



Your Voice

Survey Results

April 2025

Small business realities: Top challenges and reactions to tariff and CUSMA rules

Methodology

Your Voice April 2025

Survey Type: An omnibus, controlled-access online CFIB survey.

Survey period: April 10-24, 2025.

Sample: Based on responses from 2,561 CFIB members who are owners of Canadian independent businesses, from all sectors and regions of the country. For comparison purposes, a probability samples with the same number of respondents would have a margin of error of +/-1.9%, 19 times out of 20.

Purpose and Context: The CFIB Your Voice omnibus survey is conducted bi-monthly, focusing on issues that matter most to small business owners across Canada. For over five decades, CFIB has harnessed the collective voice of its members to produce data-driven policy strategies that reflect the needs of small businesses. Our inhouse survey capacity is a powerful tool designed to empower business owners to share insights on topics from government support to regulatory burdens.

Impact: The survey's insights are gathered directly from CFIB members, ensuring an authentic representation of small business priorities. These responses help shape CFIB's advocacy efforts, driving policies that are aligned with the evolving needs of the small business community.

Survey insights

The April 2025 edition of CFIB's *Your Voice* survey captures the mounting pressures facing Canadian small businesses. With more than 2,000 responses from entrepreneurs across all provinces and sectors, this snapshot offers a clear view of what's keeping business owners up at night—and where they urgently need support.

The results send a strong and urgent message: small businesses are under intense pressure and are seeking greater predictability, stability, and relief. Amid rising costs and uncertainty, entrepreneurs continue to show resilience—but they cannot meet these challenges alone. They are calling for clearer government direction, smarter trade policies, and practical supports to help them compete and thrive.

Uncertainty and Rising Costs are Top of Mind

Small business owners across Canada are grappling with mounting challenges. Their top concerns? Economic and political uncertainty (56%), trade uncertainty (54%), rising operational costs (53%), and taxes (51%).

Tariffs Adding to the Pressure

Tariffs are compounding the financial pressure on small firms. Canadian retaliatory measures and U.S. tariffs on aluminum, steel, and goods not covered under the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) are having the broadest impact, while other tariffs are less widely felt. Meanwhile, China's tariffs on Canadian agricultural and seafood products are taking a significant toll: about 39% of agri-businesses report being affected, including 25% who have been hit directly.

When asked about trade strategy, there is strong support for expanding trade ties beyond the U.S. and China, and renegotiating CUSMA.

Compliance with CUSMA Regulations

Understanding rules, determining origin of goods, and internal capacity (expertise and time) are the top CUSMA compliance challenges. For many, the complexity of the regulations makes it difficult to know where to start—but clearer guidance, training, and practical tools could provide meaningful support.



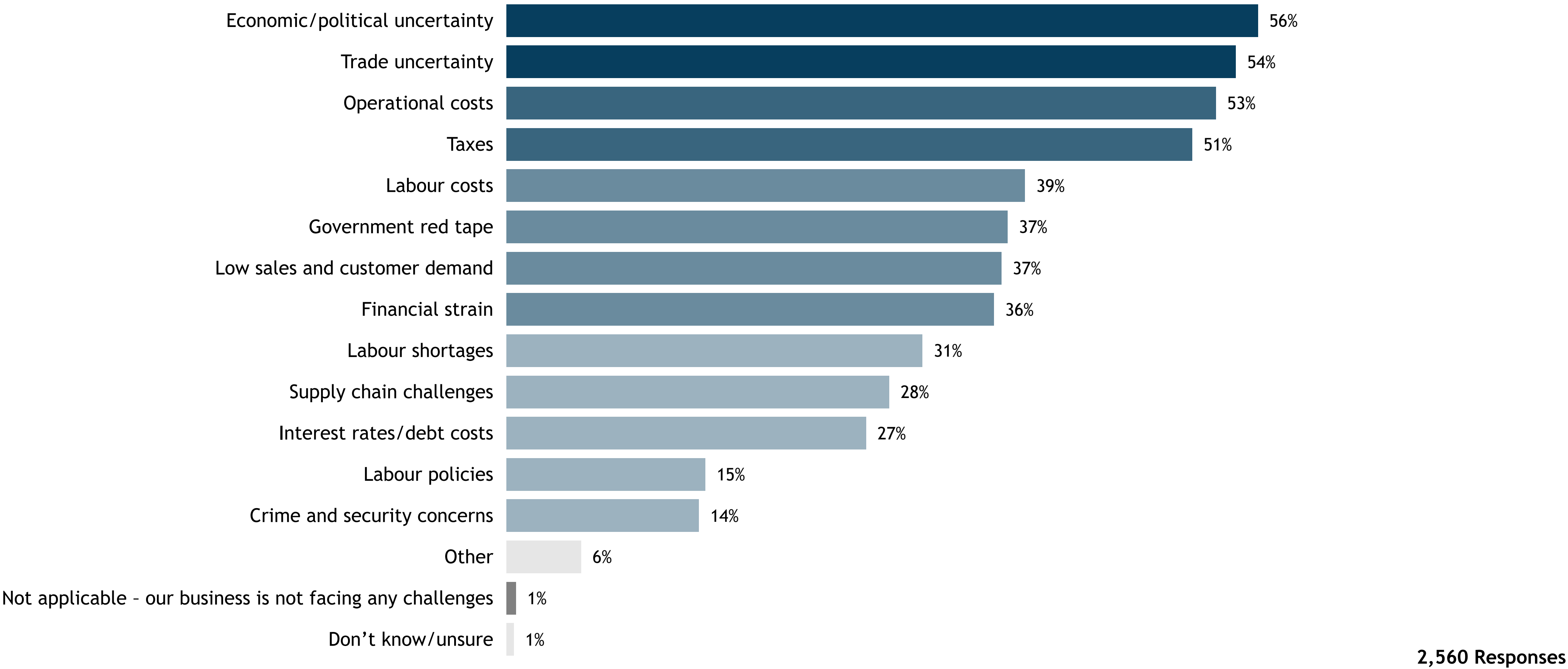
Marvin Cruz
Director, Research
CFIB



Francesca Basta
Research Analyst, Research
CFIB

Business conditions

Uncertainty, rising costs, and taxes are the most pressing challenges for businesses right now.

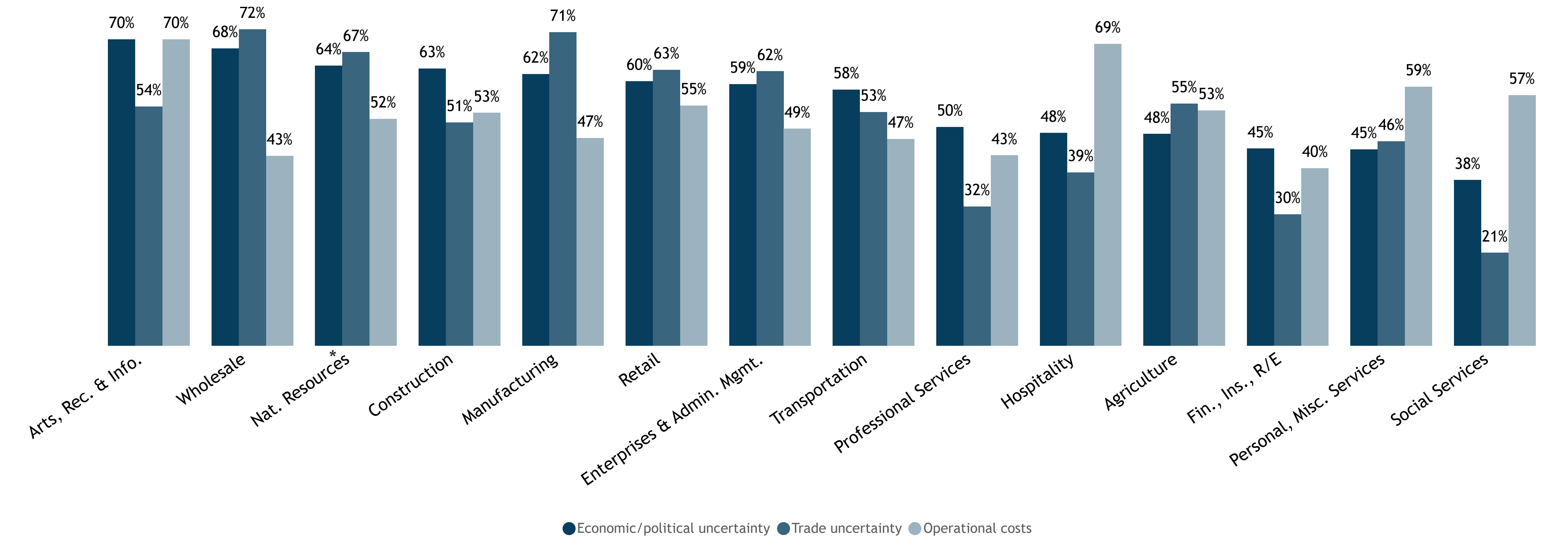


Question: What are the biggest challenges your business is facing right now? (Select all that apply)

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.



By sector, the highest levels of economic and political uncertainty are reported in arts & recreation, wholesale, and construction. Trade uncertainty is most acute in wholesale, manufacturing, and retail, while operational costs are the top concern in arts & recreation, social services, and retail.



