



**GENDER
ON THE
BALLOT**

She Leads: Progress and Persistent Barriers for Women in Politics

A SURVEY OF VOTER ATTITUDES ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND THE CURRENT POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT



WOMEN & POLITICS INSTITUTE
SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

breakthrough
campaigns

Methodology

Breakthrough Campaigns conducted 801 online interviews nationwide from September 3-6, 2025, among men and women who are registered voters.



N=801



Online interviews



Nationwide



September 3-6, 2025



Registered Voters

- The margin of error for the dataset overall is +/- 3.46% at the 95% confidence level and is higher among subgroups.
- Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100%.

Progress for Women in Politics

Voter sentiment strongly favors increased female representation in politics, with a significant 83% believing it's important to elect more women, and over half feeling there are currently too few women in office. This desire is particularly pronounced among Democrats and Gen Z. Across all age groups, voters believe government gets more done when more women hold office.

Furthermore, women leaders are seen as more trustworthy on critical issues such as childcare, abortion, and promoting women's equality. Empathy, inclusivity, and fresh perspectives are widely seen as unique strengths women bring to elected roles. This positive view extends to younger generations, with two-thirds of men under 50 believing women in office are better at solving national problems.

The importance of organizations like WPI that encourage women to run for office is also widely acknowledged, with 83% of voters viewing them as crucial for democracy.

Barriers That Remain

Despite strong support for women in politics, significant barriers persist. A notable "youth paradox" exists, where younger voters, while generally supportive of women in office, are actually the least open to electing a female president. Persistent bias is evident, with 4 in 10 voters, particularly Republicans and younger demographics, knowing someone who would not vote for a woman president.

Expectations for a "first female president" are narrowly defined, often envisioning a married Democratic mother under 65 with political experience. Women candidates also face a "double bind," needing to be both "tough" and "likable," a standard not typically applied to their male counterparts. Furthermore, skepticism regarding merit is present, with Republican men more likely to believe women achieve leadership roles due to quotas or manipulation. Structural barriers, such as the "old boys' club," negative media scrutiny, and self-doubt, are cited by women as key deterrents to running for office.

Finally, the "Harris Effect" remains a point of contention, with voters divided on whether Vice President Kamala Harris has made it easier or harder for a woman to become president, with Republicans and independents tending to believe it has made it harder.

General Political Environment

The current political environment is characterized by a mixed outlook for the 2028 election, which voters anticipate will be "more important" than most, though not the "most important" of their lives. Political engagement among women has notably decreased since 2024, though most still remain attentive to political matters. Economic pessimism is on the rise, particularly among women over 50.

Regarding political legacies, Donald Trump maintains policy support despite lacking broad personal approval, while President Biden is perceived as detrimental to the Democratic Party. Vice President Harris's impact is viewed somewhat more favorably but remains a divisive topic. A substantial "Trump backlash" is evident among women, with a majority disapproving of him and believing he has hindered women's equality, a sentiment shared by only 1 in 3 men.

Political podcasts are a significant influence, with over half of voters listening monthly, and younger men attributing the shaping of the 2024 election outcome to "bro culture" podcasts.

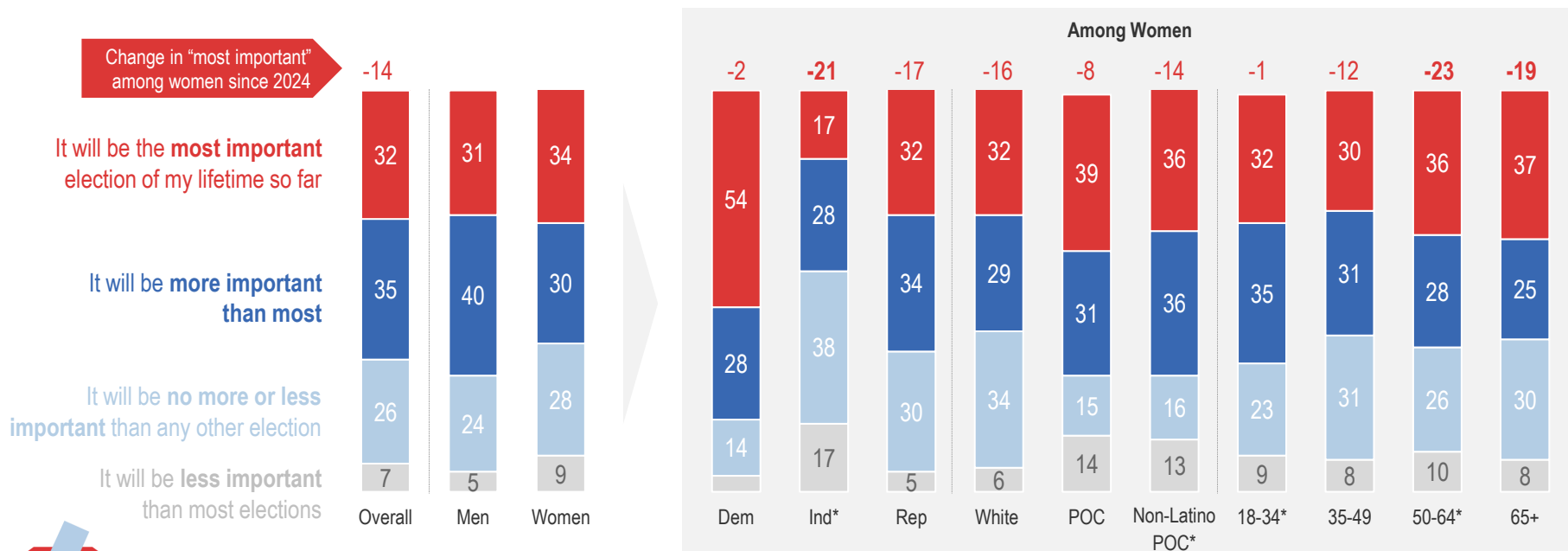


Political Engagement

With many recent “most important” elections of our lifetimes, voters across the board think the 2028 election will be *more* important rather than *the most* important

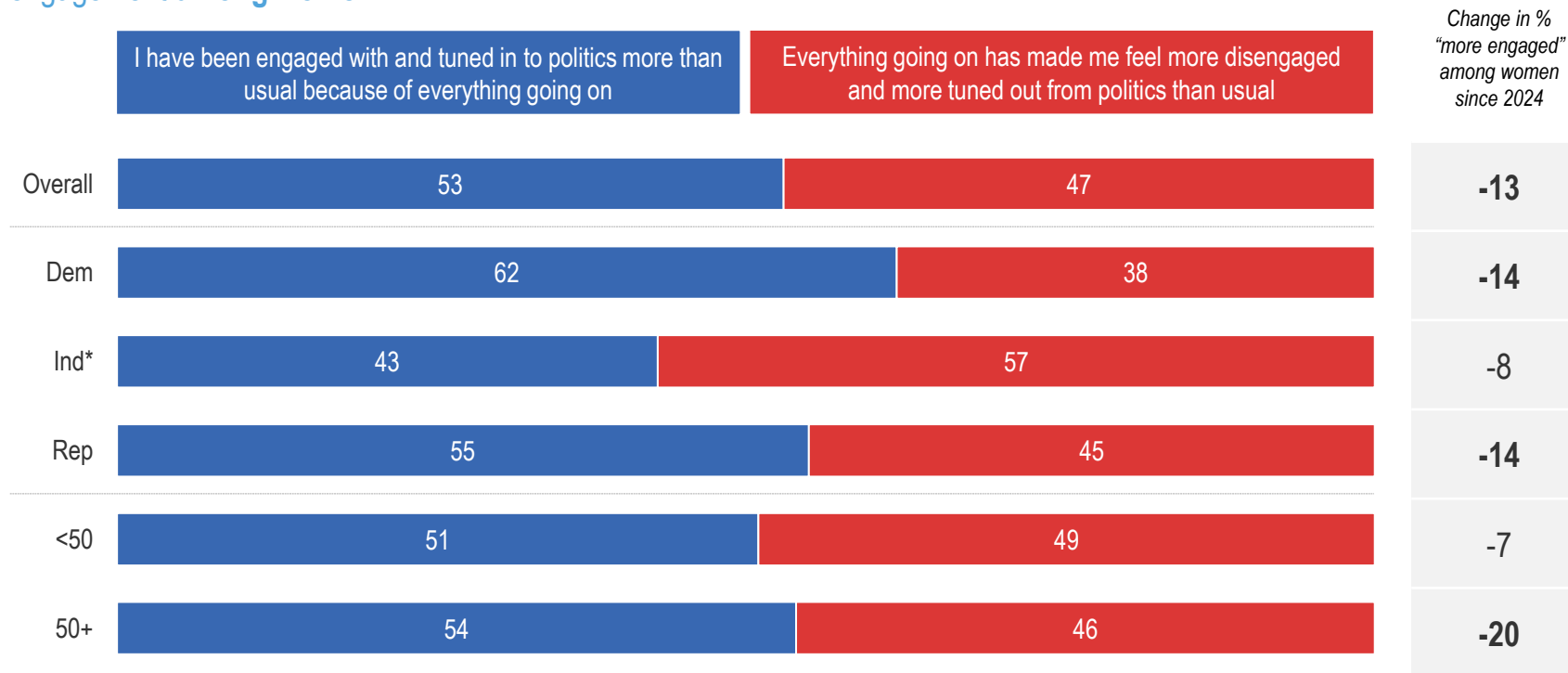
Political engagement **among all**

Thinking far ahead to the 2028 election, would you say you believe that...?



