



The
**American
Dream?**

Second Annual State of the American Dream Survey™

March 2011



XAVIER
UNIVERSITY

Center for the Study of
the American Dream

Methodology

- ❖ 1,003 telephone interviews with adults age 18+ nationwide using random digit dial methodology
- ❖ Oversample of 300 additional interviews with 1st and 2nd generation immigrants, bringing the total immigrant subsample up to 465 interviews
- ❖ Interviews conducted March 5-15, 2011 in English and Spanish
- ❖ Margin of sampling error for the base sample is +/- 3.1%
- ❖ Margin of sampling error for the immigrant subsample is +/- 4.0%

Key Findings

- ❖ The American Dream remains remarkably resilient despite a continued wave of bad news.
- ❖ While confidence in the economy and our national institutions have significantly declined, 63% of Americans say they are confident that they will reach their American Dream. 75% believe they have already attained some measure of it.
- ❖ Americans have been losing faith in public institutions for many years; however, the study reveals a devastating decline—83% say they have less trust in “politics in general” than they did 10-15 years ago.
- ❖ A growing majority believes the U.S. is in decline, and 57% feel the world looks elsewhere to discover the future.



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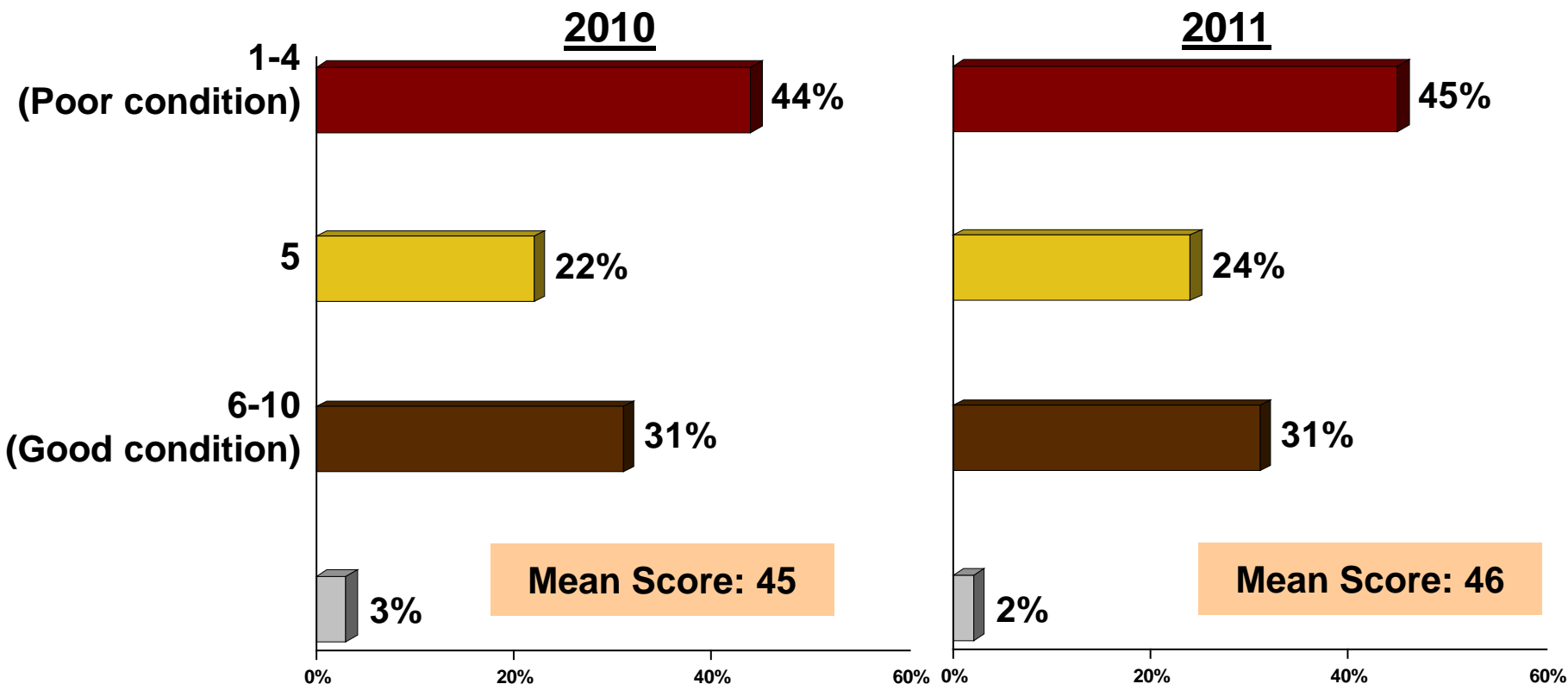
General Perceptions of the American Dream

A range of indicators concerning the direction of the country have worsened over the past year.

- ❖ Only 23% believe the country is headed in the right direction, with 67% saying things “have gotten seriously off on the wrong track”—a 15 point net drop from a year ago.
- ❖ A 55% majority believes their region of the country is headed in the wrong direction, compared to slightly less than half (48%) who expressed the same view last year.
- ❖ Confidence in the economy has lessened. Last year, a 51% majority felt the U.S. economy would improve over the next year or so; now only 41% expect it to get better.
- ❖ Only 23% now believe America is a country “on the rise,” down from 32% who felt that way one year ago.

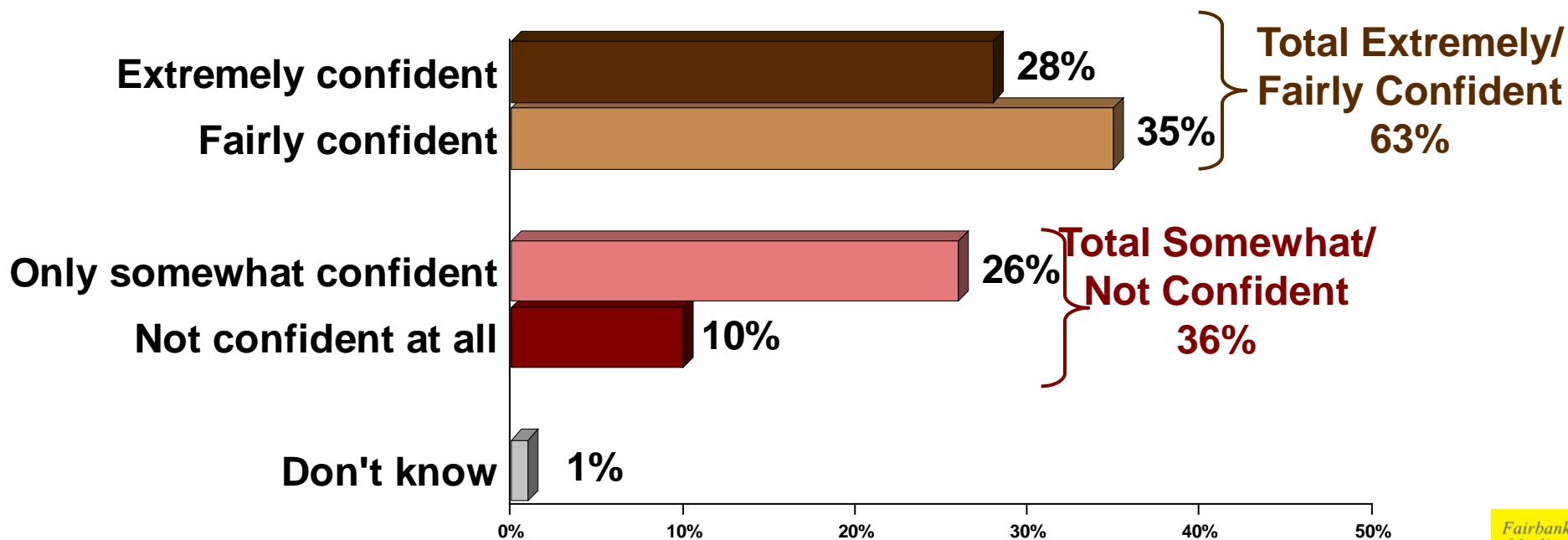
Despite this climate, belief in the American Dream has held steady since last year.

