

# **Speaking to Core Beliefs: Communicating about Immigration in 2019-2020**

**Stephen Hawkins – Director of Research  
More in Common  
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## Executive Summary

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1. We found compelling evidence that **balancing competing values works**. The three immigration messages designed to speak across core beliefs rank first, second, and third of the ten that were tested.
  2. **Polarization is deep**. The statements that receive the highest level of agreement from Devoted Conservatives and the lowest agreement from Progressive Activists, and vice-versa.
  3. Ideological orientation predicts immigration stance the best, but support for balanced messaging **cuts across demographic groups**, including race and gender.
  4. The winning message: *"**America can be both strong and compassionate**. We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values."*
    - It received 78% overall agreement score, with a low of 74% and high of 85%; 80% describe it as either fair, reasonable, or kind, and 67% say it makes them feel either happy, proud, excited, or hopeful.
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# Theory and Approach

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## Overview of Study

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**Our Hypothesis:** If we communicate about controversial political subjects with language that balances competing core beliefs, then we will achieve broad reach and resonance across Americans of different political, psychographic and demographic profiles. For instance, by appealing simultaneously to the competing moral foundations of authority and care, we can generate agreement on a general approach to immigration among a majority of Americans.

**Perceived Value:** Message testing guided by an appreciation for core beliefs yields a deeper understanding of the causal relationship in communications than the standard message test. Understanding and quantifiably evaluating the principles for why certain themes and words “work” provides us and our partners greater capacity to increase the efficacy of communications, while also expanding the array of audiences we can successfully engage.

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## Step 1: In Hidden Tribes, we collected data on immigration topics and Core Beliefs

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### **Attitudes about immigration [partial list]:**

- Feeling thermometer towards Mexicans, immigrants, refugees
- Contribution of immigrants
- Shared values with immigrants
- Support for border wall
- Economic impact of immigration
- Support for DACA
- Support for refugee sponsorship
- Support for travel ban on Muslims
- Support for sanctuary cities

### **Core Beliefs [partial list]:**

- Moral Foundations Theory
  - Perception of Threat
  - Authoritarianism
  - Agency and causality
  - Group identities
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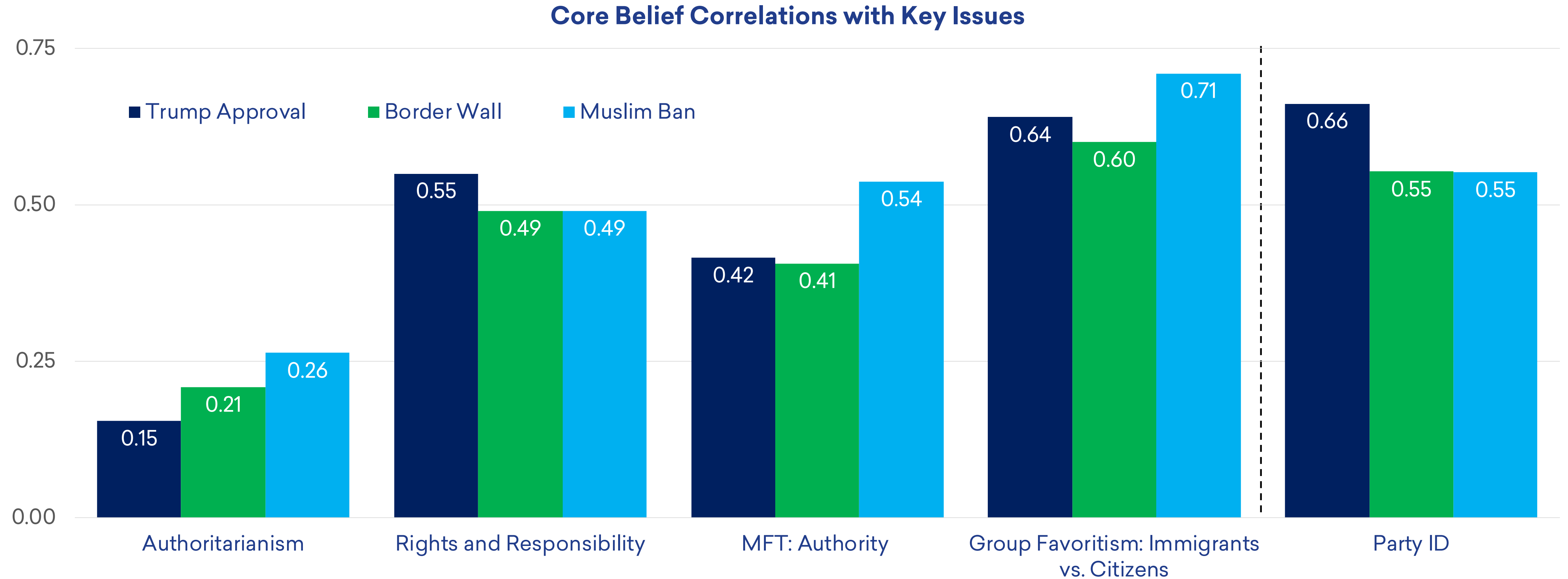
## Step 2: We ran cross tabulation analysis of which Core Beliefs matter most

<i>Which do you agree with more?</i>		Care Moral Foundation			Fairness Moral Foundation			Authority Moral Foundation		
	All	Low care	High care	Difference	Low fairness	High fairness	Difference	Low authority	High authority	Difference
Immigration nowadays is bad for America, costing the welfare system and using resources that could be spent on Americans.	50%	60%	49%	-11%	56%	49%	-7%	20%	58%	38%
Immigration is good for America, helping sectors of our economy to be more successful and competitive.	50%	40%	51%	11%	44%	51%	7%	80%	42%	-38%

## Step 2: We ran cross tabulation analysis of which Core Beliefs matter most

Immigration subjects	Most relevant Core Belief for Subject	Difference between high and low scores on Core Belief (absolute value percentages)				
		Care	Fairness	Authority	Loyalty	Purity
Immigration Impact	Authority	12%	7%	38%	26%	25%
Sanctuary cities: info sharing	Authority	27%	14%	28%	16%	17%
Sanctuary cities: enforcement	Care	23%	13%	18%	14%	18%
Sanctuary cities: deportation	Authority	3%	3%	24%	16%	10%
Sanctuary cities: tax dollars	Care	33%	17%	19%	14%	12%
Undocumented impact on jobs	Authority	19%	7%	26%	20%	14%
Employers responsibility jobs	Authority	14%	11%	20%	14%	12%
Opposition to building border wall	Authority	13%	4%	33%	29%	22%
Pro-DACA	Authority	23%	9%	24%	17%	15%
Support for Pathway to Citizenship	Authority	4%	2%	10%	3%	9%
Refugee responsibility	Authority	5%	6%	24%	19%	18%
Refugees are dangerous	Authority	9%	4%	38%	27%	28%
Opposition to 'Muslim Ban'	Authority	21%	11%	41%	33%	35%
Support refugee sponsorship	Authority	6%	2%	27%	18%	21%
<b>Average difference across items</b>	<b>Authority</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>18%</b>

## Step 2: We ran correlation analysis of which Core Beliefs matter most





## Step 3: We then developed messages that appeal to these most relevant Core Beliefs

### Personal Agency & Responsibility

Rights

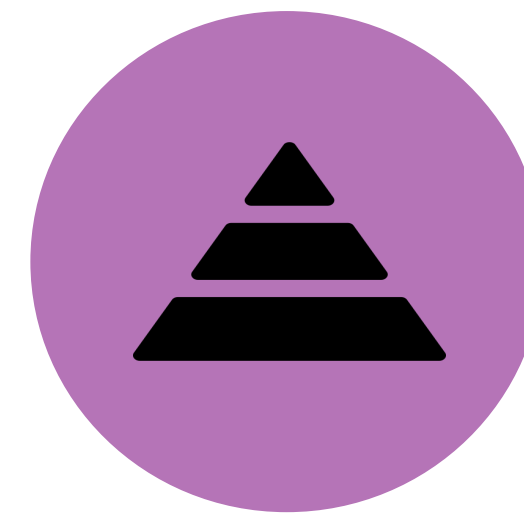


Responsibility

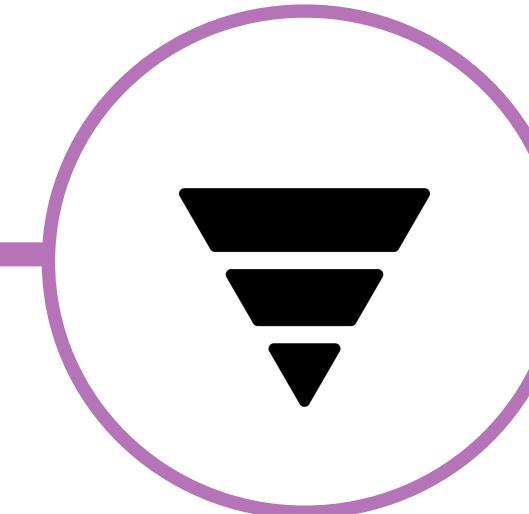


### Group Favoritism

Discrimination



Reverse  
Discrimination

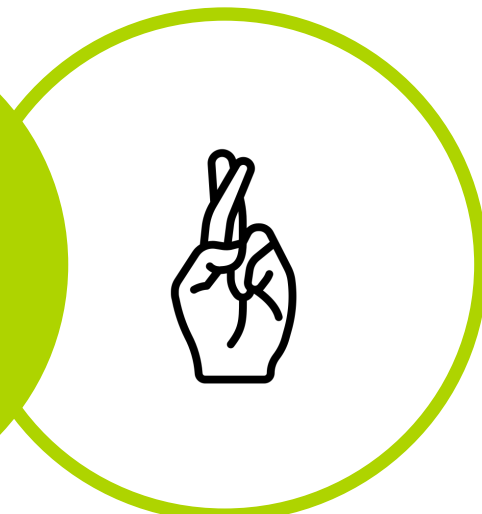


### Moral Foundations

Loyalty



Betrayal



Care



Harm



Authority



Subversion



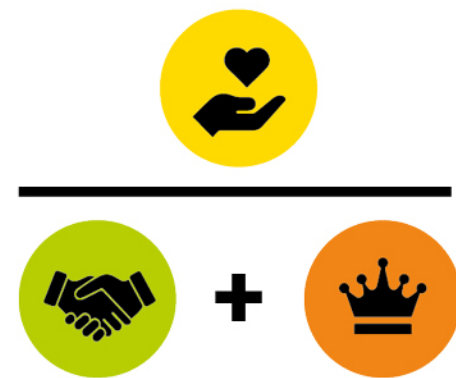
# Message Development

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# Liberal Core Beliefs Messages

L1

Care OVER  
Loyalty (In-Group) AND Authority



Our immigration system focuses too much on whether someone has legal status. The priority should not be on building walls, but on helping families and individuals to escape poverty and danger and begin a better life.

L2

Group Favoritism –  
Correct Oppression



For much of America's history, white people have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.

L3

Care OVER Authority



When I see the way that children have been separated from their parents on the US border, I feel that our country has totally lost sight of what matters. We've stopped being human and it's shameful.

## Balanced Core Beliefs Messages

**B1**

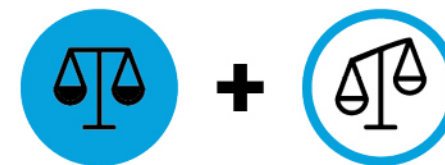
Care AND  
Loyalty (In-Group)



I believe that we can be **compassionate** towards people coming to our border while still being **committed to our citizens**. We should help **people in tough situations**, so long as **American people who need help get it too**.

**B2**

Fairness:  
Rights AND Responsibility



Immigrants who came to America as **children** without legal permission should **not be punished**. But as **adults** they **should be expected** to learn English, to find work, to pay taxes, and to respect the law.

**B3**

Authority, Loyalty (In-Group)  
AND Care



America can be both **strong** and **compassionate**. **We can protect our borders** from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we **welcome immigrants** who **respect our laws** and **embrace American values**.

