



# Collaboration and the Role of Philanthropy

*Findings from an October 2023 Survey of Adults Nationwide*

# About the Survey

Echelon Insights, in collaboration with Benenson Strategy Group, conducted a survey on behalf of the Walton Family Foundation to examine views on collaboration around issues facing the country and how philanthropic organizations could support collaboration.

The survey was fielded online from October 5-11, 2023 in English and Spanish among 1,445 adults in the US, including a base sample of 1,023 adults nationwide and an additional oversample of 422 adults born in 1981 or later (for a total of 830 Gen Z and Millennial adults in the sample) using non-probability sampling.

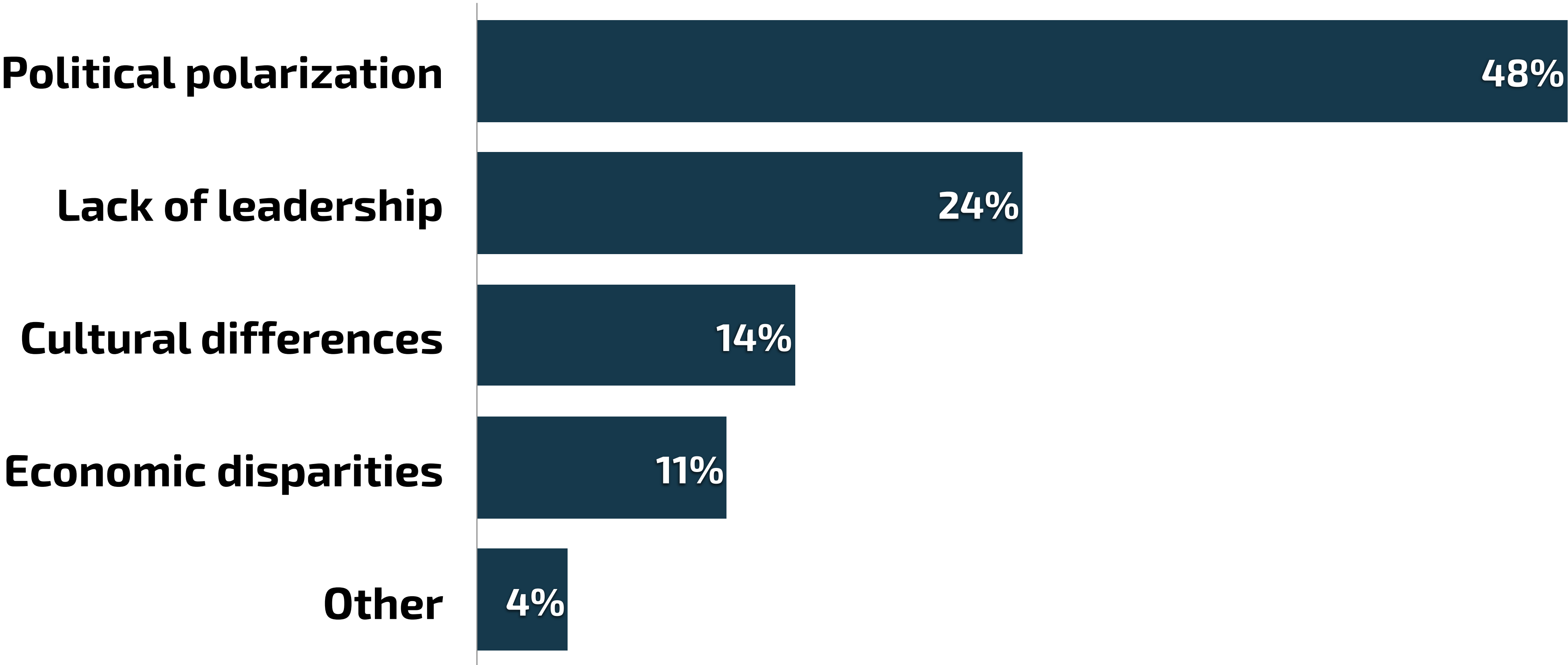
More information about the methodology can be found at the end of this report.

# Key Findings

- **Political polarization** is seen as the biggest barrier to collaboration today.
- **There is broad agreement on the importance of compromise for successful collaboration (88%),** and Americans are much more likely to say that it is important to work together get things done, even if it means compromising (75%) than they are to say it is more important to fight for your values even if it means not finding a solution very often (15%).
- **The vast majority of Americans see the value of listening to people with whom they disagree (85%),** and believe those people can still play a role in solving problems in our society (78%).
- **Expanding access to career pathways (63%)** and **protecting and conserving water sources (61%)** are the issues on which Americans think collaboration is most likely possible, followed by improving public education (54%) and creating economic opportunity (52%).
- **Americans see philanthropy as well-positioned to bring people together.** While they tend to think social media, traditional media, and elected officials divide us, a majority (56%) think mission-driven foundations and philanthropies provide a way for people to connect and work together.

# **Current Challenges and Barriers to Collaboration**

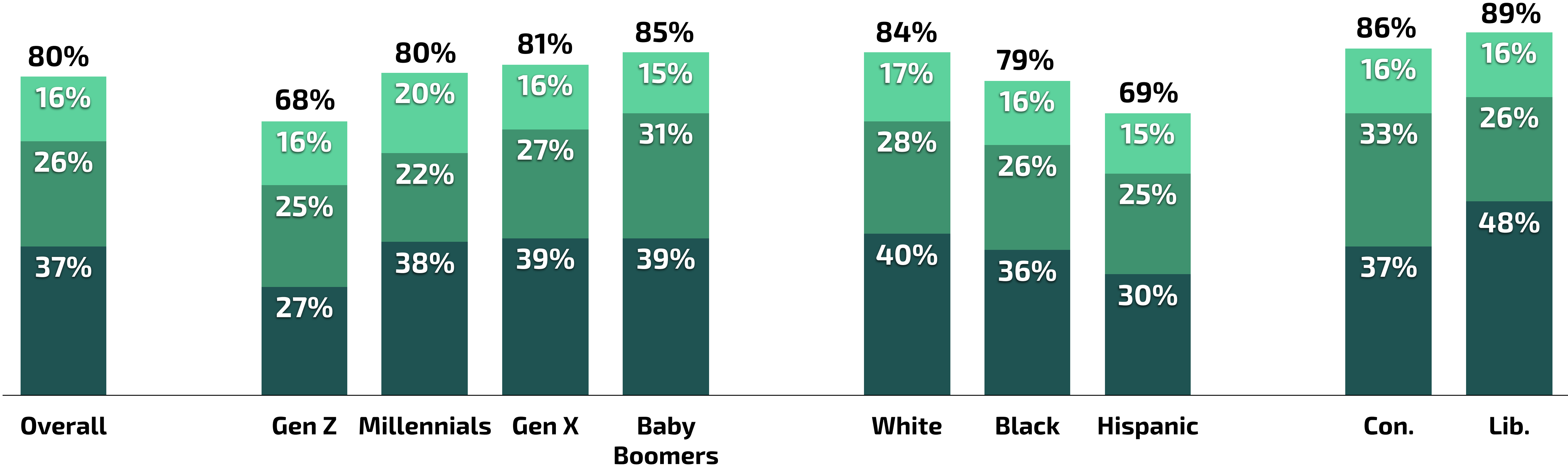
# Political polarization seen as biggest barrier to collaboration



# Many worry about how divided our society is becoming

I worry about how divided our society is becoming.

Strongly agree    Agree    Somewhat agree

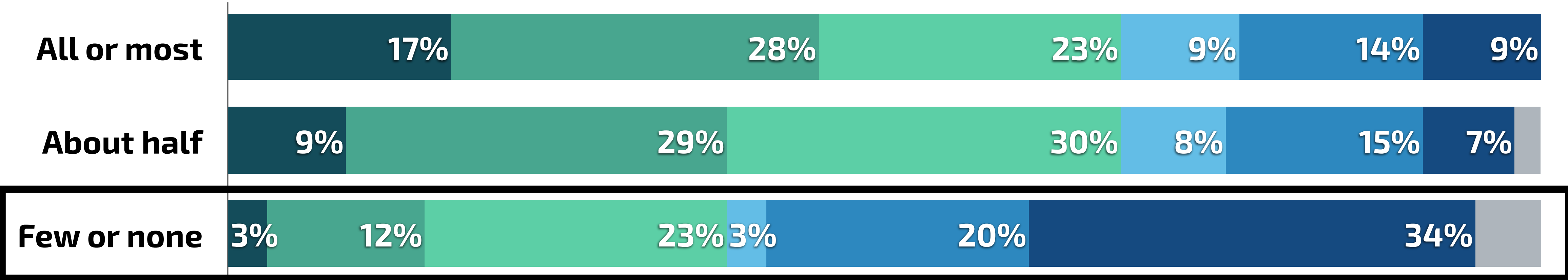


# Americans who feel like they are in the political minority in their social circle are less likely to discuss political and societal issues

■ Basically every day
■ A few times a week
■ A few times a month
■ Once a month
■ Less than once a month
■ Not at all
■ Don't know

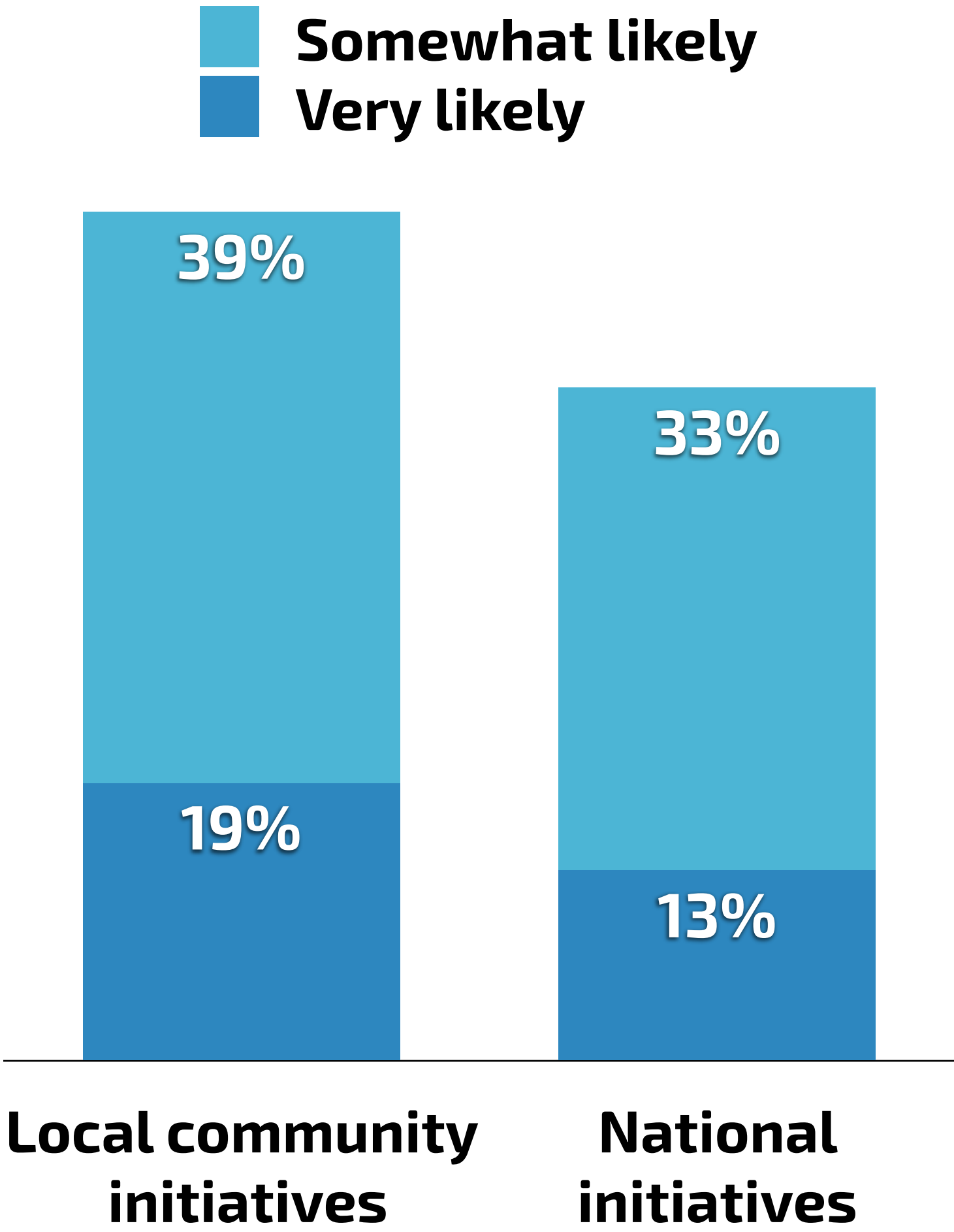


## How many in social circle have similar political views



**Fewer than 1 in 5 say they are “very likely” to get involved in efforts to bridge divides and increase collaboration, though local initiatives garner more interest than national**

