

National Public Opinion Poll

Human Purpose in Peril

Americans fear AI will undermine human meaning and weaken social bonds, even as AI users report some satisfaction and useful outcomes from the bots now

By Lee Rainie and Janna Anderson
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ELON
UNIVERSITY

Imagining the
Digital Future
Center

Human Purpose in Peril

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A new nationwide survey by Elon University's Imagining the Digital Future Center (ITDF) reveals U.S. adults' attitudes about the expanding use of LLMs and their deepening impact on essential aspects of being human: human connection, purpose, agency and critical thinking.

This survey shows that Americans share some of the core concerns we discovered in [ITDF's landmark April report on human resilience in the Age of AI](#), which gathered insights from technology pioneers, policymakers and scholars. Those experts stressed the urgent need for systemic, institutional evolution to help individuals maintain their agency. This follow-up poll offers a vivid portrait of a nation continuing to embrace AI, reaping tangible benefits, yet feeling deeply anxious about the impact AI will have on what it means to be human in an AI-suffused future.

A full set of graphics tied to the data begins on page 6

The Key Findings in This Poll of U.S. Adults Reflect Major Concerns

Fears of fracturing human connection: 69% of U.S. adults said that AI will weaken human-to-human bonds a lot (33%) or somewhat (36%). [Chart, p. 6]

The threat to human purpose: 64% agreed with the statement *"By replacing human beings in most tasks, AI will undermine our sense of purpose and meaning in life."* Some 36% agreed with an opposing statement: *"By freeing human beings from most routine tasks, AI will allow us to find greater purpose and meaning in life."* [Chart, p. 7]

Low confidence in retaining human agency: 55% said they are not confident that their fellow humans will retain their ability to think critically and evaluate information vs. 15% who are confident about that.

- 50% said they are not confident most people will use AI appropriately and effectively vs. 15% who have such confidence.
- 46% are not confident people will maintain their sense of motivation and purpose as AI advances vs. 15% who do have confidence. [Chart, p. 8]

A double-edged sword for users: Many large language model (LLM) users admitted to worrisome personal behavioral shifts: 51% said they felt they were being lazy or taking easy shortcuts at least some of the time when using bots; 39% said they are growing overly dependent on LLMs to give them answers rather than thinking for themselves; 39% feel like they are cheating at times by using chatbots; 22% said they have felt manipulated. [Chart, p. 9]

Overall adoption continued to grow: 65% of U.S. adults said they used a large language model (LLM) in the past week – up from 52% in early 2025. This growth spans all demographic groups and is striking among people of color, parents of minor children and workers. Fully half (49%) of non-working adults are also weekly users. [Chart, p. 10]

AI's expanding footprint in everyday life: 63% of Americans said AI already heavily influences their daily routine (18%) or that they expect it will within the next five years (45%). On the other hand, 16% said they expect AI will never significantly impact them. [Chart, p. 11]
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It is important to note that despite the significant worries they reported in this survey, most people also expressed generally positive reactions about their AI use, noting that bots have helped them learn new things, inspired them to create something better than they would have on their own, offered better advice than they might have received from family or friends and helped them prepare for difficult human-to-human conversations.

Data on Americans' Personal Uses of AI

The rise of personal agents: One-fifth (20%) of LLM users overall have already built their own custom AI agent; the figure is 36% among young adults (ages 18-29).

The best-known bots: ChatGPT (used in the past week by 43% of U.S. adults) and Gemini (38%) dominate public use of LLMs. Other active players include Copilot (19%), Meta AI (13%), Claude (9%), Grok (7%), and DeepSeek (3%) and 7% cited use of other bots. Use of multiple bots is common: one-fifth (19%) of adults reported using three or more chatbots, and 22% use two. [Chart, p. 12]

Primarily a personal tool: With the exception of Copilot, majorities of chatbot users said they use these bots mostly for personal rather than business needs. For example, 55% of ChatGPT users use it strictly for personal reasons, 6% said they use it for business only, and 39% use it for both. [Chart, p. 13]

Versatile daily applications: Three-quarters of LLM users said they use chatbots for self-directed, informal learning (77%) and product research (76%).

Over half use them for entertainment (52%), while others deploy them for major decision-making (43%), creative projects (37%), news consumption (31%) and roleplaying personal encounters ahead, practicing those interactions in advance (24%). [Chart, p. 14]

Guiding major life milestones: AIs have become trusted advisors in many cases. Users report that LLMs played a role in managing a medical condition (49%), upgrading job skills (44%), navigating a career change (34%), making major financial decisions (29%), and selecting a new place to live (17%). [Chart, p. 15]

The perceived intelligence gap: 56% of users said they think AI models are smarter than they are (up from 49% in early 2025), and 73% said chatbots have better ideas than they do much of the time (8%), some of the time (31%) or at least a small amount of the time (30%). [Charts, p. 16-17]

The Impact of LLMs on Users: More Upbeat Than Not

Public anxiety over the advancing influence of AI is striking and individual users' personal experiences with it are a mix of highs and lows. Yet while the public sees the darker sides of LLMs as a large part of their role in society most bot users also say they have benefited greatly from AI use.

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Bots seen to bolster motivation, communication: When asked how AI affects some valued human traits, users overwhelmingly reported improvement rather than decline. Respondents said AI use improved: their motivation to learn new skills (52% improved vs. 5% worsened), written communication (49% vs. 6%), creativity (45% vs. 8%), critical thinking (42% vs. 8%), decision-making (39% vs. 6%), self-confidence (37% vs. 7%), leadership (24% vs. 5%) and social skills (18% vs. 9%). [Chart, p. 18]

Emotional reactions while using AI: When presented with a list of words that describe emotions and asked how often they feel them in regard to AI, more users were more likely to choose positive emotions like curious (45% said they feel this always or very often when they think about AI), smart (32%), optimistic (28%) and empowered (23%) than they were to select words like anxious (13% said they felt that way always or very often when they think about AI), threatened (9%), obsolete (7%) and useless (5%). Their choices of a mix of both positive and negative descriptives reflect the mixed emotions about AI. [Chart, p. 19]

Trust, but verify: Many reported that they often work to verify bot responses. Two-thirds (66%) reported actively cross-checking AI accuracy against non-LLM sources, 46% said they compare outputs across multiple models and 51% said they have entirely abandoned a specific bot due to poor or inaccurate performance. Even so, 73% said they follow AI recommendations always, most of the time or sometimes. [Chart, p. 20]

Technology experts in earlier ITDF research have argued that individual resilience is not enough; safeguarding [human agency requires an "institutions-first" agenda](#) to allow people to flourish. This new survey shows the American public has split, yet generally hopeful views as to which of society's institutions is likely to step up to effectively guide them through this transition:

