

Government Communications Study: Year 2

Key Findings and Analysis
January 2024



Project Overview

- Schoen Cooperman Research interviewed **U.S. Adults** and **Communications Practitioners** in order to understand the challenges that communications strategists face and inform a broader strategy for increasing public trust in the government's messaging.
- Communications professionals were reached using email lists provided by NAGC, Ragan Communications, and GW/GSPM Students & Alumni.

Table 1. Sample Criteria

Group	Details
<u>U.S. Adults</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ 500 interviews with a demographically representative national sample
<u>Communications Practitioners</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ <u>Government</u>: Employed by government entity or agency➤ <u>Private Sector</u>: Employed by corporation, firm, or non-profit organization engaging in government relations

Executive Summary: Key Takeaways

Table 2. Executive Summary: Key Takeaways

- Currently, U.S. Adults view government as dishonest, self-serving, and politically-motivated, and in turn do not trust its messaging.
- But notably, Americans also express skepticism toward news and information generally. This is likely a reflection of the rise in misinformation/disinformation, which U.S. Adults universally view as a serious problem.
- In order to boost public trust in its messaging, the government must take steps to increase transparency, tackle misinformation/disinformation, and decrease political polarization.

Executive Summary: Key Takeaways

Table 3. Executive Summary: Key Takeaways

- Unlike U.S. Adults, those in Gov't Comms. view the government as effective and trustworthy, and think the public trusts information from the government “a great deal” or “somewhat.” Private Sector Comms. practitioners align with Americans’ negative outlook.
- Comms. Practitioners also identify misinformation/disinformation and political polarization as problems that harm public trust in the government’s messaging, but do not recognize government as having nefarious motives in the same way U.S. Adults do.
- Instead, Comms. Practitioners believe issues with the execution of communications – i.e., resources, styles, timeliness, and speed – contribute to the lack of public trust.

Executive Summary: Key Takeaways

Table 4. Executive Summary: Key Takeaways

- Broadly, respondents say A.I. should NOT be used to improve the government's public communications, as this is a privacy violation that will decrease trust in the government's messaging. While most Comms. Practitioners do not use A.I. in their current role, those who do say it helps them do their job more efficiently.
- With respect to other internal matters facing Comms. Practitioners, we find that the 2024 election is not currently impacting their jobs, but most are concerned that the results ultimately will impact their roles.
- Further on the issue of politics, those in Private Sector Comms. say it is important for their employer to share their ideological/political values and to take a stand on these issues, and are supportive of the rise in employee-led activism.

General Perceptions of Government: U.S. Adults

- **U.S. Adults** view their government as ineffective, untrustworthy, and believe decisions are motivated mostly by politics, rather than the country's best interest.

Table 5. General Perceptions of Government Among U.S. Adults

Question	Answer	
<i>How effective is the government is at getting things done?</i>	Total Effective:	33%
	Total Ineffective:	63%
<i>How much do you trust the government to do what's best for our country?</i>	Total Trust:	37%
	Total Do Not Trust:	60%
<i>Does government make decisions mostly based on what's in the public interest or based on political reasons?</i>	Public Interest:	14%
	Political Reasons:	78%

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Perceptions of Gov't's Messaging: U.S. Adults

- **U.S. Adults** view the government's messaging as **ineffective** and **do not trust it**, but are also **distrustful of information generally**, i.e., from news organizations.

Table 6. Perceptions of Government's Messaging Among U.S. Adults

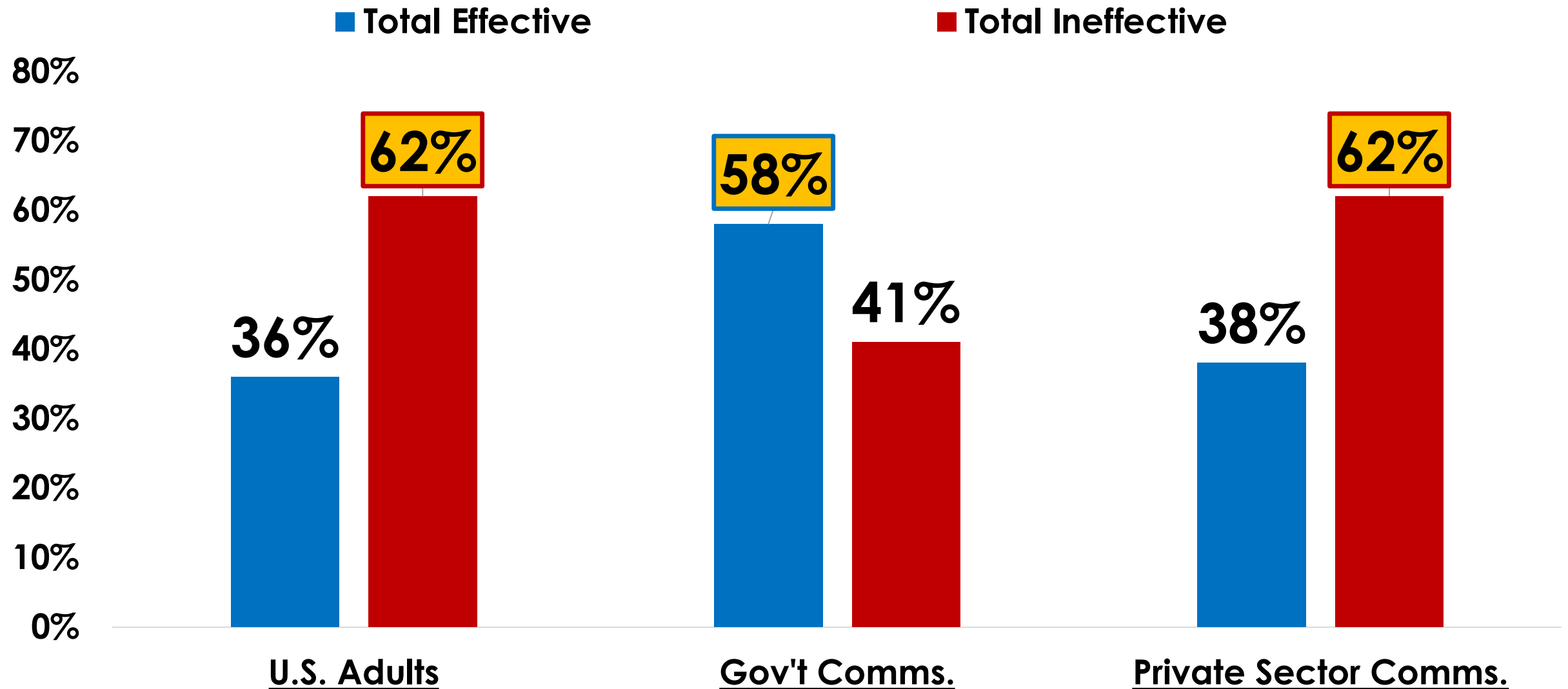
Question	Answer
<i>How effective do you feel the government is at communicating with the public?</i>	Total Effective: 36%
	Total Ineffective: 62%
<i>How much do you personally trust the information from the government?</i>	Total Trust: 33%
	Total Do Not Trust: 65%
<i>Who do you trust more to provide fair and truthful information: the government or news organizations?</i>	The Government: 8%
	News Organizations: 23%
	Neither: 46%

