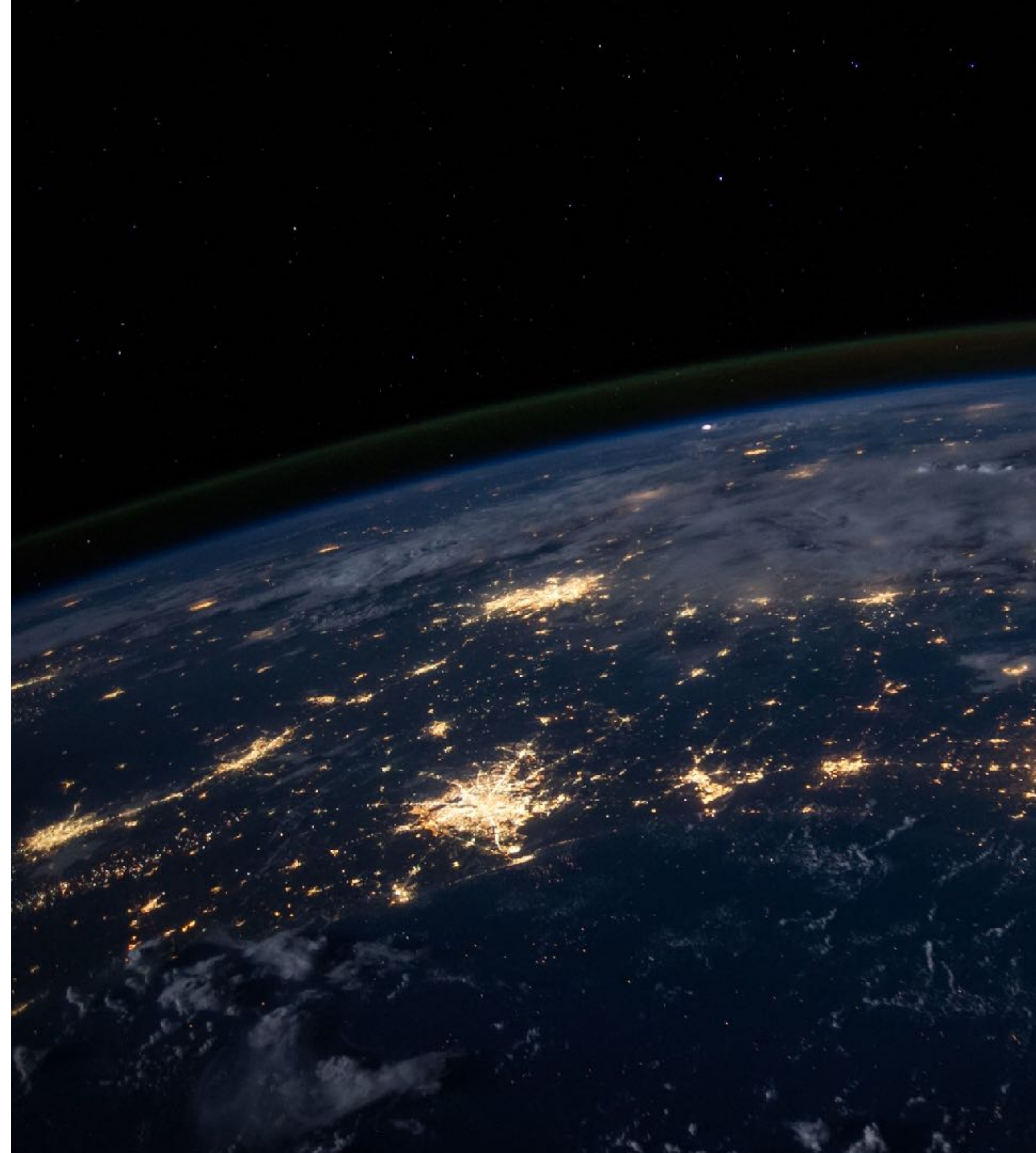




# Millennials and Generation Z: Agents of Change

Nationwide Survey of  
1,000 Americans age 13–23 (Generation Z) and  
1,000 Americans age 24–39 (Millennials)  
January 12–22, 2021



# About This Report

During the Summer of 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic and protests around racial justice, The Walton Family Foundation embarked upon a study of what young Americans thought about their own futures: their prospects for success, what they want out of life, and what they fear will stand in their way.

At the conclusion of that work, a question remained: why, in the face of so many obstacles, do young Americans feel so optimistic about the future? Do they believe the world will change for the better, and if so, who do they think will drive that change? How do they think change will be made?

To better understand Generation Z and Millennials in their own words, this research effort surveyed a diverse and representative sample of 1,000 members of Generation Z (ages 13–23) and 1,000 Millennials (ages 24–39) across the United States. The survey was conducted January 12–22, 2021 and tracked the results of key questions from the Summer 2020 study as well as introduced new topics about who and what can effectively create change. This survey also covered key issues such as education, the environment, and the communities Millennials and Gen Zers hope to create.



# Key Findings

- **Gen Zers and Millennials remain optimistic about their generation's *future prospects*...** Three-quarters (75%) believe most people in their generation will have the opportunity to succeed if they work hard, and two-thirds (66%) believe most will be able to move up the economic ladder. Over half (56%) believe all people in their generation have the opportunity to achieve the American Dream.
- **...but are less positive about how things are *currently* going for their generation.** Only 26% saying things are going well right now.
- Why do they feel positive about the future, then? **Most - seven in ten - believe their generation will be able to adapt to overcome or create change to get rid of obstacles in their way.** Six in ten (59%) believe their own generation will be a driver of positive change. Half (49%) believe the generations younger than their own will also play a role. **And they see themselves *personally* playing a role in creating change.** When asked who specifically will drive change, the top two responses were “elected officials in the future” and “me.”
- **How will they make change? Voting, engaging with charitable organizations, and through starting or working for businesses and nonprofits that make change.** They are entrepreneurial, with almost three in four (73%) saying they would want to start their own business some day.

# Overcoming Challenges And Creating Change



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**During Summer 2020, in the midst of a growing pandemic and protests around racial justice, we asked Millennials and Gen Zers how they felt about their own futures.**

**What we found? Optimism and confidence.**

**We asked again this time and wanted to dig into *why*...**

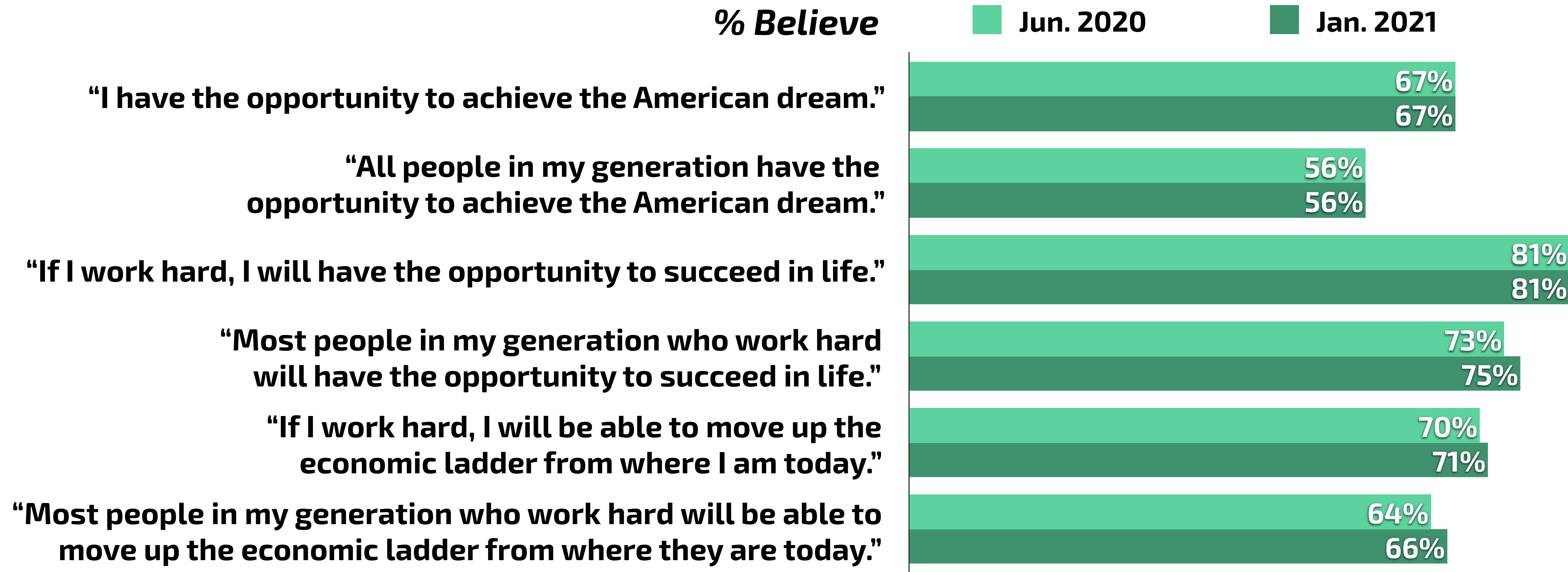




# Views On American Dream, Opportunity, And Mobility

## Consistent With Previous Survey Of Gen Zers And Millennials

Q. In general, do you believe or not believe the following statement?



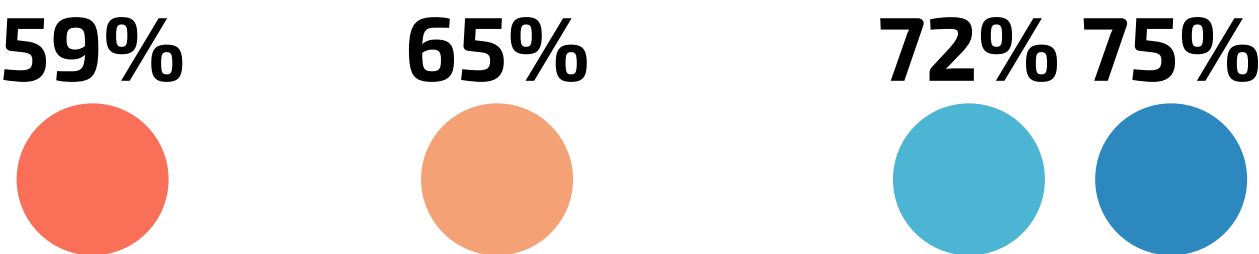
# Those With The Most Education Are The Most Optimistic

Q. In general, do you believe or not believe the following statement?

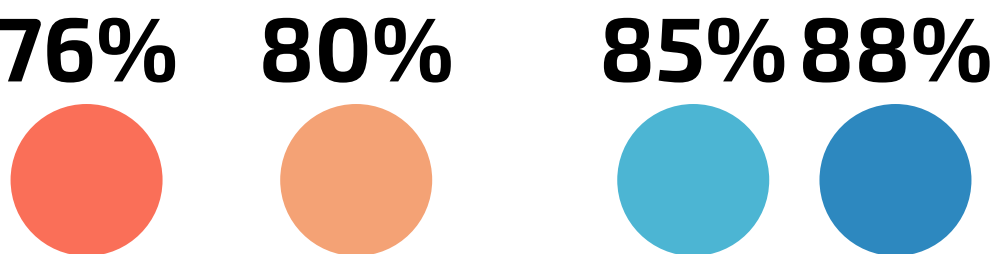
*% Believe*

- Age 18+, HS or less
- Age 18+, Bachelor's
- Age 18+, Some college
- Age 18+, Graduate

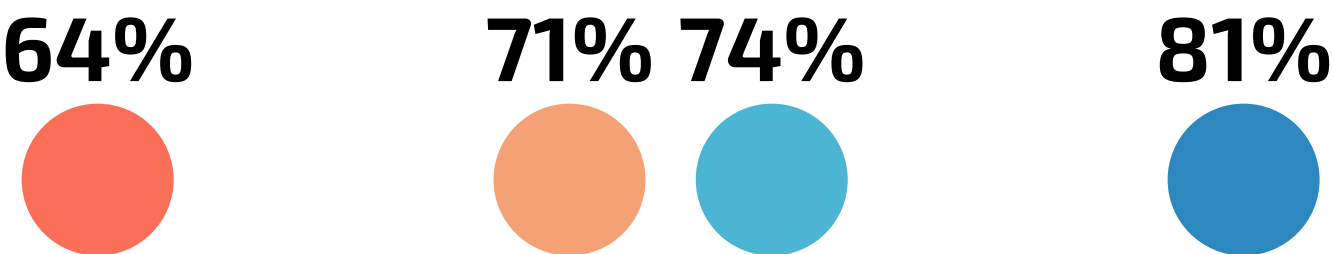
“I have the opportunity to achieve the American dream.”



“If I work hard, I will have the opportunity to succeed in life.”

