American Edge Project – Tech Sector's Role in American Values

Key Findings

Amid heightened discussion and concern about misinformation on digital platforms, voters want to keep the internet open and accessible. Voters believe an open, accessible, and free internet is a cornerstone of American life – from freedom of expression to democracy itself. They believe that an open internet gives people more rights and liberties, gives voice to the voiceless, and is a check against abuse of power.
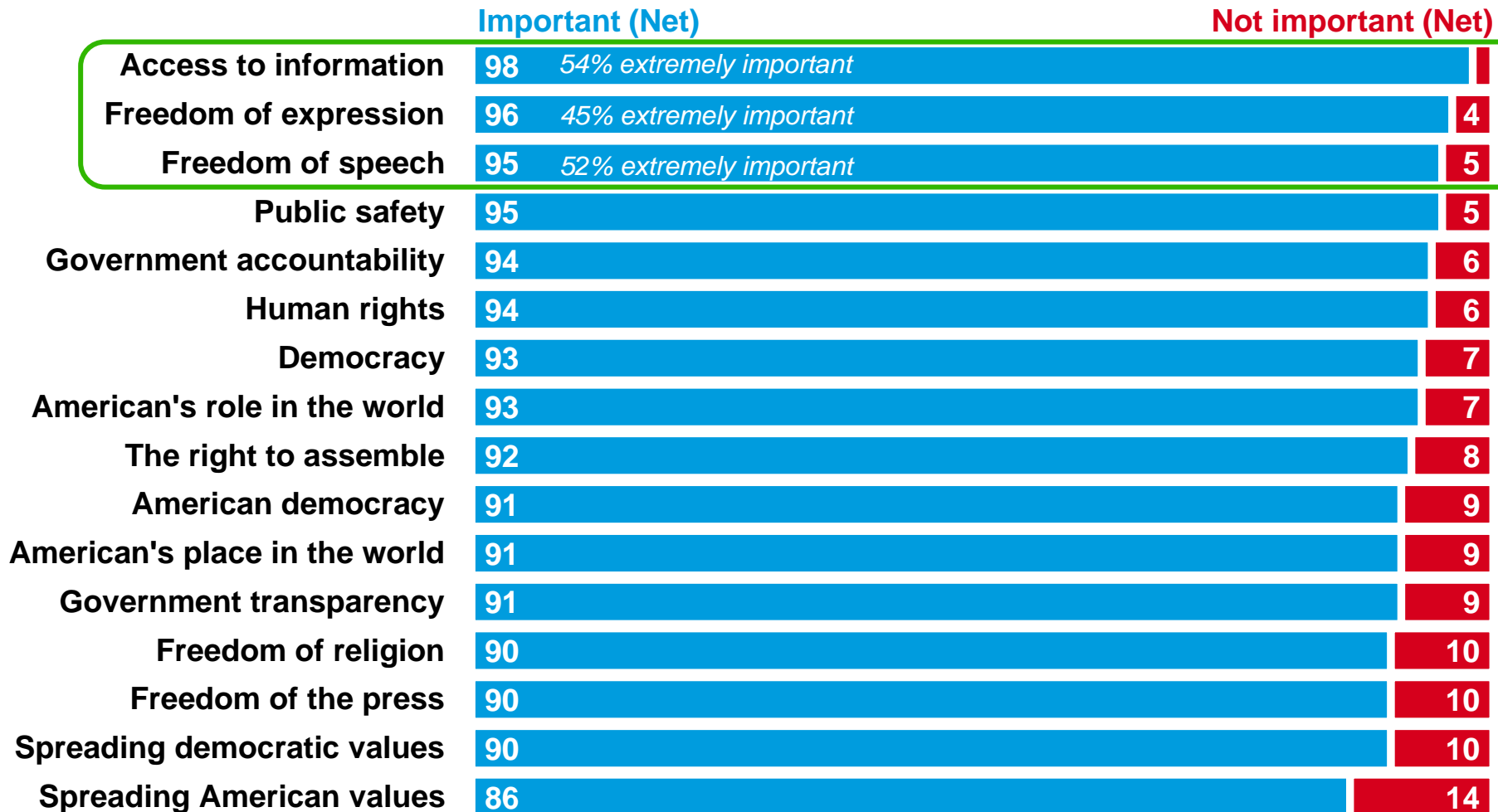
Voters believe the internet in China and Russia is significantly more restricted than the U.S. In contrast to the U.S. internet's commitment to free speech and democracy, the public believes that the Chinese and Russian models of the internet actively suppress freedom. Accordingly, they are concerned at the prospect of a tightly controlled, Chinese version of the internet, where minorities are persecuted, and political speech is policed. And in this moment where the future of the internet is uncertain, voters look to U.S. tech companies to uphold American values.

While the public wants to protect free expression online, voters are open to rules and standards for harmful and illegal content. Although seven-in-ten Americans believe it's more important to keep the internet open to all, even if some post content they disagree with, this is not an absolute view. They are open to regulating harmful content. Moreover, they believe that new internet content laws should distinguish good actors from bad actors, and over 90% believe rules for moderating content on the internet should be more transparent.

Role of Tech

An open and accessible internet is important to most facets of American life

Please indicate how important an <u>open and accessible internet</u> is to each of the following.

