



Vaccine hesitancy in Western Colorado

Prepared for San Juan Basin Public
Health and Ascend Strategies

November 2021

Summary of qualitative research

- From Sept. 29 - Oct. 6, 2021, RBI Strategies conducted five focus groups among 17 unvaccinated residents of Colorado's Western Slope. Findings included the following:
 - A substantial proportion of participants appear unreachable through either persuasion or mandates.
 - Prescriptive messages should be avoided, as the unvaccinated are highly suspect of attempts to "sell them on the vaccine."
 - Reasons not to get vaccinated centered on concerns about the development process, fear of unknown long-term side effects related to the vaccine, and the belief that the vaccine is ineffective.
 - Several participants said they had already contracted COVID-19 and therefore felt protected by natural immunity.
 - Some female participants also expressed concerns around fertility.
- Three key message areas showed promise:
 1. fact-based explanation of vaccine development and function;
 2. protecting others and gaining herd immunity;
 3. risk of long-term side effects from COVID-19.
- Survey research was conducted in order to:
 - Test if those message areas resonate among a wider audience.
 - Gauge what proportion of the population are refusers, persuadable, or reachable with mandates.
 - Determine demographics of the persuadable group.
 - Determine effective messengers.

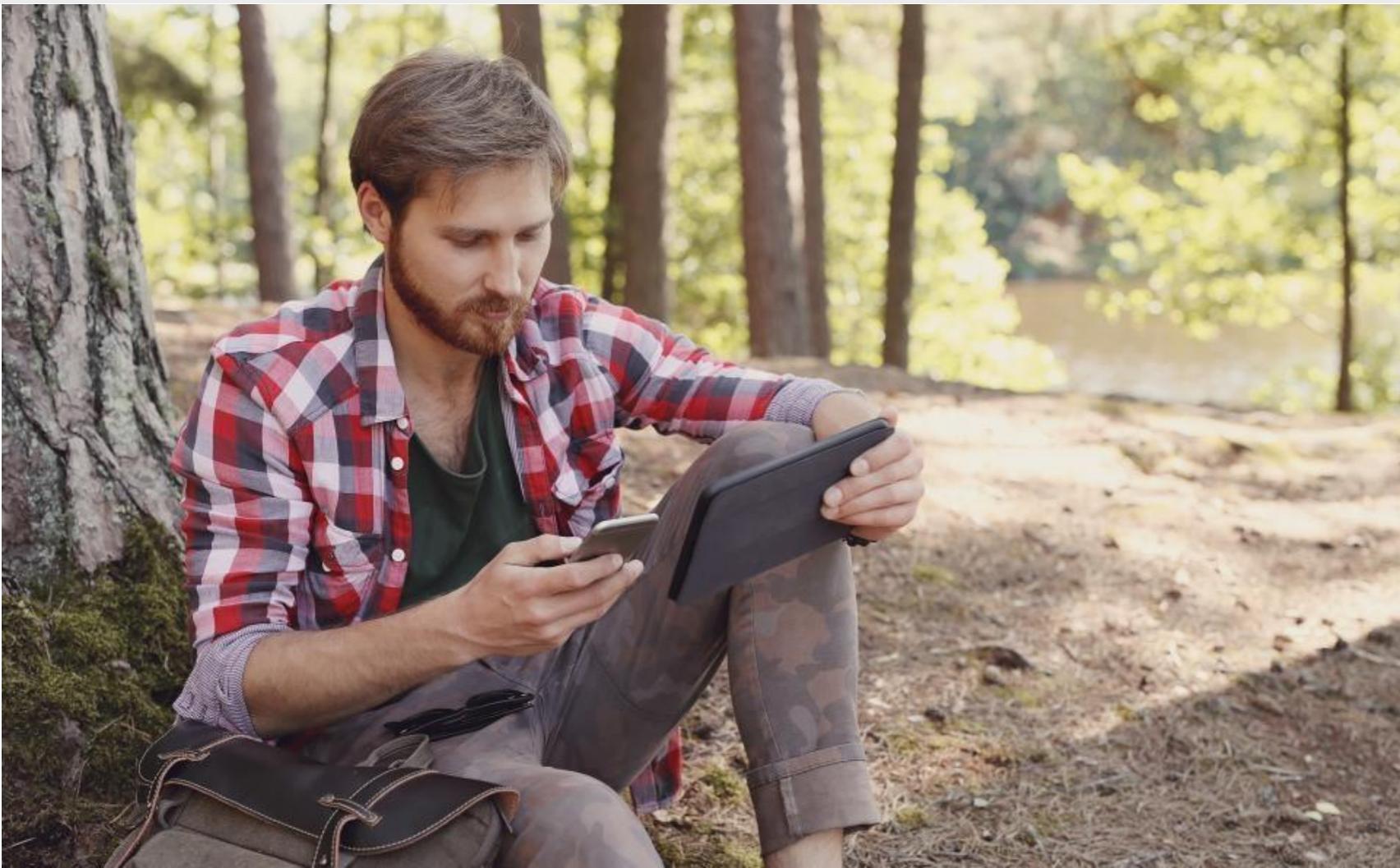
Methodology

Survey conducted October 19-21, 2021

Data Collection

Text-to-web:

Survey sent to 119,416 cell phones in 28 Western Colorado counties. English and Spanish options provided.



3,183

respondents

- 74% vaccinated
- 26% unvaccinated

501

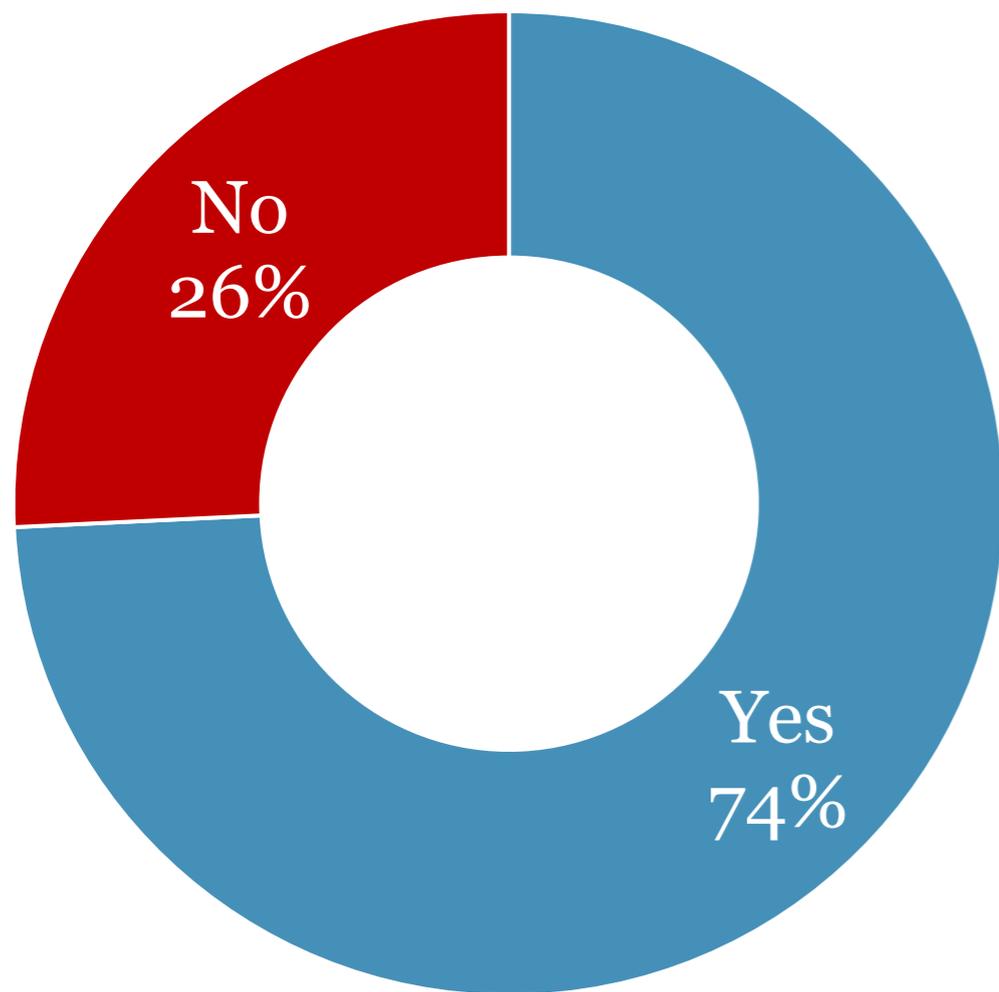
completed surveys
from unvaccinated
respondents

$\pm 4.4\%$

margin of error
at 95% confidence
for $n=501$

The gap in vaccination based on registered party remains pronounced, with just over 50% of Republicans vaccinated. Vaccination also increases with age.

