INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNANCE & CIVICS
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

DO AMERICANS SUPPORT A SALARY CAP ON COLLEGE ATHLETES?: A 2026 SURVEY EXPERIMENT



New Report Released from IGC

Surveyed 1,036 U.S. adults

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WHAT DID THE STUDY MEASURE?

We Tested Three Different Arguments.

We asked a nationally representative sample of 1,036 U.S. adults whether they support a total salary cap for college athletes. Respondents were randomly assigned to read one of three versions of the question.

Version 1	Version 2	Version 3
Facts only **(baseline)**	Argument **against** caps	Argument **for** caps
A brief description of the current system and what a salary cap is.	The same facts, plus that coaches face no limit on how much they can be paid.	The same facts, plus that caps can protect competitive balance and preserve funding for women's and lower-revenue sports.

SWIPE →

WHAT IS A SALARY CAP?

How the Cap Works...

Under the 2025 House v. NCAA settlement, participating Division I universities can pay athletes in addition to scholarships. Each school has a limit on its combined athlete payments and benefits. For 2025–26, that cap was approximately $20.5 million.

✓ **The cap limits a school's overall athlete spending.**

✗ **Does NOT limit what any individual athlete can earn.**

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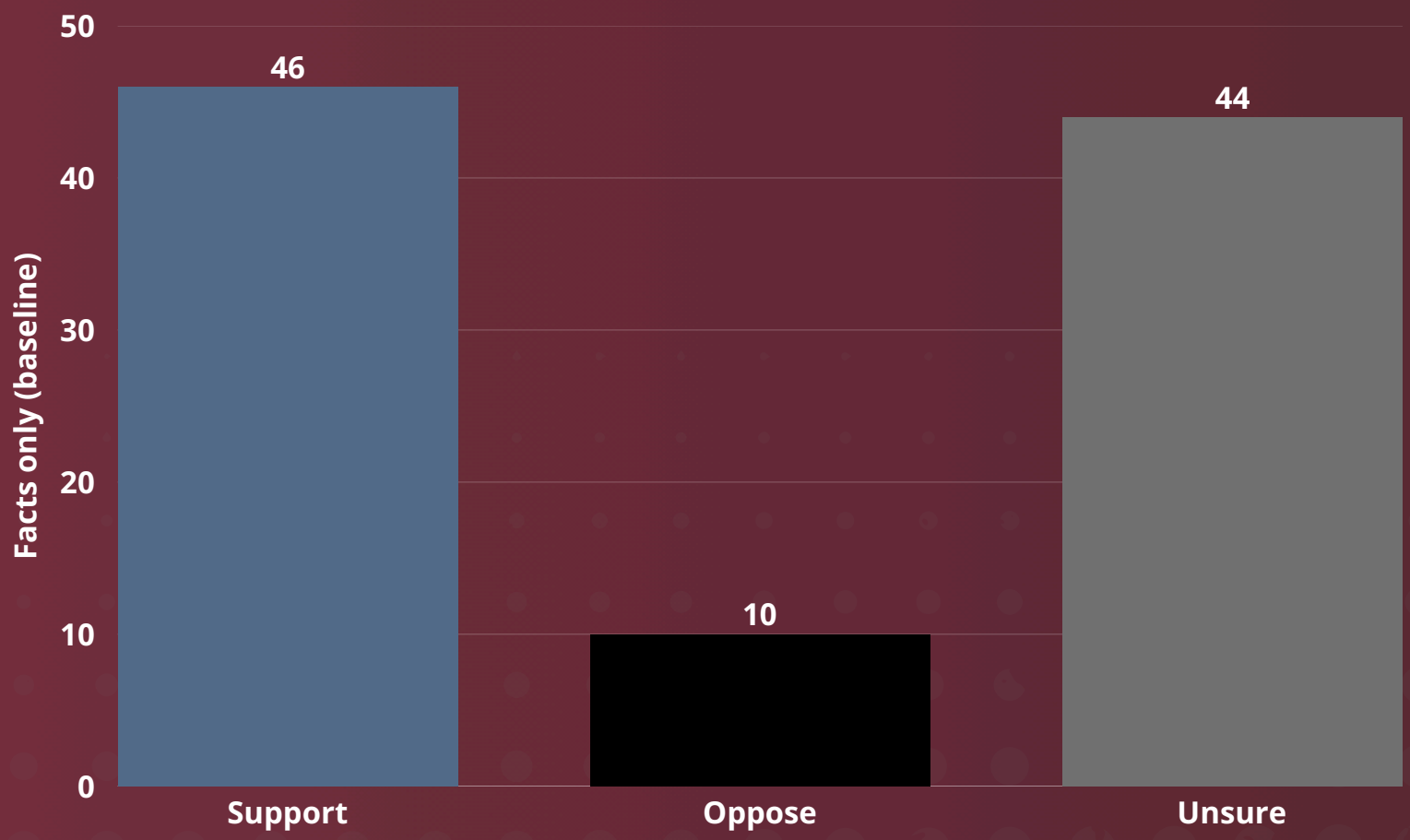
INITIAL SUPPORT IS STRONG.

