



Safety & Security in Design



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COLLABORATION

AIA would like to thank our strategic partner, Oldcastle BuildingEnvelope, for its support in this research. The work would not have been possible without its contributions.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION AND DATA TABULATION

AIA

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Letter from the CEO

Safety and security have always shaped how architects approach design—protecting health, safety, and welfare is one of the profession’s core responsibilities. This new AIA research report, *Safety & Security in Design*, looks at how architects are integrating these considerations into their work today, how expectations vary by sector, and how it all influences product specification.

The findings underscore what we have long observed: Security is a core integrated part of design across firm types and project sectors. Architects describe a shift toward holistic, integrated strategies—combining access control, visibility, and product choices—rather than relying on any single hardened solution. Implementation, though, is still shaped by real-world constraints: Budget pressures, evolving codes and testing standards, and fragmented responsibility among stakeholders.

Architects report an increased investment in safety and security in education and data center projects over the next three years. To further explore the education sector, we have included project profiles that illustrate these principles at work.

While safety is differentiated from resilient design—the principles are similar, creating a building and infrastructure that protects occupants and communities.

We thank our strategic partner, Oldcastle BuildingEnvelope, for its support of this research, helping to bring these insights to our members, the profession, and the building industry.

CAROLE WEDGE, FAIA, NOMA, LEED AP

EVP/Chief Executive Officer

The American Institute of Architects

Letter from Mark Adamson, CEO, Oldcastle BuildingEnvelope

At Oldcastle BuildingEnvelope, we believe safety in the built environment is a shared responsibility—one that architects, manufacturers, and communities carry together. That conviction is what led us to partner with AIA for this foundational research report, *Safety & Security in Design*.

The findings confirm a clear shift across the profession: Safety and security are no longer niche or reactive measures, but baseline expectations woven into every phase of design and product specification. Today’s architects are moving away from isolated “hardened” solutions in favor of layered, holistic strategies that balance access control, visual transparency, and occupant well-being.

Navigating this evolution is not without challenge. Design teams are constantly balancing tighter budgets, evolving testing standards, and changing codes, particularly in high-impact sectors like K-12 education and mission-critical facilities, where safety considerations and expectations for growth are highest.

Our role as a technical and manufacturing partner is to make achieving that balance easier—delivering performance-tested systems, transparent data, and early-stage collaboration that architects can trust. As a strategic partner to AIA, we are proud to help capture these critical insights, and we remain dedicated to being the kind of ally this profession deserves.

MARK ADAMSON
CEO, Oldcastle BuildingEnvelope

CHAPTER 1

Key findings

Key findings



Security is now a baseline expectation, not a niche service.

Across firm types, architects report that safety and security are incorporated into projects beyond minimum code requirements.



Qualitative insights reinforce this shift, with experienced practitioners describing an **evolution toward more layered, integrated approaches over time** rather than a sudden change in practice.

Security strategies are increasingly layered but not necessarily more restrictive. Architects describe a shift toward **integrated, multi-layered approaches that combine access control, visibility, operational planning, and material strategies** rather than relying solely on hardened or defensive measures.



Implementation is shaped as much by constraints and stakeholders as by design intent.

While security is widely recognized as important, architects continue to face persistent challenges, including **budget constraints, value-engineering pressures, limited client understanding, evolving codes and testing standards, and fragmented stakeholder responsibilities.**

Safety integration varies significantly by sector and perceived risk. Higher levels of integration are reported in **data centers, education, healthcare, and institutional projects**, where risk, regulation, and operational complexity are greater.



Qualitative findings further suggest that **urban contexts and higher-risk environments tend to elevate security as a design driver**, while lower-risk settings may limit investment and prioritization.



Experience level strongly influences confidence and decision-making.



Architects report varying levels of expertise in incorporating safety and security, with **less experienced professionals relying more heavily on external specialists**, mid-career professionals increasing their role in **specification**, and **senior practitioners leading strategy and integration.**

CHAPTER 2

Safety in industry sectors

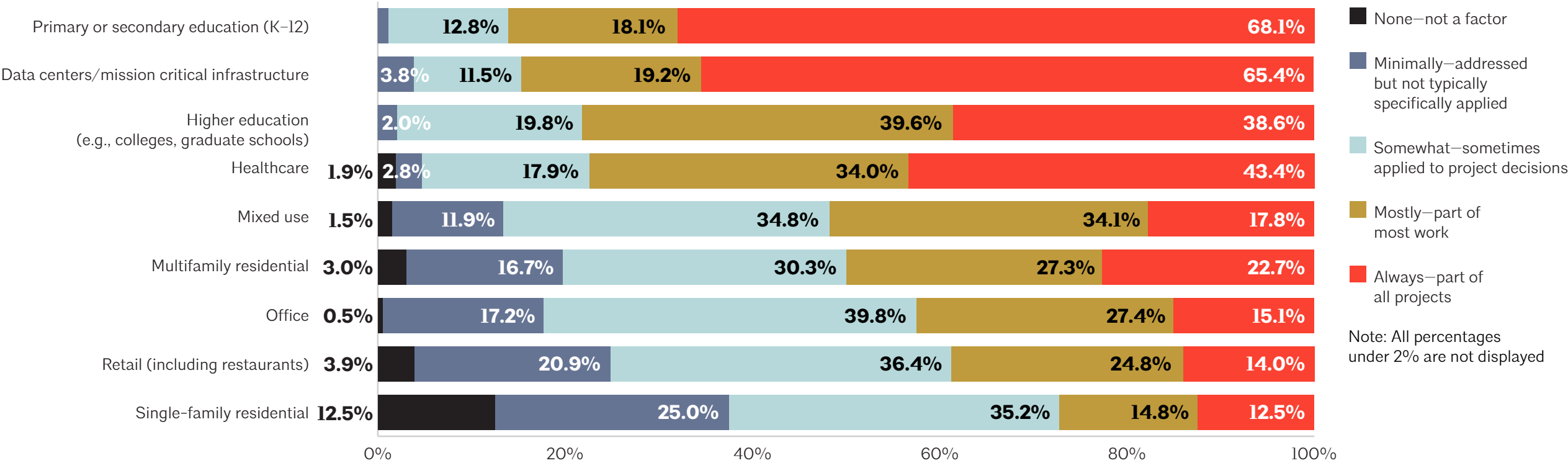
In some sectors, safety considerations are deeply embedded, while others are more varied

Safety is most deeply embedded in institutional project types, such as education and healthcare, where it is consistently treated as a core design component rather than an added consideration. In contrast, the commercial and residential sectors

exhibit greater variability, with safety applied more selectively based on project context. This suggests that perceived risk, regulatory pressure, and project type strongly influence how safety is integrated into design decisions.

Safety is a consideration on all education and data center projects to some extent, while it is less of a focus in single-family residential projects

Share of respondents who report that safety has been a part of work in each sector



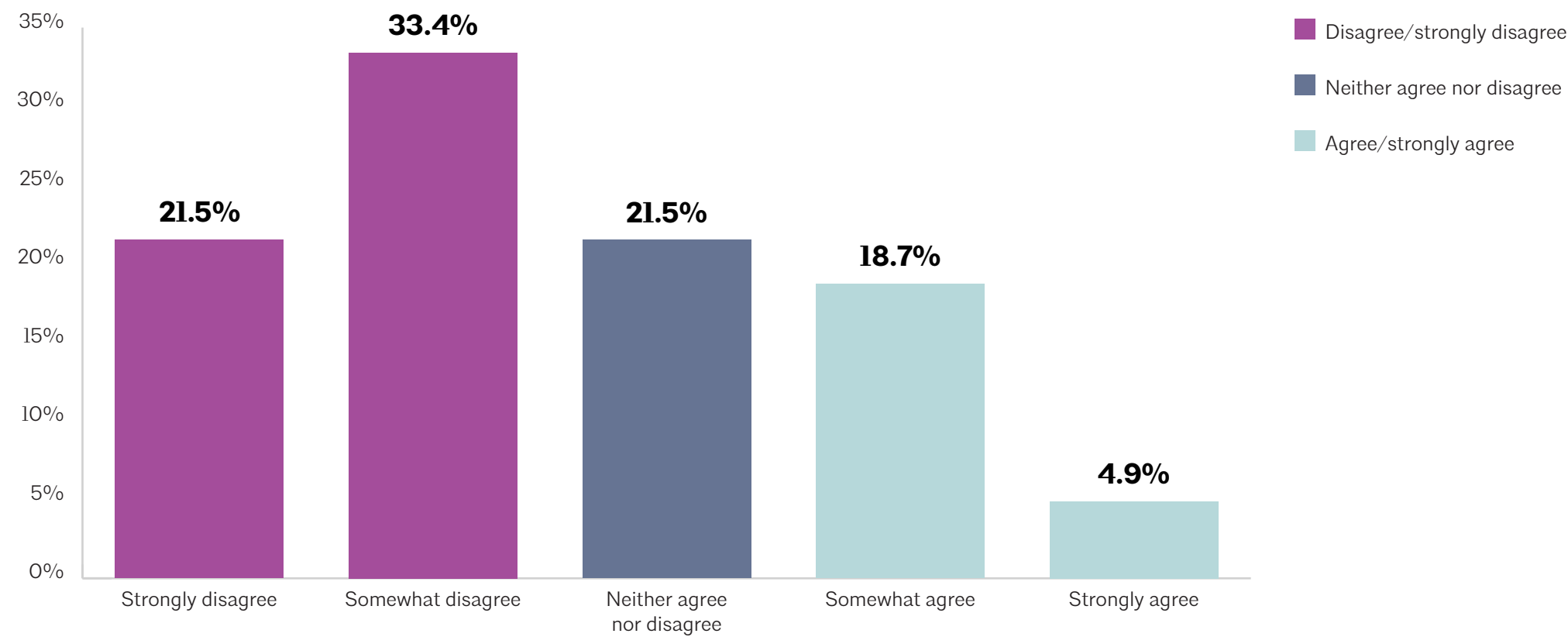
For the most part, architectural professionals recognize that safety requirements are different across industry sectors

A majority of respondents (54.9%) report that they do not think that safety requirements should be the same across building types. However, a portion of respondents would like to have standardization (23.6%).

Project managers were more likely to want a consistent set of requirements across sectors, likely because it eases their work directly. Otherwise, the respondents were in relative agreement, independent of firm size or tenure.

A majority of architects do not believe safety requirements should be the same across building types

Share of respondents who agree/strongly disagree that safety requirements on all projects are the same across industry sectors



Safety considerations are expected to grow significantly in some sectors, particularly institutional projects and data centers

Architects anticipate the most growth in safety considerations in sectors with higher perceived risk and regulatory complexity, such as education, data centers, and healthcare.

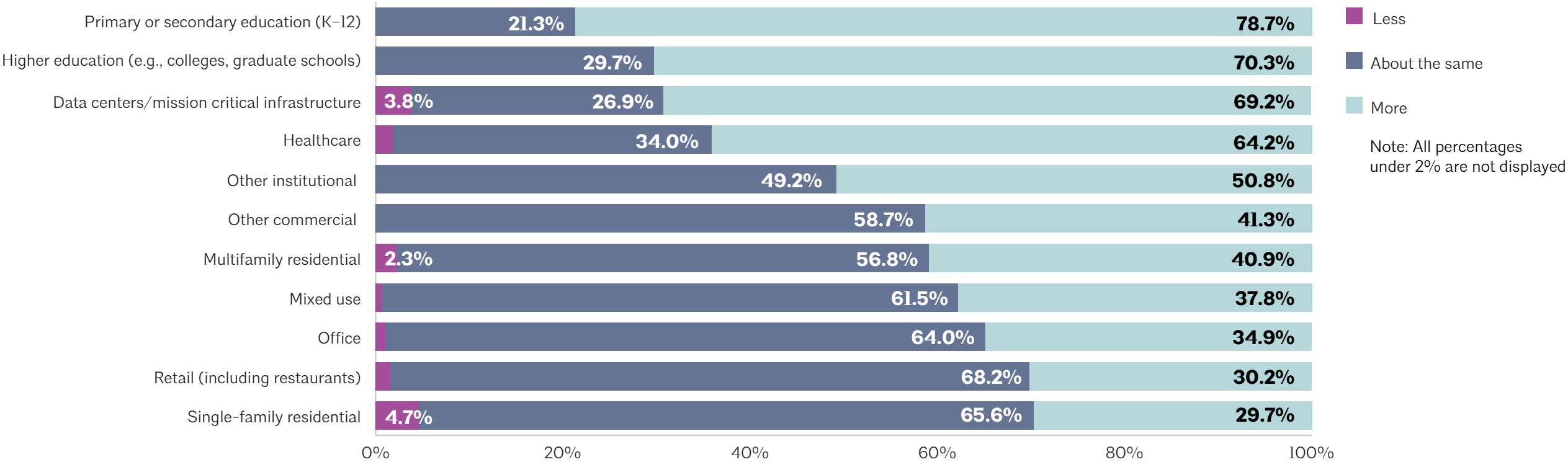
In contrast, most commercial and residential sectors are expected to see incremental or stable change rather than significant shifts. This suggests that

future increases in safety integration will be driven less by universal trends and more by sector-specific pressures and risk profiles.

There is no expectation that safety will become less of a consideration over time, confirming that it is a core tenet that architects and designers need to incorporate into their work.

