



DC Policy Influencer Survey Report

Commissioned by ALL IN – The Adult Literacy & Learning Impact Network



03		Executive Summary
07		Familiarity with Adult Literacy Issues
11		Perception of Adult Literacy Issues
17		Engagement Channels & Formats
23		Impactful Messaging
28		Appendix

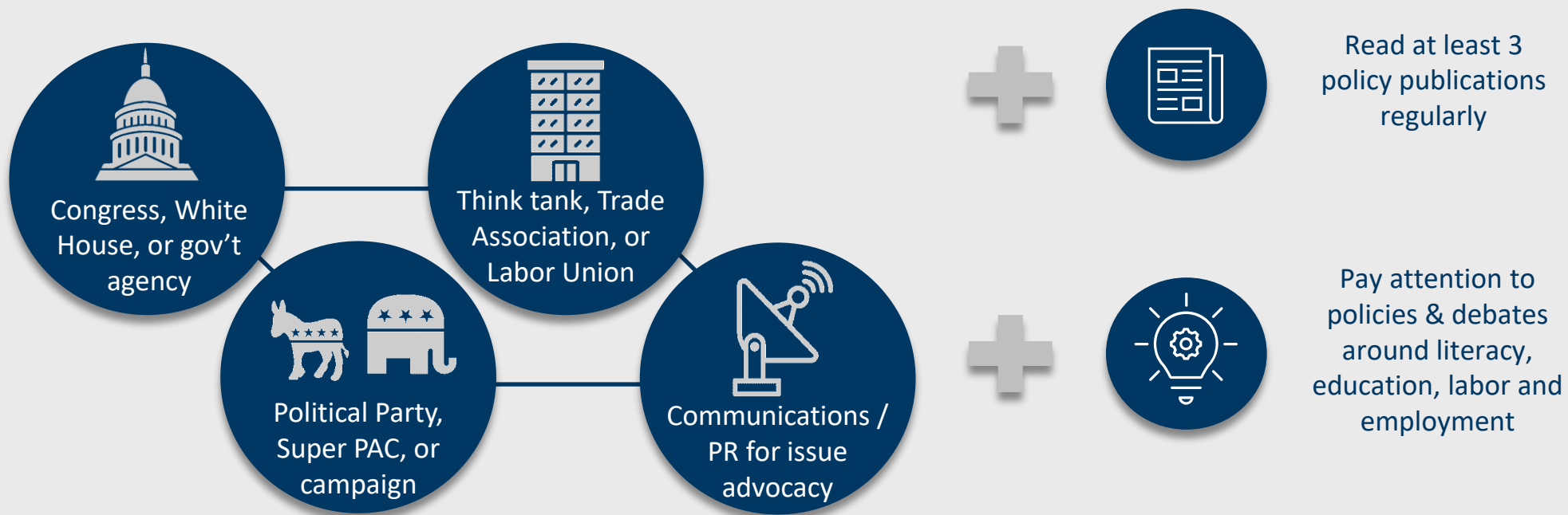


Executive Summary

Survey Methodology

FTI Consulting conducted the survey online between November 2nd – 9th, 2023 among 200 DC Policy Influencers specializing in education, labor and employment, financial services, and military/defense, among other policy areas.

All respondents currently work in at least one of the following organizations/sectors and consume at least three policy news publications regularly.



Respondent Political Affiliation

Democrats	53%
Republicans	31%
Independents	17%

Policy Area Specialization*

Financial Services	28%
Education	23%
Labor/Employment	23%
Military/Defense	23%
All Other	20%

*Note: policy areas specializations can overlap

Executive Summary



The scale of Americans struggling with adult literacy is greatly underestimated

Despite the vast majority of DC policy influencers being aware of adult literacy issues in the U.S, few are “very familiar” with the problem.

Despite most respondents saying they personally know or have met someone with adult literacy issues in the past, low adult literacy rates remain underestimated, with less than one-in-four policy influencers providing an accurate estimate.

However, there is a recognition that low literacy is more likely to affect marginalized populations, such as socioeconomically disadvantaged people, immigrant populations, and those currently incarcerated or with criminal records.



Tackling adult literacy is a unifying, bipartisan objective across the Aisle

While underestimated, most recognize the impact of low adult literacy on the U.S. economy. Nearly half who are “very familiar” with adult literacy issues consider it to have a major impact on the economy, leading to higher poverty; workforce shortages; and greater reliance on government assistance.

However, policy influencers admit that many other labor and education policy priorities take precedence over tackling the issue, with the perception that the U.S. adult literacy rates are trending upwards, and the country is performing better than other OECD countries.



The Government and private companies are expected to play a more prominent role

Policy influencers believe the biggest challenges in addressing this issue relies on first identifying learning differences among learners and then navigating how States address the issue, the investment required, and potential political polarization.

To help address these issues, policy influencers want to see the government and private companies doing more to close the gap, including increasing investment in adult education training and community programs, with the majority believing that wraparound services like childcare and transportation could be the most effective strategies to improve adult literacy.





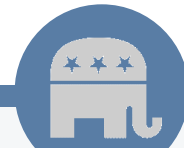
The impact of adult literacy on crime and U.S. security is most convincing message to tell

Most policy influencers are familiar with both the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy and ALL IN and are interested in hearing more information—namely best practices for improving nationwide literacy rates, the potential benefits for children and adults, and the challenges they face.

Policy influencers are most interested in seeing data showing the impact of adult literacy on the U.S. economy, as well as success stories from learners.

Moreover, discussing how higher adult literacy can lead to lower crime rates and tackle misinformation dissemination is considered the most compelling way to raise awareness of the issue and lead to action inside the Beltway.

Targeted Engagement Strategies

	 DEMOCRATS	 INDEPENDENTS	 REPUBLICANS	
FAMILIARITY FAMILIARITY WITH ADULT LITERACY ISSUES KNOWLEDGE OF ADULT POPULATION STRUGGLING KEY ASSOCIATIONS WITH ADULT LITERACY	31% very familiar 58% underestimate 42% English literacy 34% Functional literacy	32% very familiar 47% underestimate 41% Functional literacy 41% Civic literacy	26% very familiar 62% underestimate 46% English literacy 44% Digital literacy	
	PERCEPTIONS NEED TO PRIORITIZE ADULT LITERACY PERCEIVED IMPACT ON THE U.S. ECONOMY KEY OBSTACLES TO IMPROVING LITERACY RATES	67% critical/high 19% major 43% low awareness of the scale of the problem 38% limited funding/states handle the issue differently	41% critical/high 18% major 41% low awareness of the scale of the problem 41% lack of effective programs	80% critical/high 21% major 52% identifying learning disorders, disabilities 43% there are bigger policy priorities that need focus
		ENGAGEMENT KEY REASON TO SUPPORT ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVES MOST IMPACTFUL INFORMATION MOST IMPACTFUL CHANNELS MOST IMPACTFUL VOICES MOST IMPACTFUL MESSAGING	12% empowers people/ contributes to economic growth 42% Comparison to other countries 37% Challenges faced by adults 41% TV news/interviews 23% Educators 46% Crime and incarceration 44% Self-worth	38% wellbeing and self-worth 38% Impact on children 35% Best practices 50% Social media (YouTube) 41% Advocacy groups 58% Crime and incarceration 55% America's place

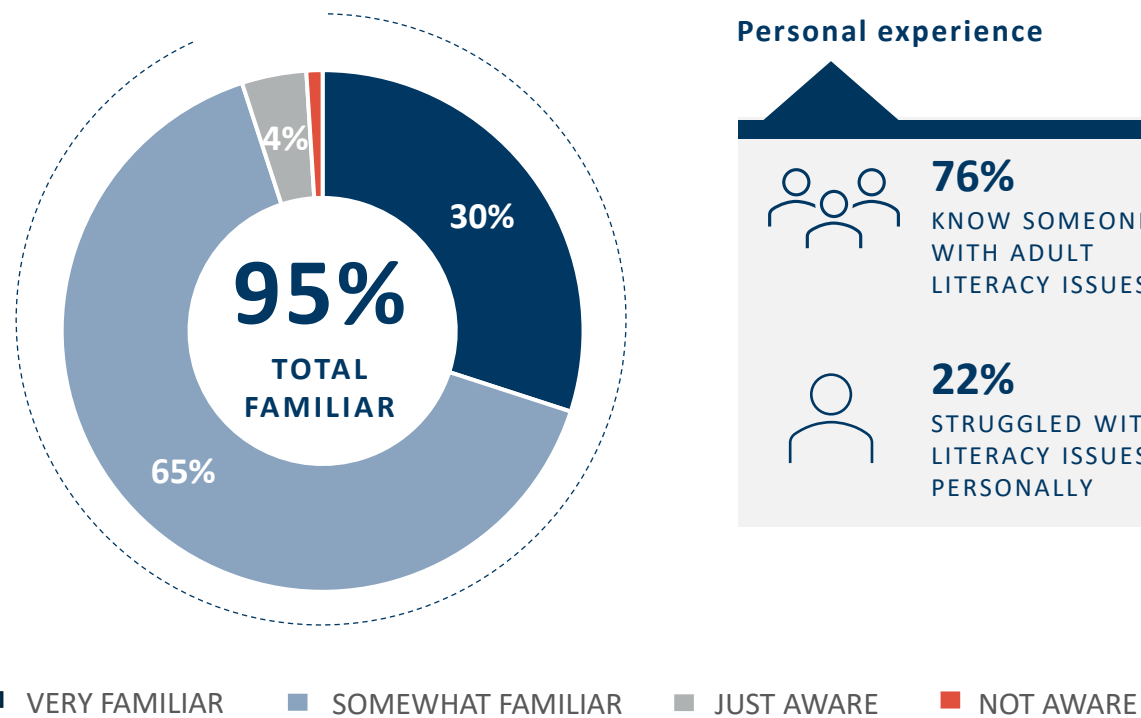


Familiarity with Adult Literacy Issues

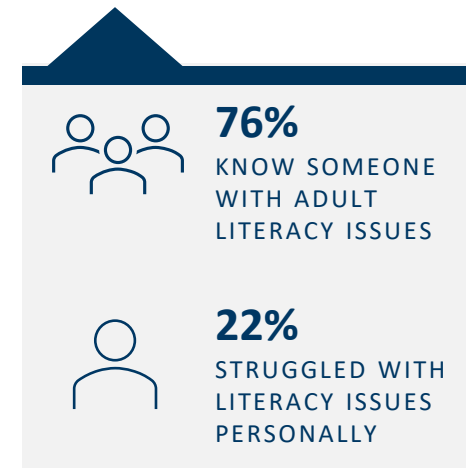
Beltway insiders are familiar with adult literacy issues yet lack deeper understanding

Despite most policy influencers saying they know someone struggling with literacy issues, less than one-third report being very familiar with the topic themselves. Although perceptions among this group vary, a plurality associate “adult literacy” with English literacy.

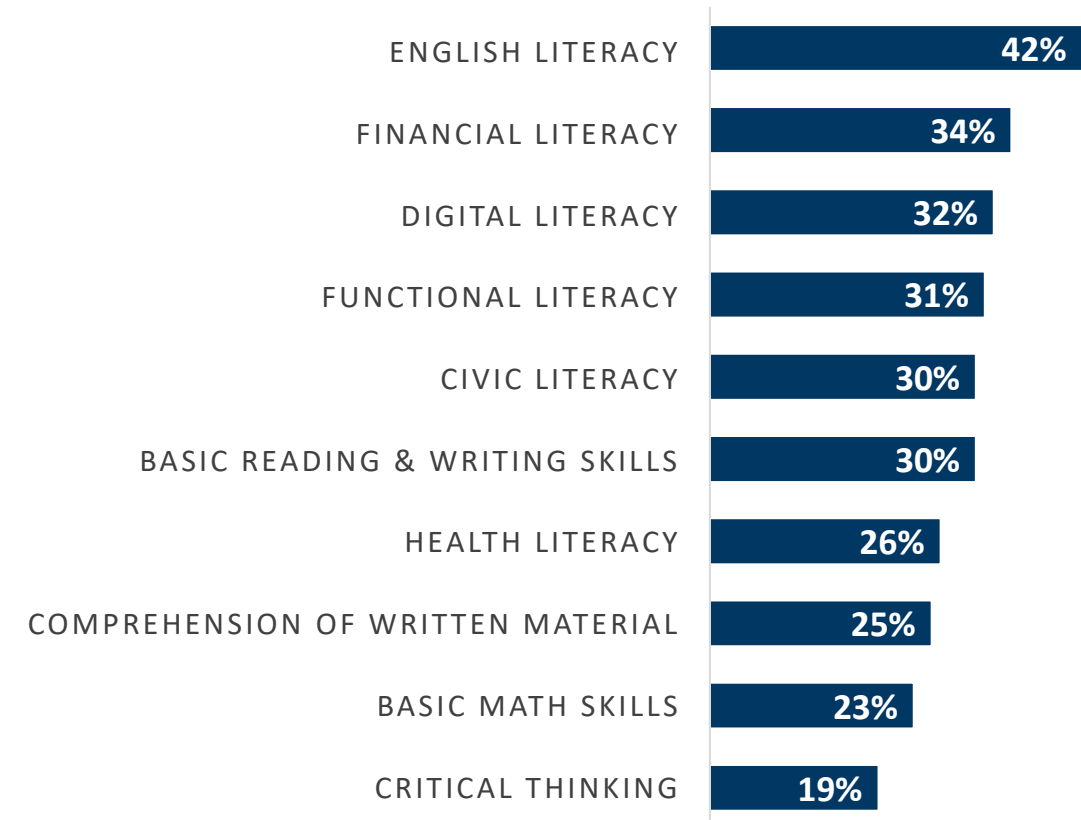
FAMILIARITY WITH ADULT LITERACY ISSUES IN THE UNITED STATES



Personal experience



TOP ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE PHRASE “ADULT LITERACY”



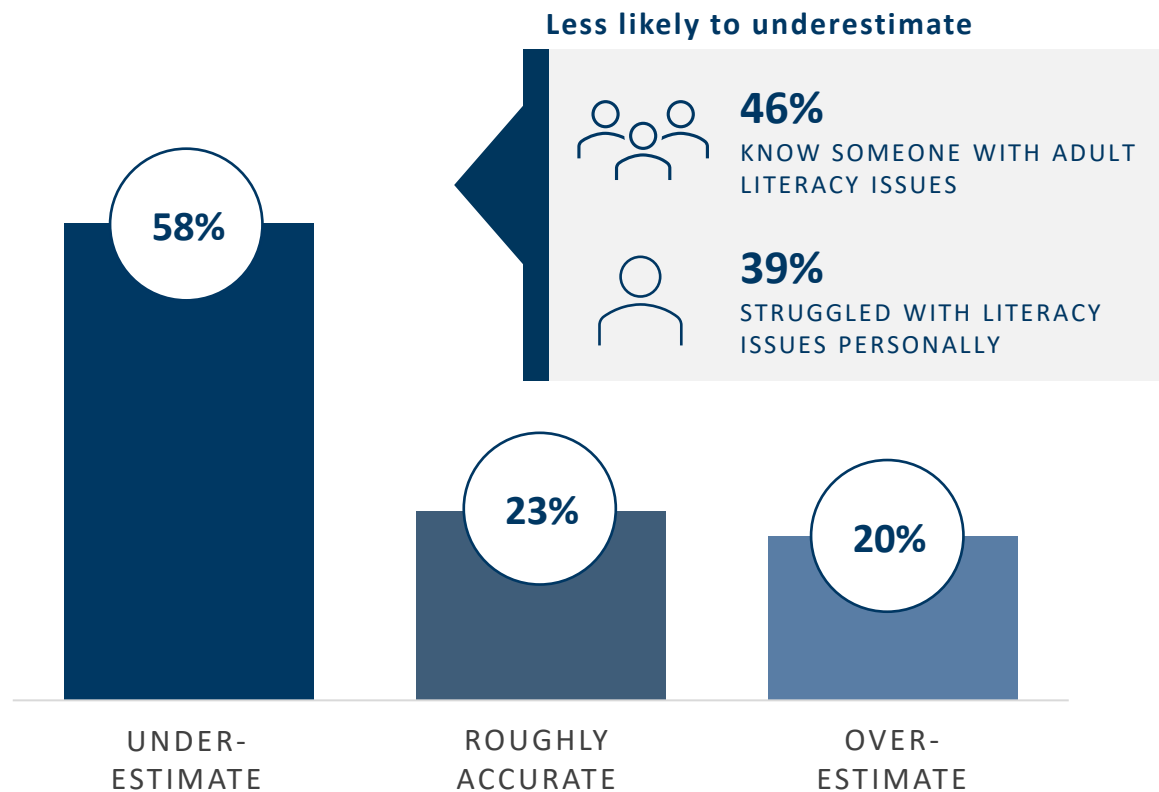
Q: Prior to joining this survey, how familiar were you with adult literacy issues in the United States?
 Q: Which of the following best describes what you think of when you see or hear the phrase “adult literacy”?

Q: Do you personally know, or have you ever met someone who has adult literacy issues?
 Q: Have you personally ever struggled with literacy issues?

