The Pandemic and Public Administration:

A survey of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers

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The State Capacity Initiative at the Centre for Policy
Research is an interdisciplinary research and practice
programme focused on addressing the challenges of the
21st-century Indian state. The purpose of this initiative is
to place the critical challenges of building state capacity at
the heart of the field of policy research in India, where it has
always belonged but remains surprisingly marginalised.
We therefore start with first principles and ground
ourselves in existing realities to deepen and expand
the understanding of the challenges and possibilities of
building state capacity in a democratic and federal India.
Our programme of work focuses on the changing roles of
the Indian state: institutional design, implementation and
administrative capacity; the challenges of regulatory and
fiscal capacity; and the complex and changing relations
between society, politics and state capacity in India.

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The Pandemic and Public Administration

Over the course of a year, since India's first case was reported in Thrissur, Kerala on 30 January 2020, it seems impossible to account for all the ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic has affected life across the country and the globe. Across the world, states have had to play a leading role in responding to the pandemic. In the course of this response, governments and public administrators have had to, and chosen to, regulate the social and economic life of citizens to an extraordinary extent.

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged the state in many ways. First and foremost, the consequential effects of decades of differential investments in building—and neglecting—basic and dynamic state capacities and public systems have been laid bare, especially when confronted with a health crisis of this magnitude.[1] From the outset, the global pandemic also required unprecedented coordination and collaboration at all levels of the system, along with decentralised action on multiple fronts. Even as countries faced an urgent and growing health crisis, the actions taken to try to control it: physical distancing, lockdowns, prolonged physical closure of institutions, travel restrictions etc., gave rise themselves to extraordinary levels of economic and social distress that continue to be difficult to adequately measure or fully comprehend. And in a situation where the failure of some to adhere to behavioural norms and conduct required of all could place the entire collective at risk, the state acquired an expanded role in constantly framing and ensuring adherence to myriad, unusual rules that regulated the behaviour of citizens and the full spectrum of public and private institutions over an undefined period of time.

As a consequence, across the world, the pandemic placed new pressures and diverse demands on public sector workers, from frontline functionaries to

central administrators, most of whom were deployed in crisis management in addition to adapting to rapidly changing work environments for what would be routine processes in ordinary times.[2] Given the structures of governance and administration in India, members of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the permanent, higher civil service, played a vital role in the country's Covid-19 response. They were prominent members of the multiple empowered action groups constituted at the centre in New Delhi; participated in specially appointed teams tasked with leading the Covid-19 response in different states; and occupied pivotal roles in leading field administration in the districts. These roles were constantly highlighted and scrutinised in the media, ranging from features lauding the achievements of district collectors and editorials lambasting the bureaucracy for compulsively issuing confusing administrative orders, at one time amounting to over 4000 executive orders in four months.

This report presents and discusses the key findings of a survey of IAS officers in the context of the Covid-19 crisis and response in India. Unlike some other national civil services, India does not have a tradition of conducting regular surveys of its bureaucracy.[3] The one major national civil services survey conducted in 2010 [4] and more recent studies on the IAS focus on the challenges of administrative reforms.[5] We hope that this survey on the pandemic and public administration is both a related and distinctive contribution to our understanding of the Indian bureaucracy. It is the first of a series of studies that seek to engage with an ongoing and renewed deliberation on the past, present and future of public administration and state capacity in India.

The IAS Covid-19 Survey

The CPR State Capacity Initiative survey sought responses from members of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) on critical aspects of governance and public administration during the Covid-19 pandemic. Fielded through August and September 2020, the survey asked civil servants to reflect on the decisions, actions and conduct of the Indian state, bureaucracy, citizens, and key non-state actors and agencies in response to the Covid-19 crisis and its management. Specific questions, therefore, related to prominent and contextual features of pandemic management and public administration in India as they had unfolded during the first 7-8 months of the crisis.

In particular, this survey of IAS officers explored three critical relationships that the Covid-19 crisis put under special scrutiny and strain:

1) the relations between different levels of the state, between political leaders and the bureaucracy, and within the bureaucracy itself;

2) the interaction between the state, bureaucracy and the public; and

3) bureaucratic perceptions of the role of civil society, private sector, international organisations and the media and their consequences for public administration.

The purpose of the survey was not to arrive at an assessment of the extent to which particular policy decisions or implementation had failed or succeeded. The sheer magnitude, complexity, diversity, duration and intensity of the effects of the pandemic and its management across India require a much larger and deeper approach both in terms of methods and analysis.

At the same time, the Covid-19 crisis and the nature of state response is a critical collective context for gaining important insights into the underlying values,

norms, attitudes, and practices that shape the Indian bureaucracy today—and the extent to which these may be widely shared, divergent or contested among the IAS. We knew that a survey of this kind came with many limitations, but it did enable what we hope is a timely, insightful and generative reflection on the bureaucracy during an extraordinarily challenging period, and one that opens up possibilities for a deeper understanding of and engagement with the Indian bureaucracy going forward.

Survey Overview

IAS officers have multiple demands on their time, even more so during a pandemic. This makes surveying a large number of officers a challenging task. This section outlines the implementation strategy used to reach our goal of surveying a cadre-representative sample of serving officers. This is followed by a discussion on data analysis with a specific focus on weighting, robustness checks, and disaggregated analysis.

Population and required sample size: We drew our sampling requirements from the publicly available Civil List of 5205 serving IAS Officers (as on 01.01.2020). Our target sample was 400 officers, stratified by cadre, to guarantee a representative sample[6].

Implementation: Prior to fielding the survey, we conducted 3 pilots and received multiple rounds of feedback from civil servants and academic experts. After fine-tuning the instrument, the survey was coded onto an online survey platform for dissemination. A link to the survey was shared via email and WhatsApp along with a covering letter ensuring confidentiality and explaining the purpose of the survey. Based on advice from officers and academics, we did not collect any identifying information on respondents to protect their identity and improve chances of a higher response rate.

Over a period of 2 months starting July 30th 2020, our

team forwarded the survey invitation and followed up with officers until the required sample size for each cadre was reached. The main method adopted for this outreach was approaching personal contacts in every cadre of the IAS. We requested former and serving officers and public policy researchers and practitioners with extensive IAS networks to forward the survey. The feeling of trust engendered by an approach through fellow members of the service was possibly key to the extensive participation.

Response: We received an excellent response with 526 serving and 44 former officers responding to the survey. While the survey was specifically targeted at serving officers, we had provided an option for former officers to indicate their status and participate in the survey as well. We found that former officers in our sample were fairly well distributed across cadres with officers from 18 different cadres responding. Given the number of responses and distribution of former officers, we also analysed their responses as a group.

Analysis: Among serving officers, we received higher than expected responses from certain cadres. Each observation was weighted by the relative size of the officer's cadre in order to make representative claims. Data cleaning, weighting and estimation, and graphical representation of data was conducted using the R statistical package. We conducted a second layer of analysis to account for the skew in responses towards younger officers by employing a raking strategy to weight responses by both cadre and year. While we found minor differences in results for certain answer options, the trends across cadre-representative and cadre*year-representative results remained exactly the same. We therefore report cadre-representative results throughout.

In this report, we present three types of results. The first result is for the full sample of 526 serving officers, followed by two disaggregated results as explained below:

a) Disaggregation by seniority: The sample of 526 serving officers was split into 2 subsets, one for officers who joined the service in the year 2011 or after (n=346) and another for officers who joined the service before 2011 (n=180). This enables us to identify differences, if any, in responses between officers who are more likely to be currently engaged in field-based roles in districts with officers who have assumed departmental or policy level positions through state or central postings. We also compare these two subsets of officers with former officers (n=44).

b) Disaggregation by the State/UT Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) score developed by the NITI Aayog: We utilised the SDG tiers published by the NITI Aayog in 2018 to analyse differences in officers by state cadres categorised according to the levels of development of States/UTs in this index. We selected the year 2018 because the last available subnational Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the United Nations is available for 2018, allowing us to compare the two metrics. We found a high correlation between the SDG and HDI indicators, and opted for the SDG indicators developed by the Indian Government. States/UTs are categorised into 4 tiers based on their performance on SDG indicators by the NITI Aayog: Achievers, Frontrunners, Performers and Aspirants, in decreasing order of performance. The States/UTs belonging to each Tier are listed in Table 1.

Front Runner	Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu
Performer	Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand, West Bengal
Aspirant	Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh

Table 1: States and UTs as per NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Tiers in 2018. No States/UTs made the topmost category of Achievers in 2018.

Table of Figures

Each figure in this list is followed by two related figures displaying disaggregated analysis

Key Themes

In the following pages, we explore a number of critical aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic and public administration in India, organised along three main themes:

1) First, we explore a set of questions around the response of the Indian state and bureaucracy to a national crisis. We focus primarily on factors that are largely within the state's own domain and control, especially as they relate to individual and institutional commitments to public service, resource mobilisation, innovation, autonomy and delivery in a time of crisis. In this section, civil servants' perceptions on the role and effectiveness of politicians, especially in the context of public communication also emerge quite clearly.

2) Next, we probe civil servant responses to and reflections on the most difficult trade-offs that the Covid-19 crisis posed for government and for public administrators. In particular, we explore the challenges and tensions around bureaucratic perceptions of the public's understanding and willing cooperation, on the one hand, and coercive practices by the state and the public's fear of the law, on the other.

3) Finally, we analyse civil servants' perceptions of key partnerships and interests as these played out during the pandemic, with a focus on four major actors/stakeholders involved in pandemic response: civil society, the private sector, international organisations, and the media.

Overall, the responses reveal some widely shared and deeply held views on a number of critical aspects of governance and public administration among and across members of the IAS. On other questions regarding the Covid-19 response, the survey reveals significant diversity and disagreement among civil servants. When read in relation to each other, the responses also throw light on tensions between the cherished values that civil servants express, and their inability to uphold those values due to the lack of trust in the public and the system they are part of.

The Indian State, Bureaucracy and Crisis Response

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Key Findings

The responses of IAS officers to the set of questions presented in this section largely endorse a widely observed view that the Indian state and bureaucracy **rise to the occasion and respond well in times of crisis, demonstrating capabilities to mobilise, motivate, innovate and communicate** that are unfortunately missing in action in its routine functioning.

In general, IAS officers come across as highly motivated, placing public service commitment above personal risk. **72 percent of serving officers felt that the refusal to undertake assigned roles due to vulnerability and risk of exposure to infection should invite penal action.**

In their assessment, **motivation levels across key public systems and services at the frontlines of pandemic management** (the police, health system, food and civil supplies, and the district administration) **were high to begin with** (between 7-8.5 on a scale of 10) and only

dipped marginally as the crisis wore on. **Levels of public trust were also assessed to be surprisingly high across services** (between 6.3 for food and civil supplies and 8.1 for the district administration).

The high level of motivation was matched by **a strong perception that the state has demonstrated the ability to deliver reasonably on key outcomes.** 51.1 percent of serving officers were of the view that health system preparedness during the lockdown increased reasonably, while another 19.7 percent assessed the improvement to be substantial. Notably, junior officers were more positive about improvement in health systems preparedness with 55.2 and 17.1 percent indicating reasonable and substantial improvement respectively. However, former officers were much more likely to judge the improvements to be marginal.

IAS officers primarily attributed this enhanced performance to the **ability to deploy all available resources towards a single cause,** along with room provided for more autonomy in emergency situations.

The need and importance of greater autonomy at all levels of state and bureaucratic functioning was repeatedly emphasised. **A striking 83 percent agreed that states must have the autonomy to formulate their own responses based on their needs and capacities.**

At the individual level, **73 percent noted that during a national crisis, innovation in the interpretation of orders in pursuit of one's objective would win greater approval from superiors** than strict adherence to procedure. **In a crisis, hard work ranked at the top** of the most valued qualities, **high-level connections came in right at the bottom.**

The emphasis on autonomy and discretion is also consistent with the response on the place of laws and rules during a crisis. On this, **there was near complete agreement among IAS officers (92.3 percent) that India had enough laws and rules, with 78.6 percent stating the need for better compliance by all** and 13.7 percent arguing that there were in fact too many laws and rules

and we could do with less.

At the same time, perhaps unsurprisingly, **the pressure to compromise on one's values and the rules in the course of service was accepted to be high even at this time of grave crisis.** In response to a question regarding the **granting of travel permits to influential people,** 56.8 percent of serving officers agreed that while allowing the privileged to bypass the strict restrictions to contain the pandemic was unacceptable, **denial would be considered by the system as an act of pettiness (20 percent), or even more likely, could cause adverse consequences (36.8 percent).** The remaining 43.2 percent of officers expressed the view that the granting of such permits was a relatively trivial and harmless matter.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic brought to the fore the **important role that civil servants felt they should play in directly communicating with the public during a time of crisis.** An overwhelming **86 percent did not think that anonymity in one's duty was an appropriate**

position for IAS officers and although **63.4 percent of IAS officers would ordinarily be circumspect** about the extent of their communication with the public and media, **they agreed that a situation like the pandemic called for them to be active communicators.**

Similarly, the **regard for and importance of frontline functionaries as highly effective communicators also came through very clearly.** Frontline workers ranked very highly and were considered only slightly less effective than public service announcements on TV and radio. Importantly, **younger officers in charge of field administration valued frontline functionaries even more than senior officers.**

Interestingly, the responses to both questions about communication during the pandemic revealed **a low regard among civil servants when it came to the capabilities of the political executive to adequately and effectively communicate with the Indian public.** Indeed, **when it came to effective communication with the public, speeches by politicians ranked as the least**

effective mode, even below government orders and guidelines.

The need for effective communication with the public only grew in importance as it became clear that the Covid-19 pandemic would be a prolonged crisis. **When it came to their preferred strategy for ensuring successful pandemic management over the long-term, an overwhelming majority of civil servants (85 percent) chose mounting an effective communication campaign to secure people's understanding and cooperation over strict enforcement of penal measures to curb people's inherent tendencies towards indiscipline.** Among IAS officers from frontrunner states, this number rises to 90 percent and among former civil servants it stretches even further to 95 percent.

Figure 1.1: Public service commitment and personal risk

The Covid-19 crisis puts government workers at risk, especially in the absence of appropriate protection. Which of these two statements would you agree with more?

● Refusal to undertake assigned roles should invite penal action

● Government employees should have the right to seek reassignment to low risk roles.

72.0%

28.0%

0 20 40 60 80 100

Percentage
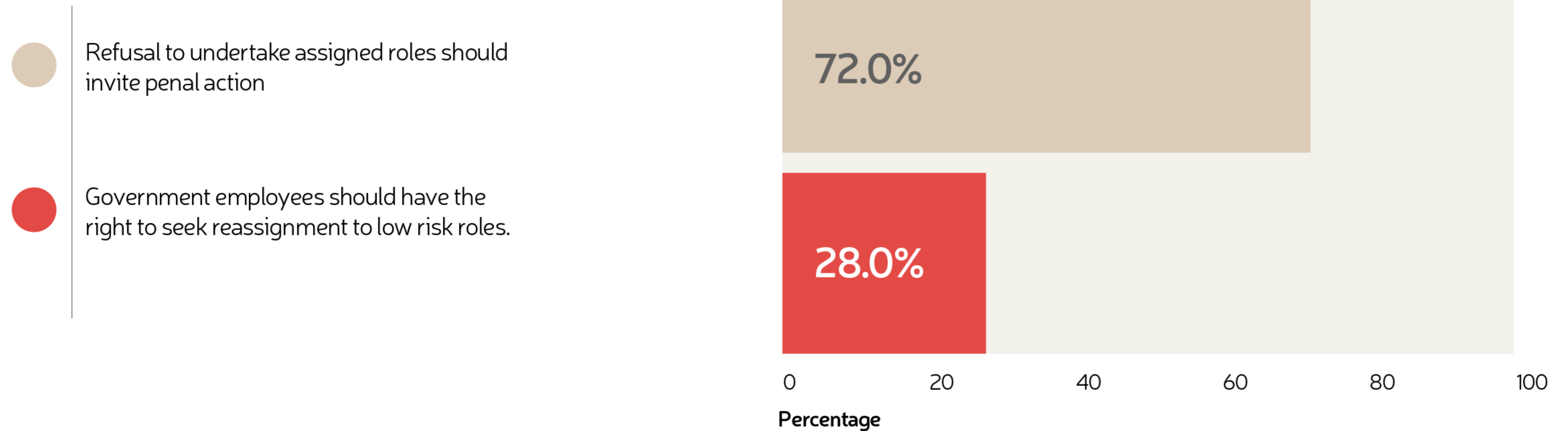
Figure 1.2: Public service commitment and personal risk: by Seniority

The Covid-19 crisis puts government workers at risk, especially in the absence of appropriate protection. Which of these two statements would you agree with more?

Refusal to undertake assigned roles should invite penal action

Government employees should have the right to seek reassignment to low risk roles.

2011 & after: 73.0% / 27.0%

Pre 2011: 72.0% / 28.0%

Former: 61.0% / 39.0%

Percentage
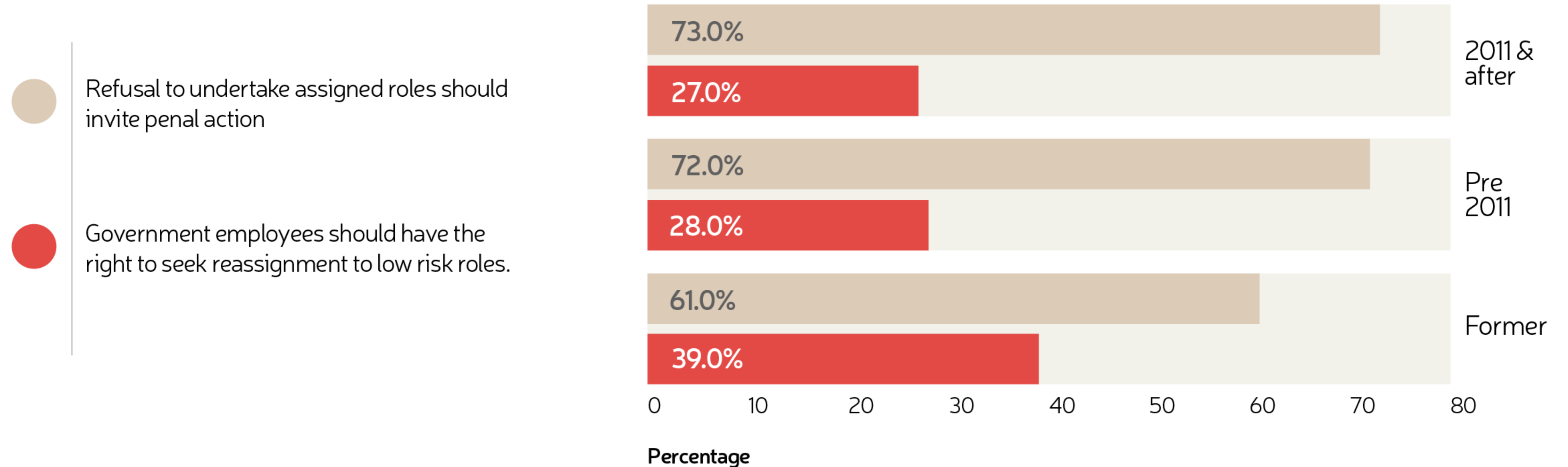
Figure 1.3: Public service commitment and personal risk: By SDG Tier

The Covid-19 crisis puts government workers at risk, especially in the absence of appropriate protection. Which of these two statements would you agree with more?

Refusal to undertake assigned roles should invite penal action

Government employees should have the right to seek reassignment to low risk roles.

Aspirant States
69.0%
31.0%

Performer States
73.0%
27.0%

Frontrunner states
66.0%
34.0%

Percentage
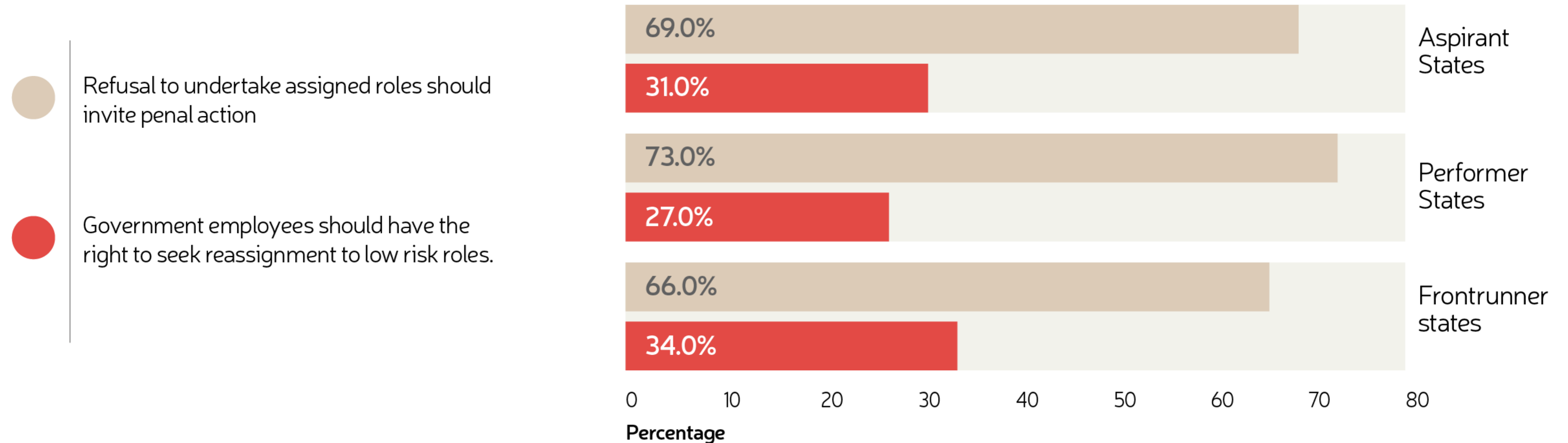
Figure 2.1: Motivation and Public Trust

Police
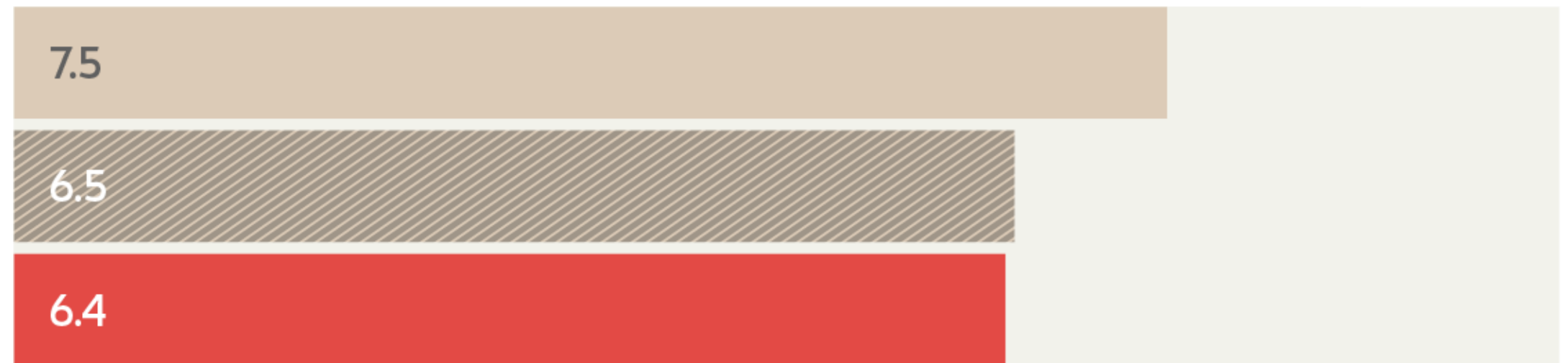
7.5	
6.5	
6.4	

District Administration

8.5	
7.9	
8.1	

Food and Civil Supplies

7.1	
6.6	
6.3	

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 10

Health

7.7	
7.3	
7.3	
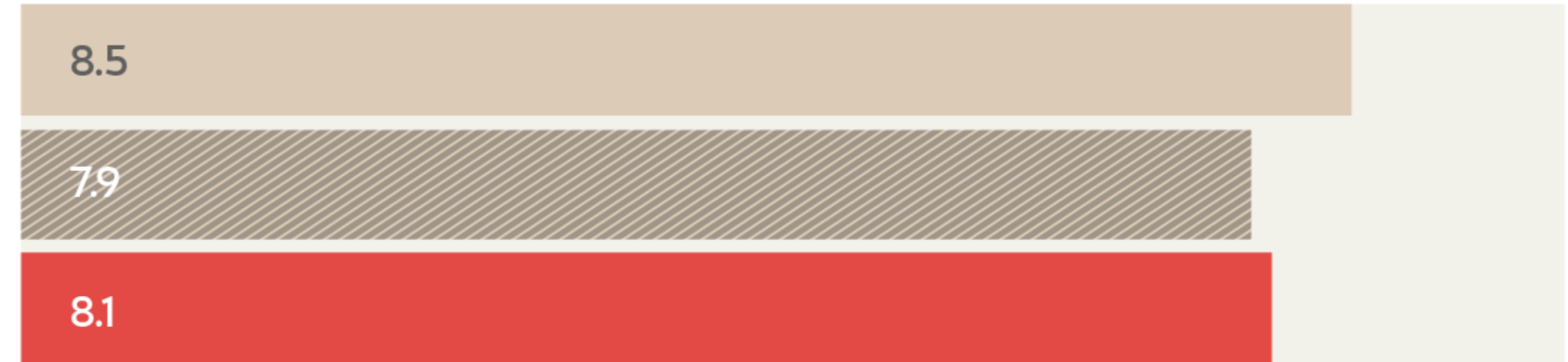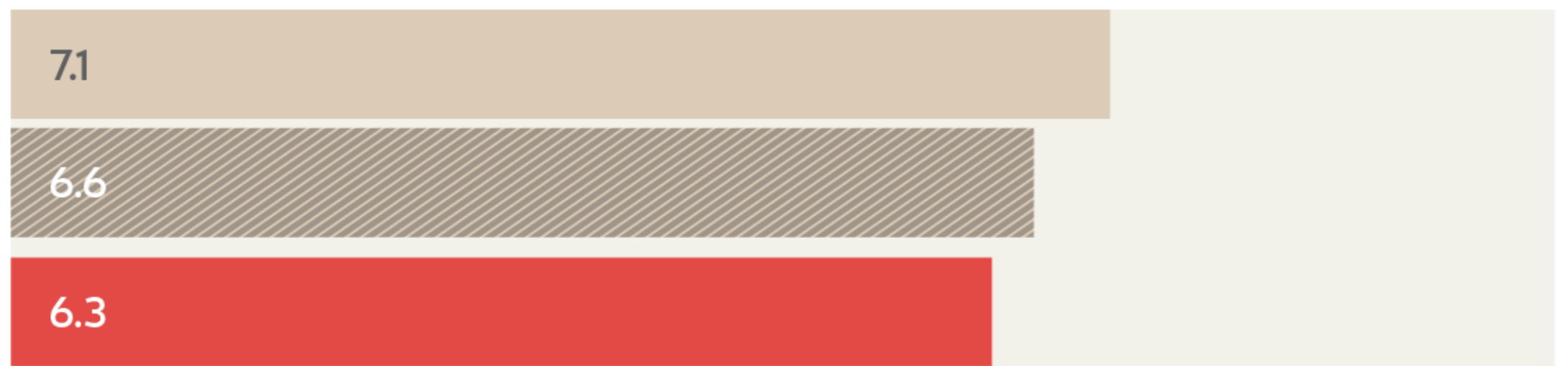
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 10

