

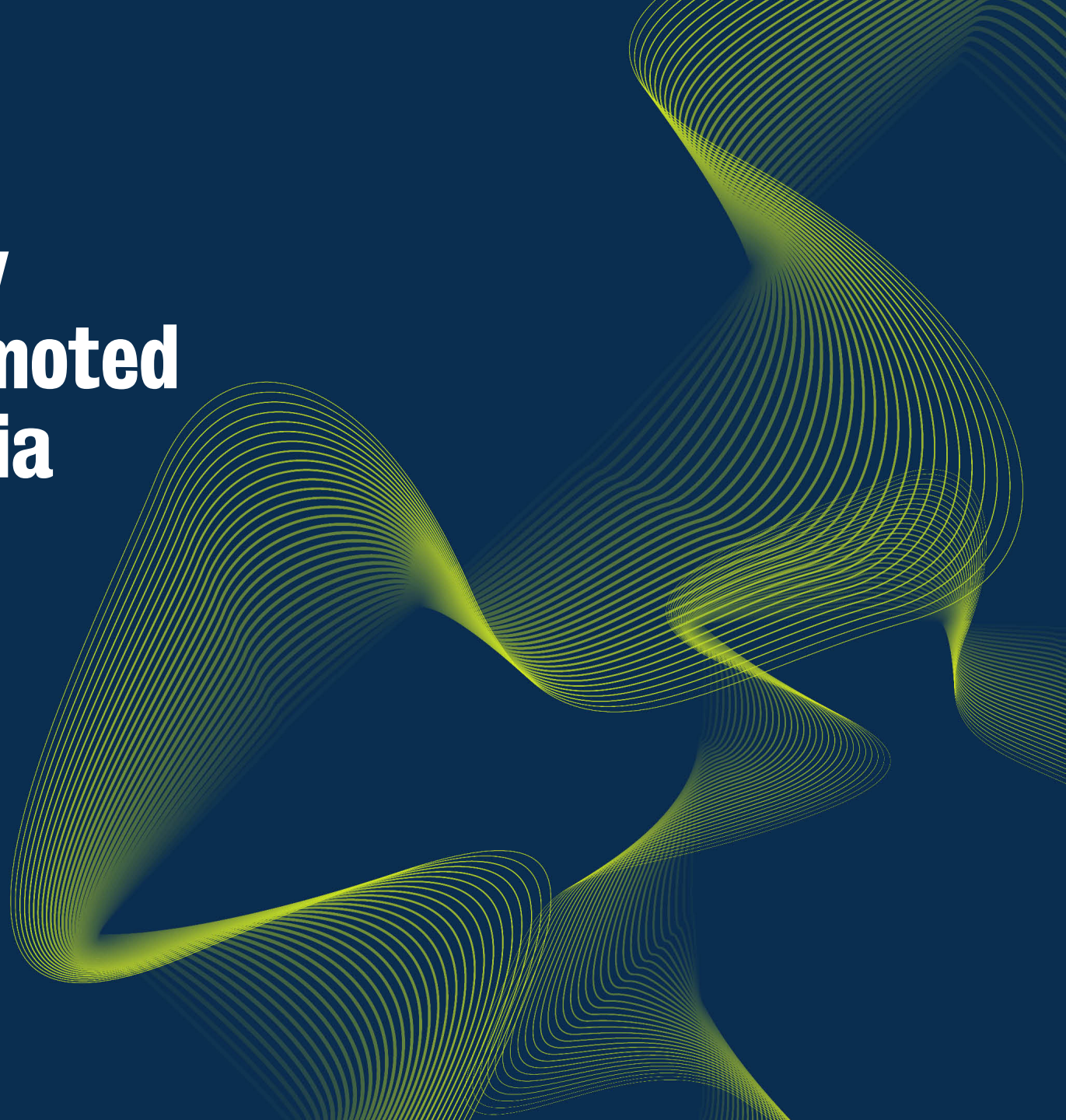
Conspiracy belief among the UK public and the role of alternative media

*Report prepared for BBC News
and BBC Radio 4 podcasts*

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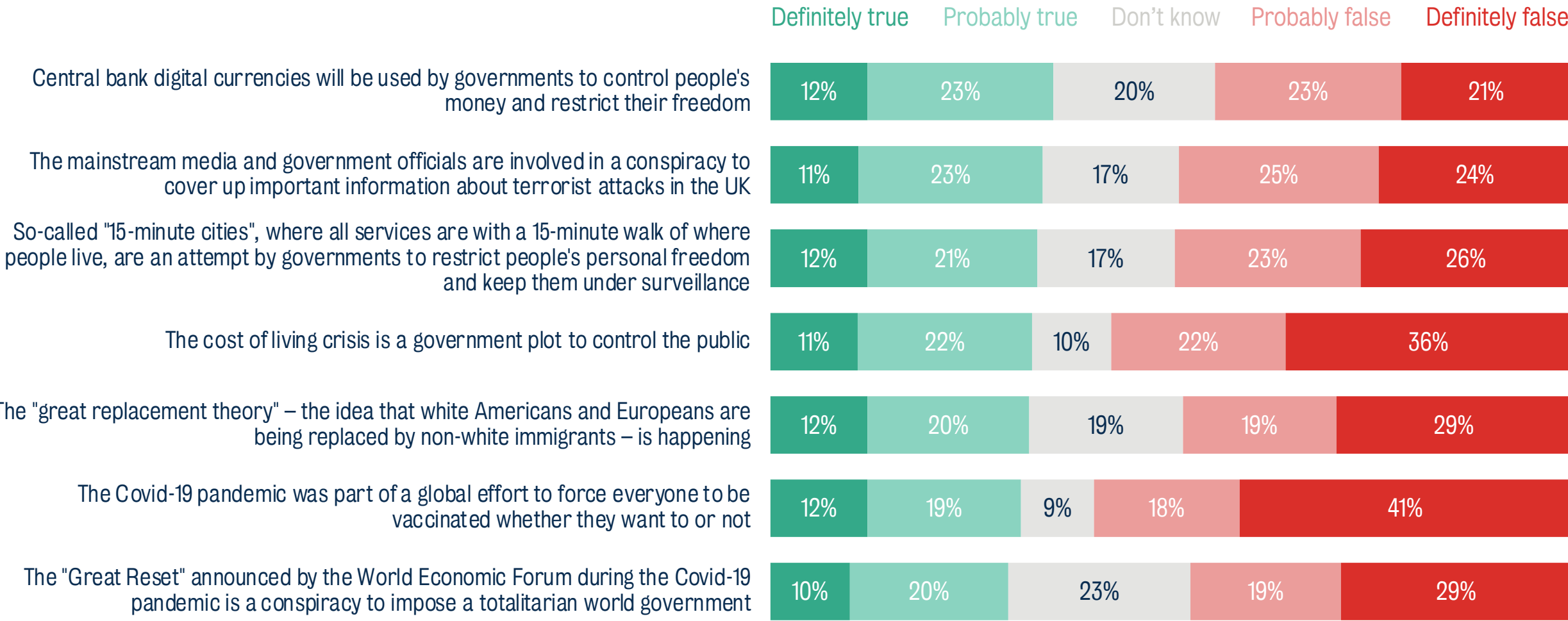
June 2023

**Belief in conspiracy
theories often promoted
by alternative media**



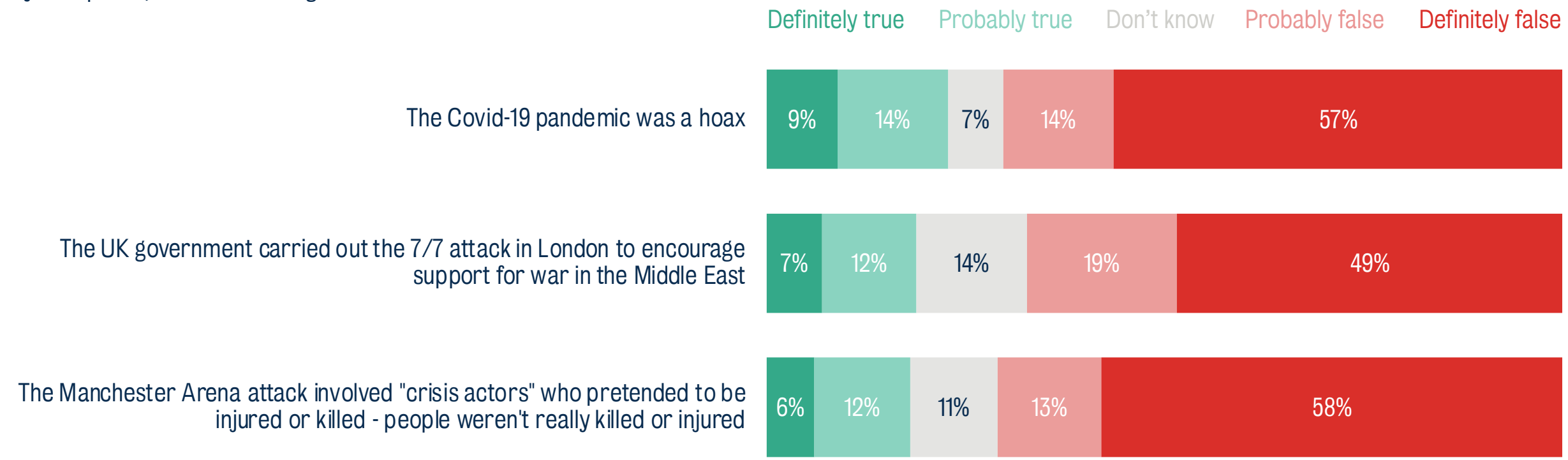
Around a third of the public say various conspiracy theories are probably or definitely true...

