

Politics, democracy and the UK's role on the world stage

Public opinion then and now

About this study

This study compares changes and similarities in attitudes to a range of political issues between 2024 and various points in the past, in some cases dating as far back as the 1930s and 40s.

Question wordings and response options have been kept consistent between the two surveys to preserve trends, even though in some cases they do not reflect current best practice in polling methods (for example, not allowing “don’t know” responses).

Fieldwork

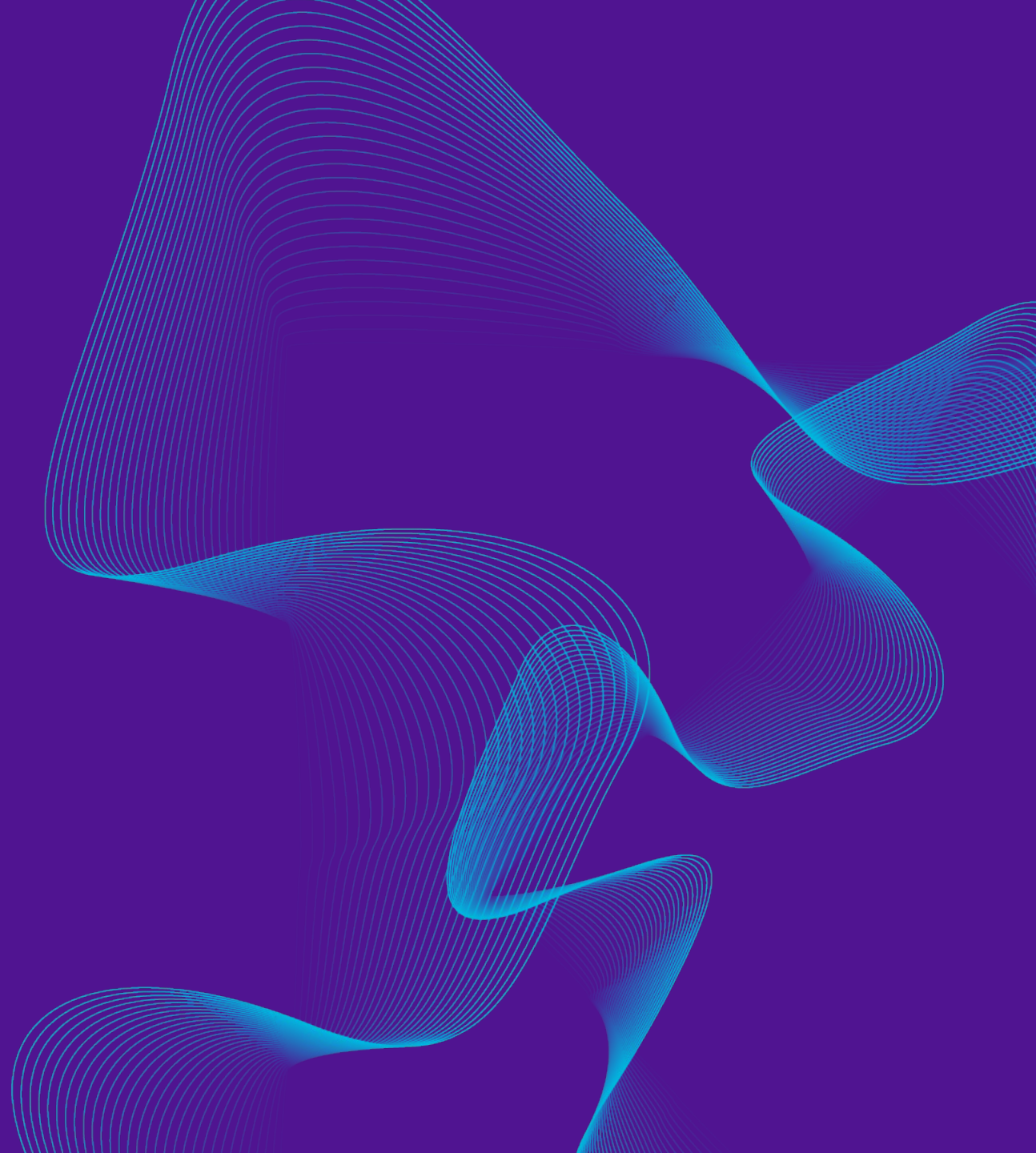
2024

Fieldwork was conducted via Focaldata’s in-house platform, with API integration to an online panel network. Data collection took place between 11 and 12 December 2024, with a total of 1,033 respondents from a nationally representative group of those aged 18+ in the UK completing the survey. Data was weighted by age, gender, region, ethnicity and education status.

Other years

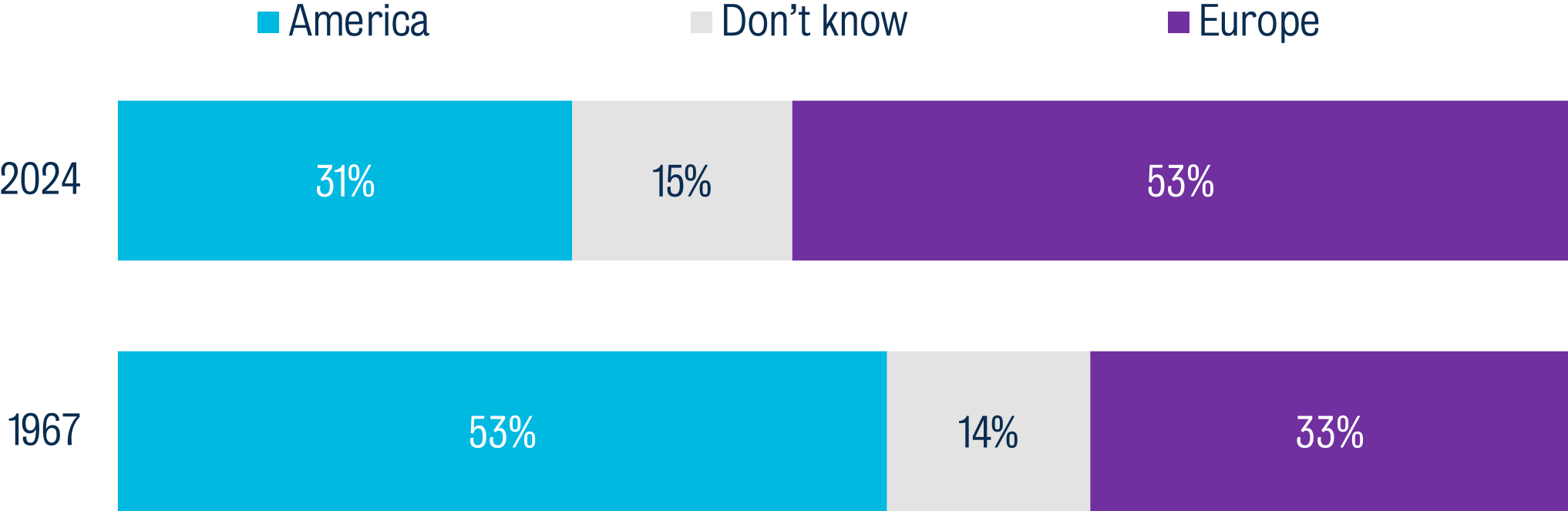
Data from other years was taken from one of two sources: an NOP survey of c2,000 UK adults in February 1967 and Gallup surveys included in *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain, 1937–1975*, with a sample size of c1,000 GB adults.

