

# 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service

CSDI

Center for the Study of  
Democratic Institutions



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

August 2014 - December 2014

David E. Lewis & Mark D. Richardson, Co-Directors

July 16, 2015

3,551 federal executives in the United States

MoE: +/- 1.8 percentage points

**Note:** Reported sample sizes were updated to give the weighted sample size on 02/14/2017. A sample weight could not be constructed for four respondents. Therefore, the weighted sample size is one to four respondents fewer than the unweighted sample size depending on whether the question was asked of the full sample or a random subset. Reported percentages were based on the weighted sample and, therefore, unaffected. See the Topline Results and SFGS Methodology documents for additional explanation.

# Overview

- Why this survey?
- Survey details
- Workforce skills
  - Recruitment
  - Retention
  - Promotion
  - Dismissal
- Recommendations



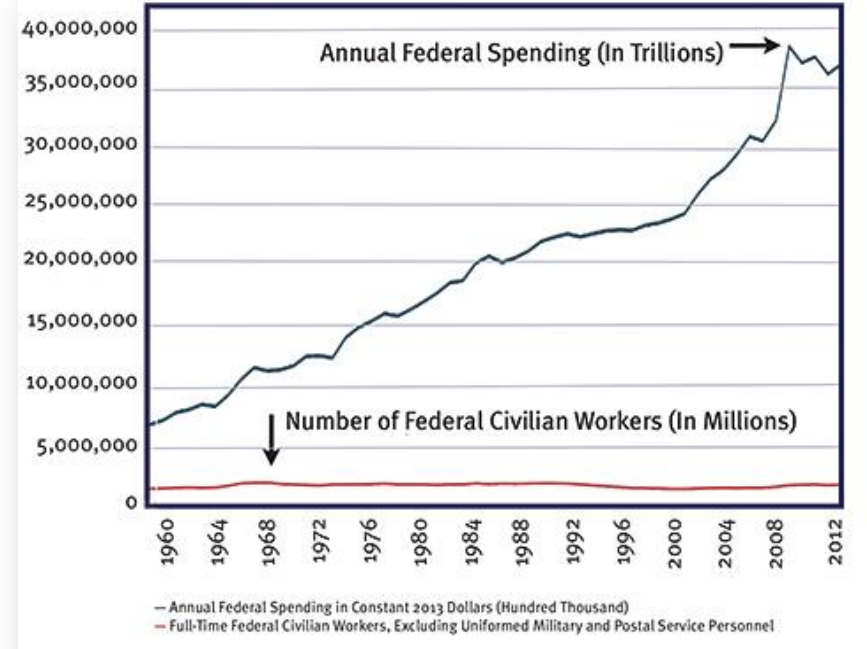
# Importance of the Survey

- *Biased perception:* Visible failures driving perceptions of the public service
- *Big picture:* Civil service reform efforts should take a broad look at health of system with hard data
- *Quality:* Republicans and Democrats disagree about what government should do but not that it should do it well



# Importance of the Survey

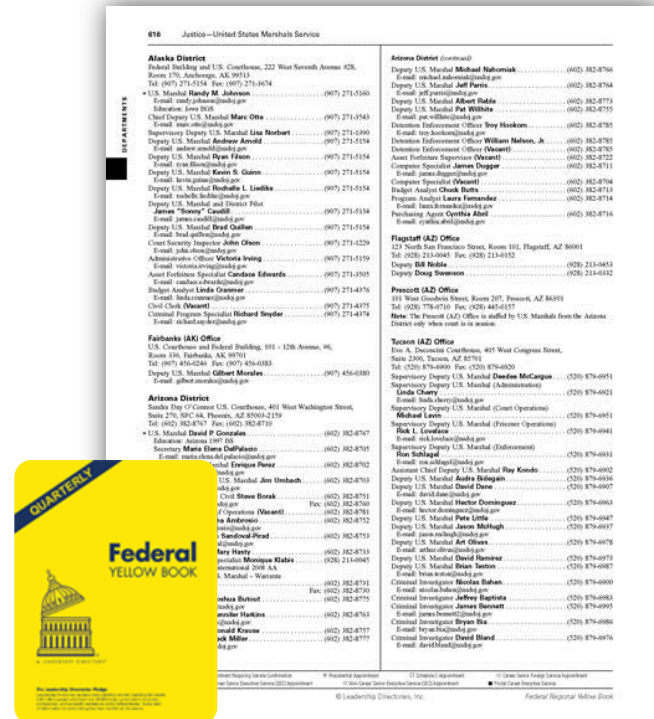
- *Biased perception*: Visible failures driving perceptions of the public service
- *Big picture*: Civil service reform efforts should take a broad look at health of system with hard data
- *Quality*: Republicans and Democrats disagree about what government should do but not that it should do it well



Source: Diulio 2014

# Survey Details

- Target population: U.S. Federal executives across executive establishment
- Sponsors: Vanderbilt and Princeton Universities with the help of the Volcker Alliance and Princeton Survey Research Center
- Response rate of 24% (3,551 of 14,698)
  - Margin of error for full sample is +/- 1.8%



Constructed sample using the *Federal Yellow Book*, published by Leadership Directories, Inc.

# Key Findings

*The federal personnel system is under stress*

- 39% of federal executives report that an inadequately skilled workforce is a significant obstacle to their agency fulfilling its core mission

*Some agencies are doing well and others are really struggling*

- In certain agencies many executives report inadequate workforce skills to be a problem (e.g., 66%); in others many do not (e.g., 91%)

## Recruitment

- 42% of federal executives report they cannot recruit the best employees
- Only 55% of eligible respondents want to join the SES or become a Senior Professional

## Retention

- 24% of career executives report they are “likely” or “very likely” to leave their agency within one year
- 33% of executives report they cannot retain the best employees

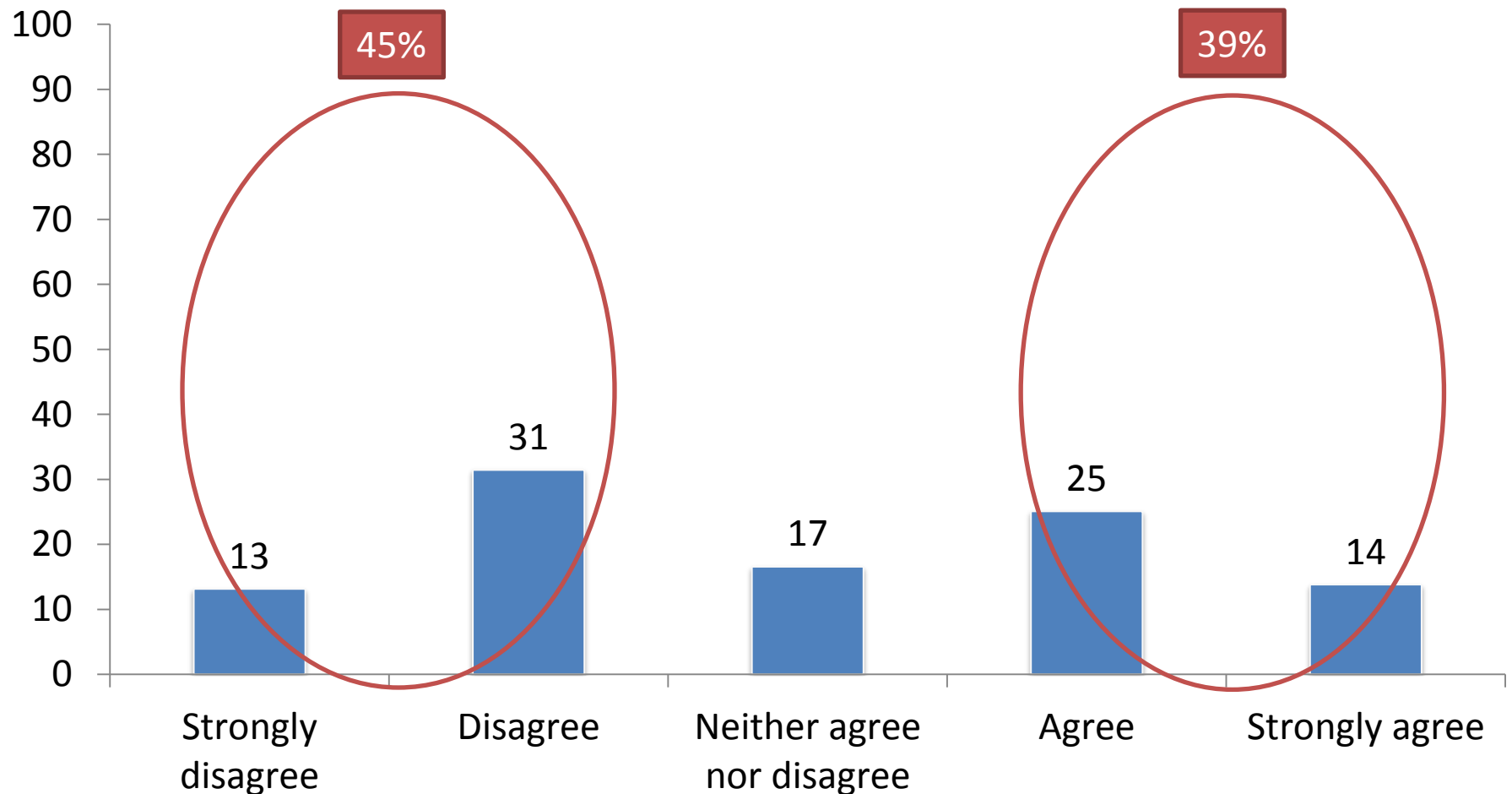
## Promotion

- 40% of executives report that performance and ability are the only factor in promotions of non-managers

## Dismissal

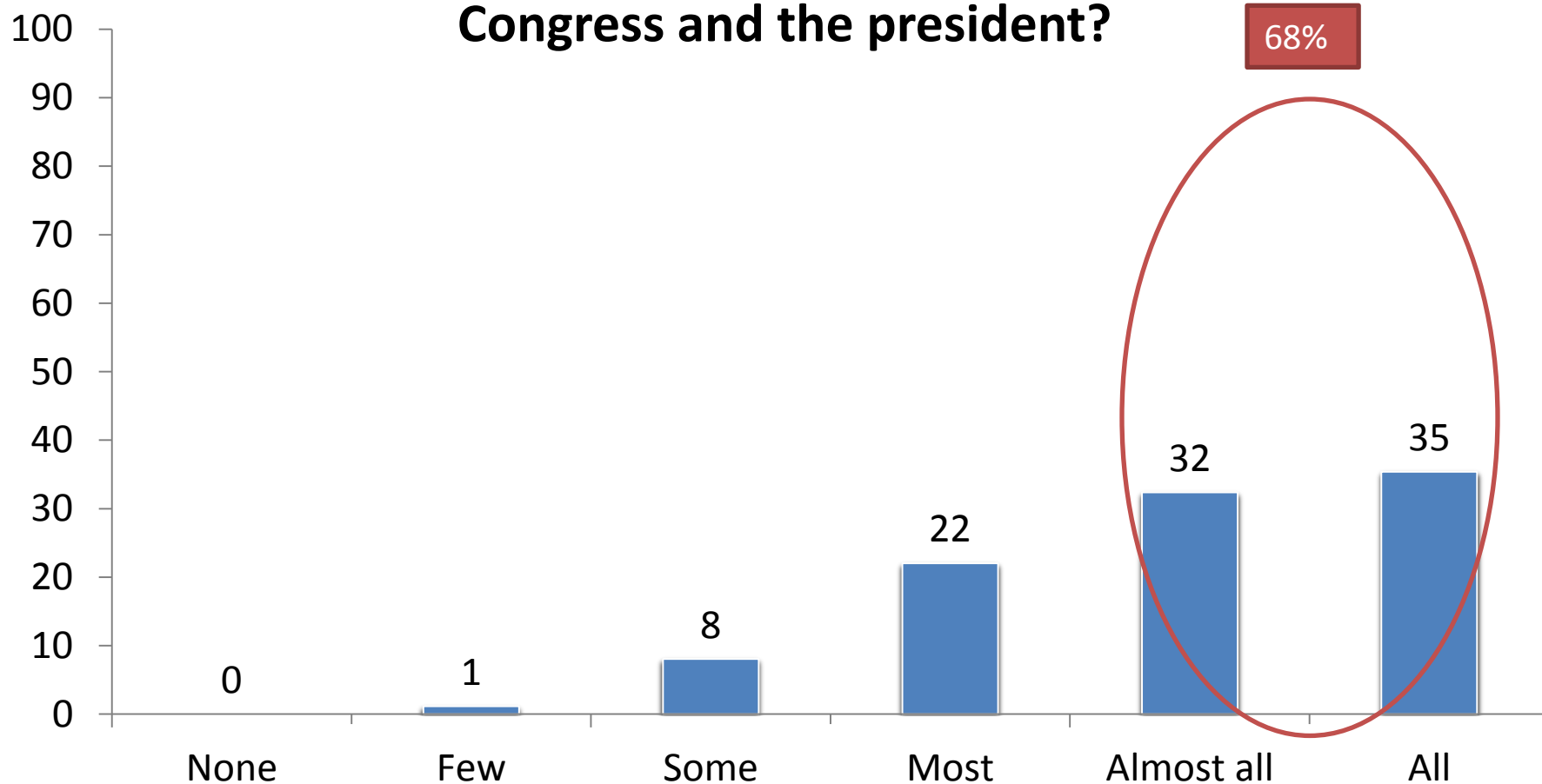
- 70% of executives report that under-performing non-managers are “rarely or never” reassigned or dismissed

# An inadequately skilled workforce is a significant obstacle to [my agency] fulfilling its core mission



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,674; MoE: +/-2.6%

# Does [your agency] have the skills necessary to implement effectively the core tasks given it by Congress and the president?



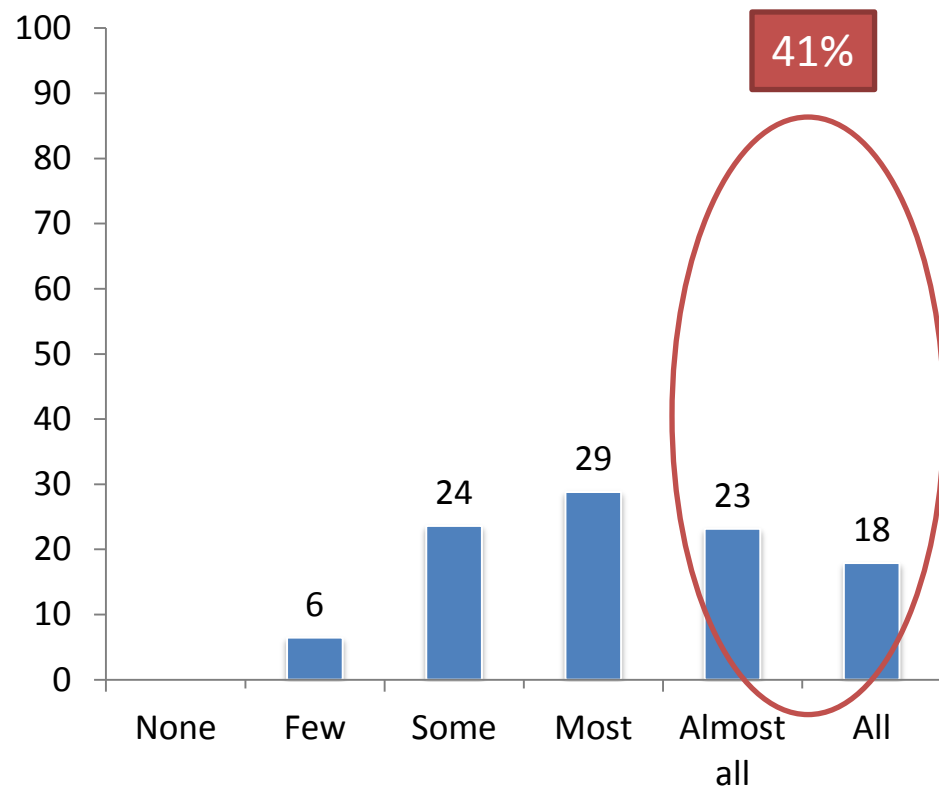
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=2,451; MoE: +/-2.1%



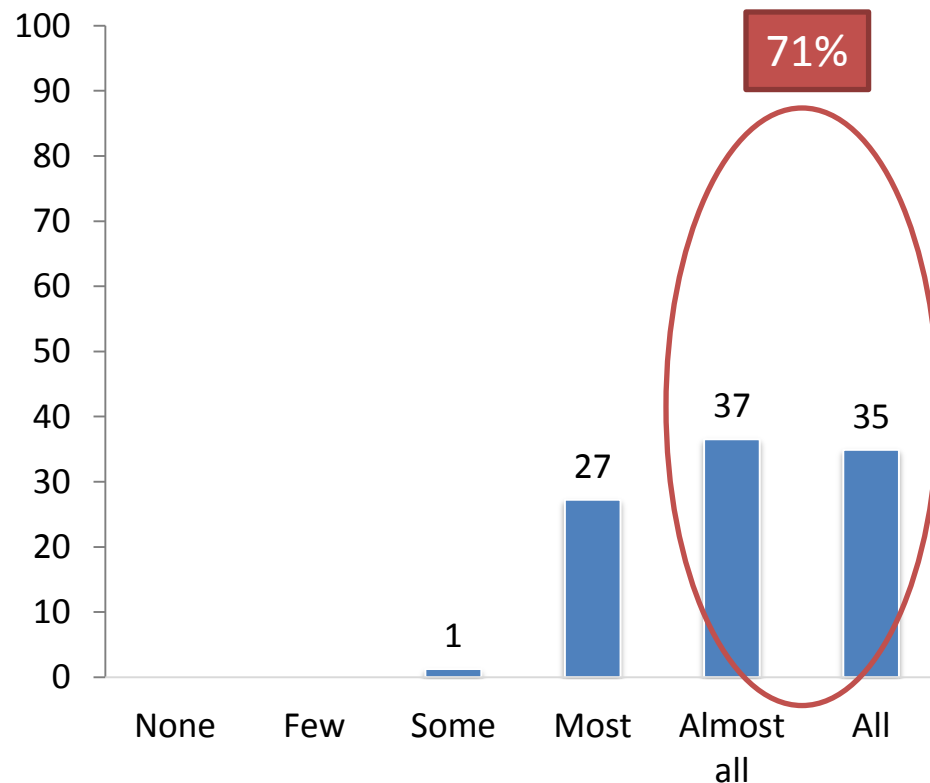
# Does [your agency] have the skills necessary to implement effectively the core tasks given it by Congress and the president?