In your opinion, are the following statements true or false?



...while other conspiracies are believed by a smaller share of the population, with between one in five and one in four saying they are at least probably true

In your opinion, are the following statements true or false?



But majorities of the public do nonetheless recognise important realities about climate change and the pandemic

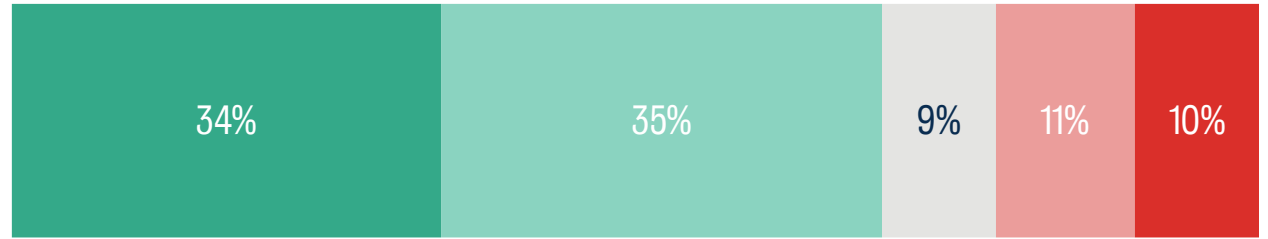
In your opinion, are the following statements true or false?

Definitely true Probably true Don't know Probably false Definitely false

Human-caused climate change is real and is a threat to people and the planet



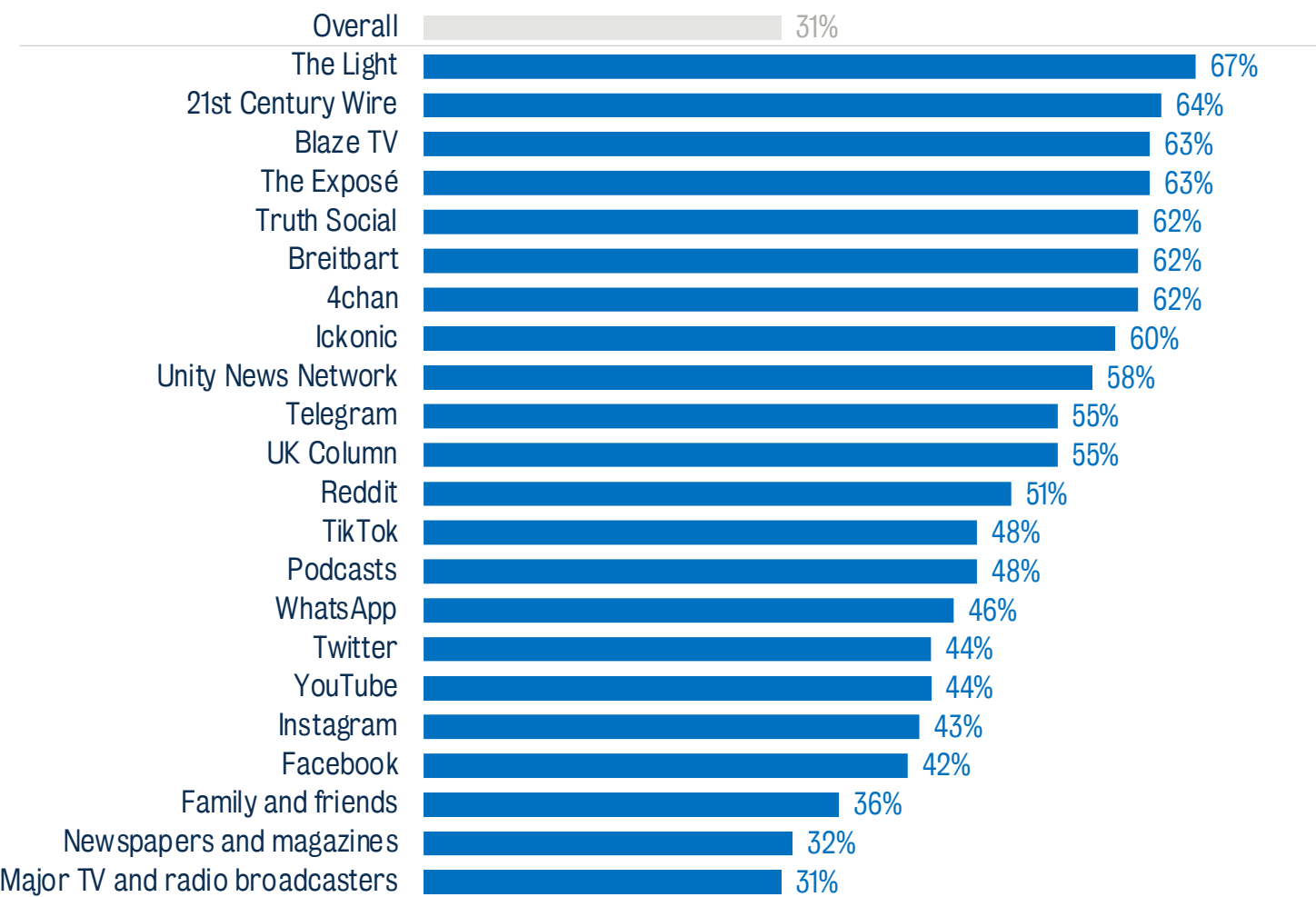
Covid-19 vaccines are safe and effective



People who get much of their information from alternative media sources are far more likely to believe the pandemic was part of a forced vaccination effort

In your opinion, are the following statements true or false? **The Covid-19 pandemic was part of a global effort to force everyone to be vaccinated whether they want to or not**