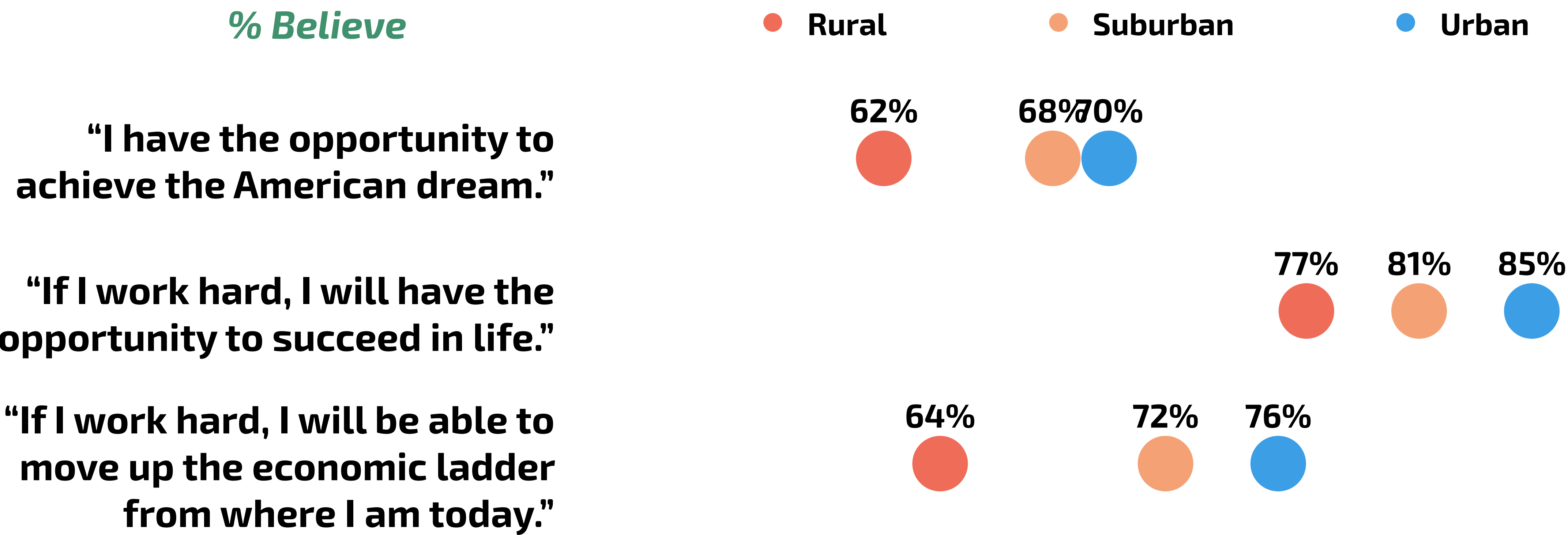


“If I work hard, I will be able to move up the economic ladder from where I am today.”



# While Rural Gen Zers and Millennials Are The Least Certain They Can Have Opportunity And Succeed

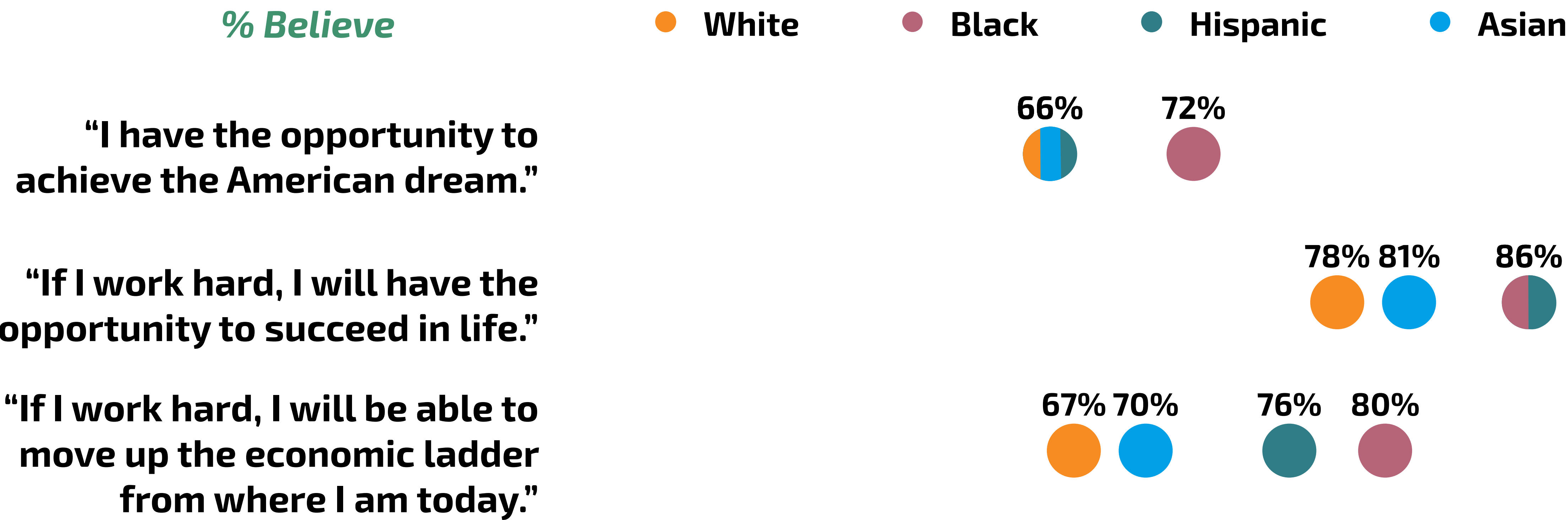
Q. In general, do you believe or not believe the following statement?





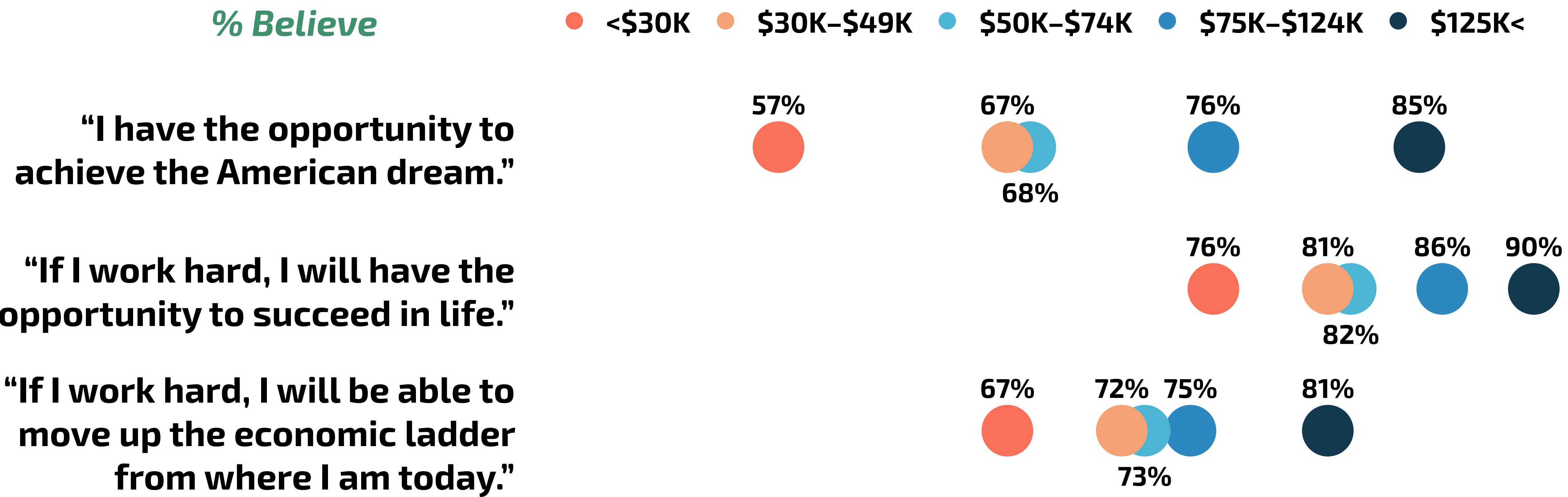
# Optimism Cuts Across Race and Ethnicity With Young People of Color Particularly Upbeat About Their Futures

Q. In general, do you believe or not believe the following statement?



# Gen Zers And Millennials With Higher Household Incomes More Likely To Feel Confident About Their Opportunities

Q. In general, do you believe or not believe the following statement?

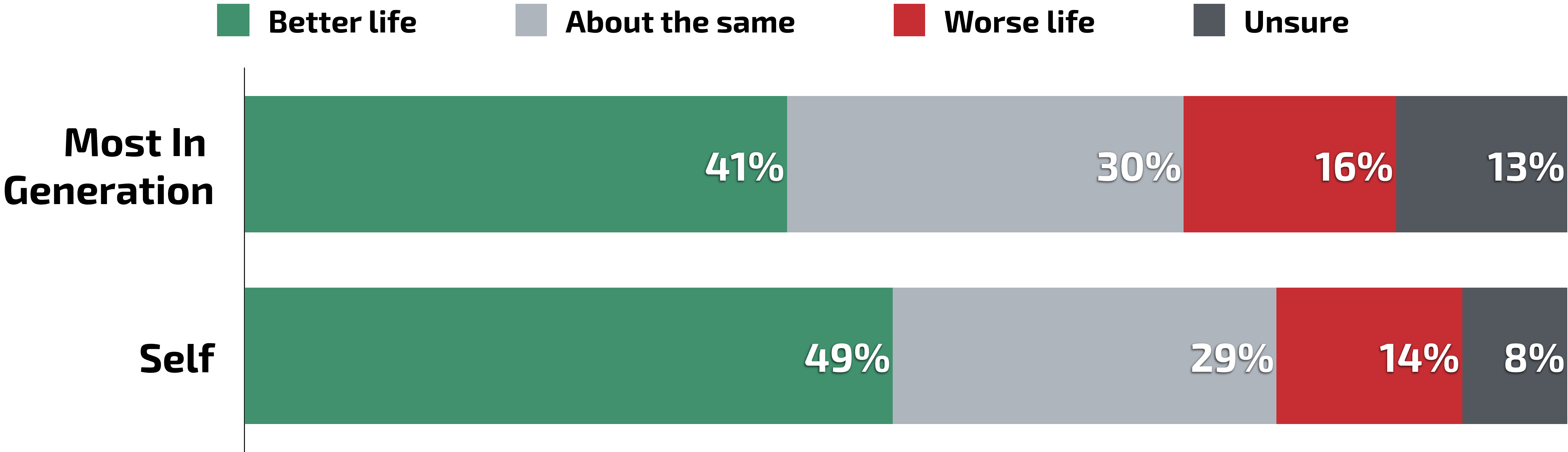




# Most Gen Zers And Millennials Expect Their Lives To Be The Same As Or Better Than Their Parents' Lives

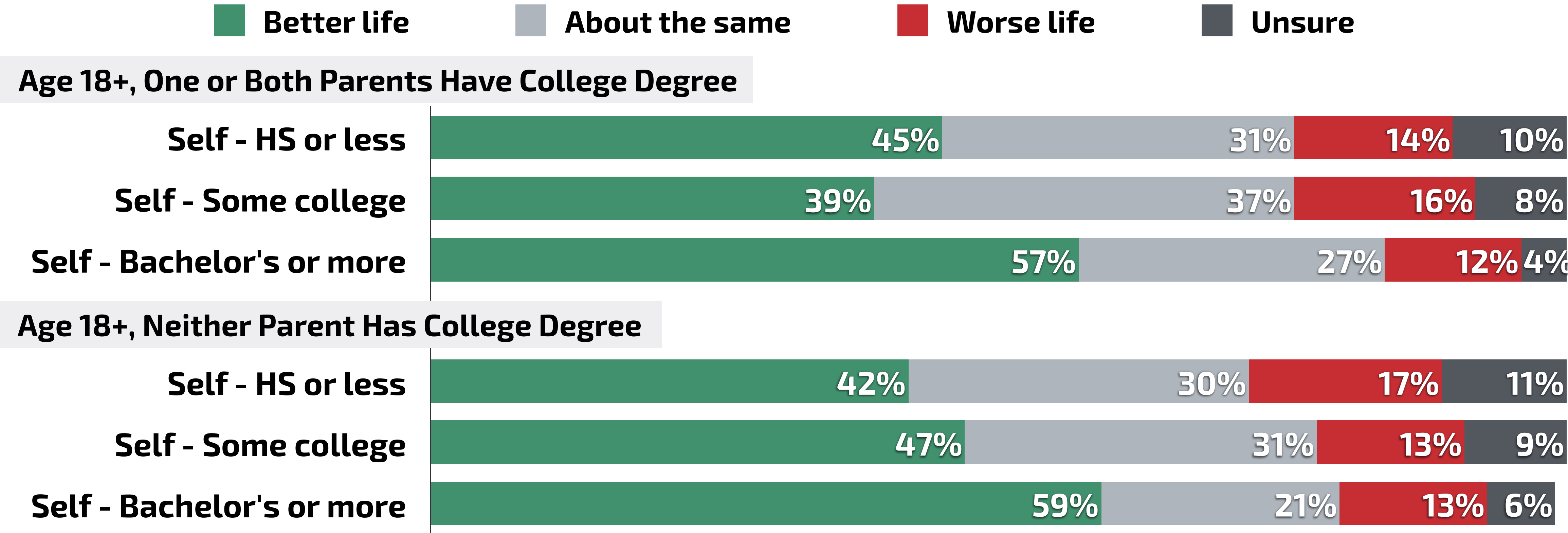
Q. Do you expect that most people in your generation will have a life that is better, worse, or about the same as their parents have had?

Q. In thinking about the life your parent or parents have had so far, do you expect that you will have a life that is better, worse, or about the same as your parent or parents?



# Gen Z And Millennial College Grads More Likely To Think Their Lives Will Be Better, Regardless Of Their Parents' Education Level

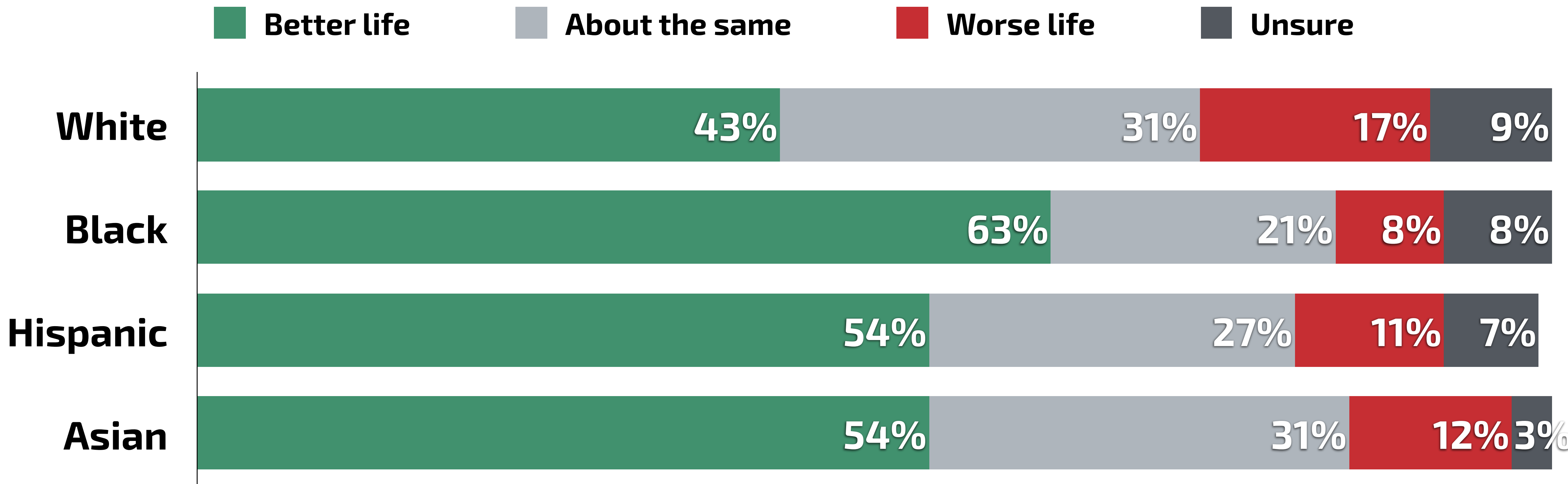
Q. In thinking about the life your parent or parents have had so far, do you expect that you will have a life that is better, worse, or about the same as your parent or parents?





