

# UNDERSTANDING POVERTY MINDSETS IN AMERICA

*Nationally-representative audience survey*

## Detailed Findings

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*



# METHODOLOGY: AUDIENCE SURVEY

# **PARTICIPANTS & SURVEY**

- **A nationally-representative sample of 2,646 adults was selected from NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel.**
- **The survey was conducted from August 3-24, 2020.**
- **Participants could choose to complete the study in either English or Spanish.**
- **Most participants completed the survey online.**
- **The dataset has been adjusted in order to correct any imbalances between participants who took the survey and the American population.**

# SEGMENTATION PROCEDURE

**Working with Harmony Labs, we used cluster analysis techniques to segment participants into one of four groups based on their beliefs about:**

- **Individuals living in poverty and/or on government assistance**
- **Economic mobility and equality**
- **Systemic causes and responsibility for poverty**
- **Racial discrimination**

**If You Say So:**

**N = 611**

**23.1% of Americans**

**Don't Tread on Me:**

**N = 536**

**20.3% of Americans**

**Tough Cookies**

**N = 1,123**

**44.3% of Americans**

**People Power**

**N = 376**

**12.3% of Americans**



# GROUP DESCRIPTIONS & ABBREVIATIONS



**If You Say So**  
*Abbreviation: SS*

Independent realists who know the system is broken but are skeptical that there are real solutions to society's problems.



**Don't Tread on Me**  
*Abbreviation: DT*

Conservative, achievement-oriented, and strong believers that equal opportunity already exists in the United States.



**Tough Cookies**  
*Abbreviation: TC*

Family-first rule followers who believe that – while the system may be broken in America – hard work can still create success.



**People Power**  
*Abbreviation: PP*

Community-minded, politically engaged, and ready to fight for system reform to solve social issues like poverty.

*Source: obiaudiences.org*

# VARIABLES OF INTEREST



Entertainment preferences

News & TV Show Preferences  
Motivations to Watch TV  
Poverty Exposure on TV



Beliefs about poverty

Core values and morals  
Receiving government benefits  
Role of government



Civic engagement

Confidence in making a difference  
Civic actions taken



Beliefs about COVID-19 and race

COVID entertainment trends  
COVID & discrimination beliefs  
Racial discrimination beliefs

# TELEVISION PREFERENCES

- Most groups watched a wide variety of TV, but SS and PP lean toward scripted TV, while TC lean toward reality TV.
- DT do not watch as much TV as the other groups but enjoy niche cable shows like *Gold Rush*, *Live PD* and *The Curse of Oak Island*.
- Shows that all groups watch include *The Voice* and *The Walking Dead*.

# NEWS & LEISURE

- All groups frequently turn to television for news, especially local television news.
- PP are more likely than other groups to also get their news from other sources, like national newspapers and the radio.
- SS are most likely to get their news from social sources, like social media and their friends/family
- While Facebook remains popular among all groups, SS and PP are most engaged in other social media platforms.

# ENTERTAINMENT MOTIVES

- **PP are least likely to seek fun or pleasure from their entertainment and most likely to seeking meaning from entertainment.**
- **Both SS and PP are open to consuming a wide range of entertainment featuring different values and ethnicities.**
- **All groups and all ages are also engaging “comfort” entertainment – including old favorite TV shows, movies, and music during COVID.**

# POVERTY EMOTIONS

- When asked to pick emotions that best describes their feeling about poverty in America right now, at least two-thirds of all groups said it makes them feel sad.
- However, the groups varied widely on other emotions. PP are more likely to feel angry about poverty.
- On the other hand, DT were more likely to pick positive or neutral words to describe their feelings, like hopeful or curious.

# POVERTY POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

- **PP** are most likely to believe that a variety of policy proposals would reduce poverty in America, including increasing minimum, expanding Medicare, increasing taxes on the rich, and breaking up corporations.
- **DT** are least likely to think any of these proposals would be effective.
- **TC** and **SS** are more moderate in their beliefs; however, **SS** agree more with **PP**, and **TC** agree more with **DT**.

# COVID-19 PERCEIVED SEVERITY

- **PP** are most likely to say that **COVID** is a threat to health at all levels – themselves, their loved ones, and the U.S. population.
- **SS** are most likely to see the pandemic as a threat to their personal finances.
- **DT** are least likely to believe **COVID** presents a serious threat to the health of themselves or others, but they are most likely to believe it is a threat to their freedom.

# COVID-19 POLICY SUPPORT

- While all groups agree that COVID represents a serious threat to the U.S. economy, DT are far less supportive of policy solutions to address this economic impact.
- TC are also generally less supportive of these policies, although not to the same extent as DT.
- PP and SS are more supportive of most equity-based COVID policy solutions.
- Only PP supports providing assistance to undocumented immigrants.

# COVID-19 RACIAL DISPARITIES

- **PP are most likely to believe that racial disparities exist in COVID hospitalization rates due to external factors such lack of access to healthcare.**
- **TC are less likely, and DT far less likely, than PP to think these external factors are a major reason for the disparities.**
- **Substantial proportions of all groups except PP also consider health and lifestyle choices to be major factors for the disparities.**

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

- TC and DT are the most likely to believe that it would be *easy* make their community a better place to live if people worked together.
- PP were most likely to most take civic actions based on on something they learned from entertainment, including “high-effort actions” like donating or attending a rally.
- The most common actions for all groups were relatively “low-effort” like talking to a friend or family member.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The top scripted shows reach most audiences, but they are most popular with SS and PP.**
- **These groups are also likely to take civic actions based on something they learned from fictional TV/movies.**
- **While DT watch less television and are less likely to be moved to action through television, they may still be influenced through popular culture.**
- **For most groups (including DT), seeing more scripted shows with storylines about poverty was associated with more support for at least one poverty-related policy.**

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **TC** represents a diverse group that was more likely than other groups to say they registered to vote because of something they saw on television.
- **SS** are the most group most engaged with social media. They are most likely to get their news from social media and check many social media platforms frequently.