⬤ Motivation level at the onset of the crisis   ⬤ Current motivation level   ⬤ Level of public trust

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Figure 2.2: Motivation and Public Trust: By Seniority

2011 & after

Police
- 7.5
- 6.4
- 6.6

District Administration
- 8.6
- 7.9
- 8.2

Food and Civil Services
- 7.1
- 6.7
- 6.4

Health
- 7.8
- 7.3
- 7.4

Pre 2011

Police
- 7.5
- 6.8
- 6.2

District Administration
- 8.3
- 8.0
- 7.8

Food and Civil Services
- 7.0
- 6.7
- 6.2

Health
- 7.7
- 7.3
- 7.2

Former

Police
- 6.8
- 7.0
- 5.3

District Administration
- 7.8
- 8.2
- 7.5

Food and Civil Services
- 6.3
- 6.5
- 5.2

Health
- 7.7
- 7.8
- 7.0

On a scale of 10

- Motivation level at the onset of the crisis
- Current motivation level
- Level of public trust

Figure 2.3: Motivation and Public Trust: By SDG Tier

Aspirant States

Police
- 7.2 (Motivation level at the onset of the crisis)
- 6.5 (Current motivation level)
- 6.2 (Level of public trust)

District Administration
- 8.6
- 8.1
- 8.2

Food and Civil Services
- 7.3
- 7.1
- 6.3

Health
- 7.7
- 7.3
- 6.9

Performer States

Police
- 7.5
- 6.5
- 6.4

District Administration
- 8.5
- 7.8
- 8.0

Food and Civil Services
- 7.0
- 6.5
- 6.3

Health
- 7.7
- 7.2
- 7.3

Frontrunner States

Police
- 7.9
- 6.7
- 6.7

District Administration
- 8.6
- 7.9
- 8.3

Food and Civil Services
- 7.1
- 6.9
- 6.8

Health
- 8.4
- 7.5
- 8.1

On a scale of 10

○ Motivation level at the onset of the crisis   ◐ Current motivation level   ● Level of public trust

Figure 3.1: Health systems preparedness during the Lockdown

A key objective of the lockdown was to improve health system preparedness in anticipation of a large number of infections. Which of these statements best reflects health system preparedness post lockdown?

Health system preparedness remained the same

Health system preparedness increased only marginally

Health system preparedness increased reasonably

Health system preparedness increased substantially

1.6%

27.6%

51.1%

19.7%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60

Percentage

A key objective of the lockdown was to improve health system preparedness in anticipation of a large number of infections. Which of these statements best reflects health system preparedness post lockdown?

2011 & after
- Health system preparedness remained the same: 1.4%
- Health system preparedness increased only marginally: 26.3%
- Health system preparedness increased reasonably: 55.2%
- Health system preparedness increased substantially: 17.1%

Pre 2011
- Health system preparedness remained the same: 2.2%
- Health system preparedness increased only marginally: 32.8%
- Health system preparedness increased reasonably: 41.7%
- Health system preparedness increased substantially: 23.3%

Former
- Health system preparedness remained the same: 6.8%
- Health system preparedness increased only marginally: 45.5%
- Health system preparedness increased reasonably: 34.1%
- Health system preparedness increased substantially: 13.6%

Percentage

Legend:
- Health system preparedness remained the same
- Health system preparedness increased only marginally
- Health system preparedness increased reasonably
- Health system preparedness increased substantially

Figure 3.3: Health systems preparedness during the Lockdown: by SDG Tier

A key objective of the lockdown was to improve health system preparedness in anticipation of a large number of infections. Which of these statements best reflects health system preparedness post lockdown?

Health system preparedness remained the same

Health system preparedness increased only marginally

Health system preparedness increased reasonably

Health system preparedness increased substantially

Aspirant States
- 2.5%
- 28.4%
- 48.8%
- 20.3%

Performer States
- 1.4%
- 28.2%
- 51.4%
- 19.0%

Frontrunner States
- 1.3%
- 22.6%
- 53.4%
- 22.7%

Percentage
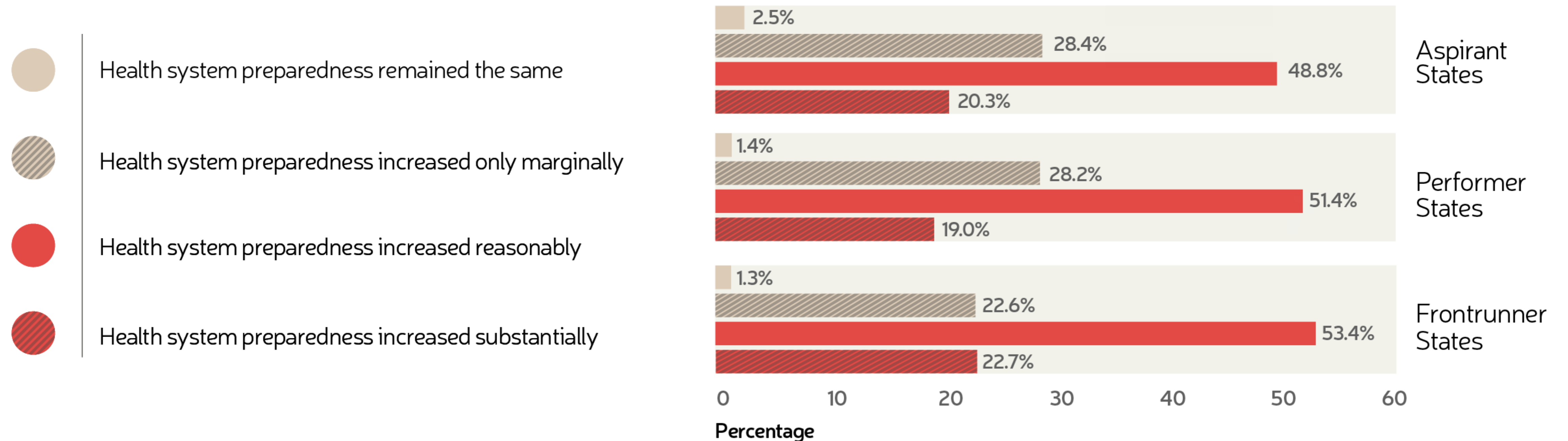
Figure 4.1: Enhanced performance during crises

It is often said that the Indian government performs particularly well in one off situations or emergencies, as compared to routine functions. With reference to COVID-19, rank the following factors on their relative contribution to the higher level of civil service performance observed during this crisis.

- ● Ability to deploy all available resources (and garner additional resources) to a single cause for the limited time

- ● Greater autonomy in action and decision making

- ● Clarity of objectives and desired outcomes

- ● Reduced interference from political and public interest groups
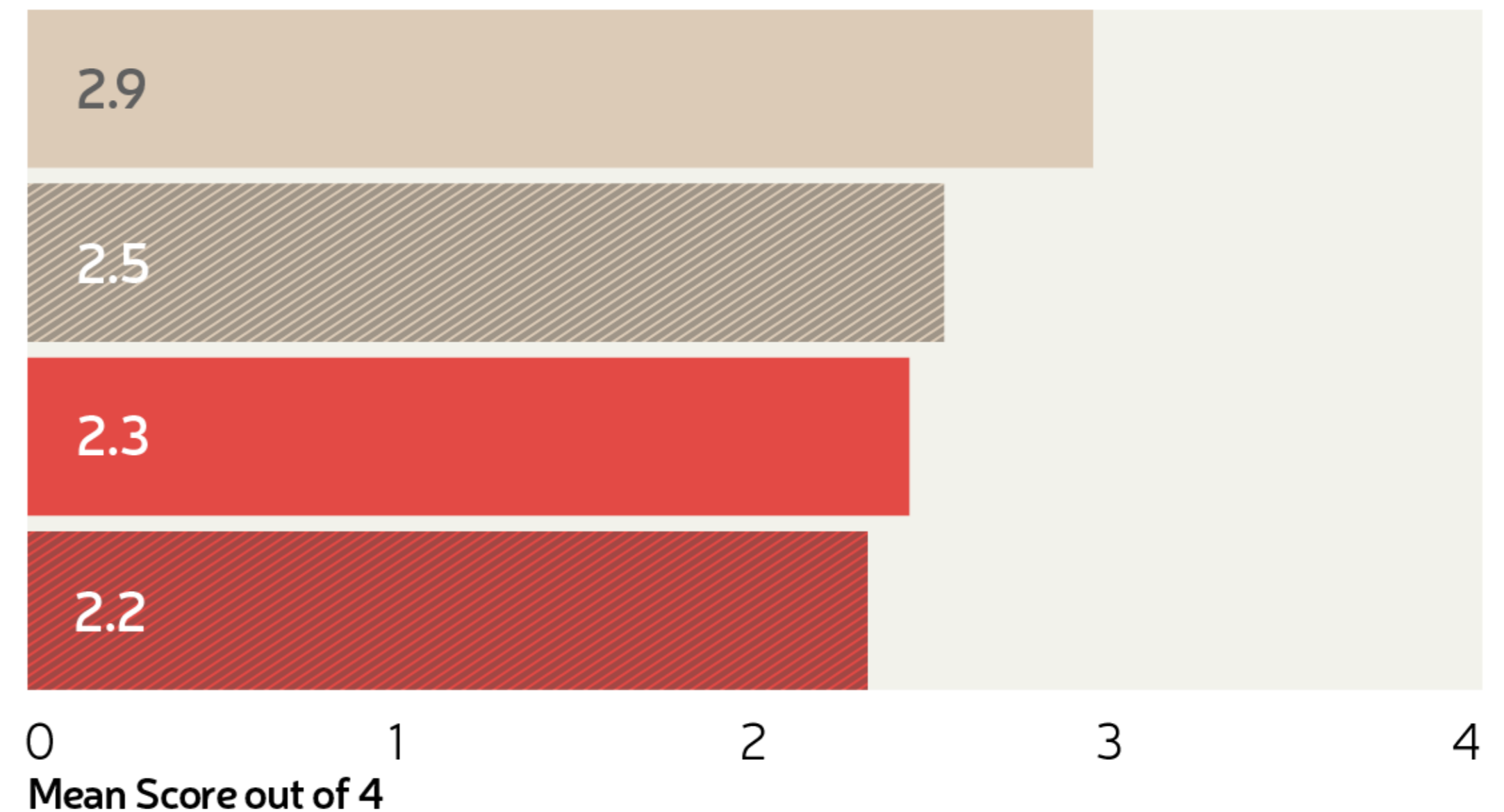
Mean Score out of 4

Note: Ranks have been converted to weighted mean scores. Rank 1 gets a score of 4, rank 2 gets a score of 3, rank 3 gets a score of 2 and rank 4 gets a score of 1. The highest score out of 4 therefore corresponds to the category which received the highest overall rank.

It is often said that the Indian government performs particularly well in one off situations or emergencies, as compared to routine functions. With reference to COVID-19, rank the following factors on their relative contribution to the higher level of civil service performance observed during this crisis.

Ability to deploy all available resources (and garner additional resources) to a single cause for the limited time

Greater autonomy in action and decision making

Clarity of objectives and desired outcomes

Reduced interference from political and public interest groups

2011 & after: 2.9, 2.5, 2.3, 2.2

Pre 2011: 2.8, 2.5, 2.4, 2.3

Former: 2.7, 2.4, 2.4, 2.4

Mean Score out of 4

It is often said that the Indian government performs particularly well in one off situations or emergencies, as compared to routine functions. With reference to COVID-19, rank the following factors on their relative contribution to the higher level of civil service performance observed during this crisis.

Ability to deploy all available resources (and garner additional resources) to a single cause for the limited time

Greater autonomy in action and decision making

Clarity of objectives and desired outcomes

Reduced interference from political and public interest groups

Aspirant States: 2.8, 2.8, 2.4, 2.0

Performer States: 2.9, 2.5, 2.3, 2.3

Frontrunner states: 3.2, 2.4, 2.2, 2.2

Mean Score out of 4

Figure 5.1: State autonomy in policy response

There is some variation in policy responses across states as seen in the Covid-19 crisis. Which of these two statements would you agree with more?

States must have the autonomy to formulate a response to the crisis keeping in view their need and capacity.

83.0%

In times of crisis, all States should follow a common set of procedures as laid down by the Centre

17.0%

0 20 40 60 80 100

Percentage
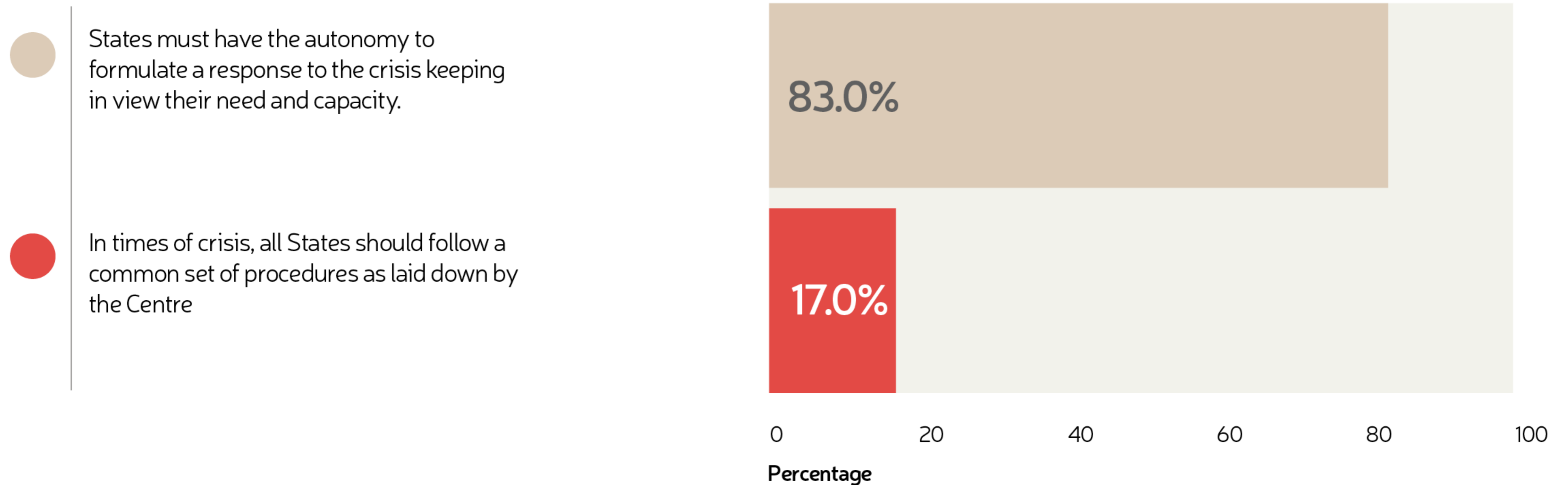
Figure 5.2: State autonomy in policy response: by Seniority

There is some variation in policy responses across states as seen in the Covid-19 crisis. Which of these two statements would you agree with more?

States must have the autonomy to formulate a response to the crisis keeping in view their need and capacity.

In times of crisis, all States should follow a common set of procedures as laid down by the Centre

2011 & after — 83.0% / 17.0%

Pre 2011 — 81.0% / 19.0%

Former — 89.0% / 11.0%

Percentage
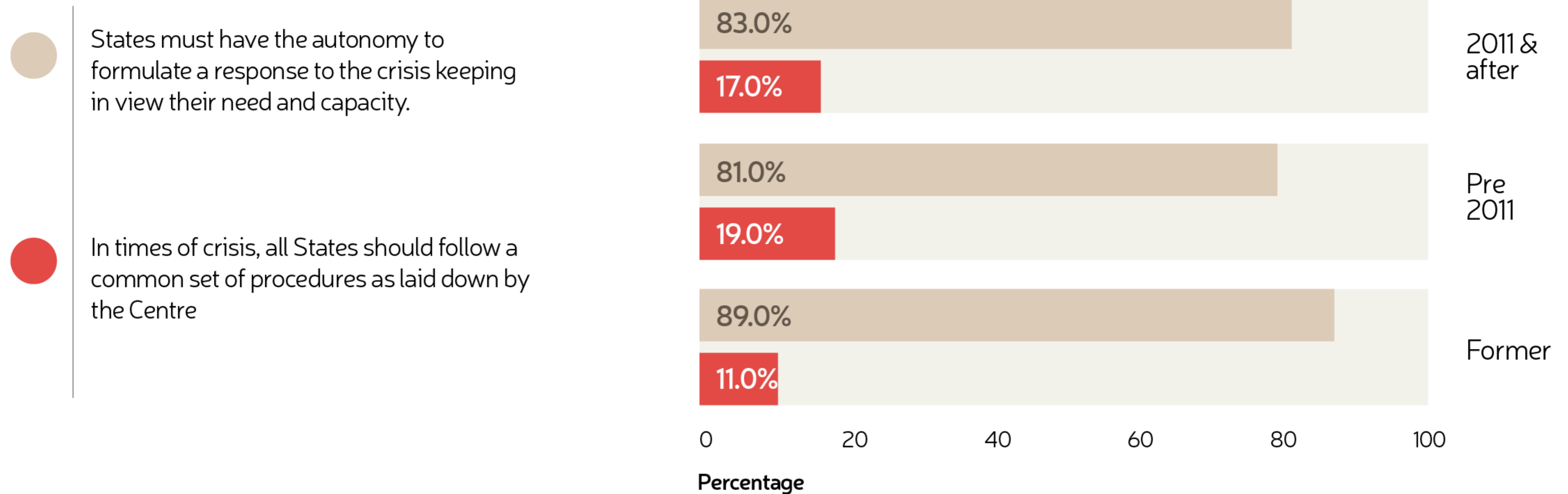
Figure 5.3: State autonomy in policy response: by SDG Tier

There is some variation in policy responses across states as seen in the Covid-19 crisis. Which of these two statements would you agree with more?

States must have the autonomy to formulate a response to the crisis keeping in view their need and capacity.

In times of crisis, all States should follow a common set of procedures as laid down by the Centre

86.0%
14.0%
Aspirant States

81.0%
19.0%
Performer States

85.0%
15.0%
Frontrunner States

Percentage
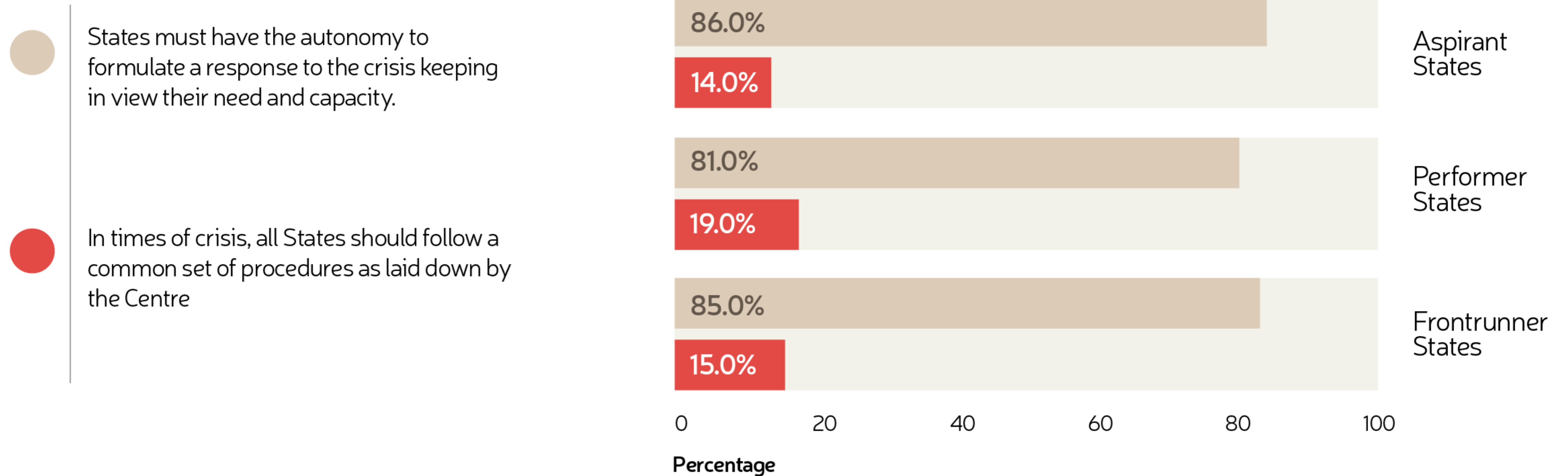
Figure 6.1: Rule adherence and innovation in a crisis

During a national crisis, which approach is likely to win approval from superiors?

Focusing on the objective being pursued and interpreting orders innovatively in order to achieve the objective.

Strictly following procedures and implementing directions / orders received from above.

