



University of
BRISTOL

KING'S
College
LONDON

Coronavirus: who the public trust on the pandemic

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Introduction

This report includes findings from a survey of 4,860 UK residents aged 18-75 by the University of Bristol and King's College London, conducted between 21 November and 22 December 2020.

The research finds that there are big differences in who is trusted on coronavirus and the response to it. Aside from the leaders of Scotland and Wales – who are trusted on coronavirus by a majority of those in their respective countries – only Chris Whitty (62%) and Patrick Vallance (60%) are trusted by more than half the UK on the crisis and response.

Trust in those who doubt the necessity of lockdown measures to combat coronavirus – such as Nigel Farage (17%) and Laurence Fox (15%) – is lower, although around one in seven say they trust them on the pandemic.

Trust is lowest in conspiracy theorist David Icke – who has spread misinformation about coronavirus vaccines – with one in 11 (9%) reporting that they trust him on the virus. Ethnic minorities (20%) are twice as likely as white people (8%) to say they trust Icke on this issue.

Trust in certain sceptics is associated with some forms of vaccine hesitancy:

- 40% of those who trust David Icke on the pandemic say they're certain or very likely to get a coronavirus vaccine – much lower than the proportions who say the same among those who trust Keir Starmer (68%), Patrick Vallance (68%), Chris Whitty (67%) and Boris Johnson (64%).
- Half (52%) of those who trust David Icke say that opposition to vaccines in general is very or fairly likely to persuade them not to get vaccinated against coronavirus, as do significant minorities of people who trust other lockdown sceptics such as Denise Welch (40%), Laurence Fox (33%) and Nigel Farage (31%). By contrast, 15% of the population overall say opposition to vaccines could deter them.

There is also a link with different behaviours and beliefs related to the crisis:

- 35% of people who say they trust David Icke on the pandemic report arguing with friends or family about getting a coronavirus vaccine – three and a half times higher than the 10% of the general public who say the same. Those who trust Icke are also more than five times as likely to say they're no longer speaking to a loved one because of disagreements about getting vaccinated (28% vs 5%). The same pattern is seen, albeit to a lesser extent, with trust in other lockdown-sceptic commentators, such as Laurence Fox.
- Those who say they trust David Icke on coronavirus (56%) are more than twice as likely as the population overall (27%) to believe the real truth about the pandemic is being kept from the public. Trusting lockdown sceptics such as Denise Welch (47%), Nigel Farage (45%) and Laurence Fox (44%) is also associated with a much greater likelihood of believing this.

Finally, which professions people trust more generally, and their views of the UK government, are also associated with different vaccine intentions.

The minorities of the population who say they don't trust otherwise well-regarded groups have high levels of vaccine hesitancy. For example, those who say they do not trust doctors and nurses (21%) are less than half as likely as the population overall (55%) to say they're certain or very likely to get a coronavirus vaccine.

And among those who say they trust the information provided by the UK government on coronavirus a great deal, 74% are certain or very likely to get a vaccine against coronavirus – compared with 36% of those who say they have no trust in this information.

How trust in public figures is linked to beliefs about coronavirus and vaccines

Aside from the leaders of Scotland and Wales – who are trusted on coronavirus by a majority of those in their respective countries – only Chris Whitty (62%) and Patrick Vallance (60%) are trusted by more than half the UK on the crisis and response.

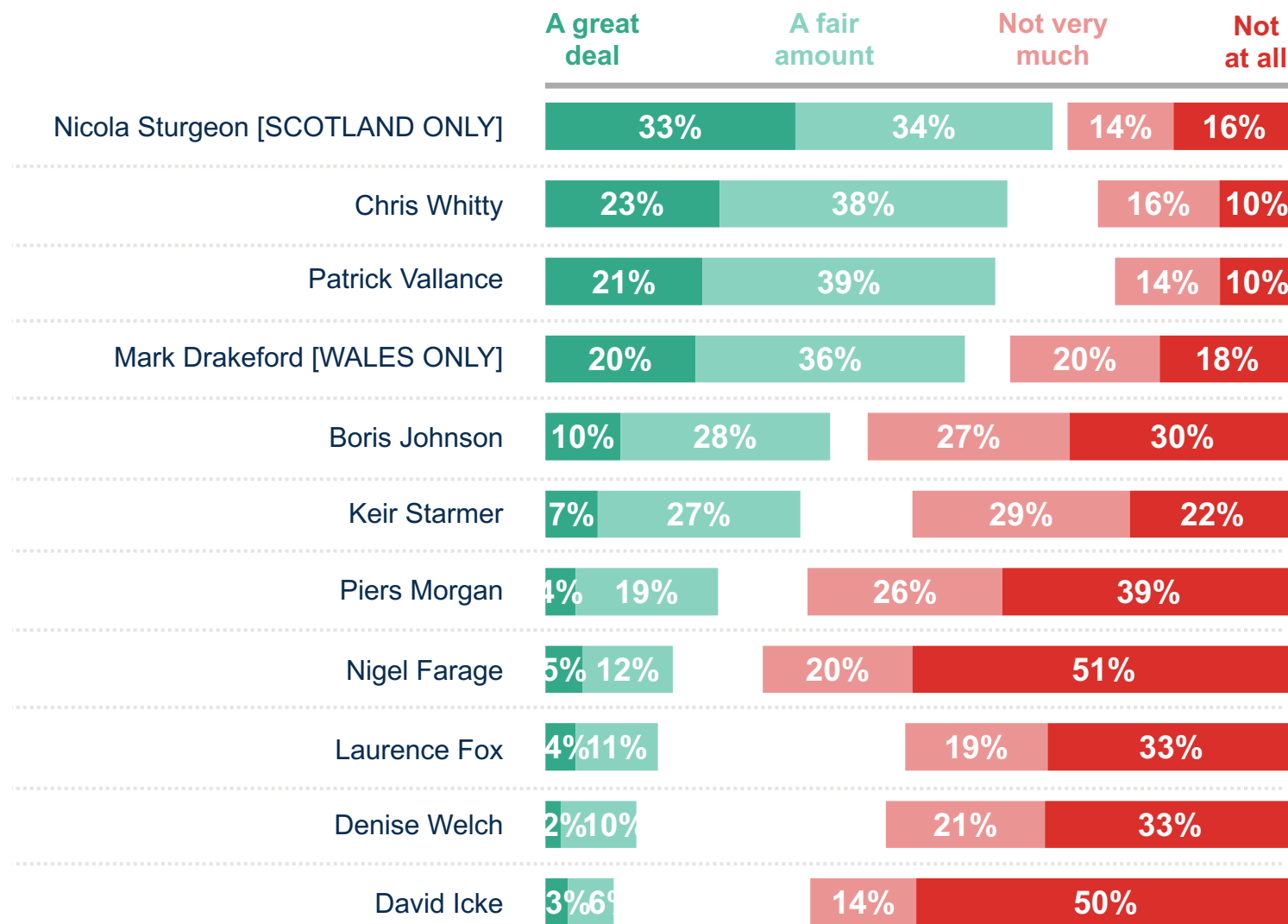
They come far ahead of the leaders of the two main political parties, Prime Minister Boris Johnson (38%) and Keir Starmer (34%).