Architects expect safety considerations to increase in education, data center, and healthcare projects, while other sectors are expected to hold steady

Share of respondents who expect safety considerations in each project type



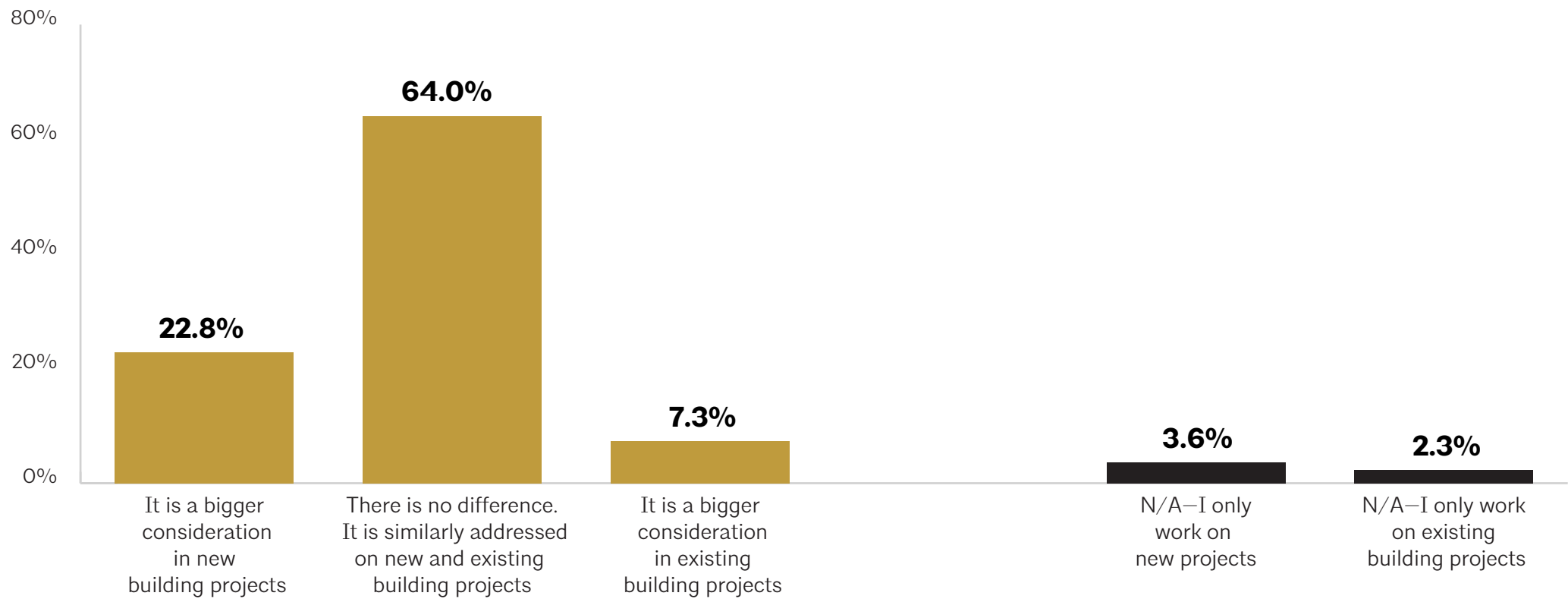
There is little difference in the application of safety considerations in new or existing building projects

More than half of architecture firm billings come from existing building work, according to [AIA’s Business of Architecture Firm Survey Report](#). The respondents of this study reflect that same distribution. The mix of new and existing building work means that safety strategies must be flexible enough to apply to both new designs and upgrades to existing building conditions.

Most architects report that safety is addressed consistently across both new and existing projects, indicating a broadly standardized approach. However, when differences do emerge, safety is more often emphasized in new construction, likely reflecting clearer code pathways and fewer constraints compared to retrofits. This suggests that while safety expectations are similar in theory, practical limitations in existing buildings may impact how fully those measures are implemented.

For the most part, architects believe there is no difference between projects that are new vs. existing

Respondents’ distribution of project safety among new and existing projects



CHAPTER 3

Safety in projects

The profession broadly defines safety and security in projects.

Most agree that safety is about protection, while security focuses on threat mitigation

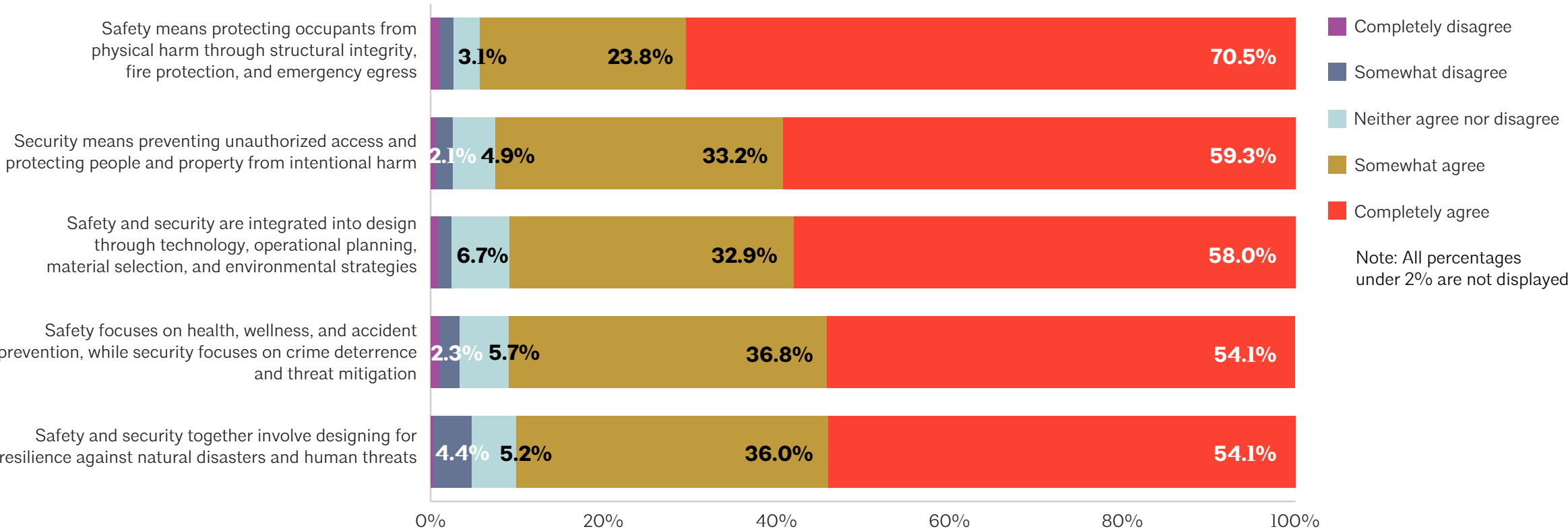
Architects demonstrate strong alignment around the core definitions of safety and security, with safety primarily focused on protecting occupants and security on preventing intentional harm. There is broad agreement that both concepts are integrated into design through multiple dimensions, including technology, materials, and planning strategies. This consistency suggests a shared industry framework, though the variety of applications indicates flexibility in how these

principles are interpreted and implemented across projects. However, the agreement across all the statements also suggests that there is not one unified definition of safety and security in design.

The are no significant differences among the respondent profiles—firm size, tenure, or position—indicating a consistent view across the profession.

The profession views safety and security in projects broadly, though generally it aligns safety with protection and security with threat mitigation

Share of respondents who agree/strongly agree with each statement



Architects incorporate many safety features into projects—many driven by code, but also around accessibility and occupant health

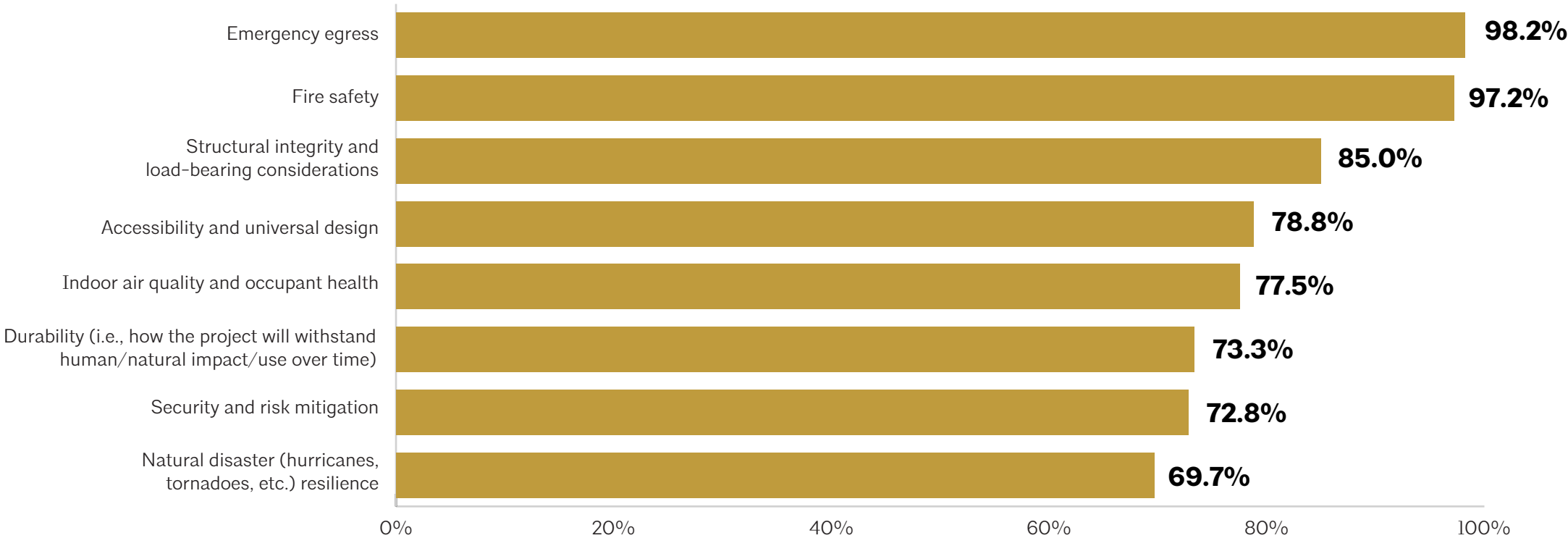
Over two-thirds of respondents incorporate all the safety aspects assessed in the study, with universal adoption of emergency egress and fire safety—which are notably code driven. Among those not code driven, universal design and indoor air quality were most used in projects—highlighting architects’ focus on the occupant experience.

There were some differences by demographic group:

- **Firm principals:** A larger share of principals (84.7%) report indoor air quality and occupant health as an important part of safety work compared to other respondents.
- **Small firms:** Fewer small firm respondents (61.1%) report risk mitigation as part of their safety work compared to other respondents.

Architects incorporate many safety features into projects, with the most common ones driven by code

Share of respondents selecting the aspect as part of their safety project work



Of the safety features included in projects, architects place the greatest importance on core life-saving elements and those with the strongest code requirements

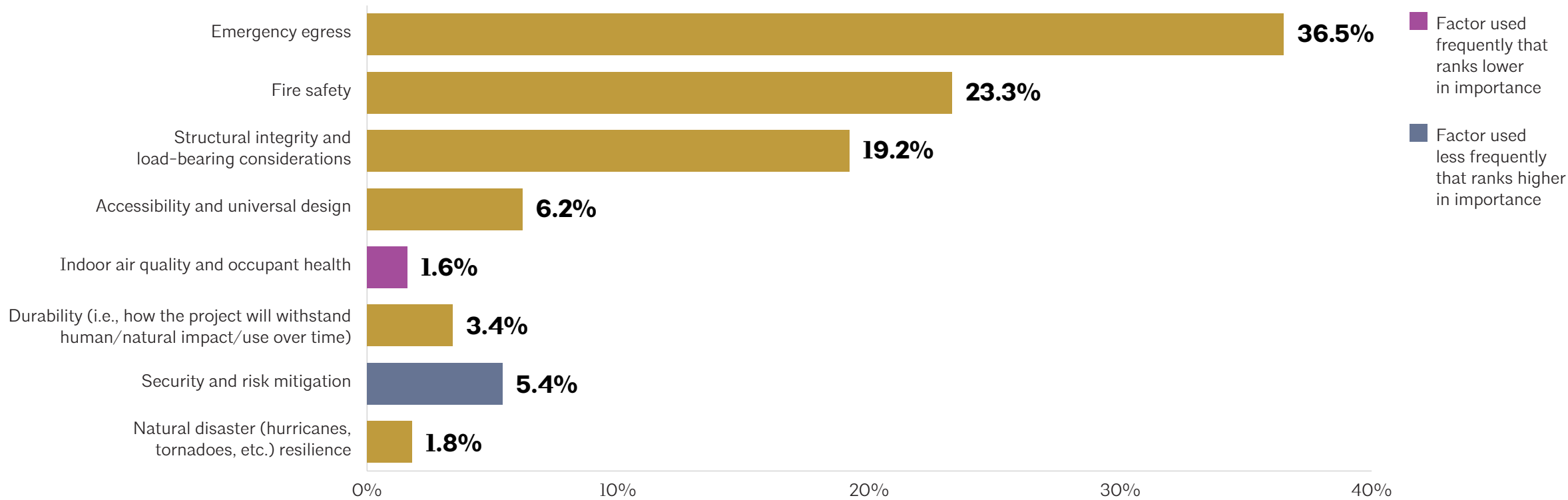
While there are many safety elements included in projects, design professionals prioritize emergency egress, fire safety, and structural integrity, which are also the most commonly used factors. Factors such as indoor air quality and resilience are less likely to be identified as top priorities. Conversely, security and risk mitigation rise in priority relative to their overall usage. This finding suggests that while they are not yet universally central to design decisions, there is growing attention to emerging threats.

There are no significant differences among different demographic groups (firm size, tenure) when it comes to the most important aspects of safety work.

However, slightly more project managers and those at the largest firms report risk mitigation as a top priority.

When looking at the most important factors, indoor air quality ranks lower than security and risk mitigation, which ranks fifth (seventh in use)

Share of respondents reporting that aspect as most important



Controlled access is a foundational strategy across all project types and is consistently integrated into safety design decisions

However, sector differences emerge:

- Surveillance plays a more prominent role in education and retail, while education projects also incorporate a broader range of layered strategies.
- Retail projects place less emphasis on reinforcement and interior measures, reflecting a more open, circulation-focused environment that limits the use of more restrictive interventions.
- Projects in urban districts more often prioritize security as a design driver than those in rural districts. Perceived threat levels influence investment and expectations.

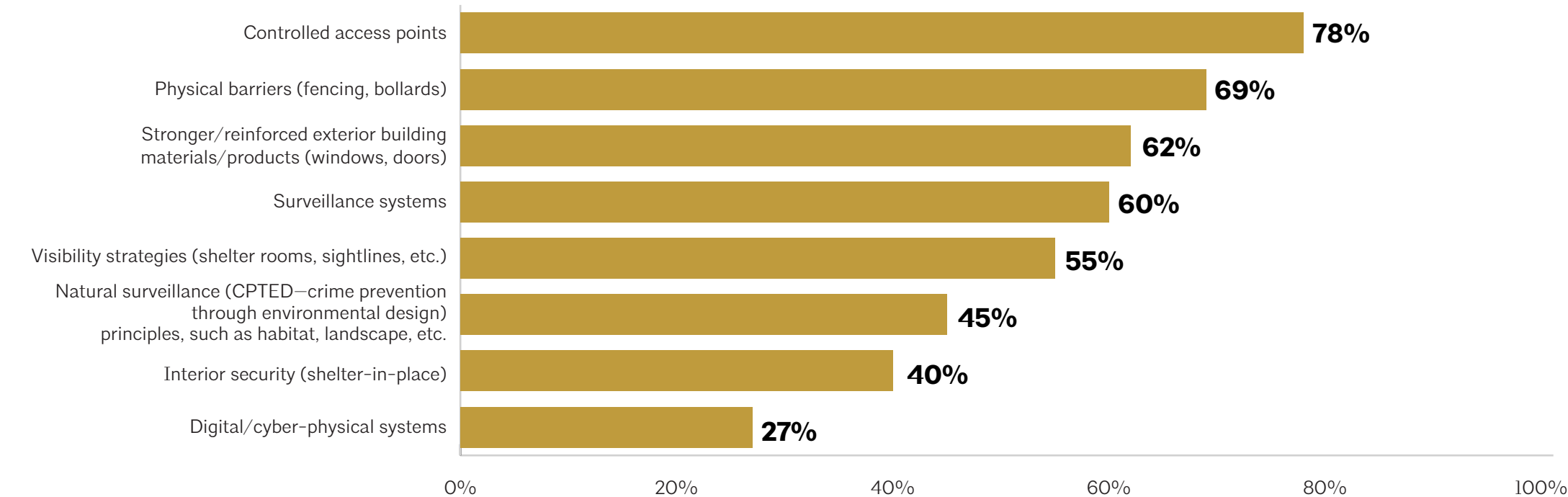
In many cases, security directors, superintendent priorities, or informal preferences shape decisions more than written requirements, especially when formal standards are absent.