2,192 Responses

Question: What are the biggest challenges your business is facing right now? (Select all that apply)

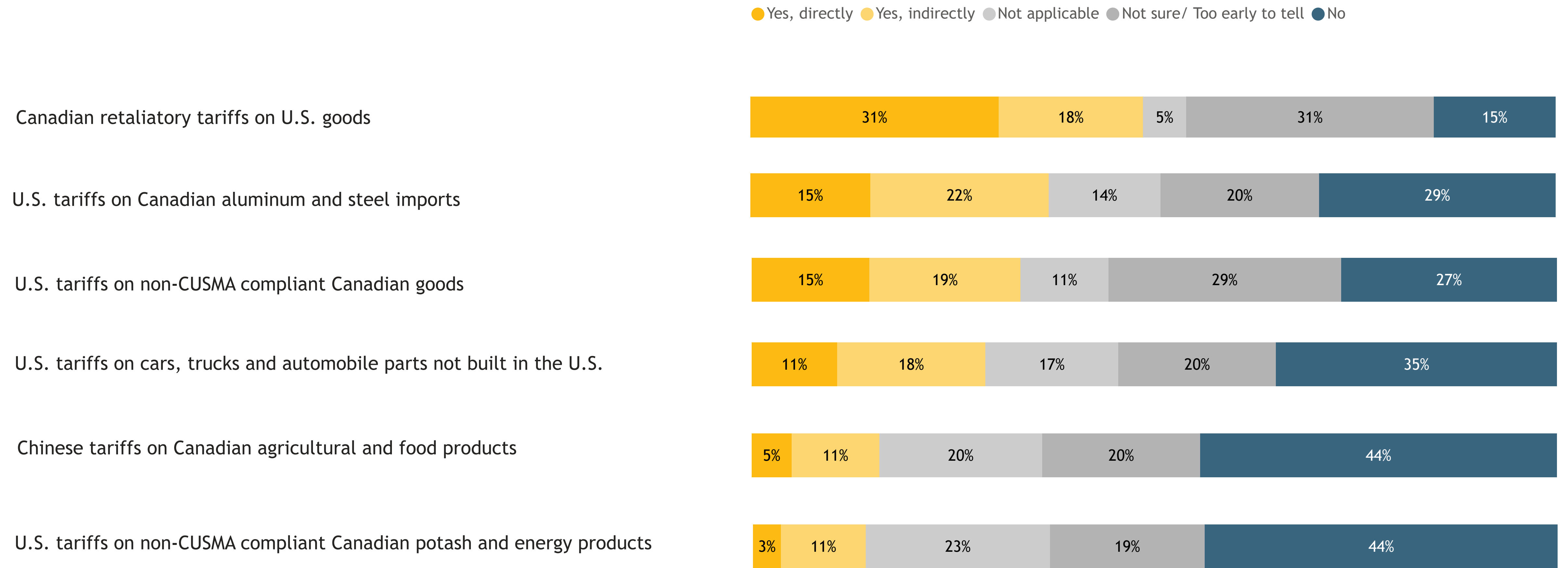
Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

Note: *Small sample size (<40).



Business response to tariffs

Canadian retaliatory tariffs and U.S. tariffs on aluminum, steel, and non-CUSMA goods are having the broadest business impact, while most other tariffs remain less widely felt.



2,450 Responses

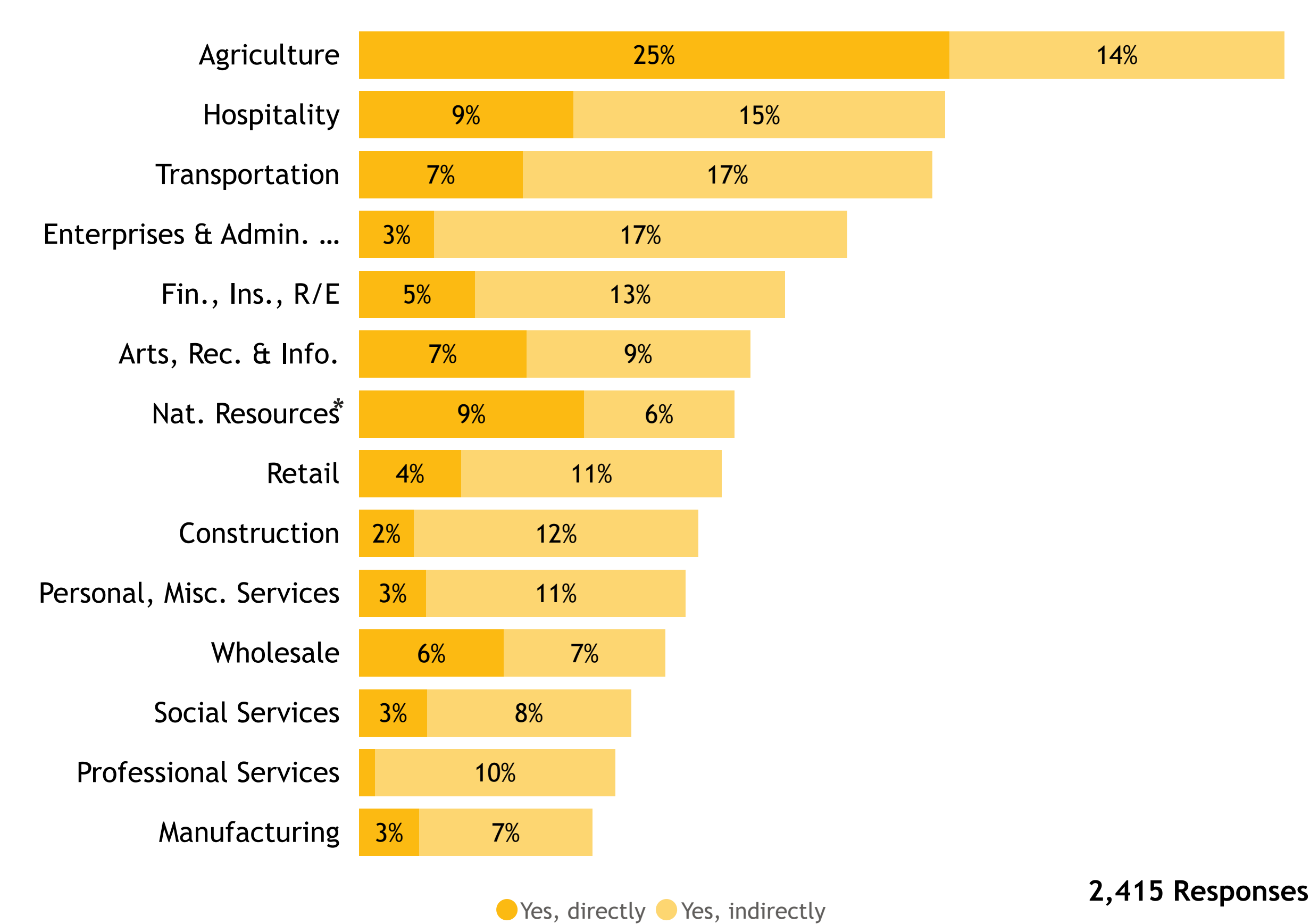
Question: Has your business been impacted by the following recent tariffs? (Select one for each line)