Trust in those who doubt the necessity of lockdown measures to combat coronavirus – such as Nigel Farage (17%) and Laurence Fox (15%) – is lower still, although around one in seven say they trust them on the pandemic.

Trust is lowest in conspiracy theorist David Icke – who has spread misinformation about coronavirus vaccines – with one in 11 (9%) reporting that they trust him on the virus and response to it.

Some figures differ from charts due to rounding.

To what extent, if at all, do you trust the following people on issues related to coronavirus and how we should be responding to it?

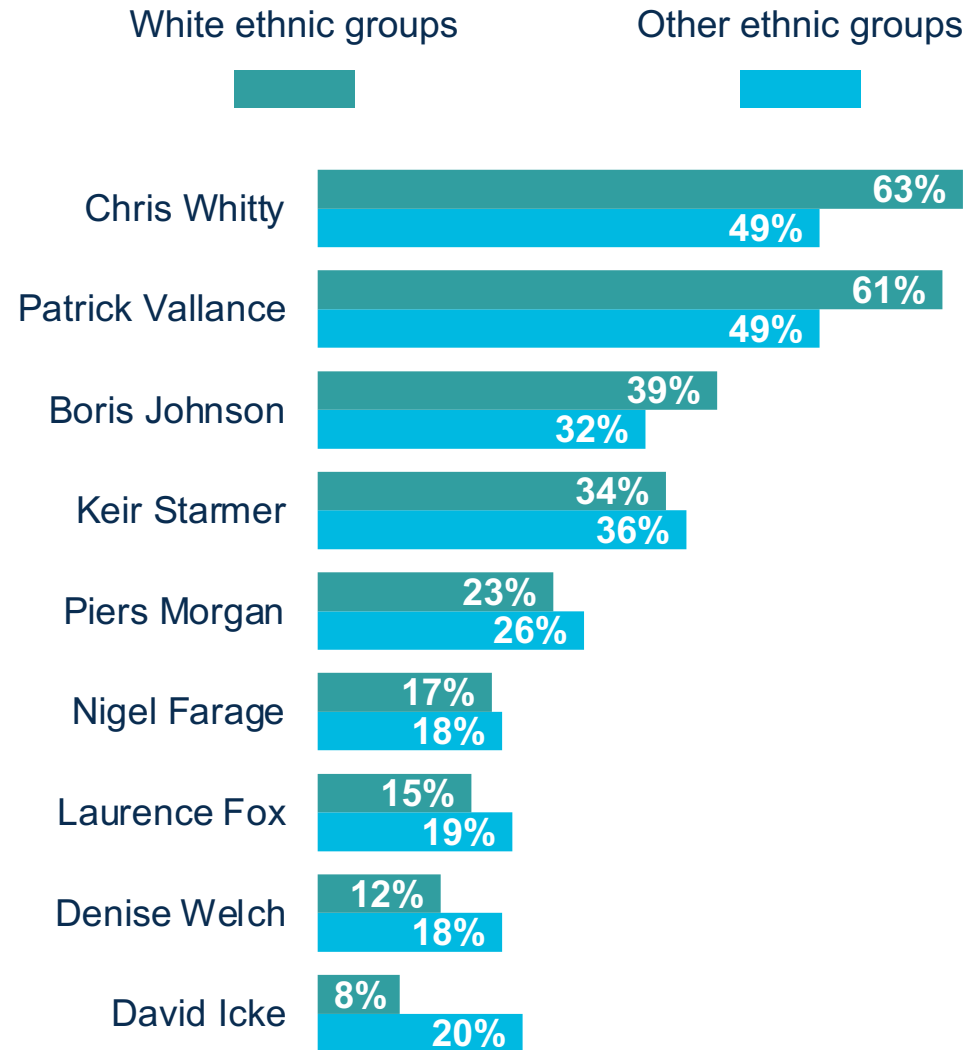


There is an ethnic divide in levels of trust in some public figures on coronavirus and the response to it.

White people are more likely than ethnic minorities to say they trust Chris Whitty and Patrick Vallance on the pandemic.

And while levels of trust in various lockdown sceptics are similar across ethnicities, those from ethnic minorities (20%) are twice as likely as those from white ethnic backgrounds (8%) to say they trust David Icke.

