

Understanding *folx* as a linguistic marker of progressive social personae

Joseph DeCarlo

Graduate Department of English, Linguistics

San Francisco State University

28 May 2021

'I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks.'

(Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1960)

'... folks wanna pop off and have opinions about what they would do? Present a specific plan.'

(President Barack Obama; G20 Summit, 16 November 2015)

1. Introduction

Toward the end of his second term as President of the United States, Barack Obama was asked to yet again respond to bad-faith criticisms of his own approach to managing the global war on terror, specifically the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In response, he spoke the second quote above that begins this section at the G20 summit in Belek, Turkey. For those readers for whom the pragmatic entailments of this speech act are not so immediately legible, the clausal segment *folks wanna pop off* is the stand-out piece of language in this utterance, and for a variety of reasons. First, this phrase is conventionally associated with Blank Language – a variety of speech elsewhere named as African American (vernacular) English, Black Vernacular English, and several more monikers, each referring to the same wide range of linguistic features available to heritage speakers of these English language varieties. In fact, this phrasing so clearly indexes racial identity that one journalist, Damon Young, who writes for the Afro-centric news blog *The Root*, named President Obama's response "... The Blackest Thing That Ever Happened this Week."¹ The quote also very quickly became that week's popular internet *meme* – a central sort of motif about which participants create new content that expands or exploits pragmatic entailments for the sake of humor, creating new meaning in the process.

The President's quote went viral across the internet in various forms, providing evidence that the president's speech was outside of the expected register. This is the second point of distinction here. Both recent Presidents Obama and George Bush jr.

¹ Damon, Y. (2015) 'President Obama's 'Folks Wanna Pop Off Is The Blackest Thing That Ever Happened This Week', *The Root (Very Smart Brothas)*, 16 October. Available at: <https://verysmartbrothas.theroot.com/president-obamas-folks-wanna-pop-off-is-the-blackest-1822523232>. (Accessed: 23 March 2021)

were frequently chastised in popular news media for speech choices perceived as *informal* – the most commonly cited linguistic features in these portraits of unbecomingness were so-called *g-dropping* and the use of *folks*. The concept of *dropping* one's *g*'s is a favorite point of colloquial linguistic criticism, likely because the framing action of 'dropping' itself implies a degree of carelessness or inattention to detail. This then becomes a vehicle of support for cultural stereotyping groups whose regional speech features this variable, namely speakers from the Southern US (Campbell-Kibler 2007). However, as is the case with many prejudicial assertions about language, there is no empirical linguistic evidence to support this mapping of evaluatively negative characterological traits. In fact, when spoken, the forms *dropping* and *droppin'* contain the same number of phonemes – in other words, nothing has been 'dropped', or haphazardly *left off* of the word. From a phonological perspective, the only change between these two constructions is that the final nasal consonant has been fronted: [ŋ] → [ɲ]. Speakers only evaluate the *g-dropped* form as reduced due to the English orthographic convention of representing the singular [ŋ] phoneme through the use of two distinct graphemes written in sequence, [-ng].

Despite these common negative evaluations of so-called *g-dropping* (nasal fronting), there may also be a pragmatic advantage to be gained in using this variable. We can again consider the public speech of former President Obama for these purposes. It has been noted that President Obama frequently utilized speech features that are not typical for dialects of English that he would have most likely been exposed to growing up in Hawaii (Alim & Smitherman 2012; R. Lakoff 2014). Specifically, neither word-final nasal fronting nor the plural lexeme *folks* are *characteristic* features in any

dialect of Hawaiian English, yet these two variables are among the most distinguishing for President Obama's public speeches. Of course, the President's mother and grandparents who raised him come from regions of the American Midwest wherein these variables are in fact quite characteristic of local speech, but language learners typically adopt the speech patterns of their peers over their parents and caretakers (R. Lakoff 2014). It is possible and even likely that President Obama incorporated these features into his speech later in life, possibly when he entered into his career in politics.

From this theory, further questions arise: why would someone's speech vary between social contexts? What triggers the decision to use one form over another in a speech event? Linguists would say that these phonetic and lexical alternations matter a great deal to pragmatic interaction, and that significant meaning can be carried by ostensibly small or insignificant details in the event context and morpho-syntactic form. President Obama positing that "*folks [who] wanna pop off... [should] present a specific plan,*" communicates a great deal of pragmatic information to listeners. Part of what makes this utterance noteworthy is no doubt the deviation from the normative register from which many listeners expect the president to speak. This register is both distinctly racialized, a norm that the president violates by phrasing his response in a style that is so characteristically true to Black Language, and classed, which the president deviates from with his use of the colloquial plural subject *folks*. While a detailed profiling of unique phrases in President Obama's speeches would be a fascinating discourse analysis project, the current research paper is specifically interested in investigating the question of toward what discursive ends does the President choose to use the plural *folks*? This research is not interested in simply demonstrating that speakers sometimes

breach rules of formality, but more so that as much pragmatic meaning can be interpreted at the lexical level as at the phrasal level. In fact, as will be demonstrated through this project, a range of social meanings may be indexed by the smallest meaningful particles of a word, even orthographic.

1.1 From *folks* to *folx*

Past and present formulas and problem posing equations in mathematics represent unknown or unknowable empirical values with the grapheme *x*, and 21st century language users have mapped this placeholder concept onto gender-inflected language, such as *Latinx* (in place of *Latino* or *Latina*). However, this convention is distinct from the Cartesian usage of variable *x* in that those speakers who choose to replace the identifiable gender marking in their language are doing so with both intentionality and semantic knowledge of the outgoing particle and the inputted placeholder. In other words, speakers are very much able to identify: 1) the presence of gender-marking particles ([*-a/-o*] in Spanish, for example), and 2) what is accomplished pragmatically when they choose to recast existing forms with the *-x* suffix (e.g., *Latino*). Modern English does not feature inflectional gender; however, the substitutive *-x* can be found in a variety of reconstructed English lexemes like *womxn* for *woman*, or a neuter-form honorific title abbreviation, *Mx.*, for the masculine *Mr.* These variations are evidence for many of the fundamental principles of language change, though they are offered here as specific examples of the much broader observation that existing linguistic forms can be ‘put up’ for reanalysis, potentially resulting in recast neologisms like the examples given here.

The current paper investigates a newly observed orthographic variant of the North American English plural *folks*, spelled *folx*. Speakers – specifically writers, or really most truly anyone performing keyboard-mediated speech – have recognized that the sound segments represented by term-final graphemes *k* and *s* can be replaced by *x* without a loss in readability, since this sign typically represents a near-same set of phonemic segments in English as those produced by the *-ks* written sequence. However, as is observed in much of the online metadiscourse about this change, the term *folks* in its conventional spelling does not feature inflectional gender, marking its re-construal as *folx* as distinct from those previously offered here. This paper – motivated by the inception, frequency, and salient social meanings of the term – is centered around two fundamental questions. First, is the motivation for introducing the lexeme *folx* pragmatically distinct from the introduction of inflectionally gender-neutral variants like *Latinx*, which have historically been inflected for gender? And second, toward what discursive ends do speakers choose *folx* over *folks*? Does a speaker's choice to use this meaningful variant index any number of typifiable social personae?

This paper will first offer a synthesis of existing linguistic theories and on-going scholarly discourses within which this current research frames its central lines of inquiry. To answer the research questions outlined above, a language attitudes survey was distributed through a widely bound network of English language users, providing metapragmatic data about the use and social meanings of *folx*. I then present an analysis of the patterns and trends between self-identified macrosociological identity categories and simple awareness and frequency metrics.

2. Background

As noted previously, contemporary English does not feature inflectional gender in its own morphosyntax, and aside from vestigial remnants of grammatical case marking via the English pronominal forms [*he/him/his*] and [*she/her/hers*] this is generally true. However, it has long been true that English, as it is spoken on an every-day basis, is a language that features *many* borrowed words; this reality is of course in part a consequence of the violent colonial histories that forced many speakers of other languages to adopt and reconstitute English as their public speech register. Aside from the linguistic processes technically entailed by *borrowing* and *contact*, speakers are also free to codeswitch or *codemesh*² depending on the pragmatic environment, creating a fluid channel between lexicons. It is through these means – as well as simply engaging with local culture more broadly – that English speakers may become more familiar with grammatical gender practices in other languages, which may be syntactically defined by any of the following criteria:

- i. The sorting of nouns into two or more classes;
- ii. Assigned depending on biological sex, animacy, and/or ‘human-ness’ for some animate nouns

² VA Young 2007, 2010; and Michael-Luna & Canagarajah 2007, 2013 distinguish linguistic *code meshing* from what was traditionally referred to as *codeswitching*, now more frequently *translanguaging*, especially in classroom pedagogy discourse. Generally speaking, code meshing is said to embrace cultural literacies that code switching definitively deletes or erases. When someone *switches* linguistic codes, they are typically attempting to conform their language patterns to fit within the restrictions of a given speech environment. These boundaries are often set along racial lines and are thereby oppressive forces to a majority of language users. Code meshing is viewed as a more holistic approach that honors and respects non-mainstream varieties of language and identities.

- iii. Reflected by agreement patterns on other elements (i.e., adjectives, determiners, verbs, auxiliaries.)

(Kramer 2015, p. 70)

Monolingual English speakers are not the group innovating x-inflection, though many of these speakers appear to understand the processes involved in the transformation. Linguistic research and descriptive writing – and certainly, too, prescriptivist language and writing style guide-type sources – has historically capped the set of defining elements for grammatical gender in this way, focusing solely on how gender is used in categorizing substantive terms and achieving grammatical agreement per the terms of any given language's alignment system. However, descriptive linguistic research, as well as the larger discourse in general, has been on a trajectory of expanding the boundaries of its investigative brief since the early 1960s. Linguistic research has begun to move further past the scribing duties of simply keeping record of what languages *look like*, and nearer toward an understanding of language as a necessarily embodied practice and culturally fluid artifact.

Labov's early studies (1964, 1972, 1972a.) are among those that are often credited as the first linguistic inquiries that questioned not simply *what* changes were underway in a speech community, but *why* they were changing, and investigating also the gaps in participation (i.e., who is notably *not* participating in an in-progress language change). A highly significant finding from Labov's classic study of the communities on Martha's Vineyard is that speakers are able to express their identities via their gradable use of salient linguistic variables, which in this original study referred to centralization of high-central English diphthongs ($[ai, au] \rightarrow [\theta i, \theta u]$). This kind of linking of variables

between very broad macro-sociological identity categories comprises the efforts of what Eckert (2012) describes as the *first wave* of variationist study. The subsequent *second wave* sought to elucidate identity formation through language at the local level via ethnographic field work (Eckert 2012, pg. 93). Third wave approaches focus on the social meaning of variation and constitute the theoretical framework from which the present research builds its central line of questioning.

Variationist research over the past two decades has begun to make clear the connection between a speaker's use of a given linguistic form and the range of social meanings it may denote in the context of a speech event (Silverstein 2003; Eckert 2008; Zhang 2005; Bucholtz 2011; Reyes 2005; Podesva 2007). *In context* is very much a key piece in this framing, as a singular linguistic *sign* may take on very different meanings in different contexts, including being differentially evaluated by listeners. A speaker's choice to use a particular variable can be viewed as indexical; speakers can symbolically gesture toward identities or *stances* via their speech, which may then be interpreted in a number of different ways depending on who is doing the interpreting; the range of possible meanings that a given linguistic variable may take on in context is termed by Eckert (2008) as the *indexical field*. As part of a larger system of cognitive ordering and categorization, language users come to associate sets of speech patterns with each other, constructing typifiable *voices* or *registers* of speech (Agha 2005, 2011; Irvine 1990). As these speech patterns begin to distinctly index particular sets of identities and persons, they become *enregistered voices* (Agha 2005, pg. 39), indexical of typifiable social personae.

Zhang 2008 provides a useful example of social persona via an exploration of the local linguistic variables that index the *smooth operator* style of speaking, part of an emerging “yuppie” persona in Beijing. Four total variables are examined, though arguably most essential to the typifiable Beijing style is an observable syllable-final rhotacization. Speakers append the subsyllabic retroflex [ʎ] as a word-final sound, which is interpreted in a variety of ways by local listeners (Zhang 2008, pg. 207). The variant is described idiomatically by some Mandarin speakers as *zi-zheng qiang-yuan*, denoting that the tonality of Beijing speech sounds *round*, or otherwise without *harshness* (pg. 209). These qualities of *smoothness* are reified by their collocation with a perceived slickness that Beijing locals associate with the emerging *yuppie* persona – often metropolitan individuals who work in international business. Through recognizing these *typifiable* voices, listeners – more precisely *readers* in the case of those interpreting *-x particle*-inflected tokens – are able to evaluate both the social persona indexed by the speaker’s language features as they are made meaningful by the local context in which they are used, and also interpret meaning through that individual listener’s personal experience and associations with stereotypical iterations of that social persona (Coupland 2002, pg. 202).

Much of the existing research that investigates indexical links between specific linguistic signs and social personae has taken place in the sociophonetic realm (Campbell-Kibler 2007; Johnson 2006; Pharoa et al. 2014; D’Onofrio 2018; Calder 2019). A meaningful English derivation that has yet been given very little attention by linguists is the way that some speakers have begun to recast gendered language as gender-neutral via what is here called *x-inflection*, though this work is likely now in-

progress. Existing research on this topic focuses nearly exclusively on the -x particle's presence in the very intentionally recast *Latinx*, specifically how the choice to expand from the previous attempt to de-gender the identity category, *Latin@*, to this *x-inflected* form is more in-line with the end goals of de-gendering and further decolonizing the language (Padilla 2016; Salinas & Lozano 2017). While it may very well be the case that many speakers who choose *Latinx* over *Latina/o* are politically motivated to do so, and indexing their political identity to listeners with this degendered form, this developing discourse does not immediately reveal why some speakers have begun to represent *folks* with the -x. *Folks*, as an overwhelming majority of the online metadiscourse notes first and foremost, is already ungendered – to many onlookers, nothing is accomplished syntactically by recasting this token. Yet, or perhaps as a result, many commentators are visibly frustrated by the change, indicating that (a) there is in fact some latent social meaning in the form change and (b) it is legible to both speaker/writers and listener/readers. Understanding the nature of *what* language users are keying into when they react to this variable is at the center of the current research effort.

2.1 Motivation for *folx* as indexical of social personae

This paper posits that an individual speaker's choice to use *folx* over the standard form *folks* is done in partial construction of an emerging social persona, the central-most elements of which are a higher degree of *online-ness* and clearly espoused progressive-left political alignment. This research understands *online-ness* as it pertains to this social persona as the degree to which an individual engages with online content. Someone who could be qualified as very *online* has invested a

substantial effort into curating an online presence, and frequently participates in or otherwise consumes online discourse. Individuals can achieve degrees of online fluency, a skill level that they may index through any number of symbolic gestures. Actions indexing relatively high *online-ness* might include 'speaking in meme', whereby one may linguistically invoke the entailments of a meme format in conversation without needing the visual format. Successfully making these references demands both a diverse repository of experience with existing meme formats and the pragmatic competence to employ them appropriately. Existing psychosociological and communications research has focused on the cognitive-behavioral consequences of ever-increasing online time for children and adolescents (Caplan 2002, 2003). Research has been conducted in the field of Communications about how non-verbal communicative norms transfer into online virtual environments (Yee et al. 2007), but linguistic research has yet to engage in any meaningful way with this enregistered way of being *online*.

