



2024 IFIC
SPOTLIGHT
SURVEY

Americans' Trust In Food & Nutrition Science

October 2024



METHODOLOGY



The International Food Information Council (IFIC) commissioned an online survey among U.S. consumers to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about trust in science about food, nutrition, and diet. One thousand adults ages 18 years and older completed the online survey from July 11-13, 2024, and were weighted to ensure proportional results. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

The Bayesian confidence level for the survey sample (N=1,000) is 3.5, which is roughly equivalent to a margin of error of ± 3.1 at the 95% confidence level. Callouts of statistically significant results are included where appropriate on slides displaying results. Something is statistically significant if the result cannot be attributed to random chance. Statistical significance in this report is only compared within each demographic group (e.g. age, race, gender, etc.).

SUGGESTED CITATION:

International Food Information Council (IFIC). 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Trust in Food & Nutrition Science. October 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our [trust in scientists](#) impacts our attitude toward science and adherence to evidence-based recommendations. This IFIC Spotlight Survey shows that while most Americans do not strongly trust food and nutrition science, food and nutrition scientists and medical professionals are the most trusted sources for food information.

While less than four in ten Americans express strong trust in science about food, nutrition, and/or diet, two in three say they have trust in that science. The remaining one-third of Americans are either ambivalent (21%) or distrusting (12%). Scientists and the work they perform to shape dietary guidance and official nutrition policy is a fact not lost on us at the International Food Information Council (IFIC). Communicating science about food is IFIC's mission.

While American diet quality is low, as indicated by the [Healthy Eating Index](#) score of 58 out of 100, Americans with lower levels of trust in science about food, nutrition, and/or diet (53%) would be more willing to change their diets if they had more trust in that science. Increasing confidence in the scientific process could go a long way toward shifting American eating patterns closer to dietary guidance recommendations.

In the meantime, Americans tell us that eating “healthy” is a moving target, with eight in ten (79%) saying that it seems like dietary recommendations are always changing, which kindles confusion, frustration, doubt, and stress about their food choices.

IFIC commissioned this *IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Trust in Food & Nutrition Science* to study U.S. consumer mindsets related to food and nutrition information.



KEY FINDINGS

Less than 4 in 10 Americans strongly trust science about food, nutrition, and/or diet.

When asked to consider their level of trust in science about food, nutrition, and/or diet, the mean level of trust among survey takers was 6.64, based on a linear numeric scale where 0 was labeled as "complete distrust," 5 as "neither trust nor distrust," and 10 as "complete trust." Only 38% of Americans report strong trust (8 out of 10 or higher). Alternatively, about 1 in 5 Americans (21%) say they are neither trusting nor distrusting whereas approximately 1 in 10 (12%) say they are distrusting (4 or lower out of 10).

Among potential sources of food information, the most trusted are food and nutrition scientists, medical doctors/nurses, and registered dietitians.

As to sources of food, nutrition, and/or diet information, 55% of consumers trust food and nutrition scientists; 51% trust medical doctors and nurses; and 41% trust registered dietitians. More Americans trust their friends and family for food information (29%) than government agencies (23%), television news (15%), or newspapers (10%).

Consumers have more trust in university food and nutrition scientists than scientists from food industry or government.

Consumers considered teams of scientists from three sectors: academia, food industry, and government. Americans express the most trust for university scientists (+49% net trust) and less trust in scientists from food industry (+38% net trust) and U. S. government scientists (+25% net trust). A mixed team of scientists from all three sectors received a net trust score of +39%. More than 1 in 5 (ranging from 21-23%) neither trust, nor distrust each team of scientists.

Among those with lower levels of trust in science about food, nutrition, and/or diet, just over half express willingness to change their diet if they had more trust in that science.

Among Americans who rated their trust in science about food, nutrition, and/or diet as 6 out of 10 or lower, 53% said they would be more willing to change their diets if they had more trust in food and nutrition science. One in three (36%) report ambivalence while one in 10 (11%) said they would not change their diets even if they had more trust in food and nutrition science.

KEY FINDINGS

8 in 10 Americans say it seems like recommendations about what to eat and drink are always changing.

Most consumers (79%) perceive that recommendations regarding what to eat and drink change frequently. On the other hand, 12% say they do not feel like food recommendations are always changing. Approximately one in ten (9%) report they are unsure.

Among those who say dietary recommendations seem like they are always changing, more than 4 in 10 say it makes them feel confused about their food choices.

Consumers who perceive volatility in nutrition recommendations experience a variety of emotions as a result, including feeling confused (43%), frustrated (33%), doubtful (30%), and stressed (22%) about their food choices. As many as one in ten (10%) say they are fearful because of changing dietary recommendations. Alternatively, some Americans report feeling curious (35%) or inspired (14%).