**Likelihood of getting involved in initiatives that focus on bridging divides and increasing collaboration**



Q. How likely are you to get involved in local community initiatives that focus on bridging divides and increasing collaboration in your community? Q. How likely are you to get involved in national initiatives that focus on bridging divides and increasing collaboration on a national level?  
Note: Other response options were “Not too likely,” “Not at all likely,” and “Unsure.”



# **The Good News**

# More than 6 in 10 feel confident we can overcome challenges by working together, and agree that what we have in common outweighs differences

Strongly agree

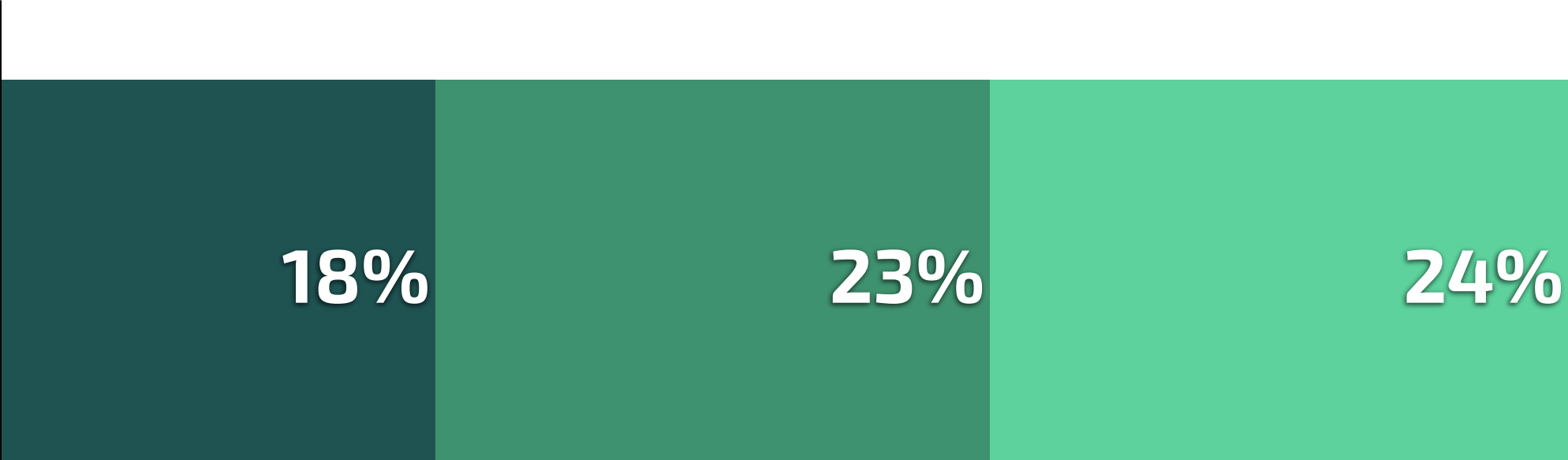
Agree

Somewhat agree

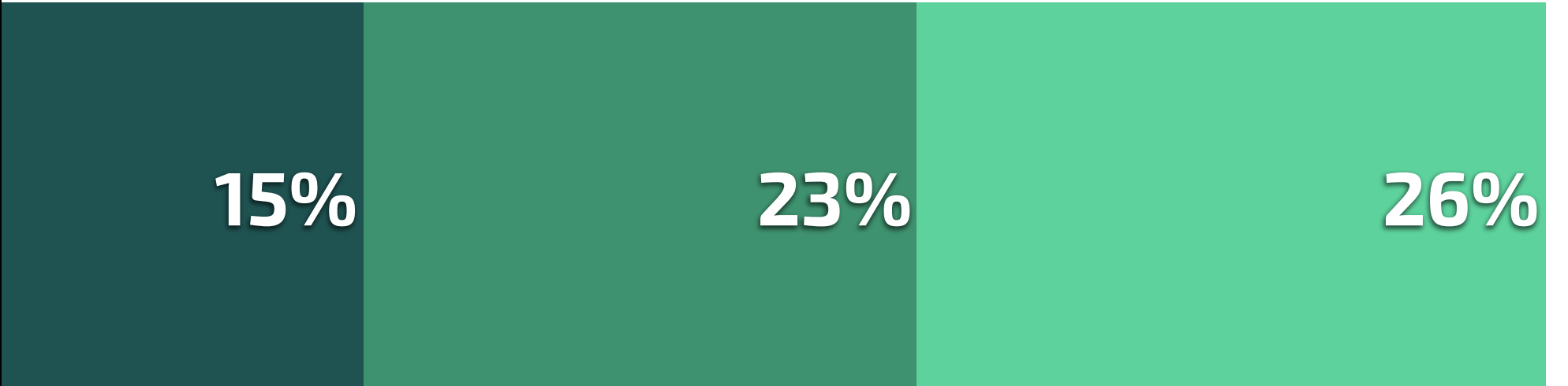
TOTAL AGREE

TOTAL DISAGREE

No matter the challenges we face, I am confident our country can overcome them if we work together.



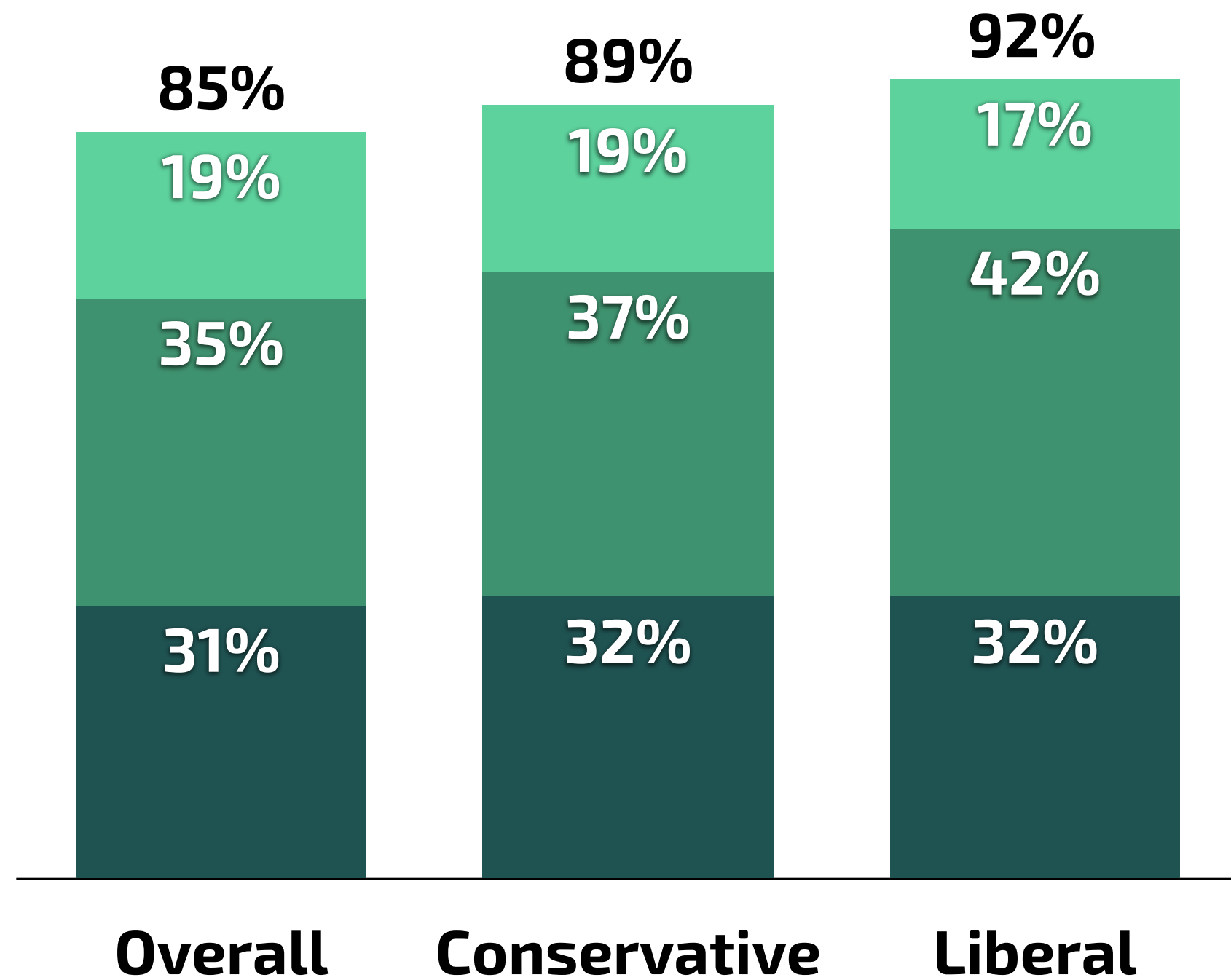
Americans have more in common with one another than they have differences.



