

# The independent report 2018

What do independent music creators think  
of their music career and the music industry?

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# A word from our CEO

Record Union has been part of the music industry for more than a decade. Everyday, we're meeting music creators that are part of this rapidly changing industry and to be able to meet their needs, we believe that it's important to identify and create an understanding for the different challenges and obstacles they face within their music creation. To do this, we decided to ask more than a thousand independent music creators what they think about the music industry in general and their music career in particular. This has resulted in some interesting insights that we would like to share with everyone who wants to be part of the music industry in the future.

The result shows that independent music creators believe that a major label would restrict their ability to explore lyrical content and innovative musical styles. The result also shows that it's not as important to be signed with a major label today as it's to be featured on a Spotify playlist and a majority of the respondents would

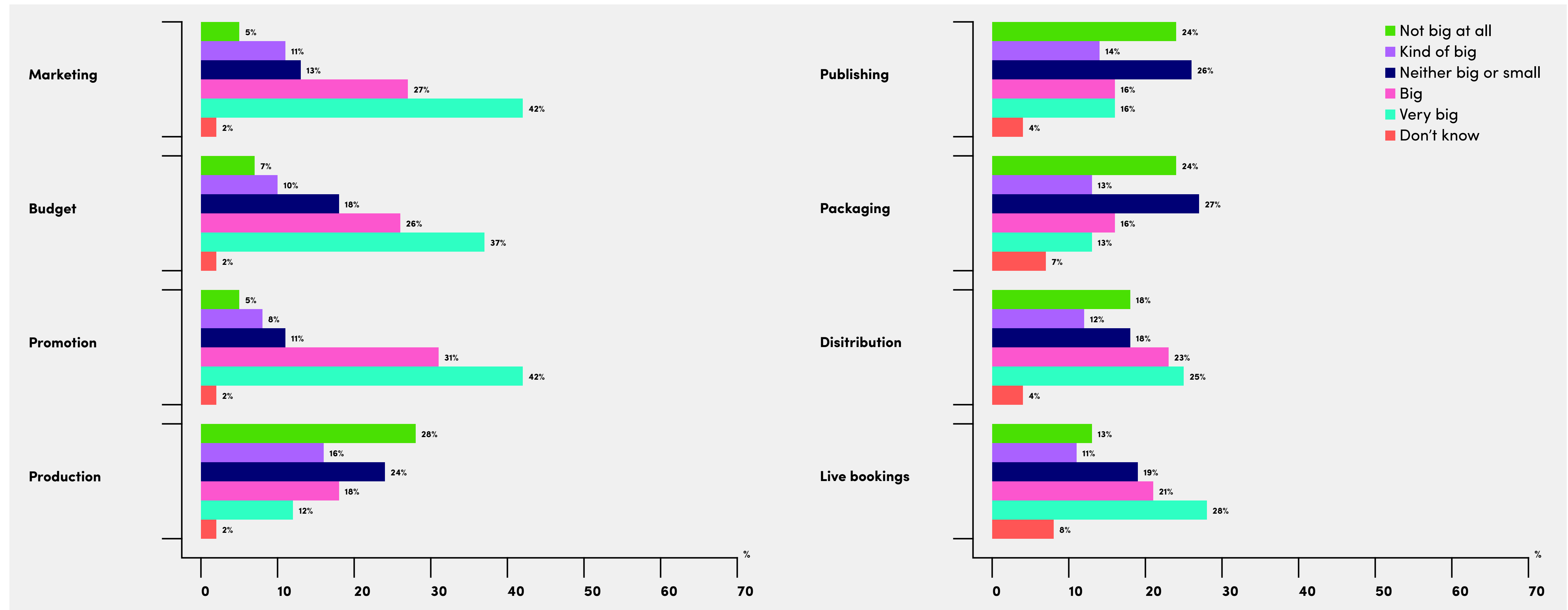
like to stay independent if they could. We can't believe asking ourselves: are Spotify the new gatekeeper of today's music industry, and are the major labels slowly loosening their power?

To present our survey, we have gathered the results into five different chapters: **The biggest obstacles to success, Benefits of independence, Independent = the new black, Perceived gatekeepers** and **What actually matters**. If you're curious to learn how music creators perceive the music industry and their career you should continue reading. Maybe you'll get some new insights on your strengths and what you could improve to meet and attract music creators today and within the future music industry?

Johan Svanberg,  
CEO of Record Union

# The biggest obstacles to success

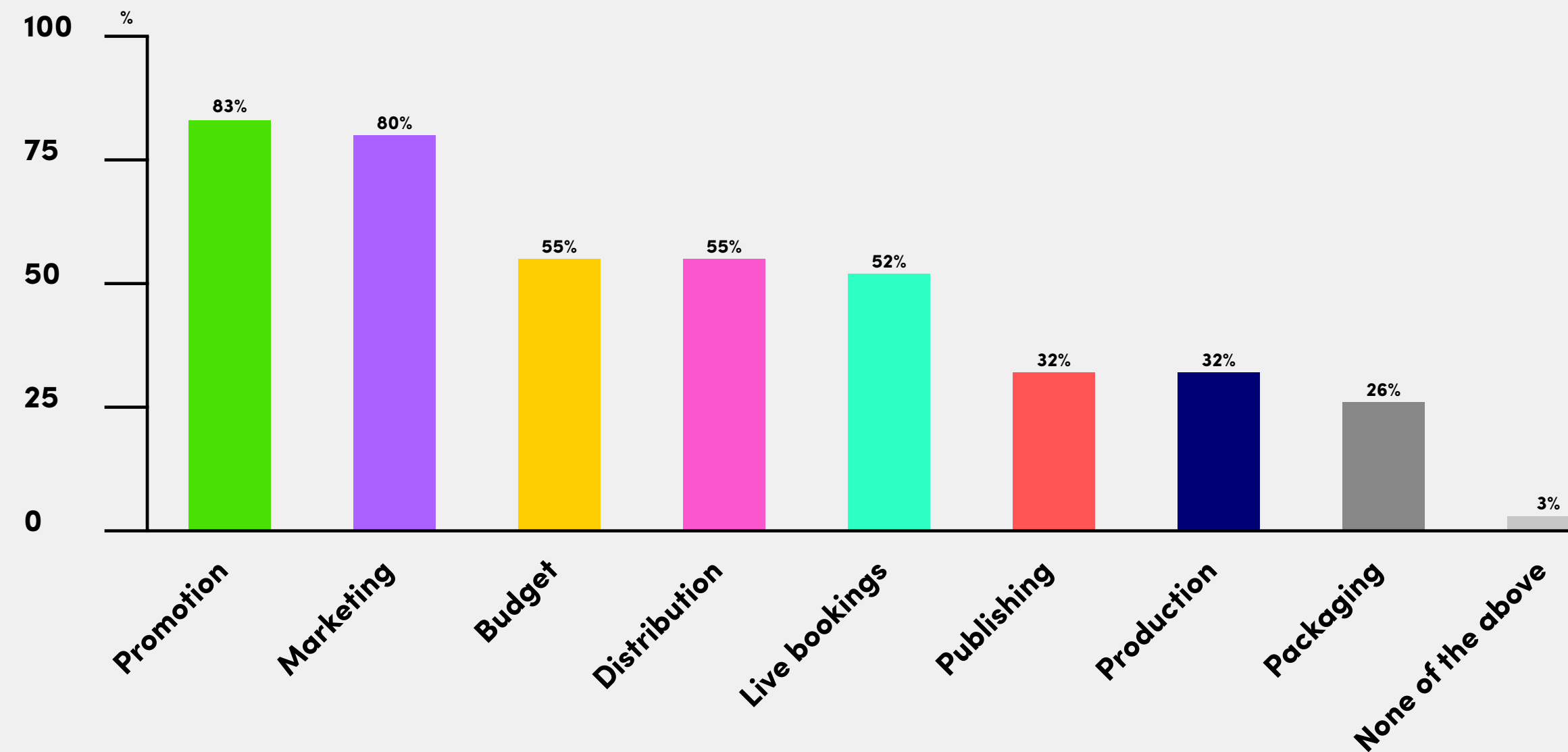
“To win the hearts of independent music creators today, companies need to find a way to democratize what happens before and after distribution in terms of marketing, promotion and financing. Thousands of songs are being uploaded to streaming services every day. Just because your song is on a platform doesn’t mean it’s going to be automatically listened to.”



How big of an obstacle are the following aspects in order to reach your full a as an artist?

The results of our survey show that promotion, marketing and budget are the biggest obstacles that independent music creators face in their strive to reach their full potential as an artist. Almost three out of four respondents said that **promotion** is a big or very big obstacle (73 percent). More

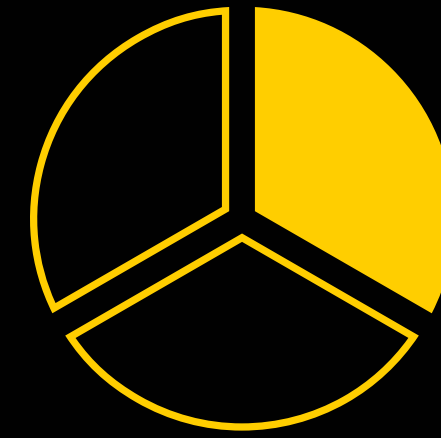
than two out of three said that **marketing** is a big or very big obstacle (69 percent) and almost two out of three said that **budget** is a big or very big obstacle (63 percent).