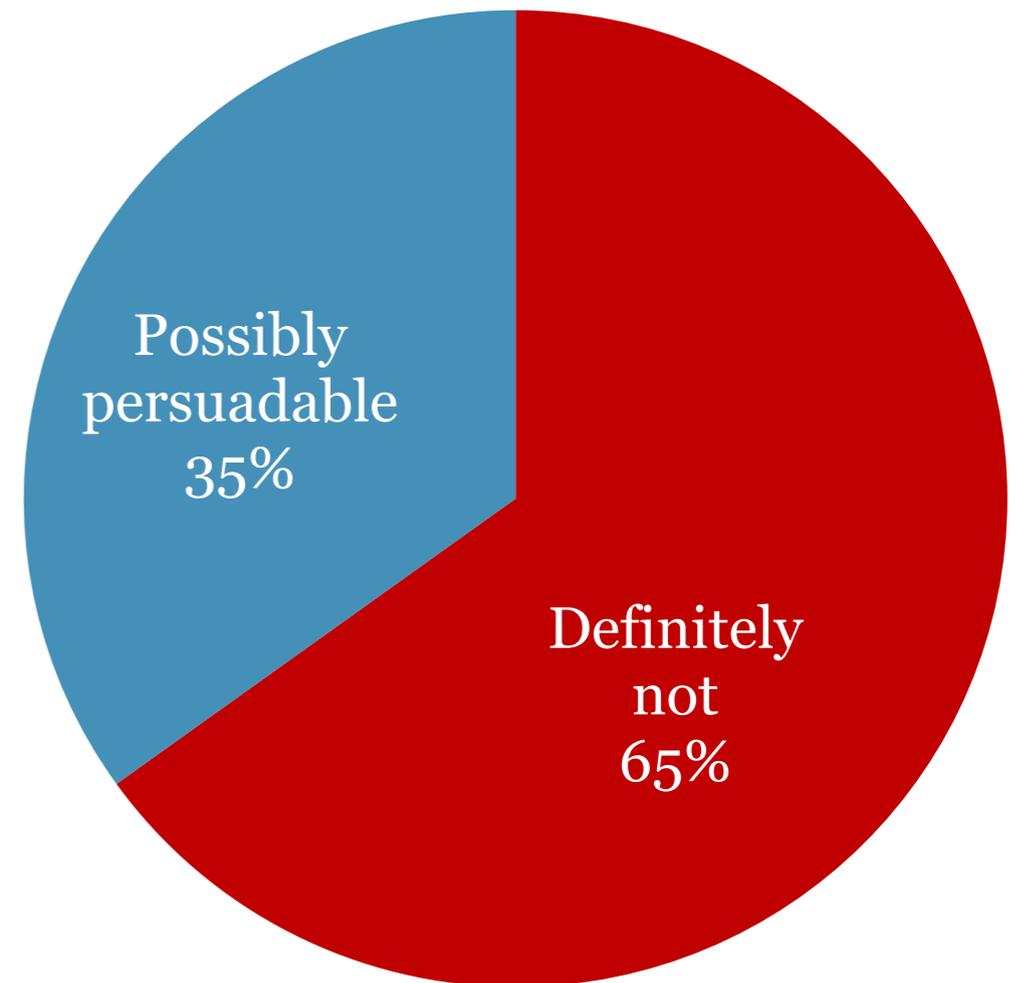
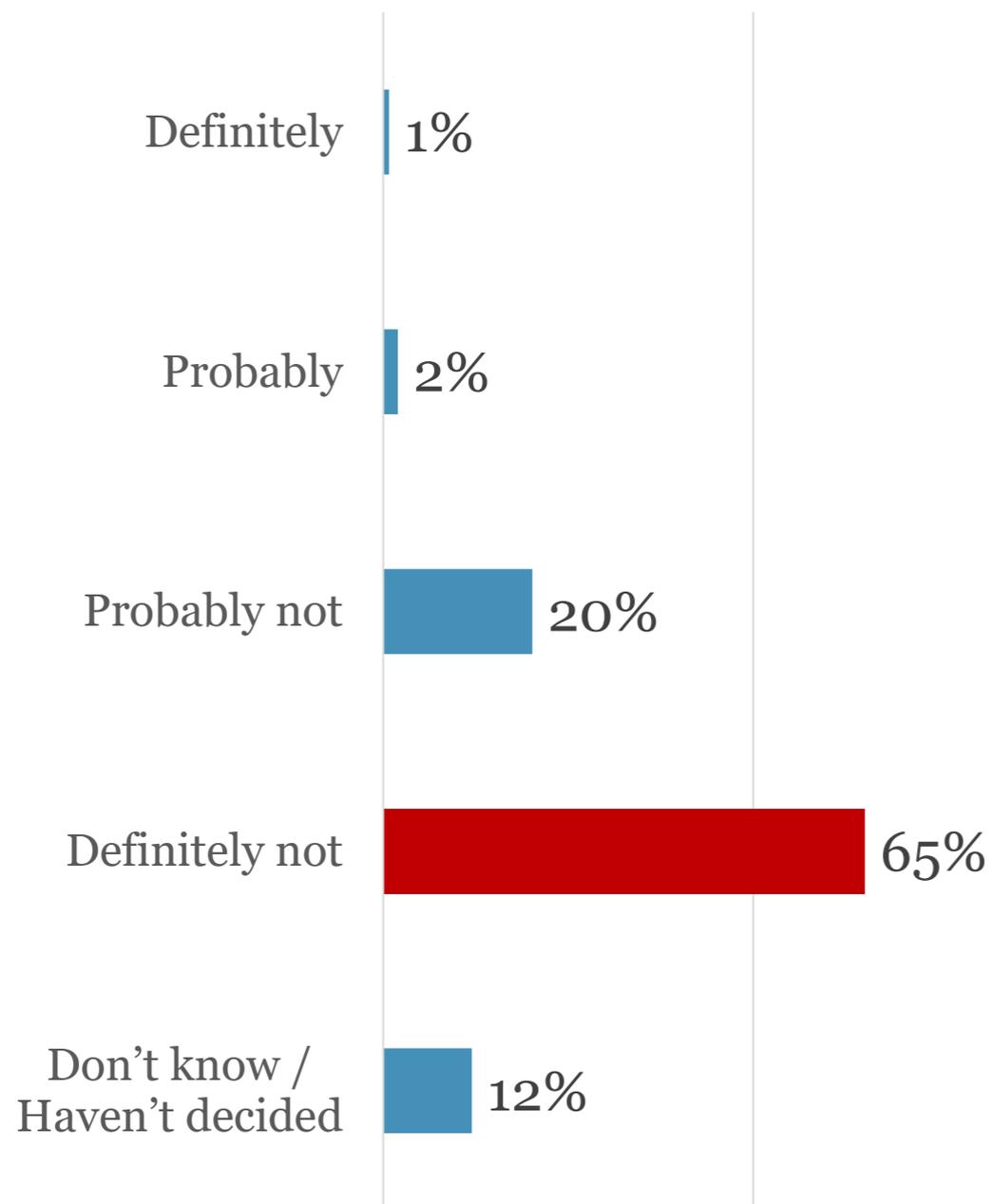
“Have you ever received any vaccination for COVID-19?”
(n=3,183)



	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated
ALL	74%	26
Democrat	94	6
Republican	53	47
Unaff. / Other	76	24
Male	71	29
Female	77	23
18-39	63	37
40-64	72	28
65+	87	13

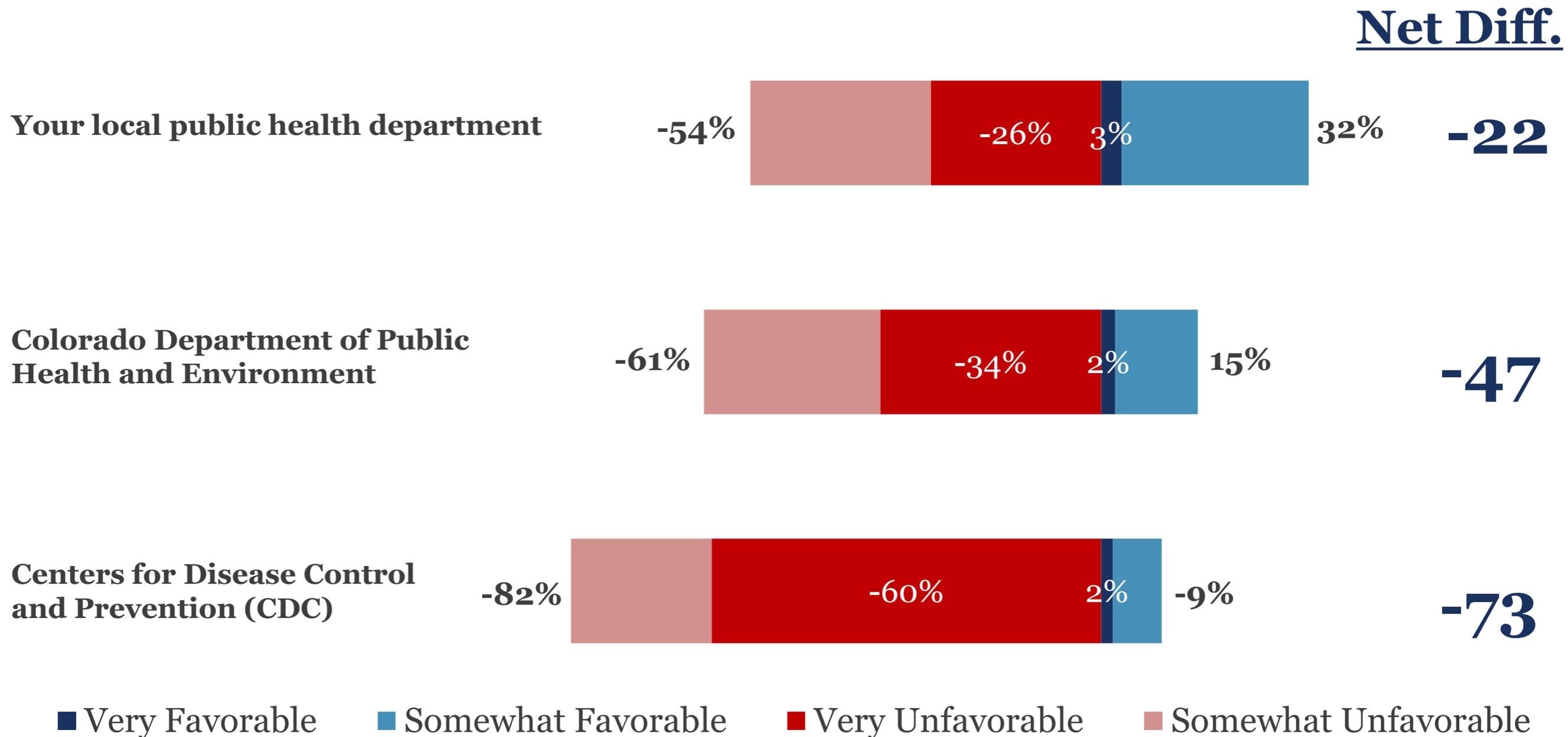
Roughly one-third of unvaccinated respondents indicate at least some openness to getting vaccinated in the future.

“Would you say that in the future you will definitely, probably, probably not, or definitely not get vaccinated against COVID-19?”