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

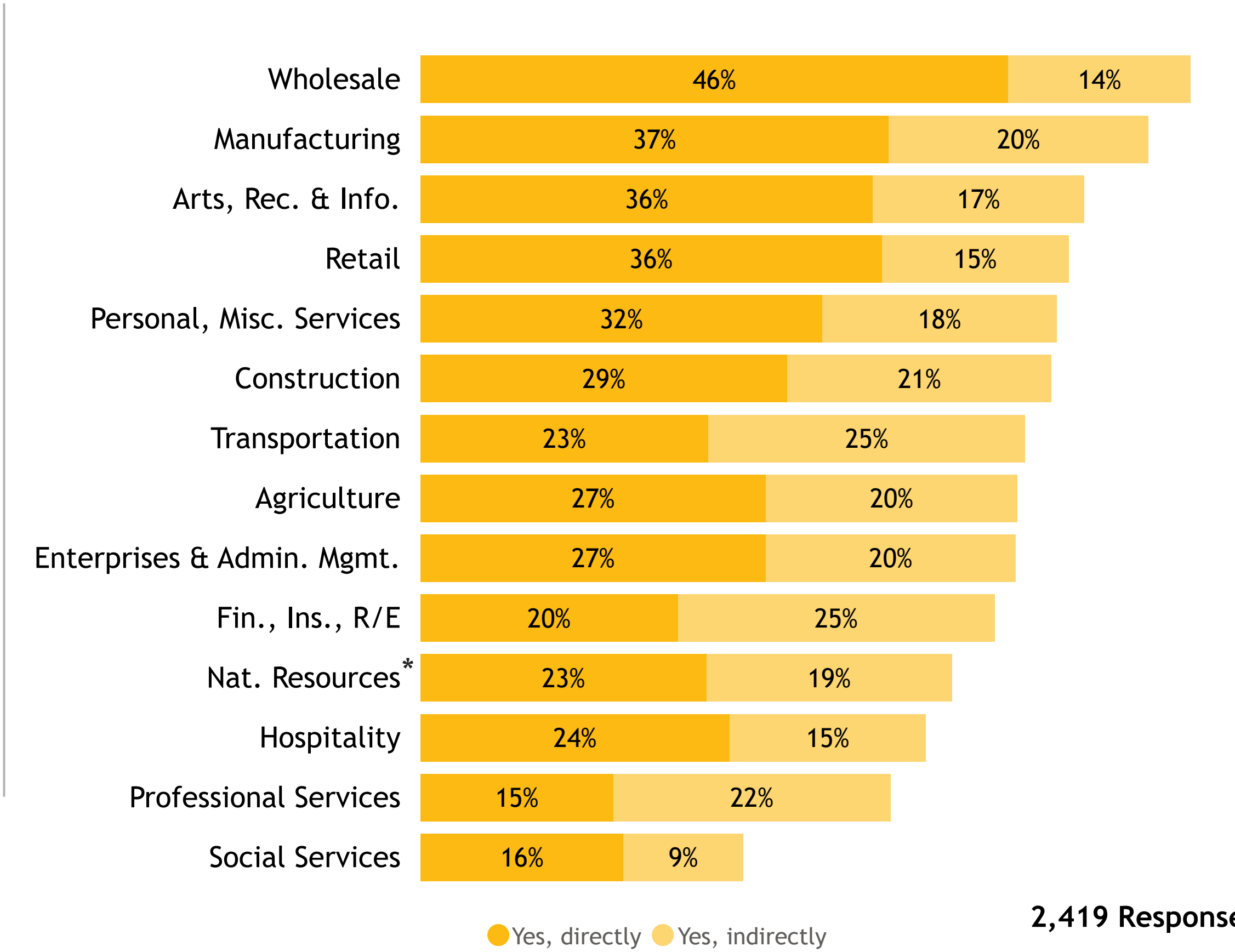


China’s retaliatory tariffs are affecting about a third (39%) of Canadian agricultural businesses, with nearly one in four (25%) taking a direct hit. Nearly half of wholesalers feel a direct impact of Canadian retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods.

Chinese tariffs on Canadian agricultural and food products (ordered by direct and indirect impact)



Canadian retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods (ordered by direct and indirect impact)



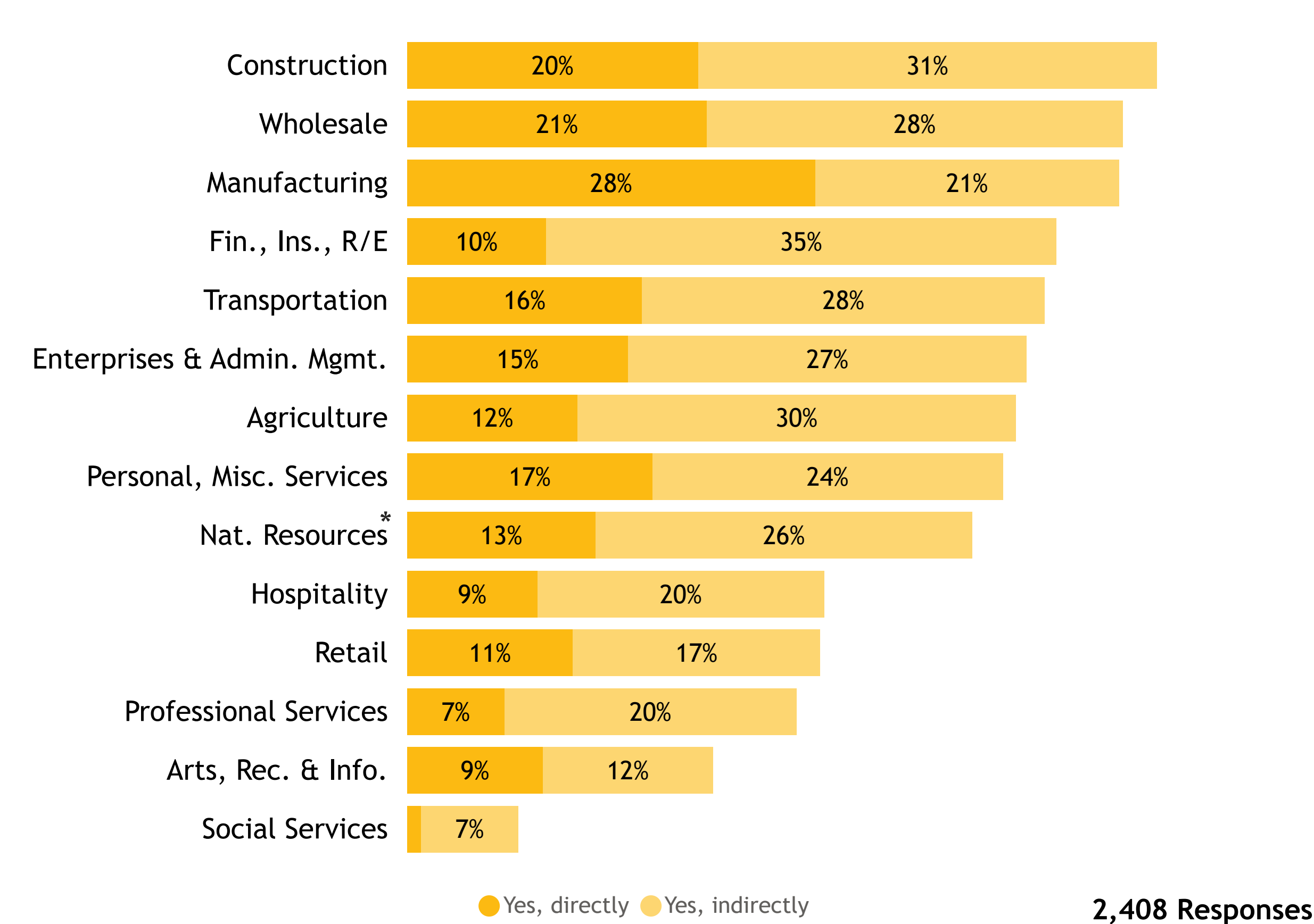
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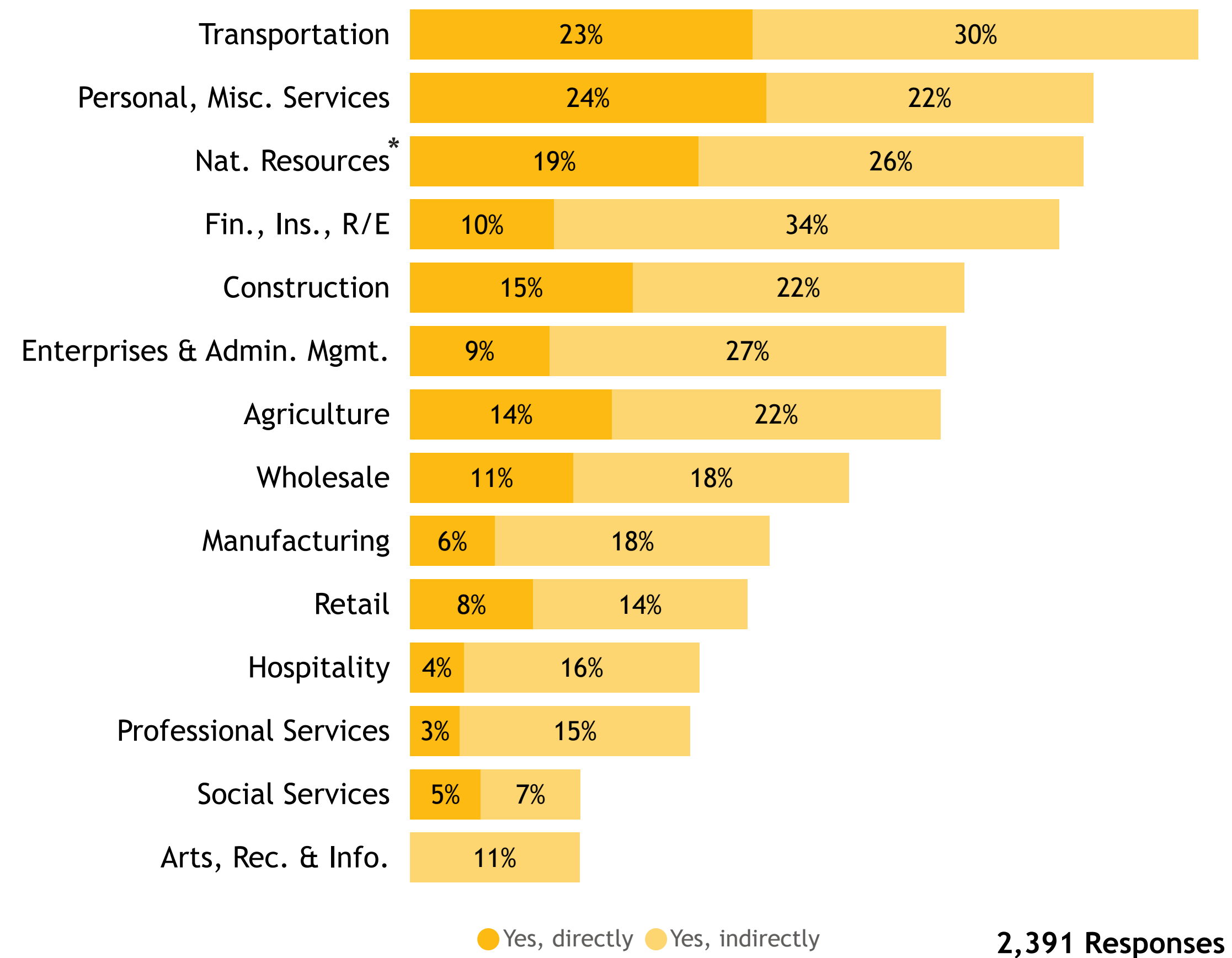
Steel tariffs hit construction, wholesale, and manufacturing the hardest; auto tariffs impact transportation and personal services most.