More than these referential behaviors, the *online* persona primarily engages with and experiences culture through browser-equipped technology. As a result, people are now interfacing more frequently with a wider range of written voices, and perhaps also at a quicker interactional pace. Microblog sites like Twitter and Reddit are heavily text-based social platforms that allow users space to discourse in spaces that range from entirely general to incredibly niche. Importantly, at least 53% of adults acquire their daily news content from social media sources (Tandoc & Johnson 2016). Given that polarizing topics typically receive the most interaction in these online spaces, news and opinion posts that center around political or sociocultural themes very quickly develop

text response networks (comment sections and diverging repost threads) rich with ideological posturing, stances which users construct in both linguistic and non-linguistic ways. Not least important of these is political identity, which can be communicated in a myriad of ways, though is here argued to be possibly communicated in as little as a speaker's choice to use a non-mainstream morphological variant.

A brief survey of the contexts where the token *folx* appears on Twitter reveals that its origins are in fact a subject of metadiscursive interest, and many users point toward online, political, Queer-identifying Black and Indigenous communities of color as the originators of the term. Discourses within these communities are also likely environments for other *x-inflected* language, like *Latinx* and *womxn*. For obvious reasons of self-preservation and liberation, these communities often exclusively align politically with progressive-left ideology. Over the course of the COVID-19 crisis of 2020 a particular genre of ideological expression and activism that has yet been named became much more popular on social media. Typically circulated via Instagram's "stories" feature, activists began to create swipe-through posts focused on particular issues of social justice. These posts began to take on a remarkably similar visible aesthetic, which is one facet of the conventional similarity among the posts that leads this research to declare them an emerging genre. These posts almost present in the sequencing one might expect from an academic slide deck presentation insofar as they typically begin with a title card, the content is highly organized in sequence, and they often script with the language of theoretically dense social justice discourses. The distinguishing deviations are in aesthetic theme – they often feature creative fonts and pastel color tones – overall brevity, and certain linguistic conventions. Posts like these

very often feature *x-inflected* language, and this research might even argue that users who participate in circulating these posts are those most likely to use newer *x-inflected* forms, such as *folx*. Constructing an online persona that is visibly political through this sort of process is more important to defining the *online-ness* indexed by *x-inflection* than the previously described popular culture literacy, though both are offered here to demonstrate that although different behaviors index *online-ness*, the politicized persona that this research explores necessitates a visibly political set of online practices.

The confluence of social identity, political orientation, and typifiable voices leads to the creation of recognizable social personae. This research posits that speakers attempt to signal or index their membership in or allyship to these online, politically progressive communities by incorporating *x-inflected* language into their own speech as a means to affirm to their peers that they are on-board with shared goals, and to signal to others with whom they stand. However, as will no doubt be illuminated in the following survey data, the meaning indexed by the *x-particle* will vary greatly across intersubjective spaces.

3. Methodology

In order to address the questions of *who is using folx*, and *to what discursive ends* a speaker may choose this salient variable over the conventional form *folks*, I created and distributed a language attitudes survey to a wide network of potential participants. Because the present study is interested in whether the use of *folx* is associated with particular politicized personae, I asked participants to self-identify various sociopolitical alignments and offer personal information about their identities. As

such, data protections were an important consideration when choosing a vehicle for the survey. I determined that using Qualtrics to build and distribute the survey was the best candidate available to this end. This particular software was chosen due to several advantages that it offers over other open-access options such as SurveyMonkey or Google Forms. For the purposes of ensuring privacy and data security, Qualtrics clearly offers the best protections for stored data and participant anonymity and confidentiality. The company contracts with many institutions for the purposes of creating employee feedback surveys, and in order to maintain confidence in participant anonymity, the software allows for an optionable 'Enhanced Anonymity' setting on each survey item. In other words, if any particular question's answer in comparison with any other previous inputs would make a participant readily identifiable, the researcher or survey creator can choose to make responses for one or more such questions completely anonymous (i.e., separated in the data report from any other input by the same participant). This control speaks to a larger motivation for choosing Qualtrics over seemingly competitive options, which is the software's relative sophistication and accessibility in design tools.

3.1 Survey content

The survey itself was reviewed by scholars from various language-interested disciplines, as well as advisors and extra-academic sources. Based on input from various review sessions, the decision was made to begin the survey with some exemplar sentences featuring *folks*. The *-x variant* term of interest was not featured in this sample set. It was assumed at the start of research that this variant would be outside the lived experience of the average participant (i.e., at least over half of

anticipated participants would have no or minimal exposure to the form), so it was decidedly *not* featured in the set of example uses at the survey form's start. In order to gather sentiment data about the new form *folx*, it was deemed necessary to prompt participants to evaluate their personal opinions about the conventionally spelled *folks* to establish something of an opinion baseline, and to start participants down the mental path of thinking about language. Early drafts of this survey began with the questions that ask participants to self-identify with various socio-cultural indexes of identity, such as: *age, gender, sex, education, naming a political affiliation*, etc. This section was moved to the end of the survey, making it the last set of questions that participants would answer. It was decided that *not* priming participants to think – and thus answer – as so categorically-identified persons would yield a truer data set.

3.2 Question design

The final iteration of the survey was comprised of 30 distinct questions, as well as some initial language modeling and interstitial task prompting. The questions were drafted such to encourage answers that would provide the most useful input to this research. For example, some questions ask participants to evaluate statements or claims on a simply graded agreeability scale (i.e., on a scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*). Other questions were purposefully designed to be open-ended; participants were prompted to offer their own input in response to the question asked. The most disparate of these answer sets (read, that which generated the greatest number of unique inputs) asks participants to: "Fill in the blank: *folx* is ____". The goal of this particular question was to allow survey participants the opportunity to reflect and

verbalize their opinions on the variable with their own language. Qualtrics offers survey authors the ability to easily introduce skip logic into the survey flow, and this feature was used where most relevant in order to protect question-level data sets from untrue inputs, or ‘noise’. One example of this practice is between questions 11 and 15. For example, Question 11 is the first point in the survey where participants are shown the *-x variable* term *folx* and asked about their familiarity or exposure to it. If their input to this question is either “no” or “not sure”, this participant would skip question 12 – which asks them to consider where they have seen the recast form – and go straight to question 15 which asks them to evaluate the semantic content shared between *folks* and *folx*. The reason for this is that participants may have something of a knee-jerk reaction to this new form and be tempted to give polarly negative input on questions where it would not necessarily reflect any relevant truth. In other words, if a participant has never seen *folx* before, they cannot offer useful input on a question that asks them *where* they’ve encountered this form, nor can they answer whether or not they use it more frequently than the conventional form, *folks*.

The survey was distributed via the primary investigator’s personal Instagram page, where a link to the Qualtrics form was hosted continuously for a period of 16 days. Internetwork users were invited to participate regularly via Instagram’s stories feature, as well as to share the survey link with their own networks. San Francisco State English department alumni were also invited to participate via the email listserv. The majority (greater than 70%) of all inputs were collected between the first and third days of the survey being live, during which time the principal investigator closely watched the results develop for a set of identified key questions in the event that one particular

distribution stream appeared to disproportionately affect overall choice counts once it was introduced.

4. Results & Analysis

The final response count for this data set is 156 both complete and incomplete forms, a significant percentage of which were submitted over the first 48-hour period of the survey's initial publishing and distribution effort, with a second wave of participation occurring near the middle of the collection period; this second substantial wave of participation is almost certainly attributable to the survey link being distributed through the SFSU English Graduate Department's listserv, which reaches both current graduate students and alumni of the programs. Final demographic information for participants is viewable on pages 62-71 of this paper's appendix.

4.1 Input on *folks*

The first central theme of the survey clusters around a set of questions that aim to understand how participants receive the English plural *folks*. I deemed it necessary to first measure metapragmatic attitudes about this conventional form before offering the variant-in-question, *folx*. A majority of respondents (65.81%) use *folks* themselves to refer to groups of people, and in a wide variety of speech contexts. Votes cast among the context options of *work*, *home*, *with people I know well*, *... don't know well*, and *online or other writing* were fairly evenly distributed, though there is a clear preference

for audience familiarity. *With people I know well* received 56 positive inputs, while only 28 selected also the option for *online or in other writing*. This result, though minor and slightly peripheral to the focus of this research, arguably indicates that *folks* is still viewed as colloquial language, which some speakers consider inappropriate for some speech contexts. This question is followed by a fill-in-the-blank style of question that asked respondents, if not by *folks*, how they typically reference or address a group of people. Responses in this section are more or less expected: many variations of *you all*, *those guys*, *people*, and some colloquial slang-type answers like *bros*, *squad*, and *my dudes*. Noteworthy of this response set, though, is that several respondents offer comments that present with variations on the sentiment that they try to *avoid gendered language* when addressing mass groups of people.

The following section begins to address whether or not *folks* is a regionally bound lexical item, which has historically been the case. At one time, most English speakers in the US associated the plural *folks* with speech varieties from the American South and Midwest (Quirk 2010). Here in this data, though, this is decidedly not the case. In fact, a majority (62.31%) of those surveyed *do not* identify *folks* as a regionally bound term, with 76.74% reporting that they have heard the term used relatively frequently by speakers whom they do not associate with Southern or Midwestern American English dialect communities. In this reflection, too, no particular speech context appears to greatly outweigh another, though more respondents did identify *On TV or in other entertainment* as the most common context for encountering the term, which is itself a meaningful data point since much of contemporary television features scripted dialogue. Since most people experience the context of option of *in a political speech*, which was

the second most frequently selected option, through a television screen, it is conceivably fair to consider these choices together, or at least with a meaningful degree of overlap between them. This input validates the original note that many Americans, at least in recent memory, identify *folks* as a term common to the lexical inventory of a register of political address. This identification would then be somewhat in contradiction to the criticism levied against former presidents Obama and W. Bush, who, as was earlier noted here in this paper, were regularly chastised in news media for their so-called *colloquial* speech, which was purportedly *unbecoming* of the Office of the President. The enduring presence of *folks* as a plural person designator in political speech scripting has not as of yet appeared to totally collapse the authority of the station. Nor has the criticism of its use deterred speech writers from deliberately choosing the term; the overwhelming positive identification of frequency, as well as from within a political speech event-type context, are evidence of the fact that there is more to be gained, pragmatically speaking, by using *folks* than there is to be lost by what some critics warned was a linguistic impropriety.

4.2 Input on *folx* and *x-inflected* language

Q11 marks the pivot point at which respondents are now being asked for their input on the variant-of-interest, *folx*. This question also marks and confirms an assumption of this research before its start, which is that *folx* is a generally lesser-known variant; that is, relatively less discussed than more publicly salient *-x particle-*featured terms like *Latinx*. This question simply asks respondents whether or not they have seen an alternative spelling of 'folks', spelled 'folx'. Input weights for this question

were monitored closely, as this question stands out among the set as at greater risk for unbalanced input weights, especially so in snapshot data saving. This is to say that, since *folx* is hypothetically a term that appears with much greater frequency within niche sociopolitical discourse communities, simple encounter frequency could be a particularly volatile metric dependent on the populations with access to the survey. Writ further plainly: if this survey was exclusively distributed to current and former students of a graduate department in the school of Humanities, those individuals who *have* come across this variable may very well be disproportionately represented in the total data. Looking ahead to respondent self-identified demographic information reveals that college-educated individuals make up an overwhelming majority (> 80%) of total inputs, though this concern of inter-discipline bias was likely avoided through first eliciting participation through the primary researcher's personal social media network, very little (statistically speaking, 0%) of which overlaps with the SFSU listserv population. Interestingly, though, this data remained remarkably consistent throughout collection where 30.41% of respondents had at least encountered the alternative *folx* before, and 69.77% reporting that they definitely had *not* seen this spelling or were unsure about whether they had or had not seen it before the moment of taking the survey. This relationship trend remained constant throughout collection, with a final count of 27.91% of respondents reporting that they have, at some point, encountered *folx* in the world.

As is noted above in the section detailing methodology and design rationale, answering *no* or *not sure* in Q11 would trigger the programmed skip logic to direct these users next to Q15, as their input on Q12-14 definitively could not be based in personal experience, and would only create statistical noise in the data. For those respondents

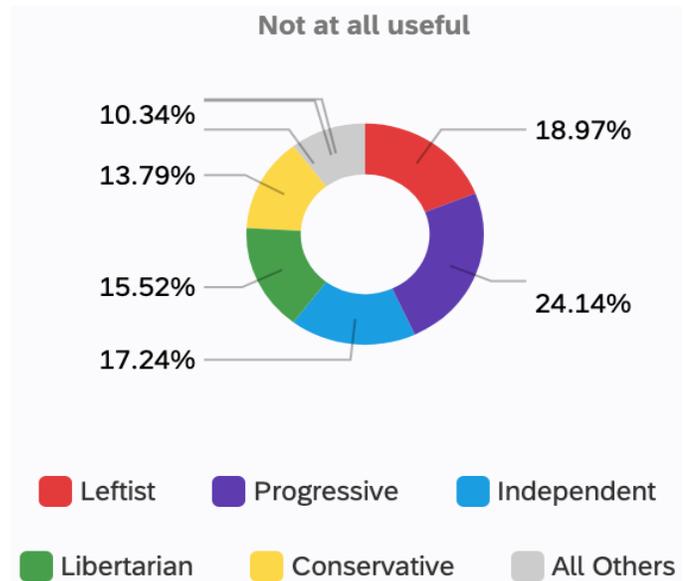
who had recalled experience with *folx*, it was reported that the most common contexts for encountering the variant were keyboard-mediated, in other words *online*. The most commonly identified context options were, as expected, *on social media* and *in online forums or blogs*. 12.96% of respondents identified *in academic writing* as a common location for *folx*, which is a statistic that would be interesting to further unpack; in hindsight, this would have been an opportune place to offer respondents the opportunity to say more, as the answer to *which* academic discourses are featuring this variant is informative to the end goals of this research. Final in this block of questions, and ultimately of great significance to this research: of those respondents who *have* encountered *folx* before, 93.80% do not recall a moment where they have themselves chosen to use *folx* over the conventional spelling *folks*; and only 1.60% report that they certainly use *folx* more frequently than they do *folks*.

On a simple empirical basis, it is quite clear from this data that *folx* is an incredibly niche lexical item, and that it is not at all common in most speakers' everyday registers. However, and perhaps more importantly to the purposes of this survey, speakers are able to sort of fill in the pragmatic gaps in their knowledge of *folx* by transferring what they do know about other similar forms of language. Noting first, though, there was an unexpected divide in Q15, which asks respondents to evaluate their intuition of the semantic content of *folx* as it relates to *folks*. A majority (53.13%) of those surveyed chose to *neither agree nor disagree* with the statement that *folx means the same thing as folks*, with an additional 30.47% collectively represented in the ambivalent margins of *somewhat agree* and *somewhat disagree*. In retrospect, this question is likely better polled with fewer grades of agreeability (i.e., simply

agree/disagree/unsure). The result was admittedly unexpected – based on assumptions alone, this research originally hypothesized in its design phase that a majority of respondents would answer that these terms denote the same referents, one (*folx*) simply features an alternative spelling that, to some, widens the group of individuals available for reference by *folks*. The underlying theory here – which is informed in part by a meaningful portion of the online metadiscourse about *folx* – is that by transforming *folks* into *folx*, speakers are able to communicate a more inclusive address. However, this thought is also not confirmed in the data; rather, it is clearly defeated by the evaluation of this data set.

Q18 asks users to decide whether *folx* is *more inclusive than folks*, and a similar majority (56.25%) of respondents chose to neither agree nor disagree with this statement, with again some marginal ambivalence (14.85%) choosing options that only *somewhat* agree/disagree, collectively. Noteworthy here is that 18.75% of respondents elected to *strongly disagree* with the statement. This departure from ambivalence, as this paper will argue and at some length expound in the discussion section below, is almost certainly triggered by the term *inclusive* in the prompting language. It is almost certainly the case that this term activates frames that speakers associate with themes of *social justice* or *political correctness*, prompting them to qualify their reactions in a much more polarized way than they had in previous questions. This disposition appears to carry forward to Q19, wherein respondents were asked to qualify the overall *usefulness* of *folx*; a near-majority (48.74%) of those surveyed opted for the definitively polar answer, *not at all useful*. Interestingly, though, this set of answers appears to comprise a wider population than the previous question's negative respondents. Consider this

breakout of the input data for Q19 (Fig. 1) by how respondents identified their political orientation in Q33. First, it should be noted that the *all others* category is made up of participant-generated political orientations, many of which are of questionable validity; this research does not consider variations of *centrism* to be particularly informative to the purposes of this analysis, though there is certainly a semantic analysis to be undertaken investigating what perceived entailments one might hope to invoke by declaring such a categorically tepid political stance.