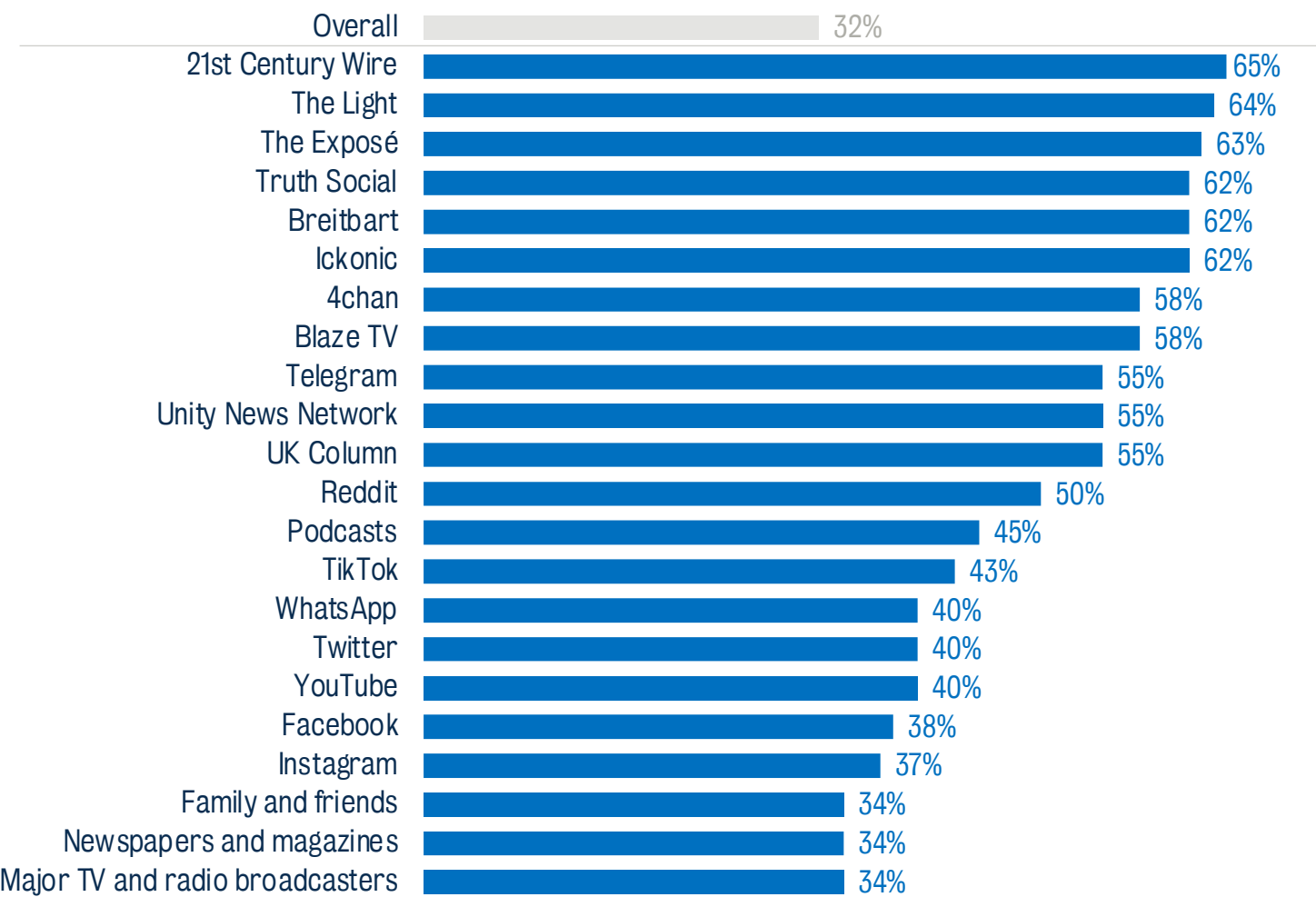
% who say this conspiracy is **definitely or probably true** among those who say they get a great deal or fair amount of their news from the following...



A third of the public overall think it's true that the “great replacement theory” is happening – but this rises to around two-thirds among those who get a lot of their news from outlets like 21st Century Wire, The Light, The Exposé, Truth Social and Breitbart

In your opinion, are the following statements true or false? **The "great replacement theory" – the idea that white Americans and Europeans are being replaced by non-white immigrants – is happening**

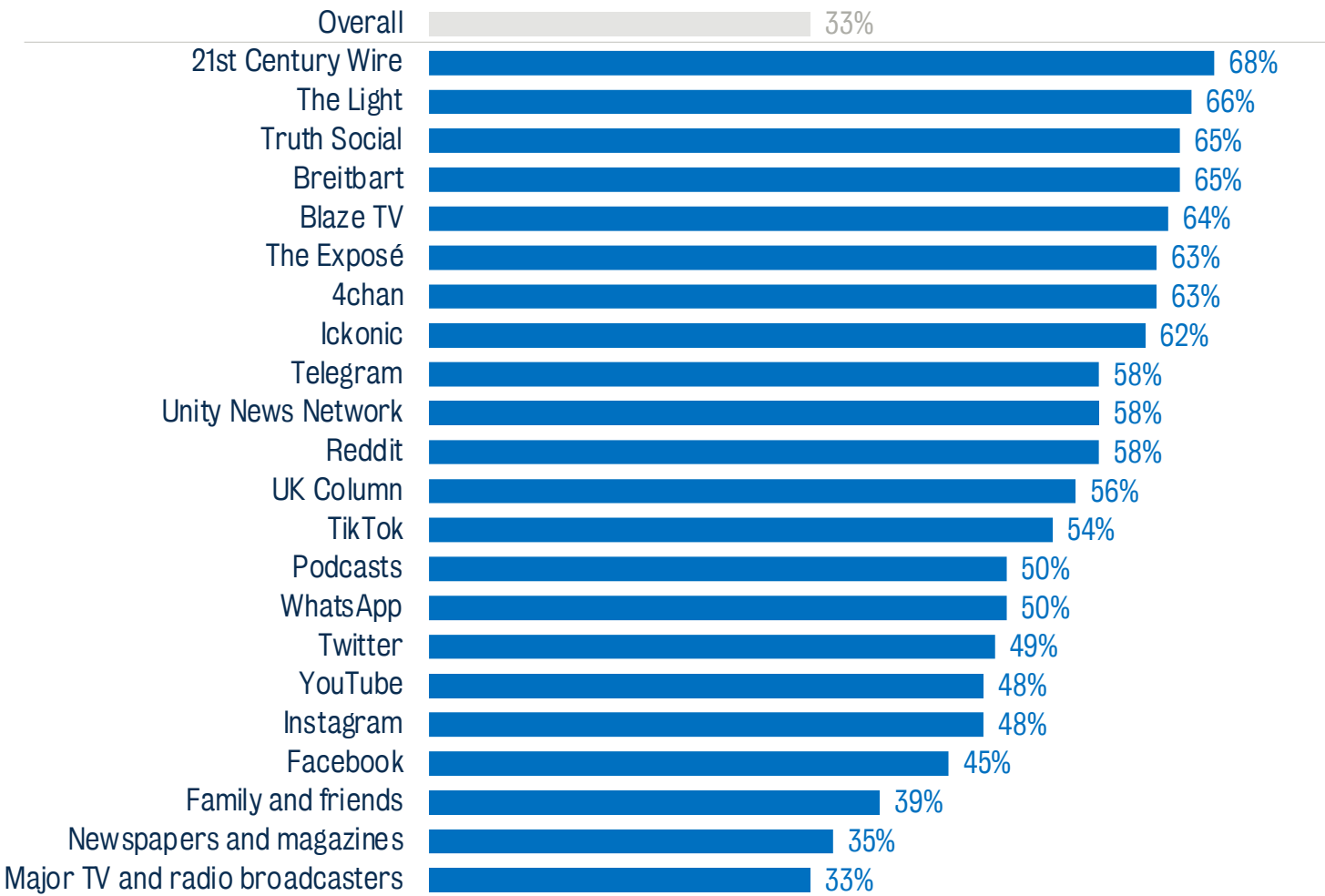
% who say this conspiracy is **definitely or probably true** among those who say they get a great deal or fair amount of their news from the following...



Greater news consumption from alternative media sources, as well as from social media platforms, is also associated with believing the cost of living crisis is a plot to control the public

In your opinion, are the following statements true or false? **The cost of living crisis is a government plot to control the public**

% who say this conspiracy is **definitely or probably true** among those who say they get a great deal or fair amount of their news from the following...