4 in 10 Americans search for additional information online after noticing food, nutrition, and diet media headlines.

Among consumers who notice food, nutrition, and diet headlines in the media, top reactions are searching for additional information online (39%), reading the corresponding content/article (32%), and reconsidering what is healthy to consume and what is not (28%). One in five (20%) consult their personal healthcare provider for more information. One in seven (15%) say they do not typically notice these types of headlines in the media, while the same percentage (15%) say they ignore such headlines and continue their usual diet.

Just over half of Americans report being in a private social media group focused on food, nutrition, and diet topics.

Slightly more than half (52%) of Americans tell us they are in a private social media group that focuses on food, nutrition, and diet topics. Their involvement varies with 8% report being very active, 17% somewhat active, 15% somewhat passive, and 11% very passive. On the other hand, 48% of consumers are not part of a private social media group focused on these topics.

KEY FINDINGS

Two-thirds of Americans say they are more likely to trust food advice if it comes from a registered dietitian.

Most Americans (66%) trust food advice if it were to come from a registered dietitian. A similar likelihood of trust was noted if food advice cites scientific evidence (64%) and if it is simple and easy to follow (59%). Conversely, about one in four say that they would be more likely to trust food advice if shocks or scares them (26%) or if it is widely shared on social media (26%).

More than 1 in 3 Americans get most of their food information from medical doctors and nurses, food and nutrition scientists, and/or friends and family.

Americans say they get most of their information about food, nutrition, and diet from medical doctors and nurses (37%), food and nutrition scientists (36%), as well as friends and family (34%). Nearly three in ten (28%) say they get most of their food information from registered dietitians. Fewer Americans report getting most of their food information from U.S. government agencies (17%).

IMPLICATIONS

According to the [National Academies' Strategic Council for Research Excellence](#), "confidence [in science] has declined . . . but the decline is not science-specific." Many institutions important to consumers have lost trust from those whom such institutions exist to serve. Therefore, science is not the sole owner of this troubling phenomenon.

The state of consumer trust in science is an urgent call to action for organizations dedicated to serving the public and improving health and nutrition. [IFIC's mission](#) to effectively communicate science-based information has never been more essential. Furthermore, promoting and practicing the principles of credible science communication is indispensable to reaching consumers with actionable information grounded in the broader context of scientific consensus.

Communicators focused on food and nutrition science and related health outcomes, such as journalists, educators, health professionals, and regulatory and policy officials, have platforms to inform public knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. Admittedly, these individuals are not the only ones communicating about food. The food and nutrition information landscape is crowded with sensational headlines and non-credentialed lifestyle influencers promoting products and practices not backed by science.

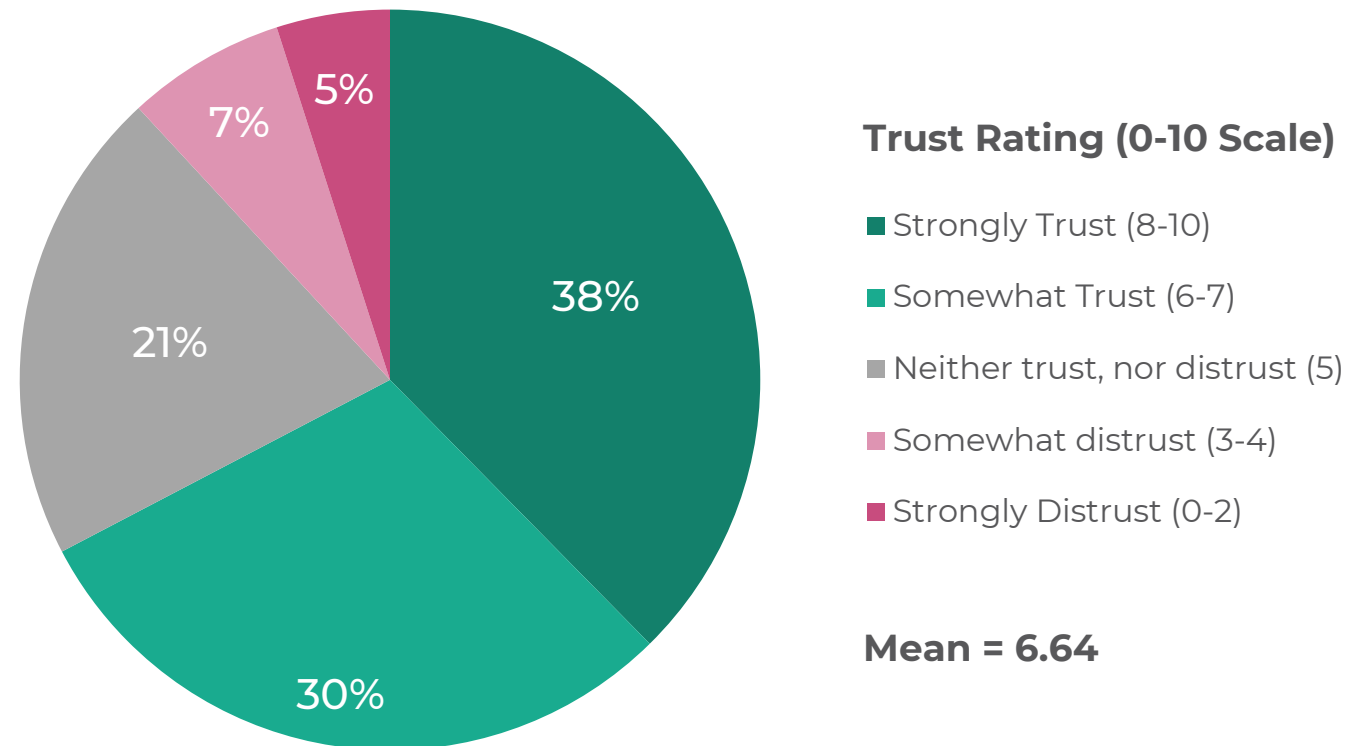
As many provocative headlines originate from misinterpreted or miscommunicated results and designs of single studies, IFIC has redoubled its efforts with its science communication platform, including [resources](#) to help communicators better understand the process of science, the types of conclusions that can be drawn from different scientific methodologies, and how to communicate effectively to consumers.

