Tantalus

The 2026 Utility of the Future Survey

Increasing urgency for data-centric grid modernization

Executive Summary

2026: Tackling top priorities with a data-centric approach to grid modernization

This year's Utility of the Future survey revealed an increasing sense of urgency around grid modernization among the 109 public power utilities and electric cooperatives Tantalus surveyed. 86% of respondents listed grid modernization as a priority, up from 74% in 2025. Yet only 9% report being extremely prepared to modernize their distribution grids, which was the same level of preparedness from last year.

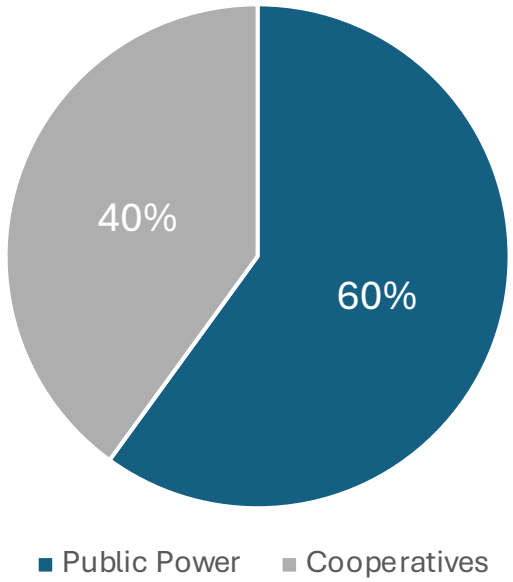
The trouble is that utilities often face conflicting issues. When asked what their number one priority was for 2026, the top three responses were (in order) financial stability and affordability, reliability and resilience, and modernizing their aging infrastructure. Meeting customer expectations ranked fourth. This points to the tough position many utilities are in, as they face a choice between spending money and possibly raising rates, or continuing to risk system outages, longer recovery times and poor service quality because of an outdated grid.

The survey also points to external trends putting even more pressure on utilities to modernize. Extreme weather events, grid data management, cybersecurity concerns, and staffing challenges rank among utilities' top concerns. Of interest, 65% of those surveyed report that they are either somewhat or extremely concerned about grid data management, while only 7% feel extremely prepared to tackle that challenge.

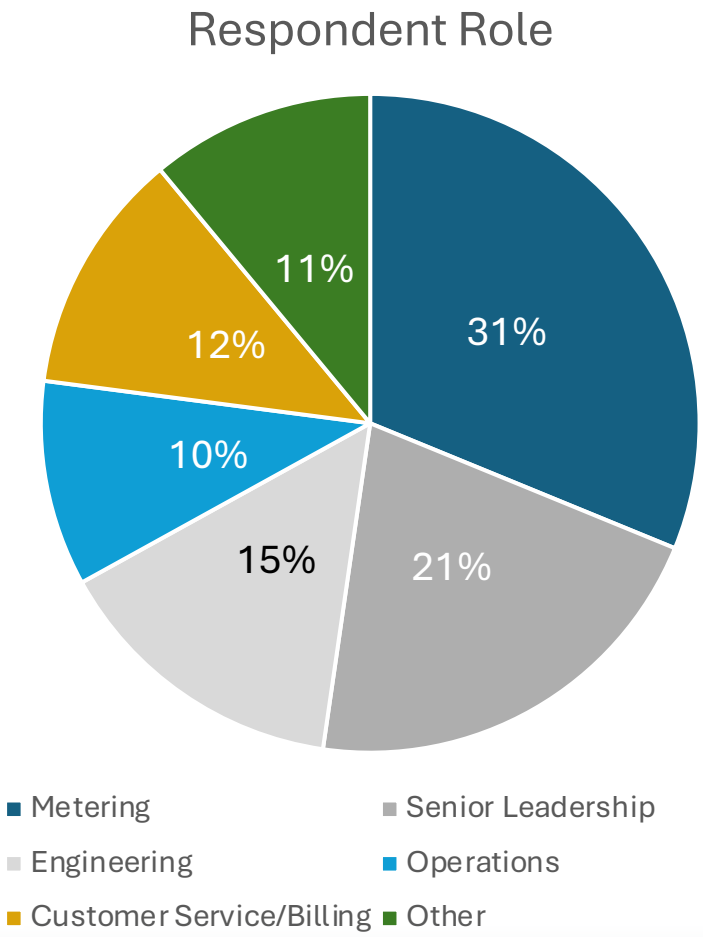
The good news is that by taking a data-centric approach to grid modernization, utilities can leverage and protect existing infrastructure investments, avoid rip-and-replace upgrades, and modernize at their own pace. In fact, 78% of those surveyed say grid data interoperability across devices, systems and vendors is important. By taking full advantage of all the insights already at their disposal across the distribution grid, utilities can prioritize the capital investments and improvements that matter most and avoid costly problems before they arise.