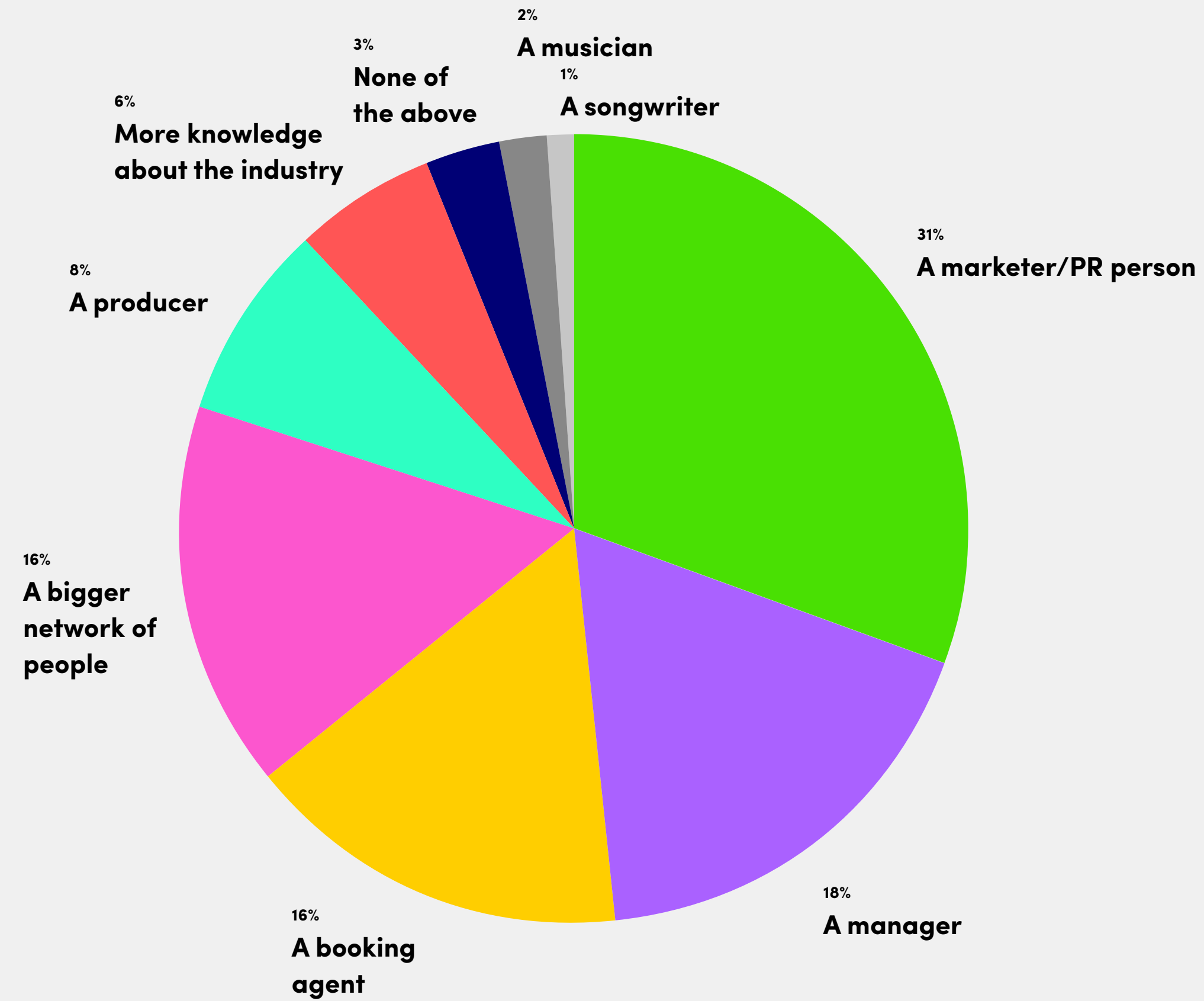
**What of the following aspects of your music career would benefit the most if you signed with a major label?**

The answers were similar when the respondents were asked to state what aspects of their music career that would benefit them the most if being signed by a major label. More than four out of five said that **promotion** (83 percent) would benefit them the most, four out of five said that **marketing** (80 percent)

would benefit them the most and a little more than half of the respondents said that **budget and distribution** would benefit them the most (55 percent).



**1/3 independent music creators say that a marketer or a PR person would benefit their music career the most.**



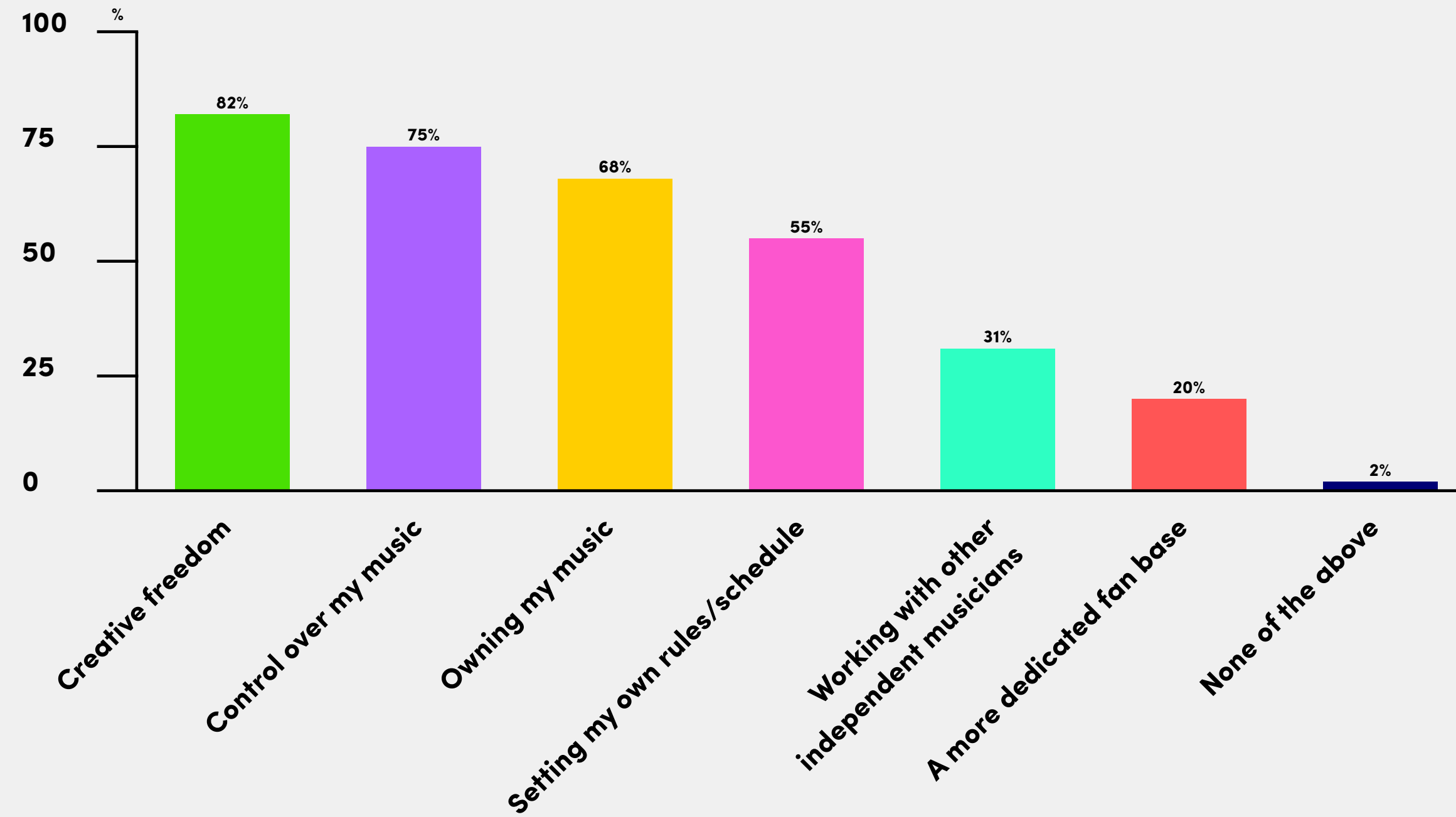
**Do you think a major label would restrict you to explore lyrical content and innovative musical styles?**

When the respondents were asked to state the one thing that would benefit their career the most, almost one out of three said **a marketer/PR person** would benefit their career the most (31 percent). Just above one out of six said that **a manager** (18 percent) or **a bigger network of people** (16 percent) would benefit their career the most.