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Trust In Food & Nutrition Science



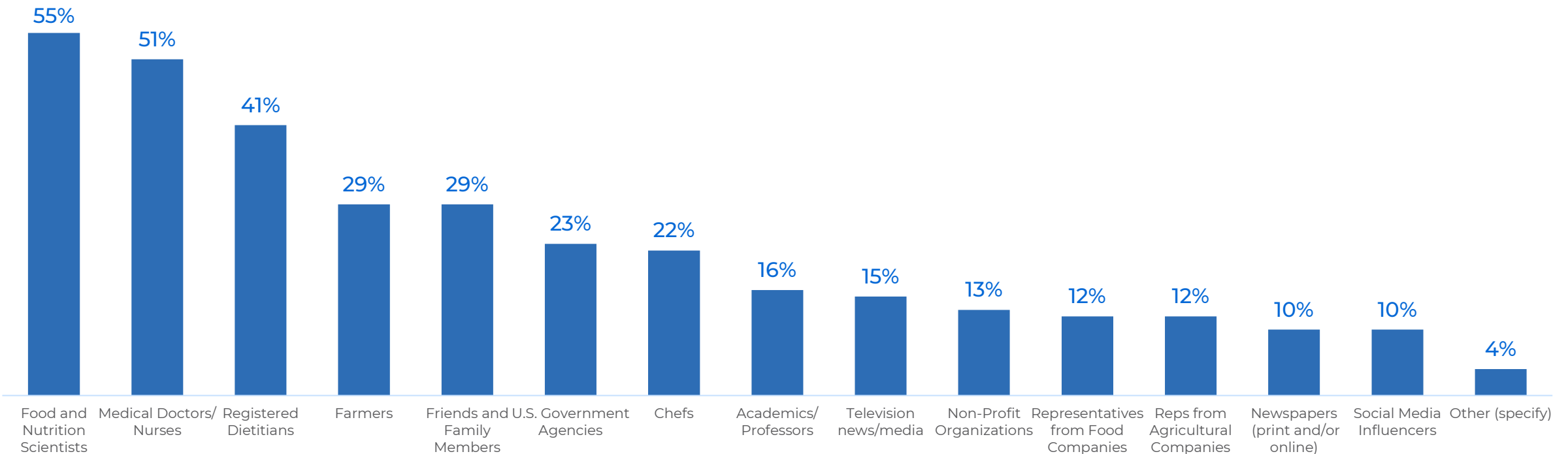
Less than 4 in 10 Americans strongly trust science about food, nutrition, and/or diet.

1 in 5 (21%) are neither trusting nor distrusting, while more than 1 in 10 (12%) are at least somewhat distrusting.