(Fig 1)

Also featured in this self-identified group are a collection of non-substantive answers such as *no faith in current government*, *none*, and some over-contextualized strings like *I'm really not that progressive I don't think but Trump really pushed me*, or *I think sports are a bad waste of time but generally vote left due to thinking we are all equals*. While some of these inputs carry a high degree of novelty, they aren't particularly useful in this data breakout analysis. What is somewhat unexpectedly reflected here in this graphic is that self-identified progressives and leftists together constitute nearly half (~43%) of the weight for the vote that *folx* is a useless term. How do we account for this, especially if one of major persona types that someone's choice to use *folx* was hypothesized to index was politically progressive or leftist?

4.3 Metadiscourse on *x-inflection*

It's evident in various sources of online metapragmatic discussion of *folx* that many people evaluate its use as performative gesture. In general, it is observed that *folx* is constructed to project a message of inclusion to marginalized groups, the most commonly identified of which are gender non-conforming, nonbinary, and transgender communities. However, a quick scrape of archived threads in communities built around these identities hosted microblog sites such as Reddit, GitHub, and Twitter reveal that many individuals within these groups view the use of *folx* as, at best, ultimately ineffective though well-meaning, and at worst performative allyship that actually results in further *othering* of the groups it theoretically attempts to include.

Indeed, examples of these evaluations are present in the current survey data, too. Q23 provides the broadest set of data, as the question itself is open ended – it asks respondents to *Fill in the blank: 'Folx' is _____*. There are a handful of noteworthy answers here, not the least of which are those that make explicit mappings between *folx* and *Latinx* via their shared *-x particle*, or those that show metacognitive thought about indexicality, as one answer reads: *potentially more inclusive than "folks", but that's just an intuition and I'm not sure why that would be the case*. However, multiple answers identify that they have evaluated the use of *folx* in their own experience as empty performativity, which, if this inquiry took instead a live interview approach rather than this survey format, would have been followed up with a question to the respondent about what exactly a speaker is performing. One respondent notably qualified *folx* as transphobic; they write that *it implies a specialized group, while being accurate, is also alienating to folks that simply want to be*. This participant identifies their own gender as

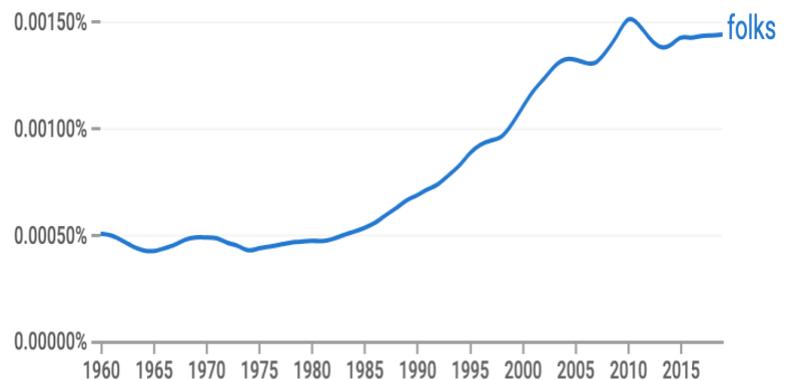
non-binary. Many of the responses present with an unignorable hostility, ranging from irritation at perceived ineffectiveness (*Beyond stupid and BS*) to explicitly political (*Just another way the left is trying to homogenize an already inclusive term*). This area of response where evaluations fall reliably along political lines will be explored in greater detail below in the discussion section.

5. Discussion

A piece of this investigative picture that is notably absent from this survey data is any meaningful lead on the etymology of *folx*. Oddly enough, it has been noted in some literature (Salinas & Lozano 2017) that despite the lack of any formal etymological or focused research on the -x particle, it is still beginning to appear in published research (Robertson 2018; Martin 2018), mostly within LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC critical discourse spaces. To the extent that these current use environments and the comments from many speakers in threads about the origins of *folx* can reliably point toward an origin, they do seem to indicate that the term originated in these critical discourse spaces online.

Whether or not individuals identify *folx* as a term that indexes a particular speaker persona, it is worthwhile at this point to note that the root form *folks* appears to be nearly free from its status as determinative of a regional speech variety. Recall Q10 from this survey, which revealed that > 50% of those individuals surveyed do *not* identify *folks* with any geographically bounded speech community. Historically speaking, *folks* as a general person plural has been said to index American Southern, Midwestern, and Northern English speech varieties (Quirk 2010). Figure 2 represents token frequency

trends for *folks* as analyzed by Google ngrams. Note that the parameters for this ngram search have been set to return token frequency counts as they occur between the years 1945 and the most contemporary threshold value, which at the time of this research is 2019. It is difficult to pinpoint a singular culture-moving event that would clearly account for *folk's* rise



(Fig. 2)

in frequency beginning in the early 1980s; a detailed sociohistorical analysis is needed to make any meaningful claims about the change. Regardless of why this is the case, this survey bears complementary data to this representation simple token frequency count. The base form *folks* is now common enough in varieties of North American English such that it is no longer determinative of regional speech patterns. The commonplaceness of this plural term may contribute to its availability for *x-inflection*, which represents yet another potential area for future study.

5.1 Influence of political alignment

From this data – particularly the free-answer evaluations of *folx* prompted by Q23 – it would appear that overall evaluation of *folx* falls pretty clearly along rigid political lines. Some respondents view *folx* as, for lack of more appropriate language, sort of silly, an empty gesture, or generally feckless. However, it is very clear from participant input gathered through Q19 and Q23 that: a) some speakers have much stronger feelings about this derivation than others, and that b) these stronger feelings are almost exclusively negative in sentiment polarity. A breakout report of the data by how

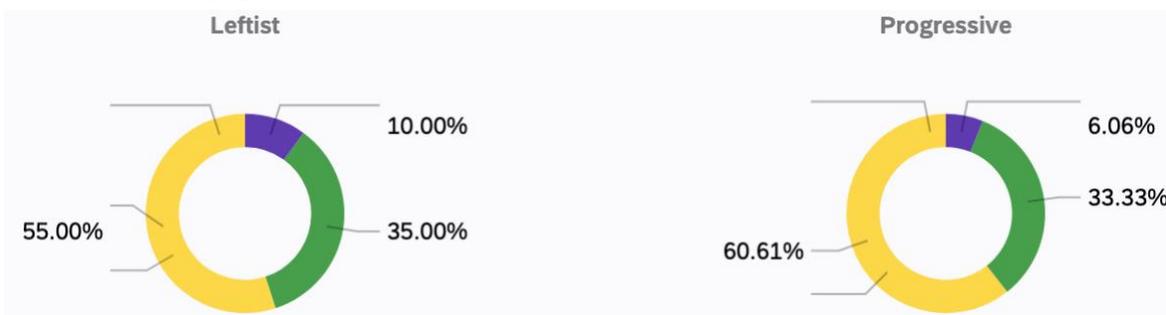
respondents chose to identify their political alignments reveals that those who identified with either the *Conservative* or *Libertarian* option consistently responded negatively to the use, and truly mere existence, of *folx*.

A partial rationale for this finding can be found through an application of George Lakoff's (1997) framework, which attempts to explain the highly divergent political values of American conservatives and liberals. Lakoff first set out his theory of cognitive metaphor (CMT) to demonstrate how we use metaphor as a tool to talk about and make sense of abstract concepts by relating them to more concrete, everyday concepts and experiences (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). As a brief introduction to this theory, we can look at one of the most conceptually pervasive and superordinate of these metaphorical structures – how we understand LIFE in terms of a JOURNEY. People think about – as evidenced by the way they so frequently *talk* about – the abstractness of elements in the target LIFE domain through concrete terms available to them in the source domain of a JOURNEY. Linguists find that similar phrases that reveal this metaphorical framing of abstract concepts are quite common cross-linguistically. Many languages have variations on the theme expressed by English phrases like *We have a long road ahead of us* or talking about someone who has gone *off the beaten path*. Each of these phrases also operate on the sub-metaphor PROGRESS IS FORWARD MOTION. Lakoff theorizes that these metaphors are totally pervasive and contribute a great deal to how we make sense of the world around us.

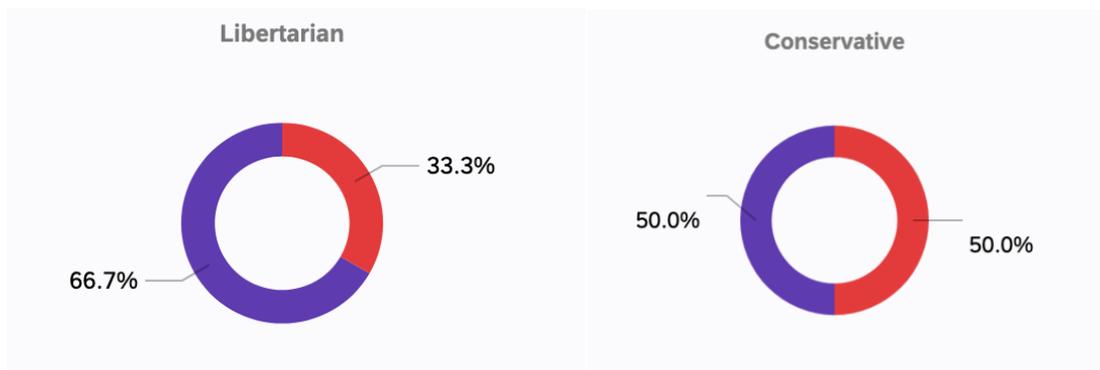
Lakoff 1996 explores how American liberals and conservatives each arrive at their own conceptions of social morality by proposing that we understand the NATION as a FAMILY. Importantly, this cognitive metaphor frames the federal government as a

parental entity, which, Lakoff proposes, liberals understand through a *nurturing parent* schema, while conservatives import concepts from one of a *strict father*. The role of the *nurturing parents* is to *support* and ensure the safety and equitable treatment of citizens, where the role of the *strict father* is primarily to model and instill *discipline*. Through being *disciplined*, as the term is used in this framing, one lives appropriately, or *morally*, according to their role in the constructed social hierarchy. Behavioral noncompliance is therefore not simply socially transgressive but understood as morally transgressive.

Consider the following graphics from the survey response data for Q26, which asked respondents to grade their agreement with the statement: *Language is ‘degradable’ – creating and accepting these ‘unnecessary’ changes weakens a language*. Figure 3 demonstrates how those who identified their political alignment as either *Leftist* or *Progressive* answered this question, and figure 4 shows the same question input from those identified as *Conservative* or *Libertarian*:



(Fig. 3)



[Values: **Strongly agree**; **somewhat agree**; **somewhat disagree**; **strongly disagree**]

(Fig. 4)

This data breakout represents what this analysis would argue to be one of the more interesting results from this research project about *folx*. Recall the content of figure 1, which represents the finding that participant political alignments did not significantly affect their overall perceived *usefulness* of *folx* – that is, most evaluated the term as *not at all useful*. The results of this cross-breakout may indicate a fundamental difference between *why* someone would evaluate *folx* as not generally useless alone, but offensive in its mere creation. Recasting the existing form *folks* as *x-inflected folx* breaks several “rules”, the obvious of which is its deviation from English orthographic conventions. The less obvious, or perhaps simply less overt or *loud*, are the ways that *folx* transgresses the terms of a rigid social hierarchy, attempting to include those who have historically been excluded, even if they are not explicitly so excluded by morphosyntactic gender inflection. This data breakout represents a version of Lakoff’s essential *discipline* alignment – to change the rules of the game, as it were, is to begin restructuring or present a challenge to the hierarchy that determines the “natural” order of things. Very plainly: some folks have no problem with making what are ultimately quite minor changes to language in an effort to accommodate folks around them; other folks are clearly threatened by these efforts to adjust the ways that our social environment privileges some at the expense of others.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

This research project set out to answer the questions: is the motivation for *folx* pragmatically distinct from the introduction of inflectionally gender-neutral variants like *Latinx*; toward what discursive ends do speakers choose *folx* over *folks*; and to what

extent does the use of *folx* index any typifiable social persona? *Folx* clearly functions distinctly from more common *x-inflected* lexemes like *Latinx*, though many of the speakers surveyed here did identify a possible connection between the two. While *Latinx* very obviously neutralizes grammatical gender inflection – thereby attempting to neutralize or lessen any negative entailments imbued by cultural evaluations of gender – *folx* is chosen by those who use it to index their allyship to inclusive sociopolitical efforts. As this variant exists primarily in the context of online discourse, it has become a salient marker of an emerging persona that is both aligned with progressive-left political ideology and highly *online*. However, to many speakers, the term *folx* is generally much less potently inclusive than its users may hope, and many of those surveyed in this research as well as online evaluate the use of *folx* as a sort of performative allyship.

This research opens several new avenues for further investigation. *X-inflection* is a relatively new linguistic phenomenon, and more complete investigations into the process origins, as well as a fuller accounting of its pragmatic effects, is doubtless forthcoming. This research is one of very few to explore morphosyntactic variables as partial means for persona construction, specifically politicized persona. The argued existence of this progressive-left online persona begs the question of whether there exist complementary conservative-right online personae. A more complete analysis of the influence of speaker political alignment on *x-inflection* generally is still needed. Further, variations on data collecting methods are certainly possible. These could valuably include advanced matched guise techniques or distributing a similar language attitudes survey outside of social media platforms exclusively.

7. References

- Agha, A. (2005). Voice, footing, enregisterment. *Journal of linguistic anthropology*, 15(1), 38-59.
- Agha, A. (2011). Commodity registers. *Journal of linguistic anthropology*, 21(1), 22-53.
- Alim, H. S., & Smitherman, G. (2012). *Articulate while Black: Barack Obama, language, and race in the US*. Oxford University Press.
- Bucholtz, M. (1999). "Why be normal?": Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls. *Language in society*, 28(2), 203-223.
- Bucholtz, M. (2010). *White kids: Language, race, and styles of youth identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Calder, J. (2019). From sissy to sickening: The indexical landscape of/s/in SoMa, San Francisco. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 29(3), 332-358.
- Campbell-Kibler, K. (2007). Accent,(ING), and the social logic of listener perceptions. *American speech*, 82(1), 32-64.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (Ed.). (2013). *Literacy as translingual practice: Between communities and classrooms*. Routledge.
- Coupland, N. (2001). Dialect stylization in radio talk. *Language in society*, 345-375.
- D'onofrio, A. (2018). Personae and phonetic detail in sociolinguistic signs. *Language in Society*, 47(4), 513-539.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (1992). Think practically and look locally: Language and gender as community-based practice. *Annual review of anthropology*, 21(1), 461-488.

- Eckert, P. (2008). Variation and the indexical field 1. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 12(4), 453-476.
- Eckert, P. (2012). Three waves of variation study: The emergence of meaning in the study of sociolinguistic variation. *Annual review of Anthropology*, 41, 87-100.
- Irvine, J. T. (1990). Registering affect: Heteroglossia in the linguistic expression of emotion. *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, 126-161.
- Johnson, K. (2006). Resonance in an exemplar-based lexicon: The emergence of social identity and phonology. *Journal of phonetics*, 34(4), 485-499.
- Johnstone, B. (2009). Stance, style, and the linguistic individual. *Stance: sociolinguistic perspectives*, 29, 52.
- Kiesling, S. F. (2009). Style as stance. *Stance: sociolinguistic perspectives*, 171-194.
- Kramer, R., & Kramer, R. T. (2015). *The morphosyntax of gender* (Vol. 58). Oxford University Press.
- Labov, W. (1964). Phonological correlates of social stratification. *American Anthropologist*, 66(6_PART2), 164-176.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English vernacular* (No. 3). University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns* (No. 4). University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2008). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago press.
- Lakoff, G. (2010). *Moral politics: How liberals and conservatives think*. University of Chicago Press.
- Martin, A. (2018). *Challenging Corrections: Empowering LGBTQ Folx*.

