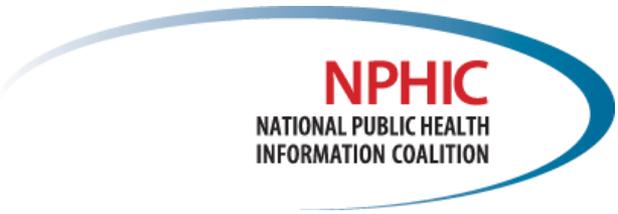


# Enhancing Trust in Public Health: Foundational Survey

A Communications Survey Supporting Technical Assistance for  
State, Local, Territorial, and Federal Communications

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**NPHIC**  
NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH  
INFORMATION COALITION



**astho**<sup>tm</sup>



**HORP**  
HARVARD OPINION  
RESEARCH PROGRAM

Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

# Data for Strategic Communications

## Collaboration

- Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health
- ASTHO
- NPHIC
- CDC

## Goals

- To provide robust evidence that can help guide communications strategy in the evolving COVID-19 context
  - Beyond publicly available polls
  - Enhancing trust in public health
  - Flexible series with on-going input

# Foundational Survey: Methods Summary

- *Timing*: February 1 to 22, 2022
- *Design*:
  - Nationally representative
  - 3 tracks with each focused on specific level of government: Federal, State, or Local
- *Sample Size*: 4,208 total [~1,400 for each track]
- *Sampling*: Representative online and phone panel
- *Languages*: English and Spanish
- *Fielding*: SSRS (Glen Mills, PA)
- *Weighting*: Standard (Age, Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Education, Urban status) and Panel-specific (Internet access; Civic engagement)

## NOTES:

For presentation purposes, Don't Know and Refused responses not always shown unless >5%  
±1.9 percentage points for total respondents at the 95% confidence level among all respondents

# Today: Foundational Survey to Guide Overarching Approaches

## Questions

- How does the public feel about public health? How much does the public trust public health agencies for information?
- Why do they trust?
- Why don't they trust?
- Who else do they trust?

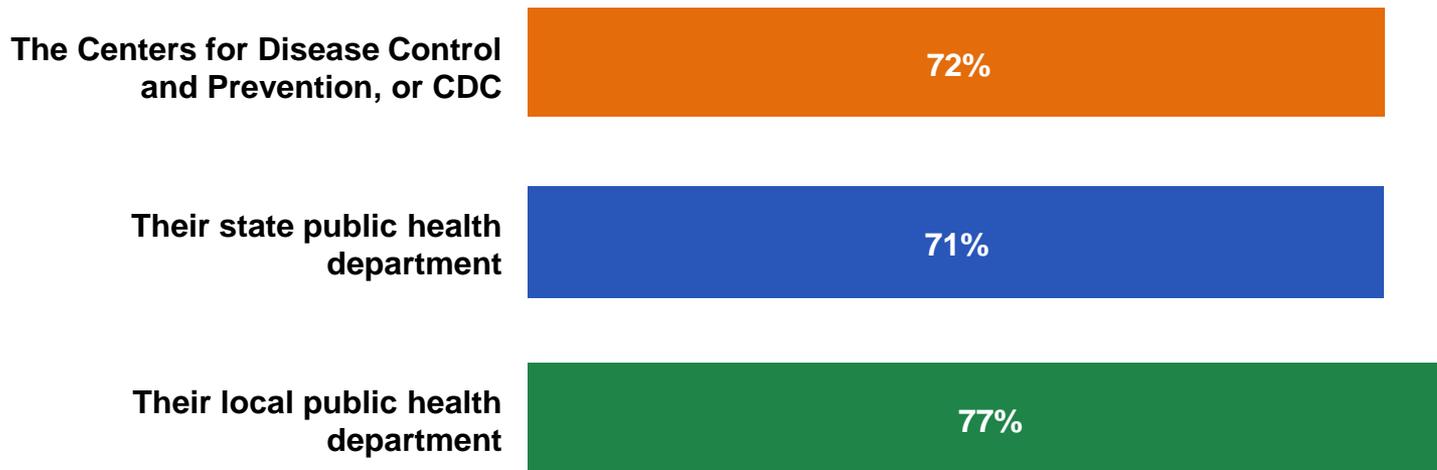
## Implications

- Foundation
- Messaging for those who trust
- Messaging for those who are less trusting
- Partners to build trust

How does the public feel about  
public health broadly?  
How much do they trust agencies for  
COVID Information?

# Most Have Positive Feelings about Public Health Institutions at All Levels

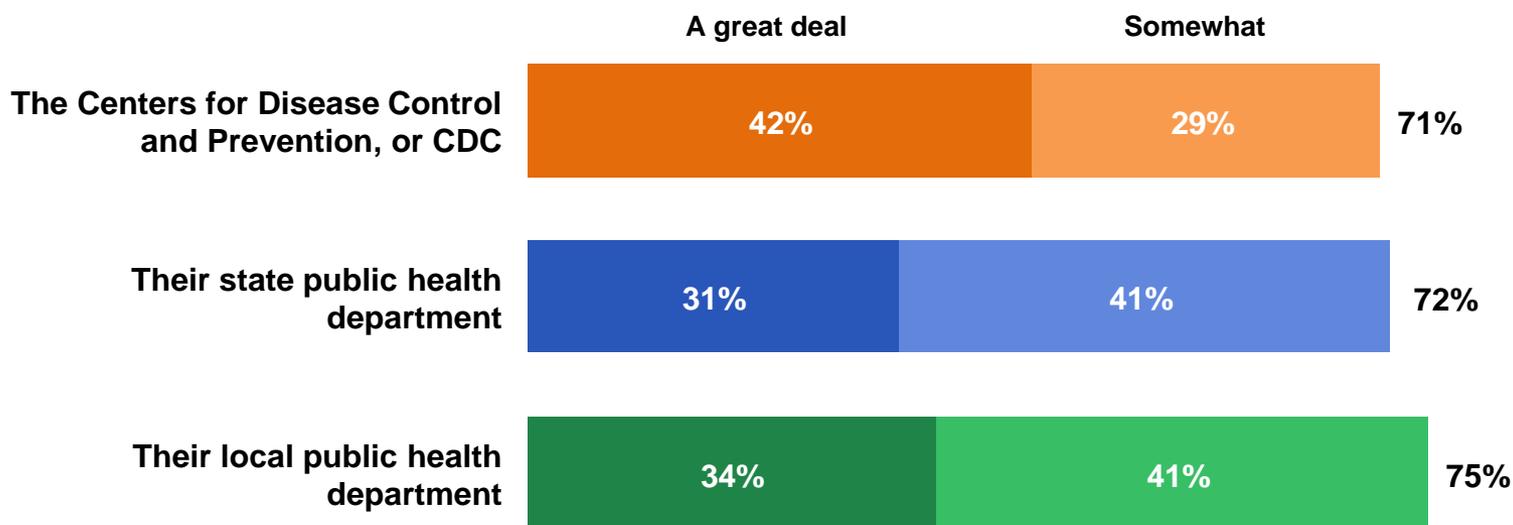
*% saying feel mostly positive about each institution*