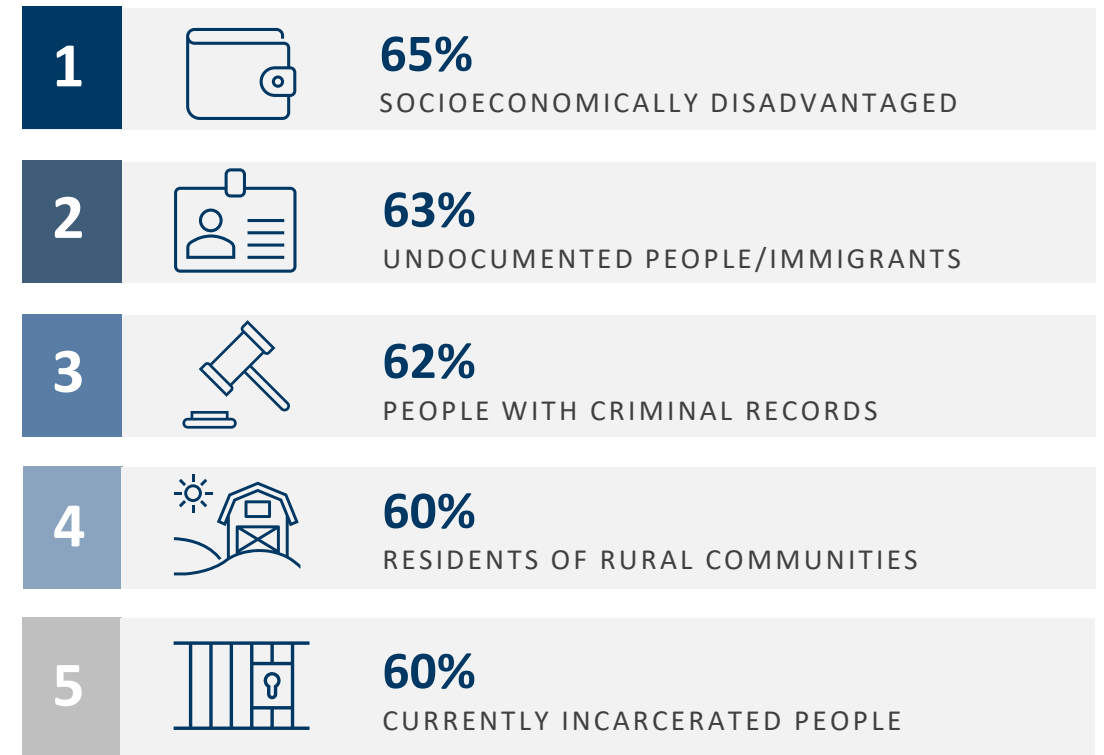
The scale of Americans struggling with literacy remains greatly underestimated

Those who have personally struggled or know someone with adult literacy issues are significantly less likely to underestimate the scale of the issue. Socioeconomically disadvantaged people, undocumented immigrants, and people with criminal records are the top three groups that policy influencers believe are more likely to exhibit lower adult literacy rates.

ESTIMATES OF U.S. ADULT POPULATION STRUGGLING WITH LITERACY



TOP 5 GROUPS MORE LIKELY TO EXHIBIT LOWER ADULT LITERACY RATES



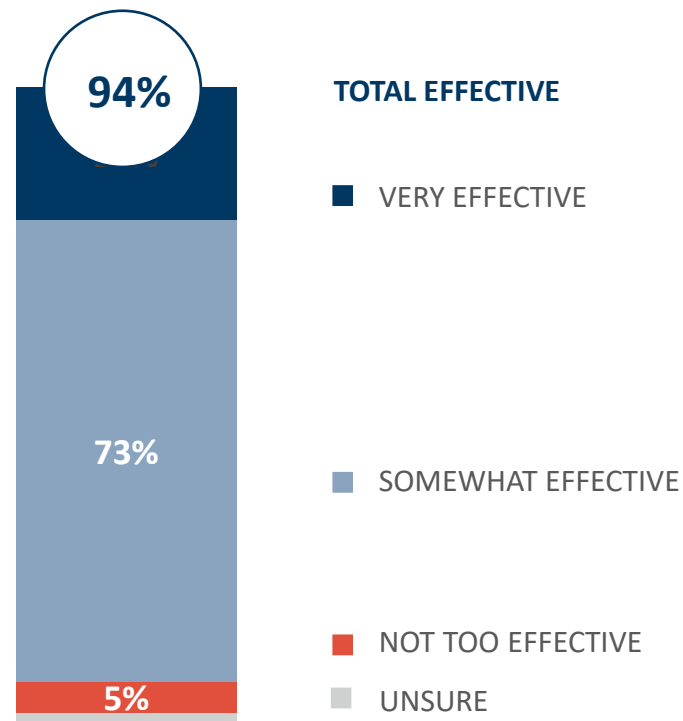
Q: Based on your current knowledge, what percentage of the U.S. adult population struggle with reading, writing, and doing basic math above a third-grade level?

Q: To the best of your knowledge, do the following groups have a higher, lower, or about the same likelihood to exhibit lower literacy rates compared to the average American?

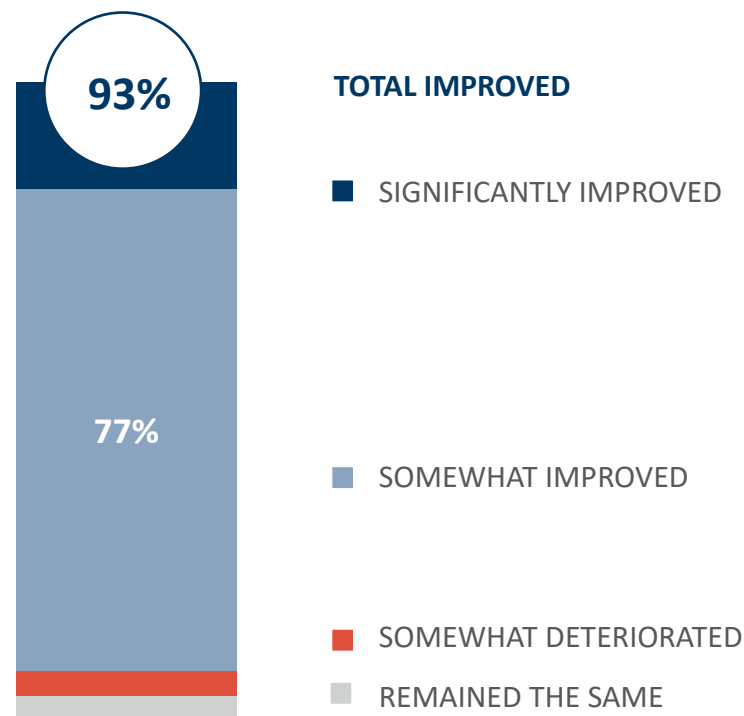
Yet the majority believes that adult literacy rates are trending upward

Most policy influencers believe adult literacy rates have improved in the past 3-5 years and are at least somewhat better compared to other OECD countries. However, few respondents say that recent efforts were very effective or resulted in significant improvements.

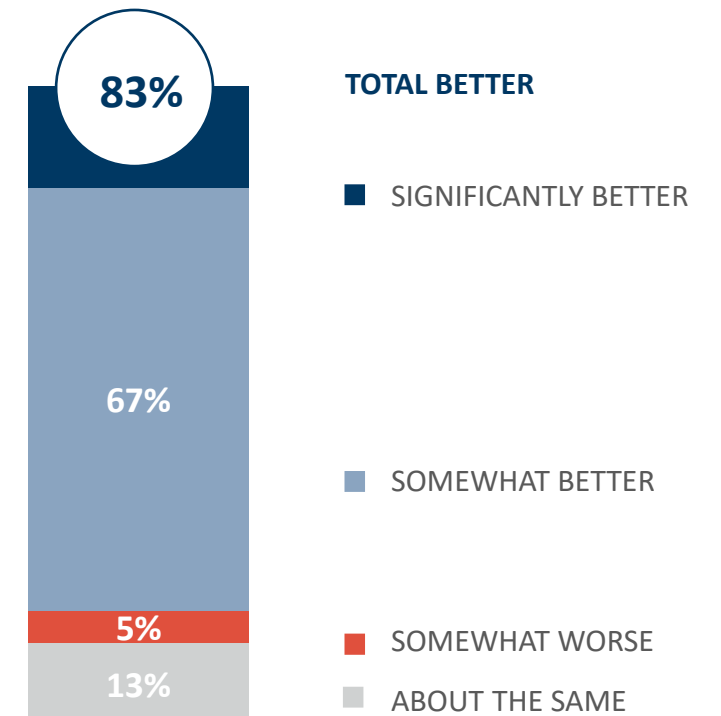
PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF RECENT EFFORTS TO INCREASE U.S. ADULT LITERACY RATES



PERCEIVED CHANGES IN U.S. ADULT LITERACY RATES IN PAST 3-5 YEARS



PERCEIVED COMPARISON OF U.S. ADULT LITERACY RATES TO OECD COUNTRIES



Q: Overall, how effective or ineffective do you think recent efforts have been in increasing adult literacy rates in the United States?

Q: To the best of your knowledge, how have adult literacy rates in the United States changed in the past 3 to 5 years?

Q: To the best of your knowledge, how do adult literacy rates in the United States compare to those in other OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries?



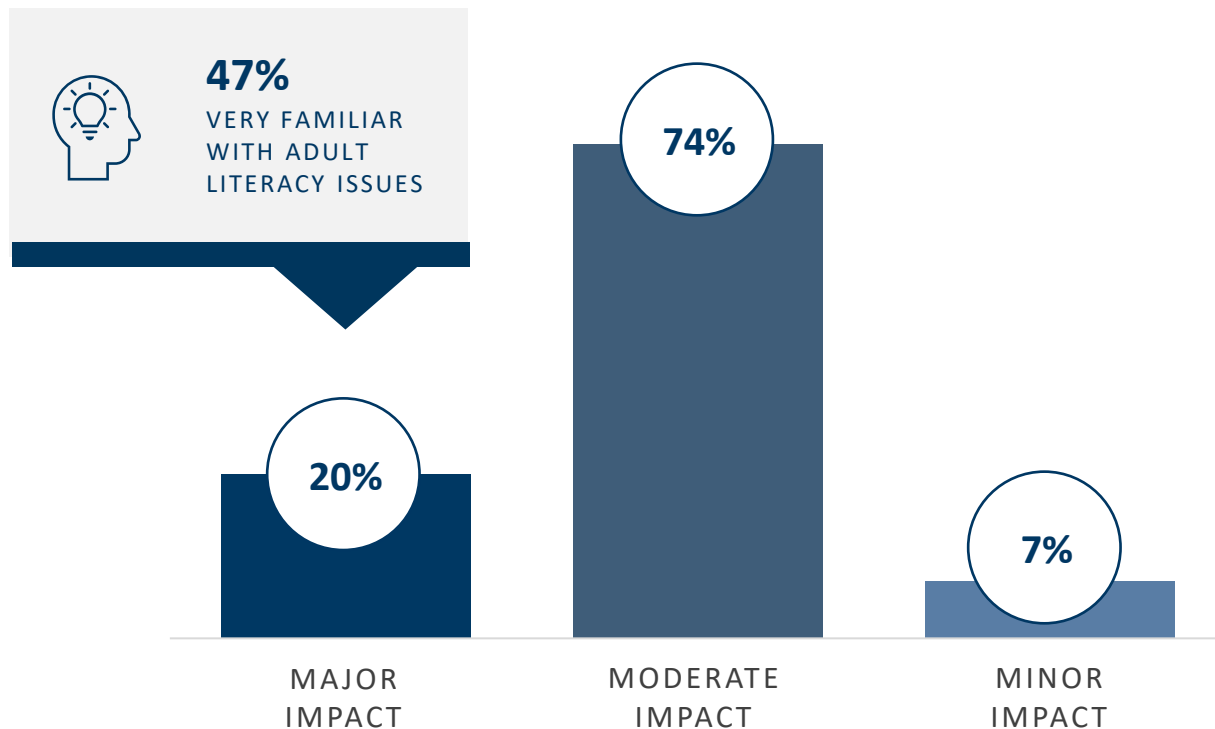
Perception of Adult Literacy Issues

Most recognize low adult literacy impact on the U.S. economy, yet believe it to be moderate

Higher poverty rates, workforce shortages, unemployment, lower income, and increased reliance on government assistance are the top perceived economic impacts of low adult literacy rates. However, most policy influencers believe this impact is only moderate, especially those less familiar with the issue.

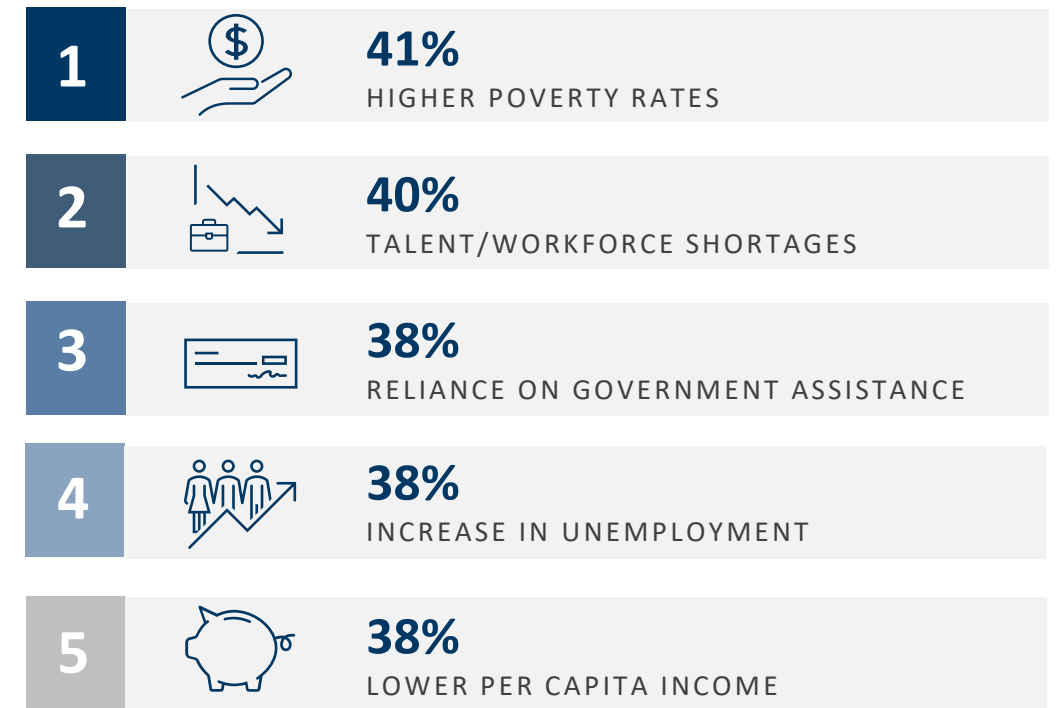
PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ADULT LITERACY RATES ON THE U.S. ECONOMY

Major impact



LOW ADULT LITERACY IMPACTS ON THE U.S. ECONOMY

99% say low adult literacy has impact on the U.S. economy

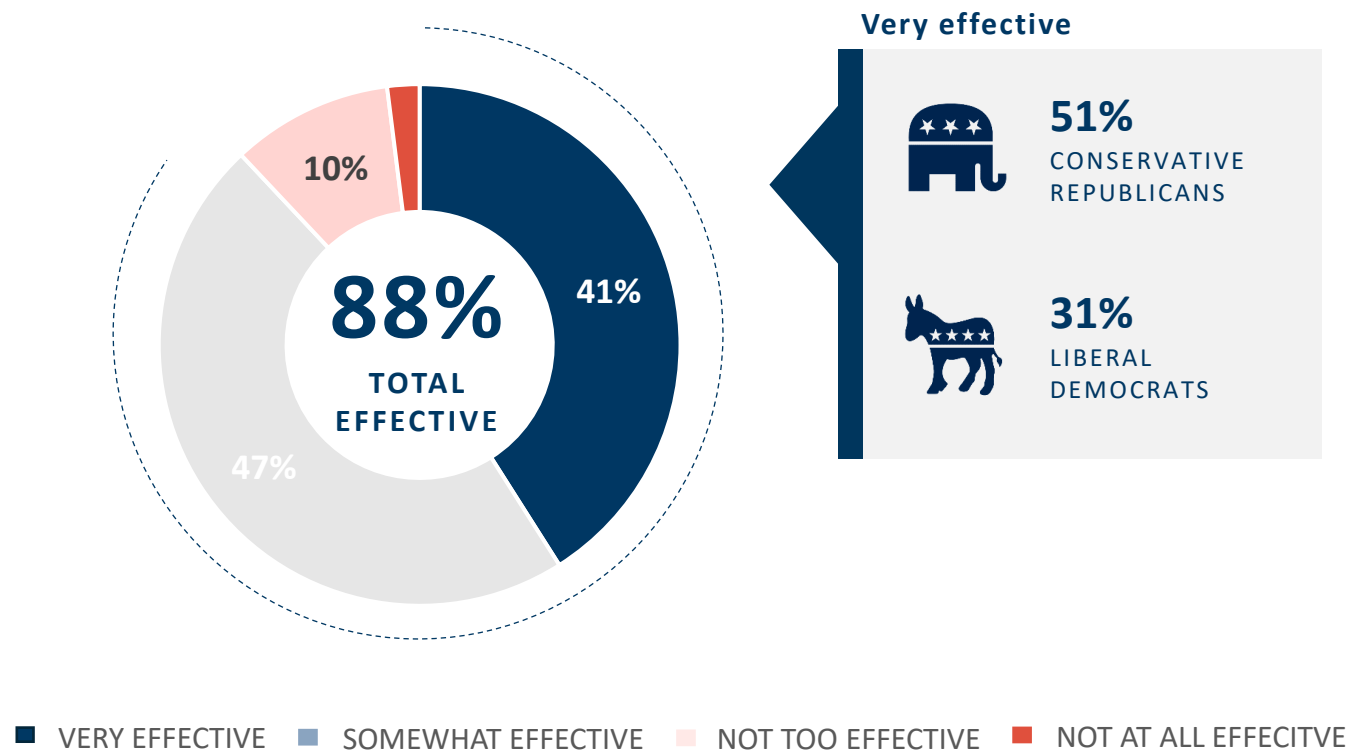


Q: In your opinion, what level of impact does the adult literacy rate have on the U.S. economy?
 Q: To the best of your knowledge, what impact does low adult literacy have on the U.S. economy?