# Gen Zers And Millennials Of Color More Likely Than Whites To Believe They Will Have A Better Life Than Their Parents

Q. In thinking about the life your parent or parents have had so far, do you expect that you will have a life that is better, worse, or about the same as your parent or parents?







**But don't mistake optimism for contentment.**

**Millennials and Gen Zers believe they face serious obstacles and must work to thrive under challenging circumstances.**



**In our Summer 2020 study, we found that affording and accessing higher education was the top barrier Millennials and Generation Z faced.**

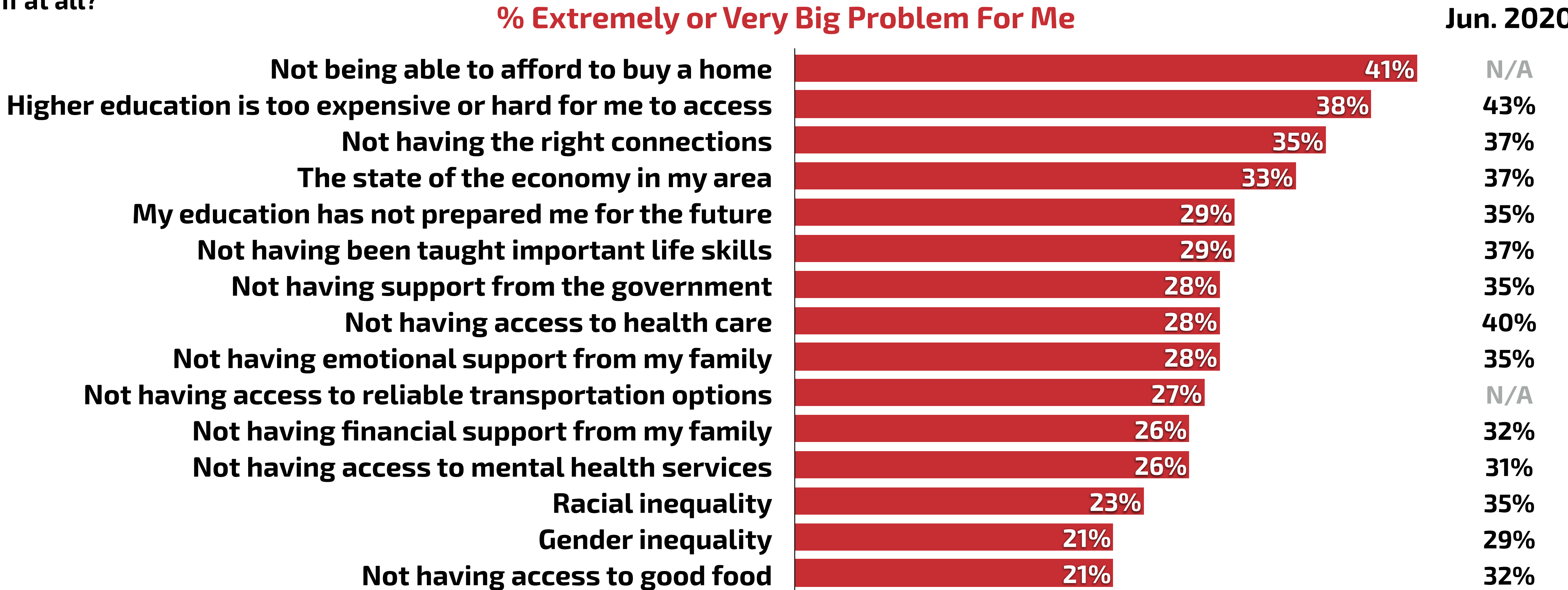
**For this survey, we added some new options to the list and found that not being able to afford a home is the top barrier Millennials and Generation Z say they face.**





# Inability To Buy Home, Access Higher Education Top Problems

Q. In thinking about things that might keep you from having the opportunity to live a “better life” or the life you want to live, which of the following do you think are problems you do face or will face? How much of a problem do you think they are or will be for you, if at all?





# Those With Lower Incomes More Likely To Report Facing Barriers To Opportunity

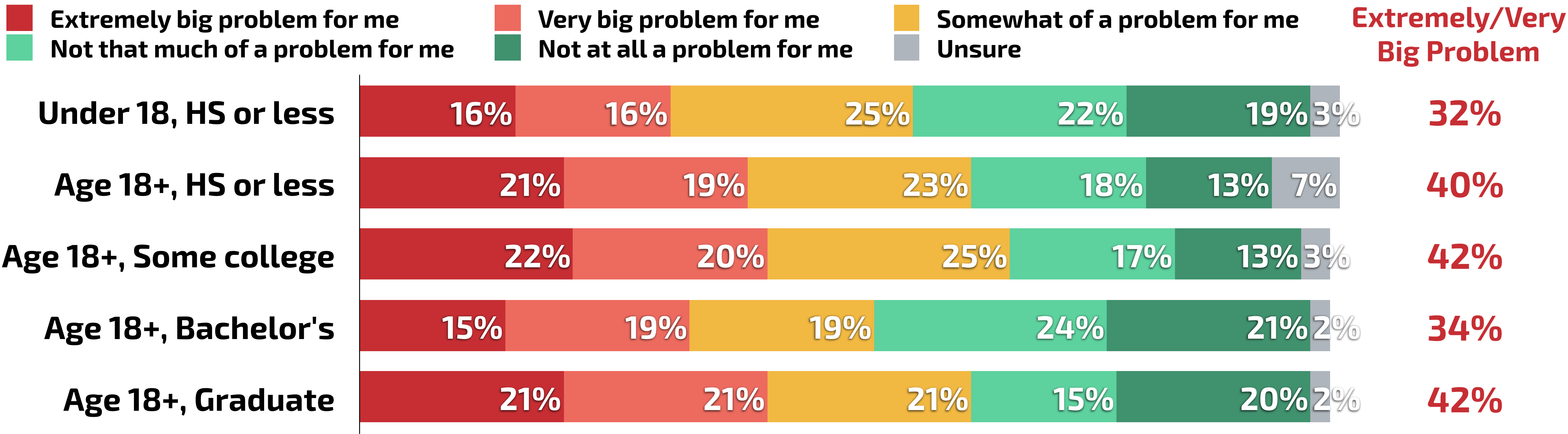
Q. In thinking about things that might keep you from having the opportunity to live a “better life” or the life you want to live, which of the following do you think are problems you do face or will face? How much of a problem do you think they are or will be for you, if at all?

% <i>Extremely or Very Big Problem</i>	<\$30K	\$30K–\$49K	\$50K–\$74K	\$75K–\$124K	\$125K<
Not being able to afford to buy a home	50%	43%	38%	41%	30%
Higher education is too expensive or hard for me to access	44%	39%	40%	35%	31%
Not having the right connections	39%	39%	33%	32%	29%
Not having access to reliable transportation options	35%	28%	23%	20%	24%

# No Matter Your Education Level, Higher Education Costs And Access Remain A Significant Challenge

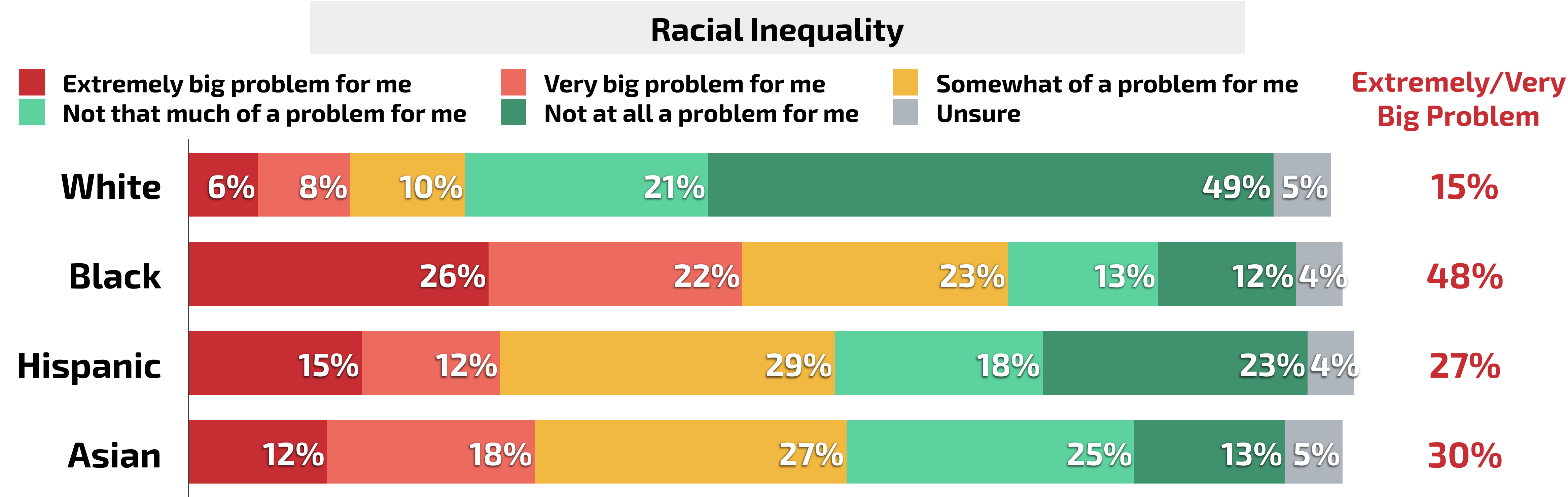
Q. In thinking about things that might keep you from having the opportunity to live a “better life” or the life you want to live, which of the following do you think are problems you do face or will face? How much of a problem do you think they are or will be for you, if at all?

## Higher education is too expensive or hard for me to access



# Racial Inequality Is A Top Problem Black Millennials and Gen Zers Say They Face Or Expect To Face

Q. In thinking about things that might keep you from having the opportunity to live a “better life” or the life you want to live, which of the following do you think are problems you do face or will face? How much of a problem do you think they are or will be for you, if at all?





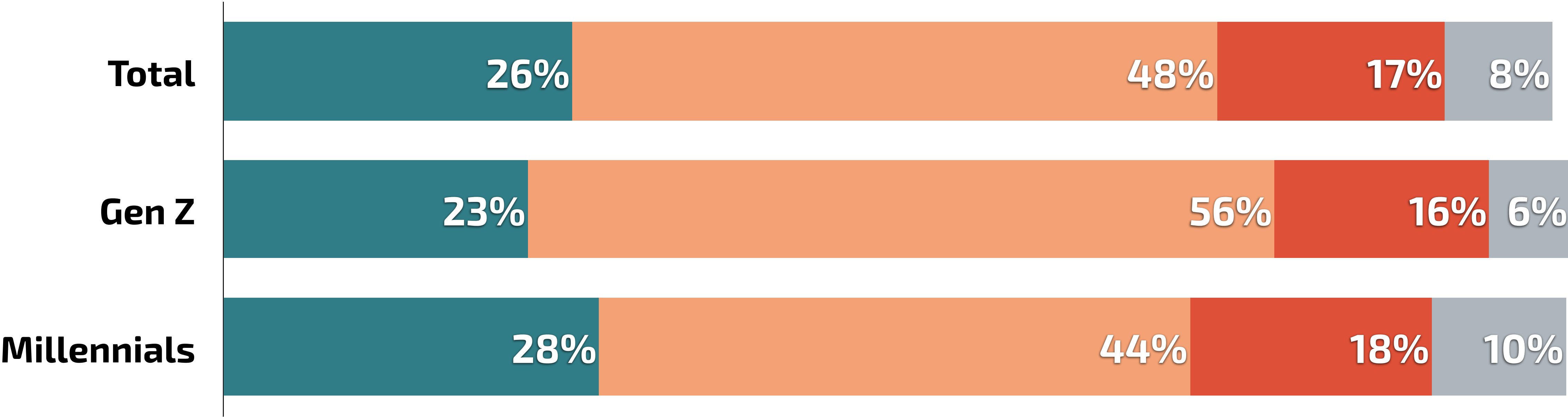
With all these hurdles, why are so many so positive about their own prospects for the future?