Slightly more than half of women are more tuned in than usual, but they have seen large drop-offs in engagement since last year

Political engagement among women



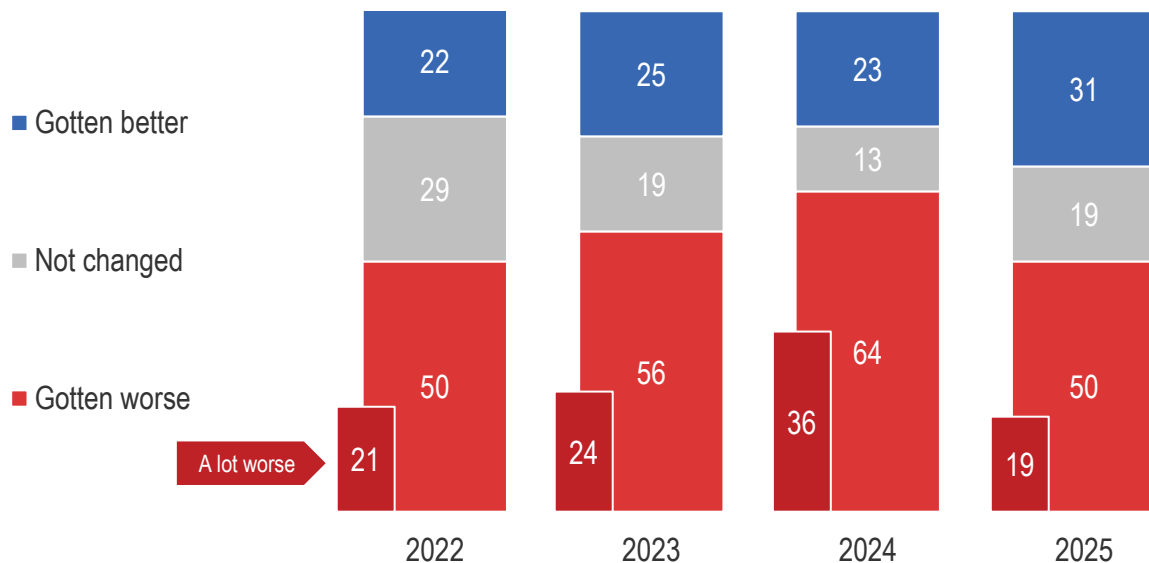


Economic & Political Landscape

More women feel that their financial situation has gotten better compared to previous years, but half still feel that their financial situation has gotten worse

Personal financial situation among women

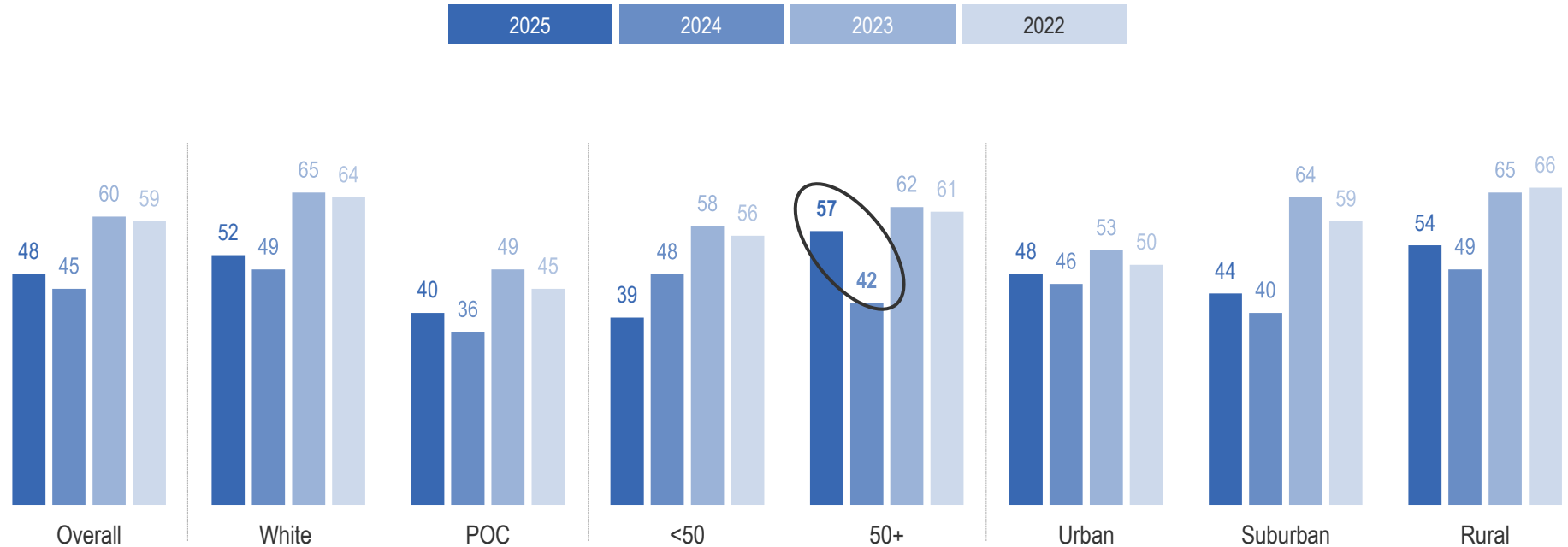
Thinking about the last couple of years, has your personal financial situation...?



- **Non-Republicans:** 58% worse
(including 20% a lot worse)
- **50+:** 57% worse
(including 22% a lot worse)
- **<\$50K:** 55% worse
(including 27% a lot worse)
- **South*:** 55% worse
(including 18% a lot worse)

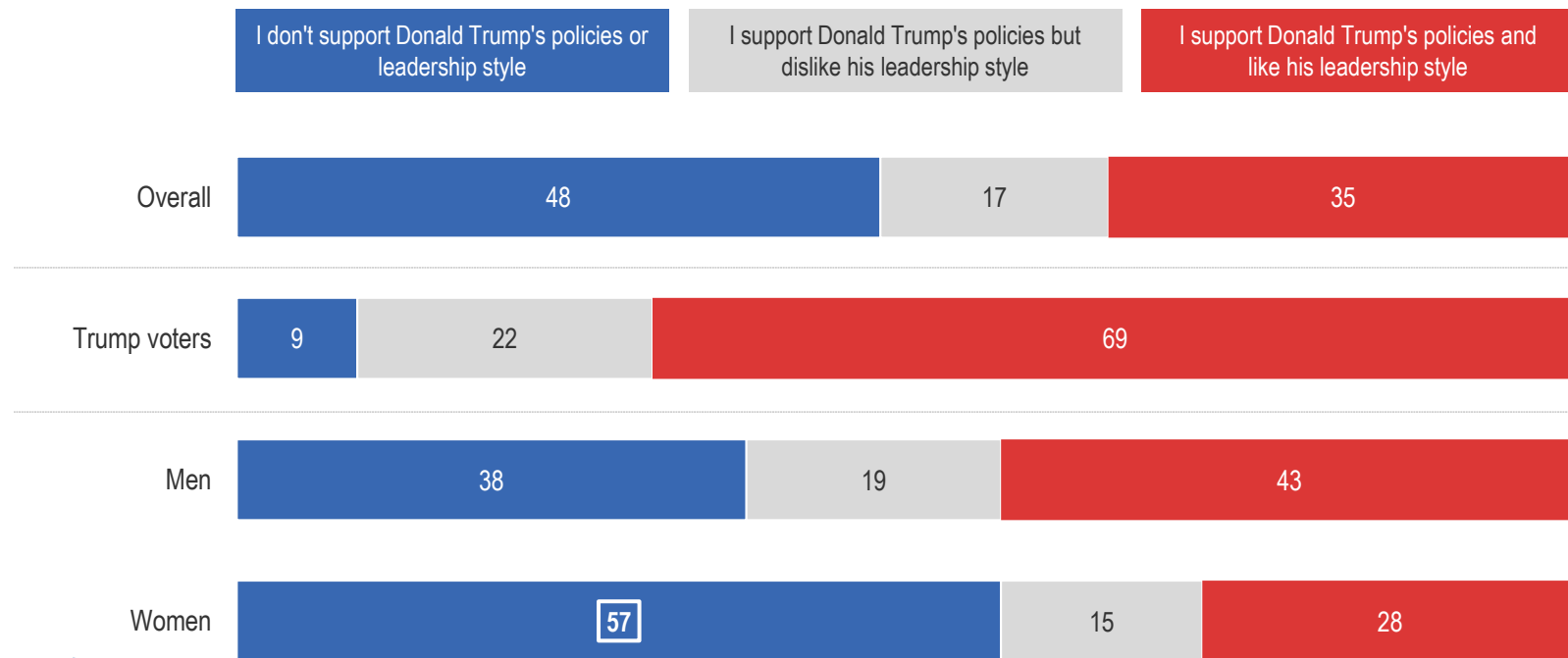
Women are generally feeling slightly more pessimistic about the economy than they were in 2024, with those age 50+ experiencing the biggest jump in pessimism