## [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

Example 1

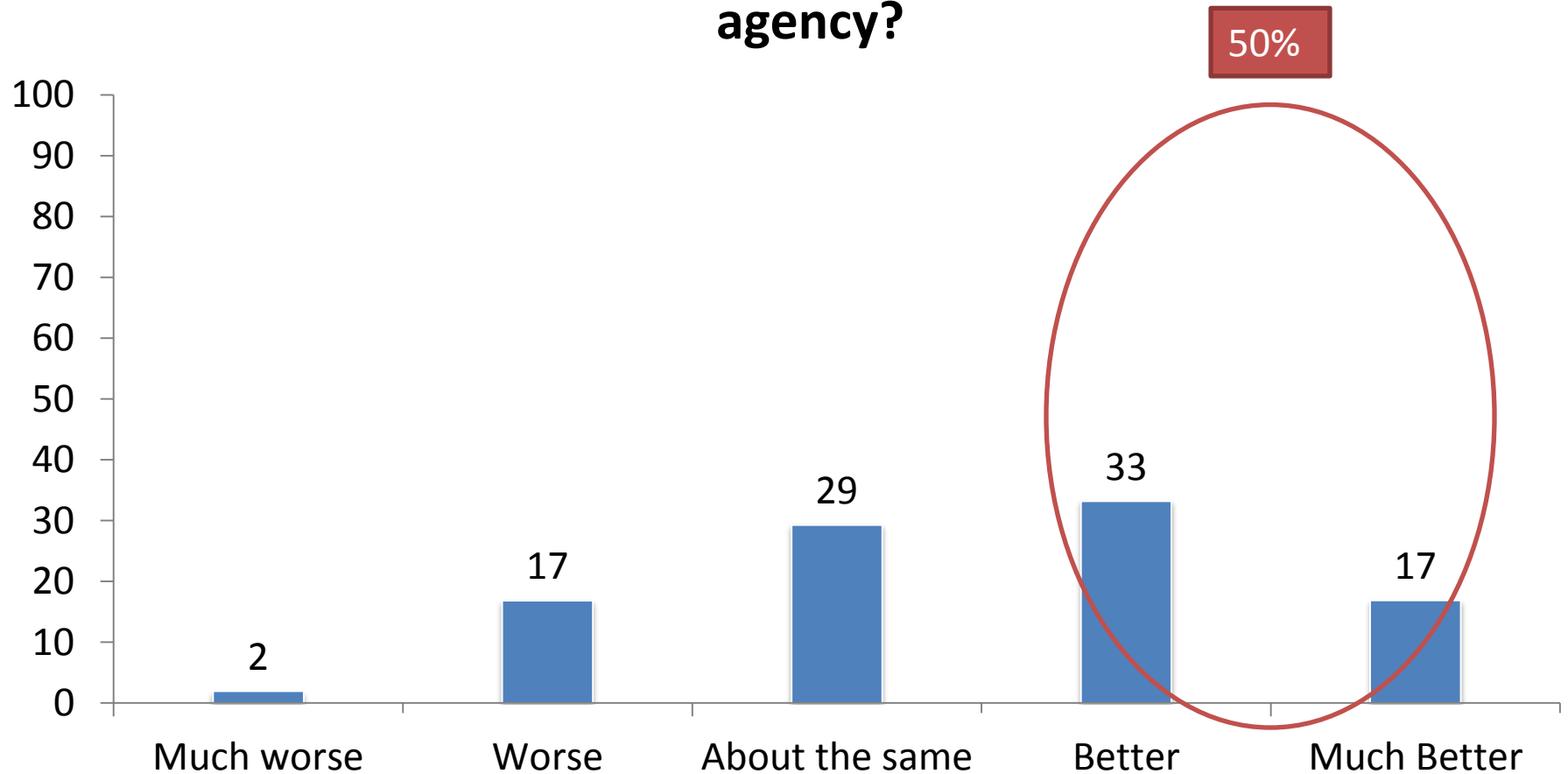


Example 2



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=2,451; MoE: +/-2.1%

# Have the skills of [your agency] worsened, improved, or stayed about the same during your time in the agency?

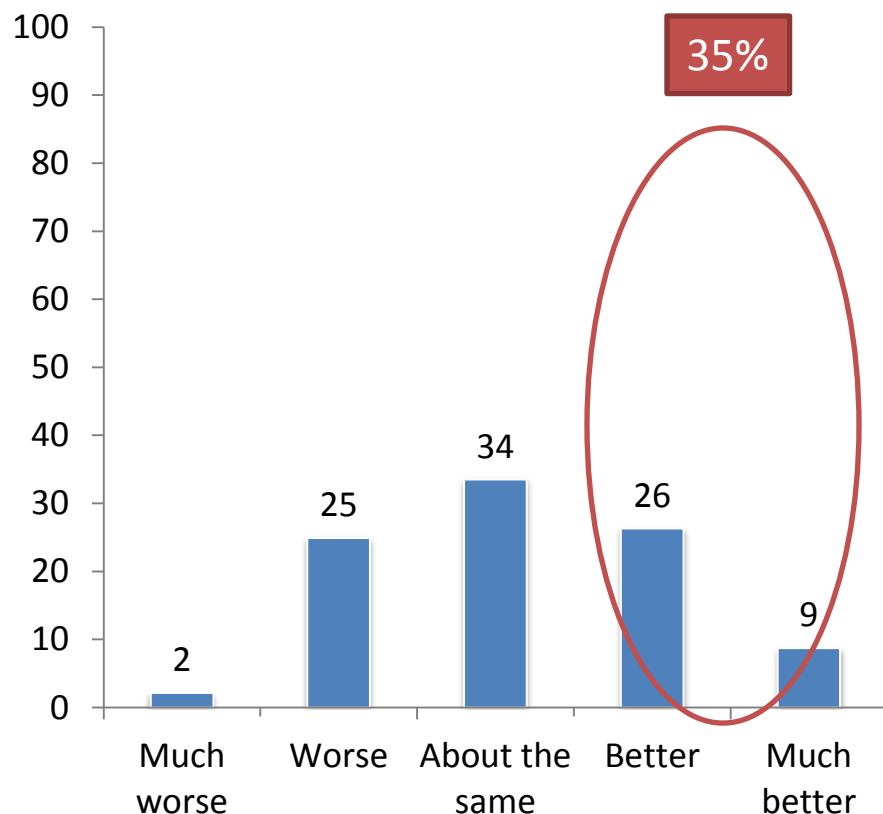


Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=2,450; MoE: +/-2.1%

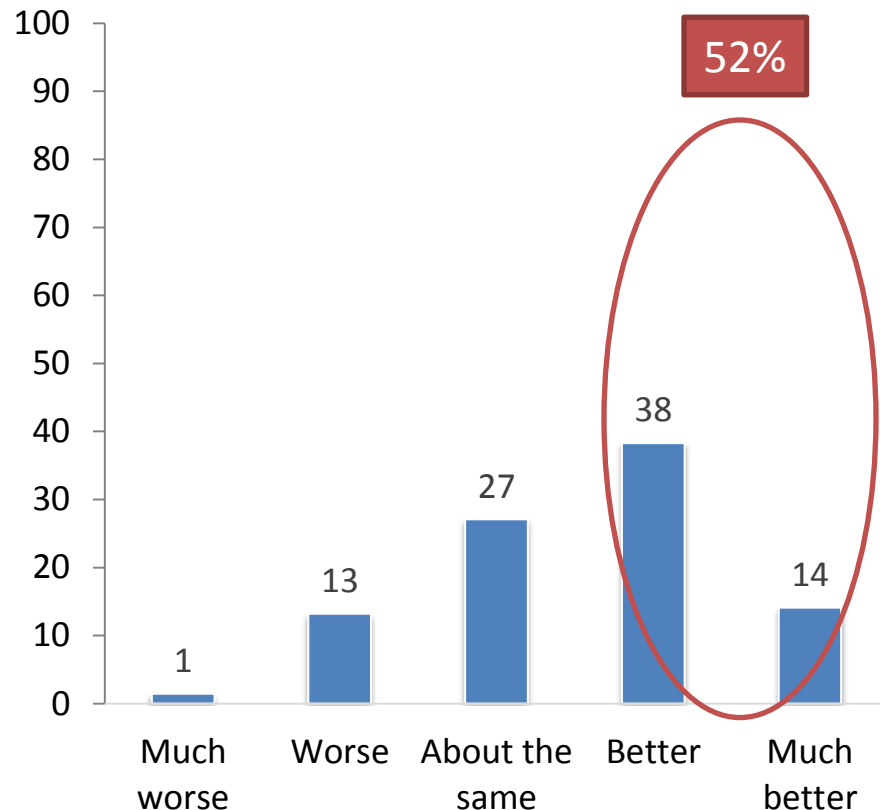
# Have the skills of [your agency] worsened, improved, or stayed about the same during your time in the agency?

## [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

Example 1

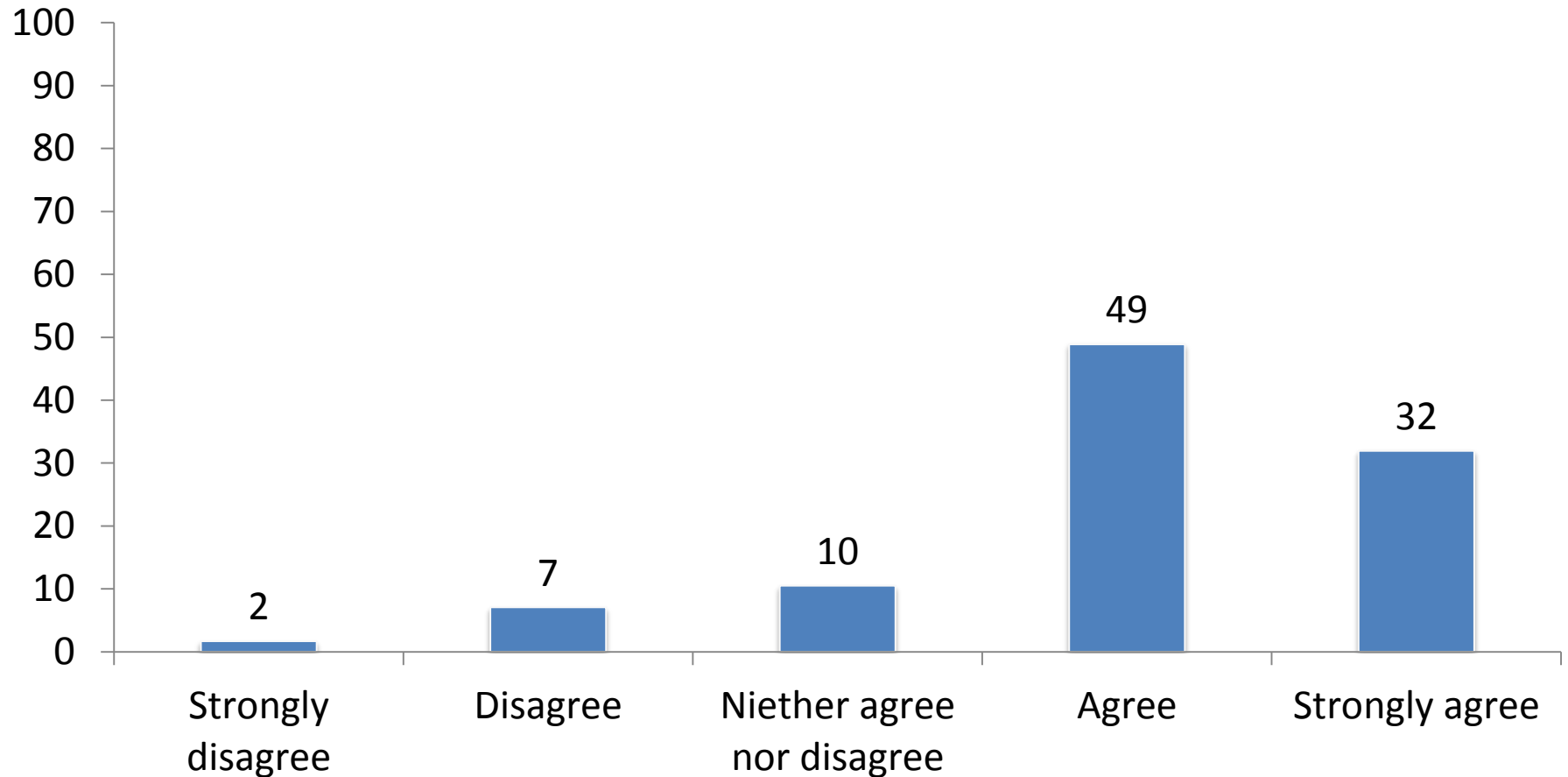


Example 2



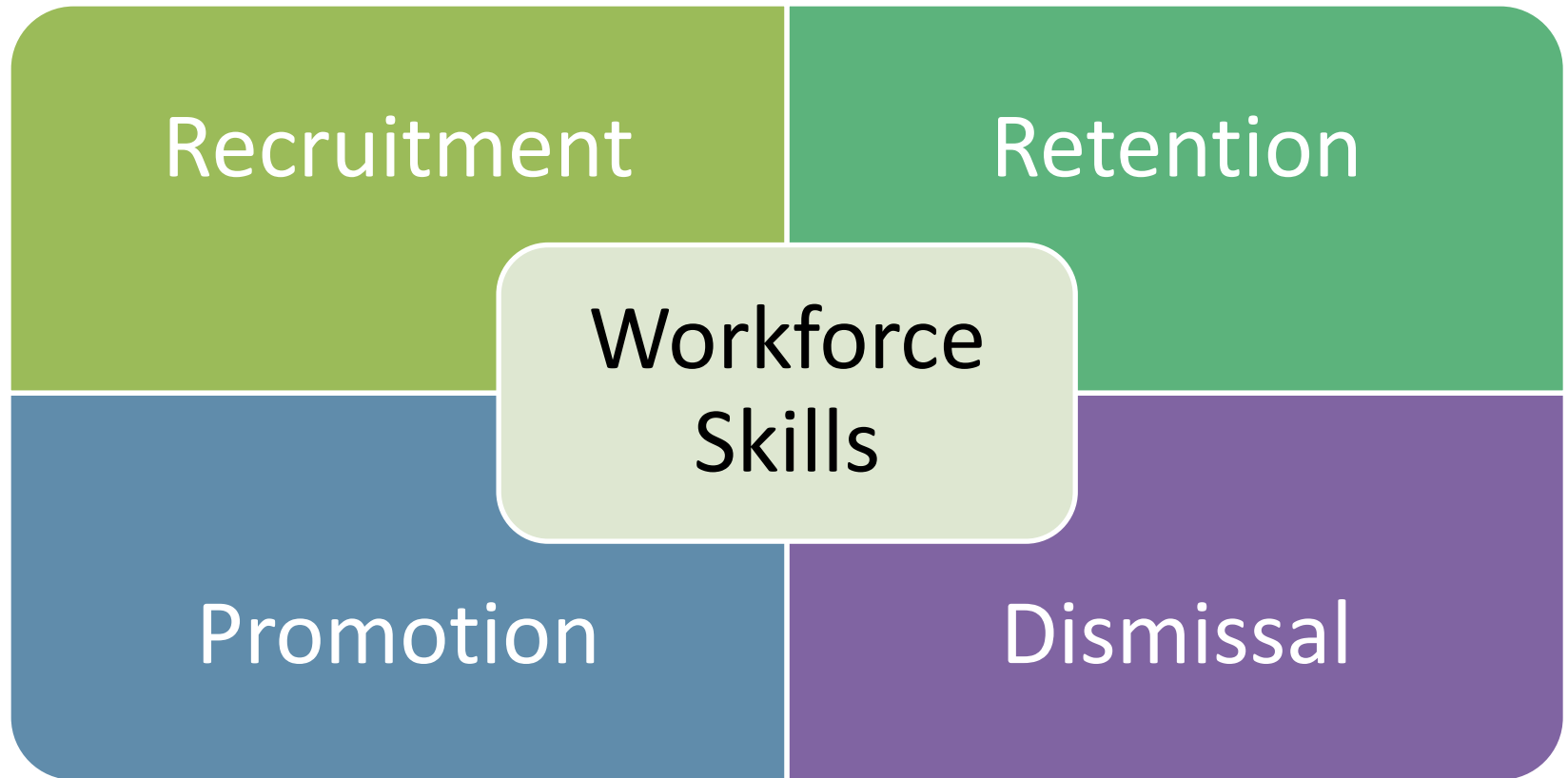
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=2,450; MoE: +/-2.1%

