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“Culture wars” in the UK

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Executive summary



Executive summary

Debate about the supposed emergence of “culture wars” in the UK has exploded in recent years, accompanied by concerns that the country may be headed in a similar direction to the US, hugely polarised and divided.

Through a review of academic literature, national and international surveys in partnership with Ipsos MORI, media content analysis and latent class analysis, this study provides insights into:

- The origins of culture wars as a concept and how the debate about them is now being conducted and shaped in the UK.
- Public awareness of this debate and terms commonly used in it.
- How divided the UK is seen to be, and how perceptions of divisions and tensions compare with those in other countries.
- What the public think about the issues that are often drawn into the UK’s culture war debate.
- How much conflict these issues are actually generating, and how people’s positions on them may be colouring their views of important and relevant facts.
- The different groups taking part (or not) in these cultural battles.

The concept and language of culture wars originated in the US in the 1990s

- It described tensions that emerged between “orthodox” and “progressive” worldviews around that time, but is often traced back to cultural transformations that began in the 1960s.
- Yet researchers generally hold that shifting cultural debates cannot be seen solely as a simple bottom-up movement, led by public opinion, beliefs and expression. The way that political parties and the media engage in these debates also plays a role in growing division.
- For James Davison Hunter, the sociologist who popularised the concept, a culture war signalled much more than just disagreement – it was about a conflict “over the meaning of America”, and denoted two irreconcilable views about what is “fundamentally right and wrong about the world we live in”.

There has been a huge surge in media discussion of “culture wars” in the UK

- Our analysis reveals that the number of UK newspaper articles focusing on the existence or nature of culture wars in the country has gone from just 21 in 2015 to 534 in 2020.
- And last year, there were twice as many UK articles about our home-grown culture wars than American ones, despite the US experiencing the most divisive presidential election in living memory.

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But it's less clear that the public are as interested or engaged in the debate

- Majorities say they have at least a little awareness of some key concepts in the culture wars debate – but when it comes to others, most people know very little or nothing about them:
 - The UK public are as likely to think being “woke” is a compliment (26%) as they are to think it’s an insult (24%) – and are in fact most likely to say they don’t know what the term means (38%).
 - 72% report they have either never heard of the term “microaggressions” or have heard of them but know very little, while 61% say the same about both “cancel culture” and “identity politics”, and 54% are similarly unaware of “trigger warnings”.
 - A major exception is “white privilege”: 82% of the public say they’ve heard at least a little about this term, including 55% who say they’ve heard a lot about it – by far the most widely known concept of those asked about.
- When people are asked to describe, in their own words, what sorts of issues the term “culture wars” makes them think of, by far the most common response is that it doesn’t make them think of any (43%).

- And only tiny minorities associate culture wars with many of the sorts of issues that have been prominent in UK media coverage of this area: just over 1% link the term to the Black Lives Matter movement or debates over transgender issues, while under 1% make a connection to the removal of statues, for instance.

There is a perception that the UK’s culture war divisions are exaggerated, but also still a real issue

- 73% think the media often makes the country feel more divided than it really is, and 44% believe politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic.
- Yet half (51%) disagree that culture wars only exist in the media and social media, not real life, compared with just 12% who agree and a quarter (27%) who don’t have a view.
- 44% think culture wars are a serious problem for UK society and politics, although 34% neither agree nor disagree that this is the case.
- Half the country (51%) think the UK is currently the most divided it’s been during their lifetime – but a similar proportion (44%) have a less negative view. This includes 30% of the public who say we have been through divided times like this before, and 14% who believe divisions were worse in the past.
- The UK is still behind the US when it comes to perceived tensions between different groups in society:
 - 90% of people in the US think there is a great deal or fair amount of tension between people who support different political parties – compared with 70% who say the same in Britain.

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- There is a similar divide in views when it comes to perceived tensions between those who have more socially liberal values and those with more traditionalist values (85% vs 67%).
- But on some other tensions, there is less of a gap between the two nations:
 - 78% of people in the US think there is tension between immigrants and those born in the country, compared with 72% of Britons who say the same.
 - And people in both the US (63%) and Britain (62%) are virtually equally likely to say there is tension between people from different religions.

Real tensions are reflected in very different views of equal rights, cultural change and class

- The public are split on whether the UK's culture is changing too fast (35%) or whether it's not (32%) – but Conservative (54%) and Leave supporters (57%) are more than twice as likely as their Labour (23%) and Remain (20%) counterparts to feel this way.
- 24% of the public say when it comes to giving Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups equal rights with white people, things have gone far enough in the UK – but this rises to 45% among Leave supporters, almost four times the proportion of Remainers (12%) who feel the same.

- 18% of the population overall believe equal rights between women and men have gone far enough in the UK, with Conservatives (28%) around twice as likely as Labour supporters (13%) to agree with this view.
- And despite a greater focus on the UK's *cultural* divides in recent times, the public are still more likely than not to say the country is more divided by class than it was 20 years ago – 48% think this is the case, compared with 22% who believe class-based divisions have reduced. Labour supporters (58%) are also more likely than Conservatives (38%) to feel we're now more divided by class.

The public are largely pro-free speech and anti-political correctness, and don't feel particularly reluctant to discuss controversial cultural issues

- Half of the UK public (50%) disagree that “no-platforming” is the right response to speakers with controversial views, compared with one in six (17%) who are in favour of such a response and one in four (24%) who don't take a position.
- 62% agree that “political correctness has gone too far” – three times the 19% who disagree.
- Looking internationally, out of 28 countries, the British public emerge as the most likely to think that people are too easily offended. We tend to come in the middle of the pack on most specific issues, but stand out in our suspicion of “political correctness”.
- Most people say they wouldn't feel reluctant to share their views on key culture war issues with colleagues or classmates – even ones that are potentially controversial. For example, of all the issues asked about, the public are least prepared to talk about trans rights in such a situation – but two-thirds (65%) are still willing to share their views on the issue, compared with one in five (21%) who say they're reluctant to do so.

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- And even more people say they'd be willing to discuss immigration (80%) or the Black Lives Matter movement (76%).

Those who support more “liberal” or left-leaning sides of culture war debates tend to say they have the most difficulty getting along with their opponents

- 35% of Labour supporters say it would be hard to be friends with people who vote Conservative – five times the proportion of Conservative supporters (7%) who say the same about those who vote Labour.
- 55% of Black Lives Matter supporters say it's hard to be friends with someone who opposes BLM, compared with 26% of BLM opponents who say the reverse.
- When asked to score their feelings towards the other side out of 100 – with 100 the “warmest” feeling, and 0 the “coldest” – Remainers rate their feelings towards Leavers at 29 out of 100, while Leavers give Remain voters a much “warmer” rating of 42 out of 100.

But those who support more “traditional” or right-leaning sides of these debates tend to be less correct on important facts related to them

- 77% of BLM supporters correctly identify that Black African, Caribbean or Black British employees earned around 9% less than their White counterparts in 2018. BLM opponents are almost half as likely to think this is the case, with 39% believing it's true.

- 42% of Conservative supporters correctly identify that, among the 35 richest countries globally, the UK had one of the highest death rates from Covid-19 at the time of the study, compared with 60% of Labour supporters who recognise this fact.
- 79% of those who support the expansion of trans rights rightly recognise that trans people are twice as likely to be the victim of a crime as the population as a whole. Among those who think trans rights have gone too far, a much smaller proportion – 33% – think this is the case.

Overall, in the UK's culture war debate, the public divide into four groups, not two warring tribes

- Our analysis shows the country is made up of four groups of people with distinct positions on issues that are often drawn into the UK's supposed culture war: Traditionalists (26% of the population), the Disengaged (18%), Moderates (32%) and Progressives (23%).
- This means half of the UK belong to groups who are either disengaged from debates about culture war issues or have comparatively moderate views about them, despite more extreme positions often generating the most public and political attention.
- Whether these two middle groups shift – and in which direction – on relevant high-profile issues could have implications for how political parties engage with culture change debates to consolidate or expand their supporter base.

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What does this all mean?

- While the language of culture wars has taken hold in the UK media, with an assumption that such conflicts are now an accepted reality, the public are much less convinced: most people are not particularly animated by many of these issues, and many take a middle position or are not engaged.
 - This mirrors how culture wars took off in the US – they were to some extent influenced by political and media “elites”. But there are crucial differences with America – for example, there is (as yet) no comparable political identity to the Republican/Democratic identity that splits the UK population to such an extent. Britons are also much less likely than Americans to say their country is divided by culture wars, and to feel that there is tension between people who support different political parties and between people with different social and cultural values.
 - But those who identify with one of the two main parties in the UK, or with a side in the Brexit debate, do show very large differences on some cultural perspectives, and it does seem to be a possible basis to build intractable political divisions based on broad cultural identities, particularly if there is top-down encouragement of cultural division, from any side.
 - We should be concerned about this while also not overstating the case for growing division: it is vital to recognise that there is always cultural tension on emergent issues, an effect of generational replacement, where younger cohorts socialised in different contexts continually drive cultural change – a type of “demographic metabolism” that keeps society from stagnating.
- There is nothing in the long-term data to suggest that the gap between current generations of young people and older generations on today’s emergent issues are particularly different from the gaps seen between these two groups in past decades on previous emergent issues.
 - The greater sense of division is therefore likely to be driven mainly by “period effects” – the current context – where a more divisive political, media and social media environment amplifies extreme views and differences. This means that we don’t need large parts of the population participating to feel like we’re in a culture war between two large, coherent, opposing blocs.

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What should we do?

- Political leaders should be looking for appeals that connect worldviews, rather than divide. The US provides a vital case study in how the left playing to a “coalition of the ascendent” – of younger, more culturally progressive generations – and the right focusing attention on the extreme positions of “campus politics”, ends in fractious division, not a decisive majority.
- Civil society needs to be supported in providing sites for real-world connections across divides: we know that real-life contact, in the right settings, reduces the sense of division.
- Similarly, our highly centralised political environment encourages these sweeping divides, and more devolved and deliberative decision-making that brings the public into or closer to debates – and each other – should be expanded.
- Finally, as recognised by a number of reviews, it is difficult to avoid the need to appeal to a sense of duty and virtue in political leaders to cool things down rather raise the temperature further, and we ourselves must get better at recognising when we’re being targeted through culture war issues (practising an “identity mindfulness” in Ezra Klein’s terms) – although this is clearly difficult to achieve when many political and media incentives work in the other direction.



1. What are culture wars?

The language of “culture wars” first emerged in the US

The language of “culture wars” was first popularised by James Davison Hunter in the early 1990s to describe the deep-seated tension that had emerged in America between “orthodox” and “progressive” worldviews. For Hunter (1991), the term not only captured a political struggle over cultural issues, but “a heightened awareness of culture itself and those who seek to shape it” – a conflict “over the meaning of America”.

The term quickly took hold after it was used by Patrick Buchanan in a speech to the 1992 Republican National Convention, who framed the “cultural war” as a “struggle for the soul of America”. Use of the term quickly gained traction in the media after this point (Thomson, 2010), portraying an antagonism between two visions of the future of America: “one fiercely upholding traditional values, and the other enthusiastically welcoming modernity” (Wolfe, 1998).

Many scholars trace the genesis of culture wars narrative to the cultural transformations that began in the 1960s, with liberation movements calling for recognition of identity and injustices faced by marginalised groups, and challenging norms around sex, family, patriotism and war (Hartman, 2019)

The relationship between culture and religion is often drawn into this debate. Indeed, Putnam & Campbell (2010) find an increasing alignment of religiosity and politics in America, with attitudes to key culture wars issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage being the “glue that holds religiosity and partisanship together”, regardless of denomination. Yet it should be noted that Putnam & Campbell – along with others such as Wolfe (1998) – challenge the idea that religion itself is the source of cultural tension in the US.

More generally, the extent to which “culture wars” reflects the experiences of the average American has been widely challenged (Fiorina, 2010).

“America is in the midst of a culture war that has had and will continue to have reverberations not only within public policy but within the lives of ordinary Americans everywhere. In understanding the character of this conflict, we ... see that important differences often separate the personal from the public. ... Personal disagreements that fire the culture war are deep and perhaps unreconcilable. But these differences are often intensified and aggravated by the way they are presented in public.”

– Hunter, 1991: p. 34

The state of the US culture wars now

The history of culture wars in the US illustrates that culture war issues come and go: as Thomson (2010) observes, once consensus is built, such as on premarital sex or women working – both issues that were salient in 1960s but now largely resolved – other issues, such as same-sex marriage, take their place.

That said, over time partisan groups have become more internally homogeneous, resulting in a Democratic party that is more clearly liberal and a Republican party that is clearly conservative, with a dramatic increase in separation between the late 1970s and mid-1990s (Fiorina, 2017).

These identities are increasingly observed as having implications for social relations and behaviours. Americans increasingly say they distance themselves from opposing partisans, be it in greater warmth of feeling to political in-groups over out-groups or their preferences to be friends with, live next door to, socialise with or marry members of their ingroup over members of their outgroup (Iyengar et al., 2019).

Defining culture wars

A “culture war” signals much more than disagreement. In Hunter’s conception, it describes a sense of conflict between two irreconcilable worldviews in what is “fundamentally right and wrong about the world we live in” (1991). Throughout this literature, we see culture wars being used to describe a struggle for securing the prominence of a particular worldview in the future of the country.

Culture wars tend to be described as being fought on one or more “fault lines”. This is often measured by observing attitudinal polarisation towards issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and gun control, which tend to have either a strong moral or values basis, or capture changing norms.

But positions on such issues are only a proxy for the underlying phenomenon. To constitute a culture war, cultural issues must not only be salient, but any shared foundation of ideals or worldview broken down. For Thomson (2010), this would represent more than disagreement: “A society experiencing a culture war would face grave difficulties. It would lack common standards and assumptions. ... Indeed, a society without such common ground could barely function.”

“If middle-class America is as morally divided as so many accounts from all across the political spectrum would have it, we all lose. For then, our future as a nation will be marked by incessant conflicts between irreconcilable worldviews, raising the prospect that the democratic stability that has kept the country together since the Civil War will no longer be attainable.”

– Wolfe, 1998: p. 15

The US story points to the importance of elite cues

Since the early 1990s, research on the US culture wars has found mixed results about the prevalence of polarisation in society overall (Wolfe, 1998; Hetherington, 2009; Campbell, 2016). But there is clear agreement on the fact that polarisation is endemic among political elites and the media – and that it is those highly-polarised elites who help to drive the culture wars agenda. In fact, even before the term came into wider use, Hunter (1991) observed how culture war debates were often “intensified” and “aggravated” in how they are presented in public.

Fiorina (2010) argued that journalists in the US are over-exposed to the political class, which results in a selection of more colourful, unusual stories being represented in debates, rather than more moderate positions held by the public; and that this over-representation to the political class contributed to the myth of widespread polarisation in the US. According to Fiorina, culture war reporting is “wishful thinking and useful fundraising strategies on the part of culture war guerrillas, abetted by a media driven by the need to make the dull and everyday appear exciting and unprecedented”.

Elusive foundations for competing worldviews in the UK

Part of what has sustained and intensified culture wars debates in the US is that identity and attitudes have become highly “sorted”. In *Uncivil Agreement*, Lilliana Mason (2018) observes that party affiliation not only predicts someone’s ideological and cultural values, but is also a strong predictor of their religion, race, ethnicity, gender and the type of neighbourhood they live in. This sorting of partisanship into a “mega-identity” has deep implications. As Klein (2020) notes, “when you activate one [identity] you often activate all, and each time they’re activated, they strengthen”.

By contrast, there is a much weaker sense of political identity in the UK today than there is in the US. The electorate in the UK has been increasingly fragmented in its economic and cultural worldview and “untethered from political parties” (SurrIDGE, 2021) – and this lack of consolidation around an identity is part of what makes it so complicated to study polarisation in the UK (Duffy et al., 2019)

The affective divides that quickly formed around “Leavers” and “Remainers” in the run-up and aftermath of the EU Referendum in 2016 (Hobolt et al., 2020) are often said to better represent the cultural divide in the UK than traditional party identities. As Sobolewska & Ford (2020) argue in *Brexitland*, Brexit was merely a “moment of awakening” in giving expression to identity conflicts that had existed for a number of decades between “conviction liberals”, “necessity identity liberals” and “identity conservatives”.

Similarly, in *Britain’s Choice*, More in Common (2020) identify seven distinct values groups in Britain, which “come together in different formations depending on the issue at hand”.

“The history of the culture wars, often misremembered as merely one angry shouting match after another, offers insight into the genuine transformation to American political culture that happened during the sixties... The radical political mobilizations of the sixties – civil rights, Black and Chicano Power, feminism, gay liberation, the anti-war movement, the legal push for secularization – destabilized the America that millions knew.”

– Hartman, 2019: pp. 2–4

Culture war debates as flashpoints for shifts in norms and shared values

The language of culture wars offers a clear signal of irresolvable conflict. Yet, in reality, it is rarely a zero sum game. Indeed, out of these cultural struggles we might expect to see a shift in norms and shared values as a result.

In US, this has been a gradual shift towards more liberal norms. As Hartman (2019) observes, while the progressive movements of the 1960s did not achieve their goals in an absolute sense, in ending war or inequalities for marginalised groups, they did nudge American values towards a more liberal position, particularly on issues such as discrimination and norms around family life and sex.

And while the foundations of cultural division are far from clear in the UK, there has been a profound change in the issues on which the conflict is fought – much as there has been in the US. Curran et al. (2019) trace the shift from coverage of the progressive policies of London Labour Councils in the 1980s around racial and gender inequalities, and gay rights, as policies of the “Loony Left”, to eventually becoming part of the political mainstream in early 2000s. These flashpoints come and go, but history has shown that after conflict can come consensus on individual issues, while new divisive issues emerge.



2. Culture wars in the UK media

There has been an explosion in UK media coverage of culture wars in recent years

There has been a huge surge in media coverage mentioning “culture wars” in recent years, with 808 articles published in UK newspapers talking about culture wars anywhere in the world in 2020 – up from 106 in 2015.

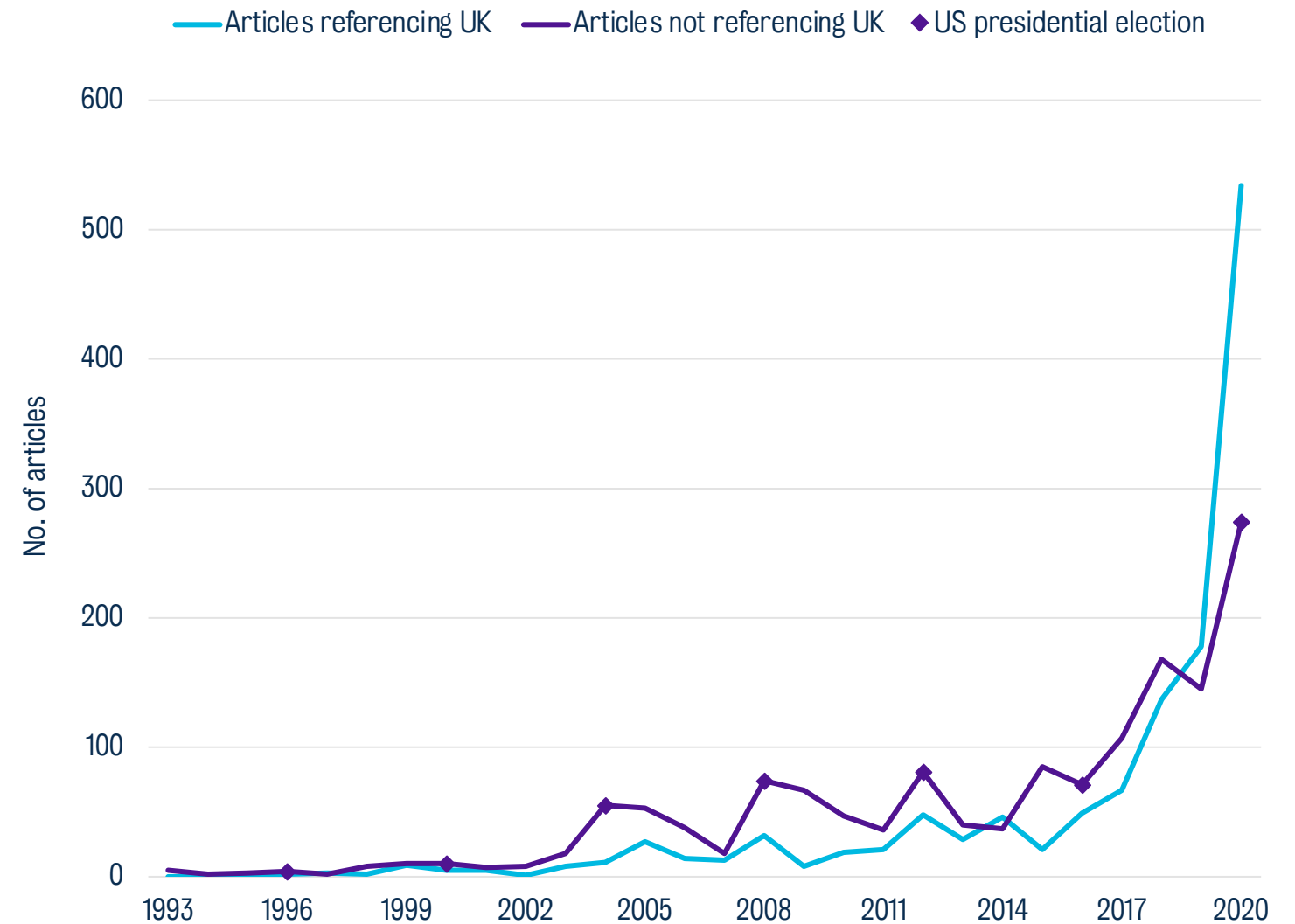
Even more strikingly, the number of articles focusing on the existence or nature of culture wars in the UK has gone from just 21 in 2015 to 534 in 2020.

When the term first appeared in UK newspapers, most articles related to culture wars in the US – and the influence of the US continued to be visible in the 2000s, with spikes in the number of reports mentioning culture wars following the American presidential election cycle.

Since the mid-2000s, the idea of UK specific culture wars began to gain some attention. And since 2016, coverage of the UK culture wars has taken off – surpassing the number of references to other countries in 2019 and becoming a term that has entered the journalistic vernacular to describe a wide range of cultural divides in the UK.

In recent years, use of the term in UK newspapers has also broadened in geographical scope beyond the US. Since 2015, Australia has also featured prominently, as did Brazil after the 2018 election. And there is growing discussion about culture wars across Europe, particularly in France, Italy, Ireland, Germany, Turkey and Poland.

Number of articles mentioning “culture wars” in UK newspapers, by those referencing the UK or other countries



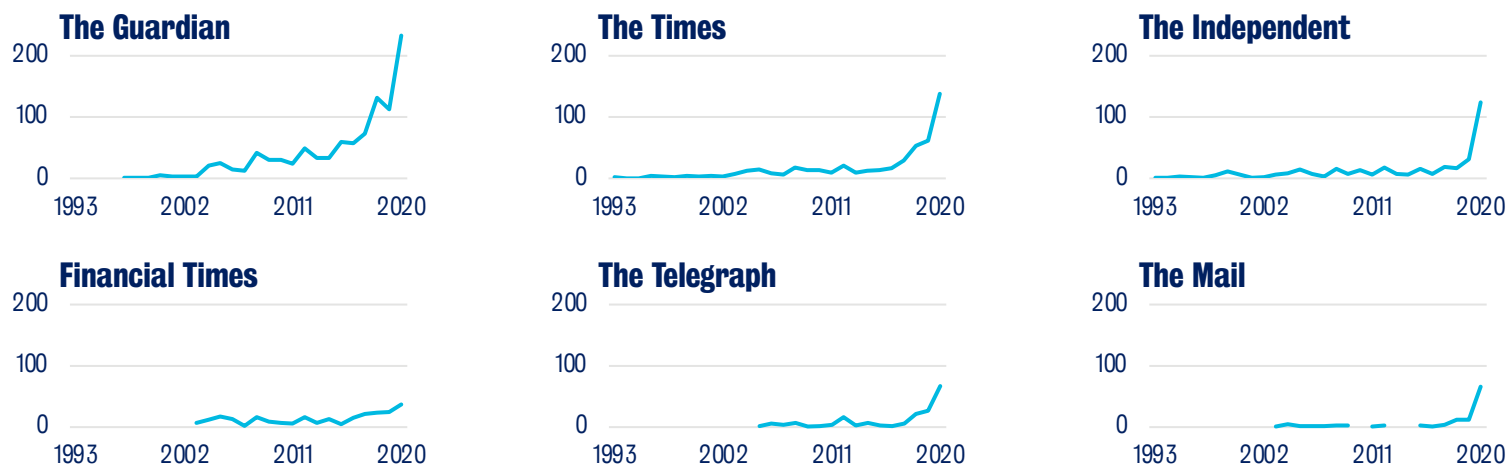
Source: Nexis (n=2,762). Country of focus primarily identified by headline; where it was not possible to determine geography from the headline, the full text was checked to determine location. The count for articles referencing the UK also includes some articles where other countries are discussed alongside the UK.

The language of “culture wars” has appeared in all major national newspapers – but in some much more than others

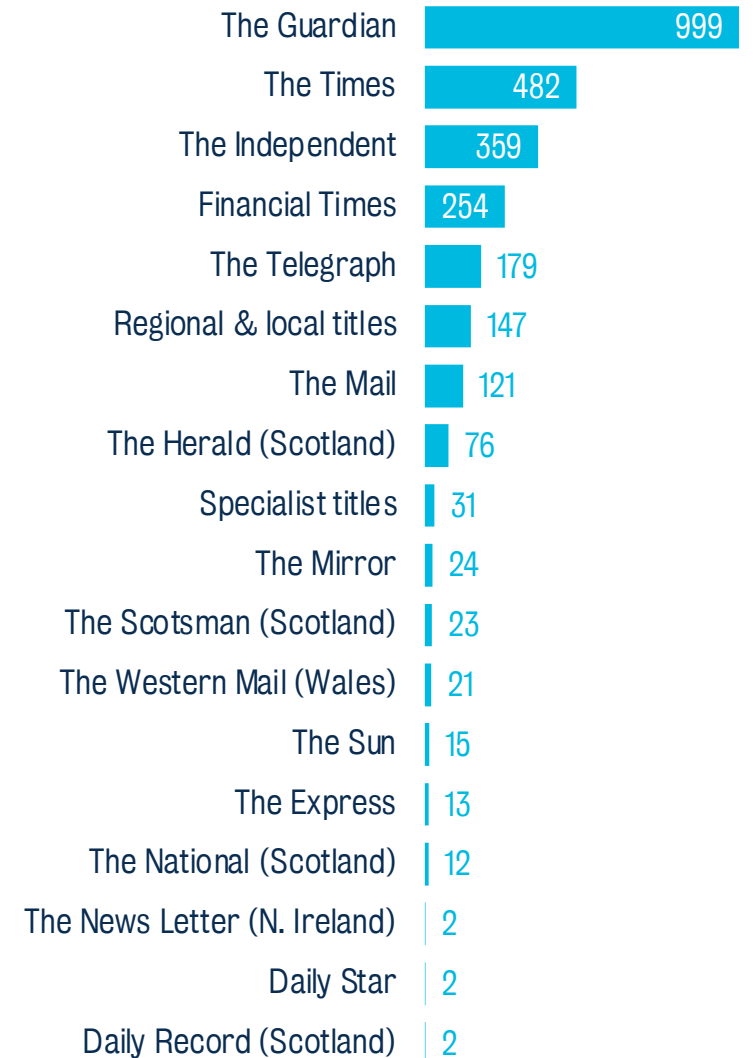
The Guardian comes top among all UK newspapers for mentions of “culture wars”, with the term appearing in 999 articles published between 1993 and 2020. The Times, which comes second for mentions of the term, used it in less than half as many (482), and the other national broadsheets – the Independent (359), the FT (254) and the Telegraph (179) – follow. And while the Guardian was an early adopter of the term in reference to the UK, the earliest mentions of culture wars are found in the Independent and the Times in the early 1990s, in reference to divisions in the US.

2020 saw the number of reports mentioning “culture wars” more than double across almost all broadsheets, but the term began to take off in the tabloids too, with the Mail publishing 66 articles mentioning culture wars last year, compared with just 12 in 2019. More generally, even if not referring to culture wars explicitly, many tabloids still use affective language common in culture wars reporting – for example, describing society as being “torn apart”, which has appeared thousands of times during the same timeframe in titles that haven’t adopted the culture wars term, such as the Mirror, the Sun and the Express.

Number of articles mentioning “culture wars” over time, by title (1993-2020)



Number of articles mentioning “culture wars”, by title (1993–2020)



Source: Nexis (n=2,762); titles grouped from Nexis metadata. Titles include Sunday editions, supplements and online (eg Times Educational Supplement, Mail Online). Regional/local and specialist titles have been grouped.

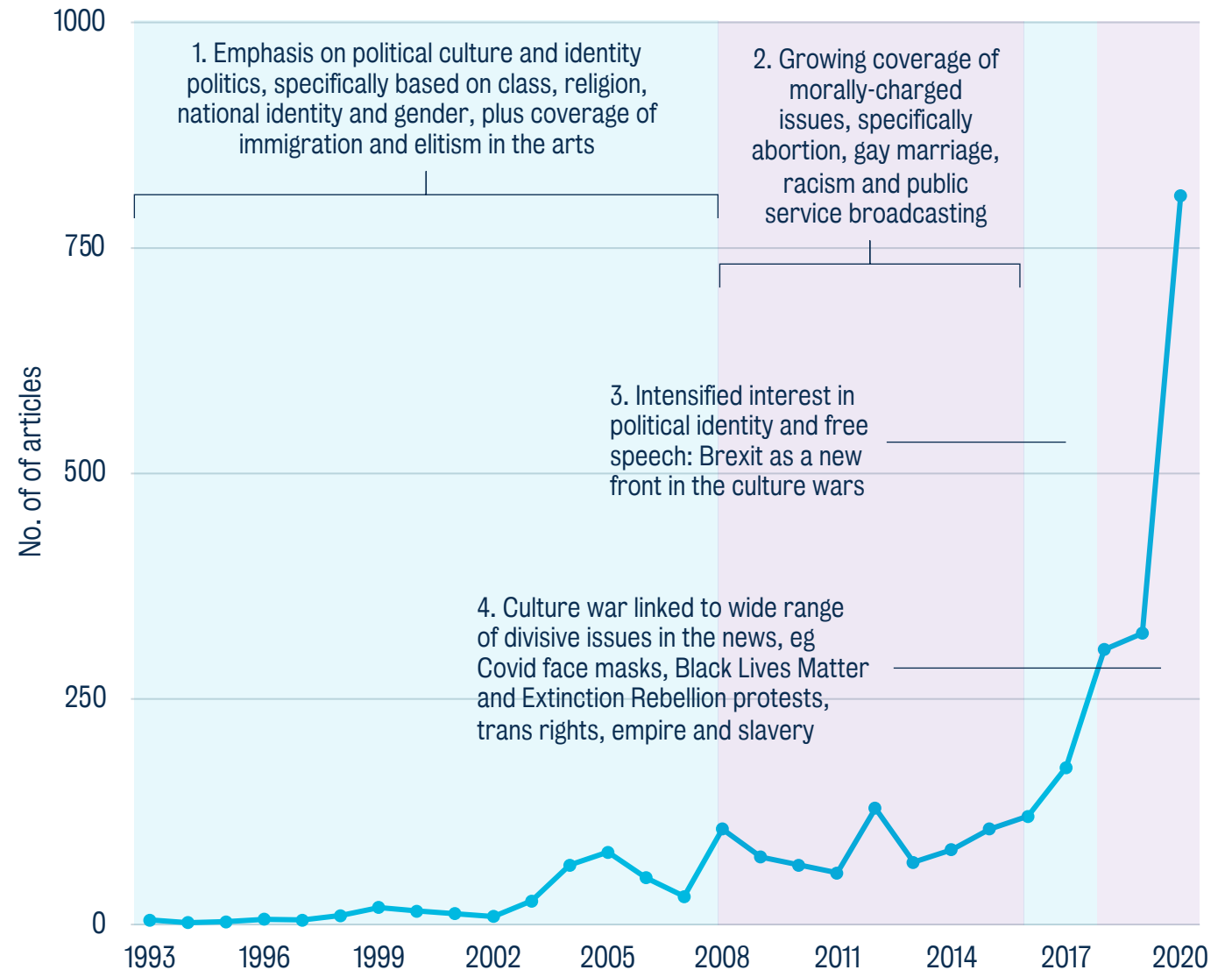
The subjects linked to culture wars in UK newspapers have broadened over time

During the 1990s and early 2000s, journalists mostly evoked the culture wars metaphor in reference to topics such as party or identity politics (particularly class, religion, national identity and gender), along with a small set of divisive topics such as immigration and elitism in the arts. But from 2008, the scope of topics associated with culture wars in the UK began to expand, with cornerstones of the US situation – abortion, gay rights and race – entering the debate.

Topics drawn into culture wars debates often mirror policy agendas. For example, articles linking gay rights to the UK culture wars peaked with the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2012 and received substantially less coverage thereafter. Focus on political divides increased sharply around the time of the EU referendum in 2016. And the recent spike in coverage of trans rights emerged as reforms to the Gender Recognition Act 2004 were being considered by government.

But since 2018, the language of “culture wars” has been a magnet for a wide range of issues: from views on lockdown to the removal of statues, from wearing a poppy or singing Rule Britannia to going vegan, any divisive topic is quickly dubbed a new “fault line” in the culture wars.

Expansion of issues associated with the UK’s culture wars in UK newspapers (1993–2020)



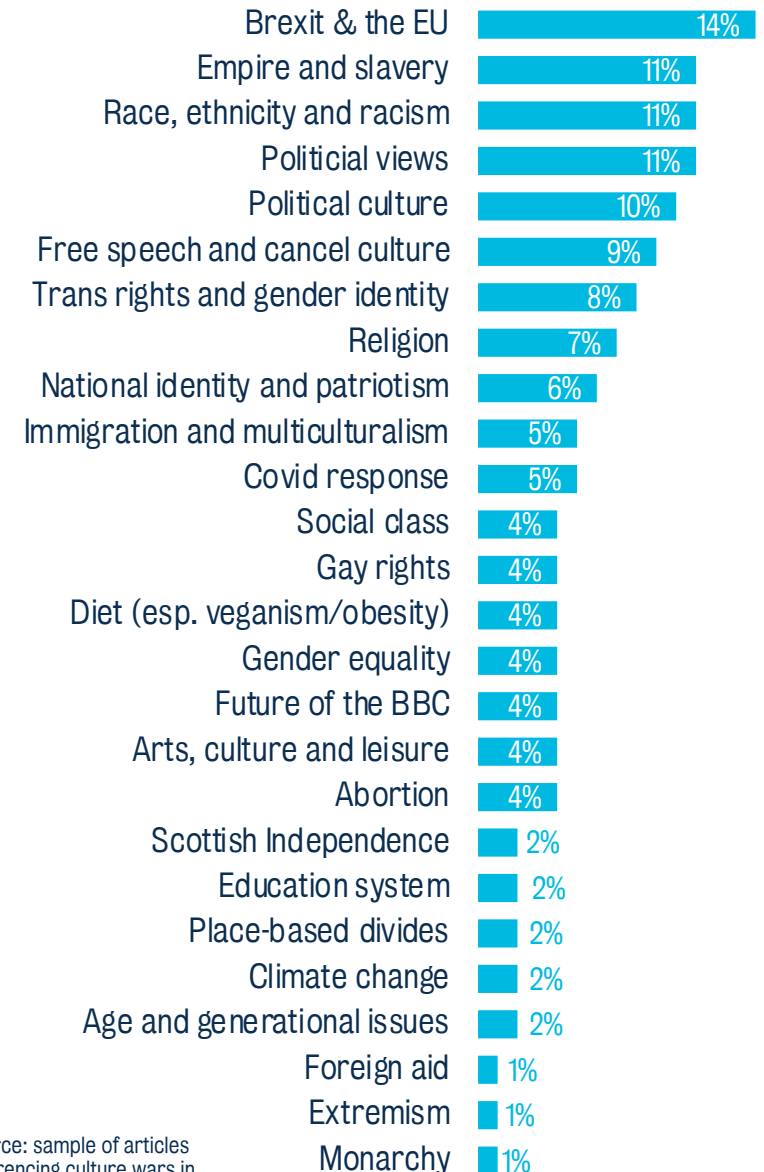
Source: Nexis (n=2,762). Labels generated from manual coding of 322 articles focused on the UK.

The issues that the UK media associate with culture wars

A wide range of issues have been drawn into the debate on culture wars in the UK. Based on close analysis of a quarter of all articles mentioning culture wars in the UK, we found:

- **Brexit and the EU** featured in roughly one in seven (14%) articles and almost half of those published in 2016, going on to receive double the amount of coverage as traditional party-political identities until 2019, when attention given to both started to diminish. Yet **political views** (particularly tensions between Labour and Conservative supporters) have been a staple of culture wars coverage, featuring in around one in nine (11%) reports.
- Other issues have clear triggering events – for example, the recent emphasis on **empire and slavery** (11%) and **race, ethnicity and racism** (11%), is often explicitly linked to the Black Lives Matter movement. Similarly, culture war debates about **trans rights and gender identity** (8%) peaked in 2019, around the time of consultations on reforms to the Gender Recognition Act, as did debates around restricting personal liberties in the government’s **coronavirus response** (5%) in 2020.
- There is also a notable focus on institutions. This is dominated by coverage of **political culture** (10%) – particularly politicians engaging in more adversarial political behaviour, identity politics or losing touch with the electorate – as well as issues around **free speech and cancel culture** (9%), which has largely centred around the no-platforming of speakers in universities and censorship in the media. The **future of the BBC** (4%) and **arts, culture and leisure** (4%) also have a recurring presence in culture war debates since the mid-2000s, with a focus on bias, elitism and trustworthiness.
- Some of the cornerstones of culture wars in the US, such as **abortion** (4%) and **climate change** (2%), attract less attention the UK – although there is slightly more focus on **religion** (7%), **national identity/patriotism** (6%) and **immigration/multiculturalism** (5%).

Issues associated with “culture wars” in UK media coverage, 1997–2020 (referenced in % of articles reviewed)



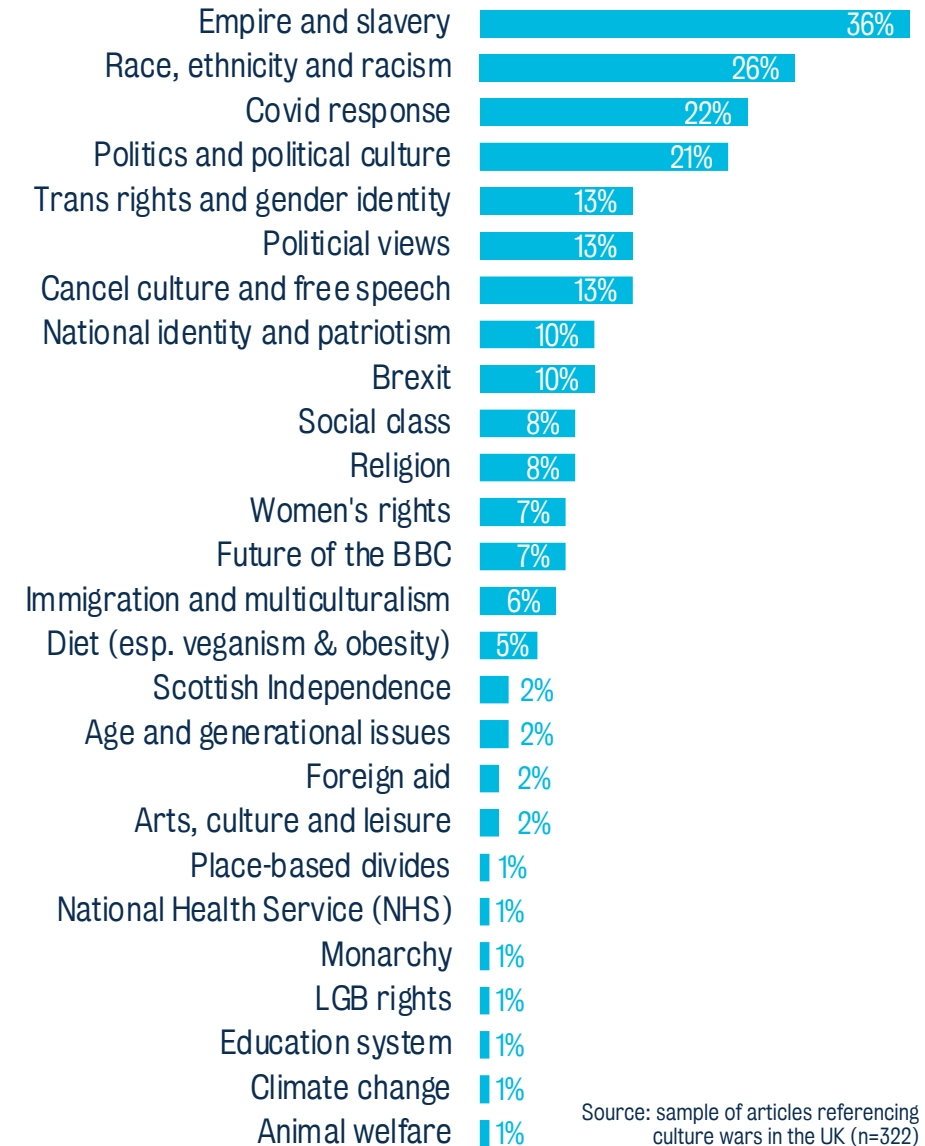
Source: sample of articles referencing culture wars in the UK (n=322)

The British empire and slavery were the issues most commonly linked to culture wars by the UK media in 2020

2020 saw a number of topics that received extensive coverage as culture war issues, with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and Covid restrictions as important triggering events. Subjects that dominated coverage include:

- **Empire and slavery** – mostly in reference to the removal of statues during or prompted by BLM protests, though with several articles engaging in a broader discussion about the representation of British history, particularly the country’s colonial past and links to the slave trade.
- **Race, ethnicity and racism** – largely linked to issues raised by the BLM protests in the UK, yet articles appeared independently on racist language, structural racism and cultural appropriation.
- **Covid** – dividing lines were primarily drawn around the public response to policies put in place by the government, such as lockdown (prompting widespread discussion on lockdown sceptics vs supporters) and mandating the wearing of face masks, as well as the breakdown of friendships over (non-)compliance with rules.
- **Politics** – triggering events are again linked to the government’s response to the pandemic, particularly reports of Covid rules being breached by senior officials, as well as the departure of Dominic Cummings from Downing Street. Many articles also highlighted politicians’ engagement in identity politics and combative political tactics, including the use of culture wars as a tactic for political gain.
- **Trans rights** – this continues to be an important narrative in culture wars since 2019, following consultation on reforms to the Gender Recognition Act 2004, but with a wide-ranging discussion around gender recognition, intolerance, debates around sex vs gender, misgendering and pronouns.

Issues associated with “culture wars” in UK media coverage in 2020 (referenced in % of articles reviewed)



Source: sample of articles referencing culture wars in the UK (n=322)

What makes an issue a “culture wars” issue?

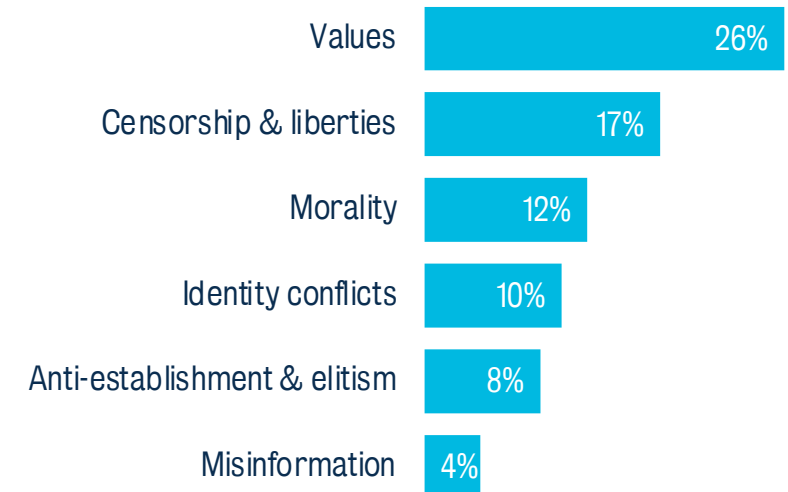
The connecting threads between articles evoking the term “culture wars” in the UK are less clear than in the US. Rather than consolidating around political identities, as has happened in the US, there are six connecting themes across the wide range of issues discussed in UK newspapers:

- **Values** are discussed in a range of ways, cutting across most topics – often through the lens of socially liberal vs socially conservative, left-wing vs right-wing economic values, or traditionalists vs progressives.
- **Censorship and liberties** such as inhibition of free speech, political correctness or censorship of cultural heritage tends to be linked to issues such as cancel culture in universities, the government’s Covid response and the arts.
- **Morality** and changing moral standards, particularly relating to intolerance, tend to be evoked more around identity politics, such as in articles on racism or trans rights, or issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage.
- **Identity conflicts** – from party and Brexit identity, to class, religion, gender and national identity – are most often associated with politics, but also appear in articles on race, national identity and immigration, as well as topics such as diet and the monarchy.
- **Anti-establishment and elitism** frames appear most often in articles on politics, where elites are seen to be driving resentment in the population overall. Some authors focus specifically on the role of populism, or antagonism between “metropolitan elites” and ordinary people.
- **Misinformation** is the overriding theme in many articles that seek to rebut culture wars claims, including the spreading of misinformation and exaggerated claims for political gain, or difficulties in discerning trustworthy sources.

“The Culture War today is deeply personal, it is about how we live our lives and our rights as individuals, which is why it is so rancorous. It is no longer about left versus right. It is difficult to pinpoint quite what it is about – authoritarianism versus liberalism, maybe, according to a liberal friend of mine. Or perhaps moral relativism versus moral absolutism. But it is also old versus young, urban versus rural, London versus the rest, tradition versus modernity, secular versus religious, and in some inchoate manner, self-defined victim versus person accused of being the oppressor ... Whatever, the Culture War is visceral: it is about who we are.”

– Rod Liddle (2018), the *Times*

Connecting themes across issues (% of articles reviewed, 1997–2020)



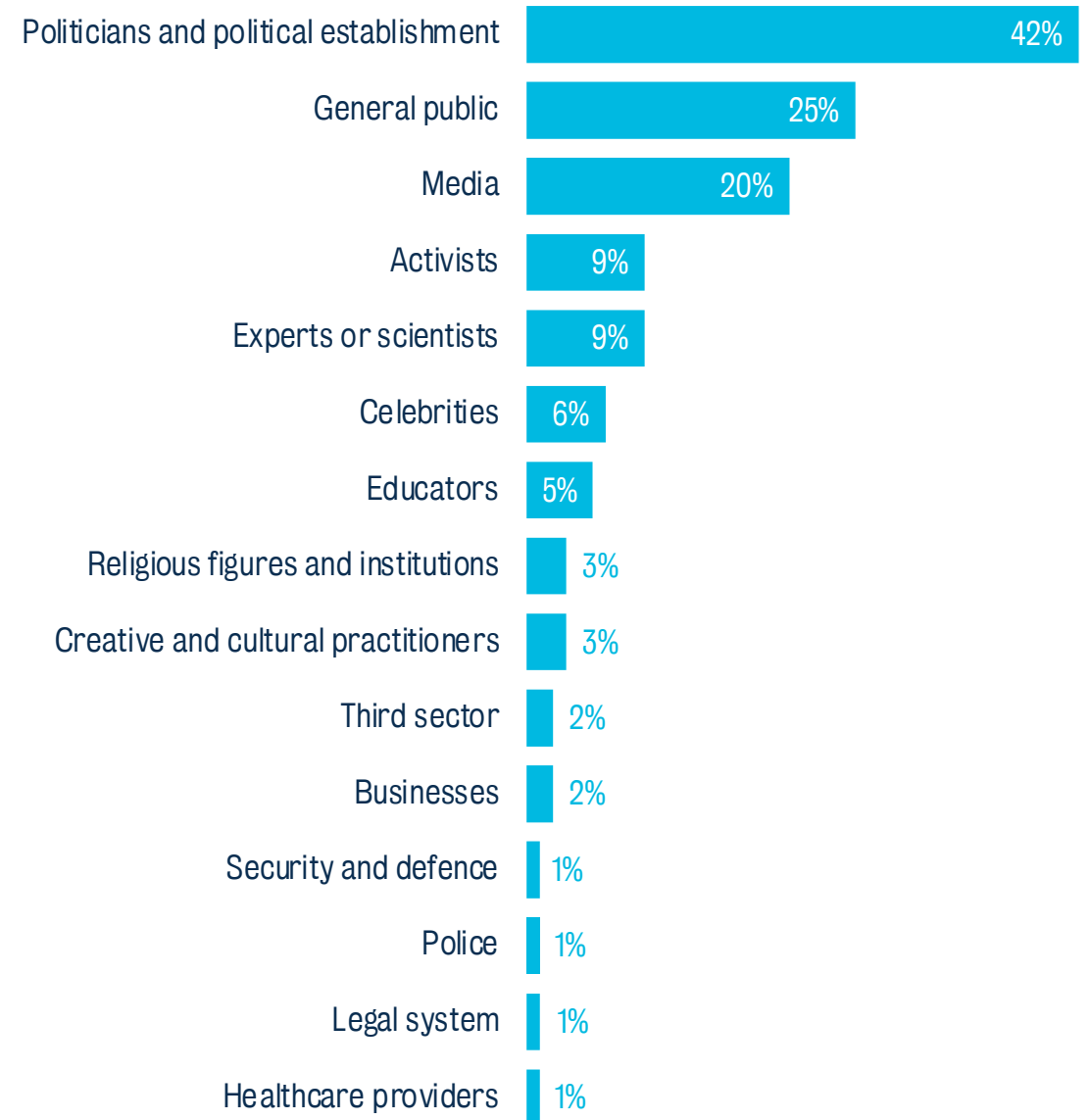
Source: sample of articles referencing culture wars in the UK (n=322)

Who is involved in the UK's culture wars?

Articles that use the language of “culture wars” refer to an array of individuals, groups or institutions who are portrayed as being implicated in, targeted or disadvantaged by the spread of culture wars in the UK. We refer to these groups as “protagonists”:

- By far, the most prominent protagonist is the **political establishment** (42%), encompassing Conservative (26%), Labour (11%) and Liberal Democrat MPs (2%), as well as members of the Scottish and Welsh governments, and political leaders from other countries.
- The **general public** feature in a quarter of articles (25%). Activity online is especially prominent (7%); yet various authors also explore the role of specific subgroups, be it by gender, race, age, sexuality, political views, religion, income and education level, among others.
- The **media** appear as a protagonist in one in five articles (20%). Much of this attention is focused on newspapers (10%), particularly right-leaning titles, and individual critics and commentators (5%). But notably, over a quarter of articles focusing on the role of the media single out the BBC (6%), whereas commercial broadcasters and social media platforms scarcely feature.
- There are a cluster of individuals portrayed as weighing in on culture wars debates, from **activists** (9%) fighting for race or gender equality, abortion, the environment or far-right/far-left movements to **experts or scientists** (9%) and **celebrities** (6%), such as actors, comedians, TV and sports personalities.
- Professional groups such as **educators** (5%), **religious figures** (3%), **creative and cultural practitioners** (3%) and the **third sector** (2%), among others, occasionally feature in relation to a specific controversy, but tend not to be portrayed as a group embroiled in the culture wars in general.

Protagonists in newspaper articles on culture wars, 1997–2020 (% of articles reviewed)



Source: sample of articles referencing culture wars in the UK (n=322). Protagonists not mentioned in 72/322 articles.

Culture wars as a top-down phenomenon

The media framing of the role that these protagonists play presents a picture of the culture wars in the UK as being primarily a top-down, elite-driven phenomenon.

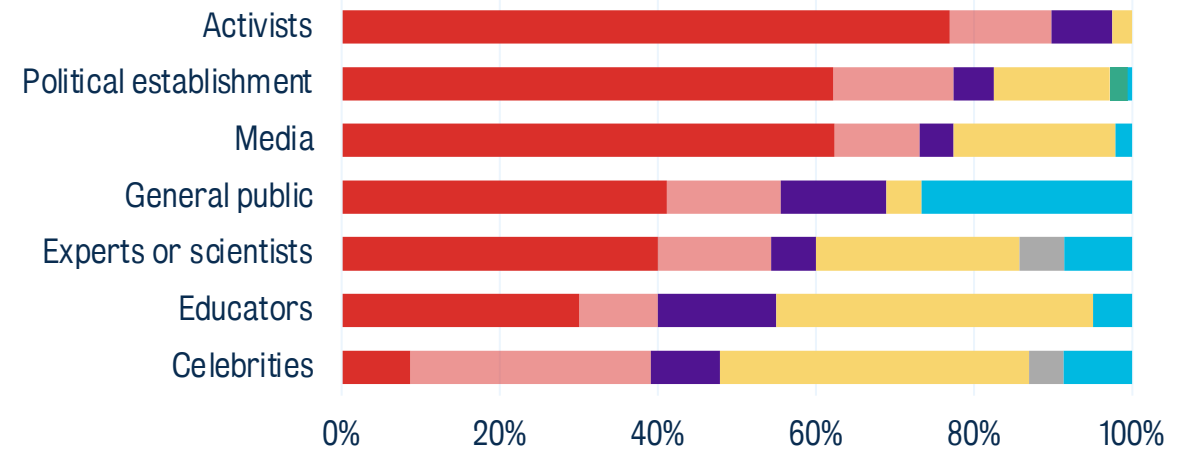
At one end of the spectrum are the actions of **activists**, who are unambiguously portrayed as deliberately seeking to stoke the debate or amplify culture war arguments with others.

At the other end of the spectrum are individuals such as **celebrities**, **educators** and **experts and scientists**, who are just as likely to be framed as being drawn into the culture war against their will or targeted by those pushing culture war narratives, as they are to be portrayed as stoking or amplifying them.

Similarly, roughly half of the references to members of the **general public** are framed as stoking or amplifying a culture war. But of all groups, the public are most likely to be portrayed as being disadvantaged by culture wars.

By contrast, the **political establishment** and the **media** – two of the most widely mentioned protagonists – are much more likely to be portrayed as stoking or amplifying culture wars, as highlighted in around three-quarters of articles in which they are mentioned.

Author's framing of protagonist's role in culture war (% references to type, 1997–2020)



- **Stoking culture war** – Deliberately placing themselves at the heart of a culture war dispute, through raising the profile of or adding heat to a particular issue
- **Amplifying culture war narratives** – Weighing in on an existing culture war dispute, eg through retweeting or commenting on an ongoing debate
- **Targeted by “culture warriors”** – People, institutions or groups that are singled out as targets by the person perceived to be stoking a culture war
- **Actions drawn into a culture war** – The actions of a person or institution become the subject of a culture wars debate, eg removal of Little Britain from Netflix
- **Diffusing culture war narratives** – Entering debate to challenge assumptions about the prevalence or existence of culture wars in the UK
- **Resisting engagement with culture wars** – Reluctance to engage on culturally divisive issues, eg politicians/parties portrayed as being unwilling to engage in identity politics
- **Disadvantaged by culture wars** – Indirect negative impacts felt by groups drawn into the culture wars debates, eg resentment or violence towards specific groups

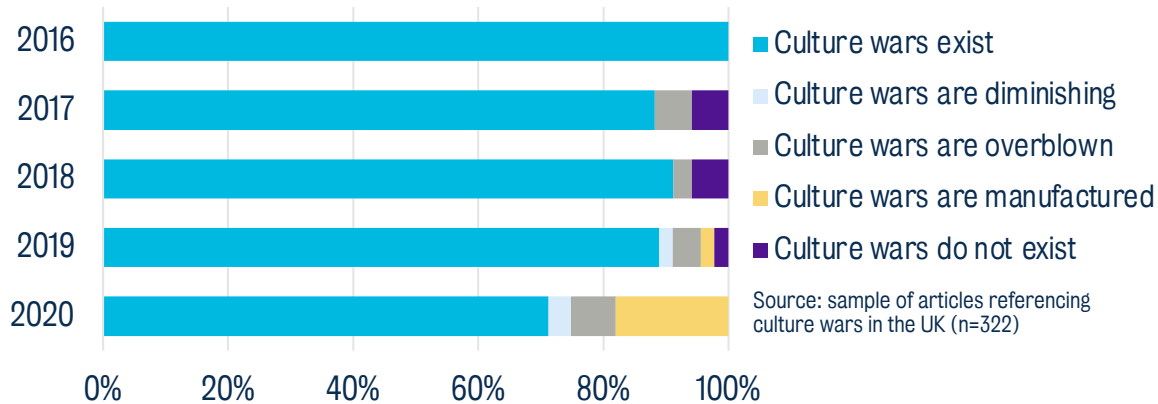
There is growing resistance to the idea of a culture war in the UK

Since the rapid expansion of references to culture wars in UK newspapers began in 2016, there has been growing resistance to the idea that the UK is embroiled in conflict.

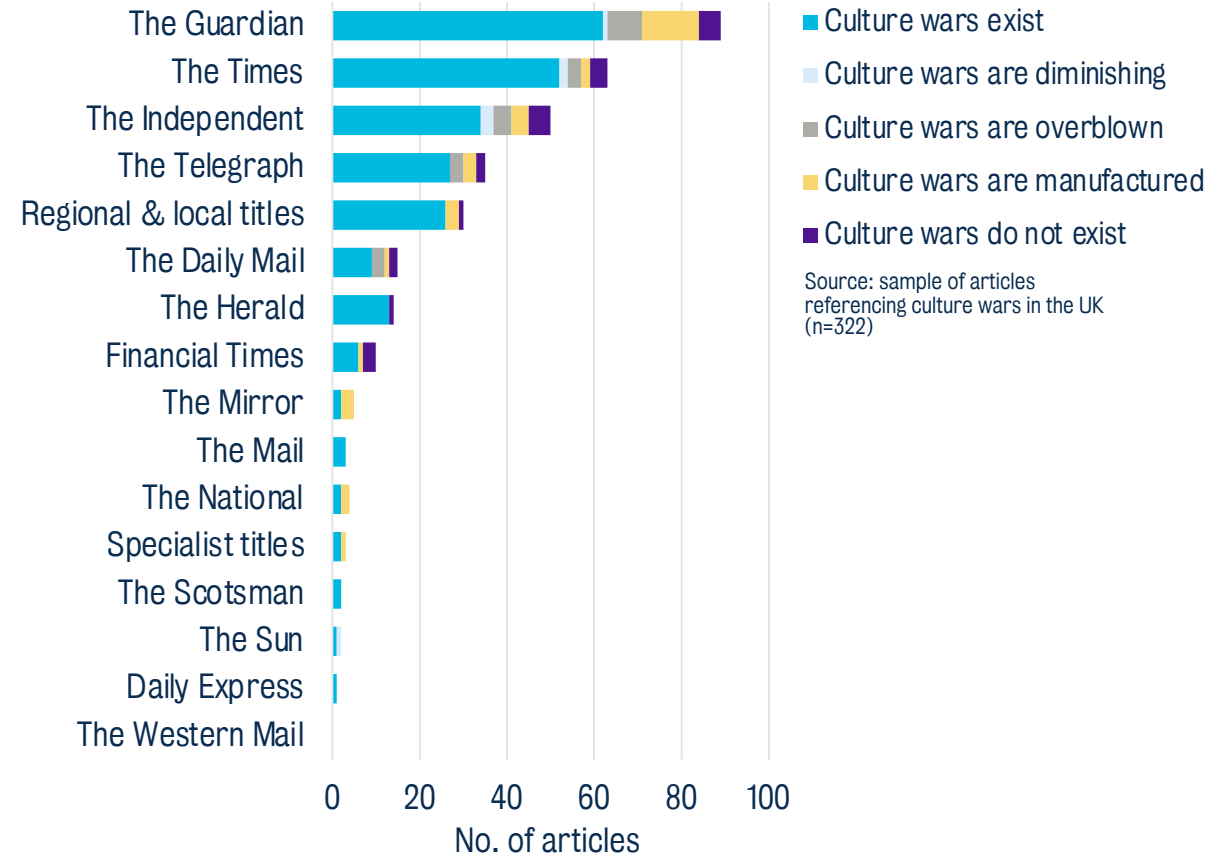
Of 134 articles reviewed from 2020, 25% take the position that culture wars are either overblown or manufactured – if they exist at all. One of the main reasons for this scepticism is the belief that culture wars are politically manufactured (8%) or fueled by the media (2%), and in reality involve only a minority of the population (3%). This contrasts with 2016, when all 12 articles reviewed accepted that culture wars exist.

Other authors who take a sceptical view of the culture wars emphasise that the media attention given to culture war issues draws focus away from the real issues facing society (2%), particularly life post-Covid.

Author's stance on existence of culture wars, by year (% of articles reviewed, 2016–20)



Author's stance on existence of culture wars, by title (1997–2020)



Resistance to culture war narratives cuts across a range of titles, from both the left and right of the political spectrum. But even in disavowing culture wars, many of these articles repeat familiar tropes. From the perspective of the right, the left is depicted as overstating the existence of culture wars in its “obsession” with identity or in pursuit of “fresh territory to ‘take’ in the name of progress” (Foges, 2020). And in left-leaning titles, the right is increasingly accused of weaponising cultural issues for political gain.