# Benefits of independence

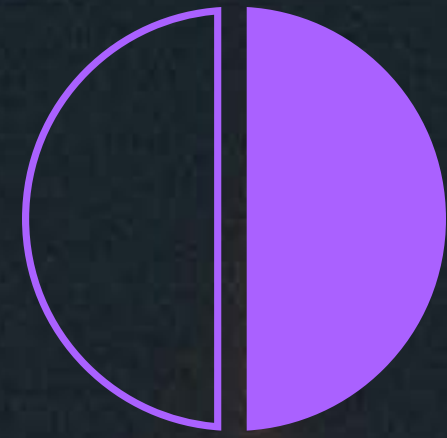
“For music innovation to thrive, status quo needs to be challenged. We believe that this is best done by independent music creators since they don’t have to answer to anyone else than themselves and are often driven by a creative vision that not necessarily have a commercial base. Hence, we believe that it’s important to encourage independent music creators to trust their creative vision, voice and idea.”



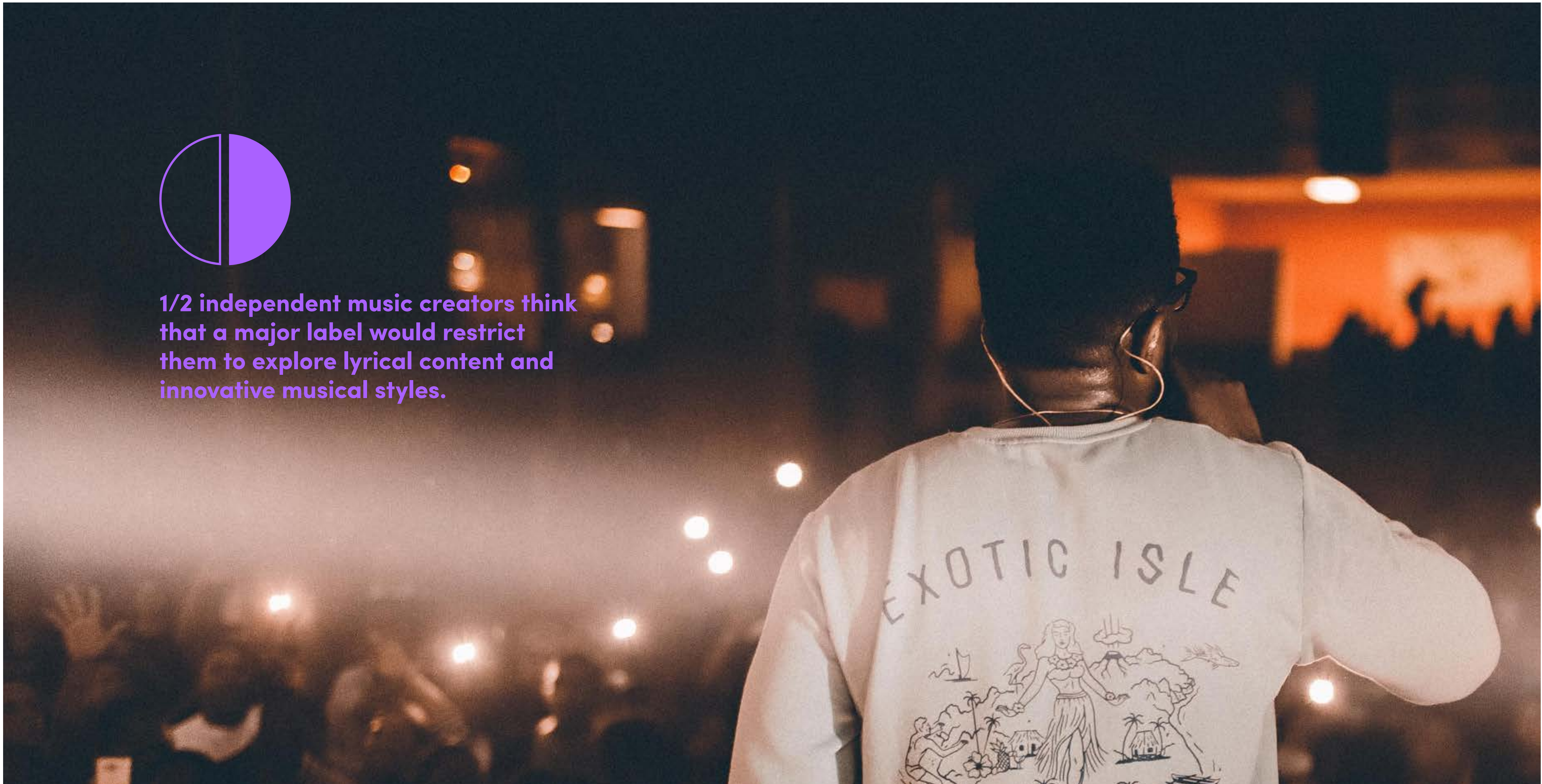
**What do you think is the most beneficial with being an independent artist?**

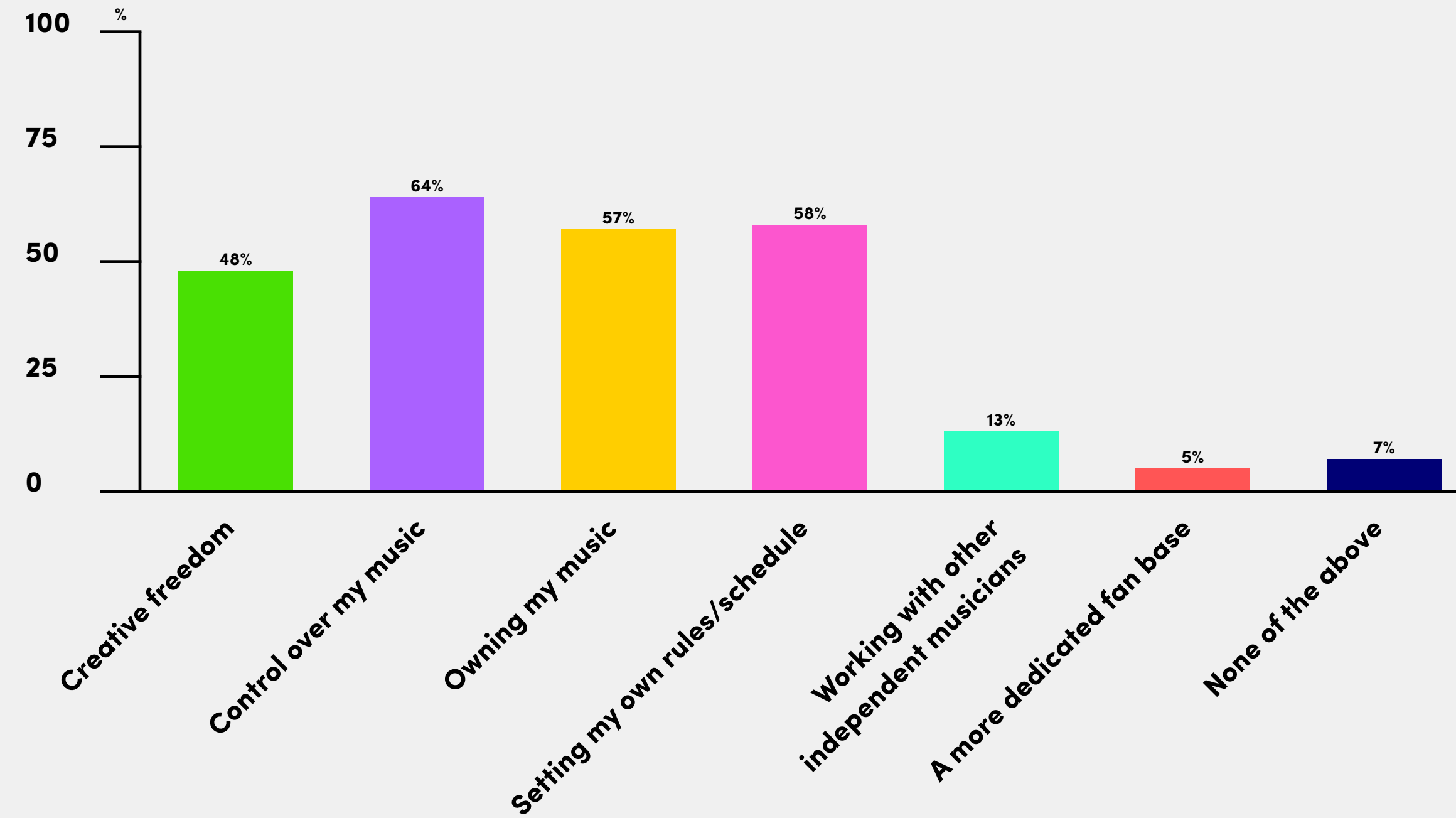
To be an independent music creator comes with challenges as well as benefits. More than four out of five said that **creative freedom** is the most beneficial with being an independent artist (82 percent). Three out of four said that it's to **have control over my music** (75 percent) and more than two out of three said that it's **owning my music** (68 percent). More

than half of the respondents said that **setting my own rules/schedule** is the most beneficial with being an independent artist (55 percent).



