



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

## Center for Rural Affairs

Findings from a survey of 804 registered voters living in rural communities and small towns

Celinda Lake, Joshua Ulibarri, and Cornelia Treptow  
*Lake Research Partners*

Ed Goeas and Brian Nienaber  
*The Tarrance Group*



THE TARRANCE GROUP

# Methods

- Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey that was conducted over the telephone, using professional interviewers.
- The nationwide survey was conducted May 28 – June 3, 2013 and reached 804 registered voters living in rural areas and small towns.
- The data were slightly weighted by gender, race, age, and region.
- The margin of error for the total sample is +/- 3.47% and larger for the sub-groups.

# Demographics

- Men – 49%
- Women – 51%
- Midwest – 33%
- Great Plains – 33%
- South – 33%
- Democrat – 25%
- Republican – 42%
- Independent – 25%
- Under 30 – 13%
- 30-39 – 13%
- 40-49 – 18%
- 50-64 – 28%
- 65 and over – 25%
- White – 88%
- African American – 5%
- Latino – 4%
- Other – 3%
- 1-11<sup>th</sup> grade – 6%
- H.S. graduate – 39%
- Non-college post H.S. – 6%
- Some college – 27%
- College graduate – 14%
- Post-graduate school – 7%

# Demographics

- NRA supporter – 66%
- Not NRA supporter – 25%
- Voted for Obama in Nov 2012– 32%
- Voted for Romney in Nov 2012 – 46%
- Married – 62%
- Unmarried with partner – 2%
- Single – 14%
- Separated – 2%
- Divorced – 9%
- Widowed – 9%
- Employed full time – 43%
- Employed part time – 8%
- Unemployed – 7%
- Homemaker – 6%
- Student – 2%
- Retired – 31%
- Born again/Evangelical Christian – 42%
- Not born again/Evangelical Christian – 45%
- Household income below \$50K – 59%
- Household income above \$50K – 23%
- One person in household – 17%
- Two persons in household – 38%
- Three or four persons in household – 31%
- Five or more persons in household – 10%

# Strategic Overview

- This is the most recent, comprehensive look at rural America and provides many unique insights into the views of rural Americans.
- This presentation seeks to give insights into the bigger findings around the economy, rural values, the role of government, policy preferences, and briefly on language that works.
- Rural America is united on a set of values about the future for themselves and their children, protecting and investing in a valuable way of life, and feeling ignored by politicians.
- Rural Americans have divided views about the role of government and have populist views about big institutions.
- Rural Americans support a broad, proactive agenda of investment in job training, education, renewable energy, and infrastructure.
- They also support cutting taxes and regulation.
- Rural America wants the government to be more efficient and effective.

# Strategic Overview

- **Rural America is an important value and lifestyle, and they want it to survive:** Rural Americans are a proud and diverse group of people. They value their way of life and want to pass those values on to their children. They sadly believe the rural way of life may be fading and they want to stop it, reverse it, and revitalize rural America. They believe they can, and they think the American Dream is more attainable in rural America than it is in bigger cities. Lastly, they believe they are being ignored by politicians and place blame on government for the state of the rural economy because the government ignores rural Americans.
- **Rural Americans have a lot on their minds – as do Americans in big cities.** And, for the most part, they have the same overall concerns, mainly the rising costs of every day items and the increased costs around health care (this is similar to what we have seen among other Americans). Ironically, they are less stressed about losing their jobs or increased rent and mortgage payments (this is different than data we see among other Americans). Ironically, it is younger rural Americans who worry about saving enough for retirement. Rural women worry most about rising costs of everyday items.

## Strategic Overview

- **Rural Americans are frustrated that the economy has grown stagnant, but are optimistic:** They feel they have too little control over their own economic situation and feel worse off now than four years ago. With that said, they are optimistic that things will get better (especially younger rural Americans) but not overwhelmingly convinced that it will. They want more stability, especially now that they lack control over their own economic situation, and want to be able to count on something at a time right now when there is little to count on. They believe that the fabric of America is being weakened by the growing gap between the rich and families struggling to make ends meet.
- **Rural Americans are divided on the role of government, but neither current ideological perspective (conservatives or progressives) has it right.** On the one hand the language around lower taxes, smaller government, and fewer regulations is attractive (the highest testing message). On the other, policies that call for more job training, increased infrastructure investments, more technology, and better preschool options clearly require a role for government if things are to improve. It is too simplistic to believe rural America is anti-government and that there is nothing for progressives to say, nor is it possible to say that rural America wants bigger government and more spending. They want tax breaks but they also support increased loans and grants to help people gain skills and open small businesses.
- They want more efficient and effective government and view much of public policy as a fairness issue in which rural America has not received fair treatment.

# Strategic Overview

- **Rural Americans remain populist Americans.** They have distrust for big farms, big cities, big banks, and big government. They believe the gap between rich and poor is increasing and harms America. They believe they are being ignored in favor of people in the cities. They think it is easier to make a living in cities compared to rural areas. They think their way of life is fading because these groups are getting ahead and they are not. They are protective of their way of life, but are also more proactive about it than conventional wisdom would suggest.
- **Rural Americans are entrepreneurial.** Many want to own their own small businesses. They want government structured to help small businesses and first time farms get started. Even then, we must be careful because they have a complicated relationship with the farm bill and farm subsidies. They do not want to see them cut. They may want them better directed and more strategic and focused, but the worst testing language in the poll talked about diverting farm subsidies to other rural priorities. They did, however, support reducing the amount of subsidies going to big and mega farms to pay for increased investments in rural America. This will be a complex path forward.

# Strategic Overview

- Their populism is driven by a distrust of all big institutions.
- While they recognize the unfairness of farm subsidies, rural Americans understand and appreciate the multiplier effect of farm jobs.
- **Language matters, but values matter more.** Rural Americans tip toward supporting government involvement in some areas when the language is based on values. They tend to tip against government solutions when it goes to spending, and particularly taxes. Rural America is still very tax-sensitive. The strongest message highlights “smaller government” but the next strongest is anchored on “investing more” to bring technology to rural America and getting business started. They respond to positive, aspirational language more than negative statements. They want to invest in the future of rural America and to develop a strong rural economy for their children and grandchildren.
- Voters respond to positive, aspirational messages. Negative messages tend to be weaker and do not resonate as well.

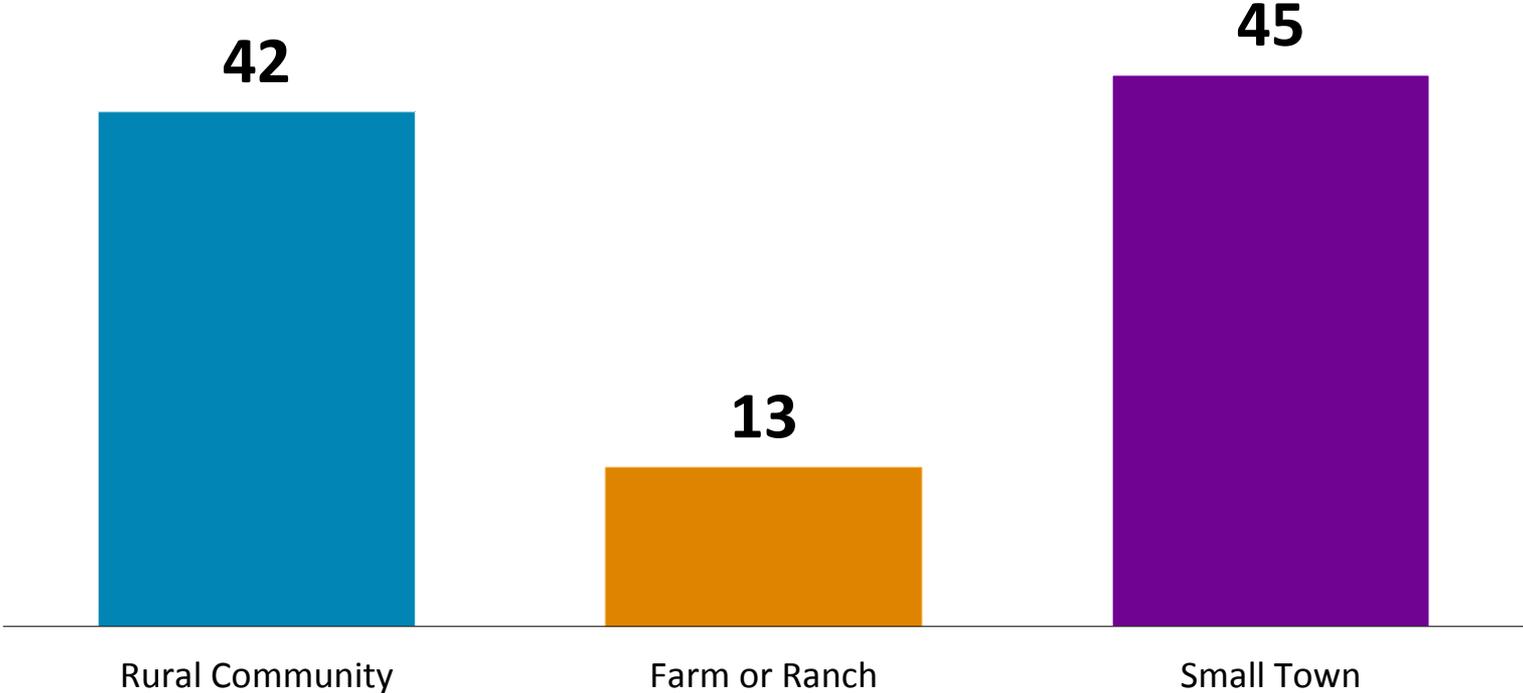


## The Rural Economy

The rural economy is much more diverse than conventional wisdom would suggest. Of the many who live in rural communities or on farms and ranches, few rely on agriculture or farming for their livelihood. While many are optimistic about the future, almost half say their economic situations have worsened in the recent past.

# Rural America is a very diverse place.

How Would You Describe Where You Live?

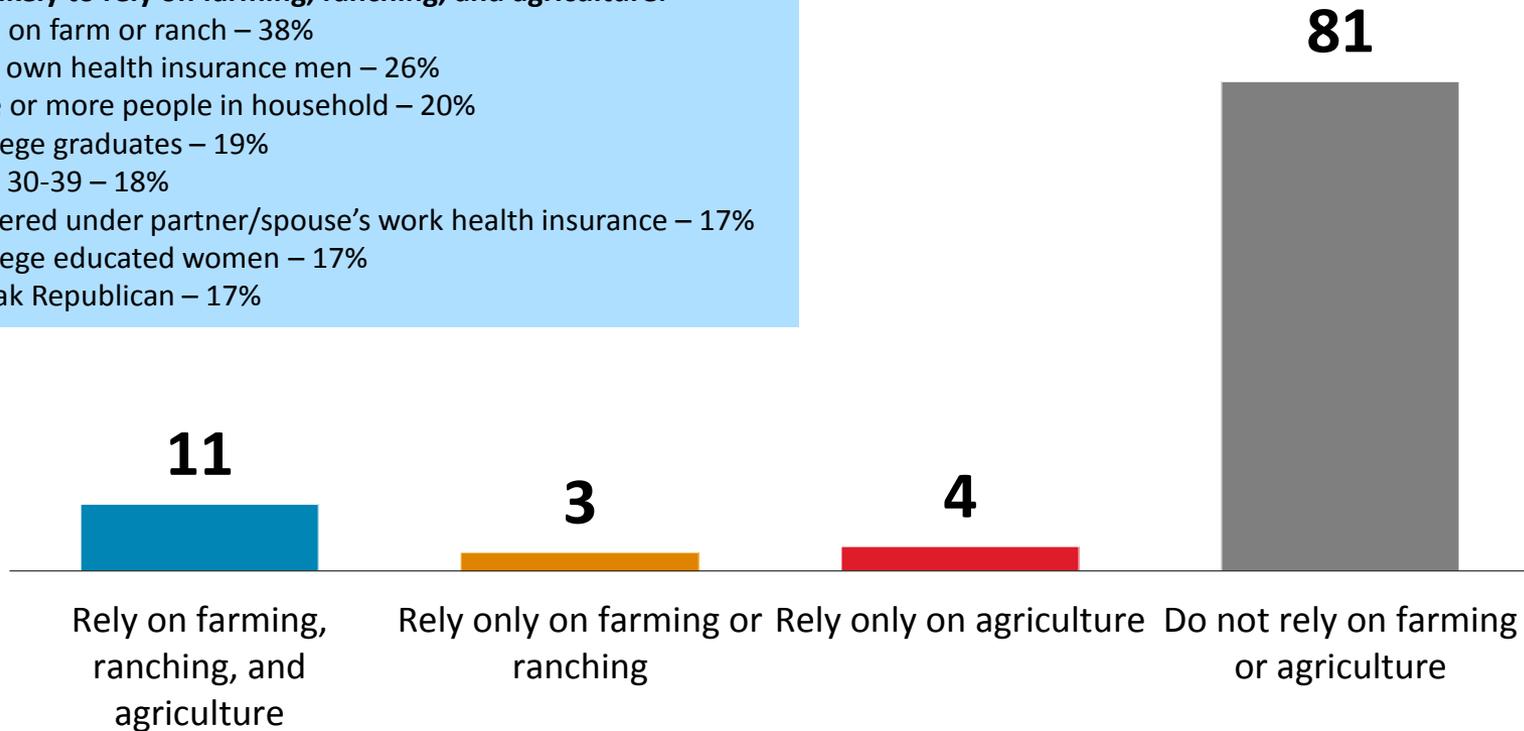


The vast majority of rural Americans do not rely on farming, ranching, or agriculture for a huge portion of their family income.

