

The State of Pets

The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice

July 2026

METHODOLOGY

About this research

This survey was conducted online within the U.S. by The Harris Poll from April 24th to 26th, 2026, among a nationally representative sample of 2,070 U.S. adults aged 18 and over.

This research comprises of 338 Gen Z (ages 18-29), 721 Millennials (ages 30-45), 506 Gen X (ages 46-61), and 505 Boomers (ages 62 and older). This research is also broken down by 1,625 pet owners.

This report references data from 2024 by The Harris Poll from May 24th to 26th, among a nationally representative sample of 2,125 adults aged 18 and over, including 321 Gen Z (ages 18-27), 662 Millennials (ages 28-43), 537 Gen X (ages 44-59), 605 Boomers (ages 60 and older), and 1,594 pet owners.

2,070

American Adults

18+, nationally
representative

1,625

Pet Owners

18+, nationally
representative

Executive Summary

01. Pet-centric Living

In 2026, 40% of Americans are choosing pets over children, with over half (55%) of Gen Z and Millennials revealing they've considered building a life around pets only.

02. The Cost of Companionship

Over half of Gen Z and Millennials (54%) are worried about today's cost of living and its impact on their ability to afford the best quality of life for their pets.

03. Pinching Pennies

From cooking more at home (56%), switching to cheaper brands (41%), and cutting back on comfort purchases (39%), pet owners are cutting back on personal purchases to afford expenses for their pets.

04. Anything For My Fur Babies

Whether it's toys, pet insurance, or training, Gen Z and Millennials spend far more for their pets across nearly all categories, with nearly three in 10 (29%) falling into debt for their pets' expenses.

05. A Cry For Paw-renting Help

Over four in 10 (44%) pet owners worry about affording pet care due to rising costs – and they want support through tax deductions (42%), rent-control caps (37%), and claiming pets as dependents (36%).

06. Making Room For Pets in Public Policy

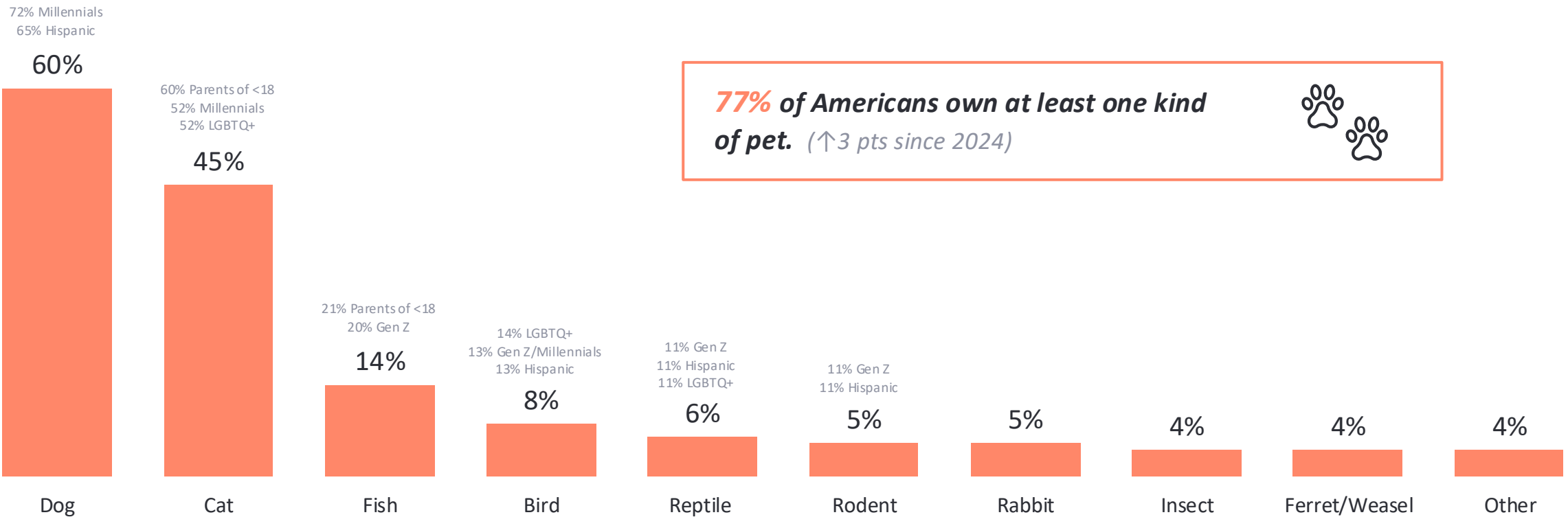
Nearly seven in 10 pet owners are in favor of pet support policies such as tax breaks on food and medical care (68%) and filing pets as legal dependents (69%).