## Conservative Core Beliefs Messages

**C1**

**Loyalty/Betrayal**  
OVER all others



It makes me angry that some cities and states are shielding illegal immigrants and refusing to cooperate with federal government and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). **It's a betrayal of America to not enforce our borders and our citizenship laws.**

**C2**

**Group Favoritism** –  
Perceived overcorrection  
or oppression



It bothers me that you can't talk about immigration without being afraid of getting called "racist". **I don't care about skin color, but I do care about American values and being safe from gangs and crime.**

**C3**

**Authority**  
OVER all others



To me it's very simple: **undocumented or illegal immigrants have broken the law.** That's disrespectful to our country, our laws, and to me. **Illegal immigration is immoral: like breaking into someone's home.**

**C4**

**Authority AND**  
**Fairness (As Accountability)**  
OVER all others



It's not politically correct to say this, but a lot of people coming to the US border make **fake asylum claims.** Our country should **send a clear message and turn these people away.**

# Fieldwork Methodology

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## Fieldwork Methodology

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### Details

- Sample size: 2,100 representative of US population; messages were split-sampled 50:50
- Sample detail: participants of original Hidden Tribes study
- Methodology: online
- Fieldwork dates: June 18 – 25, 2019
- Vendor: YouGov
- Margin of error: +/- 3% and higher for subgroups

### Metrics

- Agreement (scale: 0-100)
  - Description of statement [ignorant, naïve, harsh, fair, reasonable, kind, none]
  - Emotion it makes you feel [angry, sad, embarrassed, frustrated, proud, happy, excited, hopeful, none]
  - Highlight words agree with most
  - Highlight words disagree with most
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# Findings by Hidden Tribes

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# Top 5 Messages

Core Belief Orientation	Message Text	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
<b>B3</b> Authority, Loyalty (In-group) and Care	America can be both strong and compassionate. We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values.	78	79	85	74	74	80	81	81
<b>B2</b> Fairness: Rights and Responsibility	Immigrants who came to America as children without legal permission should not be punished. But as adults they should be expected to learn English, to find work, to pay taxes, and to respect the law.	74	67	76	75	76	78	70	62
<b>B1</b> Care And Loyalty (In-group)	I believe that we can be compassionate towards people coming to our border while still being committed to our citizens. We should help people in tough situations, so long as American people who need help get it too.	72	83	81	78	68	72	66	57
<b>C2</b> Group Favoritism - Overcorrection	It bothers me that you can't talk about immigration without being afraid of getting called "racist". I don't care about skin color, but I do care about American values and being safe from gangs and crime.	67	18	50	57	75	71	88	95
<b>L3</b> Care Over Authority	When I see the way that children have been separated from their parents on the US border, I feel that our country has totally lost sight of what matters. We've stopped being human and it's shameful.	58	95	90	81	57	65	27	9

# Bottom 5 Messages

Core Belief Orientation	Message Text	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
<b>C4</b> Authority, Fairness over others	It's not politically correct to say this, but a lot of people coming to the US border make fake asylum claims. Our country should send a clear message and turn these people away.	58	11	31	47	66	56	83	92
<b>C1</b> Loyalty/ Subversion Over All Others	It makes me angry that some cities and states are shielding illegal immigrants and refusing to cooperate with the federal government and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). It's a betrayal of America to not enforce our borders and our citizenship laws.	56	9	21	32	66	58	87	95
<b>C3</b> Authority Over All Others	To me it's very simple: undocumented or illegal immigrants have broken the law. That's disrespectful to our country, our laws, and to me. Illegal immigration is immoral: like breaking into someone's home.	56	13	22	36	66	56	85	92
<b>L2</b> Group Favoritism – Correct Oppression	For much of America's history, white people have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.	53	89	72	63	54	57	30	14
<b>L1</b> Care Over Loyalty (In-group) And Authority	Our immigration system focuses too much on whether someone has legal status. The priority should not be on building walls, but on helping families and individuals to escape poverty and danger and begin a better life.	53	87	80	75	55	56	23	10

# Findings by Gender and Race

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# Top 5 Messages

Core Beliefs	Message Text	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
<b>B3</b> Authority, Loyalty (In-group) and Care	America can be both strong and compassionate. We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values.	78	79	78	78	78	77	71
<b>B2</b> Fairness: Rights and Responsibility	Immigrants who came to America as children without legal permission should not be punished. But as adults they should be expected to learn English, to find work, to pay taxes, and to respect the law.	74	71	76	72	80	75	72
<b>B1</b> Care And Loyalty (In-group)	I believe that we can be compassionate towards people coming to our border while still being committed to our citizens. We should help people in tough situations, so long as American people who need help get it too.	72	70	74	70	77	73	67
<b>C2</b> Group Favoritism – Overcorrection	It bothers me that you can't talk about immigration without being afraid of getting called "racist". I don't care about skin color, but I do care about American values and being safe from gangs and crime.	68	69	67	70	60	66	53
<b>L3</b> Care Over Authority	When I see the way that children have been separated from their parents on the US border, I feel that our country has totally lost sight of what matters. We've stopped being human and it's shameful.	59	51	65	54	79	72	63

# Bottom 5 Messages

Core Beliefs	Message Text	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
<b>C4</b> Authority, Fairness over others	It's not politically correct to say this, but a lot of people coming to the US border make fake asylum claims. Our country should send a clear message and turn these people away.	59	62	55	61	54	59	51
<b>C1</b> Loyalty/ Subversion Over All Others	It makes me angry that some cities and states are shielding illegal immigrants and refusing to cooperate with the federal government and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). It's a betrayal of America to not enforce our borders and our citizenship laws.	58	61	55	61	40	49	44
<b>C3</b> Authority Over All Others	To me it's very simple: undocumented or illegal immigrants have broken the law. That's disrespectful to our country, our laws, and to me. Illegal immigration is immoral: like breaking into someone's home.	57	62	53	60	44	48	48
<b>L2</b> Group Favoritism – Correct Oppression	For much of America's history, white people have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.	54	50	58	49	78	58	57
<b>L1</b> Care Over Loyalty (In-group) And Authority	Our immigration system focuses too much on whether someone has legal status. The priority should not be on building walls, but on helping families and individuals to escape poverty and danger and begin a better life.	53	47	59	48	77	68	62

# Findings by Party

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# Top 5 Messages

Core Beliefs Orientation	Message Text	All	Strong Democrat	Lean Democrat	Not very strong Democrat	Independent	Not very strong Republican	Lean Republican	Strong Republican
<b>B3</b> Authority, Loyalty (In-group) and Care	America can be both strong and compassionate. We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws and embrace American values.	78	81	78	79	77	73	80	78
<b>B2</b> Fairness: Rights and Responsibility	Immigrants who came to America as children without legal permission should not be punished. But as adults they should be expected to learn English, to find work, to pay taxes, and to respect the law.	74	79	76	77	69	71	66	73
<b>B1</b> Care And Loyalty (In-group)	I believe that we can be compassionate towards people coming to our border while still being committed to our citizens. We should help people in tough situations, so long as American people who need help get it too.	72	83	81	74	69	61	64	63
<b>C2</b> Group Favoritism – Overcorrection	It bothers me that you can't talk about immigration without being afraid of getting called "racist". I don't care about skin color, but I do care about American values and being safe from gangs and crime.	68	47	49	59	75	81	88	89
<b>L3</b> Care Over Authority	When I see the way that children have been separated from their parents on the US border, I feel that our country has totally lost sight of what matters. We've stopped being human and it's shameful.	59	90	86	76	54	42	19	25

# Bottom 5 Messages

Core Beliefs Orientation	Message Text	All	Strong Democrat	Lean Democrat	Not very strong Democrat	Independent	Not very strong Republican	Lean Republican	Strong Republican
<b>C4</b> Authority, Fairness over others	It's not politically correct to say this, but a lot of people coming to the US border make fake asylum claims. Our country should send a clear message and turn these people away.	59	35	31	53	65	74	81	84
<b>C1</b> Loyalty/ Subversion Over All Others	It makes me angry that some cities and states are shielding illegal immigrants and refusing to cooperate with the federal government and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). It's a betrayal of America to not enforce our borders and our citizenship laws.	58	27	29	47	59	78	91	92
<b>C3</b> Authority Over All Others	To me it's very simple: undocumented or illegal immigrants have broken the law. That's disrespectful to our country, our laws, and to me. Illegal immigration is immoral: like breaking into someone's home.	57	29	31	47	58	75	89	90
<b>L2</b> Group Favoritism – Correct Oppression	For much of America's history, white people have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.	54	80	72	67	50	36	29	27
<b>L1</b> Care Over Loyalty (In-group) And Authority	Our immigration system focuses too much on whether someone has legal status. The priority should not be on building walls, but on helping families and individuals to escape poverty and danger and begin a better life.	53	84	75	70	47	35	18	21



# Descriptions and Emotions Generated by Messages

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# Descriptions of Messages: US Average

Which word best describes this statement?	Fair	Reasonable	Kind	Sum of Positives	Harsh	Ignorant	Naive	Sum of Negatives	None of the above	Net Description
<b>L1</b> Care over loyalty (in-group) and authority	11	29	14	54	2	15	20	37	10	17
<b>L2</b> Group favoritism – correct oppression	18	22	2	42	10	24	10	44	13	-2
<b>L3</b> Care over authority	15	25	4	44	10	21	12	43	13	1
<b>B1</b> Care and loyalty (in-group)	21	40	13	74	2	4	13	19	8	55
<b>B2</b> Fairness: rights and responsibility	25	48	5	78	1	6	7	14	7	64
<b>B3</b> Authority, loyalty (in-group) and care	27	48	6	81	1	4	8	13	7	68
<b>C1</b> Loyalty/subversion over all others	14	28	2	44	17	23	4	44	12	0
<b>C2</b> Group favoritism – overcorrection of oppression	20	36	2	58	8	16	7	31	11	27
<b>C3</b> Authority over all others	18	28	1	47	19	18	7	44	9	3
<b>C4</b> Authority and fairness (as accountability) over all others	17	30	1	48	15	22	5	42	10	6

# Emotions Generated by Messages: US Average

What emotion does this statement make you feel the most?	Proud	Happy	Excited	Hopeful	Sum of Positives	Angry	Sad	Embarrassed	Frustrated	Sum of Negatives	None of the above	Net Emotion
<b>L1</b> Care over loyalty (in-group) and authority	6	2	1	26	<b>35</b>	12	6	4	24	<b>46</b>	19	<b>-11</b>
<b>L2</b> Group favoritism – correct oppression	4	1	1	19	<b>25</b>	18	7	8	22	<b>55</b>	19	<b>-30</b>
<b>L3</b> Care over authority	2	1	0	6	<b>9</b>	21	21	10	23	<b>75</b>	16	<b>-66</b>
<b>B1</b> Care and loyalty (in-group)	6	6	2	42	<b>56</b>	4	3	1	13	<b>21</b>	23	<b>35</b>
<b>B2</b> Fairness: rights and responsibility	4	3	1	37	<b>45</b>	5	3	1	15	<b>24</b>	31	<b>21</b>
<b>B3</b> Authority, loyalty (in-group) and care	17	3	3	44	<b>67</b>	3	2	1	8	<b>14</b>	18	<b>53</b>
<b>C1</b> Loyalty/subversion over all others	3	1	1	5	<b>10</b>	26	8	11	27	<b>72</b>	18	<b>-62</b>
<b>C2</b> Group favoritism – overcorrection of oppression	4	2	2	15	<b>23</b>	8	7	7	33	<b>55</b>	21	<b>-32</b>
<b>C3</b> Authority over all others	5	2	1	6	<b>14</b>	19	11	7	28	<b>65</b>	22	<b>-51</b>
<b>C4</b> Authority and fairness (as accountability) over all others	5	3	2	14	<b>24</b>	14	9	11	22	<b>56</b>	20	<b>-32</b>

# Appendix: Summary Slides

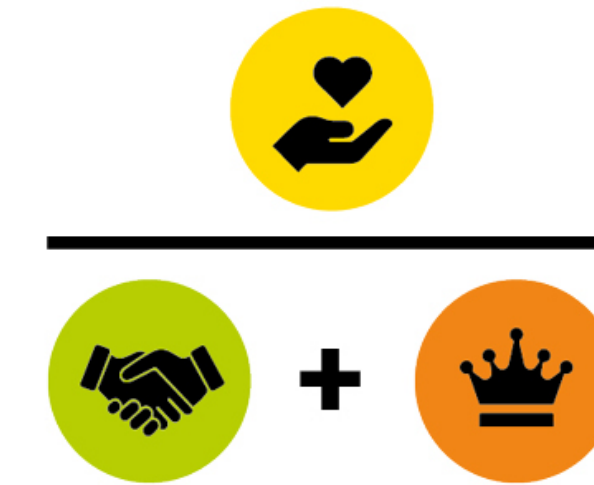
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# L1 Summary: Care OVER Loyalty and Authority

Our immigration system focuses too much on whether someone has legal status.

The priority should not be on building walls, but on helping families

and individuals to escape poverty and danger and begin a better life.