### Rely on Farming, Ranching, or Agriculture

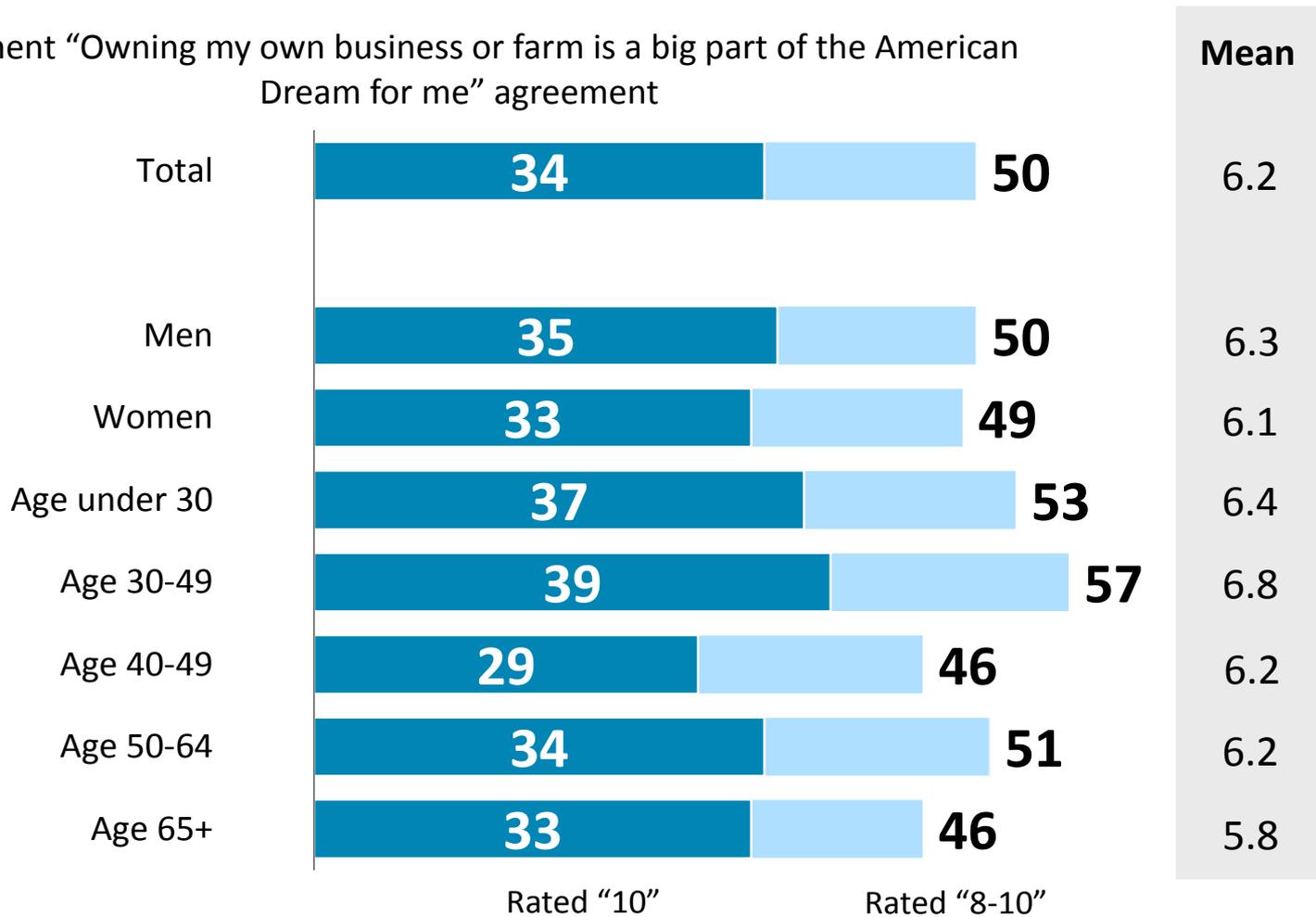
#### Most likely to rely on farming, ranching, and agriculture:

- Live on farm or ranch – 38%
- Buy own health insurance men – 26%
- Five or more people in household – 20%
- College graduates – 19%
- Age 30-39 – 18%
- Covered under partner/spouse's work health insurance – 17%
- College educated women – 17%
- Weak Republican – 17%



Half of rural voters report that owning their own business or farm is important to them, with over a third giving this statement the highest rating. Support for this sentiment is strong across voters of different ages as well as men and women alike.

Statement “Owning my own business or farm is a big part of the American Dream for me” agreement

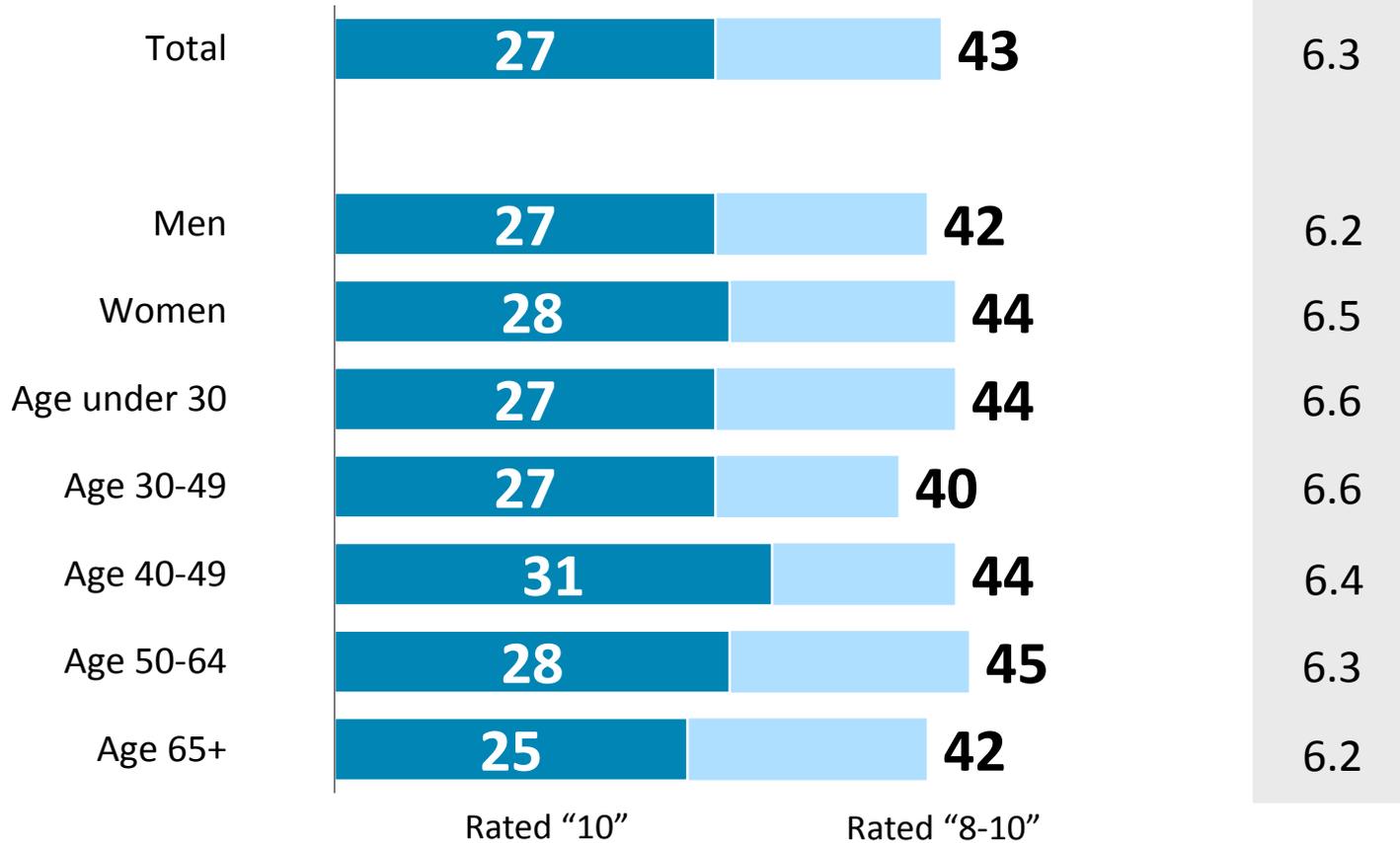


Darker colors indicate intensity.

Here are some statements other people in rural and small-town areas have made. I want you to tell me how much you agree with each one. TEN means you strongly agree and ZERO means you do not agree at all. You can use any number in between.

Generally, just under half of rural America believe it is harder to make a go of it in rural America than in cities. This feeling is shared by men and women, and rural voters across age groups.

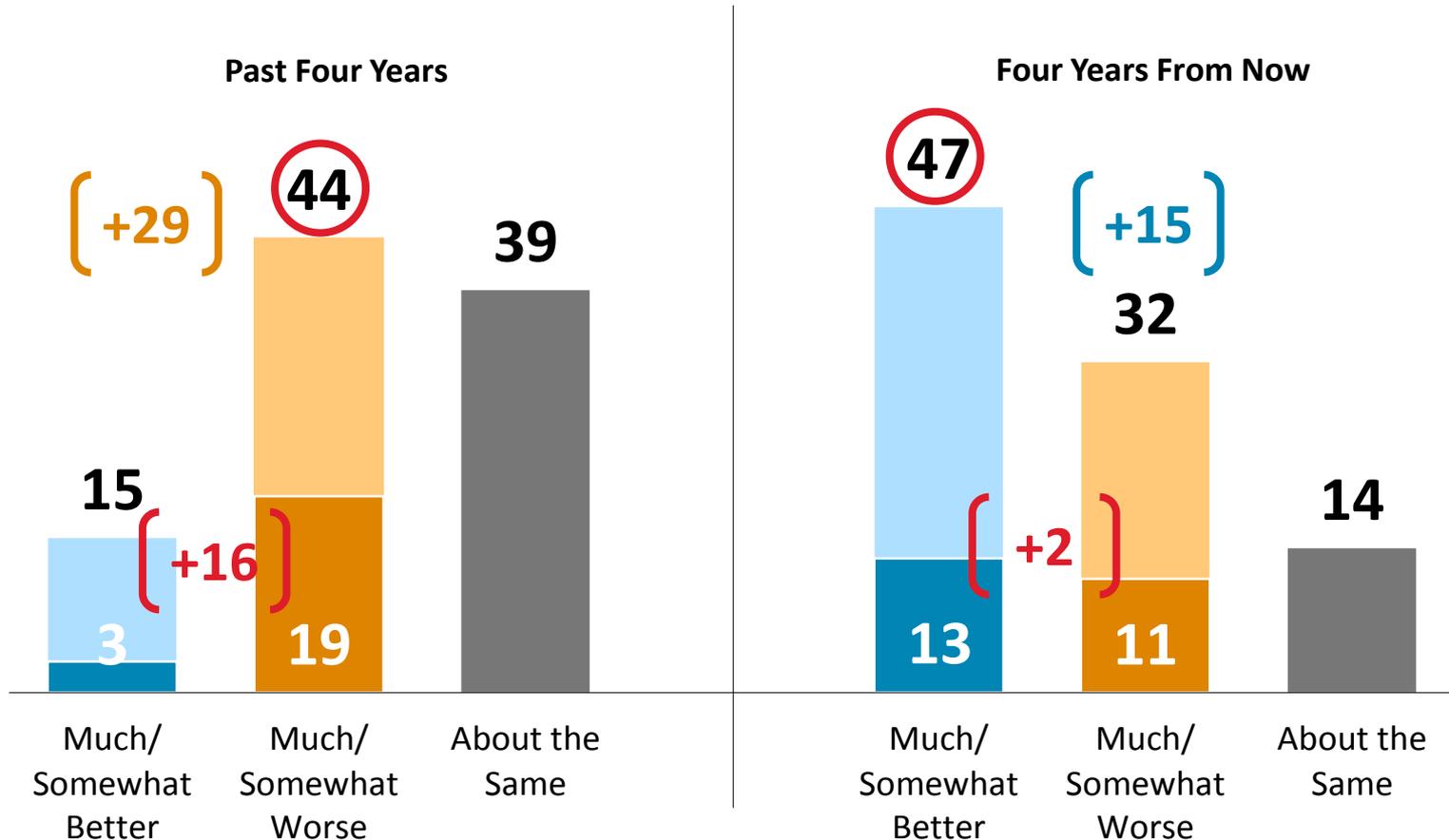
Statement “People have a harder time making a go of it in rural America than they do in the cities” agreement



Darker colors indicate intensity.