- Michael-Luna, S., & Canagarajah, A. S. (2007). Multilingual academic literacies: pedagogical foundations for code meshing in primary and higher education. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(1).
- Padilla, Y. (2016, April 18). What does “Latinx” mean? A look at the term that’s challenging gender norms. Complex. Retrieved from: <http://www.complex.com/life/2016/04/latinx>
- Pharao, N., Maegaard, M., Møller, J. S., & Kristiansen, T. (2014). Indexical meanings of [s+] among Copenhagen youth: Social perception of a phonetic variant in different prosodic contexts. *Language in Society*, 1-31.
- Quirk, R. (2010). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. Pearson Education India.
- Reyes, A. (2005). Appropriation of African American slang by Asian American youth 1. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9(4), 509-532.
- Robertson, N. (2018, January). The power and subjection of liminality and borderlands of non-binary folx. In *Gender Forum* (Vol. 69, No. 6, pp. 45-59). Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier.
- Salinas Jr, C., & Lozano, A. (2019). Mapping and recontextualizing the evolution of the term Latinx: An environmental scanning in higher education. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18(4), 302-315.
- Caplan, S. E. (2002). Problematic Internet use and psychosocial well-being: development of a theory-based cognitive-behavioral measurement instrument. *Computers in human behavior*, 18(5), 553-575.

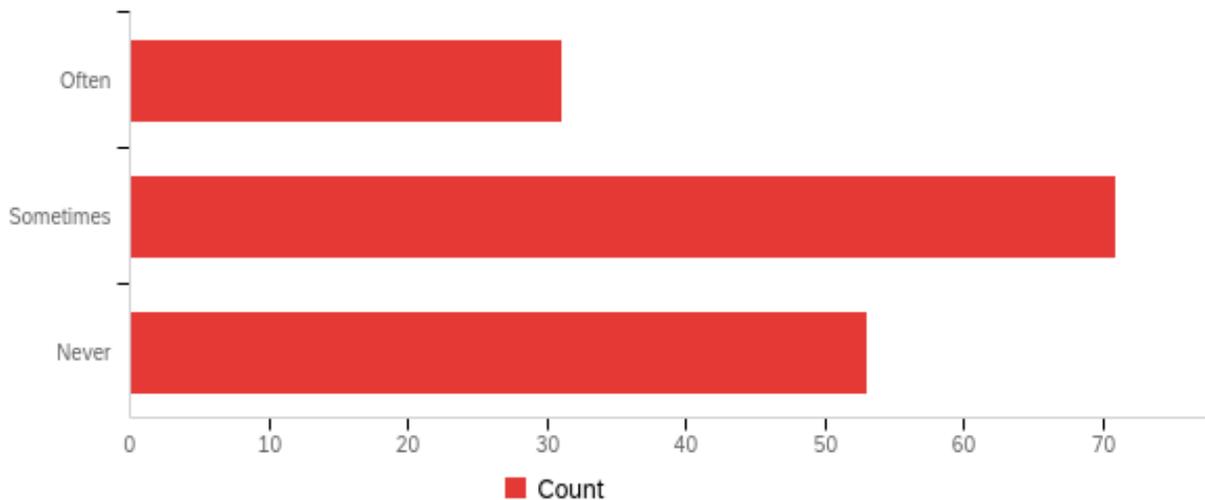
- Caplan, S. E. (2003). Preference for online social interaction: A theory of problematic Internet use and psychosocial well-being. *Communication research*, 30(6), 625-648.
- Silverstein, M. (2003). Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language & communication*, 23(3-4), 193-229.
- Tandoc, Edson & Johnson, Erika. (2016). Most students get breaking news first from Twitter. *Newspaper Research Journal*. 37. 10.1177/0739532916648961.
- U.S. Office of the Press Secretary (Producer). (2014, August 01). *Press Conference by the President*. Retrieved from:
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/01/press-conferencepresident>
- Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2007). Online communication and adolescent well-being: Testing the stimulation versus the displacement hypothesis. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1169-1182.
- Yee, N., Bailenson, J. N., Urbanek, M., Chang, F., & Merget, D. (2007). The unbearable likeness of being digital: The persistence of nonverbal social norms in online virtual environments. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 10(1), 115-121.
- Young, V. A. (2007). *Your average nigga: Performing race, literacy, and masculinity*. Wayne State University Press.
- Young, V. A. (2010). Momma's memories and the new equality. *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society*, 1(1), 6.
- Zhang, Q. (2005). Rhotacization and the 'Beijing Smooth Operator': The social meaning of a linguistic variable 1. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12(2), 201-222.

8. Appendix: Survey Results

Survey Data Report

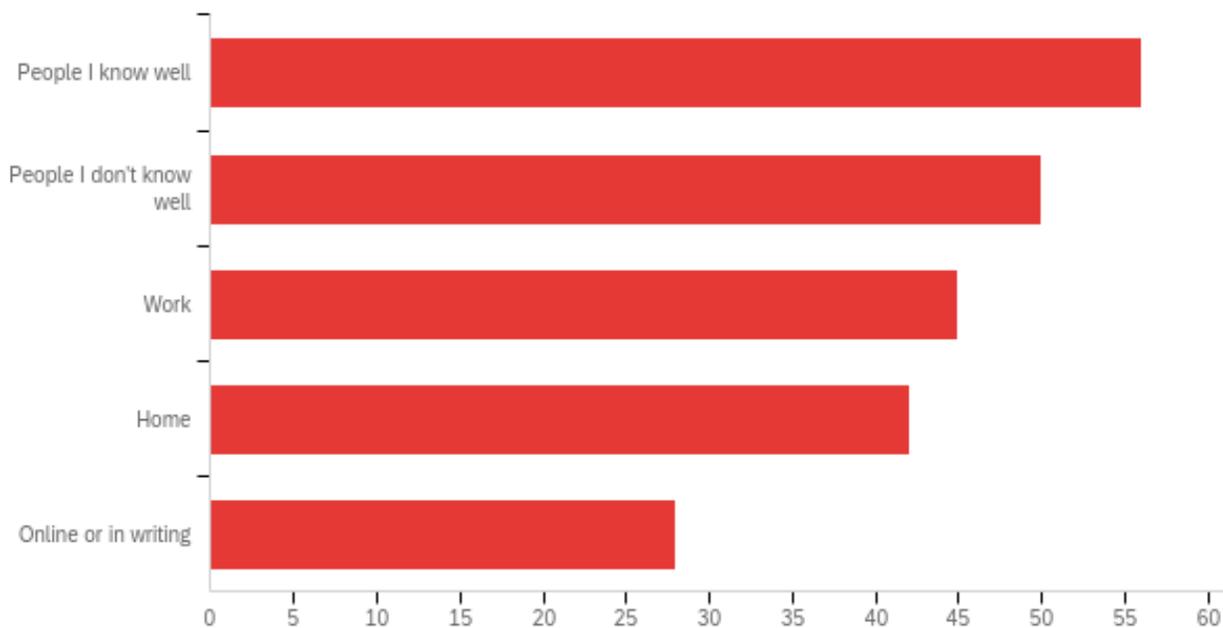
Capstone Project: Understanding 'folx'

Q4 - I use 'folks' to refer to groups of people:



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Often	20.00%	31
2	Sometimes	45.81%	71
3	Never	34.19%	53
	Total	100%	155

Q5 - I use 'folks' when I am speaking at/with:



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Work	20.36%	45
2	Home	19.00%	42
3	People I know well	25.34%	56
4	People I don't know well	22.62%	50
5	Online or in writing	12.67%	28
	Total	100%	221

Q6 - If you don't use 'folks', how do you typically address or reference a group of people?

If you don't use 'folks', how do you typically address or reference a group of people?

Everyone, people, guys, them

Gvng

"Hey you all", all of them, this group, etc.

I would just say they. Saying folks would be a forced thing for me personally

Y'all. I would use y'all 95% of the time as opposed to folks

Betches

You all, everyone, you guys

Y'all. People. Them/they

people, dudes

Y'all, guys, everyone

"Hey guys" if I am talking to them. "Those people" if I am talking about them.

Squad

Y'all

Friends

People

Hey guys

Group, people

Y'all, guys, them, those people

y'all

depends, maybe just "people", maybe something like check out those guys over there etc.

"Everyone", "All of us", "you guys", "all"

you guys

You (plural) or all (stand alone, not you all, e.g. "hello all")

you all, you guys, everyone. I use folks to describe my parents

People

community

Guys, y'all

Everyone, people, beings, folk

Guys or use the term of the specific group they belong too

Friends/ guys

Everyone, you all.

People, (i.e. them, the people over there), or pronouns (i.e. guys, girls, ladies, gentlemen)

People

Bros

Folks [they/them] don't really like that.

Everyone

y'all, guys, people

Guys

People, guys,

People

"People" "those lot" "guys"

"stereotype" people

People

Yall

They/them or people

I'll use "y'all" if I'm speaking directly to a group or "people" if I'm speaking about a group of people

By their

Everyone, all, guys, girls

Hi guys / hello everyone / hi everybody

'everyone' 'all'

"everyone" "y'all" "you all" "everybody"

Everyone

People

Guys

I'll say "hey guys" or "hi friends" regardless of gender

Dudes

Guys

Them or a more specific identifier

Guys, family, them, people

Guys

Hey everyone

People

I use "people "

You guys

Guys

guys, friends, y'all

Guys

Guys

"people" "identifying characteristic people"

Guys, although I realize that term is gendered. I more often just say "hey" and leave off a specific group name

guys

People. Those guys,

Those guys

people

Guys

You guys

People

Y'all, everyone

Guys, you all, friends

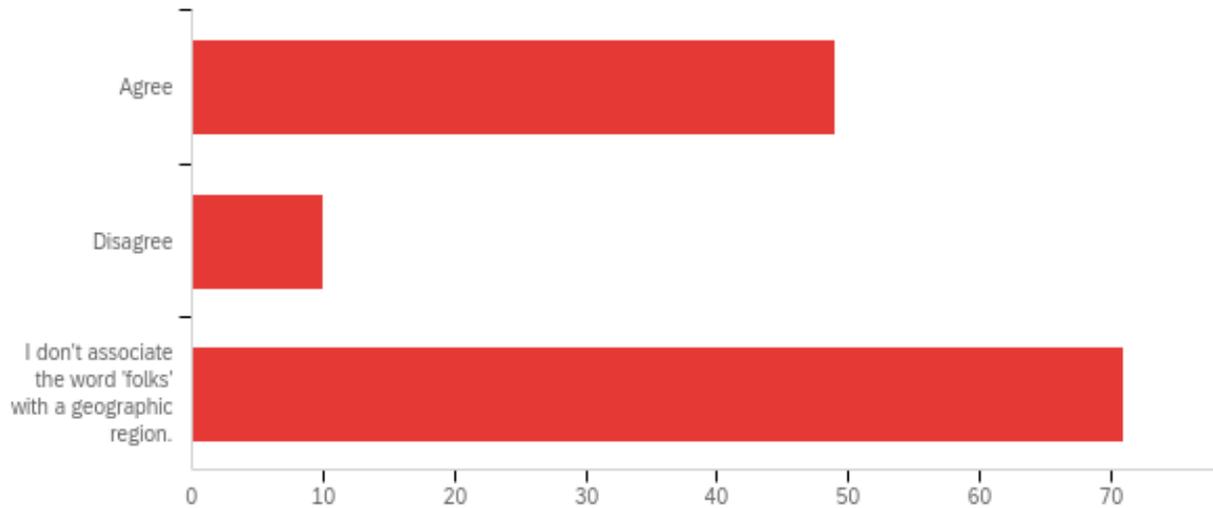
"People"

people

They

boop

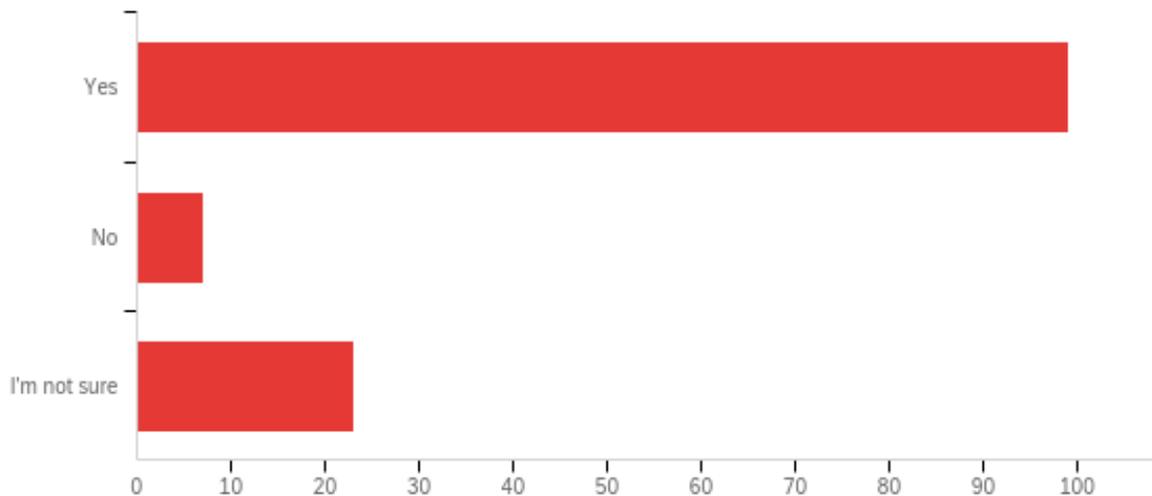
Q10 - 'Folks' is a word that I most closely associate with English speakers from the American South/Southwest.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	'Folks' is a word that I most closely associate with English speakers from the American South/Southwest.	1.00	3.00	2.17	0.95	0.89	130

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Agree	37.69%	49
2	Disagree	7.69%	10
3	I don't associate the word 'folks' with a geographic region.	54.62%	71
	Total	100%	130

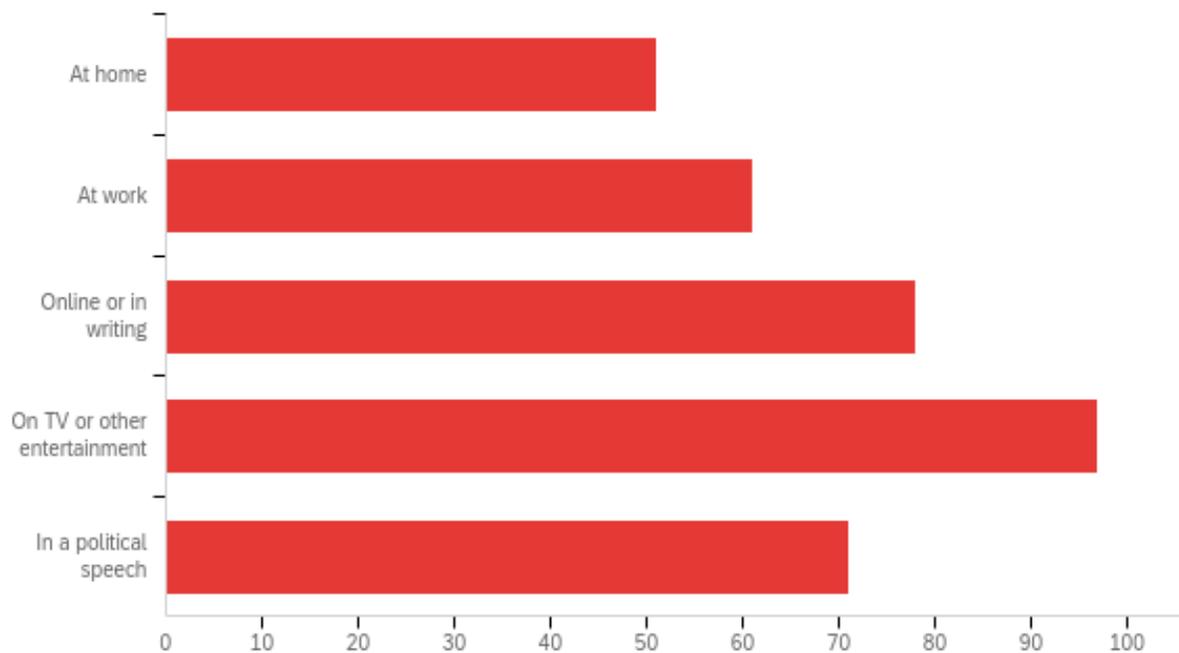
Q11 - I have heard or read 'folks' in use by English speakers outside of the American South.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I have heard or read 'folks' in use by English speakers outside of the American South.	1.00	3.00	1.41	0.77	0.60	129