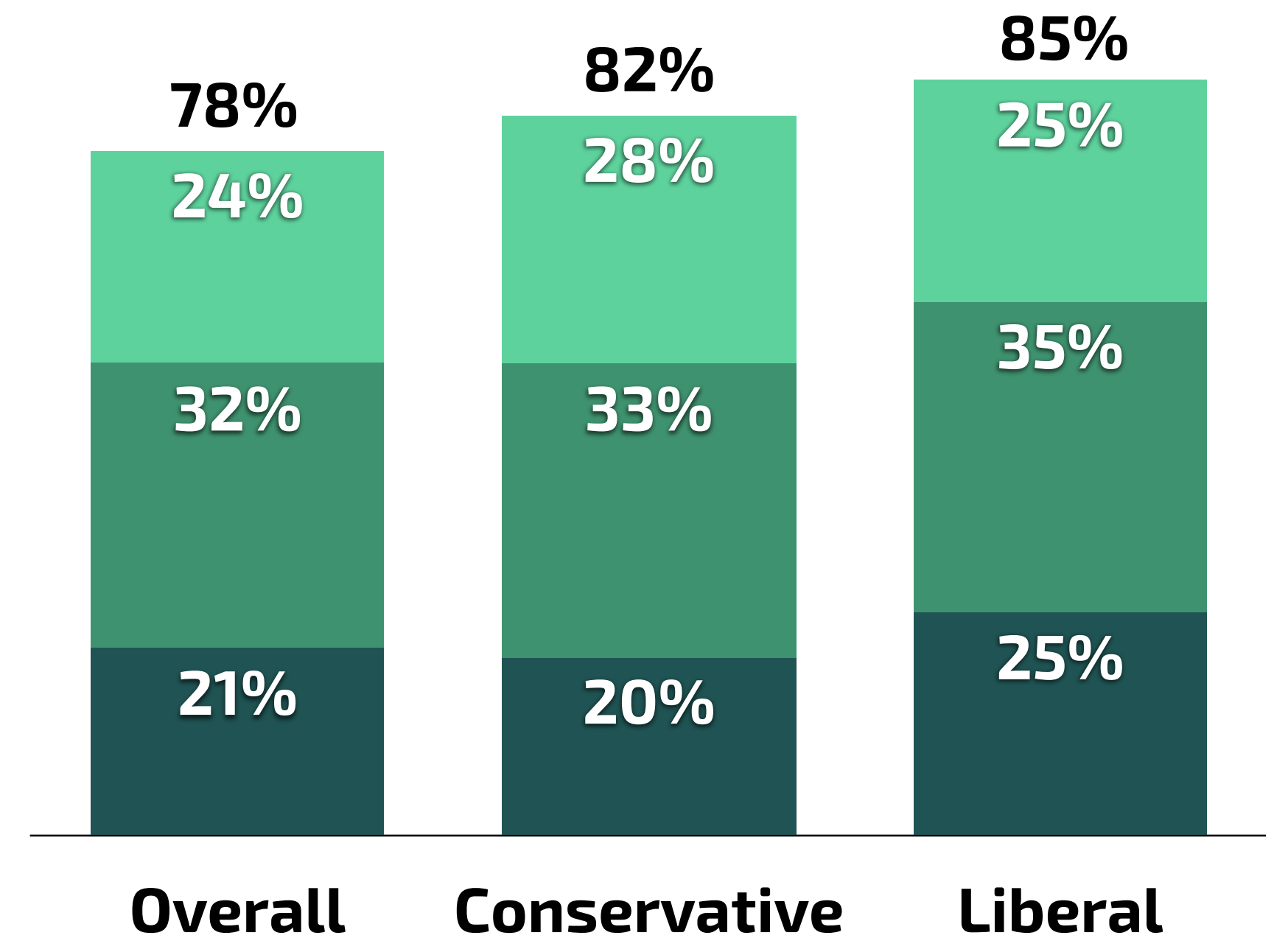
# Vast majority still value those with whom they disagree

I think there is value in hearing what people think about issues, even if we don't agree on everything.

I believe that people with whom I disagree on important issues can still play a role in solving problems our society faces.

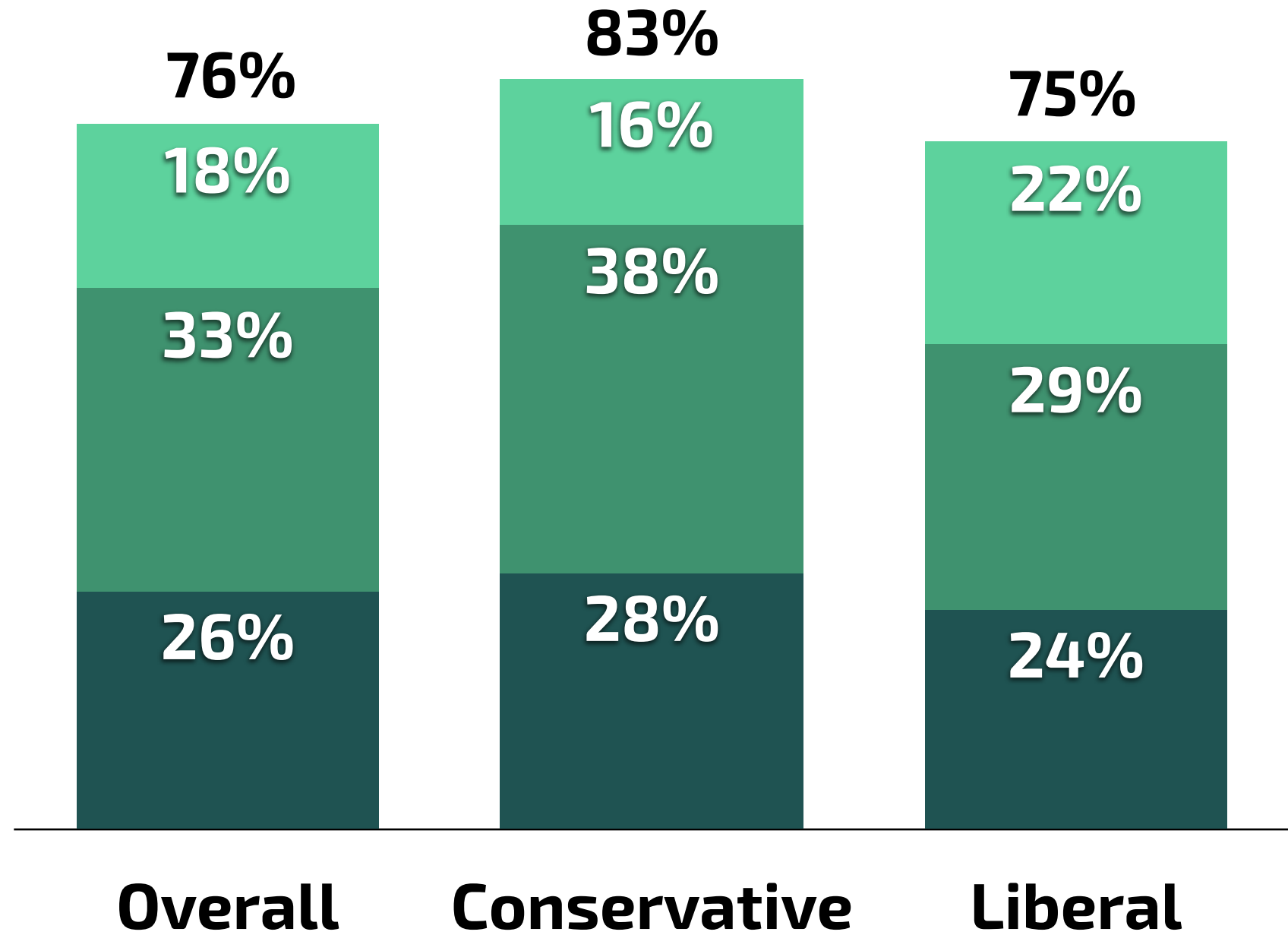


■ Somewhat agree  
■ Agree  
■ Strongly agree



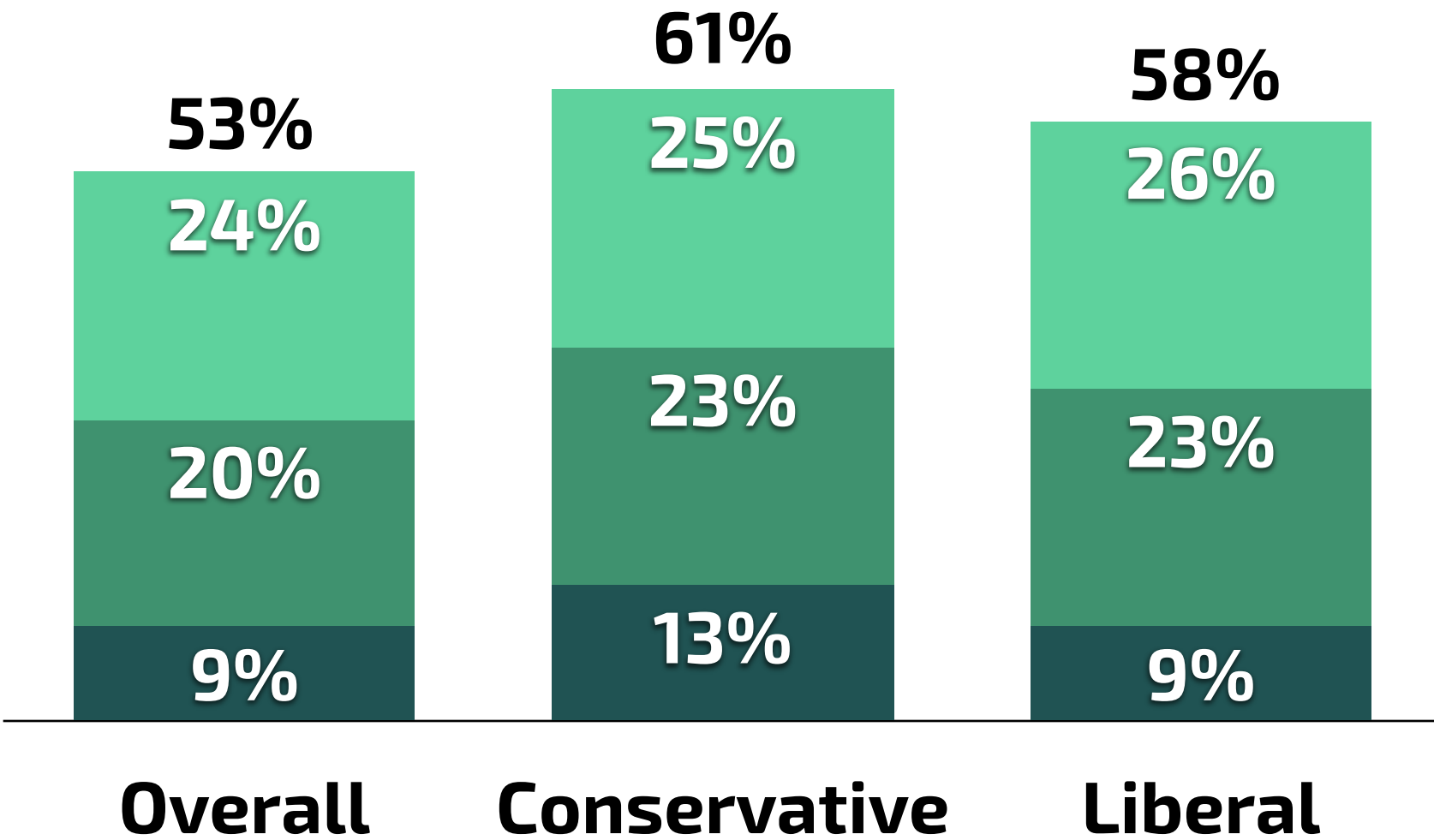
# Most say they can be friends with those they disagree with, though fewer are convinced political opponents are “generally” good people

I can be close friends with someone even if we disagree on political and social issues.



I think people with different political views from mine are generally good people who just have the wrong ideas.