On a scale of one to ten, where ten means the best possible condition of the Dream and one means the worst possible condition of the Dream, where would you rate the American Dream?



And a solid majority are confident in their individual ability to reach the American Dream.

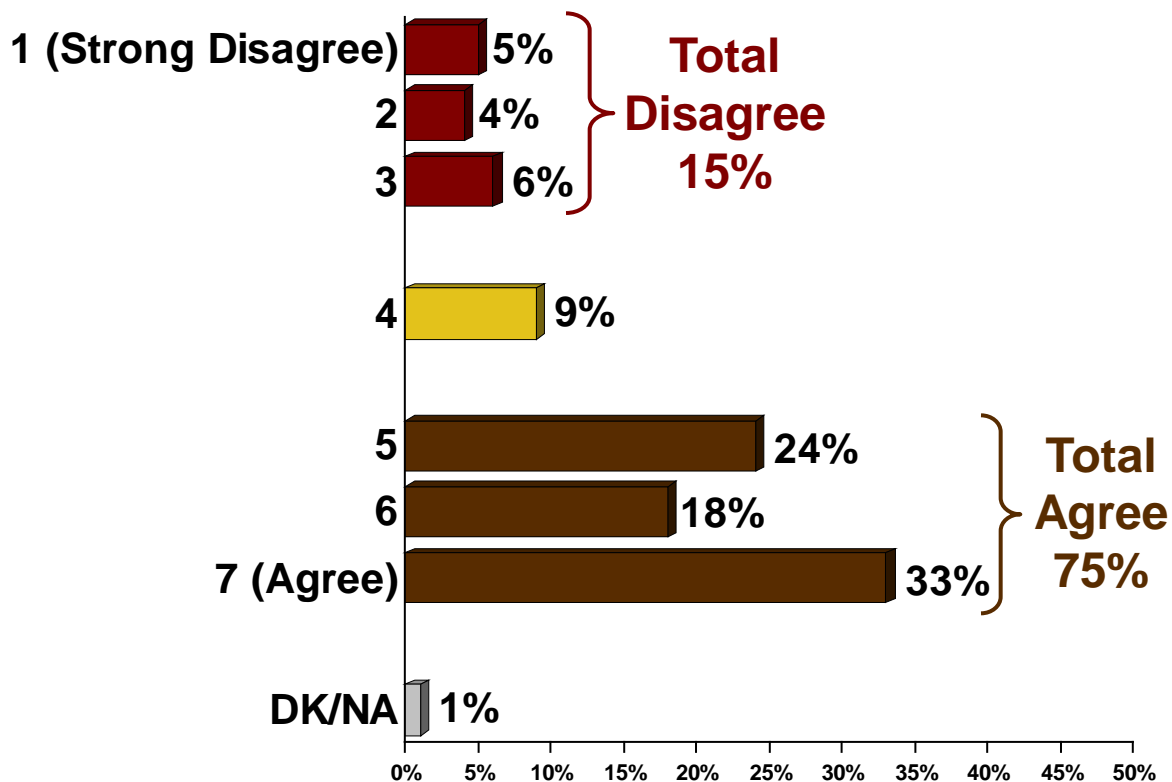
How confident are you that you already have reached or will reach the American Dream in your lifetime? Would you say you are extremely confident, fairly confident, only somewhat confident or not confident at all?



In fact, an overwhelming majority feel they have already achieved some measure of the Dream.

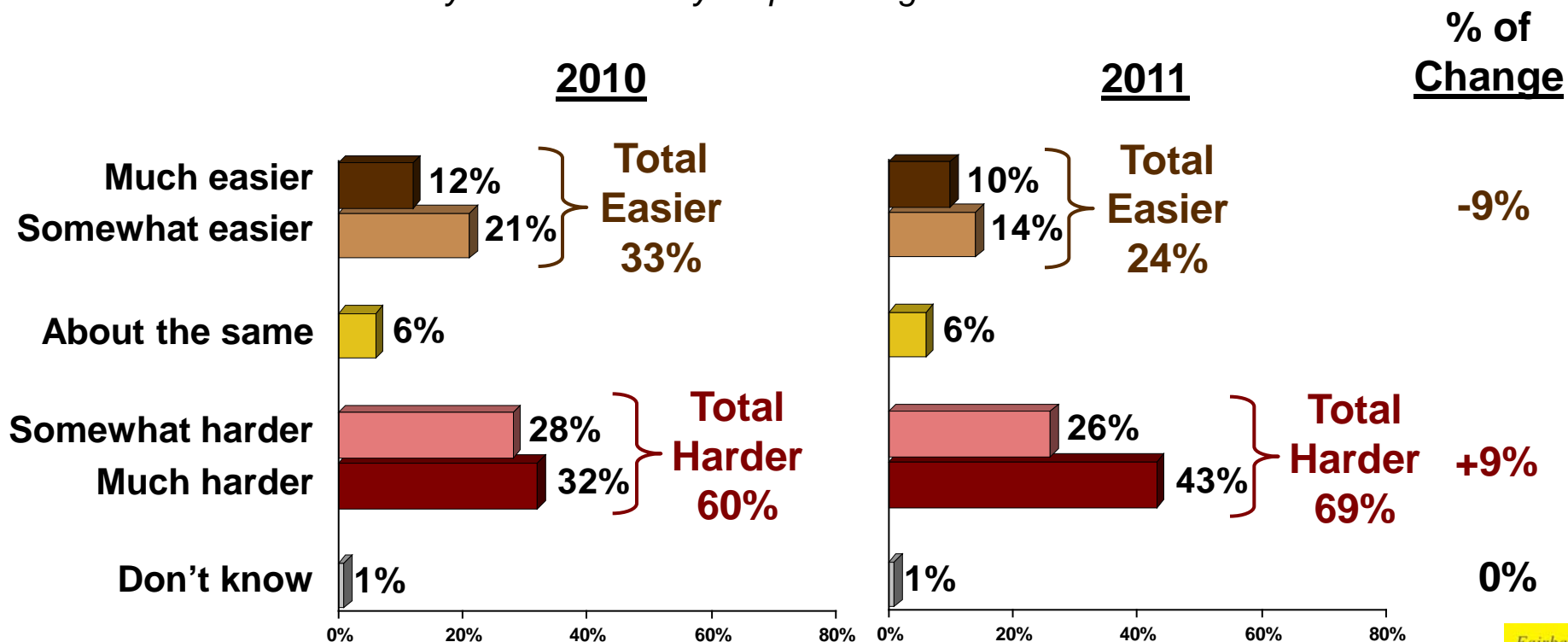
I'd like you to tell me whether you generally agree or disagree using a seven-point scale, where seven means you strongly agree with the statement and one means that you strongly disagree. You may use any number from one to seven to express your opinion.

I feel I already have achieved some measure of the American Dream.