"Undecided" Answers Not Displayed.

Effectiveness of Govt's Messaging: All Groups

- Unlike **U.S. Adults**, those in **Gov't Comms.** view the government as effective and trustworthy, but those in **Private Sector Comms.** are aligned with Americans' negative outlook.

Chart 1. How effective do you believe the government is at communicating with the public?

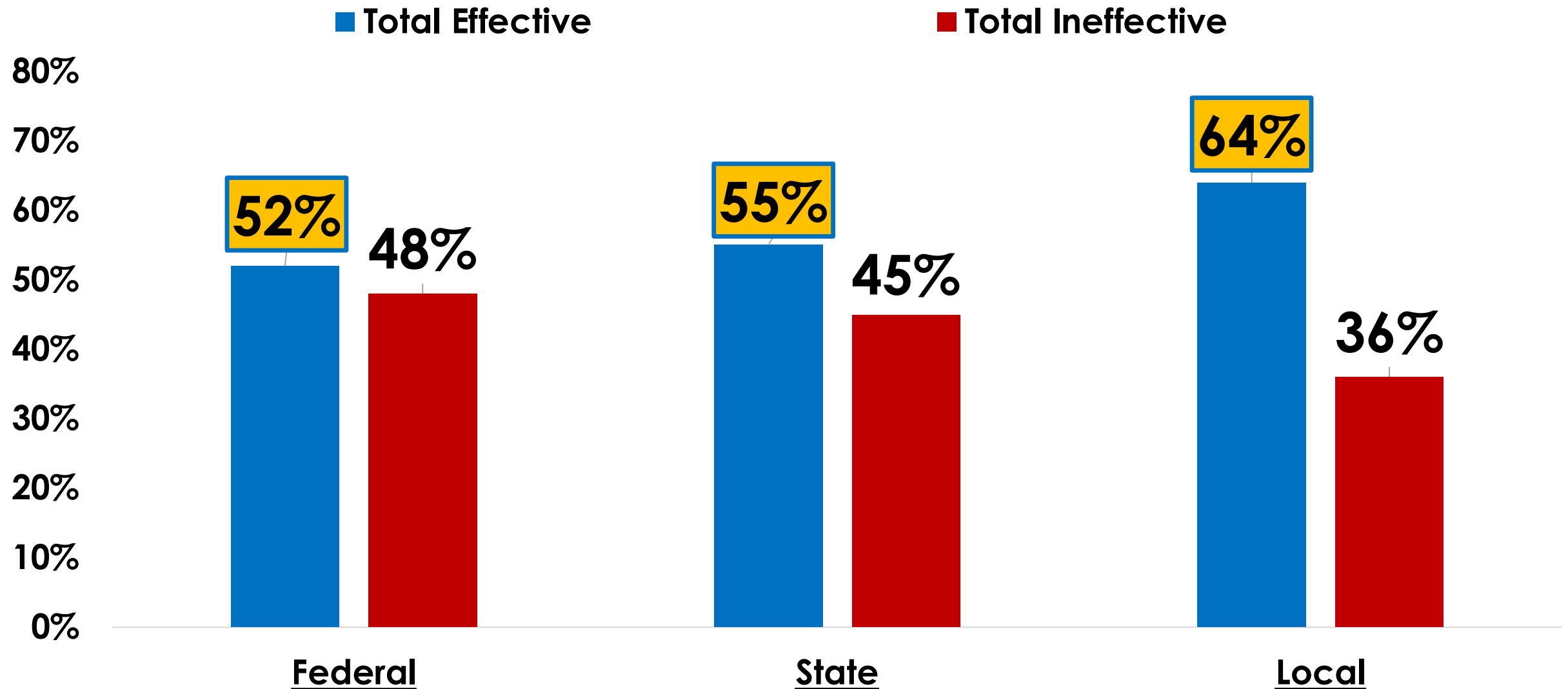


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Effectiveness of Gov't's Messaging: Gov't Comms

- Looking at differences between **Gov't Comms. Practitioners**, we find that those in **Local Gov't** are especially likely to believe the government is effective at communicating with the public, while those in **State Gov't** as well as **Federal Gov't** are somewhat less likely to believe this.

Chart 2. How effective do you believe the government is at communicating with the public?

