Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute

2021 National Defense Survey
Executive Summary

Prepared by Beacon Research and Shaw & Company Research, November 2021

About the Survey

Mode	Combined telephone (n=998) and online panel (n=1525) survey. Telephone interviews conducted by trained professionals calling landlines (49%) and cellphones (51%).
Sample	2,523 U.S. Adults.
Dates	October 25 – November 7, 2021.
Weights	Slight weights were applied to ensure the sample accurately reflects the demographic profile of the U.S. population.
Margin of Error	±2% at the 95% confidence level for the entire sample. Most questions were split sampled (n≈1250, ±2.8%). The margin of error for subgroups is higher.
Research Partnership	SHAW & Company research BEACON RESEARCH
Note	Some data may not add to 100% due to rounding.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Just one-third think U.S. is headed in right direction.

Right Direction — **Wrong Track**

54%

53%

51%

59%

37%

40%

Democrat 15%
Independent 28%
Republican 68%

42%

Democrat 69%
Independent 28%
Republican 17%

33%

Democrat 59%
Independent 23%
Republican 12%

Nov '18   Oct '19   Feb '21   Nov '21
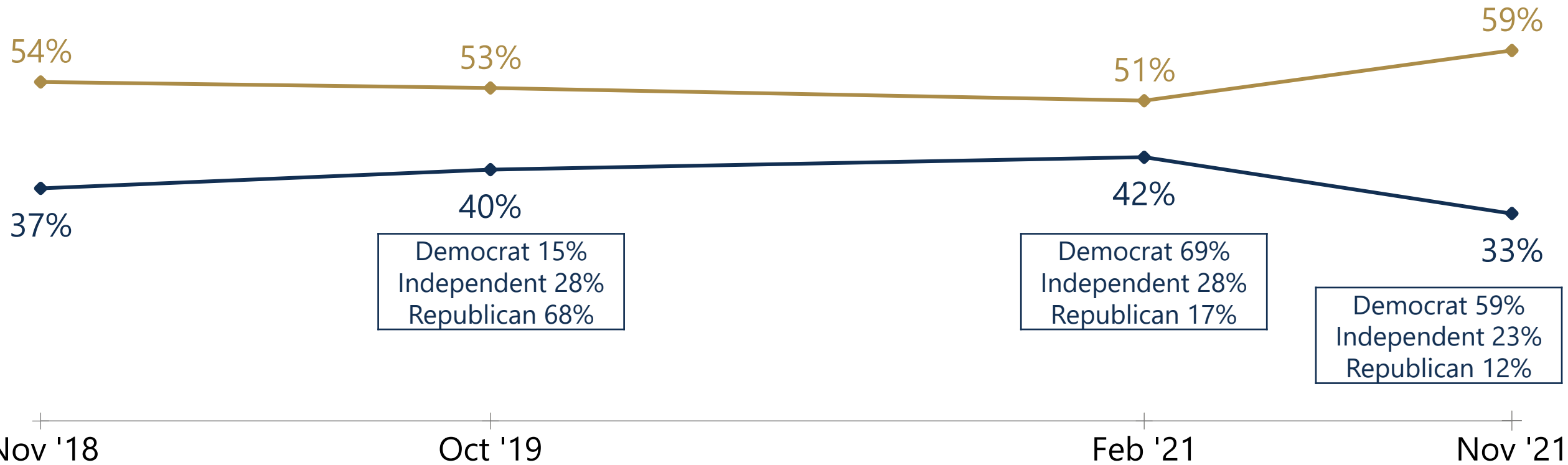
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q2. Would you say things in the United States today are:

On balance, support for increased spending on infrastructure, education, healthcare, and border security.

←**Too much**   **Too little**→

Category	Too much	Too little
Infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and ports	-10%	61%
Education	-13%	58%
Health care	-14%	56%
Border security	-19%	47%
The military	-26%	27%
Promoting freedom abroad	-30%	22%
Foreign aid	-51%	14%
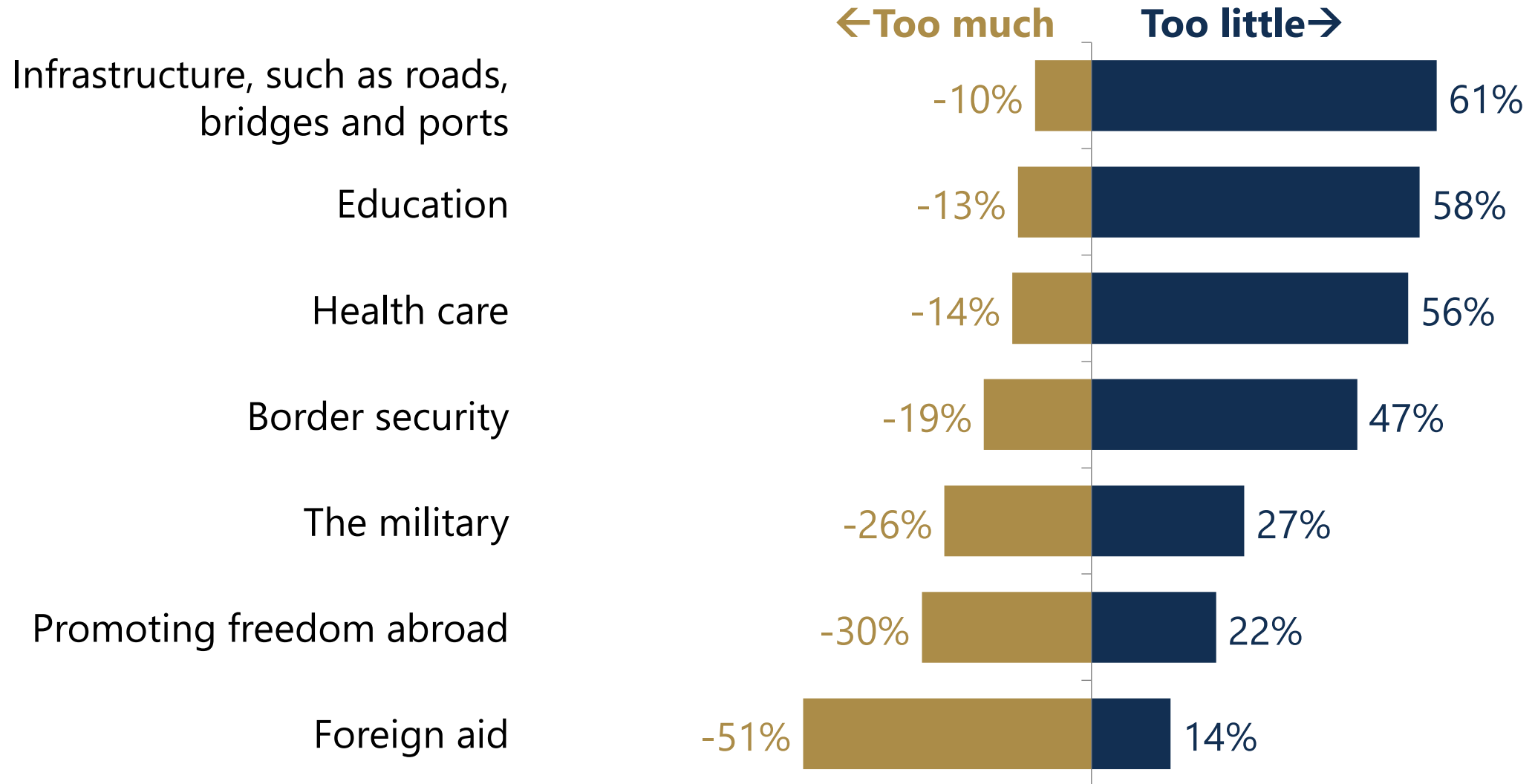
Q16-22. Do you think the U.S. government spends too much, too little, or about the right amount on each of the following?

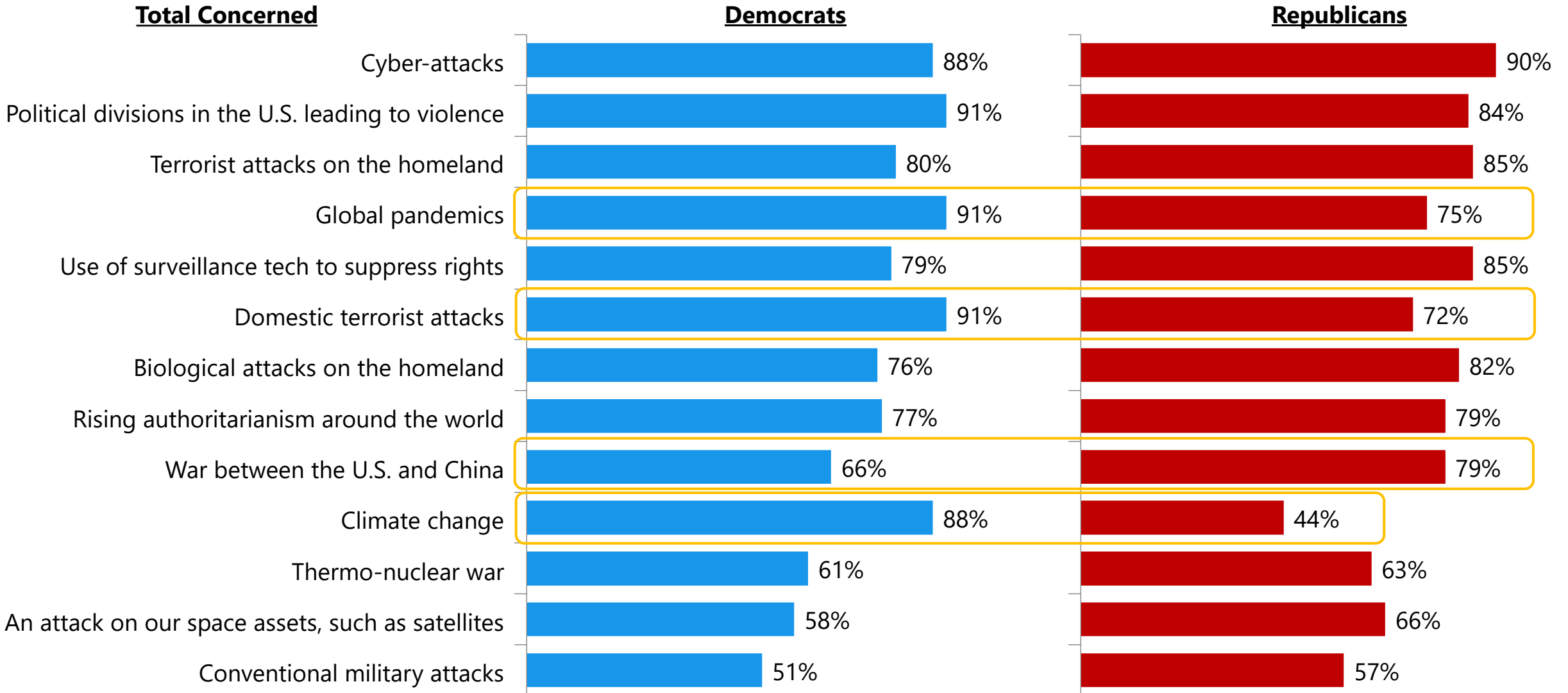# Deep concern about a wide variety of threats, with cyberattacks and political violence atop the list.

	Extremely concerned	Somewhat	Total
Cyber-attacks	56%	32%	**88%**
Political divisions in the U.S. leading to violence	55%	30%	**85%**
Terrorist attacks on the homeland	45%	37%	**82%**
Global pandemics	46%	35%	**81%**
Use of surveillance tech to suppress rights	48%	32%	**80%**
Domestic terrorist attacks	43%	35%	**78%**
Biological attacks on the homeland	40%	38%	**78%**
Rising authoritarianism around the world	39%	37%	**76%**
War between the U.S. and China	33%	37%	**70%**
Climate change	41%	25%	**66%**
Thermo-nuclear war	26%	35%	**61%**
An attack on our space assets, such as satellites	24%	37%	**61%**
Conventional military attacks	20%	35%	**55%**

Q57 – Q69. How concerned are you about the threat of each of the following in the next five years?

Partisans share similar concerns about most threats—save a few concerns.

Total Concerned	Democrats	Republicans
Cyber-attacks	88%	90%
Political divisions in the U.S. leading to violence	91%	84%
Terrorist attacks on the homeland	80%	85%
Global pandemics	91%	75%
Use of surveillance tech to suppress rights	79%	85%
Domestic terrorist attacks	91%	72%
Biological attacks on the homeland	76%	82%
Rising authoritarianism around the world	77%	79%
War between the U.S. and China	66%	79%
Climate change	88%	44%
Thermo-nuclear war	61%	63%
An attack on our space assets, such as satellites	58%	66%
Conventional military attacks	51%	57%

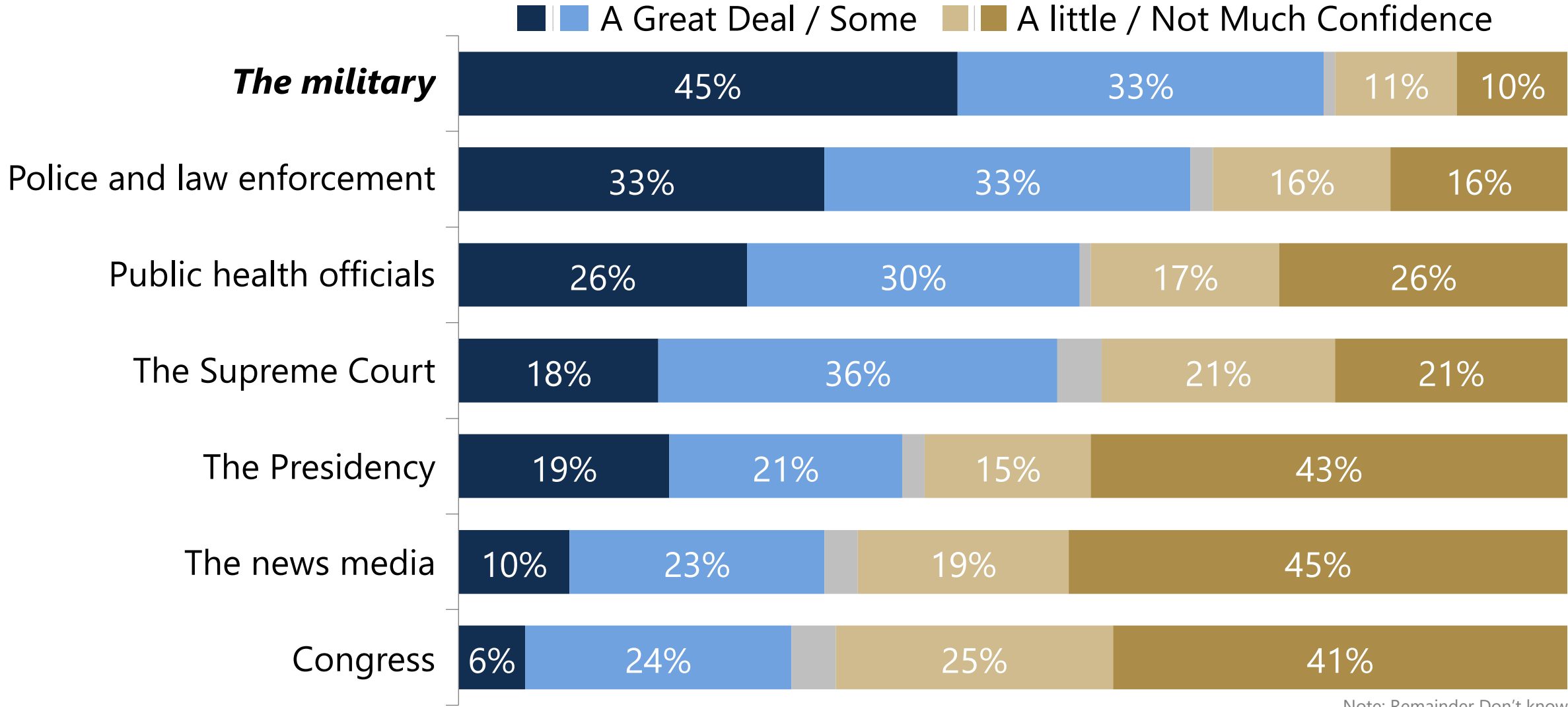*Q57 – Q69. How concerned are you about the threat of each of the following in the next five years?*

Confidence In Military

Military remains the most-trusted institution; media and Congress inspire little confidence.
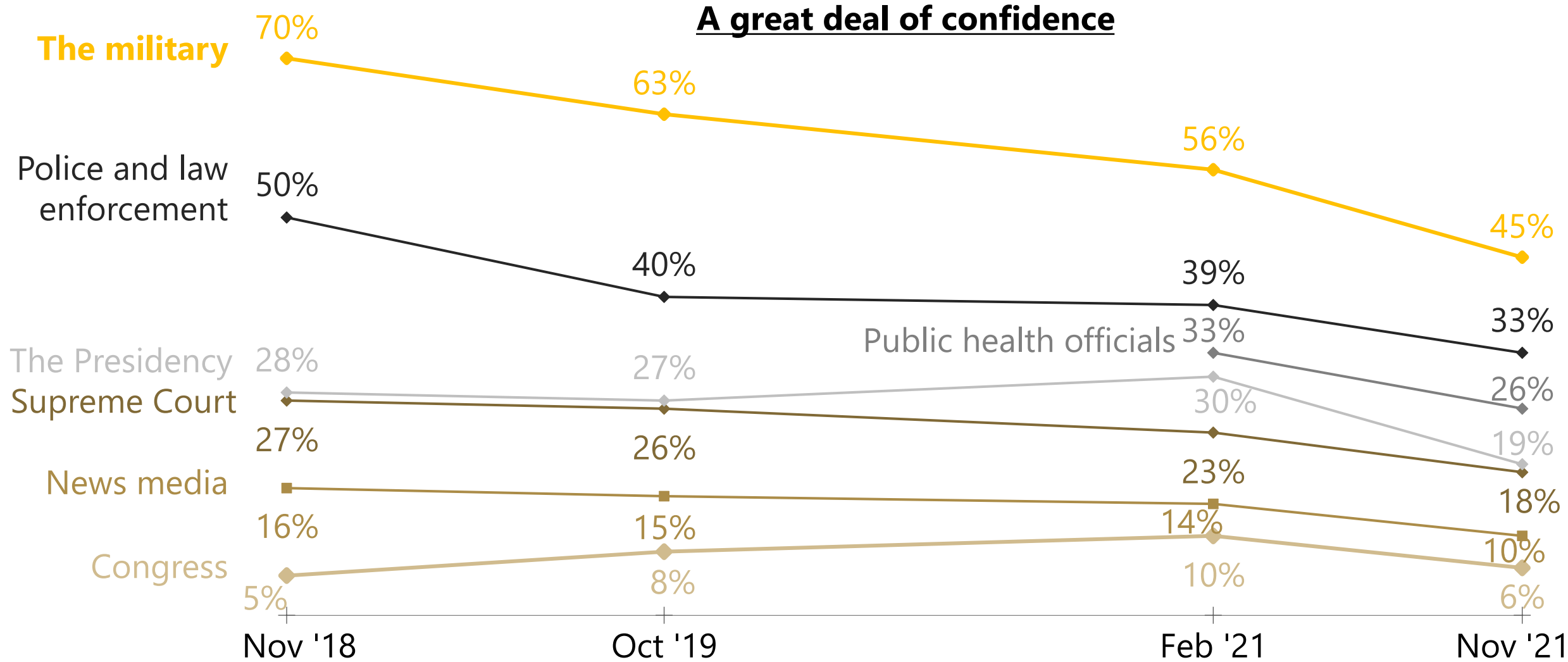
Legend: A Great Deal / Some | A little / Not Much Confidence

Institution	A Great Deal	Some	A little	Not Much Confidence
The military	45%	33%	11%	10%
Police and law enforcement	33%	33%	16%	16%
Public health officials	26%	30%	17%	26%
The Supreme Court	18%	36%	21%	21%
The Presidency	19%	21%	15%	43%
The news media	10%	23%	19%	45%
Congress	6%	24%	25%	41%

Note: Remainder Don't know

Q4-Q10. For each of the following groups or institutions, please tell us how much trust and confidence you have in them.