**Simple. They believe they will adapt to overcome barriers or change the world to remove those barriers entirely.**

# Gen Zers And Millennials Generally Don't Think Things Are Going Well, But Most Gen Zers And 44% Of Millennials Think They Can Improve Things

Q. Even if none are perfect, which of the following do you think you agree with most?

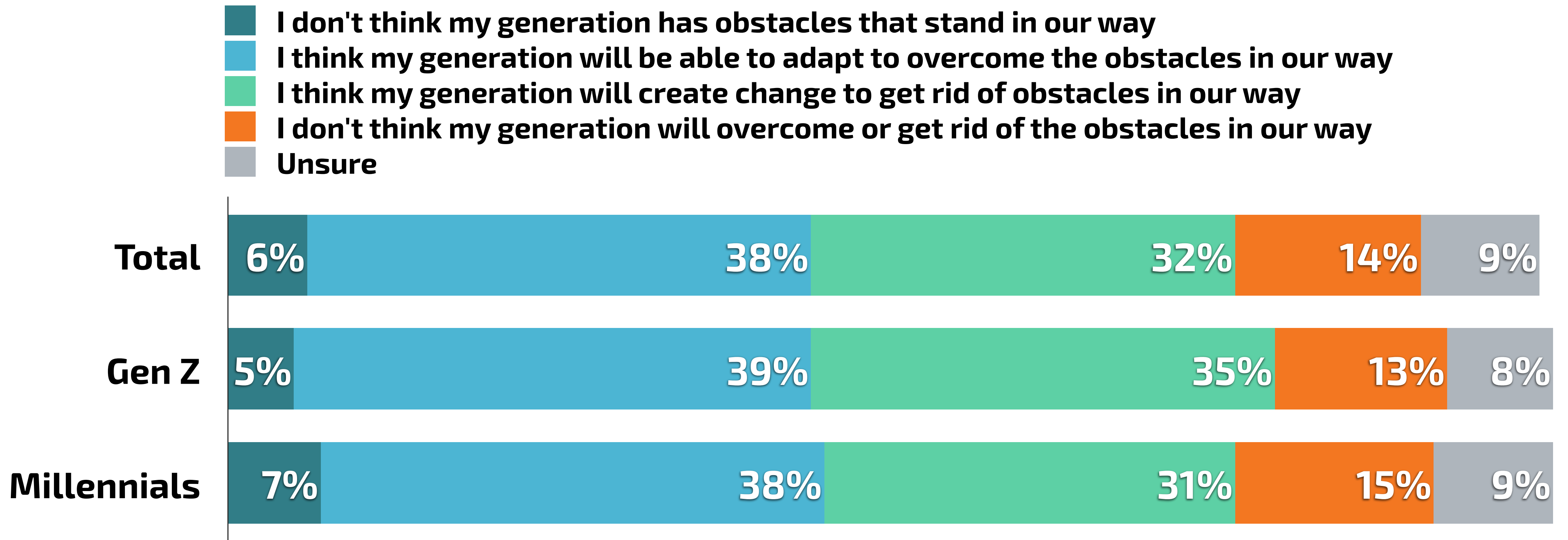
- I think things are going well for my generation
- I don't think things are going well for my generation, but I think we will be able to improve things
- I don't think things are going well for my generation, and I don't expect it to change
- Unsure





# Most Gen Zers And Millennials Feel They Will Be Able To Adapt To Overcome Or Create Change To Get Rid Of Obstacles

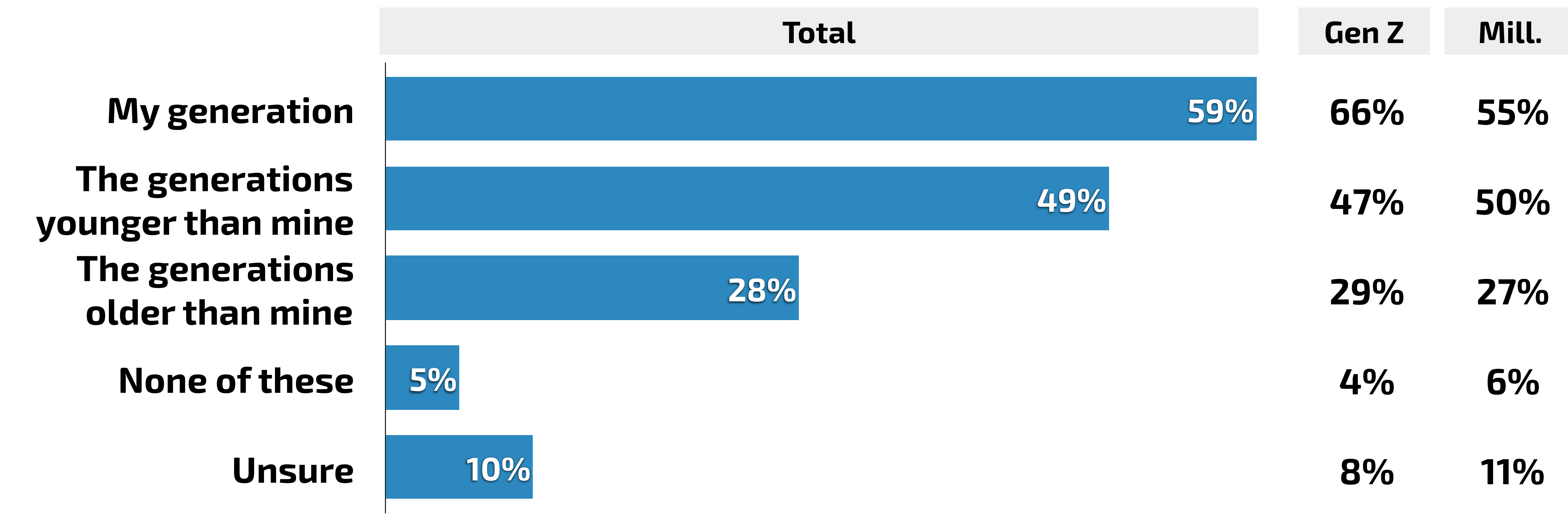
Q. Even if none are perfect, which of the following do you think you agree with most?





# Majority Believe *Their* Generation Will Bring Positive Change, Half Also Look To Their Younger Peers To Play A Role

Q. What generation or generations do you expect will play a role in bringing about positive change during your lifetime? You may choose any and all that apply, or you may choose none if none apply.





**We asked what they felt about their role in creating change:**

**“We're tired of how previous generations have failed us and we're already standing up and making a difference.”**

**- Gen Zer**

**“It's up to us to create the changes needed to improve our lives. Can't count on previous generations.”**

**- Millennial**





# Gen Zers And Millennials Describe How Challenges They Have Already Faced Demonstrate They Can Adapt And Create Change

## Great Recession

"I think we're the scrappy generation. We've gone through so many altering historical events that we are well prepared to change things." - Gen Zer

"We are resilient. Millennials have lived through a recession and are living through another and a pandemic. We adapt. We survive and we want to make life better for everyone because we know more than anyone how impossible it is." - Millennial

## Pandemic

"There are so many things going wrong in the world today. From the pandemic to climate change. My generation will have no choice but to adapt to the situations to be able to do better in life." - Gen Zer

## Social And Environmental Concerns

"I believe that my generation has a lot of problems to deal with that the people before us have created. Like climate change, racial inequality, homophobia. I believe most people my age are accepting of others and we want to change the world for the better so that everyone can be comfortable with who they are and so that we can save the planet and our own lives. I think that we are going to be the ones who make that change." - Gen Zer



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**“My generation, Gen Z, is very much looking for justice when it comes to race, gender, environmental, political, and other struggles. I know that out of all of the generations we are the most willing to stand up for a change and our rights.” - Gen Zer**

**“I think this strictly because my generation stands up for themselves. That’s it— thats the tweet. We know what is right and what is wrong and aren’t scared to express that.” - Gen Zer**

**“I’m already seeing a change. People in my generation are fighting for equal rights and opportunities. We see the obstacles in the way and have a no-man-left-behind mindset.” - Gen Zer**

**“My generation is recognizing not only obstacles that many struggle with, but the root of the problems. If enough people work together to change systems so the problems no longer exist, then we can make the obstacles vanish with them.” - Gen Zer**



# Having Technology And Knowing How To Use It Adeptly Is One Reason They Feel They Will Be Able to Adapt And Create Change

**Tech Provides  
Resources And  
Opportunity**

“I think my generation has the most opportunities to succeed than any other generation that has come before it thanks to the internet and other technologies. Resources that were only accessible to selected groups in the past are now open to everyone. Educating yourself is much easier and it is much easier to be your own boss.” - Millennial

“I think our generation is heavily influenced by technology and our generation will find a way to use technology to do more good in the future.” - Gen Zer

**They Know How  
To Use It And  
Adapt To Changes**

“I think my generation is...resourceful to say the least. We've already been through so much and most of us are so young it's hard to say that we won't be able to overcome any obstacles. I believe our upbringing with technology has prepared us at least partially to learn to adapt and use whatever we have on hand to make it work.” - Millennial

“We're tech savvy — more so than other generations because we've grown up with it. We are able to more clearly see how old ways aren't working anymore.” - Gen Zer



**Who Do They Say Has A Role in Creating Change?**

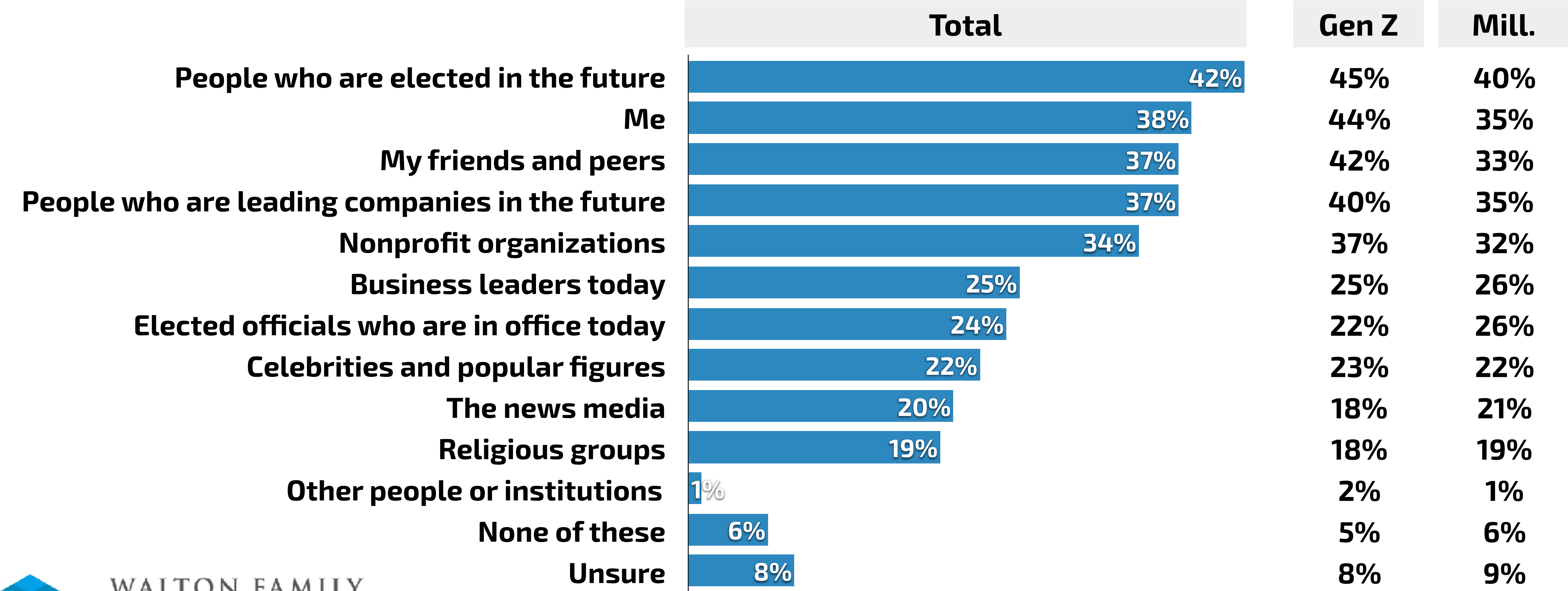
**“Me.”**





# They See Themselves Personally Having A Role To Play

Q. What people or institutions do you expect will play a role in bringing about positive change during your lifetime? You may choose any and all that apply, or you may choose none if none apply.



# Teens Particularly Confident In Themselves And Their Peers

**Q. What people or institutions do you expect will play a role in bringing about positive change during your lifetime? You may choose any and all that apply, or you may choose none if none apply.**

	Age 13–17	Age 18–23	Age 24–31	Age 32–39
People who are elected in the future	49%	43%	39%	41%
<b>Me</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>My friends and peers</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>31%</b>
People who are leading companies in the future	44%	36%	33%	37%
Nonprofit organizations	38%	37%	32%	31%
Business leaders today	29%	21%	26%	25%
Elected officials who are in office today	25%	19%	26%	25%
Celebrities and popular figures	21%	25%	23%	21%
The news media	19%	18%	23%	20%
Religious groups	21%	16%	19%	19%
Other people or institutions	2%	1%	1%	1%
None of these	3%	6%	7%	5%
Unsure	7%	8%	6%	11%



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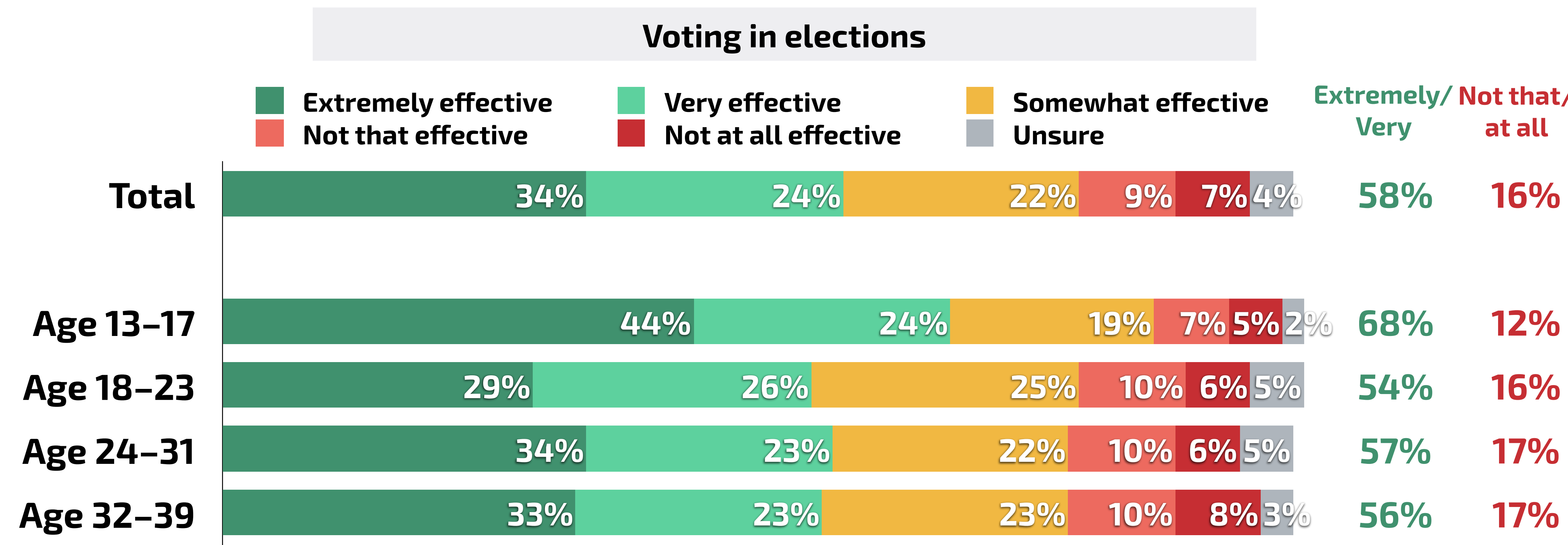
# Voting, Getting Involved in Charitable Causes, Starting Companies and Nonprofits Seen As Most Effective

Q. There are many ways people might try to create change in their community or their country. For each of the following, tell me if you think it is an effective way that people in your generation can bring about change.



