



Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute


2023 National Defense Survey *Executive Summary*



Prepared by Beacon Research and Shaw & Company Research, November 2023



About the Survey

Mode	Combined telephone (n=945) and online panel (n=1,561) survey. Telephone interviews conducted by trained professionals calling landlines (51%) and cellphones (49%).
Sample	2,506 US Adults.
Dates	October 27 – November 5, 2023.
Weights	Slight weights were applied to ensure the sample accurately reflects the demographic profile of the US population.
Margin of Error	$\pm 2\%$ at the 95% confidence level for the entire sample. Most questions were split sampled (n \approx 1,252, $\pm 2.8\%$). The margin of error for subgroups is higher.
Research Partnership	 The Research Partnership section features two logos. On the left is the logo for SHAW & Company research, which includes a blue square with a grid pattern and the text "SHAW & Company research". On the right is the logo for BEACON RESEARCH, which features the word "BEACON" in a large, bold, blue font with a blue flame-like shape above the letter "A", and the word "RESEARCH" in a smaller, blue, spaced-out font below it.
Note	Some data may not add to 100% due to rounding.



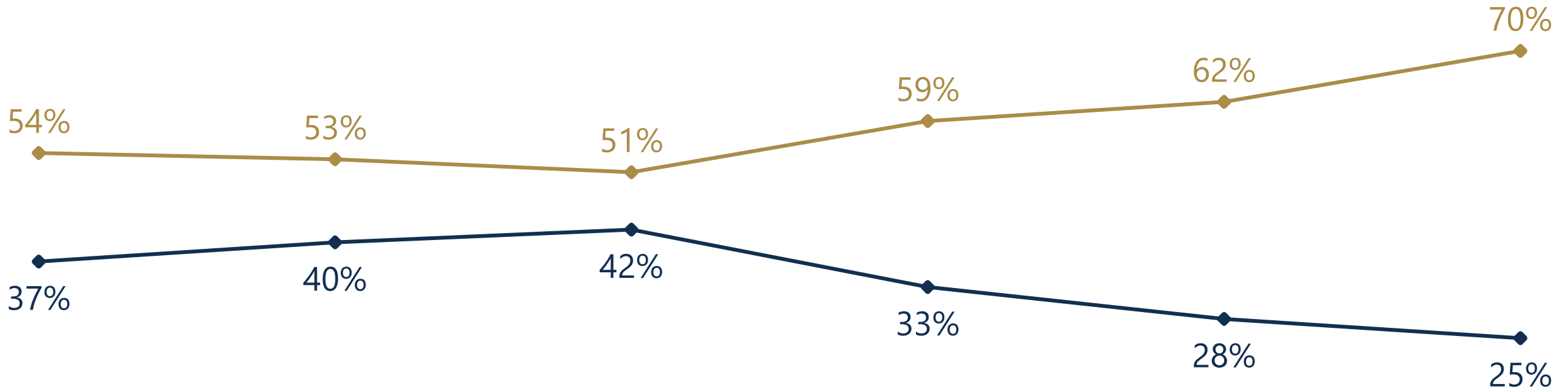
POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT





Pessimism about the direction of the country deepens.

◆ Right direction ◆ Wrong track



Nov '18 Oct '19 Feb '21 Nov '21 Nov '22 Nov '23

Note: Remainder Don't know

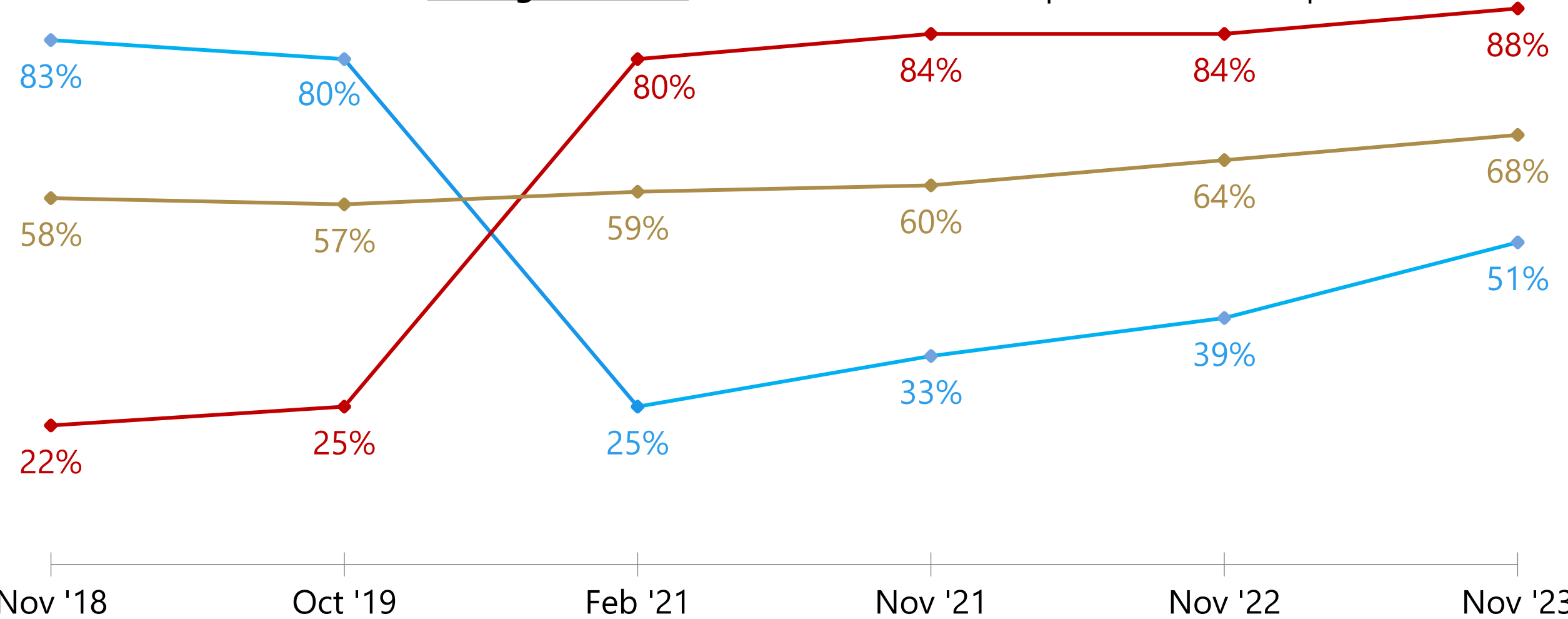
Q2. Would you say things in the United States today are:

Increasing pessimism from Democrats and independents since fall 2021.



Wrong Direction

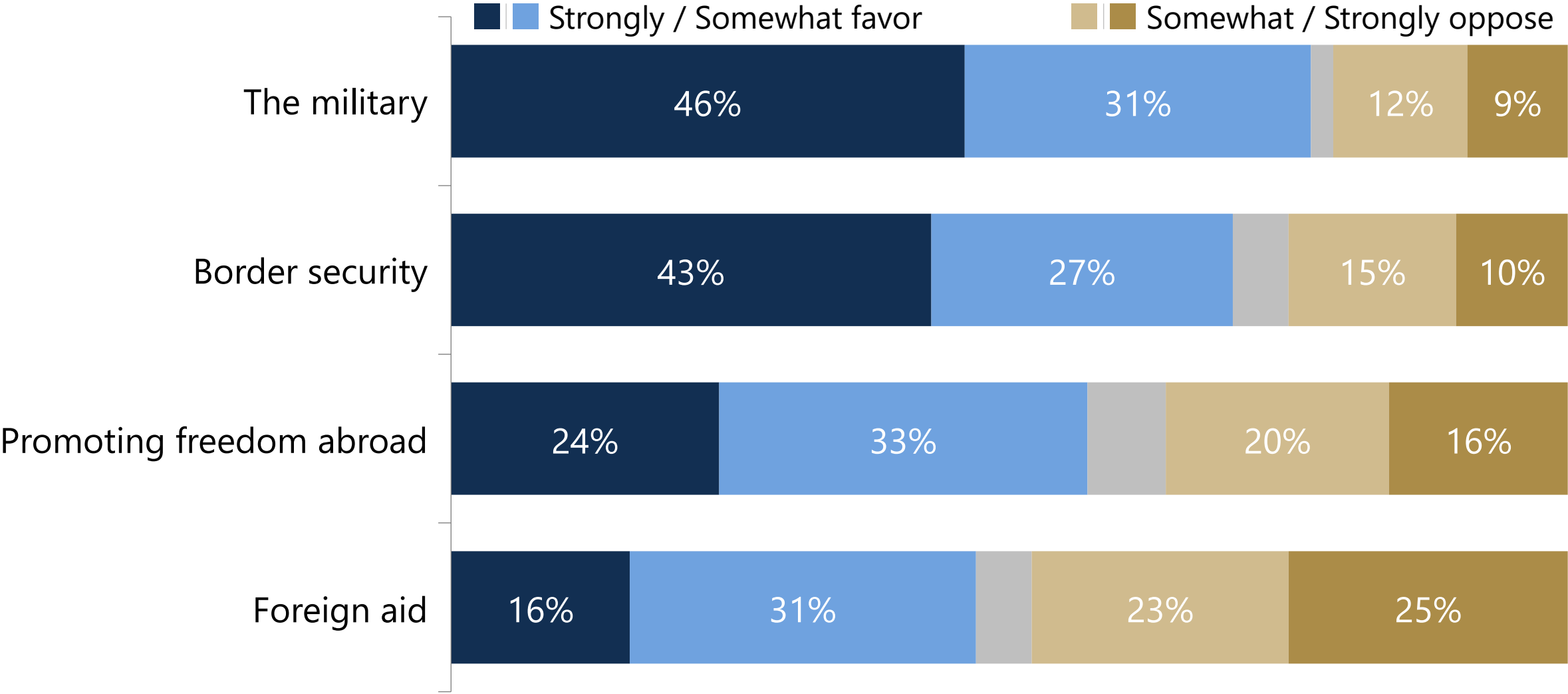
— Democrat — Republican — Independent



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



Three-quarters favor increased military spending.

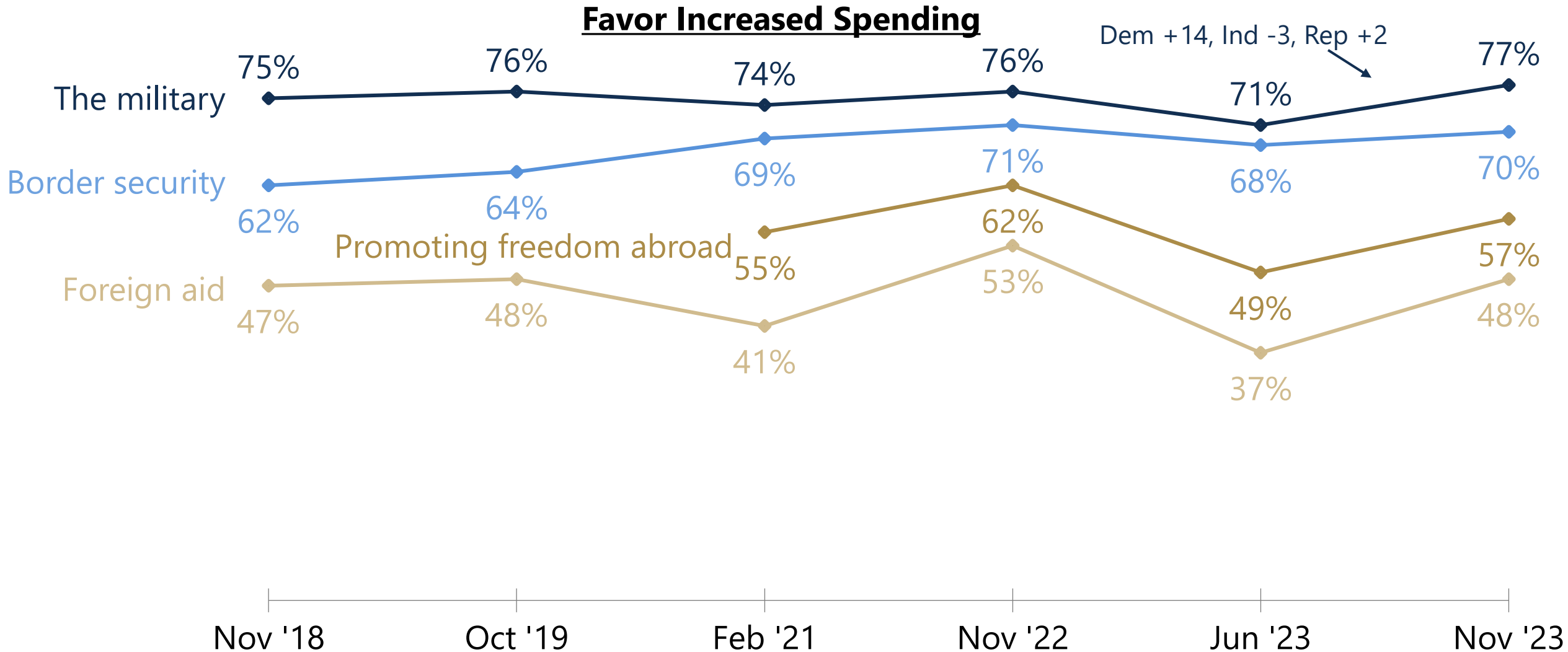


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q15-18. Please tell me if you favor or oppose increasing government spending in each of the following areas.



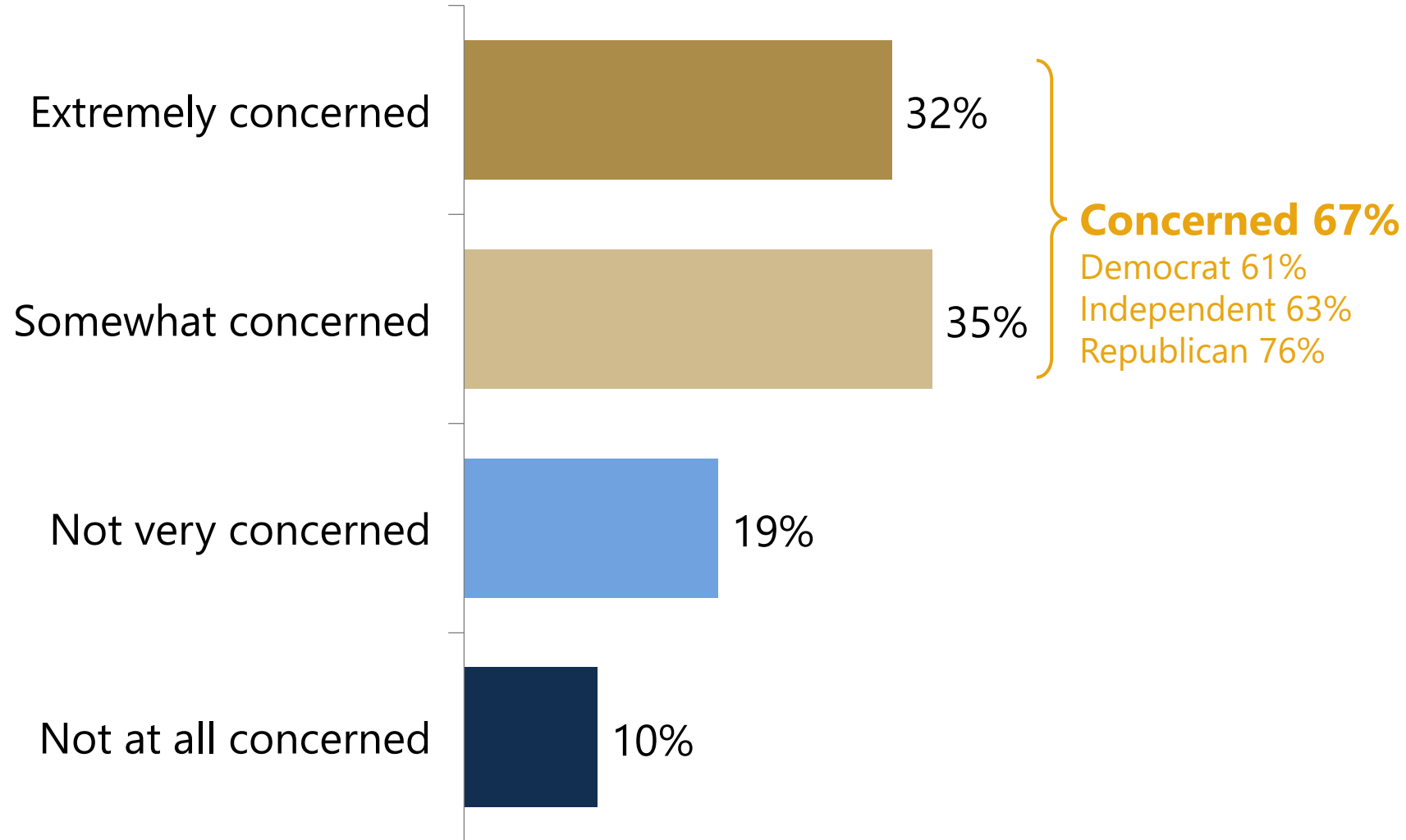
High, steady backing for increased military funding; more variability in support for foreign aid spending.



Q15-18. Please tell me if you favor or oppose increasing government spending in each of the following areas.



Two-thirds concerned Congressional cuts could harm military capabilities.

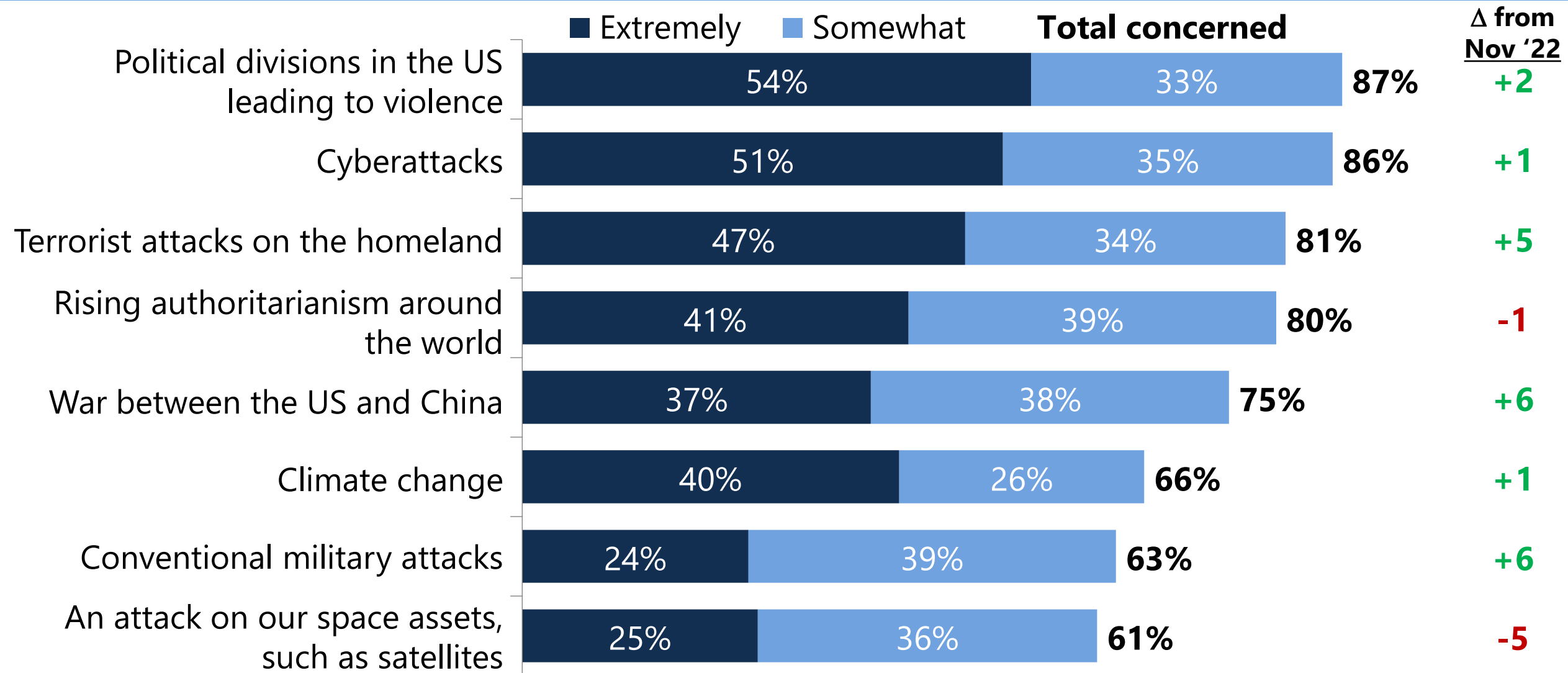


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q19. How concerned are you that budget cuts by Congress will reduce the military's capabilities?



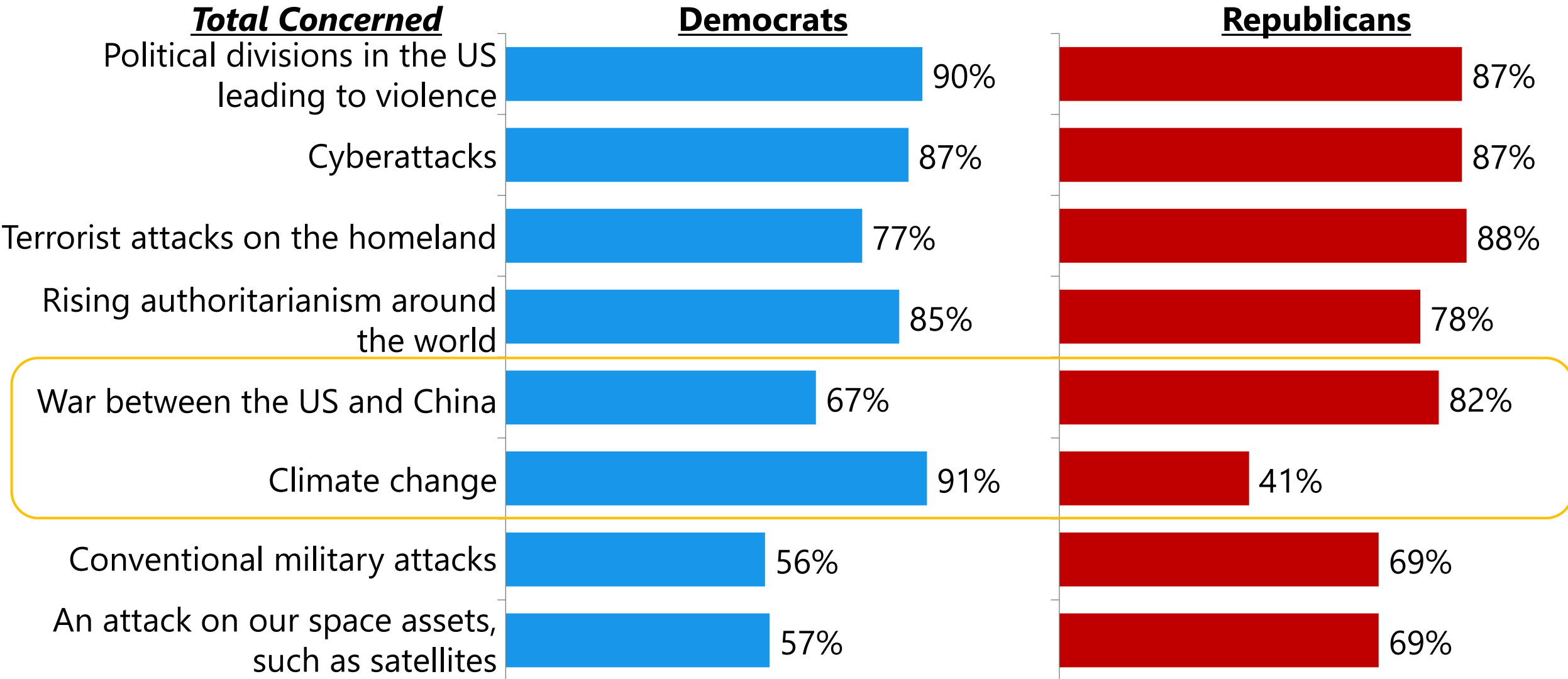
Top threats and concerns: political violence, cyberattacks.



Q20-27. How concerned are you about the threat of each of the following in the next five years?



Partisans largely agree on top concerns, with the exception of China and climate change.



Q20-27. How concerned are you about the threat of each of the following in the next five years?

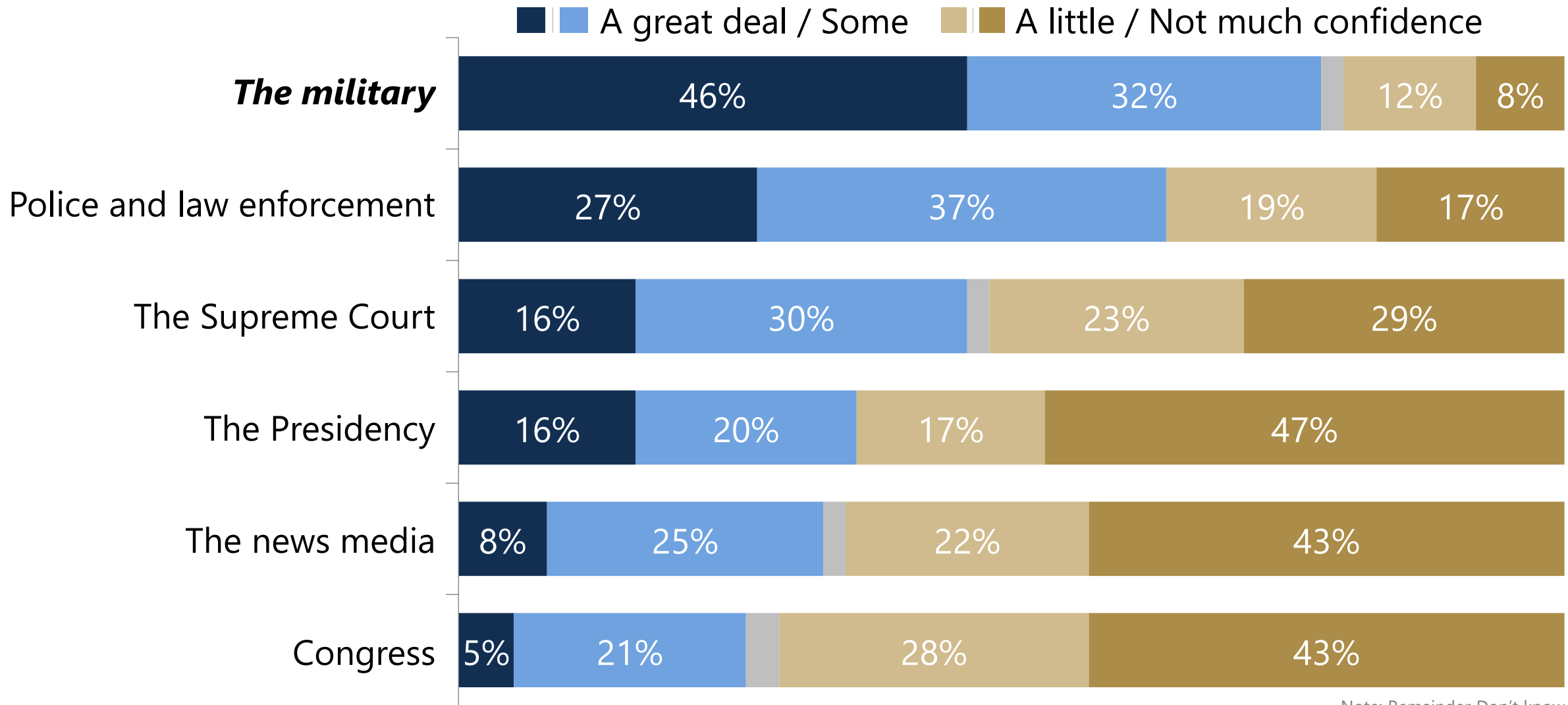


CONFIDENCE IN THE MILITARY





Military remains the most-trusted institution.

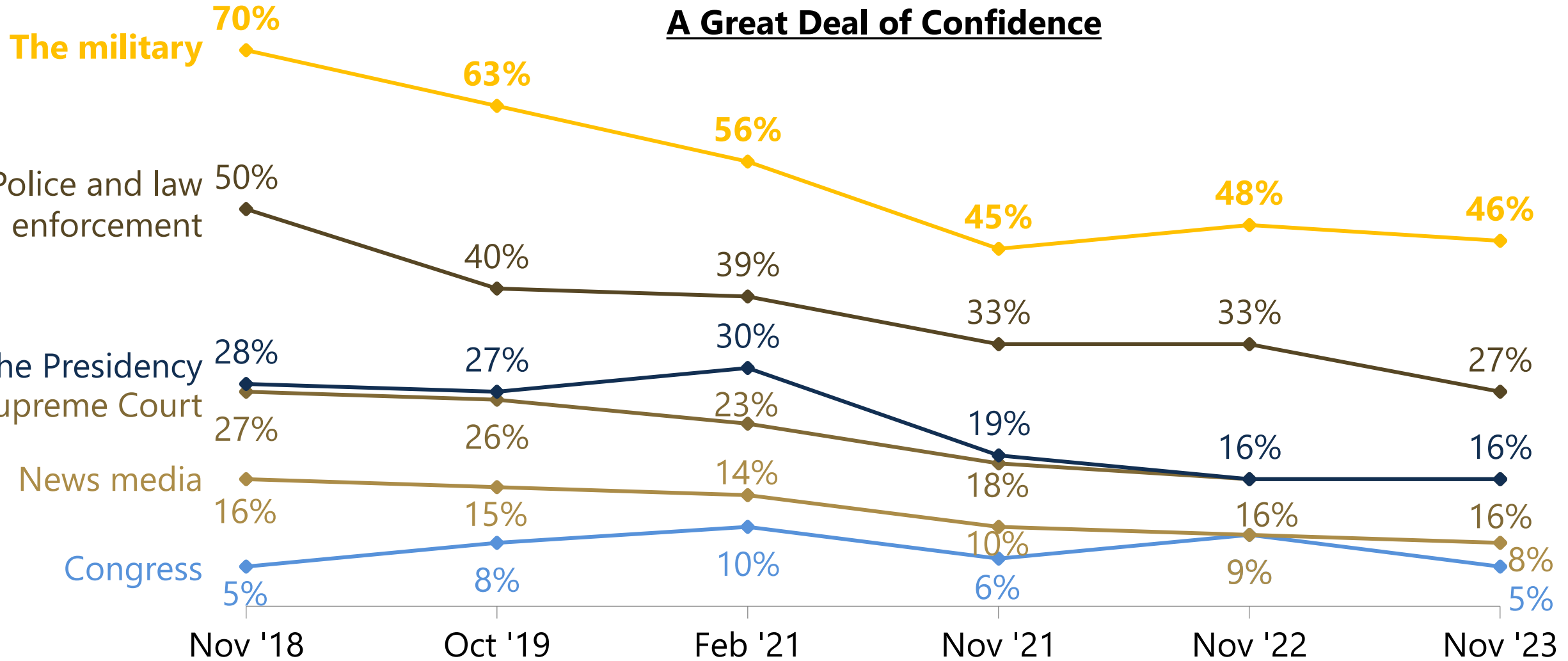


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q4-9. Please tell us how much trust and confidence you have in each of the following.



Confidence in military holds steady.

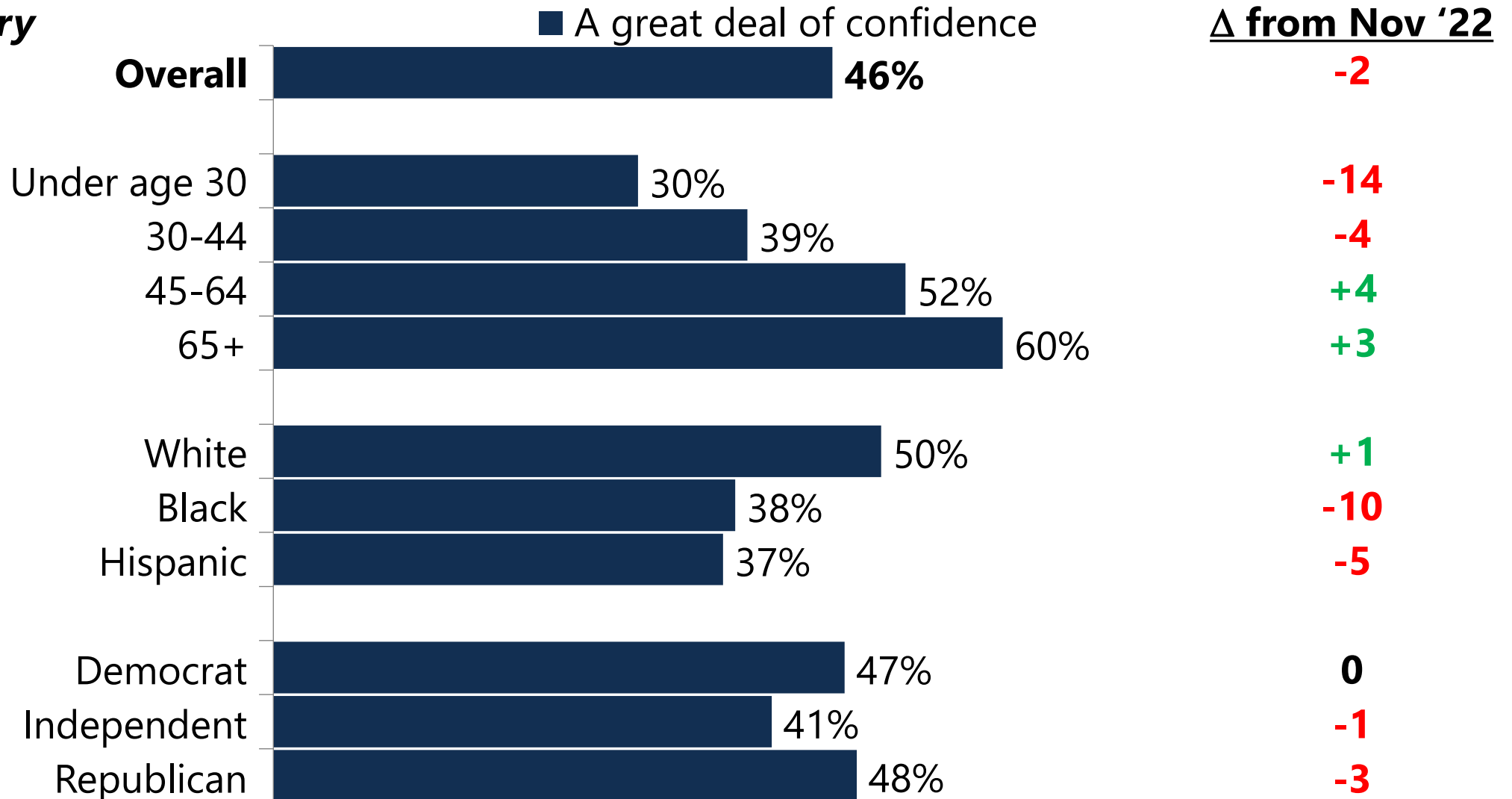


Q4-9. Please tell us how much trust and confidence you have in each of the following.



Young people and people of color are less confident in the military.

