ACL Reviewing Survey Summary

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on behalf of the ACL Executive Board

Motivation

- Recent explosion of submissions to *ACL conferences
- How can we maintain an efficient, effective, and equitable review process?
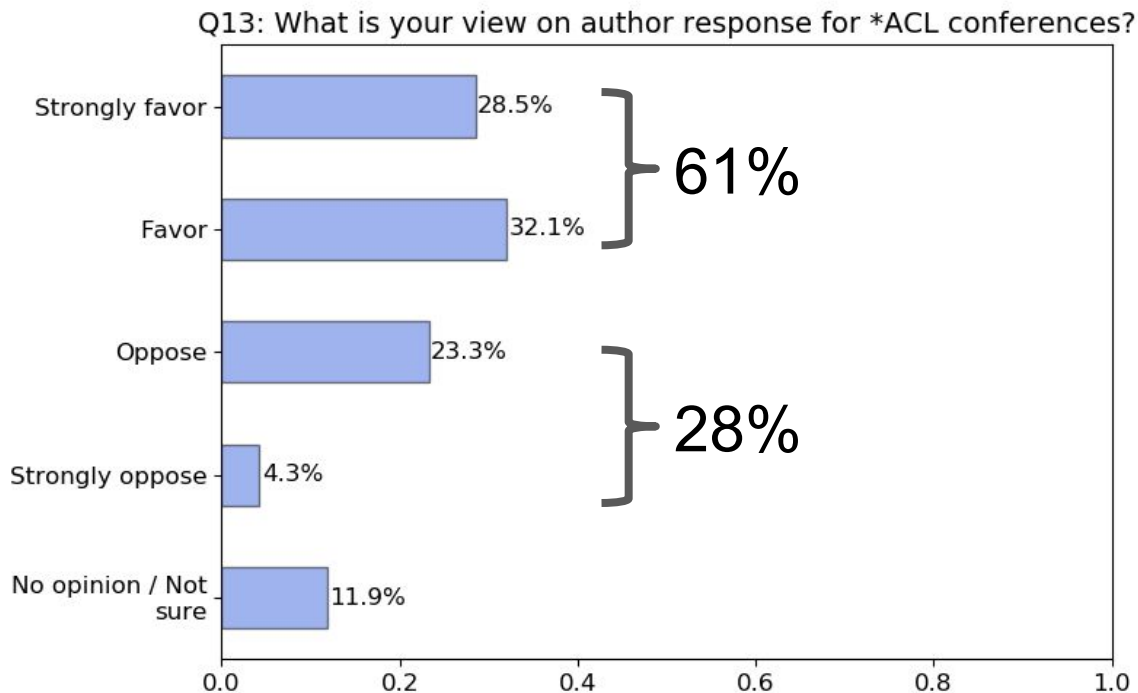
Questions

- **Demographic questions:** submission/reviewing experience, position, gender, location
- **Opinion questions:** author response, author discussion, meta-review, structured review forms, review transparency, acceptance rates, timing of deadlines and review release, and public review + open comments

Logistics / Response

- **Period:** May 6–June 5, 2019
- **Advertised:** Twice on the ACL membership email distribution list as well as on social media.
- **Responses:** 422, 95% of which were from past/present ACL members
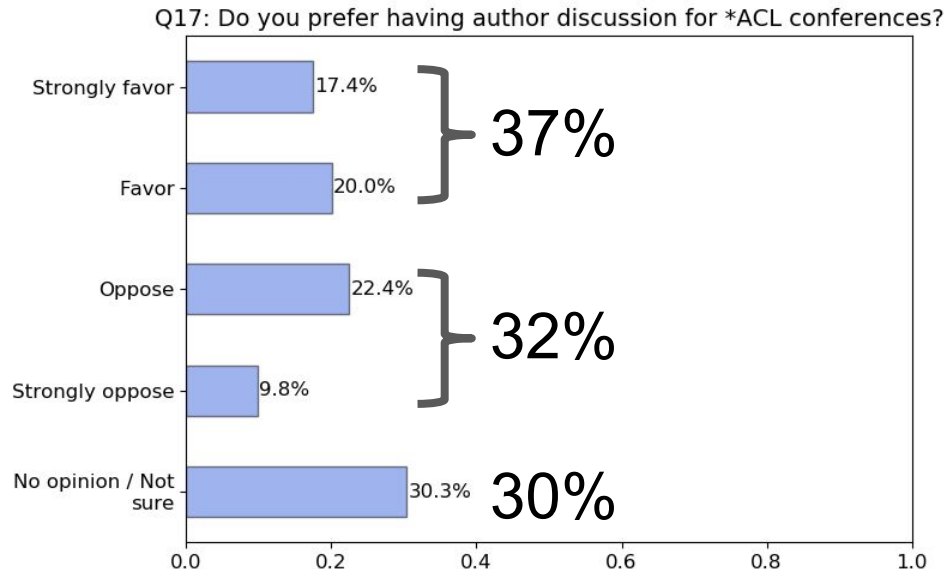- **Demographics:** Approximately match those of ACL membership