Here are some statements other people in rural and small-town areas have made. I want you to tell me how much you agree with each one. TEN means you strongly agree and ZERO means you do not agree at all. You can use any number in between.

Rural Americans have mixed emotions when it comes to their recent past and near future. Few Americans living in rural communities feel they are better off now than they were 4 years ago. However, they are optimistic and looking ahead, almost half say they will be better off in the next four years.



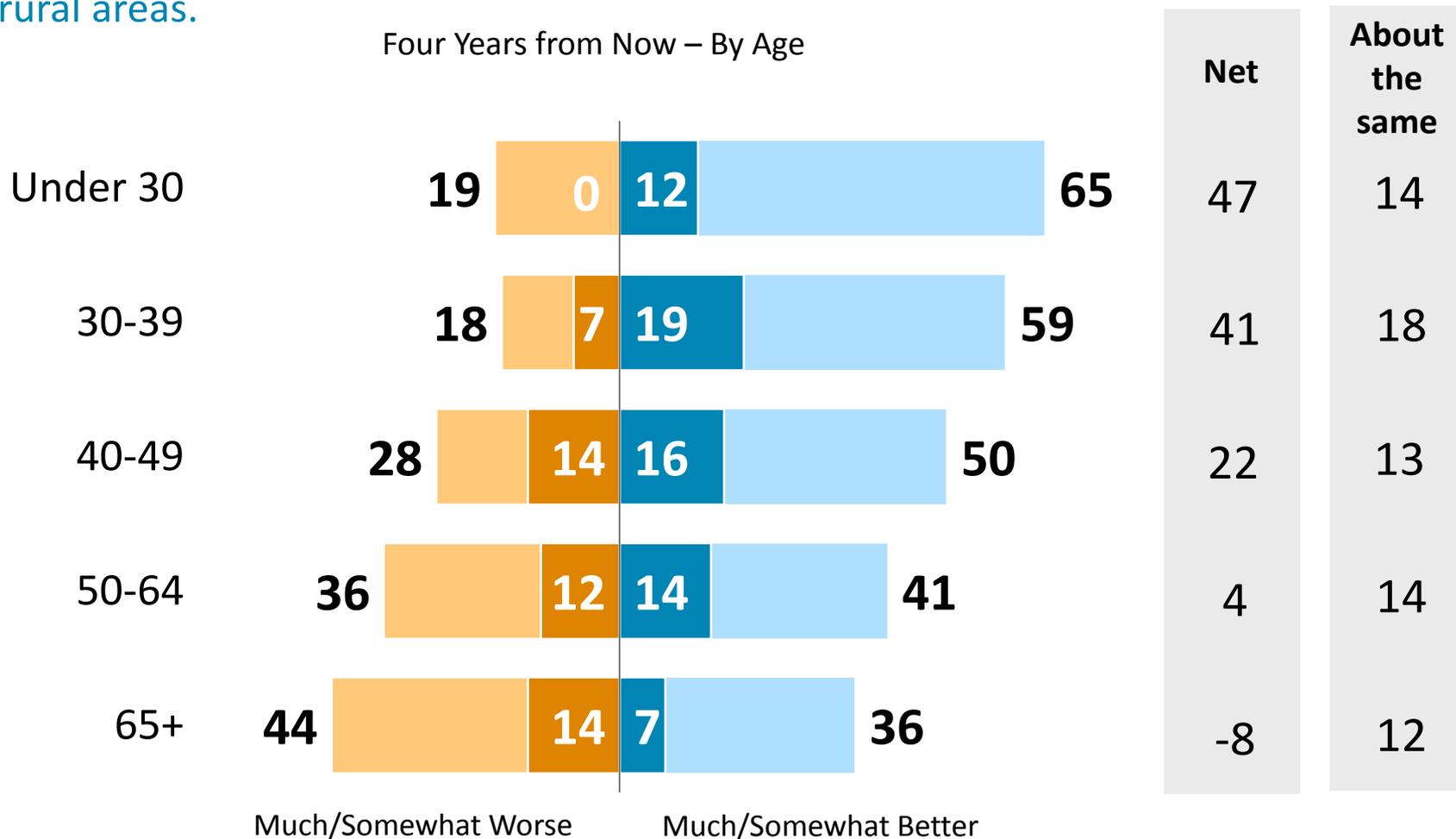
Darker colors indicate intensity.

Both questions asked of half the sample.

Would you say that your family economic situation has gotten better, worse, or stayed about the same over the past FOUR years? [IF BETTER/WORSE]: Is that much better/worse or just somewhat better/worse?

Would you say that your family will be economically better off or worse off FOUR years from now? [IF BETTER/WORSE]: Is that much better/worse or just somewhat better/worse?

The age dynamic is a surprising finding – younger people tend to be more positive than older people. Below, younger people are much more likely to say they will be better or somewhat better off in four years. It does not mean they will be living in rural areas, but it does mean they are personally more optimistic than older people in rural areas.



Darker colors indicate intensity.

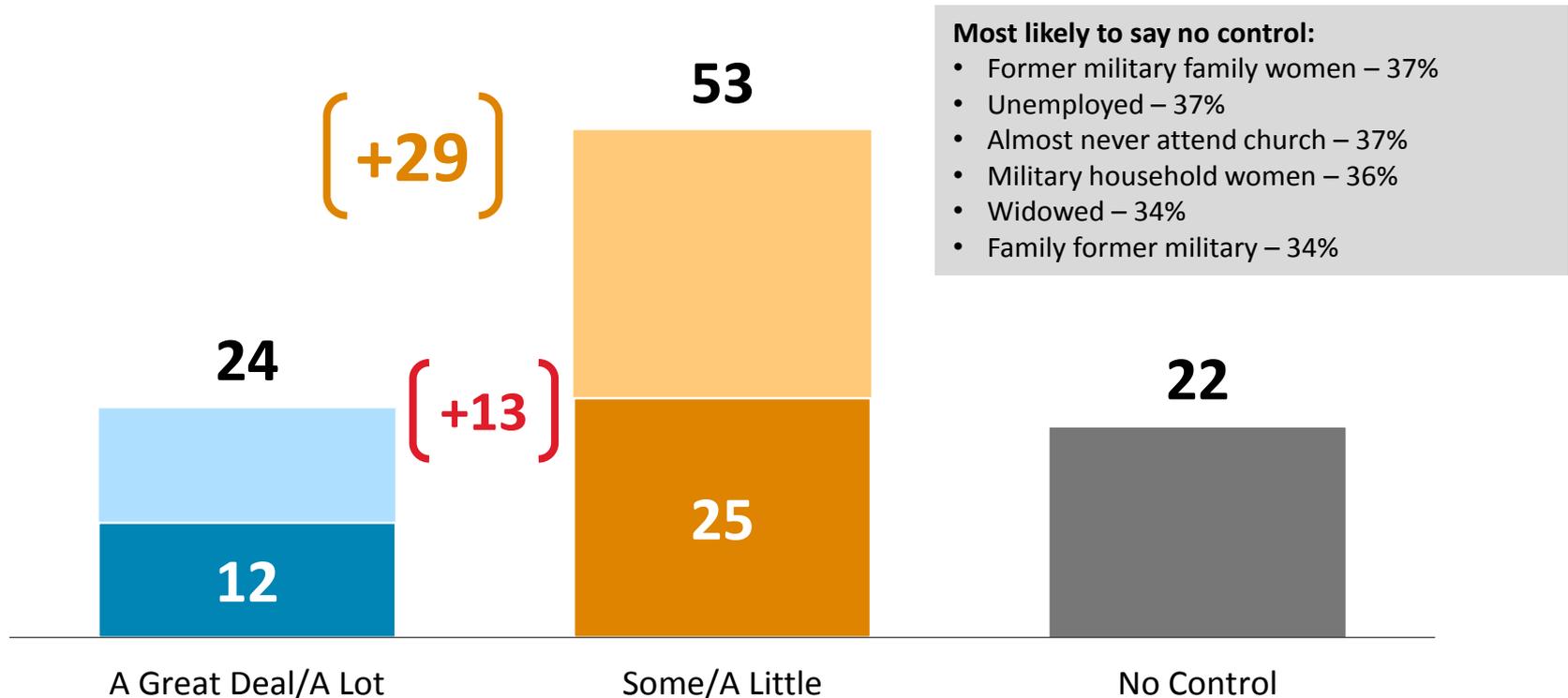
Question asked of half the sample.

Would you say that your family economic situation has gotten better, worse, or stayed about the same over the past FOUR years? [IF

**BETTER/WORSE]: Is that much better/worse or just somewhat better/worse?**

Rural Americans do not feel they have a lot of control over their own economic situation. This does not differ much by demographic group. This lack of control over their own economic situation combined with their sense that the government has forgotten about them begins to lay the groundwork for their populist beliefs around a lack of faith in big institutions, from government to mega-farms, to Wall Street and banks.

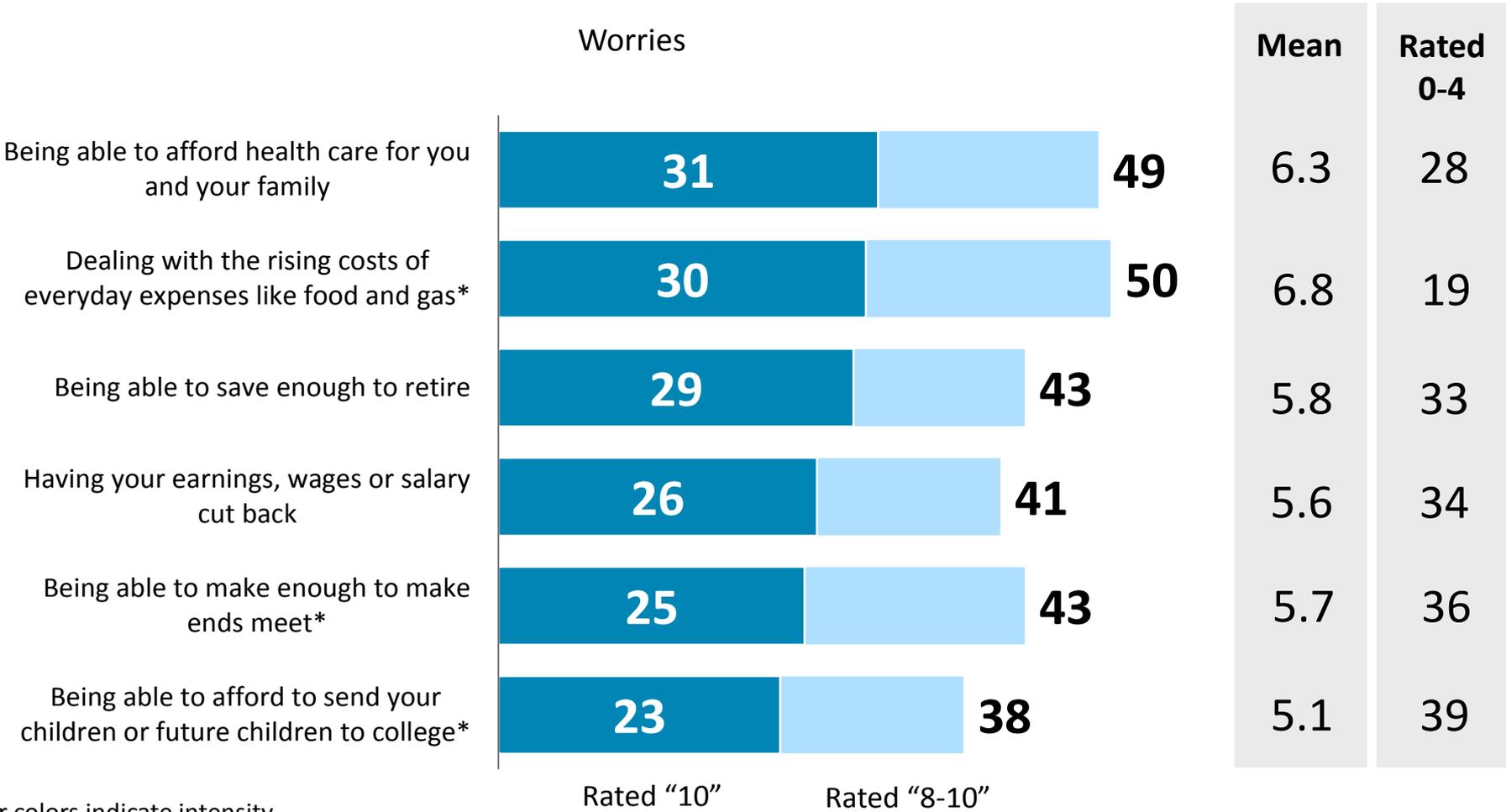
### Personal Control Over One's Current Economic Situation



Darker colors indicate intensity.