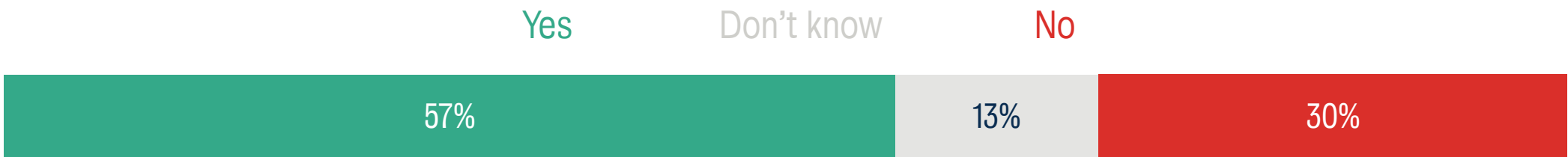


**Where people say they first
heard or read about these
conspiracies**



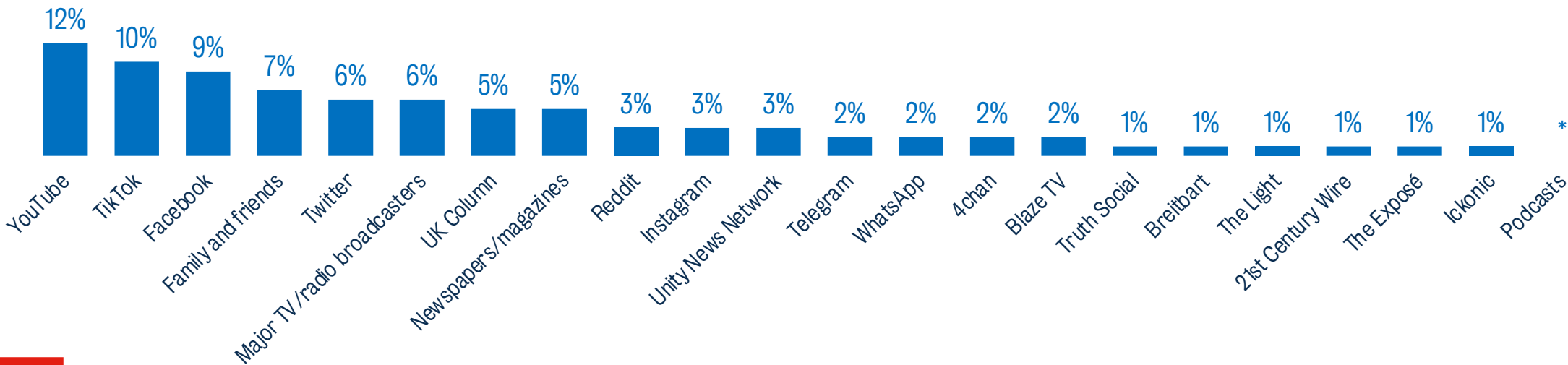
People who believe and have read a conspiracy theory about “15-minute cities” are most likely to say they first came across it on social media

So-called “15-minute cities”, where all services are within a 15-minute walk of where people live, are an attempt by governments to restrict people's personal freedom and keep them under surveillance. Have you seen or heard any information that makes you think this is true, or not?
(Responses among the 33% of the public who say this conspiracy is true)



Base: 785 UK adults aged 18+ who say this conspiracy is true, surveyed 29–30 April 2023

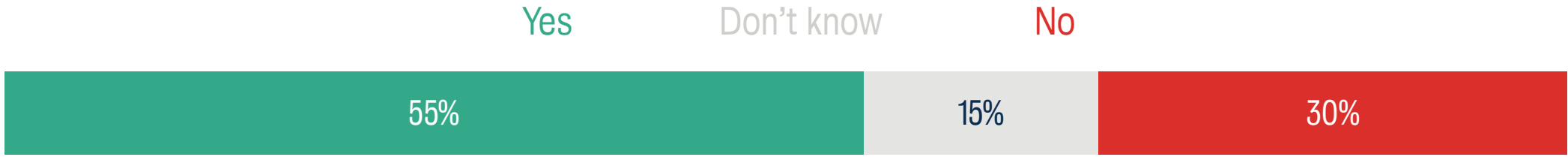
And where did you first hear or read this information? (Responses among those who say they have heard or read information about this conspiracy)



Note: figures for major TV/radio broadcasters and newspapers/magazines include through their websites and online.
Base: 448 UK adults aged 18+ who have heard or read information about this conspiracy

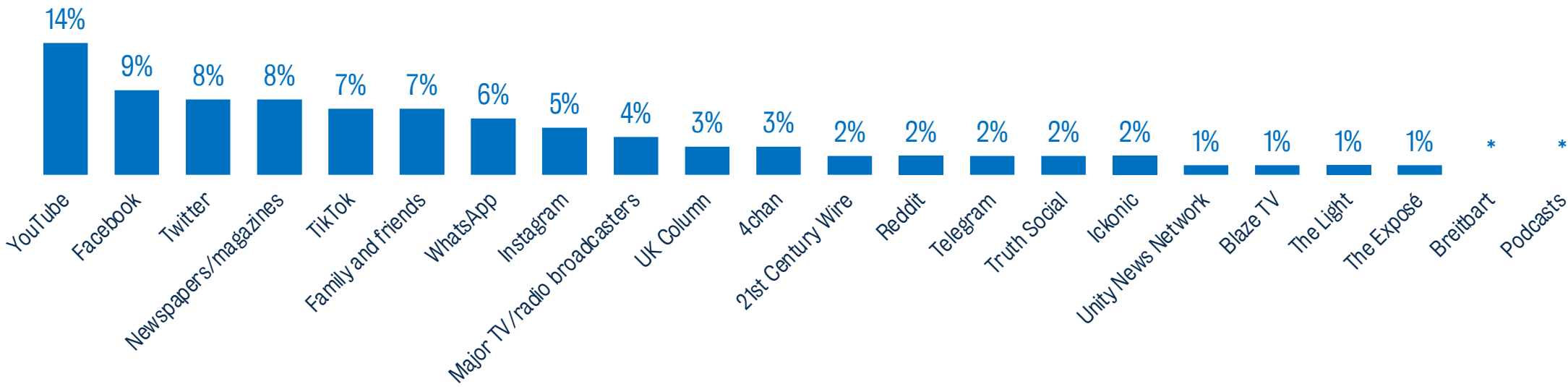
YouTube is the top answer given for where believers first heard the “Great Reset” conspiracy theory

The “Great Reset” announced by the World Economic Forum during the Covid-19 pandemic is a conspiracy to impose a totalitarian world government. Have you seen or heard any information that makes you think this is true, or not? (Responses among the 29% of the public who say this conspiracy is true)



Base: 712 UK adults aged 18+ who say this conspiracy is true, surveyed 29–30 April 2023

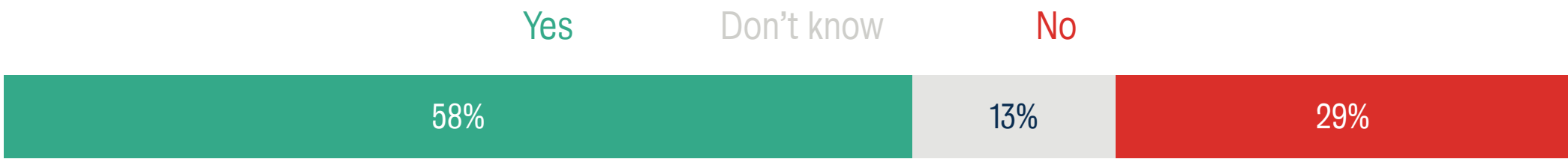
And where did you first hear or read this information? (Responses among those who say they have heard or read information about this conspiracy)



Note: figures for major TV/radio broadcasters and newspapers/magazines include through their websites and online.
Base: 391 UK adults aged 18+ who have heard or read information about this conspiracy

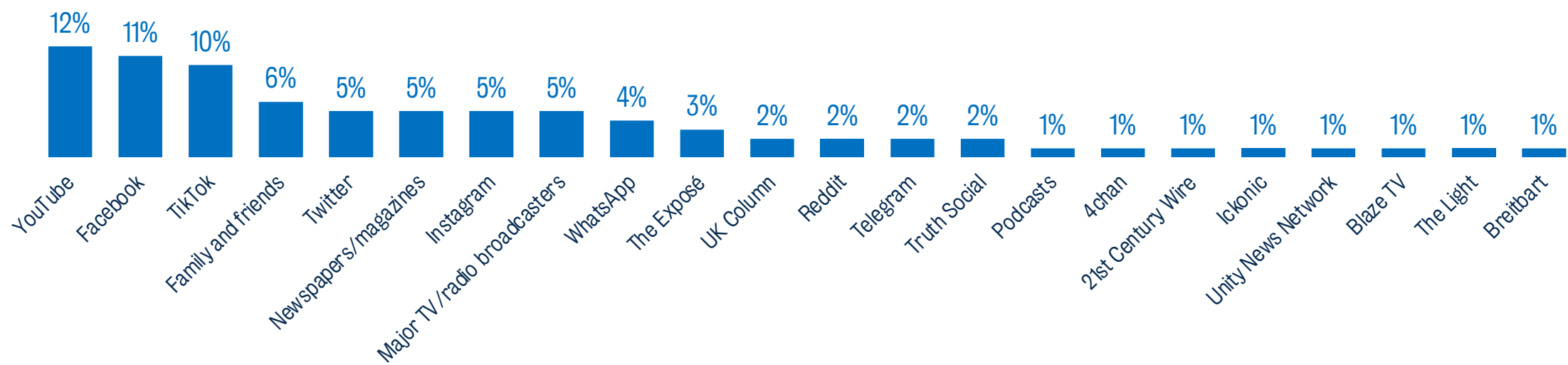
YouTube, Facebook and TikTok are the main initial sources for those who believe central bank digital conspiracies will be used to restrict people's freedom

Central bank digital currencies will be used by governments to control people's money and restrict their freedom. Have you seen or heard any information that makes you think this is true, or not? (Responses among the 35% of the public who say this conspiracy is true)