CDC n=1405; State n=1402; Local n=1401

# Majorities Trust Public Health Institutions for Accurate COVID Information – Particularly at Federal Level

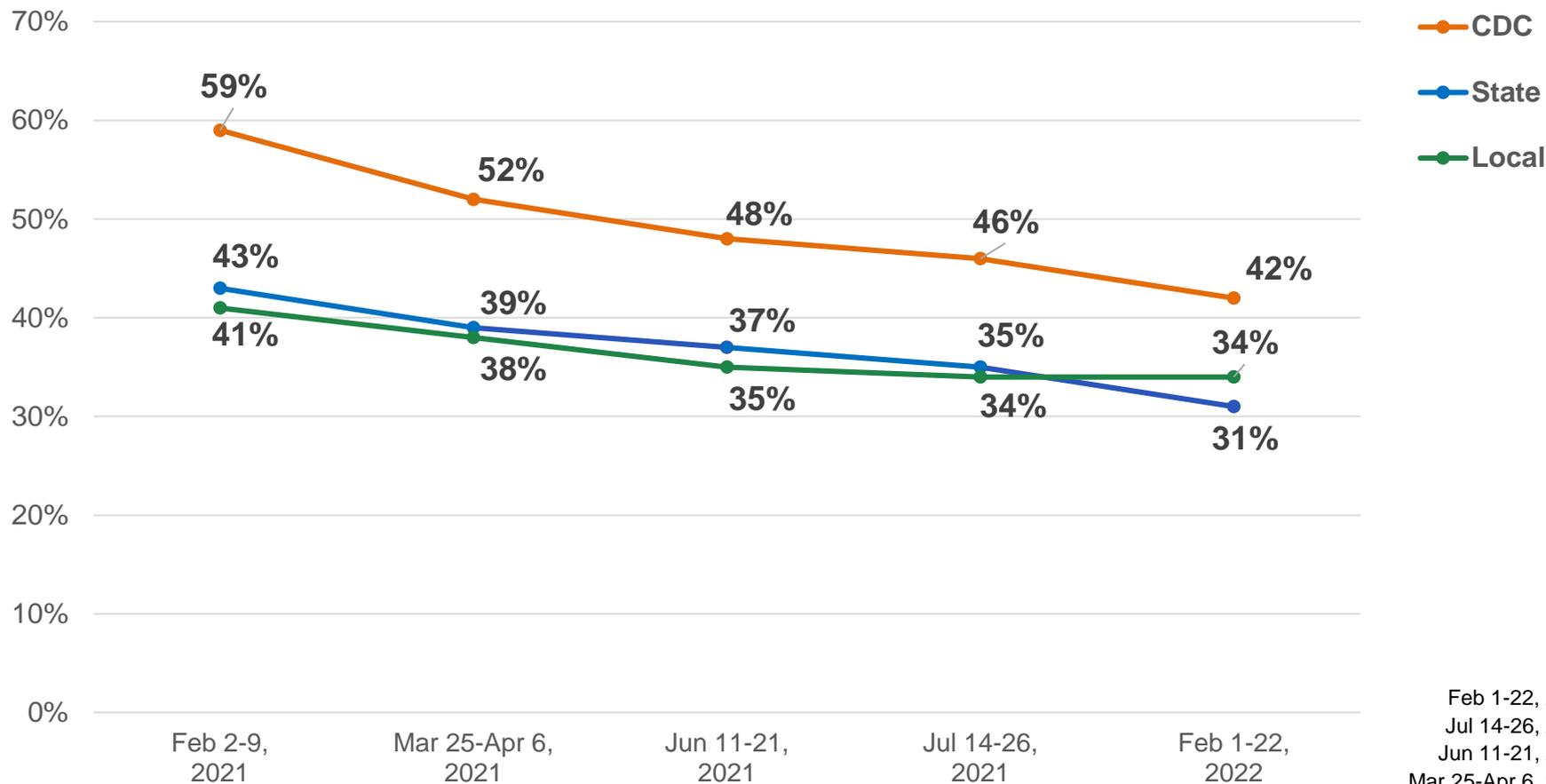
*% saying they trust each institution to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak*



CDC n=1405; State n=1402; Local n=1401

# Trust in Information Has Declined Since a Peak in Feb 2021

*% saying they trust each institution “a great deal” to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak*



Feb 1-22, 2022 n=4208  
Jul 14-26, 2021 n=2500  
Jun 11-21, 2021 n=2638  
Mar 25-Apr 6, 2021 n=1001  
Feb 2-9, 2021 n=697

# Trust Has Been Higher & Lower in Other Health Crises

## April 2010 (H1N1)

*“How much would you trust the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC for information about protecting yourself and your family from H1N1?”*