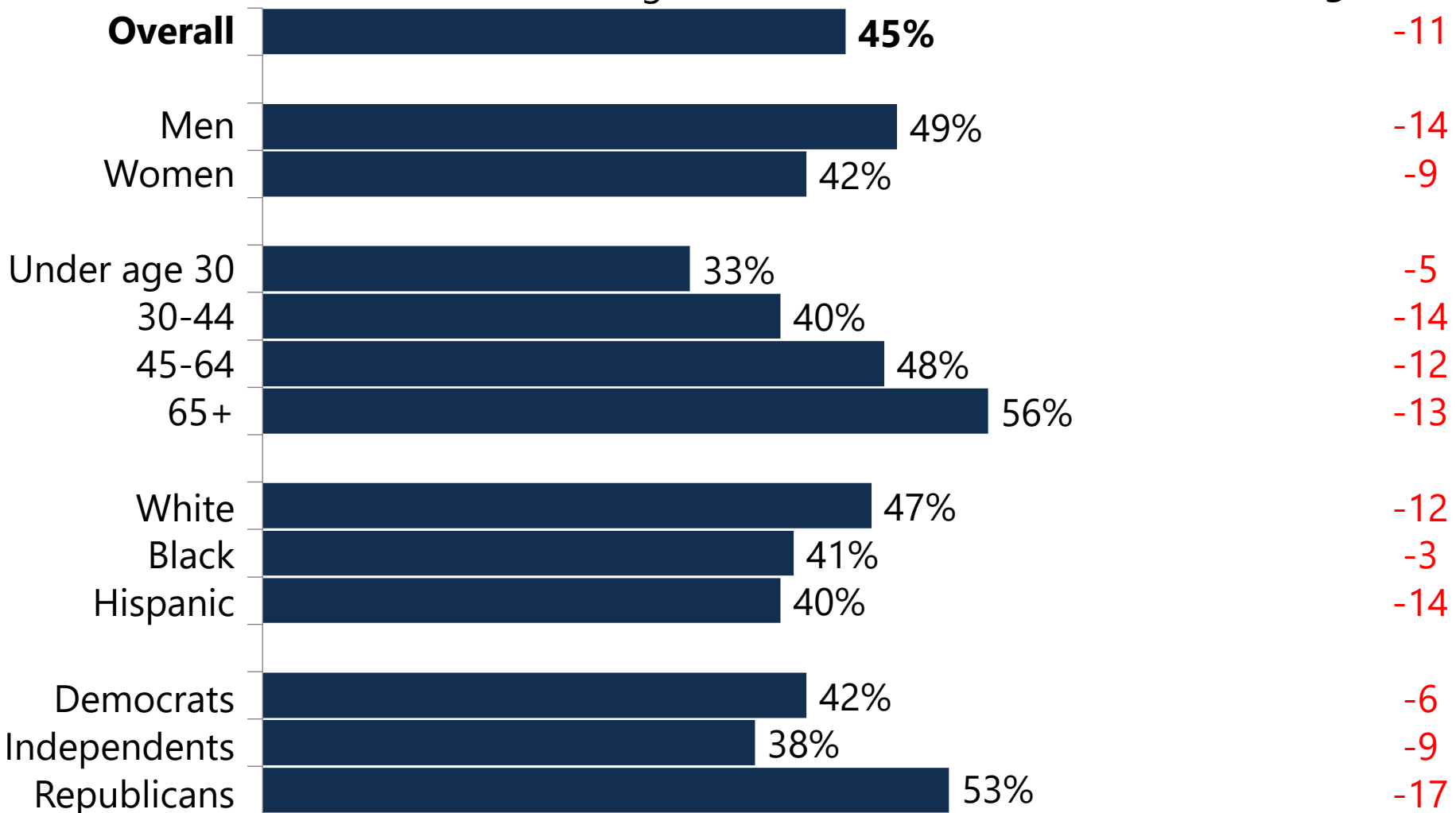# Confidence in the military down for third consecutive year.

A great deal of confidence

The military
70% — 63% — 56% — 45%

Police and law enforcement
50% — 40% — 39% — 33%

Public health officials
33% — 26%

The Presidency
28% — 27% — 30% — 19%

Supreme Court
27% — 26% — 23% — 18%

News media
16% — 15% — 14% — 10%

Congress
5% — 8% — 10% — 6%

Nov '18   Oct '19   Feb '21   Nov '21

Q4-Q12. For each of the following groups or institutions, please tell us how much trust and confidence you have in them.

Confidence in military among subgroups
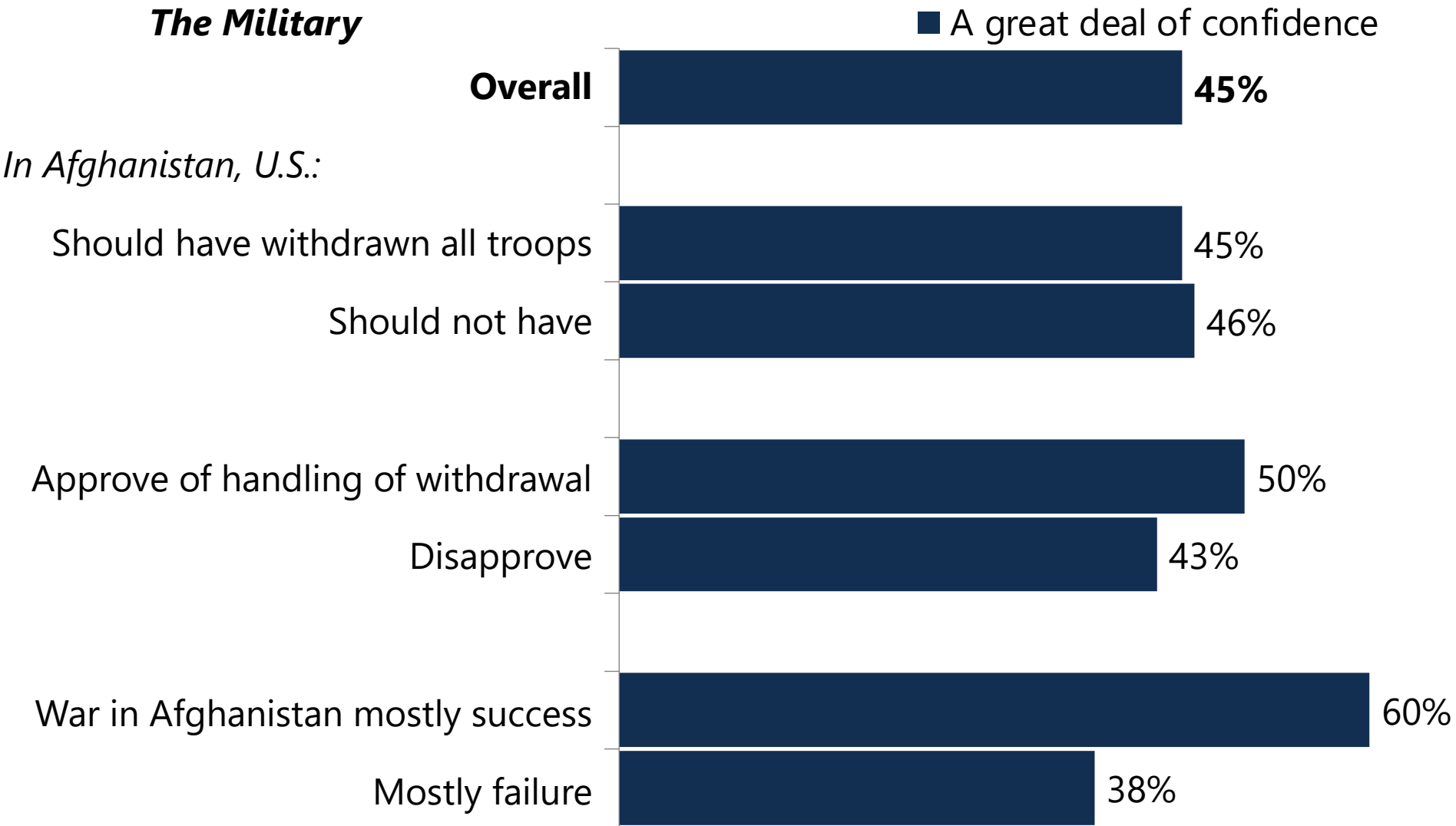
The Military

■ A great deal of confidence

Change from Feb '21

Subgroup	Confidence	Change from Feb '21
Overall	**45%**	-11
Men	49%	-14
Women	42%	-9
Under age 30	33%	-5
30-44	40%	-14
45-64	48%	-12
65+	56%	-13
White	47%	-12
Black	41%	-3
Hispanic	40%	-14
Democrats	42%	-6
Independents	38%	-9
Republicans	53%	-17

Q4. For each of the following groups or institutions, please tell us how much trust and confidence you have in them: The Military
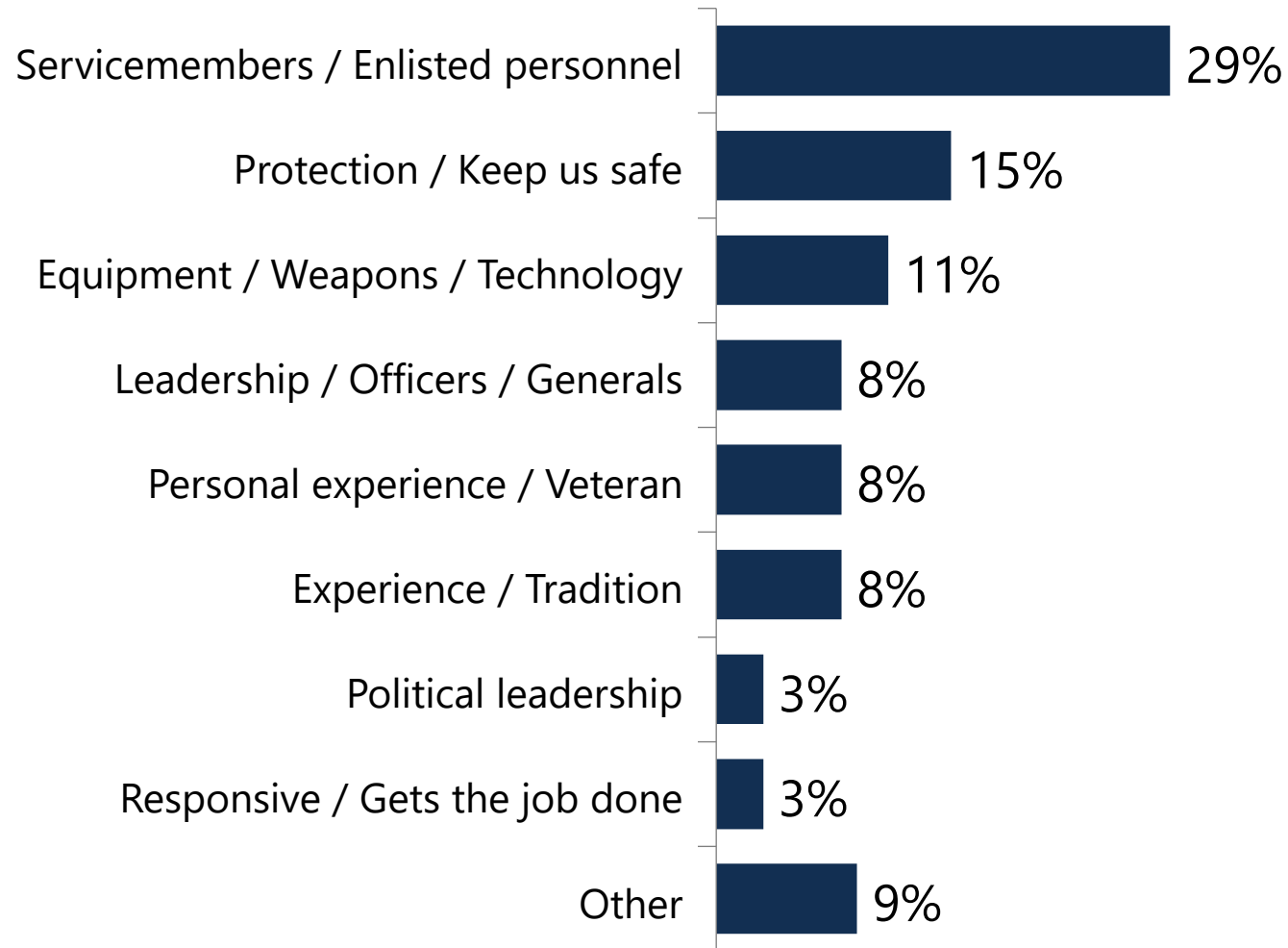
Confidence in military by views on Afghanistan

The Military   ■ A great deal of confidence

Overall	**45%**

In Afghanistan, U.S.:

Should have withdrawn all troops	45%
Should not have	46%
Approve of handling of withdrawal	50%
Disapprove	43%
War in Afghanistan mostly success	60%
Mostly failure	38%

Reasons for high confidence in military

Among those with a great deal of confidence

Reason	Percentage
Servicemembers / Enlisted personnel	29%
Protection / Keep us safe	15%
Equipment / Weapons / Technology	11%
Leadership / Officers / Generals	8%
Personal experience / Veteran	8%
Experience / Tradition	8%
Political leadership	3%
Responsive / Gets the job done	3%
Other	9%

Note: Asked as an open-ended question. Responses under 2% are not shown.