Leadership or neutrality? The UK's role on the world stage and its allies



People today are much more likely to say Britain should choose Europe, rather than America, as allies, if it ever had to make the choice – a reversal of public opinion back in 1967

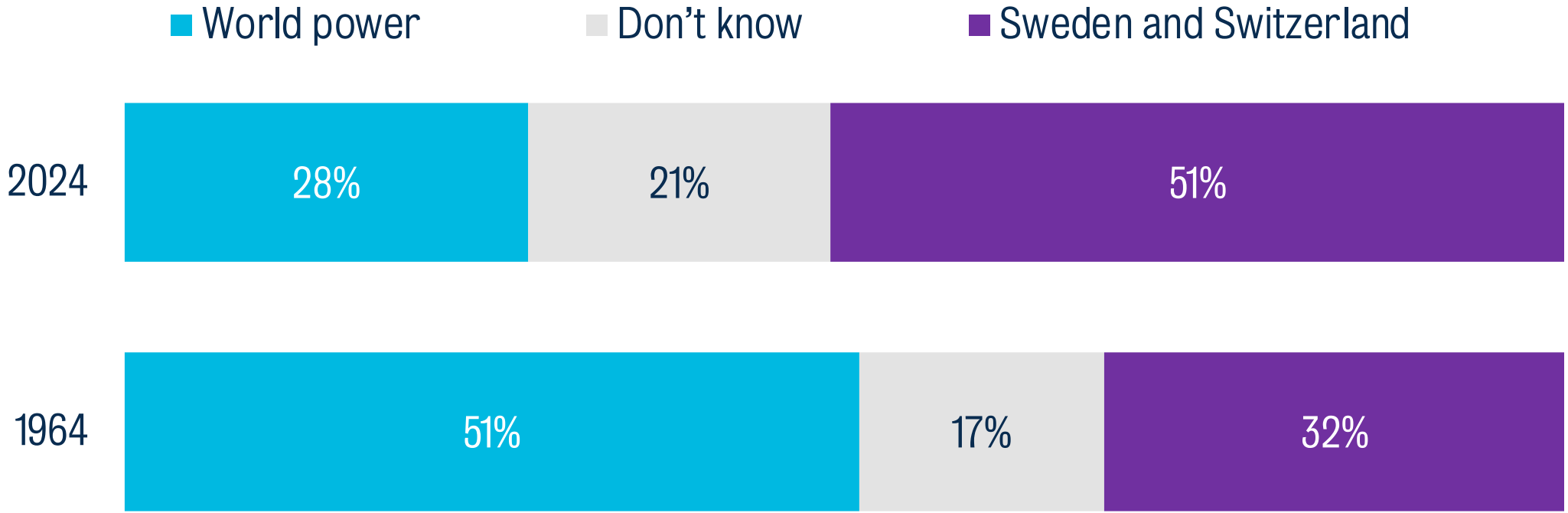
If Britain ever had to choose between Europe and America as allies, who do you think we should choose?



Half the public now say the UK should be more like Sweden and Switzerland – nearly double the share who feel it should try to be a leading world power instead.

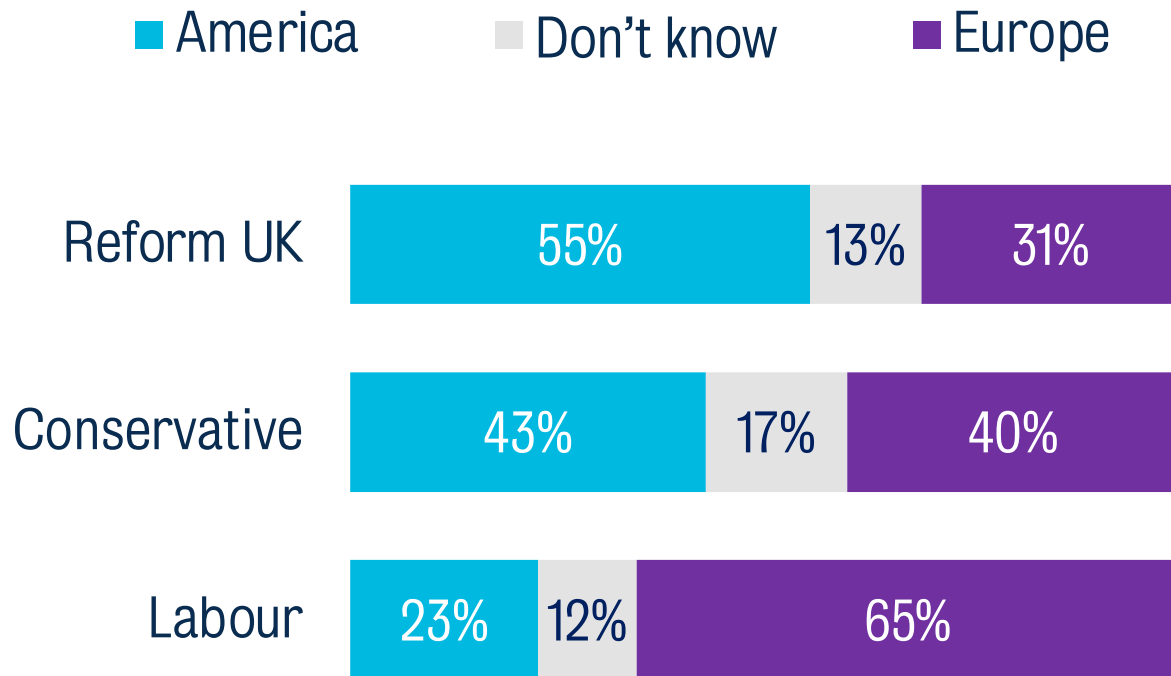
Again, this is a complete reversal from 1964, when people were far more likely to think we should attempt to be a major global player

Do you think it is important for this country to try to be a leading world power, or would you like to see us be more like Sweden and Switzerland?