How much control do you feel you have over your current economic situation – a great deal of control, a lot of control, some control, a little control, or no control at all?

Rural Americans worry about the same things most other Americans worry about making ends meet and the cost of health care. Notably, they are less worried about losing their job or the cost of rent.



Darker colors indicate intensity.  
 \* Question asked of half the sample.

Here are some issues other people say they have worried about. Using a scale of ZERO to ten please tell me how much you worry about that issue. TEN means you are VERY worried and ZERO means you are not worried about it at all. You can use any number in between. [PROBE]: From zero to ten, how worried are you about that issue?



## Rural America's Value System

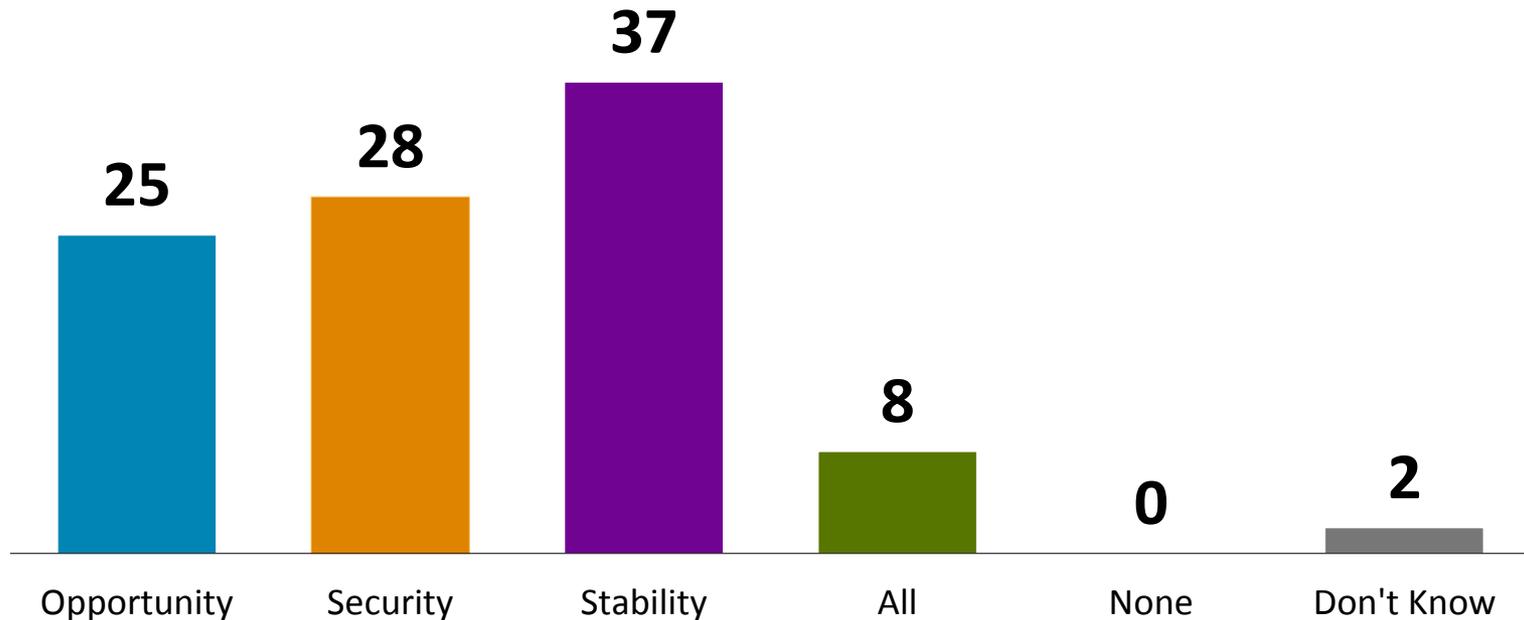
Rural America sees their challenges as unique – communicating about what is needed for their prosperity is multifaceted and needs to really speak to their experiences and challenges, which are not the same as those living in suburban and urban communities.



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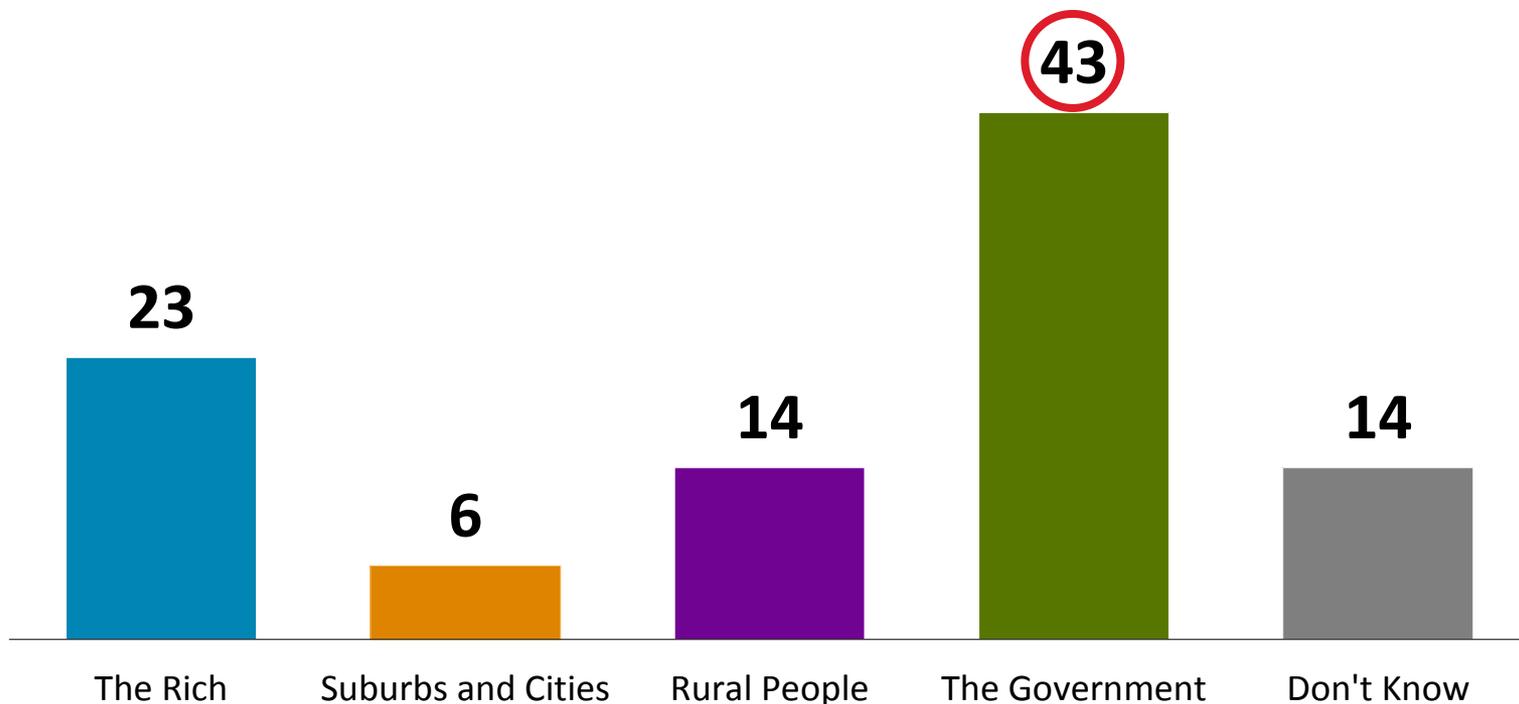
Stability is a driving values in rural America. It is not dominant, but it does outpace opportunity and security when rural Americans think about what they want in the economy. Stability allows people to count on what is going to happen, and when they lack control over their own economic situation it makes it more difficult to do so.

Most Important for Rural and Small Town America



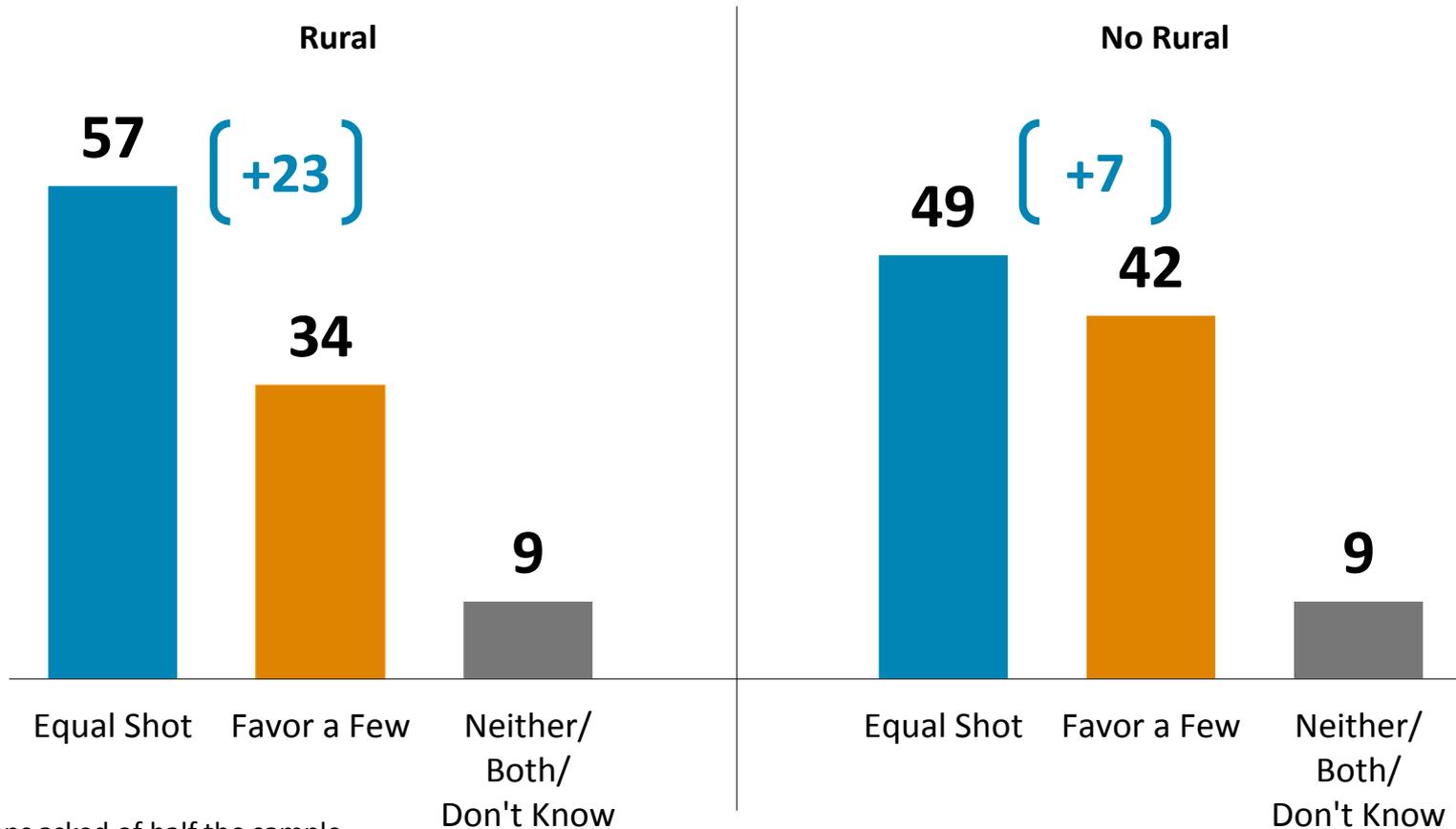
Almost half of rural America hold the government the most responsible for their economy. They feel ignored by the government, they do not believe the governments cares about or values their way of life. Communicating this understanding is key for government policies to be believed in.

Who is Most Responsible for Rural America's Economy



When it comes to rural America's economy who do you hold most responsible: [READ AND ROTATE] **The rich** because they have all the advantages **People in the suburbs and cities** who have more power and hold on to what they have **Rural people** who hold on too much to a changing way of life **The government** that does not care about rural people and their way of life

An irony here is that rural Americans think achieving the American Dream is more viable in rural America than it is in the cities or larger towns, even as the rules favor the wealthy few.



