

Trust in Nonprofits and Philanthropy

JULY 2025

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH





About Independent Sector



Independent Sector is the national membership organization that connects, strengthens, and advocates for nonprofits and philanthropies.

We believe a healthy, equitable, and trusted charitable sector helps all people in the United States thrive. Therefore, it is critical that we regularly assess public trust in nonprofits and philanthropy. This report shares our latest findings.

We would like to thank Edelman Data and Intelligence for their ongoing partnership in the development of this report.





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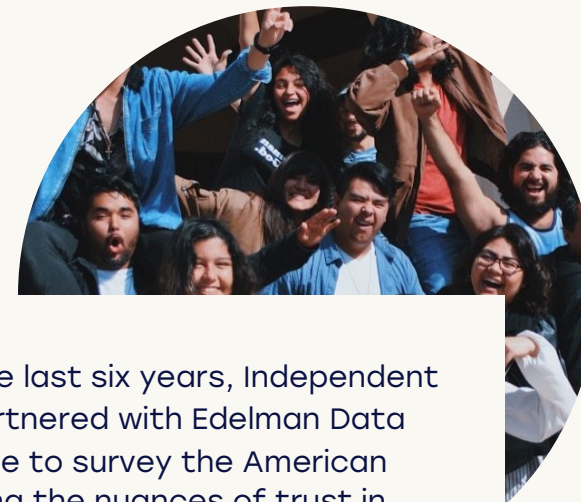




Public trust is the currency of the nonprofit sector.

Without the public's trust, everything we do to advance our collective missions becomes harder, if not impossible.

Trust is what makes it possible for us to partner with local communities to do the hard work of systemic change. Our trusted voices as advocates for our missions help drive policy change. Our trusted status makes us an essential partner to government and industry. Trust is vital in the recruitment of volunteers and in the sector's work to bridge across difference in a divided America. And, without trust, raising the resources we need to do our work becomes infinitely harder.



For each of the last six years, Independent Sector has partnered with Edelman Data and Intelligence to survey the American public, exploring the nuances of trust in American nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. These are the largest nationally representative surveys of their kind, surveying over 3,000 adults. We also conduct online focus groups to provide richer context for our findings. Given the outsized importance of trust to our sector, it is imperative to regularly assess the status of trust so, ultimately, we can fashion the policy and practice changes needed to build this critical asset.





Research Methodology

Quantitative Online Survey

Qualitative Online Discussion Boards

n = 3,000

Sample Size

+/- 2%

Margin of Error

April 5 – April 18, 2025

Timing

Edelman Data & Intelligence (DXI) fielded a 20-minute online survey among U.S. adults ages 18+.

Results were weighted to ensure comparability to prior waves, and to be nationally representative across race, income, educational attainment, gender, age, region and urbanicity.

Two (2) online qualitative discussion boards to gain deeper insights and add texture to the 2025 Trust survey findings.

Two discussion boards were focused on nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic foundations. The total between the two boards was forty-six (46) participants.

Both boards included a mix of participants by US region, gender, age, race, education, income level, and reported personal financial outlook to ensure a range of perspectives. The two boards were separated by political party ID (one group of Democrats/Democrat leaners and one of Republicans/Republican leaners).

Boards were conducted April 15 to 17, 2025.

*Wave 1 of Nonprofit 2020 study was fielded December 2 – 19, 2019 with n=3,000 participants

*Wave 1 of Philanthropy 2020 study was fielded February 28 – March 16, 2020 with n=3,000 participants

*Wave 2 of Nonprofit study was fielded April 29 – May 18, 2021 with n=5,000

*Wave 2 of Philanthropy study was fielded April 29 – May 18, 2021 with n=3,000

*Wave 3 combined Nonprofit and Philanthropy studies in a single survey with n = 3,015 participants and was fielded in February 2022

*Wave 4 combined Nonprofit and Philanthropy studies in a single survey with n = 3,000 participants and was fielded in May 16 – June 1, 2023



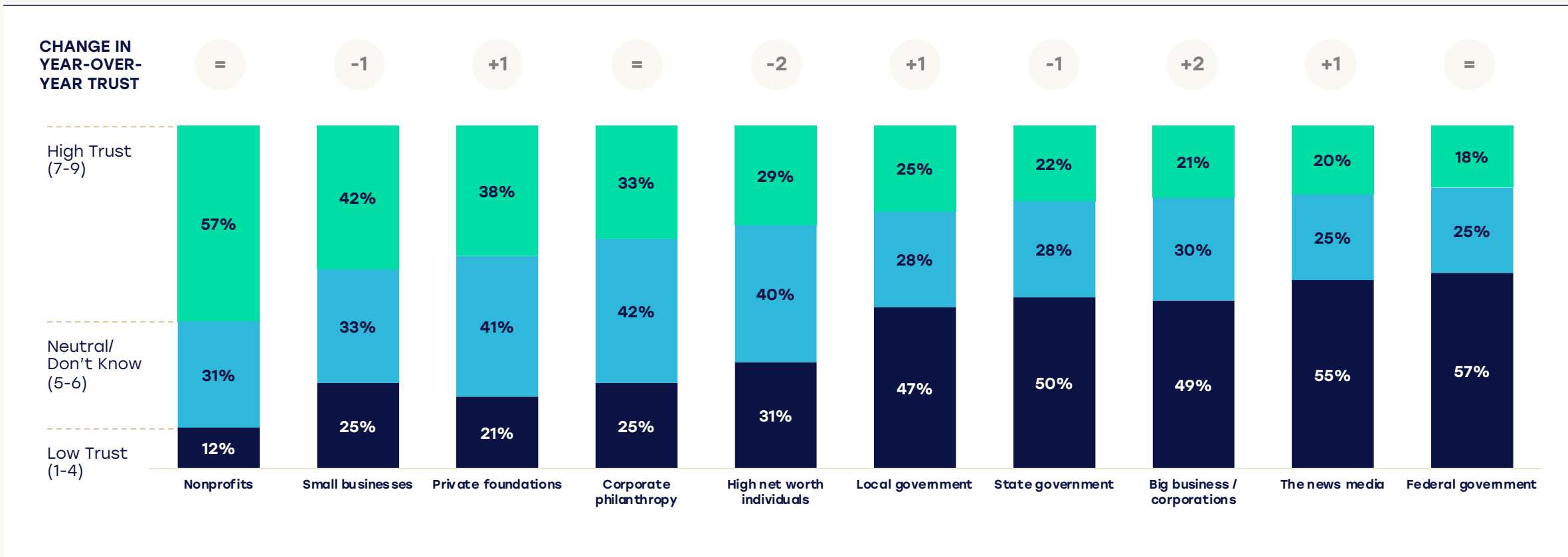
TRUST IN NONPROFITS
AND PHILANTHROPY

Key Findings



Trust in nonprofits holds steady from 2024

Nonprofit trust continues to outpace other major American institutions, particularly government, big business, and media, continuing a multi-year trend. Trust in philanthropy is lower than trust in nonprofits and remains stable, though trust in high-net-worth giving has fallen marginally.



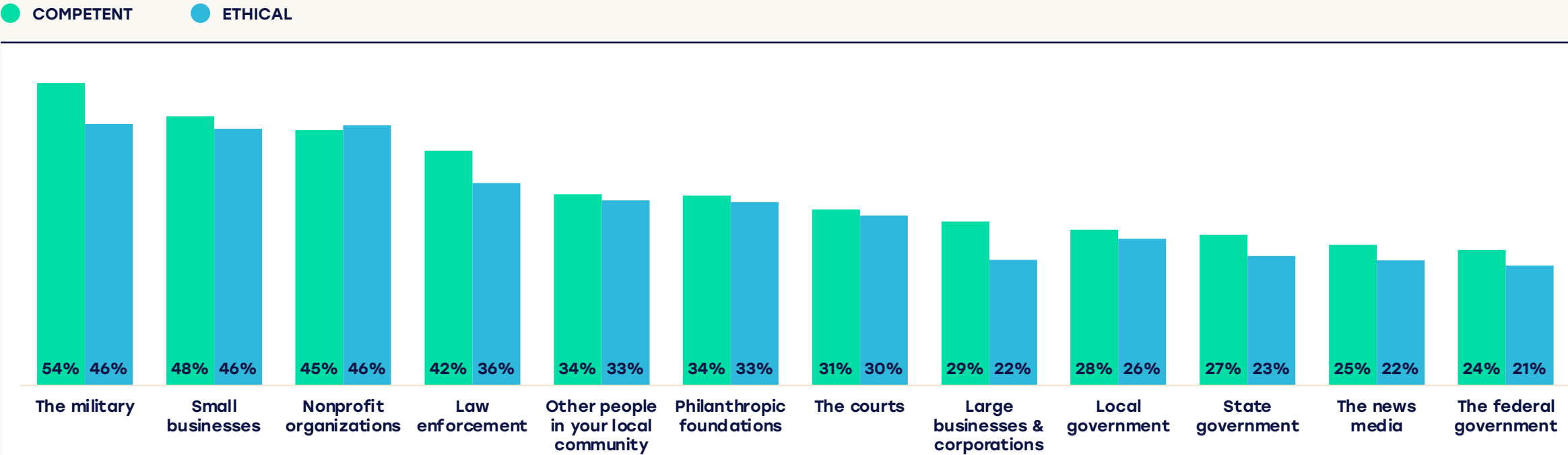
Q12: How much do you trust nonprofit organizations to do what is right? Base Size n=3,000, Q18: How much do you trust corporate foundations to do what is right? Base Size: n=1001, Q22: How much do you trust private foundations to do what is right? Base Size: n=998, Q26: How much do you trust high net worth individuals engaged in philanthropy to do what is right? Base Size: n=1001, Q30: How much do you trust the following institutions to do what is right? Base Size n=3,000