Agreement

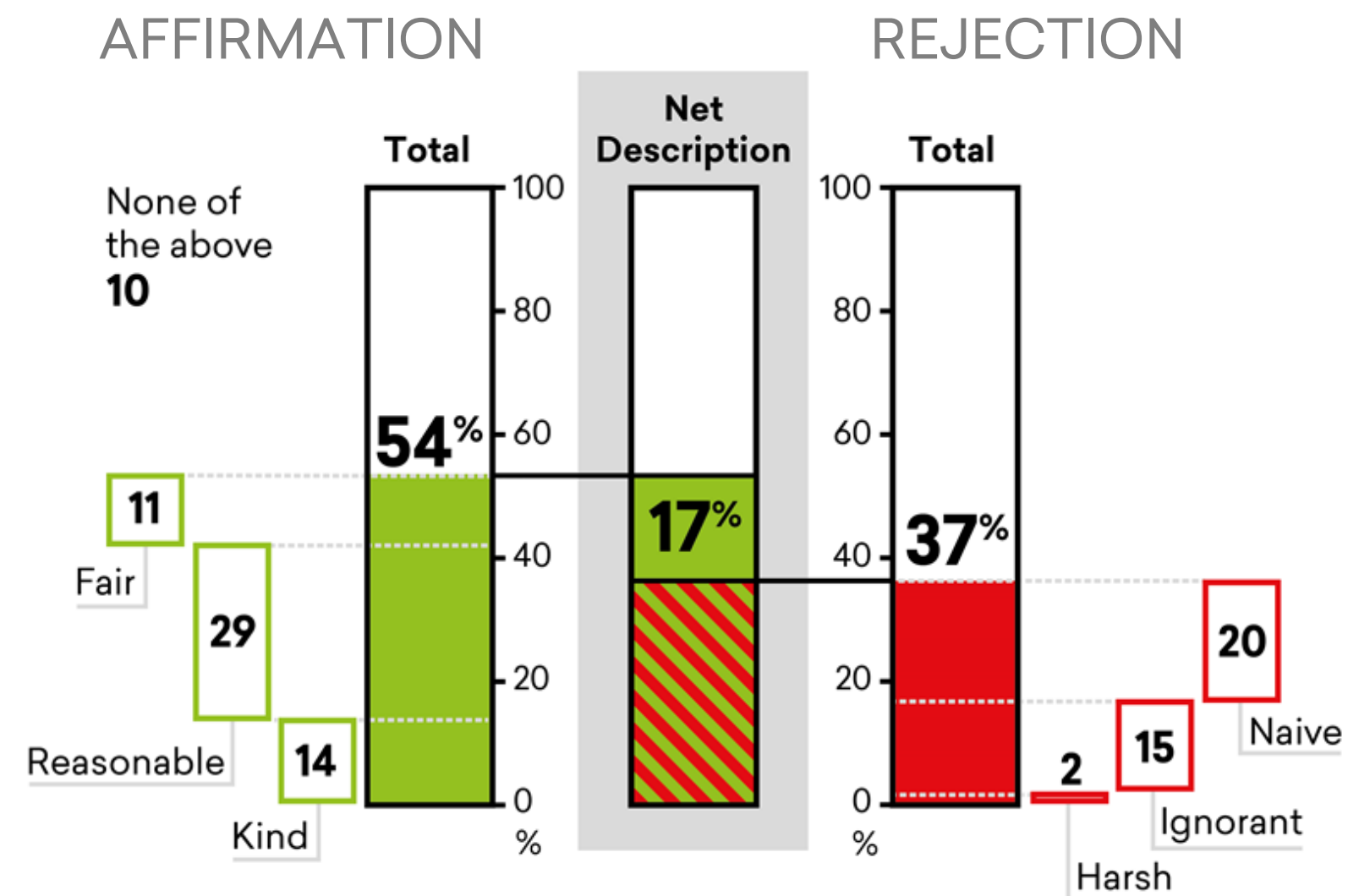
AVERAGE

53%

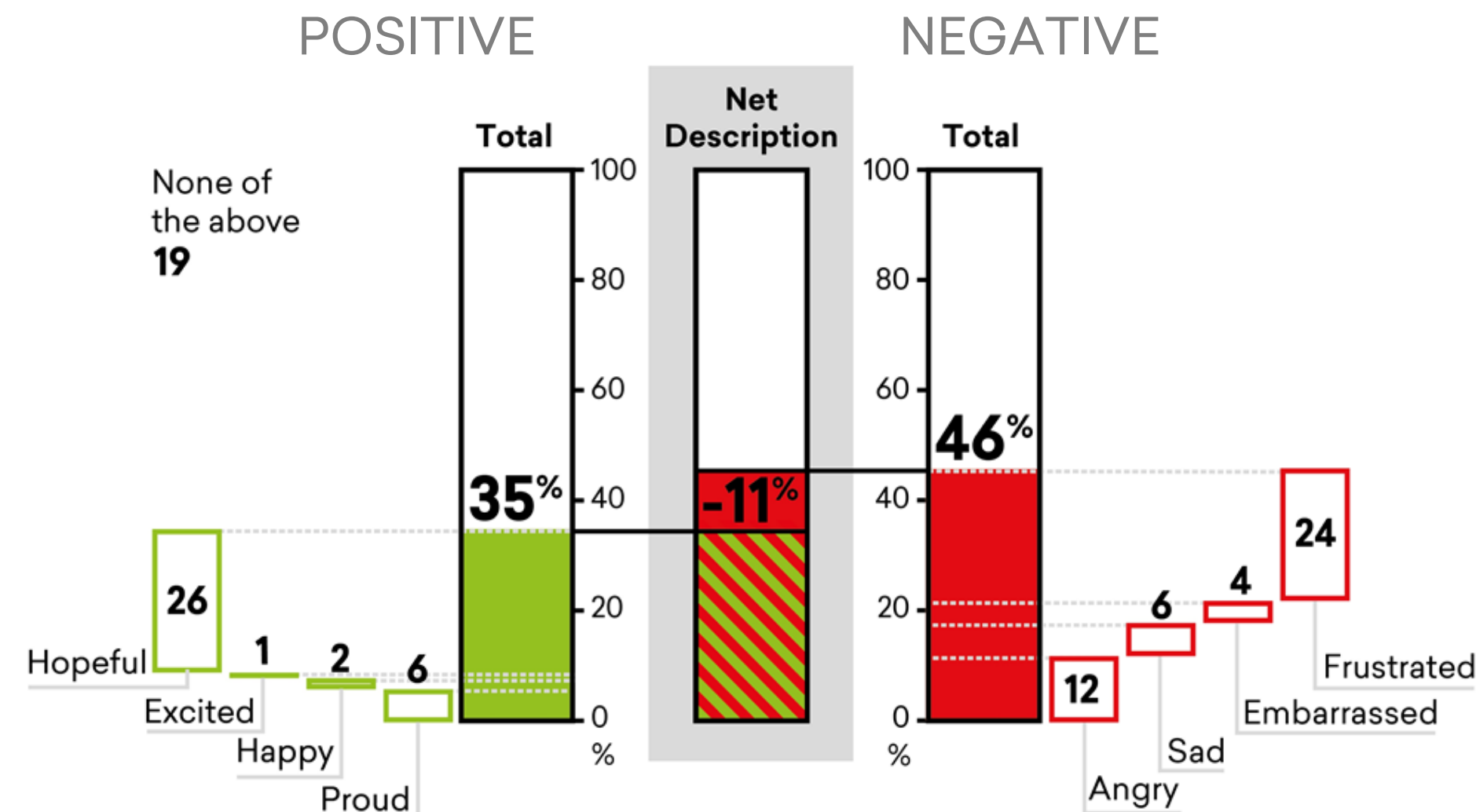
OVERALL RANK

10/10

## Assessment of Message



## Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST Progressive Activists

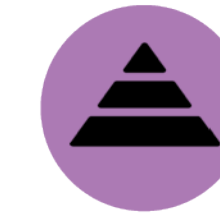
87%

LOWEST Devoted Conservatives

10%

## L2 Summary: Group Favoritism – Correct Oppression

For much of America's history, **white people** have exercised power and privilege over people of color, including immigrants. We need to dismantle all systems of oppression in America today, including our unjust immigration enforcement system.



Agreement

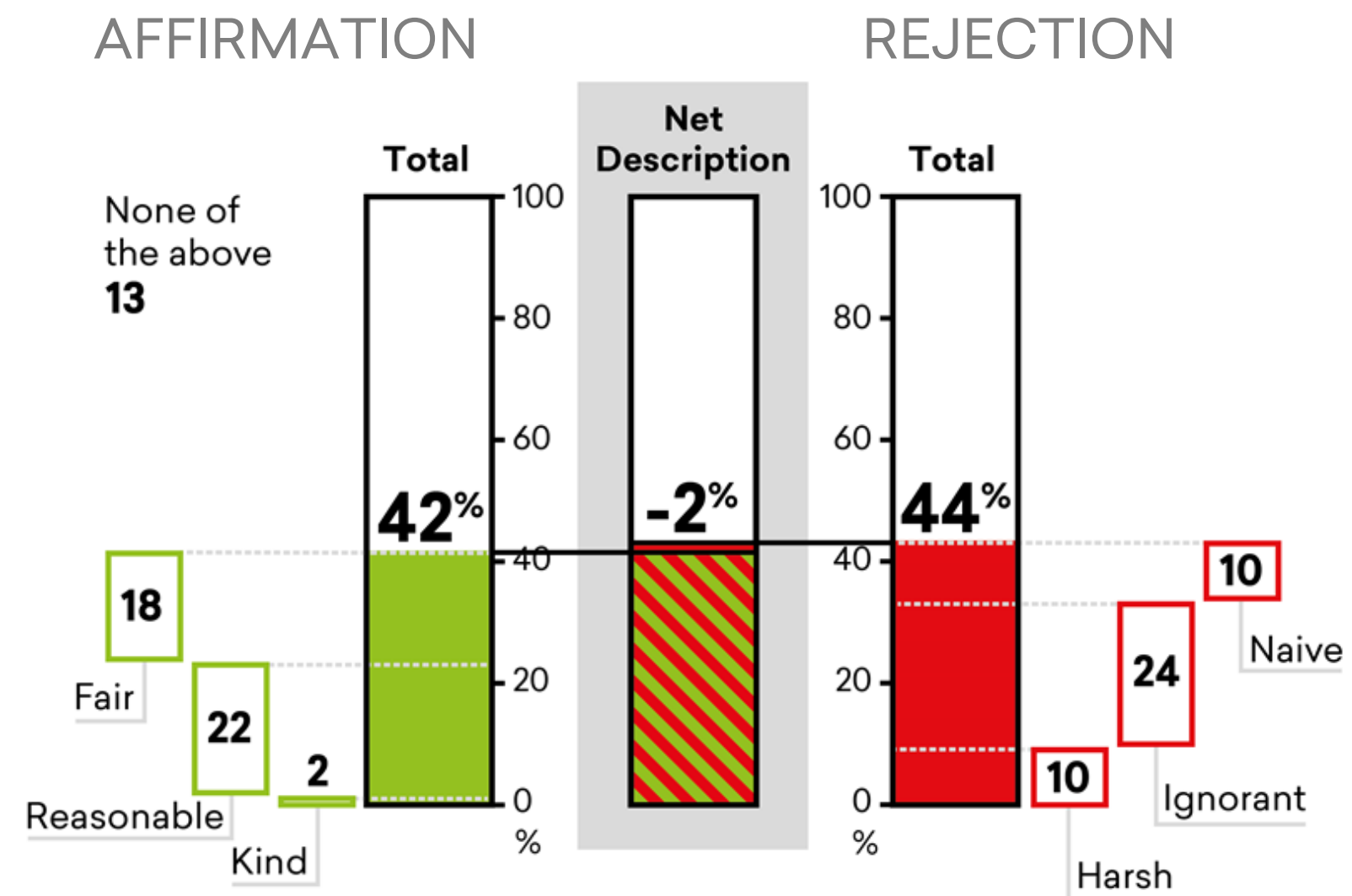
AVERAGE

54%

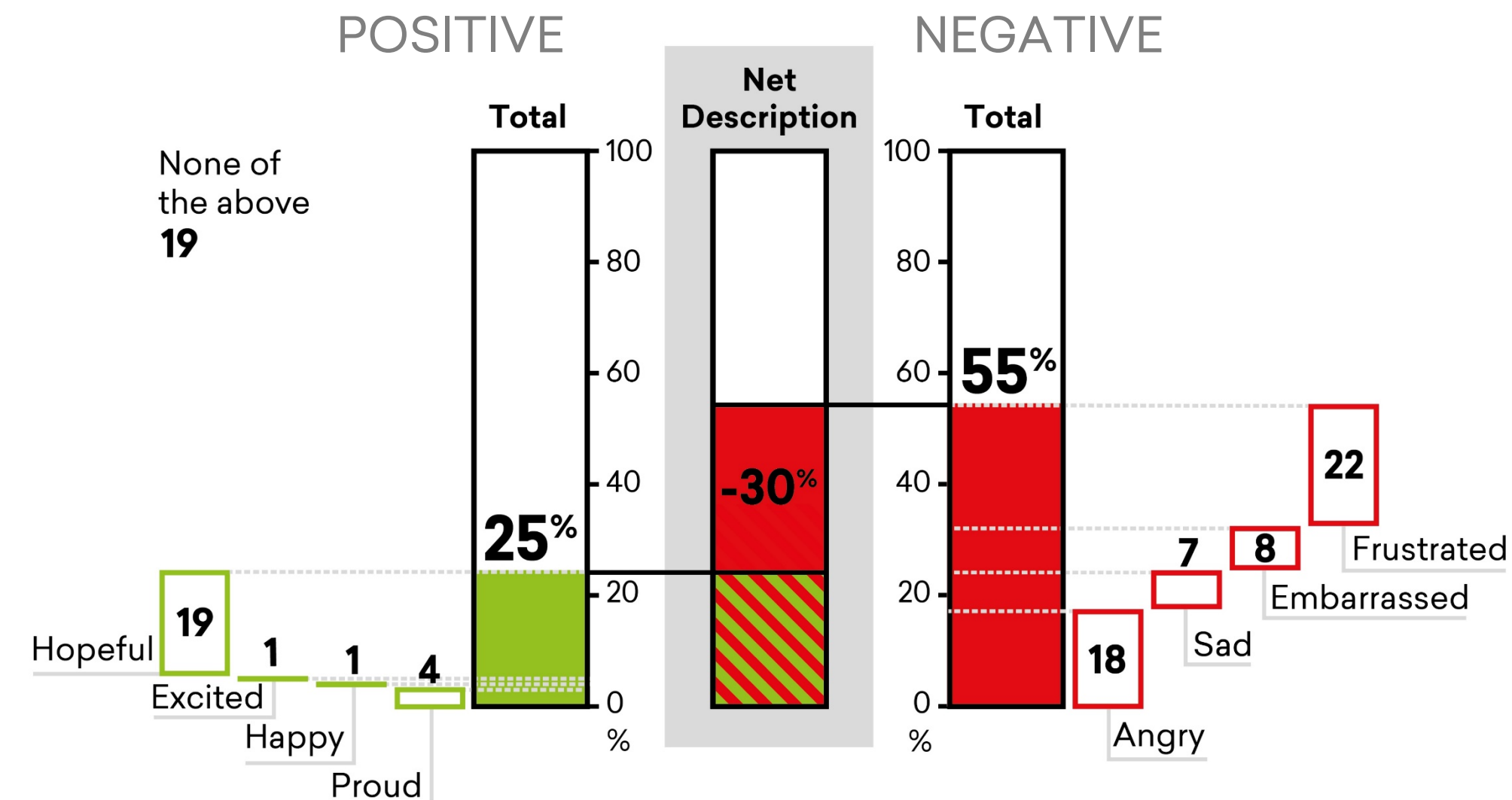
OVERALL RANK

9 / 10

### Assessment of Message



### Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST  
Progressive Activists

89%

LOWEST  
Devoted  
Conservatives

14%

# L3 Summary: Care OVER Authority

When I see the way that children have been separated from their parents in the US border, I feel that our country has totally lost sight of what matters. We've stopped being human and it's shameful.