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Modern Paw-renthood: Where Pet Parents Stand in 2026

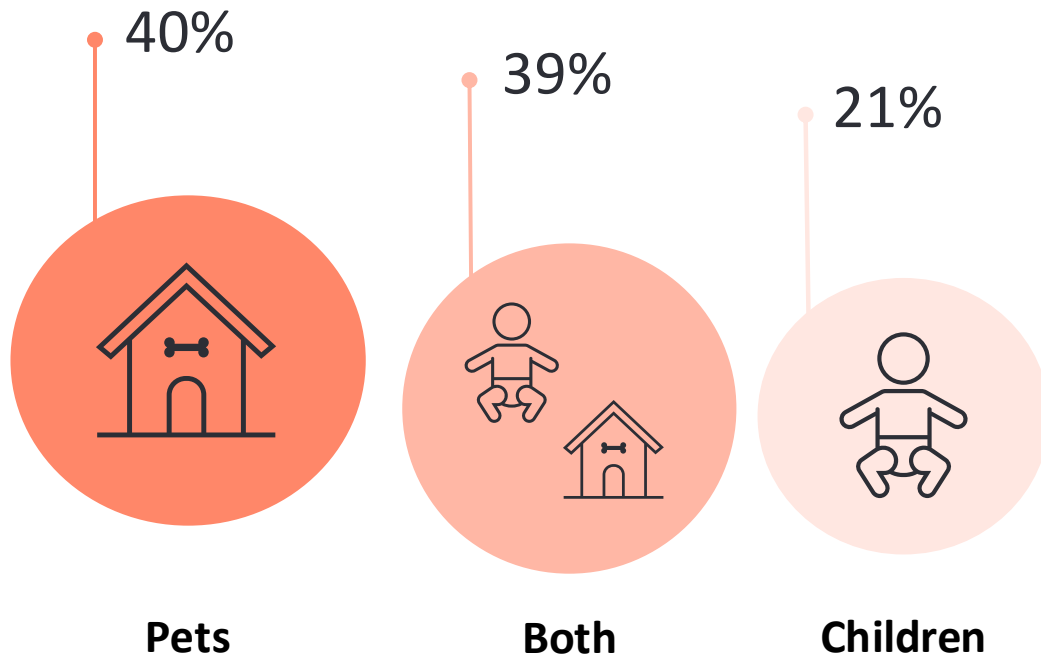
Pet ownership continues to rise, as over three-quarters of Americans own at least one kind of a pet

What kind of pets do Americans own?
(Among Total)



When forced to choose, Americans pick pets over children

If you had to choose, which would you prefer to have in the future?
(Among Total)



83%

Pet Owners

"My pet(s) is/are like my own child."

In fact, over half of Gen Z and Millennials have considered building a future around pets over kids

55%

Gen Z / Millennials

“I have thought about **building a life around pets** instead of having children.”

54%

Gen Z / Millennials

“I would **give my pet(s) my inheritance** if I could.”

55% Urban
55% Non-Parents

Timing, ease, and cost contribute to why Americans choose pets over kids

Why would you prefer having pets over children?

(Select all that apply)

#1 I am not in the right part of my life to take care of a child (45%)

#2 Pets are easier to take care of than children (35%)

#3 Pets are less of a financial strain than children (32%)

#4 Pets are less of a responsibility than children (28%)

#5 I prefer to choose to be child-free (24%)

#6 Raising a pet gives me more fulfillment than raising a child (13%)

#7 Pets are not a lifelong commitment (12%)