HSPH, Mar 17-Apr 11, 2010;  
n=2355 U.S. adults

## October 2014 (Ebola)

*“How much do you trust information about the current Ebola outbreak that comes from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC?”*



Pew Research Center, Oct 16-19, 2014;  
n=1000 U.S. adults

# Implications for Communication: Initial Considerations

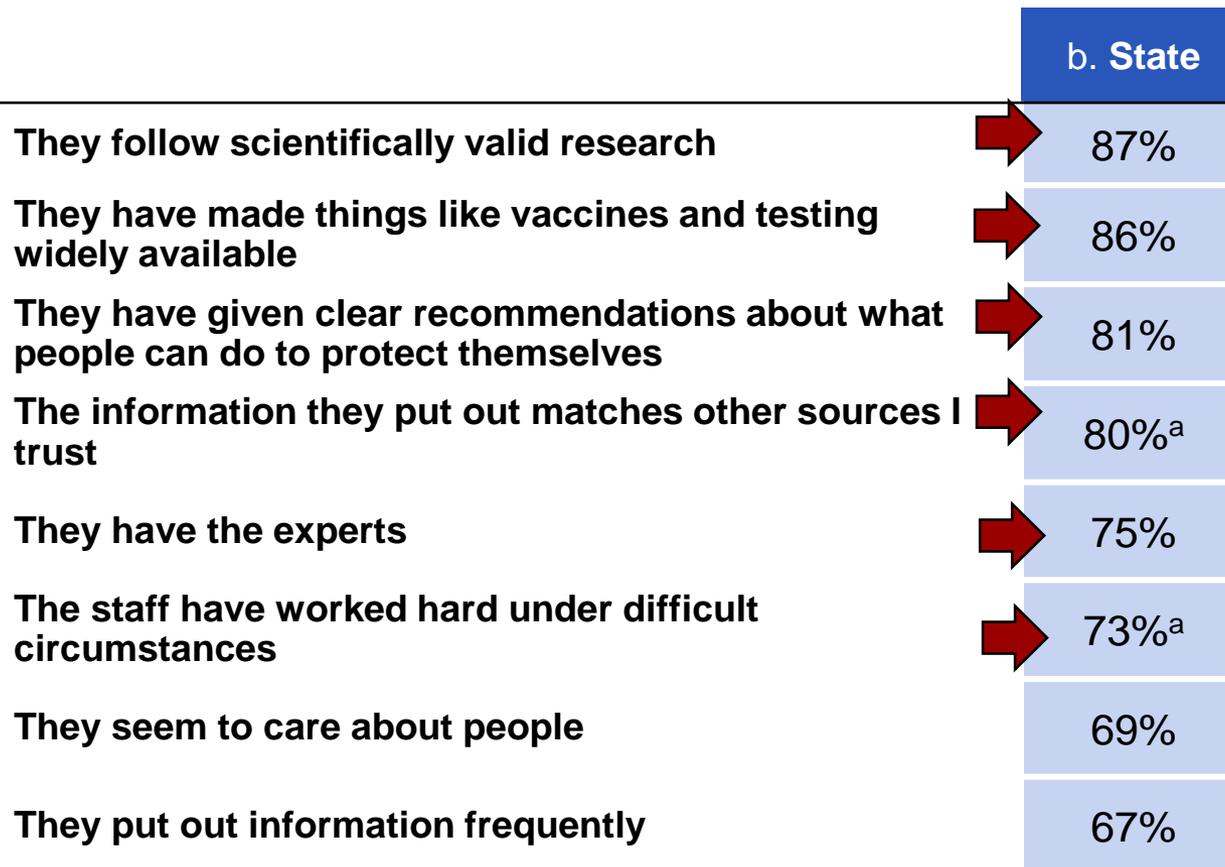
## **Foundation:**

- Remind yourselves that there is a strong foundation of positive perceptions
- Remind yourselves that public perceptions fluctuate, and they are not in an inevitable downward slide
- Supporting those who already feel positively about public health is critical to maintaining current levels of trust
  - Invest in communications at local, state and federal levels
  - Speak frequently to those who feel “mostly positive” and trust you

# Why Do They Trust?

# Trust Driven by Science, Action, Communications & Compassion at State Level

**% saying major reasons they trust each institution to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak are... (among those who trust each institution for this information)**



<sup>abc</sup>Percentage is statistically significantly greater than the percentage among the corresponding group

CDC n=422; State n=339; Local n=355

# At Federal Level, Science Plays a Stronger Role in Trust

*% saying major reasons they trust each institution to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak are... (among those who trust each institution for this information)*

	a. CDC	b. State	c. Local
They follow scientifically valid research 	94% <sup>bc</sup>	87%	85%
They have made things like vaccines and testing widely available	83%	86%	88%
They have given clear recommendations about what people can do to protect themselves	79%	81%	87% <sup>a</sup>
The information they put out matches other sources I trust	71%	80% <sup>a</sup>	82% <sup>a</sup>
They have the experts 	92% <sup>bc</sup>	75%	67%
The staff have worked hard under difficult circumstances	65%	73% <sup>a</sup>	79% <sup>a</sup>
They seem to care about people	64%	69%	73% <sup>a</sup>
They put out information frequently	68%	67%	68%

<sup>abc</sup>Percentage is statistically significantly greater than the percentage among the corresponding group

CDC n=422; State n=339; Local n=355

# Service Provision a Greater Driver at Local Level

*% saying major reasons they trust each institution to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak are... (among those who trust each institution for this information)*

	a. CDC	b. State	c. Local
The information they put out has a lot of detail	70%	64%	63%
They provide good care at public health clinics	49%	58% <sup>a</sup>	71% <sup>ab</sup>
They have steered clear of the influence of the private sector, meaning corporations and companies	56%	54%	51%
They have done a good job controlling the spread of coronavirus	49%	53%	55%
They have steered clear of a lot of the politics	56%	50%	54%
I trust the government generally	24%	34% <sup>a</sup>	29%