- **Tech Sector:** 39% of all U.S. adults said they expect that the technology companies creating AI tools could be extremely or very effective in helping people to adapt successfully to a world in which AI has more influence; another 38% said such firms are likely to be somewhat effective.
- **Higher Education:** 34% place high confidence in colleges and universities' effectiveness in the AI transition, with 44% rating them as likely to be somewhat effective.
- **K-12 Education:** 26% said primary schools could be highly effective, alongside 46% who perceived them as likely to be somewhat effective.
- **Employers:** 27% said leadership in workplaces could be highly effective, and 47% perceived them as likely to be somewhat effective.
- **Low Confidence:** In contrast, the public expressed significantly lower confidence in the likely positive contributions of legal system, state and federal governments and religious institutions to help people navigate through the challenges of the accelerating AI era. [Chart, p. 21]

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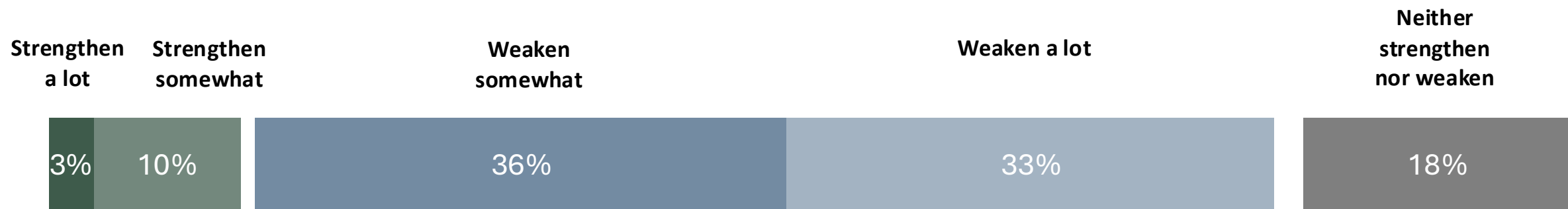
Insights Into This Survey

The material reported here comes from a nationally representative survey of 1,505 adults, including 1,163 users of large language models (LLMs). It was conducted between May 14-18, 2026. It includes an oversample of 501 LLM users. The overall sample, including the oversample, has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points. An LLM user is someone who answered “yes” when asked if they used any of these LLMs in the past week: ChatGPT from OpenAI, Gemini from Google, Copilot from Microsoft, Meta AI, also known as Llama, Claude AI from Anthropic, Grok from Xai, DeepSeek, another AI chatbot service. We use the terms “LLM users” and “bot” or “chatbot users” throughout this report to refer to this group.

Human Purpose in Peril: *Human Connection*

69% said they think AI will weaken rather than strengthen human connection in coming years

% of U.S. adults who say AI will have this kind of impact on human-to-human connection in the coming years



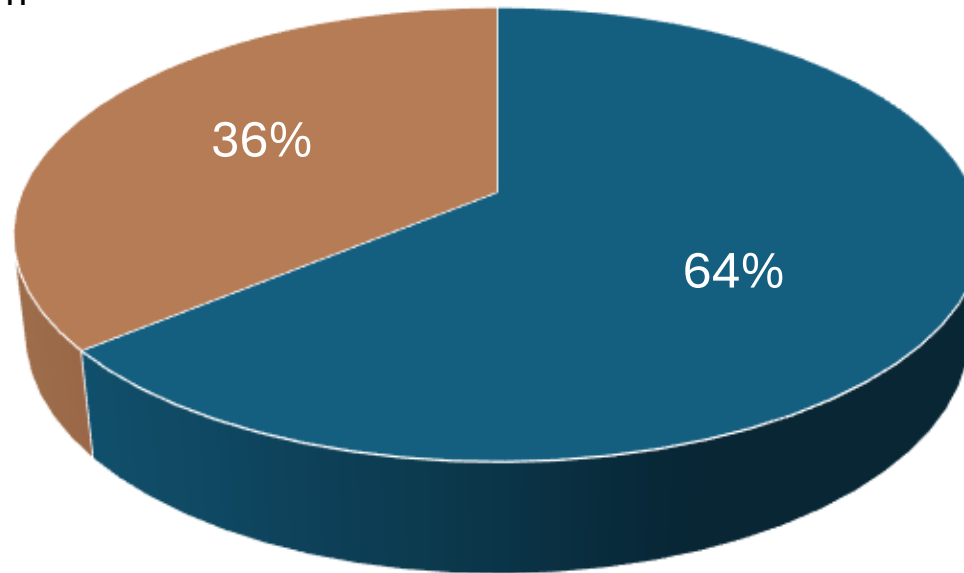
Note: Non-responses are not listed

Human Purpose in Peril: *Sense of Meaning*

Nearly two-thirds of American adults think AI will undermine our sense of purpose and meaning

% of U.S. adults who say this statement is closest to their own views

By freeing human beings from most routine tasks, AI will allow us to find greater purpose and meaning in life



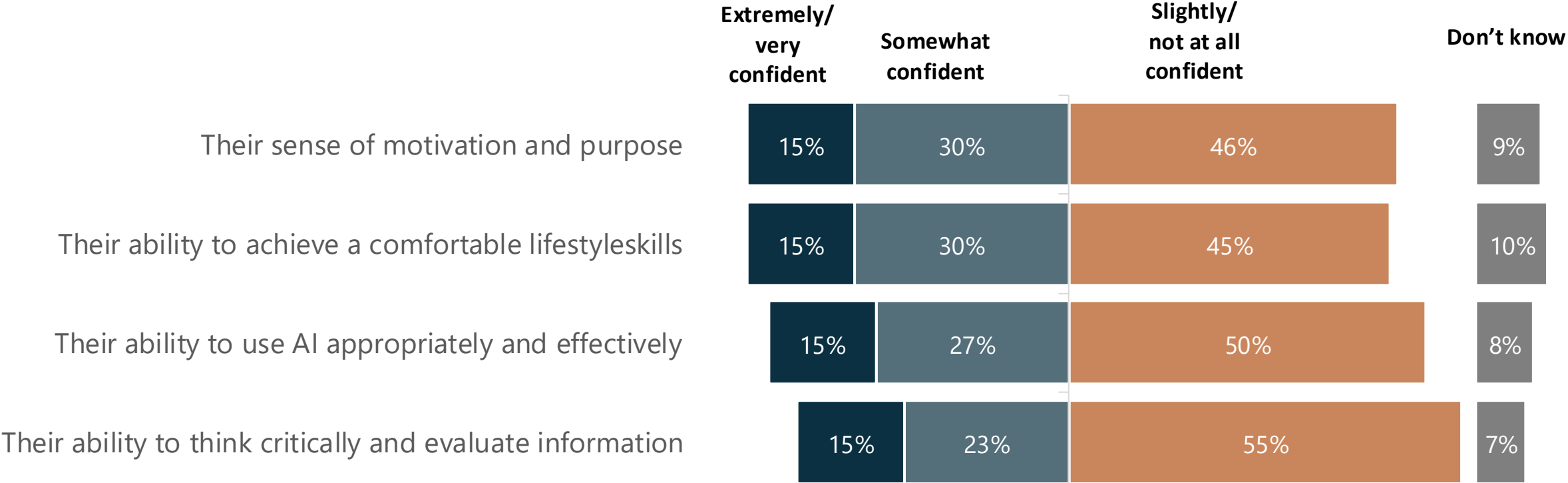
By replacing human beings in most tasks, AI will undermine our sense of purpose and meaning in life