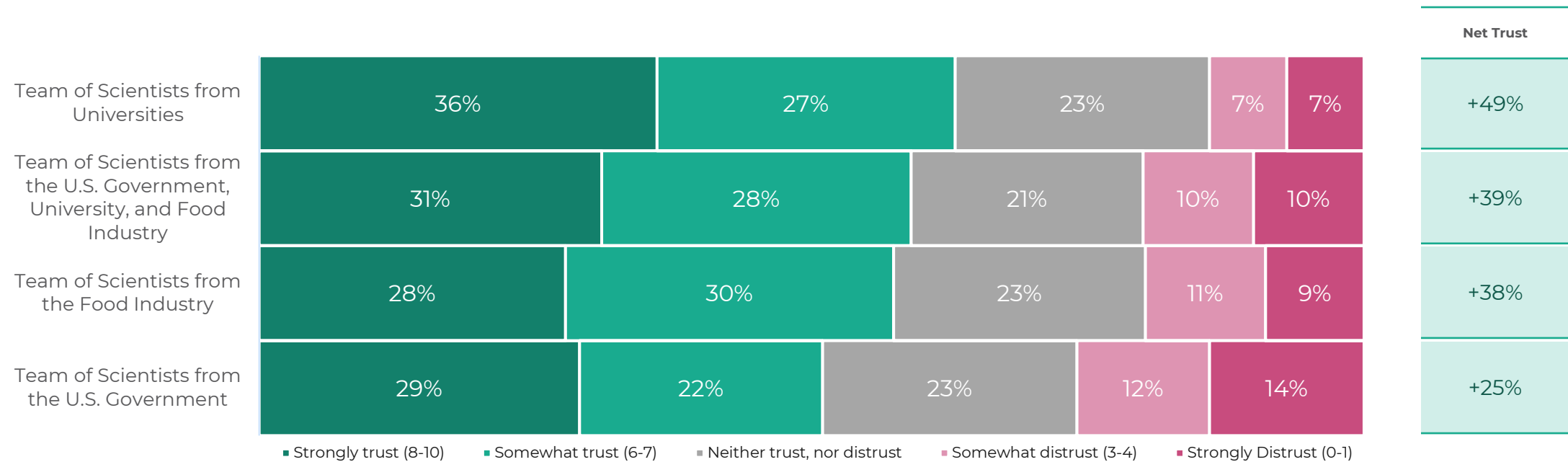
Among potential sources of food information, the most trusted are food and nutrition scientists, medical doctors/nurses, and registered dietitians.

More Americans trust their friends and family for food information (29%) than trust government agencies (23%), television news (15%), or newspapers (10%).



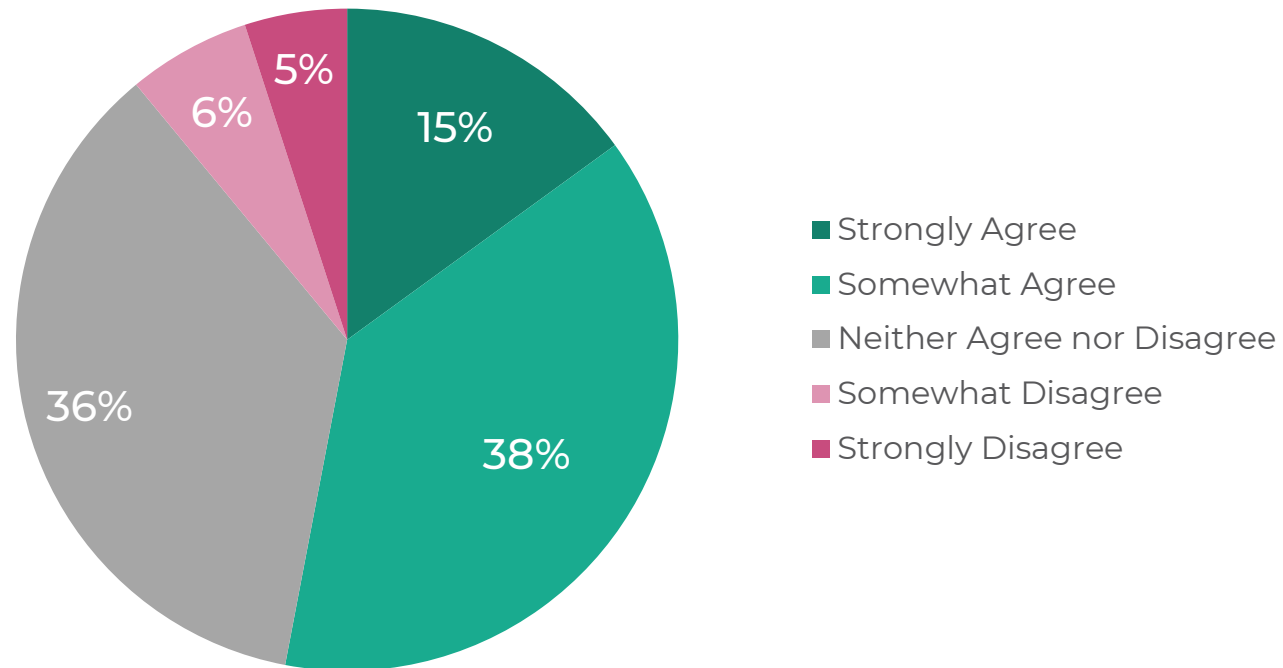
Americans have more trust in food and nutrition scientists from universities than from food industry or government.

