

Destination Reputation: Responding to Societal Issues

Full Research Report

Future Partners



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*This research was made possible through the support of the **Destinations International Foundation**, whose mission is to drive innovation and provide critical resources that strengthen the future of destination organizations. The foundation champions forward-thinking initiatives that enable destination leaders to navigate change with insight, strategy and resilience. We acknowledge their commitment to industry research and extend sincere thanks to all foundation supporters who make initiatives like this possible.*

ABOUT DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL

Destinations International is the world's largest and most respected resource for destination organizations, convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) and tourism boards. With more than 8,000 members and partners from over 750 destinations, the association represents a powerful forward-thinking and collaborative community around the world. For more information, click [HERE](#).

ABOUT THE DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Destinations International Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering destination organizations globally by providing education, research, advocacy and leadership development. The Foundation is classified as a charitable organization under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code and all donations are tax-deductible. For more information, click [HERE](#).



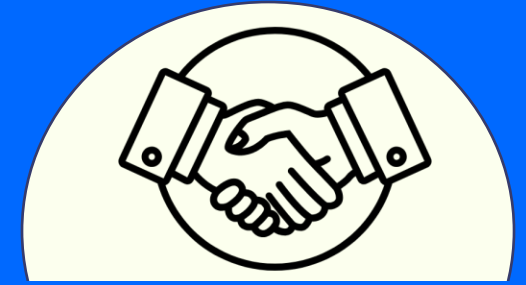
Research Objectives:



What issues impact destination reputation most?



How do different societal issues impact likelihood to source destinations for group meetings?



What can destination leaders do to overcome or mitigate these perception issues?

Methodology

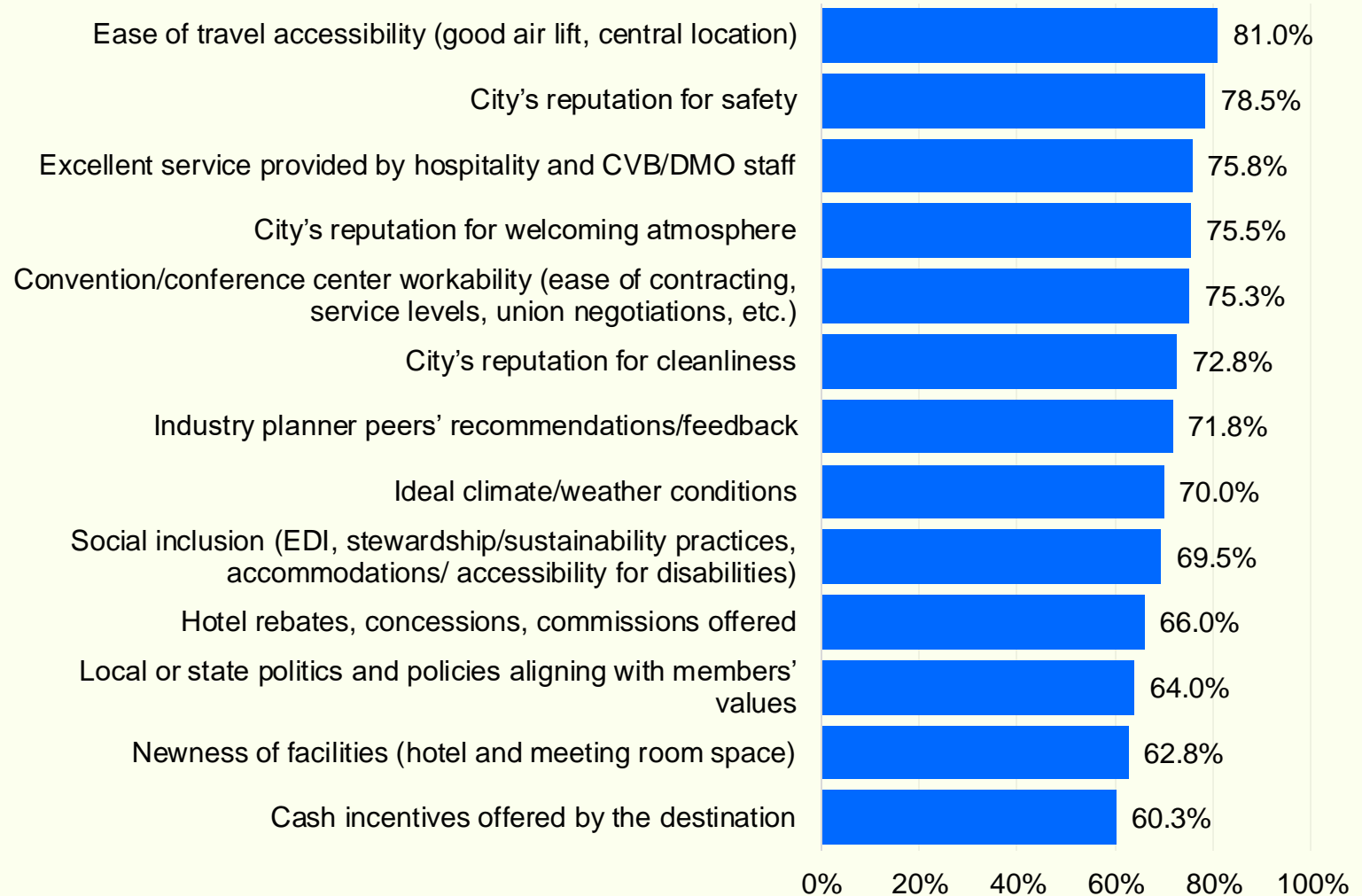
- 1. Online Survey of Meeting Planners** (n=400)
 - Fielded September 18th - October 1st, 2024
- 2. In-Depth Interviews with Meeting Planners** (n=12)
 - 45-minute in depth interviews with meeting planners
 - Took place September 23rd – October 7th, 2024
 - Recruited from Future Partners' proprietary meeting planner panel.
- 3. Analysis of American Meetings Traveler Sentiment** from *The State of the American Traveler* (n=967)
 - Fielded August 16th – 25th, 2024
 - Representative sample of Adult American Travelers
 - Results were parsed by those who have traveled to attend a group meeting in the past 12 months



**What impacts meetings
destination reputation most?**

Beyond dates, rates, and space, planners consider **accessibility, reputation for safety, service levels, and welcoming atmosphere to be the most important factors they consider when evaluating meetings destinations.**

Importance of Secondary Evaluation Factors (Top-2 Box: High or Extremely High Importance)



Question: Now assume you've narrowed your search to three destinations that each have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group. What secondary factors would be most important to you in determining which destination will ultimately win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners



“I usually consider the atmosphere of a place. I am a strong believer that the environment people are in hugely contribute to peoples’ feelings toward the meetings activities they are doing and just the mood overall.”

Professional Meeting Planner

What people say about your destination matters.

“I scrutinize tourist reviews on travel websites, social media and forums. These evaluations usually reflect the real situation of the destination, including the quality of attractions, service quality, safety and so on.”

“Visitor Reviews and Feedback. Safety records, Environmental protection and sustainability. Cultural respect and inclusiveness. Infrastructure and accessibility.”

“When evaluating a destination's reputation, several factors come into play that provide a comprehensive understanding of its overall appeal and quality. I evaluate based on accessibility, accommodation quality, venue facilities, local attractions, and safety.”

Professional Meeting Planner

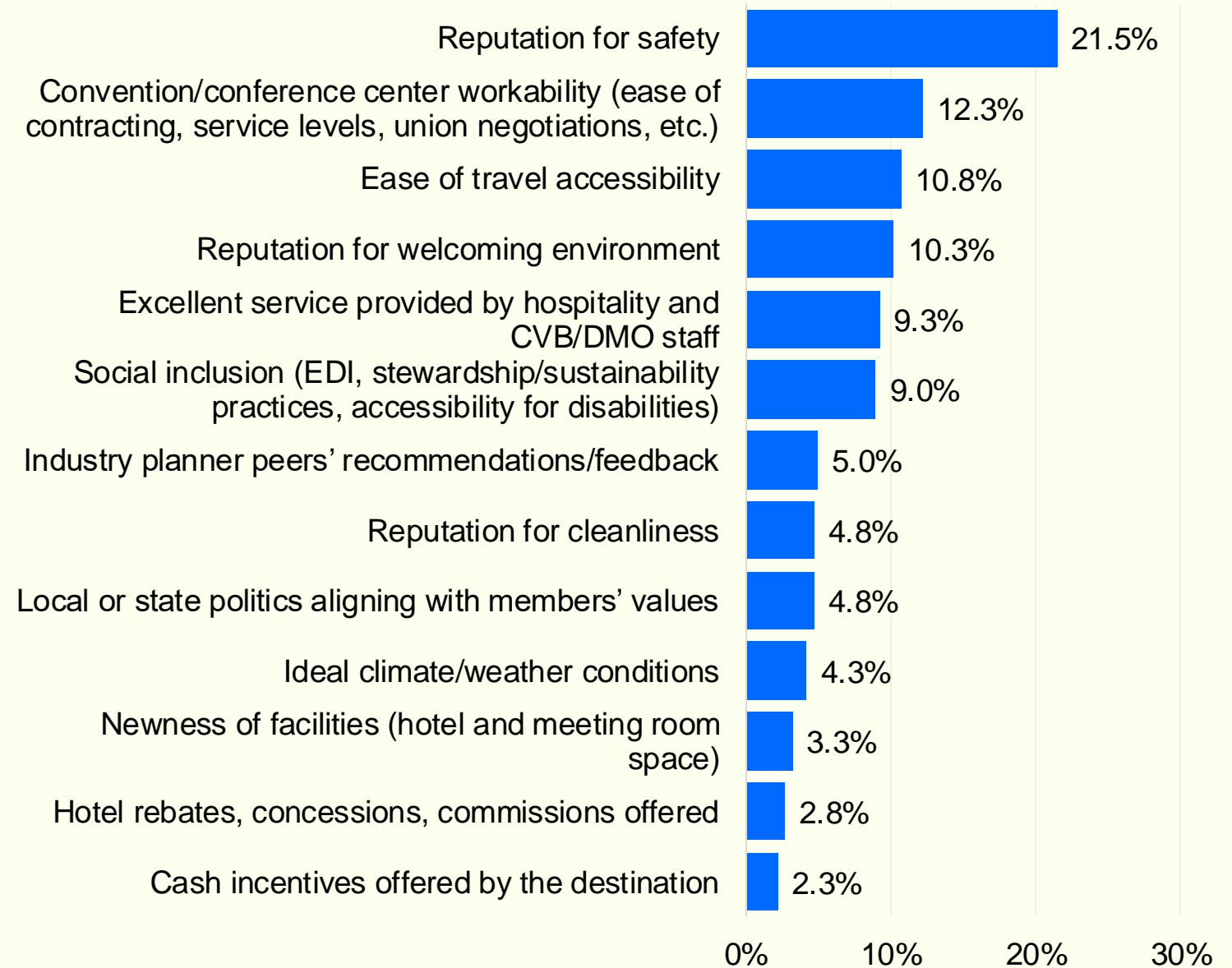
Think about a destination's reputation as a place for group meetings and events. What elements impact their reputation among meeting planners?