	Important (Net)	Not important (Net)
Access to information	98 *54% extremely important*	
Freedom of expression	96 *45% extremely important*	4
Freedom of speech	95 *52% extremely important*	5
Public safety	95	5
Government accountability	94	6
Human rights	94	6
Democracy	93	7
American's role in the world	93	7
The right to assemble	92	8
American democracy	91	9
American's place in the world	91	9
Government transparency	91	9
Freedom of religion	90	10
Freedom of the press	90	10
Spreading democratic values	90	10
Spreading American values	86	14

An open and free internet is seen as central to ensuring freedom and rights

For each of the following statements, please indicate if you agree or disagree.

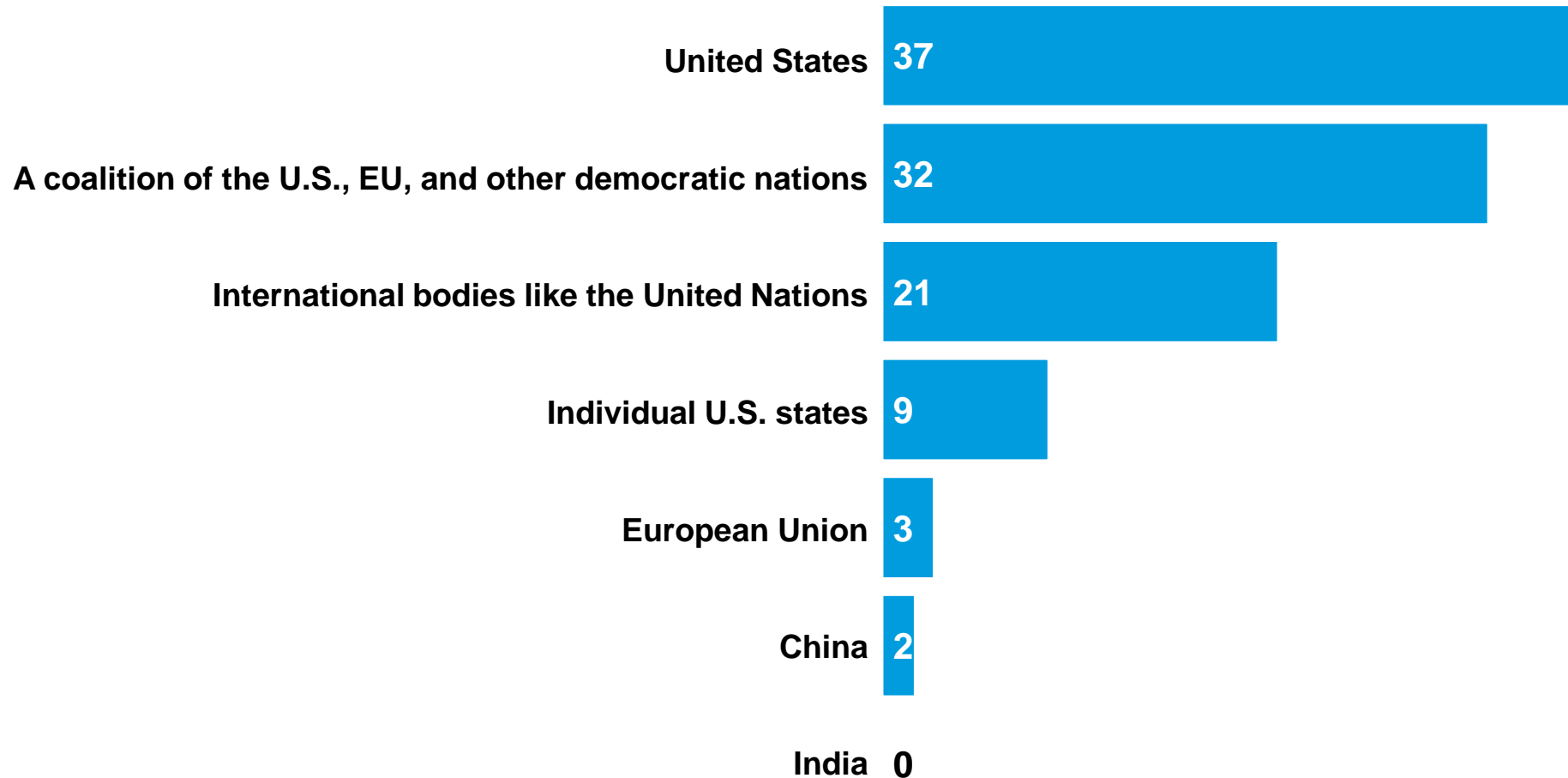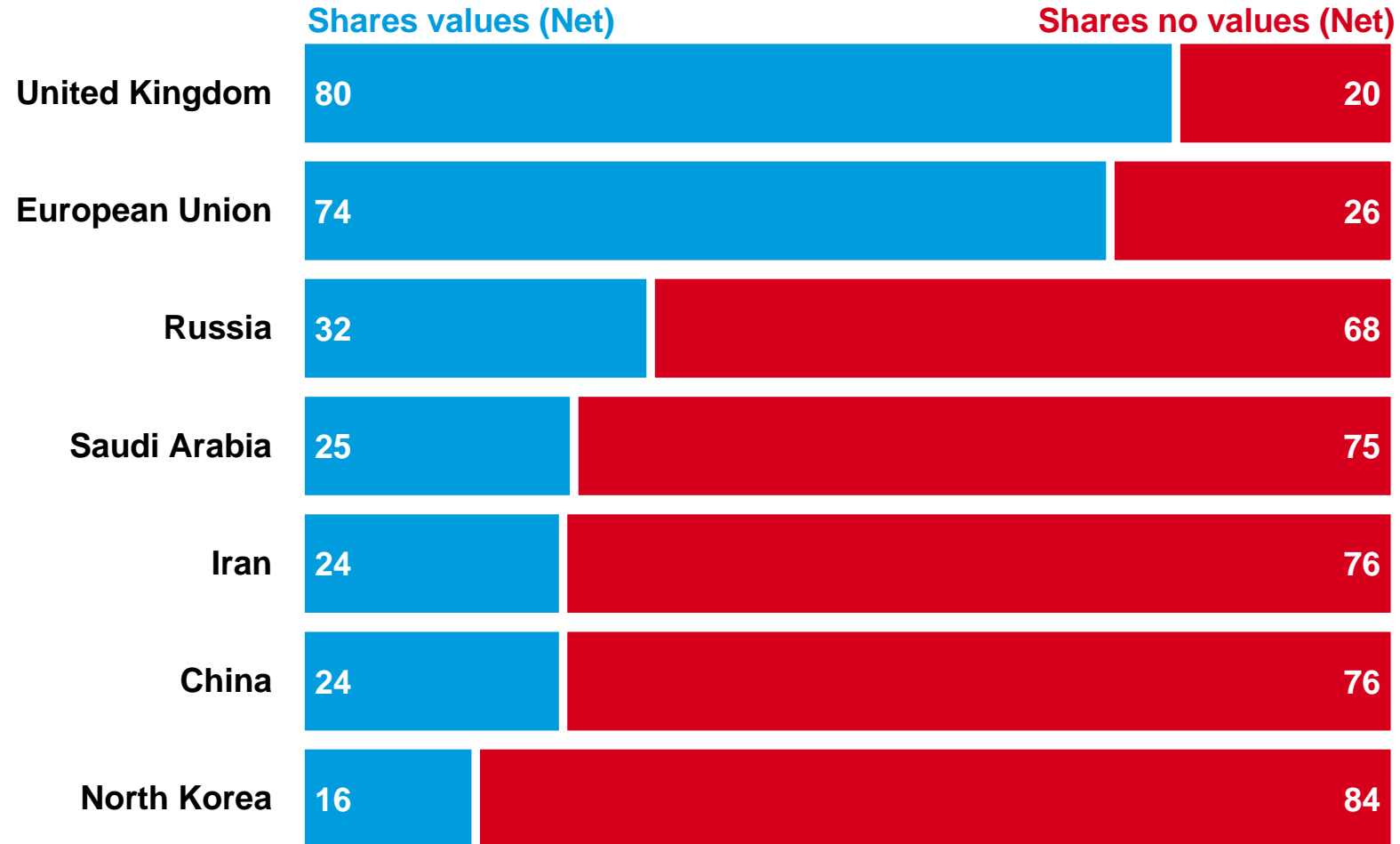| Statement	Agree (Net)	Disagree (Net)
We must protect an open, accessible, and free internet in America	88	12
Having an open and accessible internet allows us to expose abuses of power by the government	84	16
An open and free internet is a necessary part of a healthy democracy	84	16
People have more freedom and rights when the internet is open and accessible	82	18
It's better to have open debate on the internet than censor different points of view	81	19
The open and free internet has driven innovation that has allowed the U.S. to become a global technology leader	81	19
Having an unrestricted internet allows us to expose abuses of power by the government	79	21
The open and free internet has given everyone a voice, which empowers the powerless and makes society better	79	21
Restricting internet speech is a slippery slope that the U.S. should avoid	76	24
Thanks to an open an accessible internet, people don't have to rely on traditional gatekeepers in politics or media anymore	75	25