While teams of scientists from food industry and government are less trusted than university scientists, net trust is positive for each. Nearly one-quarter neither trust, nor distrust each team of scientists.



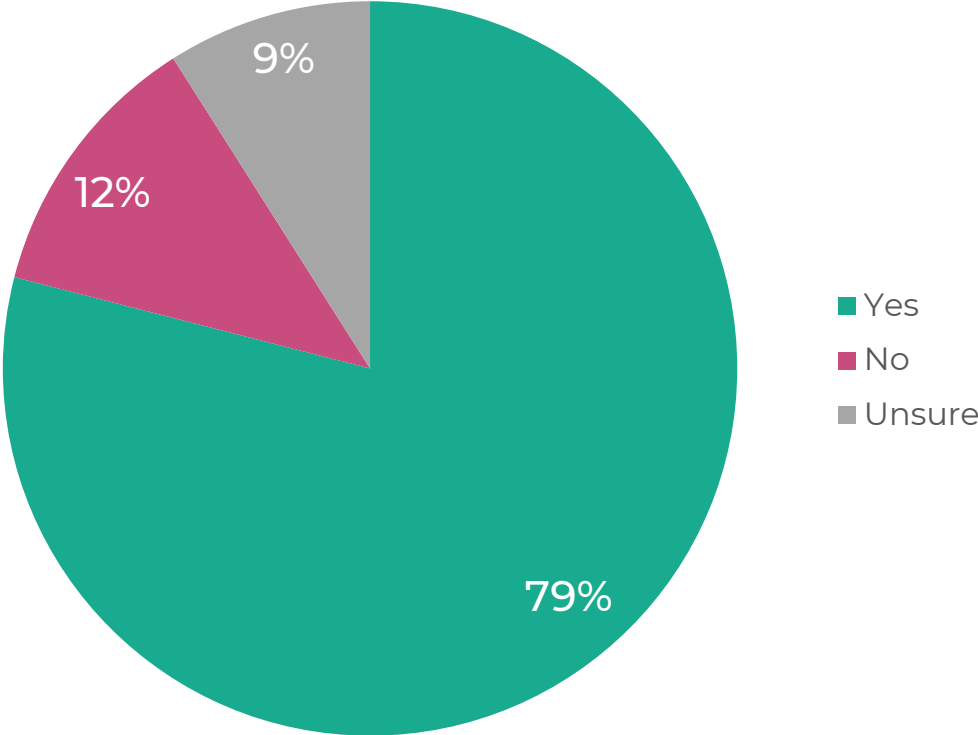
Among those with lower levels of trust in science about food, nutrition, and/or diet, just over half express willingness to change their diet if they had more trust in that science.

The remainder are either ambivalent (36%) or would not be more willing (11%) to change their diet if they had more trust in food and nutrition science.



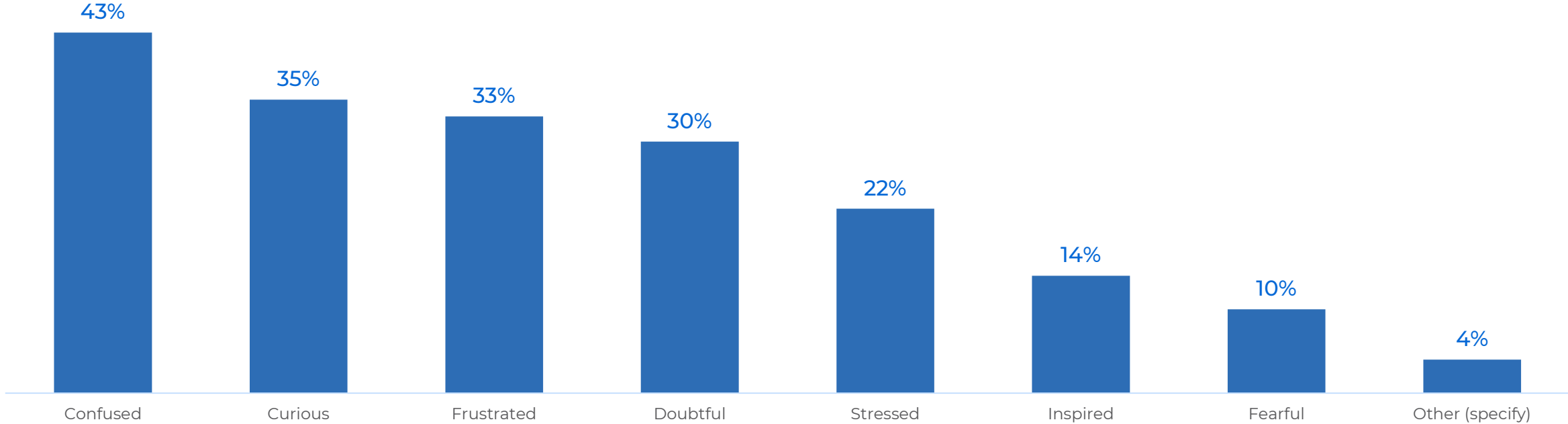
8 in 10 Americans say it seems like recommendations about what to eat and drink are always changing.