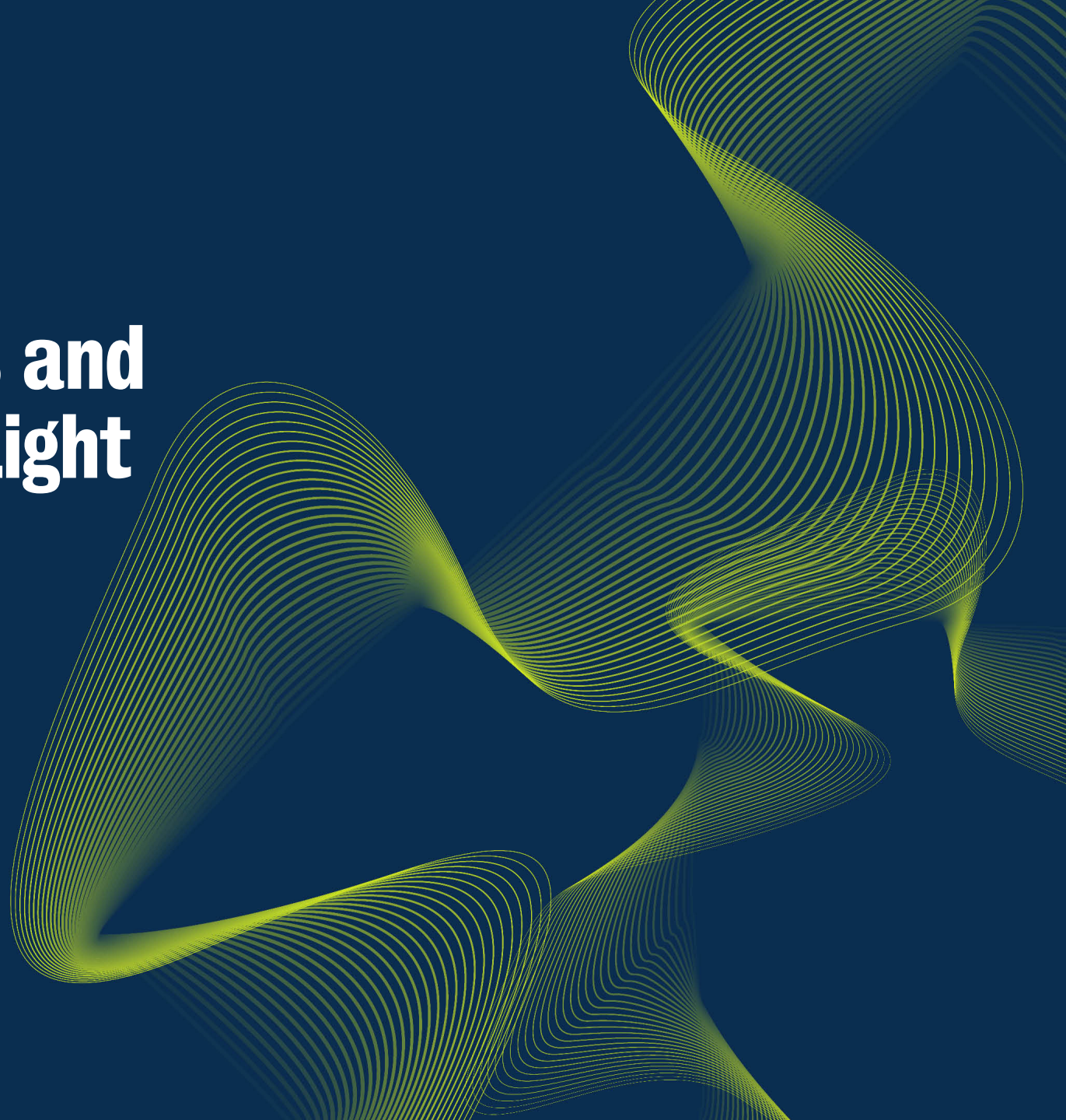
Base: 871 UK adults aged 18+ who say this conspiracy is true, surveyed 29–30 April 2023

And where did you first hear or read this information? (Responses among those who say they have heard or read information about this conspiracy)



Note: figures for major TV/radio broadcasters and newspapers/magazines include through their websites and online.
Base: 509 UK adults aged 18+ who have heard or read information about this conspiracy

Claimed awareness and readership of The Light



One in seven people in the UK say they've heard of the conspiracy theorist newspaper The Light, and among that minority, most say they have read a copy and helped distribute the paper*

Before today, had you ever heard of a newspaper called The Light?



Base: 2,274 UK adults aged 18+, surveyed 29–30 April 2023

*It's important to note estimates of engagement with The Light are based on claimed behaviour, and do not fit with what we know about the paper's likely readership and distribution in reality. Respondents can have false recall of reading and interacting with publications, and these questions were not designed to identify accurate readership estimates that could be grossed to readership numbers, which involve a more detailed question set.

Have you ever read a copy? (Responses among the 14% of the public who say they have heard of The Light)



Have you helped distribute it? (Responses among the 14% of the public who say they have heard of The Light)



Do you subscribe? (Responses among the 14% of the public who say they have heard of The Light)



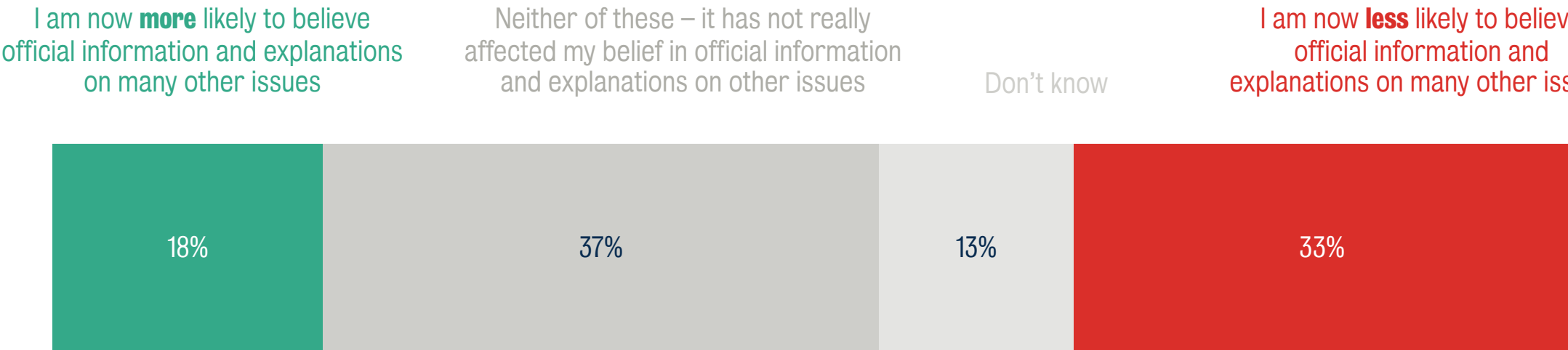
Base: 314 UK adults aged 18+ who have heard of The Light, surveyed 29–30 April 2023

