



# How Is COVID-19 Impacting International Higher Education in the United States?

A WES Survey of Prospective Students and U.S. Higher Education Professionals  
World Education Services | July 2020

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Part I:

# **Executive Summary**

# Executive Summary

World Education Services (WES) is the leading provider of credential evaluation services in the United States and Canada. Each year, WES provides hundreds of thousands of international students, immigrants, and refugees with needed assessments of their academic achievement. These verified assessments enable internationally educated individuals to pursue and achieve their academic and professional goals.

In April 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic intensified, WES surveyed prospective international and immigrant students (hereafter referred to simply as "international students") and higher education professionals to understand how the novel coronavirus had so far affected international higher education in the United States. This report details the survey results of 615 prospective international students and 199 higher education professionals.



# Key Findings

## **Most prospective international students say they are still interested in studying in the U.S.**

International students are considering multiple contingency options for their education, including postponing their enrollment in the U.S., studying in their home countries, and pursuing their education in a different country abroad. However, the majority are still interested in studying in the U.S. Sixty-seven percent of prospective international students said the pandemic has had no impact on their interest in studying in the U.S. And while 20% of prospective students are less interested, 13% are more interested in a U.S. education.

## **Nearly a third of prospective international students would not enroll if courses were only offered online for Fall 2020.**

More than one in three (38%) prospective international students say they would still enroll at a U.S. institution if courses were only offered online this fall. However, 32% say they would not enroll, and 30% of students remain unsure. Meanwhile, almost a third (31%) of higher education professionals predict that remote learning will continue for Fall 2020. Conversely, 30% of professionals think classes will resume in person, and more than one in four (39%) are unsure. However, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced July 6 that international students would not be permitted to take all their classes online and remain in the U.S. The Trump administration retracted the announcement on July 14, after swift backlash. It is unclear the extent to which such a policy, even if rescinded, could impact student decision-making.

## **More than half of higher education professionals predict that institutions will make changes to bolster enrollments.**

Higher education professionals predict that, over the next two academic years, institutions are likely to try and attract international students by offering more flexible admissions deadlines (60%) and by making some or all standardized tests optional (54%).

## **About half of prospective international students expect COVID-19 to negatively impact Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT).**

More than half of international students predict that the pandemic will have a negative effect on CPT (53%), and just under half (48%) expect the same for OPT.





Part II:

# **Profile of Respondents**

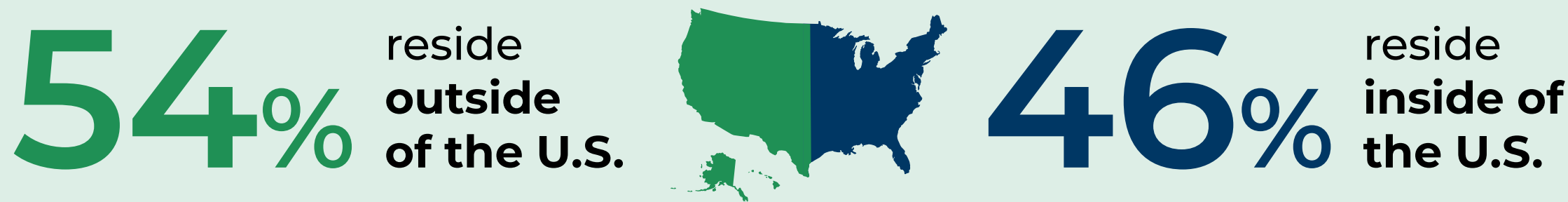


Part II: Profile of Respondents

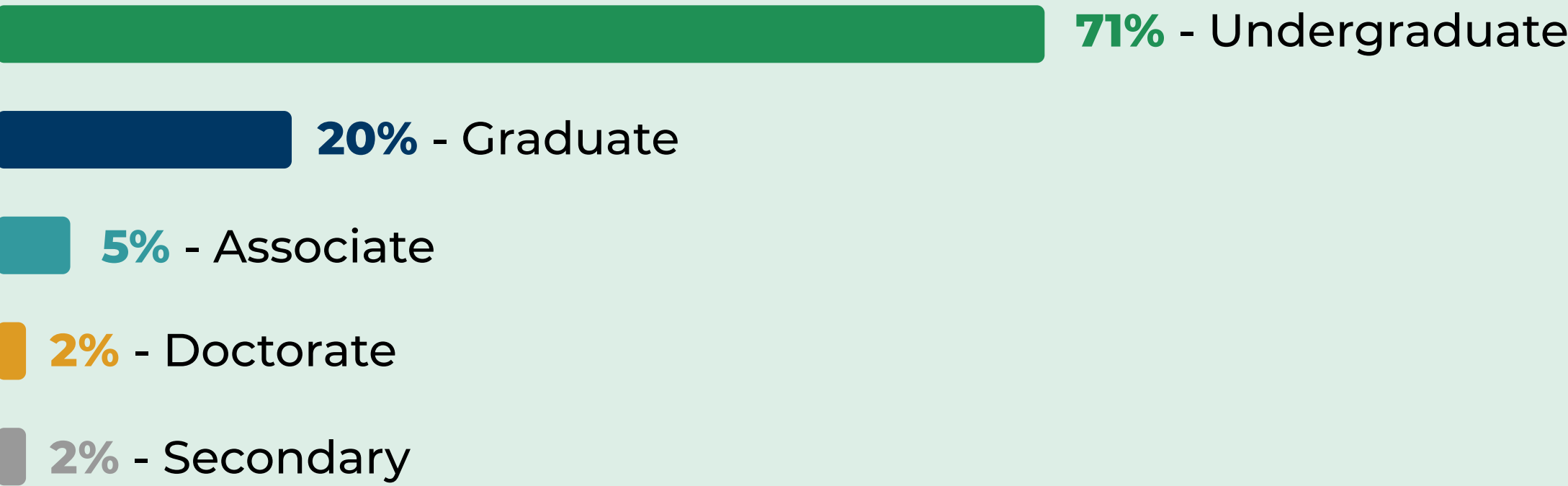
# **International and Immigrant Students**

# Snapshot of WES U.S. Applicants

Most individuals who apply for a WES credential evaluation for use in the U.S. plan to use it for educational purposes. Others use their reports for employment, licensure, immigration, or other purposes.



## Highest Level of Education

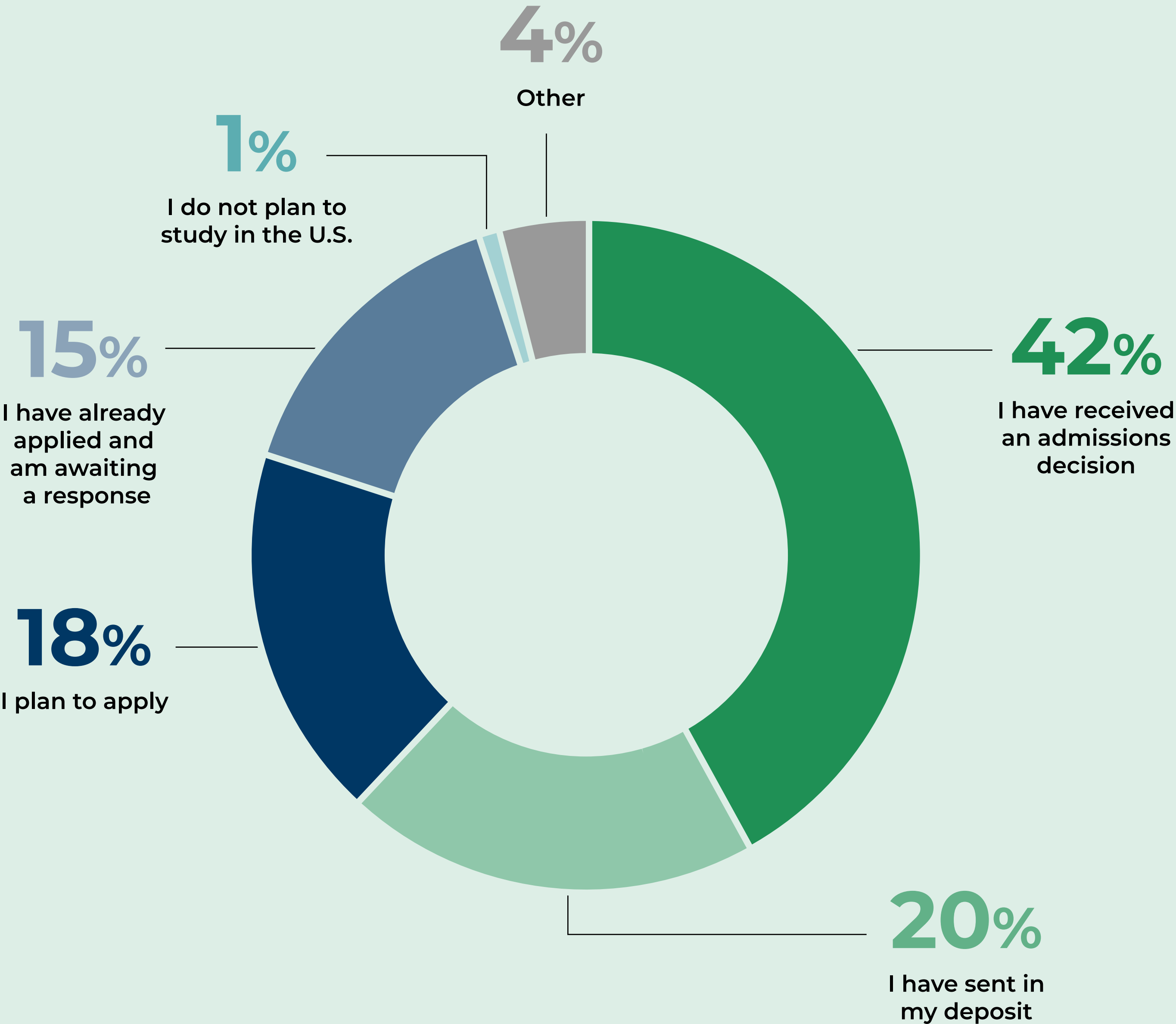




# Stage in Application Process to Attend a U.S. Higher Education Institution

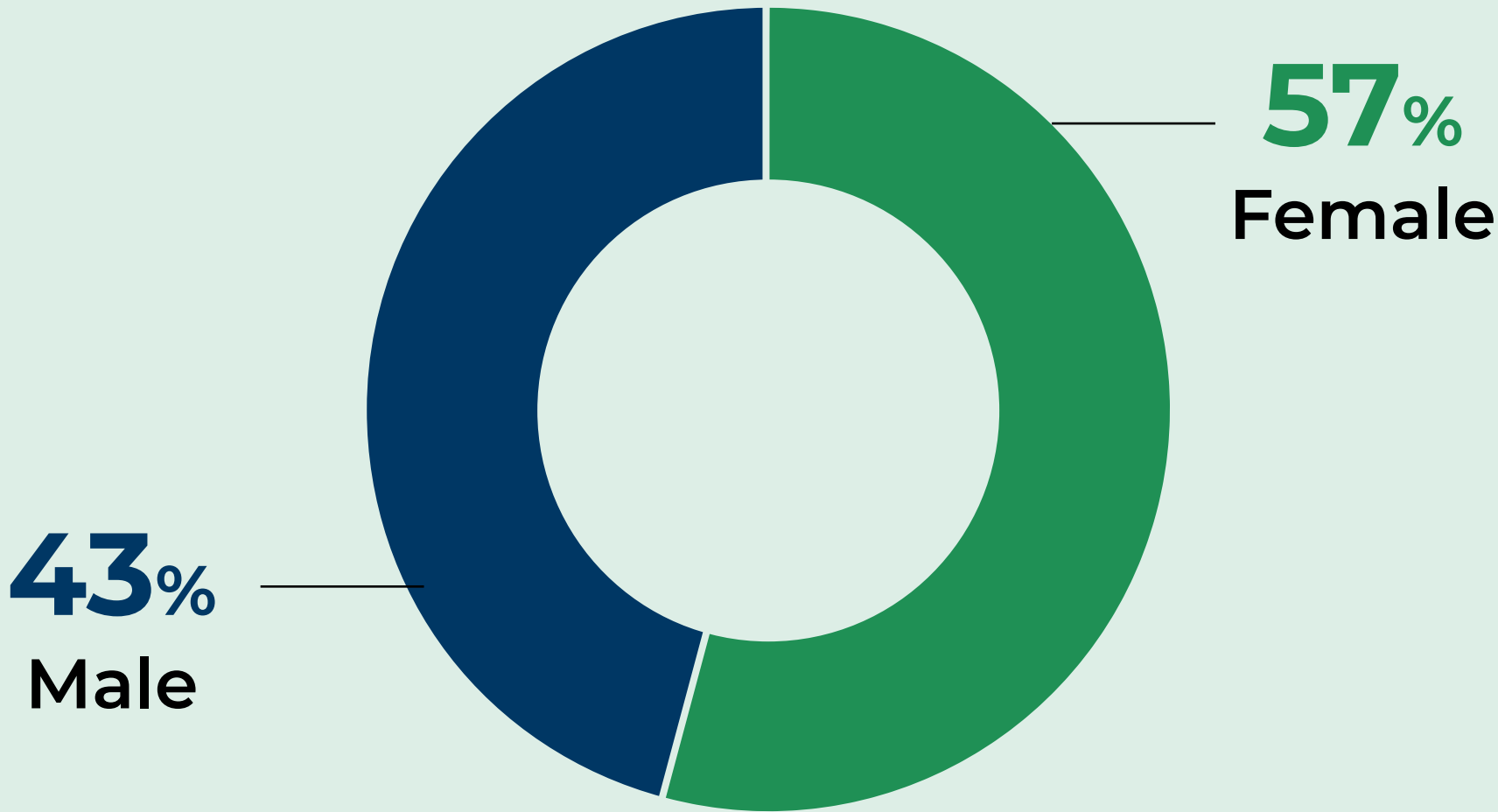
The majority of prospective students who responded to our survey had already received an admissions decision or sent in their deposit. Another 33% planned to apply or were awaiting a response to their application at the time of our survey.