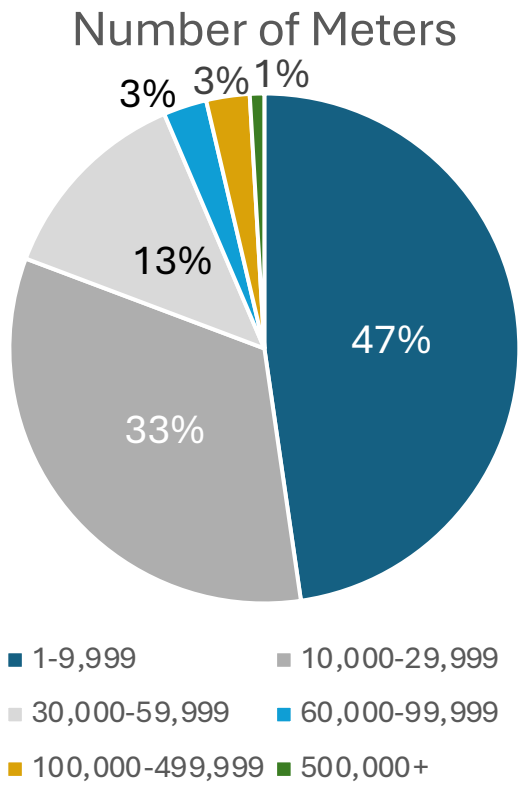
In short, it's more important than ever to be able to deliver the right insight to the right application from the right device, no matter where that underlying data originates. Ultimately, the best way to address utilities' most pressing challenges in 2026 is to harness the power of data to make the most of the infrastructure they already have in place, lower total costs, reduce risk, and chart their own path to data-centric grid modernization.

Methodology



Note: Public Power also includes utilities that categorized themselves as municipalities





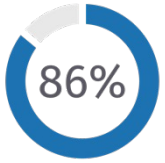
- Online survey
- 109 respondents across multiple roles
- February – March 2026
- Individual responses anonymous

Key Data Points

The numbers tell the story

The external trends utilities are **most concerned about** in 2026 include (in order) **extreme weather events**, **grid data management**, **cybersecurity threats**, and **staffing challenges**

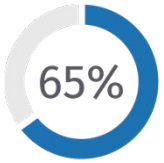
Utilities' **top strategic priorities** for 2026 include (in order) **financial stability** and **affordability**, **reliability** and **resilience**, **modernizing aging infrastructure**, and **meeting customer expectations**



of utilities surveyed say **grid modernization** is a priority, but …

only 

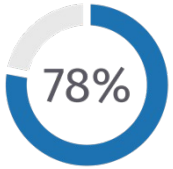
feel extremely prepared



are somewhat or extremely concerned with **grid data management**, but …

only 

feel extremely prepared



say **grid data interoperability** across devices, systems and vendors is somewhat or extremely important

Top Priorities for 2026, Ranked

Q: “What is your single most important priority for 2026?”

1. Financial stability, rates + affordability
2. Reliability + resilience
3. Aging infrastructure + grid modernization
4. Customer expectations + service quality
5. Updating digital capabilities (analytics, data management, cybersecurity)
6. Safety + wildfire risk mitigation
7. Recruiting, retaining + training staff
8. Regulatory + policy pressures
9. Supply chain + materials availability
10. Sustainability + clean energy transition

DoE's Definition of Grid Modernization Remains the Same from 2025 to 2026

THE MODERN GRID MUST HAVE ...

Greater **RESILIENCY**
to hazards of all types

Improved **RELIABILITY**
for everyday operations

Enhanced **SECURITY**
from an increasing and evolving number of threats

Additional **AFFORDABILITY**
to maintain economic prosperity

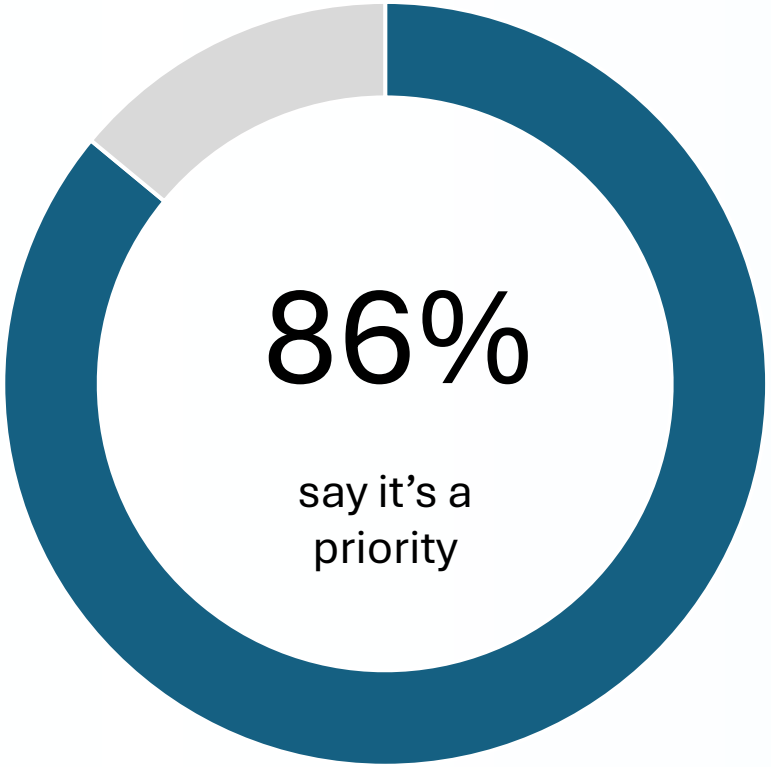
Superior **FLEXIBILITY**
to respond to variability and uncertain conditions

