

Final report: Member Survey on Concerns and Constraints Regarding Evolution Meeting Locations

June 18, 2024

Tri-Society *ad hoc* Committee on Members' Views on Evolution Conference Locations

Committee membership: The committee included equal representation of all three societies (2 members from each society), including members currently located in the contiguous US, Europe, and Oceania (including Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii). The committee also included 1 graduate student, 2 pre-tenure faculty members, and 3 post-tenure faculty members.

Executive Summary

Choosing sites for the Evolution meeting involves many factors: cost, geographic diversity across years, appeal of the location, and safety for attendees. Contracts are often entered into many years in advance of the meeting, adding an additional level of difficulty in choosing sites. As a field in which multiple groups are already underrepresented relative to the general population, it is important to choose meeting sites that do not feel riskier for members belonging to such groups, while also remaining as financially accessible as possible for all members. Our committee was tasked with gathering information and making recommendations to the Joint Meeting Committee (JMC) on the factors to consider when evaluating potential meeting sites. To do this, we did a detailed survey with quantitative and qualitative responses from 608 members of SSE, ASN, SSB, and ESEB. We focused on locations in the contiguous United States, and split the country into eight regions based on geographical proximity, regional average state ratings of LGBTQ+ protection, and regional average state ratings of abortion laws. Our analysis of survey responses allowed us to uncover the factors that mattered most to members in assessing risk levels of meeting attendance.

When comparing specific factors of concern about traveling to different regions of the US, personal safety risks were clearly the strongest concern across all respondents, with a relative weight of ~3x the lowest concern. From the qualitative responses, we could see that these safety risks included gun violence, local crime rates, and risks of anti-LGBTQ+ behavior. Other strong concerns, at a relative weight of ~2x the lowest concern, included environmentally responsible travel, risk of experiencing discrimination, and the availability of medical care (particularly for pregnant attendees). Qualitative response data were mixed when it came to avoiding specific regions, often due to concerns about excluding members from underrepresented groups who lived in these regions. However, the quantitative results showed that personal safety concerns about certain regions (i.e., the Central US, Appalachia, and the Southeast) were elevated for members of multiple groups. For example, ~22% (CI 16-29%) of respondents who did not identify as White, non-Hispanic were concerned about their personal safety if attending a meeting in the Southeast, as were ~25% (CI 16-37%) of postdoctoral researchers and ~37% (CI 20-56%) of respondents who did not identify as Cisgender, regardless of their racial or ethnic identity. Holding a meeting in such locations, without clear communication about the assessment of relevant state and local safety risks, could work against the goals of making Evolution meetings safe and accessible for all.

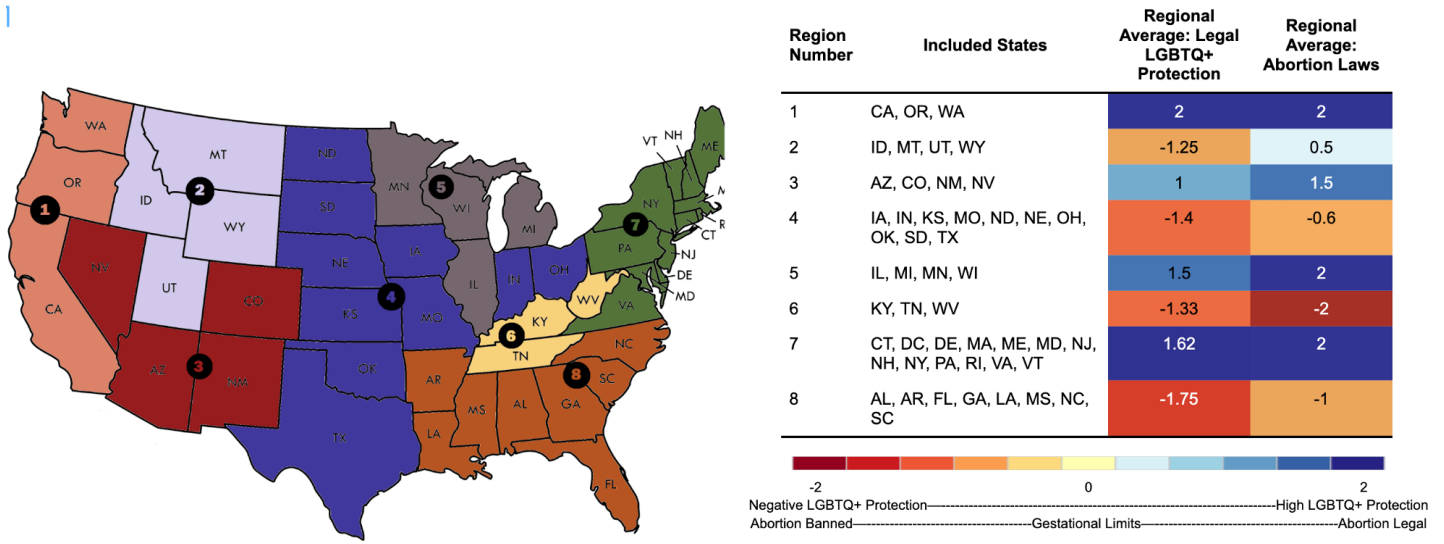
To aid in choosing good meeting locations, our committee has developed a state-level rubric using factors that our members said were important for their feeling of safety at a meeting. These factors are weighted based on the quantitative response data from the survey. Before decisions are made on which potential meeting locations to get detailed bids from, the JMC could ask representatives from each society to update the rubric with new data on current state laws related to gun safety, LGBTQ+ protection, abortion, and reproductive health care, as well as recent levels of hate crimes within states. Local crime rates for specific cities of interest could also be included within meeting location comparison. With the announcement of each annual meeting location, the JMC could communicate how these factors, along with financial and other aspects, were evaluated and compared among the locations. Such consideration for our members' safety concerns as well as transparency about how these issues are incorporated into meeting site choice, should maximize inclusion of our membership at each Evolution meeting.

Survey Description

To assist the Joint Meeting Committee in choosing future locations for Evolution meetings, this tri-society *ad hoc* committee conducted a member survey to seek input on the potentially competing concerns regarding safety and financial accessibility. The survey was open from December 11 through December 31, 2023.

The survey collected basic information (i.e., society membership and career stage) and residency information about each respondent. To increase the response rate, we simplified the survey by splitting the contiguous US into eight regions. The regions were based on a combination of geographic proximity, regional average state ratings of LGBTQ+ protection, and regional average state ratings of abortion laws (see map and table below). In defining the eight regions, we aimed to group together states that were located near each other, but also had similar laws at the time of survey development regarding both LGBTQ+ protection and abortion (see table below).