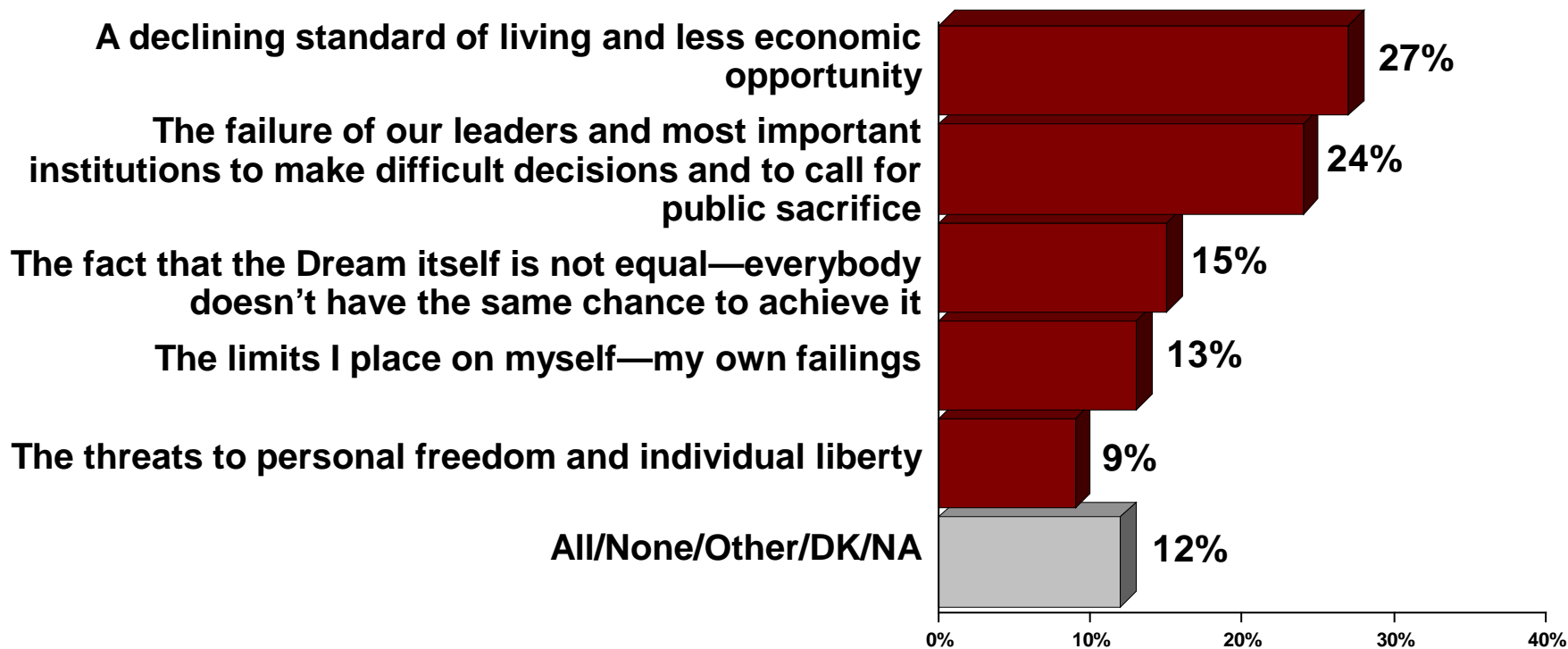
However, a higher proportion believes the Dream is harder for them to reach than it was for prior generations.

Do you think it is easier or harder to reach the American Dream today than it was for your parents' generation before?



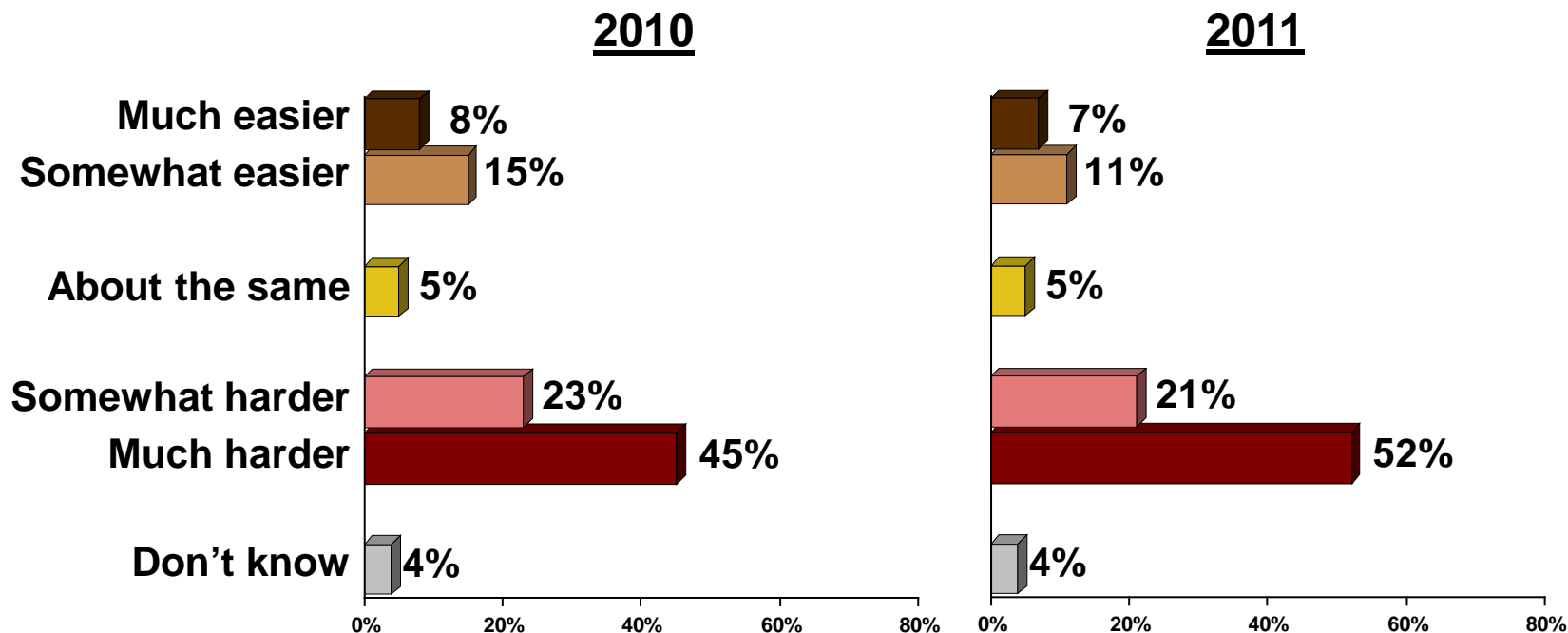
A declining standard of living and the failure of our leaders and institutions are seen as the biggest current obstacles to the Dream.

Which one of the following do you think most stands in the way of you achieving the American Dream?