Q11. Thinking about the U.S. military, what would you say is the main reason you have the level of confidence that you have

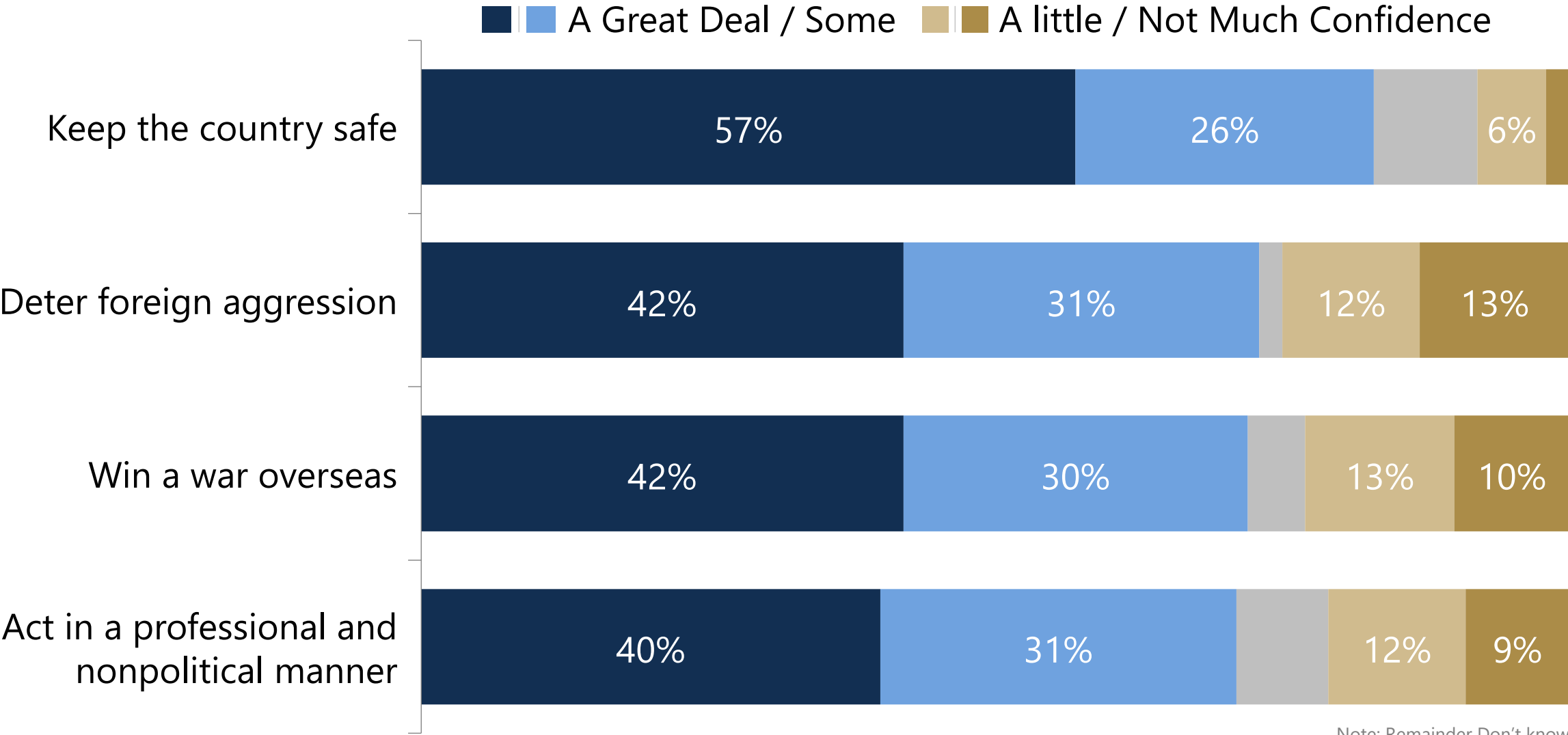# Reasons for low confidence in military

Among those with a little / not much confidence
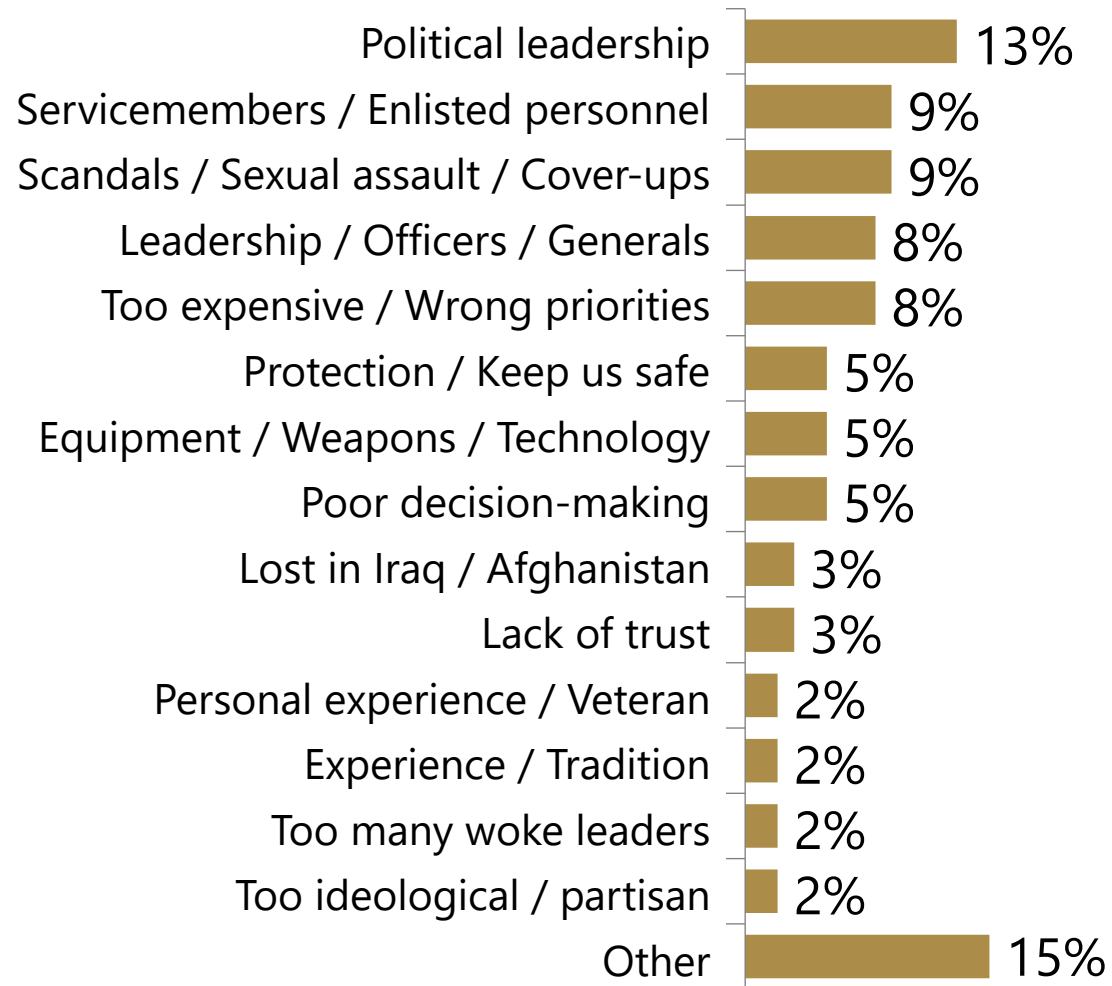
Reason	Percentage
Political leadership	13%
Servicemembers / Enlisted personnel	9%
Scandals / Sexual assault / Cover-ups	9%
Leadership / Officers / Generals	8%
Too expensive / Wrong priorities	8%
Protection / Keep us safe	5%
Equipment / Weapons / Technology	5%
Poor decision-making	5%
Lost in Iraq / Afghanistan	3%
Lack of trust	3%
Personal experience / Veteran	2%
Experience / Tradition	2%
Too many woke leaders	2%
Too ideological / partisan	2%
Other	15%

Note: Asked as an open-ended question. Responses under 2% are not shown.

Q11. Thinking about the U.S. military, what would you say is the main reason you have the level of confidence that you have

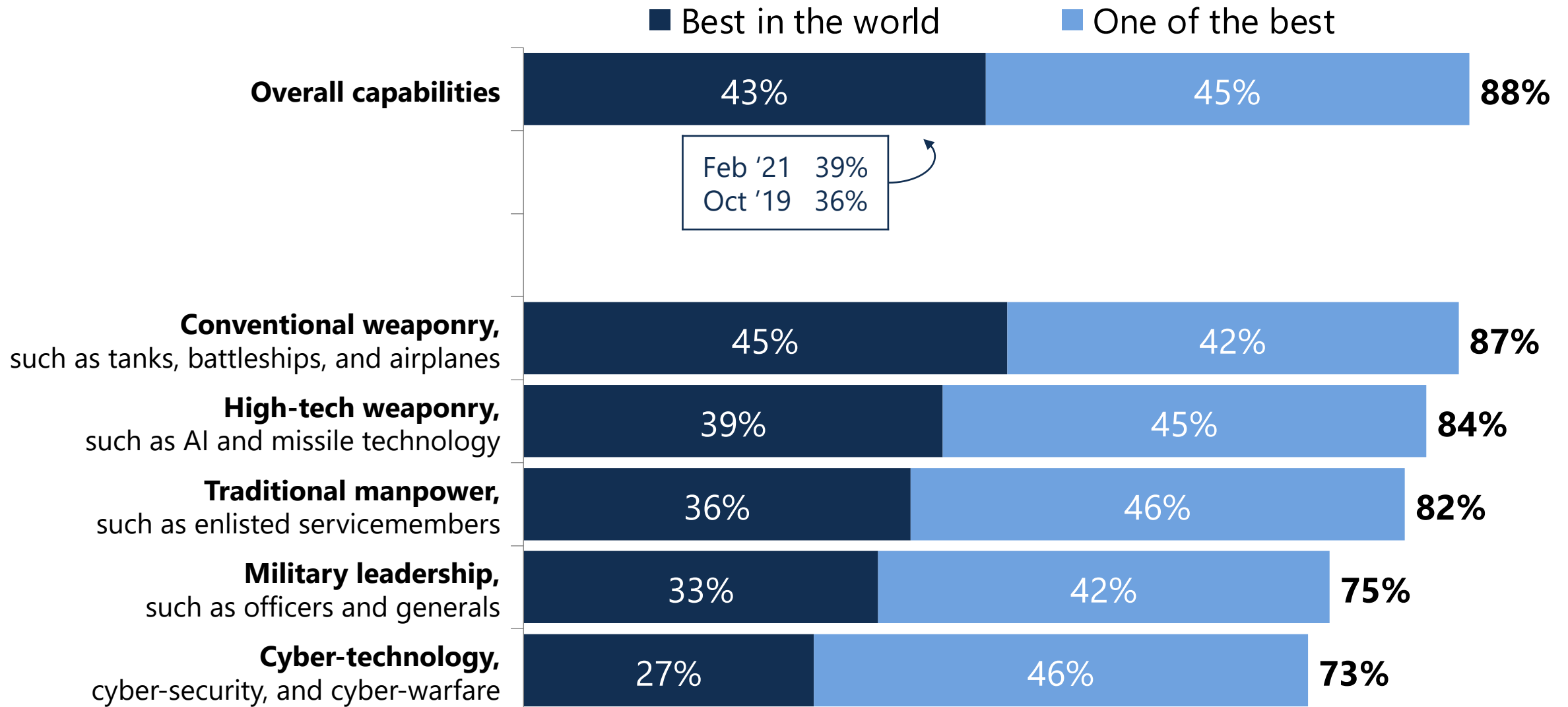# Higher degree of confidence in military's ability to keep country safe.

A Great Deal / Some **A little / Not Much Confidence**

	A Great Deal	Some		A little	Not Much
Keep the country safe	57%	26%		6%	
Deter foreign aggression	42%	31%		12%	13%
Win a war overseas	42%	30%		13%	10%
Act in a professional and nonpolitical manner	40%	31%		12%	9%

Note: Remainder Don't know

Q12-15. How much trust and confidence do you have in the U.S. military's ability to...

Evaluations of U.S. military capabilities

■ Best in the world   ■ One of the best

	Best in the world	One of the best	Total
Overall capabilities	43%	45%	**88%**

Feb '21   39%
Oct '19   36%

	Best in the world	One of the best	Total
Conventional weaponry, such as tanks, battleships, and airplanes	45%	42%	**87%**
High-tech weaponry, such as AI and missile technology	39%	45%	**84%**
Traditional manpower, such as enlisted servicemembers	36%	46%	**82%**
Military leadership, such as officers and generals	33%	42%	**75%**
Cyber-technology, cyber-security, and cyber-warfare	27%	46%	**73%**

Q26-31. For each of the following, please tell us how you think the U.S. military is doing compared to the military in other countries.

When pushed to choose, six-in-ten believe U.S. has best overall capabilities.

Country	Percentage
United States	62%
China	17%
Russia	5%
Israel	2%
North Korea	1%
United Kingdom	1%

United States — Men 76%, Women 63%
Democrat 74%, Independent 63%, Republican 68%
Great deal of confidence 84%
A little / not much 52%

China — Great deal of confidence 10%
A little / not much 28%
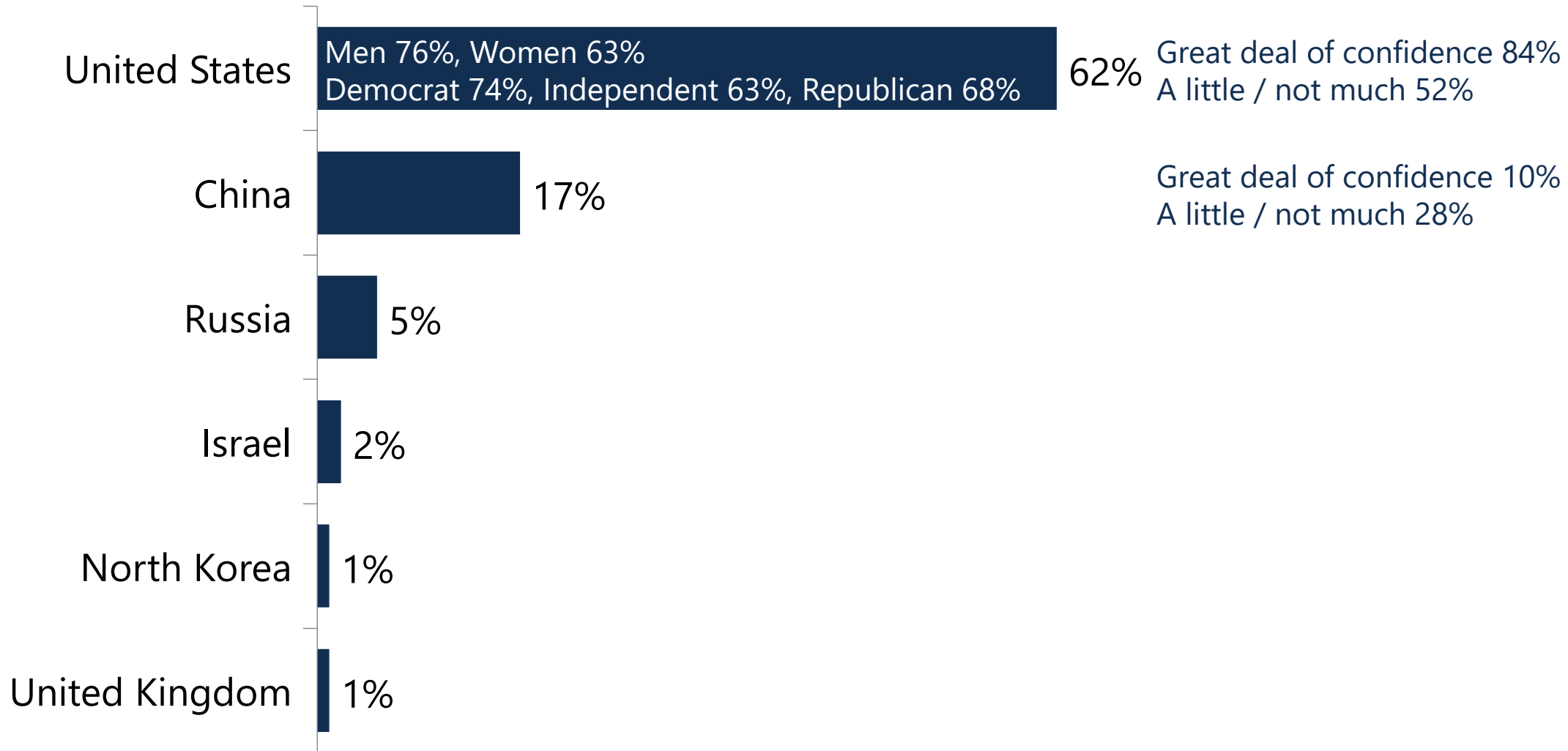
Note: Remainder Other / Not sure

Q32. Which country do you think has the best overall military capabilities? [RECORD VERBATIM]

INTERNATIONAL POSTURE

Decrease in support for an engaged U.S. foreign policy.

November 2021
- More engaged and take the lead: 42%
- Less engaged and react to events: 30%

February 2021
- More engaged and take the lead: 51%
- Less engaged and react to events: 27%

October 2019
- More engaged and take the lead: 50%
- Less engaged and react to events: 33%

Legend:
- ■ More engaged and take the lead
- ■ Less engaged and react to events
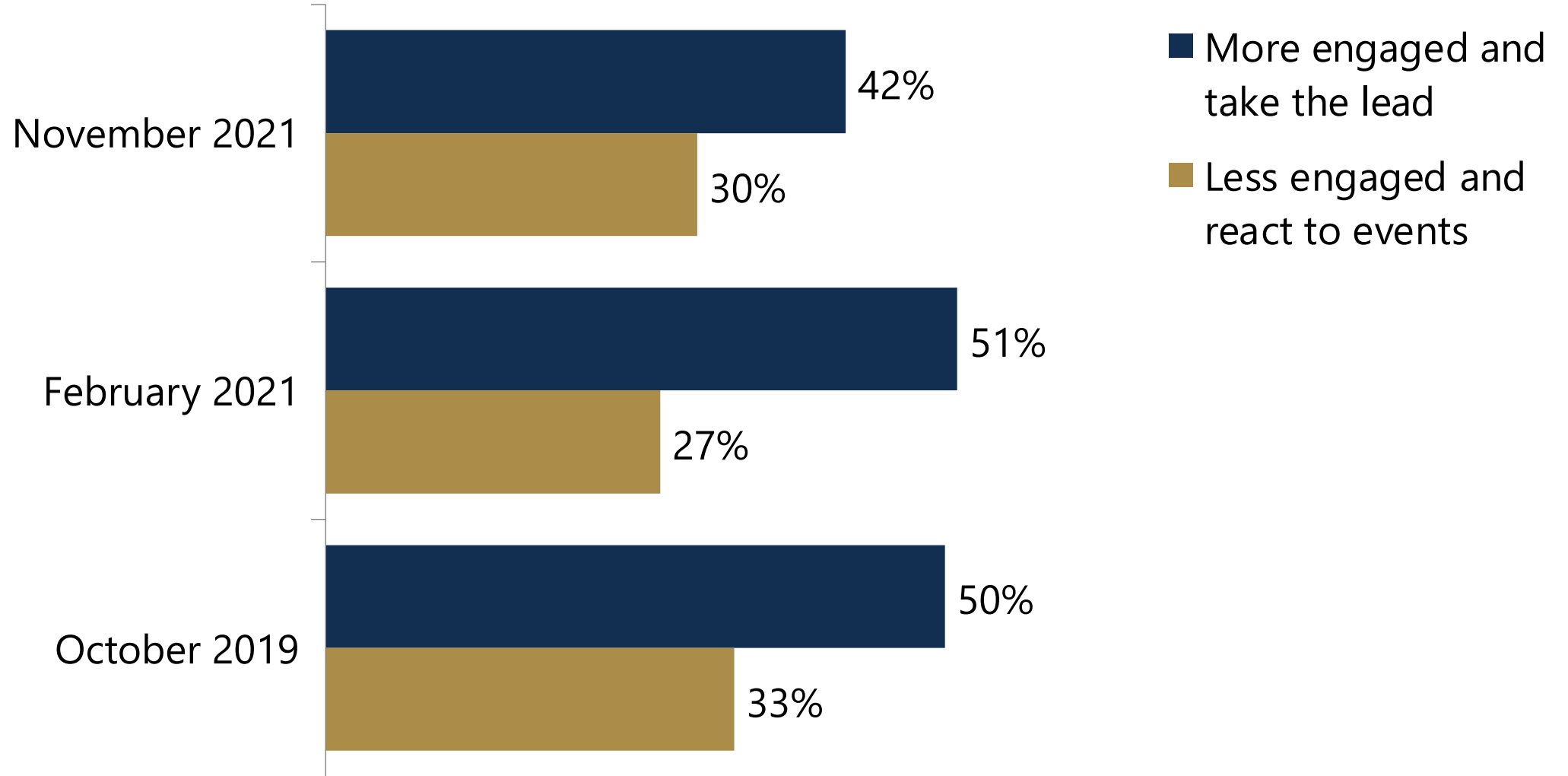
Note: Remainder Depends / Don't know

Q33. When it comes to international events, do you think it is better for the United States to be more engaged and take the lead, or to be less engaged and react to events?