There are a few statistical differences by the respondents' firm size:

- **Large firms (50 or more employees):** More use of physical barriers, visibility strategies, interior security, and digital/cyber systems compared with other-sized firms.
- **Small firms (fewer than 10 employees):** Less use of controlled access points and visibility strategies compared with other-sized firms.

Architects are most focused on access, barriers, and structural strength. However, more than half also incorporate surveillance and visibility strategies

Share of respondents selecting factor as part of safety-related design decisions



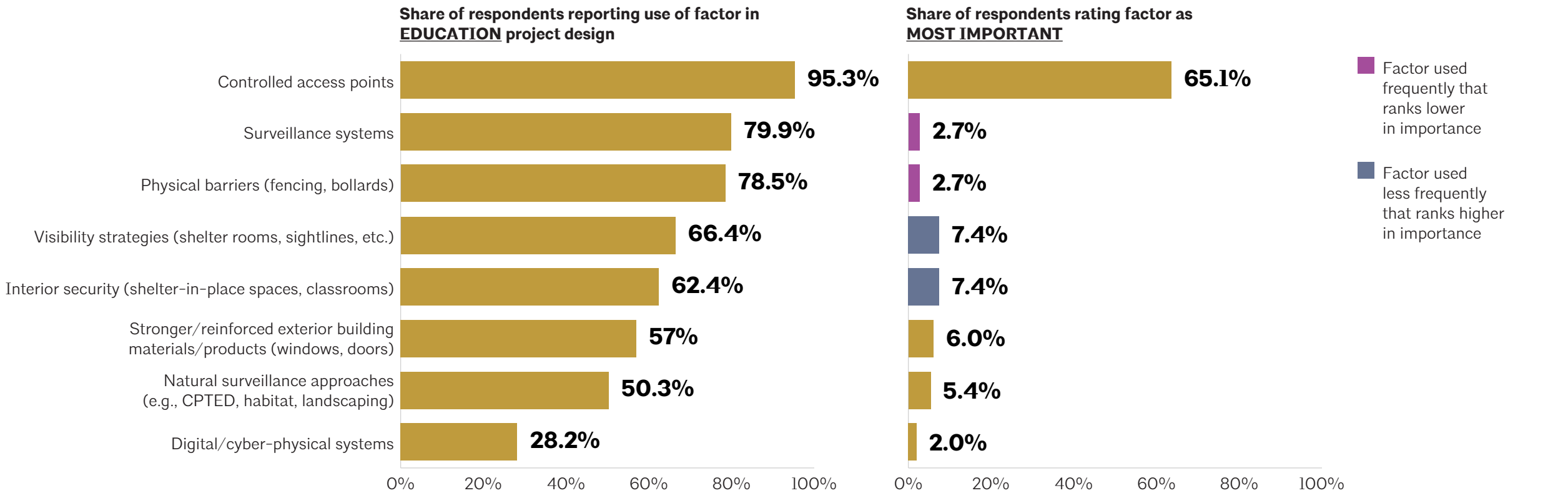
Education projects take a layered approach to security, commonly incorporating multiple strategies, with a clear emphasis on controlling entry points

While surveillance, barriers, and visibility measures are widely used, they are less frequently prioritized as the single most important factor, indicating they function more as supporting elements. This suggests that architects view access control as the primary line of defense, with other measures reinforcing a broader, integrated safety strategy.

While there aren’t significant differences across different positions, there are some significant differences across respondents from small and large firms:

- There is significantly more use of physical barriers, visibility strategies, interior security, and digital systems in education projects by large firm practitioners.
- There are significantly fewer architects from small firms using controlled access points and visibility in their education projects.

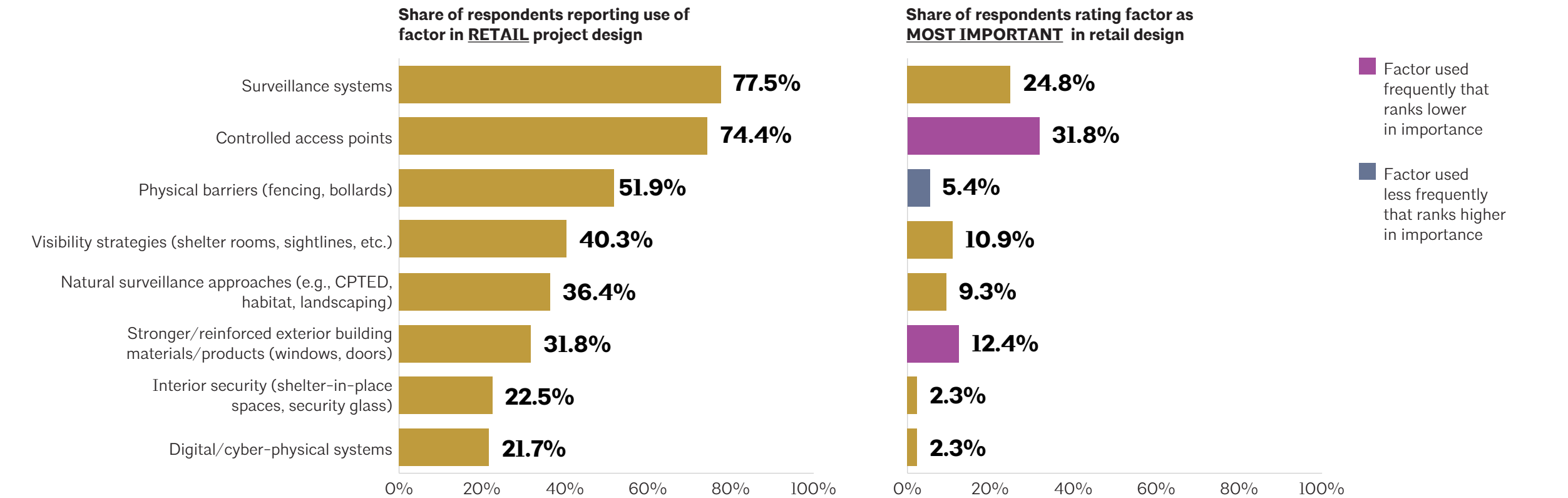
In education projects, access and surveillance are more integrated into safety design decisions, with access being the most important



Retail projects rely heavily on surveillance and access strategies, reflecting the need to monitor open, high-traffic environments

However, when prioritizing impact, controlled access emerges as the most critical factor, indicating a shift from observation to prevention. Other elements, such as barriers and interior security, play a more limited role, suggesting that retail safety strategies focus on managing flow and visibility rather than restricting space.

In retail projects, surveillance is most integrated into safety design decisions. When ranking, access is most important, while barriers are less important



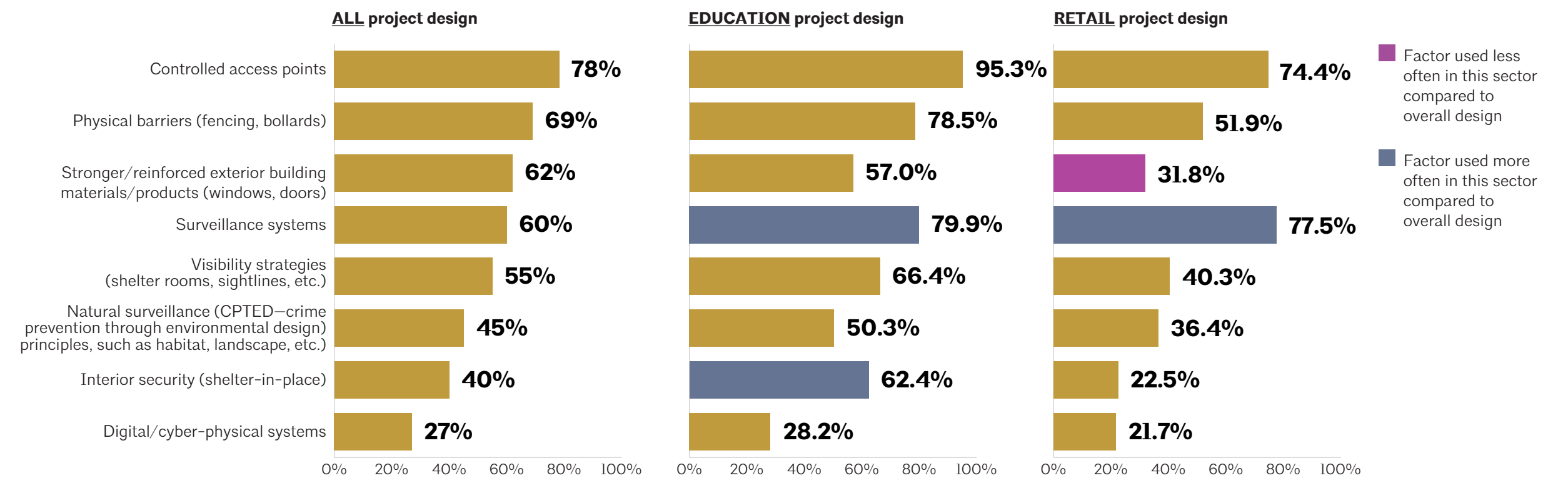
Across the different sectors, implementing controlled access points is the most commonly used safety-related design decision

Use of controlled access points is prevalent across all building types, including those for education and retail projects. However, there are also some notable differences. Architects most commonly use surveillance in education and retail

projects. Reinforcement, on the other hand, is used least in retail projects and is much more frequently part of projects overall and in education projects specifically.

While controlled access points are a universally used safety-related design decision, architects use surveillance more commonly in education and retail projects

Share of respondents selecting factor as part of safety-related design decisions, by building type



CHAPTER 4

Safety expertise in the architectural profession

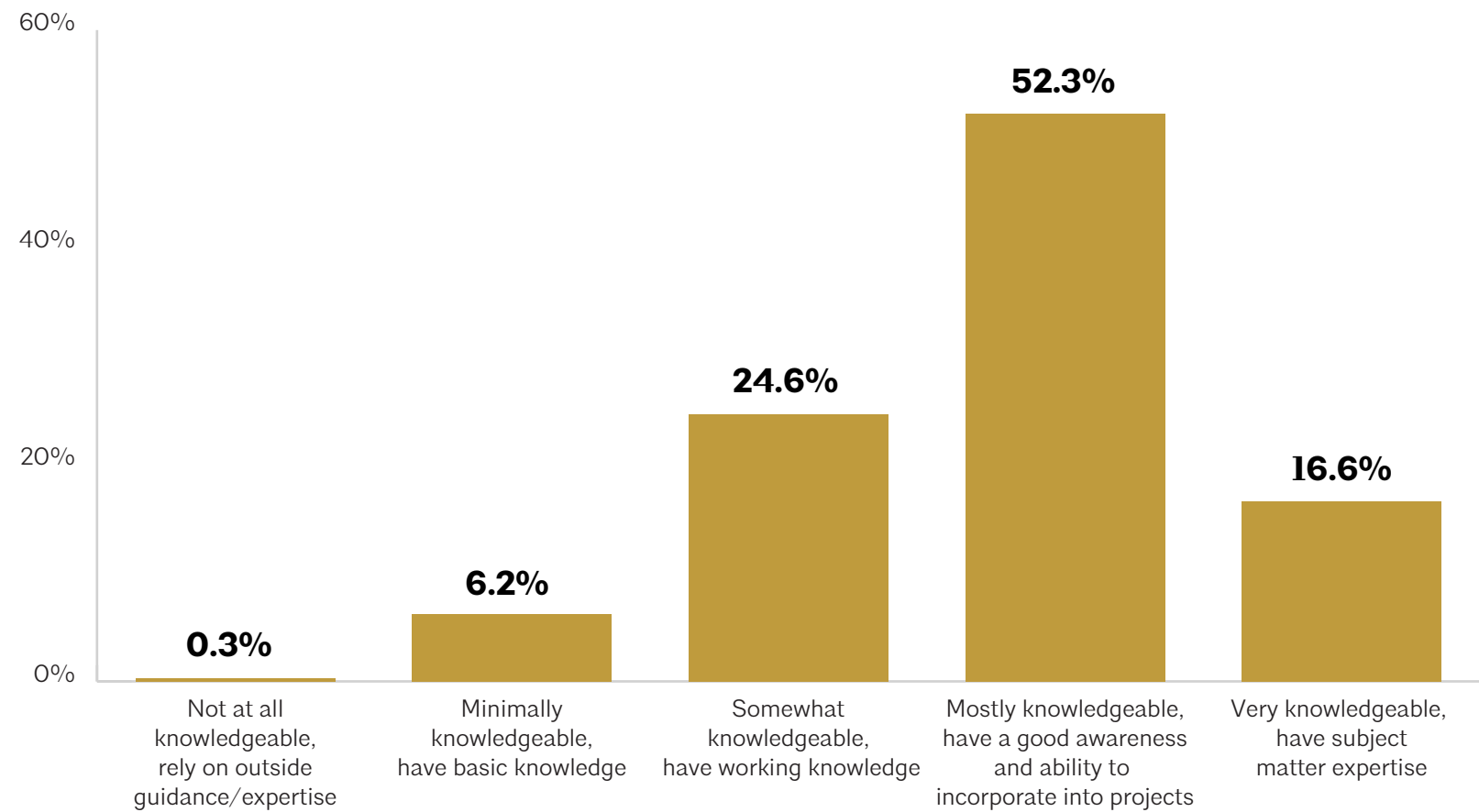
Respondents are mostly knowledgeable about safety and security

A notable share of architects (16.6%) report being subject matter experts on safety and security. In contrast, about a quarter report a working knowledge. Very few indicate minimal knowledge, and virtually no architects report a complete lack of knowledge and reliance on outside expertise.

Overall, there aren't many differences across different demographic groups. By position, there are a few differences. Principals report the highest expertise, followed by project managers.