Nonprofits are seen as both more competent and more ethical than foundations and other major American institutions

COMPETENCE AND ETHICS AMONG INSTITUTIONS

Shown: % selected T2B Very/Extremely Competent/Ethical





Trust in high-net-worth philanthropy has eroded over the past year due to concerns about questionable giving motivations and undue influence over the organizations they fund

● HIGH TRUST ● NEUTRAL/DON'T KNOW ● LOW TRUST



29%

of respondents trust high net worth individuals engaged in philanthropy **to do what is right**



● AGREE ● NEUTRAL/DON'T KNOW ● DISAGREE



58%

of respondents agree high net worth individuals are **more focused on their own interests** than the public good



59%

of respondents believe high net worth individuals often **have too much influence** over the operations of the nonprofits they fund



Americans believe government and the nonprofit sector must work together to do good – but they worry about conflicting priorities and government pressure to influence nonprofit missions



69%

of respondents agree that the nonprofit sector and the federal government must work together to address societal issues

59%

of respondents feel that the federal government and the nonprofit sector often have conflicting priorities

24%

of respondents are very confident in nonprofits ability to remain true to their missions and not be influenced by the federal government

68%

believe nonprofits losing federal funding will have a negative impact on communities

Q53: Knowing that many nonprofit organizations receive funding from the federal government, how confident are you in nonprofit organizations' ability to remain true to their missions and not be influenced by the federal government?
Q54: Now thinking specifically about the relationship between the federal government and the nonprofit sector, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base Size n=3,000



From Data to Action

While the core purpose of this report is to share the data collected in our annual survey, the findings raise critical questions about how the charitable sector can best leverage the public trust it already holds, while also taking concrete actions to increase trust where needed.

Independent Sector is developing plans to update the Principles of Good Governance for Nonprofits. Our survey research has shown that good governance practices are critical for public trust in nonprofits and philanthropy.

Independent Sector's new project on strategic volunteer engagement aims to strengthen organizational effectiveness and build community relationships that are known to increase trust.

Independent Sector is partnering with others in our sector to develop a new and comprehensive narrative for our sector – one that better communicates how nonprofits and philanthropy operate and the impact they have.

Independent Sector continues to explore policy-focused opportunities that will build public trust in the charitable sector.



TRUST IN NONPROFITS
AND PHILANTHROPY

Trust Metrics

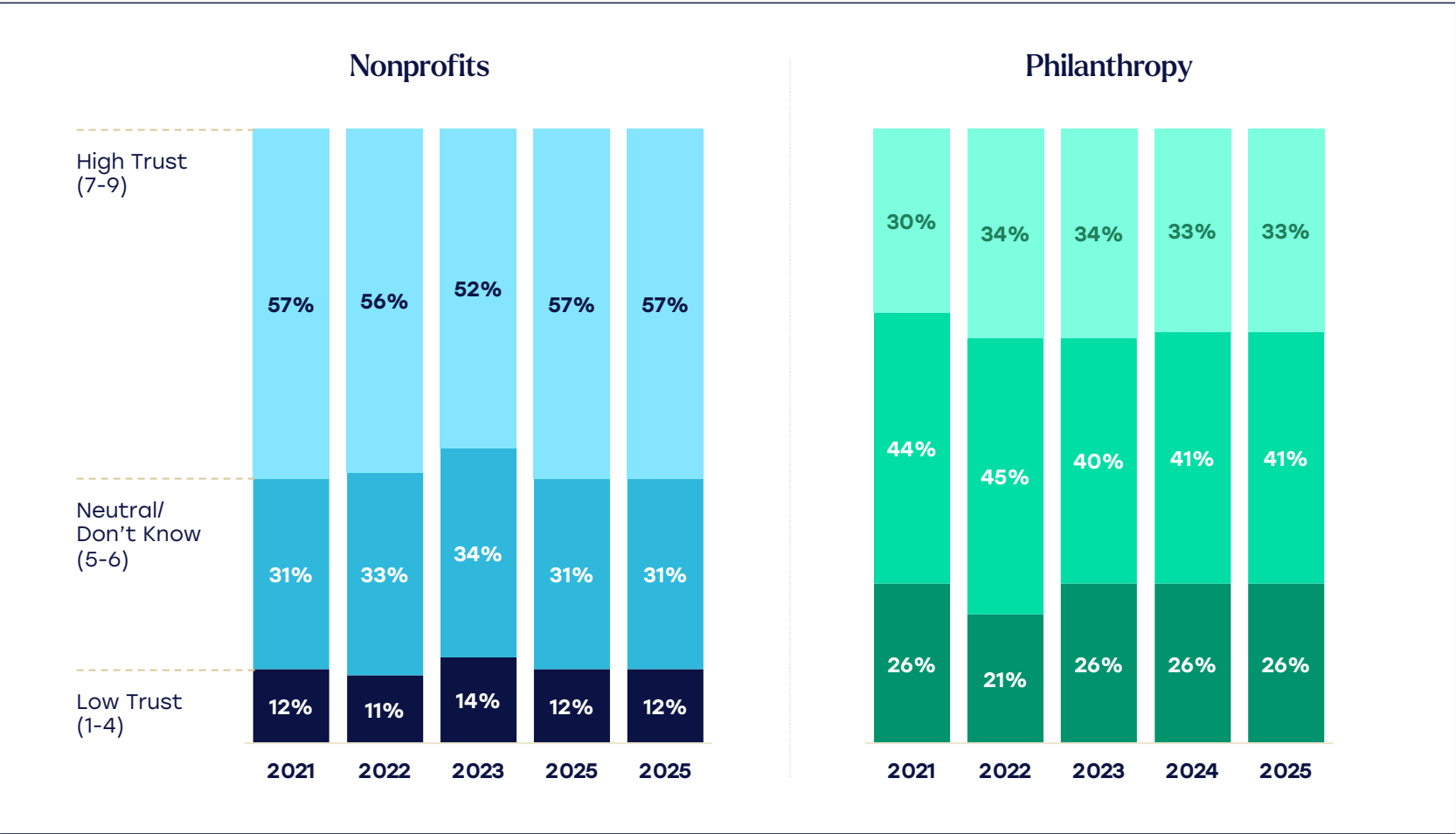


Measuring Trust Capital

Based on **overall trust on a 9-point scale**:
“How much do you trust X to do what is right?”

- 7–9
High Trust
- 5–6
Neutral
- 1–4
Low Trust

Nonprofit and philanthropy trust remains unchanged since 2024





Trust across nonprofit subsectors

Based on **overall trust on a 9-point scale:**

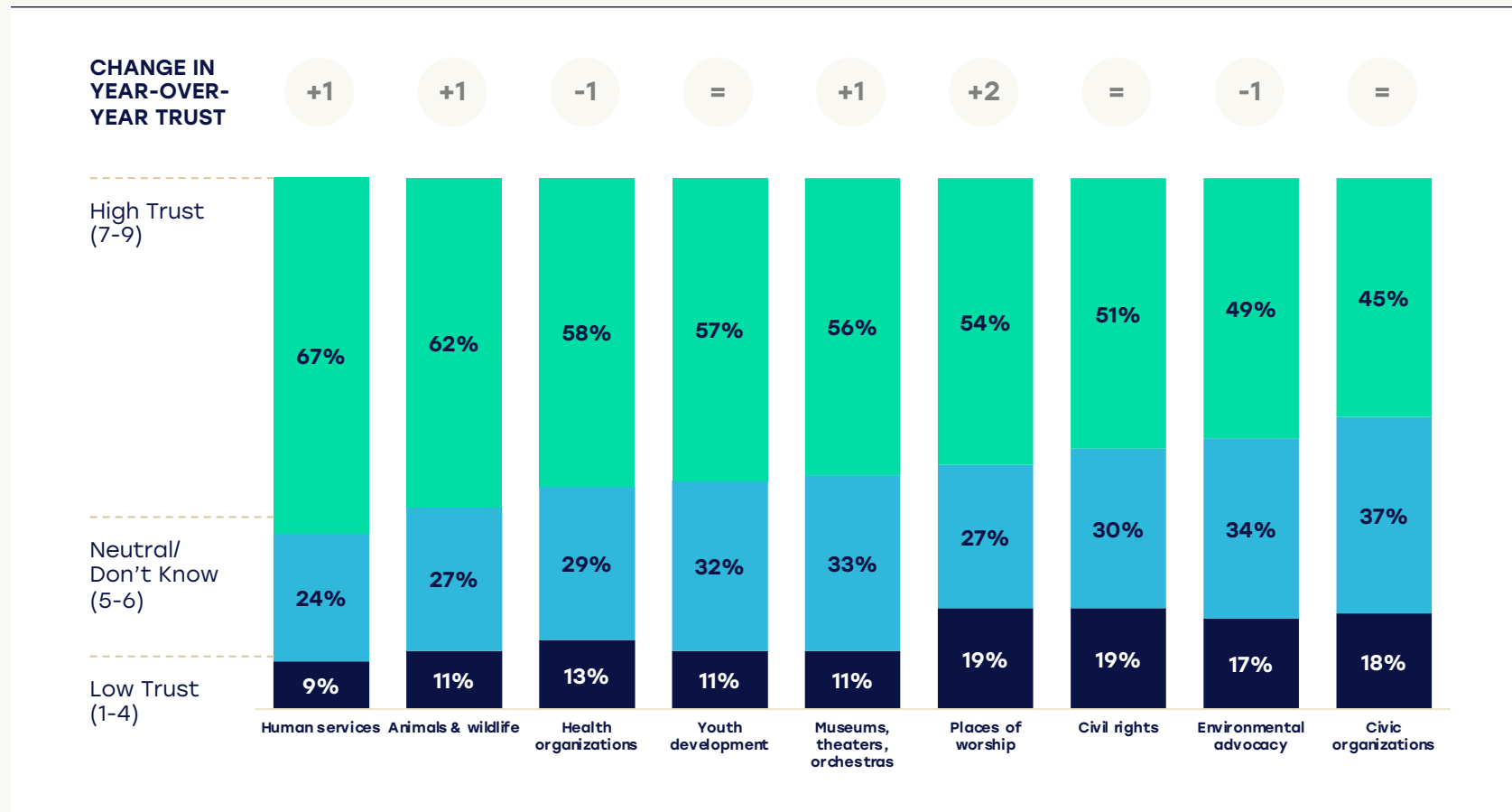
“How much do you trust X to do what is right?”