<sup>abc</sup>Percentage is statistically significantly greater than the percentage among the corresponding group

CDC n=422; State n=339; Local n=355

# Implications for Communication: Initial Considerations

## Foundation:

- Remind yourselves that there is a strong foundation of positive perceptions
- Remind yourselves that public perceptions fluctuate, and they are not in an inevitable downward slide
- Supporting those who already feel positively about public health is critical to maintaining current levels of trust
  - Invest in communications at local, state and federal levels
  - Speak frequently to those who feel “mostly positive” and trust you

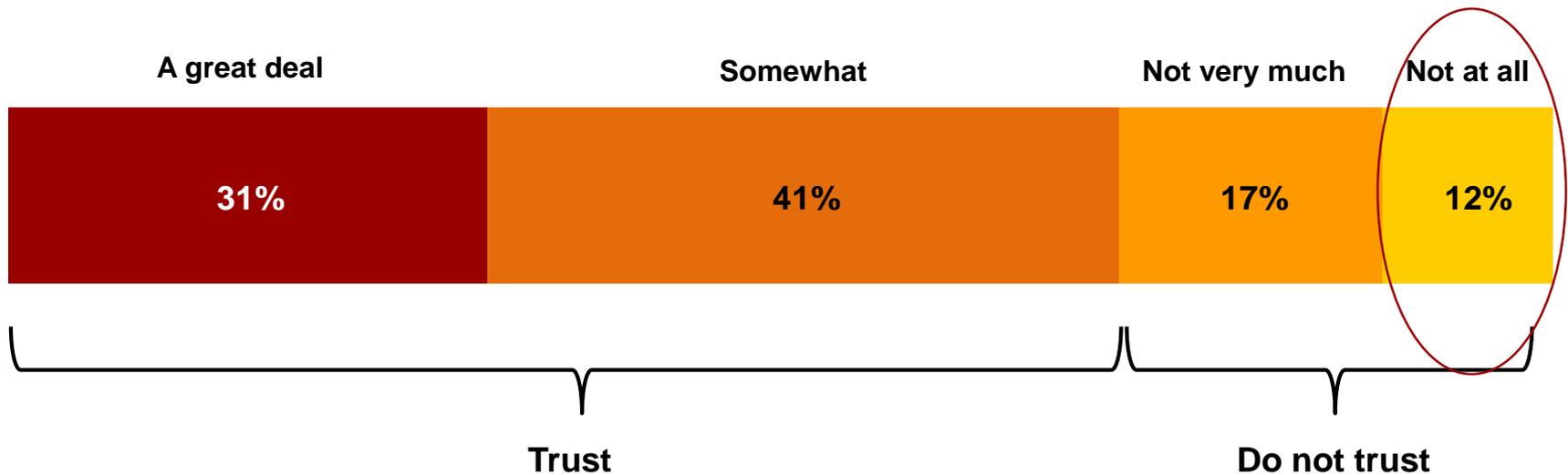
## Messaging for Those who Trust Agencies the Most:

- Providing clear, consistent situational information and recommendations for action is critical to maintaining and enhancing trust in public health among those who are more trusting. As you do:
  - Emphasize the scientific expertise that public health brings to the table
    - State and local public health agencies can sometimes leverage the authority of information from the federal level as a means of enhancing trust
  - Showcase the actions taken - locally for state and local public health agencies
  - Highlight compassionate care, particularly at the state and local levels

# Why Don't They Trust?

# Media Polls Often Focus on the “Bottom Two Boxes”; Media Stories Focus on the Least Trusting

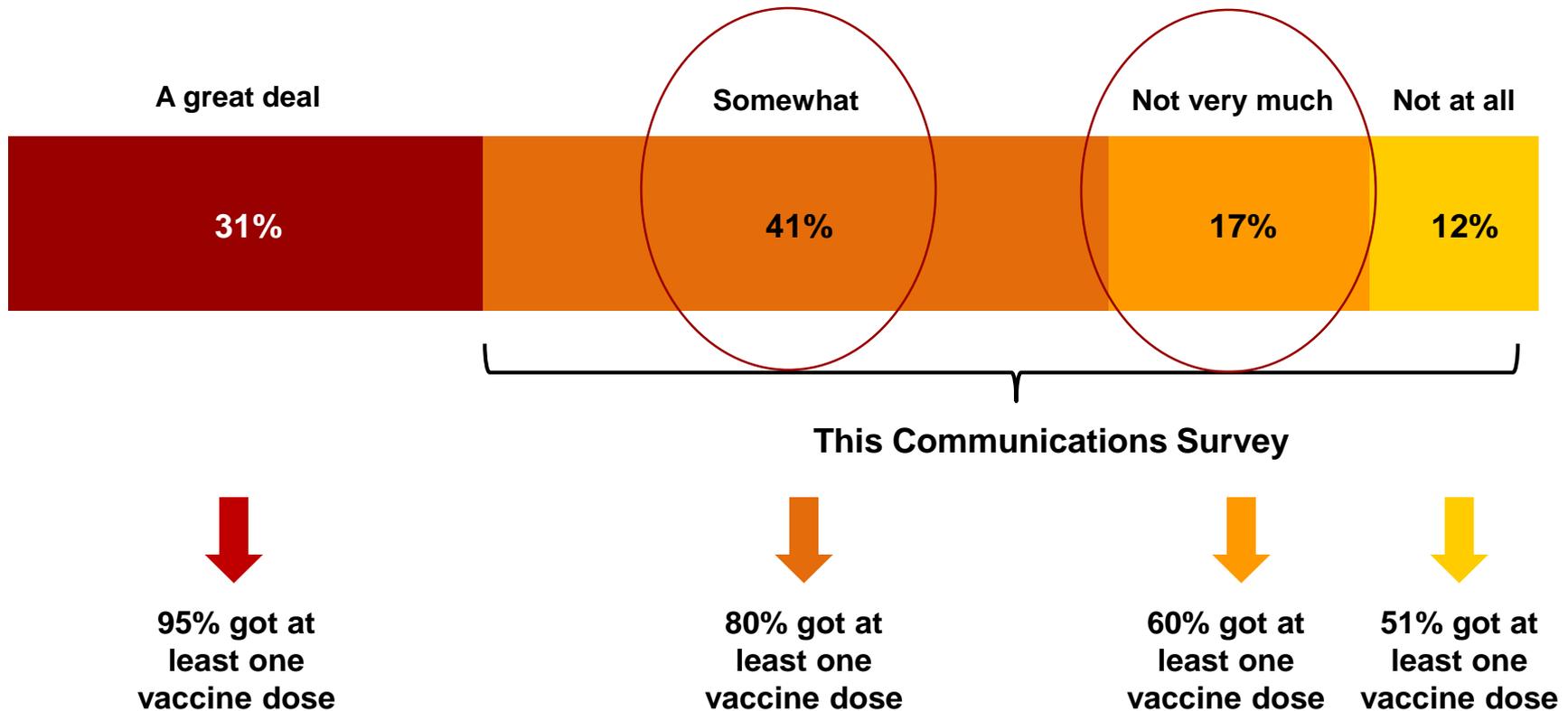
*% saying they trust their state public health department to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak*