% Pessimistic about the economy among women



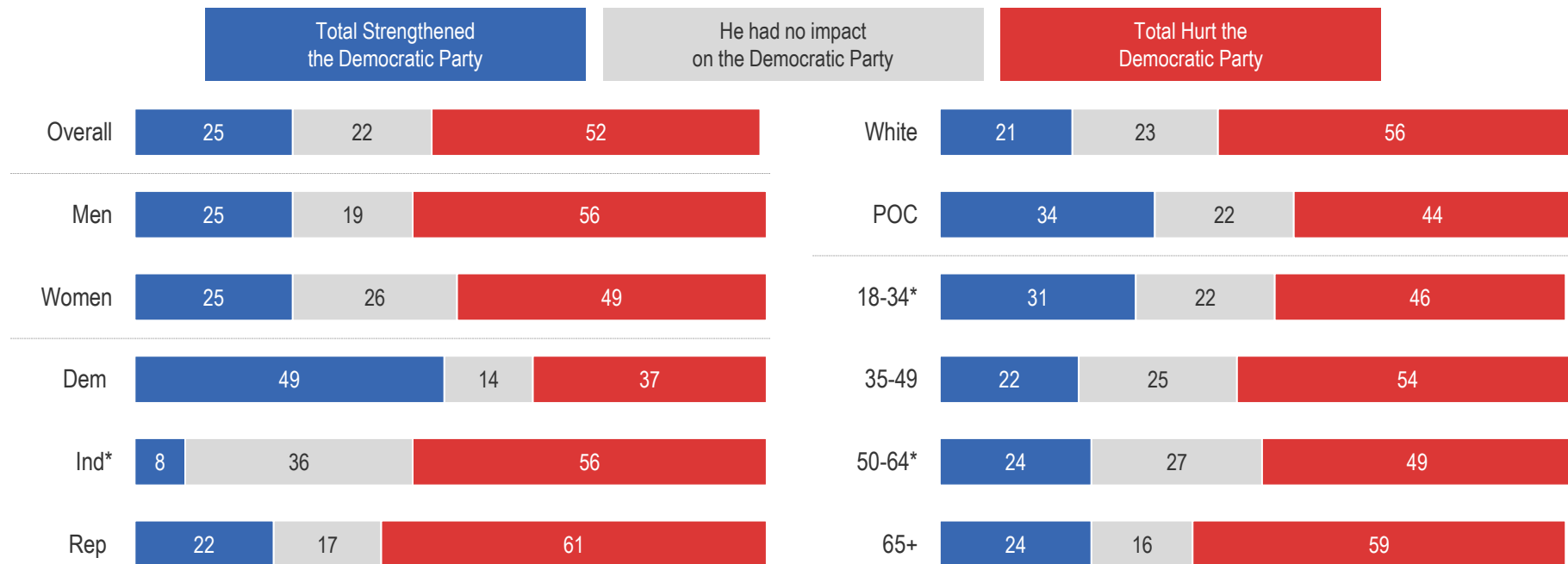
Trump disapproval is highest among women; nearly 1 in 4 Trump voters support only his policies, not his leadership style

Trump support among all



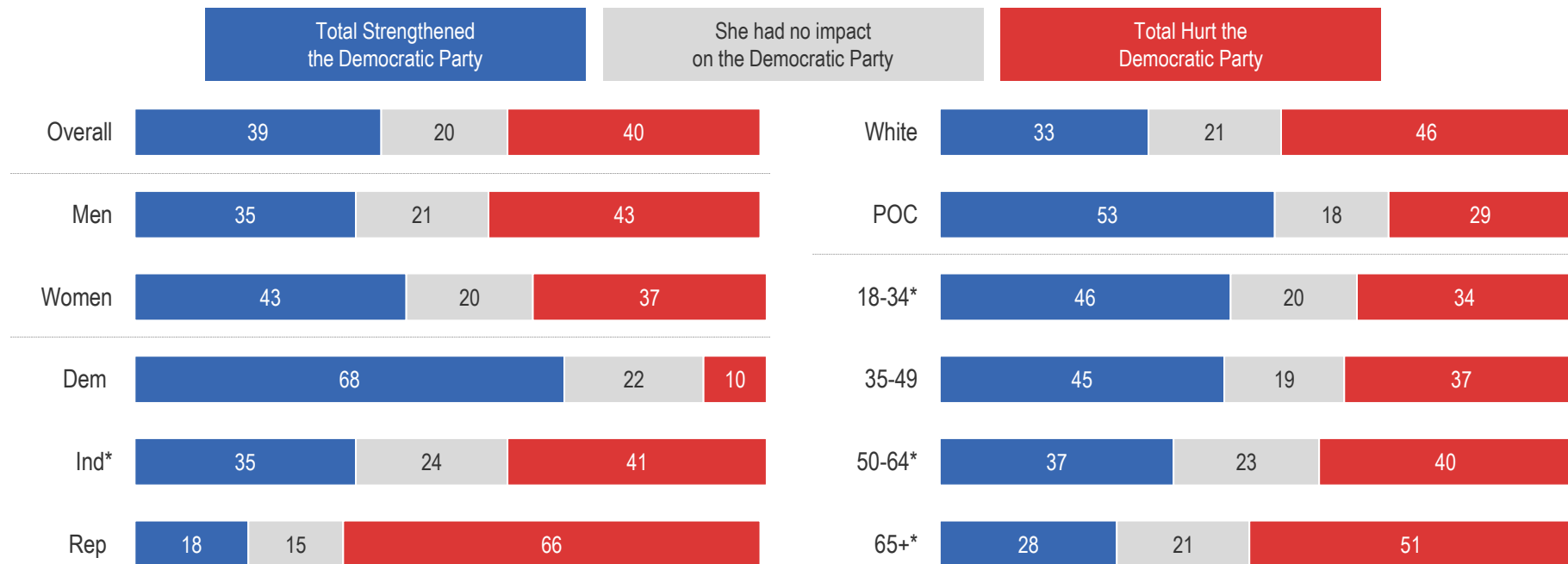
Over half believe Biden hurt the Democratic Party while only a quarter believe he strengthened it

Biden's legacy among all



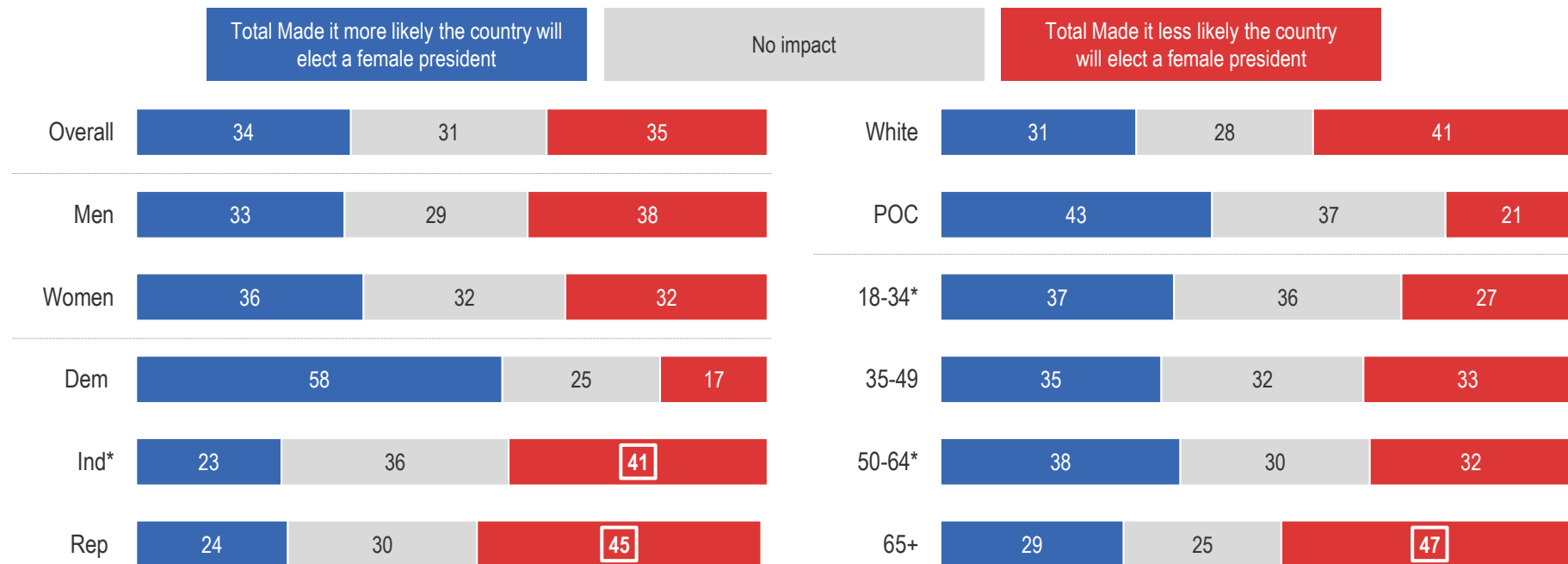
Harris is slightly better off, with only 4 in 10 believing she hurt the party and an equal amount believing she helped

Harris' legacy among all



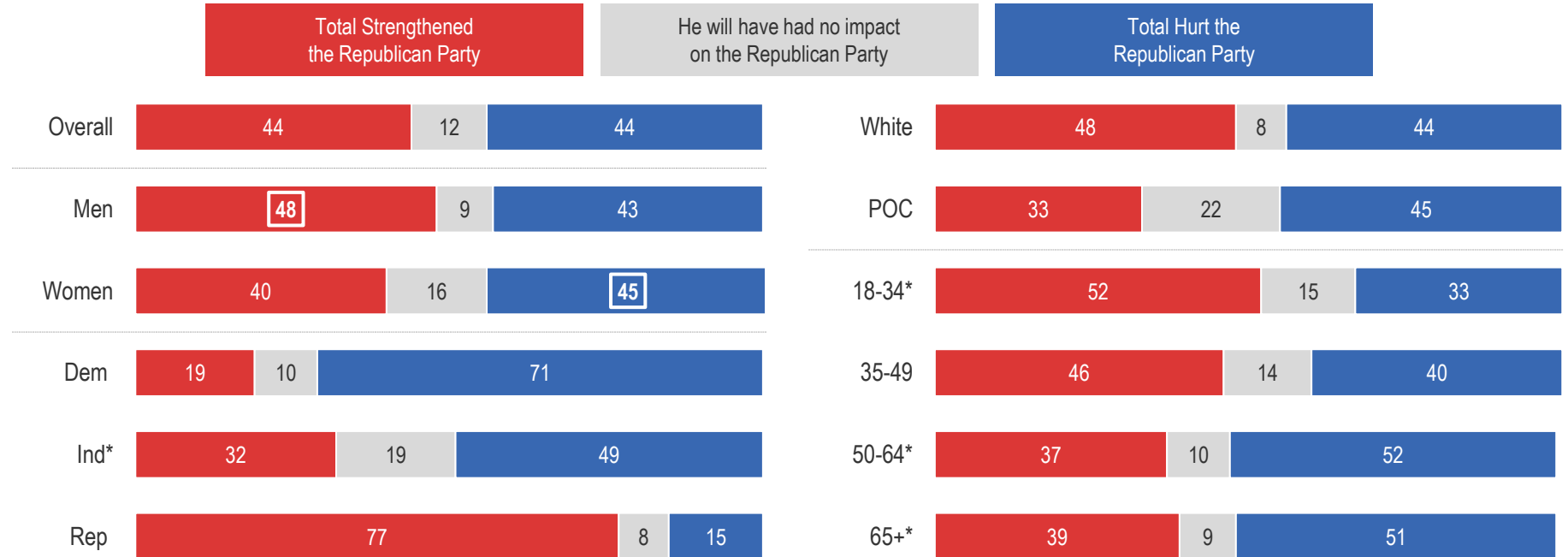
Voters are torn on if Harris paved the way for a female president; Republicans, Independents and older voters tend to lean toward believing she made it less likely