7–9
High Trust

5–6
Neutral

1–4
Low Trust

Trust has held steady across nonprofit subsectors; trust remains highest in human services, animals & wildlife organizations





Trust capital across philanthropy subsectors

Based on **overall trust on a 9-point scale**:

“How much do you trust X to do what is right?”

7–9

High Trust

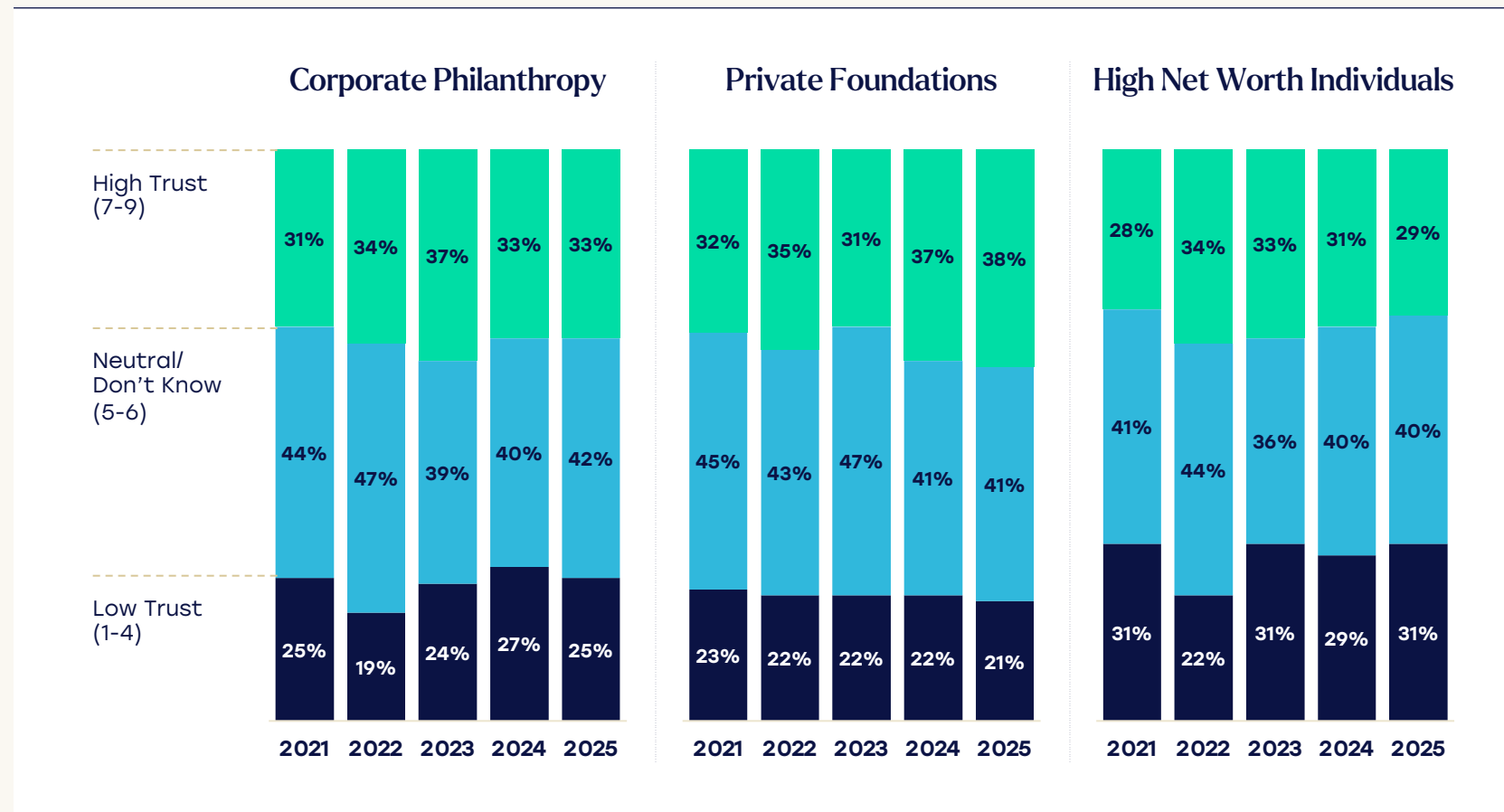
5–6

Neutral

1–4

Low Trust

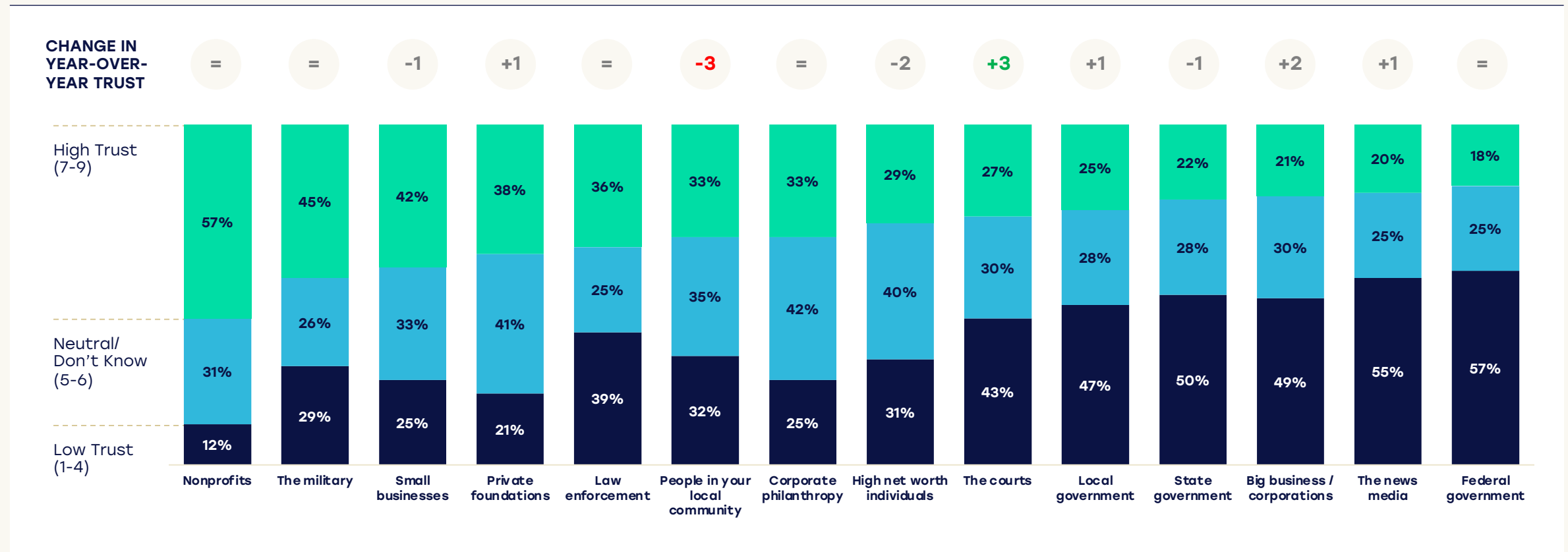
Multi-year philanthropy trends persist – trust in private foundations continues to build while eroding for high-net-worth giving





Across other major institutions, trust sees small fluctuations

Significant shifts were seen for the courts (increase) and people in one's local community (decrease)



Q12: How much do you trust nonprofit organizations to do what is right? Base Size n=3,000, Q18: How much do you trust corporate foundations to do what is right? Base Size: n=1001, Q22: How much do you trust private foundations to do what is right? Base Size: n=998, Q26: How much do you trust high net worth individuals engaged in philanthropy to do what is right? Base Size: n=1001, Q30: How much do you trust the following institutions to do what is right? Base Size n=3,000