Each respondent was asked whether they had concerns about traveling to any of the eight regions based on their own safety, based on safety concerns for others, and based on financial constraints. For any region that was identified as concerning for any of these reasons, respondents were asked follow-up questions about the nature of their concerns or constraints. At the end, the survey collected demographic information (i.e., identification and description of gender identity or identities, racial/ethnic identity or identities, and disability condition).



NOTE: Regional averages are not static, as state laws can change rapidly. Regional averages were based on information found at <https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps> and <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/us/abortion-laws-roe-v-wade.html> in November 2023.

Who completed the survey?

We obtained 608 full responses. Among the respondents:

- 95% were SSE members, 27% were ASN members, 17% were SSB members, and 9% were ESEB members (allowing for membership in multiple societies).
- 20% were graduate students, 12% were postdoctoral researchers, 16% were pre-tenure faculty, and 41% were post-tenure faculty. The remaining ~11% of respondents included retired (2.7%), research staff (2.6%), contingent faculty (2.3%), undergraduate students (1.2%), K-12 educators (0.3%), and other (1.3%).
 - Compared to the full membership of SSE, post-tenure faculty were over-represented by 15 percentage points, pre-tenure faculty were over-represented by 7 percentage points, and graduate students were under-represented by 16 percentage points.
- 76% live in the contiguous United States. Among these 465 respondents, 15% live in the West Coast (Region 1), 2.3% live in the Mountain West (Region 2), 6.2% live in the Southwest (Region 3), 15% live in the Central US (Region 4), 15% live in the Great Lakes area (Region 5), 3.7% live in Appalachia (Region 6), 27% live in the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic (Region 7), and 14% live in the Southeast (Region 8) (see map above).

- Among the respondents living outside the contiguous United States, the five regions most highly represented include Europe (7.4%), North America (6.6%), South America (3.1%), Asia (2.8%), and Oceania (including Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii; 2.1%).
 - Compared to the full membership of SSE, people in the contiguous US were over-represented by 9 percentage points, and people outside the contiguous US were under-represented by 8 percentage points.
- their race/ethnicity is summarized in Table 1 below.
 - Compared to the full membership of SSE, White, non-Hispanic respondents were over-represented by 9 percentage points, whereas South Asian / East Asian / Southeast Asian respondents were under-represented by 7 percentage points.
- they identified with the following gender identity/identities: Agender, 0.8%; Gender fluid, 1%; Woman, 42%; Man, 45%; Non-binary, 4%; Questioning/unsure, 0.7%; Not listed, 0.7%; Prefer not to respond, 9%.
 - Compared to the full membership of SSE, those identifying as Men were under-represented by 3.9 percentage points, and those identifying as Non-binary were over-represented by 1.8 percentage points.
- they described their gender identity/identities as follows: Cisgender, 84%; Transgender, 2%; Questioning/unsure, 2%; Not listed, 2%; Prefer not to respond, 12%.
 - Compared to the full membership of SSE, those identifying as Cisgender were over-represented by 10 percentage points, whereas the “Prefer not to respond” response was under-represented by 13 percentage points.
- just under 10% disclosed having a disability.
 - Compared to the full membership of SSE, this group was over-represented by 3 percentage points.

Table 1. Racial/ethnic identity (or identities) data collected from 608 survey respondents.

Racial/ethnic identity of survey respondents	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
American Indian, Alaskan Native, First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal	6	1.0
Black or African American	12	2.0
Latinx/Latina/Latino or Hispanic	73	12.0
Multi-racial	17	2.8
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1	0.2
South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian	46	7.6
West Asian or North African (also called Middle Eastern)	6	1.0
White, non-Hispanic	409	67.3
Not listed	24	3.9
Prefer not to respond	54	8.9

Overall safety and financial concern levels for each region

The percentage (lower CI, upper CI) of the 608 survey respondents expressing hesitancy to attend meetings in at least one region based on concerns for their own safety equaled 18.9% (15.9, 22.3)%. However, level of concern varied greatly among the eight regions. For the Central US, Appalachia, and the Southeast (Regions 4, 6, and 8), safety concerns were expressed by noticeably higher percentages of survey respondents than for the other five regions (Fig. 1). The percentage (lower CI, upper CI) of the 608 survey respondents expressing hesitancy about attending meetings in at least one region based on financial constraints equaled 27.3% (23.8, 31.0)%. However, only for attending a meeting along the West Coast (Region 1) were financial concerns expressed by a noticeably higher percentage of respondents than for the other regions (Fig. 1). Figure 1 shows both overall levels of self-safety and financial concerns for all eight regions. Taking into account both the self-safety and the financial axes, respondents expressed lower levels of concern for the Mountain West, the Southwest, the Great Lakes, and the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic (Regions 2, 3, 5, and 7; Fig. 1).

The JMC is already factoring in expected costs of travel to and attendance at meetings when choosing locations. They need information that will help in assessing locations on factors related to safety and inclusion for as many members as possible. From this point forward, we therefore focus on survey results related to self-safety factors.

Regional safety concerns across groups

To determine whether members of specific vulnerable groups or career stages expressed higher levels of self-safety concerns about meetings located in particular regions, we calculated the percentages of respondents from these different groups that expressed concerns about attending meetings in each region (Figs. 2-6). In cases where certain vulnerable groups were represented by a very small number of survey respondents, we combined responses from members of multiple groups. We did this as follows:

- Racial/ethnic identity (Table 1, Fig. 3): The fourth group, representing 5.9% of survey respondents, includes those who identify as American Indian, Alaskan Native, First Nations, Indigenous, or Aboriginal; Black or African American; Multi-racial; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; West Asian or North African (also called Middle Eastern); or Other.
- Gender identity/identities: The third group, representing 5.4% of survey respondents, includes those who identify as Agender, Fluid, Non-binary, Questioning/unsure, or Other (Fig. 4).
- Description of gender identity/identities: The second group, representing 4.9% of survey respondents, includes those who identify as Transgender, Questioning or unsure, or Other (Fig. 5).

The regional self-safety concerns expressed by members of different groups (Figs. 2-6) were consistent overall with the concerns expressed by the entire set of survey respondents (Fig. 1). Specifically, concerns were generally higher about attending meetings in the Central US, Appalachia, and the Southeast (Regions 4, 6, and 8), and to a lesser degree, in the Mountain West (Region 2). Levels of concern were higher for those in earlier career stages (Fig. 2); for those who did not identify as White, non-Hispanic (Fig. 3); for those who identify as either Woman or as Agender, Fluid, Non-binary, Questioning, or Other (Fig. 4); for those who identify as Transgender, Questioning or unsure, or Other (Fig. 5); and for those who disclosed having a disability or disabilities (Fig. 6).