Trust their state public health department for accurate coronavirus information n=1402; “A great deal” n=487, “Somewhat” n=545, “Not very much” n=218, “Not at all” n=152

# Varied Trust Makes a Difference: Vaccination

**% saying they trust their state public health department to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak**



Trust their state public health department for accurate coronavirus information n=1402; "A great deal" n=487, "Somewhat" n=545, "Not very much" n=218, "Not at all" n=152

# Less Trusting are More likely to be: Less Educated, White, Rural, Younger

Among those who trust their state public health department...

	a. A great deal	b. Somewhat	c. Not very much	d. Not at all
Age – 65+	29% <sup>bc</sup>	19%	19%	20%
Rurality – Rural	16%	25% <sup>a</sup>	29% <sup>a</sup>	27% <sup>a</sup>
Education – College grad or more	45% <sup>bcd</sup>	31%	31%	30%
Race/ethnicity – Black Non-Hispanic	13%	14% <sup>c</sup>	8%	8%
Race/ethnicity – Hispanic	20% <sup>cd</sup>	19% <sup>cd</sup>	11%	9%

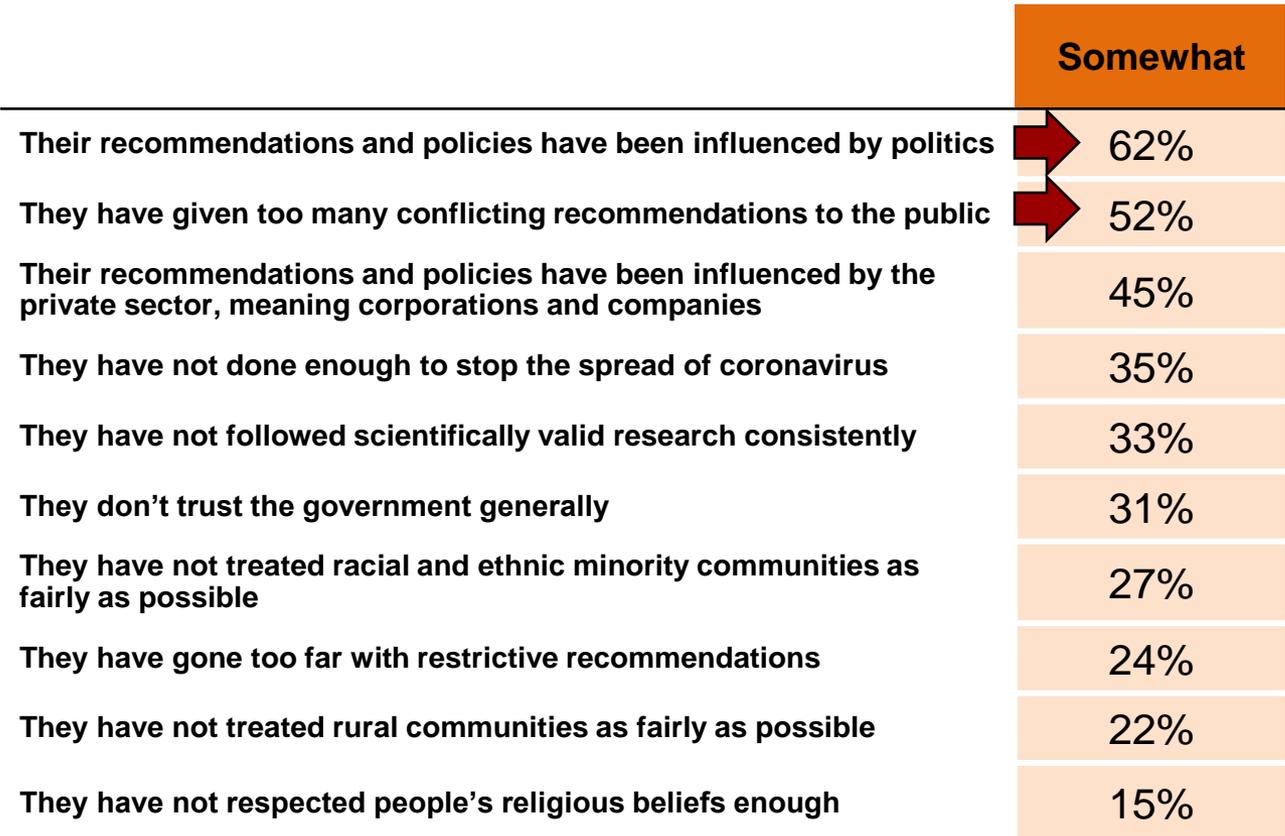
<sup>abcd</sup>Percentage is statistically significantly greater than the percentage among the corresponding group

Trust their state public health department for accurate coronavirus information “A great deal”=487, “Somewhat” n=545, “Not very much” n=218, “Not at all” n=152

# Among Those who Trust “Somewhat”, Concerns about Political Influence and Conflicting Recommendations are Top reasons

**% saying major reasons they don't trust their state public health department to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak are...**

**Among those who trust their state public health department...**



Trust for accurate coronavirus information “Somewhat” n=545, “Not very much” n=218, “Not at all” n=152

# As Trust Declines Additional Reasons Play Stronger Role

% saying major reasons they don't trust their state public health department to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak are...

