

# SOCIOPOLITICS IN THE UK WORKPLACE



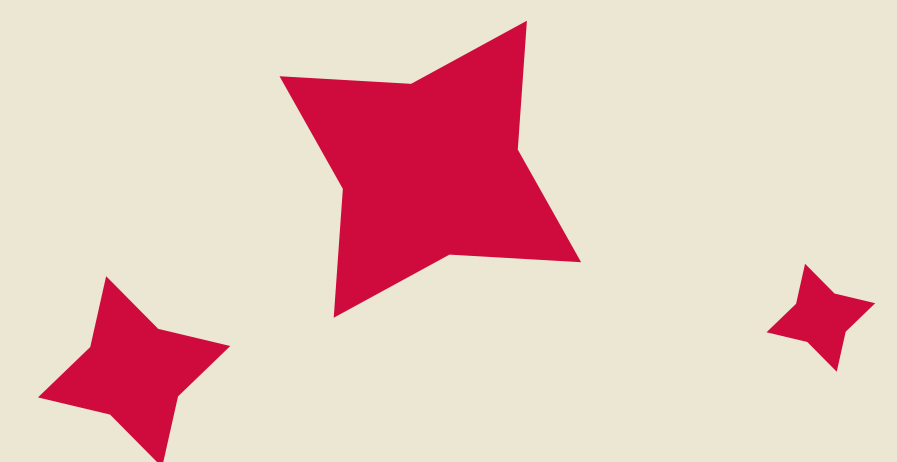
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# Introduction

In the past, work was work, and your personal life was your personal life, and the boundaries between them were clear. Today, we live in a hyper-connected world where smartphones and personal devices are our constant companions, and social media is used for both professional and personal purposes. In parallel, the political environment in the UK has become increasingly charged and polarised following Brexit and the pandemic, leaving employees in the United Kingdom wondering whether their political opinions could impact their careers.

Employers need help navigating this challenging cultural-political landscape. In January 2023 HiBob's research department surveyed 2000 professionals in the UK to help employers understand how their employees feel about political expression in the workplace, including if, where, and how discourse should be conducted. The survey also aimed to identify the best ways to conduct political discourse and the ramifications that concern employees.



# Key takeaways

## **#1 The political stance of a company can significantly deter applicants from joining, particularly if they are currently employed by a large company**

Politics can significantly impact the decision to accept an offer from a company. Within this survey, more than half of the respondents with an opinion on the subject (53%) say that a company's opposing political stance will deter them from accepting an offer to join that company. Respondents currently working for large companies are more likely to be discouraged unless they work in a company with 1001-5000 employees. In this case, politics are less likely to impact their decision to join another company.

## **#2 Employees can be prompted to leave a company due to an opposing political stance**

Fewer people will leave a company whose political stance opposes their own once they already work for that company. In this survey, 46% of respondents said they would not leave. However, a significant number, 27%, say that a company's opposing stance would prompt them to leave the company.

## **#3 Politics should be kept out of the office and company communication channels**

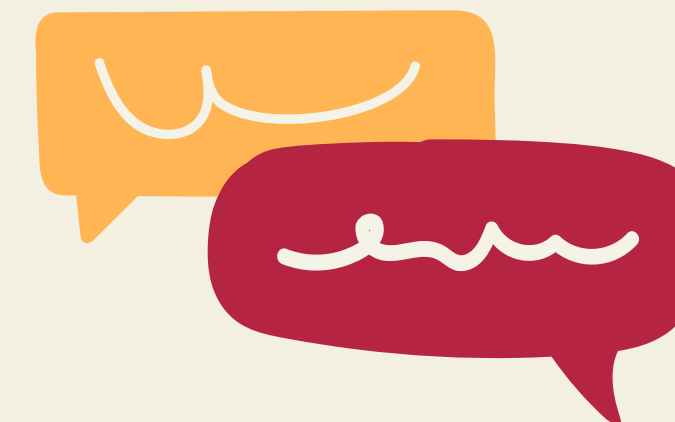
Neither employees nor managers like talking about politics at work. In the scope of this survey, 45% of respondents say that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the office, and 59% say they should be kept out of company communications channels like Slack. More managers feel this way than respondents who do not manage others.

#### **#4 Unfettered political discussions should not occur on business-related social media platforms; companies should have guidelines detailing what is and is not acceptable**

People are also concerned about discussing politics on personal-professional platforms like LinkedIn. In the framework of this survey, 47% of respondents say that sociopolitical discussions should be kept off of business-related social media, and 41% feel that companies should take action and prevent employees from posting their political opinions. Managers are especially inclined to agree that politics should be kept off social media and to see the need for clear guidelines for what is and is not acceptable.

#### **#5 Discussing sociopolitical opinions with managers and colleagues can harm work and working relationships**

According to our survey, there are ramifications for sharing political opinions at work. From this survey question, 38% of respondents feel that sharing their opinions with their manager could harm their job and relationships, and 45% felt the same about sharing opinions with a colleague.



## **#6 Respectful and safe sociopolitical discourse should be encouraged to nurture a legitimately inclusive and diverse company culture**

Sociopolitical discourse in the workplace can't be eliminated altogether in a free society. But free speech isn't hate speech, and employers must ensure that discourse is held in a respectful and safe manner. In the context of this survey, 53% of respondents who have an opinion feel that respectful sociopolitical discourse should be encouraged to nurture an inclusive and diverse company culture, and 62% of respondents who have an opinion say that sociopolitical topics need to be discussed in a safe space and include voicing opposing opinions respectfully. Women, singles, and younger respondents are more likely to indicate the need for a safe space for discussion, probably because they may not feel safe without one.



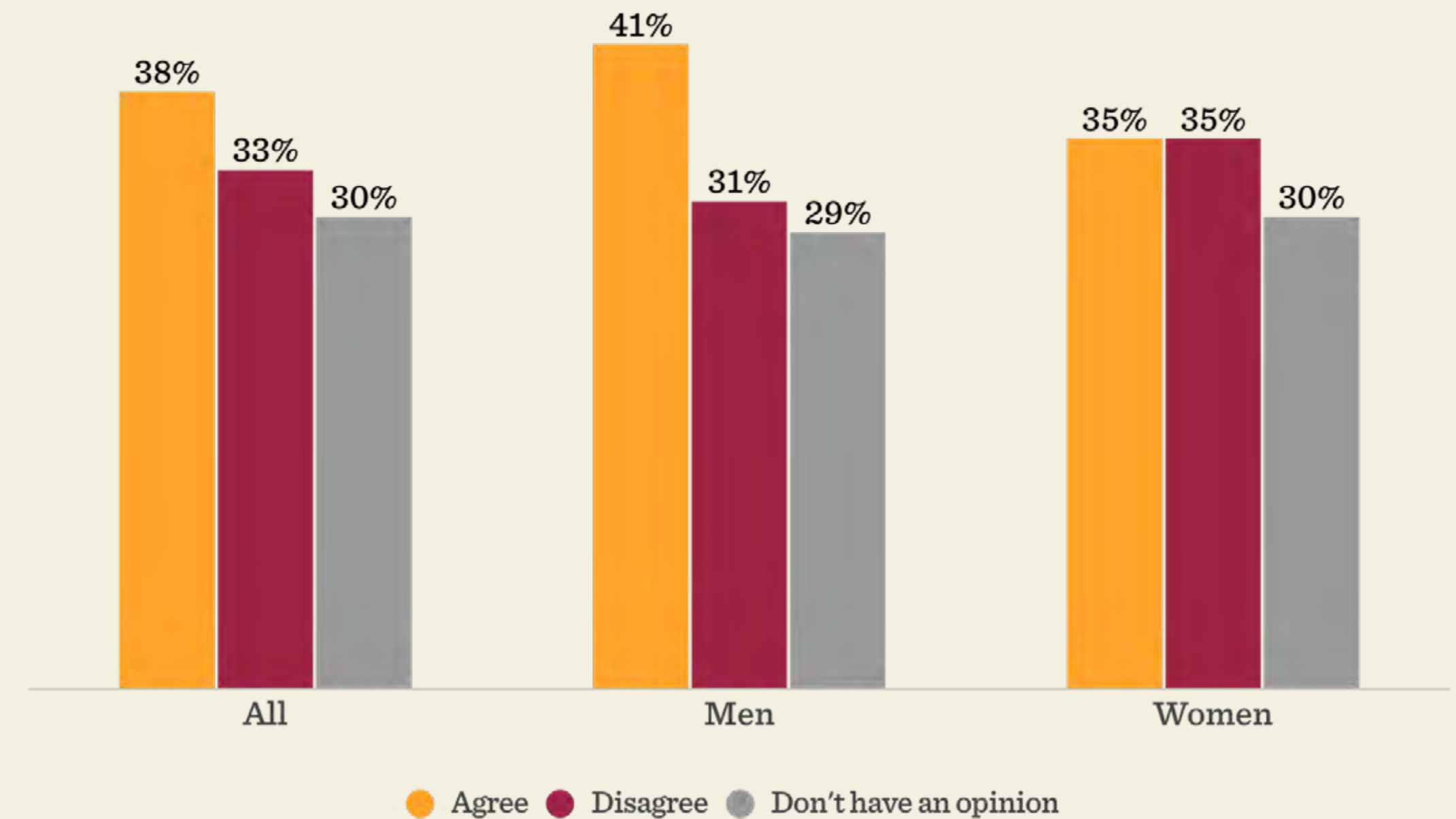


# Findings

# Employer brand

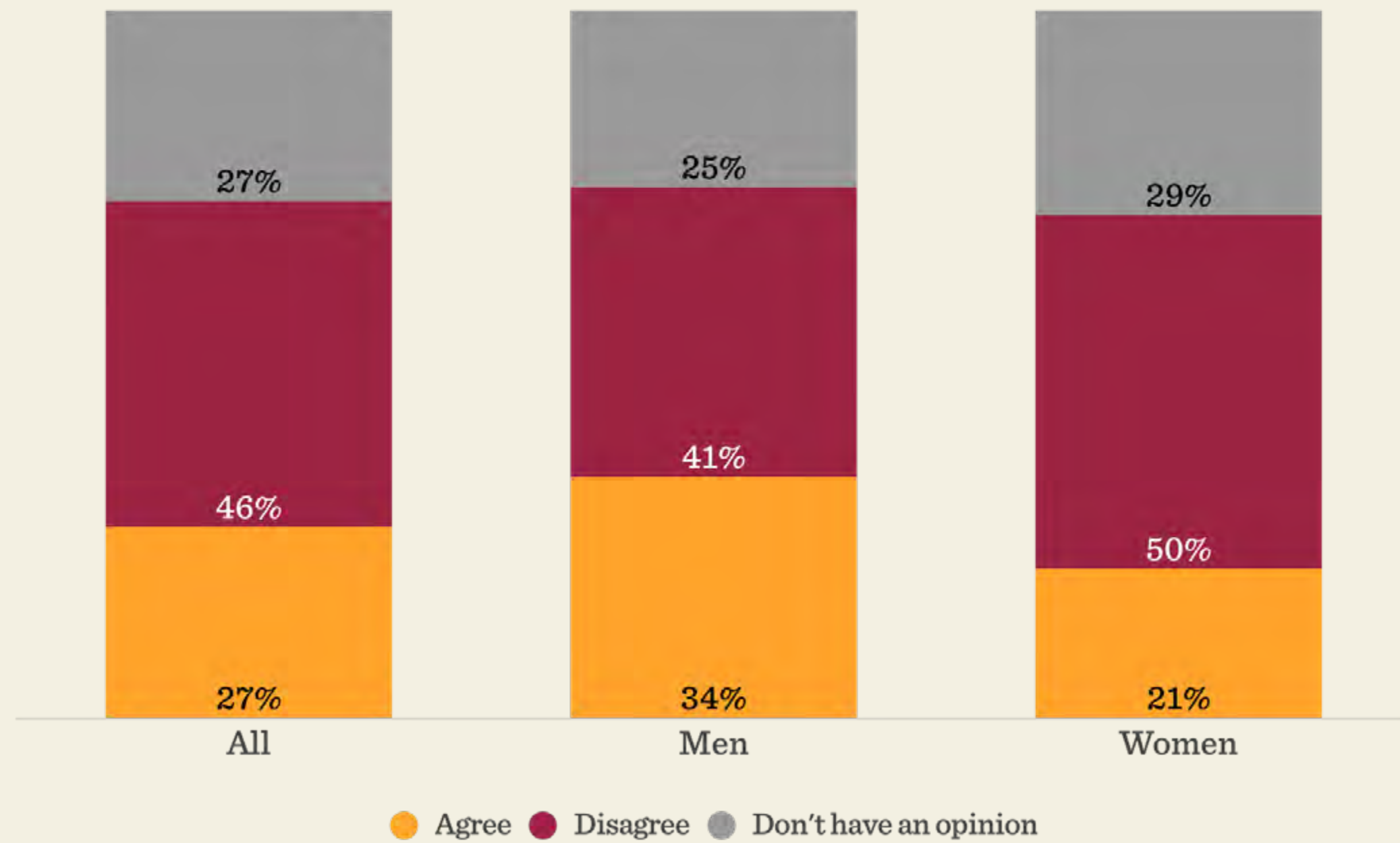
In our increasingly polarised world, politics have permeated almost every aspect of life, and it's difficult for companies to refrain from taking a stance on political and ideological issues ranging from environmental concerns to racial tensions and gender issues. Our study examined how a company's political stance impacts its employer brand and whether it deters candidates from accepting an offer to join the company or may prompt them to leave the company where they are currently employed.

A company's political stance that opposes mine will deter me from accepting an offer to join





An employer's political stance that opposes mine will prompt me to leave

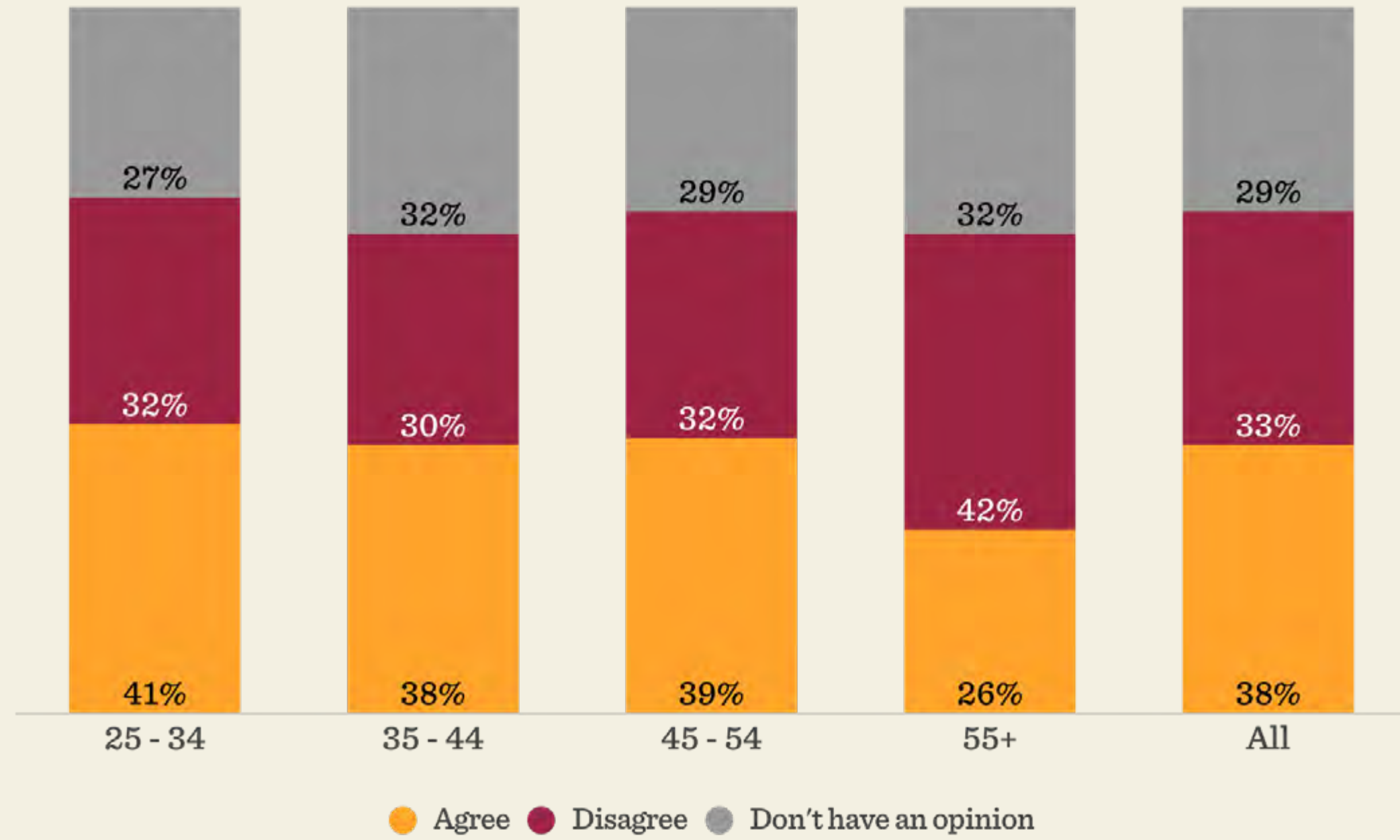


We found that a company's political stance can significantly impact respondents' willingness to work at a company. Among the respondents who have an opinion on the issue, the majority, 53%, say that an opposing opinion would deter them from accepting a company offer, and 35% say that it will prompt them to leave a company where they already work.

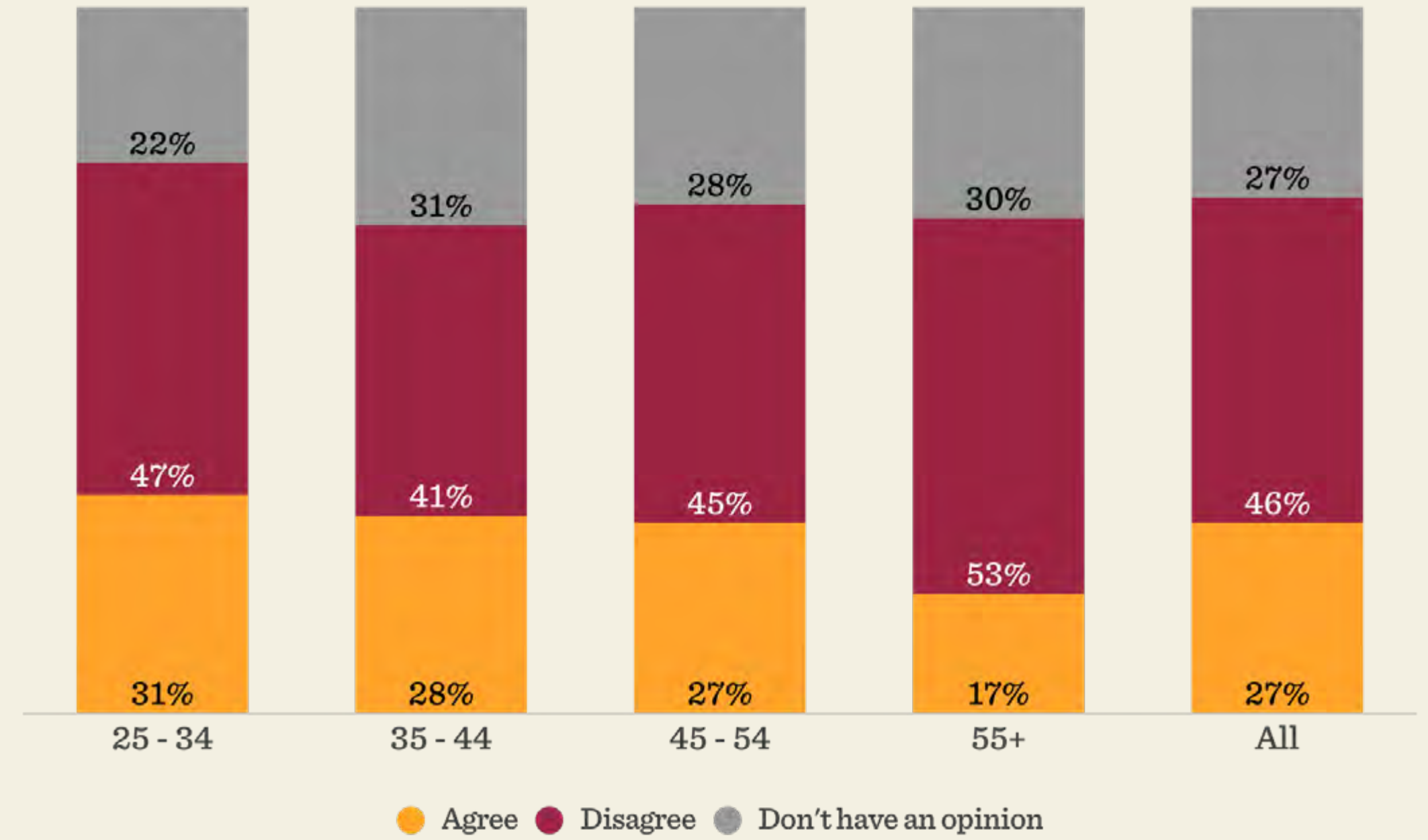
We also found that men are less likely than women to join a company with a political stance that opposes their own and are more likely to leave a company for the same reason. Among men who have an opinion, we found that 57% feel it would be a deterrent from joining compared to 50% of women, and 45% of men say it would cause them to leave compared to only 29% of women.

The impact of a company's political stance is more significant on younger respondents than on their older counterparts. The survey found that 41% of respondents ages 25-34 say that an opposing political stance would deter them from joining a company, and 31% say it would prompt them to leave. In contrast, among respondents 55+, those numbers were 26% and 17%, respectively.