% who trust the following people a great deal or fair amount on coronavirus and how we should be responding to it



Base: 4,860 UK residents aged 18-75 interviewed online, 21 November and 22 December 2020

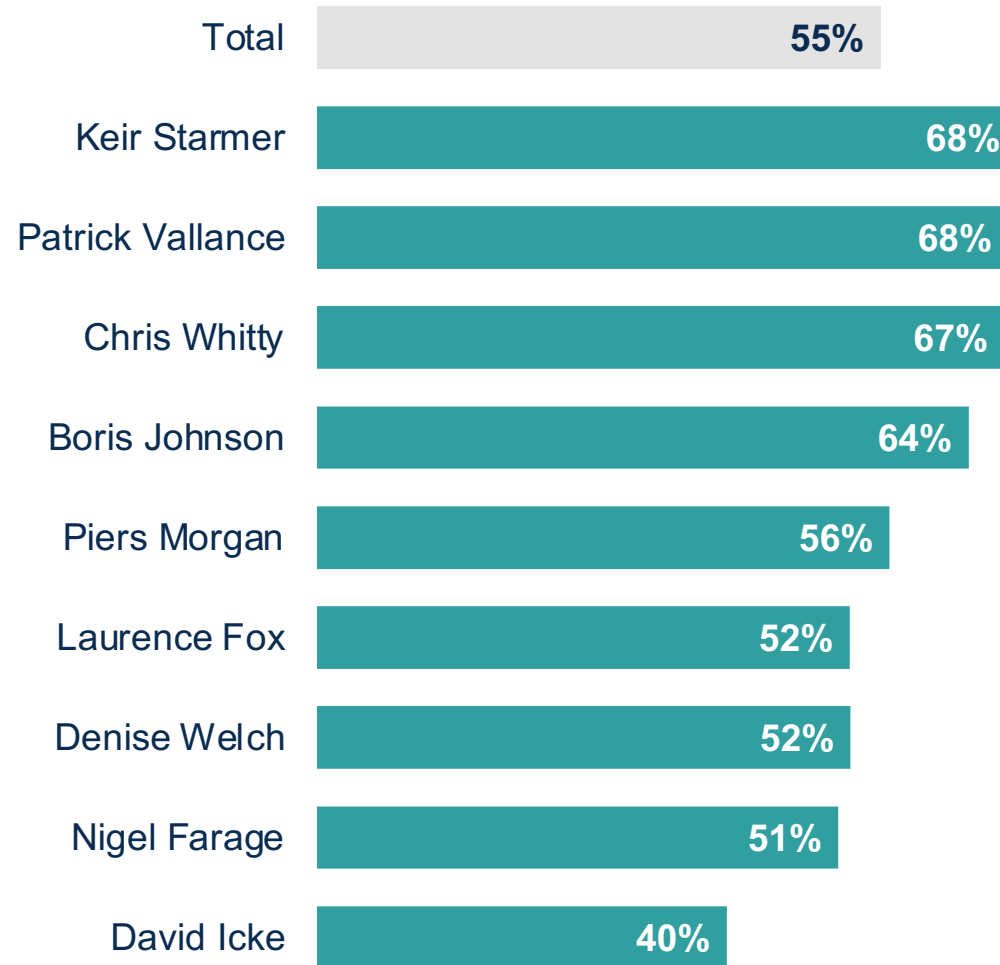
Likelihood of getting vaccinated against coronavirus varies with trust in different public figures.

People who say they trust Keir Starmer (68%), Patrick Vallance (68%), Chris Whitty (67%) and Boris Johnson (64%) on the pandemic are more likely than the public overall (55%) to say they're certain or very likely to get a coronavirus vaccine.

And while, by comparison, people who trust various lockdown sceptics are less likely to say they'll get vaccinated, it is only among those who trust David Icke (40%) where a minority say they're certain or very likely to get a vaccine.

% who say they are a **certain or very likely** to get a coronavirus vaccine

Trust a great deal or fair amount on coronavirus...

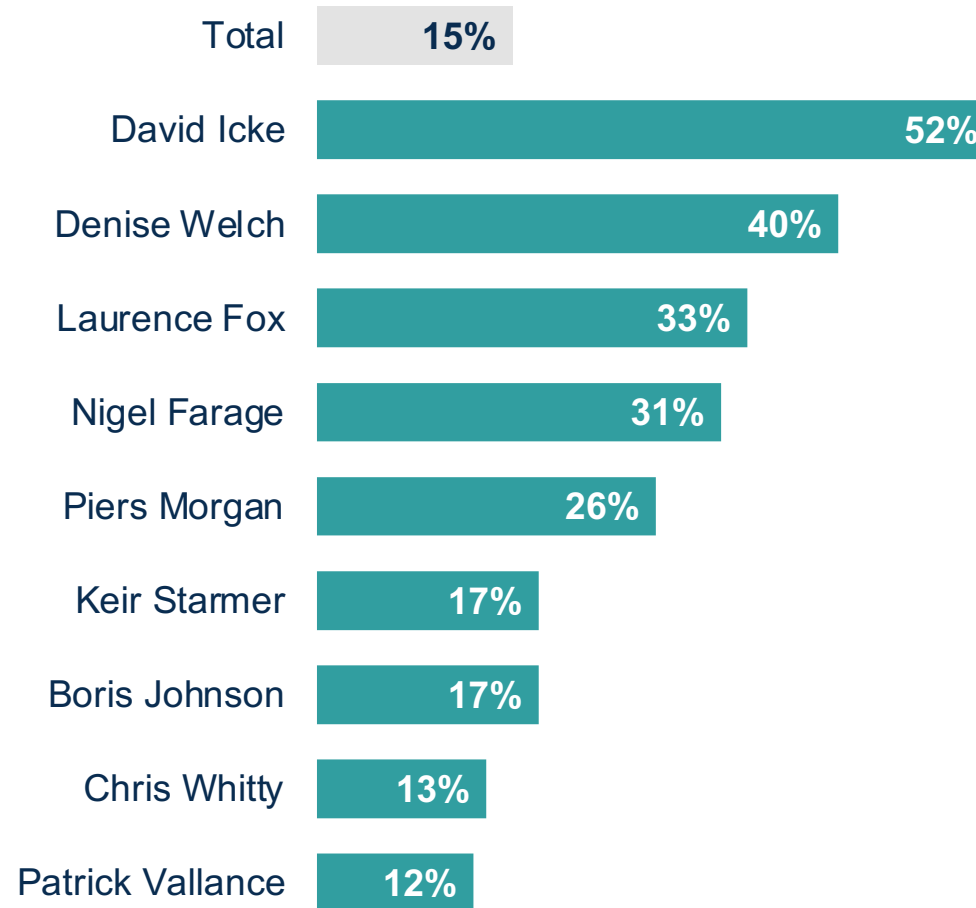


People who trust lockdown sceptics are also much more likely to say that opposition to vaccines in general could persuade them not to get vaccinated against coronavirus.