## I am confident in my agency's ability to successfully fulfill its core mission



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,682; MoE: +/-2.6%

# Why the different levels of workforce skills?



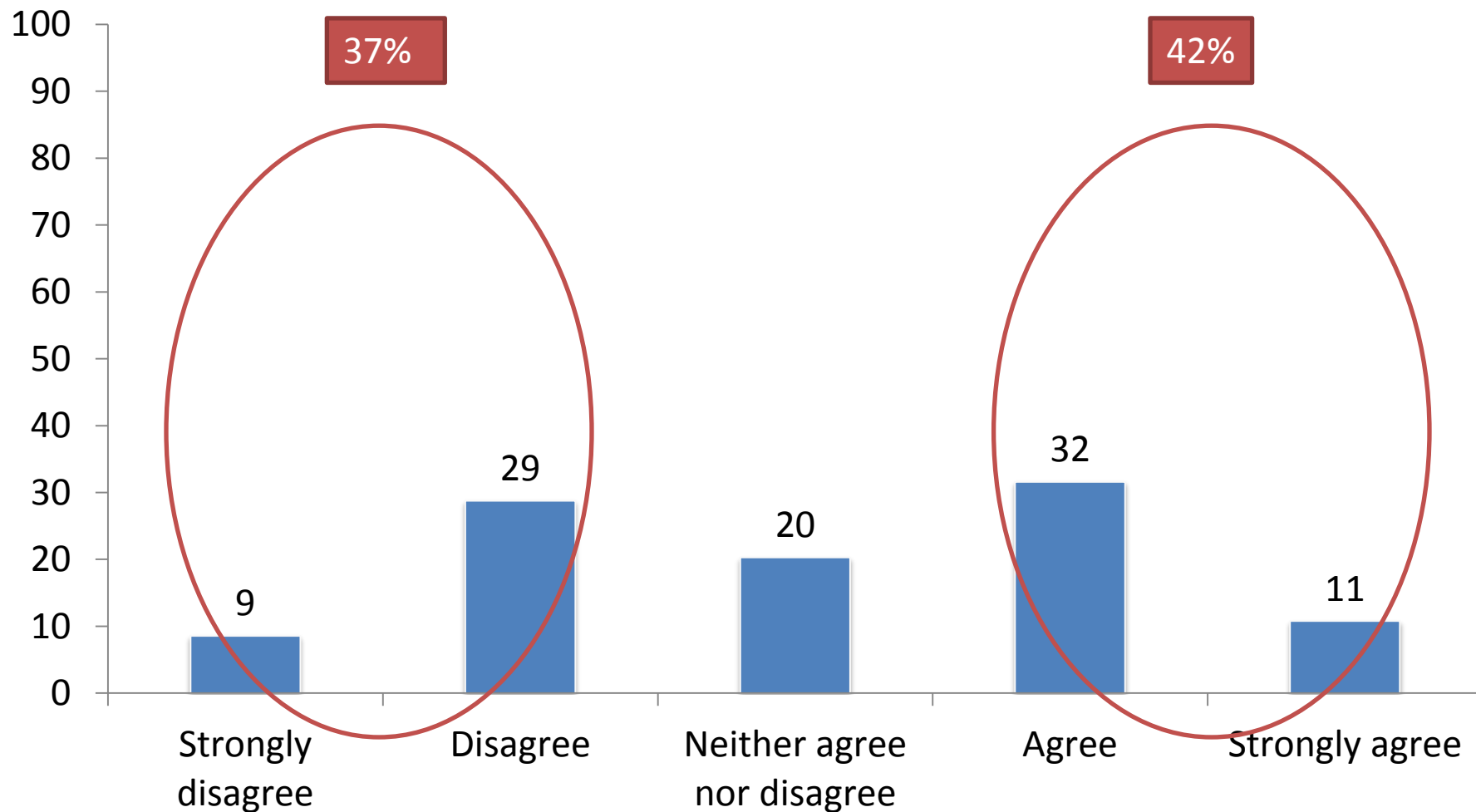
## To what extent do the following factors contribute to the difficulty [your agency] has in maintaining a skilled workforce?



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service N=639-642;  
MoE: +/-4.2%; Updated 02/14/2017 to correct paper survey branching violations.

# Recruitment

## [My agency] is unable to recruit the best employees



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,681; MoE: +/-2.6%



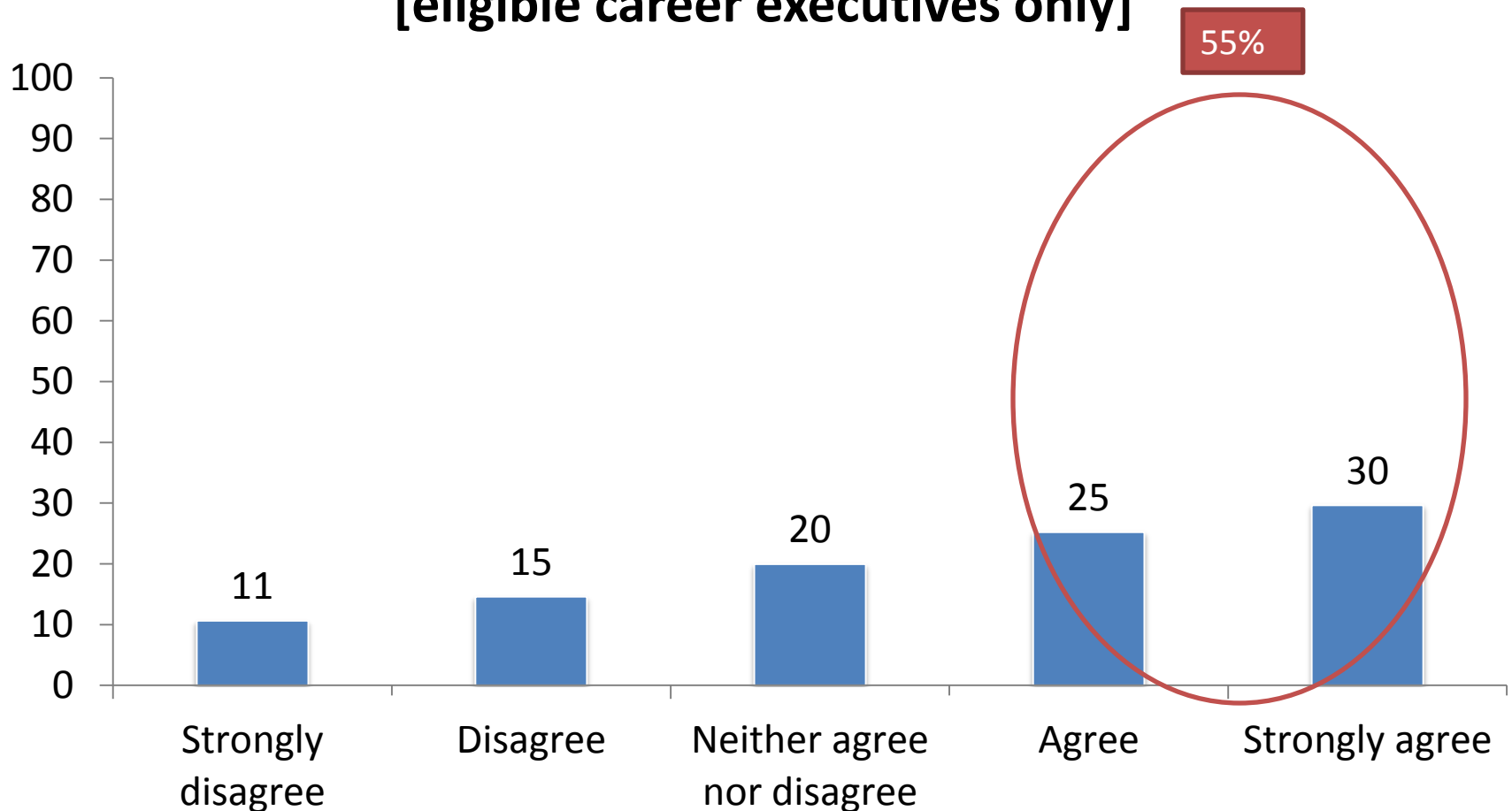
# Recruitment Example

“Here in the [omitted], we have a vast pool of entry-level (and more advanced) talent, but the federal government’s arcane procedures make it almost impossible to reach these wonderful candidates. An example of this is the most user-unfriendly place on the planet to look for and the only way to apply for a GS-level job in our agency: the USAjobs website. It’s a nightmare, everyone finds it difficult to use, and even those familiar with job openings cannot readily refer someone to the right place to apply.”

# Recruitment Example

“We recently posted an opening on USAJobs for several entry-level [omitted] openings. Within a few days, over 1,000 applicants survived the USAjobs application process, but here at [omitted], we received a list of 8 applicants from that process, reflecting veterans preference. We interviewed all 8, were keen to hire 4 of the 8, but are precluded from reaching any of the remaining 992 applicants unless we make offers to all 8!”

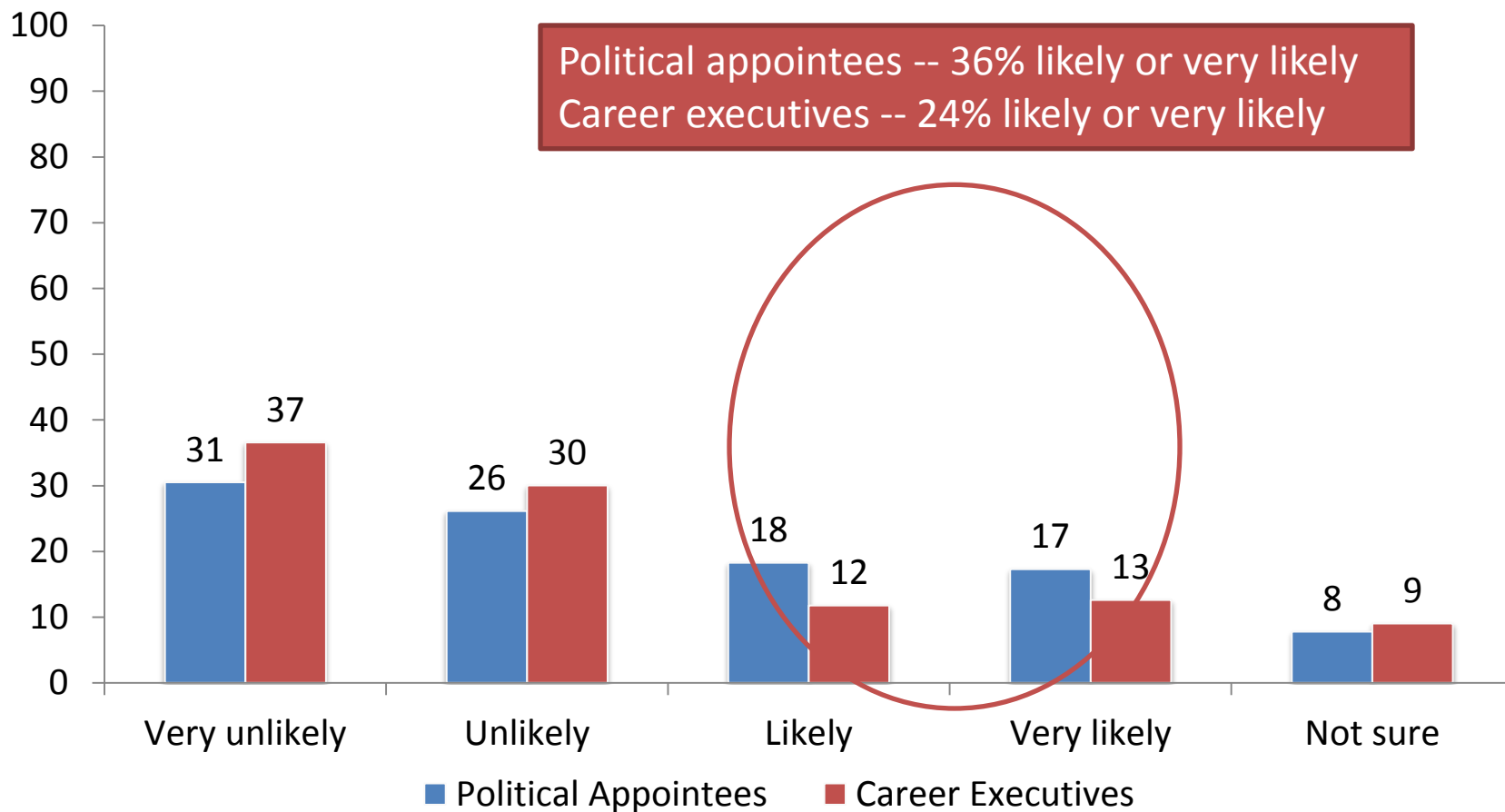
# I am interested in becoming a member of the Senior Executive Service or a Senior Professional [eligible career executives only]