Note: Non-responses are not listed

Human Purpose in Peril: *Human Agency and Autonomy*

Americans are not very confident about most people’s ability to retain these dimensions of life that focus on their agency and autonomy in the coming years

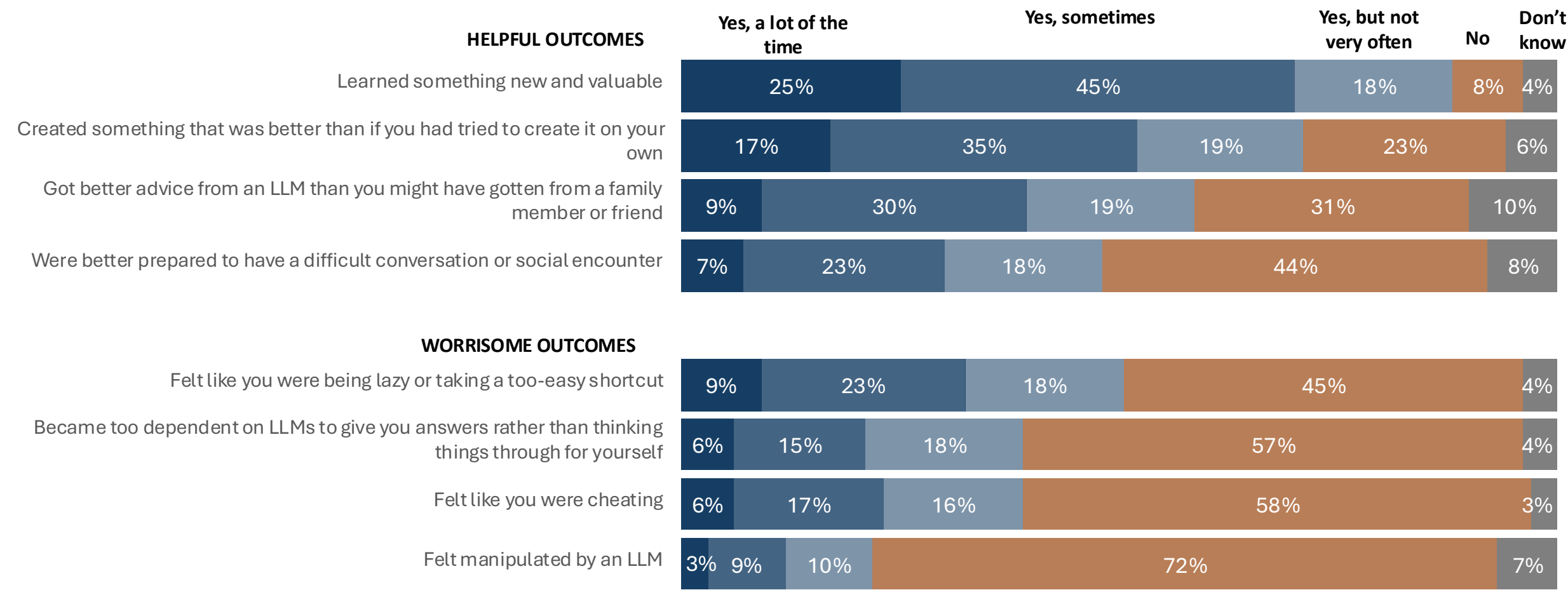
% of U.S. adults who say they are _____ confident that most people will be able to maintain the following in the coming years



Human Purpose in Peril: *Helpful and Harmful Bots*

Chatbot users have experienced both harms and benefits from their use of LLM chatbots

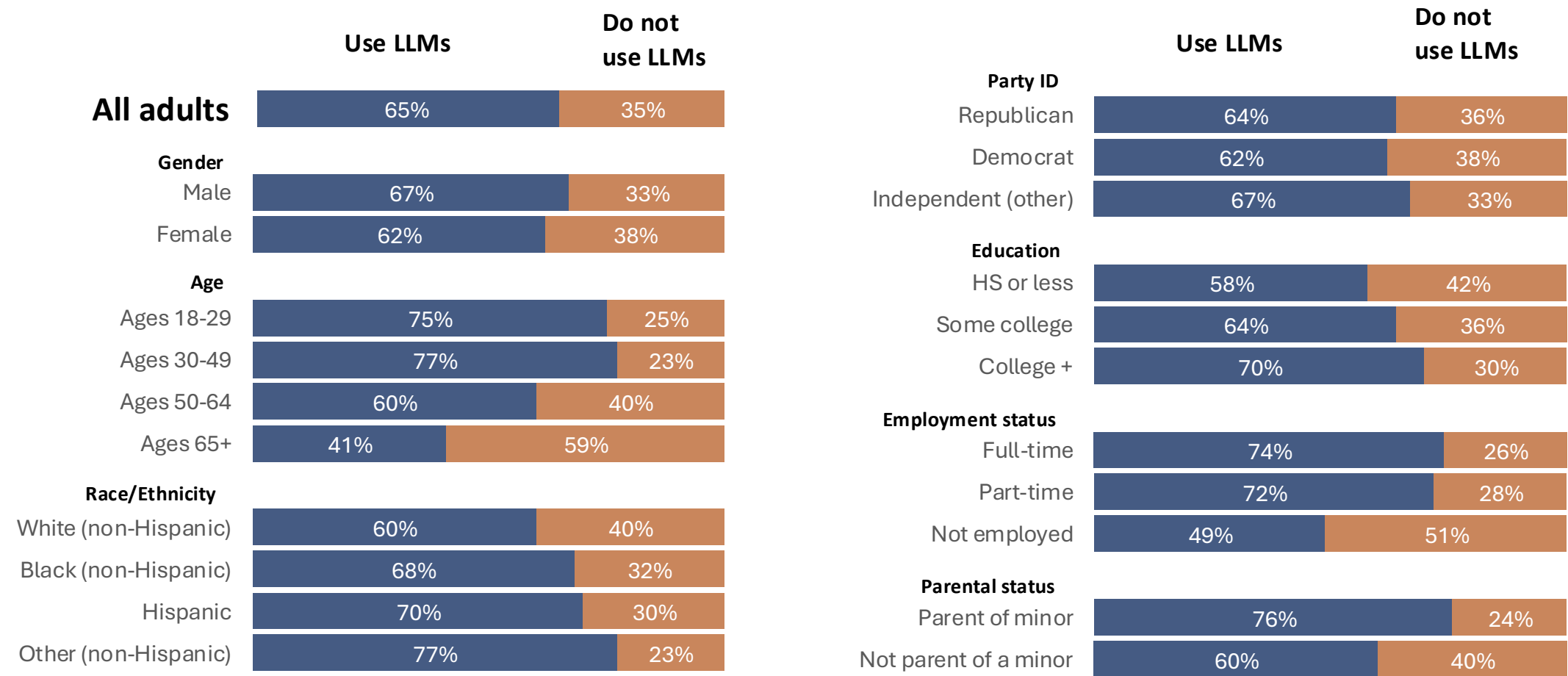
% of large language model users who say they have ever experienced these things while using their chatbots