5

Voters want the U.S. to lead the way in setting internet rules and standards, followed by a coalition of democratic nations

In your view, who should be leading the way in setting the rules and standards for the internet?

United States	37
A coalition of the U.S., EU, and other democratic nations	32
International bodies like the United Nations	21
Individual U.S. states	9
European Union	3
China	2
India	0

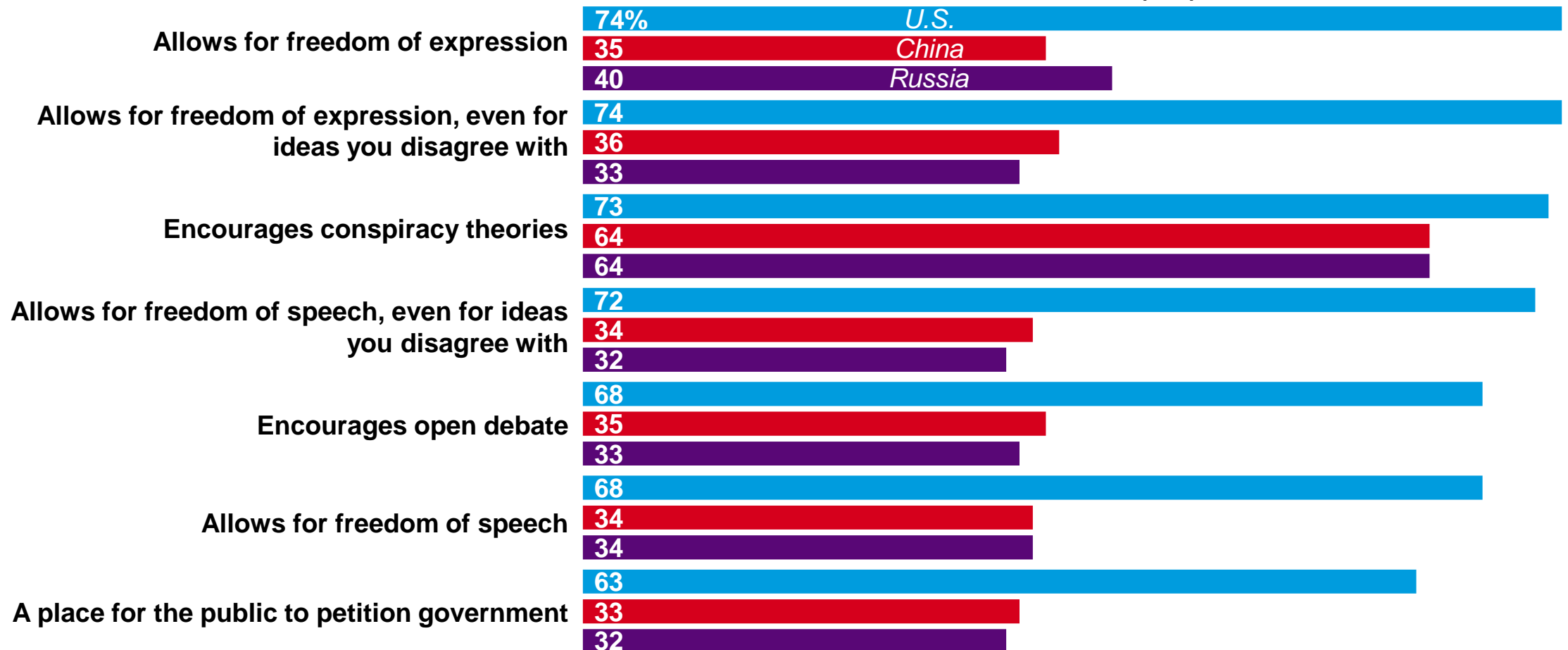# The EU and UK internets are seen as sharing American values

Now you will see a list of countries. For each, please indicate to what extent their own internet shares American values like the freedom to express yourself. Even if you are not 100% certain how to answer, please give your best guess.

Shares values (Net)   **Shares no values (Net)**

Country	Shares values (Net)	Shares no values (Net)
United Kingdom	80	20
European Union	74	26
Russia	32	68
Saudi Arabia	25	75
Iran	24	76
China	24	76
North Korea	16	84

The U.S. internet is viewed as far more conducive to freedom than its Chinese or Russian counterparts

Now you will see a similar list of attributes. For each, please indicate how well you feel it describes the internet in the U.S. / China. / Russia.

Describes well (Net)

Allows for freedom of expression
- 74% U.S.
- 35 China
- 40 Russia

Allows for freedom of expression, even for ideas you disagree with
- 74
- 36
- 33

