

# Threats and Harassment in Local Government: Benchmarking Report

*November 2023*



11/30/2023

Threats and Harassment in Local Government – November 2023 Benchmarking Report



Bridging  
Divides  
Initiative

# Table of contents

---

- Key Findings ([Slide 3](#))
- Local Officials' Experience With Hostile Events ([Slide 4](#))
- Local Officials' Worries about Hostile Events ([Slide 11](#))
- Appendix – Methodology and Additional Info ([Slide 18](#))

# Key Findings across 5 rounds of surveys to date:

---

## **1. Increasing harassment for local officials, consistently high baseline across remaining categories**

In the last three months, the rate of harassment of local officials has measurably increased. Incidence of insults, threats, and attacks have remained high.

## **2. Threats and attacks cut across party lines**

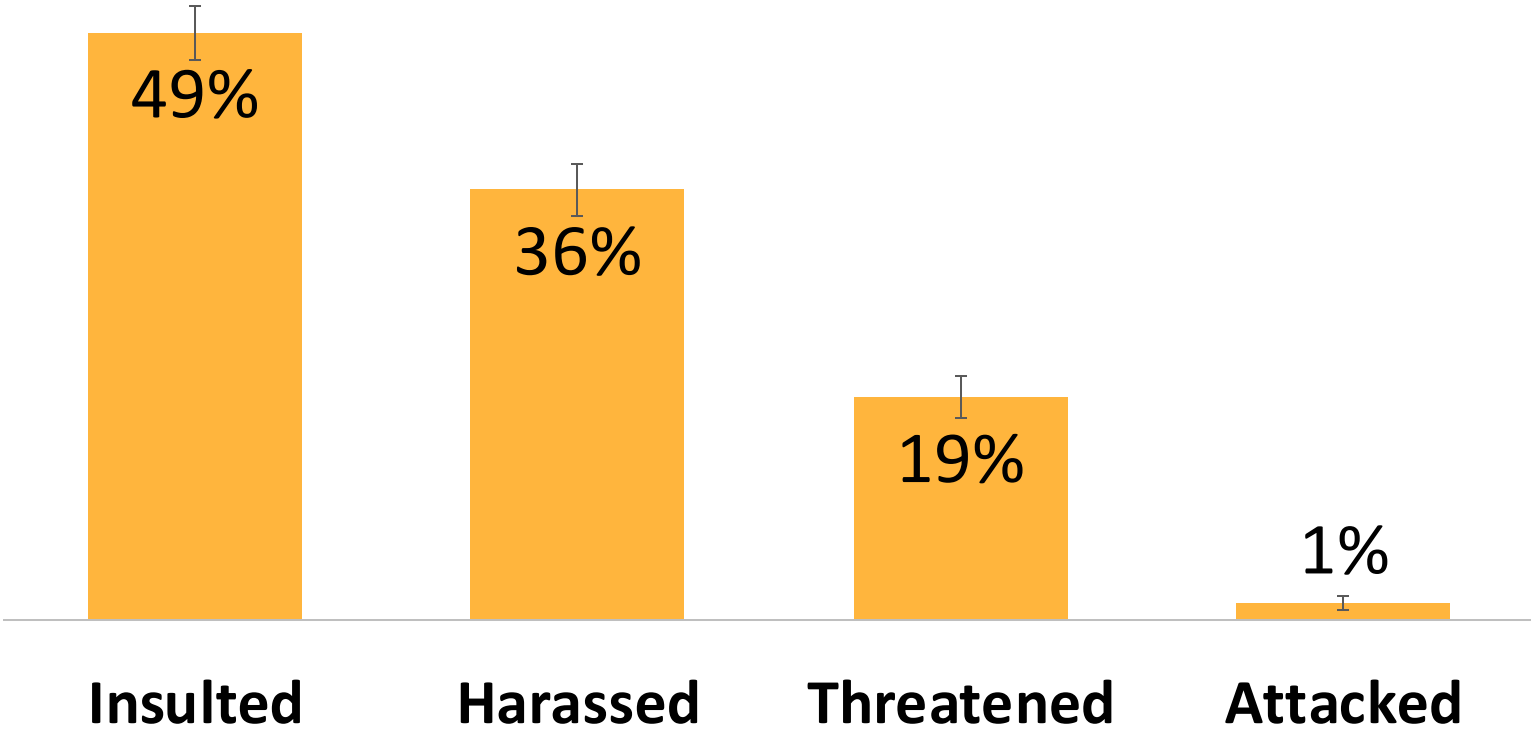
While Democratic officials are more likely to report experiencing insults and harassment, the most serious events—threats of physical violence and actual physical attacks—are experienced at similar rates across parties.

## **3. Women and minority officials are harassed and threatened more often**

Even after controlling for other factors like party and constituency size, women are significantly more likely to report being harassed, and both women and racial/ethnic minorities are significantly more likely to report being threatened.

Experiences of threats and harassment are widespread, with over a third of officials surveyed reporting harassment in a three-month period.