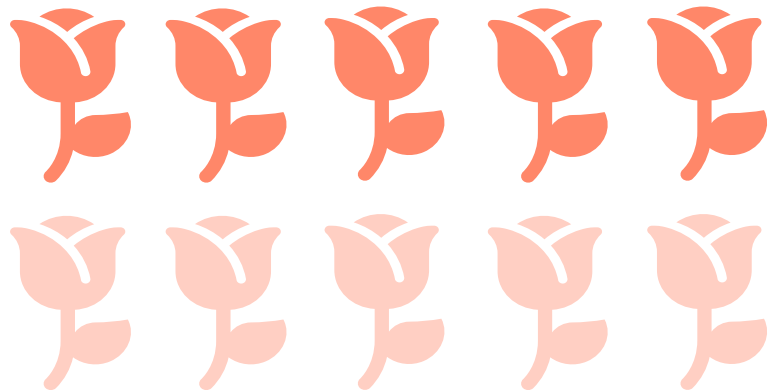
#8 Other (10%)

Pets are even part of the dating equation, as nearly half of single pet owners rely on them for companionship

49%

Single Pet Owners

"I have **given up on finding a romantic partner** and rely on my pet(s) for companionship."



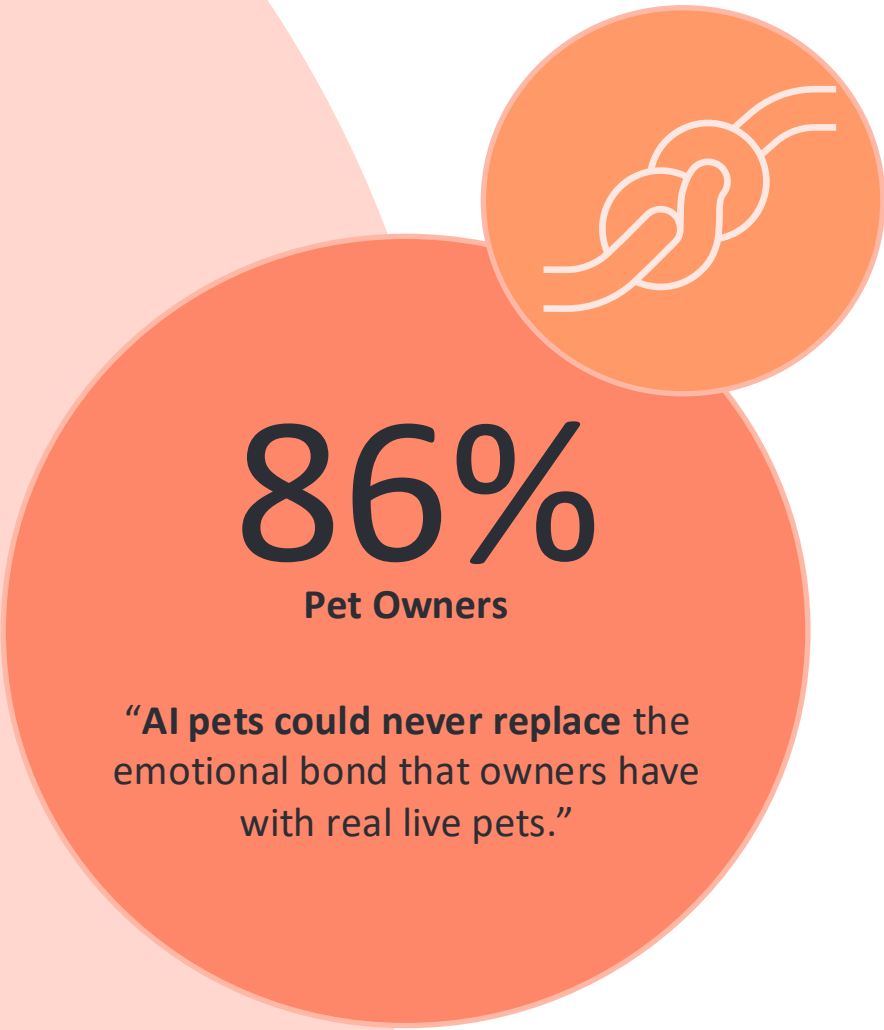
59% Boomers | 56% Women | 56% LGBTQ

78%

Pet Owners

"**Not treating pets like family is a red flag** for me when forming close relationships."

AI is far from replacing real pets, according to nearly nine in 10 pet owners



86%

Pet Owners

“AI pets could never replace the emotional bond that owners have with real live pets.”