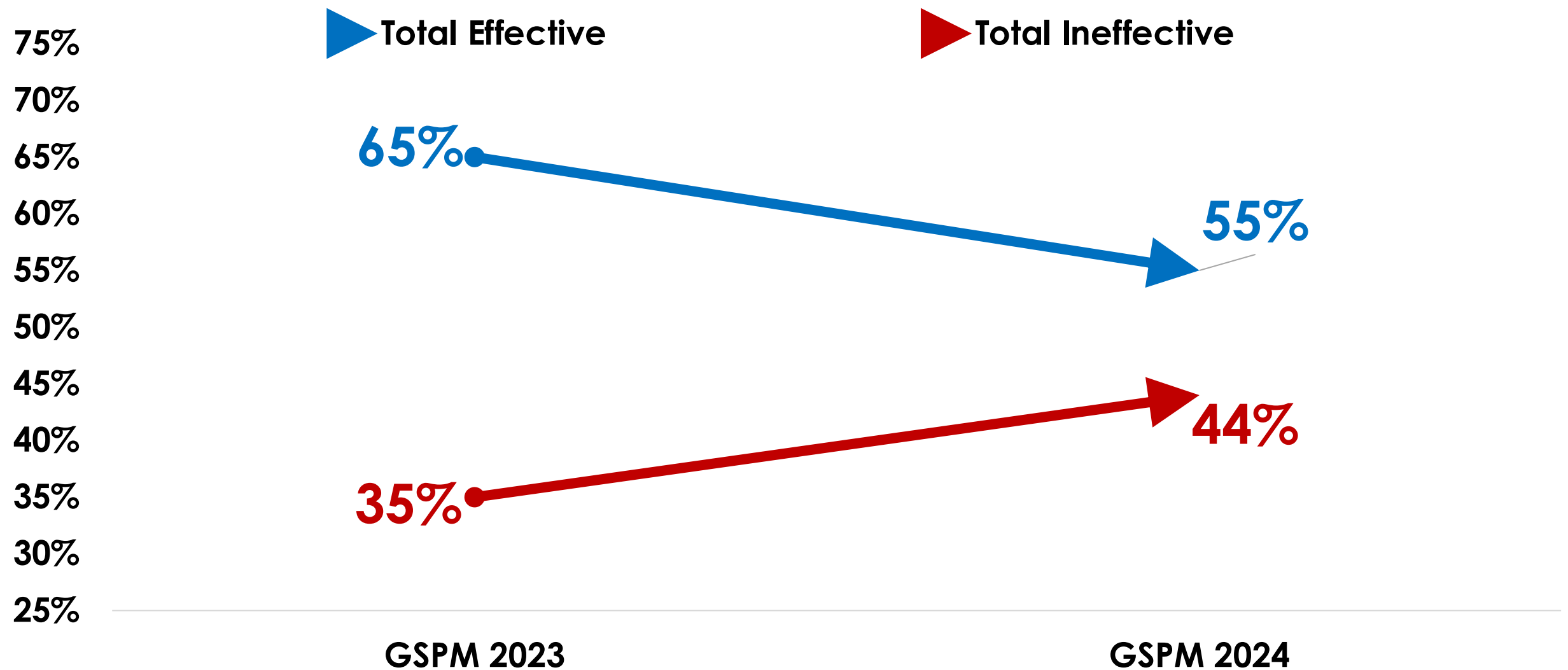


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Tracked Effectiveness of Gov't: All Comms.

- When comparing responses to last year's GSPM survey, **Comms. Practitioners** are **now far less likely to believe that the government is effective at communicating with the public.**

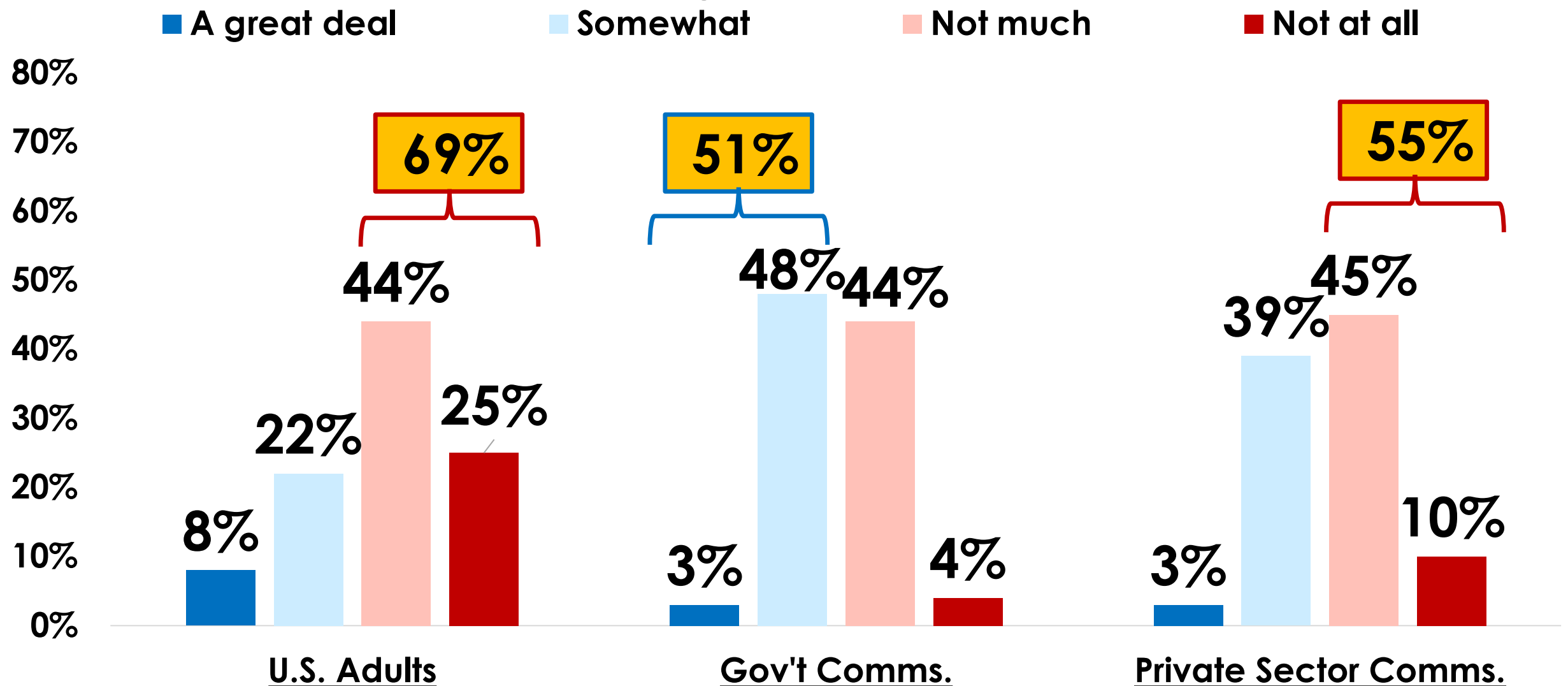
Chart 3. How Effective is the Government at Communicating with the Public? Among All Comms.



