

2026 Firms in Focus

Chartbook on California Employer Firms

Findings from the
2025 Small Business Credit Survey



About the Small Business Credit Survey



- The Small Business Credit Survey (SBCS) is an annual survey of firms with fewer than 500 employees.
- Data in this chartbook represent findings from the 2025 survey year. The survey was fielded from September to November 2025.
- The findings in this chartbook show data for employer firms only. Employer firms are those with at least one employee in addition to the owner(s). For chartbooks on state and metropolitan statistical area (MSA) findings, the “US employer firms” comparison bars show data for the national SBCS sample.
- Estimates are shown only when the corresponding sample includes 50 or more observations.
- Firms in Focus chartbooks examine differences in small businesses’ credit experiences based on firm characteristics, owner demographics, and geographic location (states and metro areas). This chartbook contains data on firms in California. Additional information, including on firms in specific states, is available via FedSmallBusiness.org.

Suggested citation

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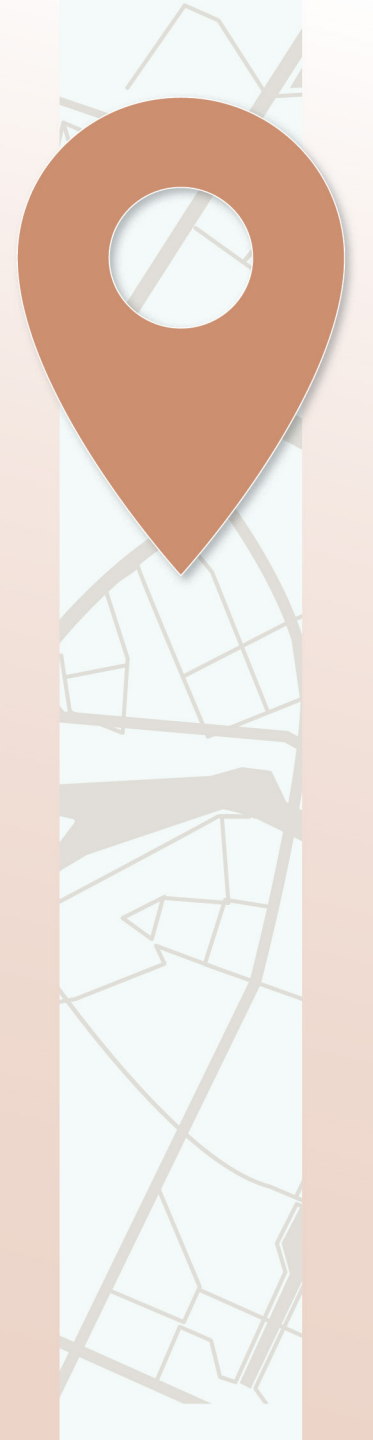
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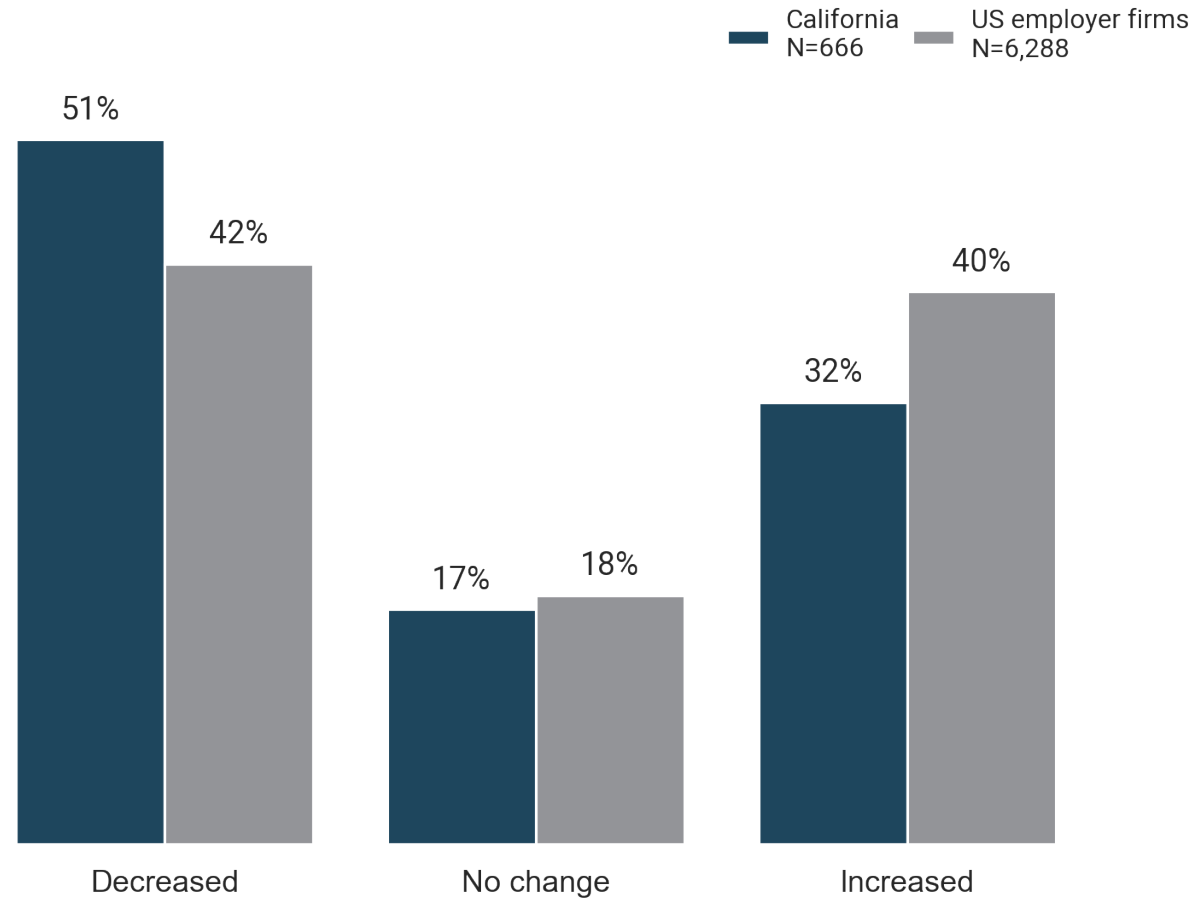
Firm Performance

Revenue, employment, and
business conditions



Revenue change, prior 12 months

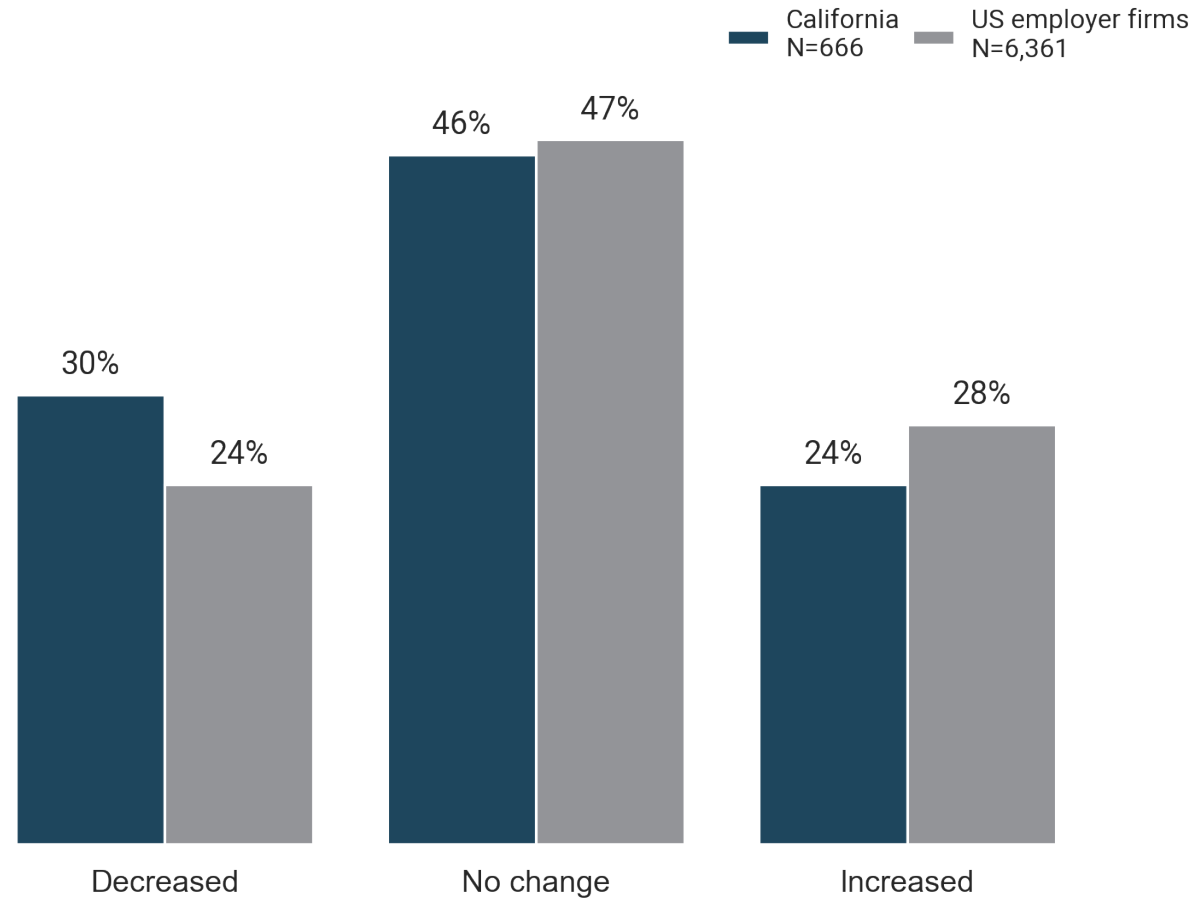
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Employment change, prior 12 months

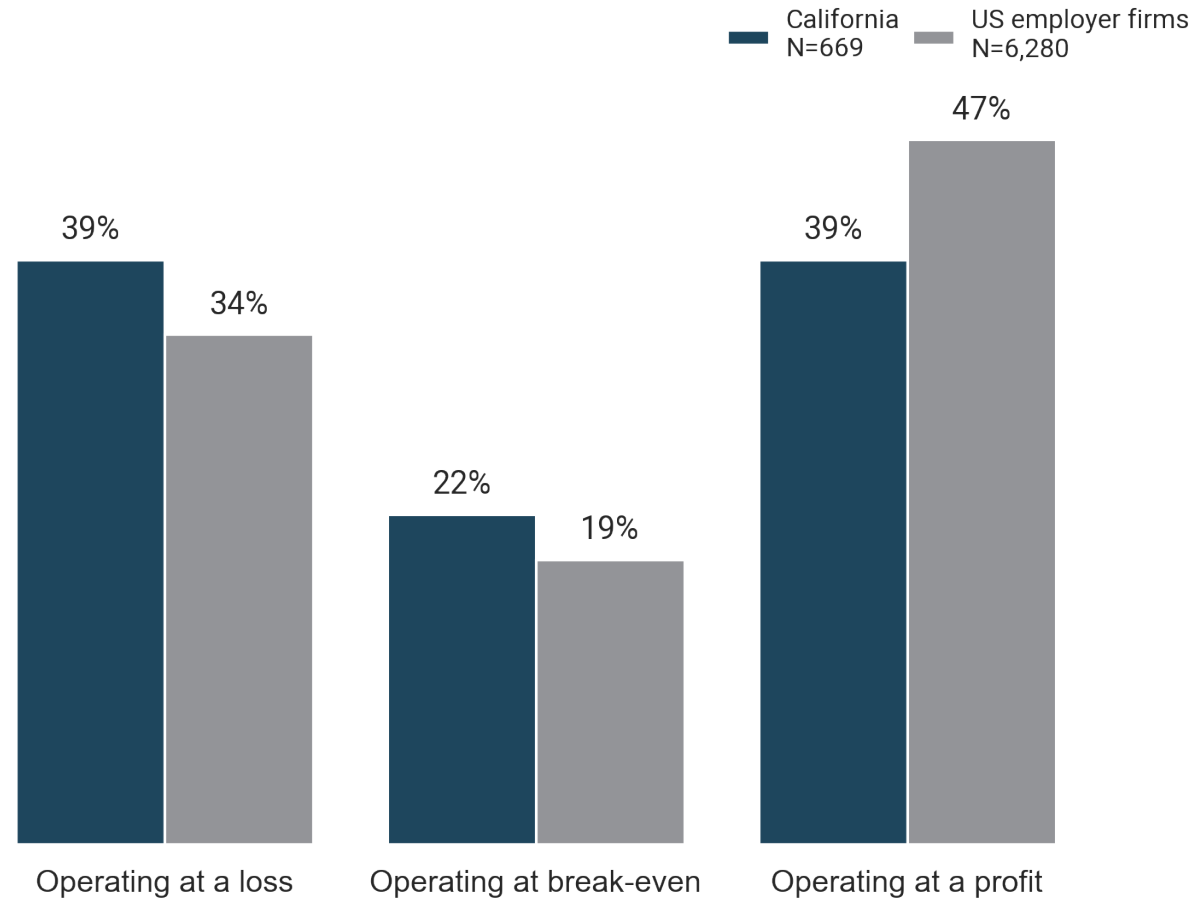
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Profitability, end of 2024

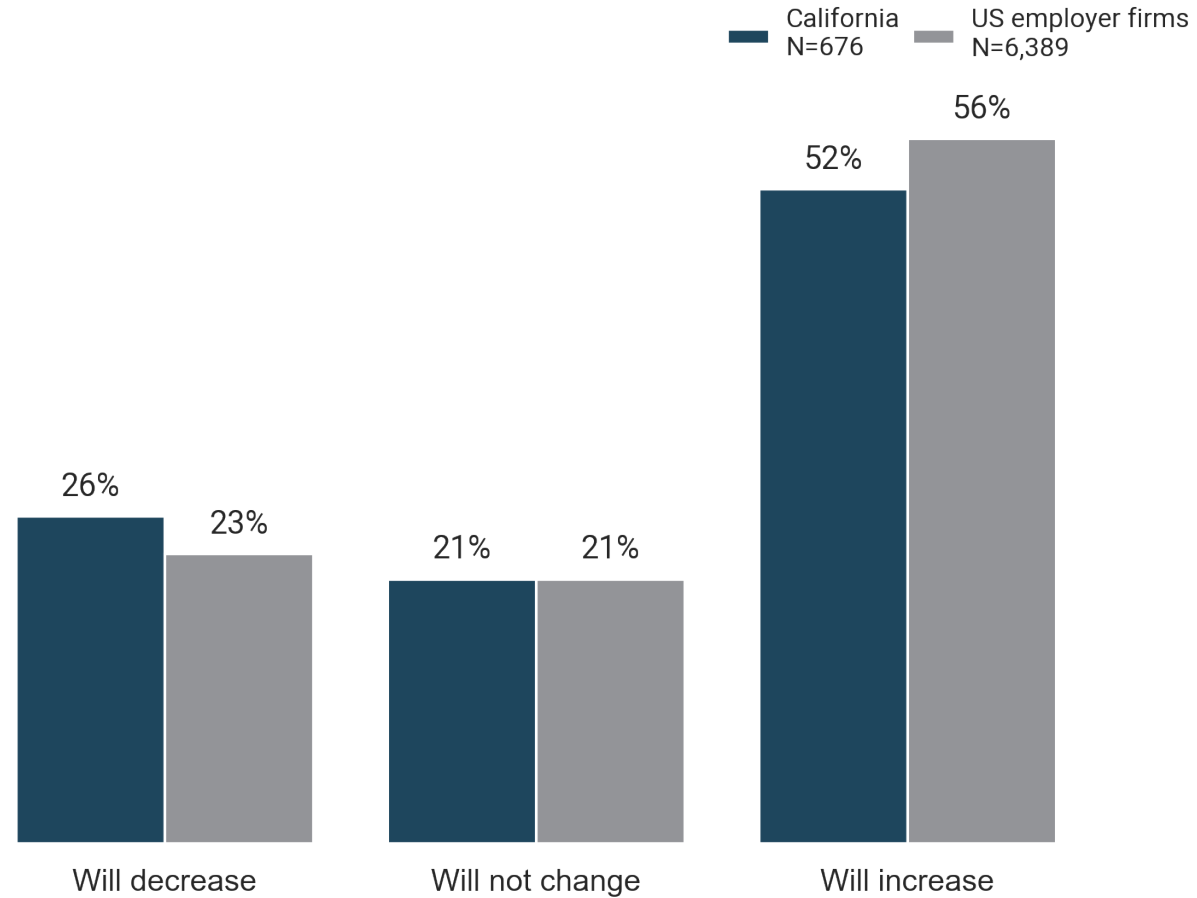
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Expected revenue change, next 12 months

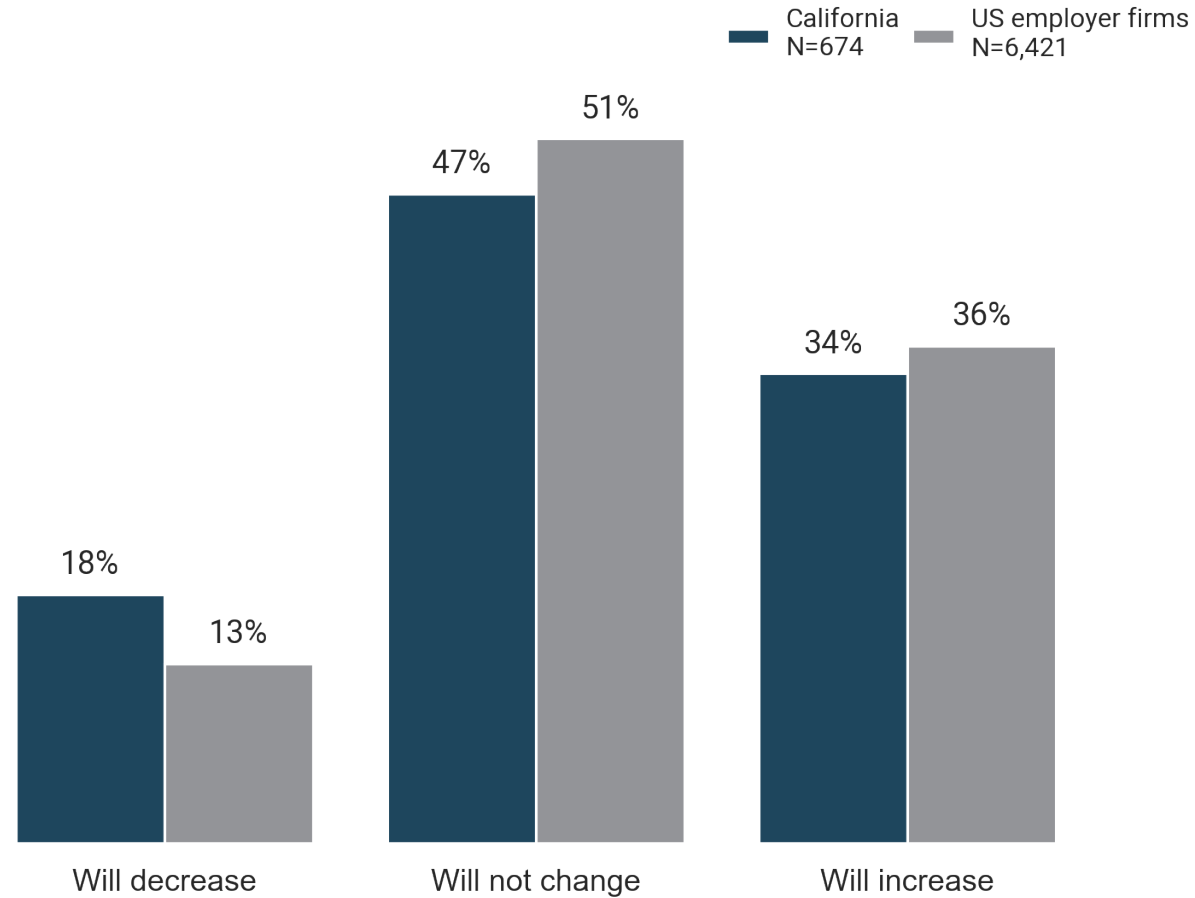
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Expected employment change, next 12 months