“It is the whole picture of what a city can bring to a table. They must be welcoming and safe. In assessing safety, perception is unfortunately reality right now. What our members think, we take that into consideration.”

Professional Meeting Planner

Reputation for safety was the number one factor that impacts a meeting destination's selection.

Top Factor for Destination Selection



Question: What would be the number 1 factor that would push a destination into your top selection? Base: 400 Meeting Planners

Think about a destination's reputation as a place for group meetings and events. What elements impact their reputation among meeting planners?

“If it’s not safe for my attendees to walk across the street to get a coffee, then I don’t want my people there. I don’t want them to feel like they are held hostage at the hotel. That ruins the overall experience.”

Professional Meeting Planner

Historically, personal safety has always been a top concern for planners but now the tone has shifted.

In conversation with meeting professionals, most now say that violent crime is an “everywhere problem” within the U.S.

“The big one that comes to mind in today’s climate is safety and security. How are they handling crime and homelessness? This plays a big part into where planners want to take their meetings. Also service levels, are they welcoming? That service and how you are treated plays a big part in decision making when it comes to a destination’s reputation.”

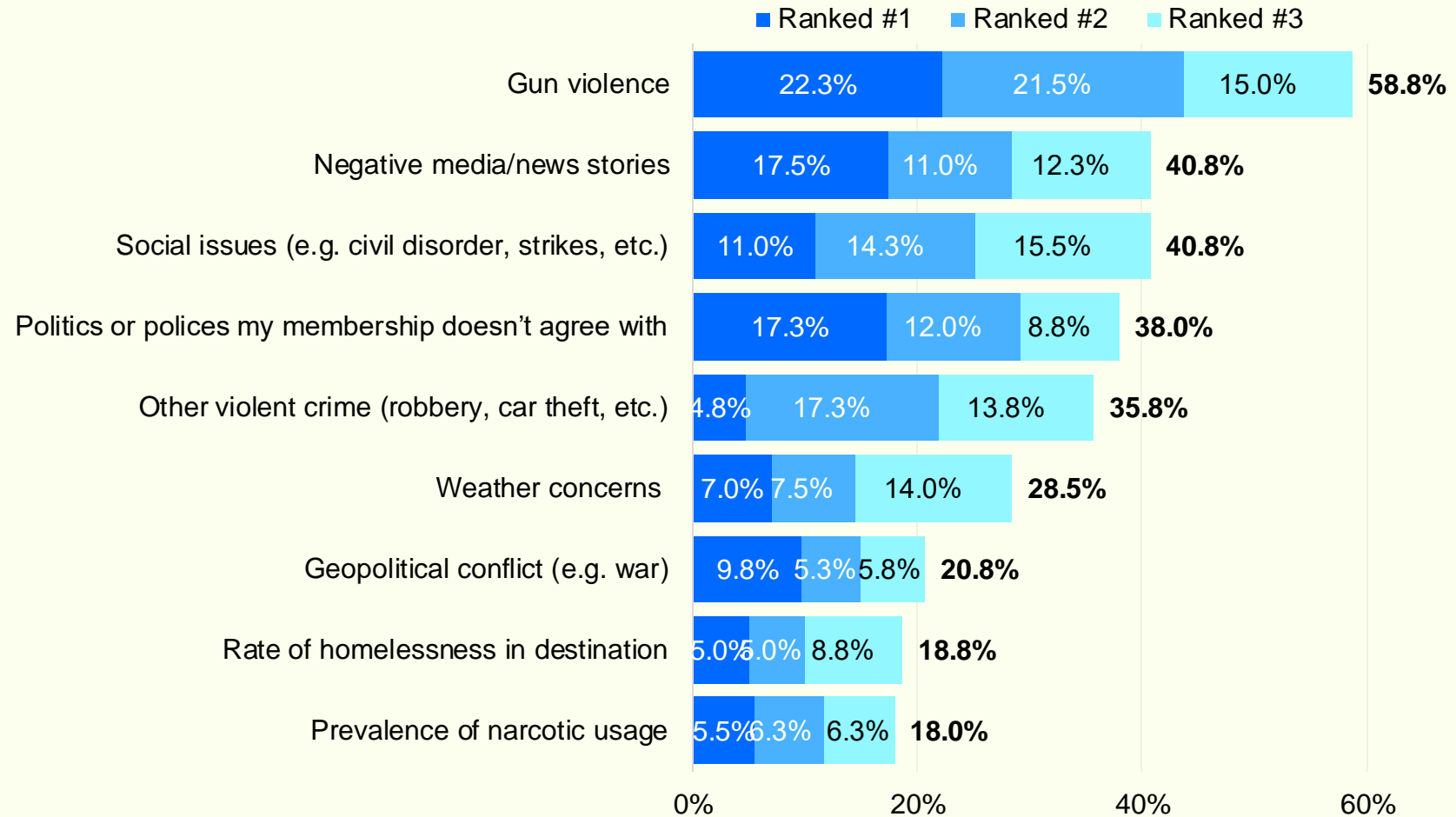
Professional Meeting Planner

Future Partners

**Which of the following impacts
your perception of a city's
reputation the most?**

Gun violence is the number one factor that impact's a city's reputation most among meeting planners.

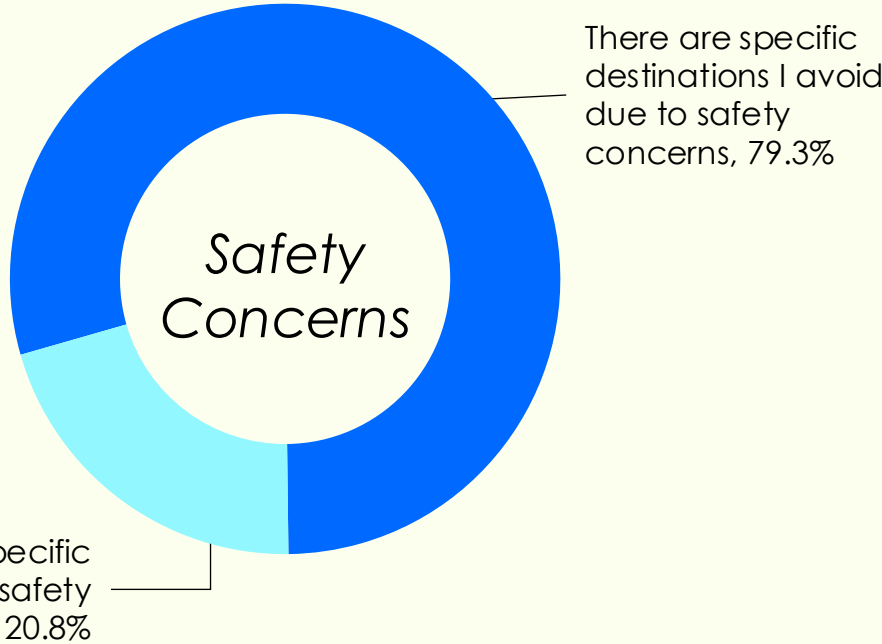
Key Factors Influencing City's Reputation