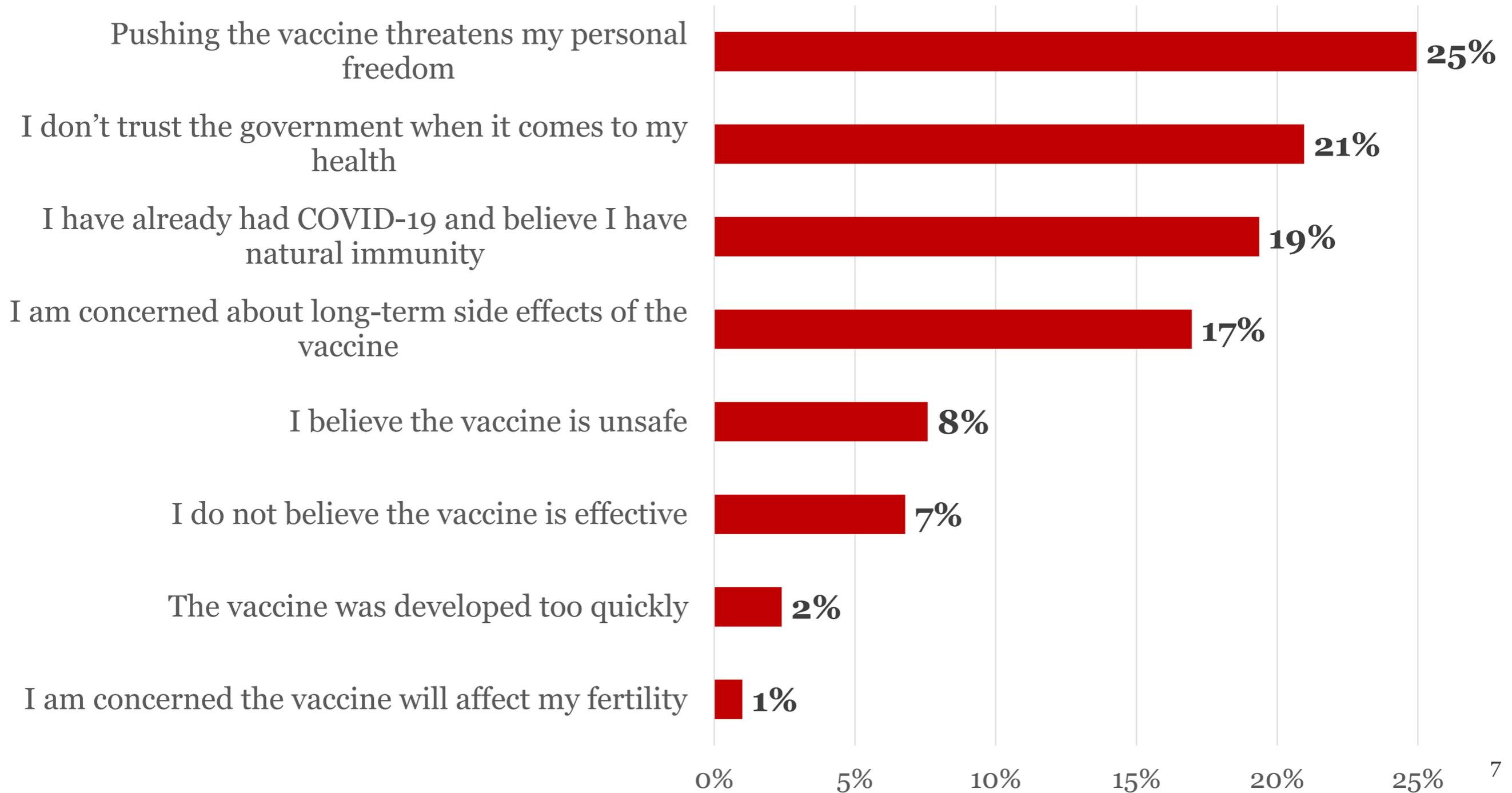
Local public health departments are viewed more favorably than either the CDC or CDPHE among unvaccinated respondents.

“Now I’d like you to rate your feelings towards several organizations. After each one, please tell me whether you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of that organization.”



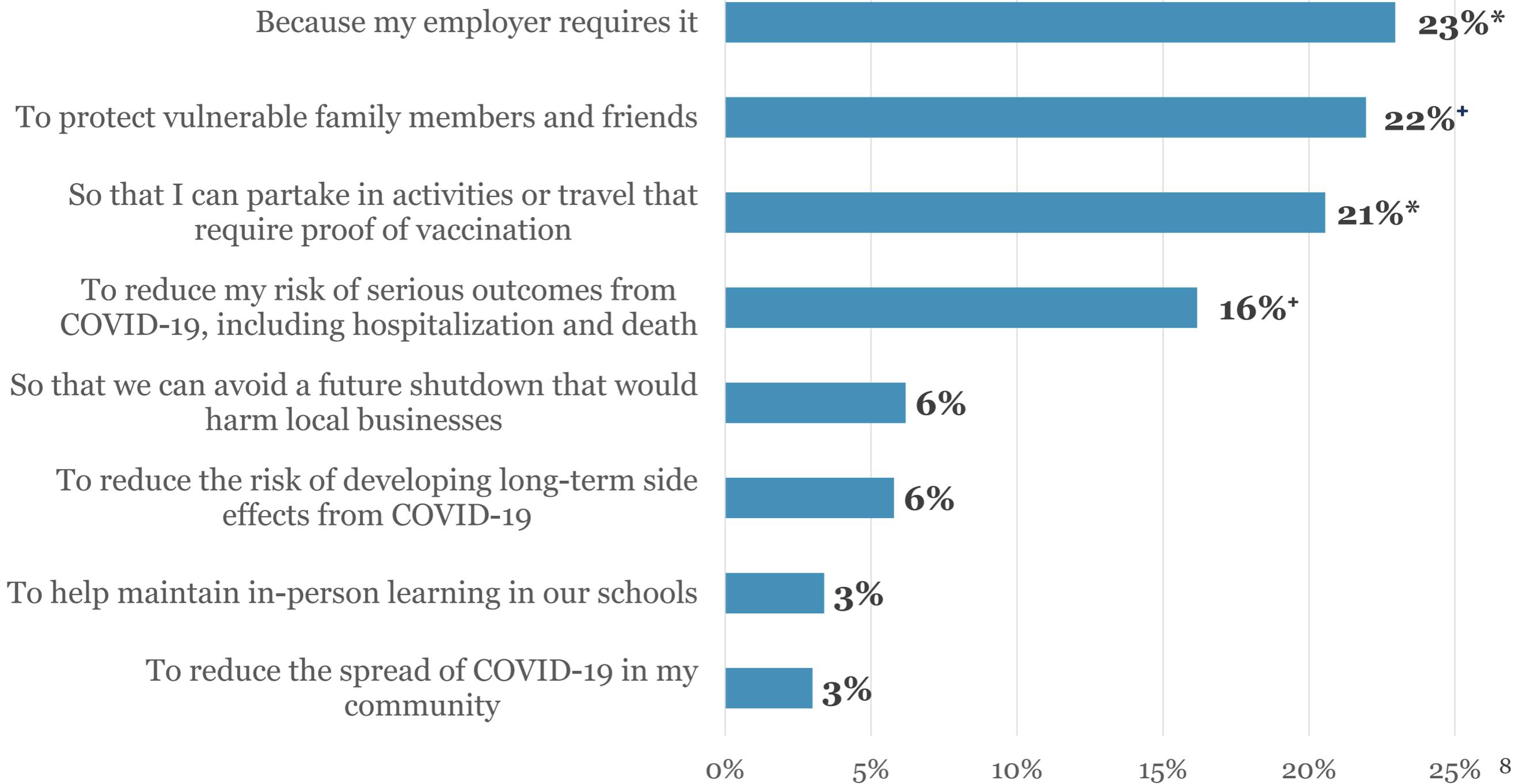
Personal freedom and distrust of government top the reasons not to get vaccinated, followed by a belief in immunity and concern about long-term side effects.

“Which of the following would you say is your top reason not to get vaccinated?” (Rotate all)



A combined 44%* selected vaccine requirements as their top reason to get vaccinated. A total of 38%+ said their top reason is to protect family and friends or reduce their own risk.

“Which of the following would you say is your top reason to consider getting vaccinated?”



Top reason to get vaccinated grouped by openness to future vaccination

47%

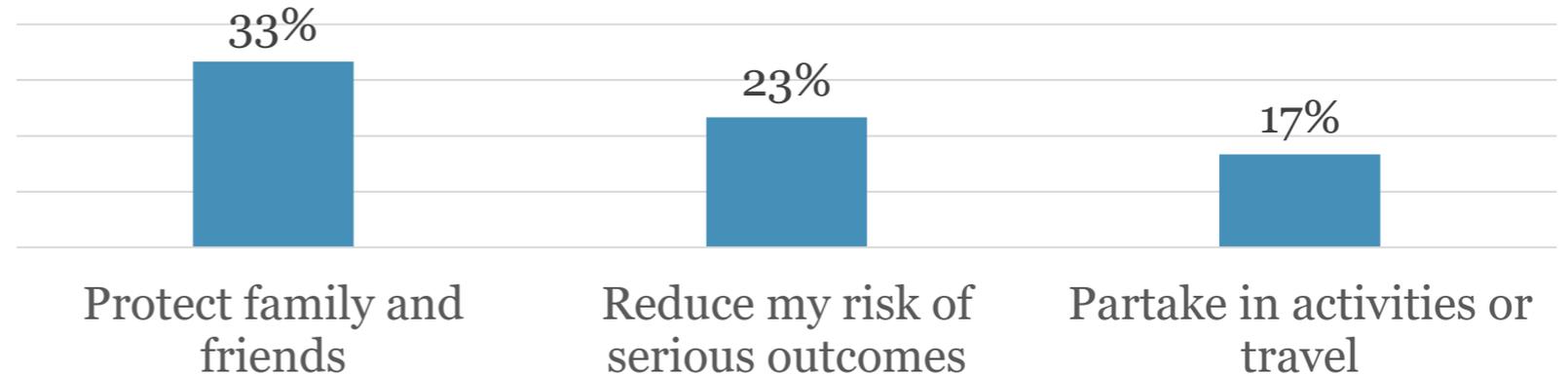
of those who say they will “definitely not” get vaccinated cite mandates as the top reason to consider getting vaccinated

Risk reduction (for self or loved ones) is top of mind for those who haven’t decided.

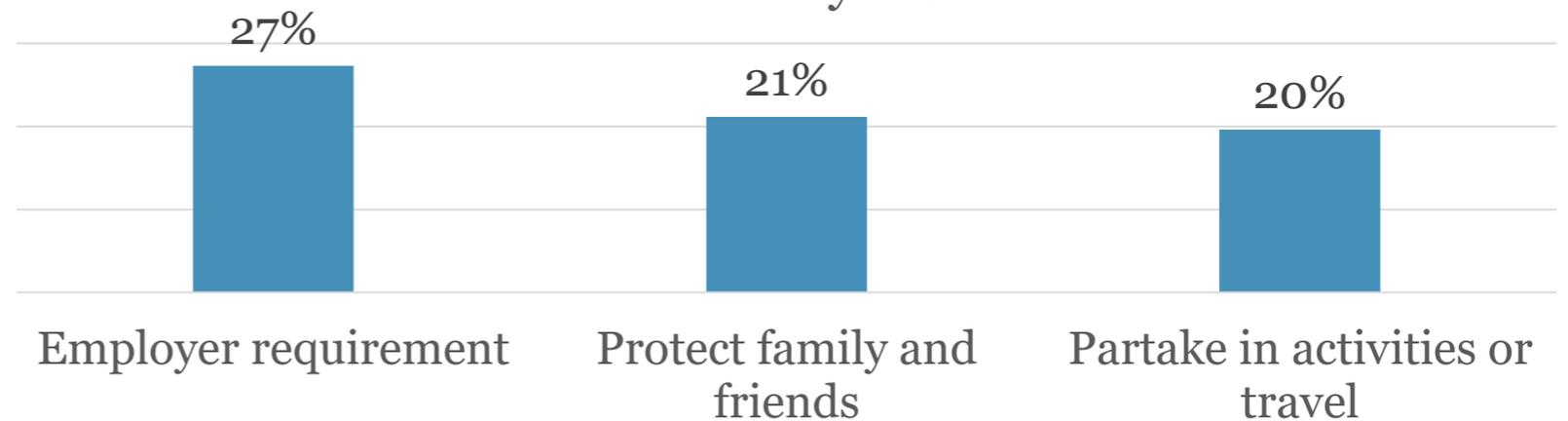
Partaking in activities is the top reason for those who say, “probably not.”