Author Response

- The chance for authors to respond to reviews before decisions are made

- Significant majority in favor. Very few strongly opposed.
- Preference for author response was negatively correlated with reviewer experience, and seniority of role.

Q13: What is your view on author response for *ACL conferences?

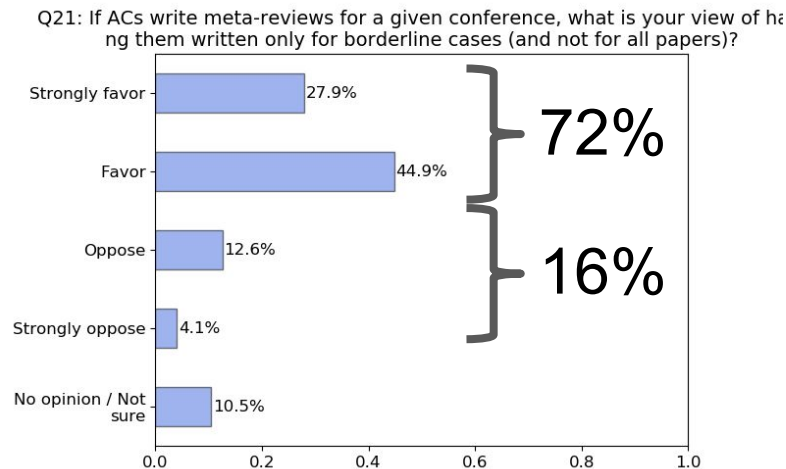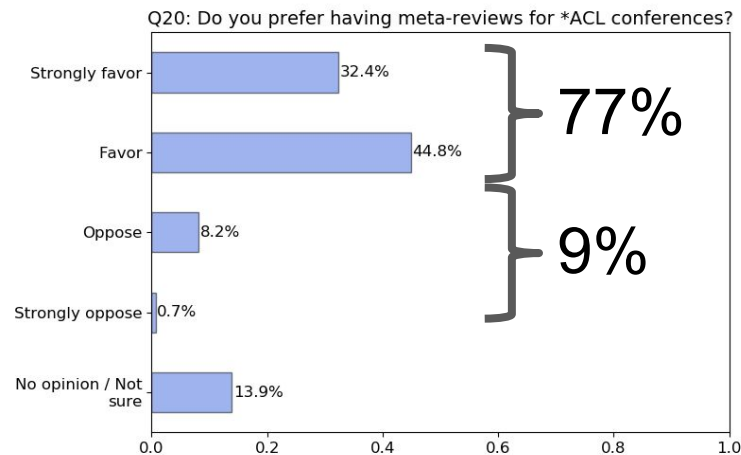|	
Strongly favor	28.5%
Favor	32.1%
Oppose	23.3%
Strongly oppose	4.3%
No opinion / Not sure	11.9%

61%

28%

Author Discussion

- A discussion period between authors and reviewers before decisions

- Opinions were nearly evenly split
- Those who had submitted to a conference with author discussion were more in favor (63-26% vs. 24-37%).
- Those with experience as an Area Chair were more opposed.

Q17: Do you prefer having author discussion for *ACL conferences?