Human Purpose in Peril: *Demographics of Chatbot Users*

Use of language model chatbots is widespread among diverse groups

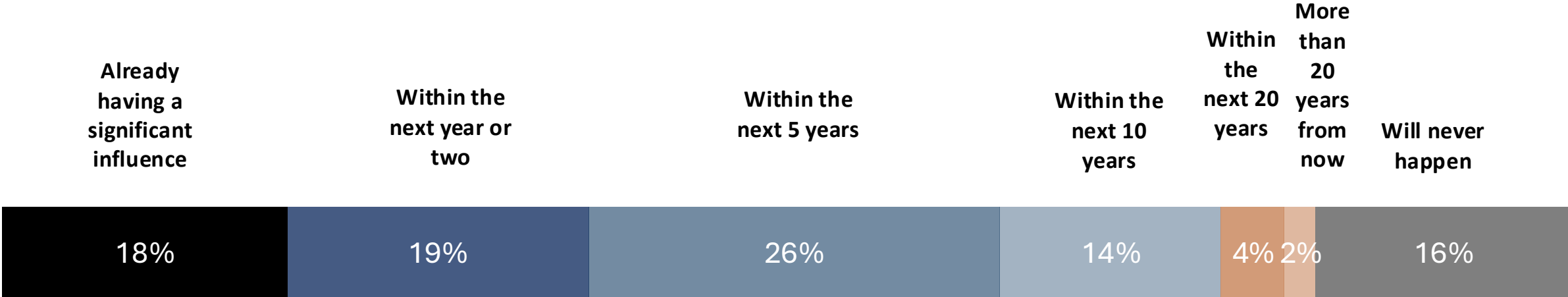
% of U.S. adults who used large language model chatbots in the previous week



Human Purpose in Peril: *AI Influence is Growing*

Most Americans think AI already have or will have more-significant influence over their everyday lives in the coming years

% of U.S. adults who say AI will have significant influence over their everyday lives in these time periods