Change in support for engaged foreign policy, by subgroup
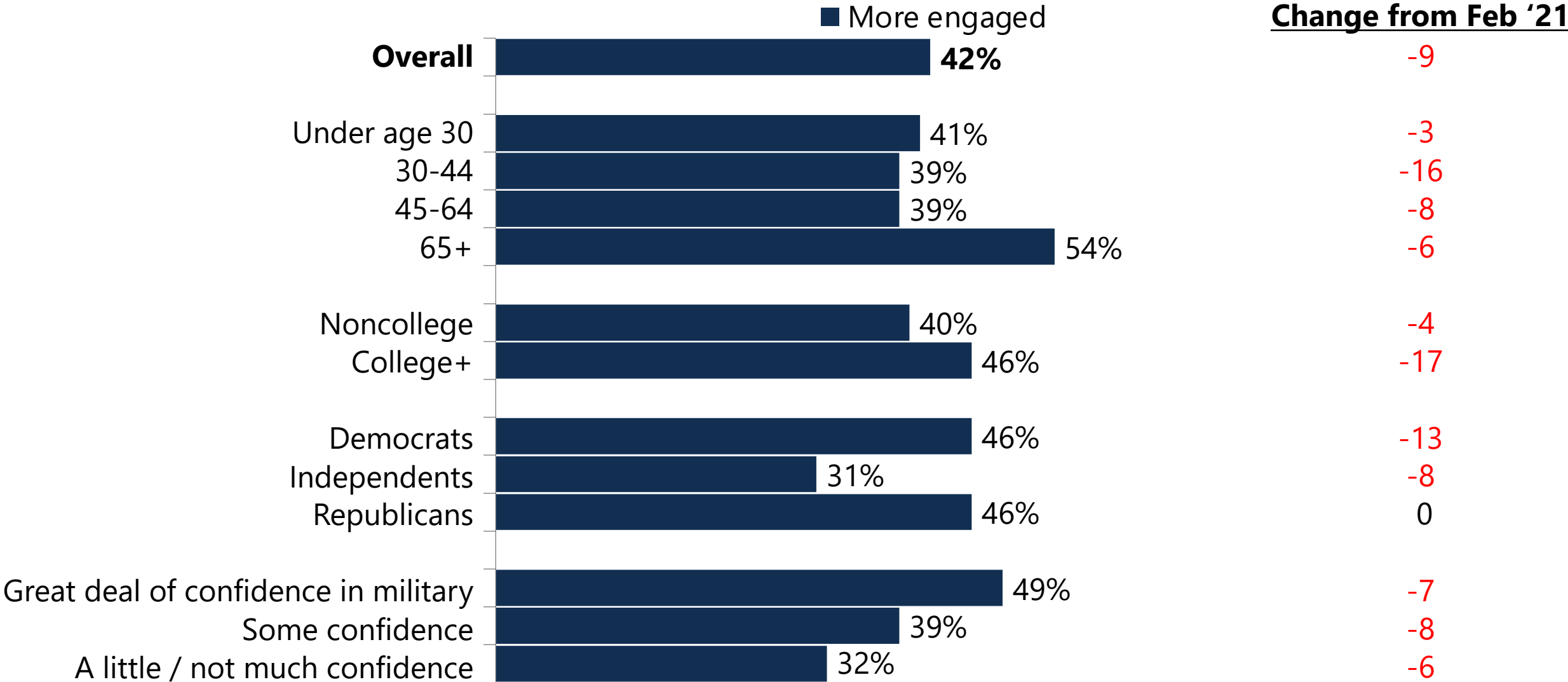
■ More engaged

Change from Feb '21

Subgroup	More engaged	Change from Feb '21
Overall	**42%**	-9
Under age 30	41%	-3
30-44	39%	-16
45-64	39%	-8
65+	54%	-6
Noncollege	40%	-4
College+	46%	-17
Democrats	46%	-13
Independents	31%	-8
Republicans	46%	0
Great deal of confidence in military	49%	-7
Some confidence	39%	-8
A little / not much confidence	32%	-6

Q33. When it comes to international events, do you think it is better for the United States to be more engaged and take the lead, or to be less engaged and react to events?

Steady, bipartisan support for maintaining bases overseas.

Maintain bases

Reduce presence overseas

November 2021
- Democrat 59%, Independent 56%, Republican 75% — 65%
- 27%

February 2021
- 63%
- 31%

October 2019
- 65%
- 28%
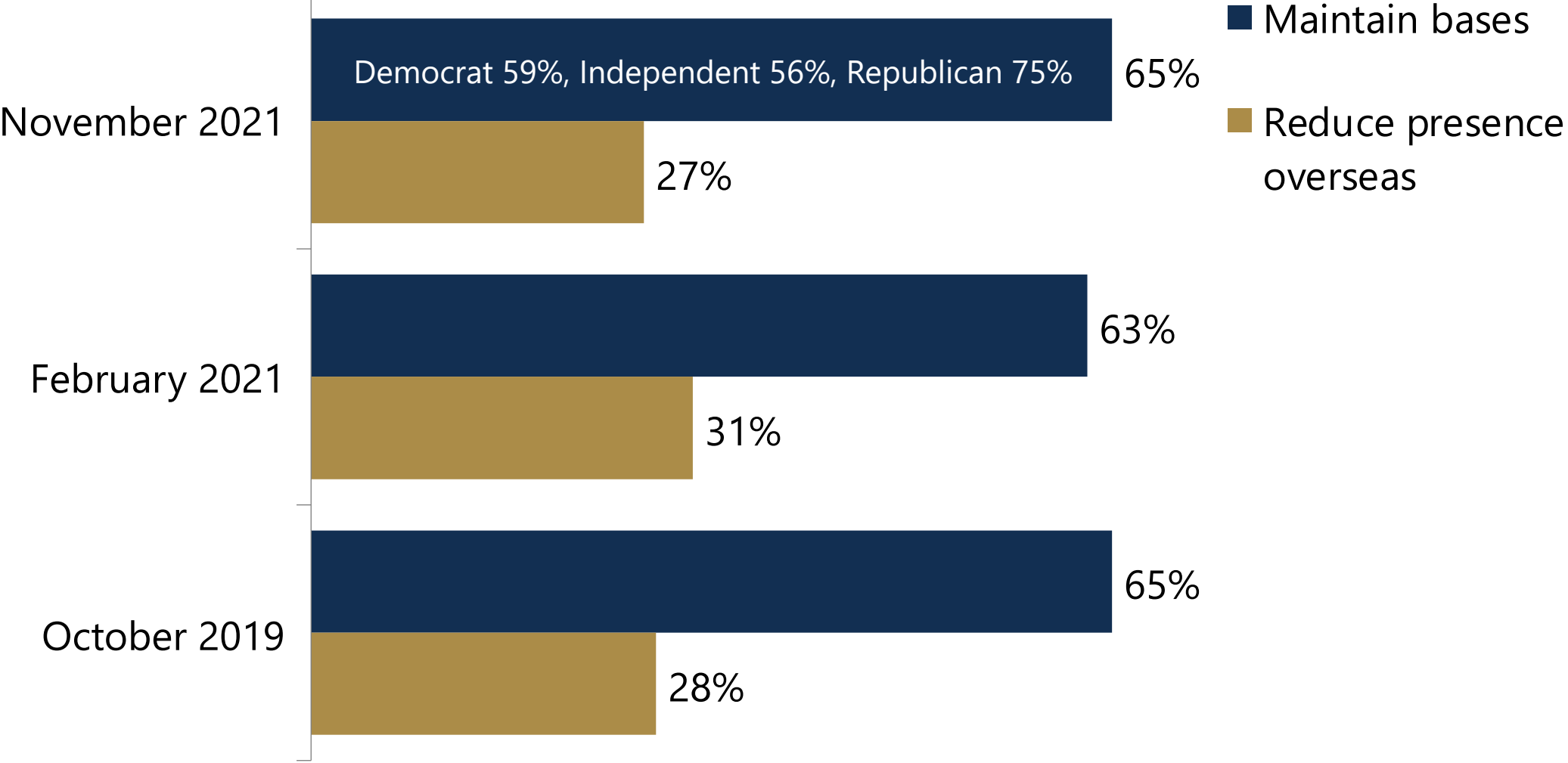
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q35. In general, do you think it is better for the US to maintain military bases around the world to deter attacks and respond quickly if something happens, or do you think the US should reduce our military presence overseas and only deploy troops in response to aggression?

East Asia overtakes the Middle East as area US should focus its military forces.

East Asia, such as China, Japan and South Korea
- 37%
- 28%
- 16%
- 24%

The Middle East, such as Iran and Syria*
- 17%
- 21%
- 37%
- 27%

South Asia, such as India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan
- 9%
- 7%
- 7%
- 15%

Europe, including Russia*
- 5%
- 8%
- 9%
- 5%

Central America
- 4%
- 5%
- 4%
- 4%

South America
- 1%
- 3%
- 3%
- 3%

Africa
- 1%
- 2%
- 1%
- 3%

Legend:
- November 2021
- February 2021
- October 2019
- November 2018

Δ Feb 21
Democrat	+18
Independent	-2
Republican	+6
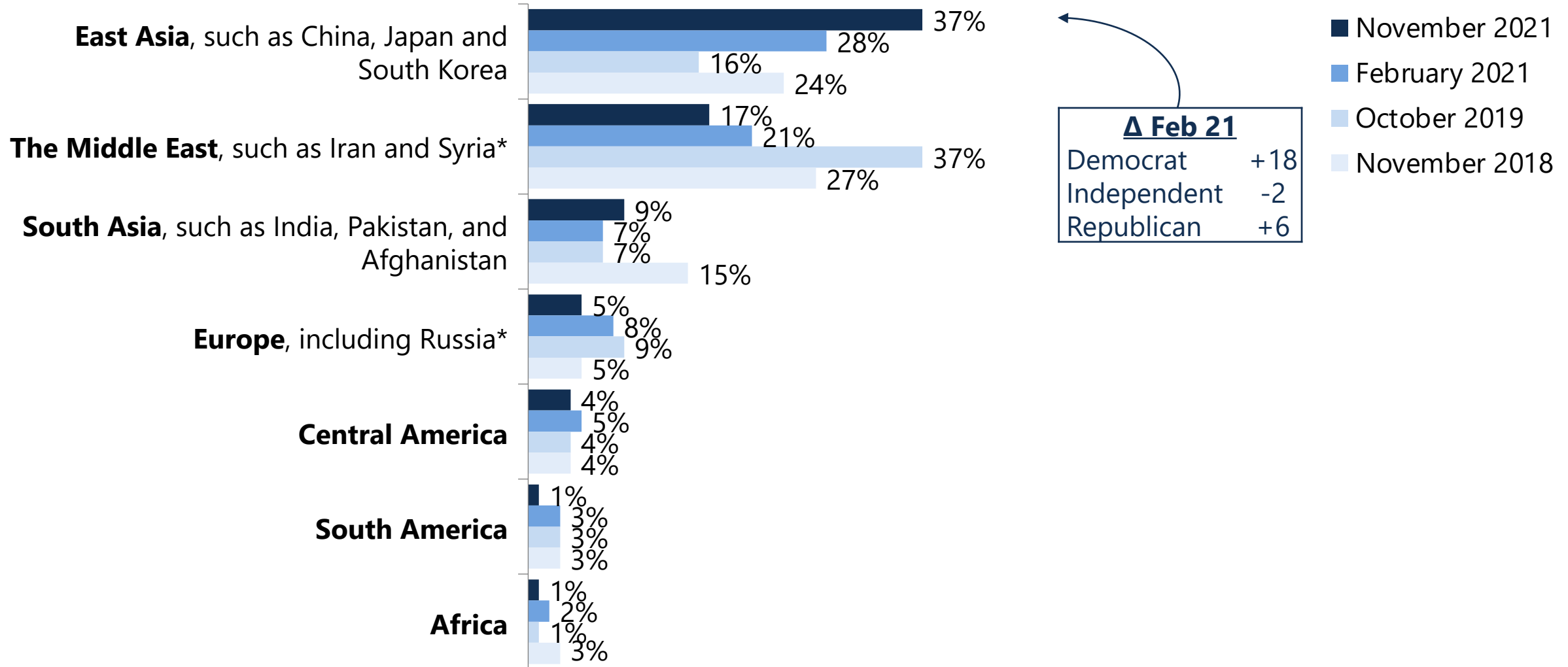
*2018 survey did not specify "including Russia" and "such as Iran and Syria"

Note: Remainder Don't know

Q41. Thinking about American interests and the threats that exist in the world today, where do you think the U.S. should focus its military forces?

After sharp uptick, majority sees China as greatest threat.

Greatest threat to U.S.

Russia

China

North Korea

Iran

Afghanistan

	Nov '18	Oct '19	Feb '21	Nov '21
China	21%	28%	37%	52%
Russia	30%	25%	16%	14%
North Korea	18%	14%	15%	12%
Iran	7%	9%	8%	5%
Afghanistan	2%	3%		4%

Q42. Which country do you see as the greatest threat to the U.S.? [RECORD VERBATIM]

Bipartisan agreement on China as greatest threat; particular increase in concern among Democrats.

Overall

China	52%
Russia	14%
North Korea	12%
Afghanistan	5%
Iran	4%

Democrats

China	44%
Russia	22%
North Korea	14%
Afghanistan	5%
Iran	3%

+24 since Feb '21

Republicans

China	64%
Russia	7%
North Korea	7%
Afghanistan	6%
Iran	5%
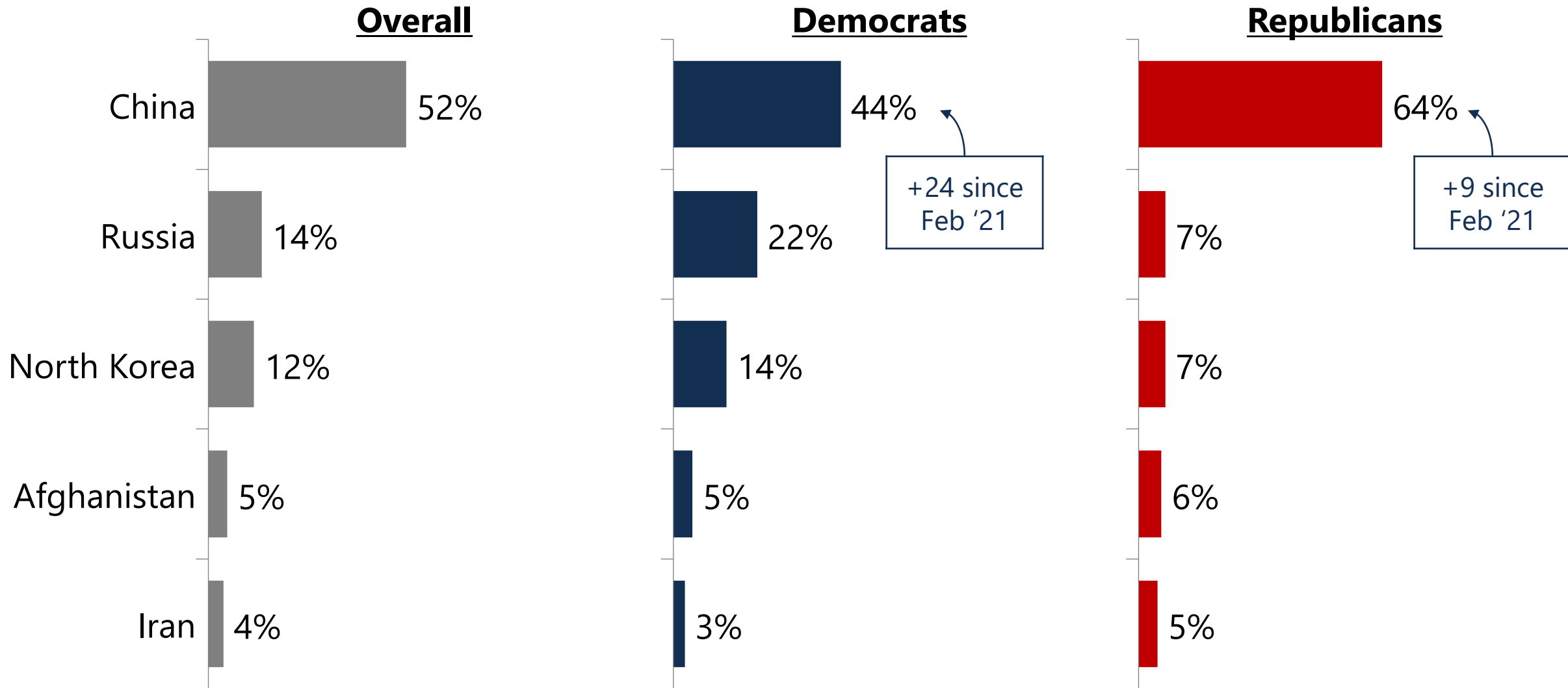
+9 since Feb '21

Note: Responses under 4% not shown

Q42. Which country do you see as the greatest threat to the U.S.? [RECORD VERBATIM]

Four-in-ten see the UK as greatest ally.