Just over 1 in 10 (12%) do not feel like food recommendations are always changing.



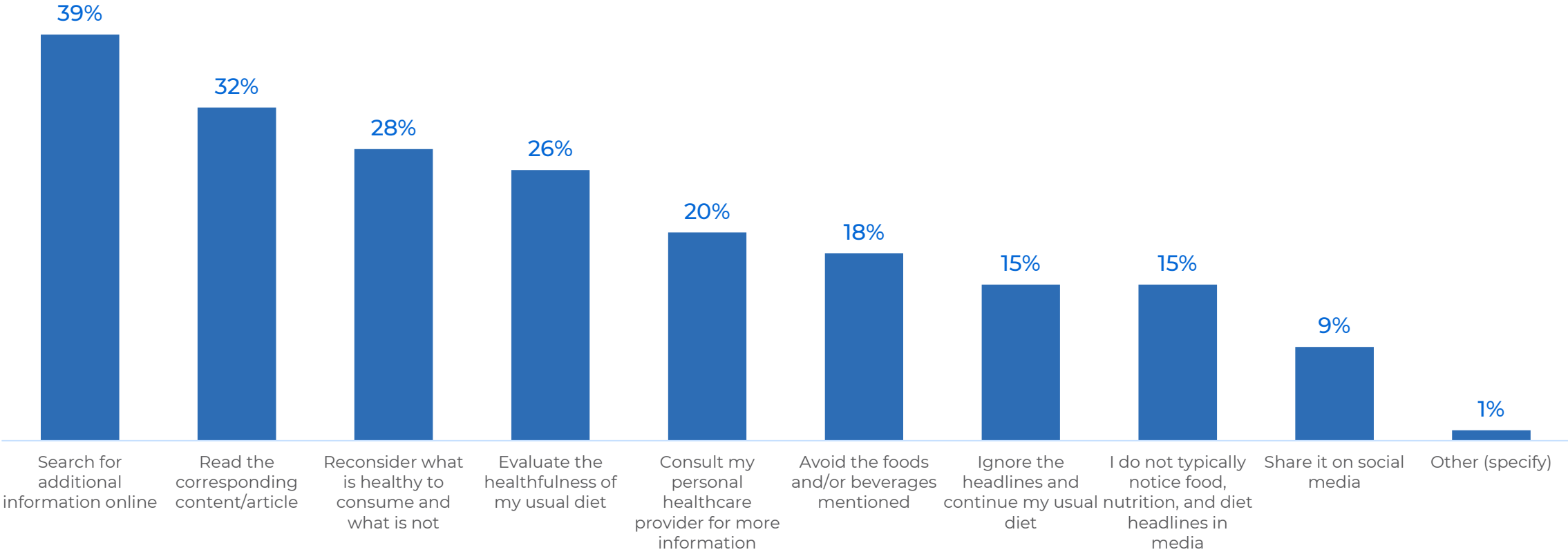
Many feel confused, frustrated, doubtful, and/or stressed about their food choices due to the perception that dietary recommendations seem like they are always changing.

Still, approximately one-third report feeling curious (35%) and 14% feel inspired.