Harris' impact among all



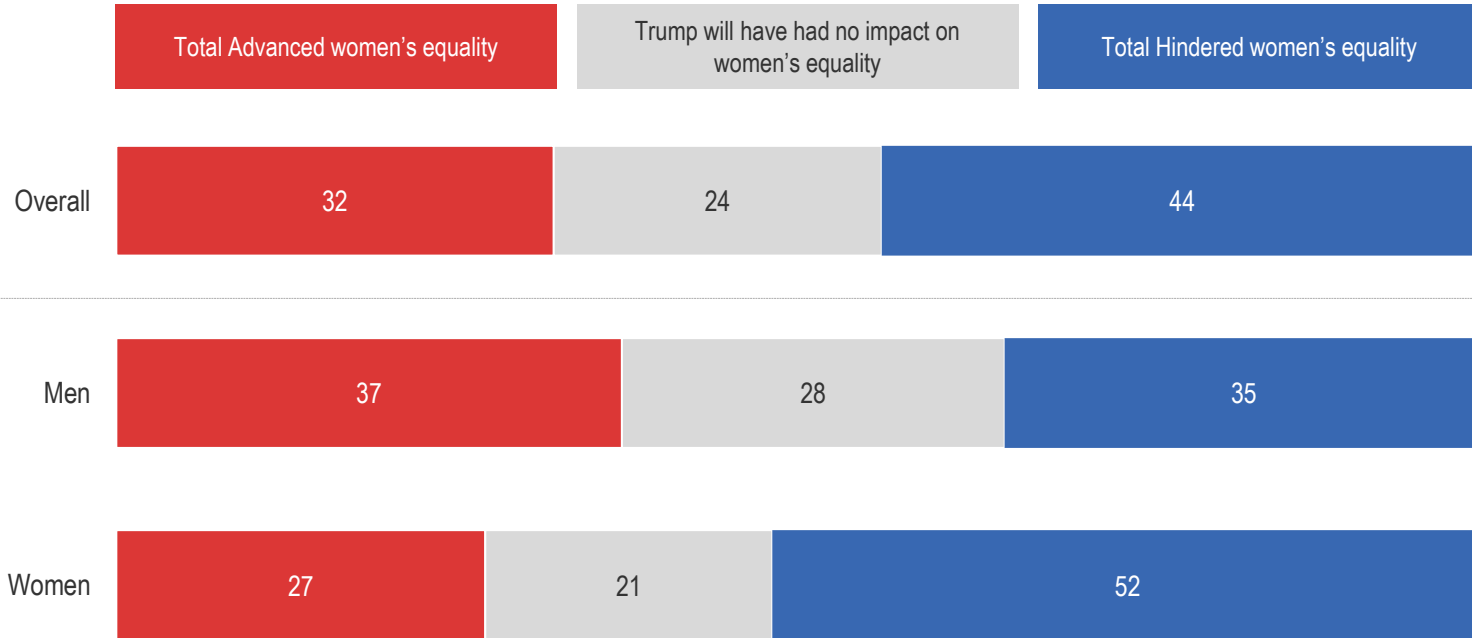
The plurality of men think Trump has significantly strengthened the party, compared to the plurality of women who think he significantly hurt the Republican party

Trump's legacy after 2028 among all



A majority of women believe Trump significantly hindered women's equality, but only 1 in 3 men agree

Trump's impact among all



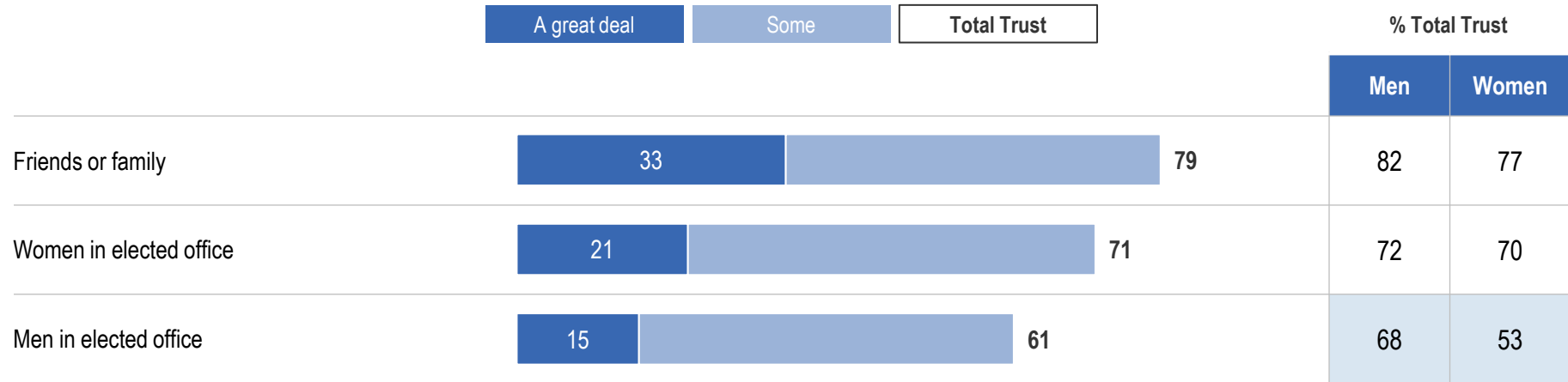


Trust & Leadership

When it comes to information, women in elected office are trusted more than men; friends and family are most trusted

Trust in sources **among all**

How much do you trust the information and decisions coming from each of the following sources?



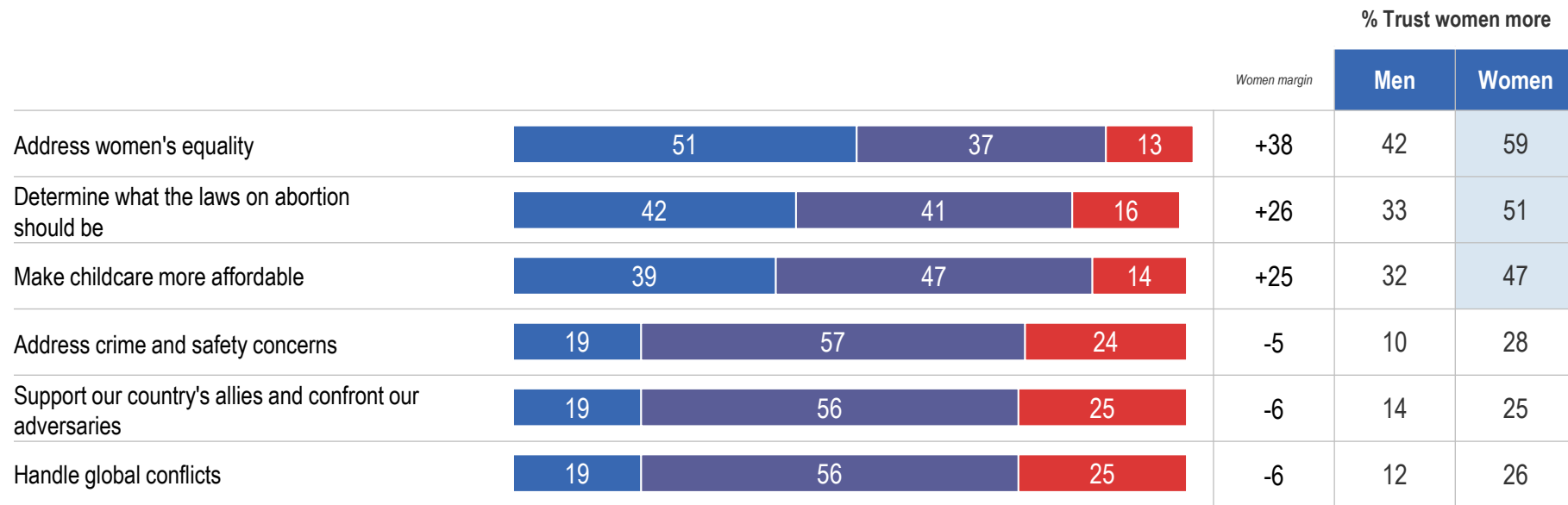
Women are trusted most to advance women's equality and address family-related issues, but men are more trusted to deal with the economy, security, and global affairs

Trust in elected officials, issues **among all**

Trust women in elected office more

Trust both equally

Trust men in elected office more



Voters believe women in office are better at focusing on family issues than men, but worse at handling security decisions or foreign adversaries

Trust in elected officials, personality **among all**

More true of women in elected office

Equally true of both men and women

More true of men in elected office

% More true of women

			Women margin	Men	Women
Focuses on issues that support everyday families	36	45	+17	30	42
Listens to their constituents and works to represent their interests	28	52	+8	20	36
Is able to make tough decisions on national security	17	52	-14	14	21
Is tough enough to handle foreign adversaries	16	52	-16	13	18