Among those who trust their state public health department...

	a. Somewhat	b. Not very much
Their recommendations and policies have been influenced by politics	62%	83% <sup>a</sup>
They have given too many conflicting recommendations to the public	52%	73% <sup>a</sup>
Their recommendations and policies have been influenced by the private sector, meaning corporations and companies	45%	65% <sup>a</sup>
They have not done enough to stop the spread of coronavirus	35%	29%
They have not followed scientifically valid research consistently	33%	64% <sup>a</sup>
They don't trust the government generally	31%	45% <sup>a</sup>
They have not treated racial and ethnic minority communities as fairly as possible	27% <sup>b</sup>	19%
They have gone too far with restrictive recommendations	24%	50% <sup>a</sup>
They have not treated rural communities as fairly as possible	22%	15%
They have not respected people's religious beliefs enough	15%	33% <sup>a</sup>

<sup>ab</sup>Percentage is statistically significantly greater than the percentage among the corresponding group

Trust for accurate coronavirus information "Somewhat" n=545, "Not very much" n=218, "Not at all" n=152

# Reasons Grow Among Least Trusting

**% saying major reasons they don't trust their state public health department to provide accurate information about the coronavirus outbreak are...**

**Among those who trust their state public health department...**

	a. Somewhat	b. Not very much	c. Not at all
Their recommendations and policies have been influenced by politics	62%	83% <sup>a</sup>	92% <sup>a</sup>
They have given too many conflicting recommendations to the public	52%	73% <sup>a</sup>	79% <sup>a</sup>
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They don't trust the government generally	31%	45% <sup>a</sup>	55% <sup>a</sup>
They have not treated racial and ethnic minority communities as fairly as possible	27% <sup>b</sup>	19%	23%
They have gone too far with restrictive recommendations	24%	50% <sup>a</sup>	68% <sup>ab</sup>
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# Implications for Communication: Initial Considerations

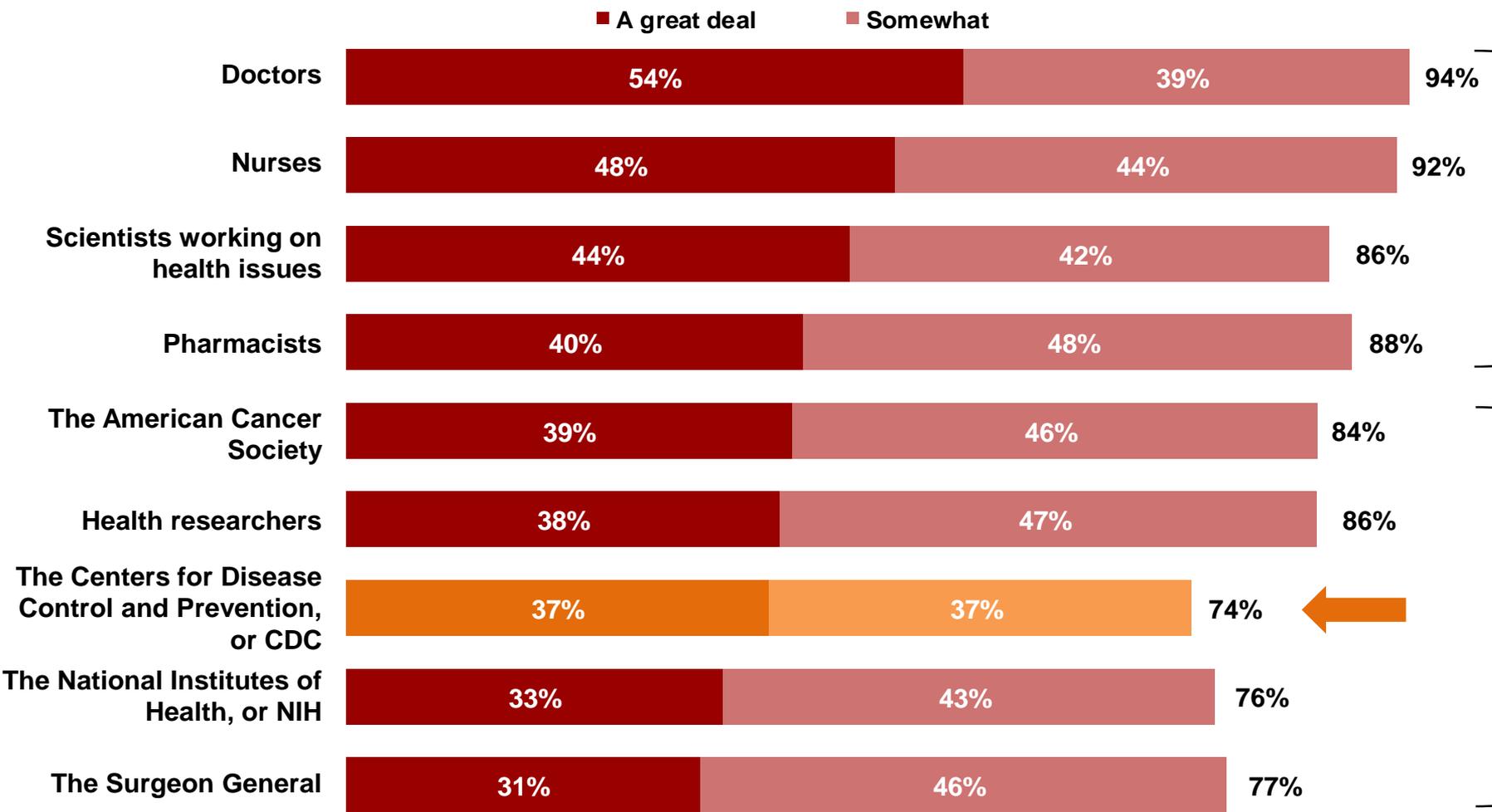
## **Messaging for Those who are Lessing Trusting:**