Agreement

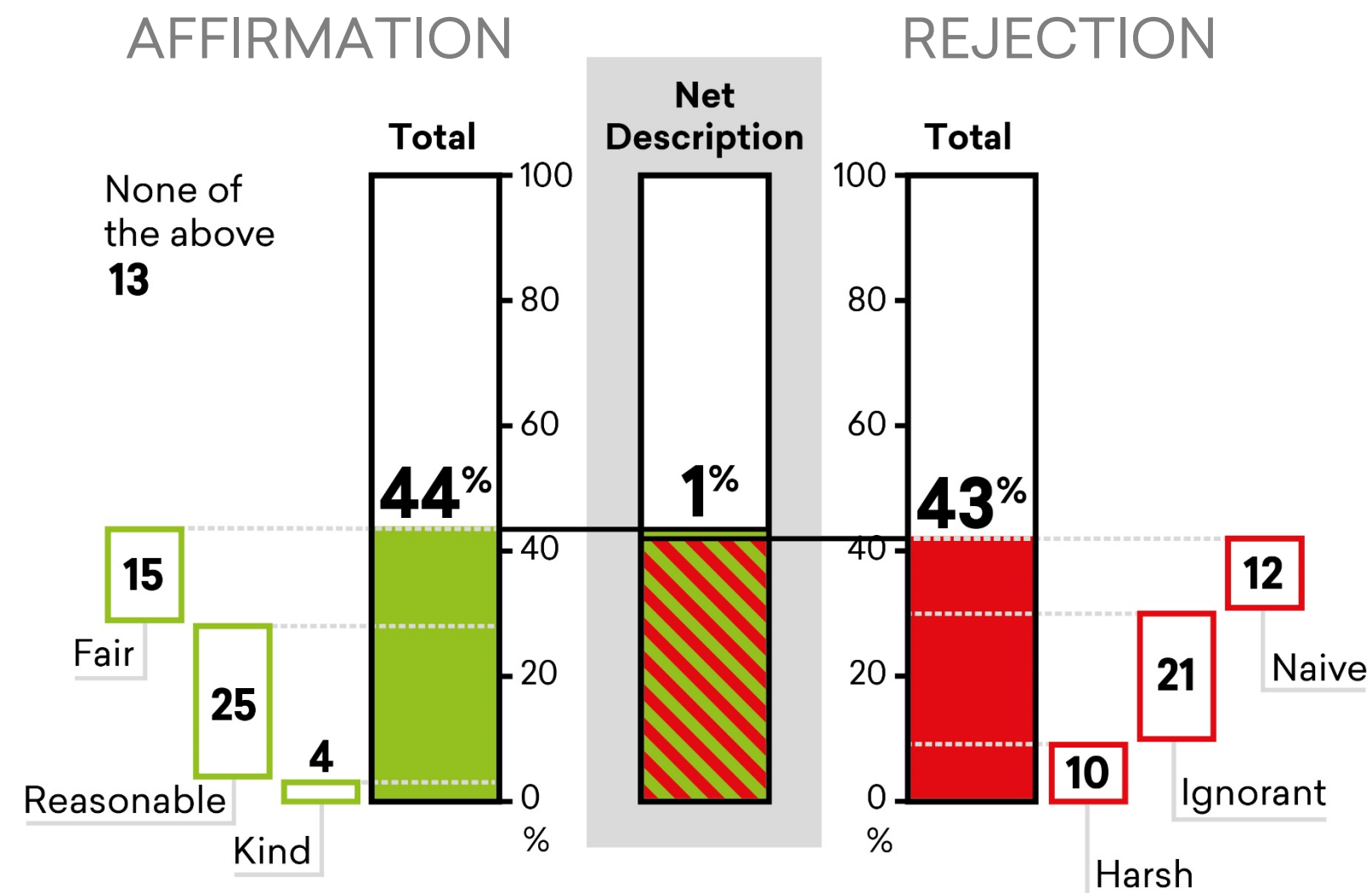
AVERAGE

58%

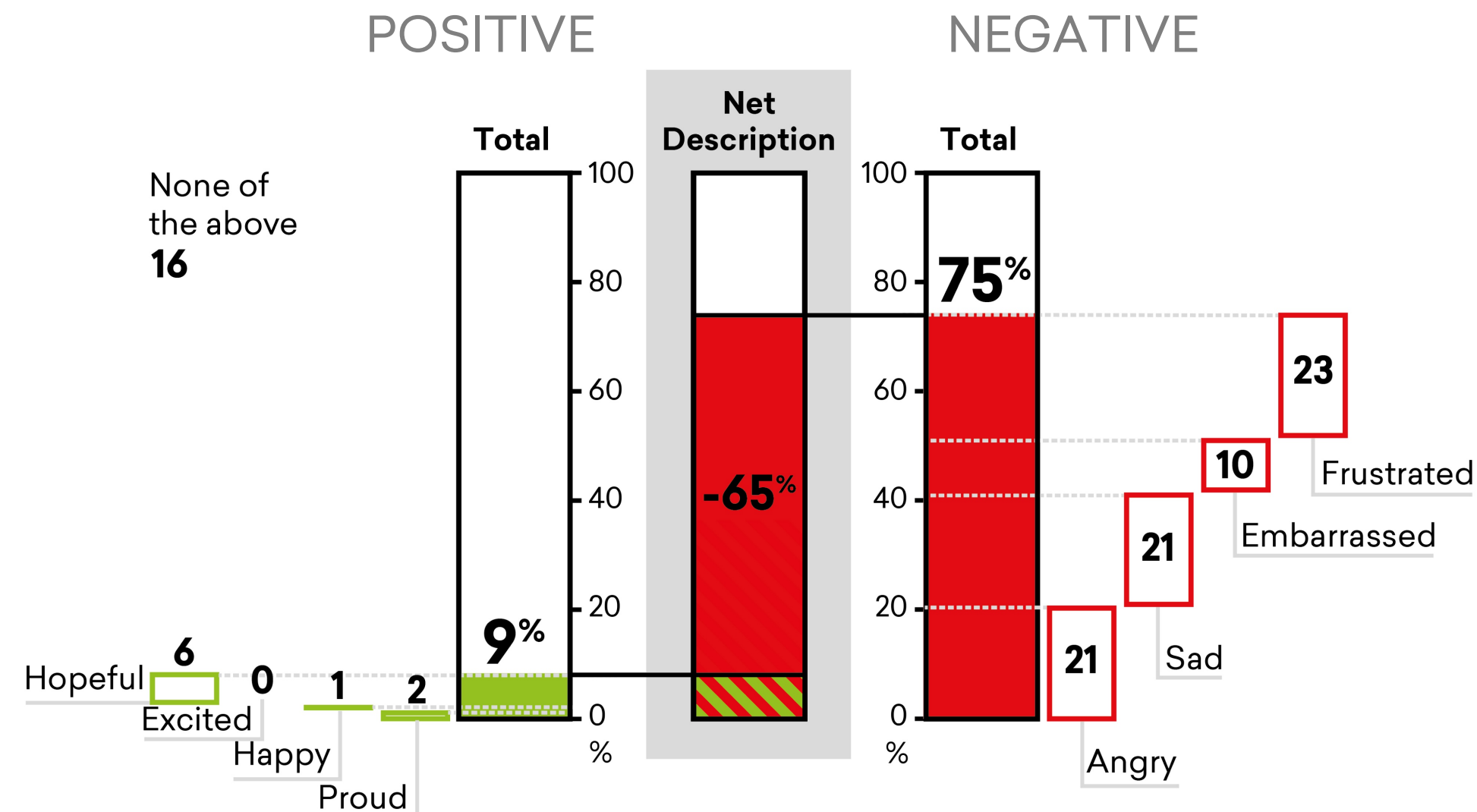
OVERALL RANK

5 / 10

## Assessment of Message



## Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST  
Progressive Activists

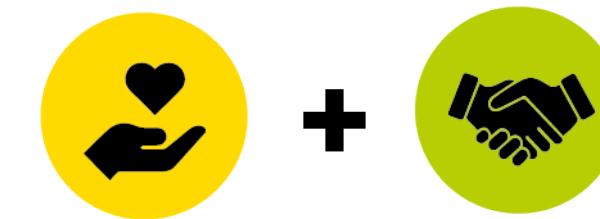
95%

LOWEST  
Devoted  
Conservatives

9%

**B1** Summary: Care AND Loyalty (In-Group)

I believe that we can be **compassionate** towards people coming to our border while still **being committed** to our citizens. We should help people in tough situations, so long as American people who need help get it too.