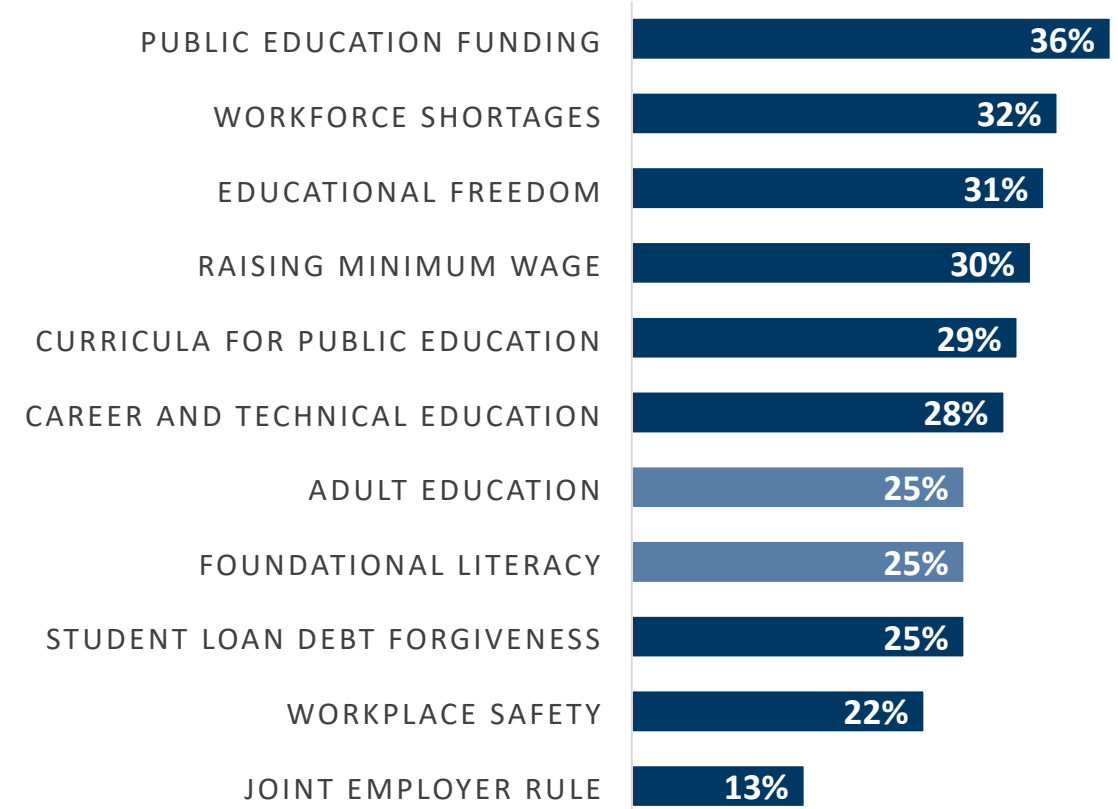
Adult education and foundational literacy fall below several other education and labor priorities

While most believe that increasing adult literacy would be at least somewhat effective in improving the U.S. economy, many other labor and education policy priorities take precedence over it – including minimum wage, public education, and career/technical education.

EFFECT OF ADULT LITERACY RATE IMPROVEMENT ON THE U.S. ECONOMY



EDUCATION AND LABOR POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION



Q: When thinking of the following policies or strategies for improving the U.S. economy, to what extent do you find them effective or ineffective?

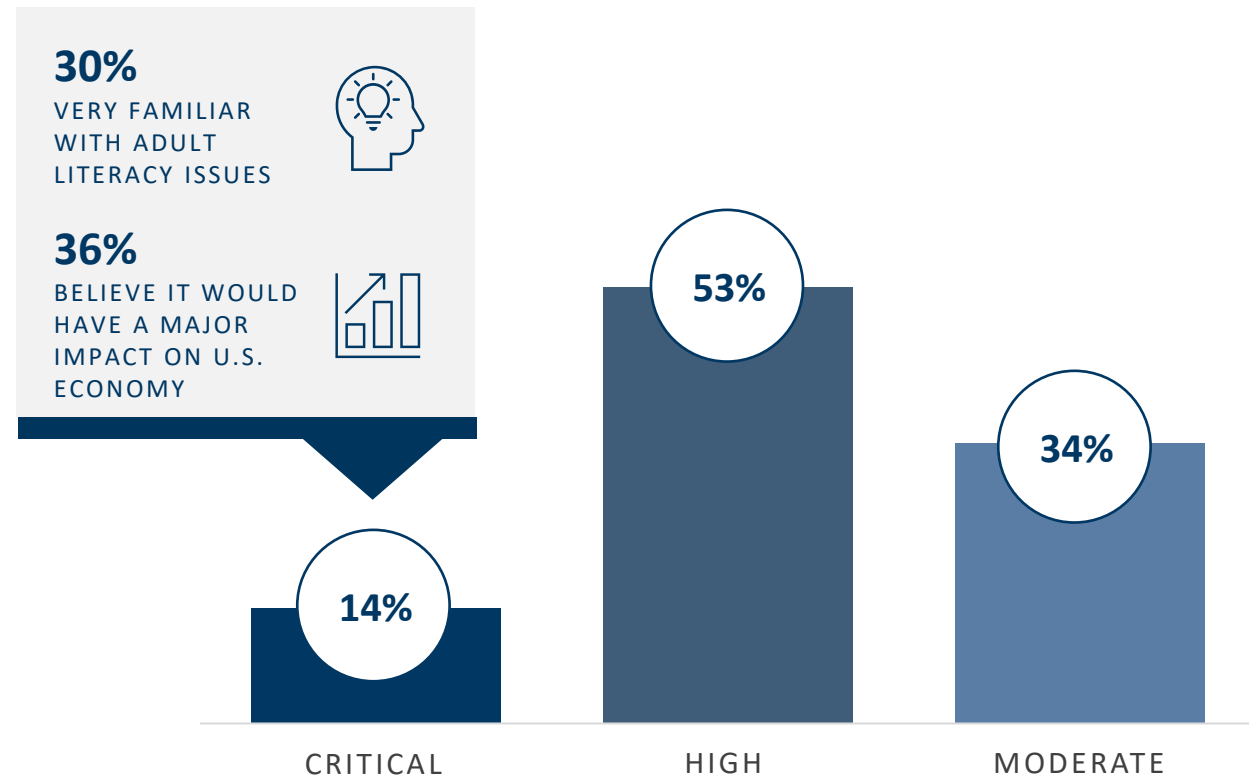
Q: In your opinion, which of the following SHOULD be the next major education and labor policy priorities for the Biden administration? Please select up to three (3)

Nevertheless, more than half consider U.S. adult literacy issues to be a high priority

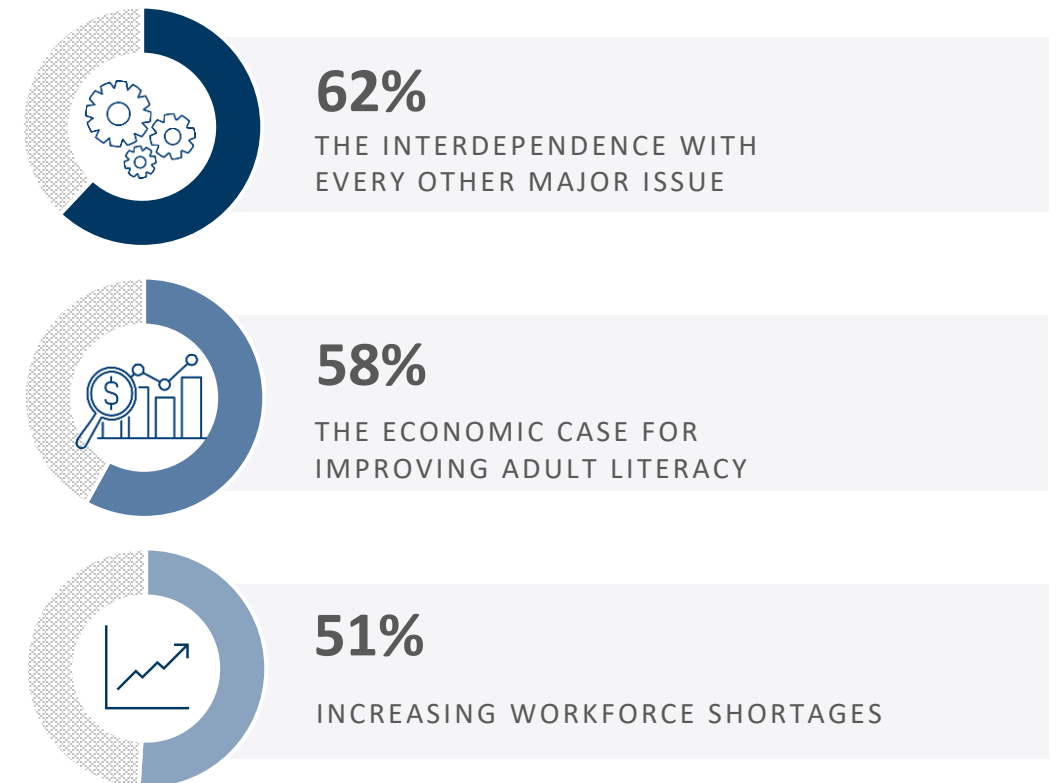
Those more familiar with adult literacy issues, as well as those who believe adult literacy rates have a major impact on the U.S. economy, are significantly more likely to consider the issue a critical priority. The interdependence of adult literacy with every other major issue is the primary reason driving this sense of priority.

THE NEED TO PRIORITIZE ADULT LITERACY ISSUES IN THE UNITED STATES

Critical need



TOP 3 FACTORS DRIVING PRIORITY



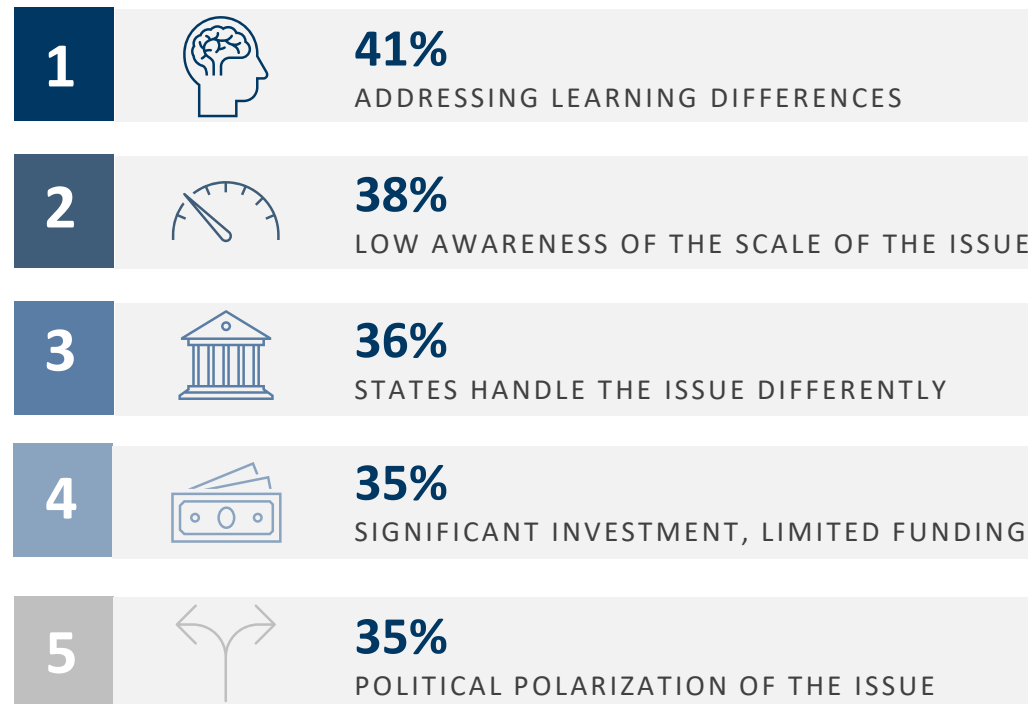
Q: How would you categorize the need to prioritize adult literacy issues in the United States?

Q: What is driving this sense of priority?

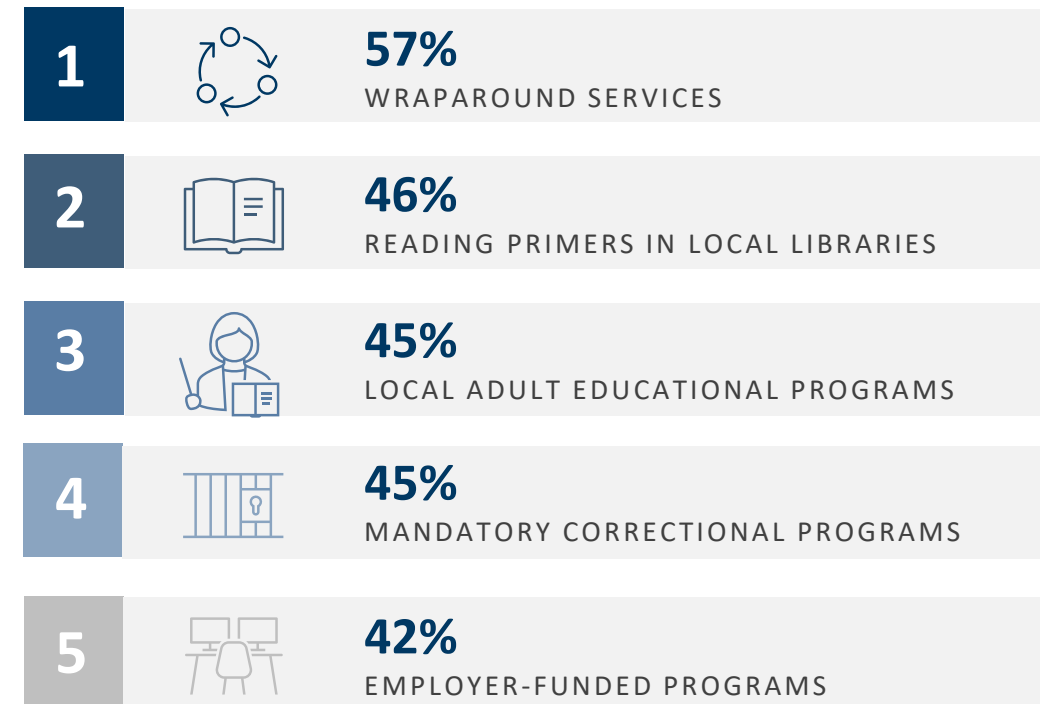
Providing wraparound services is perceived to be the top strategy for improving adult literacy

Meanwhile, addressing learning differences and low awareness of the scale of the issue emerged as the top obstacles to improving adult literacy rates nationally.