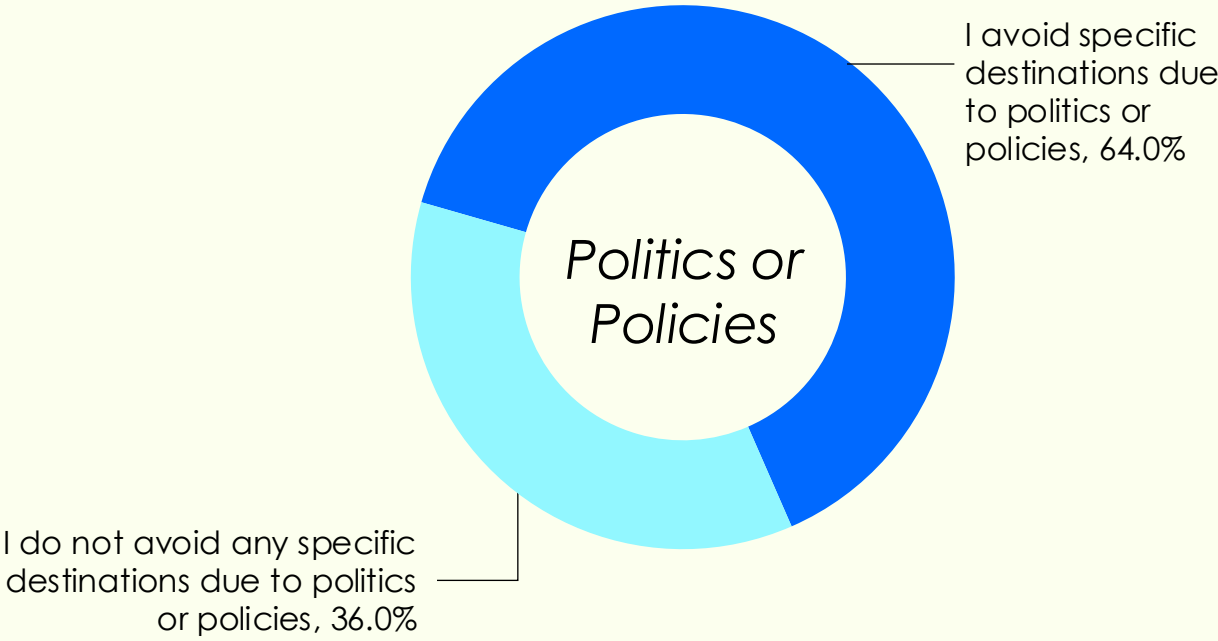
Question: Which of the following impacts your perception of a city's reputation the most? Rank the response below by selecting an item from the list on the left and ranking it in the appropriate position at right. Base: 400 Meeting Planners

A large majority of planners say they do avoid certain meeting destinations due to safety concerns and/or politics.

Avoiding Destinations with Safety Concerns



Avoiding Destinations Due to Politics or Policies

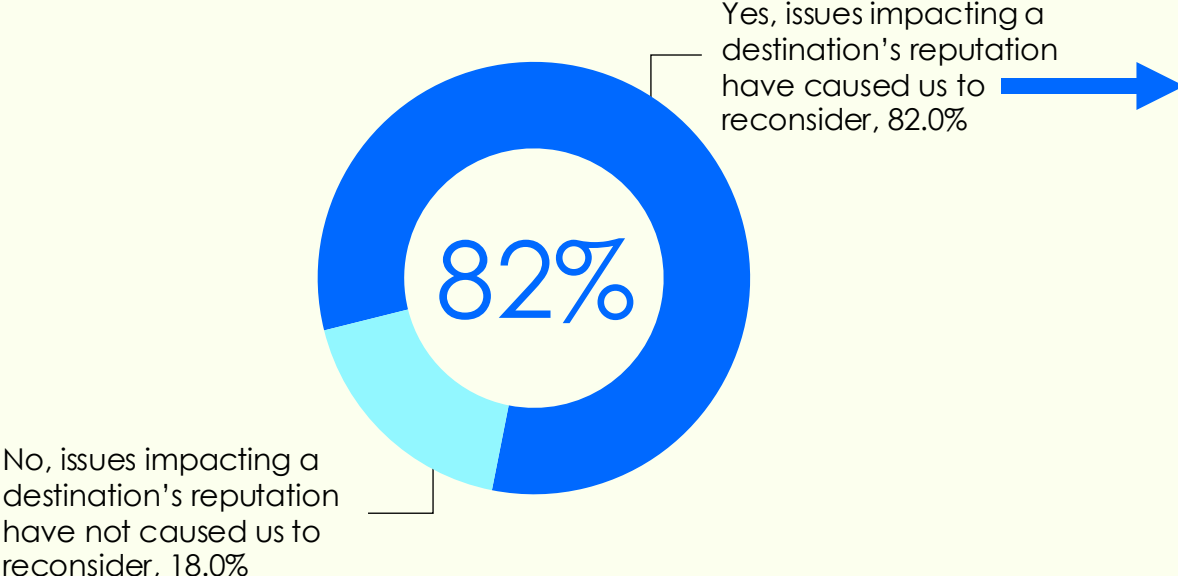


Question: Are there specific destinations you would not host your meeting within due to safety concerns (crime, violence) in the destination? Base: 400 Meeting Planners

Question: Are there specific destinations you would not host your meeting within due to politics or policies enacted in the destination? Base: 400 Meeting Planners

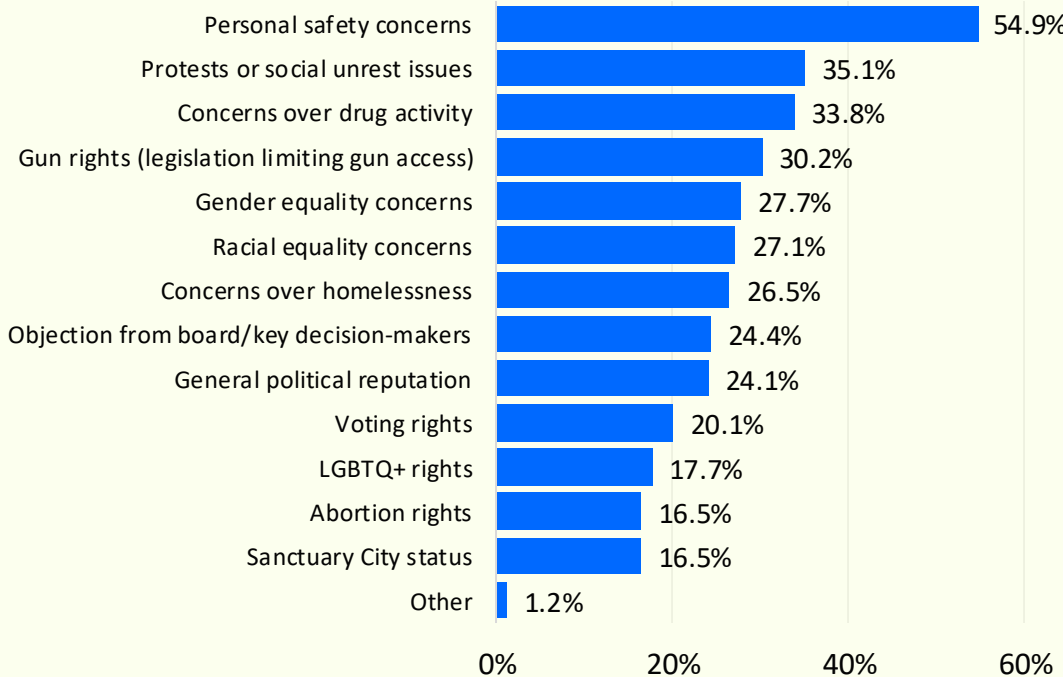
Four-in-five planners have reconsidered a meeting destination due to safety concerns/ politics/social problems.

Has Reconsidered a Meetings Destination Based on its Reputation



Question: Have issues impacting a destination's reputation such as safety concerns, politics, societal problems, etc. caused you (or your clients) to reconsider a destination for your meetings? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.

Reasons for Reconsidering a Meetings Destination



Question: Which of the following has led you (or your clients) to reconsider a meetings destination? Select all that apply. Base: 328 Meeting Planners who reconsidered a destination due to its reputation.

Similar to reasons to reconsider a destination, half of planners would disqualify a destination from their consideration set if personal safety were an ongoing concern there.