73.0%

27.0%

0   20   40   60   80   100

Percentage
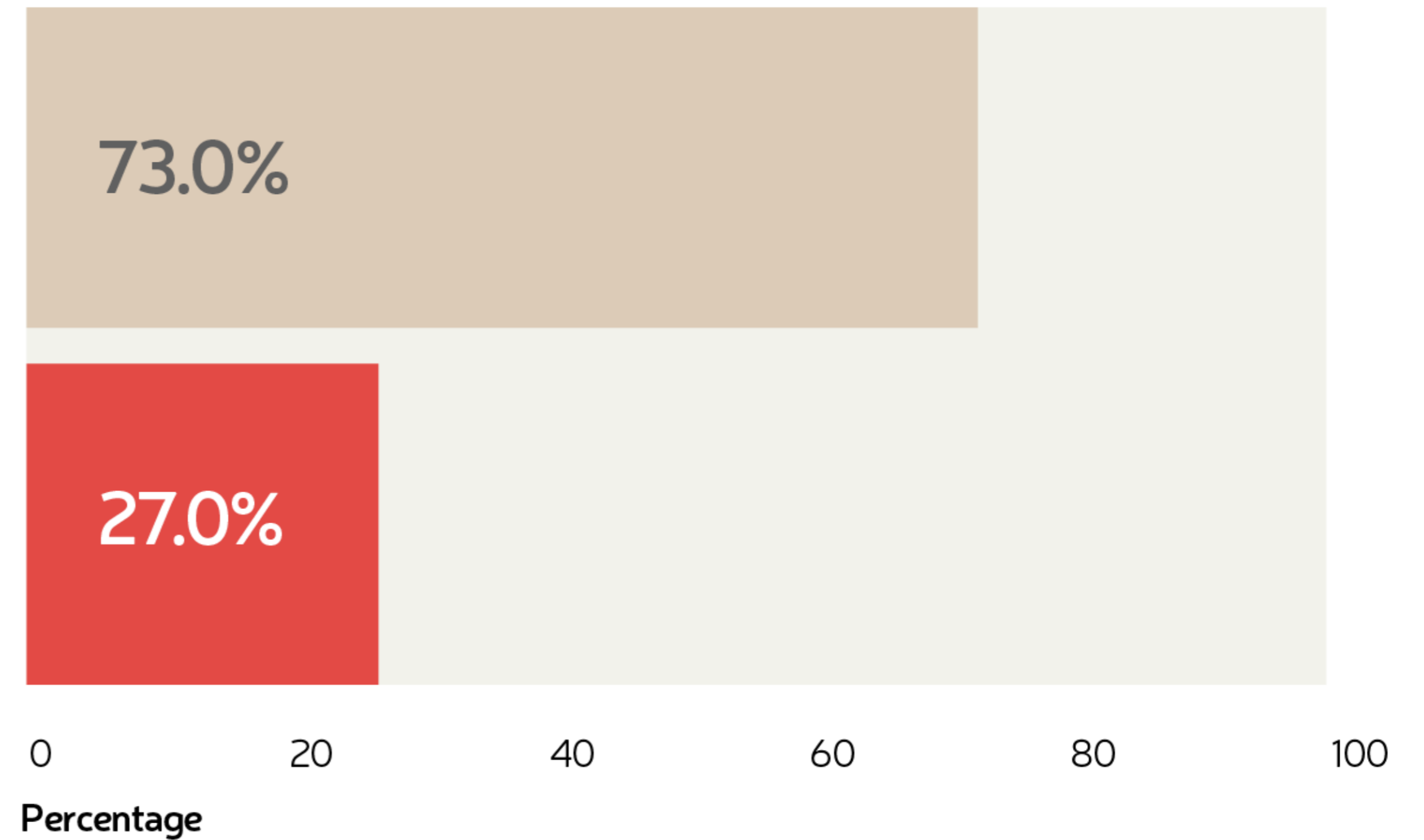
Figure 6.2: Rule adherence and innovation in a crisis: by Seniority

During a national crisis, which approach is likely to win approval from superiors?

Focusing on the objective being pursued and interpreting orders innovatively in order to achieve the objective.

Strictly following procedures and implementing directions / orders received from above.

2011 & after
73.0%
27.0%

Pre 2011
71.0%
29.0%

Former
77.0%
23.0%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80

Percentage
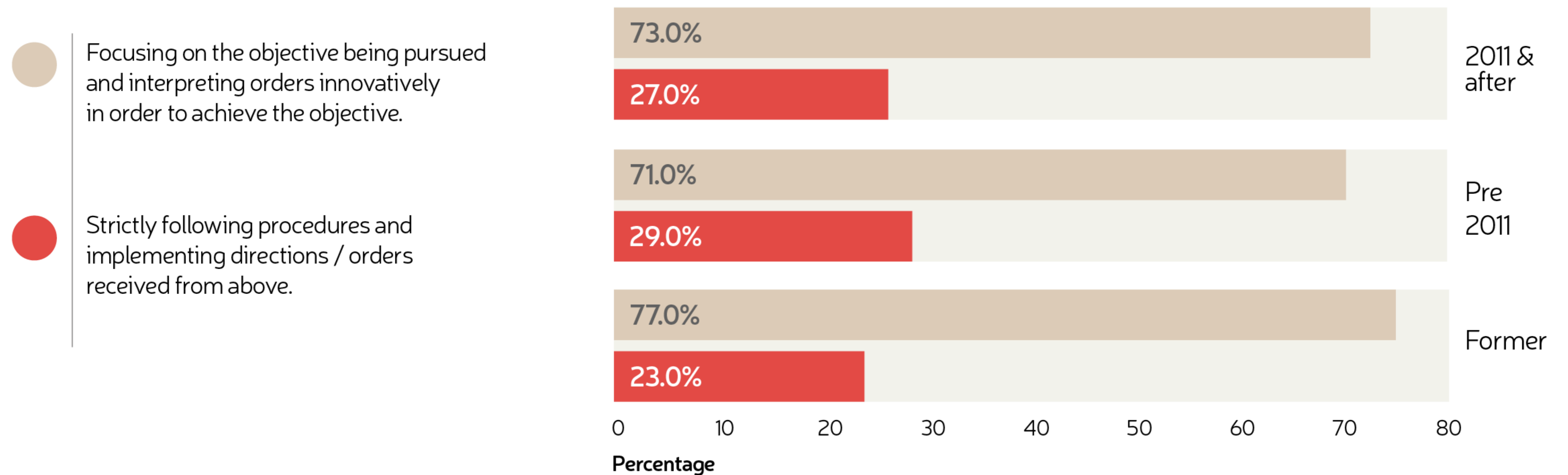
Figure 6.3: Rule adherence and innovation in a crisis: by SDG Tier

During a national crisis, which approach is likely to win approval from superiors?
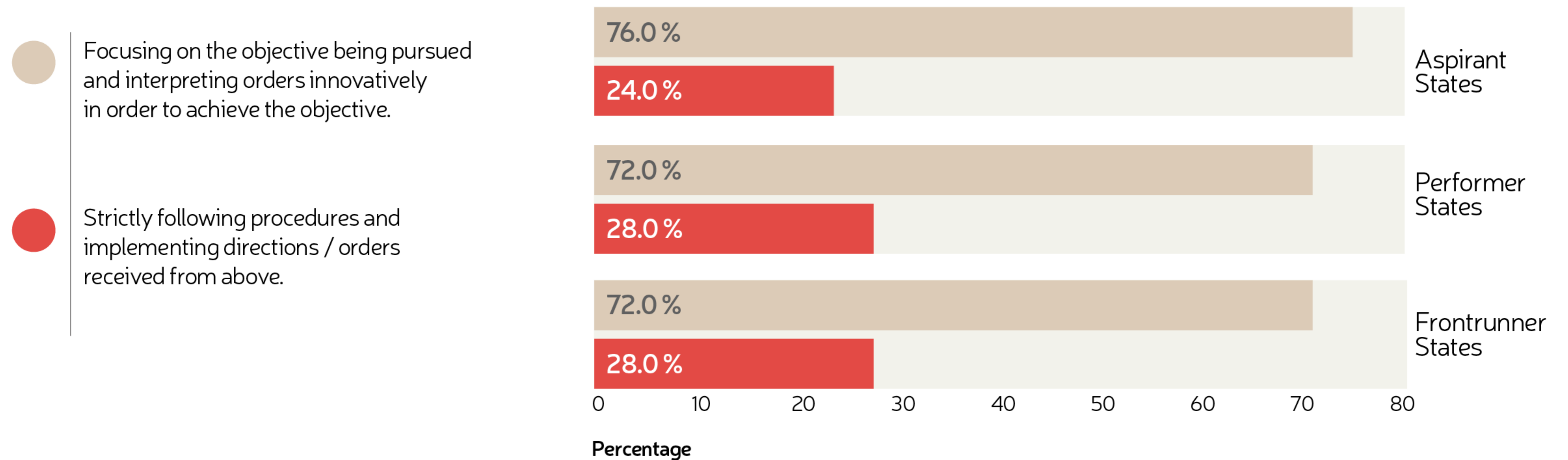
Focusing on the objective being pursued and interpreting orders innovatively in order to achieve the objective.

Strictly following procedures and implementing directions / orders received from above.

	Focusing	Strictly following
Aspirant States	76.0 %	24.0 %
Performer States	72.0 %	28.0 %
Frontrunner States	72.0 %	28.0 %

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80

Percentage

In an emergency like the Covid-19 crisis, government servants are at the forefront in the response. Which of the following qualities are most valued in government servants during a time of crisis? Rank in descending order from the most valued to the least valued.

Quality	Mean Score
Hard work	4.3
Intelligence	3.6
Honesty	2.7
Obedience	2.6
High level connections	1.8

Mean Score out of 5

Note: Ranks have been converted to weighted mean scores. Rank 1 gets a score of 5, rank 2 gets a score of 4, rank 3 gets a score of 3, rank 4 gets a score of 2 and rank 5 gets a score of 1. The highest score out of 5 therefore corresponds to the category which received the highest overall rank.

Figure 7.2: Qualities most valued in a crisis: by Seniority

In an emergency like the Covid-19 crisis, government servants are at the forefront in the response. Which of the following qualities are most valued in government servants during a time of crisis? Rank in descending order from the most valued to the least valued.

Legend:
- Hard work
- Intelligence
- Honesty
- Obedience
- High level connections

2011 & after
- Hard work: 4.3
- Intelligence: 3.5
- Honesty: 2.8
- Obedience: 2.6
- High level connections: 1.8

Pre 2011
- Hard work: 4.4
- Intelligence: 3.6
- Honesty: 2.8
- Obedience: 2.6
- High level connections: 1.6

Former
- Hard work: 4.3
- Intelligence: 3.5
- Honesty: 3.0
- Obedience: 2.7
- High level connections: 1.4

Mean Score out of 5
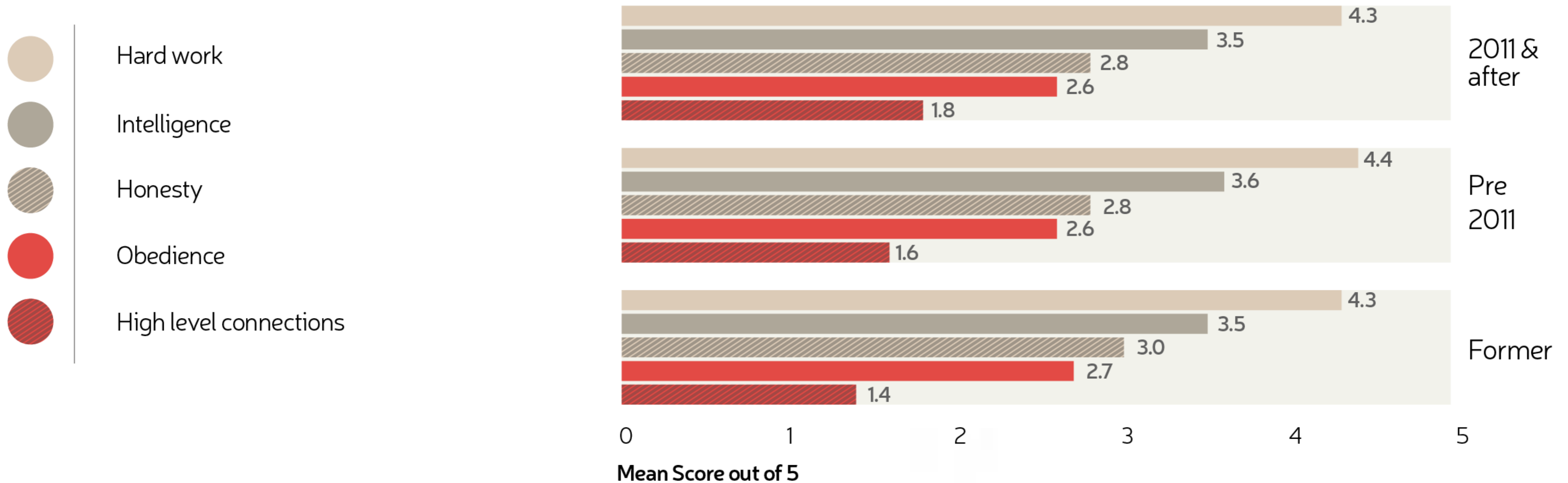
Figure 7.3: Qualities most valued in a crisis: by SDG Tier

In an emergency like the Covid-19 crisis, government servants are at the forefront in the response. Which of the following qualities are most valued in government servants during a time of crisis? Rank in descending order from the most valued to the least valued.

Legend:
- Hard work
- Intelligence
- Honesty
- Obedience
- High level connections

Aspirant States
- Hard work: 4.4
- Intelligence: 3.4
- Honesty: 2.7
- Obedience: 2.6
- High level connections: 1.8

Performer States
- Hard work: 4.3
- Intelligence: 3.6
- Honesty: 2.7
- Obedience: 2.6
- High level connections: 1.8

Frontrunner States
- Hard work: 4.5
- Intelligence: 3.6
- Honesty: 2.8
- Obedience: 2.5
- High level connections: 1.6

Mean Score out of 5
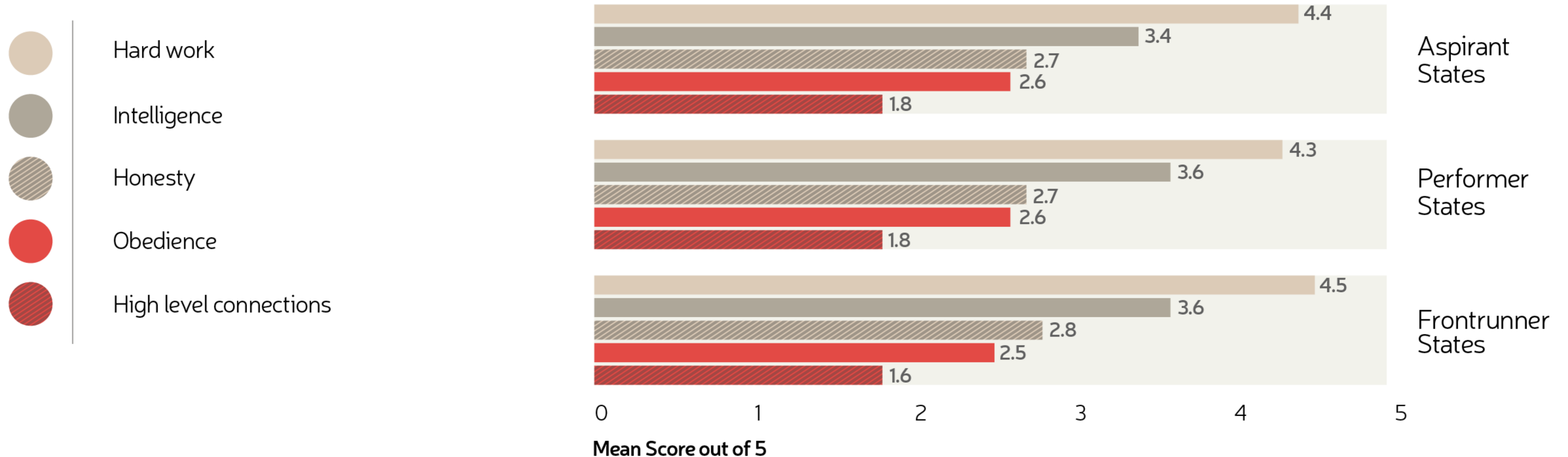
Figure 8.1: Laws, rules, and compliance

Laws and rules are part of everyday governance but acquire greater importance in an emergency. Choose the option that you feel best reflects the scenario witnessed during the Covid-19 crisis.

- Our laws/rules need to be more stringent
- Our laws/rules have little impact because they do not affect the influential.
- We have too many laws/rules and could do with less.
- We have enough laws / rules but need better compliance by all.

2.0%

5.7%

13.7%

78.6%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80

Percentage
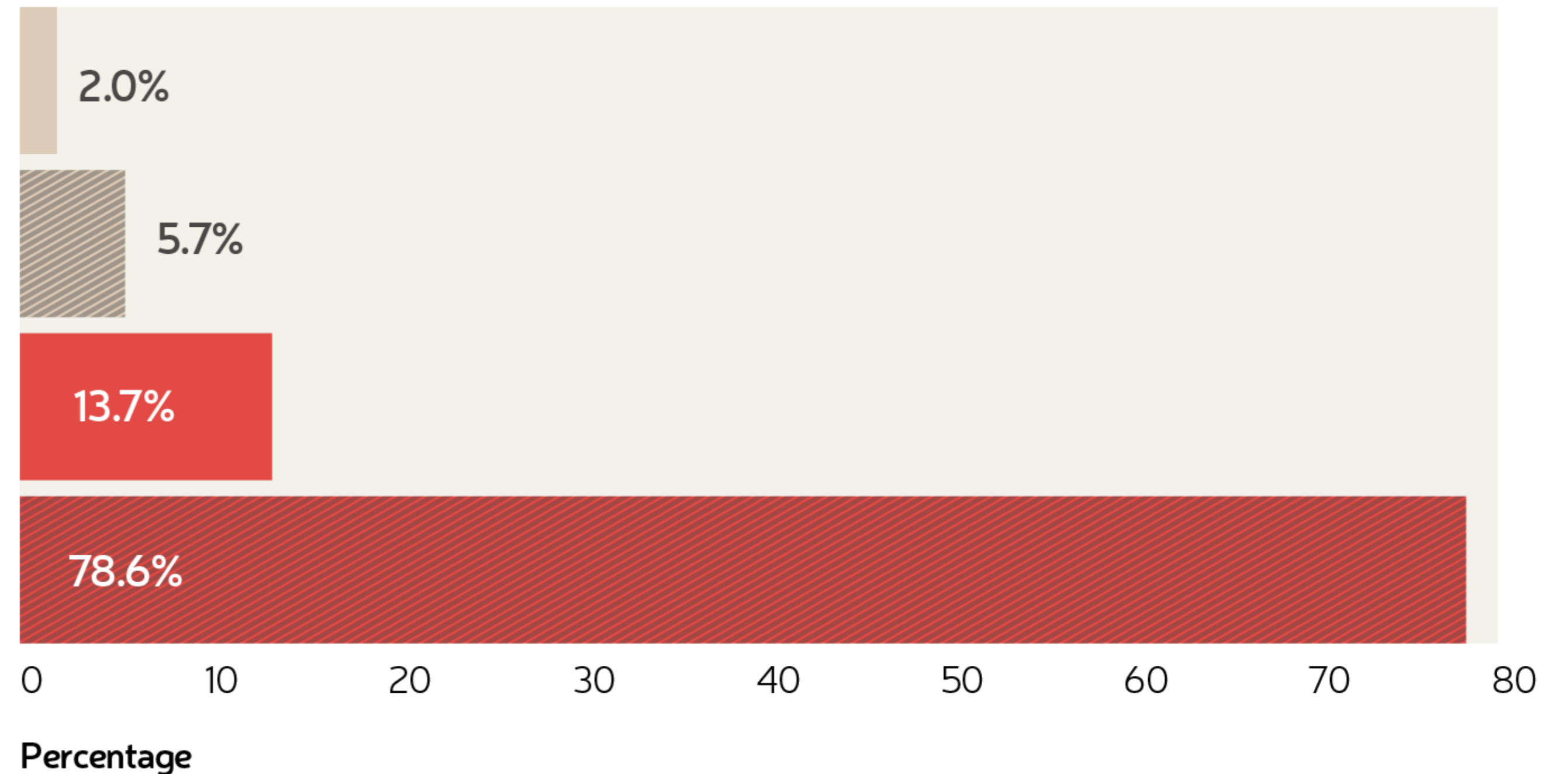
Figure 8.2: Laws, rules, and compliance: by Seniority

Laws and rules are part of everyday governance but acquire greater importance in an emergency. Choose the option that you feel best reflects the scenario witnessed during the COVID-19 crisis.

Our laws/rules need to be more stringent

Our laws/rules have little impact because they do not affect the influential.

We have too many laws/rules and could do with less.

We have enough laws / rules but need better compliance by all.

2011 & after
- 2.6%
- 4.9%
- 13.3%
- 79.2%

Pre 2011
- 1.7%
- 7.8%
- 12.8%
- 77.8%

Former
- 2.3%
- 4.5%
- 18.2%
- 75.0%

0   20   40   60   80

Percentage

Laws and rules are part of everyday governance but acquire greater importance in an emergency. Choose the option that you feel best reflects the scenario witnessed during the COVID-19 crisis.

Our laws/rules need to be more stringent

Our laws/rules have little impact because they do not affect the influential.

We have too many laws/rules and could do with less.

We have enough laws / rules but need better compliance by all.

Aspirant States
- 1.0%
- 1.5%
- 13.0%
- 84.5%

Performer States
- 2.2%
- 6.1%
- 13.0%
- 78.7%

Frontrunner States
- 2.6%
- 9.7%
- 18.7%
- 69.0%

0   20   40   60   80

Percentage
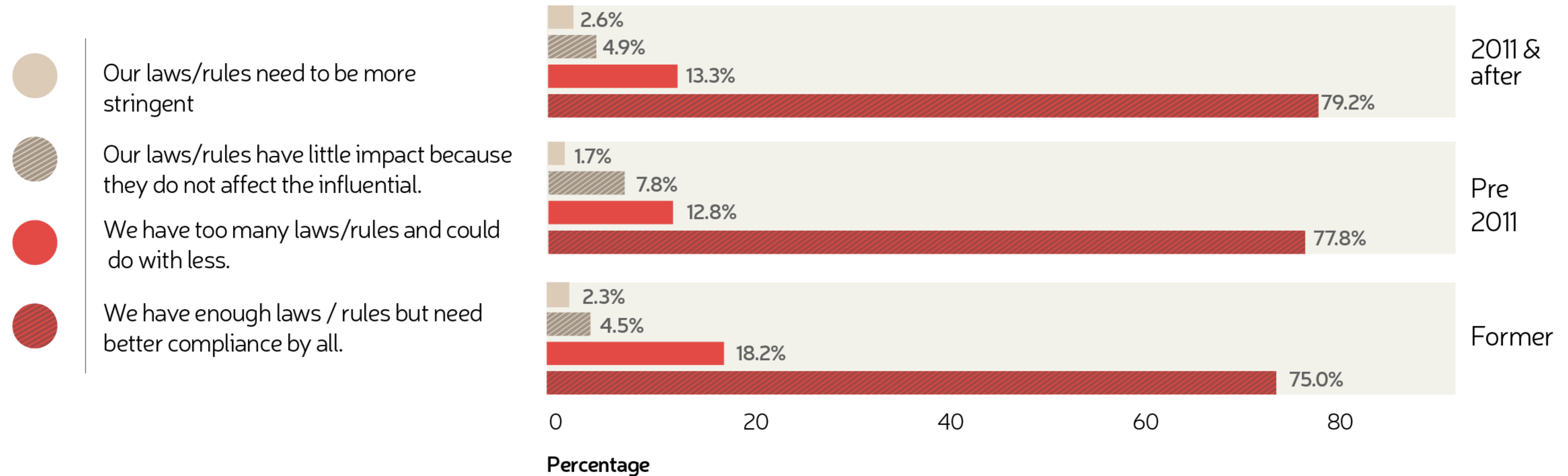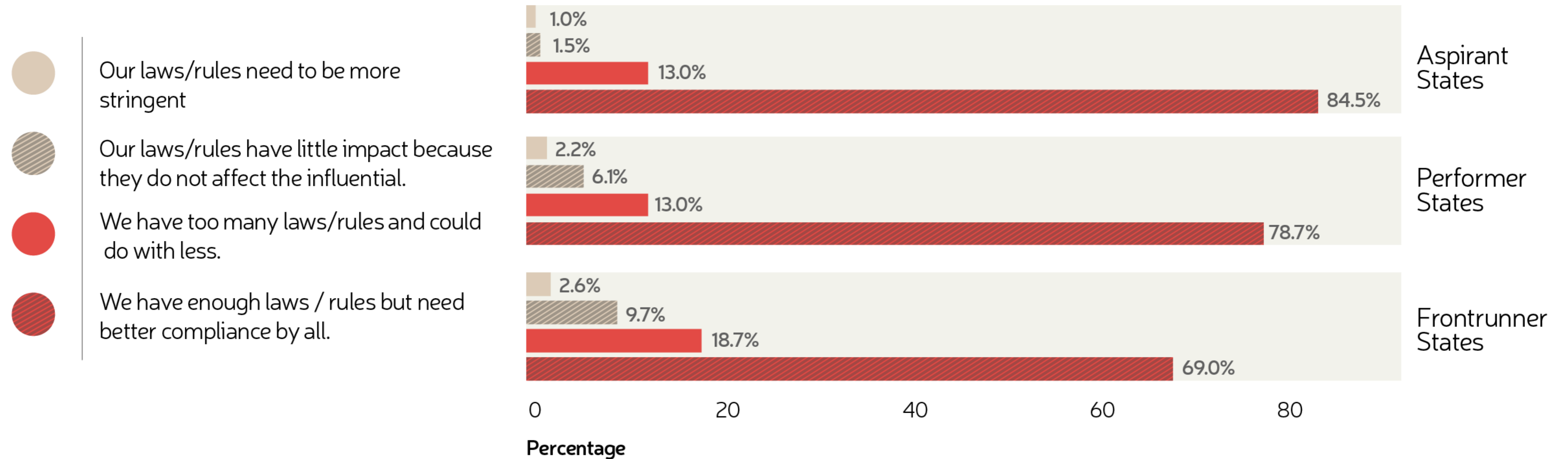
Figure 9.1: Travel permits during the lockdown

During lockdown, some people with influence were given travel permits while travel restrictions were in place. While all of the following reasons may have had a role in the decision of granting authorities, in your opinion, which one of them would be most prominent?