Battle metaphors are most often employed in the descriptive language of culture wars reporting

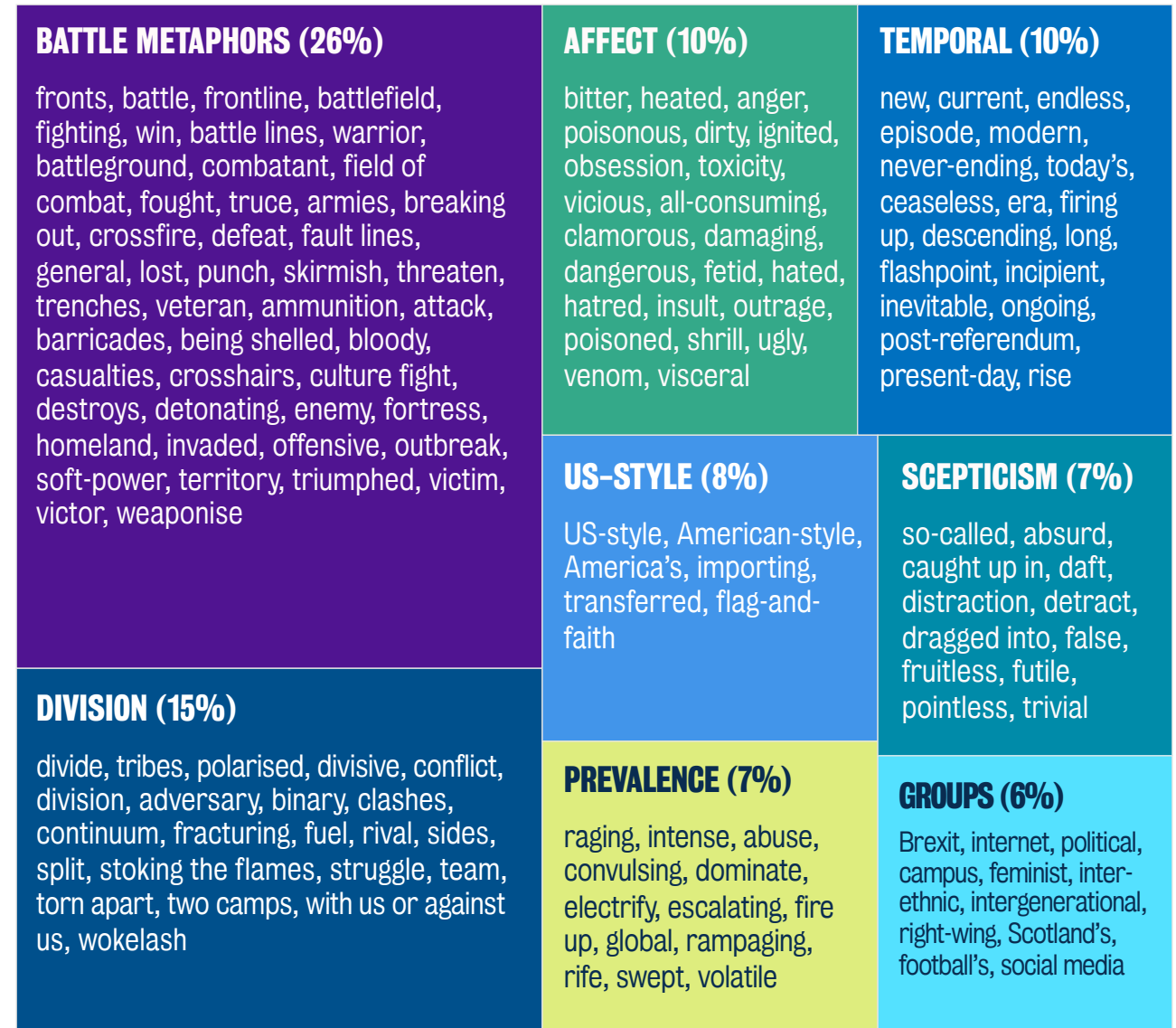
The specific framing of the term “culture wars” frequently evokes an underlying sense of conflict and division. More than half of the articles reviewed (57%) included descriptive language near the term – be it immediately preceding the words “culture wars” or in the surrounding sentence or paragraph.

Battle metaphors (26%) are most common, with “culture warriors” often portrayed as fighting “battles” on a particular “front” or “fault line” in the culture war. Some authors also explicitly convey a **sense of division** in describing “conflicts” or “clashes” between “tribes” or “camps” (15%) or emphasise the **affective dimension** (10%) of culture wars, using language such as “bitter”, “heated” or “poisonous”.

Descriptive language is also used to emphasise spread, both **over time** (10%) – with some authors describing the culture war as a “new” phenomenon and others as “never-ending” – and **prevalence** (7%), reflecting the rapidity with which culture wars have spread.

Some authors also directly appeal to a **comparison with the US** (8%) or use descriptive language to express **scepticism** about the applicability to the UK (7%) through dismissive language such as “absurd”, “daft” or “trivial”. Yet only a handful of authors frame their use of the term around **specific groups** (6%), such as political, identity-based or generational divides.

Descriptive language used in reference to the term “culture war”, 1997–2020



Source: sample of articles referencing culture wars in the UK (n=322). Chart maps frequency of descriptive language used in direct reference to the term “culture wars” (ie in the same sentence or paragraph as the word “culture wars”). Words are listed in order of frequency. Size of each box is proportionate to the number of references to that group.



3. Culture wars among the UK public

3. Culture wars among the UK public

Division and connection

A Union Jack flag is shown waving in the wind, set against a blurred background of green trees and a body of water. The flag is the central focus, with its red, white, and blue colors clearly visible. The background is out of focus, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere.

A large majority of the UK think the country is divided

Three-quarters of the public (74%) say the UK feels divided to them these days, with more than one in four (28%) saying it feels very divided. By contrast, one in seven (16%) think the country is united, including just 1% who feel we're very united as a nation. A [survey](#) from May 2020 which asked a similar question also found three-quarters of Britons thought the country was divided – down from 85% in 2018, according to an even earlier [global study](#) (although the latter is less directly comparable due to differences in methodology).

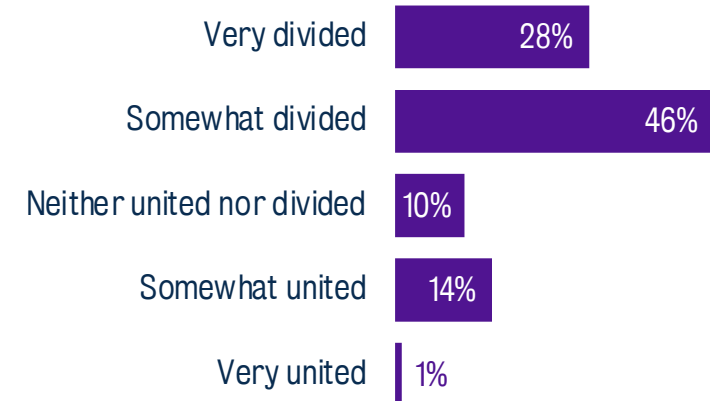
Looking more closely, people in Scotland are most likely to say the UK is divided – 86% feel this way, compared with 81% in Wales and 72% in England.* And of the two main parties, a greater proportion of Labour supporters (82%) than Conservative supporters (69%) feel the country is divided, with a similar split between Remain (80%) and Leave (70%) supporters.*

Among different age groups, young people are most positive about the state of the UK's divisions – although nearly two-thirds (64%) of those aged 16 to 24 still think the country is divided. There is little variation in views among those aged 25 and above, with around three-quarters of each age group believing the UK is very or somewhat divided.

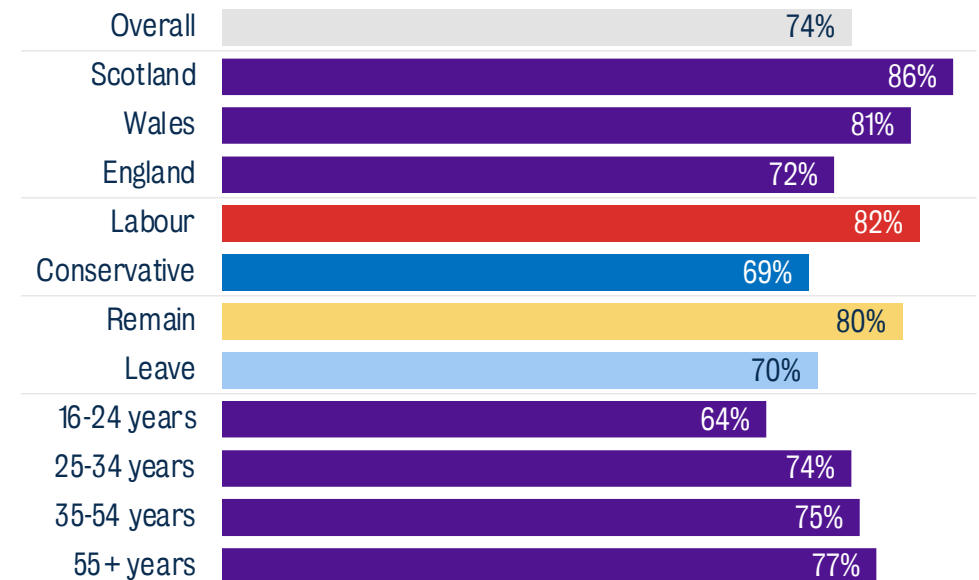
Some figures differ from charts due to rounding.

* Northern Ireland excluded due to small sample size.

How united or divided does the UK feel to you these days?



% who say the UK feels very or somewhat divided



Half the country think the UK is currently the most divided it's been during their lifetime

51% think this is the most divided we have been during their lifetime – although a similar proportion, 44%, have a less negative view. This includes 30% of the public who say we have been through divided times like this before, and 14% who believe divisions were worse in the past.

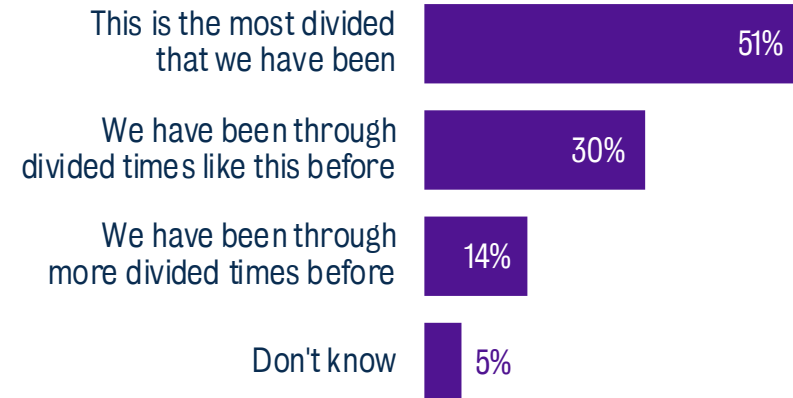
Again, there is a notable age divide in views – it is only among the youngest age group where a minority believe we're more divided than at any other point in their lifetime. Just over a third (36%) of under-25s feel this way, compared with over half of those aged 25 and above.

Labour supporters have a worse perception of the UK's current divisions than do Conservative supporters – by 59% to 46%, they are more likely to believe we've never been as divided in their lifetime. By contrast, there is little difference in the proportion of Leave (49%) and Remain supporters (55%) who hold this view.

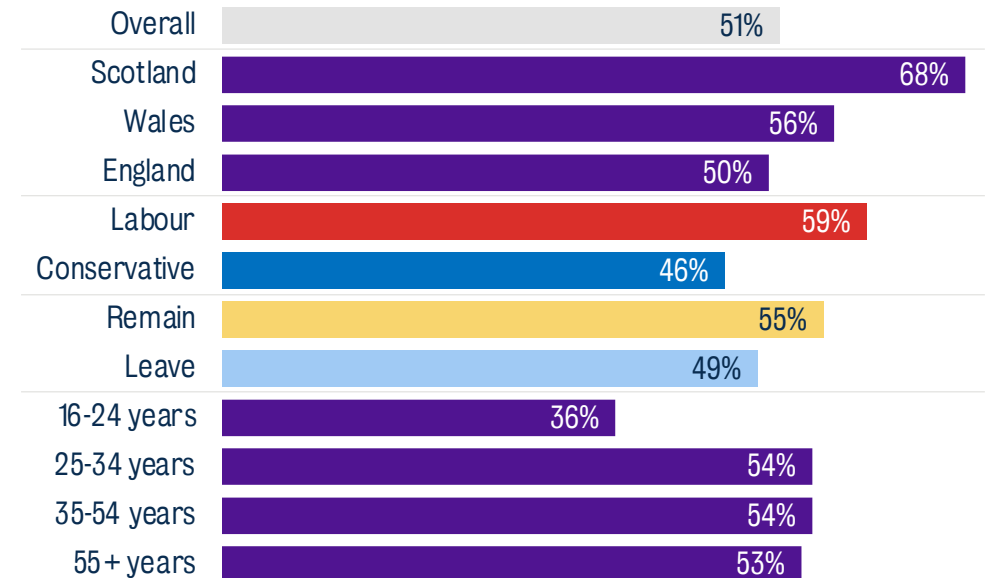
Meanwhile, people in Scotland have the most negative outlook on societal divides today. 68% say the level of division is unprecedented in their lifetime, compared with 56% in Wales and 50% in England who feel this way.*

* Northern Ireland excluded due to small sample size.

Which statement do you agree with more? In my lifetime...



% who say this is the most divided that we have been in their lifetime



There is little sign that cultural and social change are a strong concern for most of the public

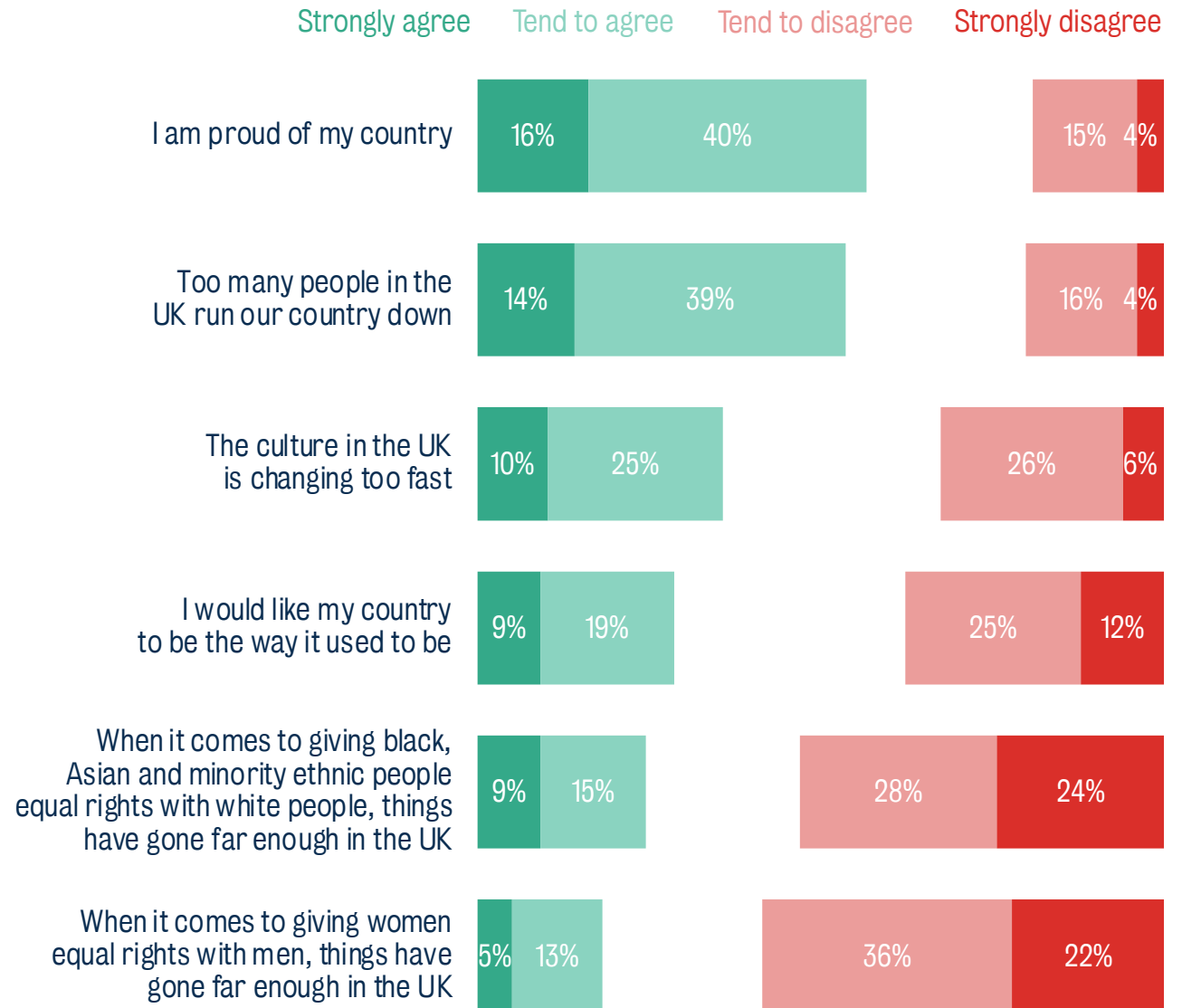
56% are proud of their country – more than double the 19% who are not – and there is a similar split between those who agree (52%) and disagree (20%) that too many people in the UK run the country down.

Overall, the public are divided on the nation’s social and cultural evolution. Minorities say that the UK’s culture is changing too fast (35%) and that they would prefer the country to be the way it used to be (28%) – but this is matched by virtually the same proportion or greater who actively disagree with these views. However, few have strong views in either direction.

People are more likely to disagree that enough has been done in terms of equal rights for women and people from ethnic minorities in the UK. In both cases, majorities disagree that efforts to provide equal rights have gone far enough, including nearly a quarter who strongly disagree.

Some figures differ from charts due to rounding.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

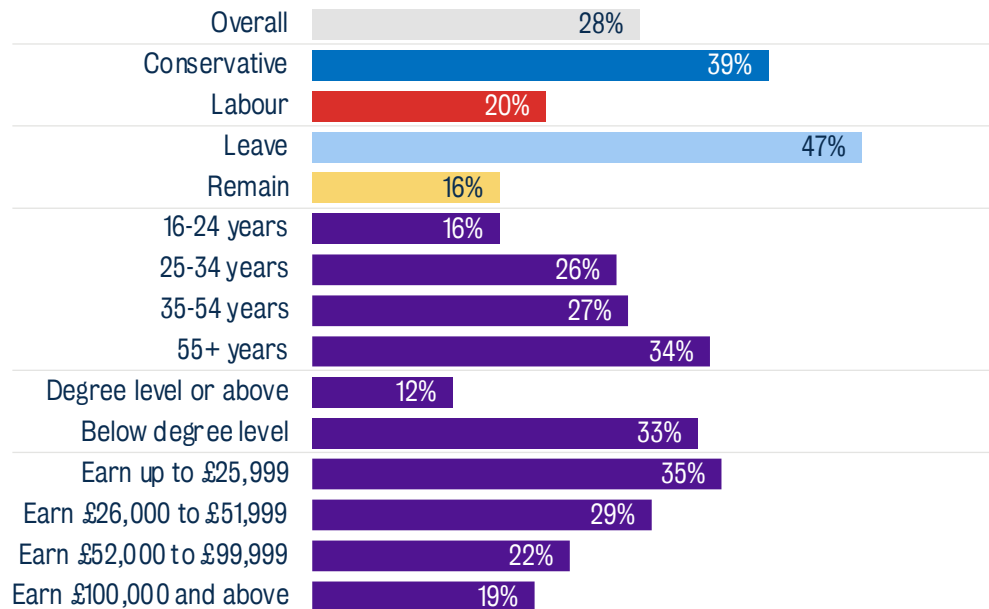


Leavers, Conservatives, older people, lower earners and those without degrees are most concerned about the pace of change

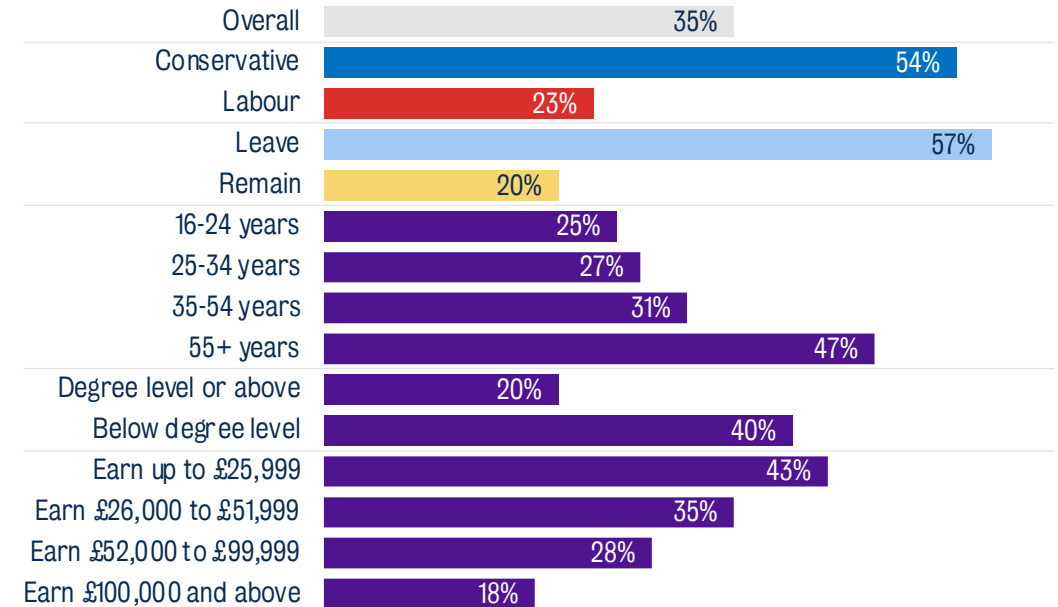
47% of Leavers say they would like the country to be the way it used to be – three times the 16% of Remainers who say the same. And Conservative supporters (39%) are twice as likely as Labour supporters (20%) to feel this way.

Likelihood of holding this view increases with age, with 16% of 16- to 24-year-olds feeling this way, rising to 34% among 55 and above. It also varies substantially according to income and education level.

Agree “I would like my country to be the way it used to be”



Agree “the culture in the UK is changing too fast”



57% of Leave supporters think the culture in the UK is changing too fast – nearly triple the 20% of Remain supporters who agree. There is virtually the same divide in views between Conservative (54%) and Labour supporters (23%).

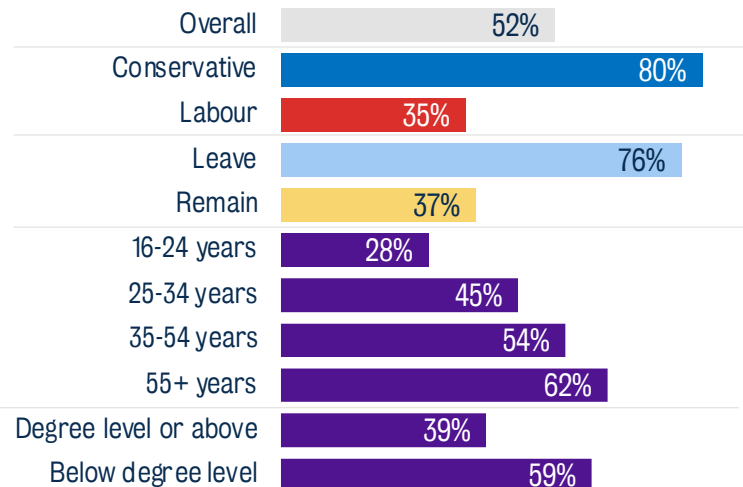
Younger people are markedly more comfortable with the speed of cultural change than older people, although it is still notable that a quarter (25%) of those aged 16 to 24 believe it is changing too fast. And again, agreement that this statement declines the more people earn and the higher their education level.

Conservative and Leave supporters are most likely to say too many people run the UK down, and that equal rights have gone far enough

80% of Conservative and 76% of Leave supporters believe too many people in the UK run the country down – far higher than the 35% of Labour and 37% of Remain supporters who say the same.

Older age groups are more likely than younger ones to believe that people in the UK are unfairly critical of the country, and there is a big divide in views by education level: 59% of those without a degree say that too many people run the country down, compared with 39% of those with a degree.

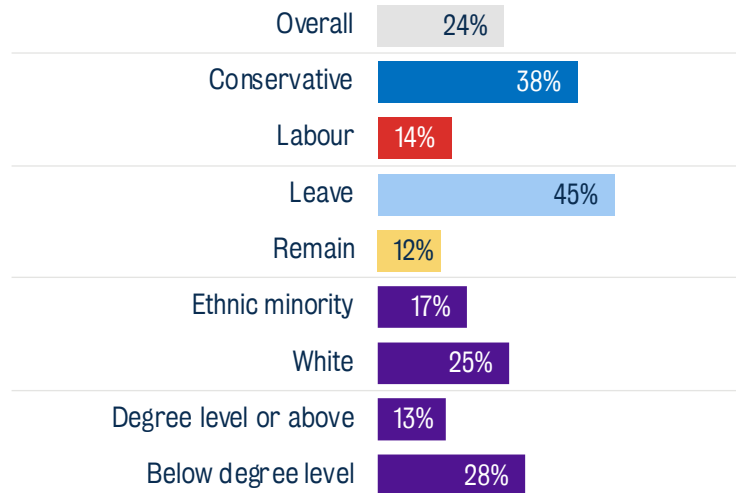
Agree “too many people in the UK run our country down”



While relatively few people in the UK think things have gone far enough in terms of giving people from ethnic minority groups equal rights with white people, support does vary markedly across groups.

Most notably, 45% of Leavers agree with this statement, as do 38% of Conservative supporters. By contrast, 14% of Labour supporters and 12% of Remainers agree.

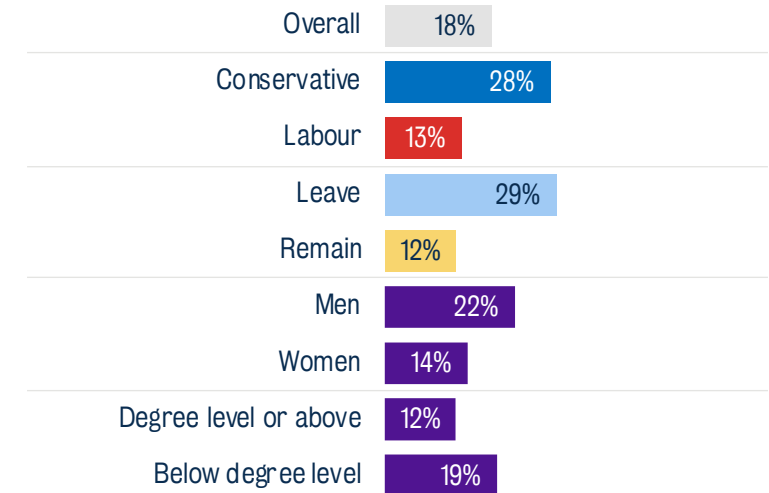
Agree “when it comes to giving Black, Asian and minority ethnic people equal rights with white people, things have gone far enough in the UK”



Those who believe the expansion of women’s rights has gone far enough are in the minority in the UK, but more than a quarter of Leavers (29%) and Conservatives (28%) hold this view. This compares with around one in eight Labour supporters (13%) and Remainers (12%).

Men (22%) are a little more likely than women (14%) to agree that gender equality efforts have gone far enough, and there is also less of an educational divide on this issue, with 12% of degree holders agreeing, compared with 19% of those without degrees.

Agree “when it comes to giving women equal rights with men, things have gone far enough in the UK”



Brexit and differences in wealth are seen as the greatest sources of tension in the UK

78% believe there is at least a fair amount of tension between Leavers and Remainers, including 38% who think there is a great deal. A similar proportion (75%) think there is tension between supporters of different political parties, but relatively fewer – 27% – say it’s at a particularly high level.

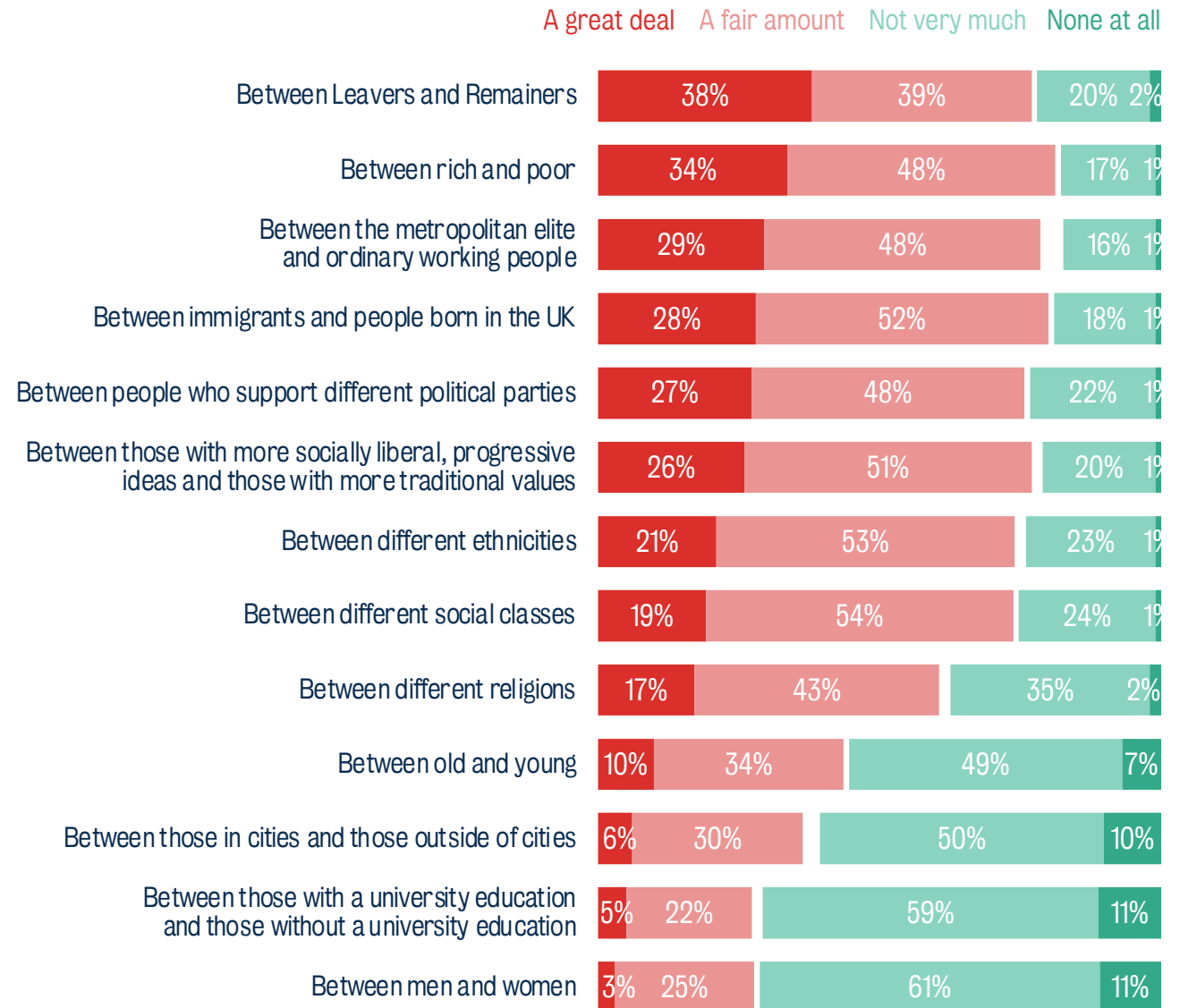
While the media focus is increasingly on cultural differences, economic division is still of great importance to the public: 81% believe there is tension between rich and poor, including a third (34%) who say a great deal. People are less likely (19%) to say there is a lot of tension between different social classes, but this is on a par with ethnic divisions.

However, 29% perceive relations between the “metropolitan elite” and “ordinary working people” to be highly strained. A similar proportion (26%) say the same about those with progressive or more traditional values. Overall, three-quarters of the public think there is some tension between these two sets of groups.

And while immigration may have receded as a political issue in recent years, 28% still feel there is a high degree of tension between immigrants and those born in the UK, with 80% overall feeling there is at least a fair amount.

Relatively few people in the UK see there being big divisions on the basis of gender, education level, or whether or not they live in cities. People are overwhelming likely to say there is no tension, or not very much, between those who differ according to these characteristics.

How much tension, if any, would you say there is between the following groups in the UK today?

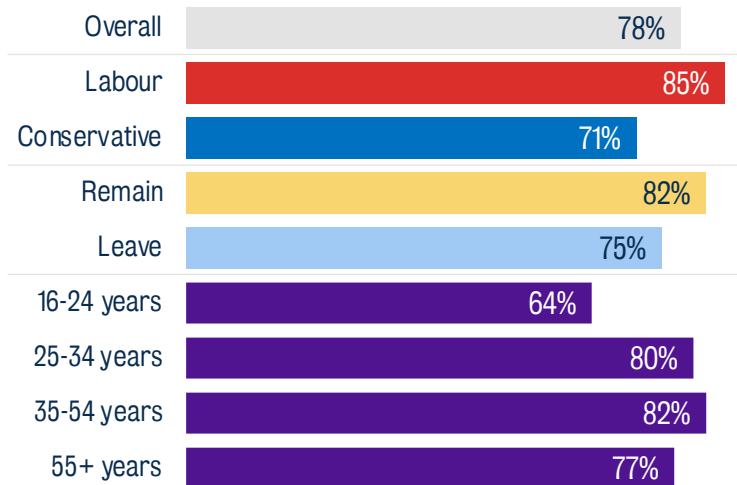


Perceptions of tension around Brexit cut across groups, while high earners are less likely to see conflict between rich and poor

Large majorities of those who identify with different political groups perceive tension between Leave and Remain supporters. More than three-quarters of those on either side of the Brexit debate feel relations are strained, while Labour supporters (85%) are more likely than Conservatives (71%) to feel this way.

The only notable age divide in views is between those aged 16 to 24 and those who are older. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the former think there is a fair amount or great deal of tension between Leave and Remain supporters, compared with more than three-quarters of older age groups who feel the same.

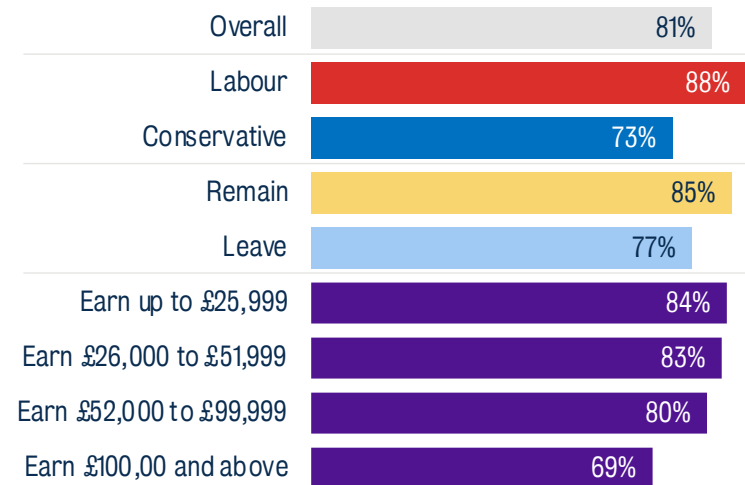
Agree there is a fair amount or great deal of tension between Leavers and Remainers



69% of those who earn £100,000 a year think there is tension between rich and poor – compared with around 80% of people in lower income brackets who think the same.

88% of Labour supporters believe there is tension between rich and poor, compared with 73% of Conservatives. And there is a similar, albeit smaller divide in views between Remainers (85%) and Leavers (77%).

Agree there is a fair amount or great deal of tension between rich and poor



There are some notable differences and similarities across groups when it comes to agreement that there is a great deal or fair amount of tension between...

...the metropolitan elite and ordinary working people

People who live in the North East: 88%
People who live in London: 71%

...people who support different political parties

Labour supporters: 85%
Conservative supporters: 71%

...immigrants and people born in the UK

Remain supporters: 81%
Leave supporters: 83%

...those in cities and those outside cities

People who live in London: 49%
People who live in the South East: 30%

...different social classes

Labour supporters: 88%
Conservative supporters: 76%

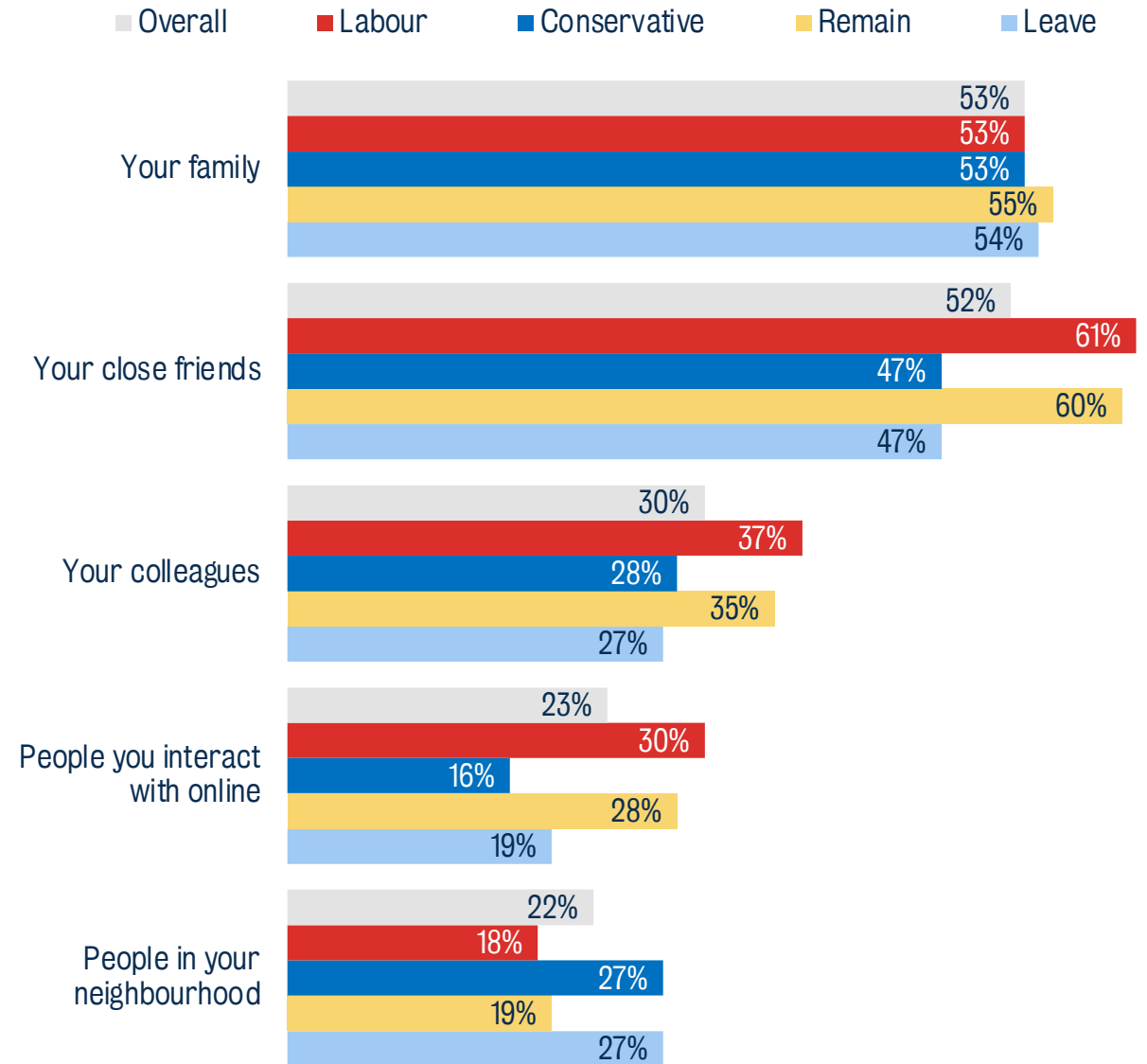
Labour supporters are twice as likely as Conservatives to say the people they interact with online share their political views

30% of Labour supporters say that most of the people they interact with online agree with them on political issues. This compares with 16% of Conservative supporters who say the same. And this isn't just because Labour supporters are more likely to use social media – a similar pattern can be seen when looking only at supporters of both parties who use social media on a daily basis.

Across nearly all other types of people asked about, Labour supporters are more likely to say they agree with them on politics – for example, 61% say their close friends share their views, compared with 47% of Conservatives who say the same. And Labour supporters are 9 percentage points more likely than Conservatives to say their colleagues have the same politics as them. The exceptions are people who live in the same neighbourhood, where Conservatives (27%) are more likely than Labour supporters (18%) to say such people share their political views, and family members, where there is no difference between the parties.

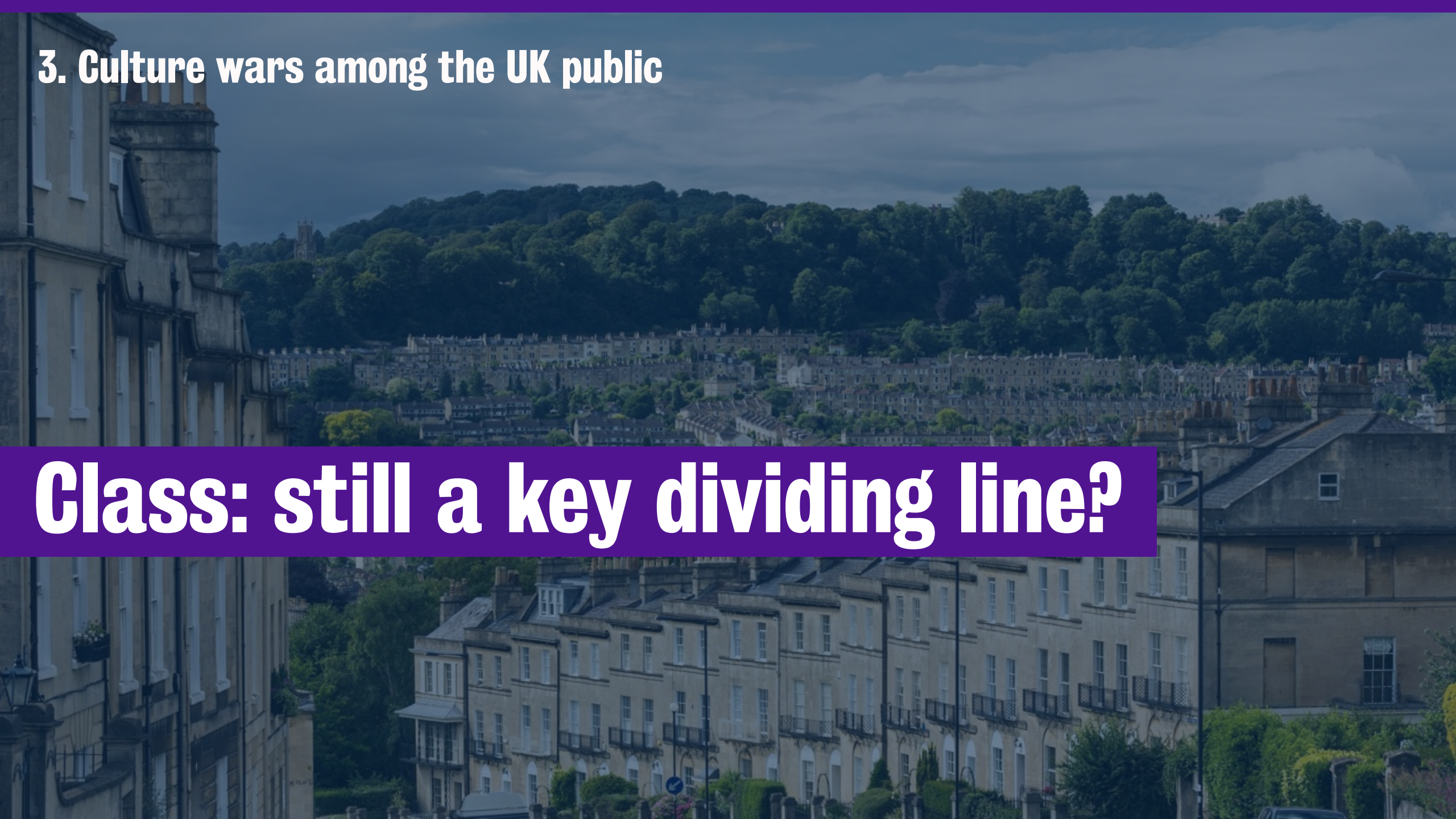
There is virtually the same divide between Remain and Leave supporters – the former are more likely to agree on politics with their close friends and those they interact with online, while the latter are more likely to say their neighbours share the same opinions.

When it comes to political issues, do most of the following groups agree with you, is it about 50:50, or do most disagree with you? % who say most agree



3. Culture wars among the UK public

Class: still a key dividing line?



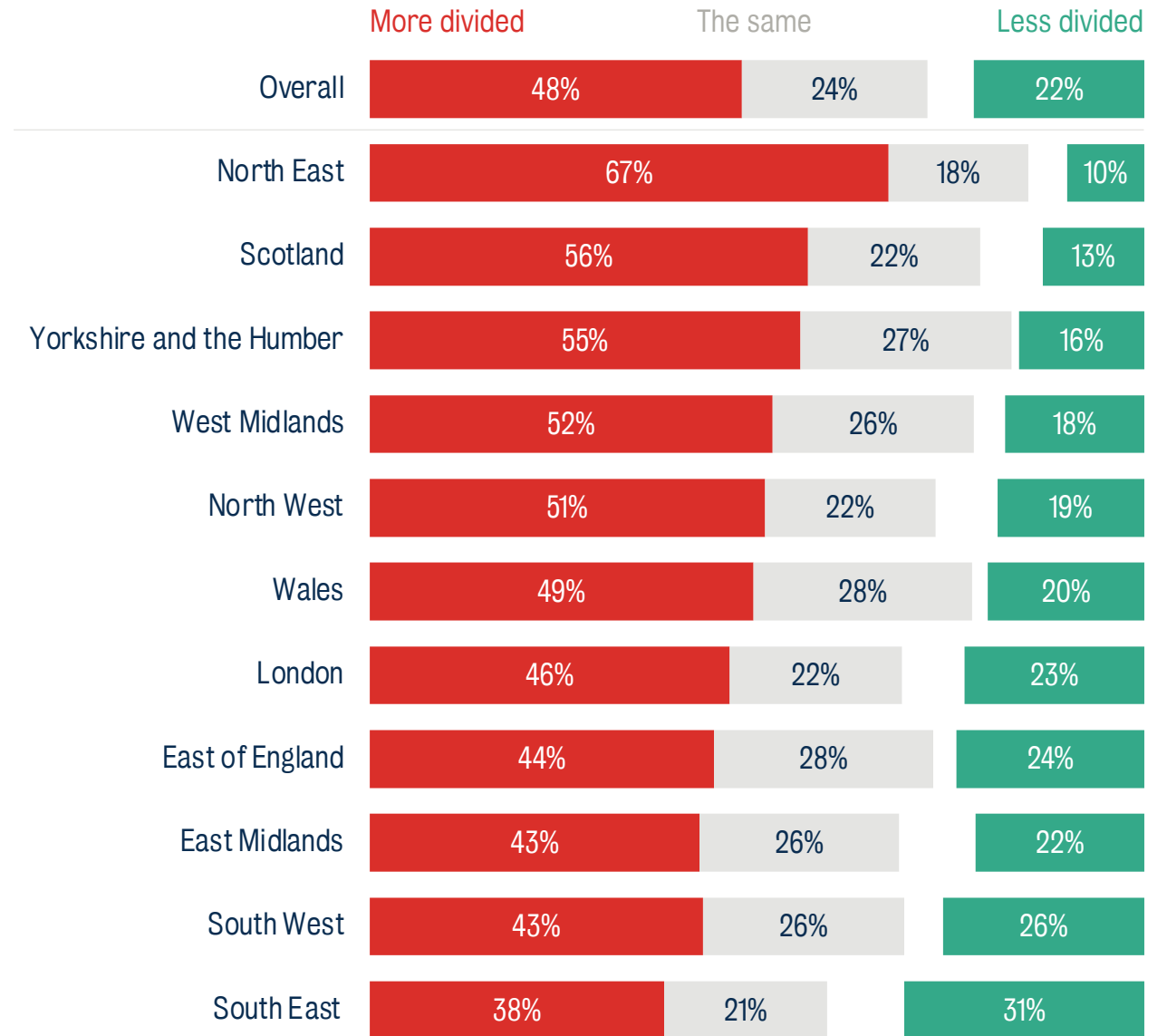
Half the public think the UK is more divided by class than it was 20 years ago, with differences in views by region

48% of the public think class-based divisions in the UK are greater today than they were two decades ago – more than twice the 22% who believe there is now less of a divide between people of different social classes.

Views on this issue also vary by region, ranging from 67% in the North East who think the UK is now more divided by class, to 38% in the South East who think the same. On the whole, areas in the north are more likely than those in the south to see class as a greater source of division in the country today.

But it is important to treat this perception of change with caution. In 1996 and 2000, MORI asked a similar question: “On balance, do you think Britain is more or less divided by class than it was in 1979”. The results are close to what we see today, with 45% saying that Britain was more divided by class in 1996 than in 1979, and 40% in 2000. And while it is difficult to assess the significance of this shift due to changes in mode and question wording, it is clear that class is considered no less important today than it was 20 years ago.

On balance, do you think the UK is more or less divided by class than it was 20 years ago?

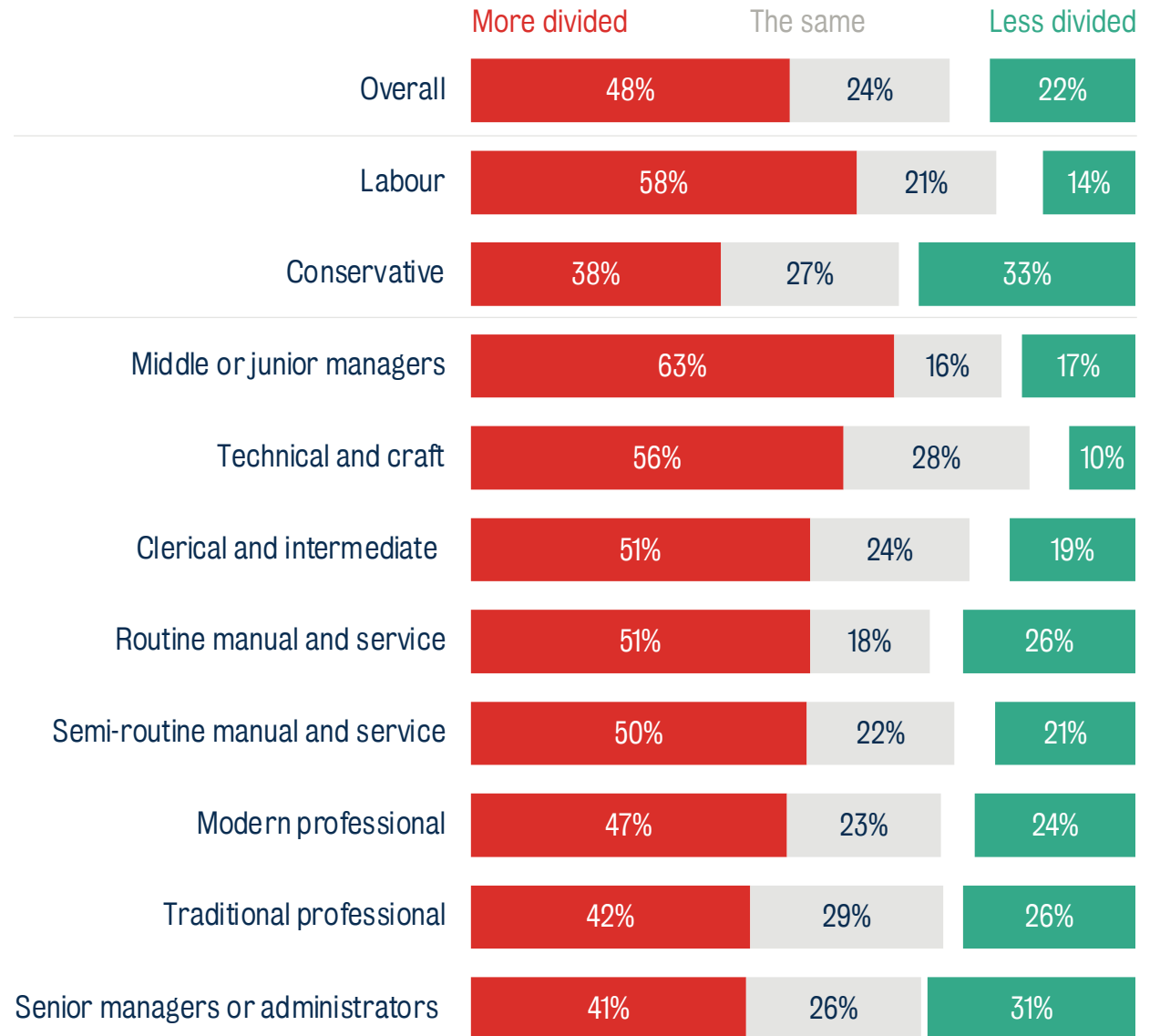


Views of class split along party lines – and middle managers are most likely to think class-based divisions have grown

63% of middle or junior managers think the UK is more divided by class than it was 20 years ago – the highest of all the occupation types surveyed and higher than other types of professions, such as semi-routine manual and service workers (50%), which in the past might have been more expected to be focused on divisions between people of different social classes.

And as might be anticipated, Labour supporters are much more likely than Conservative supporters to feel that the UK’s class-based divisions have worsened over the past two decades – 58% of the former think this is the case, compared with 38% of the latter.

On balance, do you think the UK is more or less divided by class than it was 20 years ago?



3. Culture wars among the UK public

A group of six people standing in a line against a plain wall. Each person is holding a large, colorful speech bubble or thought bubble in front of their face, completely obscuring it. The speech bubbles are in various colors: purple, yellow, green, blue, pink, and teal. The people are dressed in casual clothing like t-shirts, blouses, and jackets.

Awareness of “culture wars”

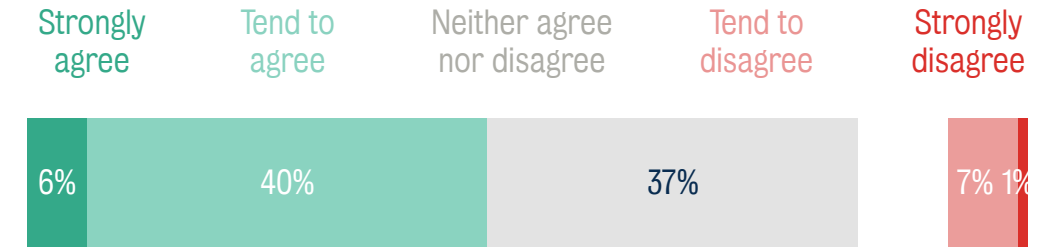
and understanding of key concepts

The public are most likely to say the UK is divided by culture wars – but not hugely more likely than they are to not have a position at all on this issue

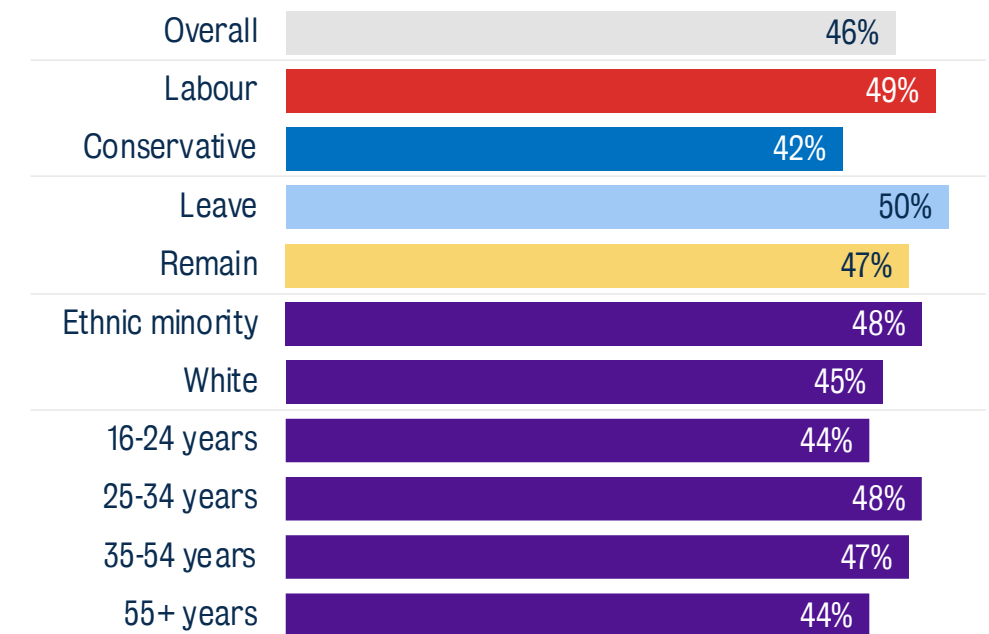
46% agree that culture wars are dividing the country, although only 6% strongly agree. This compares with 37% who neither agree nor disagree that this is the case, underscoring that there is a large proportion of the public for whom these kinds of divisions mean little or are not something that animates them one way or another. 8% disagree that the UK is divided by culture wars.

Agreement with this statement is relatively consistent across different groups, with, for example, similar proportions across the age range saying culture wars are a source of division.

From what you see on TV, in the news media and online, and in your conversations with others, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the UK is divided by “culture wars”?



% who say the UK is divided by “culture wars”



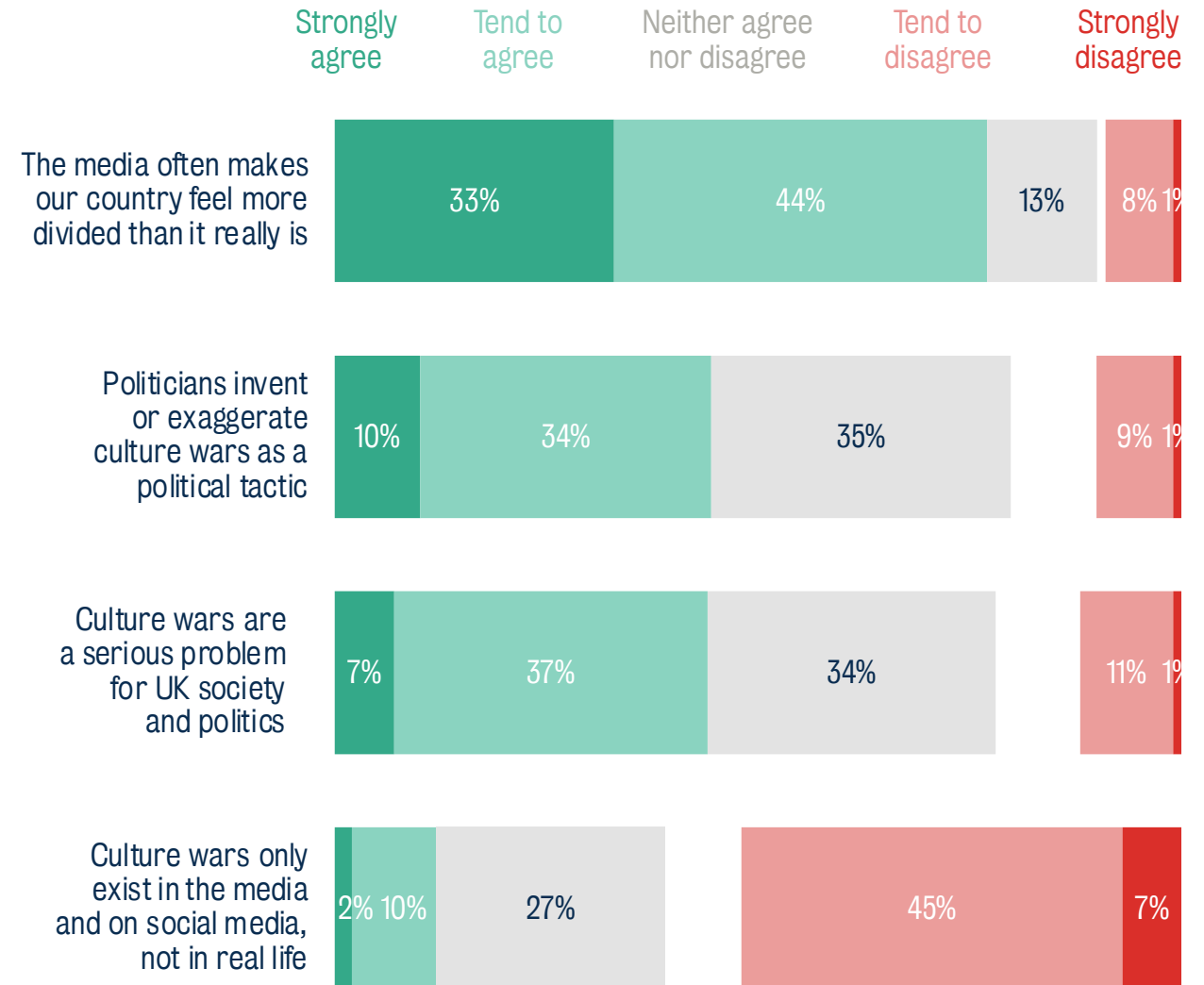
Some blame politicians for stoking culture wars, and three-quarters think the media exaggerates the country's divisions – but half still believe they are not just a media creation

Just over four in 10 people agree politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic, but the same proportion also think culture wars are a serious problem for the UK. However, around a third don't take a position on this issue, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and few people feel strongly either way.