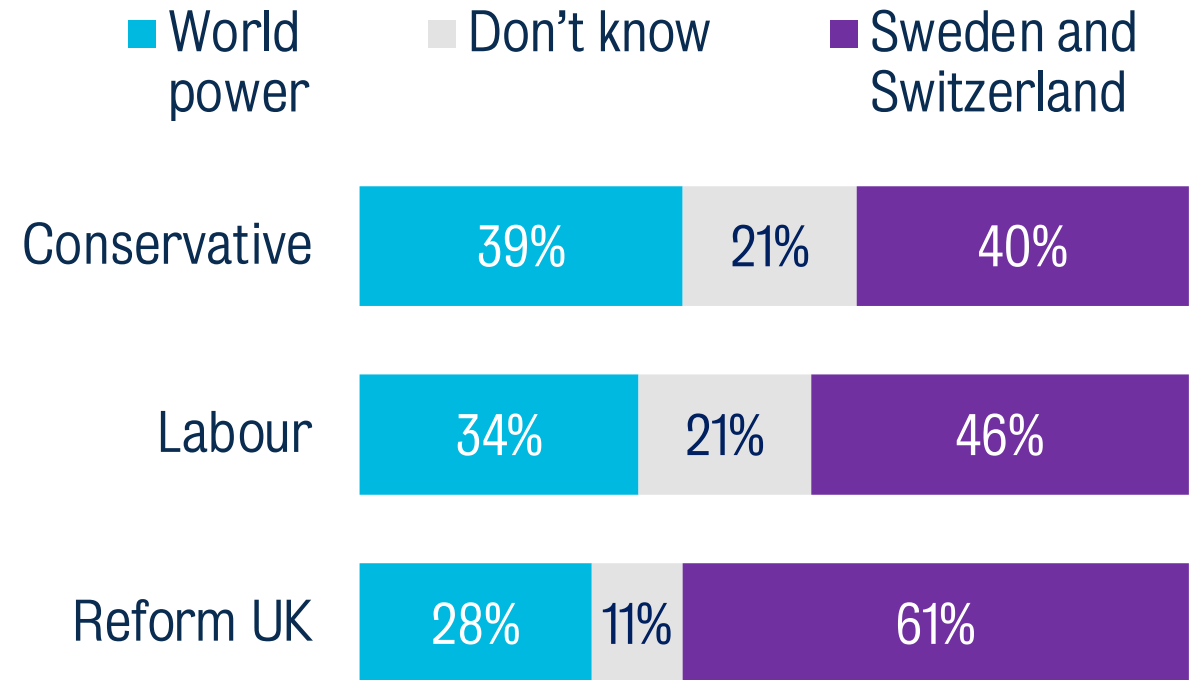
Today Reform UK voters stand out for their commitment to America over Europe...

If Britain ever had to choose between Europe and America as allies, who do you think we should choose?

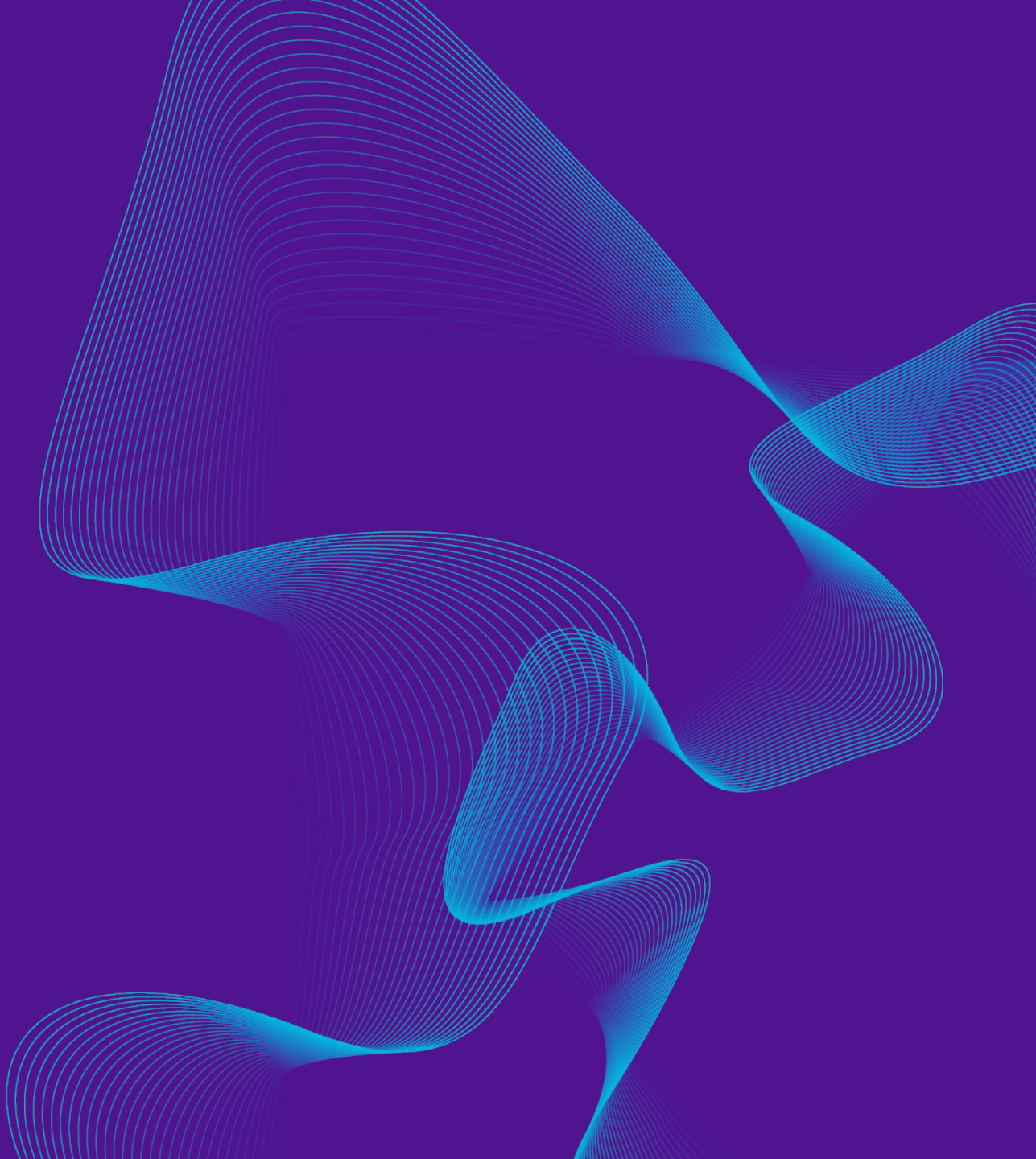


...as well as for their belief that Britain should follow Sweden and Switzerland in not attempting to be a world power

Do you think it is important for this country to try to be a leading world power, or would you like to see us be more like Sweden and Switzerland?