“Which of the following would you say is your top reason to consider getting vaccinated?” x “Would you say that in the future you will definitely, probably, probably not, or definitely not get vaccinated against COVID-19?”

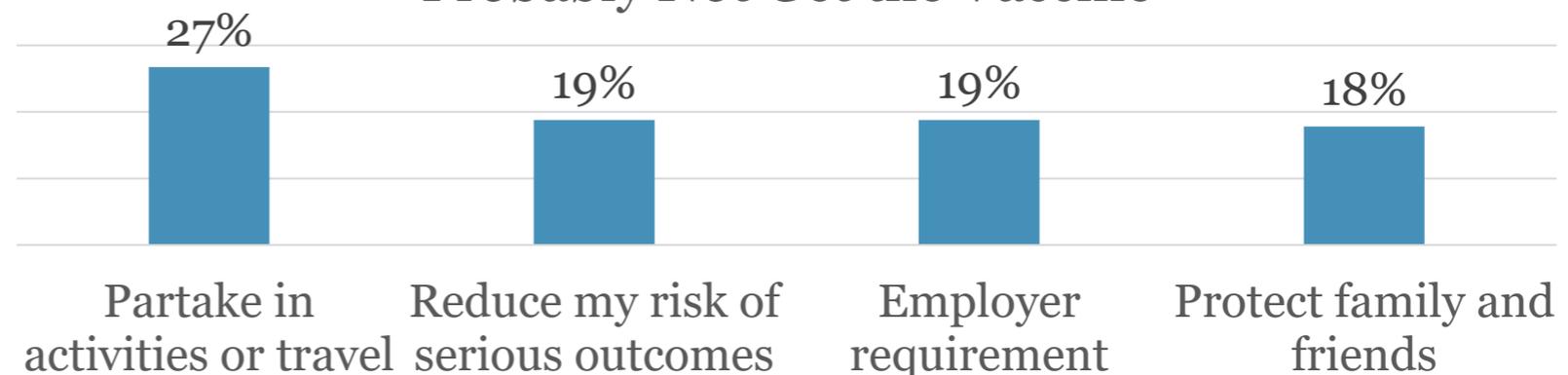
Don't Know / Haven't Decided



Definitely Not



Probably Not Get the Vaccine



None of the messages tested were a silver bullet. The top two highlighted cutting red tape in the development process and explained the function of the mRNA vaccine.

“Please tell me whether each of the following statements makes you more or less likely to get vaccinated for COVID-19.”

These vaccines were approved quickly—not because corners were cut, but because the previous presidential administration helped cut out the red tape and bureaucracy that typically slows the development process.

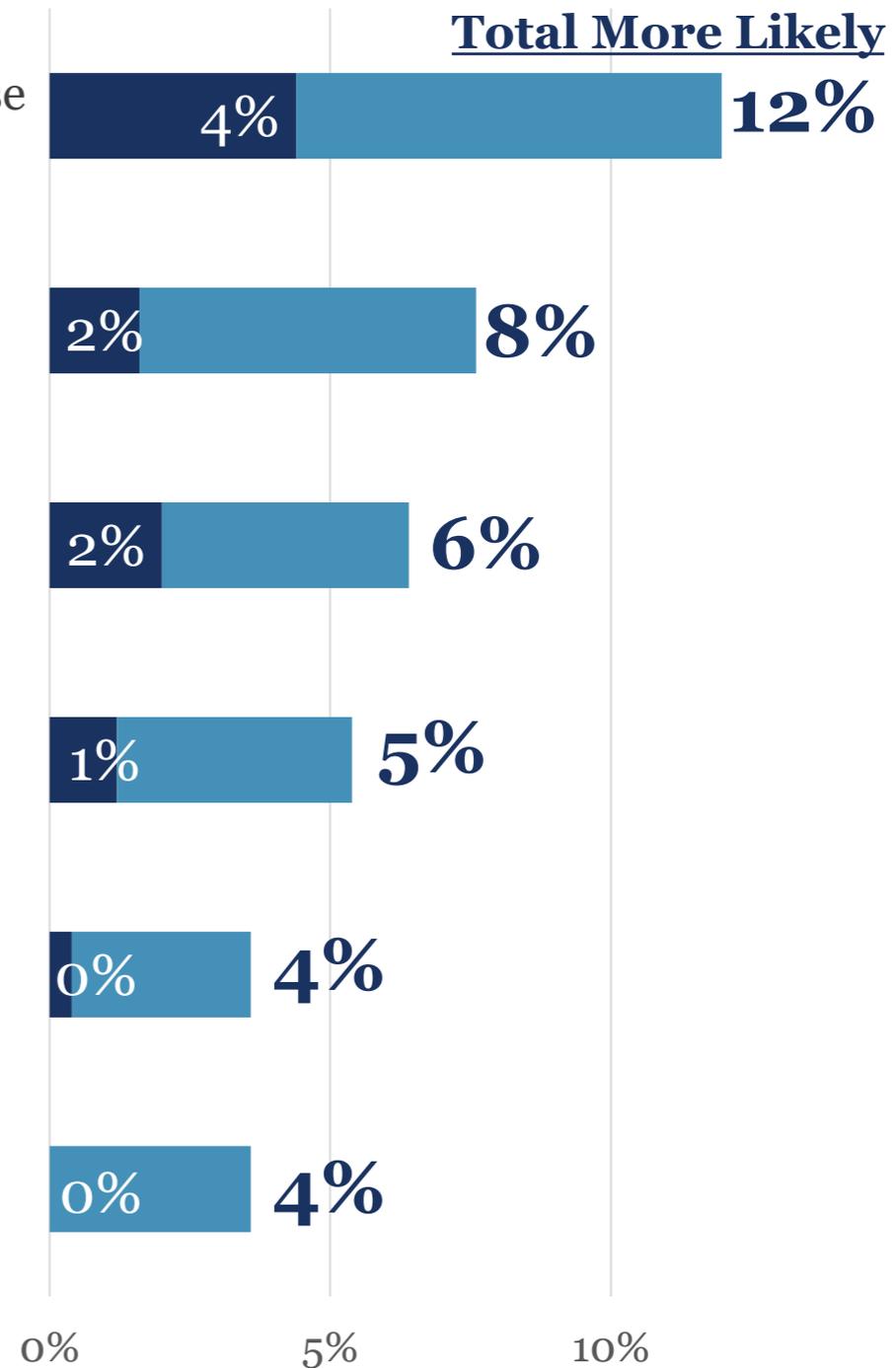
The mRNA vaccine works like an email sent to every one of your immune cells to show it a “most wanted” picture of what the virus looks like, along with instructions on how to kill that virus. After delivering the message, it disappears from your body within 72 hours.

The COVID-19 vaccines are non-live. No non-live vaccines have ever been shown to cause side effects years later.

Pfizer and Moderna phase 3 trials started on July 27, 2020, so we have been studying COVID-19 vaccine side effects for over a year.

More than 95% of the doctors who have been offered this vaccine have gotten it as soon as they could.

If you get the vaccine, it will prime your immune system, but then the vaccine is gone within 72 hours. It will not be in your body anymore.