77% of people agree that the media often makes the country feel more divided than it really is, including a third (33%) who strongly agree. Fewer than one in 10 disagree (8%).

But despite this, there is still a sense that the UK's divisions are real-world problems, with half (51%) disagreeing that culture wars only exist in the media and social media.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Majorities say they have at least a little awareness of some key concepts in the culture wars debate – but when it comes to others, most people know very little or nothing about them

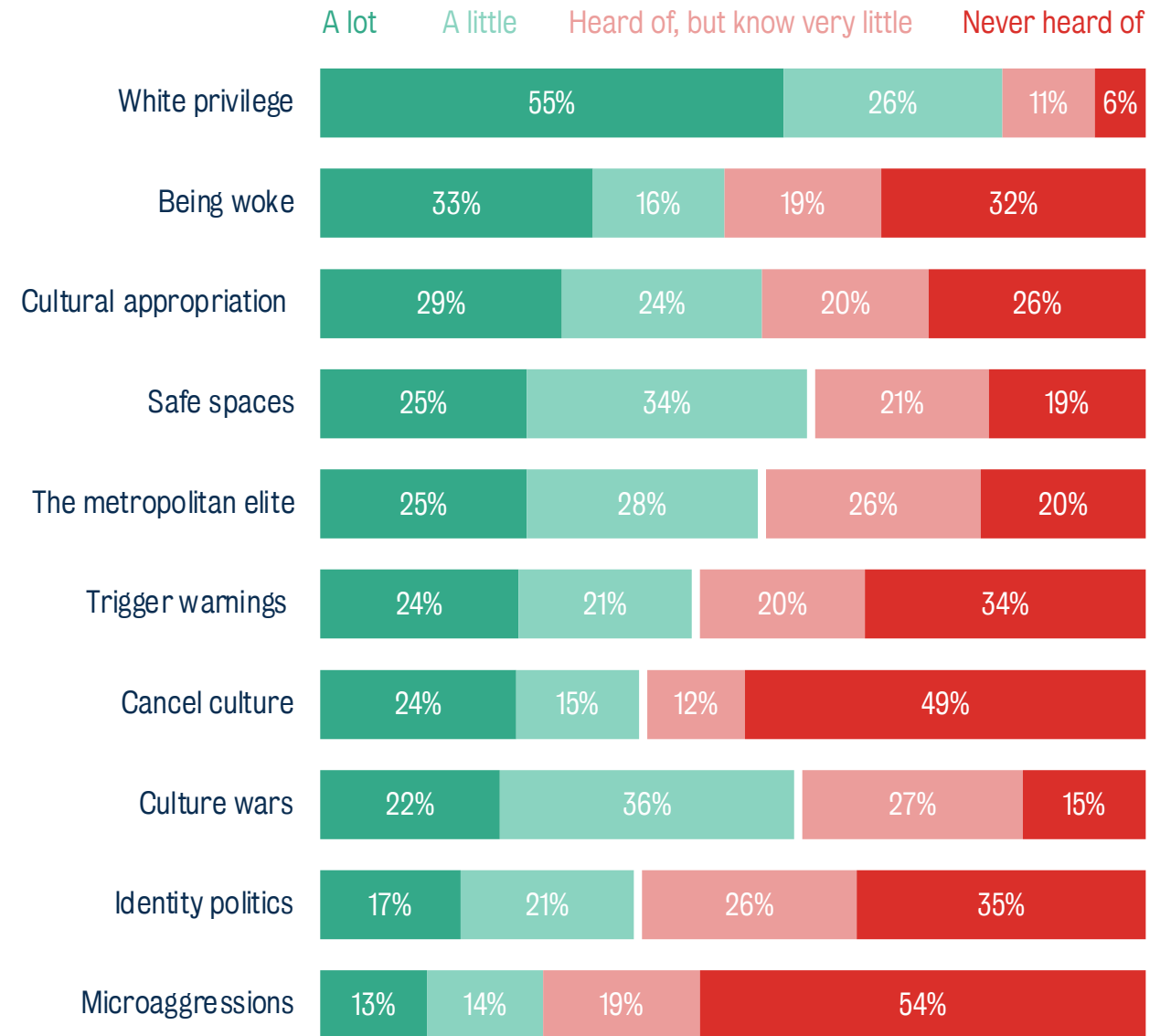
82% of the public say they've heard at least a little about white privilege, including 55% who say they've heard a lot about it – by far the most widely known concept of those asked about.

And while majorities say they are relatively aware of culture wars (58%), safe spaces (59%), cultural appropriation (53%) and the metropolitan elite (53%), notable minorities are not.

When it comes to other terms, most people have either heard of them but know very little or have never heard of them at all. For example, 72% report hearing little to nothing about microaggressions, while 61% say the same about both cancel culture and identity politics.

There is also a virtually even split in awareness of the concept of being woke – 49% say they've heard a lot or little about it, while 50% say they haven't, including 32% who have never heard of the term.

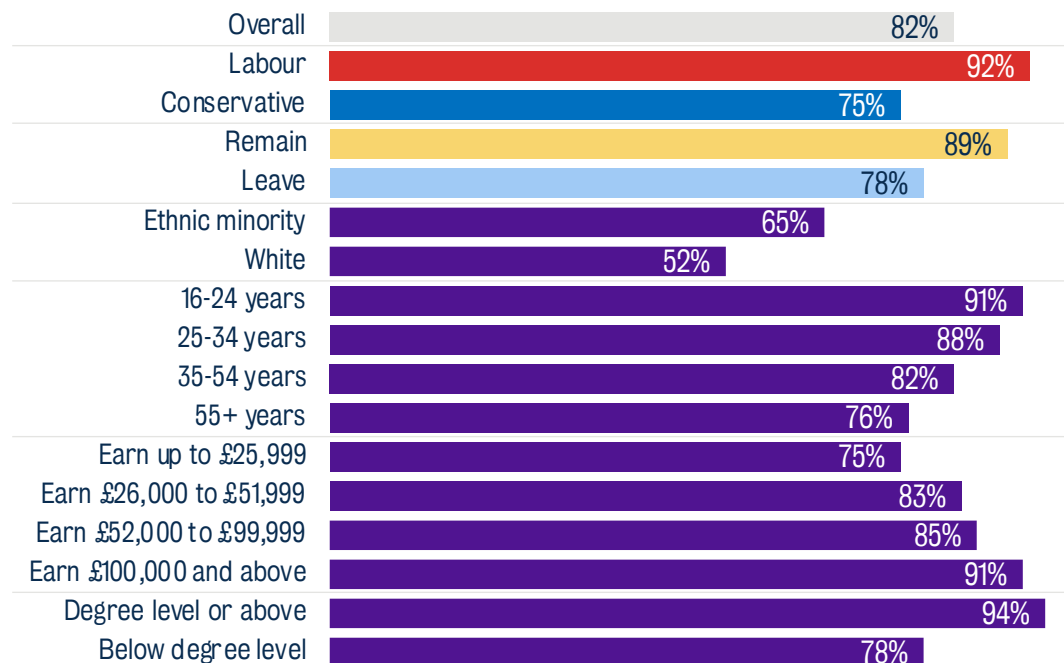
How much, if anything, have you heard or read about the following terms or phrases?



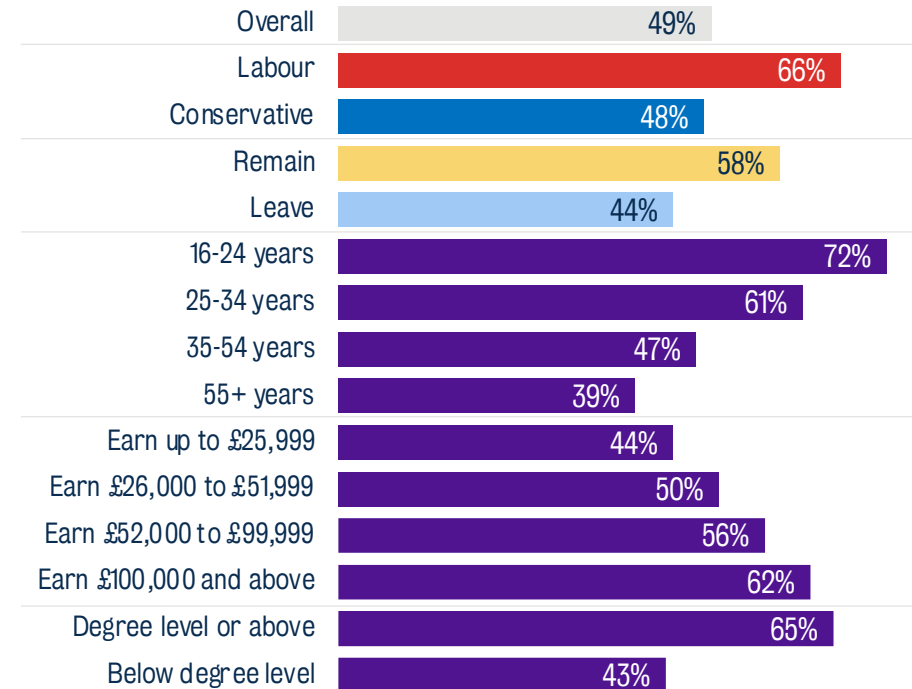
Whether people are aware of key culture wars terms varies a lot by age, politics, education and income level

Nine in 10 Labour supporters say they've heard a lot or a little about the concept of white privilege, compared with three-quarters of Conservatives who say the same. There is a similar divide between Remainers and Leavers, as well as a difference in awareness between ethnic minorities (65%) and white people (52%). And although awareness varies by age, income and education – especially in the proportion who say they have heard a lot about white privilege – the vast majority in each category say they know about the concept.

Have read / heard a lot or a little about “white privilege”



Have read / heard a lot or a little about “being woke”



Awareness of the concept of being woke declines with age: 72% of 16- to 24-year-olds have heard a lot or a little about the term, falling to 39% among those aged 55+.

Higher earners and those with university degrees are also much more likely to say they've come across the concept, as are Labour and Remain supporters.

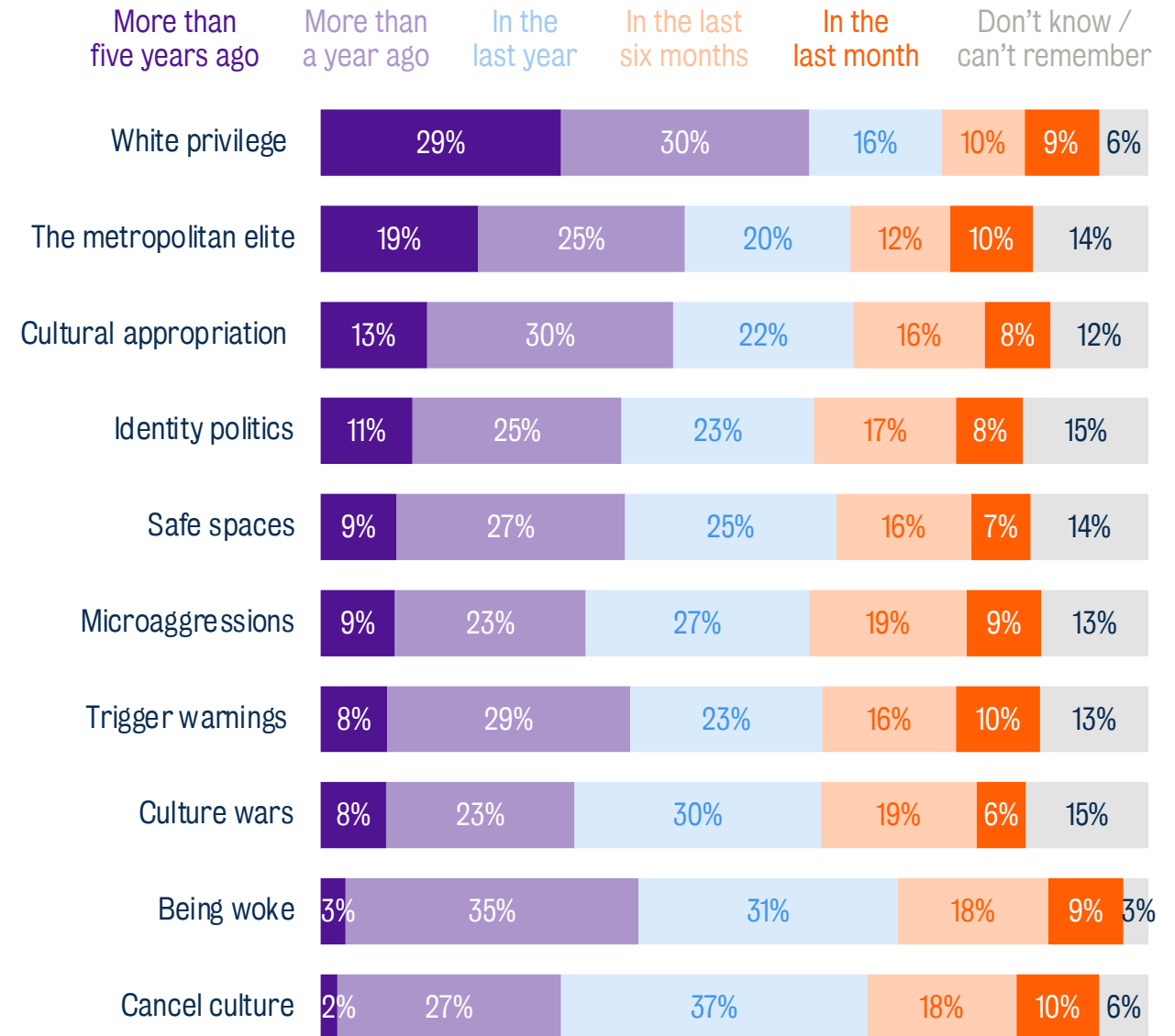
Many key culture wars terms only entered the public's consciousness within the last year

In keeping with it being the most widely recognised term, 59% of those who'd heard of "white privilege" say they first came across the concept a year or more ago – but other terms have less of a history among the public.

For example, 58% of those who've heard of being woke say they first heard or read about it at some point within the last year, compared with 38% who say it was more than a year ago at least. A majority (55%) also say the concept of culture wars was something they first came across in the last year or even more recently.

Cancel culture is the newest term as far as the public are concerned, with 65% of those aware of the term saying they first heard or read about it at some point within the last year.

When did you first hear or read about this term or phrase?



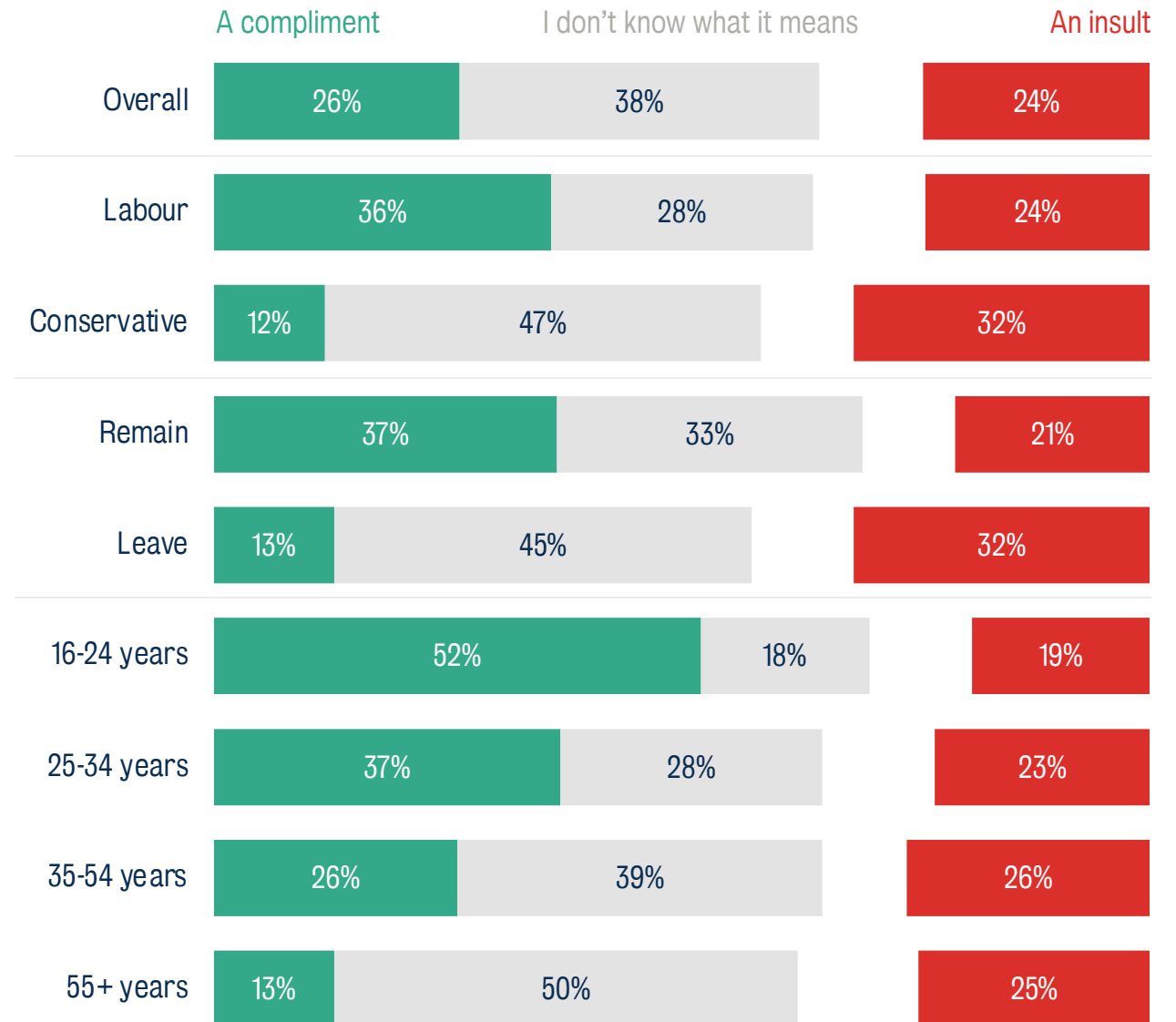
People are divided on whether being woke is a compliment or insult – but Labour supporters, Remainers and young people are much more likely to think the term has positive connotations

A quarter (26%) of the public would consider it a compliment if someone called them woke, while another quarter (24%) would see it as an insult – the most common response, however, is that people don't know what being woke means (38%).

But there are big differences in views between groups: Labour supporters (36%) are three times as likely as Conservatives (12%) to view being woke as a positive, and Remainers (37%) are around three times as likely as Leavers (13%) to say the same.

The likelihood of considering being woke a compliment also declines sharply with age: 52% of 16- to 24-year-olds say the term would have positive connotations for them, which declines to 13% among those aged 55 and above, half of whom also say they don't know what being woke means.

If someone described you as “woke” would you consider it....



The public have a limited understanding of what the term “culture wars” refers to

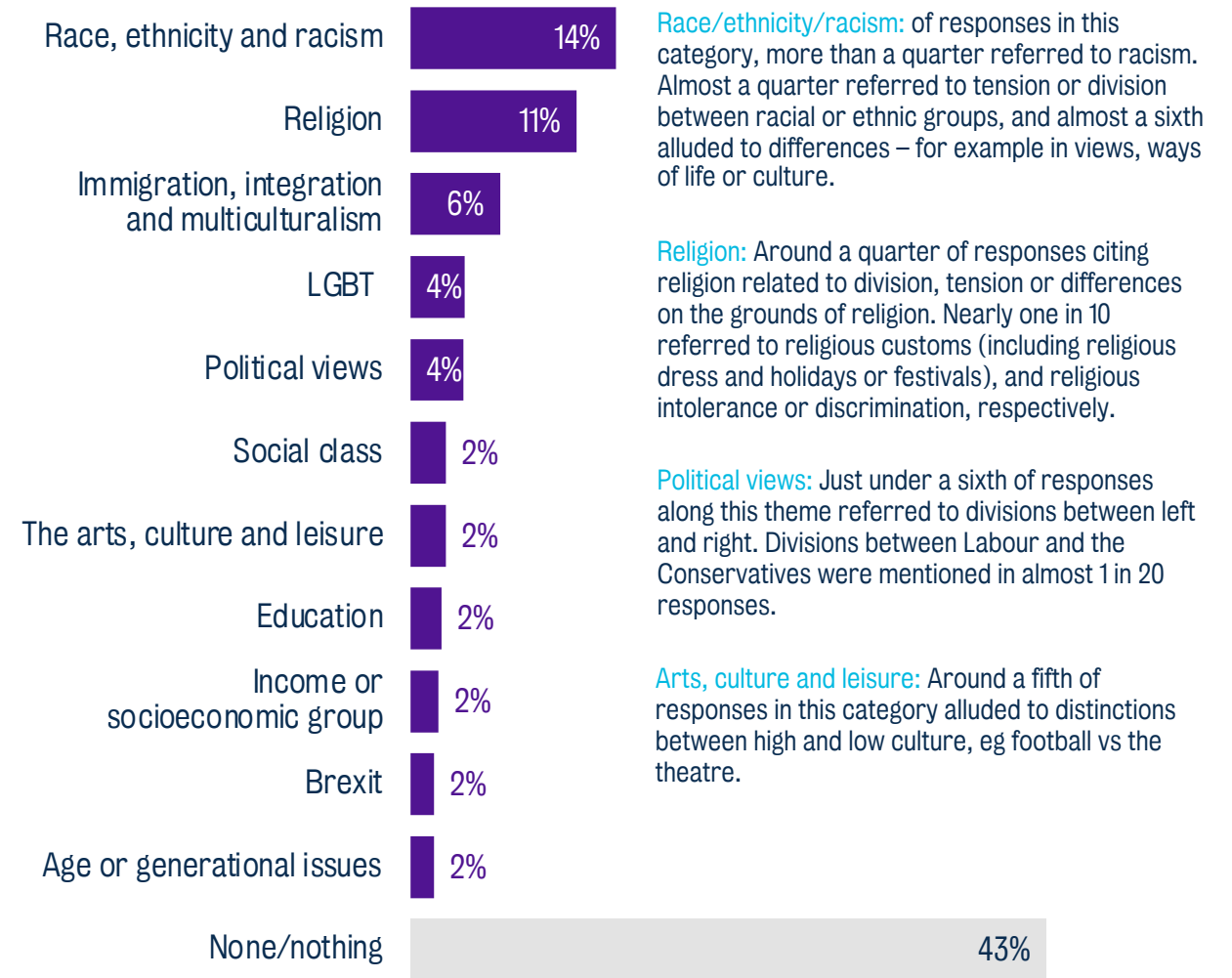
When asked to describe, in their own words, what issues the term “culture wars” makes them think of, the public’s most common response is none or nothing: for 43% of people, the term brings no particular issues to mind, indicating that the public have relatively little familiarity with the concept.

Where people do associate the term with specific issues, these tend to be around group identities on the basis of race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, politics, class or sexuality.

In particular, the high frequency of references to religion is perhaps surprising, in light of this not being a top focus in media coverage of culture wars.

Many responses simply offered general words or phrases, suggesting the lack of a clear understanding of the term.

What sorts of issues do you think of when we say “culture wars”?* **
(Responses coded according to topics mentioned)



* Top 12 issues shown, by % of responses mentioning the issue

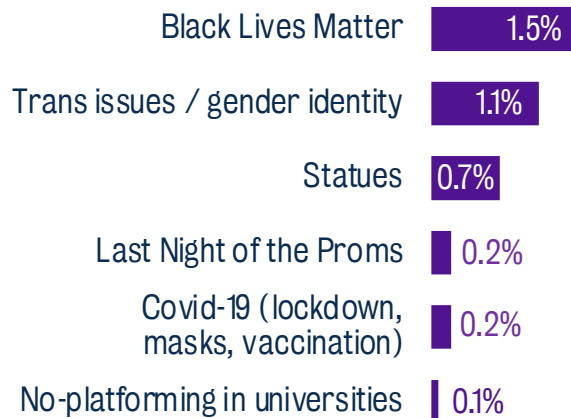
**Option of free text response (and therefore for respondents to identify multiple issues), or option of none/nothing

High-profile media topics are rarely recalled by the public when they think of culture wars

Apart from race and ethnicity, only tiny minorities of people associate the term “culture wars” with the sorts of issues that have been prominent in the media’s coverage of culture wars. Less than 1% of people offered responses related to the Last Night of the Proms, university no-platforming and statues, for example, while only marginally more people cited the Black Lives Matter movement and trans or gender identity issues.

Despite Covid-19 dominating the news cycle, issues related to mask wearing, obeying lockdown restrictions and vaccination are seen by vanishingly few members of the public as a site of culture wars.

What sorts of issues do you think of when we say “culture wars”?*



* Selected culture wars issues and terms with a high media profile shown

What sorts of issues do you think of when we say “culture wars”?
(Responses coded according to implicit or explicit themes)

Theme	Frequency (% responses)	Ideas captured within theme
Tension between different groups in society with different identities	18%	Tension or conflict between different groups in society (eg based on culture, religion, age, ethnicity, nationality, etc), or one group versus another.
Values	10%	Values, beliefs, morality, the tension between tradition and progressivism.
Competition between cultures	3%	Competition or rivalry, the struggle for dominance between cultures, one group seeking to force its views on others, threat to “British culture”.
Way of life	3%	Different ways of life, backgrounds and upbringings.
Intolerance, discrimination against other cultures	3%	Intolerance, a lack of respect for or a refusal to accept other cultures or ways of life.
Culture wars as manufactured or exaggerated	1%	Exaggeration by the media, politicians stoking culture wars as a political tactic.

3. Culture wars among the UK public

**Political correctness
and free speech**



The public tend to think people are too easily offended, and some groups are particularly likely to say political correctness has gone too far

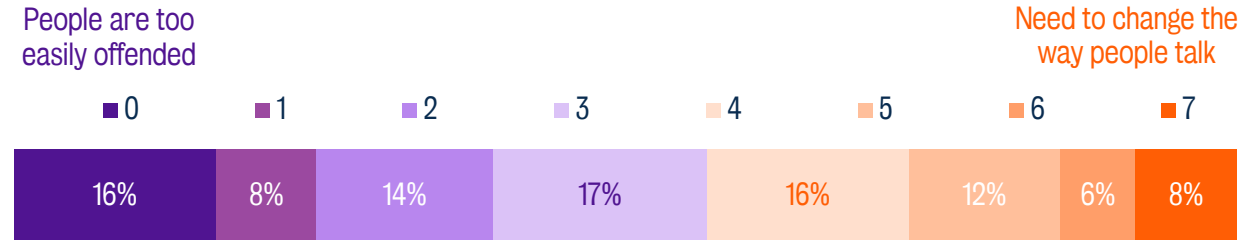
Britons are relatively divided on whether people are too easily offended or if the way they talk needs to be more sensitive to those from different backgrounds. 55% tend to think people take offence too readily and 42% lean more towards believing it's important to change how they communicate.

But the public are clear that political correctness has gone too far: 62% agree with this view – three times the 19% who disagree. This is a longstanding concern, as a [2000 survey](#) found virtually the same proportion – 65% – thought political correctness had gone too far.

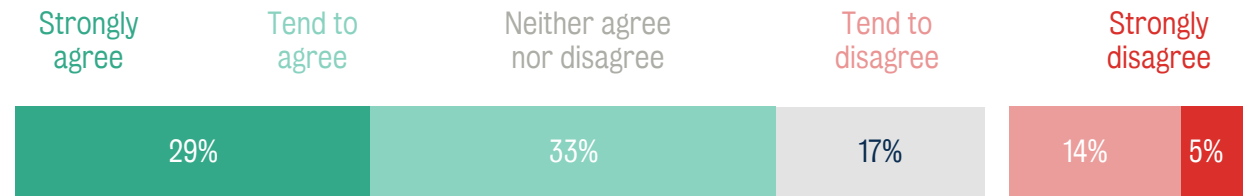
However, perspectives on this issue vary hugely by political affiliation – 88% of Leavers think we're too politically correct as a society, compared with 46% of Remainers who feel the same. And there is a similar split between Conservative (85%) and Labour (46%) supporters.

There is also a steep age gradient in views: the older people are, the more likely they are to feel political correctness has gone too far, with 76% of those aged 55 and above believing we're too PC, declining to 38% among 16- to 24-year-olds.

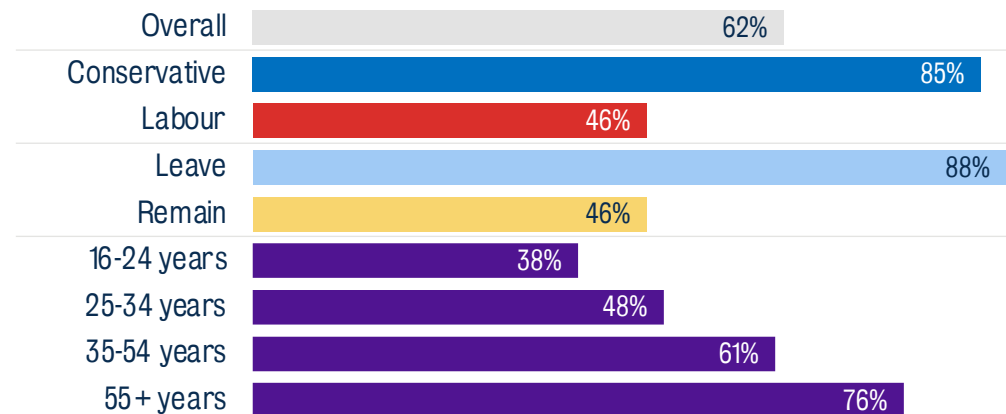
Some people think that the way people talk needs to be more sensitive to people from different backgrounds. Others think that many people are just too easily offended. Where would you place yourself on this scale?



How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Political correctness has gone too far



Agree political correctness has gone too far



Most people say they don't feel reluctant to share their views on key topics – even ones that are potentially controversial

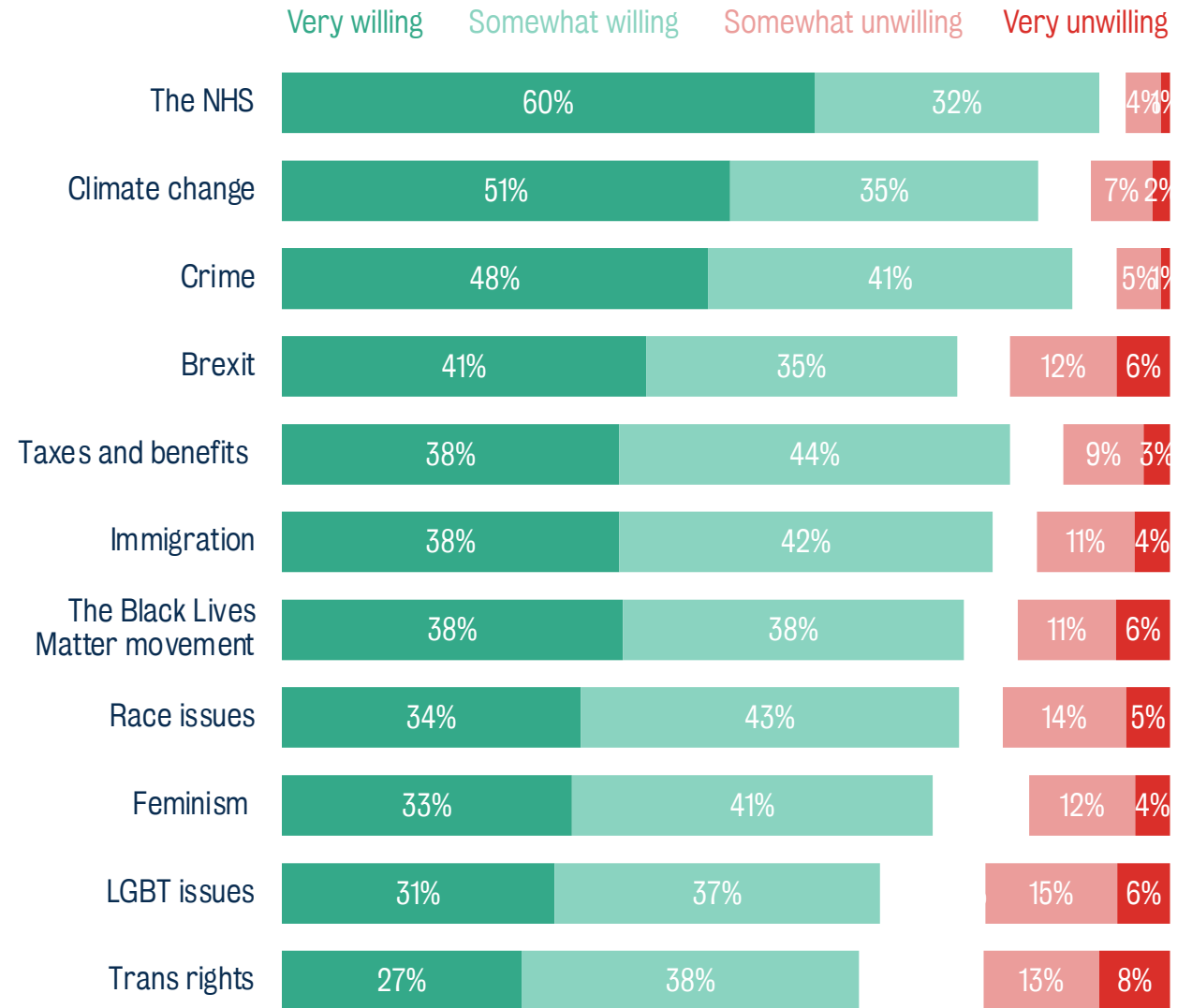
Majorities of the public say they would be willing to discuss their opinions on a range of issues – including many that are often seen as divisive – with colleagues or classmates.

For example, of all the issues asked about, the public are least prepared to talk about trans rights in such a scenario – but two-thirds (65%) are still willing to share their views on the issue, compared with one in five (21%) who say they're reluctant to do so.

There is also little difference in responses when similar issues are described differently, as illustrated by people being just as willing to talk about Black Lives Matter (76%) as they are to discuss race issues (77%).

And while notable minorities say they're *very* willing to share their views on potentially contentious issues such as Brexit (41%), immigration (38%) and feminism (33%), it is only on the topics of climate change (51%) and the NHS (60%) where majorities report being particularly content to discuss their opinions.

Suppose you were at a restaurant with co-workers after work or with classmates after school or college. If any of the following topics came up, how willing or unwilling would you be to share your views?



Most people think universities should expose students to a range of views, even if they are offensive – and there is little support for “no-platforming”

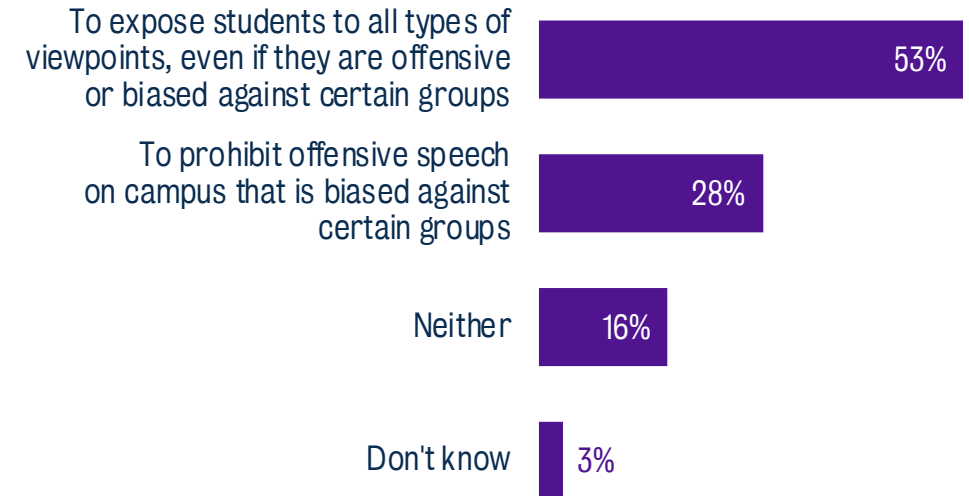
53% say it’s more important for universities to expose students to all types of viewpoints, even if they are offensive or biased against certain groups – almost twice as many as the 28% who feel universities should instead ban speech that promotes such views.

And when it comes to the issue of “no-platforming” speakers with controversial views, around one in six (17%) are in favour of such a response, compared with half (50%) who are against it.

Labour supporters (27%) are nearly three times as likely as Conservatives (10%) to agree that no-platforming is appropriate in these kinds of scenarios, while people from ethnic minorities (29%) are about twice as likely as white people (15%) to support such a measure.

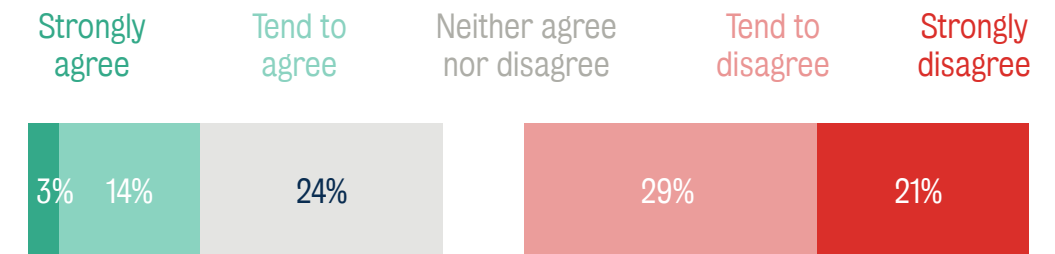
Only a minority among all age groups surveyed support no-platforming – although there are bigger variations in the extent to which people actively disagree with the practice. For example, 32% of 16- to 24-year-olds oppose the idea, compared with 60% of those aged 55 and above.

If you had to choose, is it more important for universities...



There have been well-publicised instances of “no-platforming” at UK universities in recent years. This involves students trying to prevent invited speakers, whose views the students believe to be unacceptable, from speaking, or disrupting the events they are speaking at.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that “no-platforming” is the right response to speakers with controversial views?

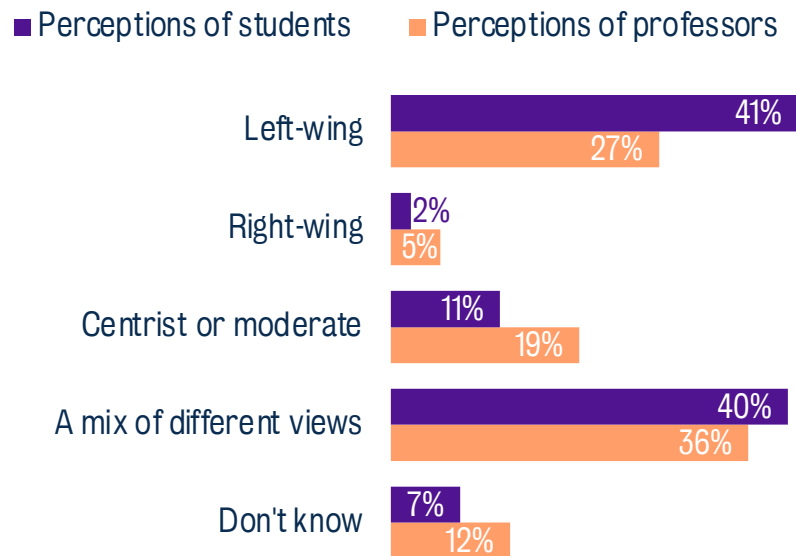


There is little sign that the public see university professors as left-wing

People who have attended university are more likely to say their fellow students (41%), rather than their professors (27%), had left-wing views. And people who went to university are not much more likely than people who didn't to say that academics tend to be left-wing (27% vs 18%).

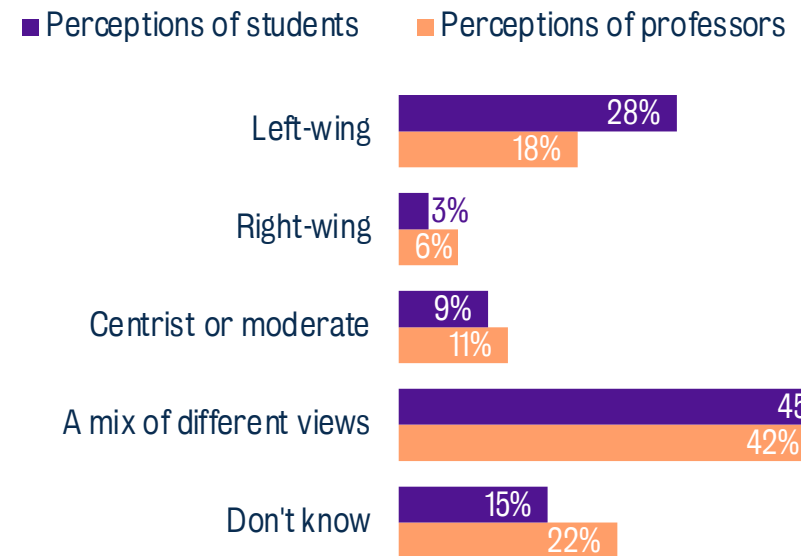
The most common view of professors is that they had a range of different political perspectives, with 36% of former students feeling this way. 19% think the academics at their university had centrist or moderate views and 5% thought they were mostly right-wing.

Thinking about the students and professors at the university you attended, what would you say are or were the most common political views?



Among people who didn't go to university, around one in five (18%) think professors mostly have left-wing views, compared with around two in five (42%) who think they tend to have a mix of different political opinions. And people who haven't been to university are more likely to see students (28%), rather than professors (18%), as holding left-wing views. But the most common perception of both groups is that they tend not to be more closely affiliated with any one political viewpoint over another, and very few see right-wing views dominating.

Thinking about the students and professors at universities in the UK, what would you say are or were the most common political views?



Views on whether the government should promote progressive or traditional values differ strongly by age and politics

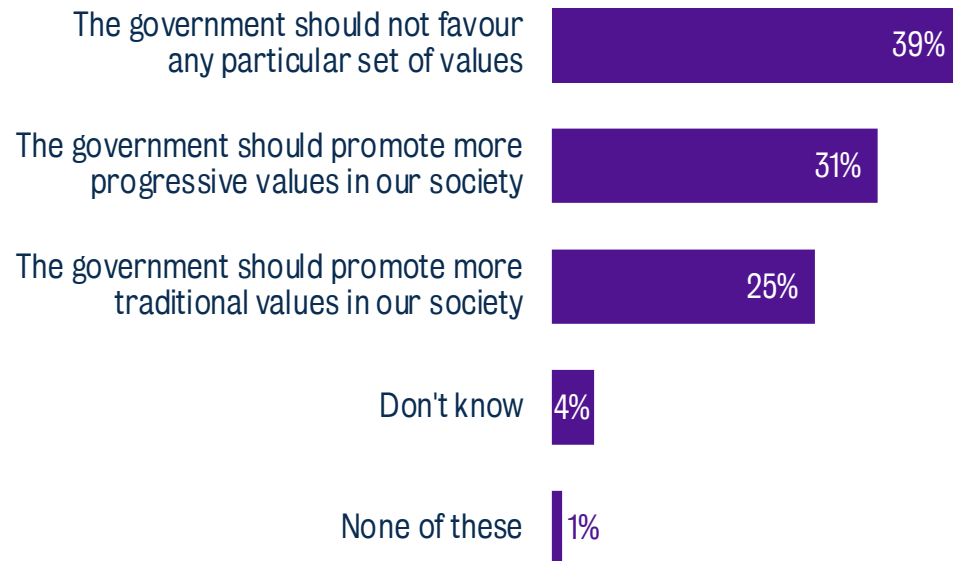
39% of people think the government shouldn't favour any particular set of values – but a majority of 56% think it should come down on one side or another: 31% say the government should promote more progressive values in society, while 25% say it should promote more traditional values.

And opinions are split largely along political and generational lines. For example, Labour supporters (45%) are around three times as likely as

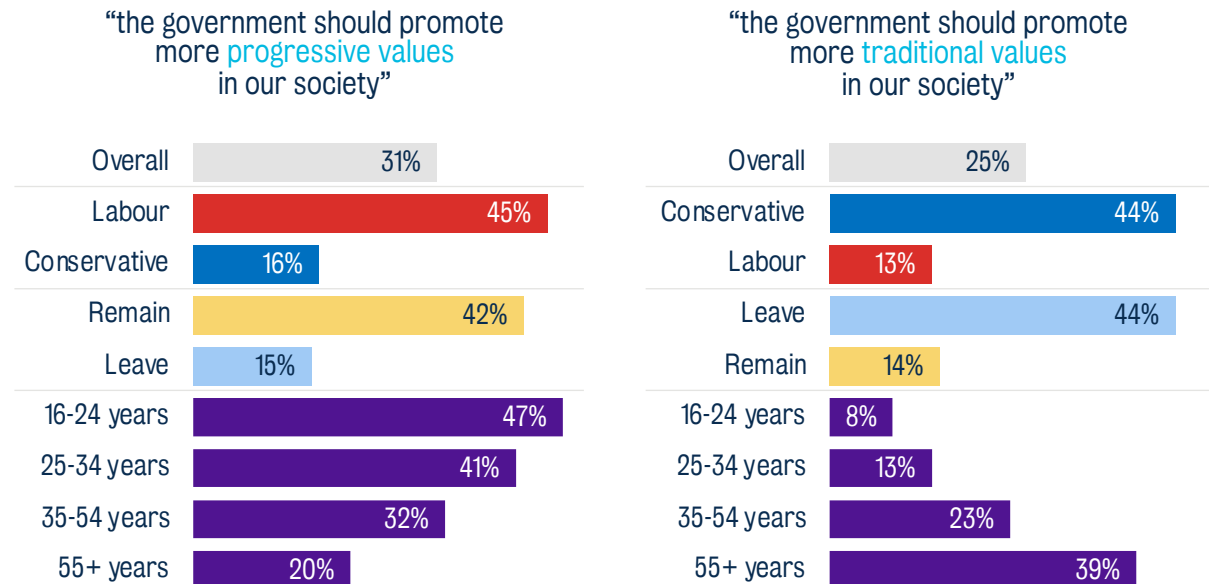
Conservatives (16%) to want the government to promote progressive values, while the situation is reversed when it comes to views on advocating traditional values.

And of all age groups surveyed, only those 55 and above are more likely to prefer that the government adopt a traditionalist, rather than progressive, approach. Around four in ten of all groups say the government should not favour any particular set of values.

Which statement comes closer to your own view?



% who say the following statements come closer to their view



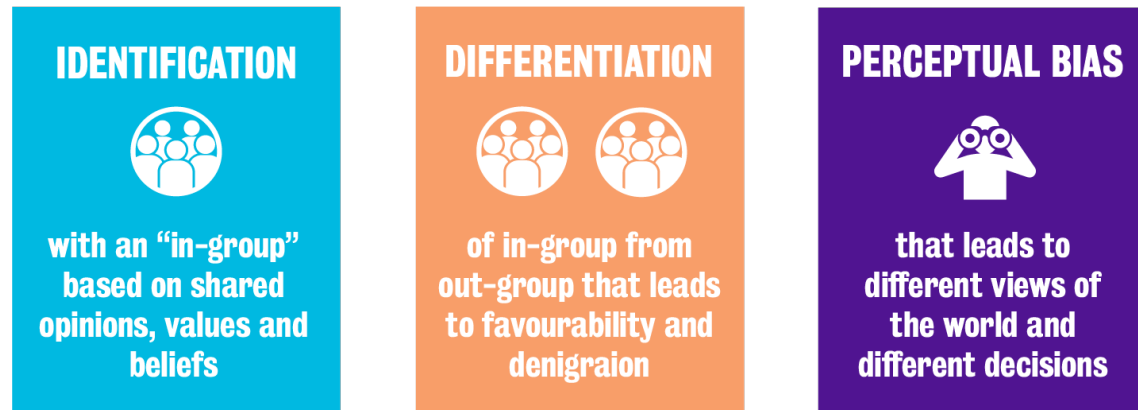
3. Culture wars among the UK public

“Fault lines” in the culture wars

The “fault lines” in detail

We explored six culture war issues in more detail, using a consistent questioning approach for each by drawing on measurement approaches in the affective polarisation literature, to assess the strength of division between groups. The questions were formulated and asked in a three-stage approach:

- **Identification:** how strongly people identify with a “side” in a culture war debate.
- **Differentiation:** the social distance between one side and the other side.
- **Perceptual bias:** whether group identity affects perceptions of measurable realities.



The six issues examined are:

1. Party politics
2. Brexit
3. Covid-19
4. The British empire
5. The Black Lives Matter movement
6. Transgender rights

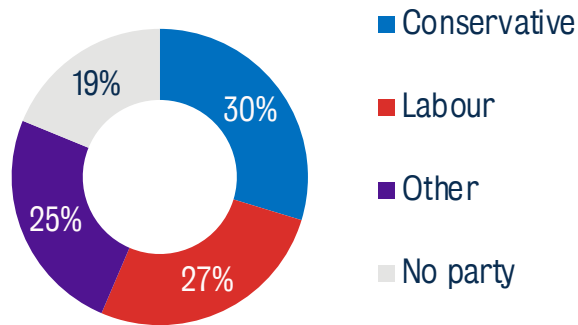
These were selected as a cross-section of the most prominent current debates, and are clearly very different sorts of issues. The question approach, particularly on identification measures, therefore varies to reflect these differences, and should be interpreted carefully.

The different sides in the UK's culture wars – and how many identify with them

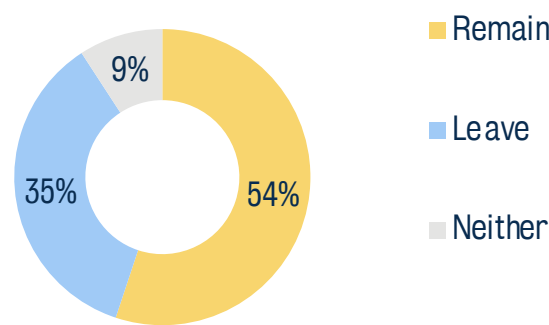
Very different proportions of the population identify with each side on various culture war issues – and many don't really take a side at all, indicating that while some of these topics may be divisive, they are not necessarily dividing the country to the extent that is sometimes suggested.

For example, only a small minority of the public make up the anti-lockdown side of the debate on Covid-19 restrictions, many people don't identify with one of the two main parties, and a large proportion of the public don't express any view on the British empire.

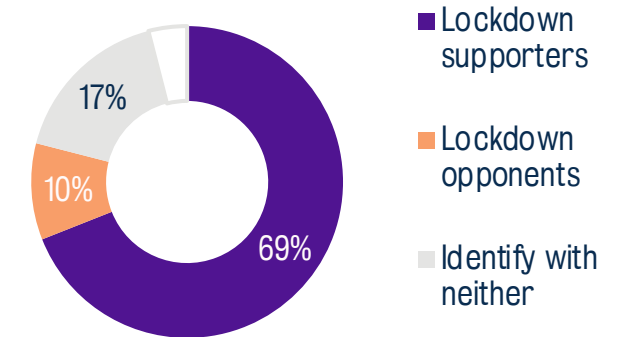
Party politics (supporters)



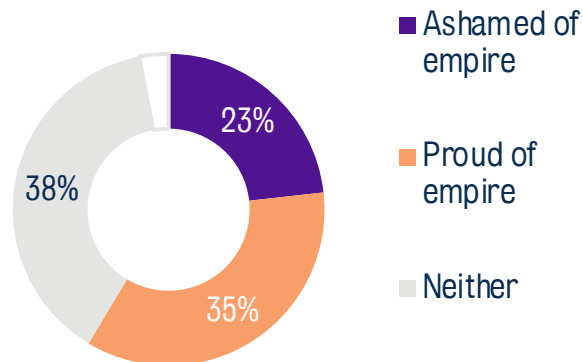
Brexit (supporters)



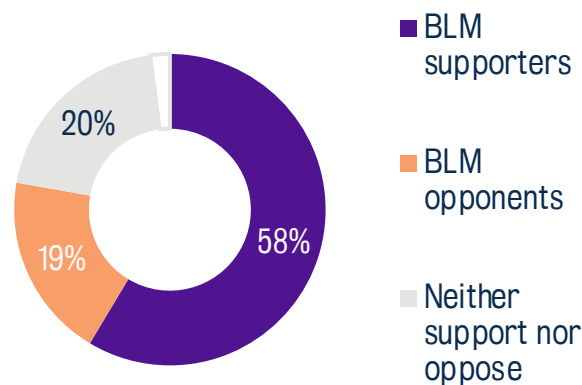
Covid-19



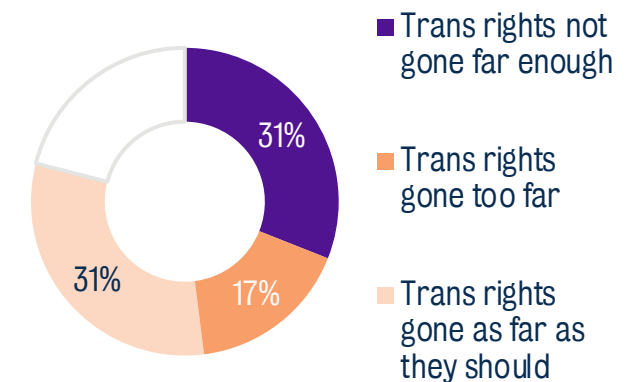
The British empire



The Black Lives Matter movement



Transgender rights



Culture wars in the UK

“Fault lines” in the culture wars:

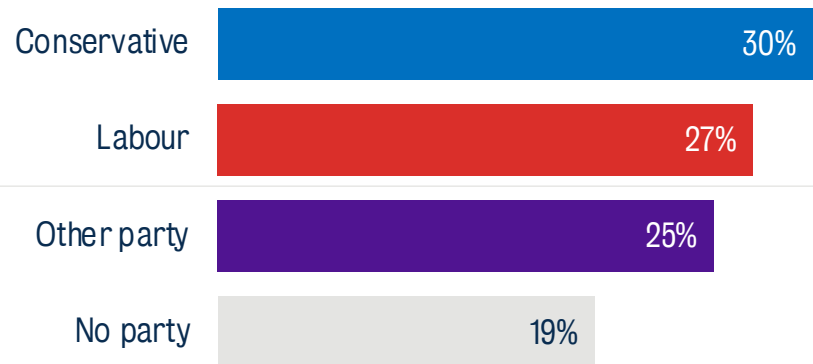
party politics



Around three in 10 people identify as either a Conservative or Labour supporter, and one in four a supporter of another party

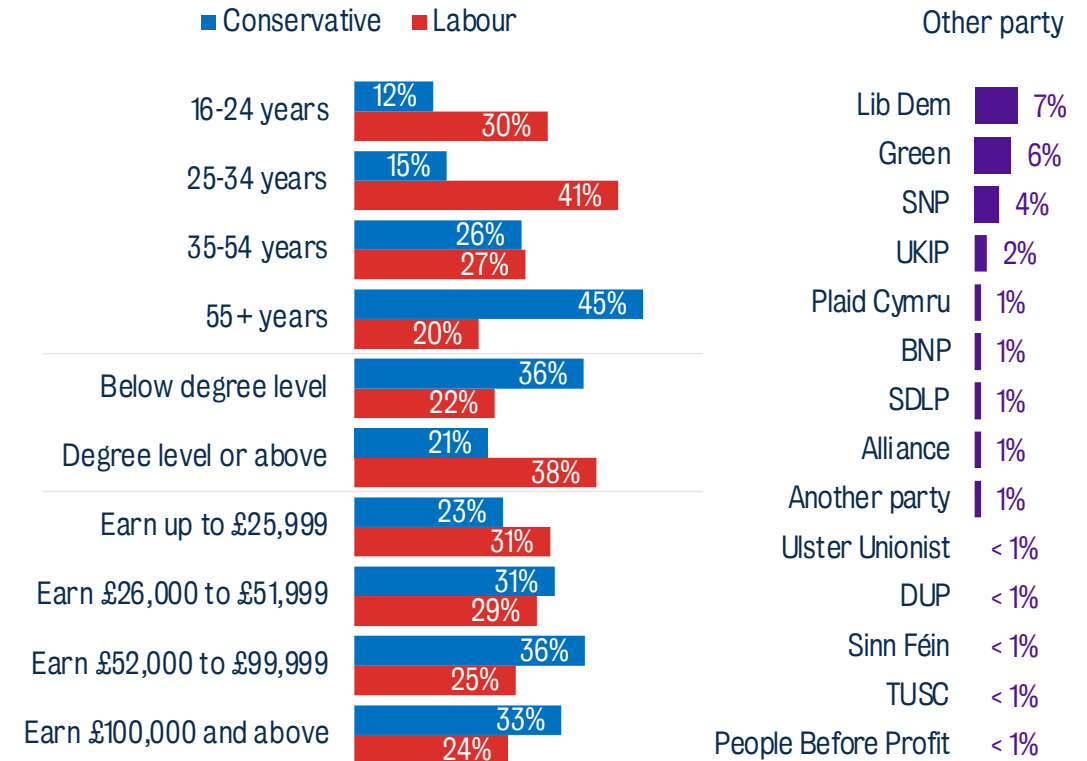
A majority of 57% say they consider themselves a supporter of one of the two main parties (30% Conservative; 27% Labour). This compares with 25% who identify as a supporter of another political party and 19% who don't see themselves as a supporters of any party.

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party?*



* Those who answered no were asked "Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one political party than to the others?" People who then chose a party are also included in chart.

Who are the supporters of the parties?



Conservative supporters tend to be older and wealthier their Labour counterparts, while a greater proportion of Labour supporters are university-educated.

Among those who support another party, 7% of the population consider themselves Lib Dem supporters, 6% Green supporters and 4% SNP supporters.

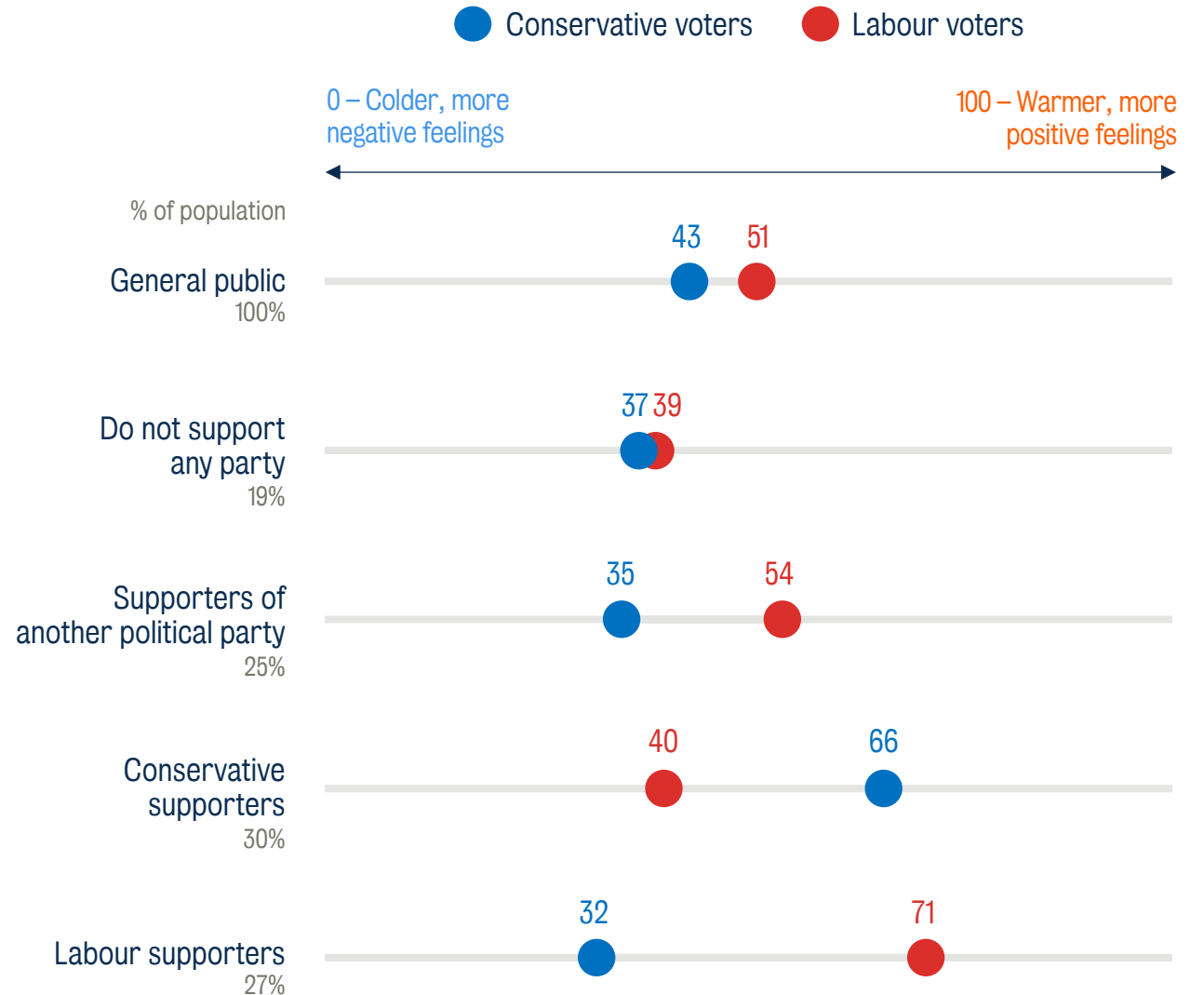
Both sides of the political divide have negative views of each other, with Labour supporters more negative about Conservatives than the reverse

When asked to score their feelings towards the other side out of 100 – with 100 the “warmest” feeling, and 0 the “coldest” – the general public say they feel more negative about Conservative voters (43) than they do about Labour voters (51). However, feelings are more polarised among those who do see themselves as belonging to one side or the other, and there is no difference among those who don't support any party.