U.S. tariffs on Canadian aluminum and steel imports (ordered by direct and indirect impact)



U.S. tariffs on cars, trucks and automobile parts not built in the U.S. (ordered by direct and indirect impact)

Note: Personal services sector includes automotive repair and maintenance businesses



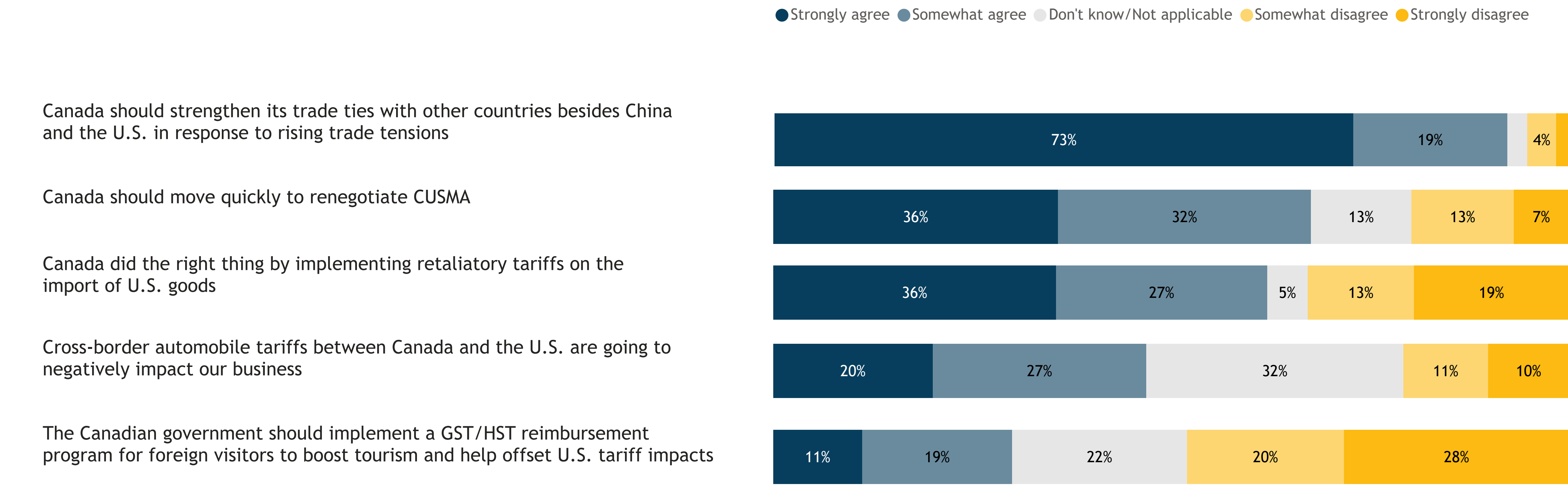
Question: Has your business been impacted by the following recent tariffs? (Select one for each line)

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

Note: *Small sample size (<40).



There is broad business support for expanding trade relationships with countries other than the U.S. and China, as well as for renegotiating CUSMA. While support is strong for retaliatory tariffs on the import of U.S. goods, there is also a significant share that disagree.



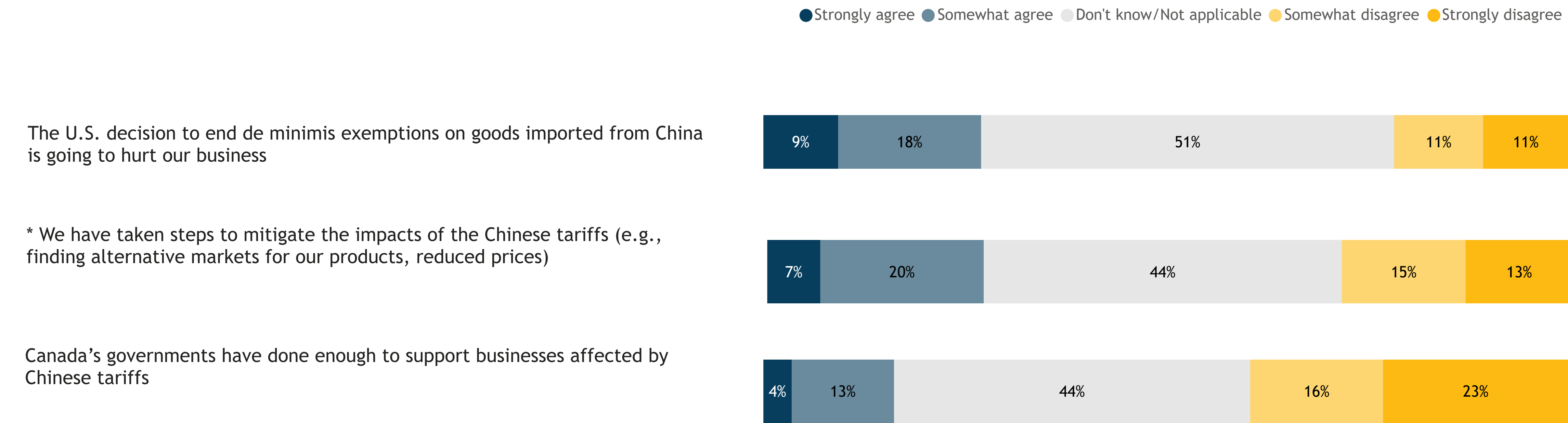
2,272 Responses

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tariffs? (Select one for each line)

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.



On Chinese tariffs, a low share of businesses agree that governments have done enough to support those affected. About 1 in 4 have taken steps to mitigate their impact. Nearly 3 in 10 also anticipate being affected by changes to the U.S. de minimis exemption.



2,272 Responses

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tariffs? (Select one for each line)

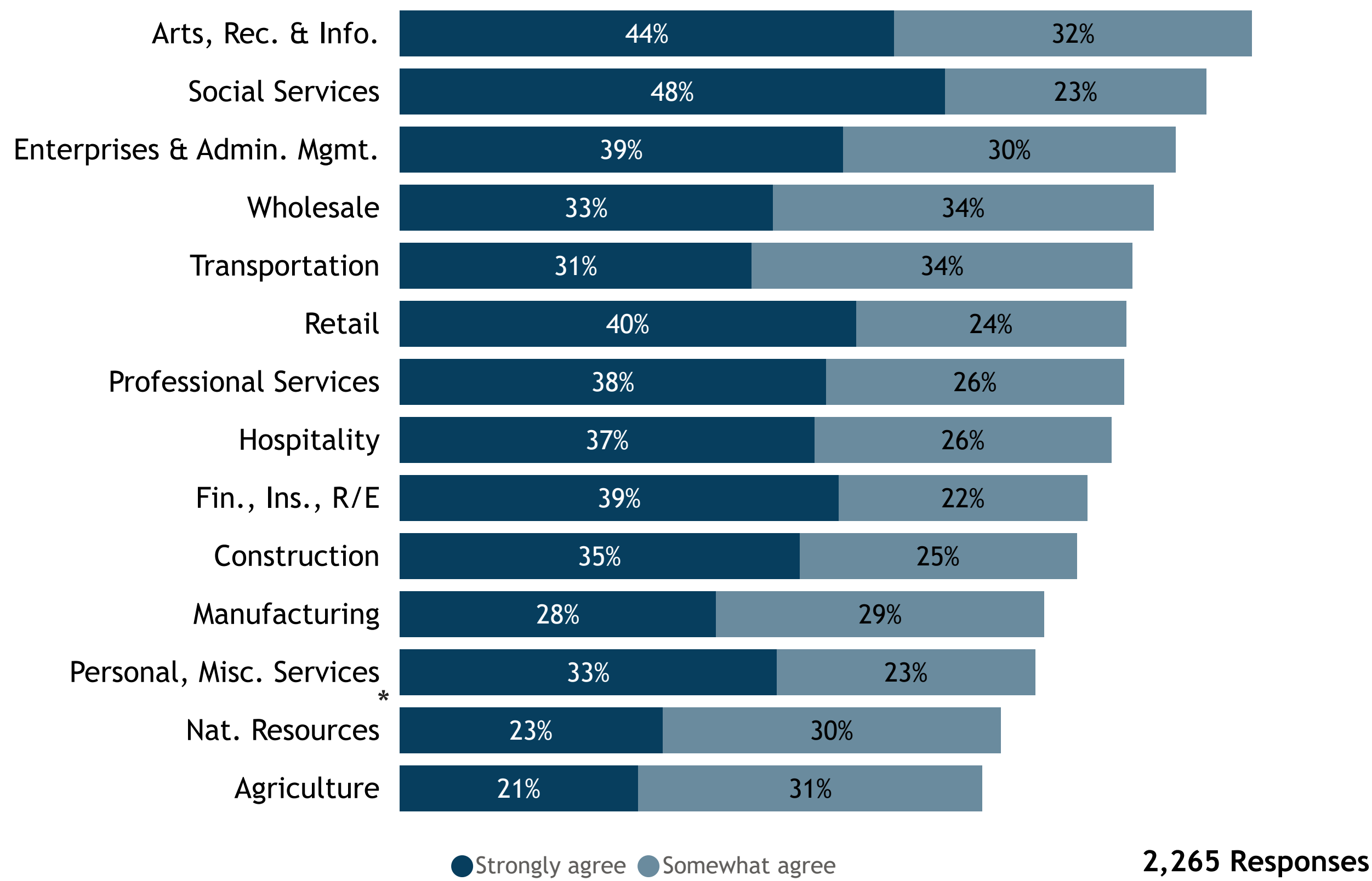
Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

Note: *Results reflect only those respondents who indicated their business had been directly or indirectly impacted by recent Chinese tariffs, or who stated it was too early to tell.