TRUST IN NONPROFITS
AND PHILANTHROPY

Views of Institutional Competence and Ethics



Nonprofits are seen as more competent and ethical than other institutions

NONPROFIT COMPETENCE & ETHICS

Shown: % selected T2B Very/Extremely Competent/Ethical

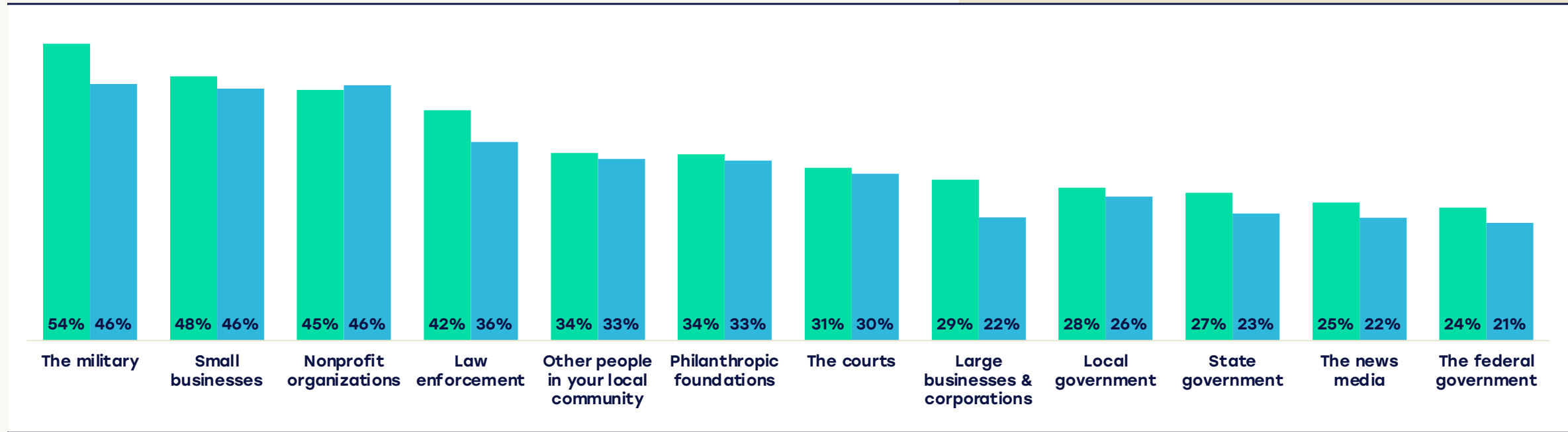
COMPETENT ETHICAL

Competent

the ability to effectively fulfill their responsibilities, make informed decisions, and meet the needs of the communities they serve

Ethical

the ability to operate with integrity, transparency, and a commitment to serve the public good





Organizational standards and accountability contribute to higher levels of perceived competence and ethics for nonprofits than other institutions



**Male, 36,
Republican**

I generally believe that nonprofits are ethical. Nonprofits at their core are meant to do good in the communities they serve and are usually guided by strong values. I'm also aware that nonprofits must meet standards established by our government which I hope would keep the majority of groups honest with how they are using donated funds."



**Male, 36,
Democrat**

I think they're mostly ethical because many of them have proof of the work they've done for the community and are readily able to publish figures or proof of what projects they've completed. They also fill out their information on Form 990 with the IRS that anyone can review."



**Male, 56,
Republican**

I believe that nonprofits are mostly competent, but some make poor choices because of greed. They have the ability to do what they say their goals are, but it is too easy to use loopholes to line their own pockets."



**Female, 38,
Democrat**

I do believe a lot of nonprofit organizations are competent. I think they really try to serve the communities and anticipate the community's needs. I have seen nonprofits that are local really trying to fill in the gaps in the communities."



TRUST IN NONPROFITS
AND PHILANTHROPY

High Net Worth Individuals



Trust in high-net-worth givers continues to fall, with a significant dip in perceptions they're trying hard to have a positive impact on society



29%

of respondents trust high net worth individuals engaged in philanthropy to do what is right

HIGH NET WORTH GIVERS: PERFORMANCE ON TRUST PILLARS

● AGREE

● NEUTRAL

● DISAGREE

CHANGE IN YEAR-OVER-YEAR TRUST

-2

-4

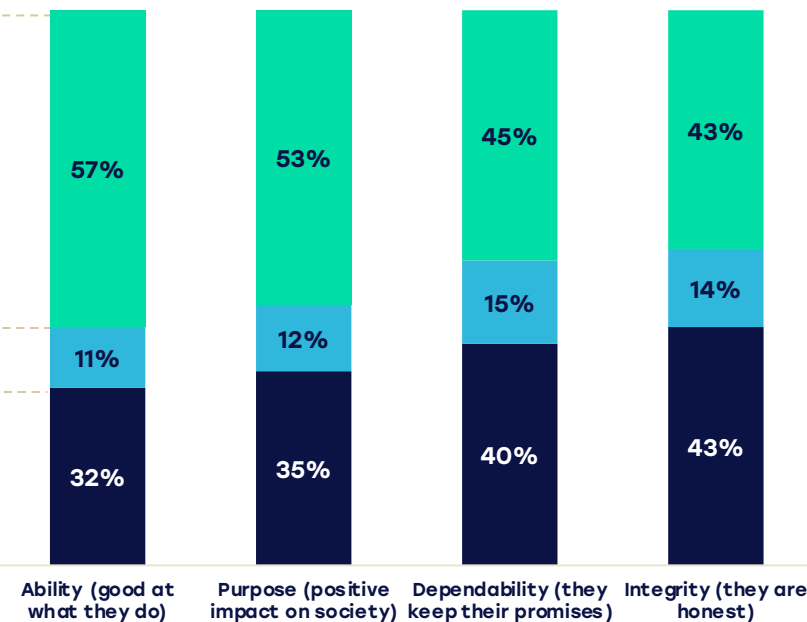
-1

=

High Trust (7-9)

Neutral/Don't Know (5-6)

Low Trust (1-4)





Americans question the role and influence high-net-worth individuals currently hold within nonprofits, philanthropy, and government

62%

believe they have too much influence on federal government policymaking

59%

feel that these individuals often have too much influence over the operations of the nonprofits they fund

58%

agree that they are more focused on their own interests than the public good



**Male, 45,
Republican**

I believe most engage in donations because of how it looks to their friends, family, and stockholders. Some additional motivators are hopefully the want to help people and the need to give back.”



**Female, 43,
Democrat**

I believe high net worth individuals donate their money, property and or assets to good causes because they receive a tax benefit at the end of the year. They donate to certain charities whom they feel strongly and passionate about. Some of these individuals are serious about helping those in need and some are solely about themselves and showing out to the publicity. Its all about reducing the taxes at the end of the day.”



Many believe high-net-worth individuals engage in philanthropy for tax write-offs or to boost their public image rather than for truly altruistic reasons



**Male, 31,
Democrat**

I think most people that engage in philanthropy are doing it for the wrong reason. Getting the tax write off will help with their tax earnings.”



**Female, 26,
Democrat**

I don't generally hear about high net worth individuals using their money/property/assets for causes that benefit others without gain in return from it. I know that money changes people, and it can make people make uglier choices so they can make sure they can keep their wealth.”



**Female, 54,
Republican**

I think that they WANT to do the right thing and probably THINK they are doing the right thing but sometimes, when you get that far removed from the common people, how they see things doesn't always match the reality of everyday people so maybe some of their loftier aspirations are a little misguided.”



**Male, 28,
Republican**

High net worth individuals can be trusted however donating does not always come with no strings attached. Usually there is a deeper meaning for these donations therefore I do not fully trust them to do things out of heart. Donations can catapult them into a higher goal they have or a more intricate plan to become bigger or have more power.”



**Male, 61,
Democrat**

They can donate all they want. But claiming it on tax's and paying a smaller percentage than regular people is not right. A lot of them use their nonprofits for travel and meals and the nonprofit pays because they had a meeting about the nonprofit while on vacation or such.”



**Male, 24,
Republican**

Donations in government, donating to a candidates personal fund. These practices have always been seen as shady and it takes away power from the people and placing a few at the top to be the voice for everyone else.”