A company's political stance that opposes mine will deter me from accepting an offer to join by Age

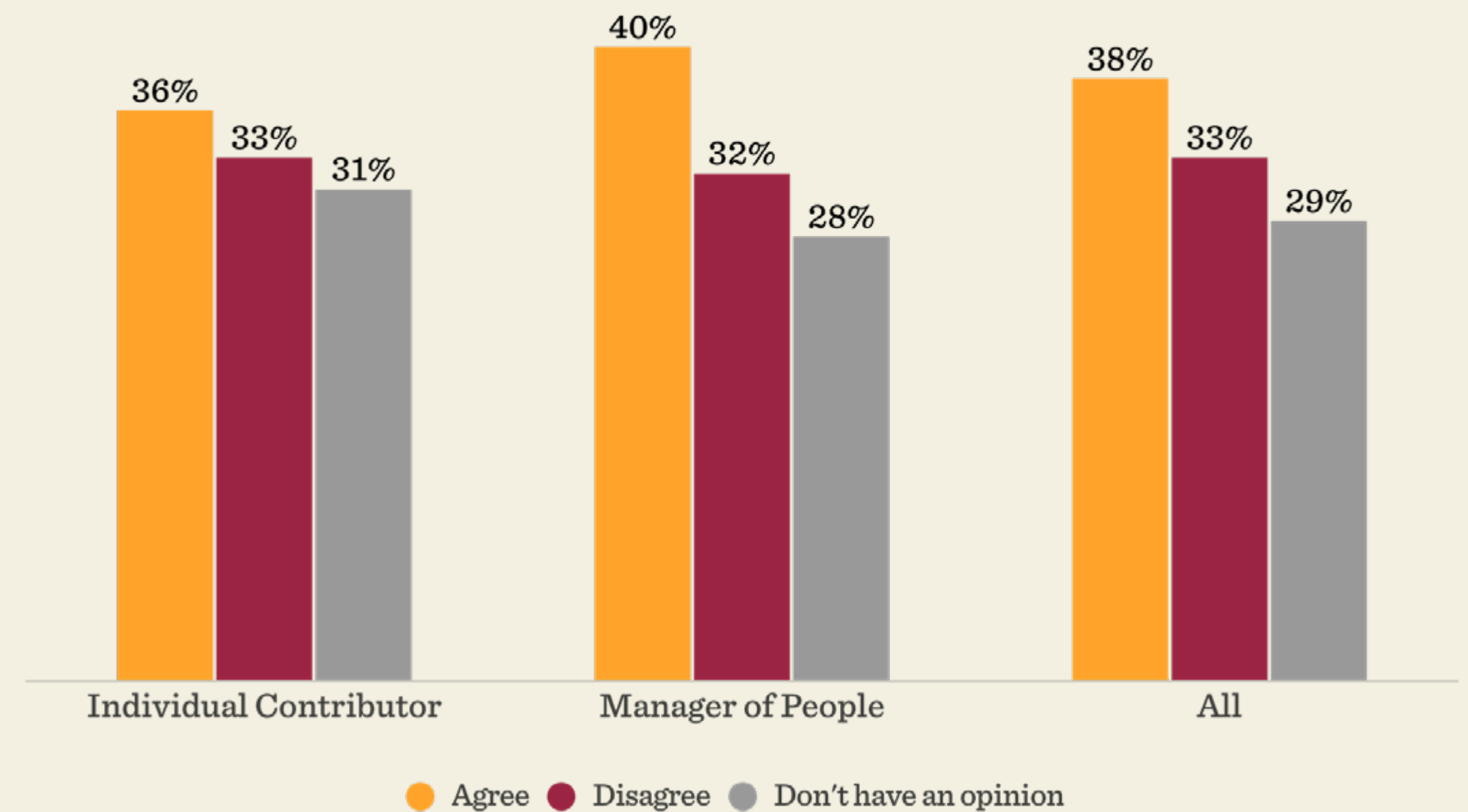


An employer's political stance that opposes mine will prompt me to leave by age group

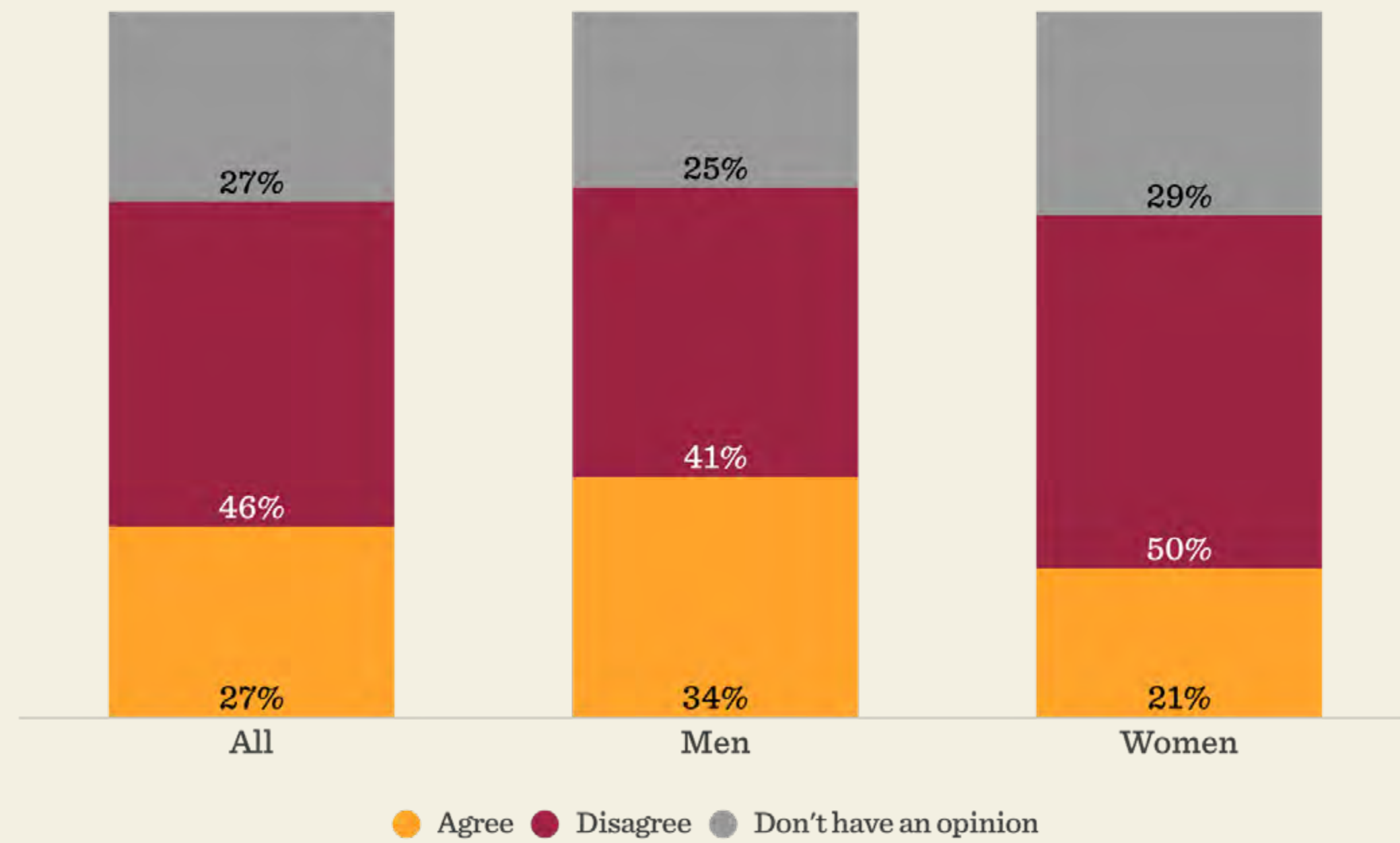


Managers in the UK are more likely to be discouraged from joining or prompted to leave a company where they currently work due to its political stance than individual contributors. The research finds 40% of managers would be deterred from joining, and 29% would be prompted to leave, compared to 36% and 25% of individual contributors. From one perspective, this points to a level of confidence among managers, who feel secure in following their convictions. On the other hand, it shows that managers are more impacted by the company brand than non-managers and are less likely to work at a company that doesn't align with their values and beliefs.

A company's political stance that opposes mine will deter me from accepting an offer to join by role

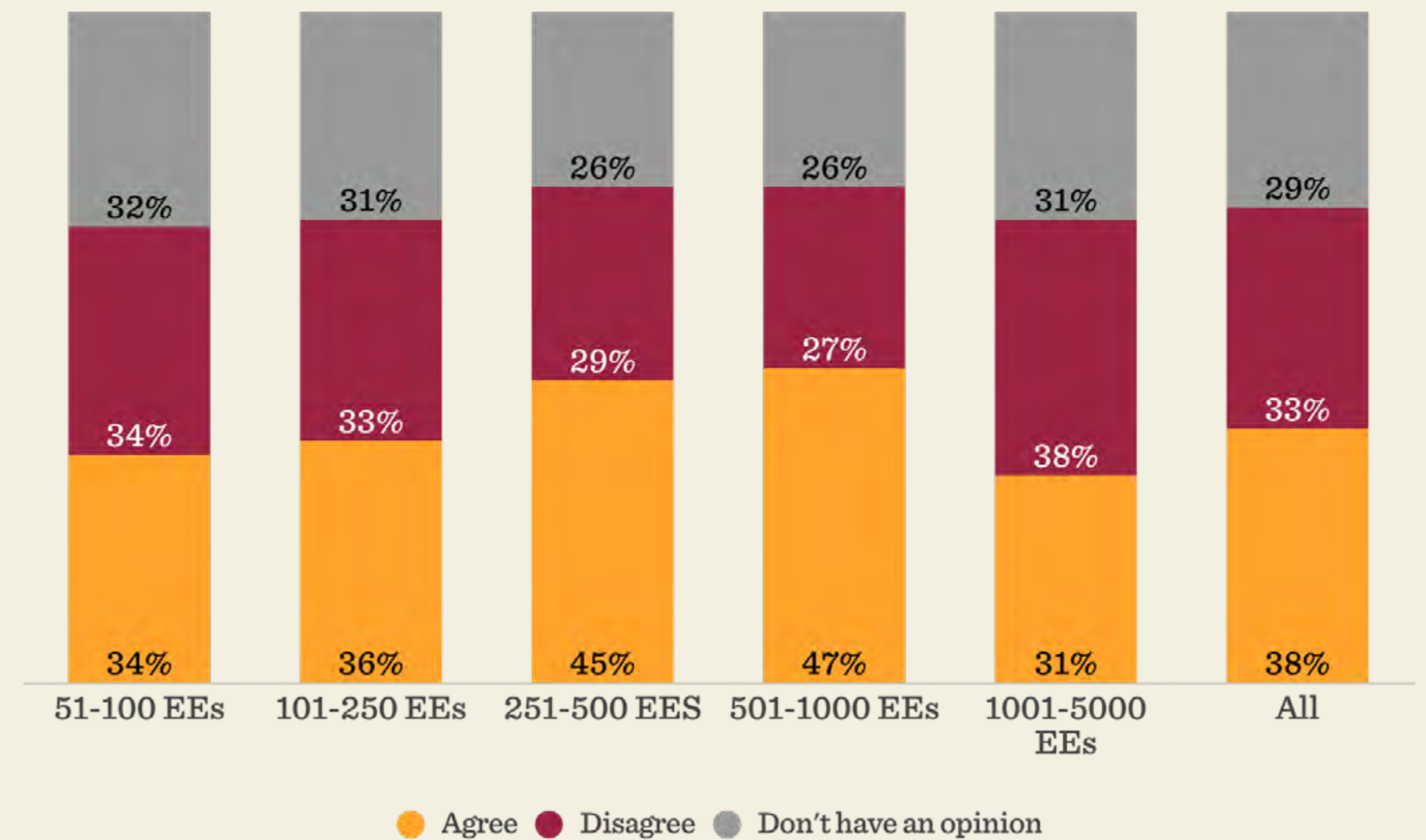


An employer's political stance that opposes mine  
will prompt me to leave

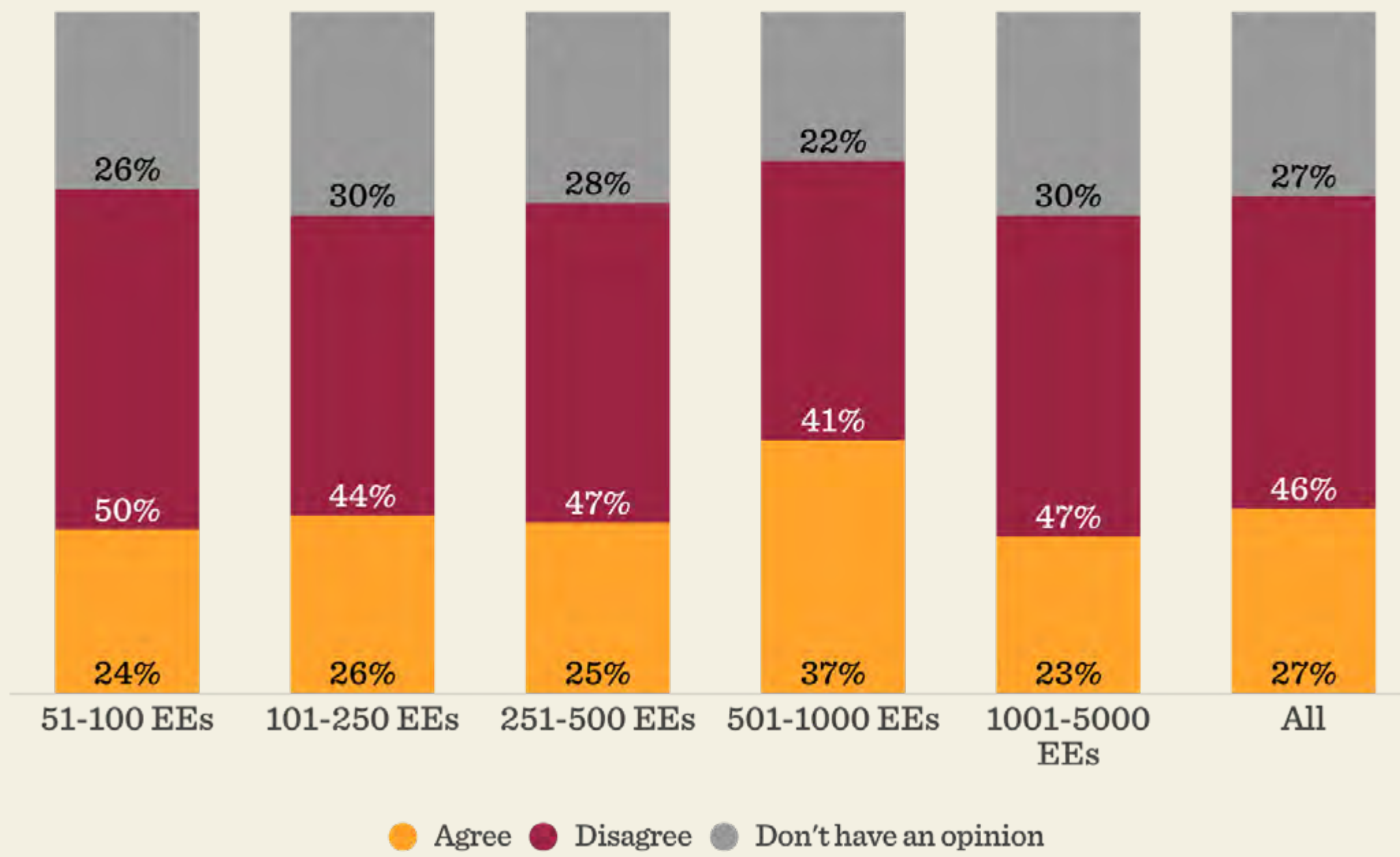


Our study reveals a distinct pattern among companies with up to 1000 employees: the impact of a company's political stance on respondents is directly proportional to the size of their current employer. However, that trend flips in companies with 1001-5000 employees. Respondents in these larger companies are more likely to be deterred from joining a company with an opposing political stance and less likely to be prompted to leave a company. This is likely because, in bigger companies, the person applying for a job will not have a direct relationship with the company's executives and, therefore, will be less impacted by their views.

A company's political stance that opposes mine will deter me from accepting an offer to join by company size

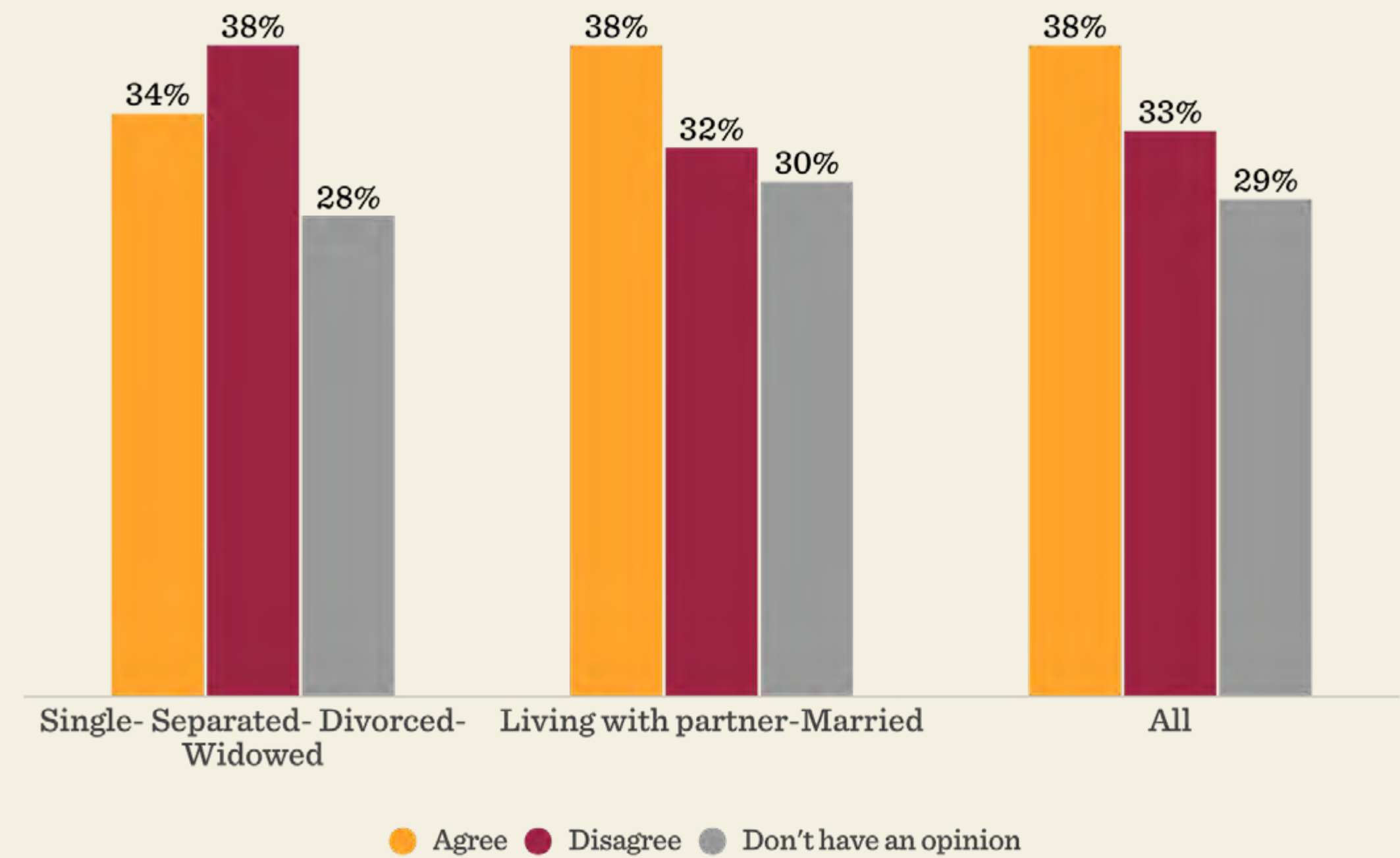


An employer's political stance that opposes mine will prompt me to leave by company size



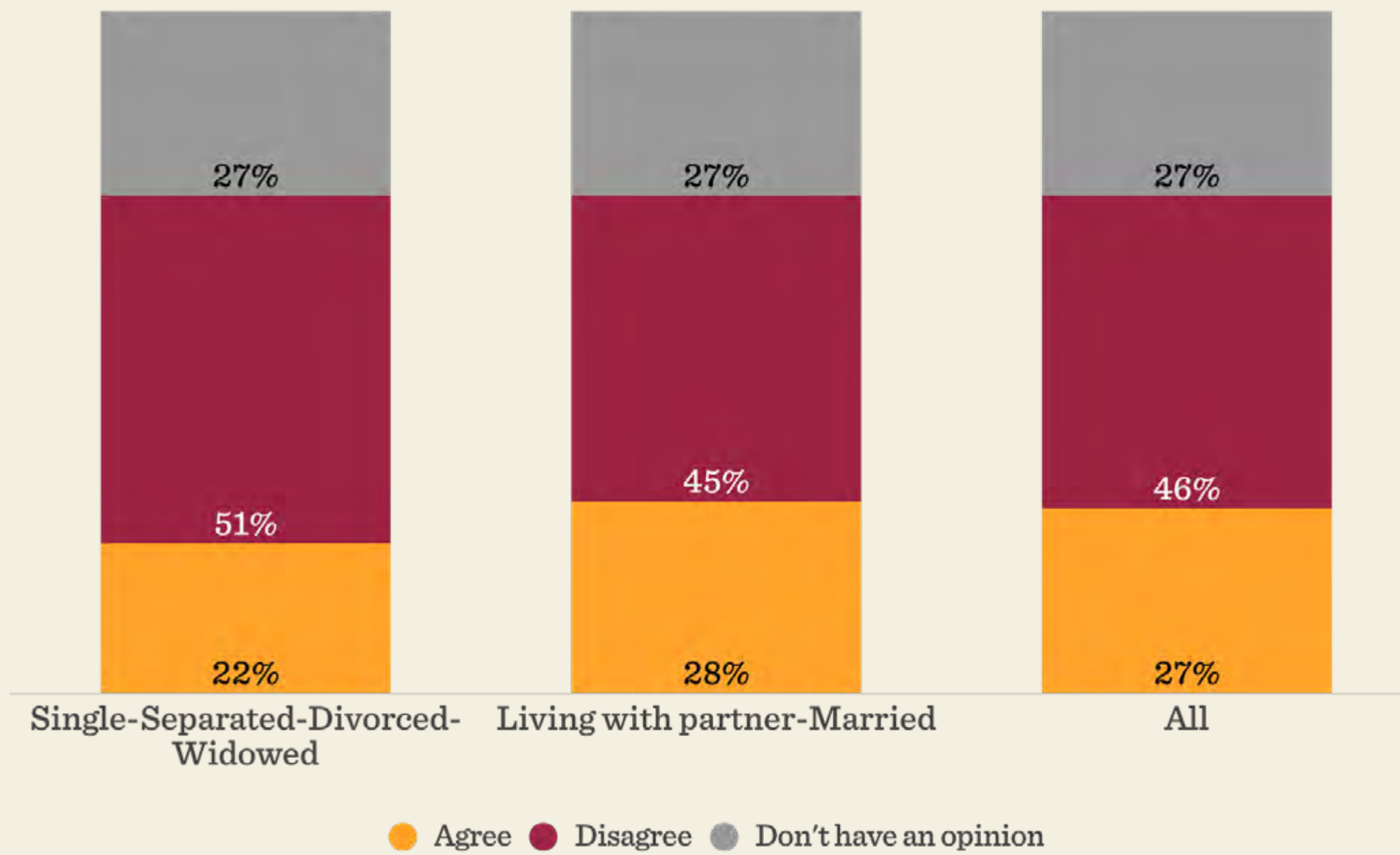
Respondents who are married or living with a partner are more likely to say that a company's political stance will deter them from joining or prompt them to leave than their single counterparts. In the survey, 38% of married or cohabitating respondents say that it will deter them from joining, compared to 34% of single respondents, and 28% say that it will prompt them to leave, compared to 22% of single respondents.

