Culture wars in the UK: division and connection

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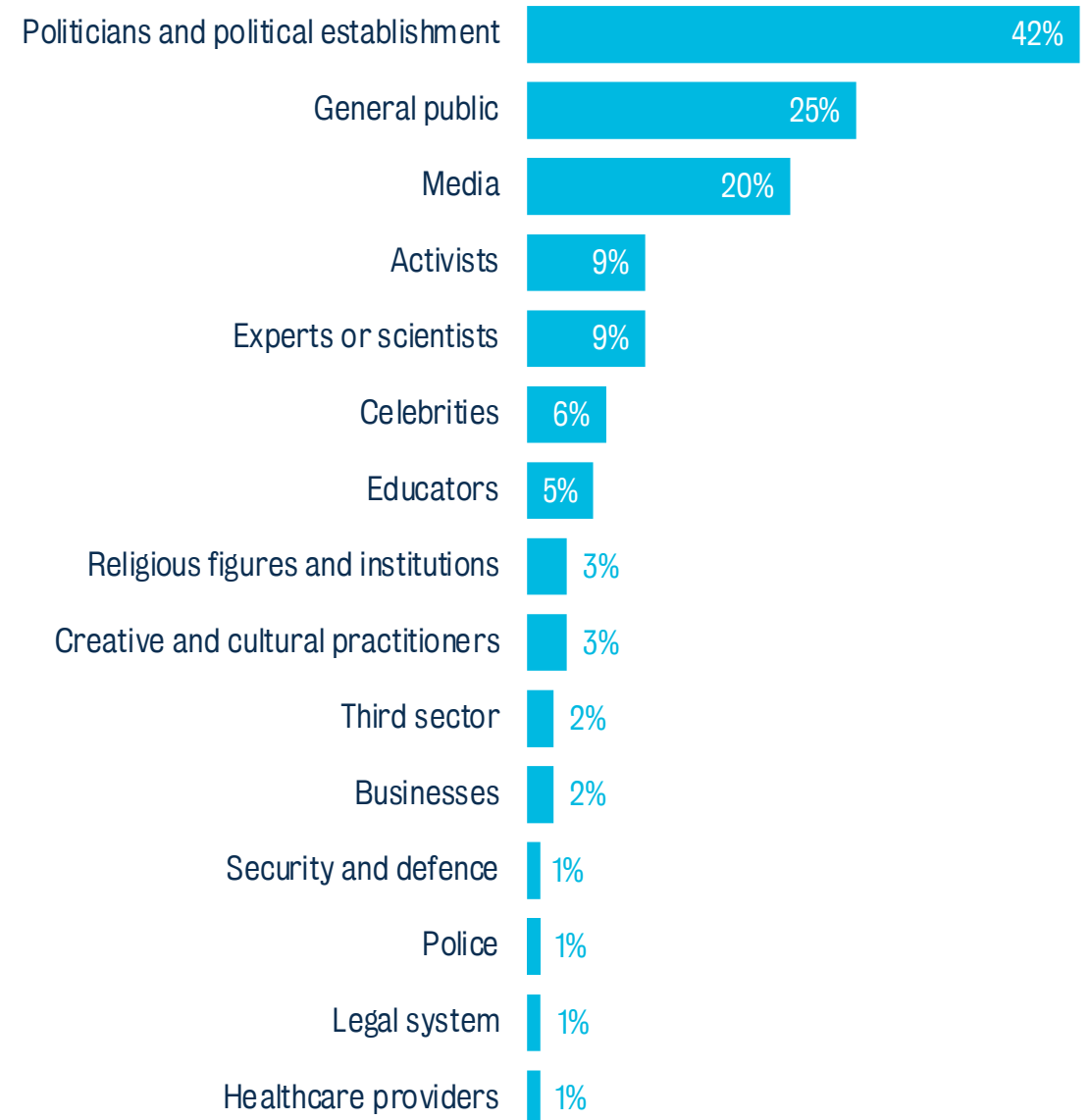
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How the media frames "culture wars"

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)

Protagonist	%
Politicians and political establishment	42%
General public	25%
Media	20%
Activists	9%
Experts or scientists	9%
Celebrities	6%
Educators	5%
Religious figures and institutions	3%
Creative and cultural practitioners	3%
Third sector	2%
Businesses	2%
Security and defence	1%
Police	1%
Legal system	1%
Healthcare providers	1%

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

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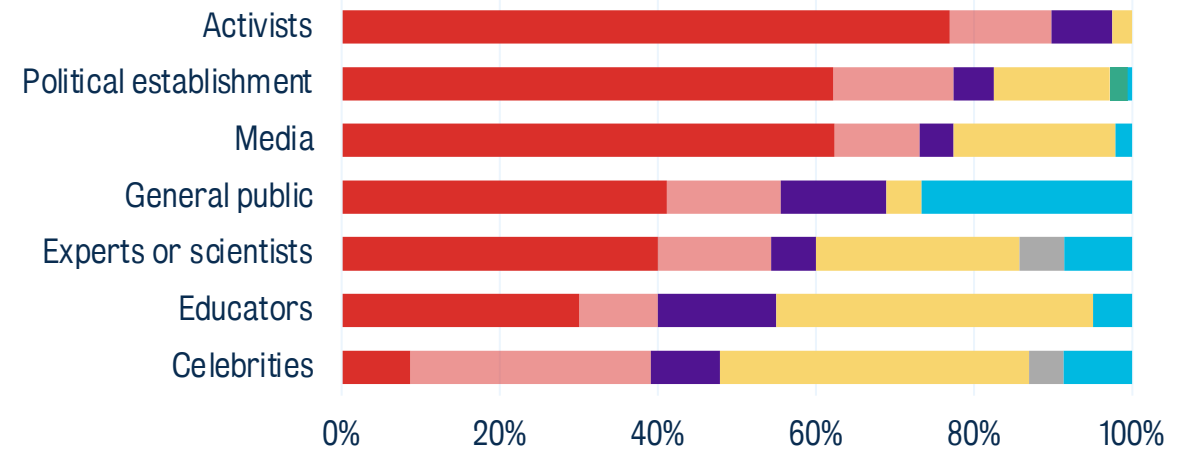
At one end of the spectrum are the actions of activists, who are unambiguously portrayed as deliberately seeking to stoke the debate or amplify culture war arguments with others.

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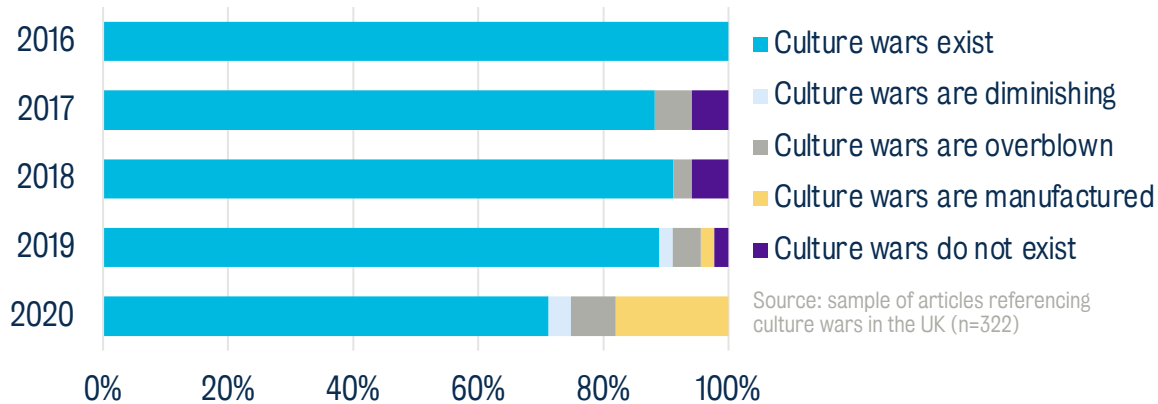
There is growing resistance to the idea of a culture war in the UK