Strongly favor — 17.4%

Favor — 20.0%

37%

Oppose — 22.4%

Strongly oppose — 9.8%

32%
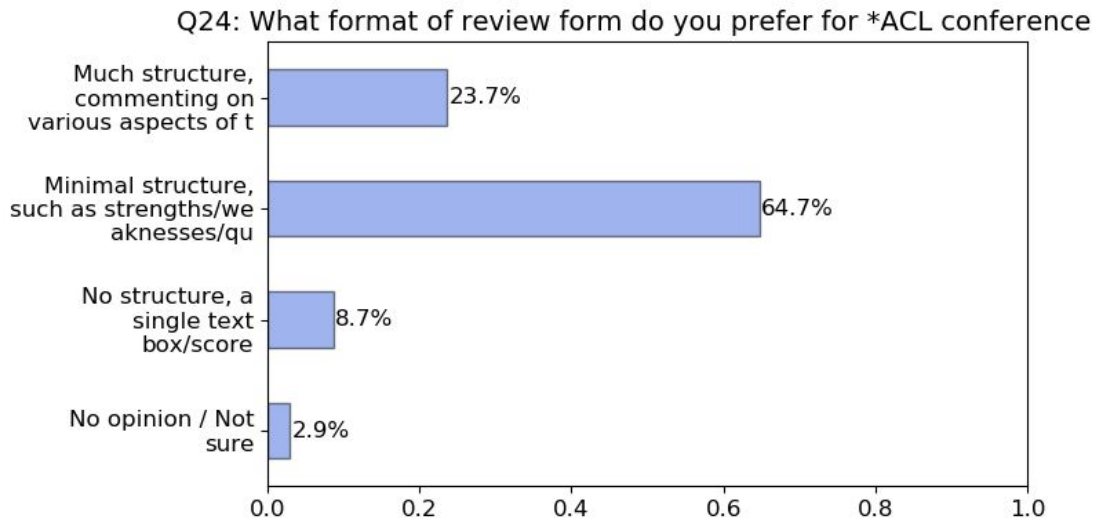
No opinion / Not sure — 30.3%

30%

Meta-Review

- A brief summary of reviews written by an AC or PC

- Strong support for meta-reviews (77-9%)

- 73% agreed that it is ok to have them only for borderline cases
- Former PC chairs were split 50%-35% on the latter question

Q20: Do you prefer having meta-reviews for *ACL conferences?

Strongly favor — 32.4%
Favor — 44.8%
Oppose — 8.2%
Strongly oppose — 0.7%
No opinion / Not sure — 13.9%

77%

9%

Q21: If ACs write meta-reviews for a given conference, what is your view of having them written only for borderline cases (and not for all papers)?

Strongly favor — 27.9%
Favor — 44.9%
Oppose — 12.6%
Strongly oppose — 4.1%
No opinion / Not sure — 10.5%

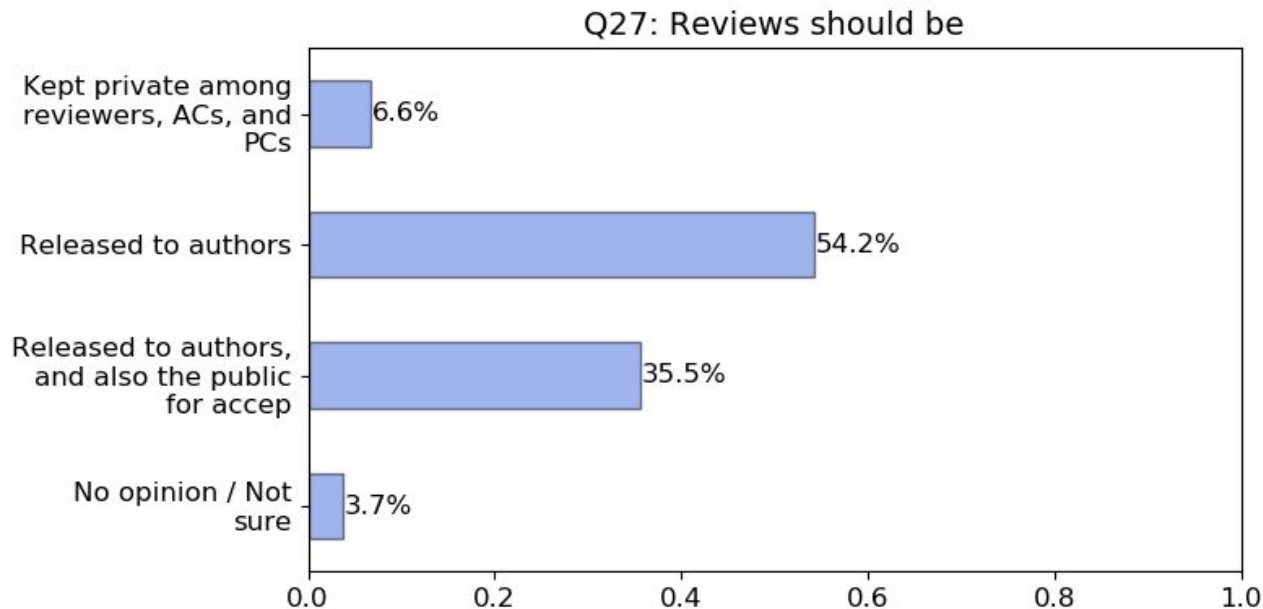72%

16%

Review Form Structure

- Review forms can vary from a single text box to many fine-grained questions

- A significant majority supported (65%) a minimal amount of structure in review forms, although a minority (24%) preferred more structure.