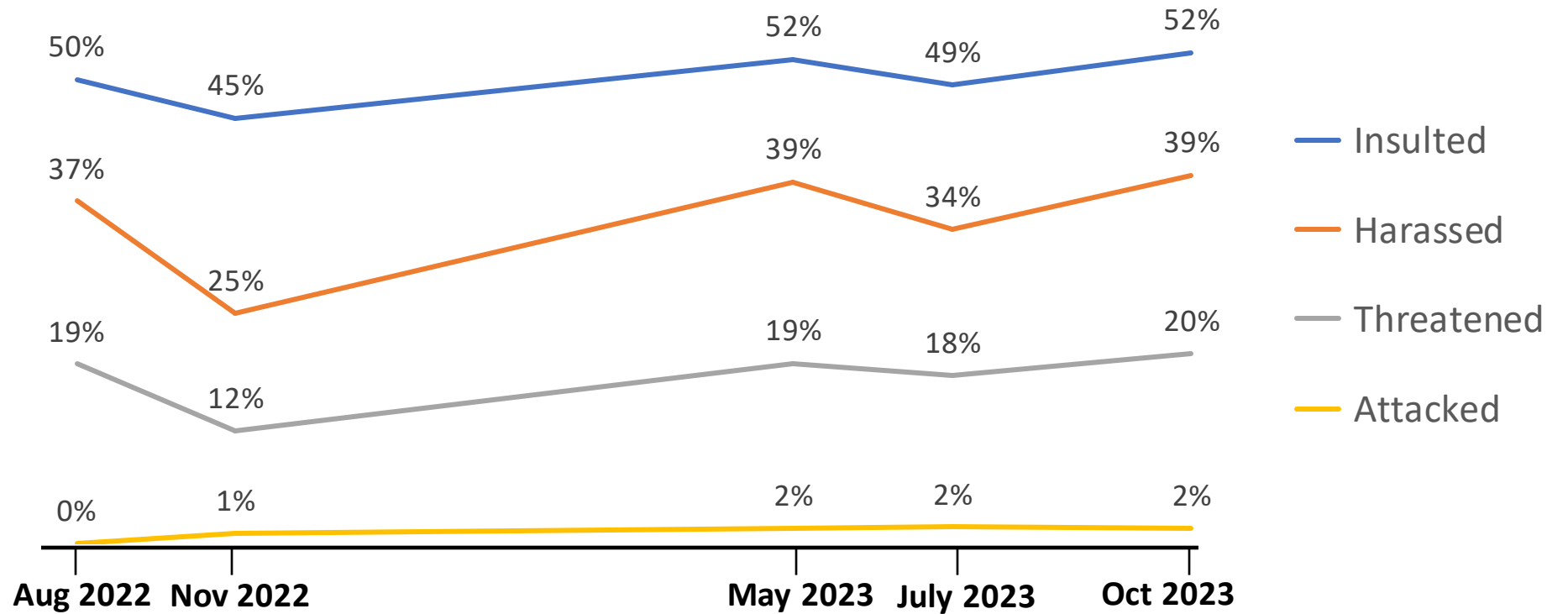
### LIKELIHOOD OF EXPERIENCING EVENT IN A THREE-MONTH PERIOD



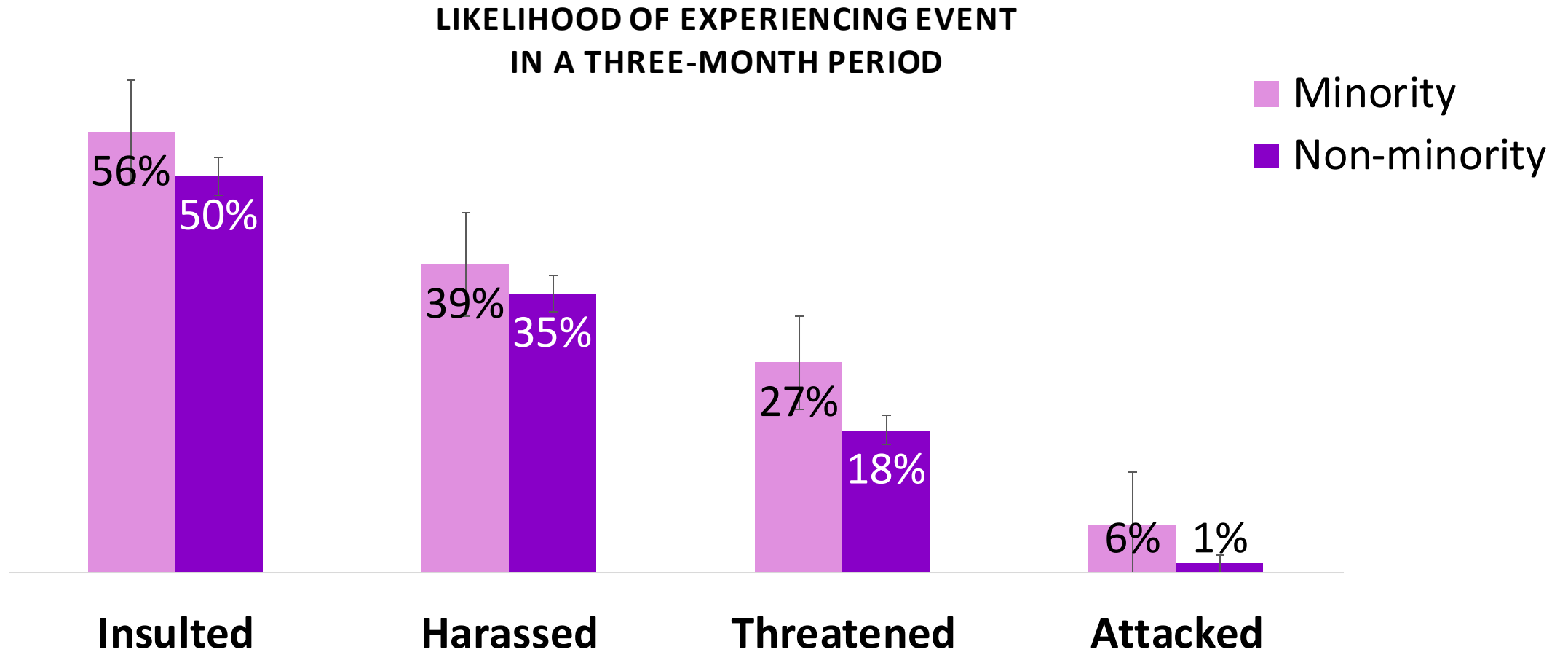
*Note: These estimates are averaged over the five surveys administered in the last fourteen months.*