■ Somewhat agree  
■ Agree  
■ Strongly agree

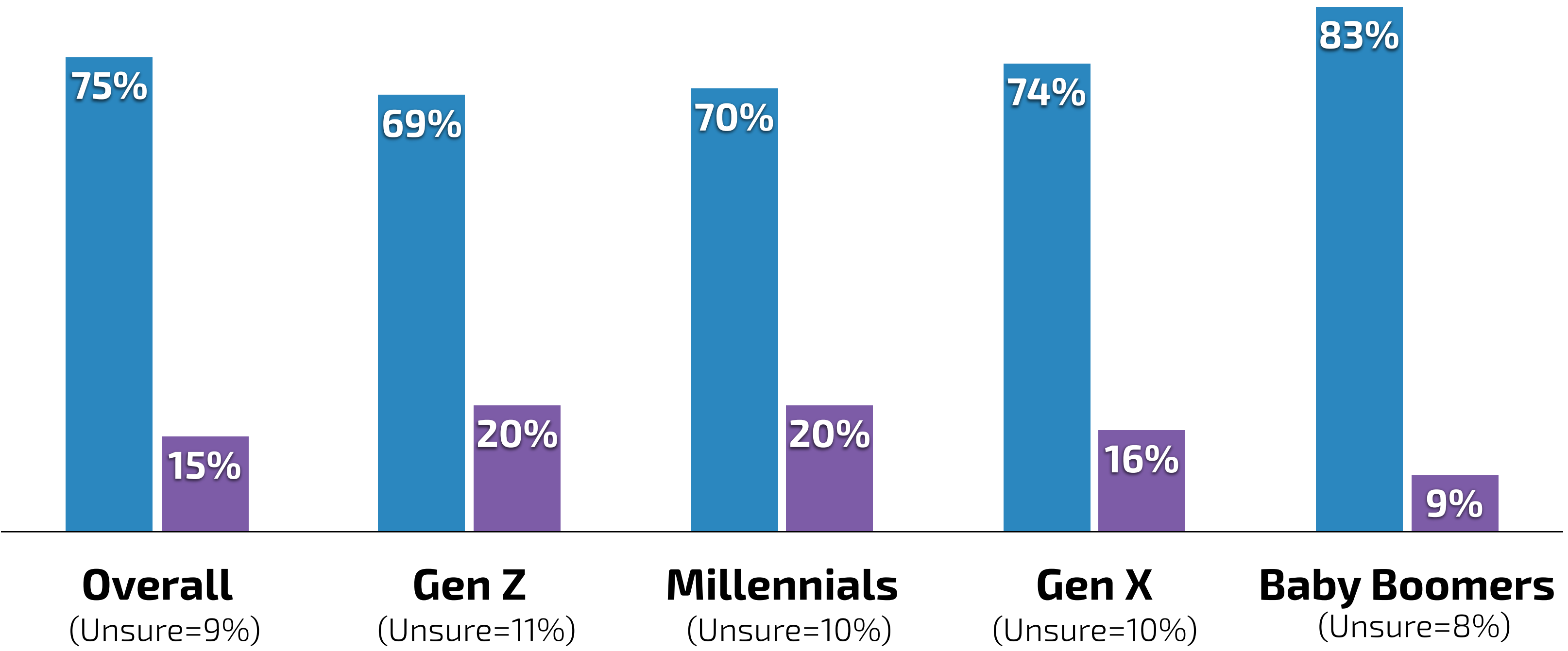


Q. For each of the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree. Note: “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Somewhat disagree”, and “Neither agree nor disagree” are not shown in the chart.

# Americans broadly favor working together and compromising over letting values impede progress

It is important to work together to get things done, even if this means sometimes compromising on what you want

It is important to consistently fight for your values, even if this means not finding a solution very often



# Overwhelming majority see compromise and finding common ground as important for collaboration

■ Very important    
 ■ Somewhat important    
 ■ Not too important    
 ■ Not important at all    
 ■ Unsure    
 VERY/SOME. IMP.



# Being willing to listen, compromise, and focus on shared concerns or common ground seen as necessary for collaboration



“It means being open-minded, **listening to other people's opinions** and **putting personal agendas to one side.**”

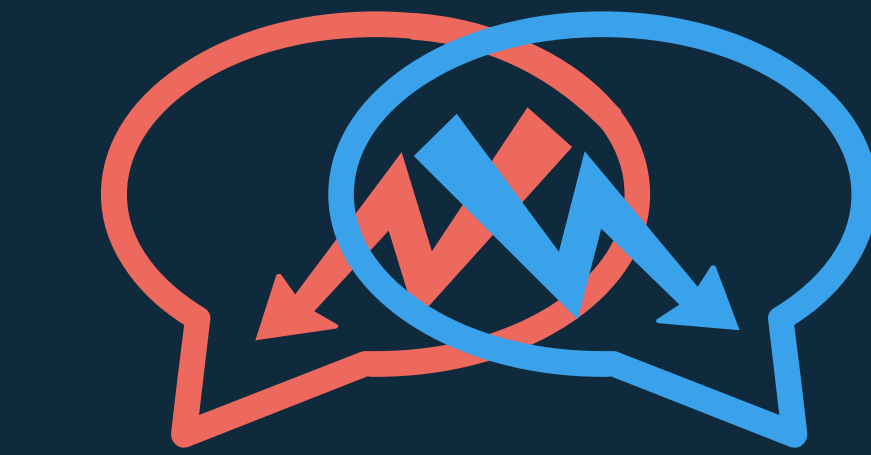


“It involves **actively listening and open communication.** Go over the 5 W's: who this is affecting, what exactly the concern is, when did this become a problem, where in our community needs our attention, and why have the issues escalated to the place it's at.”



“I think the most important thing to be able to collaborate with others is **being able to meet in the middle.** Not everyone is going to agree completely with each other, but **we have to find common ground and be able to make sacrifices where needed.**”

**Americans also recognize how political leaders and organizations can either hinder or advance collaboration**

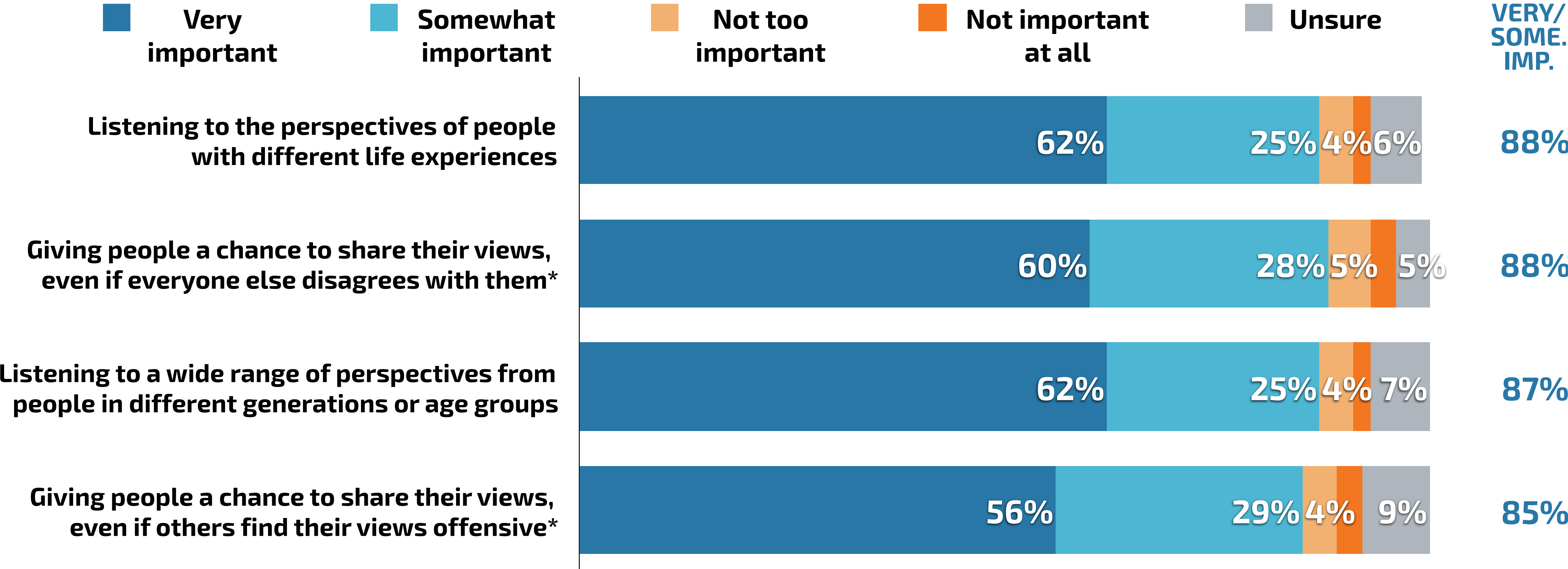


“Successful collaboration requires dialog, data, listening and compromise. **The focus should be on taking action to get something done to achieve progress even if the result is small steps.** Inaction seems to be where our government is given the vast political divide.”

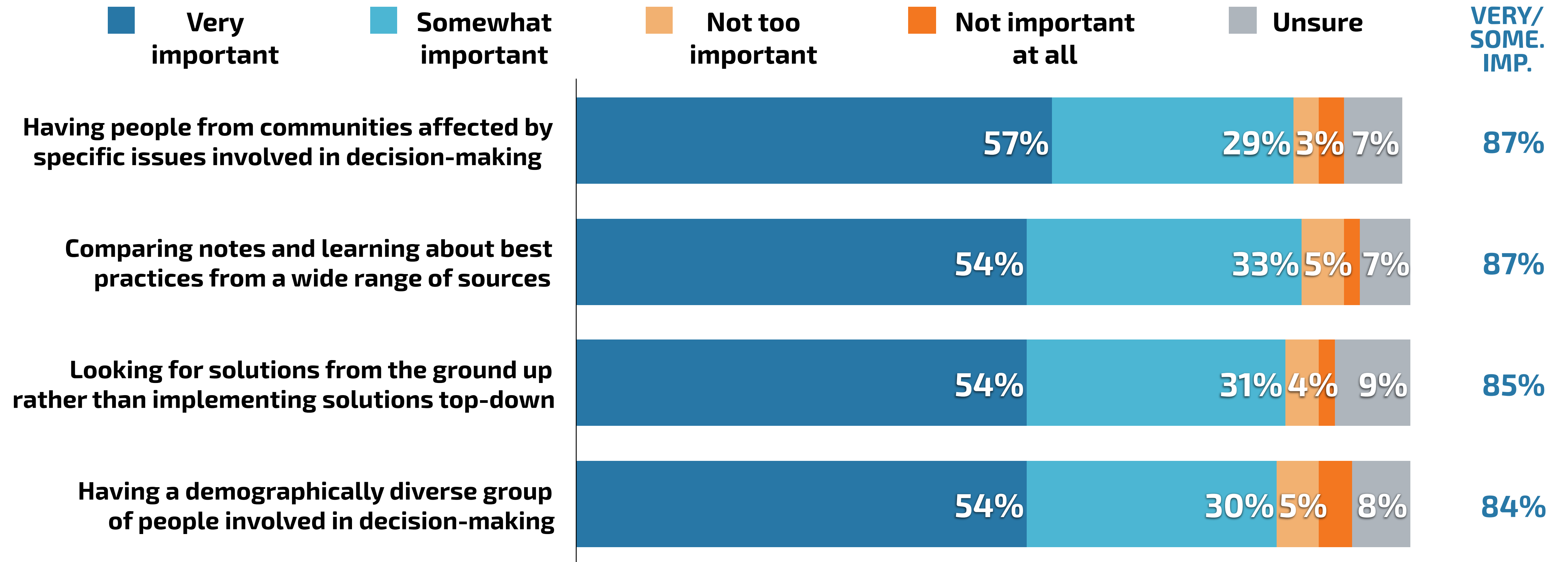
“It takes **political leaders dedicated to de-polarizing the nation** rather than further dividing, and it takes **organizations dedicated to helping people rather than political agendas.**”