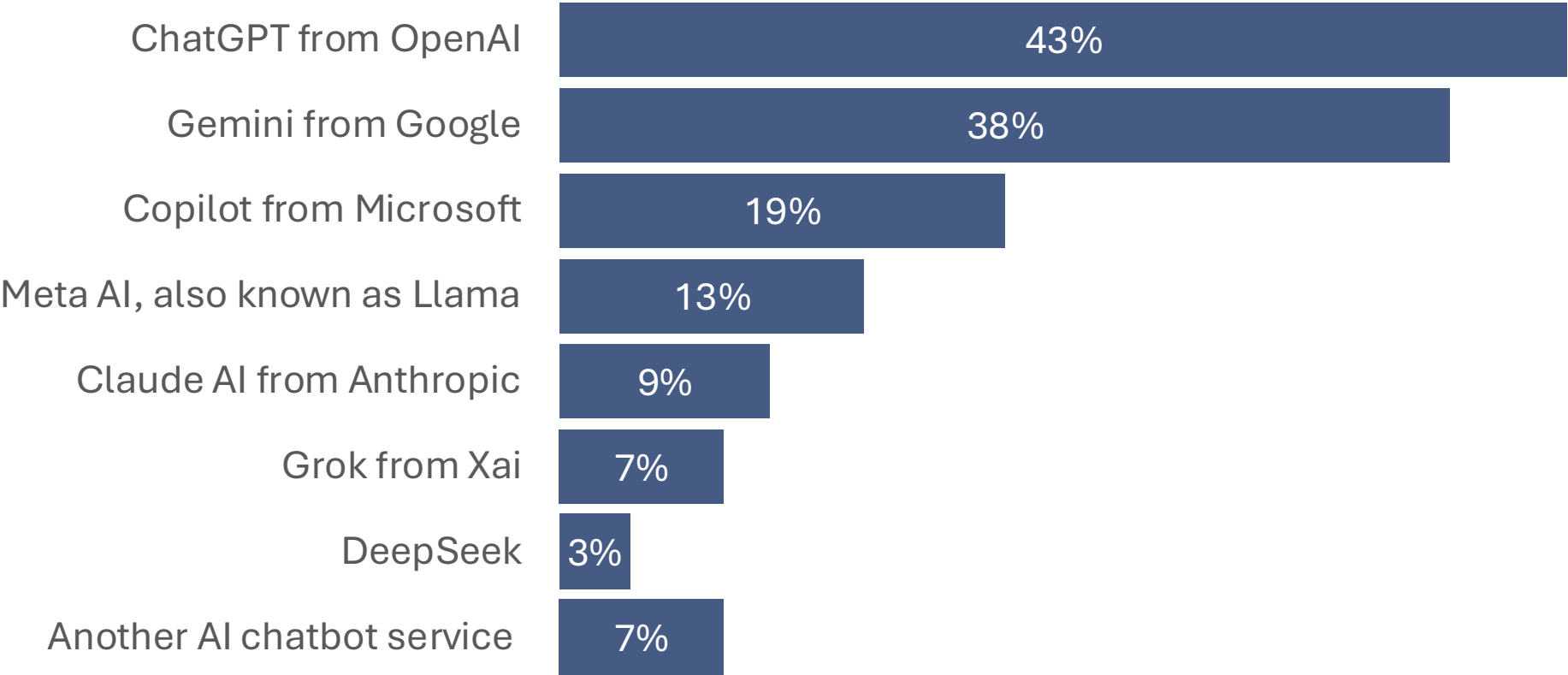


Note: Non-responses are not listed

Human Purpose in Peril: *Most-Used Chatbot Models*

ChatGPT and Gemini are the most used chatbot models

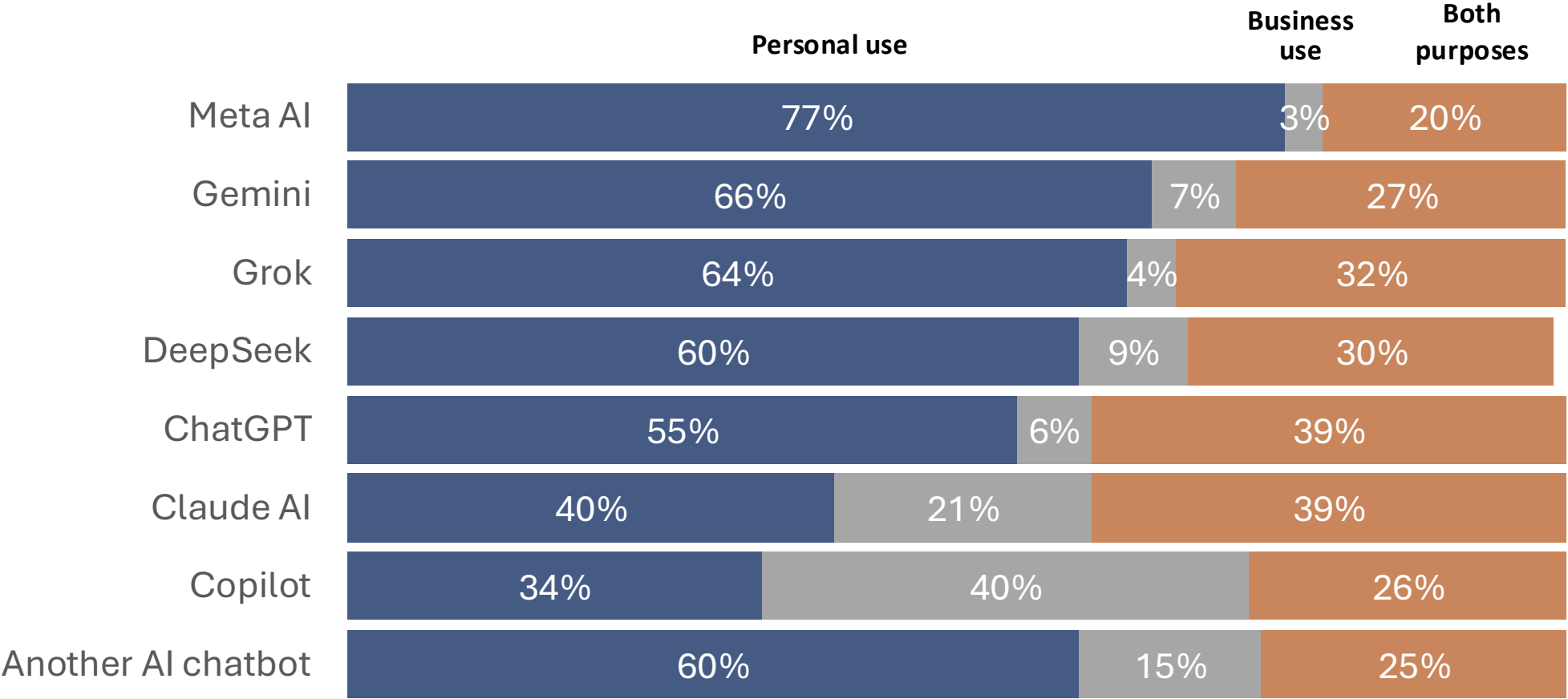
% of U.S. adults who used these language models in the previous week



Human Purpose in Peril: *Bots As Primary Personal Tools*

Most use language model chatbots for personal – rather than business – purposes

% of large language model users who use their bots for these reasons in the previous week

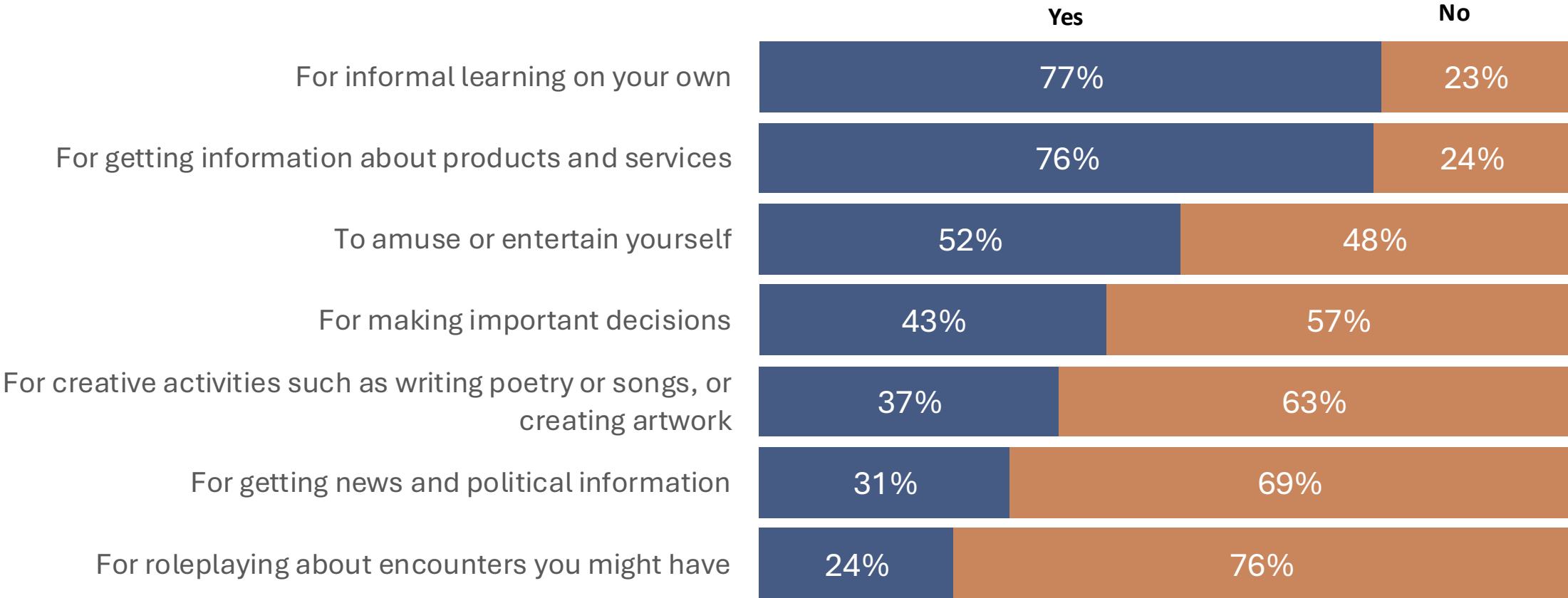


Note: Numbers may not add to 100% because of rounding

Human Purpose in Peril: *Popular Uses of Chatbots*

Informal learning and product search top the uses of LLMs, but roleplaying is also part of the mix