Both questions asked of half the sample.

Here are two different statements about economic opportunity in America. Tell me which one is closer to your opinion even if neither is perfect:

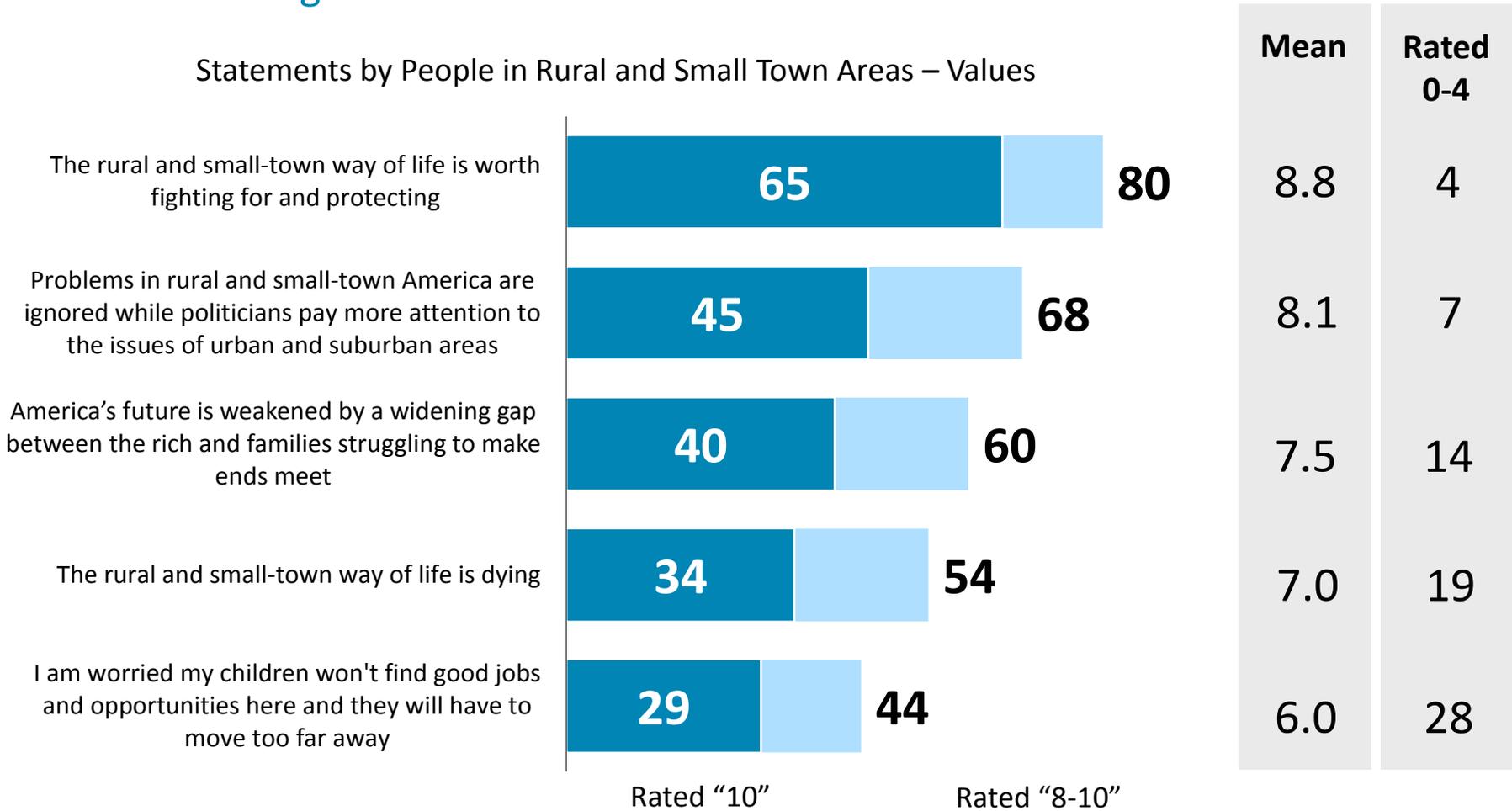
[READ AND ROTATE STATEMENTS]

**RURAL** \_In rural and small-town America, everyone has an equal shot at being financially secure if they work hard and play by the rules and \_If you are born in small-town or rural America you have a hard time getting ahead because the rules favor a wealthy few

**NO RURAL** \_In America, everyone has an equal shot at being financially secure if they work hard and play by the rules and \_In America, you have a hard time getting ahead because the rules favor a wealthy few

These rural voters see the gap between the rich and the poor as being an issue for all of America, not just themselves – it weakens America’s future more strongly than it weakens RURAL America’s future. They need to be heard and acknowledged.

Statements by People in Rural and Small Town Areas – Values



Darker colors indicate intensity.

\* Question asked of half the sample.

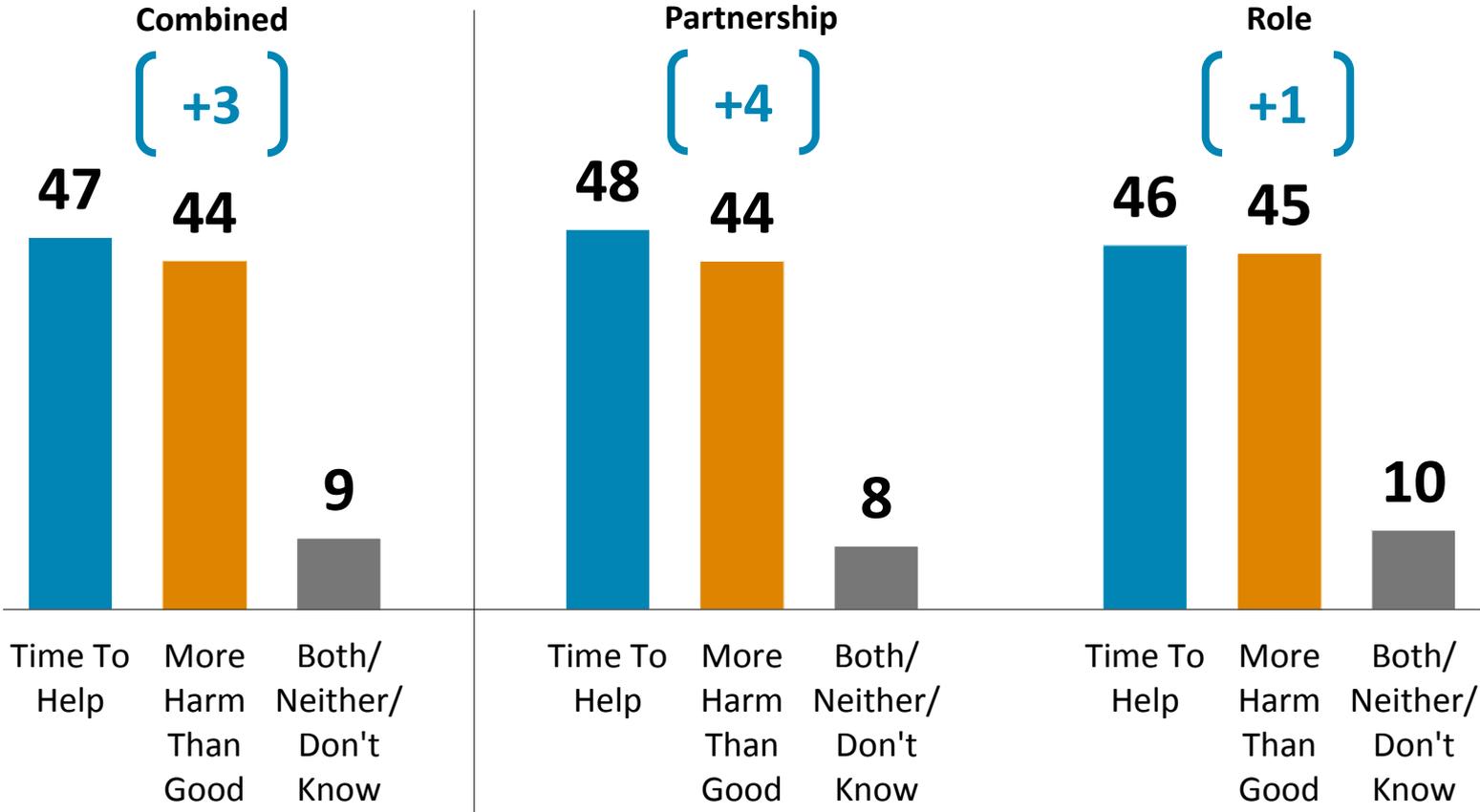
Here are some statements other people in rural and small-town areas have made. I want you to tell me how much you agree with each one. TEN means you strongly agree and ZERO means you do not agree at all. You can use any number in between.



## The Role of Government

Rural Americans are +17 points Republican but are split on the role of government. Rural America holds the government accountable for their economy and believes that federal policies can influence their outcomes. Linking policies to positive results could be the key to broadening rural America's openness to this role.

Rural Americans are divided on the role of government when it comes to strengthening rural communities. When partnership language is used, the sense that government ought to help increases only slightly, but still attitudes are divided and complex.



Both questions asked of half the sample.

Which of these two statements is closer to your opinion even if neither is right. [READ AND ROTATE]

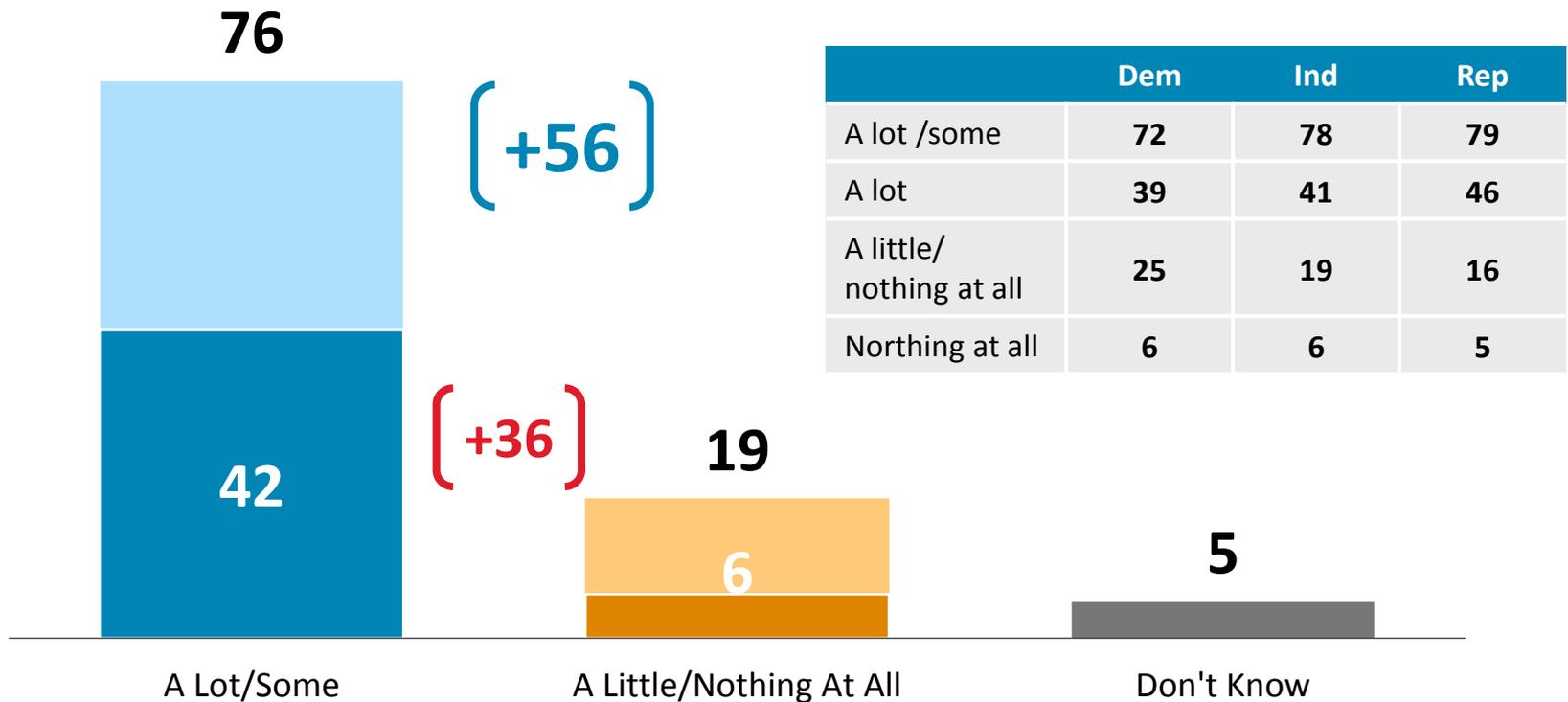
**PARTNERSHIP** \_It's time for government to have a stronger partnership role in strengthening rural communities and making the economy work for the average person in rural and small-town America