# Threats and harassment of local officials remain consistently high.

## % HAVING EXPERIENCED EVENT IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS

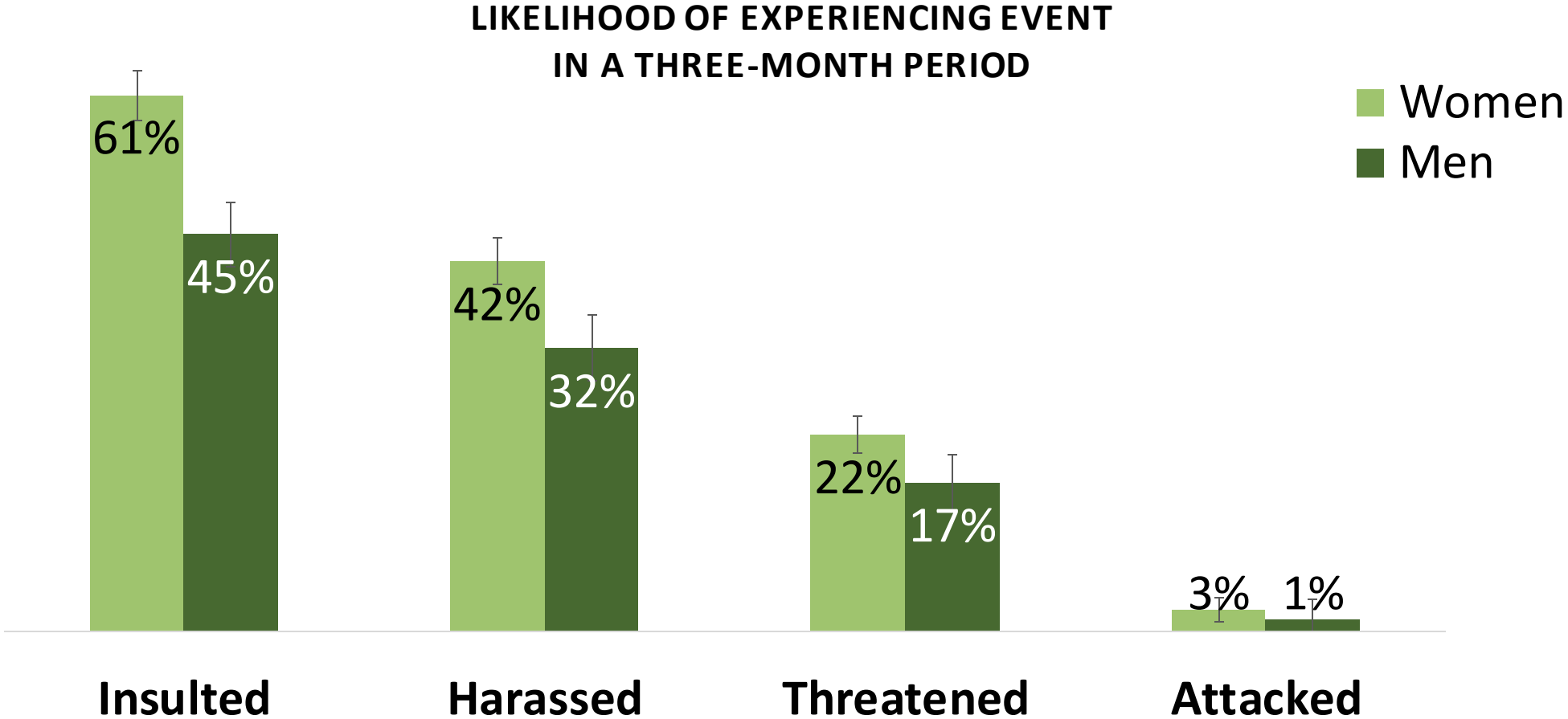


Local officials who are racial or ethnic minorities are disproportionately likely to experience insults, harassment and threats.



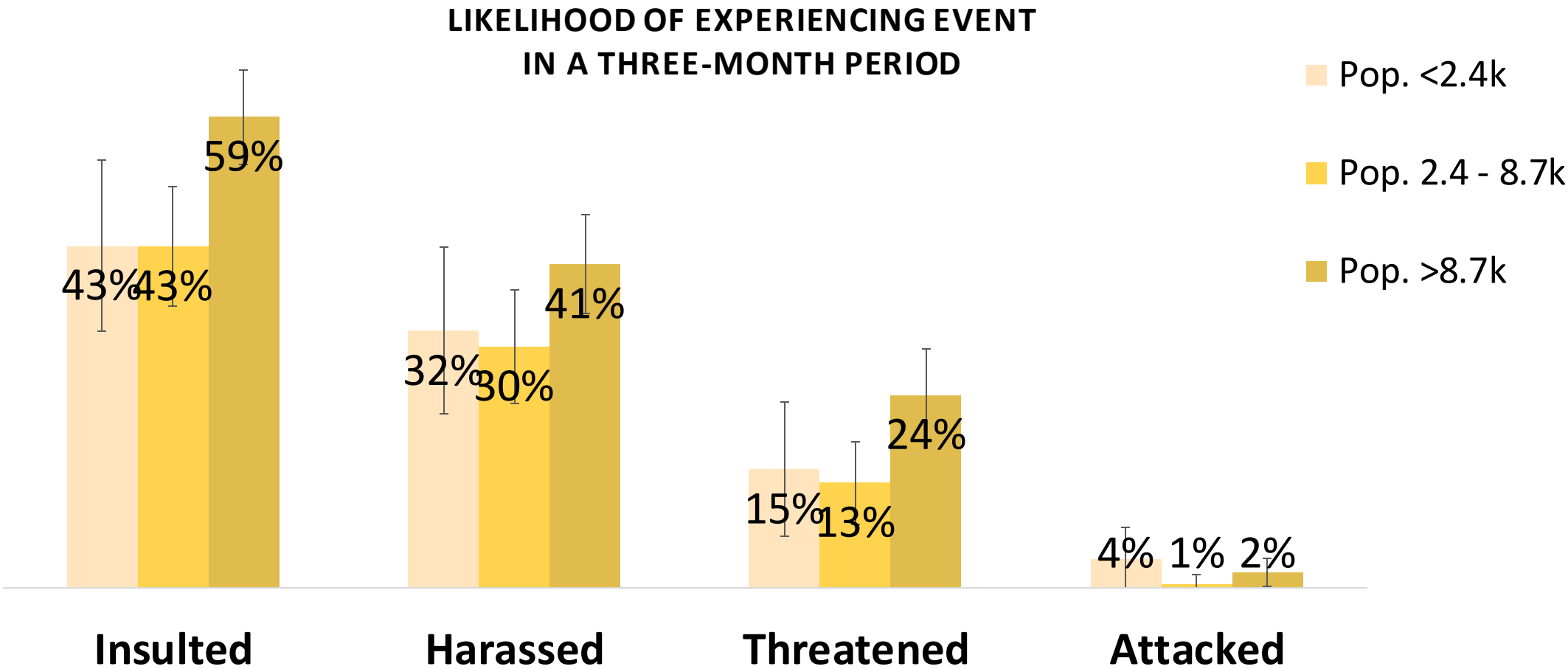
*Note: These estimates are averaged over the five surveys administered in the last fourteen months.*

Local officials who are women are also more likely to experience insults, harassment, and threats.



*Note: These estimates are averaged over the five surveys administered in the last fourteen months.*

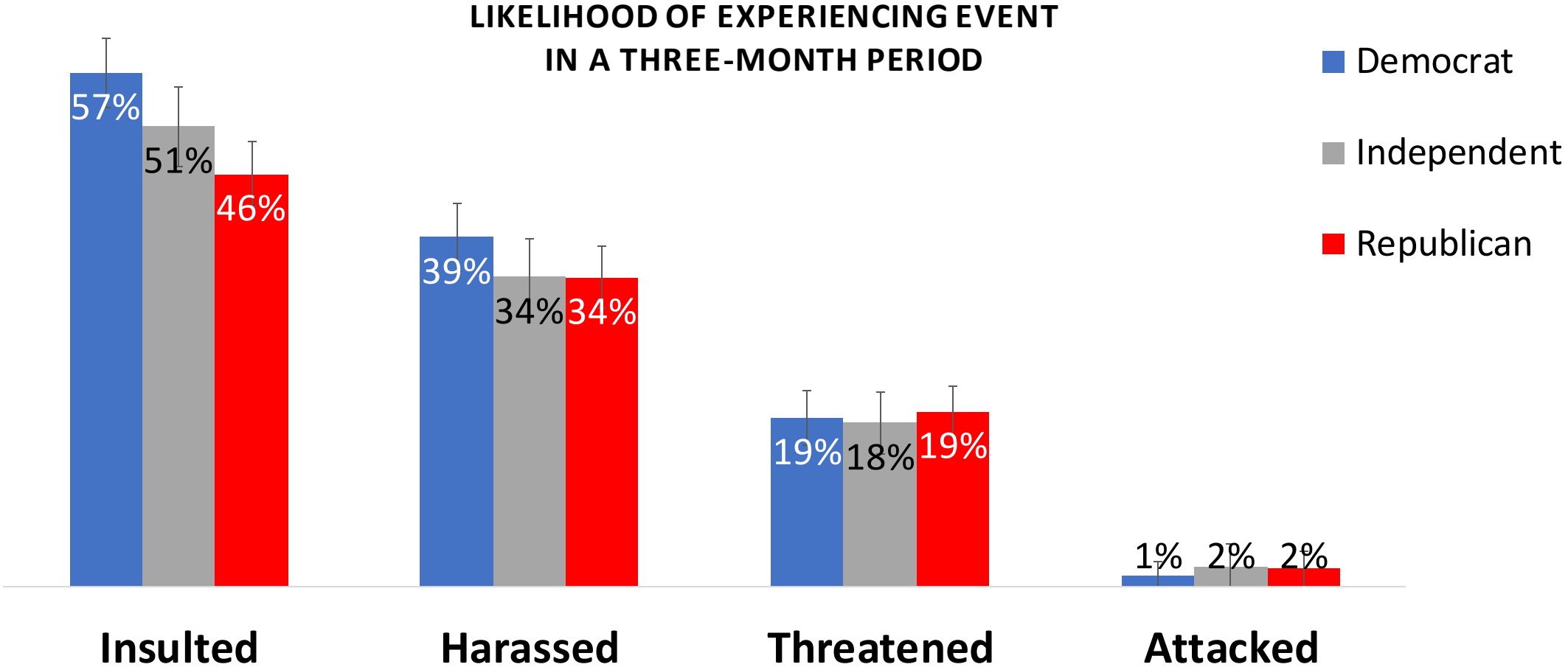
Insults, harassment, and threats are pervasive across communities of all sizes, but especially likely in bigger towns, cities, and counties.