TRUST IN NONPROFITS
AND PHILANTHROPY

Government and the Nonprofit Sector

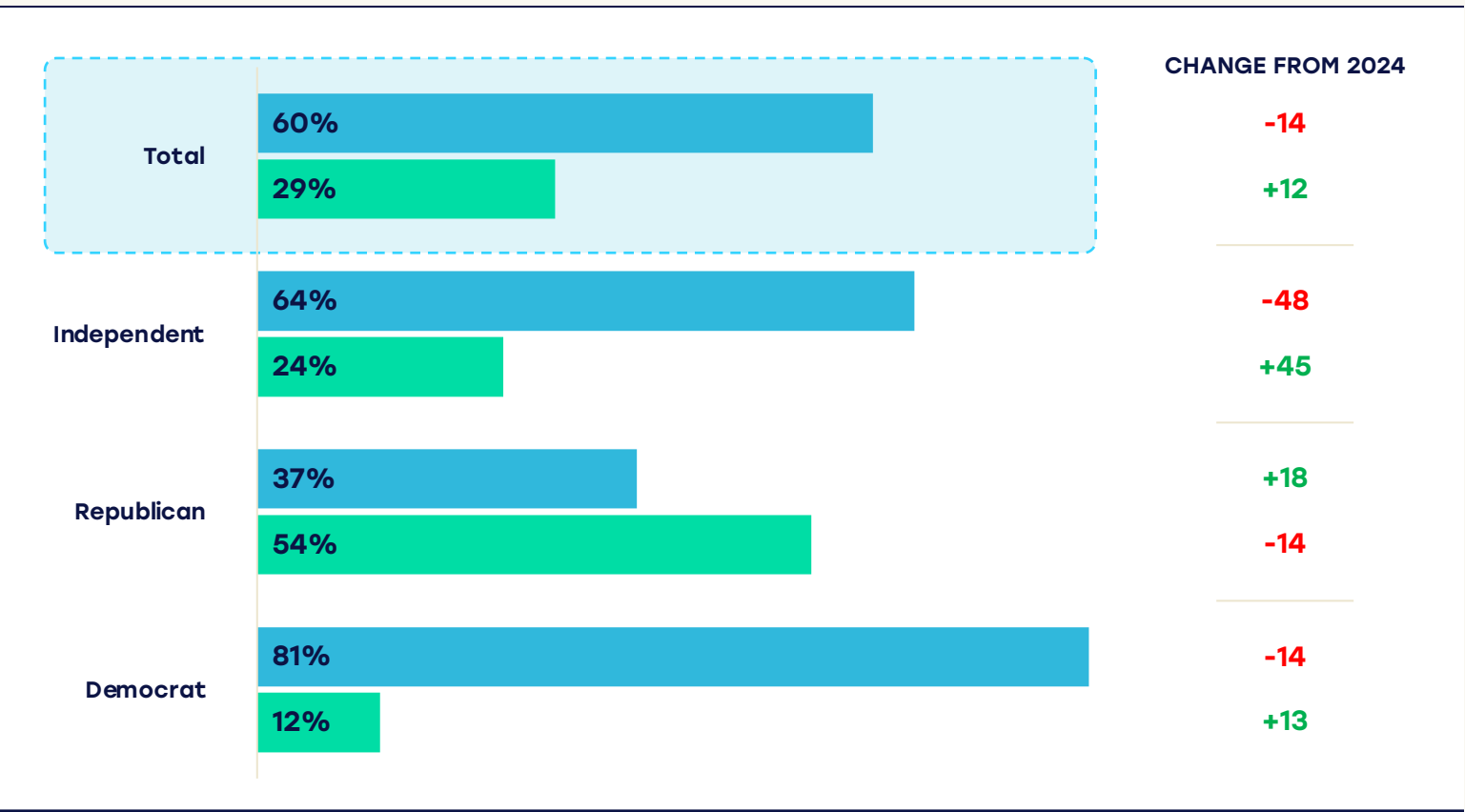


Americans overall remain worried about the current direction of the country – though republicans have become markedly more hopeful since the election

PERCEPTIONS OF THE CURRENT DIRECTION OF THE US

Shown: % selected T3B Hopeful/B3B Worried

HOPEFUL WORRIED





Americans believe nonprofits are, on balance, working to heal national divisions rather than exacerbate them

44%

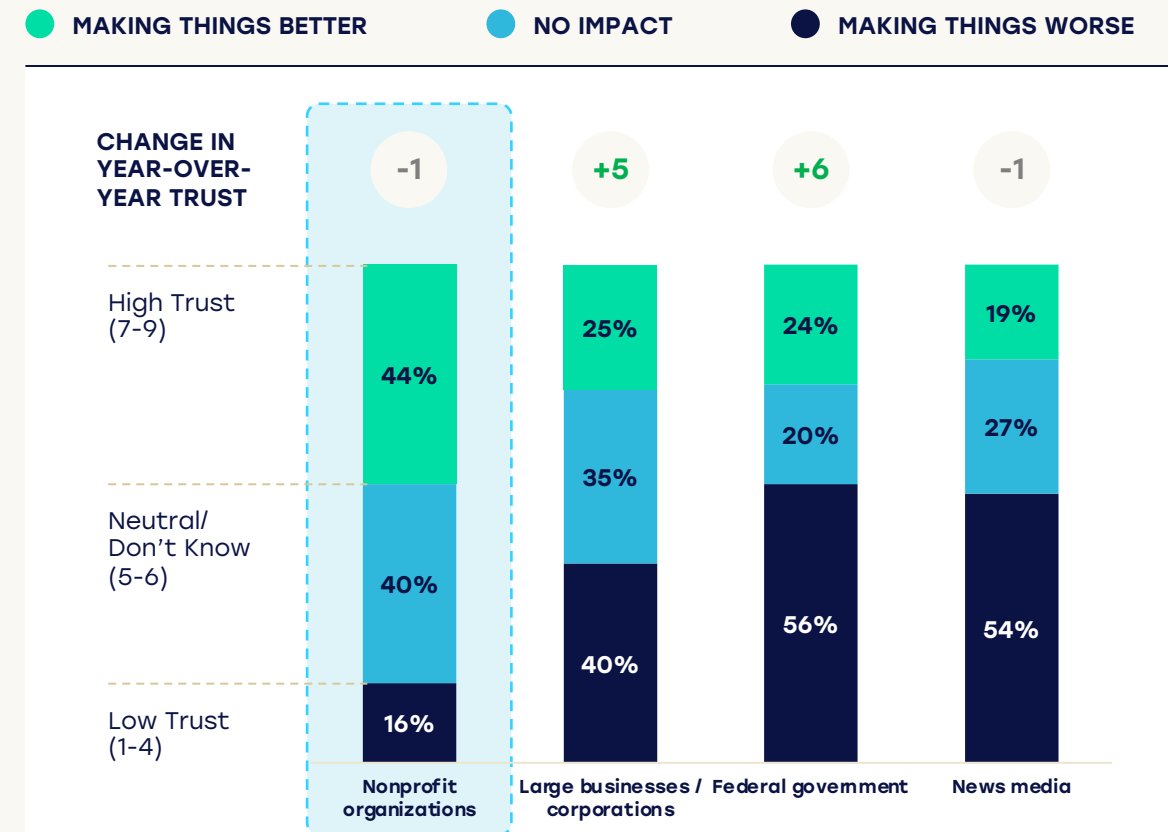
Say nonprofit organizations are making things better in America today

56%

Say the federal government is making things worse in America today

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONS ON NATIONAL DIVISIONS

Shown: % Selected Net: Somewhat/Much Better; No Impact; Net: Somewhat/Much Worse

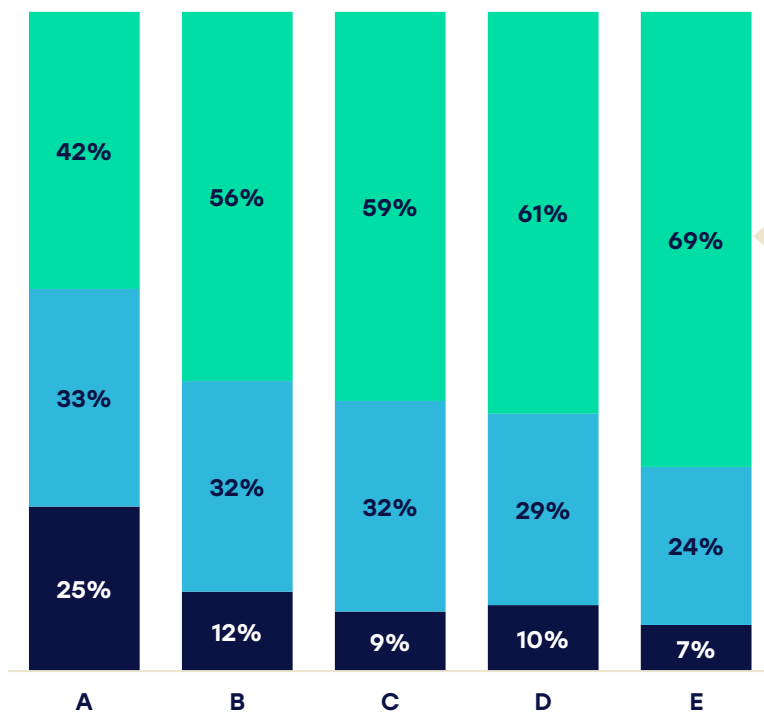




RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

Shown: % selected T2B Strongly Agree

DISAGREE NEUTRAL/DON'T KNOW AGREE



There's high agreement across the political spectrum that nonprofits and government **have to work together**

A

The federal government is more effective at making change than the nonprofit sector.

B

Government funding and support is essential for a healthy nonprofit sector.

C

The federal government and the nonprofit sector often have conflicting priorities.

D

The nonprofit sector is held more accountable by communities than the federal government.

E

They must work together to address societal issues.

The public believes government and the nonprofit sector should work together to address societal issues – but worry these institutions have conflicting priorities



Nonprofits are expected to “fill the gap” between communities’ needs and existing government support – but many Americans are skeptical of nonprofit engagement with politicians and political leaders

NONPROFIT SUPPORT

Shown: % selected T2B Strongly Agree

58%

Nonprofits should assist individuals and communities who may not have access to government assistance

45%

Nonprofits should collaborate with political leaders on events or initiatives that address community needs





Distrust of partisan politics colors public perception of nonprofit advocacy, with few trusting nonprofits to remain politically neutral, especially during elections

● HIGH TRUST ● NEUTRAL/DON'T KNOW ● LOW TRUST



23%

of respondents trust nonprofits to avoid partisan politics



**Male, 32,
Democrat**

I think with as fairly divided as our political parties are nowadays it's virtually impossible to stay completely neutral. Some things just have to sway one side or another since there is little to no agreeing between the 2 sides."



**Male, 36,
Republican**

I'd say that I generally trust nonprofit organizations to remain neutral politically during elections but the organizations themselves can be viewed as leaning left or right based on what the principles of the organization."



**Female, 26,
Democrat**

A lot of politically charged issues can be linked to certain political parties. A nonprofit working towards protecting state parks will probably be viewed more democratically if there are republican candidates working to begin mining in those state parks."



Many want maximum separation between the nonprofit sector and electoral politics; hearing about provisions of the Johnson Amendment increased trust in nonprofits, while hearing about congressional efforts to repeal it decreased trust



**Female, 54,
Republican**

My biggest concern would be that it would open them up to corruption - that they would be more likely to accept monetary donations or favors in return for endorsements. They would no longer be doing what is right, they would be doing what is more financially expedient."