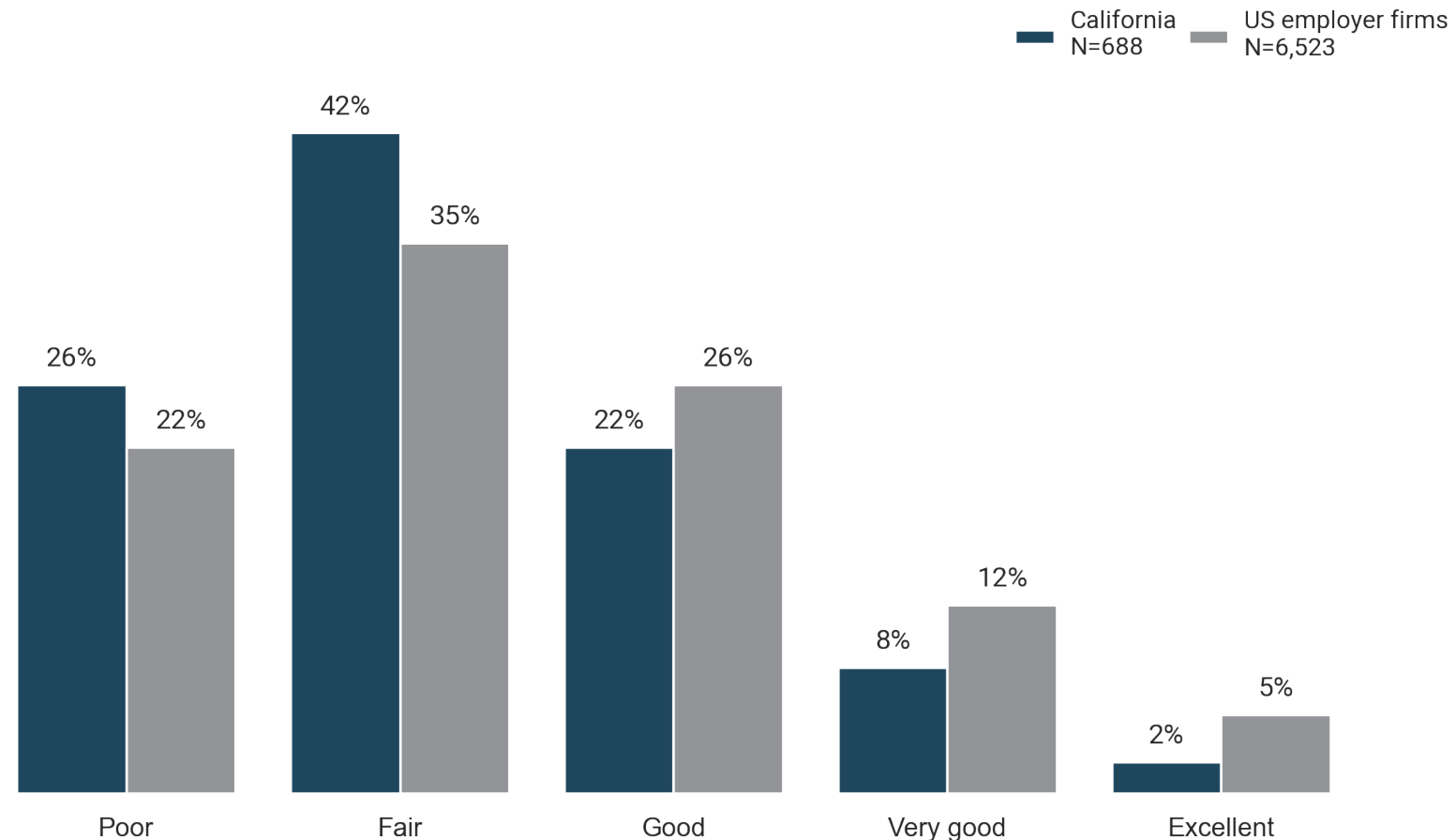
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Financial condition, time of survey

(% of employer firms)



Notes: Self-reported financial condition at the time of the survey. Percentages may not sum to 100 within respondent groups because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

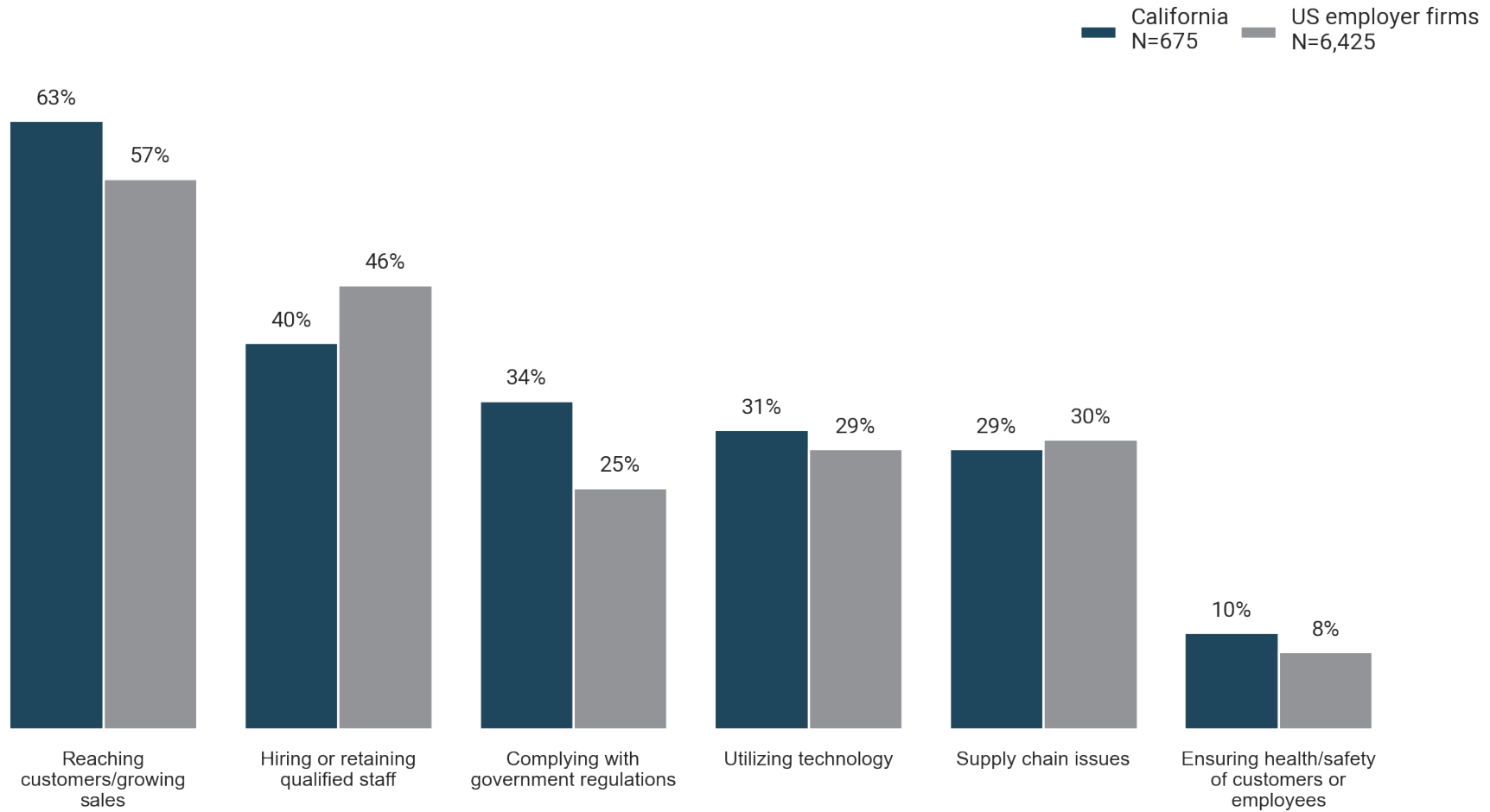
Challenges

Financial and operational challenges and actions taken in response



Operational challenges, prior 12 months

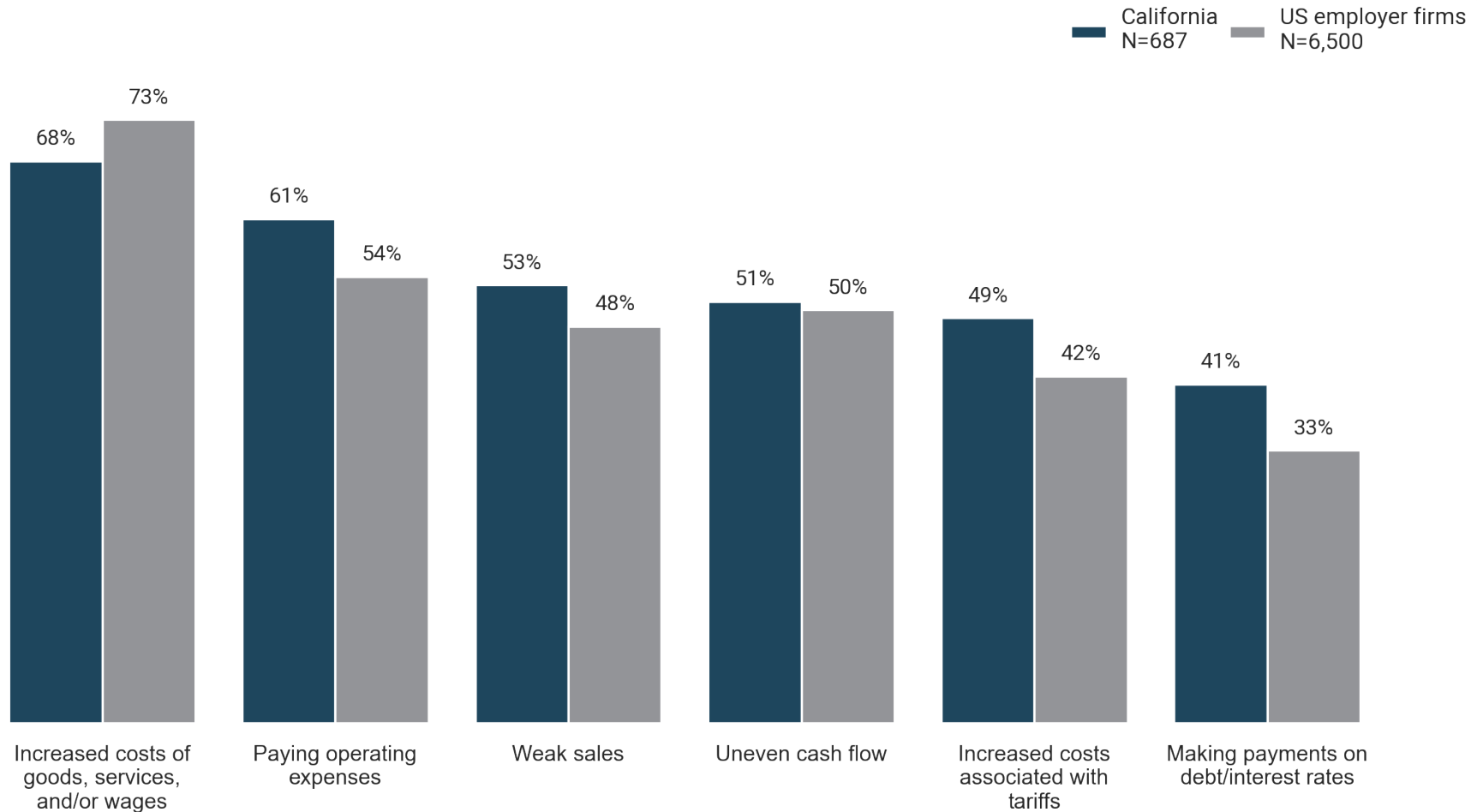
(% of employer firms)



Notes: "Utilizing technology" includes issues with ecommerce, cybersecurity, social media, and websites. Respondents could select multiple options. Most common responses shown. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Financial challenges, prior 12 months

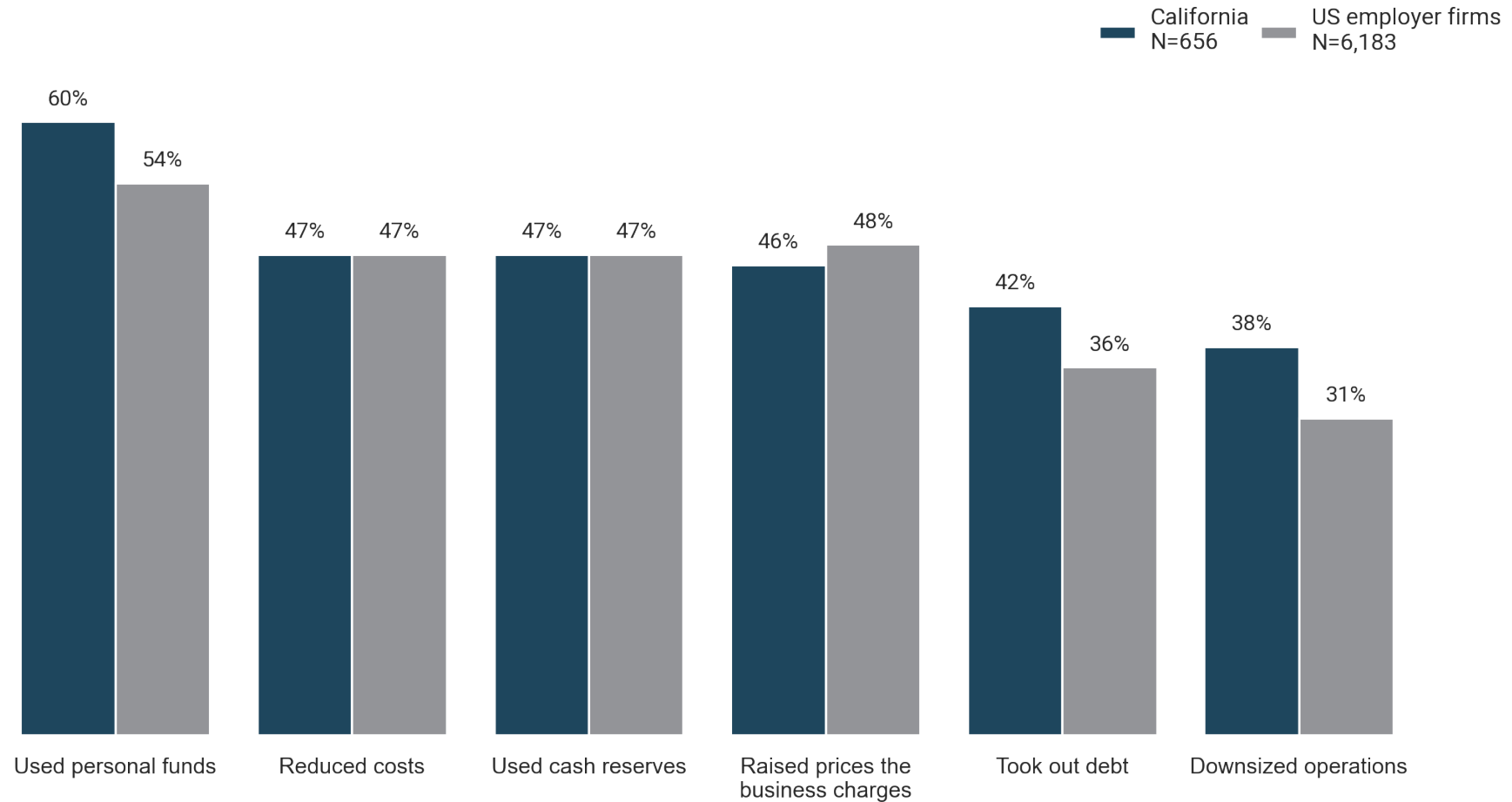
(% of employer firms)



Notes: "Uneven cash flow" includes collecting on receivables. Examples presented for "paying business expenses" include payroll, rent, and inventory costs. Respondents could select multiple options. Most common responses shown. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Actions taken in response to financial challenges, prior 12 months

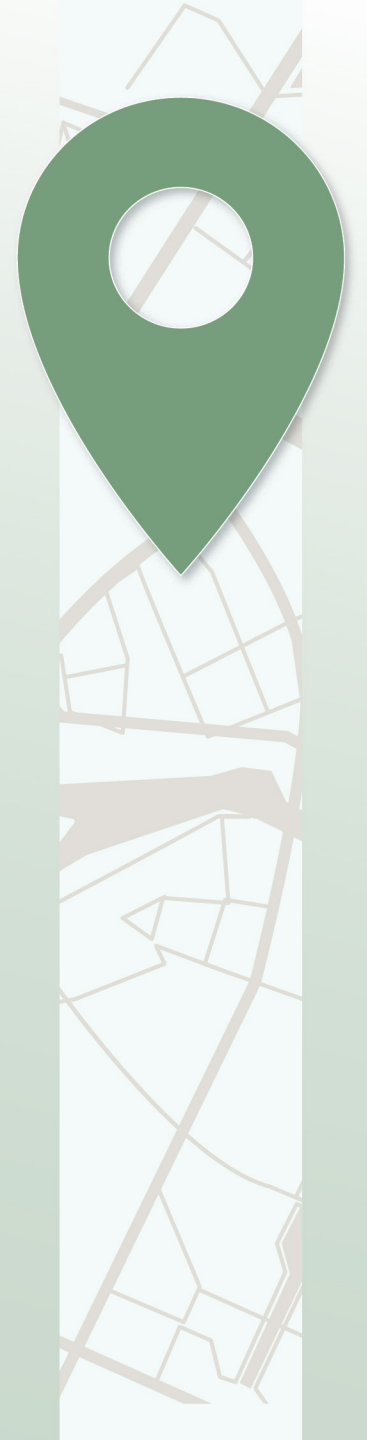
(% of employer firms with financial challenges)