The survey included both international and immigrant students. Hereafter, we will refer to this group simply as "international students."

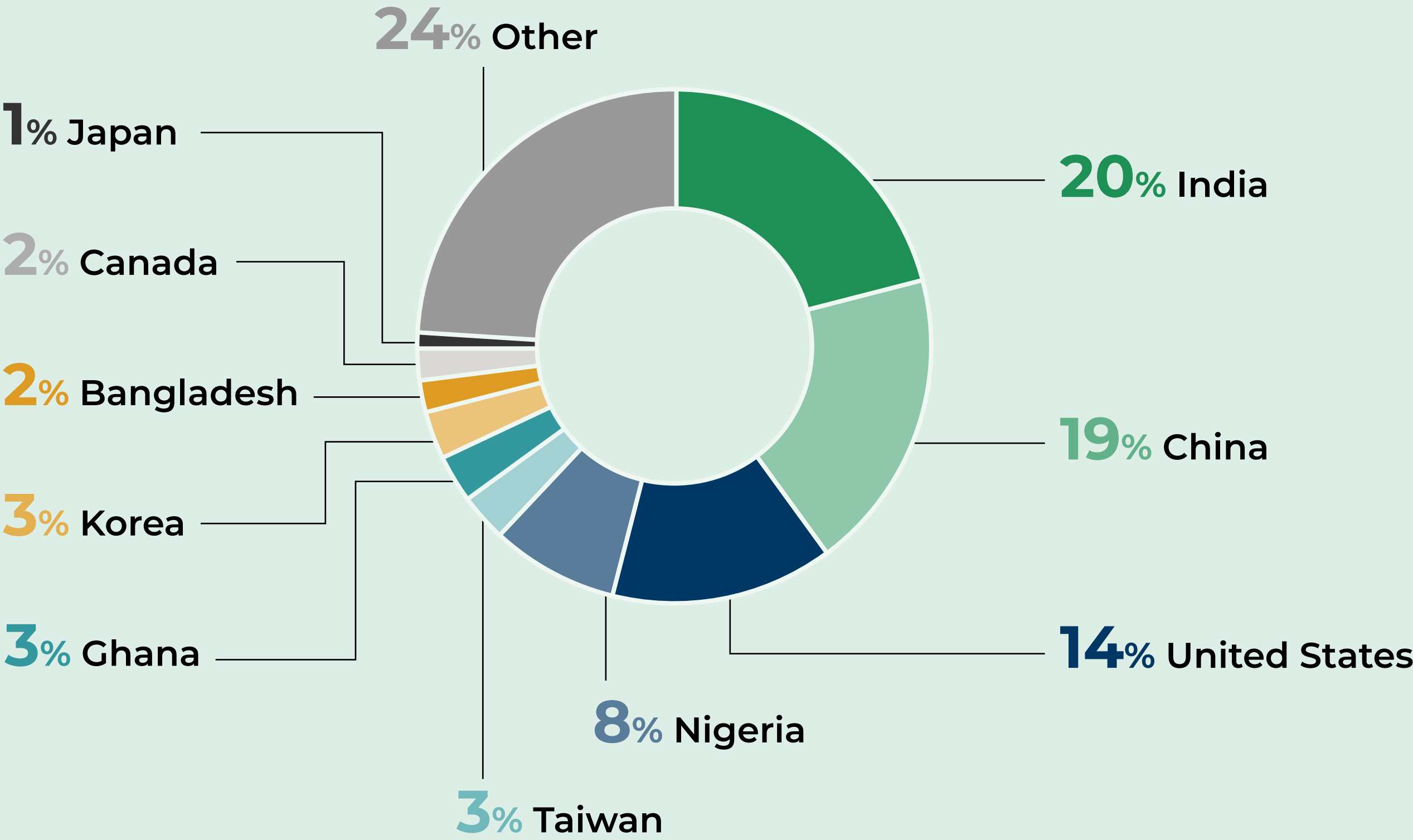


Note: Those currently enrolled at a U.S. institution were disqualified from the survey. Those not planning to study in the U.S. were included in the analysis.

# Gender of Respondents



# Top 10 Countries of Residence



Note: Gender data are drawn from linked WES data. Gender data are missing for 28 respondents.

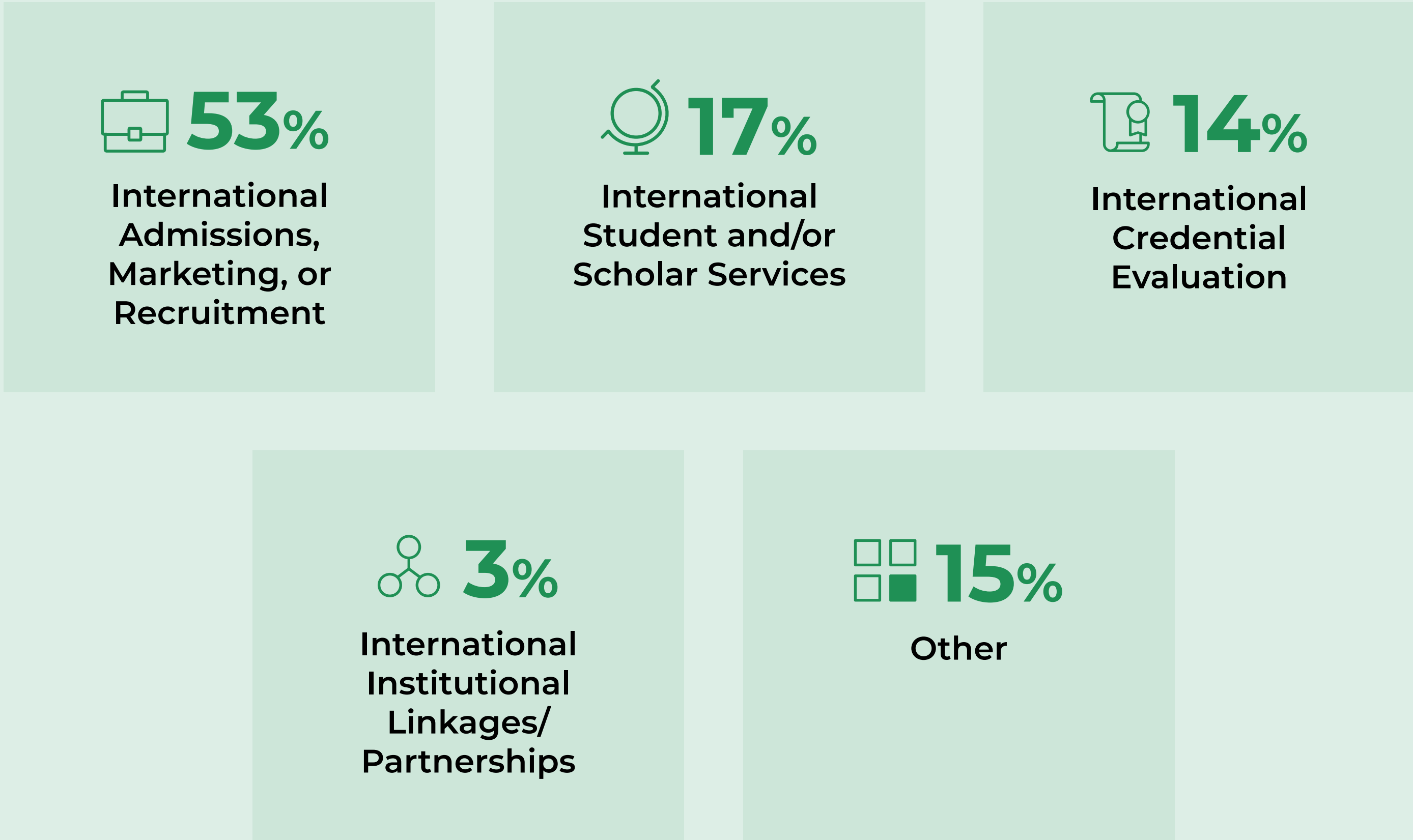


Part II: Profile of Respondents

# Higher Education Professionals

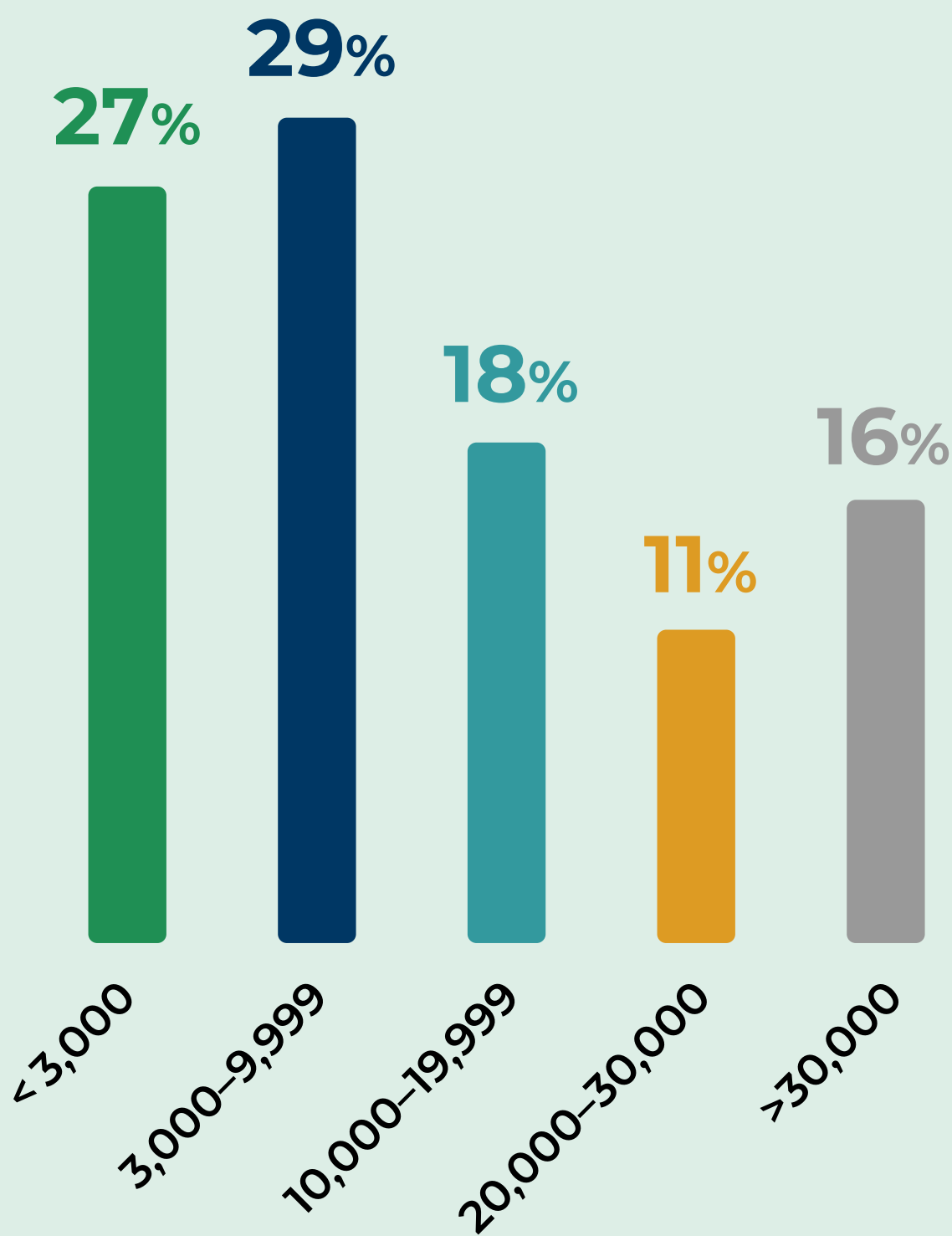
# Higher Education Professionals

More than half of the higher education professionals who responded to our survey are responsible for international admissions, marketing, or recruitment. An additional 17% work in international student and/or scholar services.