Encourages conspiracy theories
- 73
- 64
- 64

Allows for freedom of speech, even for ideas you disagree with
- 72
- 34
- 32

Encourages open debate
- 68
- 35
- 33

Allows for freedom of speech
- 68
- 34
- 34

A place for the public to petition government
- 63
- 33
- 32

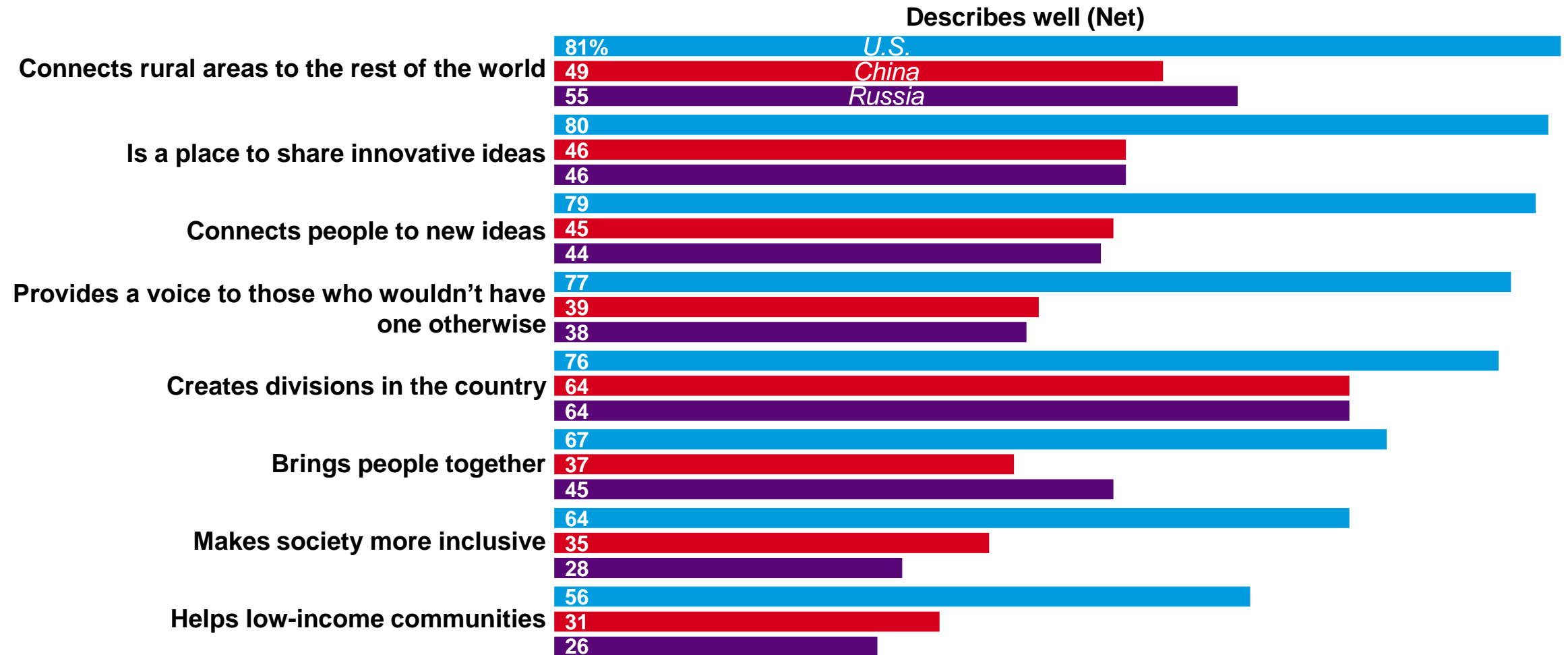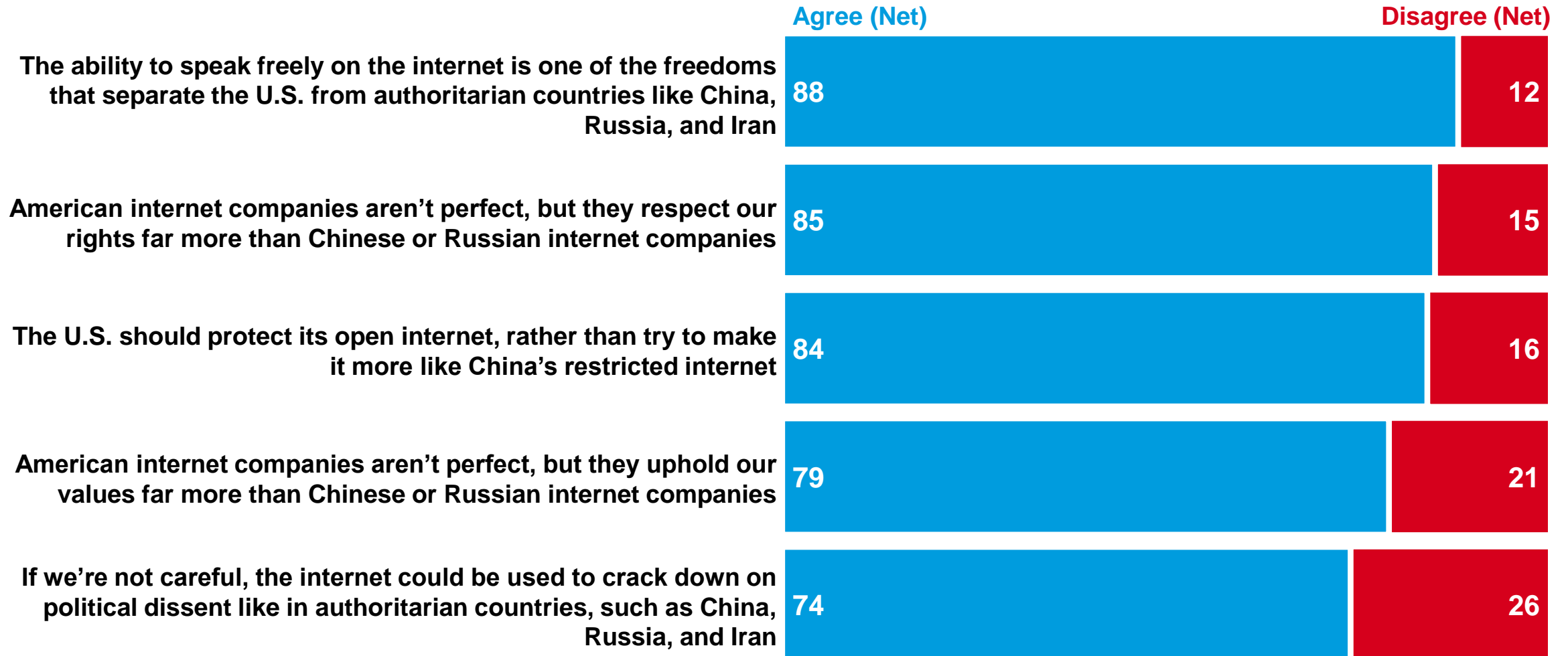# The U.S. internet is also seen as more inclusive than the Chinese or Russian internets

Now you will see a similar list of attributes. For each, please indicate how well you feel it describes the internet in the U.S. / China. / Russia.