Agreement

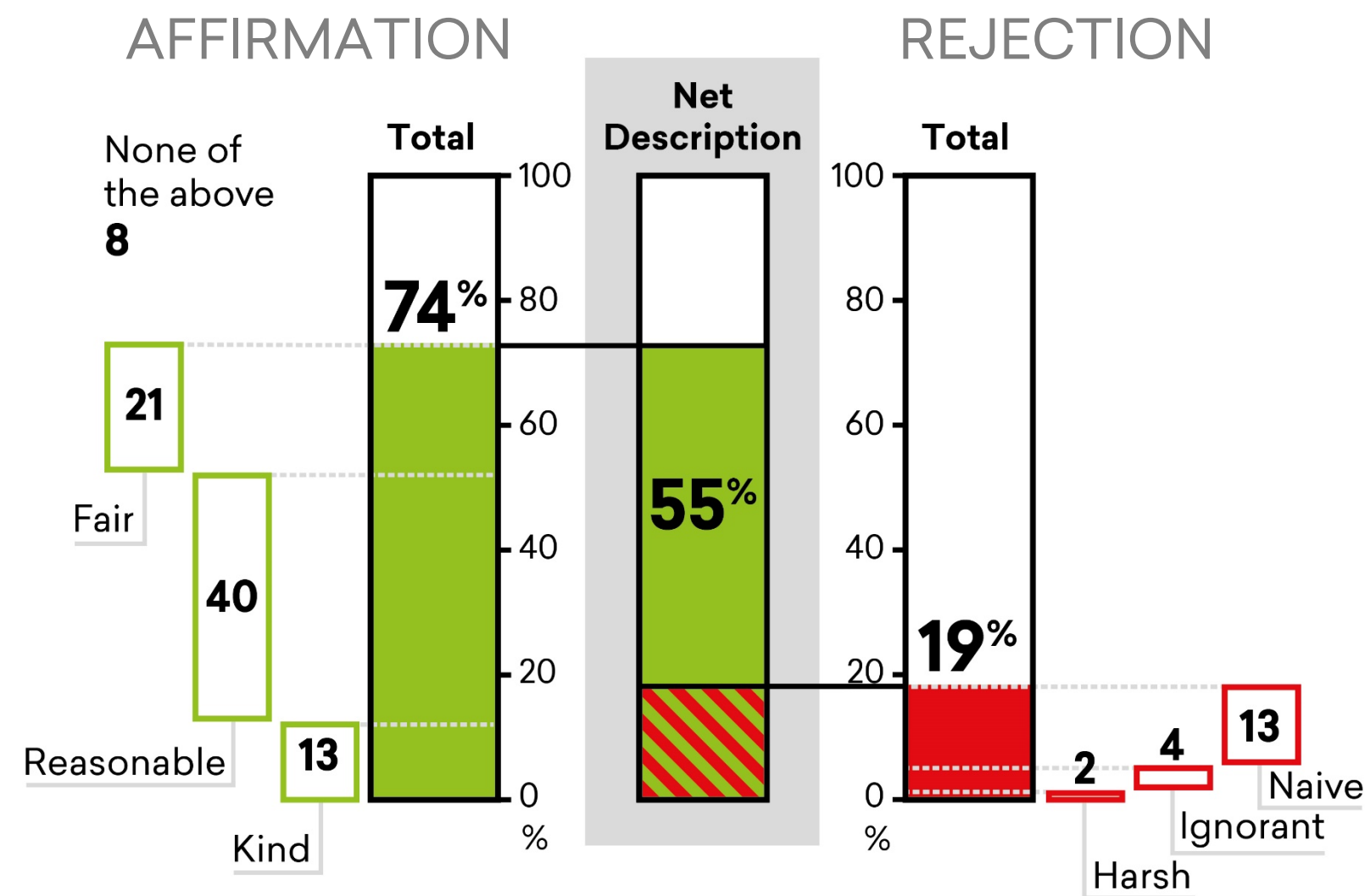
AVERAGE

72%

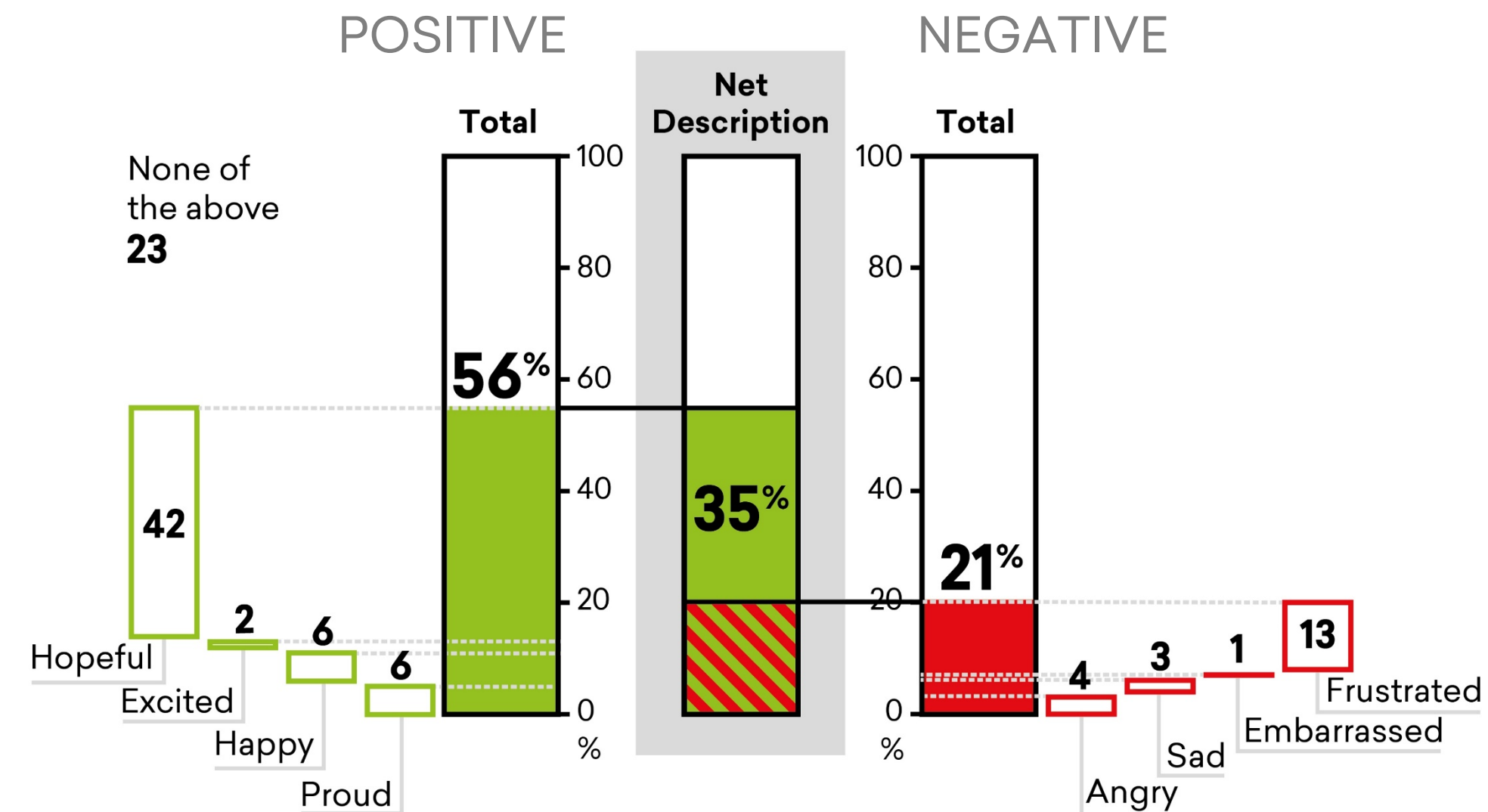
OVERALL RANK

3 / 10

Assessment of Message



Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST Progressive Activists

83%

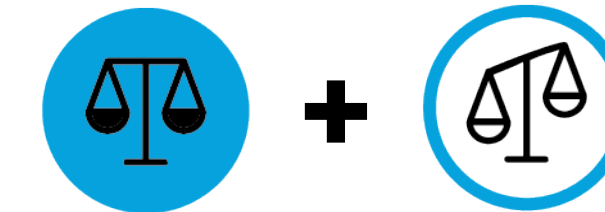
LOWEST Devoted Conservatives

57%



**B2** Summary: Fairness: Rights AND Responsibility

Immigrants who came to America as children without legal permission should not be punished.  
 But as adults they should be expected to learn English, to find work,  
 to pay taxes, and to respect the law.



Agreement

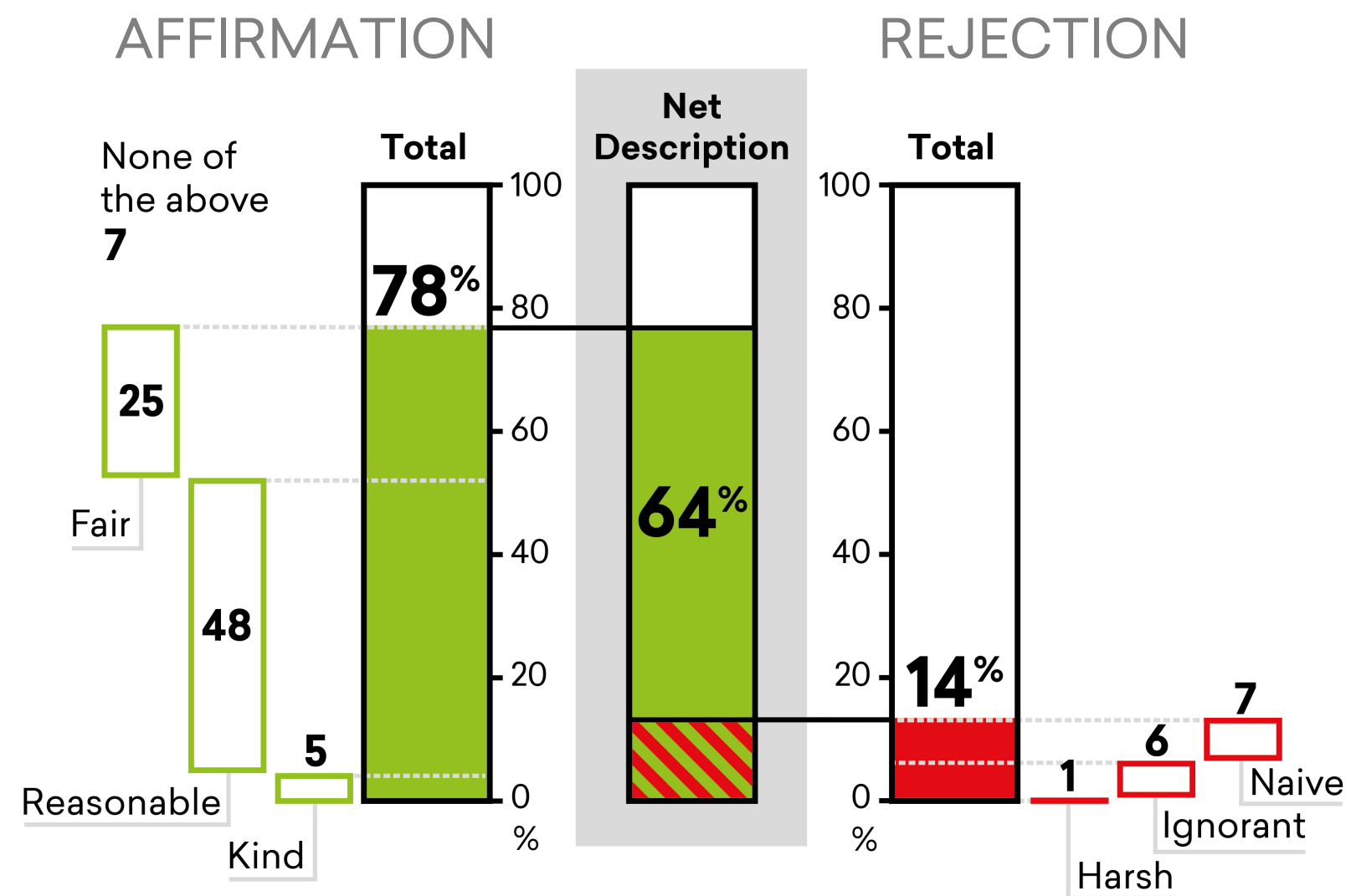
AVERAGE

74%

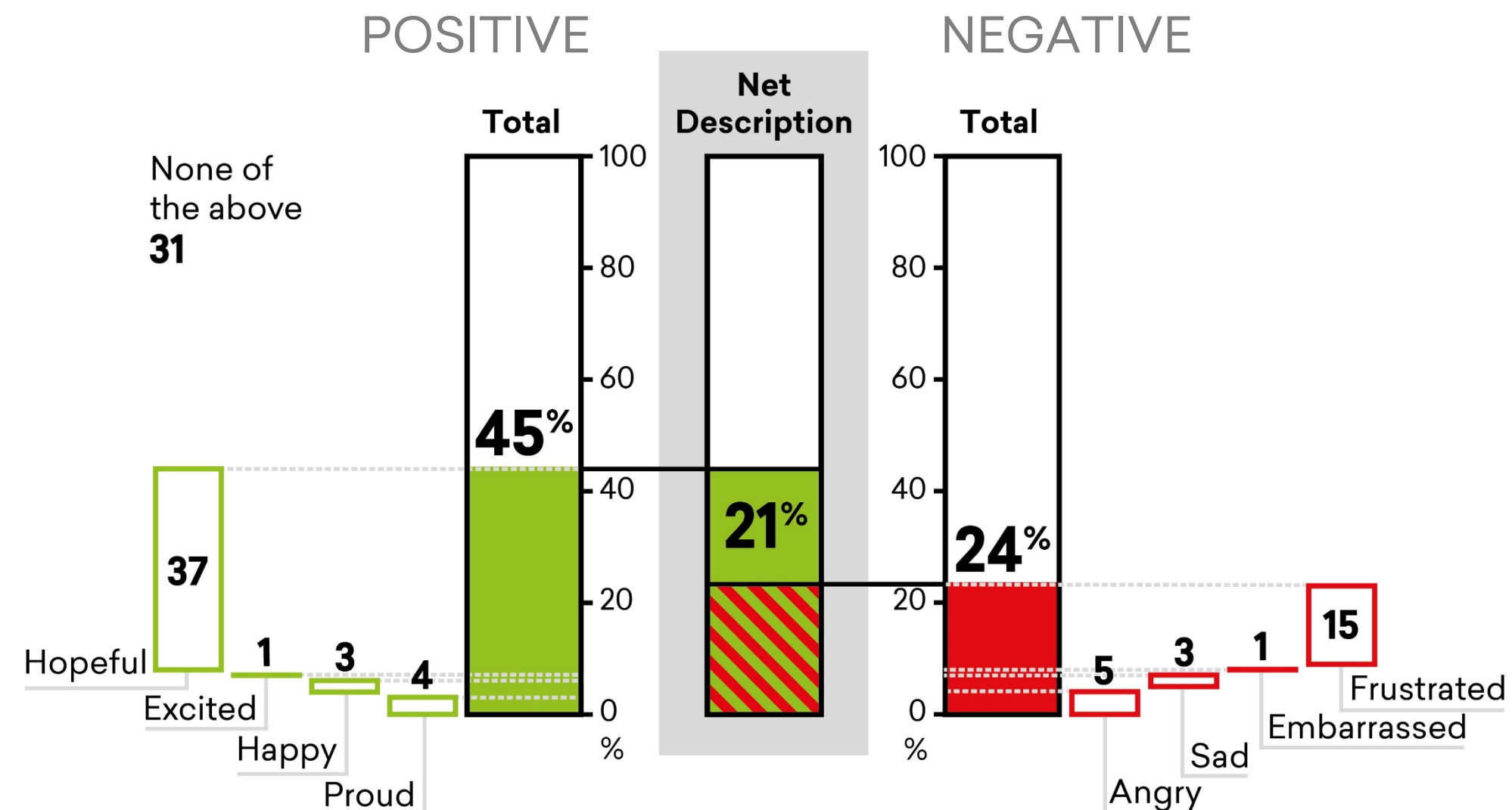
OVERALL RANK

2 / 10

Assessment of Message



Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST African Americans

80%

LOWEST Devoted Conservatives

62%

# B3 Summary: Authority, Loyalty (In-Group) AND Care

**America can be both strong and compassionate.**  
**We can protect our borders from criminals and terrorists**  
**at the same time that we welcome immigrants who respect our laws**  
**and embrace American values.**