**1/2 independent music creators think that a major label would restrict them to explore lyrical content and innovative musical styles.**

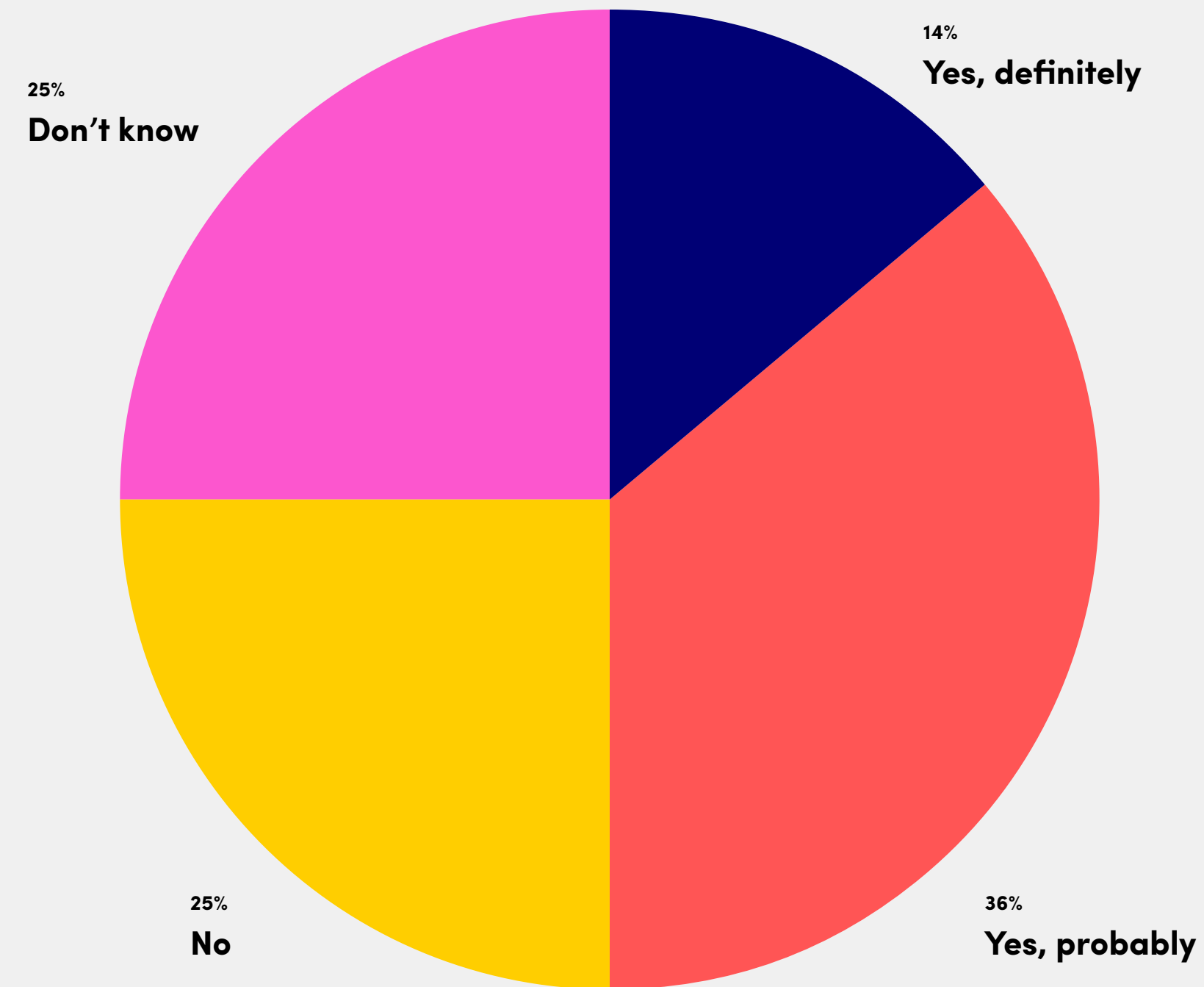




**What of the following do you think you would have to sacrifice if signing with a major label?**

These perceived benefits are the same as the respondents think that they would have to sacrifice if signing with a major label. Almost two out of three said that they think they would have to sacrifice the **control over my music** (64 percent) and almost three out of five think that they would have to sacrifice **setting my own rules/schedule** (58 percent) as well as the

**owning my music** (57 percent). Almost half of the respondents said that they think they would have to sacrifice my **creative freedom** if signing with a major label (48 percent).



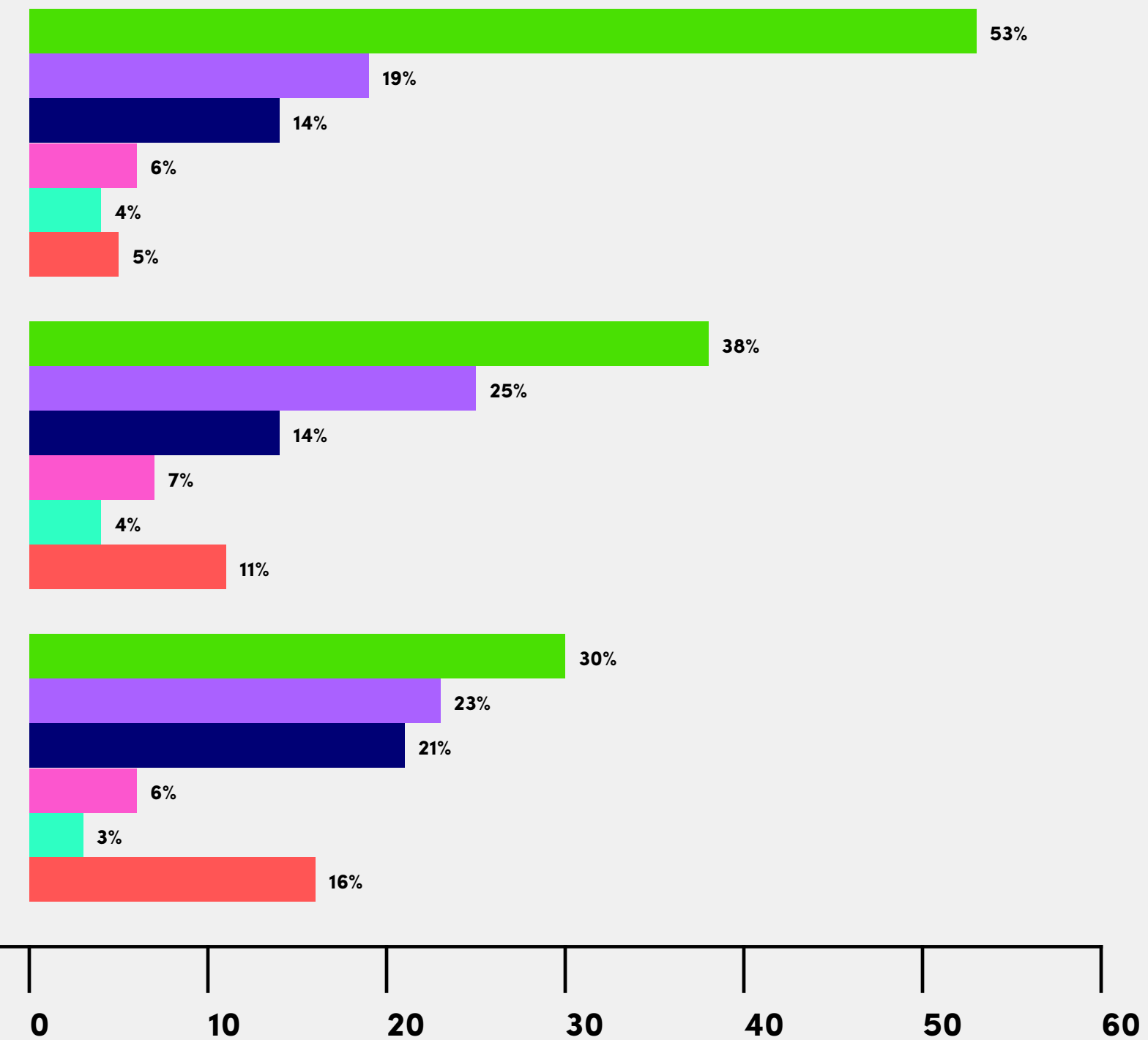
**Do you think a major label would restrict you to explore lyrical content and innovative musical styles?**

Half of the respondents said that they think **a major label would restrict them to explore lyrical content and innovative musical styles** (50 percent). Only one out of four said that they don't think that a major label would restrict them to explore lyrical content and innovative musical styles (25 percent).

# Independent = The new black

“For quite some time we’ve had a gut feeling telling us that the independent community is growing stronger and that more and more artists are actively choosing to become or stay independent, but we haven’t had any numbers confirming it. It will be exciting to follow how the relationship between independents and majors will develop further.”