Levels of Trust in Gov't's Messaging: All Groups

- Majorities of **U.S. Adults** (69%) and those in **Private Sector Comms.** (55%) say the public does NOT trust information from the government “much” or “at all.”
- Yet, most in **Gov't Comms.** (51%) think the public trusts it “a great deal” or “somewhat.”

Chart 4. How much does the public trust the information from the government?

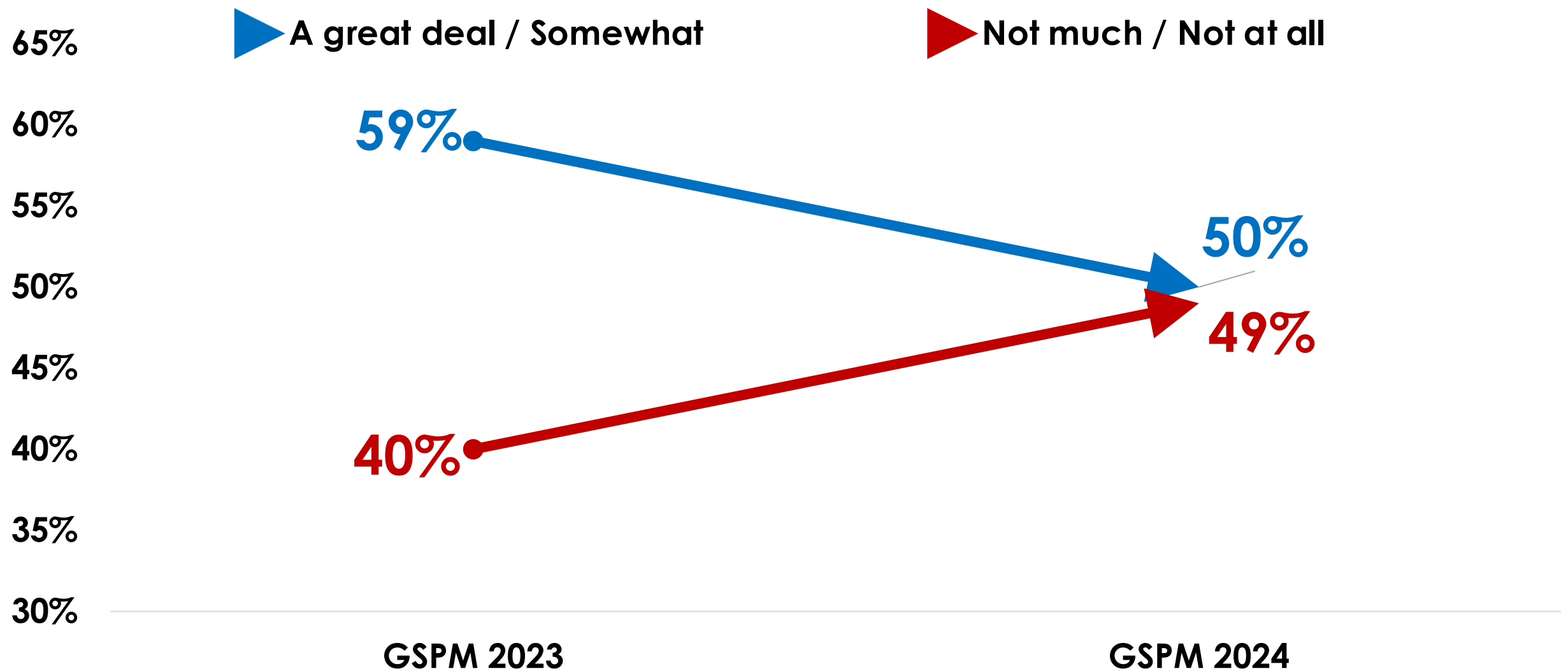


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Tracked Trust in Gov't Messaging: All Comms.

- When comparing responses to last year's GSPM survey, **Comms. Practitioners** are **now much less likely to believe that the public trusts the government's messaging.**

Chart 5. How Much Does the Public Trust the Info from the Government? Among All Comms.



Reasons for Distrust in Gov't Comms: All Groups

- In terms of reasons for the public's distrust in the government, **U.S. Adults** say government is dishonest and self-serving, while **Comms. Practitioners** cite misinformation/disinformation and problems with the communications itself. Both groups believe polarization is an issue.

Table 7. What are Reasons the Public Lacks Trust in Gov't's Messaging?

U.S. Adults		All Comms.	
<u>Dishonesty</u>	30%	<u>Political Polarization</u>	17%
<u>Self-Serving Interests</u>	20%	<u>Misinformation, Disinformation</u>	14%
Polarization	15%	Poor communication styles	13%
Lack of Transparency	10%	Media Influence	12%
Media Influence	8%	Public Distrust and Skepticism	11%

Ways to Improve Public Trust: All Groups

- According to both **U.S. Adults** and **Comms Practitioners**, increasing transparency is the key to improving public trust in the government's messaging. Comms. Practitioners also identify internal fixes, i.e., more timeliness and simplicity in messaging.