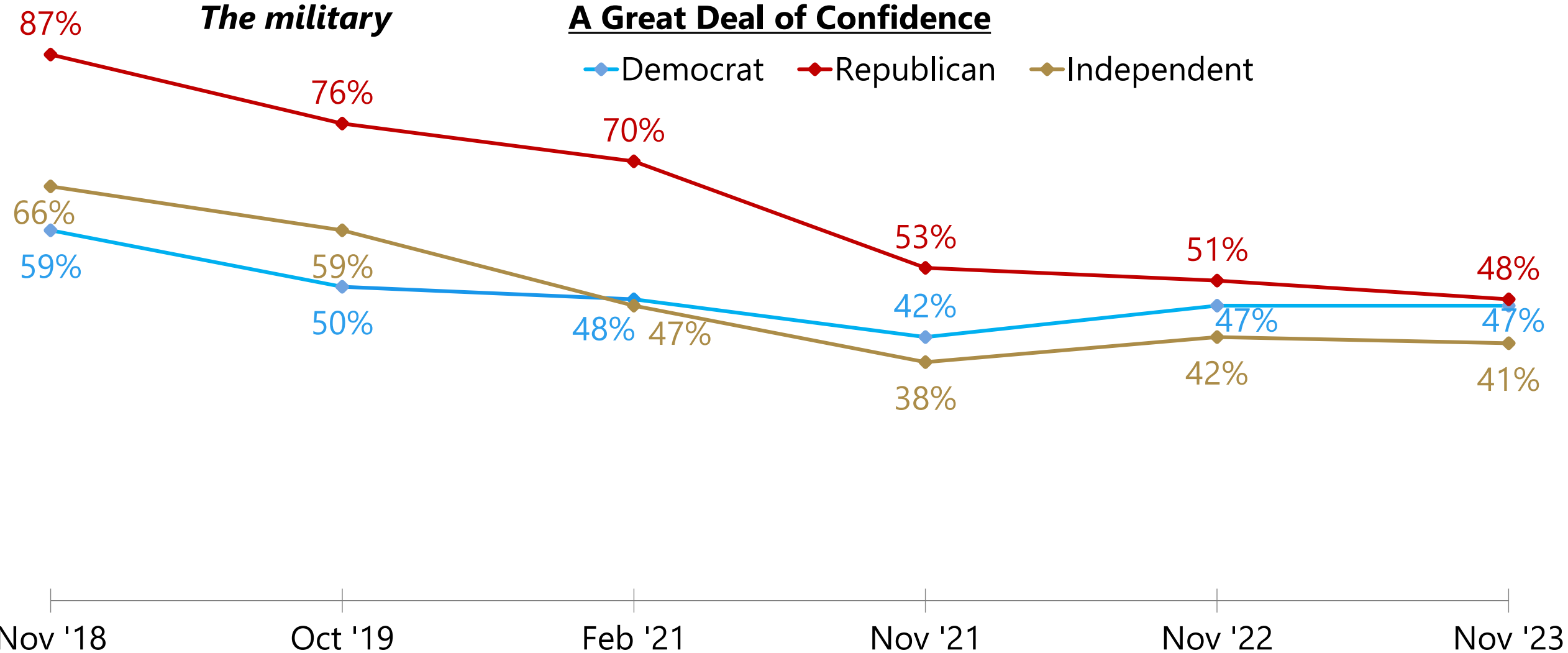
The military



Q4. Please tell us how much trust and confidence you have in: The military



Long-term declines in confidence in the military mostly (but not entirely) a Republican phenomenon.



Q4. Please tell us how much trust and confidence you have in: The military

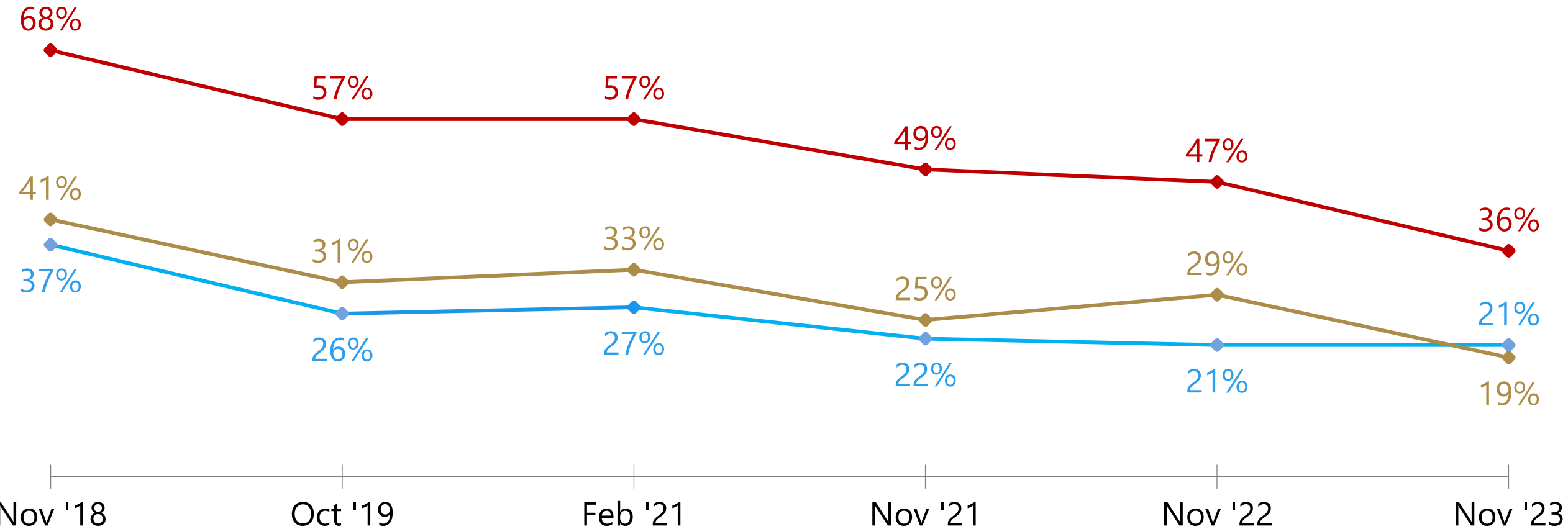


Declines in confidence in law enforcement largely a function of changing Republican attitudes.

Police and Law Enforcement

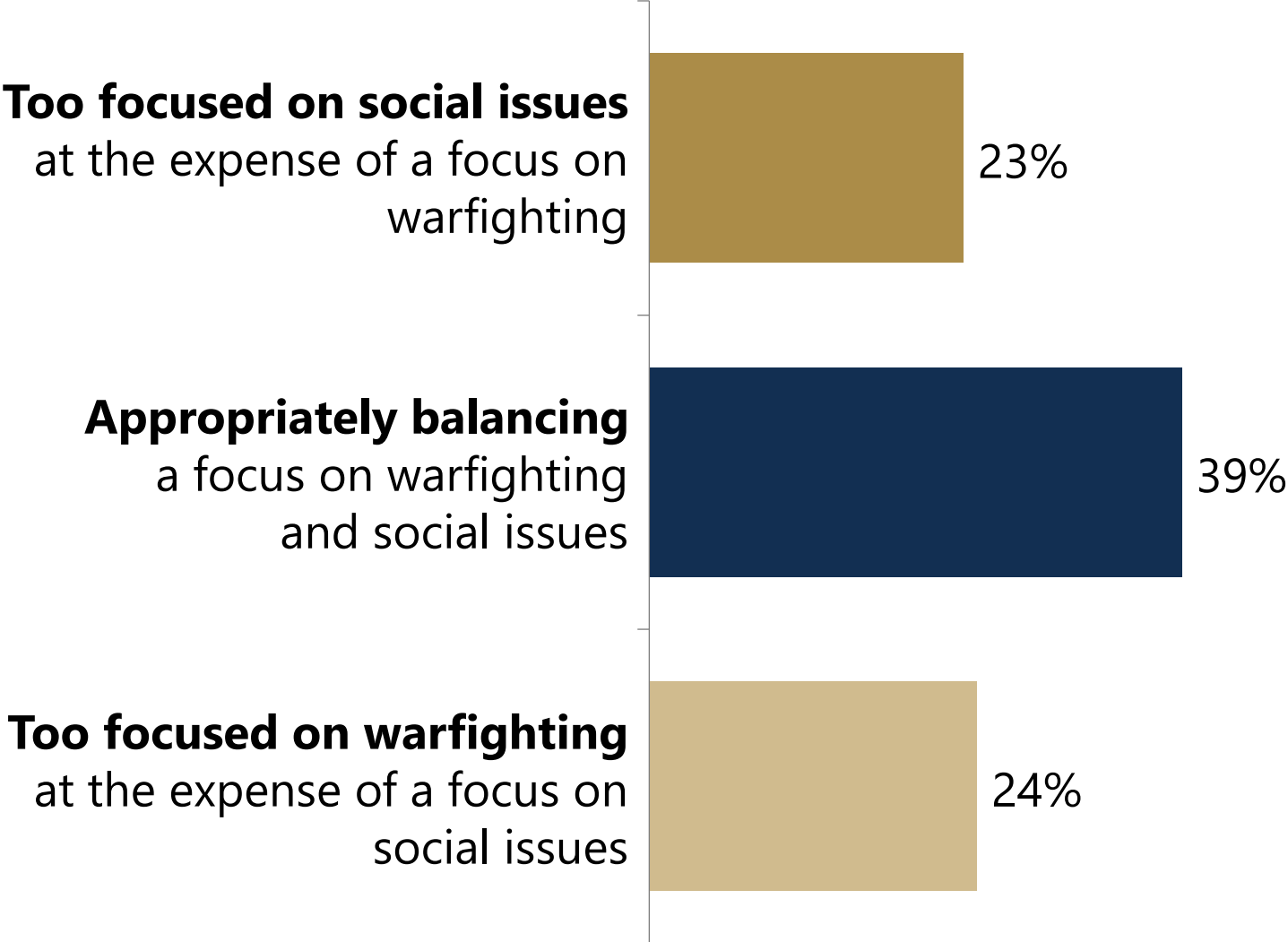
A Great Deal of Confidence

— Democrat — Republican — Independent



Q9. Please tell us how much trust and confidence you have in: Police and law enforcement

Deeply and evenly divided views on military's balance of social issues and warfighting.

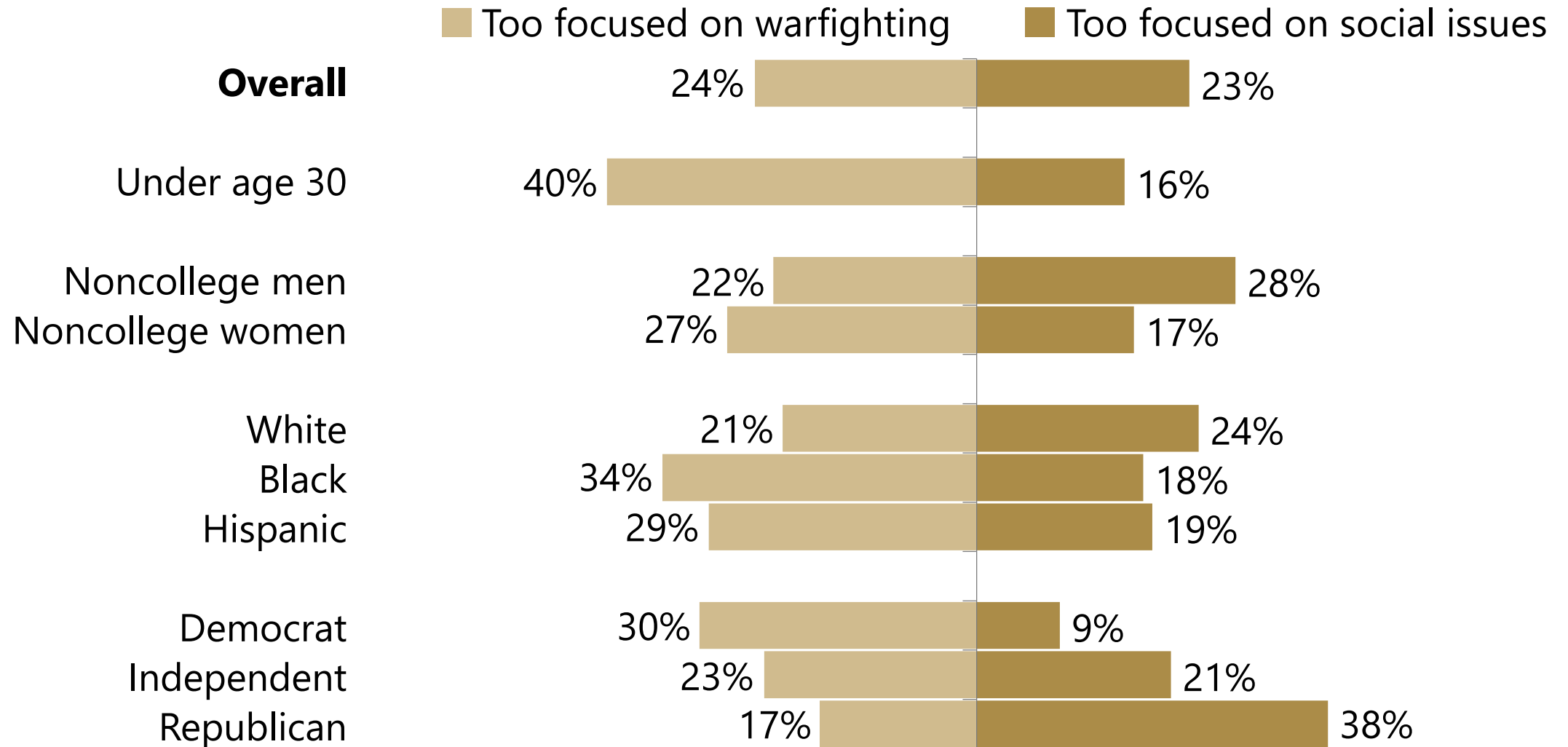


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q10. Do you think the US military is:



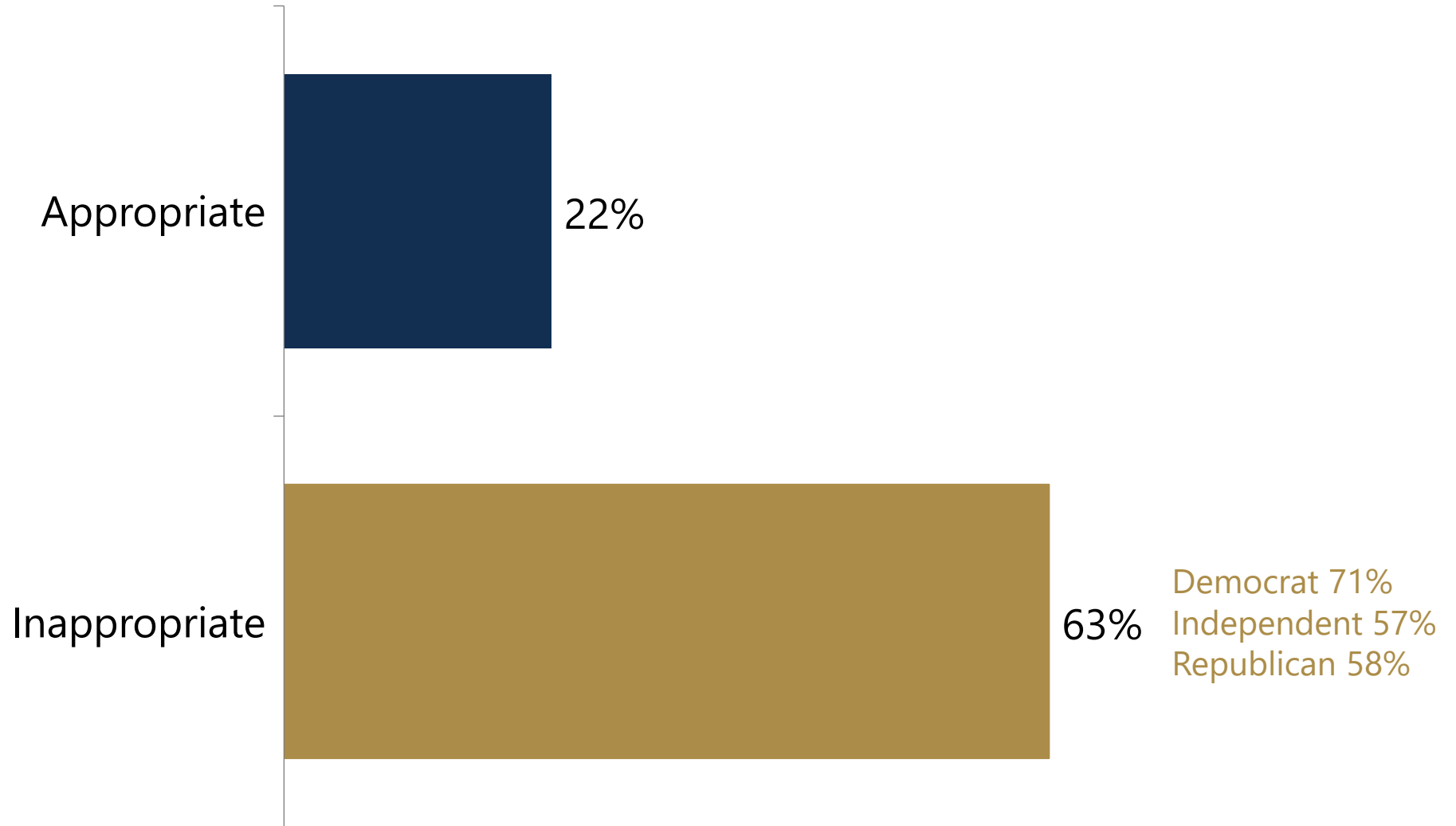
Balancing warfighting versus social issues, by subgroup.



Note: Remainder Appropriately balancing warfighting and social issues, Don't know

Q10. Do you think the US military is:

Bipartisan majorities think protest holds on military nominees are inappropriate.

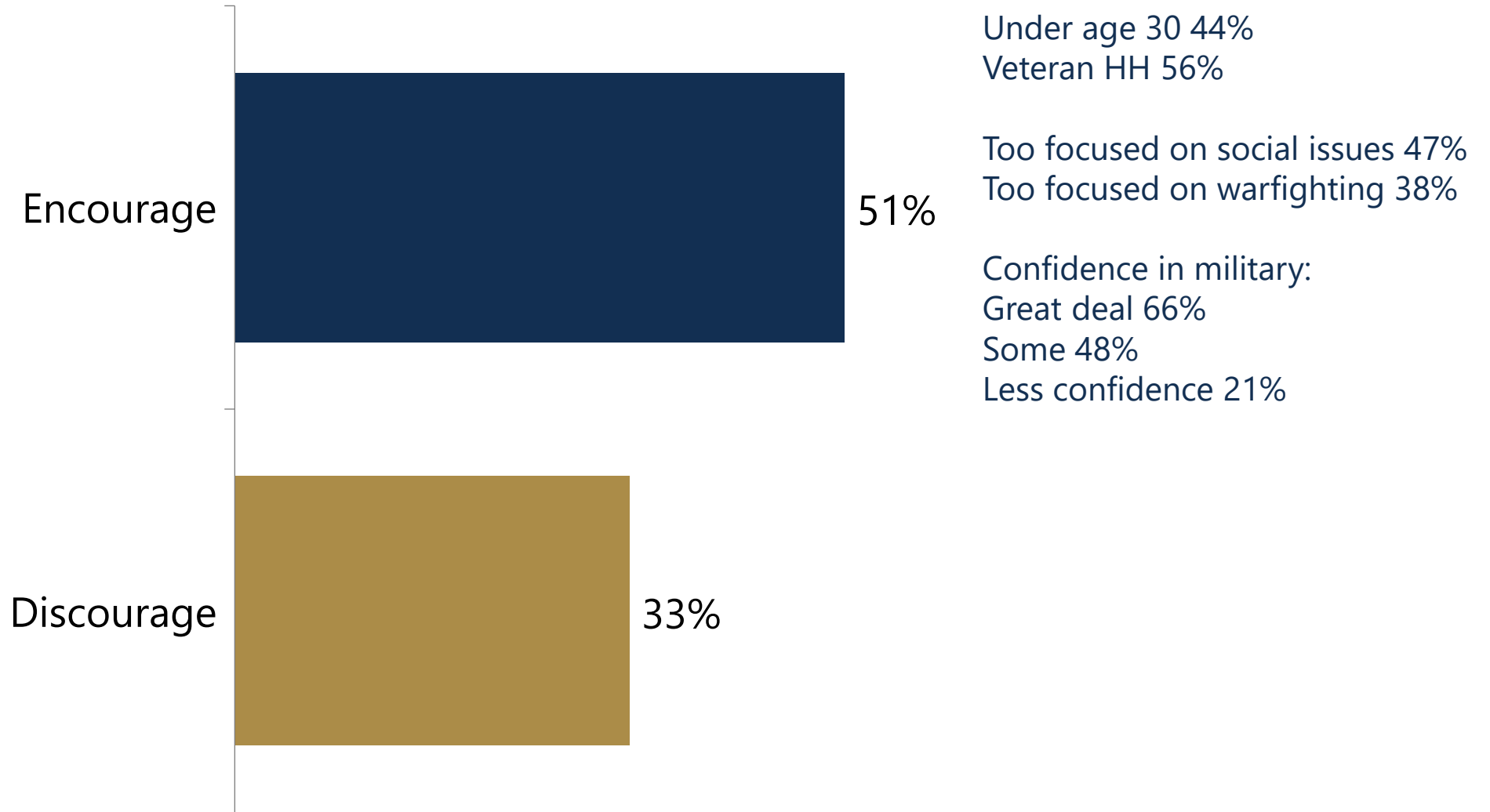


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q11. The Senate confirms nominees for senior military positions. These positions are left unfilled if the Senate does not vote on them. Do you think it is appropriate or inappropriate for a senator to block votes on these nominees to protest Defense Department policies unrelated to warfighting?



Half would encourage a friend/family member to join the military.



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q12. If a close friend or family member were considering joining the military, would you encourage them or discourage them?



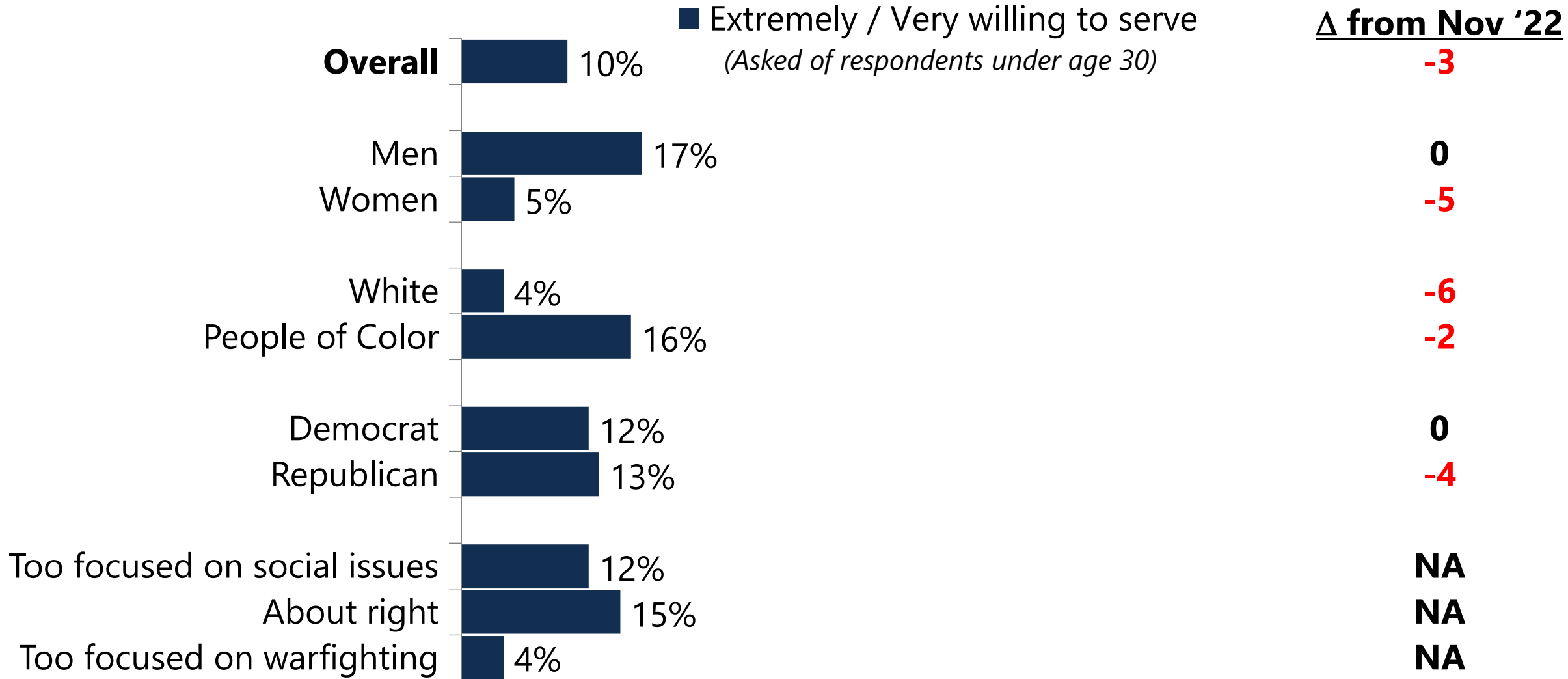
Reasons to encourage / discourage joining the service.

Top Reasons to Encourage	
Patriotism / Serve the country	31%
General support	13
Military needs people	12
Career opportunities / skills training / pay	11
Builds character	10
Veteran / positive personal connection	10
Good benefits (GI Bill, retirement, etc.)	7

Top Reasons to Discourage	
Too dangerous	21%
Anti-war / Potential to go to war	20
Political climate / distrust politicians	15
Not worth it (general)	13
Poor treatment of veterans	8
Too woke / negative social policies	8
Corruption / distrust military leadership	6
Veteran / negative personal connection	4



One-in-ten under age 30 very willing to serve.



[IF AGE 18-29 AND NOT SERVICE MEMBER OR VETERAN] Q141. How willing would you, personally, be to serve in the US military?



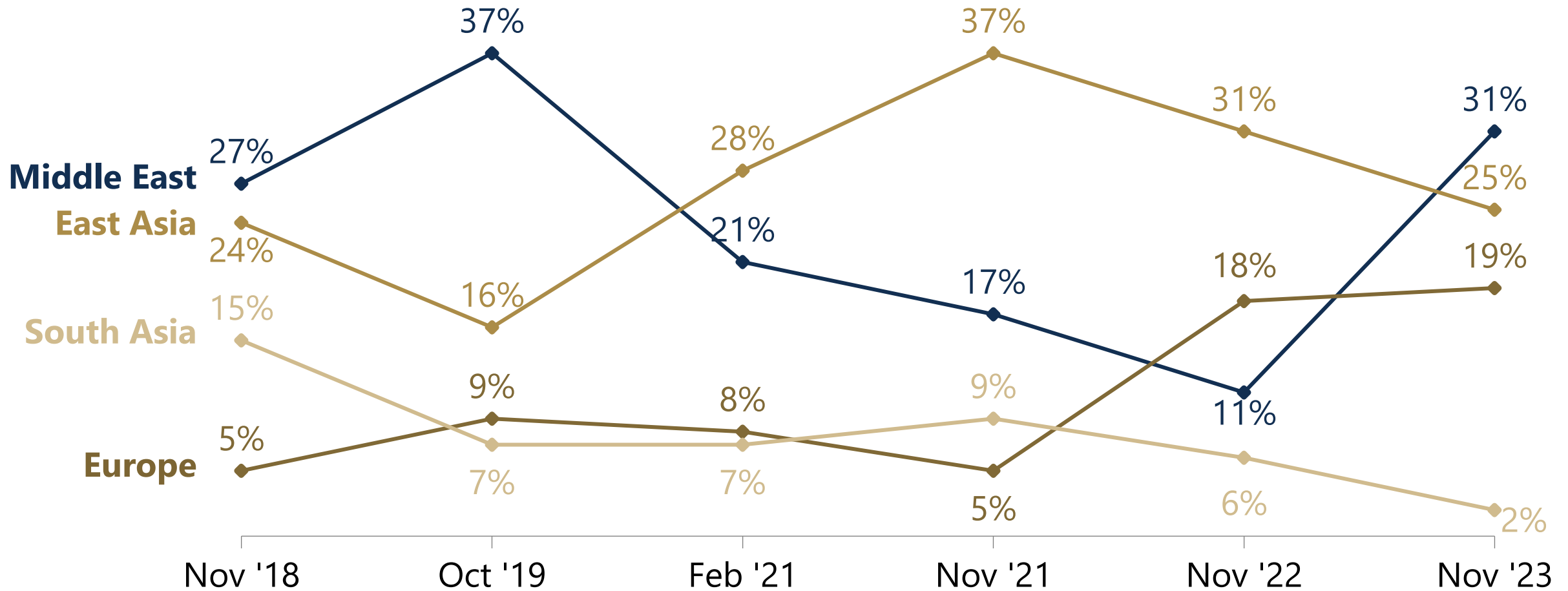
DEFENSE / FOREIGN POLICY POSTURE





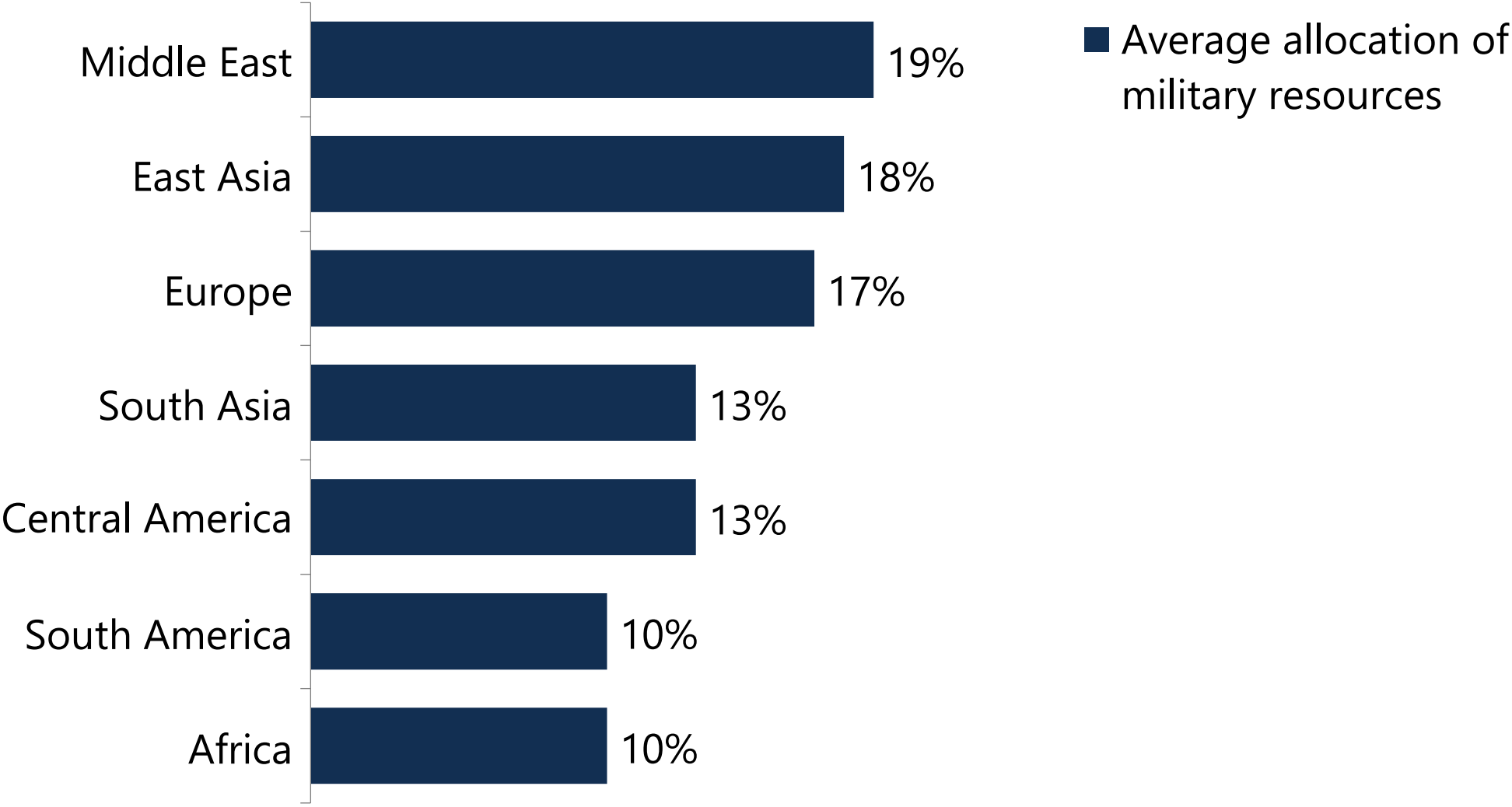
Middle East overtakes East Asia as top theater of focus.

US Military Focus



Q28. Thinking about American interests and the threats that exist in the world today, where do you think the US should focus its military forces?

Americans prefer to spread military resources broadly rather than an exclusive focus on one theater.



Q29. What percentage of military resources, forces, and attention do you think the US should allocate to each of the following areas?

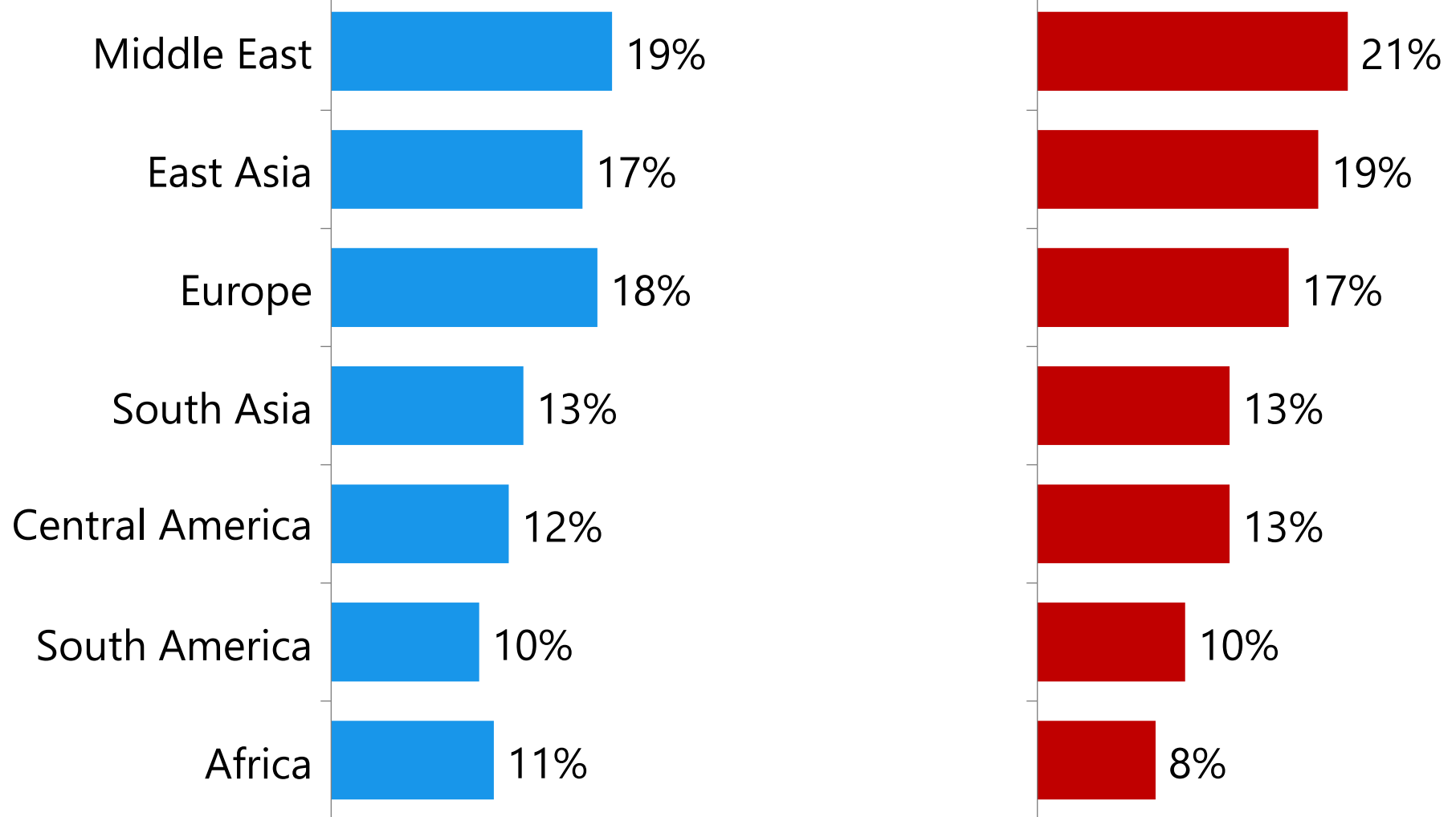


Partisans would allocate military resources in remarkably similar ways.