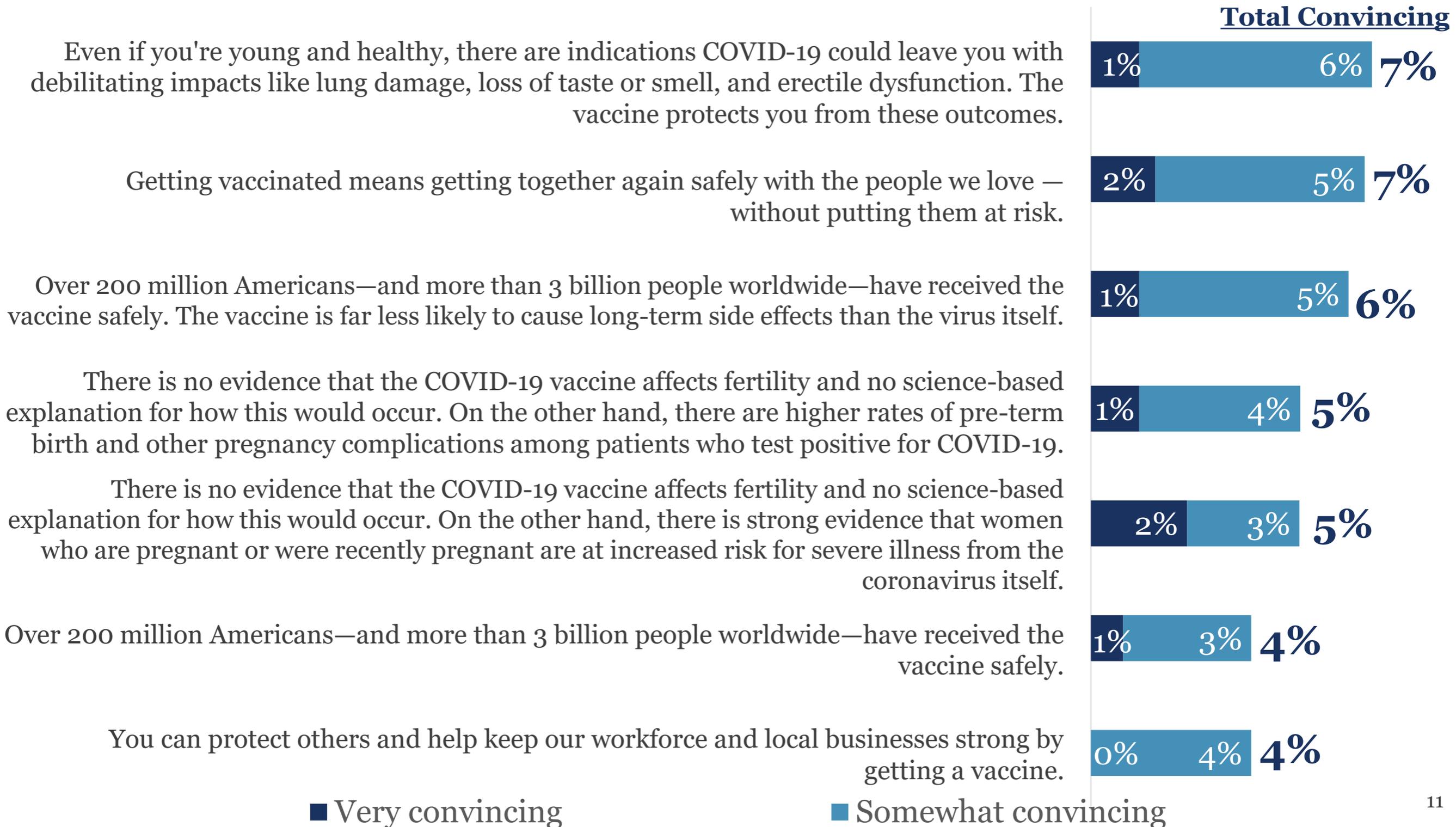


■ Much more likely

■ Somewhat more likely

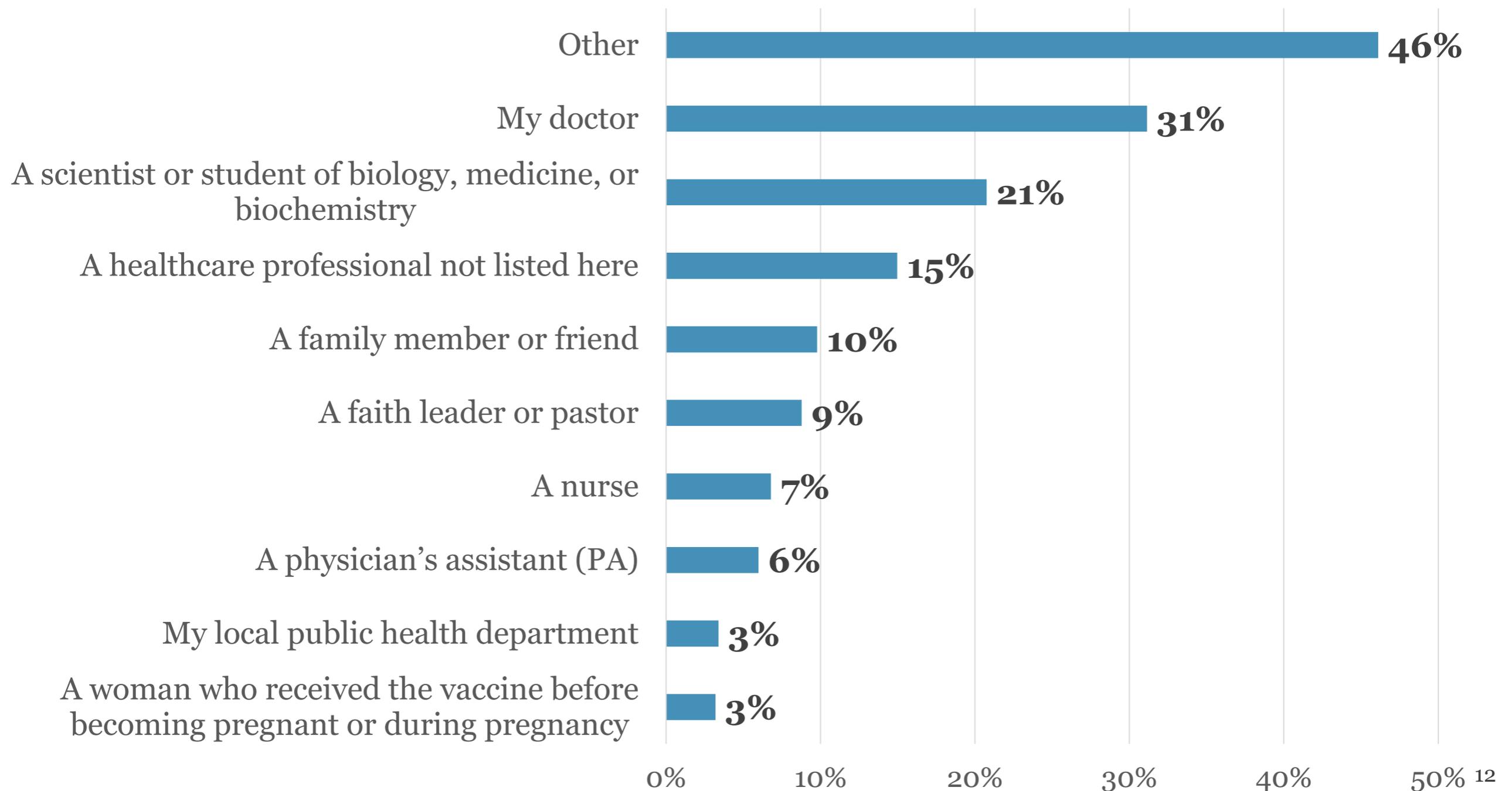
Among the most convincing battery, the top two messages focused on side effects from COVID-19 and protecting loved ones. This fits with the focus group findings.

“Please tell me whether each of the following statements is a convincing or unconvincing reason to consider getting vaccinated.”



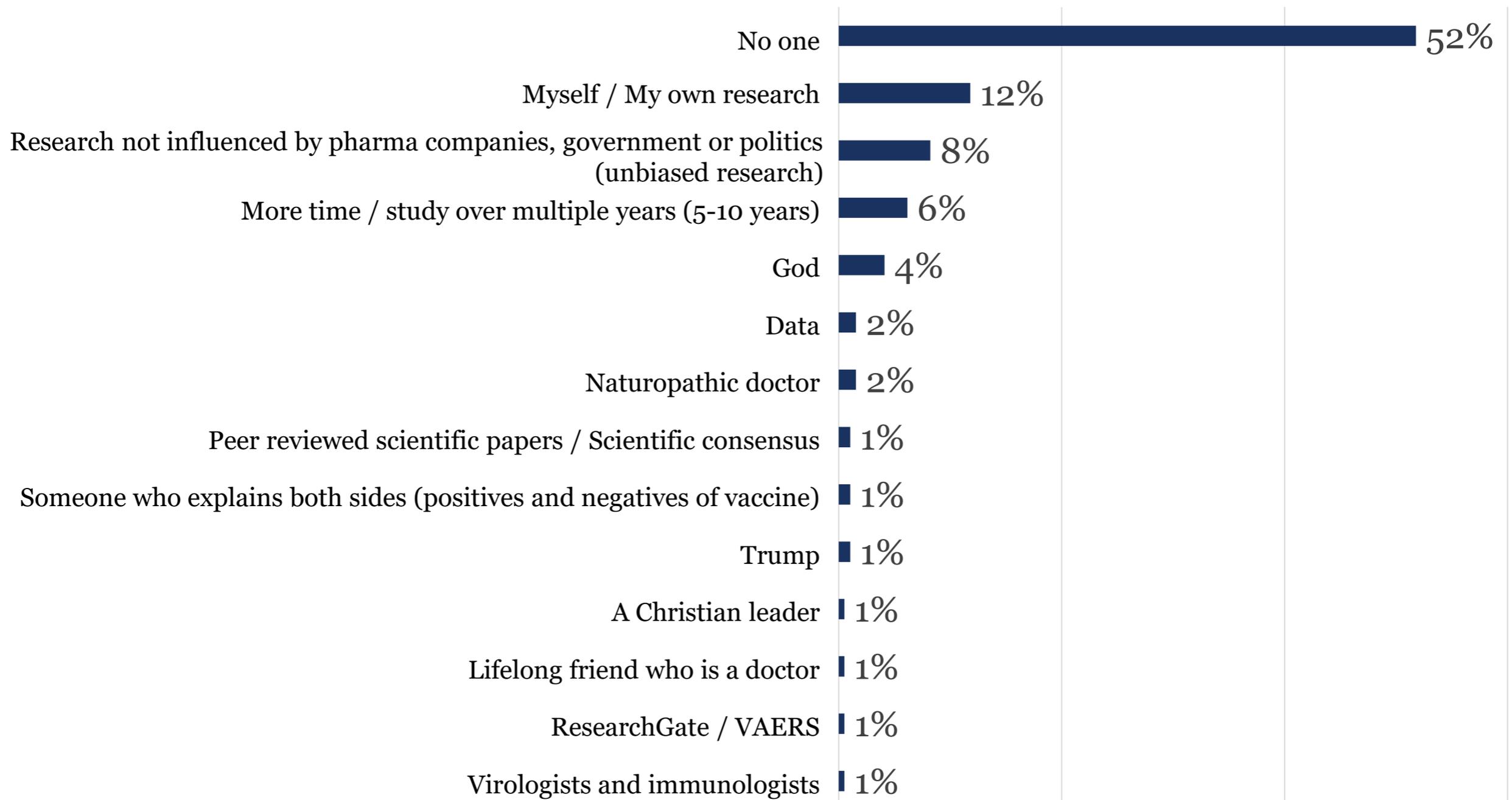
Personal doctors are the most trusted messenger among those tested, followed by scientists and other healthcare professionals.

“Which of the following individuals or organizations would you trust to provide you with information about the COVID-19 vaccine? (Choose all that apply.)”



“Other” responses, categorized: The majority of those who selected the “Other” option when asked about messengers said they trust no one – or themselves.

“Which of the following individuals or organizations would you trust to provide you with information about the COVID-19 vaccine? ... Other (Please specify.)”