Permitting anybody to bypass travel restrictions is unacceptable as it causes risk to the public, but denial would be considered an act of pettiness.

Permitting anybody to bypass travel restrictions is unacceptable as it causes risk to the public, but denial could cause adverse consequences for the granting authority.

There are very few such permits granted so risk to the public is negligible.

The persons asking for such permits are unlikely to pose a risk of spreading Covid-19.

20.0%

36.8%

35.1%

8.2%

Percentage

During lockdown, some people with influence were given travel permits while travel restrictions were in place. While all of the following reasons may have had a role in the decision of granting authorities, in your opinion, which one of them would be most prominent?

Permitting anybody to bypass travel restrictions is unacceptable as it causes risk to the public, but denial would be considered an act of pettiness.

Permitting anybody to bypass travel restrictions is unacceptable as it causes risk to the public, but denial could cause adverse consequences for the granting authority.

There are very few such permits granted so risk to the public is negligible.

The persons asking for such permits are unlikely to pose a risk of spreading Covid-19.

2011 & after
22.0%
38.7%
32.7%
6.6%

Pre 2011
15.0%
35.0%
37.8%
12.2%

Former
13.6%
43.2%
38.6%
4.5%

0   10   20   30   40   50

Percentage

During lockdown, some people with influence were given travel permits while travel restrictions were in place. While all of the following reasons may have had a role in the decision of granting authorities, in your opinion, which one of them would be most prominent?

Permitting anybody to bypass travel restrictions is unacceptable as it causes risk to the public, but denial would be considered an act of pettiness.

Permitting anybody to bypass travel restrictions is unacceptable as it causes risk to the public, but denial could cause adverse consequences for the granting authority.

There are very few such permits granted so risk to the public is negligible.

The persons asking for such permits are unlikely to pose a risk of spreading Covid-19.

Aspirant States
- 21.1%
- 33.7%
- 34.4%
- 10.8%

Performer States
- 20.0%
- 36.8%
- 36.2%
- 7.0%

Frontrunner States
- 19.0%
- 41.1%
- 28.4%
- 11.5%

Percentage

Figure 10.1: Extent of communication with the public in a crisis

IAS officers are often engaged in roles that involve considerable public interaction. How active a role should they play in communicating with the public?

IAS officers should function anonymously and leave it to the political executive and official public relations machinery to engage in communication with the public and media.

IAS officers should be circumspect and not very visible in their interaction with the public and media.

IAS officers should ordinarily be circumspect but in a situation like the current public emergency, they should play an active role in communicating with the public and media.

IAS officers are expected to and should play an active role in communicating with the public and media at all times.

14.0%

2.1%

63.4%

20.5%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80

Percentage

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 10.2: Extent of communication with the public in a crisis: by Seniority

IAS officers are often engaged in roles that involve considerable public interaction. How active a role should they play in communicating with the public?

Legend:
- IAS officers should function anonymously and leave it to the political executive and official public relations machinery to engage in communication with the public and media.
- IAS officers should be circumspect and not very visible in their interaction with the public and media.
- IAS officers should ordinarily be circumspect but in a situation like the current public emergency, they should play an active role in communicating with the public and media.
- IAS officers are expected to and should play an active role in communicating with the public and media at all times.

2011 & after:
- 11.0%
- 1.0%
- 65.0%
- 23.0%

Pre 2011:
- 18.9%
- 4.4%
- 63.3%
- 13.3%

Former:
- 13.6%
- 0.0%
- 68.2%
- 18.2%

Percentage

IAS officers are often engaged in roles that involve considerable public interaction. How active a role should they play in communicating with the public?

Legend:

- IAS officers should function anonymously and leave it to the political executive and official public relations machinery to engage in communication with the public and media.
- IAS officers should be circumspect and not very visible in their interaction with the public and media.
- IAS officers should ordinarily be circumspect but in a situation like the current public emergency, they should play an active role in communicating with the public and media.
- IAS officers are expected to and should play an active role in communicating with the public and media at all times.

Aspirant States:
- 8.3%
- 1.0%
- 67.1%
- 23.6%

Performer States:
- 13.6%
- 2.7%
- 62.5%
- 21.1%

Frontrunner States:
- 24.0 %
- 0.0 %
- 63.0%
- 12.0 %

Percentage

Figure 11.1: Modes of communication with the public in a crisis

Effective communication with the public is important during a pandemic. Rank the following modes of communication, from the most effective to least effective , during the current Covid-19 crisis.

Public service announcements on TV and radio

Frontline government workers relaying messages directly to the public

Orders and guidelines issued by the government

Speeches by political leaders

3.1	
2.8	
2.2	
2.0	

0.0　　1.0　　2.0　　3.0　　4.0

Mean Score out of 4

Note: Ranks have been converted to weighted mean scores. Rank 1 gets a score of 5, rank 2 gets a score of 4, rank 3 gets a score of 3, rank 4 gets a score of 2 and rank 5 gets a score of 1.

Effective communication with the public is important during a pandemic. Rank the following modes of communication, from the most effective to least effective , during the current Covid-19 crisis.

Public service announcements on TV and radio

Frontline government workers relaying messages directly to the public

Orders and guidelines issued by the government

Speeches by political leaders

2011 & after
3.0
2.9
2.1
2.0

Pre 2011
3.1
2.6
2.3
2.0

Former
3.0
2.9
2.2
1.9

0.0   0.5   1.0   1.5   2.0   2.5   3.0   3.5

Mean Score out of 4

Effective communication with the public is important during a pandemic. Rank the following modes of communication, from the most effective to least effective , during the current Covid-19 crisis.

Legend:
- Public service announcements on TV and radio
- Frontline government workers relaying messages directly to the public
- Orders and guidelines issued by the government
- Speeches by political leaders

Aspirant States
- 3.0
- 2.7
- 2.2
- 2.1

Performer States
- 3.1
- 2.8
- 2.2
- 2.0

Frontrunner States
- 3.1
- 2.8
- 2.1
- 2.0

Mean Score out of 4

Figure 12.1: Communication versus penalties in crisis management

The government has followed a lockdown strategy to tackle immediate spread of Covid-19. But we know that this is likely to be a prolonged crisis and the public will experience extreme hardship. In this context, which of these two approaches is most important in ensuring long term success? Select one option.

● Mounting an effective and consistent communication campaign to secure people's understanding and cooperation in the response required of them.

● Strict enforcement of penal measures to curb people's inherent tendency to be undisciplined.

85.0%

15.0%

0   20   40   60   80   100

Percentage

The government has followed a lockdown strategy to tackle immediate spread of Covid-19. But we know that this is likely to be a prolonged crisis and the public will experience extreme hardship. In this context, which of these two approaches is most important in ensuring long term success? Select one option.

Mounting an effective and consistent communication campaign to secure people's understanding and cooperation in the response required of them.

Strict enforcement of penal measures to curb people's inherent tendency to be undisciplined.

83.0% — 2011 & after
17.0%

90.0% — Pre 2011
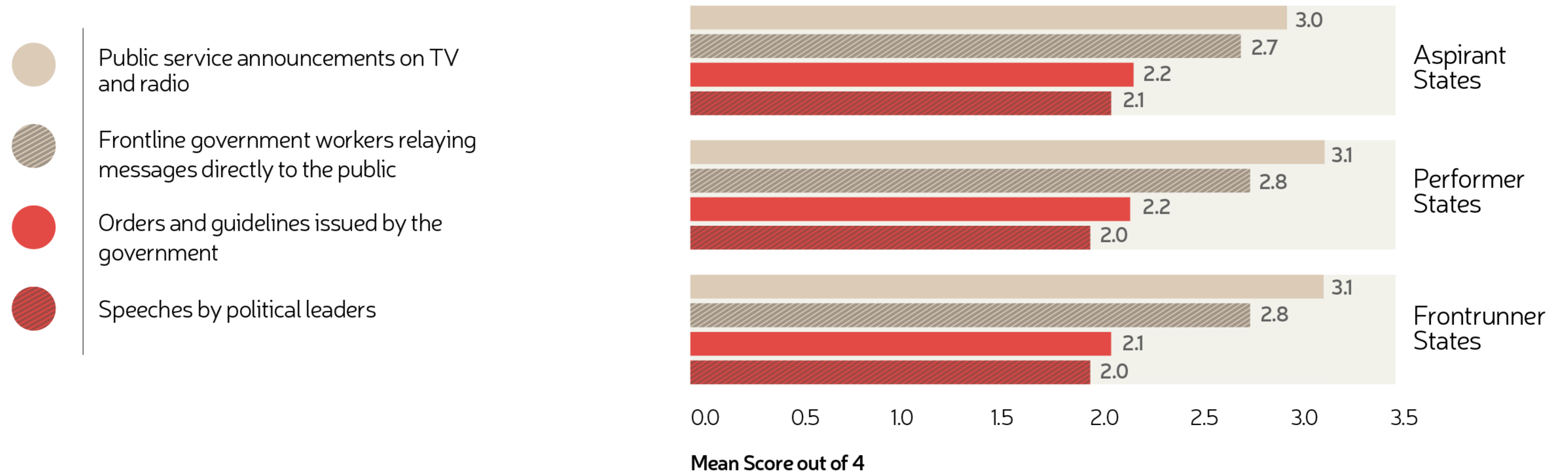10.0%

95.0% — Former
5.0%

Percentage

Figure 12.3: Communication versus penalties in crisis management: by SDG Tier

The government has followed a lockdown strategy to tackle immediate spread of Covid-19. But we know that this is likely to be a prolonged crisis and the public will experience extreme hardship. In this context, which of these two approaches is most important in ensuring long term success? Select one option.
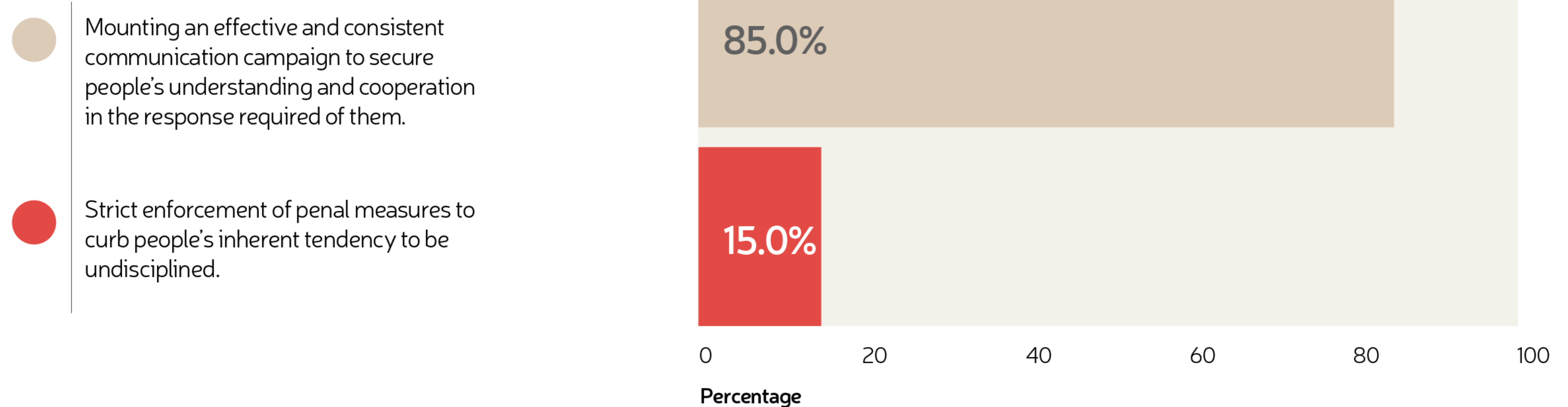
Mounting an effective and consistent communication campaign to secure people's understanding and cooperation in the response required of them.

Strict enforcement of penal measures to curb people's inherent tendency to be undisciplined.

Aspirant States
- 85.0%
- 15.0%

Performer States
- 84.0%
- 16.0%

Frontrunner States
- 90.0%
- 10.0%

Percentage
0   20   40   60   80   100
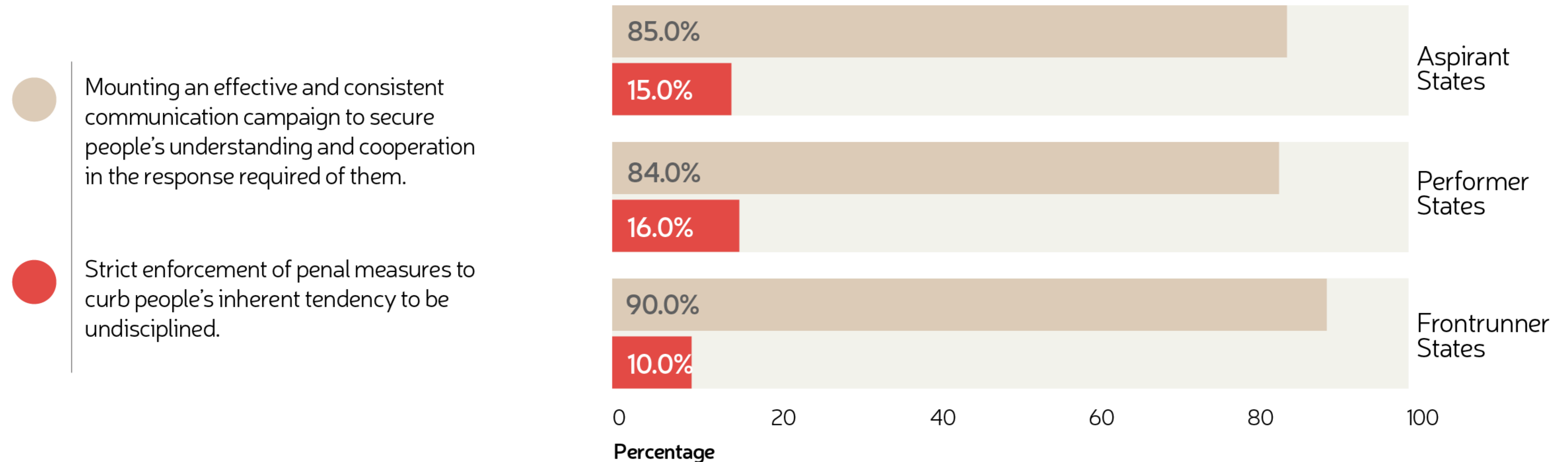
Public and Pandemic: Trade-offs and Tensions

State Capacity Initiative | Centre for Policy Research

Key Findings

In contrast to the general clarity and consistency of the responses presented in the previous section, the responses and reflections of IAS officers to the questions explored in this section bring to the surface **significant diversity of opinion and disagreement within the civil services.** They also illuminate the **tensions between ideals and experience**, arising from **different degrees of trust in and responsibility** attributed to the state as against the public, for critical failures in pandemic management.

First, **on the critical initial trade-off between prioritising health by taking urgent and extreme action** (in the case of Covid-19, the decision to impose a strict national lockdown) versus **taking the time to plan more comprehensive mitigation measures at the outset**, even in the face of a grave health crisis, **serving IAS officers were divided down the middle.** While **52.3 percent** reflected on the experience thus far to conclude

that it would be **worthwhile to take the time needed to plan and prepare, 47.7 percent felt** that given the unpredictability of the situation and all possible impacts, **the right course of action was to take urgent and decisive action to prioritise health.**

On this question, however, **the disaggregated analysis reveals significant differences.** When compared to currently serving officers (52.3 percent), **a much higher number of former civil servants (68 percent) considered taking the time to plan mitigation measures as the more appropriate approach** at the outset of the Covid-19 crisis. **Similarly, IAS officers from front runner state cadres also strongly expressed a preference for more comprehensive planning (58 percent) than those from cadres of aspirant (53.3 percent) or performer states (51 percent).**

A similar degree of tension and disagreement surfaces in the assessment of the main reasons for the lockdown's 'success', to the extent that it may be considered as having met its objectives. Here, **IAS officers are split**

again on whether it is the **public's understanding and willing cooperation (54.9 percent) or the public's fear of the law (45.1 percent)** that secured the public's compliance during the national lockdown.

It is also notable that **former civil servants (68 percent) and officers from frontrunner state cadres (64 percent) give significantly greater weightage to the public's understanding and willing cooperation** than serving officers and aspirant/performing state cadres respectively. Moreover, the **difference between the two ends of the SDG ranking, i.e. between aspirant and frontrunner state cadres** is especially pronounced on this question. While 56 percent of civil servants in aspirant state cadres of Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh felt compliance was achieved largely due to the public's fear of the law, the **corresponding figure was only 36 percent in the frontrunner state cadres** of Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (and the UTs of Chandigarh and Puducherry), where IAS officers expressed much greater faith in public understanding and cooperation.

Overall, the survey reveals a tension between the values and ideals that IAS officers express (i.e. public policy and administration that relies upon and works to secure public understanding and cooperation) and the reality of the state's recourse to coercion and its substantial dependence on the public's fear of law to enforce compliance to the extent possible.

Responses to another pair of questions further reveal a critical, persistent **source of tension and ambiguity.** On the one hand, officers **acknowledge the problems of state incapacity and state failure** in the delivery of key health services, while on the other hand, display a **pronounced tendency to blame poor uptake on the public and societal norms and values** (in this case, stigma and the fear of community ostracisation).

In considering possible f**actors for the widely perceived lower virulence and spread of Covid-19 infection in India, about 20 percent overall was attributed to natural factors in India** (7.4 percent plus 13.4 percent attributed to Indians being less susceptible to the

virus), while another **20 percent was attributed to the lockdown. The remaining 60 percent was a reflection on the inability to capture the actual spread of the virus due to underreporting driven by fear of stigma (23.4 percent) and even more so, due to limited testing (36.3 percent).**

When probed to reflect on the major factors for the failure to self-report for testing, **the stress that IAS officers put on the public's own beliefs and behaviour becomes even more pronounced, as fear of ostracization by the community is considered the leading driver.** Inconvenience of quarantine options and the inaccessibility of tests come in after this. Interestingly, low public trust/perception of poor treatment in public hospitals and the fear of losing time and work are considered relatively less important by IAS officers.

It is **only among former civil servants that one observes a marked reduction in the weightage given to the fear of stigma and community ostracization in driving the** failure to self-report for testing. Former civil servants **transfer greater responsibility onto the state** by focusing on its failure to deliver on accessible testing and convenient quarantine facilities. On the other hand, IAS officers from the least resourced, **aspirant state cadres gave stigma and ostracization by the community an even higher weightage than other state cadres** in determining people's failure to self-report and test.

In contrast to the high levels of public service commitment, motivation, confidence in crisis response and resource mobilisation expressed in the first section, and the widely held conviction that effective public communication should be at the core of the state's effort to secure public cooperation to fight the pandemic, **when reflecting on the drivers of poor outcomes, IAS officers come down heavily on the public's own beliefs and practices (stigma and ostracism) while accepting the state's failure in securing their compliance by delivering accessible public services.** Moreover, while civil servants express relatively greater confidence in the state's ability to ramp up resources and

deliver on infrastructure, to an extent, their responses reveal a strong recognition that the state is **much less successful in critical aspects of public service delivery such as behaviour change communication, which become vital during the Covid-19 pandemic.** But, strikingly, **much of the responsibility for the state's incapacity is placed by officers on the public itself** and on societal values and practices. This is also **consistent with the major splits observed above:** with nearly half the officers agreeing that it is ultimately only the public's fear of law rather than their understanding and cooperation that secures compliance, and that urgent and decisive action should be favoured over planning and mitigation in a complex, multidimensional crisis.

Finally, given all the tension and ambiguity regarding public cooperation and compliance due to coercion by the state and the public's fear of law, as well as the acceptance of significant failure in the state's capacity to deliver on testing, it is striking that **an overwhelming majority of IAS officers repose a high degree of trust in the state when it comes to collecting and using citizens'**

data. **87 percent of IAS officers are of the view that on balance, there is merit in harnessing technology to capture more information about citizens. This number only shrinks significantly (to 54.5 percent) among former civil servants.**

However, it is worth noting that the **minority who are uncomfortable with the use of technology to collect citizens' data, are highly committed to the principle of protecting privacy;** 69 percent were clear that such data extraction would not be justified even during the Covid-19 crisis.

Figure 13.1: Decisive versus planned response to crises

The Covid-19 crisis has consequences for health, jobs, the economy and much more. Which of these two approaches would you consider more appropriate to tackle the crisis at the outset?

It is possible to predict the consequences of urgent action, and even in a crisis, taking the time to plan mitigation measures is worthwhile.

It is difficult to predict all possible impacts in advance. Therefore, the policy response should be urgent and decisive in prioritising health.

52.3%

47.7%

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80

Percentage
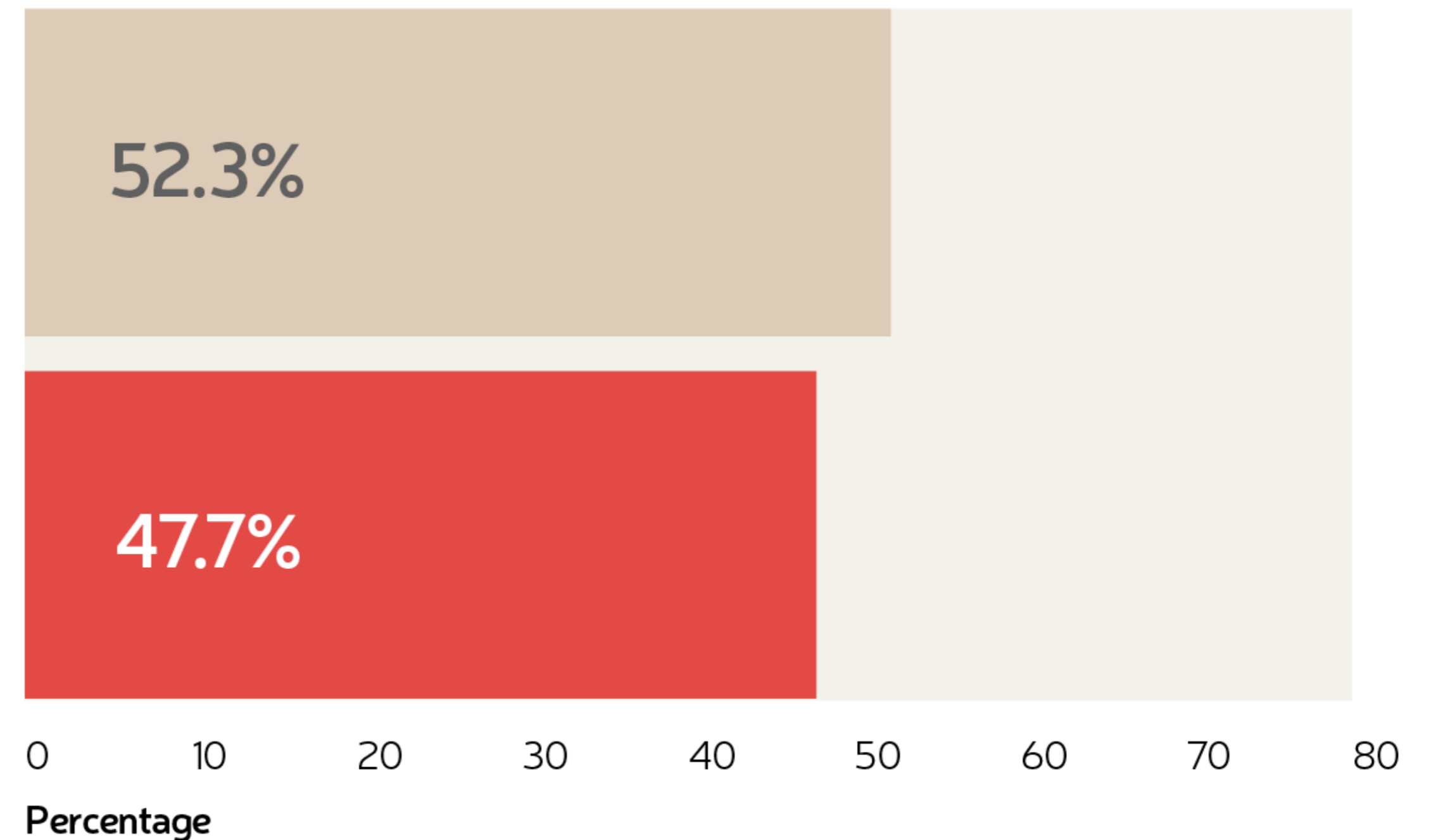
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Figure 13.2: Decisive versus planned response to crises: by Seniority

The Covid-19 crisis has consequences for health, jobs, the economy and much more. Which of these two approaches would you consider more appropriate to tackle the crisis at the outset?