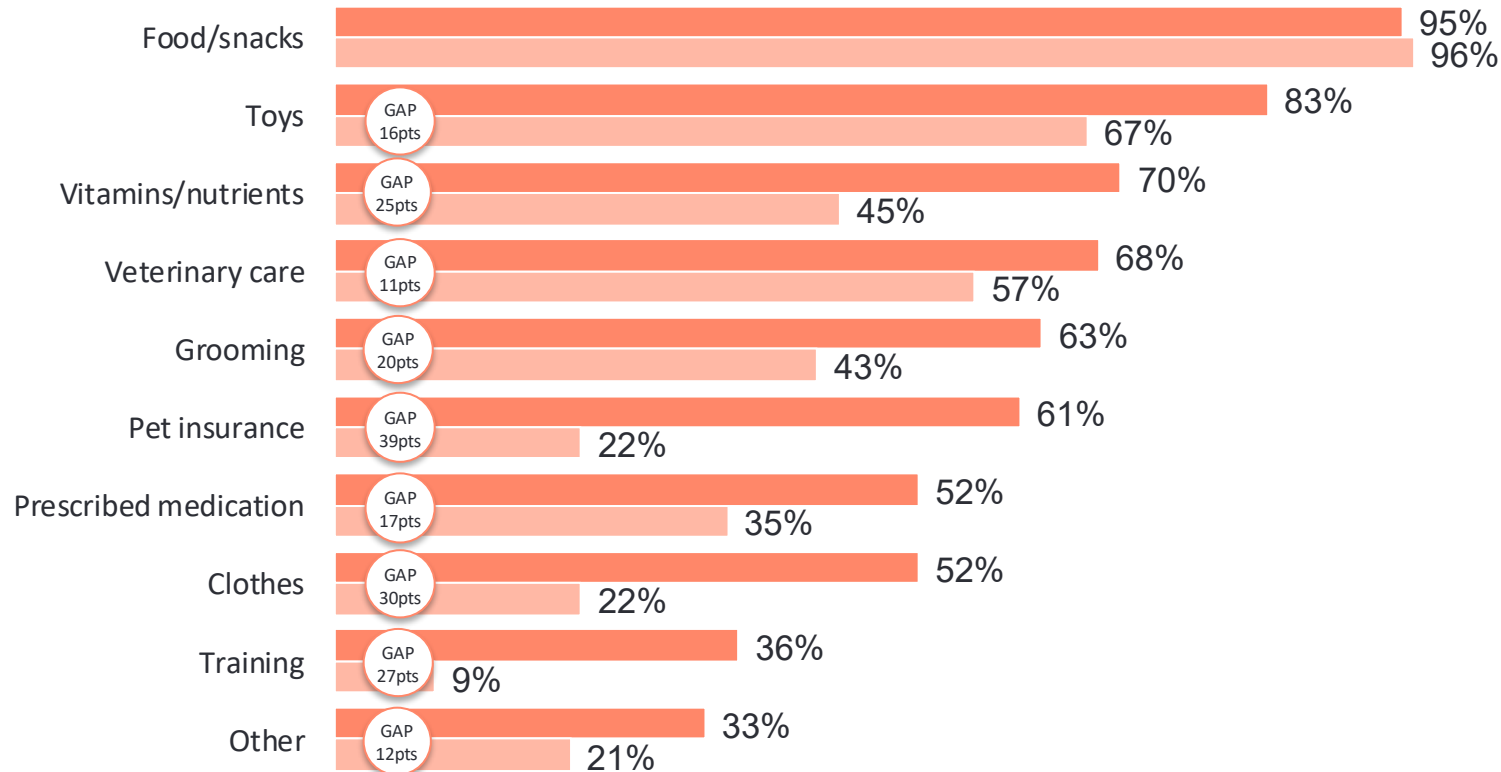
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Pets Before Purchases: The Rising Cost of Companionship

Younger pet owners are more likely to spend on the extras, from insurance and training to wellness and wardrobe

Pet Expenses Incurred Monthly

■ Gen Z / Millennials ■ Gen X / Boomers



77%

Gen Z / Millennials
(vs. 56% Gen X / Boomers)

“I have a separate budget just for my pets.”