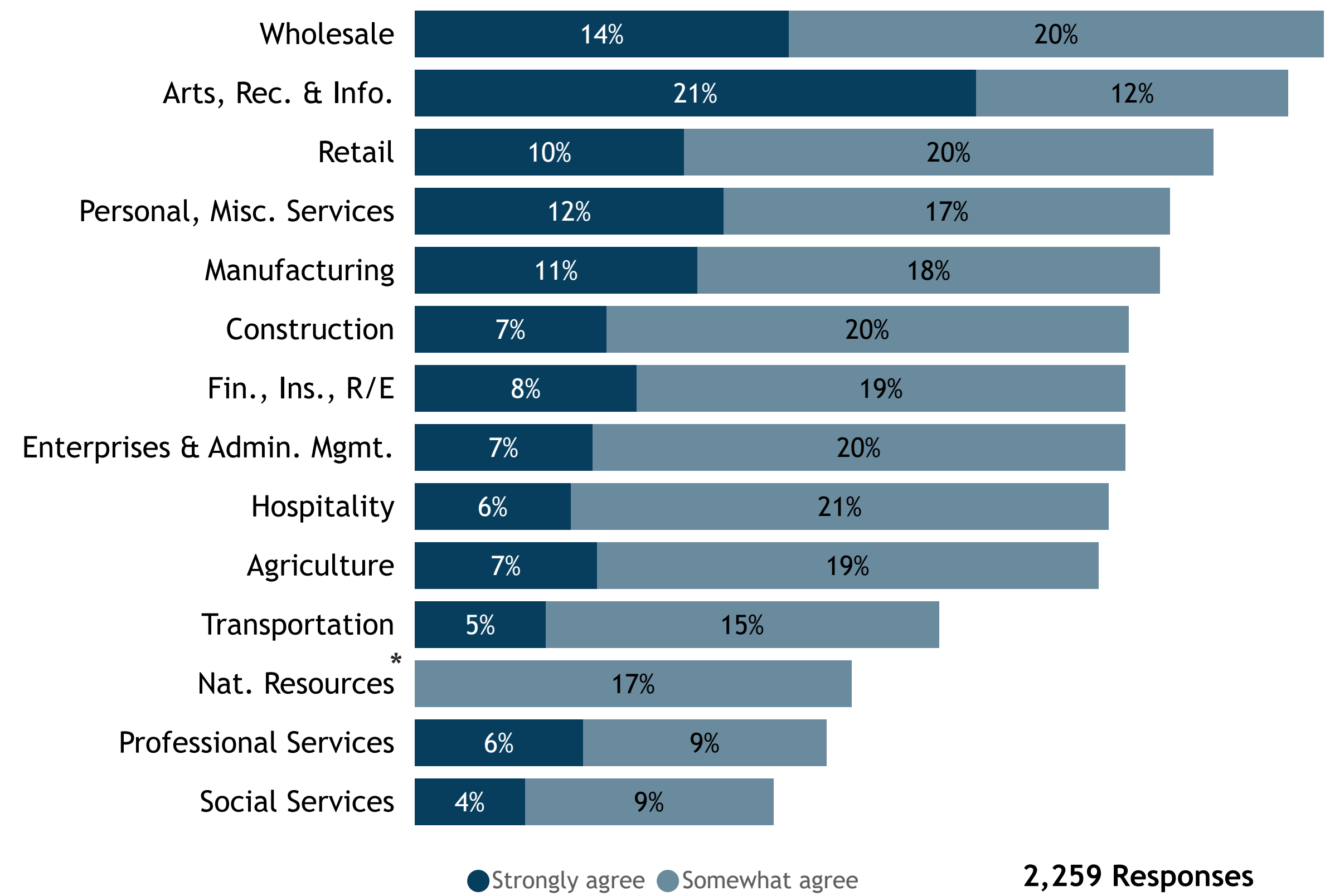


Support for Canada’s retaliatory tariffs while strong, varies significantly by sector, with lower support in agriculture. Concerns about the U.S. de minimis exemption change are most pronounced in wholesale, arts & recreation, and retail sectors.

Canada did the right thing by implementing retaliatory tariffs on the import of U.S. goods



The U.S. decision to end de minimis exemptions on goods imported from China is going to hurt our business



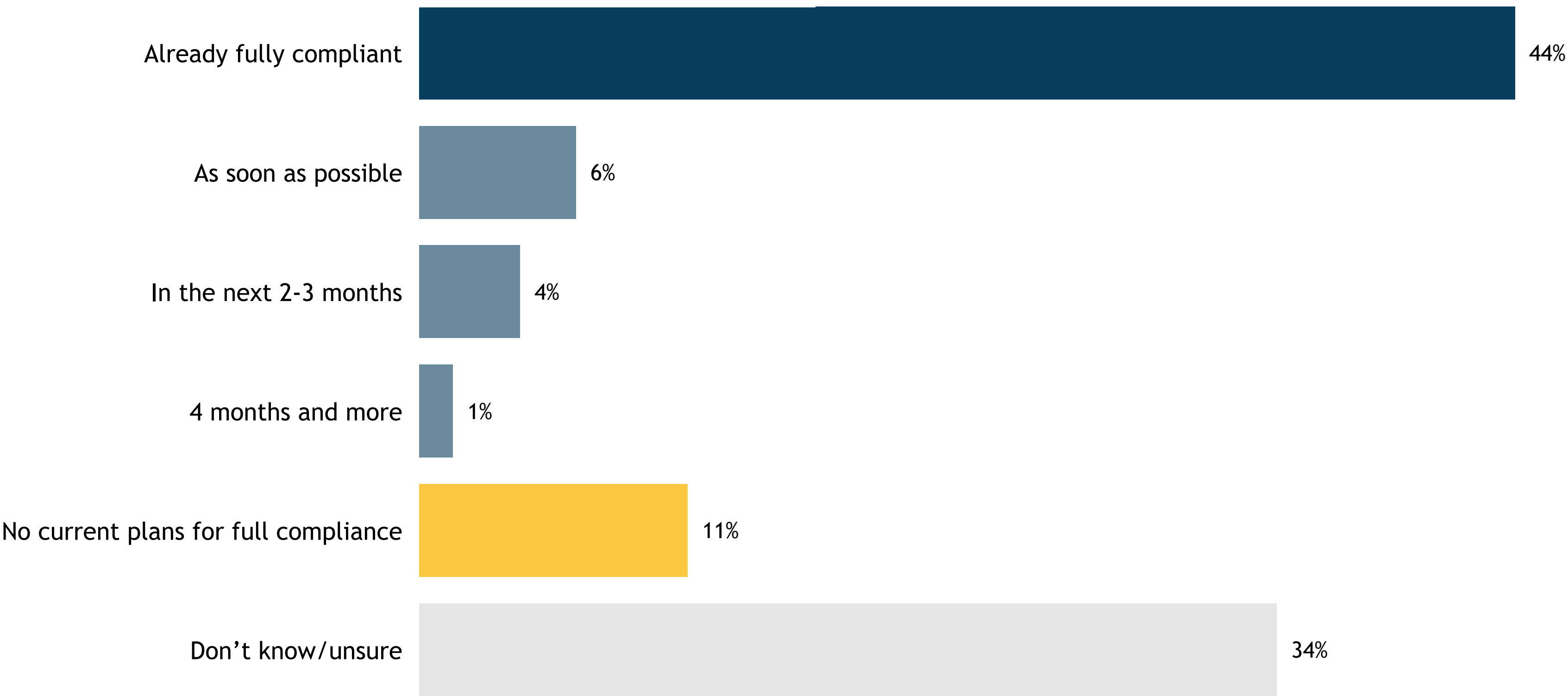
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Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

Note: *Small sample size (<40).

Compliance with CUSMA regulations

Among businesses that export to the U.S., almost half are already fully compliant with CUSMA regulations, 6% aim to be as soon as possible, and about 1 in 3 are unsure when they will be.