Average Allocation of Military Resources

Democrats

Republicans

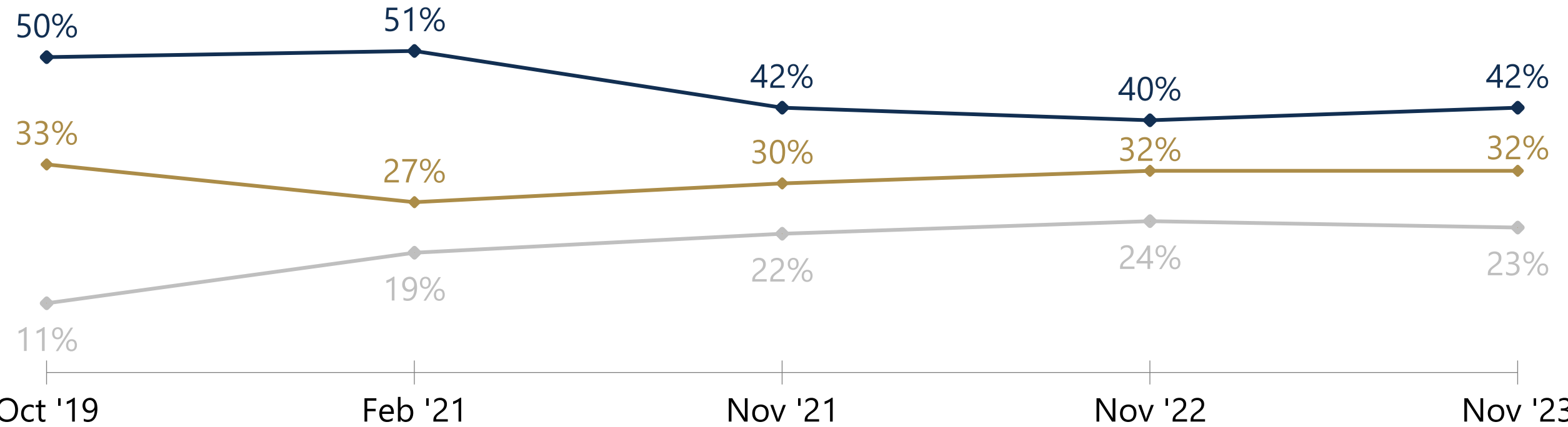


Q29. What percentage of military resources, forces, and attention do you think the US should allocate to each of the following areas?



Steady preference for an engaged US foreign policy.

◆ More engaged and take the lead ◆ It depends ◆ Less engaged and react to events

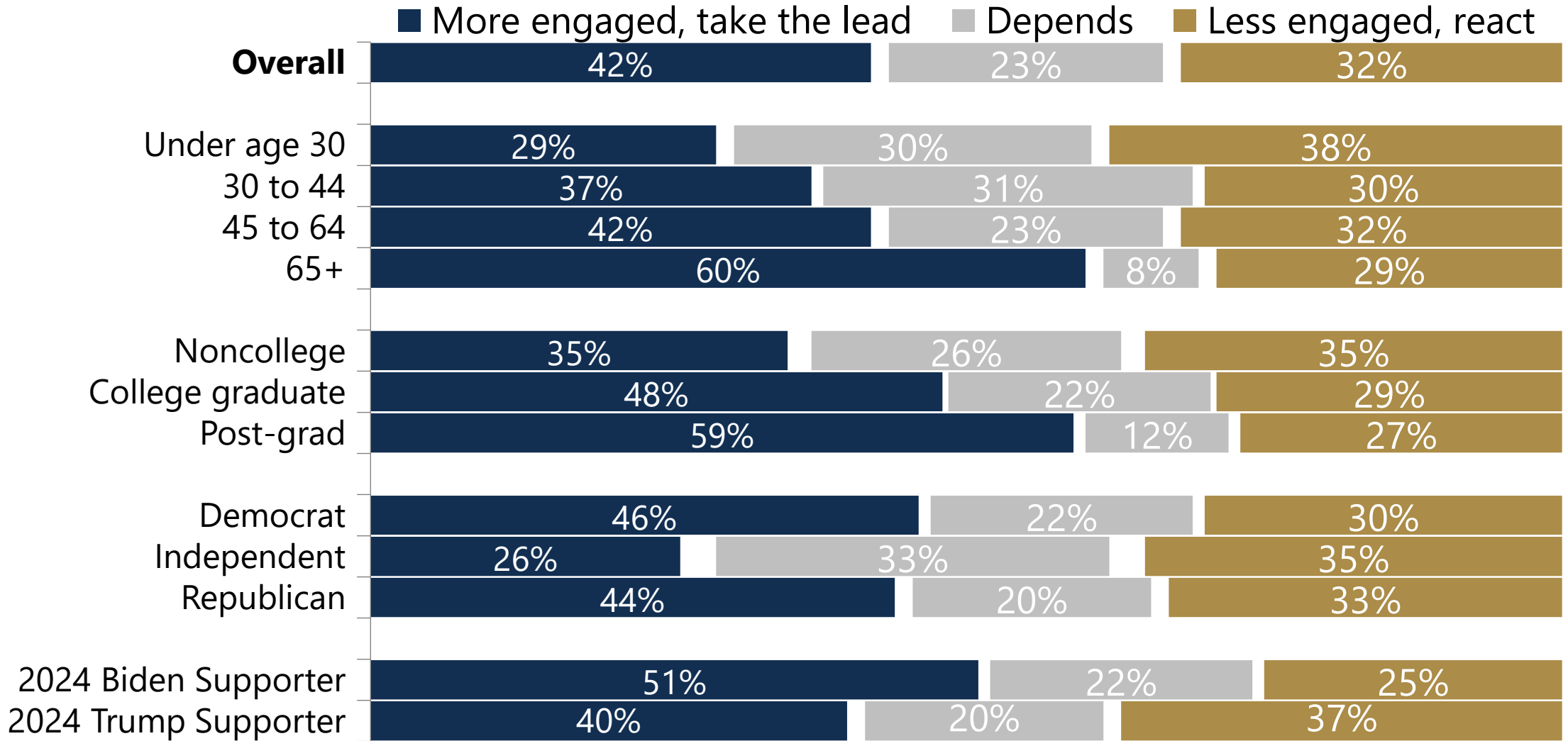


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q30. 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?



Preferred foreign policy posture, by subgroup.



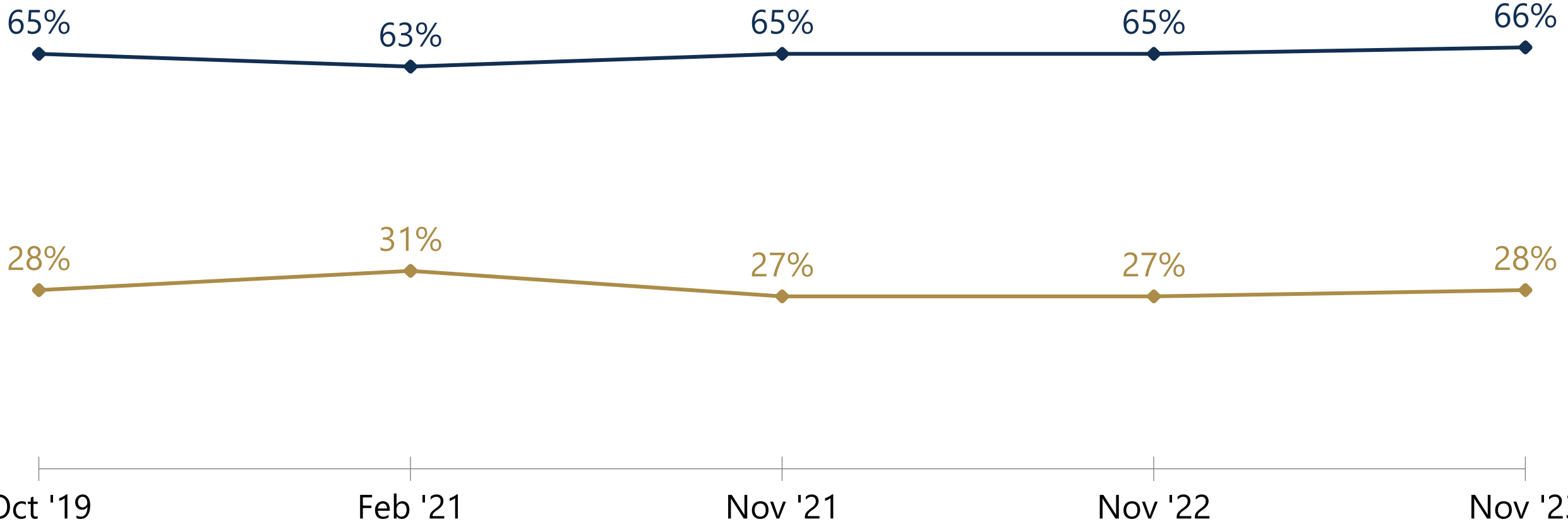
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q30. 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?



Consistent, stable support for maintaining bases overseas.

◆ Maintain bases ◆ Reduce presence overseas

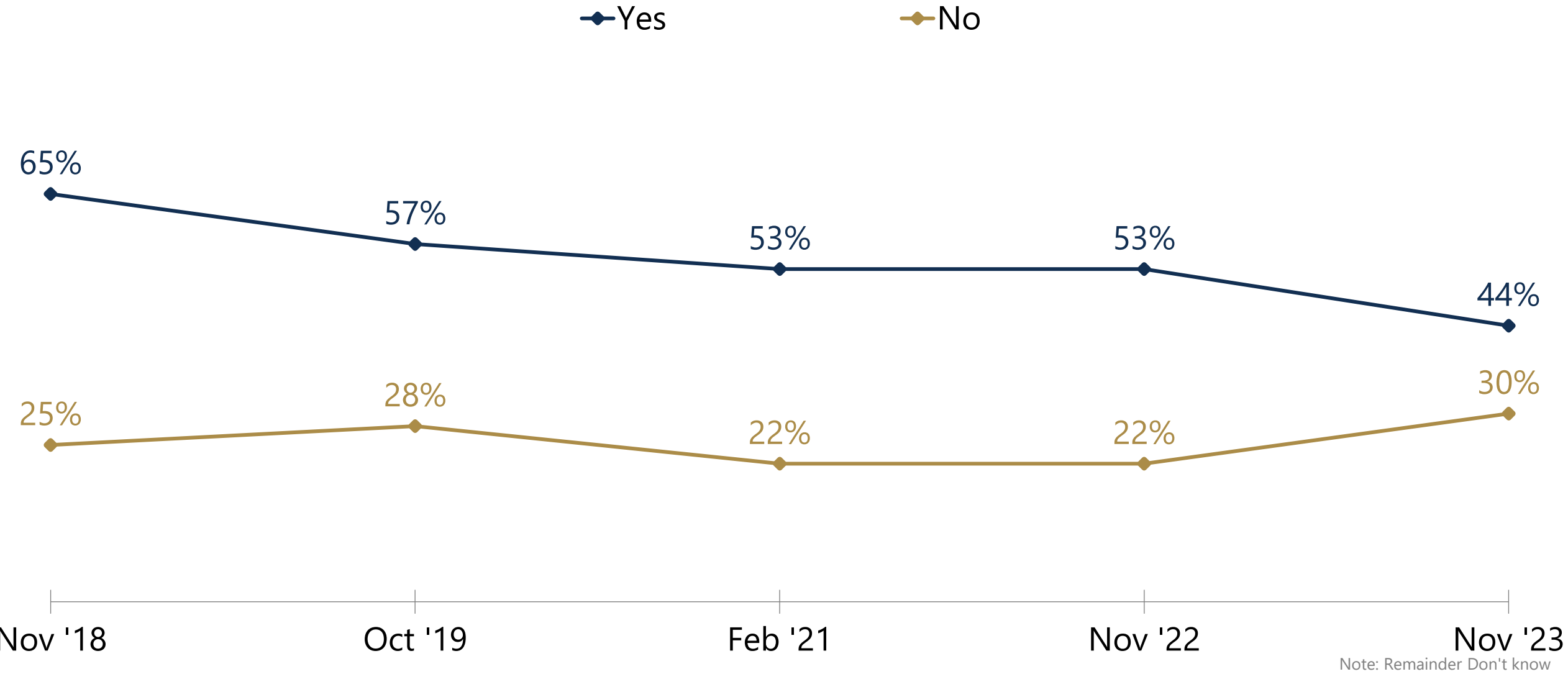


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q31. 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?



Declining confidence US would win against a nuclear power.



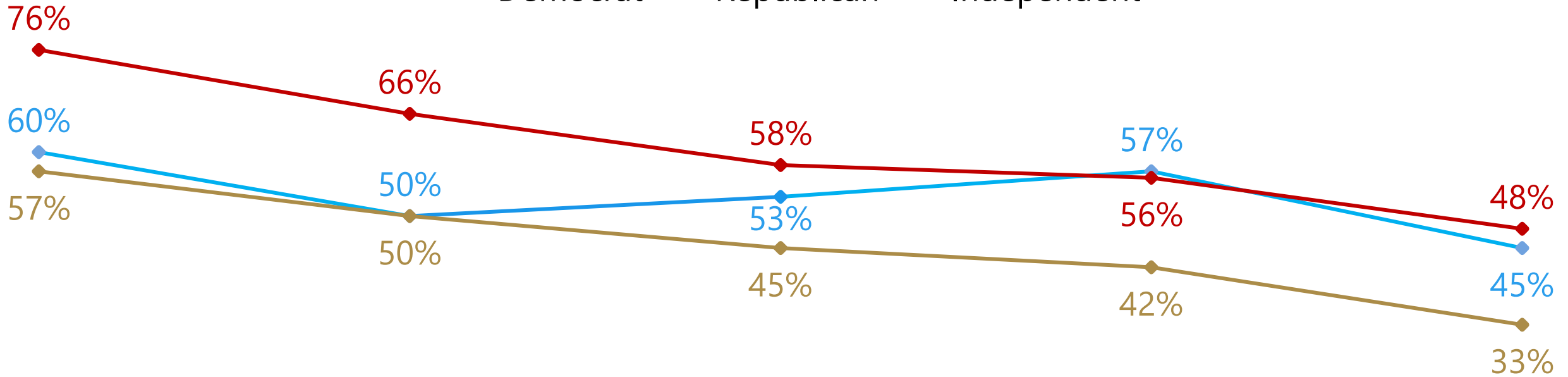
Q32. Do you think the US would win a war with a nuclear power?

Bipartisan declines in belief US would win a war against a nuclear power.



Yes, Would Win

— Democrat — Republican — Independent



Nov '18

Oct '19

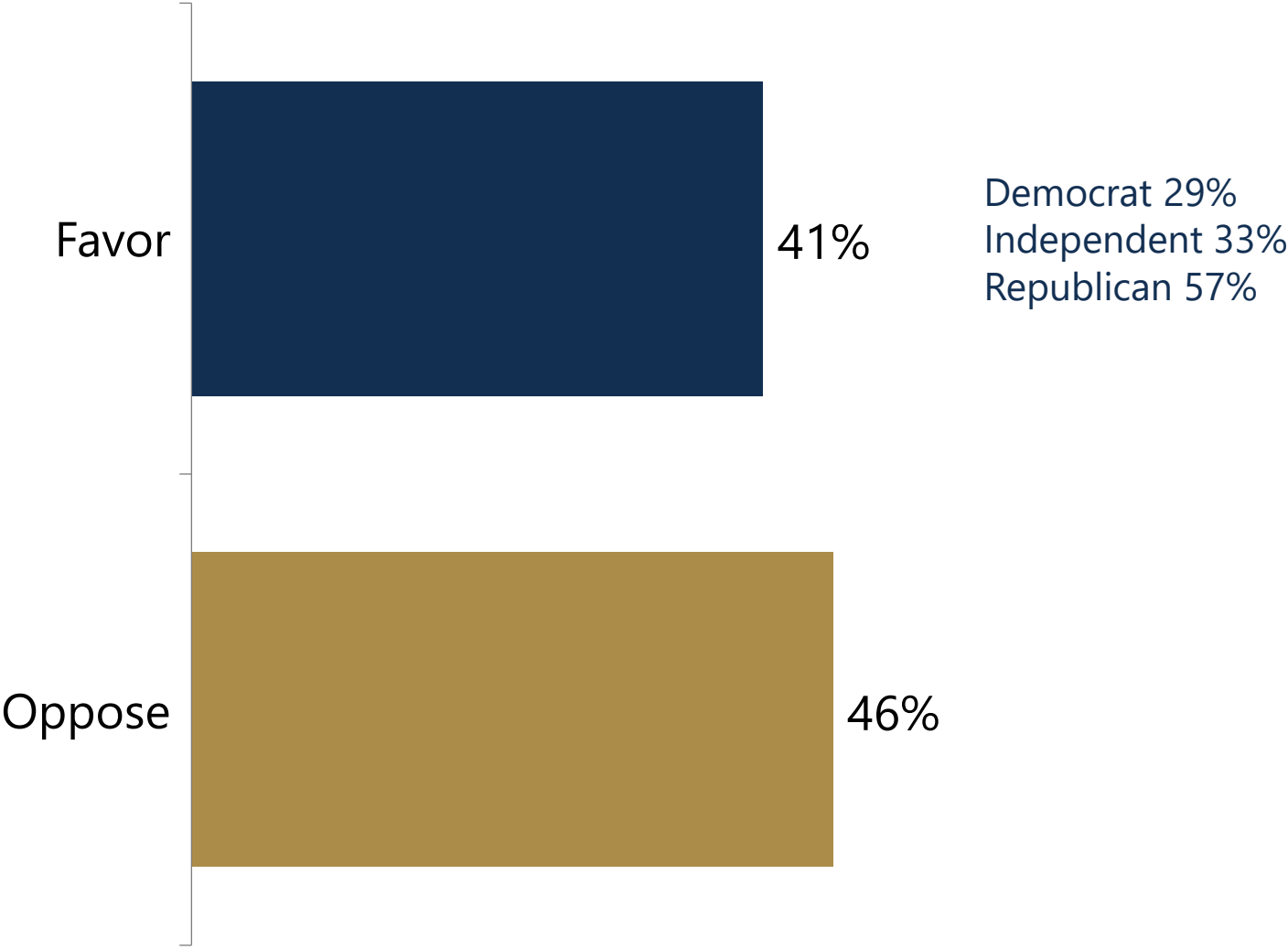
Feb '21

Nov '22

Nov '23

Q32. Do you think the US would win a war with a nuclear power?

Plurality opposes using military to engage Mexican cartels.



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q33. Do you favor or oppose sending the US military into Mexico to counter, and if necessary attack, drug cartels?

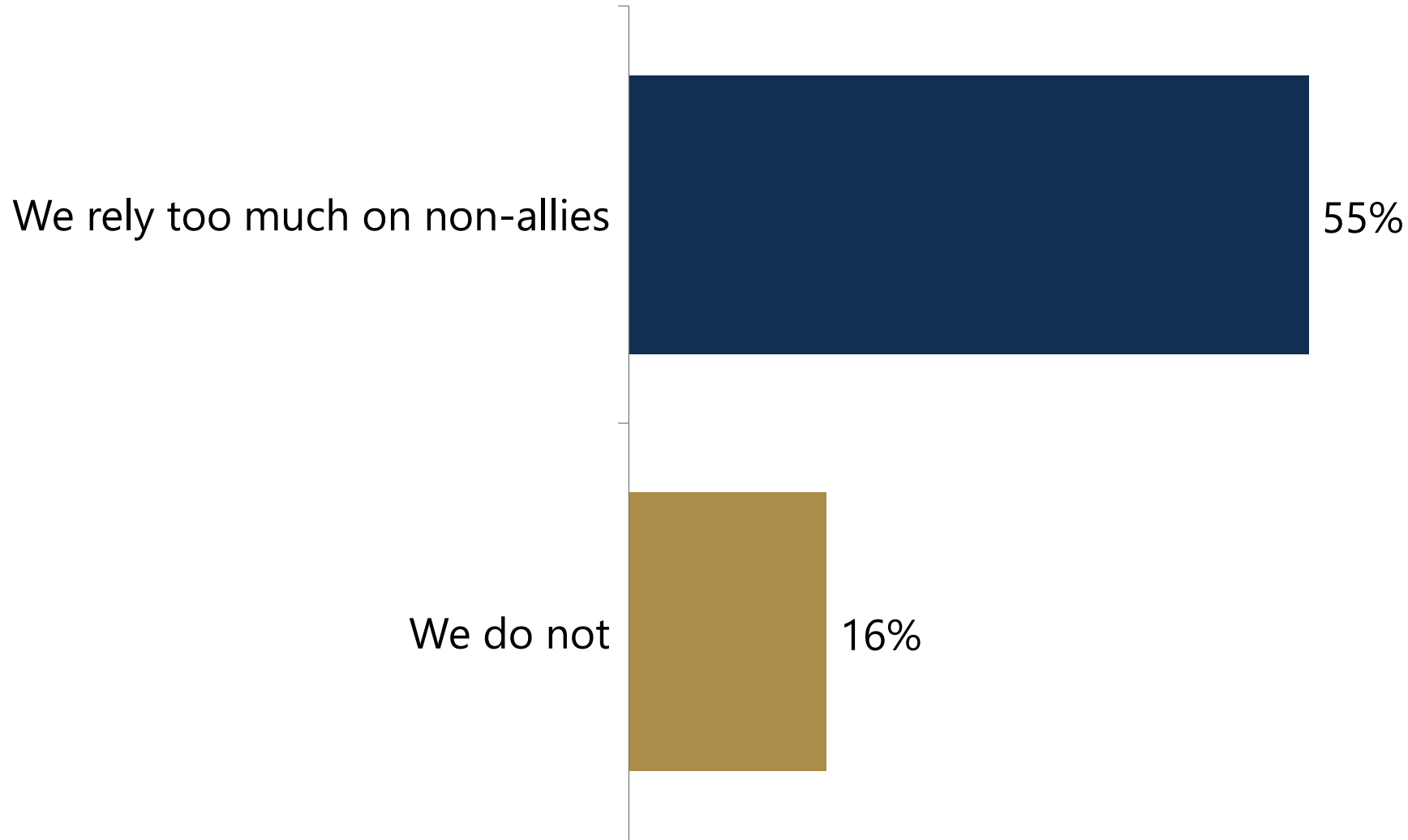


DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASE





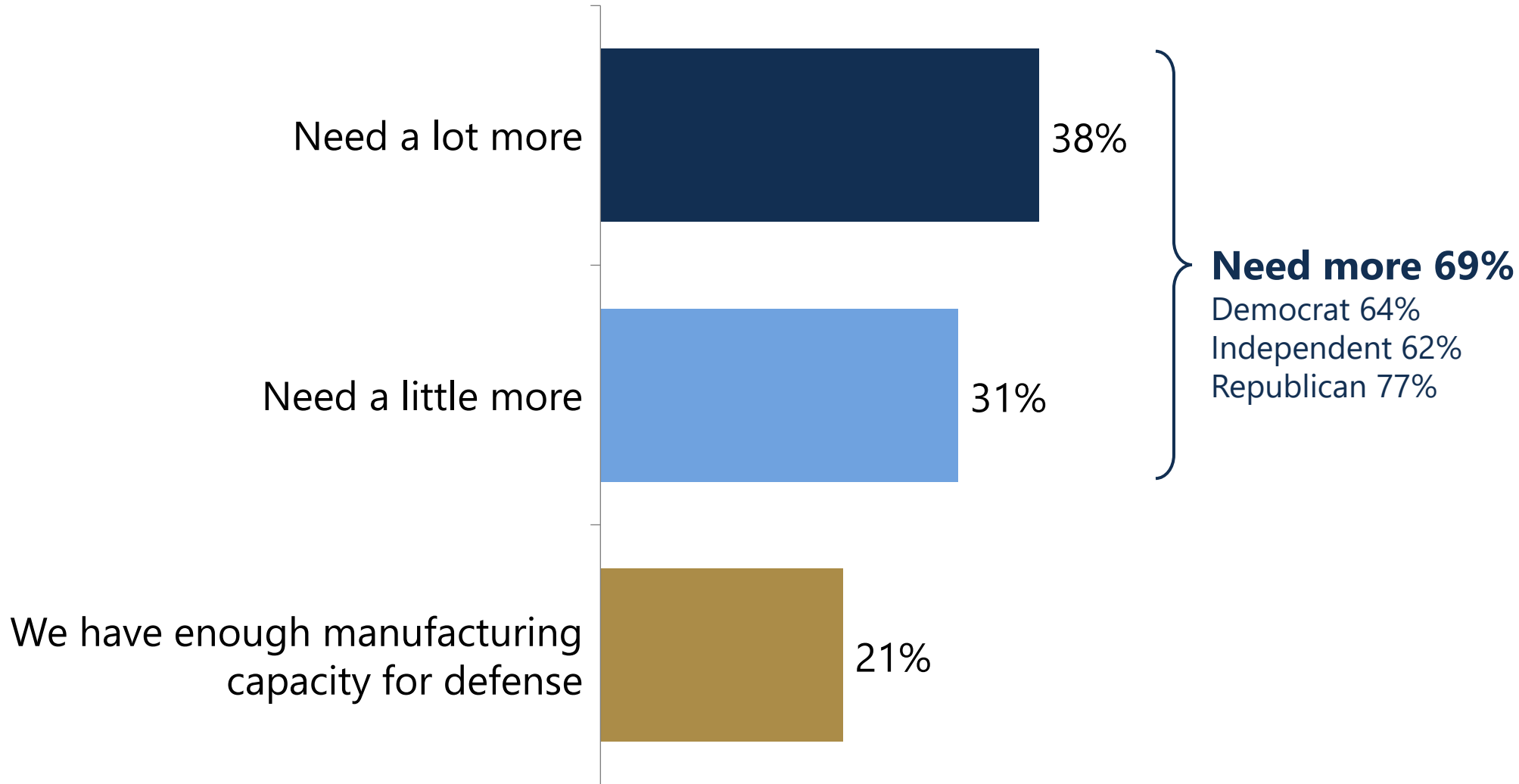
Majority thinks US is too reliant on non-allies for national security manufacturing.



Note: Remainder Depends / Don't know

Q34. In general, when it comes to manufacturing the materials necessary for national security, do you think the US relies too much on countries that are not our allies?

Bipartisan agreement US needs more domestic defense manufacturing capacity.



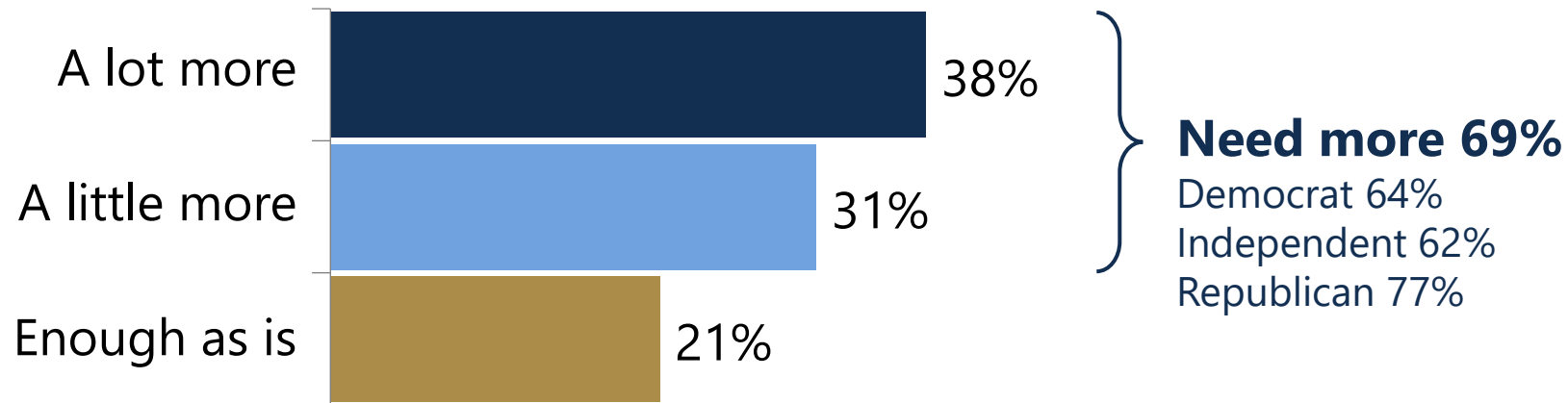
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q35. Do you think the US currently has enough domestic manufacturing capacity to produce the materials, equipment, and weapons needed for national defense, or do we need more manufacturing capacity?

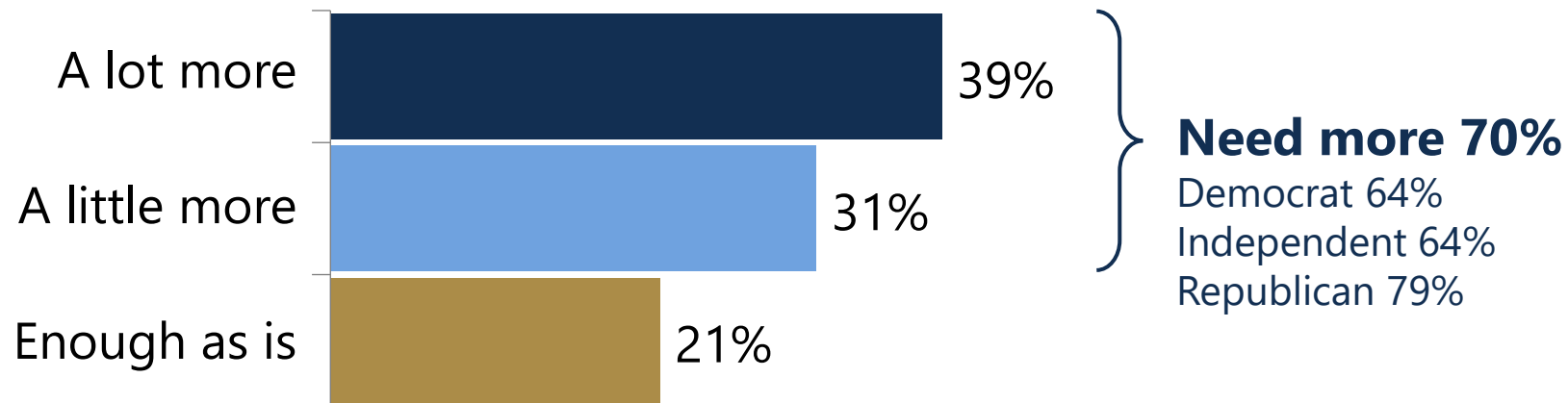
Bipartisan agreement US needs more domestic defense manufacturing capacity.



Does the US need more capacity to produce the materials, equipment, and weapons needed for defense?



Does the US need more capacity to ramp up quickly to meet our needs in a crisis?



Note: Remainder Don't know

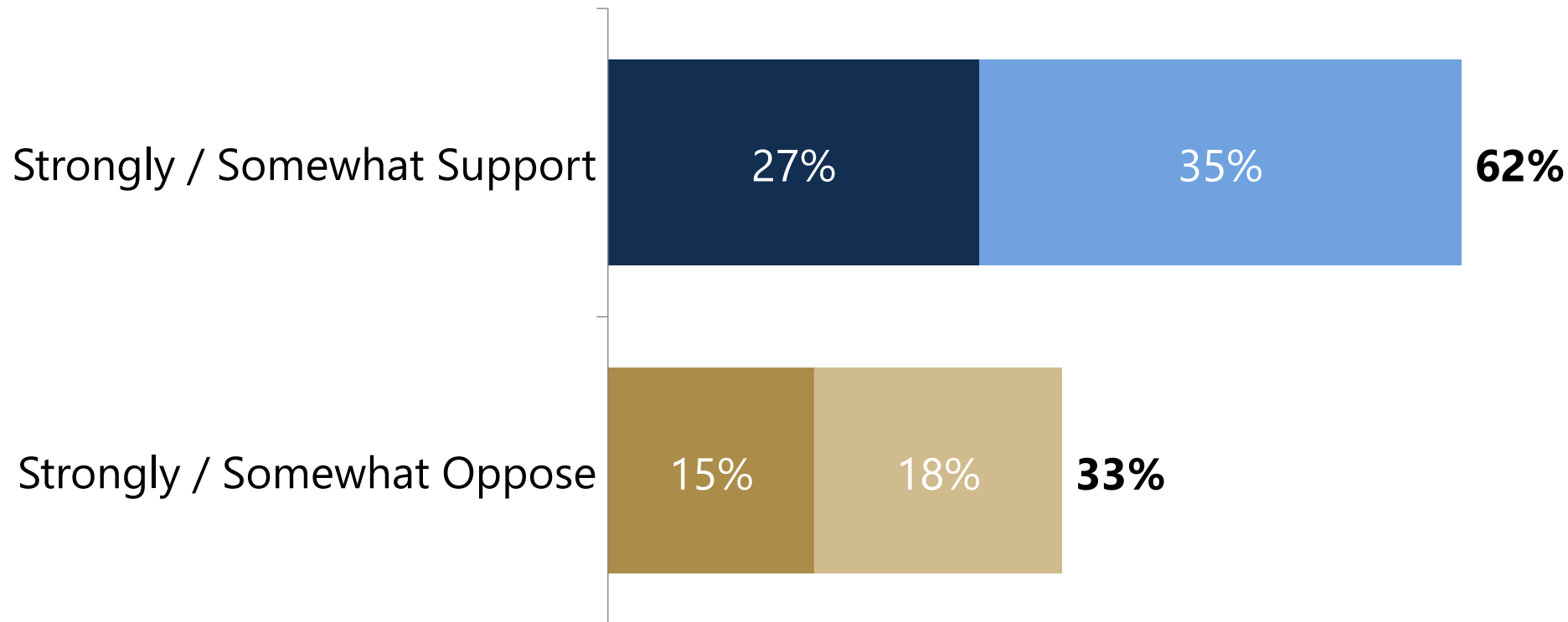
Q35-36. Do you think the US currently has enough domestic manufacturing capacity to... or do we need more manufacturing capacity?



Six-in-ten support increasing skilled immigration to fill national security roles.

Question Frame: *The US military and companies in the defense sector believe more skilled immigrants—meaning those with advanced degrees working in science and technology—are needed to fill high-tech national security jobs.*

Knowing this, do you support or oppose increasing the number of skilled immigrants legally allowed to come to the US?

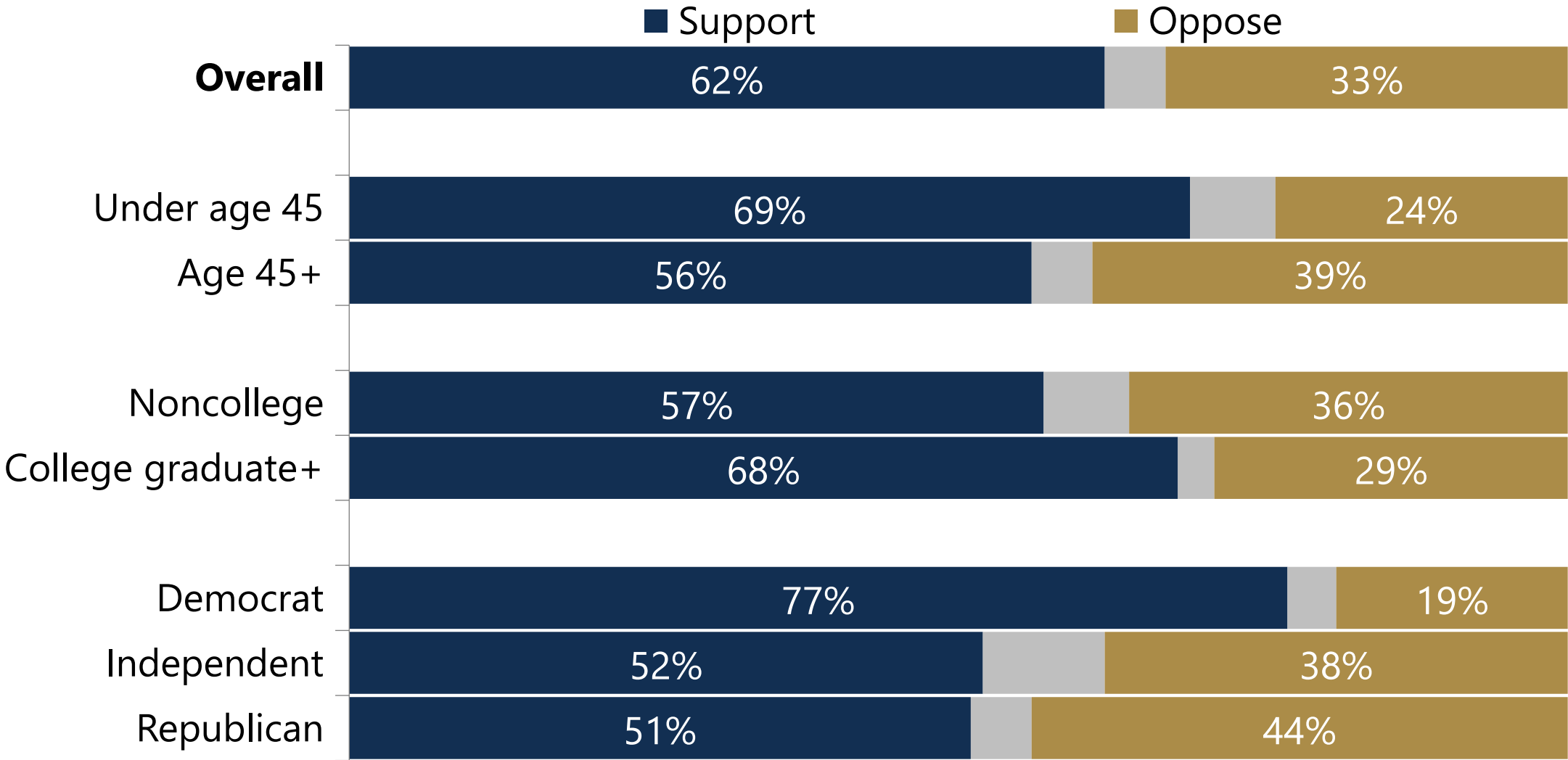


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q37. *Knowing this, do you support or oppose increasing the number of skilled immigrants legally allowed to come to the US?*



Support for increasing skilled immigration, by subgroup.