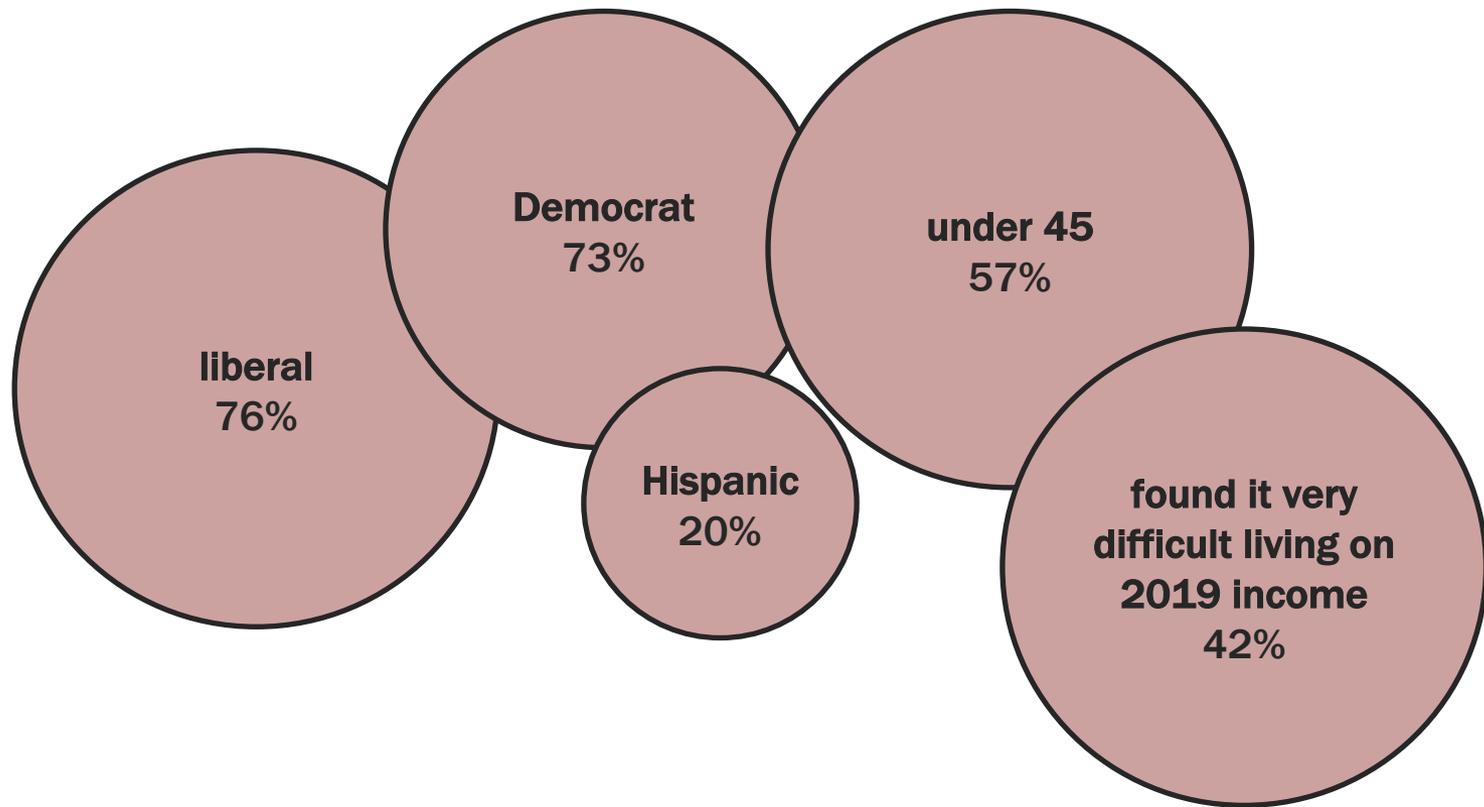


# DEMOGRAPHICS AND CORE BELIEFS



# IF YOU SAY SO

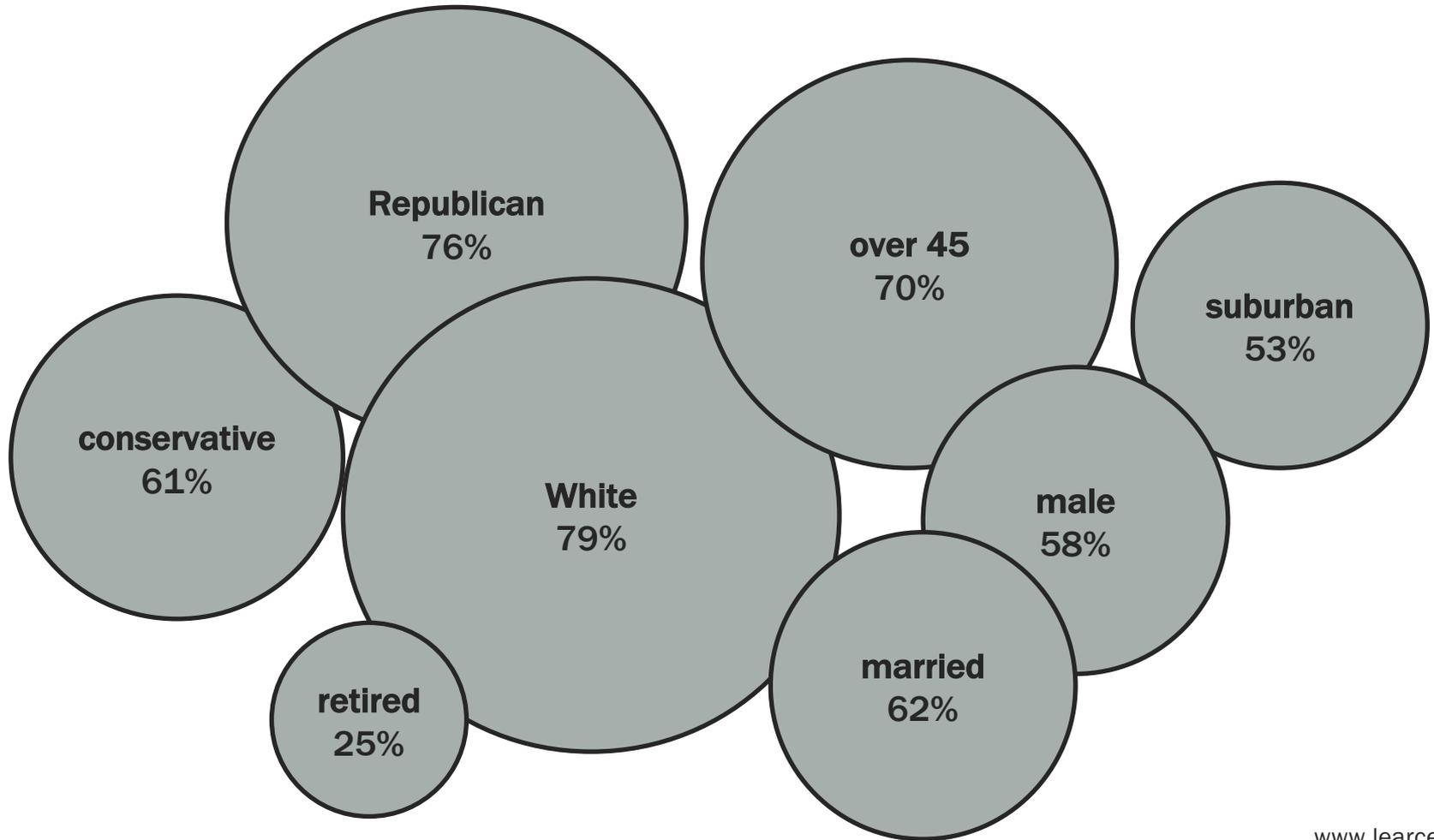
*who are they?*





# **DON'T TREAD ON ME**

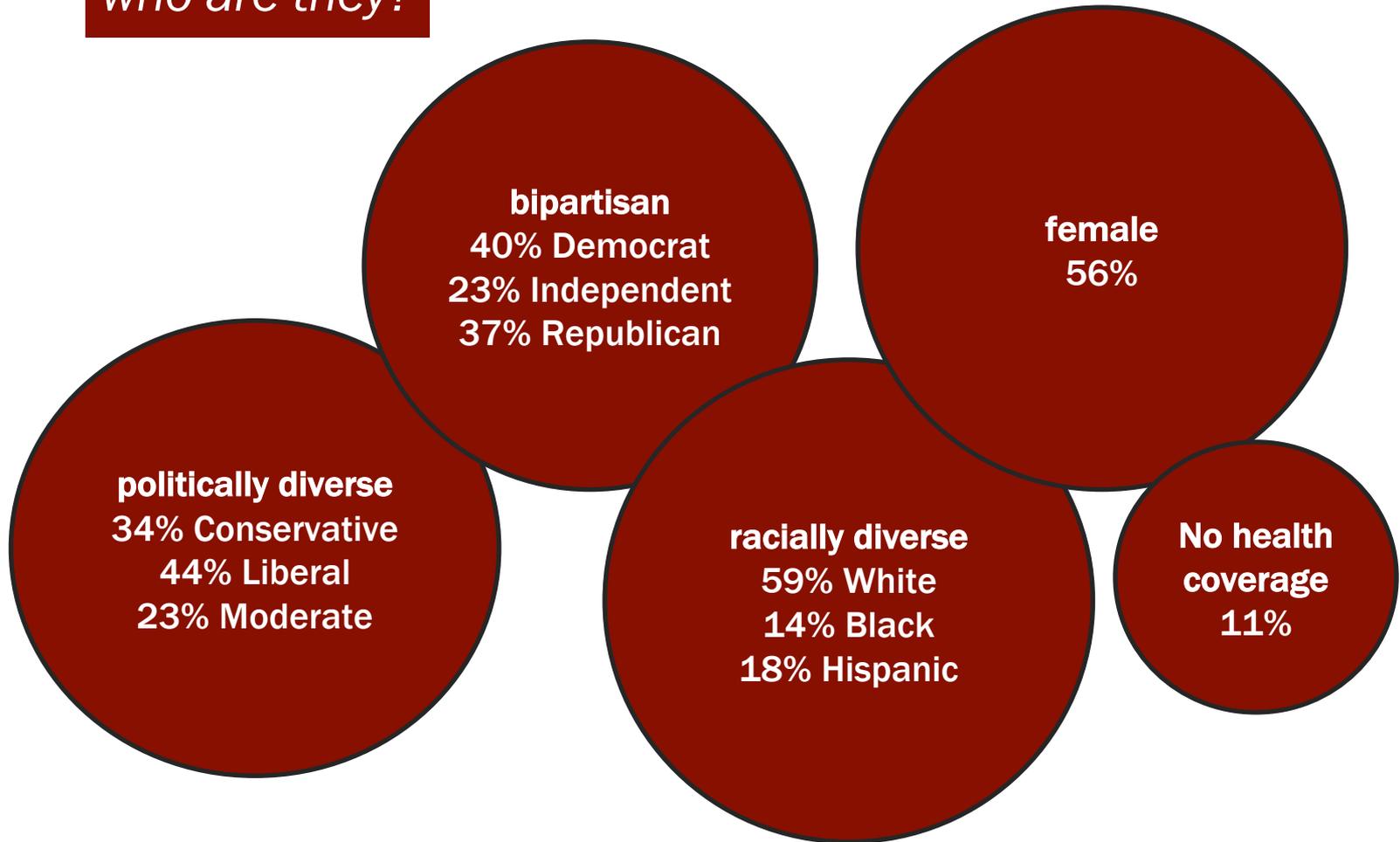
*who are they?*





# **TOUGH COOKIES**

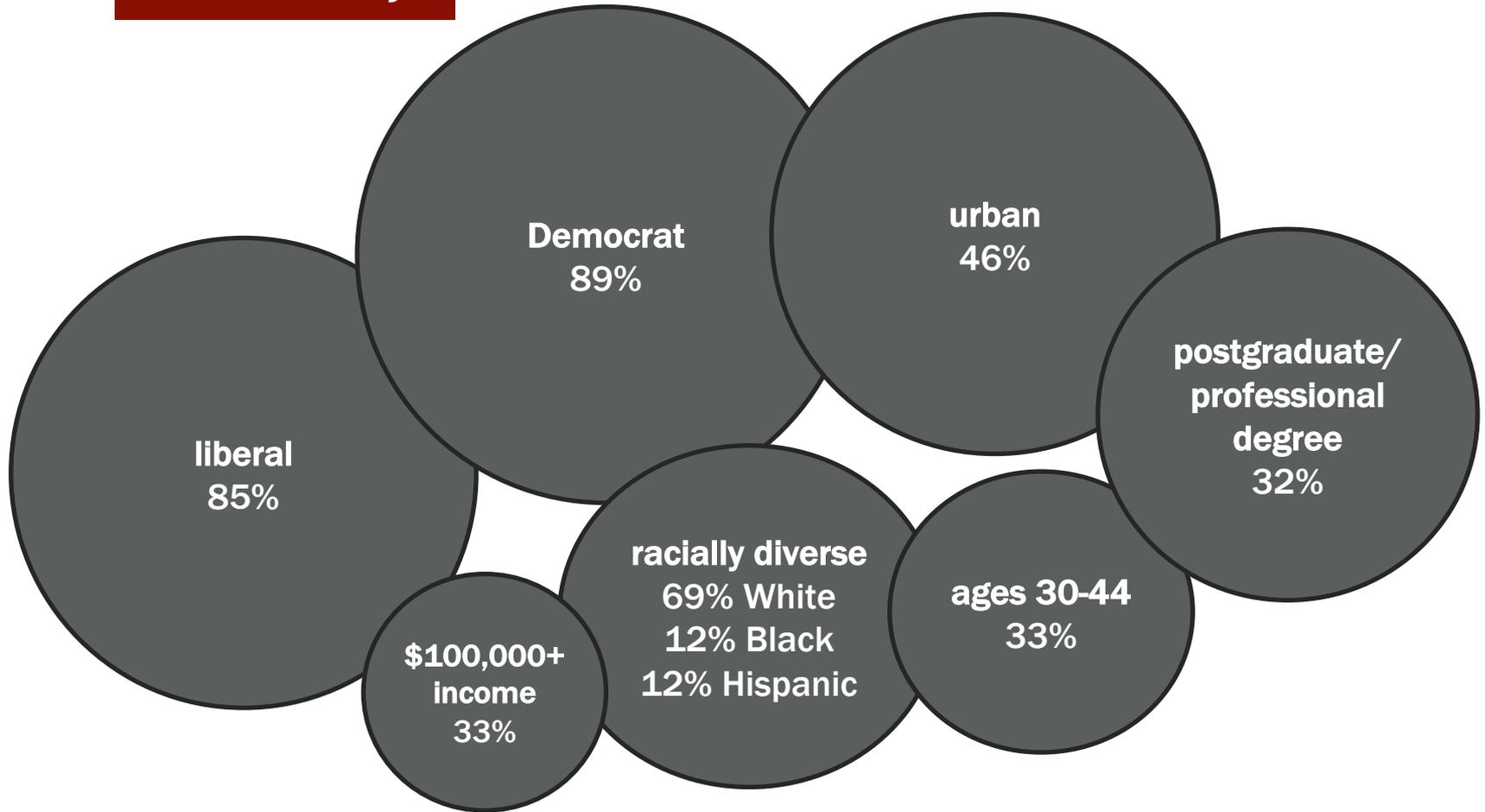
*who are they?*





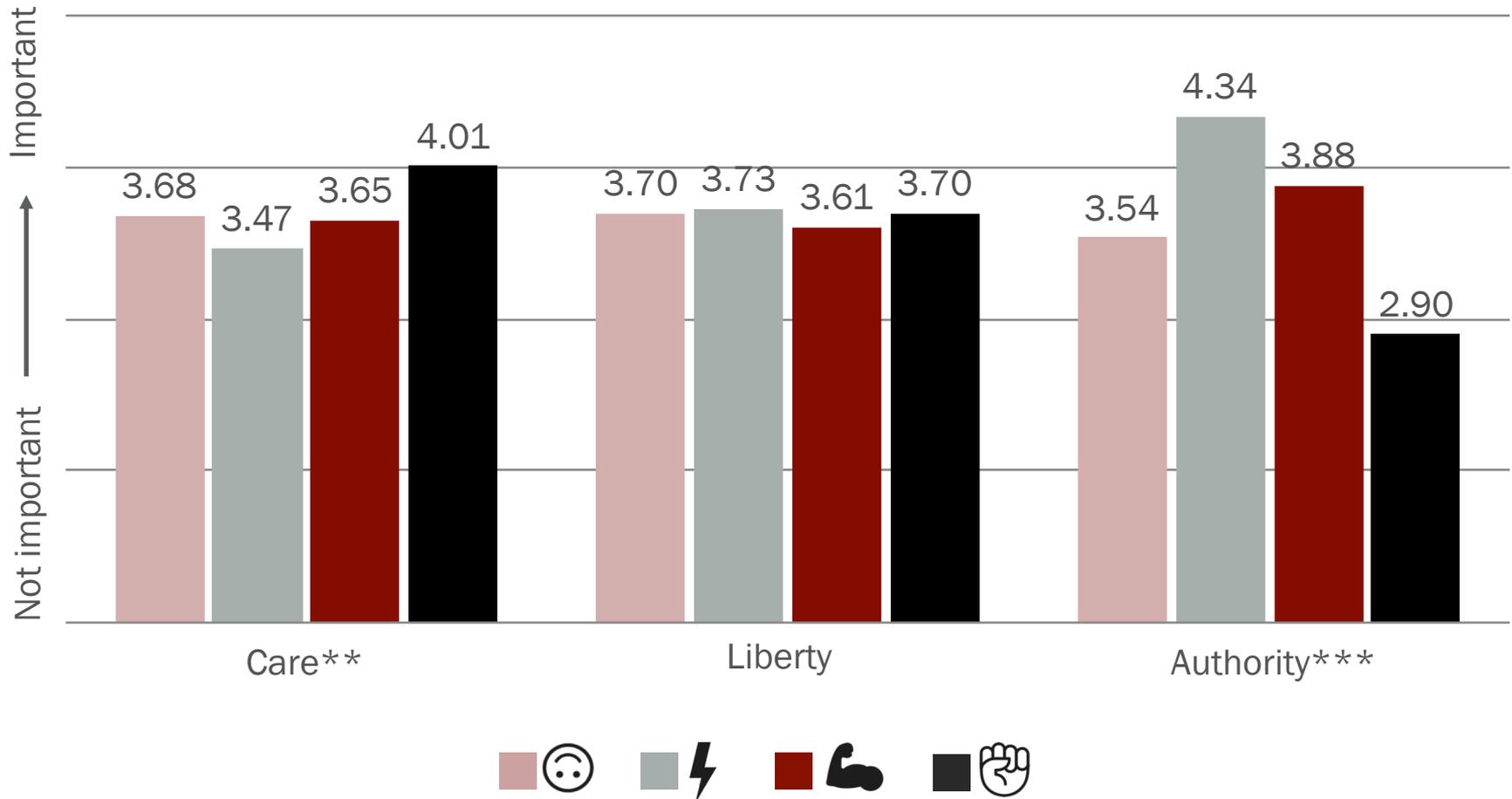
# PEOPLE POWER

*who are they?*



# CORE MORALS

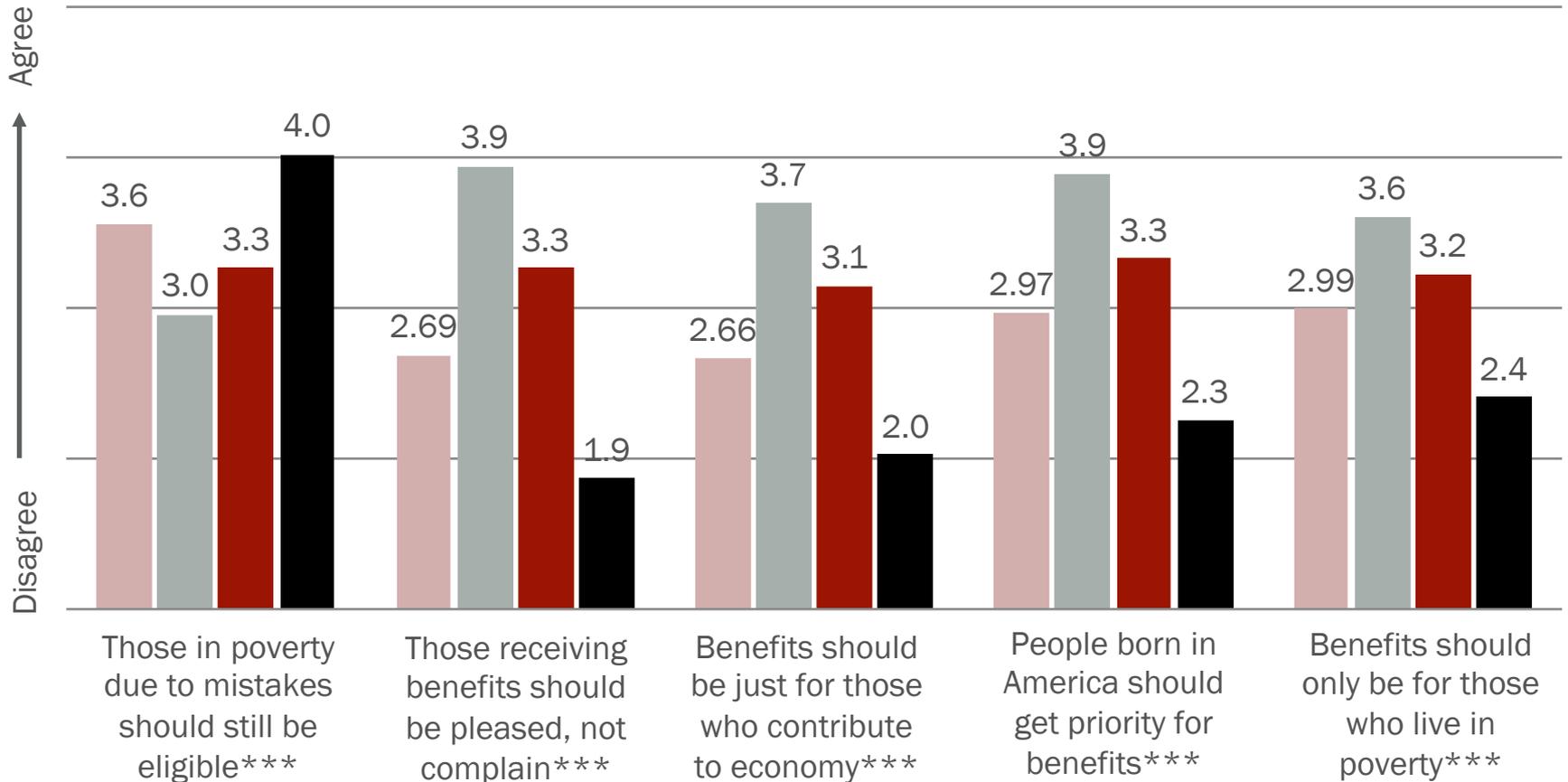
PP rely more on the morality of care or compassion,  
while DT rely more on the morality of authority



\*\*medium effect

# GOVERNMENT BENEFITS: DESERVINGNESS

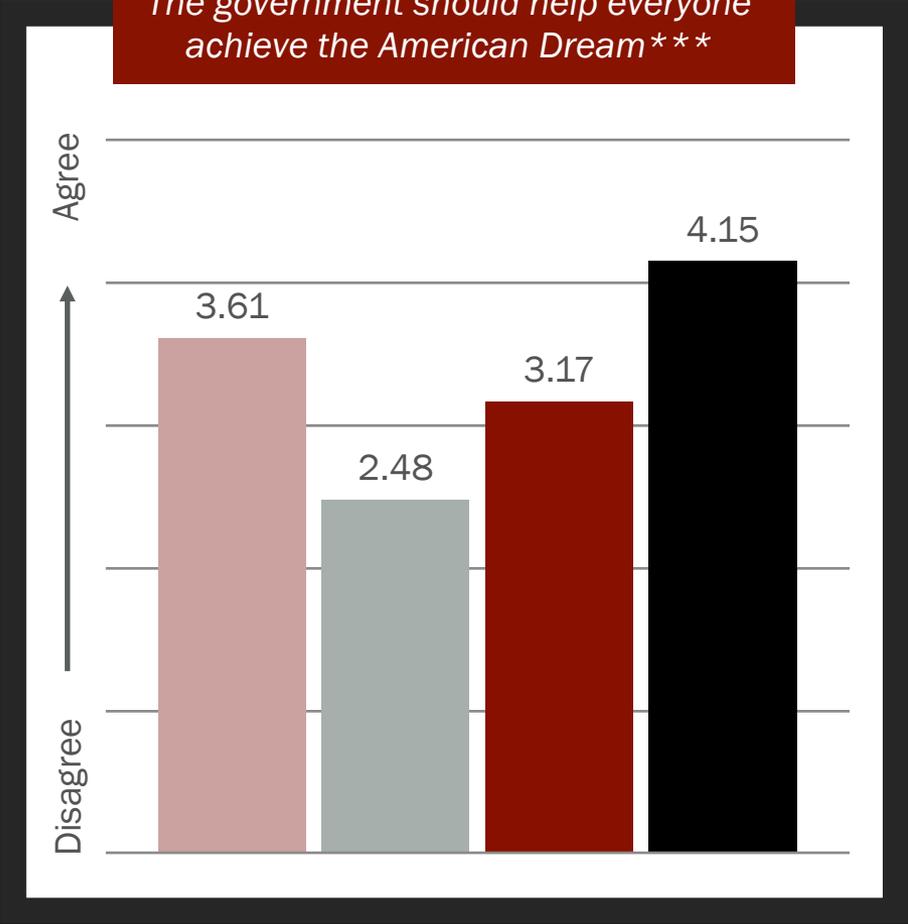
PP are the most likely, and DT the least likely, to perceive those receiving government benefits as deserving



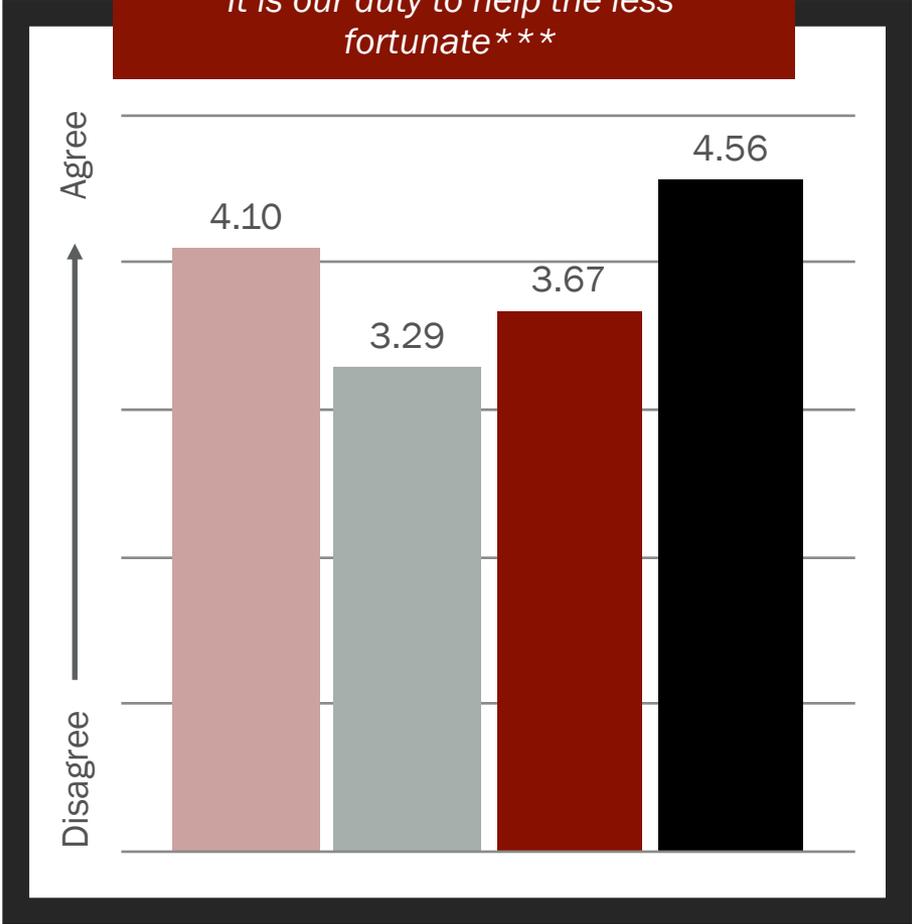
\*\*\*large effect

# GOVERNMENT / OUR DUTY TO HELP OTHERS

The government should help everyone achieve the American Dream\*\*\*



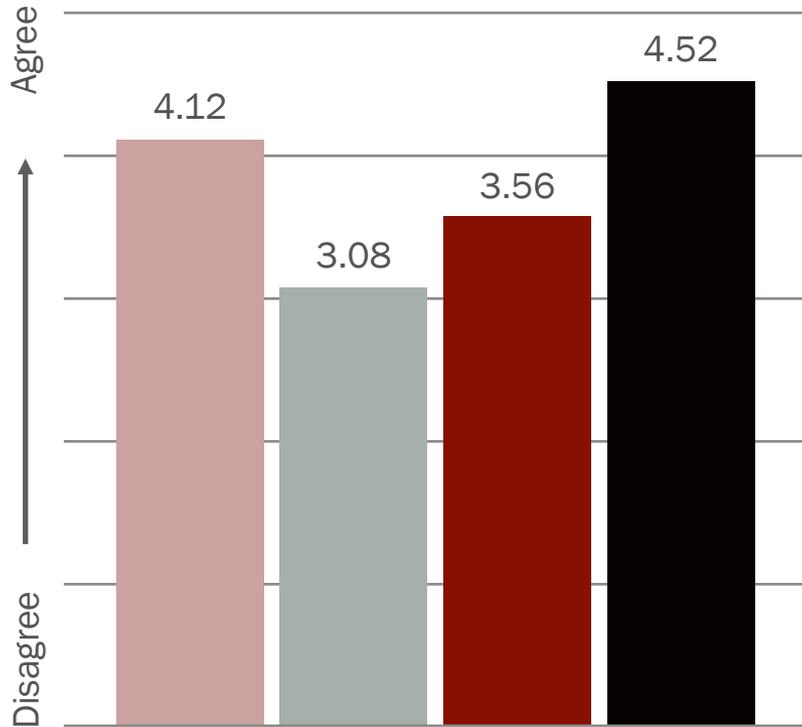
It is our duty to help the less fortunate\*\*\*



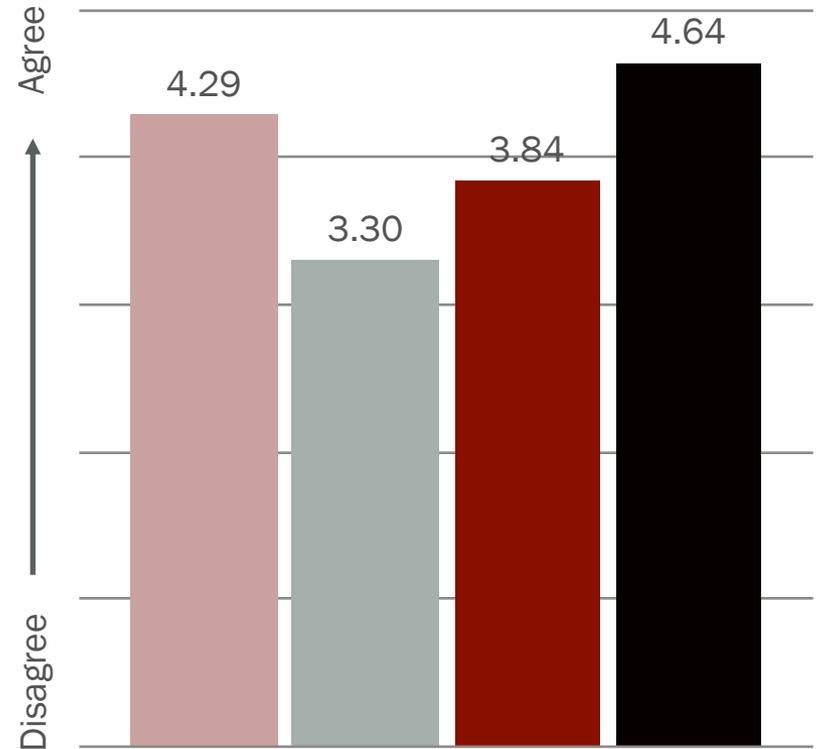
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# HEALTH EQUITY ATTITUDES

*Unjust if some people have more of an opportunity to be healthy\*\*\**



*Everyone should have an equal opportunity to be healthy\*\*\**



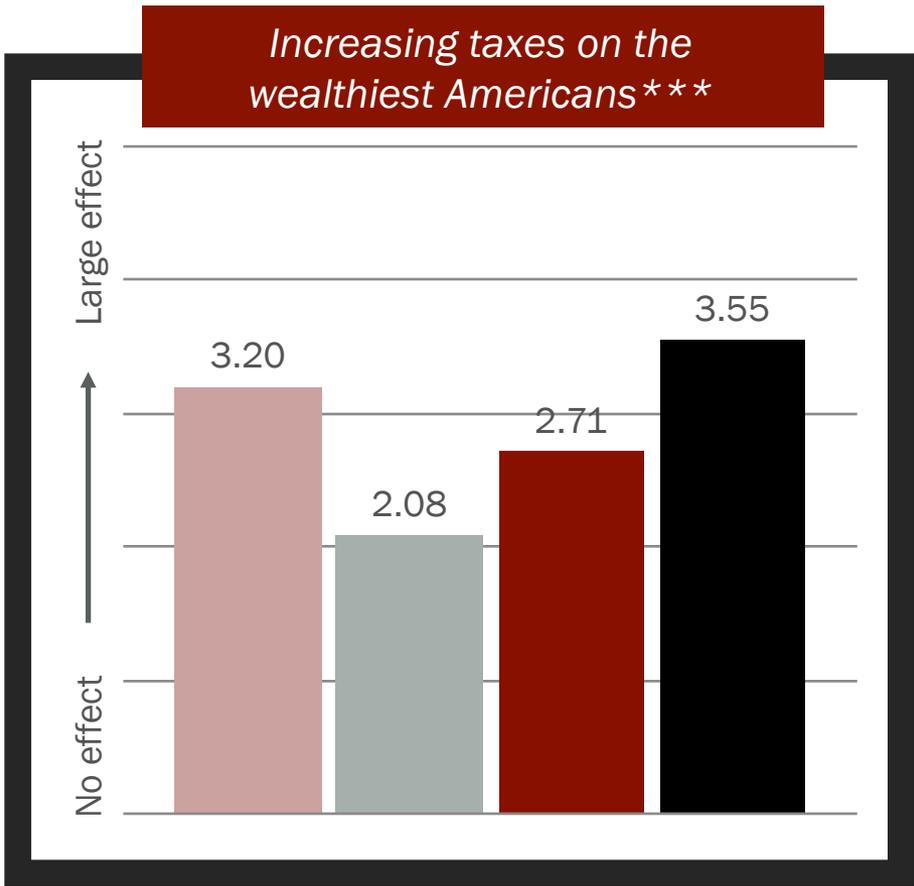
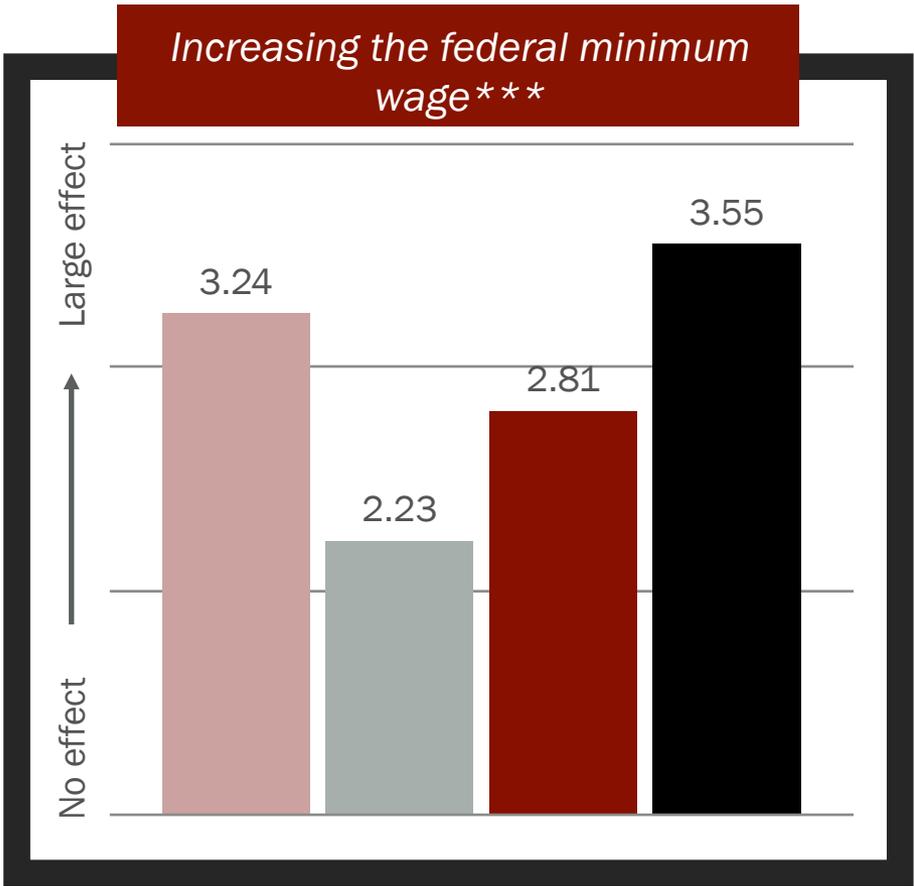
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# BELIEFS AND EMOTIONS ABOUT POVERTY

# POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

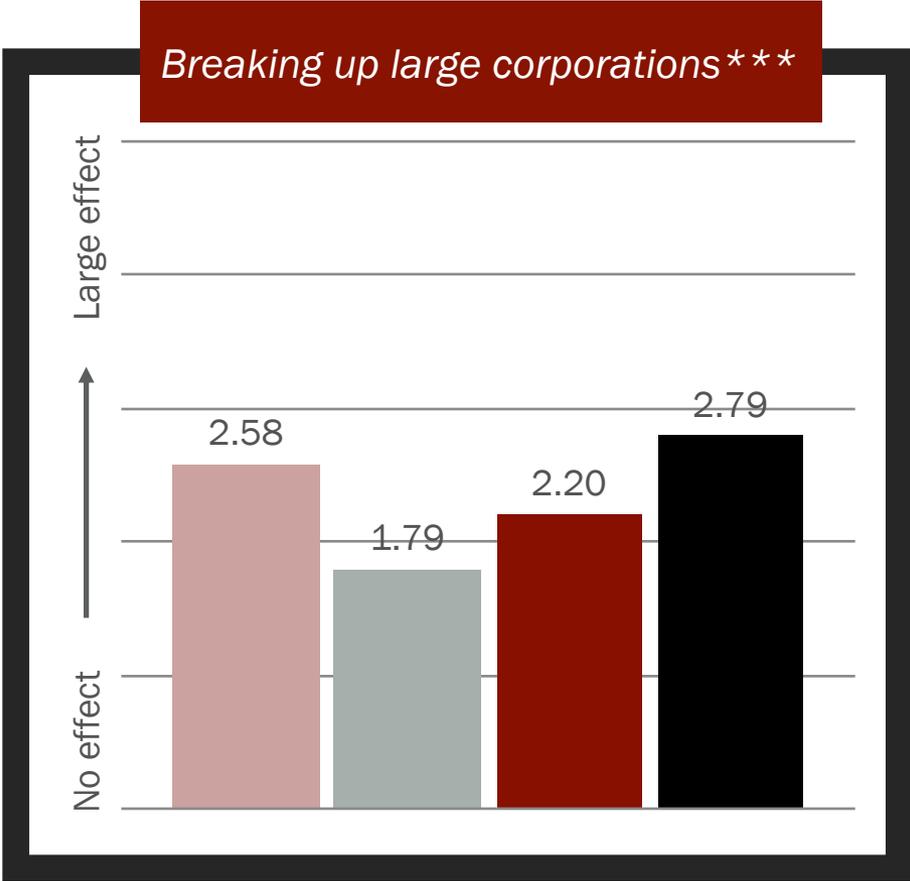
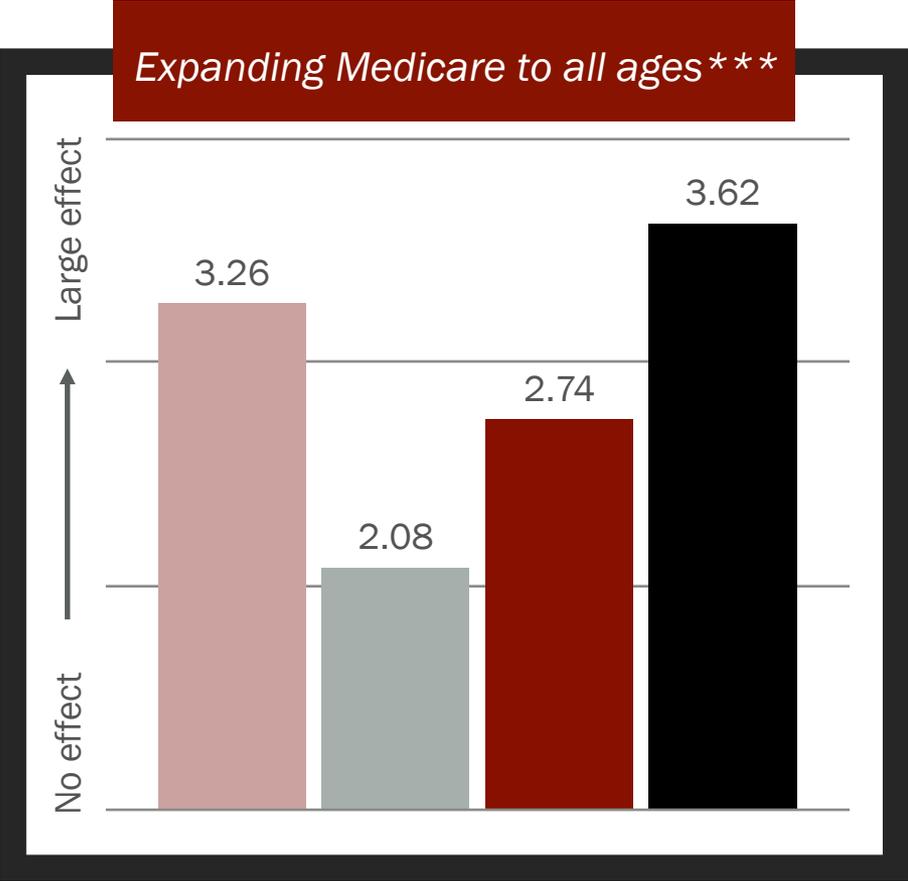
PP are most likely, and DT least likely to think all policy proposals would reduce poverty in the US



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# POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

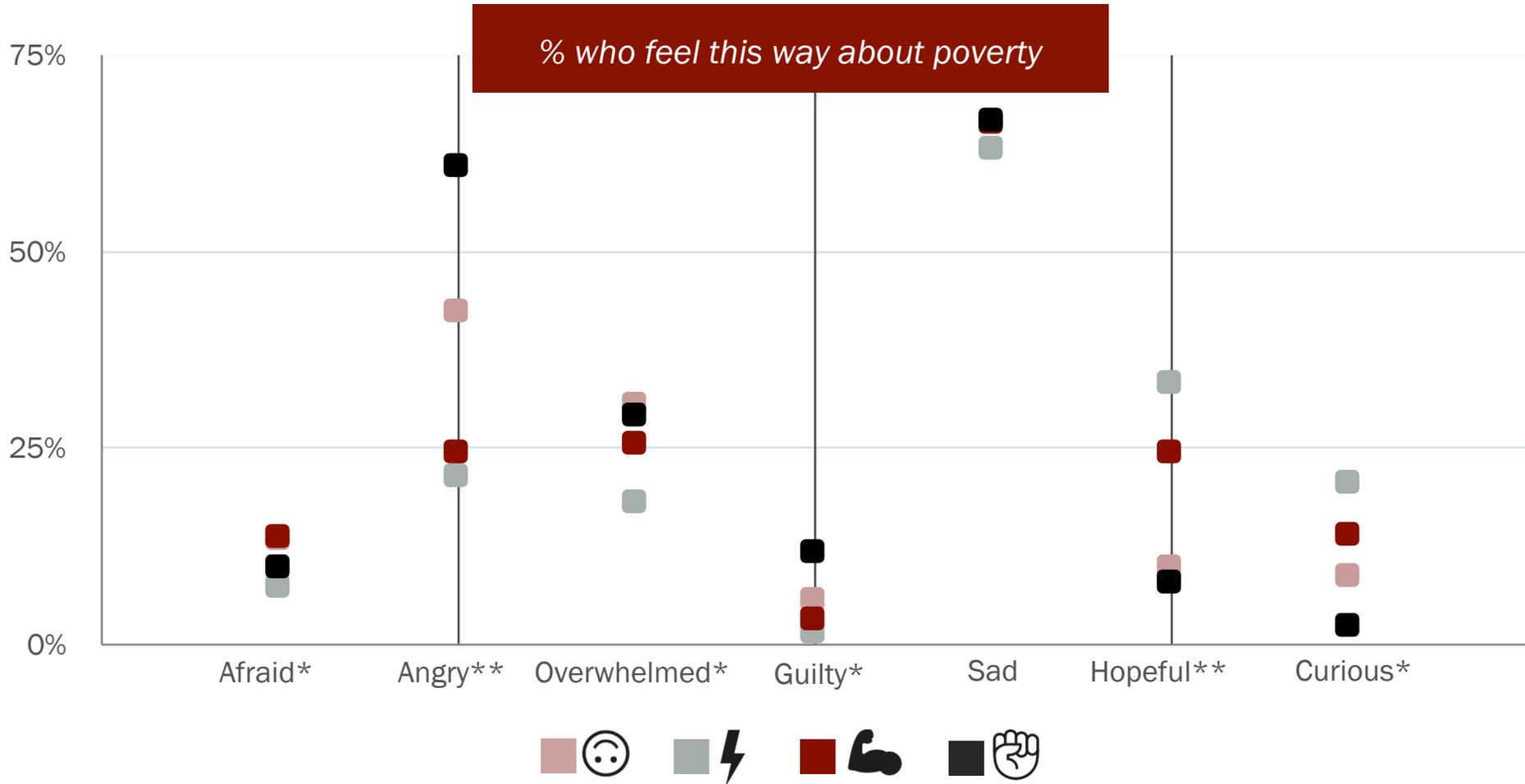
PP are most likely, and DT least likely to think all policy proposals would reduce poverty in the US



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# FEELINGS/EMOTIONS ABOUT POVERTY

PP are most likely to feel angry about poverty in the United States, while DT are most likely to feel hopeful and curious



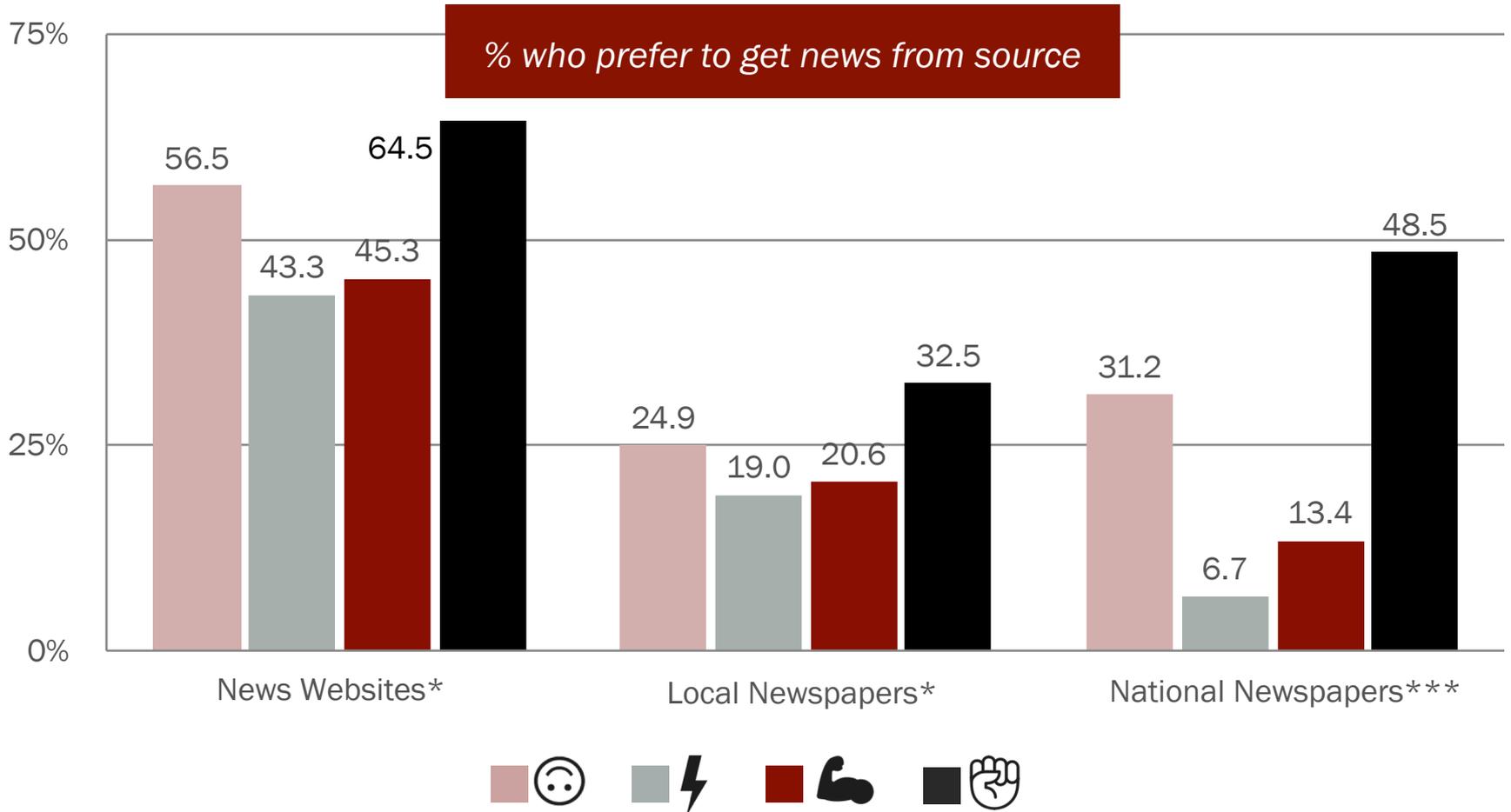
\*small effect; \*\*medium effect



# NEWS PREFERENCES

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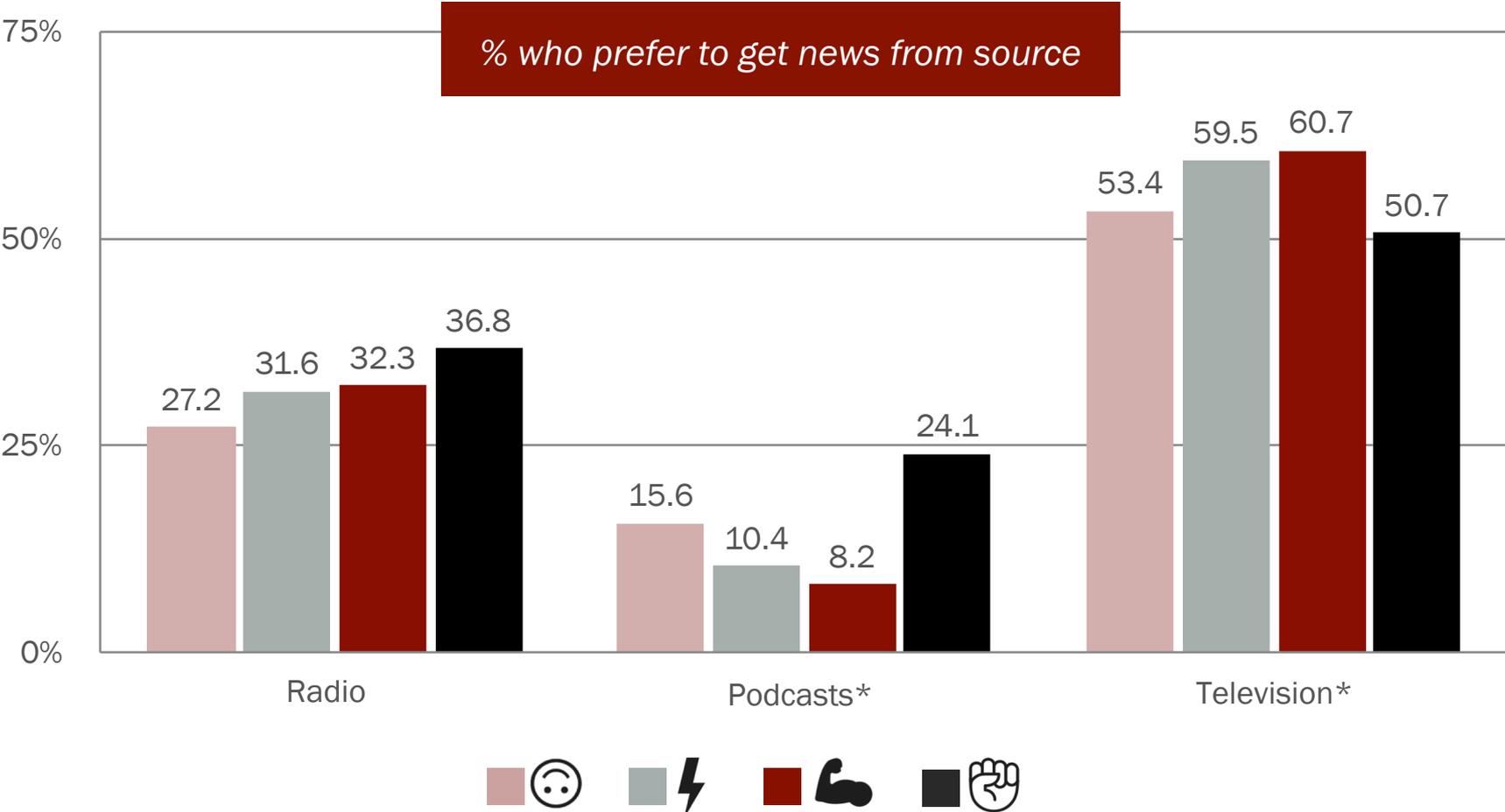
PP are more likely to get news from most legacy news sources, especially national newspapers