Describes well (Net)

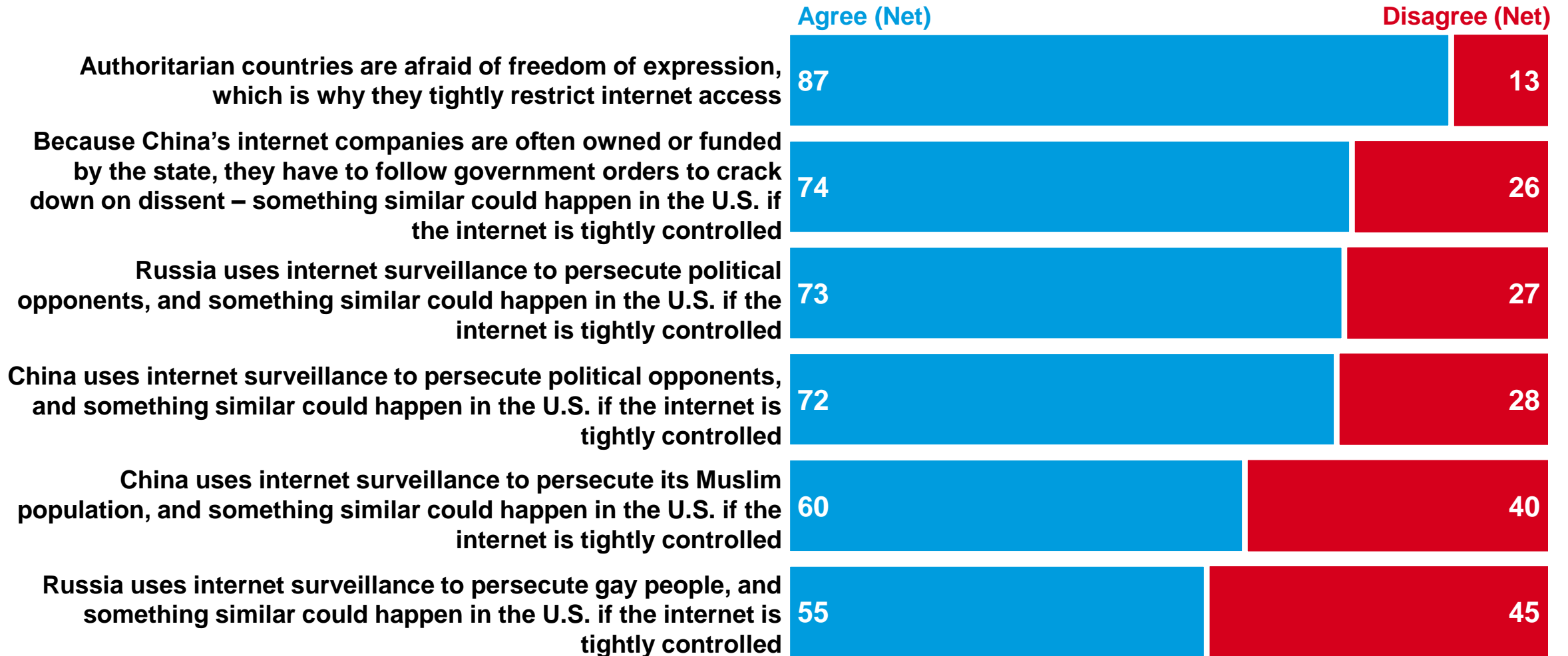| Attribute	U.S.	China	Russia
Connects rural areas to the rest of the world	81%	49	55
Is a place to share innovative ideas	80	46	46
Connects people to new ideas	79	45	44
Provides a voice to those who wouldn't have one otherwise	77	39	38
Creates divisions in the country	76	64	64
Brings people together	67	37	45
Makes society more inclusive	64	35	28
Helps low-income communities	56	31	26

9

Although voters acknowledge the U.S. is not perfect, its vision of the internet is more constructive than those in authoritarian countries

For each of the following statements, please indicate if you agree or disagree.

Agree (Net)   Disagree (Net)

Statement	Agree (Net)	Disagree (Net)
The ability to speak freely on the internet is one of the freedoms that separate the U.S. from authoritarian countries like China, Russia, and Iran	88	12
American internet companies aren't perfect, but they respect our rights far more than Chinese or Russian internet companies	85	15
The U.S. should protect its open internet, rather than try to make it more like China's restricted internet	84	16
American internet companies aren't perfect, but they uphold our values far more than Chinese or Russian internet companies	79	21
If we're not careful, the internet could be used to crack down on political dissent like in authoritarian countries, such as China, Russia, and Iran	74	26

The public also believes that a tightly controlled internet could lead to abuse of power in the U.S.

For each of the following statements, please indicate if you agree or disagree.

Agree (Net) | **Disagree (Net)**

Statement	Agree (Net)	Disagree (Net)
Authoritarian countries are afraid of freedom of expression, which is why they tightly restrict internet access	87	13
Because China's internet companies are often owned or funded by the state, they have to follow government orders to crack down on dissent – something similar could happen in the U.S. if the internet is tightly controlled	74	26
Russia uses internet surveillance to persecute political opponents, and something similar could happen in the U.S. if the internet is tightly controlled	73	27
China uses internet surveillance to persecute political opponents, and something similar could happen in the U.S. if the internet is tightly controlled	72	28
China uses internet surveillance to persecute its Muslim population, and something similar could happen in the U.S. if the internet is tightly controlled	60	40
Russia uses internet surveillance to persecute gay people, and something similar could happen in the U.S. if the internet is tightly controlled	55	45

Regulation Views

A bipartisan majority prefers free expression on the internet even if some post disagreeable content, over regulating content on the internet