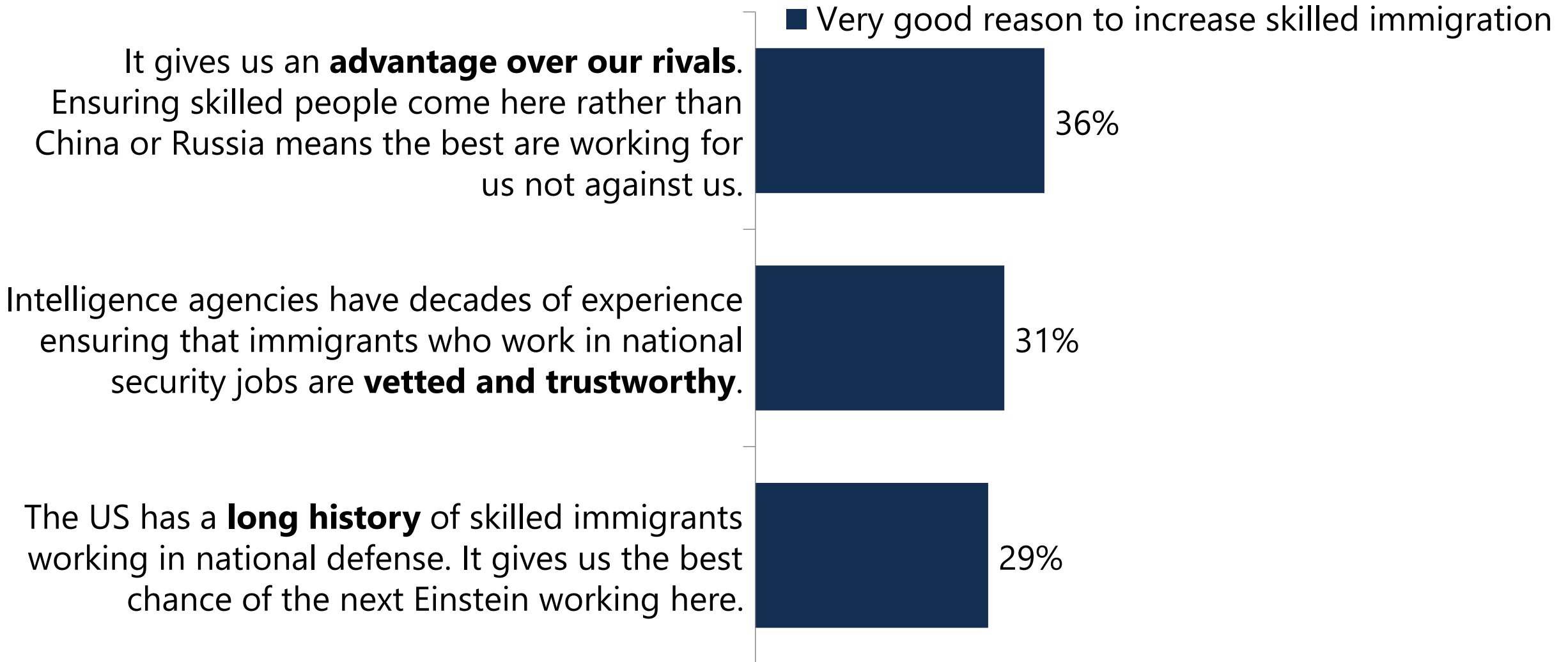


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q37. Knowing this, do you support or oppose increasing the number of skilled immigrants legally allowed to come to the US?



Gaining an *advantage over rivals* is the top-testing argument in favor of skilled immigration.



Q38-40. Please tell me whether you think each one is a very good reason to increase skilled immigration in national security and defense, a somewhat good reason, or not a good reason.

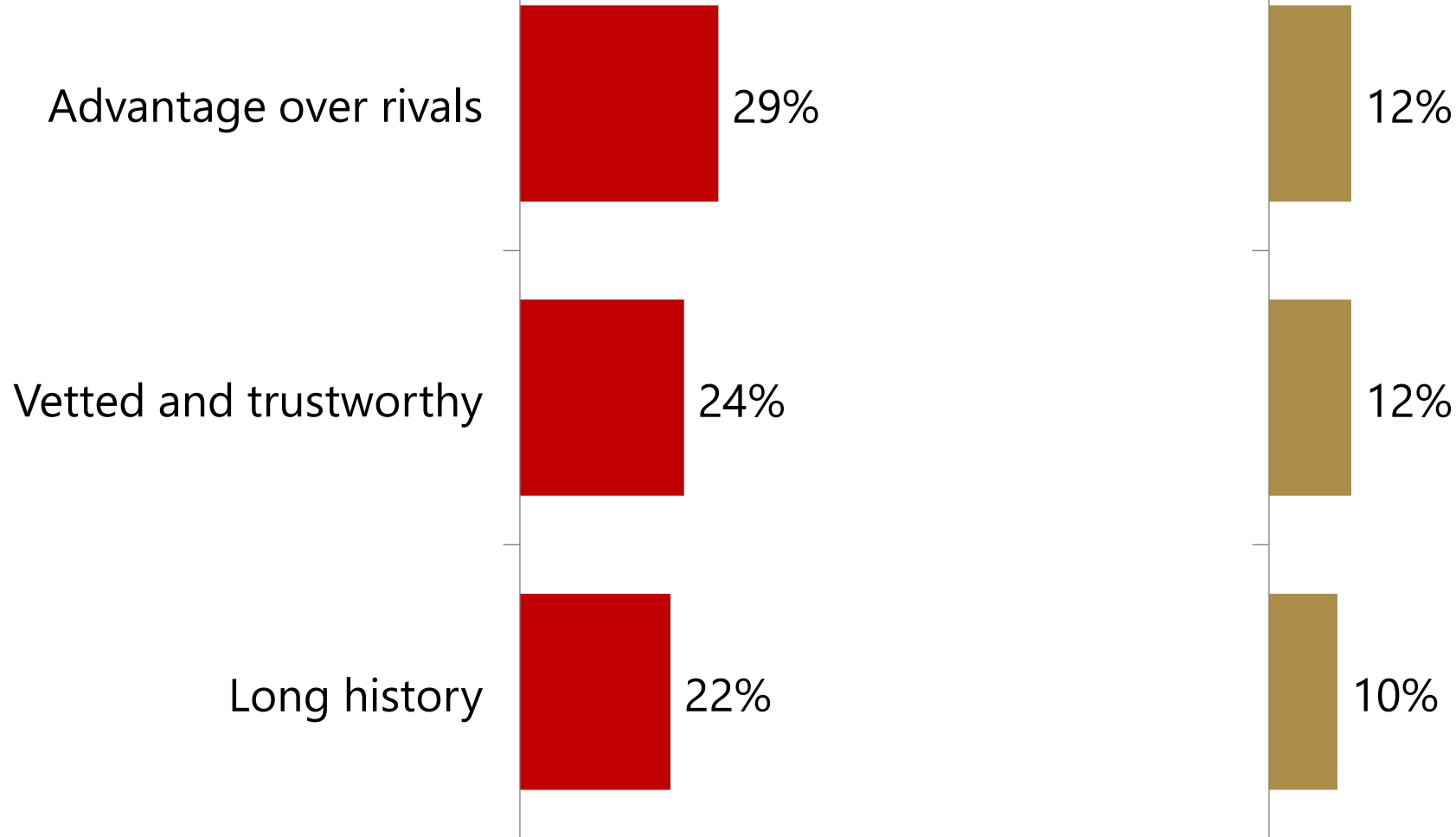


Skeptics don't see messages in favor of skilled immigration as entirely convincing.

Very good reason

Republicans

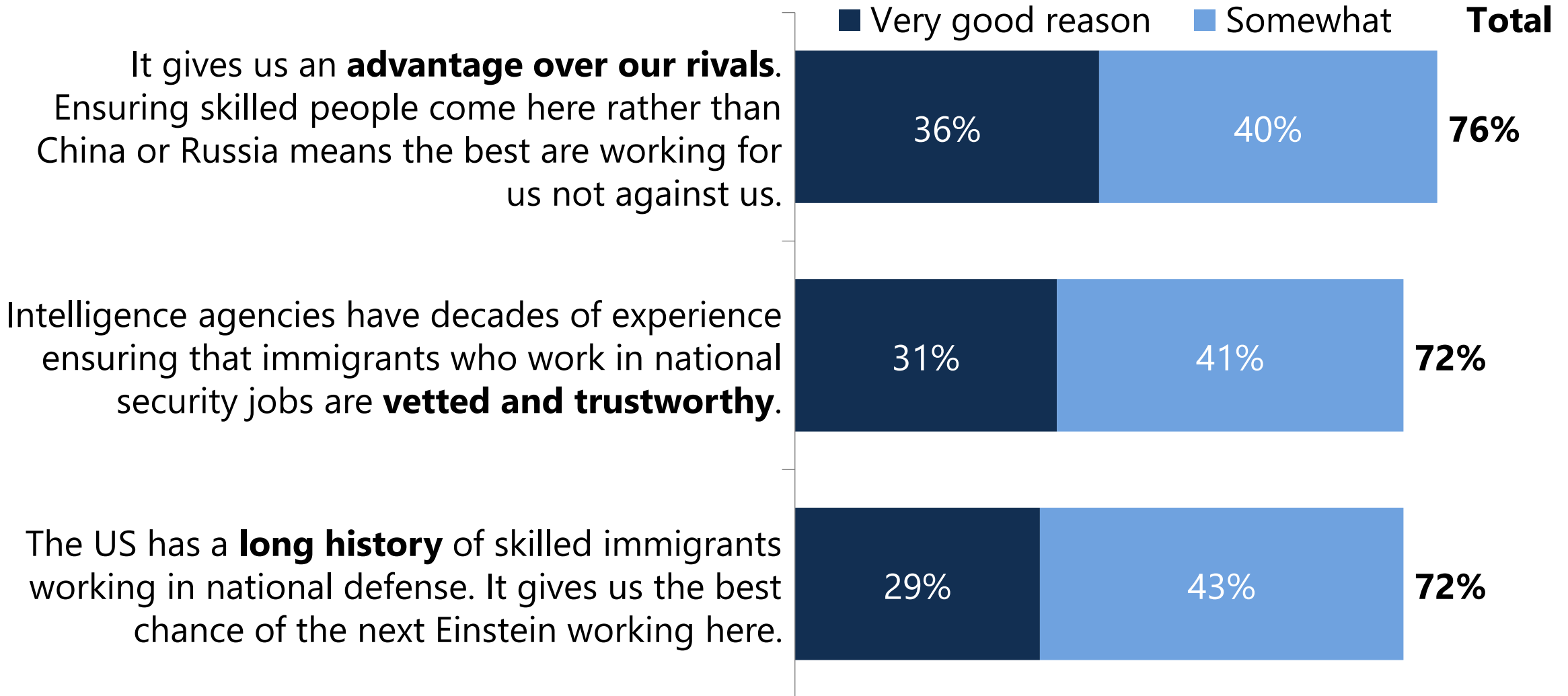
Initially Opposed



Q38-40. Please tell me whether you think each one is a very good reason to increase skilled immigration in national security and defense, a somewhat good reason, or not a good reason.



Gaining an *advantage over rivals* is the top-testing argument in favor of skilled immigration.



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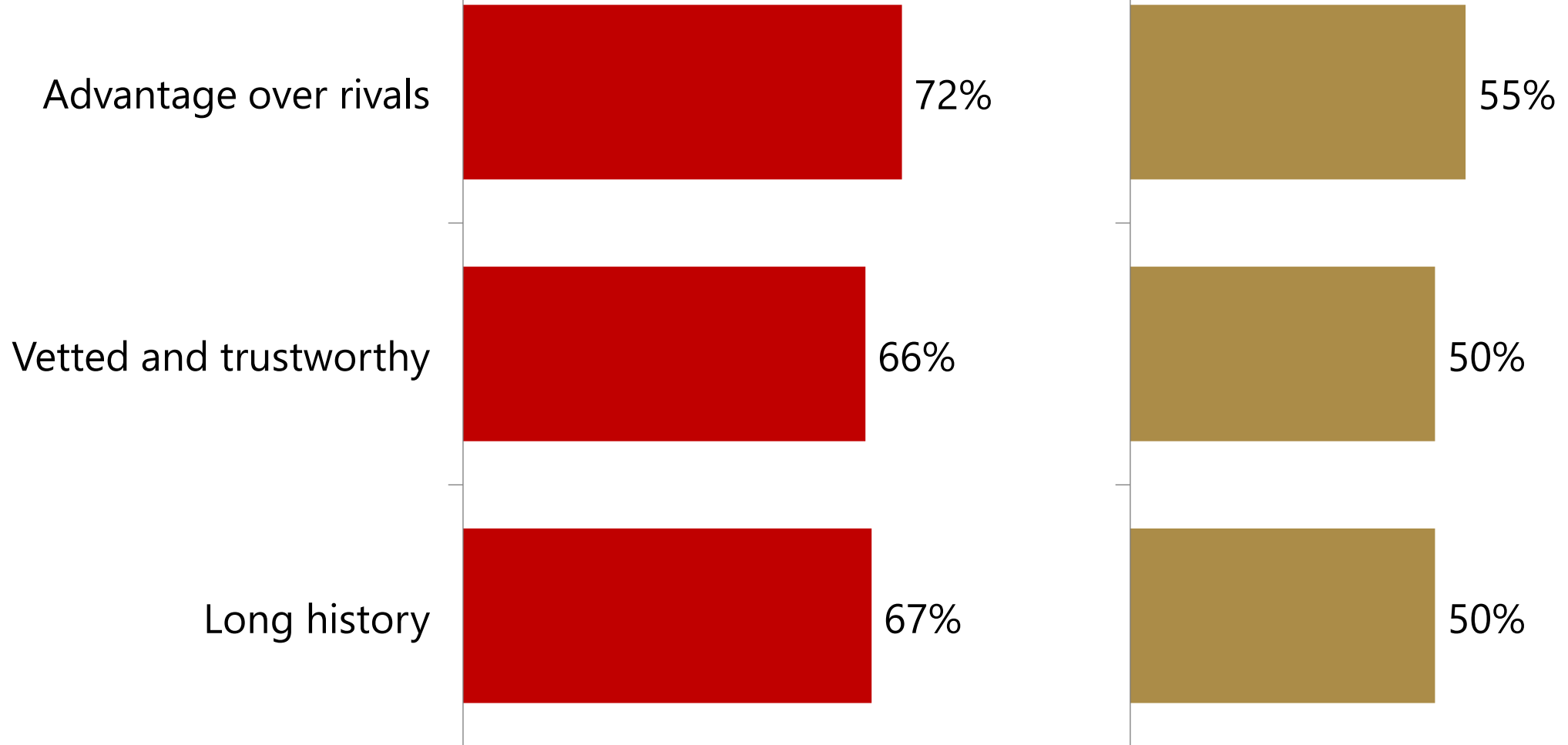


Messages in support of skilled immigration resonate with Republicans and those initially opposed.

Total good reason

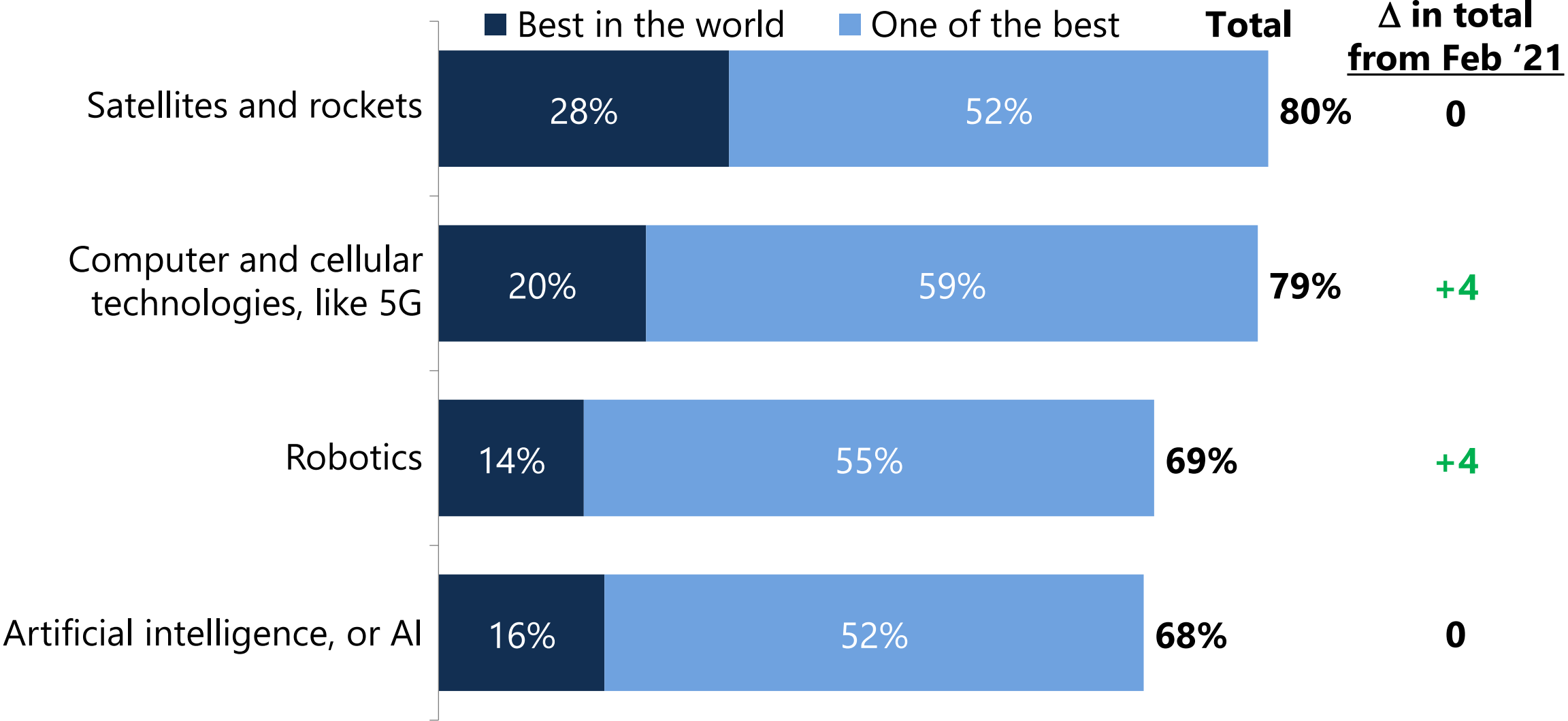
Republicans

Initially Opposed



Q38-40. Please tell me whether you think each one is a very good reason to increase skilled immigration in national security and defense, a somewhat good reason, or not a good reason.

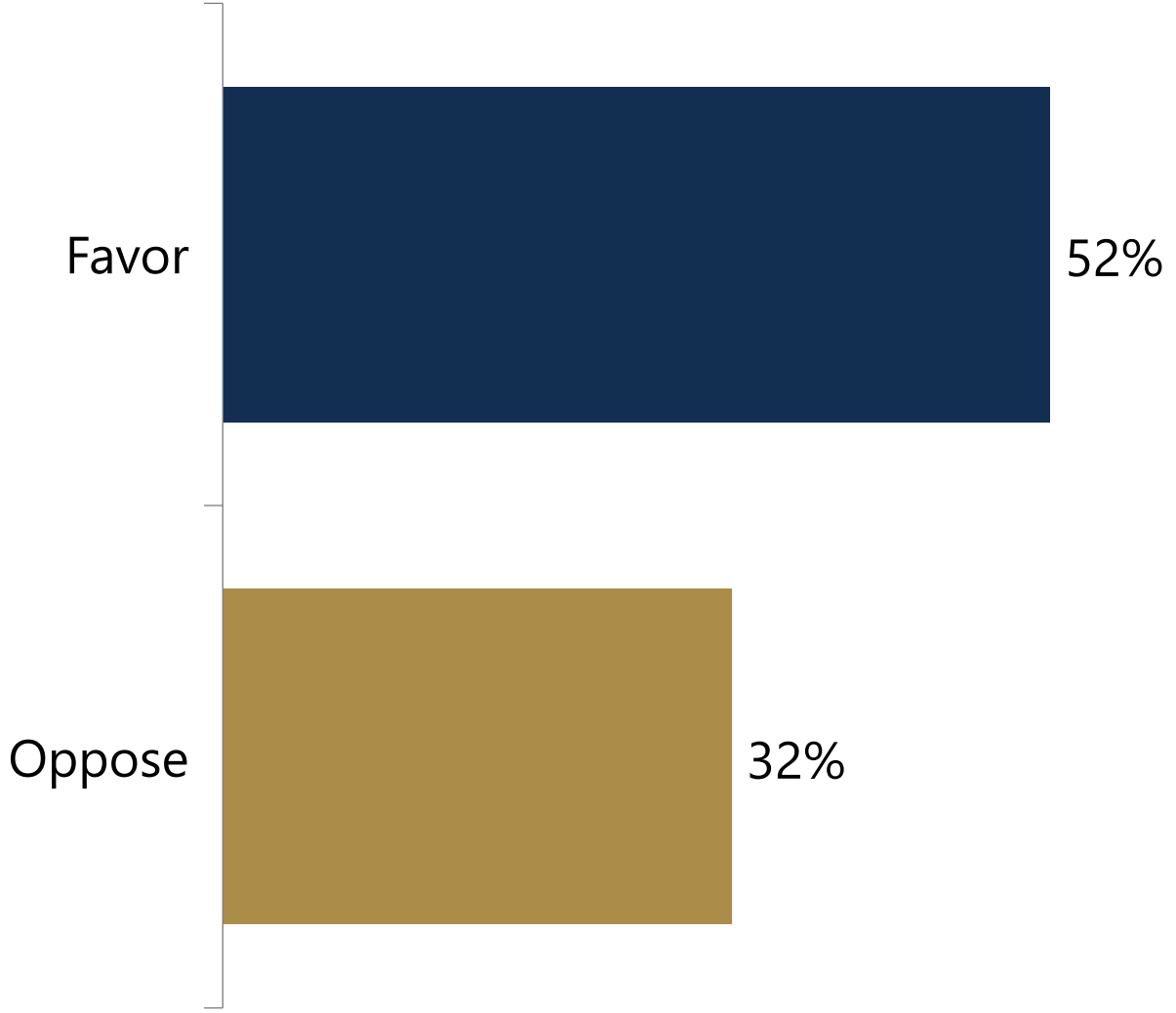
Most think US is one of the best at advanced defense technologies—but not *the* best.



Q41-44. Thinking specifically about materials and technologies that are important for national security – how do you think the US is doing when it comes to developing and producing each of the following? Is the US the best in the world, one of the best, or not one of the best?



Half favor increased military spending on AI.



Note: Remainder Don't know

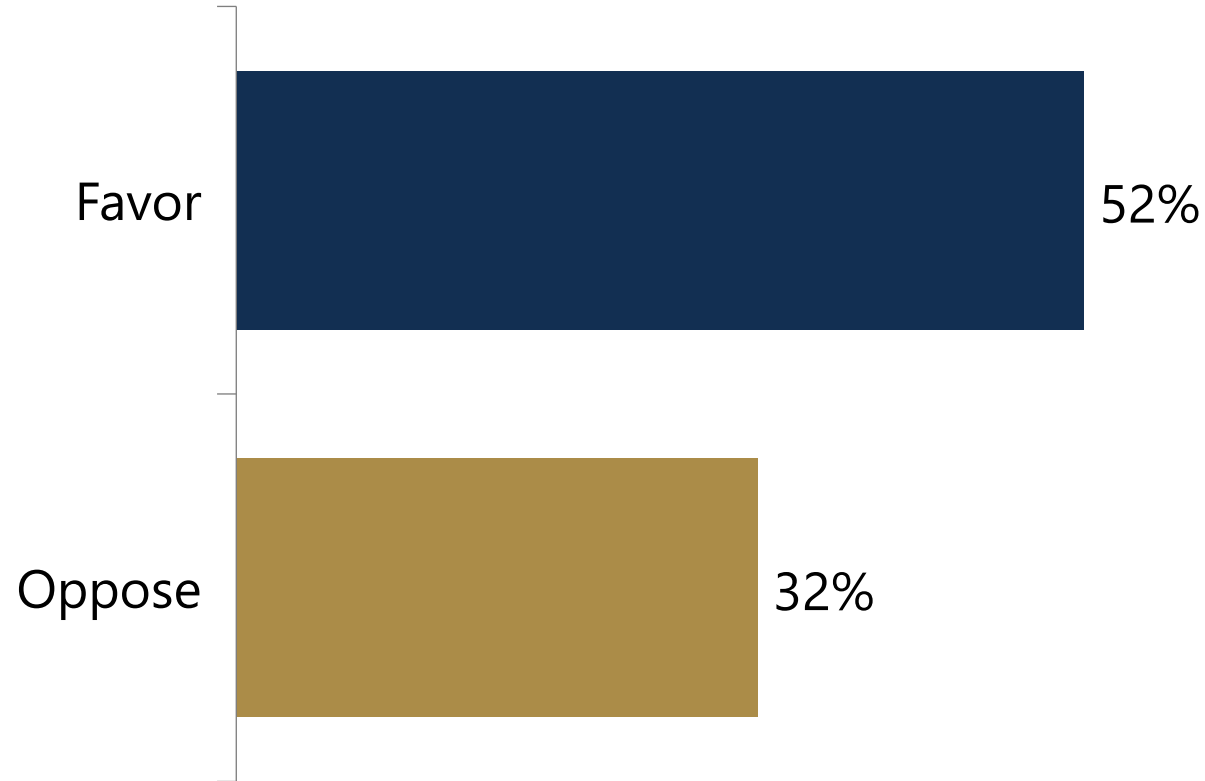
Q45. At present, the military spends roughly 1% of its budget on artificial intelligence. Knowing this, do you favor or oppose increasing military spending on AI?



No change in support for AI spending after balanced message of potential pros and cons.

Question Frame: *Some say the use of AI in military technology can provide life-saving safety to soldiers and improve decision-making. Others say it poses ethical concerns and could lead to unpredictable consequences.*

Knowing this, do you favor or oppose increasing military spending on AI?



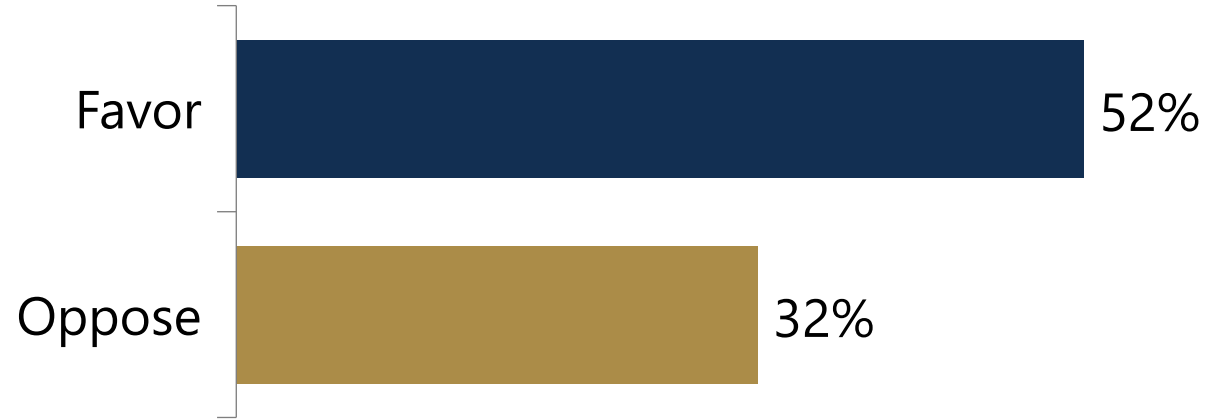
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q46. *Some say the use of AI in military technology can provide life-saving safety to soldiers and improve decision-making. Others say it poses ethical concerns and could lead to unpredictable consequences. Knowing this, do you favor or oppose increasing military spending on AI?*

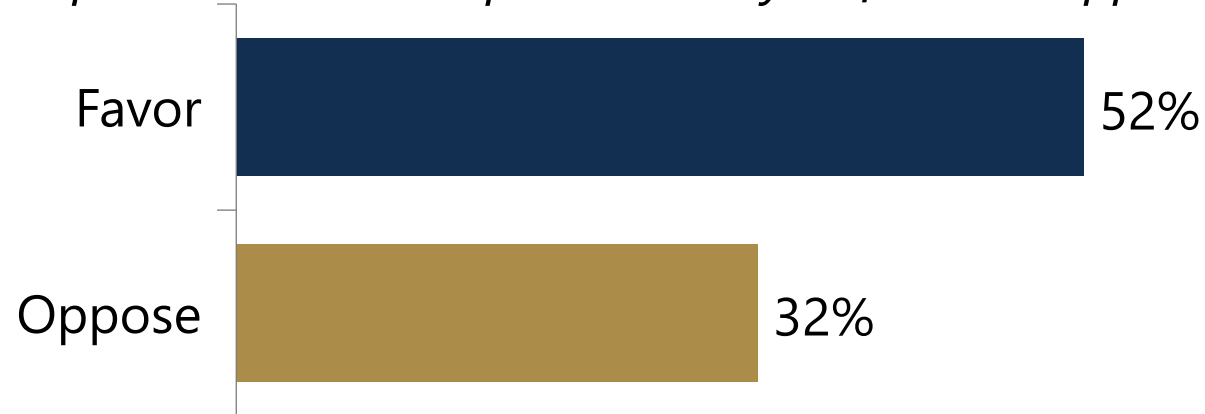


Half support increasing military spending on AI, even after considering pros and cons.

The US military spends roughly 1% of its budget on AI. Do you favor or oppose increasing spending?



Some say AI can provide safety to soldiers and improve decision-making. Others say it poses ethical concerns and could have unpredictable consequences. Do you favor or oppose increasing spending?



Note: Remainder Don't know

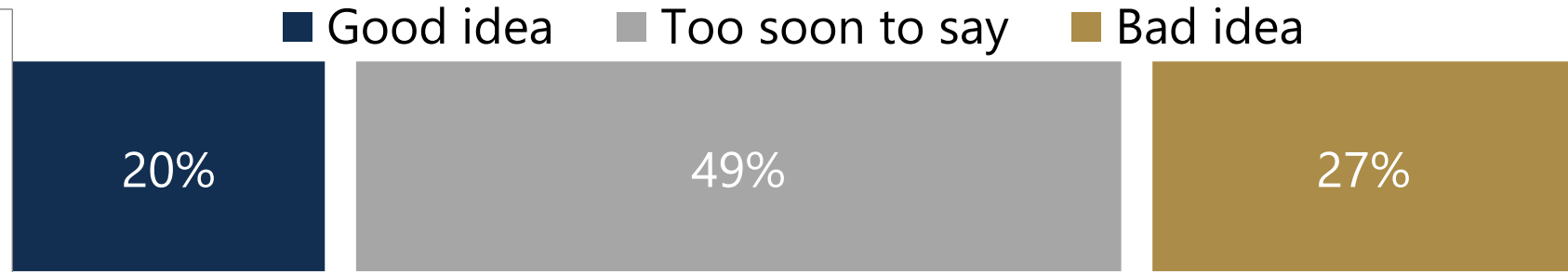
Q45-46.Knowing this, do you favor or oppose increasing military spending on AI?



Initial skepticism of AI in military systems moderates when framed as an advantage over China.

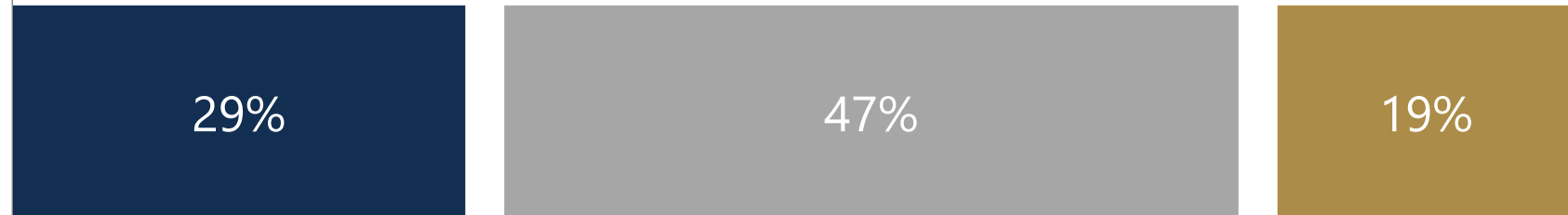
Initial reaction:

More integration of AI into our military systems.

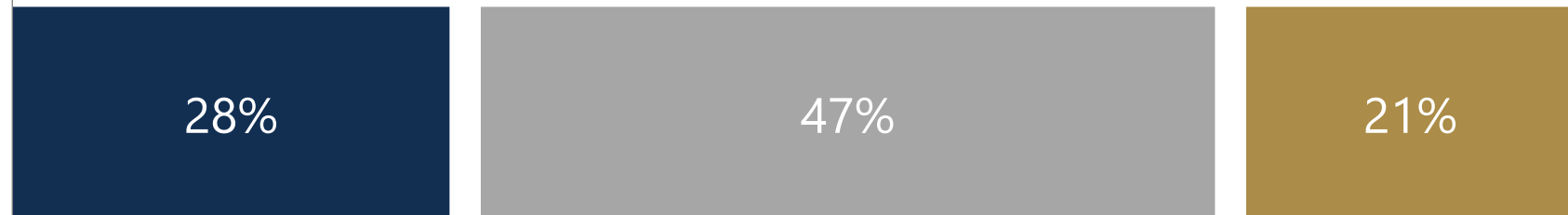


After hearing:

Experts say AI can provide a **strategic advantage over China.**



Military policy **requires safeguards** such as human oversight.

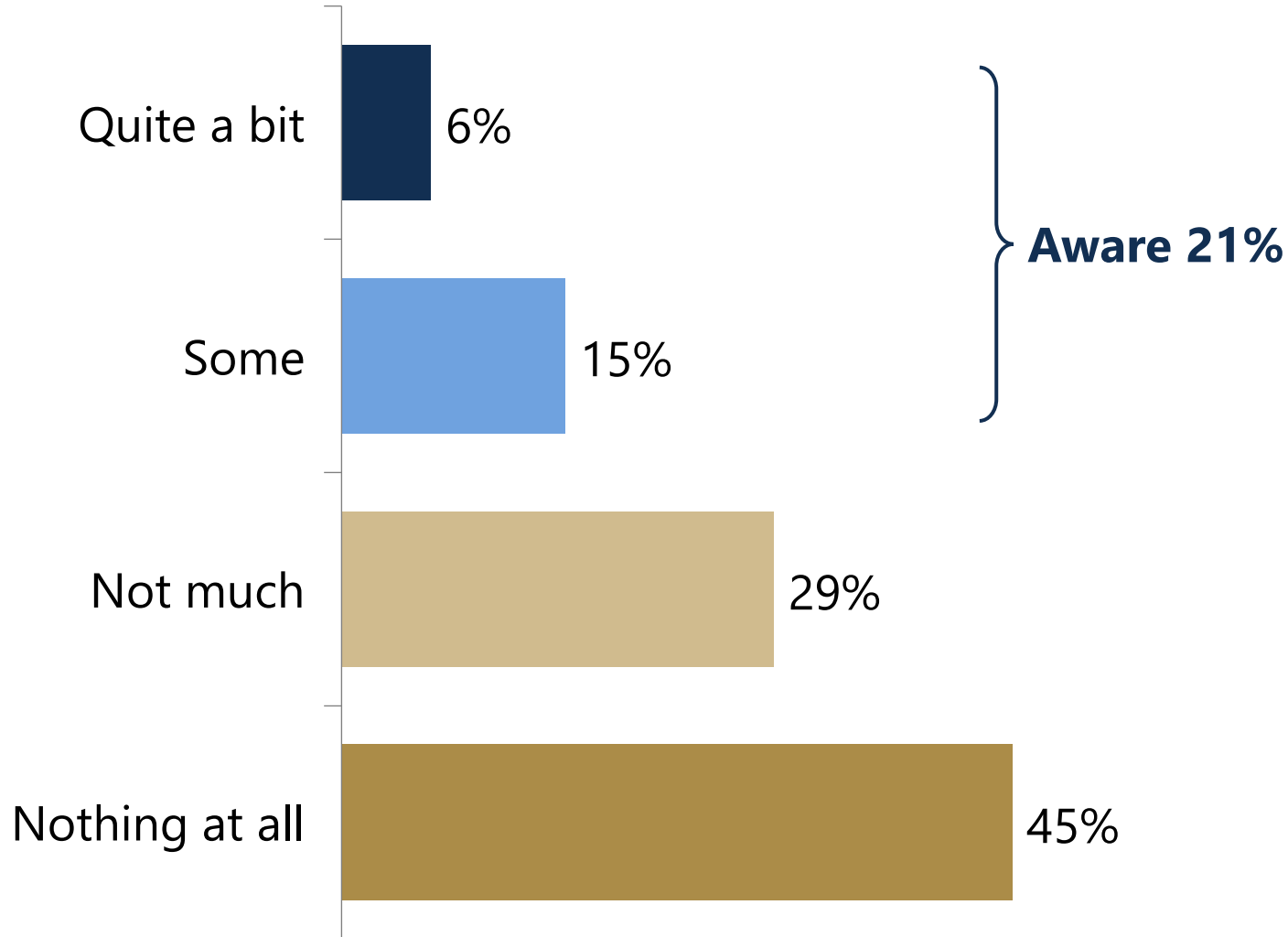


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q47-49. Do you think more integration of AI into military systems is a good idea, a bad idea, or is it too soon to say?