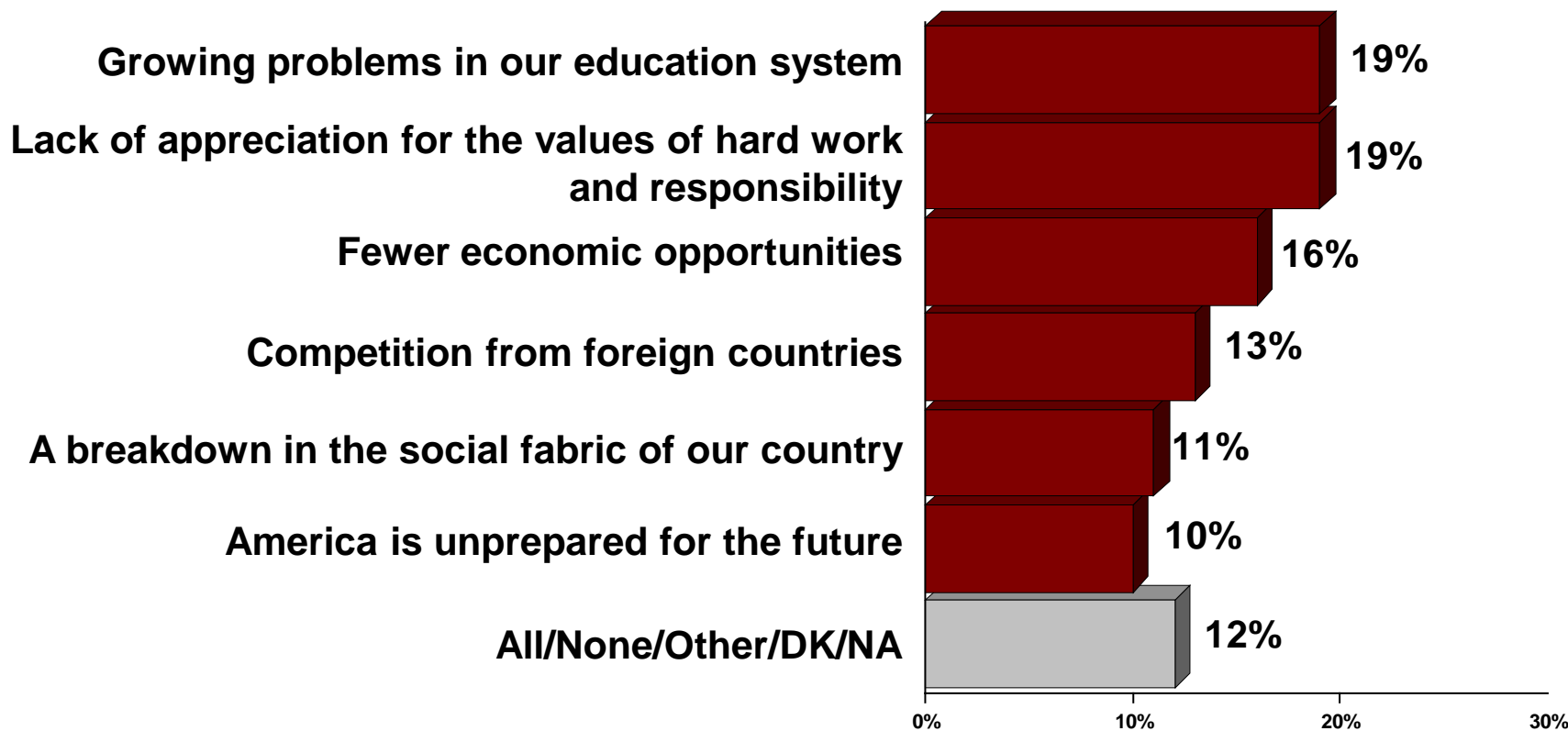
A majority now believe it will be much harder for the next generation.

And what about for your children or grandchildren? Do you think it will be easier or harder for them to reach the American Dream than it has been or is for you?



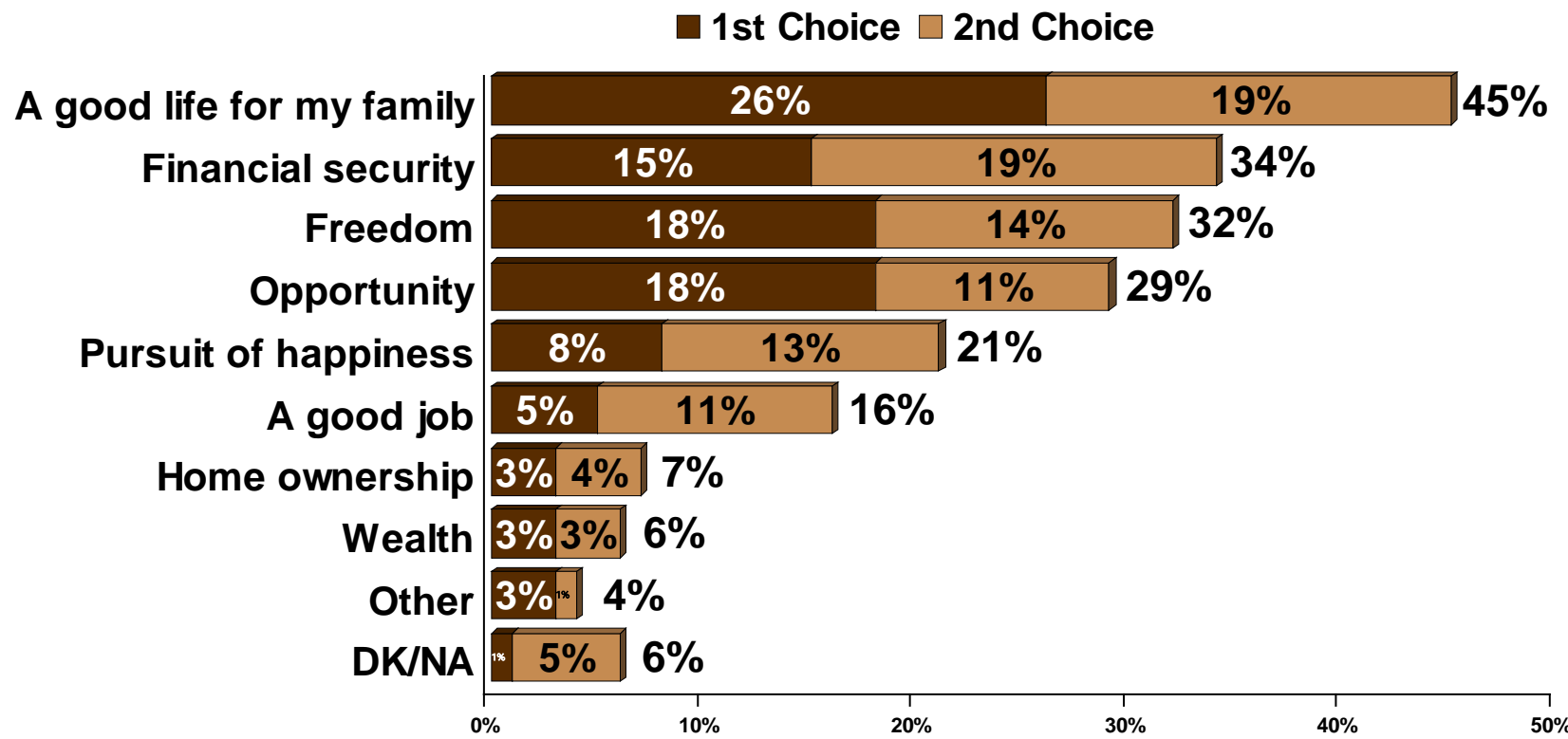
Education and a declining appreciation for core values lead as the greatest obstacles for the next generation.

Considering the next generation, which of the following, if any, do you think represents the biggest threat to their prospects for achieving the American Dream?



More people define the American Dream in terms of family.

(Ranked by % Total 1st and 2nd Choice)



There have been slight shifts in how Americans define the Dream.

(Total 1st and 2nd Choice)

Definition	2010	2011	% Change
Family	36%	45%	+9%
Opportunity	35%	29%	-6%
Freedom	33%	32%	-1%
Financial Security	29%	34%	+5%
Happiness	19%	21%	+2%
A good job	18%	16%	-2%
Homeownership	13%	7%	-6%
Wealth	8%	6%	-2%



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Demographic Trends



Perceptions of the Dream are most negative in the Far West, Midwest and among less affluent women.