Factors That Automatically Disqualify a Destination



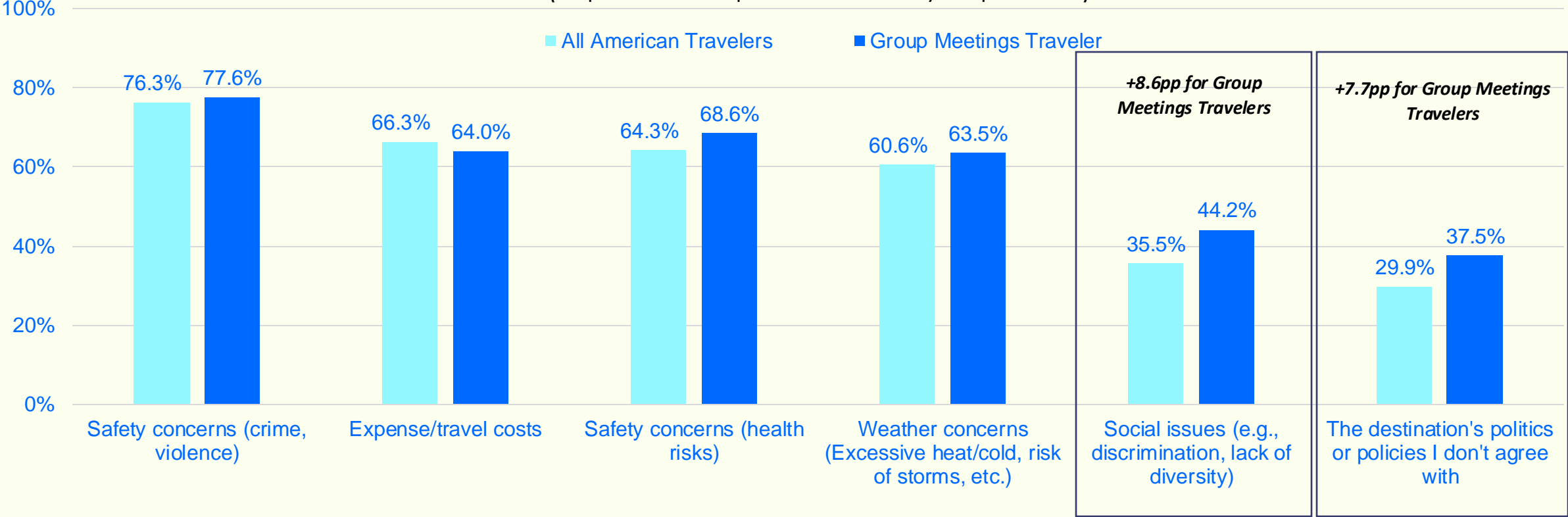
Question: Which of the following would automatically disqualify a destination from your consideration if it were a current/ongoing issue in the destination? Base: 400 Meeting Planners

**Bringing in the Perspective of
Meetings Travelers**

{from the State of the American Traveler}

While personal safety is the most important consideration among all American travelers, group meetings travelers place greater importance on social issues and politics when deciding where they want to travel.

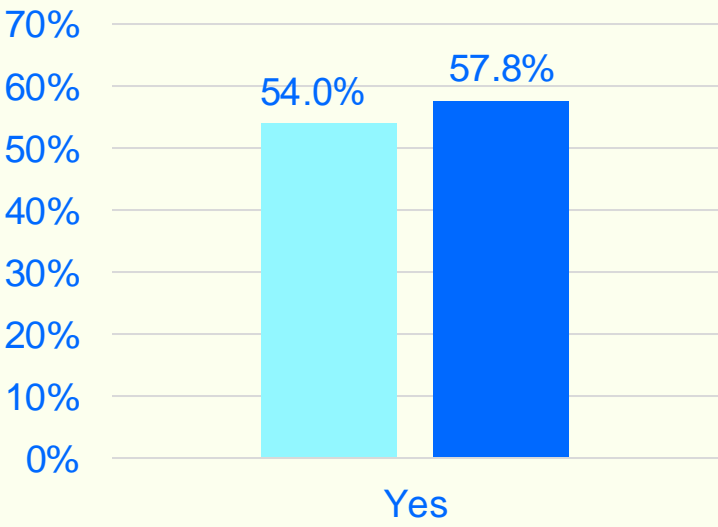
Importance of Destination Attributes in Selection Decisions
 (Top-2 Box: Important or Very Important)



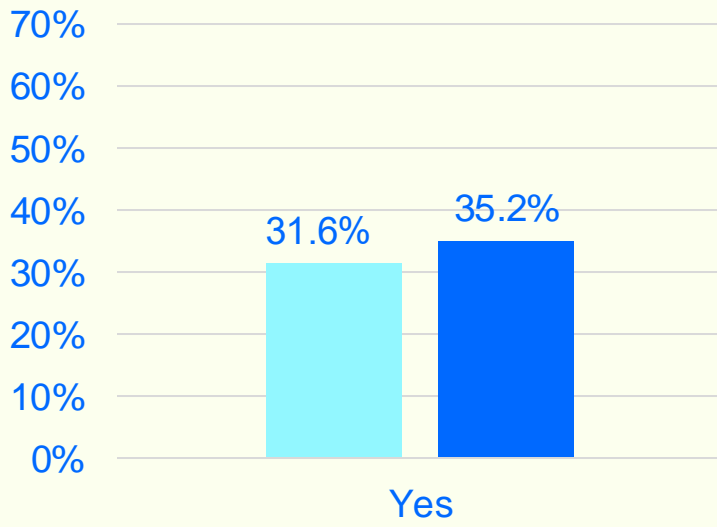
Question: In general, how important are these factors to you in deciding where you travel? Base: 1. All American travelers; 4,026 surveys 2. Americans who have traveled to attend a group meeting in the past 12 months; 967 surveys.

Convention goers are slightly more apt to avoid destinations due to safety concerns, politics, and weather compared to the average American traveler.

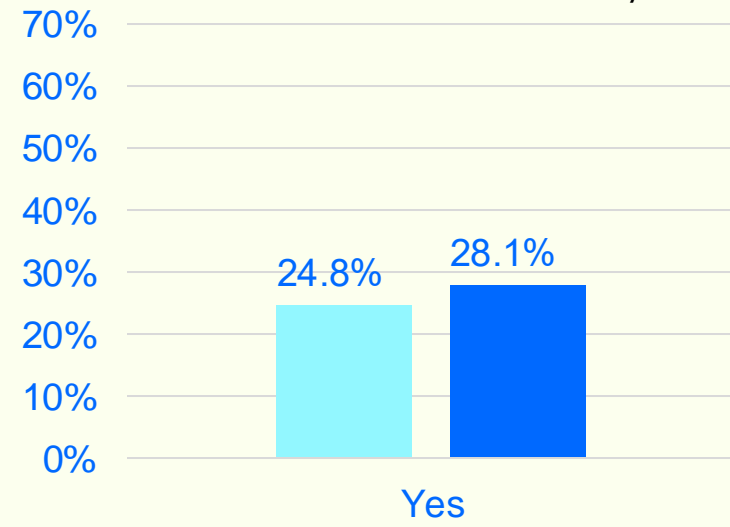
Are there any specific places you would not visit due to safety concerns (crime, violence) in the destination?



Are there specific places you would not visit due to a destination's politics or policies you don't agree with?



Are there specific places you would not visit due to weather concerns in the destination (e.g., excessive heat/cold, risk of storms, etc.)?



■ All American Travelers ■ Group Meetings Traveler

Base: 1. All American travelers; 4,026 surveys 2. Americans who have traveled to attend a group meeting in the past 12 months; 967 surveys.

Avoidance of destinations due to safety concerns and politics are much more prevalent among planners than traveling consumers.

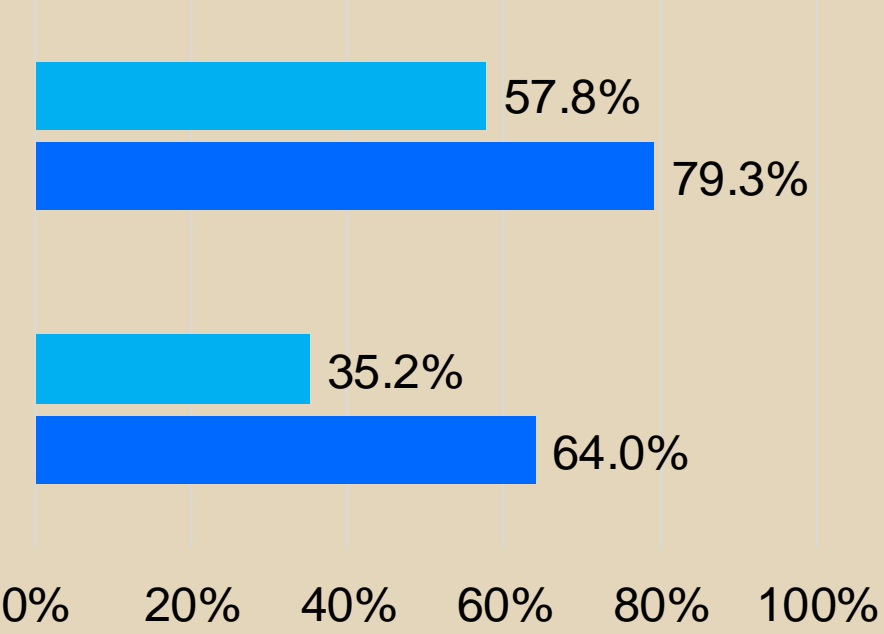


Avoiding Destinations due to **Safety Concerns**



Avoiding Destinations due to **Politics or Policies**

American Convention Travelers Meeting Planners



**...Back to Meeting
Planner Sentiment**

Overall, a chief concern among planners in destination sourcing is that their groups will be treated well in the place. And for some, safety and politics are inextricably linked.

“Putting my personal feelings aside about heartbeat bills, I would not want to send pregnant women to a place where they would have to worry about medical services being denied to them in an emergency.”