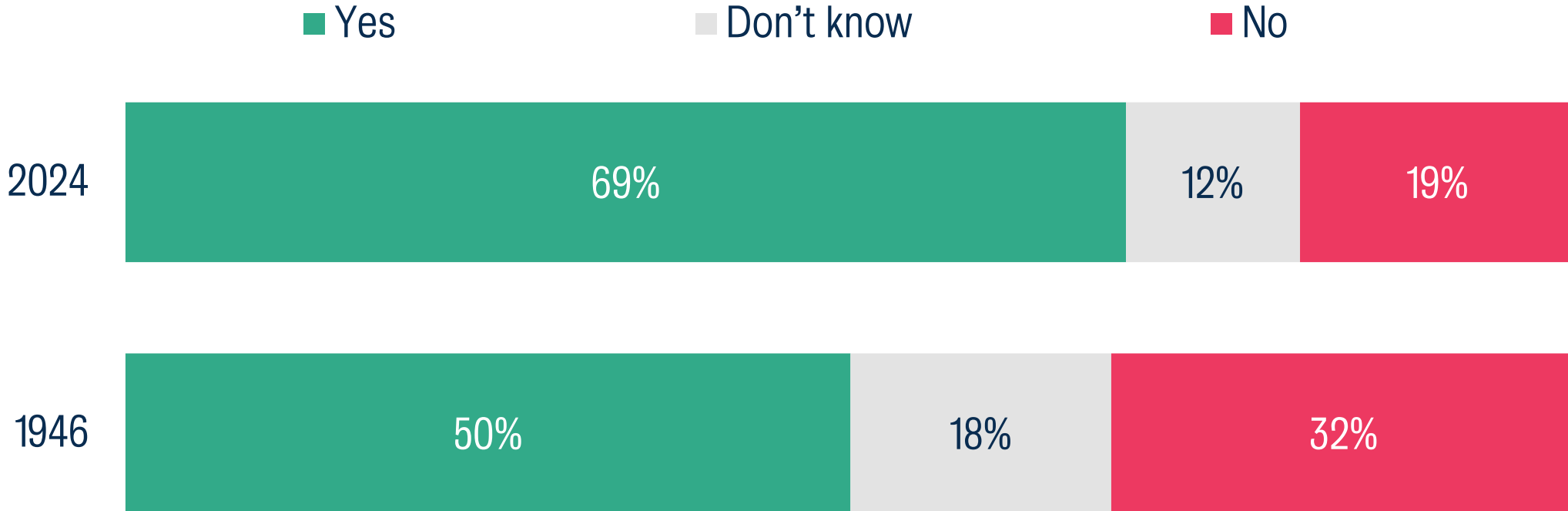


**The state of UK democracy
and MPs' pay**



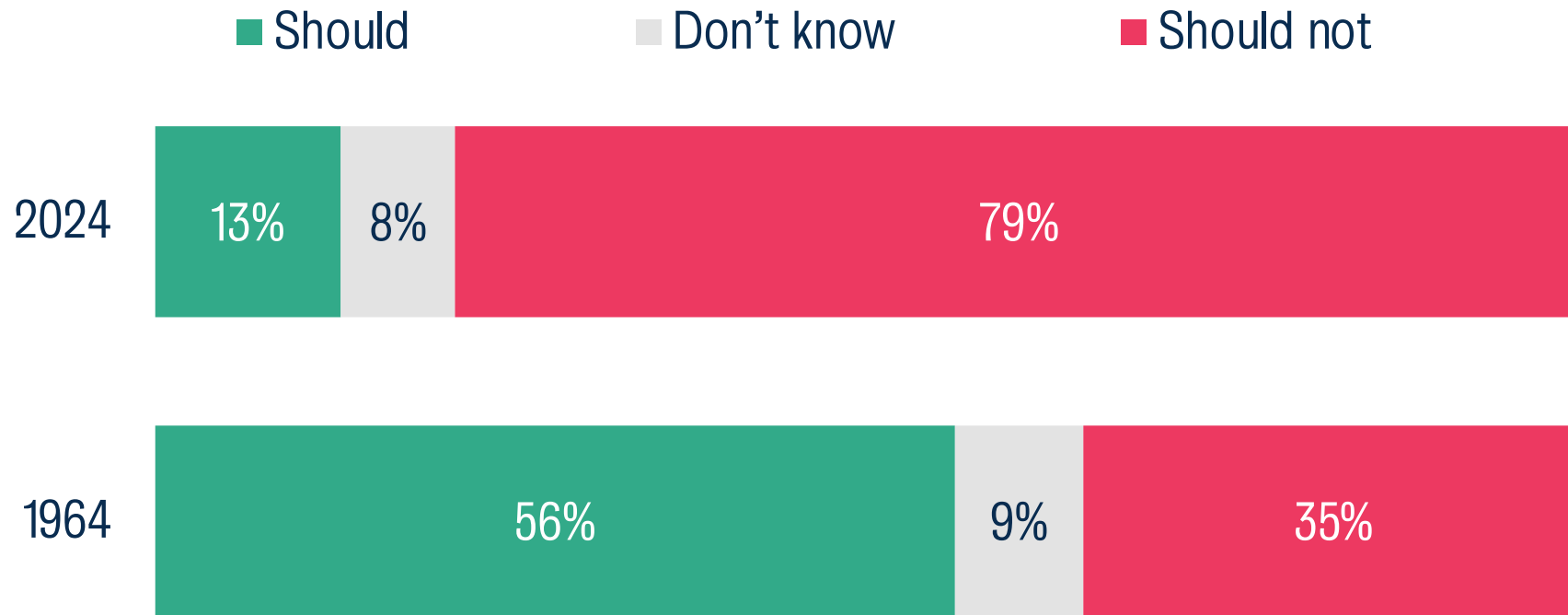
Seven in 10 people today say we have democracy in Britain – up from half in 1946

Would you say that we have democracy in Britain?