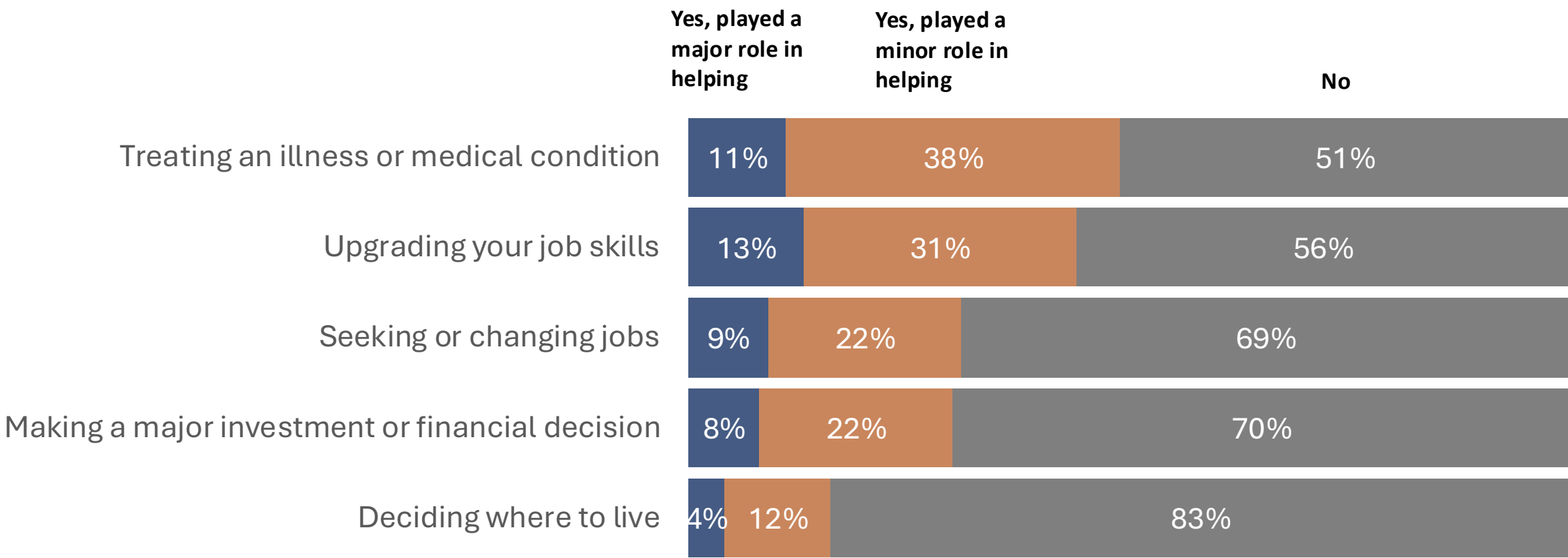
% of large language model users who use their bots for these reasons



Human Purpose in Peril: Bot Uses in Vital Human Moments

Notable shares of LLM users turn to their bots in major life events

% of language model users who say using an LLM has helped them in these areas of life

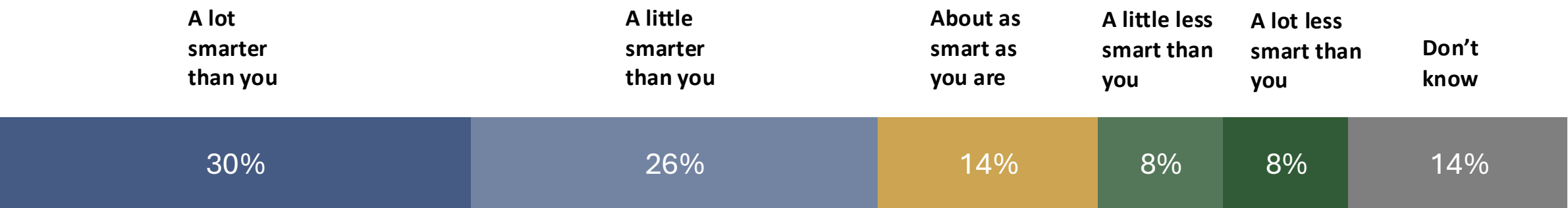


Note: Non-responses are not listed

Human Purpose in Peril: *Als Are Smarter*

A majority of LLM users said their LLMs or AI chatbots are already smarter than they are

% of language model users who think the LLMs they use are _____

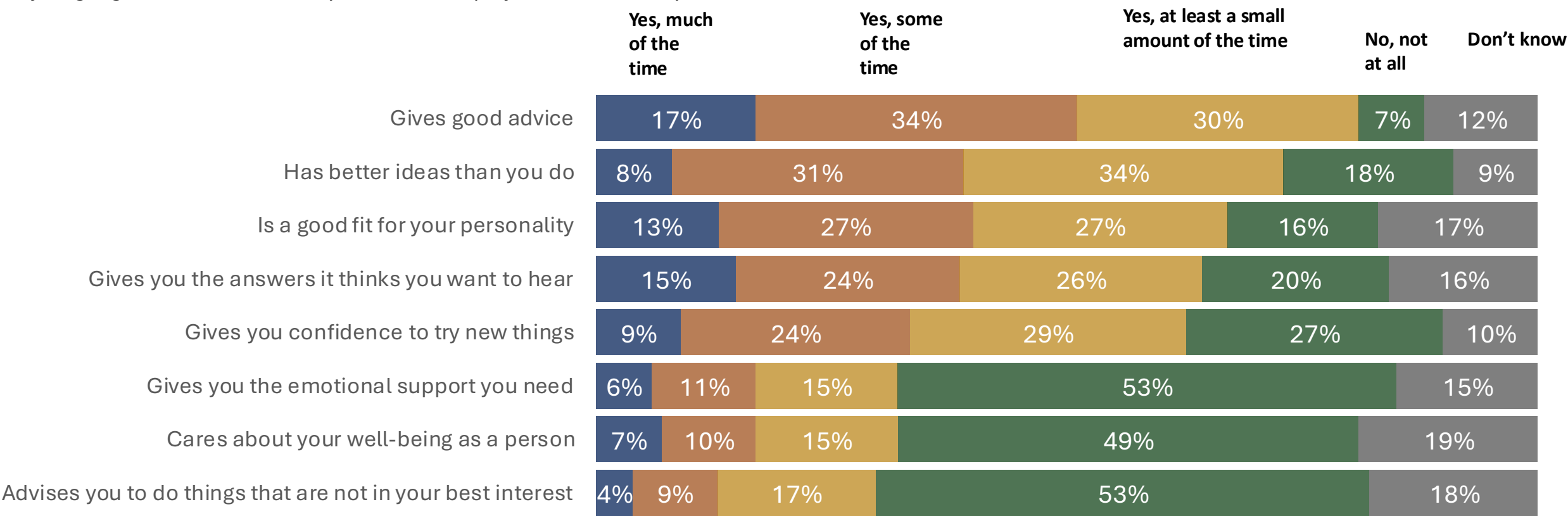


Note: Non-responses are not listed

Human Purpose in Peril: *Chatbot Performance*

LLM users say their chatbot at least at times gives them good advice and has better ideas than they have; but it also panders