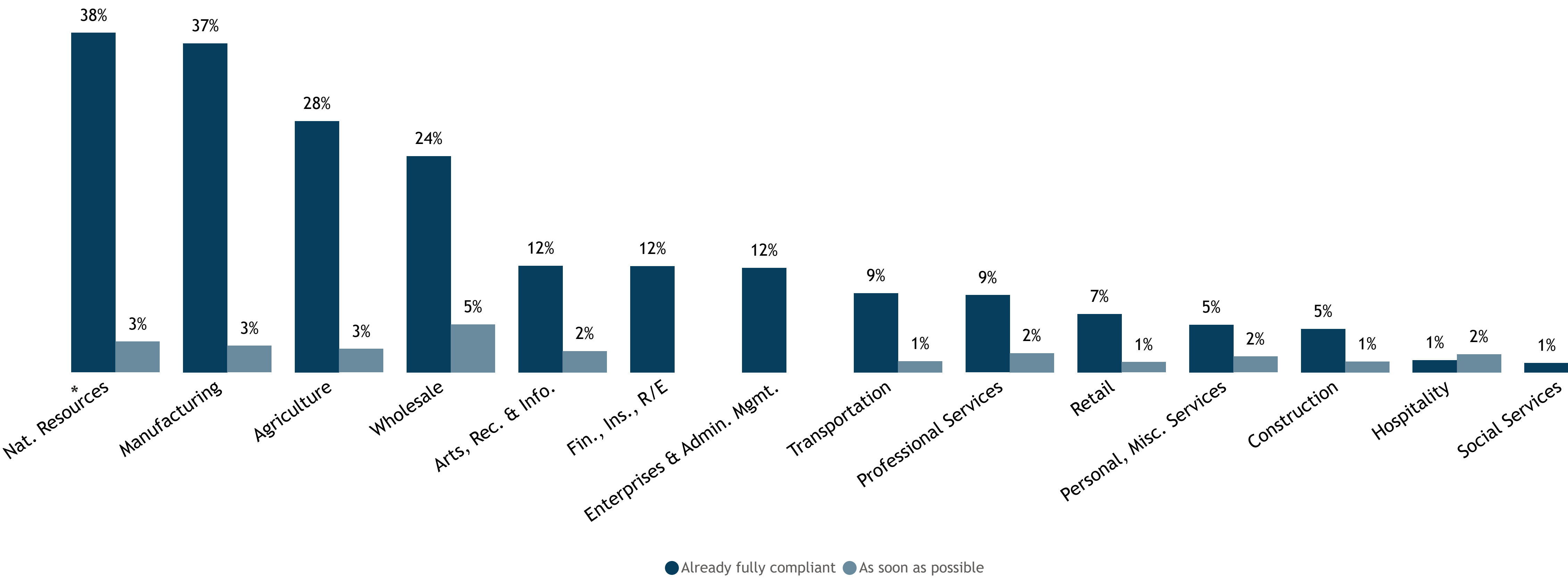
674 Responses

Question: What best describes your business's timeline for full compliance with CUSMA regulations for goods exported to the U.S.? (Select one)

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

Note: Findings exclude "Not applicable, Our business does not export to the U.S." response.

The manufacturing, agriculture and wholesale sectors lead in full CUSMA compliance, while service-based sectors lag significantly.



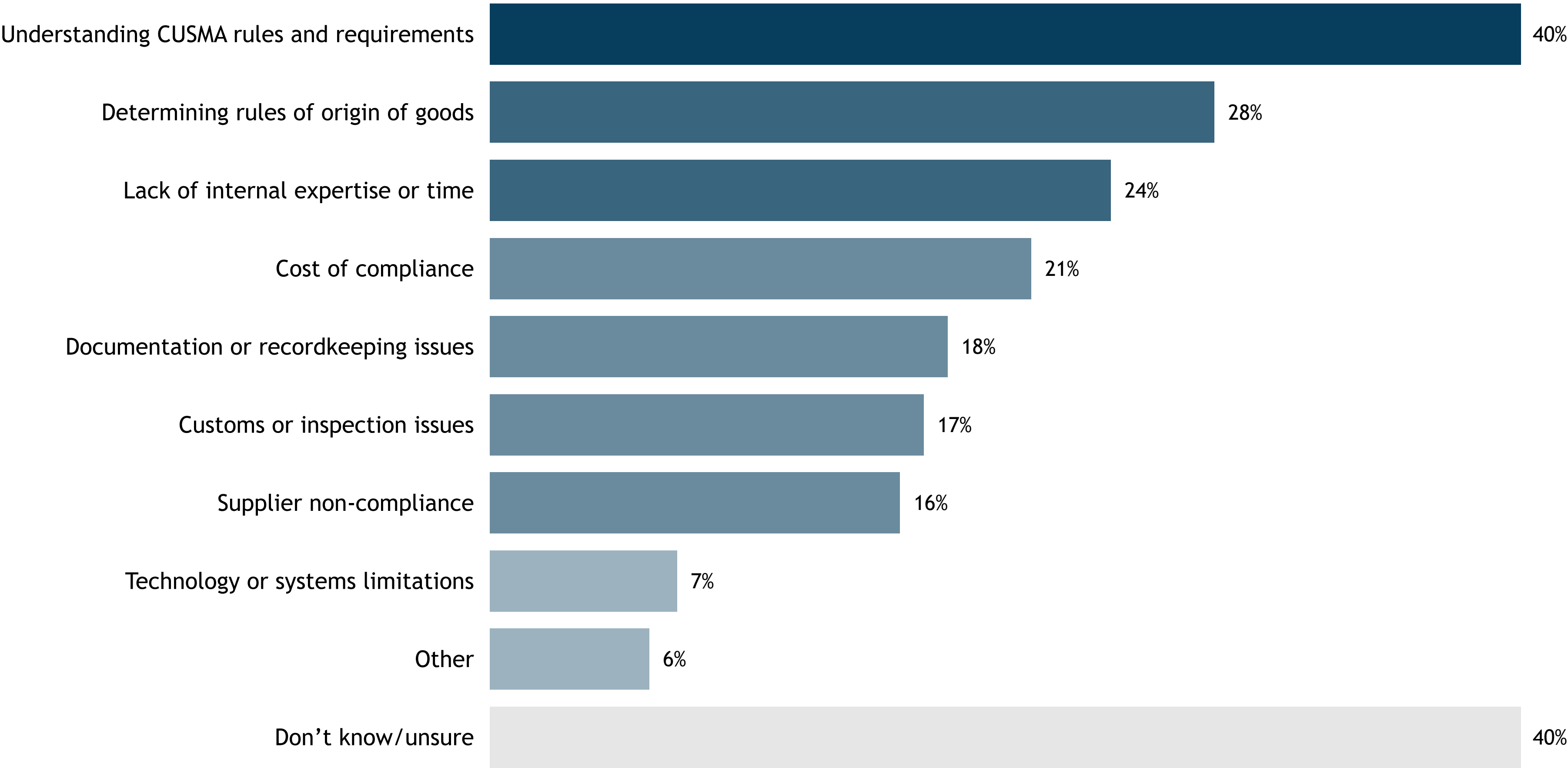
336 Responses

Question: What best describes your business's timeline for full compliance with CUSMA regulations for goods exported to the U.S.? (Select one)

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

Note: Findings exclude "Not applicable, Our business does not export to the U.S." response. *Small sample size (<40).

Top CUSMA compliance challenges include understanding the rules, determining origin of goods, and limited internal capacity (expertise and time).



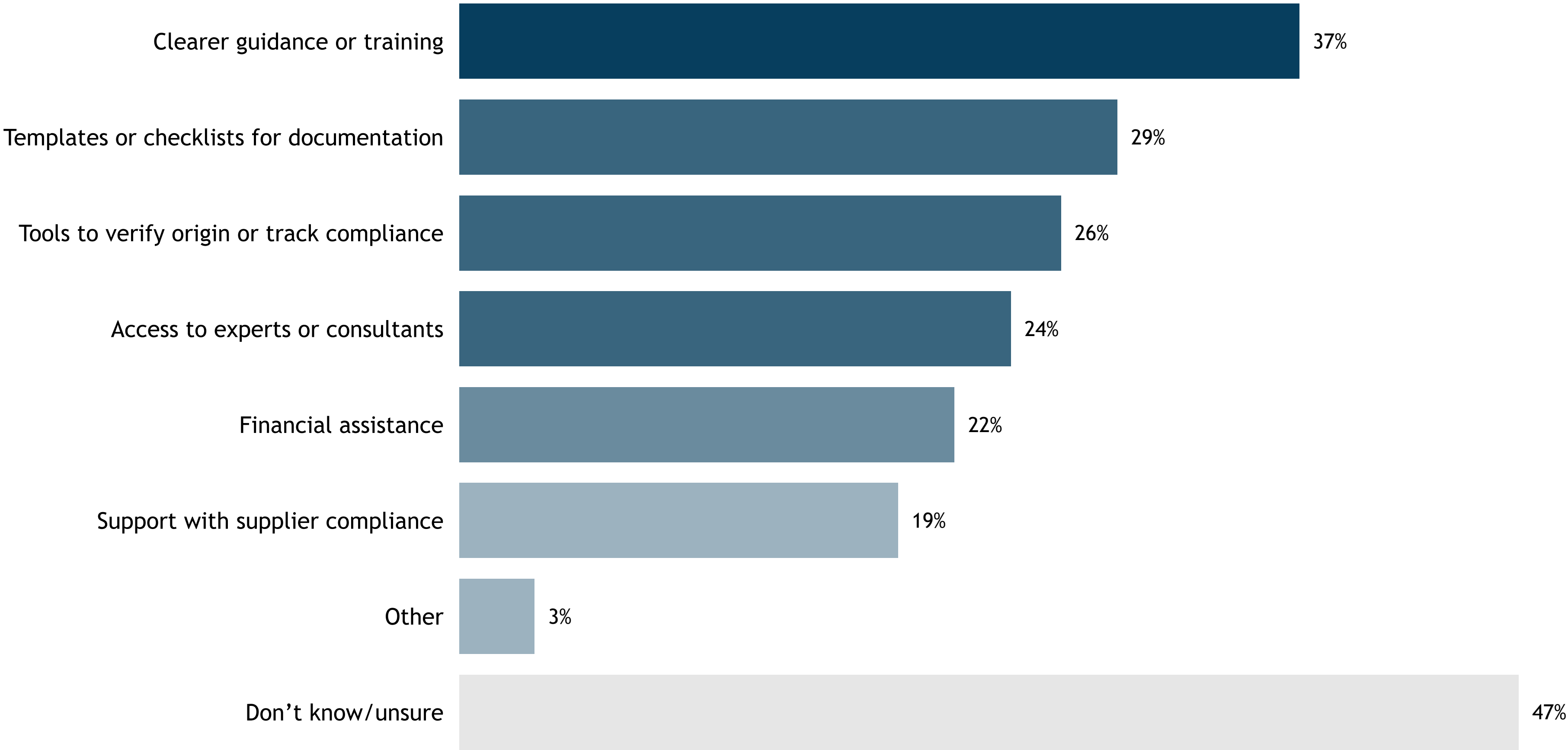
652 Responses

Question: What are the biggest challenges you face in becoming CUSMA-compliant? (Select all that apply)

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.



