male	Female
Strongly disagree/ disagree/Somewhat disagree	27.2%	44.4%	55.1%	37.2%	31.3%	43.5%	47.9%	35.6%	46.9%
Neither support nor oppose	19.0%	18.5%	15.8%	18.3%	20.3%	17.1%	16.2%	16.3%	18.6%
Strongly agree/ agree/Somewhat agree	53.8%	37.0%	29.1%	44.5%	48.4%	39.4%	36.0%	48.1%	34.5%

Support for federal research	Education			Cultural Authority of Science		
	HS or less	Some college	4-year college+	Low	Moderate	High
Strongly disagree/ disagree/Somewhat disagree	46.9%	44.9%	34.7%	66.0%	32.9%	25.1%
Neither support nor oppose	18.8%	18.5%	15.8%	13.8%	24.3%	14.6%
Strongly agree/ agree/Somewhat agree	34.4%	36.6%	49.5%	20.1%	42.7%	60.4%

Support for federal research	Religious Identity				
	Catholic	Other Christian (Protestant/Baptist/Lutheran/Methodist)	Agnostic/ Atheist	Other religions (Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, Russian or Greek Orthodox)	Nothing in particular
Strongly disagree/ disagree/Somewhat disagree	42.3%	50.8%	20.8%	34.2%	38.3%
Neither support nor oppose	16.4%	16.8%	19.7%	19.3%	18.9%
Strongly agree/ agree/Somewhat agree	41.3%	32.3%	59.6%	46.5%	42.8%

Support for industry	Party ID			Age				Gender	
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	18-25	26-35	36-64	65+	Male	Female
Strongly disagree/ disagree/Somewhat disagree	26.7%	38.4%	48.8%	34.5%	29.7%	39.8%	41.8%	31.0%	44.0%
Neither support nor oppose	20.3%	24.6%	18.6%	21.7%	23.0%	19.4%	17.8%	19.3%	20.9%
Strongly agree/ agree/Somewhat agree	53.0%	37.0%	32.5%	43.8%	47.3%	40.8%	40.4%	49.7%	35.1%

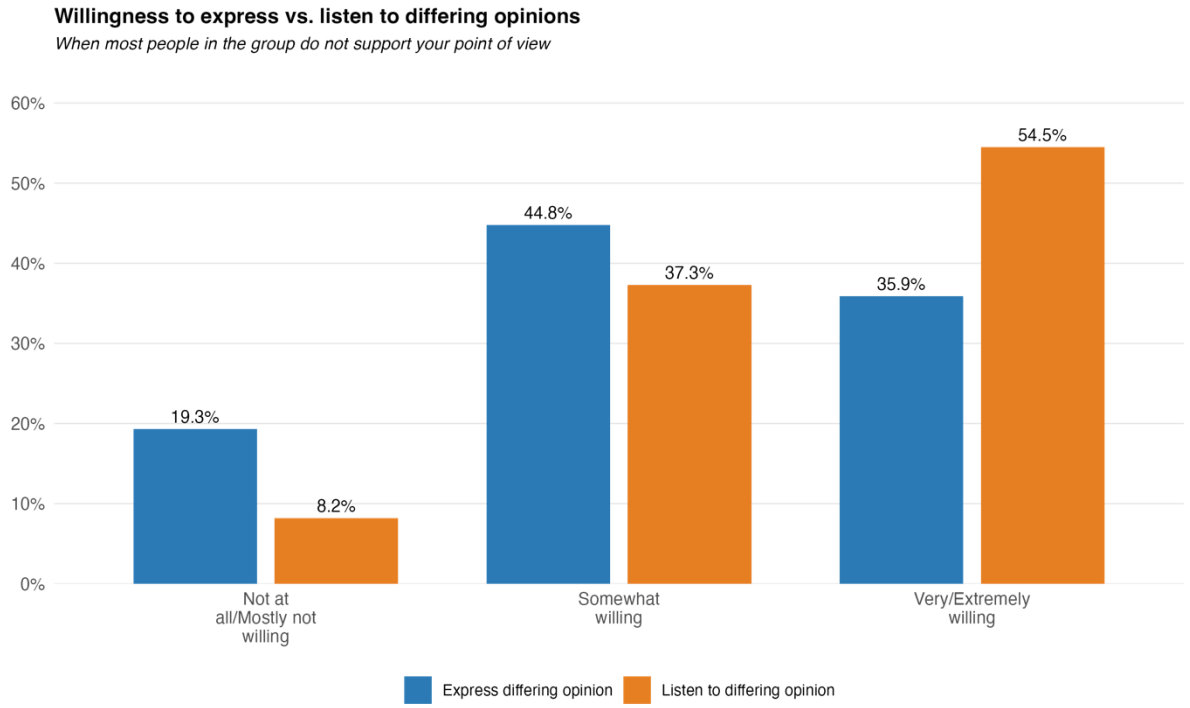
Support for industry	Education			Cultural Authority of Science		
	HS or less	Some college	4-year college+	Low	Moderate	High

Strongly disagree/ disagree/Somewhat disagree	44.3%	40.0%	31.6%	58.3%	30.7%	23.9%
Neither support nor oppose	21.9%	20.8%	18.3%	17.3%	26.4%	16.7%
Strongly agree/ agree/Somewhat agree	33.8%	39.1%	50.1%	24.4%	43.0%	59.4%

Support for industry	Religious Identity				
	Catholic	Other Christian (Protestant/Baptist/Lutheran/Methodist)	Agnostic/ Atheist	Other religions (Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, Russian or Greek Orthodox)	Nothing in particular
Strongly disagree/ disagree/Somewhat disagree	37.0%	46.9%	19.1%	29.8%	36.2%
Neither support nor oppose	17.8%	20.4%	19.7%	19.7%	23.4%
Strongly agree/ agree/Somewhat agree	45.3%	32.6%	61.2%	50.4%	40.4%

7. Imagine you're at a party where you don't know most people. You're talking to a group of people when somebody brings up the issue of human gene editing. From the discussion, you can tell that most people in the group do not support your point of view.

In this kind of situation, some people would express their opinions and some would not.



	Not at all willing	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very willing
How likely would be for you to **express** an opinion on human gene editing that was different from others in this situation?	9.5%	3.9%	5.9%	6.2%	12.7%	11.2%	14.7%	12.2%	6.4%	17.3%
How willing would you be to **listen** to an opinion on human gene editing that was different from your own in this situation?	4.9%	1.2%	2.1%	3.0%	10.1%	8.2%	16.1%	16.2%	10.6%	27.7%

Sample Demographics (*N* = 2,517)

Variable	Category	n	Percentage (%)
Gender			
	Male	1,194	47.4
	Female	1,279	50.8
	Non-binary	35	1.4
Age			
	18-25	290	11.5
	26-35	444	17.6
	36-64	1,279	50.8
	65+	445	17.7
	Missing	59	2.3
Education			
	4-year college+	960	38.1
	Some college	1,004	39.9
	High school or less	544	21.6
Political Orientation			
	Liberal	892	35.4
	Moderate	575	22.8
	Conservative	1,041	41.4
Political Party Preference			
	Democrat	1,117	44.4
	Independent	297	11.8
	Republican	1,094	43.5
Religious Identity			
	Other Christian	1,076	42.7
	Catholic	433	17.2
	Nothing in particular	381	15.1
	Agnostic/Atheist	361	14.3
	Other religions	228	9.1

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