Notes: Respondents could select multiple options. Select responses shown. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

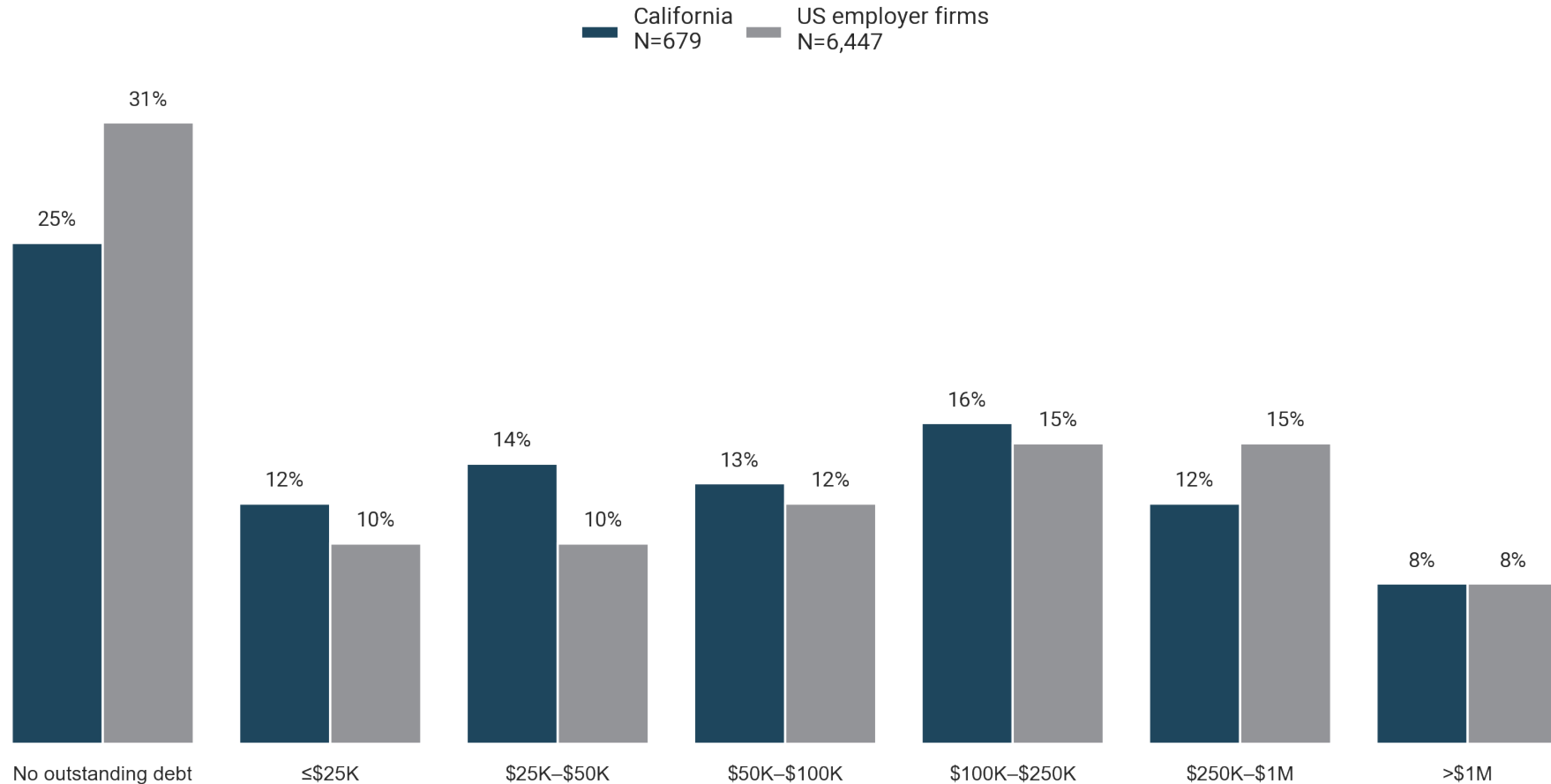
Debt and Financial Services

Outstanding debt and use of financial services



Amount of outstanding debt, time of survey

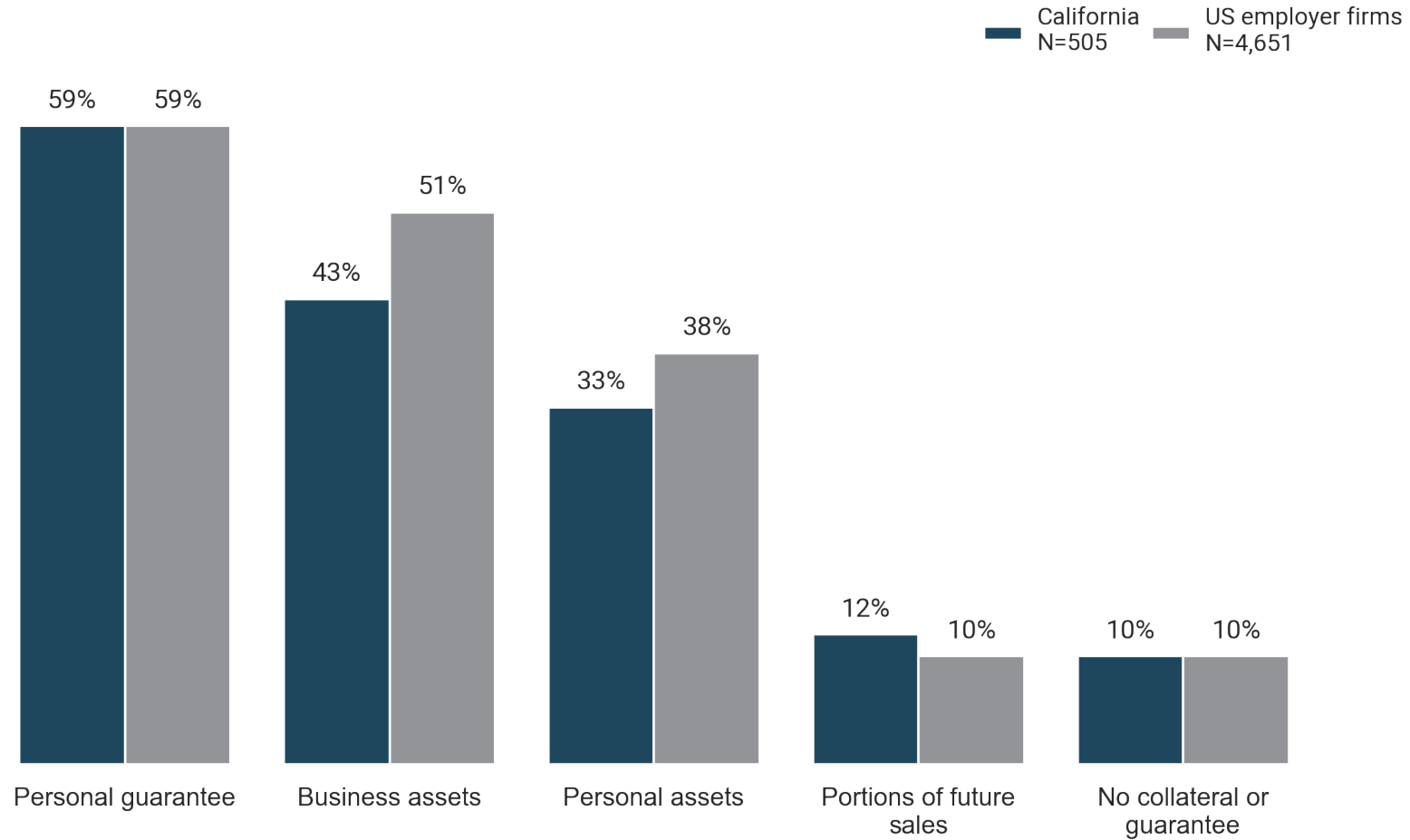
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Respondents were instructed to consider funds borrowed from external parties, including formal borrowing from financial institutions and loans from friends and family. Categories have been simplified for readability. Actual categories are: ≤\$25K, \$25,001–\$50K, \$50,001–\$100K, \$100,001–\$250K, \$250,001–\$1M, and >\$1M. Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

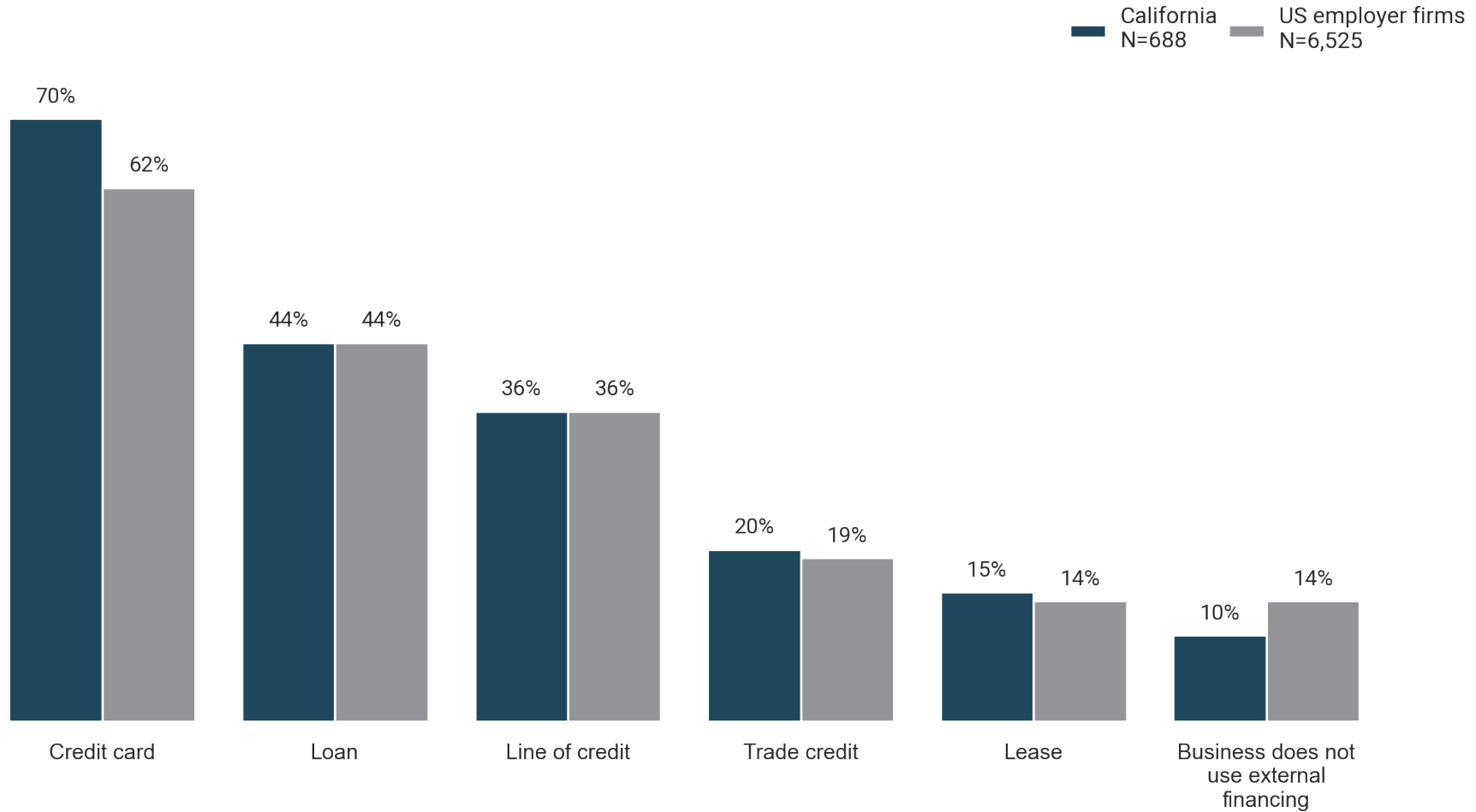
Type of collateral used to secure debt

(% of employer firms with debt)



Notes: Respondents could select multiple options. Response option "other" not shown.

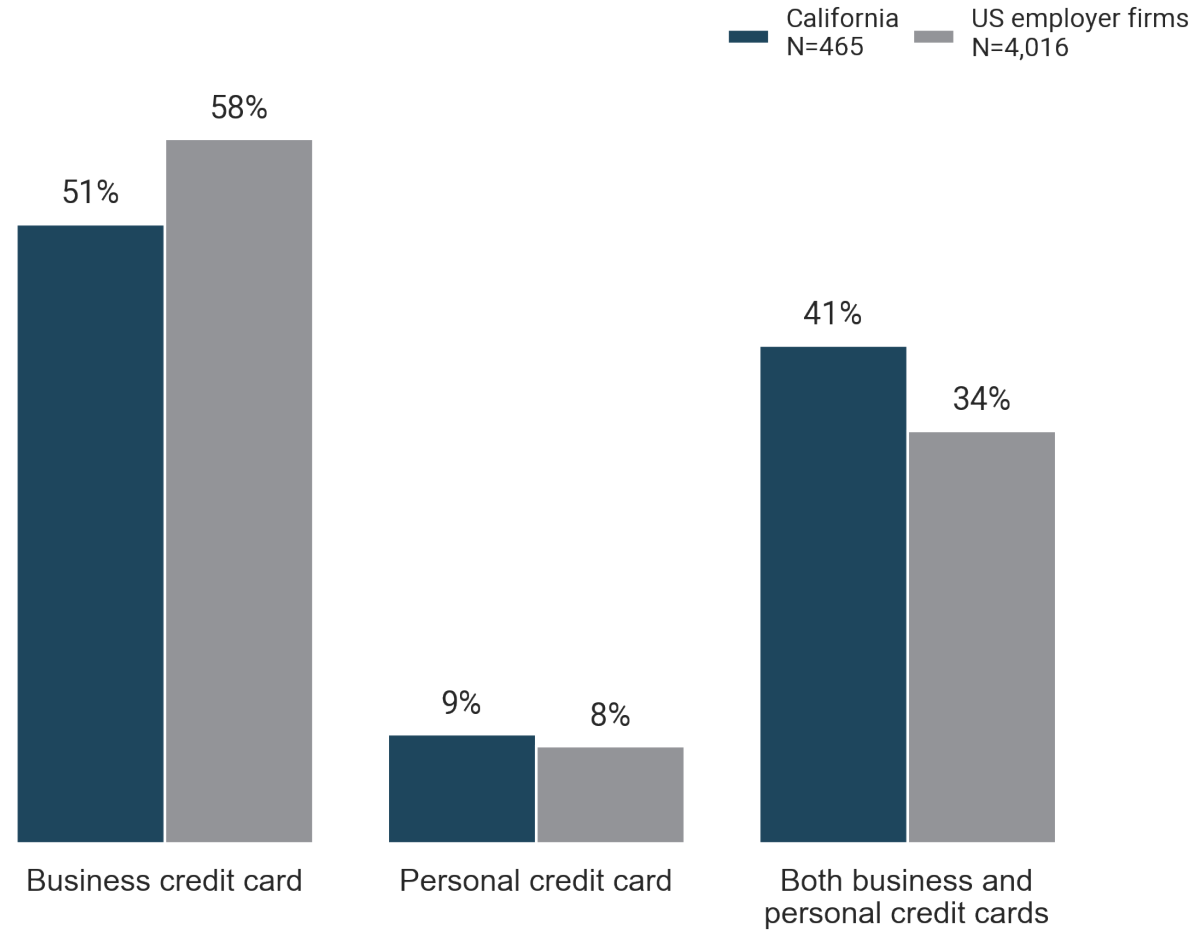
Use of financing and credit, products used on a regular basis (% of employer firms)



Notes: Respondents were asked to select the types of financing products they regularly use or on which they regularly carry a balance. "Loan" includes mortgage for the business. Respondents could select multiple options. Most common responses shown.

Type of credit card used by business

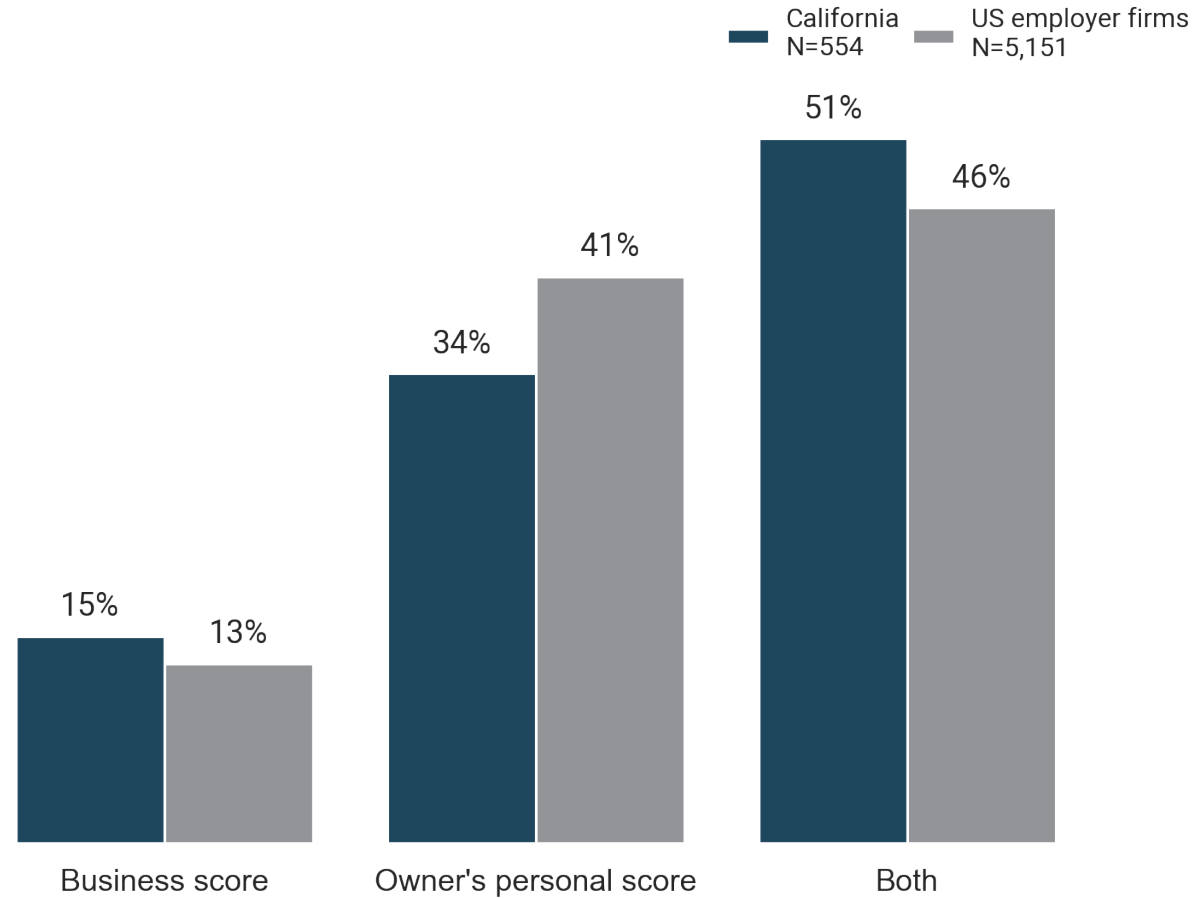
(% of employer firms that regularly use or carry a balance on a credit card)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding.