On a scale of one to ten, where ten means the best possible condition of the Dream and one means the worst possible condition of the Dream, where would you rate the American Dream?

2011 Demographic Subgroup	Percent Rating the Dream 1-4
Overall Population	44%
Region: Far West	53%
Women: Household Income \$70K or Less	48%
Whites	48%
Protestants	48%
Age 30-39	48%
Region: Midwest	48%
2010 Demographic Subgroup	Percent Rating the Dream 1-4
Overall Population	44%
Region: Midwest	52%
White Women	51%
Age 40-49	51%
Women: Age 50+	50%
Region: South Central	49%
Age 65-74	49%
Whites: College+	49%
Region: Central Plains	48%
Retired	48%
Non-College Educated Women	48%

Perceptions of the Dream are most positive among Latinos and Immigrants.

Demographic Subgroup	Percent Rating the Dream 6-10	% Sample
<i>Overall Population</i>	31%	100%
Latinos	47%	12%
Immigrants	42%	10%
People of Color	42%	29%
Income \$90K+	39%	11%
Region: Northeast	38%	20%
College Graduates	37%	26%
Men: Household Income \$70K or Less	37%	27%
College Educated Men	37%	18%
Texas	37%	8%
Men Ages 18-49	37%	29%

5. On a scale of one to ten, where ten means the best possible condition of the Dream and one means the worst possible condition of the Dream, where would you rate the American Dream? Feel free to use any number from one to ten to express your opinion.

Across a range of indicators, the year-to-year decline in optimism is most dramatic among African Americans.

- ❖ African American confidence in the ability to reach the Dream has declined from 40% who felt “extremely confident” in 2010 to only 27% who feel similarly today.
- ❖ 23% of African Americans state that the American Dream is in the “worst possible condition.” Only 14% of Americans overall offer a similar response.
- ❖ 61% of African Americans believe the country is “seriously on the wrong track”, compared to only a third who felt that way a year ago.

1st and 2nd generation immigrants remain much more optimistic than the general population.

- ❖ 40% of immigrants feel the country is headed in the right direction—which is largely unchanged since last year—compared to only 23% of the general population.
- ❖ 48% of immigrants rate the dream in “good condition” compared to only 31% of the population overall.
- ❖ Nearly half—48%—believe America still represents the future, a much stronger result than the 39% of the general population.
- ❖ While all respondents chose “a good life for my family” as the best definition of the Dream, the response was highest among immigrants.



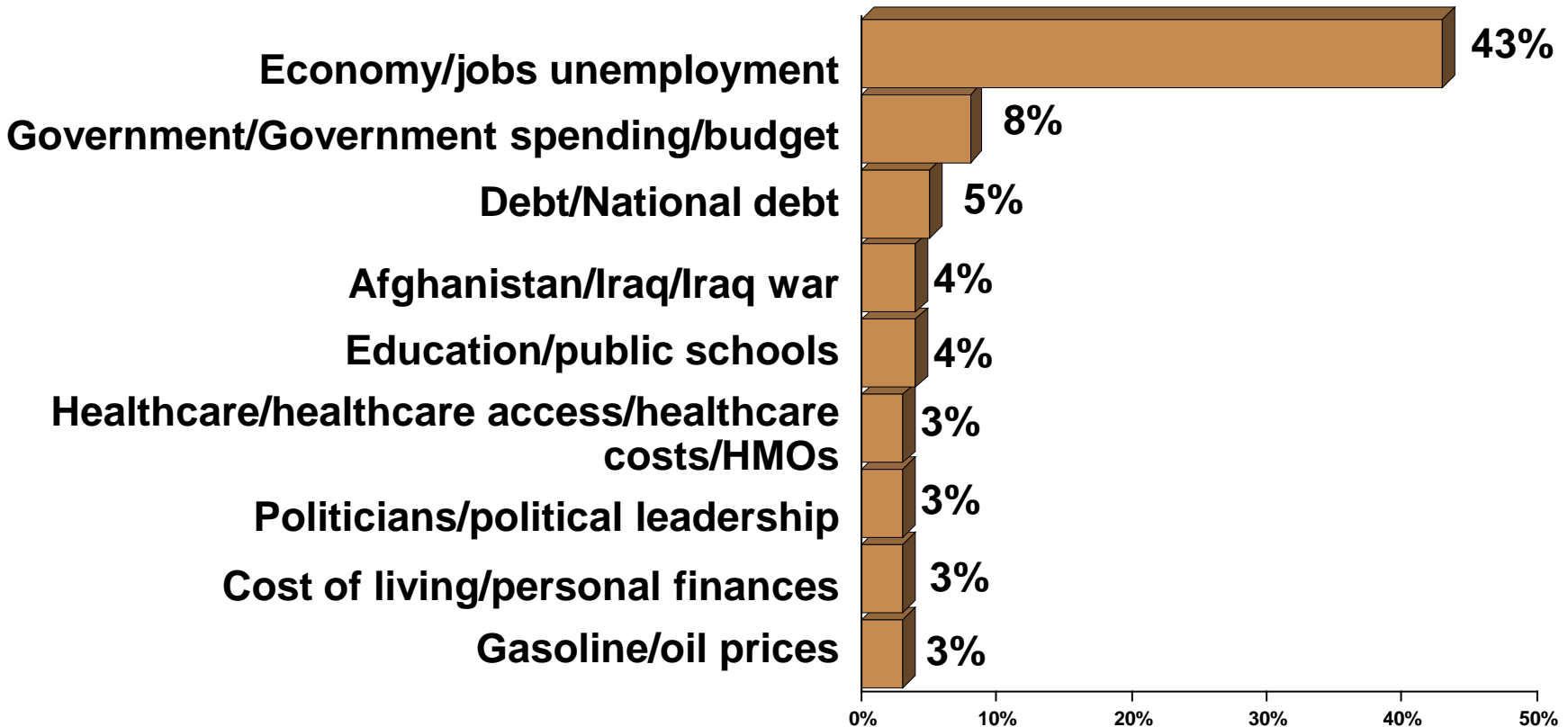
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Perceptions of America's Status in the World

The economy and jobs dominate as the most important issues facing the country.

What do you think is the most serious problem facing the United States today?