**Female, 73,
Republican**

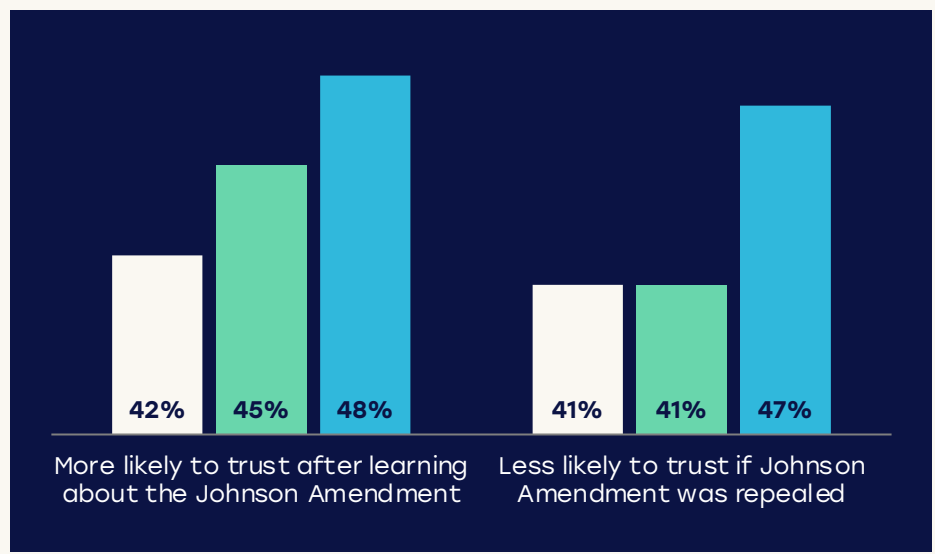
These nonprofit organizations would greatly influence the way people think and vote. If someone was providing you with food or money you would not want to disappoint them. So you would support whatever they say."



**Female, 26,
Democrat**

If a nonprofit I support were to start endorsing a candidate I don't support, that would be very upsetting. I wouldn't necessarily trust their mission statements or actions as much."

☐ TOTAL ☒ CONSERVATIVE ☒ LIBERAL



Q37a: For the past 70 years, the U.S. Tax Code has prohibited charitable organizations, including churches, youth development programs, and food pantries from either endorsing or opposing political candidates. This is called the Johnson Amendment. Thinking about the nonprofit sector, does this longstanding rule make you more or less likely to trust the nonprofit sector?, Q37b: Recently, some elected officials have proposed changing the Johnson Amendment to allow churches and charitable organizations to endorse political candidates. If Congress repealed the Johnson Amendment, would you be more or less likely to trust the nonprofit sector? Base Sizes: General Population n=3000, Liberal n=863, Conservative n=892, Quotes are sourced from the April 2025 Qualitative Board discussion

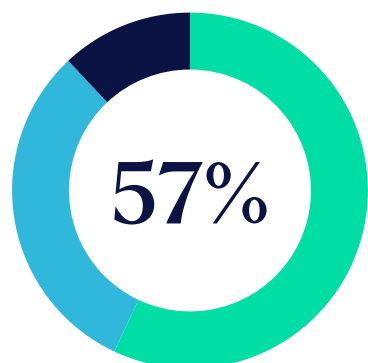


Trust in nonprofits falls when the public hears the sector receives a significant portion of its funding from government sources

● HIGH TRUST ● NEUTRAL/DON'T KNOW ● LOW TRUST

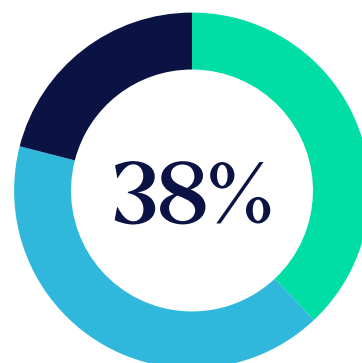
BASELINE NONPROFIT TRUST

Shown: % Selected



NONPROFIT TRUST AFTER GOVERNMENT FUNDING INFORMATION IS SHARED

Shown: % Selected



**Male, 56,
Democrat**

I believe most nonprofits gladly accept government sources of funding given how difficult raising funds can be. In the past, I wouldn't have suspected any undue influence from the government. But now? This current administration is interfering everywhere."



**Male, 56,
Republican**

It (government funding) makes me less confident in a nonprofit. A person donating a hundred dollars expects that money to go toward the organization's goals. The federal government giving millions of dollars probably expects to have that money spent in a way that helps their own agenda."



**Male, 24,
Republican**

I believe most nonprofits want to stay true to their mission, but it's hard because the cost of going against what the federal government wants would be funding, jobs, or even the existence of the organization as a whole."



There is a tension between the public's desire for transparency into how nonprofits are funded and the negative impact this knowledge may have on trust in the sector

While
57%

of participants would be more likely to trust a nonprofit organization if they disclosed their funding sources in detail

Only
24%

of participants are very/ extremely confident in nonprofits' ability to remain true to their mission despite government funding



**Female, 26,
Democrat**

I would be more likely to trust them if they disclosed their funding sources in detail. Transparency builds trust the same way that honesty does.”



**Male, 36,
Republican**

Yes, I would be more likely to trust a nonprofit organization to serve its community if it disclosed its funding sources in detail because I feel the transparency provided with these numbers would help build trust among community members.”



**Male, 45,
Republican**

I would be more likely to trust There is no way these nonprofits can remain true to their mission because all of this funding has to remain constant, and if they make decisions that these agencies don't like they will cut the funding off, putting their staff and organization at risk for closure.”



**Male, 61,
Republican**

I truly believe they try hard to maintain their ideals, but in the real world you have to be mindful of where the money comes from and to ensure it continues.”



Despite concerns about undue influence, there is broad recognition that losing federal funding would negatively impact local communities and hinder nonprofits' effectiveness



68%

believe that nonprofits losing federal funding would have a negative impact on local communities



Male, 27,
Republican

If non-profit organizations lost federal government funding, I believe it would have a big impact on local communities. Local communities (especially small) rely heavily on funding from the government, whether it be state or federal.”



Female, 26,
Democrat

I think it could be devastating for some communities. There are so many nonprofit organizations that provide resources to families that don't have other options. If they can't uphold their mission as a result of lack of funds, that could cause the community to crumble and people would suffer.”

NONPROFIT PERCEPTIONS

Shown: % selected 'Agree'

59%

agree the federal government and nonprofit sector often have conflicting priorities