A company's political stance that opposes mine will deter me from accepting an offer to join by personal status





An employer's political stance that opposes mine will prompt me to leave by personal status



# Where should sociopolitical issues be discussed?

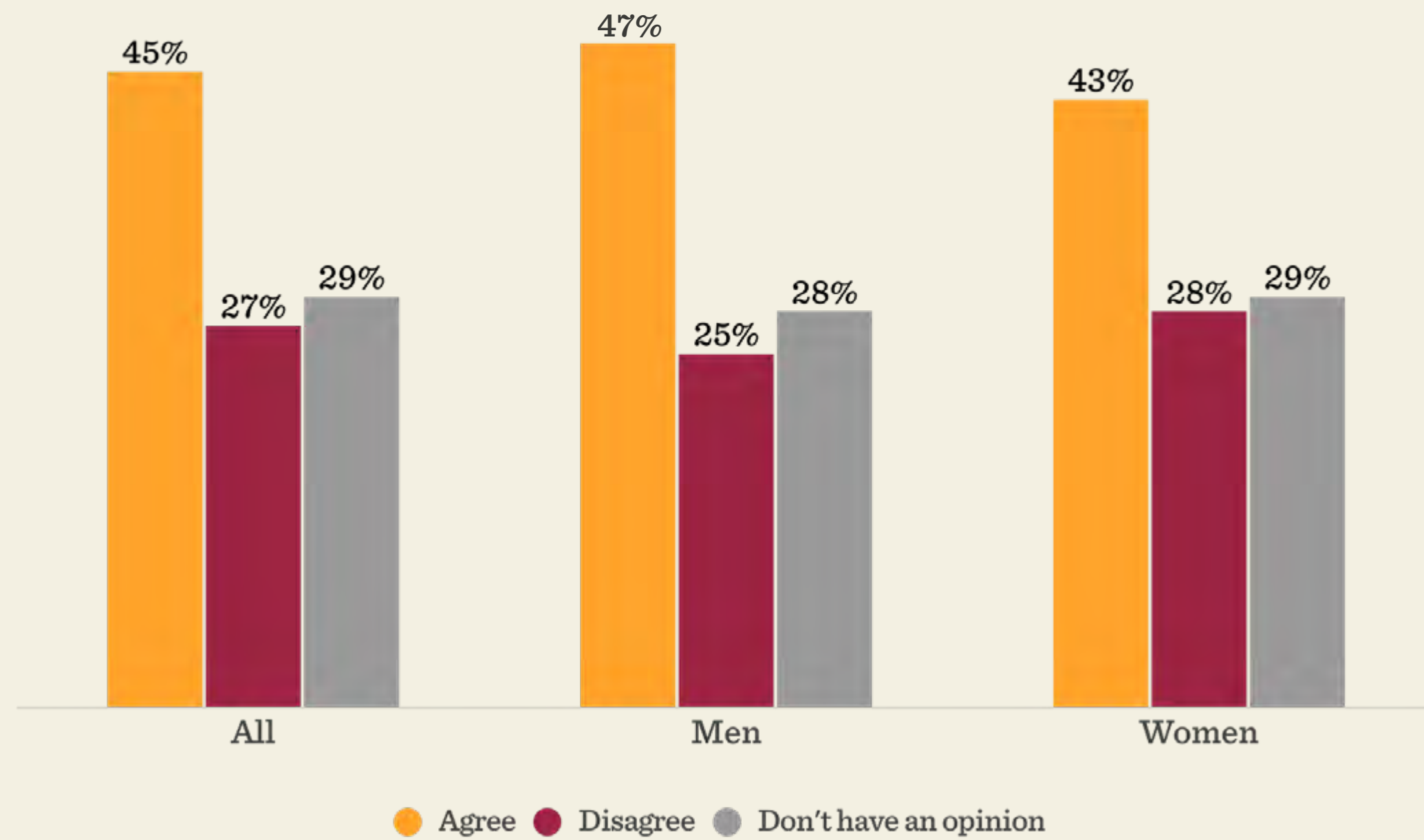
Our study also looked at the respondents' opinions about where sociopolitical issues should and should not be discussed, including the office, company digital communication channels, and on social media.

## Political discussions in the office

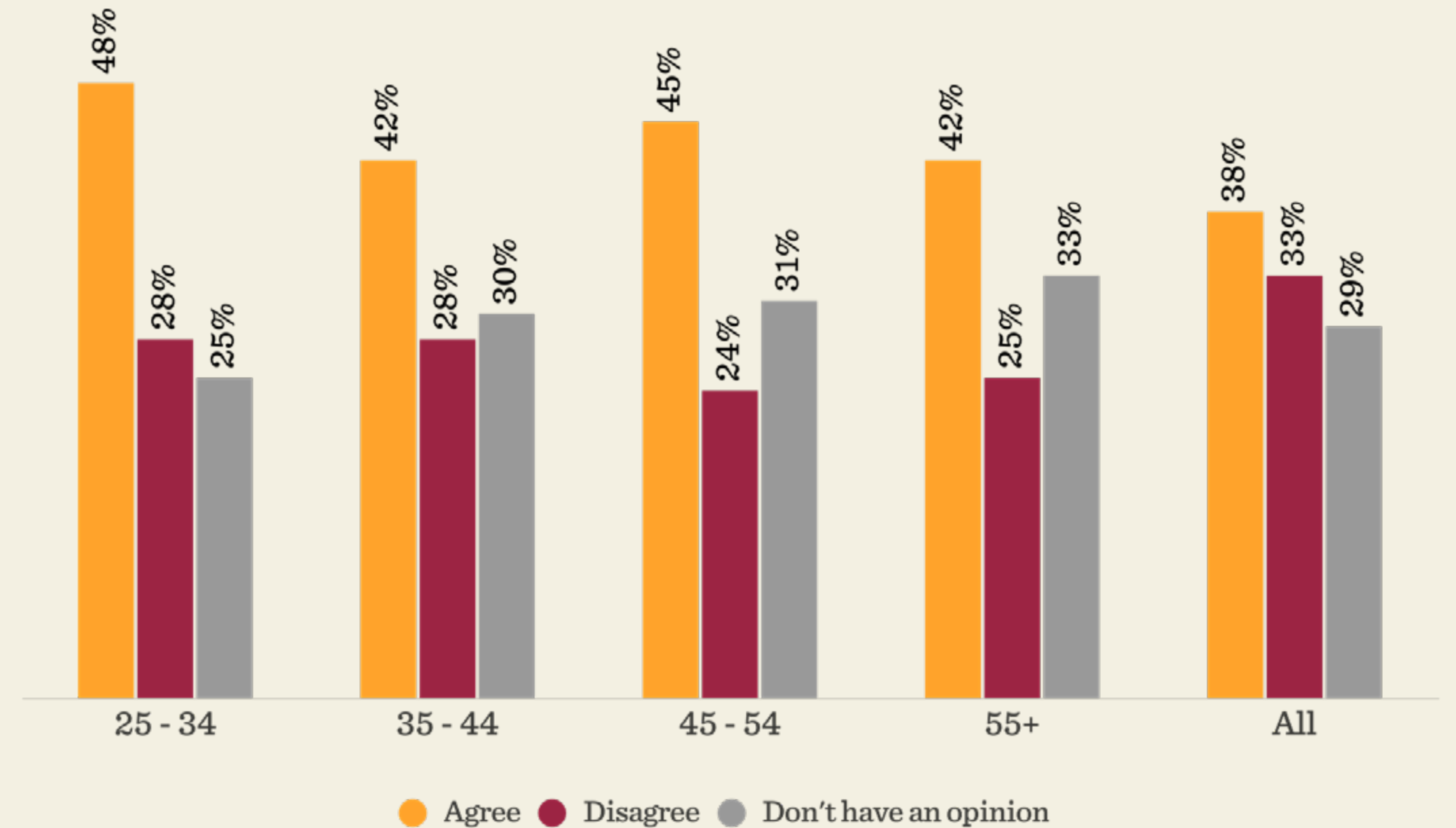
Within this survey, 45% of the respondents in the UK agree that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the office because they can negatively impact company culture, while 27% disagree and 29% do not have an opinion. Men are slightly more likely to agree than women (47% and 43%, respectively).

Age has an impact on respondents' opinions about political discussions in the office, as younger respondents are slightly more likely to agree that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the workplace than their older colleagues. In the context of this survey, 48% of respondents ages 25-34 agree that politics should be kept out of the workplace, compared with 42% and 45% of older respondents. This could be because younger people often have less seniority and feel less secure expressing opinions in the workplace.

Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the office because they can negatively impact company culture

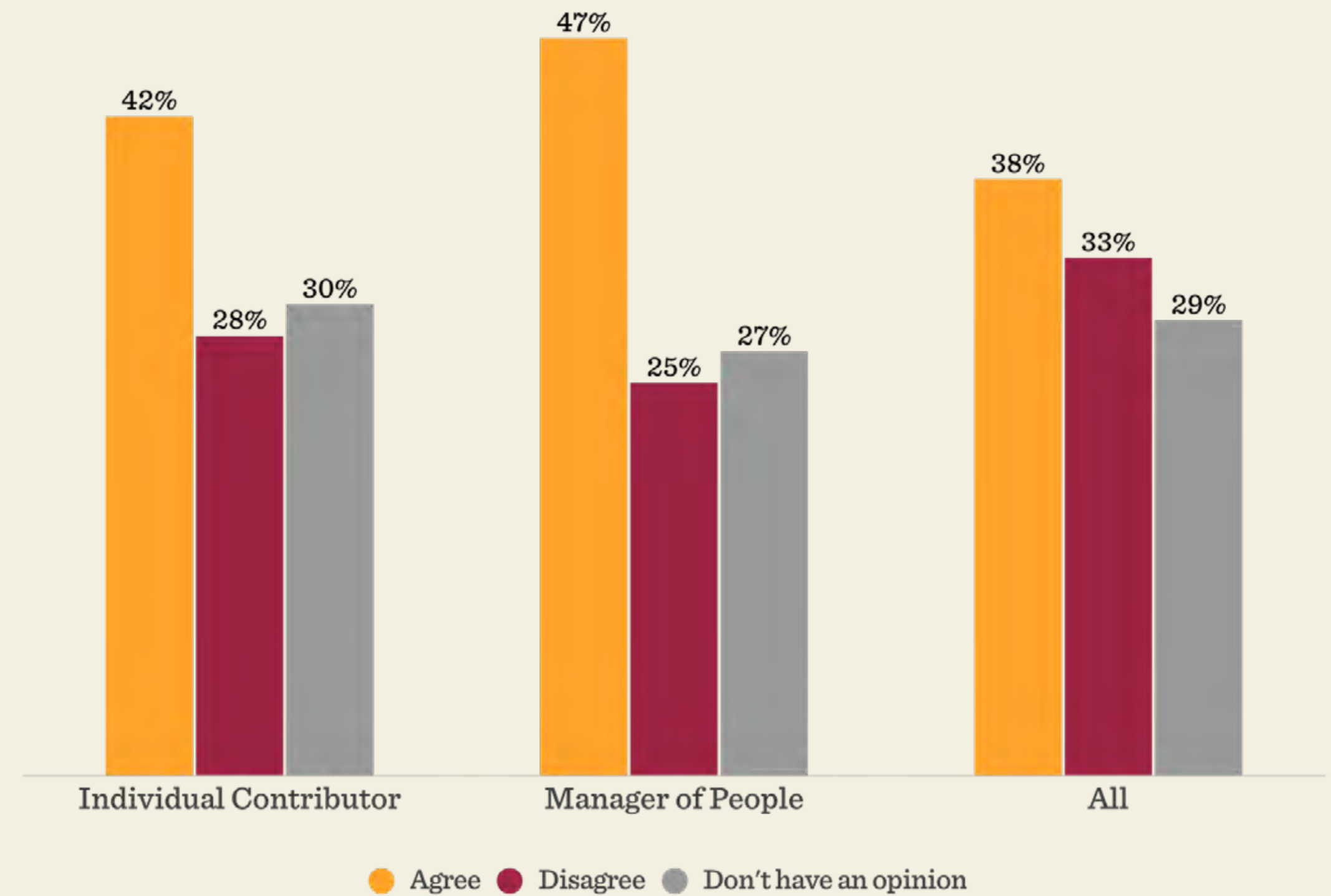


Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the office because they can negatively impact company culture by age group



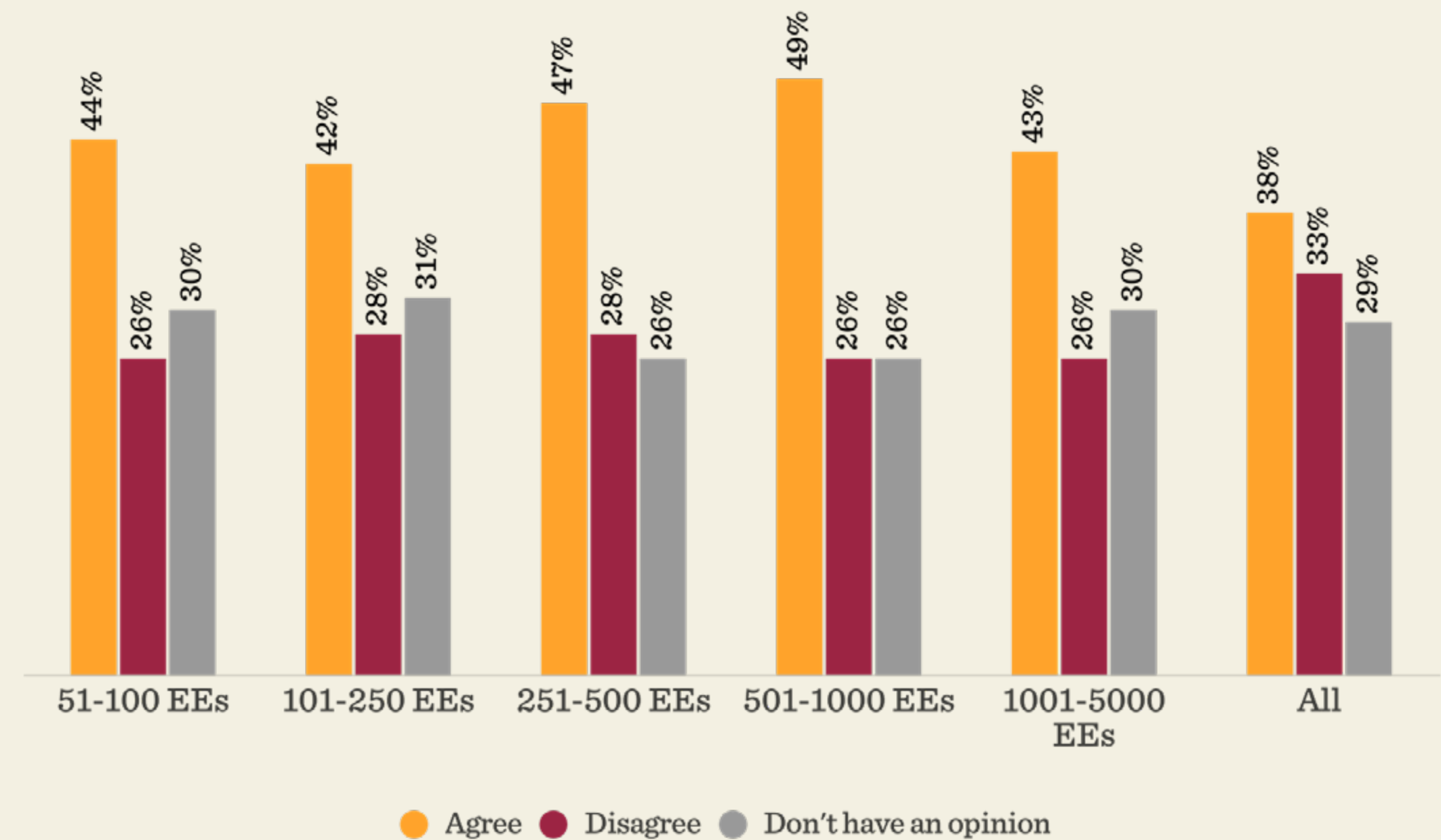
Managers feel a greater sense of responsibility for company culture and therefore are more likely to agree that sociopolitical discussions can negatively impact company culture than non-managers (47% compared to 42% of respondents who are not managers).

Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the office because they can negatively impact company culture by role



As with the previous topic, the larger the company where they work, the more likely respondents are to say that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the office. Yet here, too, the trend reverses with the largest companies. In our study, respondents in companies with 1001-5000 employees show less concern about this issue.

Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the office because they can negatively impact company culture by company size

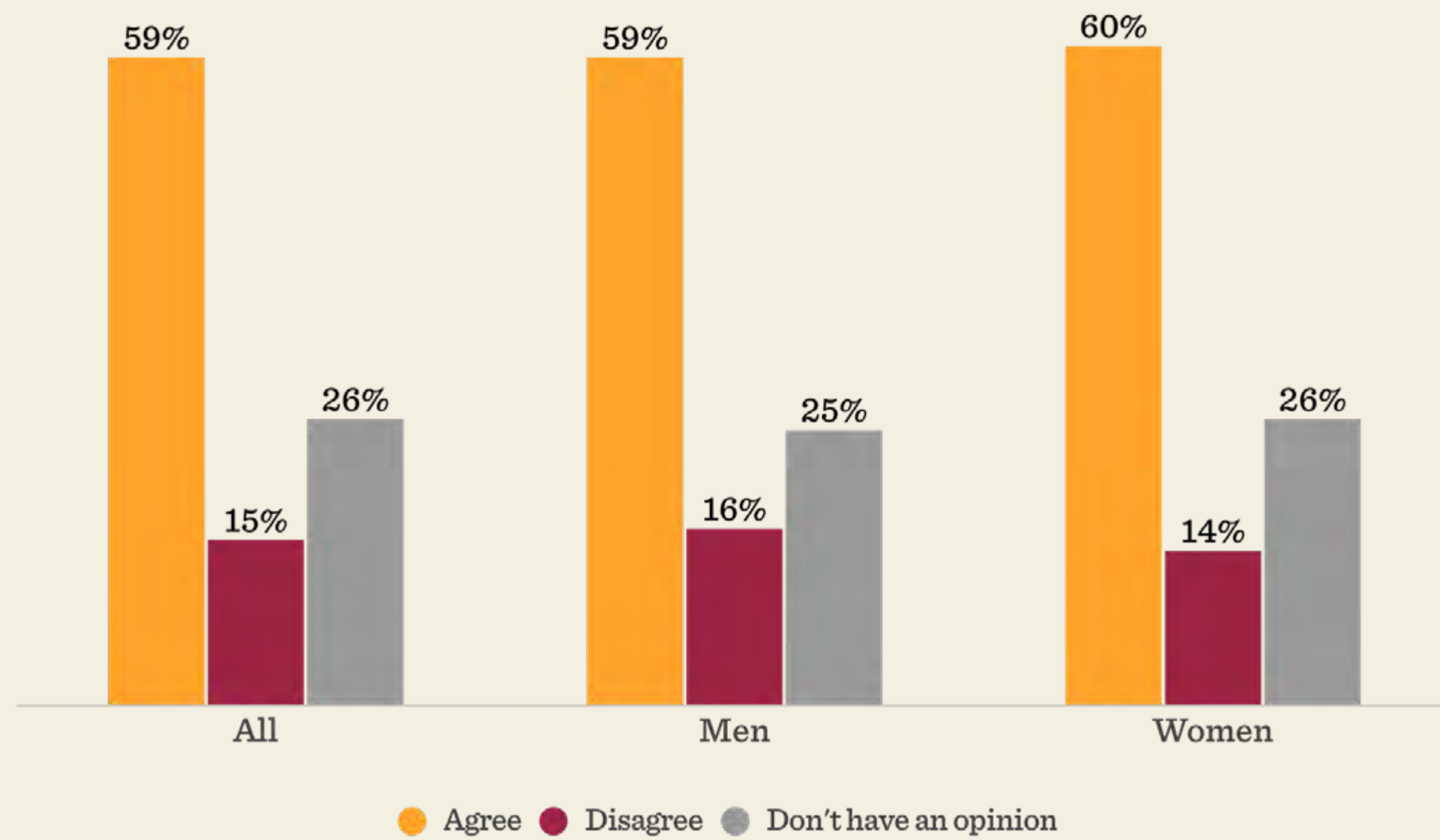


## Political discussions on company digital communication channels

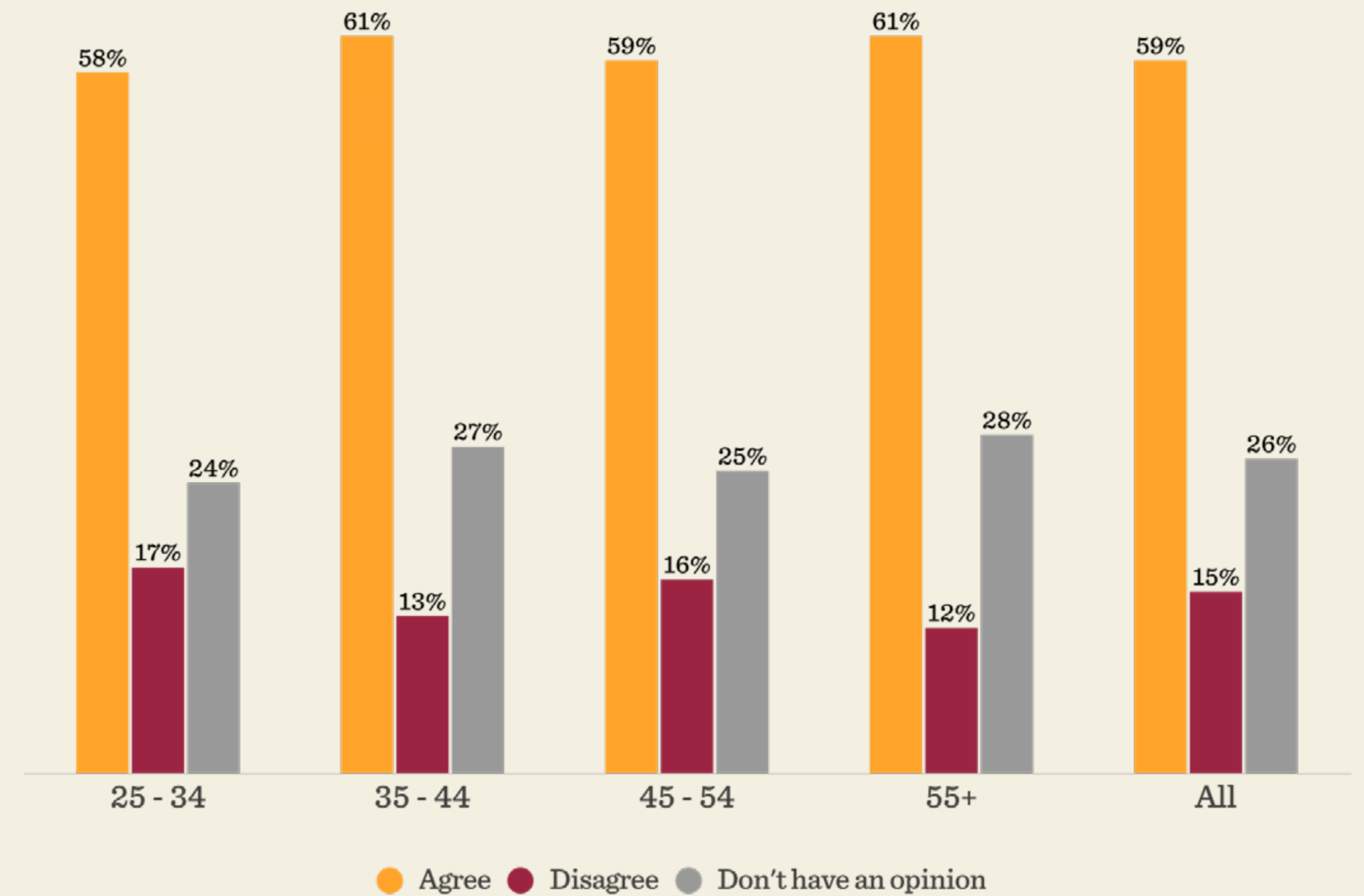
The majority of men and women respondents, 59%, feel that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the company's digital communication channels, without significant disparity between ages or genders.



Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the company's digital communications channels (email/Slack/Teams/Zoom etc.)

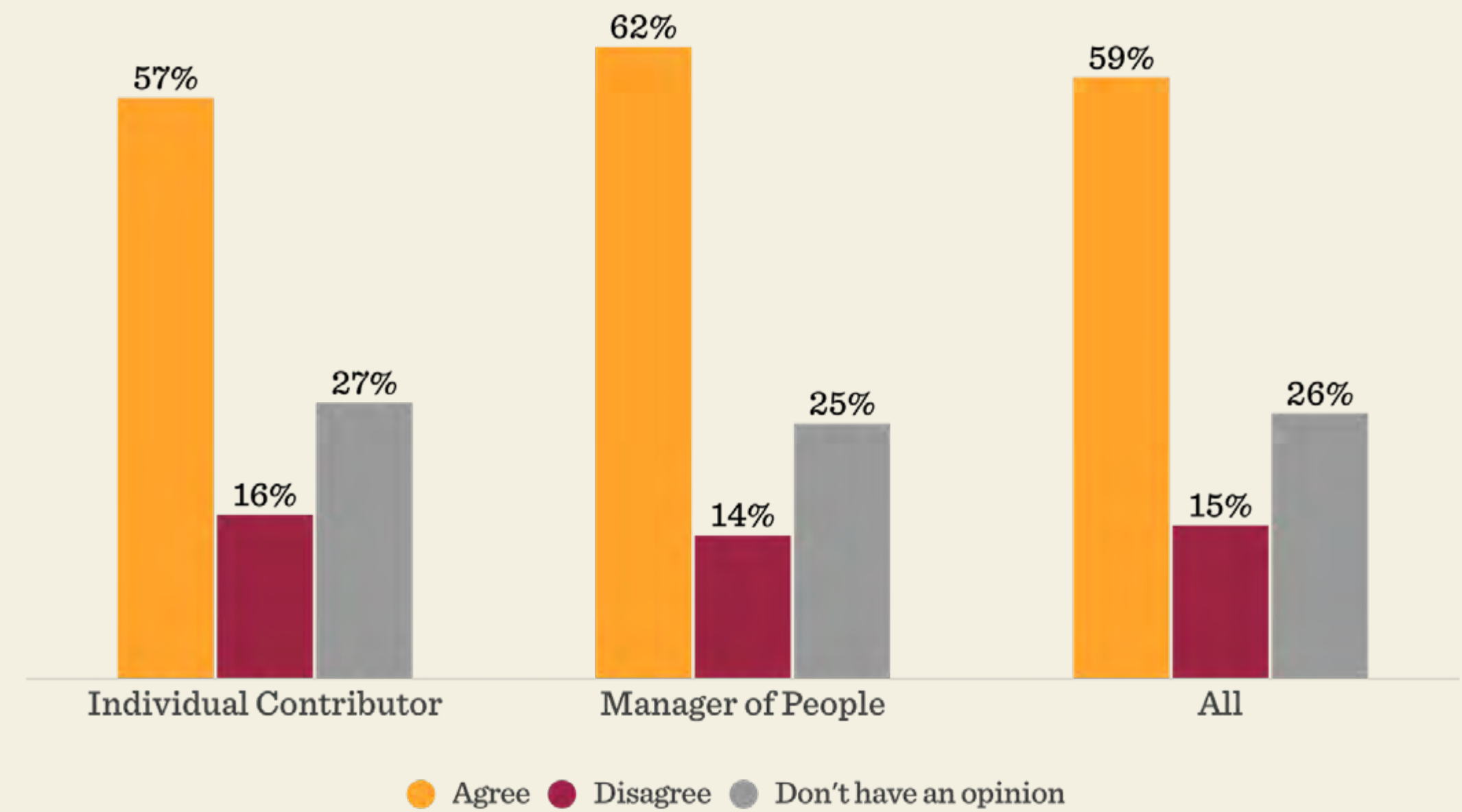


Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the company's digital communications channels (email/Slack/Teams/Zoom etc.) by age groups



Similar to the previous question, managers feel more responsible for the dynamics between team members and therefore are more likely to feel that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the company's digital communication channels (62% compared to 57% of respondents who are not managers).

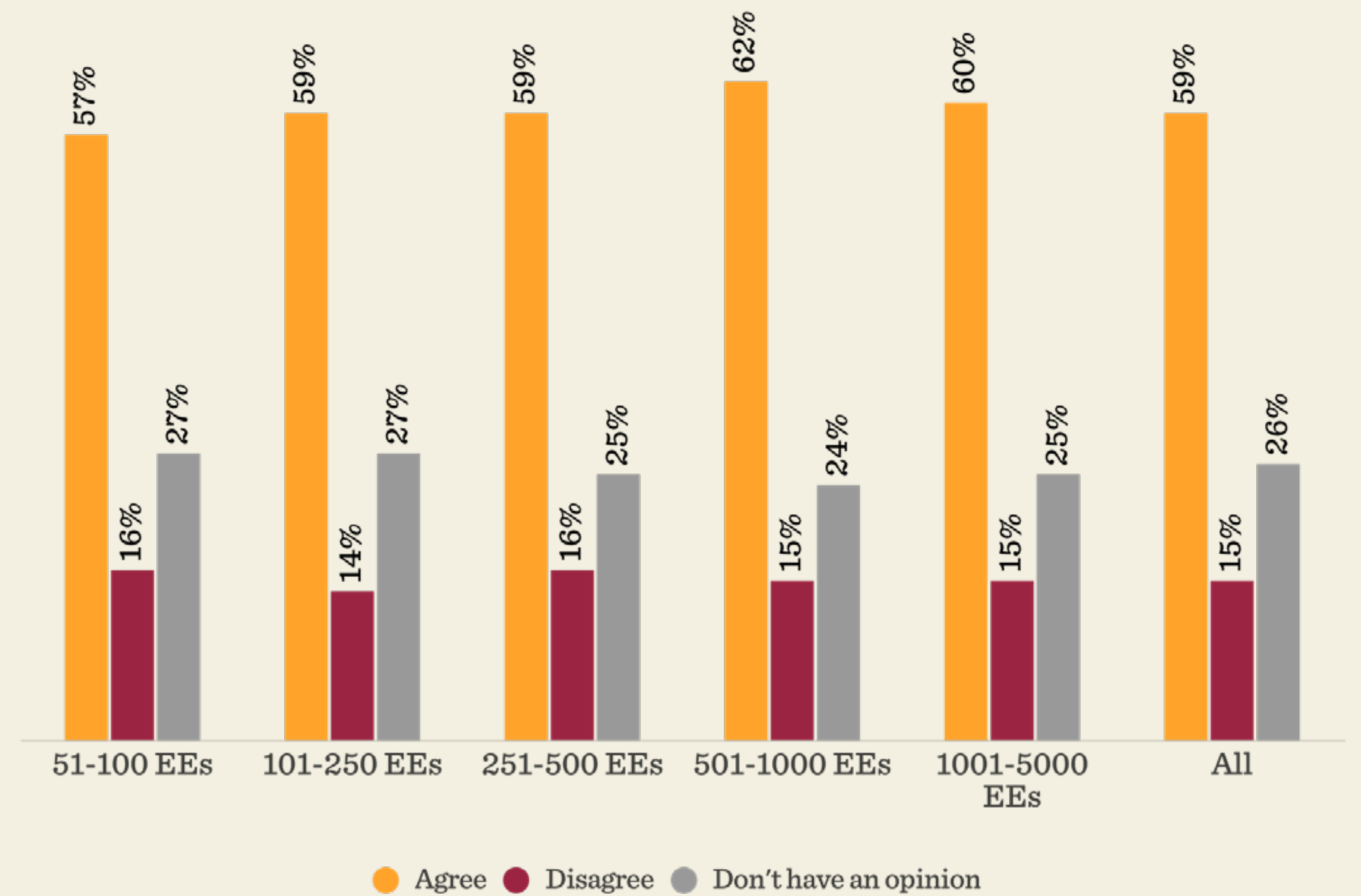
Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the company's digital communications channels (email/Slack/Teams/Zoom etc.)





Although the variation between companies of different sizes was minimal, the same trend that we saw in other questions is apparent here as well—the larger the company where the respondents work, the more likely they are to feel that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of company communication channels, with the trend reversing itself in employees of the largest companies.

Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of the company’s digital communications channels (email/Slack/Teams/Zoom etc.) by company size

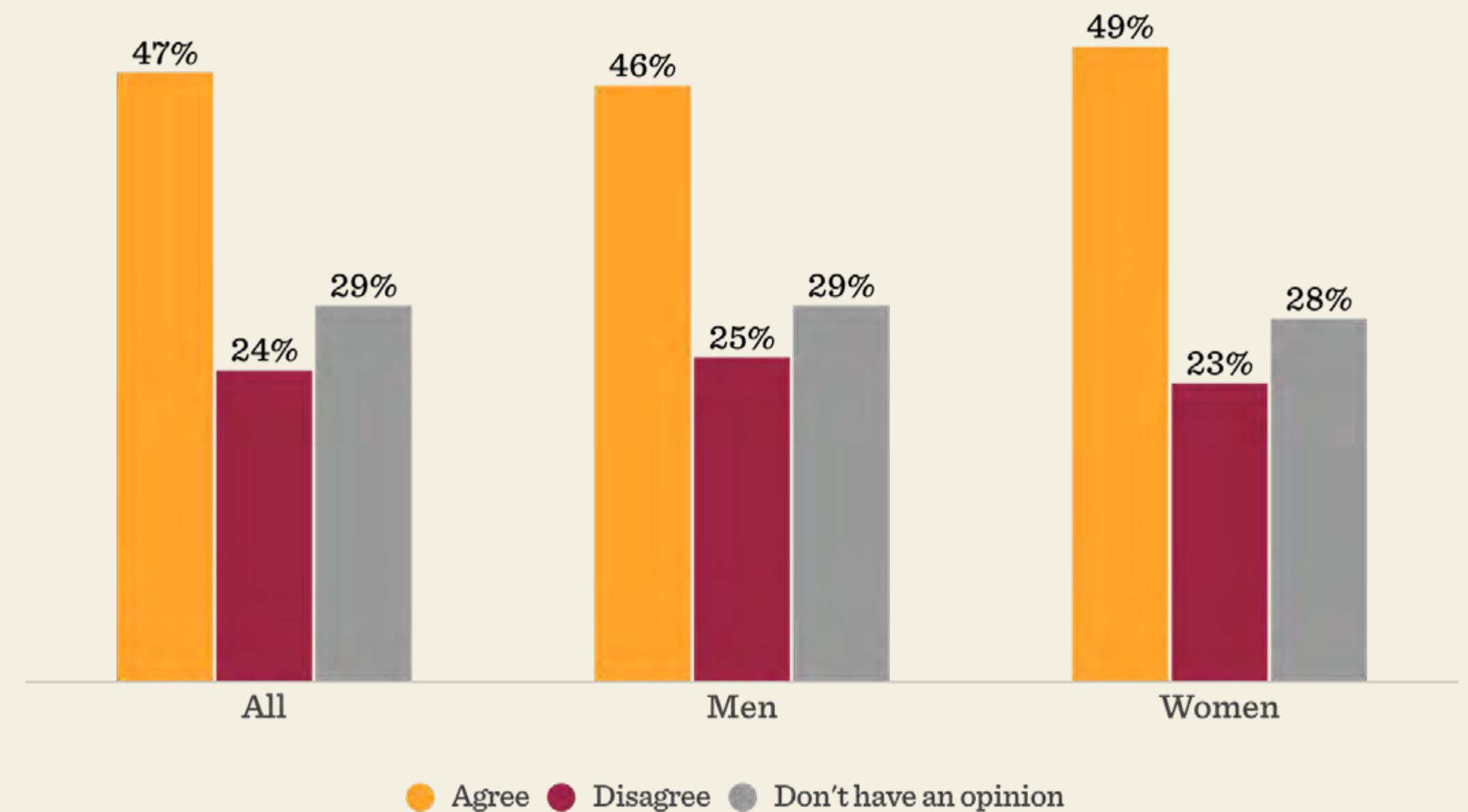


## Political discussions on social media

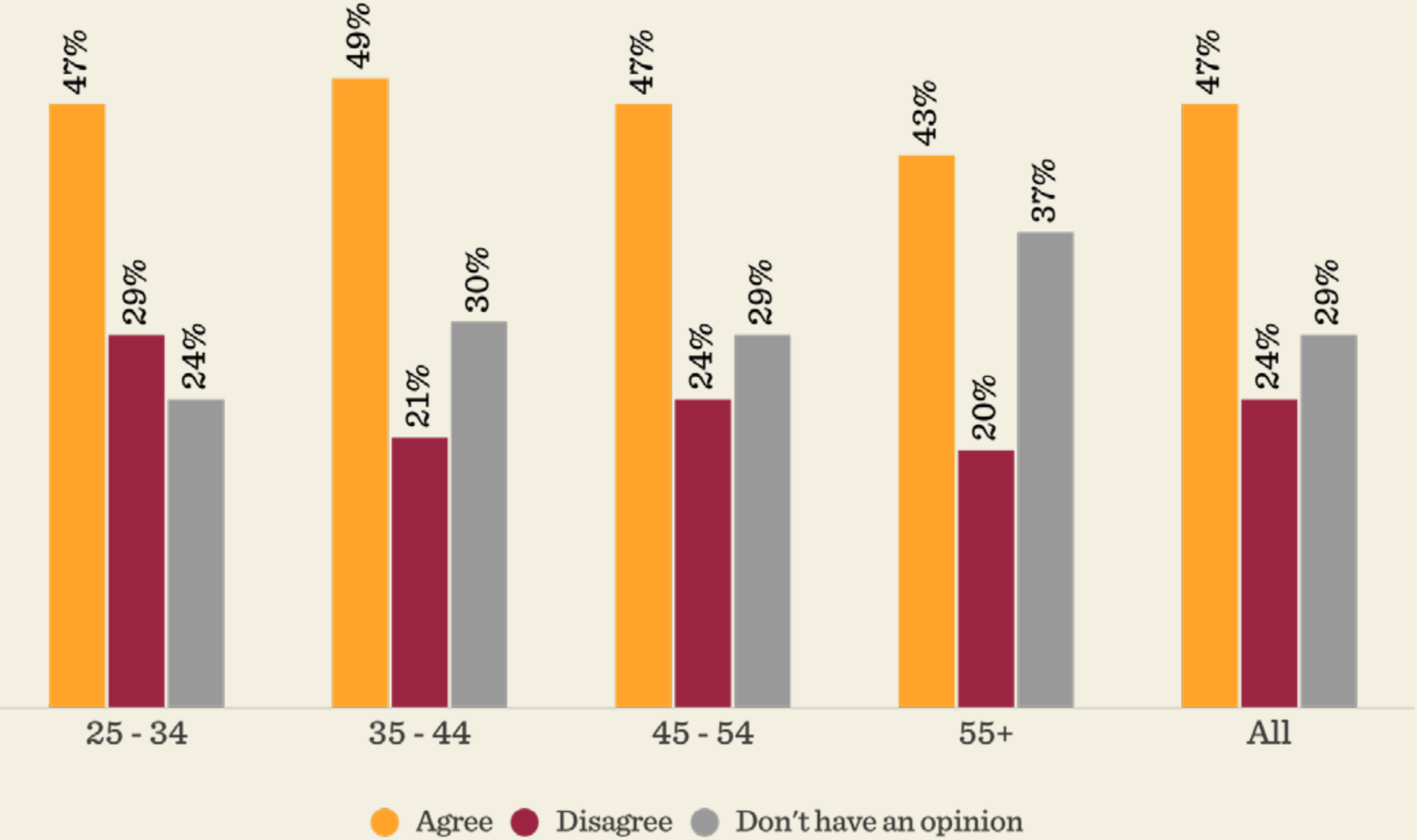
The majority of men and women respondents who have an opinion on the issue agree that sociopolitical discussions should not only be kept out of company communication channels but should also be kept out of personal-professional social media channels (47% compared to 29% who disagree). A significant percentage (24%) state that they do not have an opinion on the issue, and there is no major differentiation between genders.

Age impacts people's perceptions regarding political discussions on social media. Older respondents are less likely to feel that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of personal-professional social media channels. Only 43% feel this way compared to 47% and 49% of other age groups.

Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of personal-professional social media channels like LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, Twitter



Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of personal-professional social media channels like LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, Twitter by age groups



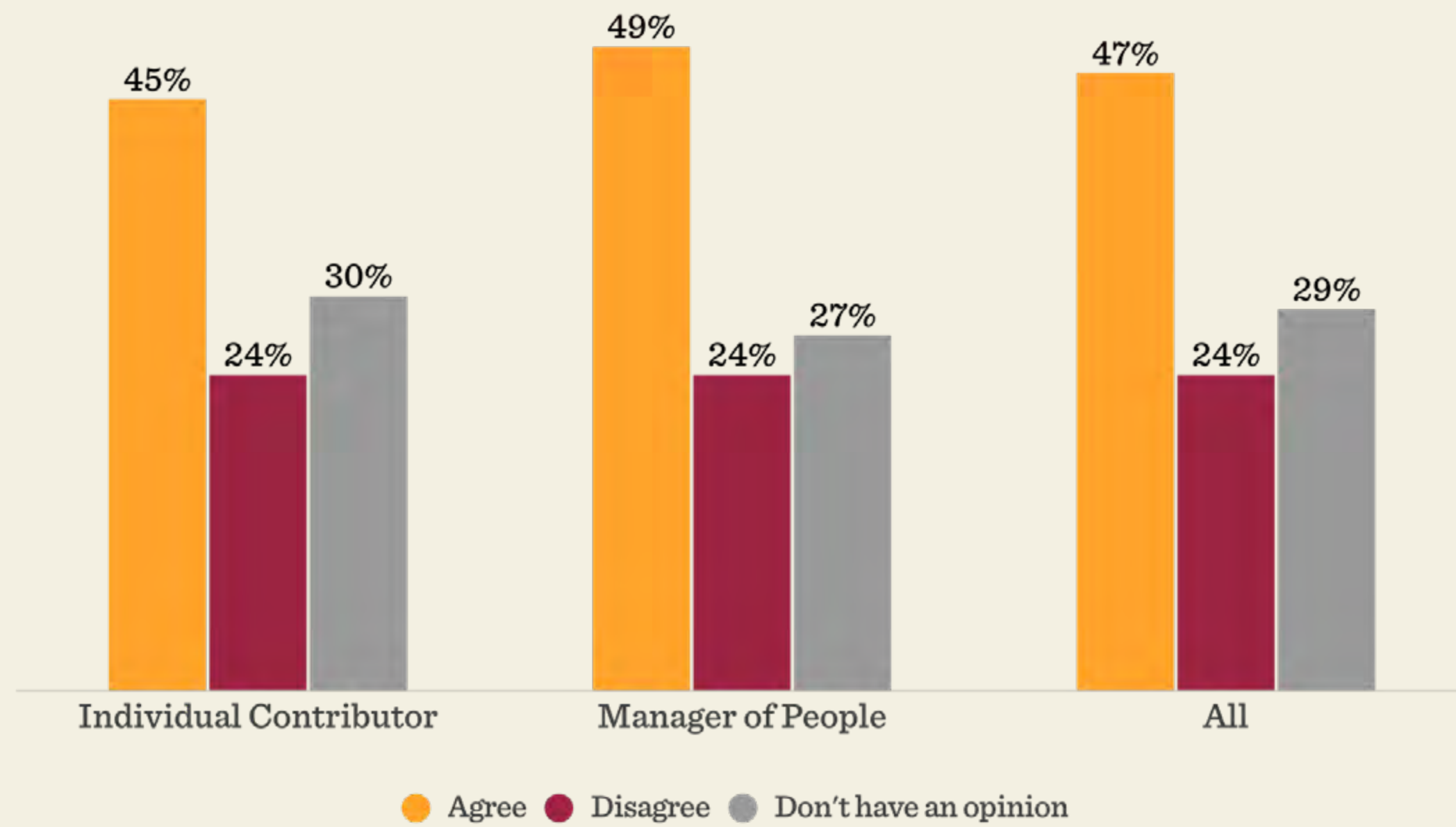
Here again, managers are more aware of the consequences of political dialogue and, therefore, slightly more likely to agree that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of personal-professional social media channels (49% compared to 45% who are not managers).