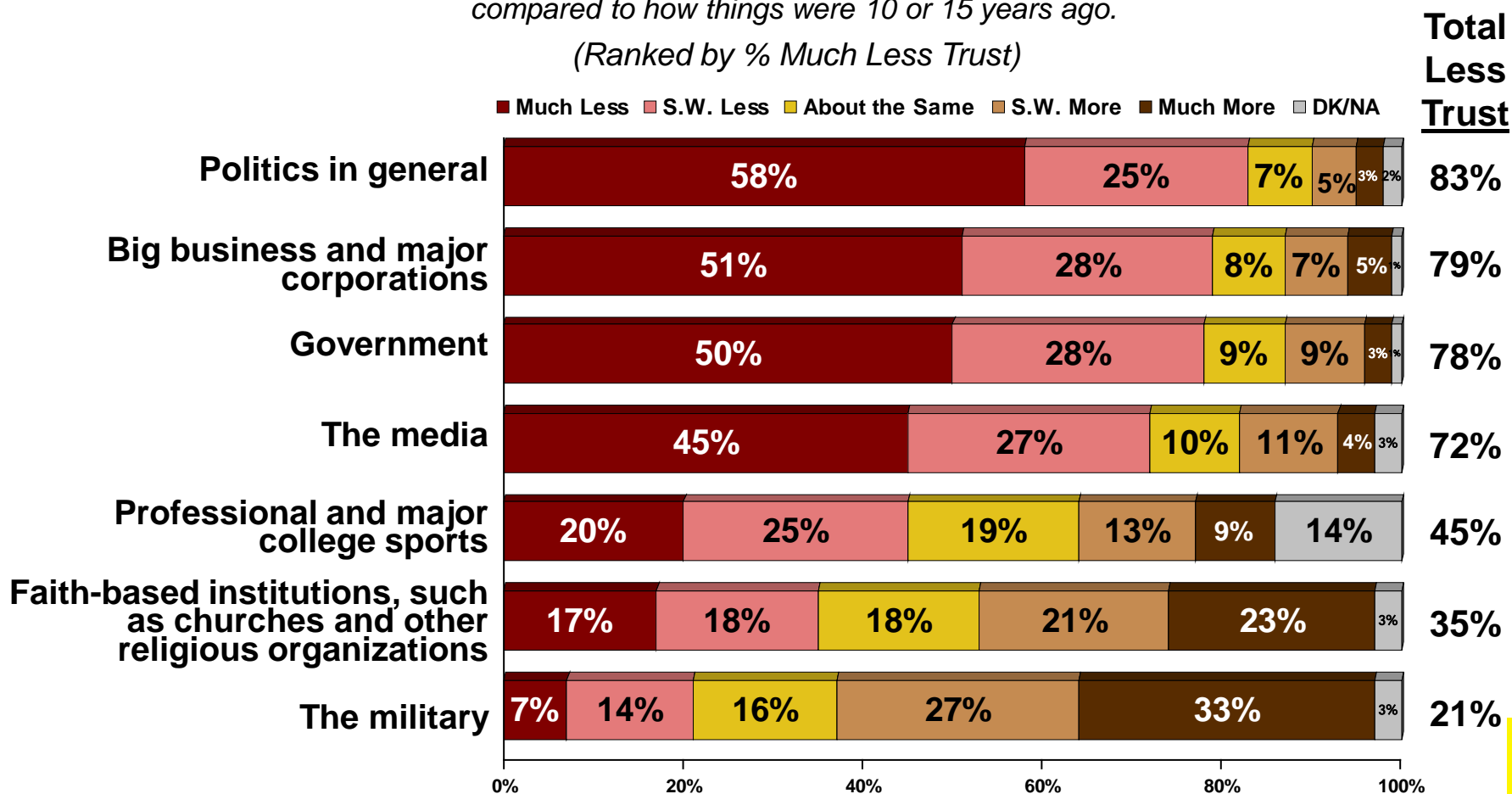
(Top 3% and Above Responses Shown; Open-ended)



Public trust in the country's institutions is dramatically low.

I am going to read you a list of different types of institutions and aspects of society in the US. Please tell me if you have more or less trust in that particular type of institution as it stands today compared to how things were 10 or 15 years ago.

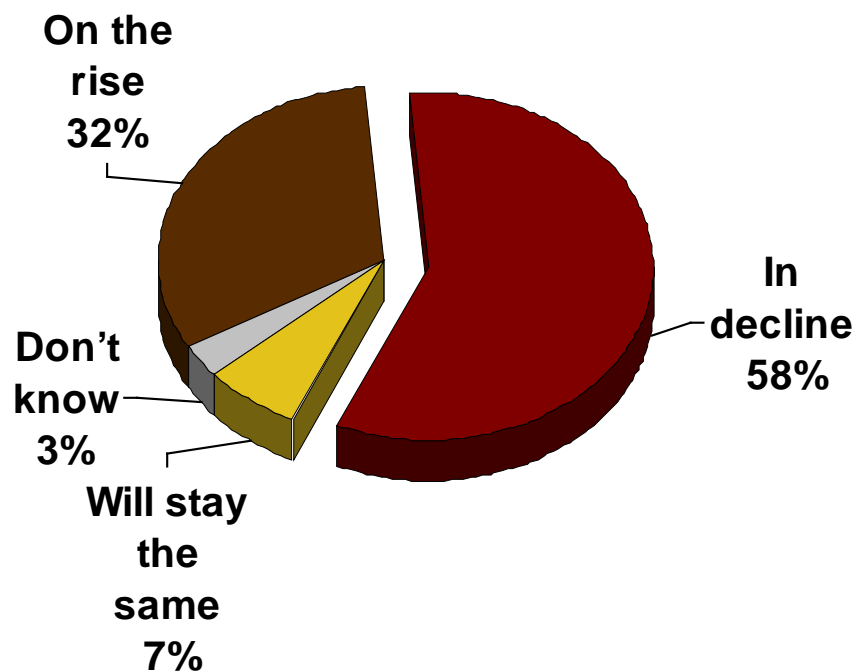
(Ranked by % Much Less Trust)



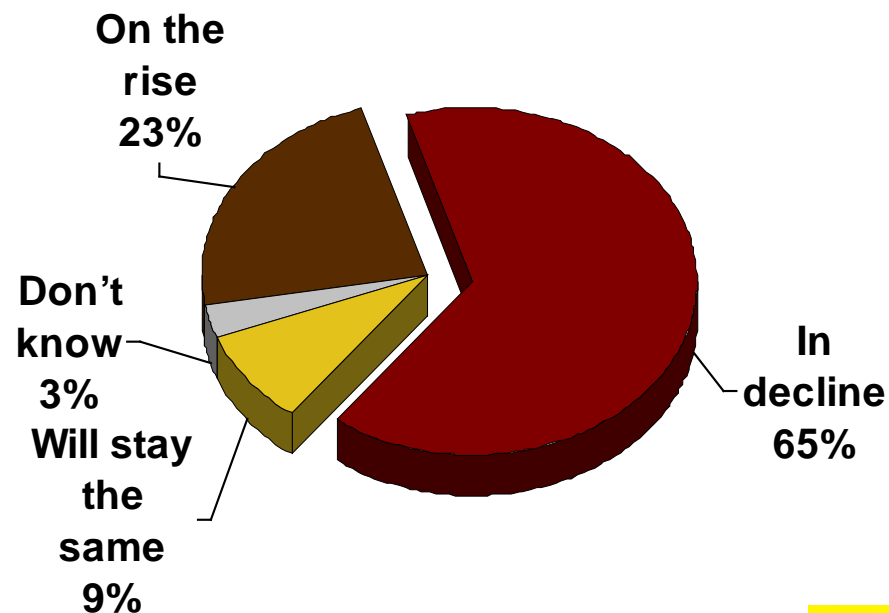
Nearly 2/3rds now believe America is in decline.

Thinking about America's long term prospects, do you think the country is on the rise or do you feel it is in decline?