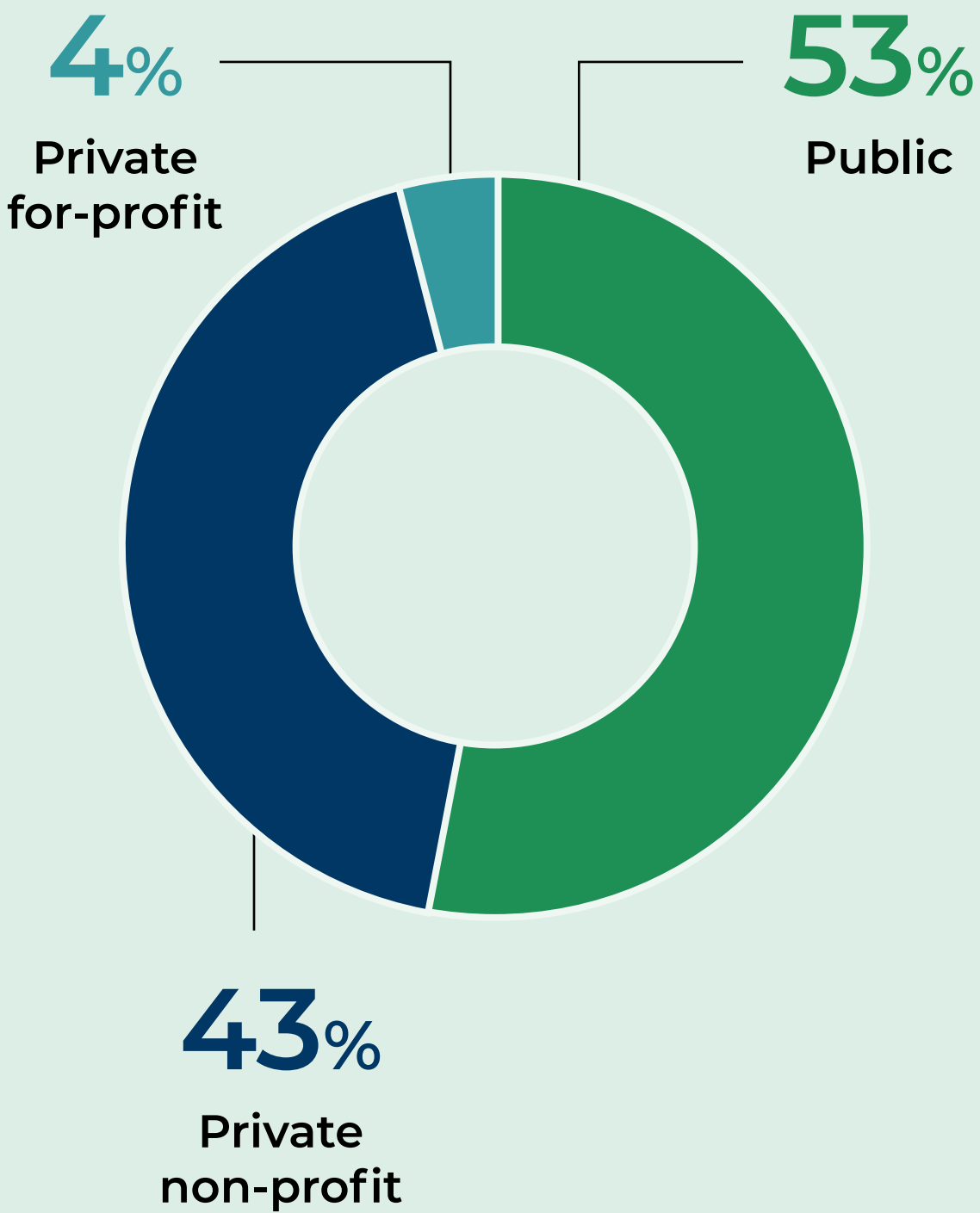




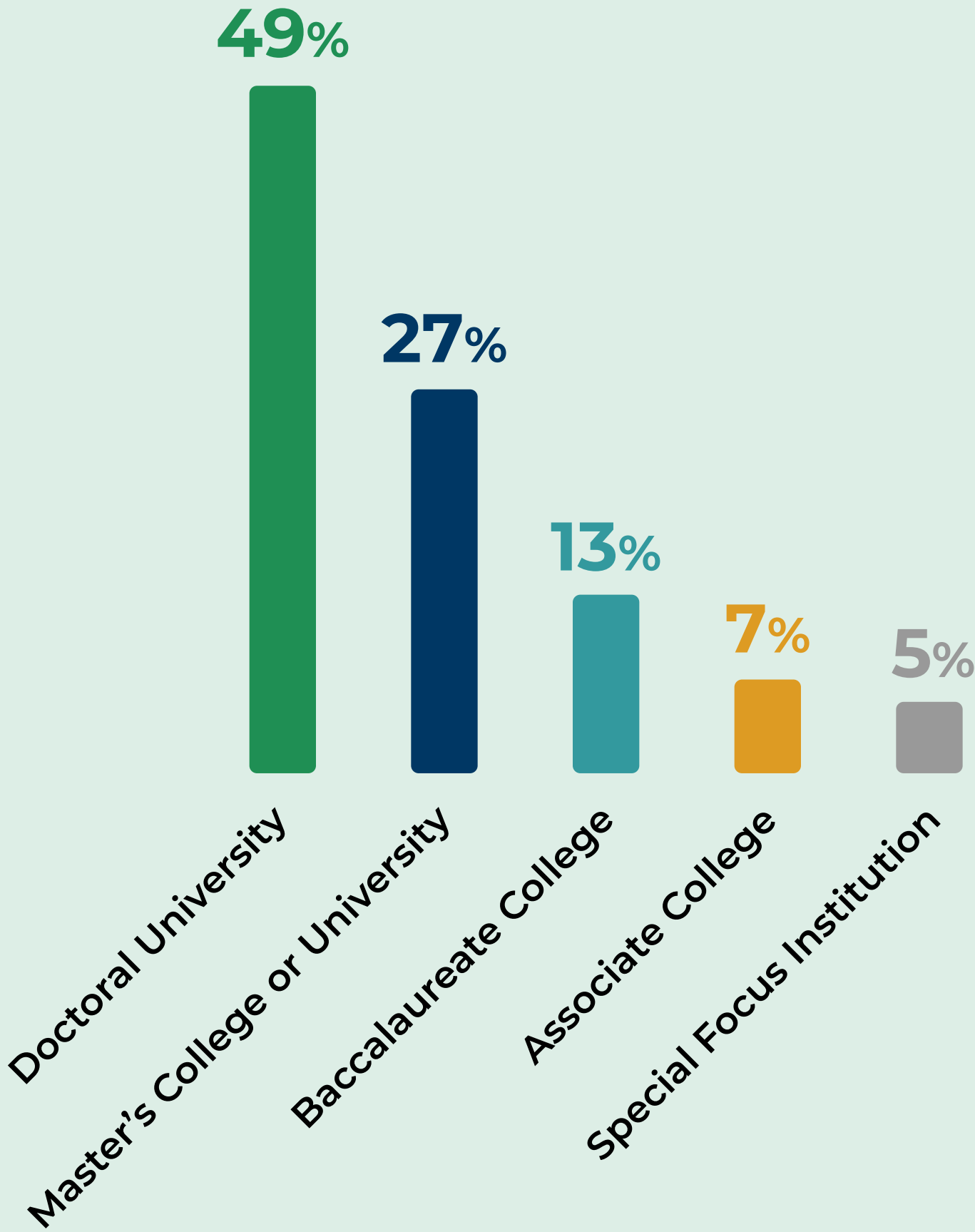
# Total Student Enrollment



# Funding Structure



# Carnegie Classification







Part III:

# Results



Part III: Results

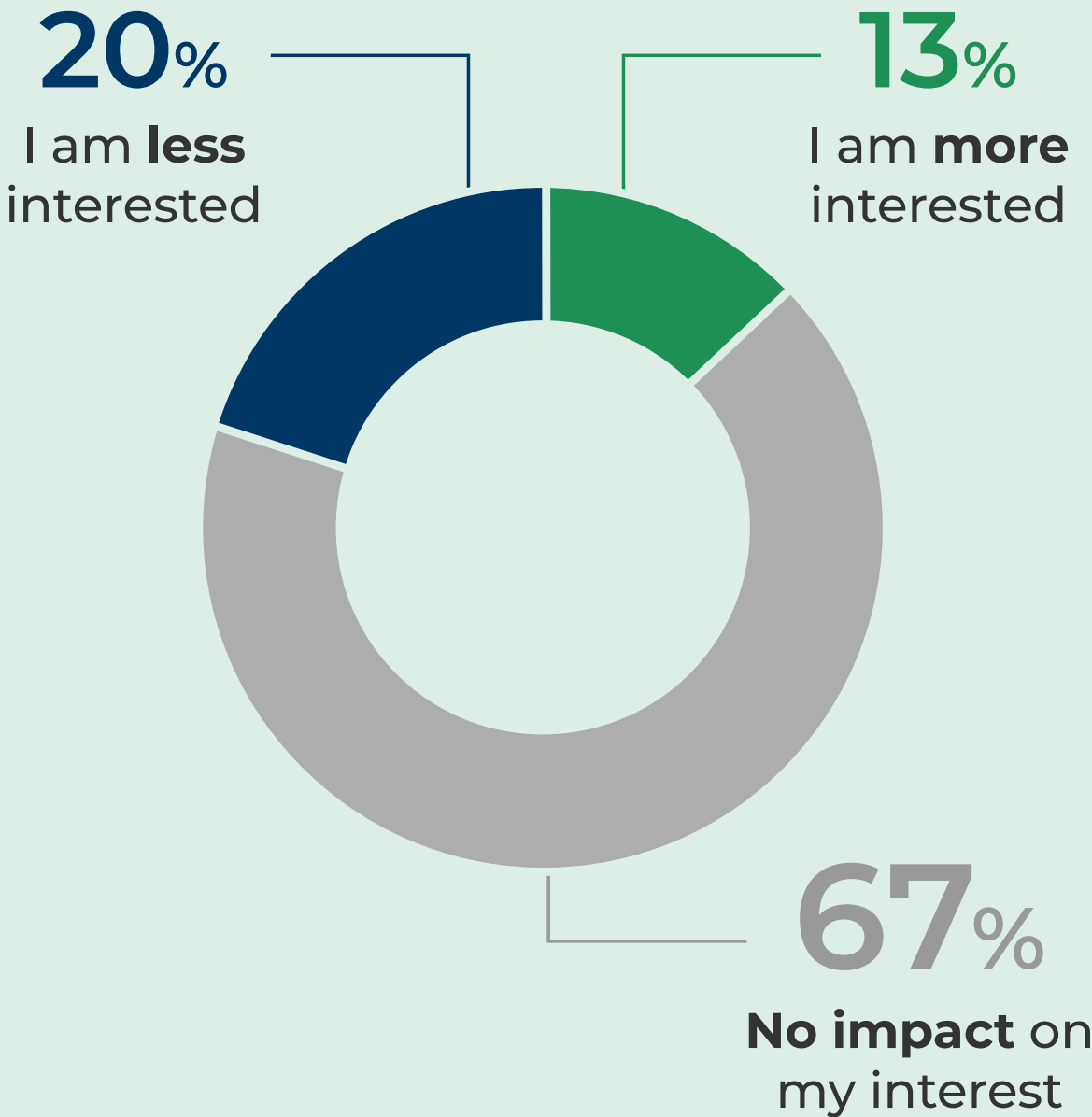
# **Concerns and Impact on International Student Enrollment**