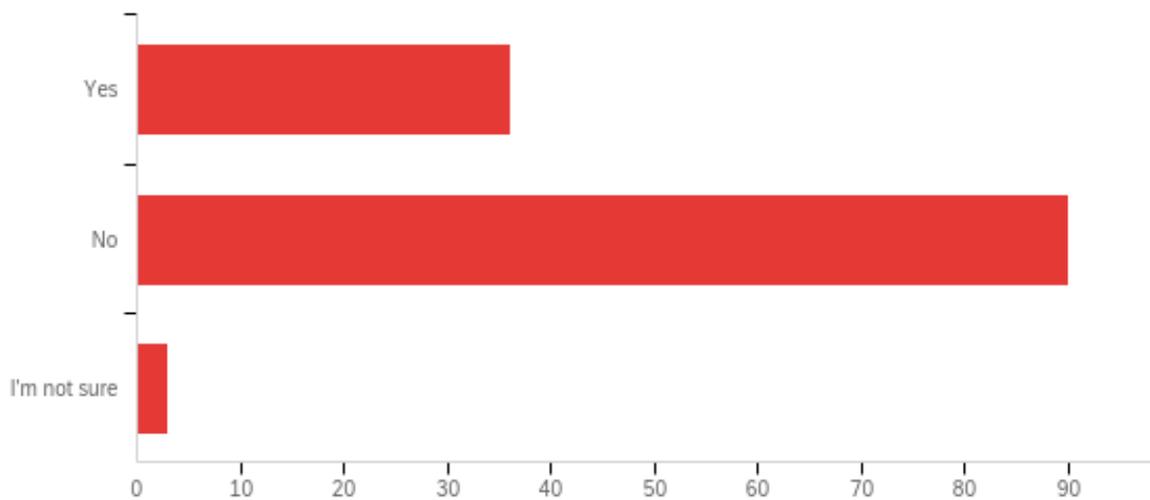
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	76.74%	99
2	No	5.43%	7
3	I'm not sure	17.83%	23
	Total	100%	129

Q10 - In what context have you heard folks used by speakers who don't come from the American South? Select all that apply:



#	Answer	%	Count
1	At home	14.25%	51
2	At work	17.04%	61
3	Online or in writing	21.79%	78
4	On TV or other entertainment	27.09%	97
5	In a political speech	19.83%	71
	Total	100%	358

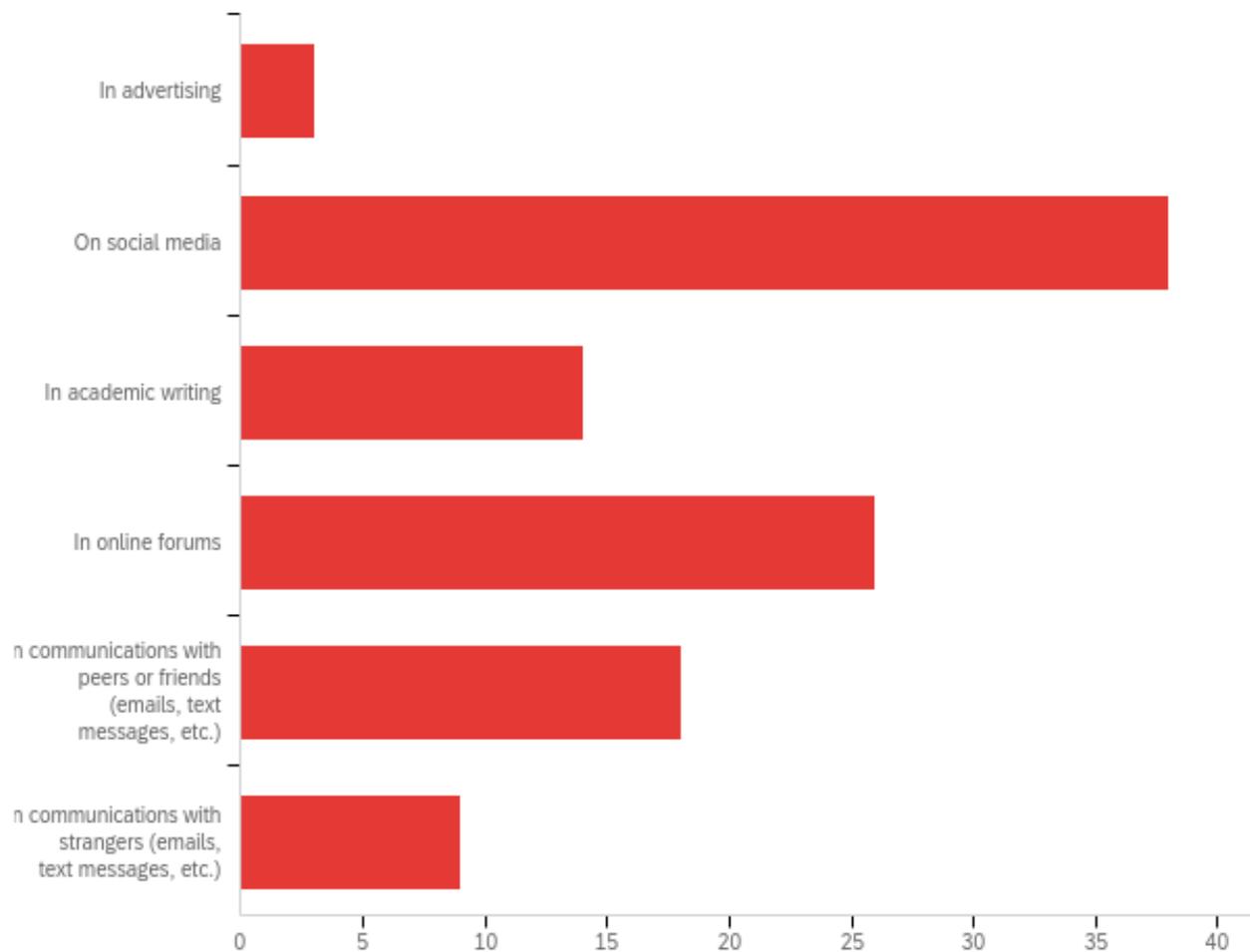
Q11 - I have seen an alternative spelling of 'folks', spelled as 'folx'



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I have seen an alternative spelling of 'folks', spelled as 'folx'	1.00	3.00	1.74	0.49	0.24	129

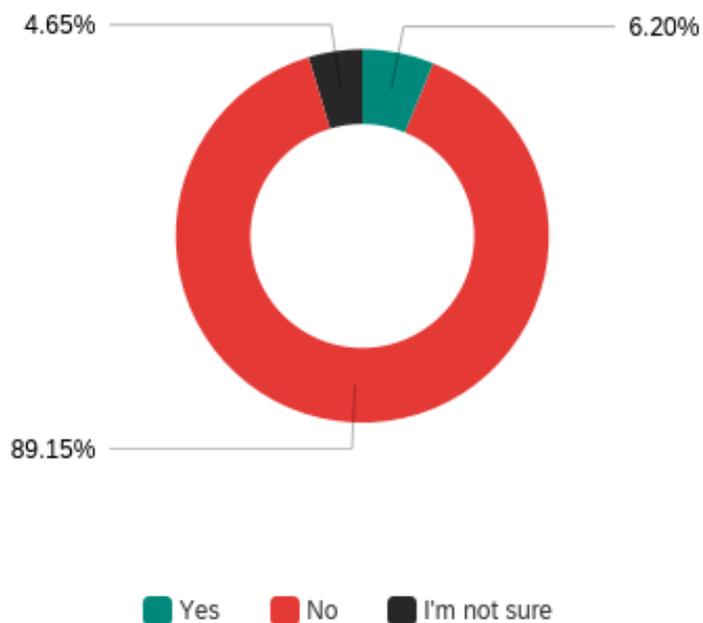
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	27.91%	36
2	No	69.77%	90
3	I'm not sure	2.33%	3
	Total	100%	129

Q12 - If you have seen 'folx' before, in what context do you typically come across it? Select all that apply



#	Answer	%	Count
1	In advertising	2.78%	3
2	On social media	35.19%	38
3	In academic writing	12.96%	14
4	In online forums	24.07%	26
5	In communications with peers or friends (emails, text messages, etc.)	16.67%	18
6	In communications with strangers (emails, text messages, etc.)	8.33%	9
	Total	100%	108

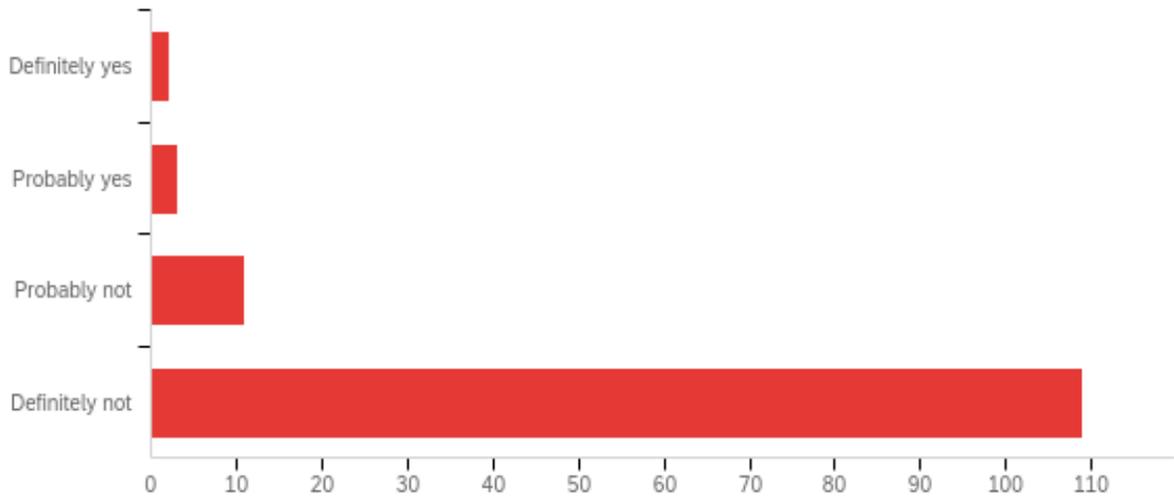
Q13 - I have used 'folx' instead of 'folks' before



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I have used 'folx' instead of 'folks' before	1.00	3.00	1.98	0.33	0.11	129

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	6.20%	8
2	No	89.15%	115
3	I'm not sure	4.65%	6
	Total	100%	129

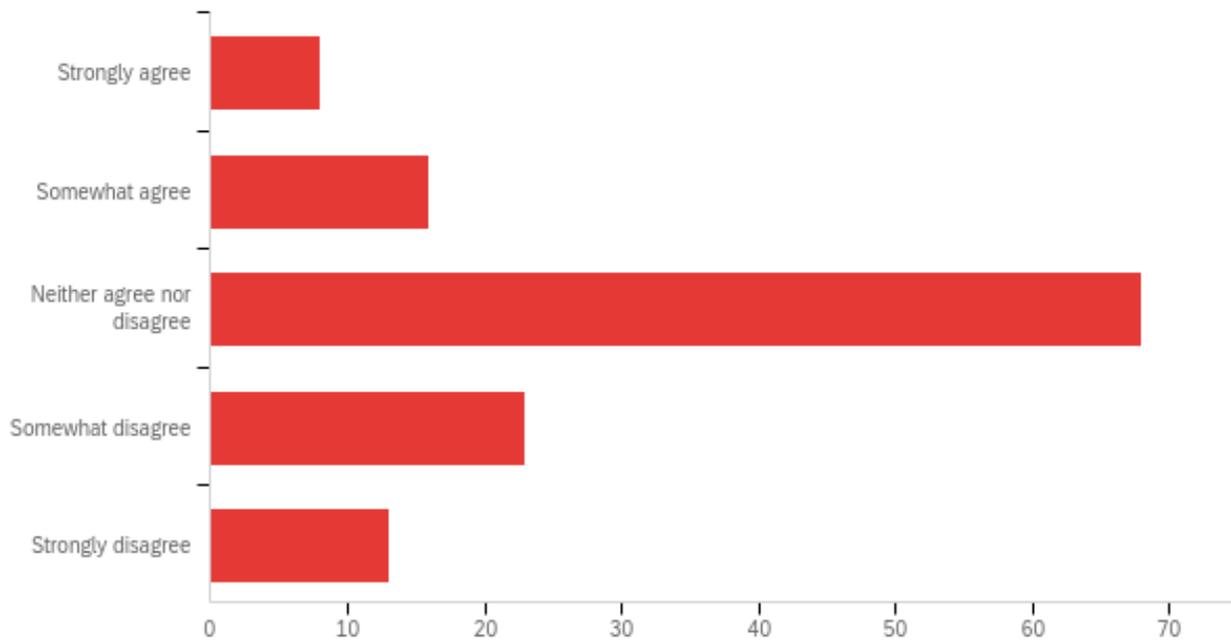
Q14 - I use 'folx' more frequently than 'folks', especially in informal contexts (online, text messages, etc.)