KEY OBSTACLES TO IMPROVING ADULT LITERACY RATES IN THE UNITED STATES



MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ADULT LITERACY RATES IN THE UNITED STATES



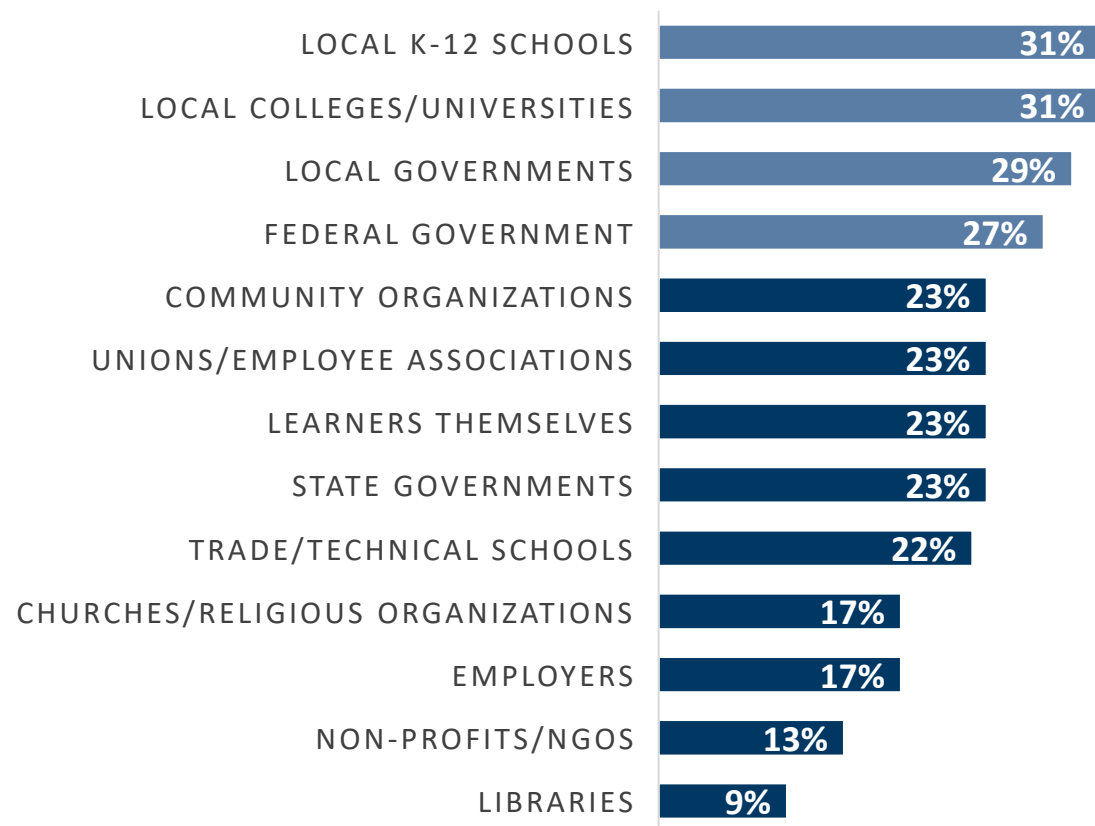
Q: What are the key obstacles to improving adult literacy rates in the United States?

Q: What do you believe are the most effective strategies for improving adult literacy rates in the United States?

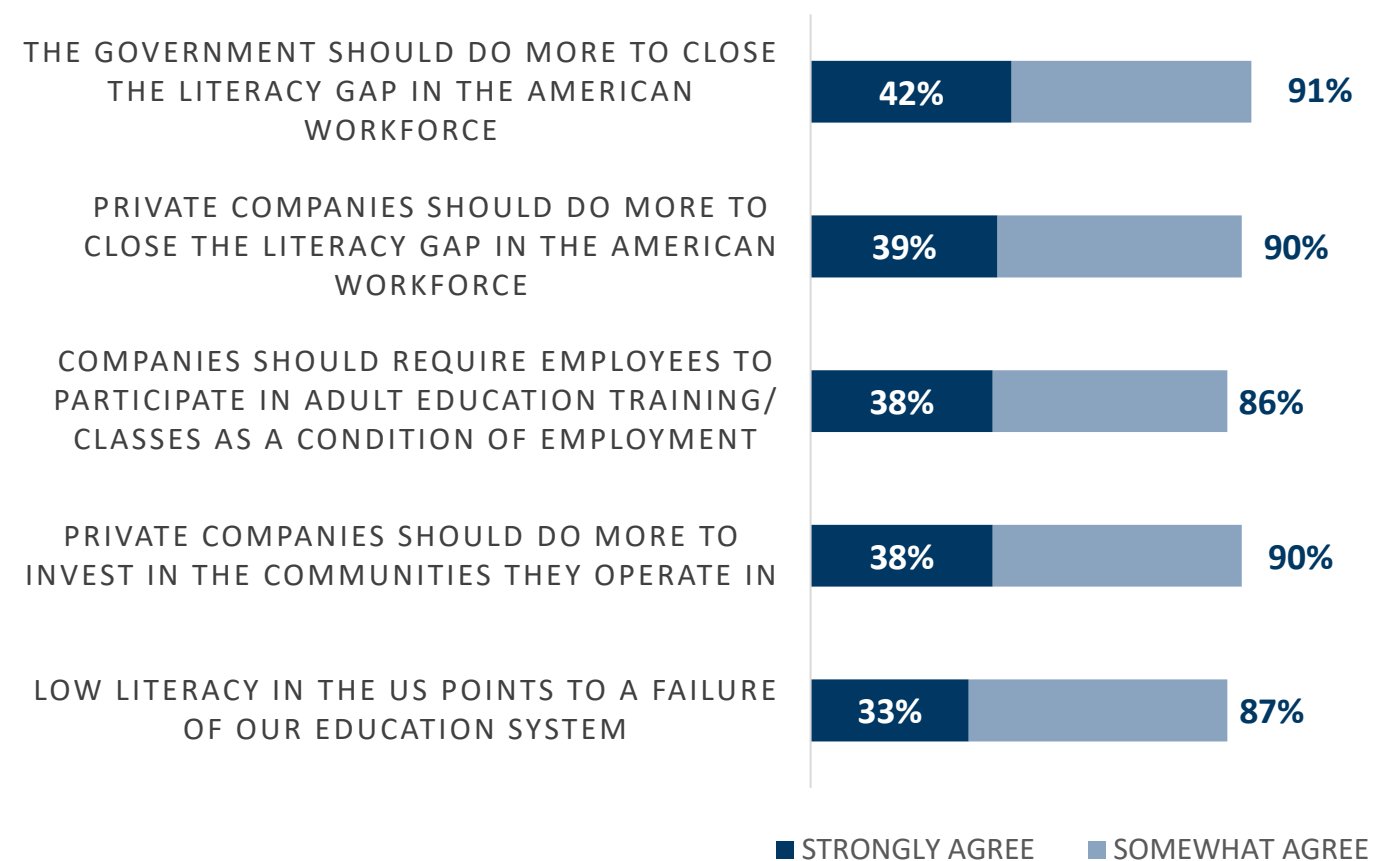
Local education institutions are believed to be best positioned to address adult literacy gaps

Nevertheless, majorities agree that the government should do more to close the literacy gap, with local and federal institutions ranking close second among impactful groups. While employers rank lower on this list, policy influencers generally agree that private companies can play a meaningful role to help address the issue.

GROUPS BEST POSITIONED TO ADDRESS ADULT LITERACY GAPS IN THE UNITED STATES



PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ADULT LITERACY ISSUES IN THE UNITED STATES



Q: Who is best positioned to address adult literacy gaps in the United States?

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about literacy?

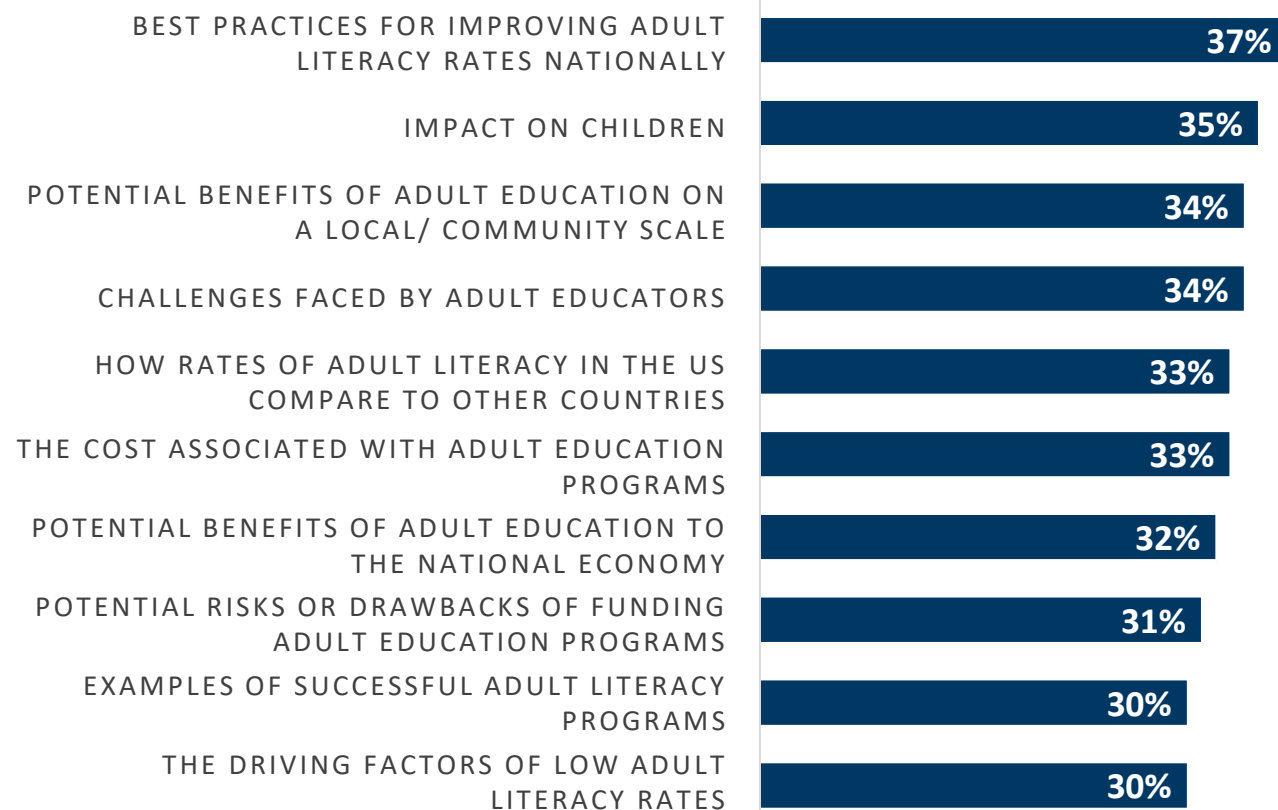


Engagement Channels & Formats

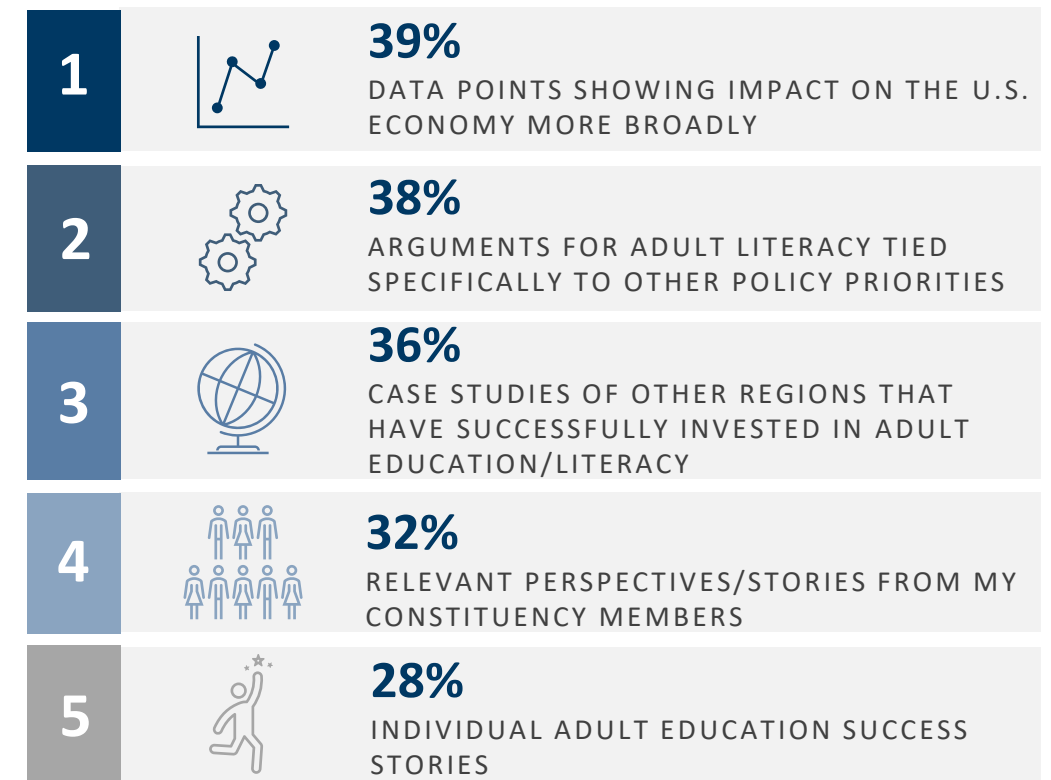
Additional information on the issue can help increase engagement inside the Beltway

Policy influencers believe that more information on best practices and potential impact on local communities and children can help them engage in this issue more effectively. Data showcasing the impact on the U.S. economy more broadly and potential arguments for adult literacy to be tied with other policy priorities can help encourage their peers to support the issue.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION THAT WOULD HELP POLICY INFLUENCERS ENGAGE MORE EFFECTIVELY



INFORMATION MOST EFFECTIVE IN ENCOURAGING SUPPORT OF ADULT LITERACY IMPROVEMENT



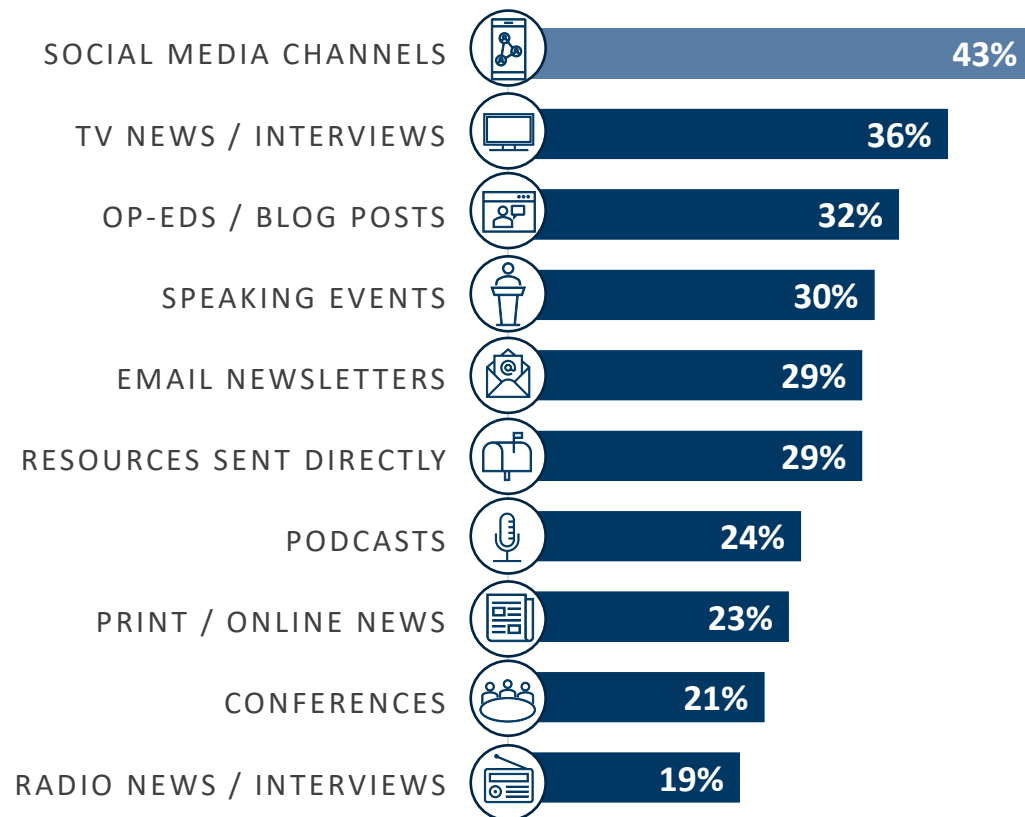
Q: What additional information about adult literacy would help you engage in this issue more effectively?

Q: What type of information would be most effective in encouraging professionals such as yourself to support programs and policies aimed at improving adult literacy rates?