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=623; MoE: +/-3.7%

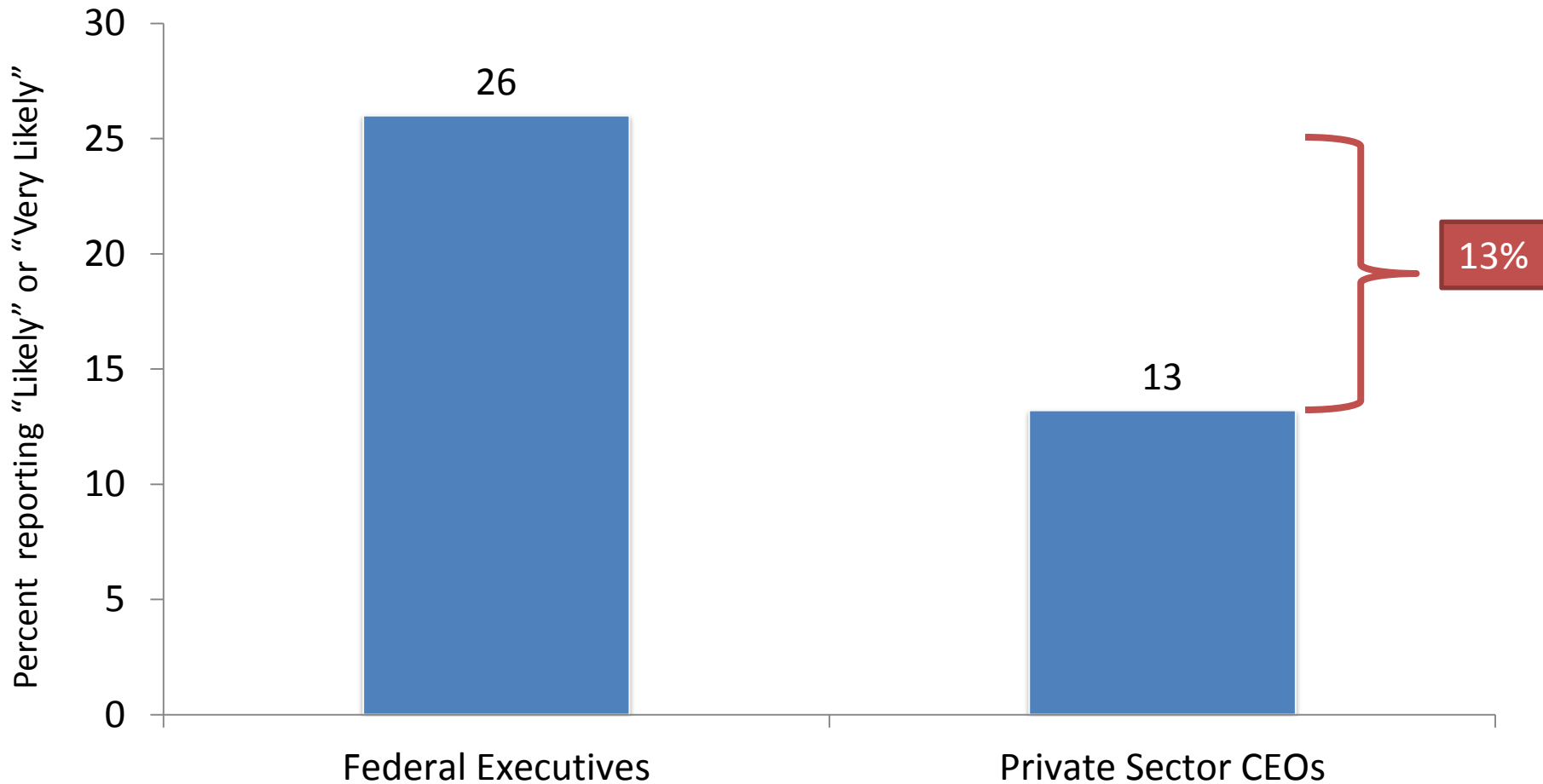
# Retention

# How likely is it that you will leave [your agency] in the next 12 months?



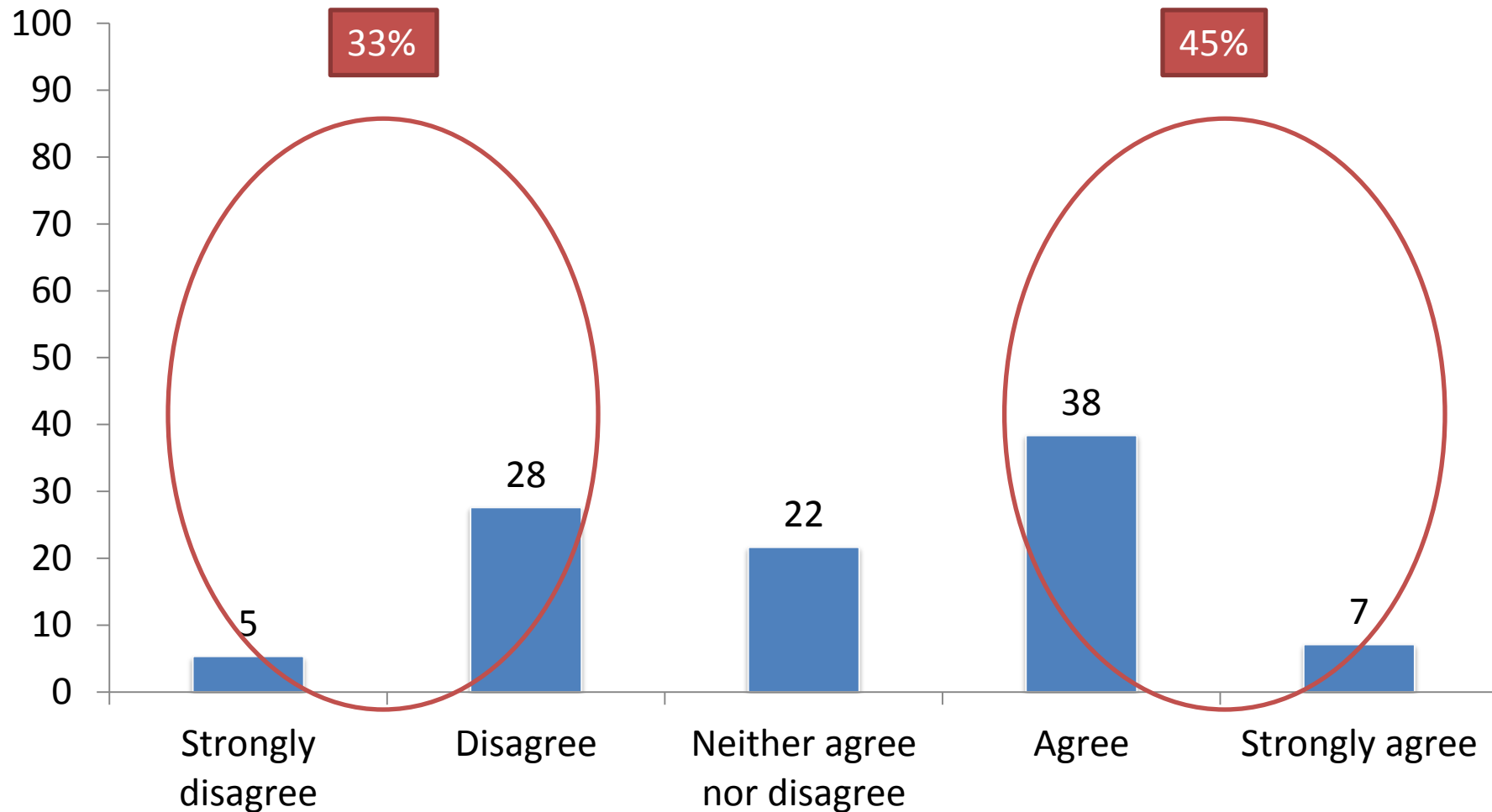
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=3,211; MoE: +/-1.8%

# How likely is it that you will leave [your agency] in the next 12 months?



Source: strategy& Study of CEOs, Governance, and Success

## [My agency] is able to retain its best employees

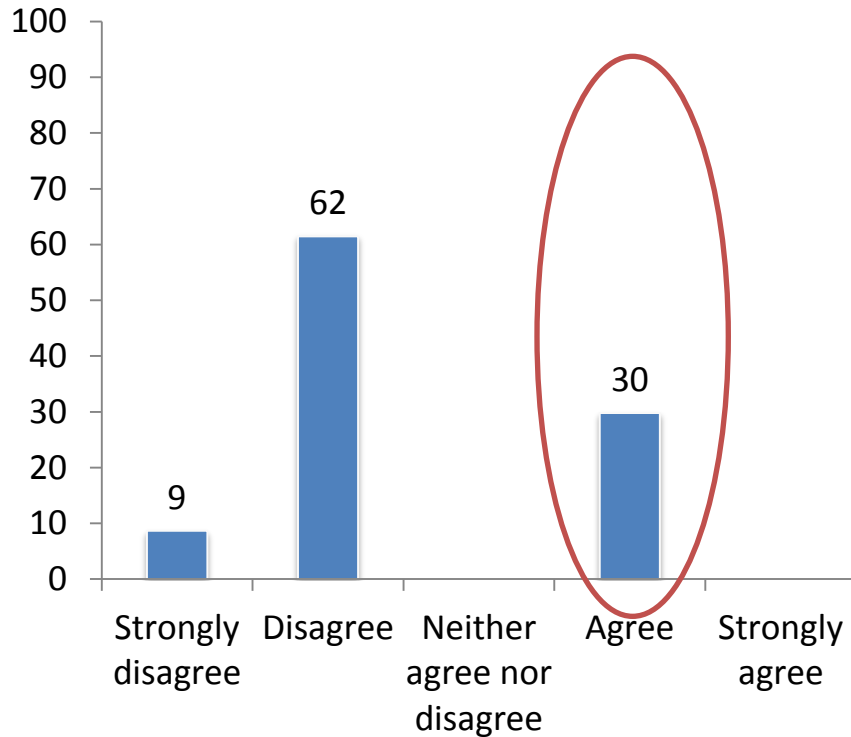


Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,681; MoE: +/-2.6%

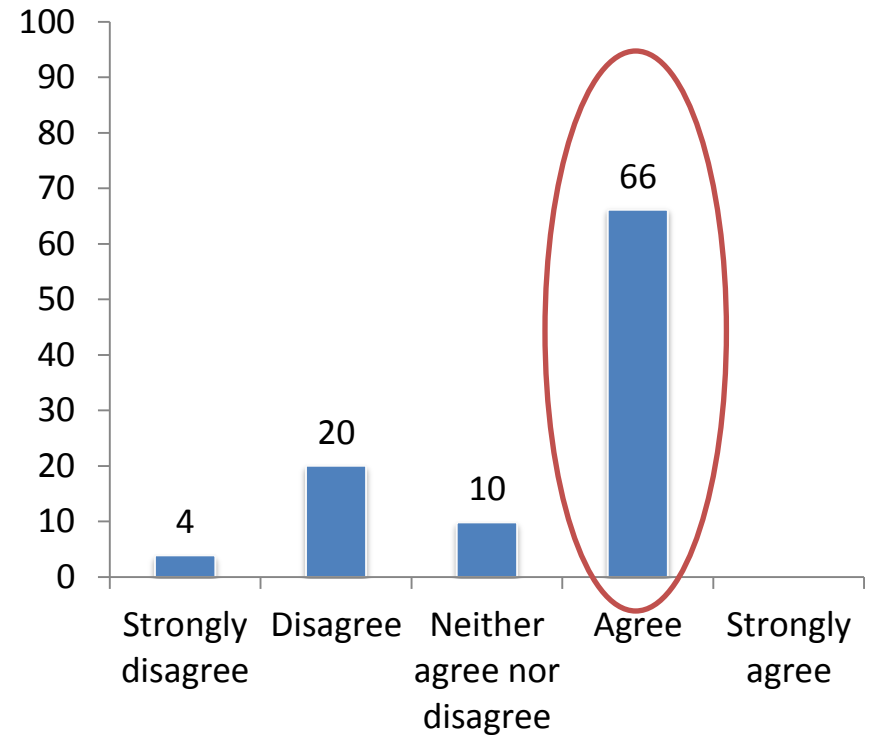
# [My agency] is able to retain its best employees