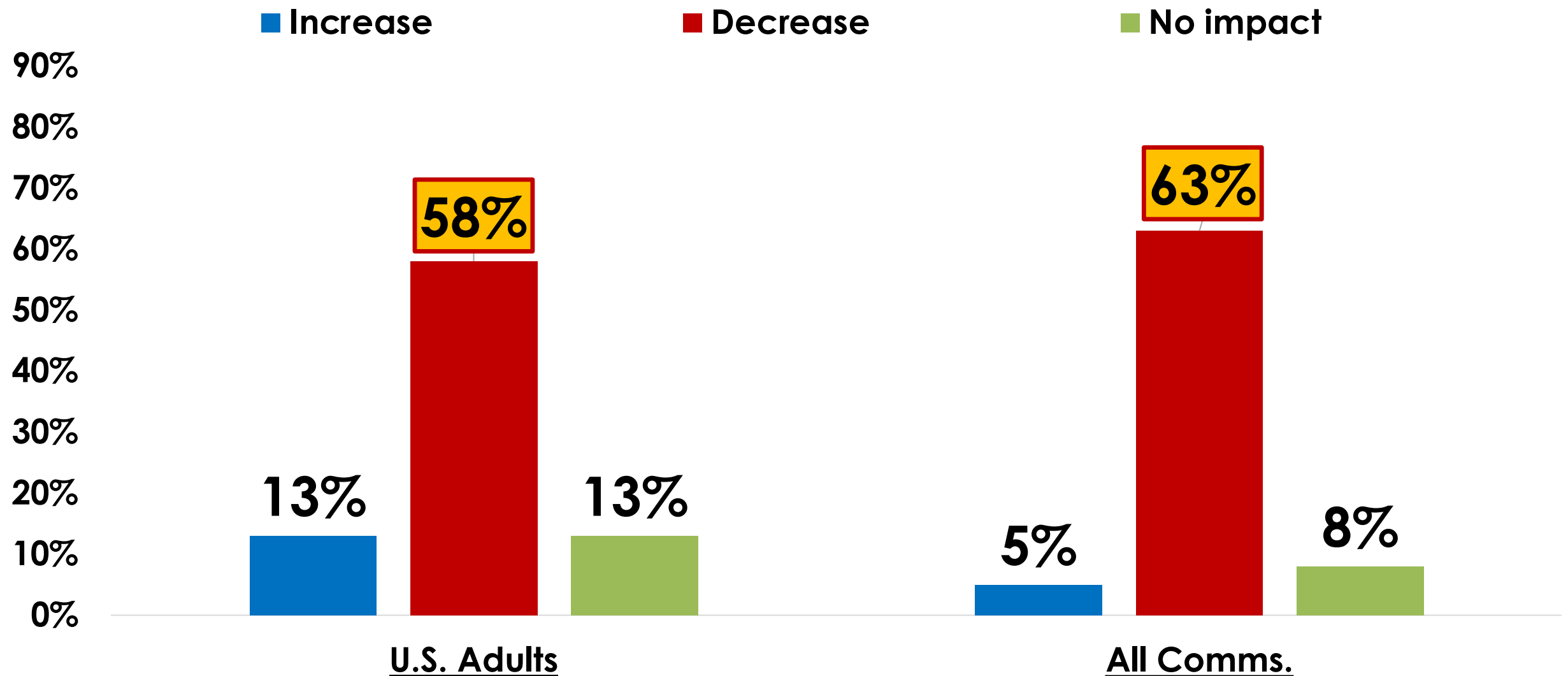
Table 8. What are Ways to Improve Trust in Gov't's Messaging?

	U.S. Adults		All Comms.
Honesty & Transparency	69%	Transparency	24%
Trust through Actions	15%	Timeliness	19%
Bipartisanship	5%	Simplicity	17%
Fact-Checking	3%	Authenticity	12%
Accessible Communication	2%	Fact-Based	11%

Potential Impact of A.I.: All Groups

- According to both **U.S. Adults** and **Comms. Practitioners**, the use of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) will decrease public trust in the government's messaging.

Chart 6. Do you think government using A.I. in Comms. would increase or decrease public trust in their messaging?



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A.I. Use in Gov't Comms Trade-off: U.S. Adults

- In a trade-off on this issue, a majority of **U.S. Adults (61%)** say the government should NOT use A.I. given the privacy violations and risks. Only 19% believe the government should use A.I. to more efficiently and effectively share information.