Respondents in companies with 501-1000 employees are the outliers on this topic. In the scope of this survey, 52% agree that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of personal-professional social media channels, compared to 45%, 46%, and 47% of respondents in companies of other sizes.

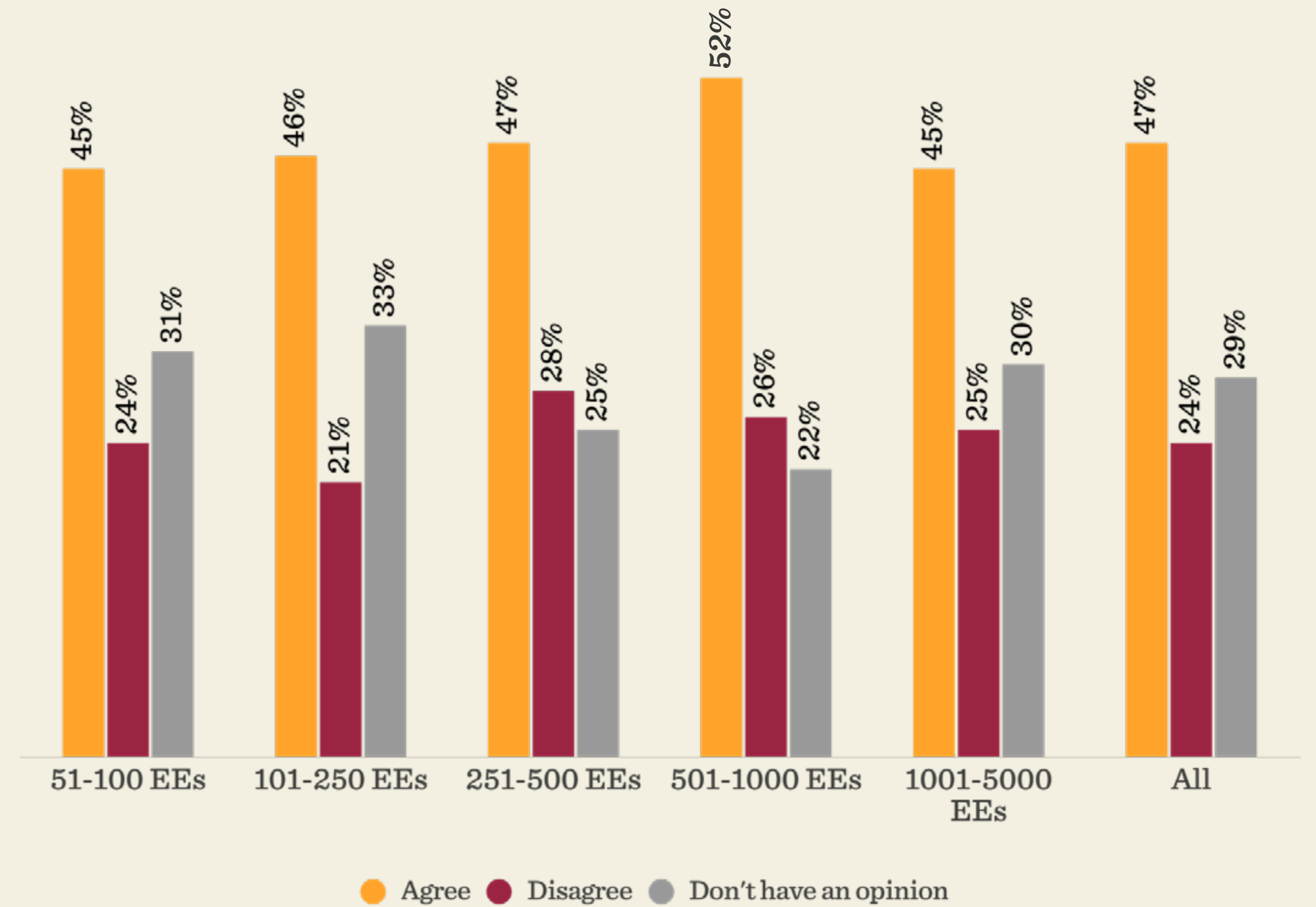
Single respondents are more likely to agree that sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of personal-professional social media channels than their married or cohabitating counterparts (53% of singles compared with 47% of those who are married or cohabitating).



Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of personal-professional social media channels like LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, Twitter by role



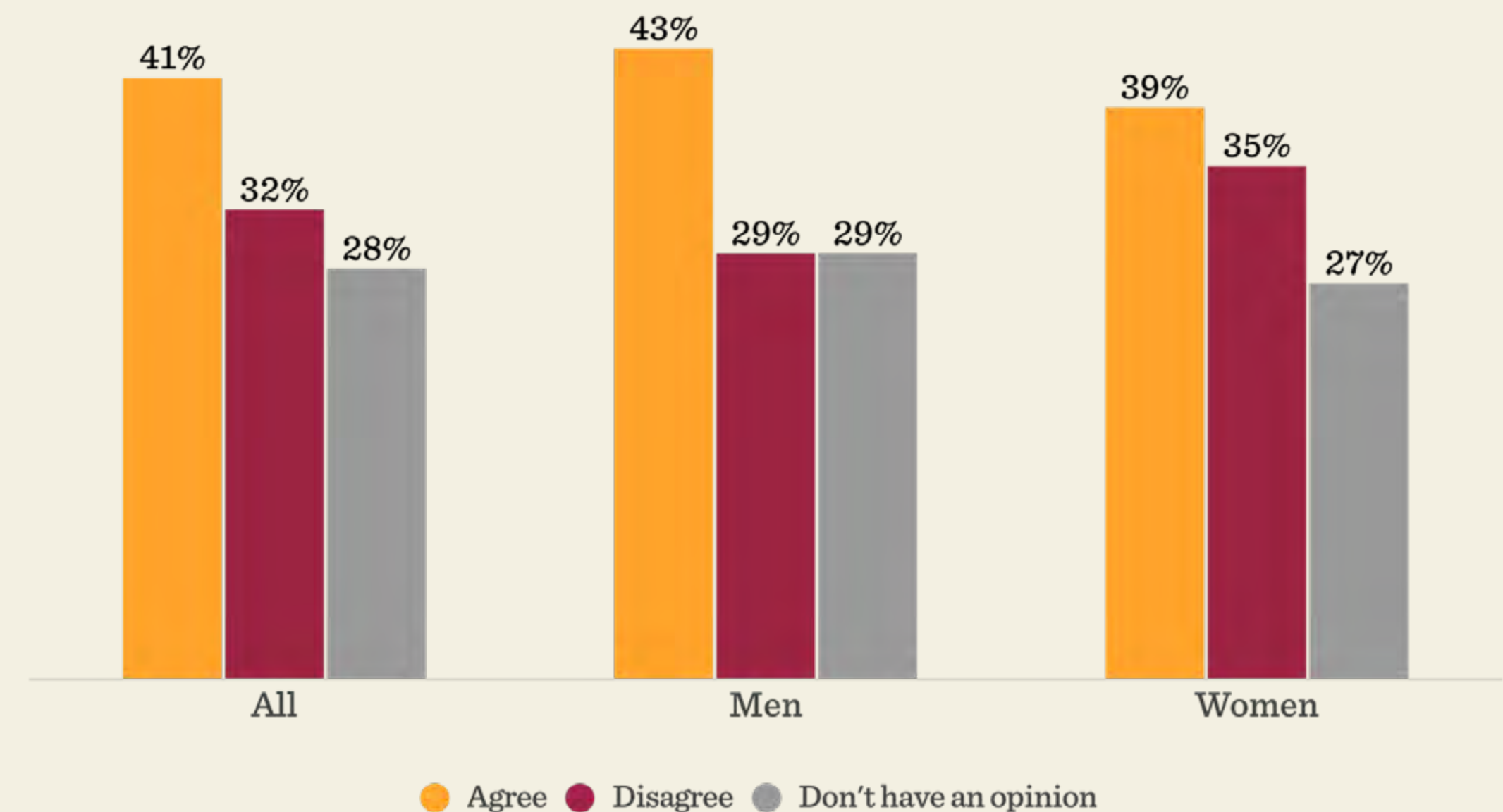
Sociopolitical discussions should be kept out of personal-professional social media channels like LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, Twitter by company size



## Preventing employees from posting political opinions on social media

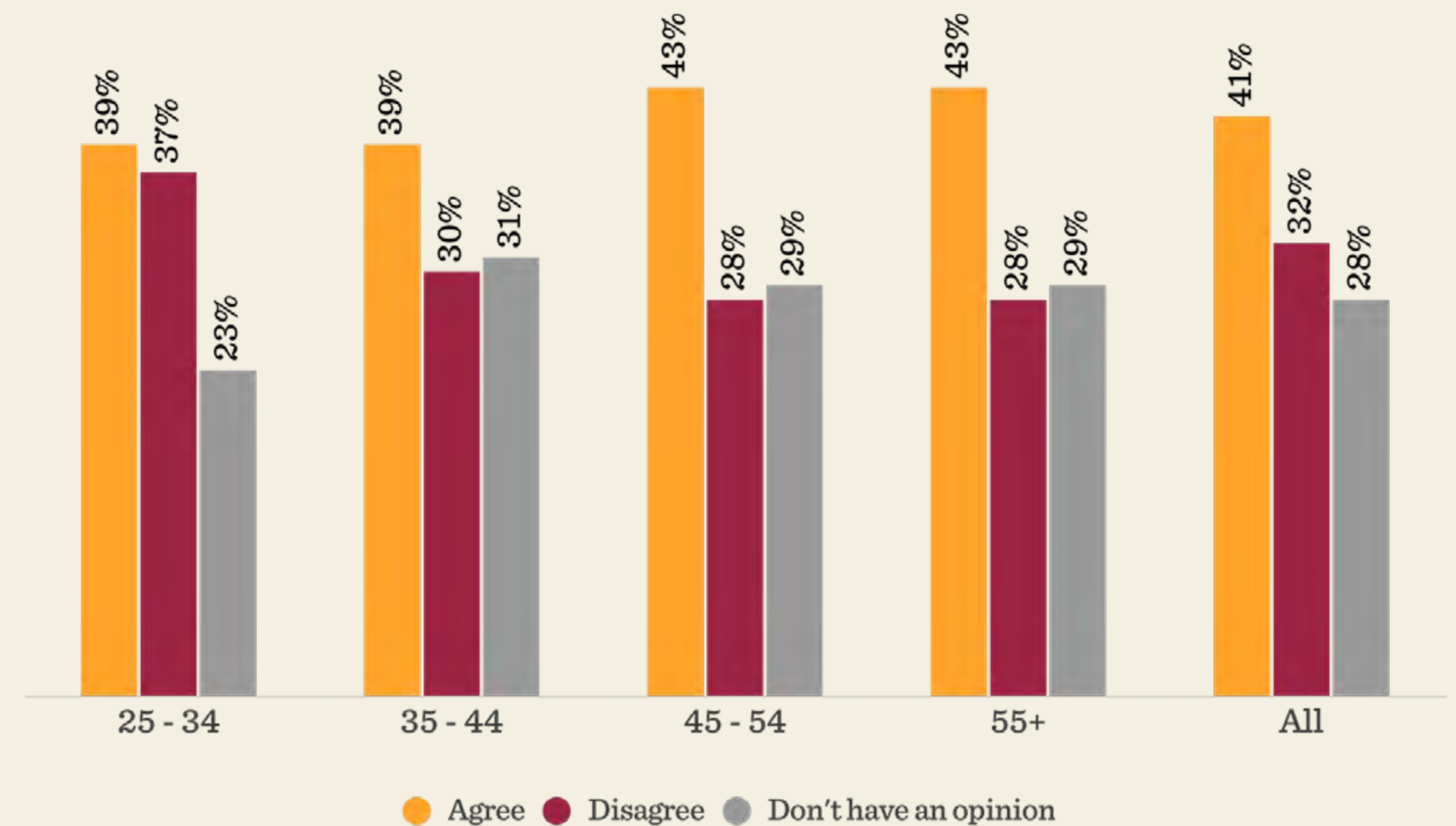
Since political discussions can be sensitive, we also asked respondents if they think employees should be actively prevented from posting political opinions on personal-professional social media channels. While a significant number of both genders feel that companies should prevent employees from posting about politics, more men (43%) than women (39%) feel that way. (53% of singles compared with 47% of those who are married or cohabitating).

A company should prevent its employees from posting about political opinions on their personal-professional social media channels  
LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, Twitter



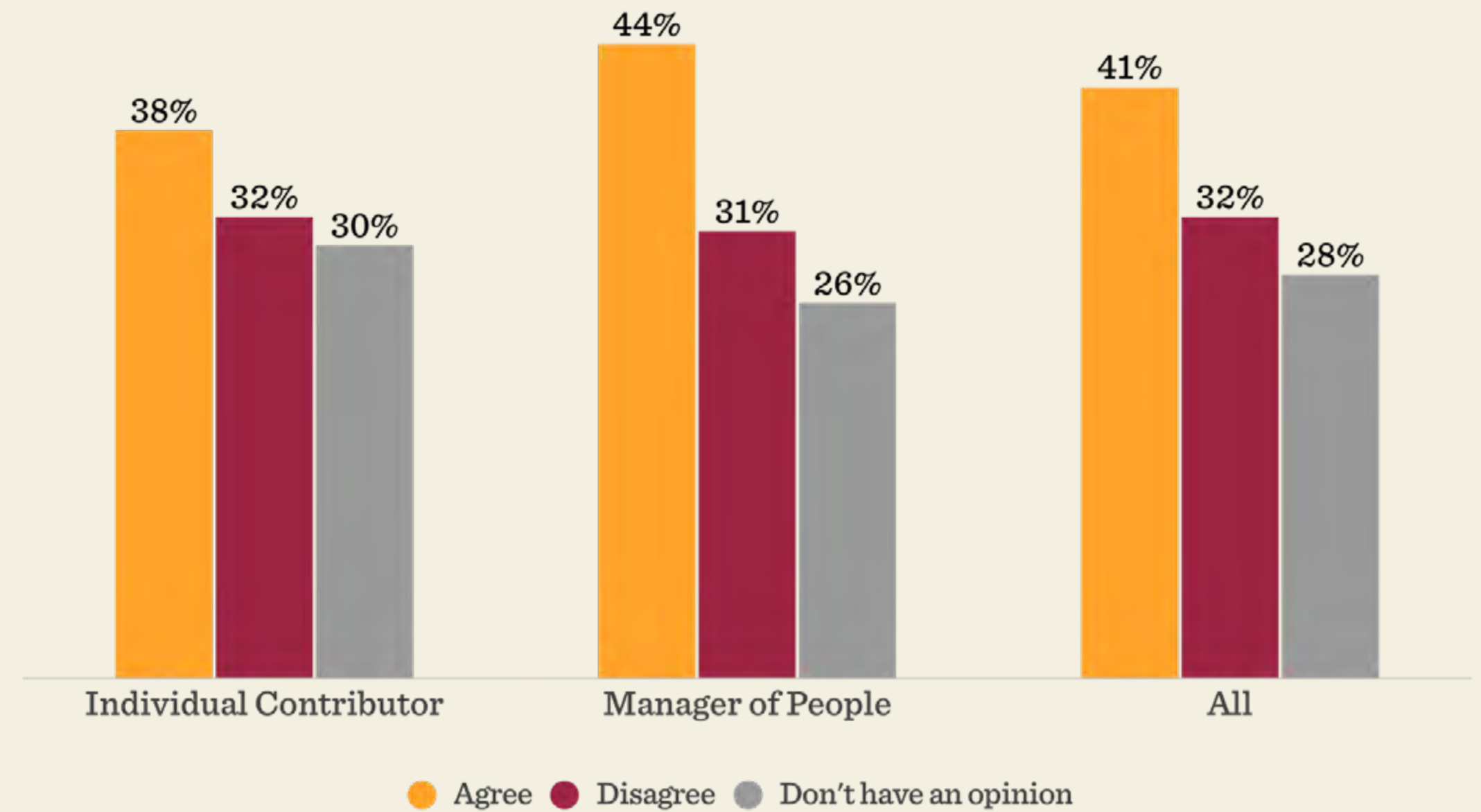
Older workers are more likely to agree that companies should prevent employees from posting political opinions on social media, with 43% of employees 45+ agreeing compared to 39% of employees ages 25-44.

A company should prevent its employees from posting about political opinions on their personal-professional social media channels LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, Twitter by age groups



Managers, who are often responsible for dealing with the ramifications of discussions that get out of hand, are more likely to agree that employees should be prevented from posting about political opinions on social media channels (44%) compared to 38% who are not managers.

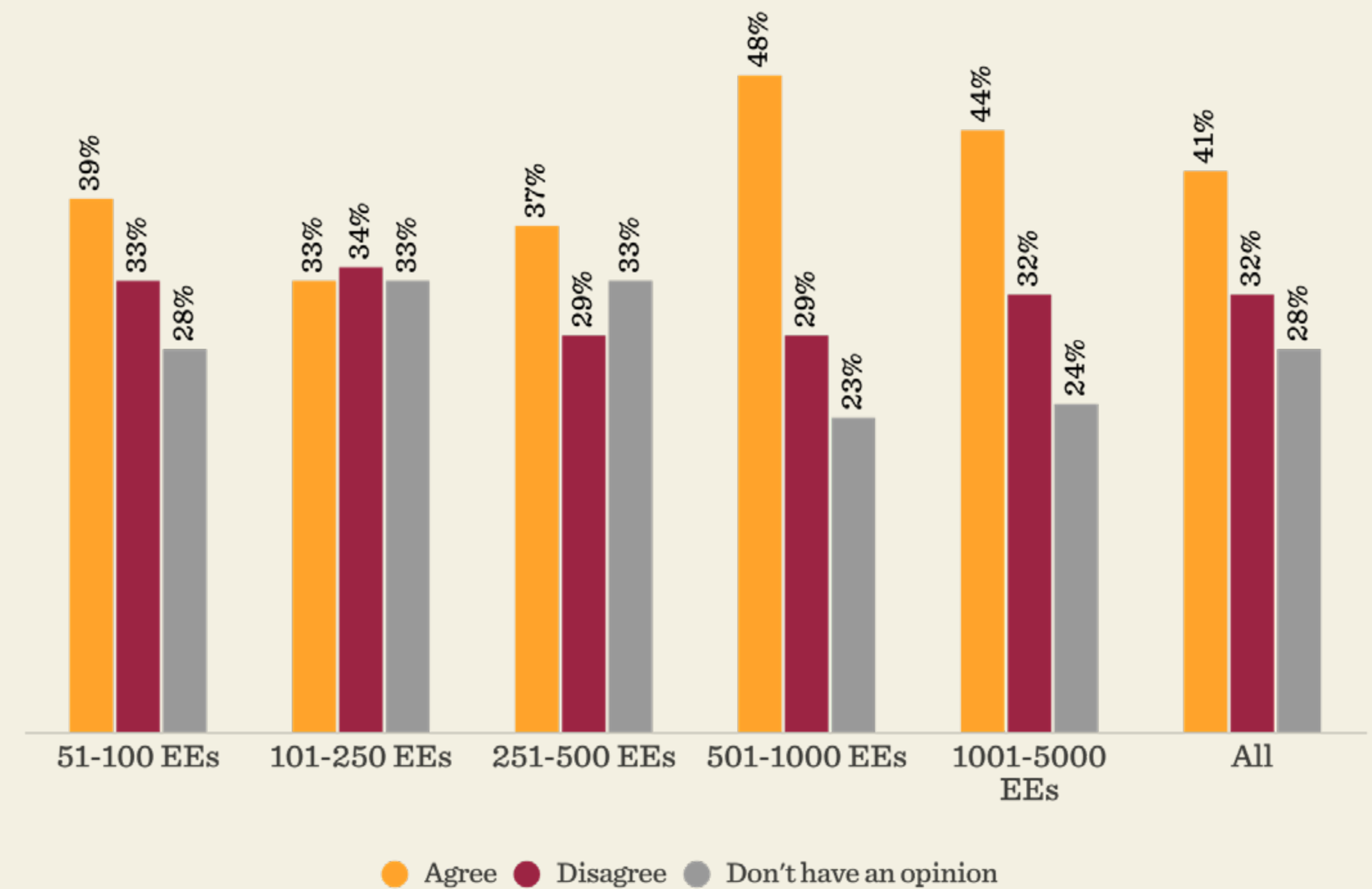
A company should prevent its employees from posting about political opinions on their personal-professional social media channels  
LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, Twitter by role





A company should prevent its employees from posting about political opinions on their personal-professional social media channels  
 LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, Twitter  
 by company size

More employees in larger companies feel that the company should prevent its employees from posting political opinions on personal-professional social media channels. As part of this survey, 44% and 48% of respondents who work in companies with 501-5000 employees think companies should prevent these types of posts, while only 33%, 37%, and 39% of respondents in companies with 51-500 employees feel they should.



# How should sociopolitical issues be discussed in the workplace?

Free speech doesn't necessarily mean hate speech, and our study found that respondents want the option to discuss politics as long as it is done in a respectful and safe manner.