Nature of concerns

Although simplifying the survey by breaking the US into eight regions may have successfully increased our response rate, we acknowledge that this coarse resolution does not account for variation between and within states. Safety concerns related to crime rates, for instance, vary from city to city; others may depend upon state laws (e.g., legal risks, or the availability of medical care for certain conditions). Additionally, some of these concerns will change as states pass new laws. Because we included survey questions aimed at identifying the nature of respondents' concerns about particular regions (including write-in fields for open-ended responses), we are also providing the JMC with information about factors that can be used when assessing the safety and inclusiveness of potential conference locations in the future, even as laws and conditions continue to change.

In Table 2, we list the four options that were potential answers to "What is the nature of your safety concerns for yourself about traveling to Region x for a conference?" Additionally, because a number of survey respondents wrote in concerns about the carbon footprint involved in thousands of people traveling annually to a meeting, we also include one of the potential answers to "What is the nature of your financial constraints about traveling to Region x for a conference?" In addition to the percent of respondents that chose each of these factors, we include the relative weight of each of these factors (with the factor having the lowest concern level set at 1). As we describe in more detail below, we used the relative weight values in constructing a rubric for comparing multiple meeting location options.

In addition to Table 2, Appendix I summarizes common open-ended responses, including specific safety concerns and the carbon or environmental footprint of having annual in-person conferences. Appendix II provides selected quotes from the write-in fields. These quotes cover safety concerns, financial concerns, environmental concerns, and concerns about excluding residents of particular regions (some of whom are also members of underrepresented groups) by actively avoiding certain locations.

Although somewhat outside this committee's focus, a number of survey respondents expressed concerns related to the carbon footprint of travel to annual meetings (Table 2, Appendices I and II). The idea of substituting a virtual meeting for the annual Evolution meeting on a regular schedule is an idea the three societies should continue to explore and discuss.

Table 2. Overall levels of concern about specific factors

Concern	Average Percent Concern Across All Regions	Relative Weight of Concern
Experiencing Discrimination	2.7	1.80
Availability of Medical Care	2.7	1.80
Personal Safety Risks	4.4	2.93
Legal Risks	1.5	1.00
Environmentally Responsible Travel	3.1	2.07

Using a rubric: The committee’s recommendation for comparing potential meeting locations

To assist the JMC in using our survey responses during assessment of potential conference locations, our committee has prepared a rubric. With this rubric, each state under consideration for a meeting can be rated on the four safety factors from the survey (Table 2). These values can then be weighted based on the relative levels of concern expressed by respondents. Specific concerns, such as gun safety or COVID vaccination rates (Appendix I), could also be included. The committee agreed that external data should be used to update the rubric scores each year, allowing individual state ratings to adjust as new laws are passed or conditions change. Prior to requesting detailed bids from certain locations, the JMC could ask representatives from each society to gather the necessary data for updating rubric scores. Easily accessible sources of such data include: USAFacts (<https://usafacts.org>; a compilation of government data), the US FBI (<https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home>), the US Department of Justice (<https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/state-data>), the NAACP (Travel Advisories: https://naacp.org/resources/library?type_resource=153), Everytown Research & Policy (<https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>), the Movement Advancement Project (<https://www.lgbtmap.org/>), Guttmacher Institute (<https://states.guttmacher.org/policies/>), and other sources of information (see <https://collegetables.info/about.html#main-sources-for-information>).

Proposed rubric

	State 1	State 2	State 3	State 4
Factor 1: Personal Safety				
Gun safety laws ¹ : 1 (strongest) to 5 (weakest)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Hate crime incidence ² : 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Mean Score	_____	_____	_____	_____
Factor 1 Weighted Score (Mean x 3)				
Factor 2: Experiencing Discrimination				
LGBTQ+ legal protection ^{3,4} : 1 (high) to 5 (low)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Race/Ethnicity legal protection ^{4,5} : 1 (high) to 5 (low)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Mean Score	_____	_____	_____	_____
Factor 2 Weighted Score (Mean x 2)				
Factor 3: Availability of Medical Care				
Abortion policies ⁶ : 1 (least restrictive) to 5 (most restrictive)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Gender affirming care laws ⁷ : 1 (least restrictive) to 5 (most restrictive)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Mean Score	_____	_____	_____	_____
Factor 3 Weighted Score (Mean x 2)				
Factor 4: Legal Risks				
Anti-trans bathroom laws ⁸ : 1 (no bans) to 5 (criminal offense)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Mean Score	_____	_____	_____	_____
Factor 4 Weighted Score (Mean x 1)				
Overall Score (Sum of four weighted scores)				

¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>

² <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/state-data>

³ <https://www.lgbtmap.org/>

⁴ https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/naacp_hate_crime_laws_by_state.pdf

⁵ <https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-the-criminal-justice-system#anchor5408>

⁶ <https://states.guttmacher.org/policies/>

⁷ https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/healthcare_laws_and_policies

⁸ https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/nondiscrimination/bathroom_bans