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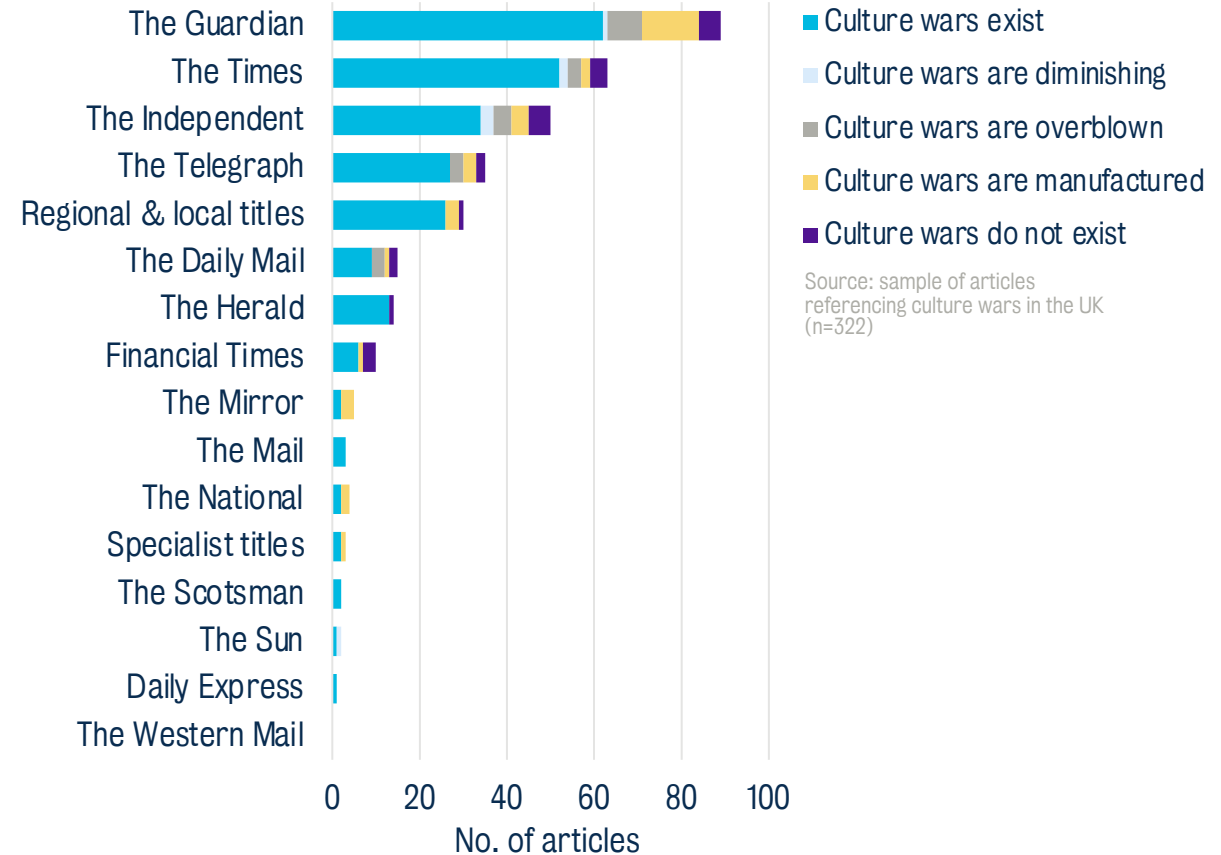
Of 134 articles reviewed from 2020, 25% take the position that culture wars are either overblown or manufactured – if they exist at all. One of the main reasons for this scepticism is the belief that culture wars are politically manufactured (8%) or fueled by the media (2%), and in reality involve only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

Legend:
- Culture wars exist
- Culture wars are diminishing
- Culture wars are overblown
- Culture wars are manufactured
- Culture wars do not exist

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

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

Legend:
- Culture wars exist
- Culture wars are diminishing
- Culture wars are overblown
- Culture wars are manufactured
- Culture wars do not exist

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

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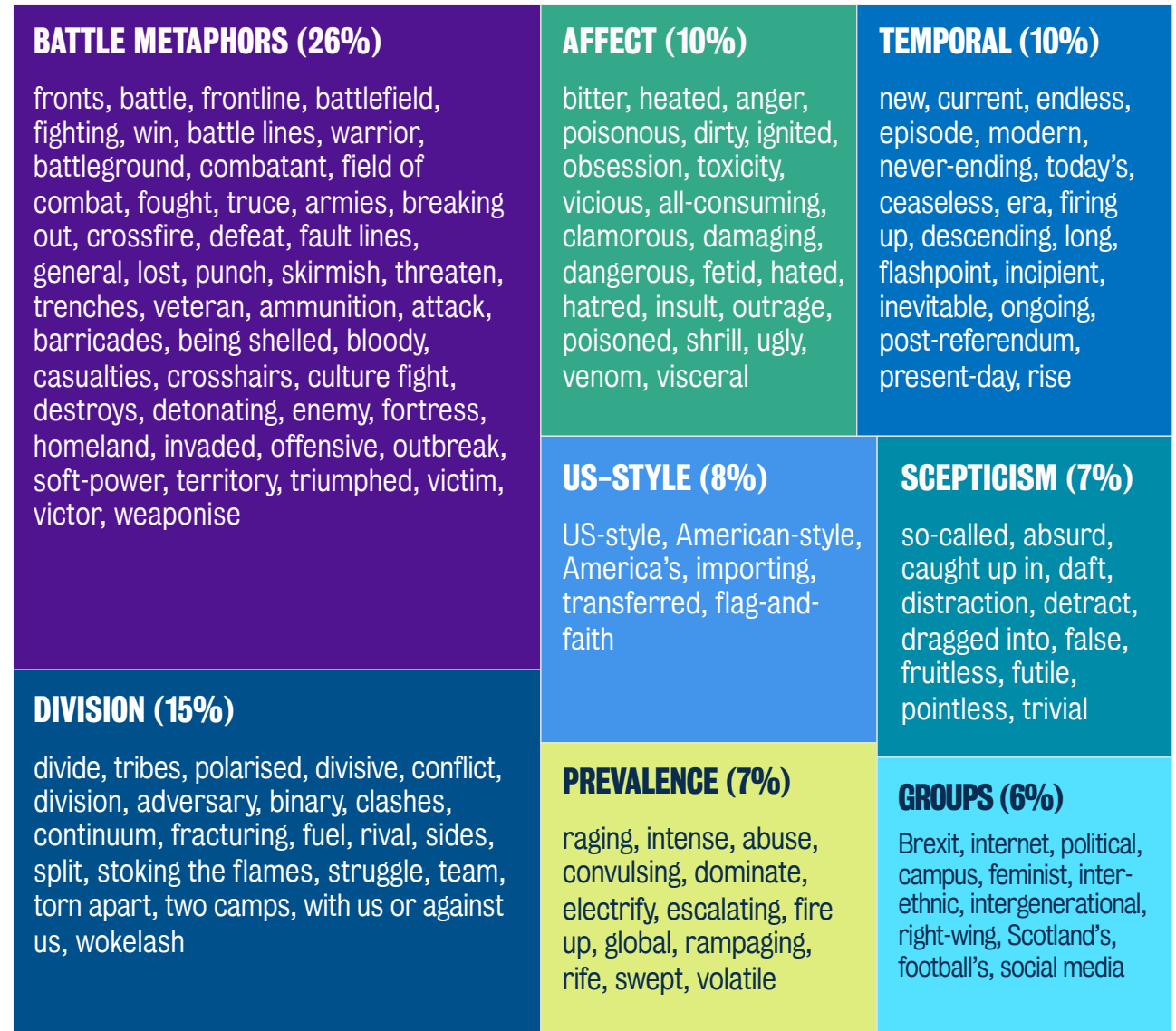
The specific framing of the term "culture wars" frequently evokes an underlying sense of conflict and division. More than half of the articles reviewed (57%) included descriptive language near the term – be it immediately preceding the words "culture wars" or in the surrounding sentence or paragraph.

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

BATTLE METAPHORS (26%)

fronts, battle, frontline, battlefield, fighting, win, battle lines, warrior, battleground, combatant, field of combat, fought, truce, armies, breaking out, crossfire, defeat, fault lines, general, lost, punch, skirmish, threaten, trenches, veteran, ammunition, attack, barricades, being shelled, bloody, casualties, crosshairs, culture fight, destroys, detonating, enemy, fortress, homeland, invaded, offensive, outbreak, soft-power, territory, triumphed, victim, victor, weaponise

AFFECT (10%)

bitter, heated, anger, poisonous, dirty, ignited, obsession, toxicity, vicious, all-consuming, clamorous, damaging, dangerous, fetid, hated, hatred, insult, outrage, poisoned, shrill, ugly, venom, visceral

TEMPORAL (10%)

new, current, endless, episode, modern, never-ending, today's, ceaseless, era, firing up, descending, long, flashpoint, incipient, inevitable, ongoing, post-referendum, present-day, rise

US-STYLE (8%)

US-style, American-style, America's, importing, transferred, flag-and-faith

SCEPTICISM (7%)

so-called, absurd, caught up in, daft, distraction, detract, dragged into, false, fruitless, futile, pointless, trivial

DIVISION (15%)

divide, tribes, polarised, divisive, conflict, division, adversary, binary, clashes, continuum, fracturing, fuel, rival, sides, split, stoking the flames, struggle, team, torn apart, two camps, with us or against us, wokelash

PREVALENCE (7%)

raging, intense, abuse, convulsing, dominate, electrify, escalating, fire up, global, rampaging, rife, swept, volatile

GROUPS (6%)

Brexit, internet, political, campus, feminist, inter-ethnic, intergenerational, right-wing, Scotland's, football's, social media

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.