# Those Under Age 18 Most Likely To See Voting As Effective

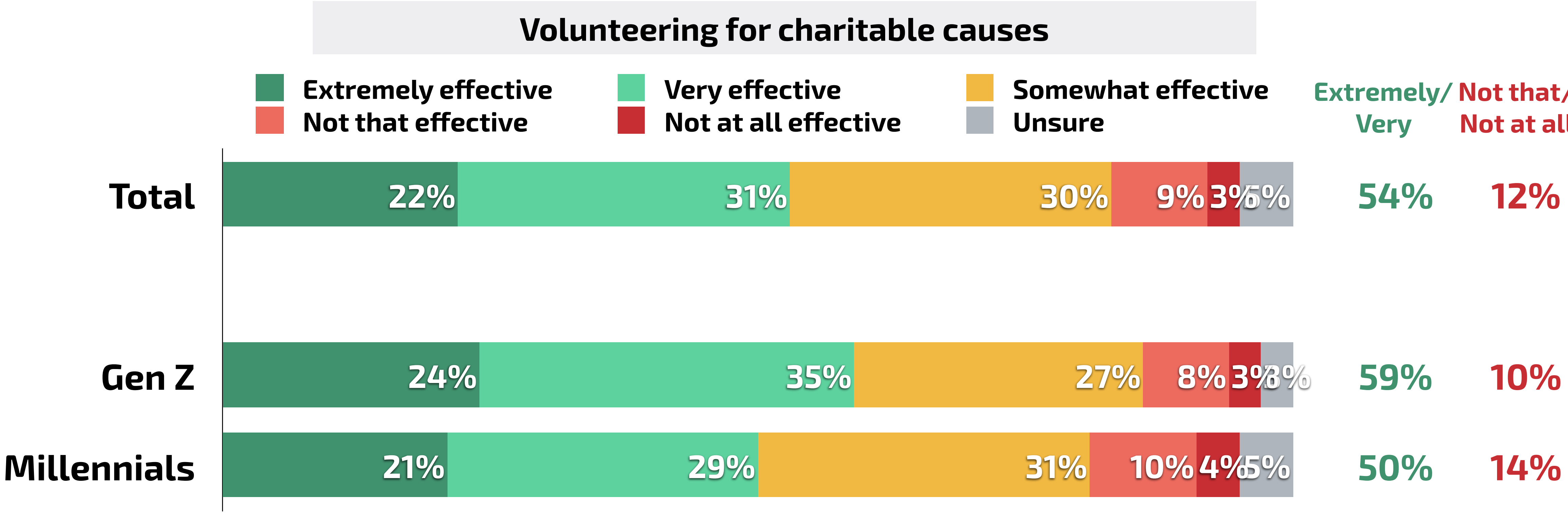
Q. There are many ways people might try to create change in their community or their country. For each of the following, tell me if you think it is an effective way that people in your generation can bring about change.





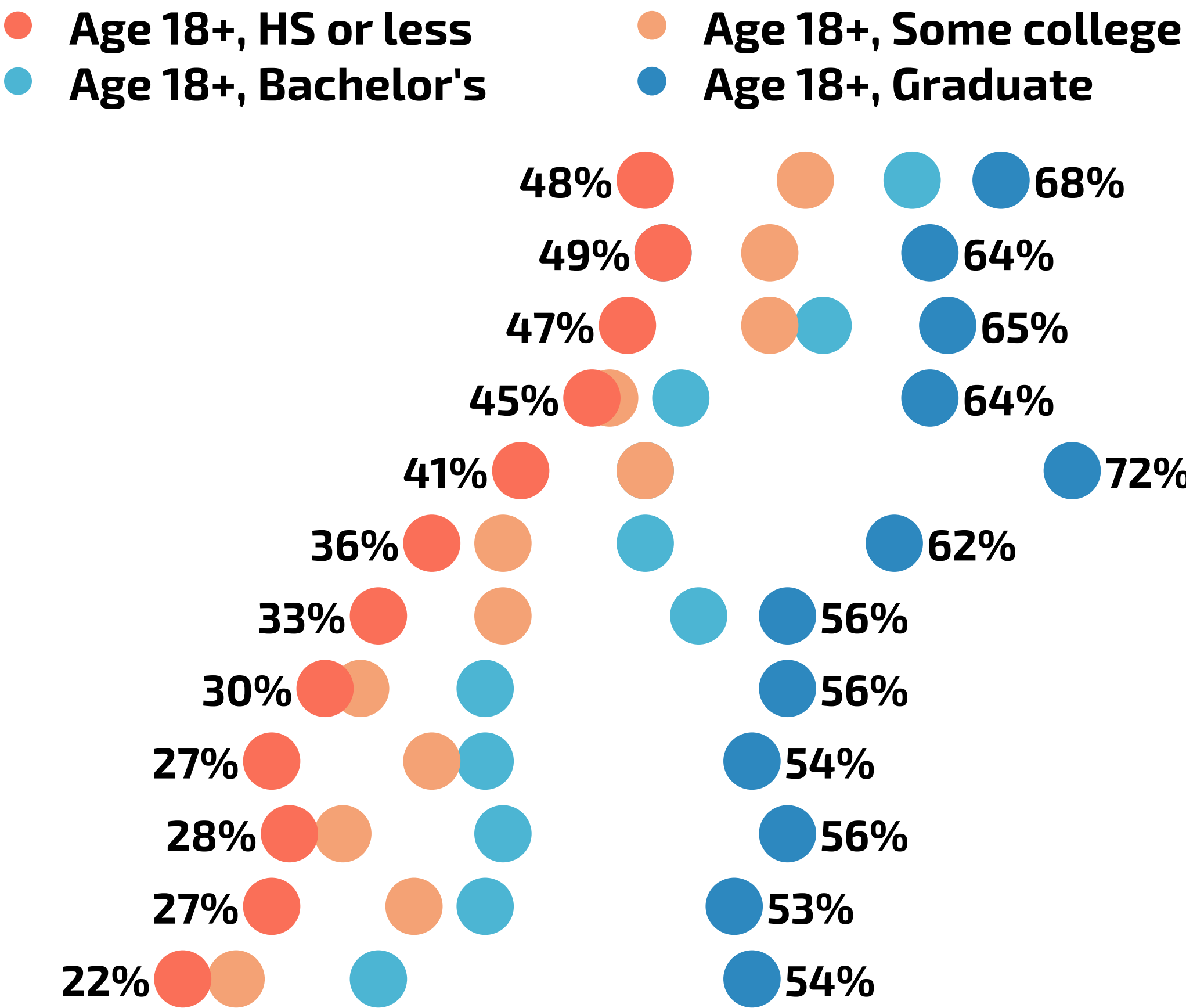
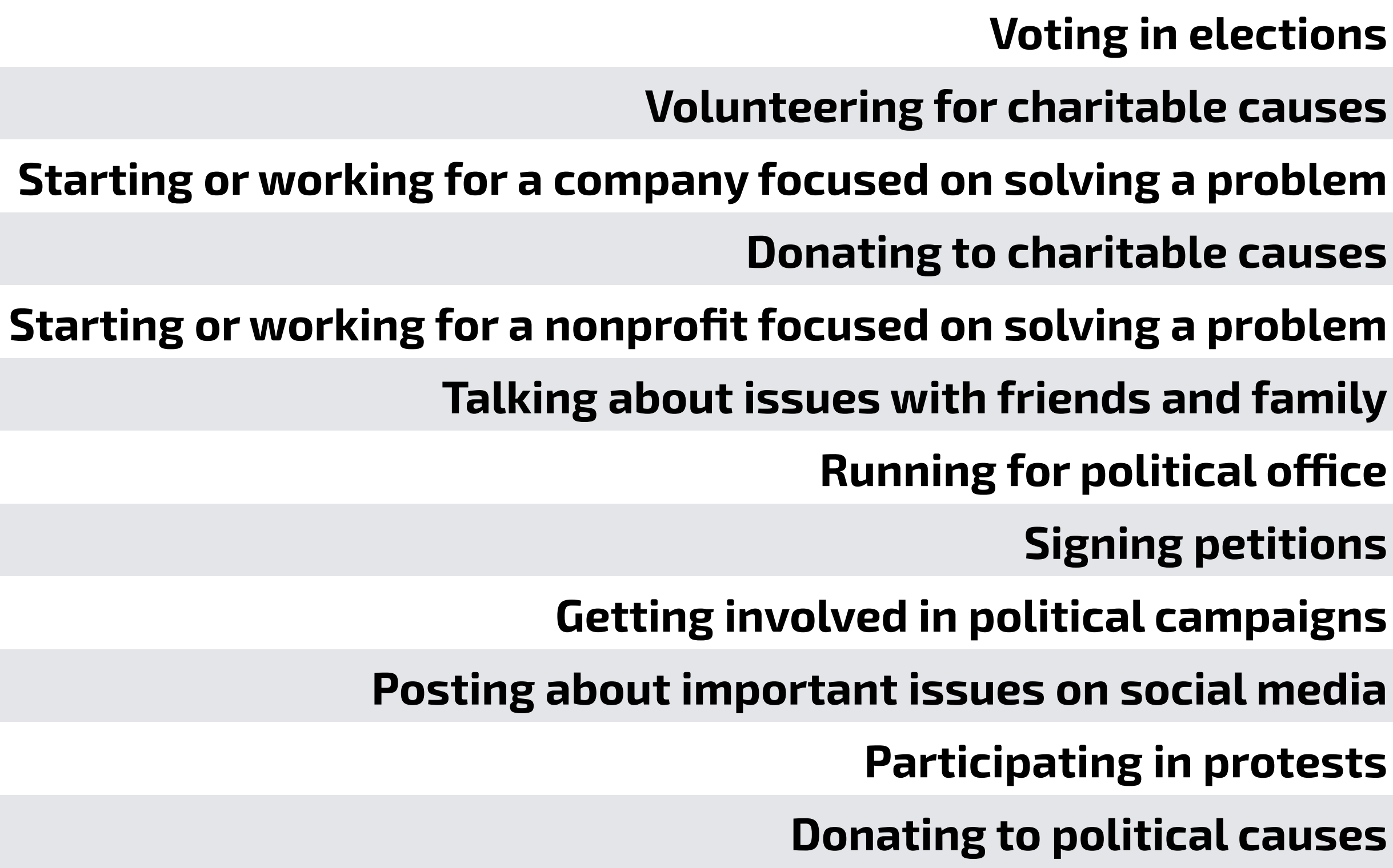
# Gen Zers Particularly See Volunteering For Charitable Causes As Highly Effective Way To Create Change

Q. There are many ways people might try to create change in their community or their country. For each of the following, tell me if you think it is an effective way that people in your generation can bring about change.



# College Graduates Are Most Likely To View Starting or Working For A Nonprofit As A Highly Effective Way To Make Change

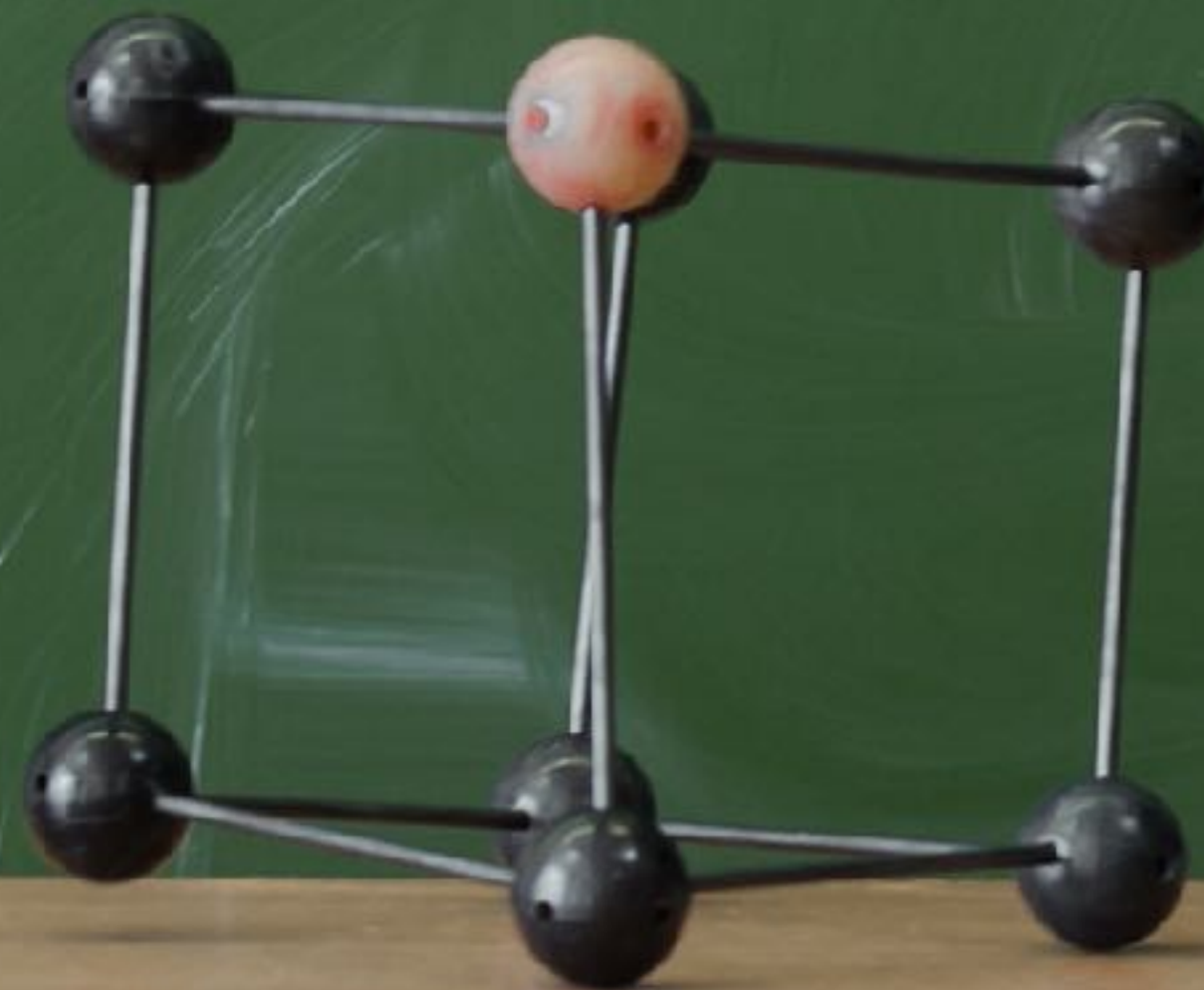
% *Extremely or Very Effective*





**We also looked more specifically at key issue areas like education, the environment, and community.**

**Over and over, Millennials and Gen Zers say: our generation - our teachers, our scientists, ourselves - we will create the change we want to see.**