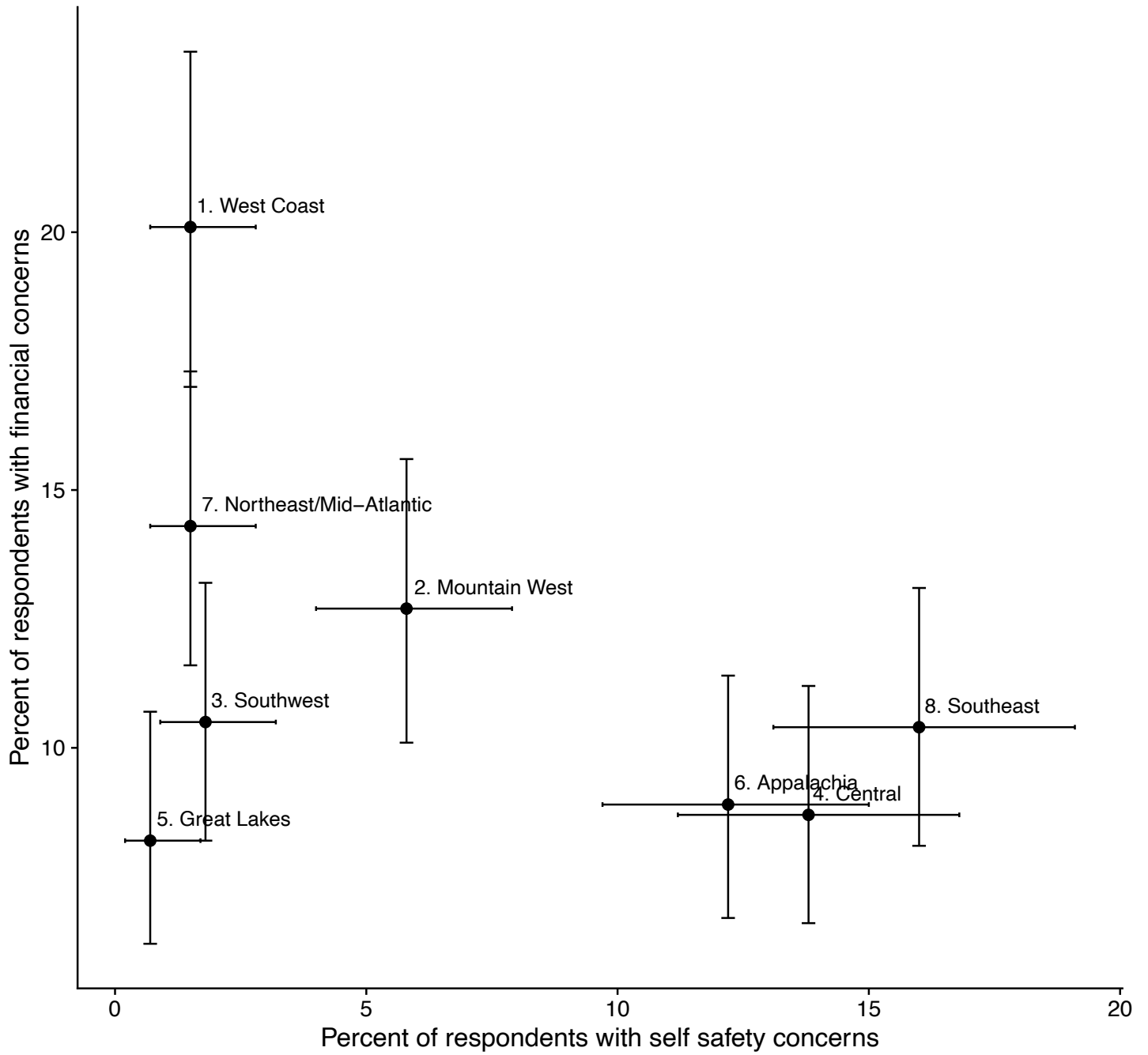


Figure 1. Levels of safety and financial concerns about attending meetings in eight US regions, from 608 survey respondents (including SSE, ASN, SSB, and ESEB members).

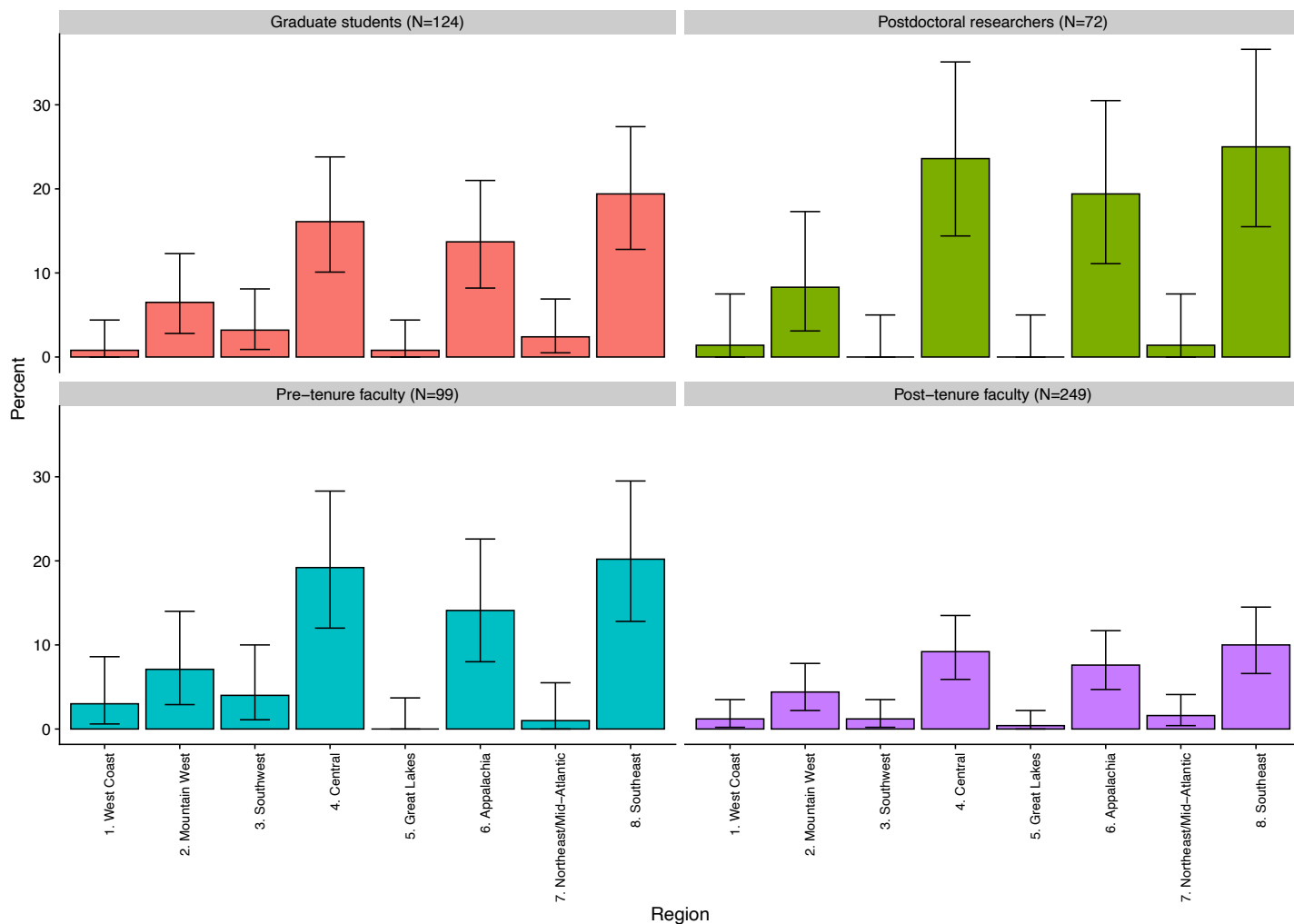


Figure 2. Levels of safety concerns related to attending meetings in eight US regions, for respondents from four different career stages.