# More than 8 in 10 believe it is important to listen to people of all ages, experiences, and perspectives

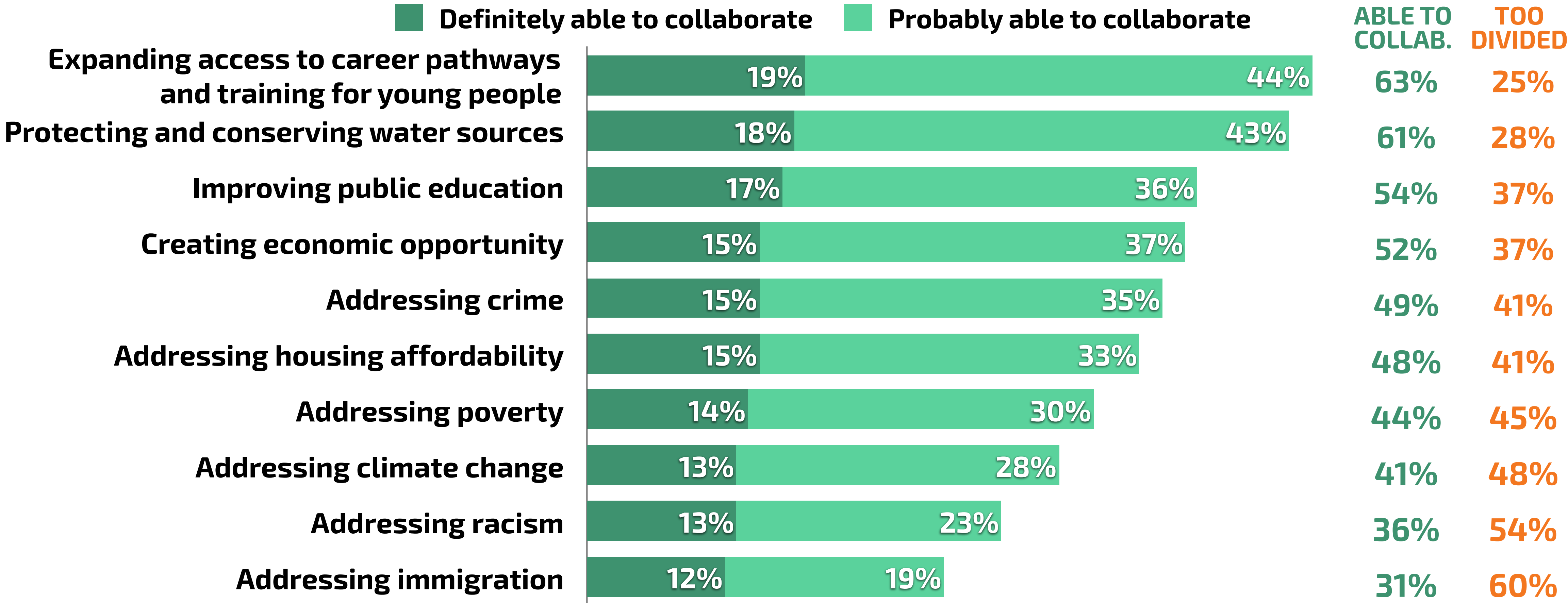


# Involving community stakeholders and people with diverse backgrounds and sharing best practices also seen as important



# **Opportunities for Collaboration**

# Americans are most hopeful about collaboration on expanding career pathways and protecting water sources

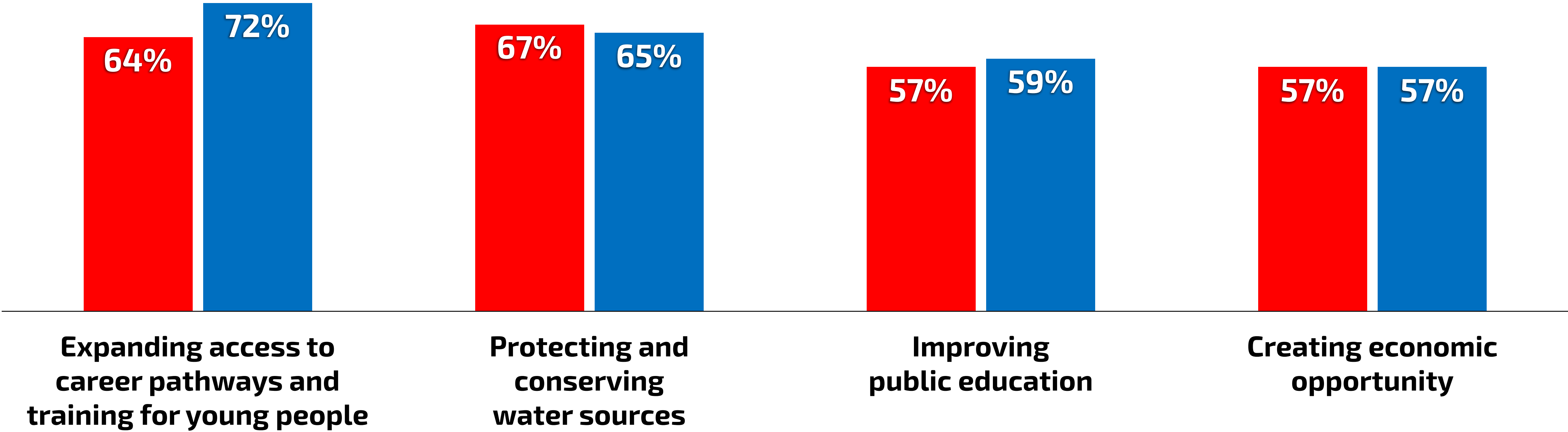


Q. On each of the following issues, please indicate whether you think people in the US will be able to work together and overcome political division, or if you think people are too divided to collaborate on the issue.  
 Note: "Too divided" includes Definitely / Probably too divided. "Unsure" not shown on chart.

# Bipartisan majority believe people will be able to work together on key issue areas

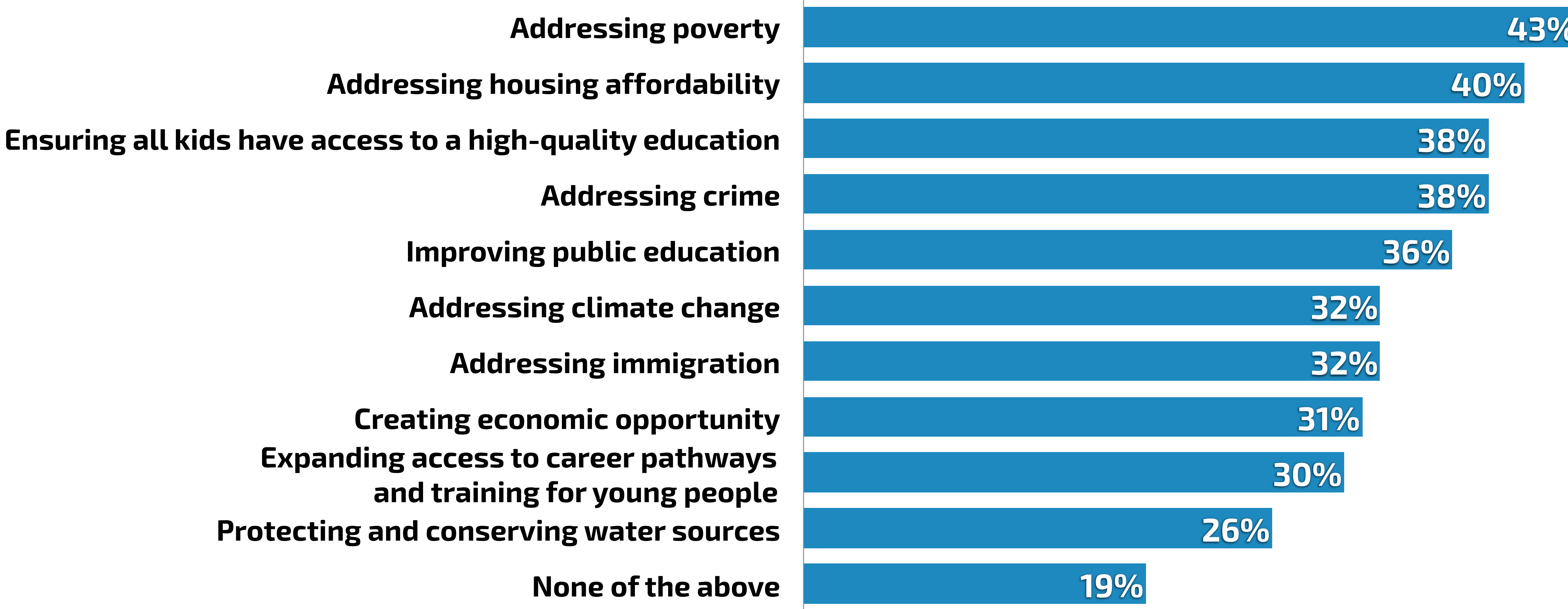
*% Definitely/Probably able to collaborate*

■ **GOP**      ■ **Dem**



Q. On each of the following issues, please indicate whether you think people in the US will be able to work together and overcome political division, or if you think people are too divided to collaborate on the issue.  
Note: Other response options were "Definitely too divided," "Probably too divided," and "Unsure."

# Addressing poverty, housing affordability, and education among top areas Americans say they would be interested in getting involved



**Some differences in level of interest suggest Americans may be more likely to engage on issues that could affect them or people they know**



Though addressing poverty and housing affordability ranked among top interests across many demographic groups, **lower-income Americans** were more likely to express interest in getting involved than those with higher incomes, and **Black Americans** were more likely to express interest than people in other racial and ethnic groups.



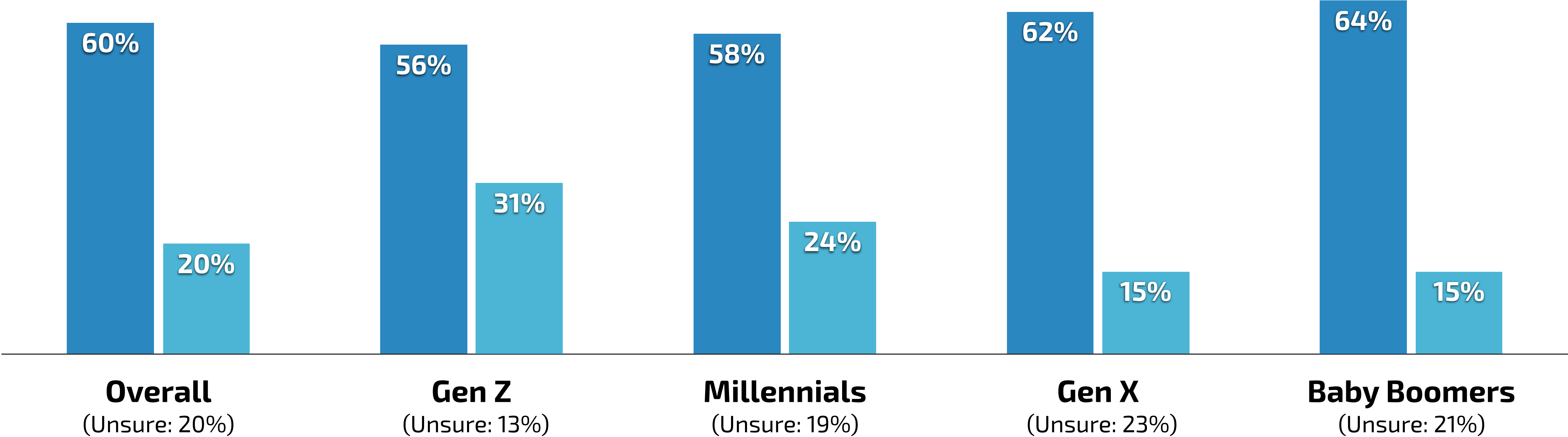
**Younger generations** and **people with children under age 18** were more likely to express interest in getting involved in education initiatives and expanding career pathways for young people.