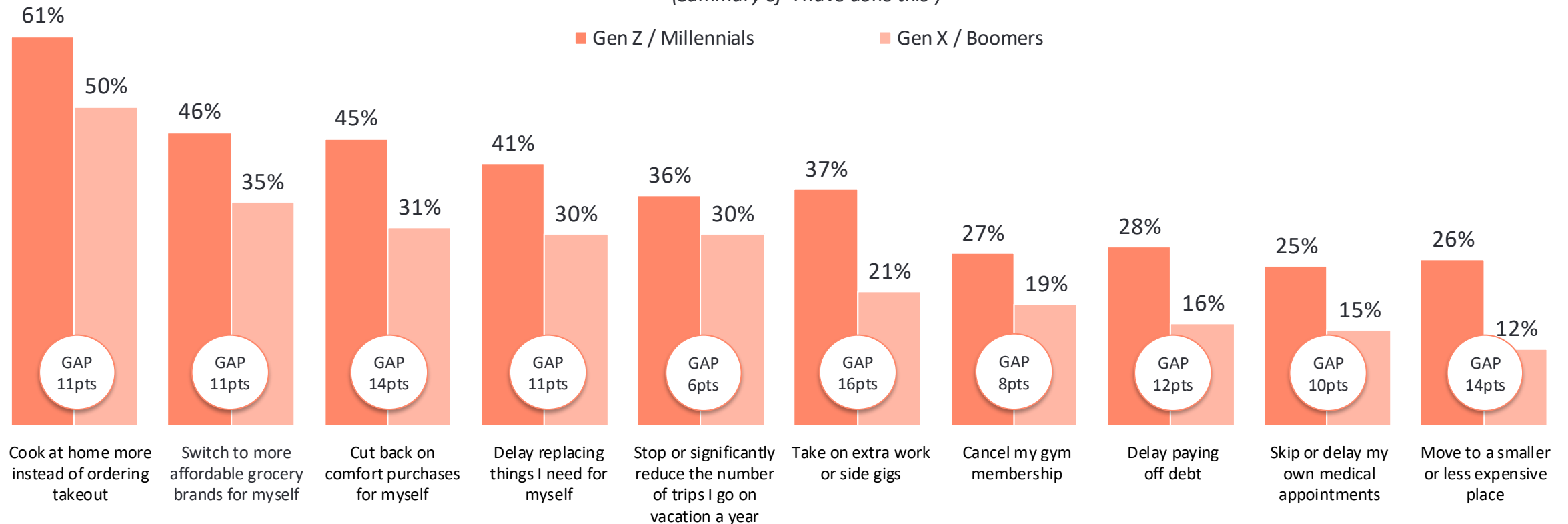
80% Hispanic



Pet costs push younger owners to side gigs, debt delays, and personal cutbacks

Which of the following have you done in order to afford expenses for your pet?

(Summary of 'I have done this')



Three in 10 younger pet parents prioritize their pets over financial stability



51%

Gen Z / Millennial Dog Owners

Spend **\$100 or more** on prescribed medication for their dog(s) in an average month.

(vs. 33% of Gen X / Boomer Dog Owners)

29%

Gen Z / Millennials
(vs. 14% Gen X / Boomers)

"I am facing debt as a result of expenses related to my pet(s)."



23%

Gen Z / Millennial Cat Owners

Spend **\$100 or more** on pet insurance for their cat(s) in an average month.

(vs. 6% of Gen X / Boomer Cat Owners)

Despite pinching pennies for themselves, Gen Z and Millennials are splurging on luxury pet purchases

Which of the following things have you spent or considered spending on your pet(s)?
(Summary of 'I have done this')

Gen Z / Millennials

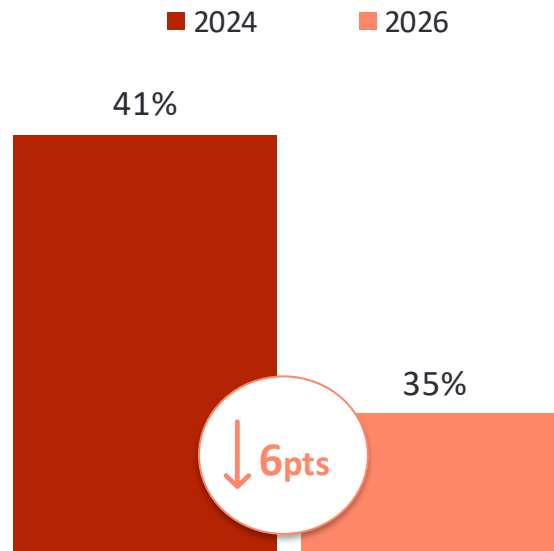
	Designed a specific part of my home for my pet(s)	49%
	Organized a birthday party / celebration for my pet(s)	41%
	Purchased a pet tracker or GPS collar for safety	40%
	Subscribed to a monthly pet subscription box for toys and treats	39%
	Bought a specialized pet camera or monitoring system	35%
	Purchased a pet stroller or carrier for transportation	33%
	Gone to a bar or cafe specifically catered to pets	31%
	Dressed my pet(s) in designer clothing	30%
	Moved to a more expensive place that allowed pets	30%
	Enrolled my pet(s) in activities	27%
	Commissioned a custom portrait or artwork of my pet	27%
	Booked my pet(s) into a pet hotel	25%