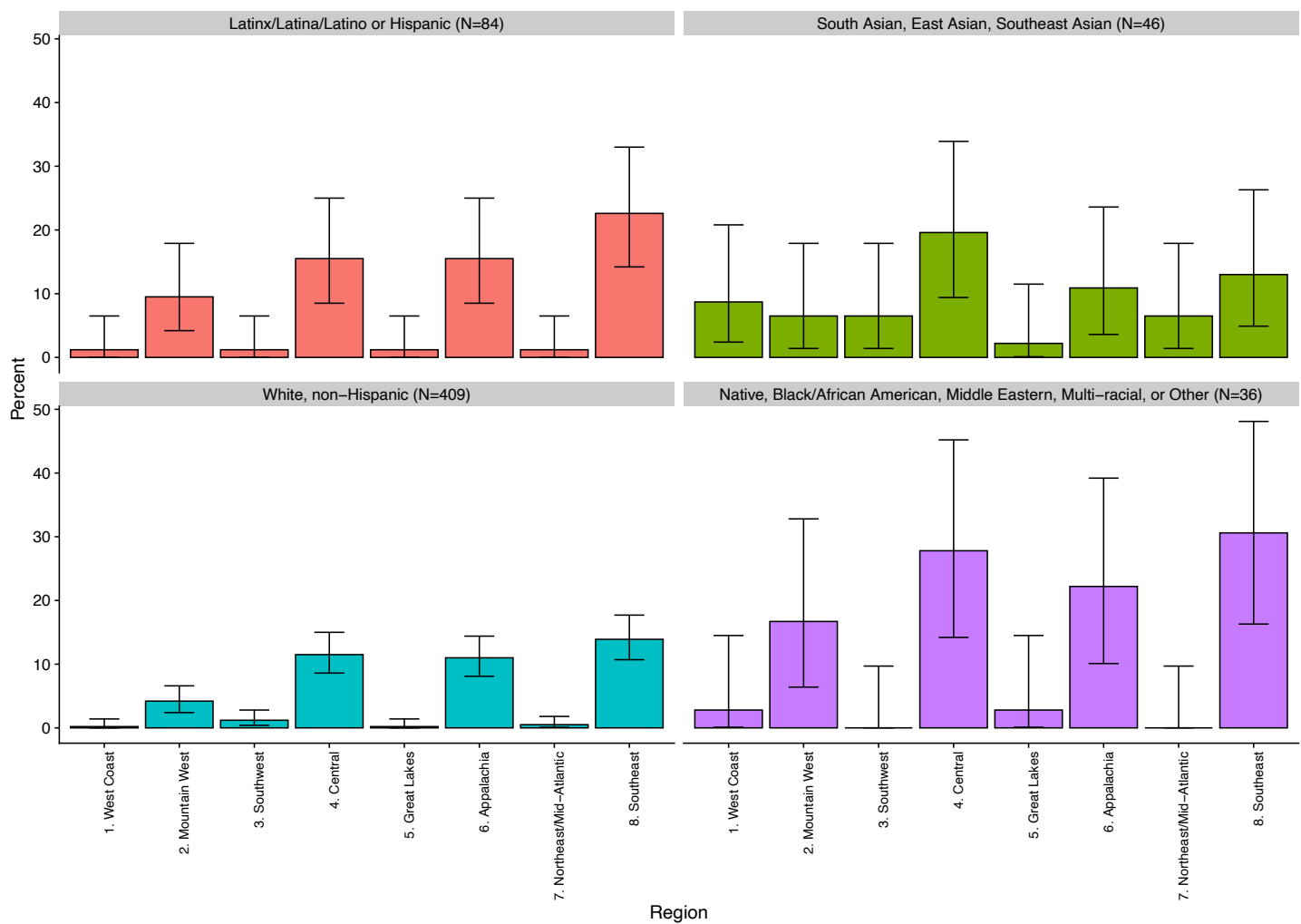


Figure 3. Levels of safety concerns related to attending meetings in eight US regions, for respondents with different racial/ethnic identities.

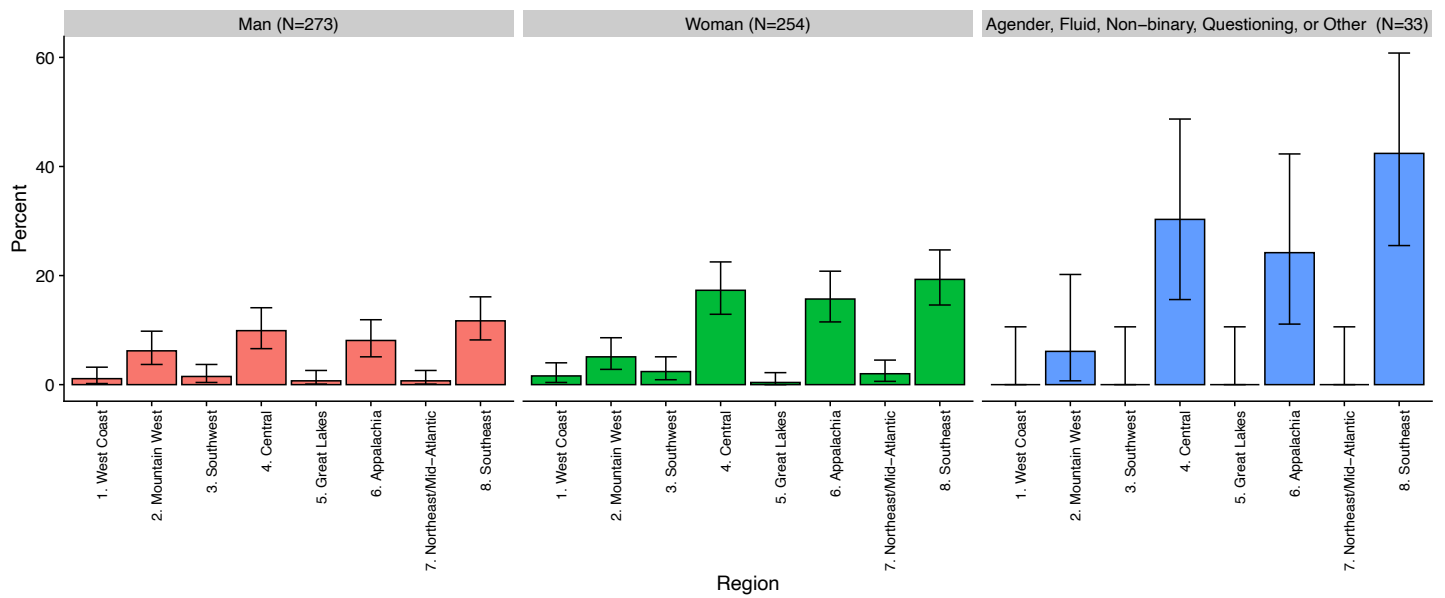


Figure 4. Levels of safety concerns related to attending meetings in eight US regions, for respondents with different gender identities.