*Note: These estimates are averaged over the five surveys administered in the last fourteen months.*

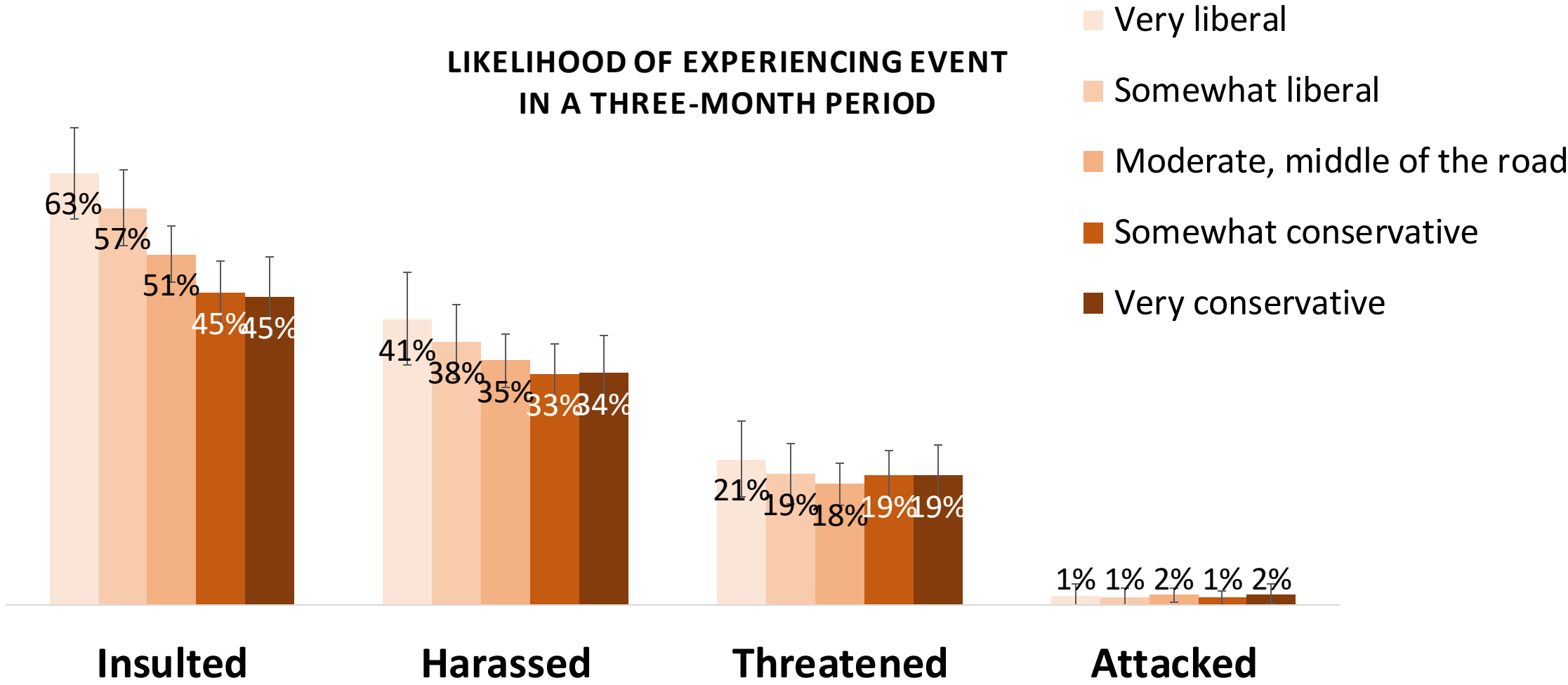


Democrats are more likely to report insults and harassment, but all parties report experiencing threats in equal measure.



*Note: These estimates are averaged over the five surveys administered in the last fourteen months.*

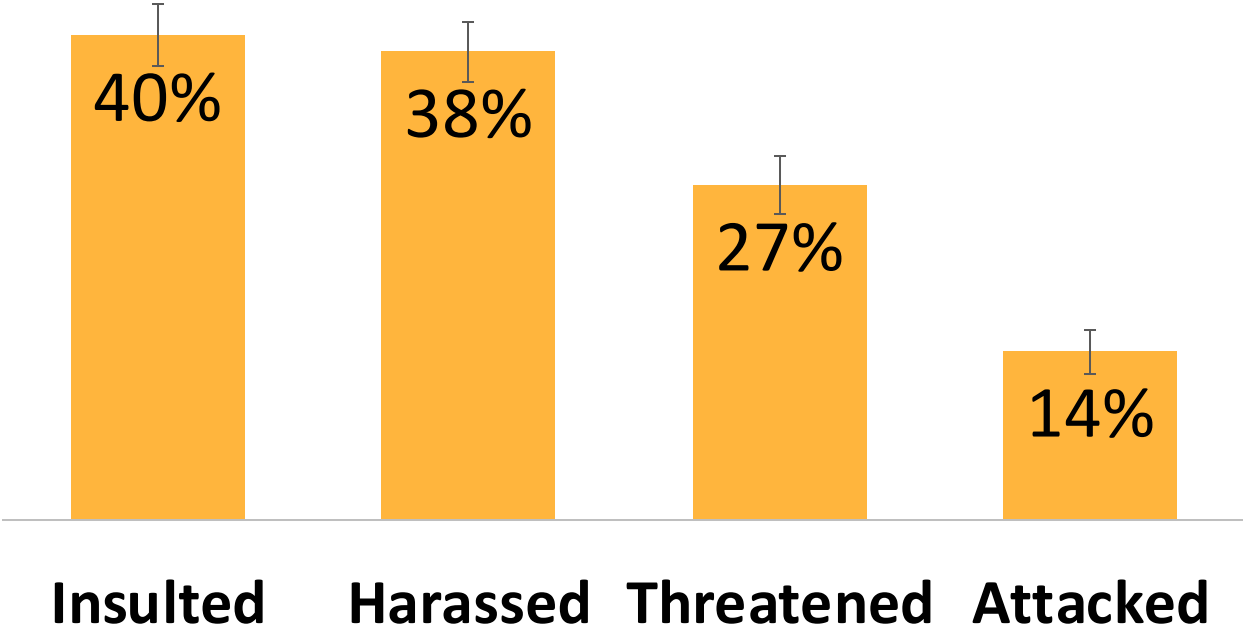
Liberals are more likely to be insulted but harassment and threats are experienced at similar levels across the ideological spectrum.