\*small effect; \*\*medium effect

# NEWS PREFERENCES

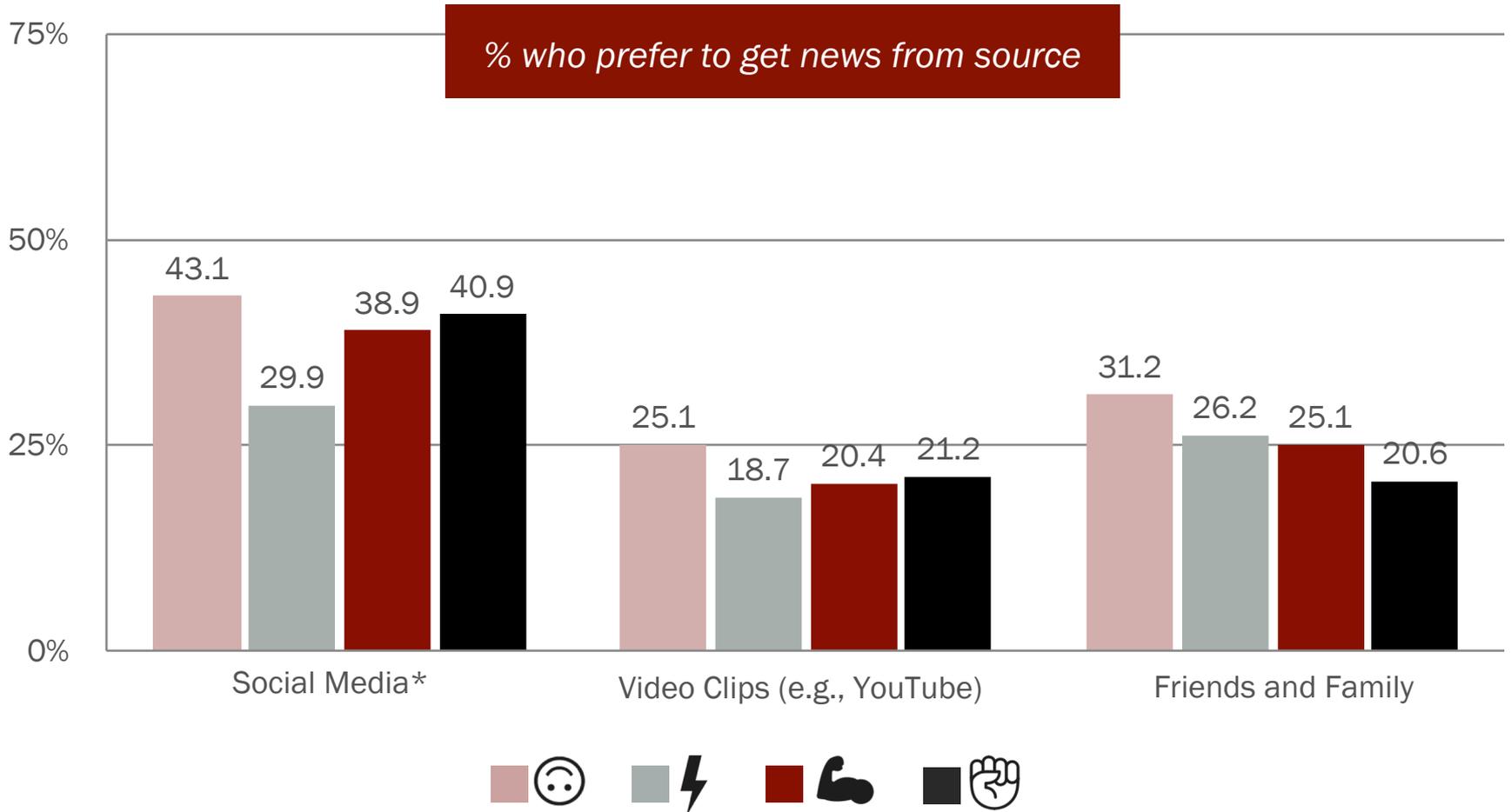
At least half of all groups prefer to get their news from television, and PP are most likely to also get news from audio sources



\*small effect

# NEWS PREFERENCES

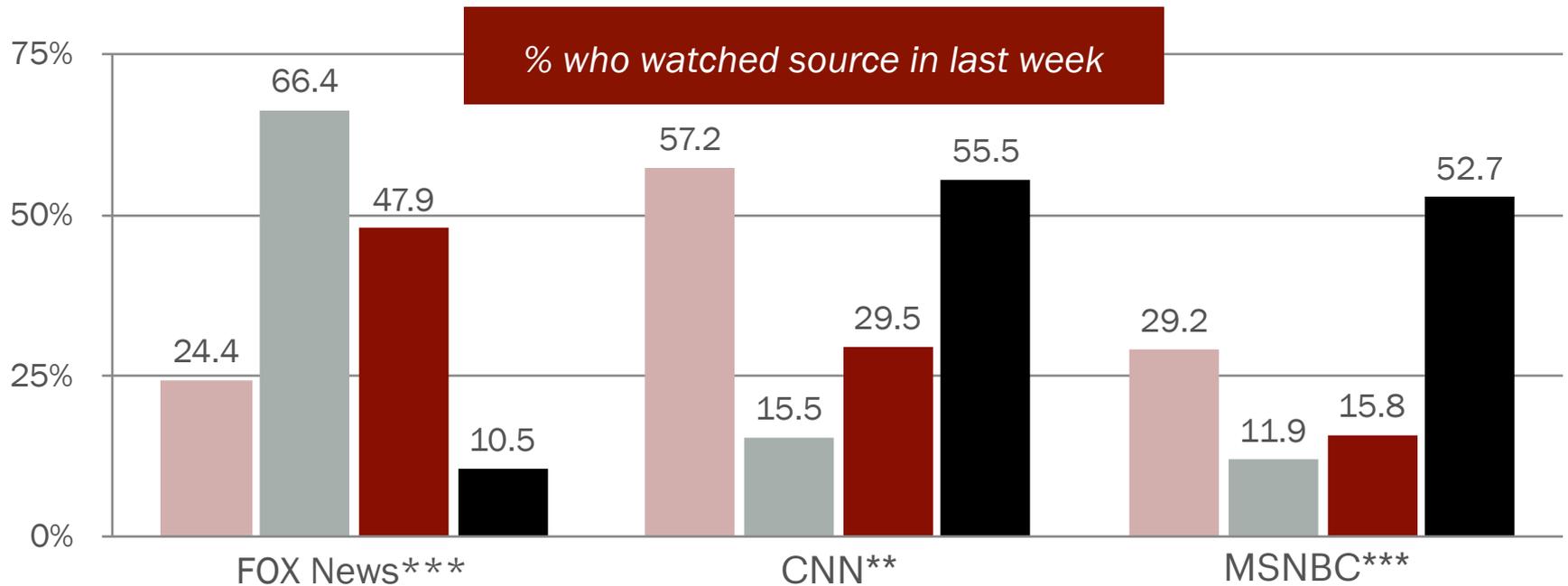
SS are most likely to prefer to get their news from social sources, like YouTube, social media, and their friends and family



\*small effect

# TELEVISION NEWS PREFERENCES†

Cable news preferences differ dramatically between the groups, with DT turning most to FOX News, SS turning to CNN, and PP turning to CNN & MSNBC



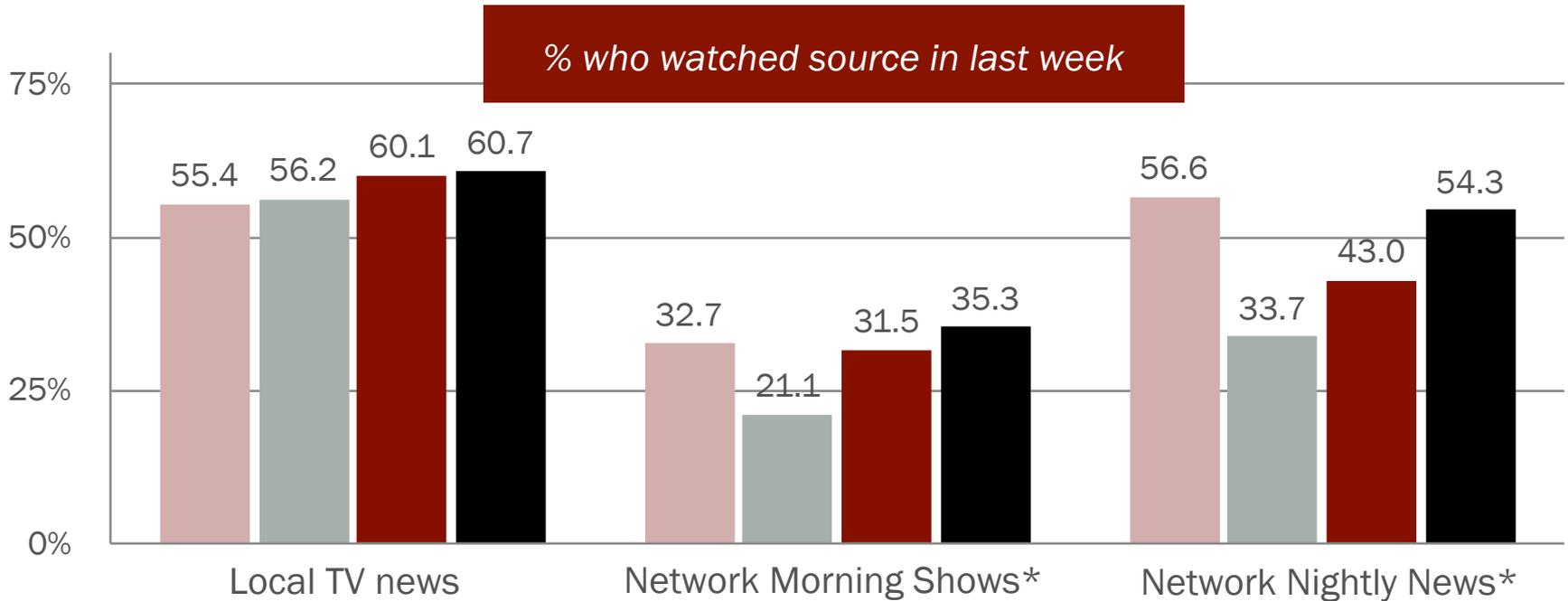
†Only participants who said they prefer to get their news from television were asked which TV sources they turn to for news.



\*\*medium effect; \*\*\*large effect

# TELEVISION NEWS PREFERENCES†

Over half of all groups got their news from local television news in the past week



†Only participants who said they prefer to get their news from television were asked which TV sources they turn to for news.



\*small effect;



# TV PREFERENCES

# TELEVISION PREFERENCES

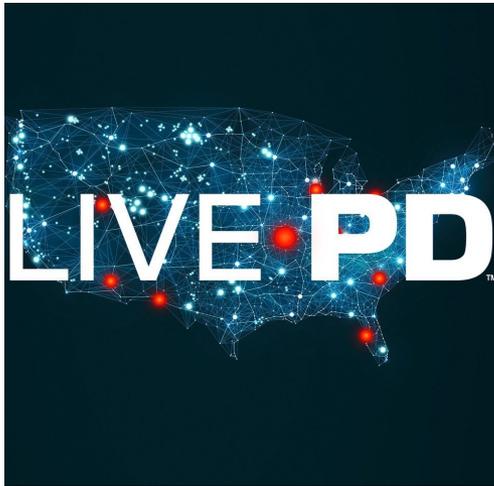
- **We asked participants about 45 popular television shows**
- **Participants were first asked if they had watched each show enough to have an opinion about.**
- **Participants who had watched the show were then asked how much they liked the show.**
- **A full list of shows can be found in Appendix A.**



IF YOU SAY SO

*Entertainment preferences*

*what do they watch?*



# DON'T TREAD ON ME

*Entertainment preferences*

*what do they watch?*



# TOUGH COOKIES

*Entertainment preferences*

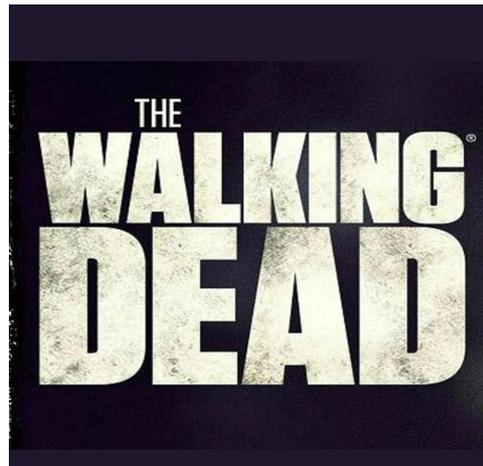
*what do they watch?*



## PEOPLE POWER

*Entertainment preferences*

*what do they watch?*



ALL GROUPS

*Entertainment preferences*

*what do they watch?*

# POVERTY SCRIPTED TV

For all groups except PP, seeing more scripted shows with poverty storylines was associated with higher support for at least one poverty-related policy

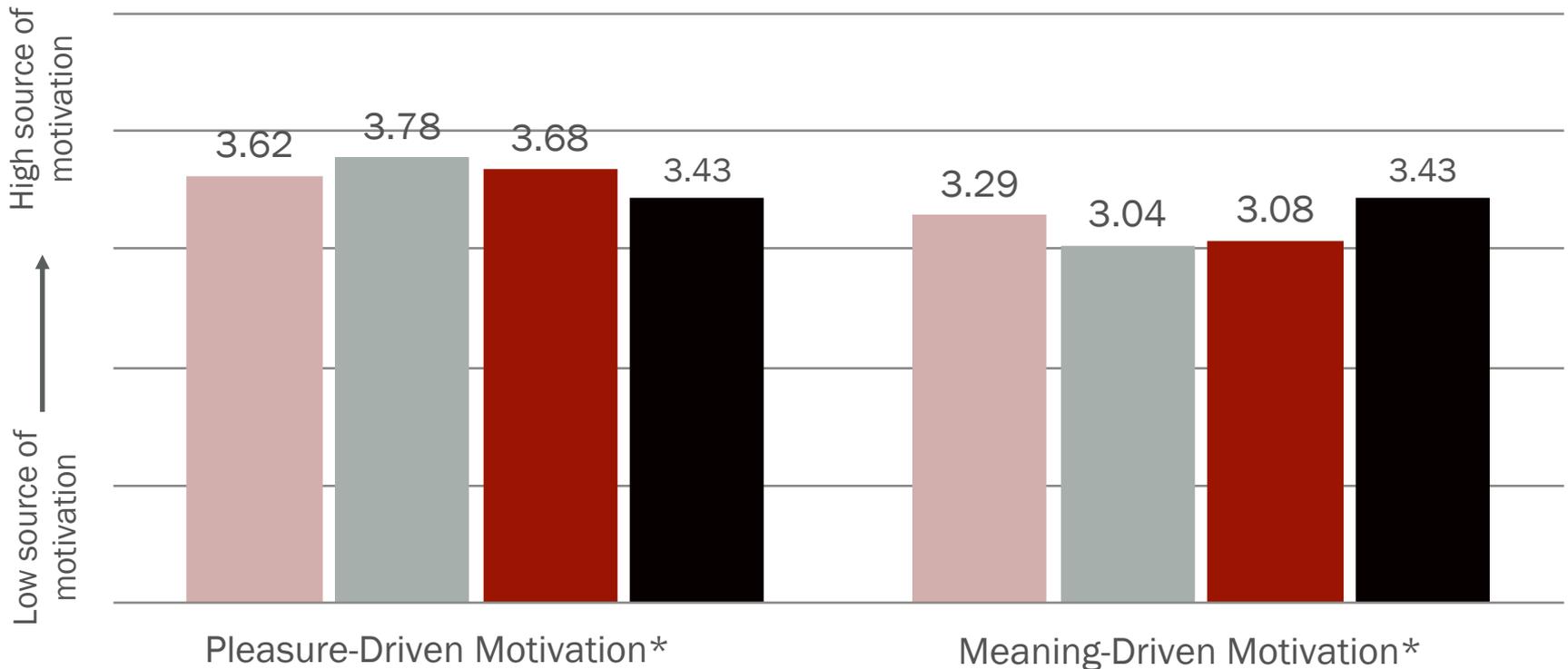


Increasing the federal minimum wage	+		+	
Increasing taxes on the wealthiest Americans		+	+	
Expanding Medicare so that it covers Americans of all ages				
Breaking up large corporations				

*Note: A plus sign indicates there is a significant positive association ( $p < .05$ ) between the number of shows with poverty storylines and support for the policy. No symbol indicates no significant association. Association cannot be interpreted as impact.*

# MOTIVATIONS FOR ENTERTAINMENT

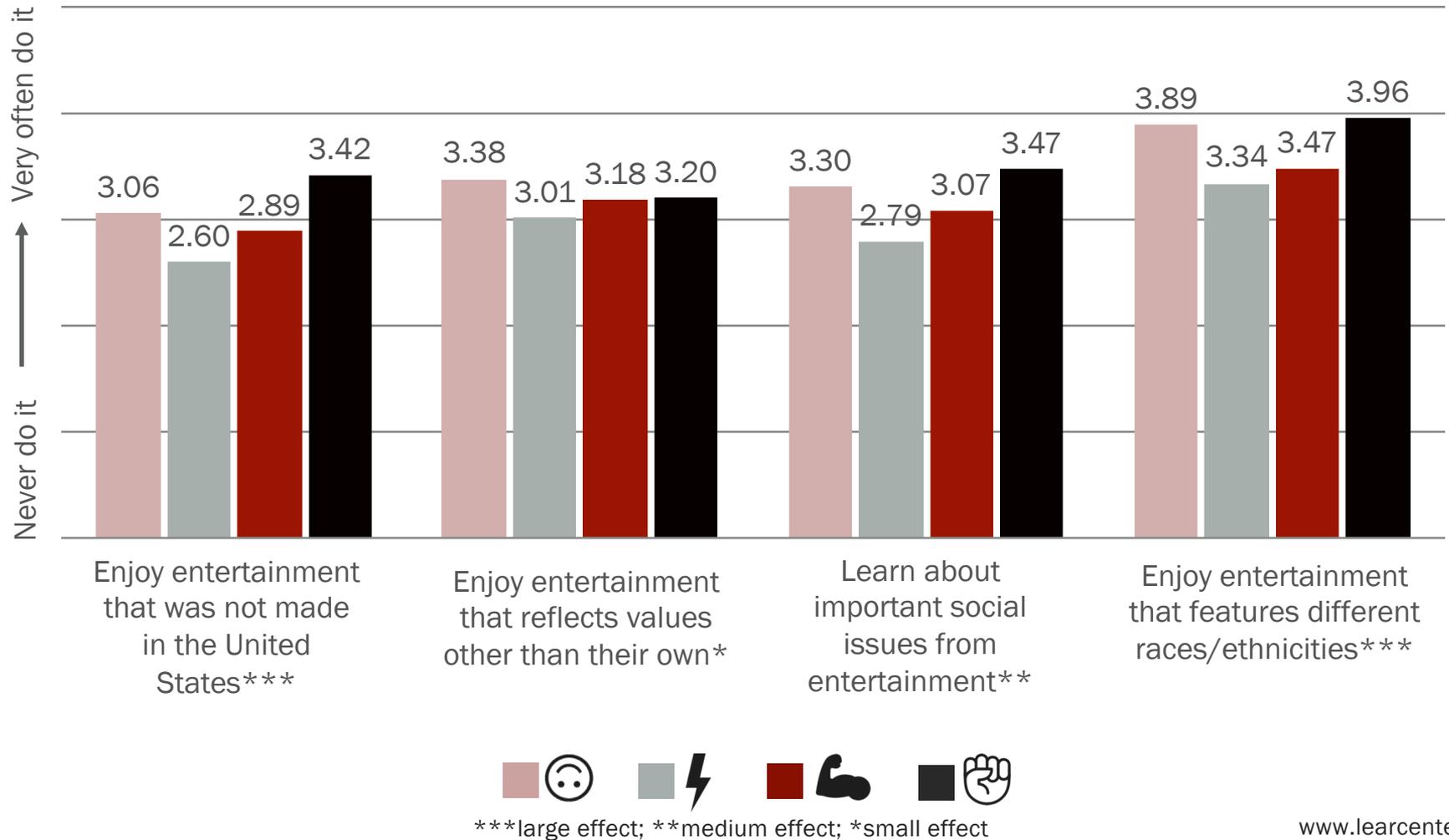
DT are most likely to have pleasure-driven motivations for entertainment,  
And PP are most likely to have meaning-driven motivation



\*small effect

# OPENNESS TO ENTERTAINMENT

SS and PP most often enjoy different types of entertainment, while DT are least likely to have this openness toward entertainment