Q24: What format of review form do you prefer for *ACL conference

Category	Percentage
Much structure, commenting on various aspects of t	23.7%
Minimal structure, such as strengths/weaknesses/qu	64.7%
No structure, a single text box/score	8.7%
No opinion / Not sure	2.9%

- Clear trend that more experienced reviewers preferred less structure.

Review Transparency

- To whom should information about reviews be shared?
- 54% preferred that reviews be released only to authors, but a notable minority of 36% preferred public release of reviews.

Q27: Reviews should be

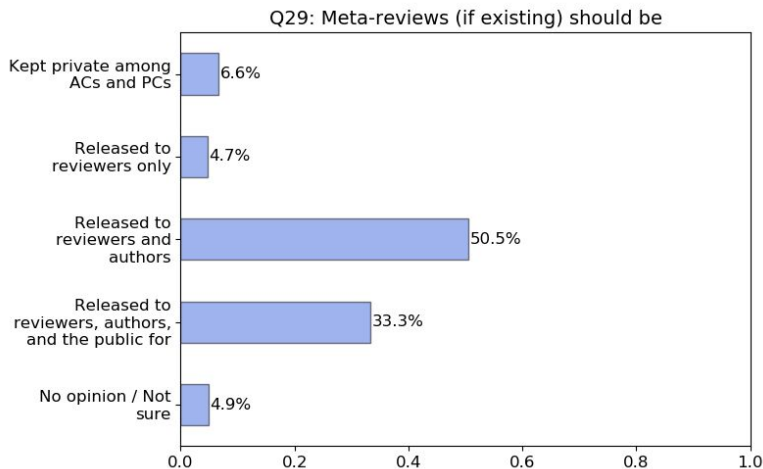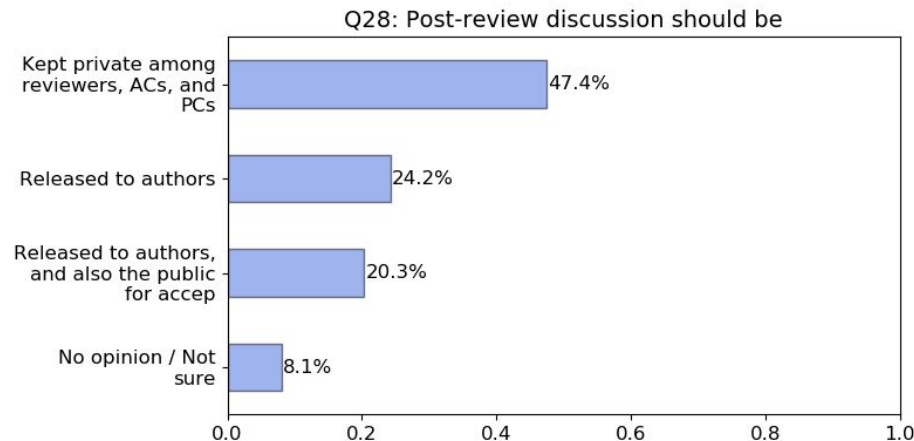| Category	Percentage
Kept private among reviewers, ACs, and PCs	6.6%
Released to authors	54.2%
Released to authors, and also the public for accep	35.5%
No opinion / Not sure	3.7%