## [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

Example 1



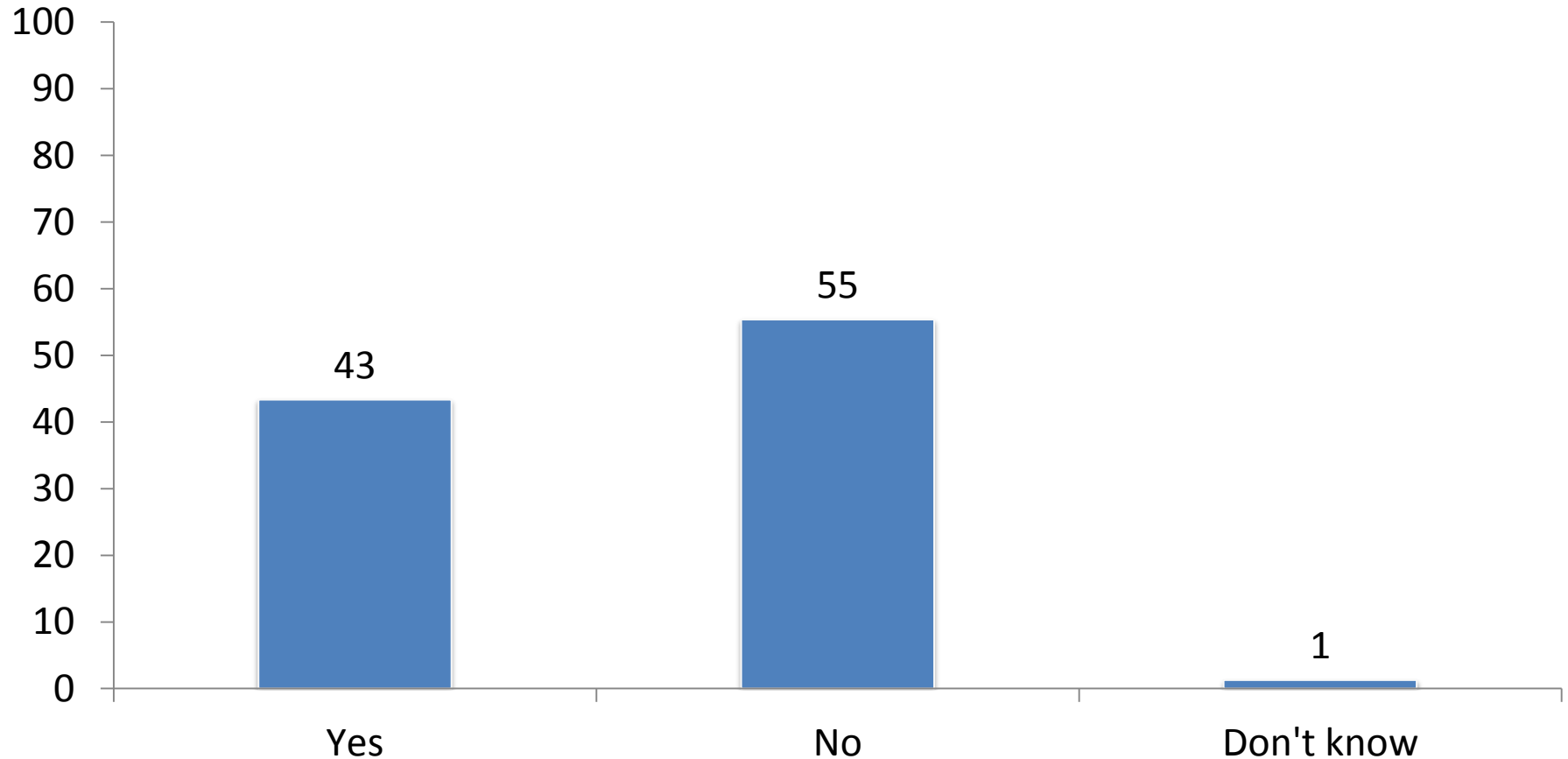
Example 2



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,681; MoE: +/-2.6%

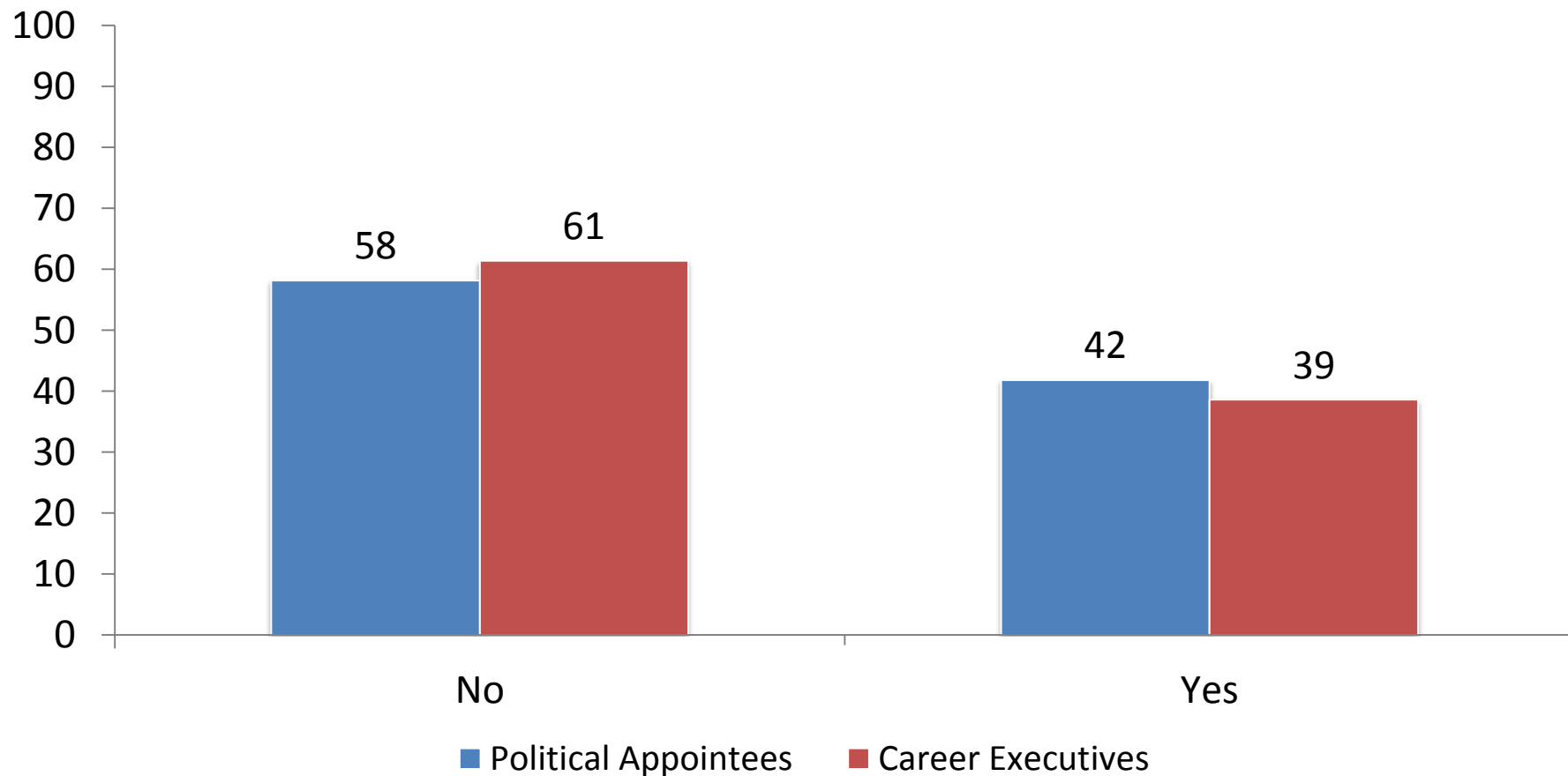


## Are you now or will you become eligible to retire in the next 12 months? [Career executives only]



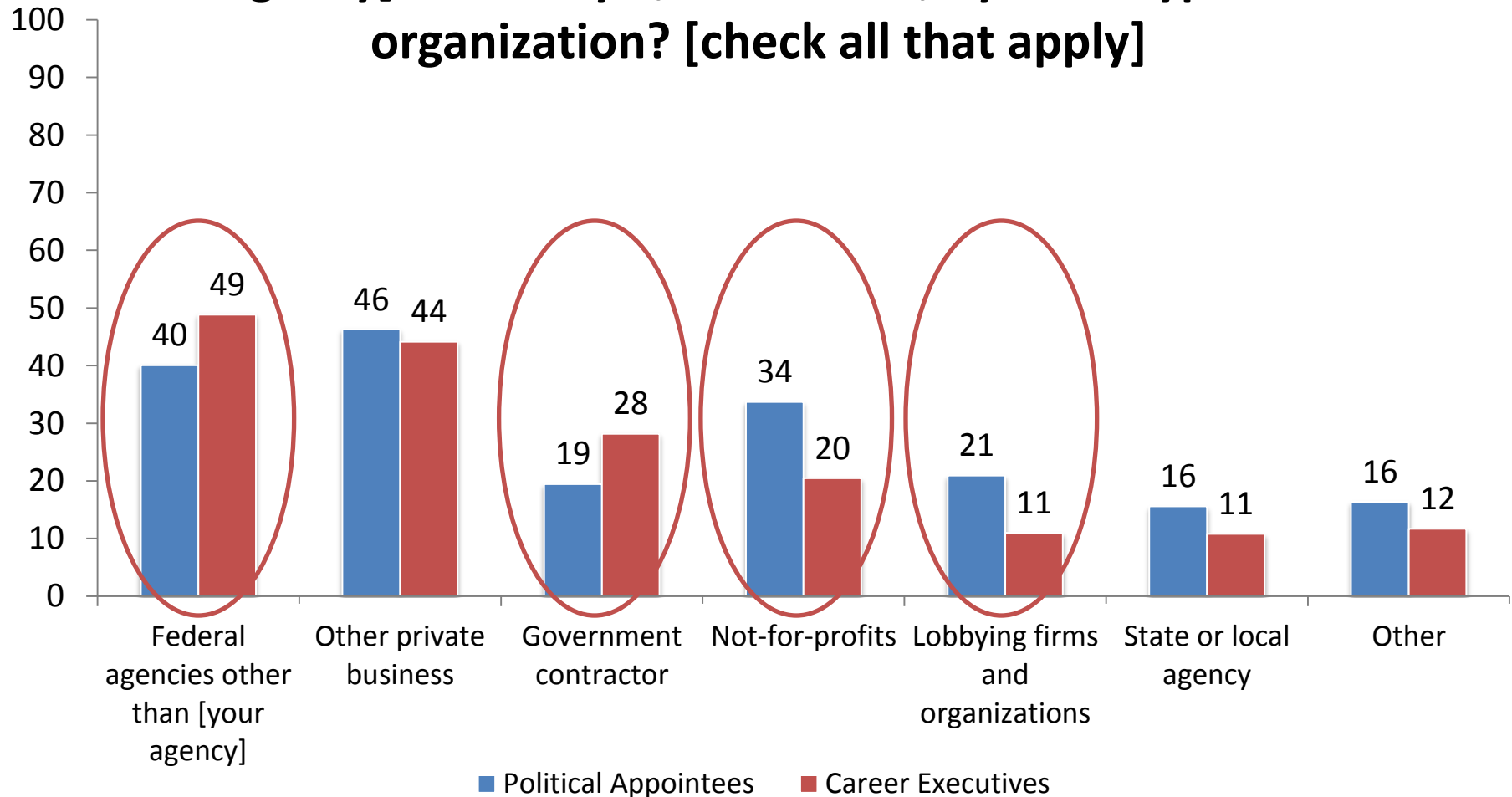
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=2,819; MoE: +/-2.0%

## Have you been approached about a job outside [your agency] since July 1, 2013?



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,677; MoE: +/-2.6%

# Have you been approached about a job outside [your agency] since July 1, 2013? If so, by what type of organization? [check all that apply]

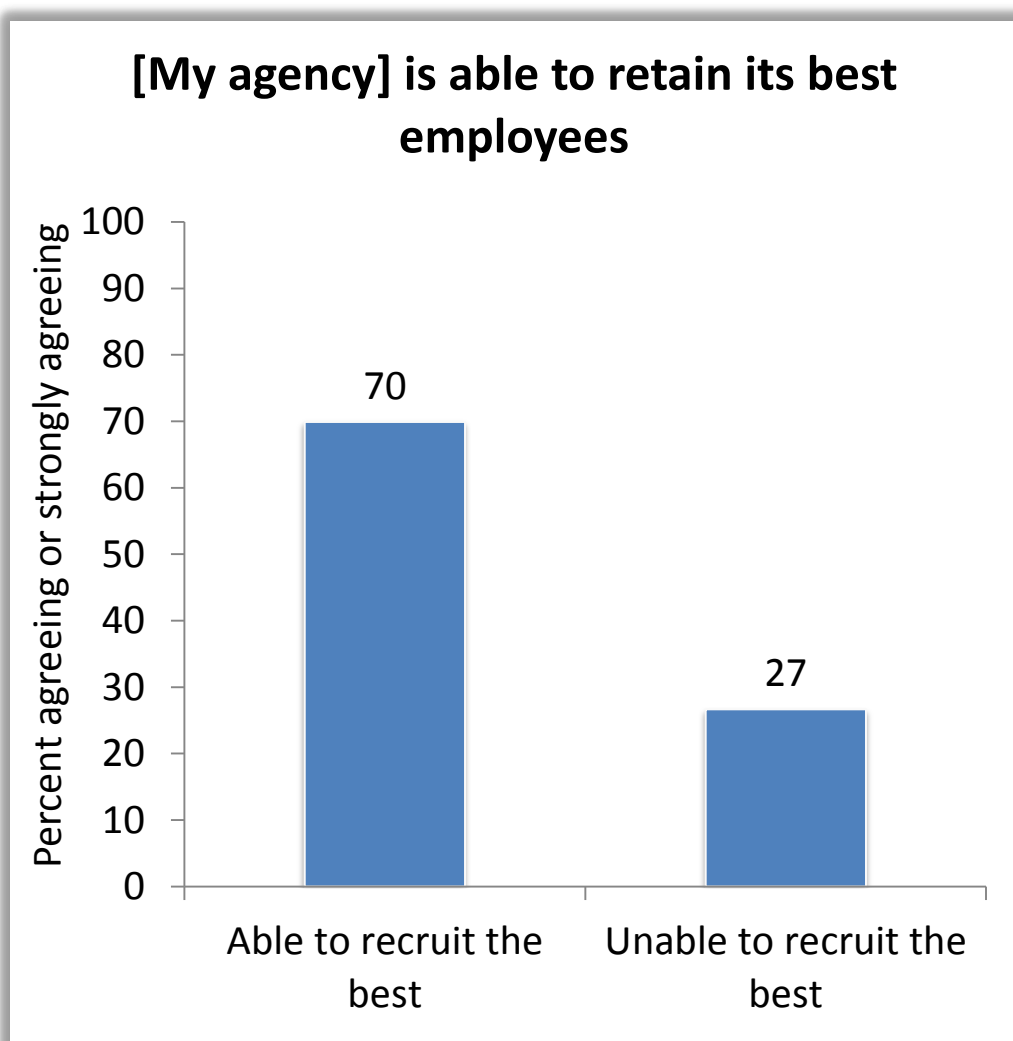


Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=653; MoE: +/-4.3%

## Ability to Recruit and Retain the Best by Agency

Two possible explanations for the strong correlation between difficulty recruiting and retaining the best:

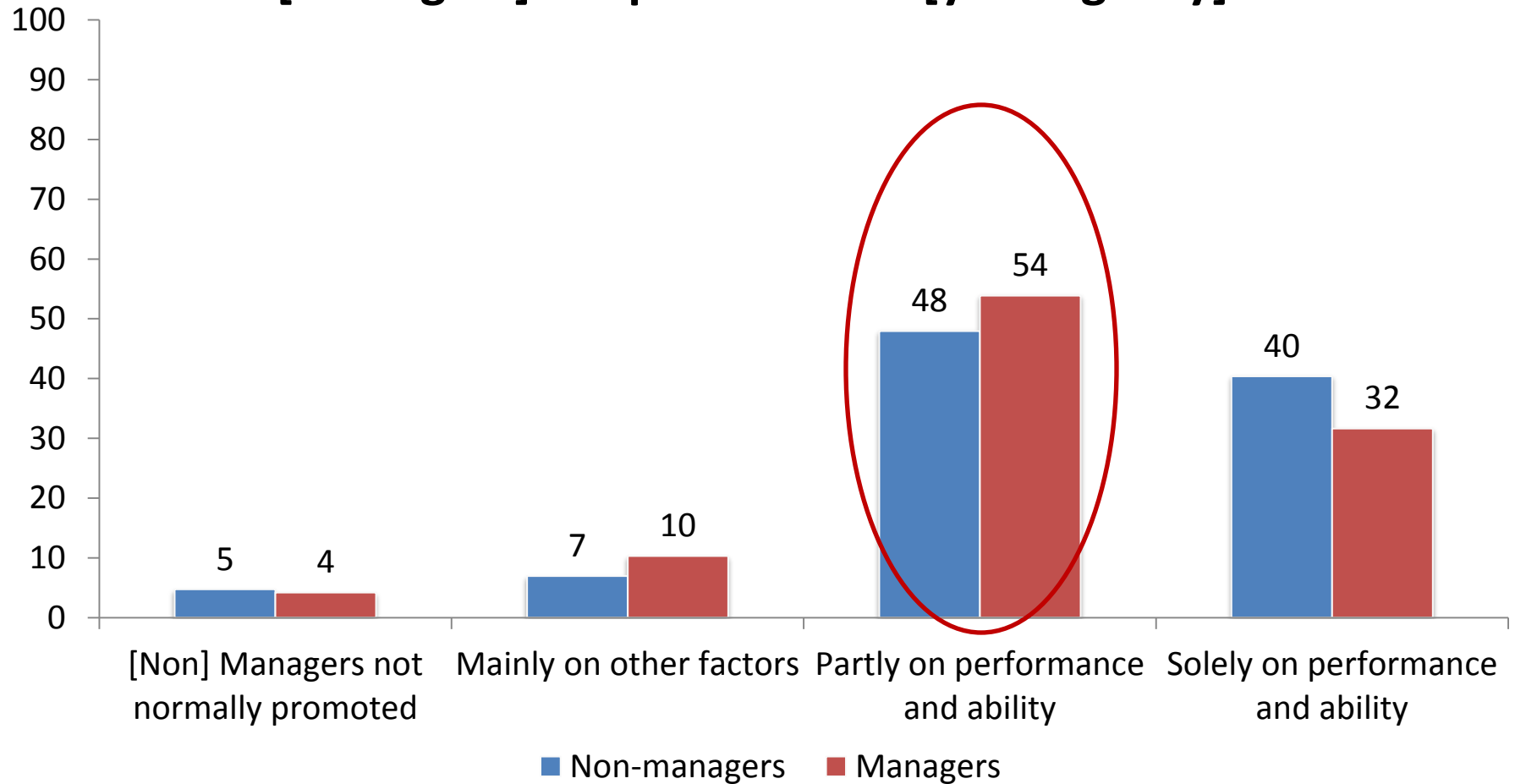
1. Market conditions
2. Management problems



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,678; MoE: +/-2.6%

# Promotion

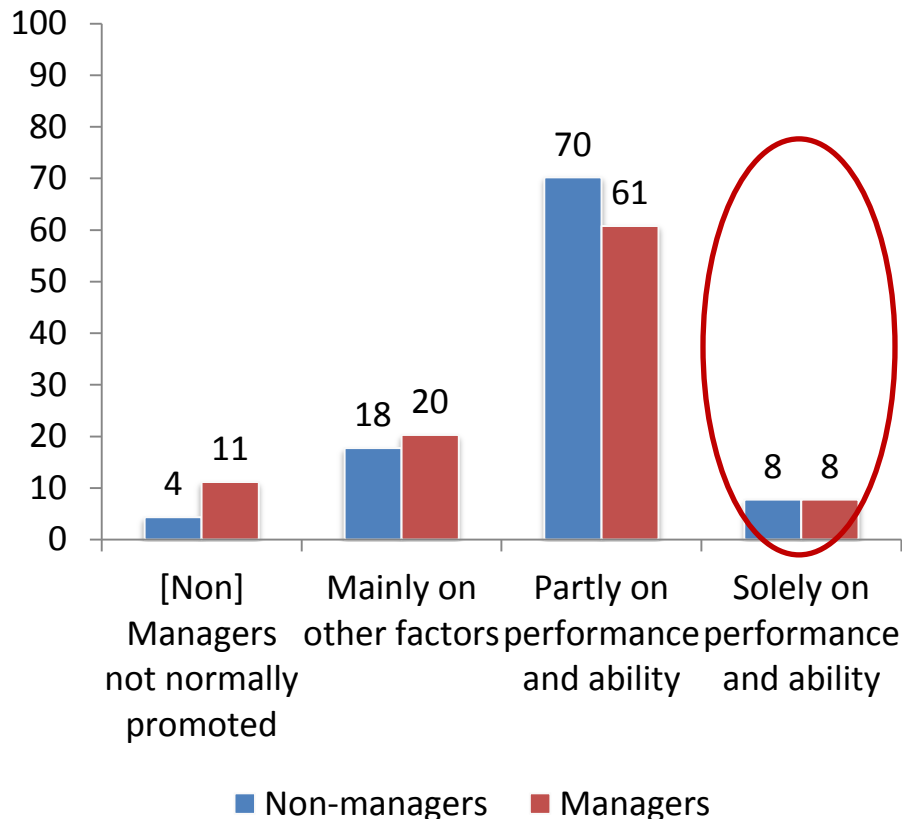
# What is the primary way that non-managers [managers] are promoted at [your agency]?