Half (52%) of those who trust David Icke on the pandemic say this is a possibility, as do significant minorities of people who trust other sceptics such as Denise Welch (40%), Laurence Fox (33%) and Nigel Farage (31%).

% who say **opposition to vaccines in general** is very or fairly likely to persuade them not to take the coronavirus vaccine if one was made available

Trust a great deal or fair amount on coronavirus...



Trust in some lockdown sceptics is linked with a much higher likelihood of being involved in disputes about getting vaccinated.

35% of people who say they trust David Icke on the pandemic report arguing with friends or family about getting a coronavirus vaccine – three and a half times higher than the 10% of the general public who say the same. Those who trust Icke are also more than five times as likely to say they're no longer speaking to a loved one because of disagreements about getting vaccinated.

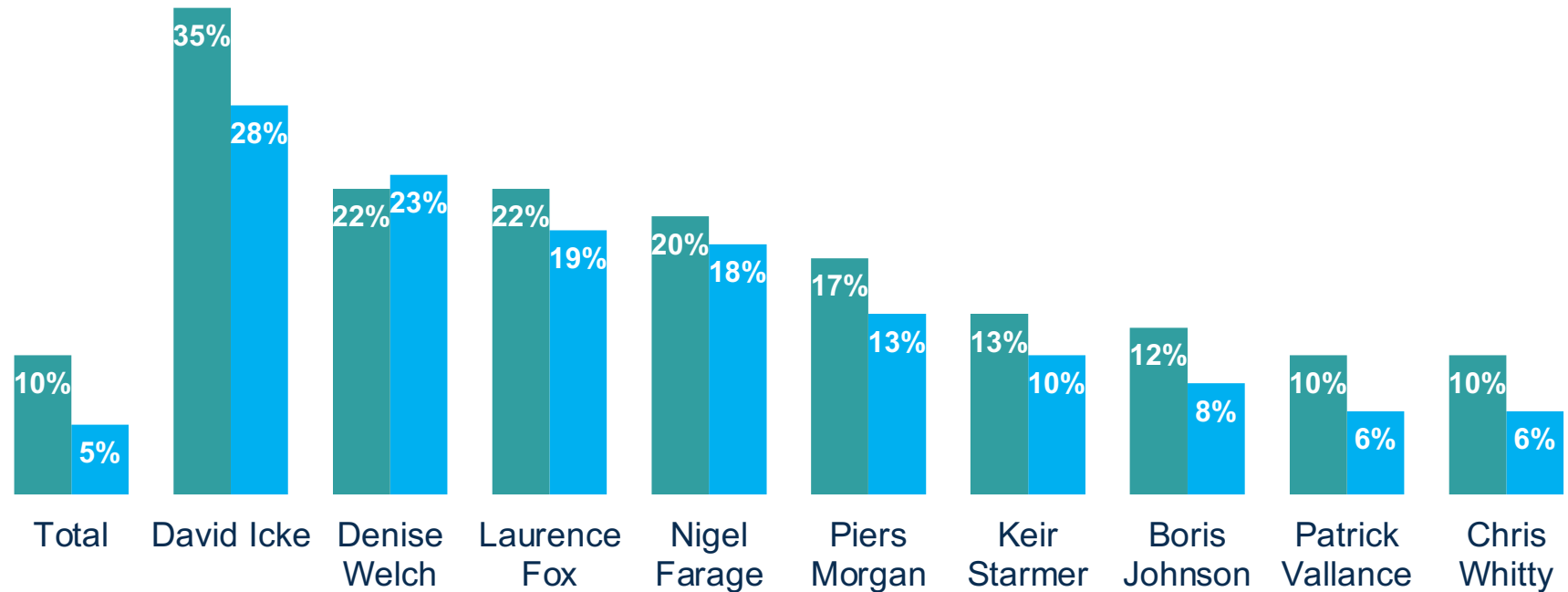
The same pattern is seen, albeit to a lesser extent, with trust in other lockdown-sceptic commentators, such as Laurence Fox. People who trust him are twice as likely as the population overall to have argued about the vaccine and almost four times as likely to no longer be on speaking terms with someone because of it.

% who have had arguments or fallen out with others over getting a coronavirus vaccine

Had arguments with friends or family members about getting vaccinated against coronavirus

No longer speaking to a friend or family member because of disagreements about getting vaccinated against coronavirus

Trust a great deal or fair amount on coronavirus...



Base: 4,860 UK residents aged 18-75 interviewed online, 21 November and 22 December 2020

Those who say they trust David Icke on coronavirus (56%) are more than twice as likely as the population overall (27%) to believe the real truth about the pandemic is being kept from the public.