Conservative and Labour supporters have a similarly positive view of their own sides, rating themselves at 66 and 71 out of 100 respectively. But there is a slightly bigger difference in how each side perceives the other: Conservatives give Labour voters a rating of 40, while Labour supporters give Conservatives a rating of 32, indicating relatively colder and more negative feelings.

Those who say they support another political party give Conservatives almost the same negative rating (35) – which is considerably colder than the score they give Labour voters (56).

Please rate your feelings towards Conservative and Labour voters, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold



Labour supporters are more likely than Conservatives to say the other side are selfish, hypocritical and closed-minded

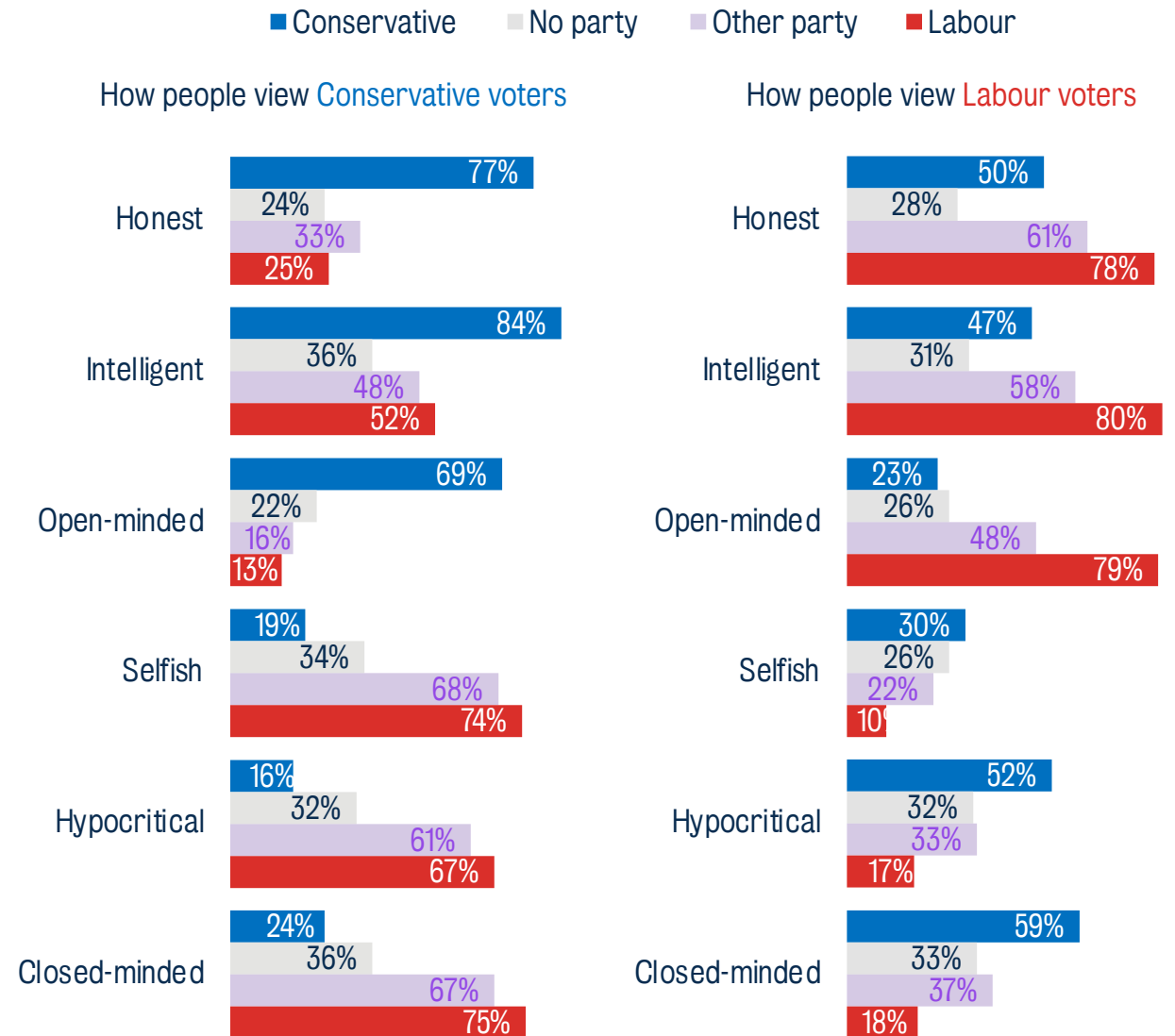
74% of Labour supporters consider Conservative voters to be selfish – more than twice the 30% of Conservatives who say the same about Labour voters.

Labour supporters are also more likely to describe Conservatives as closed-minded (75% vs 59%) and hypocritical (67% vs 52%) than the reverse, and half as likely to see them as honest (25% vs 50%) than the other way around.

Supporters of other parties tend to describe Labour voters more favourably than they do Conservative voters. For example, 61% of those who support another political party say Labour voters are honest, compared with 33% who say the same about Conservatives.

People who don't support any party have more similar views of the two groups, aside from on perceptions of selfishness, where Conservative voters (34%) are more likely to be seen as selfish than Labour voters (26%).

How well, if at all, do you think each of the following characteristics describe Conservative voters and Labour voters? % who say very or fairly well



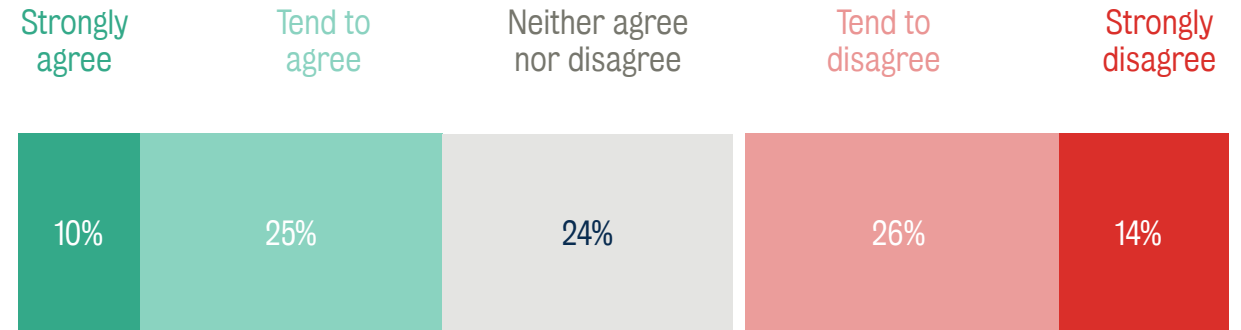
Labour supporters are much more likely than Conservatives to say it's hard to be friends with the other side

35% of Labour supporters say it would be hard to be friends with people who vote Conservative – five times the proportion of Conservative supporters (7%) who say the same about those who vote Labour.

In line with this, 65% of Conservative supporters disagree that it's hard to be friends with people who vote Labour compared with 40% of Labour supporters who say the same about Conservatives.

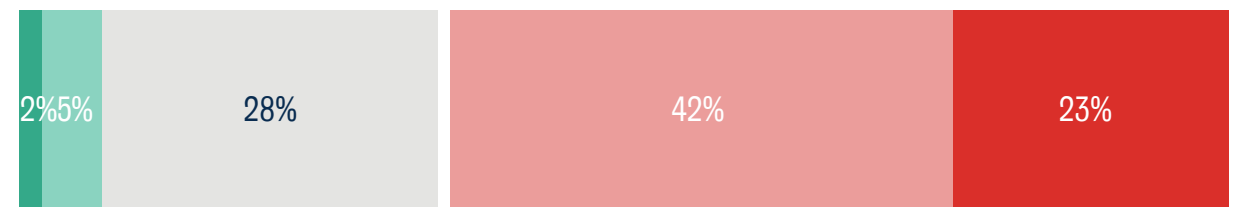
* Note some figures differ from charts due to rounding

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who vote for the **Conservative** party



* Asked to **Labour** supporters

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who vote for the **Labour** party



* Asked to **Conservative** supporters

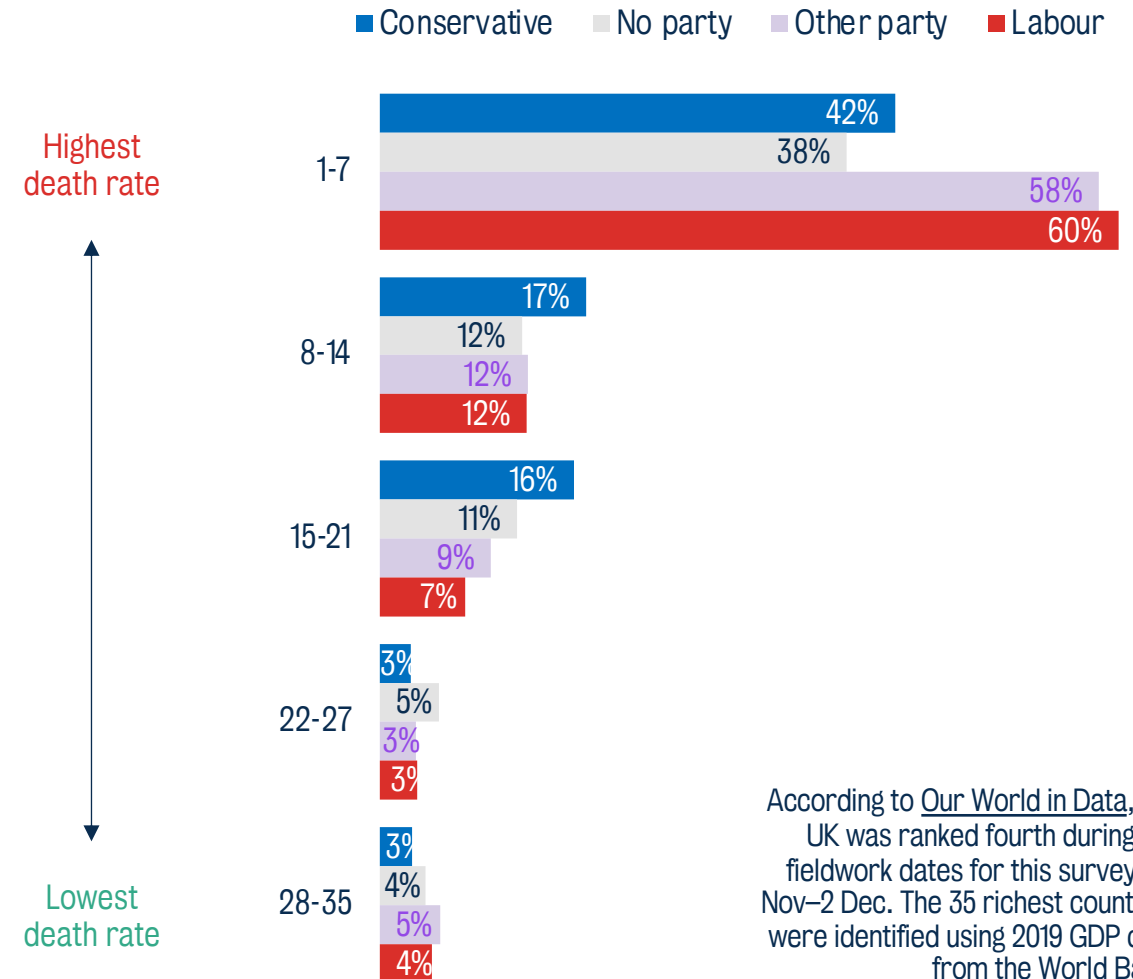
People's assessment of how the UK has fared during the Covid-19 pandemic varies according to their political allegiance

How people in the UK perceive the reality of coronavirus varies with their politics, with Labour supporters giving a more critical – and more accurate – assessment than Conservatives of how the country has fared during the crisis.

In late November / early December 2020, the UK had the fourth-highest Covid-19 death rate of the 35 richest countries in the world. Those who identify with the Labour party were much more likely than Conservatives to correctly judge that the UK had one of the top seven worst death tolls at the time (60% vs 42%).

By contrast, Conservatives were more likely (16%) than Labour supporters (7%) to place the UK somewhere in the middle of the ranking – though neither party's supporters see the UK as being among the advanced economies with the lowest proportion of deaths.

Thinking about the UK's experience of coronavirus, how do you think the UK's total death rate compares to that of other advanced economies? Specifically, where do you think the UK ranks among the 35 richest countries globally in terms of deaths directly attributed to coronavirus per million of population?



According to [Our World in Data](#), the UK was ranked fourth during the fieldwork dates for this survey: 26 Nov–2 Dec. The 35 richest countries were identified using 2019 GDP data from the [World Bank](#).

Culture wars in the UK

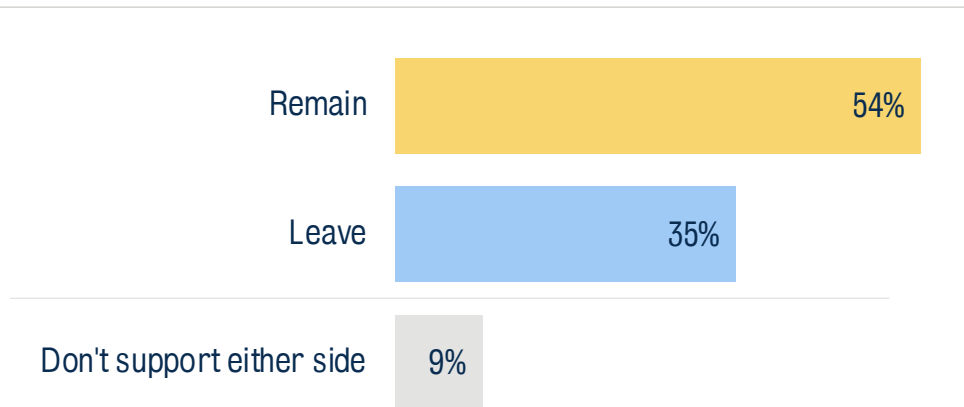
“Fault lines” in the culture wars:

Brexit

More people now identify as Remain supporters than as Leave supporters, with age and education a big dividing line between the two sides

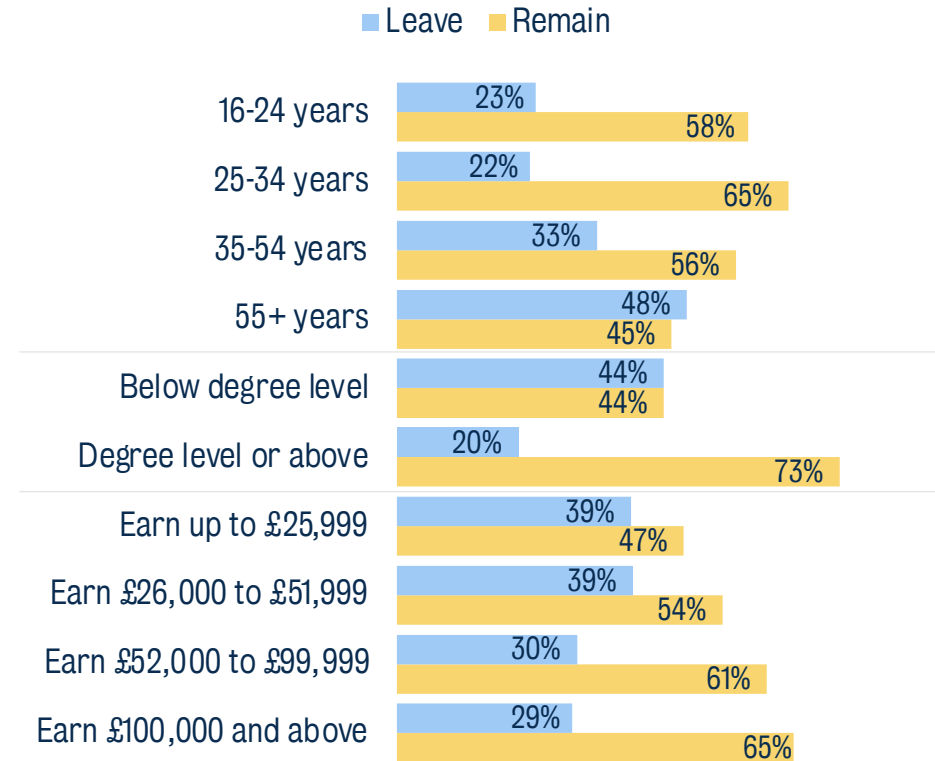
54% of the public now consider themselves a Remain supporter, compared with 32% who say they're a Leave supporter. Just 9% say they don't support either side.

Thinking about the UK's relationship with the European Union, do you think of yourself as a "Remainer", a "Leaver", or do you not think of yourself in that way?*



* Those who answered no were asked "Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one side than to the other?" People who then chose a side are also included in chart.

Who are Leave and Remain supporters?



People with university degrees are more than three times as likely to be Remain supporters as they are to be Leavers (73% vs 20%).

Younger people and higher earners are also much more likely to identify as Remain supporters – for example, 65% of those who earn £100,000 and above see themselves this way, compared with 29% who side with Leave.

Brexit is just as polarising as party politics, with Remainders feeling more negative about Leavers than the reverse

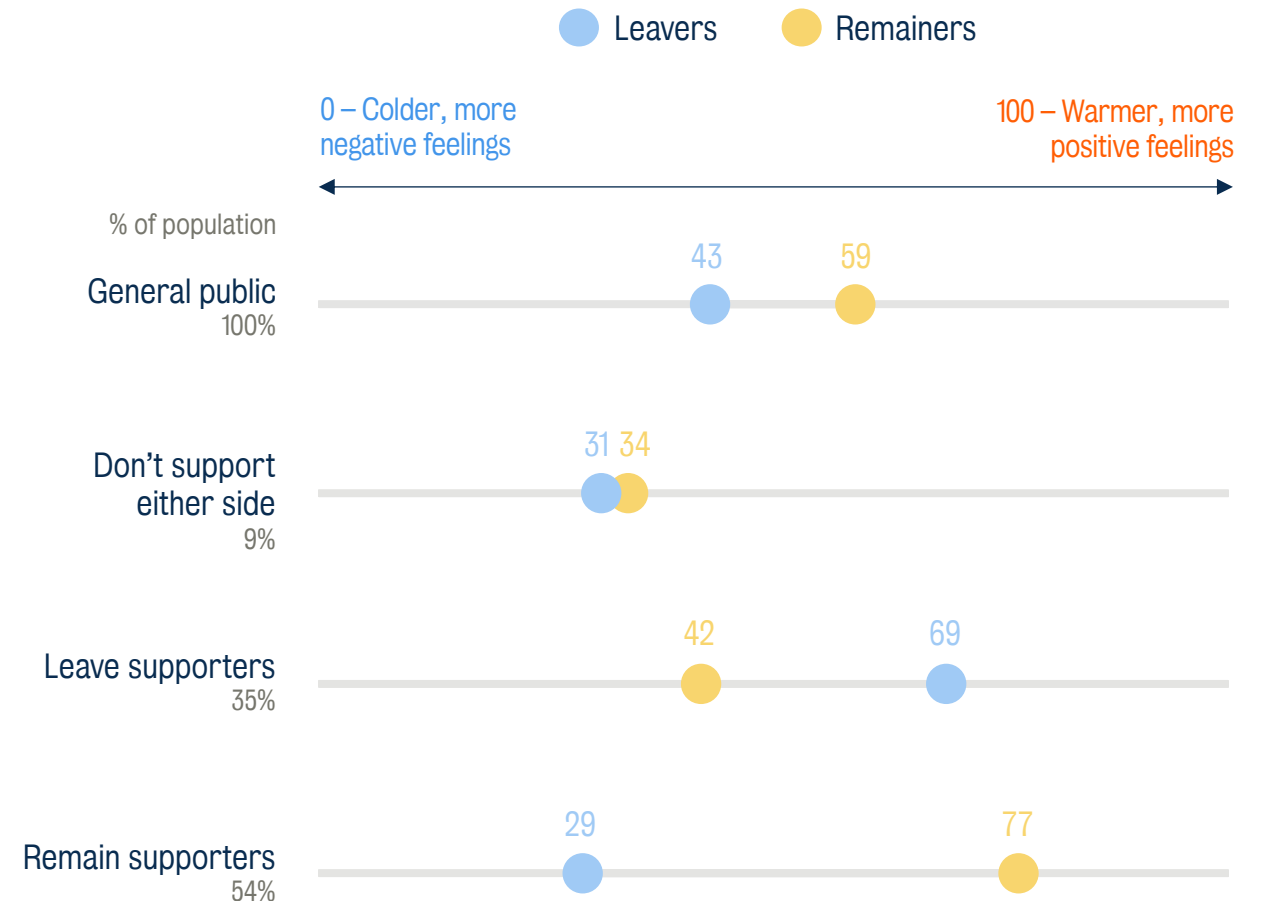
Remainers view Leavers in a more negative light than Leavers do Remainers, with the divide in perceptions similar to that between Labour and Conservative supporters.

Remainers rate their feelings towards Leavers at 29 out of 100, while Leavers give Remainers a warmer rating of 42 out of 100.

Those who don't support either side of the Brexit debate have very similar feelings towards both Leavers and Remainers. Both are viewed unfavourably, with Leavers given a score of 31, and Remainers a score of 34.

Among the general public as a whole, people have warmer feelings towards Remainers (59) than they do towards Leavers (43) – although this will partly reflect the higher numbers who now identify with Remain rather than Leave.

Please rate your feelings towards Leavers and Remainers, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold



Across every characteristic asked about, Leavers are more positive about Remainners than Remainners are about Leavers

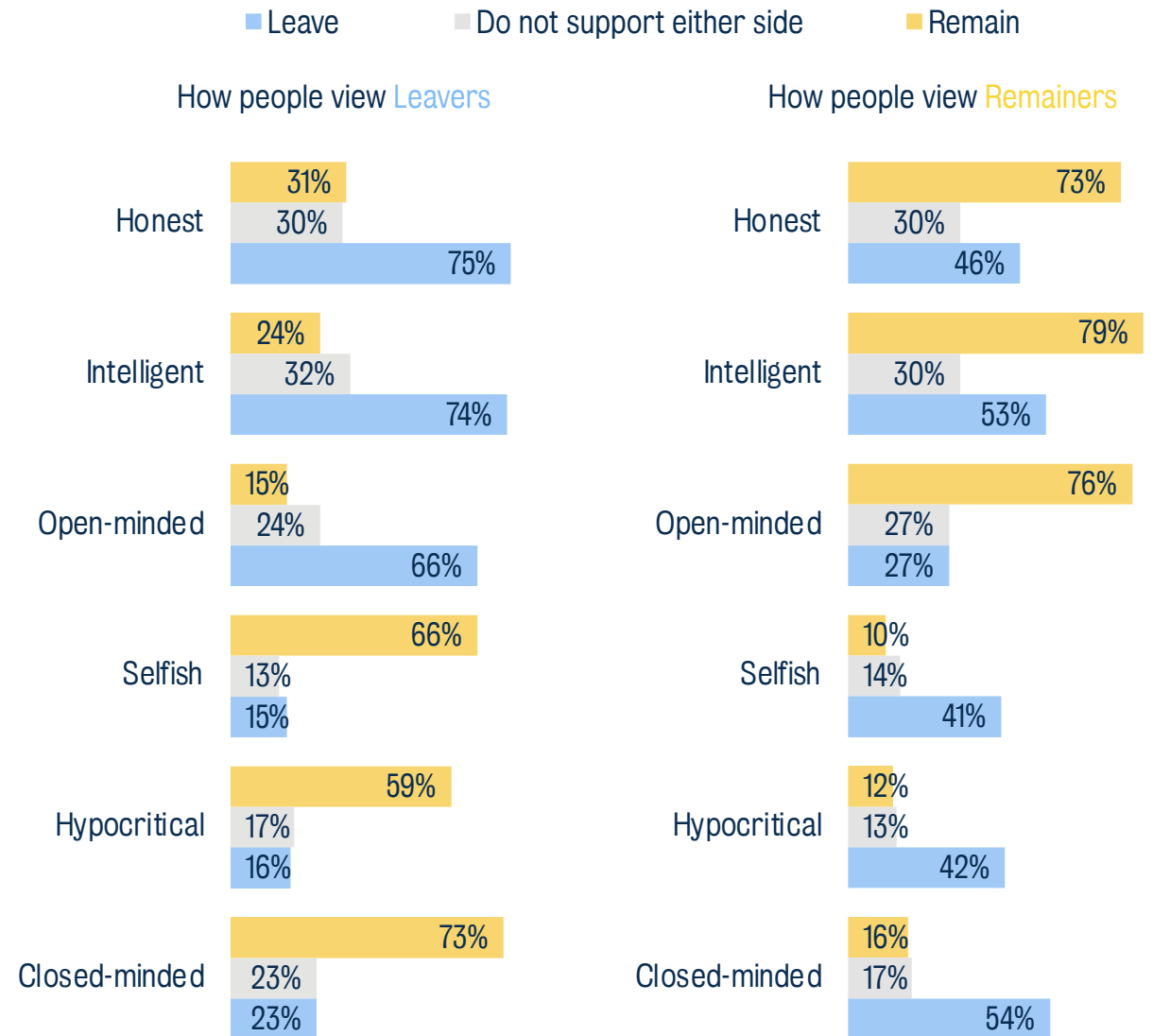
Leavers are more likely than Remainners to say that the other side is honest (46% vs 31%), intelligent (53% vs 24%) and open-minded (27% vs 15%).

Correspondingly, Leavers are also less likely than Remainners to describe the other side in pejorative terms – for example, by saying that they are selfish (41% vs 66%), hypocritical (42% vs 59%) or closed-minded (54% vs 73%).

And large majorities of Leavers and Remainners view those who share their views as honest, intelligent and open-minded, and only minorities believe the charges of selfishness, hypocrisy and closed-mindedness can be applied to their own side.

Among those who don't identify with either Leave or Remain, the two sides are viewed relatively similarly.

How well, if at all, do you think each of the following characteristics describe Leavers and Remainners? % who say very or fairly well



Leavers say they are more comfortable being friends with Remainners than the reverse

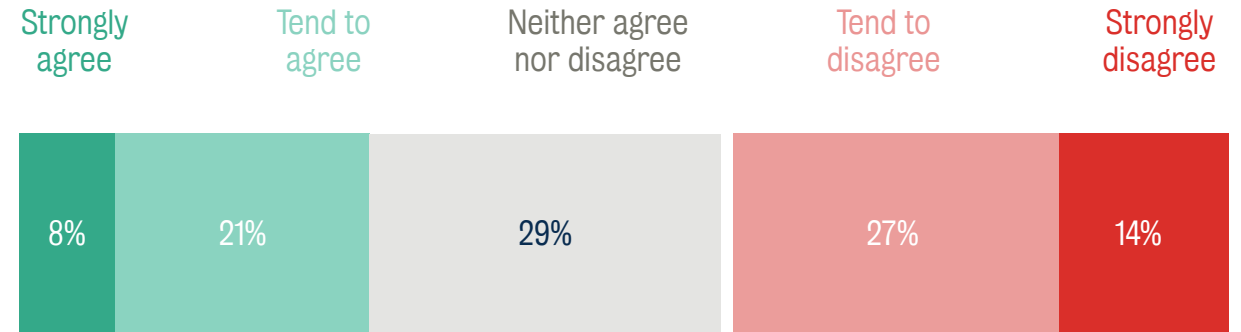
29% of Remain supporters say it's hard to be friends with people who voted Leave in the EU referendum – four times the 7% of Leavers who say the same about Remain voters.

In line with this, 60% of Leavers do not think it's difficult to be friends with those who voted differently to them, compared with 41% of Remainners who feel this way.

Three in 10 of both groups say they neither agree nor disagree that they struggle to be friends with someone on the other side of the Brexit debate.

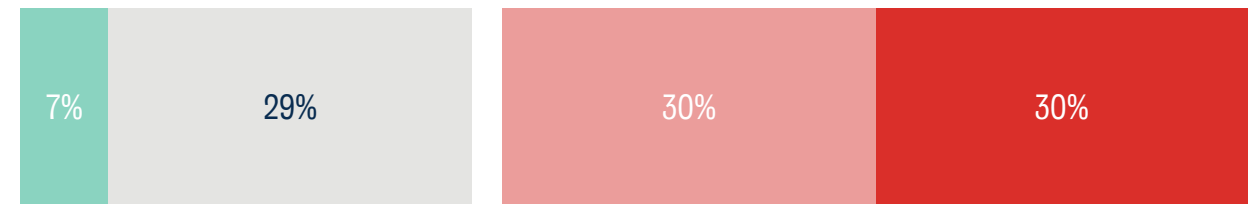
* Note some figures differ from charts due to rounding

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who voted **Leave** in the Brexit referendum*



*Asked to **Remain** supporters

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who voted **Remain** in the Brexit referendum*



*Asked to **Leave** supporters

People's position on Brexit is associated with different perceptions of European immigration

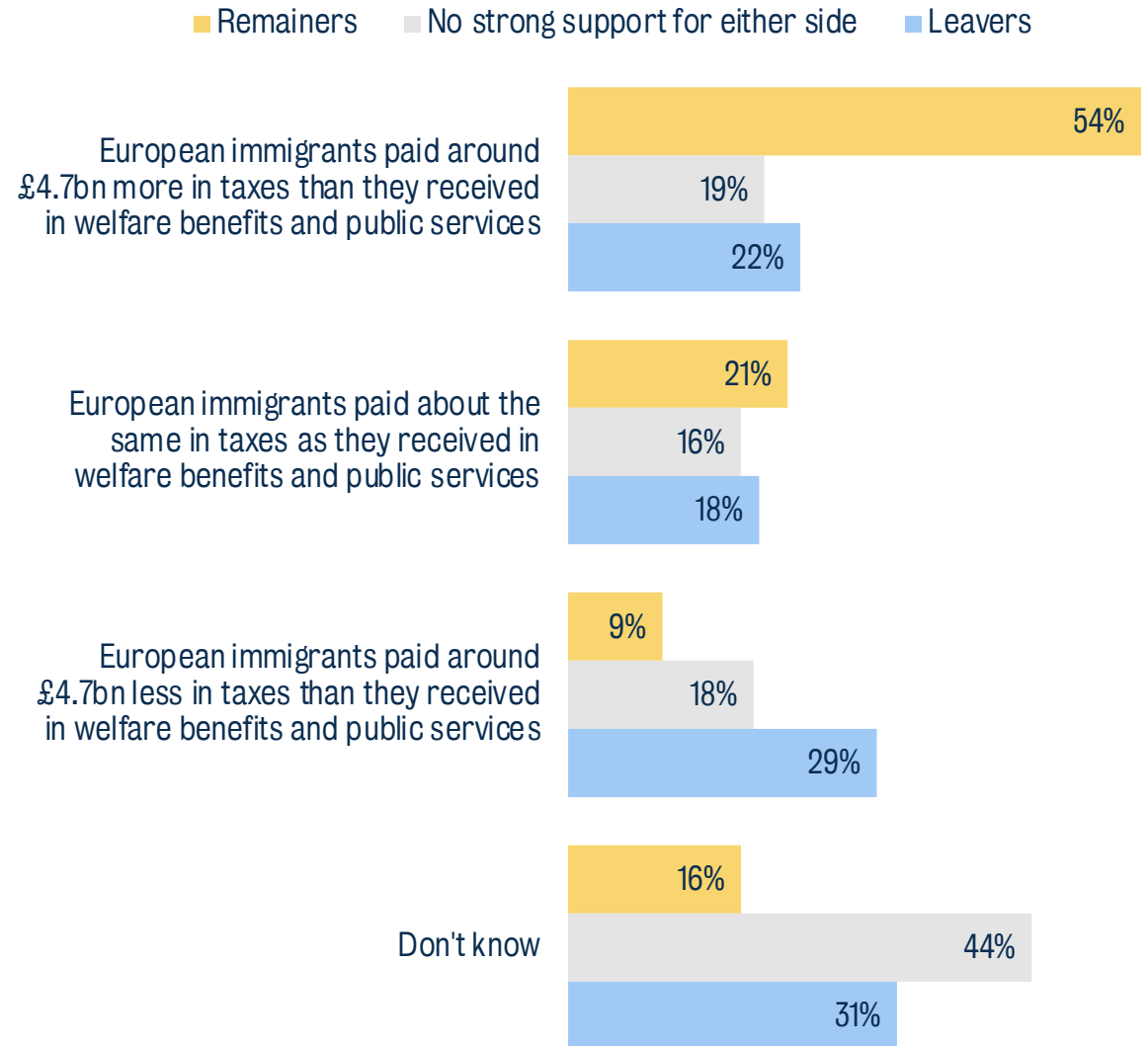
When asked a factual question about European immigration – a policy issue closely linked to Brexit – Leavers and Remainers tend to give very different responses, and these responses largely align with the view that might be expected of their side of the debate.

Over half of Remainers (54%) correctly believe that, in 2016/17, European immigrants in the UK contributed more in taxes than they received in welfare benefits and public services, compared with one in five (22%) Leavers who believe this.

Correspondingly, Leavers (29%) are three times as likely as Remainers (9%) to think that immigrants from Europe paid less in taxes than they received in benefits and services.

Those who identify with neither side of the Brexit debate are much more divided in their responses, with nearly half (44%) saying they don't know what the true situation is and the other half distributed evenly across the other response options.

Which of these do you think was true in the UK in 2016/17?



Source: Migration Advisory Committee

Culture wars in the UK

“Fault lines” in the culture wars:

Covid-19



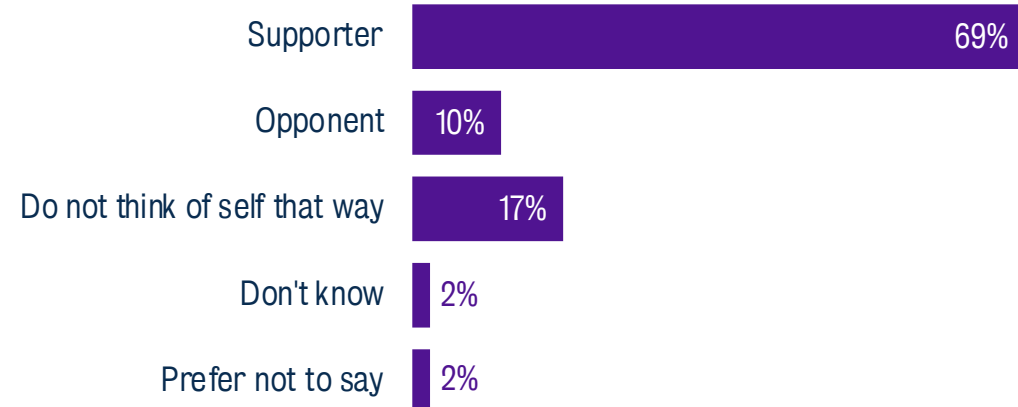
The majority of the public identify as supporters of the coronavirus restrictions – but some groups are less likely than others to see themselves this way

Seven in 10 people (69%) say they see themselves as a supporter of the Covid-19 restrictions introduced by the UK government – compared with one in 10 (10%) who identify as an opponent of the rules. 17% of people say they do not think of themselves as either a supporter or opponent.

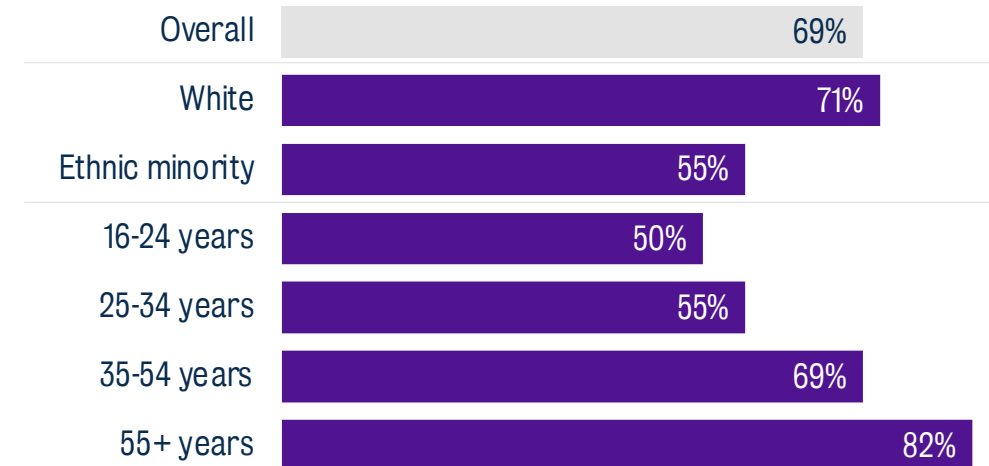
And while majorities of most groups identify as a supporter of the rules, there are big differences in how likely they are to see themselves this way. For example, those from ethnic minority groups (55%) are less likely than white people (71%) to identify as a lockdown supporter.

And 82% of people aged 55 and above consider themselves supporters of the restrictions, which declines across younger age groups, with 50% of 16- to 24-year-olds identifying with this position.

The UK government has imposed a series of restrictions on how we live, including lockdowns and wearing of masks in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Do you think of yourself as a supporter or an opponent of these restrictions, or do you not think of yourself in that way?



% who identify as a supporter of the coronavirus restrictions



Lockdown opponents are viewed unfavourably not just by lockdown supporters but also those who identify with neither side

Lockdown supporters – who comprise the majority of the population – say they have particularly cold feelings towards lockdown opponents, rating them at just 22 out of 100.

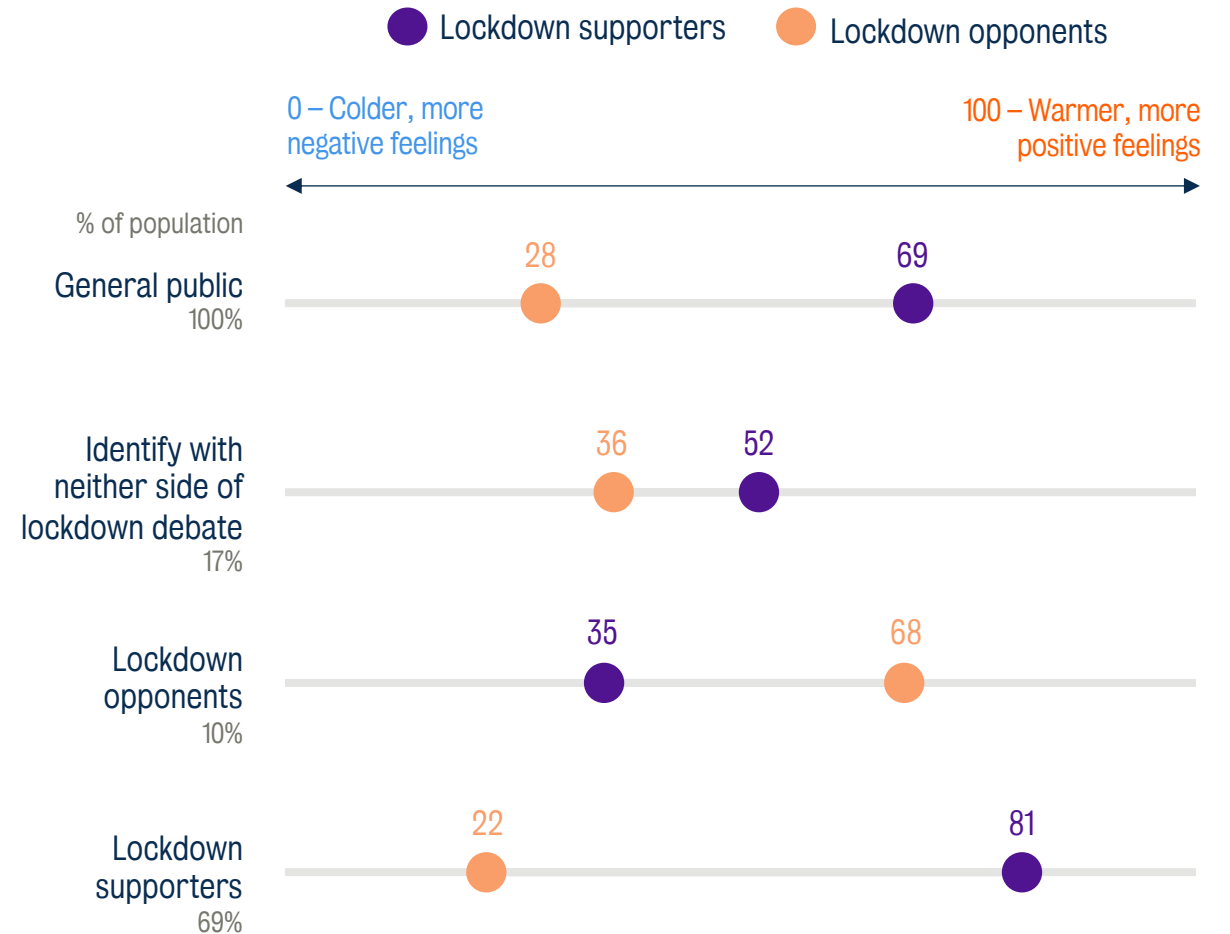
Lockdown opponents, by contrast, have a somewhat warmer – albeit still negative – view of the other side, giving them a rating of 35 out of 100.

Compared with lockdown supporters, lockdown opponents are also less positive about others like them, giving those on their side of the divide a colder rating (69 vs 81).

Reflecting the larger proportion of the population who back the lockdown rules, among the public as a whole, supporters of the restrictions (69) are viewed much more favourably than those who oppose them (28).

There is also a big divide, in the same direction, among the minority who say they identify with neither side of the lockdown debate (52 vs 36).

Please rate your feelings towards lockdown supporters and lockdown opponents, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold



Lockdown supporters overwhelmingly associate lockdown opponents with negative characteristics

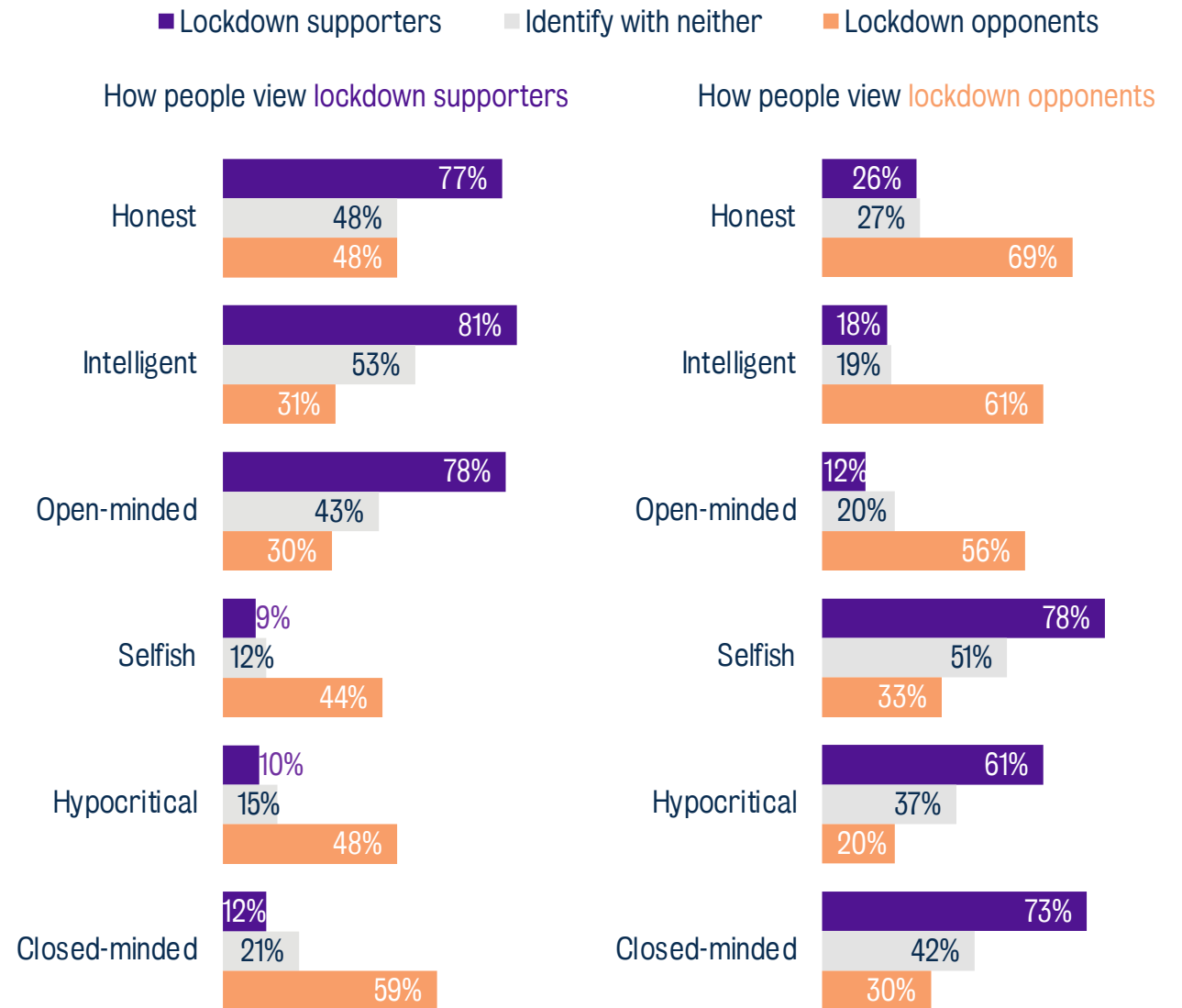
Over 70% of lockdown supporters describe lockdown opponents as selfish and closed-minded, and 61% believe they are hypocritical.

Most lockdown opponents also describe the other side in pejorative terms, although smaller proportions have such negative perceptions – with, for example, 44% saying lockdown supporters are selfish.

Those who are against the Covid-19 restrictions are also more likely than those who support them to describe the other side as honest (48% vs 26%), intelligent (31% vs 18%) and open-minded (30% vs 12%).

And people who do not identify with a side in this debate have a much more negative perception of lockdown opponents than they do of lockdown supporters. For instance, 51% of this group think those who oppose the restrictions are selfish, compared with 12% who say the same about those who are in favour of the rules.

How well, if at all, do you think each of the following characteristics describe lockdown supporters and opponents? % who say very or fairly well



Base: 2,834 UK adults aged 16+, interviewed 26 Nov–2 Dec 2020. Lockdown supporters, n=2,107; Lockdown opponents, n=220; identifies with neither side, n=451.

A majority of lockdown supporters say they struggle to be friends with someone who opposes lockdown

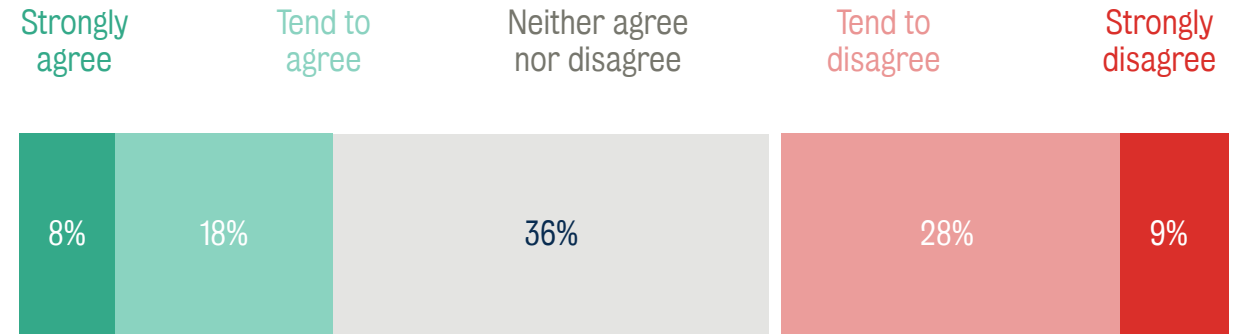
Lockdown supporters (55%) are twice as likely as lockdown opponents (27%) to say it's difficult to be friends with people on the other side of the debate.

In line with this, lockdown opponents are much more confident that someone's position on the coronavirus restrictions isn't a barrier to their being friends with them: 37% disagree that it's be hard to form such a friendship – almost three times the 13% of lockdown supporters who feel the same.

Around three in 10 people on both sides of this debate say they neither agree nor disagree that it's hard to be friends with someone with the opposing view.

* Note some figures differ from charts due to rounding

To what extent do agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who **support** the government's restrictions on how we live in response to the coronavirus outbreak*



*Asked to people who are **oppose** the coronavirus restrictions

Base: 382 UK adults aged 16+ who oppose lockdown restrictions, interviewed 1-7 Apr 2021

To what extent do agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who **oppose** the government's restrictions on how we live in response to the coronavirus outbreak*



*Asked to people who are **support** the coronavirus restrictions

Base: 6,725 UK adults aged 16+ who support lockdown restrictions, interviewed 1-7 Apr 2021

Lockdown opponents are less likely to recognise that face masks are effective and more likely to believe conspiracies linked to the pandemic

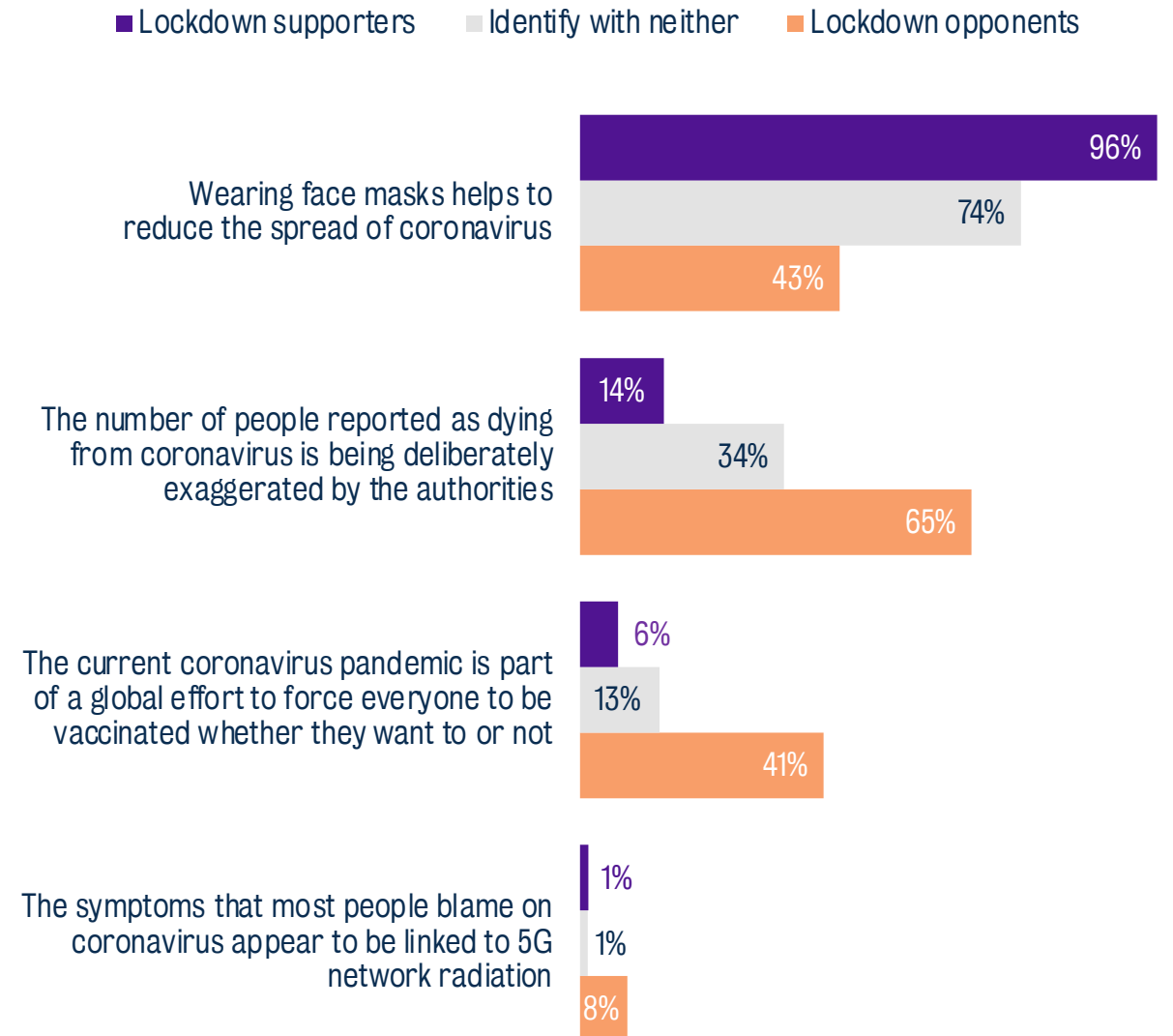
People's views on issues related to the coronavirus crisis differ according to whether they identify as a supporter or an opponent of lockdown.

For example, while 96% of lockdown supporters believe that face masks help to prevent the spread of the virus, this is true of 43% of lockdown opponents.

Meanwhile, lockdown opponents (65%) are more than four times as likely as lockdown supporters (14%) to believe that deaths from coronavirus are being exaggerated, and nearly seven times as likely to believe the pandemic is part of a global effort to forcibly vaccinate people (41% vs 6%).

Relatively few people on either side of this debate endorse the idea that coronavirus symptoms are linked to 5G radiation, although lockdown opponents are more likely than lockdown supporters to believe this (8% vs 1%).

Do you consider the following statements to be true or false? % who say true



Base: 2,834 UK adults aged 16+, interviewed 26 Nov–2 Dec 2020. Lockdown supporters, n=2,107; Lockdown opponents, n=220; identifies with neither side, n=451.

Culture wars in the UK

A photograph of a city street featuring a statue of a man in a top hat on a pedestal. The name 'CLIVE' is visible on the base of the statue. The street is lined with grand, classical-style buildings. In the foreground, there are stone steps leading up to a building. A few people are sitting on the steps. A sign with the name 'MURPHY' is visible on a structure near the steps.

**“Fault lines” in the culture wars:
the British empire**

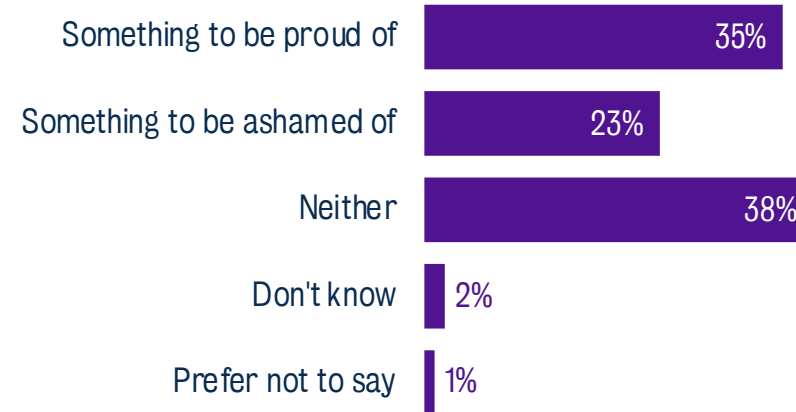
The public are relatively divided on the question of how Britain's colonial past should be viewed today

Around a third of the public (35%) think the British empire is something to be proud of, compared with roughly a quarter (23%) who think it's something to be ashamed of. But the most common answer is that people don't see this issue in such binary terms, with nearly four in 10 (38%) saying the empire is neither a source of pride nor shame.

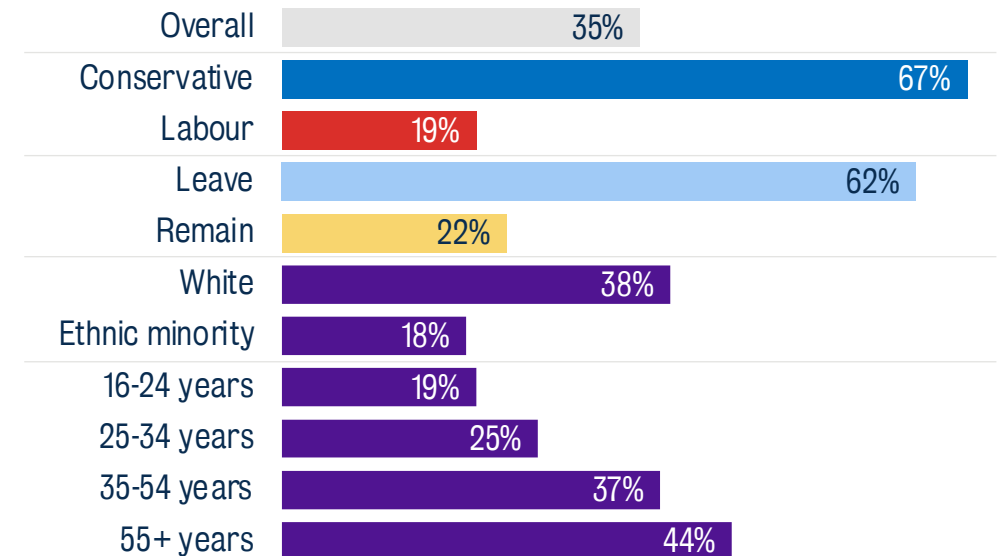
There are big variations in opinion between different groups, however. White people (38%) are twice as likely as people from ethnic minorities (18%) to be proud of the British empire, and older age groups are more likely than younger ones to hold this view.

And Conservatives (67%) and Leave supporters (62%) are around three times as likely as Labour (19%) and Remain supporters (22%) to say that the empire inspires pride.

Is the British empire more something to be proud of or ashamed of?



% who say the British empire is something to be proud of



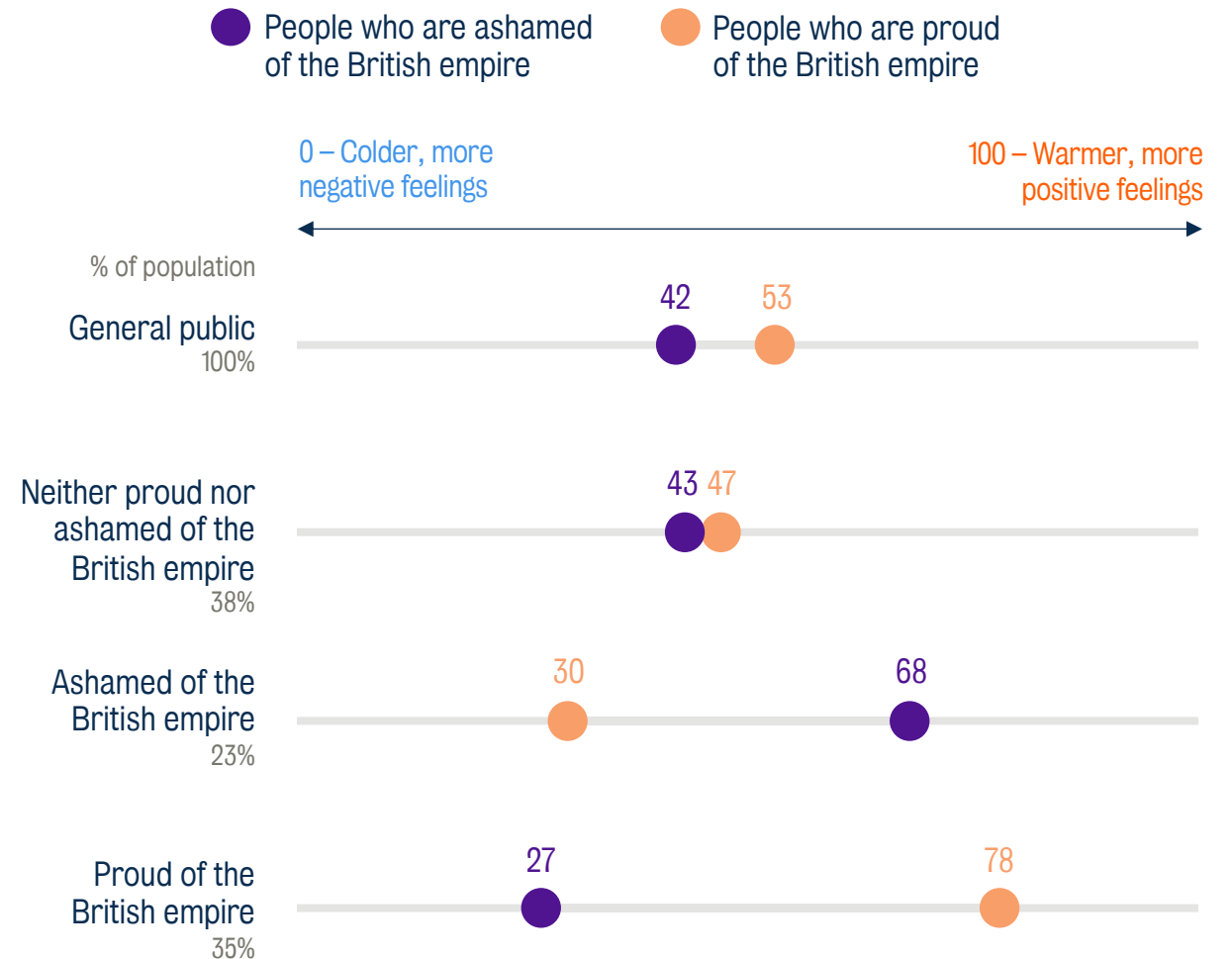
People on either side of the empire debate feel almost equally negative towards the other

People who are ashamed of the British empire give those who are proud of it a rating of 30 out of 100. And in turn, people who are proud of the empire give those who are ashamed of it almost the same negative rating, of 27.

But people who consider the empire a source of pride have warmer feelings towards their own side (78) than do people who consider it a source of shame (68).