In 1964, over half the public said MPs' salaries should be increased. Now just 13% feel they deserve a pay rise

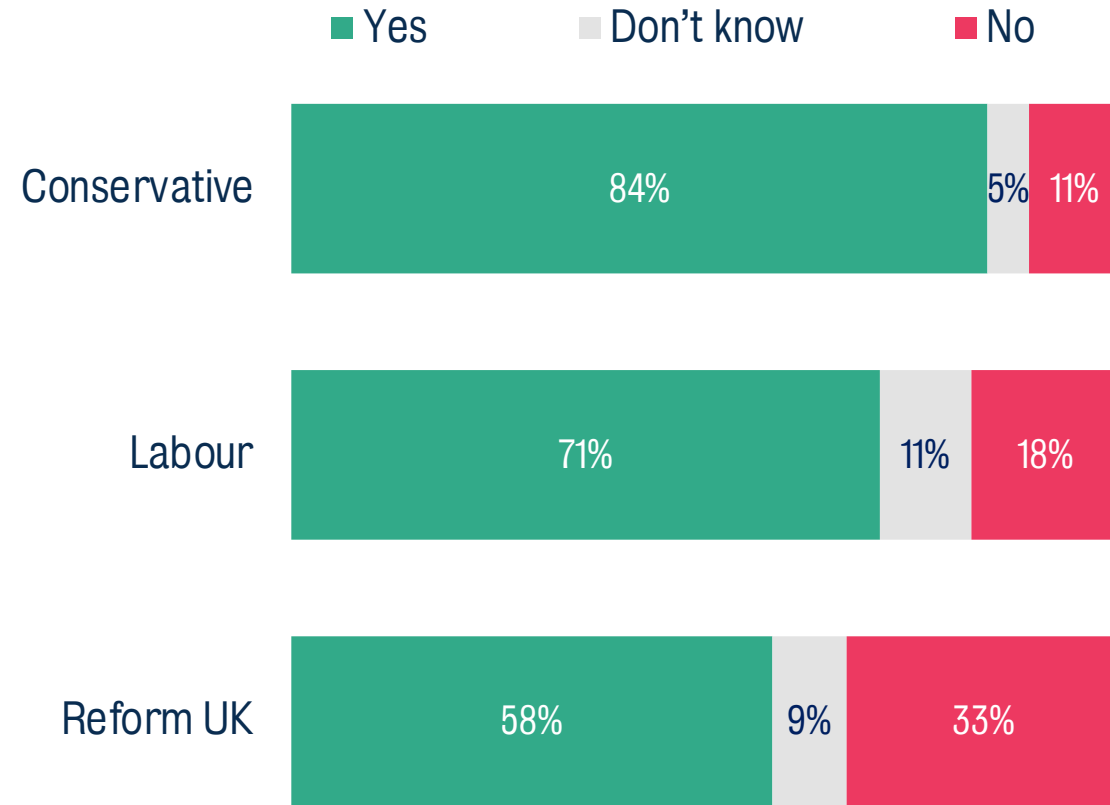
Do you think that MPs' salaries should or should not be increased?



In 1964, MPs' salary was £3,250 a year, equal to around £56,000 in today's money – far below the £91,346 basic annual salary that MPs earn now. Although in the 1960s it was widely thought that Parliament benefitted from the fact many MPs earned income from other sources, with it seen as necessary or even desirable that MPs represent business or other interests in their parliamentary work.

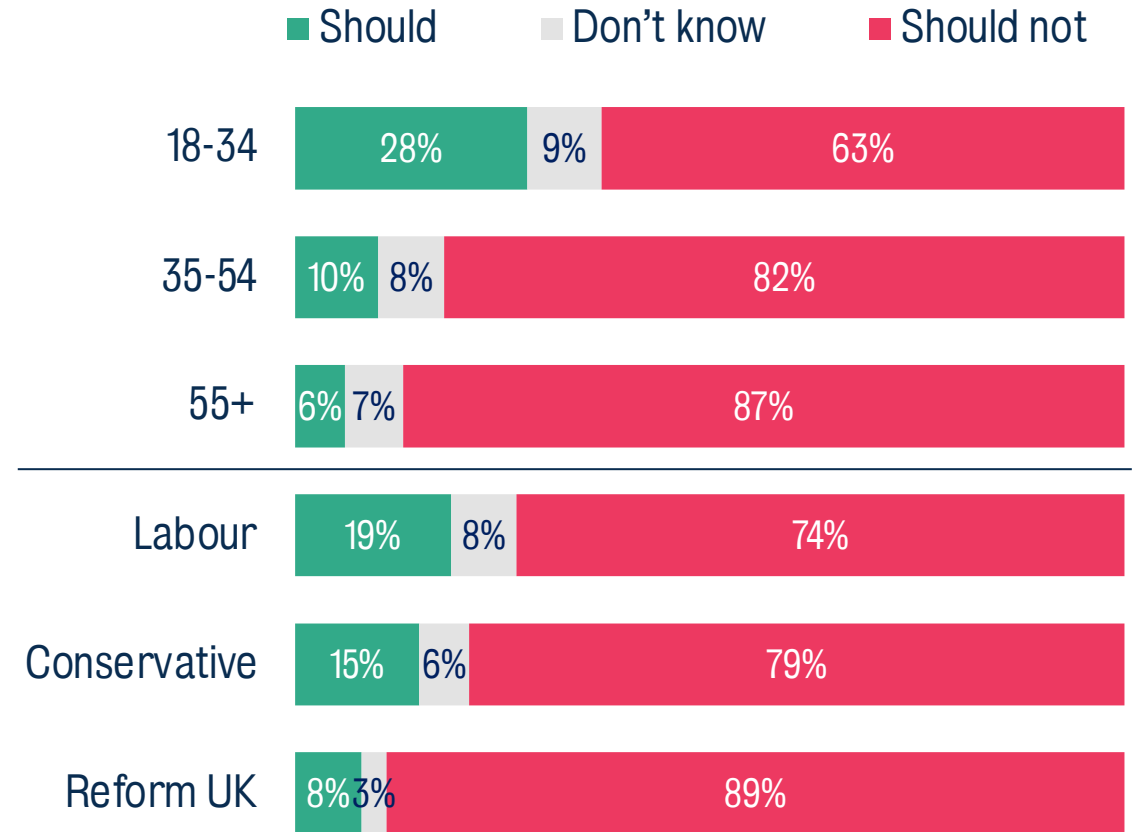
Reform UK voters are less likely to say we have democracy in Britain compared with voters for one of the two main parties

Would you say that we have democracy in Britain?