Nearly Half of Americans Support a Salary Cap.

When respondents were given only the basic facts about the current system, 46% supported a limit on total athlete payments and benefits, while just 10% opposed one.



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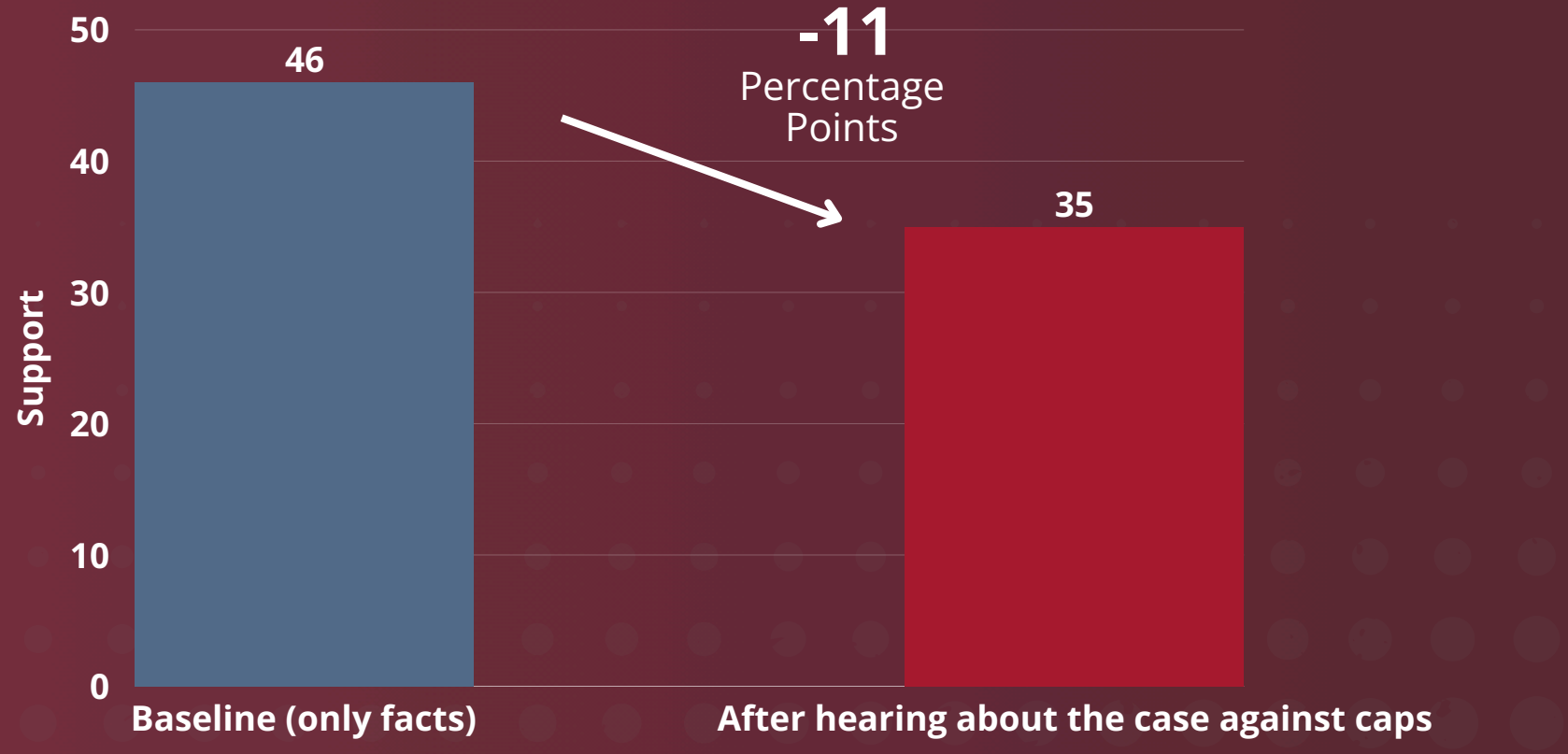
THE CASE AGAINST CAPS.

The Coaches' Salary Comparison Changes Opinions.