Type of credit score used by business

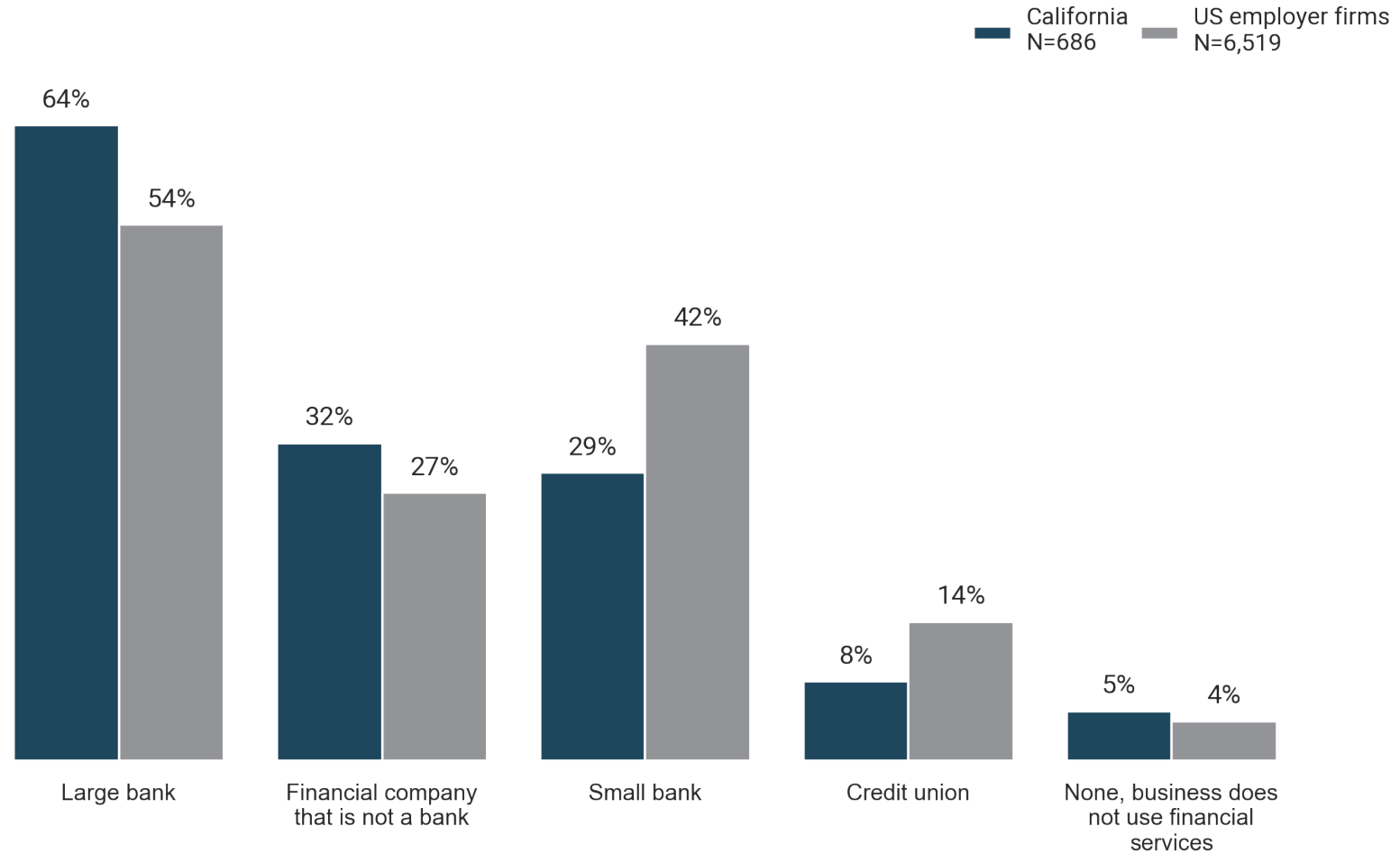
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding.

Use of financial services providers

(% of employer firms)



Notes: Financial services providers are those at which the firm has an account or uses other financial services, including loans and payments processing. Respondents could select multiple options. Response option "other" not shown. See Appendix for financial services provider definitions used in the SBCS.

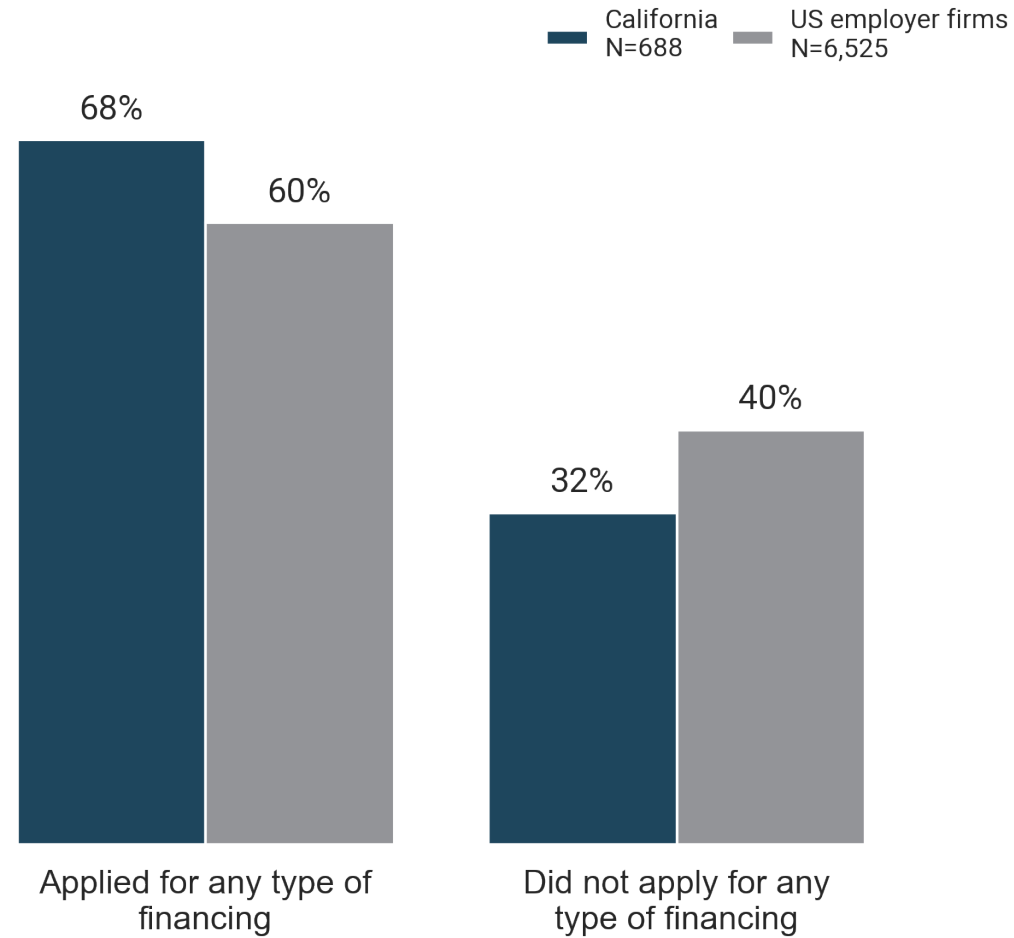
Financing

Financing applications
and outcomes



Share that applied for financing, prior 12 months

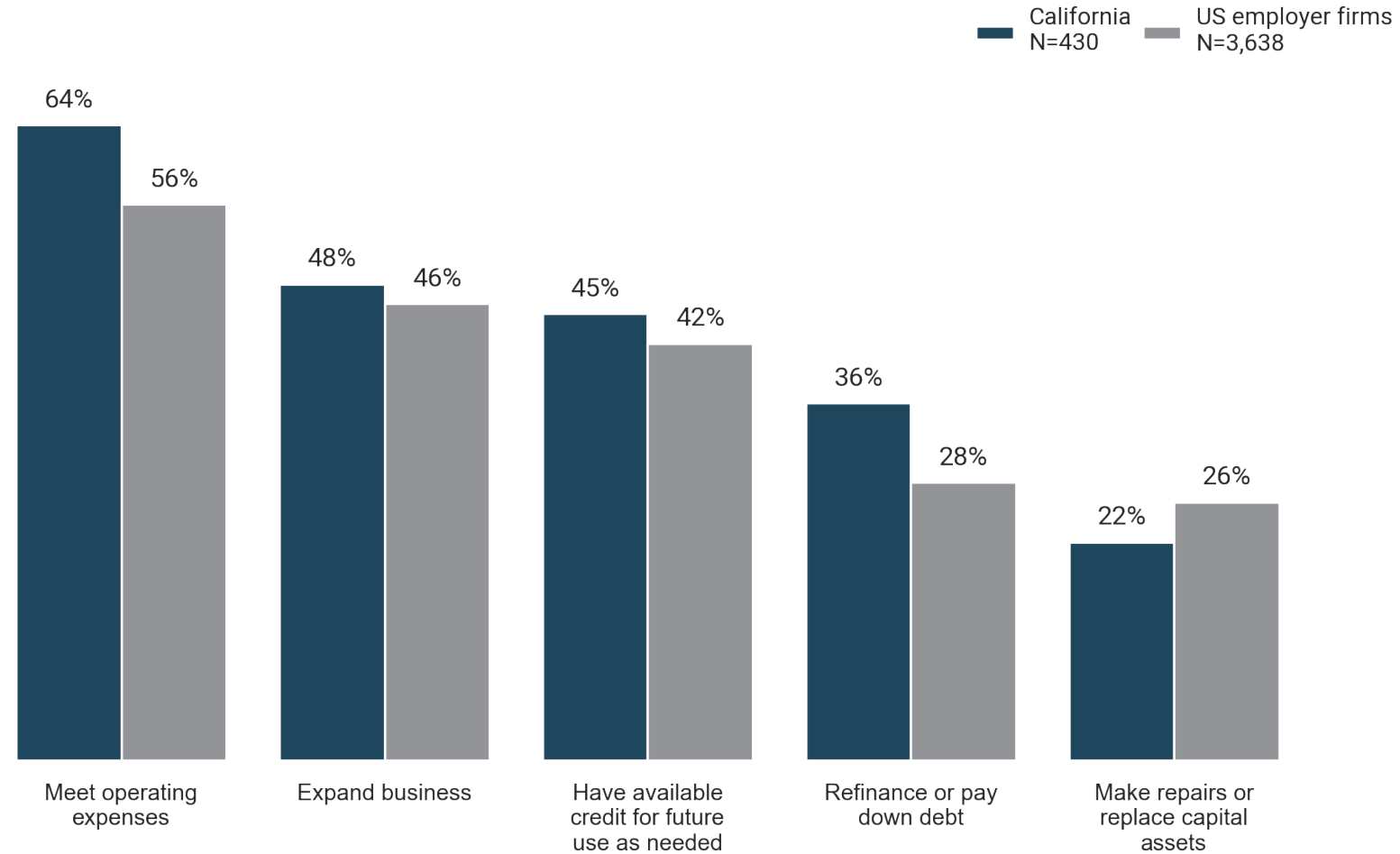
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Includes financing applications for loans, lines of credit, merchant cash advances, leases, trade credit, credit cards, and factoring. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

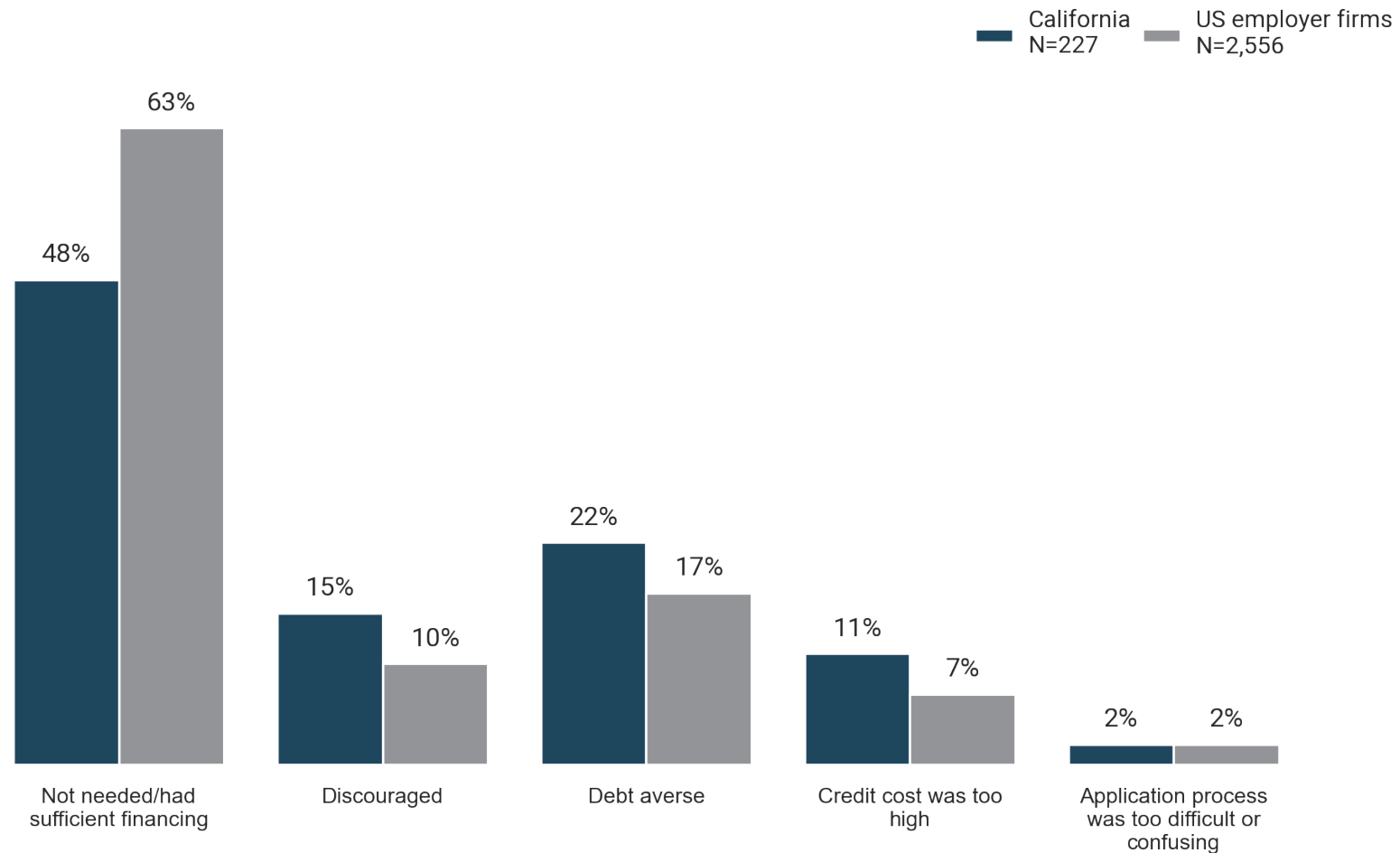
Reasons for applying for financing, prior 12 months

(% of applicants)



Notes: Respondents could select multiple options. Response option "other" not shown. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

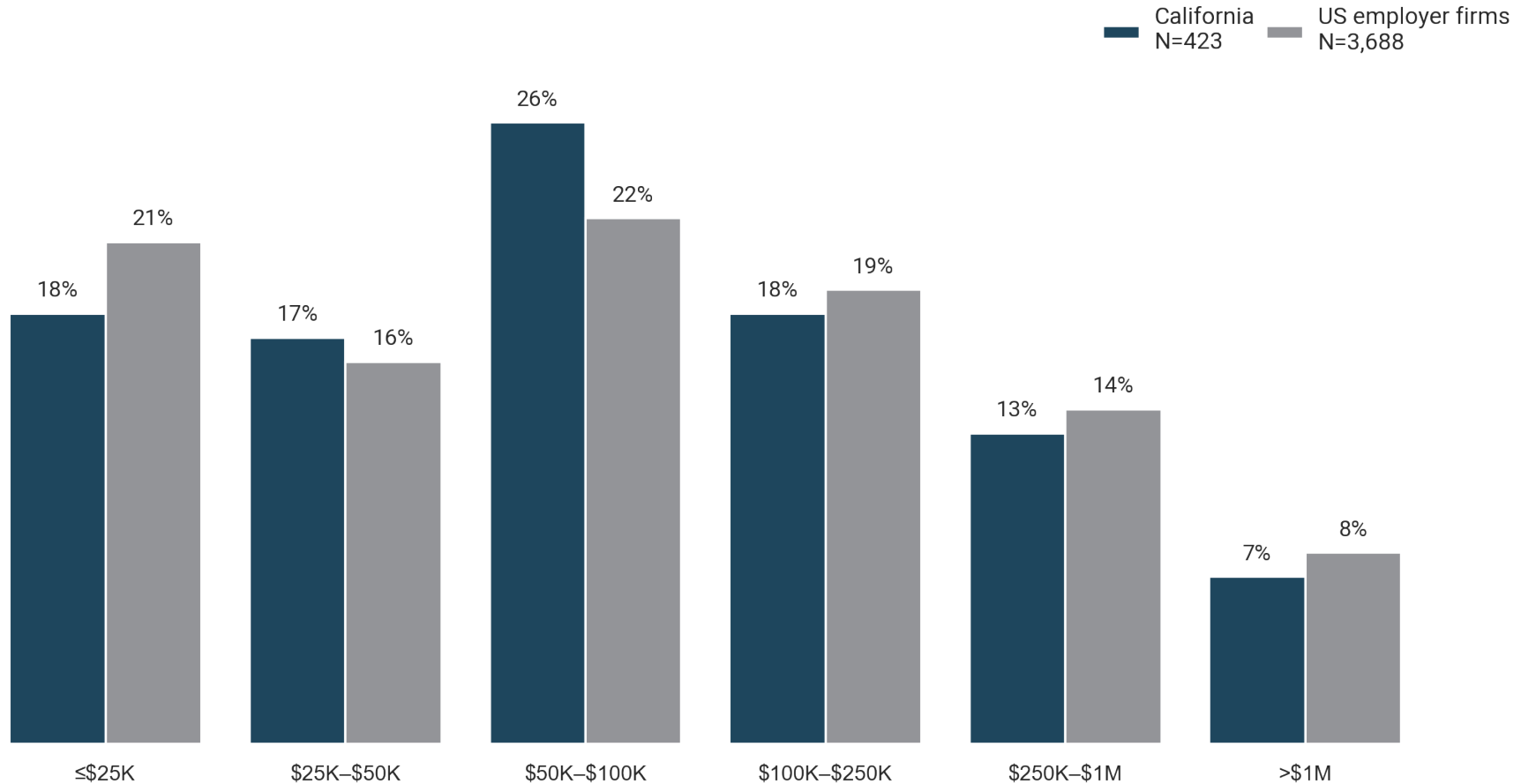
Top reasons for not applying for financing, prior 12 months (% of nonapplicants)



Notes: Respondents were asked to select the primary reason they chose not to apply for financing. "Nonapplicants" are firms that did not apply for financing in the prior 12 months. "Discouraged" firms are those that did not apply because they did not think they would be approved. Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding and because response option "other" is not shown.