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Supporting Modern Pet Families

The gap between paw-renthood and parenthood is shrinking as pet costs rise with today's cost of living

Why would you prefer having pets over children?
(Select all that apply)



Pets are easier to take care of than children

44%

Pet Owners

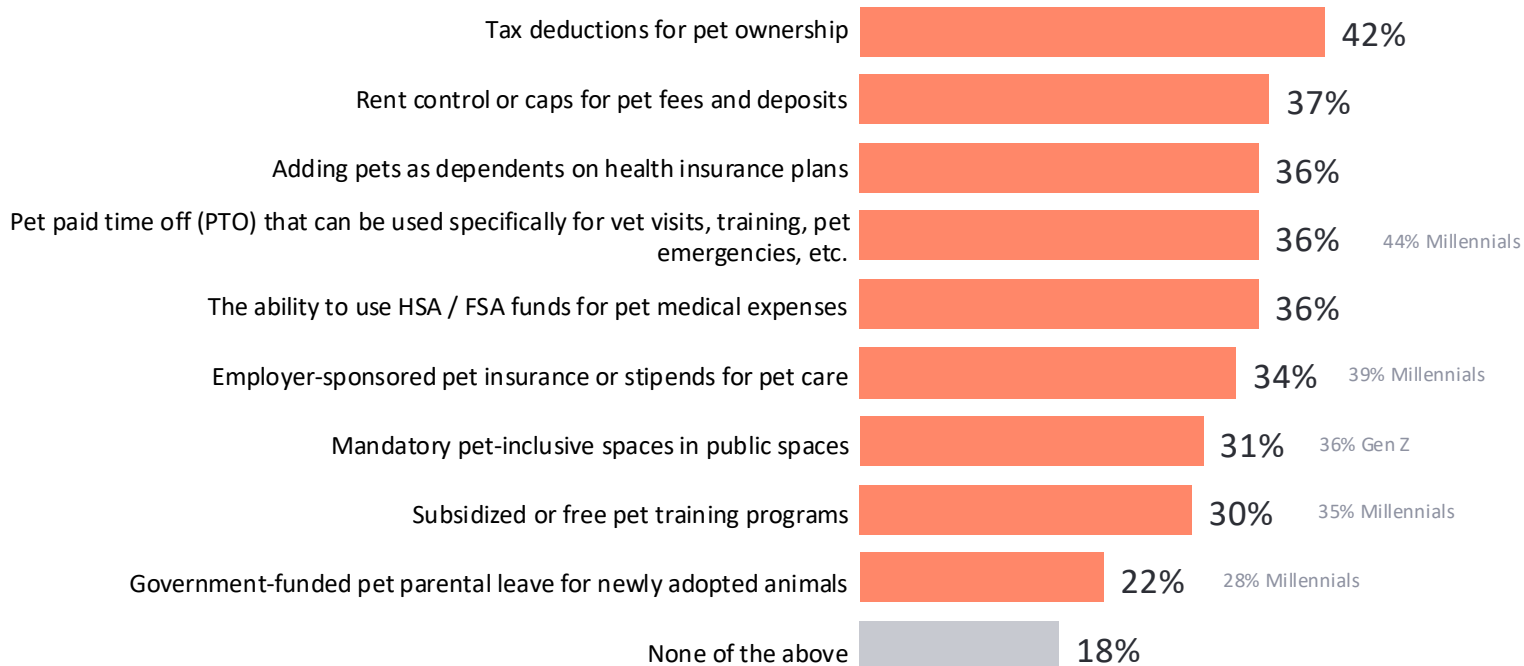
"The cost of living today makes me worry about whether I can continue to afford the life my pet deserves."