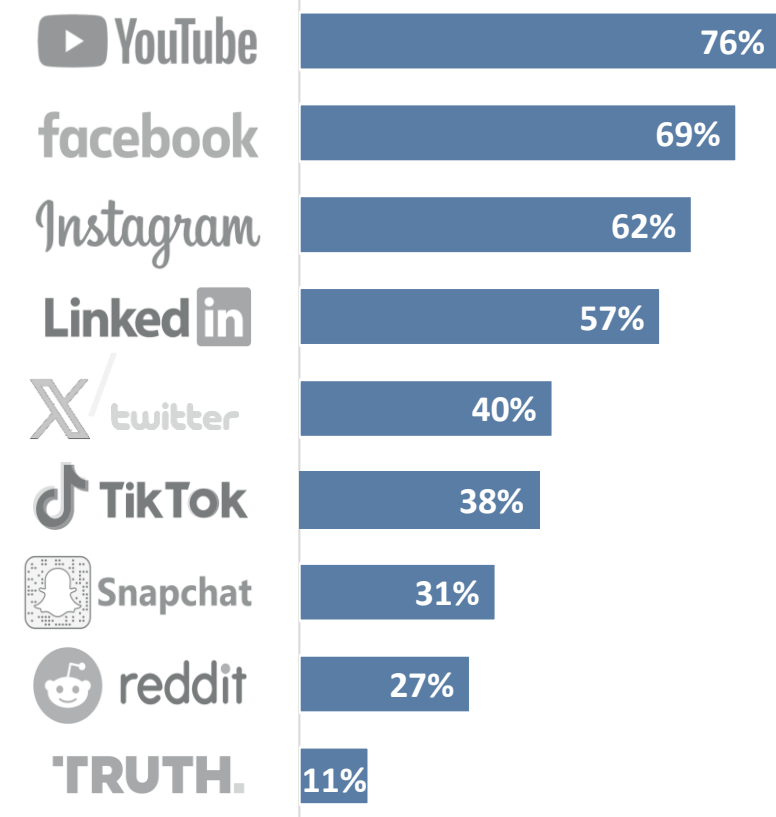
Policy influencers mostly prefer social media channels for receiving adult literacy information

Specifically, policy influencers are currently most active on YouTube, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Beyond social media, TV news/interviews and op-eds or blog posts are also key preferences for policy influencers.

PREFERRED CHANNELS FOR RECEIVING INFORMATION ABOUT ADULT LITERACY



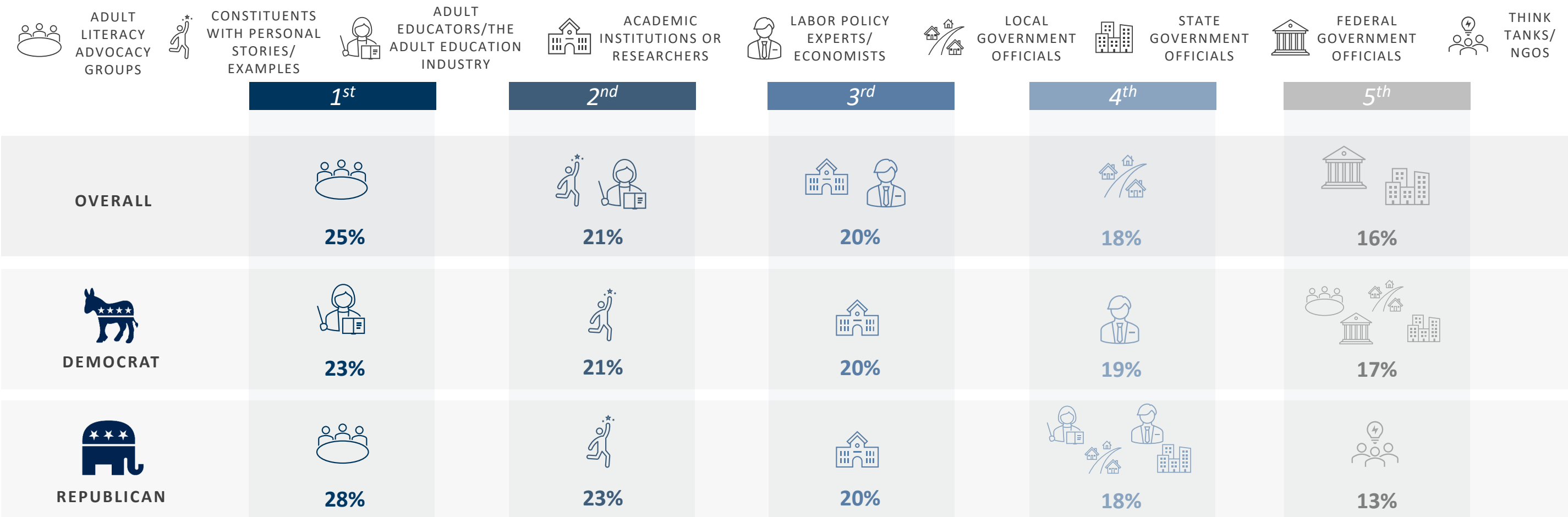
SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS THAT POLICY INFLUENCERS ARE CURRENTLY ACTIVE ON



Adult literacy advocacy groups and adult educators are most credible on the issue of literacy

Constituents with personal stories or examples fall closely behind advocacy groups and educators as the most credible voices on the issue. However, government officials are least likely to be selected as credible voices on adult literacy issues in the U.S.

CREDIBLE VOICES FOR INFORMATION ABOUT ADULT LITERACY AND ITS ECONOMIC IMPACT

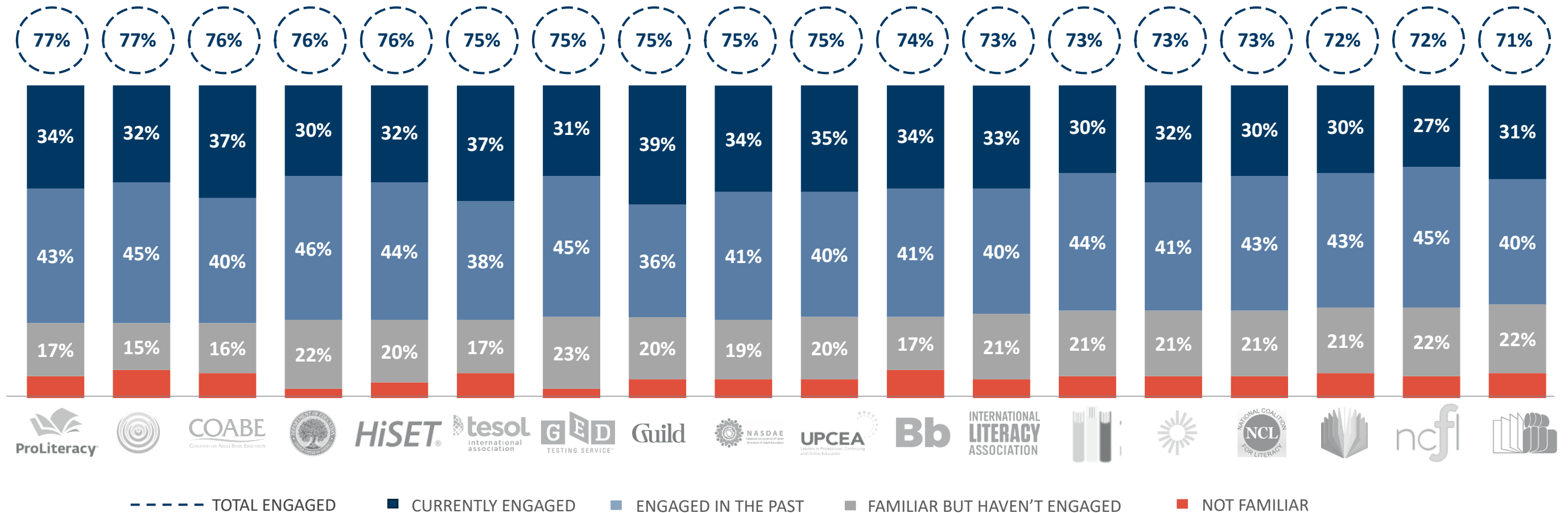


Q: Out of the following groups, who would you trust the most to provide you with accurate information about adult literacy and its impact on the U.S. economy?

Policy influencers follow multiple organizations to inform their decision making

Most policy influencers are familiar with both the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy and ALL IN – the Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network. Engagement levels are similar across all organizations.

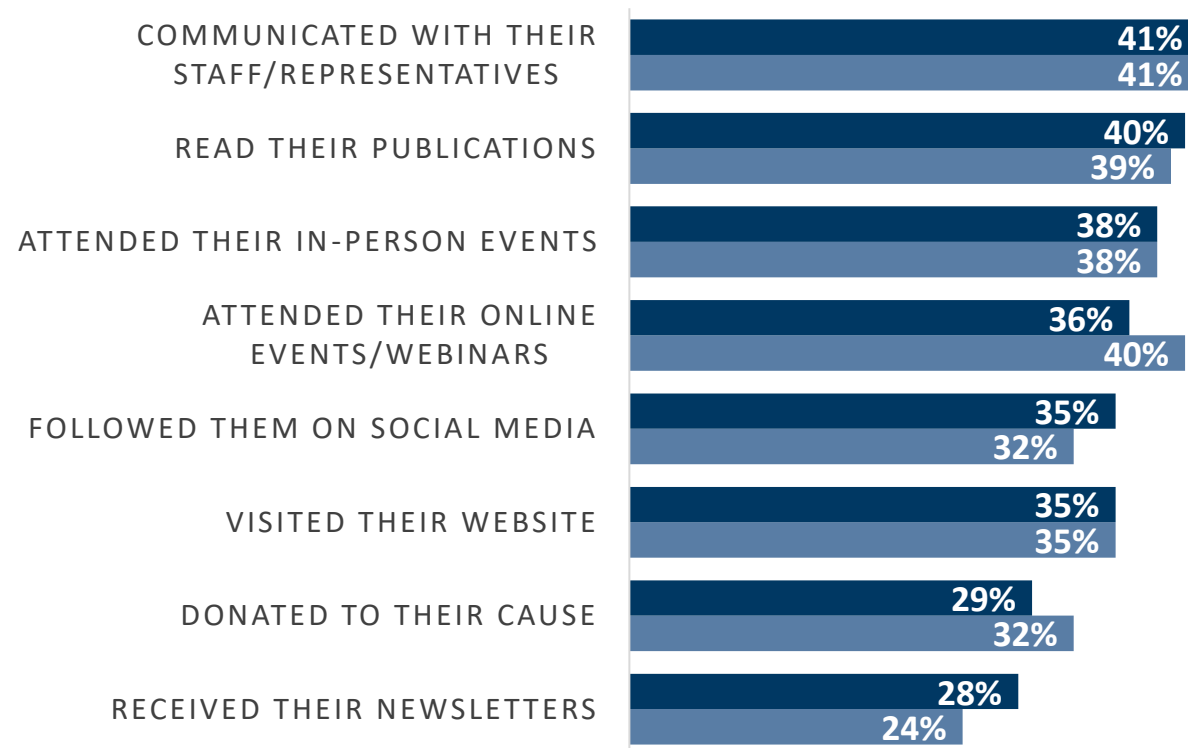
FAMILIARITY & ENGAGEMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONS WORKING IN ADULT LITERACY



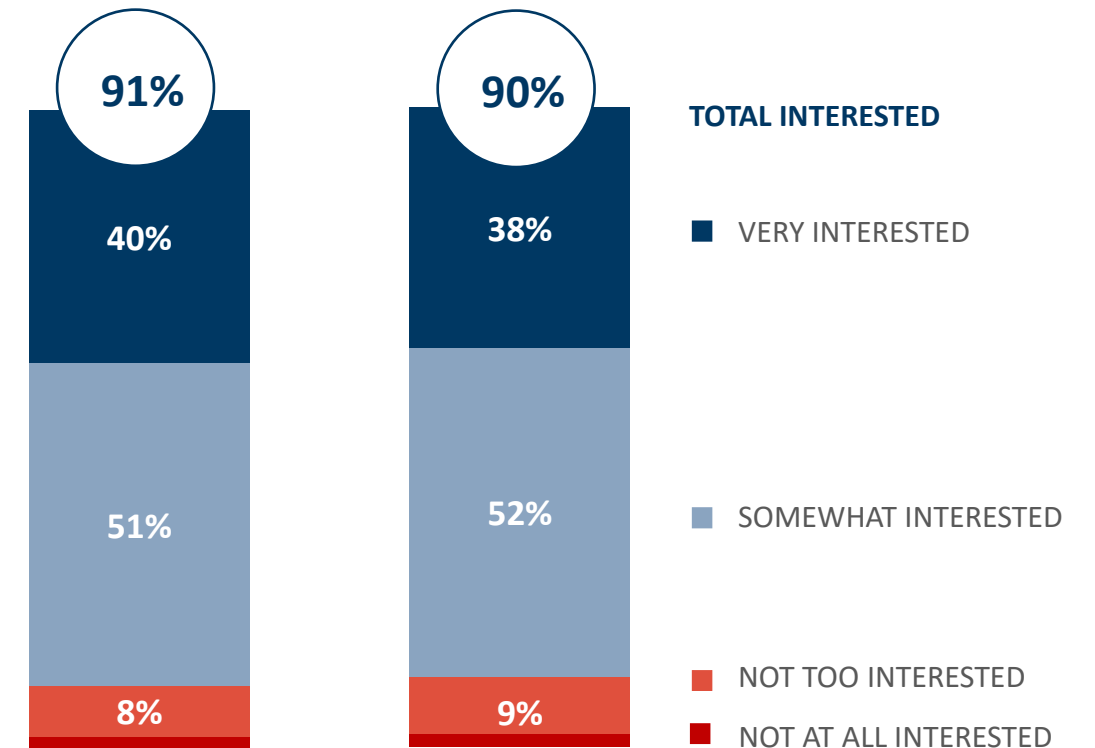
Policy influencers are interested in getting more adult literacy information from ALL IN

The top engagement method with ALL IN and BBF for policy influencers in the past has been direct communications with staff and representatives. Interestingly, just about one-third follow one of the organizations on social media, a preferred channel for receiving information about adult literacy.

METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH ALL IN AND BBF



INTEREST IN RECEIVING INFORMATION ABOUT ADULT LITERACY FROM ALL IN AND BBF



Q: You mentioned that you have engaged with [BBF/ALL IN] in the past. In what ways did you engage with them?

Q: How interested would you be in receiving information about adult literacy from each of the following organizations?



Impactful Messaging

Overview of message testing methodology

The message testing section consists of the following:



➤ Each respondent was shown four statements in support of increasing adult literacy rates in the United States.



➤ Respondents were asked to highlight text if they found it a **compelling** reason to agree with that statement.

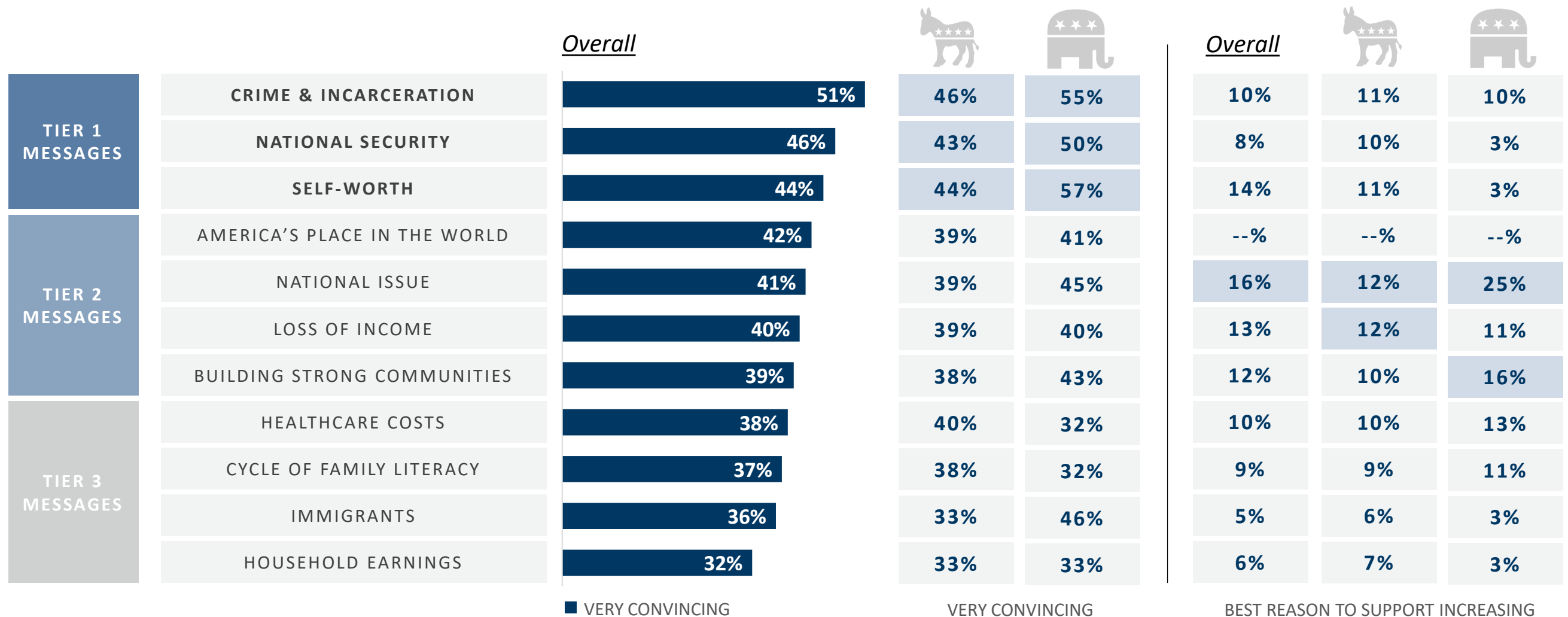


➤ After reading each statement, respondents were asked how convincing the statement was in making them SUPPORT the need to increase adult literacy rates in the United States.