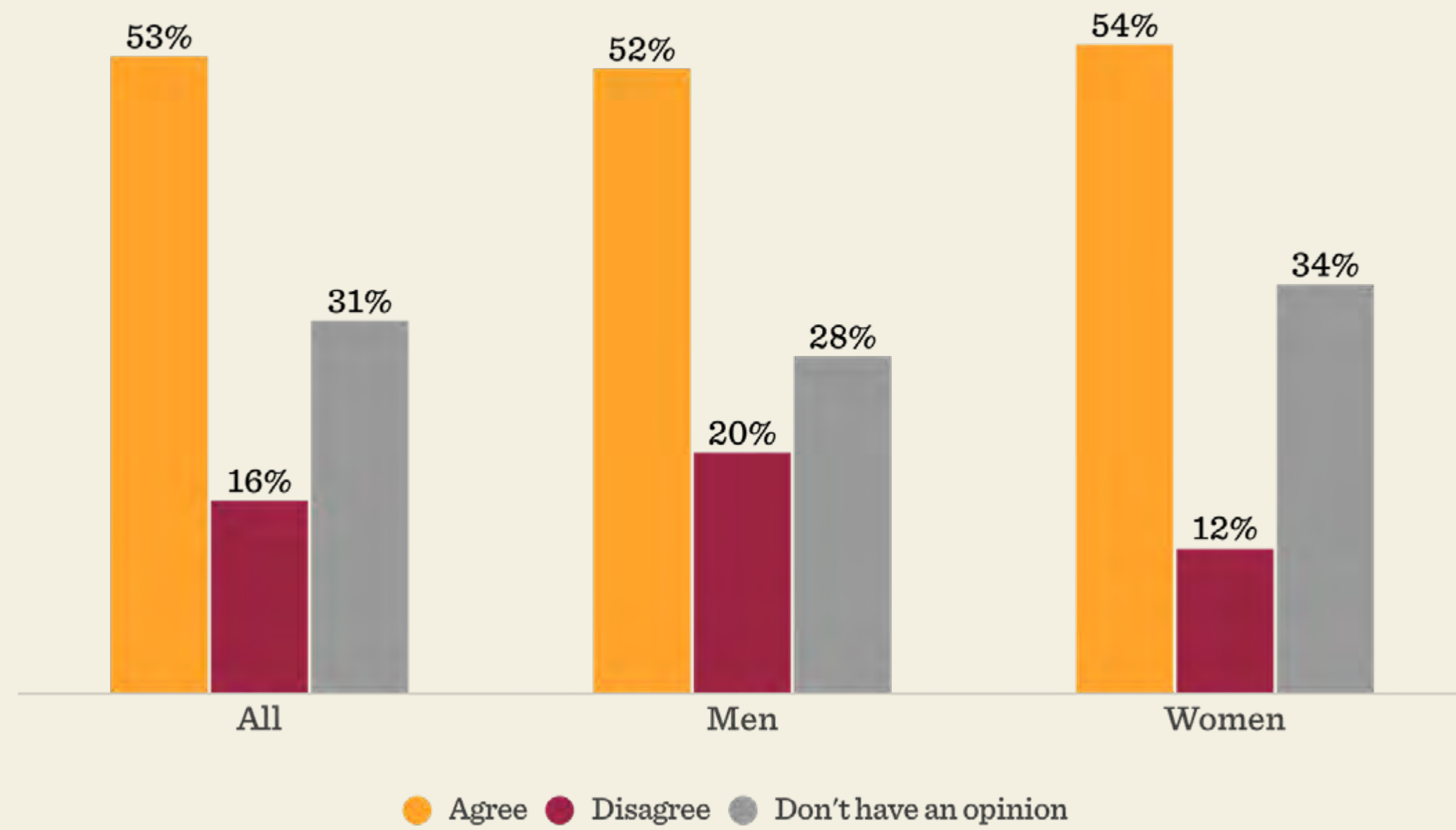
## Should discussions be encouraged?

Despite the concerns expressed in previous questions, respondents do want to discuss politics in the right environment. More than half of the respondents in the UK, 53%, feel that respectful sociopolitical discourse should be encouraged to nurture a legitimately inclusive and diverse company culture with no significant difference between genders.

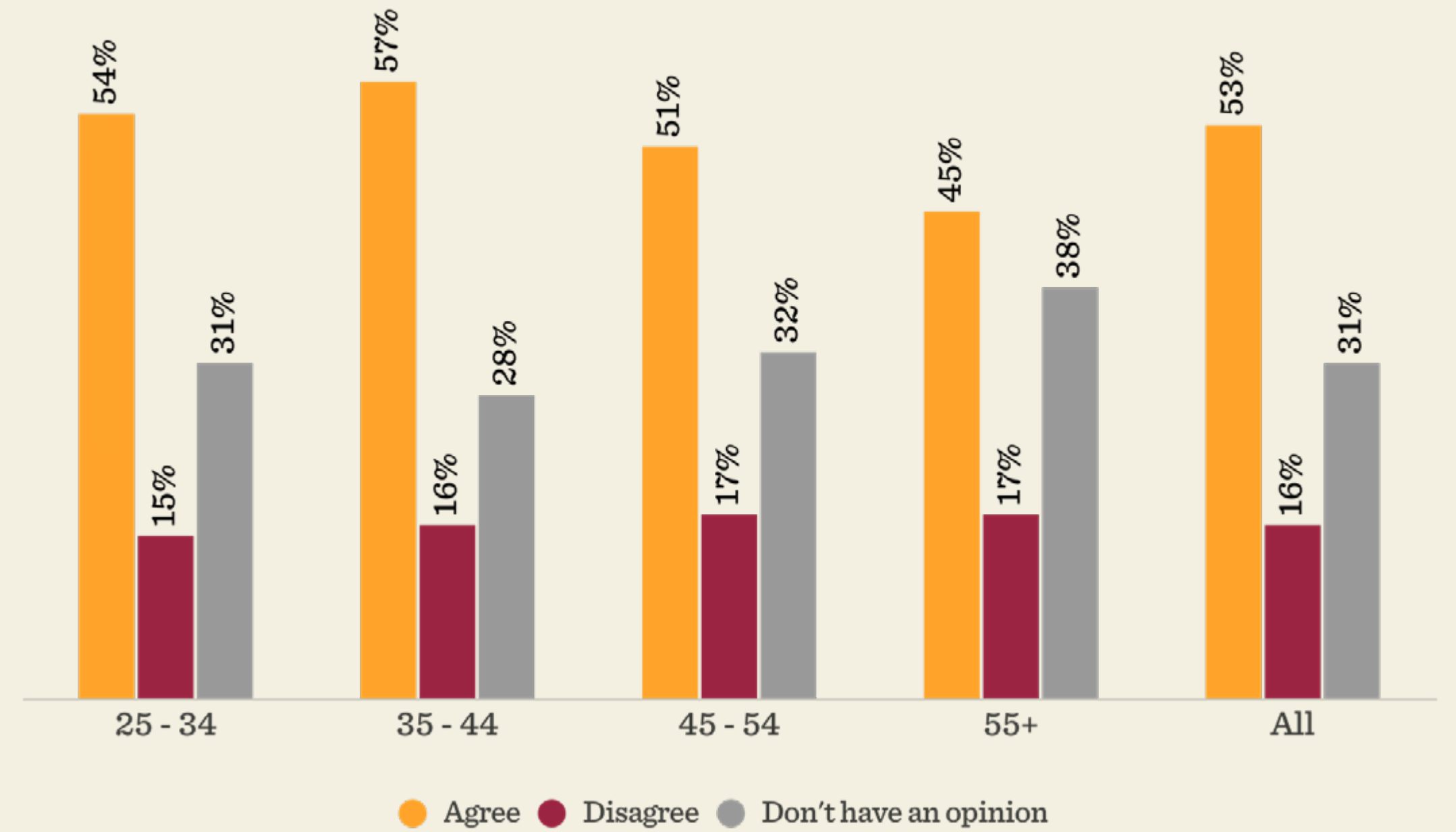
Younger respondents are more likely to agree that respectful discourse should be encouraged. Within this survey, 54% and 57% of respondents ages 25-44 feel that it should be encouraged, compared to 45% of respondents ages 55+ and 51% of respondents ages 45-54.

In the scope of this survey, 56% of managers feel that respectful discourse should be encouraged and are more likely to have an opinion on the topic than non-managers (34% of managers have an opinion compared to 28% of non-managers).

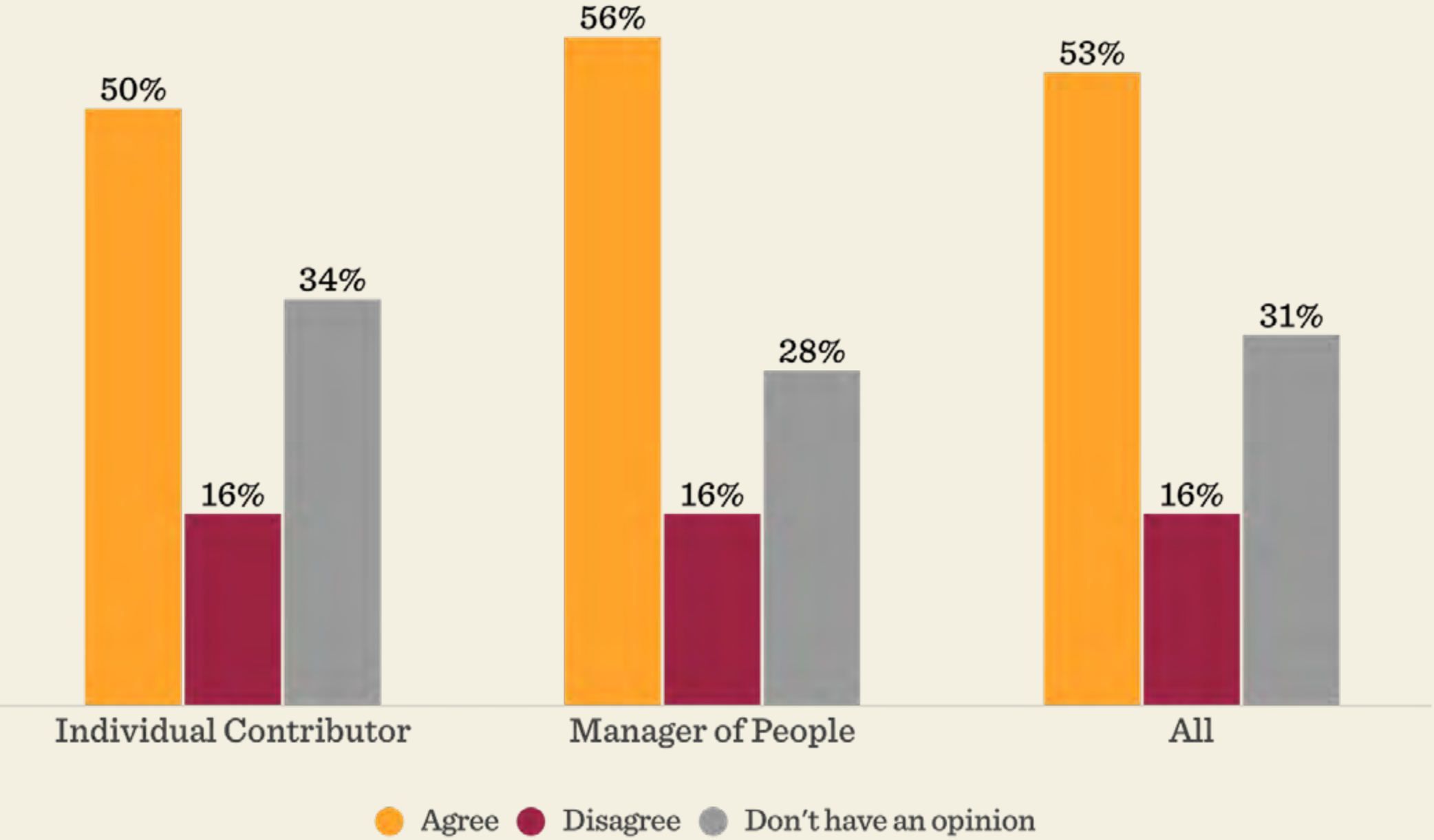
Respectful sociopolitical discourse should be encouraged in order to nurture a legitimately inclusive and diverse company culture



Respectful sociopolitical discourse should be encouraged in order to nurture a legitimately inclusive and diverse company culture by age groups

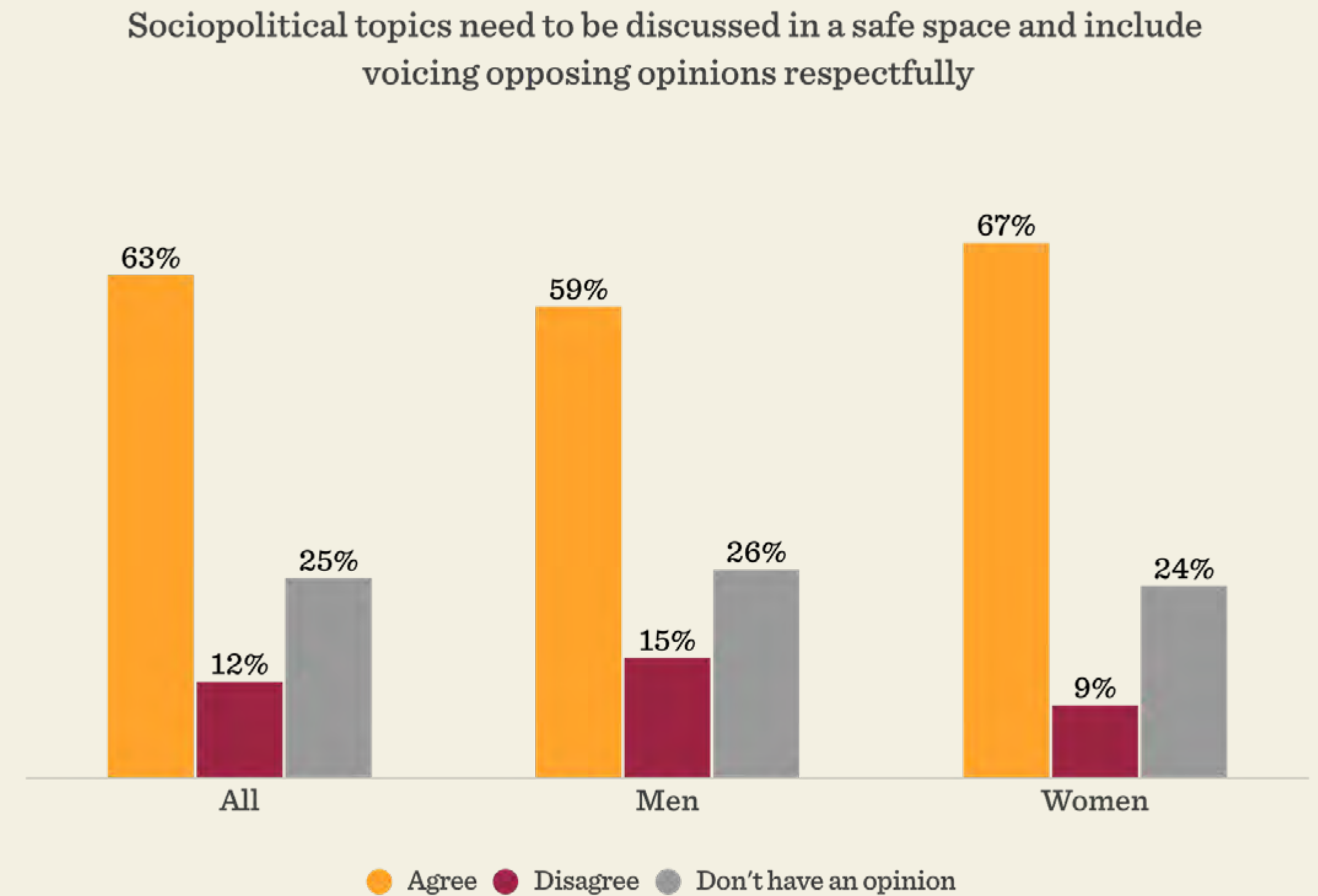


Respectful sociopolitical discourse should be encouraged in order to nurture a legitimately inclusive and diverse company culture by role



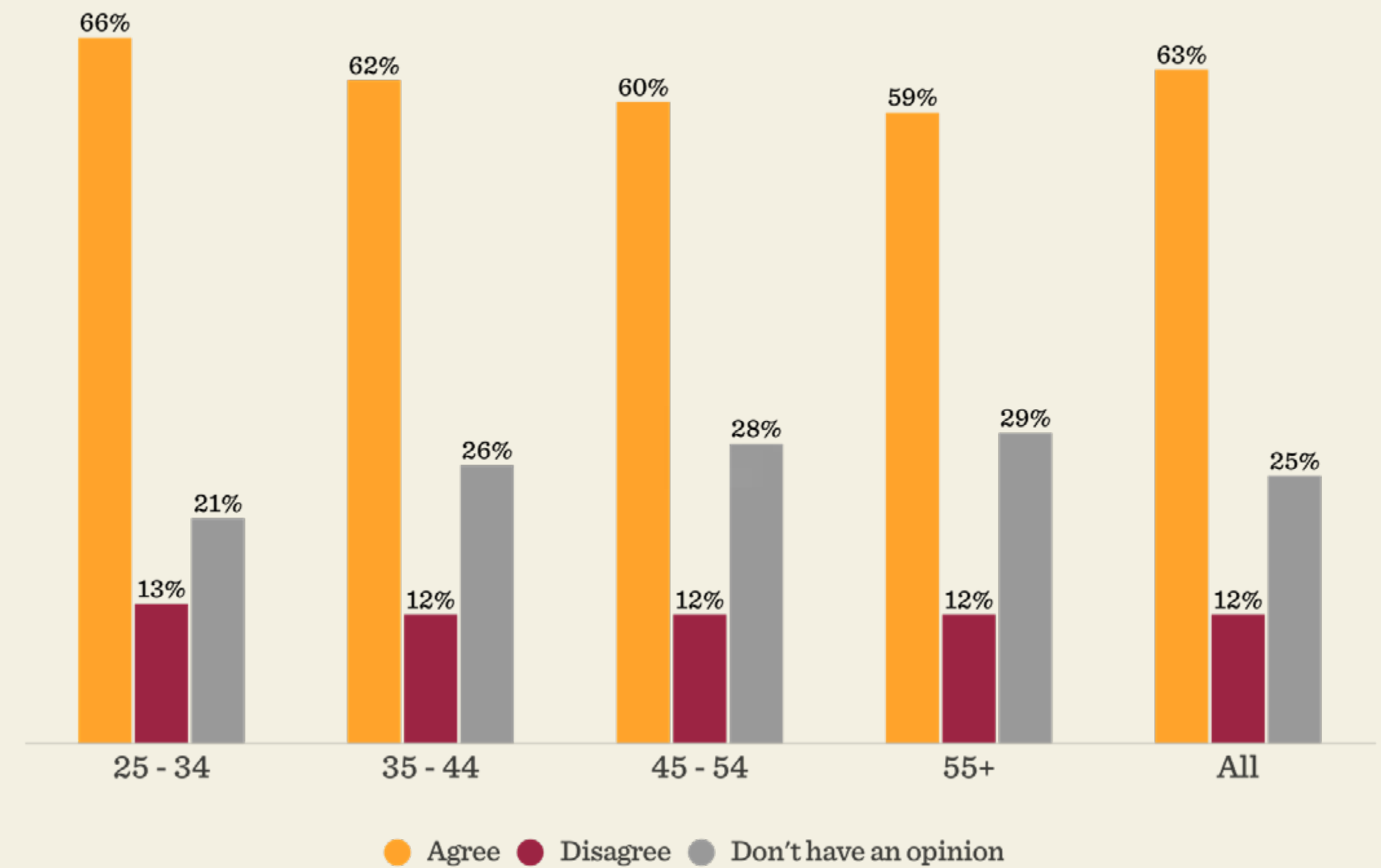
## The need for a safe space to voice opinions respectfully

The majority of respondents feel that sociopolitical topics need to be discussed in a safe space where opposing opinions can be voiced respectfully. However, women are significantly more likely to feel that they need to be discussed in a safe space (67% of women compared to 59% of men). The difference between genders may be because women are more likely to feel insecure in these discussions if a safe space is not made available, something employers should take note of.



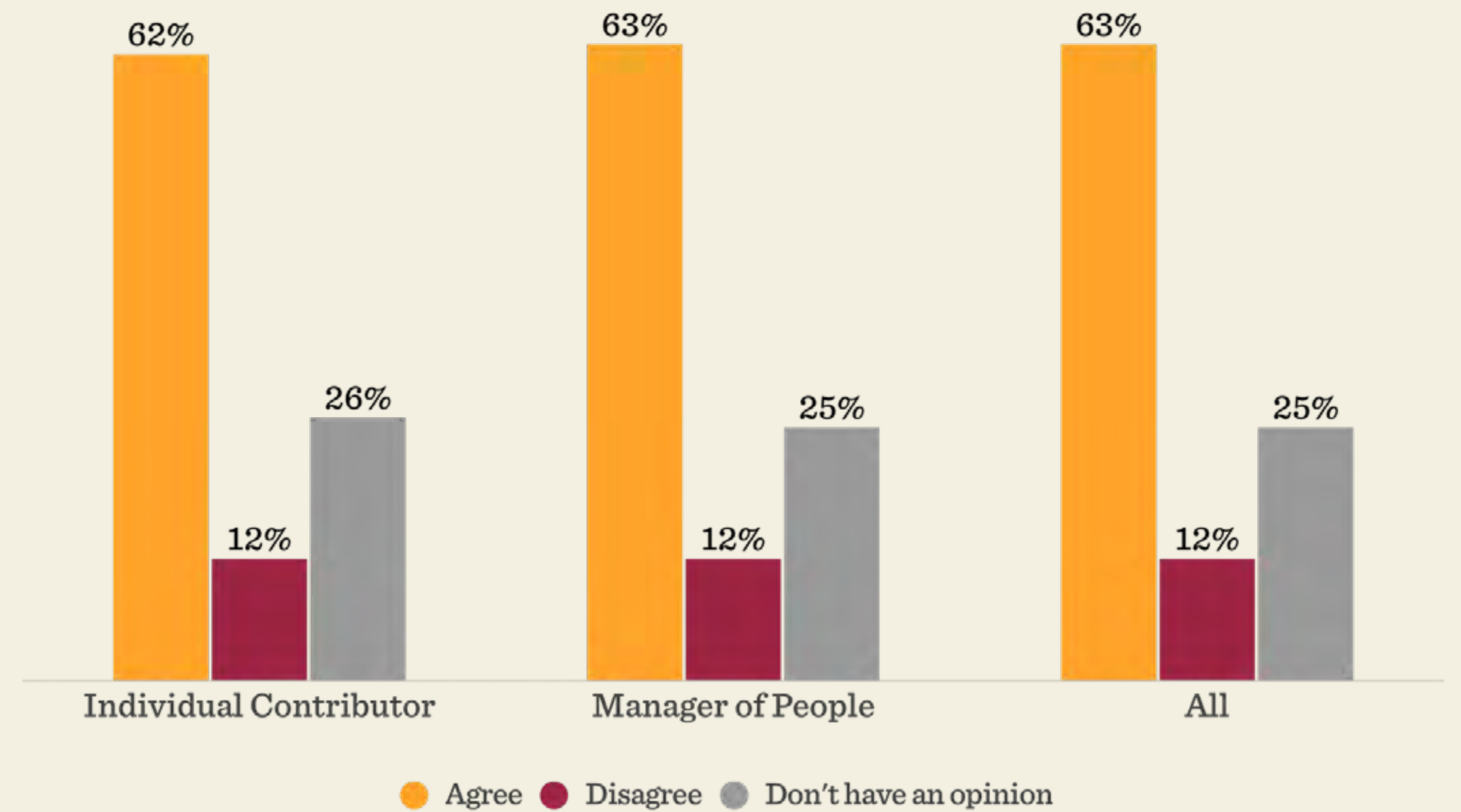
A larger proportion of younger respondents feel that a safe space is needed for sociopolitical discussions. Within this survey, 66% of respondents ages 25-34 agree, compared to 59%, 60%, and 62% of their older colleagues. Again, this could be because younger respondents have less seniority in their positions and are more likely to feel insecure or less protected in such discussions when a safe space is not established.