It is possible to predict the consequences of urgent action, and even in a crisis, taking the time to plan mitigation measures is worthwhile.

It is difficult to predict all possible impacts in advance. Therefore, the policy response should be urgent and decisive in prioritising health.

2011 & after
51.7%
48.3%

Pre 2011
51.7%
48.3%

Former
68.0%
32.0%

Percentage
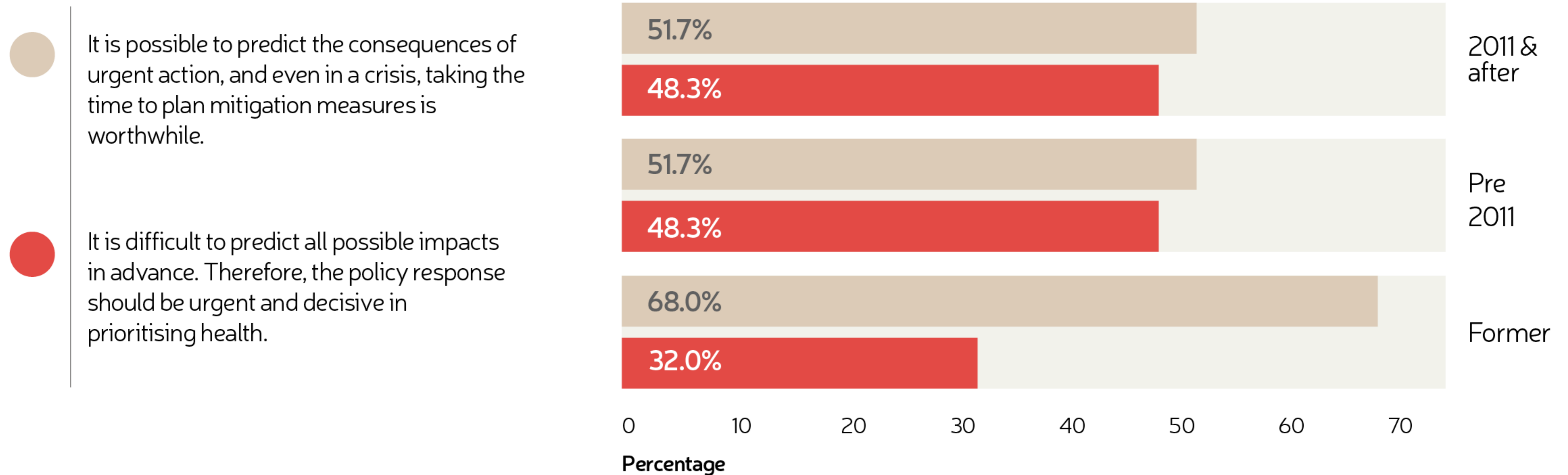
Figure 13.3: Decisive versus planned response to crises: by SDG Tier

The Covid-19 crisis has consequences for health, jobs, the economy and much more. Which of these two approaches would you consider more appropriate to tackle the crisis at the outset?

It is possible to predict the consequences of urgent action, and even in a crisis, taking the time to plan mitigation measures is worthwhile.

It is difficult to predict all possible impacts in advance. Therefore, the policy response should be urgent and decisive in prioritising health.

53.3% — Aspirant States
46.7%

51.0% — Performer States
49.0%

58.0% — Frontrunner States
42.0%

Percentage
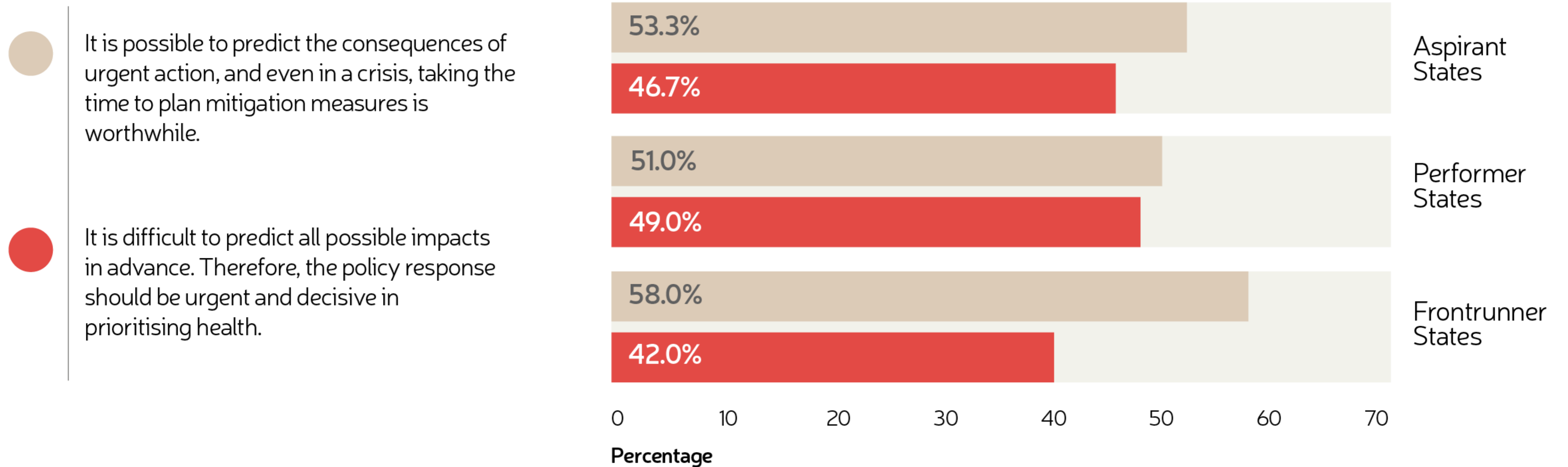
Figure 14.1: Factors contributing to the success of the lockdown

To the extent that lockdown has been successful, to which one of these two factors would you give higher weightage?

The public has understood the need for the restrictions imposed and has cooperated willingly. — 54.9%

The public has observed restrictions due to the fear of the law — 45.1%

Percentage (x-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60)

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To the extent that lockdown has been successful, to which one of these two factors would you give higher weightage?

The public has understood the need for the restrictions imposed and has cooperated willingly.

The public has observed restrictions due to the fear of the law

2011 & after
52.9%
47.1%

Pre 2011
63.0%
37.0%

Former
68.0%
32.0%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80
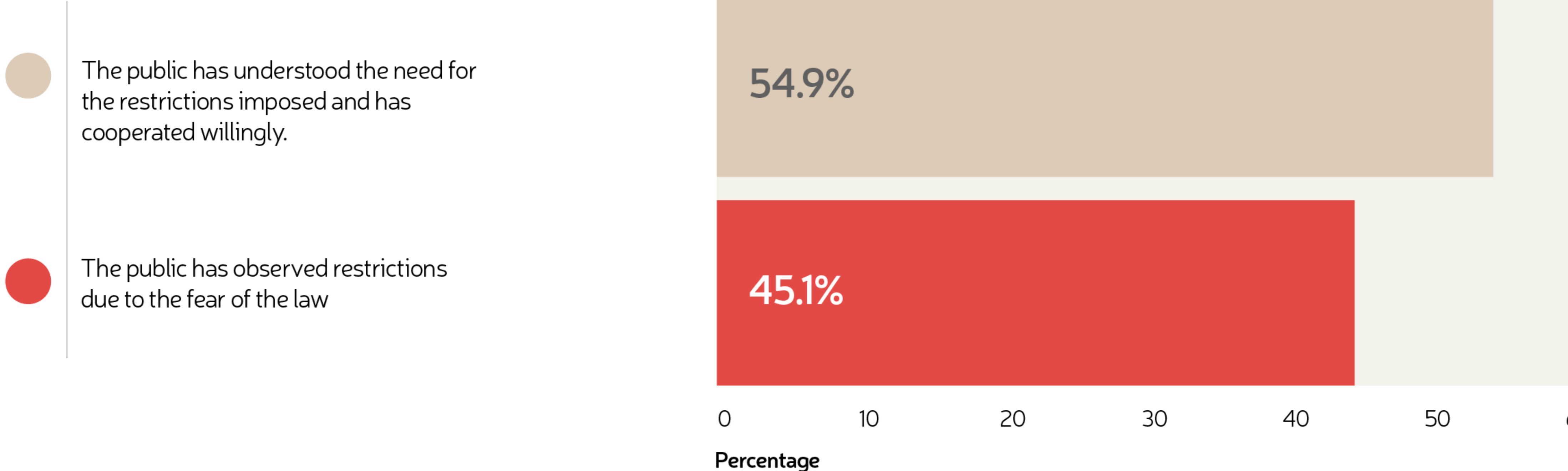
Percentage
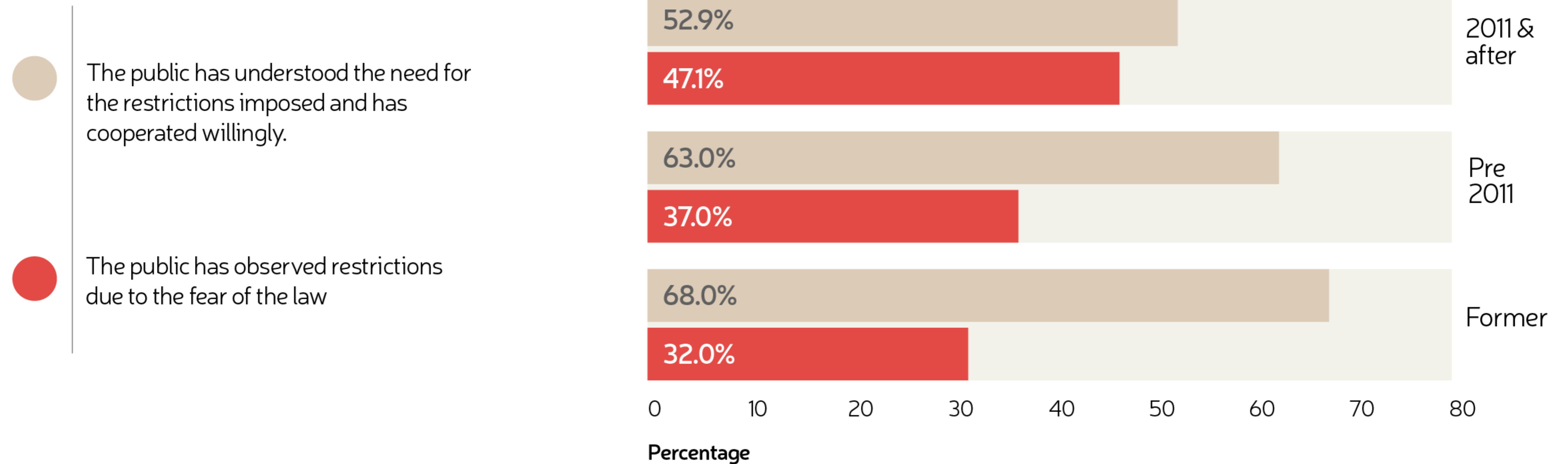
Figure 14.3: Factors contributing to the success of the lockdown: by SDG Tier

To the extent that lockdown has been successful, to which one of these two factors would you give higher weightage?

The public has understood the need for the restrictions imposed and has cooperated willingly.

The public has observed restrictions due to the fear of the law

	Aspirant States	Performer States	Frontrunner States
Understood	44.0%	56.0%	64.0%
Fear of law	56.0%	44.0%	36.0%

Percentage

Figure 15.1: Reasons for low virulence of Covid-19 in India

It would seem that Covid-19 has not shown the same virulence in India as in other countries until now. What weightage (in %) would you assign to the following factors for reports of this favourable outcome?

Factor	Mean Weight
The virus has spread in India. We do not know about it because of limited testing.	36.3%
The virus has spread in India but fear of stigma causes under reporting.	23.4%
Our lockdown strategy has been successful.	19.5%
Most Indians are less susceptible to the virus.	13.4%
The virus has not spread due to the environmental conditions in India.	7.4%

Mean Weight out of 100

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Figure 15.2: Reasons for low virulence of Covid-19 in India: by Seniority

It would seem that Covid-19 has not shown the same virulence in India as in other countries until now. What weightage (in %) would you assign to the following factors for reports of this favourable outcome?

The virus has spread in India.
We do not know about it because of limited testing.

The virus has spread in India but fear of stigma causes under reporting.

Our lockdown strategy has been successful.

Most Indians are less susceptible to the virus.

The virus has not spread due to the environmental conditions in India.

2011 & after
- 35.7%
- 23.9%
- 19.6%
- 13.1%
- 7.6%

Pre 2011
- 37.0%
- 20.6%
- 20.9%
- 14.2%
- 7.3%

Former
- 45.5%
- 17.3%
- 16.6%
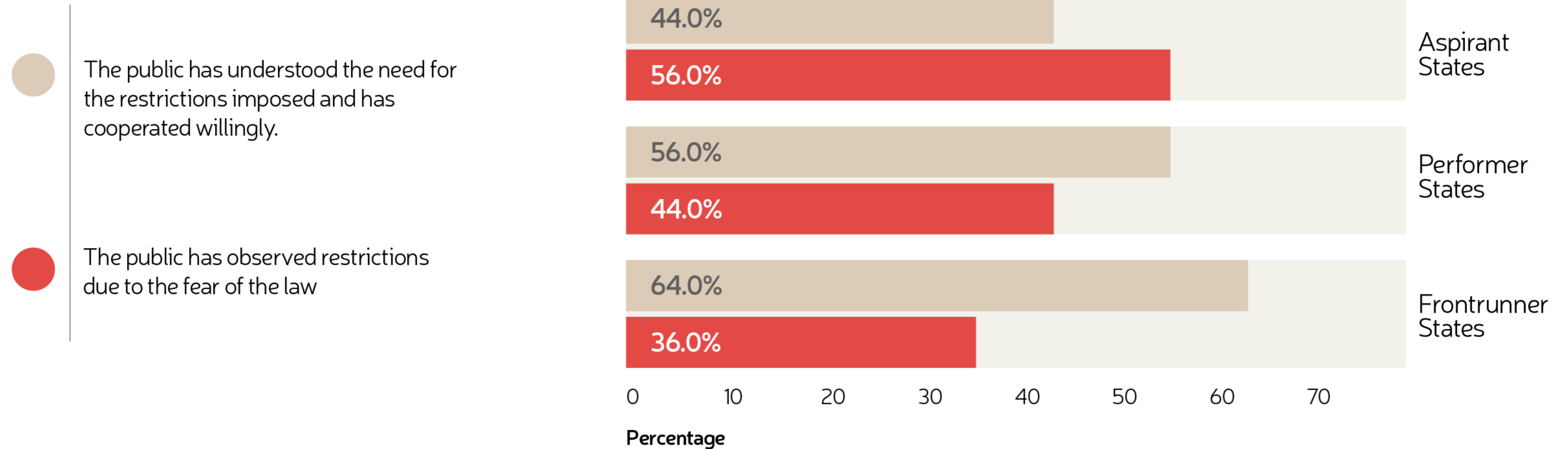- 12.5%
- 8.1%

Mean weight out of 100
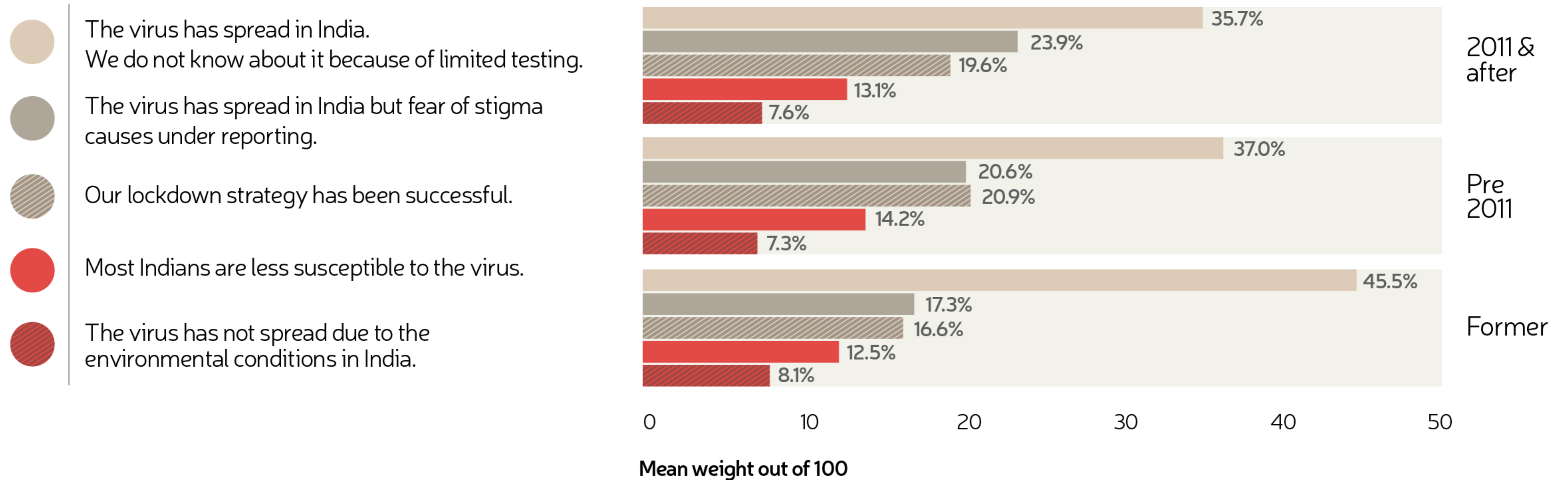
Figure 15.3: Reasons for low virulence of Covid-19 in India: by SDG Tier

It would seem that Covid-19 has not shown the same virulence in India as in other countries until now. What weightage (in %) would you assign to the following factors for reports of this favourable outcome?
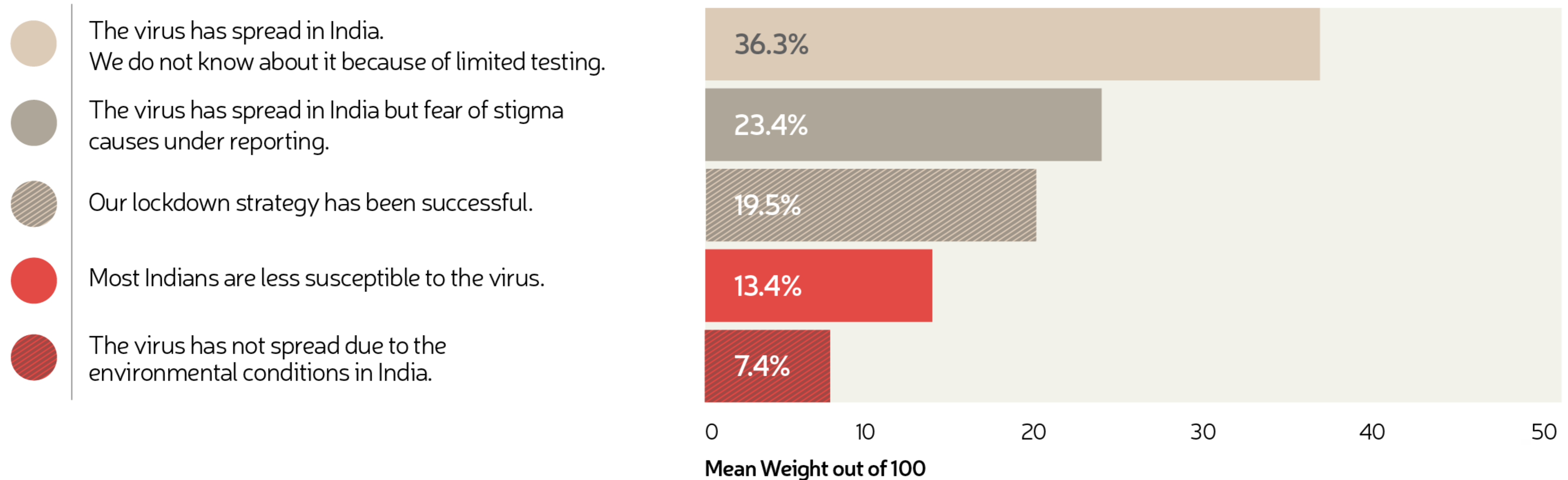
The virus has spread in India.
We do not know about it because of limited testing.

The virus has spread in India but fear of stigma causes under reporting.

Our lockdown strategy has been successful.

Most Indians are less susceptible to the virus.

The virus has not spread due to the environmental conditions in India.

Aspirant States
35.1%
22.5%
19.6%
15.9%
6.9%

Performer States
36.5%
24.2%
19.4%
12.6%
7.3%

Frontrunner States
37.4%
19.8%
20.4%
14.1%
8.3%

Mean weight out of 100

Figure 16.1: Failure of people to self-report

The failure of people to self-report for testing has been an impediment to the success of the government's test trace-isolate strategy. What do you consider to be the major factors leading to this reluctance of people to self-report and test?

Fear of ostracisation by community — 3.5

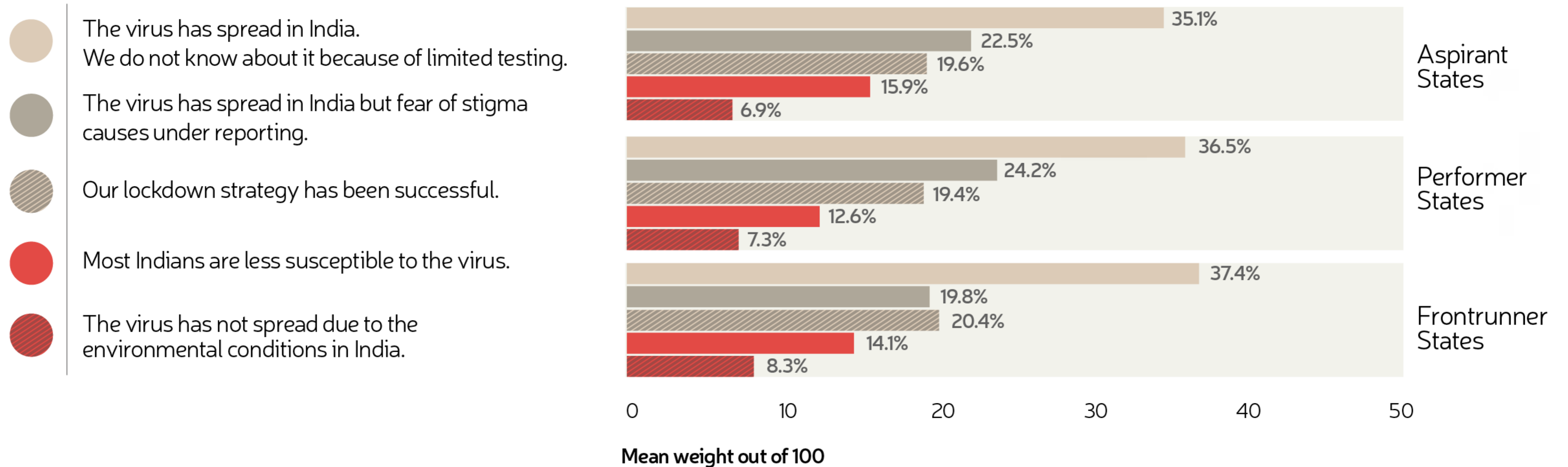Inconvenience of quarantine options available — 3.2

Difficulty in accessing tests -such as unavailability of test providers, exposure to infection from testing, time taken for testing and results, high cost of tests — 3.0

Perception of poor treatment in hospitals — 2.8

Fear of loss of time and livelihood resulting from quarantine — 2.5

Mean Score out of 5

Note: Ranks have been converted to weighted mean scores. Rank 1 gets a score of 5, rank 2 gets a score of 4, rank 3 gets a score of 3, rank 4 gets a score of 2 and rank 5 gets a score of 1.
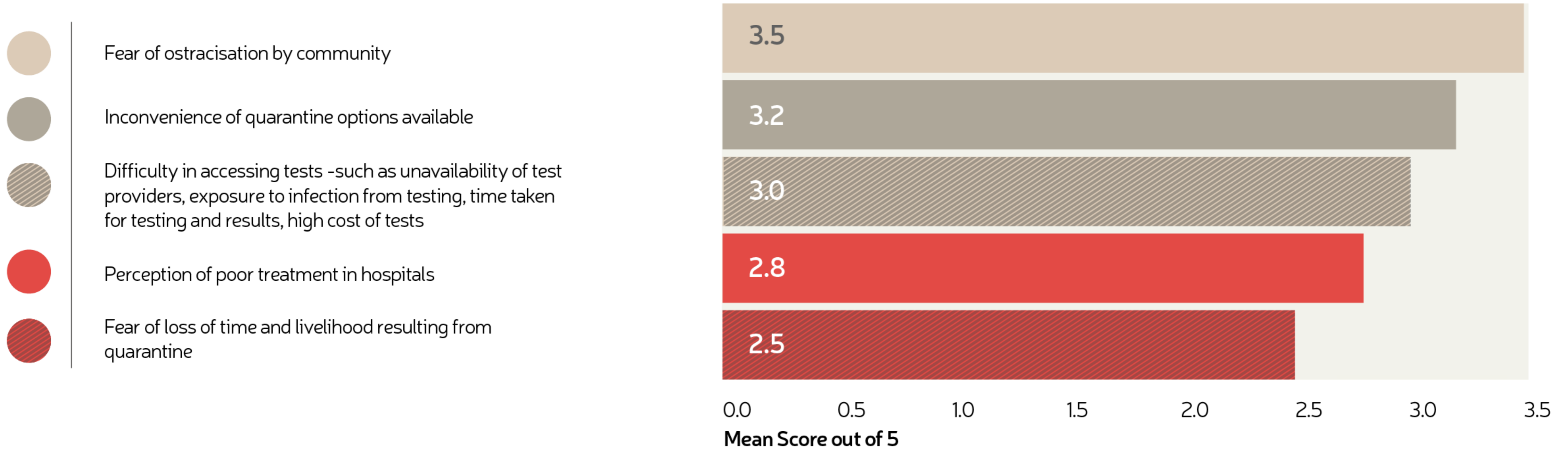
TABLE OF FIGURES

The failure of people to self-report for testing has been an impediment to the success of the government's test trace-isolate strategy. What do you consider to be the major factors leading to this reluctance of people to self-report and test?