**If I could get the same opportunities to succeed with my music by being independent as being contracted by a major label I would stay independent**



**Artists today are less dependent on major labels than five years ago**

**As a music creator I will be less dependent on major labels in the future**

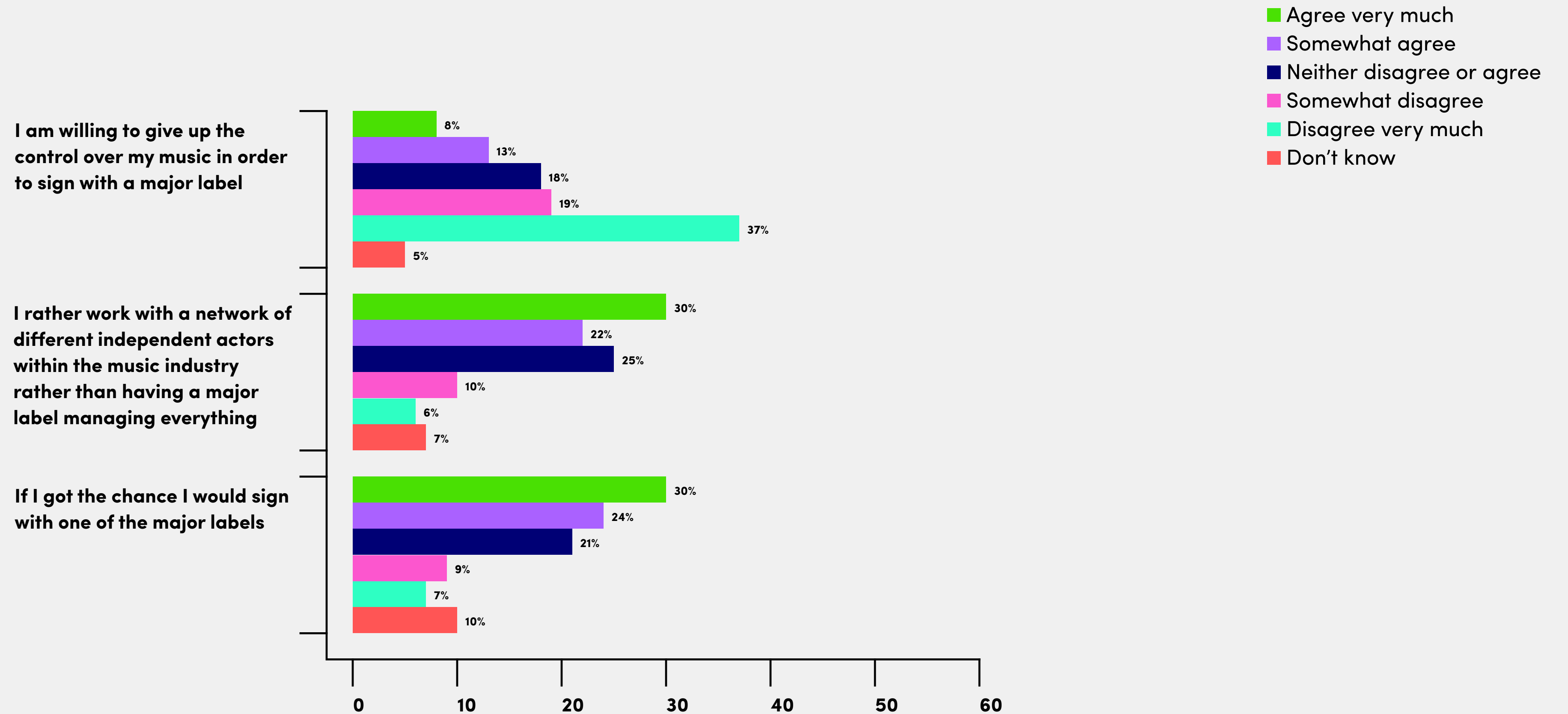
- Agree very much
- Somewhat agree
- Neither disagree or agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree very much
- Don't know

**To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding independent and major labels?**

Part 1/2

When the respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a range of statements related to the music industry we got some interesting results. Almost three out of four somewhat agreed or agreed very much that **If I could get the same opportunities to succeed with my music by being independent as being contracted by a major label I would**

**stay independent** (72 percent). Almost two out of three somewhat agreed or agreed very much that **artists today are less dependent on major labels than five years ago** (63 percent). A majority also somewhat agreed or agreed very much that they, as music creators, **will be less dependent on major labels in the future** (53 percent).



To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding independent and major labels?

Part 2 / 2

More than half of the respondents somewhat disagreed or disagreed very much that they are **willing to give up the control over my music in order to sign with a major label** (56 percent).

A majority of the respondents somewhat agreed or agreed very much that they **would rather work with a network of**

**different independent actors within the music industry than having a major label managing everything** (52 percent). But more than half of the respondents also somewhat agreed or agreed very much with **If I got the chance I would sign with one of the major labels** (54 percent).

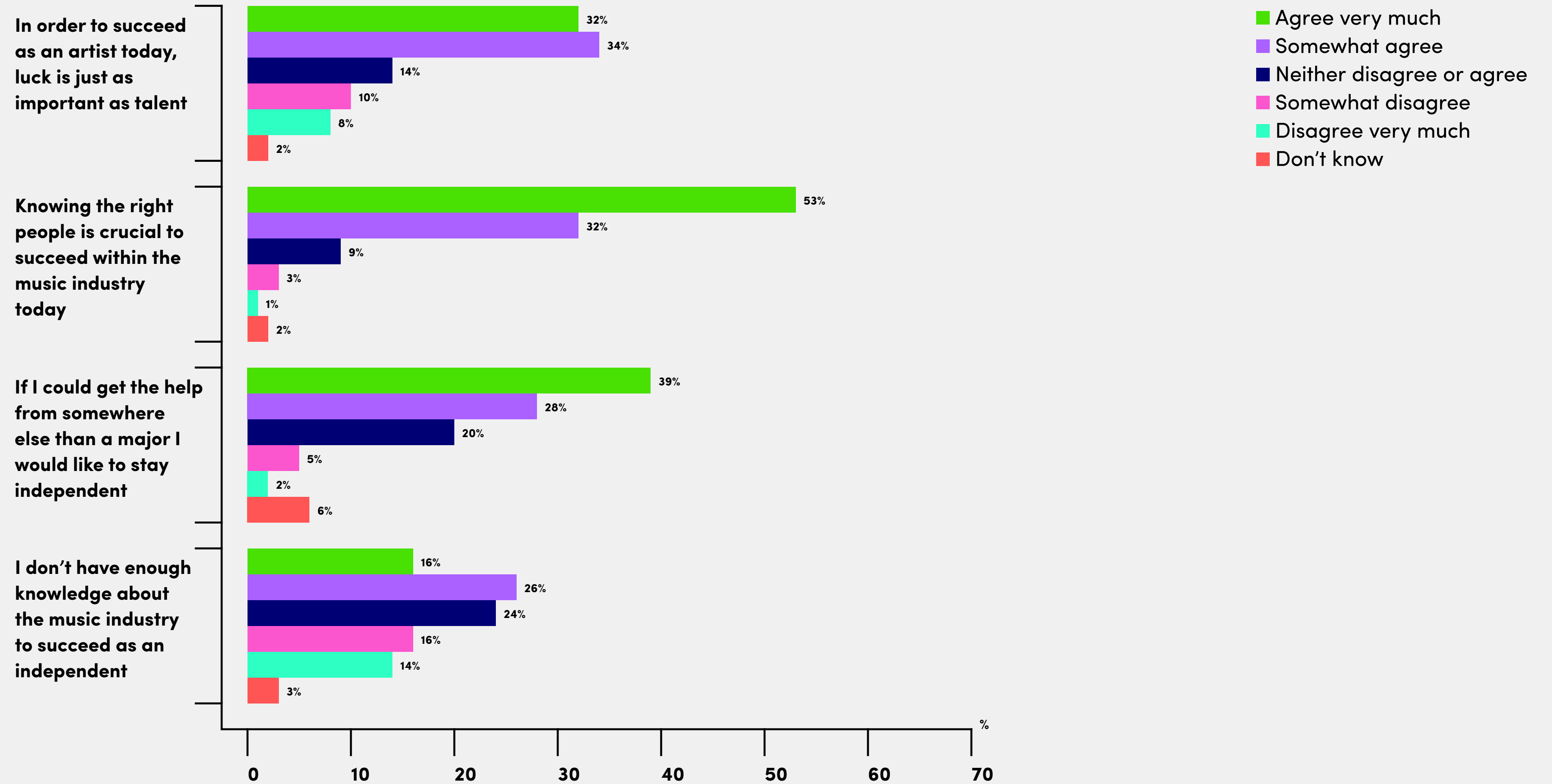




**Almost 3/4 independent music creators say that if they could get the same opportunities to succeed with their music by being independent, as being contracted by a major label, they would stay independent.**

# Perceived gatekeepers

“It’s interesting to see that 69 percent of the respondents think that today’s playlist culture favors a certain type of music. To me, this tells how much of a gatekeeper Spotify and other streaming services have become. Independent artists are actually being listened to less in the era of streaming and maybe the one to blame is the current playlist culture?”