Review Transparency by Demographics

- **Experience reviewing:** Those with no experience reviewing more often favored public release of reviews.
- **Gender:** 26% of female respondents approved vs. 40% for those who were male or preferred not to state gender.
- **PC experience:** Those with PC experience were strongly against public release of reviews (only 14% agree).
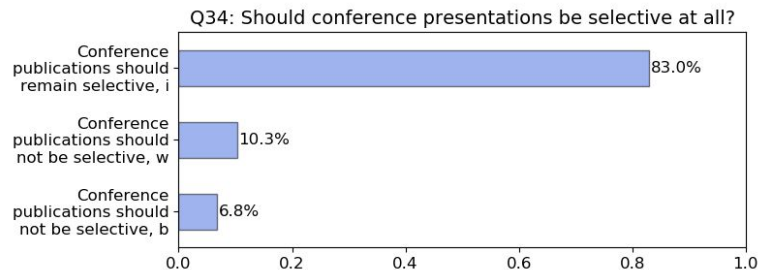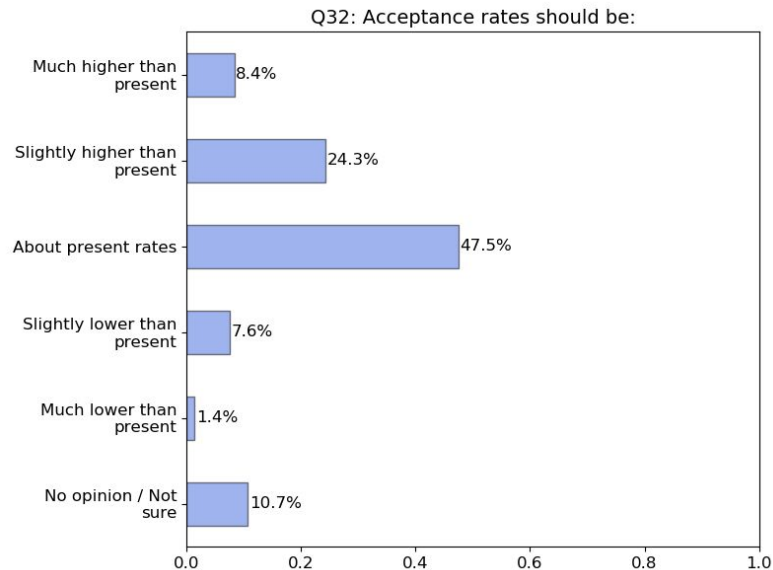
Post-review Discussion / Meta-review Transparency

- Discussion and meta-review also play an important part in decisions, should they be released?

- 47% preferred that post-review discussion not be released to authors, remaining half split between release to authors and public release.

- 83% support for releasing meta-reviews to authors, 33% also in favor of public release.
- Preference for public release reduced with reviewer experience.

Q28: Post-review discussion should be

Option	%
Kept private among reviewers, ACs, and PCs	47.4%
Released to authors	24.2%
Released to authors, and also the public for accep	20.3%
No opinion / Not sure	8.1%

Q29: Meta-reviews (if existing) should be

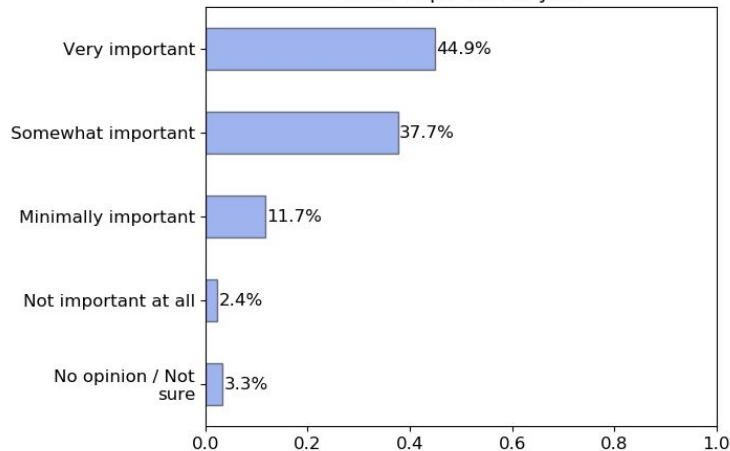| Option	%
Kept private among ACs and PCs	6.6%
Released to reviewers only	4.7%
Released to reviewers and authors	50.5%
Released to reviewers, authors, and the public for	33.3%
No opinion / Not sure	4.9%

Acceptance Rates

- Near majority (47%) in favor of keeping the status quo acceptance rates, while 32% were in favor of increasing, 9% were in favor of decreasing.

- Strong overall support (83%) for the status quo for conference publications remaining selective.

Q32: Acceptance rates should be:

Category	Percentage
Much higher than present	8.4%
Slightly higher than present	24.3%
About present rates	47.5%
Slightly lower than present	7.6%
Much lower than present	1.4%
No opinion / Not sure	10.7%

Q34: Should conference presentations be selective at all?

| Category	Percentage
Conference publications should remain selective, i	83.0%
Conference publications should not be selective, w	10.3%
Conference publications should not be selective, b	6.8%

Timing of Review Release

- The great majority said that the timing between review release and the next conference deadlines was at least somewhat important, (83%-14%)

- People would prefer at least 2-3 weeks, and many (39%) said at least a month was preferable.
- Female respondents slightly preferred having more time between review release and the next deadline.