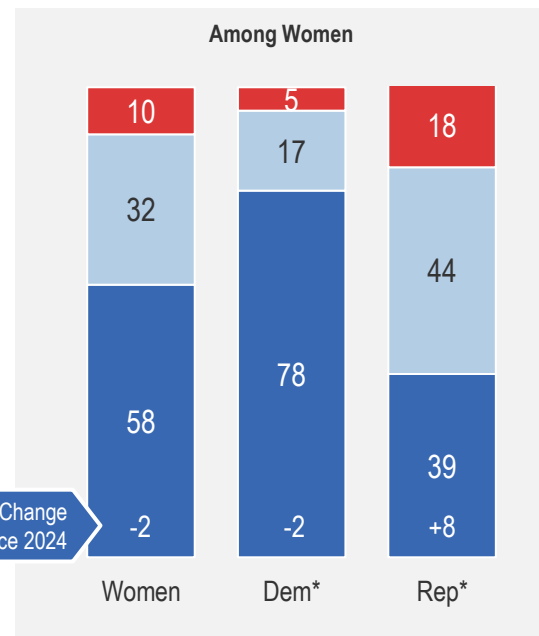
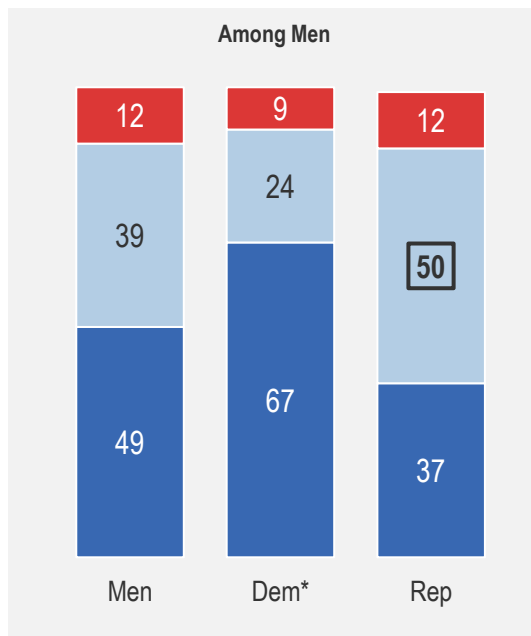
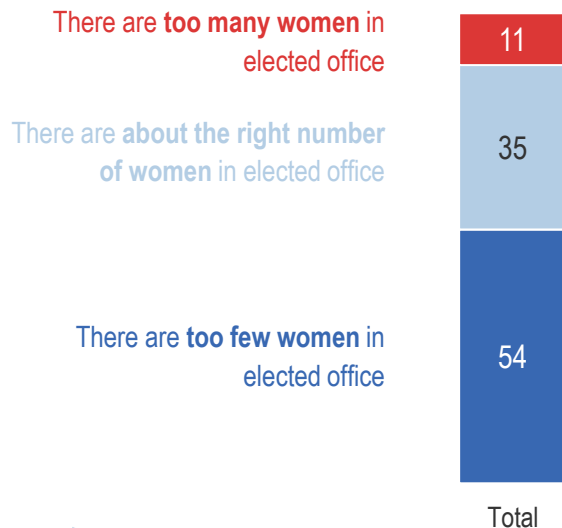


Women in Elected Office

More than half of voters feel there are too few women in elected office, but half of Republicans feel there are the right number of elected women

Women in elected office **among all**

Thinking about the number of women in political office, which is closer to your view?



Change since 2024

-2

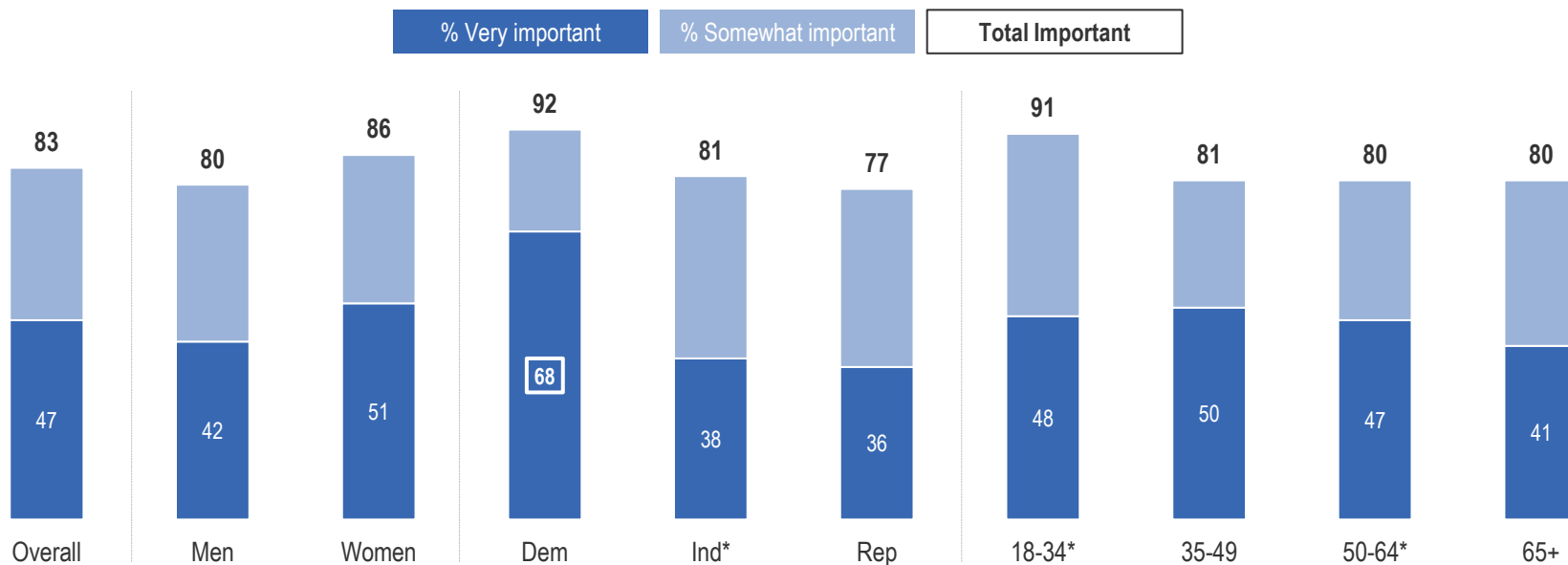
-2

+8

Overwhelming majorities believe it's important to elect more women, particularly Democrats and Gen-Z

Women in elected office among all

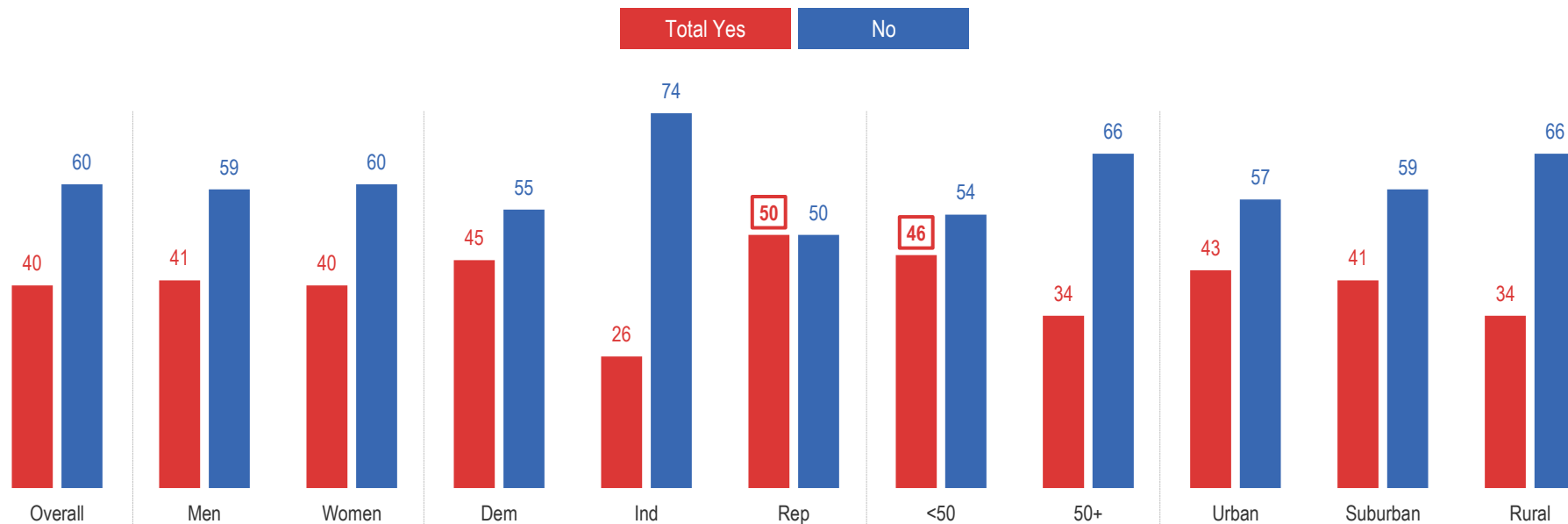
How important is it to elect more women to political office?



4 in 10 voters, particularly Republicans and younger voters, know someone who wouldn't personally vote for a woman for president

Know someone who wouldn't vote female among all

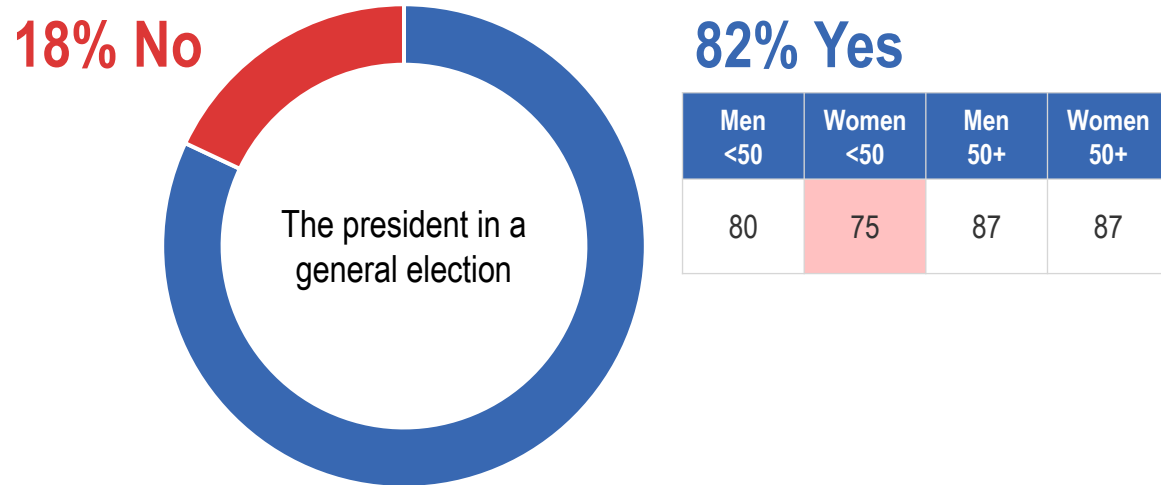
Do you personally know someone who wouldn't vote for a woman for president?