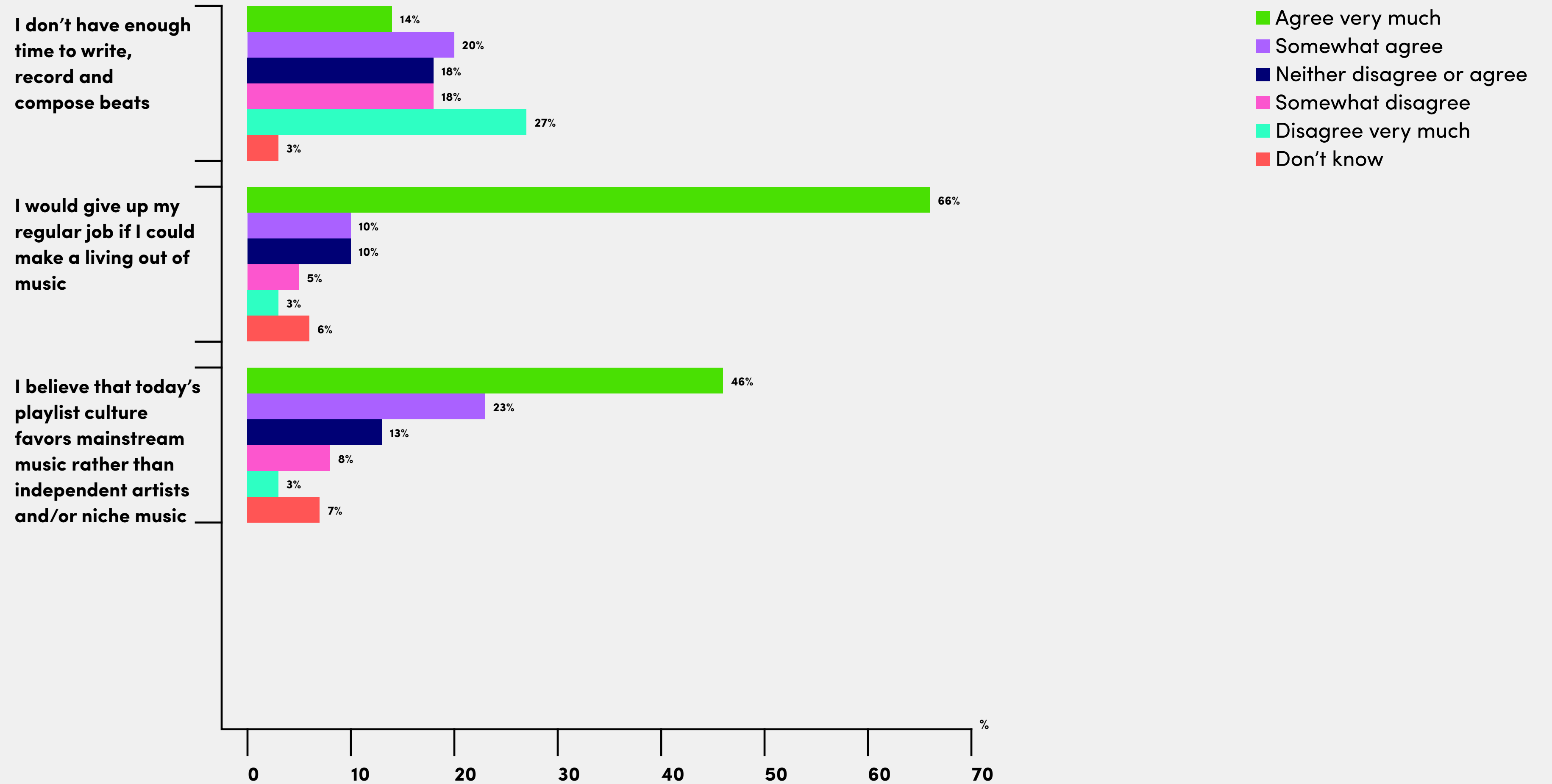


To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your music career?

Part 1/2

When the respondents were asked about their music career, two out of three somewhat agreed or agreed very much that **luck is just as important as talent in order to succeed as an artist today** (66 percent). More than four out of five somewhat agreed or agreed very much that **knowing the right people is crucial to succeed within the music industry today** (85 percent). About two out of three respondents

somewhat agreed or agreed very much with **If I could get the help from somewhere else than a major I would like to stay independent** (67 percent). A little more than two out of five somewhat agreed or agreed very much that they **don't have the knowledge about the music industry to succeed as an independent** (42 percent).



To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your music career?

Part 2 / 2

1 191 responses

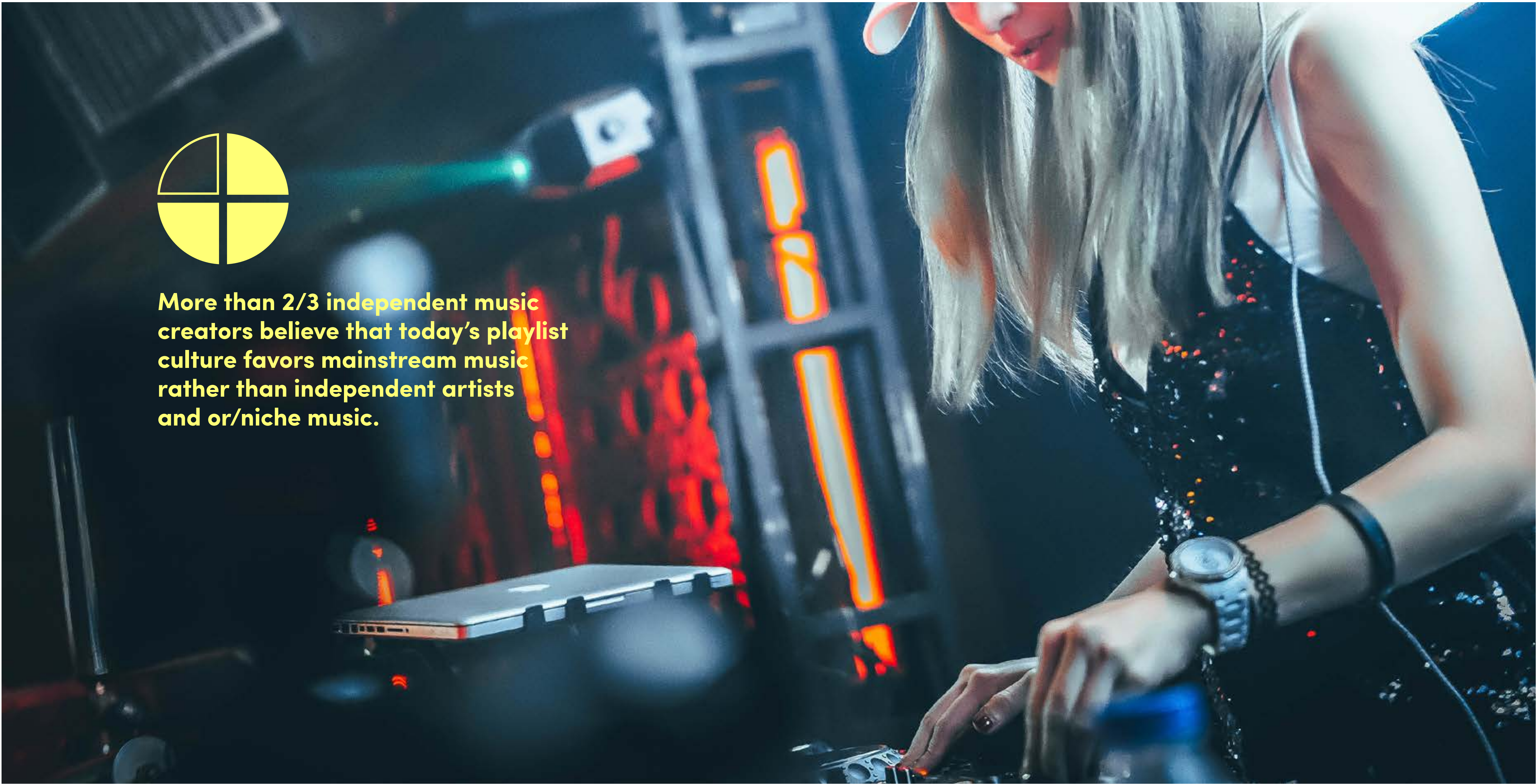
When it comes to time, the experiences go apart. Almost half (45 percent) of the respondents somewhat disagreed or disagreed very much when asked if they **don't have enough time to write, record and compose beats** but more than one out of three somewhat agreed or agreed very much (34 percent). More than three out of four somewhat agreed or agreed very much with **I would give up my regular job if I**

**could make a living out of music** (76 percent), whereof two out of three agreed very much.

More than two out of three somewhat agreed or agreed very much that **today's playlist culture favors mainstream music rather than independent artists and/or more niche music** (69 percent).