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I use 'folx' more frequently than 'folks', especially in informal contexts (online, text messages, etc.)	1.00	4.00	3.82	0.54	0.29	125

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Definitely yes	1.60%	2
2	Probably yes	2.40%	3
3	Probably not	8.80%	11
4	Definitely not	87.20%	109
	Total	100%	125

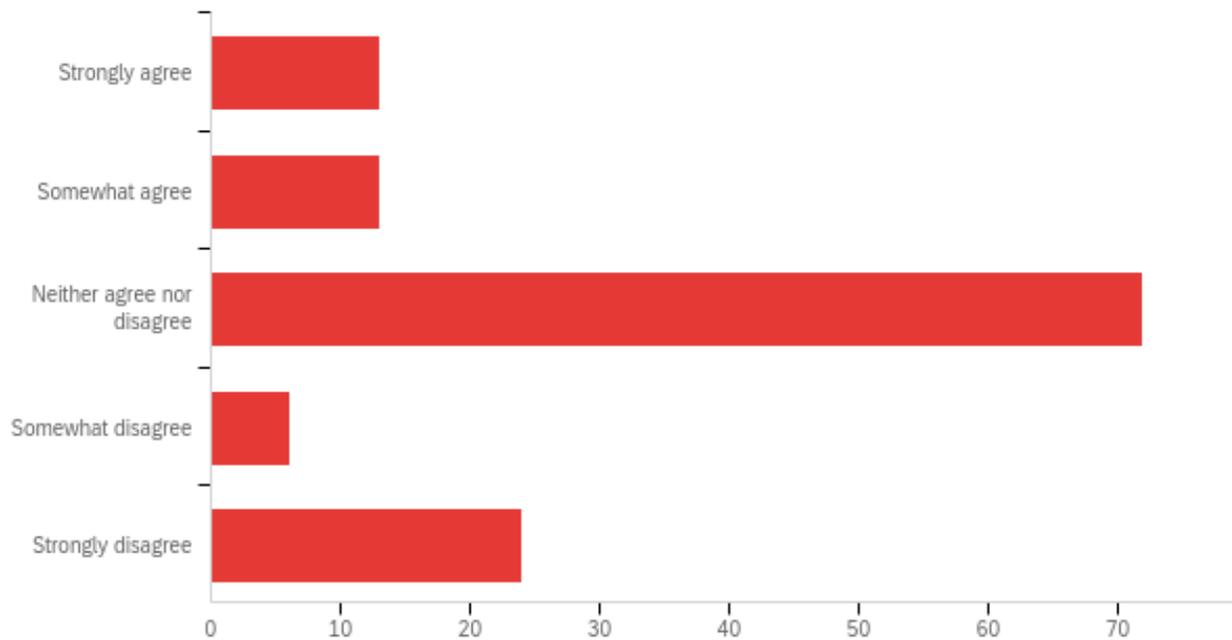
Q15 - 'Folx' means the same thing as 'folks'



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	'Folx' means the same thing as 'folks'	1.00	5.00	3.13	0.97	0.94	128

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	6.25%	8
2	Somewhat agree	12.50%	16
3	Neither agree nor disagree	53.13%	68
4	Somewhat disagree	17.97%	23
5	Strongly disagree	10.16%	13
	Total	100%	128

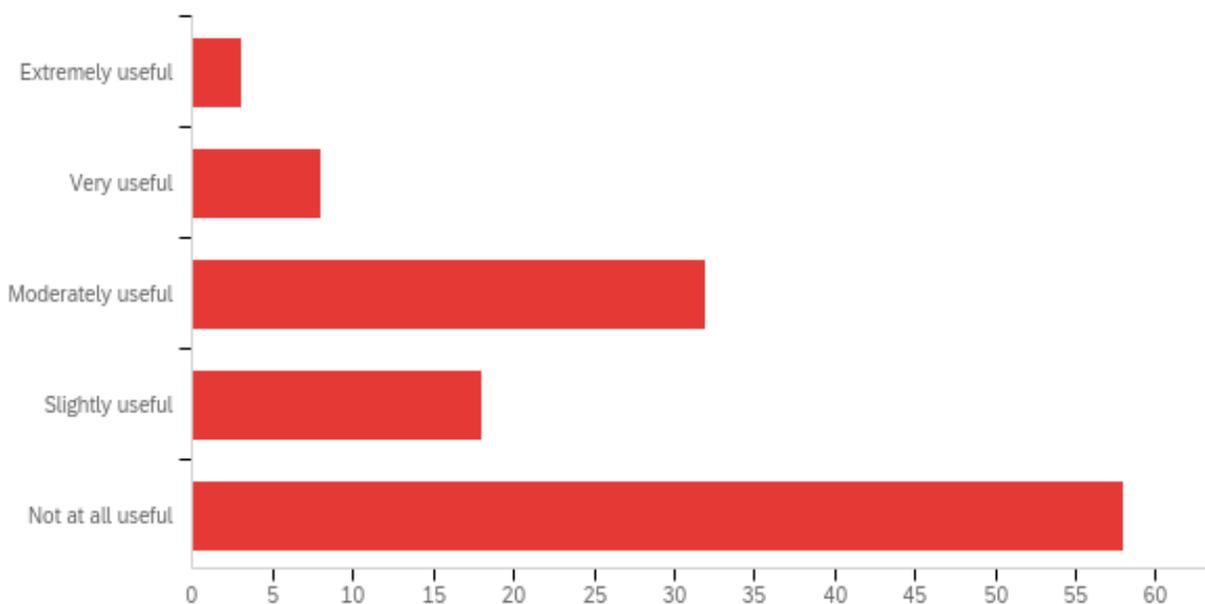
Q18 - 'Folx' is more inclusive than 'folks'



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	'Folx' is more inclusive than 'folks'	1.00	5.00	3.12	1.14	1.29	128

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	10.16%	13
2	Somewhat agree	10.16%	13
3	Neither agree nor disagree	56.25%	72
4	Somewhat disagree	4.69%	6
5	Strongly disagree	18.75%	24
	Total	100%	128

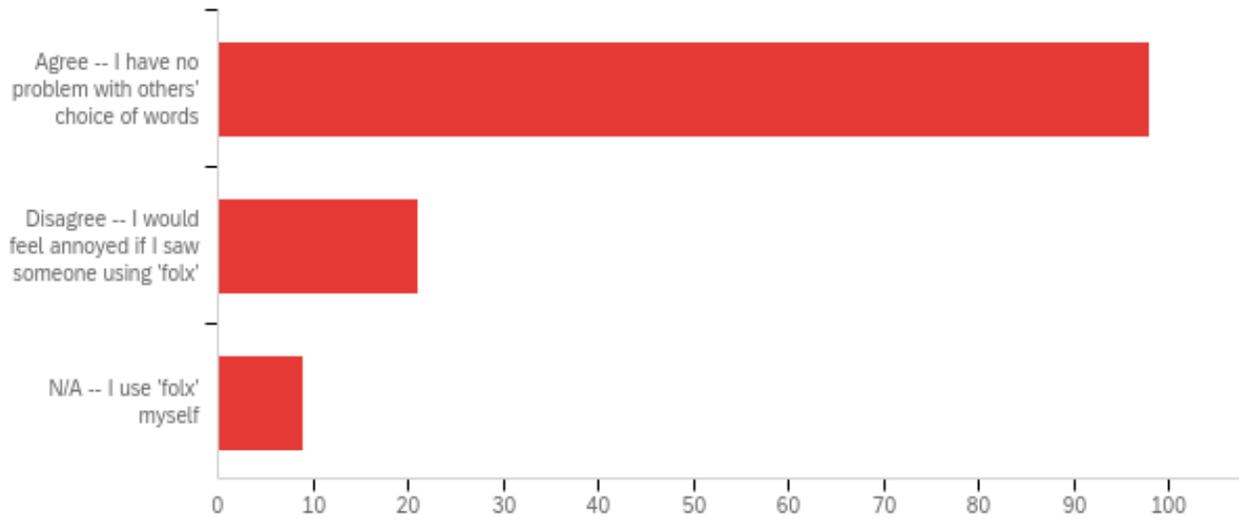
Q19 - 'Folx' is a useful term



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	'Folx' is a useful term	1.00	5.00	4.01	1.12	1.25	119

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Extremely useful	2.52%	3
2	Very useful	6.72%	8
3	Moderately useful	26.89%	32
4	Slightly useful	15.13%	18
5	Not at all useful	48.74%	58
	Total	100%	119

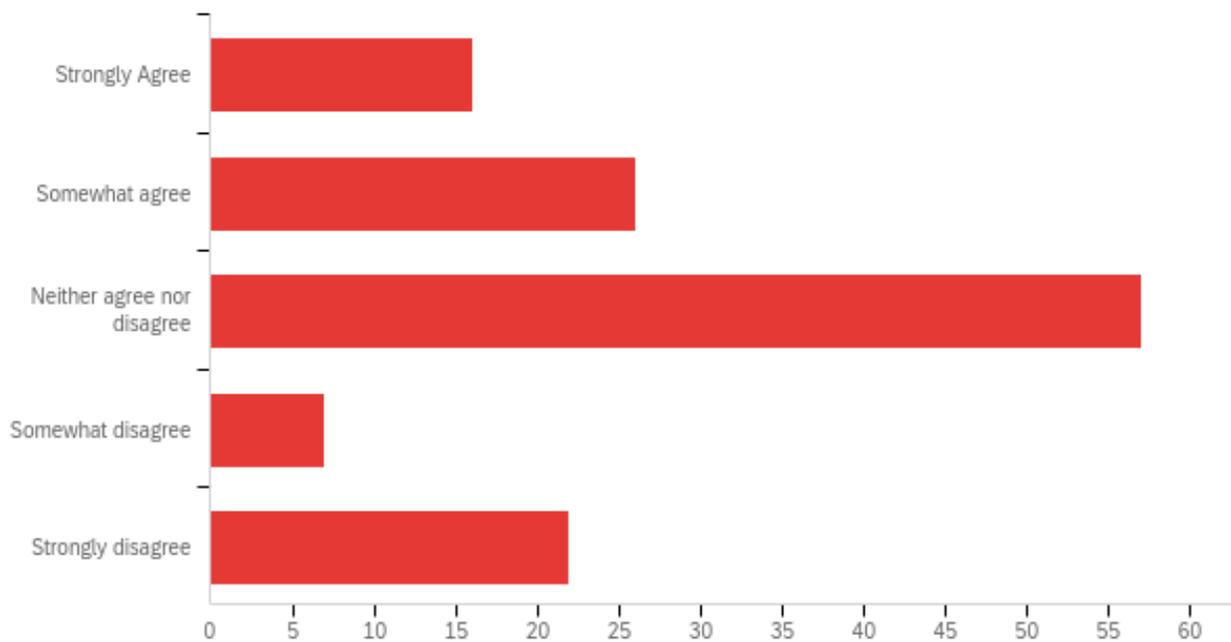
Q20 - I don't understand why someone would use 'folx' over 'folks', but I'm unbothered by someone's choice to do so.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I don't understand why someone would use 'folx' over 'folks', but I'm unbothered by someone's choice to do so.	1.00	3.00	1.30	0.59	0.35	128

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Agree -- I have no problem with others' choice of words	76.56%	98
2	Disagree -- I would feel annoyed if I saw someone using 'folx'	16.41%	21
3	N/A -- I use 'folx' myself	7.03%	9
	Total	100%	128

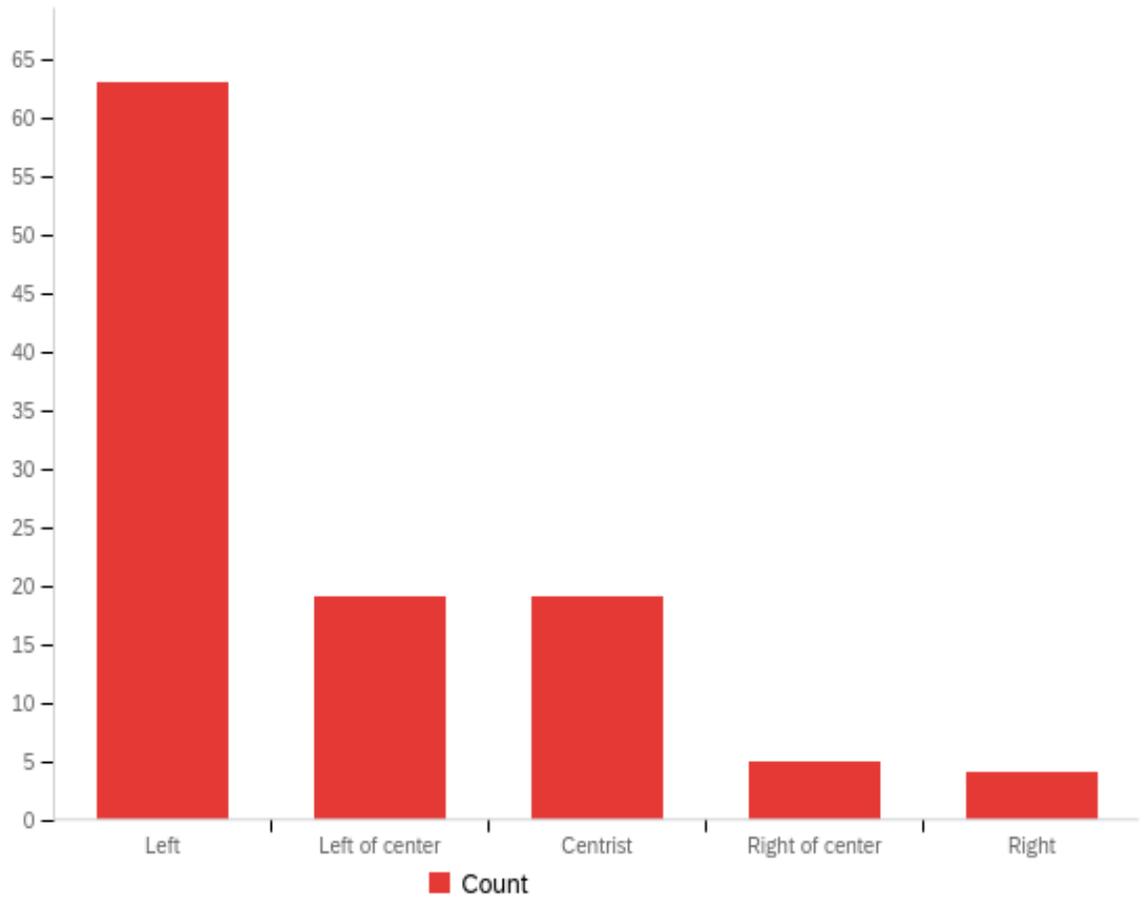
Q21 - Choosing to use 'folx' is a political act



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Choosing to use 'folx' is a political act	1.00	5.00	2.95	1.20	1.44	128

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly Agree	12.50%	16
2	Somewhat agree	20.31%	26
3	Neither agree nor disagree	44.53%	57
4	Somewhat disagree	5.47%	7
5	Strongly disagree	17.19%	22
	Total	100%	128

Q22 - Nearest which point on a political spectrum do you most closely identify individuals likely to use 'folx'?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Nearest which point on a political spectrum do you most closely identify individuals likely to use 'folx'?	1.00	5.00	1.80	1.10	1.21	110

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Left	57.27%	63
2	Left of center	17.27%	19
3	Centrist	17.27%	19
4	Right of center	4.55%	5

5	Right	3.64%	4
	Total	100%	110

Q23 - Fill in the blank: 'Folx' is _____ .

Fill in the blank: 'Folx' is _____ .

a word I've never seen before and upon first glance would not understand what it means

Who cares

An Urban dictionary word

An alternative to folks

Something I will use more

A term created by hyper sensitive people. Folks isn't meant to be non-inclusive in the first place and just because it can potentially be used in a certain context doesn't mean it's intrinsically harmful in any way. It still doesn't bother me when anyone uses it

Wack

All inclusive

Betches

A modern term of inclusion

A gender inclusive version of folks?

a more inclusive term to groups of adults

Folks

people, and people is folx

A gender neutral term used to describe a group of people

A non-gender identifying way of saying "people"? Is it related to the idea of latinx? I think the x is used in place of the "o" or "a" at the end of the word so as not to specify a gender.

Insignificant

Trans and non-binary inclusive

A group of people

Different

A variant of folks

not sure

a new word for me

No idea

the same as folks. Probably a new and more inclusive term. But it's the same word. If it's mutually intelligible to the speakers then great! Words are cool, words change, the end.

Gender neutral term of a group of people

A politically "correct" term for folks.

similar to "Latinx", so I assume it has to do with gender-neutrality, although the word "folk" isn't gendered, so I guess it's just an extension of that.

unnecessary

Not more inclusive than "folks". Folks is androgynous.

potentially more inclusive than "folks", but that's just an intuition and I'm not sure why that would be the case

Somebody's misspelled version of a commonly used word

Whatever you want it to be

new, inclusive

a well-meaning but ultimately misguided attempt to make an already inclusive term more so by analogy to, e.g., 'Latinx,' often seemingly implemented as a performative gesture.

Confusing at first and would make me pause to think because I read for understanding based on morphemes.

a word i do not use.

Another thing people are going to make a big deal about

Virtue signaling the



A made up word

I have not idea, never heard of it bad spelling?

A different way to say Folks?

No clue...