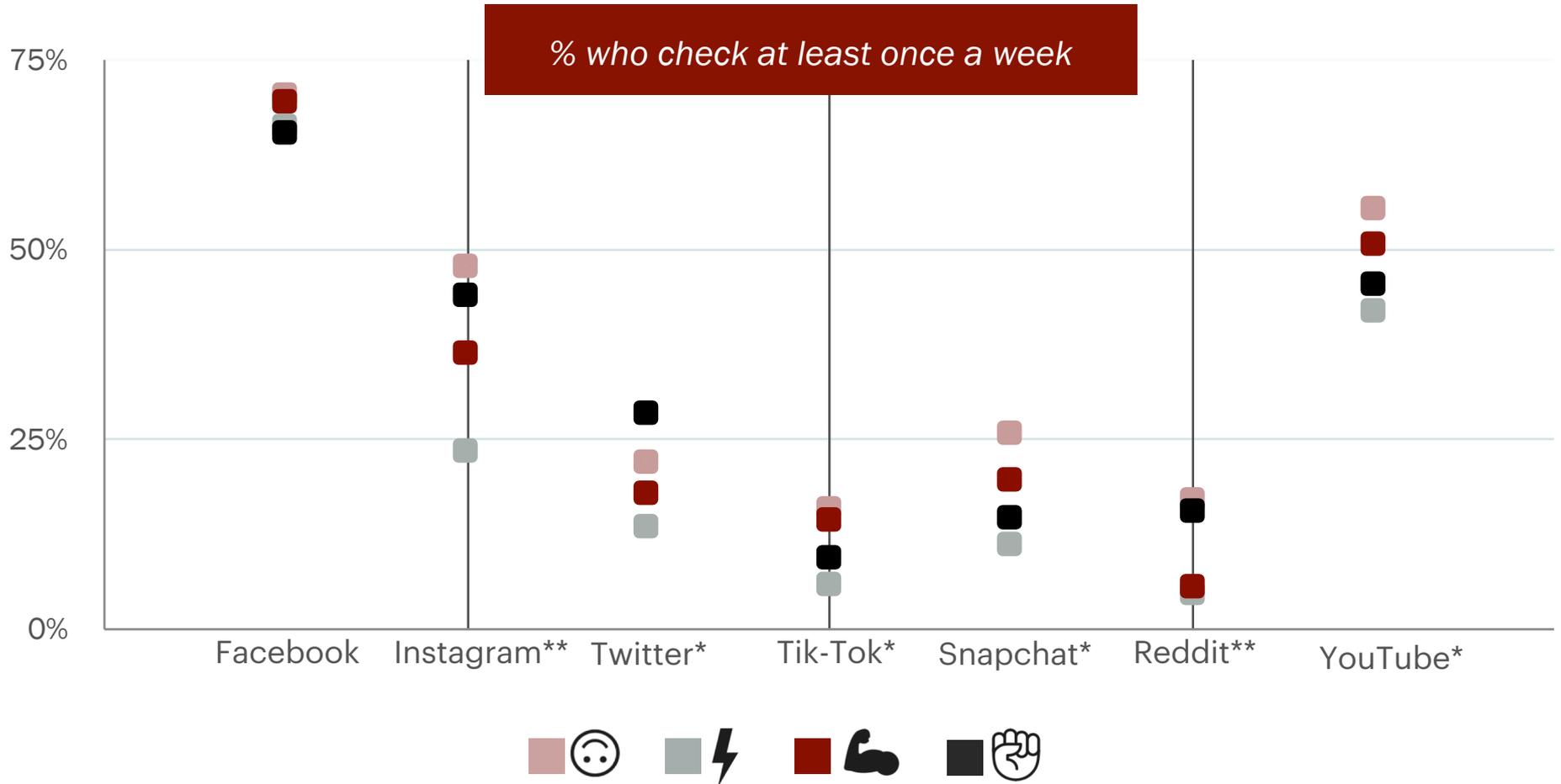




# OTHER CULTURAL PREFERENCES

# SOCIAL MEDIA PREFERENCES

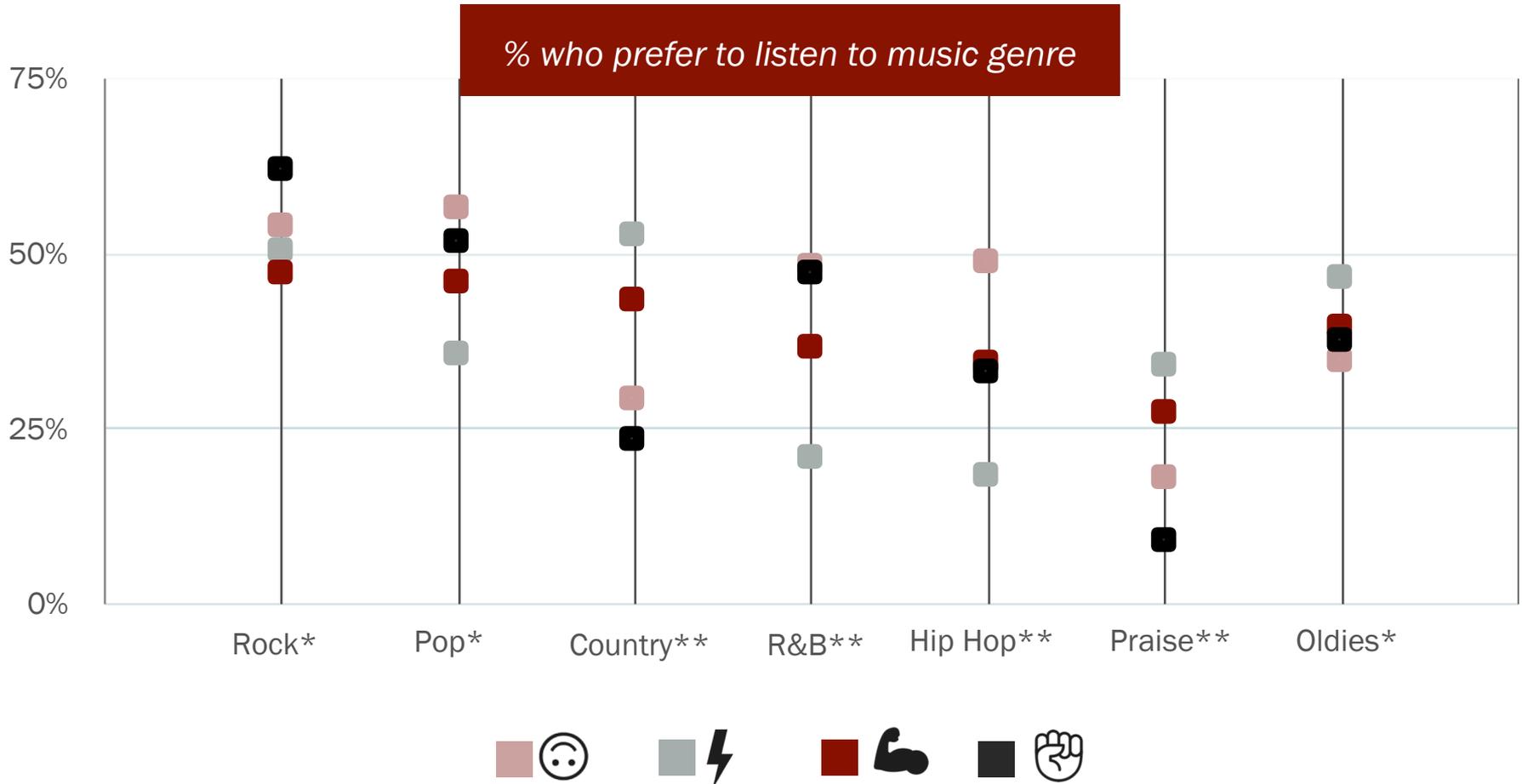
Facebook remains the most popular social media platform for all groups



\*small effect; \*\*medium effect

# MUSIC PREFERENCES

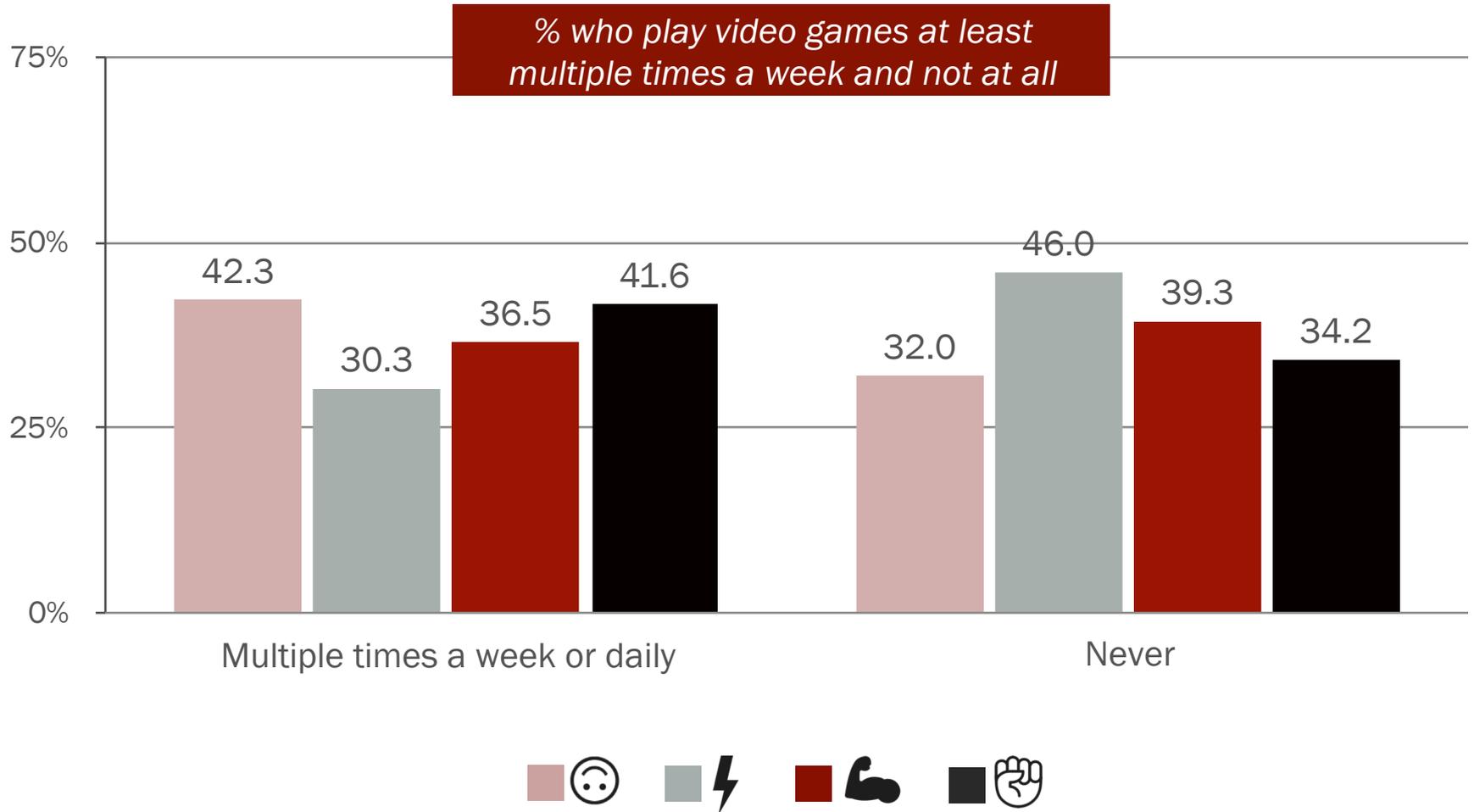
DT are least likely to prefer Hip Hop, R&B, and Pop, but most likely to prefer country, Christian praise, and oldies music



\*small effect; \*\*medium effect

# VIDEO GAMES

SS play video games most frequently,  
while DT play video games the least frequently

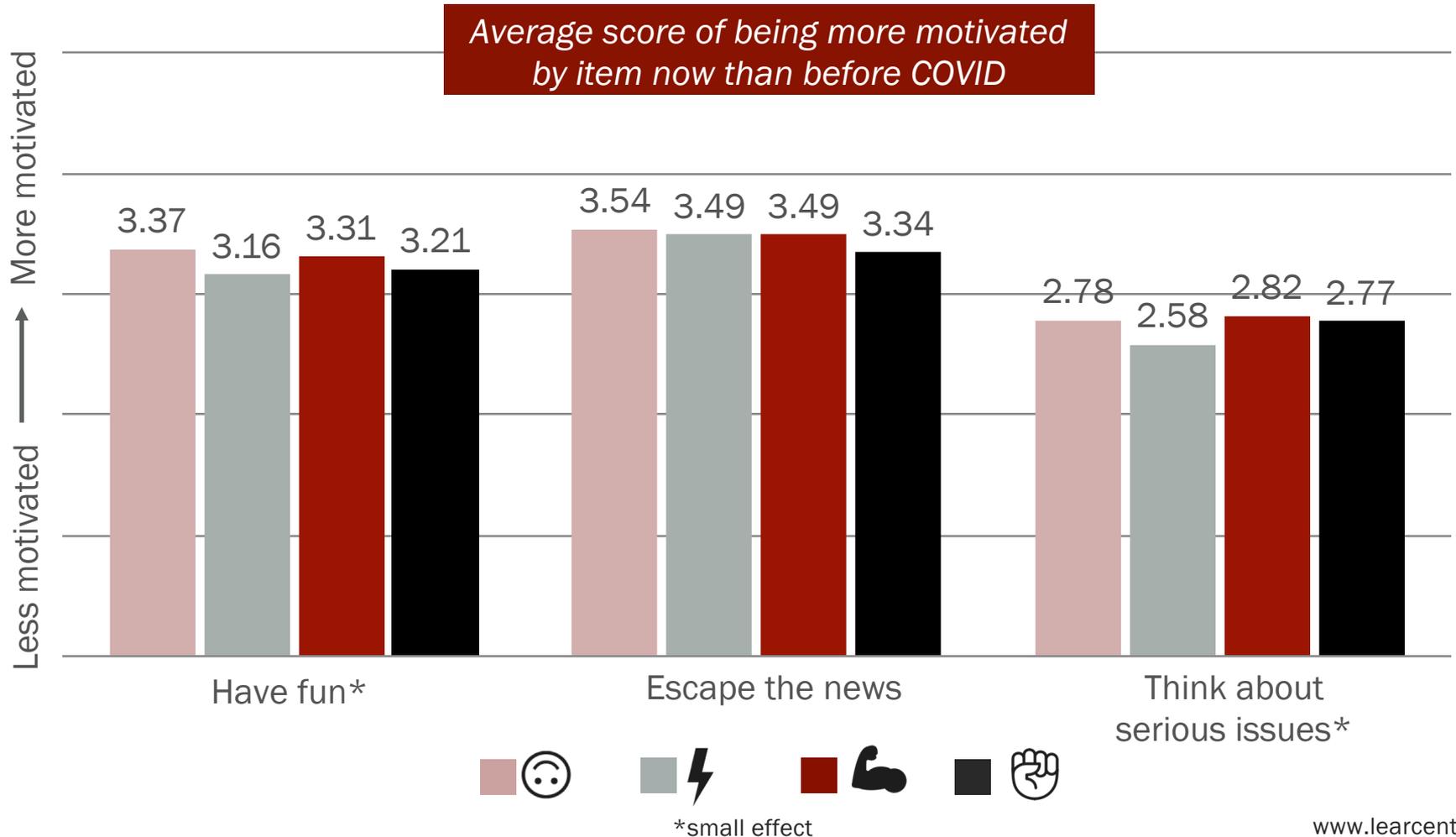




# COVID-RELATED ENTERTAINMENT TRENDS

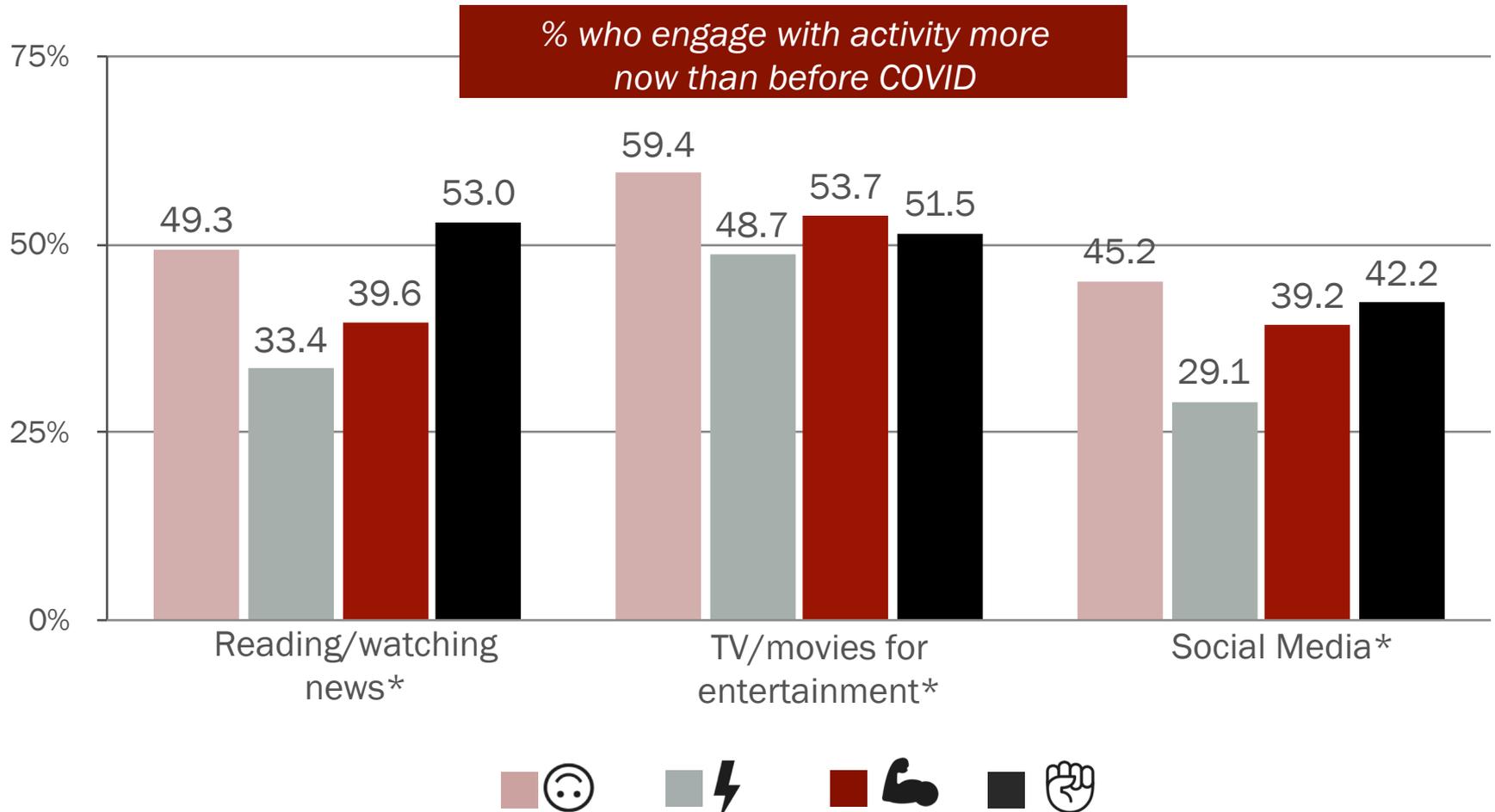
# ENTERTAINMENT MOTIVATION CHANGES

While all groups were somewhat more motivated by pleasure during COVID-19, the pandemic did not dramatically change motivations for any group



# MORE TIME WITH ENTERTAINMENT

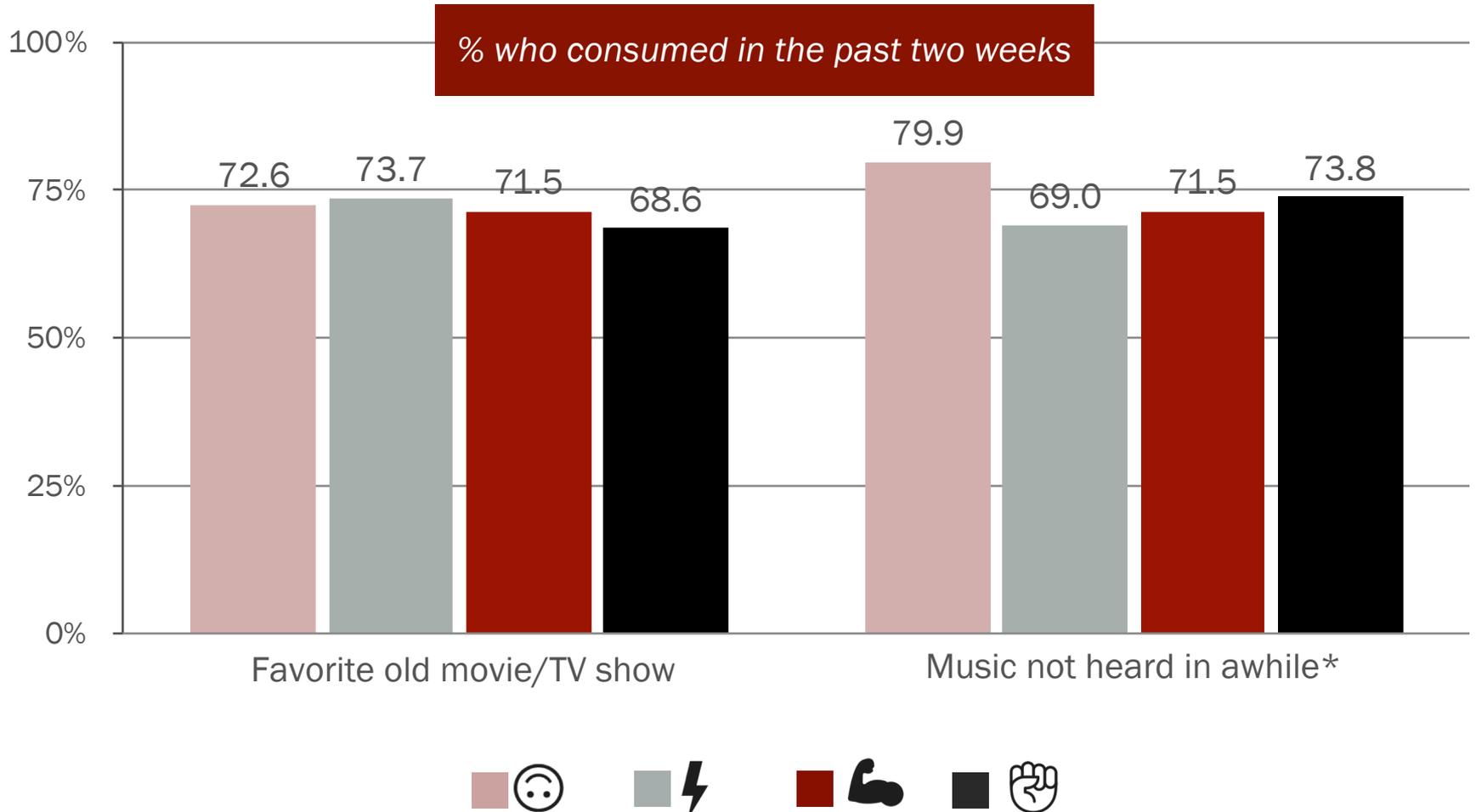
PP are most likely to be reading/watching more news during COVID, while SS are more likely to be watching more TV and engaging in more social media.