# Challenges And Creating Change: K-12 Public Education



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**In our Summer 2020 study, we asked Millennials and Gen Zers what they thought K-12 schools should focus on.**

**They said they thought schools needed to focus on providing career and job skills, as well as financial literacy.**

**When we asked in this survey how they think schools are doing, those were the two areas where Millennials and Gen Zers most think schools are doing *poorly*.**

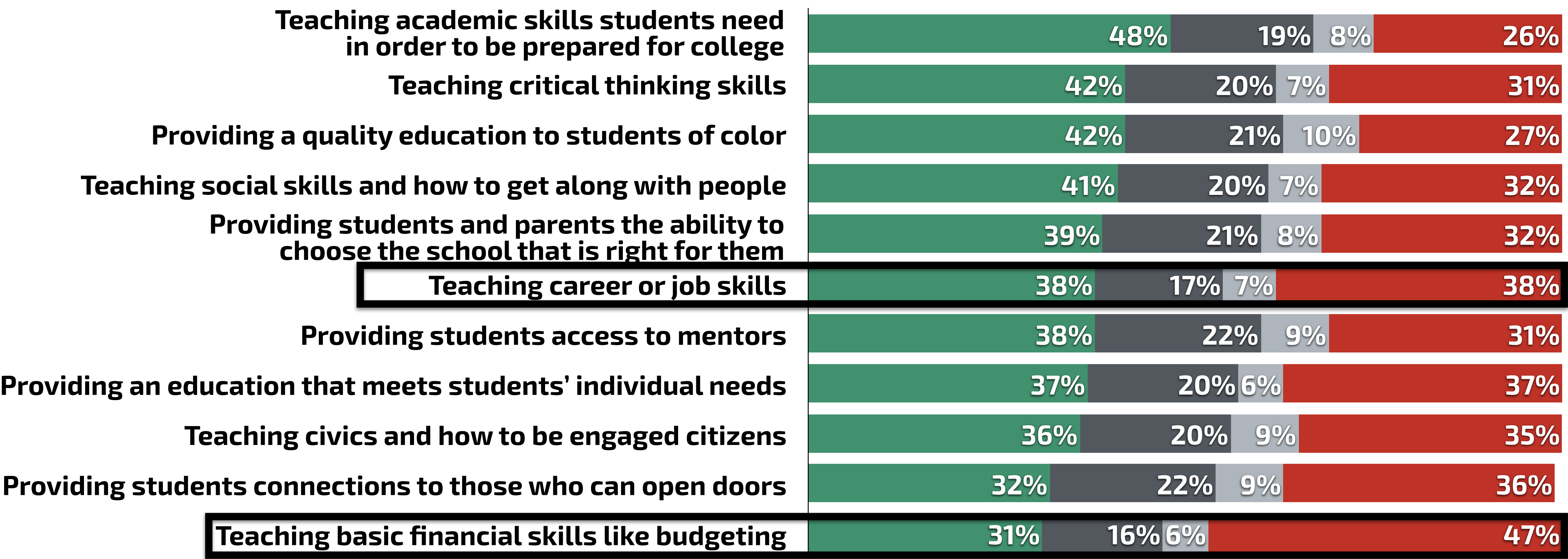




# Career and Financial Skills Are Highest “Taught Poorly”

Q. How well or how poorly do you think most public schools for students in grades K-12 are doing these days at each of the following?

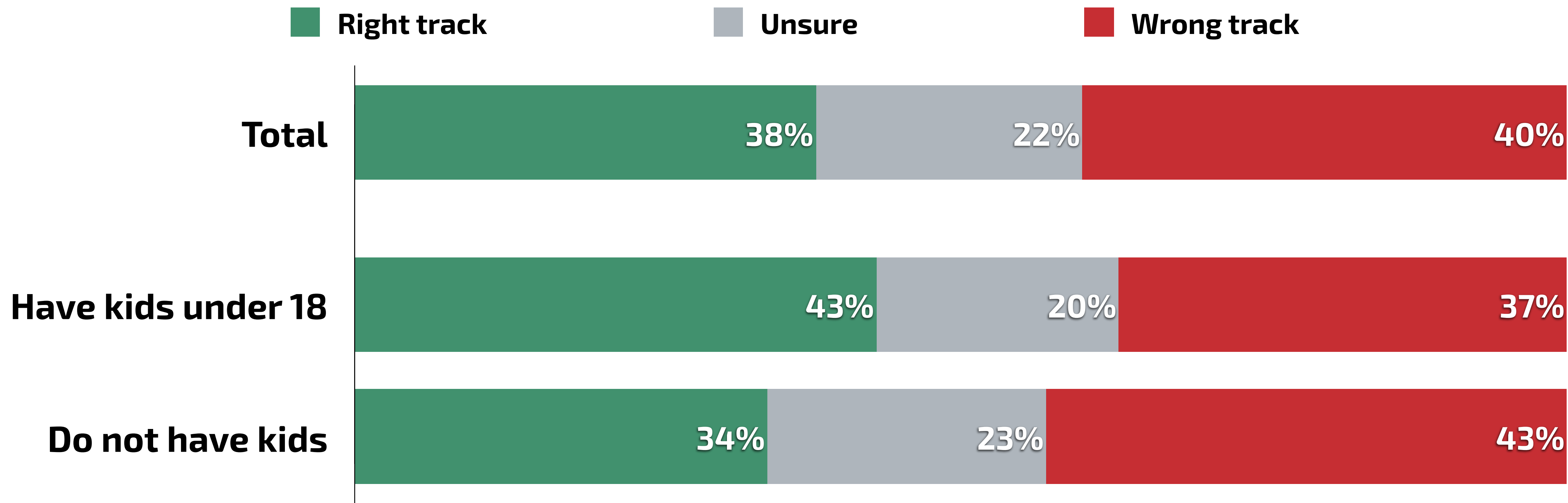
■ Doing this very/somewhat well ■ Neither doing well nor poorly ■ Unsure ■ Doing this very/somewhat poorly





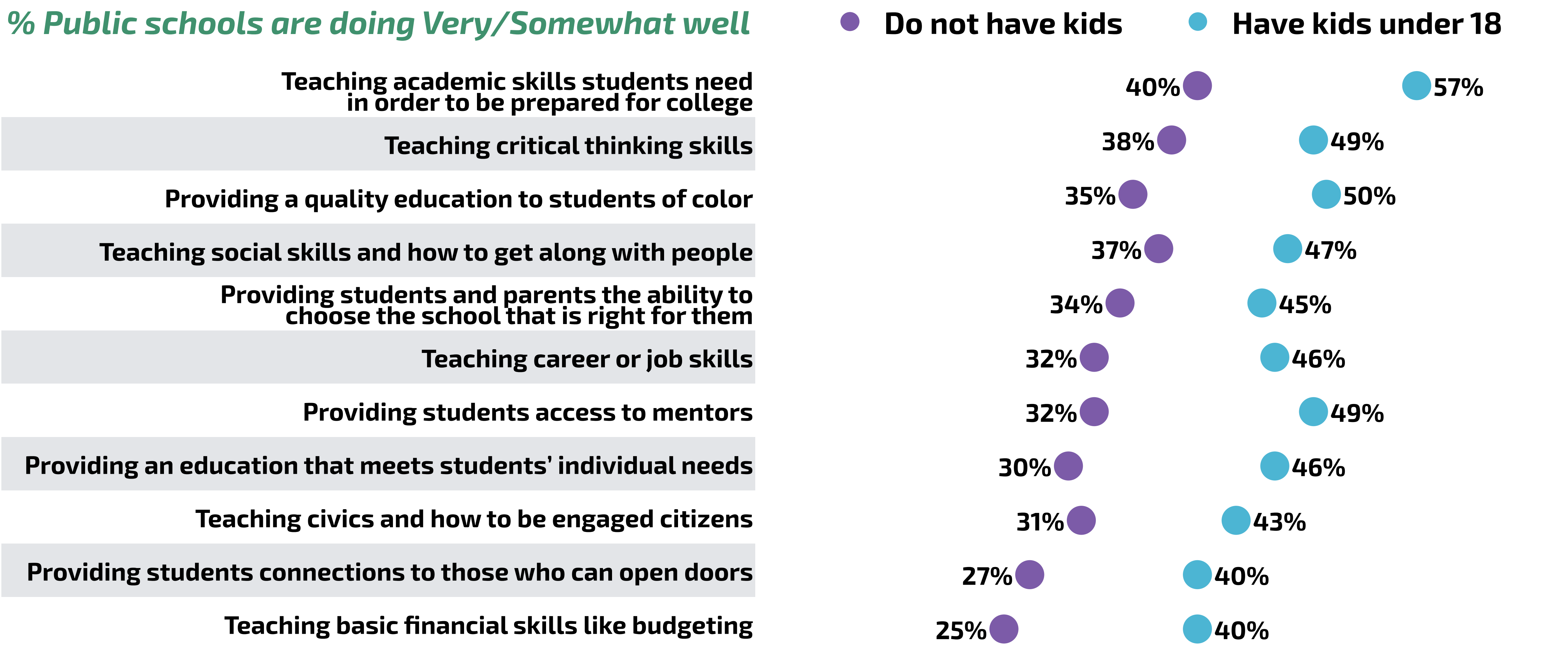
# Gen Zers And Millennials Divided On Whether K-12 Public Education Is On Right Or Wrong Track

Q. Would you say that public education for students in grades kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade is on the right track or the wrong track?



# Millennial and Gen Z Parents More Positive On Public Schools

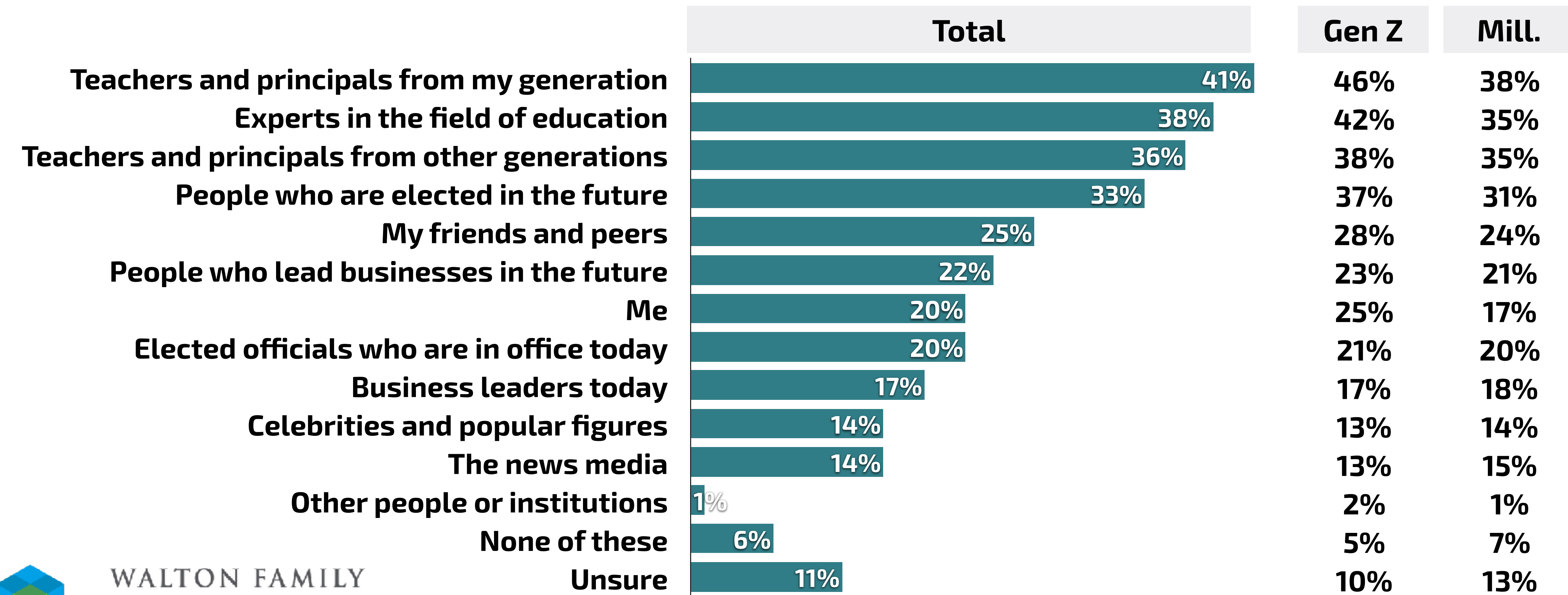
% Public schools are doing Very/Somewhat well





# Teachers And Principals, Education Experts Most Broadly Expected To Bring About Positive Change

Q. What people or institutions do you expect will play a role in bringing about positive change in K-12 public schools during your lifetime? You may choose any and all that apply, or you may choose none if none apply.