# How Will COVID-19 Affect Fall 2020 Enrollment?

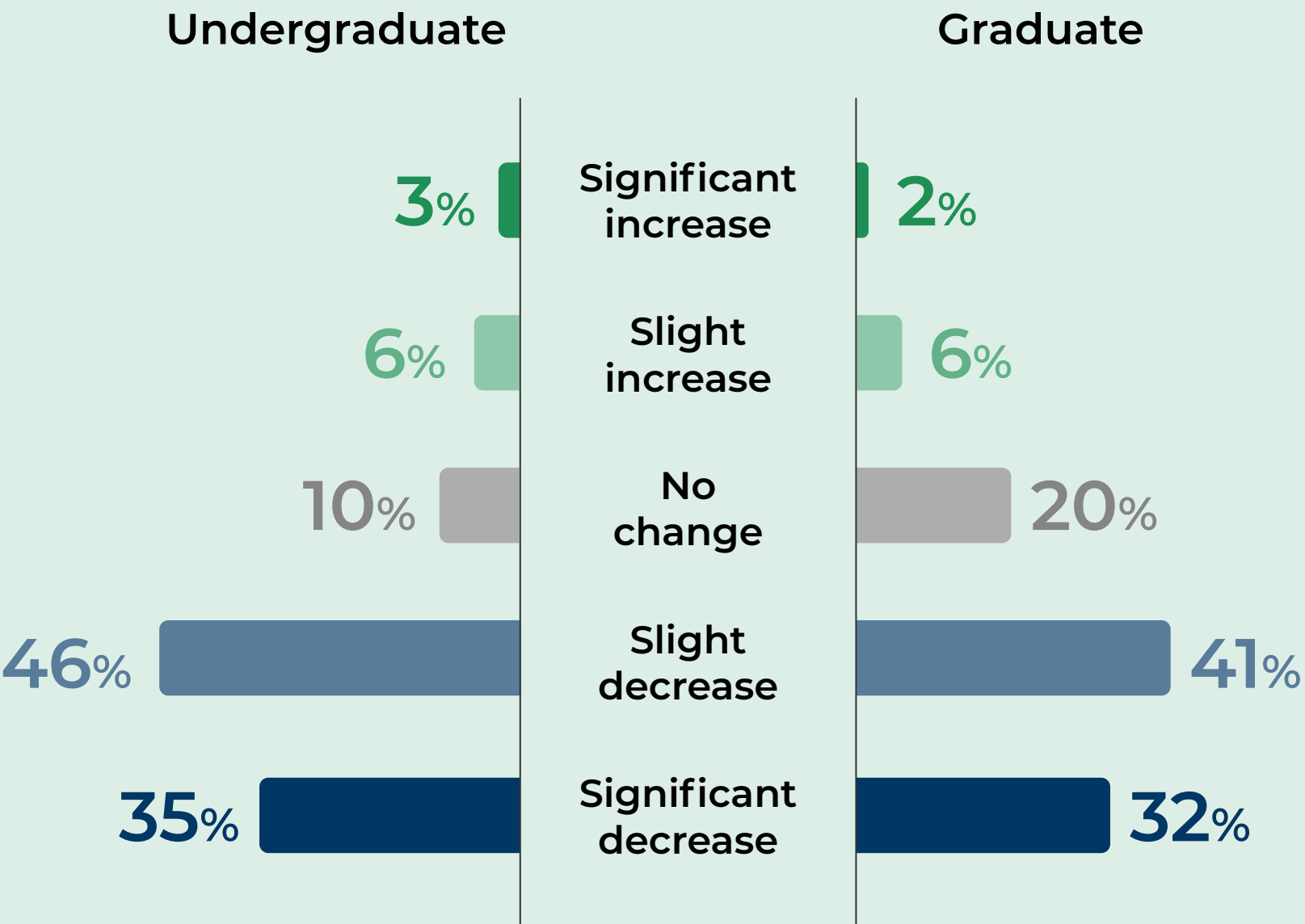
Two-thirds of prospective international students to the U.S. say the COVID-19 pandemic has had no impact on their interest in studying in the U.S.; however, 20% are less interested.

The majority of international education professionals at U.S. higher education institutions expect declining international student enrollment at their institutions for the coming academic year.

International Students:  
Impact of COVID-19 on Interest  
in Studying in the U.S.



Higher Education Professionals:  
Anticipated Change in  
Enrollment 2019/20–2020/21



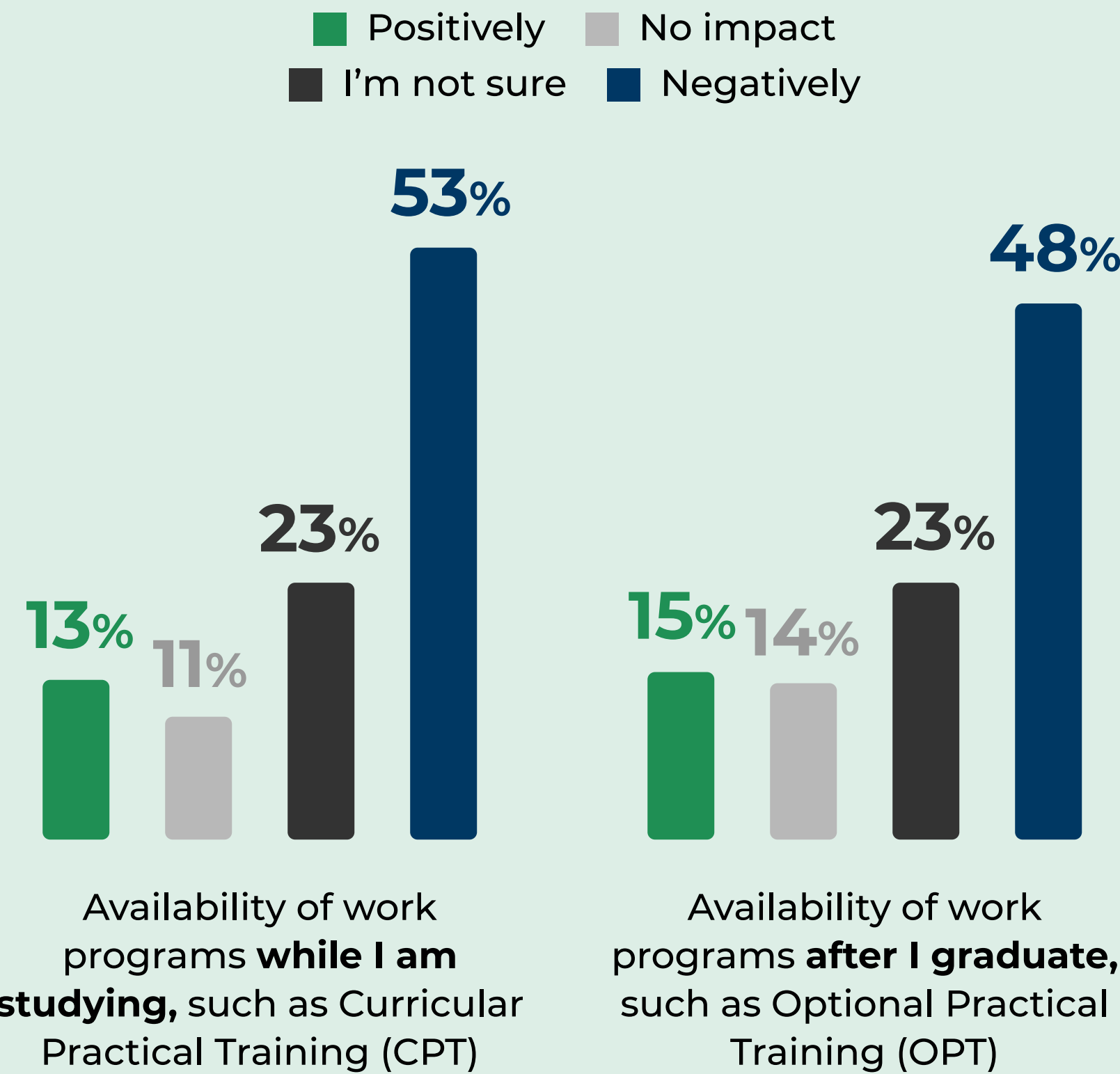
Note: “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.



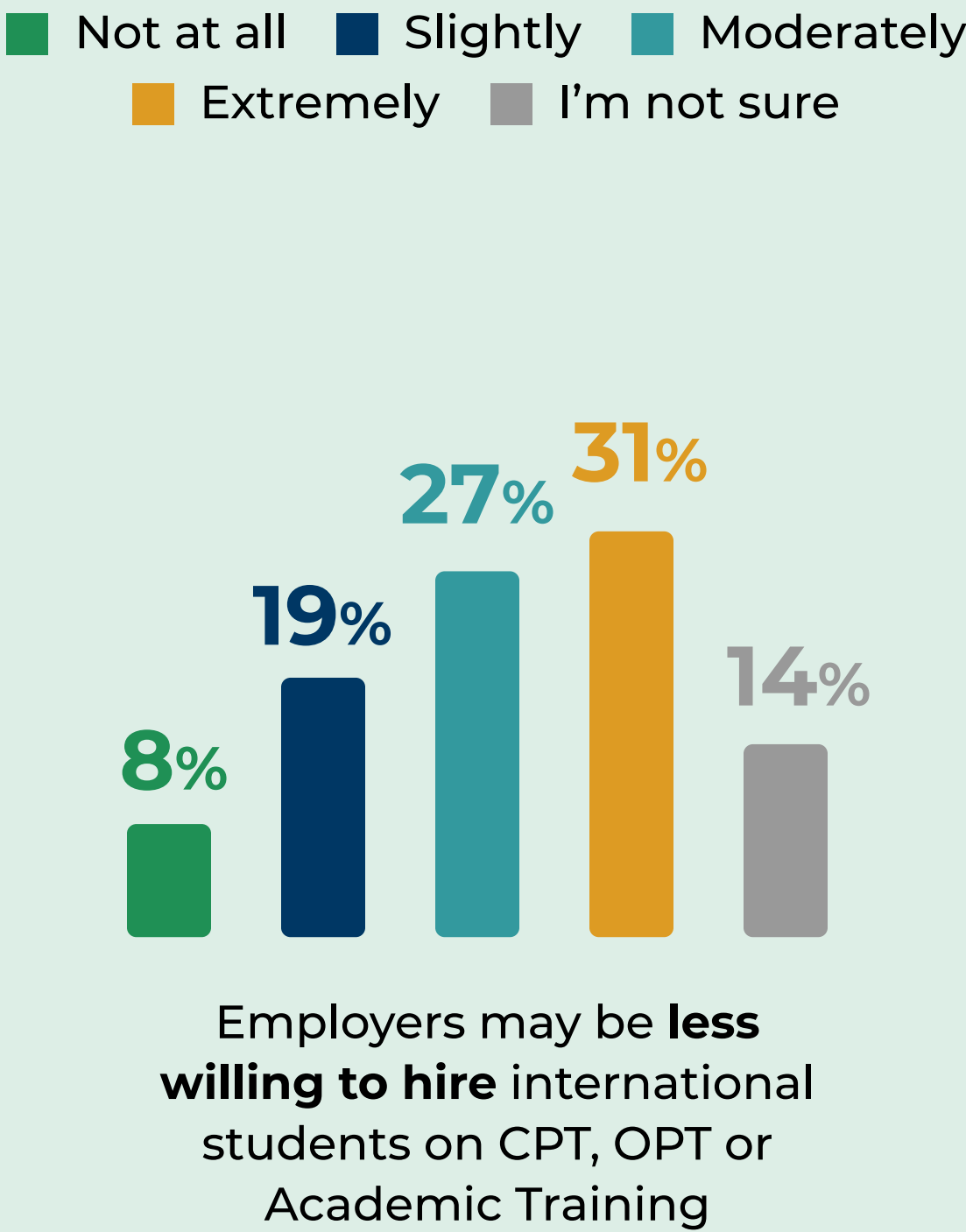
# Concerns About CPT and OPT

About half of prospective international students expect COVID-19 to negatively impact CPT and OPT. Likewise, almost a third of higher education professionals are extremely concerned that employers will be less willing to hire international students on CPT, OPT, or Academic Training.