PERSUADABLE RESPONDENTS

(n=175, MOE=+/- 7.5%)

Demographics of persuadable group

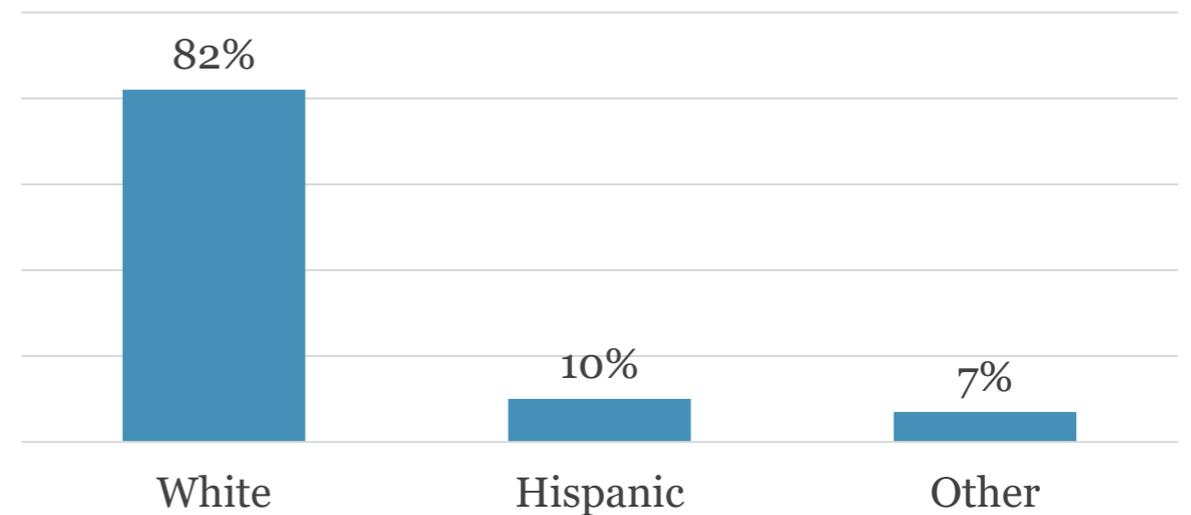
71%
under age 55

50%/50%
male/female

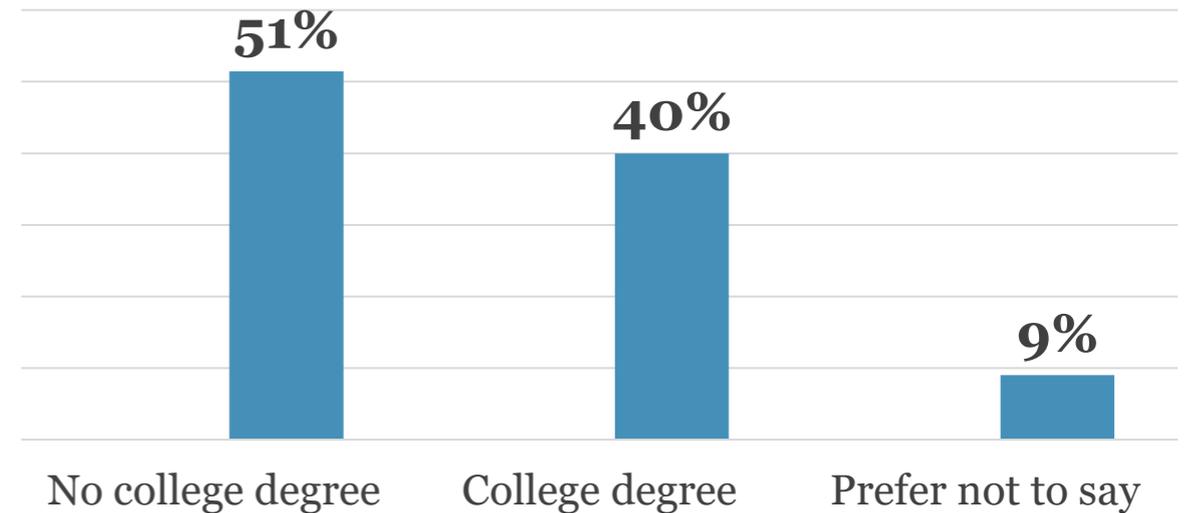
86%
have health insurance

39%
hold favorable view of local
public health department

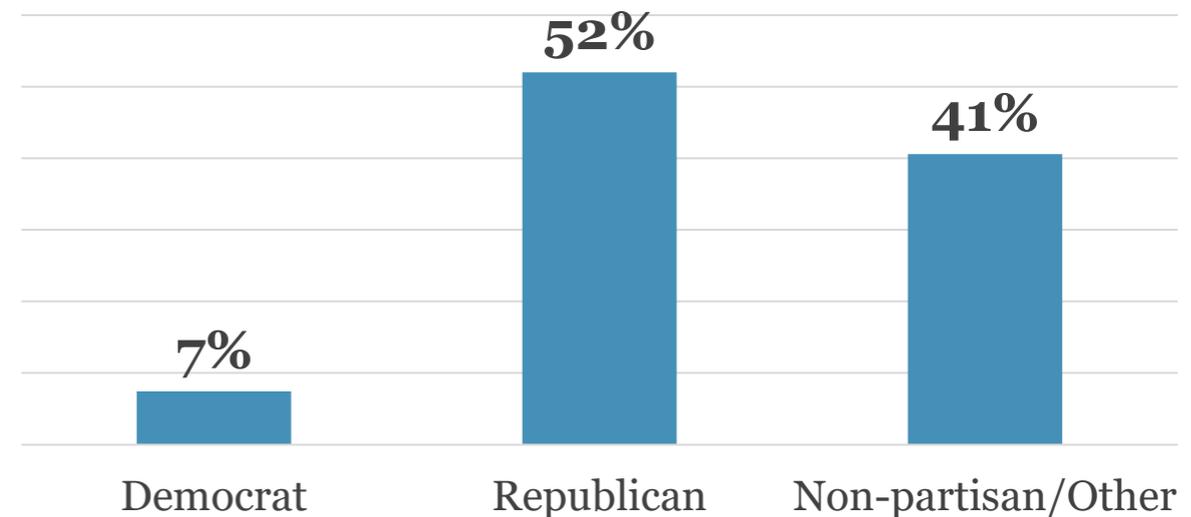
Race



Education



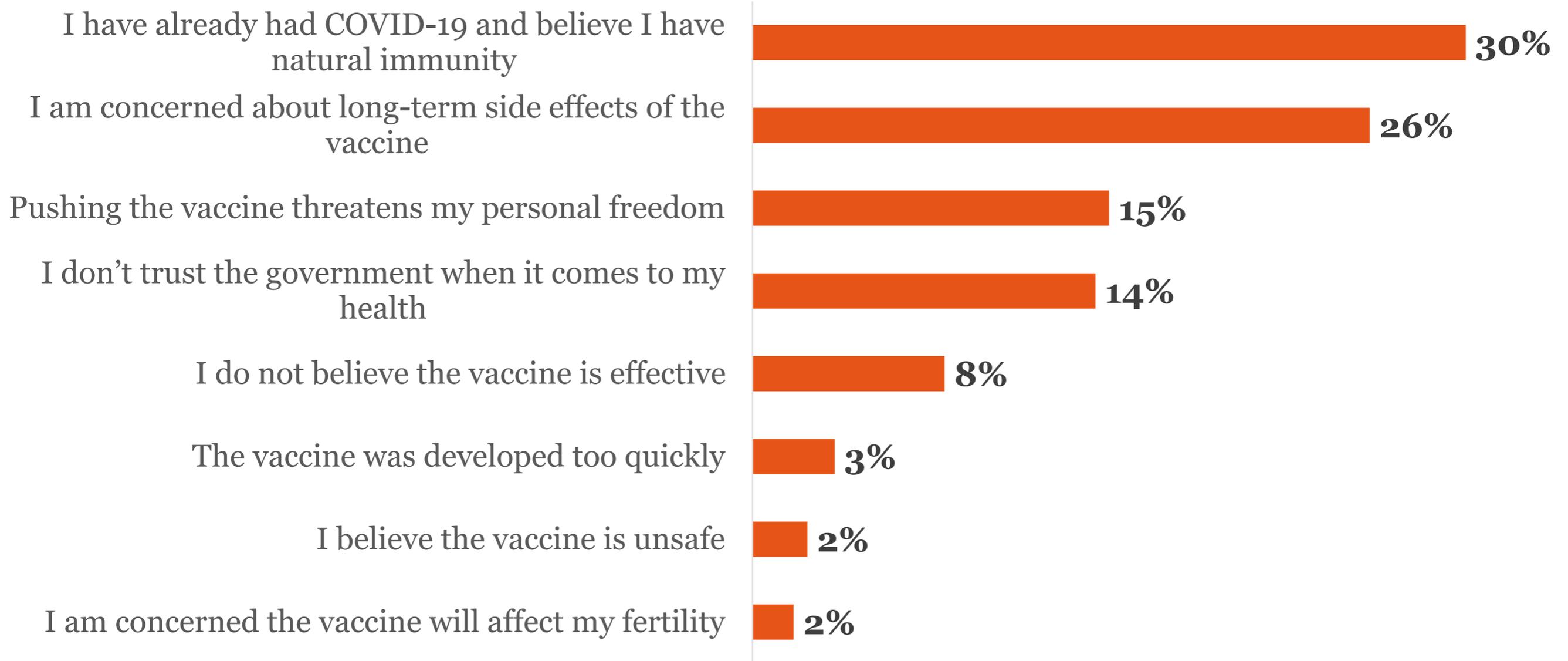
Registered Party



Among persuadable respondents, perceived immunity due to previous infection and concern about vaccine side effects are the top reasons not to get vaccinated.

“Which of the following would you say is your top reason not to get vaccinated?” (Rotate all)