% of language model users who say their chatbot performs in these ways

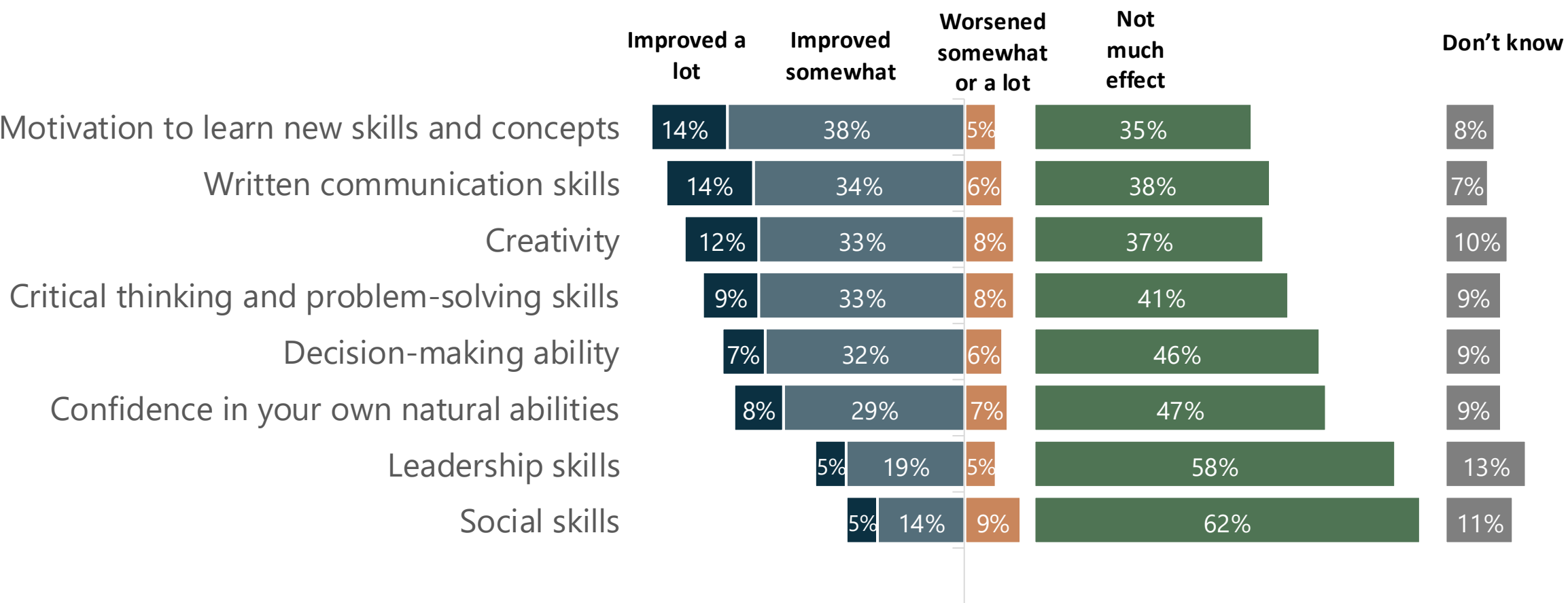


Note: Non-responses are not listed

Human Purpose in Peril: *Impact on Respondents' Capacities*

These chatbot users were more likely than not to say AI has improved, rather than worsened, some of their key human capacities. Many also said AI has not had much impact on them yet.

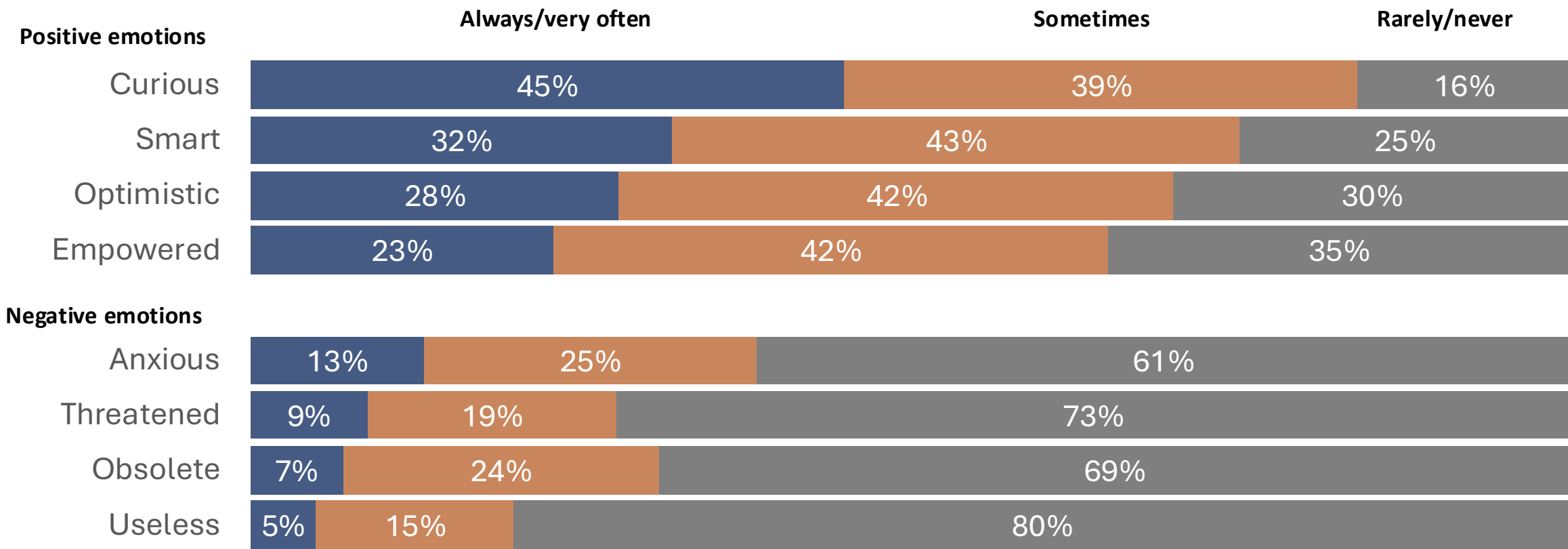
% of language model users who say their own, personal chatbot use has affected these parts of their lives



Human Purpose in Peril: *How LLM Users Often Feel About AIs*

Despite their concerns, LLM users in this survey associated AIs with mostly positive feelings