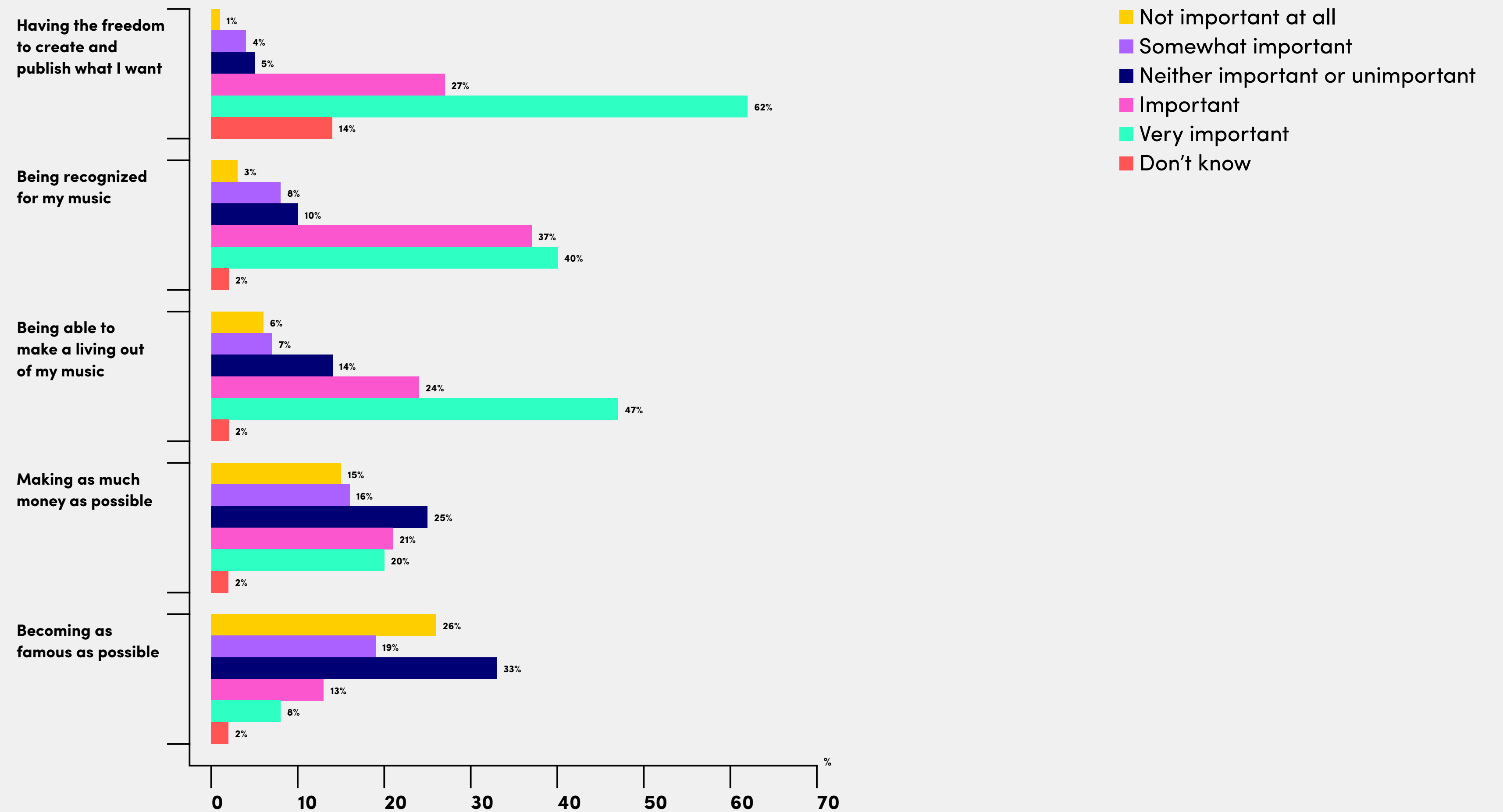


**More than 2/3 independent music creators believe that today's playlist culture favors mainstream music rather than independent artists and or/niche music.**



# What actually matters

“What this result is telling us is that Spotify is perceived to be more important than the major labels today. It’s no longer a dream to be signed by one of the majors and that is telling us that the music industry is changing – hopefully for the better.”



How important are the following aspect for your music career?

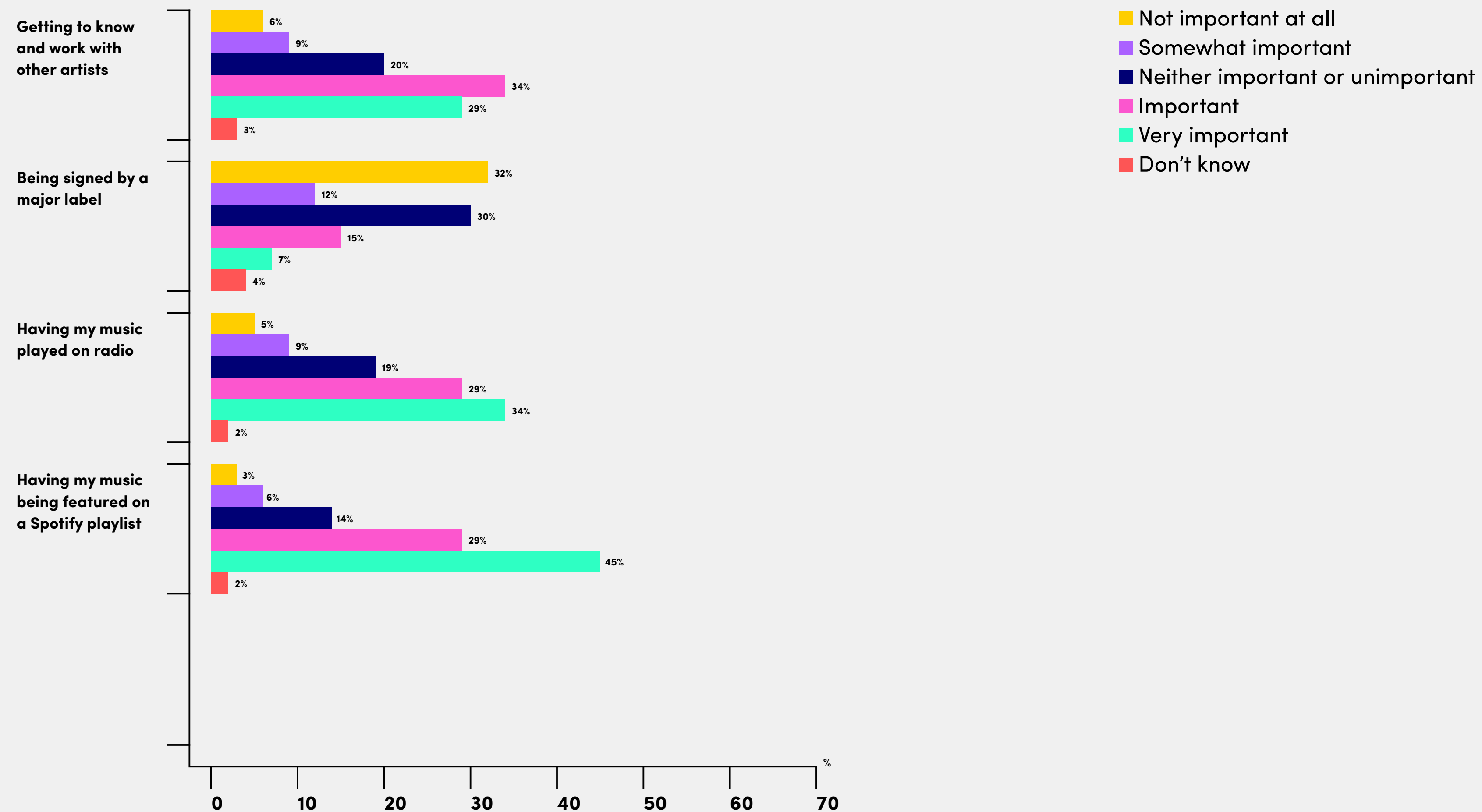
Part 1/3

1 191 responses

When the respondents were asked how important certain aspects are for their music career almost nine out of ten said that **having the freedom to create and publish what I want** is important or very important for their career (89 percent).

**Being recognized for my music** is important or very important to more than three out of four respondents (77 percent) and almost three out of four think that it is important or very

important to **be able to make a living out of music** (71 percent). Only about two out of five said that **making as much money as possible** is important or very important (41 percent) and only one in five said that **becoming as famous as possible** is important or very important (21 percent).



How important are the following aspect for your music career?