Transphobic. It implies a specialized group, while being accurate, is also alienating to folks that simply want to be.

cool. I use folks but I can dig it

No fucking idea

A term

Cray cray

A modern alternation of the term "folks"

Woke

New to me

Unnecessary

Gender neutral word for folks , even though folks is gender neutral
strange

A word that can replace folks.

a PC version of folks? I've never heard of this term before now.

A term I learned about today.

Genderless term for a group of people that is supposed to acknowledge nonbinary/trans people

Just another way the left is trying to homogenize an already inclusive term

Duplicative

Inclusive

A play on gender neutral mass greetings or identities like the term Latinx instead of gendered Latino or Latina, except for folks is already a gender neutral and inclusive term and is unnecessary in my view and might actually "other"ize the people who use it

Genderfluid

Awkward

An inclusive term used for a group of people where everyone's pronouns are not known

The stupidest fucking thing I've ever heard of

A a term used to reference people from all walks of life. E.g, race, sex, religion, etc.

Never used

probably used in liberal, more populated cities like Portland or San Francisco.

Unique

People

Reminding us to change language to become inclusive and shed negative nuanced connotations

Pointless

an odd spelling of "folks"

I don't know

Not a real world .

A term to address a group of people inclusive of all gender identities

Fox with an "l"

A word I've never seen before this survey

Brand new to me

Trying to be inclusive like "Latinx" but "Latinx" is turning "Latina/Latino" into a gender neutral word, whereas "folks" is already gender neutral.

Dumb

Contextual and could be useful if backed up with non action and support

I have no idea

A non gendered word to address a group of people

no idea

Beyond stupid and BS.

~_(\ツ)_/~

Folks

Weird

a group of hiks in the south

a word I'm unfamiliar with.

Not a word

Inclusive

Fox with an l

A group of people and is perceived as more inclusive in terms of gender identity

"People" used by the younger generation

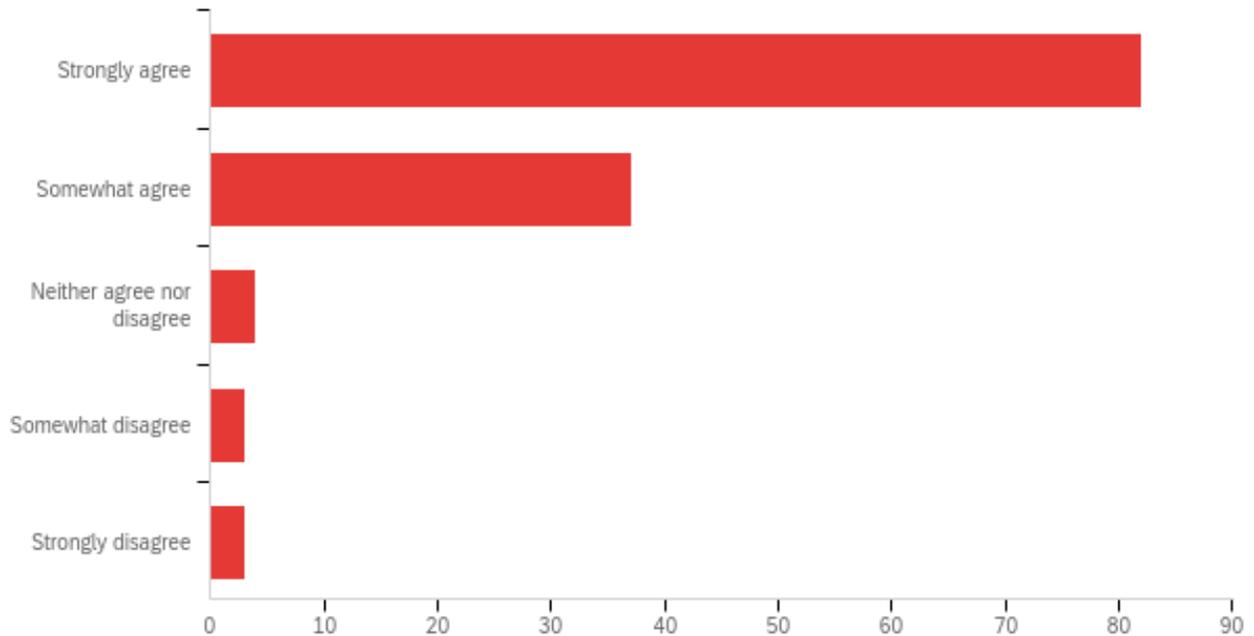
a gender-inclusive term for "folks."

Useless

Fine

A term for a group of people

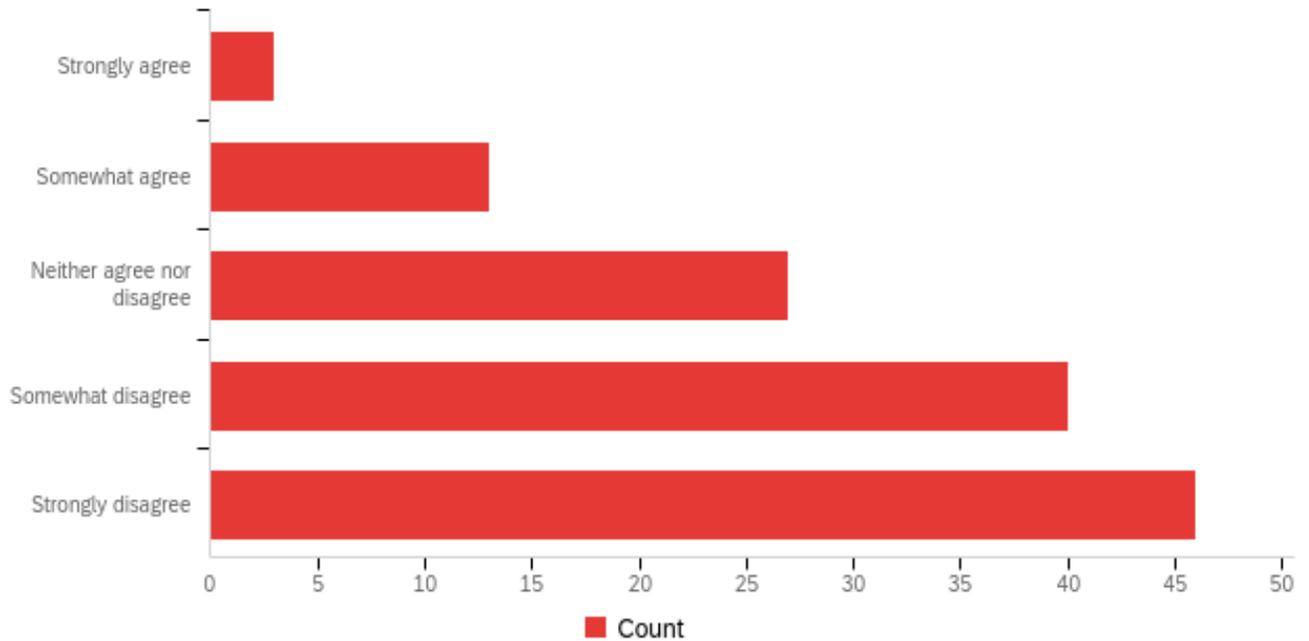
Q25 - Language -- specifically, how we communicate in casual vs. formal settings -- is undergoing constant change, and that's ok.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Language -- specifically, how we communicate in casual vs. formal settings -- is undergoing constant change, and that's ok.	1.00	5.00	1.51	0.85	0.73	129

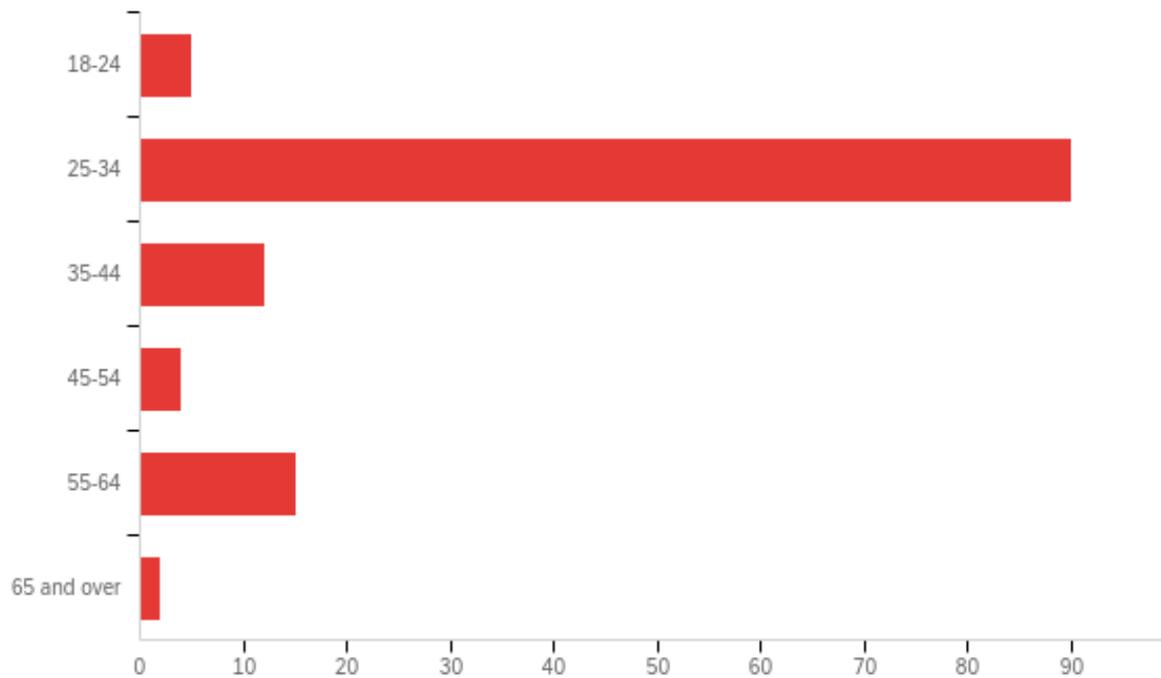
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	63.57%	82
2	Somewhat agree	28.68%	37
3	Neither agree nor disagree	3.10%	4
4	Somewhat disagree	2.33%	3
5	Strongly disagree	2.33%	3
	Total	100%	129

Q26 - Language is 'degradable' -- creating & accepting these 'unnecessary' changes weakens a language.



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	2.33%	3
2	Somewhat agree	10.08%	13
3	Neither agree nor disagree	20.93%	27
4	Somewhat disagree	31.01%	40
5	Strongly disagree	35.66%	46
	Total	100%	129

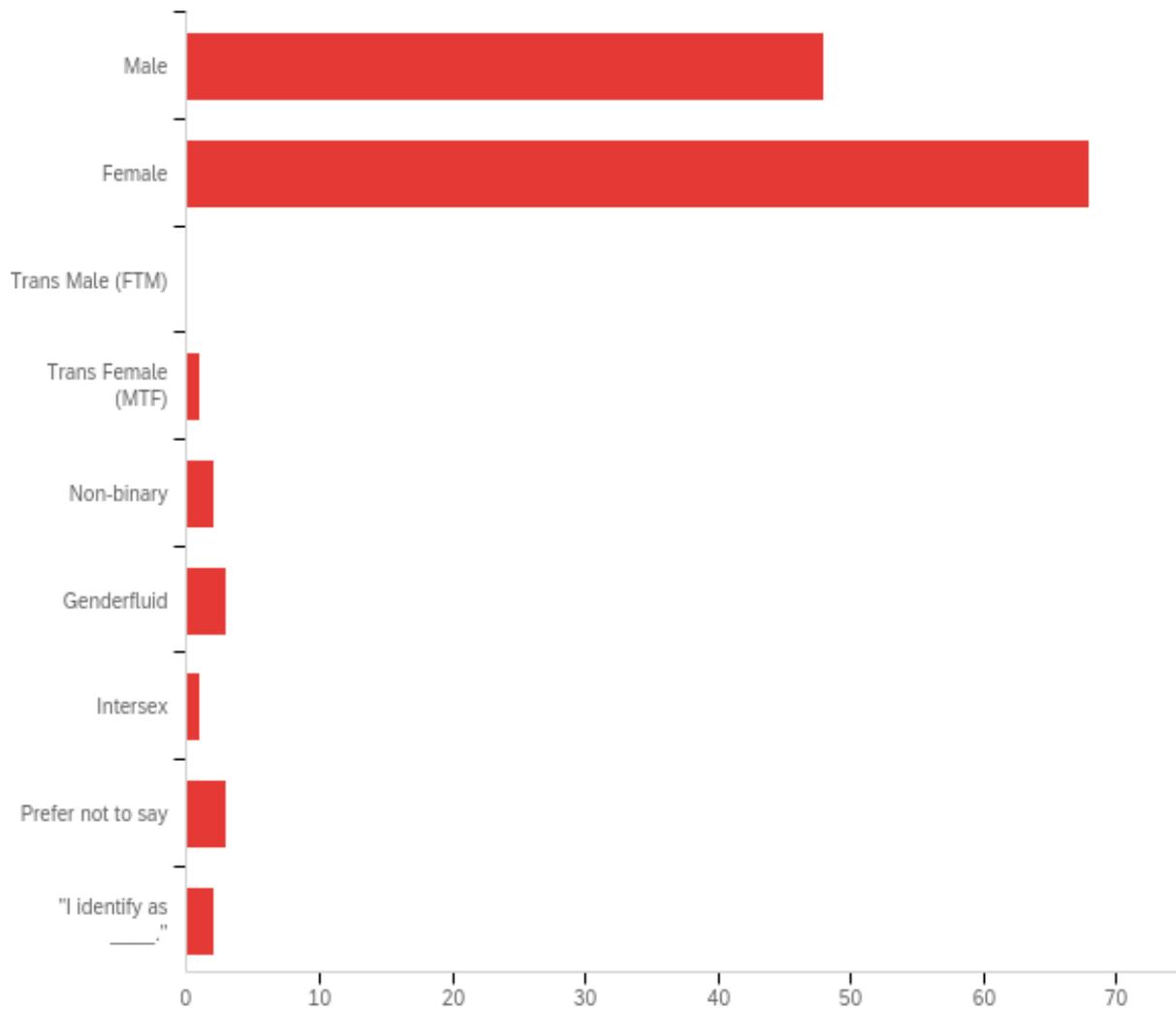
Q28 - How old are you?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How old are you?	1.00	6.00	2.53	1.13	1.28	128

#	Answer	%	Count
1	18-24	3.91%	5
2	25-34	70.31%	90
3	35-44	9.38%	12
4	45-54	3.13%	4
5	55-64	11.72%	15
6	65 and over	1.56%	2
	Total	100%	128

Q29 - Your gender:



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Your gender: - Selected Choice	1.00	9.00	2.07	1.65	2.72	128

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Male	37.50%	48
2	Female	53.13%	68
3	Trans Male (FTM)	0.00%	0

4	Trans Female (MTF)	0.78%	1
5	Non-binary	1.56%	2
6	Genderfluid	2.34%	3
7	Intersex	0.78%	1
8	Prefer not to say	2.34%	3
9	"I identify as ____."	1.56%	2
	Total	100%	128