*Note: These estimates are averaged over the five surveys administered in the last fourteen months.*

# Local elected officials experience pervasive worries about their well-being and safety.

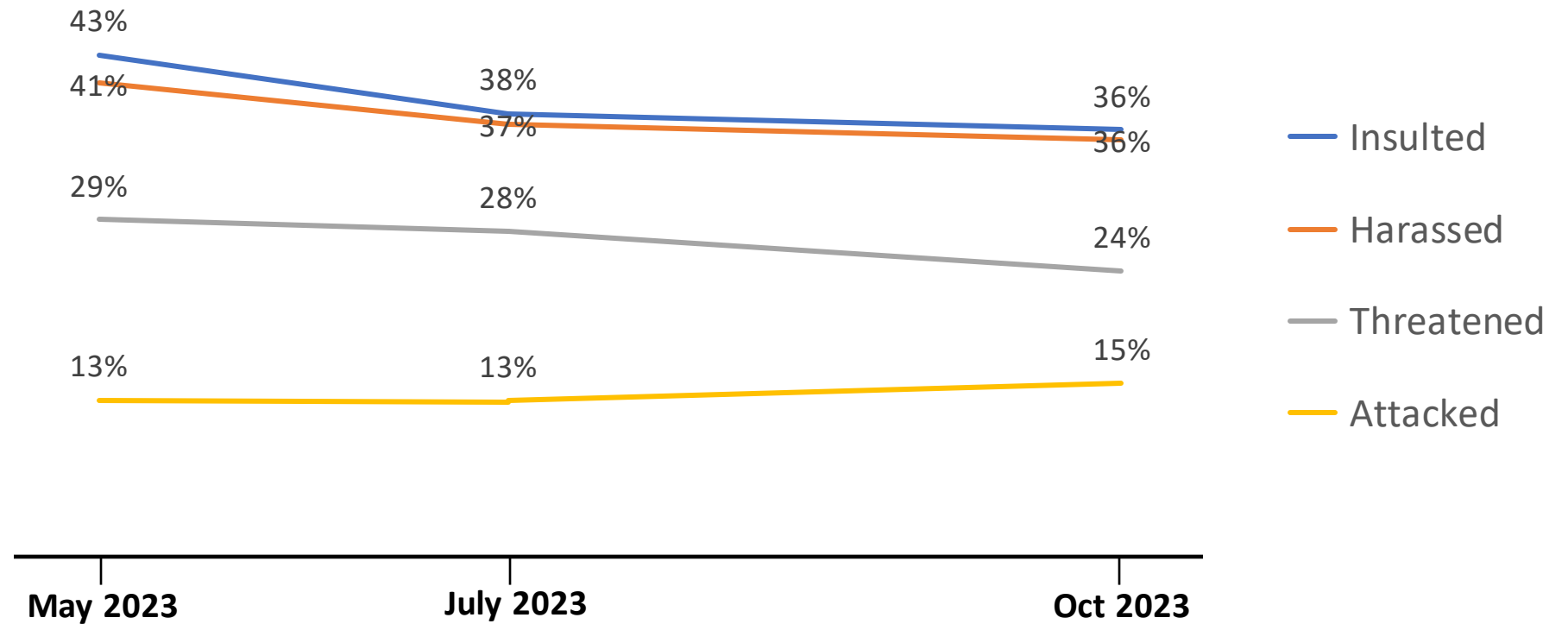
**% WORRIED ABOUT EVENT FOR THEMSELVES OR FAMILY MEMBERS**



*Note: These estimates are averaged over 3 surveys administered in the last six months. Shows combined percentage of people that indicated they were "All the time", "Often", or "Sometimes" worried about themselves or family experiencing these events.*

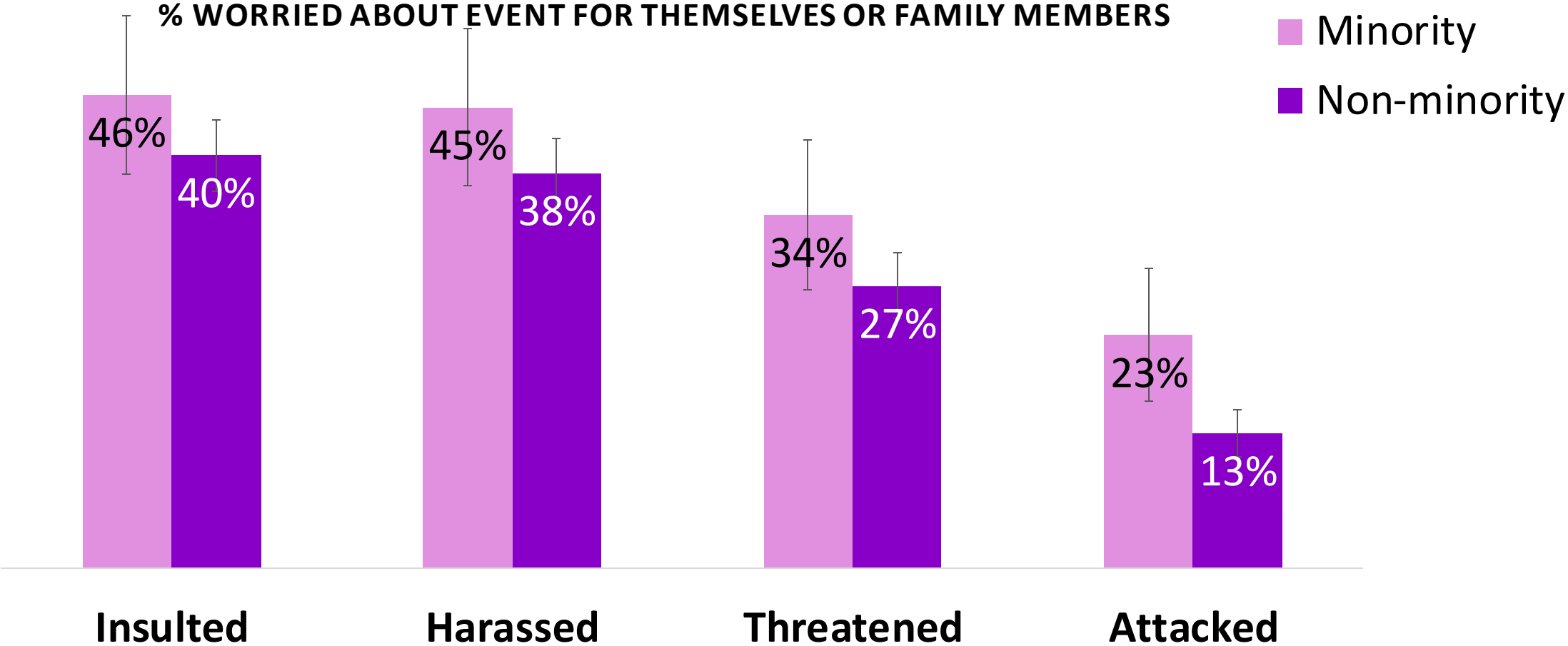
While worry about being insulted, harassed or threatened has decreased slightly, worry about attacks remains consistent.