Sociopolitical topics need to be discussed in a safe space and include voicing opposing opinions respectfully by age group



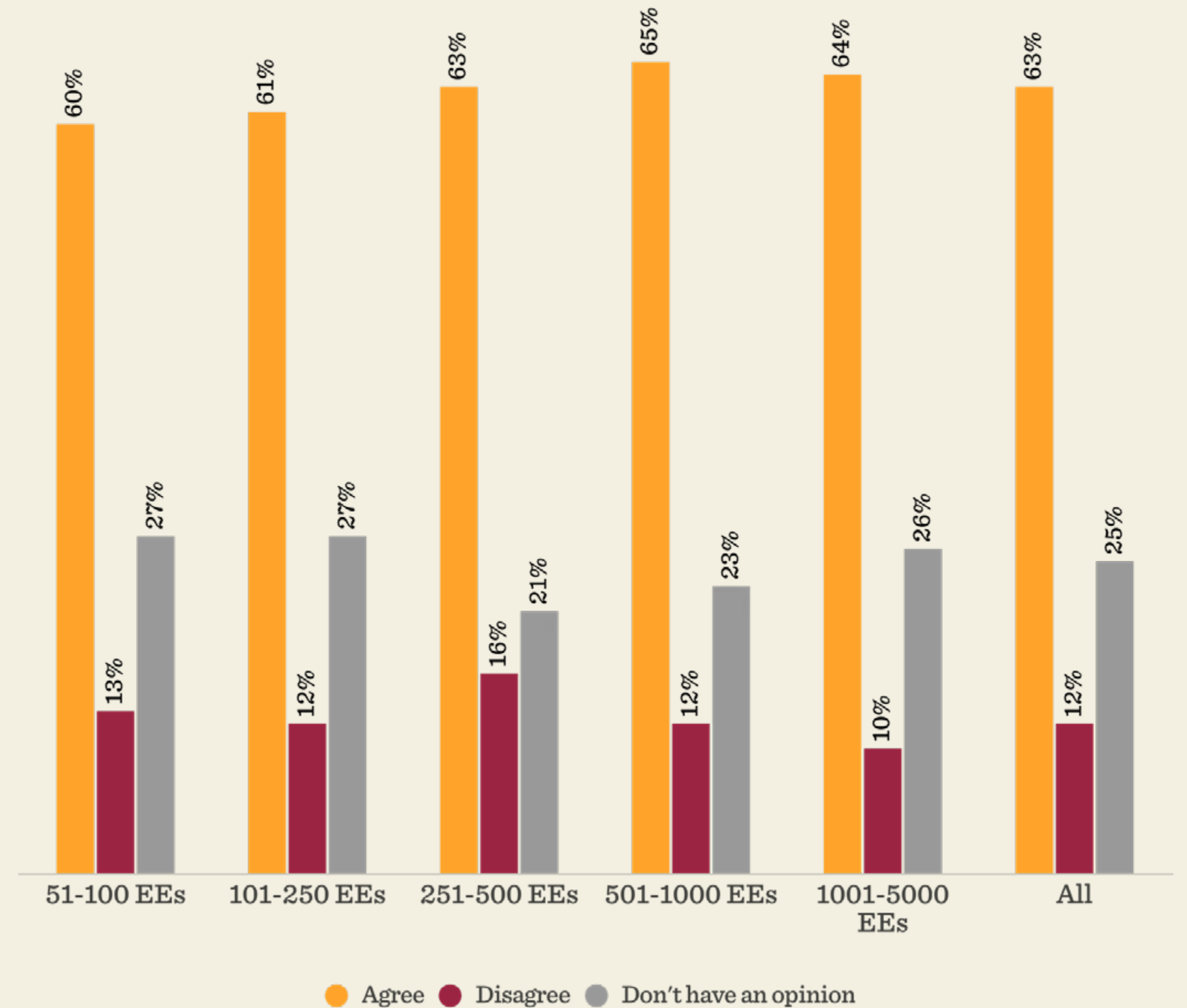
Although there was a discrepancy between managers and non-managers on other issues, similar numbers in both groups agree that a safe space is needed for sociopolitical discussions. This points to the fact that although people are afraid to talk about politics, they know that the subject can't be ignored entirely and therefore see the need for a safe space for it to occur.

Sociopolitical topics need to be discussed in a safe space and include voicing opposing opinions respectfully by role



Employees in larger companies are slightly more likely to agree that sociopolitical topics need to be discussed in safe spaces with 63%, 64%, and 65% in companies with 251-5000 employees compared to 60% and 61% in smaller companies.

Sociopolitical topics need to be discussed in a safe space and include voicing opposing opinions respectfully by company size





# The ramifications of discussing politics in the workplace

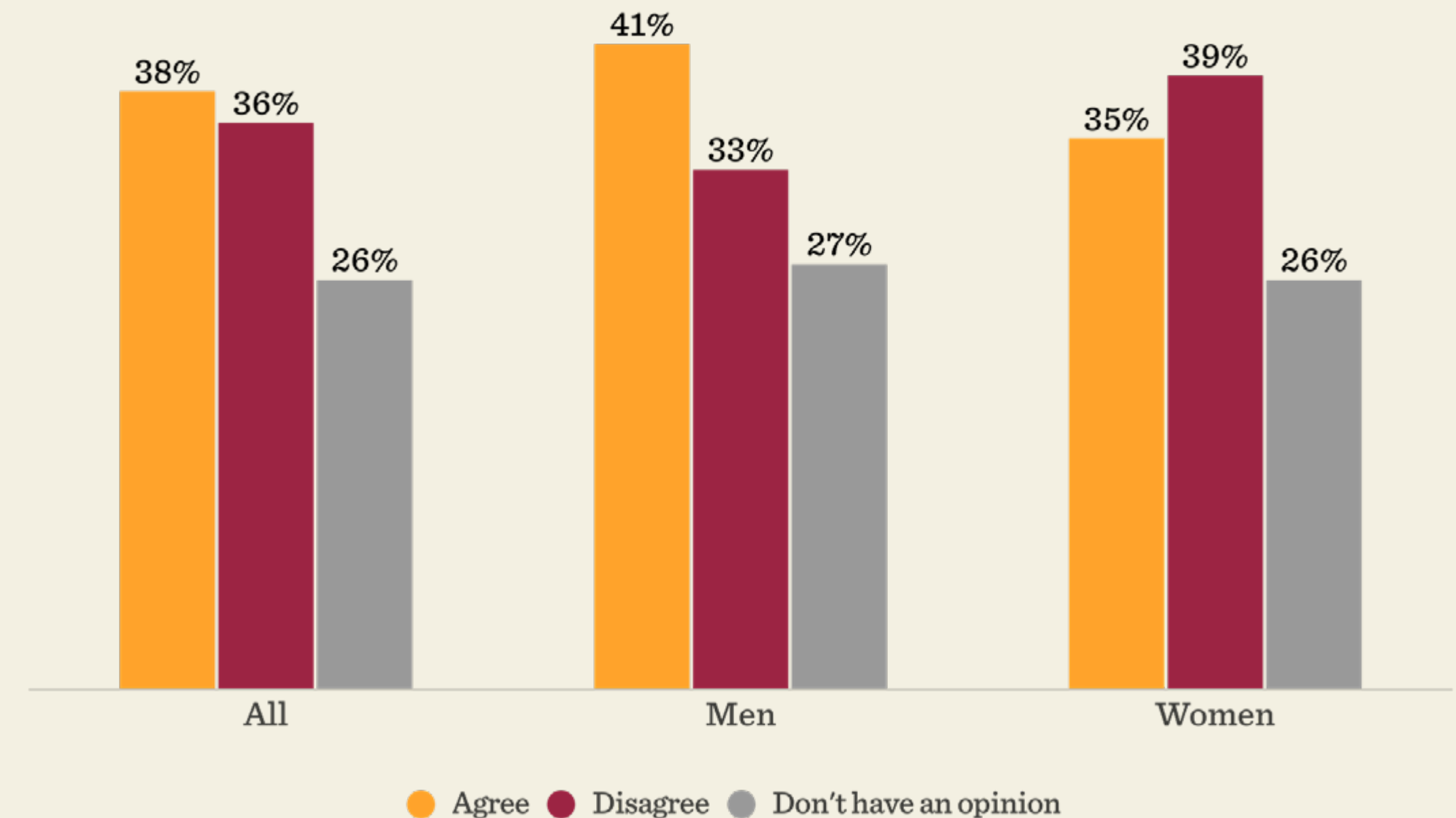
We also wanted to learn more about employees' perceptions about the ramifications of sharing their political opinions with managers and colleagues.

## Sharing an opinion with a manager

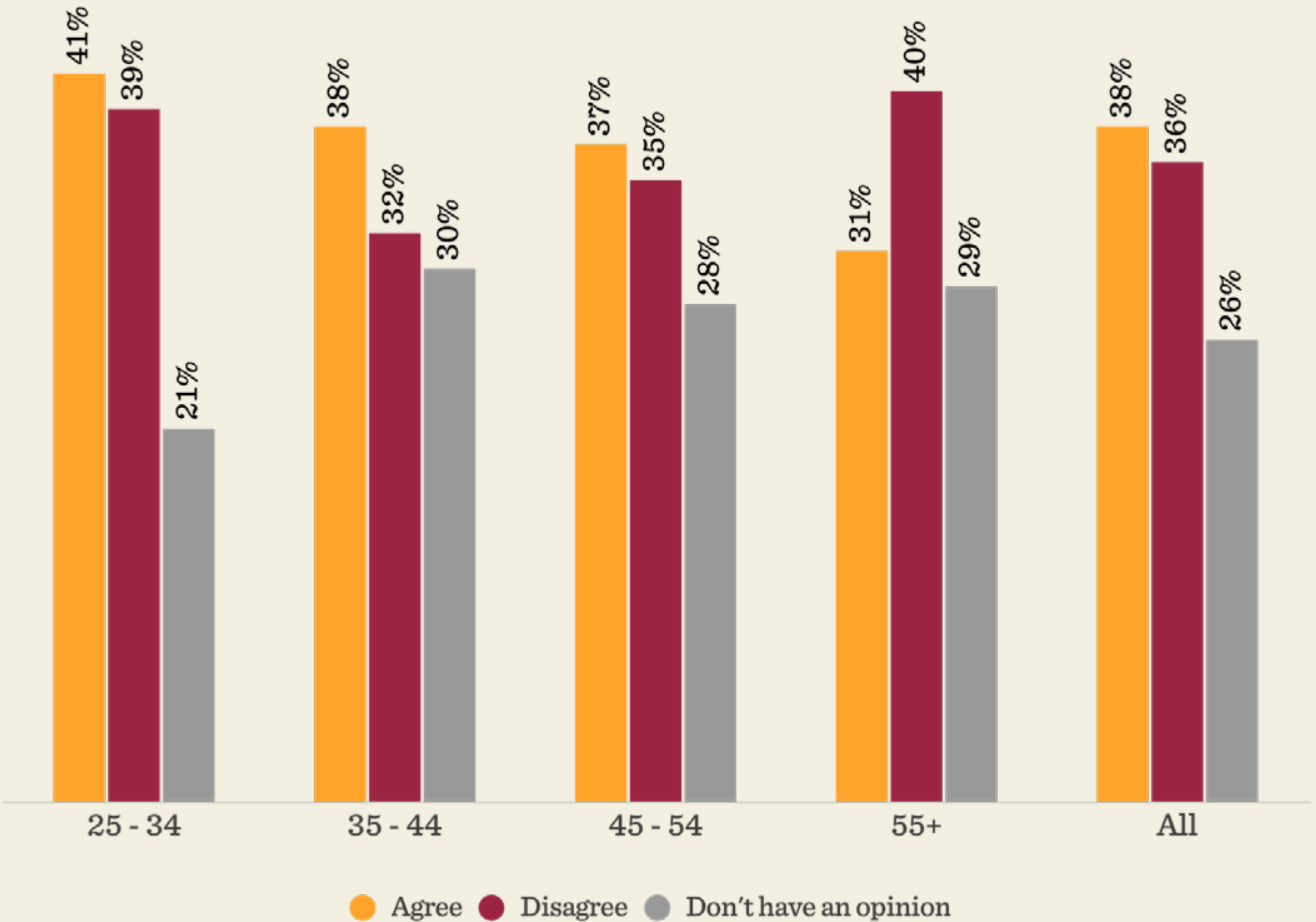
A significant number of respondents, 38%, feel that sharing a political opinion that their manager disagrees with could harm their position in their company. Men are more likely to feel that way than women (41% compared to 35%).

Younger respondents, who are often less senior and therefore less secure in their positions, are more likely to agree that sharing an opposing opinion with a manager could harm their position.

Sharing a political opinion my manager disagrees with could harm me and my position at the company



Sharing a political opinion my manager disagrees with could harm me and my position at the company



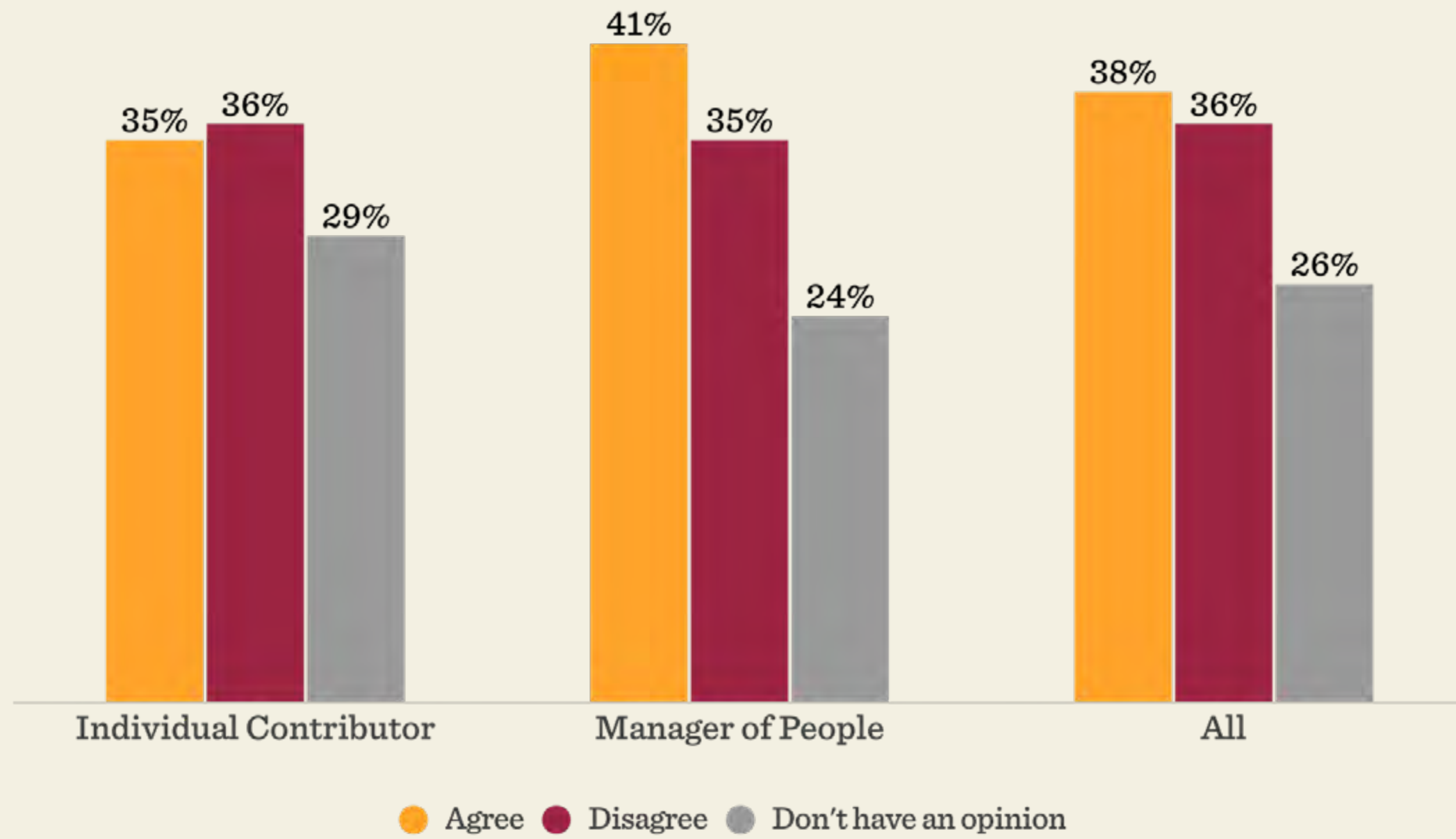
More managers are concerned about the implications of sharing an opposing political opinion than non-managers. Within this survey, 41% agree that doing so may hurt their position in the company, compared to 35% of non-managers.

As with several other issues, employees in companies with 501-1000 employees were the exception here. As part of this survey, 44% feel that sharing a political opinion with a manager could harm their position in the company, compared to 33, 34%, and 38% in larger and smaller companies.

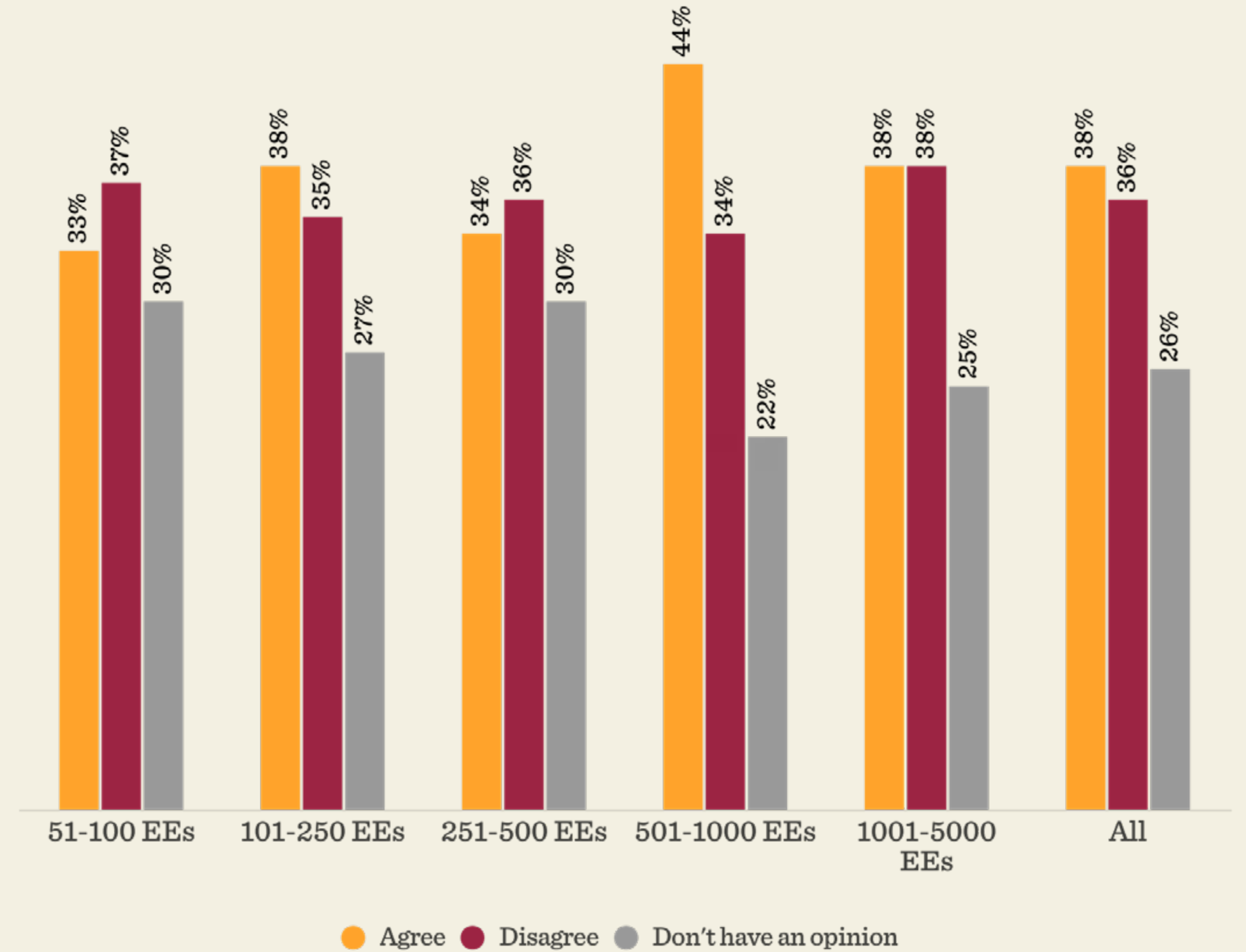
Singles are significantly more likely to agree that sharing an opposing political opinion with a manager could harm their position (45% compared to 37%) pointing again to the fact that singles seem to feel less secure in sharing their political views than their married or partnered counterparts. They are also more likely to have an opinion on the topic.