Connecting low adult literacy rates with crime/incarceration, national security, and self-worth are the most convincing messaging strategies across parties

Additionally, empowering people to become high-functioning adults is the top reason to support literacy across both parties. While adult literacy’s contribution to U.S. economic growth is equally important for Democrats, building stronger and more resilient communities appeals to Republicans as the next best reason to support investments in adult literacy.



Q: How convincing is the statement you just read in making you support the need to increase adult literacy rates in the United States?
Q: Overall, which of the following is the best reason to support increasing adult literacy rates in the United States?

Summary results of message highlighting exercise

The following are recommendations based on the highlighting exercise of each message.

Topics	Phrases that are MORE EFFECTIVE	Phrases that are LESS EFFECTIVE
Correlation with Incarceration	There is a correlation between literacy and incarceration. Higher adult literacy rates mean lower crime rates and safer communities.	Incarcerated individuals who participate in correctional education programs are 43% less likely to commit future crimes than inmates who do not.
Maintaining National Security	Increasing literacy rates in the U.S. can help solve this issue and is critically important to maintaining the country's national security.	Low literacy can create misinformation and disinformation, and lead to an increase in polarization, extremism, conflict, and potential social unrest.
Wellbeing and Self-Esteem	Americans with low literacy are more likely to experience lower quality of life and self-esteem. We must address adult literacy rates as an essential building block for wellbeing.	Literacy enables individuals to become active and engaged members of society.
Cost to the Country	Low levels of adult literacy could be costing the U.S. economy as much as 10% of its GDP Adult literacy is critical to the strength and future prosperity of our nation.	Every student who does not complete high school costs an estimated \$260,000 each in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity.
Educational System	Our educational system has not done enough to help Americans compete – or position the U.S. to lead – in a global economy that demands increasingly higher skills.	Americans are being left behind before they even reach high school. Only 10% of all adults in need of literacy training are currently receiving such services
National Issue	The literacy crisis does not only affect the individual – it affects everyone.	The literacy gap is even wider among economically disadvantaged communities. Literacy is more than reading and writing
Minimum Proficiency Level	Our nation is facing a literacy crisis, with an estimated 130 million Americans – over half of U.S. population ages 16 to 74 – struggling to read and write at a sixth-grade level.	Bringing all adults to the equivalent of a sixth-grade reading level would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion in annual income for the country.
Strengthening Communities	Adult literacy programs and initiatives are essential components of robust, resilient communities that can respond to challenges with flexibility and creativity.	Higher-skilled adults are more likely to participate in democracy, community service, volunteerism, and other social activities.
Healthcare Outcomes	Adults with low literacy rates are less likely to seek preventive care. Investing in adult literacy can reduce healthcare expenditures and improve national health outcomes.	They are also less likely to understand and help manage the diagnosis and treatment of their children. Between \$106–\$238 billion in health care costs are linked to low adult literacy skills.
Impact on Home and Family	Low literacy affects not only adults, but entire families and can trickle across generations.	Children of parents with low literacy have a 72% chance of being at the lowest level of literacy themselves in adulthood..
Correlation with Low Income	Adults with low literacy are at a higher risk of un- or underemployment, tend to earn lower wages if employed, and have higher rates of poverty and welfare dependence	In fact, workers who have less education than a high school diploma have the lowest median weekly earnings. The average annual income of adults who are at the minimum proficiency level is significantly higher than earnings of those below.
More Than Just Reading	Literacy is not only about reading documents, but also reading food and medicine labels, building and maintaining connections.	Literacy is more than reading and writing. Issues for those who cannot read include difficulty reading street signs while driving, a prescription bottle from their doctor, or even a menu at a restaurant.
Extent of the Problem	Our nation is facing a literacy crisis, with an estimated 130 million Americans struggling to read and write at a sixth-grade level	With the U.S. immigrant population projected to increase, more investment in literacy training and resources will be needed to ensure immigrants can successfully integrate.

When raising awareness, remember the following...

The following outlines best practices to follow and things to avoid when engaging with policymakers.

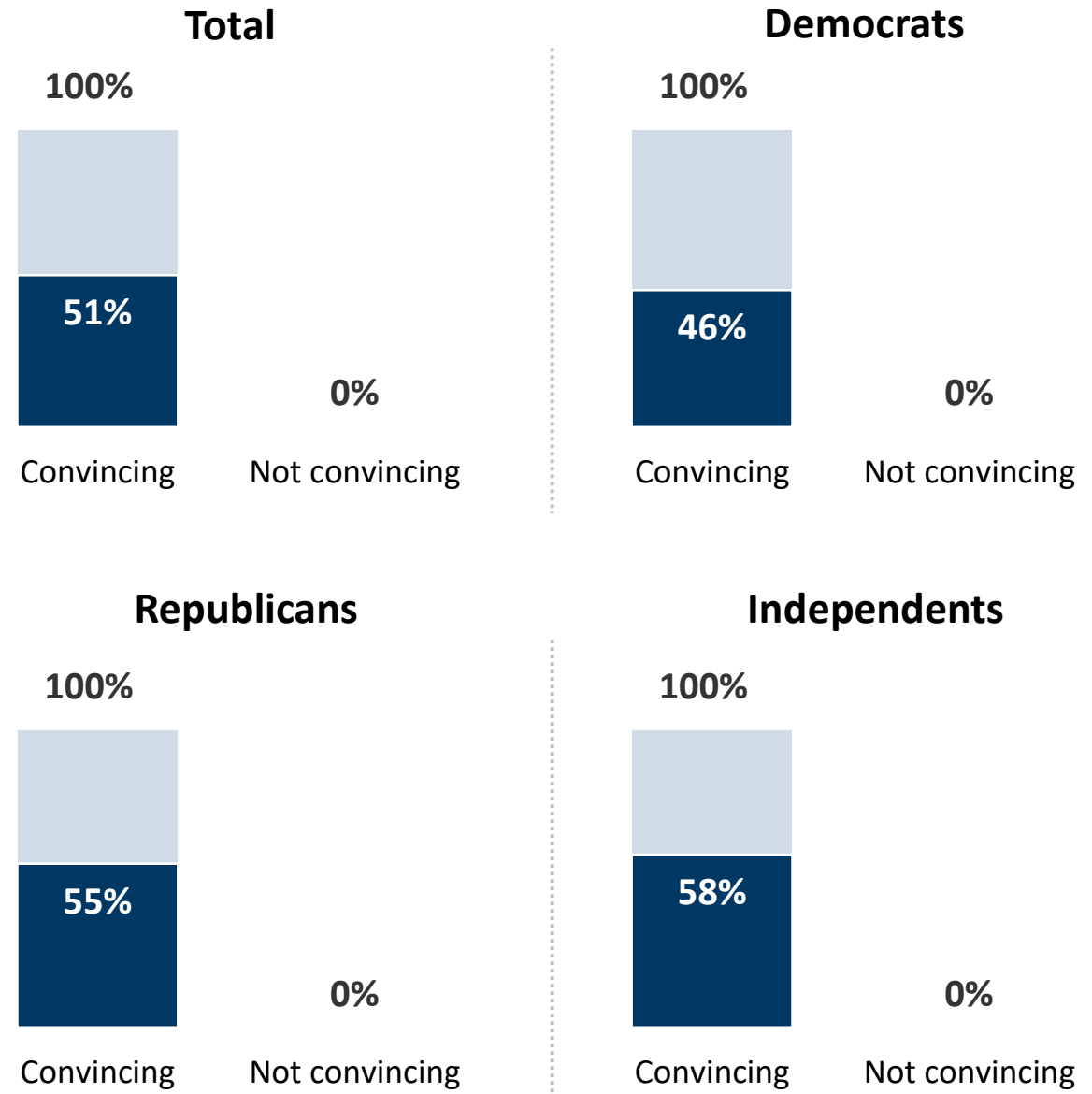
DO			DON'T
	Use simple, summarized facts to succinctly describe the state of adult literacy in the US	Cite isolated numbers or statistics to explain the state of adult literacy	
	Leverage policymakers' patriotism and nationalist values, framing America as a global superpower	Position adult literacy as a personal problem	
	Let the facts around the impact of low adult literacy speak for themselves in demonstrating the issue	Subjectively characterize adult literacy as a pressing issue or significant opportunity	
	Highlight the positive reasons to support investments in adult literacy, in an optimistic and prideful tone	Focus on the negative factors that may contribute to or stem from low adult literacy rates	
	Describe all the benefits to society that would be unlocked through improved adult literacy rates	Use fear-driven language about what could happen without further investment in adult literacy	



Appendix

Messaging: Crime & Incarceration

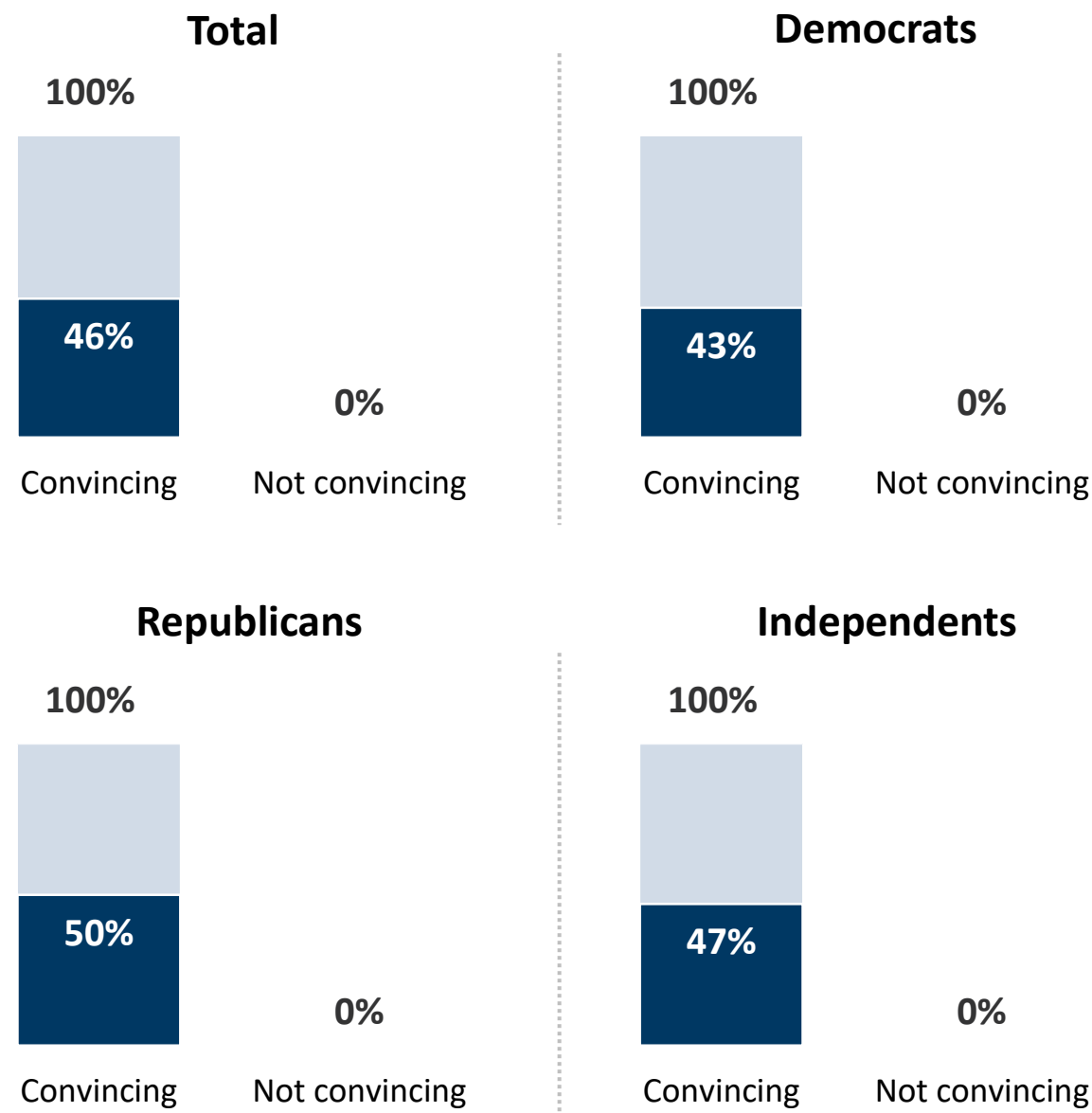
The literacy crisis does not only affect the individual – it affects everyone. While having low literacy does not directly lead to imprisonment, there is a correlation between literacy and incarceration. Over 70% of inmates in America’s prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level. Moreover, incarcerated individuals who participate in correctional education programs are 43% less likely to commit future crimes than inmates who do not. Higher adult literacy rates mean lower crime rates and safer communities.



Messaging: National Security

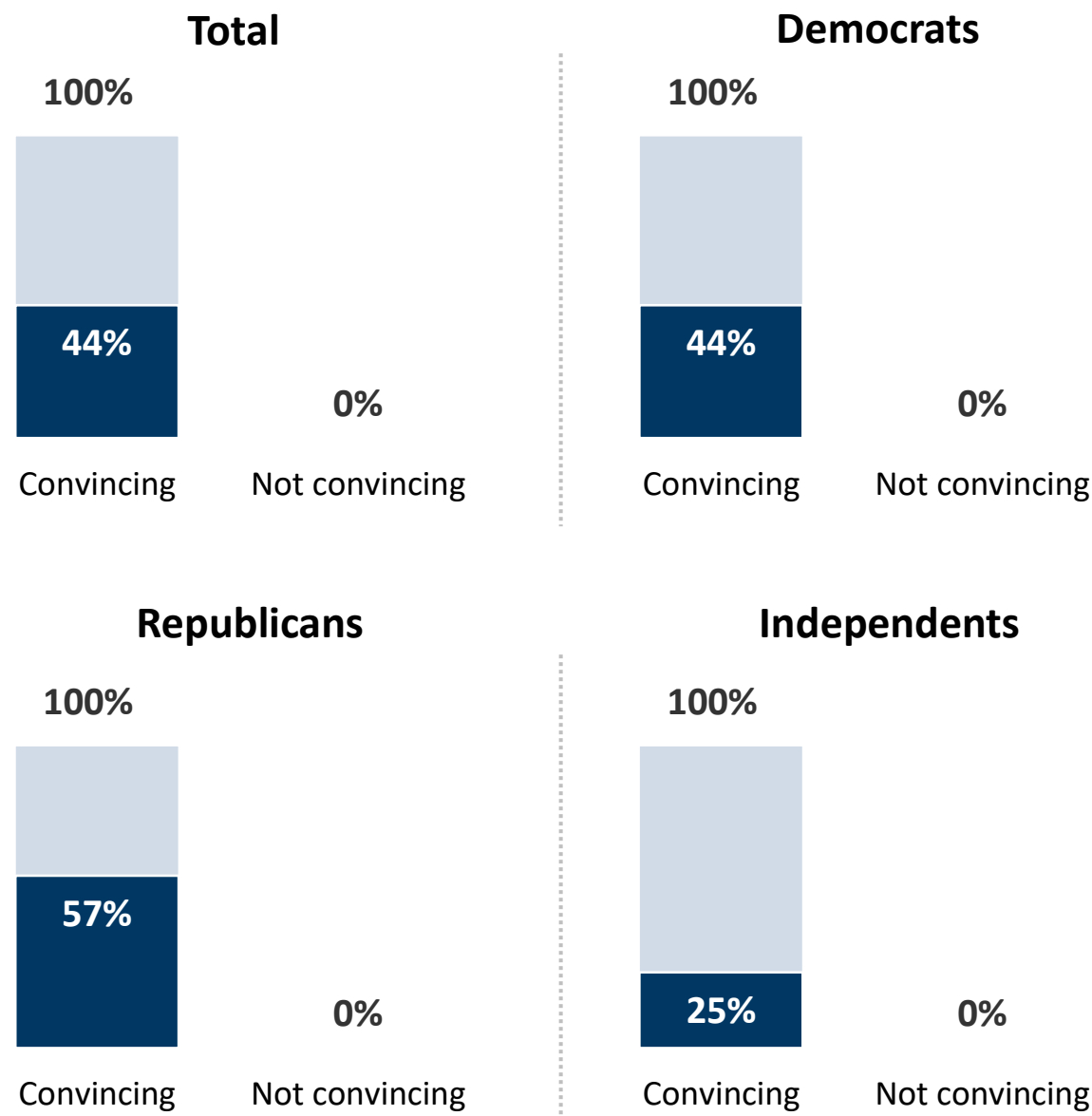
Low literacy in the U.S. poses a serious national security threat. *It can create an environment where misinformation and disinformation are more likely to take root within society, and lead to an increase in polarization, extremism, conflict, and potential social unrest. Moreover, the U.S. military faces an ongoing recruitment crisis, partly driven by low aptitude scores in reading.*

Increasing literacy rates in the U.S. can help solve this issue and is critically important to maintaining the country's national security.