58%

agree nonprofits are more effective at making change than the federal government



TRUST IN NONPROFITS
AND PHILANTHROPY

Demographic Cuts: Nonprofit & Philanthropy Trust



NONPROFITS

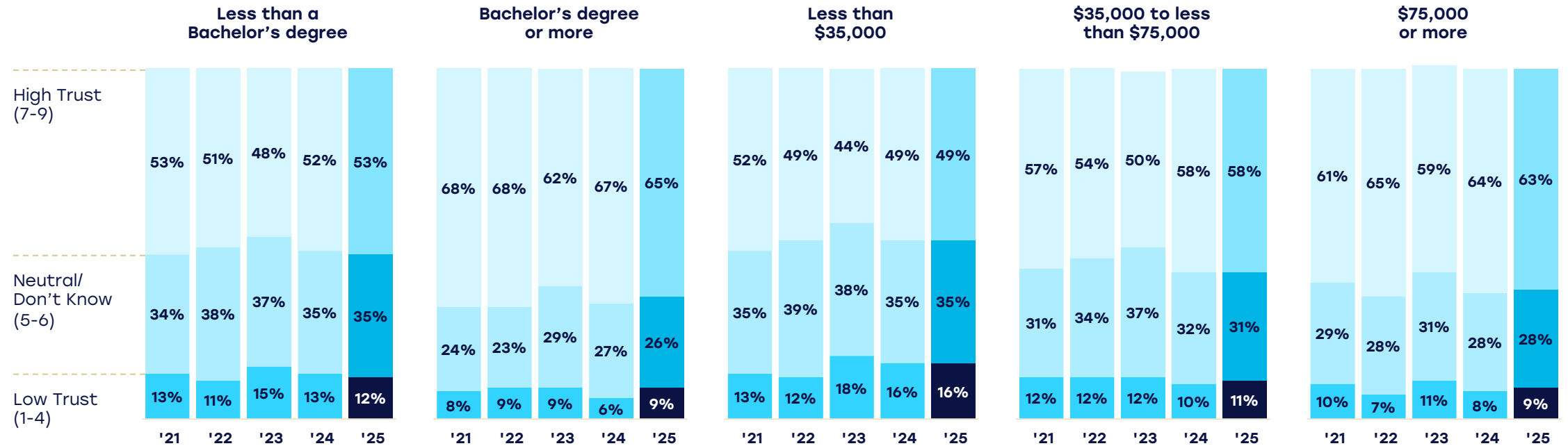
Income & Education

● LIGHTER COLORS INDICATE 2021 - 2024

● DARKER COLORS INDICATE 2025

Education

Household Income





PHILANTHROPY

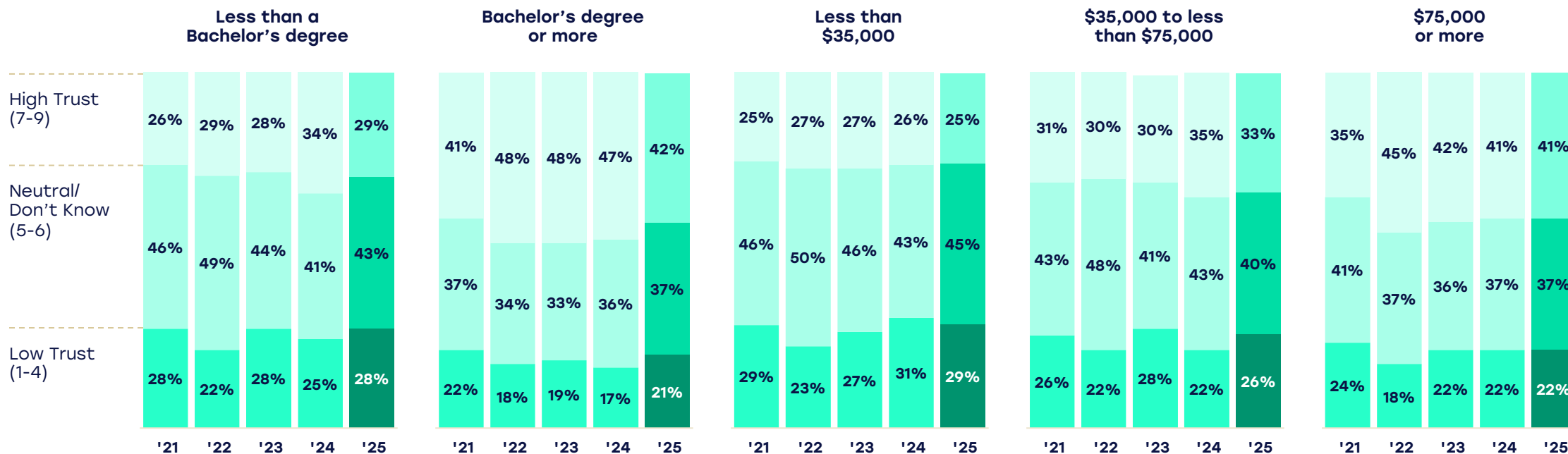
Income & Education

● LIGHTER COLORS INDICATE 2021 - 2024

● DARKER COLORS INDICATE 2025

Education

Household Income

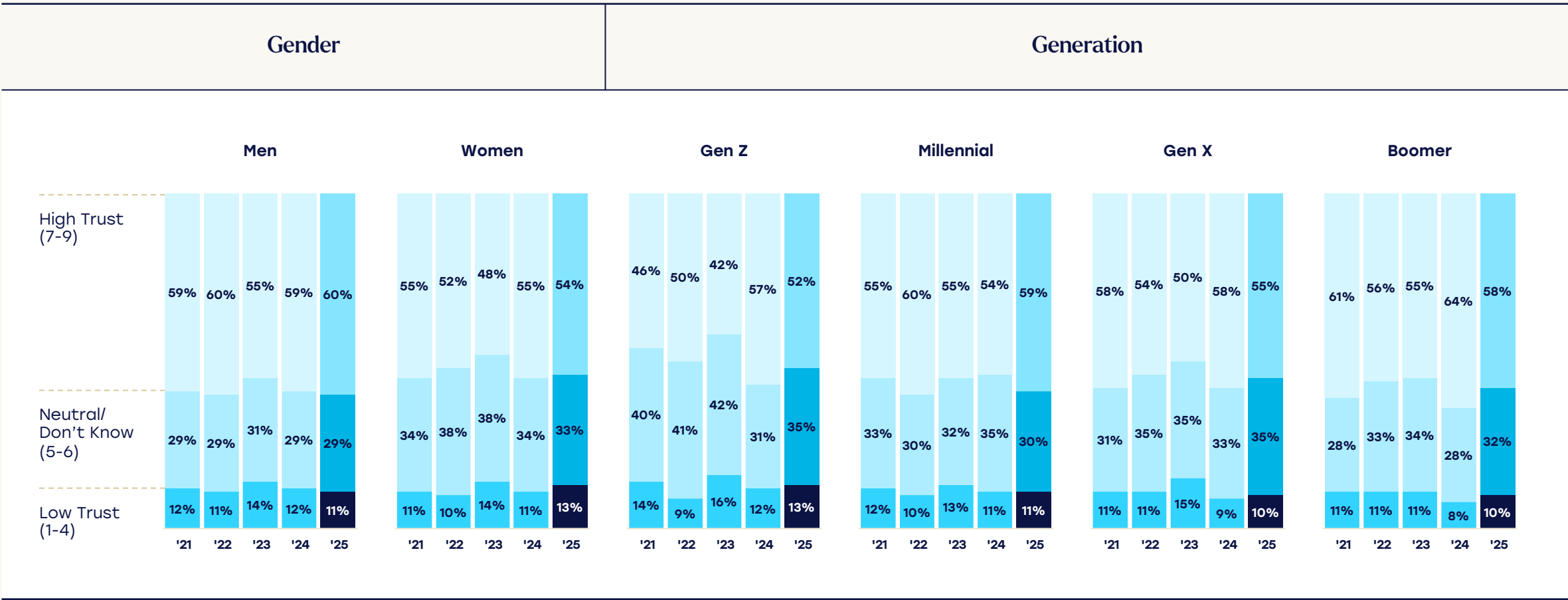




NONPROFITS

Gender & Generation

● LIGHTER COLORS INDICATE 2021 - 2024 ● DARKER COLORS INDICATE 2025



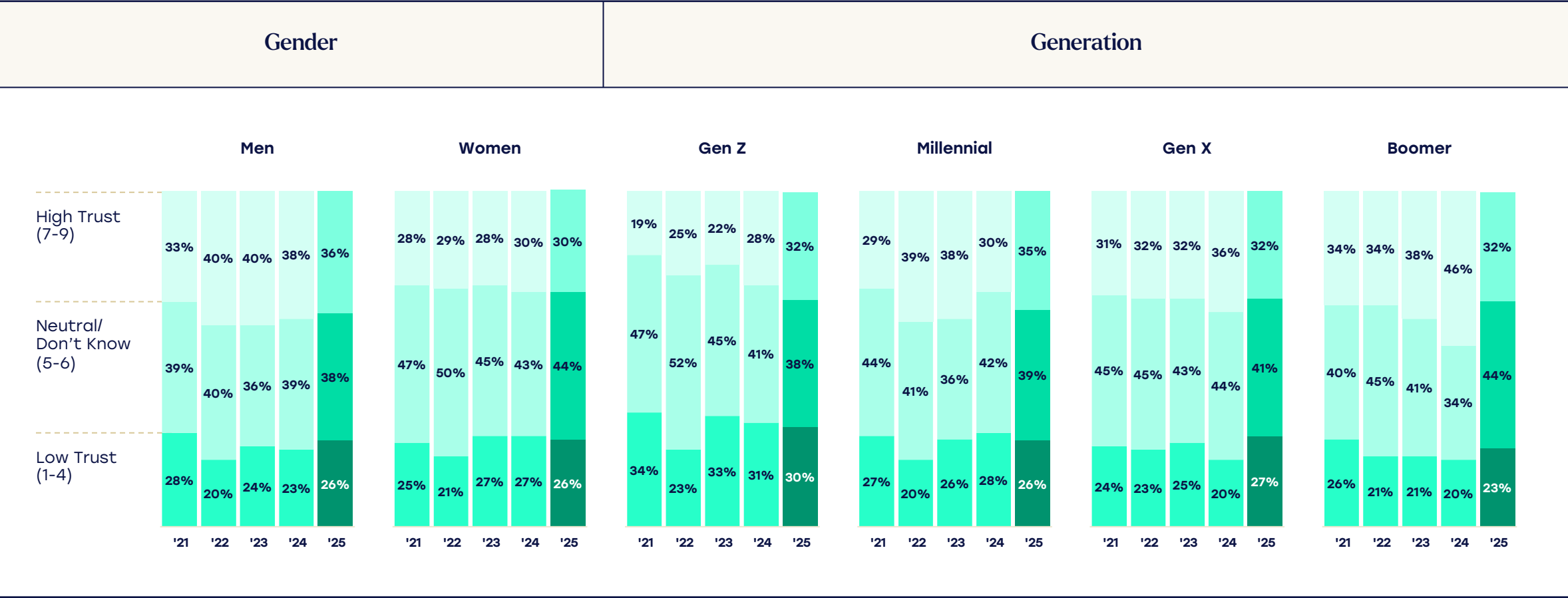


PHILANTHROPY

Gender & Generation

LIGHTER COLORS INDICATE 2021 - 2024

DARKER COLORS INDICATE 2025





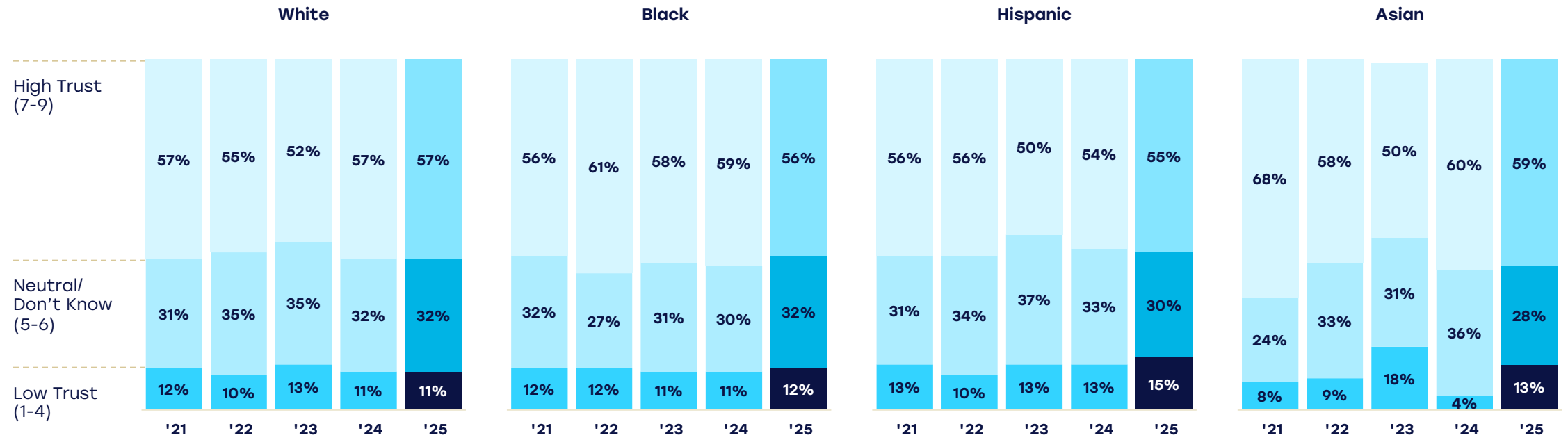
NONPROFITS

Ethnicity

LIGHTER COLORS INDICATE 2021 - 2024

DARKER COLORS INDICATE 2025

Ethnicity





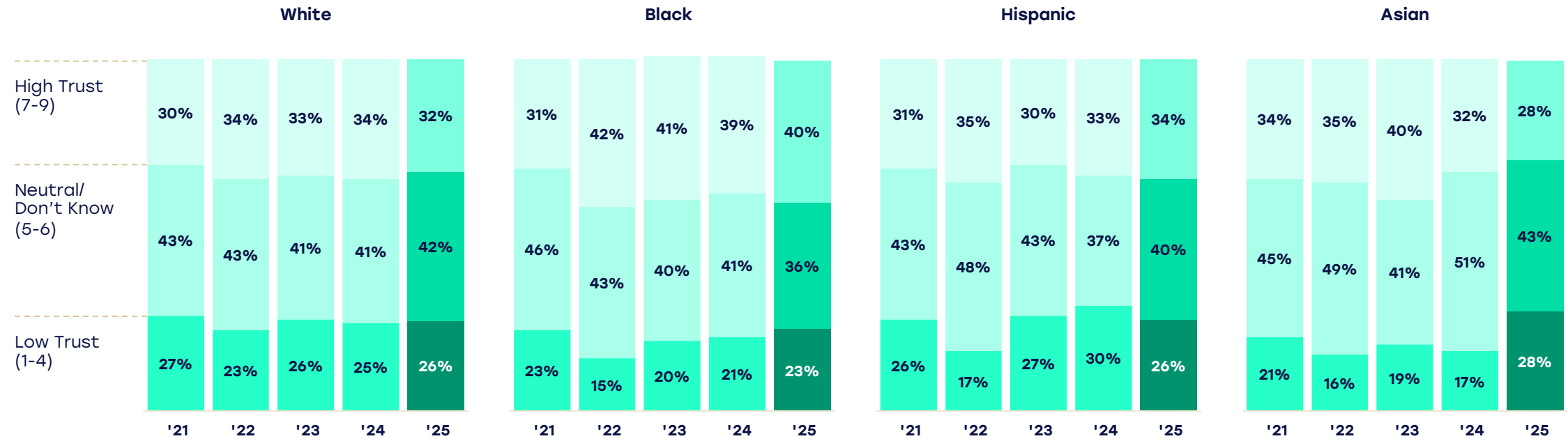
PHILANTHROPY

Ethnicity

LIGHTER COLORS INDICATE 2021 - 2024

DARKER COLORS INDICATE 2025

Ethnicity