Fear of ostracisation by community

Inconvenience of quarantine options available

Difficulty in accessing tests -such as unavailability of test providers, exposure to infection from testing, time taken for testing and results, high cost of tests

Perception of poor treatment in hospitals

Fear of loss of time and livelihood resulting from quarantine

2011 & after
- 3.6
- 3.2
- 2.9
- 2.8
- 2.6

Pre 2011
- 3.3
- 3.1
- 3.6
- 2.8
- 2.2

Former
- 2.5
- 3.4
- 3.6
- 2.9
- 2.5

0.0   1.0   2.0   3.0   4.0

Mean Score out of 5

The failure of people to self-report for testing has been an impediment to the success of the government's test trace-isolate strategy. What do you consider to be the major factors leading to this reluctance of people to self-report and test?
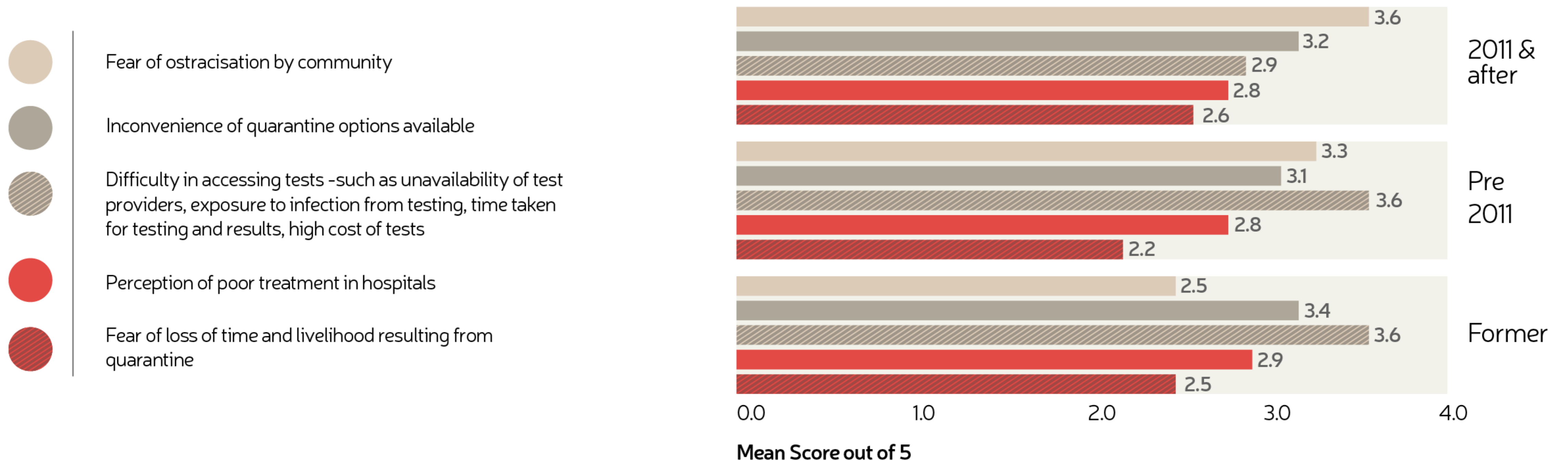

Fear of ostracisation by community

Inconvenience of quarantine options available

Difficulty in accessing tests -such as unavailability of test providers, exposure to infection from testing, time taken for testing and results, high cost of tests

Perception of poor treatment in hospitals

Fear of loss of time and livelihood resulting from quarantine

Aspirant States
- 3.7
- 3.1
- 3.0
- 2.8
- 2.4

Performer States
- 3.5
- 3.2
- 3.0
- 2.8
- 2.5

Frontrunner States
- 3.3
- 3.3
- 3.1
- 2.8
- 2.5

0.0   1.0   2.0   3.0   4.0
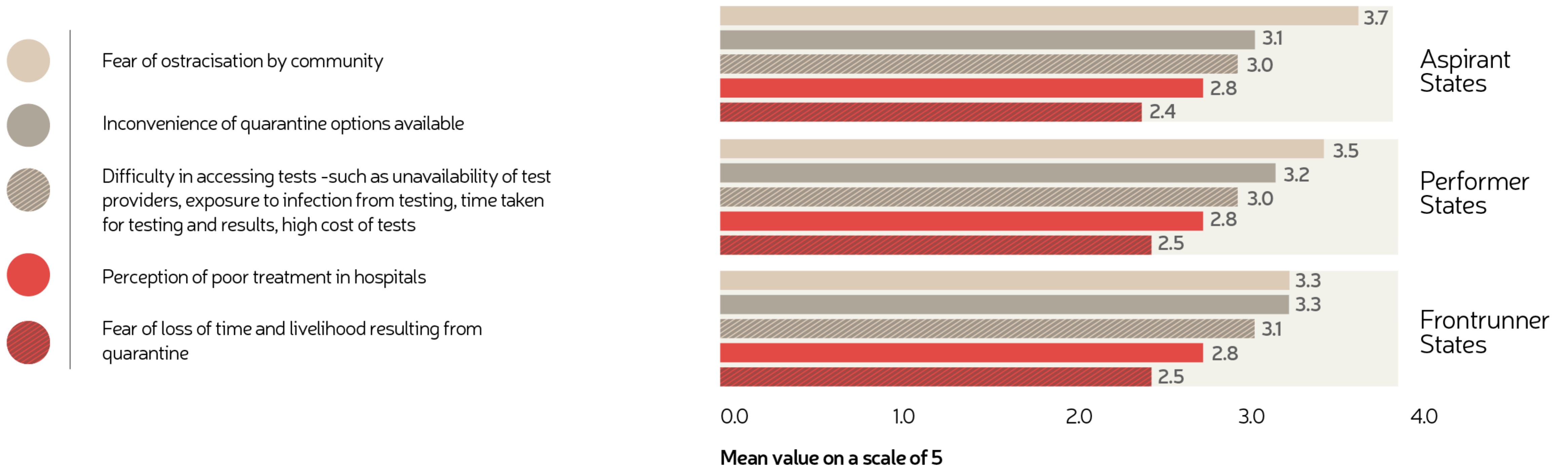
Mean value on a scale of 5

Figure 17.1: Use of technology for capturing information on citizens

On balance, there is merit in harnessing technology to capture more information about citizens.

Yes 87.0%

No 13.0%

0   20   40   60   80   100

Percentage

On balance, there is merit in harnessing technology to capture more information about citizens.

Yes

No

88.0%

12.0%

2011 & after

86.0%

14.0%

Pre 2011

54.5%

45.5%

Former

0   20   40   60   80   100

Percentage
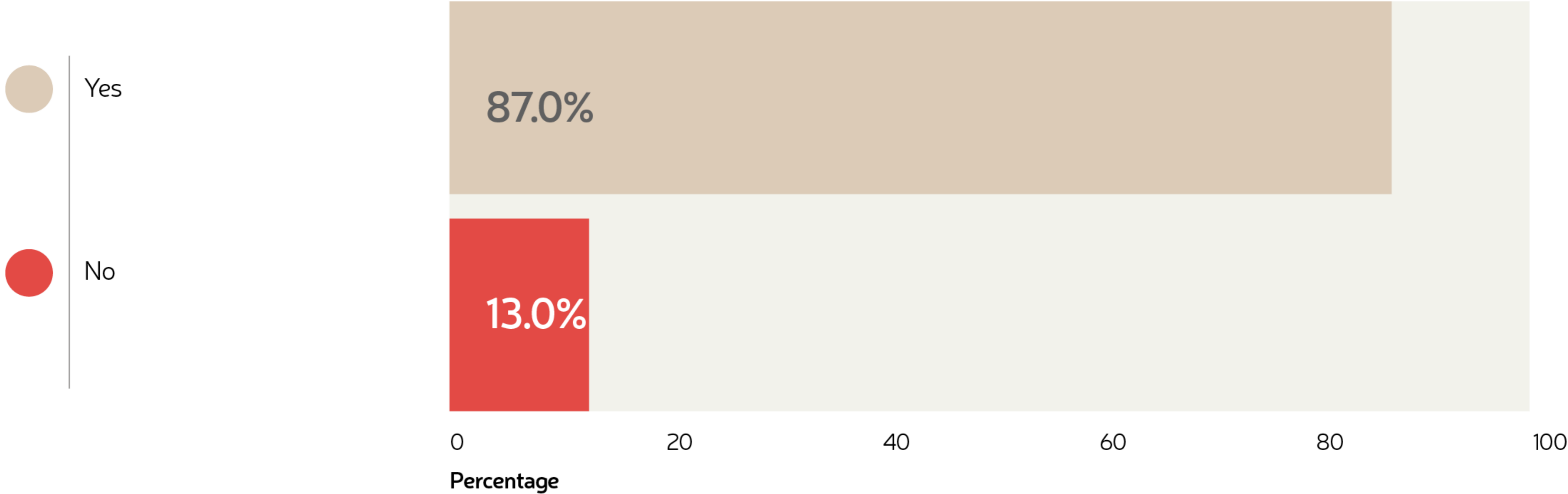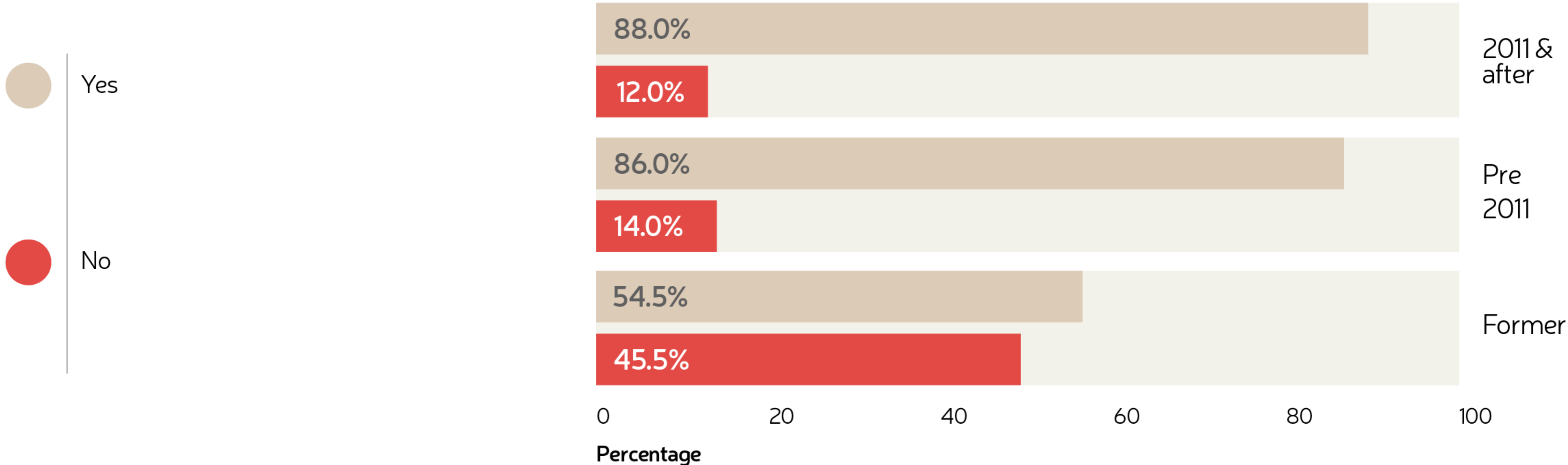
Figure 17.3: Use of technology for capturing information on citizens: by SDG Tier

On balance, there is merit in harnessing technology to capture more information about citizens.

Yes

No

Aspirant States
88.0%
12.0%

Performer States
88.0%
12.0%

Frontrunner States
81.0%
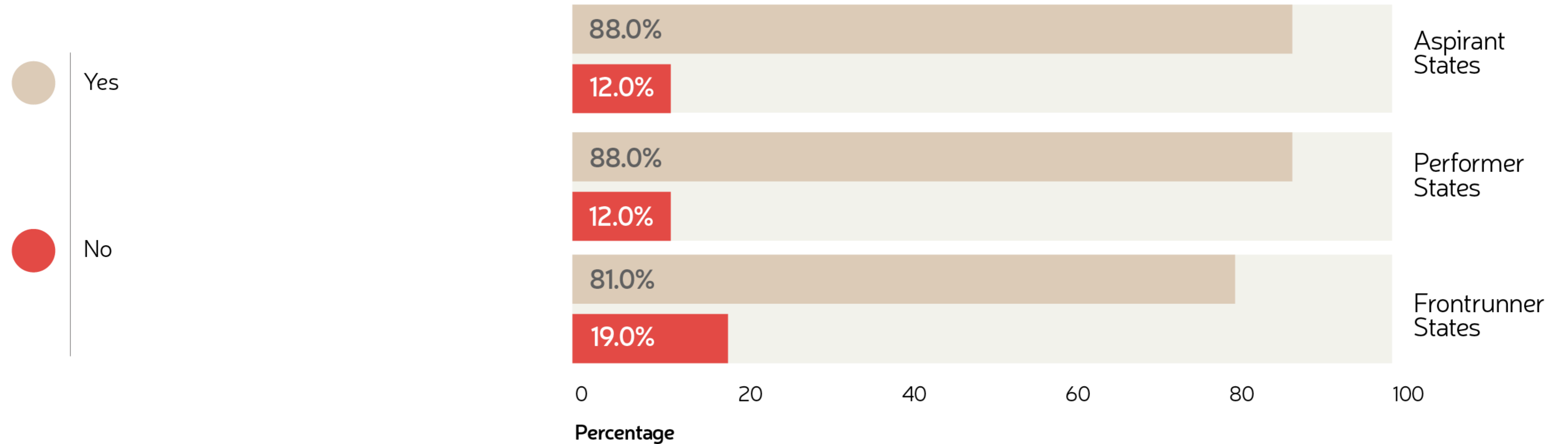19.0%

0   20   40   60   80   100

Percentage

Figure 18.1: Use of technology for capturing information on citizens during a crisis

(If answer to the previous question was "No") Would harnessing technology to capture more information about citizens be justified in the Covid-19 crisis?

Yes

No

31.0%

69.0%

0   20   40   60   80   100

Percentage
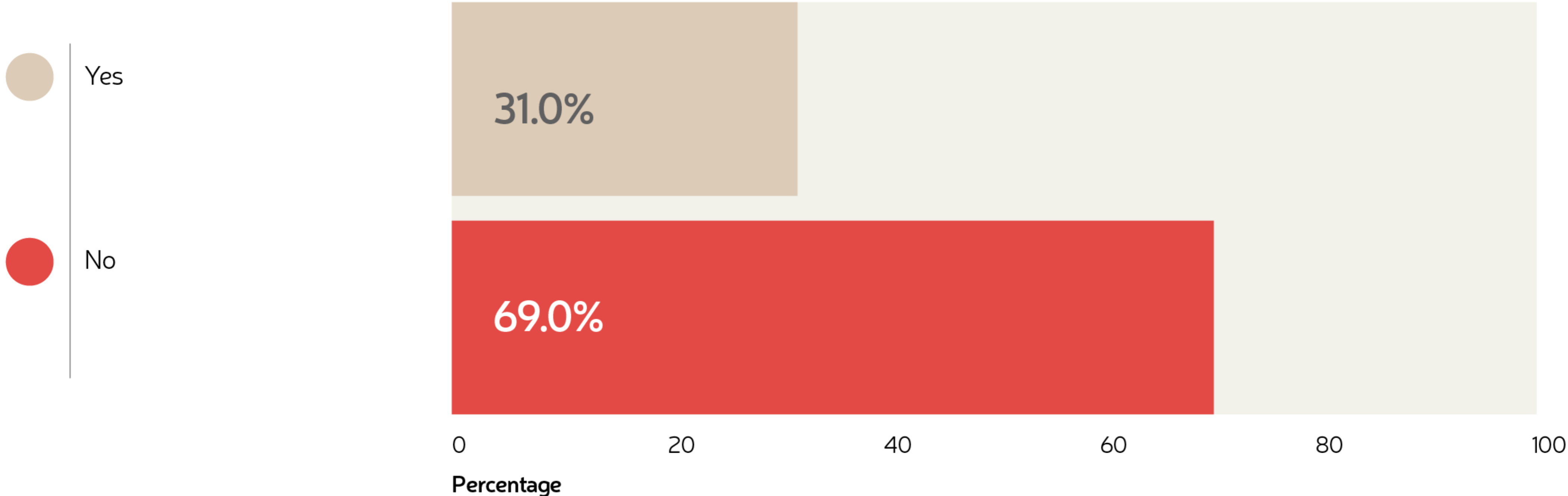
Figure 18.2: Use of technology for capturing information on citizens during a crisis: by Seniority

(If answer to the previous question was "No") Would harnessing technology to capture more information about citizens be justified in the Covid-19 crisis?

Yes

No

35.0%	2011 & after
65.0%	
26.0%	Pre 2011
74.0%	
30.0%	Former
70.0%	

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80

Percentage
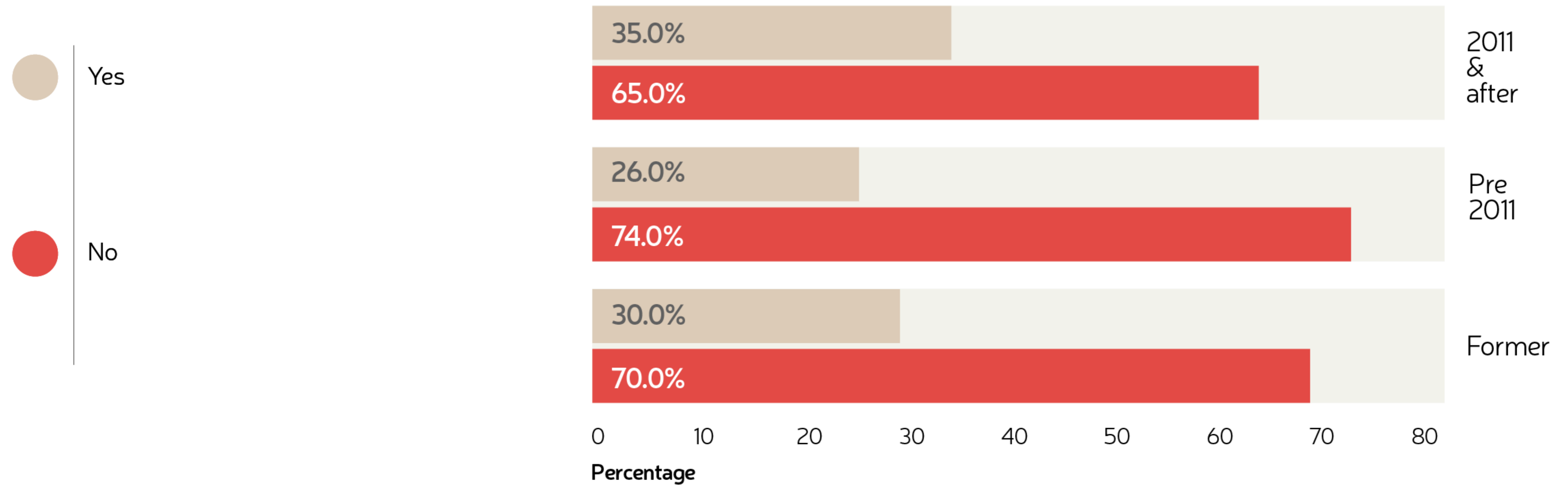
Figure 18.3: Use of technology for capturing information on citizens during a crisis: by SDG Tier

(If answer to the previous question was "No") Would harnessing technology to capture more information about citizens be justified in the Covid-19 crisis?


Legend:
- Yes
- No

Aspirant States: Yes 33.0%, No 67.0%
Performer States: Yes 30.0%, No 70.0%
Frontrunner States: Yes 33.0%, No 67.0%

Percentage (x-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80)
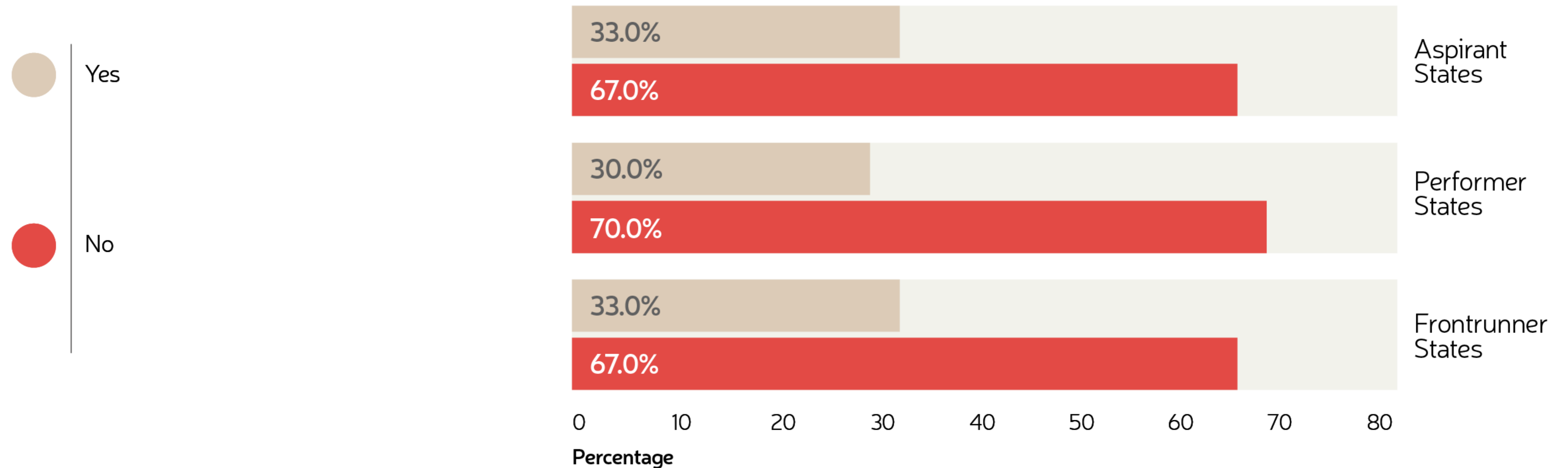
Partnerships and Interests in the Pandemic

State Capacity Initiative | Centre for Policy Research

Key Findings

In the final section of this report, we explore civil servants' perceptions of **key non-state partners and interests** as these played out during the pandemic, with a focus on four major actors/stakeholders involved in pandemic response: civil society, the private sector, international organisations, and the media.

Overall, IAS officers expressed a positive view of the role that NGOs and civil society have played in the Covid-19 pandemic. **59.4 percent of officers considered NGOs and civil society critical partners in the response.** Another 14.2 percent acknowledged their positive contributions, but also noted the increased regulatory burden on government. **Only 12.8 percent of officers expressed a strong negative opinion of NGOs and civil society** by agreeing with the statement that their work was driven by self-interest and self-promotion.

Interestingly, officers from **front runner state cadres were noticeably less likely to consider NGOs and civil society to be critical partners,** and much more likely to acknowledge them for the increased regulatory burden that they represent or report that they made very little difference one way or the other.