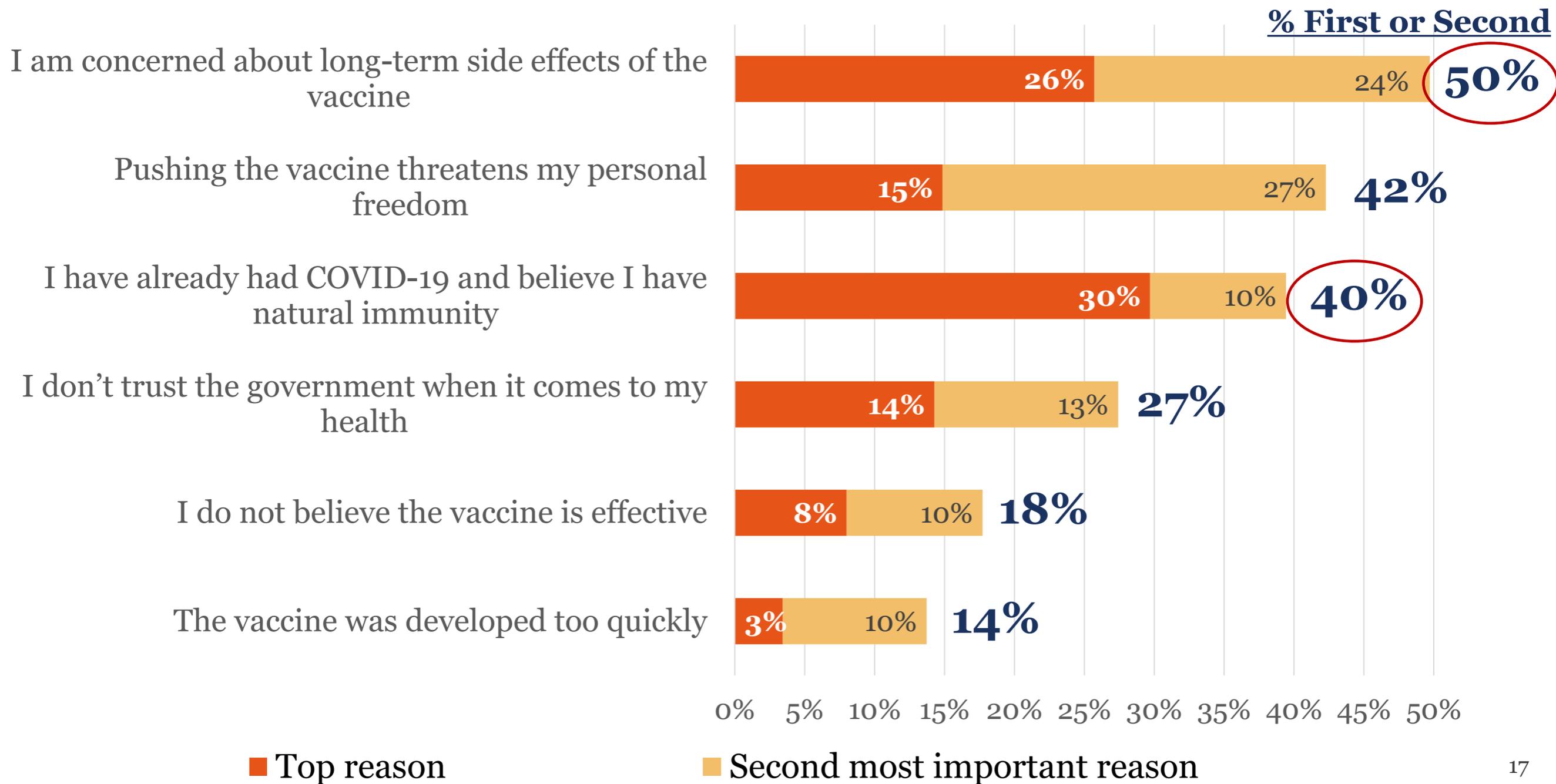
*Persuadable respondents only (n=175)



*Note that personal freedom and distrust of government are less prominent among this group than among the full sample.

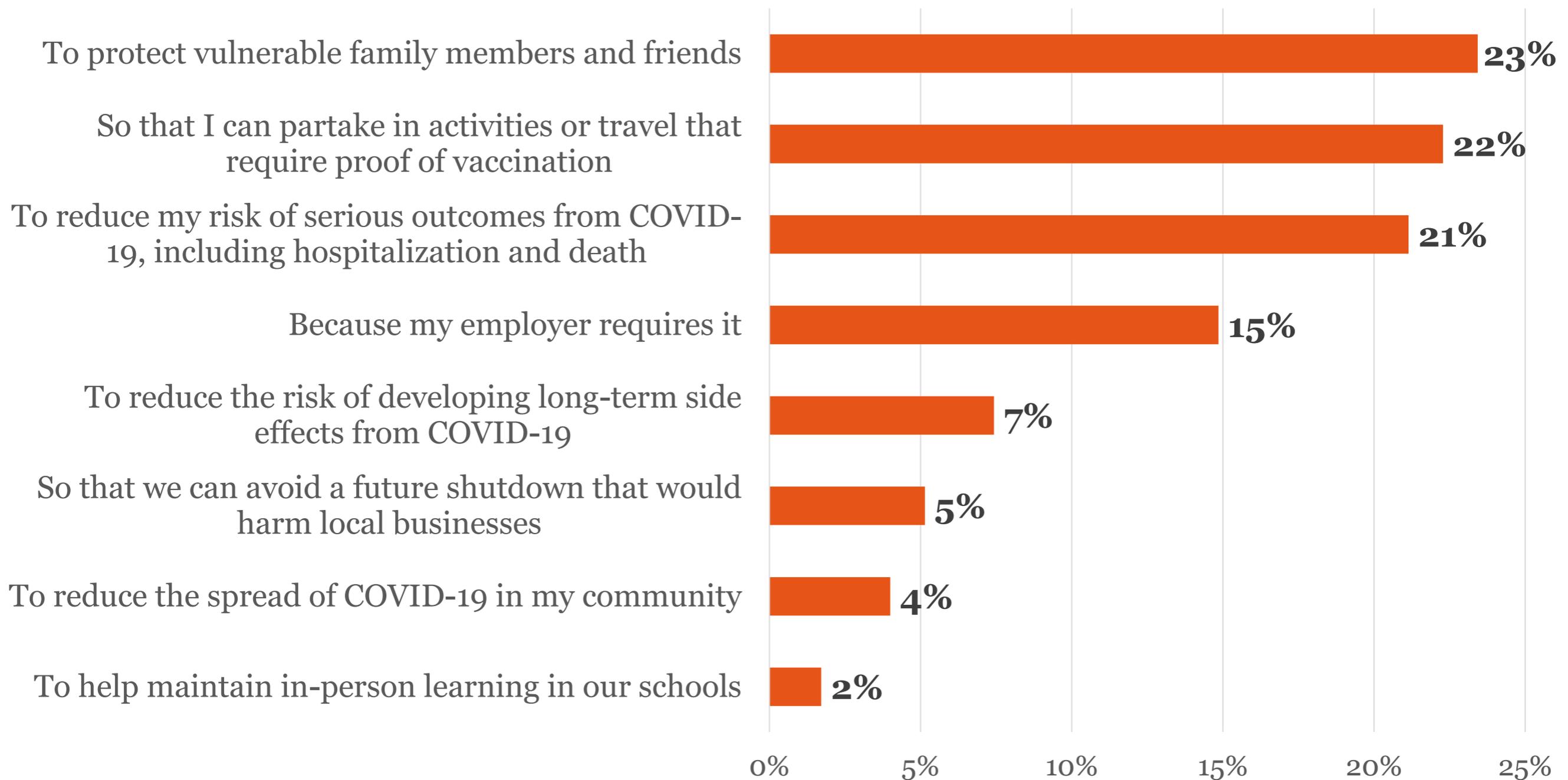
Half of persuadable respondents chose “long-term side effects” among their top two reasons not to get vaccinated, and at least 40% have already had COVID-19.

“Which of the following would you say is your top reason not to get vaccinated?” + “Which of the following is the second most important reason not to get vaccinated?”



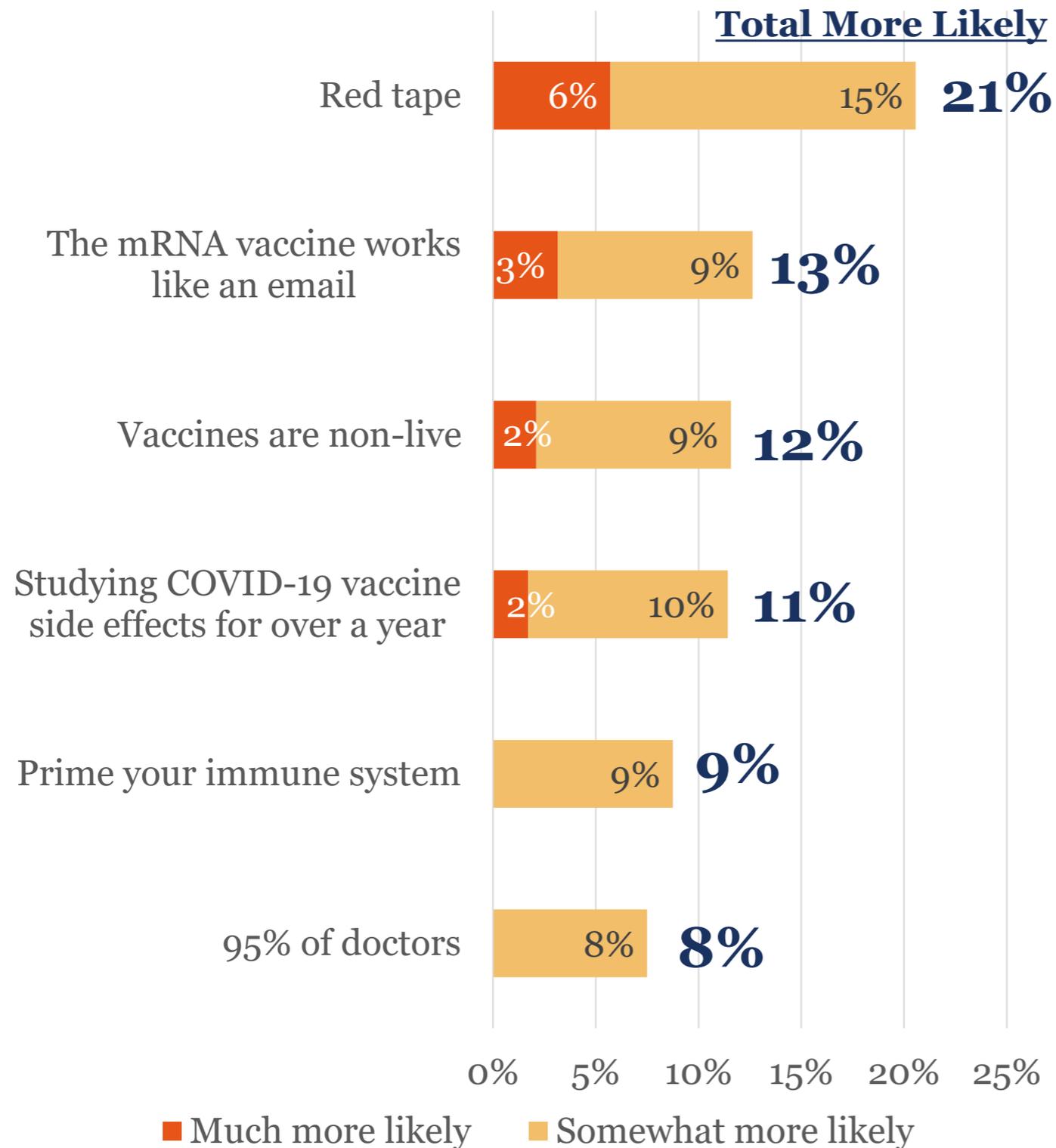
Among the persuadable group, the top reason to get vaccinated is to protect vulnerable family and friends, followed by participation in activities and reducing personal risk of serious outcomes.

“Which of the following would you say is your top reason to consider getting vaccinated?”