2010



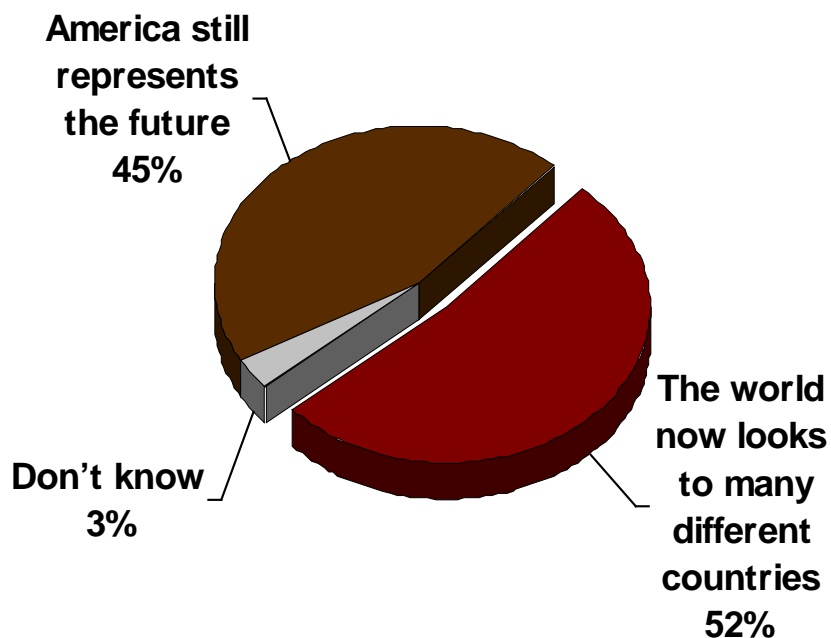
2011



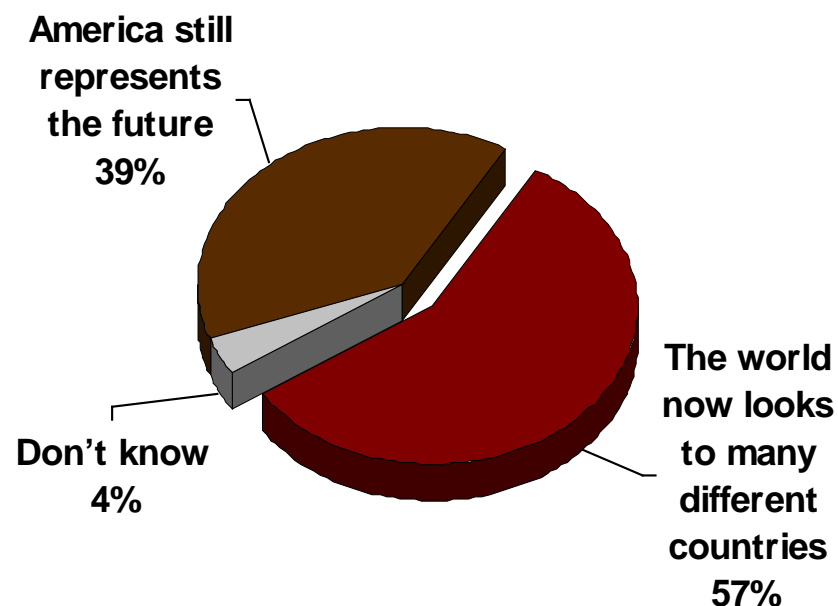
A majority have lost confidence in the country's standing in the world.

Do you believe that for the rest of the world America is still the standard of success and represents the future or do you think that America is no longer unique, and that the world now looks to many different countries to see where things are headed in the future?