Perceptions of official information and explanations post-Covid

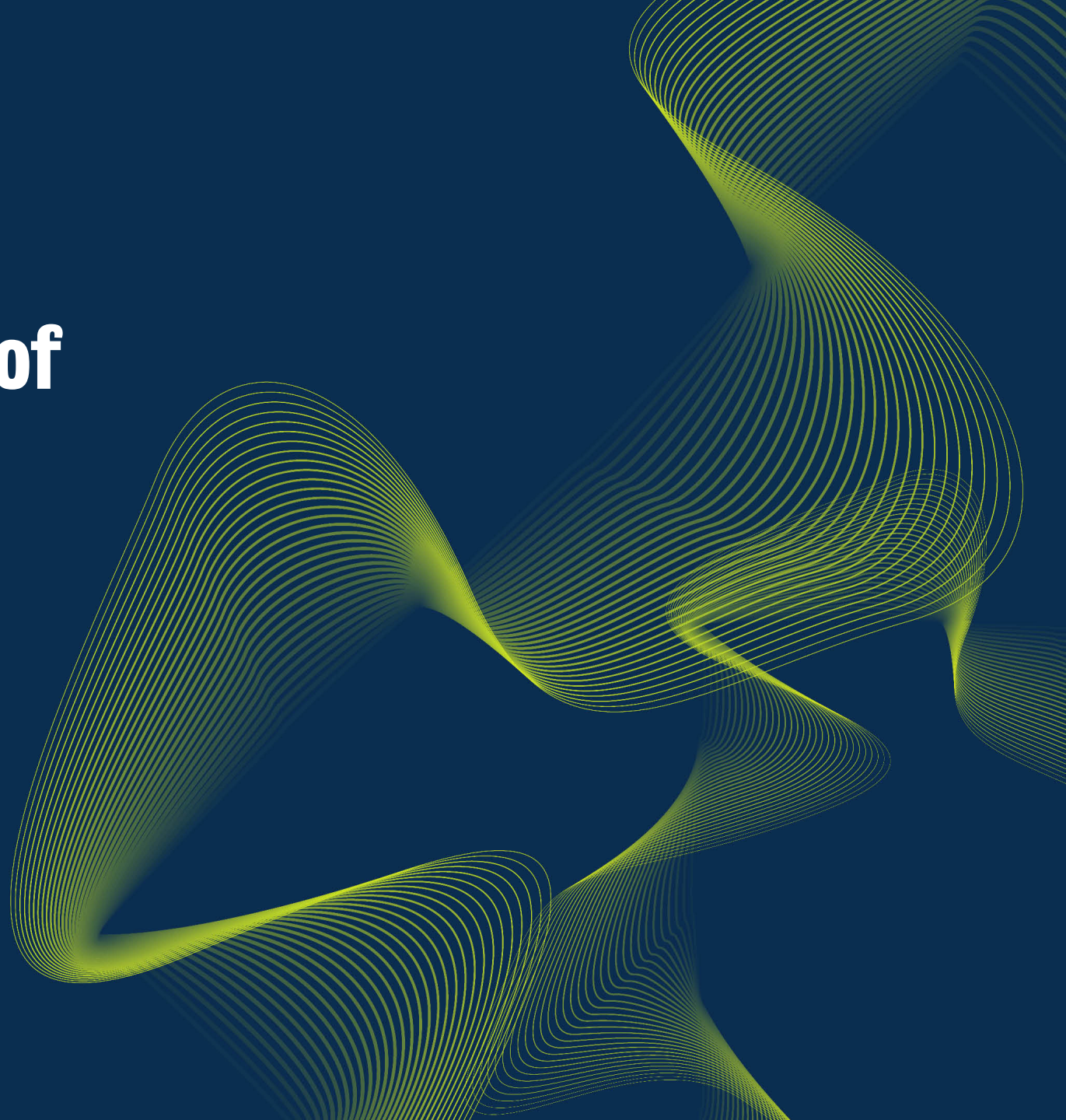


A third of the public say they are now less likely to believe official information because of how government and the media behaved during Covid – almost double the proportion who say the opposite

Thinking about the behaviour of government and the mainstream media during the pandemic, which of the following is closest to your view?

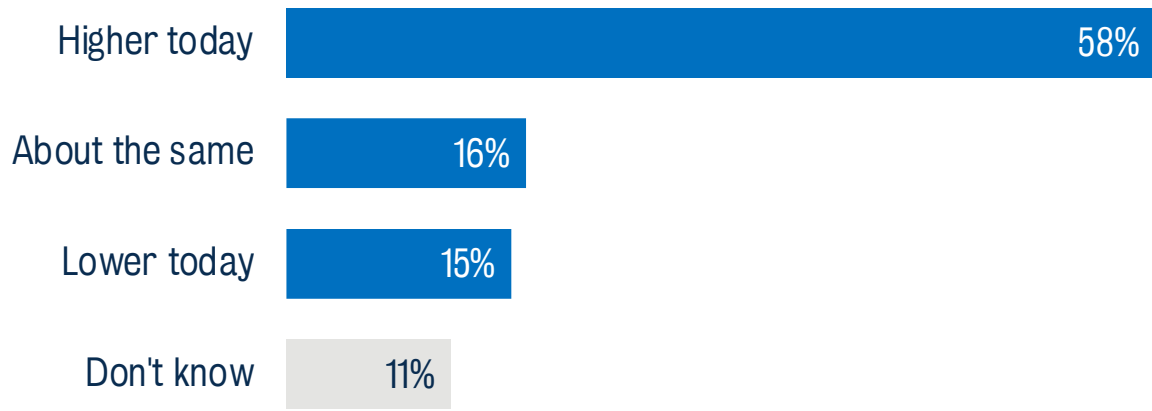


Public perceptions of conspiracy beliefs

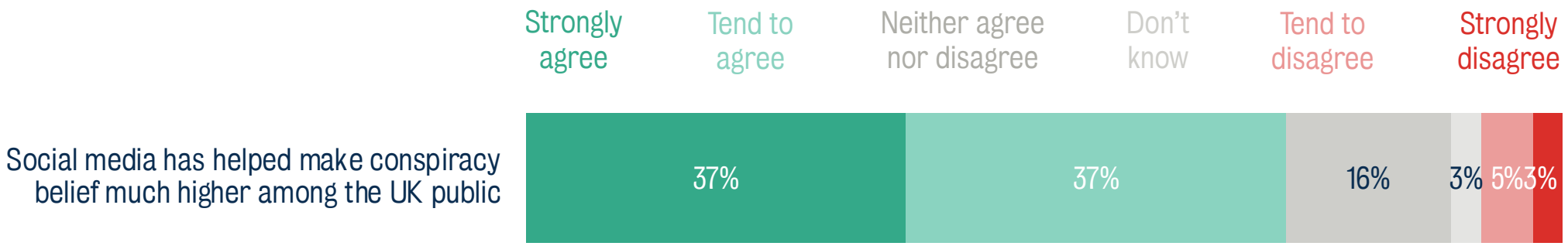


A majority of the public think belief in conspiracy theories is higher than it was 20 years ago – and three-quarters think social media has contributed to this rise

Do you think the proportion of the UK public that believe in conspiracy theories today is higher, lower or about the same as it was 20 years ago?



To what extent do you agree/disagree with following?



But despite most people thinking conspiracy belief has risen in the UK, the public actually *underestimate* just how widespread it is

Out of every 100 people in the UK, about how many do you think believe that the following are *definitely or probably true*?

The public's median guess

Reality

So-called '15-minute cities', where all services are within a 15-minute walk of where people live, are an attempt by governments to restrict people's personal freedom and keep them under surveillance



20%

33%

The 'Great Reset' announced by the World Economic Forum during the Covid-19 pandemic is a conspiracy to impose a totalitarian world government



20%

29%

The 'great replacement theory' – the idea that white Americans and Europeans are being replaced by non-white immigrants – is happening



20%

32%

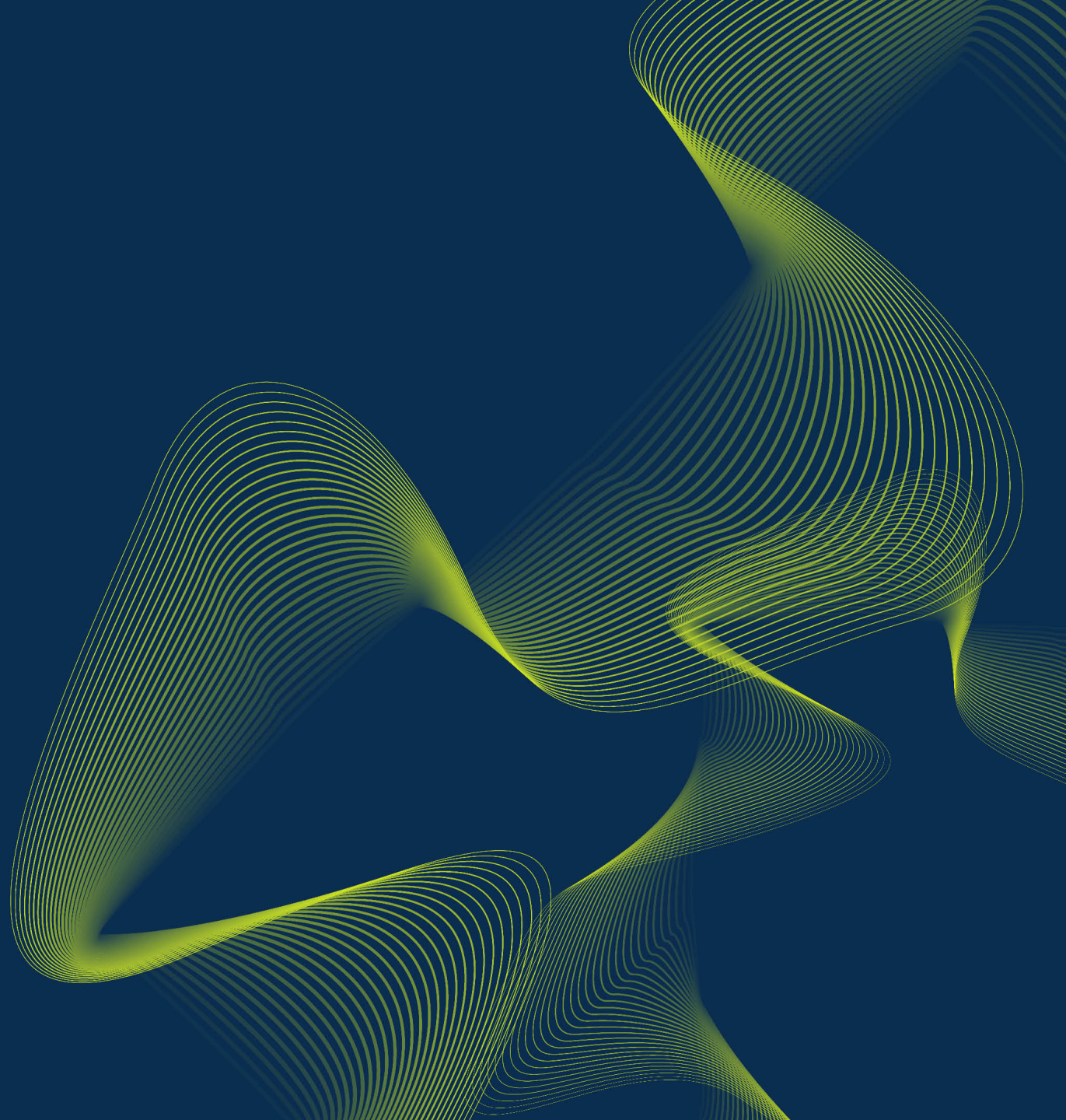
The Manchester Arena attack involved 'crisis actors' who pretended to be injured or killed – people weren't really killed or injured