Prospective International Students:  
Expectation of COVID-19’s Impact  
on CPT and OPT



Higher Education Professionals:  
Level of Concern about Employers  
Hiring International Students on CPT/  
OPT for Academic Year 2020/21



Note: “Positively” is a combination of “Positively” and “Very Positively.” “Negatively” is a combination of “Negatively” and “Very Negatively.” “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.

“

Many students that will graduate this May left the U.S. (following U.S. and home country directives) and will not be able to apply for post-completion Optional Practical Training, and [are] therefore **ending their professional development tied to their academic career earlier than expected.”**

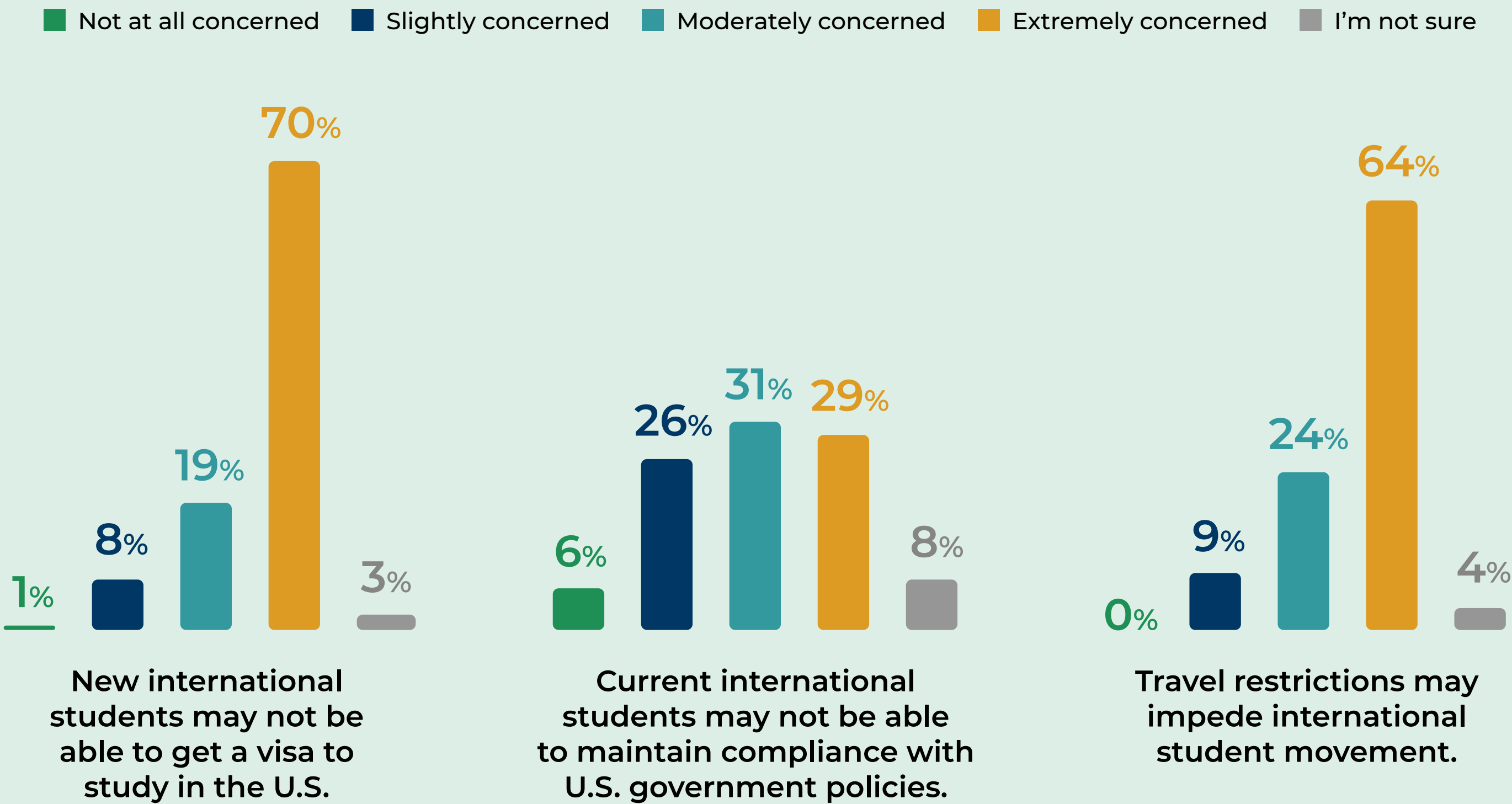
HEI Professional

# HEI Professionals: Concerns About Visa and Travel Challenges

Seventy percent of higher education professionals are extremely concerned that new international students may not be able to get a visa to study in the U.S.

Additionally, 64% are worried that travel restrictions will impede international student movement.

Concerns About Barriers to International Student Enrollment



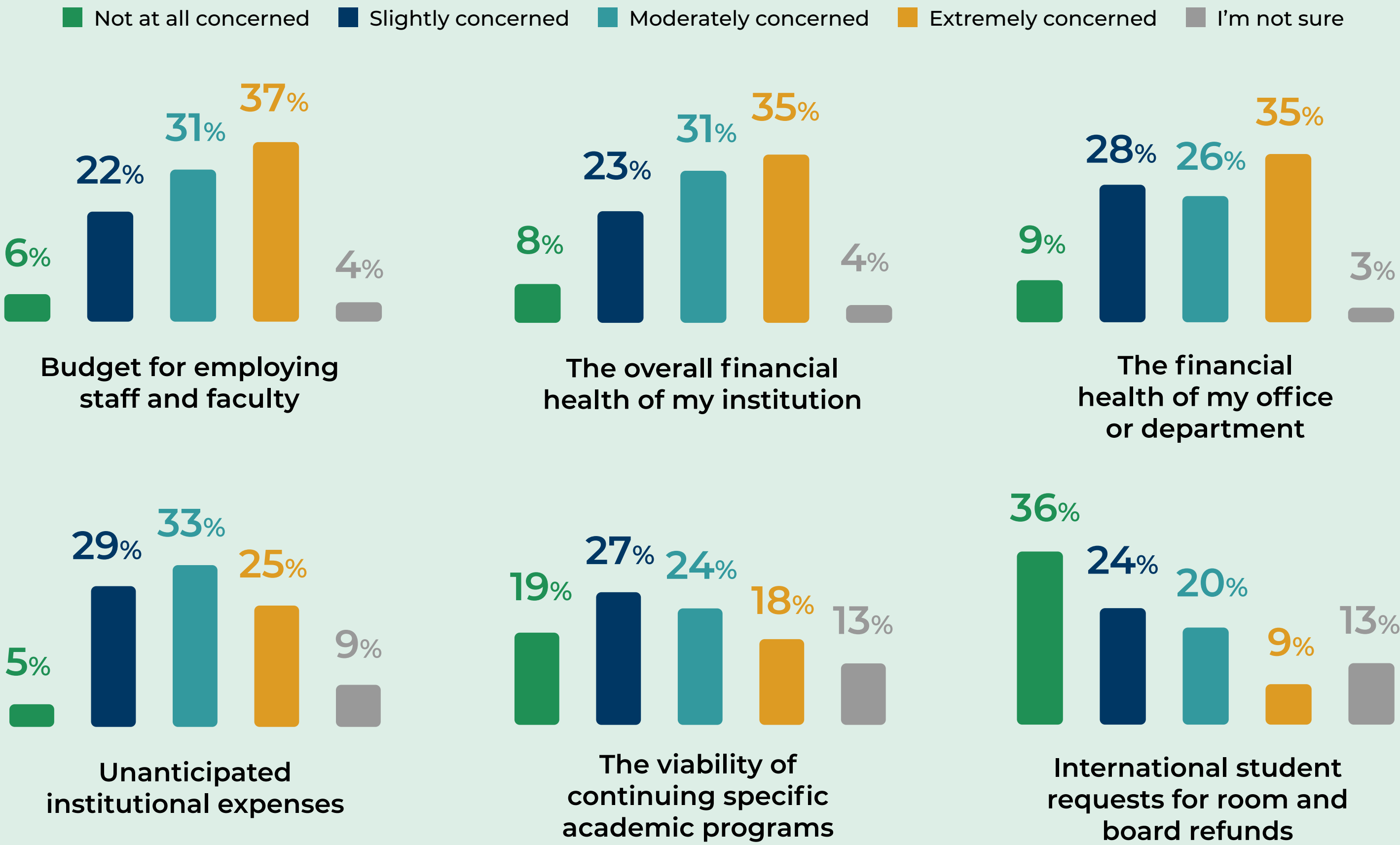
Note: “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.



# Concerns About the Financial Impact of COVID-19

More than a third of professionals are extremely concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their institution’s budget for employing staff and faculty (37%), the overall financial health of their institution (35%), and the financial health of their office or department specifically (35%).

## Higher Education Professionals’ Level of Concern About COVID-19 Impacting the Following:



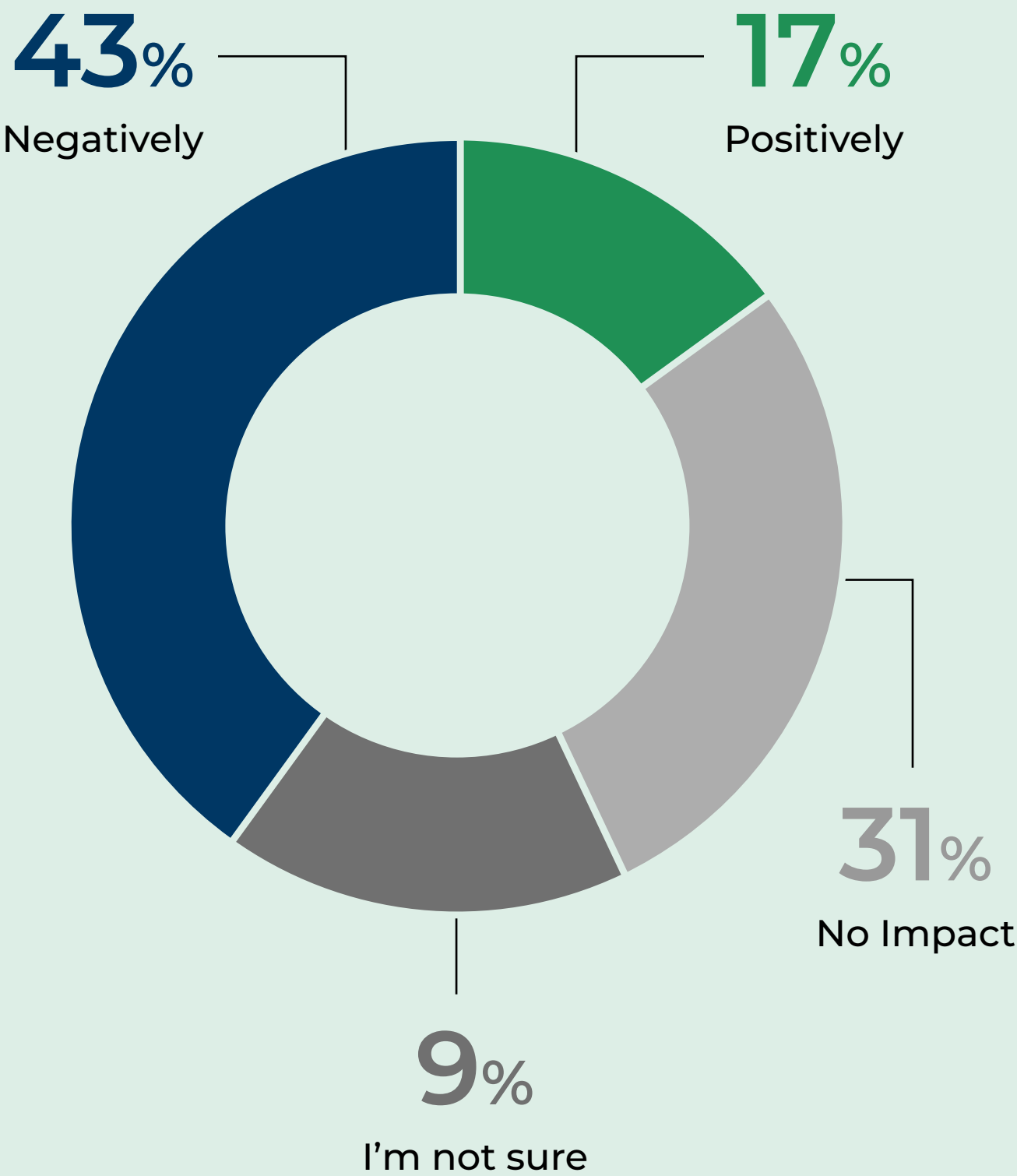
Note: “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.