Increased **SUSTAINABILITY**
through energy-efficient and renewable resources

Grid Modernization

Priority vs. Preparedness

Priority

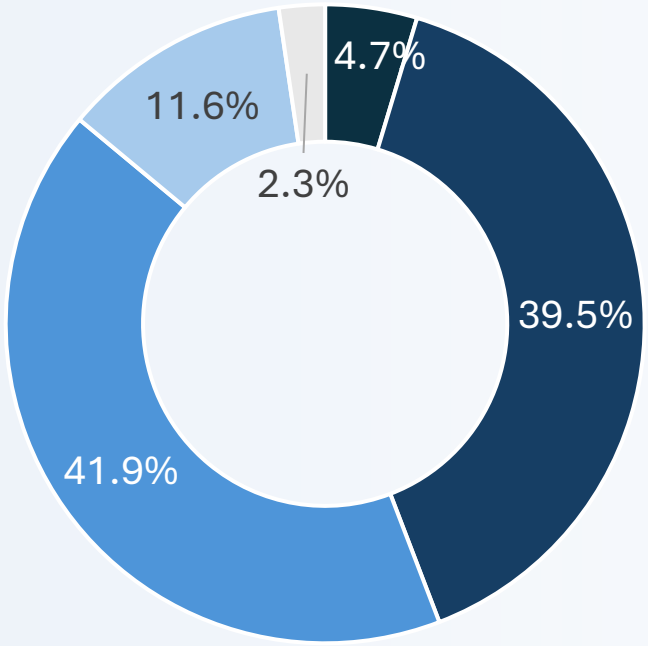


Preparedness

Grid Modernization

Priority vs. Preparedness, detailed view

Priority

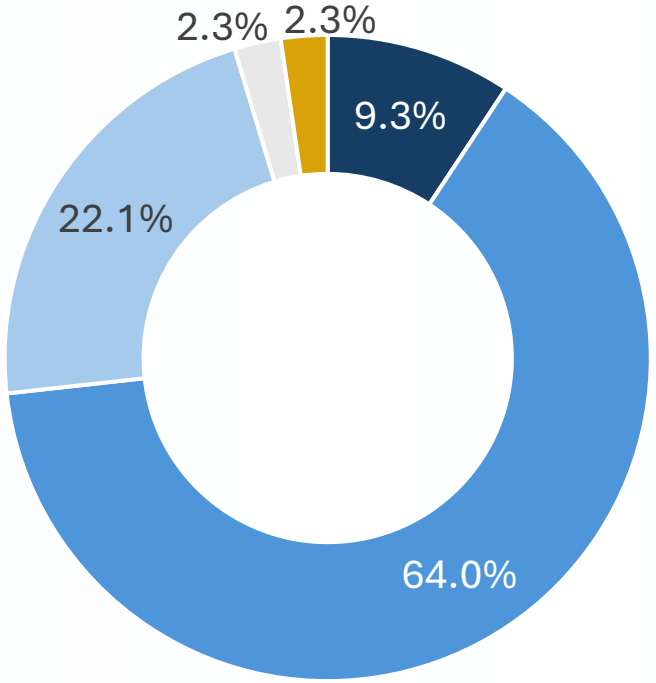


Top Priority | High priority | Mid-level priority | Low priority | Not a Priority

Grid modernization is a **top, high** or **mid-level priority** for 86% of respondents