Businesses struggle to identify what would help most with CUSMA compliance, but clearer guidance and templates top the list.



363 Responses

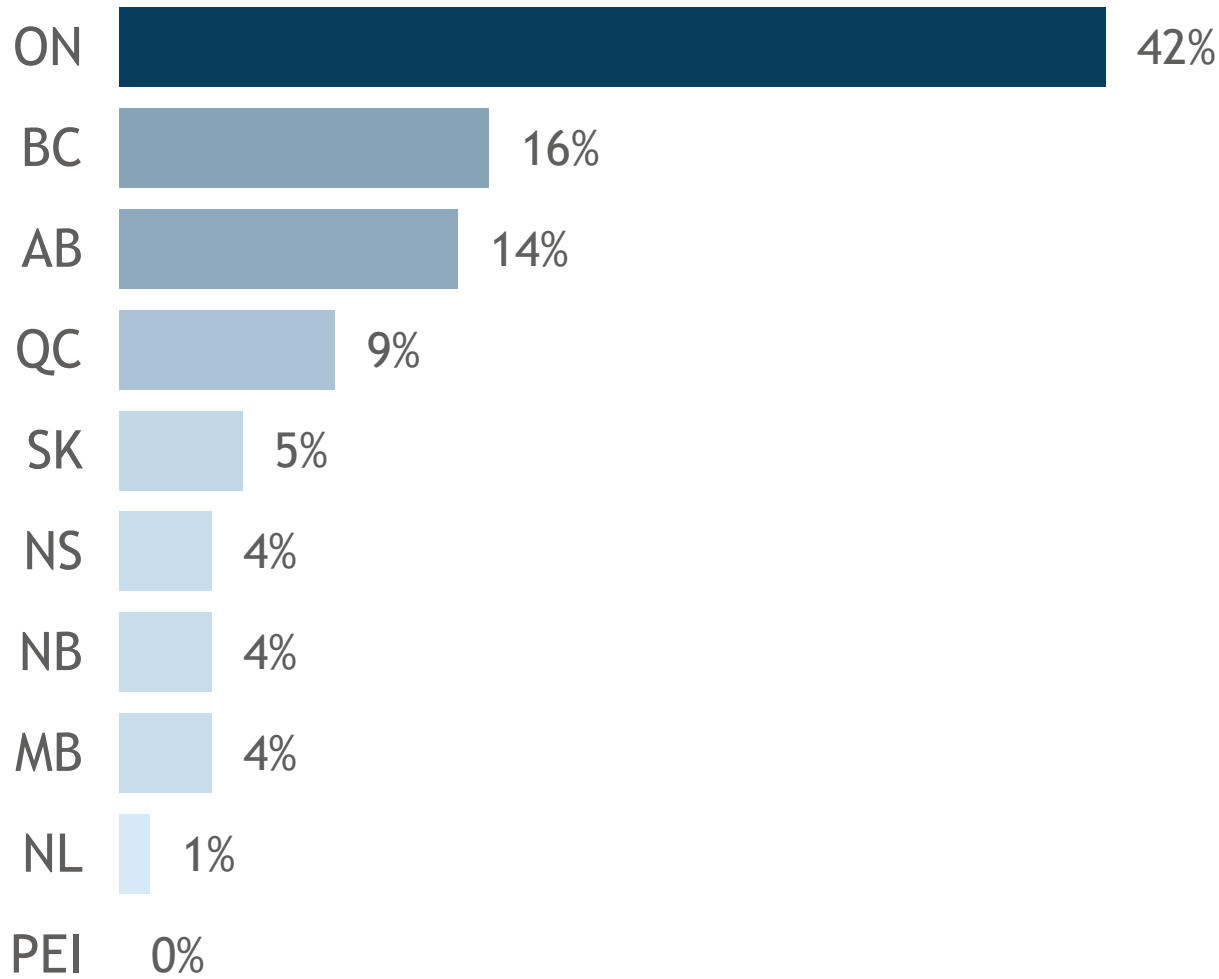
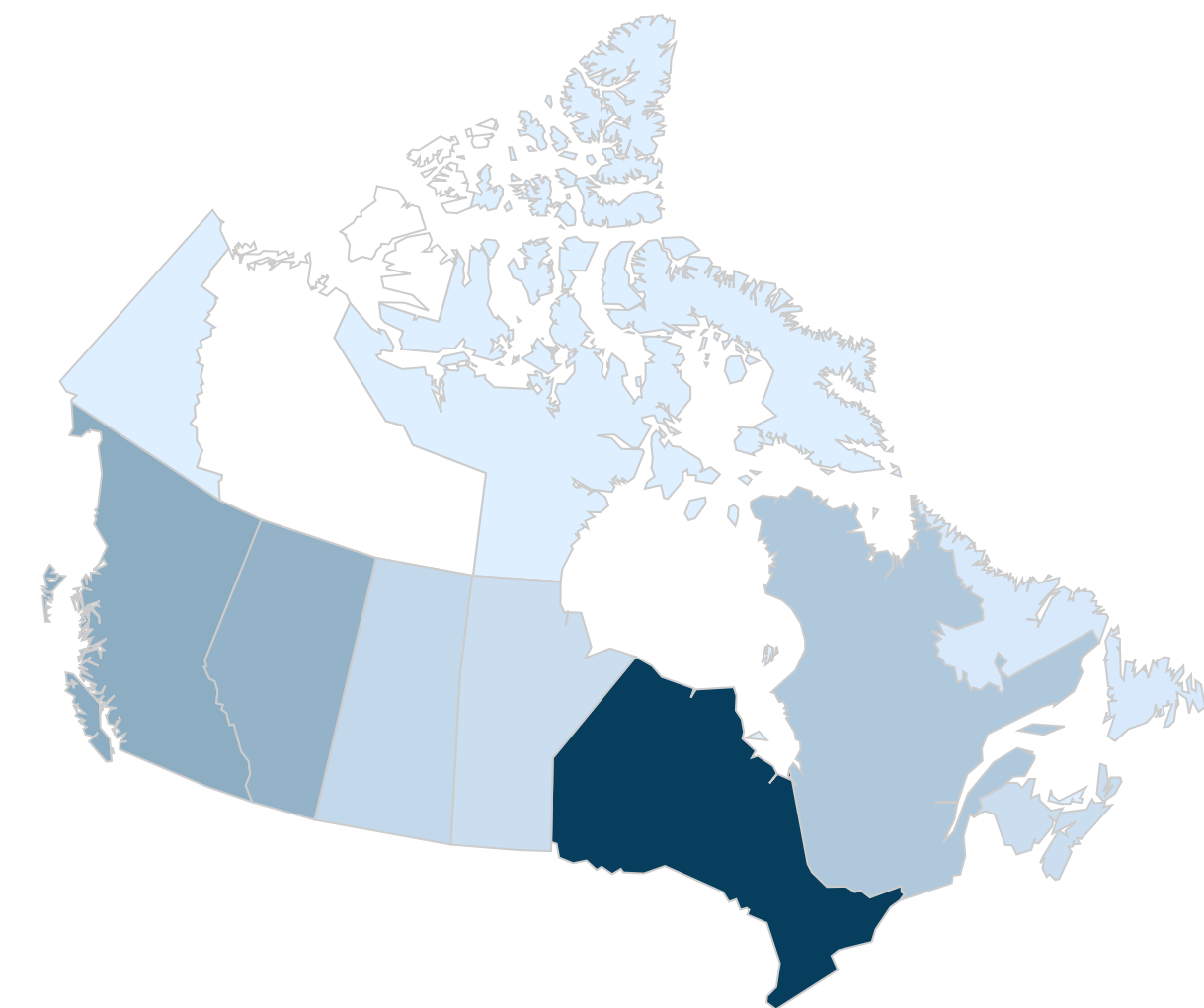
Question: What would be most helpful to support your CUSMA compliance efforts? (Select all that apply)