### % WORRIED ABOUT EVENT FOR THEMSELVES OR FAMILY MEMBERS



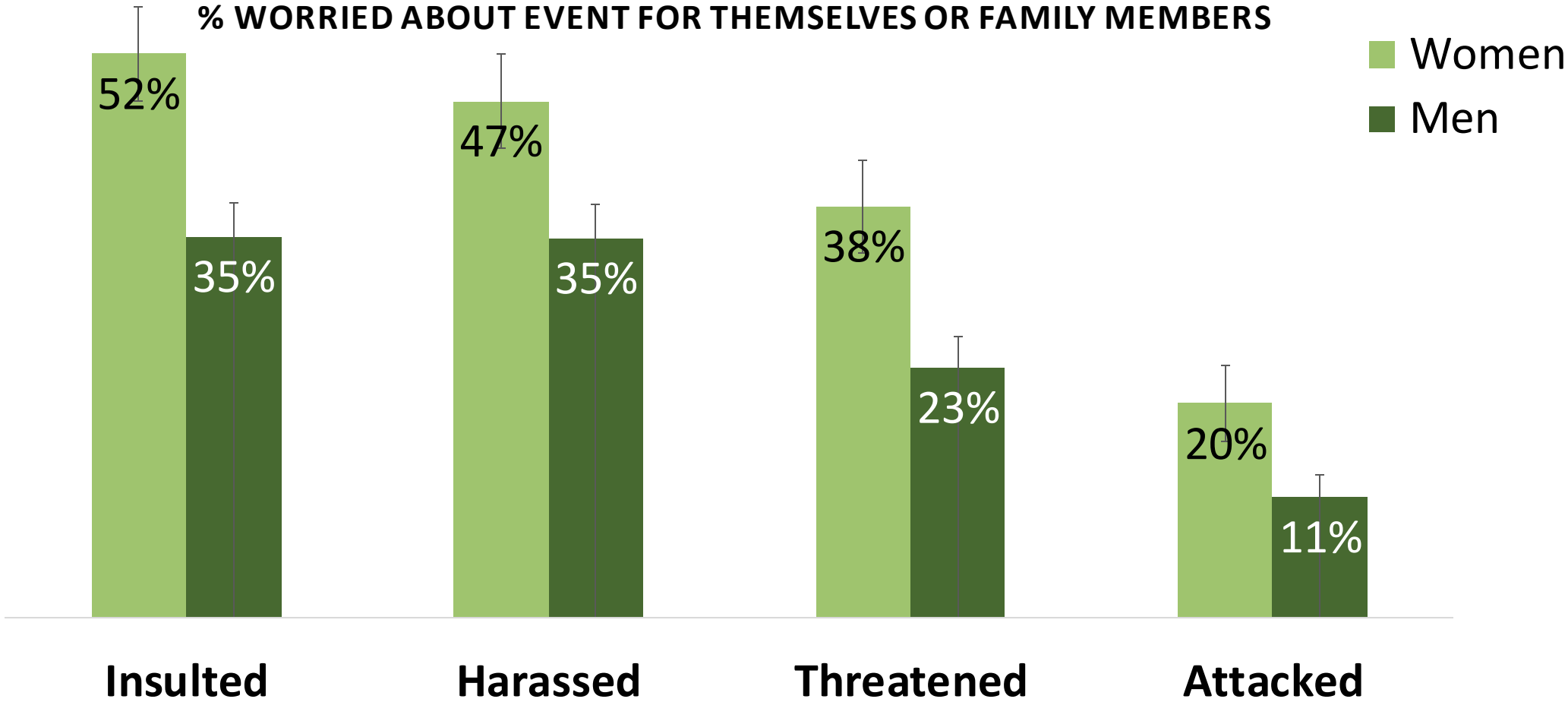
Note: Shows combined percentage of people that indicated they were "All the time", "Often", or "Sometimes" worried about themselves or family experiencing these events.