Only 9% are extremely prepared

Preparedness

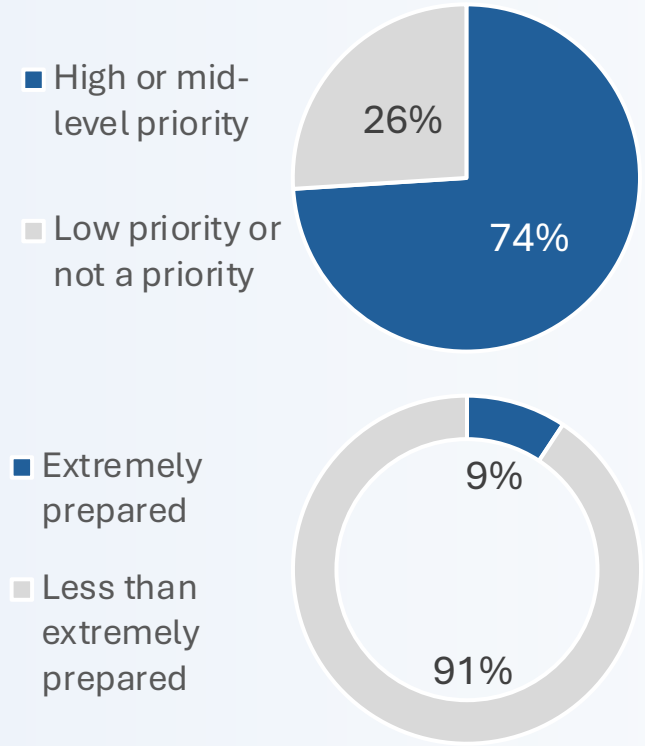


Extremely prepared | Somewhat prepared | A little prepared | Not at all prepared | I don't know

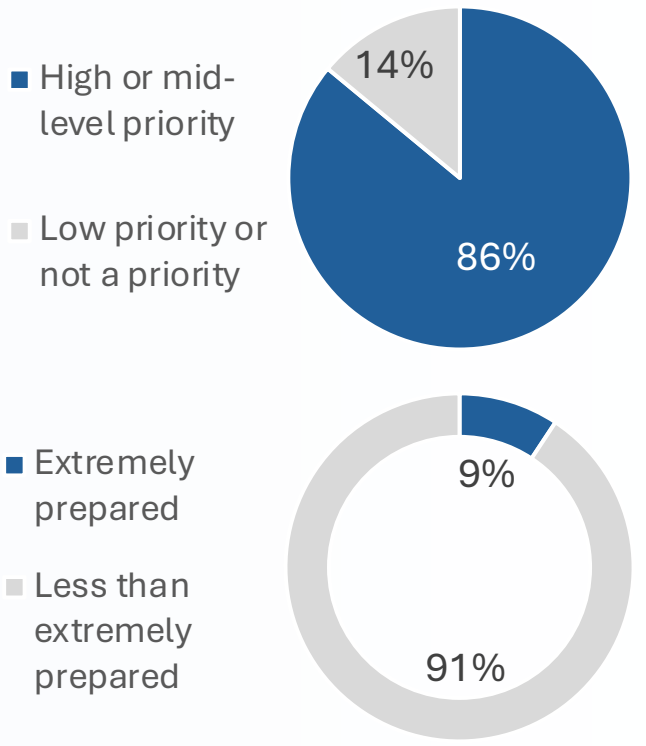
Grid Modernization Increased in Urgency YoY

Level of total preparedness stayed the same

Grid Modernization Priority + Preparedness, 2025



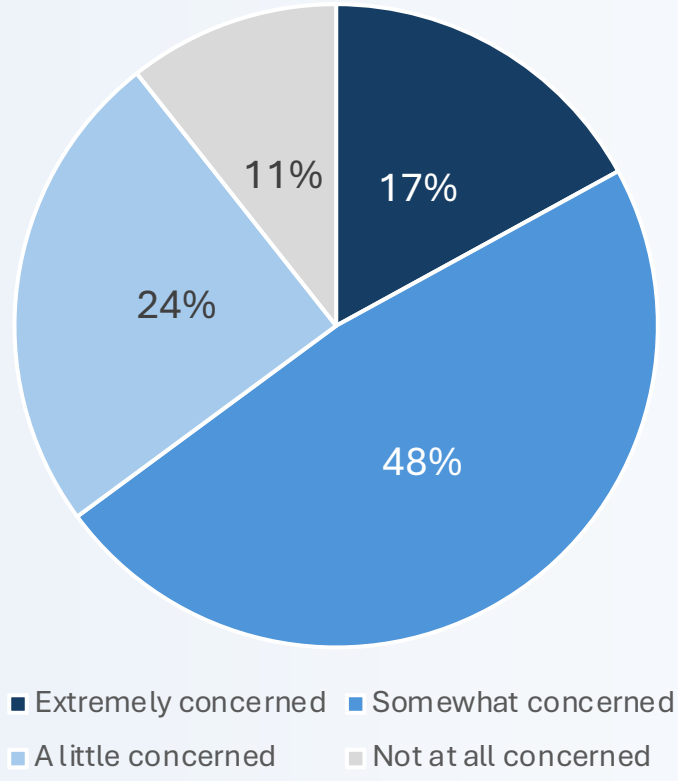
Grid Modernization Priority + Preparedness, 2026