2010

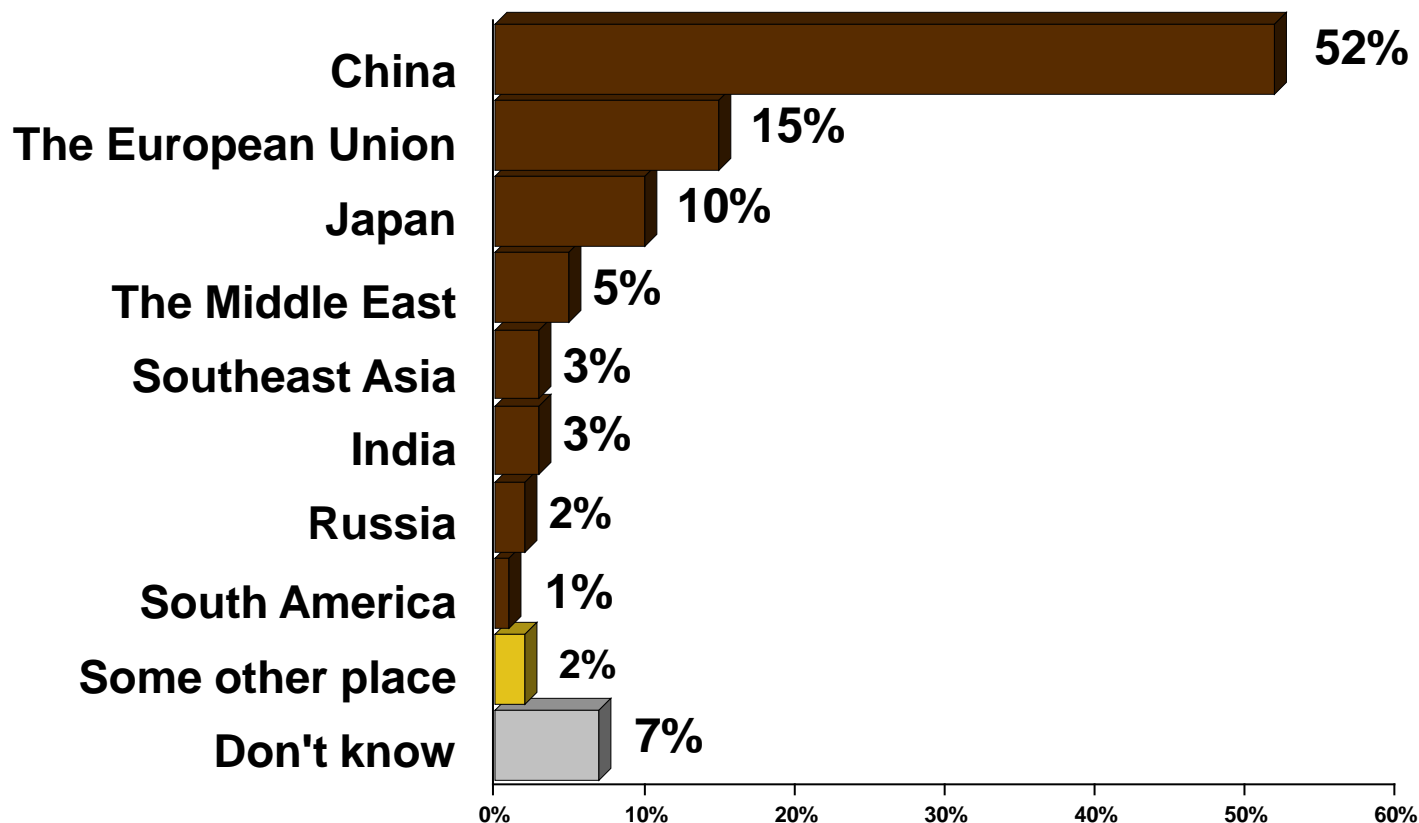


2011

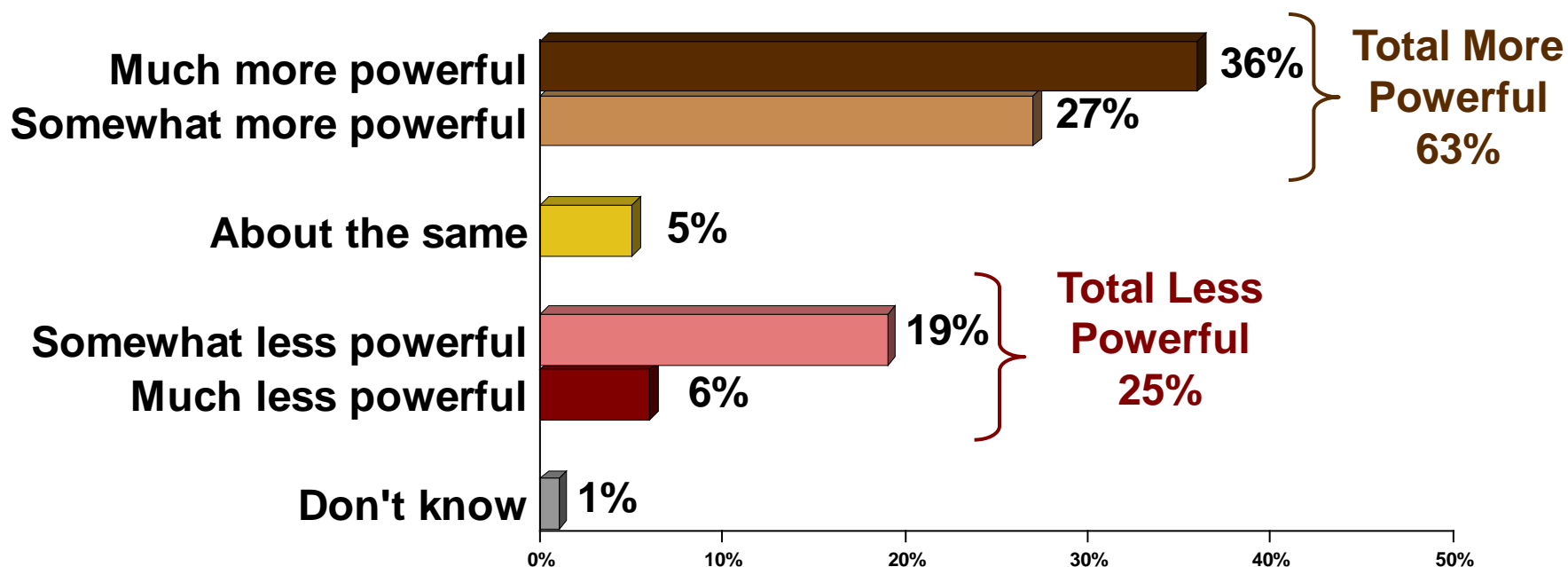


A majority view China as having the strongest claim to the future.

And which one of the following countries or regions first come to mind when you think about where the world looks to see where things are headed in the future?



3 in 5 view China's role in the world economy as more powerful than that of the U.S.





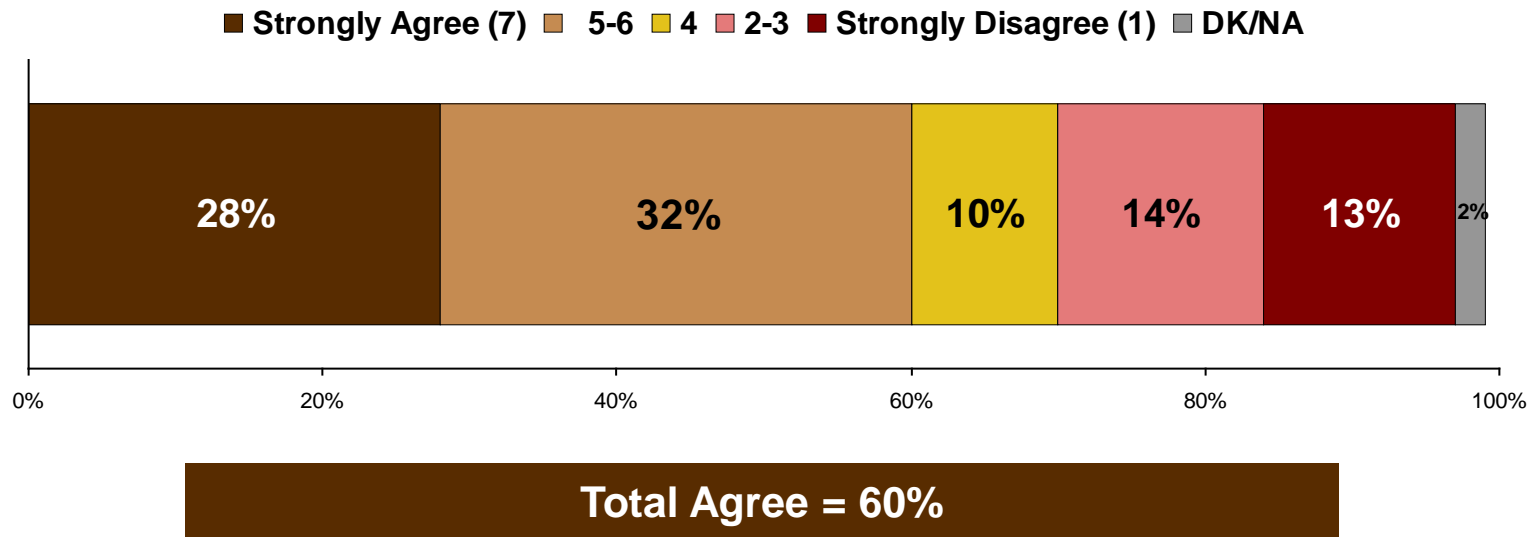
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Attitudes Toward Immigration

A majority of Americans view immigration as an important part of keeping the American Dream alive.

I'd like you to tell me whether you generally agree or disagree using a seven-point scale, where seven means you strongly agree with the statement and one means that you strongly disagree. You may use any number from one to seven to express your opinion.

I believe that immigration—people from all over the world coming to America for a better life—is important to keeping the American Dream alive.



...and a majority believes immigration continues to be one of America's greatest strengths.

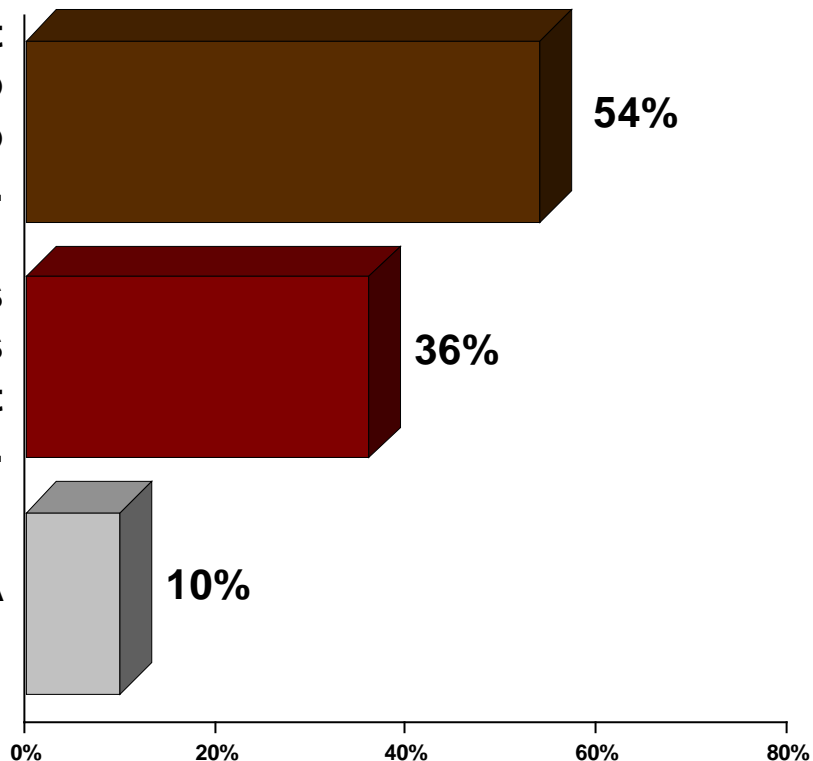
I am going to read you two statements. Please tell me which comes closest to your own opinion, even if neither matches your views exactly.

One of America's greatest strengths is that it has always been a beacon of opportunity to the rest of the world. People still yearn to come here for a better life.

OR

America used to be a melting pot, but things are different now. Today, new immigrants come here to take advantage of government hand outs or to take good jobs away.

Both/Neither/DK/NA



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