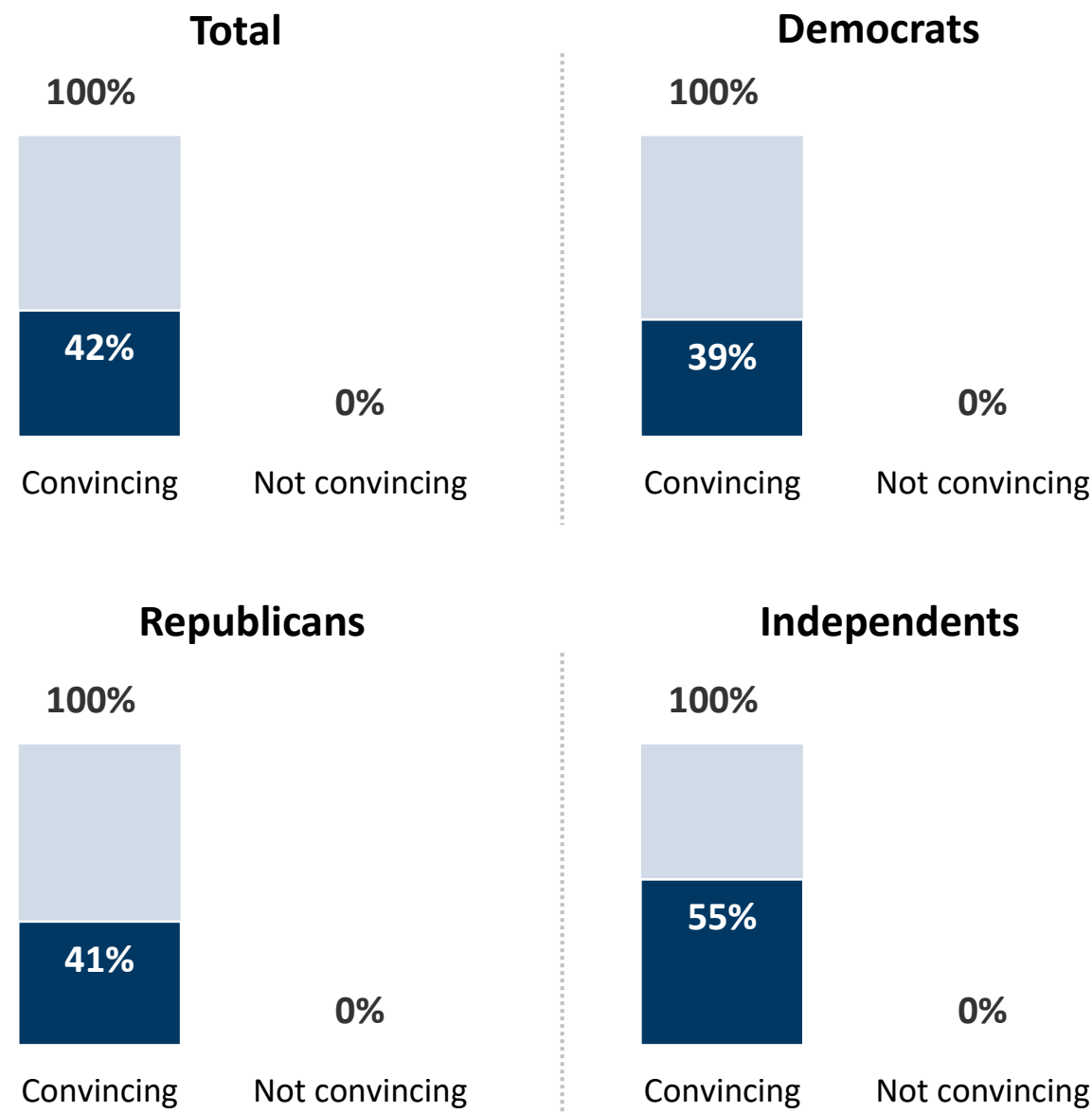
Messaging: Self Worth

Literacy is not only about reading documents, but also reading food and medicine labels, building and maintaining connections with new people, and nurturing loved ones (e.g., reading bedtime stories to children). Without this foundation to build on, **Americans with low literacy are more likely to experience lower quality of life and self-esteem.** We must address adult literacy rates as an **essential building block** for wellbeing, mental health, and **self-actualization** for all Americans.



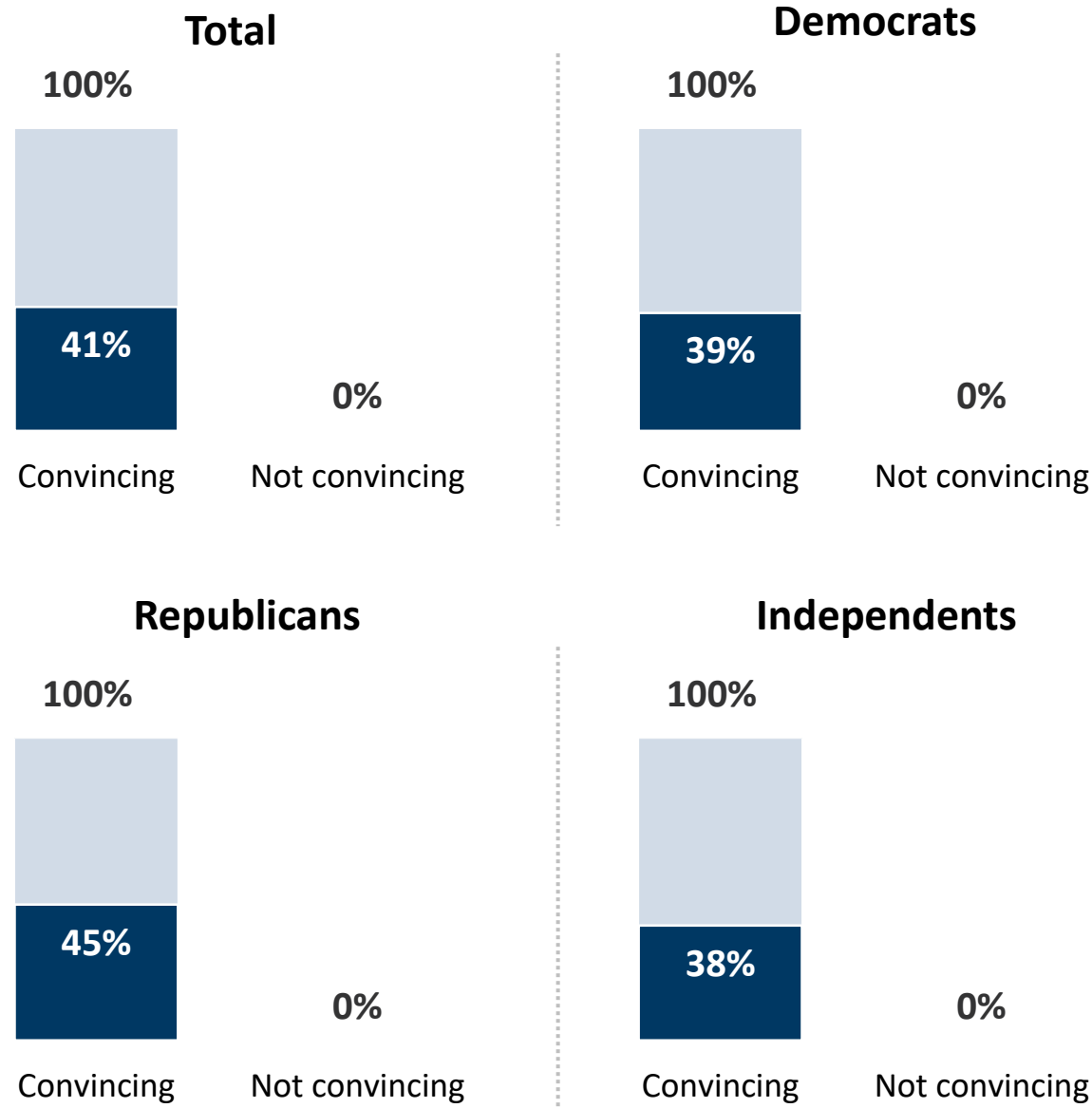
Messaging: America's Place in the World

The U.S. has some of the world's best universities, but many Americans are being left behind before they even reach high school. Nearly one-in-five adult age Americans read below a third-grade level, and only 10% of all adults in need of literacy training are currently receiving such services. Our educational system has not done enough to help Americans compete – or position the U.S. to lead – in a global economy that demands increasingly higher skills.



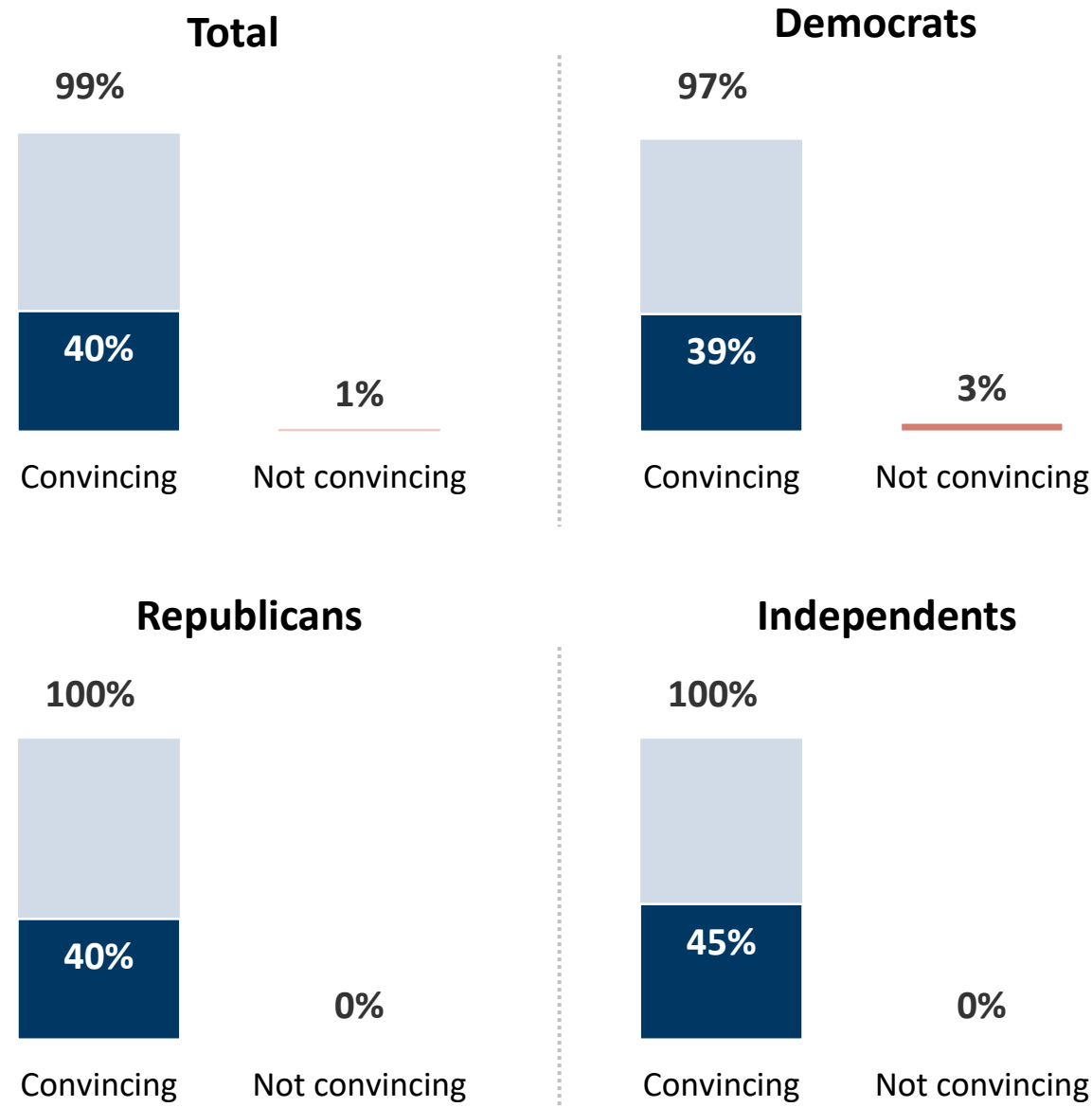
Messaging: National Issue

Our nation is facing a literacy crisis, with an estimated 130 million Americans – over half of U.S. population ages 16 to 74 – struggling to read and write at a sixth-grade level. The literacy gap is even wider among economically disadvantaged communities. Issues for those who cannot read include difficulty reading street signs while driving, a prescription bottle from their doctor, or even a menu at a restaurant. Literacy is more than reading and writing. It empowers people to fully engage in society and be active citizens.



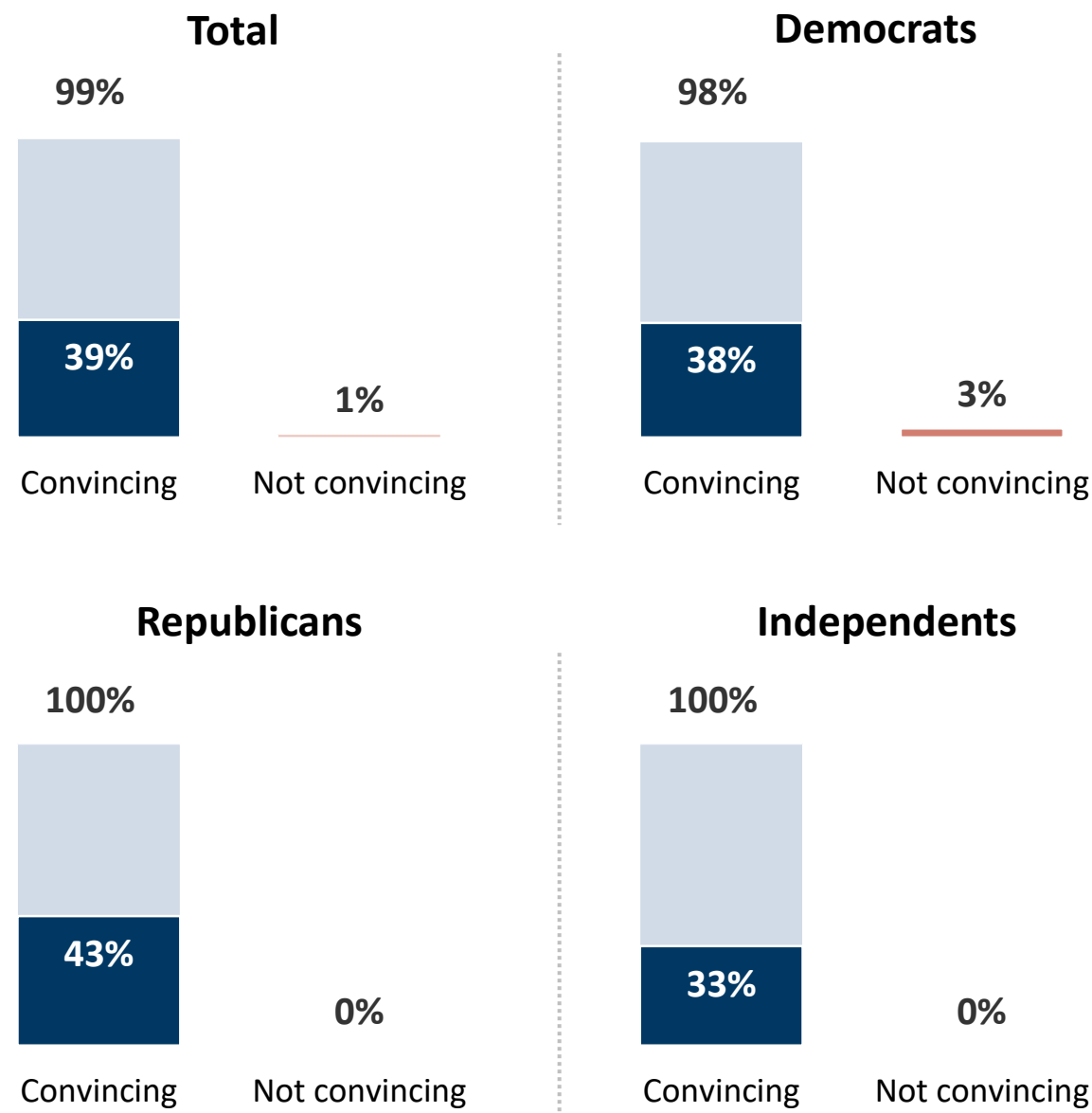
Messaging: Loss of Income

Low levels of adult literacy could be costing the U.S. economy as much as 10% of its GDP. Every student who does not complete high school costs an estimated \$260,000 each in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity. Bringing all adults to the equivalent of a sixth grade reading level would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion in annual income for the country. The U.S. cannot afford to have untapped potential among its population. Investing in adult literacy is absolutely critical to the strength and future prosperity of our nation.