Grid Data Management

Still a meaningful concern, still work to be done to prepare

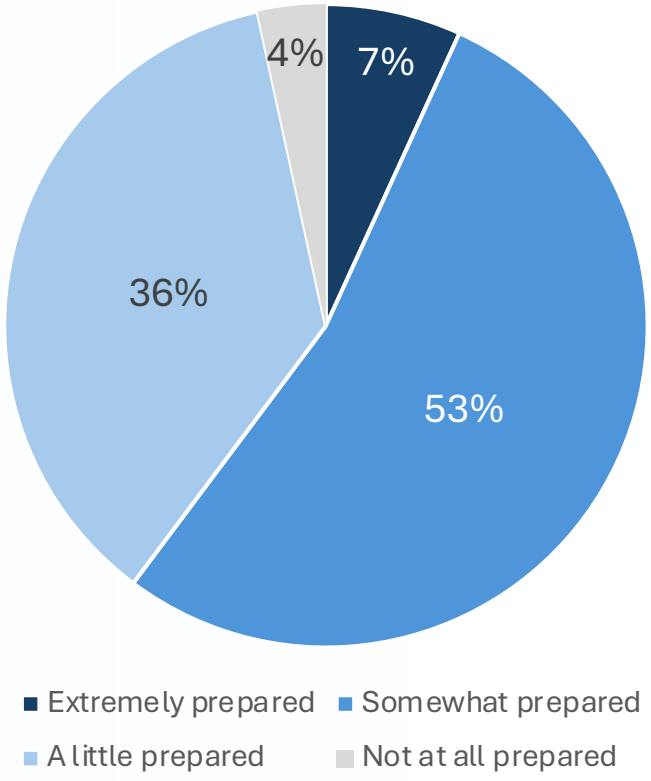
Priority



65% of respondents are extremely or somewhat concerned about **grid data management**