While there is broad agreement in voting for a qualified woman, young voters are actually the least open to voting for a qualified woman as president

Voting for women **among all**

Would you be open to voting for a qualified woman as:



Voters appreciate women's perspectives and empathy that they bring to office

What women bring to politics among all

What do you believe women in elected positions bring to politics?

		Men	Women
A different/new perspective	22	29	15
Empathy and compassion	14	10	17
General improvement compared to men	14	14	13
Rationality and level-headedness	12	10	14
Focus on family and social issues	10	9	10
Diversity and representation	9	7	10
No difference from men	8	9	6
Inclusivity and equality	7	6	8
Advocacy for women's rights	7	5	10
Skepticism toward female politicians	6	7	4

"Diverse perspectives, collaboration approaches, and increased focus on social and community issues."

- Man, 50-64, Latino, Dem, South

"Empathy, heart, concern for women's and children's issues, more concern for health care."

- Woman, 65+, White, Dem, Northeast

"Women in elected positions bring fresh perspectives, balance and a stronger voice for issues that often go underrepresented."

- Woman, 18-34, White, Dem, West

"They bring a fresh perspective on things that we have never seen before when it comes to things like immigration and family affairs."

- Man, 35-49, Latino, Rep, West

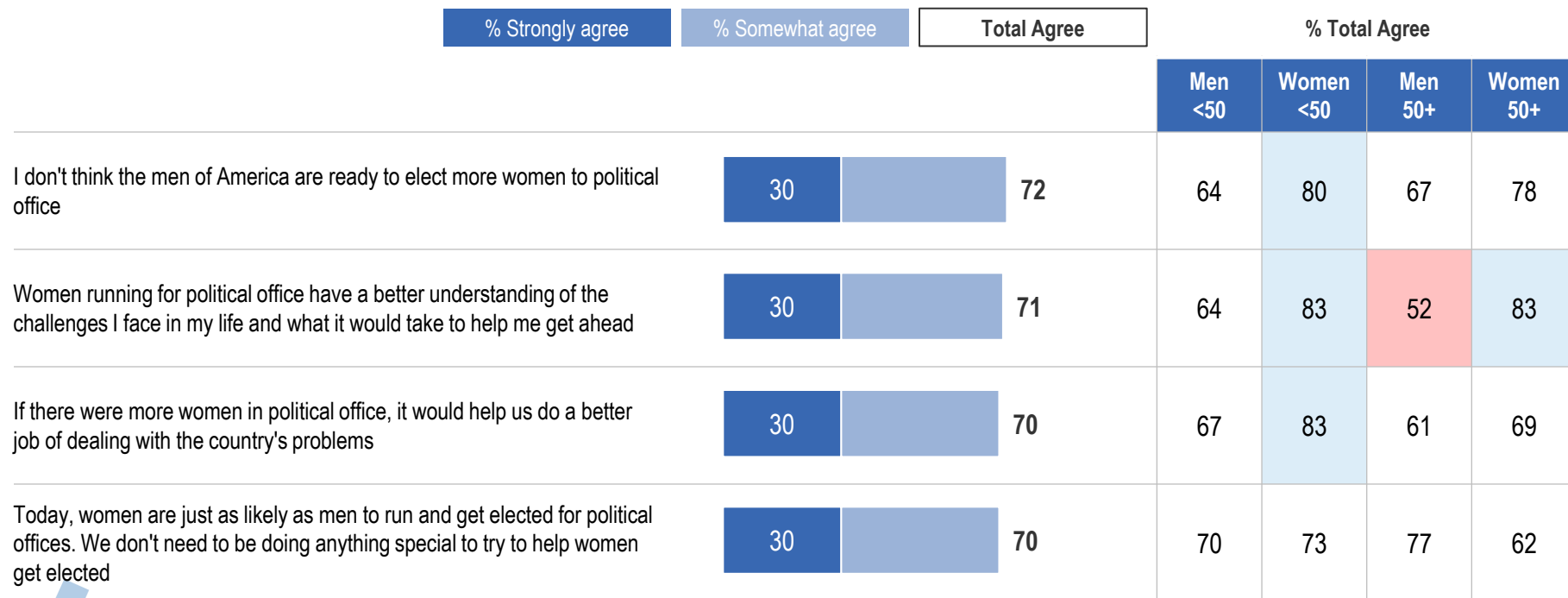
"I think women tend to be more empathetic than men. I think it's most important to stop electing rich out-of-touch elderly white men."

- Man, 50-64, White, Dem, South



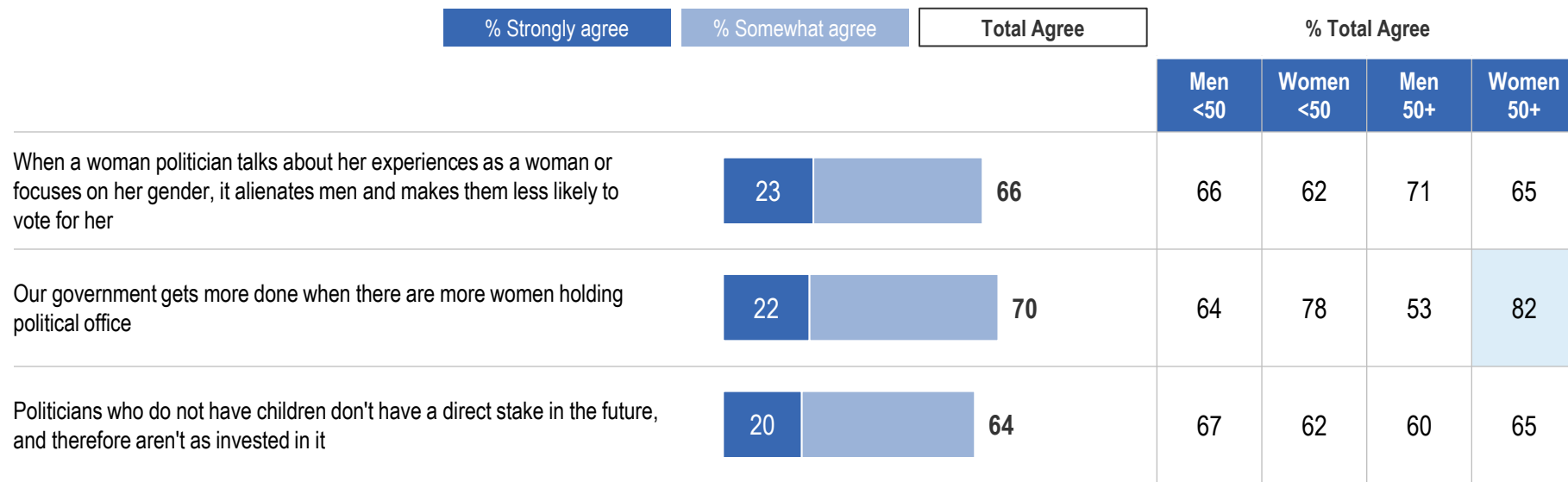
2 in 3 men under 50 agree women in elected office do a better job of dealing with the country's problems

Women in elected office among all



Across the age spectrum, there is broad agreement that the government gets more done with more women in elected office

Women in elected office among all



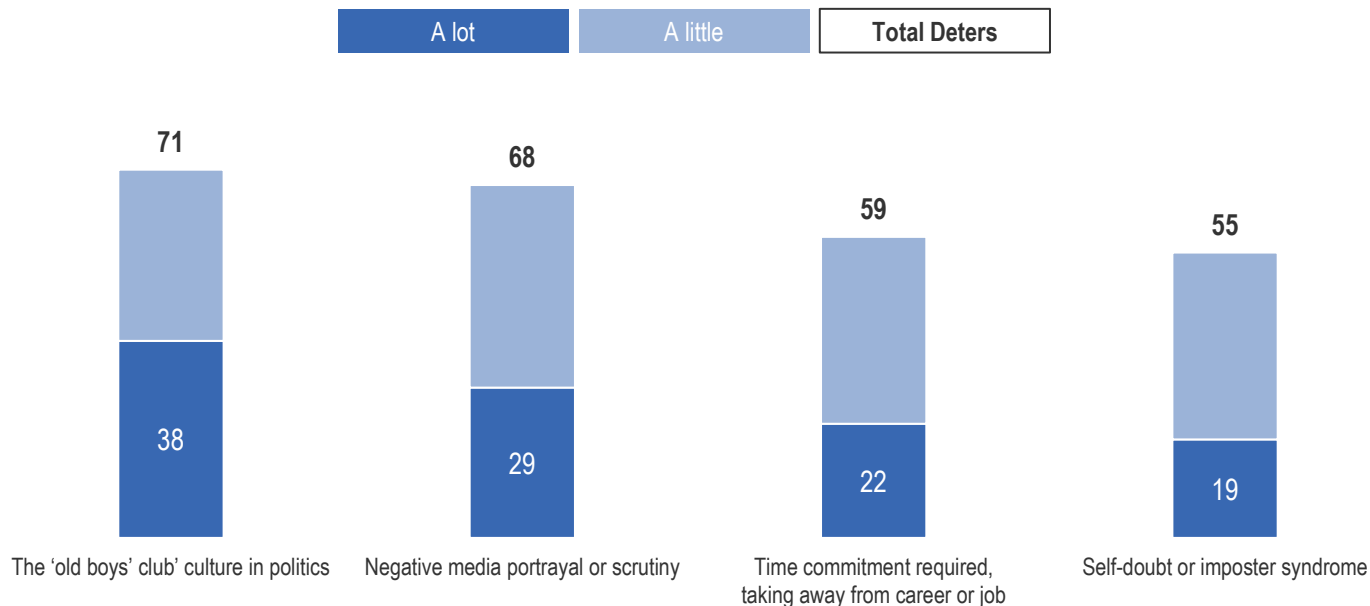


Barriers & Encouragement for Women in Politics and Leadership

Fraternal culture and negative media portrayal are seen by women as the biggest factors deterring women from running for office