- Consider the gradient of trust in your jurisdiction (use vaccination as proxy)
  - Remember that it's not always the least trusting that needs to be addressed in communications
  - To grow trust among those who have some to start:
    - Maintain the emphasis on science and research as a thread of consistency through changes in policy
  - Aim for a non-partisan approach to communication

# Who Else Do They Trust?

# Most Trusted Sources of Health Information are Medical Professionals

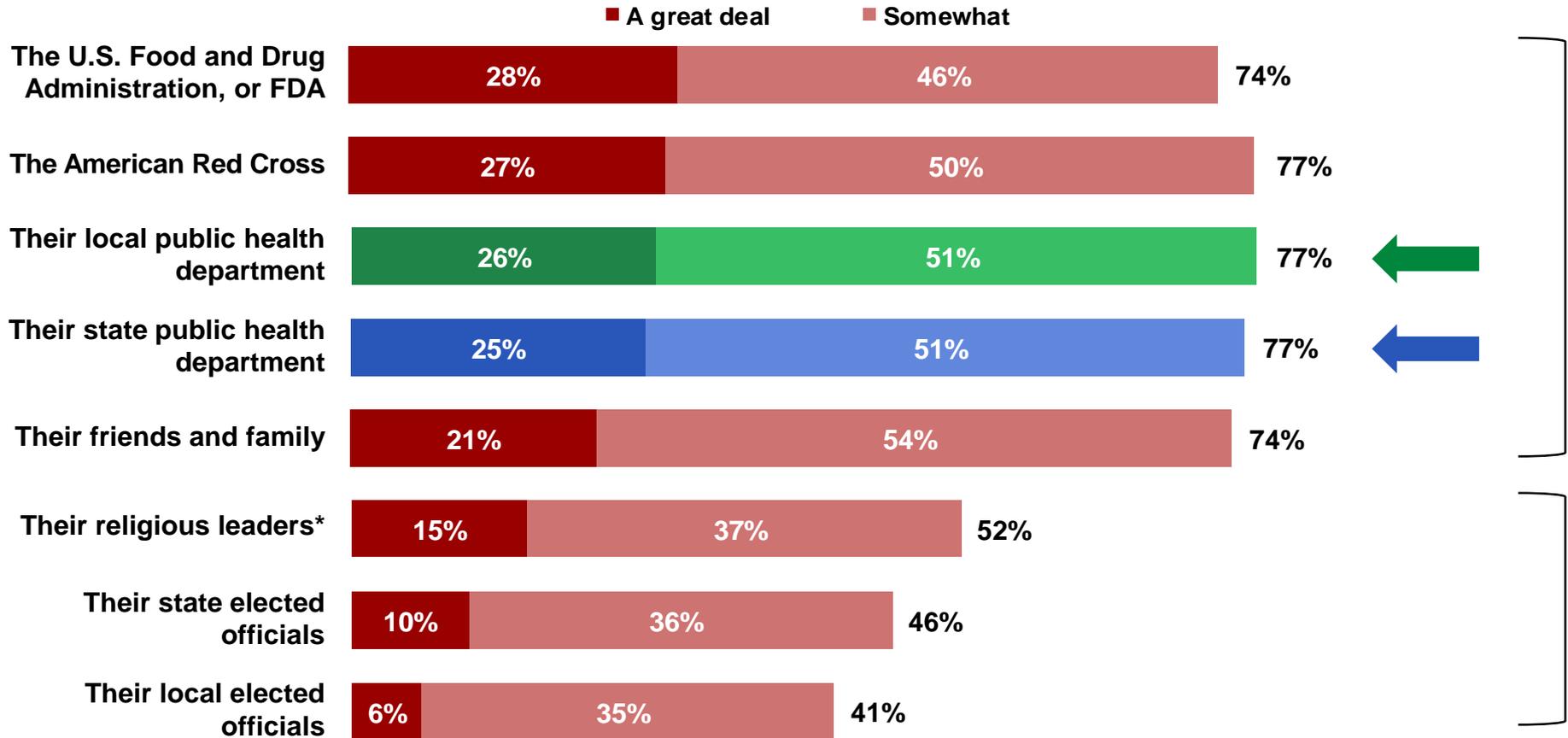
*% saying they trust recommendations to improve health in general made by each group*



All respondents asked about state and local public health departments and CDC (n=4208); respondents asked about random 10 institutions among remaining (n=2026-2168)

# Least Trusted for Information include Friends/Family and Elected Officials

*% saying they trust recommendations to improve health in general made by each group*