# **Philanthropy as a Unifier**

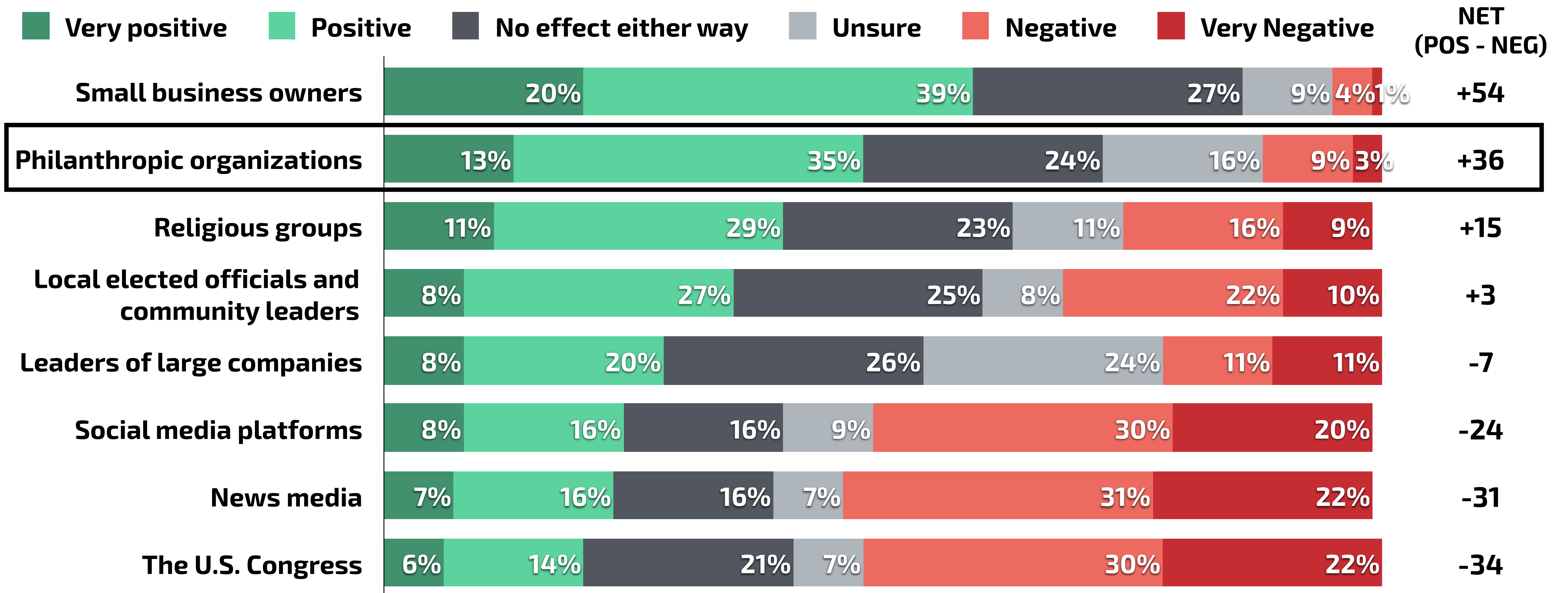


# Majority believe collaboration will be driven by people and organizations outside of government

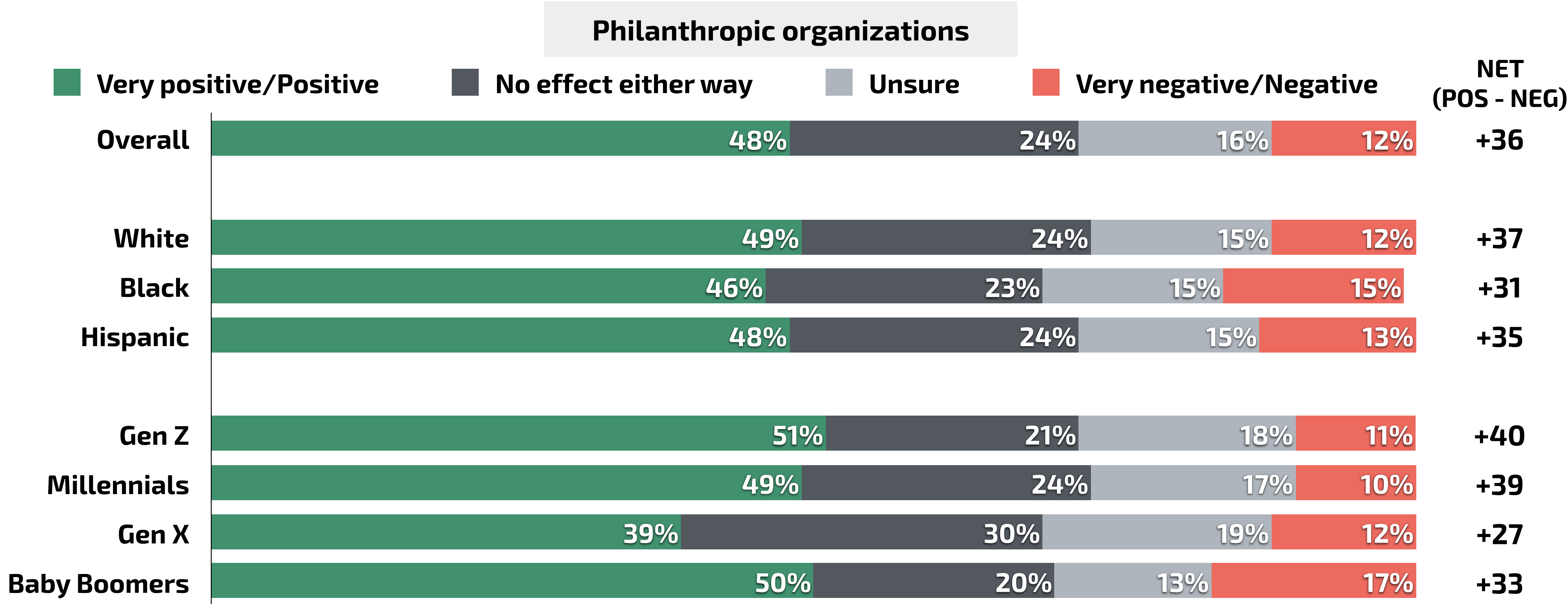
■ People and organizations outside of government      ■ Elected officials



# Philanthropic organizations and small business owners seen as having a more positive effect on collaboration than other entities

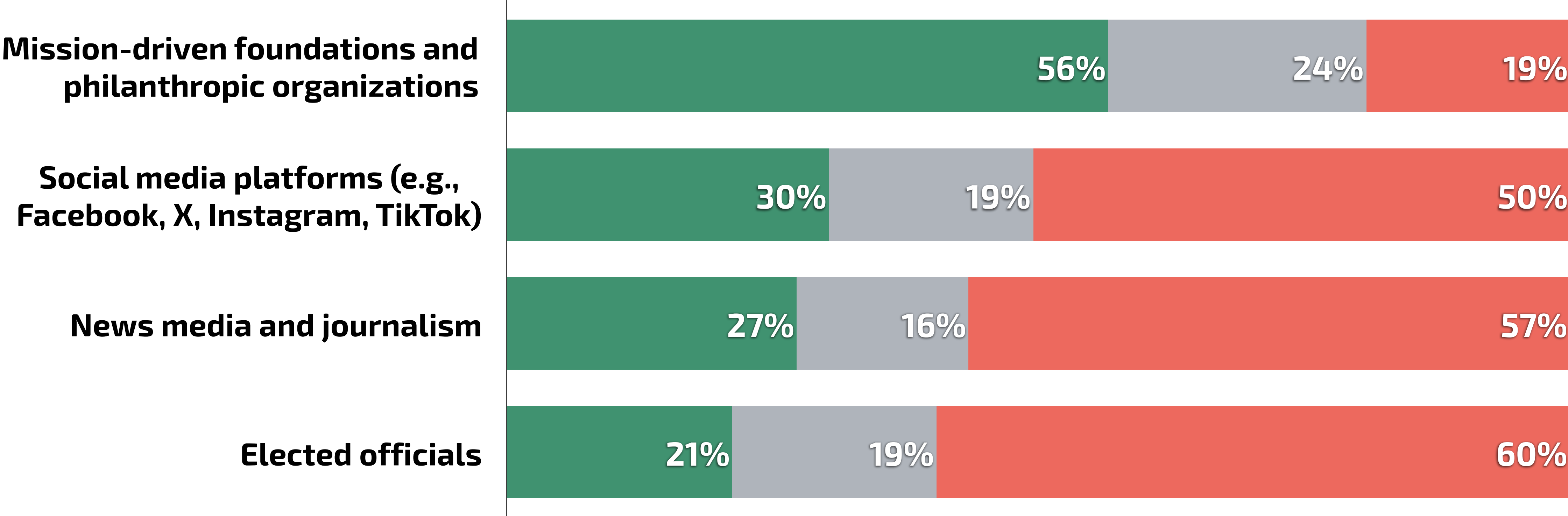


# Philanthropic organizations seen as having net-positive effect on collaboration by all generations and racial and ethnic groups