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Culture wars in the UK

Division, connection and culture wars among the UK public

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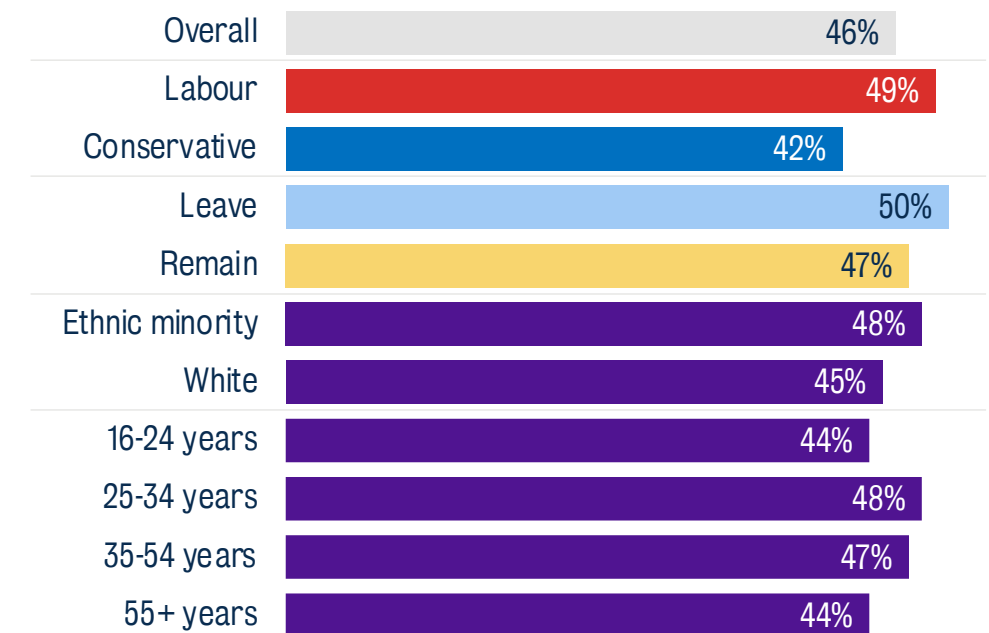
46% agree that culture wars are dividing the country, although only 6% strongly agree. This compares with 37% who neither agree nor disagree that this is the case, underscoring that there is a large proportion of the public for whom these kinds of divisions mean little or are not something that animates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

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
6%	40%	37%	7%	1%

% who say the UK is divided by "culture wars"

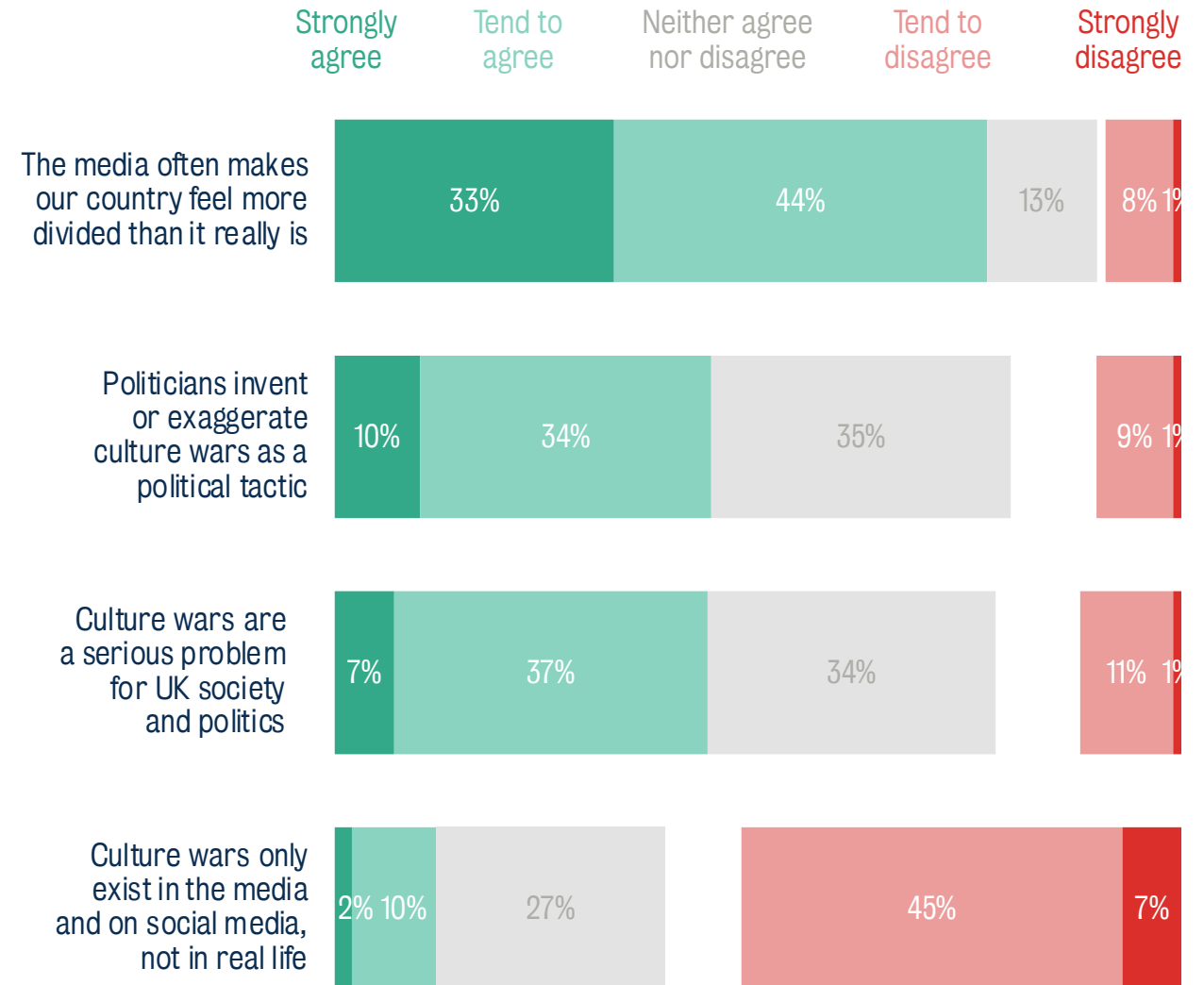|	
Overall	46%
Labour	49%
Conservative	42%
Leave	50%
Remain	47%
Ethnic minority	48%
White	45%
16-24 years	44%
25-34 years	48%
35-54 years	47%
55+ years	44%

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?

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
The media often makes our country feel more divided than it really is	33%	44%	13%	8%	1%
Politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic	10%	34%	35%	9%	1%
Culture wars are a serious problem for UK society and politics	7%	37%	34%	11%	1%
Culture wars only exist in the media and on social media, not in real life	2%	10%	27%	45%	7%

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).
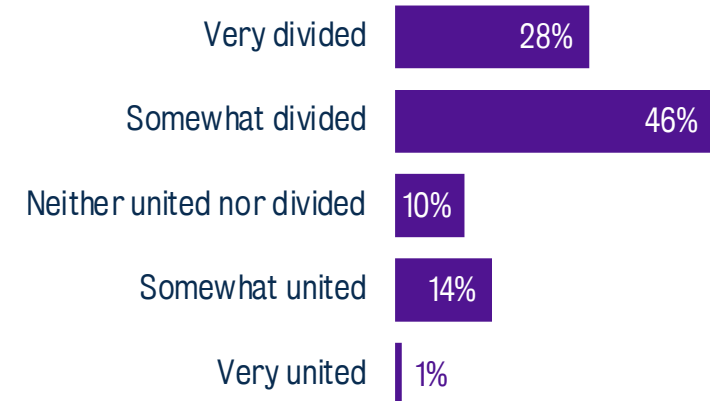
Looking more closely, people in Scotland are most likely to say the UK is divided – 86% feel this way, compared with 81% in Wales and 72% in England.* And of the two main parties, a greater proportion of Labour supporters (82%) than Conservative supporters (69%) feel the country is divided, with a similar 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.
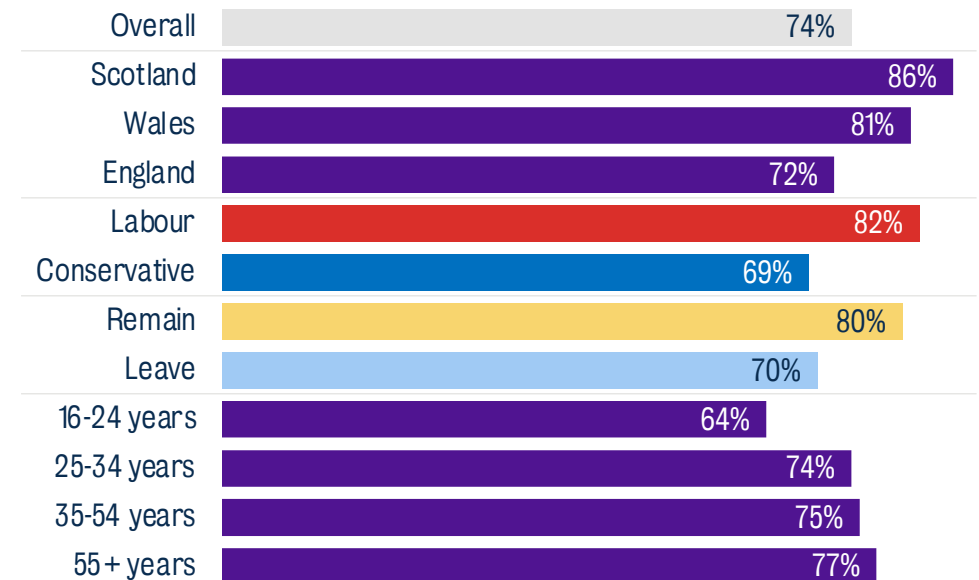
Some figures differ from charts due to rounding.