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

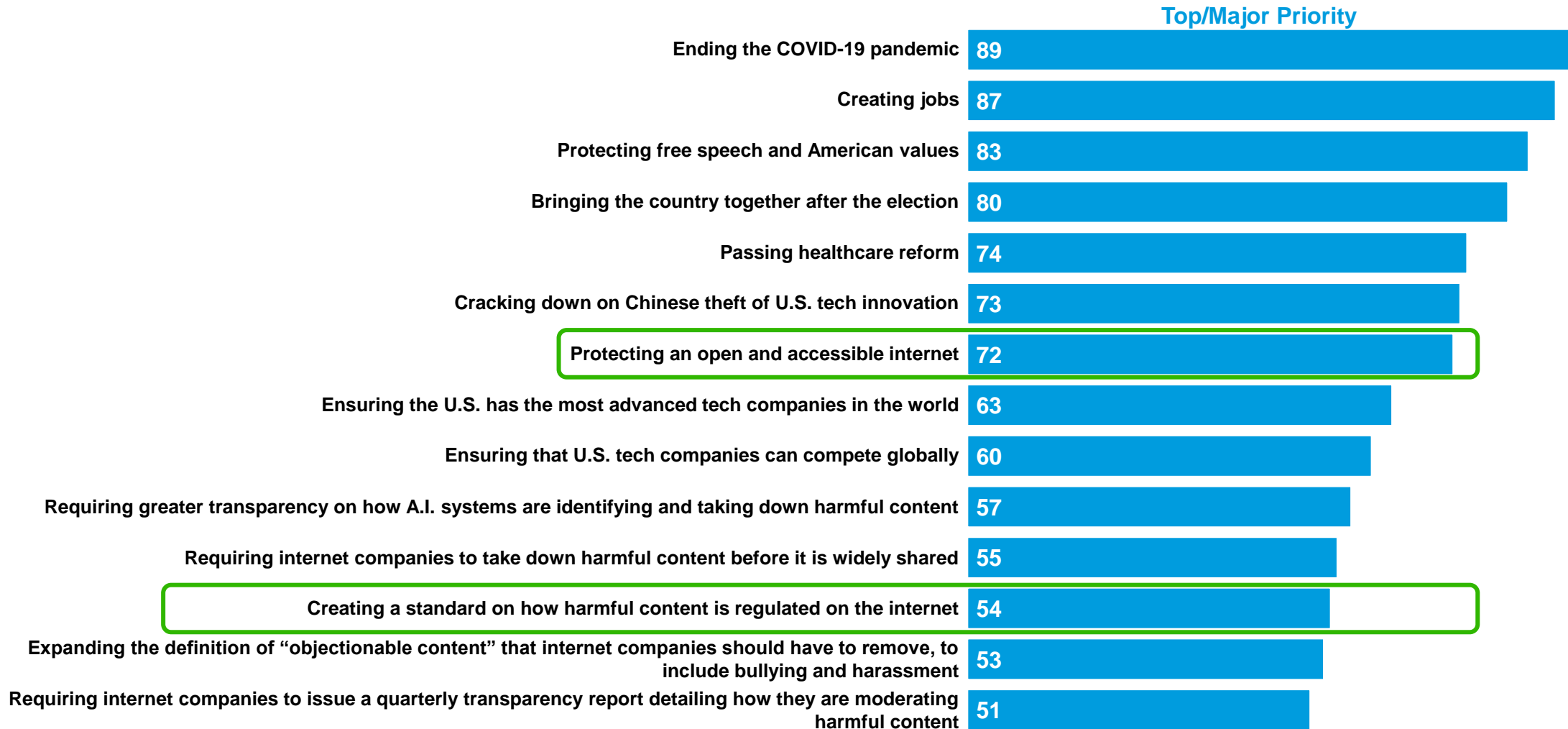**It's more important to <u>keep the internet open and accessible to all</u>, even if some people post content that I disagree with**

It's more important to <u>regulate content on the internet,</u> even if that means making the internet less open and accessible to all

	Keep open	Regulate
Overall	71	29
Democrat	60	40
Independent	81	19
Republican	79	21

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

It's more important to <u>allow people to freely express themselves on the internet</u>, even if some people post content that I disagree with

It's more important to <u>regulate content on the internet,</u> even if that means restricting freedom of expression

	Allow free expression	Regulate
Overall	71	29
Democrat	62	38
Independent	77	23
Republican	81	19

While there is broad support for free expression even for "content I disagree with," voters are more willing to regulate explicitly "harmful content"

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

It's more important to <u>keep the internet open and accessible to all</u>, even if some people post content that I disagree with

71 | **29**

It's more important to <u>regulate content on the internet,</u> even if that means making the internet less open and accessible to all

It's more important <u>to keep the internet open and accessible to all</u>, even if some people abuse that freedom by posting harmful content