\*small effect

# “COMFORT” ENTERTAINMENT CONSUMPTION

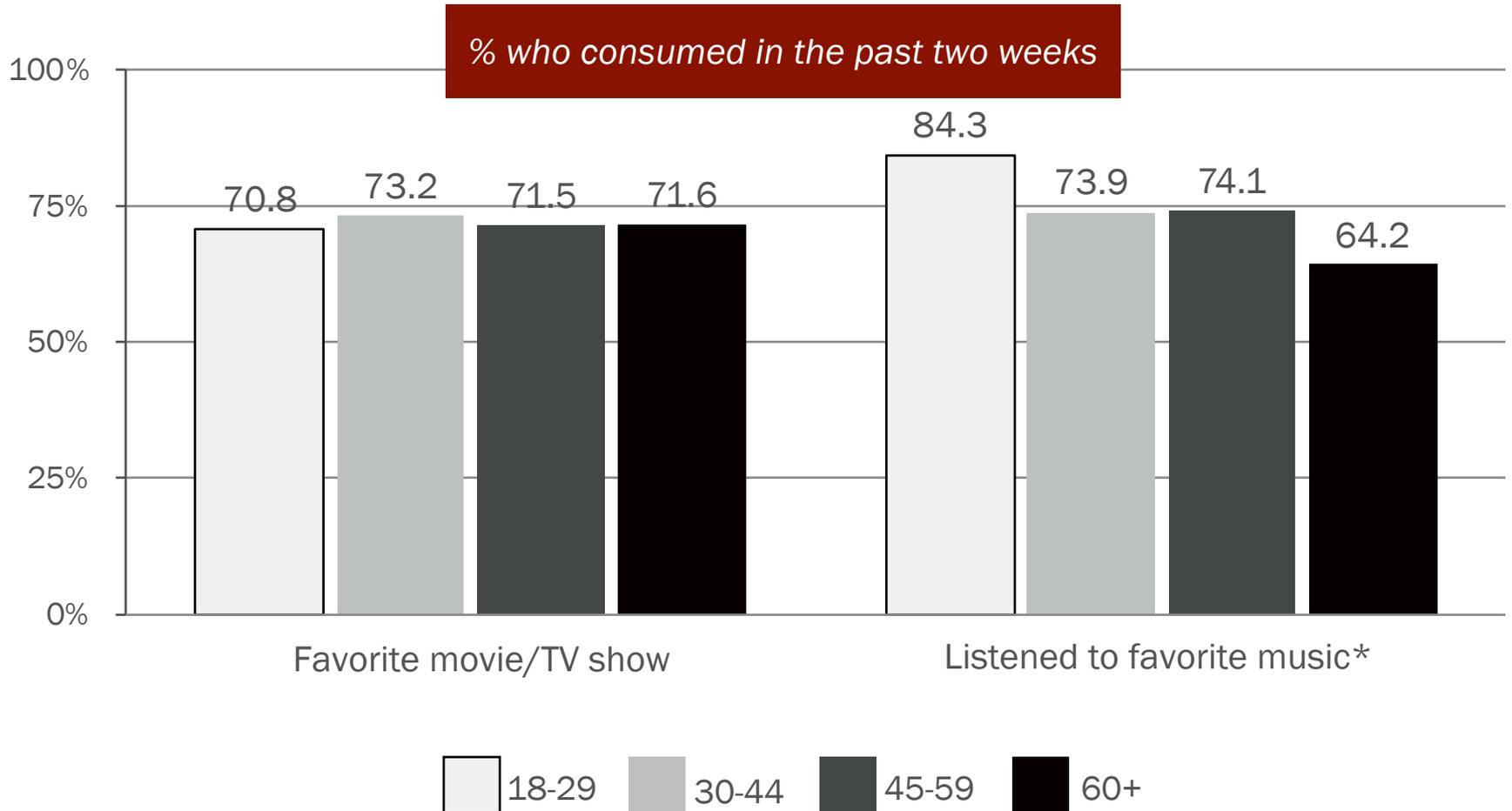
All groups are frequently consuming old favorite entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic, with SS re-listening to favorite music the most.



\*small effect

# AGE DIFFERENCES IN COMFORT ENTERTAINMENT

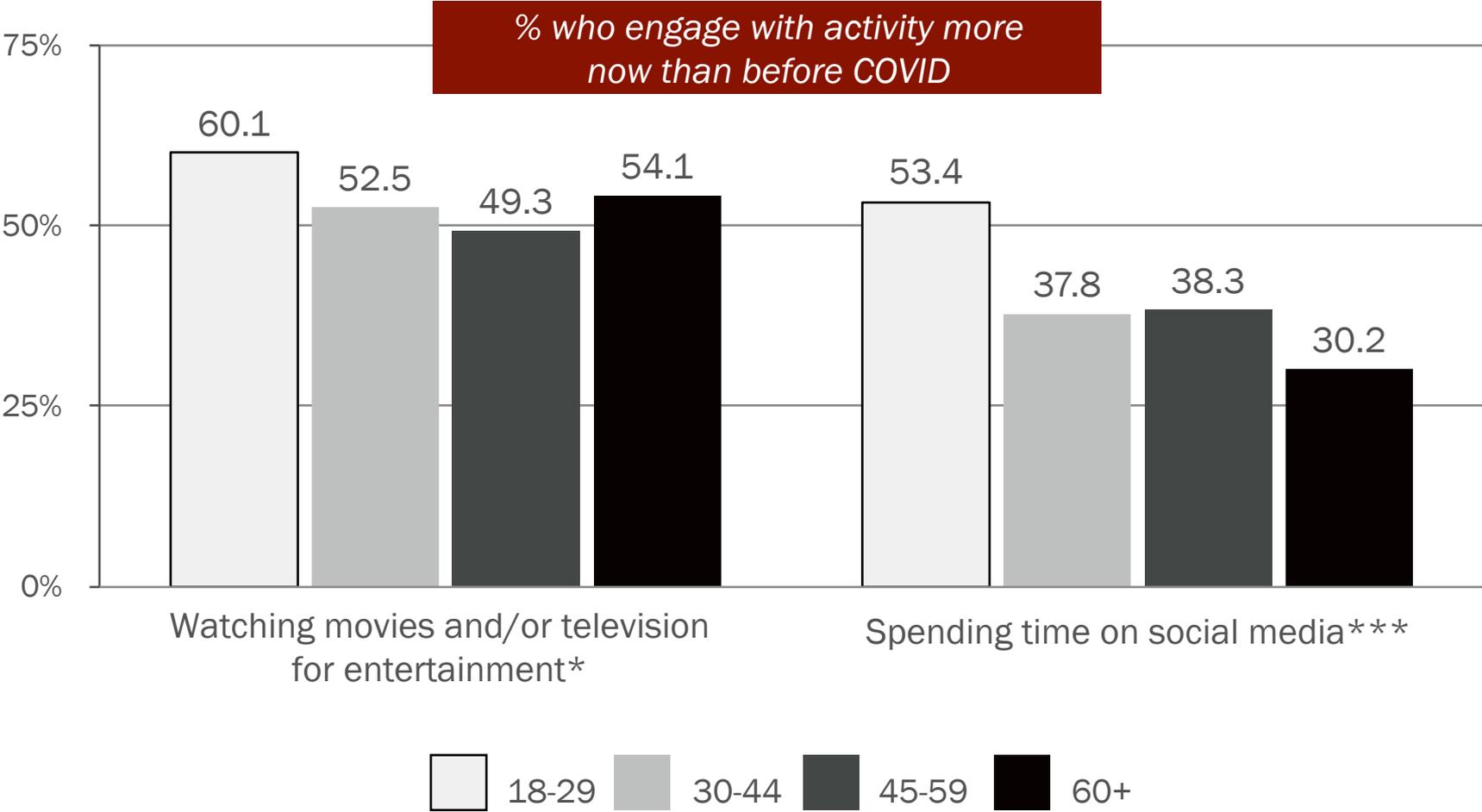
Overall, younger Americans are more likely than older Americans to listen to favorite music. All ages enjoy watching an old favorite movie/TV show



\*small effect

# AGE DIFFERENCES IN ENTERTAINMENT CHANGES

Younger Americans are most likely to be spending *more* time watching TV and on social media now than before the COVID outbreak



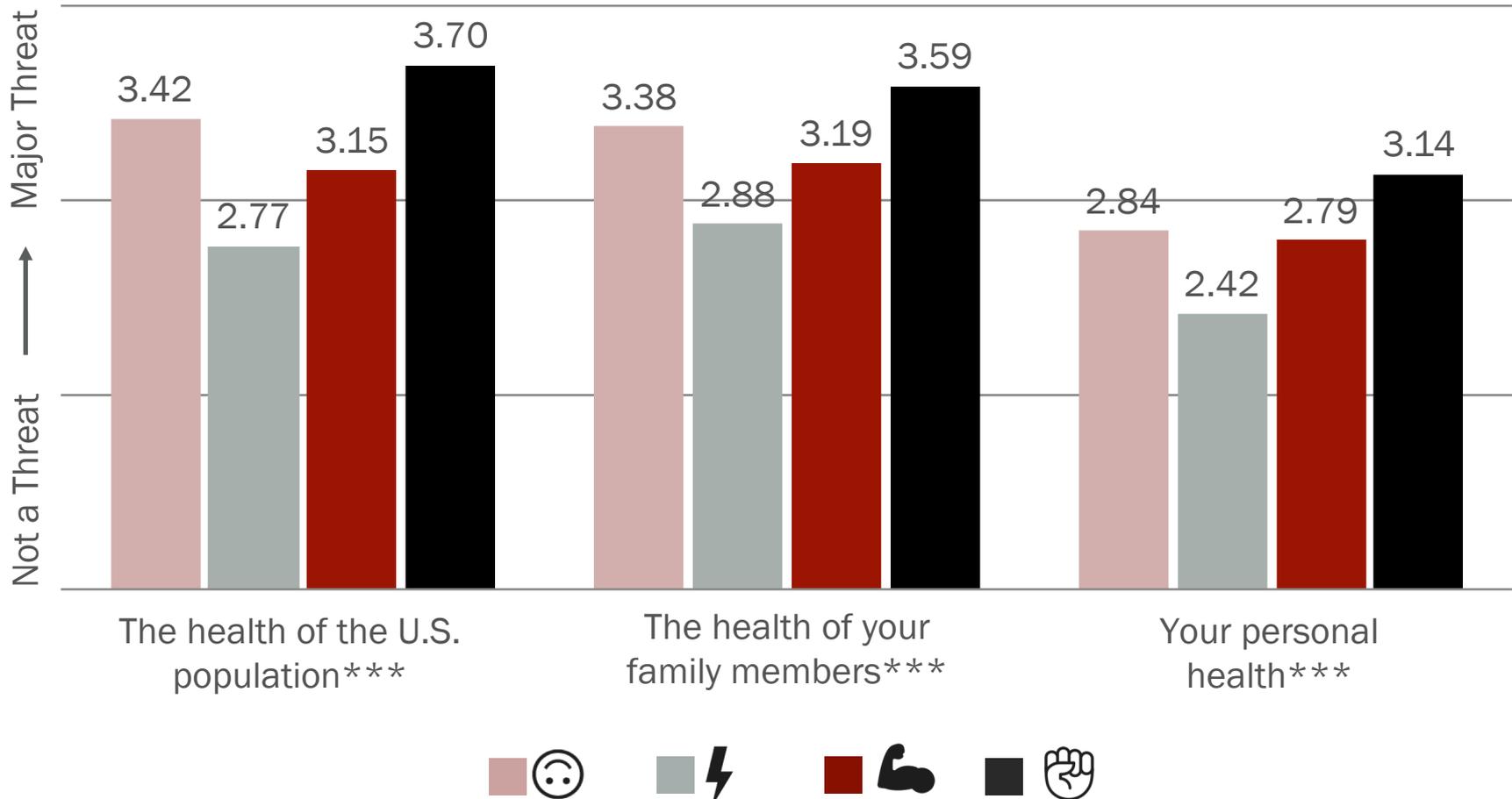
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# COVID AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION BELIEFS

# COVID THREAT (HEALTH)

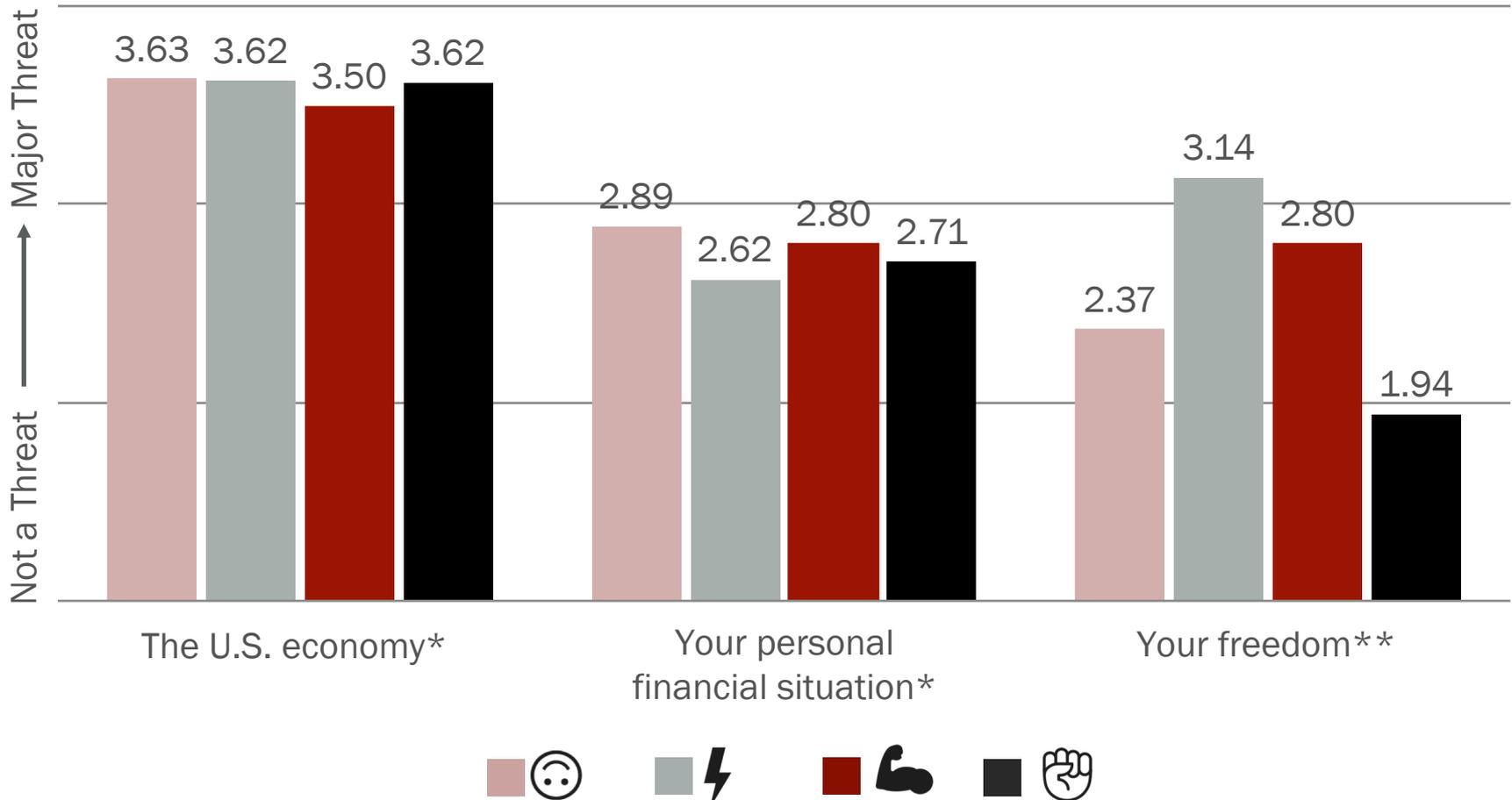
PP are the most likely to see COVID as a threat to health at all levels, while DT are consistently less likely to see COVID as a health threat.



\*\*\*large effect

# COVID THREAT (FINANCIAL/FREEDOM)

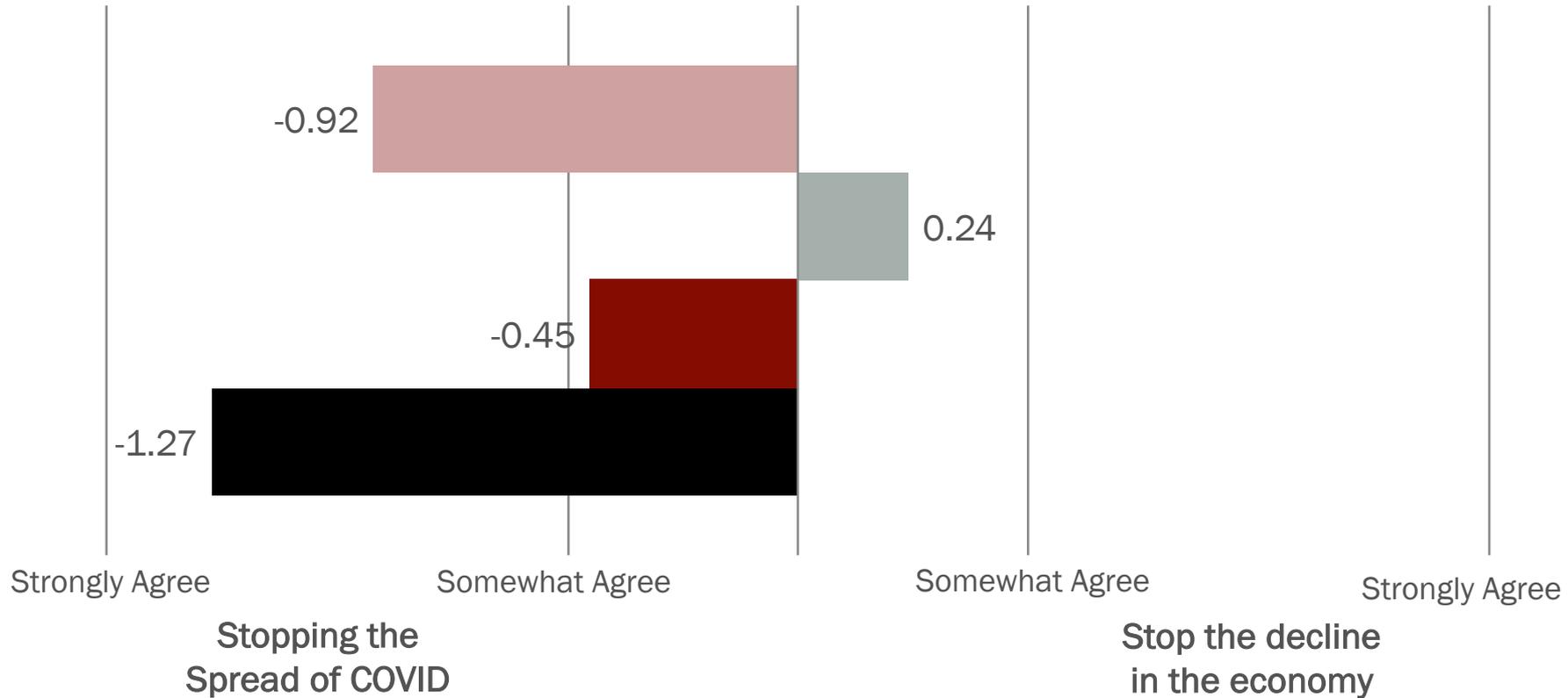
DT are most likely to see COVID as a threat to their freedom, but least likely to see it as a threat to their finances.