Total amount of financing sought, prior 12 months

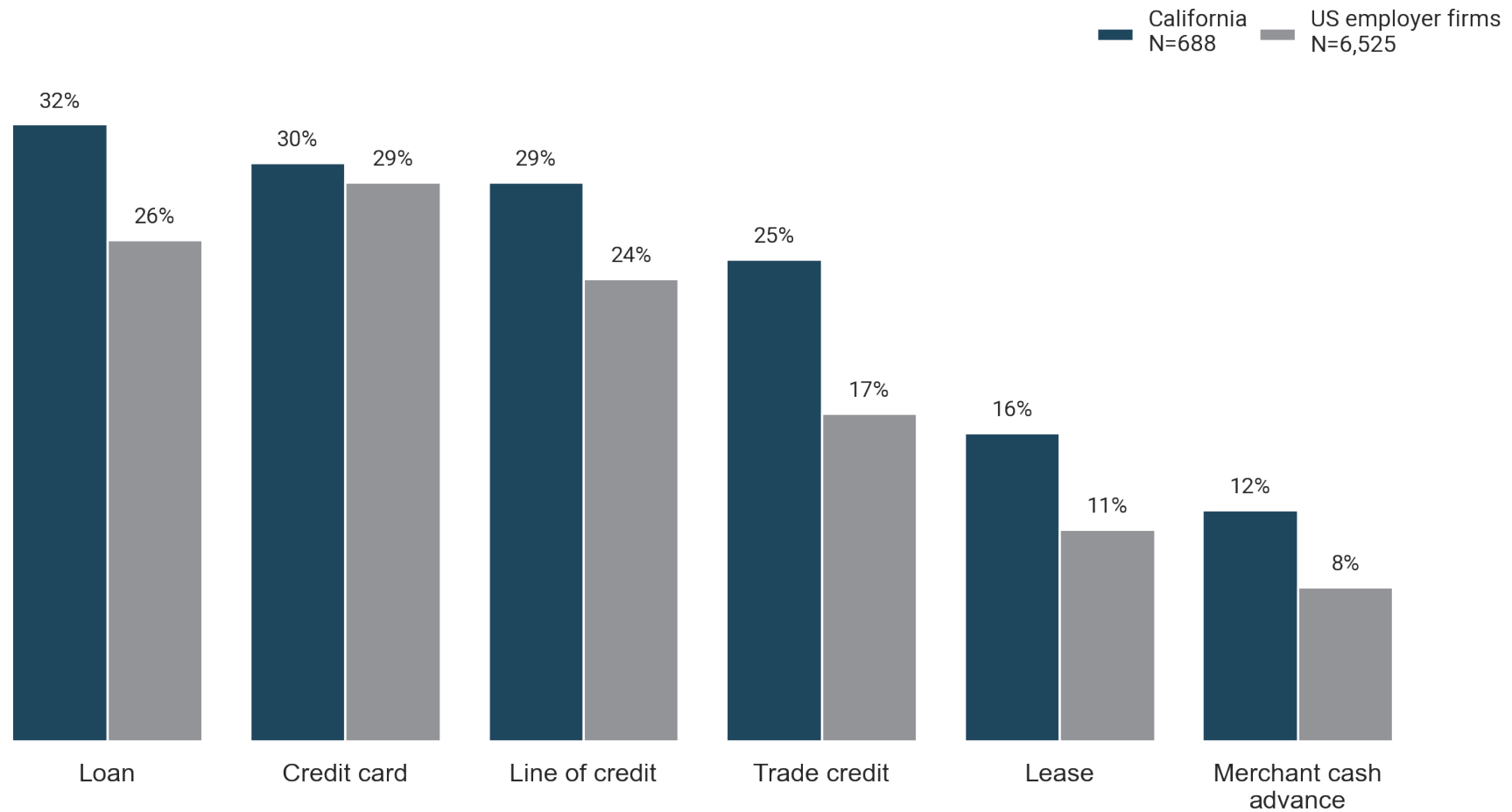
(% of applicants)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. Categories have been simplified for readability. Actual categories are: ≤\$25K, \$25,001-\$50K, \$50,001-\$100K, \$100,001-\$250K, \$250,001-\$1M, and >\$1M. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

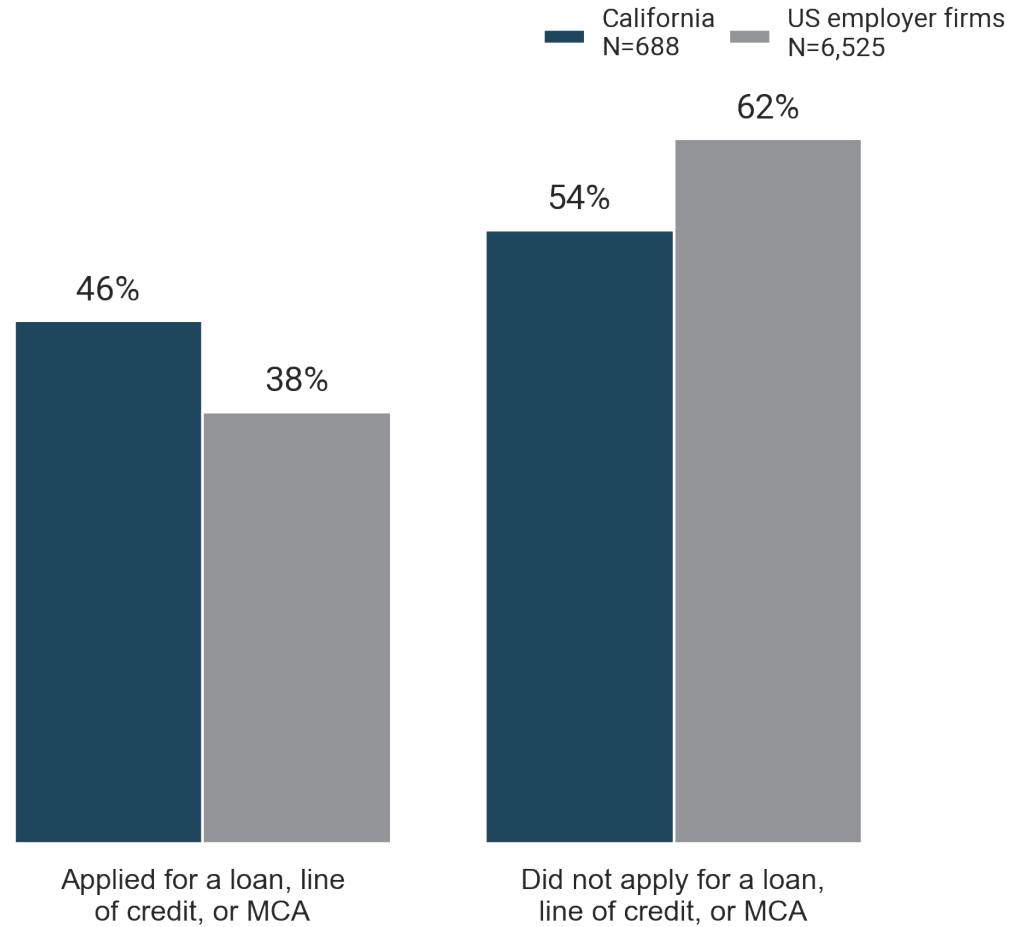
Financing and credit products sought, prior 12 months

(% of applicants)



Notes: Respondents could select multiple options. Most common responses shown. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

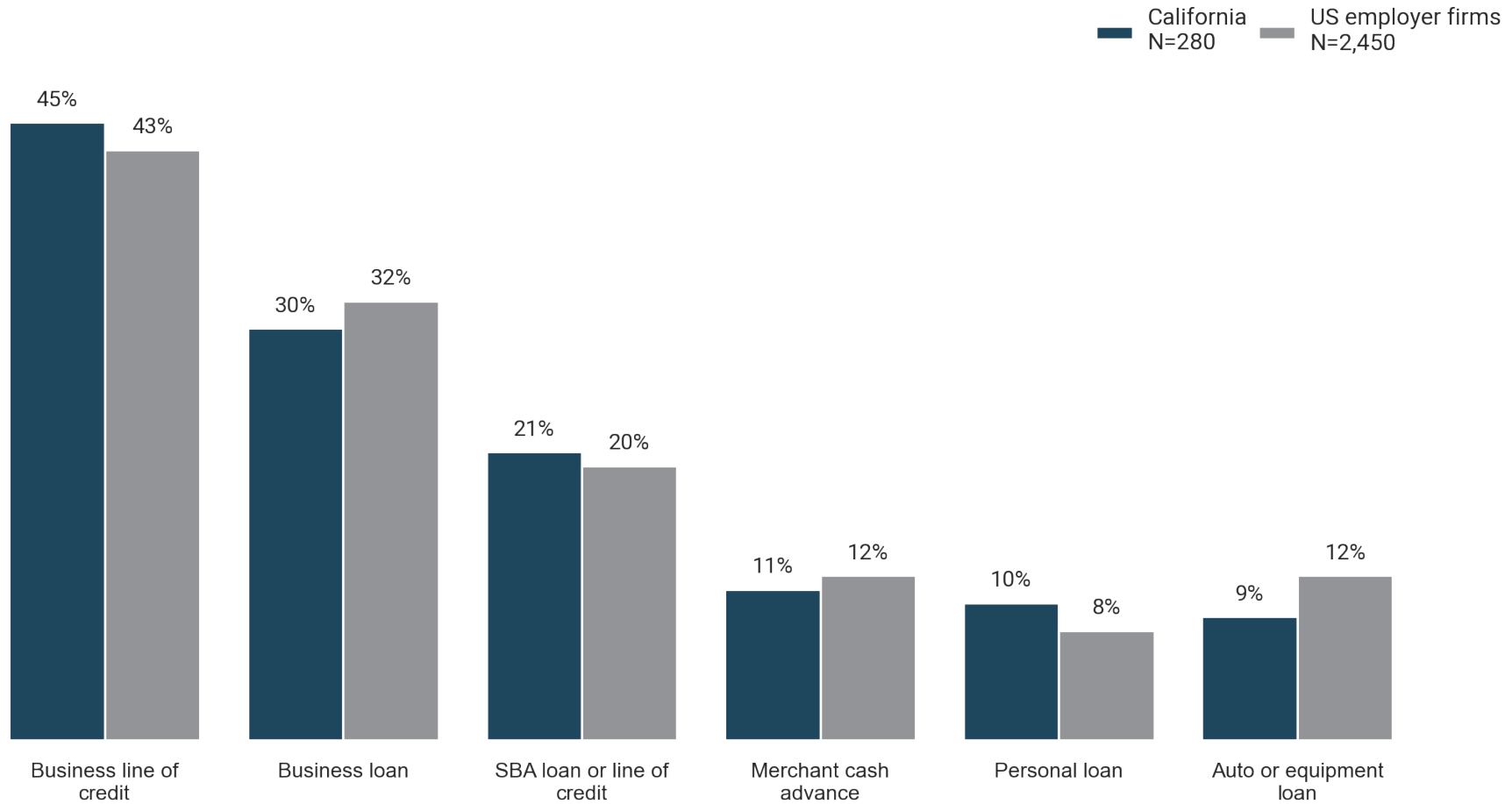
Share that applied for a loan, line of credit, or MCA, prior 12 months (% of employer firms)



Notes: "MCA" is a merchant cash advance. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Application rate by type of loan, line of credit, or MCA, prior 12 months

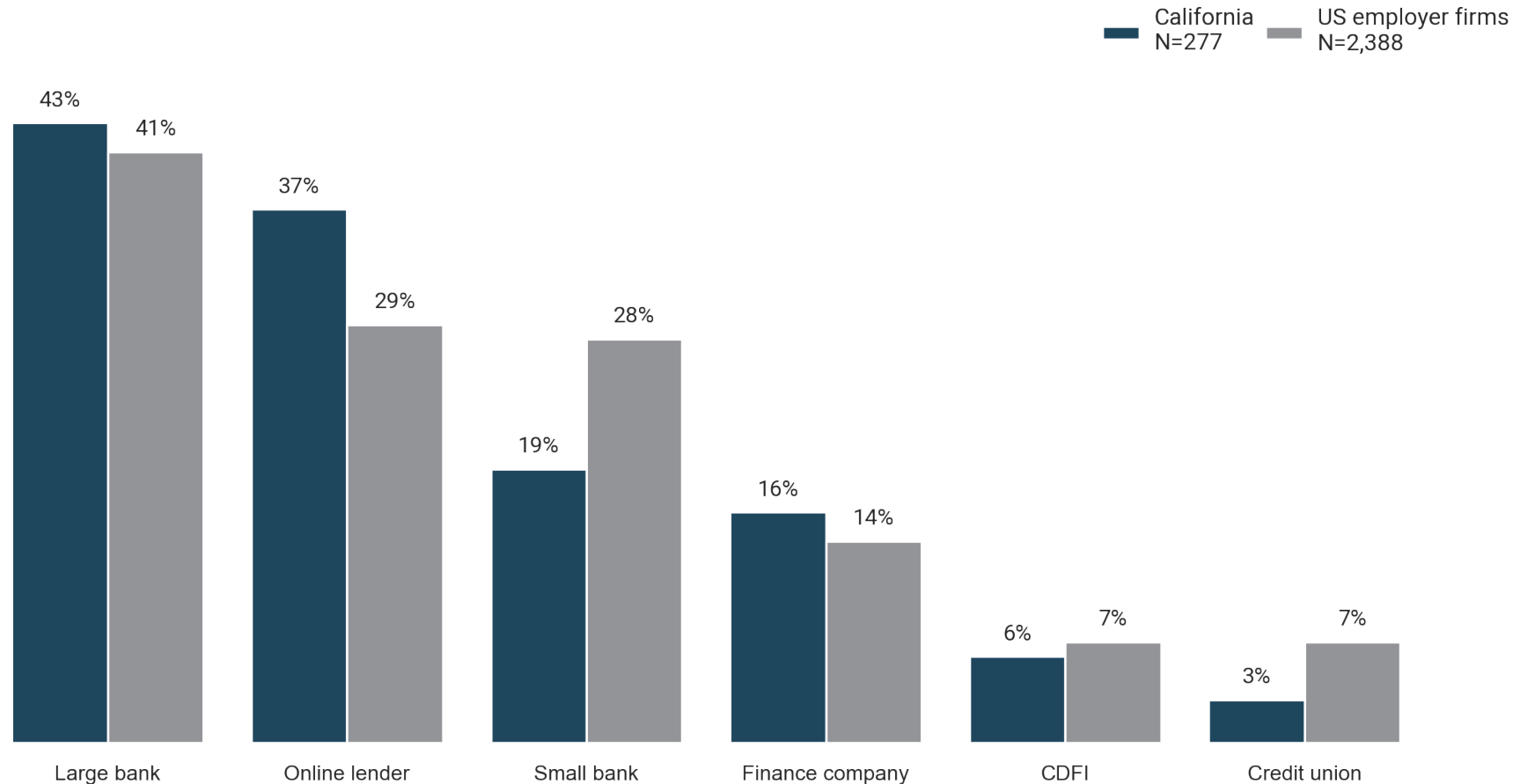
(% of loan, line of credit, or MCA applicants)



Notes: "SBA" refers to the Small Business Administration. Respondents could select multiple options. Most common responses shown. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Credit sources applied to, prior 12 months

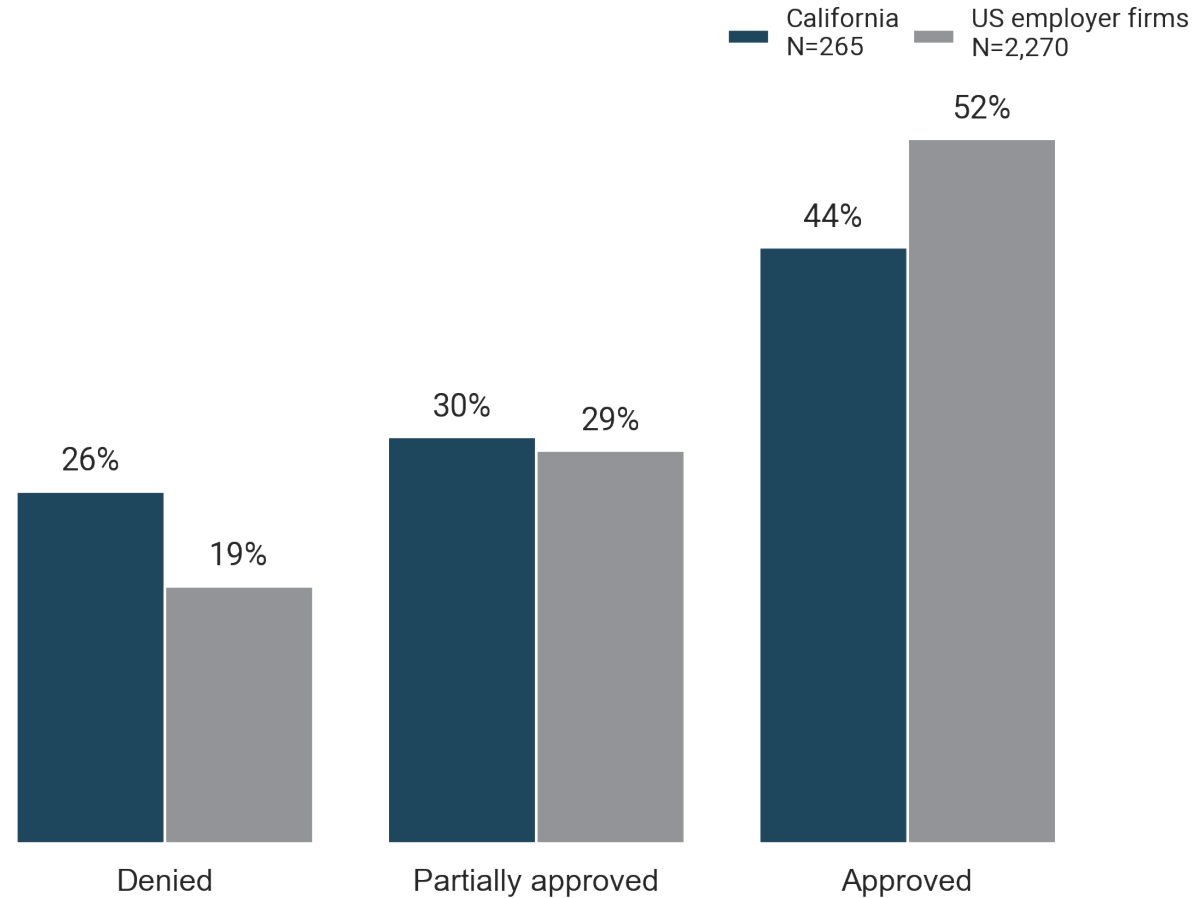
(% of loan, line of credit, or MCA applicants)



Notes: Respondents that submitted more than one application could select multiple source options. Response option "other source" not shown. "CDFI" refers to community development financial institutions. See Appendix for time period definitions and lender descriptions used in the SBCS.