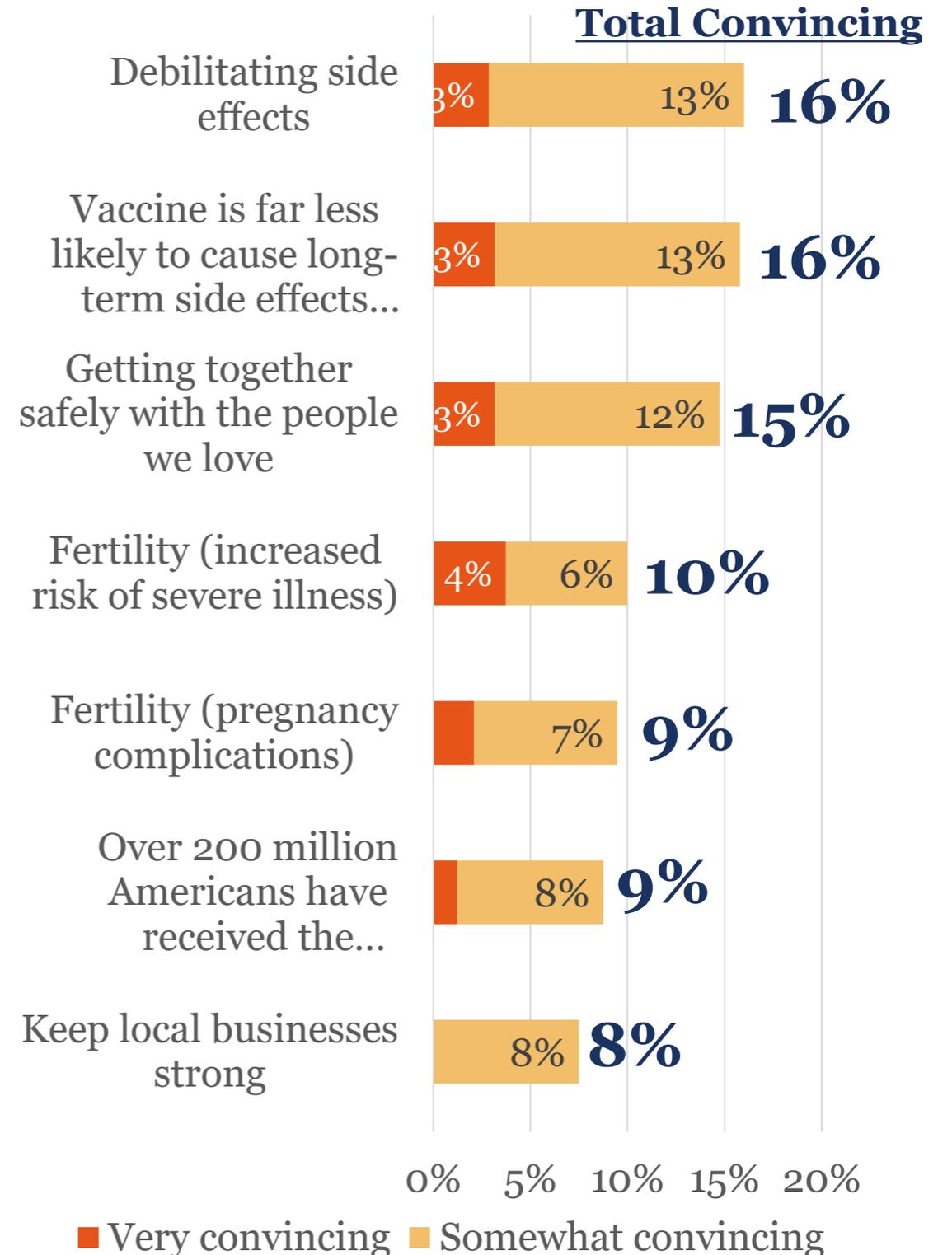


TOP MESSAGES AMONG PERSUADABLE RESPONDENTS

“Please tell me whether each of the following statements makes you more or less likely to get vaccinated for COVID-19.”



“Please tell me whether each of the following statements is a convincing or unconvincing reason to consider getting vaccinated.”





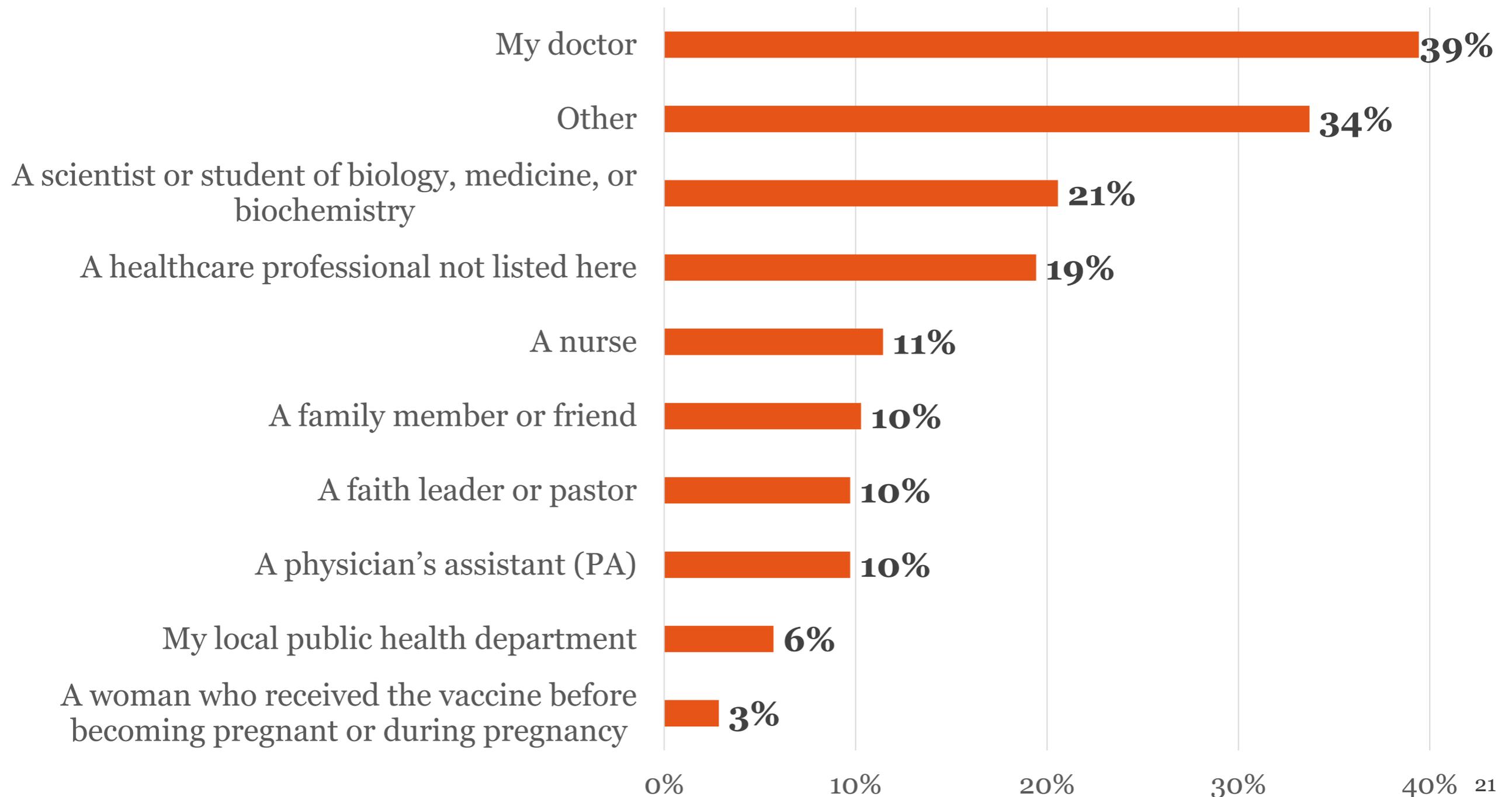
Persuadable respondents: Top Messages

- These vaccines were approved quickly—not because corners were cut, but because the previous presidential administration helped cut out the red tape and bureaucracy that typically slows the development process.
- Even if you're young and healthy, there are indications COVID-19 could leave you with debilitating impacts like lung damage, loss of taste or smell, and erectile dysfunction. The vaccine protects you from these outcomes.
- Over 200 million Americans — and more than 3 billion people worldwide — have received the vaccine safely. The vaccine is far less likely to cause long-term side effects than the virus itself.*
- Getting vaccinated means getting together again safely with the people we love — without putting them at risk.

*Note that the first sentence of this message was also tested as a standalone message using a split sample and was less convincing (reaching only 7% of respondents.)

Personal doctors are more trusted among the persuadable group than among the full sample.

“Which of the following individuals or organizations would you trust to provide you with information about the COVID-19 vaccine? (Choose all that apply.)”



Key findings

- Much of what we found in the focus groups was confirmed in the survey research:
 - ❑ Roughly two-thirds of all unvaccinated say they will “definitely not” get the vaccine in the future. Persuasive messaging should focus on the remaining one-third.
 - ❑ Vaccine requirements may be effective among roughly half of the “definitely not” group. Among the full sample, 44% chose vaccine requirements as their top reason to get vaccinated.
 - ❑ Among the “definitely not” group, resistance to vaccination centers on personal freedom and distrust of government. Among the persuadable group, it is more based in a sense of fear about possible unknowns associated with the vaccine.
 - ❑ Among the persuadable group, the main motivation to get vaccinated centers on risk reduction – whether for themselves personally (reducing risk of serious harm/long-term side effects from COVID-19) or loved ones (protecting vulnerable family and friends.)
 - It is important to keep messaging highly personal, as these individuals are not motivated by broader messages about community or societal responsibility.
 - ❑ Overall, resistance to the vaccine is highly focused on 1) personal freedom/distrust of government; 2) fear of long-term side effects; 3) perceived immunity due to previous infection.

Key findings (cont.)

- A strong element of distrust shows up in the “personal freedom” and “distrust of government” rationales (including among persuadable individuals.) This underscores importance of avoiding prescriptive messaging.
 - Messaging about side effects or harms from COVID-19 should be shared one at a time, rather than listing several negative outcomes in one message (which starts to sound more prescriptive.) Such messages should also link directly to a source that appears as unbiased as possible – thus letting people do their own research and draw conclusions.
- It will be also be key to push back on the belief that natural immunity from COVID-19 is sufficient, since 40% of the persuadable group have had the virus and believe this provides them with sufficient protection.
- The survey also revealed useful information about what does not appear to motivate the unvaccinated:
 - Concerns around fertility, speed of the vaccine development, and ineffectiveness of the vaccine are not primary motivators to resist vaccination.
 - Limiting the spread of the virus, maintaining in-school learning, and protecting local businesses are not the most compelling reasons to get vaccinated.
- Personal doctors are the most trusted messengers, followed by scientists and other healthcare professionals.