Relatively low awareness of AUKUS agreement.



Note: Remainder Don't know

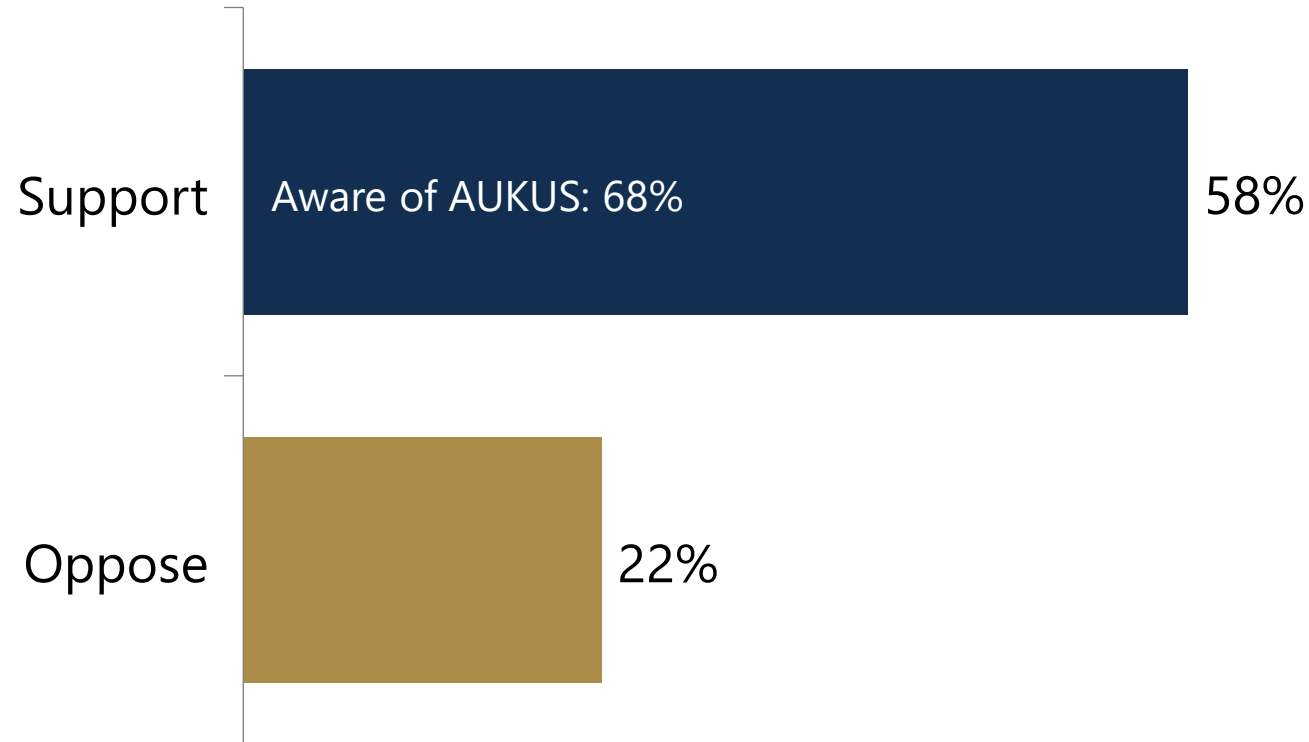
Q67. How much have you heard about the security agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States called the AUKUS pact?



Six-in-ten support changing export regulations to facilitate AUKUS goals.

Question Frame: *As part of the AUKUS pact, designed to counter growing Chinese power, the US is working with the UK and Australia to develop advanced defense technologies like nuclear-powered submarines. This will require changing US export regulations, which currently make it difficult to share defense technologies with these countries.*

Do you support or oppose changing making it easier to share sensitive technology with the UK and Australia?



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q68. Do you support or oppose changing US regulations to make it easier to share these sensitive technologies with the UK and Australia?



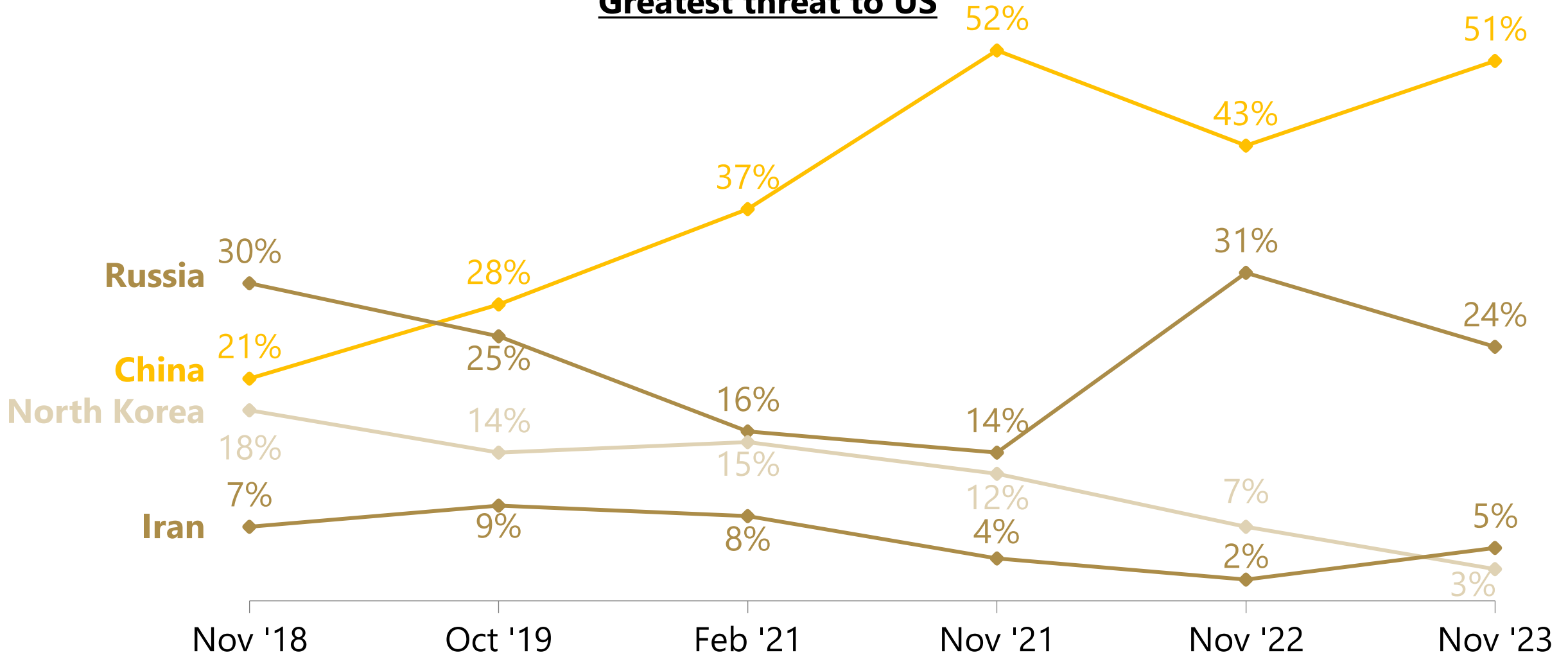
ALLIES AND ENEMIES





China seen as the greatest nation-state threat to US.

Greatest threat to US

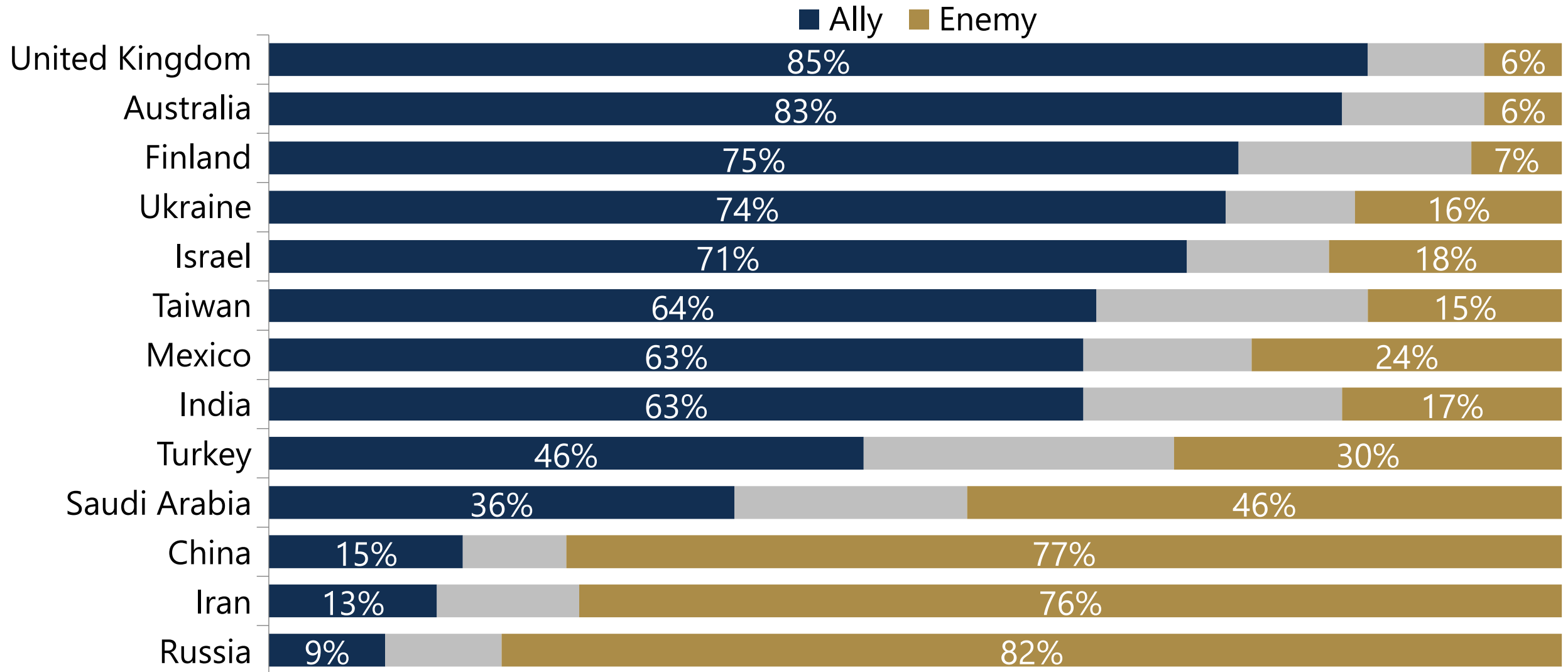


Note: Top 4 other countries shown

Q50. Which country do you see as the greatest threat to the US? [RECORD VERBATIM]



Overview of Allies and Enemies

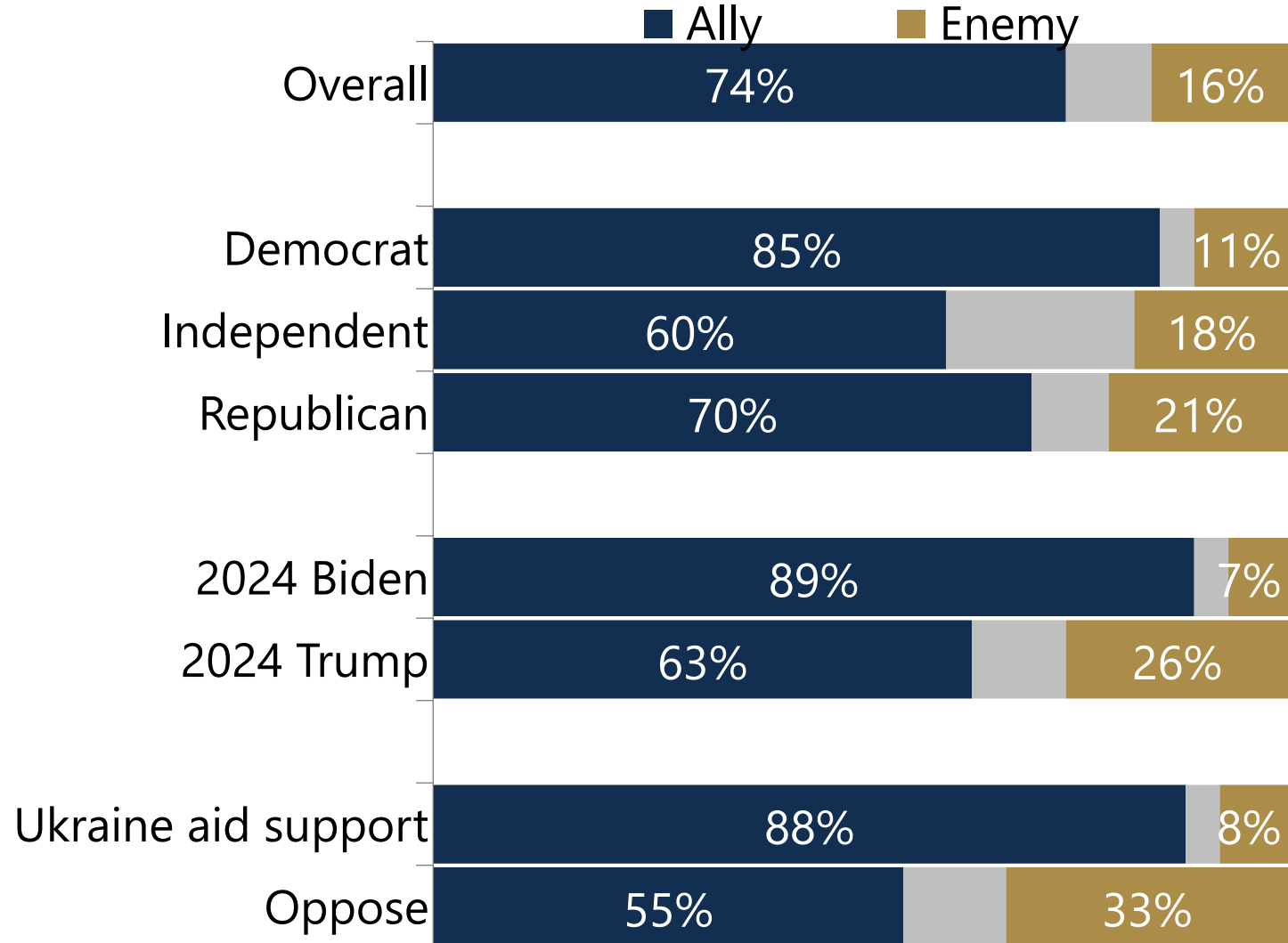
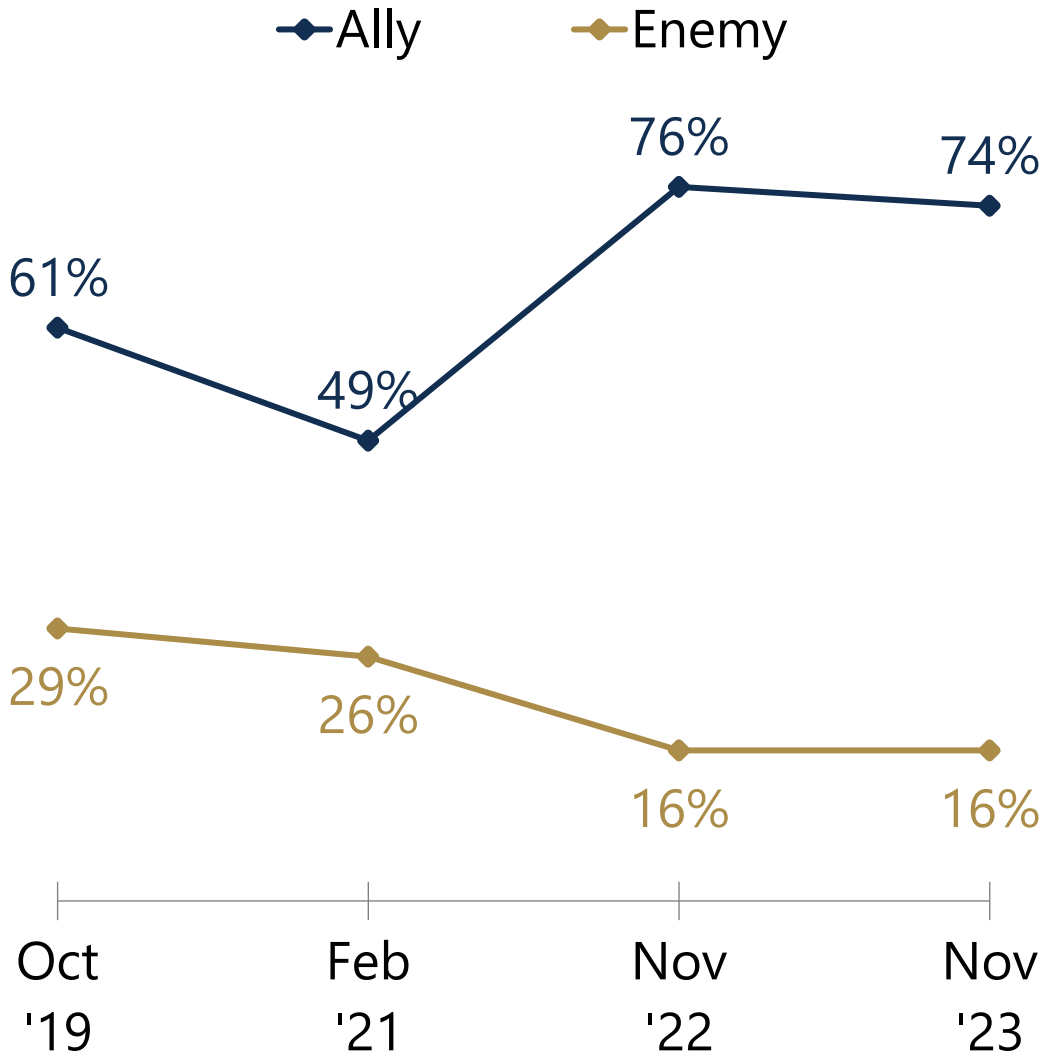


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q51-58. Do you see each of the following countries as a strong ally, something of an ally, something of an enemy, or a strong enemy?



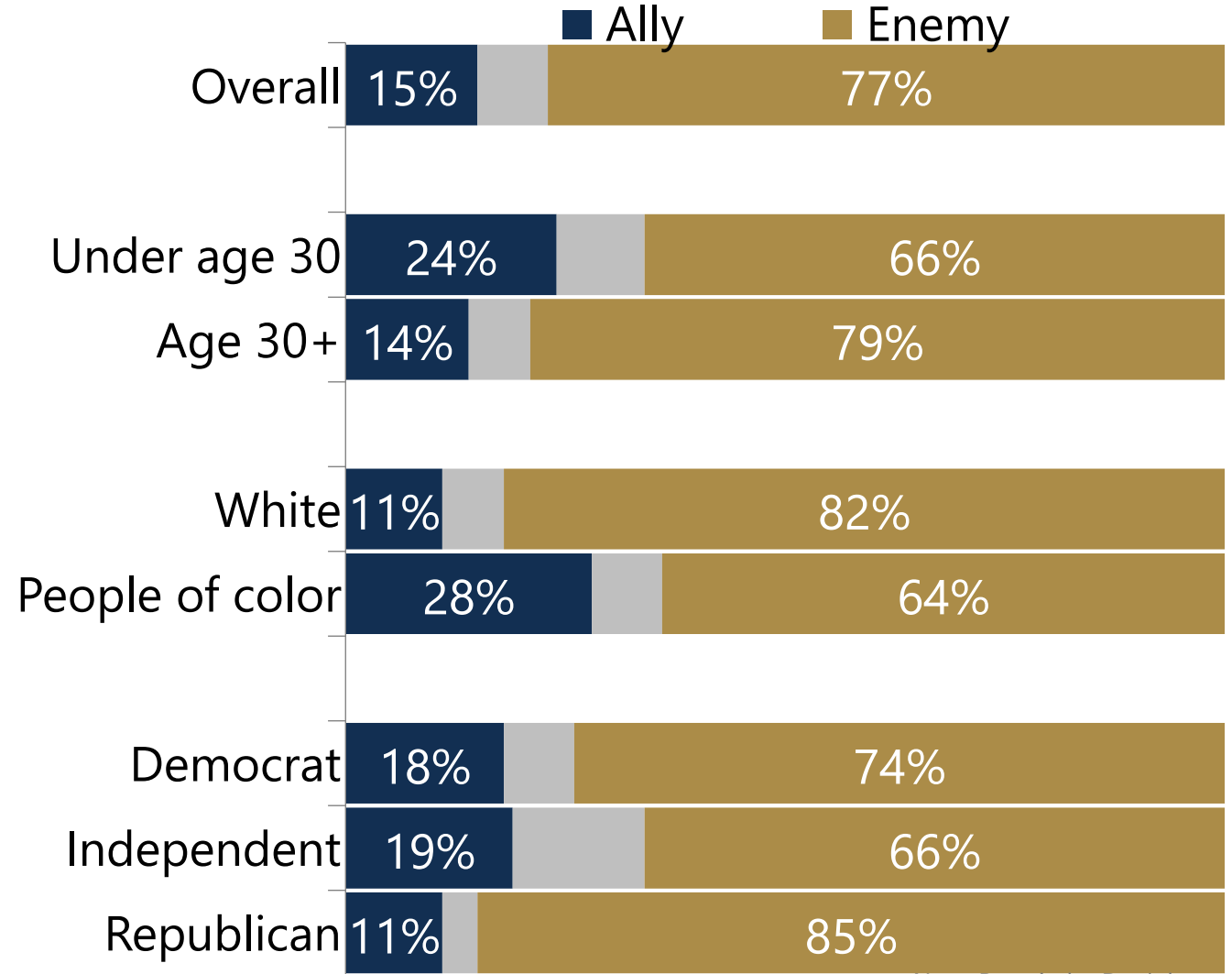
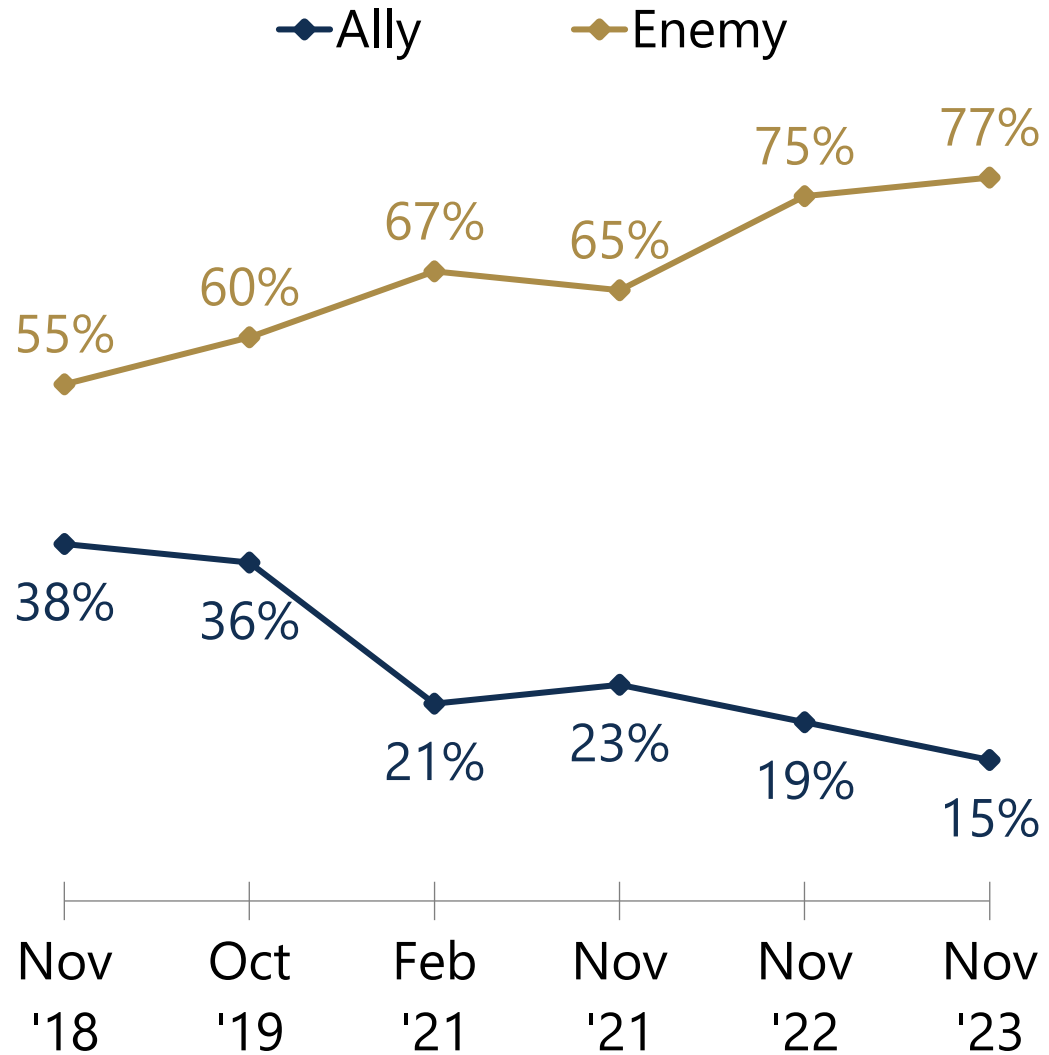
Ally/Enemy Profile: Ukraine



Q51-58. Do you see each of the following countries as a strong ally, something of an ally, something of an enemy, or a strong enemy?



Ally/Enemy Profile: China

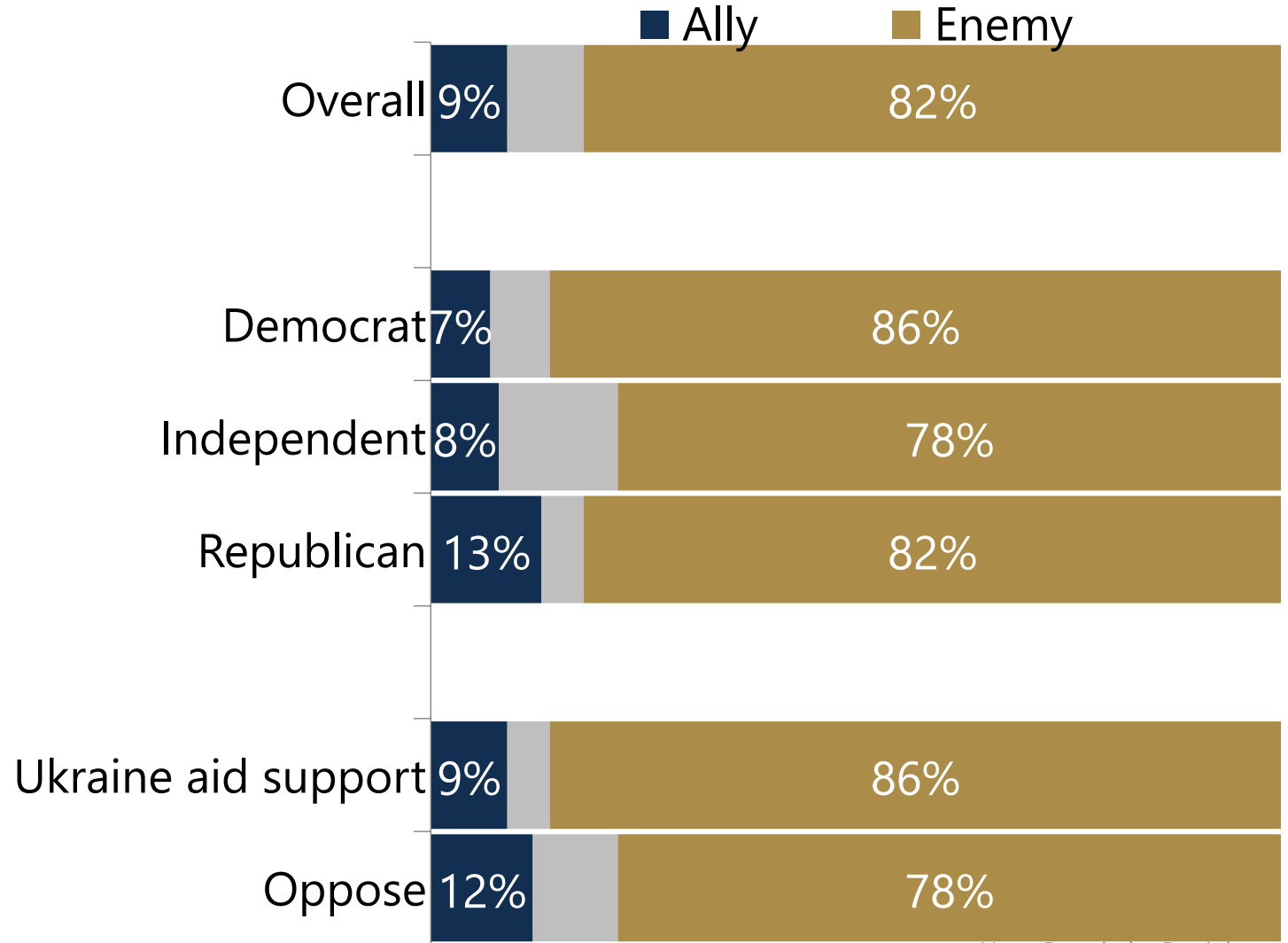
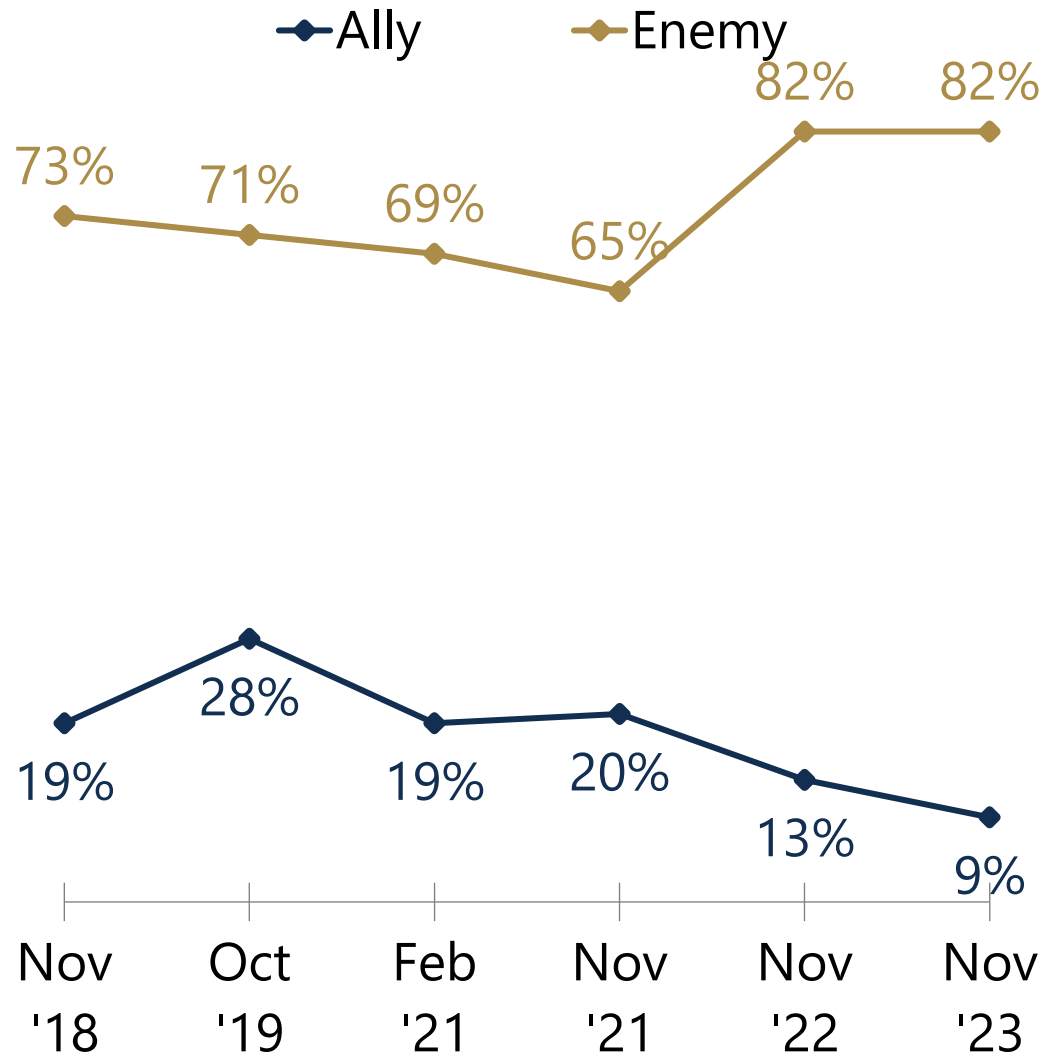


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q51-58. Do you see each of the following countries as a strong ally, something of an ally, something of an enemy, or a strong enemy?