Overall

United Kingdom	39%
European Union	14%
Canada	9%
Israel	7%

Democrats

United Kingdom	43%
European Union	15%
Canada	12%
Israel	3%

Republicans

United Kingdom	40%
European Union	12%
Canada	7%
Israel	11%
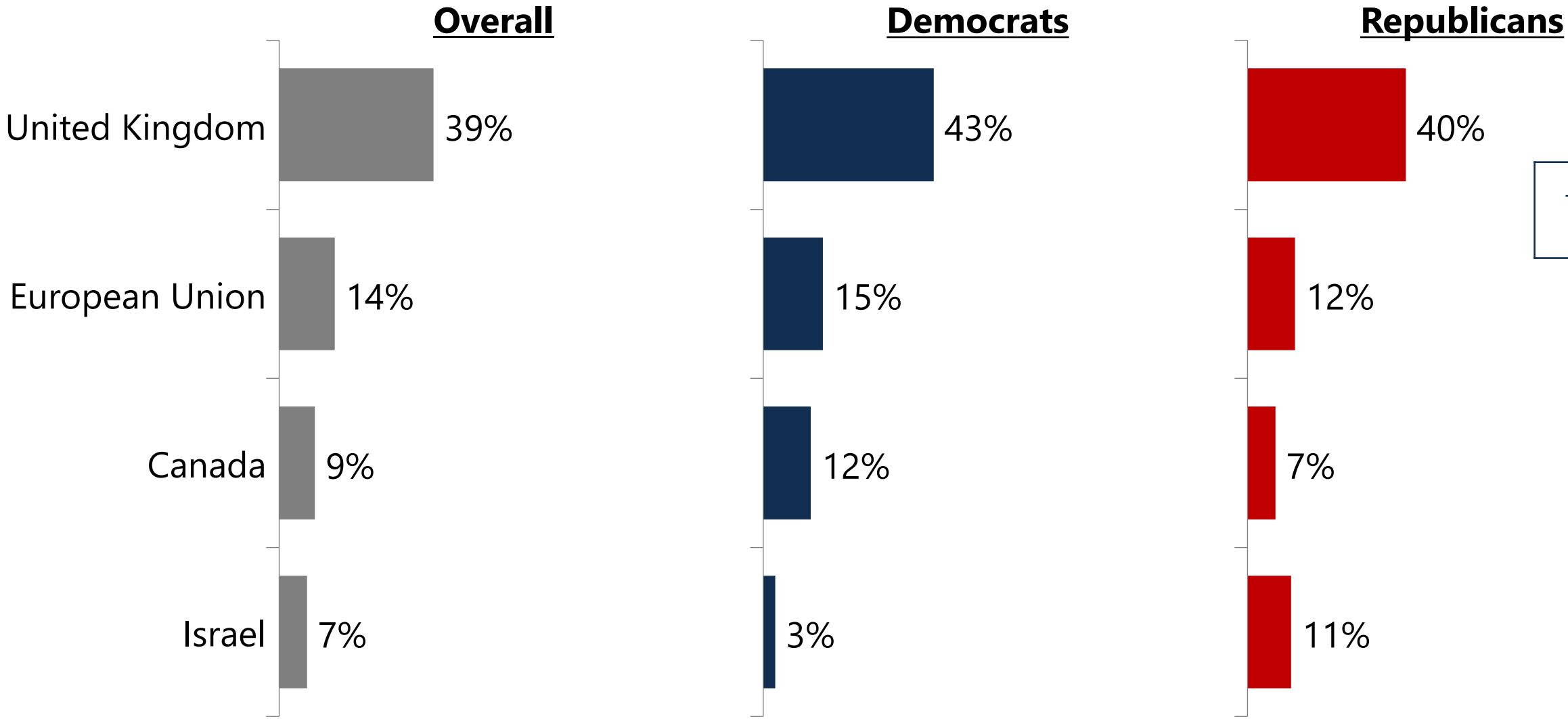
+9 since Feb '21

Note: Responses under 4% not shown

Q43. Which country do you see as the greatest ally to the U.S.? [RECORD VERBATIM]

Overview of Allies and Enemies

Legend: ■ Ally ■ Enemy

Country	Ally	Enemy
United Kingdom	86%	4%
Australia	84%	4%
France	84%	6%
Germany	76%	11%
Japan	70%	14%
Israel	66%	17%
Taiwan	62%	14%
Saudi Arabia	40%	33%
China	23%	65%
Russia	20%	65%
Afghanistan	19%	65%
North Korea	10%	78%
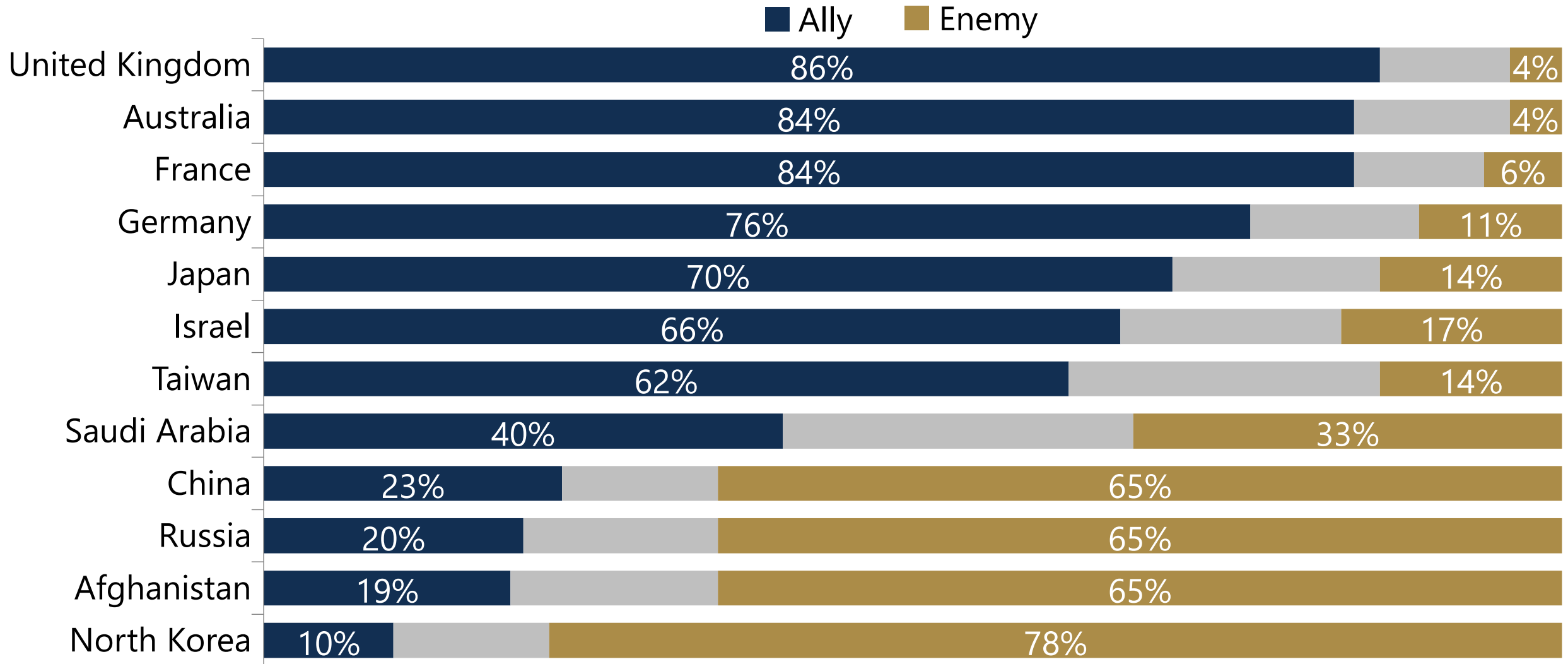
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q44 – Q55. Do you see each of the following countries as a strong ally, something of an ally, something of an enemy, or a strong enemy?

Shifts in Views toward Allies and Enemies

Change in Net Rating (Ally-Enemy) From Feb '21

←**Increasingly negative**   **Increasingly positive**→
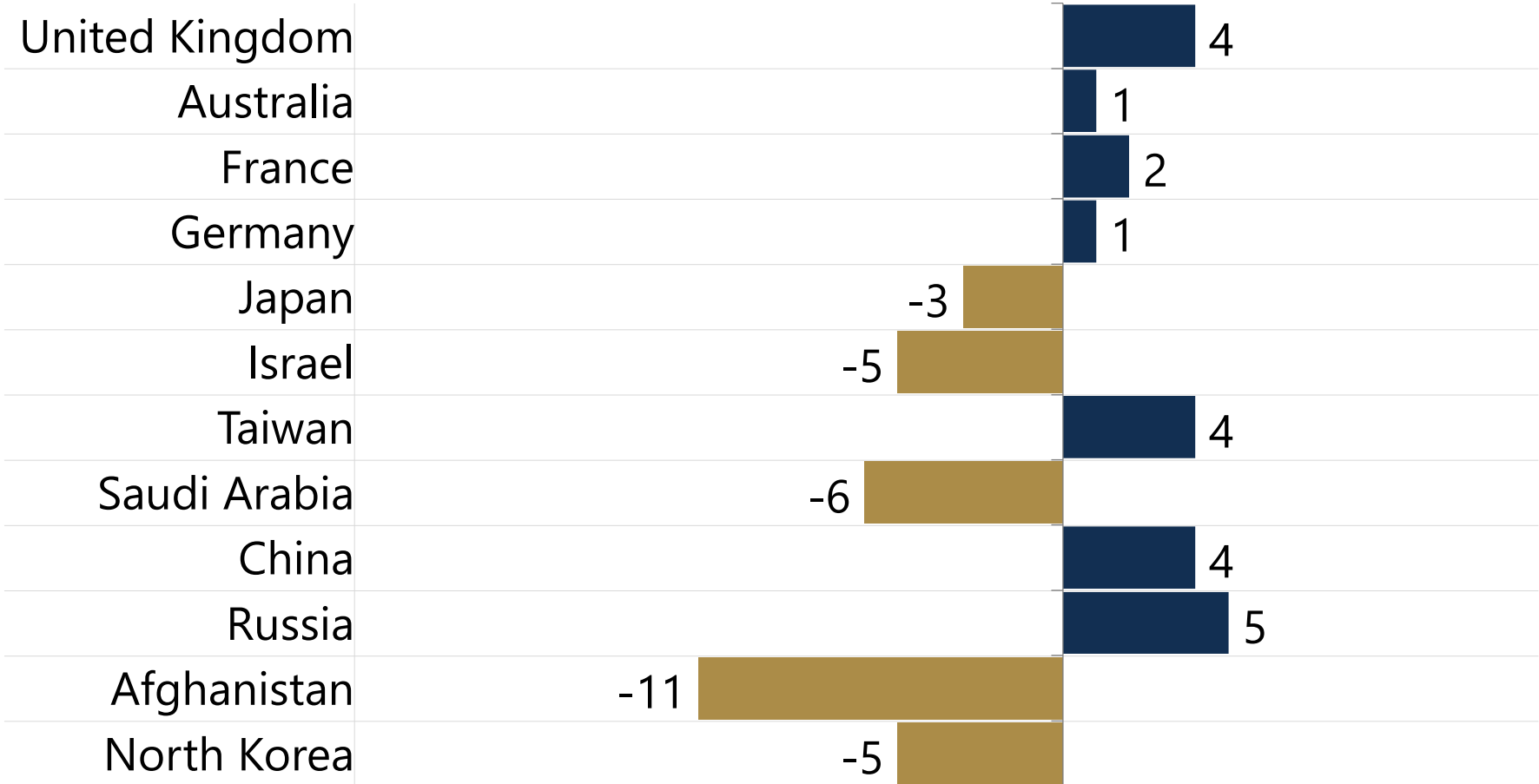
Country	Value
United Kingdom	4
Australia	1
France	2
Germany	1
Japan	-3
Israel	-5
Taiwan	4
Saudi Arabia	-6
China	4
Russia	5
Afghanistan	-11
North Korea	-5

Q44 – Q55. Do you see each of the following countries as a strong ally, something of an ally, something of an enemy, or a strong enemy?

China

Diverse range of concerns over China.

Chinese economic practices, including technology theft and trade relationships — 20%

Chinese military buildup, including naval activity in the South China Sea — 19%
Democrat 17%, Republican 23%

Chinese human rights abuses, including the treatment of Hong Kong and the Uyghur ethnic group — 17%
Democrat 22%, Republican 12%

Chinese foreign policy, including expanding influence in South Asia, Africa and S. America — 13%

China invading Taiwan — 7%

Note: Remainder All / Mix / Don't know

Q71. Which of the following most concerns you about China?

Widespread concern about technological gap with China.

US Falling Behind China Technologically

Category	Value
Extremely concerned	38%
Somewhat	35%

Concerned 73%

Category	Value
Not very	15%
Not at all	6%

Not 21%

Most Concerning Tech

Category	Value
Artificial intelligence	23%
Supply-chain vulnerability	23%
Satellite technology	16%
Tele-communications technology	12%
Manufacturing capacity	12%
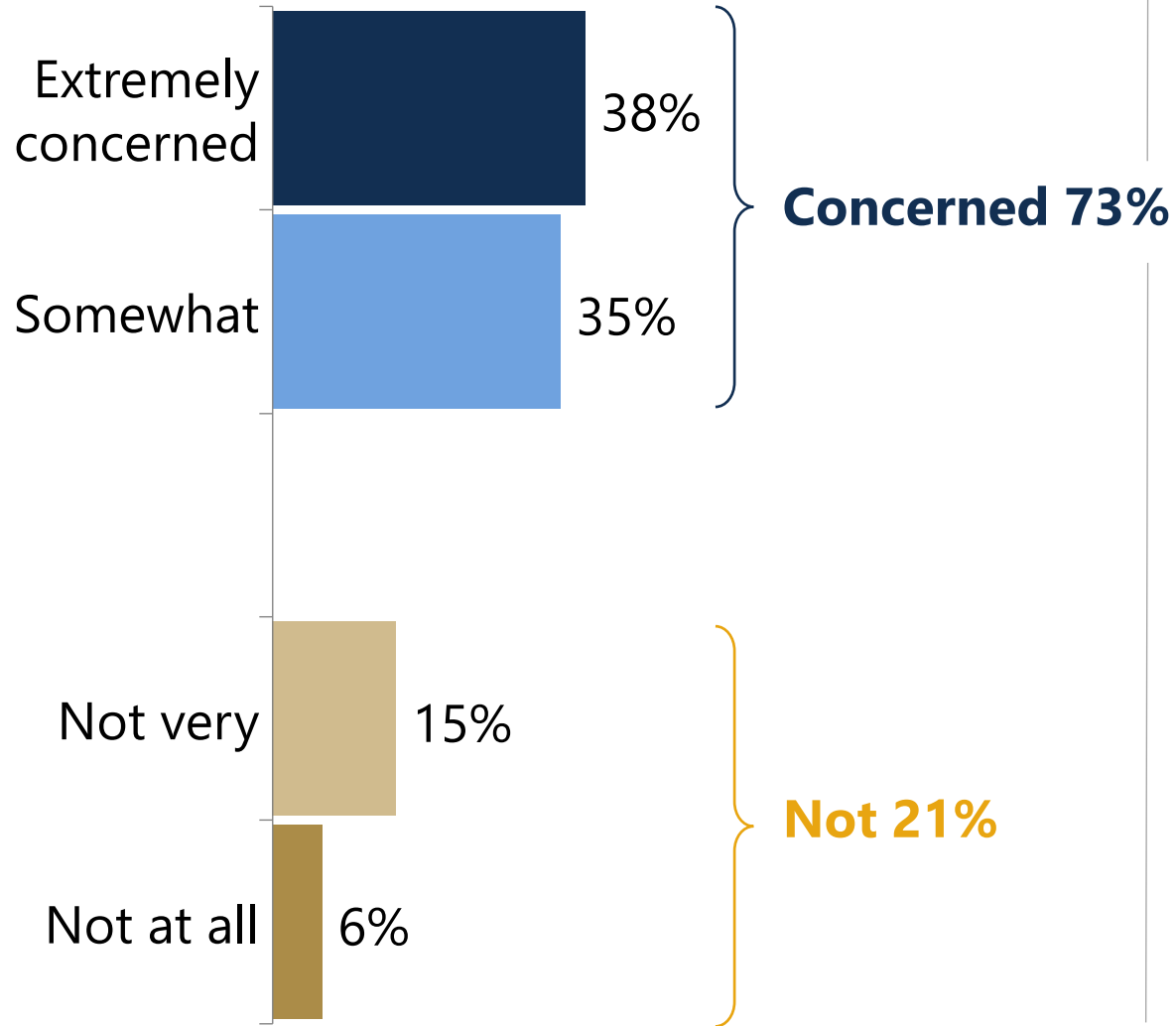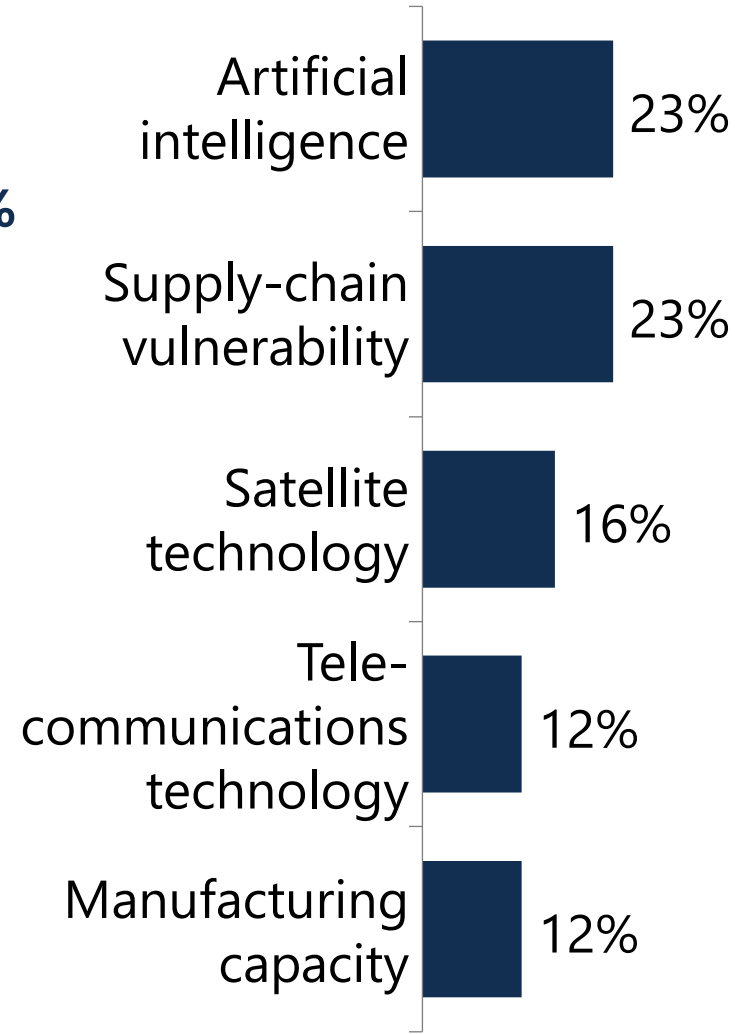
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q78. How concerned are you about the possibility of the U.S. falling behind China technologically?
AND Q79. Thinking about China's progress in various areas of technology, which of the following areas concerns you most?