Those who identify with neither side in this debate have virtually the same feelings towards those who take opposing views on it (43 vs 47), while the public as a whole have a more favourable perception of people who are proud of the empire (53) than they do of those who are ashamed of it (42), which is in line with the former view being more widely held among Britons.

Please rate your feelings towards people who are proud of the British empire and people who are ashamed of the British empire, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold

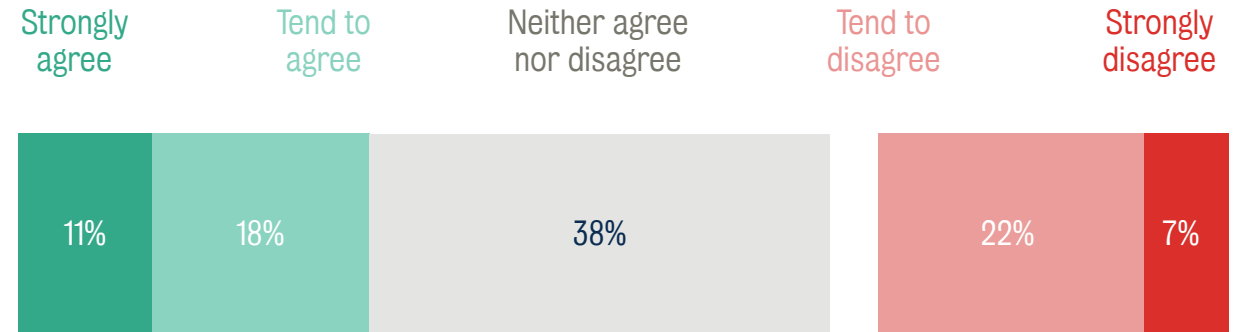


Those who say they're proud or ashamed of the British empire are about as likely as each other to say it's hard to be friends with the other side

Among people for whom the empire is a source of shame, 29% say it's hard to be friends with someone who takes the opposing view in this debate. This compares with 23% who say the same among those who are proud of Britain's colonial past.

And around four in 10 people in both groups say they neither agree nor disagree that friendships are difficult with those belonging to the other side – higher than the proportions who feel this way about friendships with those whose politics or position on Brexit differs to their own.

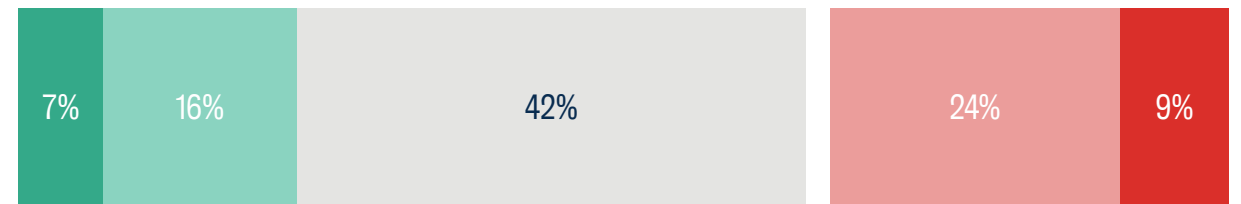
To what extent do agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who say they are **proud** of the British empire*



*Asked to people who are **ashamed** of the British empire

Base: 652 UK adults aged 16+ who said they are ashamed of the British Empire, interviewed 26 Nov–2 Dec 2020

To what extent do agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who say they are **ashamed** of the British empire*



*Asked to people who are **proud** of the British empire

Base: 938 UK adults aged 16+ who said they are proud of the British Empire, interviewed 26 Nov–2 Dec 2020

People's beliefs about last year's BBC Proms controversy are associated with the side they take in the empire debate

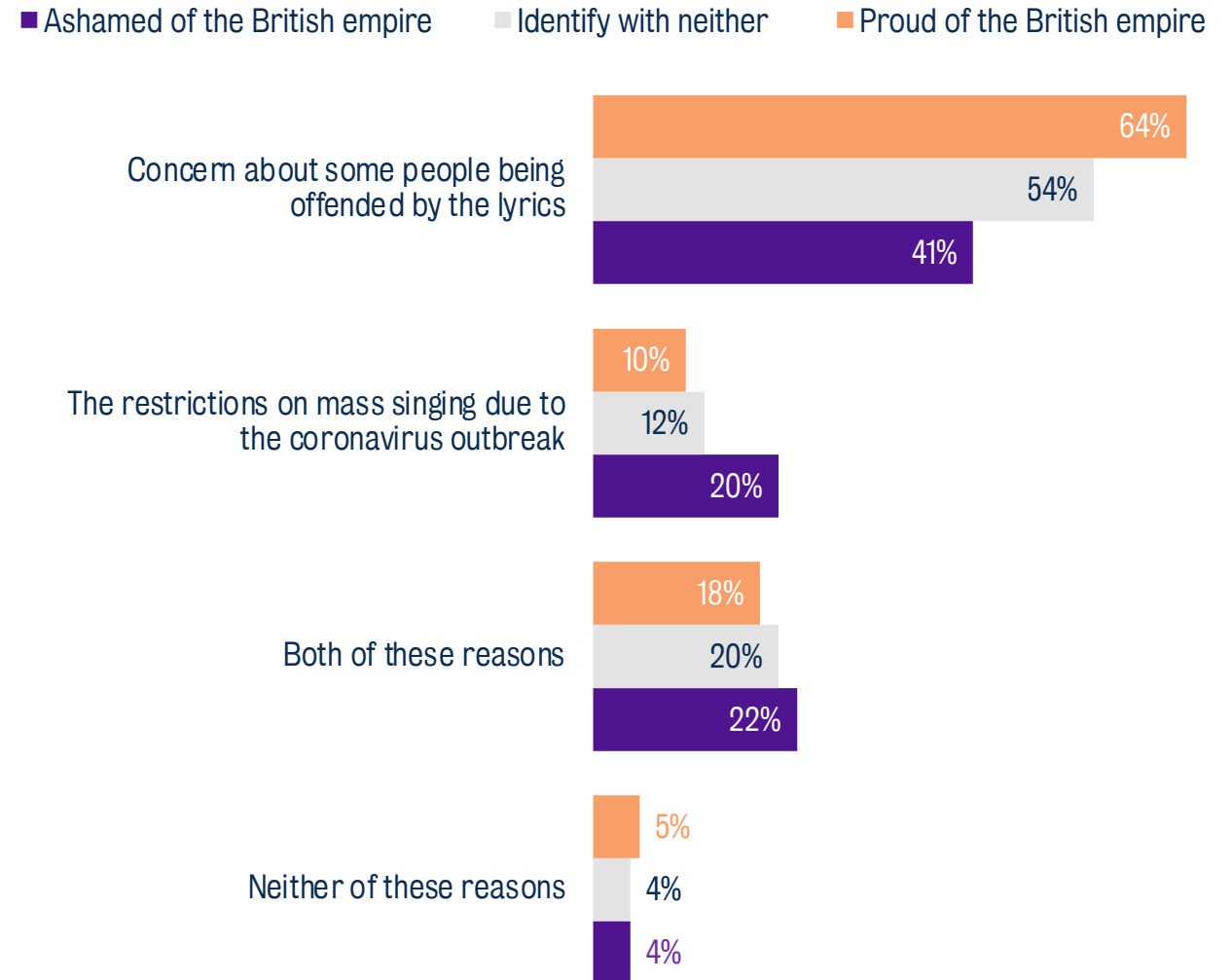
Among those who are proud of the British empire, 64% think the BBC Proms Rule Britannia! controversy was prompted by concerns about the lyrics causing offence – much higher than the 41% who think the same among those who are ashamed of the empire.

And people who see the empire as a source of shame are twice as likely as those who see it as a source of pride to think Covid-19 restrictions were in fact the key factor behind the controversy (20% vs 10%) – although far fewer people overall select this as the reason.

Around one in five people on either side of the empire debate think the BBC's decision was motivated by both concern about the lyrics causing offence and the Covid rules in place at the time. Meanwhile, among the four in 10 people who do not associate themselves with either side of the empire debate, concern about offence being caused is by far the top reason given for the controversy, with 54% holding this view.

Public perceptions may reflect a variety of explanations that have circulated for why the songs were not intended to be sung, with the BBC citing the limits on singing during the pandemic and media reports suggesting the move was motivated by concerns over the lyrics in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, which rose to prominence around the same time.

You may have seen news stories in the summer about Rule, Britannia! and Land of Hope and Glory not being sung at the Proms. In the end, they were sung, but what do you think was the reason the BBC originally decided they would not be sung?



A group of people, primarily Black women, are participating in a protest. They are holding up various signs and banners. The signs include "BLACK LIVES MATTER", "STOP KILLING BLACK PEOPLE", and "I HOPE I DON'T GET KILLED FOR BEING BLACK TODAY". One sign features a graphic of a fist and the text "This is how you arrest a white man who shot 9 people, and this is how you arrest a black man for asking questions." The background shows a city street with buildings.

Culture wars in the UK

“Fault lines” in the culture wars:

The Black Lives Matter movement

The majority of people in the UK support Black Lives Matter – but views vary by age and politics

Six in 10 people (58%) say they support the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, with three in 10 (32%) saying they strongly support it.

Two in 10 (18%) oppose the movement, while the same proportion (20%) say they don't take a side on the issue.

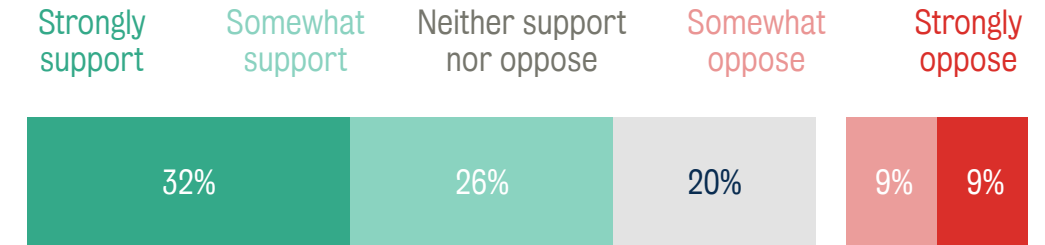
But among the majority of the public who have a favourable view of BLM, opinions vary hugely across political views and age.

Around eight in 10 Labour supporters (79%) and Remain supporters (79%) say they support the movement – compared with almost four in 10 Conservatives (37%) and about one in three Leave supporters (33%) who say the same.

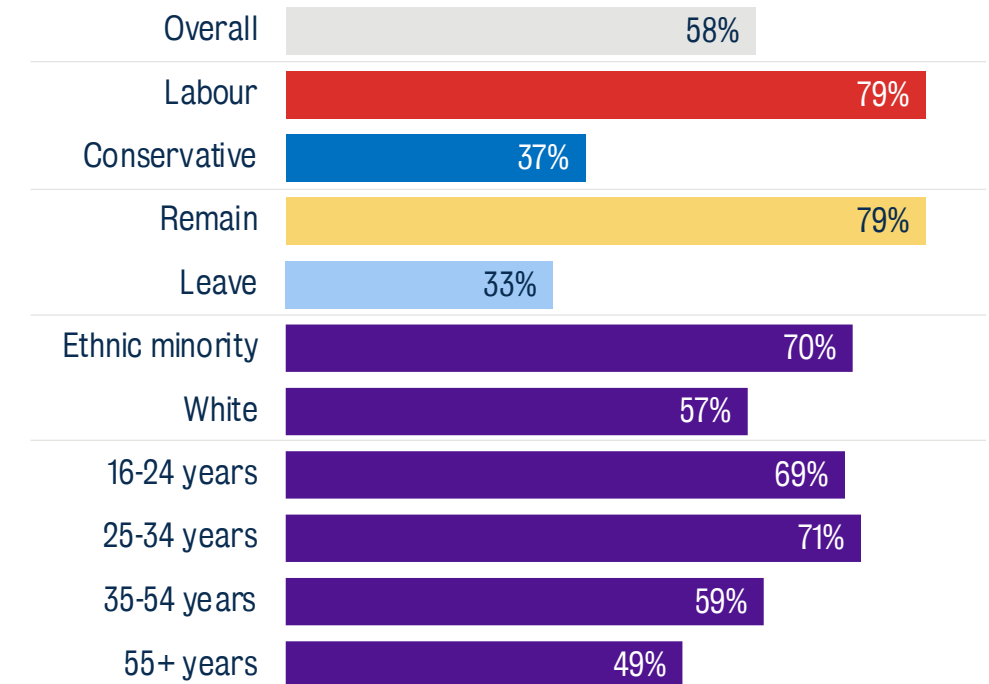
And while seven in 10 16-34 year-olds are supportive of BLM, support declines among older age groups, with half of those aged 55 and above (49%) backing the movement.

There is also a divide in views among ethnic groups, with those from an ethnic minority background (70%) more likely than white people (57%) to support BLM.

From what you've read and heard, how do you feel about the Black Lives Matter movement?



% who strongly or tend to support Black Lives Matter



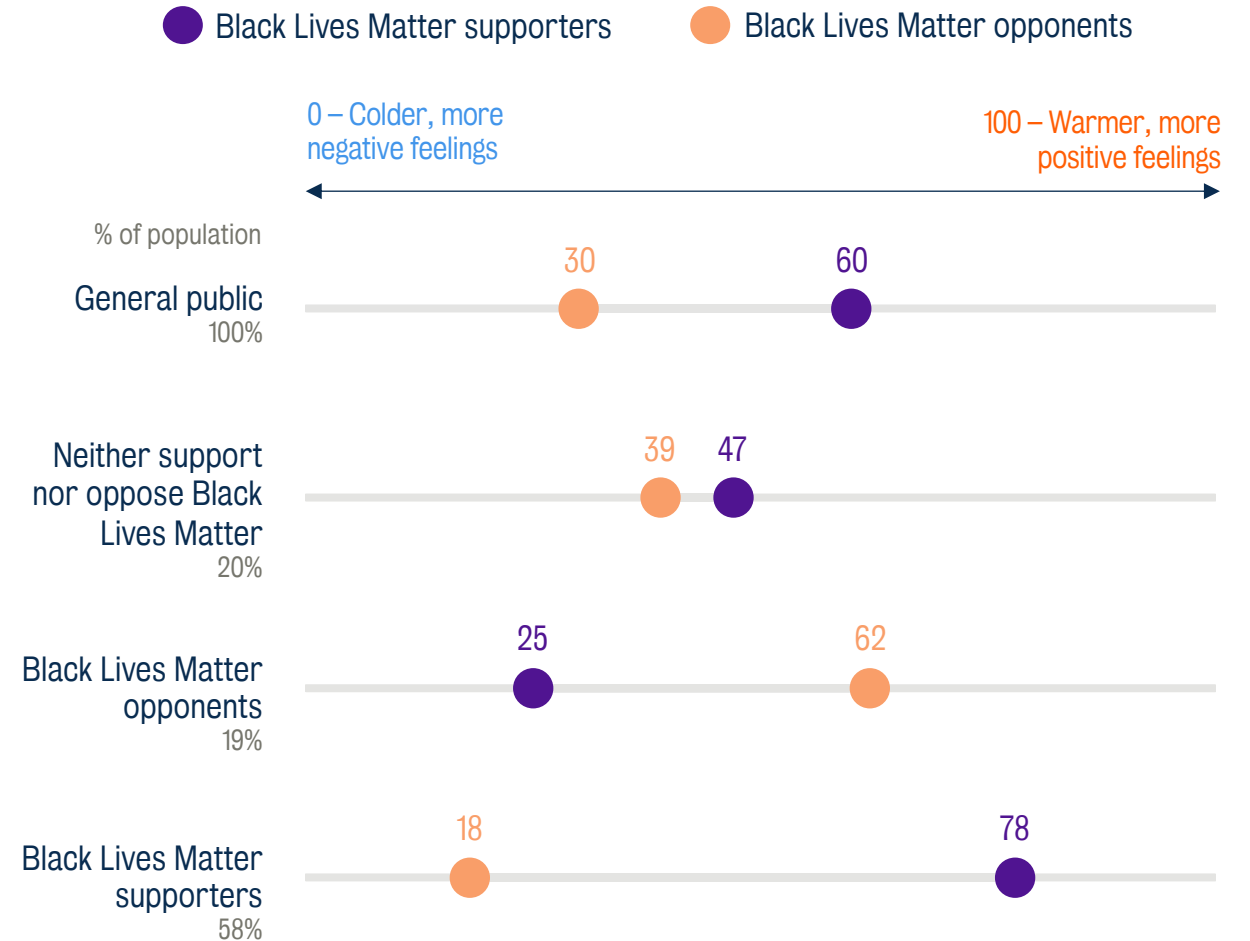
Black Lives Matter is seen as particularly divisive, with both sides in the debate having very cold feelings towards each other

Those who oppose BLM give people on their side of this issue a warm rating of 62 and a cold rating of 25 to those on the other side. But this gap in perceptions is even greater among BLM supporters, who rate their side at 78 and BLM opponents at 18 – the joint-coldest rating given to a group across all the culture war issues asked about in this study.

People who identify with neither side of the BLM debate give relatively similar ratings to both supporters (47) and opponents (39) of the movement – although they do have warmer feelings towards the former group.

The public rate their feelings towards BLM opponents at 30 out of 100, compared with 60 out of 100 for BLM supporters, indicating that their view of the former group is twice as negative as their view of the latter. This reflects the fact that there are far more people who are pro-BLM among the population overall.

Please rate your feelings towards people who support the Black Lives Matter movement and people who oppose the Black Lives Matter movement, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold



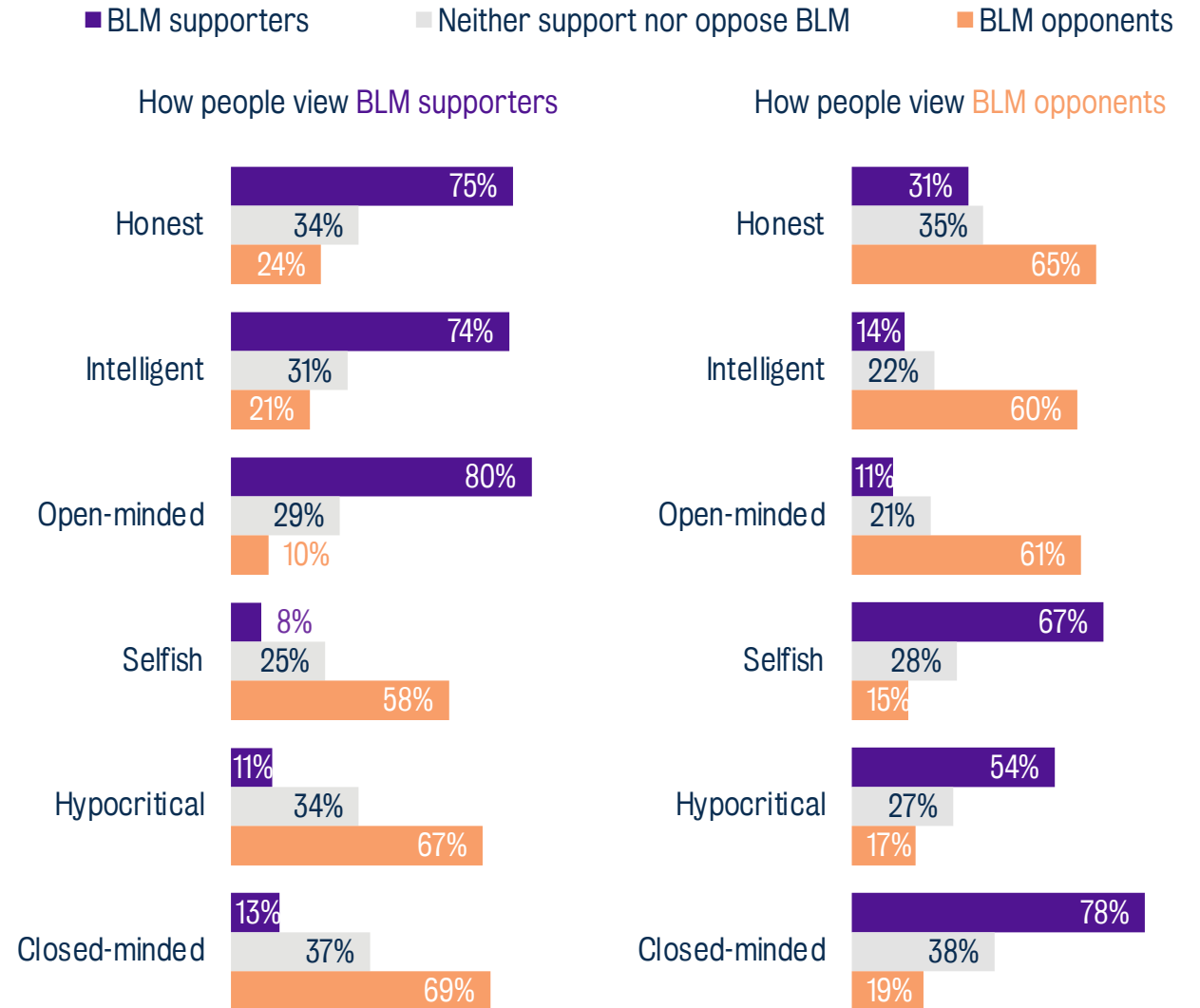
Majorities of both BLM supporters and opponents associate those on the other side with negative characteristics

BLM supporters are more likely to think BLM opponents are closed-minded (78% vs 69%) and selfish (67% vs 58%) than the reverse, while those who are against Black Lives Matter are more likely to think those who support the movement are hypocritical (67% vs 54%).

Both BLM supporters and opponents describe their own side in favourable terms – although higher proportions of the former think people on their side are honest (75% vs 65%), intelligent (74% vs 60%) and open-minded (80% vs 61%).

Those who neither support nor oppose BLM have very similar views of both sides in the debate. For example, 34% call BLM supporters honest, compared with 35% who say the same about BLM opponents.

How well, if at all, do you think each of the following characteristics describe people who support the Black Lives Matter Movement and people who oppose it? % who say very or fairly well



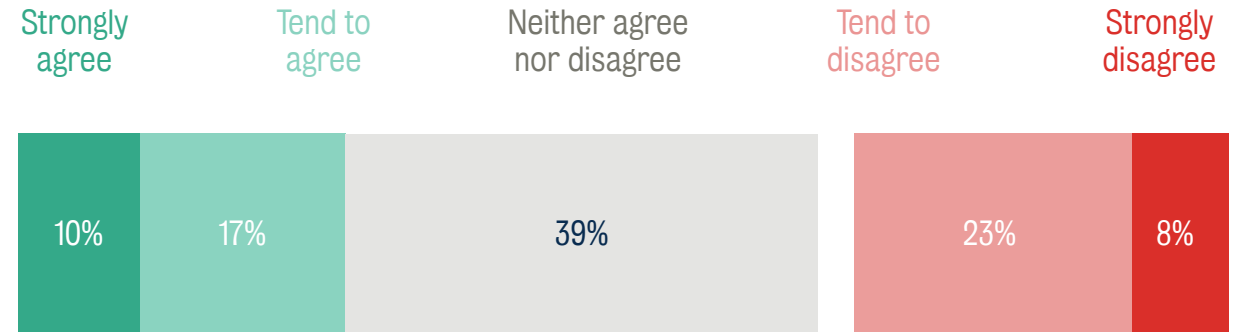
Base: 8,558 UK adults aged 16+, interviewed 1-7 Apr 2021. BLM supporters, n=4,926; BLM opponents, n=1,736; identifies with neither side, n=1,756

BLM supporters are twice as likely as BLM opponents to say it's difficult to be friends with someone from the other side

55% of BLM supporters say it's hard to be friends with someone who opposes BLM. This is the joint-highest proportion (tied with lockdown supporters) of any group included in this study who say they struggle to be friends with the other side.

By comparison, BLM opponents (26%) are half as likely to say they would have difficulty being friends with a BLM supporter, while four in 10 (39%) neither agree nor disagree that this would cause an issue for them – compared with three in 10 (30%) BLM supporters who say the same.

To what extent do agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who **support** the Black Lives Matter movement*



*Asked to people who **oppose** the Black Lives Matter movement

Base: 1,736 UK adults aged 16+ who oppose the BLM movement, interviewed 1-7 Apr 2021

To what extent do agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who **oppose** the Black Lives Matter movement*



*Asked to people who **support** the Black Lives Matter movement

Base: 4,926 UK adults aged 16+ who support the BLM movement, interviewed 1-7 Apr 2021

* Note some policy figures differ from charts due to rounding

People who support Black Lives Matter are much more likely to recognise the true extent of income disparities between ethnic groups

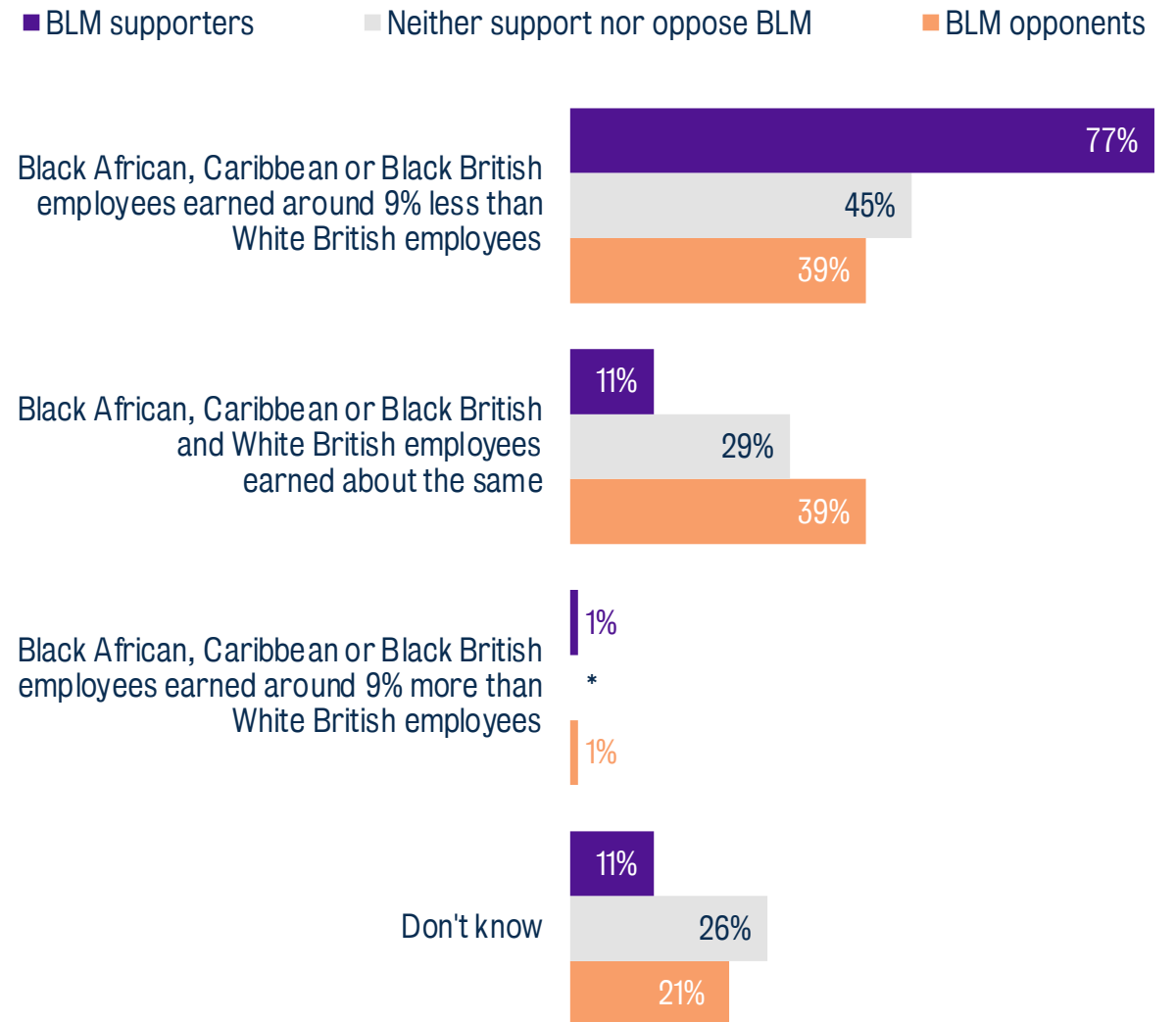
77% of BLM supporters correctly identify that Black African, Caribbean or Black British employees earned around 9% less than their White counterparts in 2018. BLM opponents are almost half as likely to think this is the case, with 39% believing it's true.

39% of BLM opponents also think there was in fact hardly any difference between what Black and White workers earned that year – more than three times the 11% of BLM supporters who hold this view.

And among the one in five people who neither support nor oppose the BLM movement, 45% think Black employees earned less than white employees, compared with 29% who think both groups had roughly the same levels of income.

Virtually no one believes that Black workers earned more than white workers in 2018.

Which of these do you think was true in Great Britain in 2018?



Source: [Office for National Statistics](#)

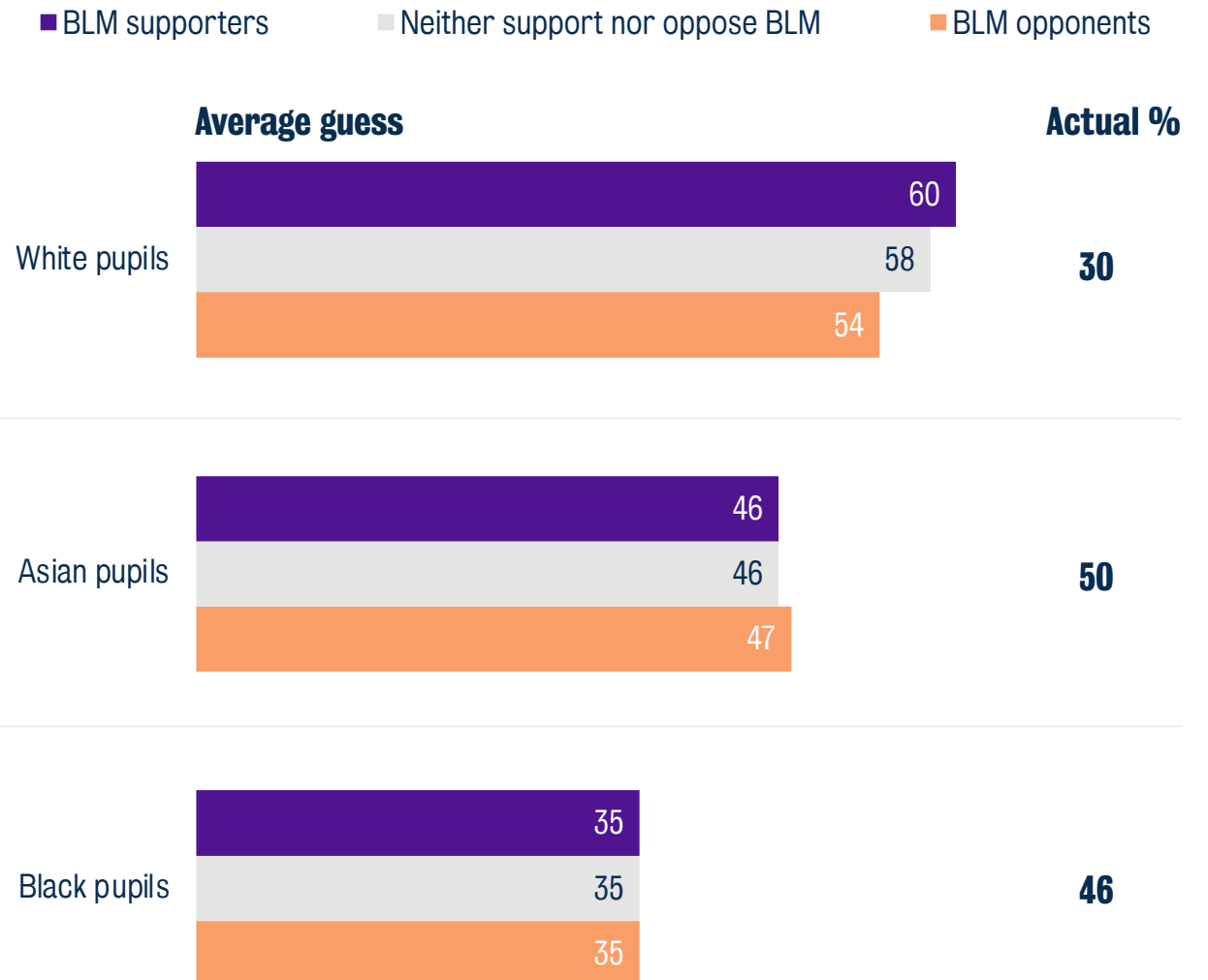
The public overestimate white state school pupils' success and underestimate that of Black pupils – and people's position on Black Lives Matter makes relatively little difference to their perceptions

The public wrongly think that, across different ethnic groups, white state school pupils have the best success rate when it comes to getting accepted on to a full-time undergraduate course at university or college. 30% of these pupils get a place on such a course – but the public's average guess is that it's 58%.

And those who support BLM are slightly more likely than those who oppose it to overestimate the acceptance rate for white state school pupils – the former guess that it's 60%, while the latter guess it's around 54%.

BLM support makes even less of a difference to people's perceptions of the success of Black state school pupils – those who support the movement guess 34% of such pupils make it on to a course like this, while those who oppose it guess 35% do so. The reality, however, is that 46% make it on to a full-time undergraduate course, meaning that the public overall – regardless of whether or not they support BLM – underestimate these Black pupils' success according to this measure.

Out of every 100 Black/white/Asian state school pupils in England aged 18, how many do you think got a place on a full-time undergraduate course at university or college in 2019?



Source: [UCAS](#)

Culture wars in the UK



“Fault lines” in the culture wars:

transgender rights

The public are split on whether trans rights should be expanded in the UK

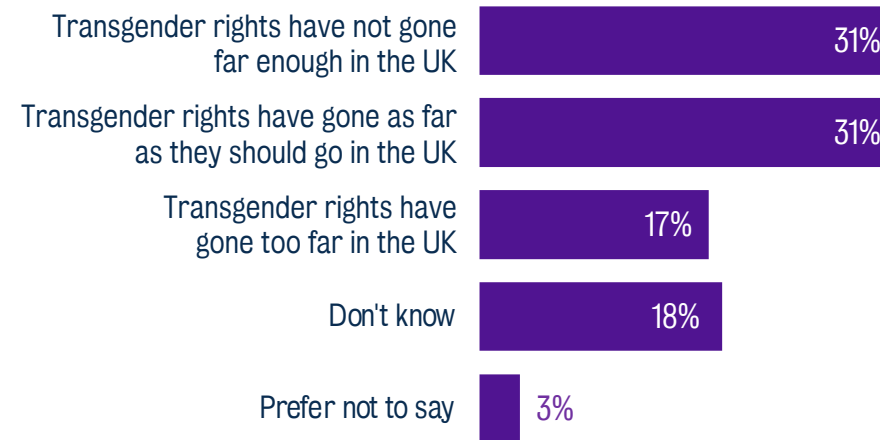
Three in 10 people (31%) think trans rights have gone as far as they should in the UK – but the same proportion think they have not gone far enough. A smaller proportion – 17% – think that trans rights have gone too far, while 18% say they don't know.

In this study, the two “sides” of this debate are taken to be those who believe trans rights have not gone far enough and those who think they've gone too far. But it's important to note that, unlike the other culture war issues discussed in this report, the “middle” group do not take a neutral position, as those who think trans rights have gone as far as they should are still expressing a view on the issue.

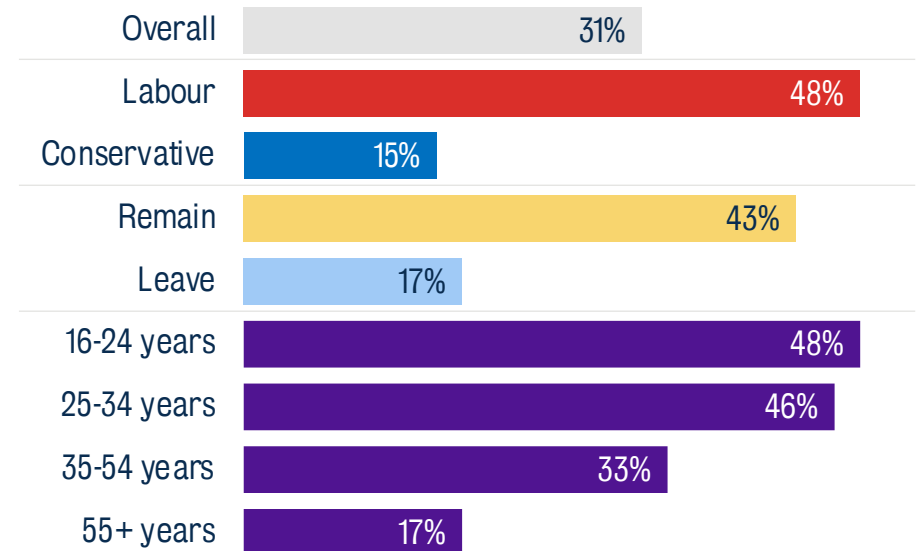
Looking in more detail at who wants to expand rights for trans people, Labour (48%) and Remain (43%) supporters are about three times as likely as Conservative (15%) and Leave supporters (17%) to think trans rights have not gone far enough.

And there are big differences in views by age, with 17% of those aged 55 and above believing trans rights should go further, compared with 47% of 16- to 34-year-olds.

Which of the following statements best matches your view?



% who say transgender rights have not gone far enough in the UK



Both sides of the trans rights debate have very negative feelings towards each other

People who think trans rights have not gone far enough give those who think they have gone too far a score of 18 out of 100 – the joint-coldest rating given to a group in this study.

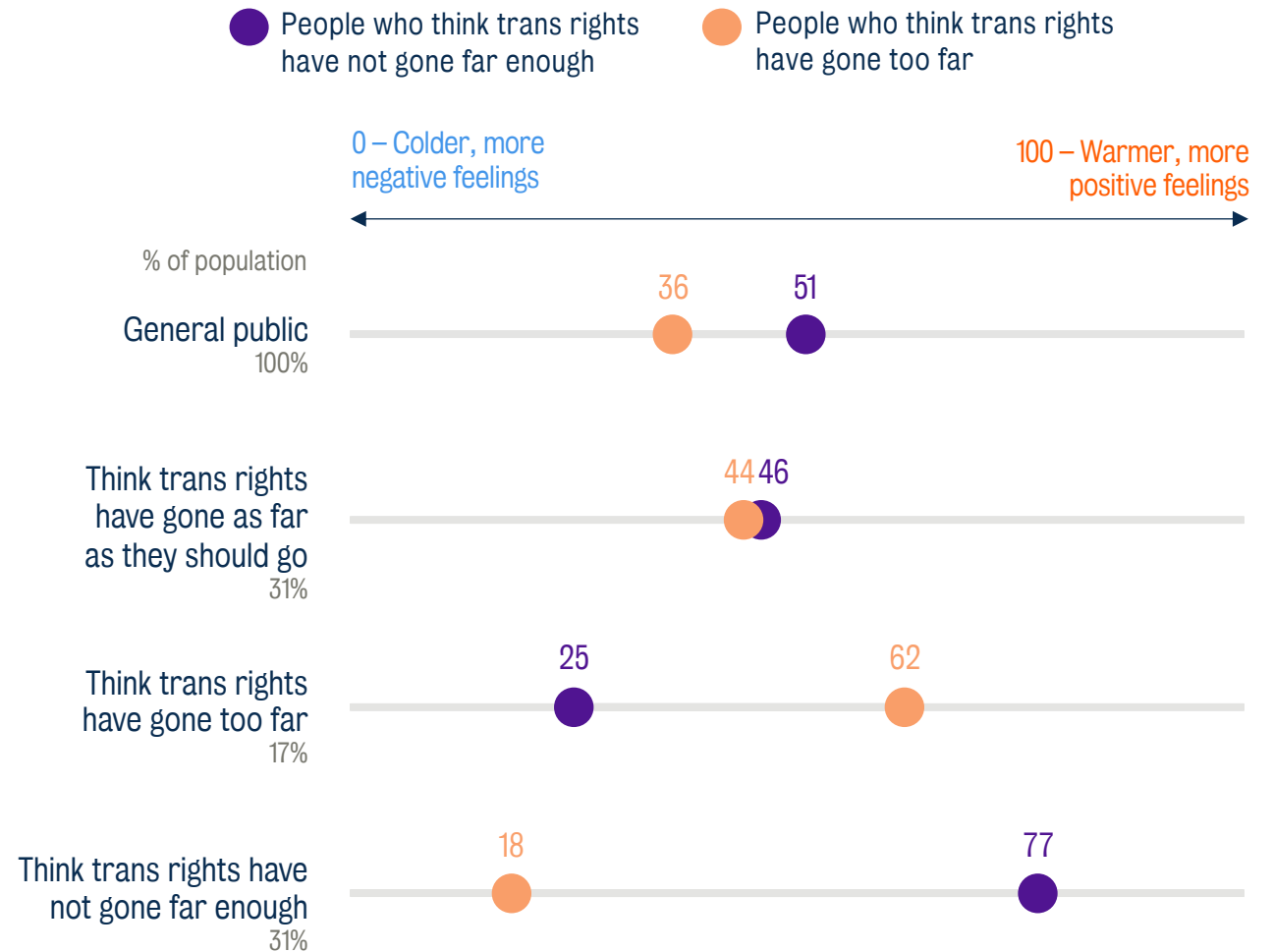
And those on the other side of this debate are not much warmer towards their opponents: people who think trans rights have gone too far give those who are in favour of expanding them a rating of 25 out of 100.

Both groups have much more positive views of their own sides, with people who believe trans rights have not gone far enough the most positive (77 vs 62).

The general public feel colder towards those who think rights for trans people have gone too far than they do towards those who are in favour of expanding trans rights (36 vs 51), in line with there being fewer people who hold the former view than the latter.

And people who take the “middle” position on this issue – that trans rights have gone as far as they should go – have virtually the same view of the other two sides in this debate, giving them a relatively neutral rating (44 vs 46).

Please rate your feelings towards people who support the expansion of transgender rights in the UK and people who oppose the expansion of transgender rights in the UK, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold



Those who think trans rights have not gone far enough are more likely to have a problem being friends with those on the other side of the debate

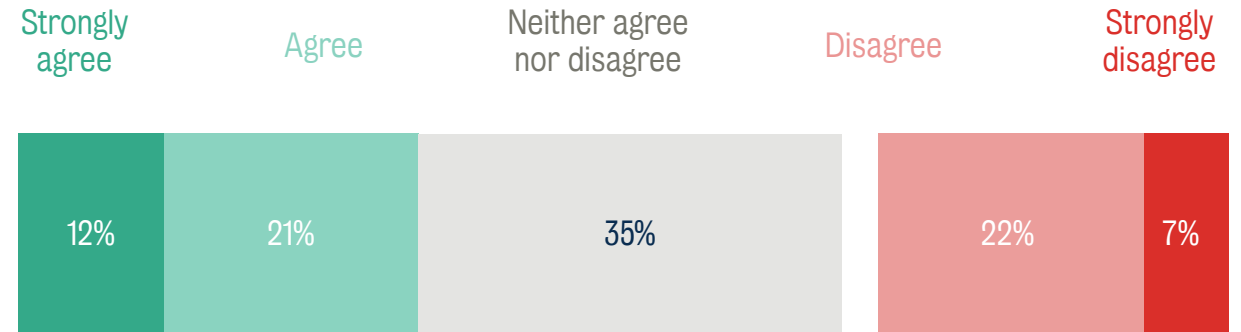
47% of those who want to expand trans rights in the UK say it would be difficult to be friends with someone who thinks trans rights have gone too far. By comparison, among this latter group, 32% feel as negative about being friends with someone on the other side of this debate.

Correspondingly, people who think trans rights have gone too far (30%) are more likely than those who want to expand such rights (18%) to say they wouldn't find it hard to form this kind of friendship.

Around a third of each group neither agree nor disagree that making friends with the other side would be difficult for them.

* Note some figures differ from charts due to rounding

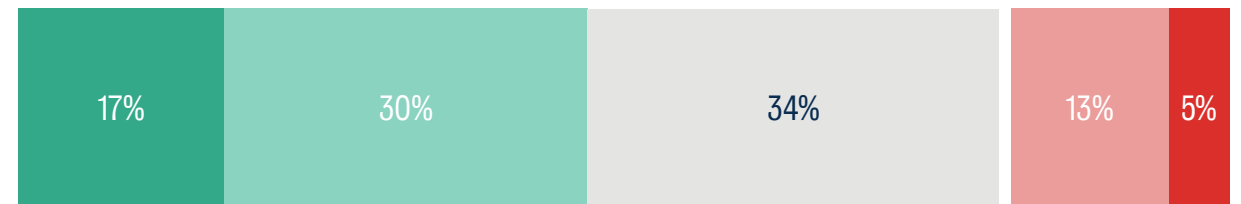
To what extent do agree or disagree with the following statement: It would be hard to be friends with someone who **supports** the expansion of transgender rights in the UK*



*Asked to people who **think transgender rights have gone too far** in the UK

Base: 504 UK adults aged 16+ who think transgender rights have gone too far, interviewed 26 Nov–2 Dec 2020

To what extent do agree or disagree with the following statement: It would be hard to be friends with someone who **thinks transgender rights have gone too far** in the UK*



*Asked to people who **think transgender rights have not gone far enough** in the UK

Base: 829 UK adults aged 16+ who support the expansion of transgender rights, interviewed 26 Nov–2 Dec 2020

Perceptions of trans people’s experience of crime vary a great deal according to the position people take on trans rights

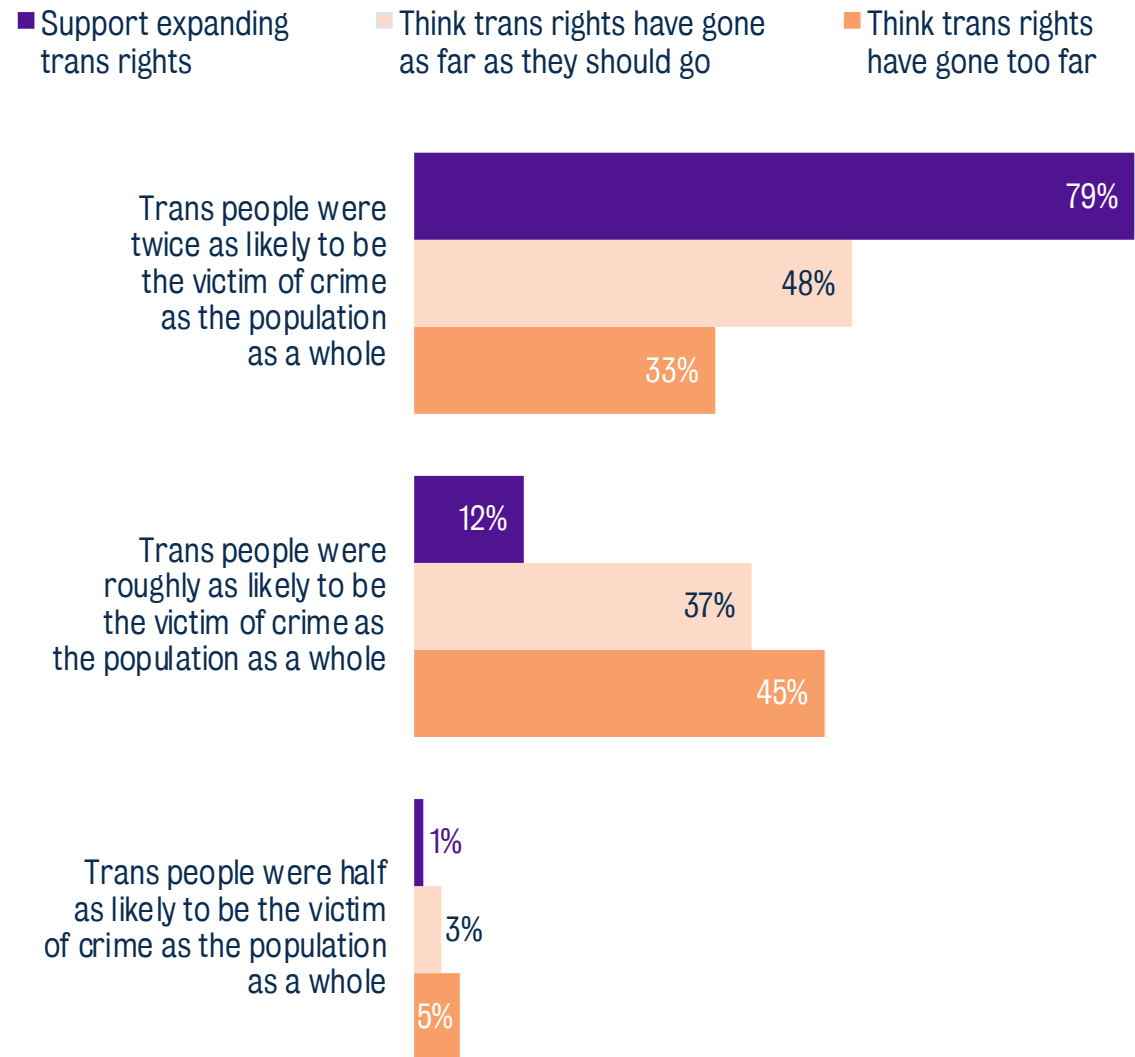
79% of those who support the expansion of trans rights correctly identify that trans people are particularly likely to be the victim of a crime. Among those who think trans rights have gone too far, a much smaller proportion – 33% – think this is the case.

By contrast, 45% of those who think trans rights have gone too far believe trans people are not more likely to be the victim of a crime – nearly four times higher than the 12% who think this is true among those who support expanding trans rights.

People who think trans rights have gone as far as they should go – the third group in this debate – are more likely to think trans people have a higher risk of being the victim of a crime (48%) than they are to think they have no greater risk (37%).

Very few people on any side of this debate are under the impression that, compared with the population overall, trans people are less likely to be the victim of a crime.

Which of these do you think was true in England and Wales in the year to March 2020?



Source: [Office for National Statistics](#)



Culture wars in the UK

“Fault lines” in the culture wars:

overview – which are most divisive?

Lockdown aside, on all issues asked about, the more “liberal” or left-leaning side of the debate have the most difficulty getting along with their opponents

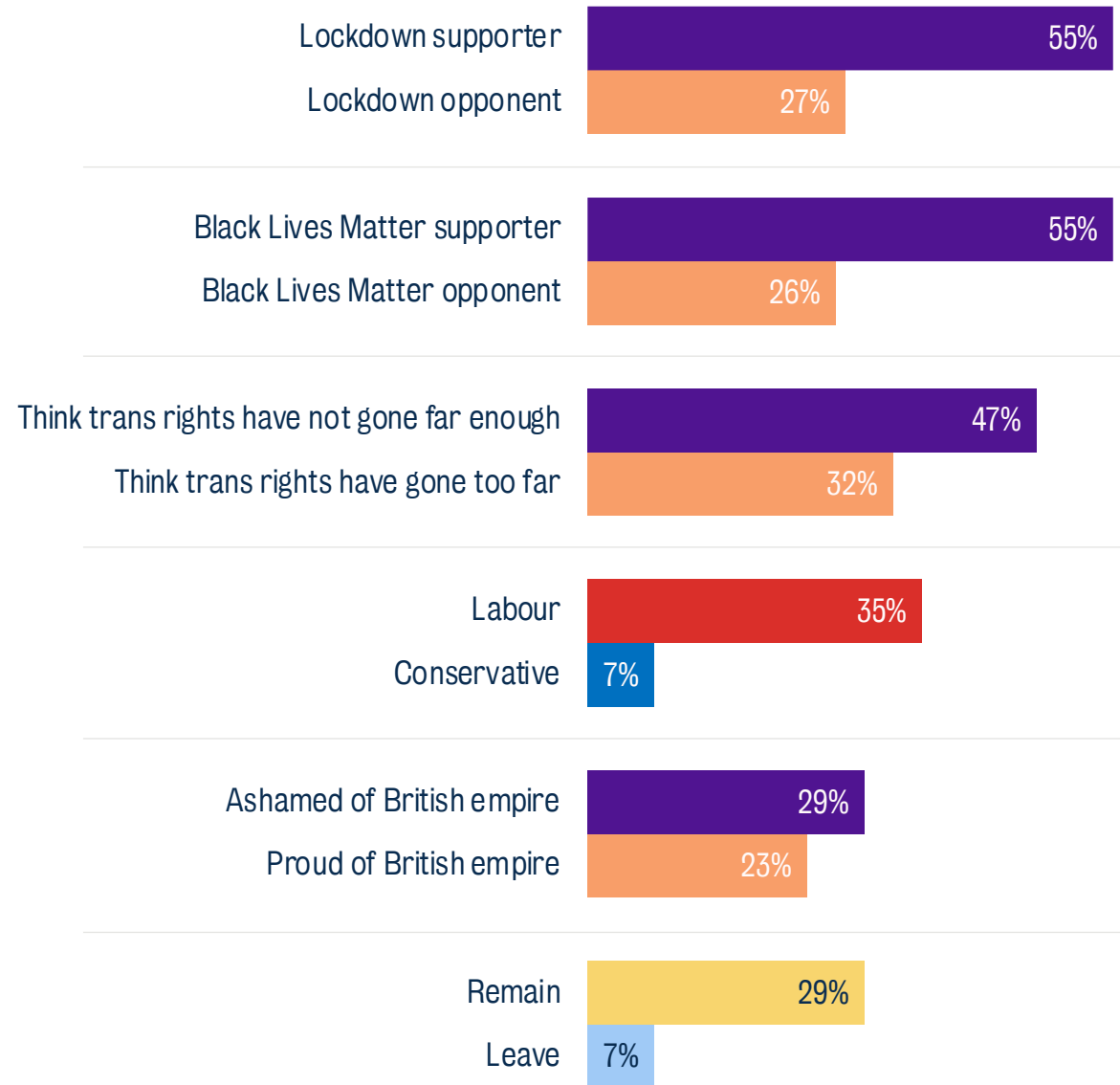
Despite the rhetoric from some around coronavirus, the division between lockdown supporters and opponents has not really embedded itself in culture war-style debates, partly because of the very low number of opponents. However, it still causes strong reactions, with a majority of lockdown supporters saying it’s hard to be friends with lockdown opponents.

Beyond Covid-related division, across all five of the other culture war subjects asked about, people on the more liberal side of the debate have the most difficulty seeing past the divide.

For example, Black Lives Matter supporters (55%) are twice as likely as BLM opponents (26%) to say it’s hard to be friends with someone on the other side of the debate. And Labour supporters (35%) are five times as likely as Conservative supporters (7%) to say they find it difficult to form friendships across the party-political divide.

On attitudes to the British empire, the two sides’ views are much closer, although those who are ashamed of Britain’s imperial history are slightly more likely to say they would find it hard to be friends with people who are proud of the empire than vice versa.

% who say it’s hard to be friends with the other side in the debate on culture war issues



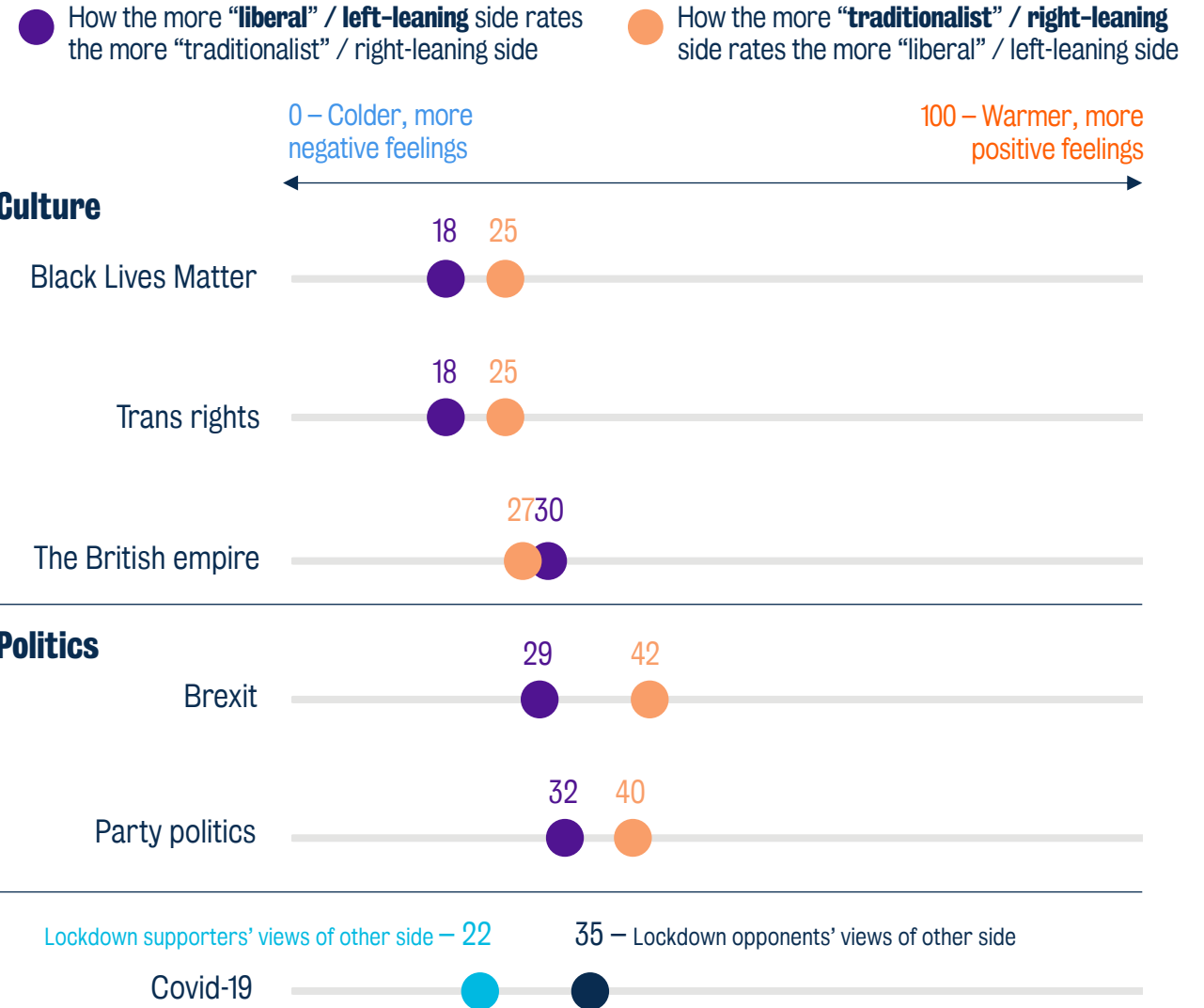
People who take a more liberal or left-leaning position on culture war and political debates tend to have the coldest feelings towards the other side

Reflecting the pattern on being friends with the other side, across most culture war issues asked about, those on the more progressive side of the debate say they feel colder towards their more traditionalist opponents than the reverse.

For example, when asked to rate their feelings towards the other side out of 100 – with 100 meaning very warm and zero meaning very cold – people who think trans rights have not gone far enough give a rating of 18 to people who think trans rights have gone too far. By comparison, the latter give the former a rating of 25.

Issues that have traditionally been seen as engendering negative feelings on both sides – such as Brexit and politics – actually inspire more warmth across their respective divides than do more recent culture war concerns, such as Black Lives Matter and coronavirus.

How different sides of culture war debates rate their feelings towards the other side out of 100, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold



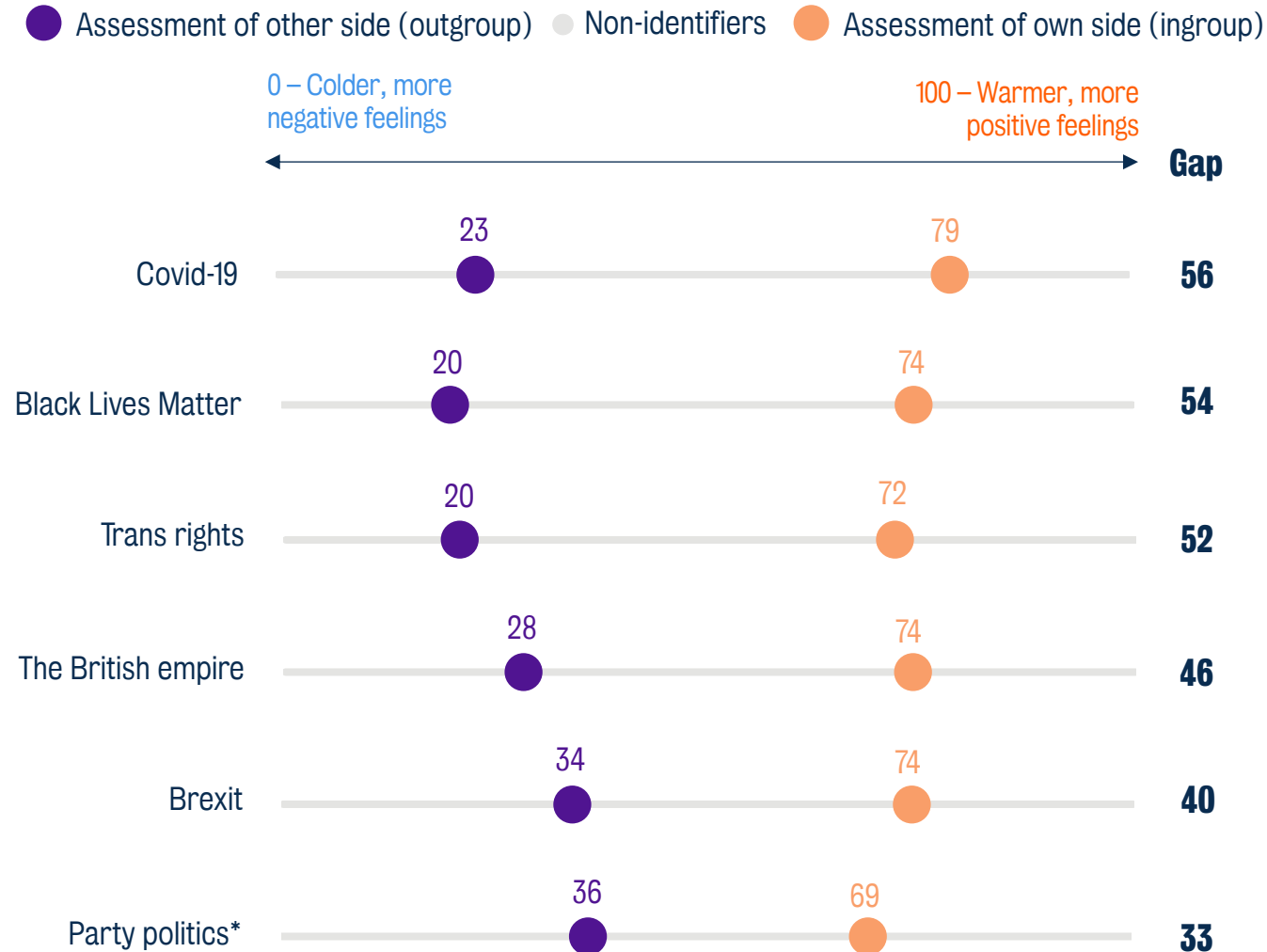
There is less of a gap between our feelings towards our own side and the other side on party politics and Brexit than other culture war issues

What makes an issue or identity divisive is as much about how close you feel to your own side as it is about how you feel about the opposing side.