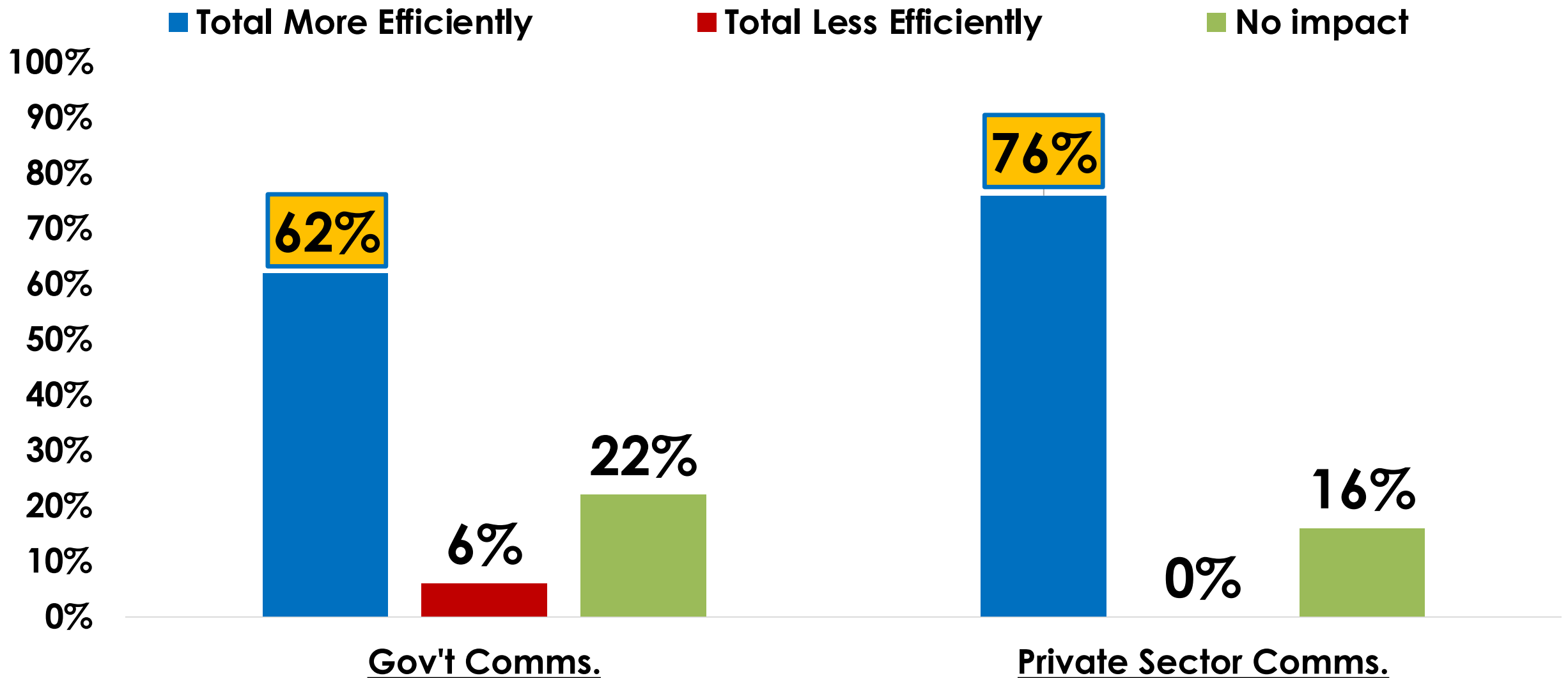
Table 9. Thinking about the government potentially using A.I. to communicate, which of the following positions comes closer to your view?

Position	U.S. Adults
The government <u>should not</u> use A.I., as this is a clear privacy violation and puts our personal data at risk	61%
The government <u>should</u> use A.I., as doing so will allow them to share important information with the public more efficiently and effectively	19%

Impact of A.I. Use on Efficiency: All Comms.

- While most **Comms. Practitioners** do not use A.I. in their current role – including **78%** in **Gov't Comms.** and **64%** in **Private Comms.** – majorities of those who do use it say **A.I. helps them do their job more efficiently.**

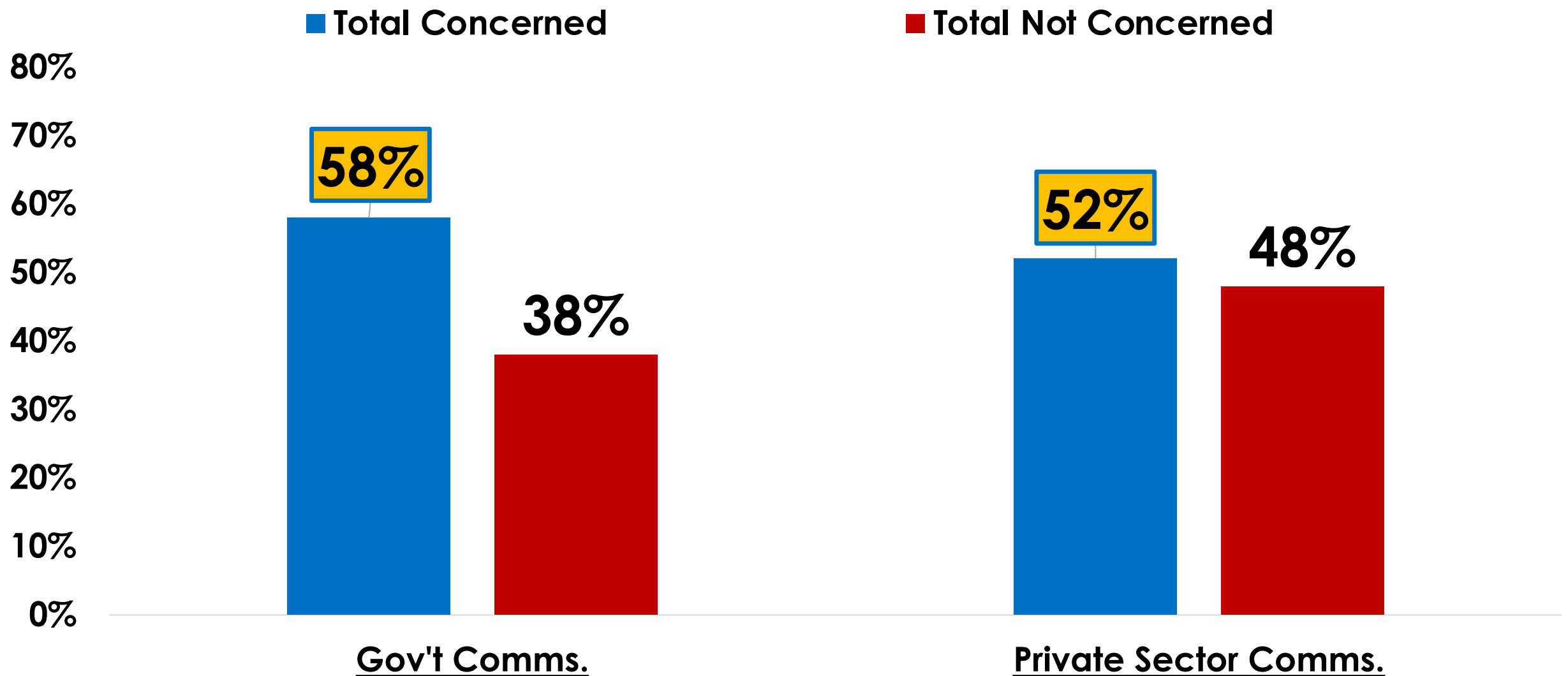
Chart 13. Does using Artificial Intelligence (AI) help you do your job more or less efficiently, or does it have no impact?