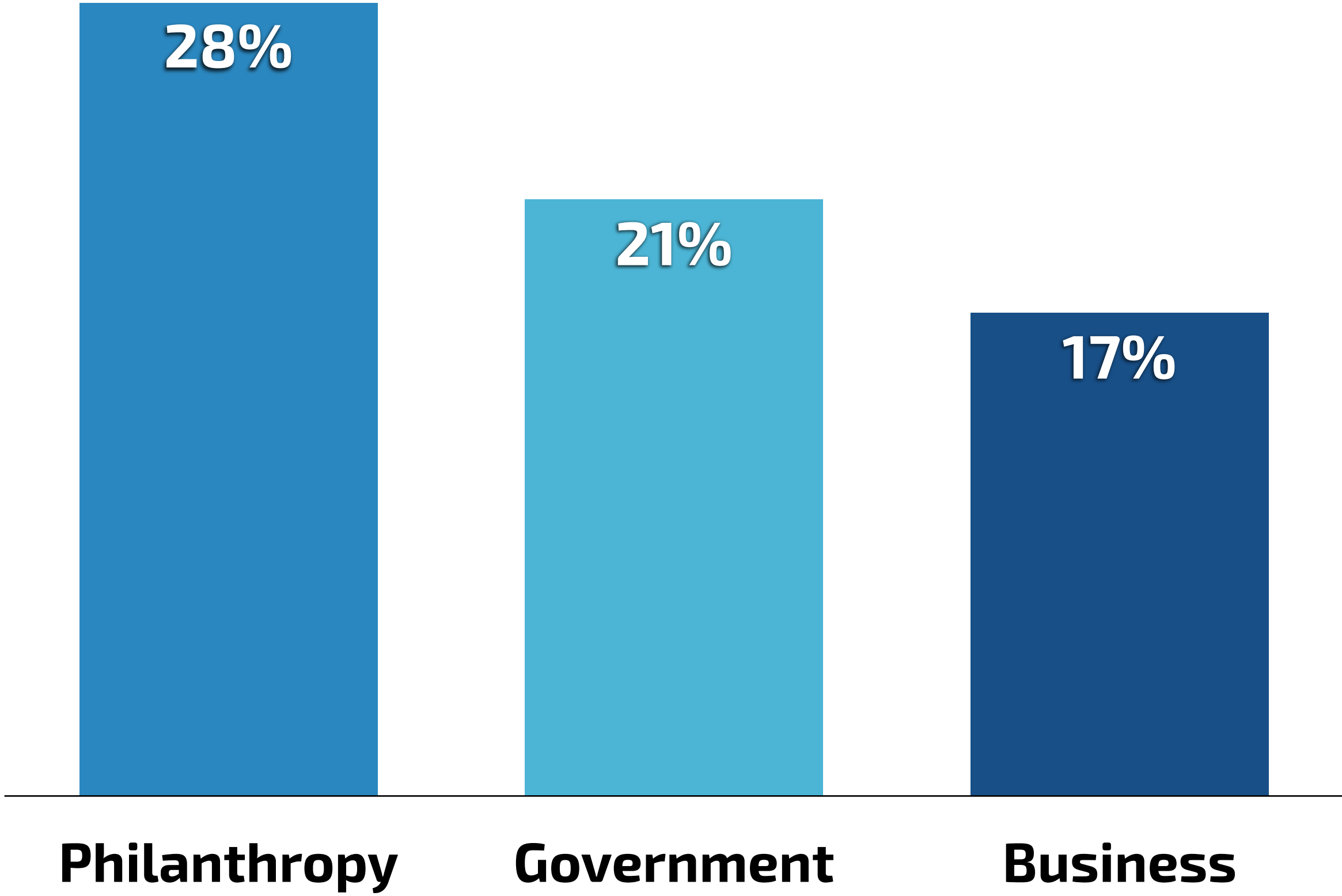
# Most believe philanthropic organizations provide a way for people to work together while elected officials and media divide people

■ Provide a way for people to connect and work together
 ■ Unsure
 ■ Foster negativity and divide people



**When asked which sector is most likely to bridge divides, more chose philanthropy than government or business**

**Most likely to help bridge divides and collaborate on issues facing the country**



Q. Which of the following sectors do you think is most likely to help bridge divides and collaborate on issues facing the country today?  
Note: 33% said Unsure.

## **We asked Americans:**

*If a philanthropic organization wants to help foster collaboration on issues facing the country, what do you think would be the best way for them to help?*

**Here were some of the top ways they said philanthropies could help . . .**



## Connect People

- Facilitate connection and build partnerships
- Encourage open and respectful communication
- Create diverse communities that allow people to exchange ideas and better understand each other

“They could support initiatives that **promote open dialogue, provide resources for community engagement, and facilitate partnerships** among different stakeholders.”

“Start by talking to the people, then local officials, small businesses, large businesses and government officials to **help get all involved in issues on the same page.**”

“Start a **community that is diverse** and get together with all of them and **let them freely share their views and ideas.** This will **give everyone insight on others’ lives** and how their day to day life is.”

“**Foster open and respectful communication platforms. Connect people from different ages, ideologies, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, etc** to allow for sharing of ideas and information with a goal of creative problem solving.”



## Be Open & Neutral

- Listen to and invite different perspectives
- Bring both sides / political parties to the table
- Provide neutral ground to facilitate discussion

“Listen to those they seek to help, and listen to both those who agree with them and those who don't so they can see the whole picture.”

“**Don't pick a side.** Try to actually try to figure out the best solutions. Get everyone on board. Leave politics out of it.”

“Have meetings that **invite people from both sides to offer their opinions** and answer people's questions.”

“**They need to be the ones who bring both sides to the table.**”

“Provide situations where two parties can **meet on neutral ground** to discuss issues.”





## Communicate

- Raise awareness and invite people to get involved
- Provide information about issues and address misinformation
- Amplify successful collaboration efforts

“**Make it known that they are willing to help** and provide a way for citizens to participate.”

“**Providing information** on different issues and **providing opportunities for people to get involved** aside from monetary donations.”

“Just simply getting people together and **stating facts**. There's **so much incorrect information being spread** so often.”

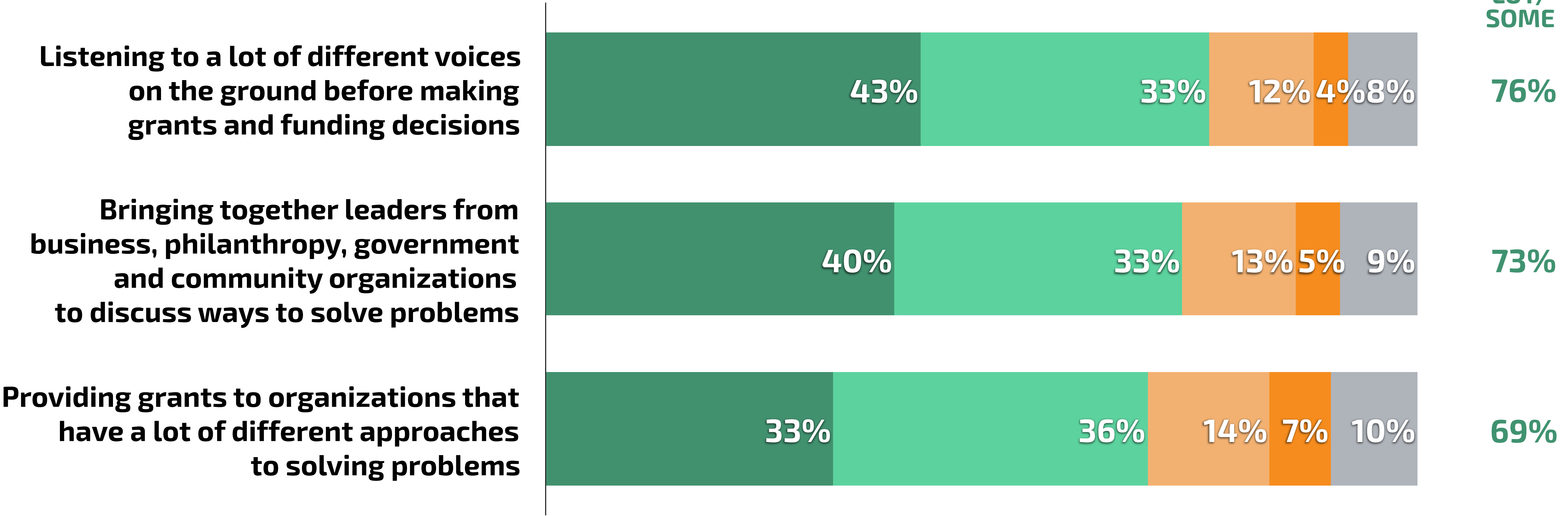
“**Find projects that offer a lot of middle ground** and get people working together to make progress, no matter how small, and **publicize it like crazy. Set an example of success.**”

“Continue setting up and advertising all the organizations formed. I would say this is where the positive side of social media comes in. **I would love to see and hear about these events going on.**”

# Americans recognize multiple ways philanthropies can help support collaboration and positive change

■ Would help a lot  
 ■ Would help some  
 ■ Would help just a little  
 ■ Would not help at all  
 ■ Unsure

WOULD HELP A LOT/SOME



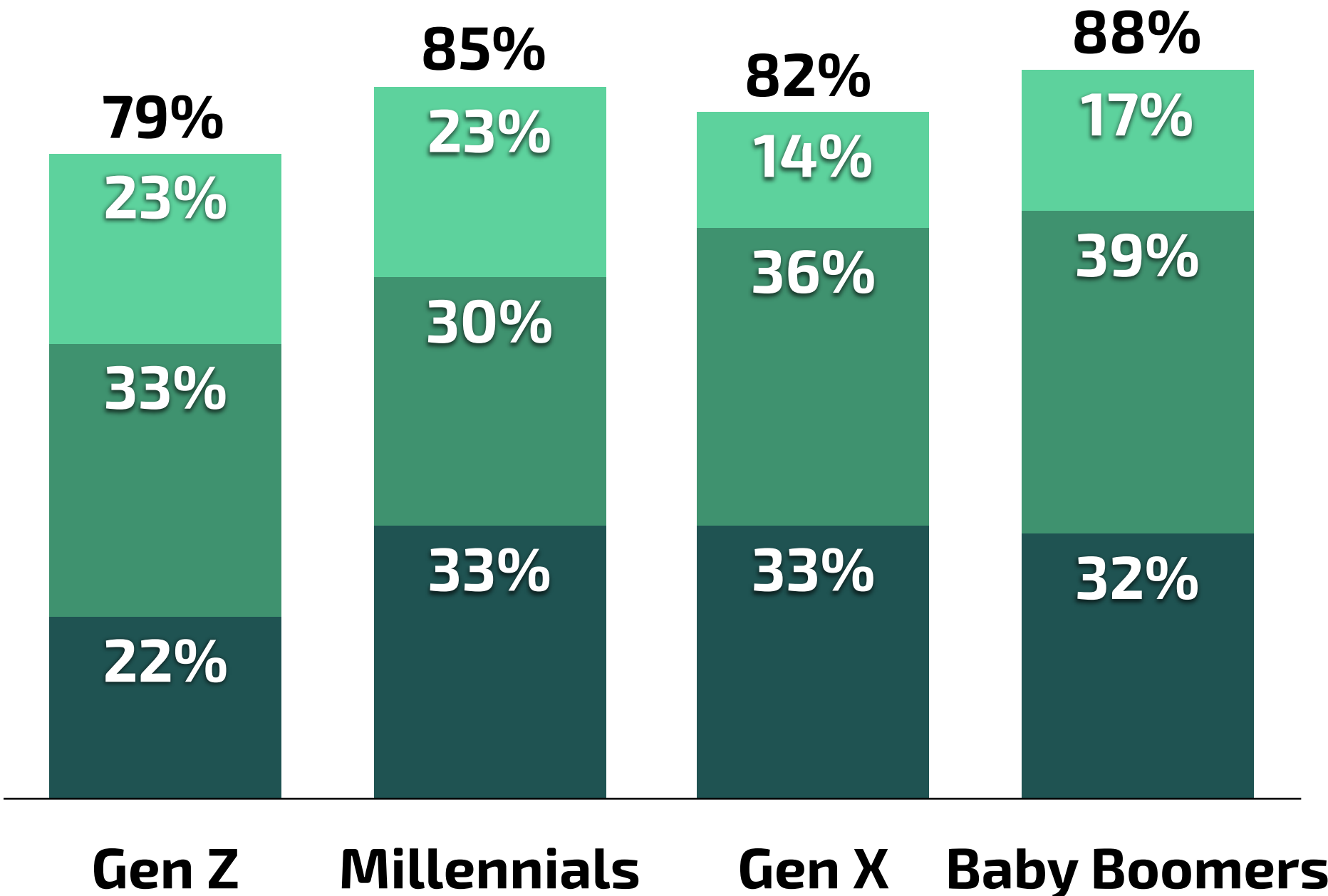
Q. If philanthropic organizations took the following actions, how much do you think it would help support collaboration and positive change?