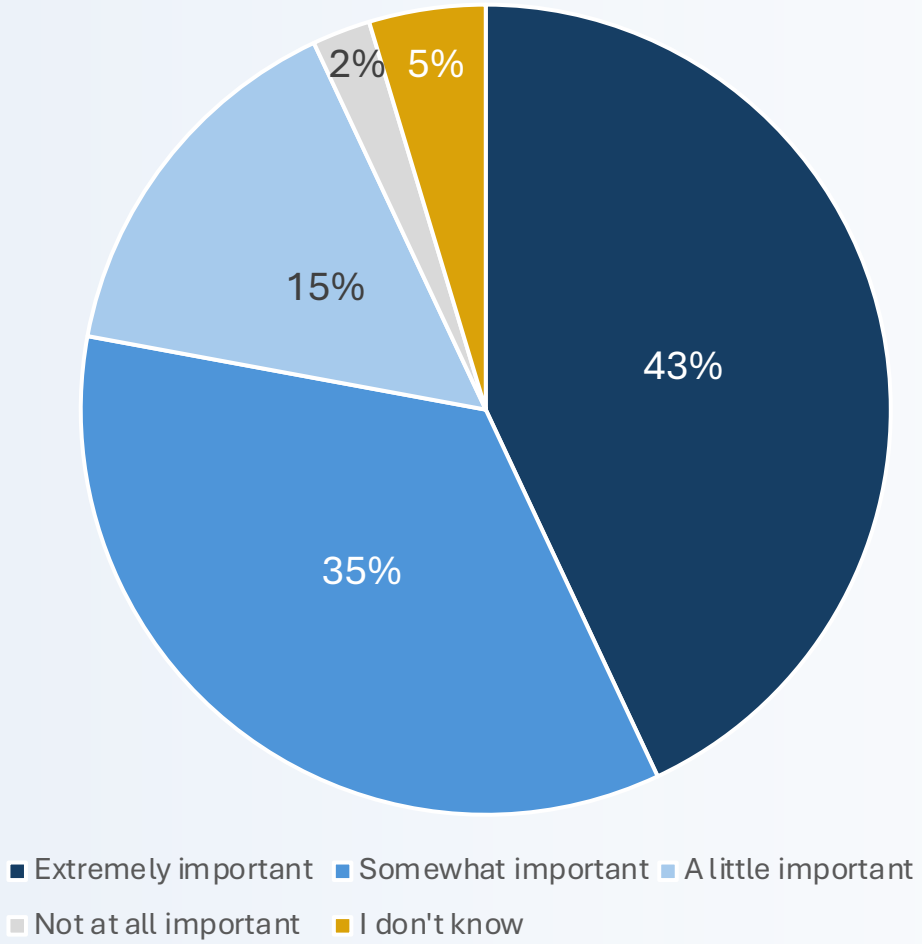
Only 7% are extremely prepared for it

Preparedness



Grid Data Interoperability

Delivering the right insights across devices, systems and vendors

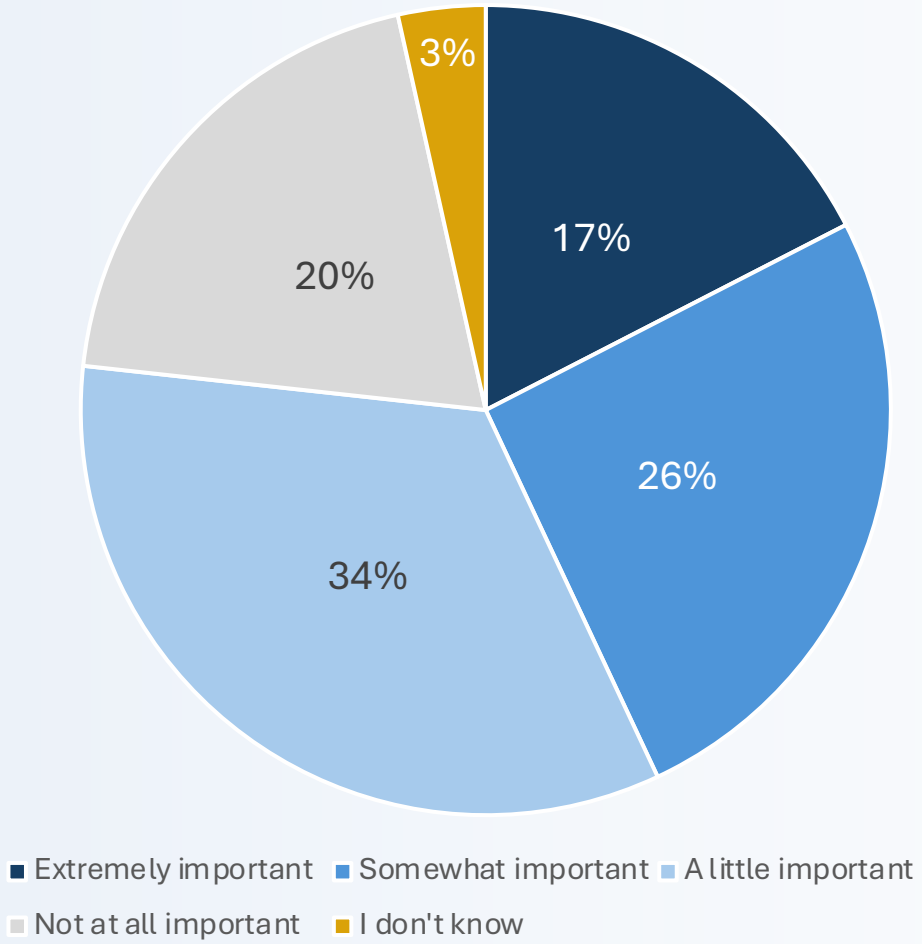


78% of respondents say that **grid data interoperability** across devices, systems and vendors is somewhat or extremely important

This underscores the importance of a **data-centric approach** to grid modernization

Behind-the-Meter Visibility: A Mixed Priority

Not every utility values BTM insights the same way



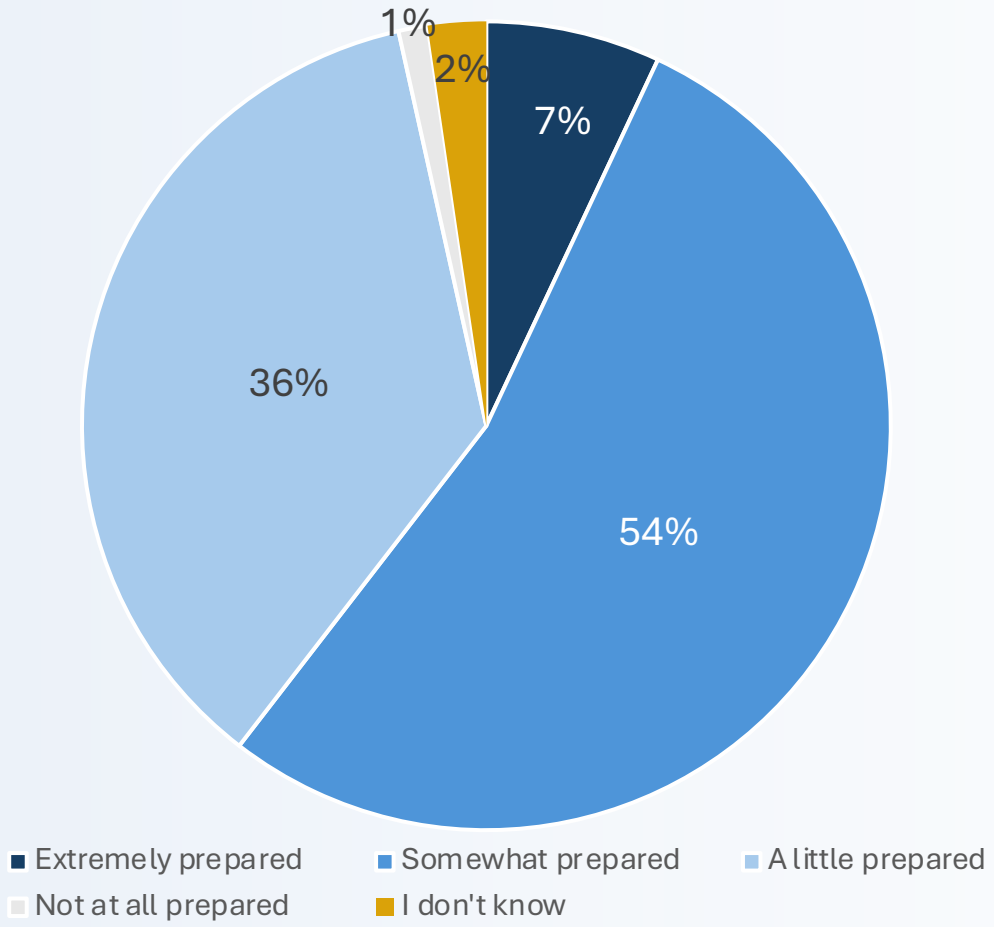
BTM visibility, command and control is somewhat or extremely important to 43% of respondents