# Almost one-in-four minority officials worry about being physically attacked.



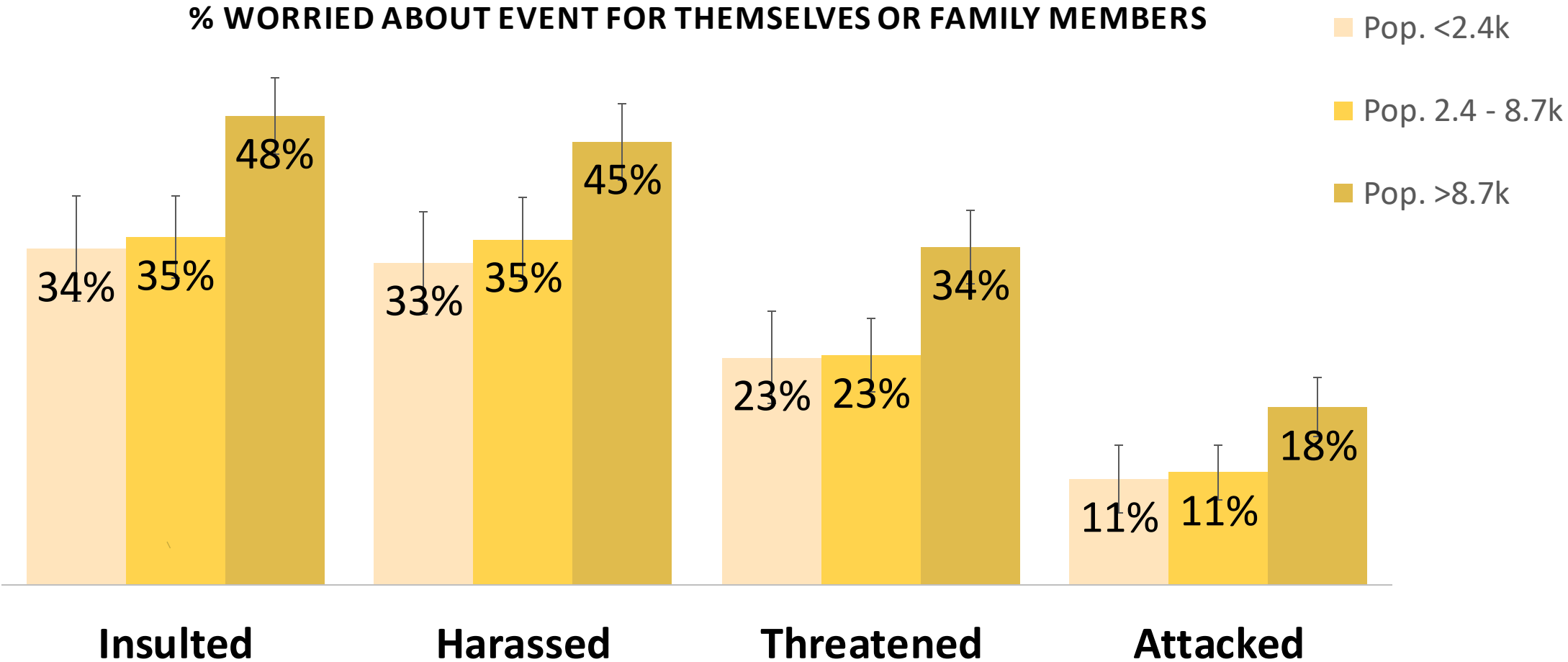
*Note: These estimates are averaged over 3 surveys administered in the last six months. Shows combined percentage of people that indicated they were "All the time", "Often", or "Sometimes" worried about themselves or family experiencing these events.*

# Women officials report higher levels of worry about threats, harassment and attacks, reflecting disproportionate likelihood of incidents reported.



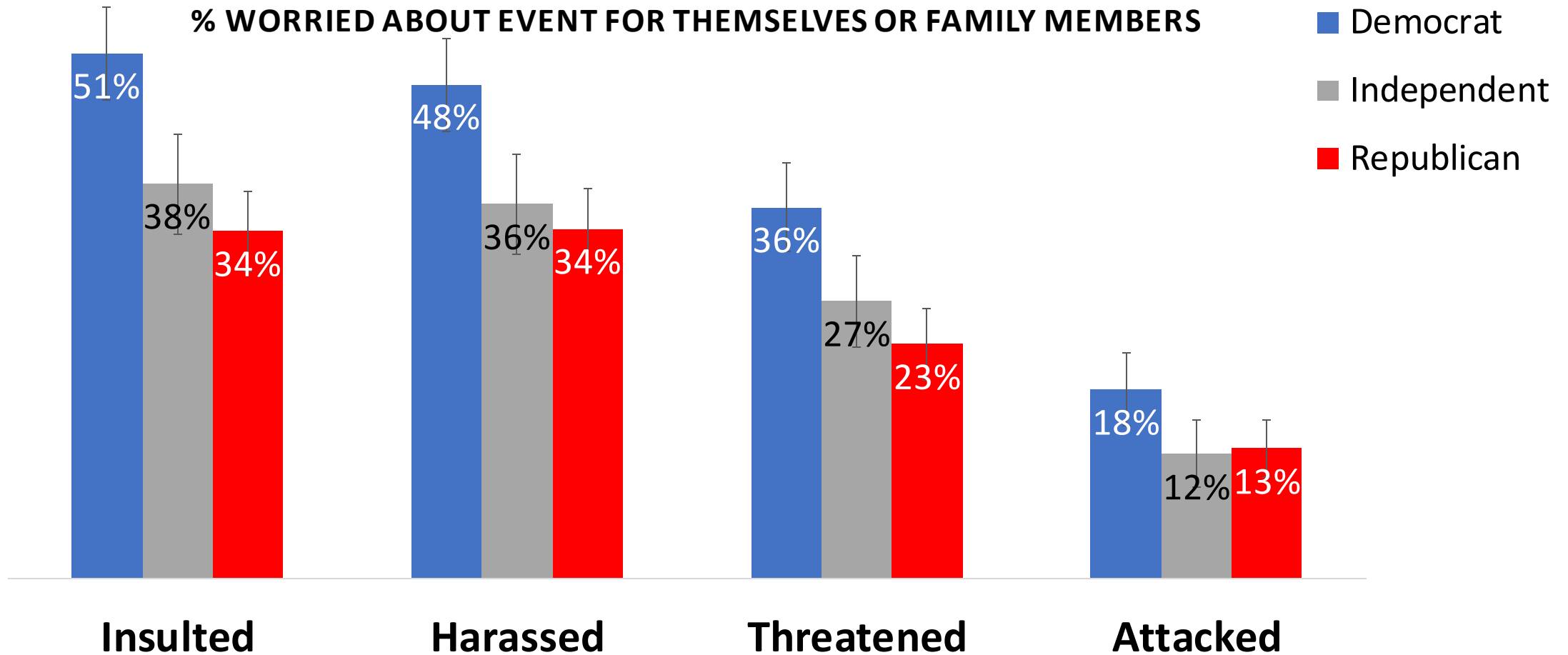
*Note: These estimates are averaged over 3 surveys administered in the last six months. Shows combined percentage of people that indicated they were "All the time", "Often", or "Sometimes" worried about themselves or family experiencing these events.*

Likewise, officials in the largest communities worry more than their counterparts in smaller communities.



*Note: These estimates are averaged over 3 surveys administered in the last six months. Shows combined percentage of people that indicated they were "All the time", "Often", or "Sometimes" worried about themselves or family experiencing these events.*