10%

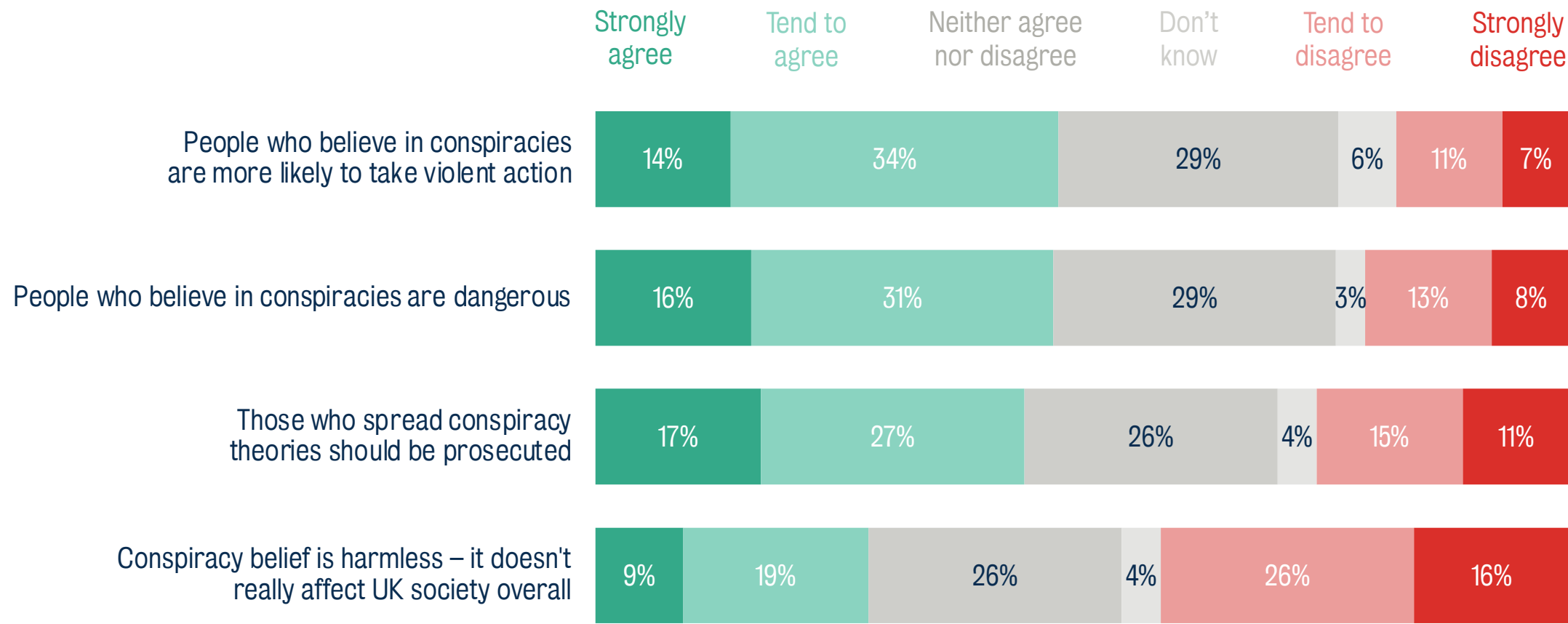
18%

Acting on conspiracy beliefs



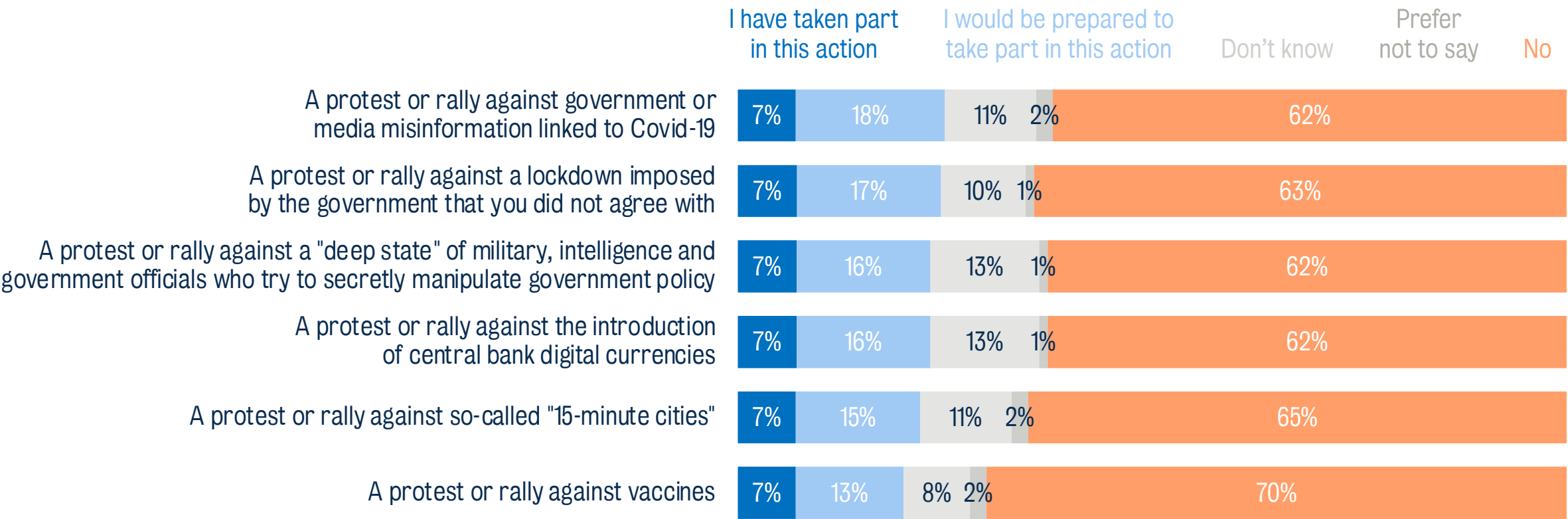
The public are much more likely to agree than disagree that those who believe conspiracies are inclined to take violent action and are dangerous – but around three in ten think conspiracy belief is harmless

To what extent do you agree/disagree with following?