**ROLE** \_It's time for government to have a stronger role in strengthening rural communities and making the economy work for the average person in rural and small-town America

**ALL HEAR** \_Turning to big government to solve our rural and small-town economic problems will do more harm than good

# Rural Americans strongly believe the federal government influences the rural economy.

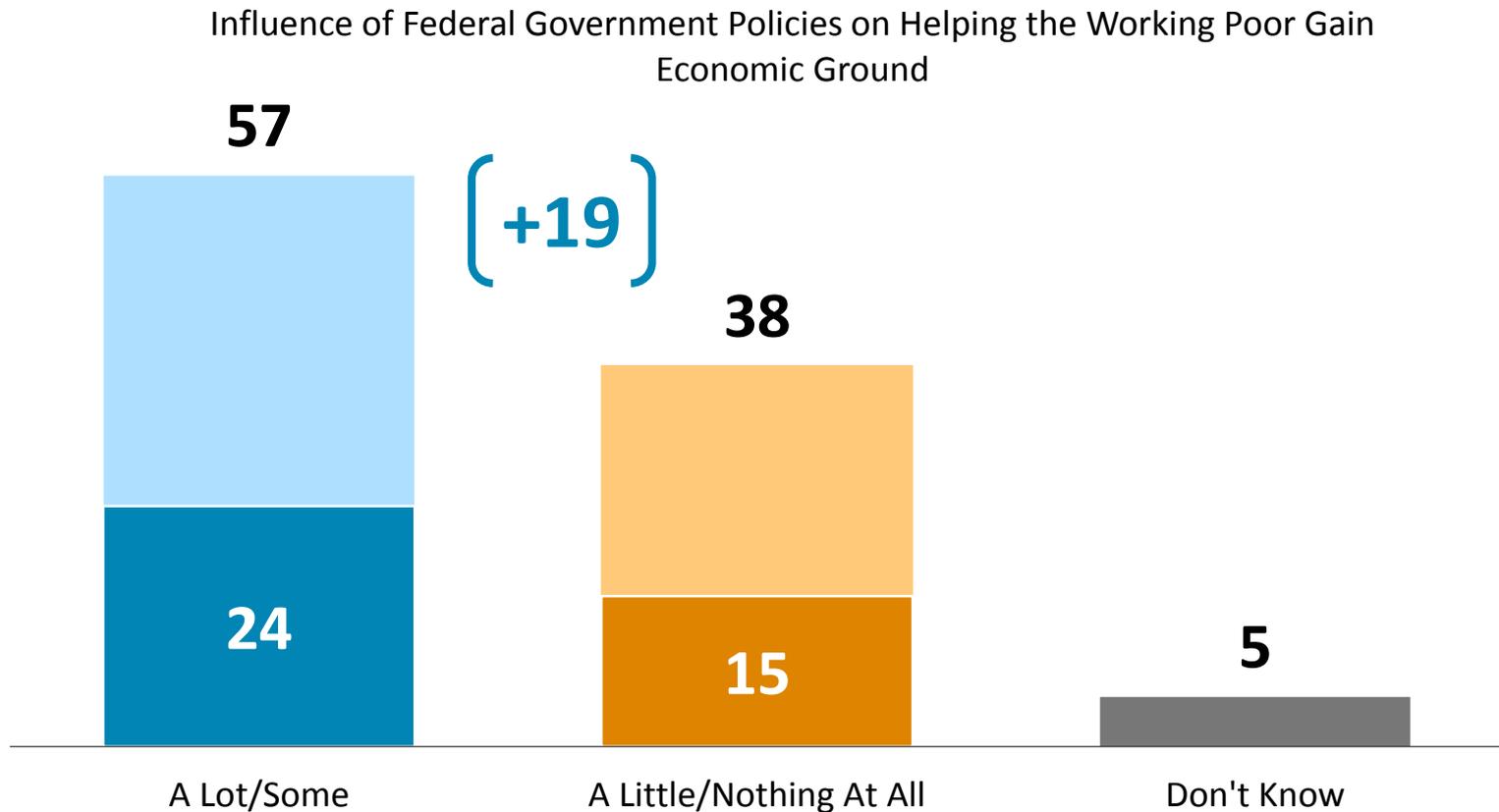
Influence of Federal Government Policies on the Rural and Small Town Economy



Darker colors indicate intensity.

How much influence do federal government policies have on the rural and small-town economy – a lot, some, a little, or nothing at all?

Almost six in ten believe the federal government has influence in helping the working poor gain ground....

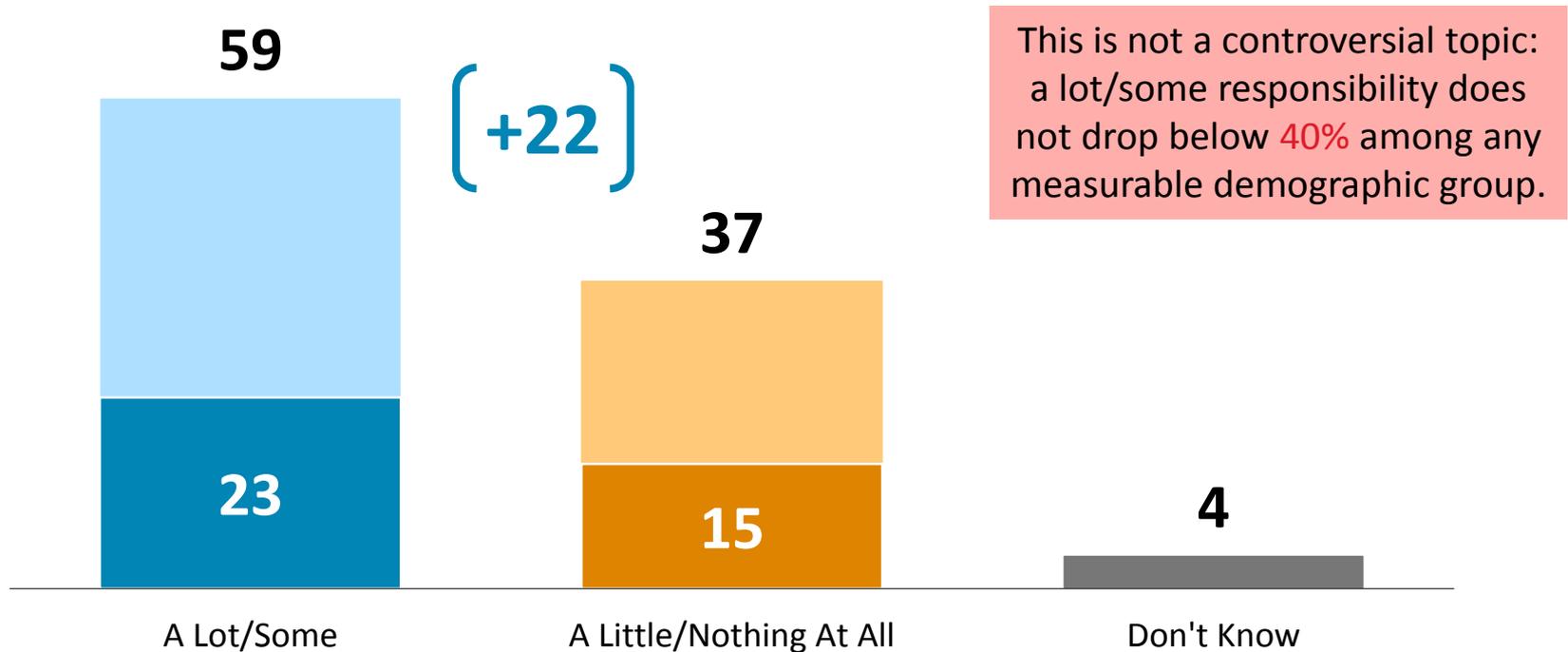


Darker colors indicate intensity.

How much influence do federal government policies have on helping the working poor gain economic ground – a lot, some, a little, or nothing at all?

...And almost six in ten believe the federal government has a responsibility to help the working poor advance economically.

### Government Responsibility to Help the Working Poor Advance Economically

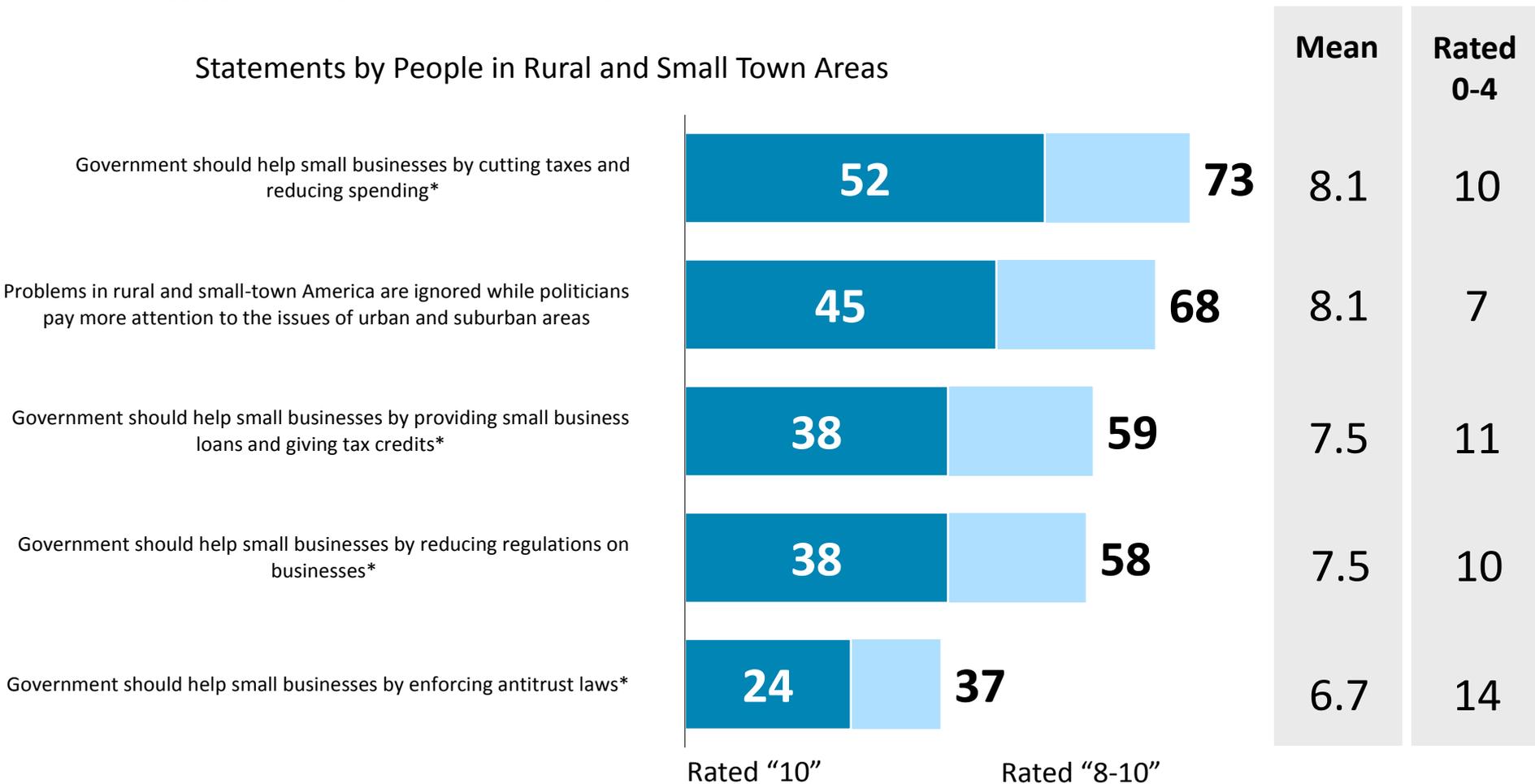


Darker colors indicate intensity.

And how much responsibility do you think the government has to helping the working poor advance economically – a lot, some, a little, or no responsibility at all?

While rural America does see a role for the government in aiding small businesses, this support is most welcomed in ways that scale back the work of the government, namely through removing barriers and costs. But also popular is providing small businesses loans and tax credits.