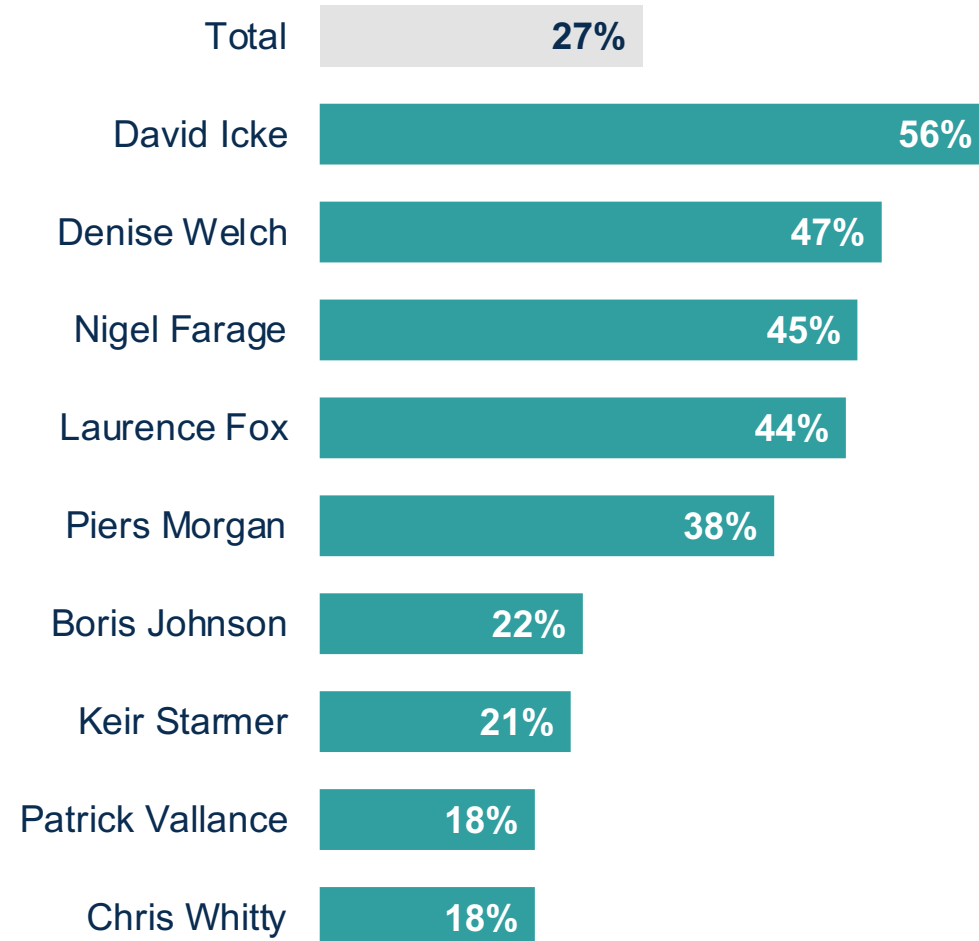
Trusting lockdown sceptics such as Denise Welch (47%), Nigel Farage (45%) and Laurence Fox (44%) is also associated with a much greater likelihood of believing this.

And while Piers Morgan has different views on the pandemic and the measures needed to control it, people who trust him are more likely to have this conspiracy suspicion, too.

By contrast, those who trust political leaders and government scientific experts such as Chris Whitty (18%) are much less likely to believe a cover-up is taking place.

% who believe the real truth about coronavirus is being kept from the public

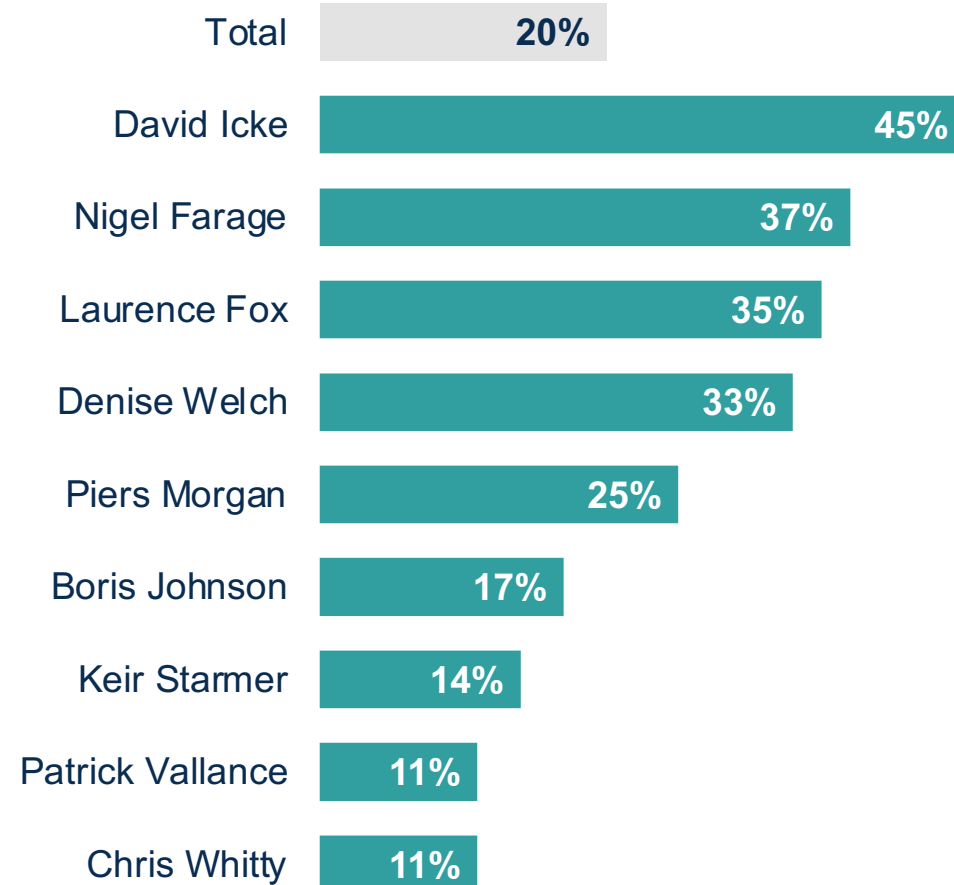
Trust a great deal or fair amount on coronavirus...



The same dynamic can be seen when it comes to belief in the conspiracy claim that the authorities want us to think coronavirus is far more dangerous than it really is, with those who trust lockdown sceptics much more likely than the public overall to believe this is true.

% who believe the authorities want us to think that coronavirus is much more dangerous than it really is

Trust a great deal or fair amount on coronavirus...