Between one in four and one in five people in the UK say they have or would be prepared to take part in protests often linked to common conspiracy theories*

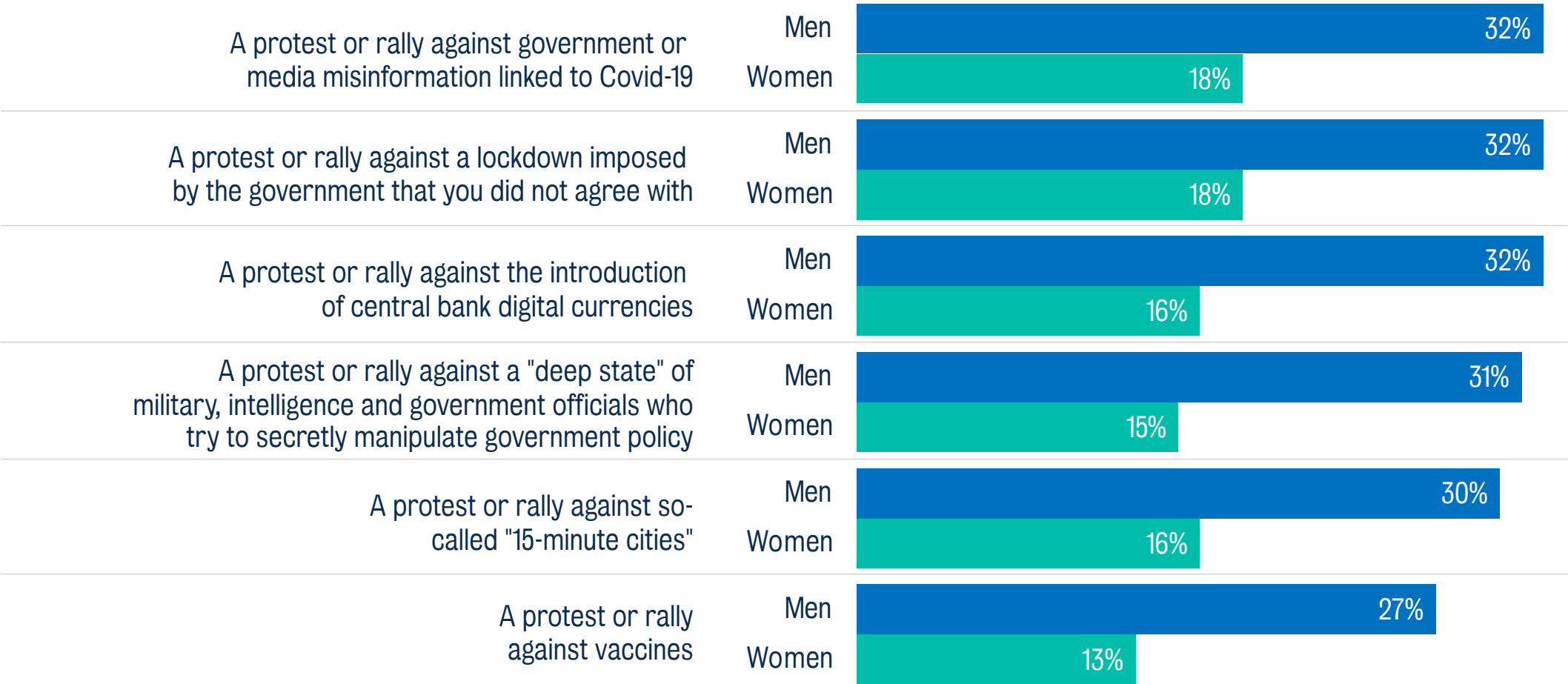
Have you ever taken part in, or would you be prepared to take part in, the following types of direct action?



*These estimates for taking part in direct action are based on claimed behaviour in response to the questions as asked. They would convert into significantly more protestors than can be the case in reality, and so should be treated with caution. This could be due to false recall, a broader interpretation of "protest", or other reasons, and we will explore this further in a new study.

And it is mostly men who say they would be willing to engage or already have engaged in this kind of direct action

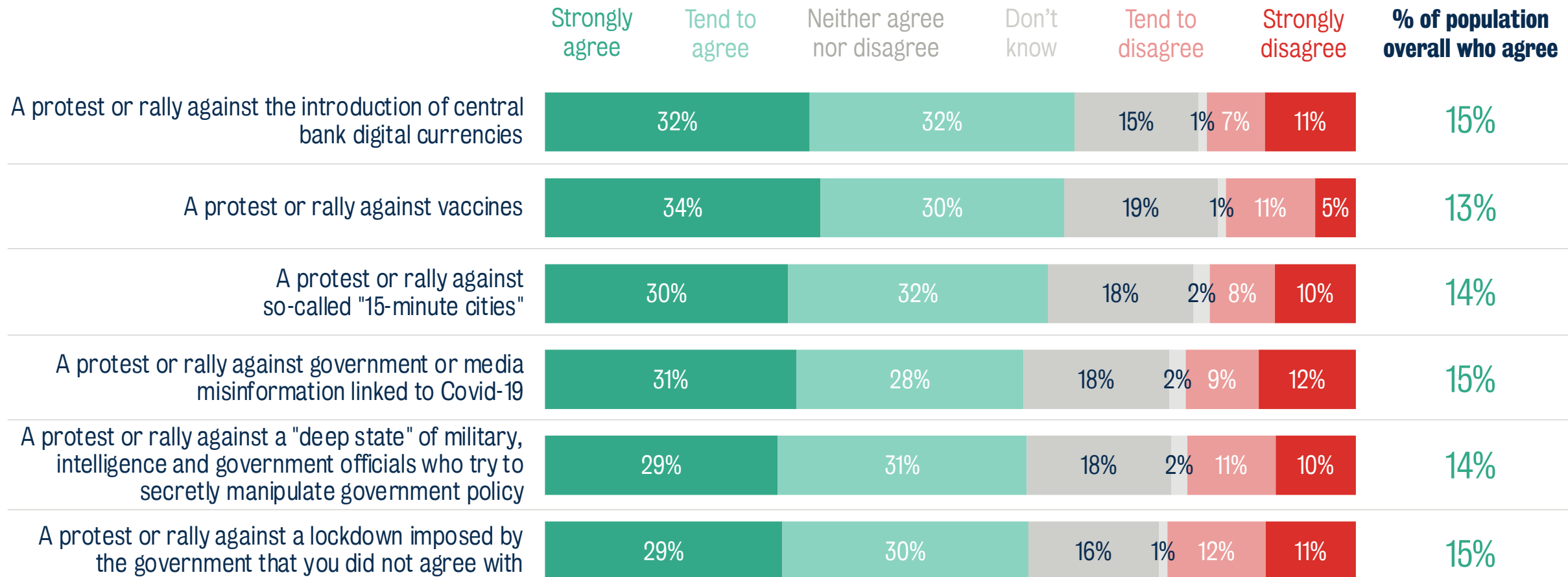
Have you ever taken part in, or would you be prepared to take part in, the following types of direct action? (% who say they have/would)



Among the minority of the public who say they have or would be prepared to take part in various forms of direct action linked to conspiracy theories, most say violence could be justified*

To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree that violence could be justified at these protests or rallies?
(Responses among those who say they have taken part in, or would be prepared to take part in, at least one of the actions)

*Note estimates based on claimed behaviour.

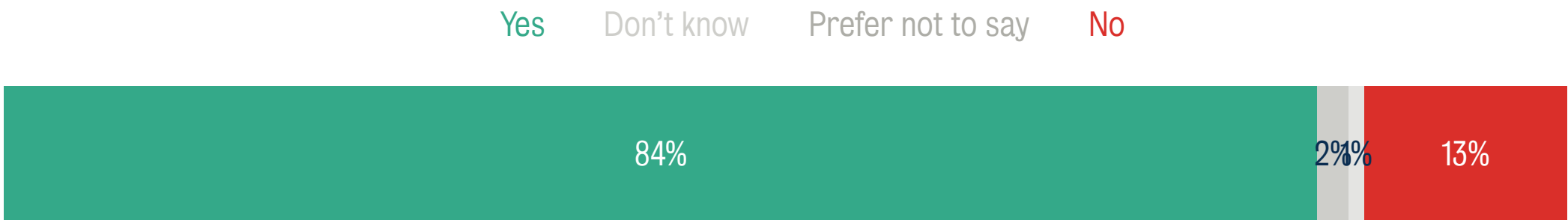


Attitudes to getting a Covid-19 vaccine



The vast majority of the public are glad to have received a Covid vaccine – although one in nine say they regret it

Have you received any coronavirus vaccines?



Base: 2,274 UK adults aged 18+, surveyed 29–30 April 2023

And which of these describes your view of taking the vaccine?



Base: 1,842 UK adults aged 18+ who say they have received any coronavirus vaccine, surveyed 29–30 April 2023

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Survey details

Savanta interviewed 2,274 UK adults aged 18+ online between 28 and 30 April 2023. Data were weighted to be representative of the UK by age, sex, region, and social grade.