Little change in views on Taiwan contingencies since 2019.

Support

Officially recognizing Taiwan as an independent country
- November 2021: 71%
- October 2019: 76%

Imposing economic sanctions against China
- November 2021: 66%
- October 2019: 64%

Dramatically increasing arms sales to Taiwan
- November 2021: 44%
- October 2019: 44%

Moving U.S. military assets into the region
- November 2021: 55%
- October 2019: 55%

Establishing a no-fly zone over the area
- November 2021: 50%
- October 2019: 42%

Committing U.S. ground troops to the defense of Taiwan
- November 2021: 40%
- October 2019: 39%

■ November 2021
■ October 2019

Q72-Q77. As you may know, although official Chinese policy is that Taiwan is part of China, Taiwan has operated relatively independently for decades. If China invaded Taiwan, please tell me if you would support/oppose the United States coming to Taiwan's defense in each of the following ways.

Six-in-ten support relocating the Winter Olympics; half back a boycott.

Support

A business boycott, where U.S. corporations refuse to sponsor / advertise during it — 60%

The IOC **delaying and relocating** the games — 60%

A U.S. diplomatic boycott, where U.S. athletes would still compete — 48%

A full boycott by the U.S. Olympic team and its athletes — 47%
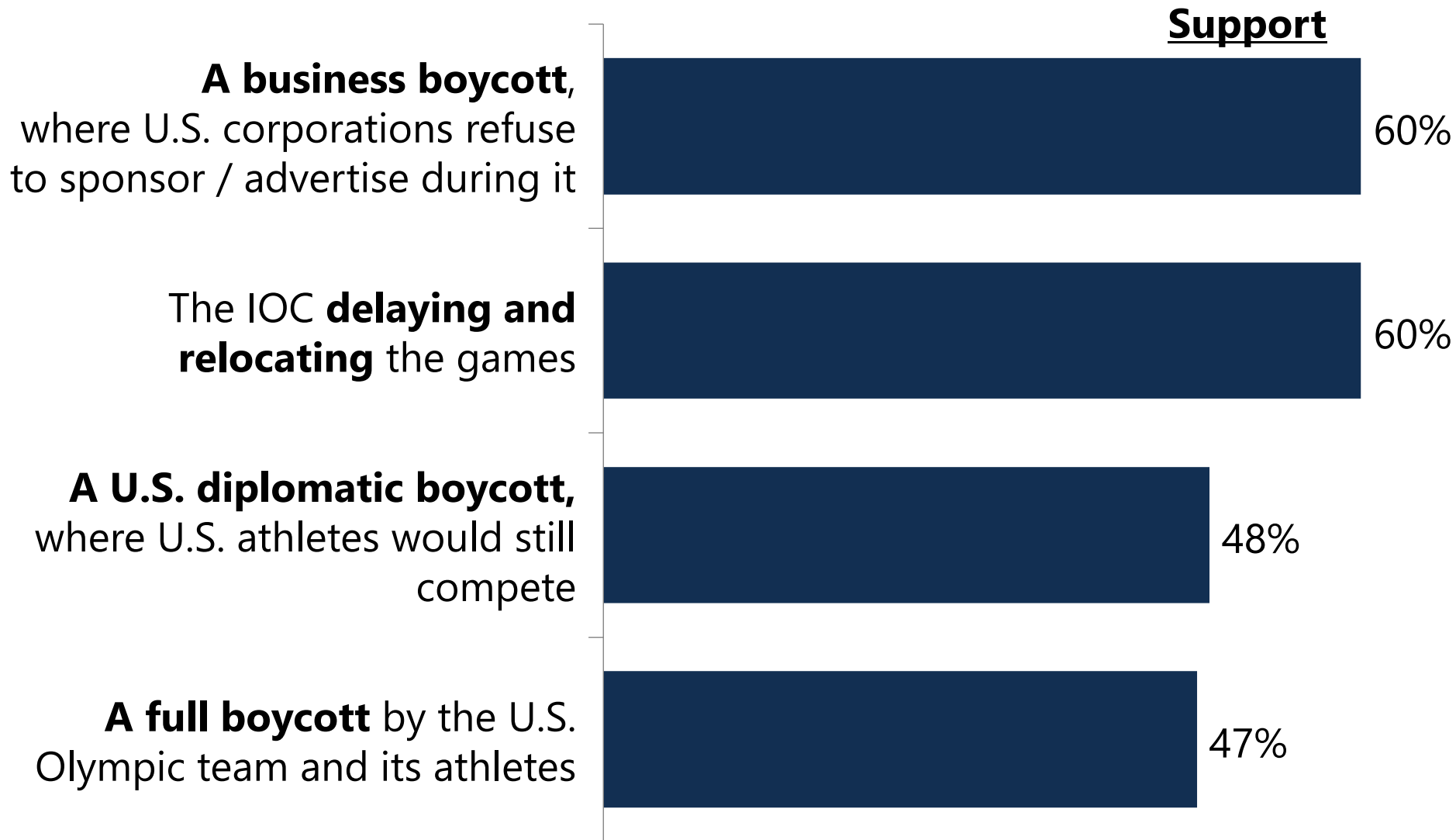
Q80-Q83. As you may know, China will host the next Winter Olympics. State Department reports accuse China of human rights abuses, including genocide against the Uyghurs. Many are calling for a boycott. Please tell me if you favor or oppose each of the following.

Three-quarters think a lab leak as the origin of COVID-19 is at least somewhat likely.

Question frame: *Some believe the coronavirus was developed by scientists working at a Wuhan lab, but accidentally leaked, and the Chinese government then hid and lied about the leak to international public health officials.*
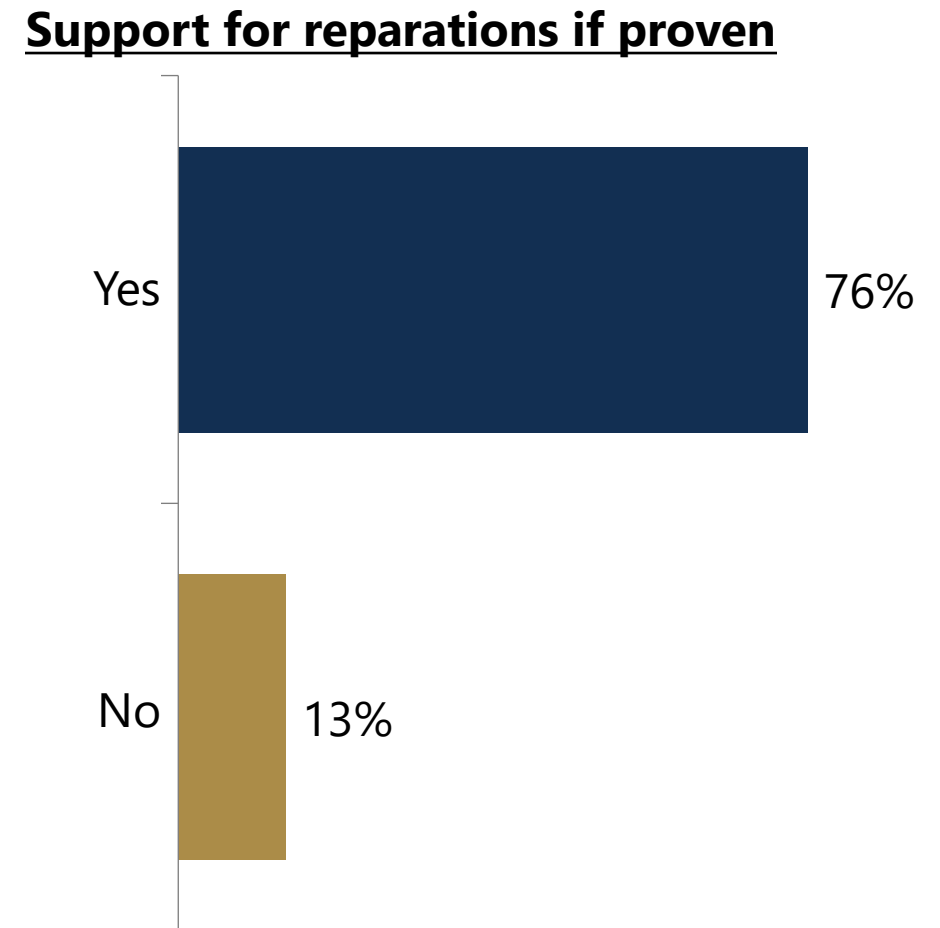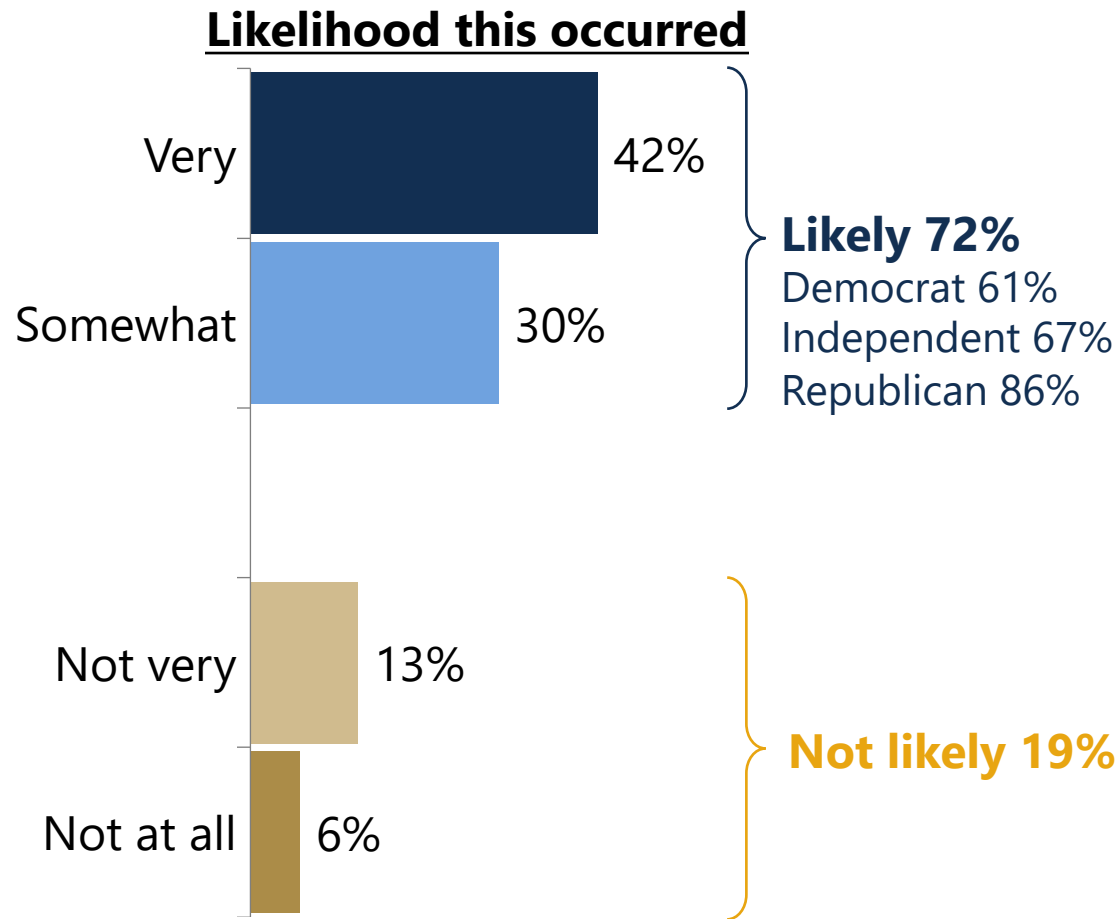
Likelihood this occurred

Very — 42%

Somewhat — 30%

Likely 72%
Democrat 61%
Independent 67%
Republican 86%

Not very — 13%

Not at all — 6%

Not likely 19%

Support for reparations if proven

Yes — 76%

No — 13%

Afghanistan

Nearly half think U.S. should have withdrawn all troops from Afghanistan.

Should U.S. Have Withdrawn Troops?

Should have withdrawn all troops — **47%**
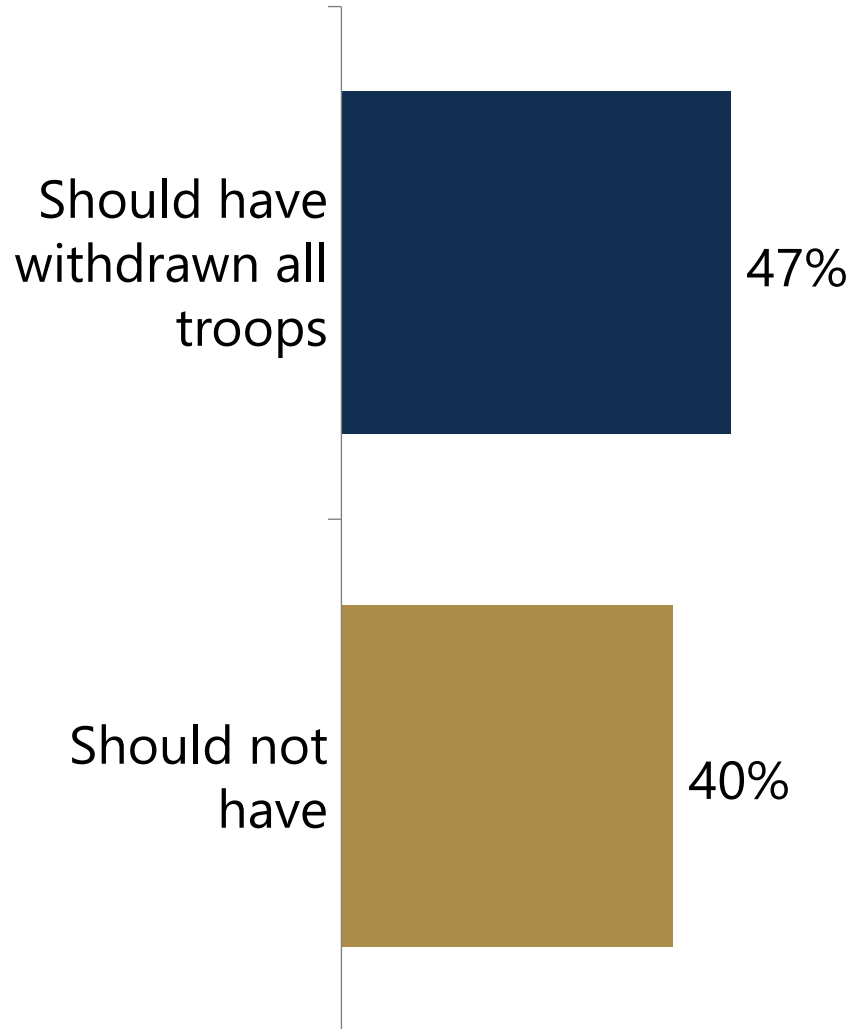
Should not have — **40%**

Rather than Withdrawing, Should the U.S. Have:
(Among those who think troops should not have been withdrawn)

Increased troop levels — **24%**

Left troop levels the same — **69%**

Note: Remainder Don't know

Nearly half thinks U.S. should have withdrawn all troops from Afghanistan…

Withdrawn all troops — 47%
Democrat 67%, Republican 30%
Active service HH 55%, Veteran HH 47%