Ally/Enemy Profile: Russia

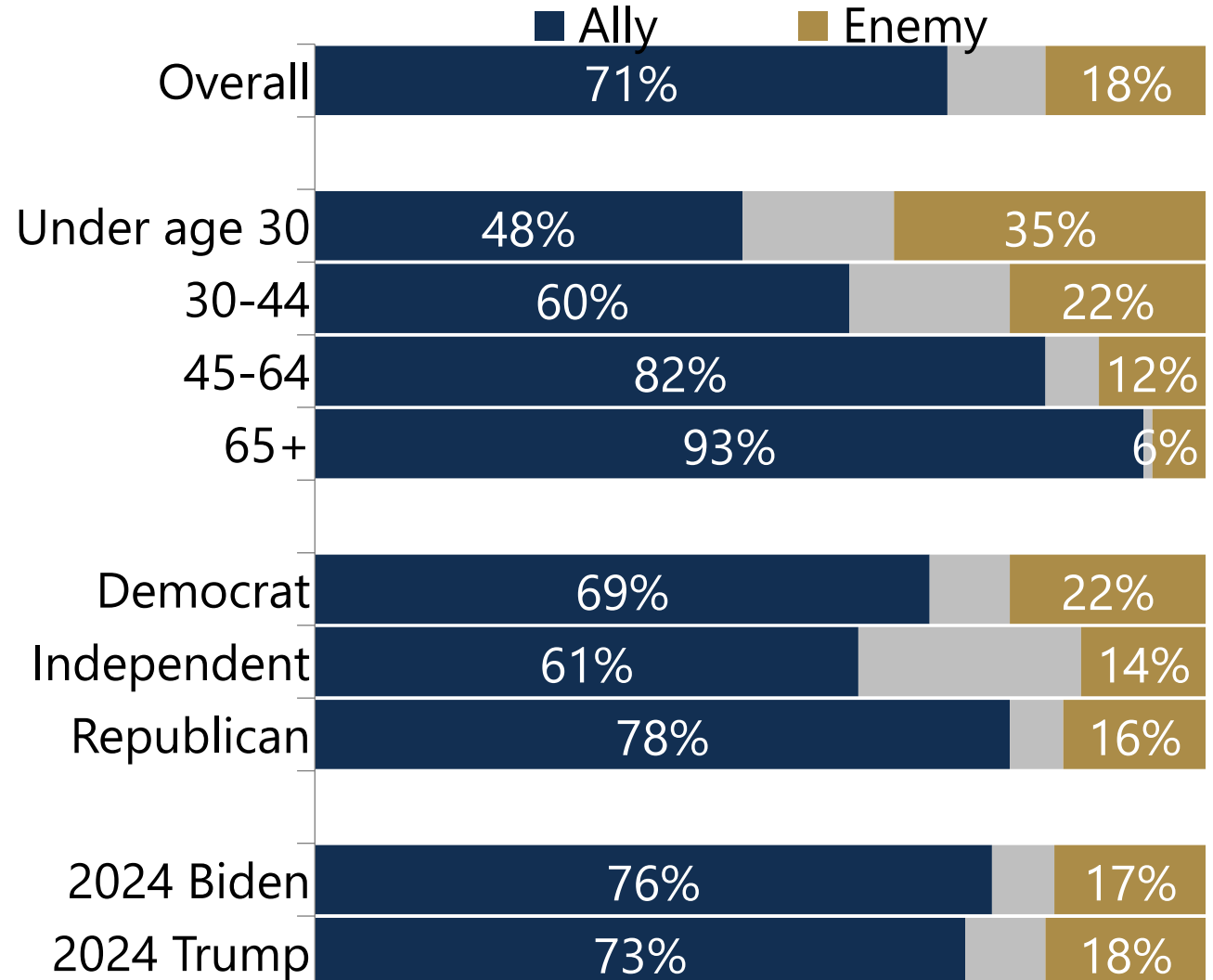
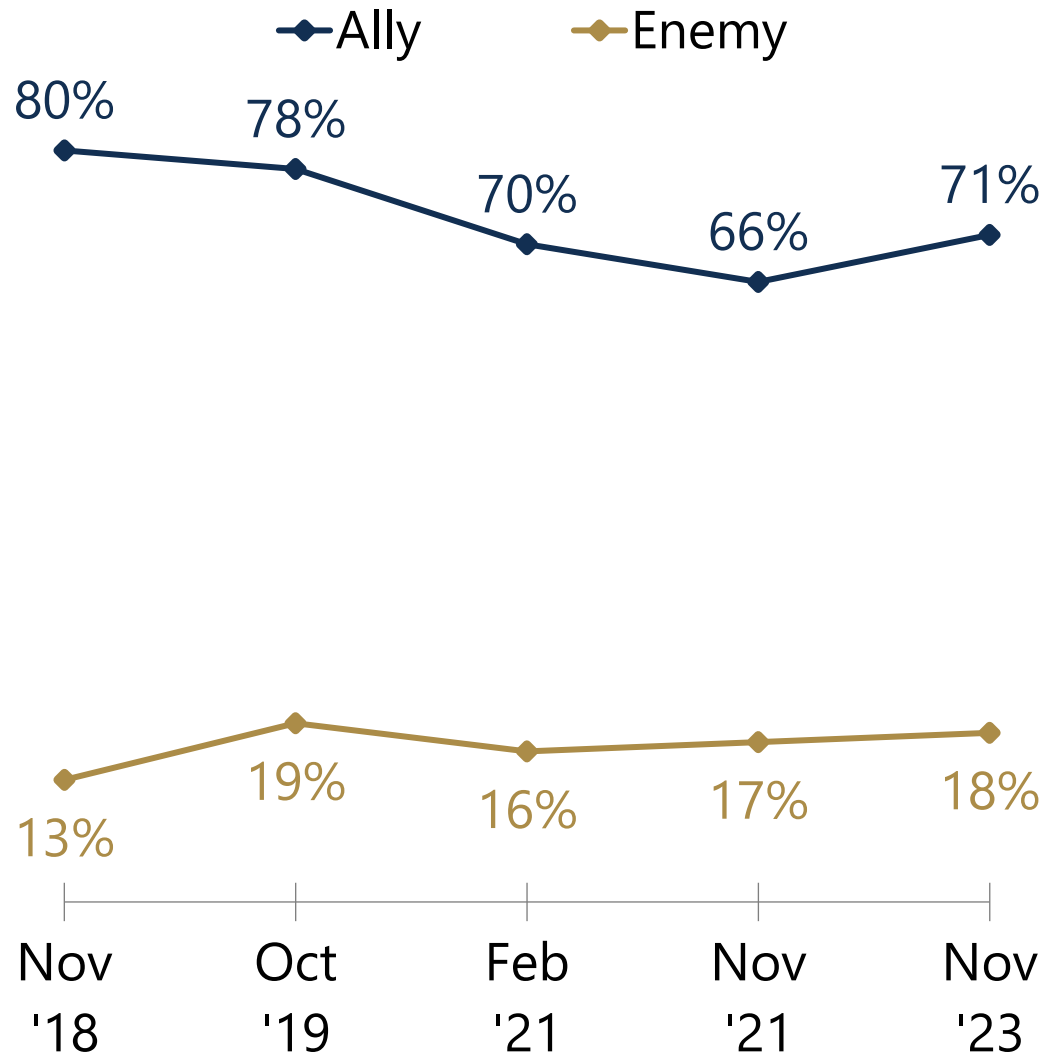


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q51-58. Do you see each of the following countries as a strong ally, something of an ally, something of an enemy, or a strong enemy?



Ally/Enemy Profile: Israel

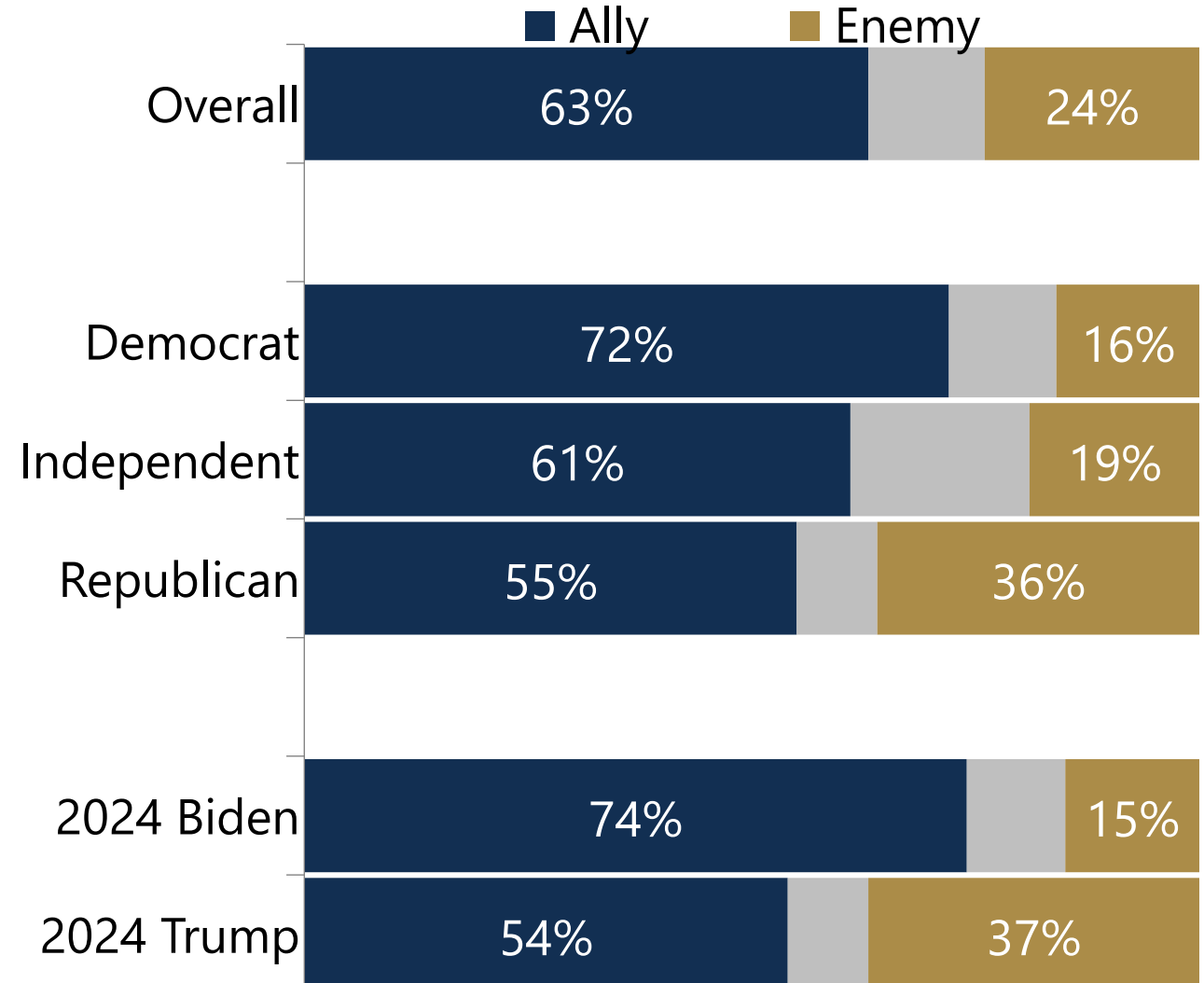
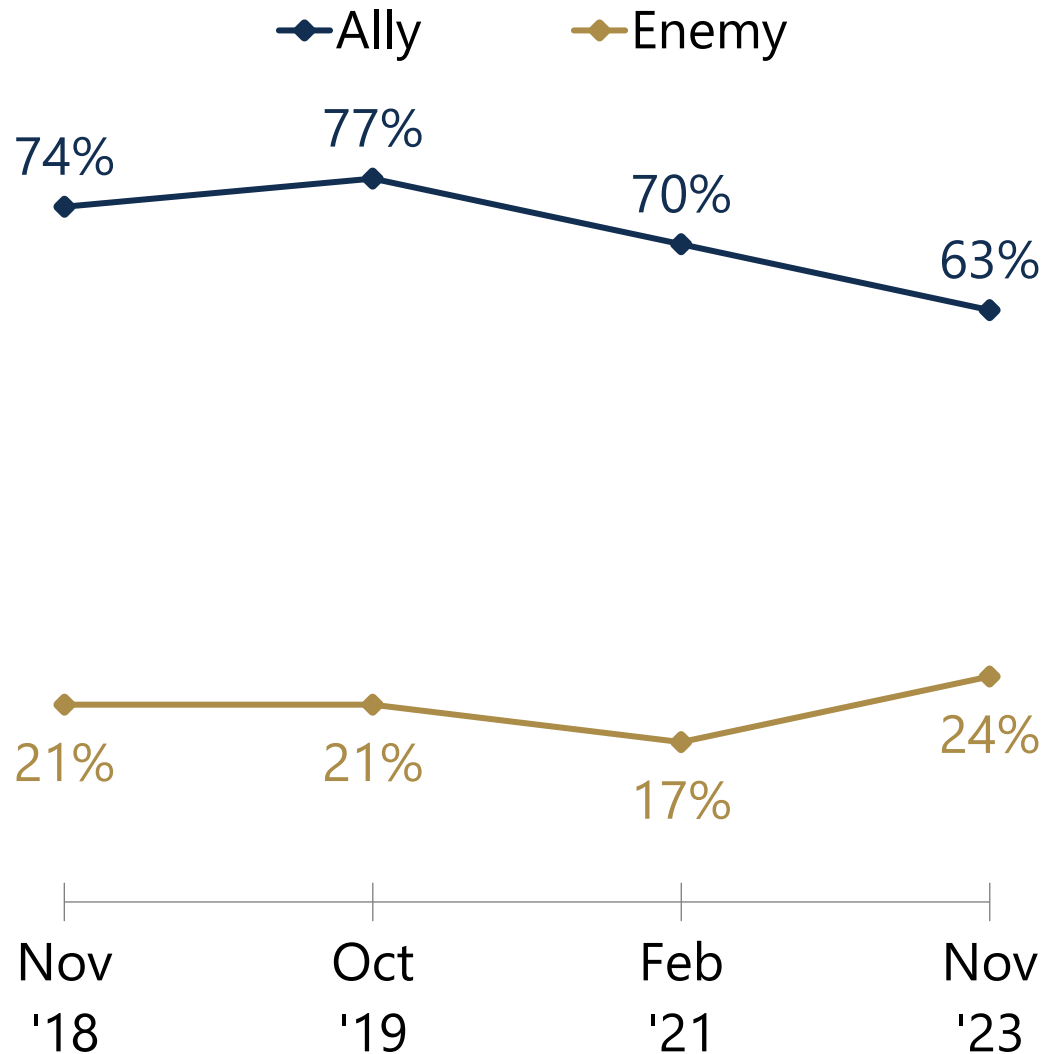


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q51-58. Do you see each of the following countries as a strong ally, something of an ally, something of an enemy, or a strong enemy?



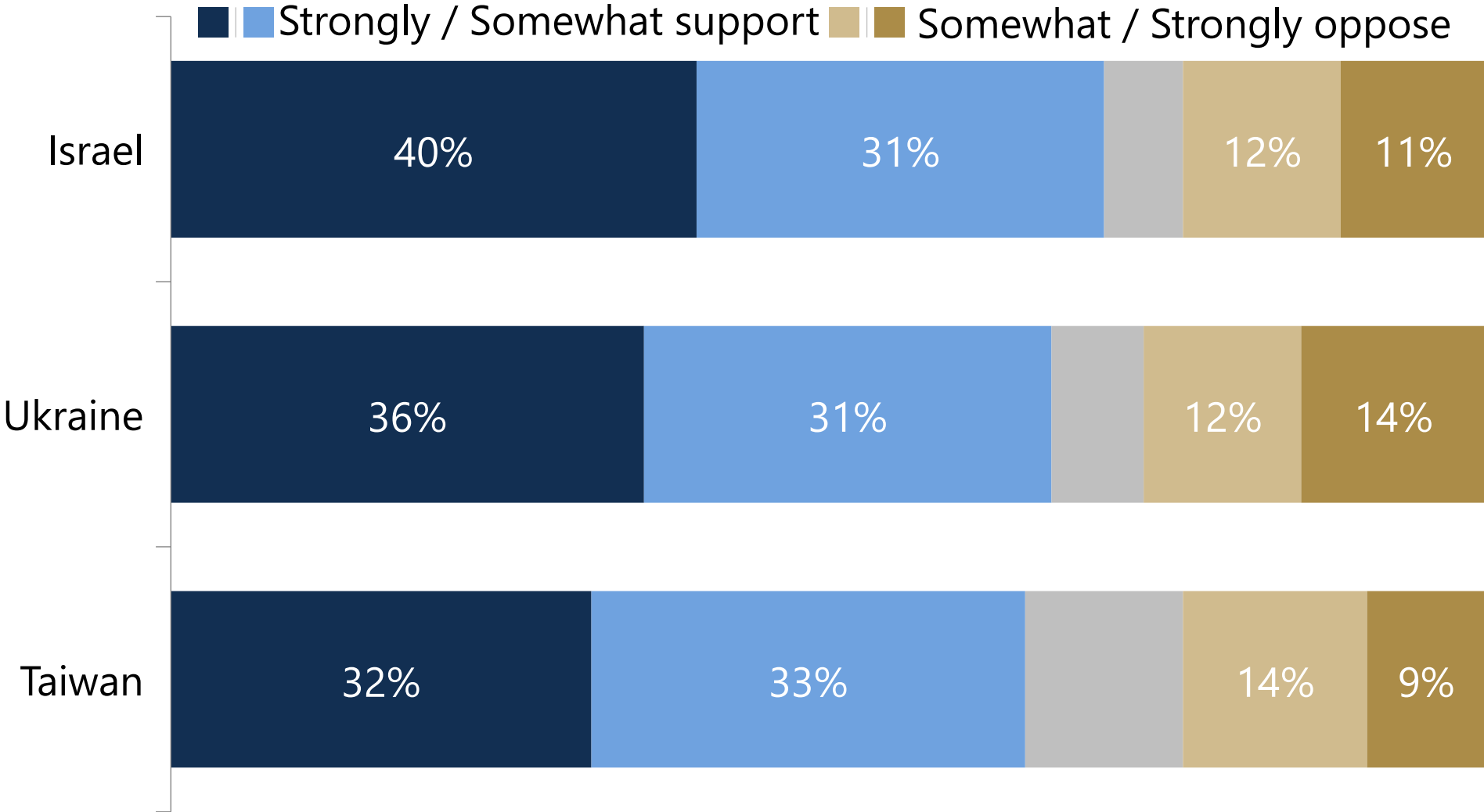
Ally/Enemy Profile: Mexico



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q51-58. Do you see each of the following countries as a strong ally, something of an ally, something of an enemy, or a strong enemy?

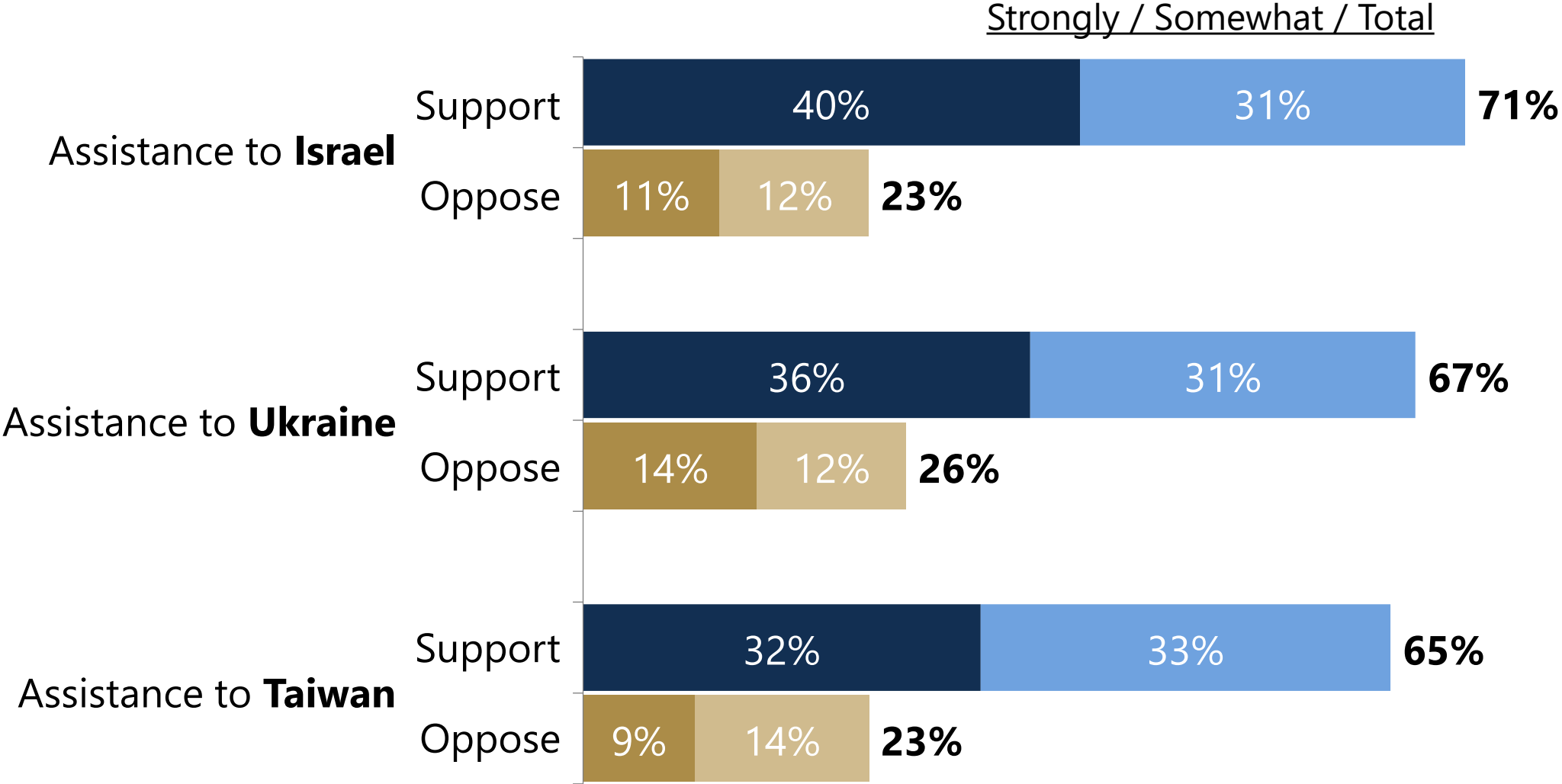
Strong majority support for security assistance to Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan.



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q64-66. The US has historically provided security assistance to help its allies and friends defend themselves if they are willing to fight aggression against their own countries. Do you support or oppose the US assisting each of the following?

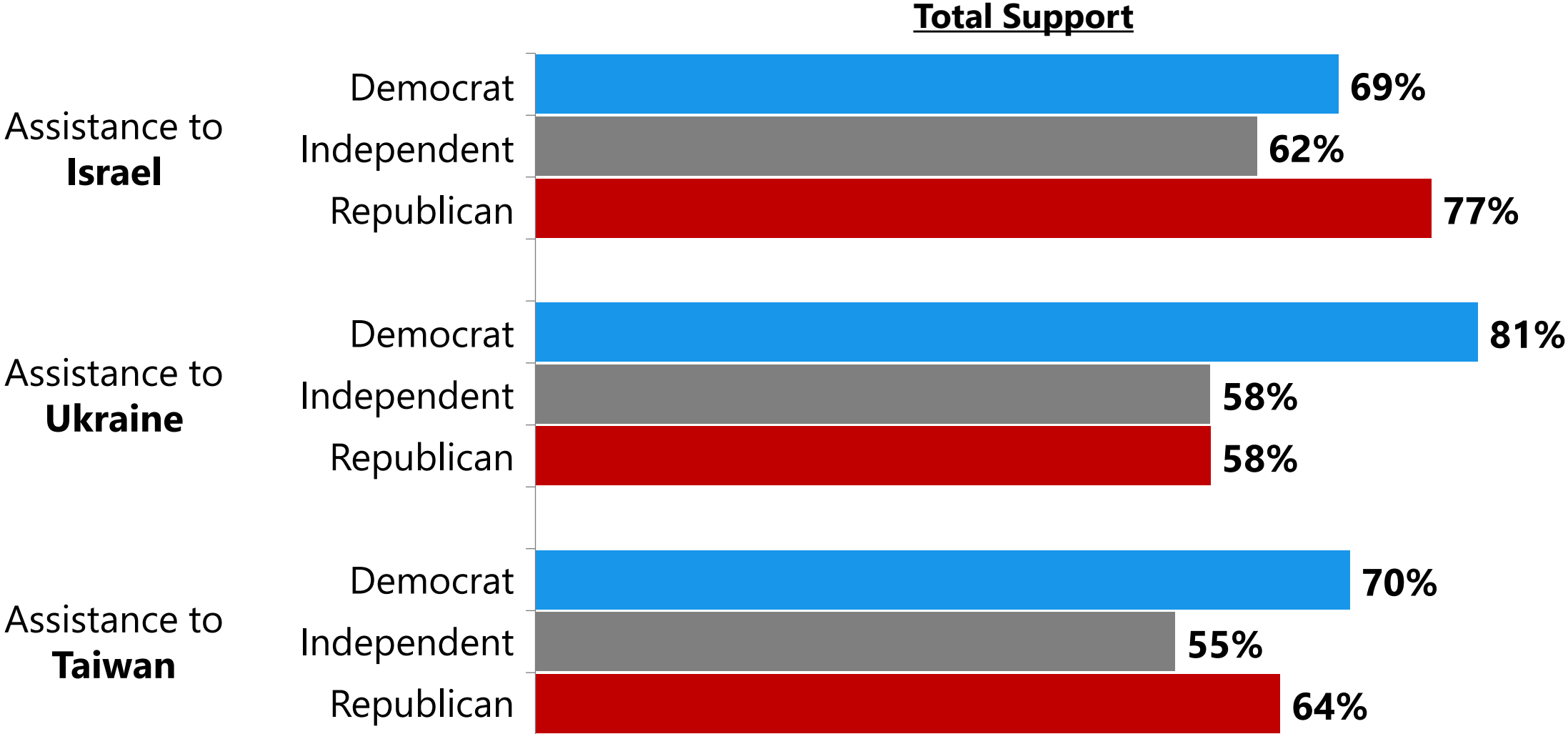
Strong majority support for defense assistance to Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan.



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q64-66. The US has historically provided security assistance to help its allies and friends defend themselves if they are willing to fight aggression against their own countries. Do you support or oppose the US assisting each of the following?

Bipartisan majorities support defense assistance to all three countries.



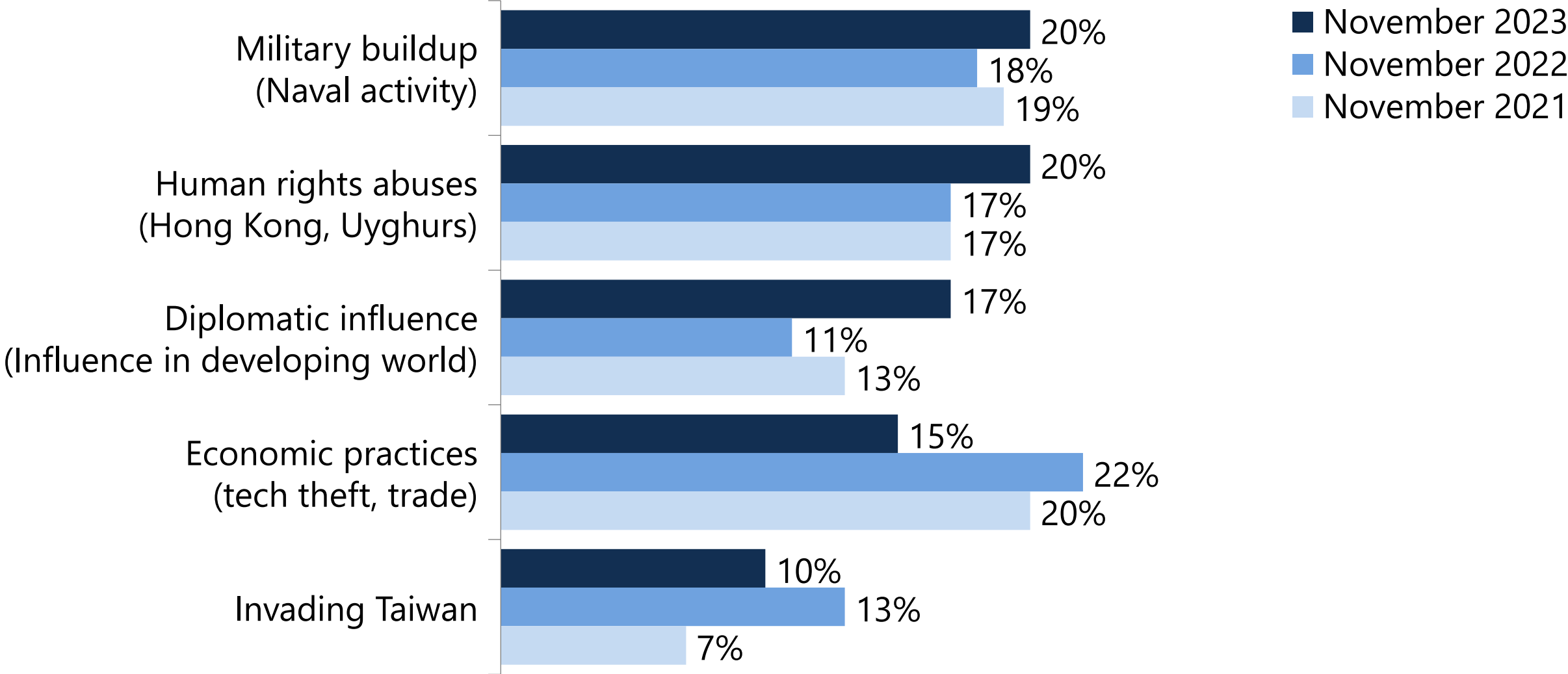
Q64-66. The US has historically provided security assistance to help its allies and friends defend themselves if they are willing to fight aggression against their own countries. Do you support or oppose the US assisting each of the following?



CHINA & TAIWAN



Americans see a variety of Chinese practices as the most concerning aspect of Chinese activity.



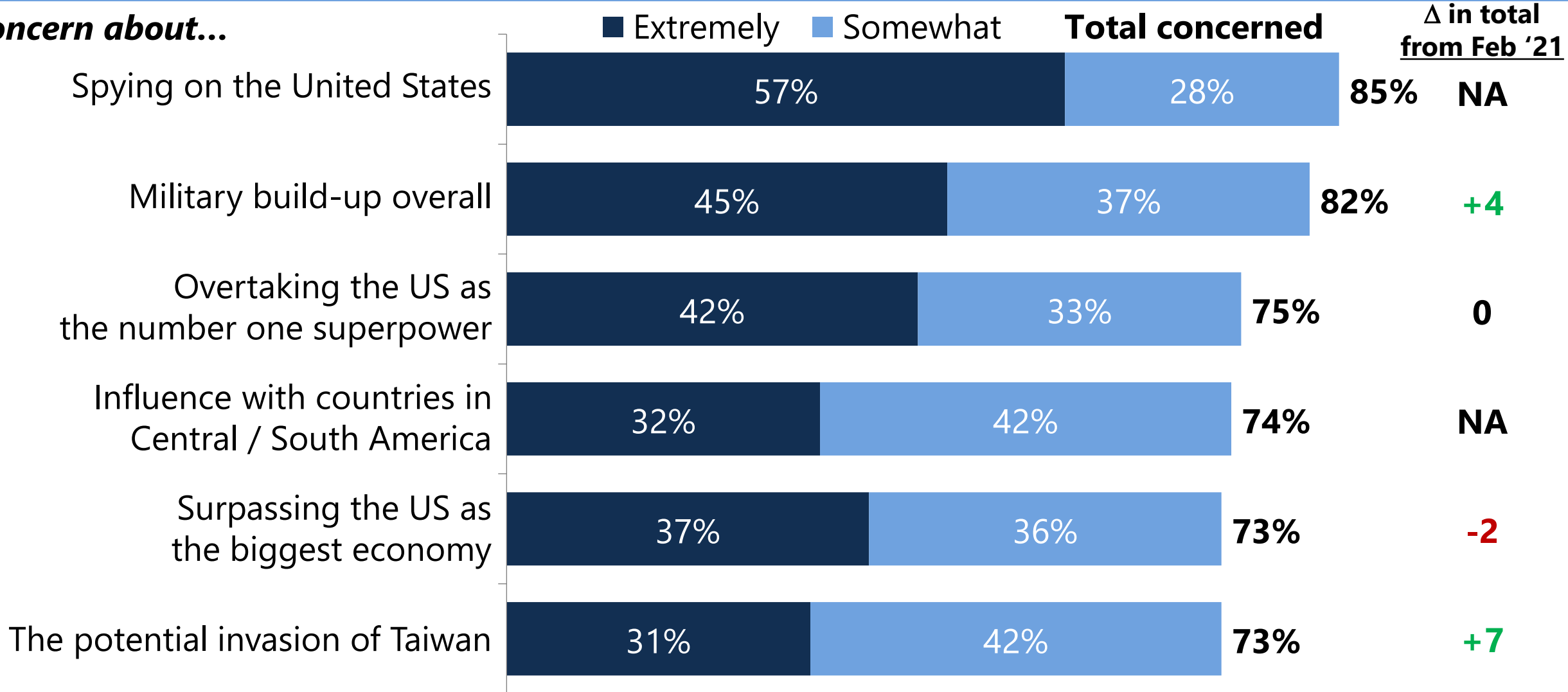
Note: Remainder All / Mix, Don't know

Q69. Which of the following most concerns you about China?

Chinese spying and military build-up top the list of concerns.



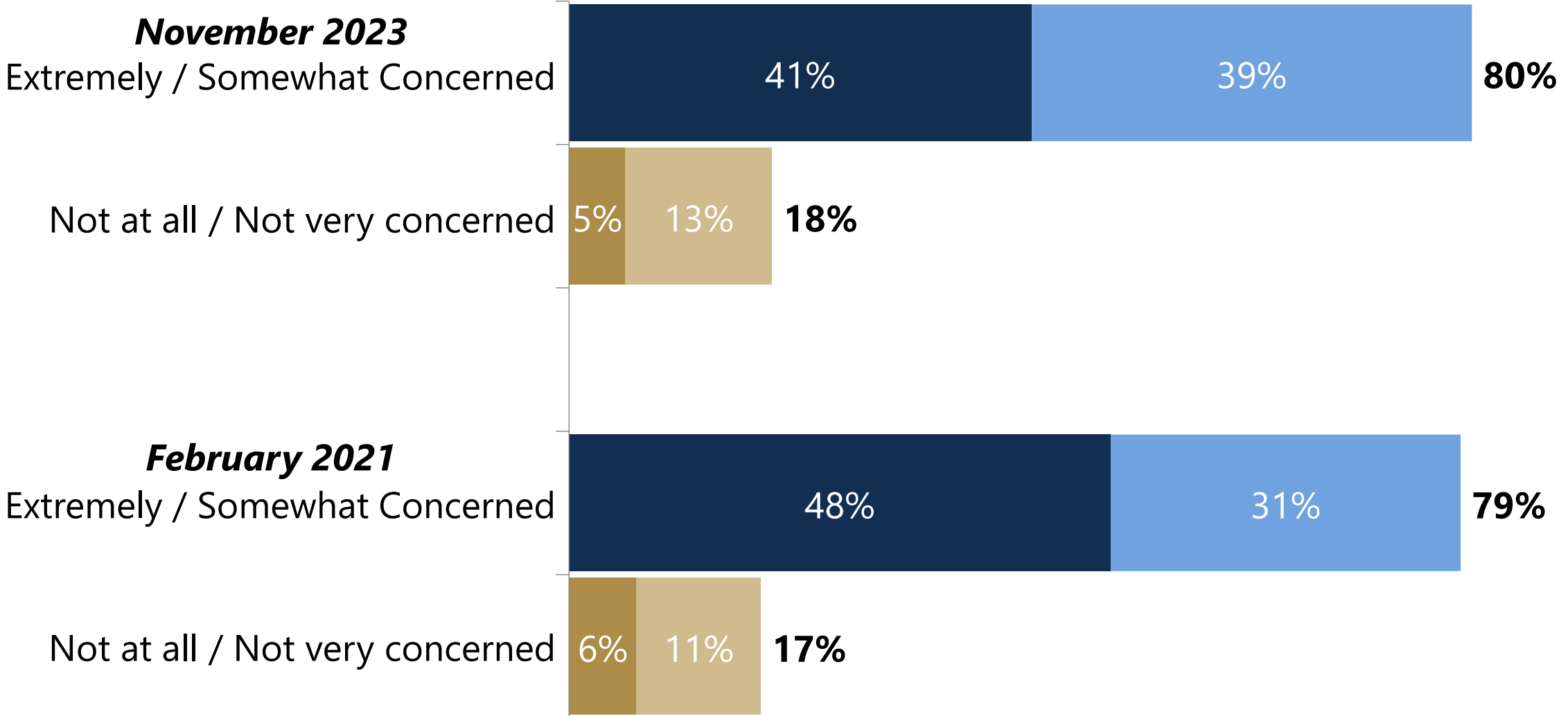
Concern about...



Q70-75. Thinking specifically about China, how concerned are you about each of the following?