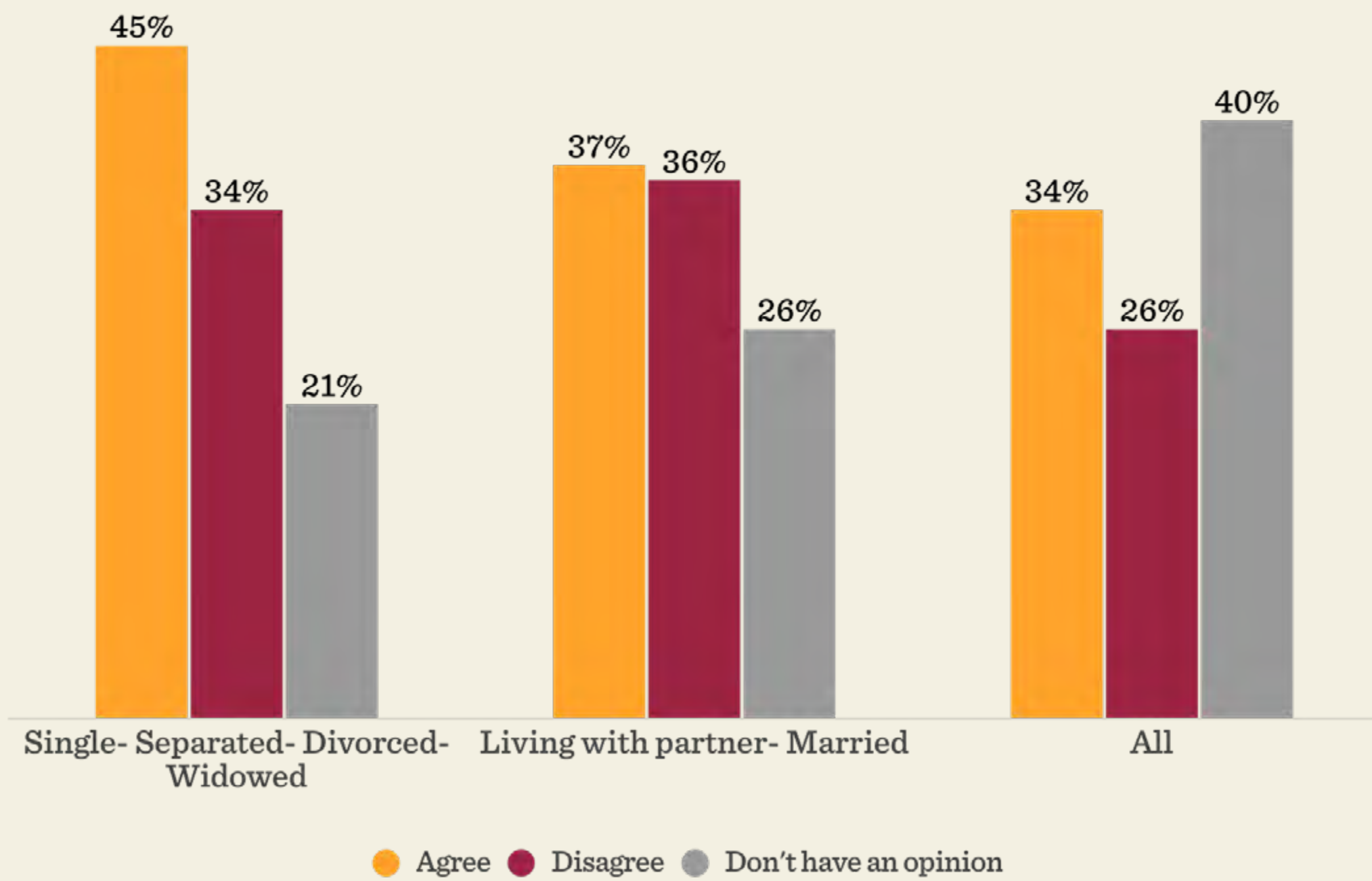
Sharing a political opinion my manager disagrees with could harm me and my position at the company by role



Sharing a political opinion my manager disagrees with could harm me and my position at the company by company size



Sharing a political opinion my manager disagrees with could harm me and my position at the company by personal status



## Sharing an opinion with colleagues

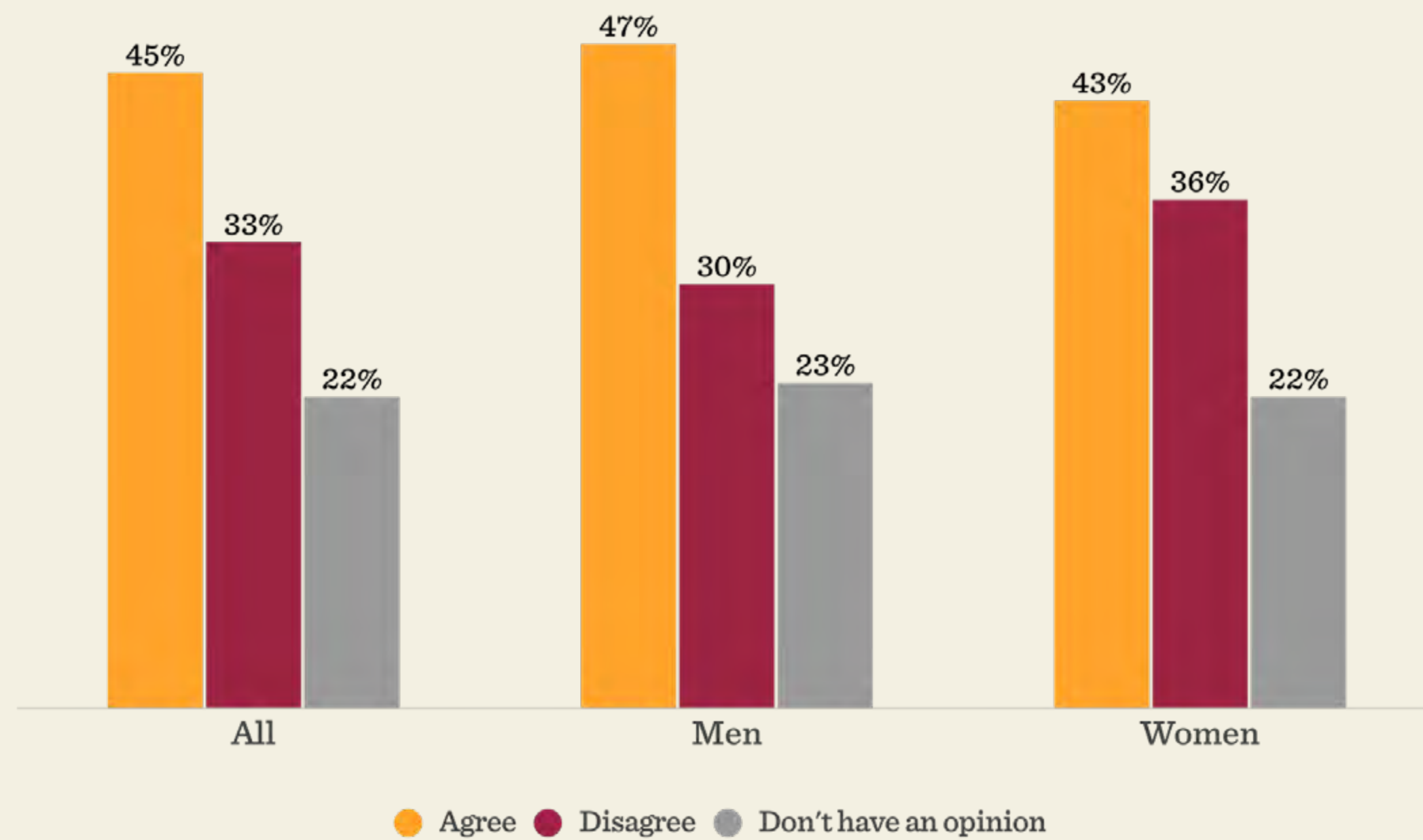
Respondents are more likely to be concerned about sharing their opinions with colleagues than with their managers. The research found 45% agree that doing so could cause harm, compared to 38% who agree that sharing with a manager could lead to problems. Also, more men expressed concern than women (47% and 43%, respectively).

Younger employees are more concerned that sharing their opinions with colleagues could harm their relationships. In this survey, 47% and 49% of respondents ages 25-44 feel that it could, compared to only 41% of people ages 45-54 and 37% of respondents ages 55+. This again points to the fact that younger employees are more likely to feel insecure in their positions and their status in the workplace.

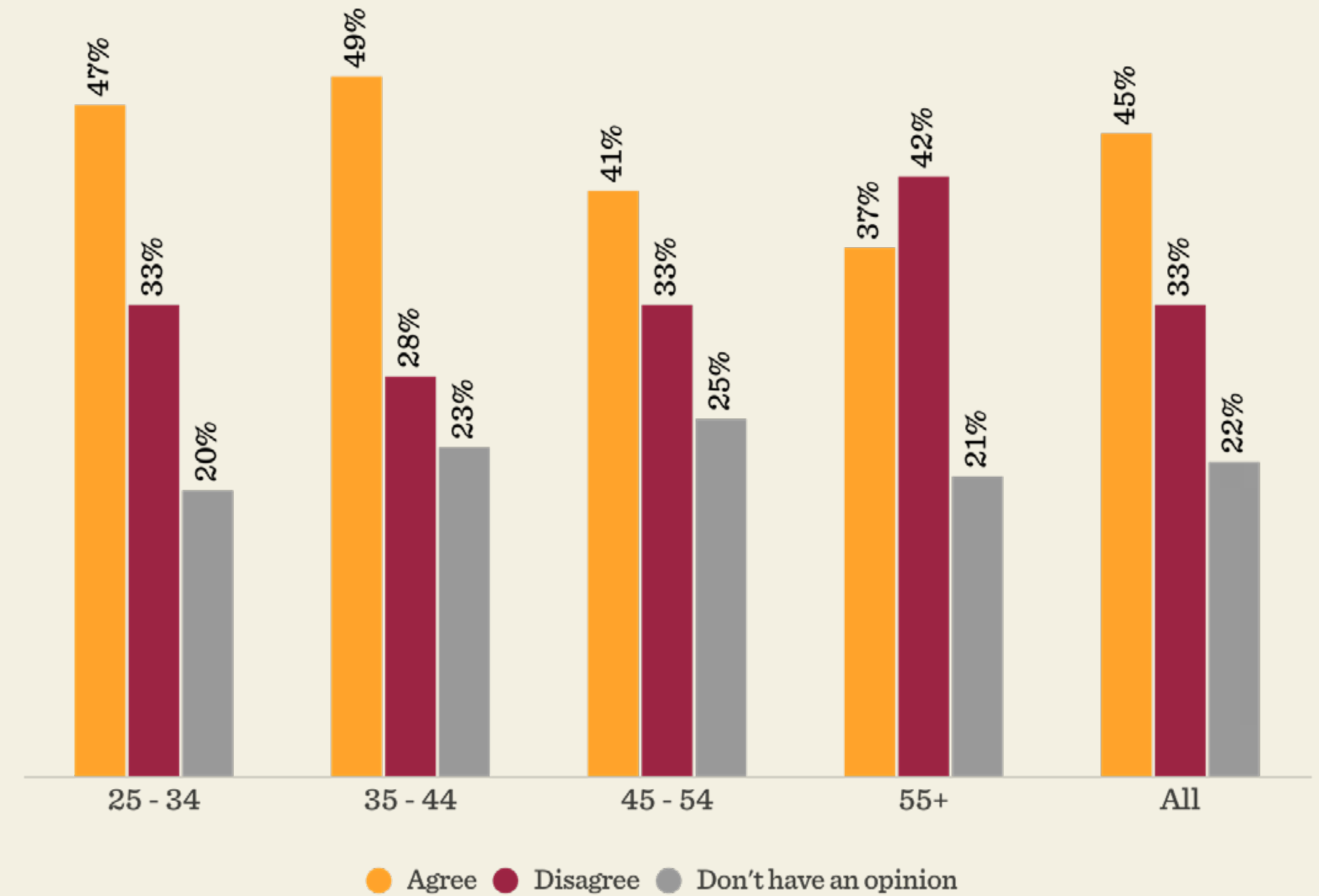
Managers are more likely to be concerned about sharing opinions with colleagues, just as they are more concerned about sharing with their managers. As part of the survey, 47% feel it could harm their relationships and negatively impact productivity, compared to 43% of non-managers.

The same trend we saw in other questions was apparent here as well. The larger the company where they currently work, the more likely respondents are to agree that sharing their political opinion with colleagues could harm their relationships and team productivity. Also, similar to other questions, the trend reverses itself when it comes to companies with 1001-5000 employees.

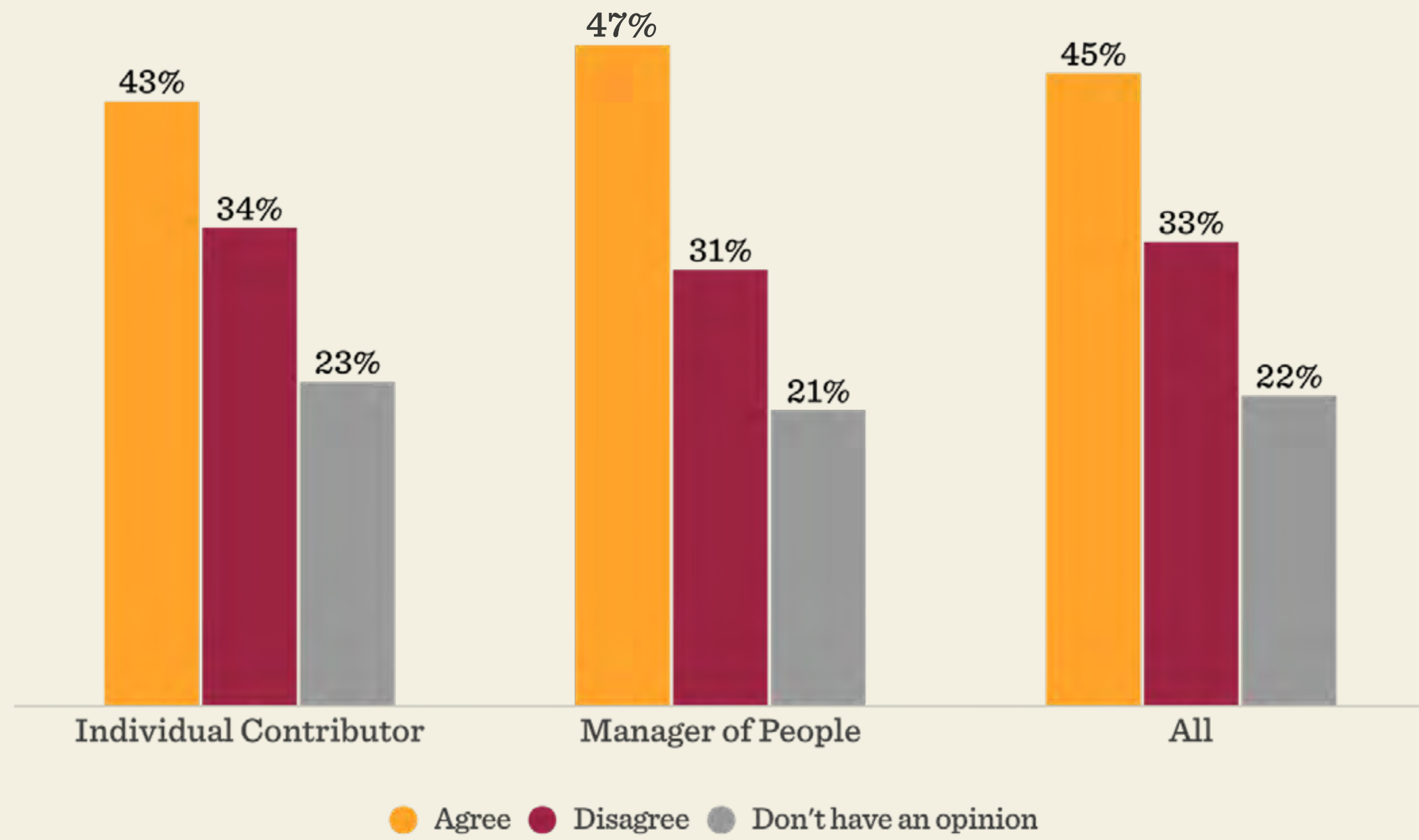
Sharing my political opinion with colleagues could harm my relationship with them and negatively affect our productivity as a team



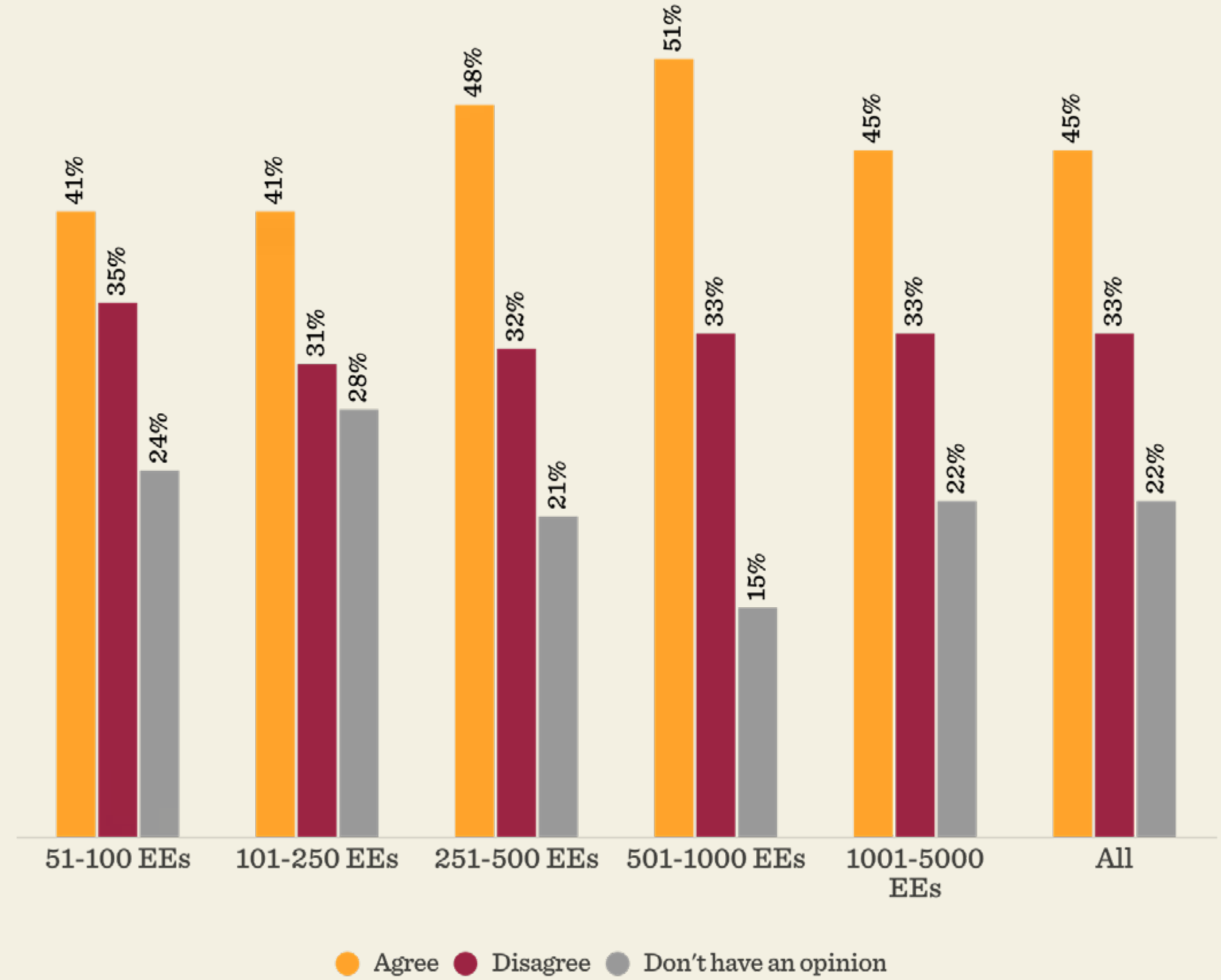
Sharing my political opinion with colleagues could harm my relationship with them and negatively affect our productivity as a team



Sharing my political opinion with colleagues could harm my relationship with them and negatively affect our productivity as a team



Sharing my political opinion with colleagues could harm my relationship with them and negatively affect our productivity as a team by company size





# Where does it leave us?

Politics seem to impact every element of life today, and a company's position on anything from the environment to its use of technology can point to its political identity. Applicants see political identity as part of the company's employer brand, and for many professionals in the UK, opposing politics can be a deterrent from joining a company. For some people, a company's political stance may prompt them to leave the company where they are currently employed. This is especially true for managers and employees of larger companies.

Professionals in the UK are concerned about the impacts that sociopolitical discussions can have on the workplace, and many respondents feel that they shouldn't take place at all. Yet it is clear that politics can't be avoided altogether, especially during charged times such as national elections, global conflict, economic downturns, climate events, or a pandemic.

People-first companies can't ignore political discourse—doing so can result in broken working relationships and damage cultural safety. Younger employees and single people are especially vulnerable, something that employers should pay attention to. That is why companies must set clear guidelines for respectful discourse and create safe spaces where discourse can occur. Doing so is key to creating a supportive, inclusive work environment for all employees, regardless of political opinions.



# Meet Bob

**At HiBob, we've built a modern HR platform designed for modern business needs—today and beyond.**

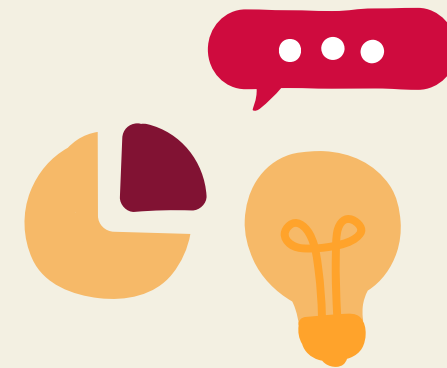
We focused on building something robust yet intuitive and easy to use, which has led Bob to be the **company culture platform** of choice for thousands of fast-growing modern, mid-sized organisations.

In a short time, Bob can be deployed to enable communication, collaboration, and connectivity that drives stronger engagement, productivity, and business outcomes.



## For HR

it automates many common processes, allows greater oversight and visibility of the business, and centralises all people data in a secure, user-friendly environment.



## For managers

It provides access to data and insights to help them lead more effectively and streamline processes.



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It's the tools and information they need to connect, develop, and grow throughout their journey.

# Now is the time to make smarter decisions when it comes to your people and organization

To learn more about HiBob and our data-driven tools, get in touch with us at [contact@hibob.com](mailto:contact@hibob.com)

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