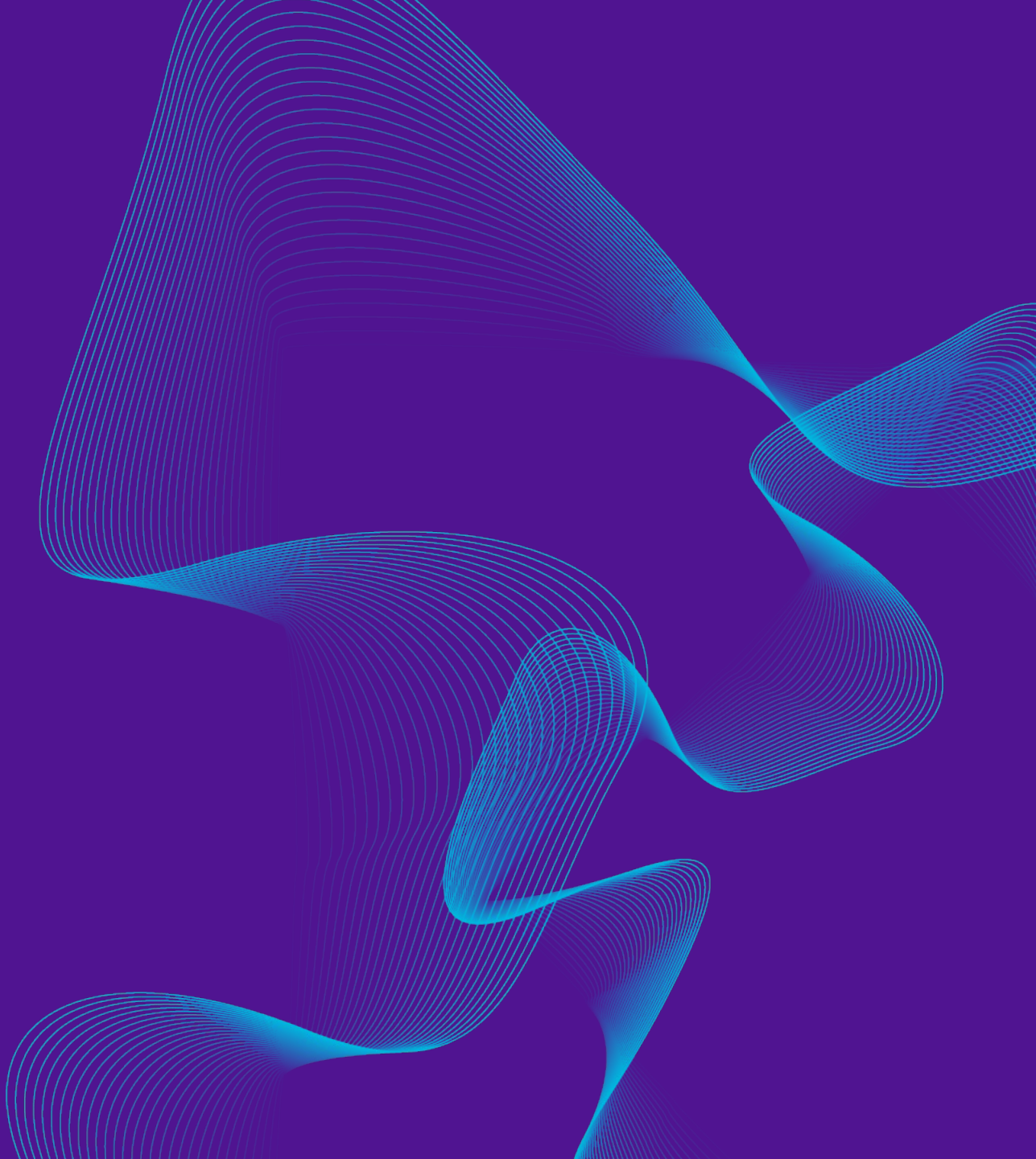


Older generations are much more opposed than younger people to increasing MPs' salaries, as are Reform supporters

Do you think that MPs' salaries should or should not be increased?

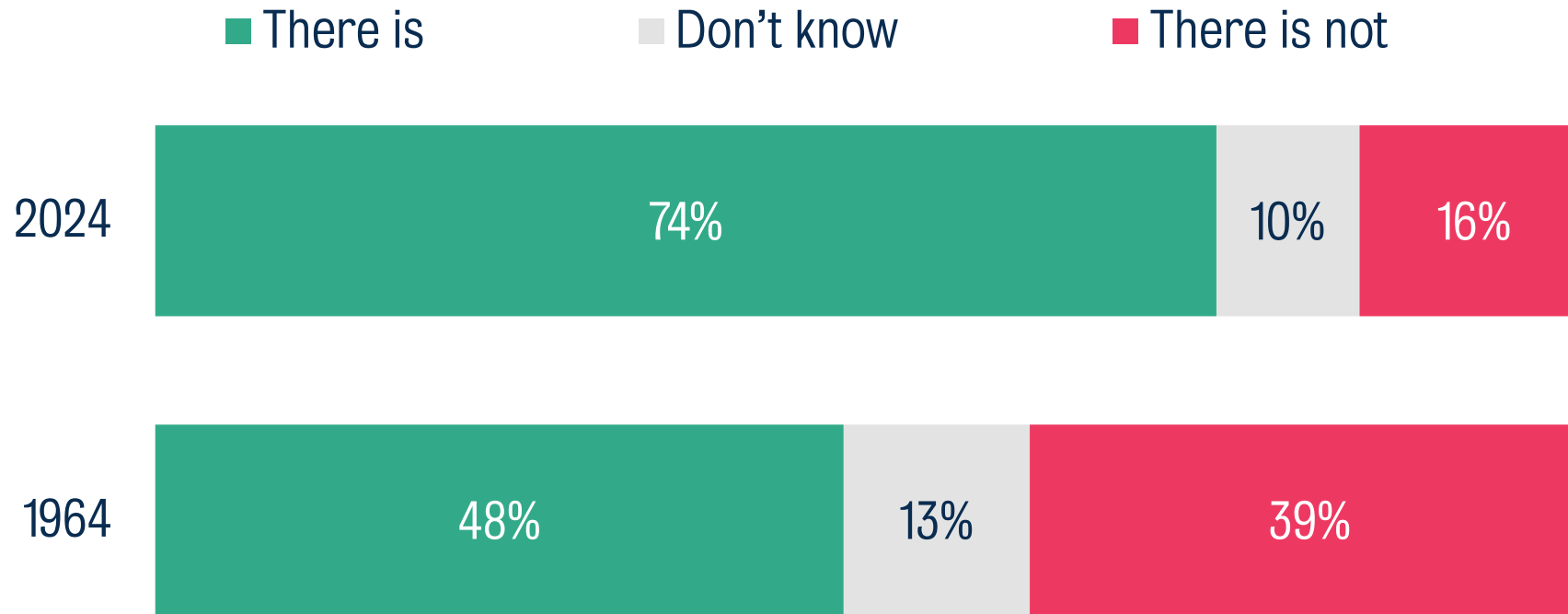


**Key political issues
then and now**



Three-quarters of the public today think there is a class struggle in the UK – a big increase from around half who held this view in 1964

There used to be a lot of talk in politics about class struggle. Do you think there is a class struggle in this country or not?