2024 Election Impact: All Comms.

- While the election is not yet affecting **Comms. Practitioners'** jobs, majorities in both **Gov't Comms.** (58%) and **Private Sector Comms.** (52%) are concerned that the 2024 election results ultimately will impact their roles.

Chart 15. How concerned are you about how the results of the 2024 election will impact your role?

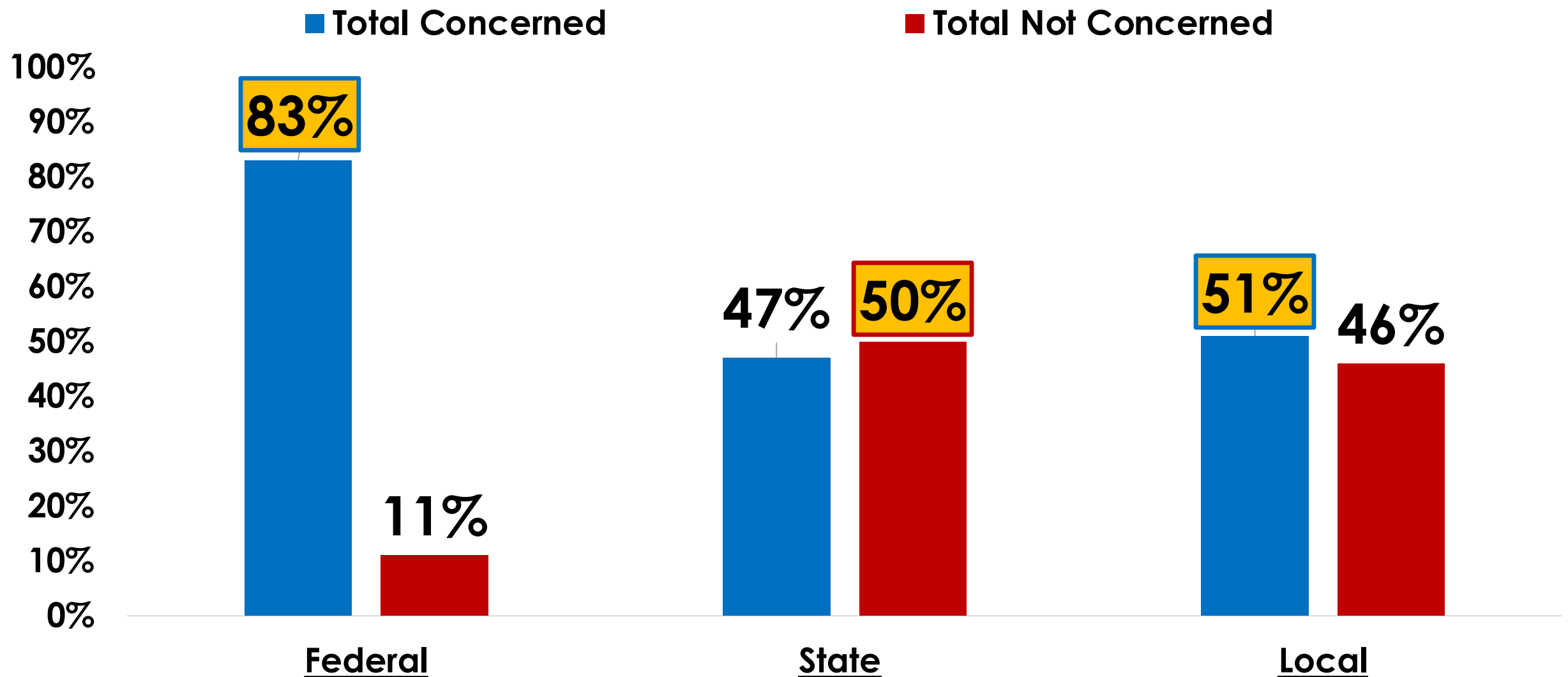


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2024 Election Impact: Gov't Comms.

- Looking at differences between **Gov't Comms. Practitioners**, we find that those in **Federal Gov't** are especially likely to be concerned that the 2024 election will impact their role, while those in **State Gov't** as well as **Local Gov't** are much less concerned.

Chart 15. How concerned are you about how the results of the 2024 election will impact your role?