Agreement

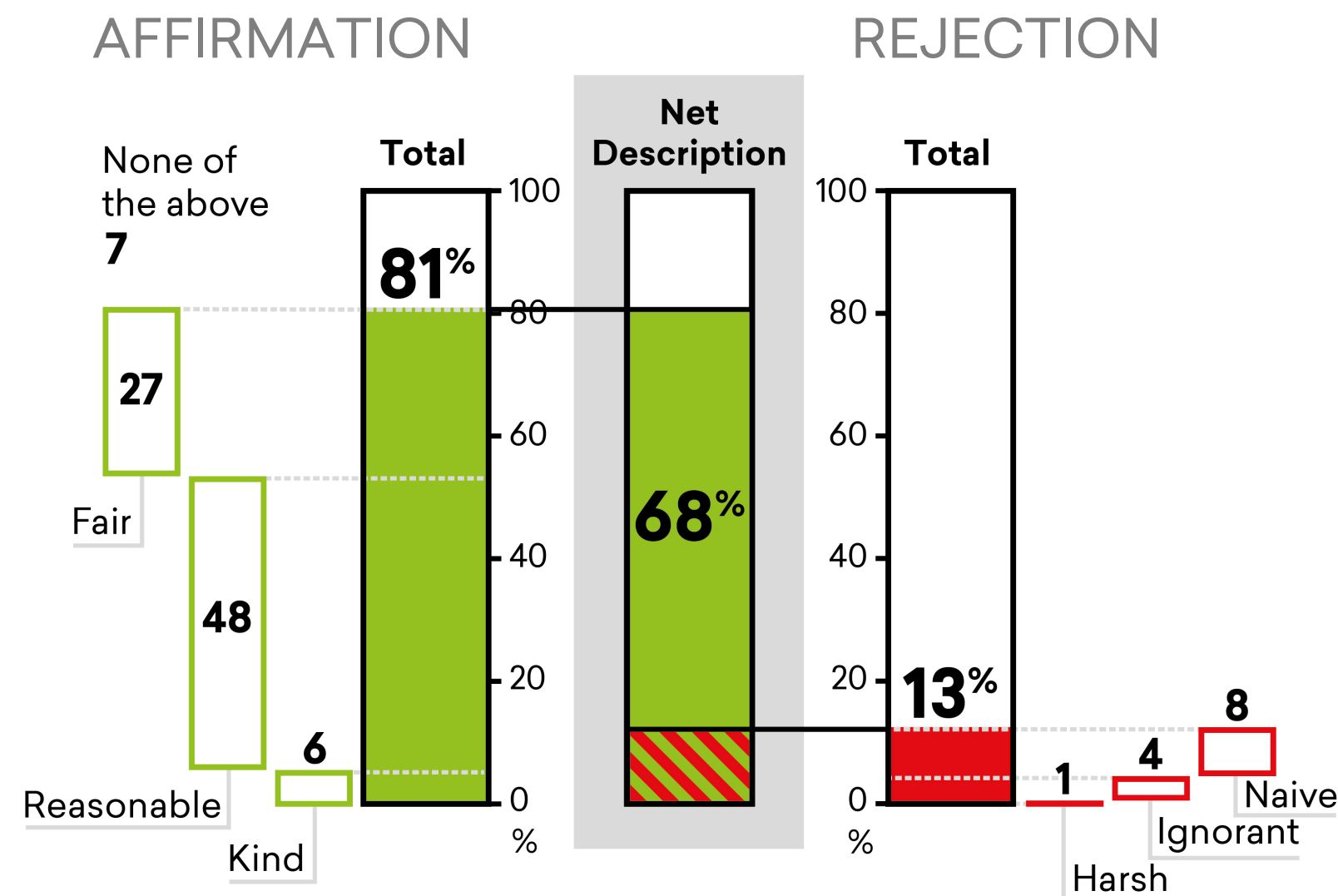
AVERAGE

**78%**

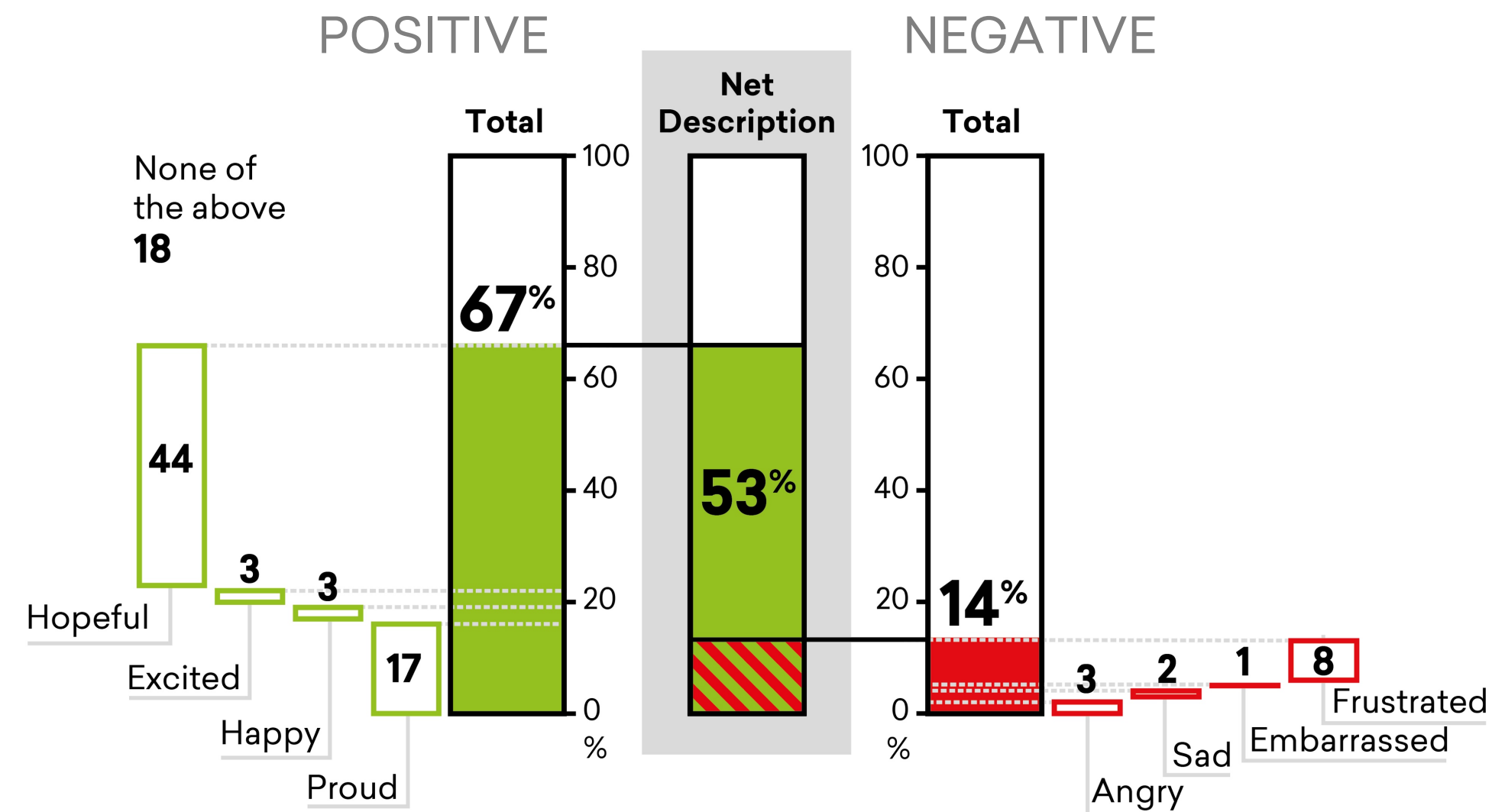
OVERALL RANK

**1** / 10

## Assessment of Message



## Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST Traditional Liberals

**85%**

LOWEST Asians

**71%**

**C1** Summary: Loyalty/Betrayal OVER all others

**It makes me angry** that some cities and states are shielding **illegal immigrants** and refusing to cooperate with the federal government and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). **It's a betrayal** of America to not enforce our borders and our citizenship laws.