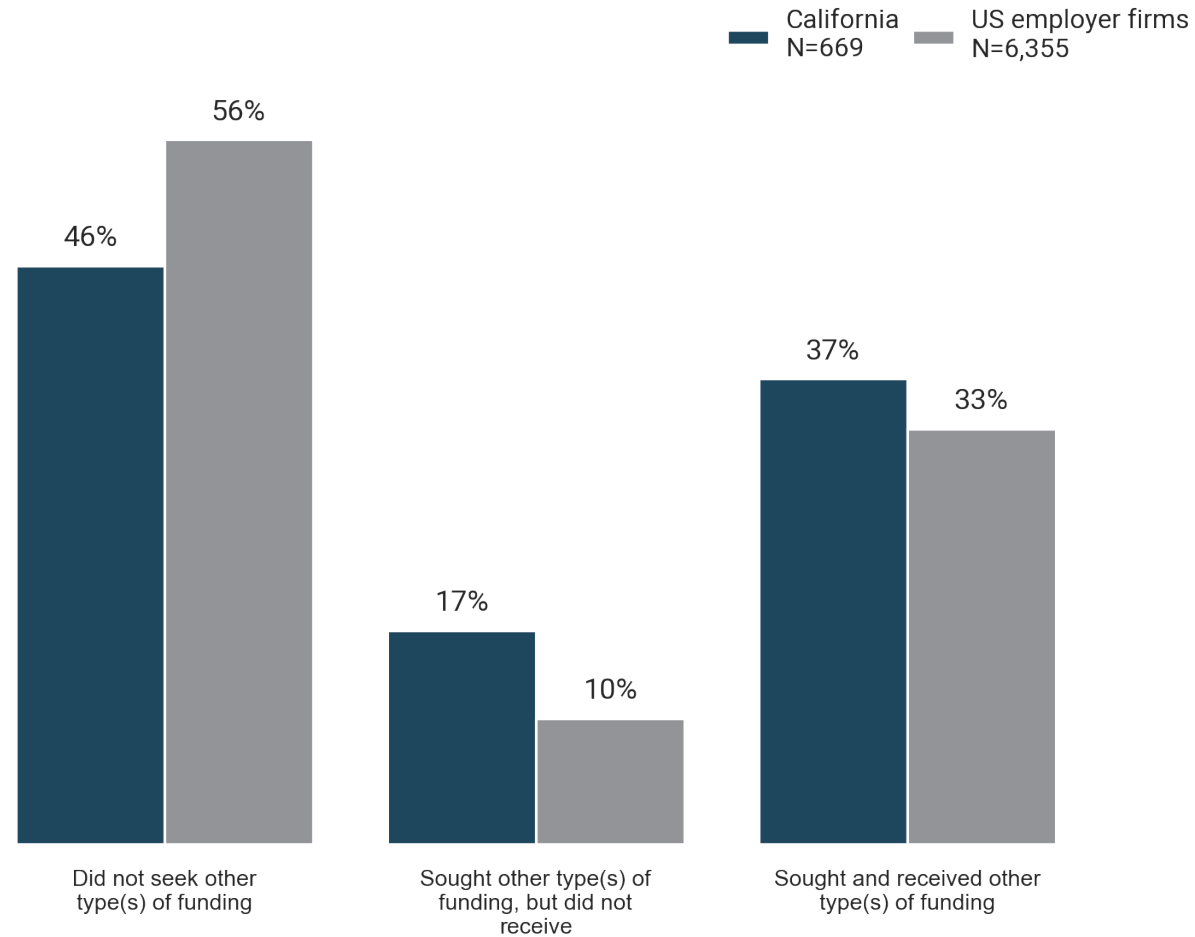
Outcomes for loan, line of credit, or MCA applicants, prior 12 months

(% of loan, line of credit, or MCA applicants)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

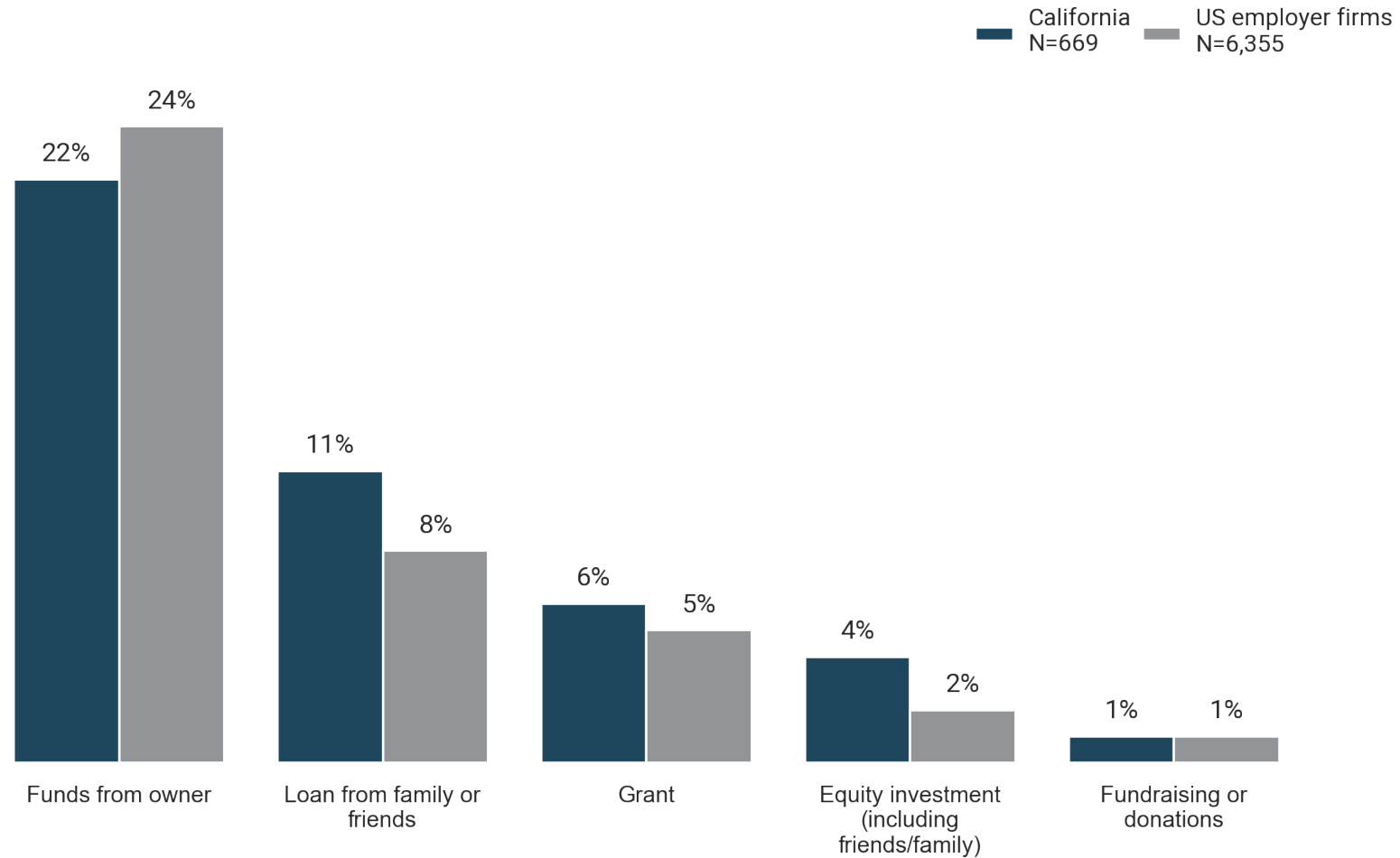
Other types of funding sought and received, prior 12 months (% of employer firms)



Notes: "Other type(s) of funding" includes funds from the owner(s), loans from family or friends, grants, equity investments, and fundraising or donations. Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

Other types of funding received, prior 12 months

(% of employer firms)



Notes: Respondents could select multiple options. Response option "other" not shown. See Appendix for time period definitions used in the SBCS.

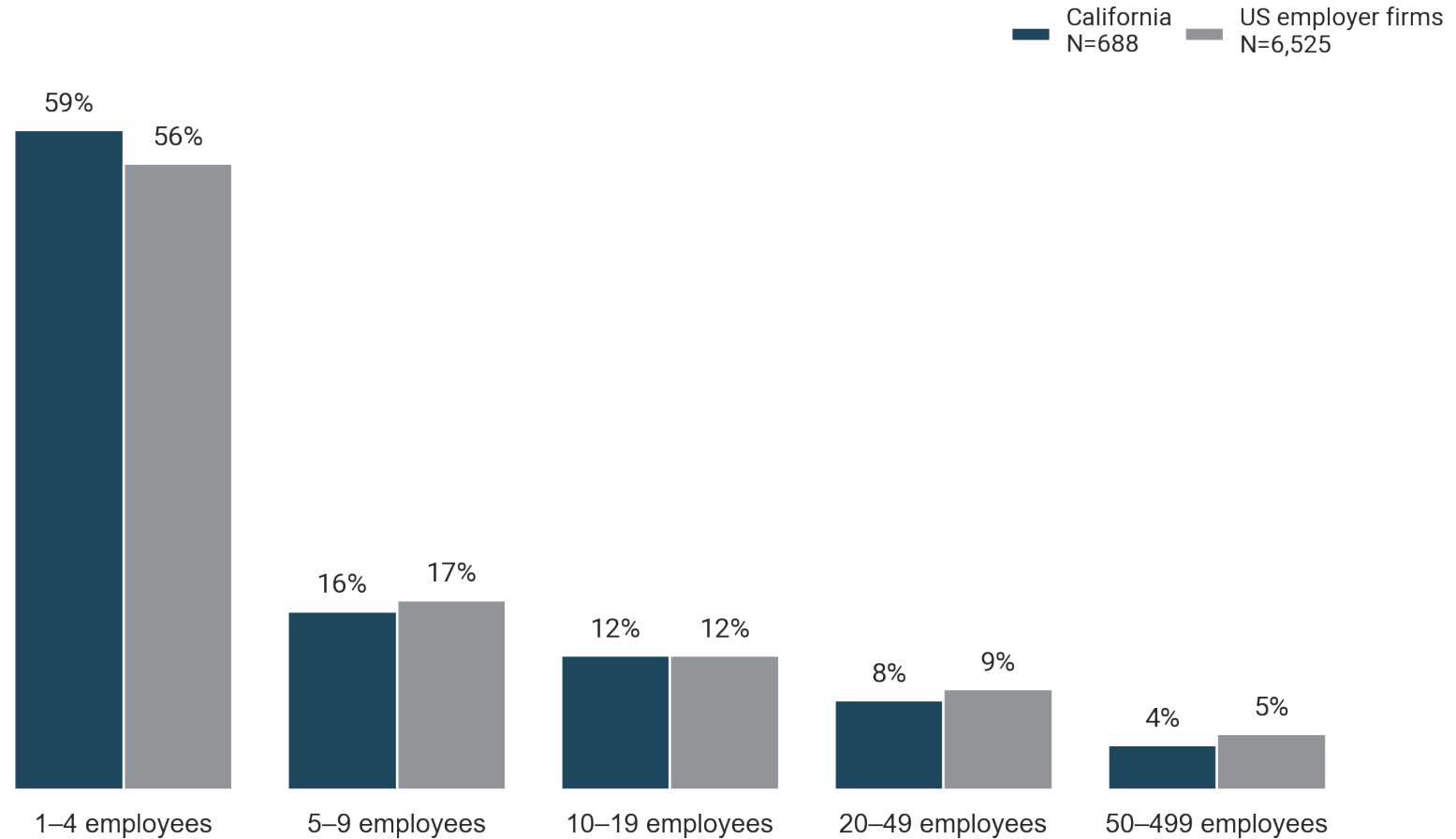
Demographics

Firm and
owner characteristics



Number of employees

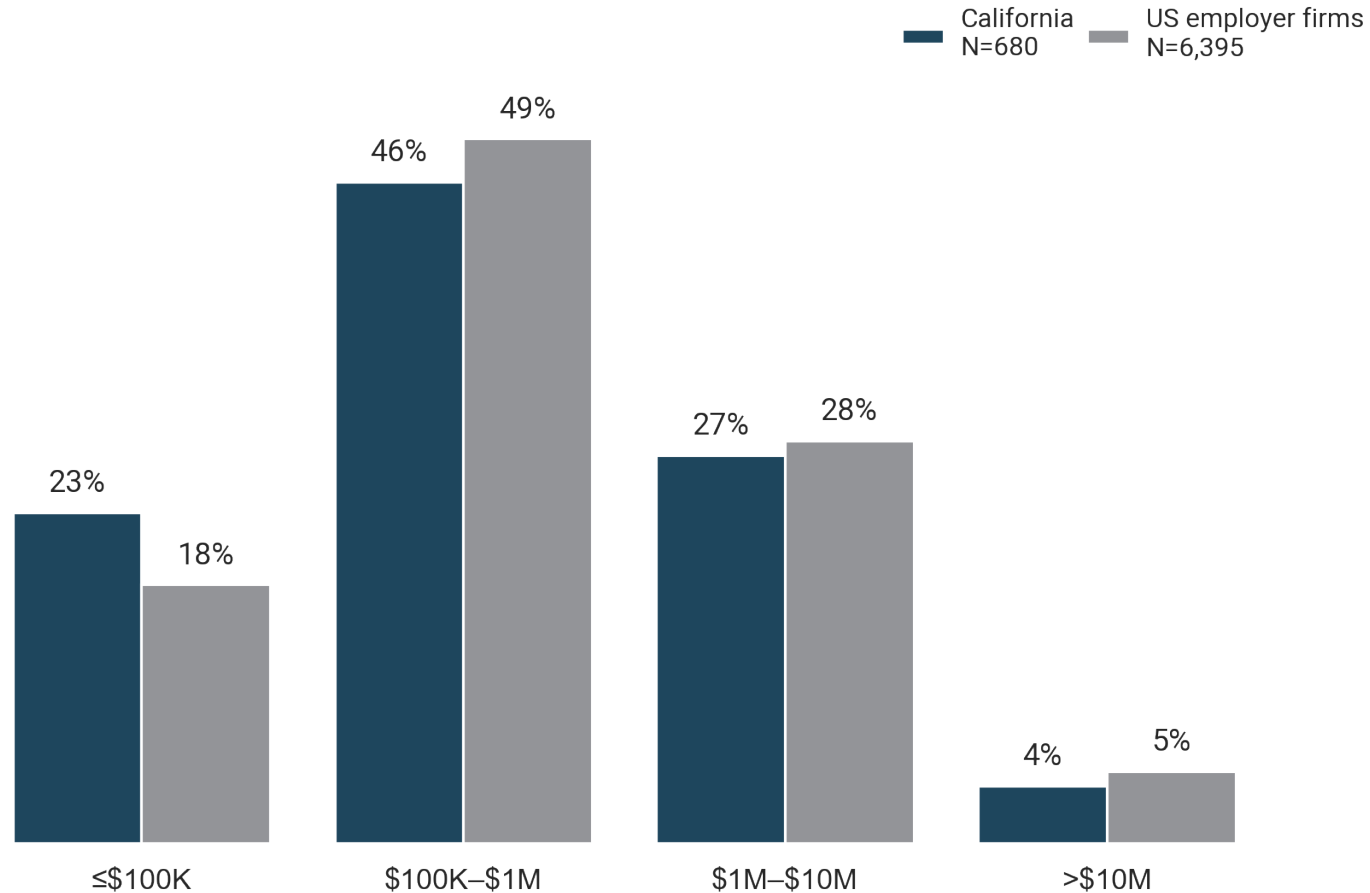
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. Because firm size is included in the SBCS weighting dimensions, the shares shown in the figure reflect the weighted distribution as sourced from US Census Bureau data. See Appendix for details on national-, state-, and MSA-level SBCS weights.