* Northern Ireland excluded due to small sample size.

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

Very divided	28%
Somewhat divided	46%
Neither united nor divided	10%
Somewhat united	14%
Very united	1%

% who say the UK feels very or somewhat divided

Overall	74%
Scotland	86%
Wales	81%
England	72%
Labour	82%
Conservative	69%
Remain	80%
Leave	70%
16-24 years	64%
25-34 years	74%
35-54 years	75%
55+ years	77%

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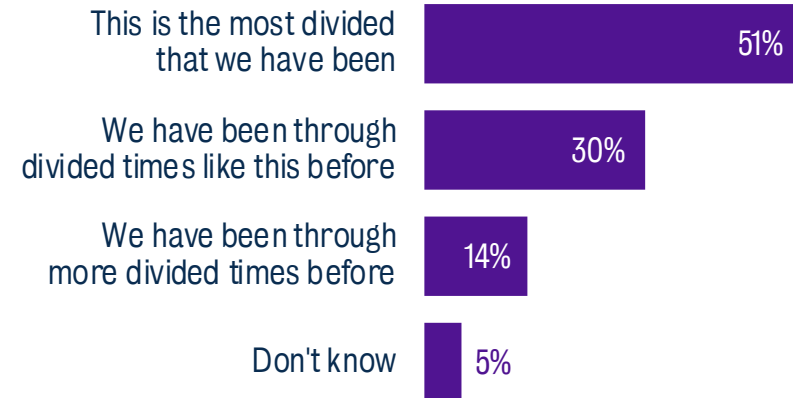
Again, there is a notable age divide in views – it is only among the youngest age group where a minority believe we're more divided than at any other point in their lifetime. Just over a third (36%) of under-25s feel this way, compared with over half of those aged 25 and above.

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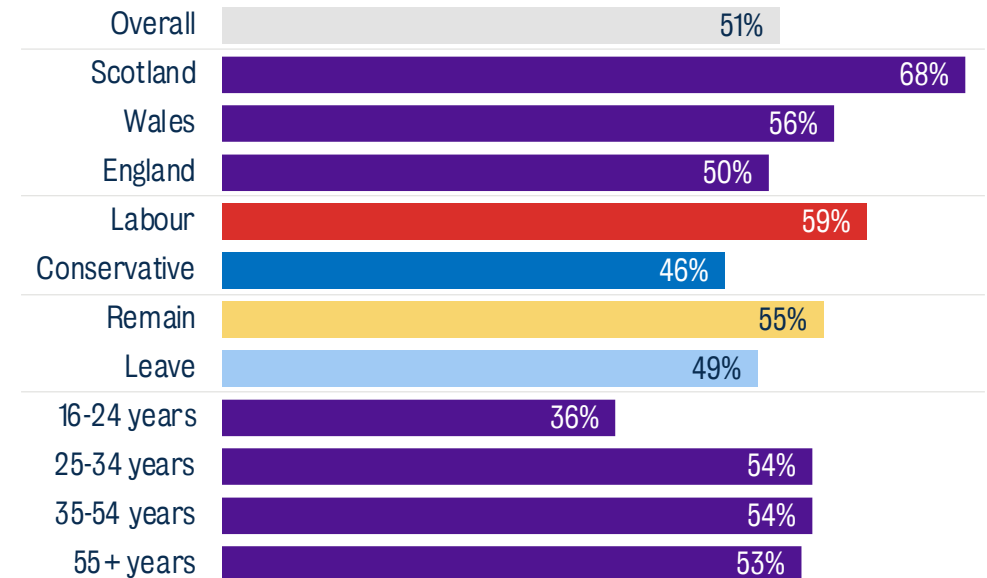
Meanwhile, people in Scotland have the most negative outlook on societal divides today. 68% say the level of division in unprecedented in their lifetime, compared with 56% in Wales and 50% in England who feel this way.*

* Northern Ireland excluded due to small sample size.

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

Statement	%
This is the most divided that we have been	51%
We have been through divided times like this before	30%
We have been through more divided times before	14%
Don't know	5%

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

Group	%
Overall	51%
Scotland	68%
Wales	56%
England	50%
Labour	59%
Conservative	46%
Remain	55%
Leave	49%
16-24 years	36%
25-34 years	54%
35-54 years	54%
55+ years	53%

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There is little sign that cultural and social change are a strong concern for most of the public
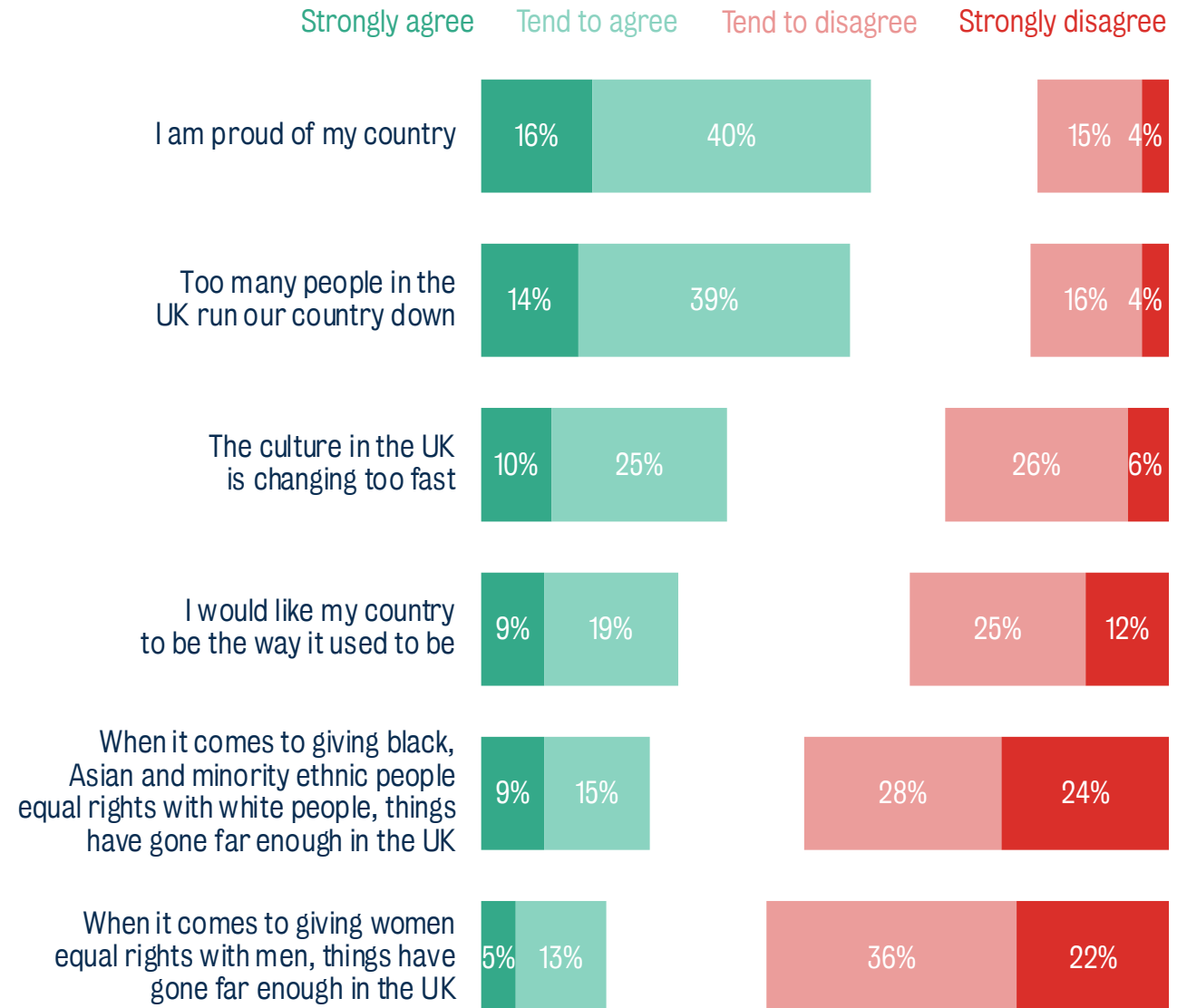
56% are proud of their country – more than double the 19% who are not – and there is a similar split between those who agree (52%) and disagree (20%) that too many people in the UK run the country down.

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.