59% LGBTQ+
55% <\$50K Income
54% Gen Z / Millennials

From tax credits to rent caps, pet owners yearn for policies that better support today's pet families

Which of the following, if any, do you believe should be offered or available to support pet owners?
(Select all that apply)



69%

Pet Owners

"I would adopt my pet as a dependent (e.g., like a child) if it were legally possible."

77% Urban
76% Millennials
76% Black

68%

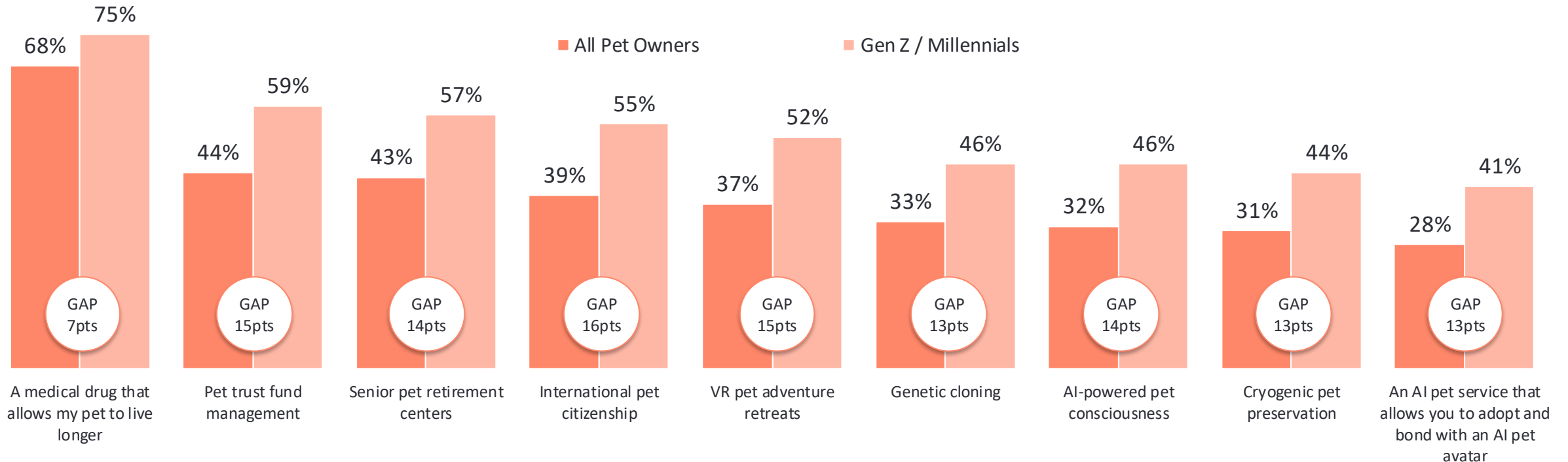
Pet Owners

"Pet owners should receive tax breaks for expenses like food and medical care that are similar to child-related deductions."

76% Millennials
74% Democrats
73% Parents of <18

Gen Z and Millennial pet owners treat pet care as a lifetime financial commitment, with most expressing desire to invest in their pets' quality of life

How likely or unlikely would you be to spend money on the following types of pet services if they were offered today?
(Very / Somewhat Likely)