Yet **BTM visibility also supports** grid modernization, reliability and resilience, which were **top-rated priorities**

This suggests that not all utilities see the connection

Preparedness for Future Load Demand

Still work to be done



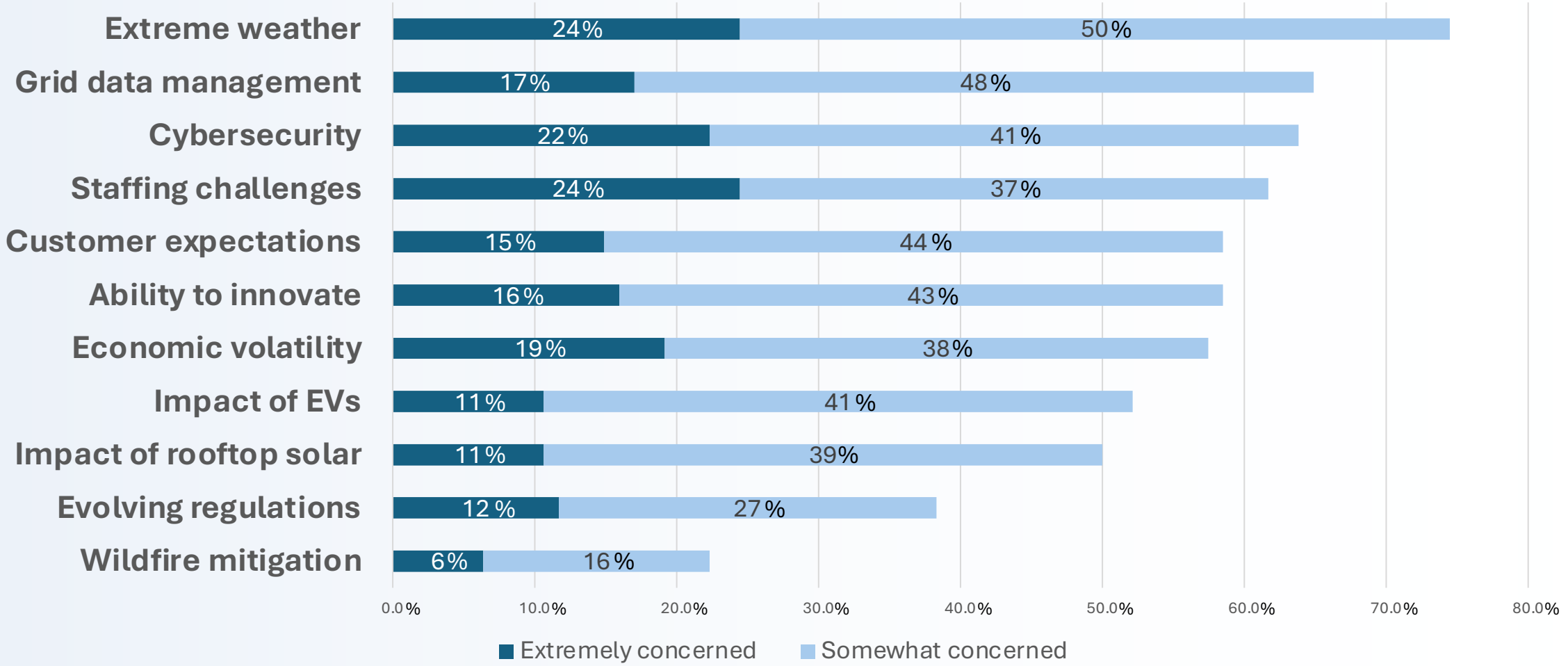
54% of respondents feel somewhat prepared to handle **future load demand**