This raises an interesting question: are civil servants from states with better public system capacity less likely to see NGOs/civil society and other non-state actors as vital partners, required to substitute for weak state implementation? Also, as we probe further, are they more likely to stress the increased regulatory role for the state vis-à-vis key non-state actors and institutions?

If the Indian civil service holds a largely positive and appreciative view of NGOs and civil society, **they expressed a striking disregard and suspicion of the private sector.** If nearly 60 percent acknowledged NGOs and civil society as critical partners in pandemic response, when it came to an assessment of the role of the private sector, **only 11 percent of IAS officers agreed**

with the view that the private sector had gone out of its way in efforts to supply essential services. 35.8 percent, however, acknowledge their contributions were valuable while noting the increased regulatory burden that the private sector also imposed on government during the pandemic. Still, 53.2 percent held a largely negative view with 29.6 percent responding that they made no significant impact at all and a high 23.6 percent agreeing with a statement that the private sector capitalised on the crisis to further their own interests.

Here again, the differences among state cadres does seem to call for closer analysis. IAS officers from the aspirant state cadres were the most critical of the character and conduct of the private sector. Performer state cadres were more likely to hold the view that acknowledged both value and regulatory burden (35.6 percent) or their lack of contribution one way or the other (29.6 percent). Most strikingly, frontrunner state cadres were much less likely to characterise the private sector in negative terms: only 10.9 percent, a much

smaller proportion compared to the other cadres said they capitalised on the crisis to further their interests. Instead, they were much more likely (47.6 percent) to acknowledge their positive contributions while noting the increased regulatory burden this placed on the state.

When it came to the role and contribution of major international organisations such as the WHO in the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, civil servants appear to be much more split, although on the whole they are more positive than negative. Altogether 60 percent of IAS officers felt that international organisations have played a positive role, by providing invaluable expertise and resources to government (32.5 percent) or by enabling effective global coordination (27.5 percent). However, a very substantial 40 percent of IAS officers questioned their role and conduct, either emphasising the primary role of Indian technical expertise and the government's own competence and preparation (23.9 percent) or, in smaller but still significant proportion (16.1 percent)

accusing international agencies of working in favour of only certain countries and curbing the autonomy and effectiveness of the Indian government.

Notably, this last, highly critical view was held by a much higher proportion of former civil servants (29.5 percent) when compared to serving officers. On the other hand, **IAS officers from aspirant state cadres were much more wholehearted in their support of the invaluable technical role that international agencies play (41.6 percent) compared to the other state cadres,** who distribute themselves more evenly among the range of views on the subject.

Finally, we end with IAS officers' responses on the role of the India's TV and print media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Here, on the whole, **there is a clear (72.4 percent) view among civil servants that the media has played a vital and positive role in the pandemic,** of which 21.4 percent viewed the media as a responsible partner in the dissemination of information, while 51 percent acknowledged their very important role even

though instances of misinformation compromised their larger contribution to some extent. Significantly fewer officers (27.6 percent) felt that media had played a negative role, of which 12.7 percent considered the media to have been actively damaging to efforts to manage the crisis.

Interestingly, as in the previous question on international organisations, a significantly higher proportion of former civil servants (38.7 percent) held a negative view of TV and print media on both counts: spreading misinformation (20.5 percent) and actively adding to the difficulties of crisis management due to irresponsible behaviour (18.2 percent).

Figure 19.1: The role of civil society during the crisis

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of NGOs and civil society to the Covid-19 crisis?

NGOs and civil society have used resources and networks unavailable to the government and have been critical partners in the response.

NGOs and civil society have done useful work but they have added to the regulatory burden of the government.

NGOs and civil society have made very little difference, positive or negative.

NGOs and civil society have focussed largely on increasing their own presence and visibility.

59.4%

14.2%

13.6%

12.8%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60

Percentage

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 19.2: The role of civil society during the crisis: by Seniority

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of NGOs and civil society to the Covid-19 crisis?

NGOs and civil society have used resources and networks unavailable to the government and have been critical partners in the response.

NGOs and civil society have done useful work but they have added to the regulatory burden of the government.

NGOs and civil society have made very little difference, positive or negative.

NGOs and civil society have focussed largely on increasing their own presence and visibility.

2011 & after
60.1%
14.2%
13.0%
12.7%

Pre 2011
58.3%
14.4%
14.4%
12.8%

Former
59.1%
13.6%
22.7%
4.5%

Percentage

Figure 19.3: The role of civil society during the crisis: by SDG Tier

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of NGOs and civil society to the Covid-19 crisis?

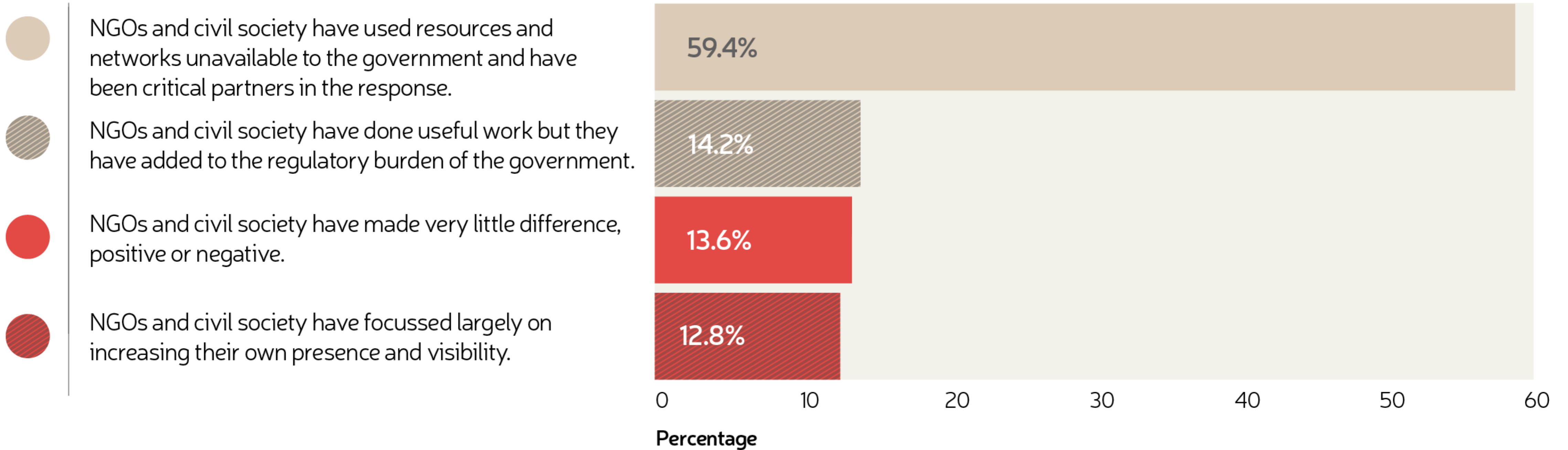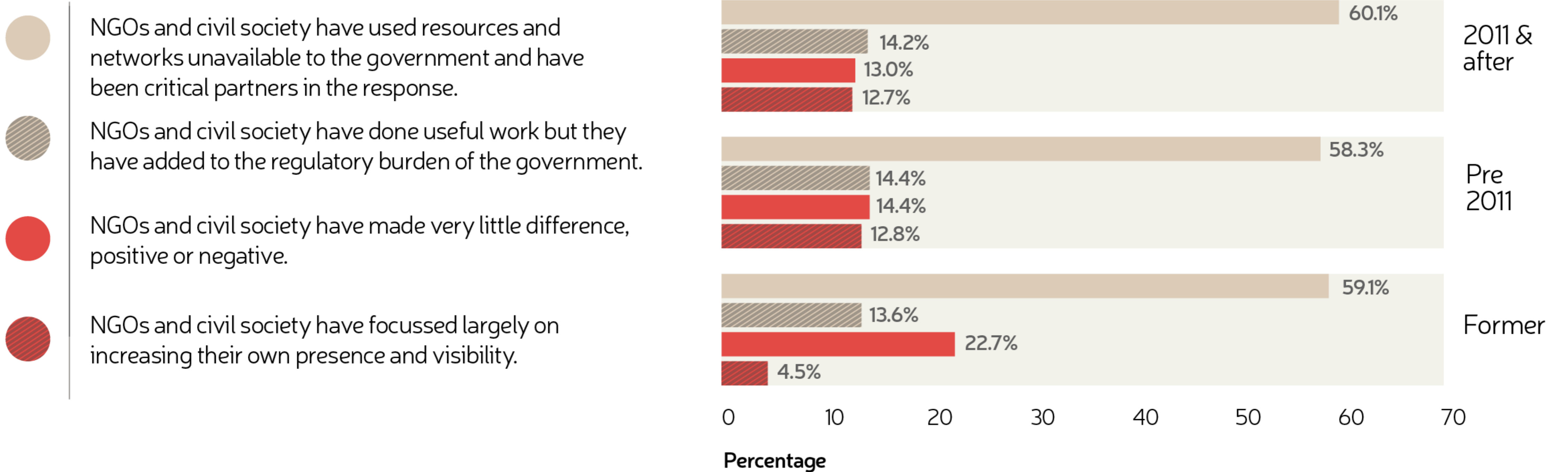NGOs and civil society have used resources and networks unavailable to the government and have been critical partners in the response.

NGOs and civil society have done useful work but they have added to the regulatory burden of the government.

NGOs and civil society have made very little difference, positive or negative.

NGOs and civil society have focussed largely on increasing their own presence and visibility.

Aspirant States
- 50.8%
- 10.4%
- 19.5%
- 19.2%

Performer States
- 63.5%
- 13.3%
- 11.5%
- 11.8%

Frontrunner States
- 47.4%
- 23.5%
- 18.3%
- 10.7%

Percentage

Figure 20.1: The role of the private sector during the crisis

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of the private sector to the Covid-19 crisis?

The private sector has gone out of its way in efforts to supply essential services

The private sector's presence and contribution have been valuable in some areas but have also increased the regulatory burden on the government

The private sector has not had a significant impact, positive or negative, in the current context.

Private sector actors have capitalised on the situation to further their interests.

11.0%

35.8%

29.6%

23.6%

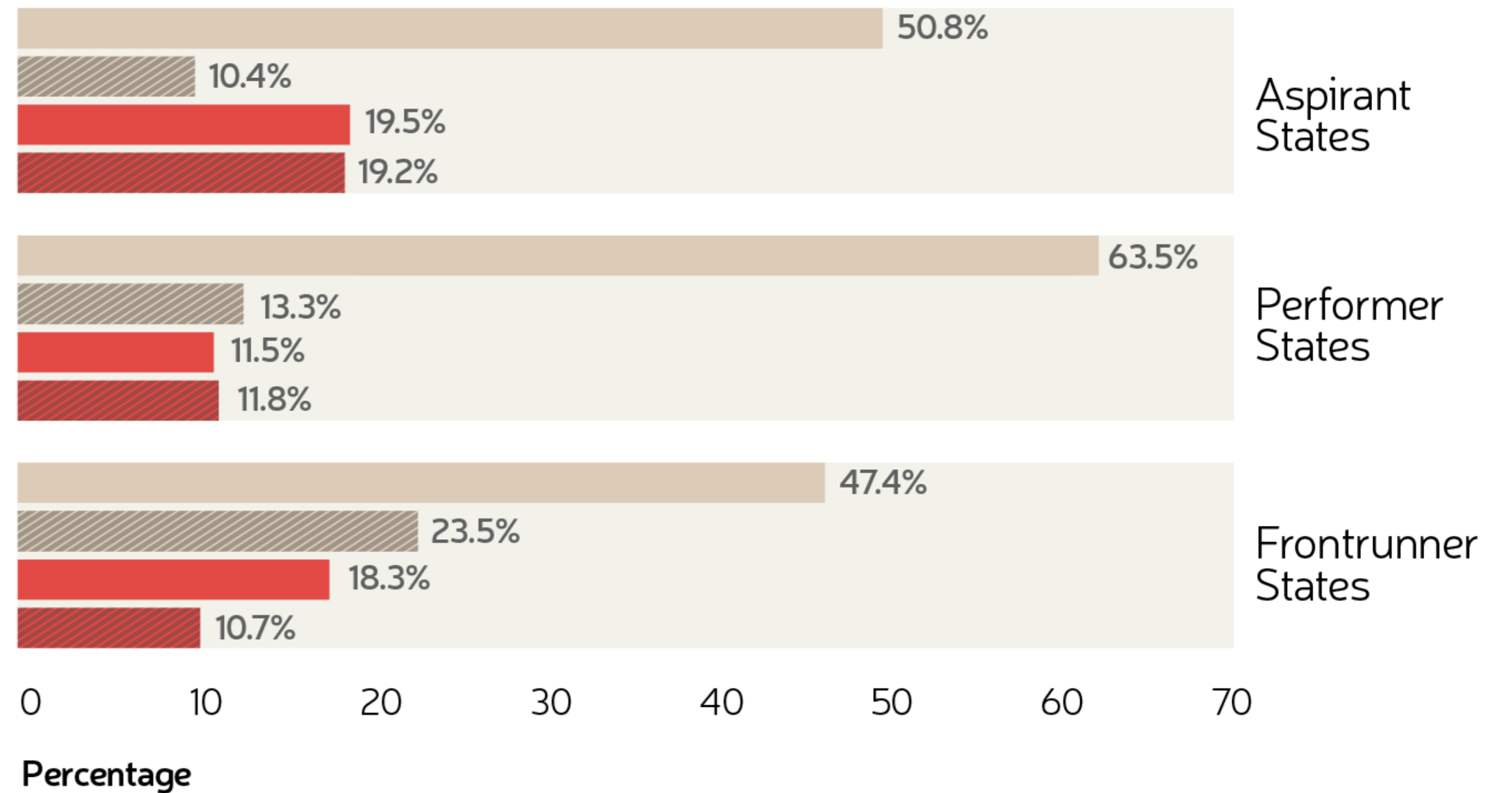0   10   20   30   40

Percentage
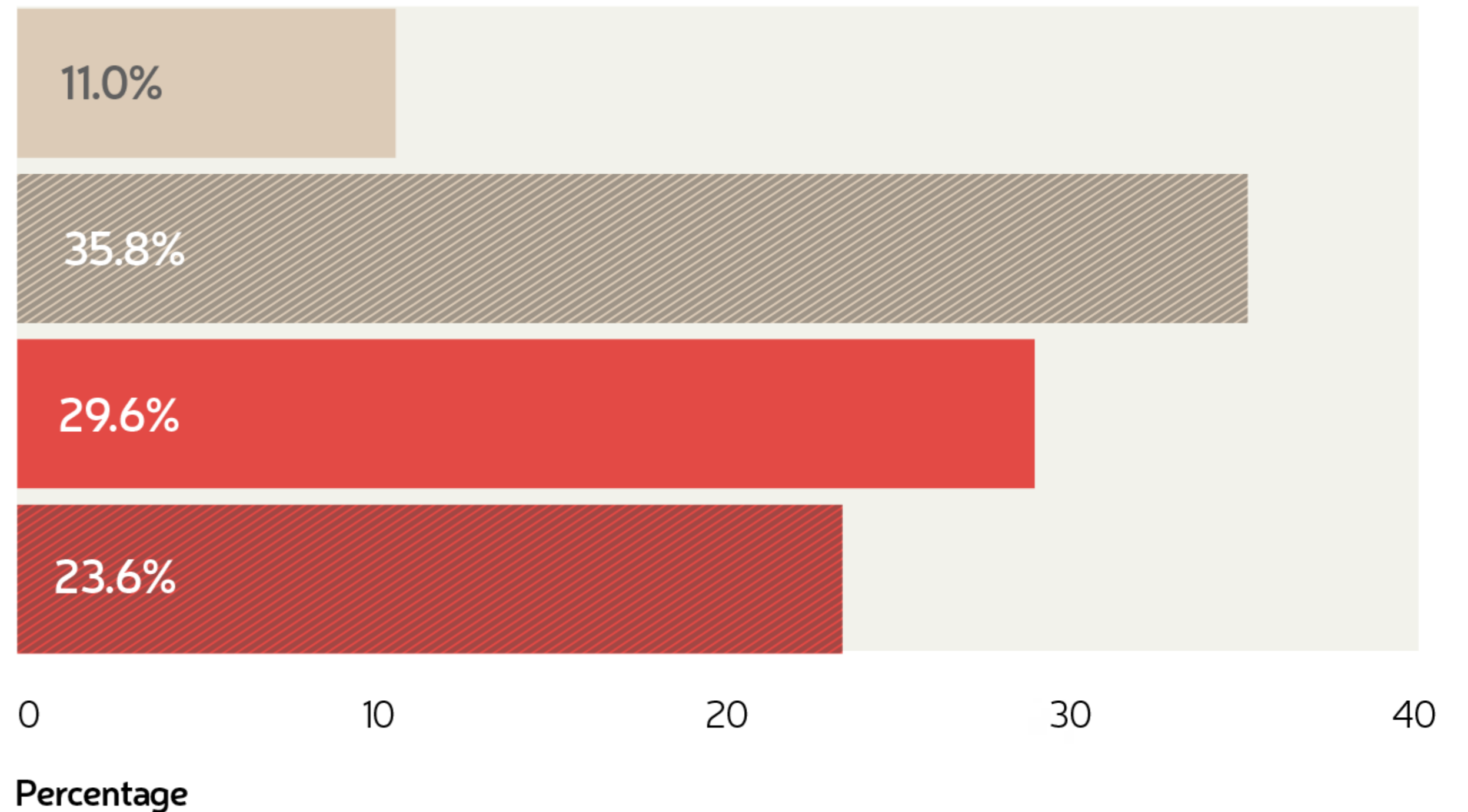
Figure 20.2: The role of the private sector during the crisis: by Seniority

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of the private sector to the Covid-19 crisis?

The private sector has gone out of its way in efforts to supply essential services

The private sector's presence and contribution have been valuable in some areas but have also increased the regulatory burden on the government

The private sector has not had a significant impact, positive or negative, in the current context.

Private sector actors have capitalised on the situation to further their interests.

2011 & after
11.8%
35.8%
30.6%
21.7%

Pre 2011
8.9%
35.6%
31.1%
24.4%

Former
13.6%
22.7%
29.5%
34.1%

Percentage

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of the private sector to the Covid-19 crisis?

The private sector has gone out of its way in efforts to supply essential services

The private sector's presence and contribution have been valuable in some areas but have also increased the regulatory burden on the government

The private sector has not had a significant impact, positive or negative, in the current context.

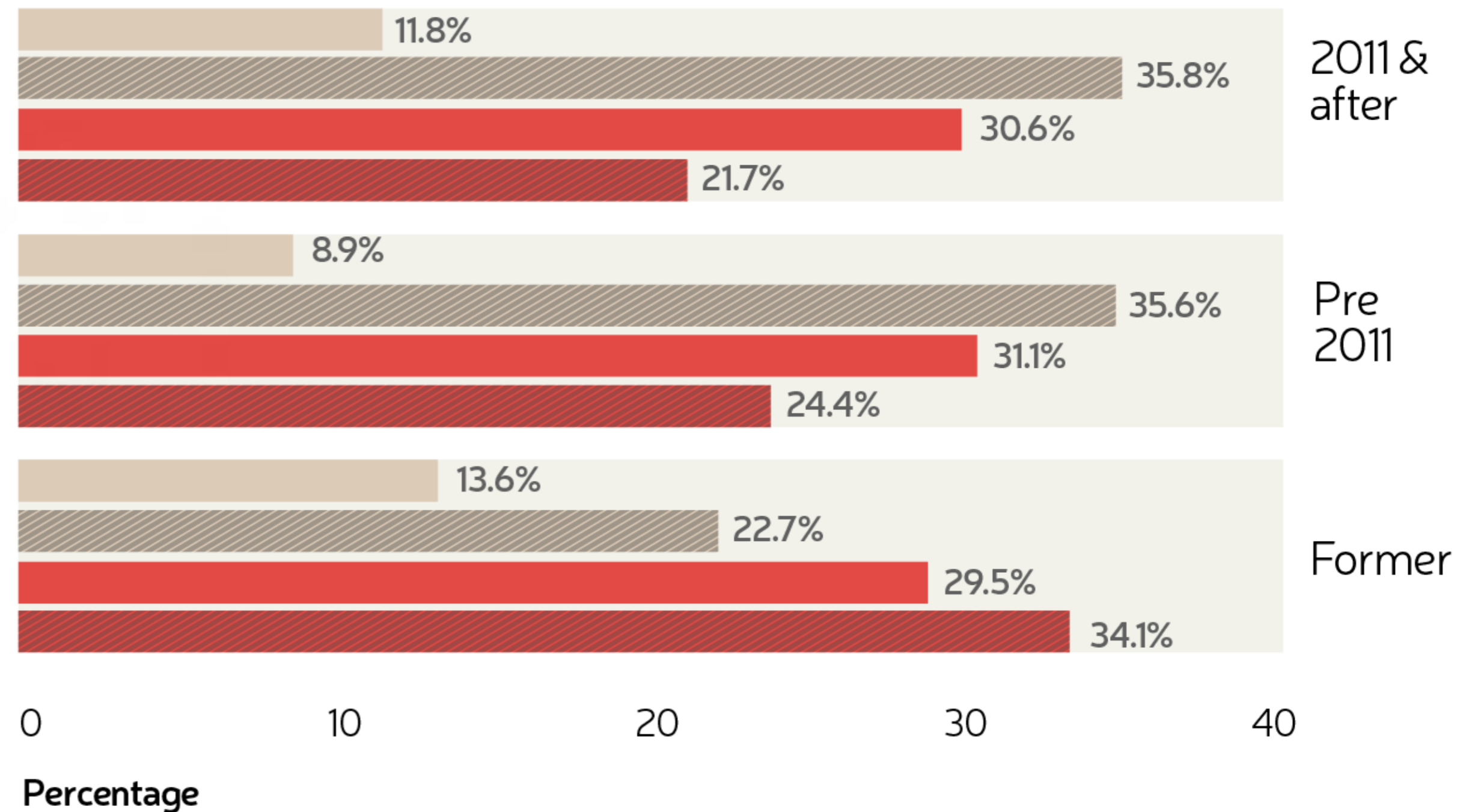Private sector actors have capitalised on the situation to further their interests.

Aspirant States: 15.4%, 29.2%, 28.7%, 26.7%

Performer States: 10.1%, 35.6%, 29.6%, 24.8%

Frontrunner States: 10.2%, 47.6%, 31.3%, 10.9%

Percentage

In this crisis, international organisations such as the WHO have played a critical role in shaping the response. In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of these actors in the Covid-19 crisis?

The expertise and resources made available by international organisations have been invaluable in framing government response.

Effective global coordination could have only been achieved with the support of international organisations.

Government responses were prepared well before guidance from international organisations. Any technical expertise needed was sourced from Indian organisations.

International organisations have primarily worked to benefit certain countries and to spread their belief systems. The use of their expertise in India tends to curb government autonomy as well as effectiveness.