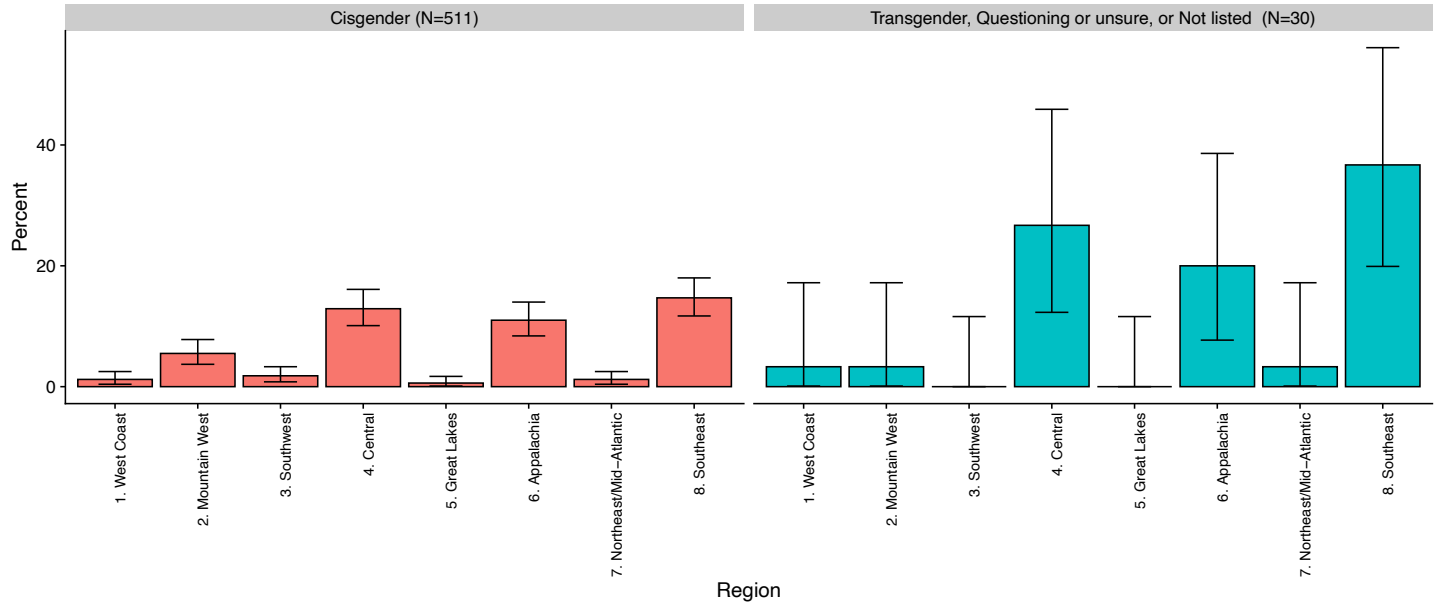


Figure 5. Levels of safety concerns related to attending meetings in eight US regions, for respondents with different descriptions of their gender identity/identities.

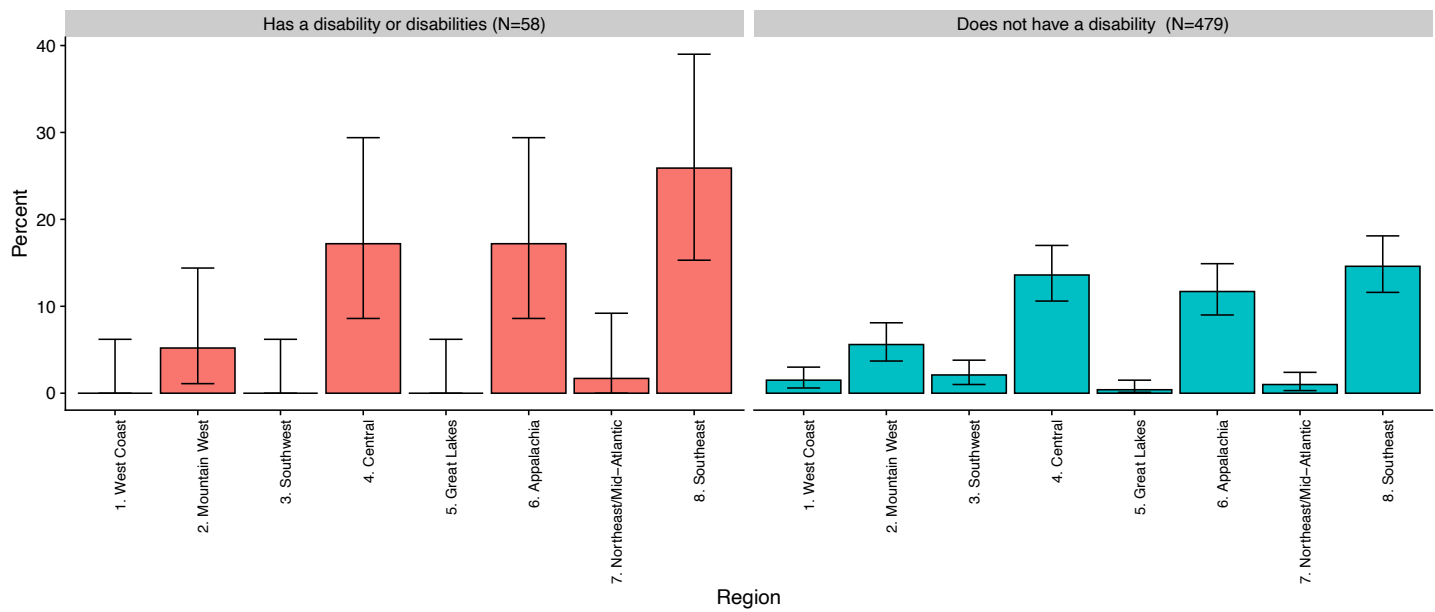


Figure 6. Levels of safety concerns related to attending meetings in eight US regions, for respondents who do and do not have a disability or disabilities.

Appendix I: Common responses to open-ended questions

Safety concerns

- gun violence
- anti-LGBTQ+ behaviors
- medical issues (access or legal ramifications) for pregnant members
- states where teaching evolution would be restricted
- COVID
- Consider crime rates in area around where meeting will be held (city center, etc.)
- Security at meetings is lax – no one checking badges, active shooter plan or security guards?