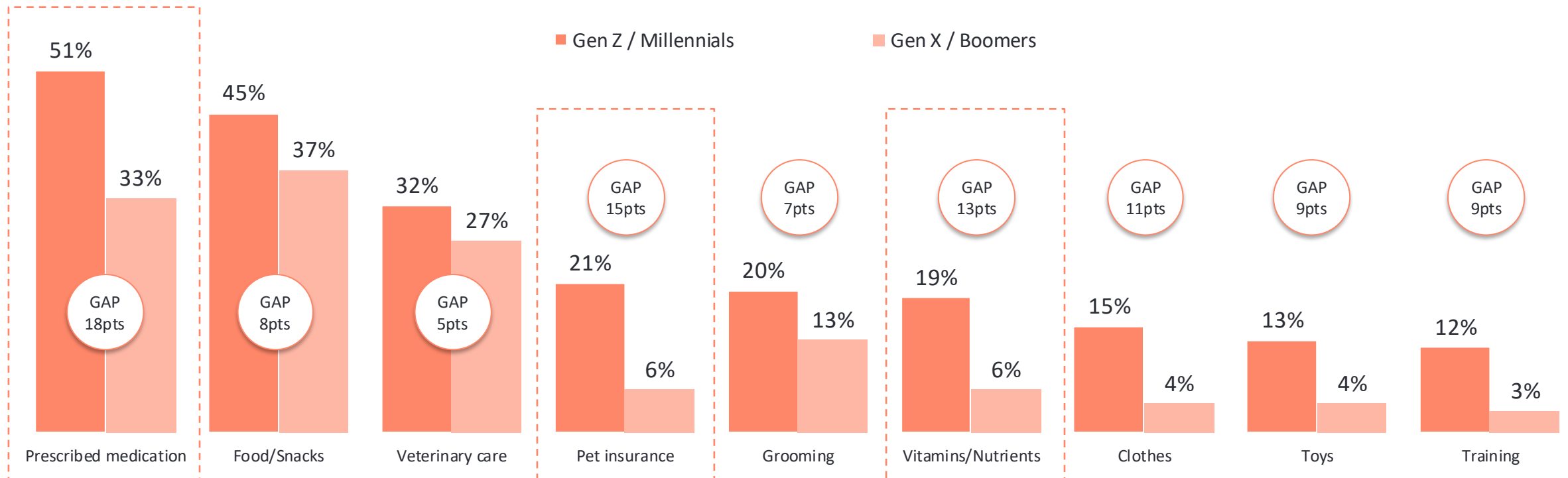


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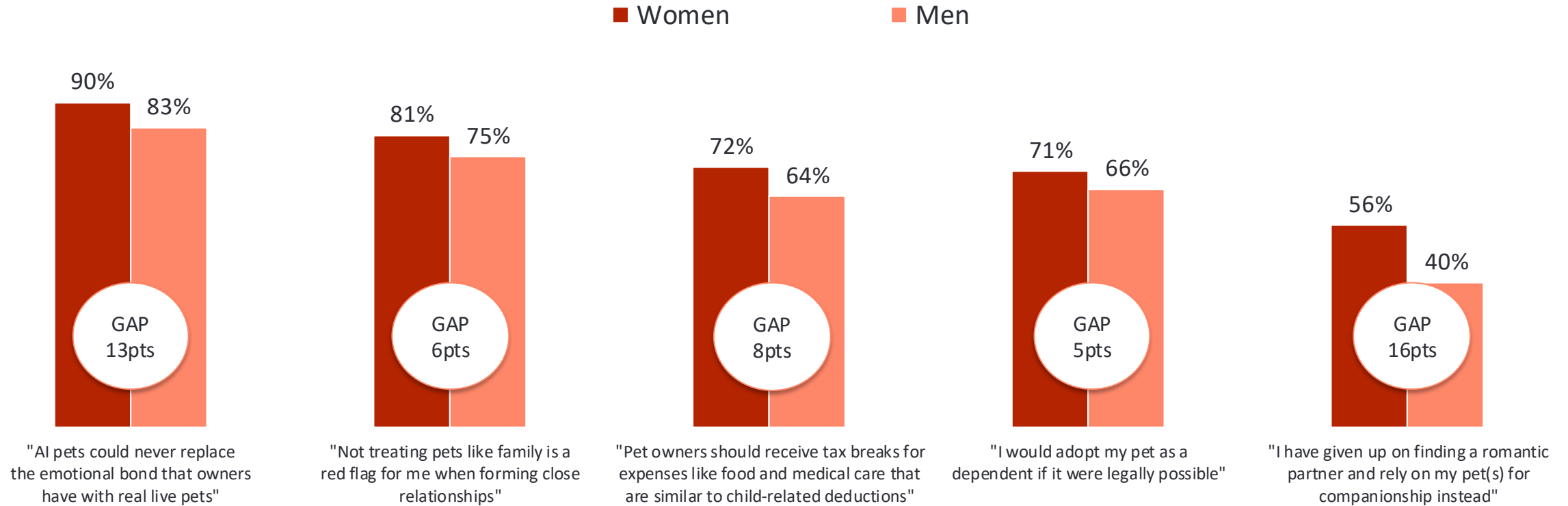
Appendix

Younger dog owners spend significantly more on medication, pet insurance, and vitamins than older owners

For each of the following categories, how much do you approximately spend on your pet(s) on an average month?
(% of Dog Owners who spend \$100+ per month)



Pet ownership by gender reveals stronger support for pet-friendly policies and sentiments among women



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