Annual revenues

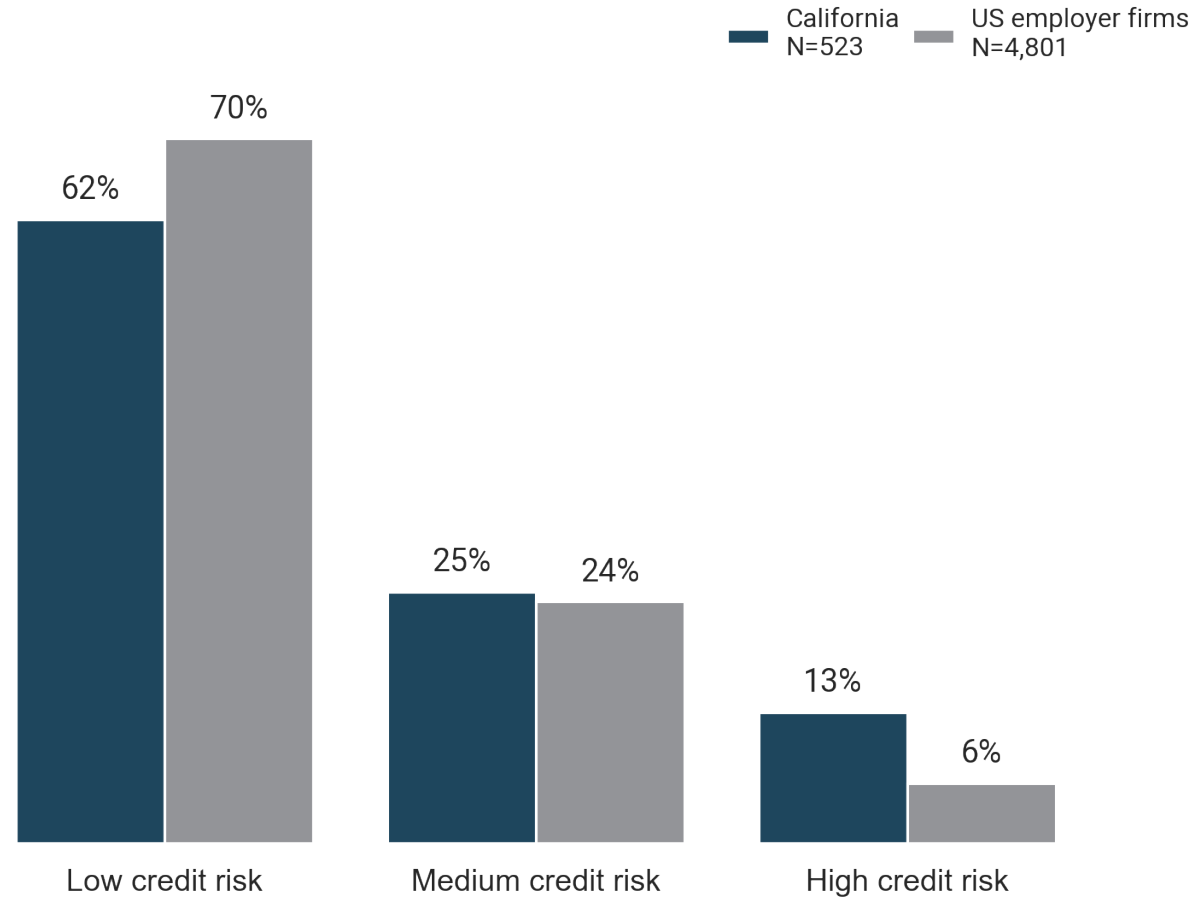
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. Revenue size categories have been condensed and simplified for readability. Actual categories are ≤\$25K, \$25,001–\$50K, \$50,001–\$100K, \$100,001–\$250K, \$250,001–\$500K, \$500,001–\$1M, \$1,000,001–\$5M, \$5,000,001–\$10M, and >\$10M.

Credit risk of firm

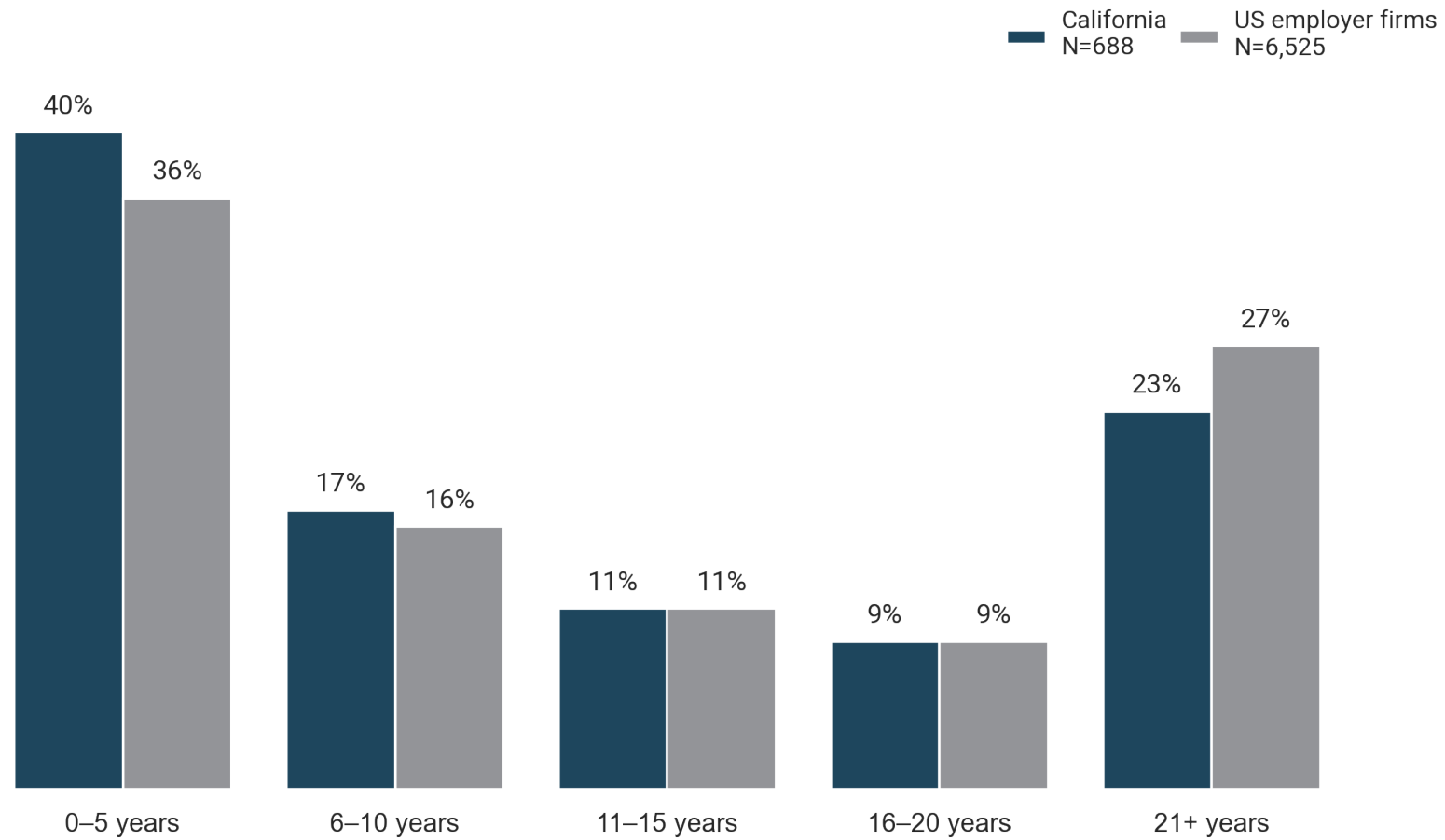
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. See Appendix for credit risk definitions used in the SBCS.

Age of firm

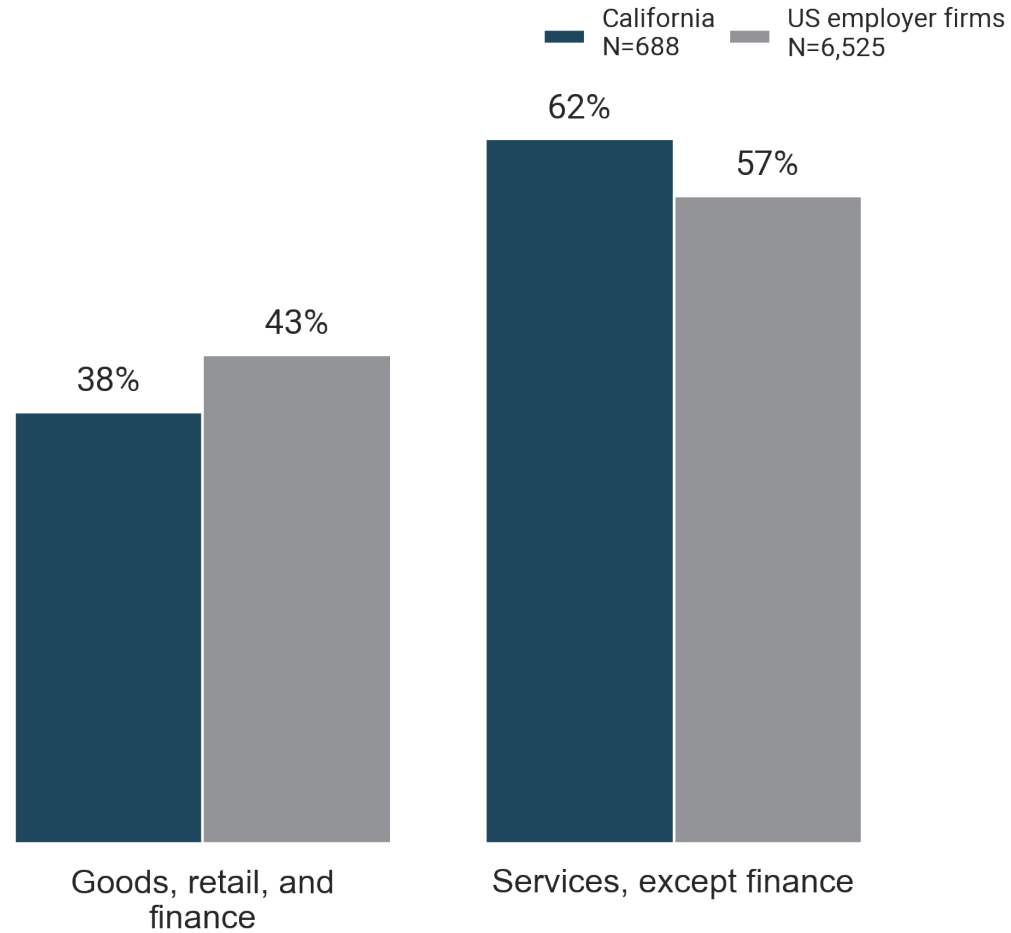
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. Because firm age is included in the SBCS weighting dimensions, the shares shown in the figure reflect the weighted distribution as sourced from US Census Bureau data. See Appendix for details on national-, state-, and MSA-level SBCS weights.

Industry

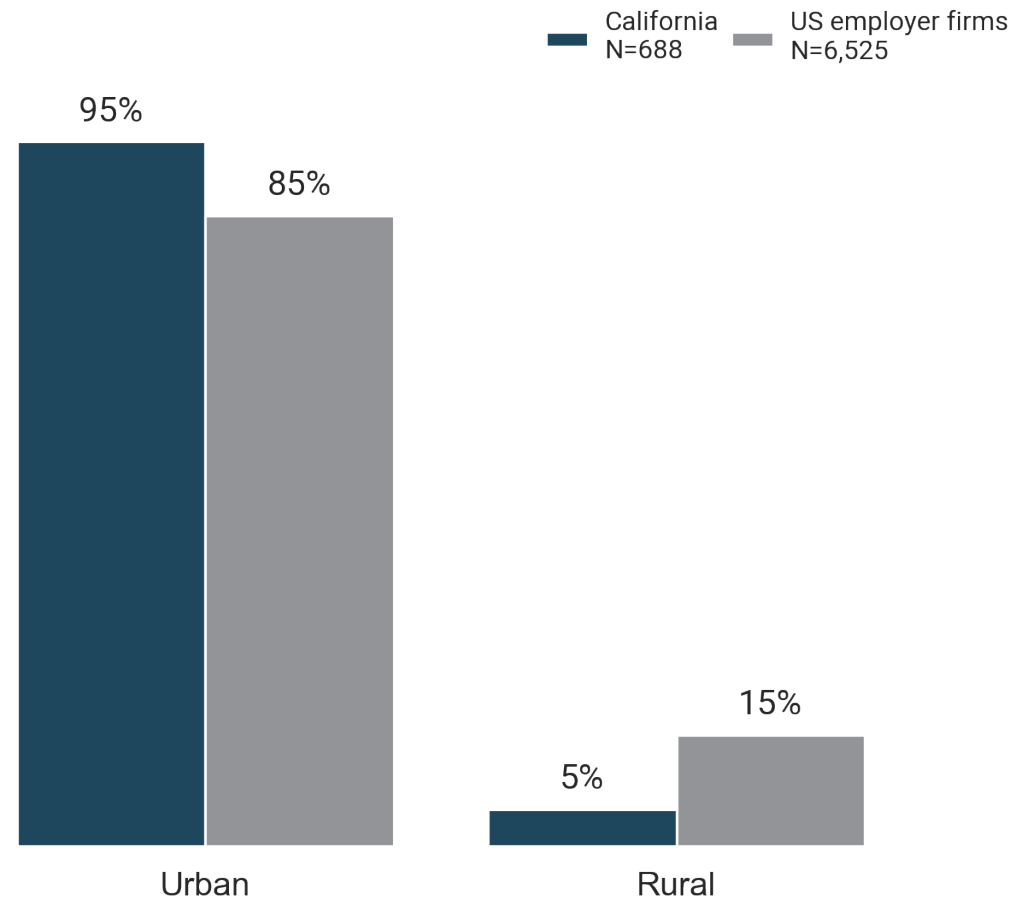
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Select industries shown. Because industry is included in the SBCS weighting dimensions, the shares shown in the figure reflect the weighted distribution as sourced from US Census Bureau data. Industries are consolidated into two categories for state- and MSA-level chartbooks. See Appendix for industry definitions and for details on national-, state-, and MSA-level SBCS weights.

Geography

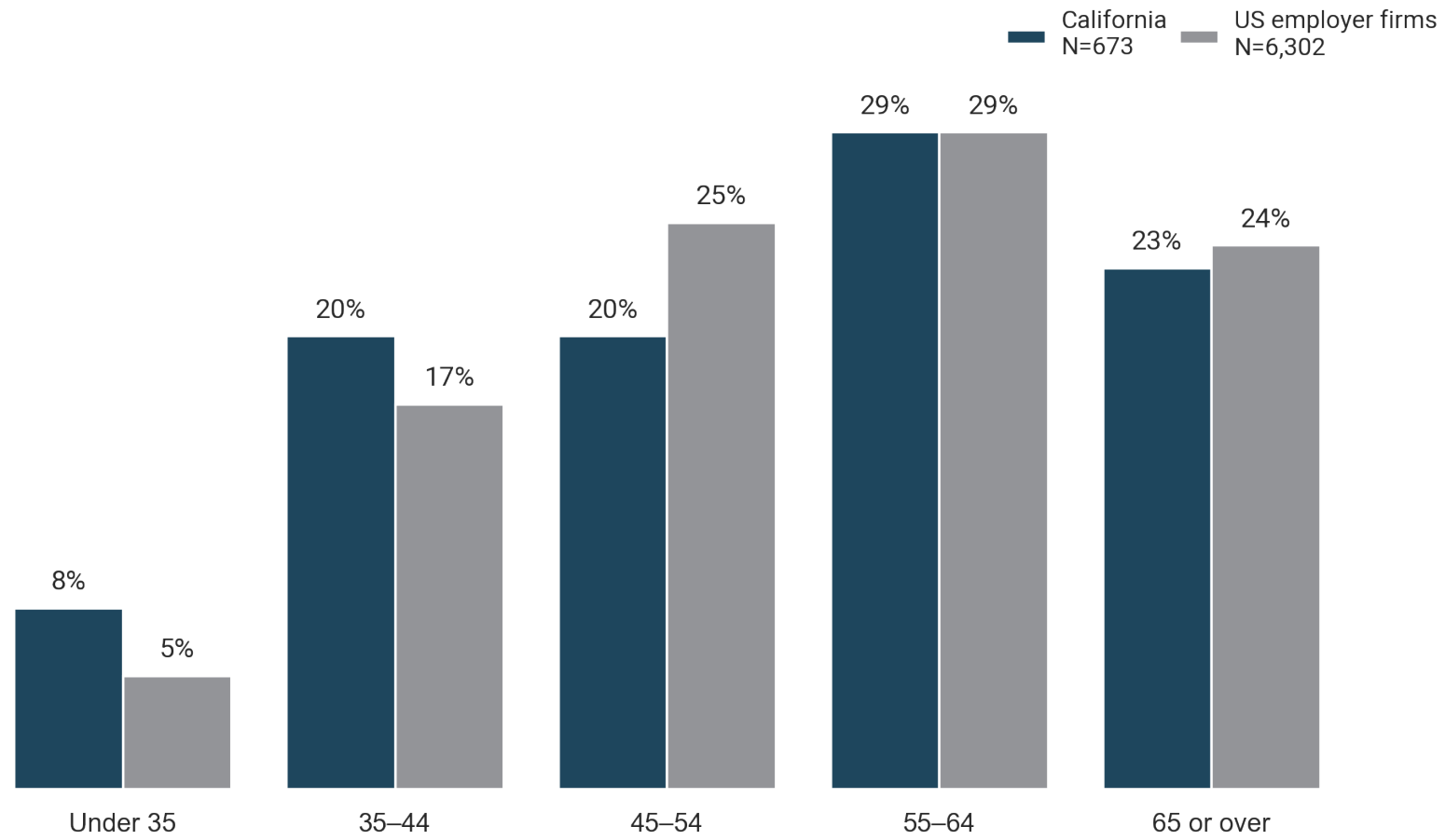
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Urban and rural definitions come from US Department of Agriculture Rural-Urban Commuting Area codes. Because geography is included in the SBCS weighting dimensions, the shares shown in the figure reflect the weighted distribution as sourced from US Census Bureau data. See Appendix for details on national-, state-, and MSA-level SBCS weights. Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding.