\*small effect; \*\*medium effect

# GOVERNMENT TOP PRIORITY

PP are most likely to think that the top priority should be stopping the spread of COVID, while DT place more importance on the economy



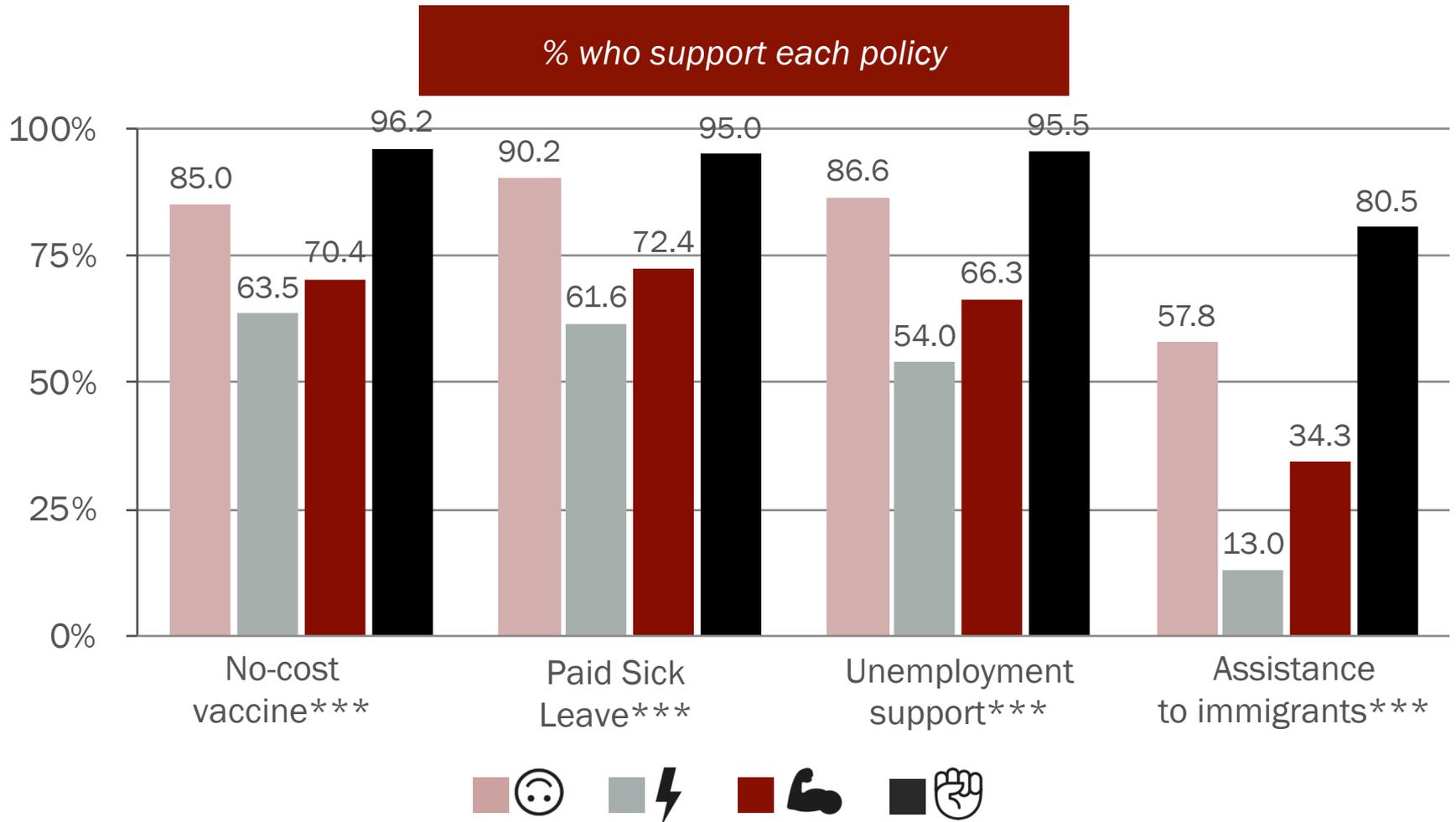
What should be the government's top priority?\*\*\*



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# SUPPORT FOR COVID POLICIES

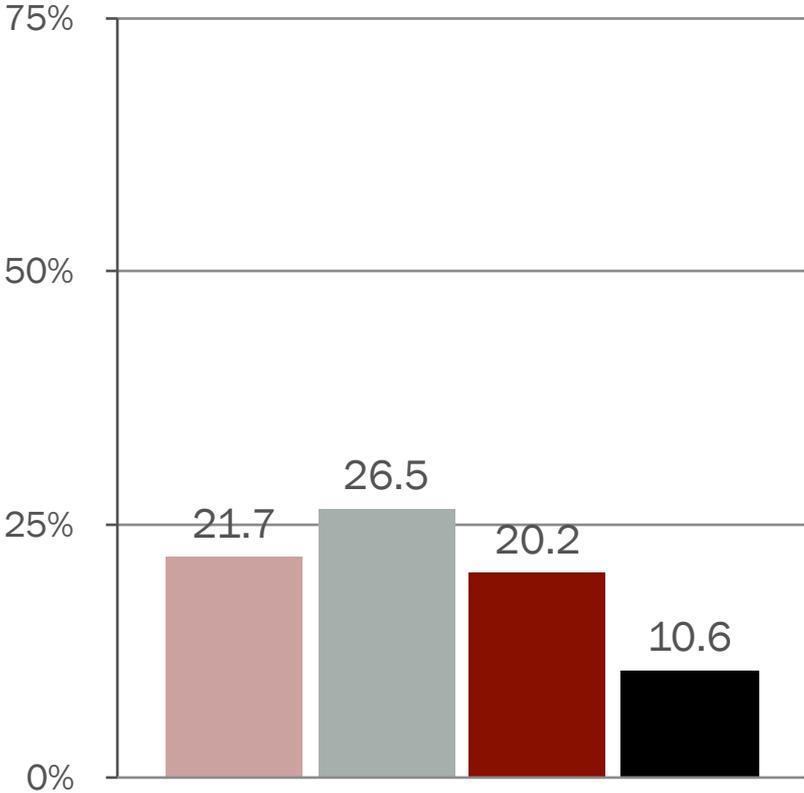
PP and SS generally support health equity COVID policies, while TC, and especially DT, are far less likely to support these policies



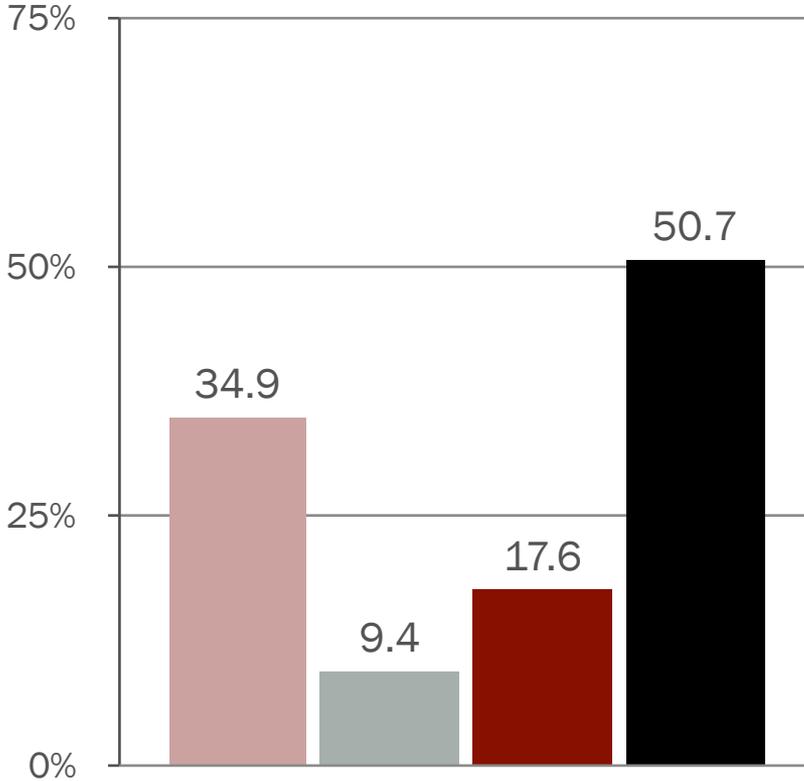
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# REASONS FOR COVID-19 DISPARITIES

*% who say lifestyle choices are a major reason for disparities\**



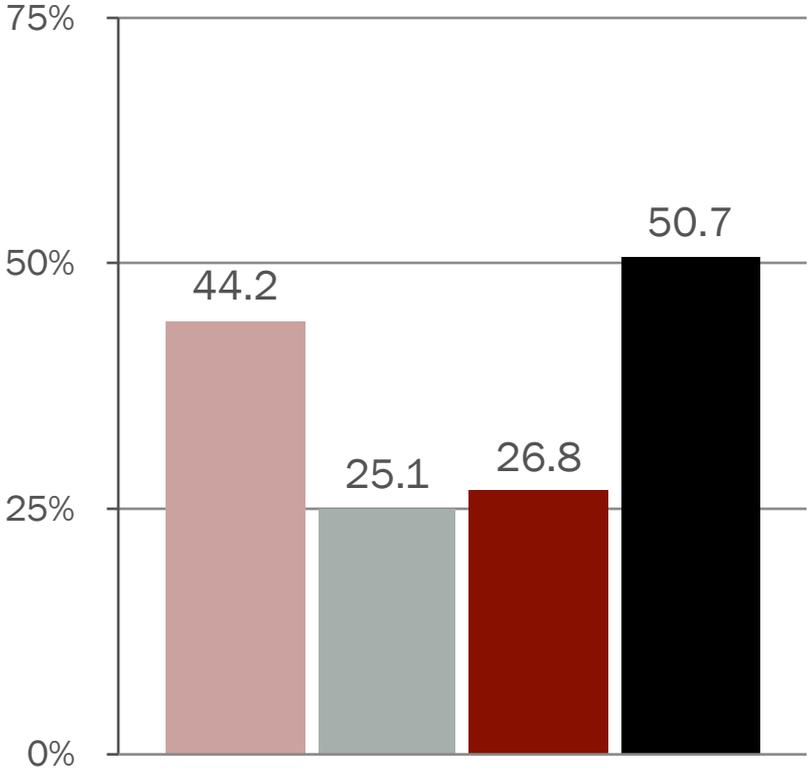
*% who say outside factors are a major reason for disparities\*\*\**



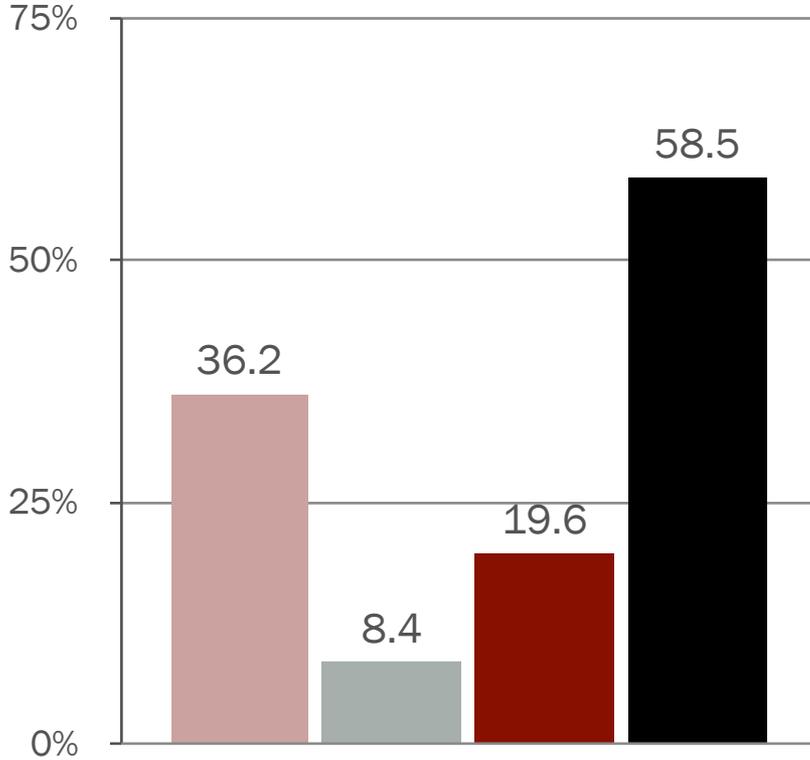
\*small effect; \*\*\*large effect

# REASONS FOR COVID-19 DISPARITIES

*% who say living in densely populated areas is a major reason for disparities\*\**

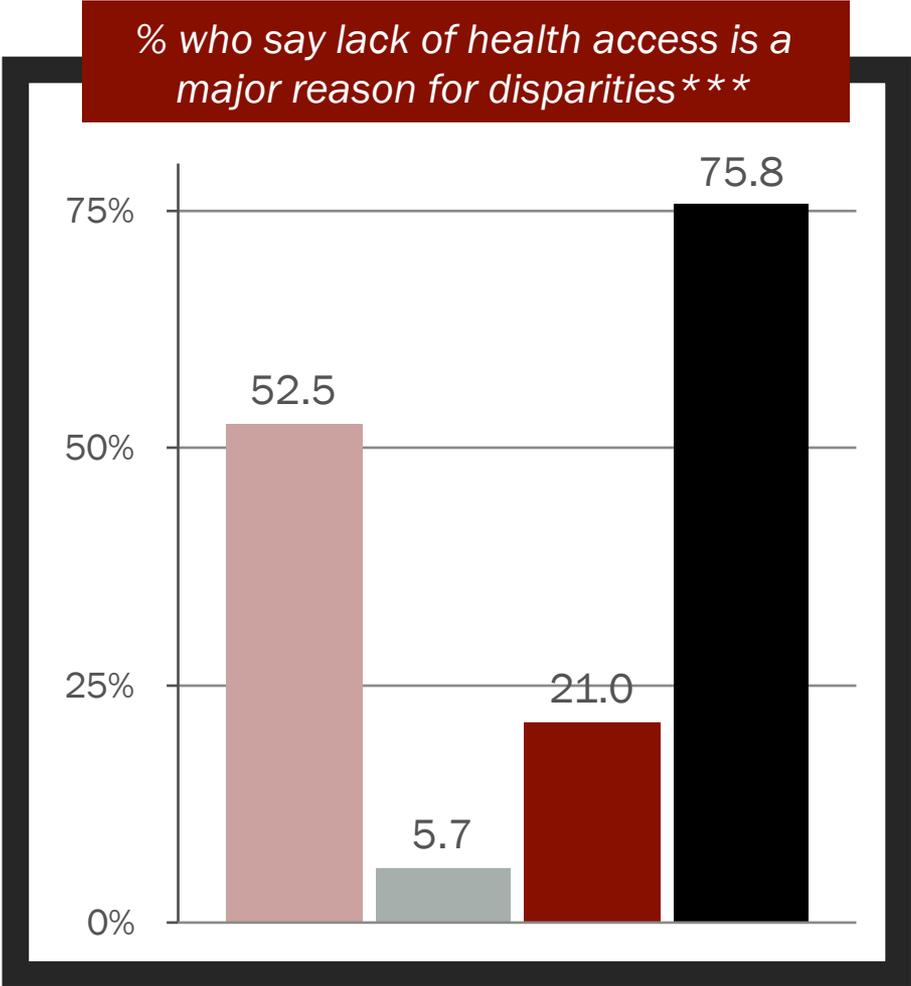


*% who say work that requires public contact is a major reason for disparities\*\*\**



\*\*medium effect; \*\*\*large effect

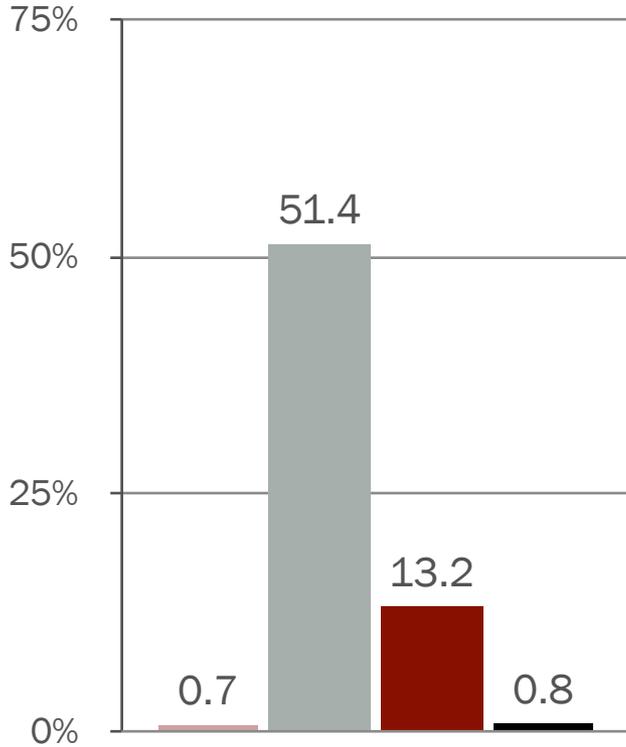
# REASONS FOR COVID-19 DISPARITIES



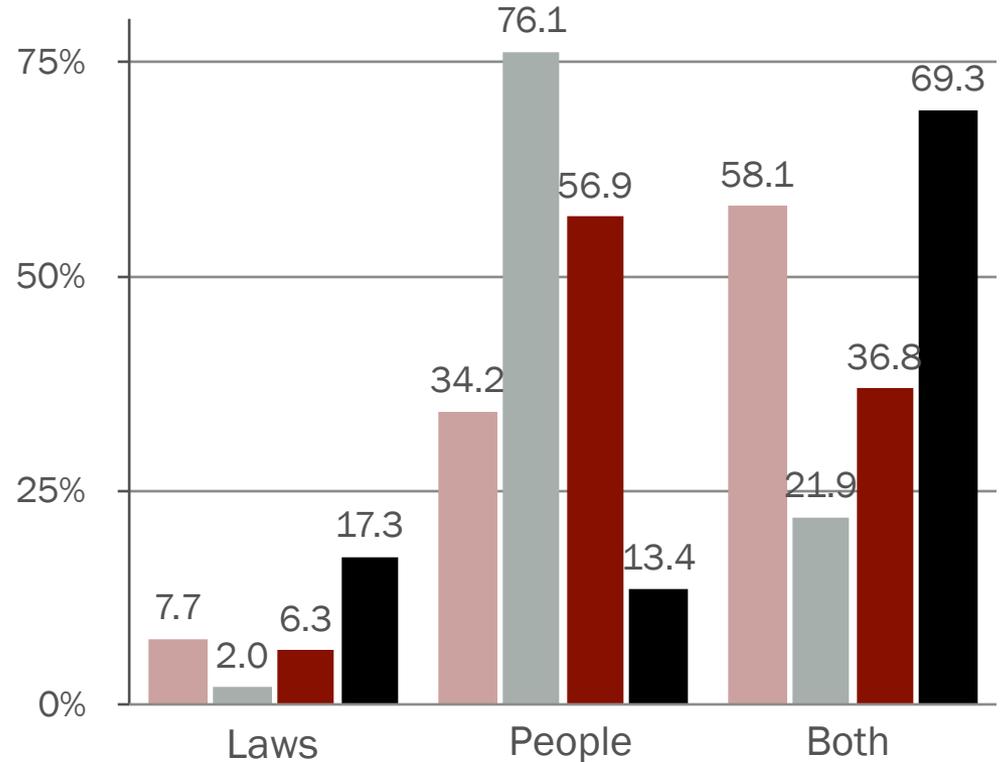
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# BELIEFS ABOUT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

*% who said there is NO racial discrimination in America\*\*\**



*% who said that laws, people or both are the bigger discrimination problem\*\*\**