Deterrants for women **among women**

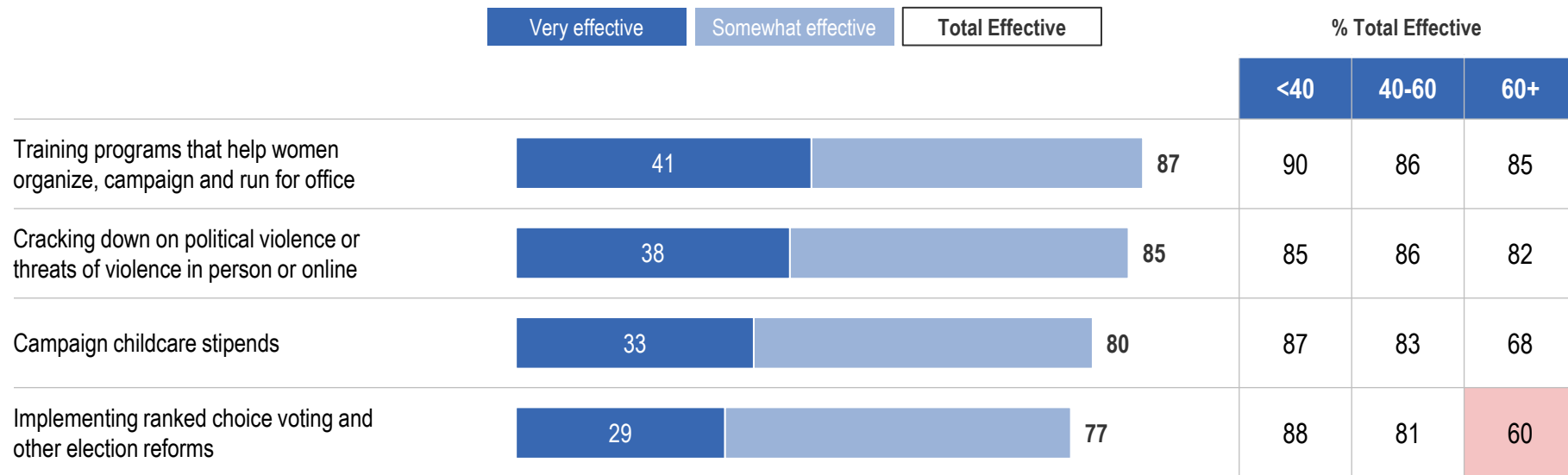
How much do you think each of the following deters women from running for office?



Training programs are seen as an effective tool to encourage women to seek office; electoral reforms are broadly effective but lack intensity

Encouraging factors for women among all

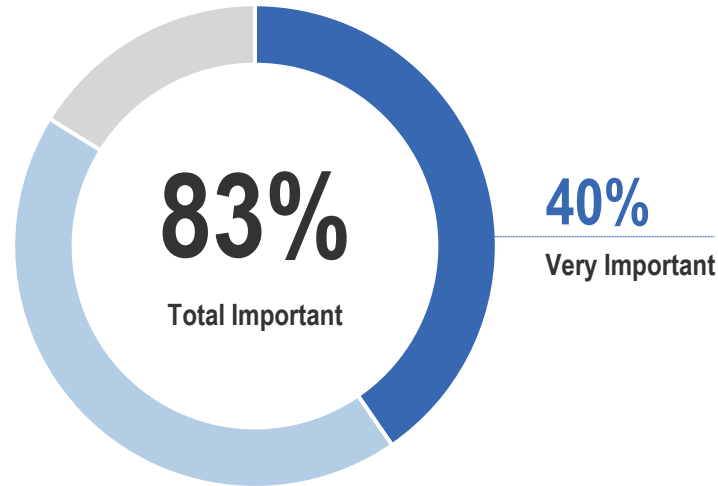
How effective do you think each of the following would be in encouraging more women to seek political office?



Voters are very likely to view organizations focused on encouraging women as important

Organizations encouraging women among all

How important do you think it is to have organizations and institutions focused on encouraging women to become involved in the political process, like AU's Women & Politics Institute?



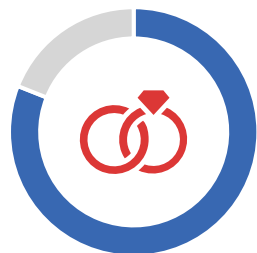


The First Female President

Overwhelming majorities see the first female president as a married mother under 65 with experience in elected office

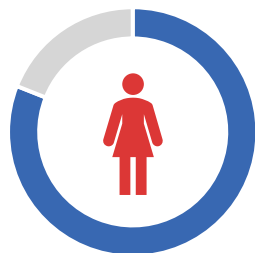
First female president's traits among all

When thinking about the first female president of the United States, please select which option best aligns with how you envision her



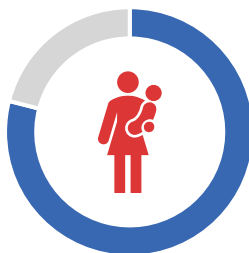
81%

She is married



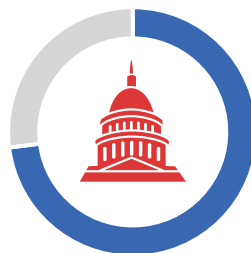
81%

She is younger
than 65 years old



79%

She is a mother



73%

She has served multiple
terms in Congress or as
a Governor



71%

She has older kids who
have moved out

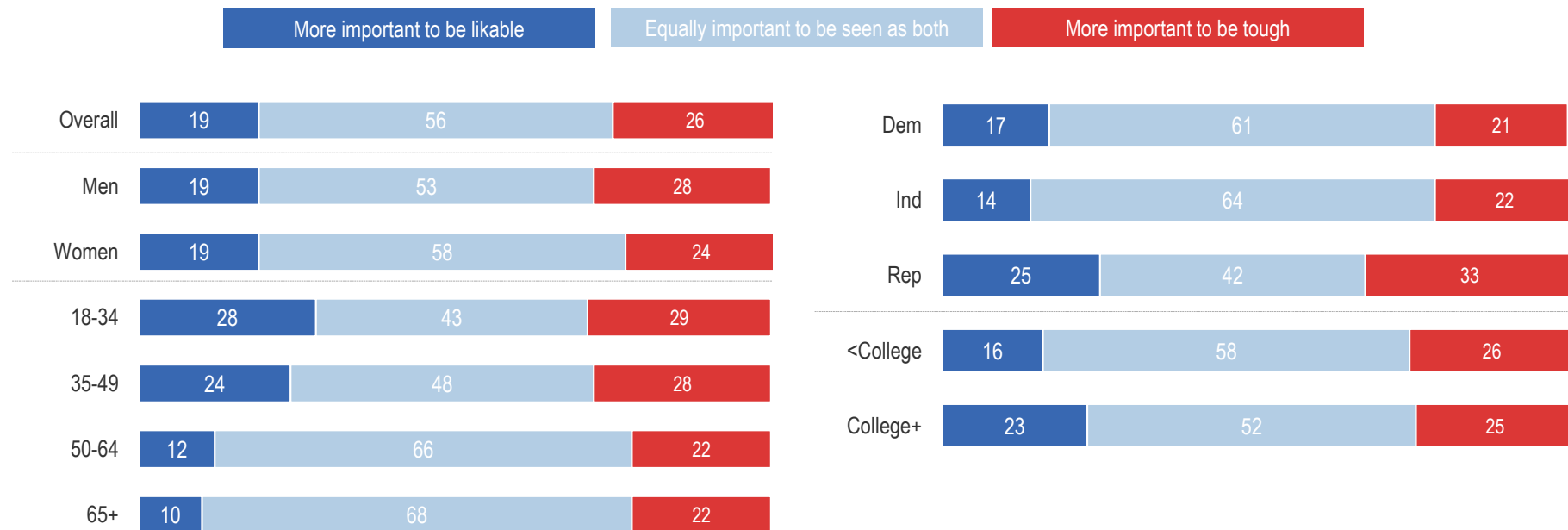


66%

She has a
background primarily
in law or politics

Though the majority feels it's equally important for her to be both, voters slightly prefer that the first female president is tough rather than likable

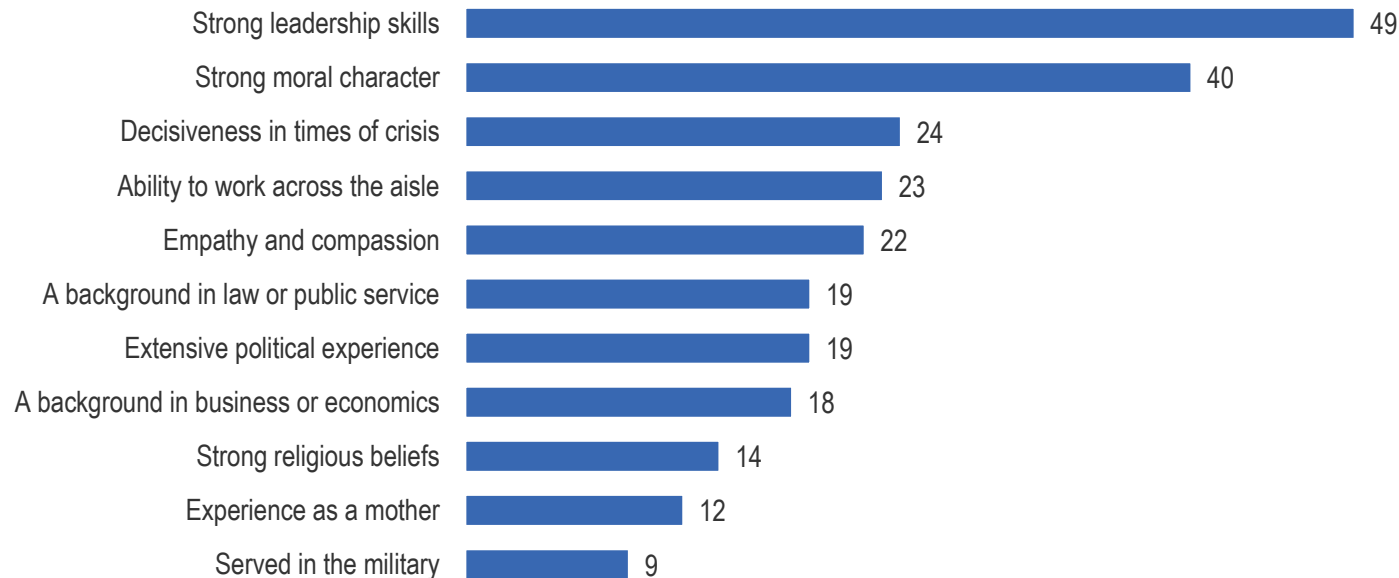
First female president among all



Voters see strong leadership skills and moral character as the most important qualities for the first female president to possess

First female president's qualities among all

Which of the following qualities do you think would be MOST important for the first female president to possess?