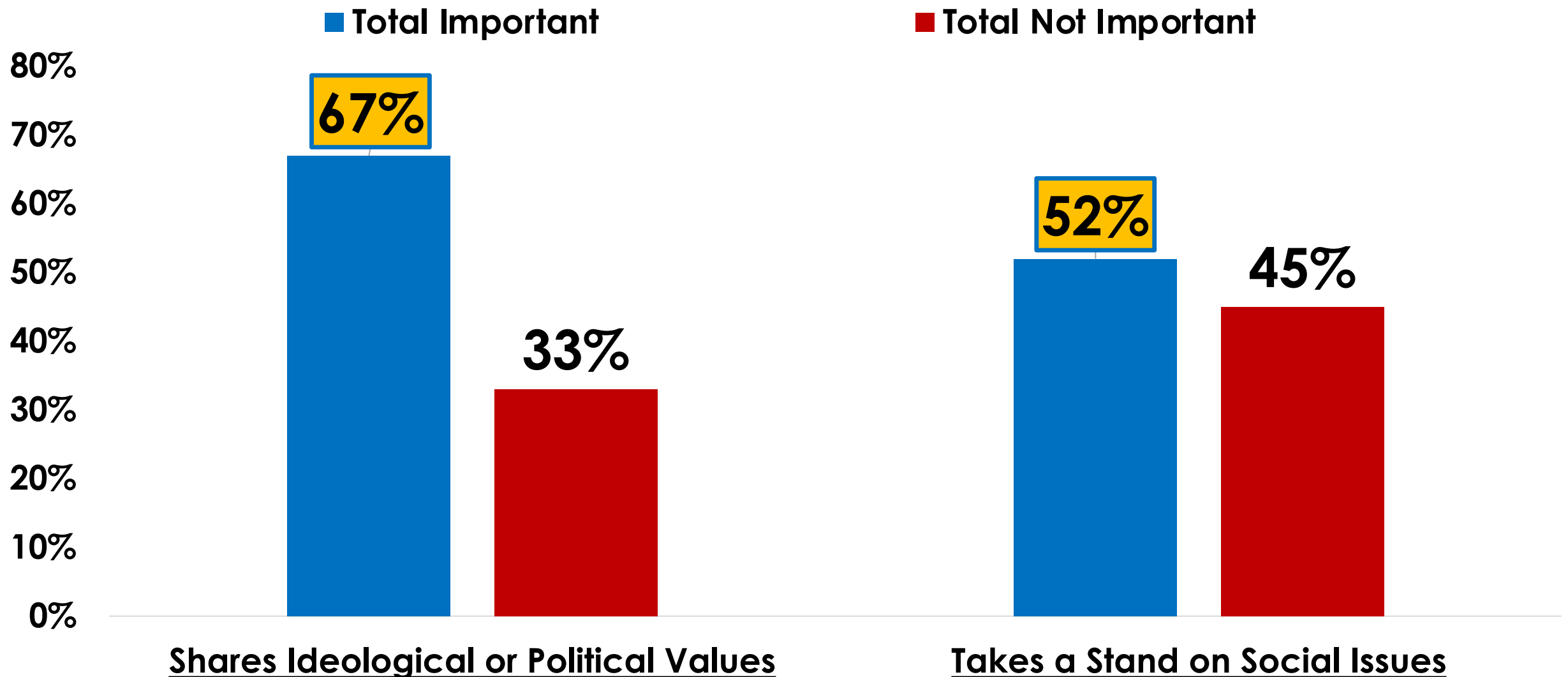


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Employer Values: Private Sector Comms.

- Those in **Private Sector Comms.** say it is important for their employer to share their ideological and political values (67%) as well as to take a stand on these issues (52%).

Chart 16. How important is it to you that your employer...?
Among Private Sector Comms.

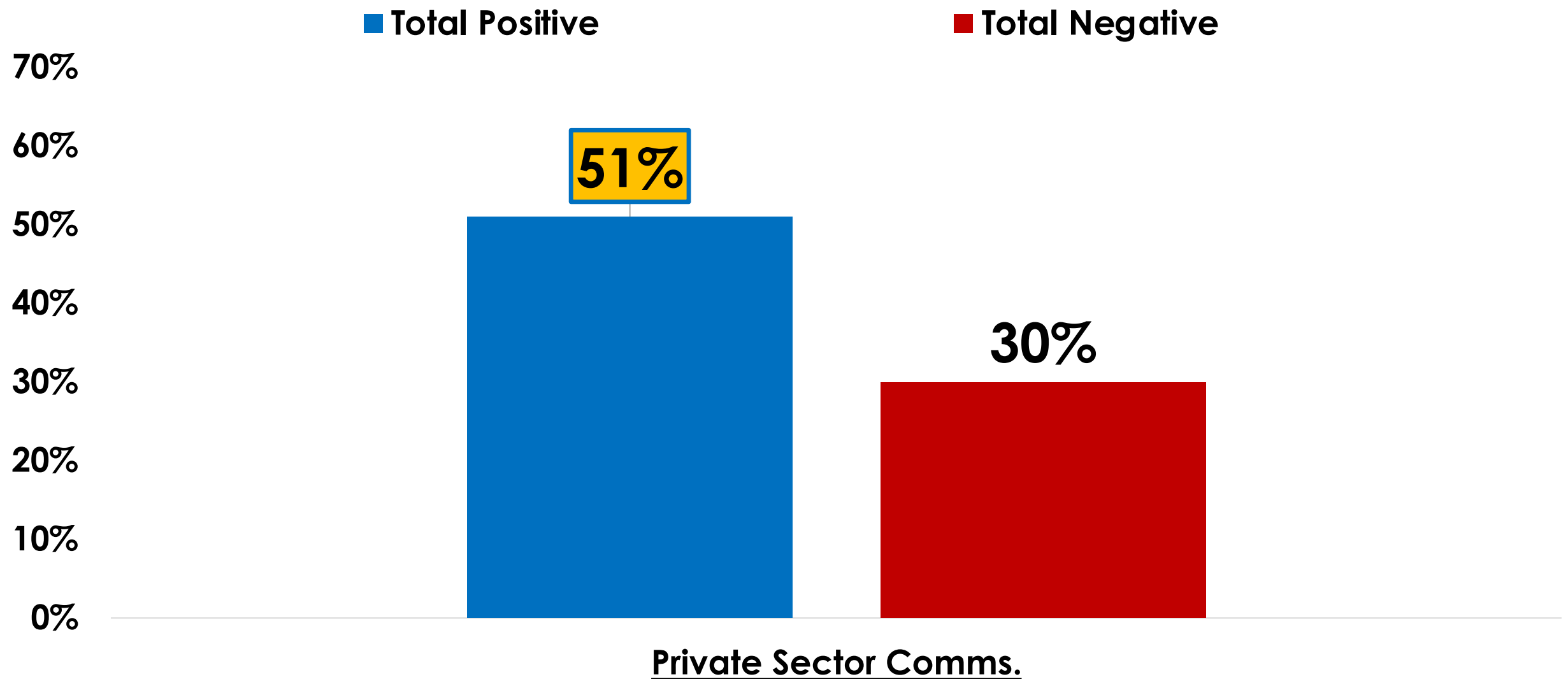


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Employee-led Activism: Private Sector Comms.

- Relatedly, a majority of those in **Private Sector Comms.** (51%) view the recent rise in employee-led activism as a positive development.

Chart 7. Is the recent rise in employee-led activism a positive or negative development?



"Undecided" Answers Not Displayed.