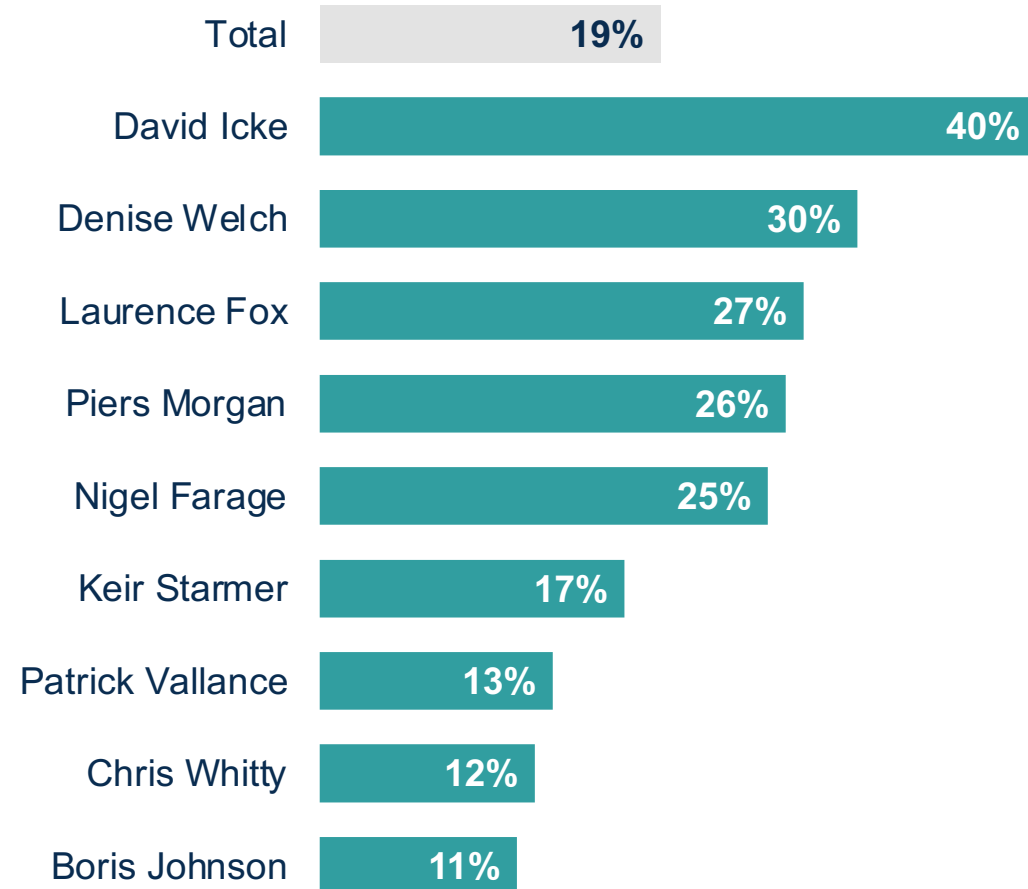
Base: 4,860 UK residents aged 18-75 interviewed online, 21 November and 22 December 2020

Believing that the government is deliberately letting the vulnerable die is also linked with greater trust in lockdown sceptics.

For example, while 11% of those who trust Boris Johnson on the pandemic think this is true, 40% of those who trust David Icke and 30% of those who trust Denise Welch believe it.

% who believe the government is deliberately allowing vulnerable people to die

Trust a great deal or fair amount on coronavirus...



How trust in different professions and government is linked to vaccine hesitancy

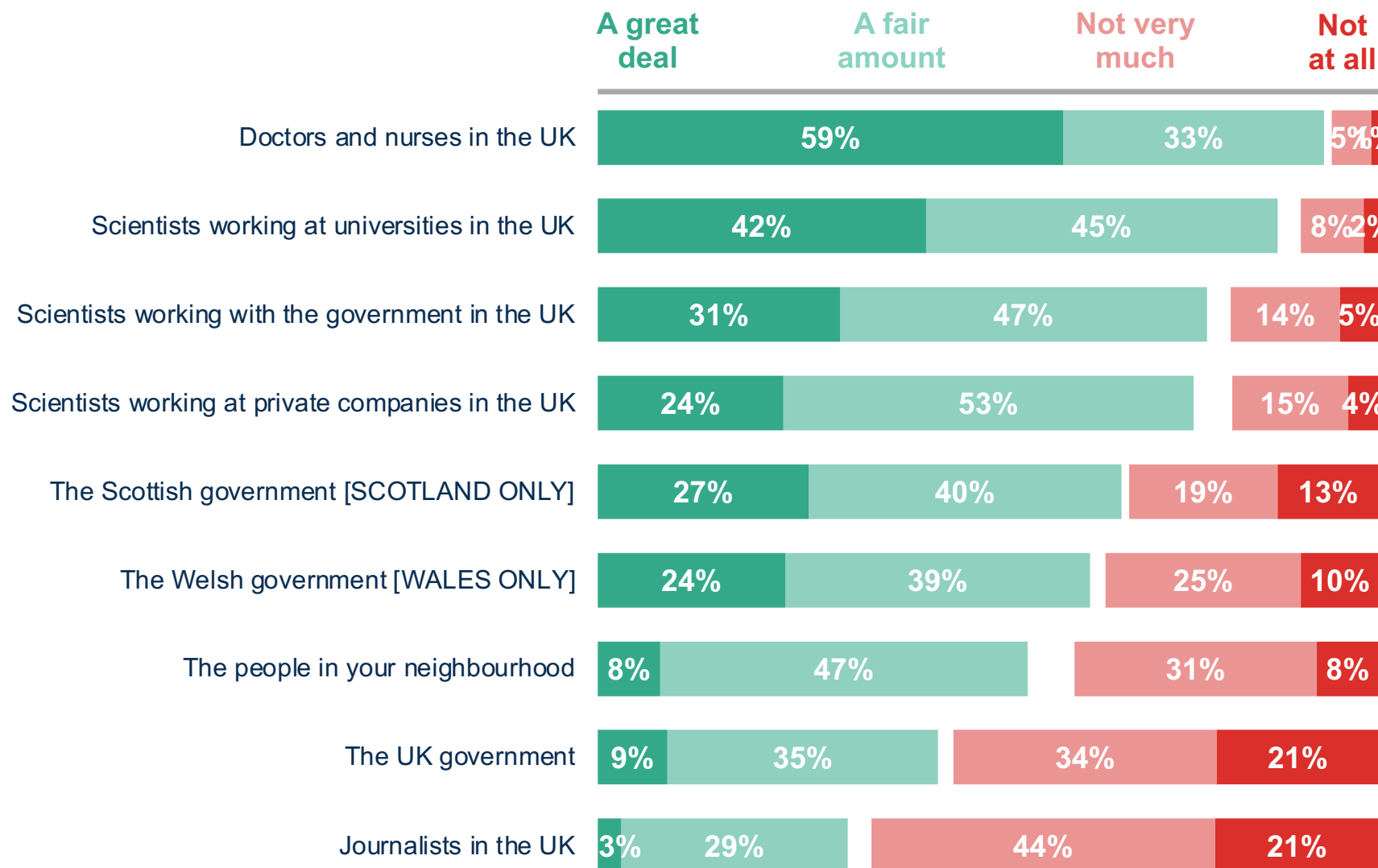
Doctors and nurses are by far the most trusted group in the UK, with 92% having confidence in them.