Social concerns

- the questionable need to have face-to-face meetings each year given carbon footprint (environmental footprint)
- difficulties for people outside US to obtain visas
- scientists in areas being avoided are disadvantaged by not having meetings in those states
- if using a conference center, check which other groups may be using that same venue

Travel concerns

- distance/time to travel is a consideration (from W to E Coast of US or from Europe to US)

Financial concerns

- attending annual meetings is difficult - PI may be able to attend, but not feasible for many students in their lab
- expensive locations [but larger cities easy to get to]

Positive comments/suggestions

- appreciative of being able to comment and give feedback on concerns holding meetings
- outside of the US – elsewhere in North America seen as positive
- (SSE) could have a European section to organize satellite meetings there
- affordable locations on University campuses so dorms are available (negative comments about convention centers and their expenses)
- Diversify areas where meeting is held – in the center, alternating coasts, online, overseas
- Choose a fun and affordable place, “vacay adjacent”
- Consider hub meetings held in several locations
- Continue to offer online/hybrid options for those who cannot travel

General negative comment

- Keep politics out of these decisions

Disabilities

- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Mobility impairment
- Tourette's, OCD, ADHD, Neurodiverse

Appendix II: Selected responses and comments to open-ended questions

Note: Text generalized as appropriate (noted by use of <, >) to protect anonymity of respondents

SAFETY

General safety

“Like many overseas researchers, I find the gun culture in the US so worrying that I am reluctant to attend a conference in the US.”

“Any states that have legalized open carry of guns, have loose or no legislation about weapon purchase, states and/or cities with open animosity toward ethnic, cultural, or "racial" groups.”

“If using a conference center, be sure to check with center to see what other groups may be present at the same time.”

“The regions are incoherent and make no sense at all. Laws vary by state, not region. This renders this entire exercise pointless. The actual safety concerns I have are for the location of the conference venue and the accommodations. This varies by city, not by region. I was concerned at Albuquerque last summer by the situation encountered in traveling to the university dorms (where many students stayed). In the evening, getting there required a walk to a bus stop through darkened streets with essentially no business activity. Drug dealers and panhandlers were evident, though, and one attendee reported to me that they saw a naked person. When I became aware of this, I walked with a colleague staying at the dorms to the bus stop each night, and waited with her for the bus to arrive. Site selection planners need to have some awareness of the personal safety situation at the site for attendees. Such awareness is necessarily site-specific, and not reflected by state or region.”

“The crime rates in the region close to potential conference venues should be looked at carefully prior to making a decision; the meeting in Albuquerque seemed to be in a high-crime area, which was disproportionately felt by the student attendees who stayed further from the site and therefore were exposed to more violence/crime/harrassment than attendees staying at the nearby hotels. I know that college campuses are not always appropriate venues for a conference the size of Evolution, but it might be worth considering them in the future as they often (but not always) are in areas that are safer than other parts of the cities they are found in. One of the limitations for travel for me coming from a distant international country is being able to link travel for conferences and research opportunities, so conferences in cities with large and/or many universities will better enable me to justify both the financial and environmental costs of long-haul travel.”

Health

“Covid concerns in general (don't really want to catch it at a meeting). Probably not too related to regions though.”

“High altitude, like Snowbird, can be a physical problem for people with heart or lung problems.”

“I am extremely concerned about meeting safety without any COVID mitigations for anyone who is pregnant, high risk, or dealing with or recovering from long-COVID. This is a very real risk that is being entirely disregarded by the joint meeting organizers. The data we have shows that conferences are super spreader events, even in times of low transmission, and this shows little sign of changing. Anyone at risk of severe disease (which includes anyone pregnant) is facing serious risks by attending conferences without mitigations, even if they themselves choose to mask. We should look to the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution's guidelines on what a COVID-safe meeting looks

like. This includes providing participants tests for daily testing, and masking in crowded indoor situations (but opting for outdoor venues whenever possible). It also includes paying attention to air quality standards at the conference venues we book, and bringing in additional air filtration if standards are not sufficient.”

“As a medically vulnerable person with breathing issues that make it impossible for me to mask 16 hours/day, it’s important that conference locations (whatever region they are in) are focused on outdoor eating, and that they have good indoor ventilation. I have only been to one large meeting post-pandemic (not Evolution), and these criteria were promised but not delivered, which is the worst combination. I used to go to multiple large meetings per year, now the default number is zero.”

Concerns for others safety

“I would be concerned about other attendees experiencing LGBTQ and gender discrimination. I would be concerned about other attendees experiencing discrimination, harassment, and legal risk for (supposed) immigration status.”

“I would be concerned about the bias in medical care attendees could receive, especially those that are pregnant.”

“I would be concerned that members may feel unsafe due to these regions having less protection against discrimination of individuals of certain sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status.”

“remember that states with poor protections punish the residents of those areas. refusing to have meetings there double punishes the scientists who would always have to travel far vs benefit from in-state/in-region meetings. of course, current real-time safety issues are non-negotiable (high/hate-based crime)”

SOCIAL

“I have serious concerns about the politics and laws being enacted in especially Texas and Florida. Unfortunately, I am no longer willing to travel to these two states because of their antidemocratic, religion-based, barbaric, and stone-age policies.”

“My undergrads and grads are missing out on opportunities to attend conferences because societies are moving away from our region. It’s hurting the students here..”

“Concerns about the safety of a large evolution conference in states that are actively introducing measures to remove scientific education or prevent teaching certain topics, including evolution (i.e. Florida, Texas). On the one hand, hosting a conference of this nature in those states may give access to these topics to people who would have difficulty travelling out of state and are otherwise limited, and it makes a political statement to defy these measures, but on the other hand it introduces considerable risk with how polarized these issues have become, and the rising radicalization of the political right.”

“I live in Tennessee and I’ve been troubled by recent trends where societies try not to travel to places with regressive laws. Moving all meetings to progressive coastal cities is not the equity action some societies think it is. It’s more expensive to travel there for people in states where they may already face discrimination and where they are paid lower wages. And it further divides people. Meetings are a good opportunity to make the surrounding area aware of the field and bring people together, and so function as a little outreach all the time. Retreating into a cocoon of progressive politics will only make it easier for state legislatures in red states to do as they please without pushback from people who disagree.”

“Look: I'm gay, and I've lived in <southeast state> for <multiple years>. I've NEVER experienced any kind of hostility or discrimination for being gay here (in contrast, random acts of animus were common when I lived in <northeast state>). I think it's utterly ridiculous to take these kinds of issues into consideration in selecting meeting locations. The so-called safety concerns are largely imaginary and borne more out of ignorance and geographical/cultural prejudices than any real basis for elevated risks in some States. This is evident in your geographical groupings. <This southeast state's> laws are not nearly as right-wing as outsiders think, particularly when compared to <two nearby southeast states>. I'd much rather just rotate around geographically, so that almost everyone periodically has a "nearby" meeting. To maintain their public credibility, scientific societies should not take stands on political issues. The political left seems to have zero comprehension of just how deeply such actions undermine credibility with the moderate right.”

“I'm a queer graduate student in <southeast state>. I agree with the sentiment behind the travel bans, but as a person in and surrounded by states/regions with anti-lgbtqia+, anti-trans, and racist laws on the books, I have to then travel a minimum of a 3 hour flight or 8 hour car ride to get out of this region, which I simply cannot afford for a conference. If conference organizers are not willing to host conferences in these locations then you need to provide enhanced financial support for early career researchers to attend your conference. Otherwise, in your attempt to protect folks from discrimination, you're actually leaving some of us behind.”