The first female president needs to walk a fine line; she should use strength and a balance of firmness and friendliness to show she's both likable and tough

First female president among all

How can the first female president best show that she is both likable and tough?



"She can have a charismatic personality and a determined demeanor."

- Woman, 65+, White, Rep, South

"Listen to what the people want and fight for it."

- Man, 35-49, Asian, Dem, Midwest

"By balancing firm, decisive leadership with empathy, transparency."

- Man, 35-49, White, Rep, West

"By working with both parties to get things done but taking no trash talking from opponents or the media, being able to stick up for herself."

- Woman, 50-64, White, Dem, West

"By being empathetic while making tough decisions."

- Woman, 50-64, American Indian, Rep, Midwest

"Spending time with and listening to her citizens, backing law enforcement to be tough on crime, keep a strong military, don't take any crap from foreign leaders or the UN."

- Man, 65+, White, Rep, South

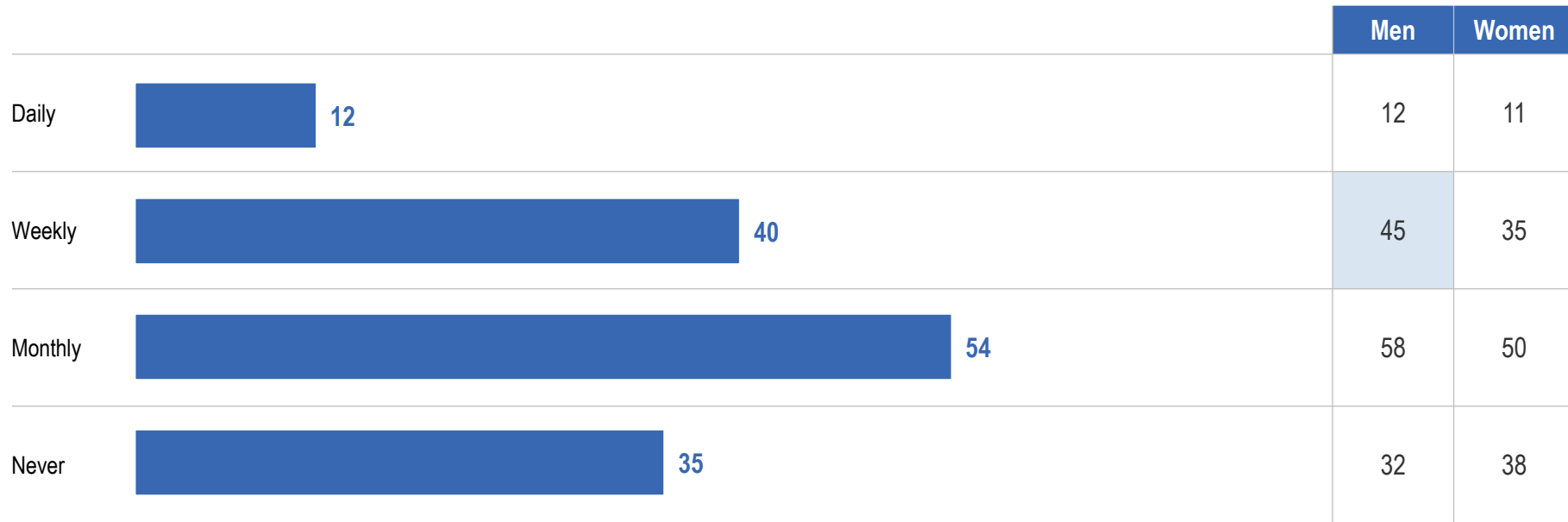


Culture & Media Influence

More than half of voters listen to political podcasts at least monthly, including almost 3 in 5 men

Podcast frequency **among all**

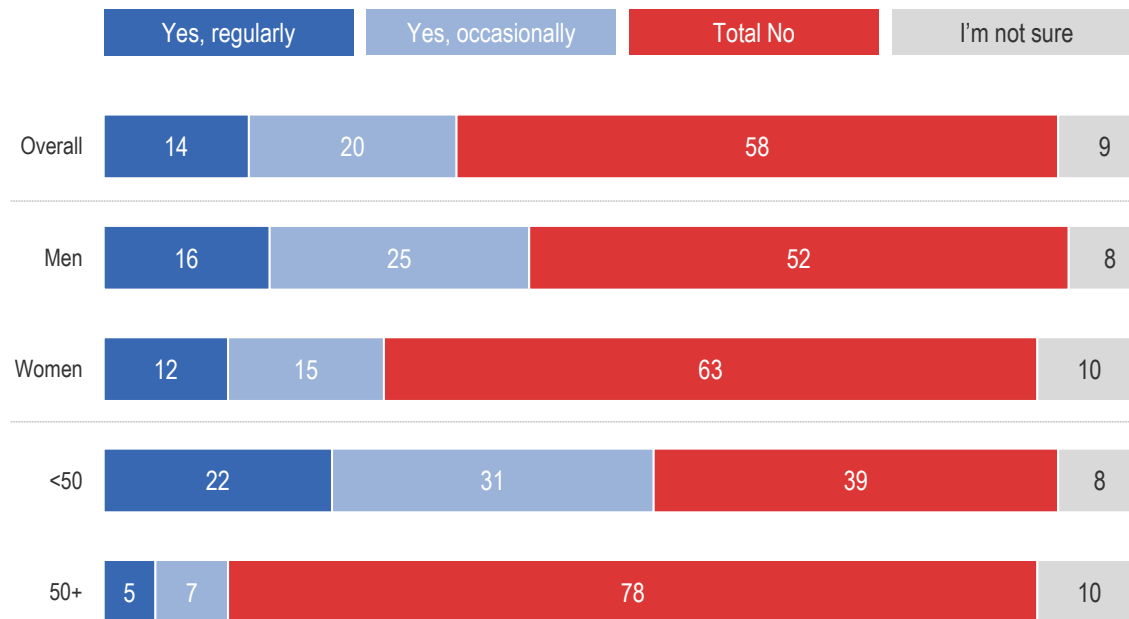
How often do you listen to podcasts that discuss current events, politics, or social issues?



Only a third overall have listened to “bro culture” podcasts, though closer to half of younger voters

“Bro culture” podcasts among all

Have you listened to any “bro culture” podcasts in the past year?

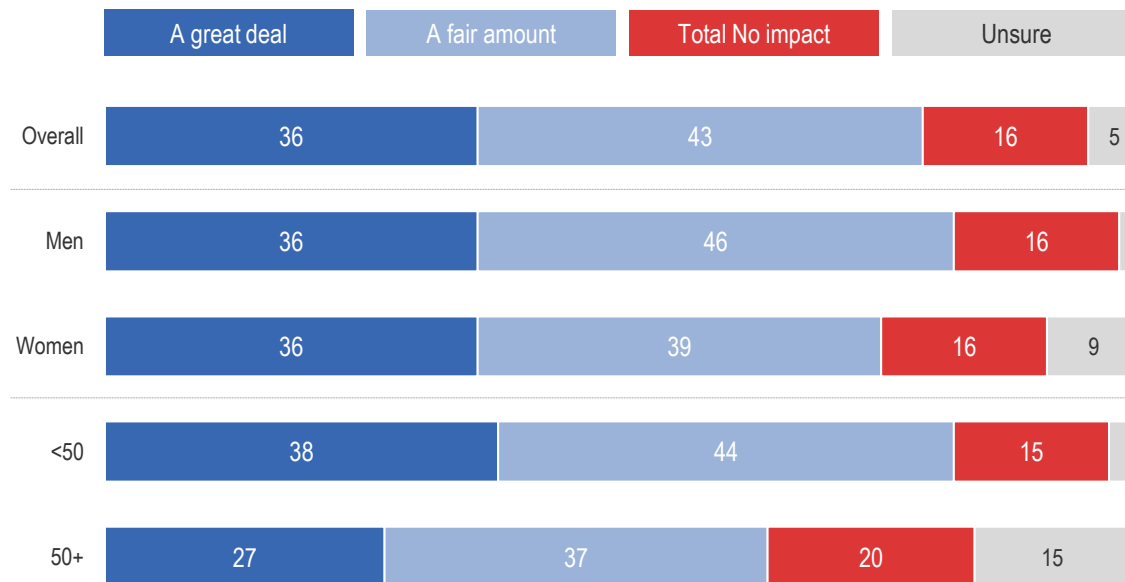


Among those who listened, 4 in 5 voters feel “bro culture” podcasts impacted the 2024 election

“Bro culture” podcasts’ impact among all

How much do you think “bro culture” podcasts or online communities influenced the outcome of the last presidential election?

Among those who listen to “bro culture” podcasts





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