# **Intergenerational Collaboration**

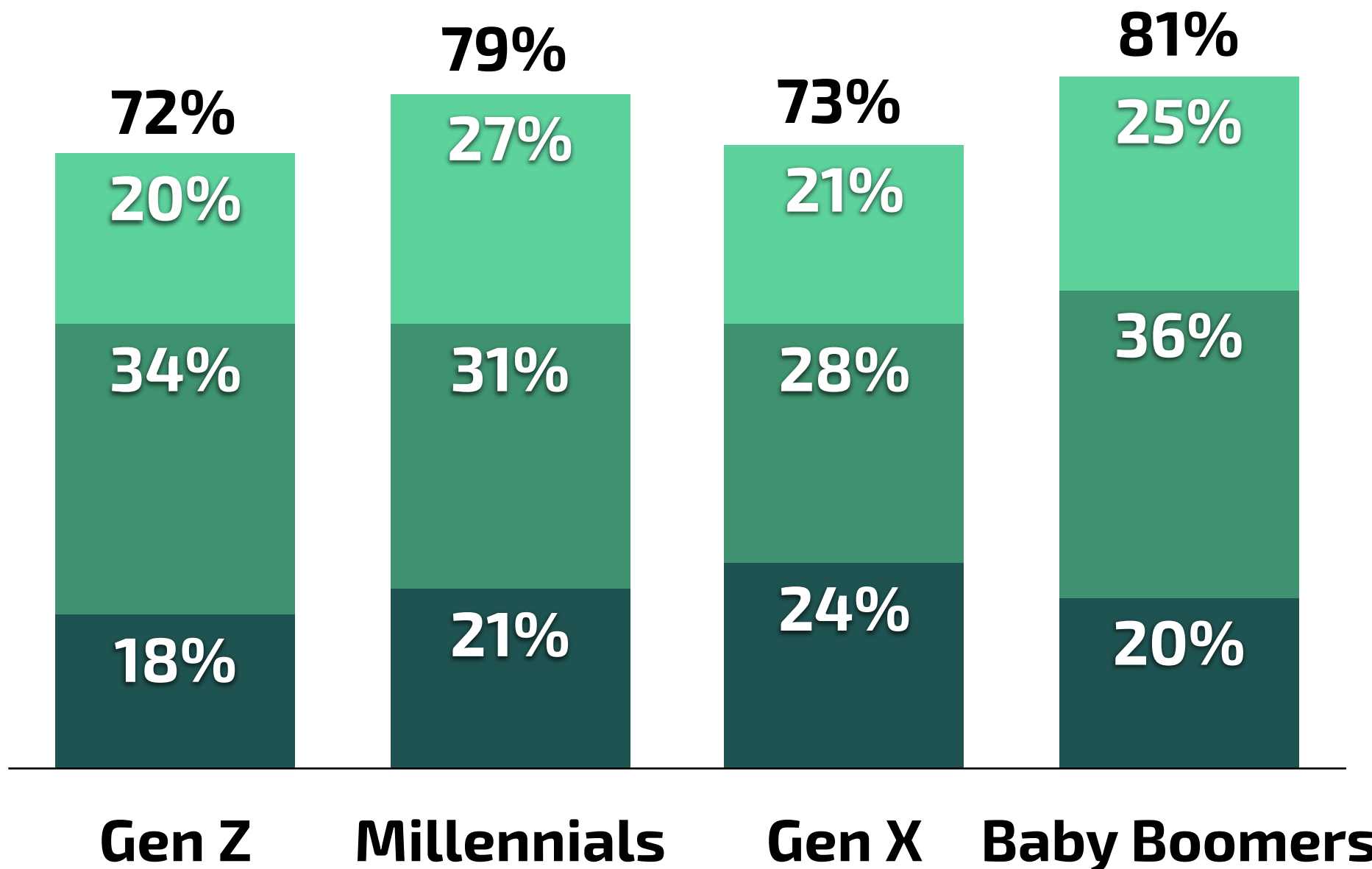
# In all cohorts, majority see value of hearing people's views and having them involved in problem solving even if they disagree

I think there is value in hearing what people think about issues, even if we don't agree on everything.

I believe that people with whom I disagree on important issues can still play a role in solving problems our society faces.



■ Somewhat agree  
■ Agree  
■ Strongly agree

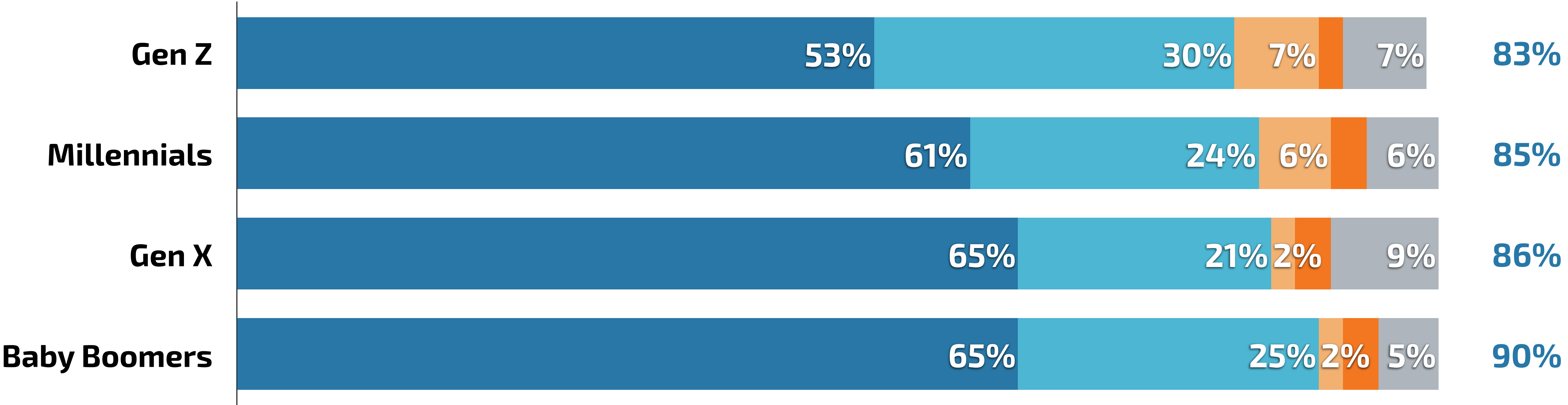


Q. For each of the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree.  
 Note: "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Somewhat disagree", and "Neither agree nor disagree" are not shown in the chart.

# Across all generations, more than 8 in 10 agree on importance of listening to different generations' perspectives

Listening to a wide range of perspectives from people in different generations or age groups

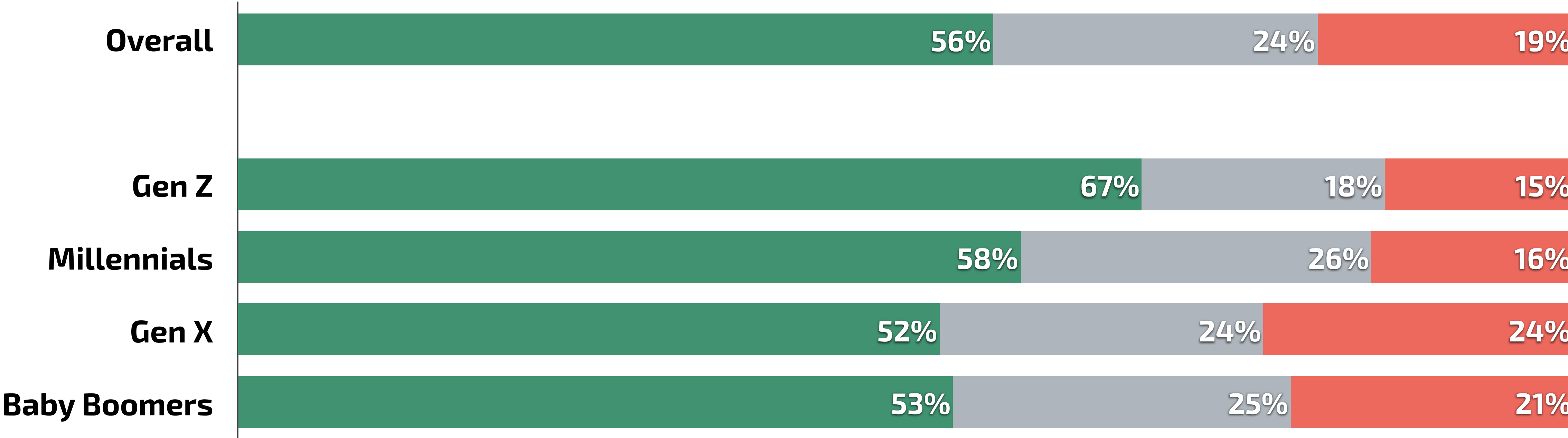
■ Very important    
 ■ Somewhat important    
 ■ Not too important    
 ■ Not important at all    
 ■ Unsure    
 VERY/SOME. IMP.



# Shared belief in philanthropic organizations' ability to connect people could position them to help bring generations together

## Mission-driven foundations and philanthropic organizations

■ Provide a way for people to connect and work together      ■ Unsure      ■ Foster negativity and divide people



# Methodology

Echelon Insights, in collaboration with Benenson Strategy Group, conducted a survey on behalf of the Walton Family Foundation to examine views on collaboration around issues facing the country. The survey was fielded online from October 5-11, 2023 in English and Spanish among 1,445 adults in the US, including a base sample of 1,023 adults nationwide and an additional oversample of 422 adults born in 1981 or later (for a total of 830 Gen Z and Millennial adults in the sample) using non-probability sampling.

The base sample of adults was drawn from the Lucid sample exchange based on gender, age, race/ethnicity, and education quota targets derived from the US Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) data on adults nationwide. The additional oversample of adults born in 1981 or later was drawn from the Lucid sample exchange based on gender, age, and race/ethnicity quota targets derived from the 2021 ACS data, and on education quota targets derived from the US Census Bureau's March 2023 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS-ASEC) data. Data quality measures included the use of an attentiveness check where respondents were directed to select a particular response and measures to prevent duplicate responses. Respondents who answered more than one-third of the questions they were asked in less than one-third of the median response time per question were removed from the data file.

The sample was weighted to population benchmarks for adults in the US, and the oversampled group (adults born in 1981 or later) was weighted to reflect its correct proportion in the national adult population. Benchmark sources and weighting dimensions are listed below.

For adults in the United States: 2021 ACS data: Gender, Age, Race/ethnicity, Education, Region, Gender by education, and Race by education; 2021 CPS Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement data: Volunteerism by cohort, Having contacted or visited a public official to express an opinion, and Frequency of posting views on the internet or social media; Federal Election Commission - 2020 Presidential Election Results: 2020 Presidential vote choice (Applied only if respondents said they voted and for which candidate they voted)

Additional weighting dimensions applied within the group of adults born in 1981 or later: 2021 ACS data: Gender, Race/ethnicity, and Generational cohort; March 2023 CPS-ASEC: Education, and Gender by education

Calculated as it would be for a random sample and adjusted to incorporate the effect of weighting, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3.6$  percentage points for the full sample.