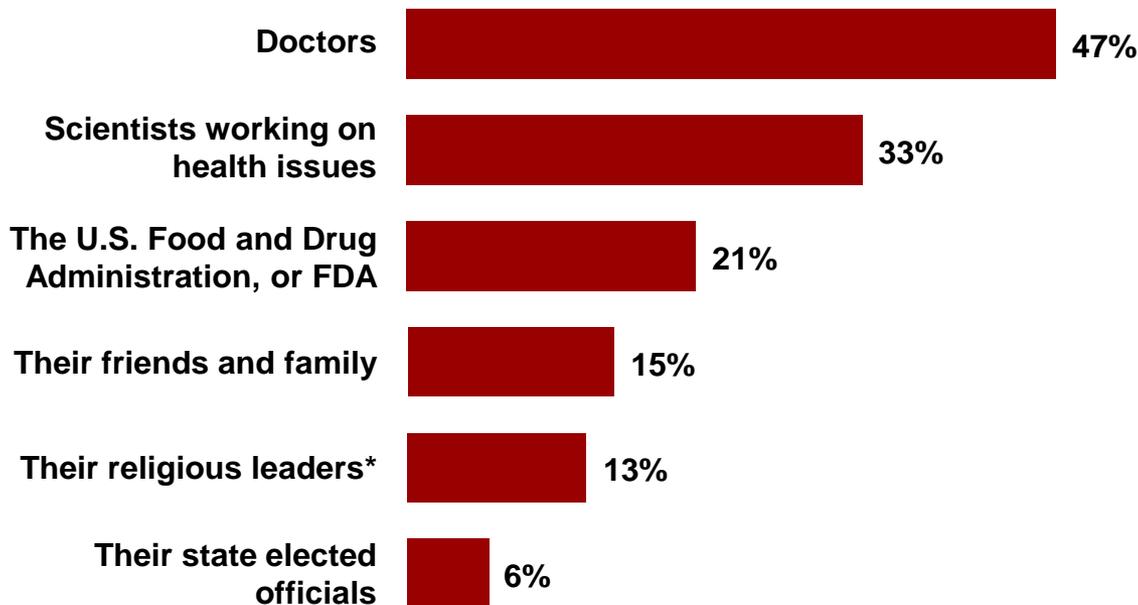


All respondents asked about state and local public health departments and CDC (n=4208); respondents asked about random 10 institutions among remaining (n=2026-2168)

\*Among those who also say they have a religious leader, n=1606

# Among Those who Trust State Public Health “Somewhat”, Doctors Most Trusted

**% saying they trust recommendations to improve health made by each group “a great deal”  
(among those saying they trust their state public health department to provide accurate  
information about the coronavirus outbreak “somewhat”)**

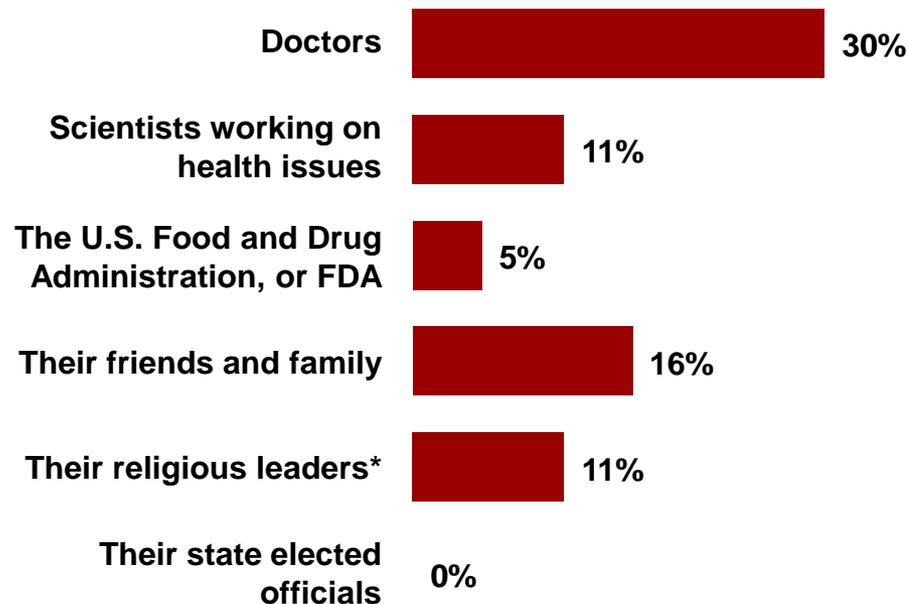


Respondents asked about random 10 institutions, including those shown; data shown here for each among those who say they trust their state public health department for accurate coronavirus information “somewhat” (n=259-283)

\*Among those who also say they have a religious leader, n=194

# Least Trusting of State Public Health for Information are Broadly Distrustful

**% saying they trust recommendations to improve health made by each group “a great deal”  
(among those saying they trust their state public health department to provide accurate  
information about the coronavirus outbreak “not at all”)**



Respondents asked about random 10 institutions, including those shown; data shown here for each among those who say they trust public health institutions for accurate coronavirus information “not at all” (n=63-82)

\*Among those who also say they have a religious leader, n=54

# Implications for Communication: Initial Considerations

## **Messaging for Those who are Lessing Trusting:**

- Consider the gradient of trust in your jurisdiction (use vaccination as proxy)
  - Remember that it's not always the least trusting that needs to be addressed in communications
  - To grow trust among those who have some to start:
    - Maintain the emphasis on science and research as a thread of consistency through changes in policy
  - Aim for a non-partisan approach to communication

## **Partners:**

- Bringing in trusted spokespeople can help build on a foundation of trust in public health institutions for health information.
  - Care providers can provide a key, personalized voice that is both expert and compassionate
  - To the extent possible, provide distance from communications that go only through elected officials
    - Demonstrate that advice goes to elected officials rather than the reverse

# Implications for Communication: Initial Considerations

## **Messaging for Those who are Lessing Trusting:**

- Consider the gradient of trust in your jurisdiction (use vaccination as proxy)
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    - Demonstrate that advice goes to elected officials rather than the reverse

## **Communication with the Least Trusting:**

- If you need to reach the least trusting, a specialized approach will likely be needed
- Identifying localized partners who are trusted by individual communities will likely be useful

# Special Thanks

## **Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)**

- Alyssa Boyea
- Jane Esworthy
- Keith Coleman
- Sidnie Christian
- O'Keyla Cooper
- Ericka McGowan
- Meredith Allen
- ASTHO membership

## **National Public Health Information Coalition (NPHIC)**

- Laura Espino
- Tom Schafer
- NPHIC membership

## **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

- Keri Lubell
- JIC Lead
- JIC Research and Evaluation Team

# Your Ideas for Next Survey

# Harvard Opinion Research Program

**Gillian K. SteelFisher, Senior Research Scientist and Deputy Director**  
**Hannah Caporello, Senior Research Projects Manager**

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