Architects, for the most part, are knowledgeable about safety and security and incorporate it into their projects

Share of respondents rating their personal knowledge and expertise in the incorporation of safety and security into their projects

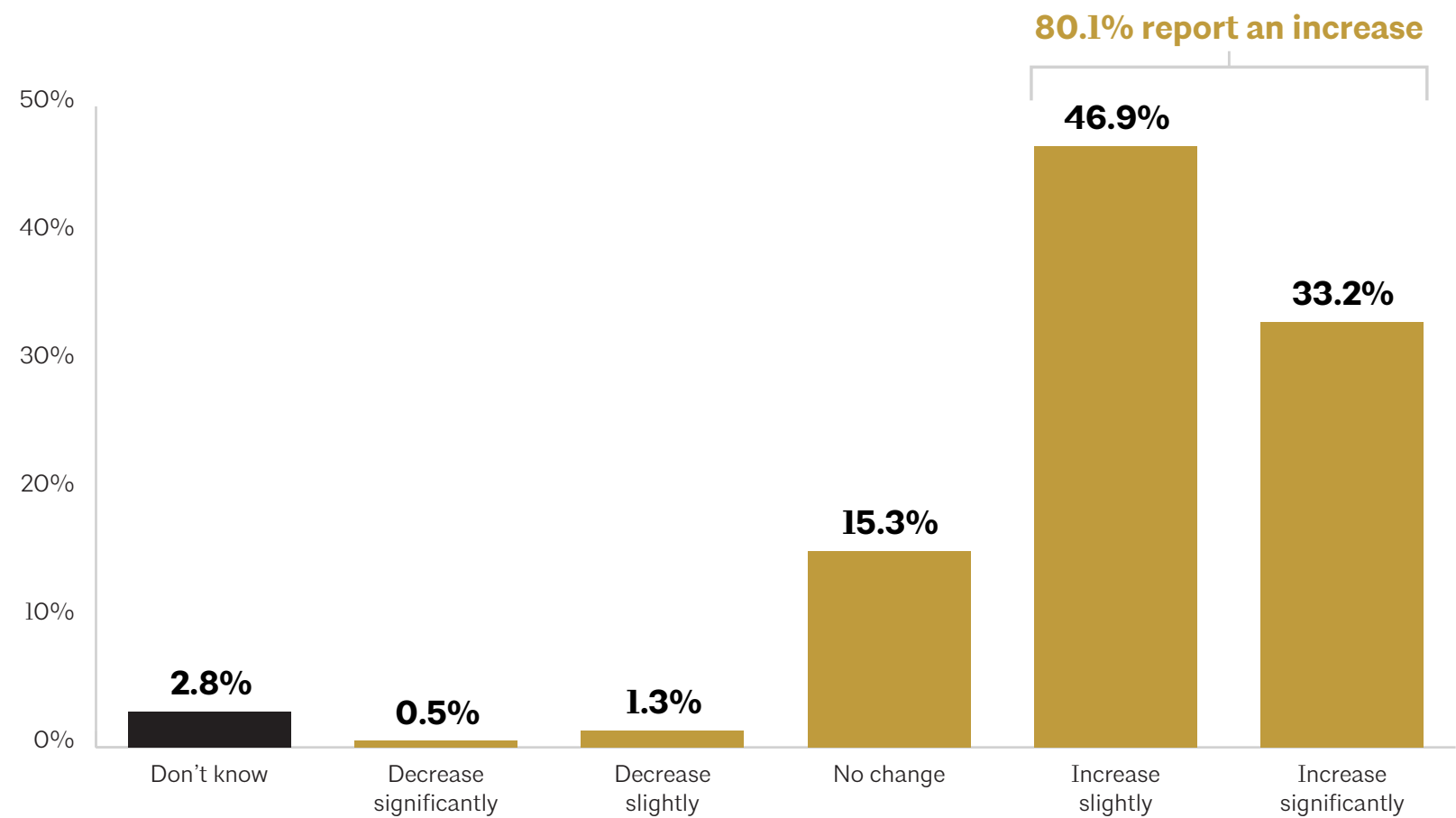


Most architects expect safety to increase as a factor in design over the next three years

Overall, all demographic groups report an expected increase in safety as a factor in project decisions, though project managers are slightly less confident in this prediction compared to respondents in other positions.

Eight in 10 architects expect safety considerations to increase over the next three years

Share of respondents reporting expected change of safety considerations in design decisions over the next three years



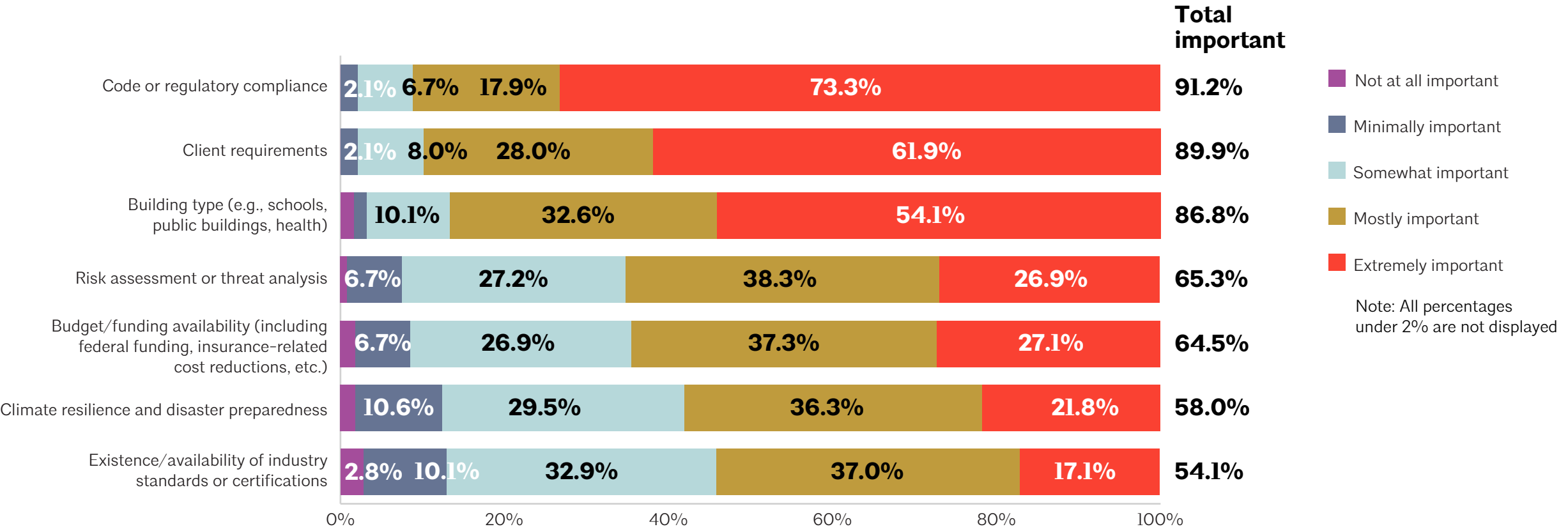
The top three drivers of safety in design are code/regulation, client requirements, and building type

Though the top three drivers were clearly distinct from the other drivers, a majority of architects believe all these elements are important in driving safety in projects.

While there were no statistically significant differences across the demographic groups, a larger number of project managers report risk assessment as important, whereas a greater number of principals rate climate resilience and disaster preparedness as important.

The top three drivers of safety in design are code/regulation, client requirements, and building type

Share of respondents rating the importance of each factor in driving safety in projects



Clients are the most impactful accelerator of safety integration into projects

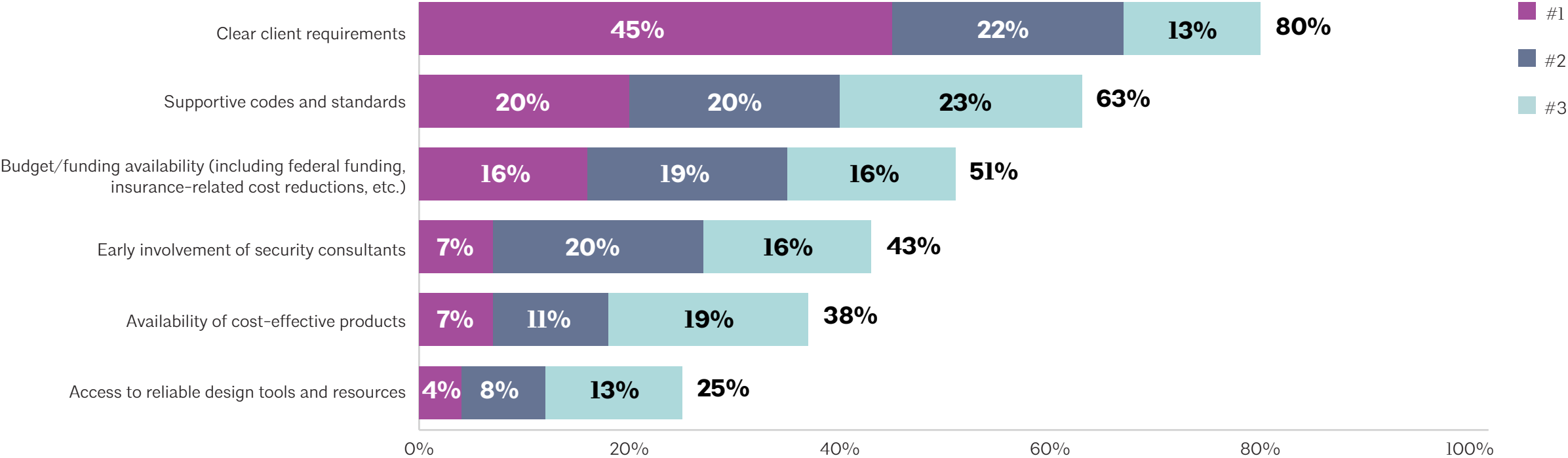
While there were many reported drivers for safety integration in projects, when ranking those drivers by importance, there was a clear distinction among them. Eight in 10 architects reported clear client requirements as a top-three driver, and almost half rated it first. There are some differences across demographic groups when it comes to the most impactful driver of safety in projects.

- **Principals:** While it is the highest rated factor in impact, client requirements is the top factor reported by principals, with 87% of them rating it as a top-three driver.
- **Project managers:** Closer to the work, project managers are more likely to see supportive codes and budget as impactful, reported by 75% of them as a top driver.

- **Smaller firm respondents:** They are looking for more cost-effective products and reliable tools, with nearly half (47%) reporting this as a top driver.
- **Large firm respondents:** Over three-fourths of very large firm respondents (those from firms with more than 500 employees) note supportive codes and standards as a top-three driver of safety. It was nearly comparable to the share that noted clients as a driver. With their resources and large share of projects, these largest firms rank clients and codes most important as they have access to tools, resources, and expertise.

Client requirements are the number one most impactful driver of safety integration in projects

Share of respondents ranking the most impactful drivers of safety integration

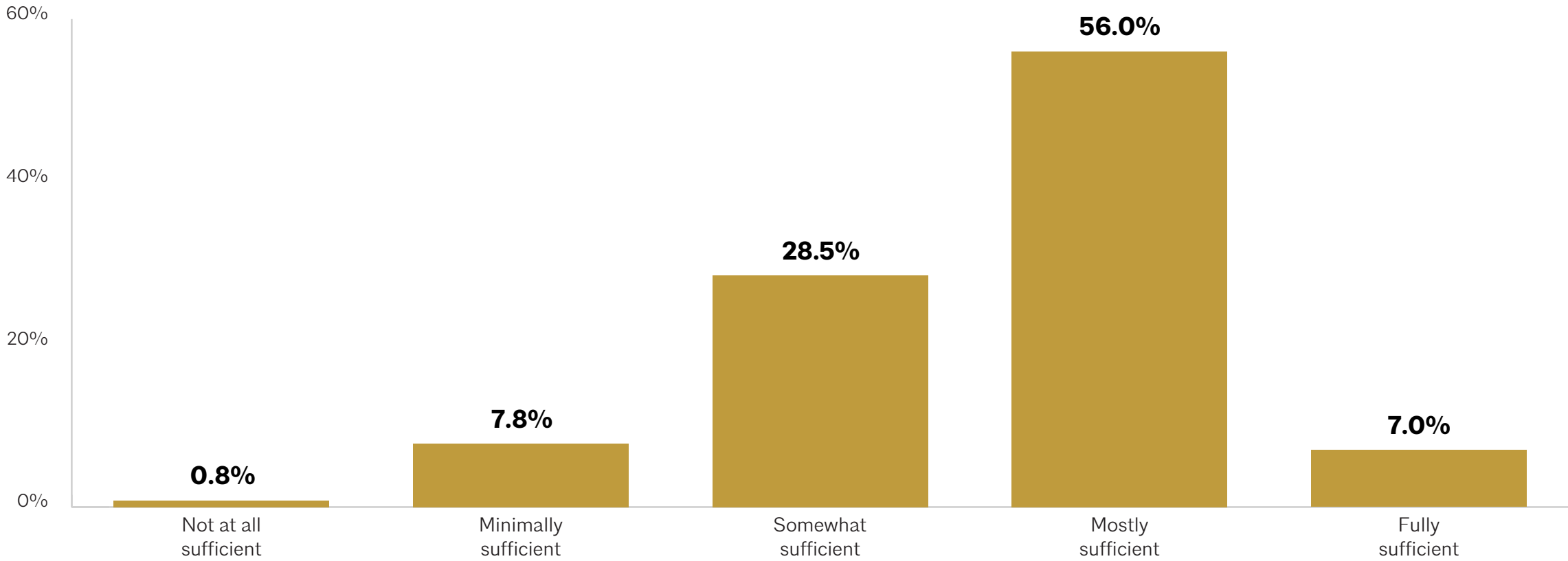


Most architects believe that codes are sufficient to ensure occupant safety, though not fully sufficient

For the most part, architects believe codes are sufficient, but not fully, suggesting there is room for stronger codes.

While there aren’t significant differences among respondents of different positions, those at smaller firms are more confident that today’s codes are sufficient to ensure occupant safety.