Strongly agree   **Tend to agree**   **Tend to disagree**   **Strongly disagree**

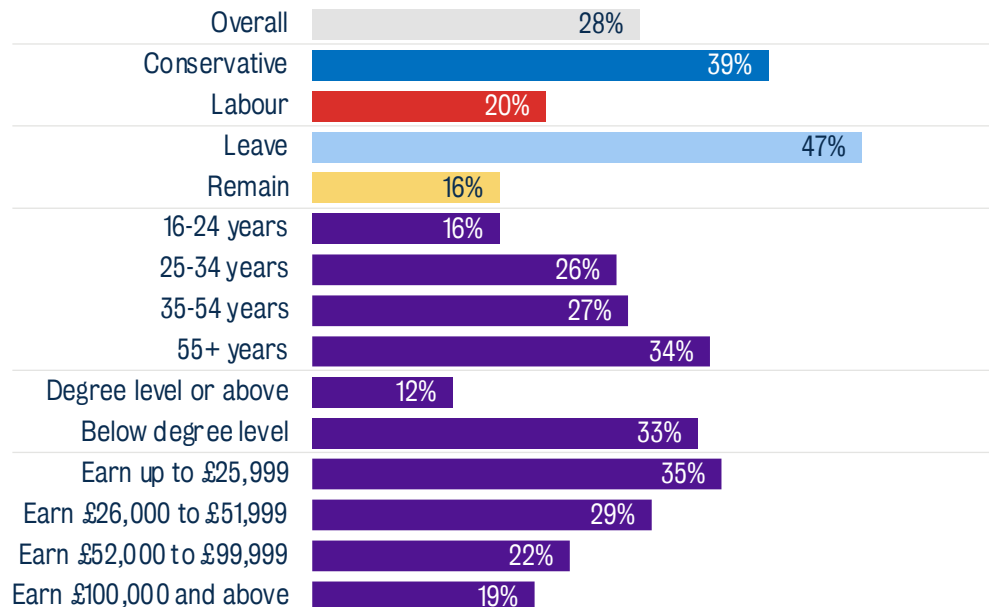| Statement	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
I am proud of my country	16%	40%	15%	4%
Too many people in the UK run our country down	14%	39%	16%	4%
The culture in the UK is changing too fast	10%	25%	26%	6%
I would like my country to be the way it used to be	9%	19%	25%	12%
When it comes to giving black, Asian and minority ethnic people equal rights with white people, things have gone far enough in the UK	9%	15%	28%	24%
When it comes to giving women equal rights with men, things have gone far enough in the UK	5%	13%	36%	22%

Leavers, Conservatives, older people, lower earners and those without degrees are most concerned about the pace of change
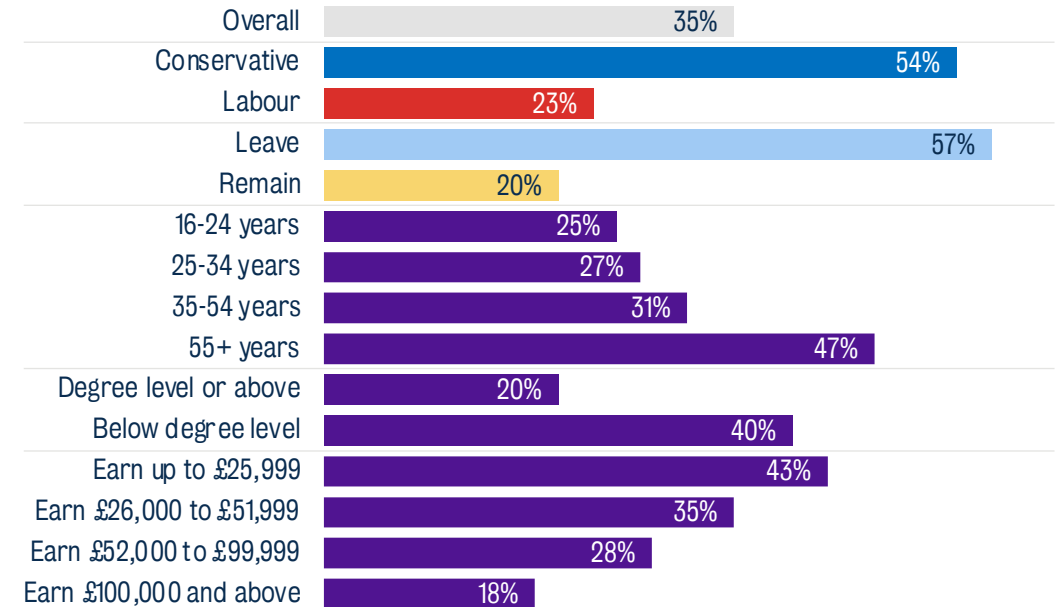
47% of Leavers say they would like the country to be the way it used to be – three times the 16% of Remainers who say the same. And Conservative supporters (39%) are twice as likely as Labour supporters (20%) to feel this way.

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"

Category	%
Overall	28%
Conservative	39%
Labour	20%
Leave	47%
Remain	16%
16-24 years	16%
25-34 years	26%
35-54 years	27%
55+ years	34%
Degree level or above	12%
Below degree level	33%
Earn up to £25,999	35%
Earn £26,000 to £51,999	29%
Earn £52,000 to £99,999	22%
Earn £100,000 and above	19%

Agree "the culture in the UK is changing too fast"

Category	%
Overall	35%
Conservative	54%
Labour	23%
Leave	57%
Remain	20%
16-24 years	25%
25-34 years	27%
35-54 years	31%
55+ years	47%
Degree level or above	20%
Below degree level	40%
Earn up to £25,999	43%
Earn £26,000 to £51,999	35%
Earn £52,000 to £99,999	28%
Earn £100,000 and above	18%

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%).
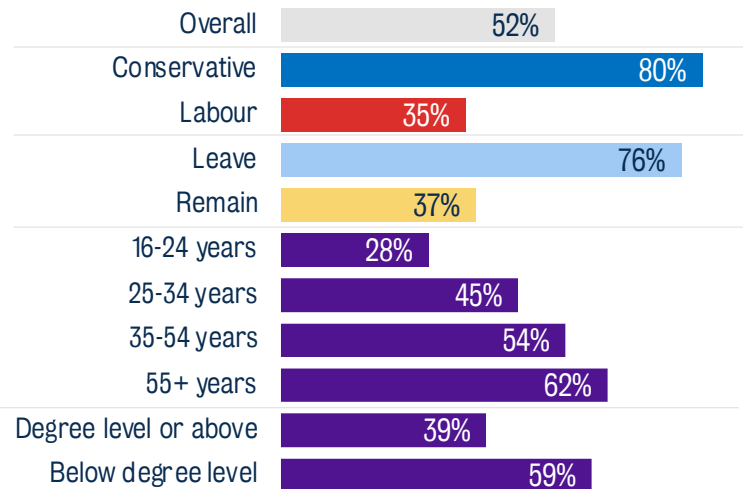
Younger people are markedly more comfortable with the speed of cultural change than older people, although it is still notable that a quarter (25%) of those aged 16 to 24 believe it is changing too fast. And again, agreement that this statement declines the more people earn and the higher their education 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.
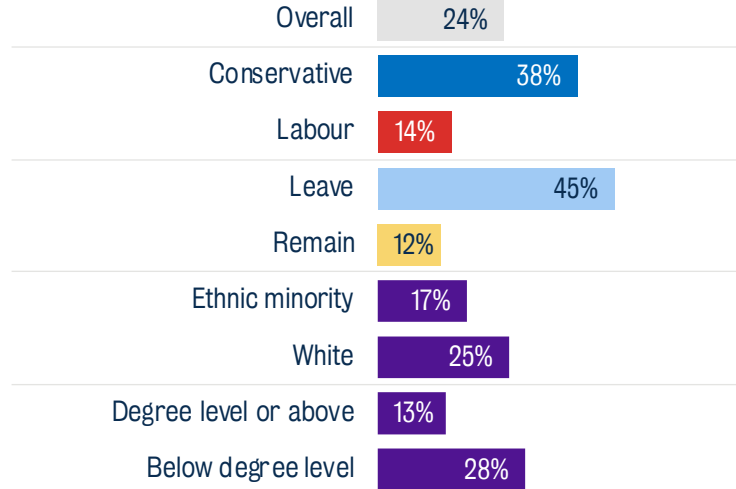
While relatively few people in the UK think things have gone far enough in terms of giving people from ethnic minority groups equal rights with white people, support does vary markedly across groups.

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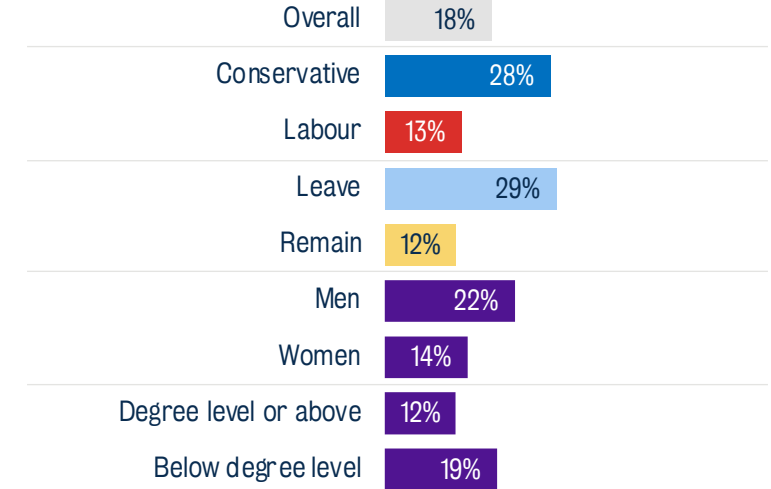
Those who believe the expansion of women's rights has gone far enough are in the minority in the UK, but more than a quarter of Leavers (29%) and Conservatives (28%) hold this view. This compares with around one in eight Labour supporters (13%) and Remainers (12%).