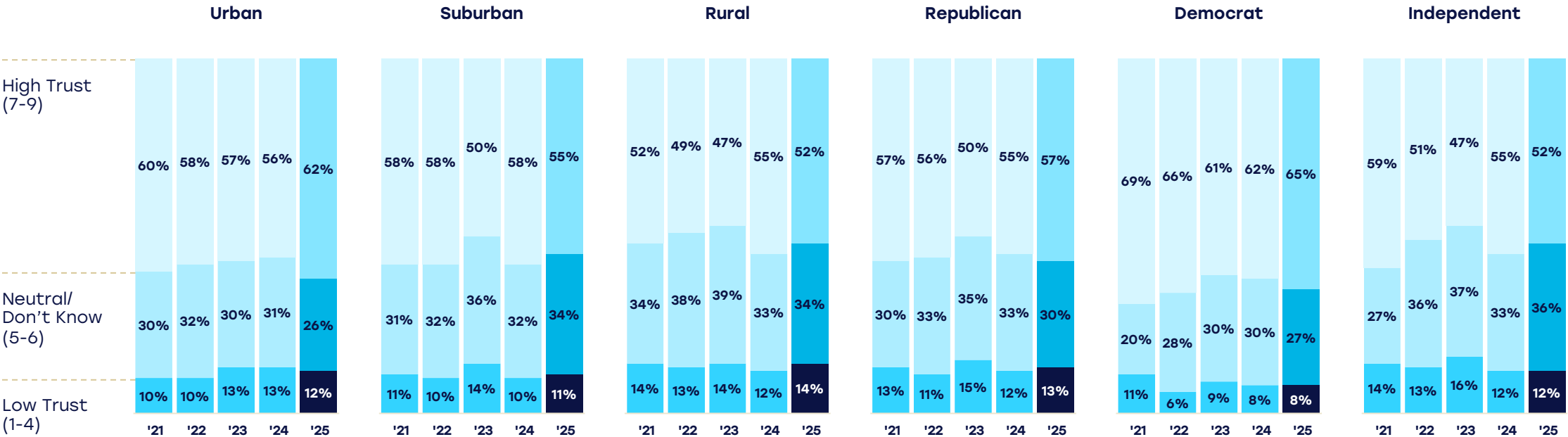
NONPROFITS

Urbanicity & Party ID

● LIGHTER COLORS INDICATE 2021 - 2024 ● DARKER COLORS INDICATE 2025

Urbanicity

Political Affiliation



Q12: How much do you trust nonprofit organizations to do what is right? Nonprofit 2020 Base Size n=3,000, 2021 n=5,000, 2022 n=3,015, 2023 n=3000, 2024 n=3000, 2025 n=3,000



PHILANTHROPY

Urbanicity & Party ID



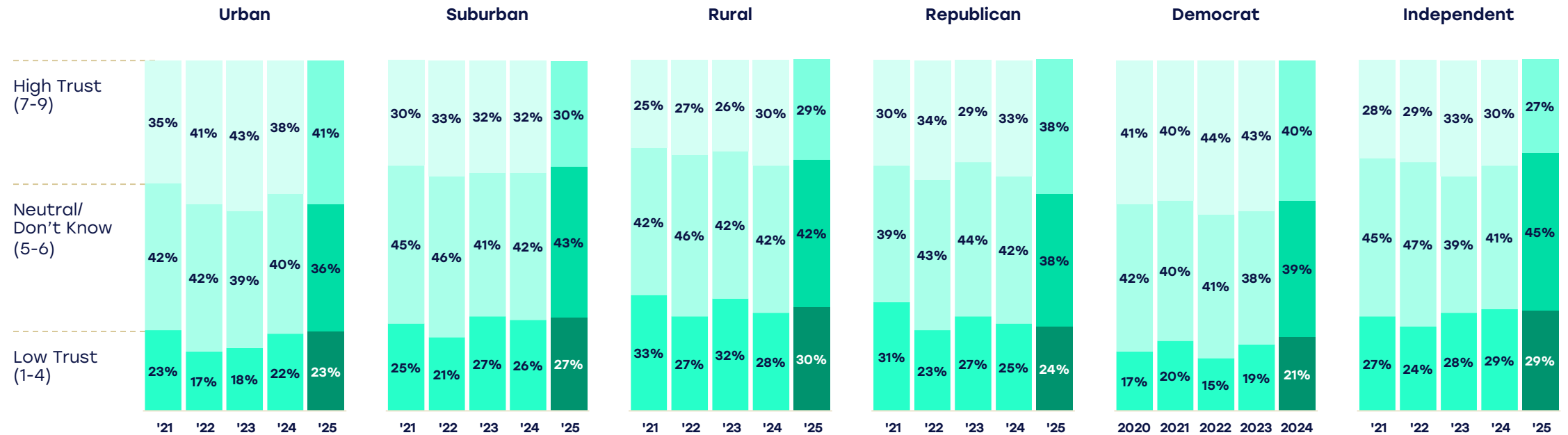
LIGHTER COLORS INDICATE 2021 - 2024



DARKER COLORS INDICATE 2025

Urbanicity

Political Affiliation





NONPROFITS

High-education, high-income, and liberal Americans continue to report higher than average trust in nonprofit organizations

NONPROFITS

% - AGE POINT DIFFERENCE FROM AVERAGE

College-educated

+8

Democrat voter

+8

Liberal politics

+6

HHI \$75k+

+6

Men

+3

Asian American

+2

Millennials

+2

Conservative politics

+1

GENERAL POPULATION TRUST

57%

Gen X

-2

Hispanic American

-2

Women

-3

Less than college education

-4

HHI <\$35k

-8

Apolitical / other politics

-15



[INDEPENDENTSECTOR.ORG](https://www.independentsector.org)