But only 7% are extremely prepared

Clearly, there is still work to be done

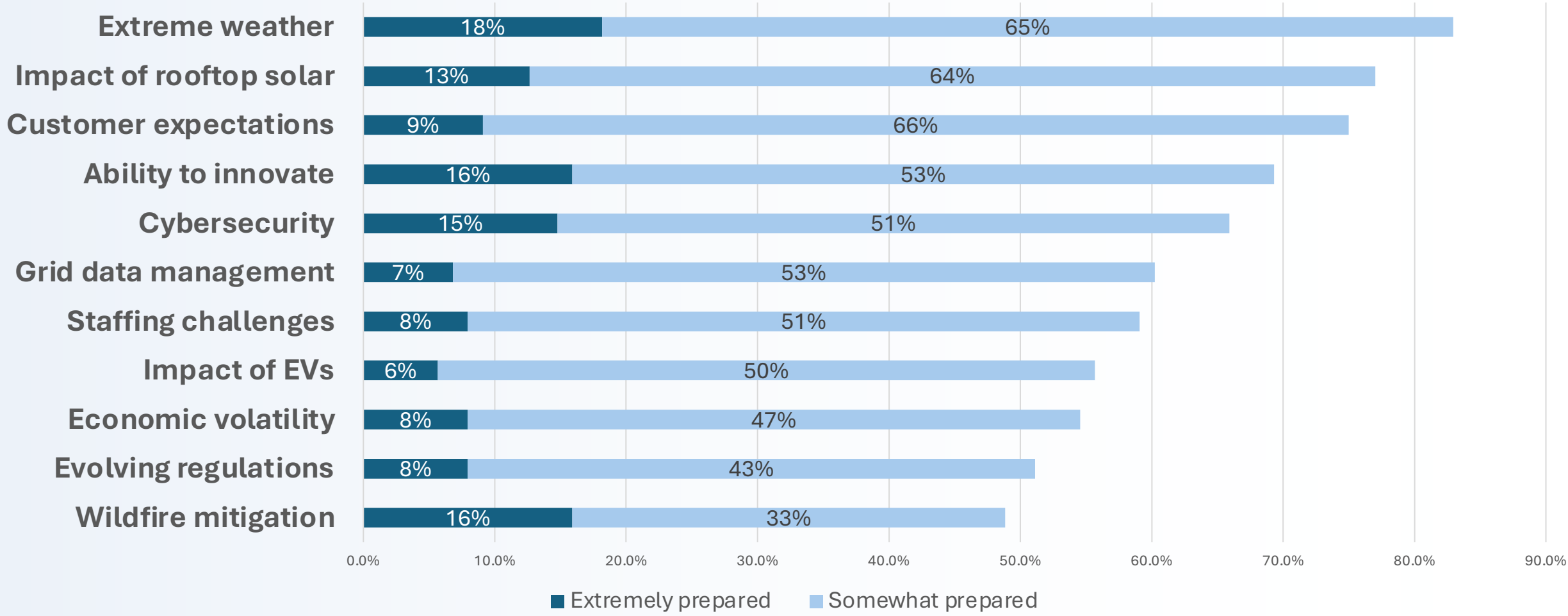
Top Concerns

From most concerned to least concerned, by percentage



Level of Preparedness

From most prepared to least prepared, by percentage



Concerns vs. Preparedness for What's Ahead

Overall, utilities reported higher levels of preparedness than concern for each challenge, *except for* …

Grid data management

65% are extremely or somewhat **concerned** about it

60% are extremely or somewhat **prepared** for it

Staffing challenges

61% are extremely or somewhat **concerned** about it

59% are extremely or somewhat **prepared** for it

Economic volatility

57% are extremely or somewhat **concerned** about it

55% are extremely or somewhat **prepared** for it

Closing Observations

What this year's survey results tell us

Grid modernization is even more of a priority in 2026 than 2025.
Utilities have made progress overall, but there's more work to do.

Many feel caught between the need to control costs and upgrade infrastructure.
It's hard to know when and where to spend money, and on which challenges.

That's why it's so important to take a data-centric approach to grid modernization,
one that embraces data interoperability as a core design principle.

It's critical to deliver the right insights from the right device to the right application,
no matter where the underlying data originates.

Only then can utilities boost their reliability and resilience
and modernize their infrastructure where it matters most.

Only then can utilities chart their *own* path to grid modernization
in a way that works for *them*.

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