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 "too many people in the UK run our country down"

Overall	52%
Conservative	80%
Labour	35%
Leave	76%
Remain	37%
16-24 years	28%
25-34 years	45%
35-54 years	54%
55+ years	62%
Degree level or above	39%
Below degree level	59%

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"

Overall	24%
Conservative	38%
Labour	14%
Leave	45%
Remain	12%
Ethnic minority	17%
White	25%
Degree level or above	13%
Below degree level	28%

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

Overall	18%
Conservative	28%
Labour	13%
Leave	29%
Remain	12%
Men	22%
Women	14%
Degree level or above	12%
Below degree level	19%

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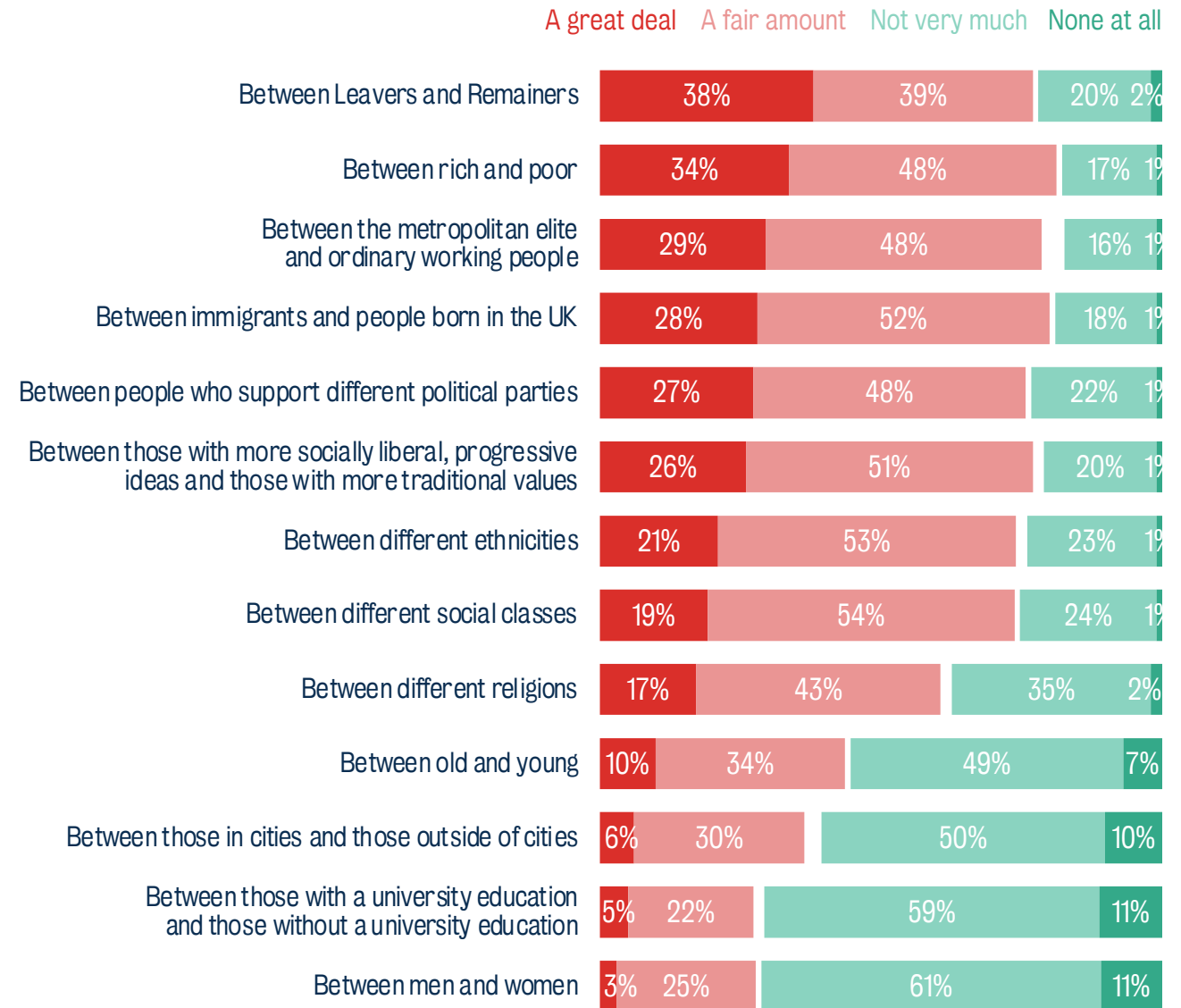
While the media focus is increasingly on cultural differences, economic division is still of great importance to the public: 81% believe there is tension between rich and poor, including a third (34%) who say a great deal. People are less likely (19%) to say there is a lot of tension between different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

Legend: A great deal · A fair amount · Not very much · None at all

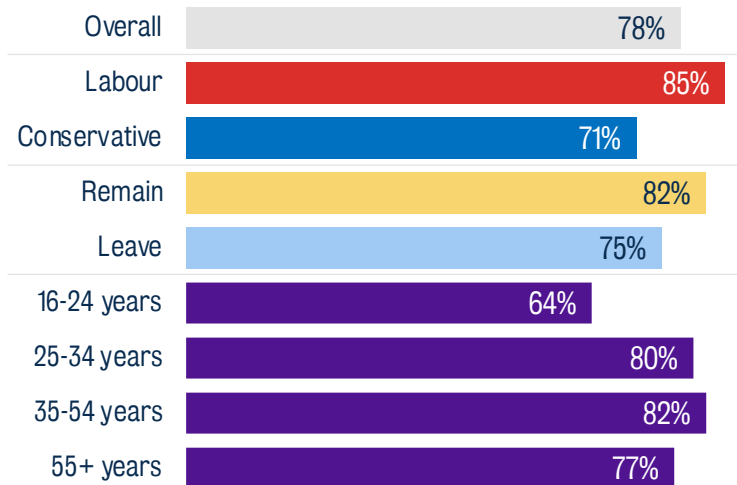| Group	A great deal	A fair amount	Not very much	None at all
Between Leavers and Remainers	38%	39%	20%	2%
Between rich and poor	34%	48%	17%	1%
Between the metropolitan elite and ordinary working people	29%	48%	16%	1%
Between immigrants and people born in the UK	28%	52%	18%	1%
Between people who support different political parties	27%	48%	22%	1%
Between those with more socially liberal, progressive ideas and those with more traditional values	26%	51%	20%	1%
Between different ethnicities	21%	53%	23%	1%
Between different social classes	19%	54%	24%	1%
Between different religions	17%	43%	35%	2%
Between old and young	10%	34%	49%	7%
Between those in cities and those outside of cities	6%	30%	50%	10%
Between those with a university education and those without a university education	5%	22%	59%	11%
Between men and women	3%	25%	61%	11%

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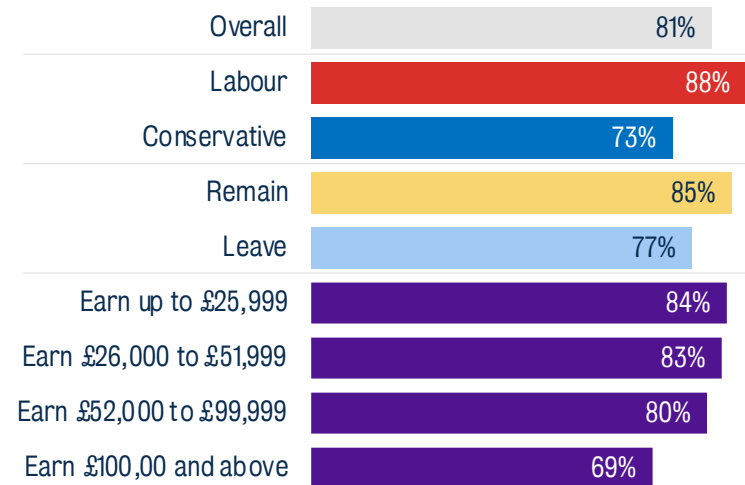
69% of those who earn £100,000 a year think there is tension between rich and poor – compared with around 80% of people in lower income brackets who think the same.

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%).