Various types of scientists also command high levels of trust, and the Scottish (67%) and Welsh (63%) governments are trusted by significant majorities of people in their respective nations.

The UK government (44%) is trusted far less by comparison, but journalists come bottom of the ranking, trusted by a third of the country (33%).

Some figures differ from charts due to rounding.

To what extent, if at all, do you trust the following?

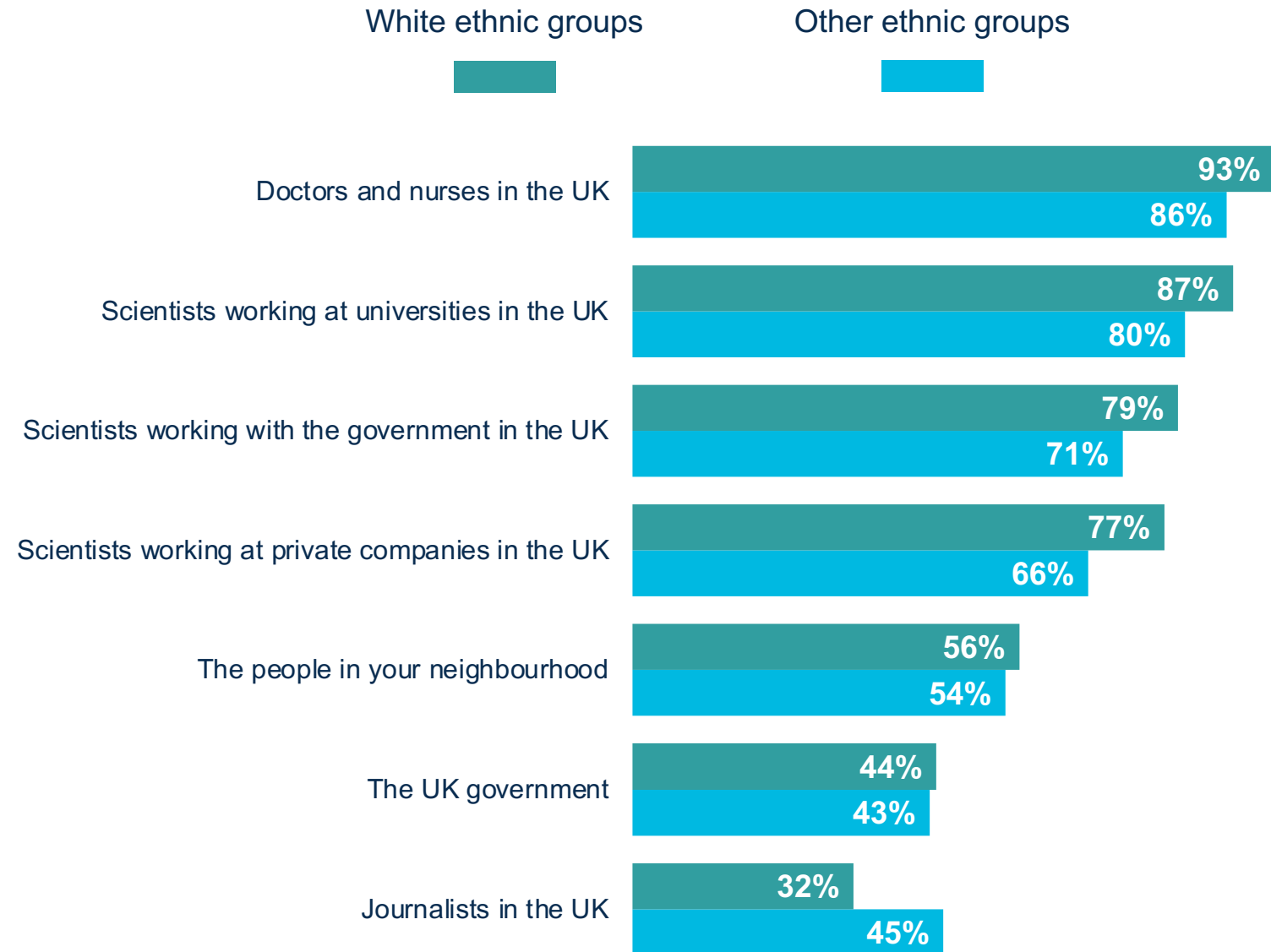


Across different ethnicities, there are relatively similar levels of trust in doctors and nurses, scientists working at universities and scientists working with the UK government.

But there is more of a difference when it comes to scientists working at private companies, who are trusted by 77% of white people and 66% of ethnic minorities.