Most architects believe that codes are sufficient to ensure occupant safety
Share of respondents reporting on the sufficiency of current building codes in ensuring occupant safety



Three-quarters of architects offer safety services that go beyond code requirements at some level

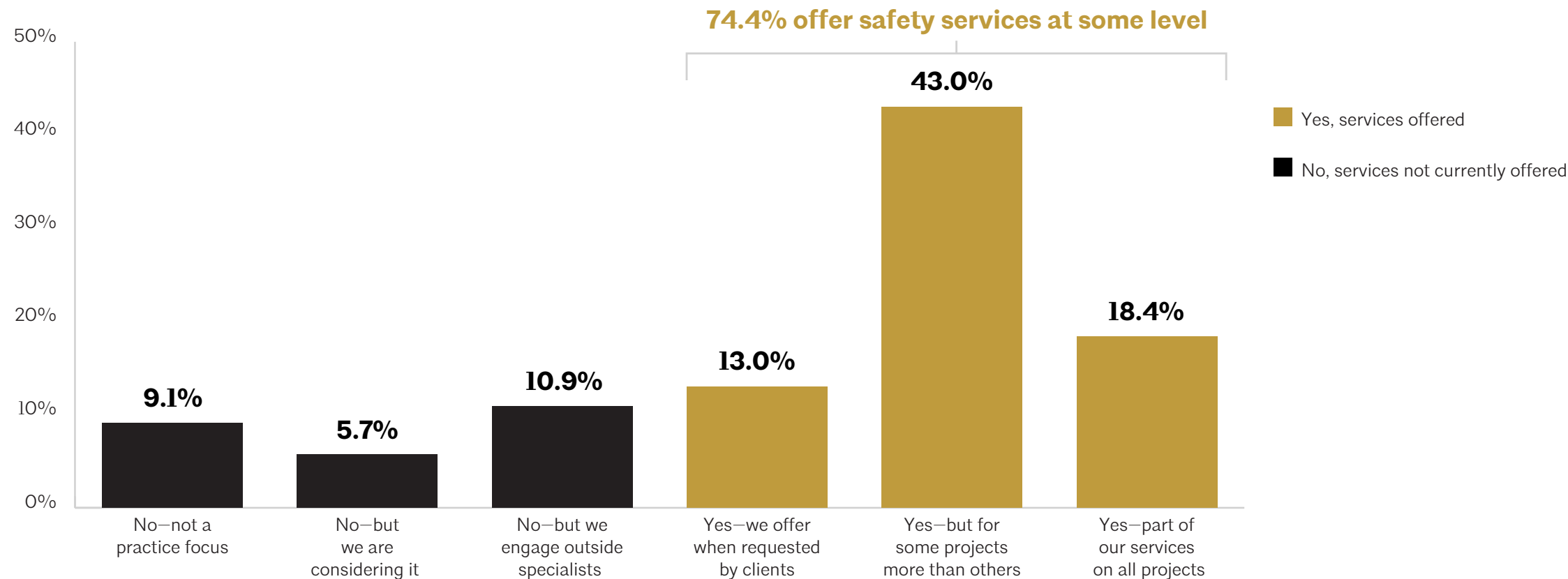
For the most part, architects offer more safety and security approaches in their architectural services than codes require. A notable share (18.4%) incorporate beyond-code approaches on all projects, while only a small share offer no such expanded services.

There are a few significant differences across demographic groups.

- **Large firms respondents:** Not surprisingly, a significantly larger share of those at large firms report that safety is part of their services across all projects.
- **Project managers:** They are more likely to report that it is part of all their work or requested by clients. All project manager respondents noted they provide safety and security services beyond code at some level.

Three-quarters of architects offer safety services that go beyond code requirements, including about a fifth that incorporate it in all projects

Share of respondents noting their use of safety in their design services beyond code requirements



The profession is split nearly evenly between those who use security consultants and those who do not

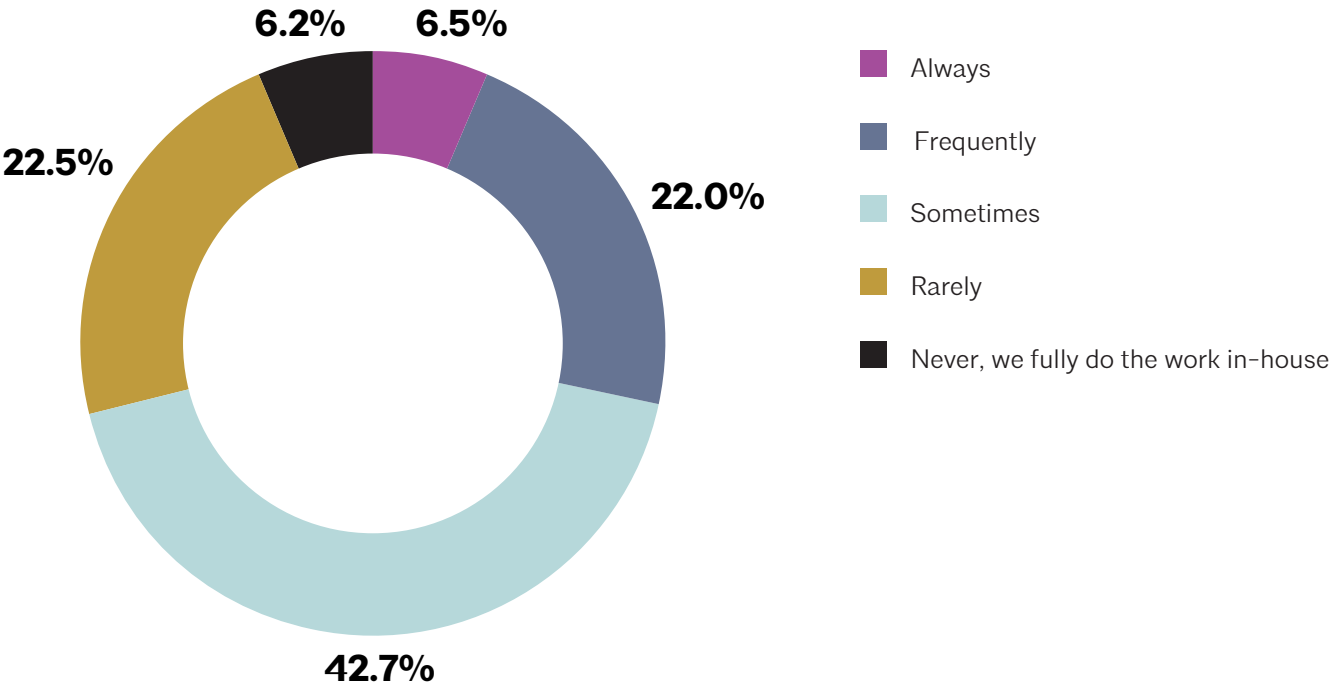
The largest share report that they sometimes use security consultants on their projects, at 43%.

There are some differences by demographic group:

- A statistically higher share of respondents from very large firms report always using safety consultants on projects—10% vs. 6.5% for all respondents.
- Small firms are more likely to report rarely using safety consultants on projects—33% vs. 22.5% for all respondents.
- Nearly a fifth of project managers report always collaborating with safety consultants on their projects.

Most of the profession use safety consultants at some level on their projects

Share of respondents reporting frequency of collaboration with security consultants during design



Respondents believe that architects and clients are the most important players in the incorporation of safety into a project

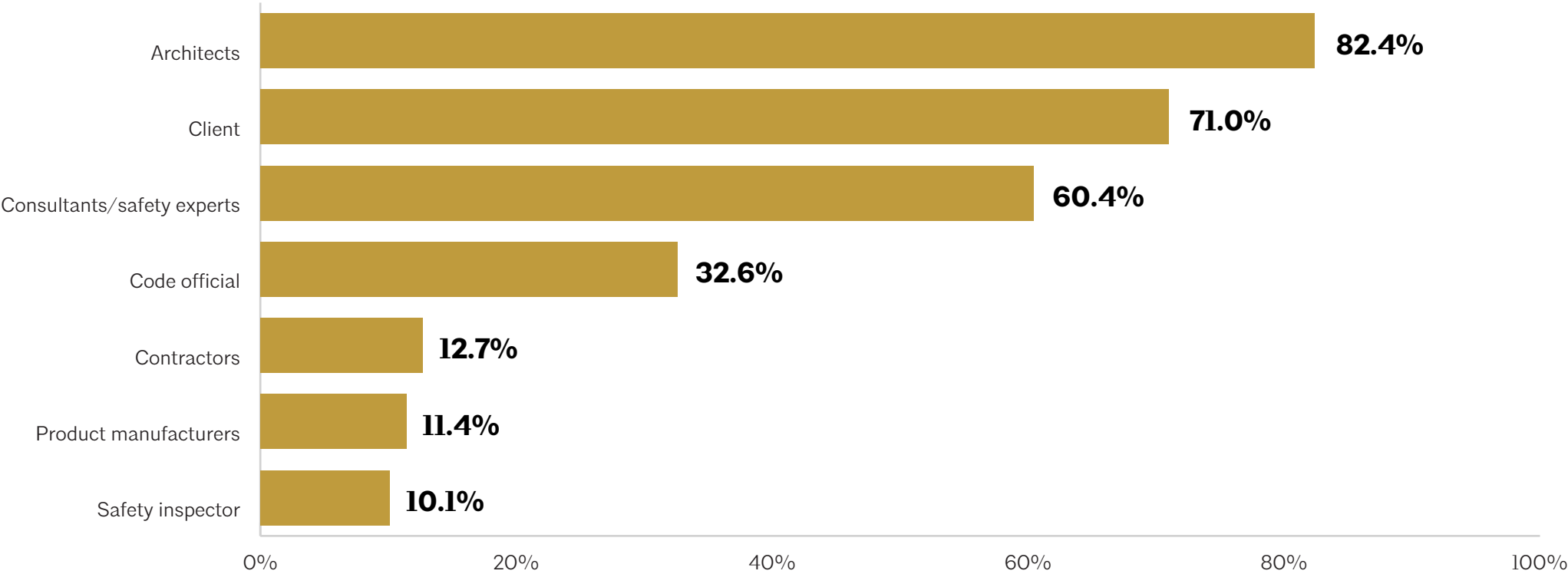
There are other influences behind the incorporation of safety into a project, but there was agreement on architects’ own influence as they work with their clients on projects.

There are some differences across demographic groups:

- **Principals:** More than eight in 10 firm leaders report clients as a top-three important player, significantly higher than the overall percentage (71%).
- **Project managers:** A quarter of project managers rate safety inspectors as an important player, significantly higher than the 10% overall response.
- **Small firms (fewer than 10 employees):** Those at smaller firms report code officials (41%) and product manufacturers (17%) as important, significantly higher compared to other groups.
- **Large firms (50 or more employees):** A larger share report safety inspectors as important (18%) compared to other respondents.

Respondents believe that architects and clients are the most important players in the incorporation of safety into a project

Share of respondents selecting each player as one of the three most important players in incorporating safety into projects



Design guidelines and expert consultants are the methods that architects most use to incorporate safety into projects

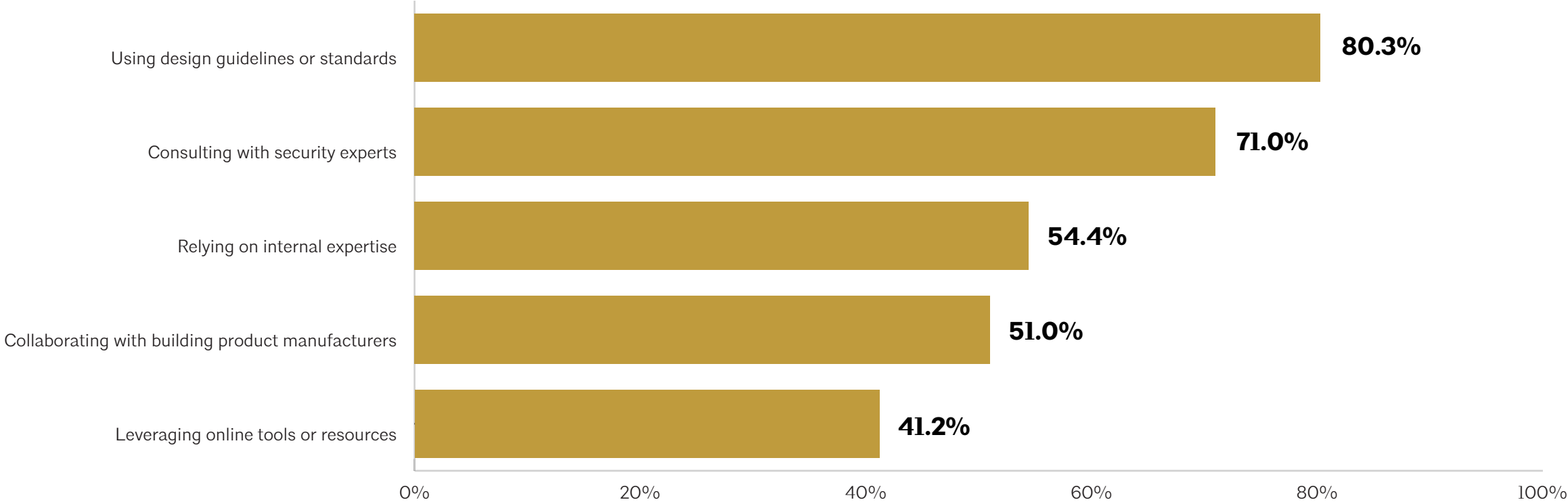
Other methods used by a majority of respondents include internal expertise and building project manufacturers.

There is little difference across different positions at firms. However, there are some notable differences by firm size.

- **Large firm respondents:** Those at the largest firms, who have more resources, are more likely to report using design guidelines (86%) or relying on in-house expertise (63%) vs. leveraging online resources (26%).
- **Small firm respondents:** Those at small firms, who do not have as many resources at hand, are more likely to collaborate with building product manufacturers (56%).

Design guidelines and expert consultants are the methods that architects most use to incorporate safety into projects

Share of respondents reporting use of each method

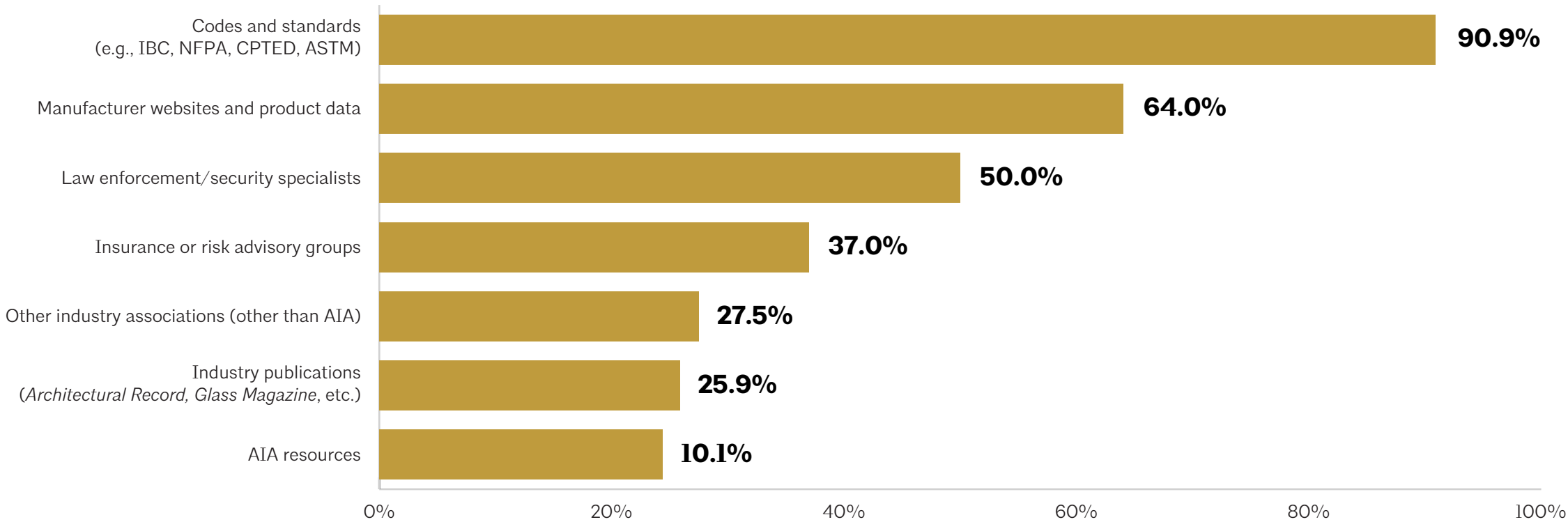


Codes and standards remain the most significant source of safety design information

Architects also use other sources for safety design information, most notably manufacturer websites and product data and security specialists. There are no significant differences across demographic groups when it comes to the sources used to inform safety design decisions, consistent with other findings that underscore the importance of codes and standards in this aspect of a project.