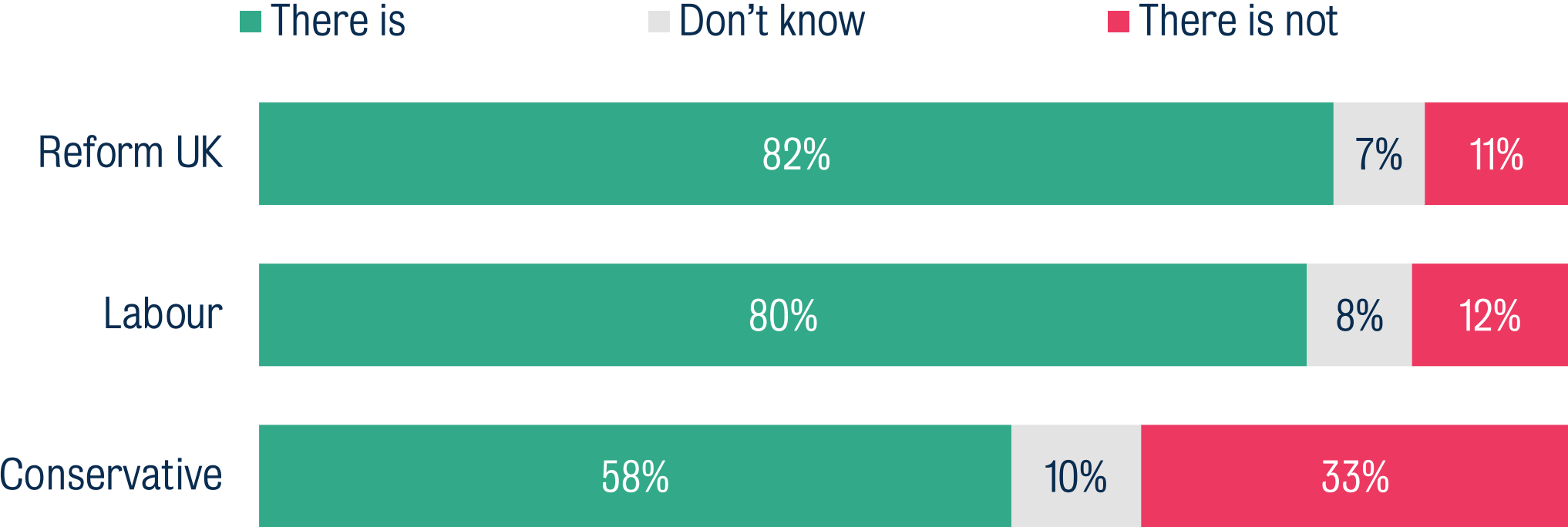


This shift may seem surprising given the 1960s are often thought of as a time of growing class and worker consciousness – but, for example, industrial action and strikes only began to surge towards the end of the decade: in 1969 there were 6,846,000 working days lost due to strikes, up from 2,277,000 in 1964.

By 1970, the number of working hours lost had grown to 10,980,000, and went on to rise even further throughout the 1970s.

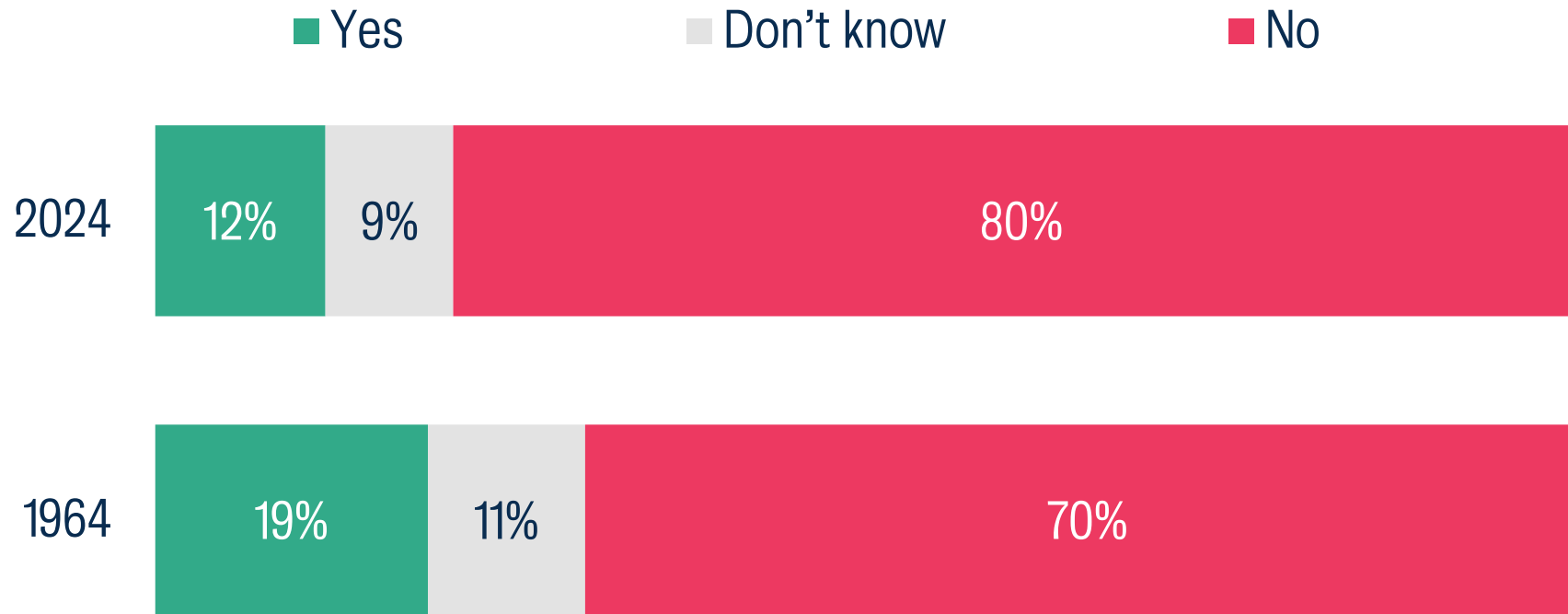
Labour and Reform voters have similar levels of belief in the idea that there is a class struggle in Britain today

There used to be a lot of talk in politics about class struggle. Do you think there is a class struggle in this country or not?