Left troop levels the same — 27%
Democrat 11%, Republican 47%

Increased troop levels — 10%
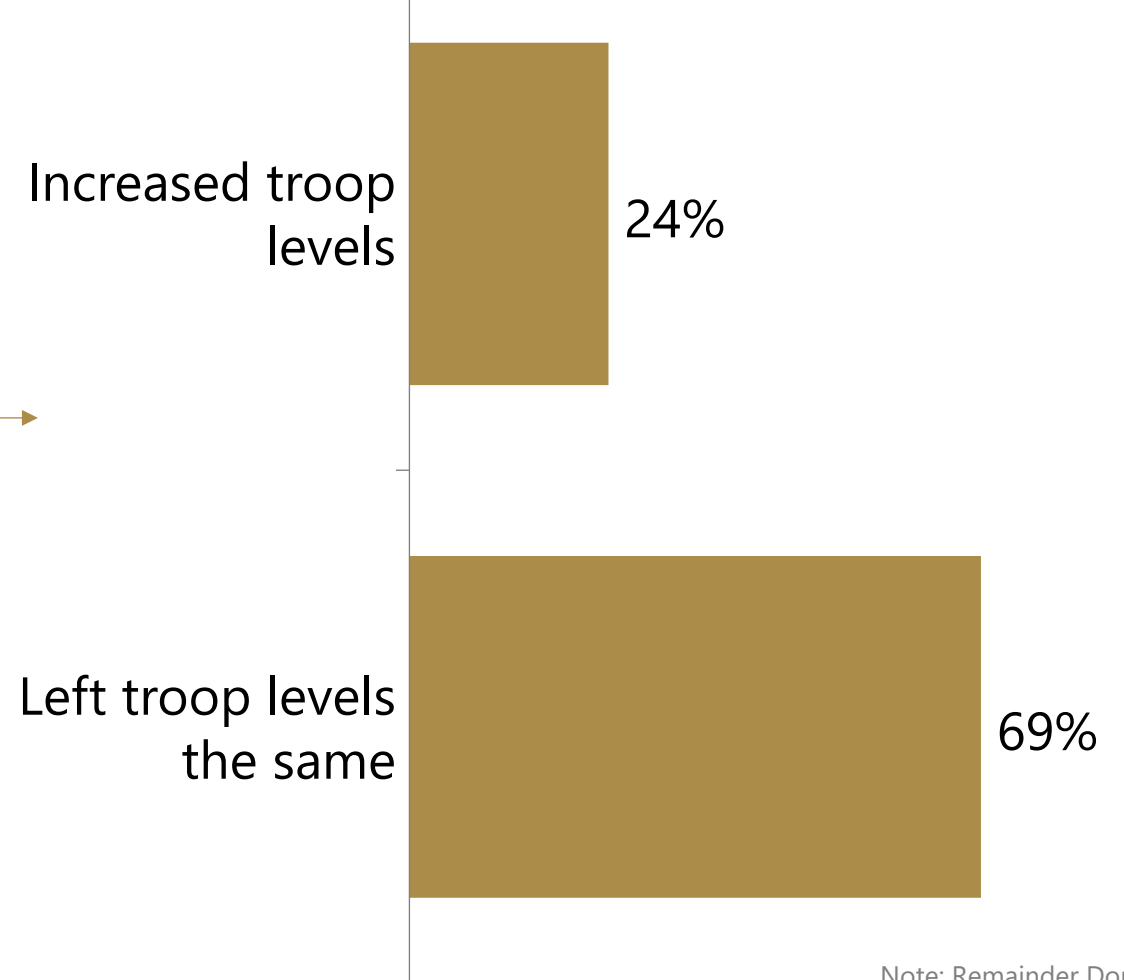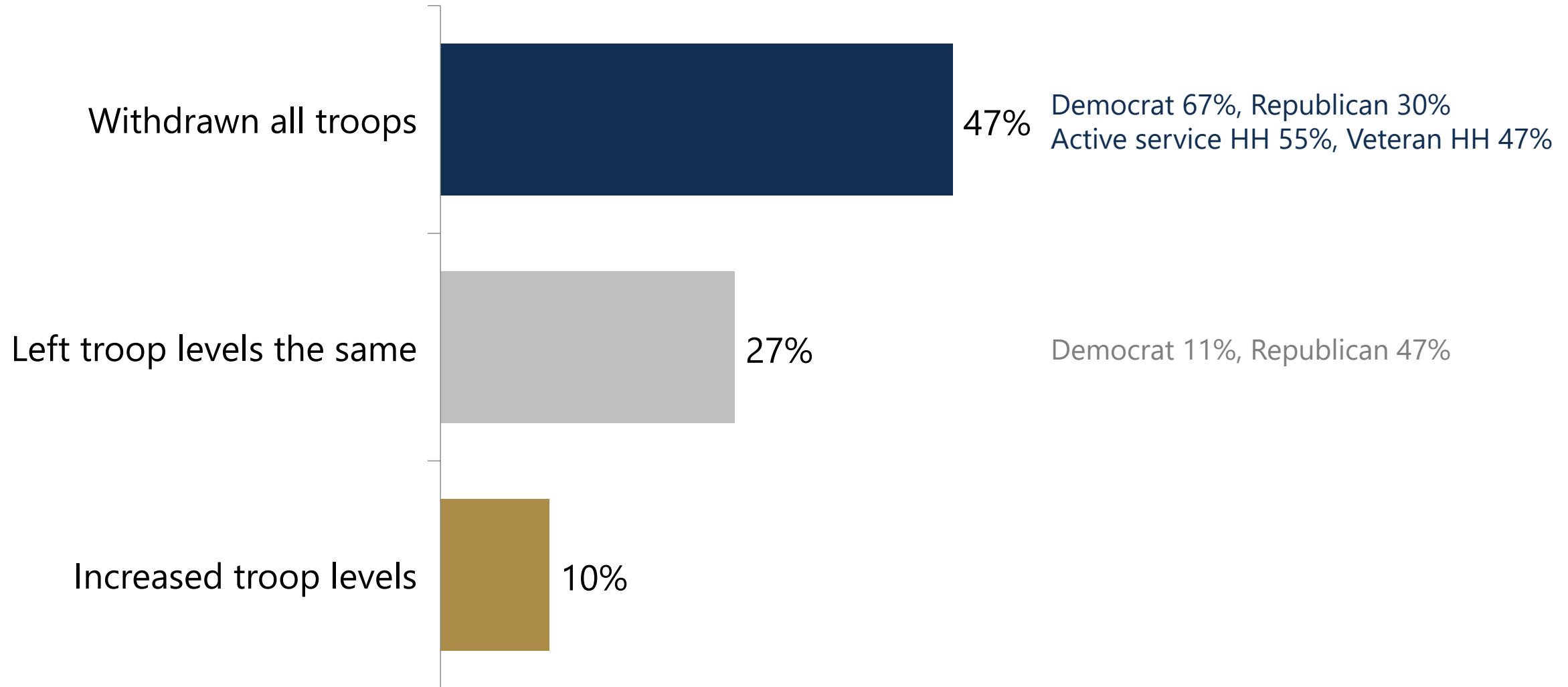
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q87. Do you think the U.S. should have withdrawn all American troops from Afghanistan, or not?
AND [IF SHOULD NOT] Q88. Rather than withdrawing all troops from Afghanistan, do you think the U.S. should have:
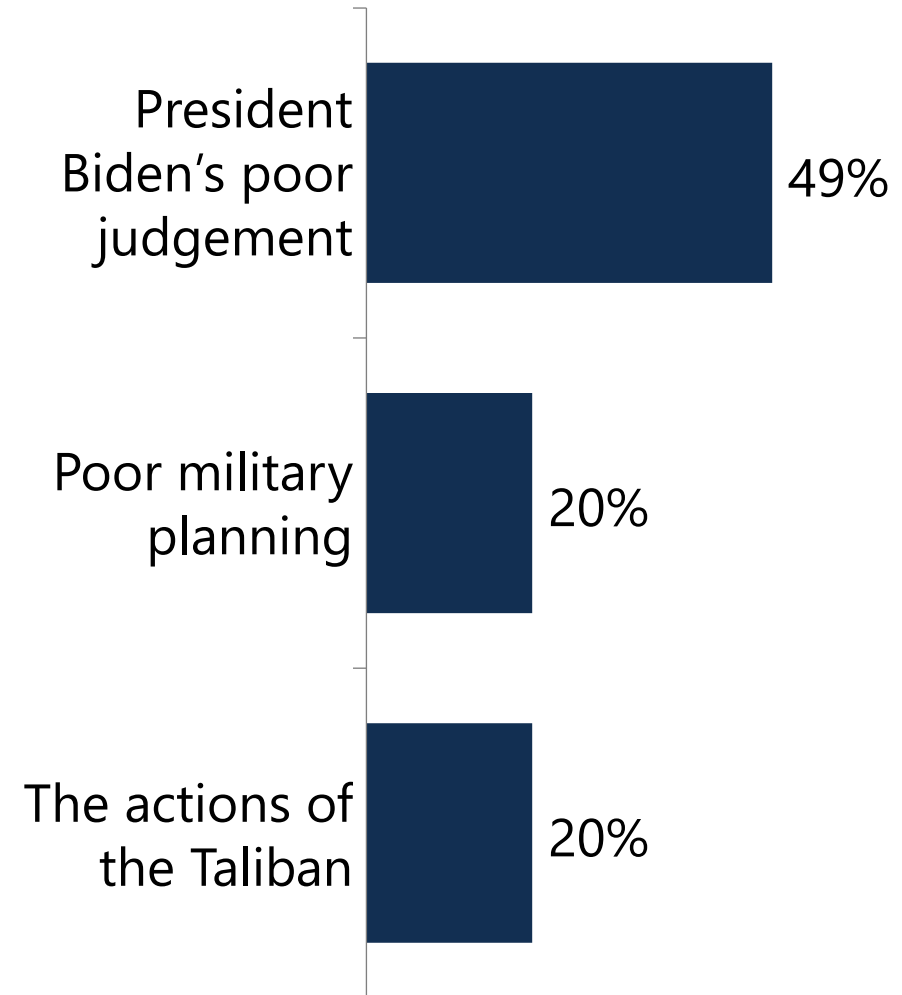
...but six-in-ten disapprove of how withdrawal was handled, and Biden gets lion's share of blame.

Handling of Withdrawal

Approve — 27%

Disapprove — 62%
Democrat 42%, Independent 60%, Republican 83%
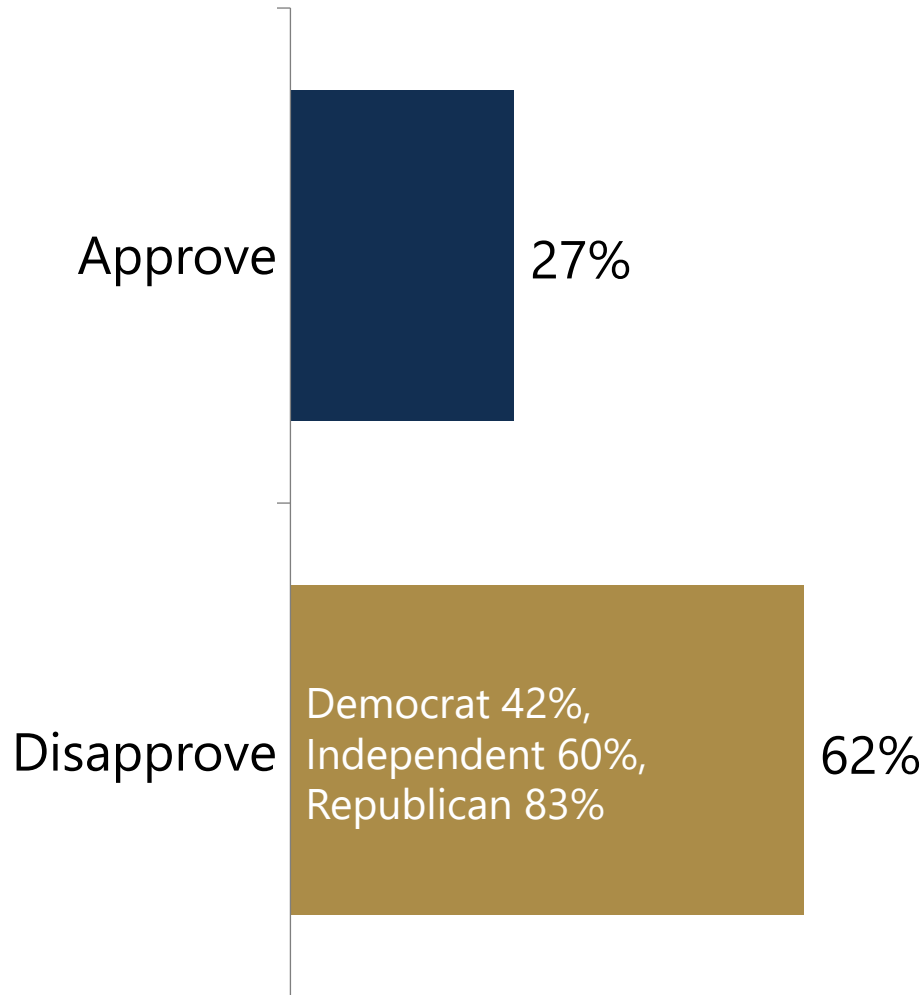
Blame for Problems with Withdrawal

President Biden's poor judgement — 49%

Poor military planning — 20%

The actions of the Taliban — 20%

Note: Remainder Don't know

Q89. Regardless of how you feel about the decision to withdraw troops, do you approve or disapprove of the way the withdrawal was handled? AND Q90. Do you believe the problems associated with the U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan were mostly the fault of:
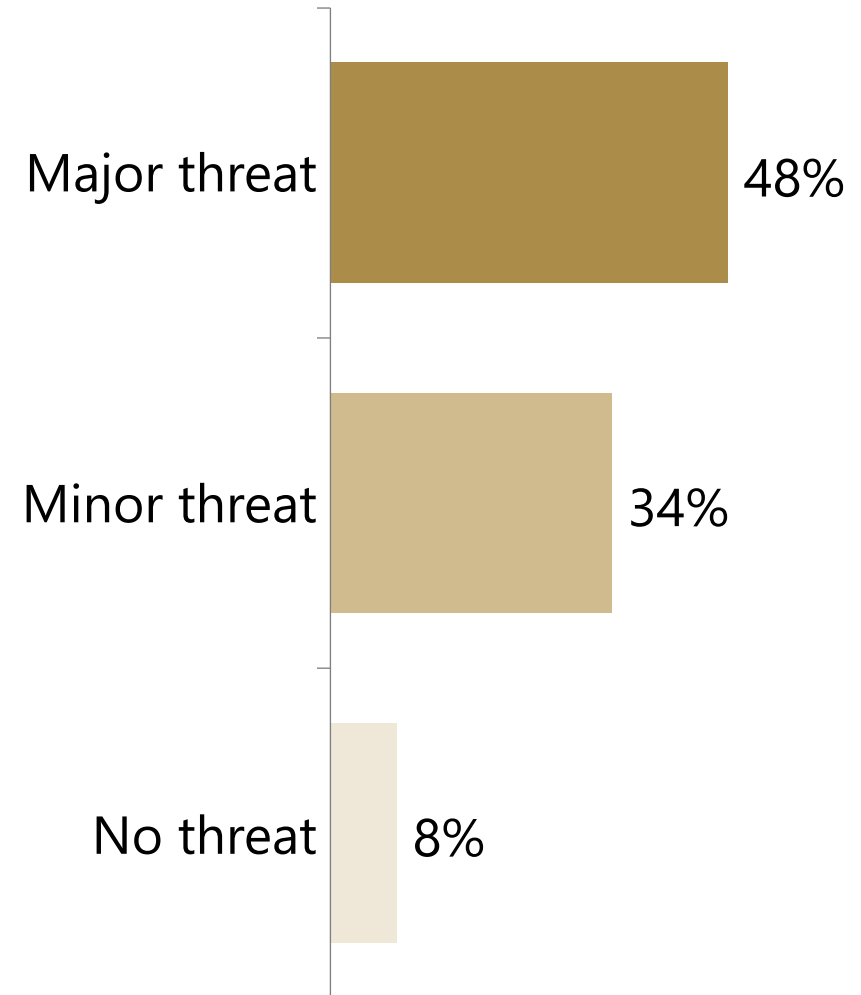
Withdrawal is seen as weakening U.S. on balance; most think Taliban control poses a threat.