Professional Meeting Planner

Future Partners

**How do different societal issues
impact likelihood to source
destinations for group meetings?**

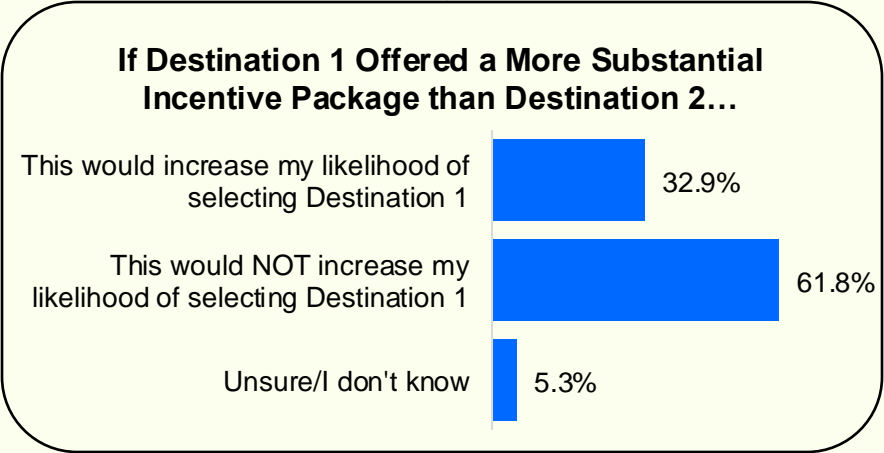
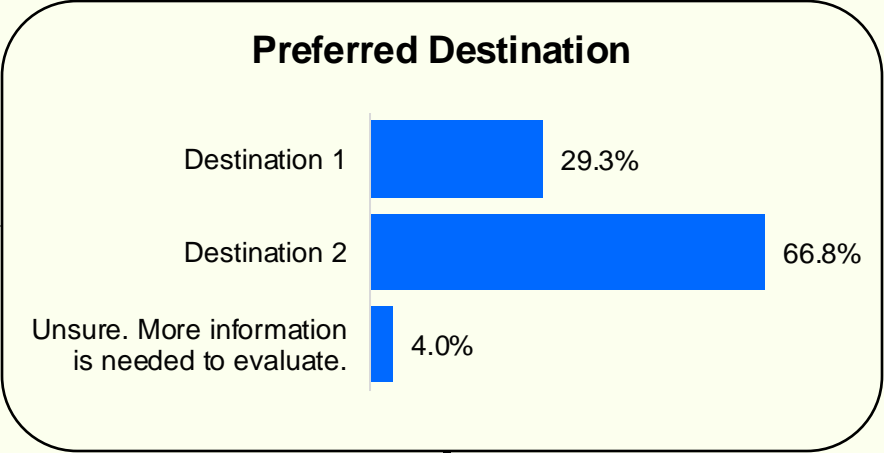
Gun violence is among the most impactful issues that would deter planners from selecting a destination.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

Now imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, **but is challenged with gun violence or other violent crime.**

Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, **but it does not have issues with violent crime.**



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.
Question 2: If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 283 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

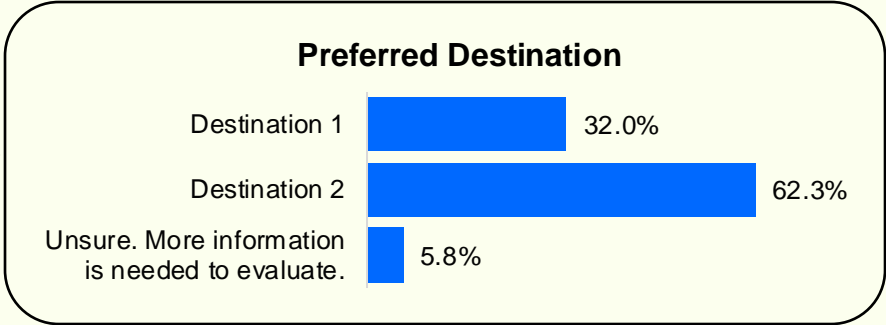
Crime and safety concerns are a huge deterrent, one that most planners don't see a great destination package overcoming.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

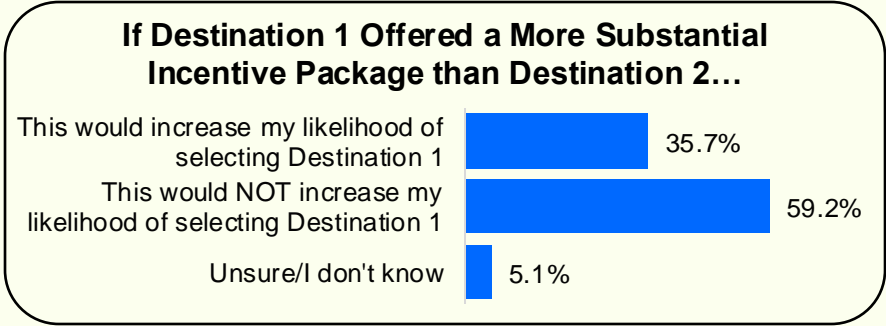
Imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, but it is challenged with crime and safety concerns.

Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, but does not have reputational issues with crime and safety.



How recent has the city been challenged with crime and are there things in place actively to make the city safer?



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.

Question 2: What other key information would you need to make a decision?

Question 3: If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 272 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

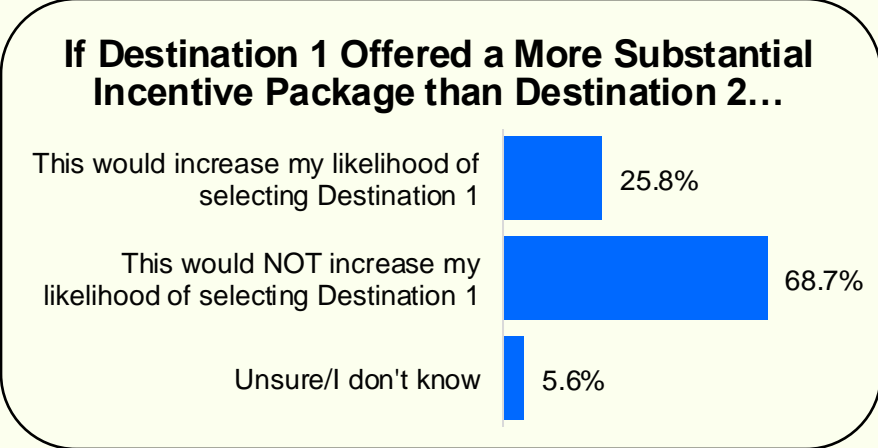
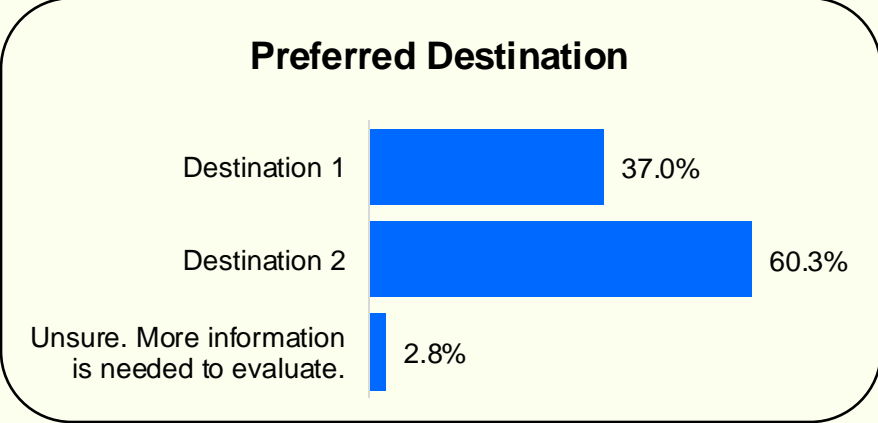
Geopolitical conflict (territory disputes/war) is among the three most impactful situations, with three-in-five (60%) planners noting that they would choose a lesser destination package to avoid such conflicts.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

Now imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, but is challenged geopolitical conflict such as territory disputes or war.

Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, but it does not have geopolitical conflicts.



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.
Question 2: If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 252 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

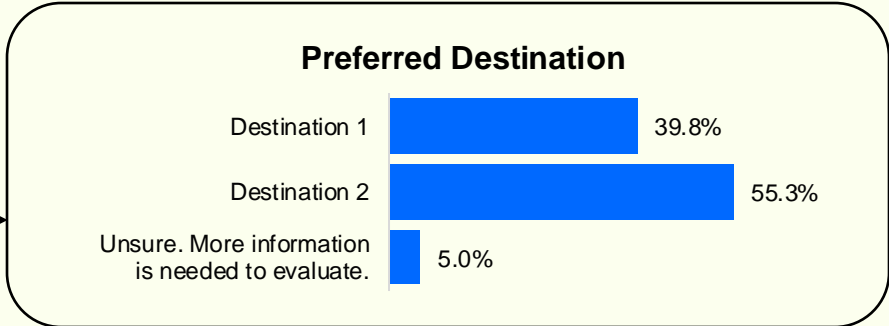
Politics play a notable role in selection decisions with over half of planners saying they would choose a lesser destination package over a place that has enacted unfavorable policies.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

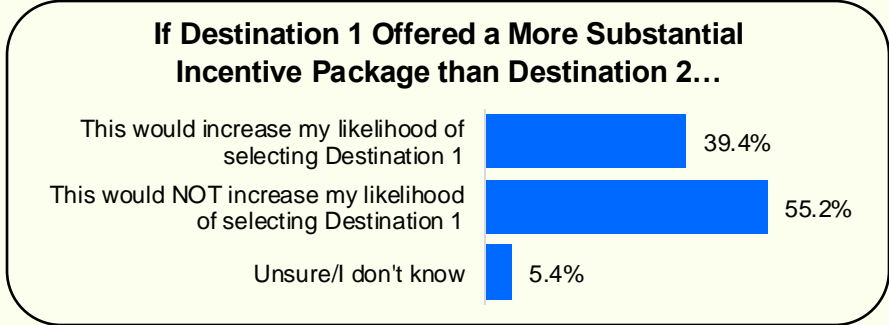
Now imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, but it has enacted policies that do not align with your membership's core values.

Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, but it does not have a politically charged reputation.



I need to know the nature of the political policies. If the policies might motivate customer interest, we may be more inclined to go, if the policies were prohibitive then we may avoid.



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.
Question 2: What other key information would you need to make a decision? **Question 3:** If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 241 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

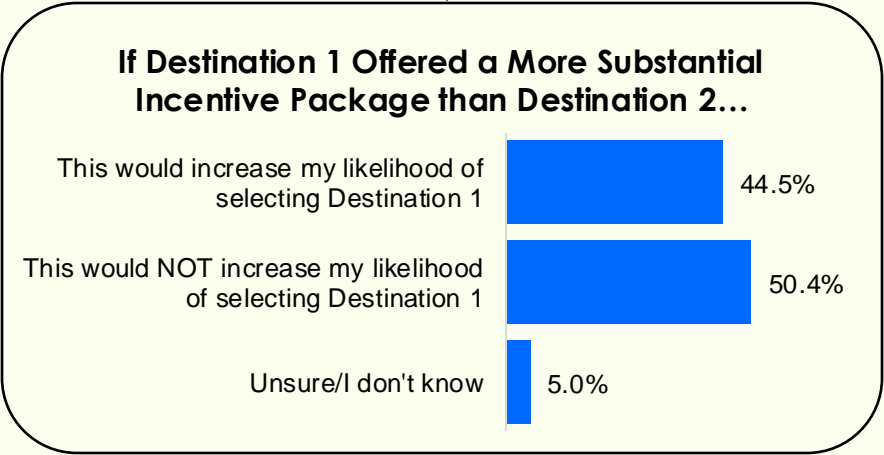
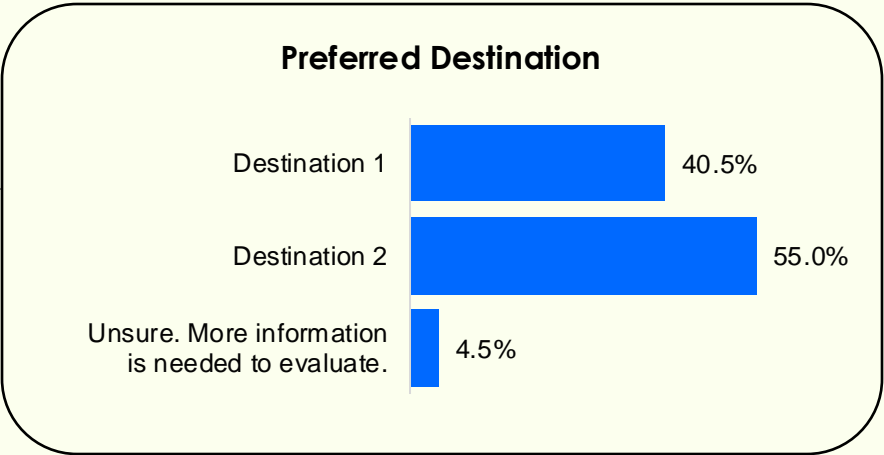
Social issues such as strikes and civil disorder weigh more heavily on planners' minds than negative media.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

Now imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, but is challenged with social issues such as civil disorder or strikes.

Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, but it does not have issues with civil disorder.



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.
Question 2: If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 238 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

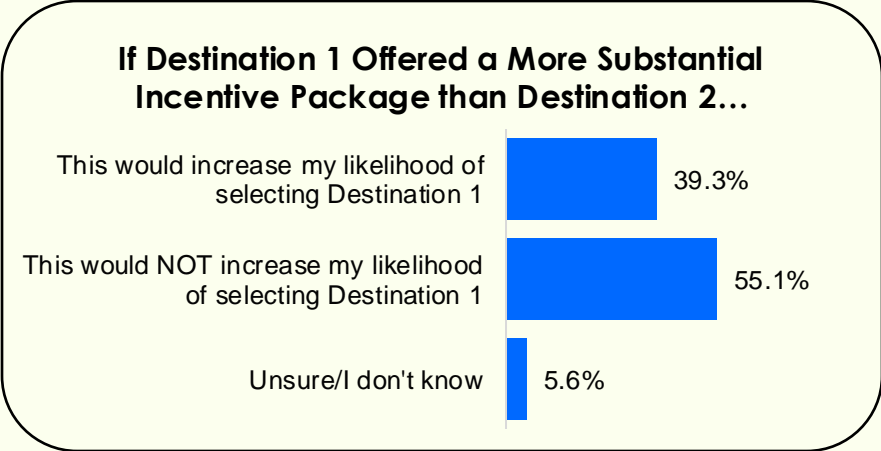
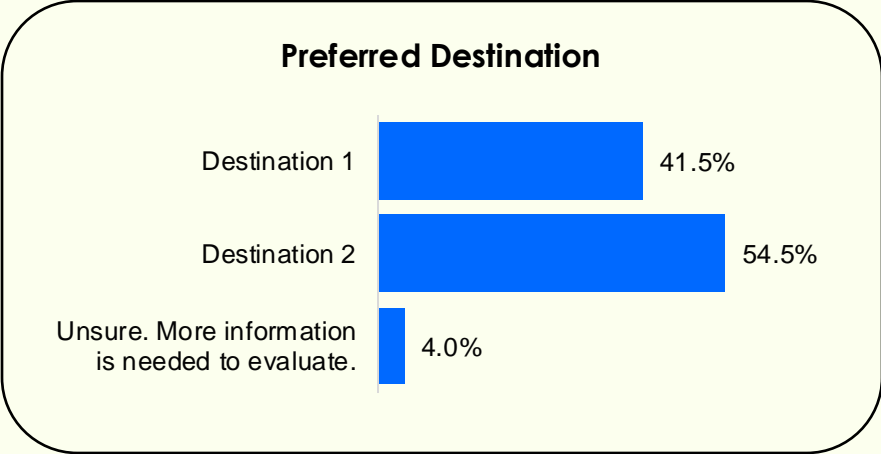
Pervasive drug use would discourage selection of a meeting destination, with more than half of planners believing they would choose a lesser destination package to avoid the situation.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

Now imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, but it is challenged with pervasive drug use in the destination.

Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, but it does not have an issue with drug usage.



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.
Question 2: If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 234 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

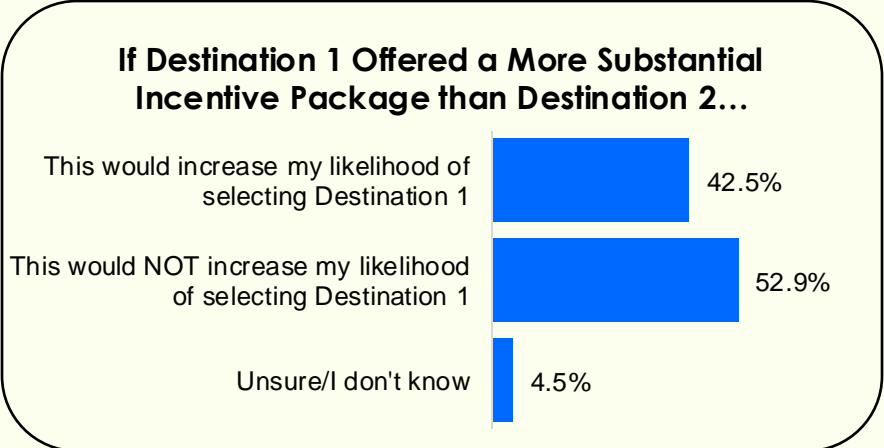
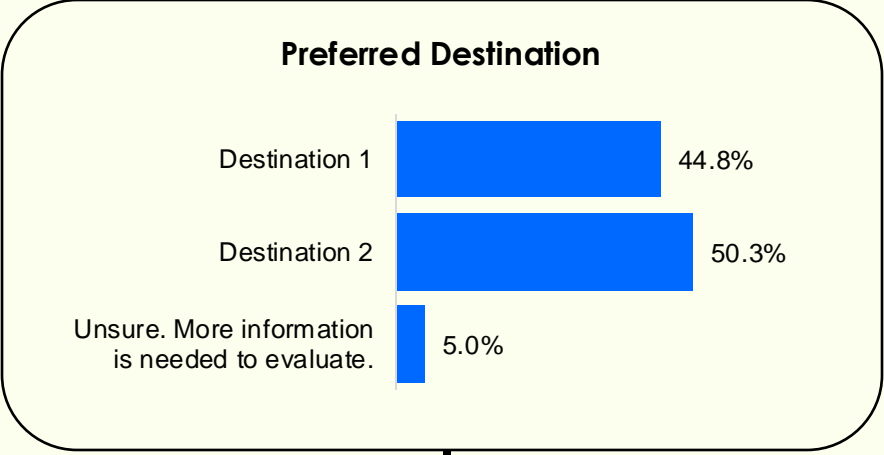
Severe weather concerns have planners split with just under half being likely to select a place that has weather challenges if it has a better overall package.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

Now imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, but it is challenged with severe weather concerns such as heat waves or hurricanes.

Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, but it does not have severe weather concerns.



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.
Question 2: If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 221 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

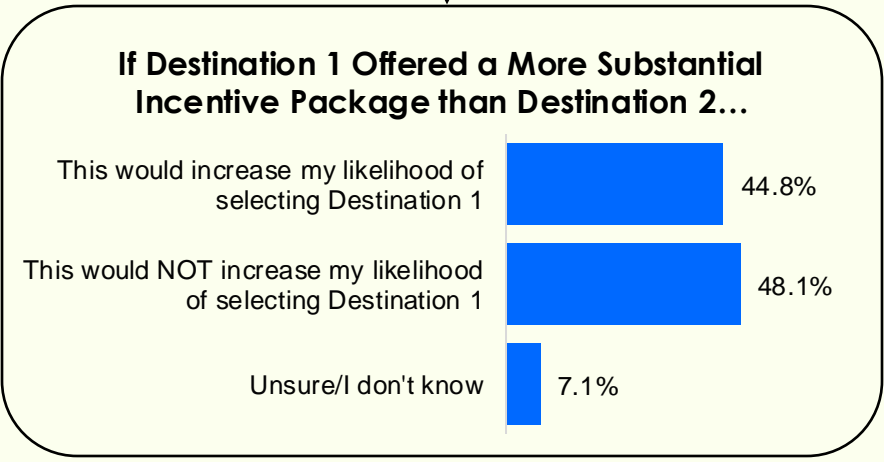
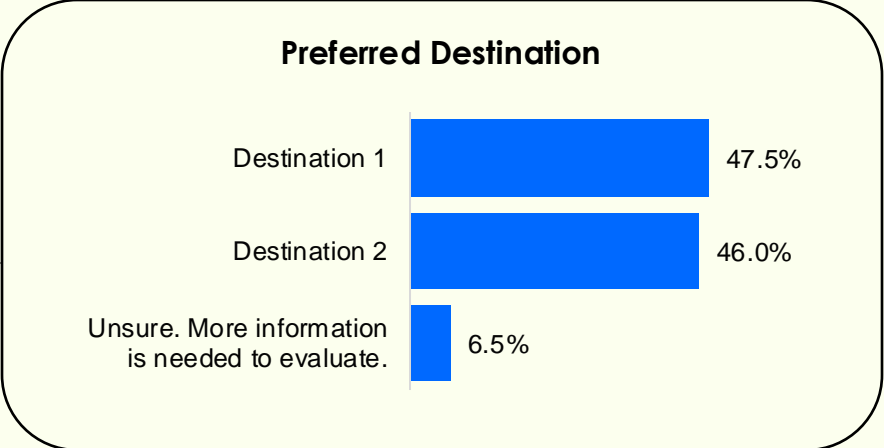
Negative media stories have a notable impact on meeting destination selection decisions.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

Now imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, but has persistent negative media coverage about the destination.

Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, but it does not have negative media stories about the destination.



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.
Question 2: If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 210 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

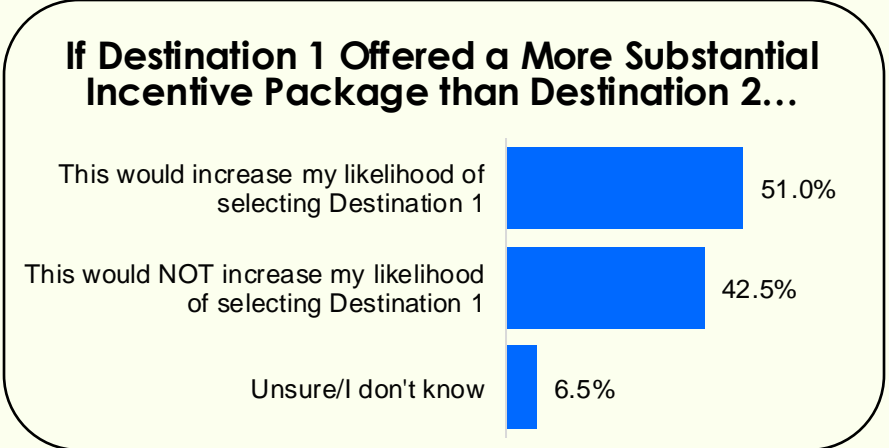
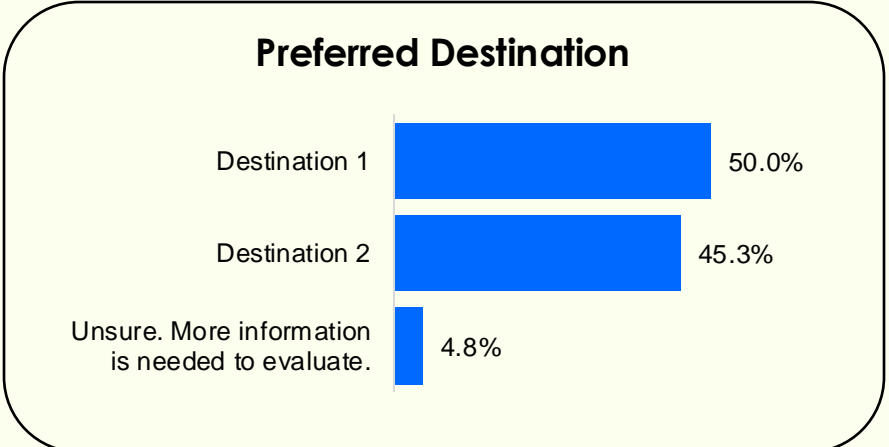
Pervasive homelessness does impact meeting destination selection, with nearly half of meeting planners opting for a lesser package to avoid that issue.

Contextual Question Set-Up:

Now imagine that you are evaluating two destinations, both of which have the dates, rates, and space needed to service your group.

Destination 1 has newer facilities (hotel and meeting room space/sporting venues), and is easily accessible for your attendees, but it is challenged with pervasive homelessness in the destination.

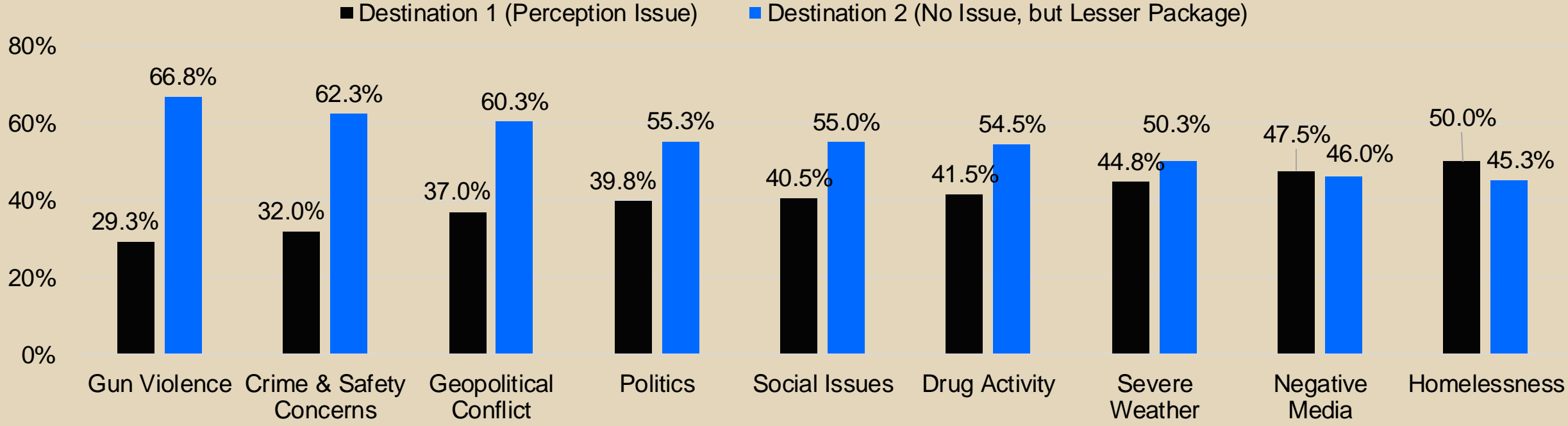
Destination 2 has older facilities, is not as centrally located for your attendees, but it does not have an issue with homelessness.



Question 1: Which destination would be more likely to win your business? Base: 400 Meeting Planners.
Question 2: If Destination 1 offered a more substantial incentive package than Destination 2, would that increase your likelihood of selecting Destination 1? Base: 200 Meeting Planners who selected Destination 2 or are unsure.