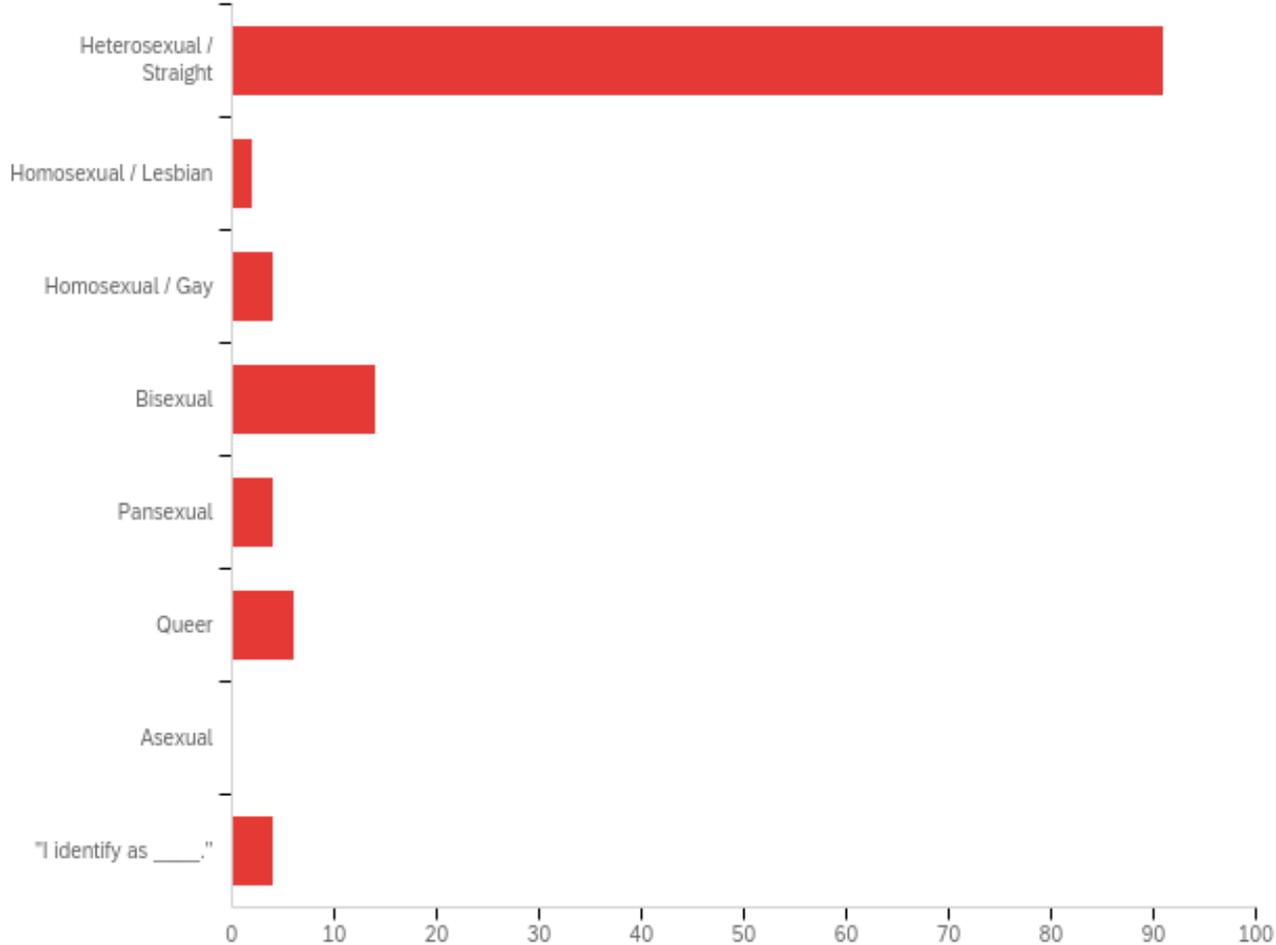
Q29_9_TEXT - "I identify as ____."

"I identify as ____." - Text

Batches

Meat bag

Q30 - Sexuality:



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Sexuality: - Selected Choice	1.00	8.00	2.01	1.85	3.42	125

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Heterosexual / Straight	72.80%	91
2	Homosexual / Lesbian	1.60%	2
3	Homosexual / Gay	3.20%	4
4	Bisexual	11.20%	14
5	Pansexual	3.20%	4

6	Queer	4.80%	6
7	Asexual	0.00%	0
8	"I identify as ____."	3.20%	4
	Total	100%	125

"I identify as ____." - Text

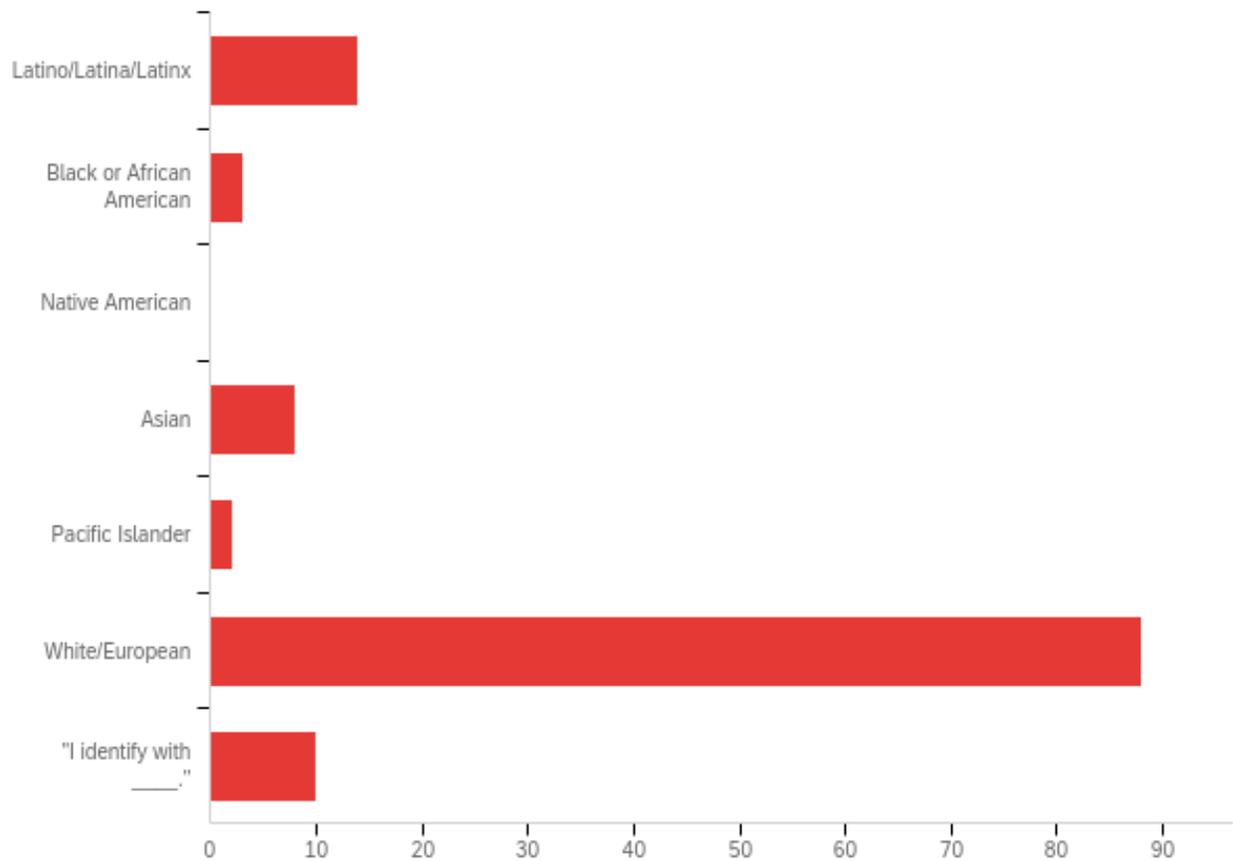
Baed betch

someone who doesn't want to tell strangers my sexuality.

Human

Sapiosexual

Q31 - Race/Ethnicity:



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Race/Ethnicity: - Selected Choice	1.00	7.00	5.28	1.74	3.02	125

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Latino/Latina/Latinx	11.20%	14
2	Black or African American	2.40%	3
3	Native American	0.00%	0
4	Asian	6.40%	8
5	Pacific Islander	1.60%	2
6	White/European	70.40%	88

7	"I identify with ____."	8.00%	10
	Total	100%	125

Q31_7_TEXT - "I identify with ____."

"I identify with ____." - Text

Mixed Race

adopted people

Middle eastern

Mongolia

Latino/Black

Mixed British

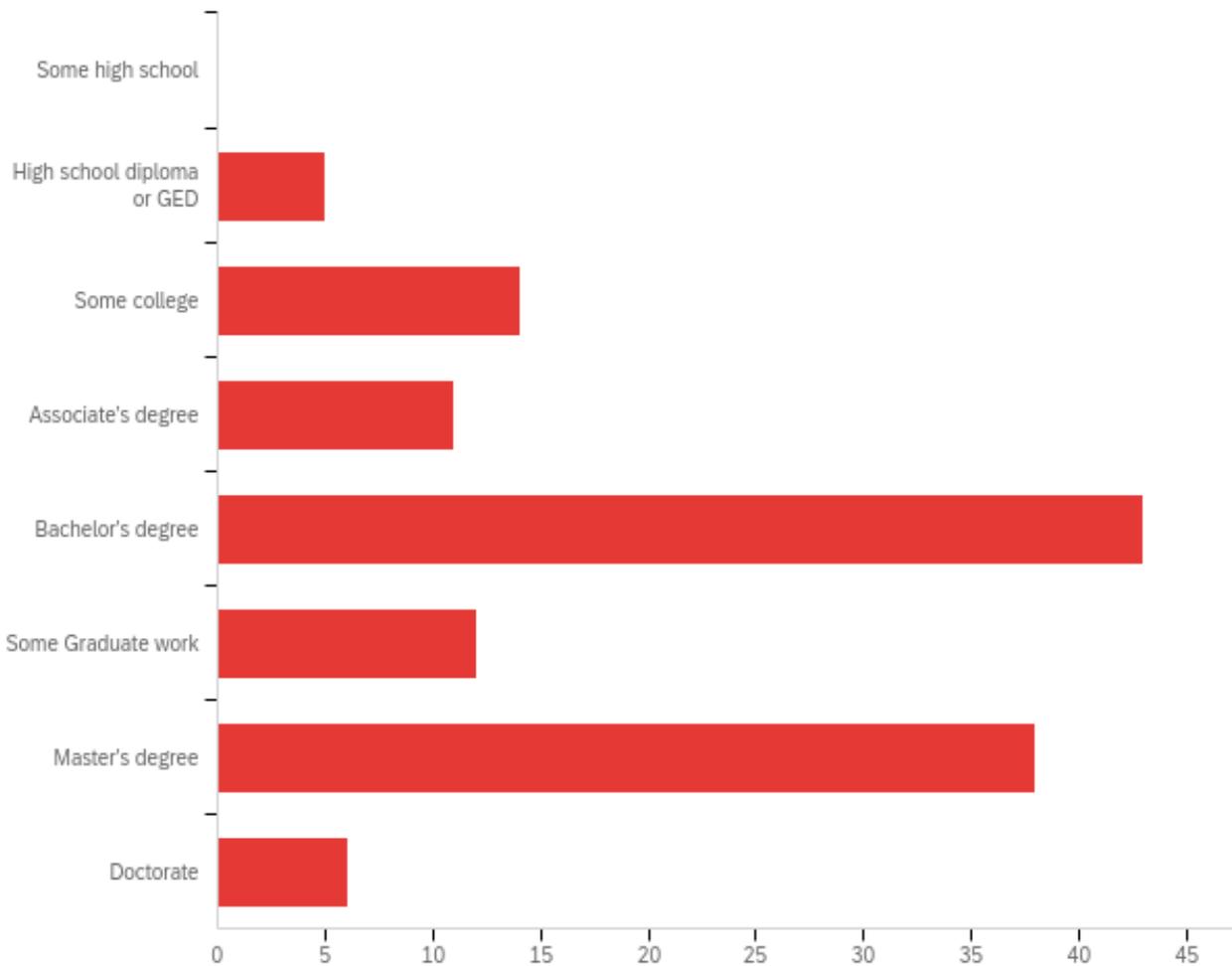
black/white

Multiracial

Biracial- Asian and white

Uyghur

Q32 - What is your highest level of education?

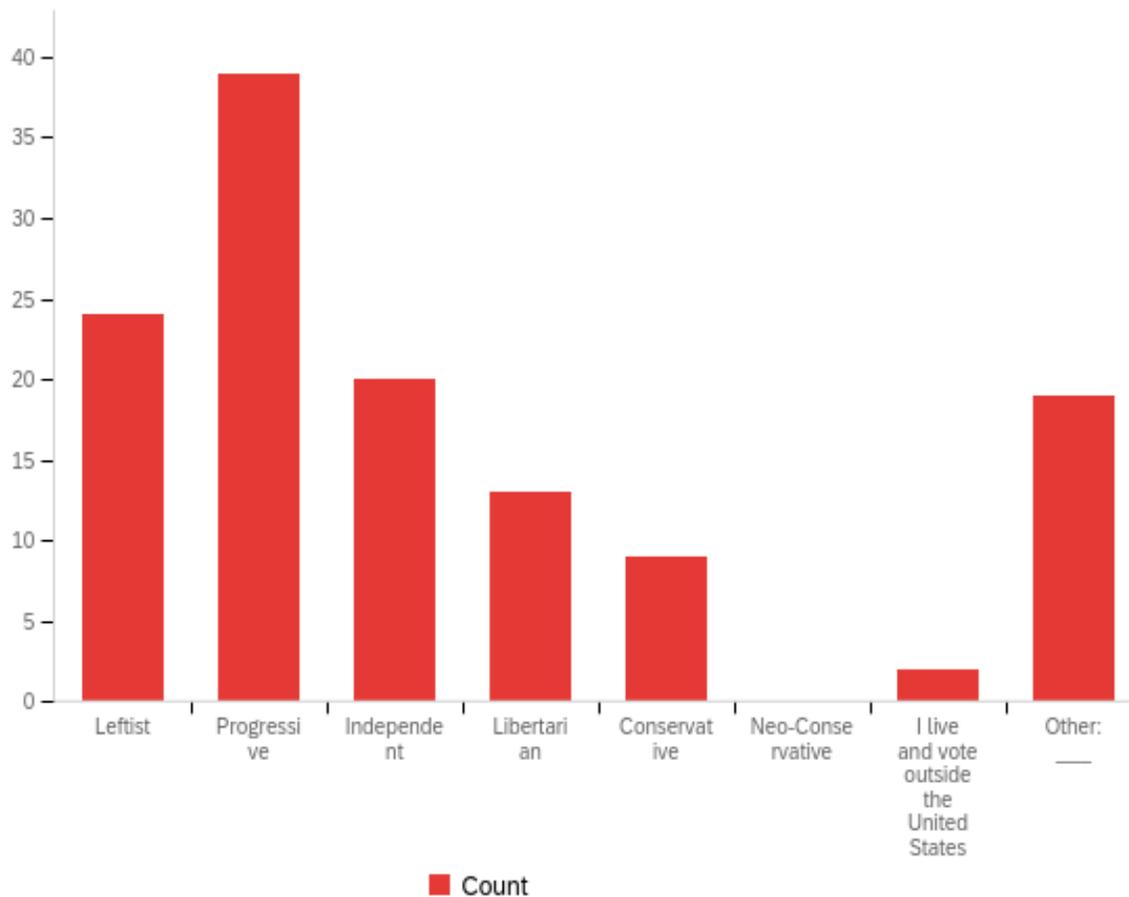


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your highest level of education?	2.00	8.00	5.40	1.55	2.40	129

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Some high school	0.00%	0
2	High school diploma or GED	3.88%	5
3	Some college	10.85%	14
4	Associate's degree	8.53%	11

5	Bachelor's degree	33.33%	43
6	Some Graduate work	9.30%	12
7	Master's degree	29.46%	38
8	Doctorate	4.65%	6
	Total	100%	129

Q33 - With which of these terms do you most closely identify on a political spectrum?



Q33_8_TEXT - Other: ____

Other: ____ - Text

I think sports are a bad waste of time but generally vote left due to thinking we are all equals

Betches

Socialist

I'm really not that progressive I don't think but Trump really pushed me.

Anti-Capitalist

None

Middle

Centrist to left-of-center

Moderate

Pan African

none

Social democrat

Leftist libertarian

Communist

no faith in current goverment

Centrist

Progressive moderate

Centrist