Agreement

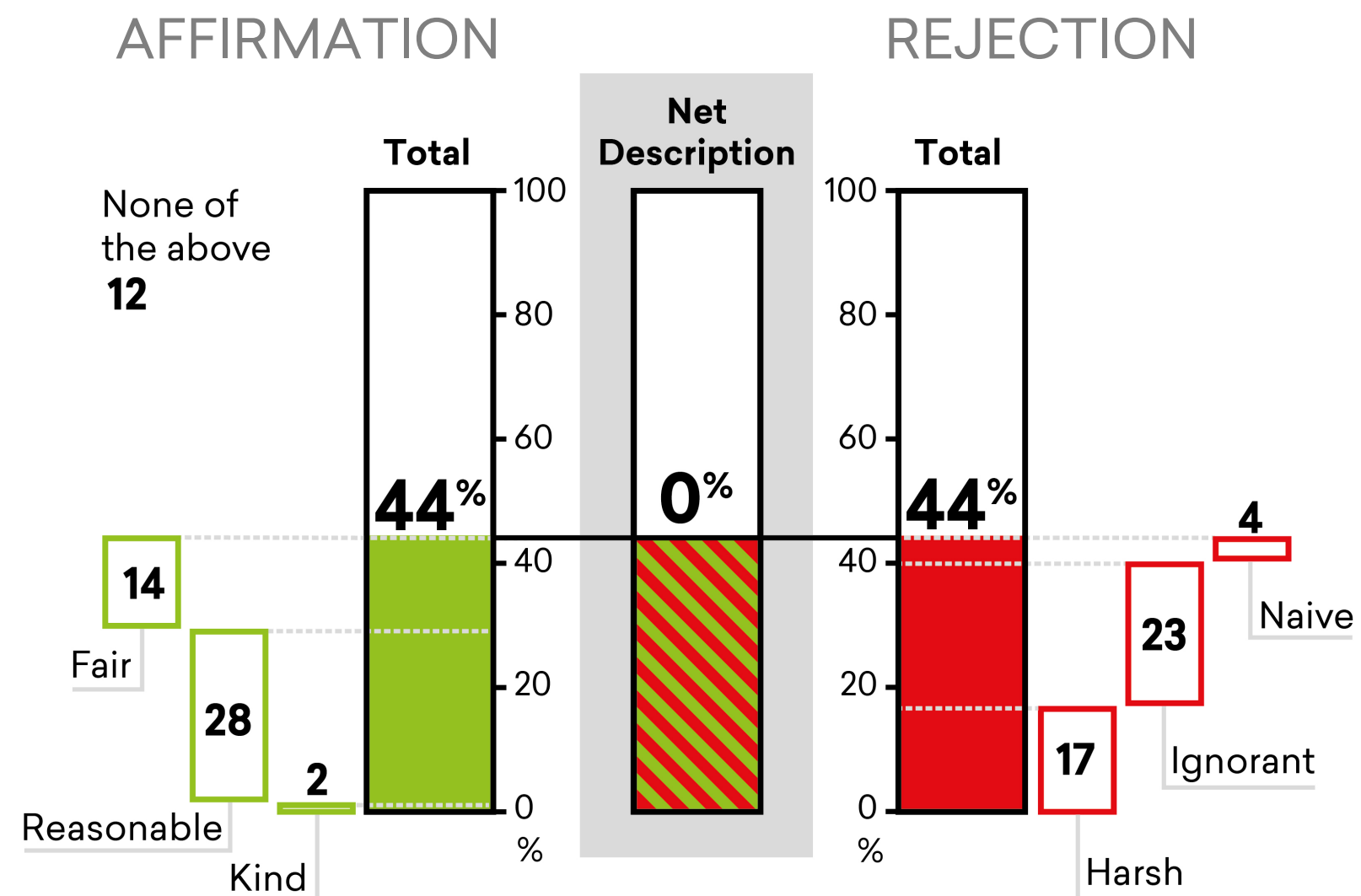
AVERAGE

**56%**

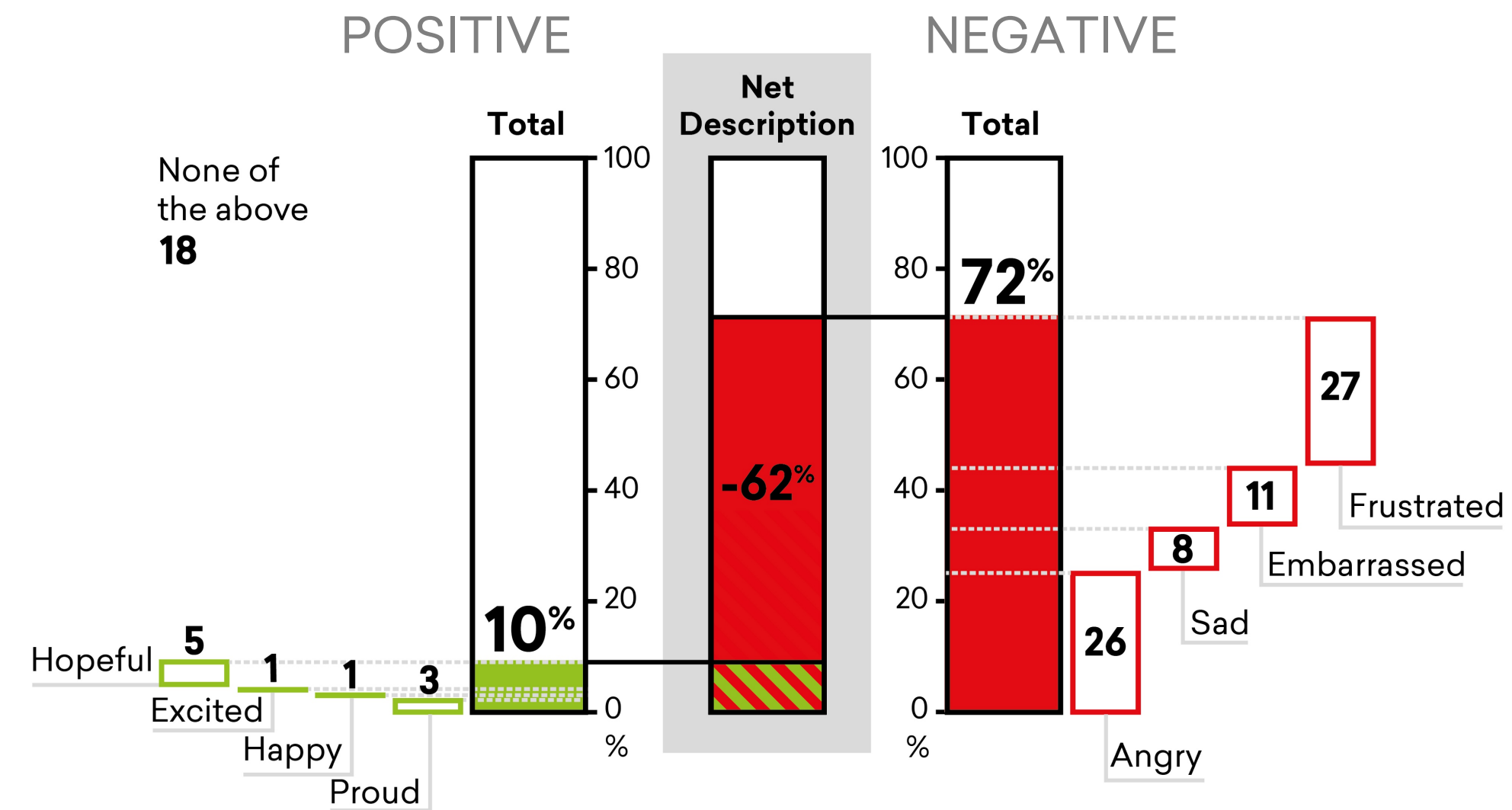
OVERALL RANK

**7**  
/ 10

Assessment of Message



Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST Devoted Conservatives

**95%**

LOWEST Progressive Activists

**9%**

**C2** Summary: Group Favoritism – Perceived overcorrection or oppression

It bothers me that you can't talk about immigration without being afraid of getting called "racist". I don't care about skin color, but I do care about American values and being safe from gangs and crime.



Agreement

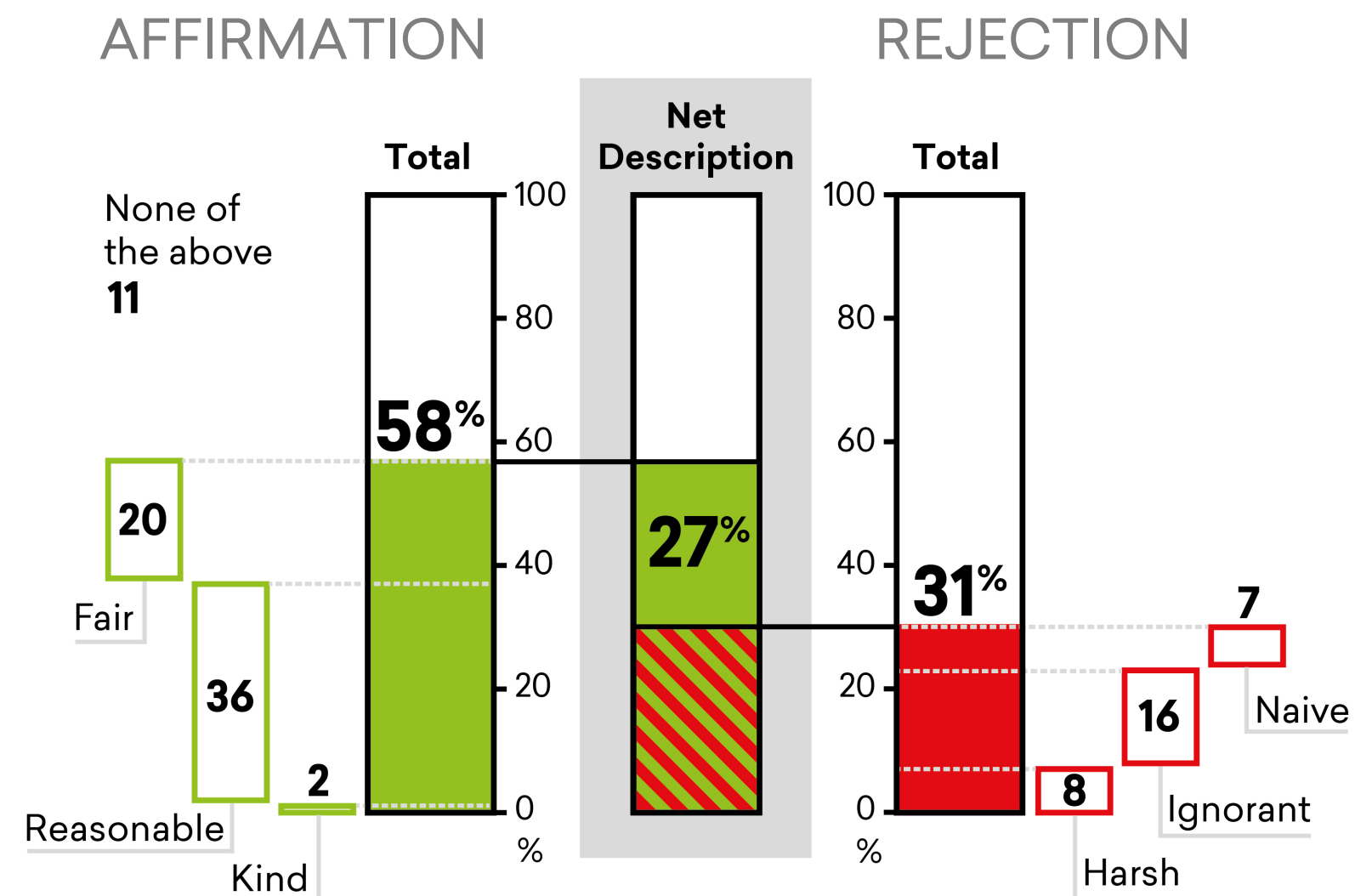
AVERAGE

67%

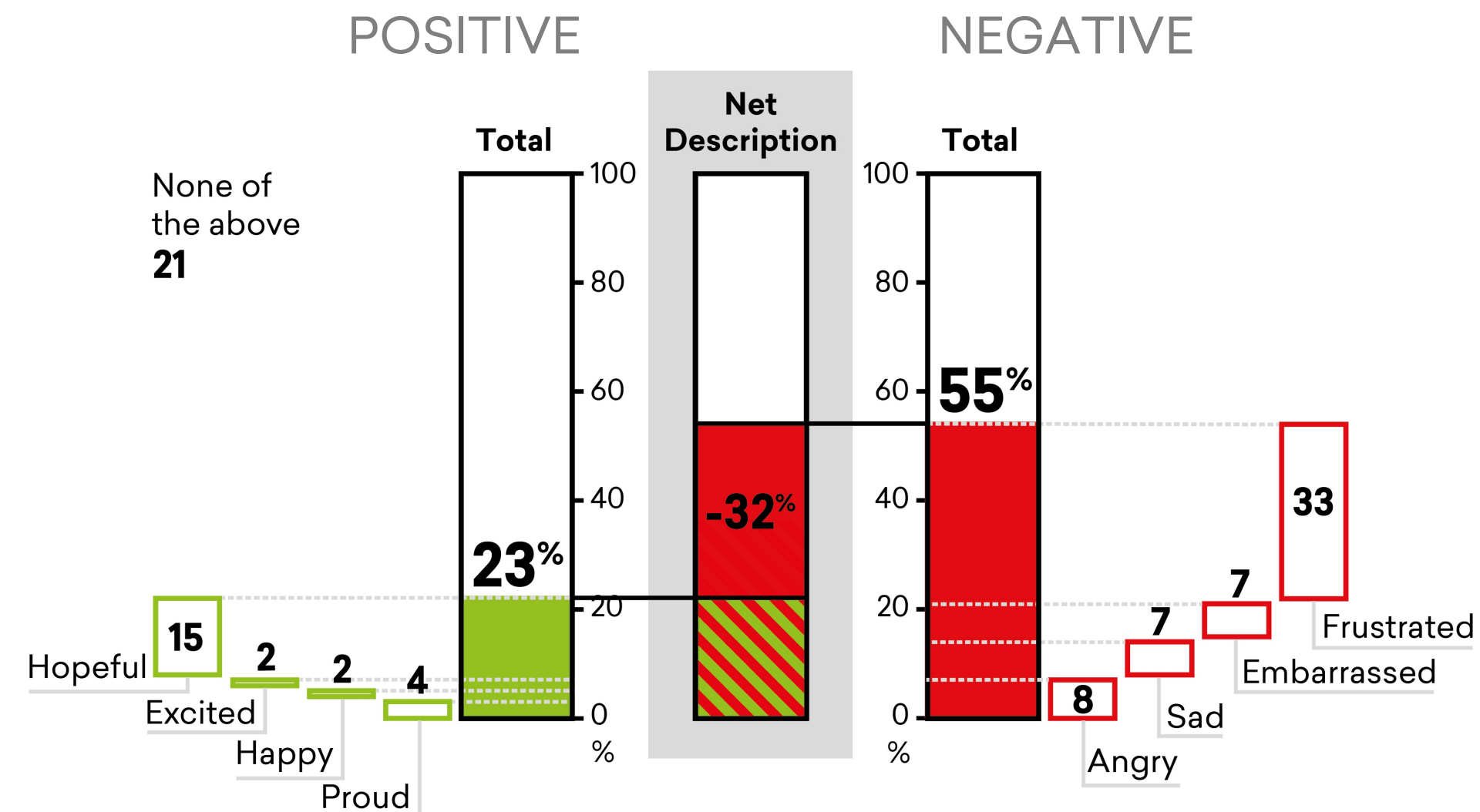
OVERALL RANK

4 / 10

Assessment of Message



Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST Devoted Conservatives

95%

LOWEST Progressive Activists

18%

**C3** Summary: Authority OVER all others

To me it's very simple: **undocumented or illegal immigrants have broken the law.**  
**That's disrespectful** to our country, our laws, and to me. **Illegal immigration**  
**is immoral:** like breaking into someone's home.