Looking at the difference between how warm people feel towards their own side and how cold they feel towards the other side, it is again Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter that are particularly divisive, with a gap of more than half the scale (56 and 55).

The gap between ingroup and outgroup ratings based on political party, on the other hand, is around a quarter smaller (33). This is driven less by people feeling a greater connection towards their own side than it is by warmer feelings towards opposing partisans – something that does not apply for culture wars issues that attracted considerable media coverage in 2020, such as BLM and trans rights.

How different sides of culture war debates rate their feelings towards the other side out of 100, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold



4. The four sides in the UK's culture wars



Introduction

Different people hold different views on issues related to what is increasingly described as a UK “culture war”. There are patterns to these differences which can be used to identify distinct groups within the population and build a picture of the types of individuals engaged (or not) in the culture war debate.

The Policy Institute has used a technique called latent class analysis, drawing on a major survey of 2,834 people in the UK conducted by Ipsos MORI on their random probability “KnowledgePanel”.

The analysis reveals the UK is made up of four groups of people with distinct positions on issues that are often rolled into the country’s culture wars: Traditionalists, Moderates, the Disengaged and Progressives.

Traditionalists and Progressives inevitably have very divergent views on key issues, such as the British empire and the Black Lives Matter movement, and make very different value judgements about society and culture in the UK.

But they make up just one half of the population; the two groups that make up the other half have more variable or less strong views on relevant issues. Many in the Disengaged group often don’t take a position on them at all.

The remaining group – the Moderates – resemble Progressives on some issues, such as greater rights for historically marginalised groups, and Traditionalists on others, such as whether too many people in the UK run the country down.

Which way Moderates break on these kinds of issues has potentially significant implications for how political parties use culture war debates to consolidate or expand their supporter base. And despite being the largest group identified in this study, as well as having the most diverse views and political beliefs, the Moderate position tends to lose out to the Traditionalist and Progressive when it comes to media and political attention, reflecting how the debate in the UK is often focused at the more extreme ends of the spectrum.

This more variable and nuanced position may, however, be influenced by the nature of the national conversation on cultural change, which commentators and political leaders can clearly influence. More careful understanding of, and engagement with, this group should be a key focus.

4. The four sides in the UK's culture wars

The four sides

A statistical technique called latent class analysis reveals that the country's culture war debate is made up of **Traditionalists** (26% of population), **Progressives** (23%), **Moderates** (32%) and the **Disengaged** (18%).

The four sides in the UK's culture wars

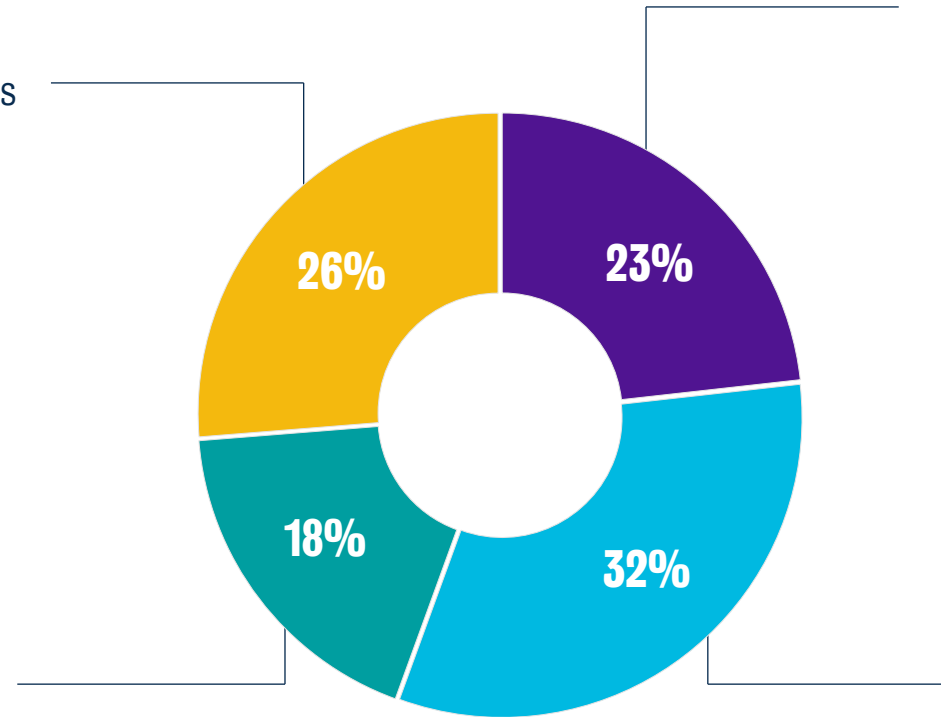
The key distinguishing features of the four groups are their attitudes towards expanding the rights of traditionally marginalised groups, and their pride in the UK and nostalgia for its history. Views on free speech and political correctness separate the most progressive group from the other three. Demographically, education and gender are important, with only one group majority-male.

Traditionalists

Oldest and most heavily male group. Most nostalgic for country's past and proud of British empire. 97% think political correctness gone too far, and most likely to feel UK has done enough on equal rights for historically marginalised groups.

The Disengaged

Stand out for neutrality on politics and Brexit. Least likely to take a position on equal rights for women and ethnic minorities, and least likely to take stance on culture war issues.



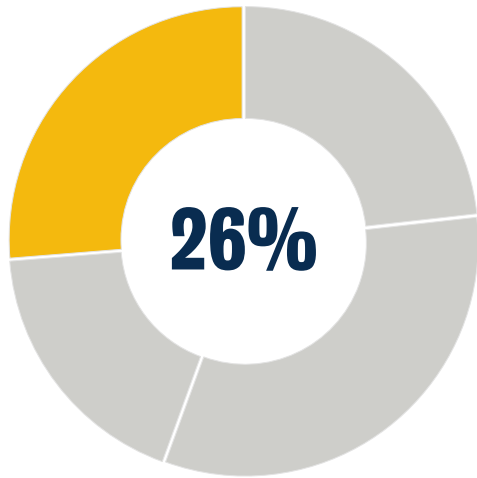
Progressives

Youngest group, with highest education level. Most likely to think women's rights, ethnic minority rights and trans rights not gone far enough. Most likely to be ashamed of British empire, and most in favour of political correctness.

Moderates

Support greater rights for women and ethnic minorities – but less strongly than Progressives. Agree political correctness gone too far, yet not nostalgic for past nor proud of empire.

Traditionalists



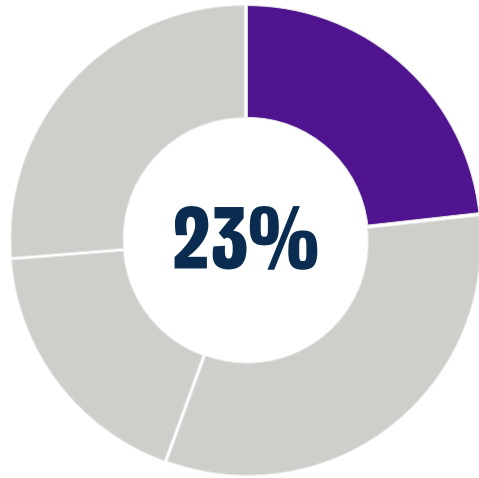
Key characteristics

- Only group with a male majority (61%).
- Oldest of the groups, with most aged 55 or above, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented.
- Highest share of members who are homeowners, and of those not in full-time work, reflecting the fact that they are the most likely of the groups to be retired.
- Of the four groups, by far the most patriotic and nostalgic for the country's past: 79% are proud of their country, 71% agree empire is something to be proud of, and 61% want their country to be the way it used to be.
- Much more likely than the other groups to believe rights for women and people from ethnic minorities have gone far enough. And 47% think trans rights have gone too far in the UK – around four times the proportion of the group next most likely to feel this way.
- Only group in which a majority are opposed to the Black Lives Matter movement.
- 97% agree political correctness has gone too far (including 76% who strongly agree), and a majority think people are too easily offended.

Key demographics

- 61% male
- 56% aged 55 or older
- 59% Conservative
- 78% Leavers
- 5% ethnic minorities (vs 11% in sample as a whole)

Progressives



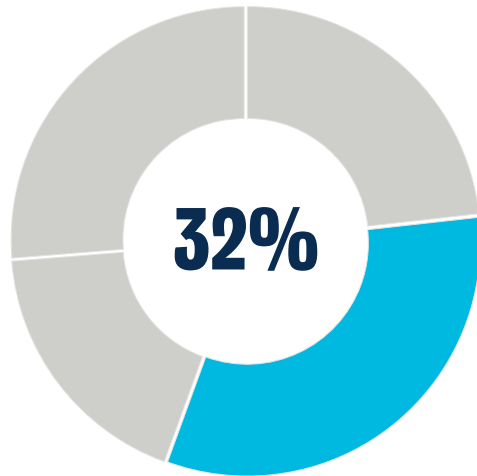
Key characteristics

- Youngest of the four groups, and slightly disproportionately female, with people from ethnic minority backgrounds overrepresented relative to the sample overall.
- Perhaps because of age, this group has the lowest proportion of members not in full-time work, and the highest renting from private landlords.
- Almost 50% have university degrees – the highest share of all the groups.
- Most likely of the groups to think the expansion of rights for historically less powerful groups – women, ethnic minorities, transgender people – has not gone far enough.
- 59% are ashamed of the British empire – three times the proportion of the next-most ashamed group – and they tend not to be nostalgic for the country’s past nor strongly patriotic.
- By far the most likely of the groups to disagree that political correctness has gone too far (61%), as well as most likely to think the way people talk needs to be more sensitive to those from different backgrounds.

Key demographics

- 45% aged 34 or younger
- 55% female
- Labour (46%) and third party (41%) supporters
- 94% Remain
- 16% ethnic minorities (vs 11% in sample as a whole)

Moderates



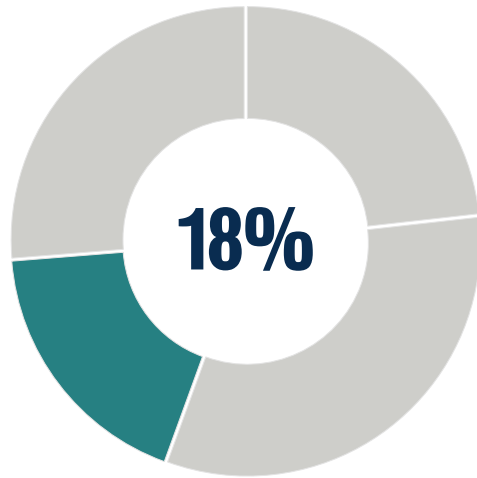
Key characteristics

- Older than Progressives, with the group including people from ethnic minority backgrounds at about the same rate as the sample overall.
- Most politically diverse group, with large shares of Conservative, Labour, and third-party supporters.
- This group is the second most highly educated, with 31% having a degree.
- On some issues, this group resembles the Progressives: they support the expansion of rights for women and ethnic minorities – albeit less strongly than do Progressives.
- On other issues their views are closer to those of Traditionalists. For example, they agree political correctness has gone too far.
- Most likely to think that trans rights have gone as far as they should go, with 40% holding this view.
- Majority are proud of the UK, but tend not to be nostalgic for the past nor proud of the British empire.
- Take a middle position between thinking there's a need to be sensitive and a perception that people are too easily offended.

Key demographics

- 33% aged 35-54 and 38% aged 55+
- 53% female
- Politically diverse: 28% Conservative, 33% Labour, 26% other party
- 63% Remain
- 12% ethnic minorities (vs 11% in sample as a whole)

The Disengaged



Key characteristics

- Highest proportion of women (58%) out of the four groups, and 35- to 54-year-olds make up the biggest share (40%). Joint-lowest share of degree holders (14%).
- Lowest rate of home ownership (63%), and highest rate of social housing (17%).
- Stand out for their neutrality on politics and Brexit: 44% don't support any party, and 37% don't think of themselves as Leavers or Remainers. Those who do support a party are more like to support the Conservatives (28%) than Labour (16%).
- Distinguished from Moderates by views on the rights of various groups. A majority of Moderates disagree (although not strongly) that the rights of women and ethnic minorities have gone far enough, while the Disengaged neither agree nor disagree.
- Least inclined of the four groups to take a position on culture war issues, choosing “neither” or “don't know” at a higher rate. On issues where the largest share do express an opinion, it is rarely the most extreme position – for example, strongly agreeing or strongly disagreeing with a statement.

Key demographics

- 40% aged 35-54
- 58% female
- 44% don't support any political party
- Diverse Brexit identities: 29% Leave, 34% Remain, 37% neither
- 12% ethnic minorities (vs 11% in sample as a whole)

4. The four sides in the UK's culture wars

The groups' identifying characteristics in detail

Responses to questions about key culture war issues point to the existence of three groups: one with progressive views, one with traditional views, and a middle group.

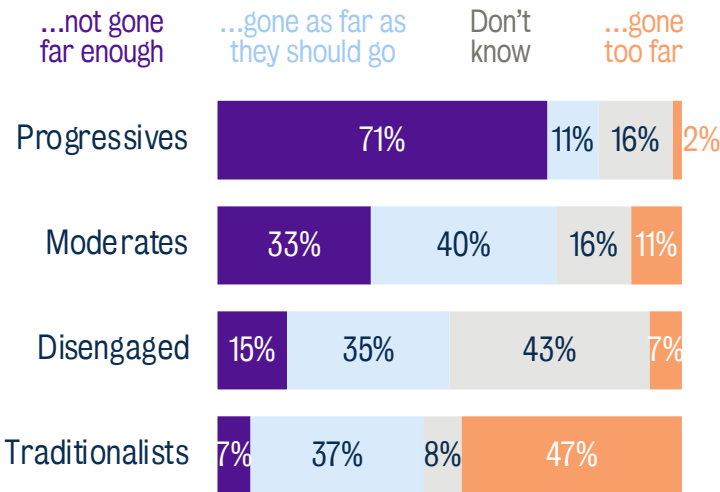
But questions about equality and rights for women, trans people, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds reveal that this middle group is actually two groups: one which is generally progressive but less so than the most progressive group, and one which generally doesn't come to a position on these (and other) issues.

The four sides are distinguished by their attitudes towards rights for historically marginalised groups

There are big differences in how the groups see the issue of trans rights. 71% of Progressives think they haven't gone far enough in the UK – compared with just 7% of Traditionalists who feel the same. Nearly half (47%) of this latter group instead think that trans rights have already gone too far.

Moderates are most likely to say trans rights have gone as far as they should go (40%), while the Disengaged are most likely to say they don't know (43%).

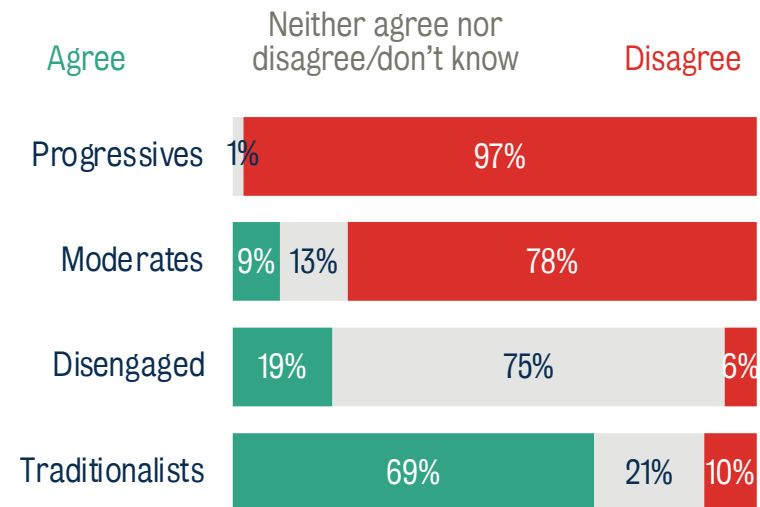
In the UK, transgender rights have...



There is near-universal disagreement among Progressives (97%) that equal rights for ethnic minority rights have gone far enough in the UK and a large majority of Moderates (78%) feel the same.

By contrast, most of the Disengaged (75%) neither agree nor disagree, while Traditionalists (69%) are by far most likely to say ethnic minority rights have gone as far as they should.

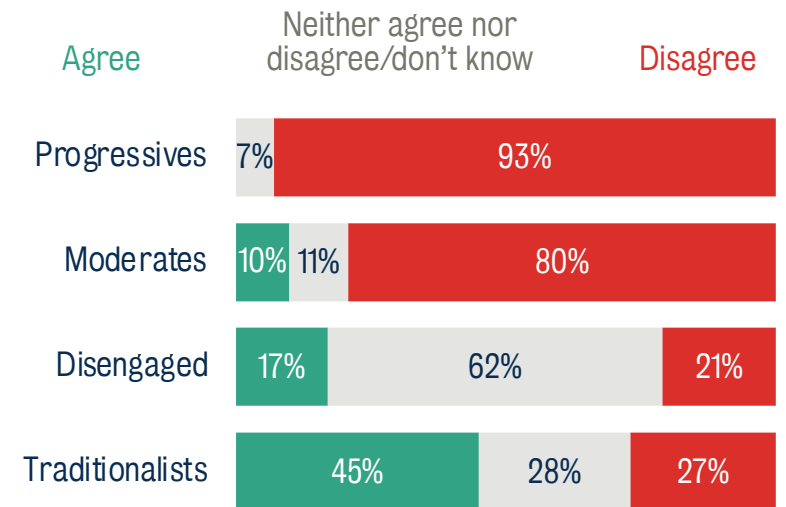
How much do you agree with this statement? When it comes to giving Black, Asian and minority ethnic people equal rights with white people, things have gone far enough in the UK



While Traditionalists are most inclined to be against greater rights for historically marginalised groups, they are more open to expanding rights for women, with 27% disagreeing that women's rights have gone too far.

Again, almost all Progressives (93%) disagree with this view, as do a high proportion of Moderates (80%), while most of the Disengaged (62%) don't take a position.

How much do you agree with this statement? When it comes to giving women equal rights with men, things have gone far enough in the UK



Most Traditionalists are proud of the British empire and would like their country to return to a past state – in stark contrast to Progressives

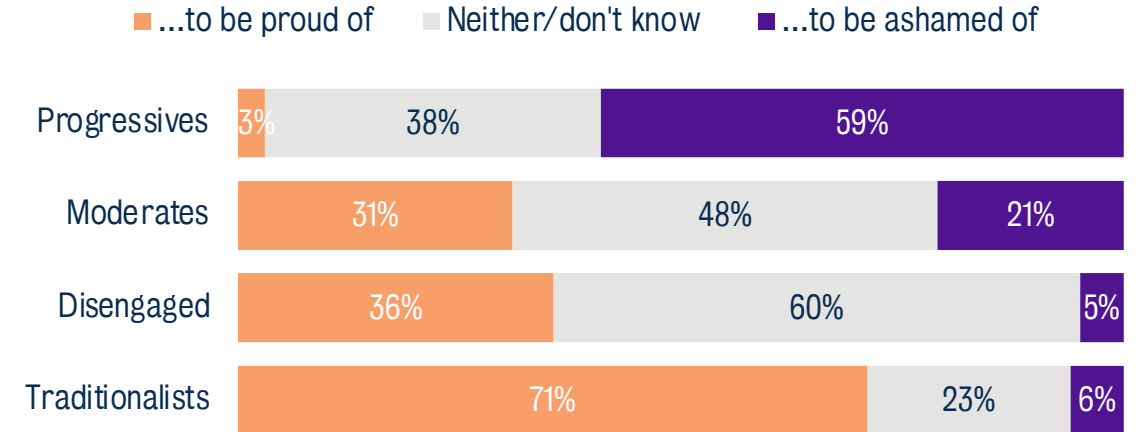
Nostalgia and views of UK history strongly divide Progressives and Traditionalists. A majority of Progressives, 59%, think empire is something to be ashamed of, while an even larger majority of Traditionalists, 71%, think empire is something to be proud of.

Similarly, 78% of Progressives say they would not like to return to the way the country used to be, while 61% of Traditionalists are in favour of such a return.

Unlike Progressives and Traditionalists, Moderates and the Disengaged are less well distinguished by their views on the UK's history than their views on expanding rights, as shown on the previous page.

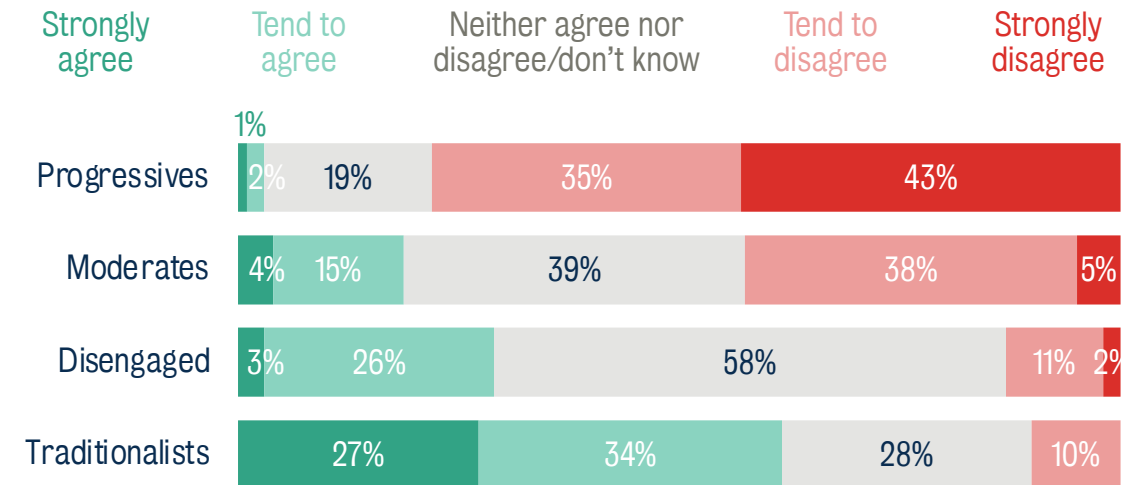
On empire and a return to the past, both groups give large numbers of neither/don't know responses. More people in both groups thought empire was something to be proud of than something to be ashamed of, however, and a greater share of the Disengaged agree than disagree that they would like the country to be the way it used to be, while more Moderates disagreed than agreed.

The British empire is something...



To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

I would like my country to be the way it used to be



Traditionalists and Progressives' divergent views on the UK's history are reflected in their pride in the country

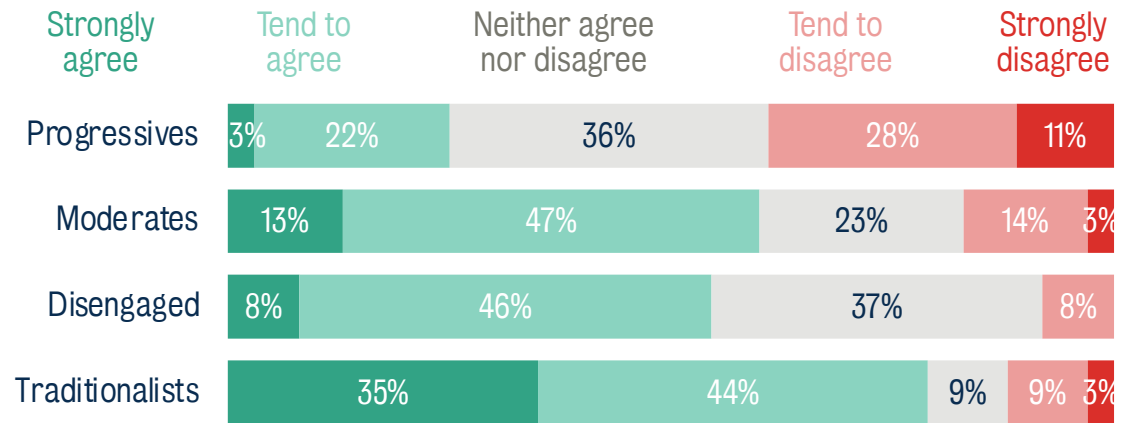
As with questions on the country's history, responses to questions about pride in the UK and people talking negatively about the country strongly distinguish Progressives and Traditionalists, with less obvious differences between Moderates and the Disengaged.

25% of Progressives say they are proud of their country, while 39% say they aren't, and 36% don't take a position or don't know. The Traditionalists, on the other hand, are much more of one mind, with a large majority of 79% saying they are proud of their country.

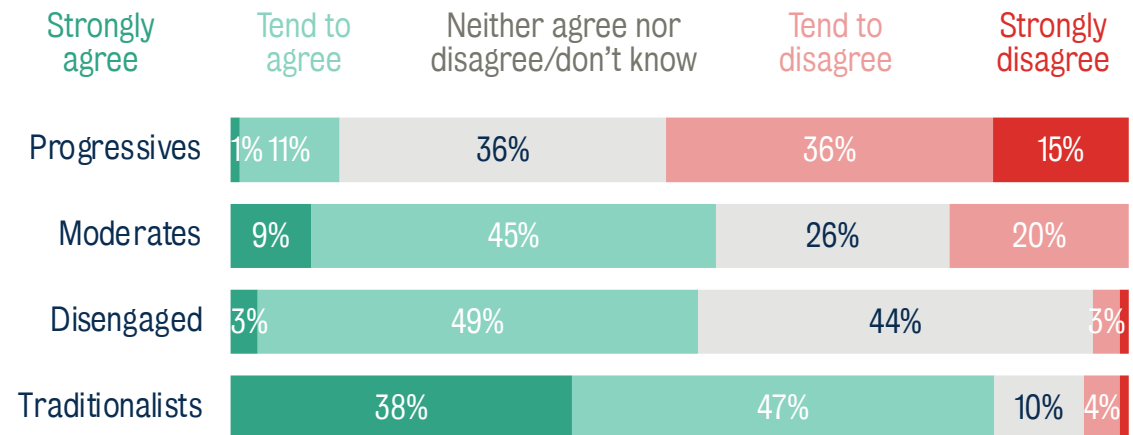
It is a similar pattern across the four groups for views on whether "too many people in the UK run our country down". However, Progressives are half as likely to agree with this statement (12%) as they are to be proud of their country (25%).

It's important to note that, unlike the question about the British empire, which specifically asked whether people feel ashamed, these questions can only capture pride or its absence – those who aren't proud of their country are not necessarily ashamed of it.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
I am proud of my country



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Too many people in the UK run our country down

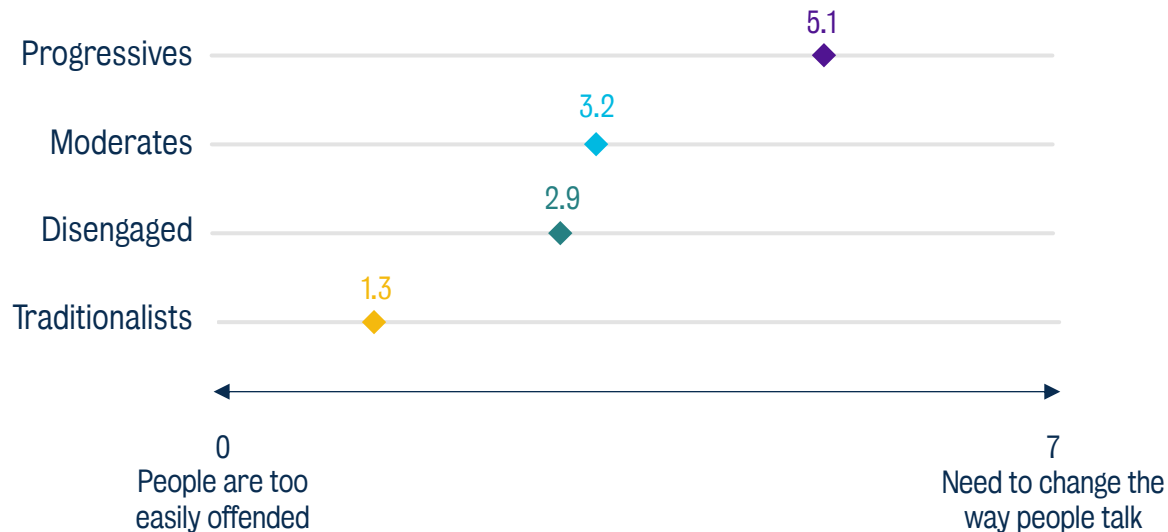


Progressives strongly favour being politically correct, while Traditionalists think all viewpoints should be aired, even if offensive

Asked to place themselves on a scale of political correctness, Progressives strongly lean towards preferring to be more sensitive to those from different backgrounds, while Traditionalists put themselves towards the other end of the spectrum, more in favour of the belief that people are too easily offended.

Moderates and the Disengaged were about halfway between Progressives and Traditionalists on the same scale.

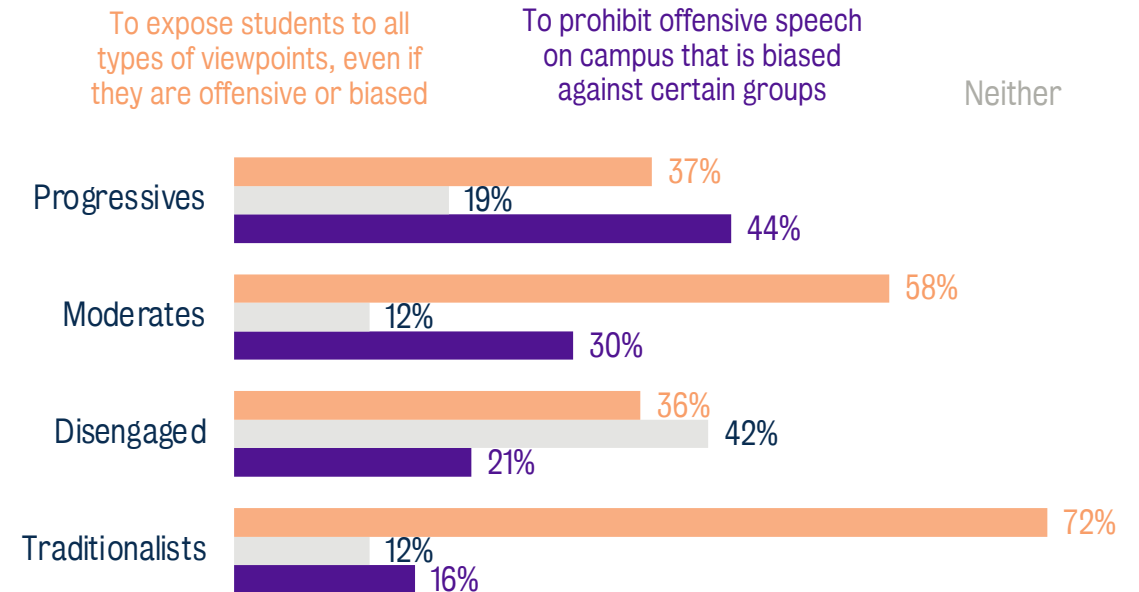
Some people think that the way people talk needs to be more sensitive to people from different backgrounds. Others think that many people are just too easily offended. Where would you place yourself on this scale?



Progressives are slightly more likely to say it is more important for universities to prohibit biased and offensive speech on campus (44%) than to expose students to all kinds of viewpoints (37%). They are the only group where a larger share support prohibiting offensive speech.

Majorities of both Traditionalists (72%) and Moderates (58%) favour exposing students to all viewpoints, while the Disengaged are the only group where the largest proportion takes neither view (42%). Among this group, exposing students to all viewpoints has more support than prohibiting offensive speech (36% vs 21%).

If you had to choose, is it more important for universities...



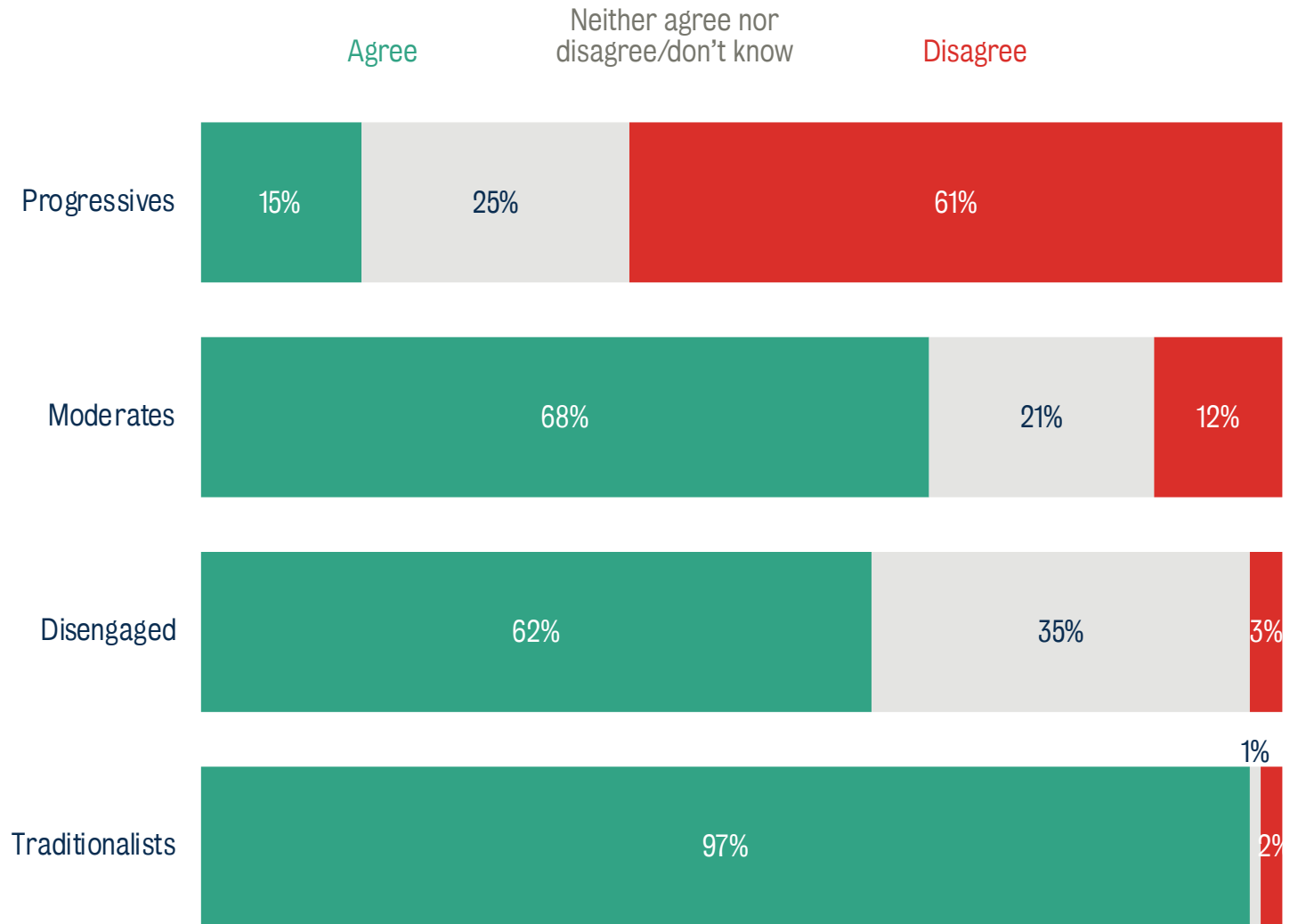
Nearly all Traditionalists think political correctness has gone too far – and majorities of the Moderates and the Disengaged feel the same

Traditionalists are near-unanimous that political correctness has gone too far, with 97% holding this view.

Progressives are the only group in which most members (61%) disagree that political correctness has gone too far.

Moderates and the Disengaged fall in the middle, although strong majorities of both nonetheless believe political correctness has gone too far, with 68% and 62% respectively taking this position.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Political correctness has gone too far



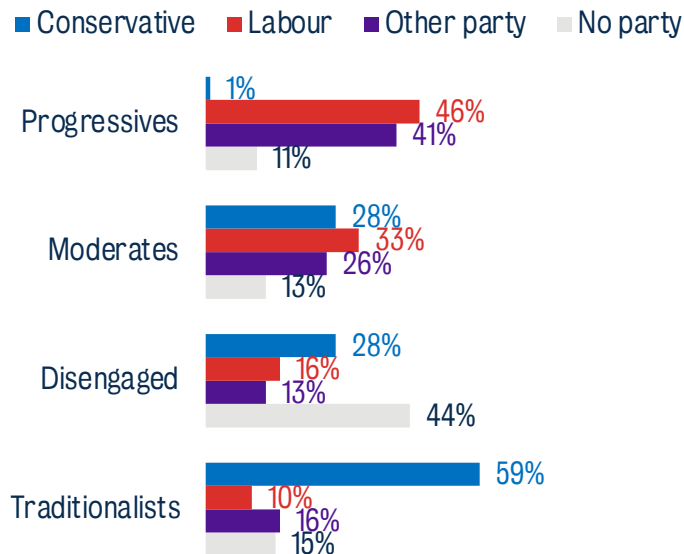
Strongly agree / tend to agree and strongly disagree / tend to disagree response options grouped

The four groups have distinct political allegiances

59% of Traditionalists support or feel closer to the Conservative party – the only group in which a single political party dominates. In all other groups, two or more political affiliations are well represented.

Progressives are split between Labour supporters (46%) and third-party supporters (41%), while the most diverse group is the Moderates, who are divided between Labour (33%), Conservative (28%) and third-party supporters (26%). Of all the groups, the Disengaged are most likely to identify with no party (44%).

Do you support/are you closer to any political party?

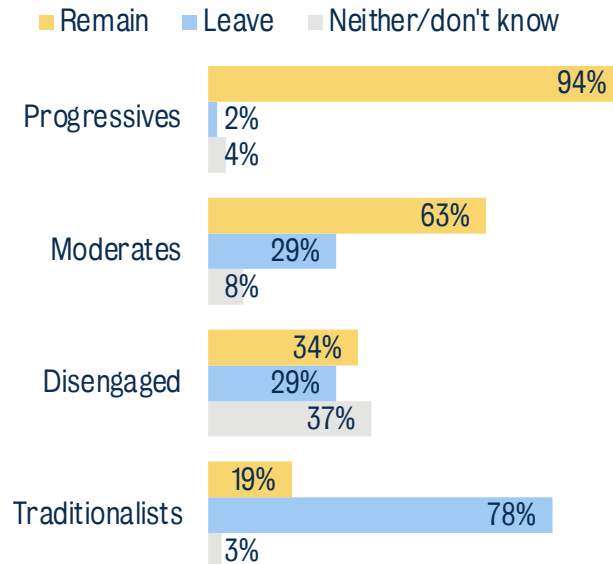


Progressives are overwhelmingly Remainers (94%), while Traditionalists have a large Leave majority (78%).

Moderates are similar to Progressives, in that the majority are Remainers (63%), although three in 10 of this group are Leavers.

The Disengaged are split relatively evenly between Remain (34%), Leave (29%) and neither side (37%).

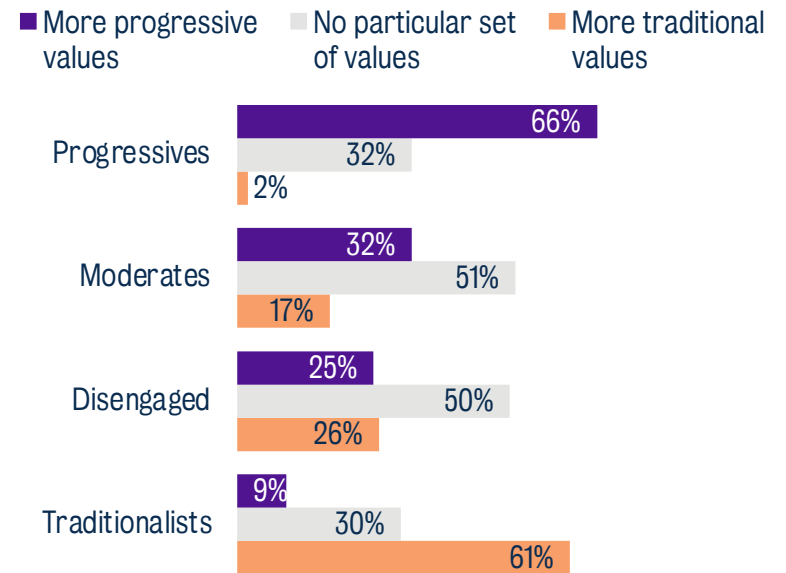
Thinking about the UK's relationship with the European Union, do you think of yourself as a "Remainer", a "Leaver", or do you not think of yourself in that way?



Strong majorities of Progressives (66%) and Traditionalists (61%) think the government should promote their respective values.

In contrast, the majority view of Moderates (51%) and the Disengaged (50%) is that the government should not be promoting any particular set of values. In both of these groups, though, there are non-trivial numbers favouring the promotion of both progressive and traditional values.

The government should promote _____ in our society*



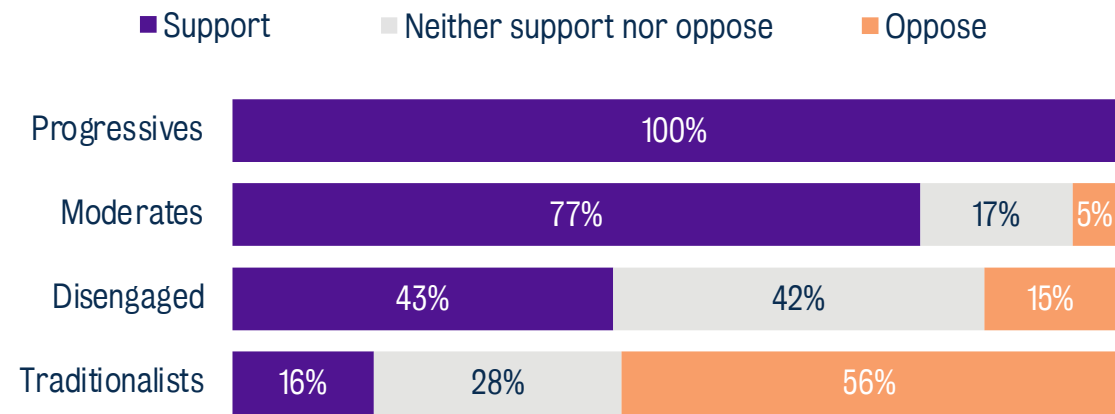
Black Lives Matter divides the four groups, but there is more unanimity over lockdown restrictions

Progressives unanimously support the Black Lives Matter movement, with 100% in favour of it, including 86% strongly. A majority of Moderates also support the movement (77%), although fewer strongly support it (35%).

Members of the Disengaged are virtually equally likely to support BLM (43%) as they are to say they don't take a position on the issue (42%).

56% of Traditionalists oppose BLM – the only group where a majority do so.

From what you've read and heard, how do you feel about the Black Lives Matter movement?*



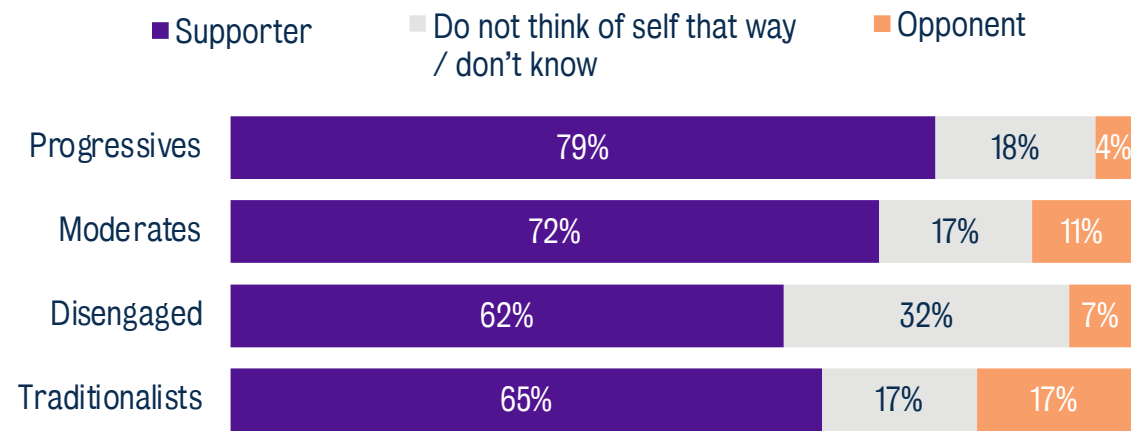
Strongly support/ somewhat support and strongly oppose / tend to oppose response options grouped

* "Don't know" responses were not used in identifying groups and were therefore excluded in calculation of percentages

By comparison, there is much less of a distinction between the groups' views on another culture war issue – Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Majorities of all four groups see themselves as lockdown supporters, although there is still a spread between them – going from 62% of the Disengaged, to 79% of Progressives.

The UK government has imposed a series of restrictions on how we live, including "lockdowns" and wearing of masks in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Do you think of yourself as a supporter or an opponent of these restrictions, or do you not think of yourself in that way?



4. The four sides in the UK's culture wars

Different views on culture war issues reflect different underlying values

The four groups' different perspectives on culture war flashpoints aren't unique to these issues. Instead, they seem to reflect fundamentally different worldviews.

These differences in worldviews are apparent in responses to questions about a range of values, with Traditionalists tending to take conservative and authoritarian positions, and Progressives being more open to change and liberal in their outlook. Moderates and the Disengaged, on the other hand, take a range of views depending on the question.

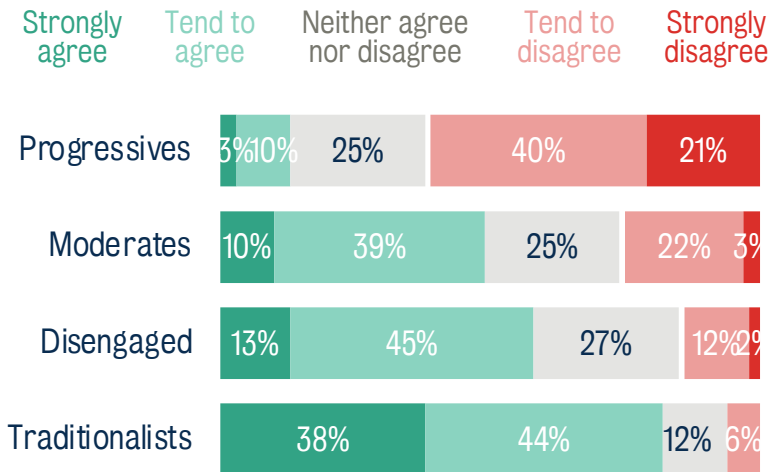
One area in which there is agreement across the groups is in recognising economic inequalities in wealth and power.

Progressives and Traditionalists make fundamentally different value judgements about society and culture in the UK

82% of Traditionalists agree that young people do not have enough respect for traditional values, compared with 13% of Progressives. And although there is a gradient in opinion across the groups on this question, it is only Progressives who have majority disagreement (61%).

Among the Disengaged, there is 59% agreement, while even among Moderates close to a majority (49%) agree young people don't respect traditional values enough.

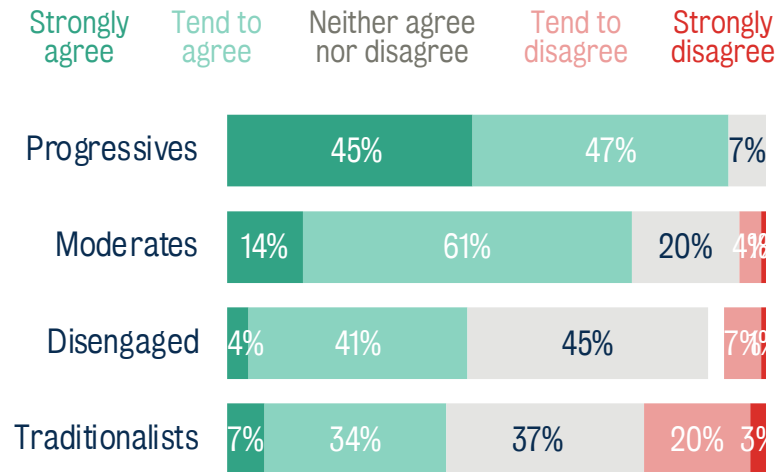
How much do you agree or disagree? Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional values



92% of Progressives agree people should be more tolerant of those who lead unconventional lives – more than double the 41% of Traditionalists who feel the same. But despite this, Traditionalists are still most likely to agree with this view.

Moderates' views on this question come closer to Progressives' while the Disengaged take a similar position to Traditionalists.

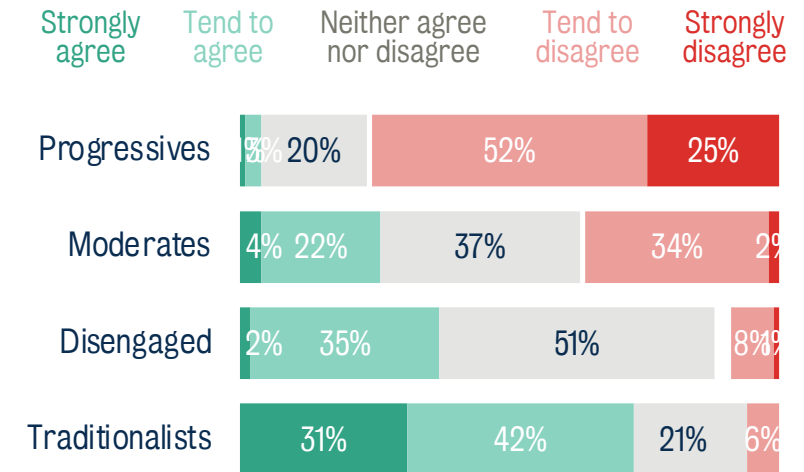
How much do you agree or disagree? People in the UK should be more tolerant of those who lead unconventional lives



In line with their view that young people do not sufficiently respect traditional values, a majority of Traditionalists (73%) agree that the culture in the UK is changing too fast. Following the same pattern as other questions, majority agreement from Traditionalists here is matched by majority disagreement from Progressives (78%).

A majority (51%) of the Disengaged don't take a position on whether the UK's culture is changing too fast, and more than a third of Moderates (37%) do the same.

To what extent do you agree or disagree? The culture in the UK is changing too fast

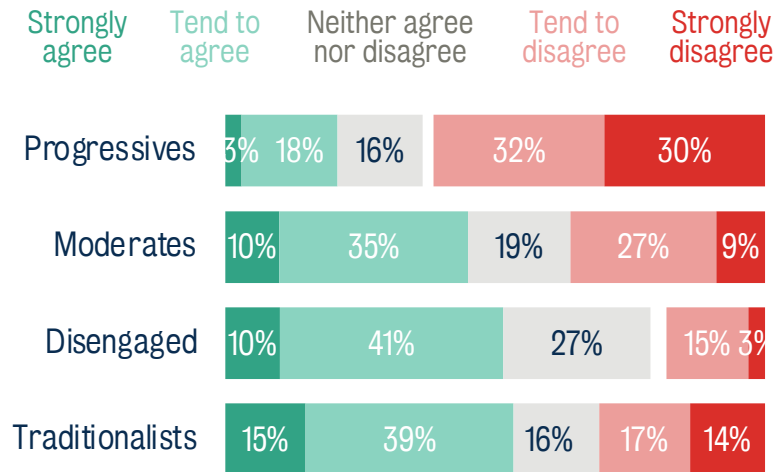


The groups think in different and sometimes contradictory ways about various aspects of free speech and the right to offend

Slight majorities of Traditionalists (53%) and the Disengaged (52%) agree that censorship is needed to uphold moral standards, while more Moderates agree than disagree with this view (45% vs 36%).

One in five (21%) Progressives think censorship is necessary for this reason, with three in five (62%) disagreeing with this perspective.

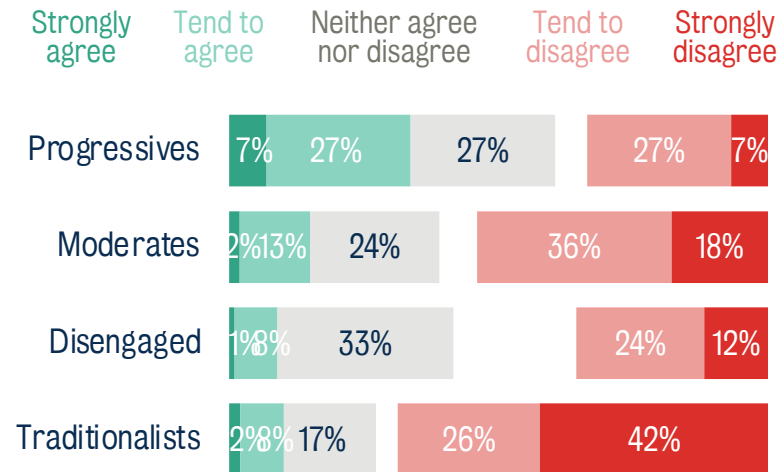
How much do you agree or disagree? Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards



In no group does “no-platforming” controversial speakers attract majority support. Around a third of Progressives (33%) are in favour of it – the highest of any group – although this is matched by the same proportion who are against it.

As seen earlier in this report, Traditionalists take a more absolutist stance on free speech issues, while Progressives seek to limit the harm caused by speech. In line with this, 68% of Traditionalists oppose no-platforming, including 42% who strongly oppose it.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that “no-platforming” is the right response to speakers with controversial views?



From these questions it is possible to see some level of contradiction between some of the groups’ positions on censorship.

For example, Progressives, who in other areas are the most willing to limit freedom of speech to protect audiences from offensive messaging, are the least supportive of censorship to protect moral standards.

Similarly, Traditionalists, who are otherwise absolutist about free speech regardless of the potential for offense, have a majority agreeing that censorship is necessary to uphold moral standards.

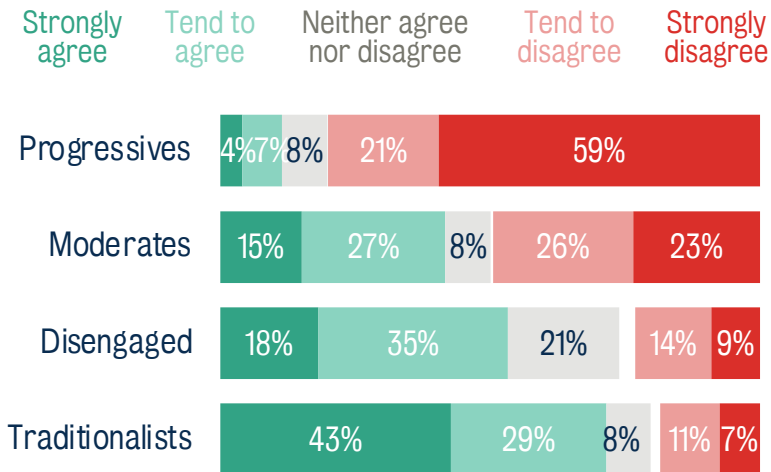
Question on no-platforming included this preamble: “There have been well-publicised instances of “no-platforming” at UK universities in recent years. This involves students trying to prevent invited speakers, whose views the students believe to be unacceptable, from speaking, or disrupting the events they are speaking at.

Progressives tend towards more liberal perspectives on law and order, while Traditionalists have more authoritarian views

80% of Progressives disagree that for some crimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence, including a majority of 59% who strongly feel this way. In contrast, 72% of Traditionalists agree that the death penalty can be appropriate in certain circumstances.

Moderates and the Disengaged take distinct positions between these two extremes: the former are relatively split on whether the death penalty can sometimes be the right option, while the latter have a slight majority in favour of it.

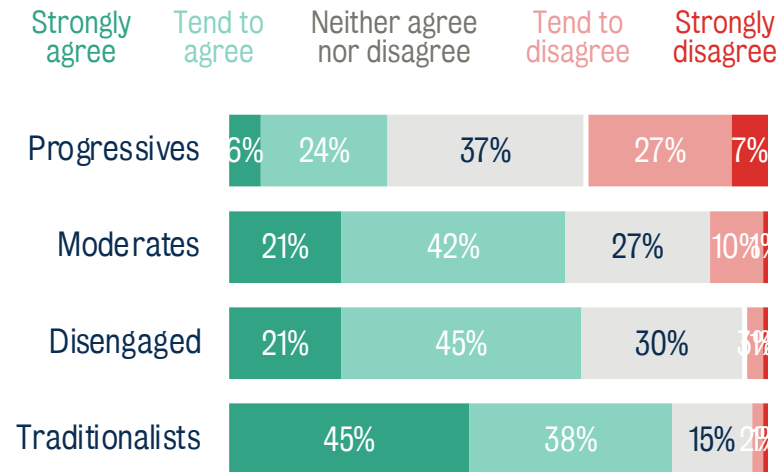
How much do you agree or disagree? For some crimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence



More generally, there is majority support across all groups except Progressives for stiffer sentences to be given to those who break the law. However, among Progressives, there is greater support for stiffer sentences than there is for the death penalty (30% vs 11%), and considerably less opposition (34% vs 80%).

Traditionalists are much more likely to be in favour of tougher sentences, with 83% favouring them. Moderates and the Disengaged have very similar views.

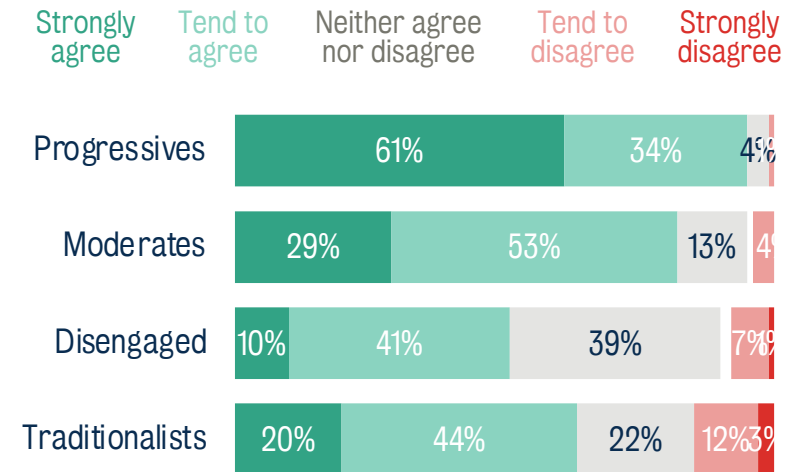
How much do you agree or disagree? People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences



With the exception of the Disengaged, there is majority support across all groups for the right to protest against the government.

Progressives come out as most supportive, with 95% agreeing people should be allowed to organise public meetings to protest (including 61% who strongly agree). Traditionalists show considerably less support – 63% feel this way.

How much do you agree or disagree? People should be allowed to organise public meetings to protest against the government?



All groups believe there are inequalities in wealth and that there is unfairness between rich and poor

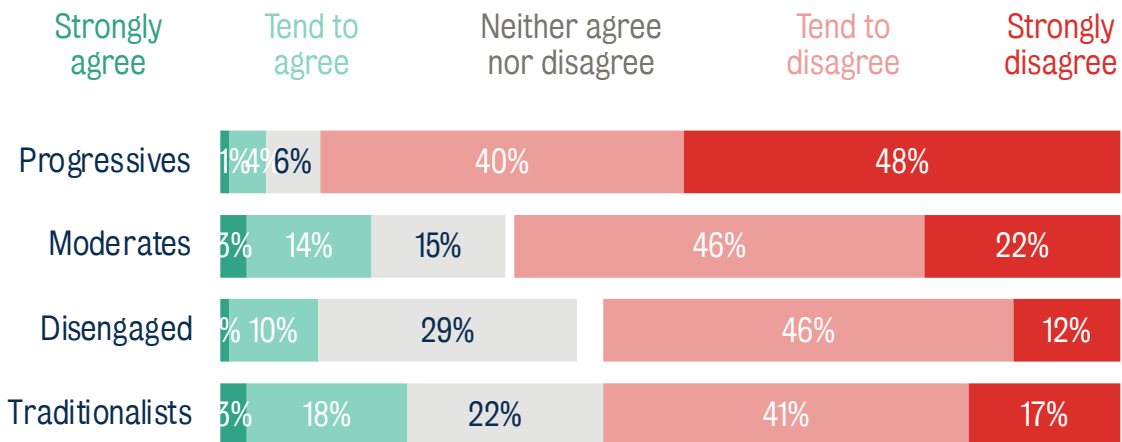
When it comes to questions of wealth inequality and fairness, majorities in all groups take the position that the status quo is unjust or unequal.