### Statements by People in Rural and Small Town Areas



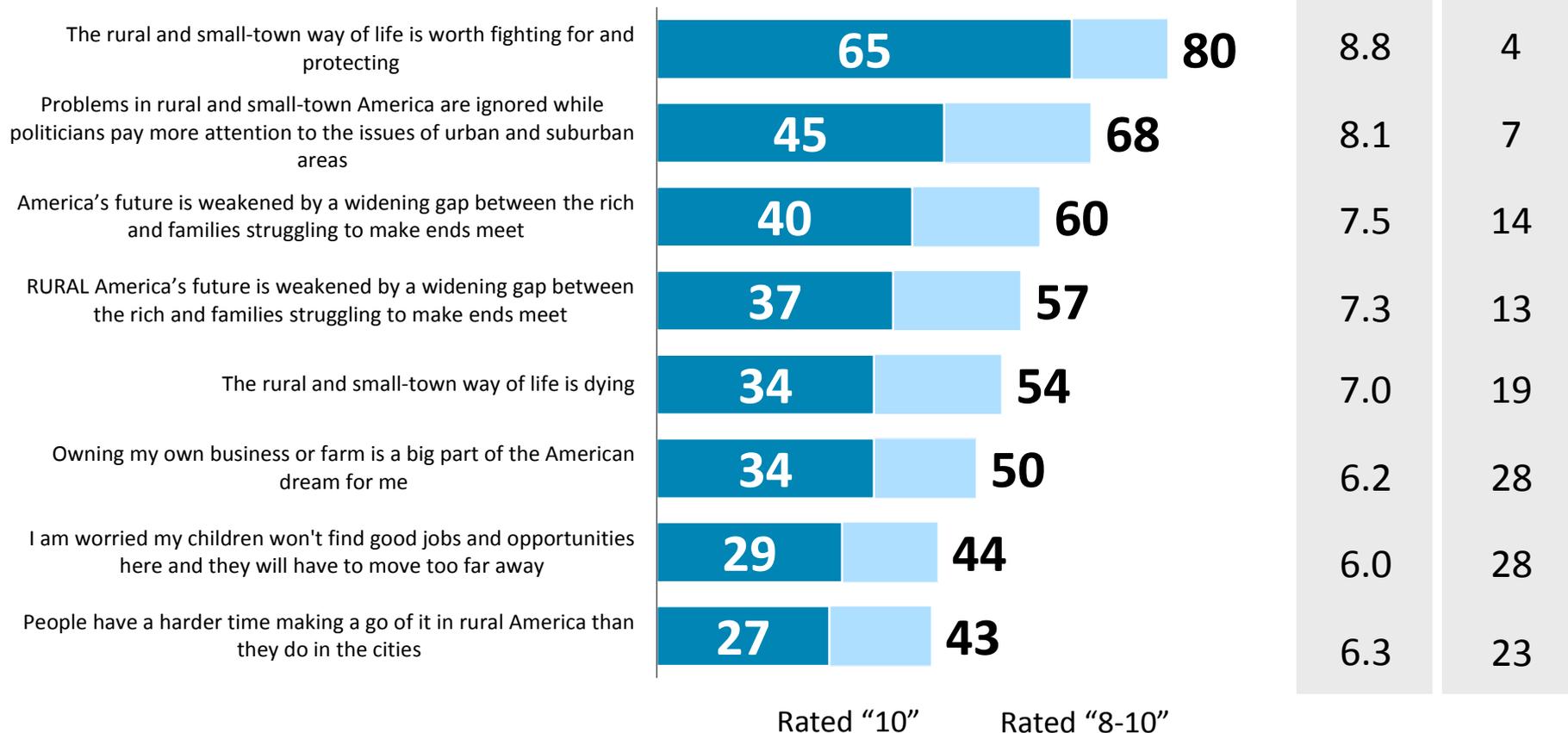
Darker colors indicate intensity.

\* Question asked of half the sample.

Here are some statements other people in rural and small-town areas have made. I want you to tell me how much you agree with each one. TEN means you strongly agree and ZERO means you do not agree at all. You can use any number in between.

The top tier value for rural America in terms of intensity and reach is that they believe in their way of life and believe it is worth fighting for. However, they strongly believe politicians ignore rural America compared to urban and suburban areas. Aspirational and proactive language, however, works better than negative statements.

### Statements by People in Rural and Small Town Areas



Darker colors indicate intensity.  
 \* Question asked of half the sample.

Here are some statements other people in rural and small-town areas have made. I want you to tell me how much you agree with each one. TEN means you strongly agree and ZERO means you do not agree at all. You can use any number in between.



## Solutions

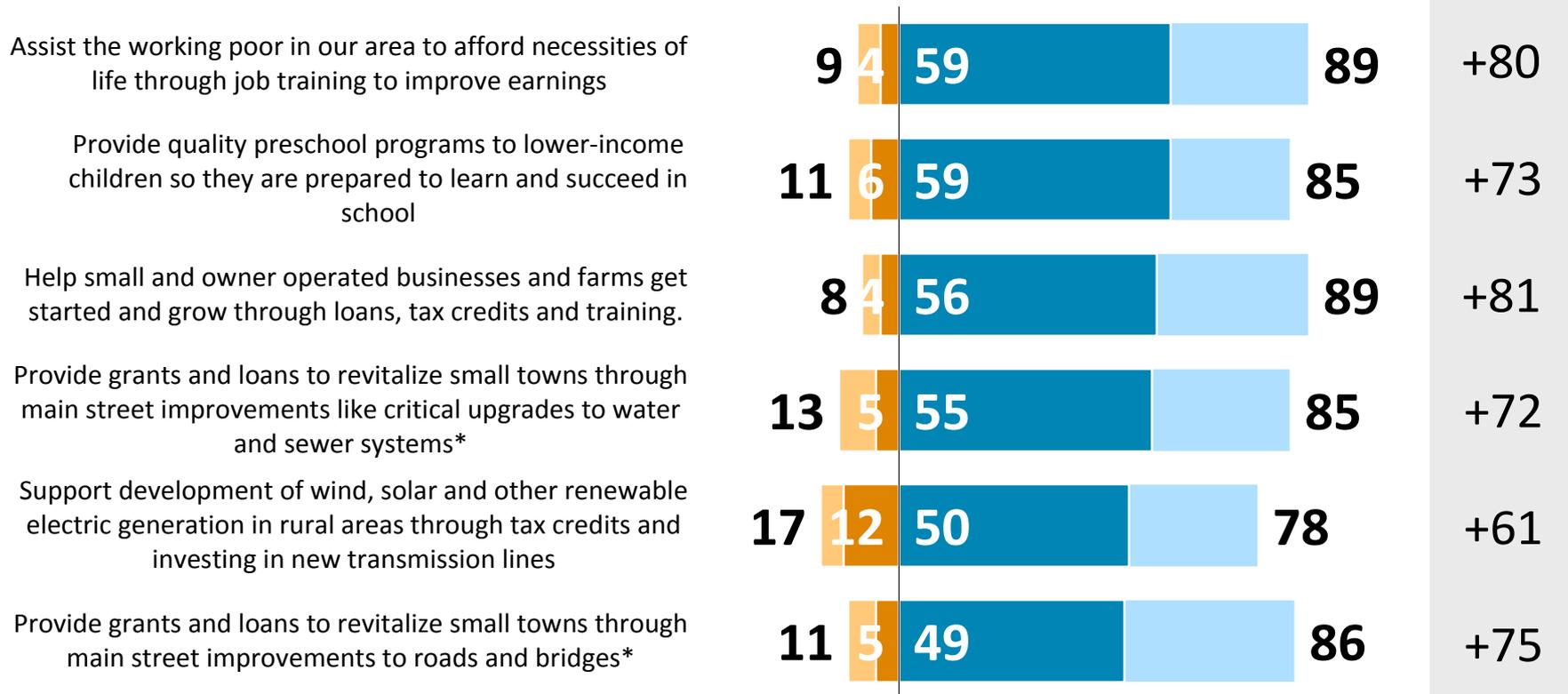
Rural Americans do not want to rely on farm subsidies and cutting back taxes to ensure their children's futures. Instead they look to job training and pre-school education as well as infrastructure investments to be important.



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# Rural America is united behind support for job training, quality preschool, loans and grants to revitalize small towns, renewable energy, and infrastructure.

## Potential Policies – Upper Tier



Darker colors indicate intensity.

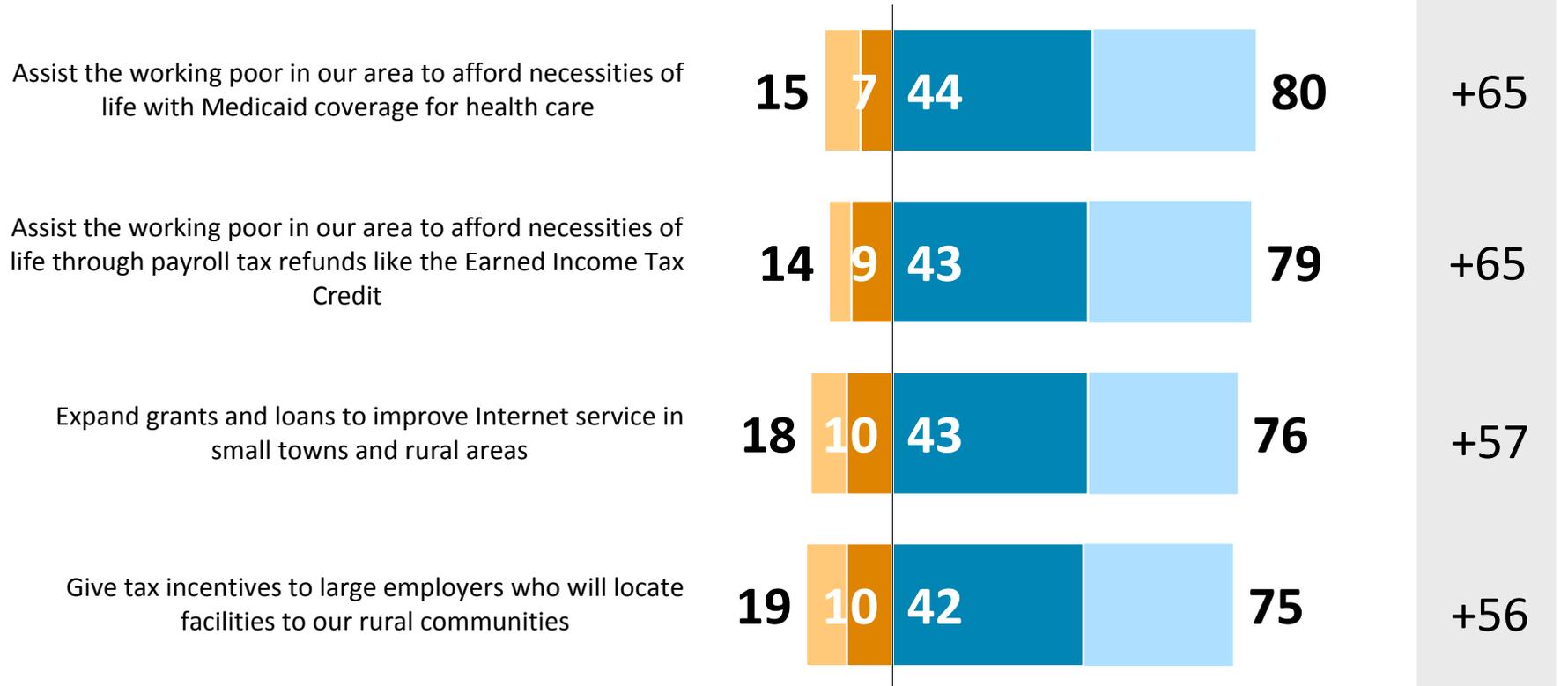
Strongly/Somewhat Oppose    Strongly/Somewhat Support

\* Question asked of half the sample.

Here are some statements other people in rural and small-town areas have made. I want you to tell me how much you agree with each one. TEN means you strongly agree and ZERO means you do not agree at all. You can use any number in between.

While they support tax cuts and less spending, rural voters support improvements that unquestionably cost money and would require the government to play a bigger role. On a second tier but still strong, rural voters support Medicaid, the Earned Income Tax Credit, broadband internet expansion, and tax incentives for employers.