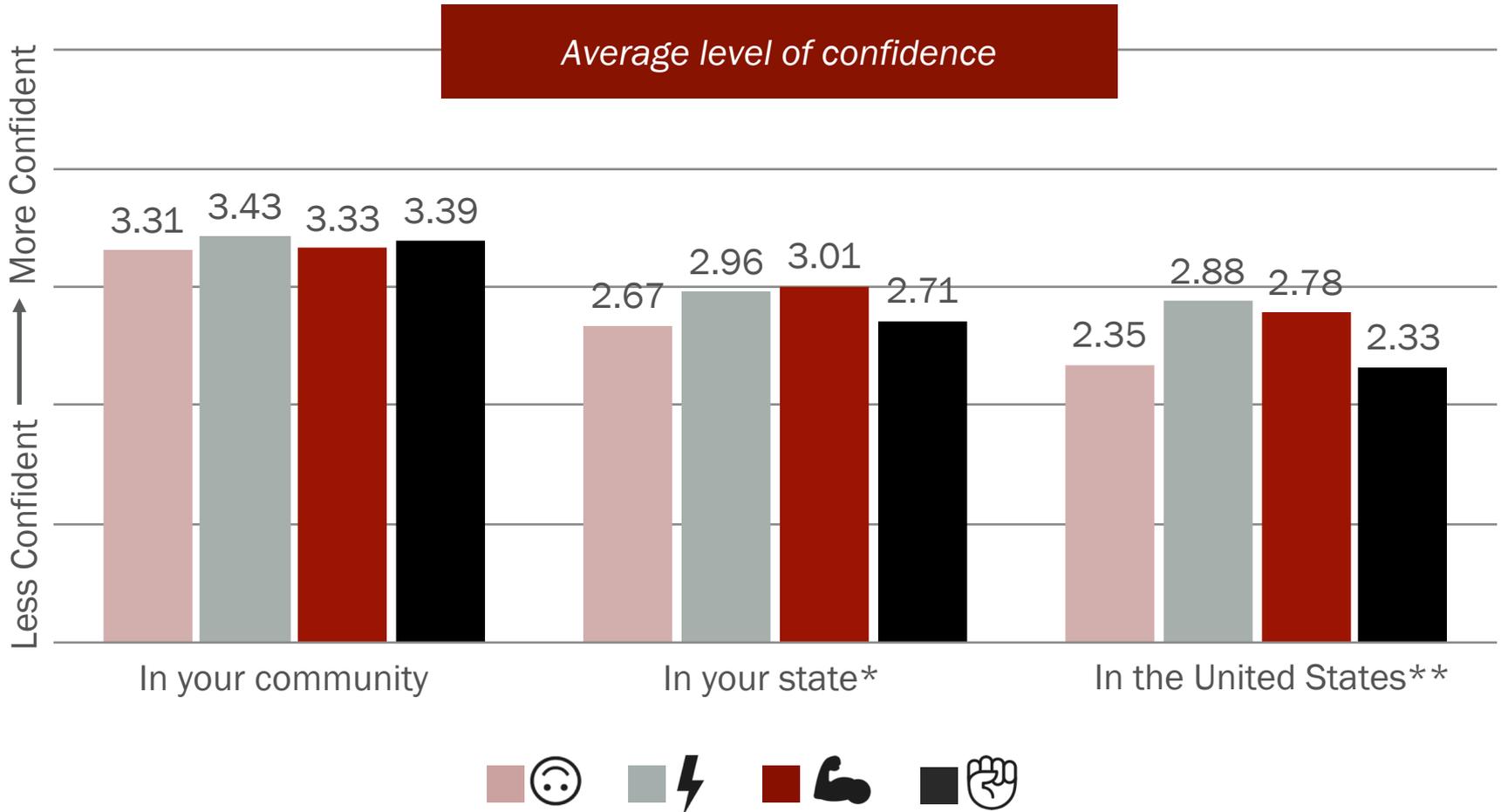
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# CIVIC ACTIONS & CONFIDENCE IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

# CONFIDENCE IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

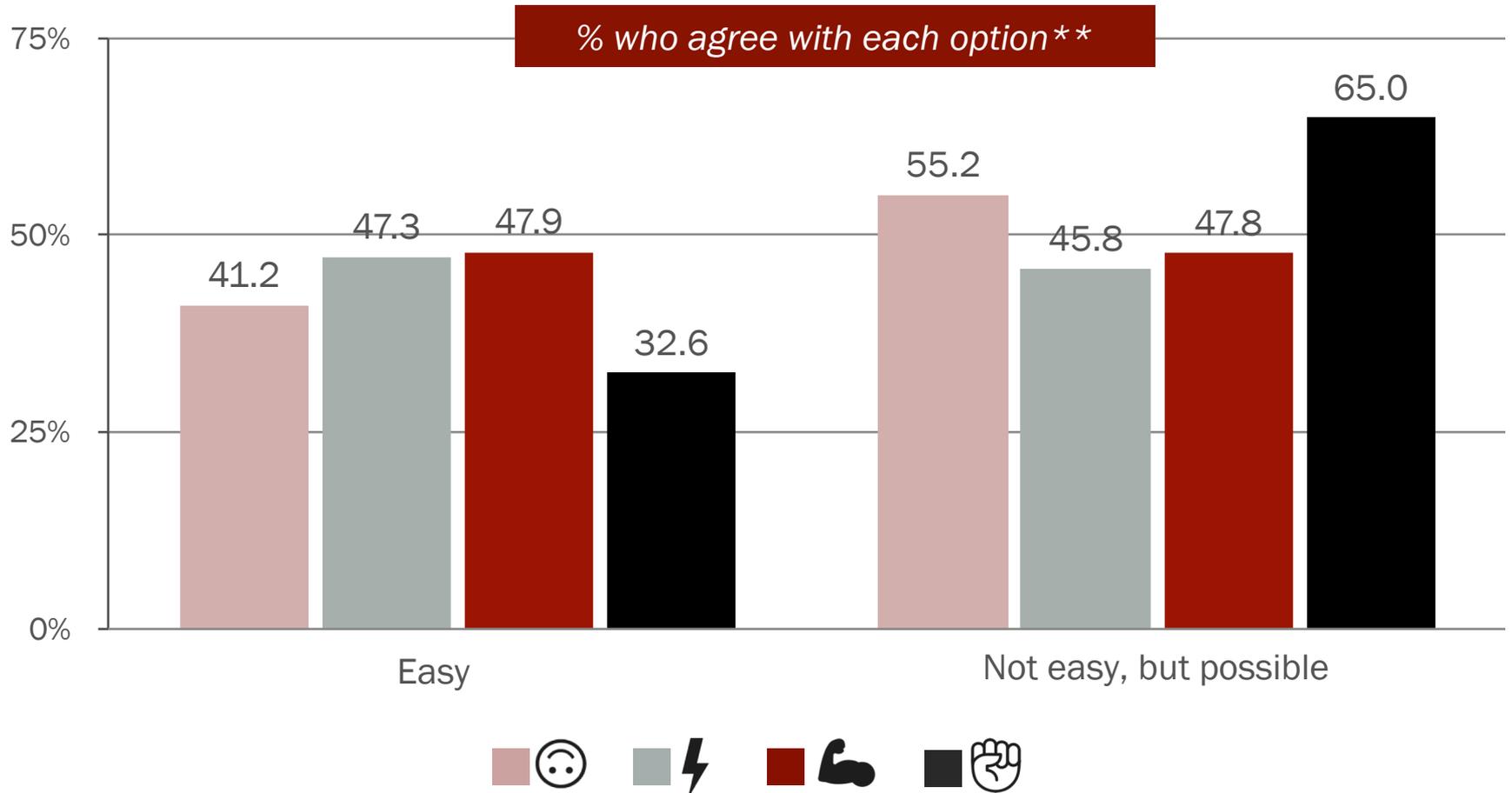
SS and PP are less likely than TC and DT to think that they can make a difference at the state or national level



\*small effect; \*\*medium effect

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

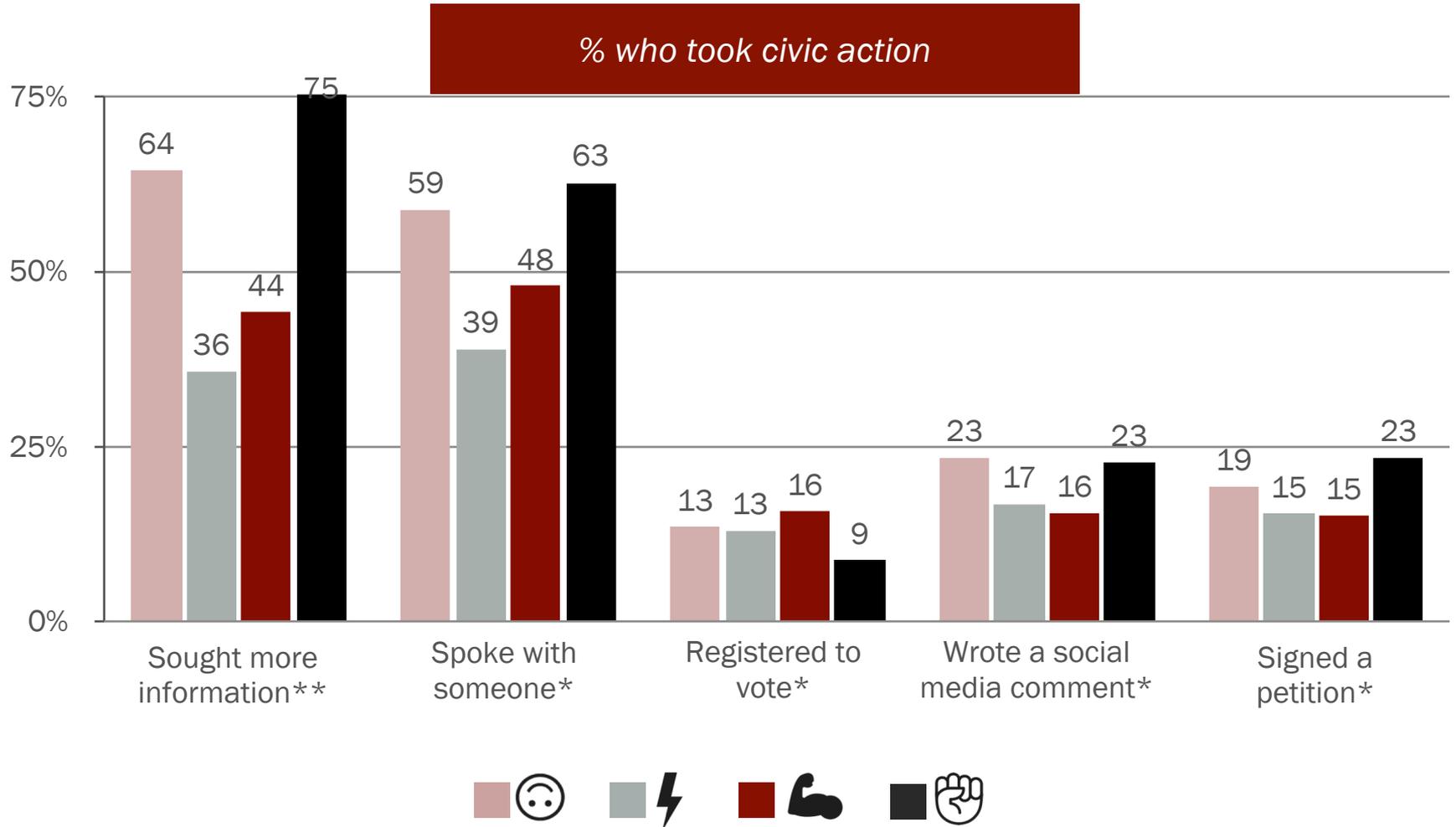
PP are the least likely to believe that it would be “easy” to make their communities a better place to live, but generally agree that it would be possible



\*\*medium effect

# CIVIC ACTION

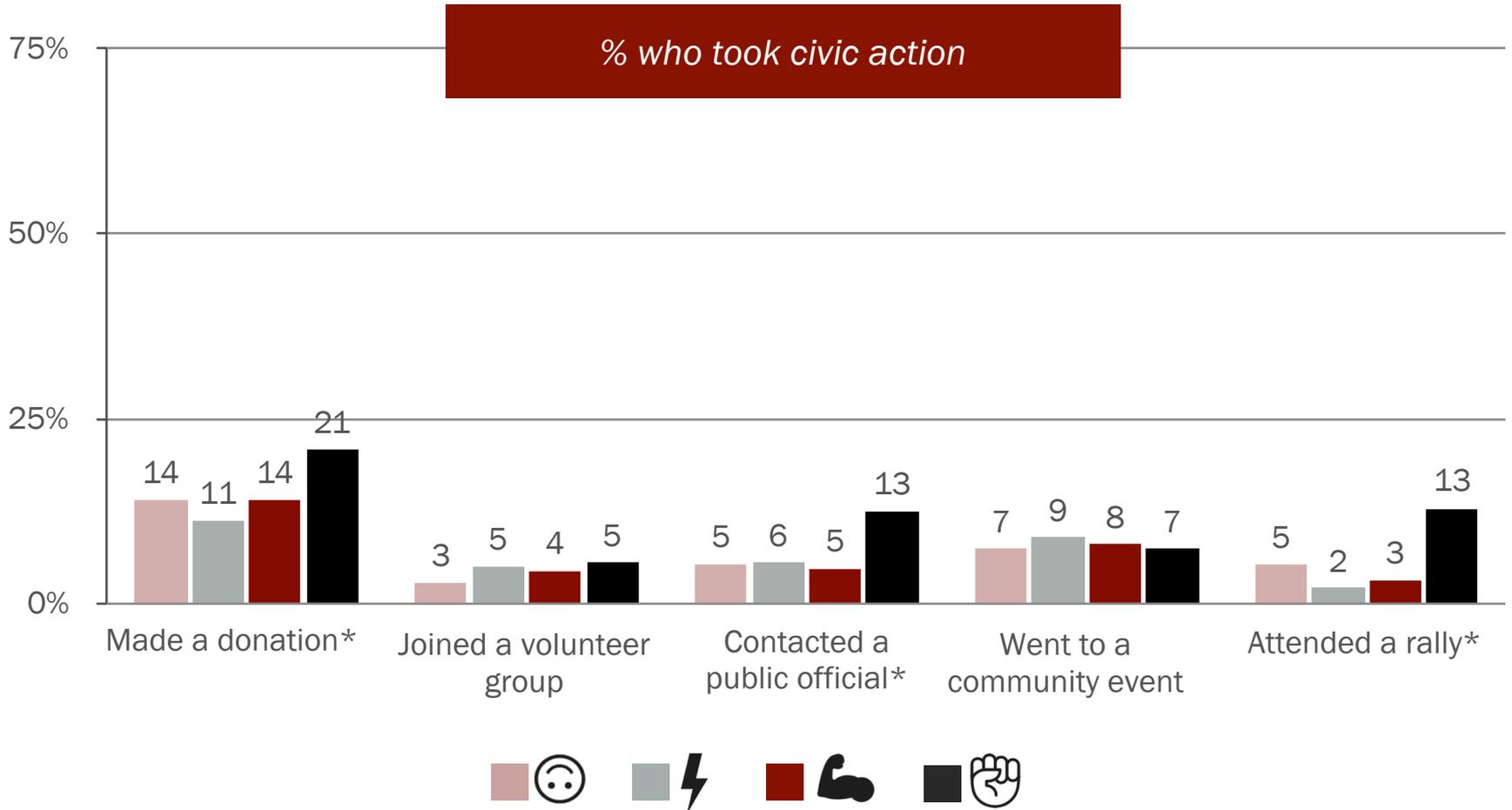
The most common actions taken by all groups was relatively low-effort, including seeking more information and talking with a friend or family member



\*small effect; \*\*medium effect; \*\*\*large effect

# CIVIC ACTION

PP were the most likely to have donated to a charity, attended a rally, or contacted a public official based on something they learned from movie/TV



\*small effect; \*\*medium effect; \*\*\*large effect

**THANK YOU!**

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**Erica Rosenthal, PhD: [erosenth@usc.edu](mailto:erosenth@usc.edu)**

This presentation is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



# APPENDIX A: DETAILED TELEVISION RESULTS

# TOP 15 SHOWS: BROADCAST

## Number and Percent who Watched

Show Name	 If You Say So	 Don't Tread on Me	 Tough Cookies	 People Power
The Masked Singer (n=431; 16.3% of total)	15.89%	12.66%	19.86%	10.23%
This is Us (n=415; 15.7% of total)	16.66%	12.15%	15.91%	18.89%
The Bachelor (n=298; 11.3% of total)	9.28%	11.83%	12.86%	8.30%
Grey's Anatomy (n=516; 19.5% of total)	28.87%	13.96%	20.57%	16.69%
9-1-1 (n=382; 14.5% of total)	13.03%	12.96%	17.38%	9.43%
Chicago PD (n=415; 15.7% of total)	13.31%	16.46%	18.40%	8.96%
Survivor (n=375; 14.2% of total)	11.19%	15.78%	15.70%	11.52%
Saturday Night Live (n=697; 26.3% of total)	35.22%	16.91%	19.80%	48.84%
Chicago Fire (n=327; 12.4% of total)	9.02%	13.45%	15.14%	6.89%
Lego Masters (n=149; 5.6% of total)	5.30%	3.93%	9.10%	5.03%
9-1-1: Lone Star (n=207; 7.8% of total)	7.83%	6.81%	11.87%	6.21%
Chicago Med (n=272; 10.3% of total)	7.19%	12.75%	11.87%	6.21%
Bachelor in Paradise (n=140; 5.3% of total)	4.18%	4.66%	6.61%	3.67%
The Voice (n=598; 22.6% of total)	19.47%	22.70%	24.91%	19.98%
American Idol (n=671; 25.3% of total)	22.40%	26.49%	28.39%	18.00%

# TOP 15 SHOWS: CABLE

## Number and Percent who Watched

Show Name	 If You Say So	 Don't Tread on Me	 Tough Cookies	 People Power
American Horror Story (n=418; 15.8% of total)	23.65%	8.10%	13.49%	22.27%
The Walking Dead (n=666; 25.2% of total)	28.05%	22.45%	22.52%	22.85%
Mayans M.C. (n=110; 4.2% of total)	2.77%	3.82%	4.70%	5.53%
The Curse of Oak Island (n=232; 8.8% of total)	5.03%	13.45%	9.58%	5.01%
Snowfall (n=90; 3.4% of total)	5.29%	1.14%	2.98%	5.02%
60 Days In (n=152; 5.7% of total)	5.19%	3.42%	7.31%	4.96%
Better Call Saul (n=292; 11.0% of total)	14.02%	11.05%	7.65%	17.67%
The Family Chantel (n=74; 2.8% of total)	1.30%	3.23%	3.69%	1.65%
90 Day Fiancé (n=304; 11.5% of total)	13.46%	7.23%	13.36%	8.17%
Top Chef (n=407; 15.4% of total)	15.22%	13.45%	16.19%	16.09%
Married at First Sight (n=201; 7.6% of total)	7.46%	7.49%	8.53%	4.64%
The Real Housewives of New Jersey (n=122; 4.6% of total)	4.37%	2.52%	5.90%	3.84%
Live PD (n=426; 16.1% of total)	9.91%	20.40%	19.42%	8.66%
Gold Rush (n=234; 8.8% of total)	3.68%	12.88%	10.74%	5.08%
Vikings (n=217; 8.2% of total)	8.19%	11.26%	6.74%	8.33%

# TOP 15 SHOWS: STREAMING

## Number and Percent who Watched

Show Name	 If You Say So	 Don't Tread on Me	 Tough Cookies	 People Power
Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness (n=601; 22.7% of total)	30.29%	16.04%	19.96%	29.41%
The Witcher (n=369; 14.0% of total)	19.01%	9.95%	11.87%	18.61%
Killer Inside: The Mind of Aaron Hernandez (n=259; 9.8% of total)	11.67%	7.23%	10.07%	9.37%
You (n=275; 10.4% of total)	16.04%	6.24%	9.78%	8.90%
Don't F**k with Cats: Hunting an Internet Killer (n=187; 7.1% of total)	12.47%	1.27%	5.92%	10.57%
The Trials of Gabriel Fernández (n=167; 6.3% of total)	10.59%	2.76%	5.93%	10.57%
Love is Blind (n=206; 7.8% of total)	9.71%	6.89%	7.21%	7.78%
Unbelievable (n=90; 3.4% of total)	5.01%	2.25%	3.41%	2.20%
Ozark (n=485; 18.3% of total)	19.99%	14.34%	17.47%	25.05%
Raising Dion (n=145; 5.5% of total)	8.14%	3.06%	5.59%	4.12%
Outer Banks (n=211; 8.0% of total)	8.82%	8.76%	8.15%	4.36%
Locke & Key (n=153; 5.8% of total)	8.71%	4.88%	4.36%	6.76%
Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan (n=364; 13.8% of total)	13.99%	16.27%	11.61%	17.01%
Living with Yourself (n=71; 2.7% of total)	4.22%	0.98%	2.62%	2.90%
Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker (n=128; 4.8% of total)	9.06%	2.07%	3.28%	7.11%