For example, 88% of Progressives disagree that ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation's wealth, while 58% of Traditionalists say the same.

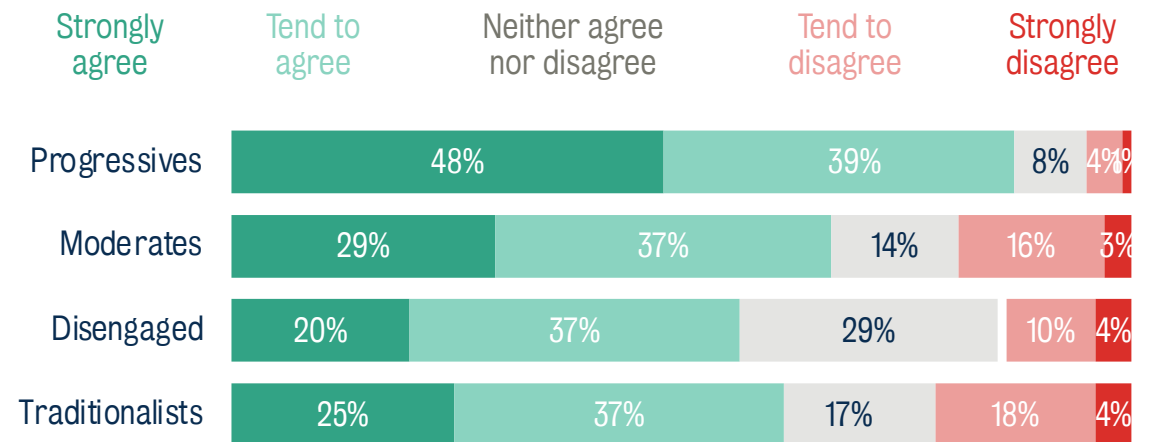
It not surprising that Progressives are the most sensitive to inequality across these issues: a defining feature of the group is that they do not believe equal rights for women, ethnic minorities, or trans people have gone far enough (although this may reflect other factors as well as economic inequalities).

Traditionalists' views on these issues indicate they may be more sensitive to particular types of economic inequalities than inequalities in rights between different groups, which, as shown earlier, are seen to have gone far enough.

How much do you agree or disagree? Ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation's wealth



How much do you agree or disagree? There is one law for the rich and one for the poor



4. The four sides in the UK's culture wars

Unity and division

While disagreeing on key culture war issues, the four groups have similar perceptions of the country as being divided. This is despite majorities in all groups believing the media exaggerates the country's divisions.

Majorities of all groups see the UK as divided, while also believing the media exaggerates the country's divisions

A majority of all four groups think the country is divided – although Progressives are much more likely to see the UK as being *very* divided: 46% say this, compared with around a quarter of Traditionalists and Moderates who say the same.

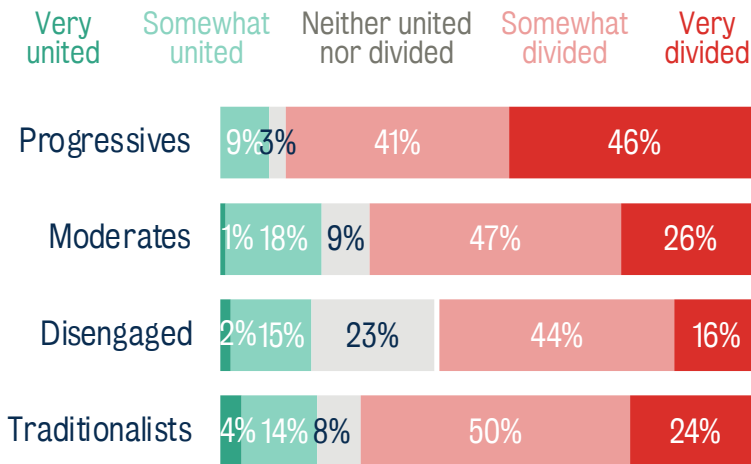
Most members of the Progressive (56%) and the Traditionalist (55%) groups think this is the most divided the country has been in their lifetime. This is despite the different age profiles of the groups and therefore potentially different frames of reference for historical levels of division.

Despite perceiving high levels of division in the UK, majorities of all four groups believe such division is exaggerated by the media.

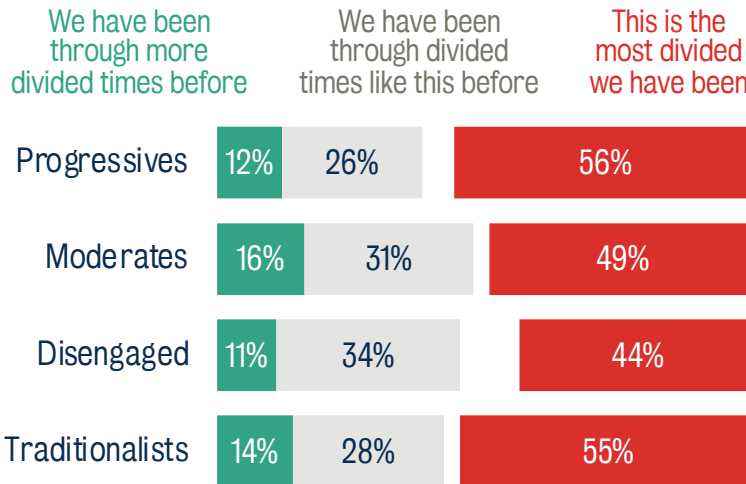
Traditionalists are particularly likely to feel this way, with 89% agreeing the media often makes the country feel more divided than it really is, including 53% who strongly agree.

Progressives have the lowest share of overall agreement, with 62% believing the media exaggerates divisions.

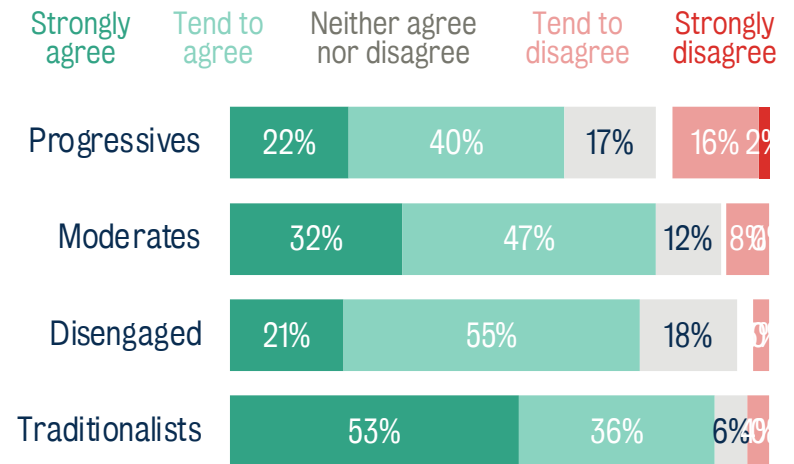
How united or divided does the UK feel to you these days?



Which statement do you agree with more? In my lifetime...



To what extent to you agree or disagree? The media often makes our country feel more divided than it really is



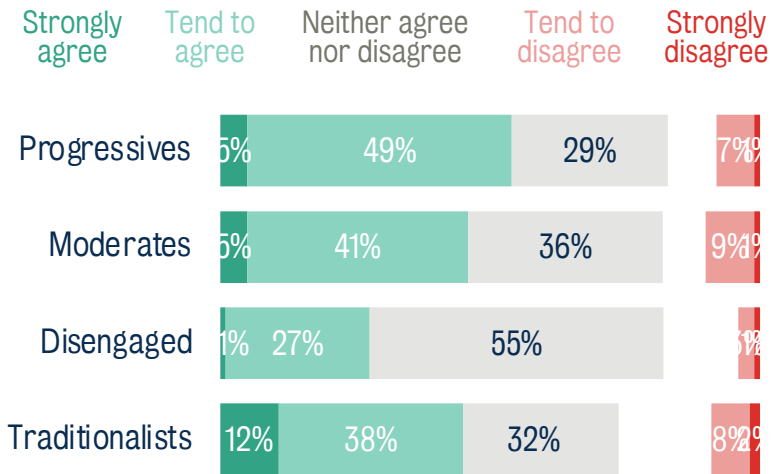
The groups all mostly think culture wars are real and a serious problem – but also that they’re stoked by politicians

Around half of three of the groups think culture wars are a serious problem – although very few strongly feel this way. The exception is the Disengaged, where around a quarter (28%) feel such conflicts are a serious problem.

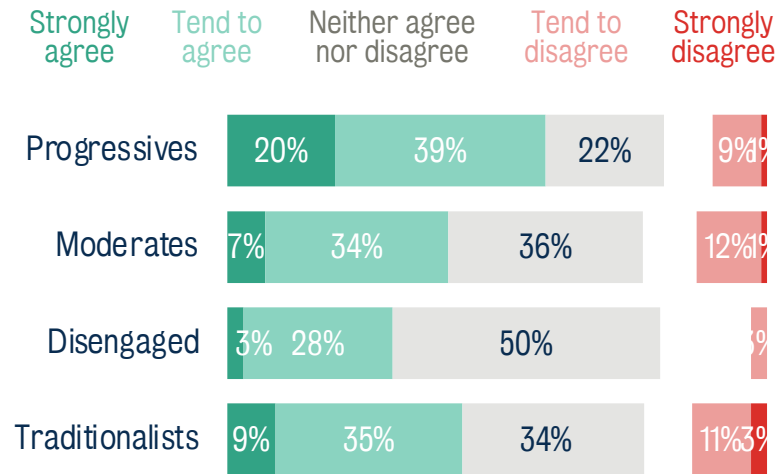
And all four groups are more likely to disagree than agree that culture wars only exist in the media and social media, rather than in real life. Only Progressives (62%) and Moderates (58%) have majority disagreement.

Progressives are most likely to think that politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic, with this group being the only one where a majority (59%) hold this view. But among the other groups, more people agree than disagree that politicians stoke culture wars in this way.

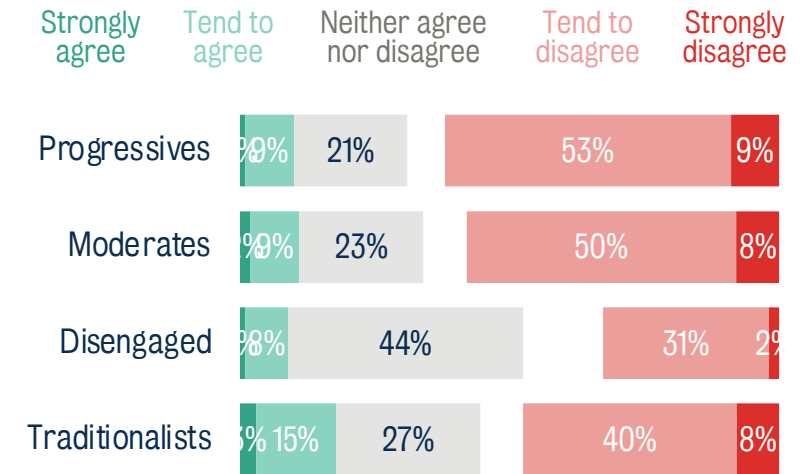
To what extent do you agree or disagree? Culture wars are a serious problem for UK society and politics



To what extent do you agree or disagree? Politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic



To what extent do you agree or disagree? Culture wars only exist in the media and on social media, not in real life



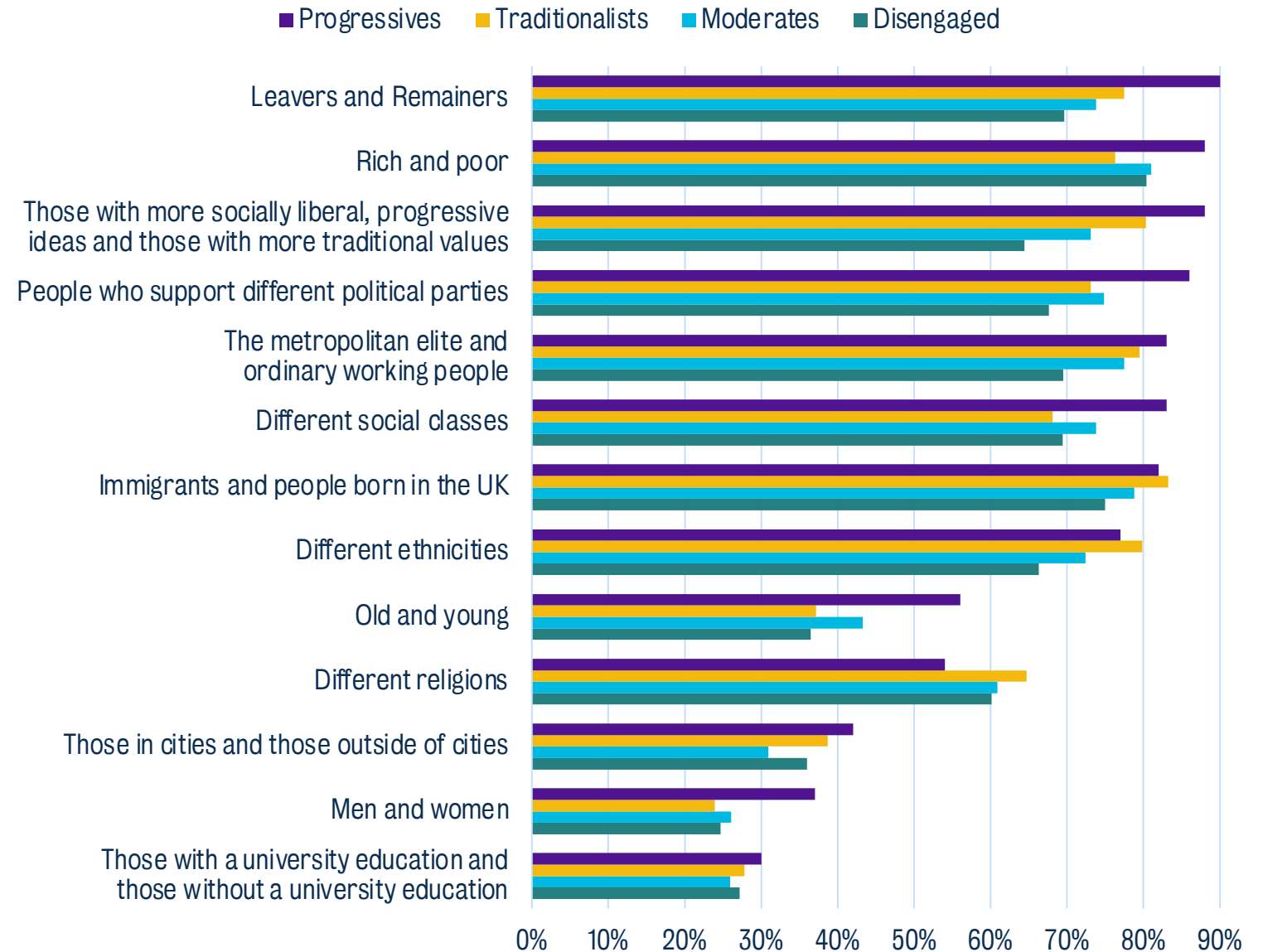
Progressives are most likely to feel there is tension between various groups in society

Around 90% of Progressives think relations are strained between Leavers and Remainers, rich and poor, the socially liberal and those with more traditional values, and people who support different political parties – higher than the proportions of the other groups who say the same.

Progressives are also the only group where a majority (56%) believe there is tension between old and young people in the UK, and 37% think there is tension between men and women – considerably higher than the other groups.

By contrast, Traditionalists are most likely to think there is tension between different religions (65%), different ethnicities (77%), and between immigrants and people born in the UK (83%) – although they are more closely followed by other groups in each category.

% who say there is a great deal or fair amount of tension between the following groups in the UK



4. The four sides in the UK's culture wars

Information bubbles

Progressives are the most likely of the groups to say that people they come into contact with share their political views.

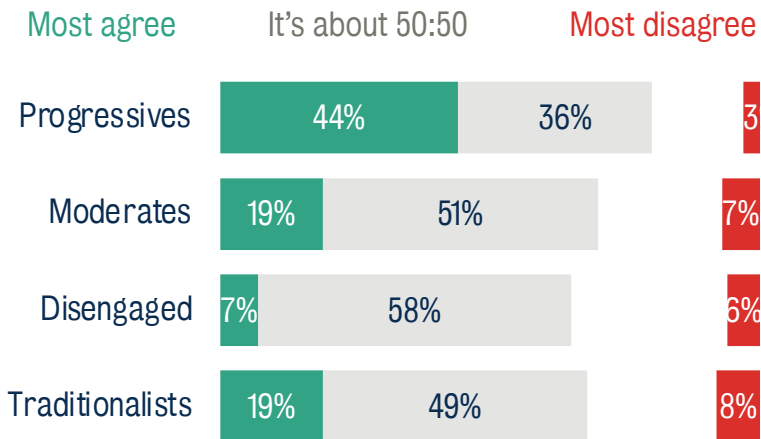
And all groups perceive greater agreement with close friends and family than with people they interact with online or their neighbours.

Progressives are much more likely than the other groups to say that those they interact with online share their politics

44% of Progressives say the people they interact with online mostly share their political views. This compares with 19% of Traditionalists and Moderates and 7% of the Disengaged who say the same.

Among all groups aside from Progressives, people are most likely to say it's about 50:50 – that half of the people they engage with online share their politics and the other half don't.

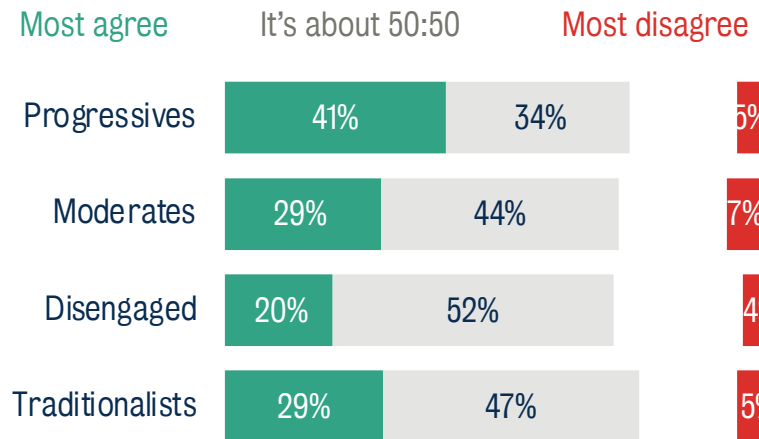
When it comes to political issues, do most of the following groups agree with you, is it about 50:50, or do most disagree with you? People you interact with online



Progressives (41%) are also most likely to say that their colleagues largely agree with them on politics.

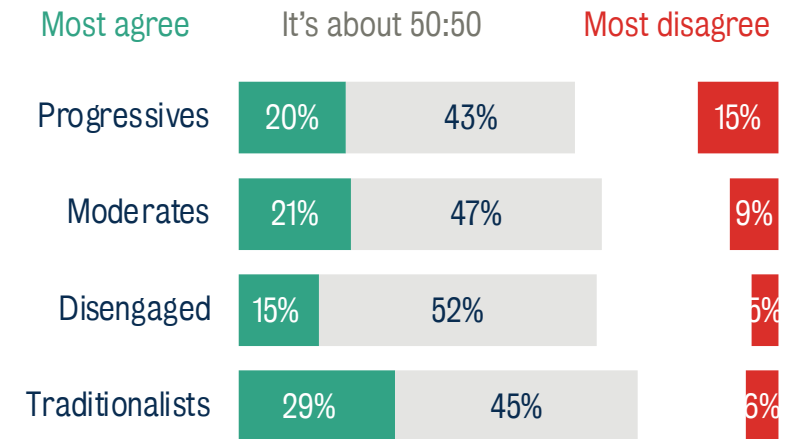
Among the other three groups, the most common response is that it's about 50:50 in terms of the extent to which colleagues agree with them.

When it comes to political issues, do most of the following groups agree with you, is it about 50:50, or do most disagree with you? Colleagues



Traditionalists (29%) are most likely to say their neighbours largely share their opinions on political issues – although among this group, as among the others, the most common response is that it's about 50:50 in terms of how much their neighbours agree with them.

When it comes to political issues, do most of the following groups agree with you, is it about 50:50, or do most disagree with you? Neighbours



Large proportions of all groups say that those closest to them agree with them on political issues

All four groups have large numbers reporting that their close friends mostly share their political views, and among Progressives (72%) and Traditionalists (51%) this perception is held by a majority.

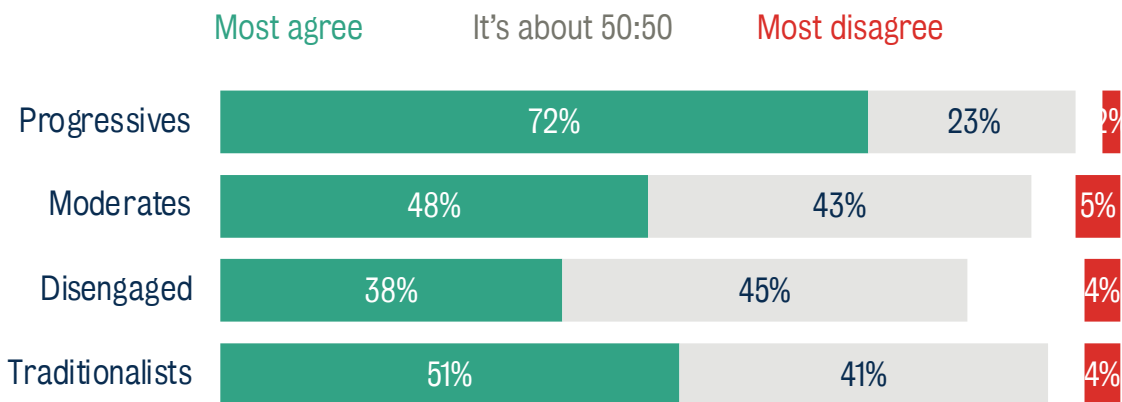
A majority of these two groups, as well as Moderates, also say that most of their family agree with them on political issues.

Across all five types of people asked about, Progressives and Traditionalists are most likely to perceive agreement, while Moderates

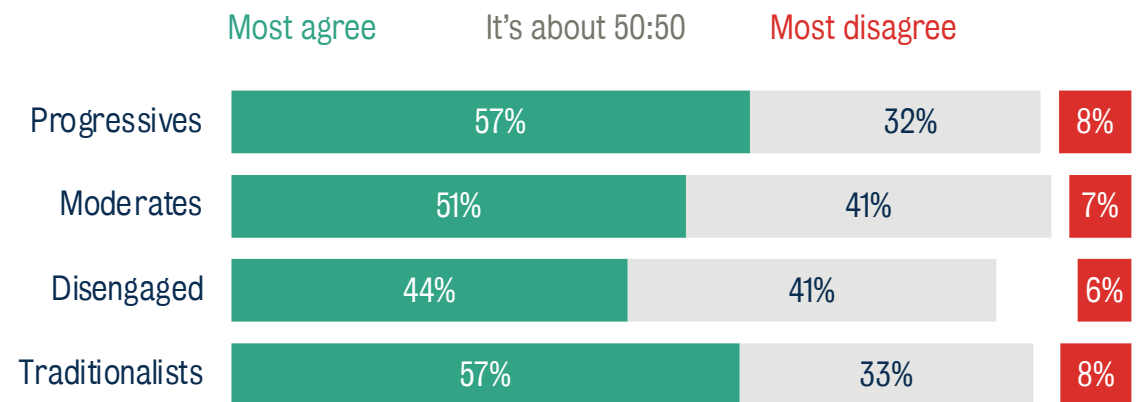
and the Disengaged are less likely. There are several potential explanations for this:

- Strong views may be more alienating, resulting in people with different views feeling reluctant to make them known.
- People with strong views may be more likely to assume agreement when other people's views are unknown.
- People holding strong views may be more likely to have political conversations and therefore be more aware of others' political views.
- People with strong views that are important to them may go to greater lengths to seek out others with similar views.

When it comes to political issues, do most of the following groups agree with you, is it about 50:50, or do most disagree with you? Close friends



When it comes to political issues, do most of the following groups agree with you, is it about 50:50, or do most disagree with you? Family



4. The four sides in the UK's culture wars

Views of the “other side” in culture war debates

All groups tend to have negative views of the other side in culture war debates – although Progressives have particularly cold feelings towards their “opponents” on the issues of Black Lives Matter, trans rights and Brexit.

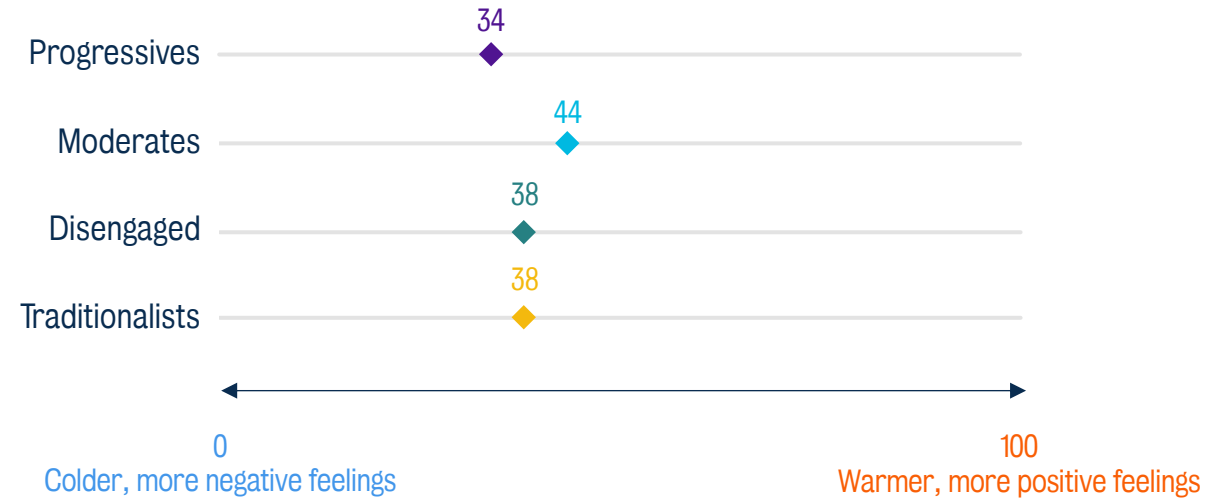
Compared with the other groups, Traditionalists are not particularly negative about the other side on most issues. While they do have the worst opinion of people who are ashamed of the British empire, their feelings are not particularly extreme.

Moderates are most positive about their political opponents, while Progressives are most negative about those on the other side of the Brexit debate

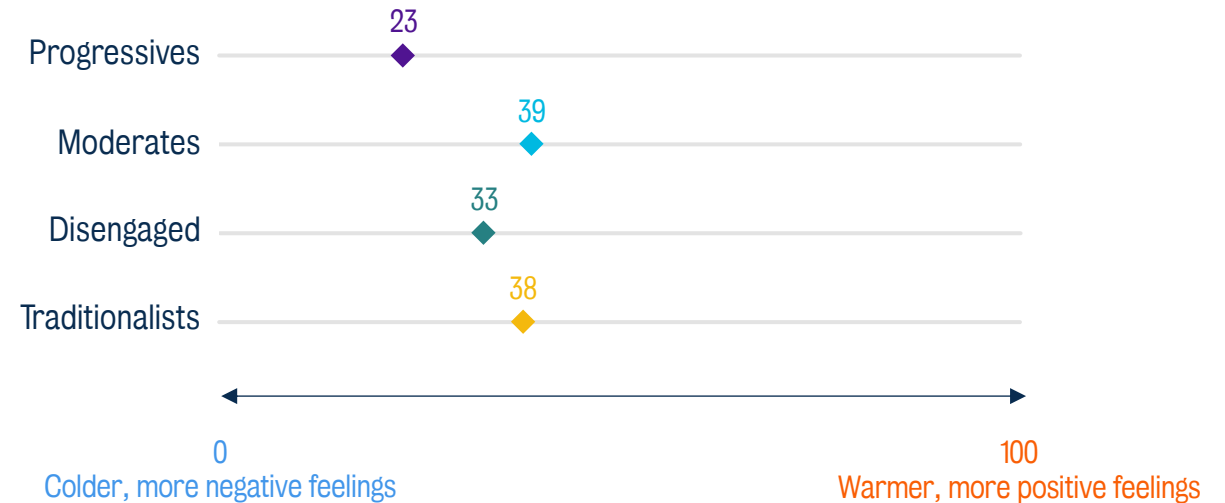
When asked to score their feelings towards people with different political opinions out of 100, all groups have a similarly negative view of the other side – except for Moderates, who are the most positive of the groups, rating their political opponents at 44 out of 100, close to a neutral rating.

There is greater variation on the issue of Brexit. Progressives rate their feelings towards those on the opposing side of the EU referendum debate at 23 out of 100 – the lowest rating given by any of the groups – while Moderates are again most positive, rating their feelings at 39, closely followed by Traditionalists, who give a score of 38.

Feelings towards people on the other side politically



Feelings towards people on the other side of Brexit

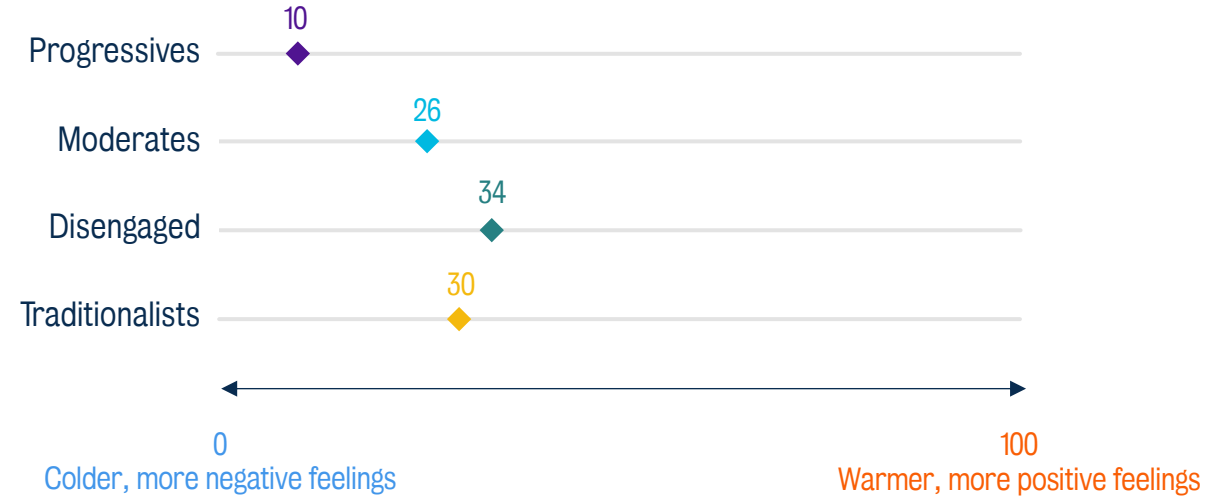


Of all the groups, progressives have the coldest feelings towards people who disagree with them on Black Lives Matter and trans rights

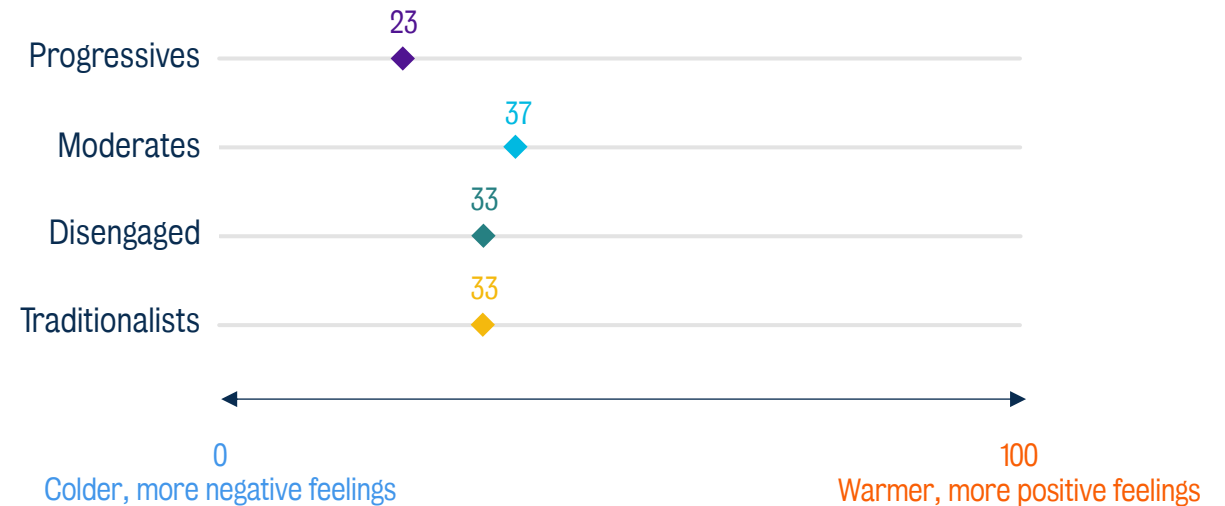
On Black Lives Matter and trans rights, Progressives stand out for holding particularly negative views of the other side – on the former issue, they rate their feelings towards their opponents at a particularly cold 10 out of 100, and on the latter, at 23 out of 100.

The other three groups have much more similar – albeit still negative – views of their opponents in these culture war debates. For example, both Traditionalists and the Disengaged score their feelings towards people with the opposite position on trans rights at 33 out of 100.

Feelings towards people with the opposite view of Black Lives Matter



Feelings towards people who have the opposite view of trans rights

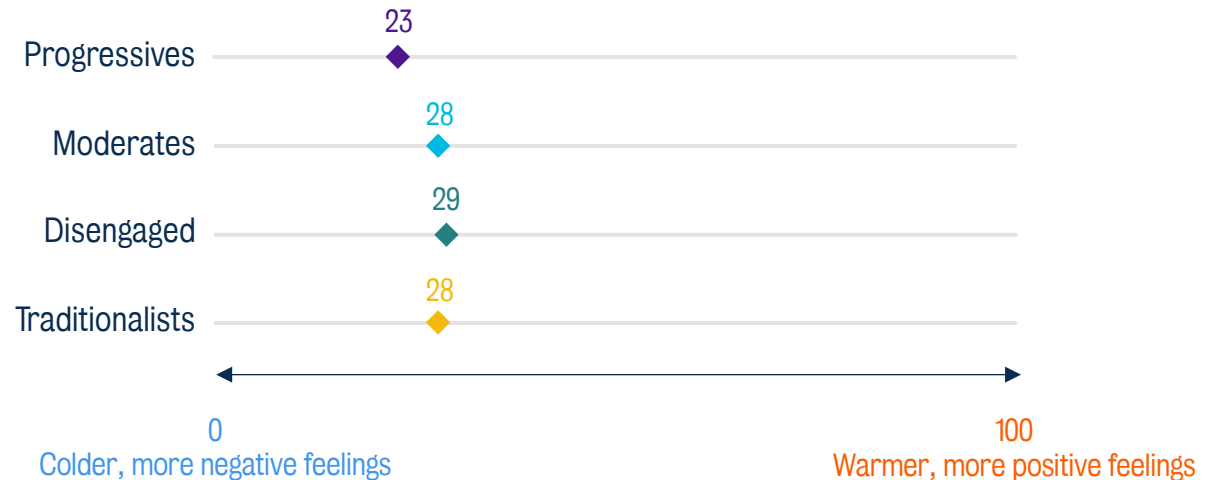


All groups have similarly negative views of people who take the opposing position on Covid restrictions, while Traditionalists have the worst view of those who disagree with them on the British empire

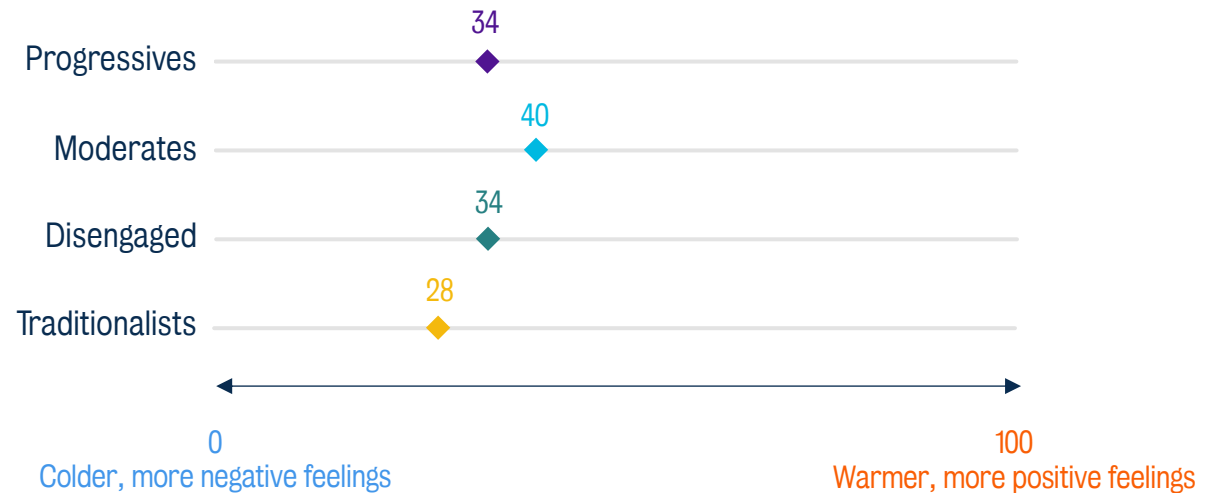
The issue of Covid-19 restrictions elicits some of the most consistently negative feelings towards the other side across the groups, with all four rating their feelings towards those who take the opposing view at under 30 out of 100. This may be because underlying support for Covid restrictions is very strong across all groups.

Meanwhile, the British empire is the only issue asked about where Traditionalists hold the most negative view of the other side. They rate their feelings towards those who take the opposite view in that debate at 28 out of 100. The Disengaged and Progressives, who are second-most negative about their opponents, give ratings of 34 out of 100.

Feelings towards people with the opposite view of Covid restrictions



Feelings towards people who take the opposite view of the British empire





5. Culture wars around the world:

how countries perceive divisions

5. Culture wars around the world: how countries perceive divisions

Political correctness



When asked to rate their feelings about political correctness on a scale, the British public emerge as joint-most likely of 28 nationalities surveyed to say that people are too easily offended.

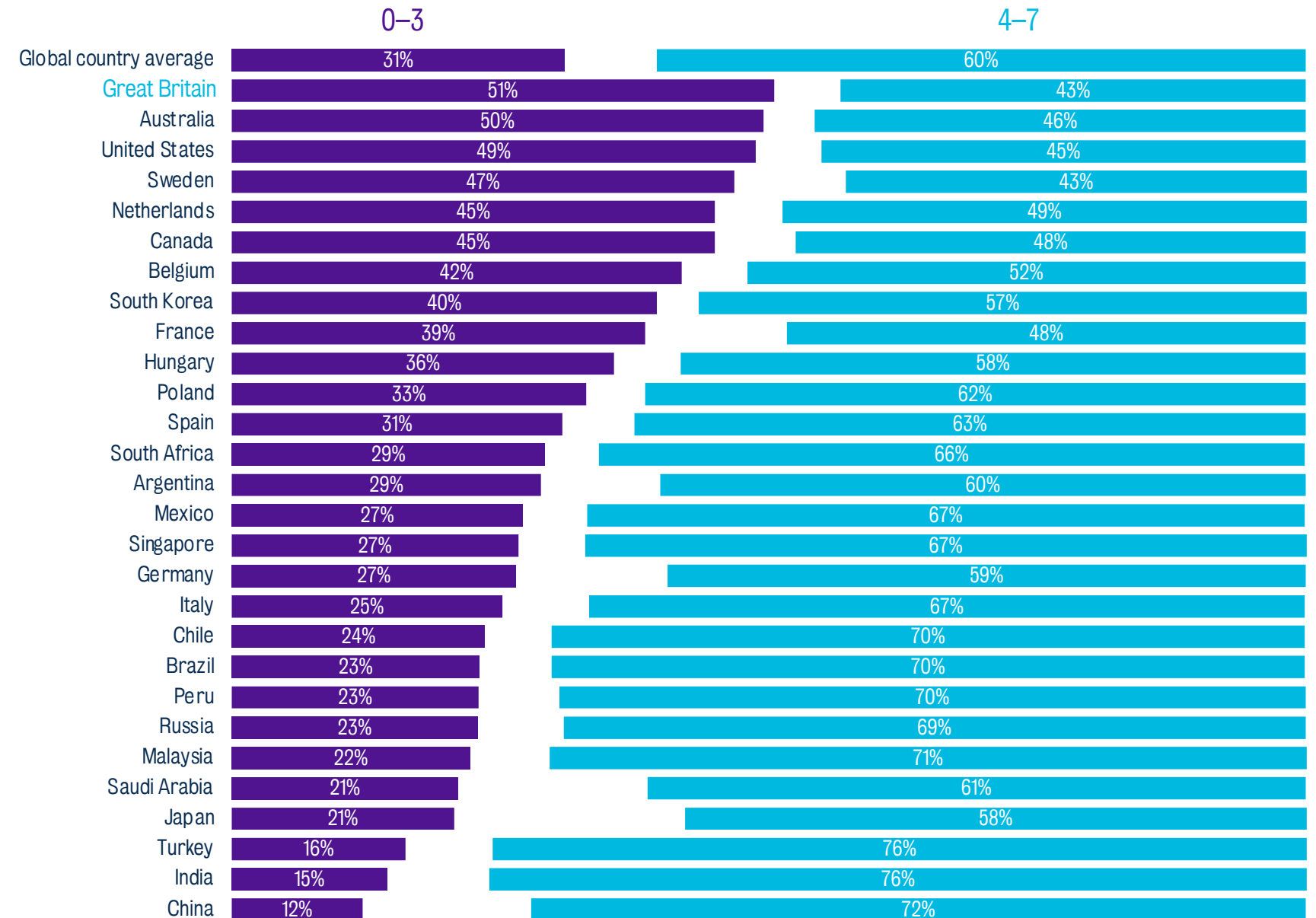
Only those in Australia and the US feel as strongly that people take offence too readily – although other nations, such as Sweden, Canada and the Netherlands are not far behind.

At the other end of the spectrum, people in India, Turkey and China are most likely to feel that people need to change the way they talk to be more sensitive to those from different backgrounds.

On balance, most countries tend towards thinking that we need to change the way people talk.

23,004 adults interviewed online between 23 Dec 2020 and 8 Jan 2021

Some people think that the way people talk needs to be more sensitive to people from different backgrounds. Others think that many people are just too easily offended. Where would you place yourself on this scale? 0 – people are too easily offended, 7 – need to change the way people talk



5. Culture wars around the world: how countries perceive divisions

Culture war divisions



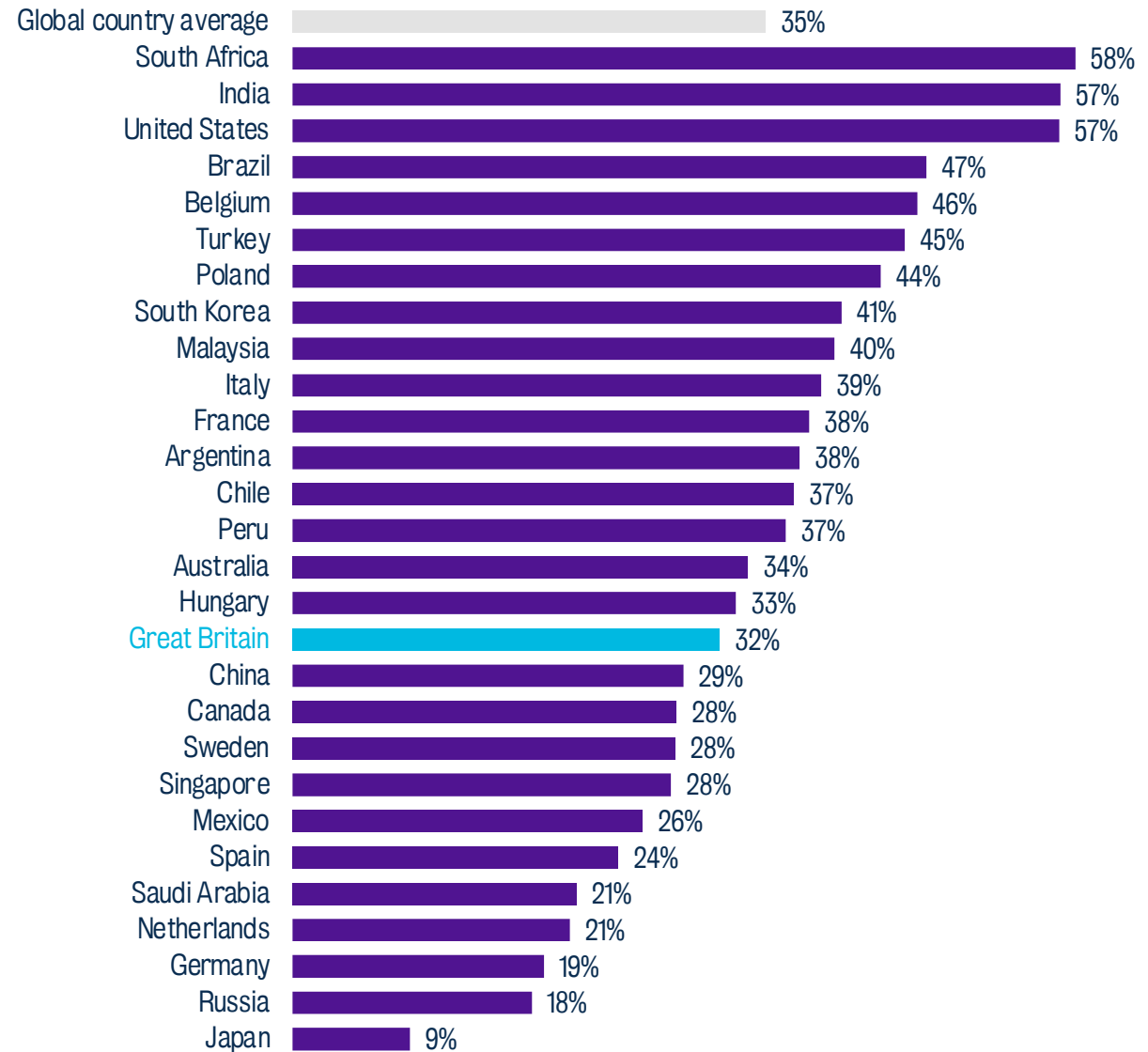
People in South Africa (58%), India (57%) and the US (57%) are most likely to feel that their country is divided by culture wars, with a significant gap in opinion between them and people in Brazil (47%), who are next most likely to think their nation is divided in this way.

32% of Britons believe culture war divisions are a problem in their country, placing them in the bottom half of nations surveyed and in line with the global country average (35%) for perceptions of such tensions.

But Britain still comes higher than some similar countries surveyed – for example, 19% of people in Germany think they have such divisions and 21% of those in the Netherlands feel the same.

In most countries, relatively few actively disagree with the statement. Instead the level of don't knows is often notable, suggesting this is not a familiar concept to many.

From what you see on TV, in the news media and online, and in your conversations with others, to what extent do you agree or disagree that [country] is divided by “culture wars”? % who agree



5. Culture wars around the world: how countries perceive divisions

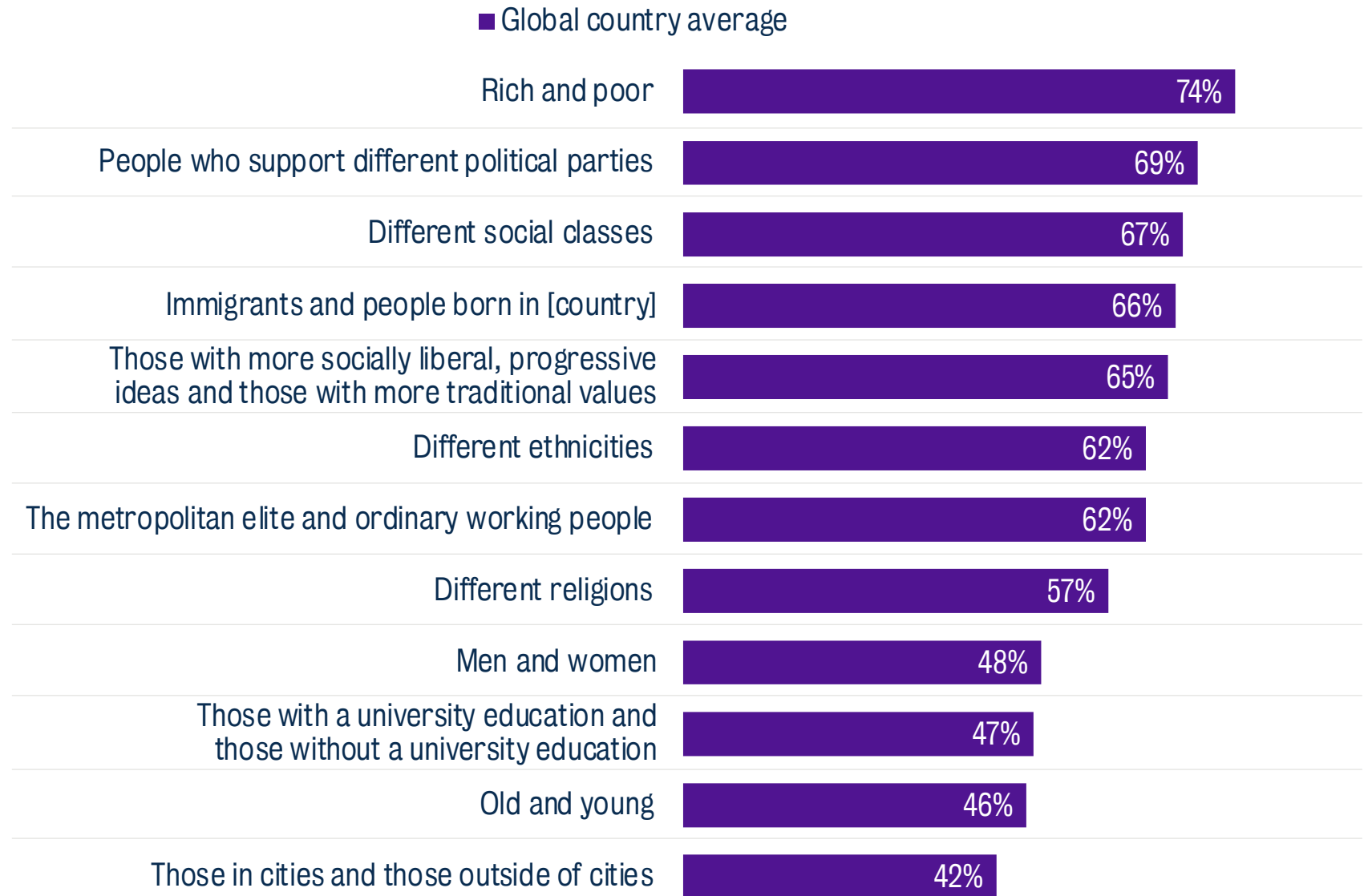
**Tensions between different
groups in society**

The background of the slide features a complex, abstract pattern of thin, overlapping lines in shades of blue and purple. These lines form a series of undulating, wave-like shapes that create a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is a textured, almost organic-looking surface that transitions from a darker purple at the top to a lighter blue at the bottom.

On average across the 28 countries surveyed, people perceive most tension to exist between the rich and poor, followed by divisions by politics, social class, immigration, and between those with different values.

There is relatively less tension (but still mentioned by nearly half) seen between cities and those outside cities, between old and young, or by levels of education.

How much tension, if any, would you say there is between [...] in [country] today?
 % who say a great deal or fair amount



People's views of tensions between different groups in Britain are largely in line with the global country average of perceived tensions in other countries surveyed.

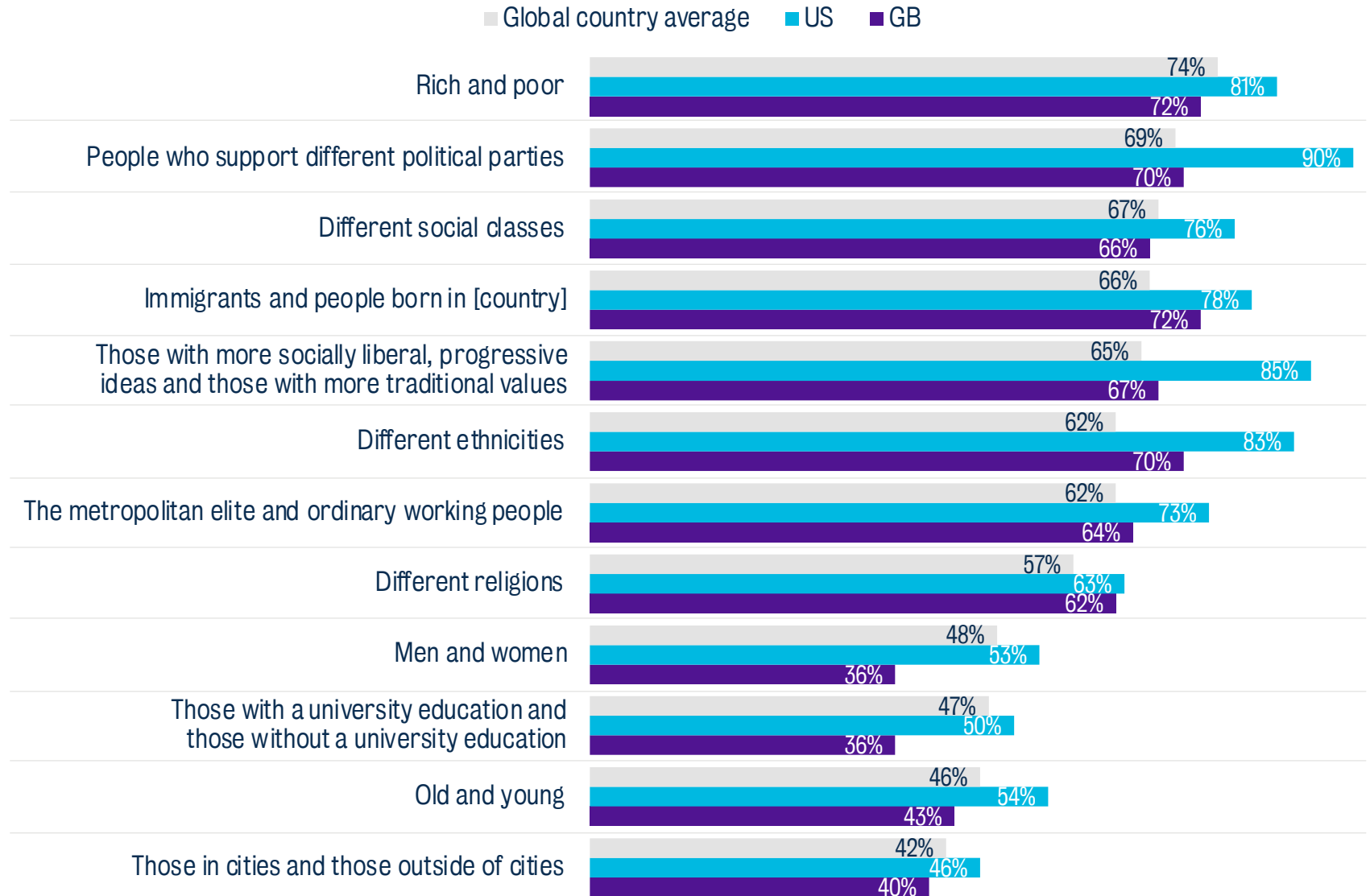
But Britons are notably less likely to think there are tensions between those with a university education and those without one (36% vs 47%), and somewhat more likely to feel there are tensions between different ethnicities (70% vs 62%) and between immigrants and people born in Britain (72% vs 66%).

Across virtually all groups asked about, the US comes out worse than Britain for perceived tensions between them.

For example, 90% of people in the US think there is a great deal or fair amount of tension between people who support different political parties – compared with 70% who say the same in Britain.

There is a similar divide in views when it comes to perceived tensions between those who have more socially liberal values and those with more traditionalist values (85% vs 67%).

How much tension, if any, would you say there is between [...] in [country] today? % who say a great deal or fair amount

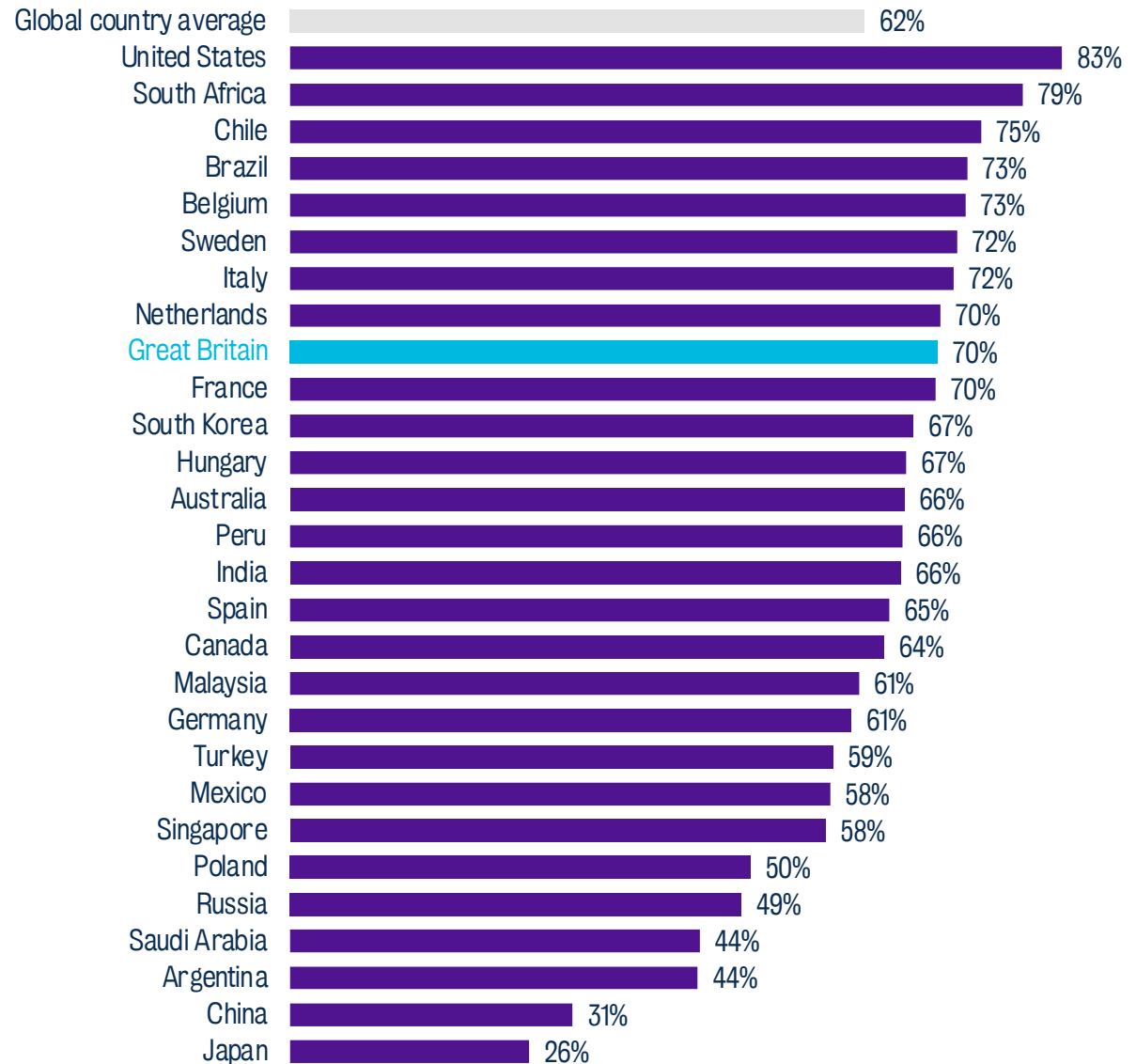


The US comes top for perceived tension between different ethnicities, with 83% believing there is a great deal or fair amount. South Africa, where 79% feel this way, comes second.

70% of the British population think significant tensions exist between people from different ethnic groups, in line with other western nations, such as France (70%), the Netherlands (70%), Italy (72%) and Sweden (72%).

People in Japan (26%) and China (31%) are least likely to perceive such tensions.