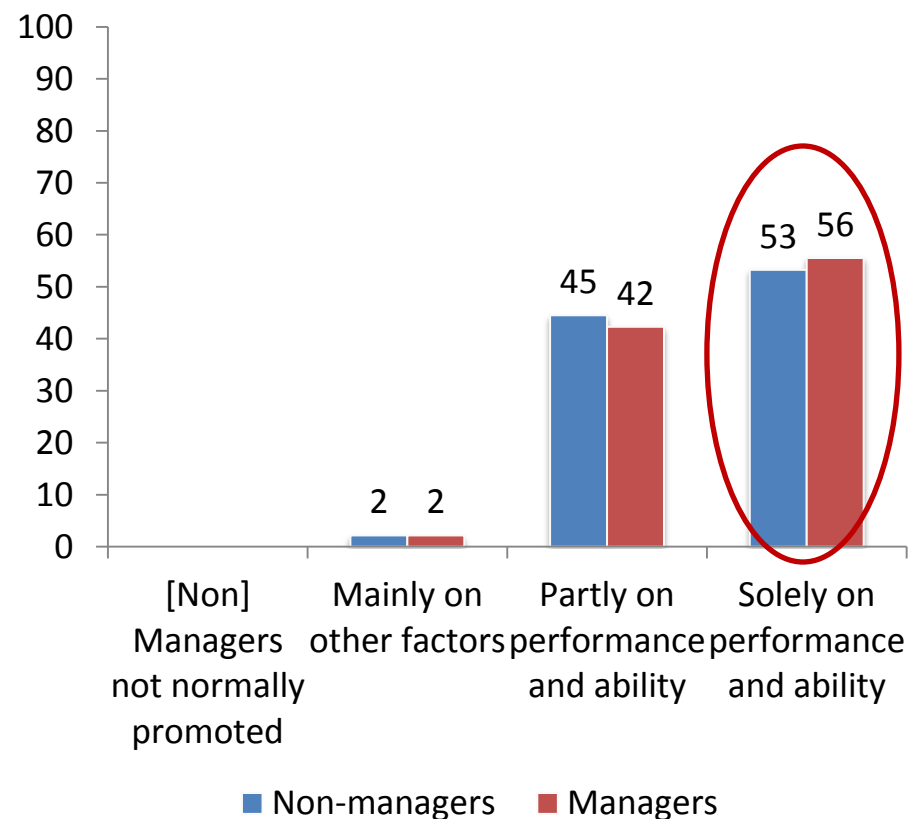
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,655-1,656; MoE: +/-2.6%

# What is the primary way that non-managers [managers] are promoted at [your agency]? [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

Example 1

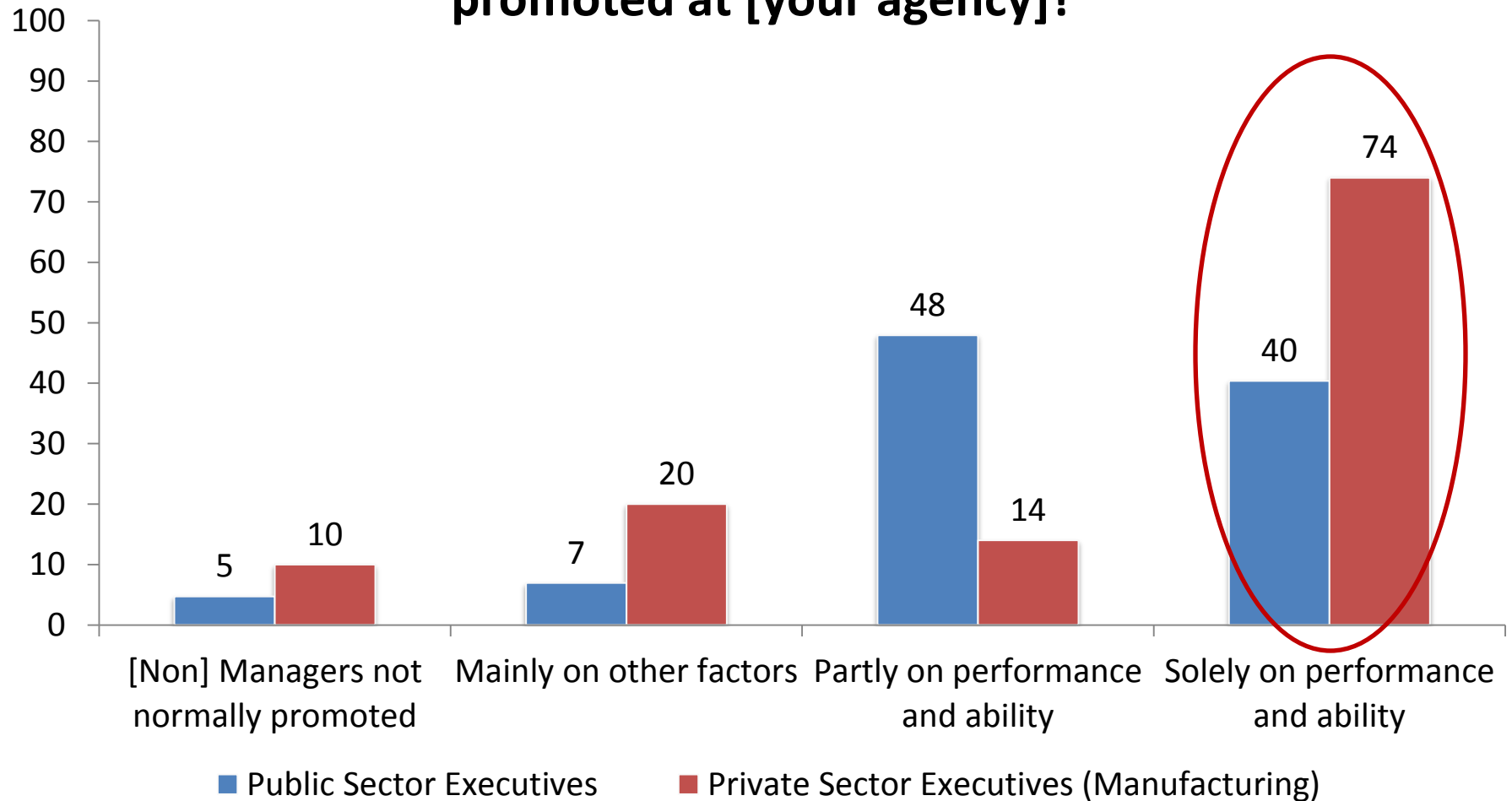


Example 2



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,655-1,656; MoE: +/-2.6%

# What is the primary way that non-managers are promoted at [your agency]?



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,656; MoE: +/-2.6%; 2010 Management and Organizational  
Practices Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013: N=37,177



# Dismissal

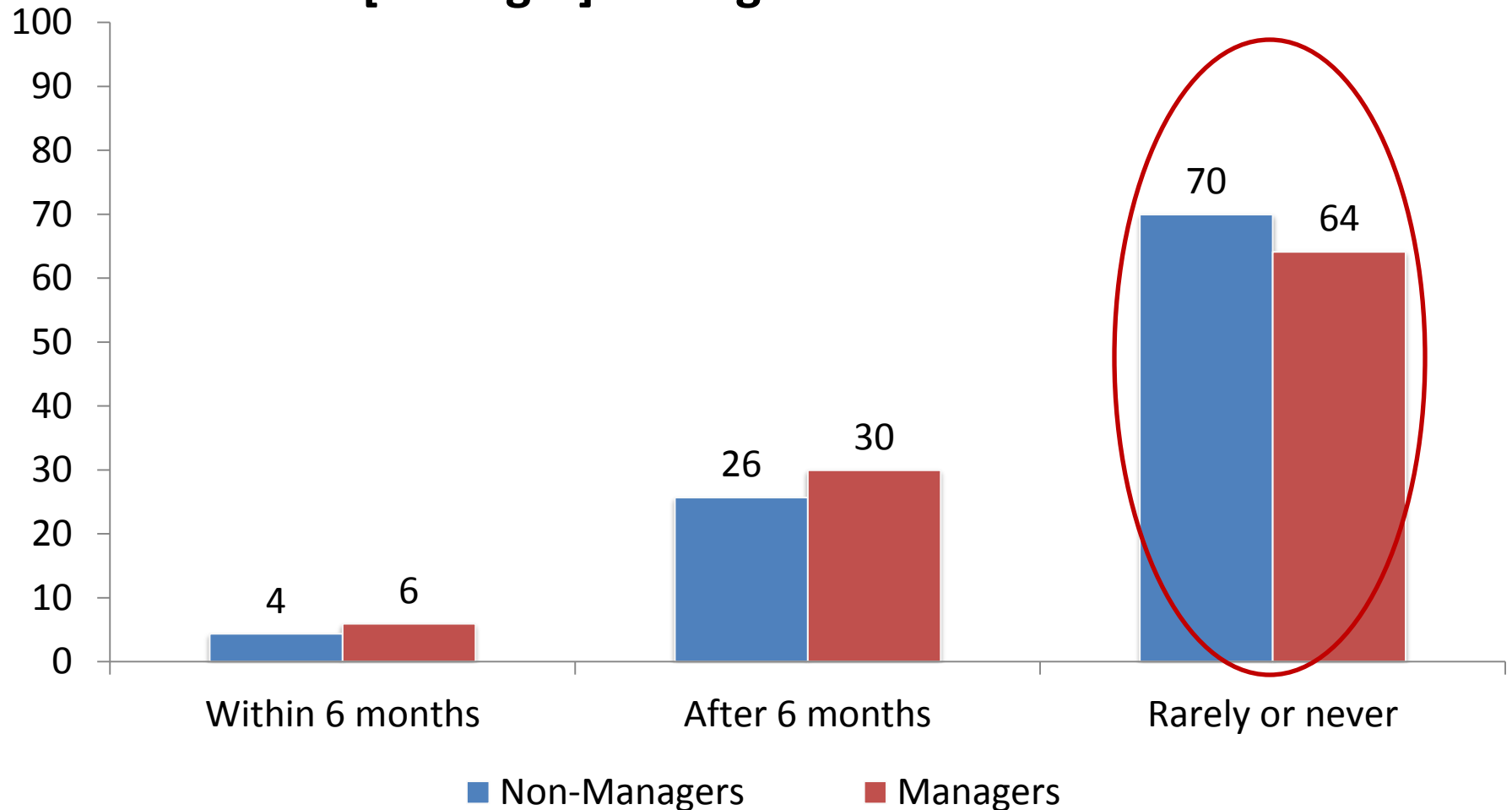
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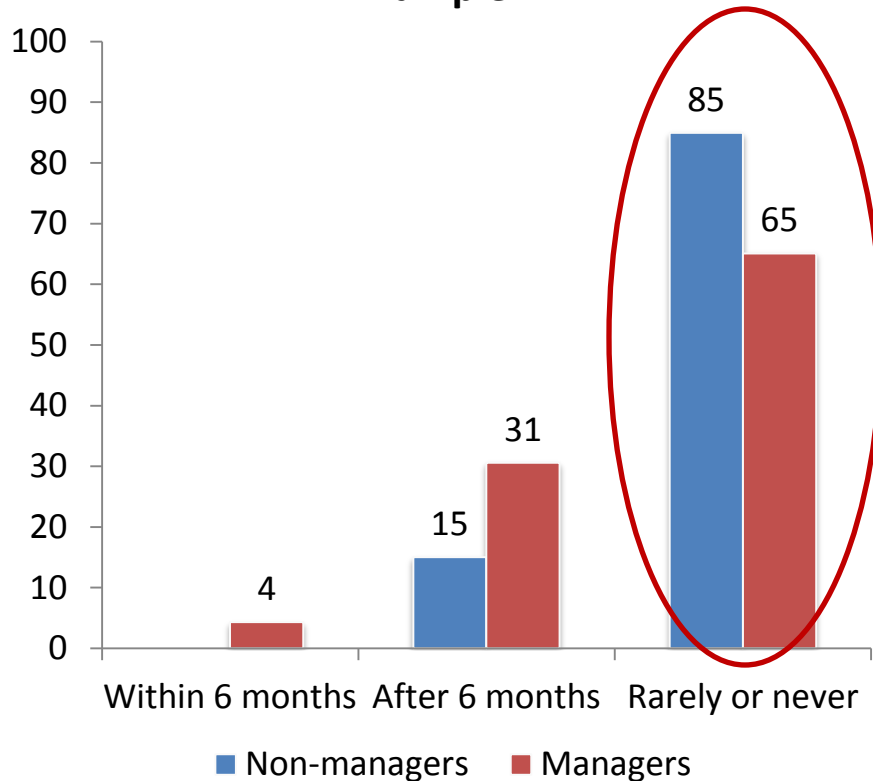
## When is an under-performing non-manager [manager] reassigned or dismissed?



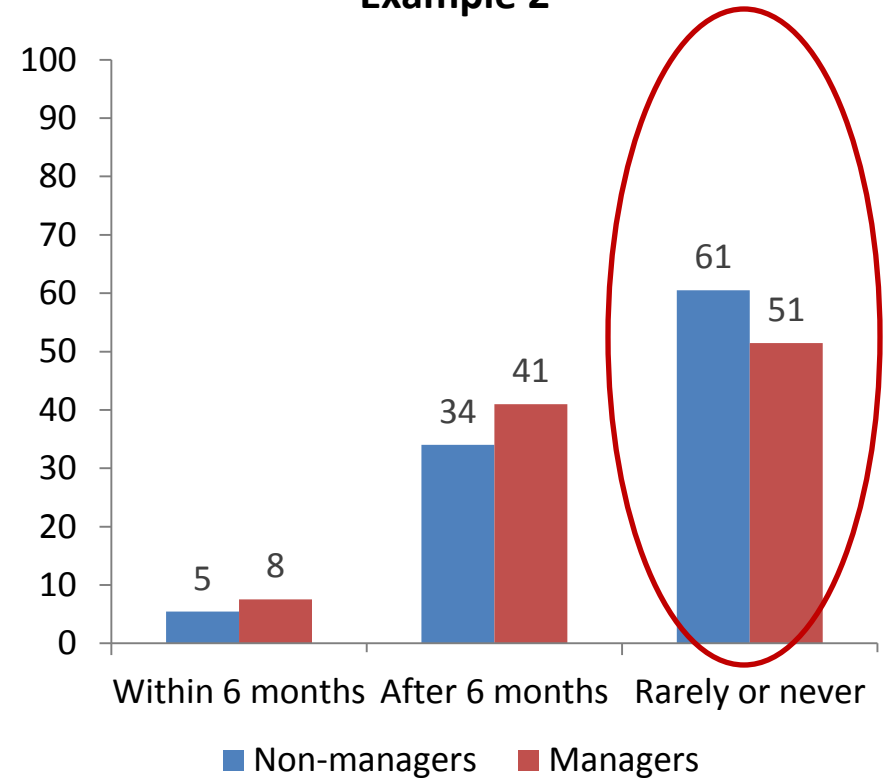
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,625-1,631; MoE: +/-2.6%

# When is an under-performing non-manager [manager] reassigned or dismissed? [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