% of language model users who say they often feel these ways about AI

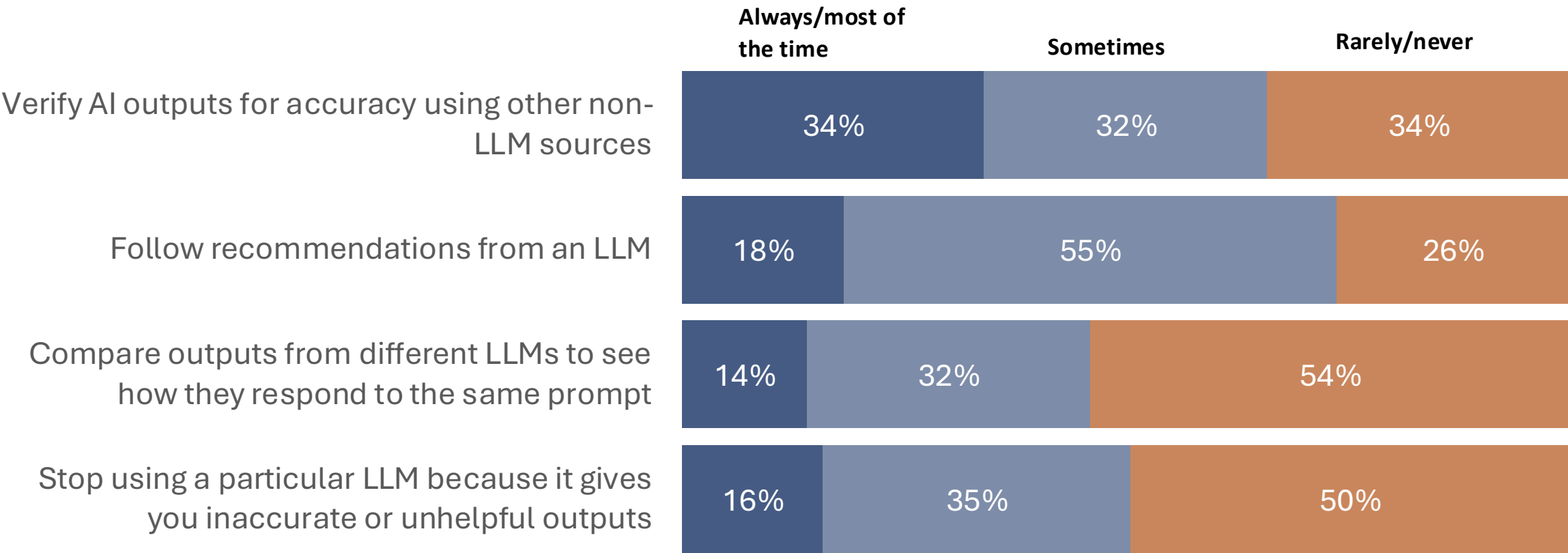


Note: Non-responses are not listed

Human Purpose in Peril: *How Often Respondents Verify AI Output*

These users said they check the responses of LLMs in a variety of ways ... sometimes

% of language model users who employ these tactics to check up on their bots' responses

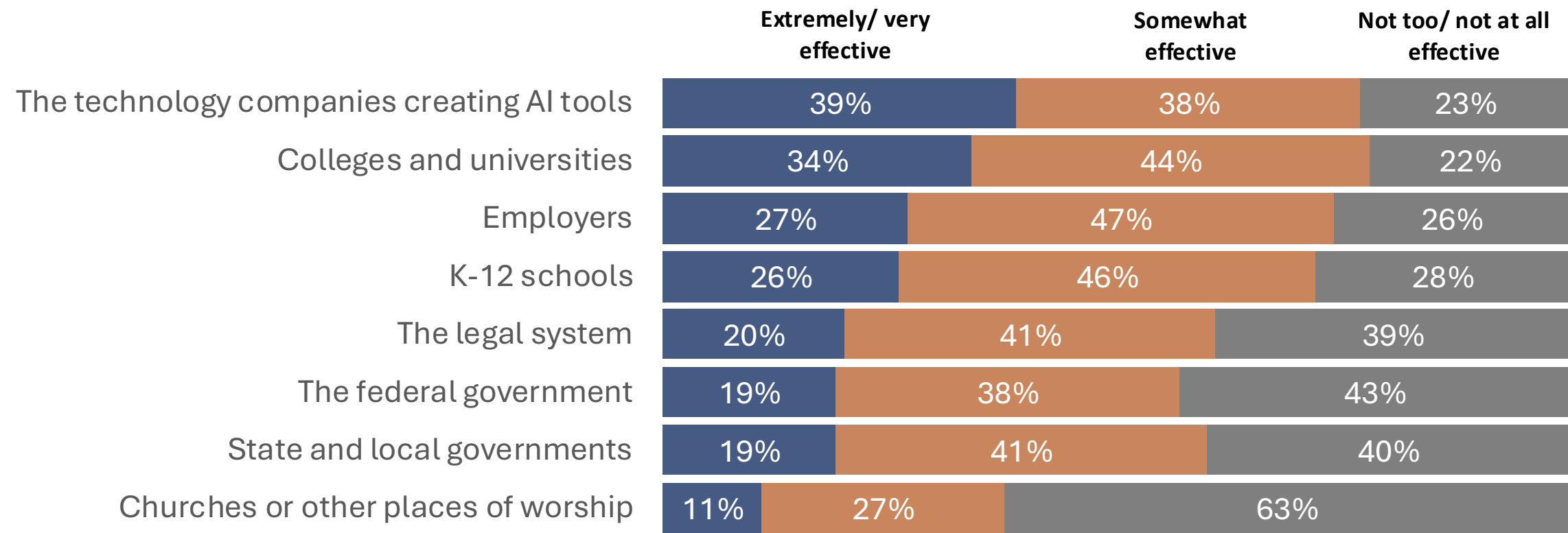


Note: Non-responses are not listed

Human Purpose in Peril: Can Institutions Help People Adapt?

People have some hope about key institutions being able to help people respond to a world where AI has growing influence

% of U.S. adults who say these institutions will be _____ in helping people successfully adapt to a world in which AI has more influence in their lives



METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by SSRS on its Opinion Panel Omnibus platform. The SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus is a national, twice-per-month, probability-based survey. Data collection was conducted from May 14 to May 18, 2026, among a sample of 1,505 respondents, which included an oversample of n=501 LLM or AI chatbot users. The survey was conducted via web (n=1,475) and telephone (n=30) and administered in English. The LLM oversample was comprised of panelists who previously shared that they had used LLMs or AI chatbots, as part of the Edison at SSRS AI User Metrics surveys conducted on the SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus. These panelists reconfirmed at the start of the current survey that they used at least one AI chatbot in the past week.

All SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus data are weighted to represent the target population of U.S. adults ages 18 or older. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The total sample design effect for this survey is 1.50.

The SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus is conducted on the SSRS Opinion Panel. SSRS Opinion Panel members are recruited randomly based primarily on nationally representative ABS (Address Based Sample) design (including Hawaii and Alaska). ABS respondents are randomly sampled by Marketing Systems Group (MSG) through the U.S. Postal Service's Computerized Delivery Sequence File (CDS), a regularly updated listing of all known addresses in the U.S. For the SSRS Opinion Panel, known business addresses are excluded from the sample frame. Additional panelists are recruited via random digit dial (RDD) telephone sample of cell phone numbers connected to a prepaid cell phone. This sample is selected by MSG from the cell phone RDD frame using a flag that identifies prepaid numbers. Prepaid cell numbers are associated with cell phones that are "pay as you go" and do not require a contract.

The SSRS Opinion Panel is a multi-mode panel (web and phone). Most panelists take self-administered web surveys; however, the option to take surveys conducted by a live telephone interviewer is available to those who do not use the internet as well as those who use the internet but are reluctant to take surveys online.

NOTES ABOUT RESULTS

Because percentages are rounded, they may not total 100%. An asterisk (*) indicates values less than 0.5%.

Data collection was conducted via web and telephone. Verbiage in this topline reflects web wording. Telephone wording may differ slightly due to interviewer-administered data collection.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional methodology and poll topline information is available at:

- imaginingthedigitalfuture.org



CONTACT INFORMATION

Media contacts

- Eric Townsend, assistant vice president for strategic communications and media relations
etownsend4@elon.edu; 336-278-7413
- Dan Anderson, special assistant to the president
andersd@elon.edu; 336-260-6870

Information in this report

- Lee Rainie, director of the Imagining the Digital Future Center at Elon University
lrainie@elon.edu; 202-527-3367



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