Agreement

AVERAGE

**56%**

OVERALL RANK

**8** / 10

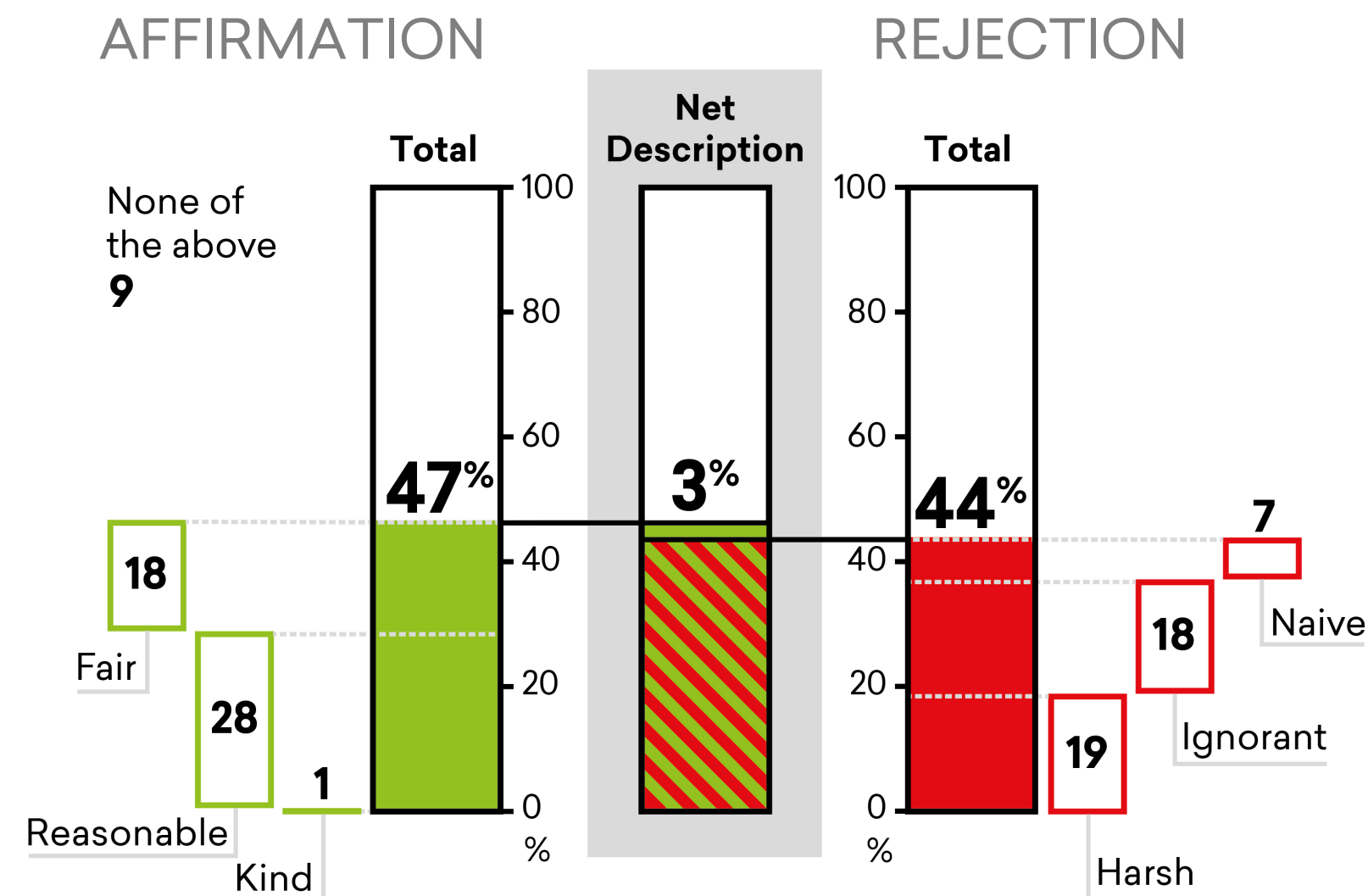
HIGHEST Devoted Conservatives

**92%**

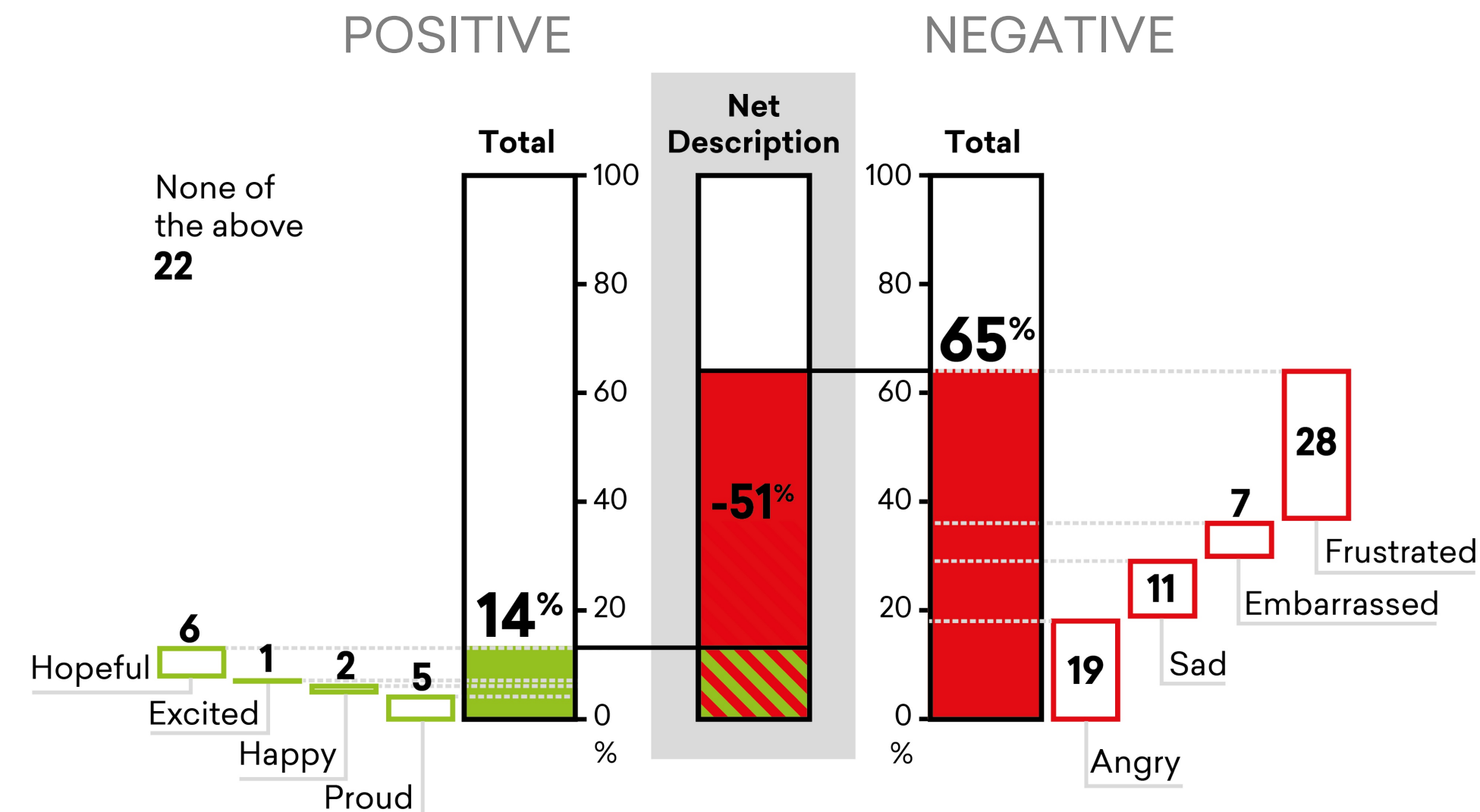
LOWEST Progressive Activists

**13%**

Assessment of Message

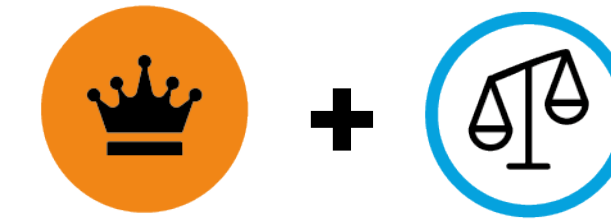


Emotional Resonance



**C4** Summary: Authority AND Fairness (As Accountability)  
OVER all others

It's not politically correct to say this, **but a lot of people** coming to the US border  
**make fake asylum claims.** Our country should send a clear message  
**and turn these people away.**



Agreement

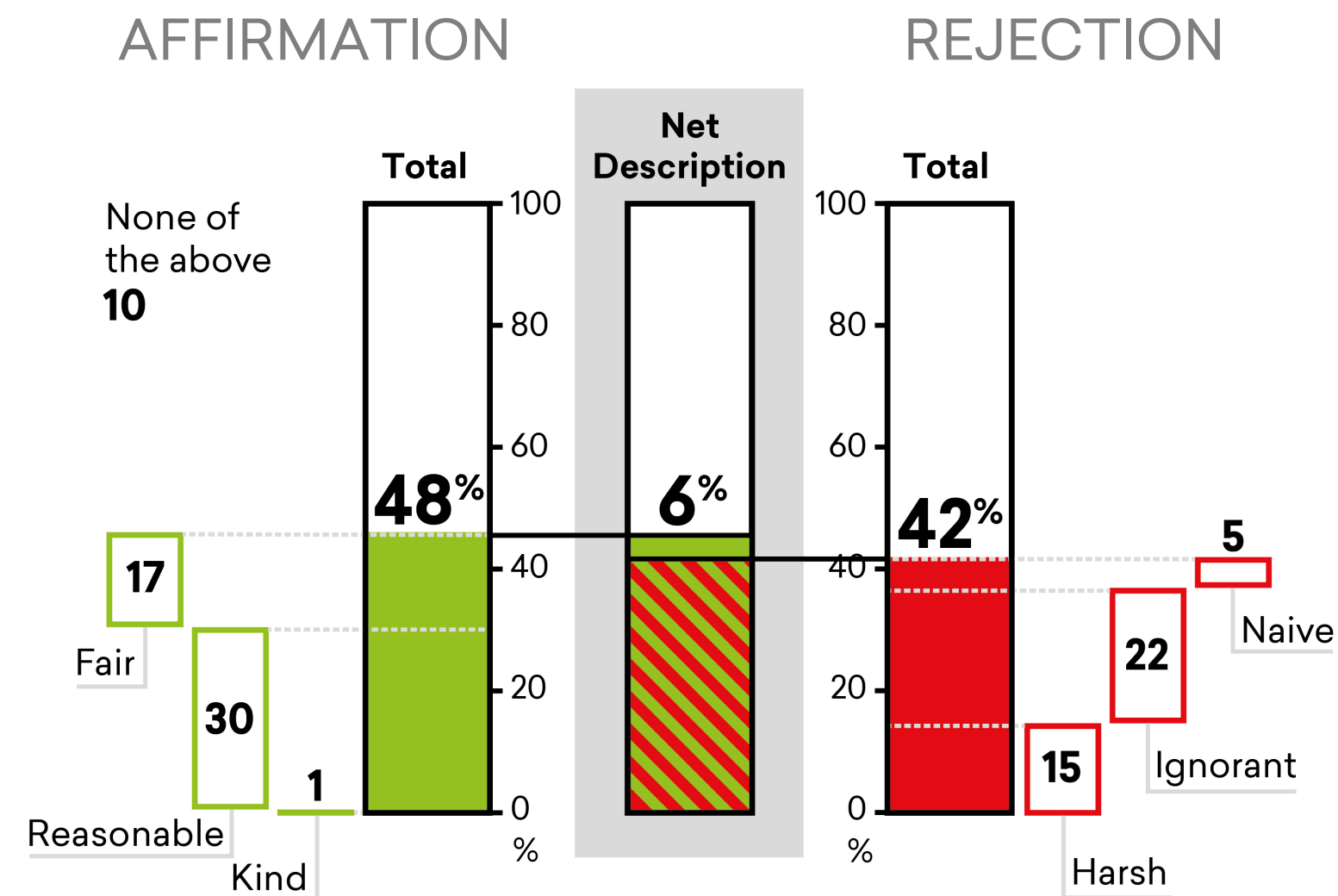
AVERAGE

**58%**

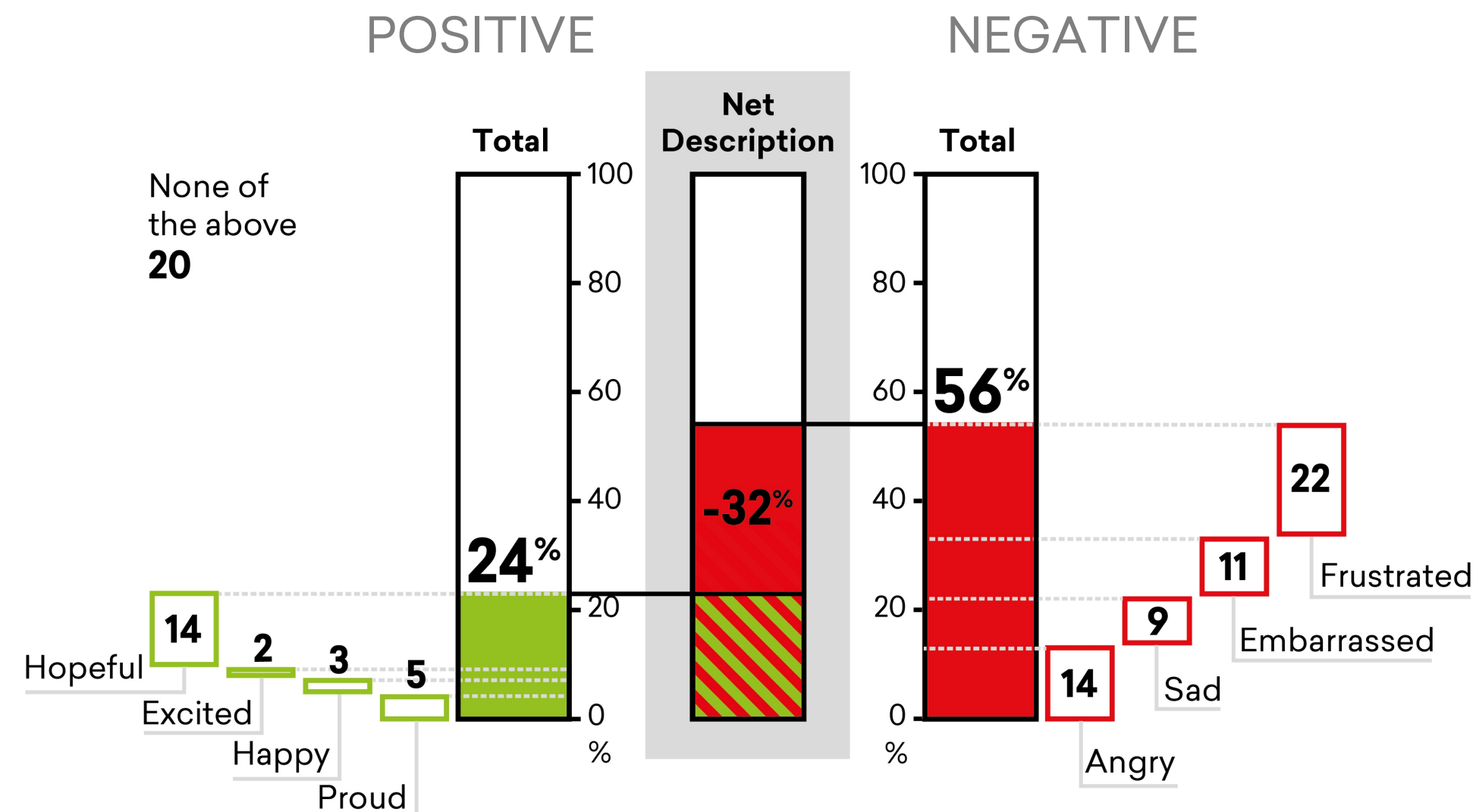
OVERALL RANK

**6** / 10

Assessment of Message



Emotional Resonance



HIGHEST Devoted Conservatives

**92%**

LOWEST Progressive Activists

**11%**

**Thank you.**

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