# Expectations Regarding Impact on Personal Finances and the Openness of U.S. Society

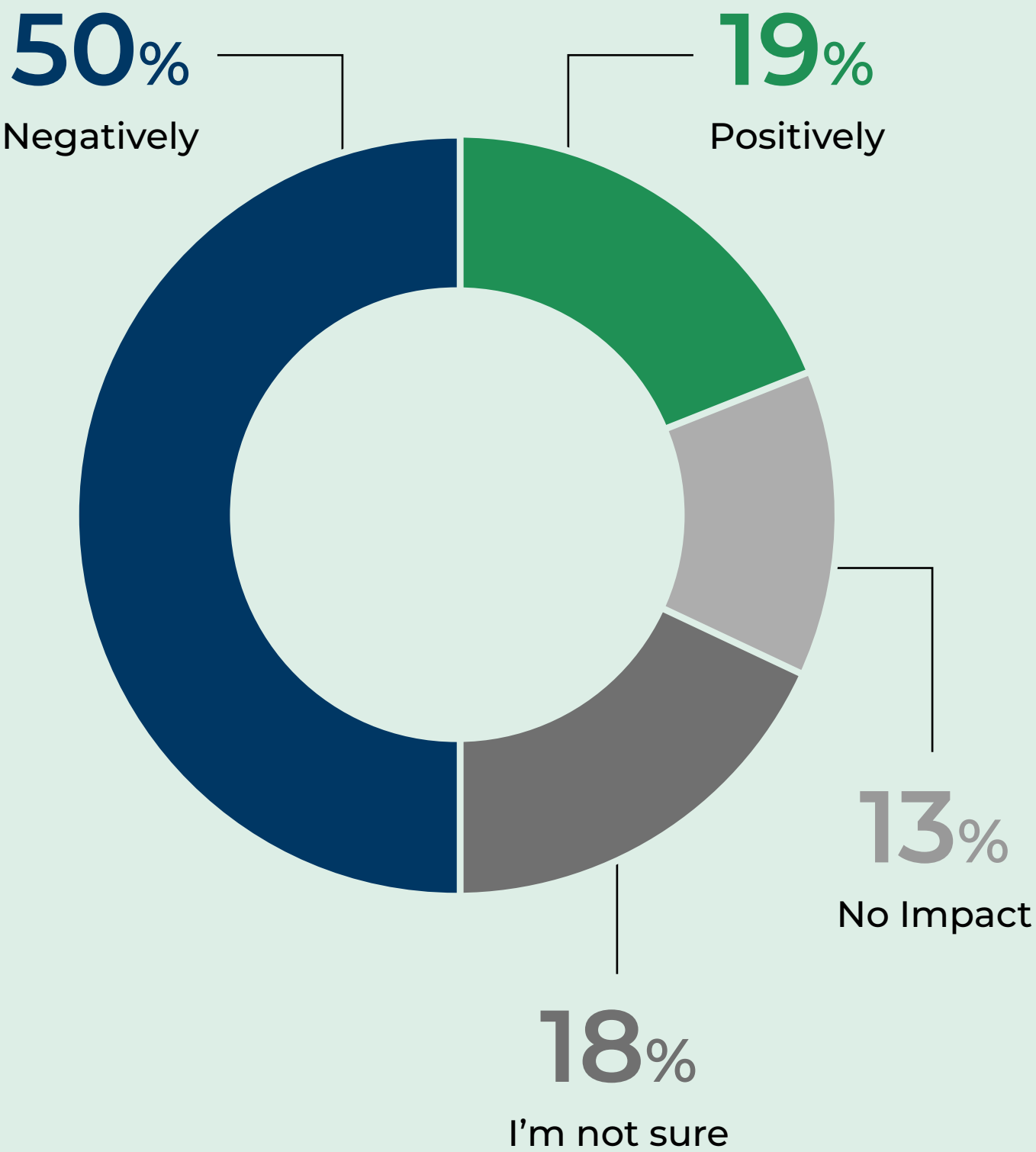
Four in ten (43%) prospective international students expect COVID-19 to negatively impact their ability to afford studying in the U.S.

Half of all prospective international students expect the pandemic to negatively impact the openness of U.S. society to international students.

Expectations of How COVID-19 Will Impact Their Ability to Afford Studying in the U.S.



Expectations of How COVID-19 Will Impact the Openness of U.S. Society to International Students



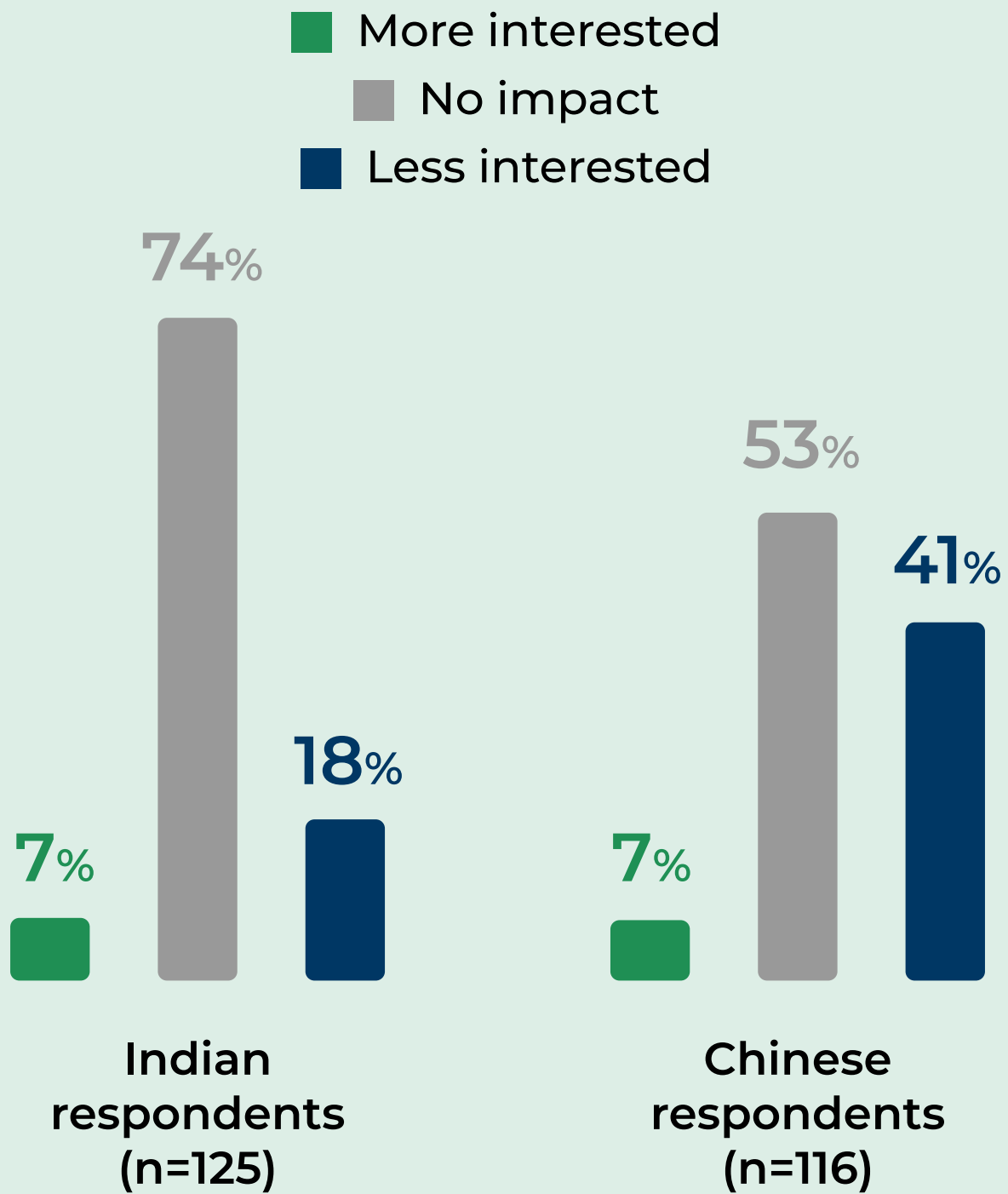
Note: “Positively” is a combination of “Positively” and “Very Positively.” “Negatively” is a combination of “Negatively” and “Very Negatively.” “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.

# Prospective Chinese and Indian Students: Interest and Expectations regarding Studying in the U.S.

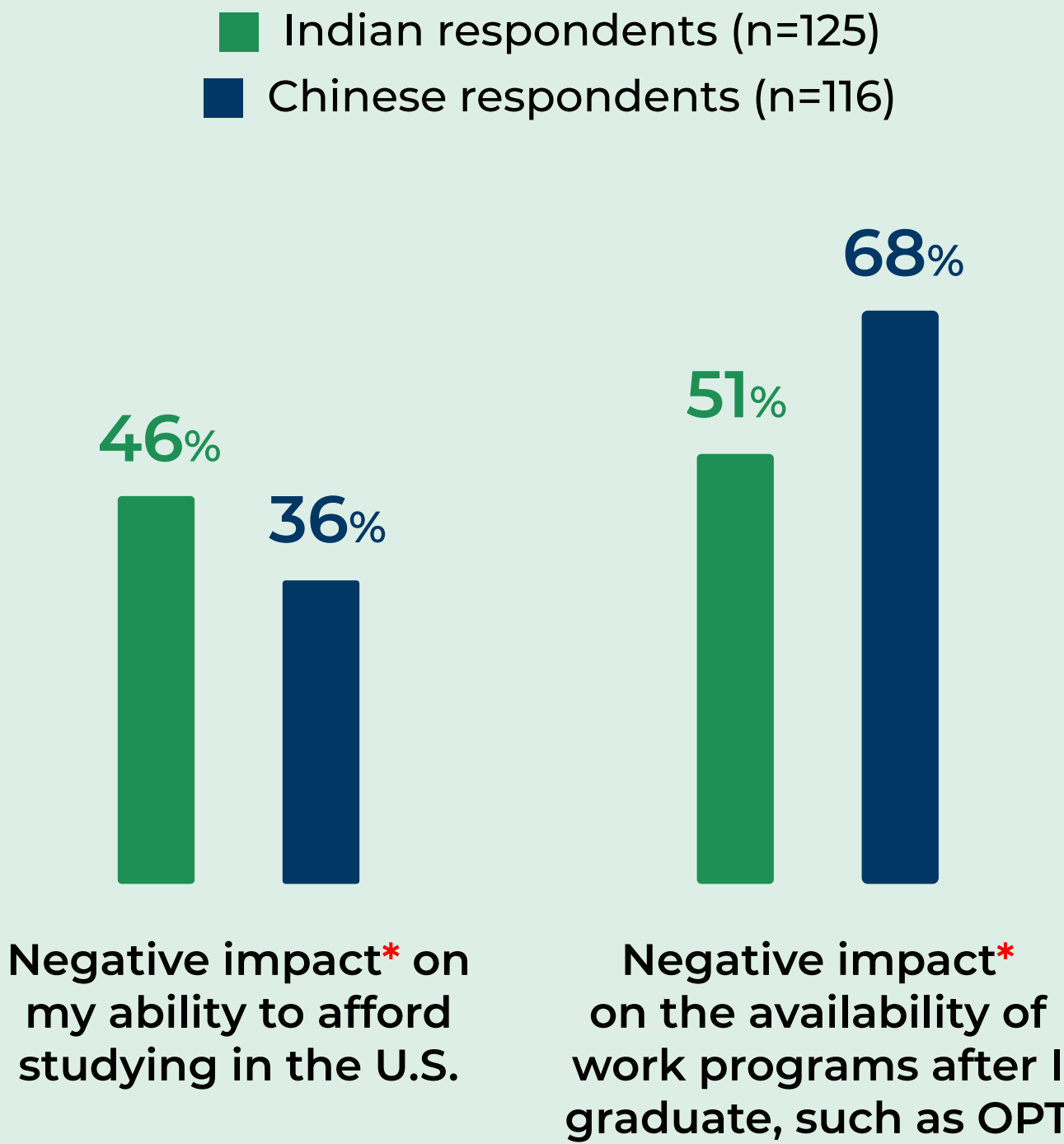
Prospective international students from China are more likely to say that COVID-19 has made them less interested (41%) in studying in the U.S. They are also more likely (68%) to expect that the pandemic will have a negative impact on the availability of post-graduation work programs.