“Although I identify as LGBT and appear somewhat gender non-conforming (i.e., often get mis-gendered) I do not support restricting meetings to only "blue" states. I think this practice limits access to people from "red" states; and maybe those people (especially early career, and students, etc) might benefit the most from attending a supportive meeting like SSE. And, unfortunately, I think one could encounter discrimination in any state, regardless of the state laws. “

“I believe that restricting locations of conferences based on state laws is penalizing many of our most vulnerable community members, is exclusionary, and promotes increased divisions and (negative) perceptions of social status and hierarchy within our community. It sounds great in principle to take the high ground of penalizing states with laws that we generally disagree with, on grounds of "safety". But fundamentally, this penalty is going to be paid by the most disadvantaged members of our societies: for instance, mothers with young children who are restricted in where they can travel, or students from under-resourced universities in red states who already have less opportunity than those of us at certain well-resourced bluestate universities. Furthermore, it reinforces stereotypes that I have personally encountered on numerous occasions from blue-state university academics implying that red-state universities are intellectual backwaters or, at least, that the academics who take jobs at such places can't get jobs elsewhere (perhaps they are "not good enough"). I have heard condescending attitudes expressed by colleagues and graduate students towards faculty jobs at multiple red states in the southeast and great plains in particular, and I think the evolution societies have a responsibility to push back against the divisions that can emerge from a societal dynamic such as the one we currently have in the US. I urge you to recognize that while "safety" – real or perceived – is something that we all agree is good, I believe that there are very significant negatives to any location restriction based on state laws and especially, stereotypes that academic scientists might hold about the communities of people that live in states with laws with which we might generally find disagreeable.

“I guess if Evolution is occurring in medium to large sized cities, I am not primarily concerned about attendees safety. I am more concerned with attendees feeling welcome in certain areas. I worry about verbal harassment making people feel unwelcome, or uncomfortable socializing in local establishments. I don't want people to have to spend time/mental energy worrying about where to go

or not go for dinner or drinks. But I also think black listing whole regions is complicated. For example, I might be hesitant to attend a meeting in the south in general, but large cities like Atlanta for example, I would be fine with.”

“There are many issues about safety that are not considered today. Many cities are viewed as unsafe. Some less urban areas might not have good medical facilities. If we avoid the South, we are making it harder for many Black and Hispanic students to get to meetings. The coasts tend to be very expensive destinations. Air travel contributes to global warming. Abortion is not the only issue. The American Sociological Association has decided to alternate with every other meeting in the center of the country, then alternating coasts, with one entirely virtual meeting every 3 or 4 years in attempts to get their carbon footprint down by 40% if I understand what I have been told properly. If we only meet in the Northeast and Northwest where the politics align with most of us, we will be missing a lot of chances for increasing diversity and decreasing our carbon footprint. And I haven't even mentioned international locations. It is complicated and the people that decide tend to face the fewest hurdles.”

“I understand your concern in theory, but lots of diverse scientists also live in these states you are concerned about, and they deserve to be able to attend nearby conferences as well.”

“FRANKLY, we should be meeting in ALL regions of the US including Alaska and Hawaii (except for maybe the cost constraints of being away from relatively cheap access near travel hubs). If our message can't stand the light (or darkness) of the day, then we're doing it wrong.”

“All the problems associated to an application for a USA visa.”

“Travel to the USA on a foreign passport is often extremely unpleasant, and can be dangerous.”

“Antisemitism”

TRAVEL

“It's not that I can't afford to travel. It's that traveling to those regions may force me to decide which conferences to attend and also I'm concerned mostly about students being able to afford cities in those regions”

“While I can afford to travel to the US with years of previous planning, it's not at all something I can do on a regular basis (i.e., for more than one Evolution meeting every 5 years).”

“I think it is important to consider non-US members of the society and not limit meetings to the continental US. Canada can be an excellent venue for meetings and bringing some meetings to Mexico (part of North America ;-)) or to any Latin american country would enable access to many who probably cannot travel to the US for a diversity of reasons.”

“Travel to hub cities is much cheaper for me and my lab. In general, I have had trouble in this region finding cheap flights even though the distance is not as great. The general issue is true with other regions, too, though. Airfare to areas near a hub is much more affordable.” [response to Region 3]

“It's more about the candidate host cities being super expensive (LA, San Diego, Portland, Seattle) than the region itself. Every aspect of life (rental, gas, food, hotel, etc) are prohibitively expensive in these cities.” [response to Region 1]

“This region is exceptionally expensive, so it makes it difficult to take a lab group there” [response to Region 1]

FINANCIAL

“the registration fee is too high and leave me with less money for traveling costs.”

“please reduce the registration fee for Phd students. We are always on a budget.”

“One major constraints why I cannot attend to any of the regions in US is financial aspect. I cannot afford to travel and have no capacity to personally fund my travel. The institution may provide financial support but it will be very minimal and no assurance of funding due to limited budget is allocated.”

“The reason I'm able to attend Evolution meetings so frequently is the availability of affordable dorm lodging. This option has been MUCH better for these meetings than any organism focused conferences I've attended (American Ornithological Society & International Ornithological Congress). Please keep these affordable options in mind!”

ENVIRONMENTAL

“Generally I seek to reduce international travel for environmental reasons. This does not mean I will not travel to the USA from Europe, but it does mean I will not go to all available options even if I had funding.”

“In view of the climate crisis I feel constrained to travel to any part of the US for such a short visit as a congress is. Obviously, this does not help in selecting a new location for the congress, but perhaps this can be taken along as endorsement for an online component to the congress.”

“Given that the world is in a state of emergency due to climate change, I find it hard to reconcile having so many in-person meetings with a large carbon footprint. Especially since that these societies are made up of thoughtful people who care about climate change... how can we justify doing this? Additionally, I find that all these annual meetings are economically exclusive (and there are often accessibility barriers too). Even when I have funding, it is hard to cover the cost, much less that of additional lab members. I think there is a lot to be gained in going to a 1-year in person/1-year virtual model for the Evolution meeting -- I think it is the ethical thing to do and would benefit many of the society members.”

... “I think we need to start taking climate change into consideration. I was at the Botany conference in 2023 in Boise, ID and the temperature was over 100F every single day of the conference. Outdoor safety was a concern. I think June and July conferences need to be held in places with more mild climate moving forward...”

“I favor alternating in-person and virtual-only meetings. This would reduce SSE carbon footprint. Having in-person allows networking, which is so valuable for students and postdocs. And unlike hybrid meetings, having every second meeting virtual puts everyone on equal footing.”