Age of firm's primary owner

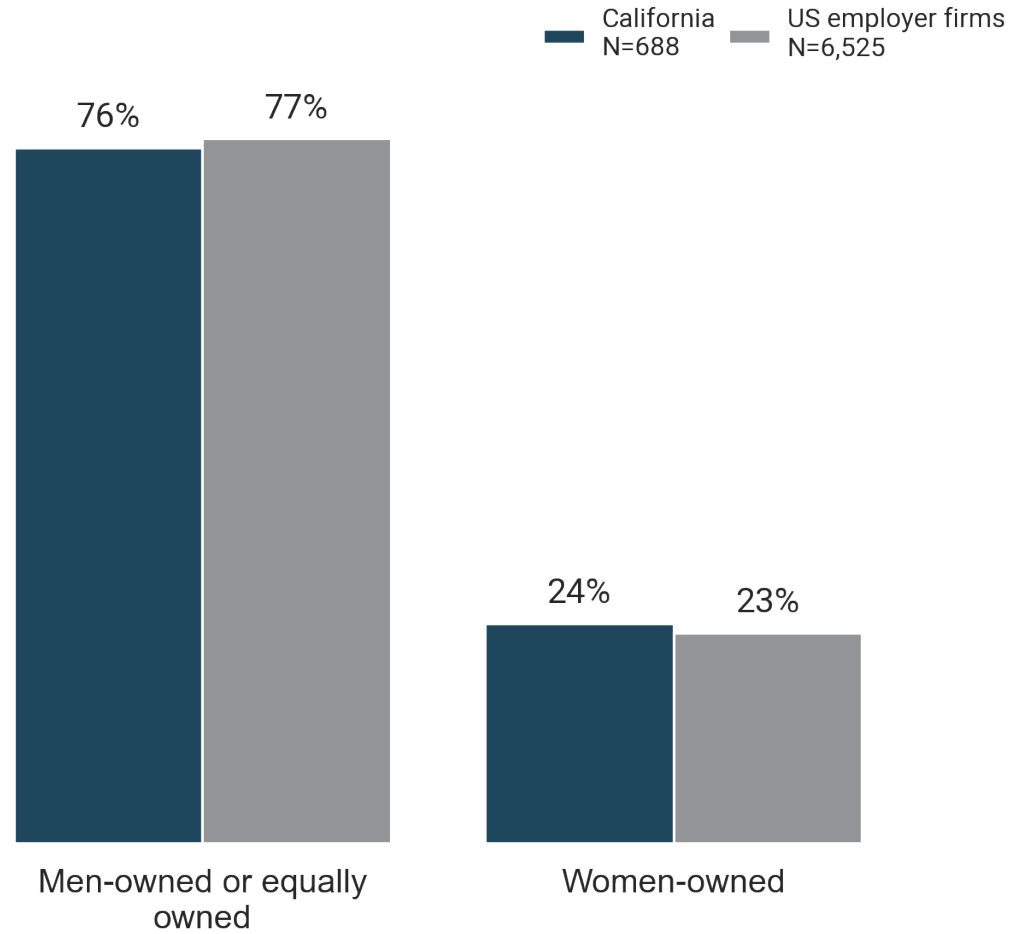
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding.

Gender of owner(s)

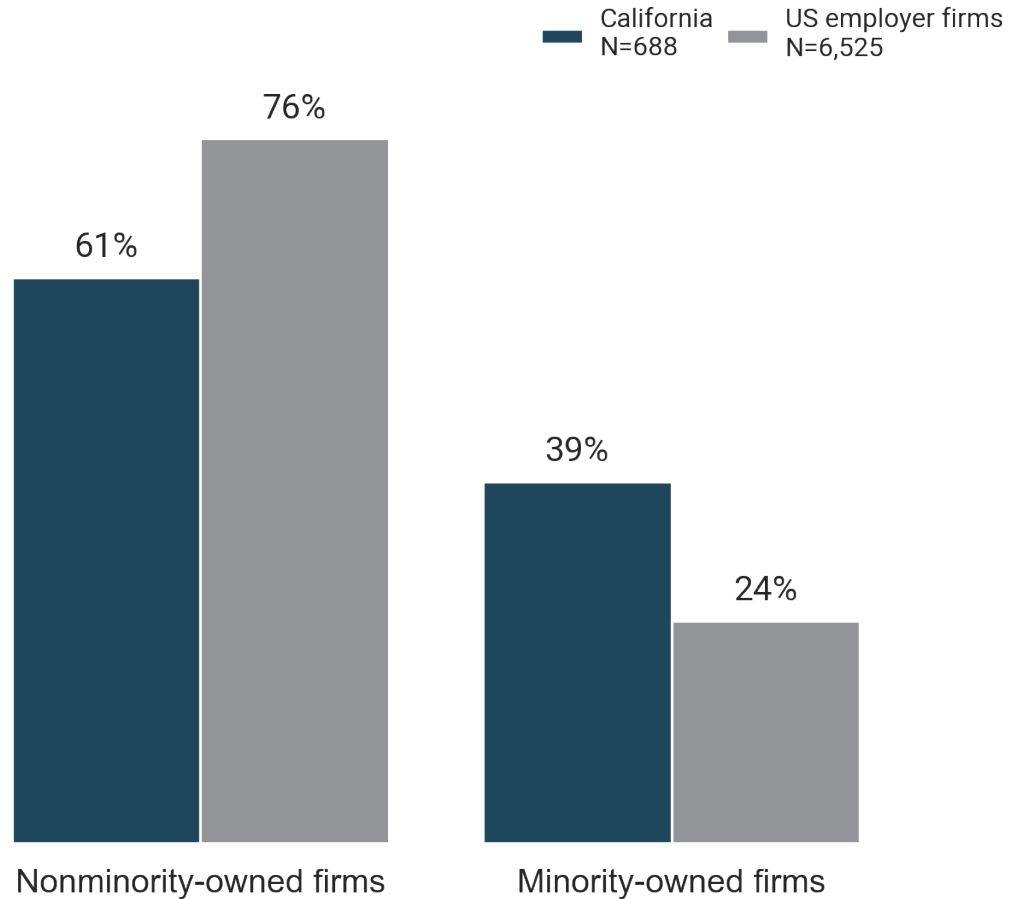
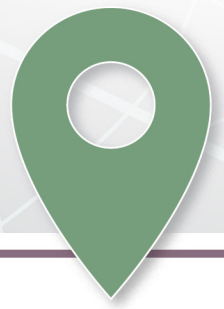
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. Because gender of ownership is included in the SBCS weighting dimensions, the shares shown in the figure reflect the weighted distribution as sourced from US Census Bureau data. See Appendix for details on national-, state-, and MSA-level SBCS weights.

Race/ethnicity of owner(s)

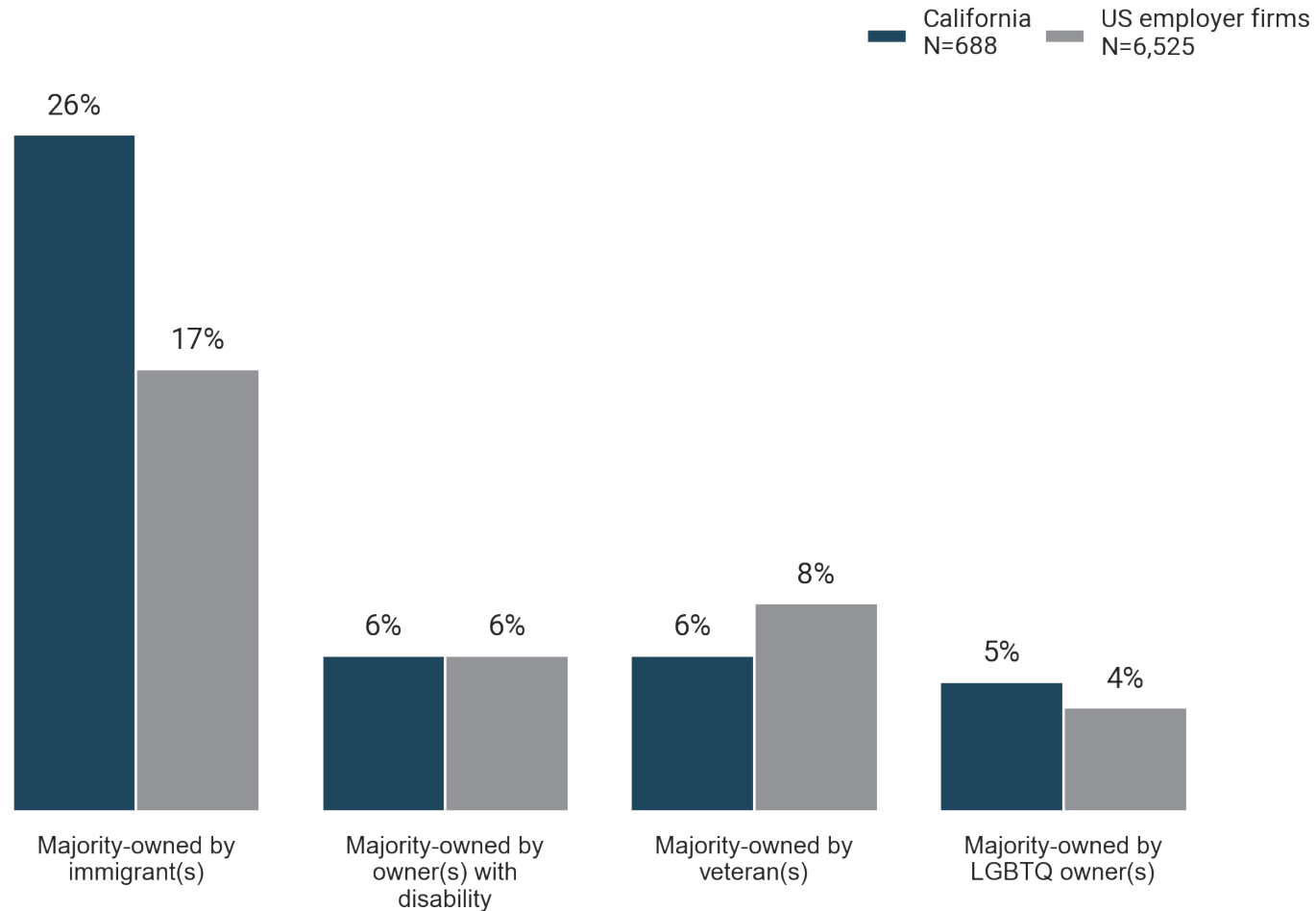
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 within firm categories because of rounding. Because owner race and ethnicity are included in the SBCS weighting dimensions, the shares shown in the figure reflect the weighted distribution as sourced from US Census Bureau data. See Appendix for race and ethnicity definitions used in the SBCS and for details on national-, state-, and MSA-level SBCS weights.

Other characteristics of firm owner(s)

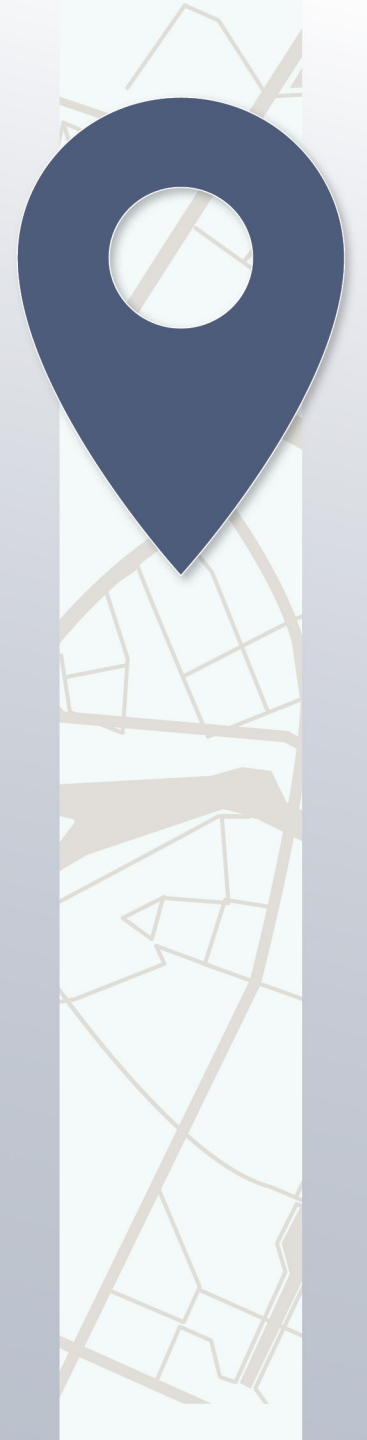
(% of employer firms)



Notes: Percentages shown represent the share of firms that are at least 51% owned by members of each respective category. The Americans with Disabilities Act defines an individual with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The SBCS questionnaire includes this definition as part of the question about owner disability.

Appendix

SBCS definitions



Definitions: Credit Risk



In the SBCS, “credit risk” refers to a self-reported business credit score or personal credit score, depending on which is used to obtain financing for the business. When firms use both, the weaker credit score is used to categorize the firm.

Low credit risk

Firms with either a business credit score of 80–100 or a personal credit score of 720 or greater.

Medium credit risk

Firms with either a business credit score of 50–79 or a personal credit score of 620–719.

High credit risk

Firms with either a business credit score of 1–49 or a personal credit score of less than 620.

Definitions: Financial Services Providers and Lenders



Questions in the SBCS ask respondents about their use of and experiences with lenders and other financial services providers. Because respondents may not have a uniform understanding of the terms used in the SBCS, the questionnaire provides examples and explanatory information about the response options.

The financial services providers, lenders, and lender categories referenced in the survey are defined as follows:

| Category | Definition |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Large bank, small bank | Large banks are defined as those with at least \$10 billion in total assets; small banks are those with less than \$10 billion in total assets. For applicable questions, respondents are shown a list of large banks operating in their state to assist them with proper classification of their institution. |
| Finance company | Finance companies are nonbanks that provide loans, leases, and other financial services. Examples include mortgage companies, equipment dealers, insurance companies, and auto finance companies. |
| Finance company that is not a bank | Examples include payroll services and payment-processing companies, fintech lenders, and finance companies. |
| Credit union | Credit unions are non-profit cooperatives where members can borrow money at competitive rates from pooled deposits. |
| Financial services provider | Financial services providers are entities at which the firm has an account or uses other financial services (including loans, payments processing, etc.). |
| Financial institution or lender | This category includes all bank or nonbank financial intermediaries such as banks, finance companies, online lenders, and credit unions. |
| Online lender/fintech lender | Online lenders/fintech lenders are nonbanks that operate online. Examples include OnDeck, CAN Capital, and PayPal Working Capital. |
| CDFI | Community development financial institutions, or CDFIs, are financial institutions that provide credit and financial services to underserved markets and populations. CDFIs are certified by the CDFI Fund at the US Department of the Treasury. |

Definitions: Industry Categories



| Industry | NAICS codes | Examples of businesses |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| Business support and consumer services | 56, 81 | Barbers, business-event planning, cleaning services, repair services, salons, spas, and travel agencies |
| Finance and insurance | 52 | Loan brokers and portfolio management firms |
| Healthcare and education | 61, 62 | Counseling services, daycare services, dentists, professional training services, sports instruction, and tutoring services |
| Leisure and hospitality | 71, 72 | Bars, caterers, fitness centers, gyms, hotels, and performing arts venues |
| Manufacturing | 31, 32, 33 | Electronics manufacturers, engraving services, packaging, print shops, and textile manufacturers |
| Nonmanufacturing goods production and associated services | 11, 21, 22, 23, 42, 48, 49 | Construction, farming, logistics, mining, taxis, wholesale suppliers and distributors, and warehousing |
| Professional services and real estate | 51, 53, 54, 55 | Book publishers, consulting services, notaries, real estate agents, and vehicle rental services |
| Retail | 44, 45 | Boutiques, craft stores, ecommerce providers, grocers, and hardware stores |

Notes: Industries are consolidated into two categories for state- and MSA-level chartbooks. "Services, except finance" includes leisure and hospitality, healthcare and education, professional services and real estate, and business support and consumer services. "Goods, retail, and finance" includes nonmanufacturing goods production and associated services, manufacturing, retail, and finance and insurance.

Definitions: Race and Ethnicity



The SBCS relies on Census-defined categories of race and ethnicity. The SBCS uses simplified, mutually exclusive race/ethnicity labels to indicate that more than 50% of the business is held by owner(s) of the given race/ethnicity. As such,

- “American Indian or Alaska Native” refers to non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native.
- “Asian” refers to non-Hispanic Asian or Pacific Islander.
- “Black” refers to non-Hispanic Black or African American.
- “Hispanic” refers to Hispanic or Latine ethnicity, regardless of race.
- “White” refers to non-Hispanic white, Middle Eastern, or North African.

Notes: Race and ethnicity categories are consolidated into two categories for state- and MSA-level chartbooks. “Nonminority-owned” includes white-owned businesses; “minority-owned” includes American Indian or Alaska Native-, Asian-, Black-, and Hispanic-owned businesses.

Definitions: Time Periods



Survey questions in the SBCS ask respondents to reference specific time periods. Most questions ask about respondents' experiences in the 12 months prior to the time of their response. Some questions ask about conditions at the time of their response. Finally, some questions ask about respondents' expectations in the 12 months following the time of their response. The time periods referenced in the survey are defined as follows throughout this report:

Prior 12 months

The 12 months prior to the fielding of the survey. For the 2025 SBCS, this is approximately September–November 2024 through September–November 2025.

Time of survey

September to November 2025.

Next 12 months

The 12 months following the fielding of the survey. For the 2025 SBCS, this is approximately September–November 2025 through September–November 2026.

Weighting



SBCS employer-firm responses are weighted using US Census Bureau data to represent the national small-employer-firm population across several demographics of businesses and their owners. SBCS data at the national, state, and MSA levels are weighted separately but largely rely on the same data sources and characteristics for weighting purposes. The tables below show the sources used by characteristic for national-, state-, and MSA-level employer weights. For more on SBCS weighting, visit <https://www.fedsmallbusiness.org/our-data/methodology>.

| Sample | Data source | Characteristics |
|-----------------|---|--|
| National sample | US Census Bureau Business Dynamics Statistics (BDS) | Age of firm |
| | US Census Bureau Annual Business Survey (ABS) | Race/ethnicity of owner(s), gender of owner(s) |
| | US Census Bureau County Business Patterns (CBP) | Industry, geography, firm size |
| State sample | US Census Bureau Business Dynamics Statistics (BDS) | Age of firm |
| | US Census Bureau Annual Business Survey (ABS) | Race/ethnicity of owner(s), gender of owner(s) |
| | US Census Bureau County Business Patterns (CBP) | Industry, geography, firm size |
| MSA sample | US Census Bureau Business Dynamics Statistics (BDS) | Age of firm |
| | US Census Bureau Annual Business Survey (ABS) | Race/ethnicity of owner(s), gender of owner(s) |
| | US Census Bureau County Business Patterns (CBP) | Industry, firm size |