Codes and standards remain the most significant source of safety design information, followed by manufacturer information

Share of respondents noting use of each information source for safety design decisions



CHAPTER 5

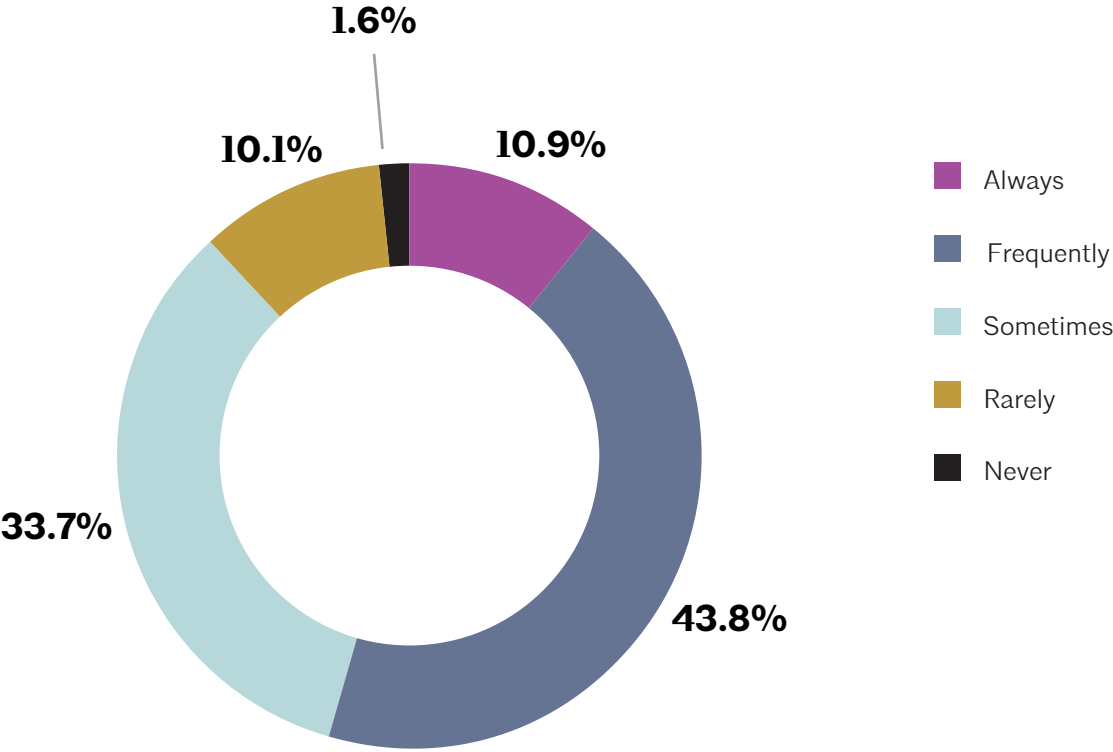
Safety in product specification

Most architects specify products that enhance safety and security in projects, with more than half (55%) reporting doing so frequently or always

Consistent with their roles, project managers are significantly more likely to report that they specify safety products, whereas principals are less likely to do so. Though not statistically different, a larger share of those at small firms rarely specify safety products.

Majority of architects specify products that enhance safety and security in projects

Share of respondents who specify or recommend products that enhance safety and security in their projects



Codes and clients are most influential in the selection of safety-related products, with compliance the biggest influence

This contrasts with safety in design, where clients are more influential. More than a third ranked compliance as the single most influential factor.

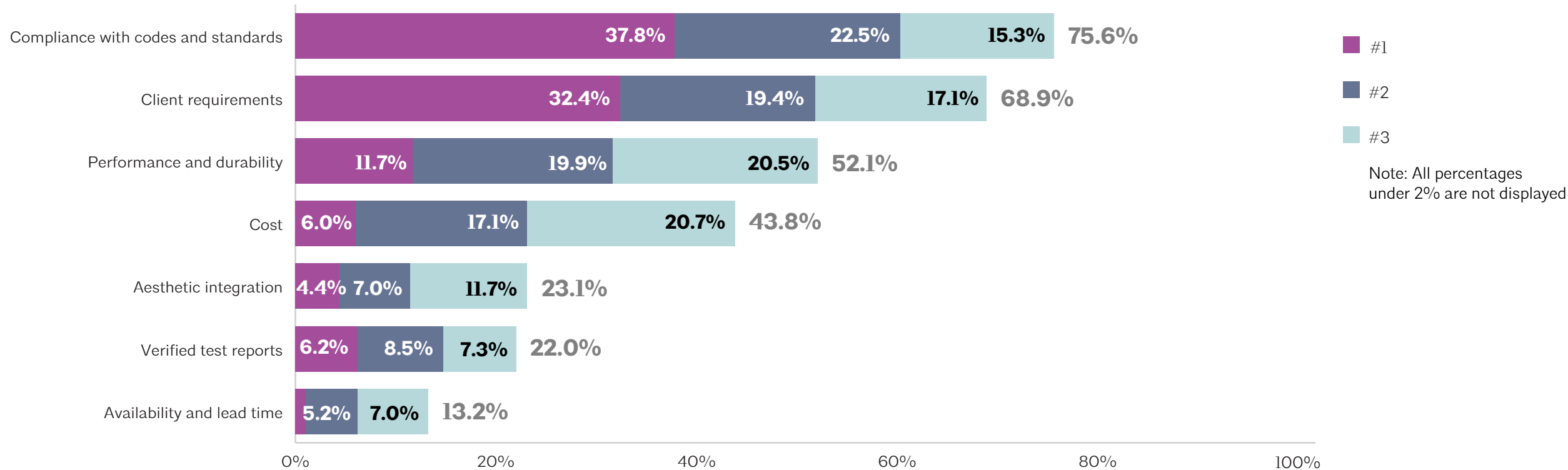
There are some differences by demographic group:

- **Project managers:** More project managers (22.5%) report lead time as influential in the selection of safety-related building products and fewer (60%) note client requirements as influential, compared with respondents in other positions.

- **Very large firm respondents (500 or more employees):** Fewer respondents from very large firms report code compliance as influential (69.4%).
- **Midsize firm respondents (10 to 49 employees):** More respondents from midsize firms (86.1%) report code compliance as influential, and fewer report verified test reports (15.8%) or lead time (8.9%).

Codes and clients are most influential in the selection of safety-related products, with compliance the biggest influence

Share of respondents ranking the most influential factors in safety-related building product selection



Architects report cost of security products as the biggest challenge to selecting them for design, though many find challenges with evaluating performance between solutions

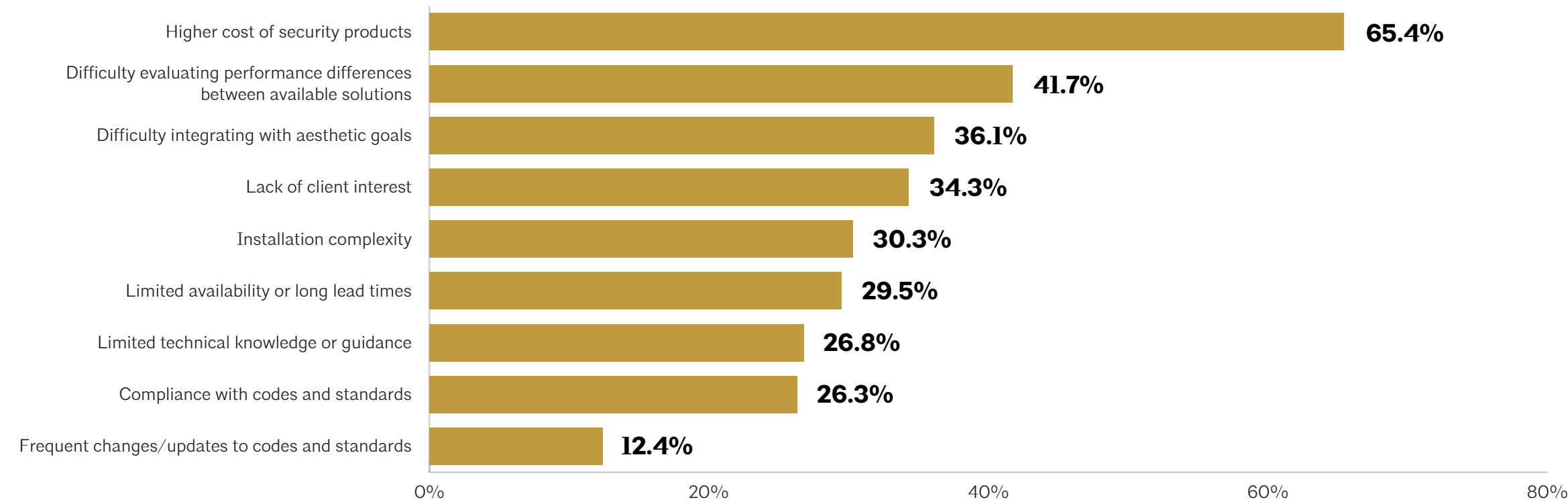
Even when safety benefits are clear, budget constraints can limit implementation. While all respondents noted the high cost of products as a challenge, there are other differences across different demographic groups.

- More principals and small firm respondents note the lack of client interest as a challenge.

- Fewer principals, but more architects, note technical knowledge as a problem.
- Project managers are more likely to report code compliance as a challenge.
- Among the larger firms, the very largest note availability/lead time as a challenge, while those at firms with 50 to 499 staff are more challenged by the complexity of installation.

Architects report cost of security products to be the biggest challenge to selecting them for design

Share reporting each factor as a challenge in the incorporation of security-related building products into design



When asked to rank the most significant challenges, cost and evaluation difficulties were also the most critical

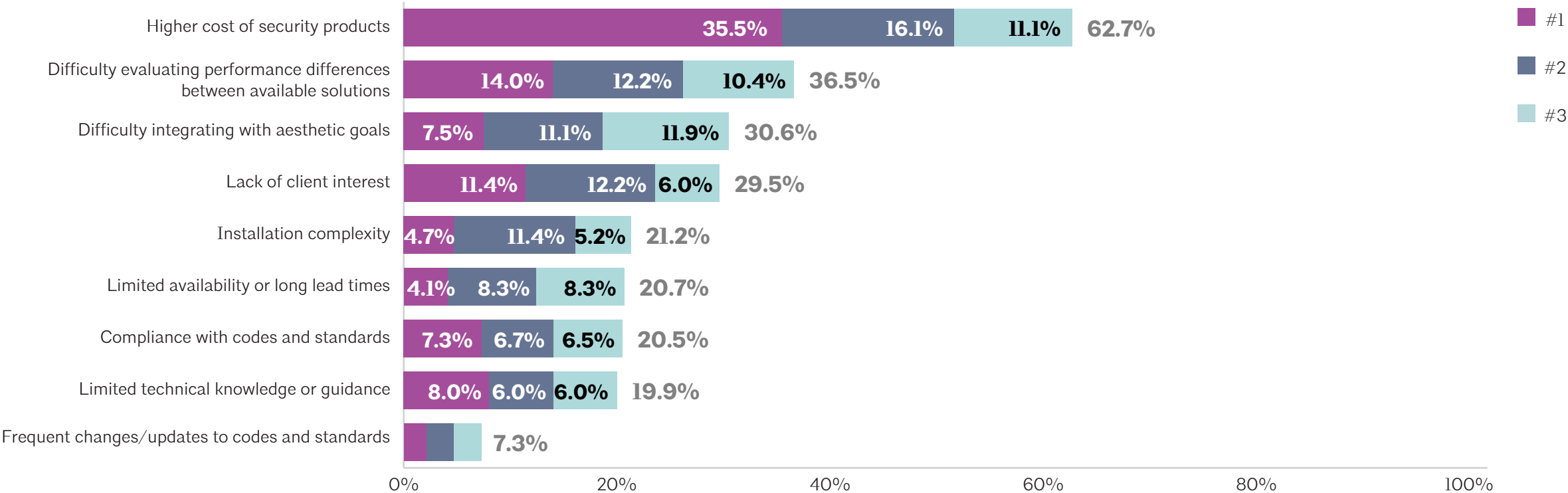
When architects were asked to rank their top three challenges, cost still emerges as the dominant issue. While there were no notable differences among positions, there were some significant differences by firm size.

- **Small firm respondents:** More respondents from small firms (39.7%) rate the lack of client interest as one of their top three challenges.

- **Midsize firm respondents:** A little over a quarter of midsize firm respondents report limited technical knowledge or guidance as a top-three challenge (higher than the other respondents). The same share of midsize firms noted difficulty evaluating performance differences, significantly lower than the share of other respondents.
- More very large firm respondents note availability/long lead time as a top challenge.

Architects rate cost and evaluation difficulties as the most critical challenges to incorporating safety-related products into project design

Share of respondents ranking the most significant challenges



Access control systems, such as key cards or biometric readers, are the most specified, with nearly nine in 10 architects reporting their use

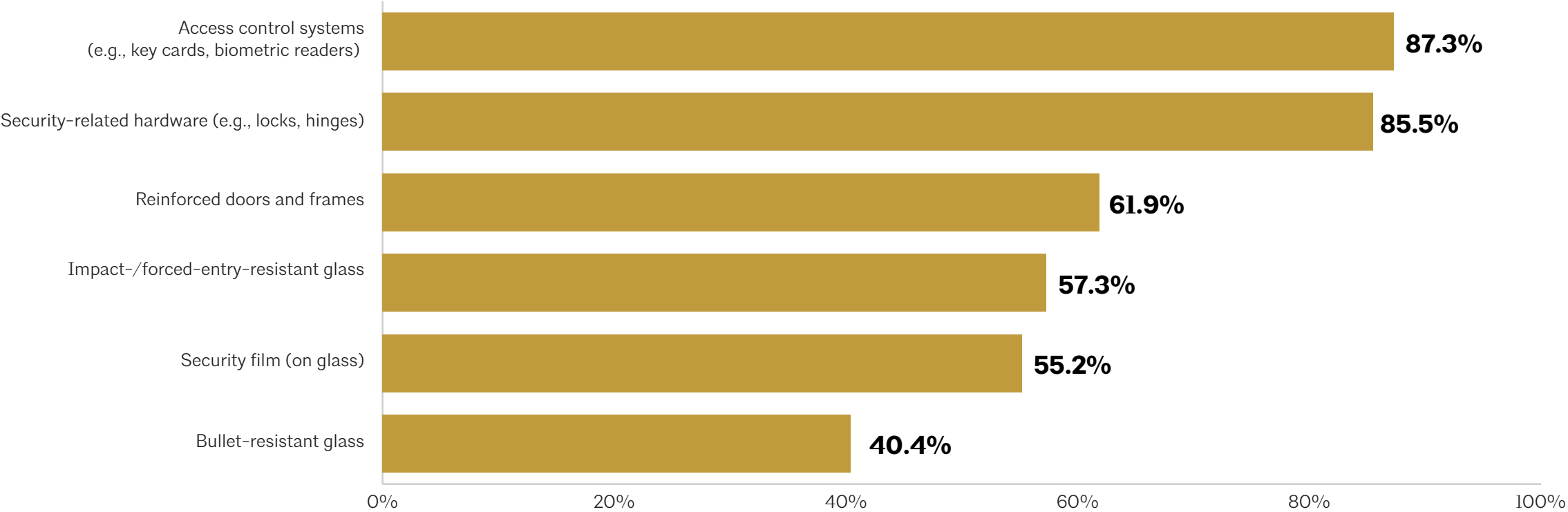
More than half also report specifying reinforcing doors, using impact- or forced-entry-resistant glass, and installing security film on glass.