Of the different groups listed, it is only journalists in the UK who are trusted more by ethnic minorities (45%) than they are by white people (32%)

% who trust the following groups a great deal or fair amount

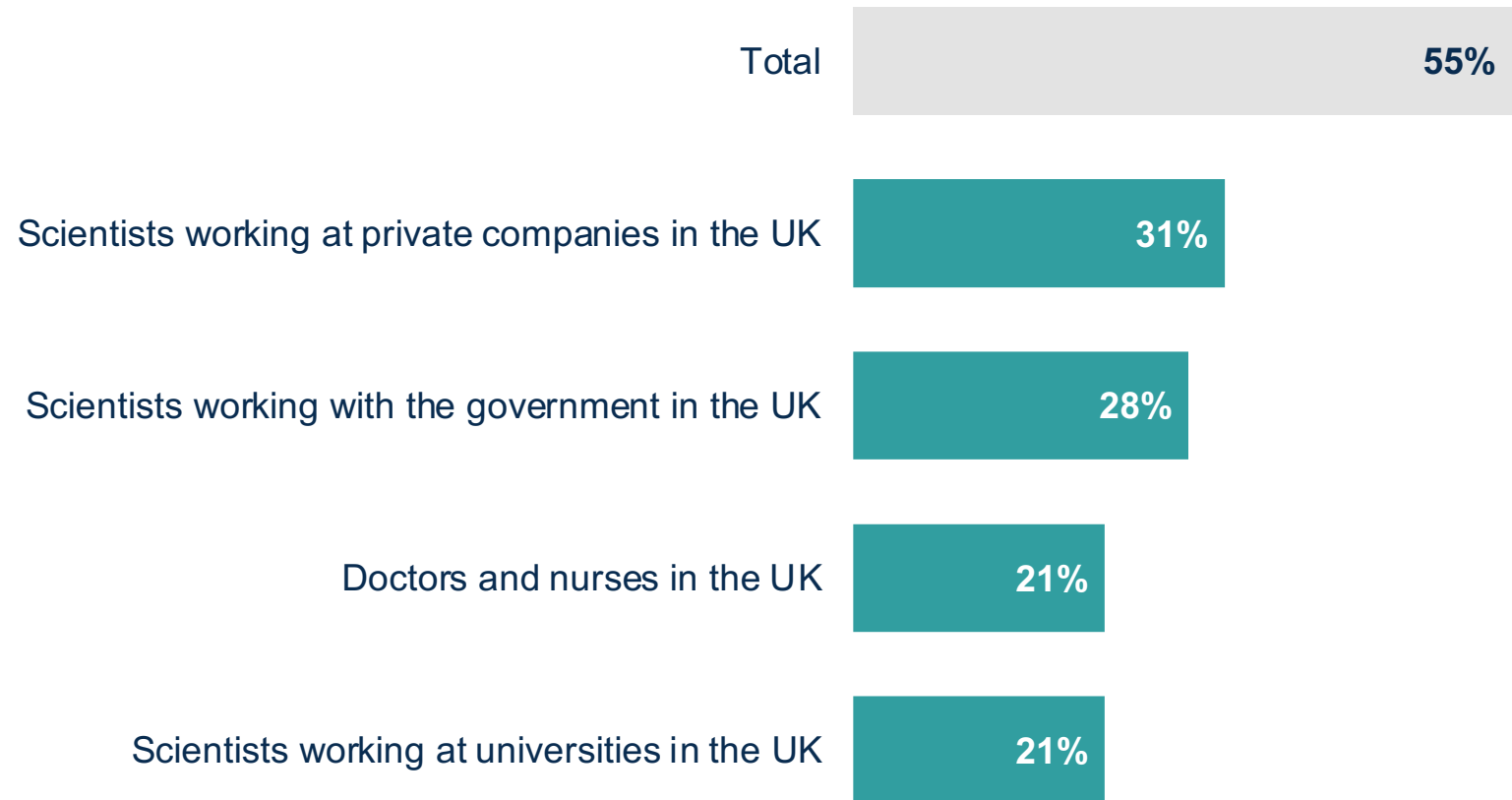


The minorities of the population who say they don't trust otherwise well-regarded groups have high levels of vaccine hesitancy.

For example, those who say they do not trust doctors and nurses (21%) are less than half as likely as the population overall (54%) to say they're certain or very likely to get a coronavirus vaccine.

% who say they are a **certain or very likely** to get a coronavirus vaccine

Do not trust very much or at all...

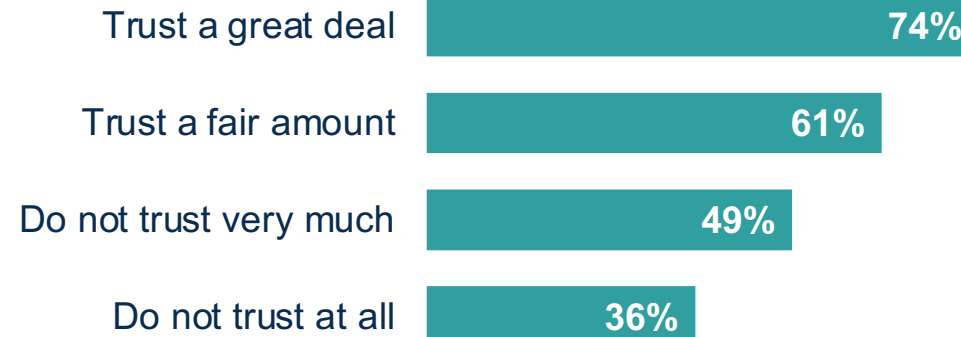


Trust in government is linked with a greater likelihood of getting vaccinated.

Among those who say they trust the information provided by the UK government on coronavirus a great deal, 74% are certain or very likely to get a vaccine against coronavirus – compared with 36% of those who say they do not trust this information at all.

% who say they are **certain or very likely** to get a coronavirus vaccine

Trust the information provided by the UK government on coronavirus



% who say they are a **certain or very likely** to get a coronavirus vaccine

Trust the UK government to control the spread of the virus



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