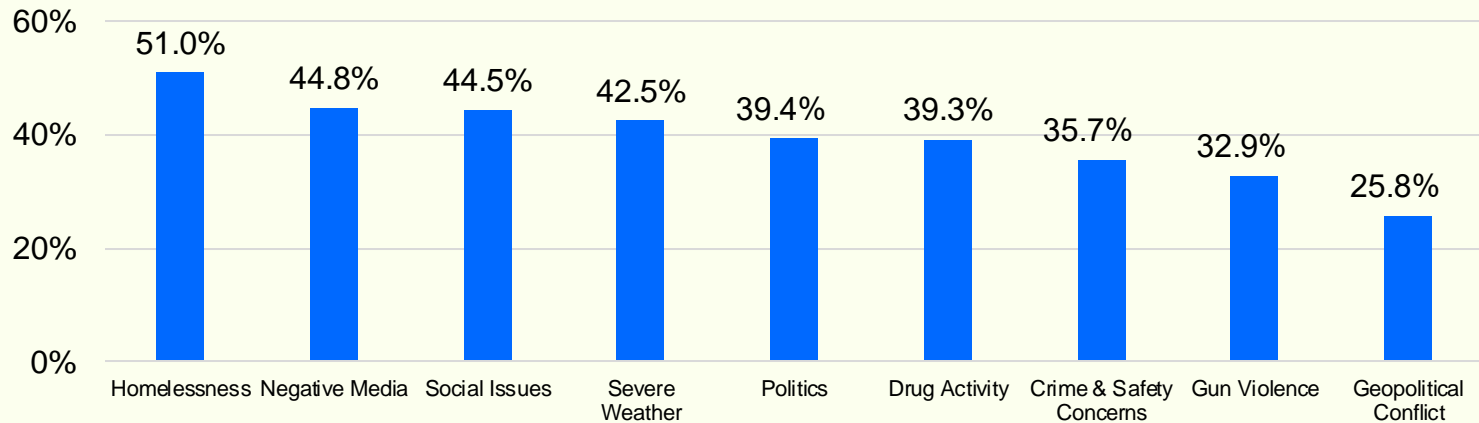
As a side-by-side comparison...

% Selecting Which Destination They Would be More Likely to Select Based on the Scenario Presented



Incentives can move the needle but is not a silver bullet.

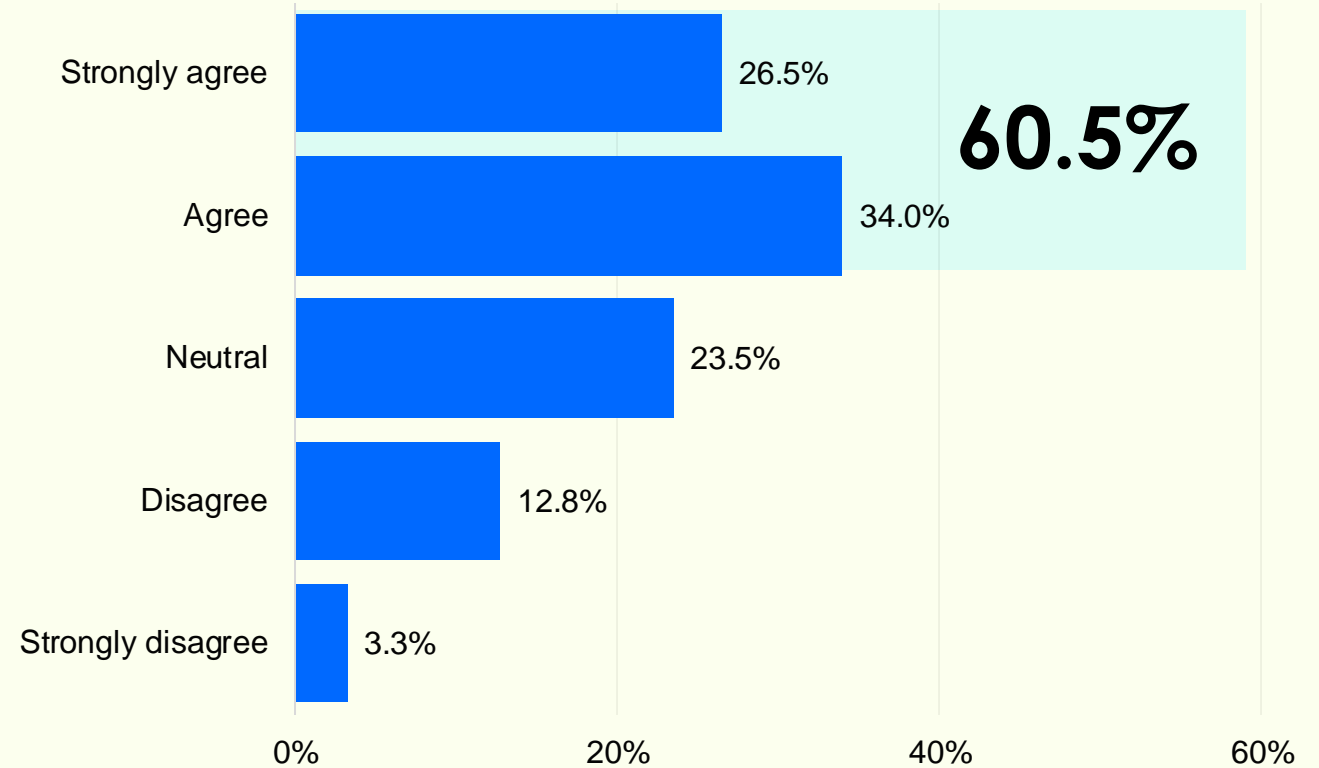
% Who Say a Substantial Incentive Package Would Increase Their Likelihood to Select a Destination with this Perception Issue



“If a CVB is willing to make that investment [offering additional incentives and/or concessions] it really shows they are invested in the event and that speaks to their willingness to partner and support us.”

Three-in-five meeting planners would be more willing to source a destination with reputational issues if given cash incentives.

Cash Incentives and Concessions Improve Consideration of Destinations with Reputational Issues



Question: Read the statement below and indicate how much you agree or disagree. Cash incentives and concessions like hotel rebates can significantly impact my willingness to source a destination I consider having reputational issues (e.g. safety concerns, policies I don't agree with, societal problems, etc.). Base: 400 Meeting Planners

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What can destination leaders do to overcome or mitigate these perception issues?

Meeting Planners are asking for support, talking points, and information from DMO/CVB representatives to help them sell destinations to decision makers.

Question: If a destination was afflicted by one or more of the scenarios above, rate how impactful each of the following would be in overcoming these issues to get meeting planners to consider sourcing them for future events. Rank the response below where a rank of 1 is most important while a rank of 8 is least important.

Top Ranked Factors for Overcoming Reputational Issues (% Ranking Each as Top 3 Out of 8 Options)



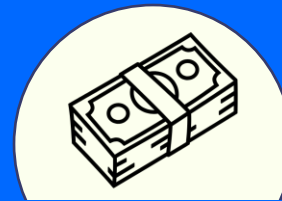
Connect us with other planners who have hosted a meeting there recently for a Q&A (58.3%)



Host an exceptional FAM to give planners firsthand experience in the destination (50.3%)



Present information & sources that combat the destination's perception issue (47.0%)



Offer more cash incentives and/or concessions (44.8%)

“My attendees don't see the cost savings from incentives, they need to see educational materials and talking points to convince them to come. Destinations aren't proactive in bringing this information to me, so more likely than not they aren't being sourced.”

The best way for a destination to overcome a reputation problem is to _____.

***“Tell a better story.
I need statistics that shed light
on the reality of the situation.”***

Professional Meeting Planner

Proactive communication and honesty are key to changing hearts and minds about a destination's reputation

- **Be honest and address the issues head on**
 - *"Trust is really important in this world."*
- **Site visits**
 - *"Site inspections are so important for planners, it's like online dating, the picture may not match the profile which would be a big issue."*
- **Help me help you**
 - Destinations need to advertise their leisure and meetings product heavily so planners can point to external information/content to better sell the idea of the place to clients.

"Get ahead of the problem and be upfront and honest about it when you are in spaces with meeting planners like at a tradeshow and conference. Be ready with your talking points about how you are addressing these issues."

Professional Meeting Planner

58% of planners said they have successfully sold a destination to their board/final decision maker who originally did not want to host their meeting in a particular place.

- **Make the business case:** Speaking to how cost effective a particular site/destination is and presenting incentives made the case for budget conscious decision makers.
 - “The city had been having civil unrest, but the incentives were significant.”
- **Provide evidence to the contrary:** For planners who sold a destination with perception issues, presenting credible information that countered their preconceived notions about a place and layering in their own personal experience in a destination was a successful tactic.
 - “Providing data on previous attendance and satisfaction rates made the pitch convincing.”
- **Make an emotional appeal:** For planners who overcame politically charged objections, showing how much of a cultural impact their group can have by still meeting in a state that did not align with their values made an impact. However, guilt tripping planners is not an effective strategy.

“I’ve had a destination literally tell me that their housekeepers won’t get paid or won’t eat if I don’t bring my meeting there. They [destinations] can’t put the onus on us in that way.”

Think about your most recent experience selling a destination to decision makers. Please share why you had to sell them on this destination and what made the pitch successful.

“There was a lot of crime in the area and people who were against LGBTQ rights. I sold them by stating that **we can make a difference and that if we want equality, we have to fight for it.”**

Professional Meeting Planner

**One final thought on
the power of persistence...**

Going above and beyond to show your commitment to a meeting planners' group pays dividends.



"[Midwest City]. That was one where our attendees were asking what do they have to offer? I found that their community was so welcoming, their CVB representatives were excellent, and they were a big part of the event which doesn't always happen.

They were part of all of our planning meetings, they attended the conference not just to come welcome attendees, they sat in on sessions to learn more about our group! I left there very shocked; it doesn't have big name recognition, but I was impressed. It felt like all the in-market partners talked to each other, like it was a coordinated effort. They were so great to work with, they went after us for 10 years, and after we finally agreed to come for a site visit, I wondered why we put them off for so long."

Future Partners



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