Those from India are more likely (46%) to expect COVID-19 to negatively impact their ability to afford studying in the U.S.

Impact on Chinese and Indian Prospective Students' Interest in Studying in the U.S.



Chinese and Indian Prospective Students' Expectations of How COVID-19 Will Impact Financing and Work Opportunities



\*Note: "Negative impact" is a combination of those who answered "Negatively" and "Very Negatively."  
Note: "Not applicable" responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.

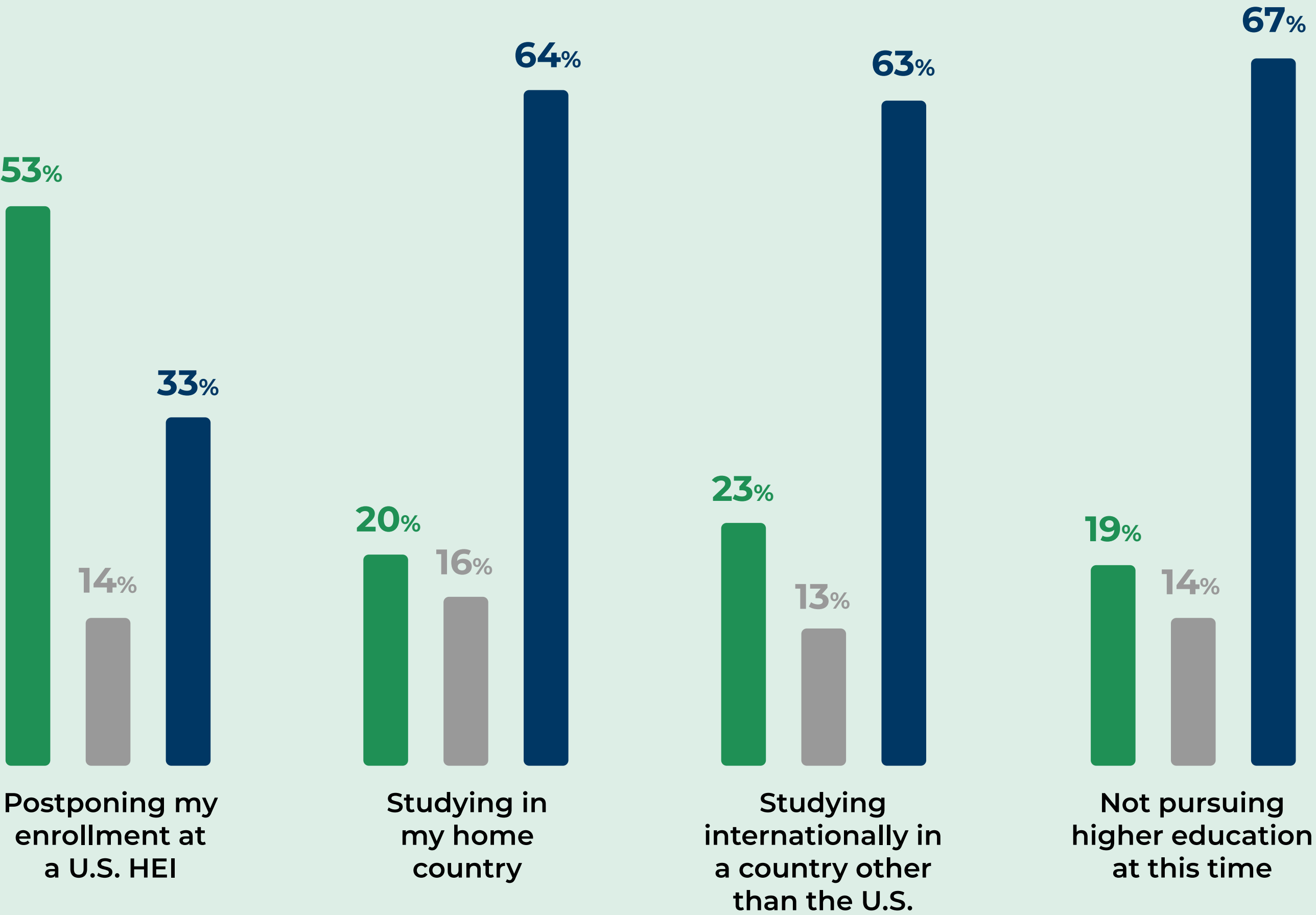


# Prospective International Students: Actions Being Considered as a Result of COVID-19

■ Likely ■ I'm Not Sure ■ Unlikely

Fifty-three percent are considering postponing their enrollment at a U.S. higher education institution.

Far fewer prospective international students are contemplating alternative destination countries (23%), studying in their home countries (20%), or not pursuing higher education at this time (19%).



Note: “Likely” is a combination of “Likely” and “Very Likely.” “Unlikely” is a combination of “Unlikely” and “Very Unlikely.” “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.

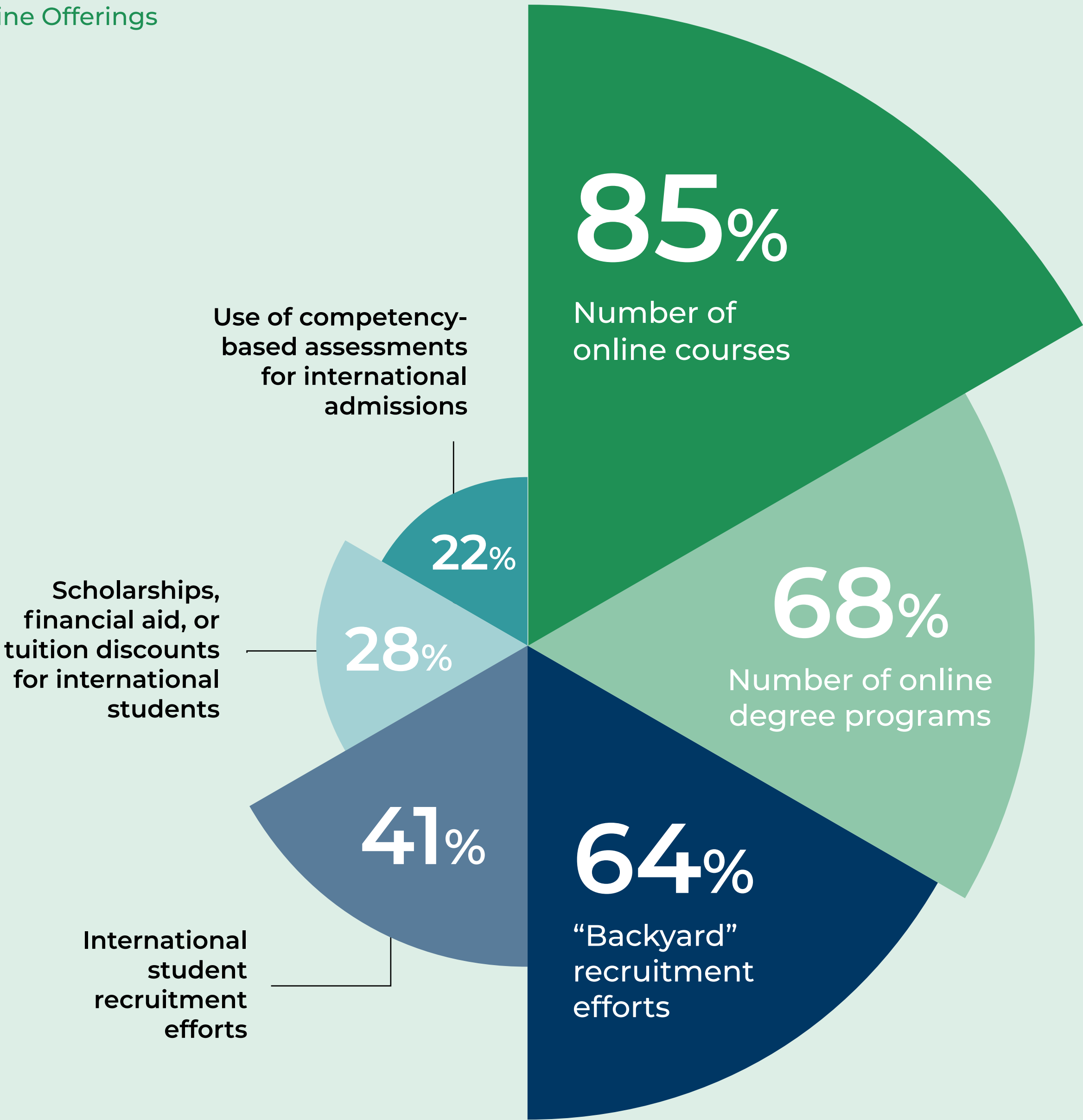
Part III: Results

# **International Student Support and the Impact of Online Offerings**

# HEI Professionals: Projection of Increased Use of Specific Recruitment and Admissions Practices

Over the next two academic years, higher education professionals expect their institution to offer more online courses (85%) and online degree programs (68%).

Most respondents (64%) believe that their institutions will increase efforts to recruit international students already living in the U.S.



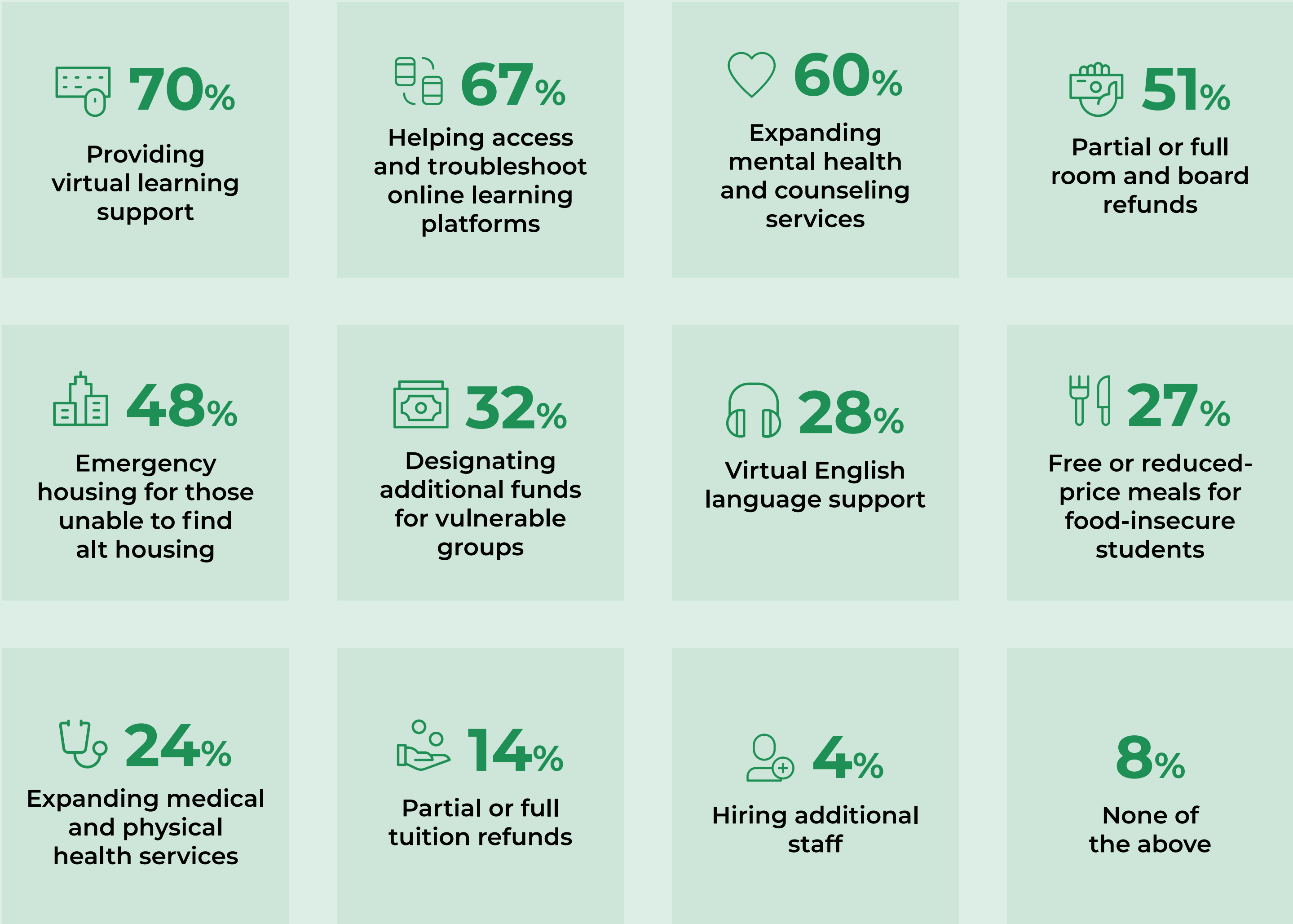
Note: Percentages reflect those who answered “Increase slightly” or “Increase significantly.” “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change. “Backyard recruitment” refers to recruitment of international students already living in the U.S., such as those attending U.S. high schools or community colleges.