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%

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

Group	%
Overall	78%
Labour	85%
Conservative	71%
Remain	82%
Leave	75%
16-24 years	64%
25-34 years	80%
35-54 years	82%
55+ years	77%

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

Group	%
Overall	81%
Labour	88%
Conservative	73%
Remain	85%
Leave	77%
Earn up to £25,999	84%
Earn £26,000 to £51,999	83%
Earn £52,000 to £99,999	80%
Earn £100,00 and above	69%

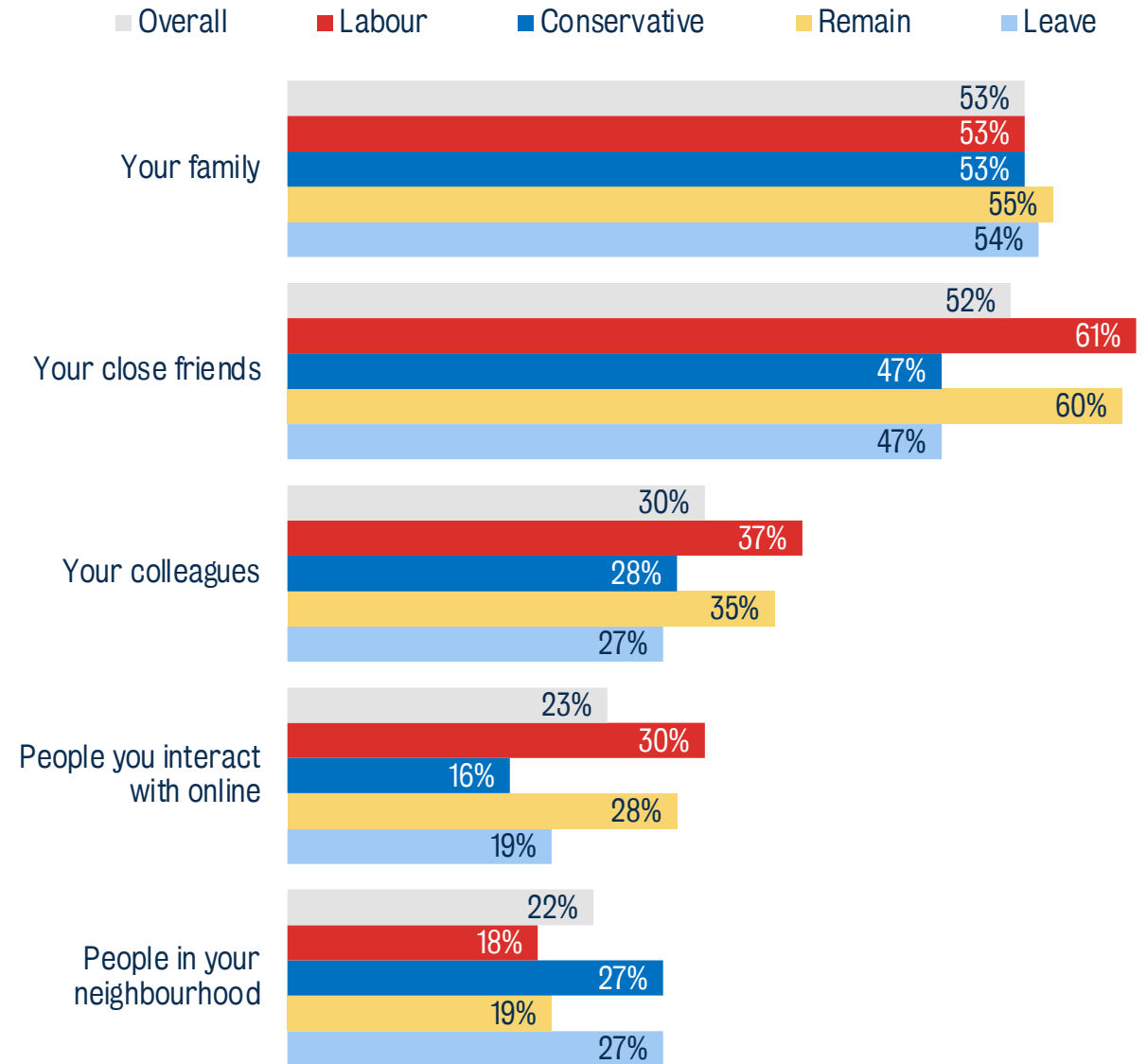Ipsos THE POLICY INSTITUTE KING'S College LONDON

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

Legend: Overall, Labour, Conservative, Remain, Leave

Your family
- Overall: 53%
- Labour: 53%
- Conservative: 53%
- Remain: 55%
- Leave: 54%

Your close friends
- Overall: 52%
- Labour: 61%
- Conservative: 47%
- Remain: 60%
- Leave: 47%

Your colleagues
- Overall: 30%
- Labour: 37%
- Conservative: 28%
- Remain: 35%
- Leave: 27%

People you interact with online
- Overall: 23%
- Labour: 30%
- Conservative: 16%
- Remain: 28%
- Leave: 19%

People in your neighbourhood
- Overall: 22%
- Labour: 18%
- Conservative: 27%
- Remain: 19%
- Leave: 27%

Culture wars in the UK
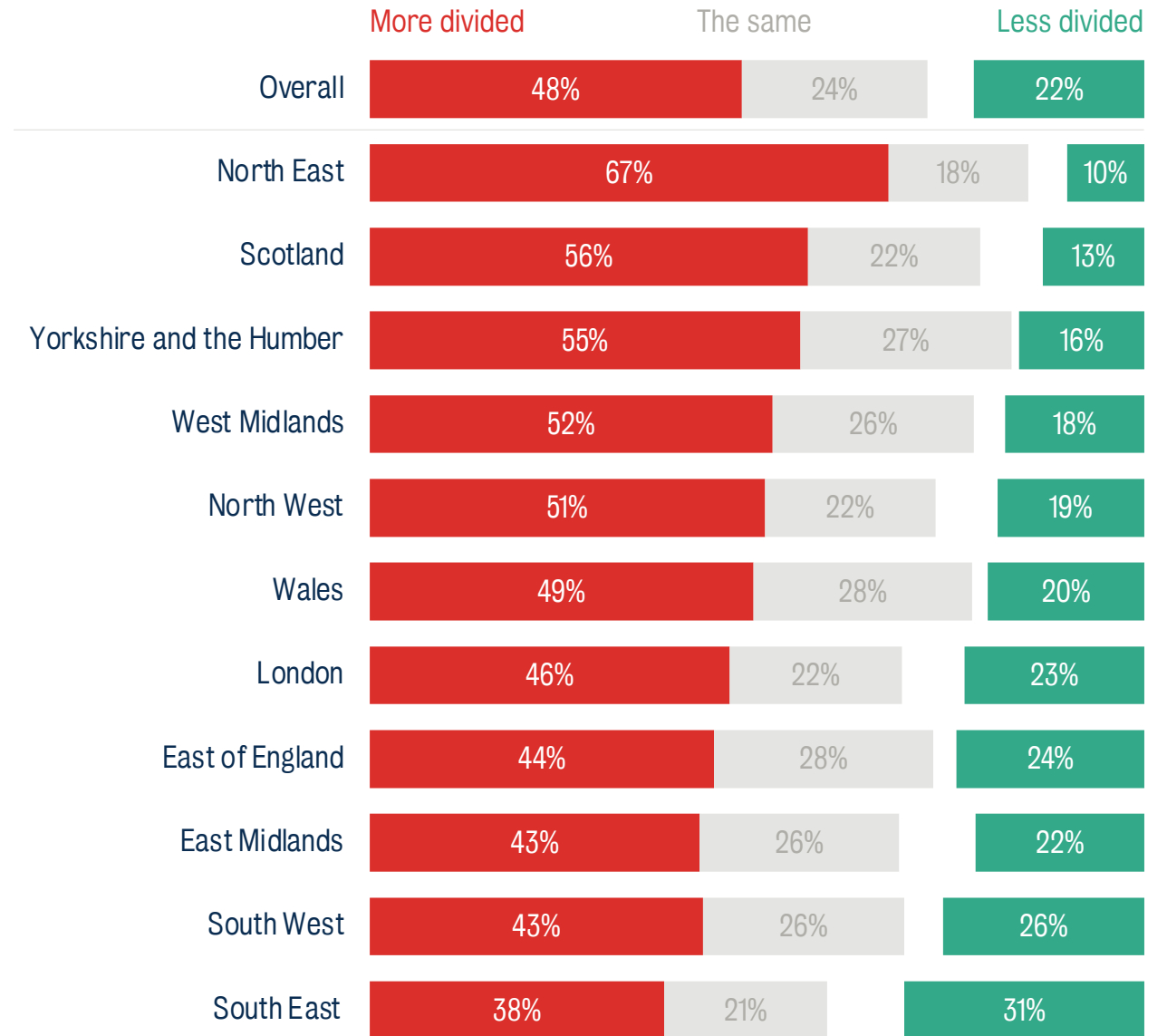
Class: still a key dividing line?

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?