Effect of Withdrawal

Strengthens U.S.	14%
Not much difference	35%
Weakens U.S.	40%
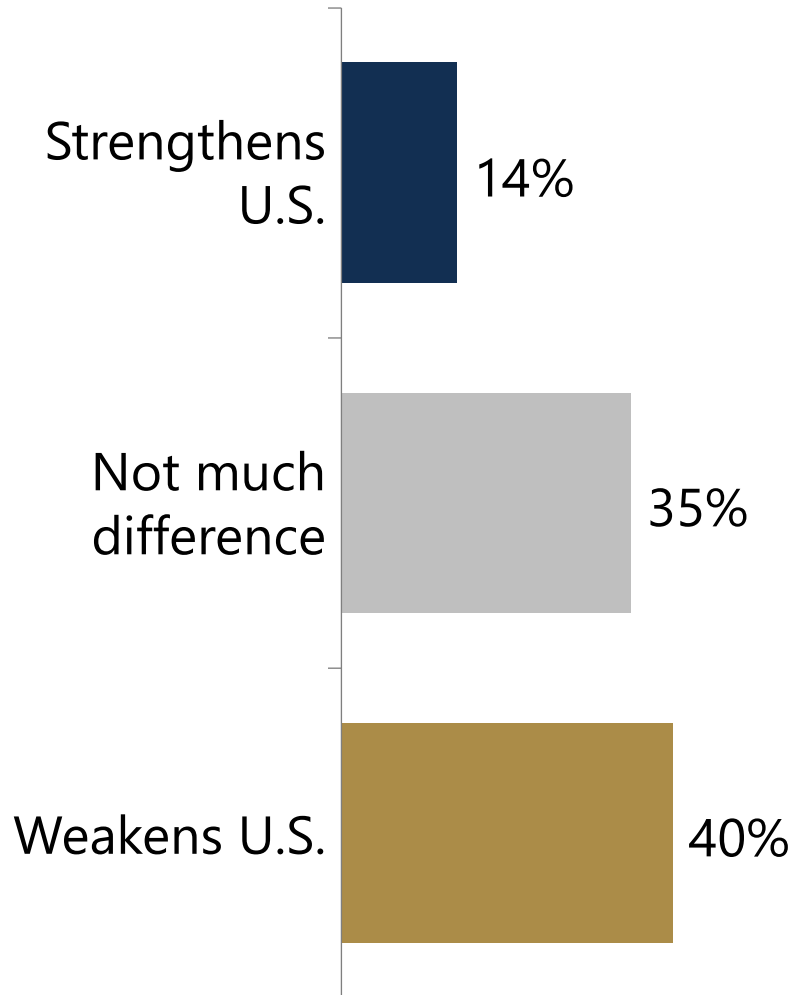
Threat to US from Taliban Control

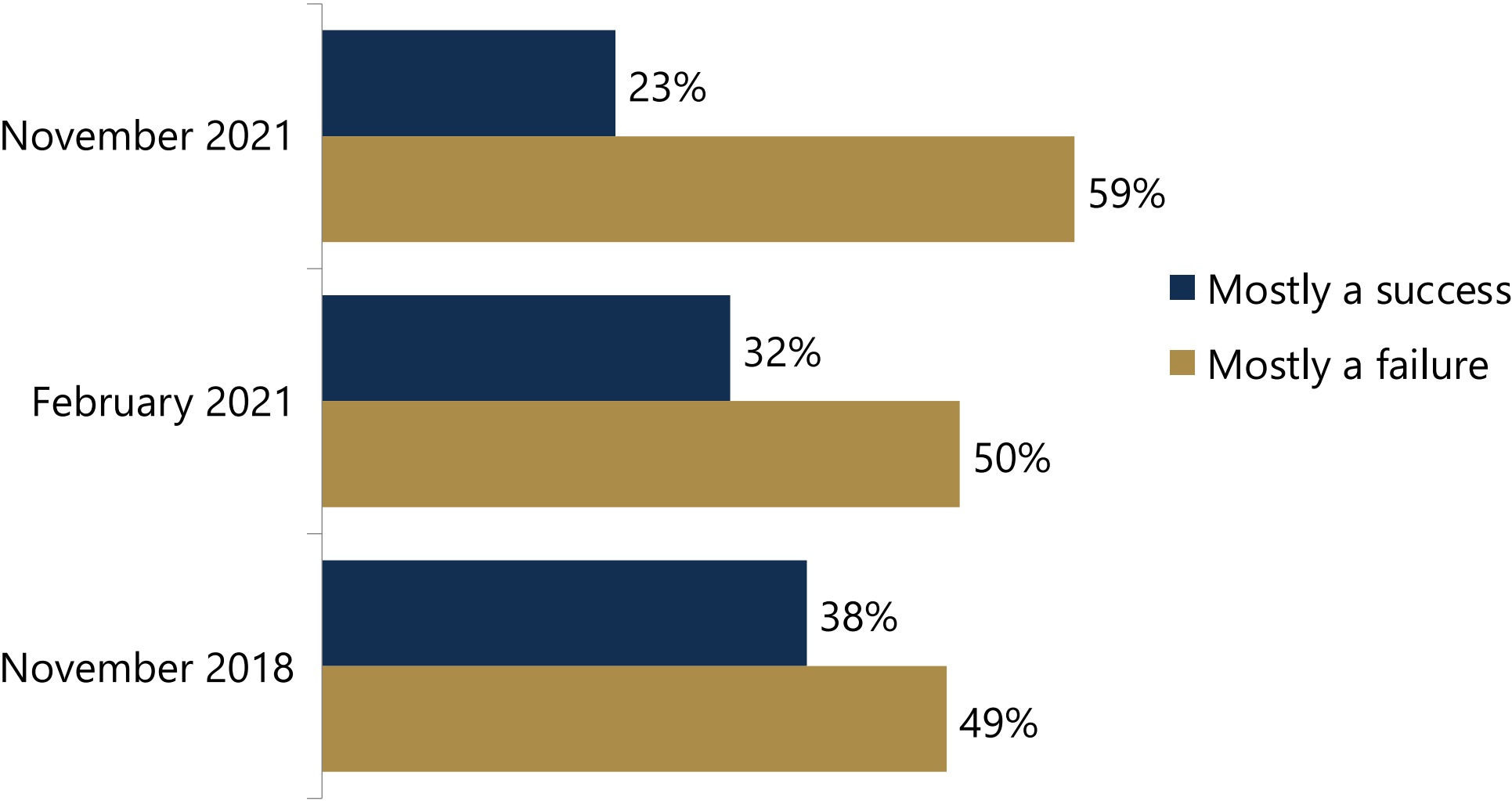|	
Major threat	48%
Minor threat	34%
No threat	8%

Note: Remainder Don't know

Q91. Which of the following best describes the effect of the decision to remove all U.S. troops from Afghanistan? AND
Q97. How much of a threat is the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan to U.S. national security?

Fewer see war in Afghanistan as a success.

November 2021
- Mostly a success: 23%
- Mostly a failure: 59%

February 2021
- Mostly a success: 32%
- Mostly a failure: 50%

November 2018
- Mostly a success: 38%
- Mostly a failure: 49%

Legend:
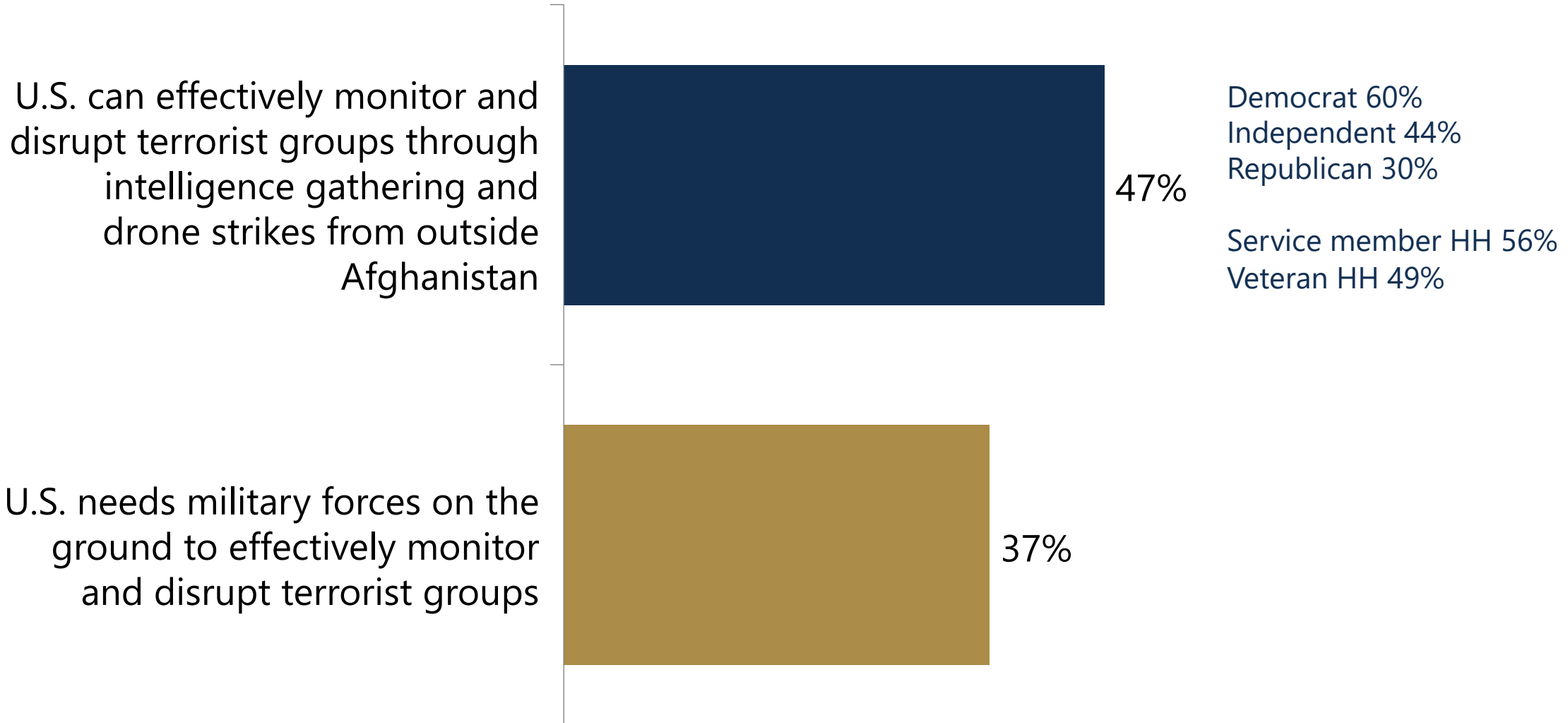- ■ Mostly a success
- ■ Mostly a failure

Note: Remainder Don't know

Q92. Do you think the war in Afghanistan has been mostly a success or mostly a failure?

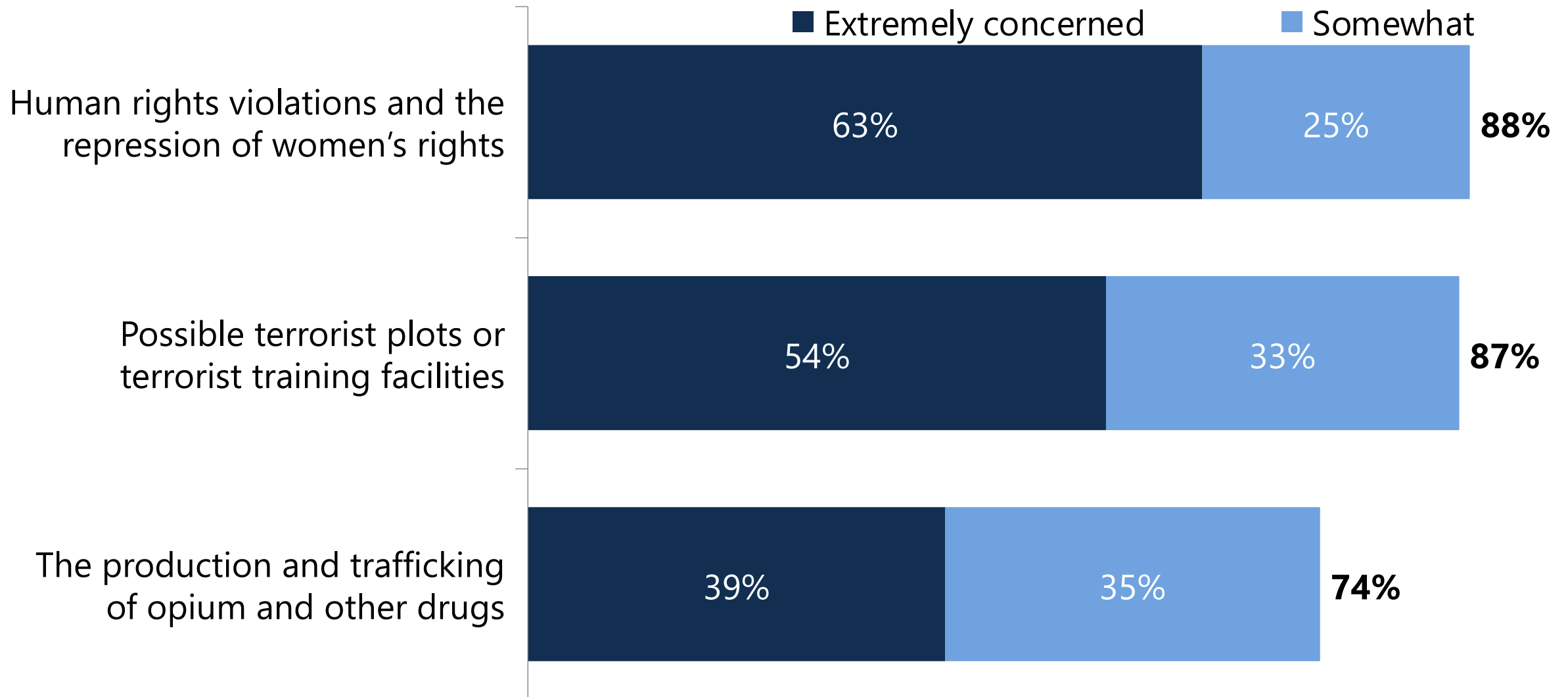# Nearly half think U.S. can disrupt terrorist activity in Afghanistan from afar.

U.S. can effectively monitor and disrupt terrorist groups through intelligence gathering and drone strikes from outside Afghanistan

47%

Democrat 60%
Independent 44%
Republican 30%

Service member HH 56%
Veteran HH 49%

U.S. needs military forces on the ground to effectively monitor and disrupt terrorist groups

37%

Note: Remainder Don't know

Q93. Which of the following is closer to your view when it comes to terrorist activities in Afghanistan?

Human rights top the list of concerns about Afghanistan.

Extremely concerned ■ Somewhat ■

Human rights violations and the repression of women's rights
63% | 25% | **88%**

Possible terrorist plots or terrorist training facilities
54% | 33% | **87%**

The production and trafficking of opium and other drugs
39% | 35% | **74%**

Q94-Q96. Moving forward, how concerned are you about each of the following in Afghanistan?

EVALUATIONS OF PRESIDENTS

Reagan viewed most favorably among recent presidents.

Very / Somewhat favorable | **Somewhat / Very unfavorable**

President	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	(Don't know)	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable
Ronald Reagan	42%	27%		12%	10%
Barack Obama	36%	23%		14%	23%
Donald Trump	32%	18%		9%	37%
Bill Clinton	23%	33%		22%	16%
George H.W. Bush	21%	41%		20%	11%
Jimmy Carter	20%	30%		19%	15%
Joe Biden	19%	25%		13%	38%
George W. Bush	18%	39%		23%	15%
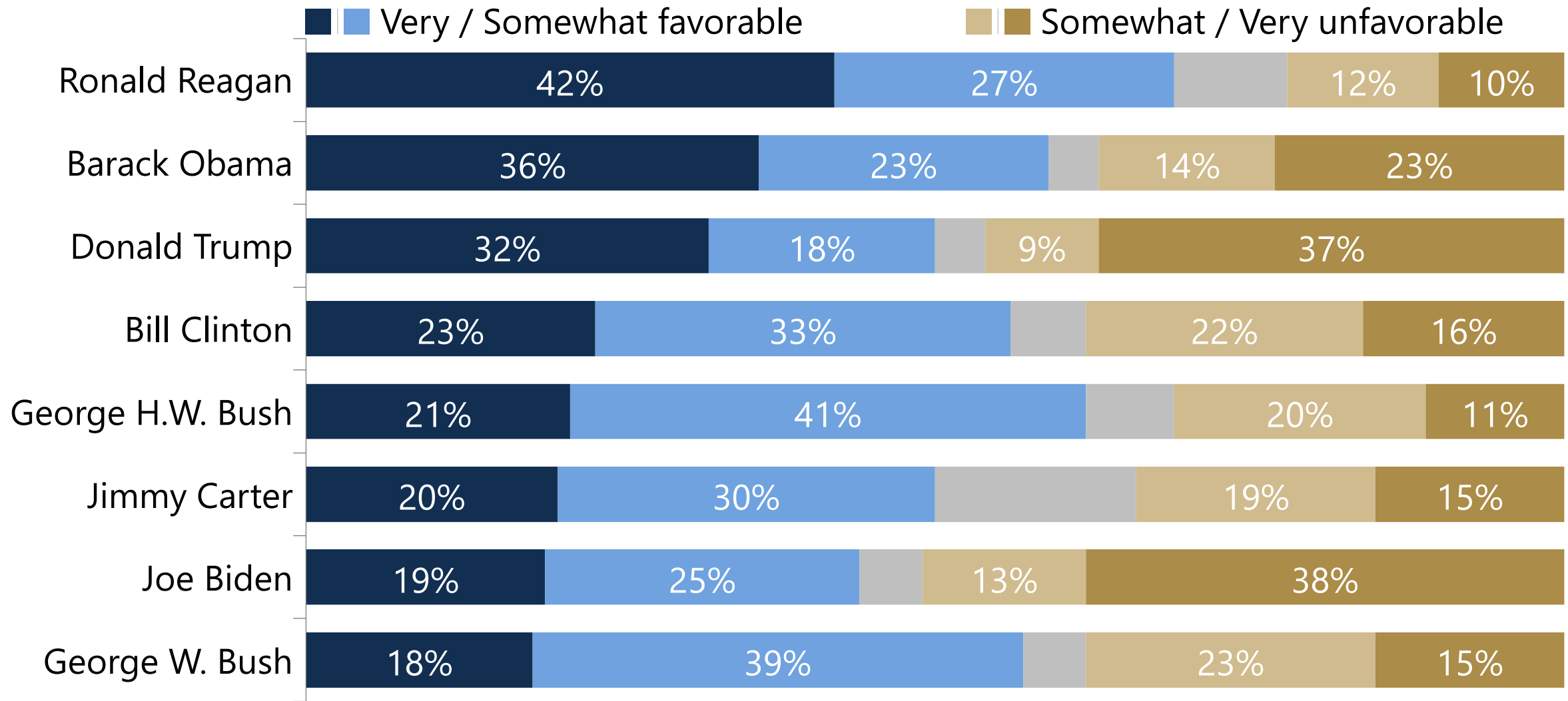
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q99-Q106. Thinking now about recent presidents, please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of each one I mention.

For more information, contact

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