There are a few differences across demographic groups:

- **Architects:** A larger share (96.1%) specify access control systems, compared with other respondents.
- **Project managers:** A larger share specify security-related hardware (92.5%), while fewer report specifying security film on glass (45%).
- **Small firm respondents:** A smaller share (55%) specify reinforced doors and frames.
- **Large firm respondents:** A larger share of those at the largest firms specify reinforced doors and frames and security film, 72.6% and 61.3%, respectively.

Architects most often report specifying access control systems and hardware (hinges, locks)

Share of respondents specifying each building products/materials specified to enhance safety and security



Durability of safety glass and glazing products saves money over time on maintenance and is essential for future-proofing projects

However, less than half (44%) cite durability as the most important factor in product selection. Additionally, most architects do not calculate the long-term life-cycle costs of glazing products.

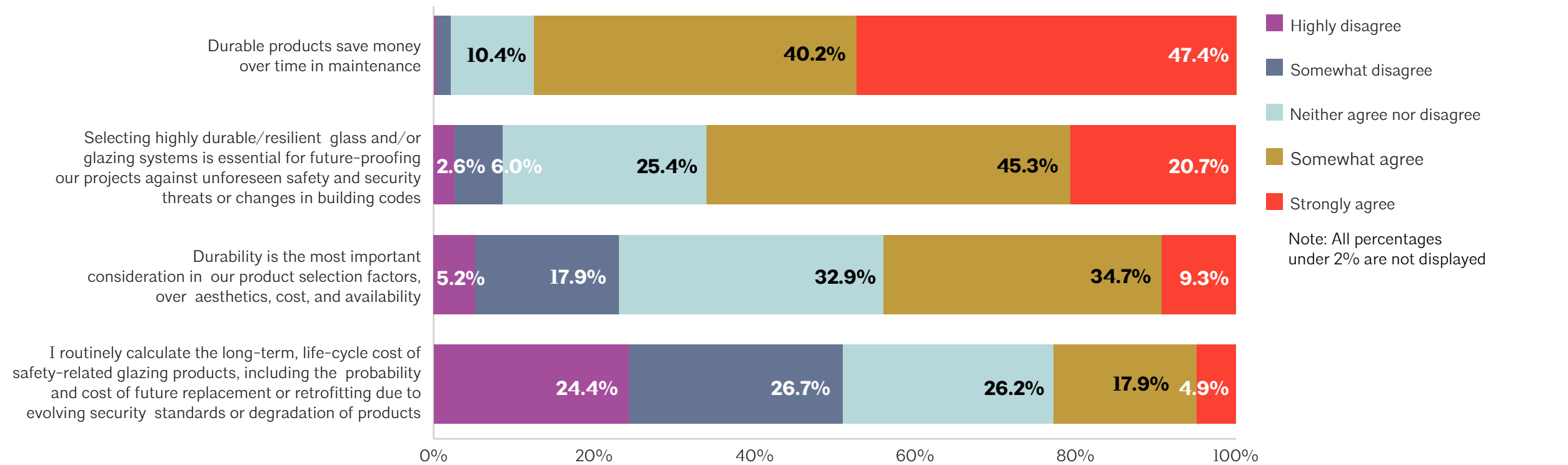
There were a few notable differences across demographic groups:

- Project managers are more likely to agree that selecting highly durable/resilient glass is essential for future proofing, at 72.5%.

- More of those at the largest firms (32.2%)—and fewer at midsize firms (16.9%)—agree that they calculate the long-term life-cycle cost of safety-related glazing products. This disparity is likely driven by availability of firm resources.

There is strong agreement that durable safety glass and glazing products reduce long-term maintenance costs

Share of respondents agreement with each statement regarding the durability and resilience of safety-related glass and glazing product selection



CHAPTER 6

Project profiles: Safety in school projects

School safety design is fundamentally about integration

Security is addressed from the neighborhood edge to the classroom interior. It includes site design, glazing strategy, zoning, supervision, operational policy, and student well-being, not just controlled-entry or lockdown hardware. Many of the most meaningful safety strategies exceed building code requirements. **Architects rely on** district standards, risk assessments, advisory committees, and **best practices to guide decisions beyond minimum compliance.**

- Across projects, the primary tension is balancing openness and transparency with deterrence and preparedness. Schools must feel welcoming, daylight-filled, and community-oriented while still incorporating layered protection.
- Elementary, middle, and high schools require different safety approaches. Community culture, site use, and local risk factors meaningfully shape strategy. A universal checklist is less effective than tailored solutions.
- Entry sequencing, glazing decisions, zoning, and access control strategies must be addressed early in design. Delayed decisions increase cost pressures and reduce flexibility.
- Product testing data, performance transparency, and flexibility in system detailing help architects justify selections within budget and align with evolving standards. However, hardware alone does not define safety; products must support broader design intent.

The five project profiles on the following pages provide examples of security in practice.

Balancing budget, performance, and security was central to elevating an older campus to updated standards

- **Firm type:** Large (500+)
- **Project region:** Dallas
- **Project type:** Renovation and secure entry addition
- **Safety driver:** District-wide effort to elevate older campuses to updated safety standards and meet Texas Education Agency (TEA) requirements

Challenges/tradeoff:

- The primary challenge was the budget. The team had to balance enhanced security measures with overall design intent and financial constraints, ensuring safety improvements did not compromise aesthetics or energy performance.

Role of manufacturer:

- Product testing data and performance transparency were essential to justify selections within budget.

Takeaways:

- Security-related glazing and entry decisions must be made early in the design process. Early planning reduces cost surprises and improves coordination across disciplines in future projects.

“The TEA requirements are open-ended and nondescript. Large school districts already know what they want. In smaller districts, we work more closely in recommending.”

“Work with your client to talk through their standard procedures and how they operate, and how our design can help that as early as possible.”

“OBE was very responsive once the TEA requirements came out in comparison to other framing manufacturers; they put out their research and recommended products.”

Aligning renovation strategy with district-wide safety standards required systematic coordination beyond code

- **Firm type:** Large (500+)
- **Project region:** Denton, Texas
- **Project type:** Renovation
- **Safety driver:** District-wide effort to elevate older campuses to updated safety standards and meet TEA requirements

Challenges/tradeoff:

- Integrating enhanced safety measures into an existing building required aligning design upgrades with district policies and operational procedures without overcomplicating the facility.

Role of manufacturer:

- Impact-resistant film and glazing solutions allowed retrofit security improvements without full system replacement. Clear product documentation supported alignment with district safety standards.

Takeaways:

- Safety strategies are most effective when tied to district-wide policy and risk assessment frameworks rather than treated as isolated building features.

“We lean on ASTM F-3561, and this now requires the framing and door hardware to be tested to comply. Most manufacturers do not have these additional tests.”

“The TEA regulations are ambiguous, which requires the architect/designer to use their best judgment to meet the intent and testing standards. There is a strong need for more detailed and specific information to ensure compliance.”

Integrating layered security while preserving dignity and emotional safety defined the project's success

- **Firm type:** Large (500+)
- **Project region:** Texas
- **Project type:** New construction
- **Safety driver:** Community-led response following tragedy; safety, trauma-informed care, and brain research guided design decisions

Challenges/tradeoff:

- Creating a highly secure campus that did not feel institutional or hardened. Transparency, warmth, and belonging had to coexist with meaningful deterrence strategies.

Role of manufacturer:

- High-performance glazing, access-control systems, and certified testing standards supported the layered approach. Manufacturer performance data was critical to exceeding baseline requirements.

Takeaways:

- Physical security and emotional safety must be considered together. Early and sustained community engagement strengthens safety outcomes in future projects.

“The people that visit know what has been put into this place and all the elements of water, English and Spanish words, and color schemes to make it a beautiful place.”

“This project is unique, which is why it was funded. We took that into account from the very beginning and got as many voices incorporated into the design of the school and the diverse needs of the community.”

Modern school safety requires balancing transparency, supervision, and worst-case preparedness

- **Firm type:** Large (500+)
- **Project region:** Washington
- **Project type:** New construction + renovation
- **Safety driver:** Evolving expectations around student well-being, supervision, site risk, and community use

Challenges/tradeoff:

- The ongoing tension between creating welcoming, daylight-filled spaces and preparing for lockdown scenarios defines contemporary school design.

Role of manufacturer:

- Provided transparent performance data and technical validation to help architects justify glazing and hardware selections within evolving district standards. Products supported a layered design strategy but did not define it.

Takeaways:

- Ask probing questions to understand the “why” behind safety requirements. Effective solutions balance risk mitigation with respectful, student-centered environments.

“Safety shows up in different ways; it’s not just about who gets into the building.”

“We’re constantly balancing transparency and connection with the realities of lockdown preparedness.”

Security strategy in urban schools is driven less by code and more by district culture and operational mindset

- **Firm type:** Large (500+)
- **Project region:** Washington
- **Project type:** New construction + renovation
- **Safety driver:** Urban context and district-level emphasis on layered security grounded in crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles, passive supervision, and operational awareness.

Challenges/tradeoff:

- Cost pressures around hardware durability and evolving security technologies.

Role of manufacturer:

- Security film and glazing manufacturers provided performance data (e.g., three-minute delay ratings under forced-entry testing).
- Learning occurs through lunch-and-learns, conferences (AIA, EdSpaces), direct outreach from reps, and demonstrations.
- District security directors sometimes introduce products first, requiring architects to evaluate performance and appropriateness.

Takeaways:

- Avoid assuming all districts have the same security priorities; each client has unique pain points and thresholds.

“When you actually read the CPTED and federal K–12 safety guidance, it’s empowering; it helps you make decisions that are proactive rather than reactive.”

CHAPTER 7

Methodology & respondent profile

Methodology & respondent profile

Project overview

Architects play a central role in shaping how safety and security are integrated into buildings. From site planning and access strategies to product selection and coordination with consultants, architects balance a wide range of considerations to protect occupants while maintaining design intent.

This study examines how architects approach safety across sectors, focusing on how safety and security are defined, how design strategies are implemented, and how safety-related products and systems are selected.

The research explores several key questions:

- How architects define safety and security within design practice
- How safety considerations vary across building sectors
- The role of codes, standards, and client expectations in shaping decisions
- How architects evaluate and specify safety-related building products
- The role of manufacturers and industry partners in supporting safety integration

To provide deeper context beyond the survey findings, AIA also conducted brief interviews with architects focused on recent projects involving safety-driven design decisions.

Methodology

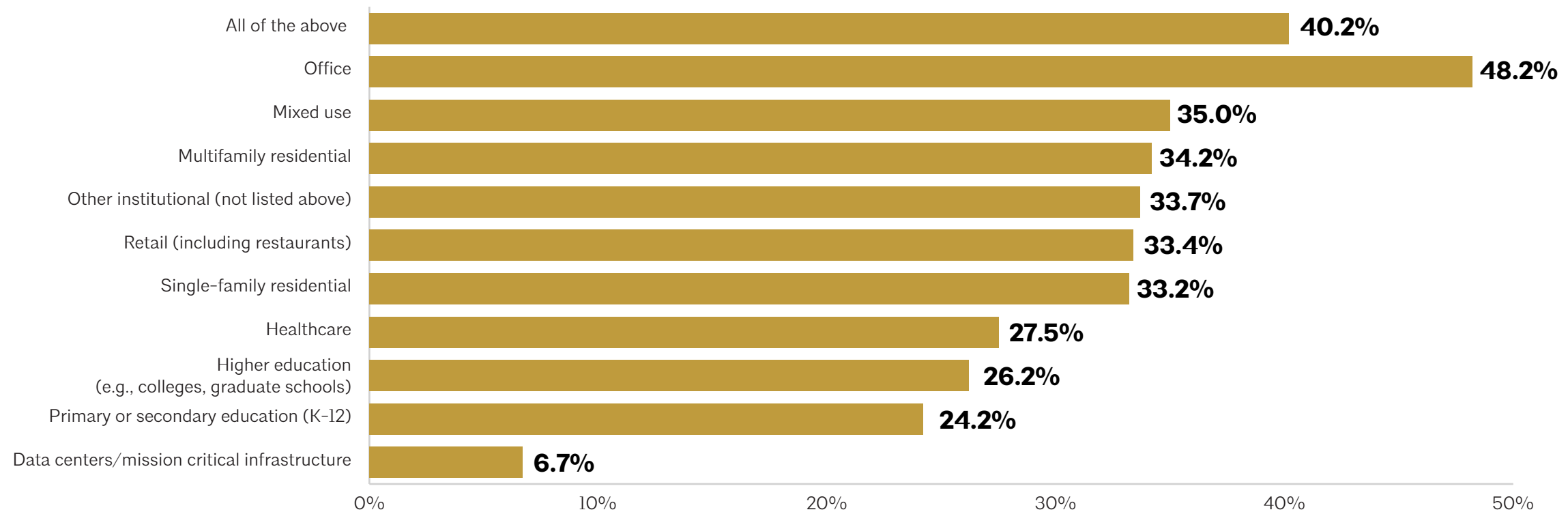
The survey was distributed to 15,000 AIA Architect members and administered via a 20-minute online questionnaire.

Following the survey, AIA conducted 5–10-minute interviews with five architect members working in the education sector. These conversations provided project-level insight into how safety considerations influence real design decisions, product selection, and collaboration with manufacturers and consultants. These qualitative project examples illustrate how safety strategies are implemented in practice.