Opponents argue that athletes should be able to earn whatever schools are willing to pay them, just as coaches can. After hearing this argument, support for the salary cap dropped by 11 percentage points. Most respondents who changed their minds became undecided rather than opposed.



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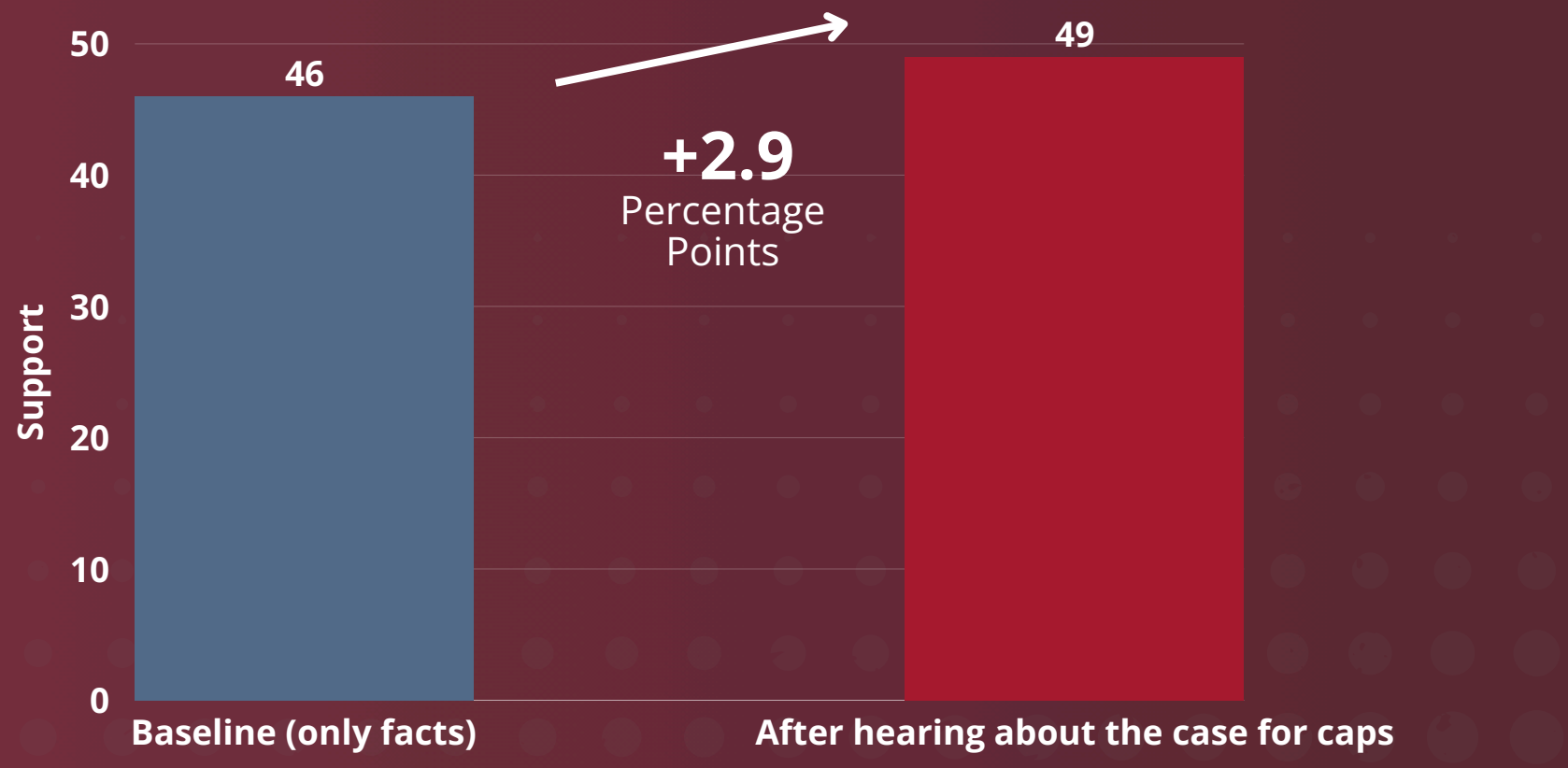
THE CASE FOR CAPS.

Can Salary Caps Protect College Sports?

Supporters argue that salary caps can prevent wealthier schools from outspending competitors for top athletes and help preserve funding for women's sports and other college programs that generate less revenue. This argument did not significantly change public opinion.



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A SHIFT IN SUPPORT

A Fairness Argument Can Shift Opinions.

Americans initially show more support than opposition for a total athlete salary cap. But when they consider the difference between athlete and coach compensation, that support weakens. In a debate many Americans don't closely follow, how the issue is presented matters.

Read the full report

LINK IN BIO