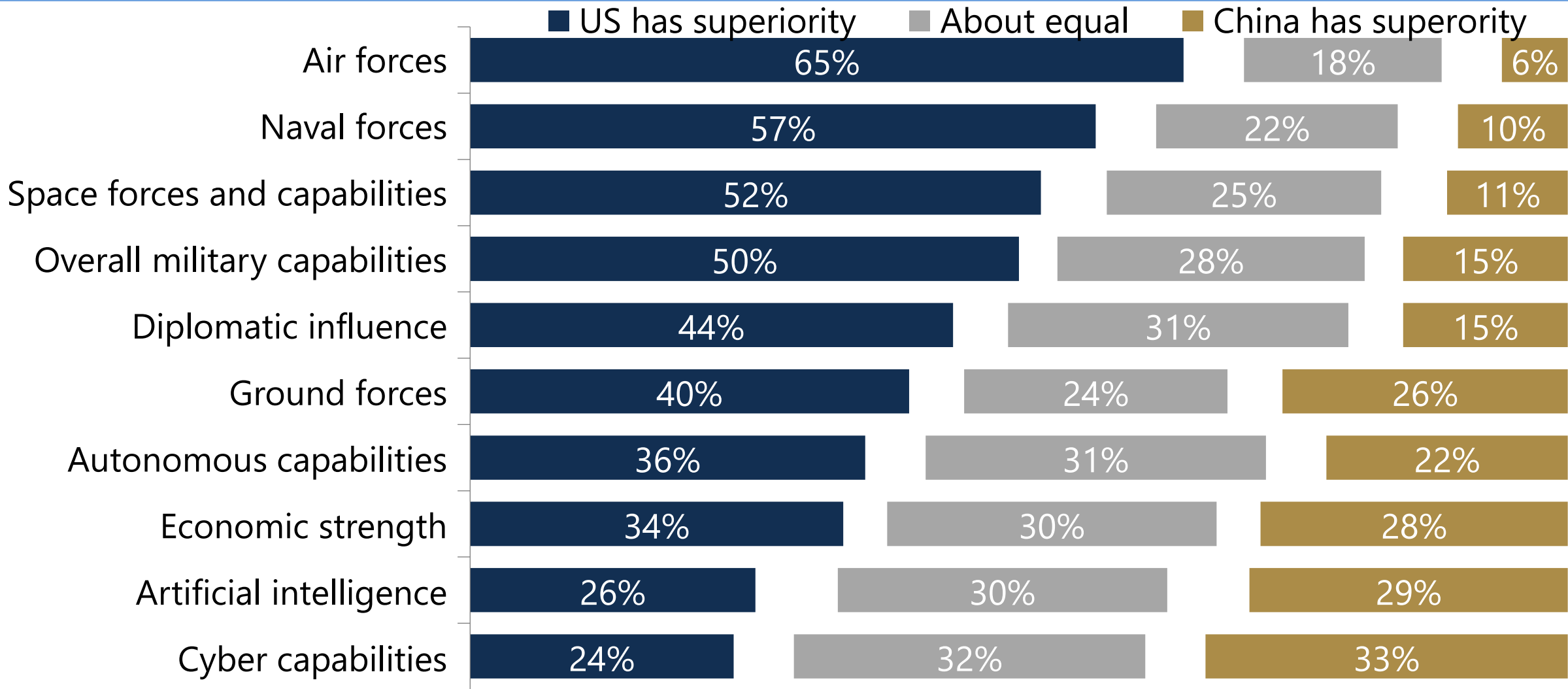
Eight-in-ten find Chinese goal of AI supremacy concerning.



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q76. As you may know, the Chinese government has a policy designed to achieve technological supremacy over the US when it comes to artificial intelligence by the year 2030. Knowing this, how concerned are you about the possibility of the US falling behind China technologically?

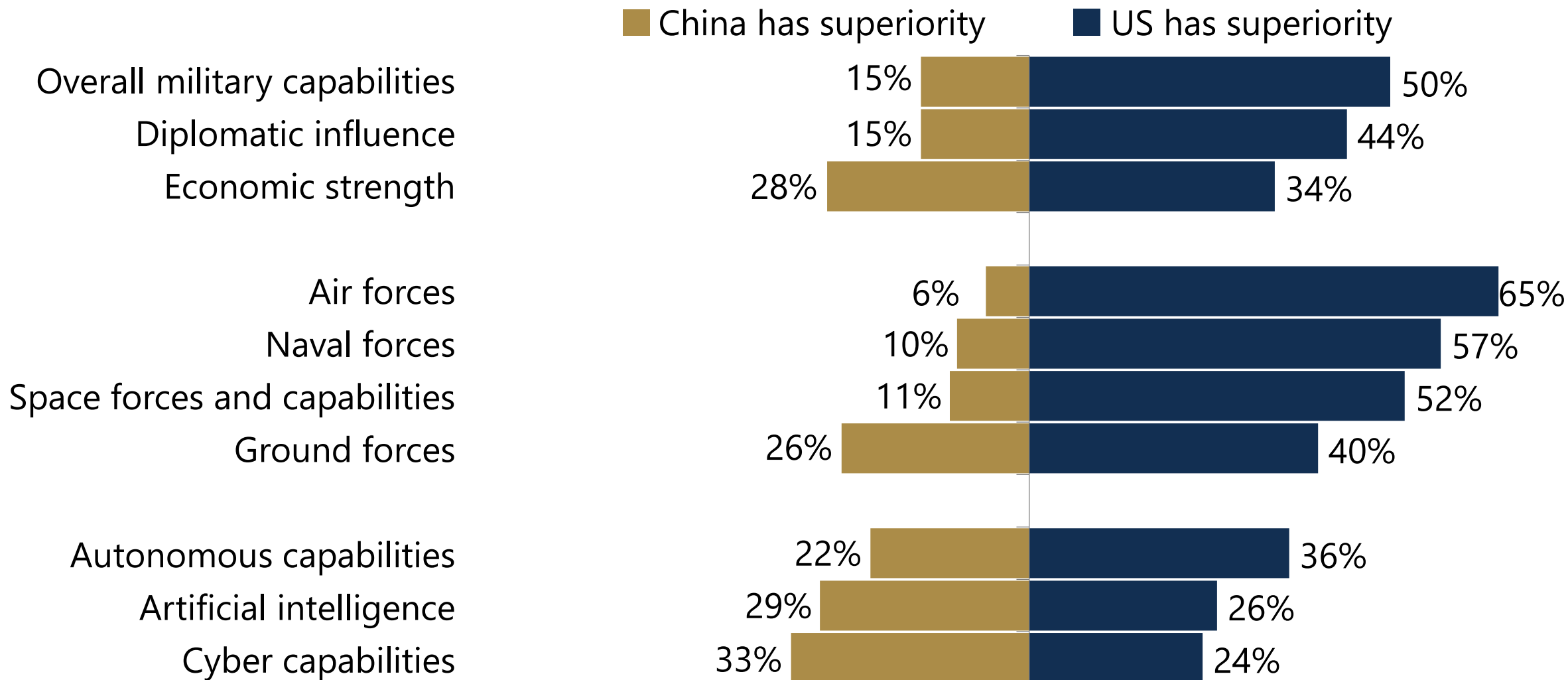
US seen as militarily superior to China; China given the edge on advanced technologies.



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q77-86. Do you think the US has superiority, are the two countries about equal, or does China have superiority?

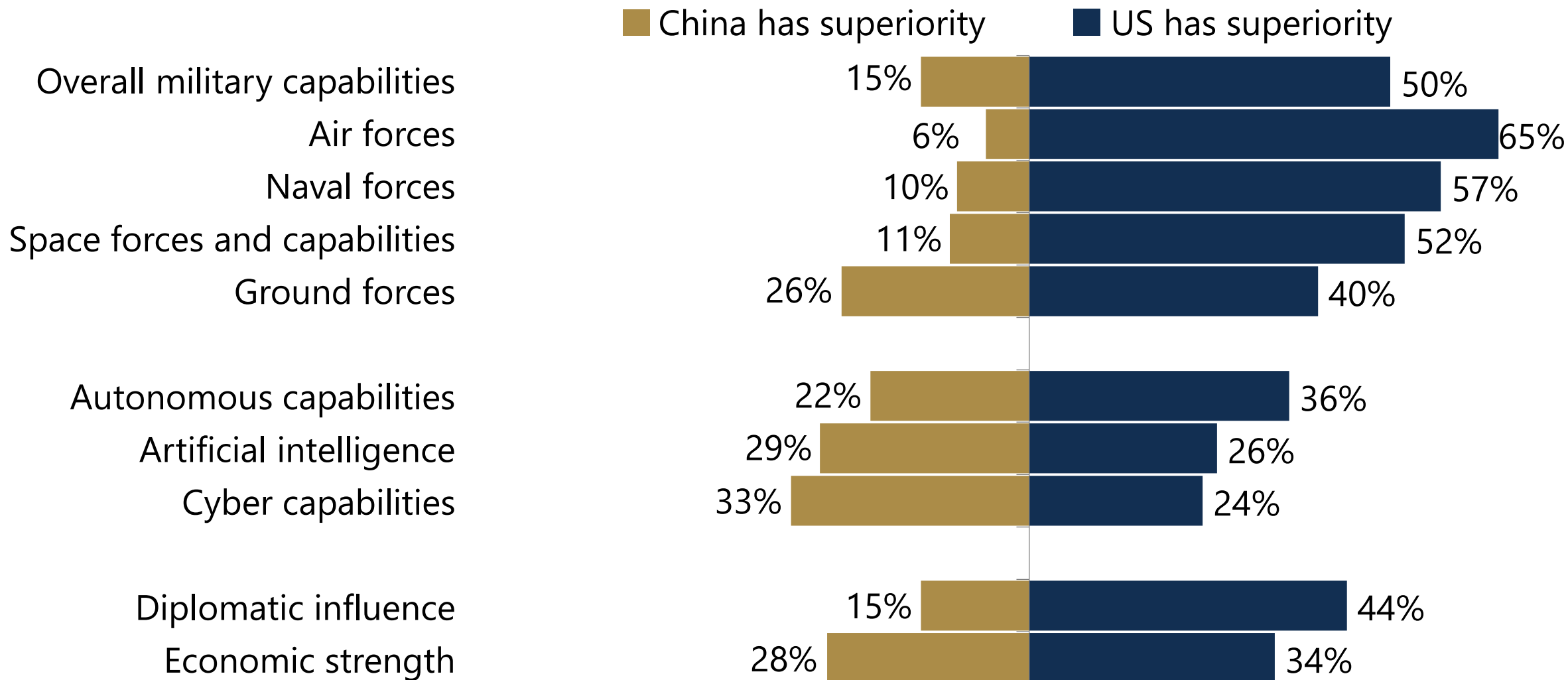
US seen as militarily superior to China; China given the edge on advanced technologies.



Note: About equal, Don't know

Q77-86. Do you think the US has superiority, are the two countries about equal, or does China have superiority?

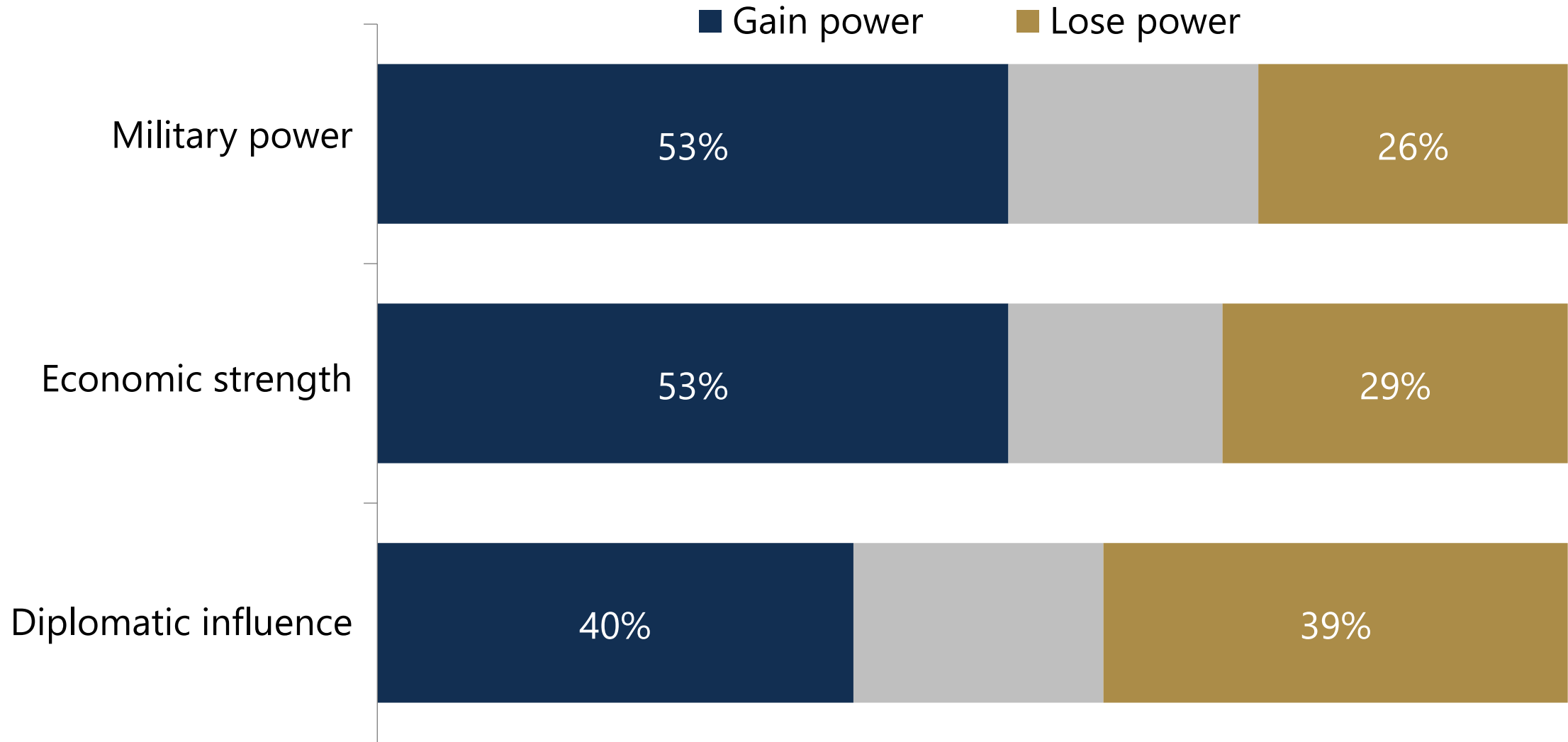
US seen as militarily superior to China; China given the edge on advanced technologies.



Note: About equal, Don't know

Q77-86. Do you think the US has superiority, are the two countries about equal, or does China have superiority?

Majorities think China will gain military and economic power over the next decade.

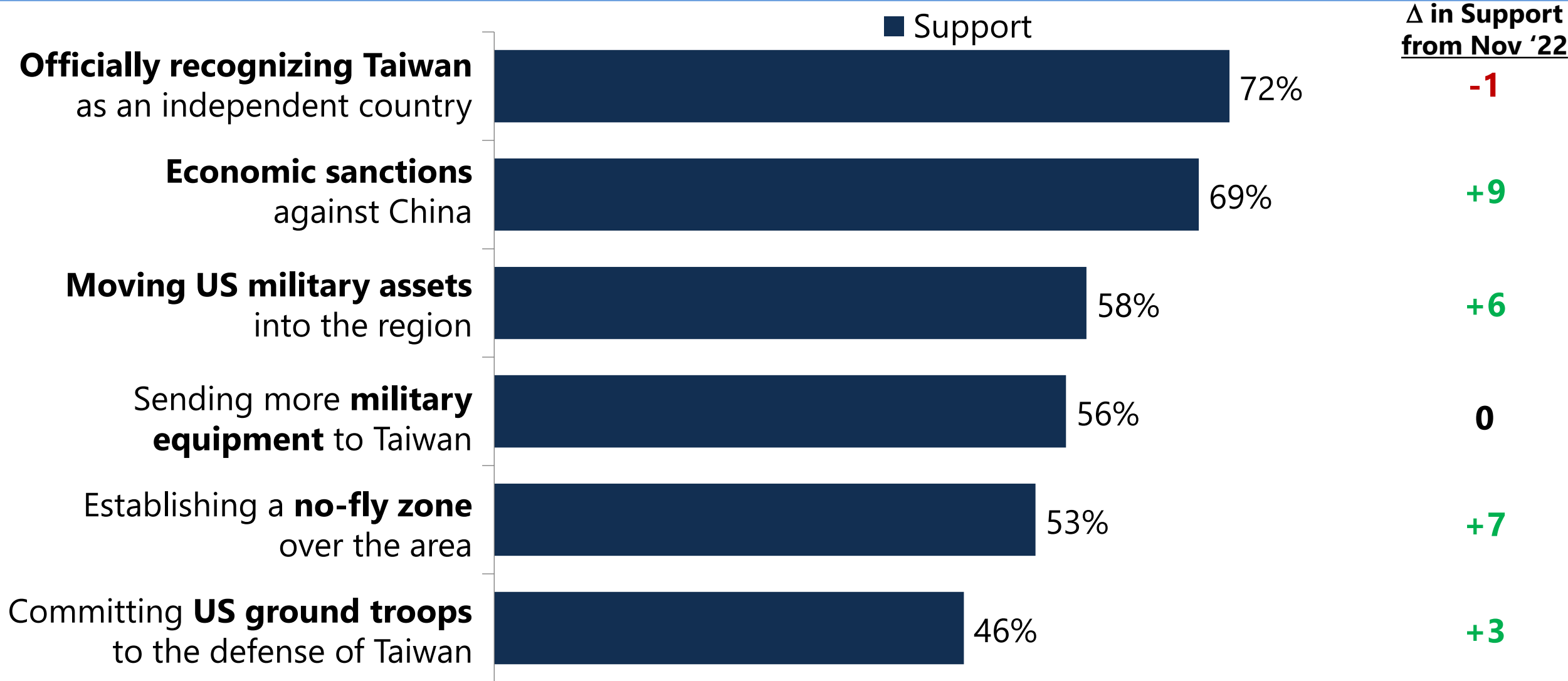


Note: Remainder Stay the same / Don't know

Q87-89. For each of the following, do you think China will gain power compared to the US over the next 10 years or lose power compared to the US?



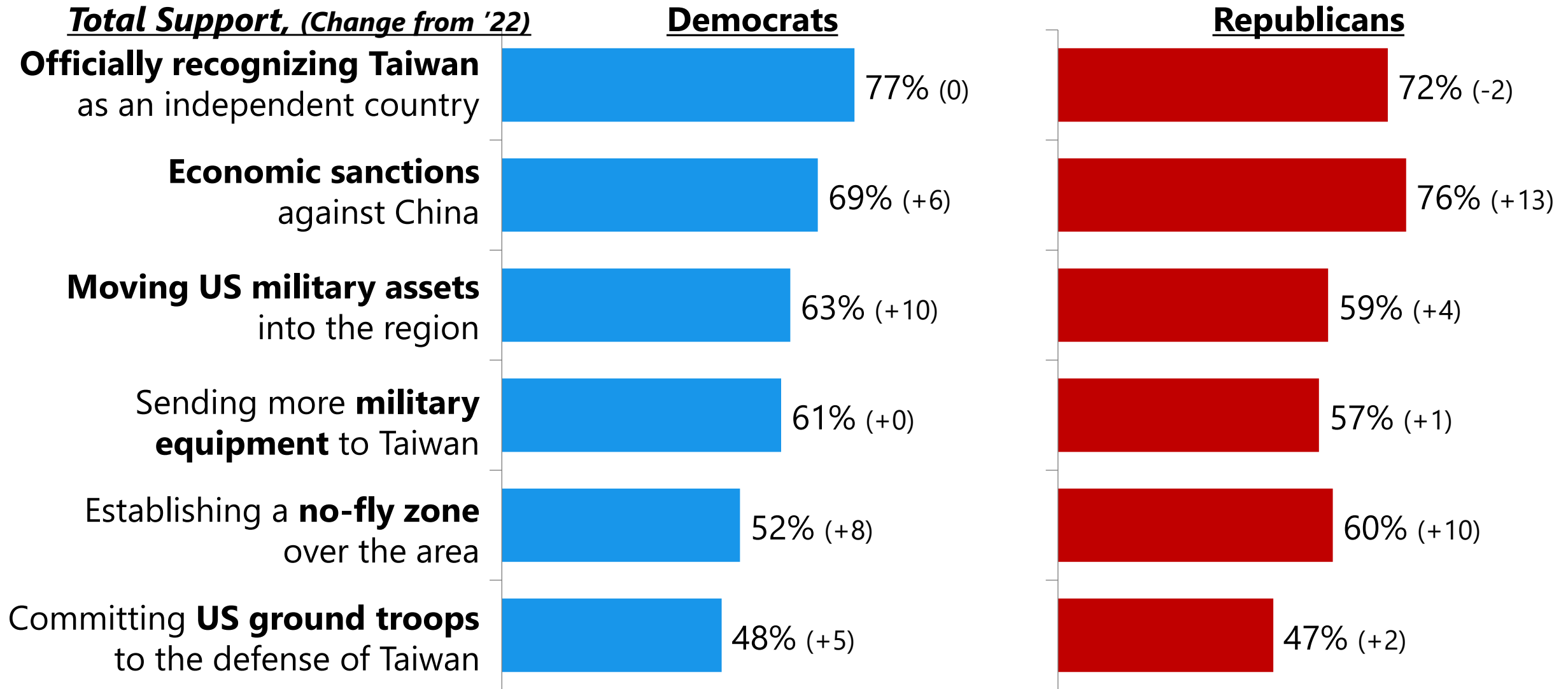
Increased support for a range of measures to defend Taiwan if China invades.



Q90-95. Although official Chinese policy is that Taiwan is part of China, Taiwan has operated relatively independently for decades. If China invaded Taiwan, would you support or oppose the United States defending Taiwan by...



Partisans are largely aligned on measures to defend Taiwan if China invades.

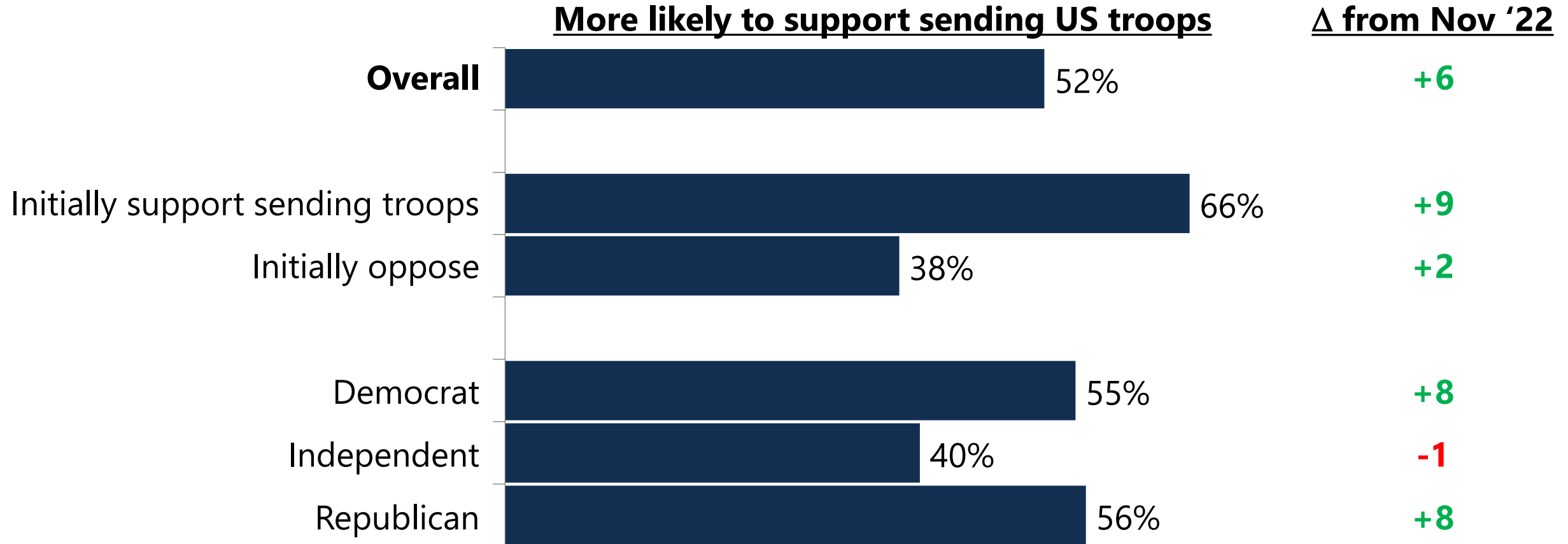


Q90-95. Although official Chinese policy is that Taiwan is part of China, Taiwan has operated relatively independently for decades. If China invaded Taiwan, would you support or oppose the United States defending Taiwan by...



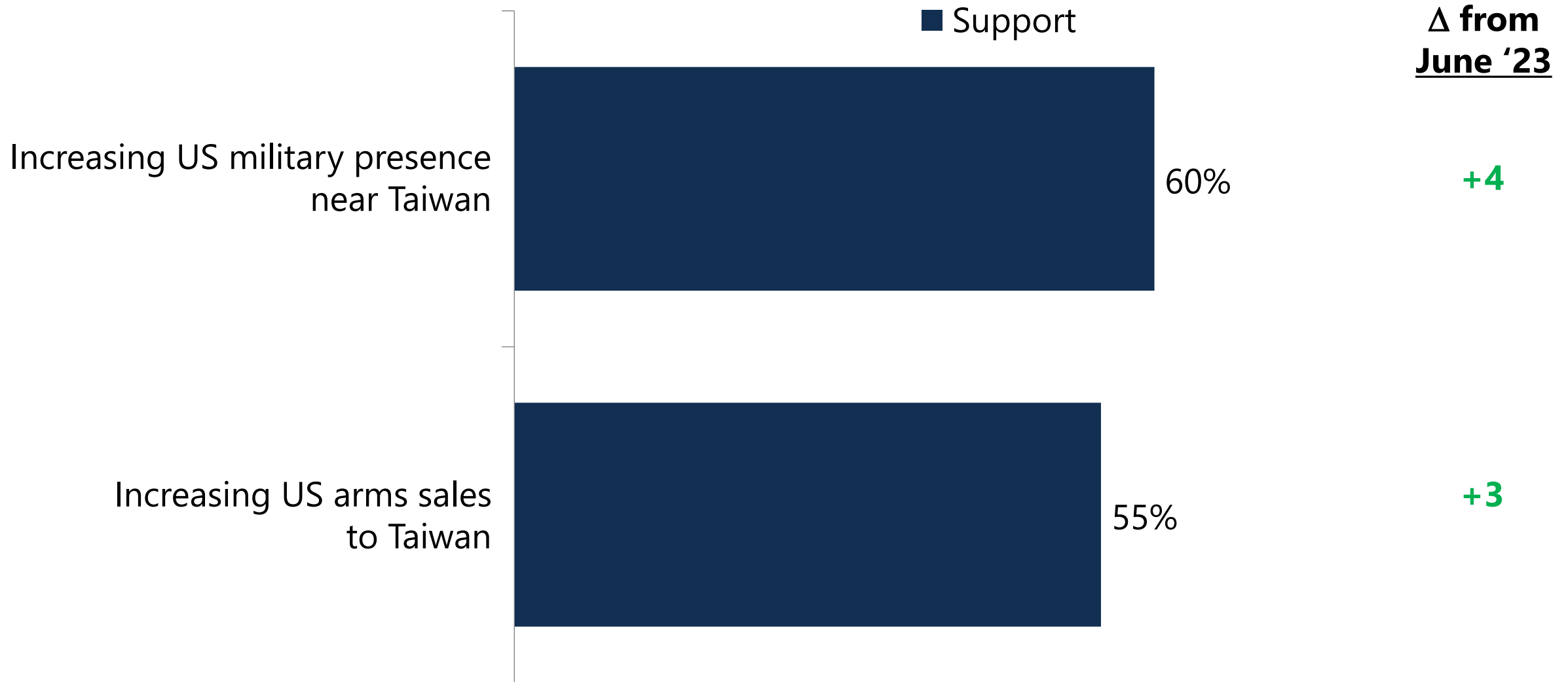
Context about Taiwan increases support for sending troops if China invades.

Question Frame: *Taiwan has a democratically-elected government, is a major manufacturer of electronics and the world's largest producer of advanced semiconductors. Does hearing this make you more or less likely to support committing US forces to the defense of Taiwan if China invades, or does it have no effect?*





Majorities support measures to deter an invasion of Taiwan, with an increase in support from June.



Q97-98. In an attempt to discourage China from invading Taiwan, do you support or oppose each of the following?

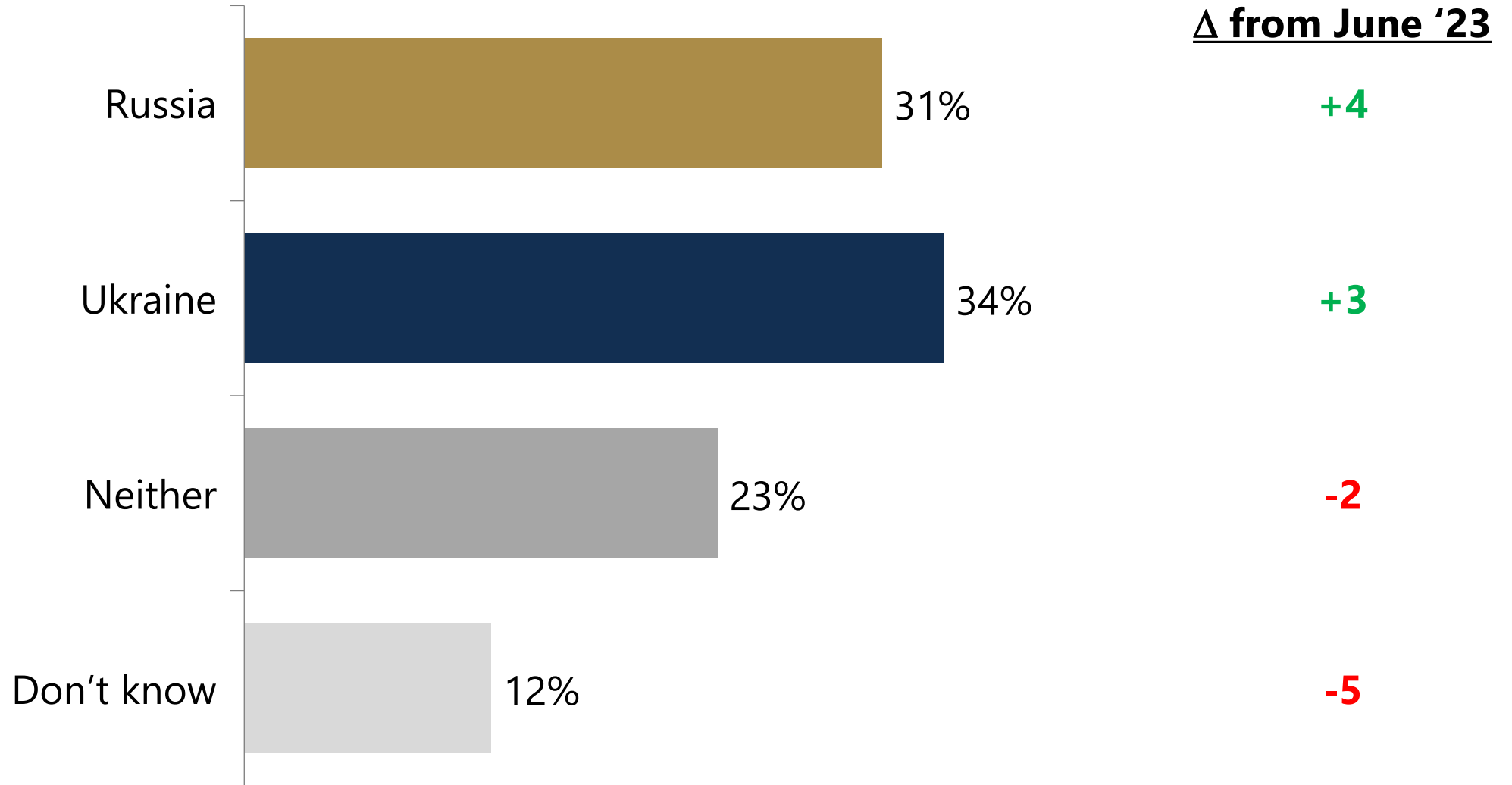


UKRAINE





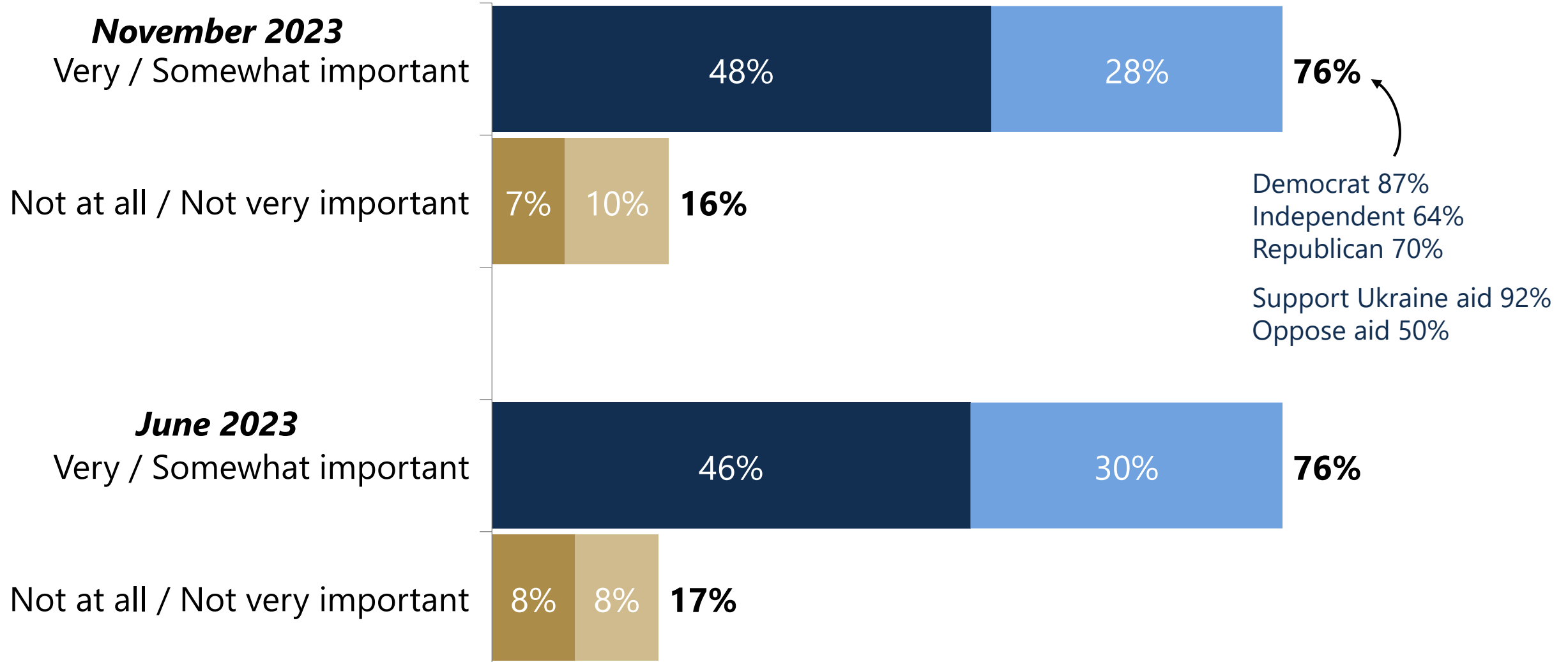
Americans are unsure who is winning in Ukraine...



Q99. Who do you think is currently winning the war between Russia and Ukraine?



...But most see Ukrainian victory as important to the US.

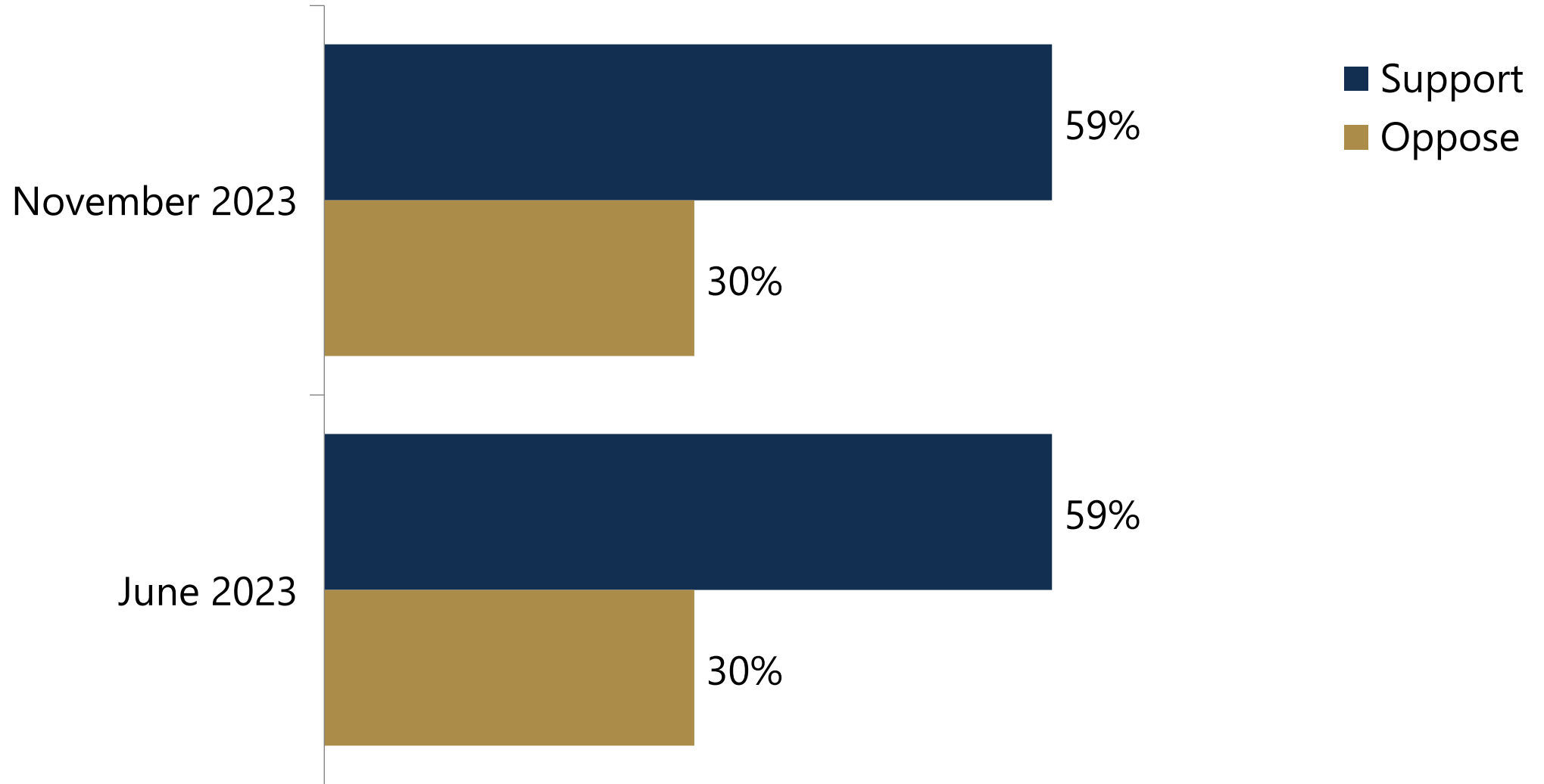


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q100. How important do you think it is to the US that Ukraine win the war?