Q37: Is the amount of time between release of reviews and the next conference deadline important to you?
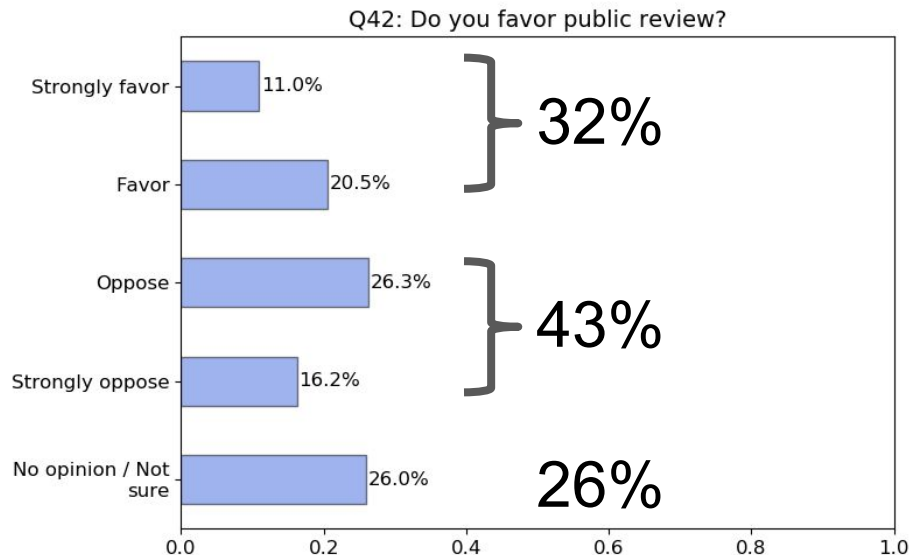
Very important	44.9%
Somewhat important	37.7%
Minimally important	11.7%
Not important at all	2.4%
No opinion / Not sure	3.3%

Q38: How long is the minimal time that you would like between reviews and next submissions?

1 week+	7.7%
2-3 weeks+	43.3%
1 month+	35.4%
2 months+	4.3%
No opinion / Not sure	9.3%
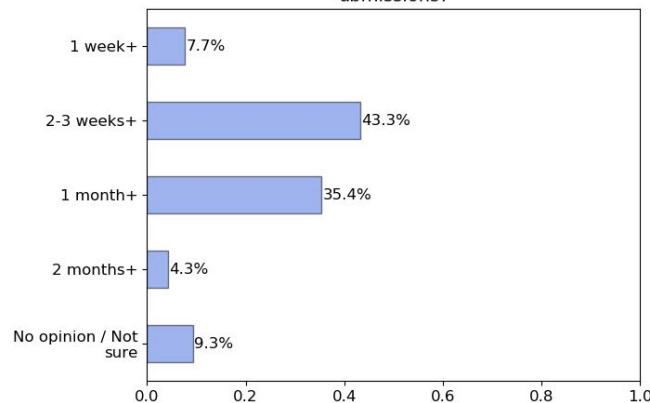
Public Review

- A review process where papers are public, and the public can comment.

- Opinions mixed: 43% opposed, 32% in favor. 37% held strong opinions.
- Those with experience in conferences with public review tended to favor 50%-30%, those who did not were opposed 27%-47%.

Q42: Do you favor public review?

Strongly favor — 11.0%
Favor — 20.5%
Oppose — 26.3%
Strongly oppose — 16.2%
No opinion / Not sure — 26.0%

32%

43%

26%

Public Review by Demographics

- **Reviewing experience:** Support for public review inversely correlated with reviewing experience.
- **Gender:** Female respondents were less likely to support public review than male respondents (19%-55% vs. 36%-39%). However, fewer female respondents had experience with public review, so two effects may interact.

Other Comments/Ideas

- Many many ideas in open discussion, see full report! Selection below:

- **Revise-and-resubmit**, with sticky reviews that carry over to the next conference? Prevent submission of minimally/unaltered papers?
- **Space out conferences** more throughout the year, or move to **rolling submission cycle**?
- **Shorten review cycle** significantly (e.g. 2 weeks) via better automation?
- **OpenReview** (e.g. ICLR) combination of public review/author discussion may be worth trying once, perhaps in lower-stakes setting first?