# Challenges And Creating Change: Environment And Water Quality



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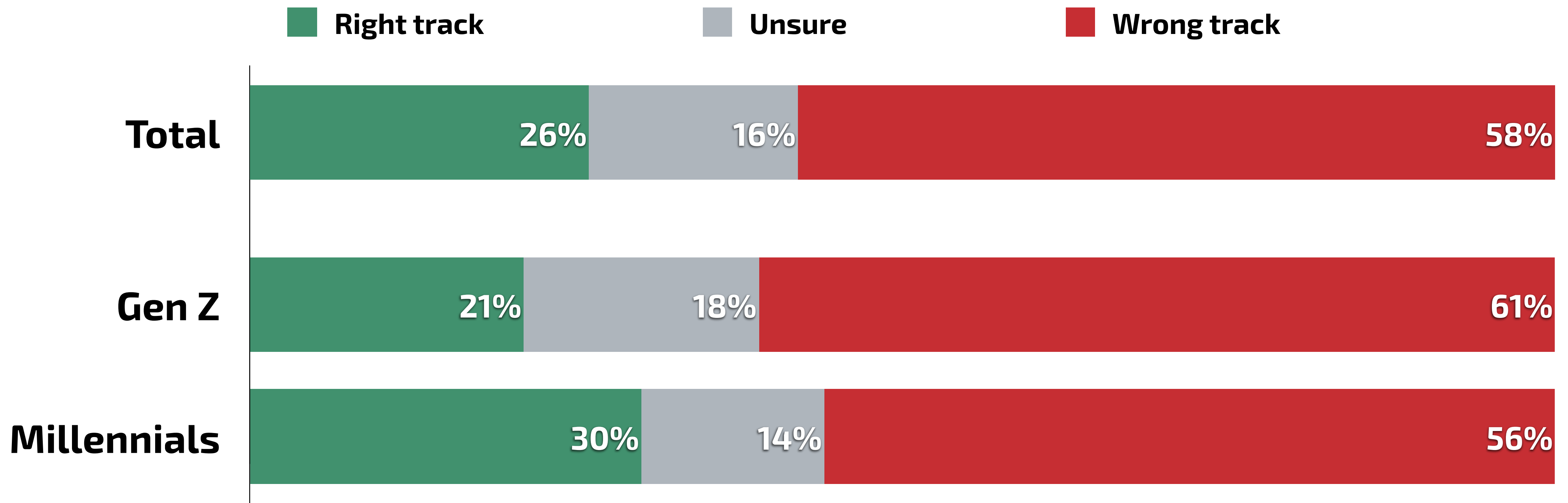
**Even in our Summer 2020 survey, despite an overall sense that the future would be bright, one area saw Millennials and Generation Z the most worried and pessimistic - the environment.**

**When we dig deeper, we find many think sustainable food production and protecting our water are bright spots where things are doing better.**



# Most Say Environment In U.S. Is On The Wrong Track

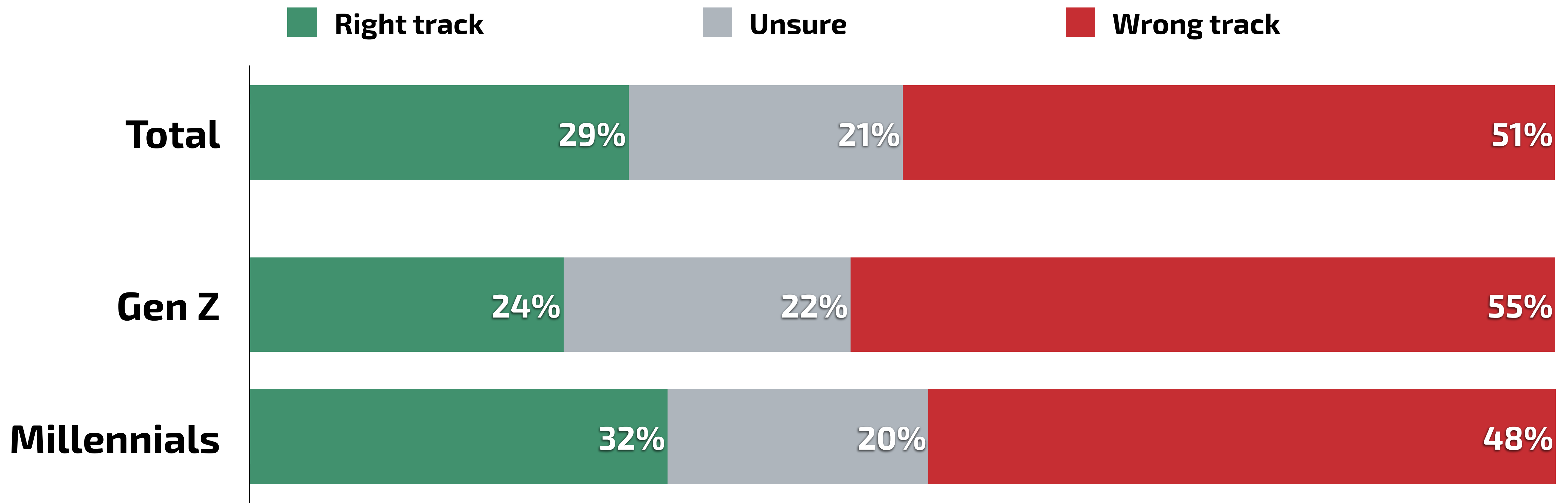
Q. Would you say that the current state of the environment in the United States is on the right track or the wrong track?





# Though Slightly Less Negative On Quality Of Lakes, Rivers, And Ocean, Most Say It Is On The Wrong Track

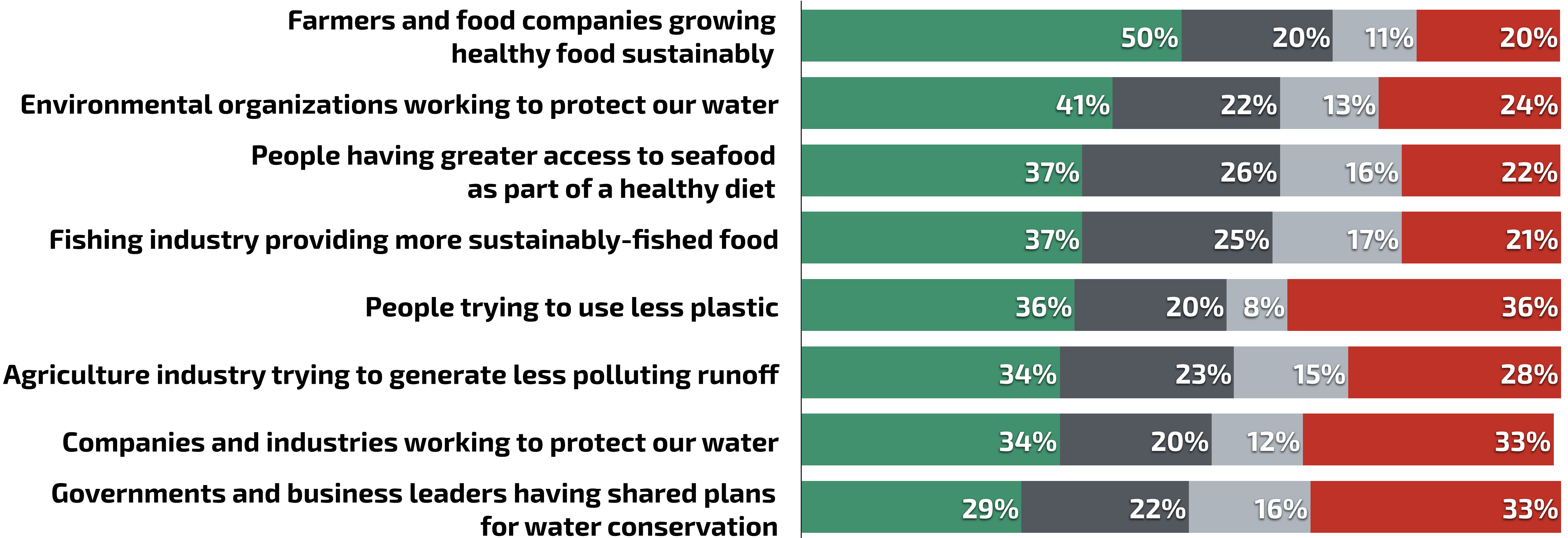
Q. More specifically, would you say that the quality of water in our lakes, rivers, and oceans in the United States is on the right track or the wrong track?



# Farmers, Food Companies Growing Sustainably Rated Highly

Q. How well or how poorly do you think the United States is doing these days at each of the following?

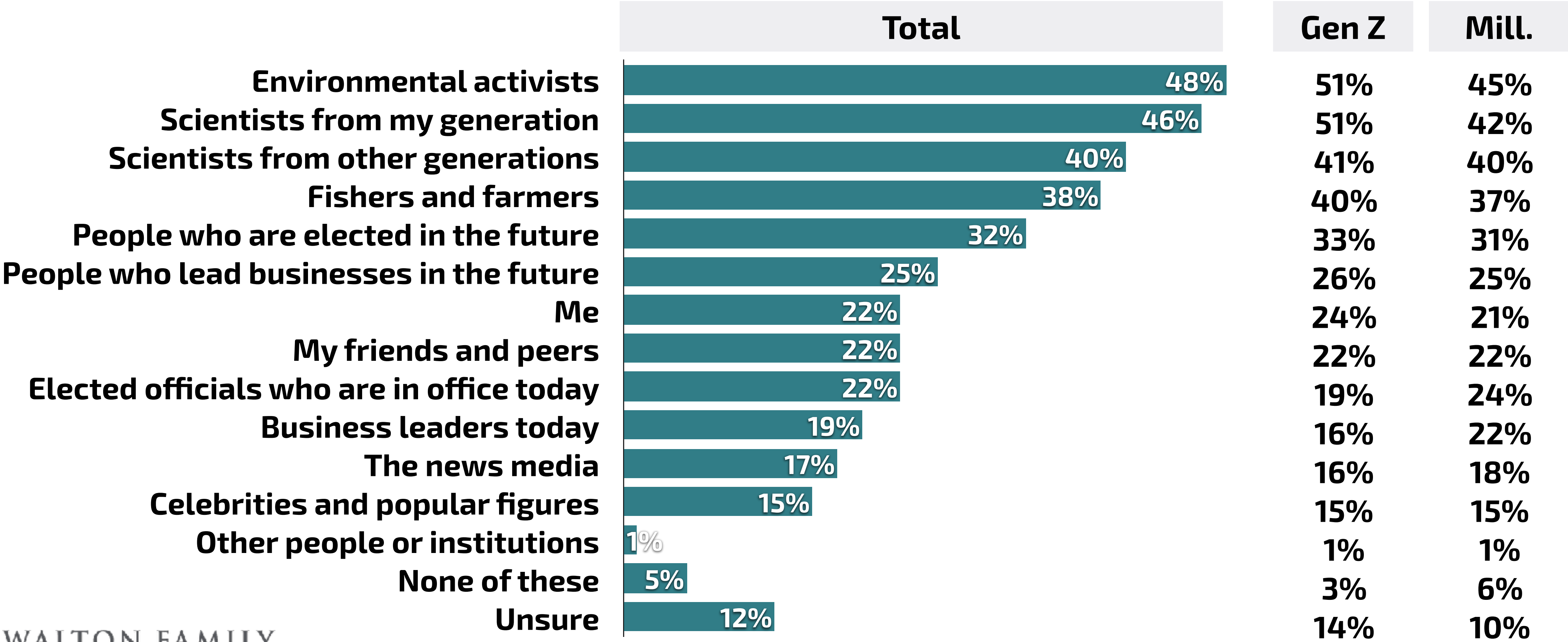
■ Doing this very/somewhat well   ■ Neither doing well nor poorly   ■ Unsure   ■ Doing this very/somewhat poorly





# Highest Expectations For Environmental Activists And Scientists

Q. What people or institutions do you expect will play a role in bringing about positive change in the quality of our rivers and oceans during your lifetime? You may choose any and all that apply, or you may choose none if none apply.



# Challenges And Creating Change: Communities For The Next Generation



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We know that issues like housing and education are among the biggest concerns Millennials and Gen Zers face.

So we wanted to explore further: what types of communities do Millennials and Gen Zers want to create?

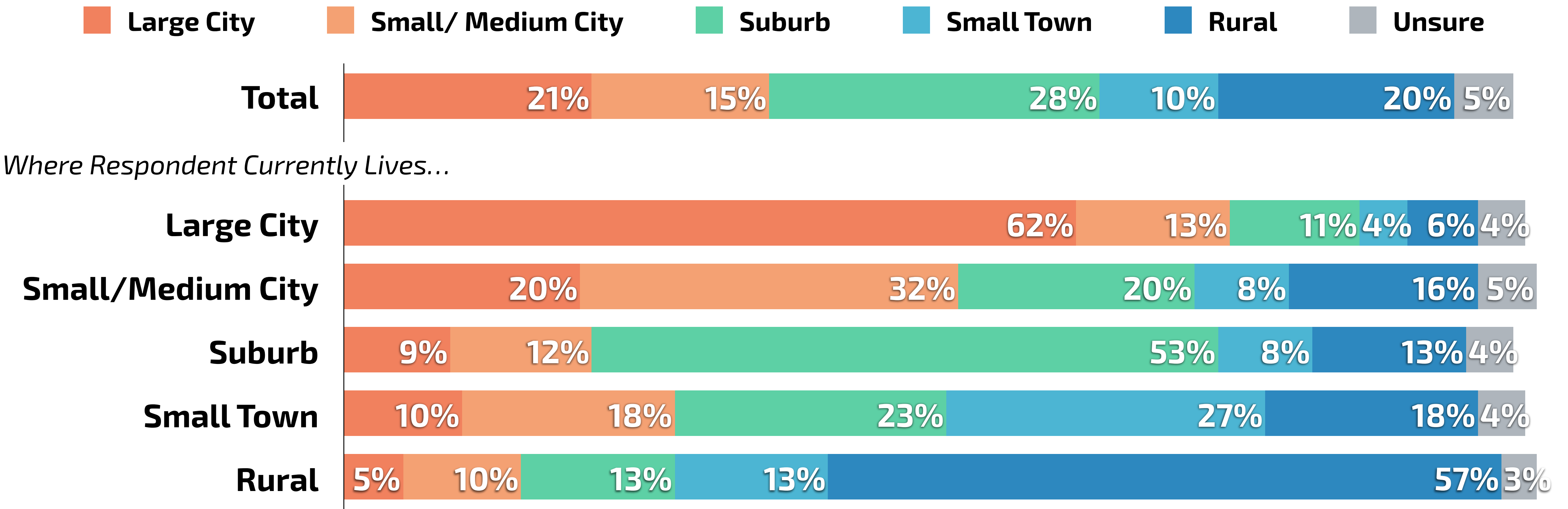
In some respects, the results aren't surprising: they want places with **affordable housing, good schools, good jobs.**

But that's not all. Rounding out the top five qualities they want? Places that **are inclusive** and have **access to the outdoors.**



# Giving The Choice Of Living Anywhere, Most Gen Zers And Millennials Would Choose An Area Similar To Their Current One

Q. If you had the ability to live anywhere you wanted, how would you describe the ideal area in which you would want to live?