Steady majority support for military aid to Ukraine.

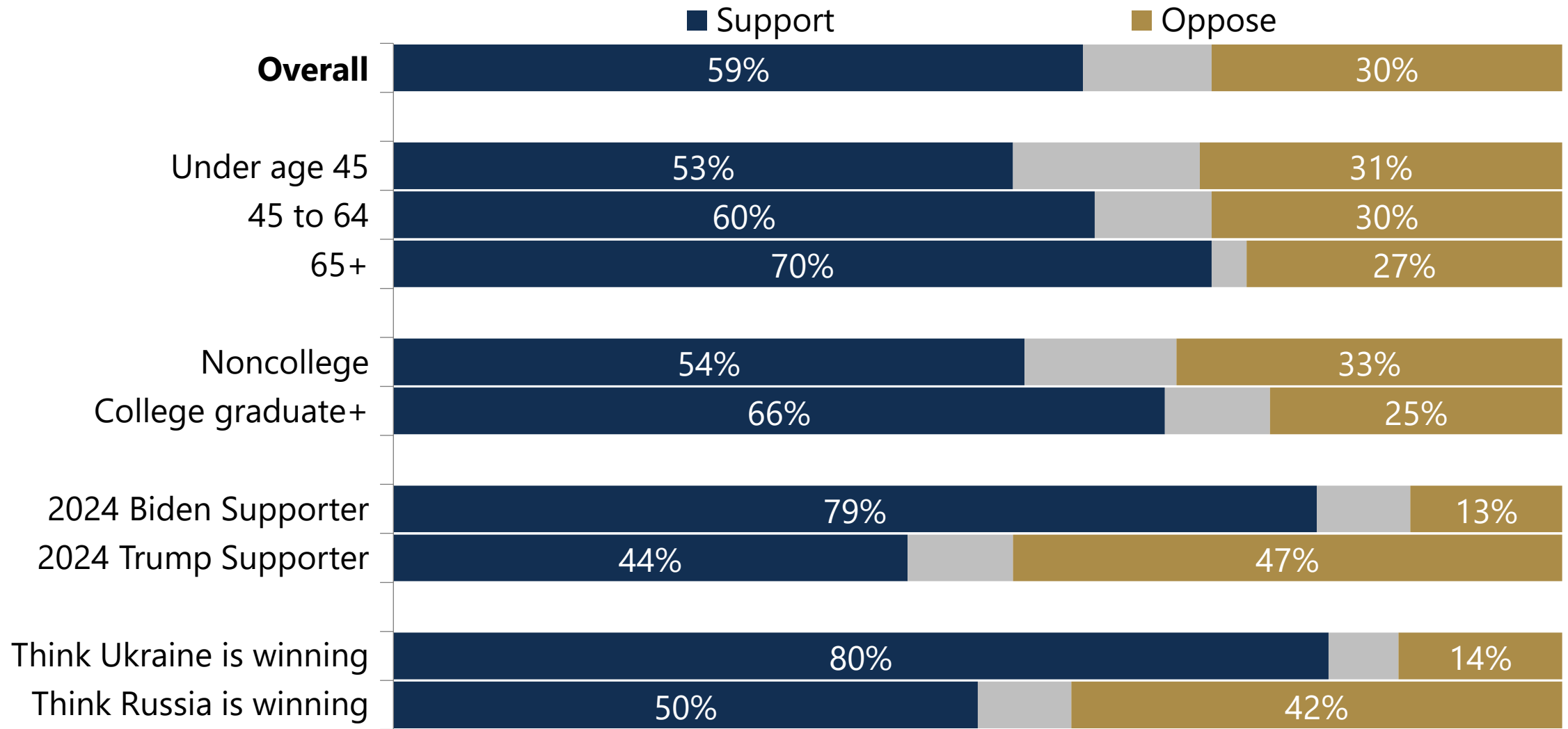


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q101. Overall, do you support or oppose sending US military aid to Ukraine?



Support for aid to Ukraine, by subgroup.

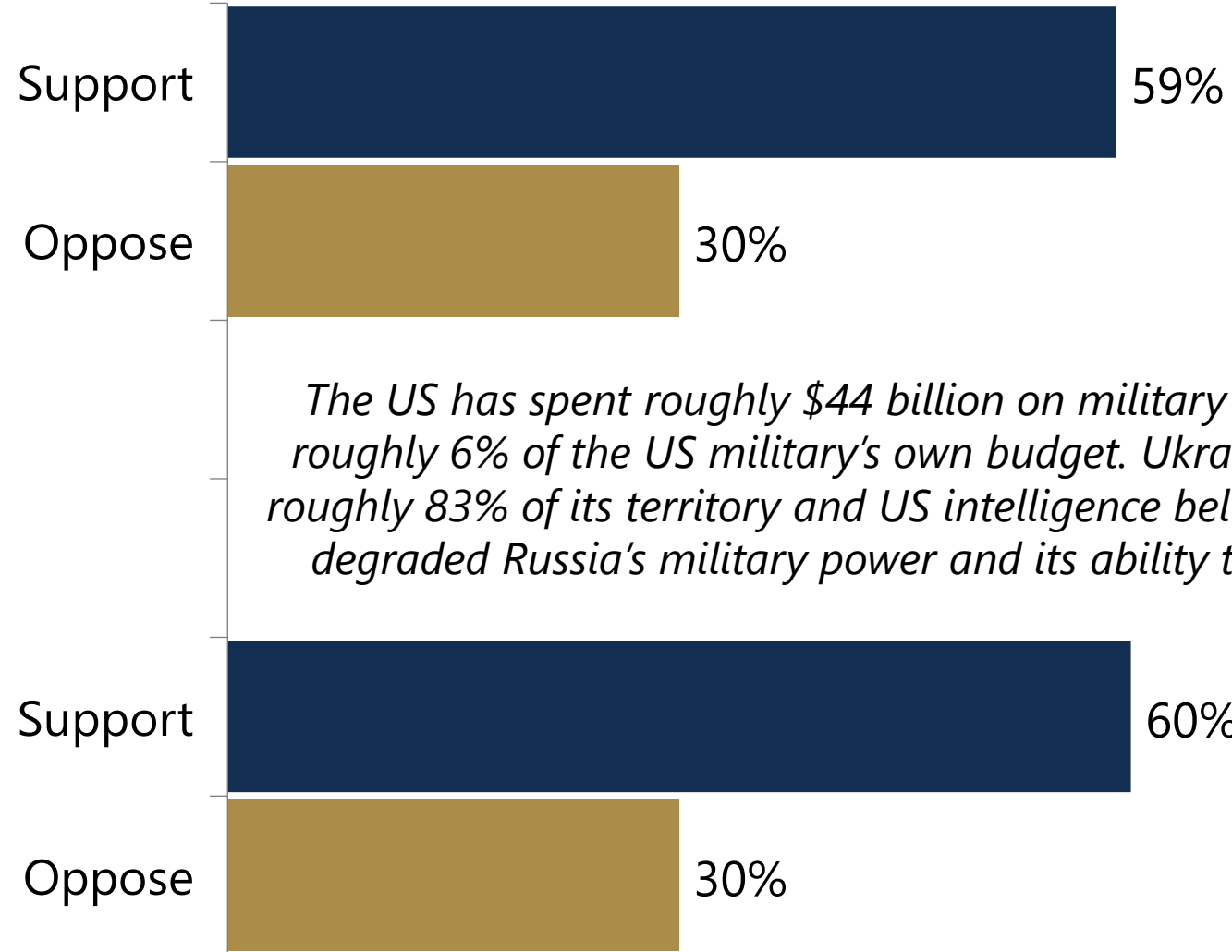


Note: Remainder Don't know

Q101. Overall, do you support or oppose sending US military aid to Ukraine?



Context about military aid to Ukraine doesn't change views—in either direction.



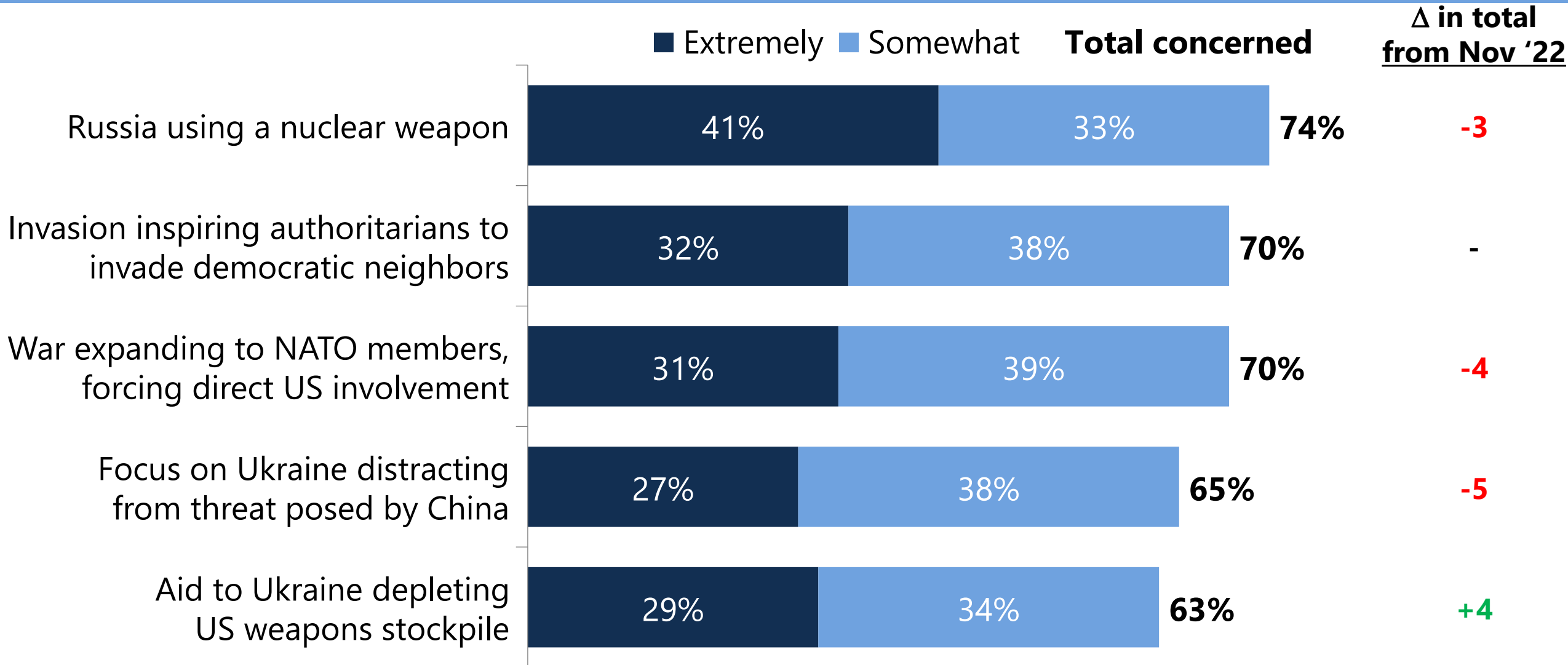
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q101. Overall, do you support or oppose sending US military aid to Ukraine?

Q102. ...Knowing this, do you support or oppose sending US military aid to Ukraine?



Concerns about the war in Ukraine are relatively high, but fading slightly compared to last year.



Q103-Q107. Regarding the war in Ukraine, how concerned are you about each of the following occurring?

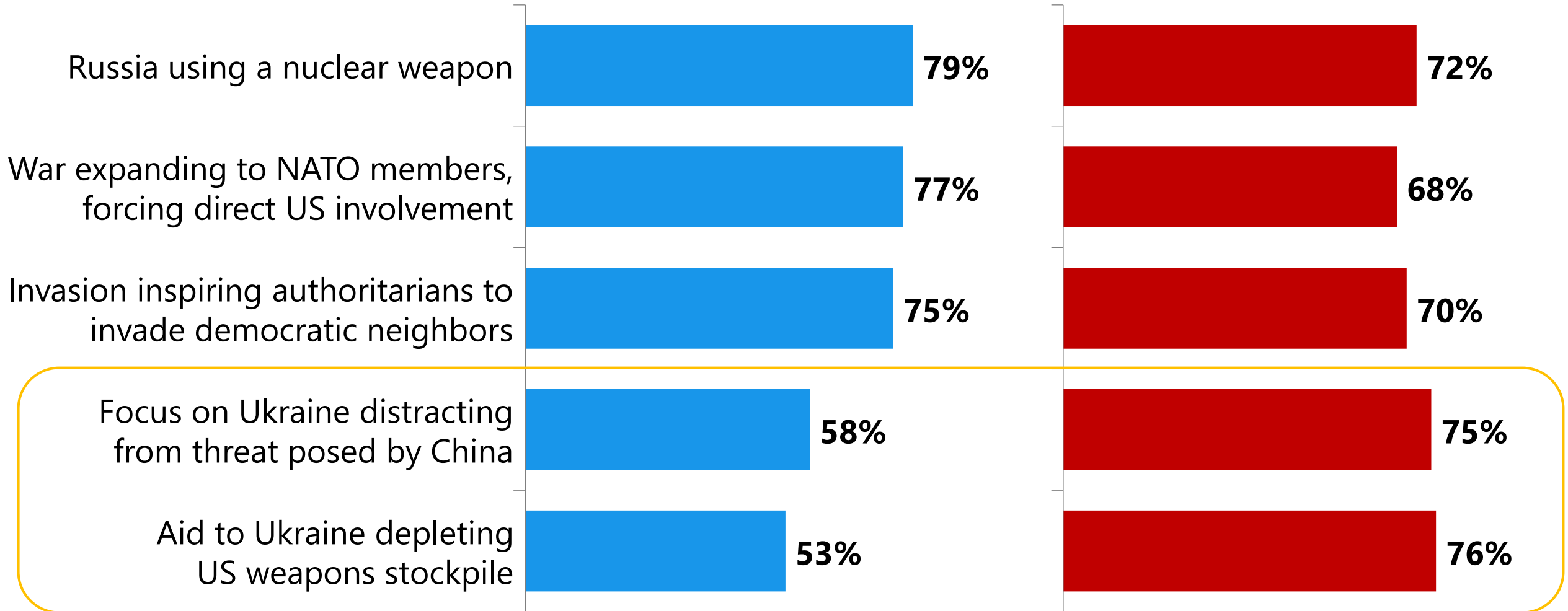


Republicans notably more concerned about domestic consequences of the war in Ukraine.

Total Concerned

Democrats

Republicans



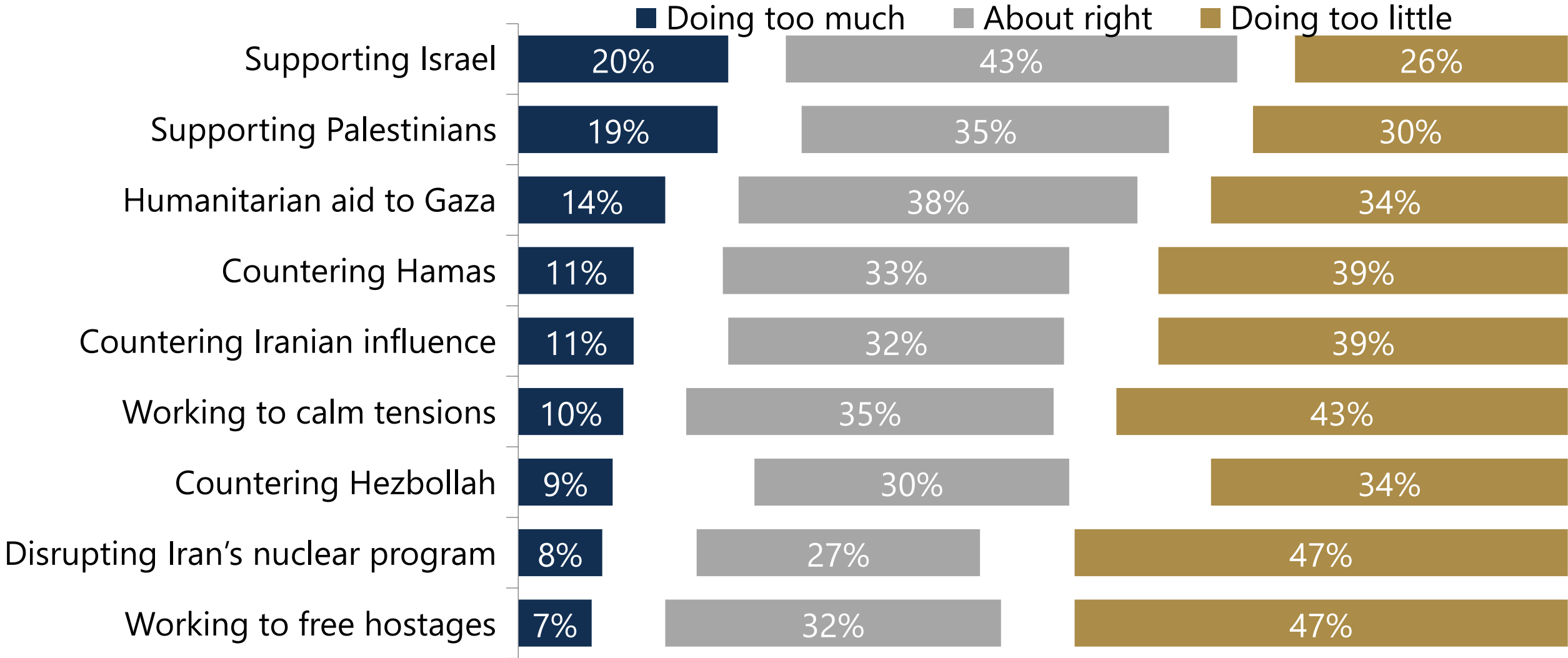
Q103-Q107. Regarding the war in Ukraine, how concerned are you about each of the following occurring?



GREATER MIDDLE EAST



On balance, Americans think US is not doing enough on a wide range of priorities in the Middle East.



Note: Remainder Don't know

Q108-116. When it comes to each of the following, do you think the US is doing too much, too little, or is the current level of activity about right?



Differences of Substance: Partisan divergence on support for Israel, Palestinians, humanitarian aid.

Democrats

Republicans

■ Too little ■ Too much

■ Too little ■ Too much

Supporting Israel

17% Too little 27% Too much

36% Too little 14% Too much

Supporting Palestinians

40% Too little 11% Too much

21% Too little 30% Too much

Humanitarian aid to Gaza

42% Too little 8% Too much

25% Too little 22% Too much

Countering Hamas

31% Too little 12% Too much

48% Too little 10% Too much

Countering Iranian influence

32% Too little 10% Too much

50% Too little 11% Too much

Working to calm tensions

41% Too little 10% Too much

46% Too little 10% Too much

Countering Hezbollah

27% Too little 8% Too much

41% Too little 9% Too much

Disrupting Iran's nuclear program

38% Too little 8% Too much

59% Too little 8% Too much

Working to free hostages

34% Too little 9% Too much

59% Too little 6% Too much

Note: Remainder About right, Don't know

Q108-116. When it comes to each of the following, do you think the US is doing too much, too little, or is the current level of activity about right?

Differences of Degree: Republicans more likely to think US doing too little on most issues.



Democrats

Republicans

■ Too little ■ Too much

■ Too little ■ Too much

Supporting Israel

17% 27%

36% 14%

Supporting Palestinians

40% 11%

21% 30%

Humanitarian aid to Gaza

42% 8%

25% 22%

Countering Hamas

31% 12%

48% 10%

Countering Iranian influence

32% 10%

50% 11%

Working to calm tensions

41% 10%

46% 10%

Countering Hezbollah

27% 8%

41% 9%

Disrupting Iran's nuclear program

38% 8%

58% 8%

Working to free hostages

34% 9%

59% 6%

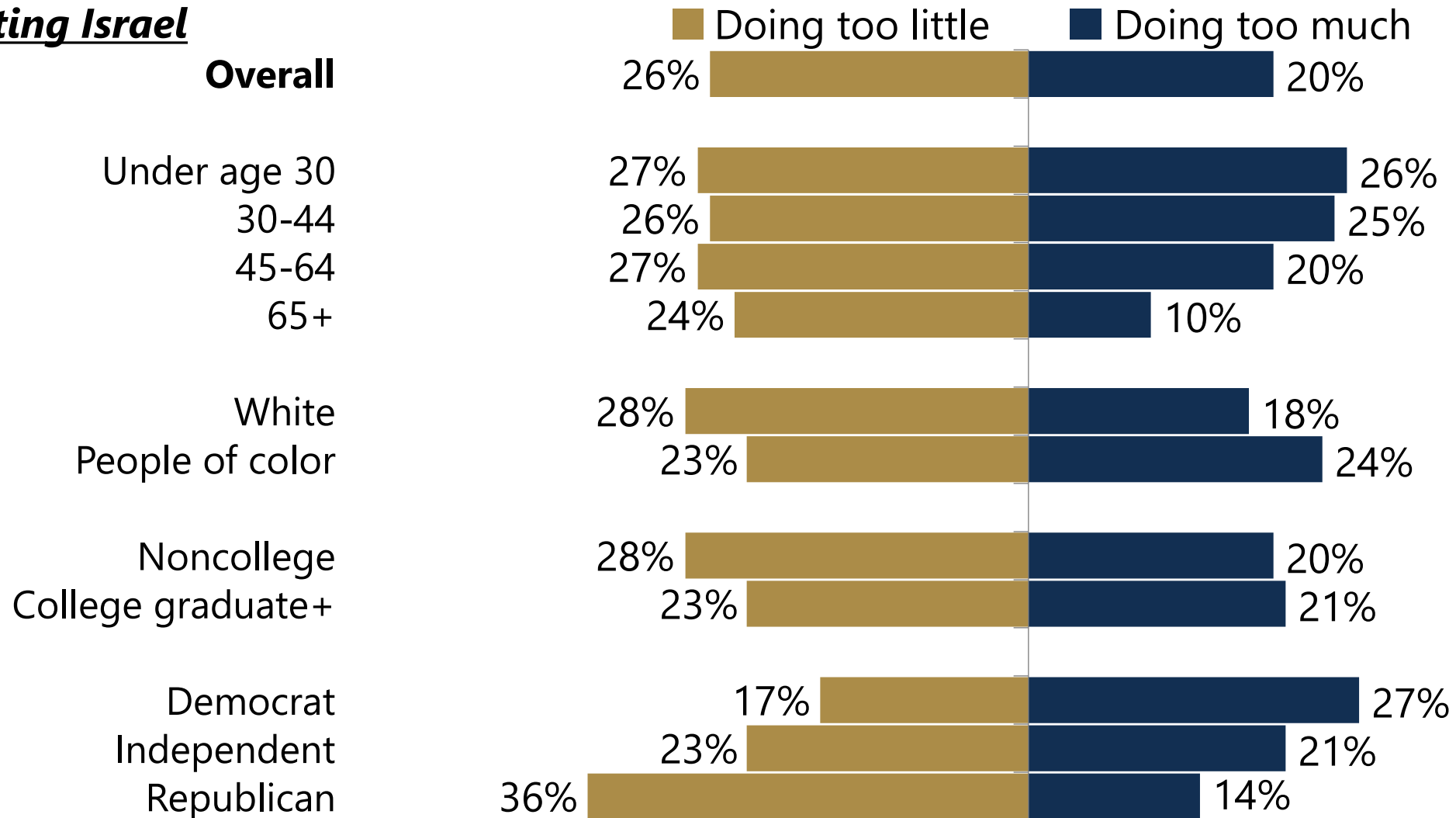
Note: Remainder About right, Don't know

Q108-116. When it comes to each of the following, do you think the US is doing too much, too little, or is the current level of activity about right?

Balance of views on US activity supporting Israel, by subgroup.



Supporting Israel



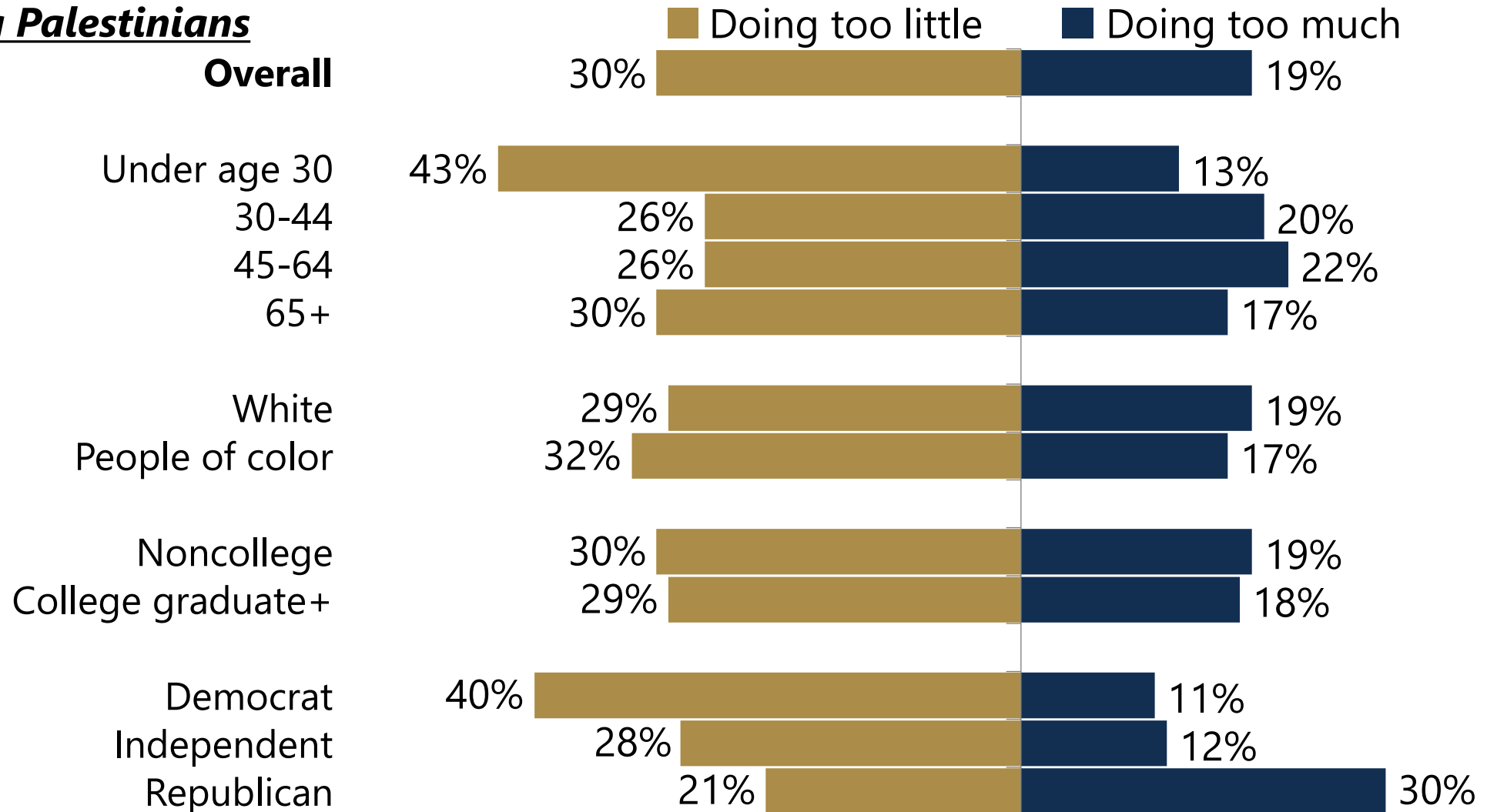
Note: Remainder About right, Don't know

Q108-116. When it comes to each of the following, do you think the US is doing too much, too little, or is the current level of activity about right?

Balance of views on US activity supporting Palestinians, by subgroup.



Supporting Palestinians



Note: Remainder About right, Don't know

Q108-116. When it comes to each of the following, do you think the US is doing too much, too little, or is the current level of activity about right?

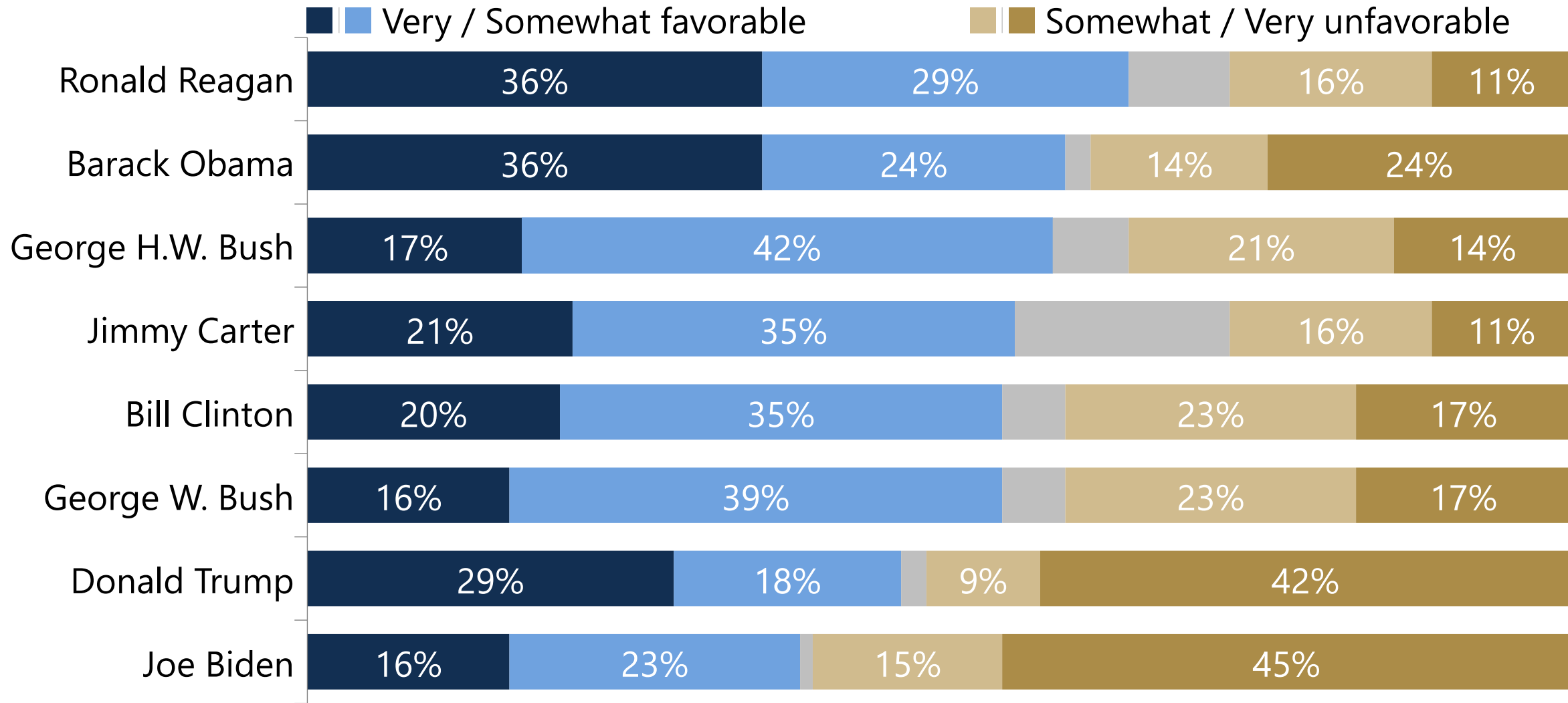


EVALUATIONS OF MODERN PRESIDENTS





Favorability Ratings of Past Presidents



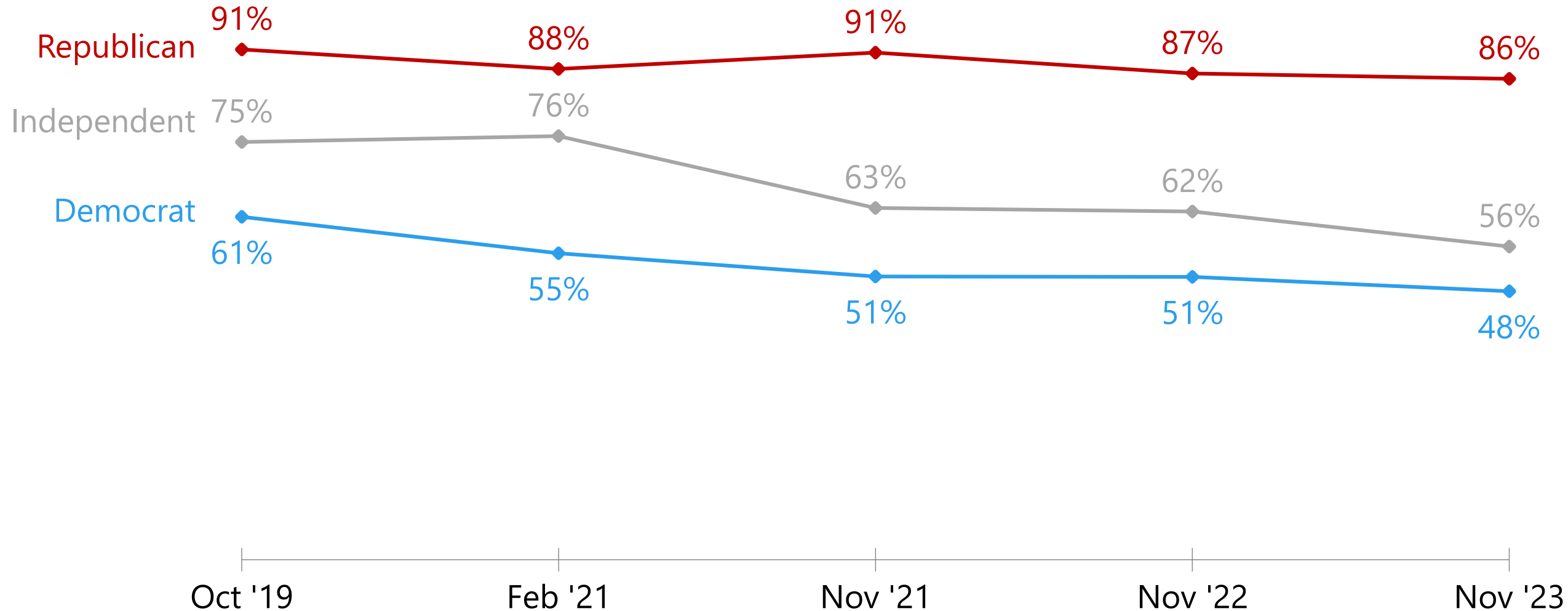
Note: Remainder Don't know

Q117-Q124. 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.



Reagan favorability by party identification.

Total Favorable



Q118. Thinking now about recent presidents, please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of: Ronald Reagan.

**FOR MORE
INFORMATION,
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Profile of the Sample

Category	Group	% of Sample
Sex	Male	47
	Female	53
Age	18-29	18
	30-44	25
	45-64	38
	65+	19
Race	White	71
	Black, African-American	13
	Hispanic or Latino	8
	Asian or Asian-American	3
Education	High school degree or less	26
	Some / 2-year college degree	34
	4-year college degree	25
	Postgraduate degree	15

Category	Group	% of Sample
Region	East	18
	Midwest	20
	South	38
	West	23
Party	Democrat	41
	Independent	19
	Republican	40
Philosophy	Liberal	27
	Moderate	33
	Conservative	35
Service	Service member	3
	Veteran	9
2020 vote	Trump	37
	Biden	40