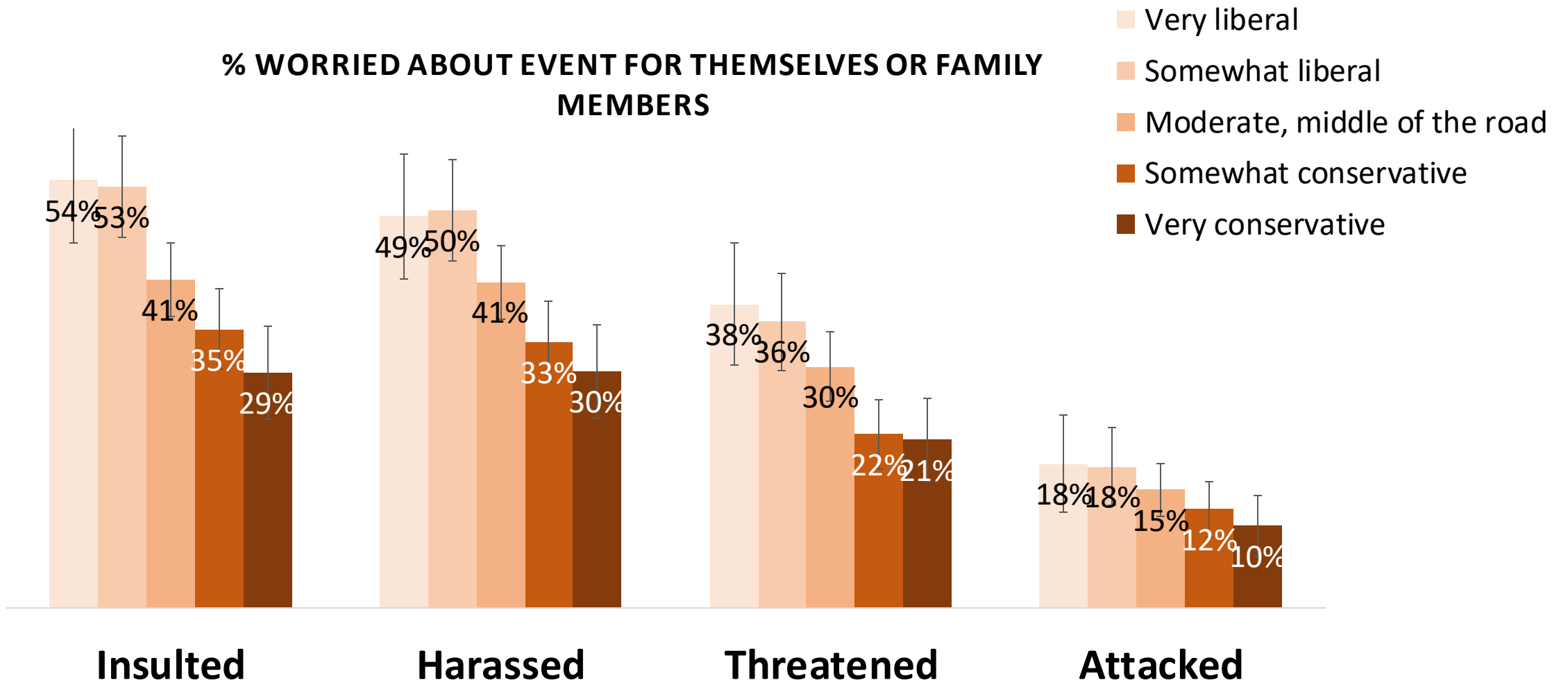
# Worry for hostile events is high across the political spectrum.



*Note: These estimates are averaged over 3 surveys administered in the last six months. Shows combined percentage of people that indicated they were "All the time", "Often", or "Sometimes" worried about themselves or family experiencing these events.*



# Worry for hostile events is high across the ideological spectrum.



Note: These estimates are averaged over 3 surveys administered in the last six months. Shows combined percentage of people that indicated they were "All the time", "Often", or "Sometimes" worried about themselves or family experiencing these events.

# What's next?

- CivicPulse will continue to conduct quarterly surveys of local elected officials.
- Ongoing 1-on-1, confidential interviews will form the basis for additional insights, and follow up reports to BDI's [Initial Qualitative Report](#).
- For additional analysis and access to the underlying data please visit [civicpulse.org/threats-harassment](https://civicpulse.org/threats-harassment).
- BDI and CivicPulse will conduct additional analysis of this data for further insights, alongside additional partner reports in 2024.

*Taken together, ongoing Threats and Harassment in Local Government Benchmarking Reports will provide a key new empirical foundation to quickly understand and respond to changes in the threat and harassment landscape in the US.*

# Appendix – Methodology, Sample Characteristics, and Question Wording

# Overview of methodology

---

- CivicPulse uses a comprehensive list of all elected policy makers associated with townships, municipalities and county governments in the United States with populations of 1,000 or more.
- CivicPulse recruits survey participants through an online random-sample approach.
- Elected policy makers include top elected officials (e.g., mayor, county executive) and governing board members (e.g., council member, county commissioner).

# CivicPulse has conducted five national surveys of local elected officials.

---

Wave	Start date	End date	n
1	Aug 12, 2022	Sept 21, 2022	207
2	Nov 16, 2022	Dec 14, 2022	262
3	May 3, 2023	June 6, 2023	409
4	July 21, 2023	Aug 16, 2023	532
5	Oct 6, 2023	Oct 23, 2023	504
<b>Total</b>	August 12, 2022	Oct 23, 2023	<b>1,914</b>

# We recommend the following guidelines for interpretation of the data.

---

Segmented by survey wave?	Segmented by demographic?	Recommended margin of error
No	No	<1%
Yes	No	~2%
No	Yes	~5%
Yes	Yes	~10%

# Respondents by party affiliation

---

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a...

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Other party

Response Options	Count	Proportion
Democrat	634	34%
Independent	422	22%
Republican	760	40%
Other party	71	4%

# Respondents by political ideology

In general, do you think of yourself as:

- Very conservative
- Somewhat conservative
- Moderate, middle of the road
- Somewhat liberal
- Very liberal
- Not sure

Response Options	Count	Proportion
Very conservative	299	16%
Somewhat conservative	455	24%
Moderate, middle of the road	590	31%
Somewhat liberal	316	17%
Very liberal	208	11%
Not sure	30	2%



# Respondents by gender identity

---

What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Prefer to self-describe

Response Options	Count	Proportion
Man	1,197	63%
Woman	673	36%
Prefer to self-describe	17	1%

# Respondents by race/ethnicity

Which of the following best describes your race/ethnicity? Please check all that apply.

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Latinx
- Native American
- Middle Eastern
- Mixed Race
- White
- Prefer to self-describe

Response Options	Count*	Proportion*
Asian	20	1%
Black	93	5%
White	1,505	82%
Hispanic	74	4%
Middle Eastern	5	<1%
Mixed	23	1%
Prefer to self describe	47	3%

\*Respondents could select multiple answers.

# Survey Questions

---

## Hostile Events

In your capacity as a public official, please indicate whether you have experienced any of the following types of incidents in the last three months or so. If you have held your office for less time than that, please answer for the amount of time you have held your position. If appropriate, you may select 'Yes' to multiple items for the same experience.

In the last three months or so, have you been...

- Insulted verbally, in writing, or online
- Harassed verbally, in writing, or online
- Threatened verbally, in writing, or online
- Attacked physically

## Worry About Hostile Events

In general, how often do you worry about you or your family being...

### **Event types:**

- Insulted verbally, in writing, or online
- Harassed verbally, in writing, or online
- Threatened verbally, in writing, or online
- Attacked verbally, in writing, or online

### **Response options:**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All the time

Survey made possible by generous support and partnership of the following organizations, and the many local officials who have already offered their time and insights.

For more detail, visit:

**CivicPulse**

[Threats and Harassment in Local Government](#)

**Bridging Divides Initiative**

[Understanding Threats and Harassment to Local Officials](#)

**BRENNAN  
CENTER**  
**FOR JUSTICE**

**ADL**<sup>®</sup>  
FIGHTING HATE FOR GOOD

**Stand  
Together**