# Additional Steps HEIs Are Taking to Support International Students

The most typical supports include providing virtual learning support services such as online tutoring (70%), helping international students access and troubleshoot online learning platforms (67%), and expanding mental health and counseling services (60%).

Only 14% of professionals say their institution is offering partial or full tuition refunds to international students.

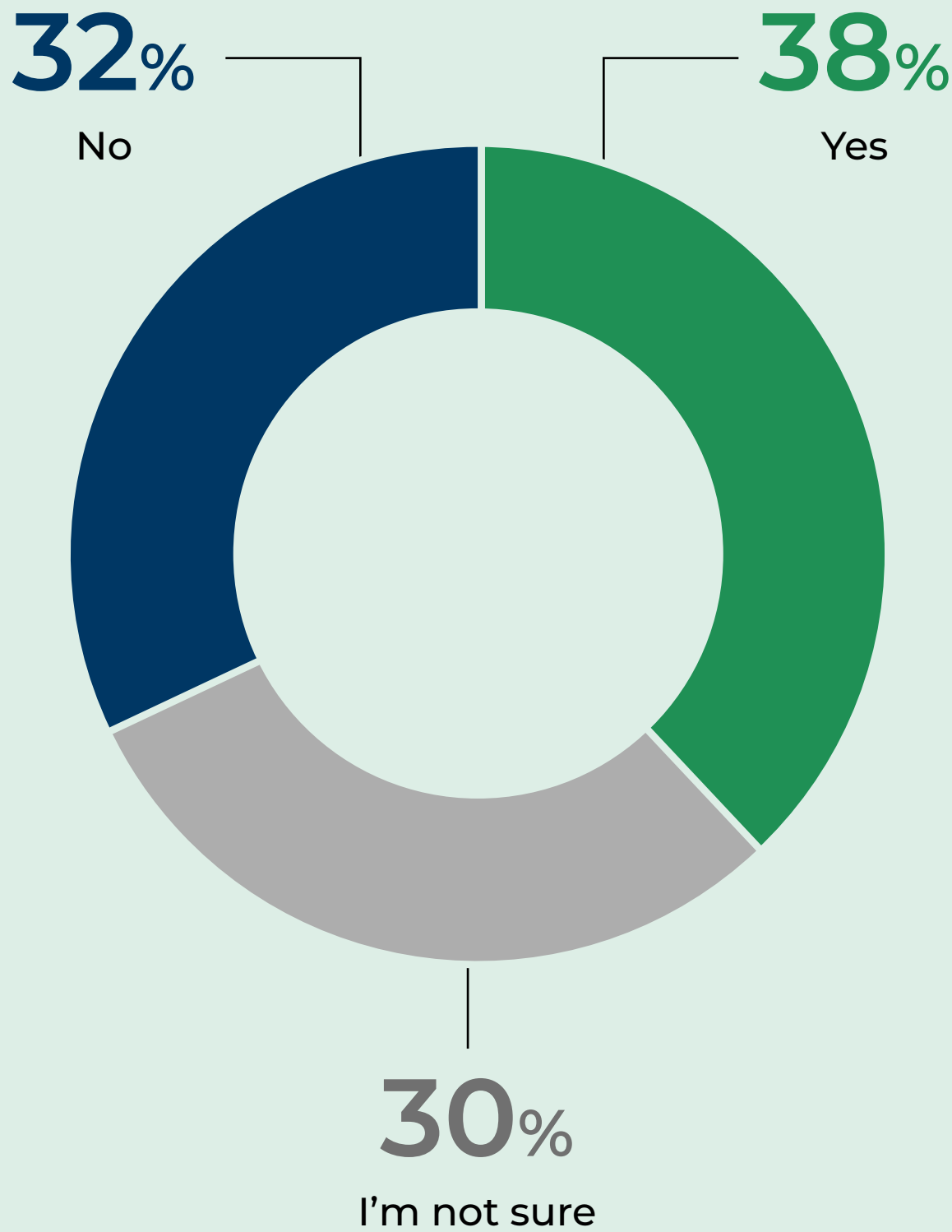


Note: Respondents could select one or more options. “None of the above” was an exclusive choice.

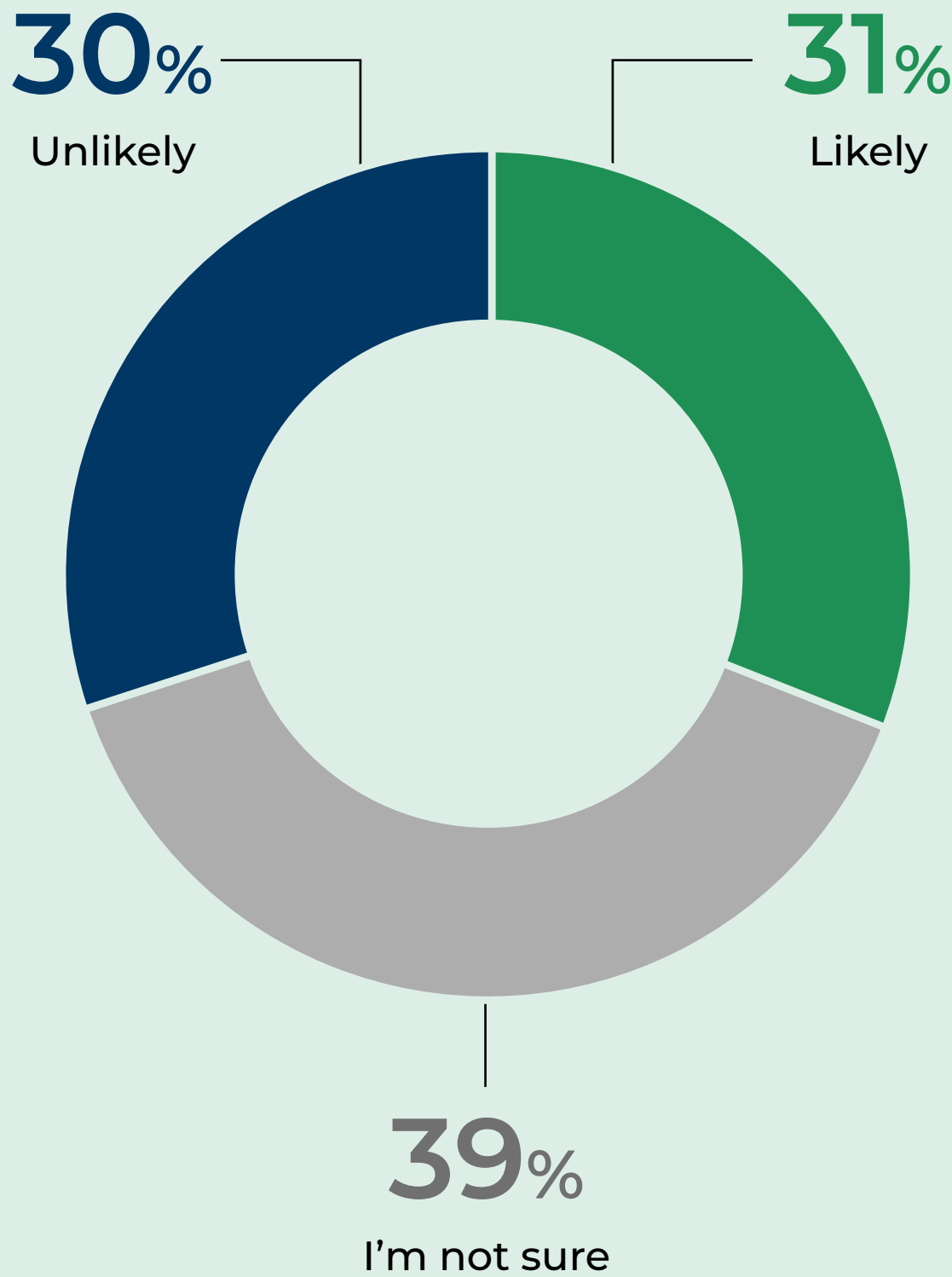
# Thoughts About Online-Only Courses for Fall 2020

Thirty-two percent of international students would not enroll in a U.S. HEI if the courses were only online for Fall 2020. About the same proportion of higher education professionals expect that their institution will continue with remote learning. Nearly four in ten (39%) are unsure.

**Prospective International Students:**  
Consideration of Enrollment at a U.S. HEI if the Courses Were Only Offered Online for Fall 2020



**HEI Professionals:**  
Expectation that Their Institution Will Continue Remote Learning in Fall 2020



Note: “Likely” is a combination of “Likely” and “Very Likely.” “Unlikely” is a combination of “Unlikely” and “Very Unlikely.” “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.

# The Trump Administration and Online-Only Courses for International Students

On July 6, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced a new policy in which international students attending U.S. institutions with online-only courses in Fall 2020 would not be granted a visa or be allowed to stay in the U.S.\* There was swift backlash, including lawsuits, from the higher education sector, many states, and others.\*\*

As a result, the Trump administration retracted the policy on July 14. However, it is unclear if the administration will attempt a revised version of the policy or issue other restrictions on international students. The volatility surrounding such a policy may impact prospective student decision-making for this fall and beyond, as well as the plans of U.S. colleges and universities.

\*Source: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, July 7, 2020, News Release on the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/sevp-modifies-temporary-exemptions-nonimmigrant-students-taking-online-courses-during>

\*\*Source: Elizabeth Redden, July 15, 2020, Government Rescinds International Student Policy, Inside Higher Ed, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/15/trump-administration-drops-directive-international-students-and-online-courses>



# Expected Changes in International Admissions and Recruitment Practices Over the Next Two Years\*

More than half of higher education professionals think it is likely that their institution will offer more flexible international admissions deadlines (60%) and make some or all standardized tests optional (54%) over the next two academic years.



Note: “Likely” is a combination of “Likely” and “Very Likely.” “Unlikely,” “Very Unlikely,” “No impact,” and “I’m not sure” are not shown in the graph. “Not applicable” responses were excluded from analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change.

\*Refers to academic years 2020/21 to 2021/22.





Part IV:

# Appendix



# Survey Methodology

## Sampling method:

- Stratified random sampling
- **Prospective International Students:** U.S. WES applicants with applications submitted and evaluations completed from June 2019 to early April 2020 for education purposes and WES applicant newsletter subscribers. The sample included some temporary residents (not on international student visas) and immigrants, including permanent residents, residing in the U.S.
- **Higher Education Professionals:** WENR subscribers, WES Training subscribers, Access WES users in the U.S., and other WES institutional clients.

## Data collection period:

April 15, 2020 – April 21, 2020

## Reporting:

- Only complete and qualified responses were included in the analysis. Students currently enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions and U.S. citizens were disqualified from the survey.
- Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
- For some questions, certain responses (such as "Not applicable") were removed from the analysis and reporting. These are noted in each case.

## Number of questions:

- **Prospective International Student Survey:** 10
- **Higher Education Professional Survey:** 19



# Survey Metrics

	Prospective International Student Survey	Higher Education Professional Survey
Total Invitations	14,537	7,586
Total Responses Collected	921	343
Response Rate	6.3%	4.5%
Total Complete Responses	778	264
Completion Rate	84.5%	77%
Complete and Qualified Responses	615	199

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