Sample demographics

Respondents report broad, cross-sector experience, with 40% working across all project types. While office, mixed-use, and multifamily projects are most common, many other sectors are represented at similar levels, indicating a diverse and balanced portfolio. This mix includes both general commercial and more security-sensitive environments, supporting the broad applicability of the findings.

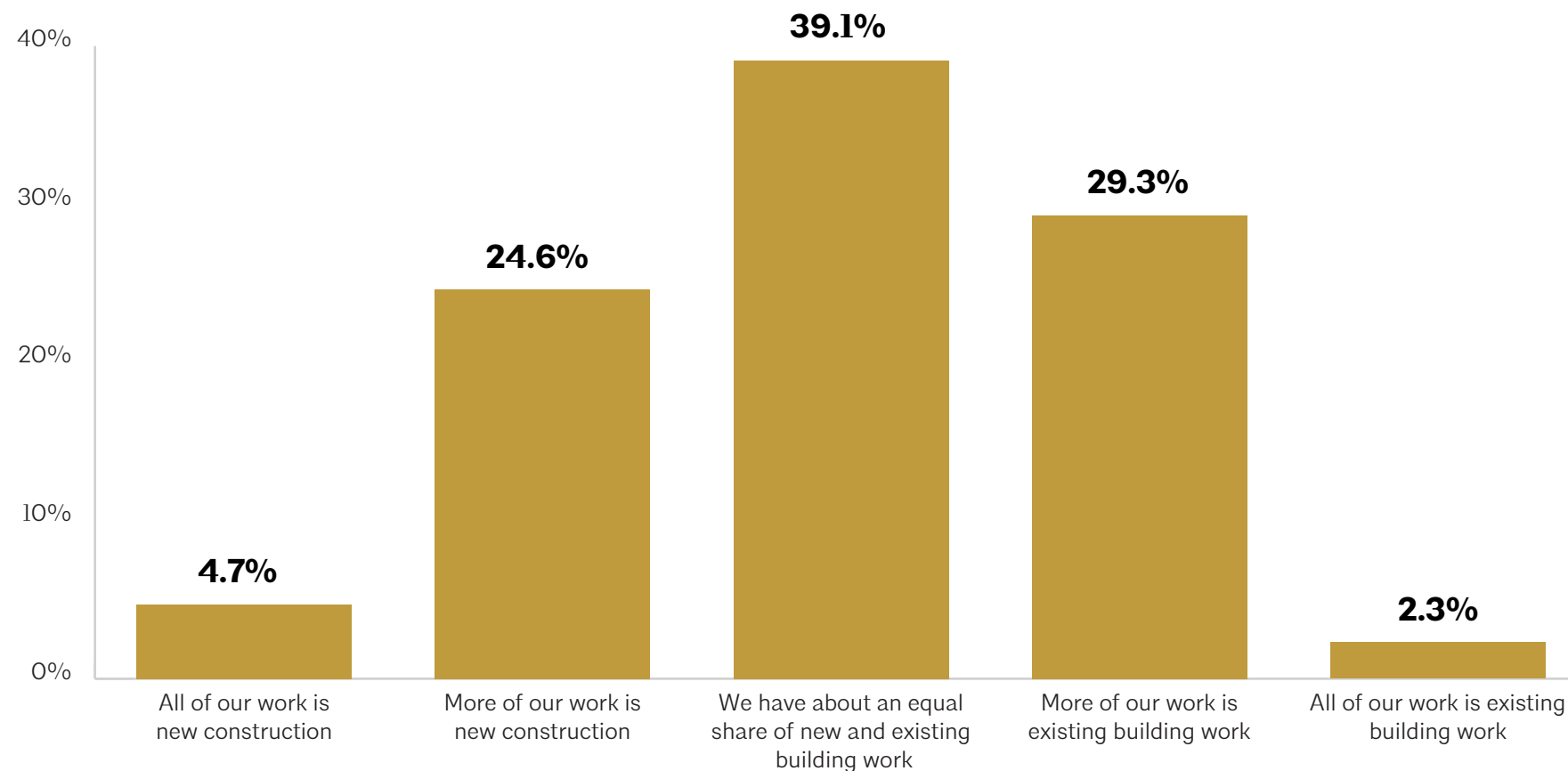
Project portfolios span multiple sectors, with office and mixed use among the most common



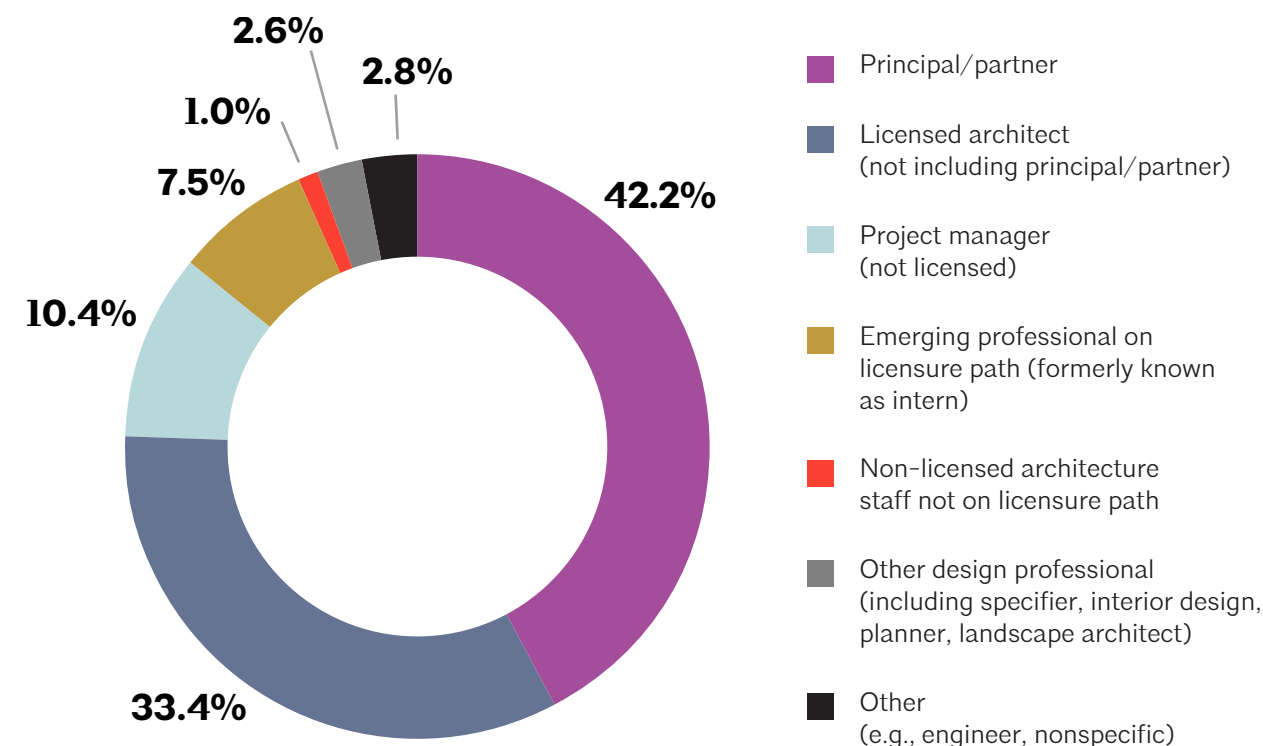
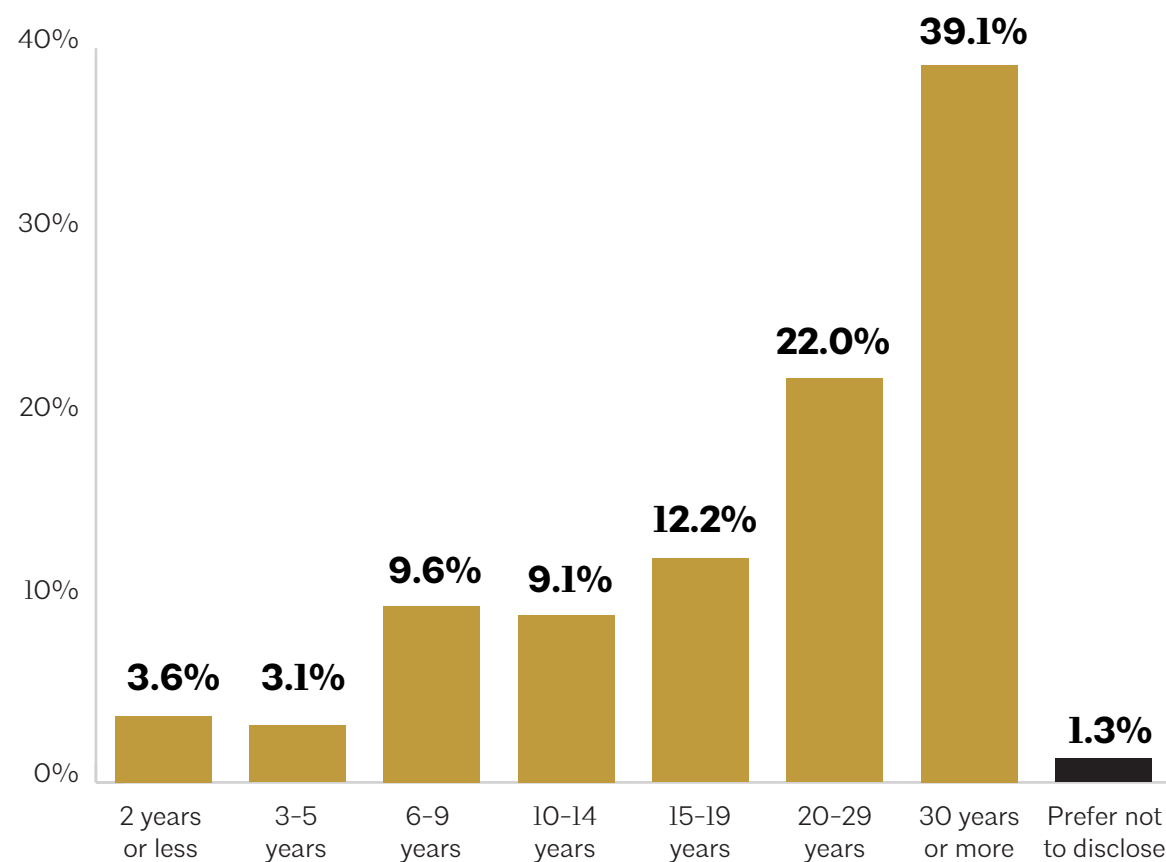
Respondents report a balanced mix of new construction and existing building work, with the largest share indicating an even split between the two. A slightly greater portion leans toward existing building work, reflecting the ongoing importance of renovation, retrofit, and adaptive reuse projects. This balance suggests that safety strategies must be flexible enough to apply to both new designs and upgrades to existing building conditions.

Respondents report a balanced mix of new construction and existing building work

Share of respondents

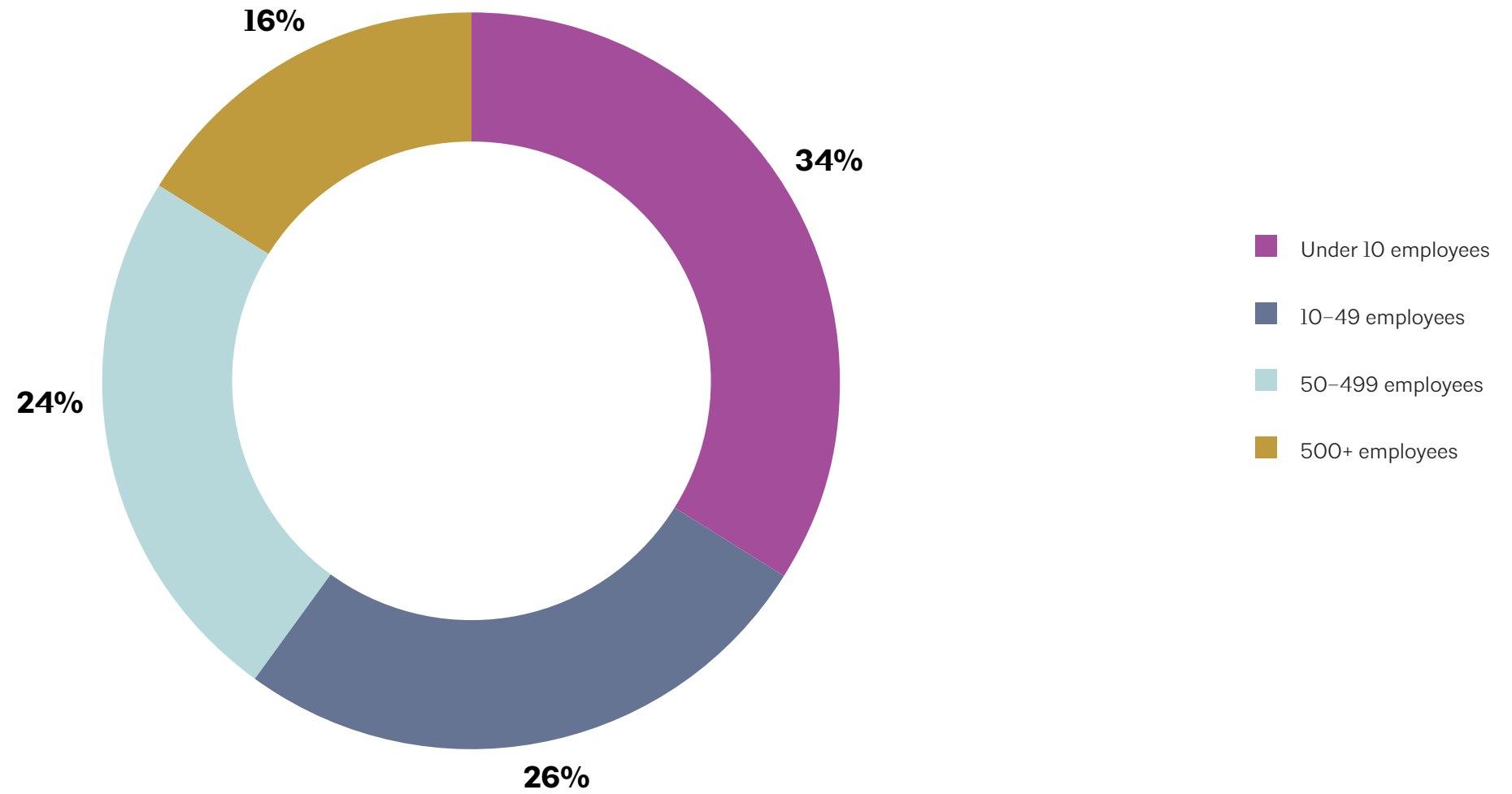


Representative of the profession, 61.7% of the respondents are men, while 32.1% are women (4.7% did not report). Overall, most of the respondents skew very senior and have decades of experience, serving as principals, partners, or licensed architects. The findings, therefore, largely reflect the perspective of those making design and specification decisions.



Respondents were distributed across firms of different sizes

Share of respondents



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