# Affordable Housing, Jobs In Chosen Field Are Top Factors

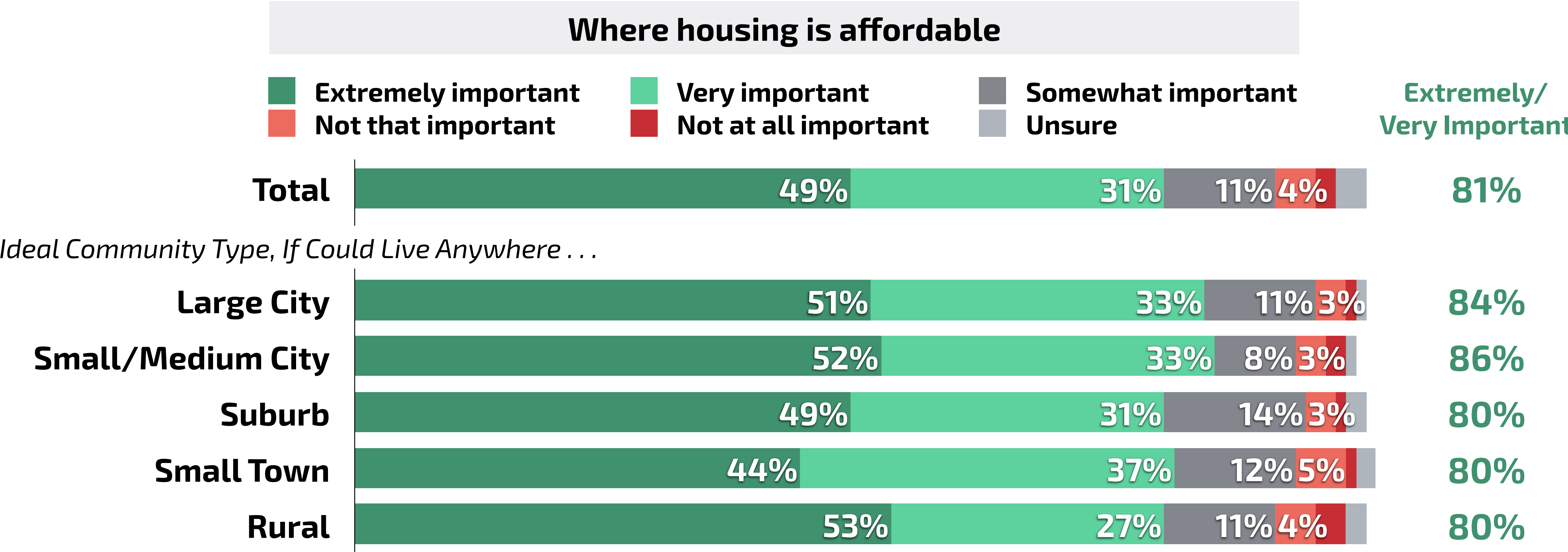
Q. If you had the ability to live anywhere you wanted, how important would it be to you to live in a community . . . ?

% Extremely or Very Important



# Whether They Want To Live In A City Or Other Area, Affordable Housing Is Important Factor For Gen Zers And Millennials

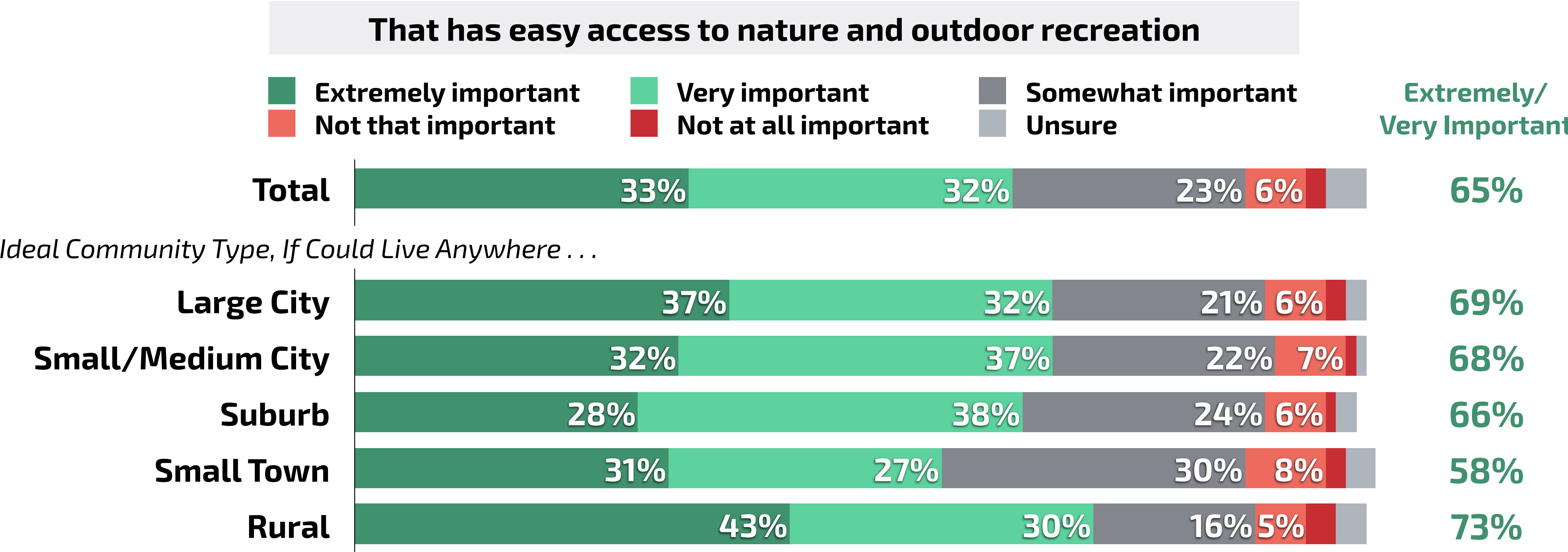
Q. If you had the ability to live anywhere you wanted, how important would it be to you to live in a community . . . ?





# Access To Nature And Outdoor Recreation Also Broadly Important, Even To Those Who Say They Would Want To Live In Urban Areas

Q. If you had the ability to live anywhere you wanted, how important would it be to you to live in a community . . . ?

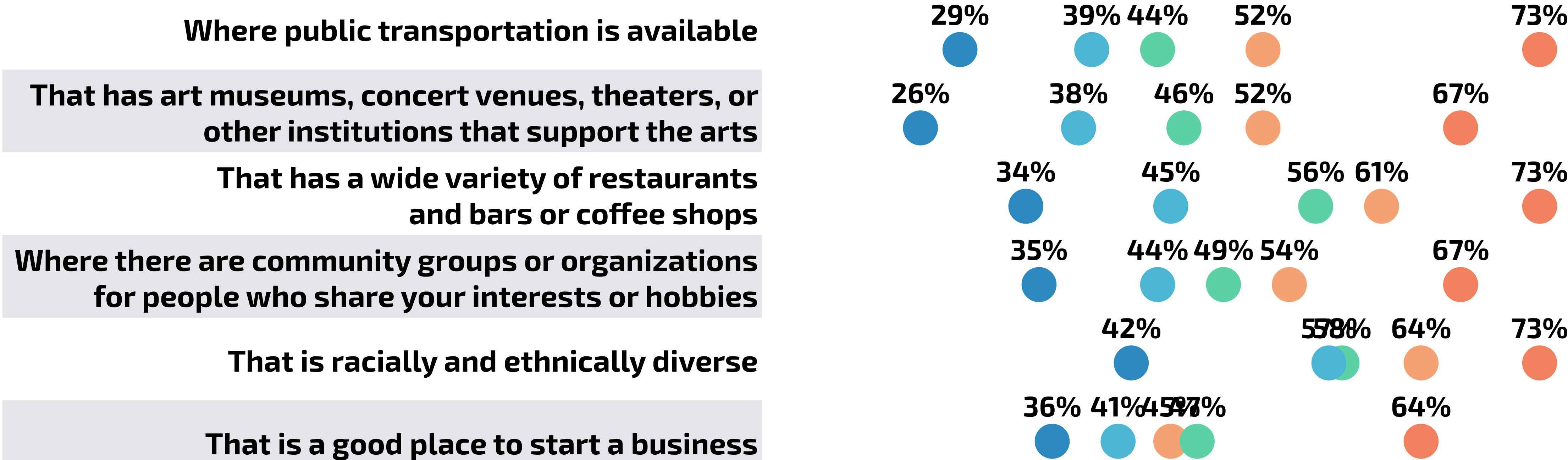


# Those Who Want To Live In More Urban Areas More Likely To Say It's Important To Have Things Like Public Transportation, Arts Institutions

Q. If you had the ability to live anywhere you wanted, how important would it be to you to live in a community . . . ?

*% Extremely or Very Important*      *Among Those Whose Ideal Community Type Is . . .*

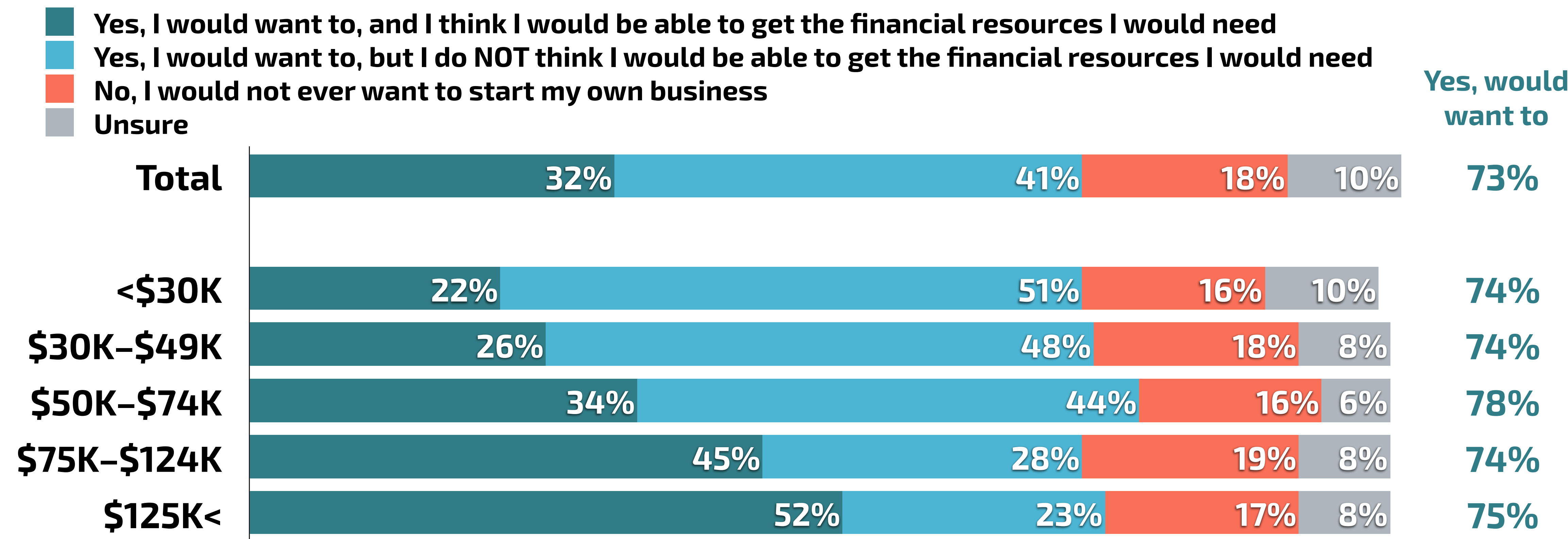
● Rural   ● Small Town   ● Suburb   ● Small/Medium City   ● Large city





# More Than 7 In 10 Interested In Starting Own Business, But Those With Lower Incomes Less Confident They Could Get Necessary Resources

Q. Would you ever want to start your own business, and if so, do you think you would be able to get the financial resources you would need to do so?





**Millennials and Generation Z don't think things are perfect.**

**But they feel confident they can create a future that opens doors and creates opportunity for themselves and their peers.**

**They aren't waiting on anyone else to do it.**

**And whether in the political arena, the business world, or the world of nonprofits and foundations Millennials and Generation Z are planning to make big change.**





# Methodology

The findings in this research report are derived from a nationally representative survey of Generation Z (n = 1,000 respondents nationwide aged 13-23) and Millennials (n = 1,000 respondents nationwide aged 24-39). The survey was conducted via online interviews, sampled from the general population panel hosted by Dynata, a leading global survey partner.

This survey was fielded January 12-22, 2021 and results are weighted by gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region to reflect known population demographics.

Research was conducted by Echelon Insights and funded by the Walton Family Foundation.





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INSIGHTS

WALTON FAMILY  
FOUNDATION

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