Potential Policies – Lower Tier



Strongly/Somewhat Oppose      Strongly/Somewhat Support

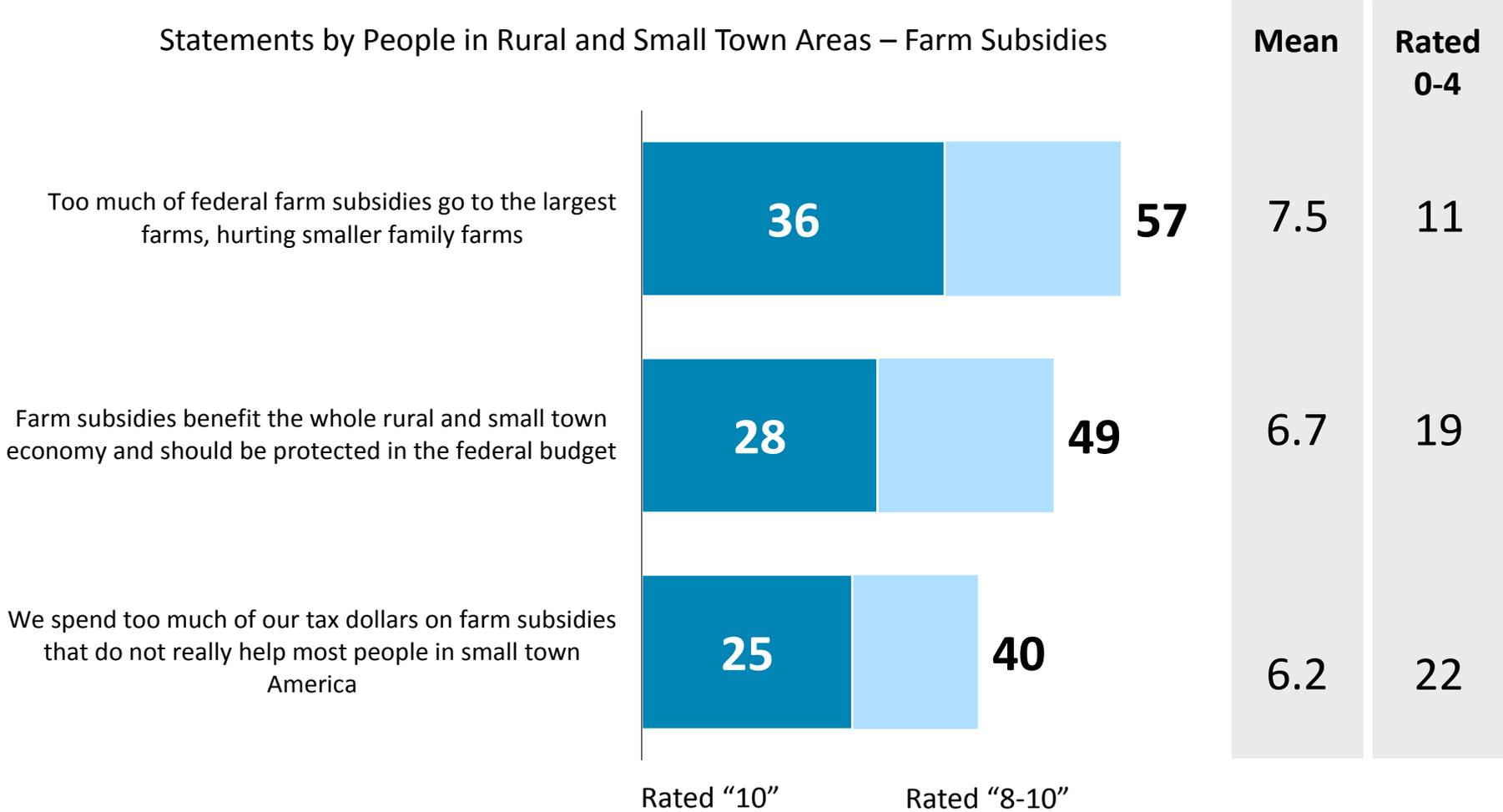
Darker colors indicate intensity.

\* Question asked of half the sample.

Here are some statements other people in rural and small-town areas have made. I want you to tell me how much you agree with each one. TEN means you strongly agree and ZERO means you do not agree at all. You can use any number in between.

Farm subsidies are important to these rural communities. However, there is a populist streak here with rural voters believing too much that subsidies go to large farms.

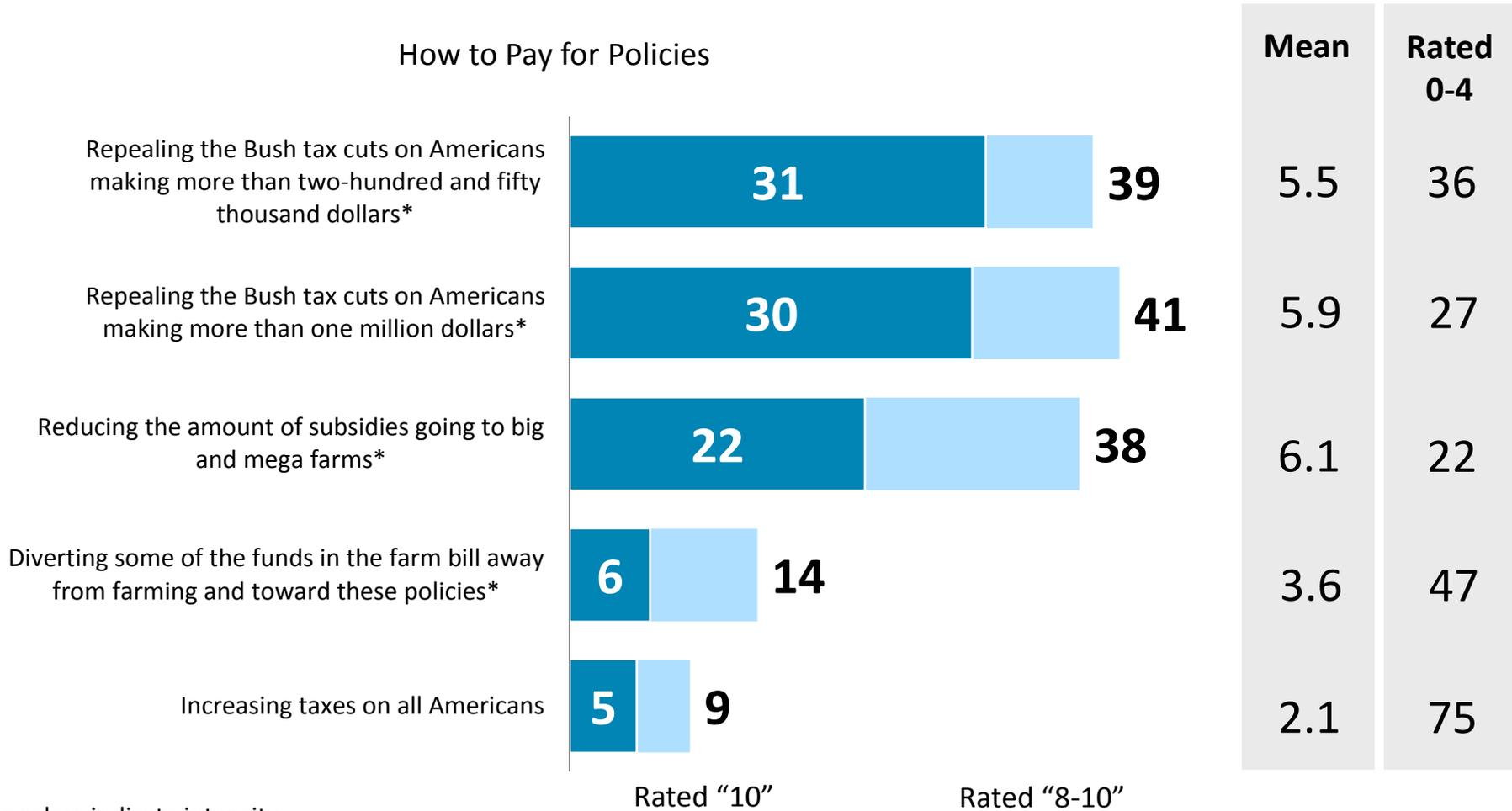
Statements by People in Rural and Small Town Areas – Farm Subsidies



Darker colors indicate intensity.  
 \* Question asked of half the sample.

Here are some statements other people in rural and small-town areas have made. I want you to tell me how much you agree with each one. TEN means you strongly agree and ZERO means you do not agree at all. You can use any number in between.

Rural Americans do not want to increase taxes for everyone in order to pay for the policies. And while they are more open to increasing taxes for wealthier Americans, support is still muted.



Darker colors indicate intensity.

\* Question asked of half the sample.

Here are some ways other people have mentioned as ways to pay for these policies that will increase investments in rural America. Using a scale from ZERO to TEN please tell me how much you support each suggestion. ZERO means you do not at all support the suggestion and TEN means you very much support the proposal. You can use any number in between.



## Speaking to Rural America

Rural America continues to show its ambivalence about the role of government. The strongest message speaks to smaller government and traditional values. At the same time, rural Americans look to policies that support the rural economy and small businesses. They want to be heard and no longer ignored. They want a future in rural America for their children and grandchildren. There is a populist streak where people want help for family farms, not Wall Street banks and corporate farmers.



THE TARRANCE GROUP

Small government is the strongest message; while these rural voters think the government has a role to play, it is mainly in leveling the playing field, investment, and incentives. Rural voters want to have a vibrant and fair economy for small businesses and farms for their children and grandchildren.

| Message – Top Tier  | Very Convincing | Total Convincing |
|---|-----------------|------------------|
| <p><b>Small Government</b></p> <p>What we can do to help rural America is get government out of the way, keep taxes low, and give entrepreneurs the freedom to start a business, grow that business, and hire more people. The free market can work; especially in rural and small-town America because we work hard and have strong family values and faith. Big government means more complications, too many regulations, and higher taxes – those are problems we don’t need in rural America.</p>            | <b>52</b>       | <b>85</b>        |
| <p><b>Fair/Smart to Help</b></p> <p>Rural and small-town America is a big and important part of what makes America go. We are hard working, patriotic, faithful, and skilled. Making sure our families, our small business owners, and our workers have the same chance as everyone else is fair and smart. That means supporting policies like investing more in helping our small businesses get started and bringing technology to our areas so we can be connected to the new economy.</p>                    | <b>48</b>       | <b>87</b>        |
| <p><b>Future</b></p> <p>Making rural America stronger is good both short term and long term. It will offer our children and grandchildren the opportunity to stay here, maintaining our way of life and protecting our values. By creating a stronger economy, investing in small businesses and schools, we can help working and middle class families get ahead. We can create stronger communities so young people can choose to stay and make a life for themselves here in rural and small-town America.</p> | <b>48</b>       | <b>89</b>        |
| <p><b>Anti-Corporate</b></p> <p>The way we currently subsidize farms actually hurts our rural economy. Farm subsidies primarily benefit large corporate farms, not small family farms. Wall Street and big banks get more help than working Americans. We should strengthen our small towns and rural communities for everyone by supporting good schools, access to technology, and small businesses with innovative ideas.</p>  | <b>46</b>       | <b>86</b>        |

The second tier of messages discuss divides between those living in rural communities and those in more urban sprawls. These feed into rural America’s belief that they are largely underappreciated and ignored but are worth fighting for. They also respond to messages about economic fairness and The diversity of the new rural America.

| Message  | Very Convincing | Total Convincing |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| <p><b>Times Change - Stats</b></p> <p>Rural America used to be about farming and ranching. But we have changed. Today, fewer than one in ten rural people live or work on a farm or ranch. Our economic policies have NOT changed. Now a few larger factory farms get most of the federal funding. The majority of rural America sees very little economic development. We need to change that and invest in beginning farmers, small businesses, and new technology.</p>                          | 45              | 85               |
| <p><b>Rural vs. Rich</b></p> <p>Ordinary rural Americans are losing ground in our economy. We need to fix it. We need policies that address problems for rural Americans too, not just for the rich and powerful. Our country is strongest when all of its communities are strong and all of its people have genuine economic opportunity. The rural American economy can be strong for everyone if federal policy makers understand rural concerns and address them.</p>                          | 45              | 84               |
| <p><b>Sec/Opp For All</b></p> <p>We need an economy that encourages prosperity for more people and allows everyone who is willing to work hard to achieve their full potential. But current policy is not getting the job done for rural America. It focuses on farming, especially big agra business, and ignores the rest of the rural economy like small business. To get our economy going again we need solutions that achieve economic security and opportunity for all rural Americans.</p> | 45              | 84               |
| <p><b>Times Change – No Stats</b></p> <p>Rural America used to be about farming and ranching. But we have changed. Today, fewer Americans live or work on ranches and farms, but our economic policies have NOT changed. Now a few larger factory farms get most of the federal funding. The majority of rural America sees very little economic development. We need to change that and invest in beginning farmers, small businesses, and new technology.</p>                                    | 44              | 83               |



## THE TARRANCE GROUP

[LakeResearch.com](http://LakeResearch.com)

202.776.9066

Celinda Lake

[clake@lakeresearch.com](mailto:clake@lakeresearch.com)

Joshua Ulibarri

[julibbari@lakeresearch.com](mailto:julibbari@lakeresearch.com)

Cornelia Treptow

[ctreptow@lakeresearch.com](mailto:ctreptow@lakeresearch.com)

[Tarrance.com](http://Tarrance.com)

703.684.6688

Ed Goeas

[egoeas@tarrance.com](mailto:egoeas@tarrance.com)

Brian Nienaber

[bnienaber@tarrance.com](mailto:bnienaber@tarrance.com)