Part 2 / 3

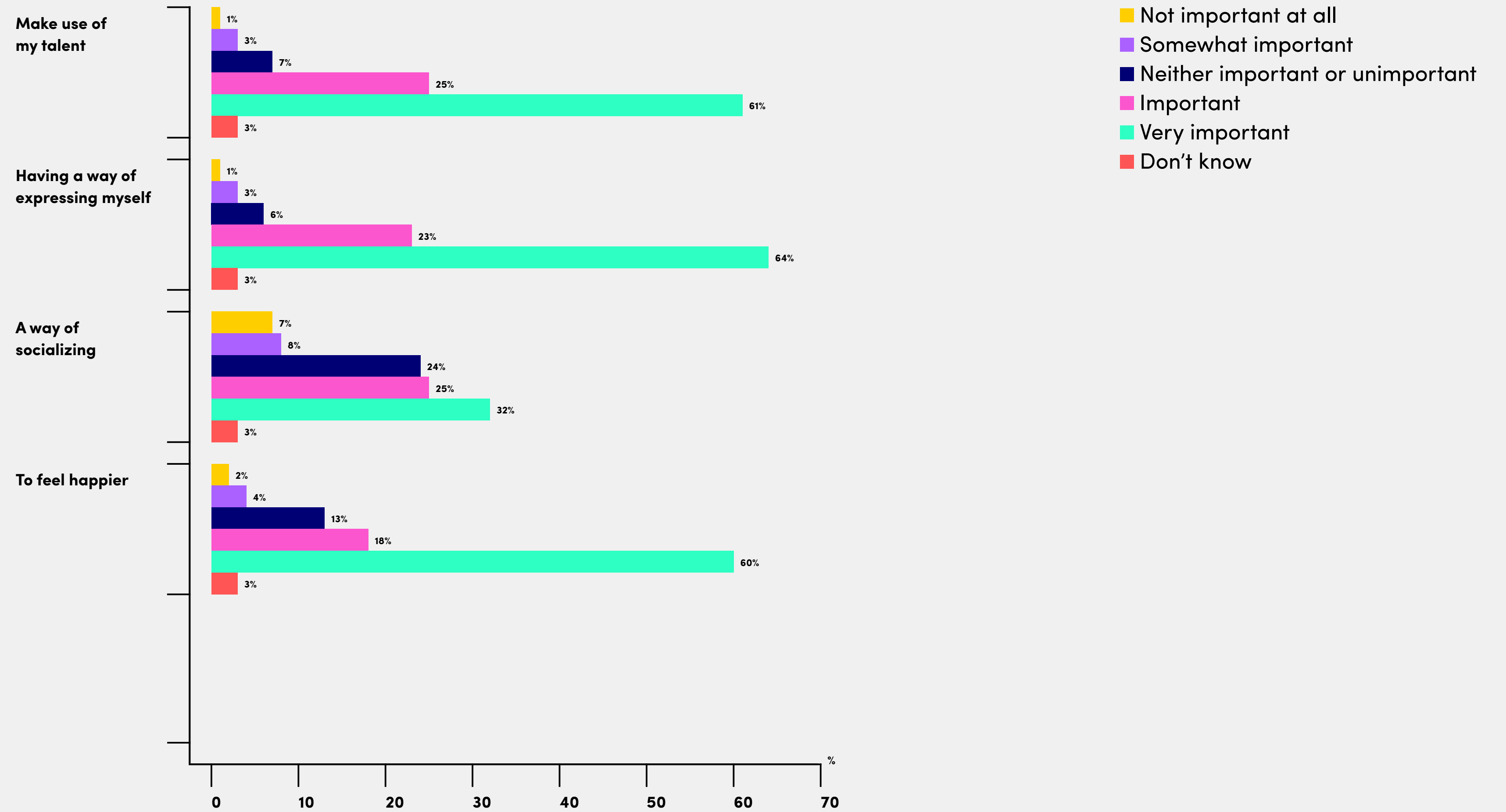
1 191 responses

Almost two out of three said that it is important or very important for their career to get **to know and work with other artists** (63 percent) but only one in five said that it's important or very important to **be signed by a major label** (22 percent).

Radio is still perceived as an important channel to reach out through. Almost two out of three said that **having my music played on radio** is important or very important for their

career (63 percent). Almost four out of five said that **having my music being featured on a Spotify playlist** is important or very important (74 percent).





How important are the following aspect for your music career?

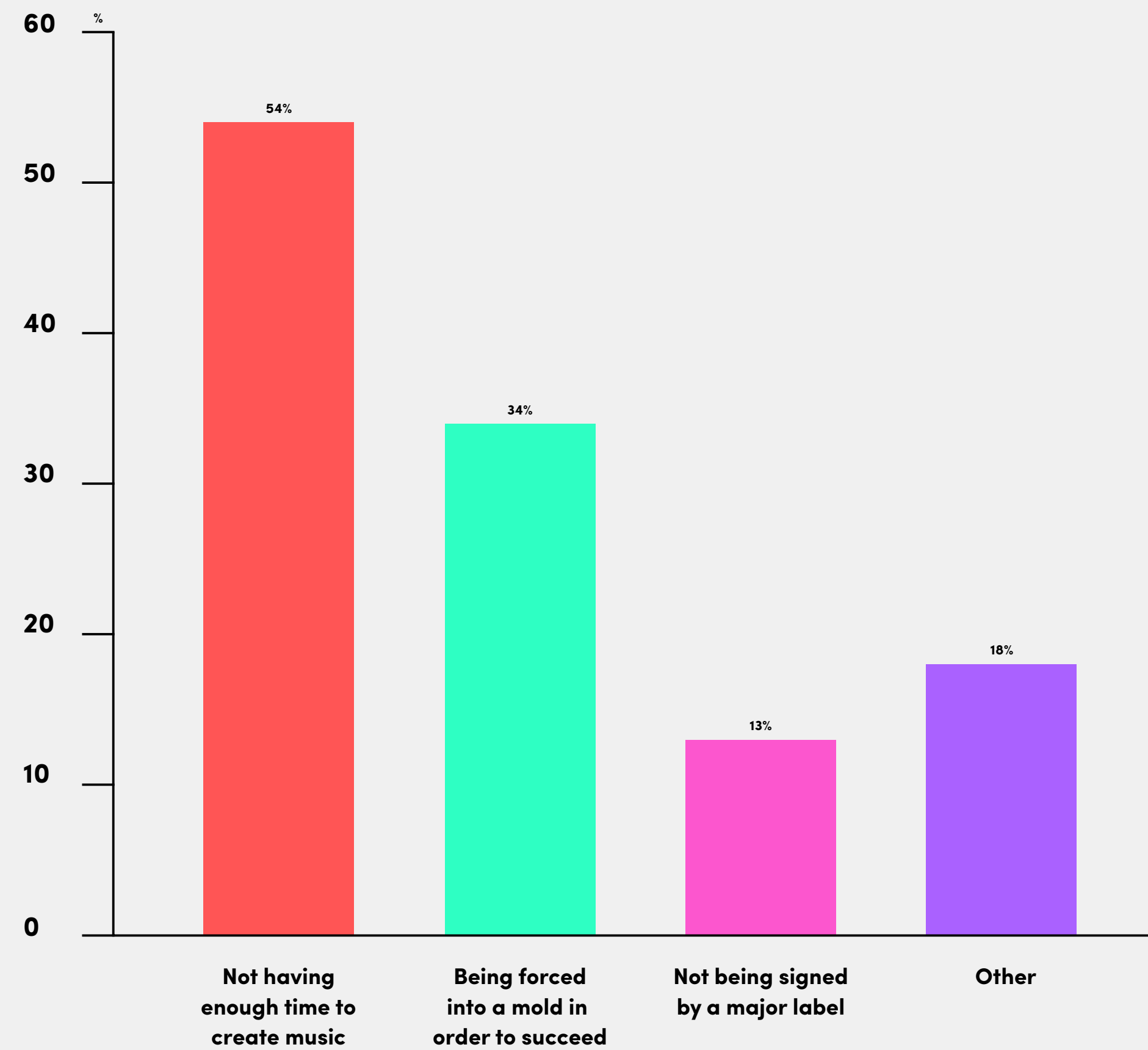
Part 3 / 3

Almost nine out of ten said that **making use of my talent** is important or very important for their career (86 percent) as well as **having a way of expressing myself** (87 percent). Almost three out of five say that music as **a way of socializing** is important or very important (57 percent) and almost four out of five say that **to feel happier** is important or very important (78 percent).



**Only 1/5 independent music creators think that being signed by a major label is important for their music career.**





**Which of the following are your biggest worries looking forward into your music career?**

When asked about what their biggest worries are, looking forward into their music career, about half of the respondents said that they are worrying about **not having enough time to create music** (54 percent). One out of three said that they are

**worrying about being forced into a mold in order to succeed** (34 percent) and a little more than one in ten said that they are **worrying about not being signed to a major label** (13 percent).

# Conclusions

“Hopefully, the reading of this report has been inspirational and useful. To sum it up we have put together some of our key insights that we think will be interesting to follow up on in our future work. So, if you’re only going to take away a few results, maybe those are the ones?”



Promotion, marketing and budget are the biggest obstacles that independent music creators face today in the strive to reach their full potential as artists. The help from a marketer or a PR person is perceived to be the one thing that would benefit their career the most.

Independent music creators believe that they would have to sacrifice the benefits of independence if signing with a major label: control over their music, setting their own rules/schedule, ownership of their music and having creative freedom.

If they could get the same opportunities to succeed with their music by being independent, as being contracted by a major label, independent music creators would like to stay independent. There's also a belief that artists today are less dependent on major labels than five years ago.

It's believed that it's crucial to know the right people to succeed within the music industry today and independent music creators believe that today's playlist culture favors mainstream music rather than independent artists and/or more niche music.

Having their music being featured on a Spotify playlist is more important than being signed by a major label and one out of three music creators are worried about being forced into a mold in order to succeed.

**Research institute**

United Minds at the request of Record Union

**Collection method**

Web survey to Record Union customers

**Collection period**

4th-25th of October 2018

**Total number of collected answers**

1 191 people

**Selection group**

Customers in Denmark, Finland, Norway,  
Sweden, The UK and The US that have released  
at least one single with Record Union

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