Example 1

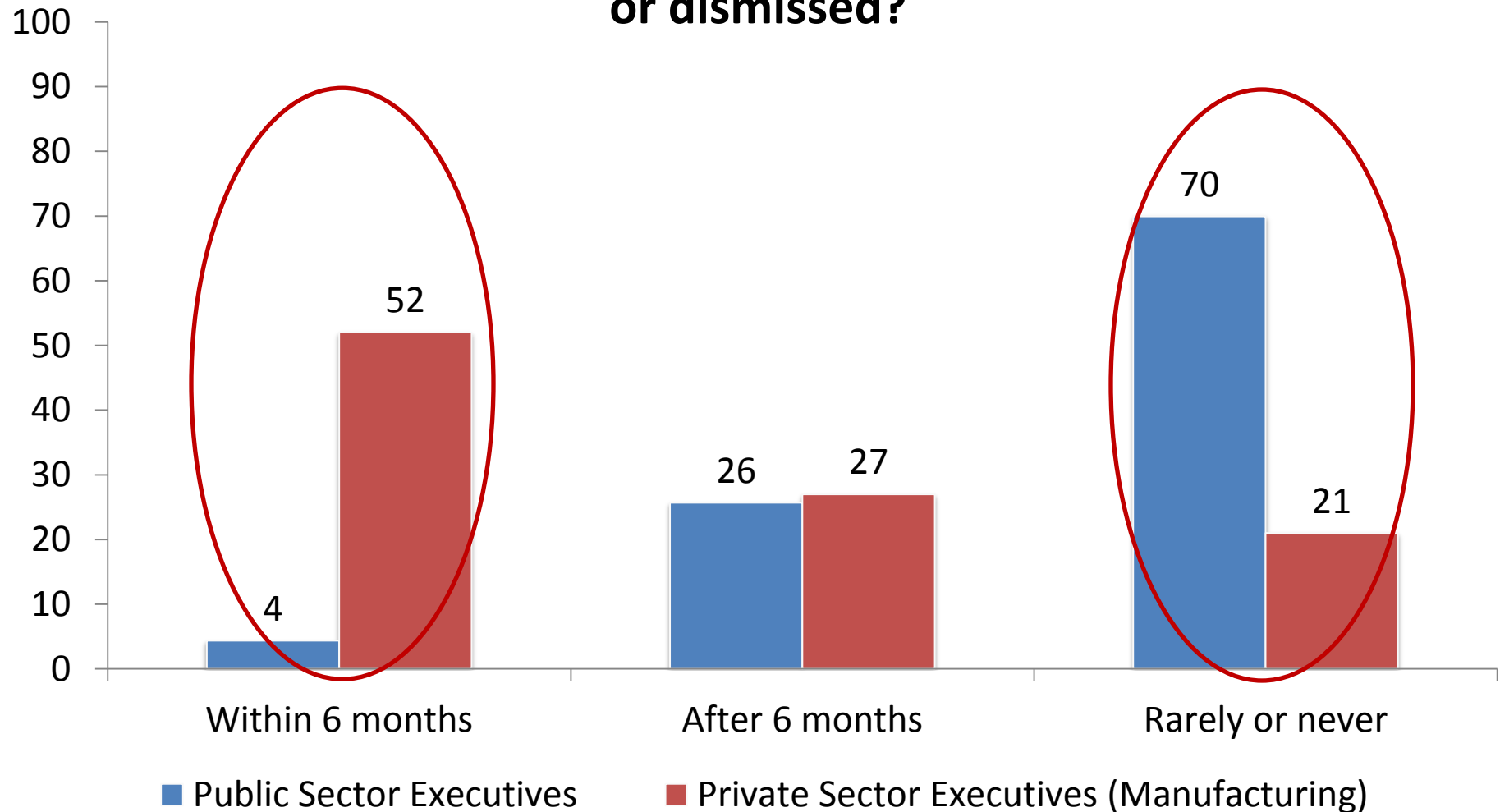


Example 2



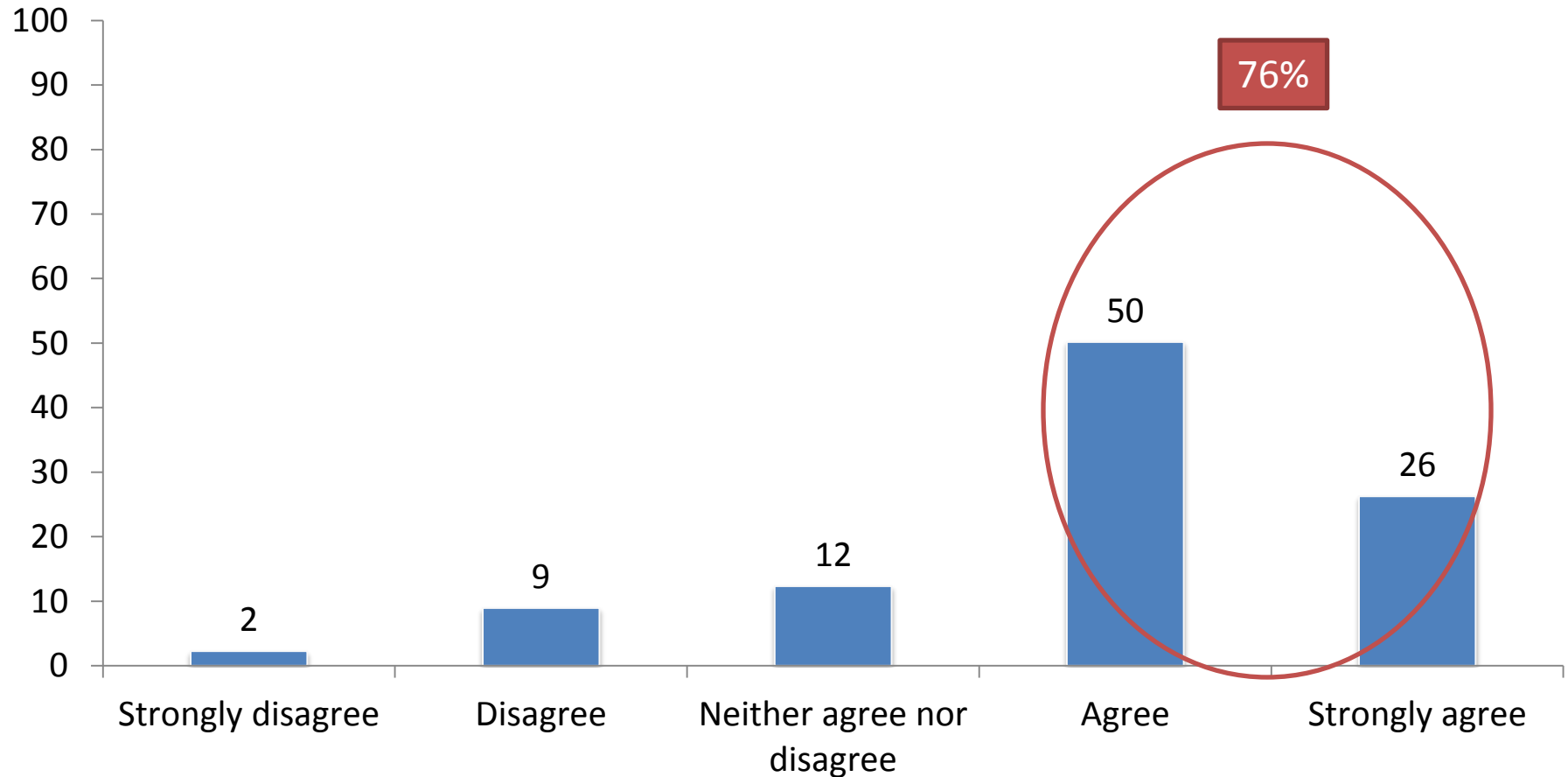
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,625-1,631; MoE: +/-2.6%

# When is an under-performing non-manager reassigned or dismissed?



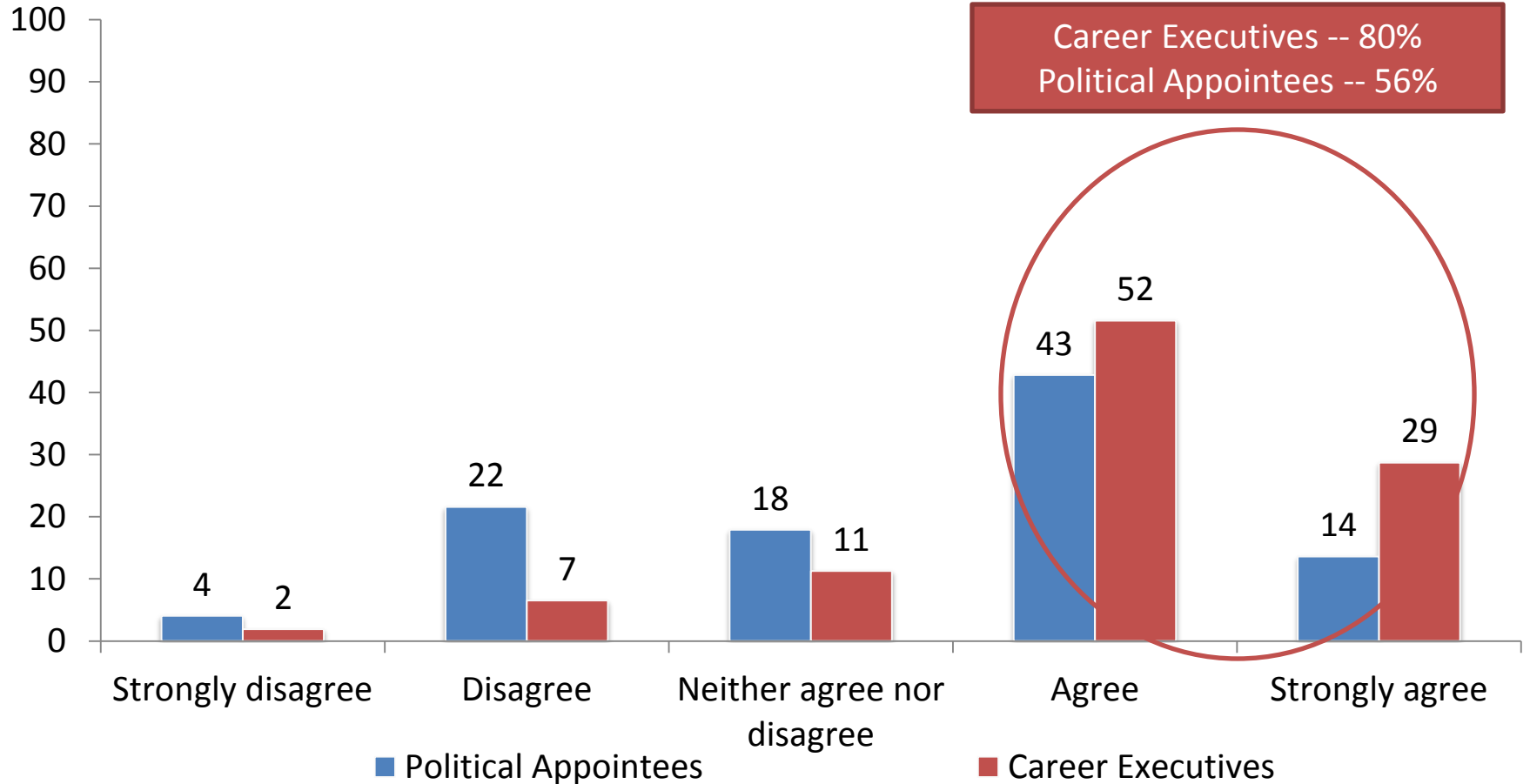
Source: 2010 Management and Organizational Practices Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013: N=37,177

# I have a good understanding of key statutes related to managing the career civil service (e.g., the Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices)



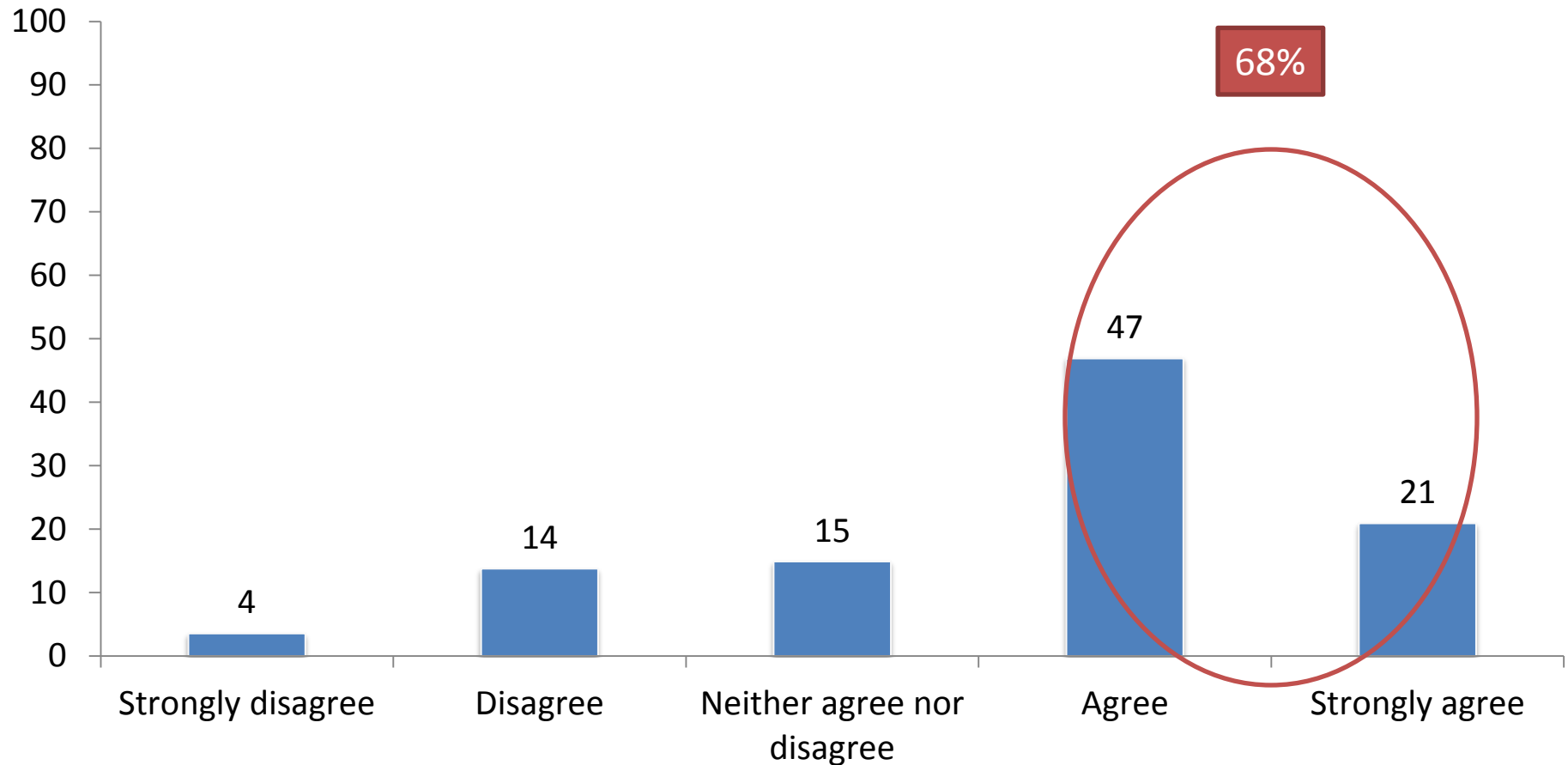
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,666; MoE: +/-2.6%

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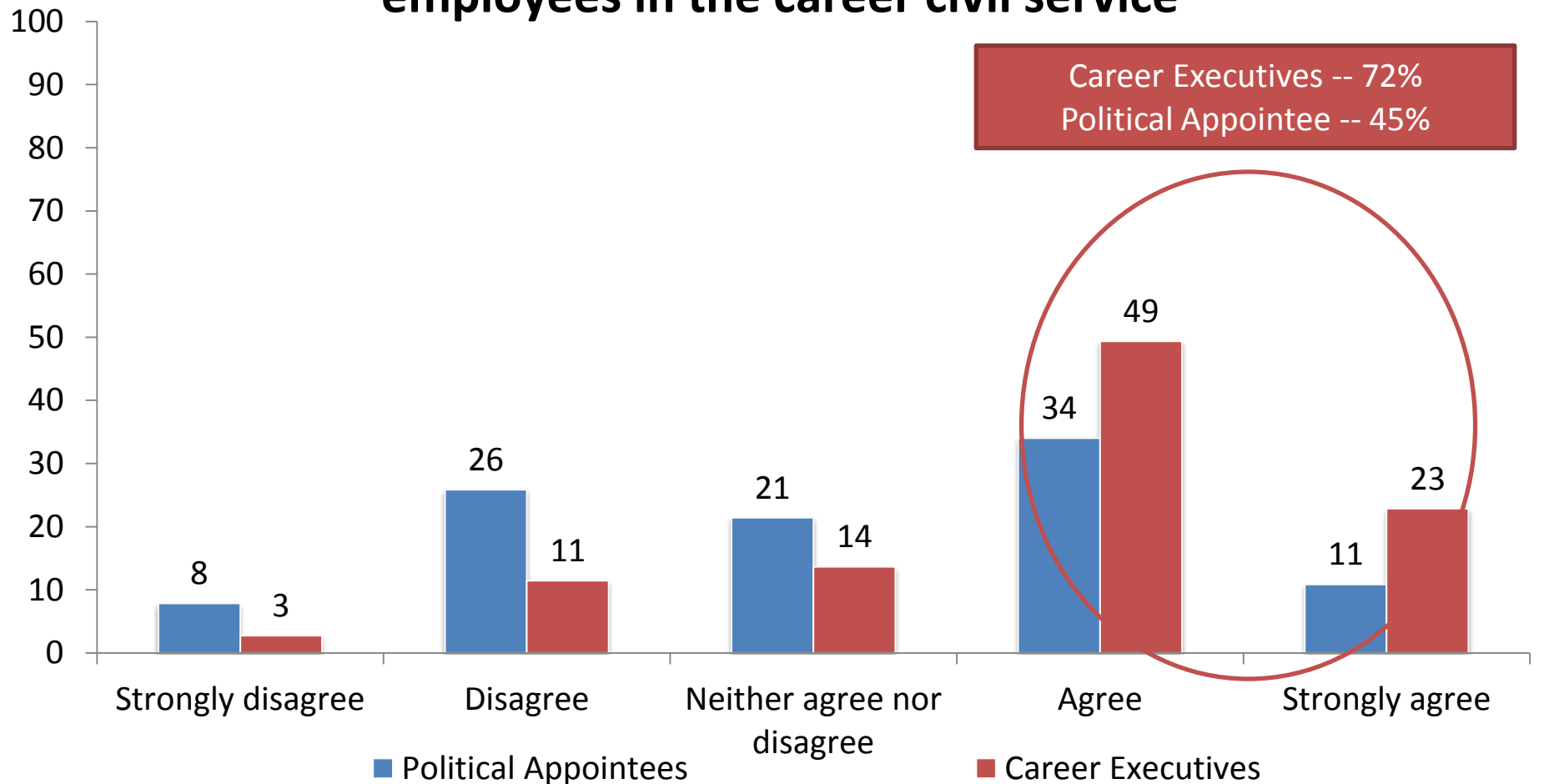
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,666; MoE: +/-2.6%

# I have received sufficient training and guidance on how to manage (e.g., hire, promote, reward, and discipline or dismiss) employees in the career civil service