59 | **41**

It's more important to <u>regulate content on the internet,</u> even if that means making the internet less open and accessible to all
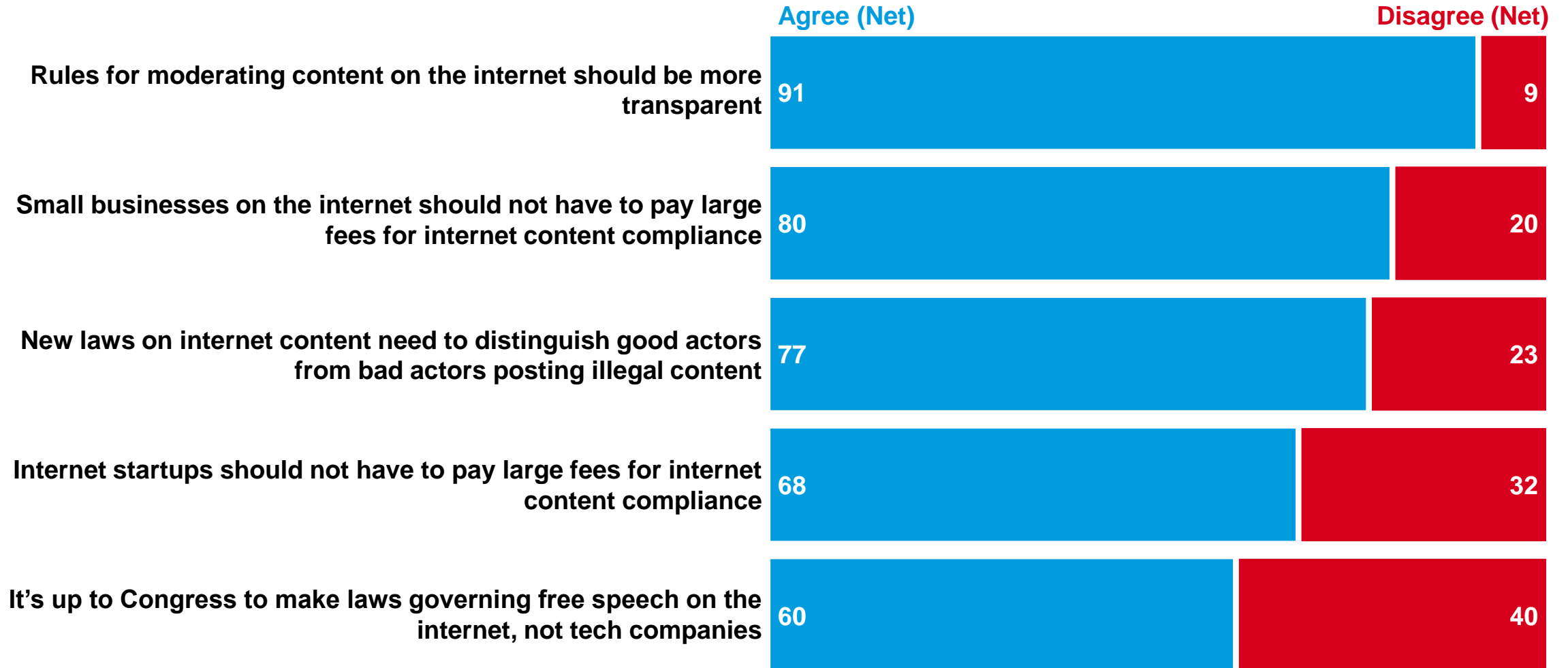
Voters want the Biden administration to focus on protecting free speech, but also want harmful content regulated and greater transparency

For each, please indicate whether it should be a priority for the next U.S. president.

Top/Major Priority

Ending the COVID-19 pandemic	89
Creating jobs	87
Protecting free speech and American values	83
Bringing the country together after the election	80
Passing healthcare reform	74
Cracking down on Chinese theft of U.S. tech innovation	73
Protecting an open and accessible internet	72
Ensuring the U.S. has the most advanced tech companies in the world	63
Ensuring that U.S. tech companies can compete globally	60
Requiring greater transparency on how A.I. systems are identifying and taking down harmful content	57
Requiring internet companies to take down harmful content before it is widely shared	55
Creating a standard on how harmful content is regulated on the internet	54
Expanding the definition of "objectionable content" that internet companies should have to remove, to include bullying and harassment	53
Requiring internet companies to issue a quarterly transparency report detailing how they are moderating harmful content	51

The public places a premium on transparency and clear standards for bad actors

Agree (Net)   **Disagree (Net)**

Statement	Agree (Net)	Disagree (Net)
Rules for moderating content on the internet should be more transparent	91	9
Small businesses on the internet should not have to pay large fees for internet content compliance	80	20
New laws on internet content need to distinguish good actors from bad actors posting illegal content	77	23
Internet startups should not have to pay large fees for internet content compliance	68	32
It's up to Congress to make laws governing free speech on the internet, not tech companies	60	40

Takeaways

The Story

In the wake of disinformation campaigns and political unrest, Americans are reaffirming their support for an open and accessible internet. Even after years of intense debate on how to manage content on platforms, the public remains staunchly committed to protecting an open and accessible internet, which is seen as a pillar of American democracy itself.

U.S. leadership stands in contrast to authoritarian models of the internet. Voters believe U.S. tech companies promote American values, and that the open internet is what separates us from authoritarian regimes. Moreover, seven-in-ten believe failure to champion this system could lead to Chinese or Russian-style political repression domestically.

While there is broad support for free expression, voters are open to rules and standards for harmful and illegal content. Although the public supports keeping the internet open to all, even if some post content they disagree with, they are also looking to the Biden administration to establish regulatory rules of the road for the internet. This includes taking down harmful or abusive content, distinguishing between good and bad actors, and greater transparency on moderation standards.

Methodology

Voters

Ipsos conducted a survey of **1,019 registered voters nationwide,** between January 28th and February 3rd, 2020.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos' online panel, partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2016 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, and education.

Credibility Interval

The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points for all respondents. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following (n=1,019, DEFF=1.5, adjusted Confidence Interval=+/-5.0 percentage points).