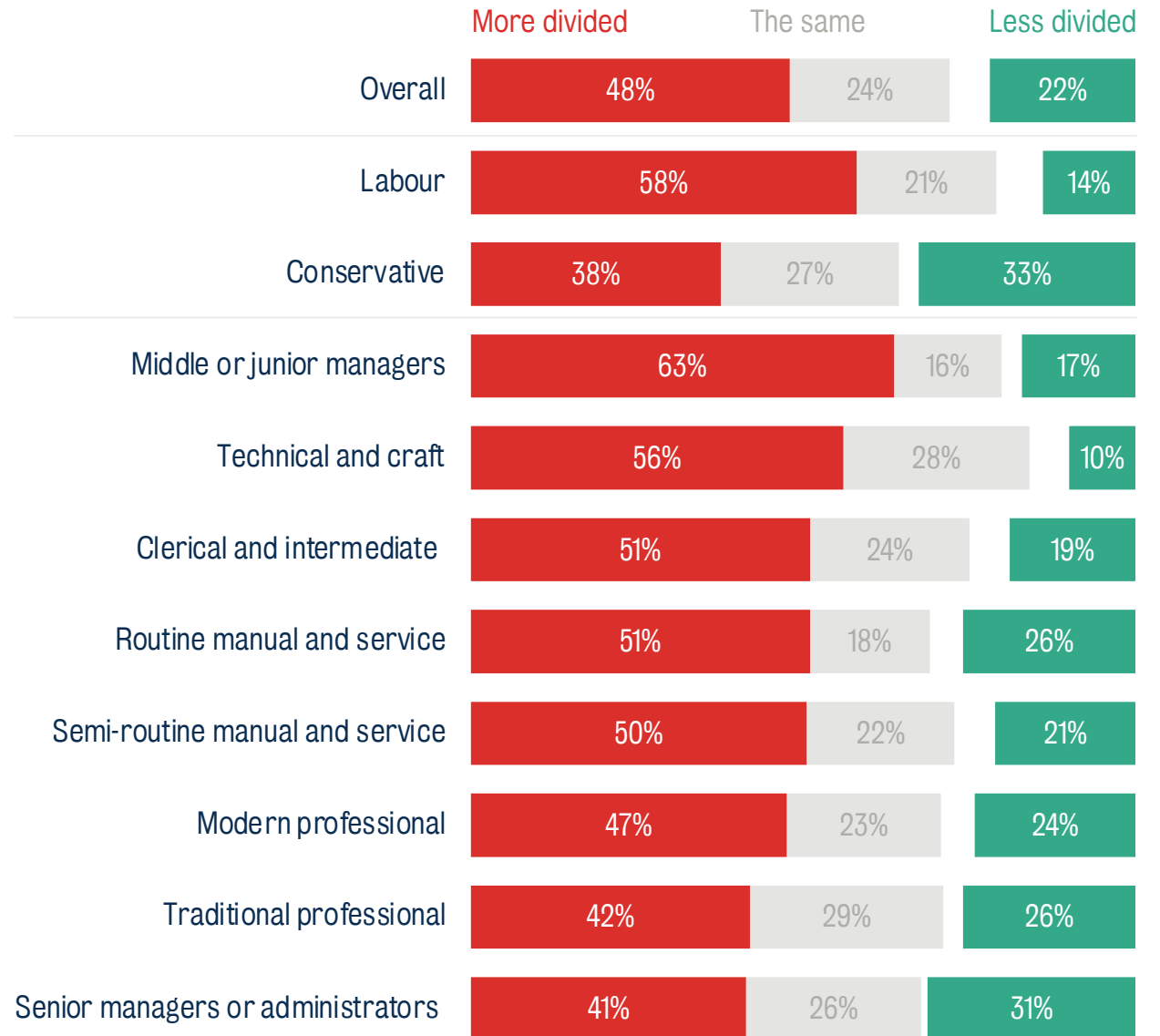|	More divided	The same	Less divided
Overall	48%	24%	22%
North East	67%	18%	10%
Scotland	56%	22%	13%
Yorkshire and the Humber	55%	27%	16%
West Midlands	52%	26%	18%
North West	51%	22%	19%
Wales	49%	28%	20%
London	46%	22%	23%
East of England	44%	28%	24%
East Midlands	43%	26%	22%
South West	43%	26%	26%
South East	38%	21%	31%

Views of class split along party lines – and middle managers are most likely to think class-based divisions have grown
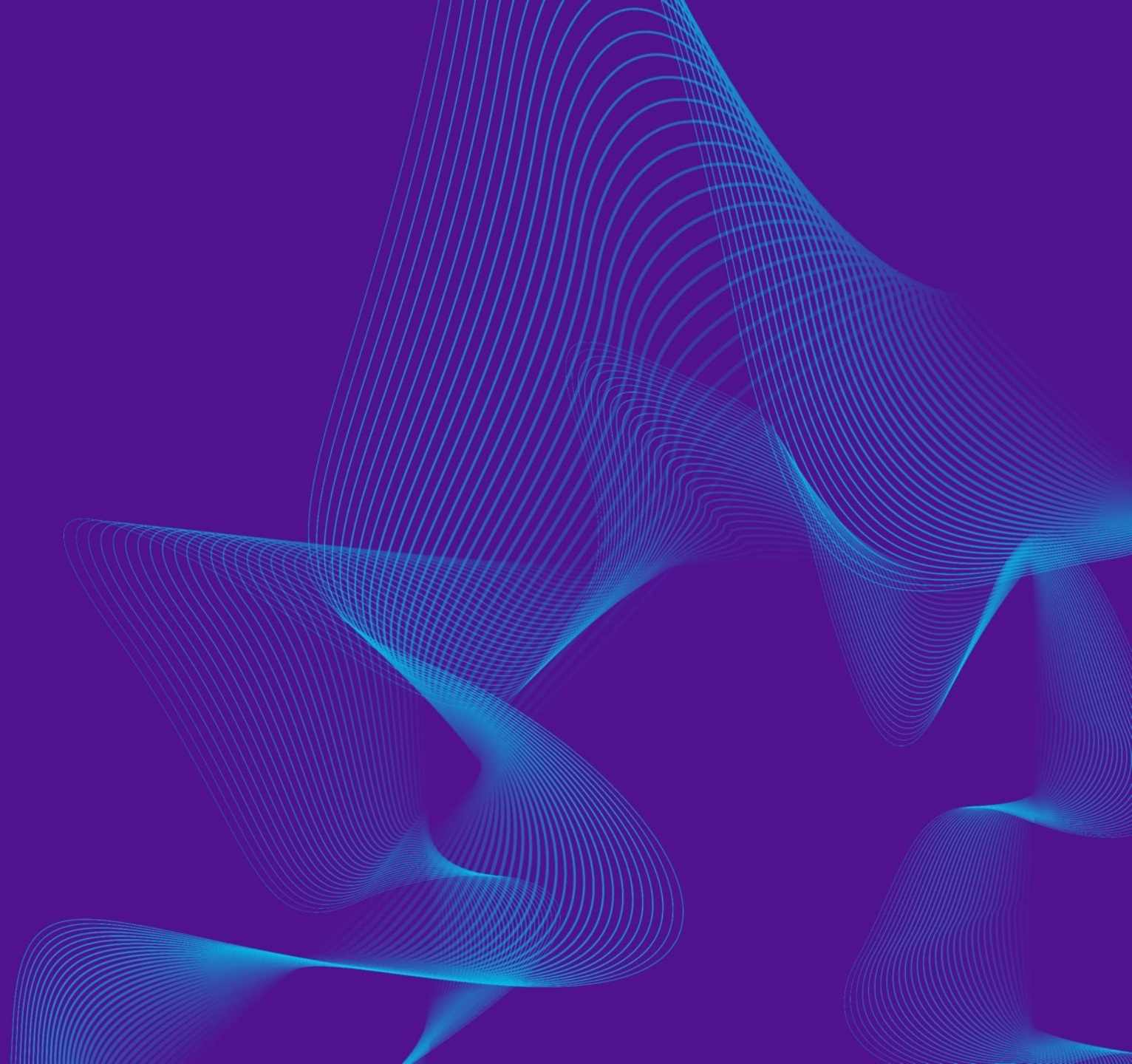
63% of middle or junior managers think the UK is more divided by class than it was 20 years ago – the highest of all the occupation types surveyed and higher than other types of professions, such as semi-routine manual and service workers (50%), which in the past might have been more expected to be focused 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?

	More divided	The same	Less divided
Overall	48%	24%	22%
Labour	58%	21%	14%
Conservative	38%	27%	33%
Middle or junior managers	63%	16%	17%
Technical and craft	56%	28%	10%
Clerical and intermediate	51%	24%	19%
Routine manual and service	51%	18%	26%
Semi-routine manual and service	50%	22%	21%
Modern professional	47%	23%	24%
Traditional professional	42%	29%	26%
Senior managers or administrators	41%	26%	31%

Technical note

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: survey

Ipsos MORI interviewed online a representative sample of 2,834 adults aged 16+ across the United Kingdom between 26th November and 2nd December 2020. 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.

This study was supported by Unbound Philanthropy

Subgroups

Variable	Survey (Nov-Dec 20)	Variable	Survey (Nov-Dec 20)
Gender		**Party support**	
Male	1,386	Conservative	806
Female	1,439	Labour	669
Age		**Brexit support**	
16-24	145	Leave	860
25-34	322	Remain	1750
35-54	973	**Income level**	
55+	1,394	Up to £25,999	612
Ethnicity		£26,000 to £51,999	934
White	2,644	£52,000 to £99,999	616
Ethnic minority	164	£100,000 and above	212
Country		**Occupation type**	
England	2,124	Modern professional	924
Scotland	443	Clerical and intermediate	397
Wales	109	Senior manager/admin.	415
Northern Ireland	158	Technical and craft	158
Region		Semiroutine manual/serv.	189
North East	107	Routine manual/service	103
North West	275	Middle/junior managers	223
Yorkshire & Humber	163	Traditional professional	343
East Midlands	205	**Education level**	
West Midlands	209	Degree level or above	1371
East of England	256	Below degree level	1199
South East	387		
South West	282		
London	240		

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