Over the last 60 years, people have become more convinced that poverty will never be done away with in the UK

Do you think poverty will ever be done away with in this country?



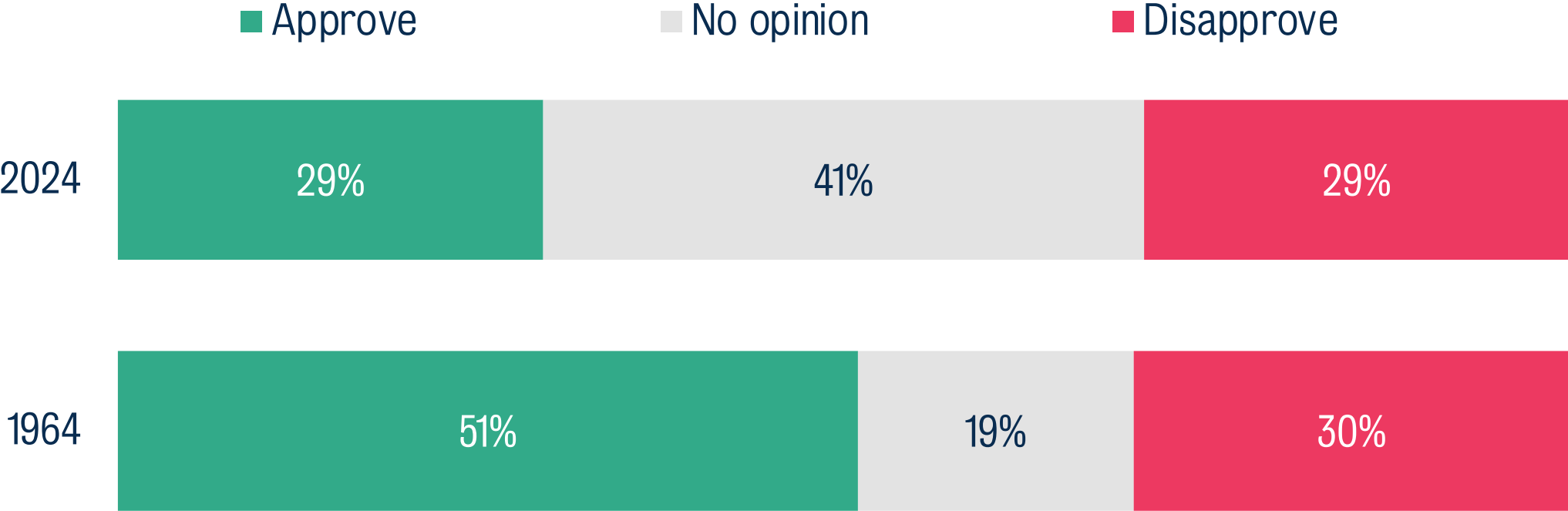
The share of the population living in relative poverty increased from around 14% in the 1960s to 22% in 2019.

Absolute poverty, on the other hand, declined substantially, from 85% in 1964 to 18% in 2022. But the big drops in even absolute poverty happened in the 1980s, and the trend has not changed substantially since the mid-2000s, when around one in five lived in absolute poverty.

The question doesn't define poverty – but in any case, it is probably not surprising that the public have become less convinced that it will ever be “done away with” given relative poverty has increased and absolute poverty has remained stuck at around a fifth of the population.

Three in 10 people approve of the nationalisation of land – down from half in 1964

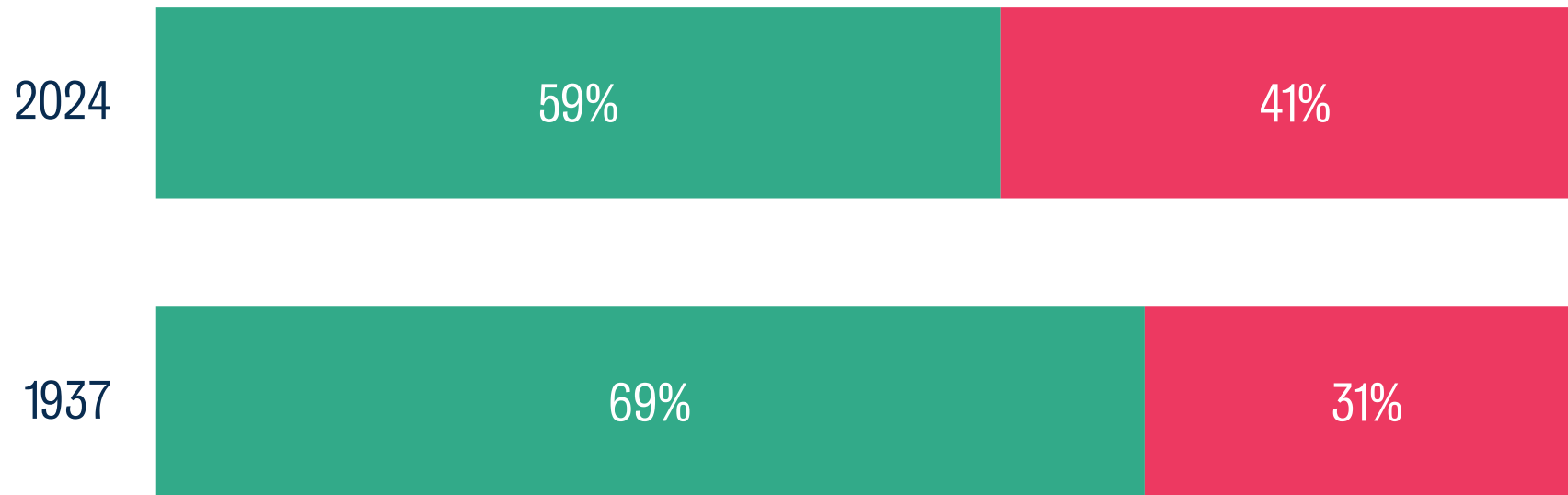
Do you approve or disapprove of the nationalisation of land?



People today are less likely than they were in 1937 to say doctors should have the power to end the life of someone who is terminally ill

Do you consider that doctors should be given power to end the life of a person incurably ill?

■ Yes ■ No



The issue of assisted dying would have been prominent in people's minds back in 1937: the year before, the Voluntary Euthanasia (Legislation) Bill was put before Parliament but ultimately defeated in the House of Lords, and the Voluntary Euthanasia Society was founded in England.

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