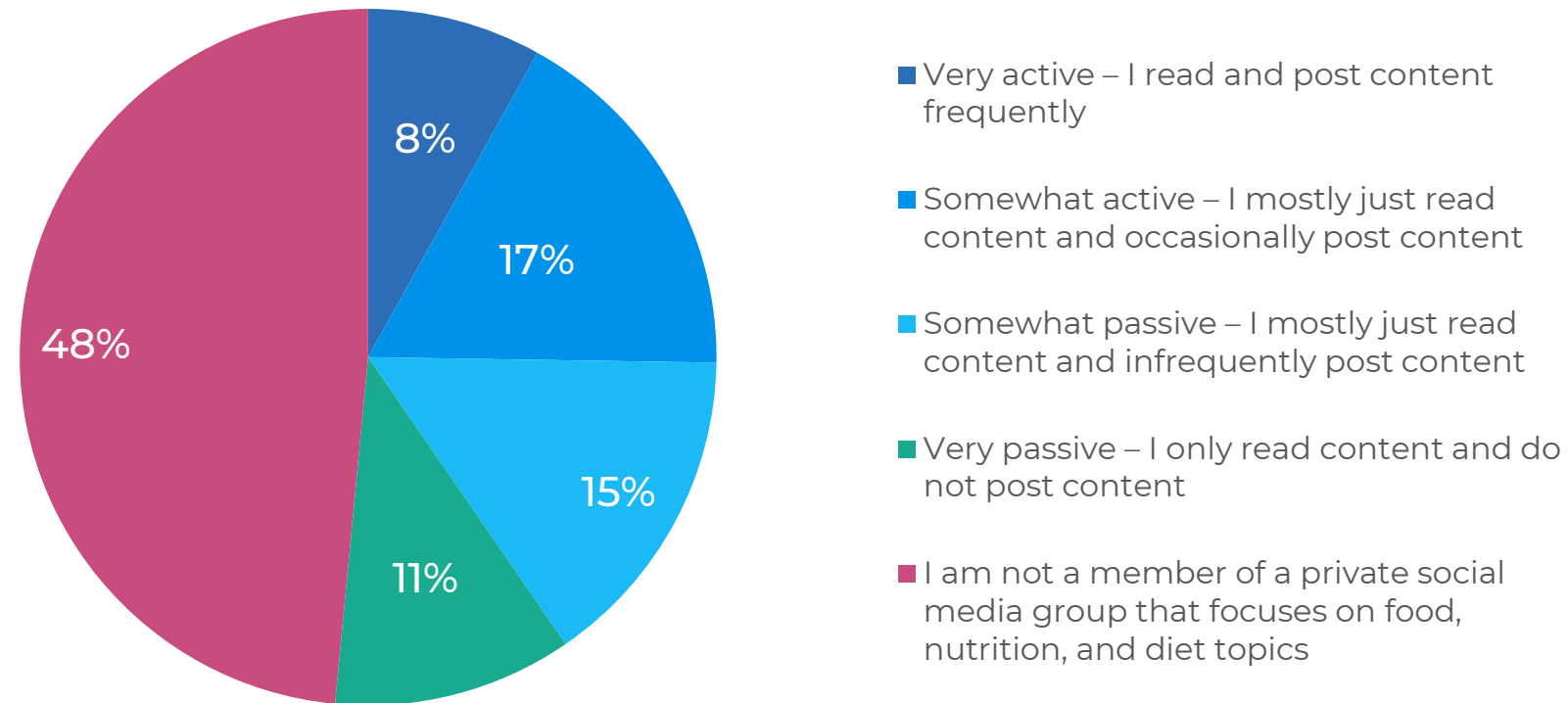
4 in 10 Americans search for additional information online after noticing food, nutrition, and diet media headlines.

While nearly 1 in 5 (18%) react by avoiding the foods and/or beverages mentioned, a similar percentage (15%) say they ignore food headlines in the media and continue their usual diet.