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

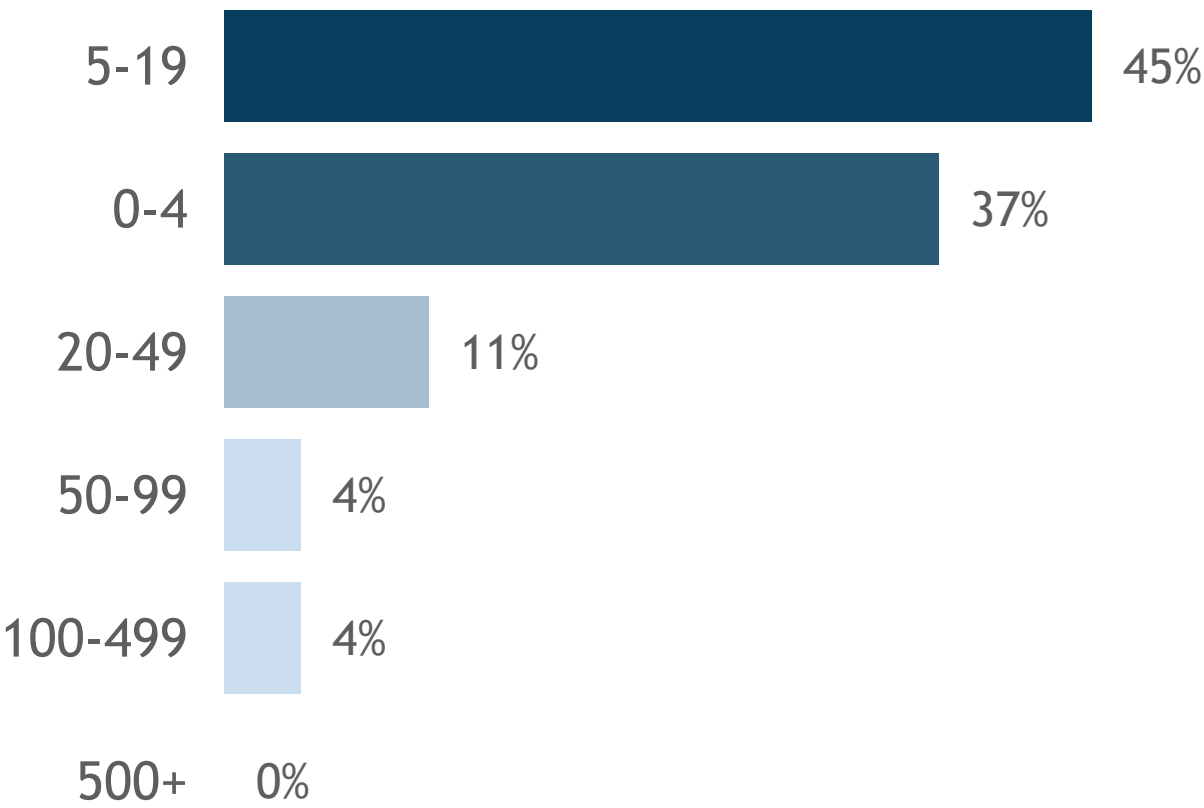


Appendix: Sample distribution

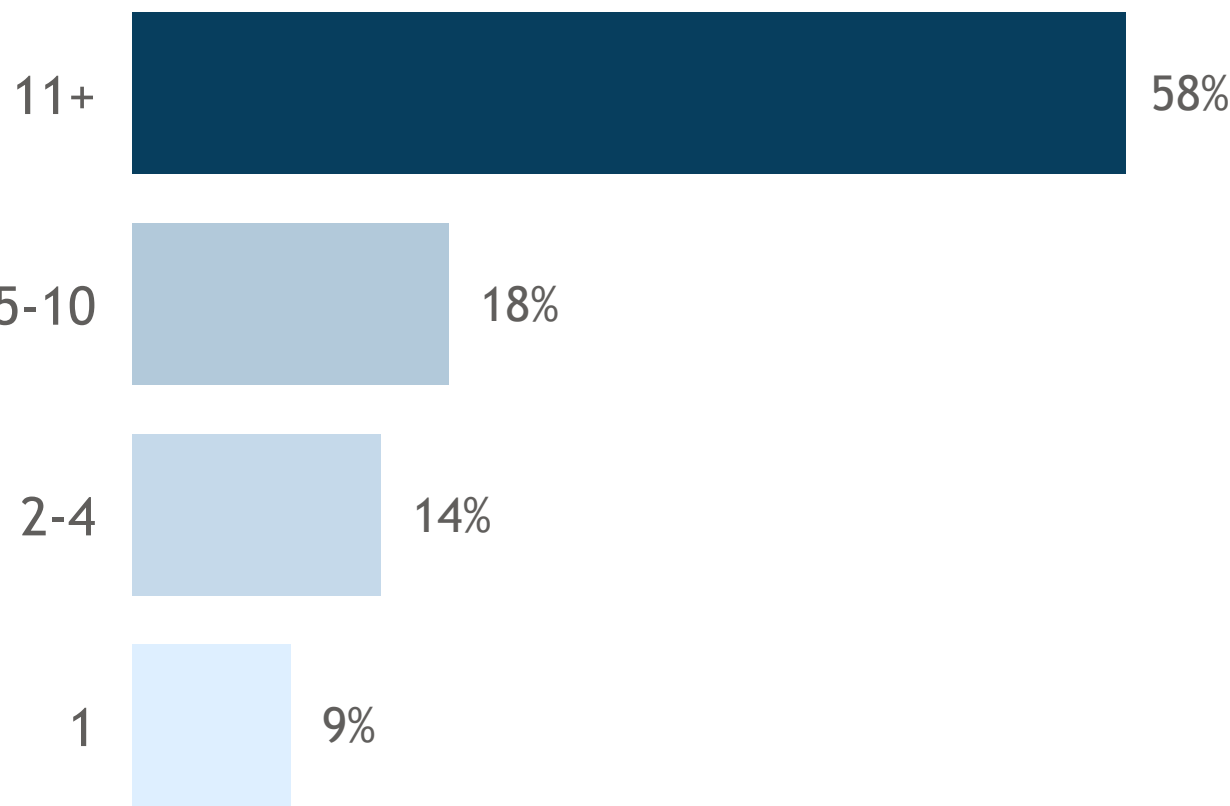
By location of the business



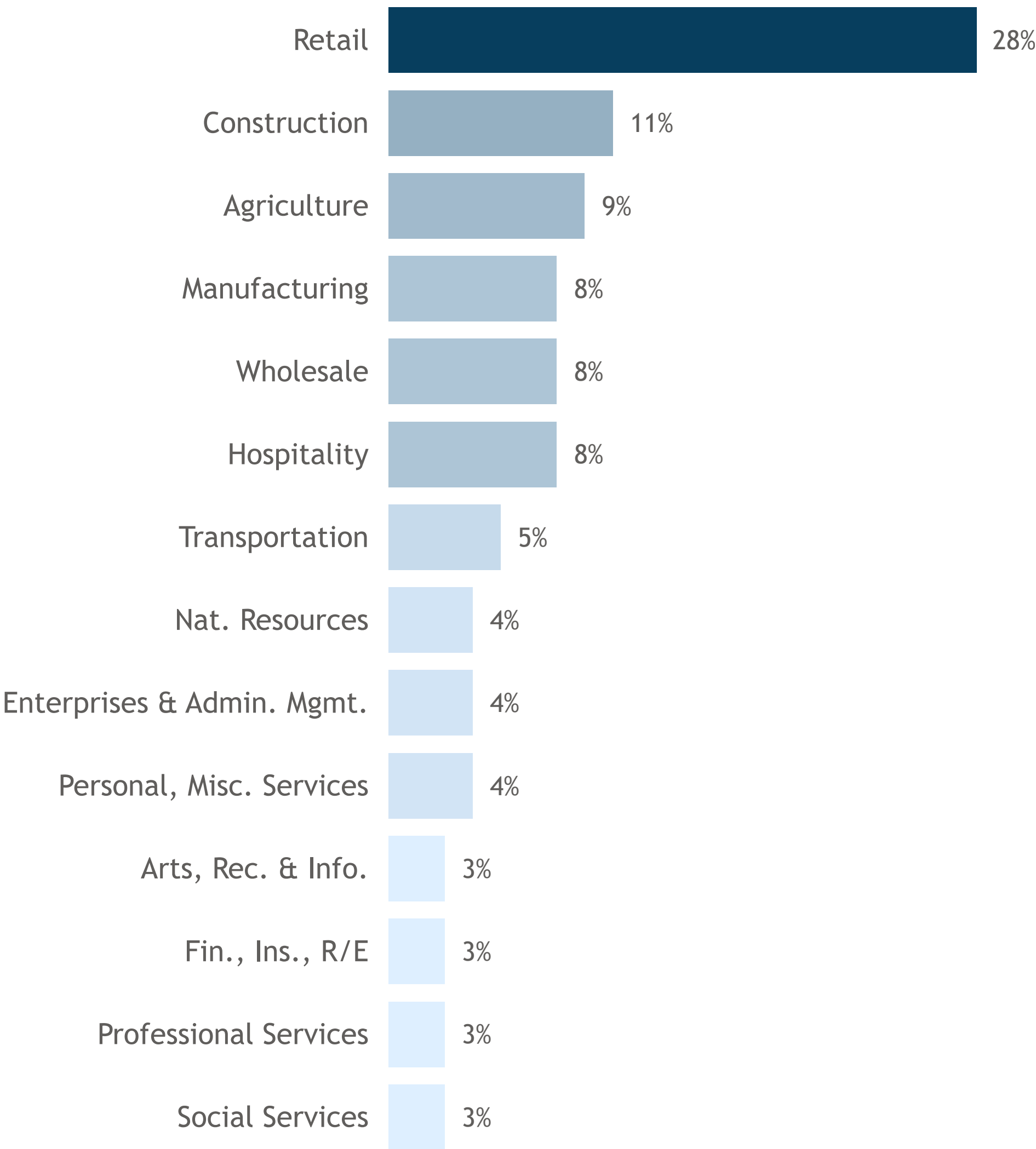
By number of employees



By years in business



By industry



Source: CFIB, Your Voice - April 2025 survey, April 10 - 24, 2025.

CFIB Research Publications and Business Stats



Monthly Business Barometer®

Our monthly survey tracks small business confidence, expectations and operating conditions in Canada.



Enterprise Pulse

Q2 2024 - Entrepreneurship in Canada is improving, but still not fully back to pre-pandemic strength.



Private Sector Job Vacancies in Canada

The private sector job vacancy rate in Canada edged down to 2.7% in 2024 Q4, down by 0.9 percentage points on a yearly basis.

Questions or data requests

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