How much tension, if any, would you say there is between different ethnicities in [country] today?
% who say a great deal or fair amount

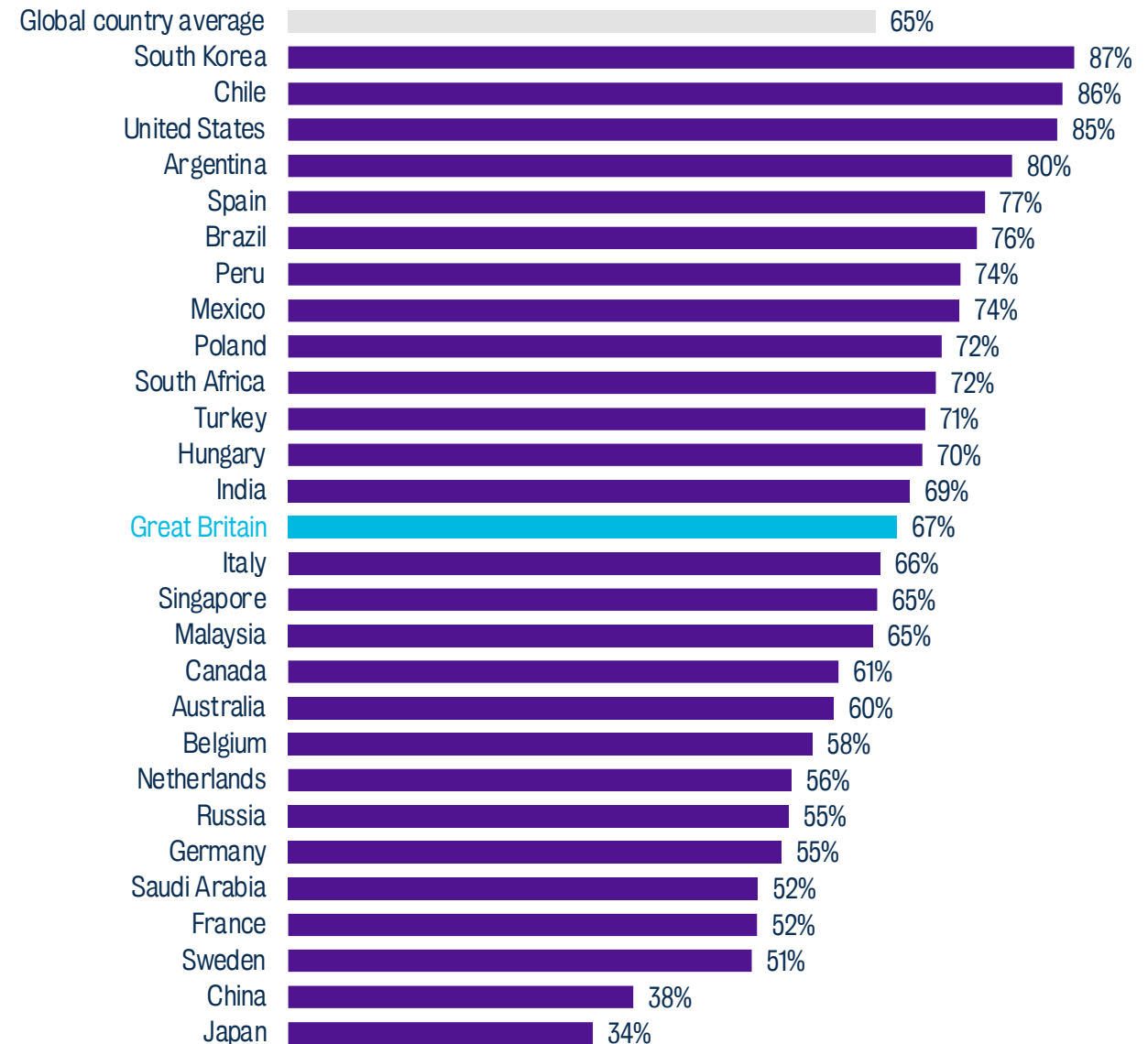


67% of people in Britain think there is at least a fair amount of tension between those with more socially liberal, progressive ideas and those with more traditional values in the country.

Among western European nations, Spain (77%) has the highest perceptions of tension between these two groups.

South Korea (87%), Chile (86%) and the US (85%) come top overall for such perceived tensions.

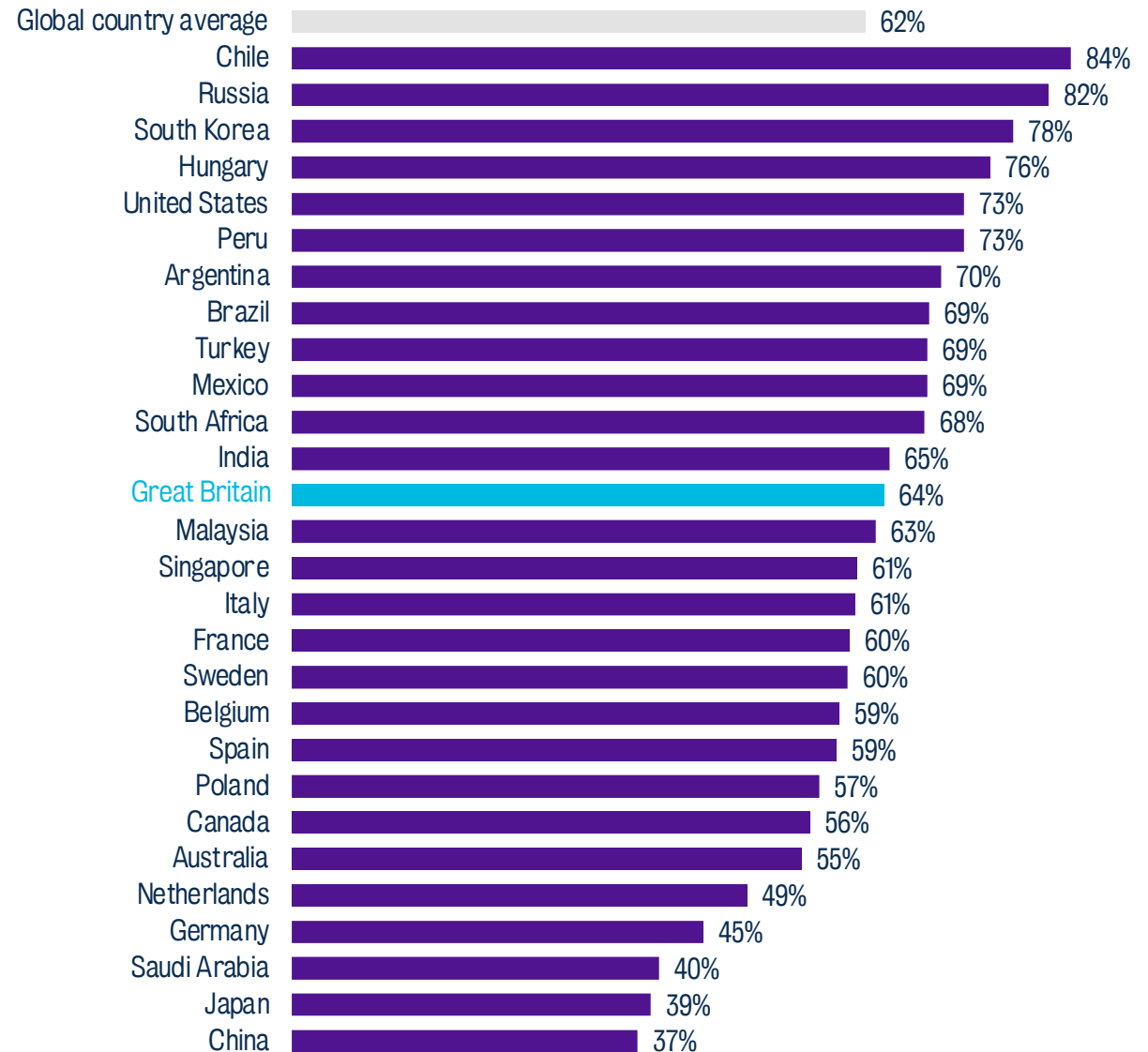
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between those with more socially liberal, progressive ideas and those with more traditional values in [country] today? % who say a great deal or fair amount



Chile (84%) and Russia (82%) are ranked top for perceived tensions between the metropolitan elite and ordinary working people.

The British public's views of tensions between these groups are in line with the global country average (64% vs 62%), while among the western European nations surveyed, people in Germany are least likely of think these tensions are particularly significant (45%).

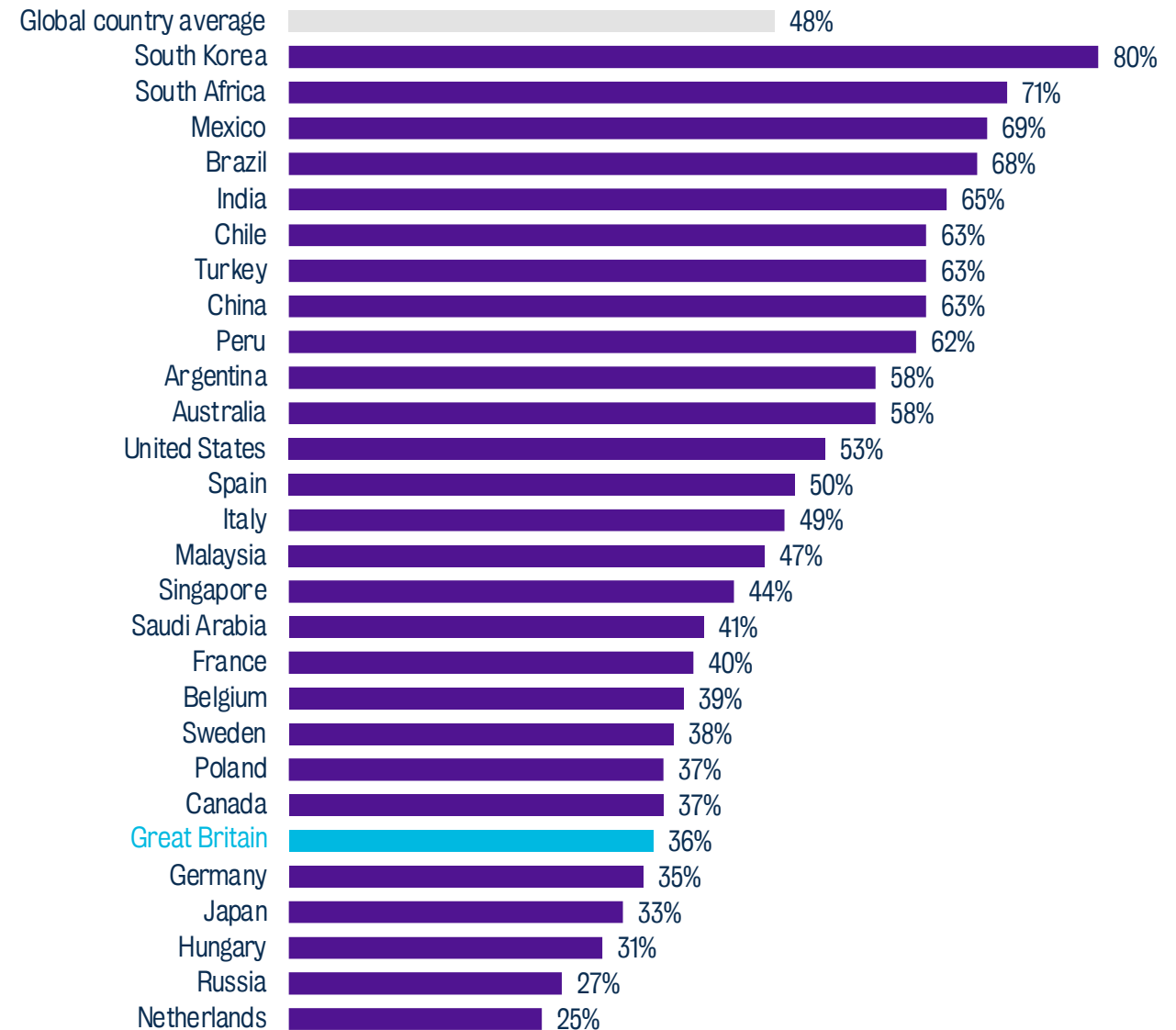
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between the metropolitan elite and ordinary working people in [country] today? % who say a great deal or fair amount



36% of Britons say there is tension between men and women in the country – among the lowest of the nations surveyed and much lower than the US, where 53% of Americans think such tensions exist.

The Netherlands and Russia do best on this measure, with around a quarter of those in each nation believing there is tension across the gender divide.

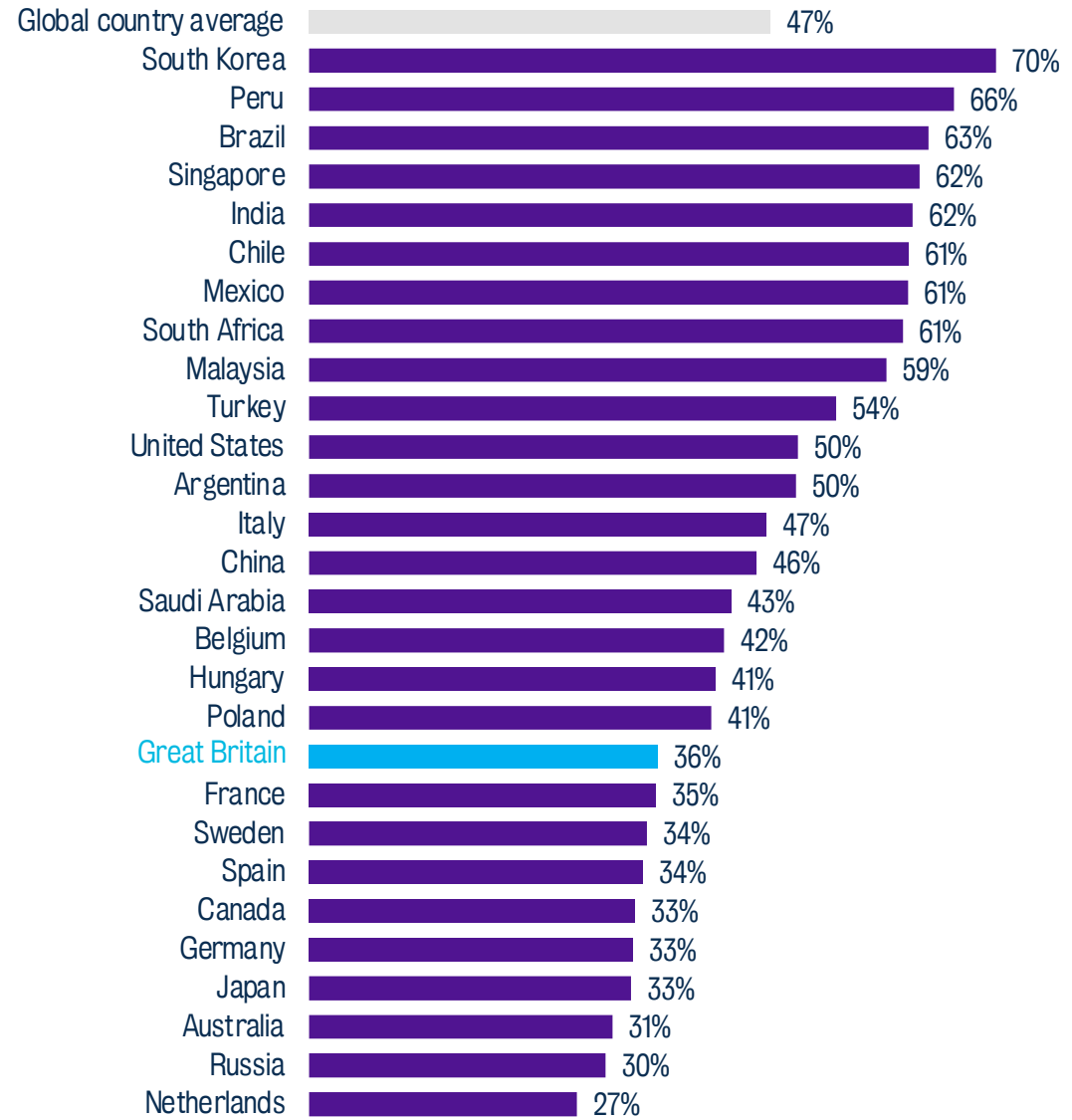
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between men and women in [country] today? % who say a great deal or fair amount



By global standards, relatively few people in Britain feel there is a notable amount of tension in their country between people who went to university and people who didn't – 36% think there is, compared with 70% who say the same in South Korea.

And these perceived tensions in Britain are in line with similar European countries, such as France (35%) and Spain (34%).

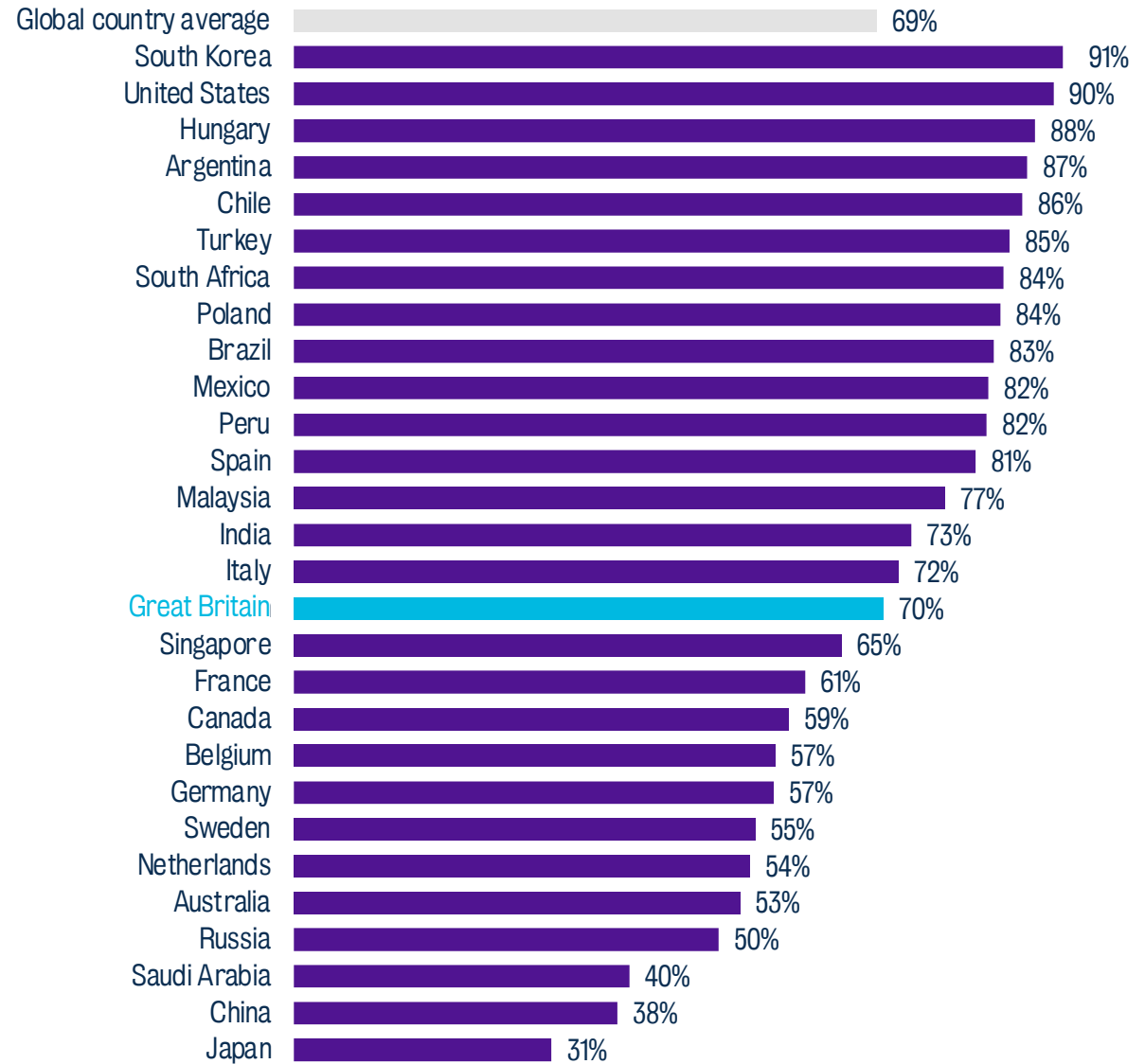
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between those with a university education and those without a university education in [country] today? % who say a great deal or fair amount



Britain is in line with the global country average for perceived tensions between people who support different political parties (70% vs 69%).

People in South Korea (91%), the US (90%), Hungary (88%) and Argentina (87%) are most likely to feel there is significant political tension in their country.

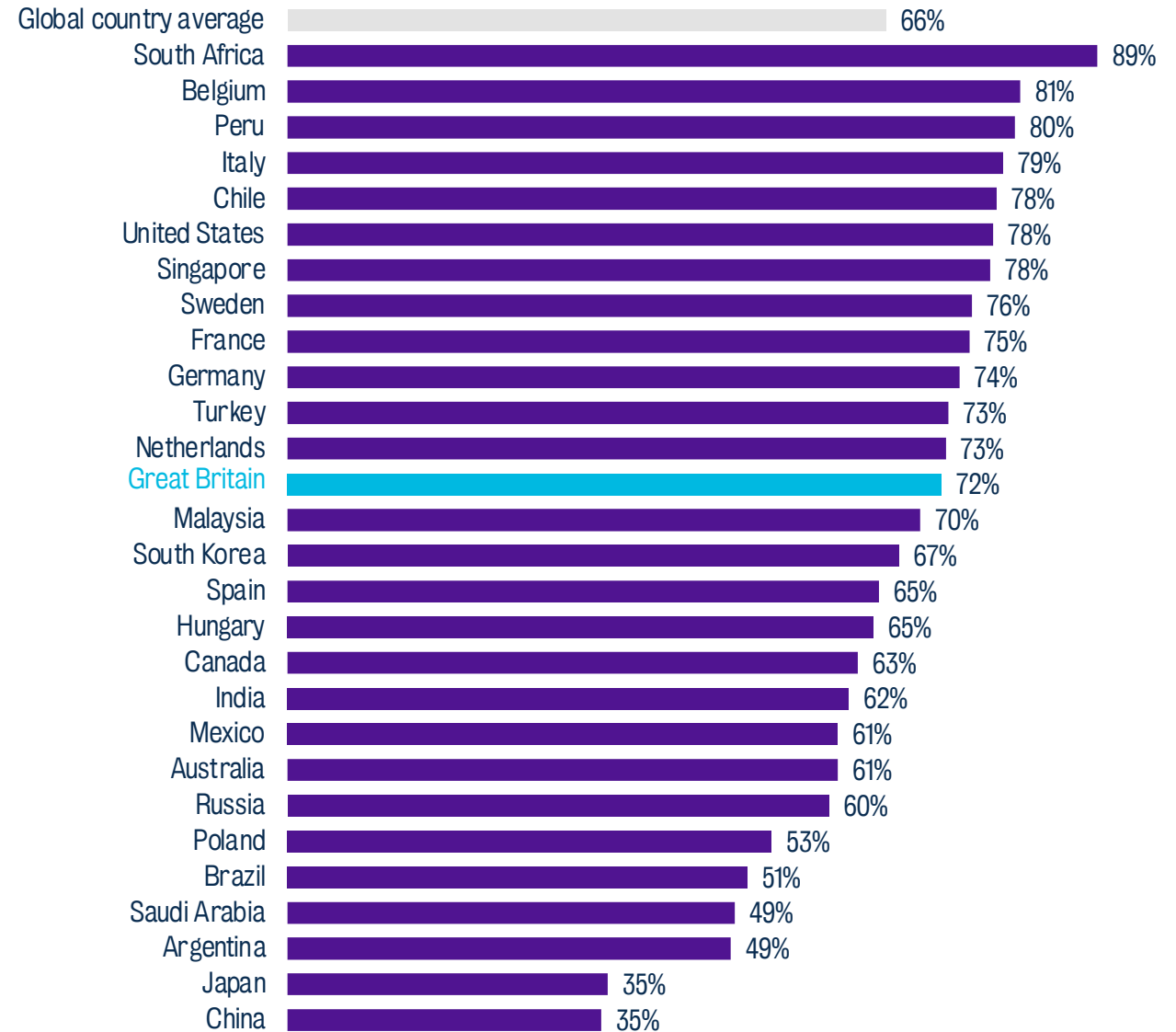
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between people who support different political parties in [country] today? % who say a great deal or fair amount



South Africa stands out for perceived tension between immigrants and those born in the country, with 89% thinking there is at least a fair amount of unease.

Britain is above the global country average on this measure (72% vs 66%), although perceptions of tensions around immigration are similar to other European nations, including Germany (74%) and France (75%).

How much tension, if any, would you say there is between immigrants and people born in [country] today?
 % who say a great deal or fair amount

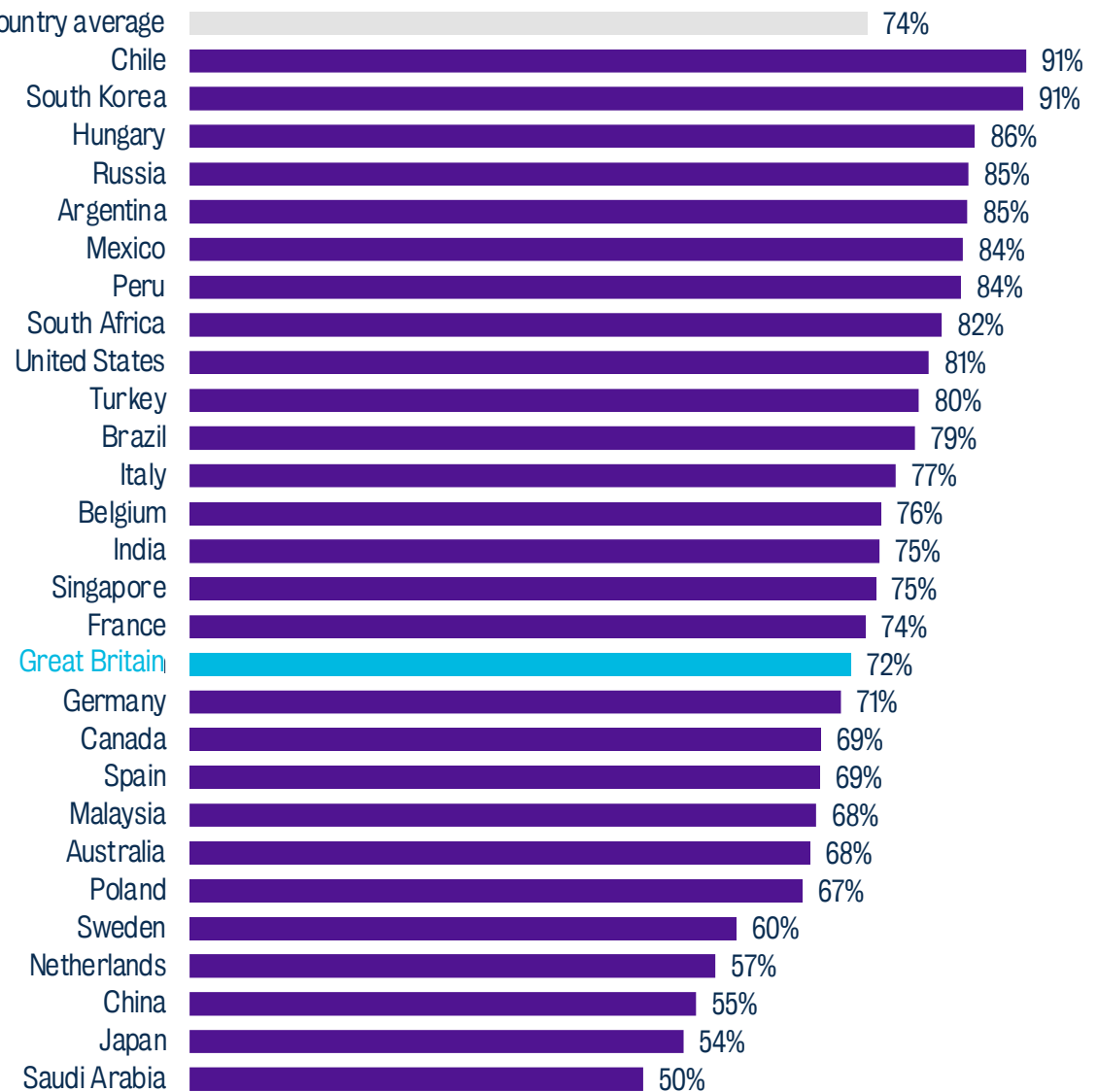


Chile (91%) and South Korea (91%) come top for perceived divisions between rich and poor.

European countries fare comparatively better, with Italy ranked highest among this group, with 77% believing there is at least a fair amount of tension between rich and poor.

72% of Britons feel this way, placing it in the bottom half of countries surveyed for perceptions of tension between these two groups of people.

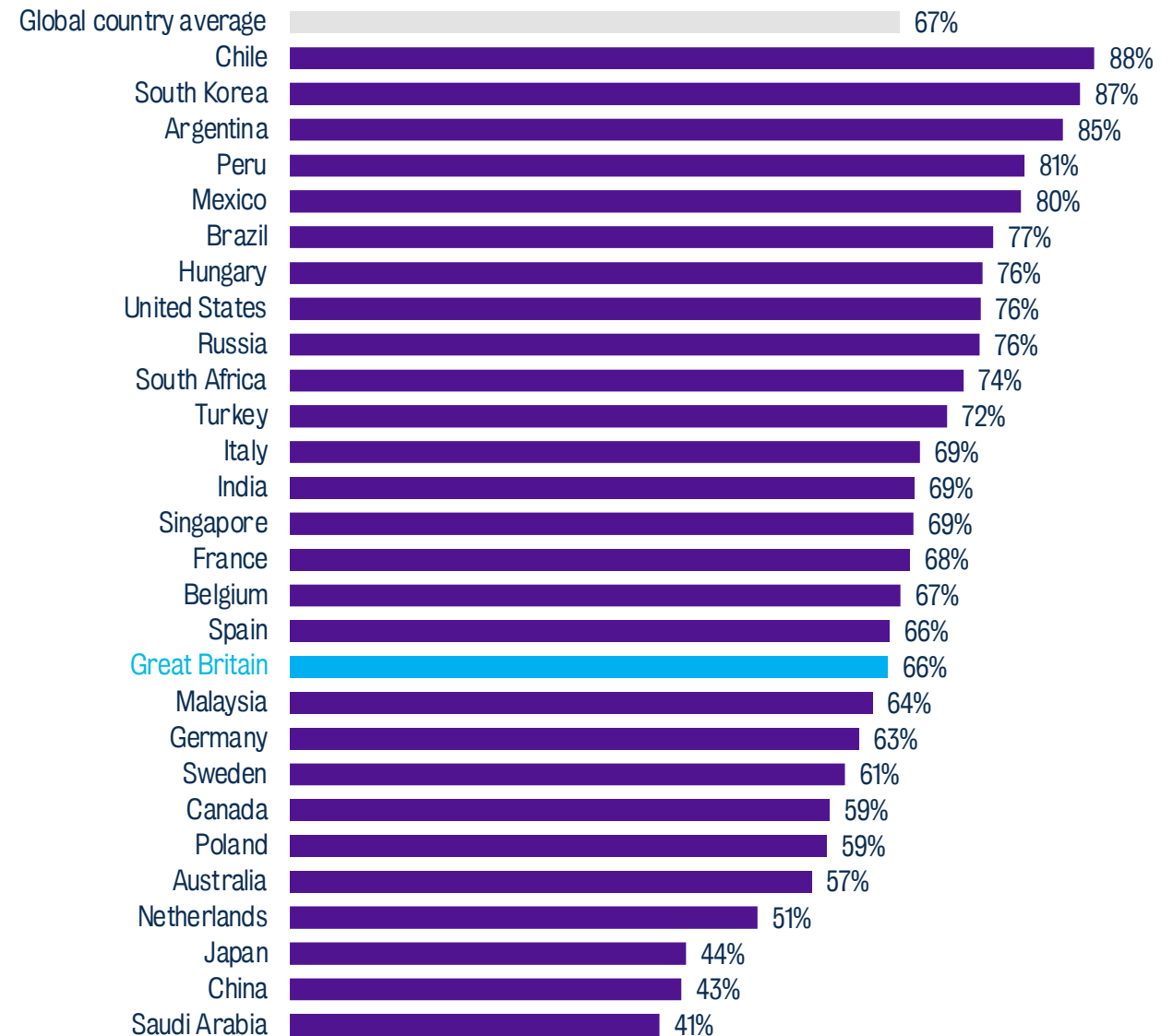
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between rich and poor [in country] today?
% who say a great deal or fair amount



People in Chile (88%) and South Korea (87%) are also most likely to think there is tension between different social classes in their country.

Again, Britain is ranked in the bottom half of countries surveyed for perceptions of this kind of tension (66%).

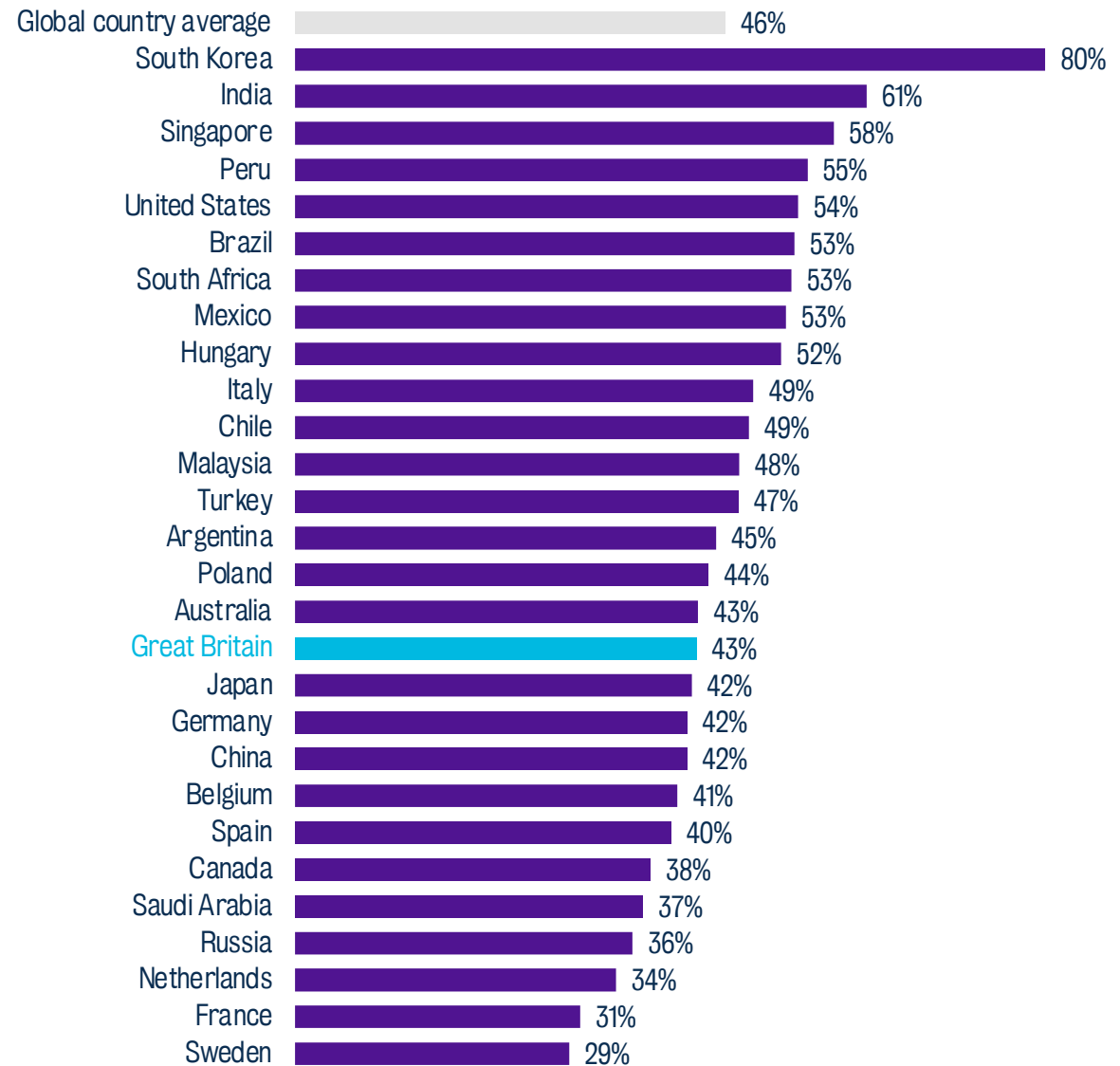
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between different social classes in [country] today?
 % who say a great deal or fair amount



80% of people in South Korea think there is a great deal or fair amount of tension between old and young people in their country – far above India, where perceptions of generational tensions are second-worst, on 61%.

People in Sweden (29%) and France (31%) are least likely to perceive such tensions, while Britain comes in the bottom of half of nations surveyed (43%).

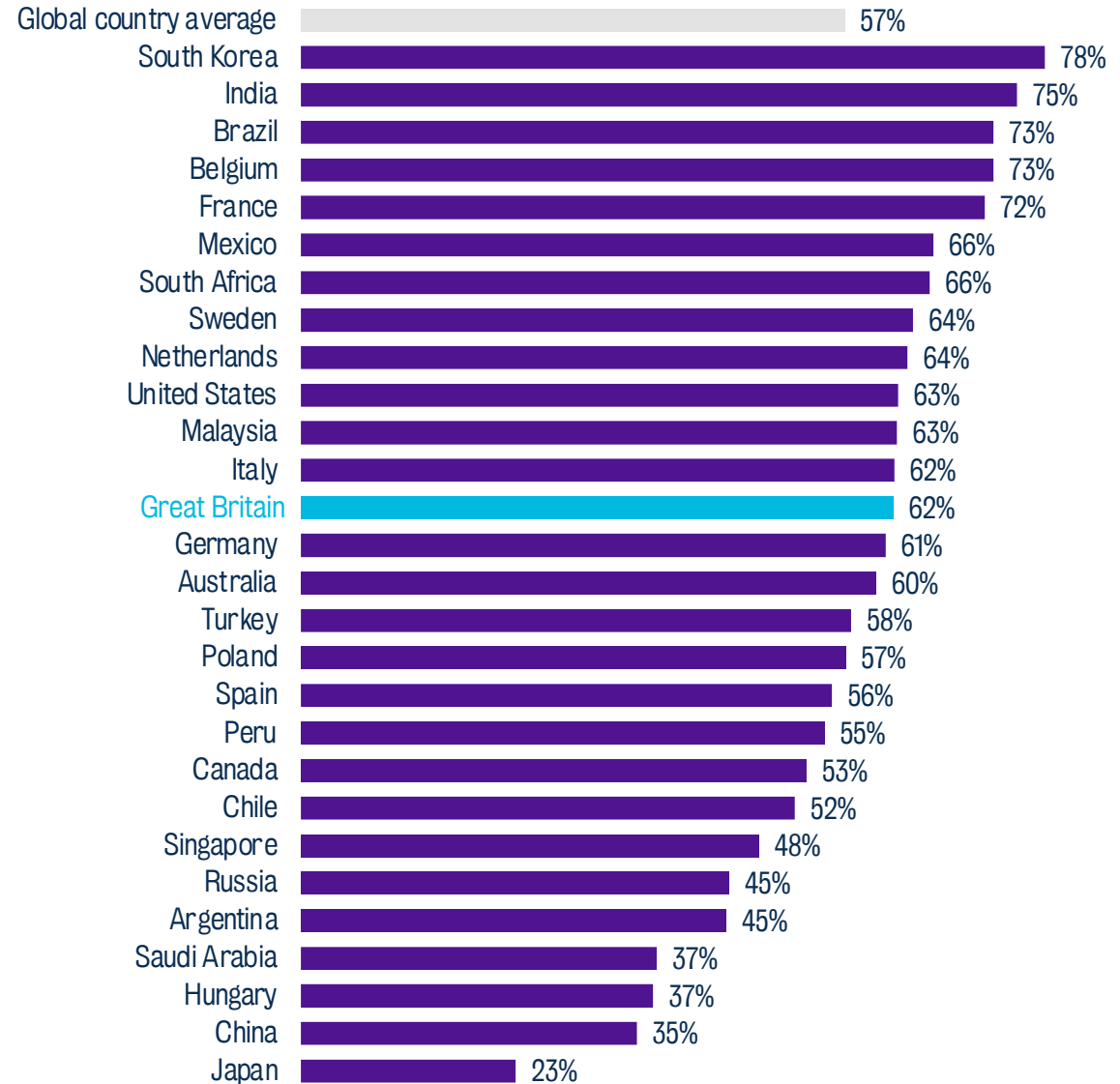
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between old and young in [country] today?
% who say a great deal or fair amount



People in South Korea (78%) and India (75%) are most likely to say there is at least a fair amount of tension between different religions in their country.

The proportion of the British public who feel the same (62%) is the same as in the US (63%), and in line with the global country average (57%).

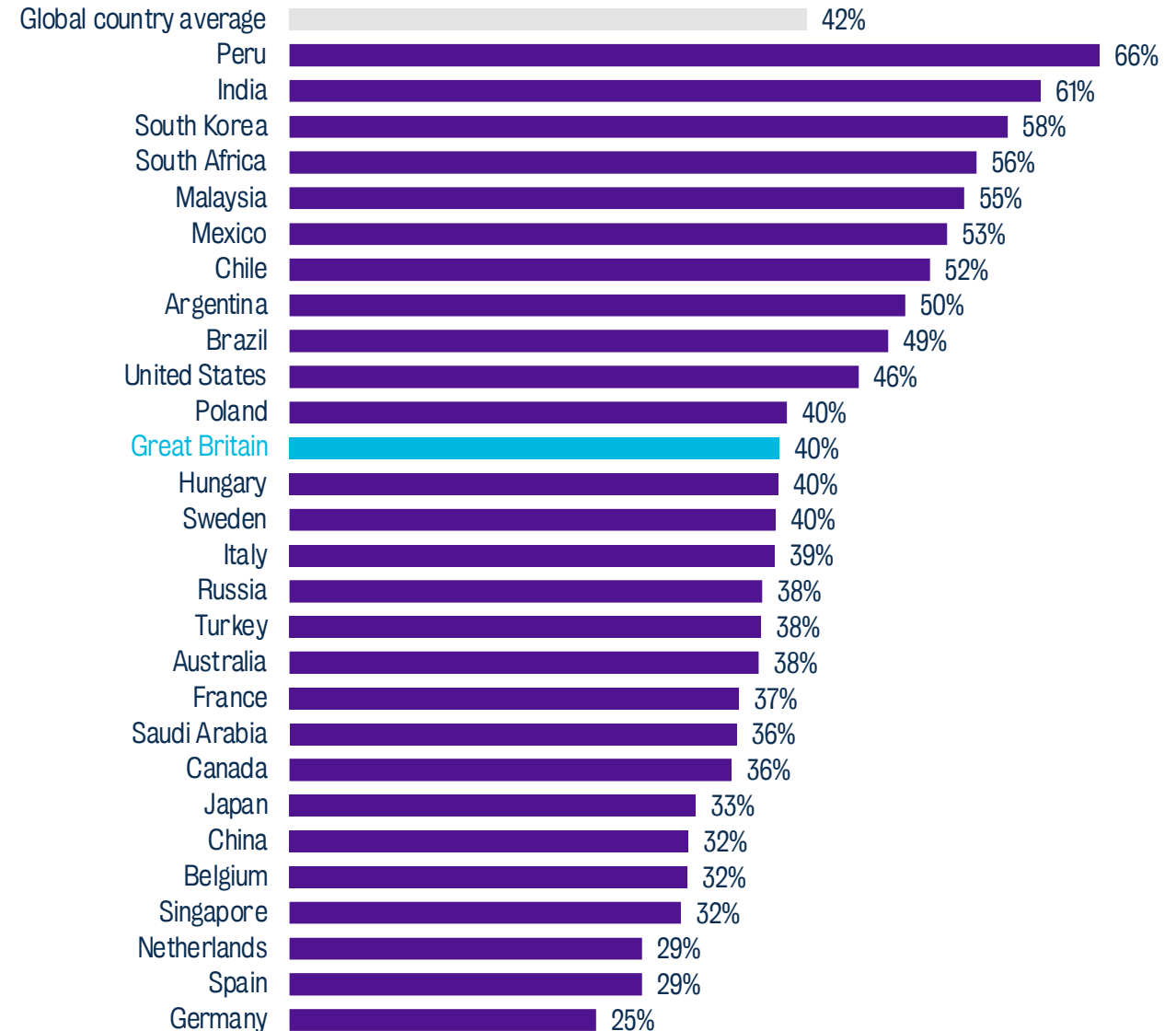
How much tension, if any, would you say there is between different religions in [country] today? % who say a great deal or fair amount



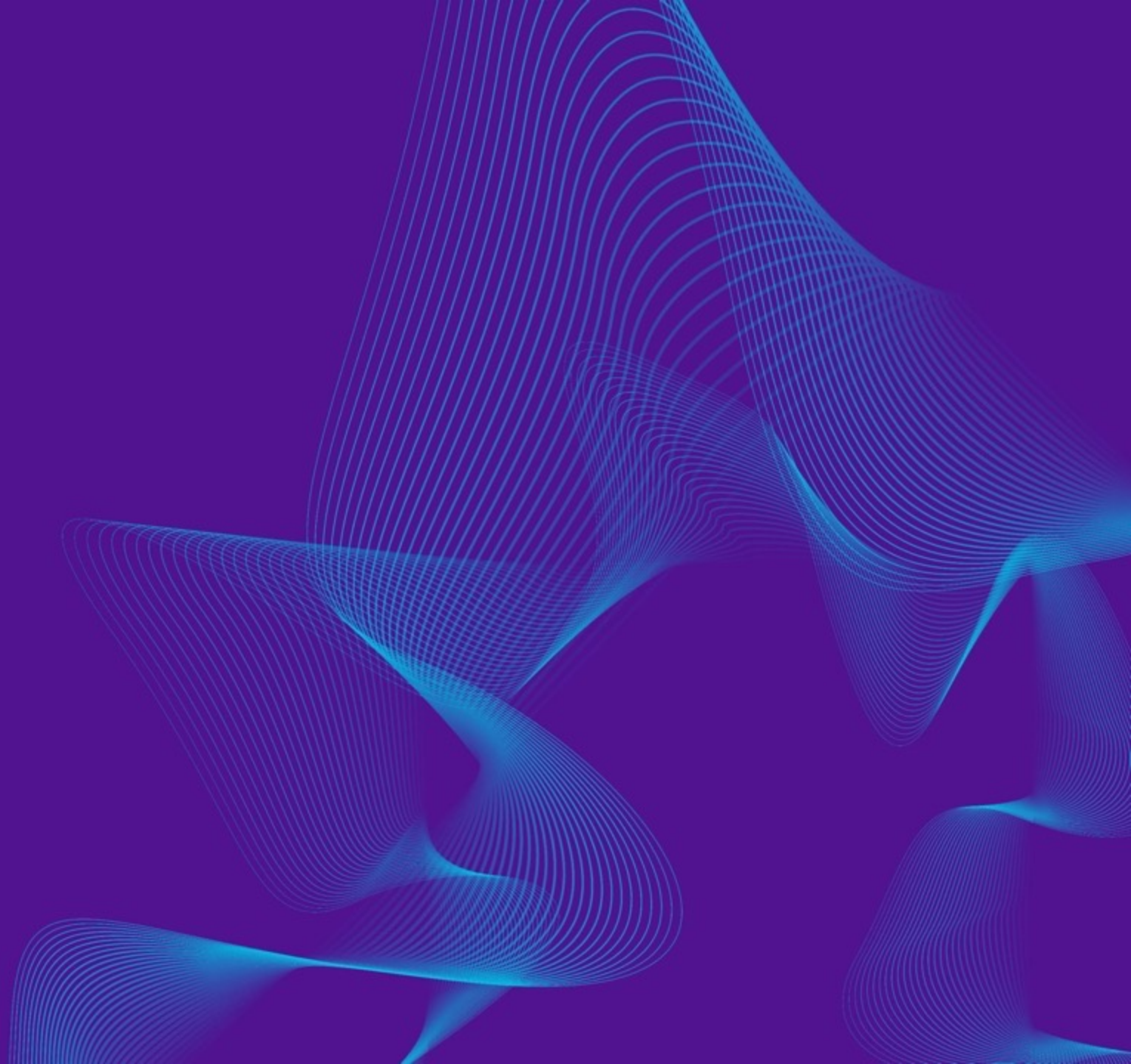
Tensions between people living in and outside of cities are seen to be the worst in Peru, where 66% there is at least a fair amount of unease between these two groups.

This is more than twice the proportion of people in Germany (25%), at the other end of the spectrum, who feel the same.

How much tension, if any, would you say there is between those in cities and those outside of cities in [country] today? % who say a great deal or fair amount



6. Conclusions



Conclusions

Are we in a culture war?

- The language of culture wars has taken hold in UK newspapers and news sites in an incredibly short period. This includes increasingly casual references – eg “in the age of culture wars” – which send a clear signal that this is now an accepted reality.
- However, the public are less convinced. Few of the questions on culture change or division in our study elicit a strong response from most people, with only minorities feeling particularly animated about such issues, and many taking a middle position or not engaged.
- This mirrors the US history of culture wars, which evolved as an interaction between bottom-up cultural change among the public, starting in the 1960s, interacting with a top-down, elite-driven phenomenon, centred around Republican and Democratic party identities, that over time helped increase real and perceived separation among the public.
- There remain important differences from the US, however, not least that there is no comparable political identity to the Republican/Democratic identity that splits the UK population to such an extent.
- But those who identify with one of the two main parties in the UK, or with a side in the Brexit debate, do show very large differences on some cultural perspectives, and this combination does seem to be a possible basis to build intractable political divisions on broad cultural identities, particularly if there is a continuing focus on cultural divides (as seems likely).

- As US analysts outlined in the 1990s, whether or not this is a concerted political strategy, the outcome is the same.

Why has the focus on culture wars taken off?

- However, it is vital to recognise that there is *always* cultural tension on emergent issues, an effect of generational replacement, where younger cohorts socialised in different contexts continually drive cultural change – a type of “demographic metabolism” that keeps society from stagnating.
- But there is nothing in the long-term data to suggest that the gap between current generations of young people and older generations on today’s emergent issues are particularly different from the gaps seen between these groups in past decades on previous emergent issues.
- The greater sense of division is therefore likely to be driven mainly by “period effects” – the current context – where a more divisive political, media and social media environment amplifies extreme views and differences. This means that we don’t need large parts of the population participating to *feel* like we’re in a culture war between two large, coherent, opposing blocs.
- There are also important incentives for political and media actors to accentuate these differences:
 - With a strong age gradient to voting patterns in the UK (and US), it makes sense for the main parties to draw supporters closer to them by emphasising extreme cultural views on the other side, including “taking campus politics national”.
 - The intense competition faced by media and social media outlets encourages a focus on extreme views to draw attention.

Conclusions

Should we be worried?

- First, it is important to acknowledge that cultural tension is both inevitable and a positive force for change – the objective is clearly not to eliminate it. Equally, it's vital to reflect the genuine concern that many have about the speed of cultural change.
- However, exaggerating and encouraging these tensions can lead to intractable divisions where compromise is increasingly difficult. This is the real risk of culture wars.
- As the public recognise in our survey, while the media and politics clearly play an active role in encouraging a culture war, this does not mean it's an entirely fabricated battle – it does reflect real tension between worldviews and is a real threat.
- While there are many important differences in context between the US and the UK – in party structures, the role of religion and many others – there are also clear echoes, where the UK could be at the early stages of a trend seen in the US in the 1980s and 1990s.
- We do not yet have the same consolidated party-political identities as in the US, where worldviews across economic and cultural issues can be very largely predicted based on connection to the two main parties. Britons are also much less likely than Americans to say their country is divided by culture wars, and to feel that there is tension between people who support different political parties and between people with different social and cultural values.

- However, the consolidation of longstanding cultural identities into strong Brexit identities, and the increasing alignment of these with party-political identities, does provide the conditions for more all-encompassing division.

Conclusions

What can we do?

Reviews of culture wars in the US and the UK offer few compelling suggestions on how to counter or reverse these polarising trends. Academics who study conflict, such as Peter T. Coleman, focus on how we need to disrupt systems that have settled into apparently implacable conflict, suggesting possible ways forward for national political contexts. But as Ezra Klein outlines, these are complex problems with long histories and multiple causes that resist being “solved in a few bullet points”. However, looking across our research and that of others, six recommendations stand out:

1. We need to start with a clearer understanding of the reality of the situation, particularly that a lot of people are in the middle of a spectrum of views, with the extremes overweighted in our public debate.
2. This includes recognising that tension is an *inevitable* feature of generationally driven cultural change, and we do not have unusually larger gaps between young and old on emergent issues than we have had in the past. The answer is not, then, to blame a particularly extreme group of younger (or older) generations, but to look at the changing context.
3. In particular, we need to address the incentives to amplify division and extremes in our new information environment, including holding media and social media platforms to better account for the role they play in this process. Back in 1991, James Davison Hunter’s first principle for settling differences was “changing the environment of public discourse”. Hunter’s focus was on the polarising effects of (what now seem like very basic)

direct mail campaigns with targeted messages. Since then, the environment of public discourse has only worsened, and the task of changing it has become hugely more relevant and urgent.

4. As part of this, political leaders should be looking for appeals that connect worldviews, rather than divide. The US provides a vital case study in how the left playing to a “coalition of the ascendent” – of younger, more diverse generations – and the right focusing attention on the extreme positions of “campus politics”, ends in fractious division, not a decisive majority.
5. Civil society needs to be supported in providing sites for real-world connections across divides: we know that real-life contact, in the right settings, reduces the sense of division.
6. Similarly, our highly centralised political environment encourages these sweeping divides, and more devolved and deliberative decision-making that brings the public into or closer to debates – and each other – should be expanded.
7. Finally, as recognised by a number of reviews, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we need to appeal to a sense of duty and virtue in political leaders on all sides to cool things down rather raise the temperature further – and we ourselves must get better at recognising when our own reactions are being driven by our identities (practising an “identity mindfulness” in Klein’s terms). This is clearly very difficult to achieve when many of the incentives drive us in the other direction, but we should attempt to make it a more prominent expectation.

References and technical note

The background features a dark purple gradient with several abstract, wavy, light blue lines that create a sense of motion and depth, resembling a stylized wave or a digital signal.

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Technical note: media content analysis

The sample was drawn from the Nexis database of UK national and regional newspapers, through a search for the term “culture wars” with a cut off date of 31 December 2020. The original search returned 3,836 articles. After cleaning (ie removing duplicates and false positives), this left a sample of **2,762 articles**.

The full sample was tagged manually in Excel for geography. Where possible, the country of focus was identified from the headline. Where this was not possible (821 articles), the full text was skim read to determine location.

Number of articles included in analysis, by publication year

Year	Total no. articles	No. UK-focused	Included in coding	Year	Total no. articles	No. UK-focused	Included in coding
1993	5	0	0	2007	31	13	3
1994	2	0	0	2008	106	32	8
1995	3	0	0	2009	75	8	2
1996	6	2	1	2010	66	19	5
1997	5	3	1	2011	57	21	5
1998	10	2	1	2012	129	48	12
1999	19	9	2	2013	69	29	7
2000	15	5	1	2014	83	46	11
2001	12	5	1	2015	106	21	5
2002	9	1	0	2016	120	49	12
2003	26	8	2	2017	174	67	17
2004	66	11	3	2018	305	137	34
2005	80	27	6	2019	323	178	45
2006	52	14	4	2020	808	534	134

Coding in NVivo

A sample of 25% of articles that observe culture wars in the UK were read in full and analysed in NVivo to identify more precisely the topics, protagonists and framing of culture wars in the discussion about culture wars in the media.

Coding was conducted by four researchers. Consistency of coding was checked by one reviewer, who reviewed a third of the articles analysed to check for consistency. The codeframe was developed iteratively through four rounds of review, following a grounded theory process. The final code-frame captured:

- **Culture wars framing** –the position of the term in the article (eg if it frames the entire argument or alluded to) as well as descriptive language used
- **Support for the culture wars thesis** – the author’s position on the existence of culture wars in the UK and temporality of their existence, if specified
- **Geographies** – references to specific regions of the UK or other countries
- **Topic** – the issues linked to the culture wars debate, sites where they are observed and bridging themes
- **Protagonists** – the people or organisations that the author describes as being involved in the culture war and their role

Inclusion/exclusion criteria for coding

	Include	Exclude
Geography	Includes direct or implicit reference to UK (or areas within the UK). Articles that cover more than one country can be included, but UK must be included as a reference point.	Articles which do not reference the UK
Topic	Any reference to culture wars, even if tangential/headline only	Articles which do not reference to culture wars, or refer to publications or media with culture wars in the title, but don't engage with topic itself

Technical note: UK surveys

Ipsos MORI interviewed online a representative sample of 2,834 adults aged 16+ across the United Kingdom between 26th November and 2nd December 2020 and 8,558 adults aged 16+ across the United Kingdom between 1 and 7 April 2021. This data has been collected by Ipsos MORI's UK KnowledgePanel, an online random probability panel which provides gold standard insights into the UK population, by providing bigger sample sizes via the most rigorous research methods. Data are weighted by age, gender, region, Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile, education, ethnicity and number of adults in the household in order to reflect the profile of the UK population. All polls are subject to a wide range of potential sources of error.

Ipsos MORI's UK KnowledgePanel is the UK's largest online random probability panel, providing total understanding of the UK public for businesses and organisations looking for cutting edge insight at the gold standard of online research methods. It is important because it includes both online and offline participants selected at random from every address in the UK, the first of its kind, with a single interface to eliminate modal effects and produce accurate data rapidly.

UK KnowledgePanel utilises a panel of 15,000+ participants to provide a new innovative tool for all those organisations who wish to garner greater insights into the behaviours, beliefs and attitudes of not just the UK population as a whole, but also into the specific communities which make up the UK's diverse population.

Studies completed on UK KnowledgePanel will be fully representative of the UK population including the 4% of households who are considered 'offline'. This is made possible by recruiting offline and supplying participants with a tablet, internet access and the tech support needed to get online. As a result of this approach the panel utilises a single online data collection method, with no differential mode effects – a pioneering advancement which enhances the ability to understand our society.

The UK KnowledgePanel builds on [work done](#) by Ipsos in the US on their own, which has been operating since 1999, utilising that experience and blending it with Ipsos MORI's own research and methodological expertise to produce a tool which delivers robust nationally representative data at speed. [Find out more.](#)

Subgroups

Variable	Main survey (Nov-Dec 20)	Top-up survey (Apr 21)	Variable	Main survey (Nov-Dec 20)	Top-up survey (Apr 21)
Gender			Party support		
Male	1,386	4,153	Conservative	806	
Female	1,439	4,359	Labour	669	
Age			Brexit support		
16-24	145	377	Leave	860	
25-34	322	891	Remain	1750	
35-54	973	2,896	Income level		
55+	1,394	4,394	Up to £25,999	612	1,845
Ethnicity			£26,000 to £51,999	934	2,757
White	2,644	7,990	£52,000 to £99,999	616	1,849
Ethnic minority	164	484	£100,000 and above	212	627
Country			Occupation type		
England	2,124	5,633	Modern professional	924	2,622
Scotland	443	1,889	Clerical and intermediate	397	1,251
Wales	109	255	Senior manager/admin.	415	1,274
Northern Ireland	158	781	Technical and craft	158	513
Region			Semiroutine manual/serv.	189	577
North East	107	228	Routine manual/service	103	378
North West	275	689	Middle/junior managers	223	712
Yorkshire & Humber	163	548	Traditional professional	343	1,007
East Midlands	205	506	Education level		
West Midlands	209	514	Degree level or above	1371	4,341
East of England	256	721	Below degree level	1199	3,849
South East	387	1,049			
South West	282	714			
London	240	664			

Technical note: international survey

The “Culture wars around the world” section includes results of a 28-market survey conducted by Ipsos on its Global Advisor online platform. Ipsos interviewed a total of 23,004 adults aged 18-74 in Singapore, 18-74 in the United States, Canada, Malaysia, South Africa and Turkey, 21-74 in Singapore and 16-74 in 22 other markets between 23 December 2020 and 8 January 2021.

The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals in each of Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, mainland China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Spain and the U.S., and 500 individuals in each of Argentina, Chile, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, and Turkey.

The samples in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden and the U.S. can be taken as representative of their general adult population under the age of 75.

The samples in Brazil, Chile, mainland China, India, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, and Turkey are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent than the general population. The survey results for these markets should be viewed as reflecting the views of the more “connected” segment of their population.

The data is weighted so that each country’s sample composition best reflects the demographic profile of the adult population according to the most recent census data.

“The Global Country Average” reflects the average result for all the countries where the survey was conducted. It has not been adjusted to the population size of each country and is not intended to suggest a total result.

Where results do not sum to 100 or the ‘difference’ appears to be +/-1 more/less than the actual, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses, or the exclusion of “don’t know” or not stated responses.

Technical note: latent class analysis

1. Latent class analysis

Respondents were grouped through latent class analysis using the GSEM suite of commands in Stata v. 16.1. Manifest variables used to identify groups were answers to questions about the rights of different groups of people, the UK and its history, the role of government in promoting values, free speech and political correctness, views on the Black Lives Matter movement and restrictions related to the Coronavirus, support for political parties, and Brexit identity. For some variables, in one or more groups there were no respondents in the most extreme categories of agree/disagree style questions. When this was a problem, we collapsed categories, for example, “strongly agree” and “agree” became a single response.

Summary statistics for other variables by group were produced by calculating summary statistics for the whole sample using each observation’s probabilities of group membership as weights.

2. Defining the other side and measuring feelings

Every respondent was asked to rate their feelings towards people on each side of politics, Brexit, Covid restrictions, the expansion of trans rights, Black Lives Matter, and the British Empire, on a scale of 0 to 100

Within each group we needed the average for how each group felt about the other side. For people who self-identified as being on one side (for example, a Labour supporter) their views of the other side (in this example, Conservative voters) went into calculating the group average. For people who weren’t on one side (for example, third-party supporters) the average of their views of both sides (in this example, Labour voters and Conservative voters) went into calculating the group average.

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