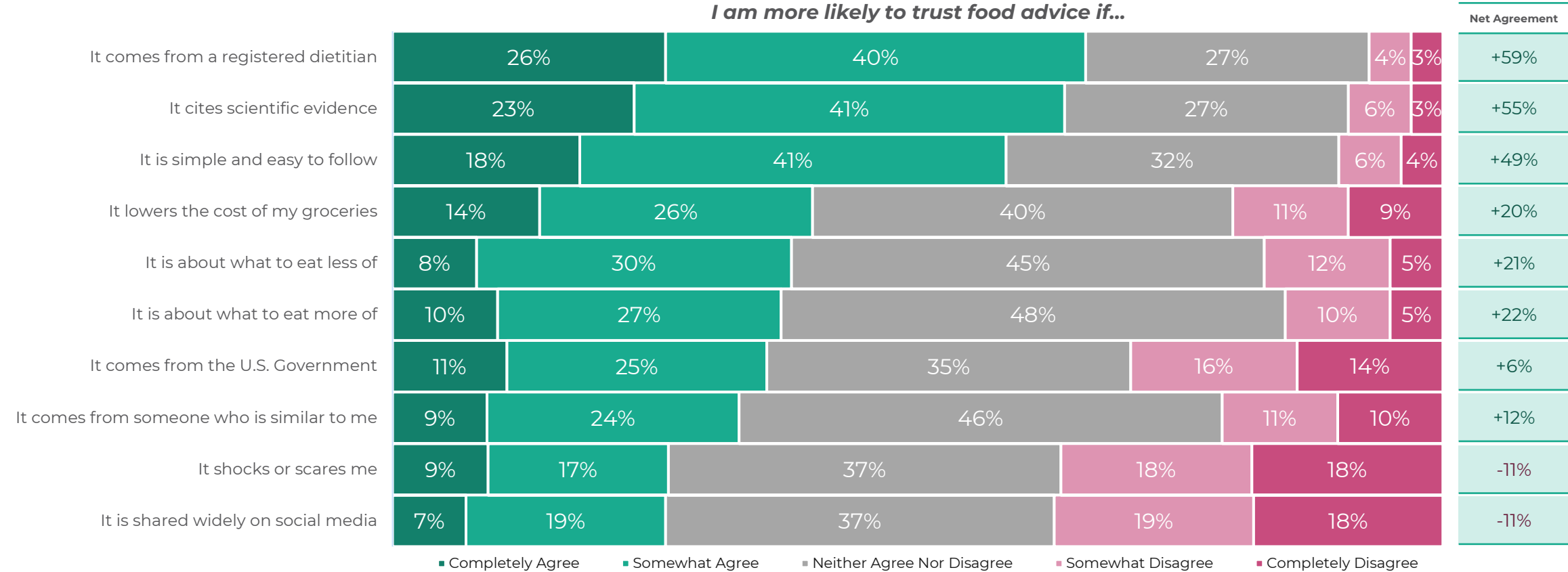
Just over half of Americans report being in a private social media group focused on food, nutrition, and diet topics.

One in four (25%) describe themselves as active in private food-focused social media groups, while a similar percentage (26%) say they are passive.



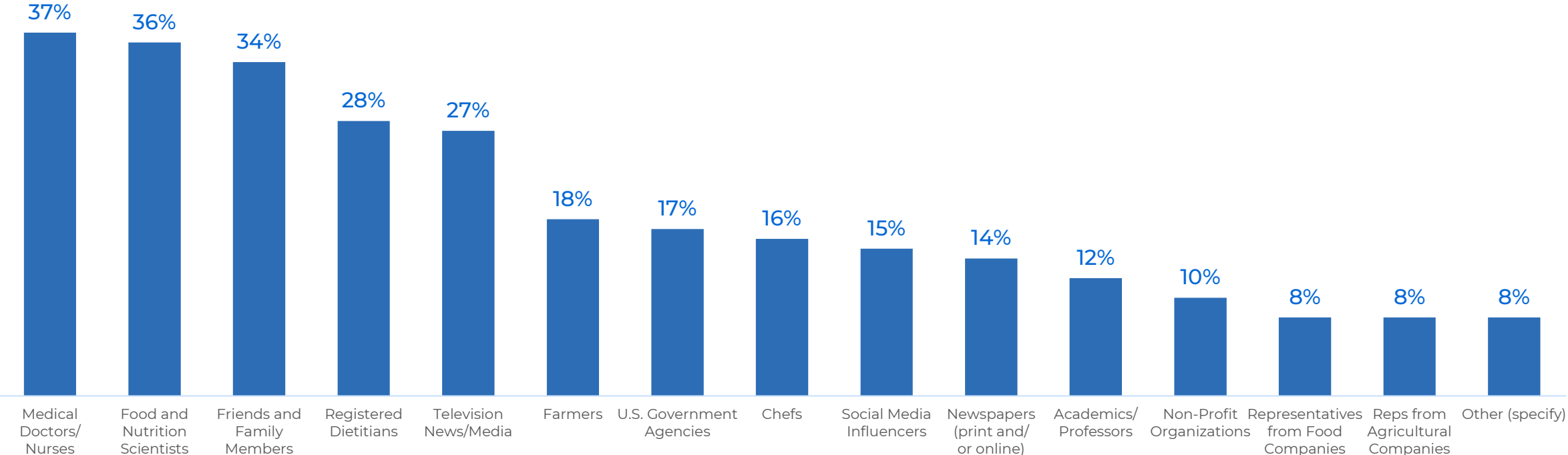
Two-thirds of Americans say they are more likely to trust food advice if it comes from a registered dietitian.

Food advice is also more likely to be trusted if it cites scientific evidence and/or is simple and easy to follow. Food advice is less likely to be trusted if it shocks or scares or if it is shared widely on social media.



More than 1 in 3 Americans get most of their food information from medical doctors and nurses, food and nutrition scientists, and/or friends and family.

A similar percentage of Americans say they get most of their food information from registered dietitians (28%) as from television (27%).



Q10. Where do you get most of your information about food, nutrition, and diet? Select all that apply. (n=1000)

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Trust In Food & Nutrition Science



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