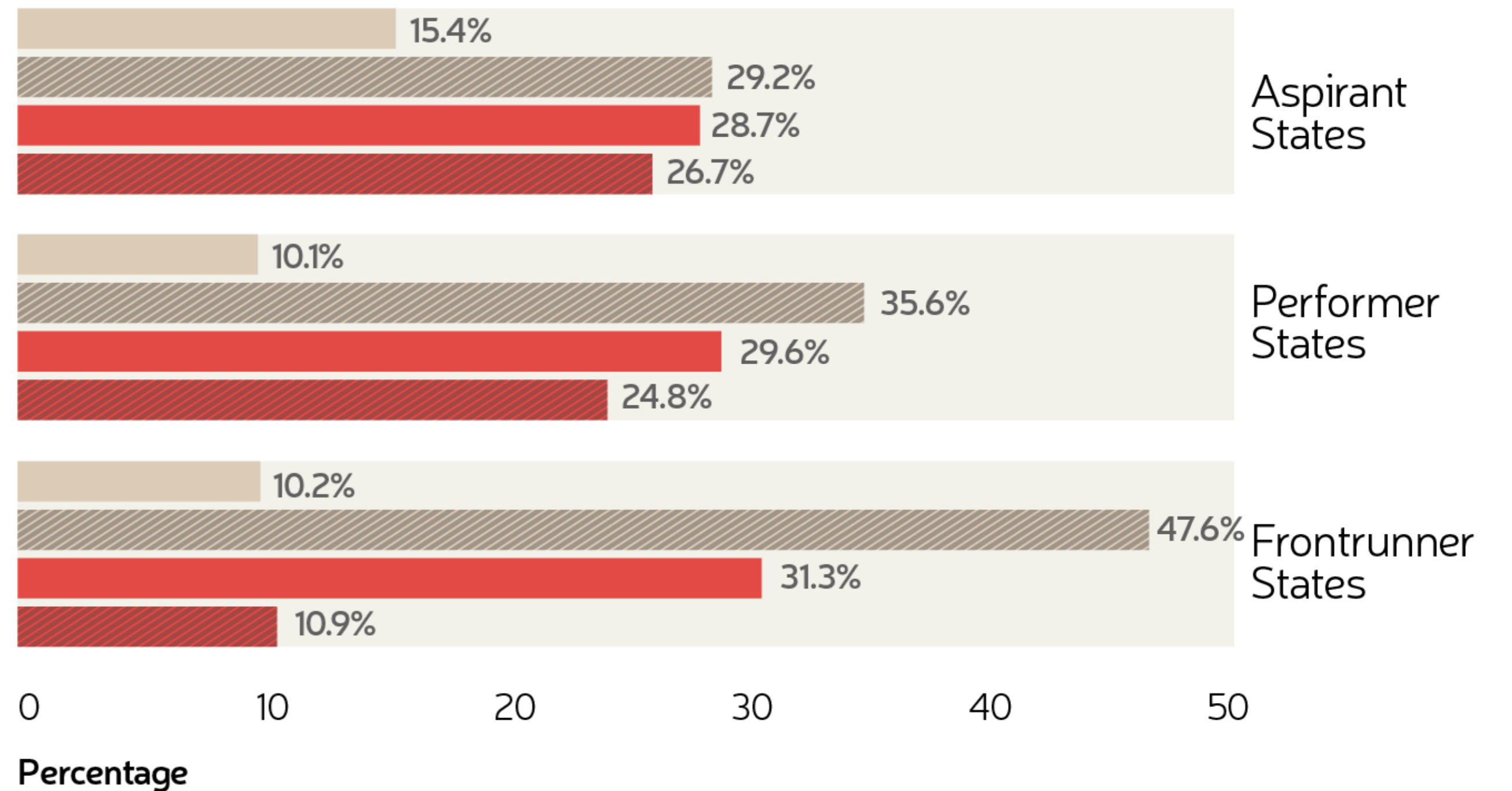32.5%

27.5%

23.9%

16.1%

Percentage

Figure 21.2: The role of international organisations during the crisis: by Seniority

In this crisis, international organisations such as the WHO have played a critical role in shaping the response. In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of these actors in the Covid-19 crisis?

The expertise and resources made available by international organisations have been invaluable in framing government response.

Effective global coordination could have only been achieved with the support of international organisations.

Government responses were prepared well before guidance from international organisations. Any technical expertise needed was sourced from Indian organisations.

International organisations have primarily worked to benefit certain countries and to spread their belief systems. The use of their expertise in India tends to curb government autonomy as well as effectiveness.

2011 & after
- 31.5%
- 26.9%
- 23.4%
- 18.2%

Pre 2011
- 33.3%
- 28.3%
- 22.8%
- 15.6%

Former
- 25.0%
- 20.5%
- 25.0%
- 29.5%

Percentage (0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50)

In this crisis, international organisations such as the WHO have played a critical role in shaping the response. In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of these actors in the Covid-19 crisis?
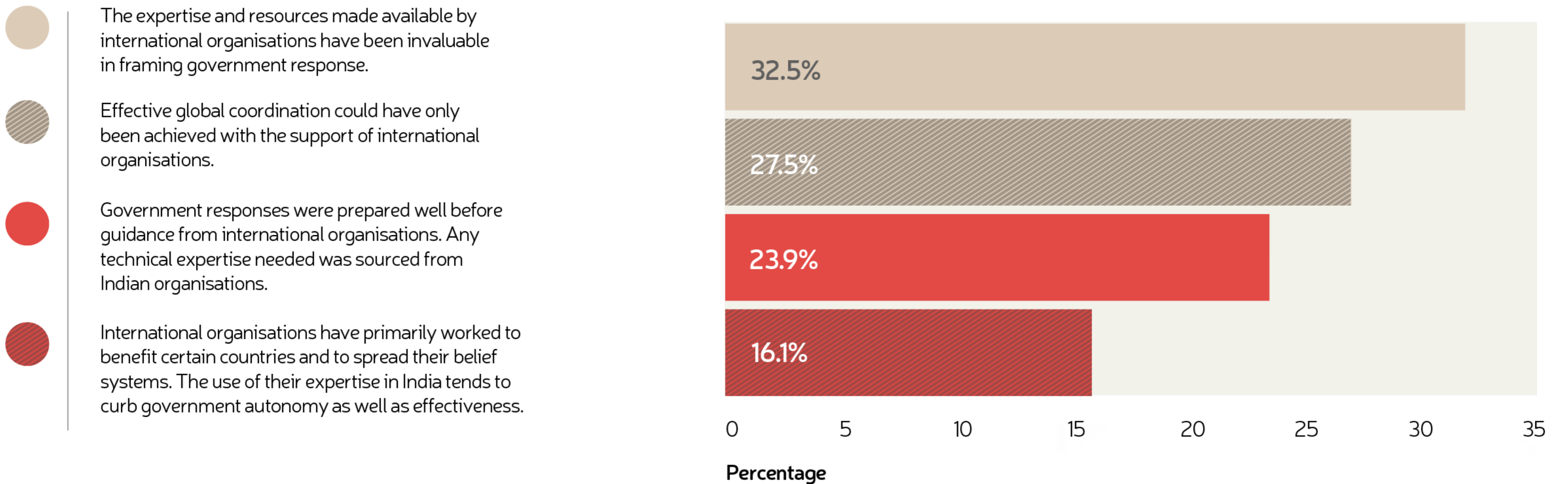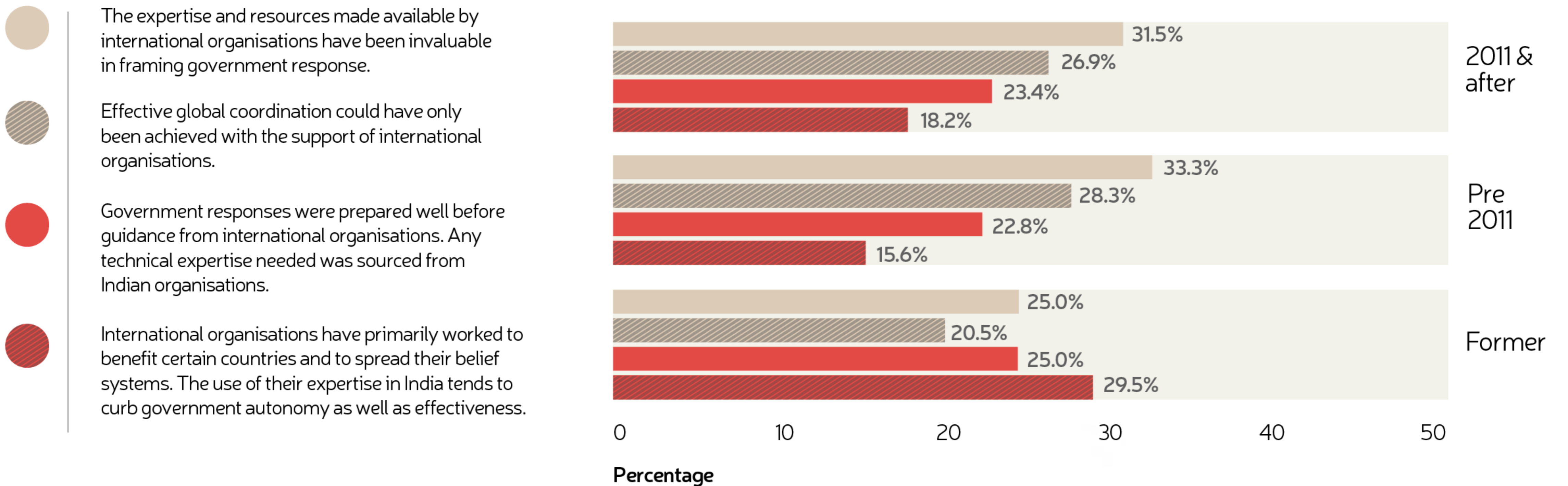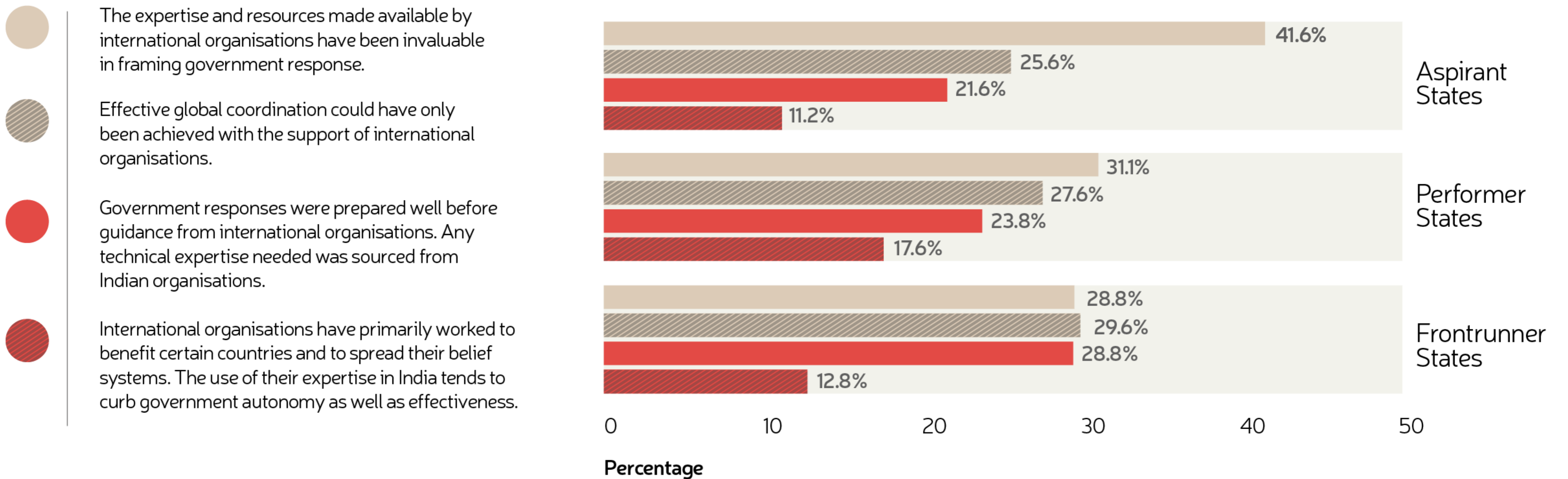
The expertise and resources made available by international organisations have been invaluable in framing government response.

Effective global coordination could have only been achieved with the support of international organisations.

Government responses were prepared well before guidance from international organisations. Any technical expertise needed was sourced from Indian organisations.

International organisations have primarily worked to benefit certain countries and to spread their belief systems. The use of their expertise in India tends to curb government autonomy as well as effectiveness.

Aspirant States
- 41.6%
- 25.6%
- 21.6%
- 11.2%

Performer States
- 31.1%
- 27.6%
- 23.8%
- 17.6%

Frontrunner States
- 28.8%
- 29.6%
- 28.8%
- 12.8%

Percentage

Figure 22.1: The role of the media during the crisis

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of the TV and print media to the Covid-19 crisis?

The media has functioned as a responsible partner in disseminating valuable information.

While the media has played a very important role in disseminating information, instances of misinformation have compromised their contribution.

The misinformation spread by the media has overshadowed its positive contribution.

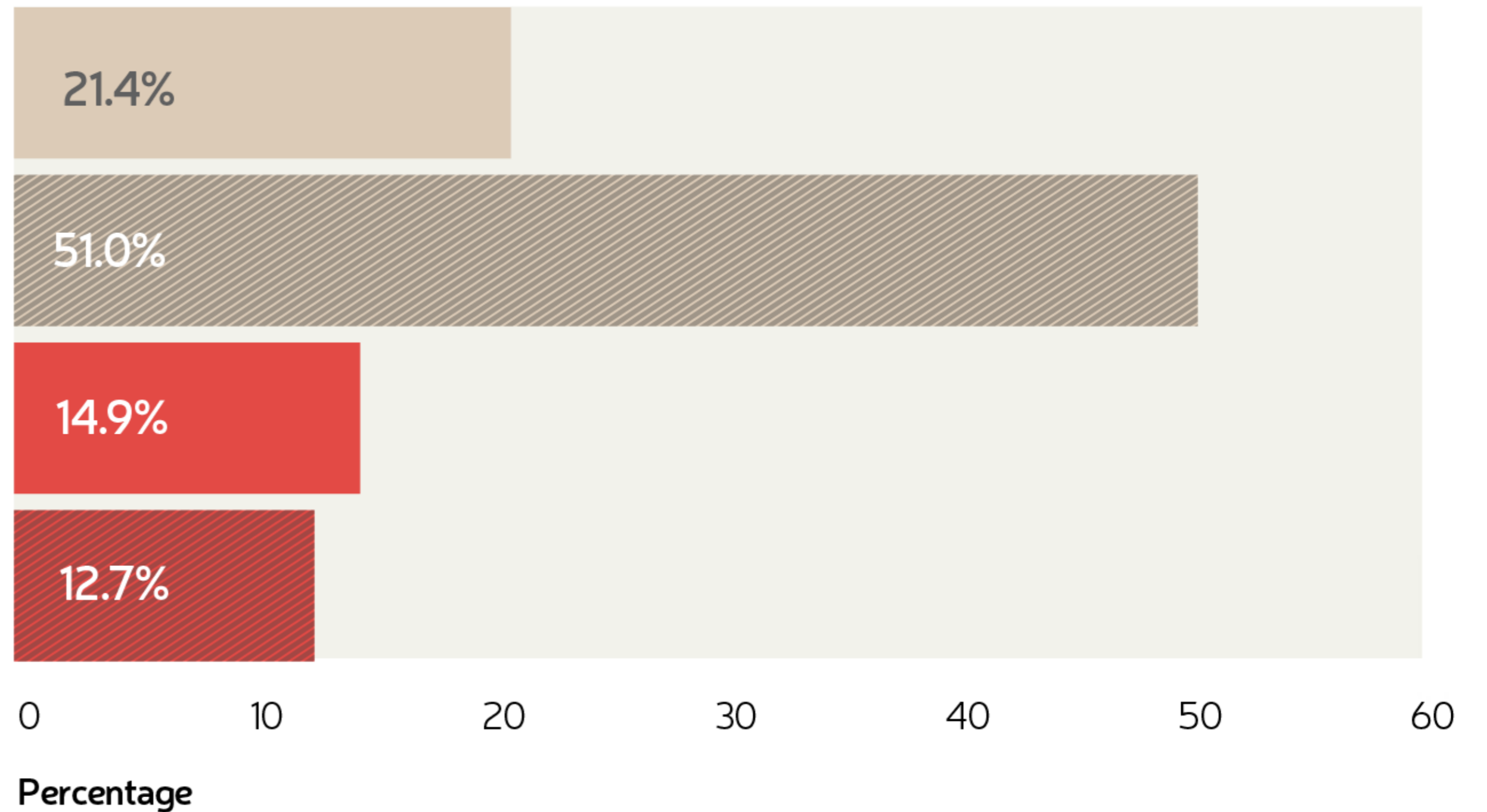The media has behaved irresponsibly and has made it more difficult to handle the crisis.

21.4%

51.0%

14.9%

12.7%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60

Percentage

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of the TV and print media to the Covid-19 crisis?

The media has functioned as a responsible partner in disseminating valuable information.

While the media has played a very important role in disseminating information, instances of misinformation have compromised their contribution.

The misinformation spread by the media has overshadowed its positive contribution.

The media has behaved irresponsibly and has made it more difficult to handle the crisis.

2011 & after
- 19.9%
- 52.0%
- 14.5%
- 13.6%

Pre 2011
- 25.6%
- 50.6%
- 12.8%
- 11.1%

Former
- 25.0%
- 36.4%
- 20.5%
- 18.2%

Percentage

In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the response of the TV and print media to the Covid-19 crisis?

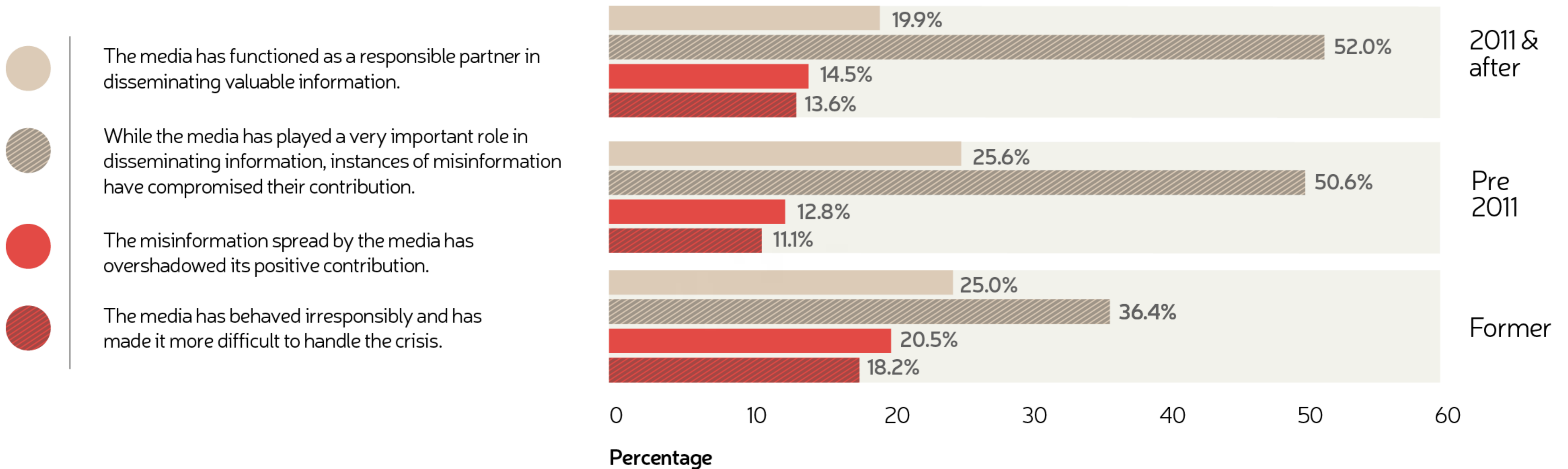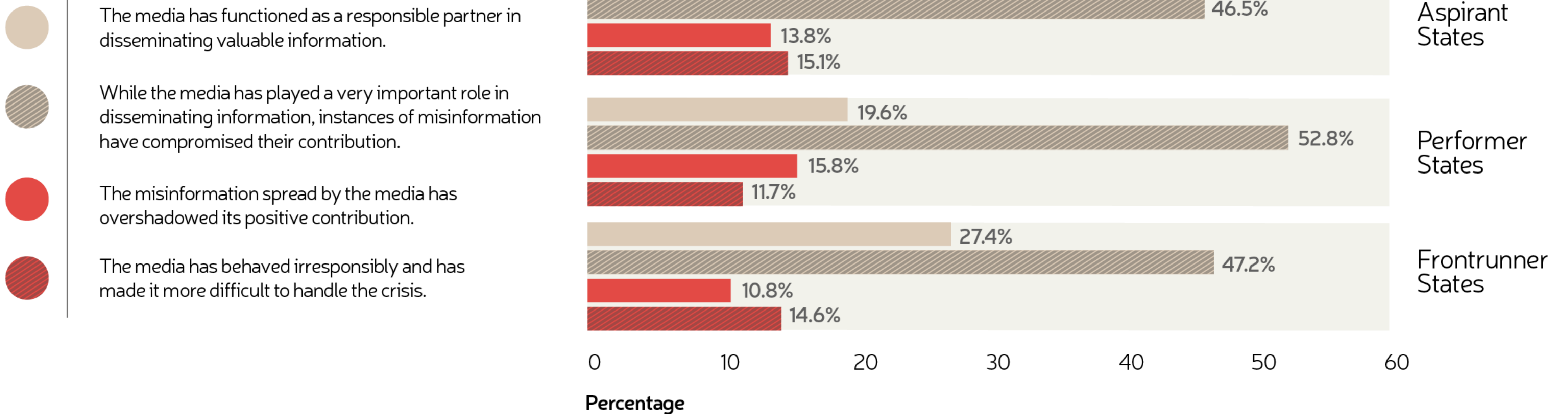The media has functioned as a responsible partner in disseminating valuable information.

While the media has played a very important role in disseminating information, instances of misinformation have compromised their contribution.

The misinformation spread by the media has overshadowed its positive contribution.

The media has behaved irresponsibly and has made it more difficult to handle the crisis.

Aspirant States
- 24.6%
- 46.5%
- 13.8%
- 15.1%

Performer States
- 19.6%
- 52.8%
- 15.8%
- 11.7%

Frontrunner States
- 27.4%
- 47.2%
- 10.8%
- 14.6%

Percentage

Conclusion

This report has presented findings and analysis based on a survey of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers on some key aspects of public administration in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. While the different questions referred to specific policies and interventions that were prominent at the time that the survey was fielded (August-September 2020), the survey itself was not intended as an evaluation or even self-assessment of India's pandemic management, although it does provide several interesting insights in that regard. Rather, with the ongoing Covid-19 crisis as the context, the survey sought to engage members of the IAS in reflecting on the critical challenges, decisions, and trade-offs that confronted public administrators charged with managing the state response at different levels. In doing so, it revealed both widely shared and sharply contested views on a range of subjects, including the role of the civil servant, executive and bureaucratic functioning in a crisis, and perceptions

of and relations between the state, the public, and other important actors and institutions.

As a whole, IAS officers are remarkably consistent in expressing high levels of motivation and public service commitment even in the face of personal risk and endorse the view that the Indian state and bureaucracy galvanise resources and deliver reasonably well in times of crisis. Officers also collectively emphasise the importance of autonomy, innovation, decentralisation, the use of technology and the need for effective public communication, both in administrative leadership and at the frontlines of service delivery. Together, they express a strong core set of public service values and a shared understanding of the roles and capabilities of the bureaucracy, especially when challenged by a grave crisis.

However, when it comes to decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, officers are deeply and evenly split between the need to take decisive action to prioritise health (i.e. the lockdown) versus taking the time to plan comprehensive mitigation measures. More generally, there

is a tension between some strongly expressed ideals and the realities of administrative action. So while officers are vigorous advocates of strategies that depend on securing public understanding and cooperation rather than inflicting penalties on the public, nearly half of them credit the public's fear of law rather than willing cooperation for the high levels of compliance observed during the lockdown. Moreover, what comes through is a palpable ambivalence towards the public itself, reflected in a tendency to lay the largest proportion of blame for failures in the state's public health strategy (in this case, test-trace-isolate) on societal values and practices (such as stigma and ostracism).

Finally, there is significant diversity among IAS officers when it comes to perceptions of key stakeholders (civil society, international agencies and the media) and a striking distrust of the private sector. This set of questions invites us to further explore the implications of these perceptions in shaping the state's role as a regulator in different sectors of economic and social life. Here, and at various points in the analysis, we also pointed out significant differences in the responses of officers across state cadres and by seniority. The disaggregated analysis directs us to focus much more deeply on the importance of context through further fieldwork, research, and discussion.

As we enter 2021 and the current context of vaccine approvals, distribution, delivery, and uptake, the insights from this survey of IAS officers, even with its limitations, perhaps offers a timely reminder of the deeper challenges for Indian public administration. Better planning, coordination, public engagement, partnership building, and regulation are not only technical challenges, but are profoundly shaped by deeply held and contested norms and values, which are experienced, upheld, undermined and challenged by civil servants in different contexts, both routine and extraordinary. How bureaucrats view different state institutions and functionaries, the public, and diverse actors, interest groups and stakeholders is at the heart of the matter. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought some of these underlying values and norms to the surface, but they deserve sustained attention, understanding and engagement.

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Notes and References

[6] More formally, we computed the sample size required for a Minimum Detectable Effect (MDE) of 5% across both binary and ranked responses (at 95% statistical significance). For multiple choice questions with more than 2 response options, we clubbed positive and positive-leaning, and negative and negative-leaning responses into two separate bins to model them as binary responses.

[1] See for example, Mazzucato, M. and Kattel, R. (2020). 'Covid-19 and public sector capacity.' *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*.

[2] Schuster, C. et al. (2020). 'Responding to Covid-19 through Surveys of Public Servants.' *Public Administration Review*.

[3] See the work of the *Global Survey of Public Servants Consortium* and the World Bank Bureaucracy Lab:
https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/dime/brief/Bureaucracy-Lab

[4] See the work of the Global Survey of Public Servants Consortium and the World Bank Bureaucracy Lab:
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[5] Vaishnav, M. and Khosla, S. (2016). 'The Indian Administrative Service Meets Big Data.' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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