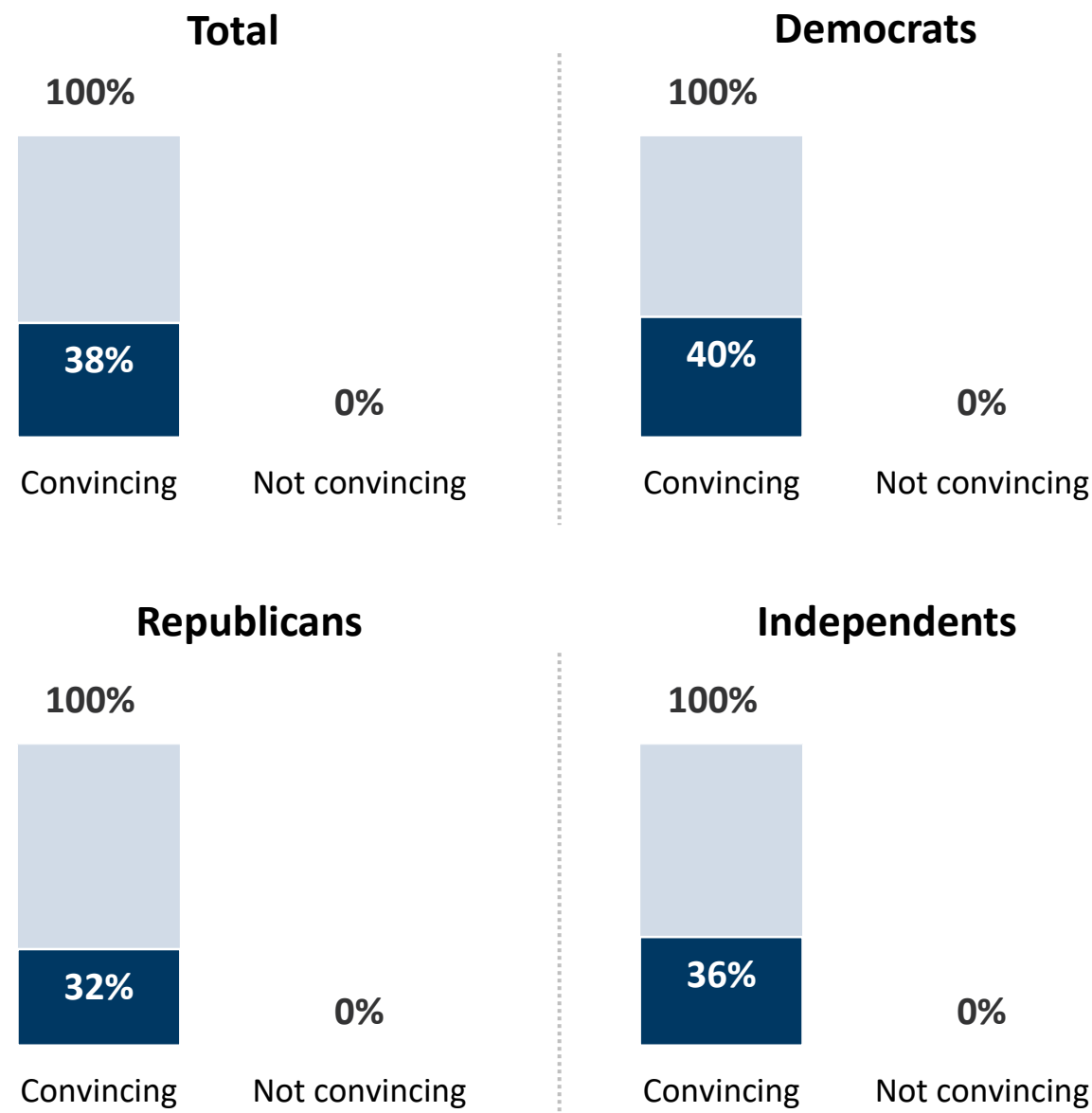
Messaging: Building Strong Communities

Adult literacy programs and initiatives are essential components of robust, resilient communities that can respond to challenges with flexibility and creativity. Literacy enables individuals to become active and engaged members of society. Higher-skilled adults are more likely to use their knowledge and skills to participate in democracy, community service, volunteerism, and other social activities. Raising adult literacy rates would increase civic engagement and help strengthen our nation's communities.



Messaging: Healthcare Costs

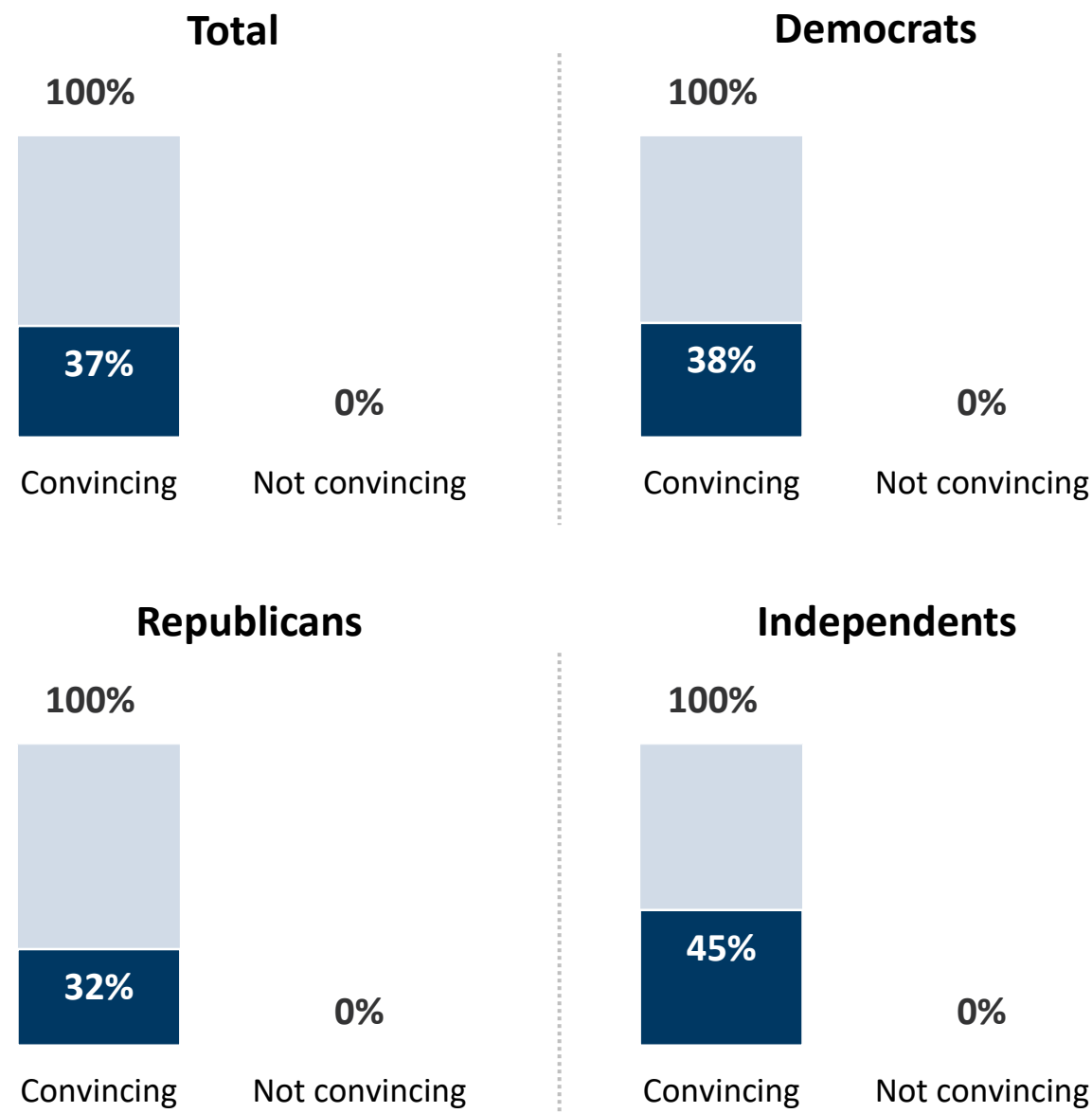
Adults with low literacy rates are less likely to seek preventive care, less able to manage chronic conditions, and have a higher rate of hospitalizations and use of emergency services. They are also less likely to understand and help manage the diagnosis and treatment of their children. Between \$106 - \$238 billion in health care costs each year are estimated to be linked to low adult literacy skills. Investing in adult literacy can reduce healthcare expenditures and improve national health outcomes.



Messaging: Cycle of Family Literacy

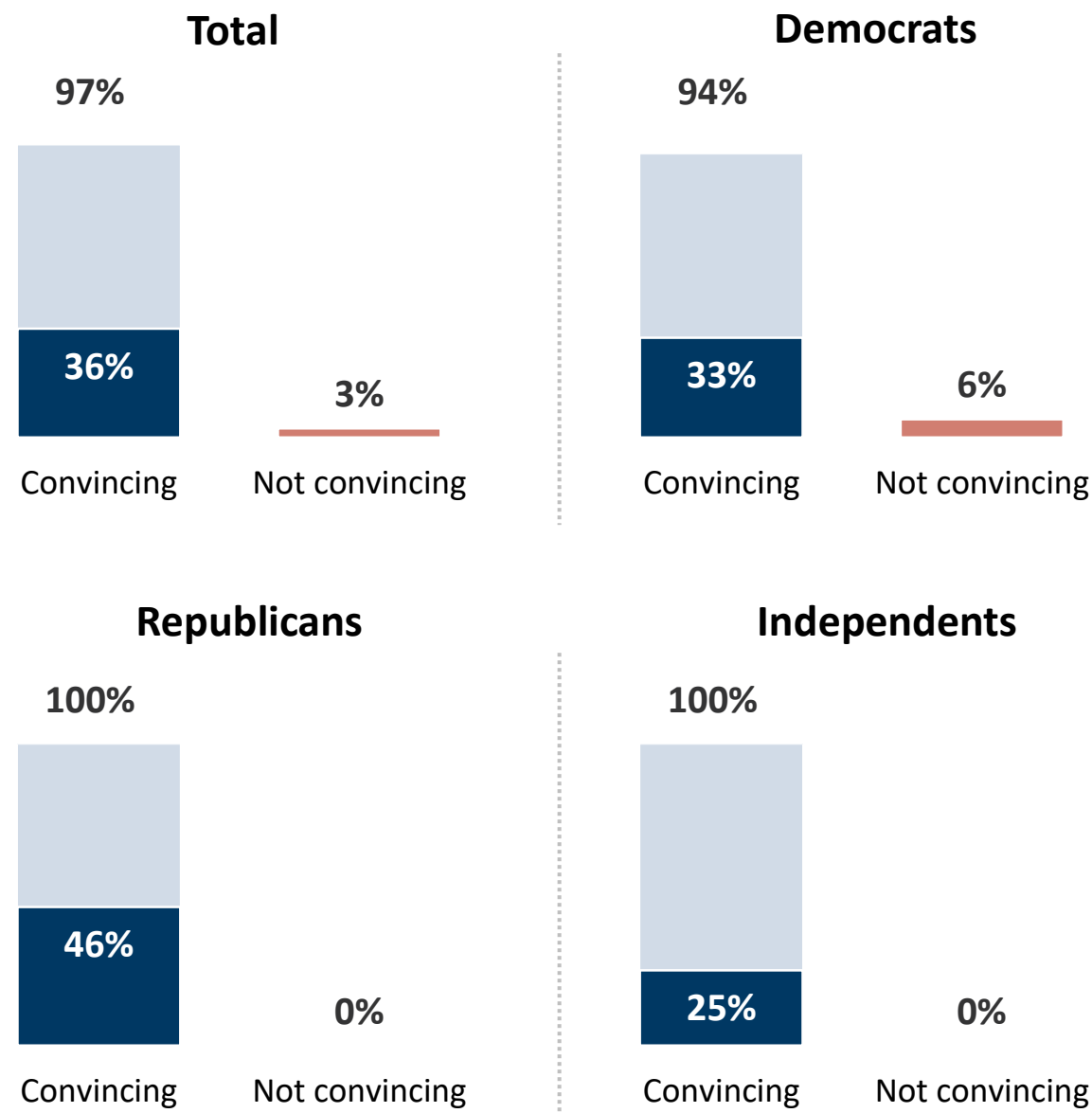
Low literacy affects not only adults, but entire families and can trickle across generations.

Children of less-educated parents are 10 times more likely to become **low-skilled** adults. Children of parents with low literacy have a 72% chance of being at the lowest level of **literacy themselves** in adulthood, and 88% of children under age six whose parents did not complete high school live in poverty. **Addressing the challenge of low literacy is a pressing need and an unprecedented opportunity for breaking generational curses.**



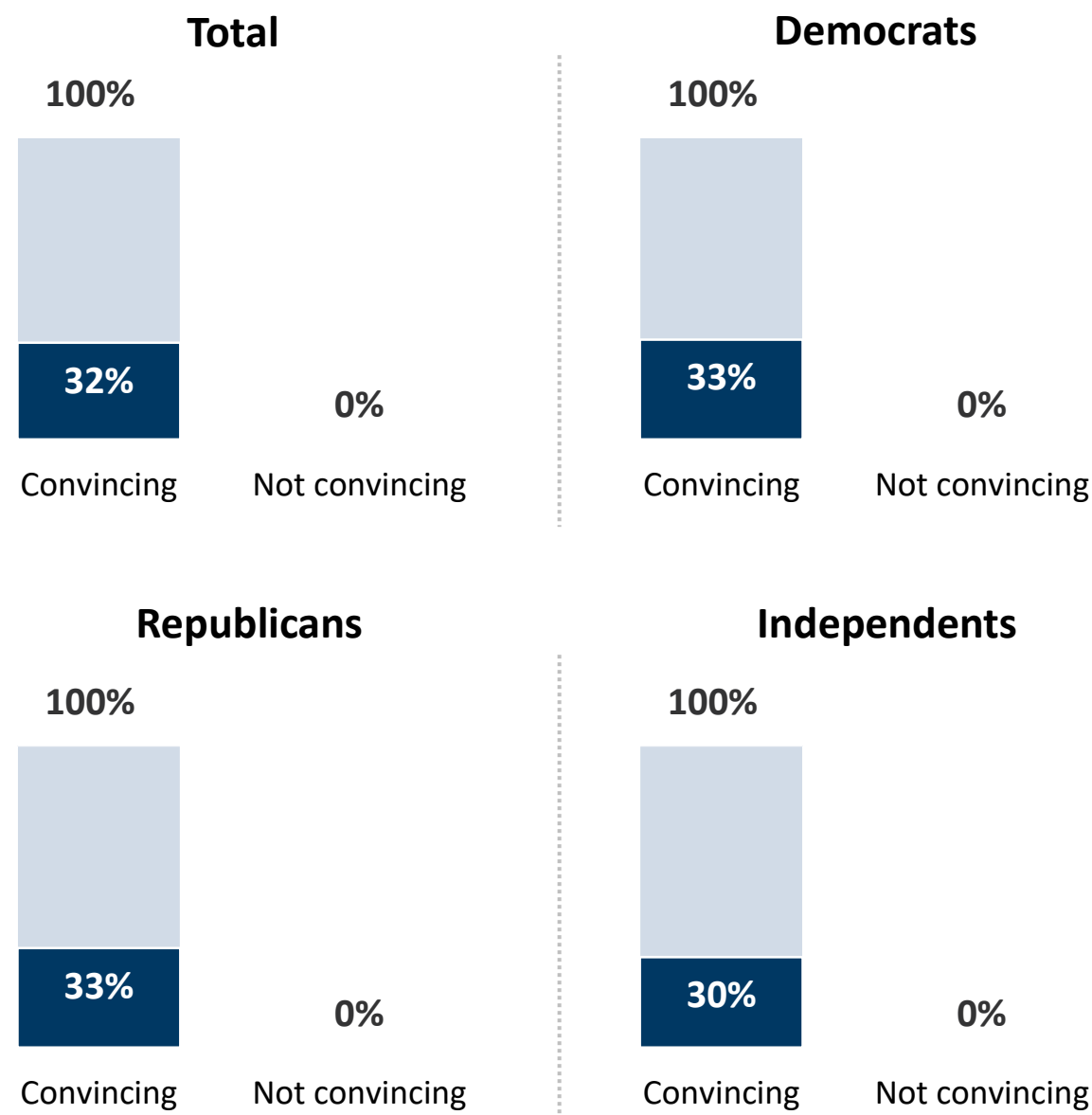
Messaging: Immigrants

The U.S. has the world's largest immigrant population, home to one-in-five of the world's immigrants. Children from immigrant families account for one-in-four young children in the United States. However, only about half of immigrants are proficient English speakers. In fact, one-third of the 43 million U.S. adults with the lowest level of literacy are immigrants. With the U.S. immigrant population projected to increase, more investment in literacy training and resources will be needed to ensure immigrants can successfully integrate and contribute to our society.



Messaging: Household Earnings

Adults with low literacy are at a higher risk of un- or underemployment, tend to earn lower wages if they are employed, and have higher rates of poverty and welfare dependence. *In fact, workers who have less education than a high school diploma have the lowest median weekly earnings. The average annual income of adults who are at the minimum proficiency level for literacy (\$63,000) is significantly higher than earnings of those below proficiency (\$48,000) and those at the lowest levels of literacy (\$34,000).*





Experts with Impact™