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,665; MoE: +/-2.6%

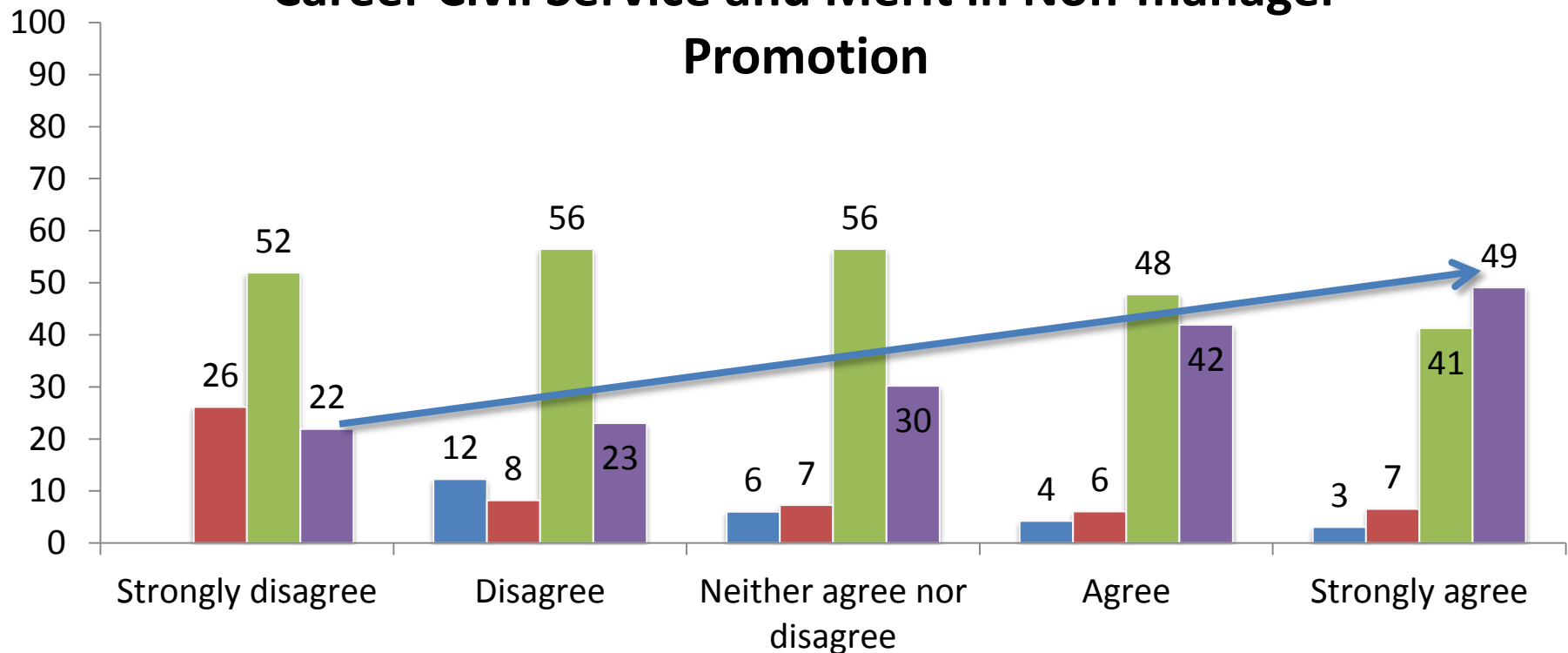
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Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,665; MoE: +/-2.6%



# Knowledge of Key Statutes Related to Managing the Career Civil Service and Merit in Non-manager Promotion



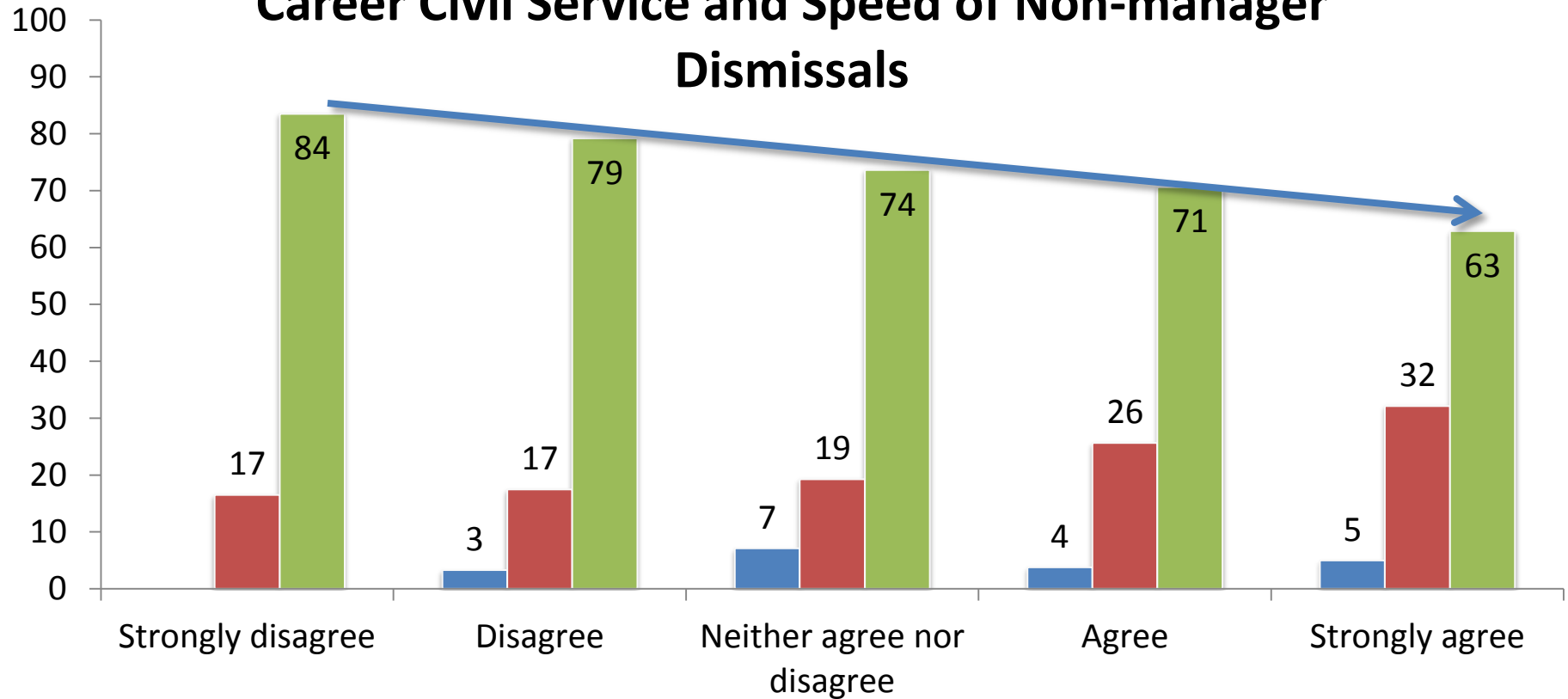
"I have a good understanding of key statutes related to managing the career civil service..."

[Non] Managers Not normally promoted  
Partly on performance and ability

Mainly on other factors  
Solely on performance and ability

Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,648; MoE: +/-2.6%

# Knowledge of Key Statutes Related to Managing the Career Civil Service and Speed of Non-manager Dismissals



"I have a good understanding of key statutes related to managing the career civil service..."

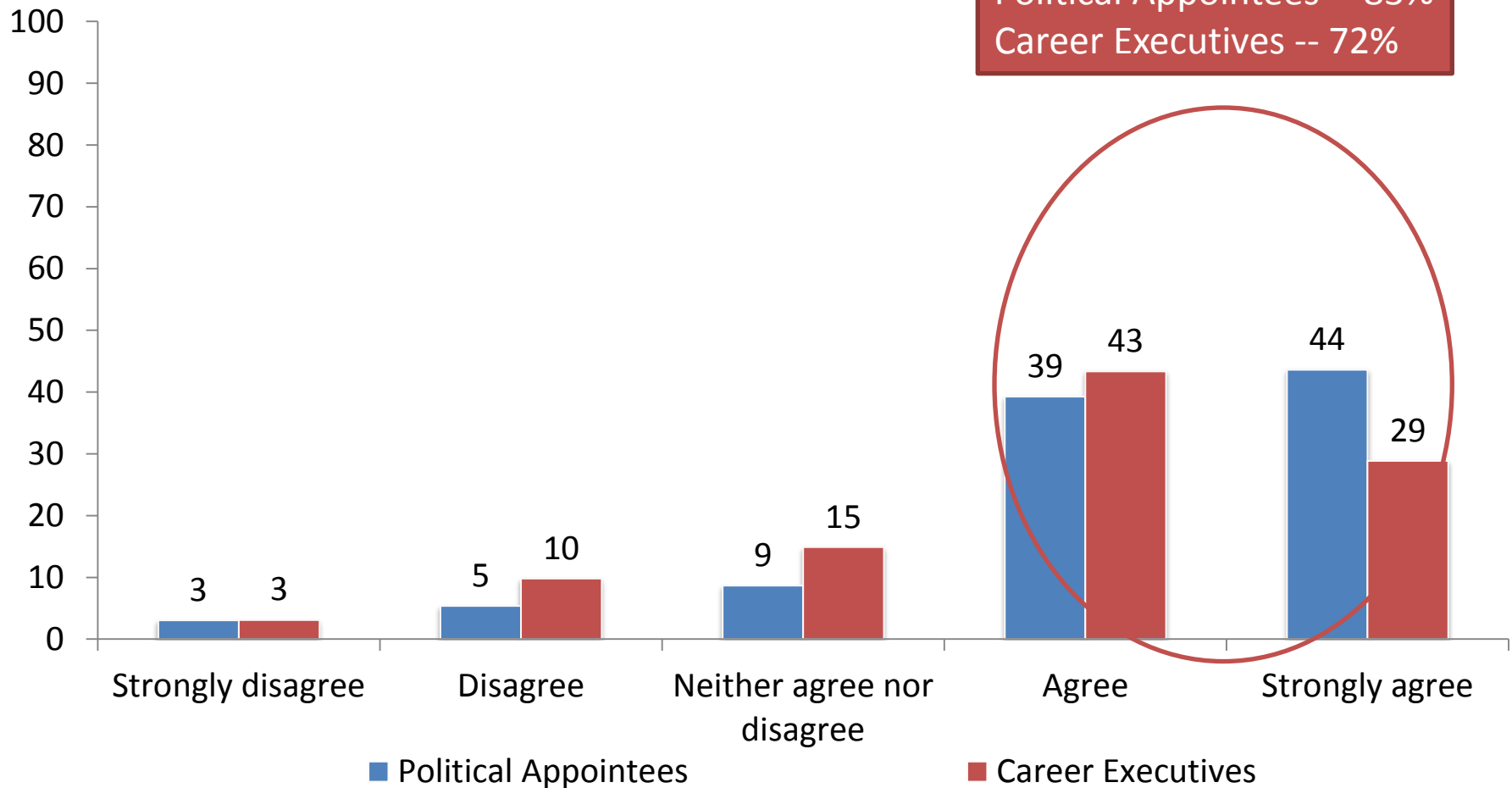
■ Within 6 months

■ After 6 months

■ Rarely or never

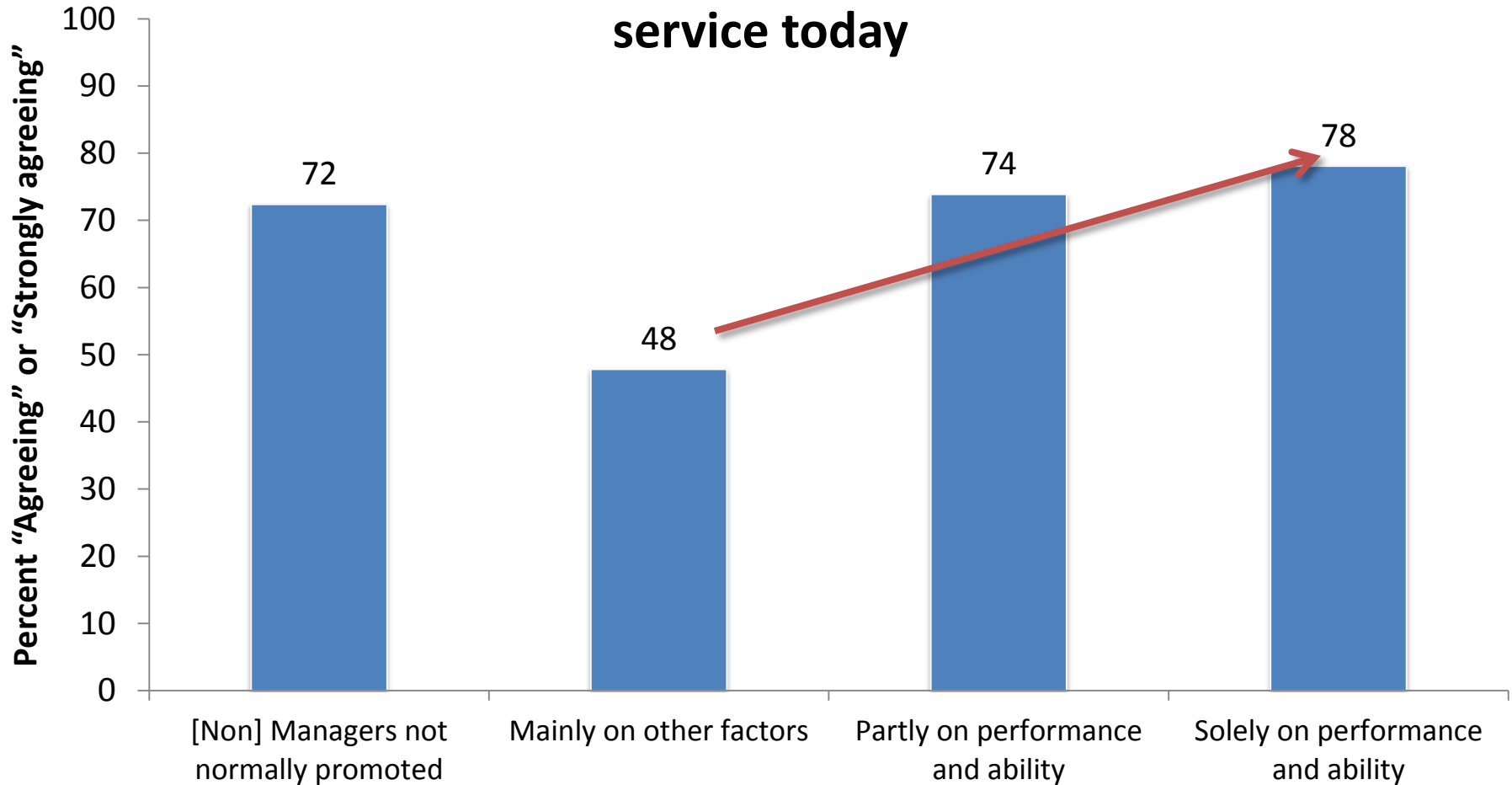
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,627; MoE: +/-2.6%

# I recommend that a young person work in public service today



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,682; MoE: +/-2.6%

# I recommend that a young person work in public service today



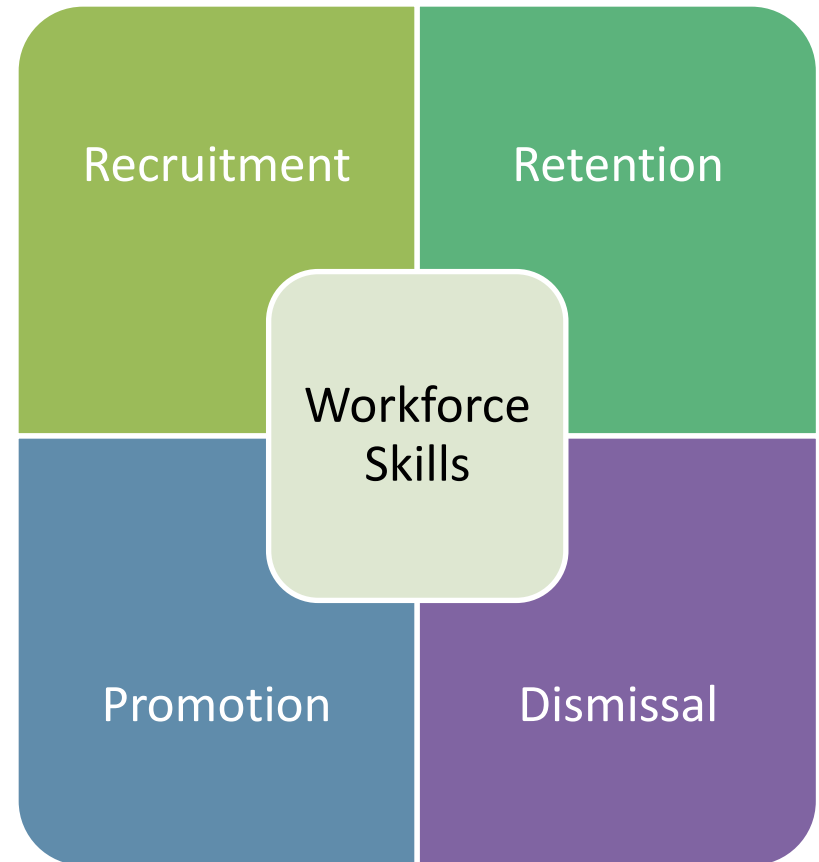
**What is the primary way that non-managers are promoted at [your agency]?**

Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,654; MoE: +/-2.6%

# Workforce Skills

The federal personnel system is under stress.

Some agencies are doing well and others are struggling.



# Recommendations:

Invest in diagnosis  
and remedies

Free up managers  
to recruit top  
quality talent,  
reward merit, retain  
best employees

Pursue a personnel  
system equal to the  
importance of our  
challenges