Trust in scientists

The role of values and moral and political identities in the UK

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Executive summary

Executive summary

This study, led by the Policy Institute at King's College London and Sense about Science, and funded by Wellcome, is based on a **nationally representative survey of 4,262 UK adults aged 18+**, conducted with YouGov, as well as **regression modelling** to identify the factors most associated with trust in scientists, and a novel **segmentation analysis** to break the public into groups with distinct positions on trust in scientists.

As seen in other studies, trust in scientists in general is high, with 63% giving a score of seven or above on an 11-point scale of 0-10. Only 5% give a score of 0-3. This does, however, vary significantly by area of specialism and institutional connection, where scientists working in private companies (34% high trust), in government (42%) and on climate (54%) have notably lower levels of trust among the public.

Our key focus was to understand what factors are most associated with trust in different scientists, and how the public segment in the level and nature of their trust. From that analysis, seven main points stand out.

1. Trust in scientists is highly related to the perception of shared values and identity

- One of the strongest drivers of trust is whether people feel scientists are **'on the side of people like them'**. This outweighs other drivers of perceptions of trustworthiness, such as expertise, and it varies very significantly across the population: only 7% of people who have low trust in scientists in general think scientists are on their side, and only 22% of those who score in the middle – compared with 68% of those with high trust.
- Part of this is a suspicion among those with lower levels of trust that scientists have different values systems to themselves:
    - Four in 10 (40%) of those with low trust and a quarter (25%) of those with middling trust feel **scientists care more about social and political causes** than about scientific progress, compared with just one in 10 (10%) of those with high trust.
    - A third (34%) of those with high trust agree **scientists have the same values as them**, but just 8% of middling-trusters and 2% of low-trusters feel the same.
    - Low-trusters (38%) are nearly five times as likely as high-trusters (8%) to say **'scientists are too woke'**, while middling-trusters (23%) are around three times as likely to agree with this view.
- This dynamic plays out most along party political lines, where **Reform UK supporters are consistently the least positive about scientists**: just 32% feel scientists are 'on the side of people like them', versus 71% of Green supporters – a 39-point gap, reflecting real polarisation across the public. Labour (69%) and Lib Dem (65%) supporters are closer to Greens on this question, while Conservatives (50%) are nearer to Reform, though still much more likely to feel scientists are on their side.
- This same identity-driven scepticism means Reform supporters are by far most likely to say that **scientists are 'in cahoots'** with politicians and businesses (50% vs 27% for public as a whole), and that society should **rely more on common sense than scientific studies** (48% vs 24%). On both questions, supporters of other parties are much closer to the public overall.

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2. But other drivers of trustworthiness still really matter

- There are other factors strongly related to trust, some of which are more in scientists' control than others. **Perceptions of openness and transparency are vital** across different types of scientists: for example, 73% of those with high trust in scientists in general say they are open and transparent, compared with just 28% of those in the middle and 10% of those with low trust.

- Other factors are less in scientists' control. The high-trust group are quite distinct from the others in their **direct connection to science, through working in science or medicine themselves, or personally knowing someone who does**: 38% say they do, but only 23% of the middle group and 16% of the low-trusters say the same. This personal connection to science is linked to greater trust **regardless of occupational and educational levels**. For example, among those with no or low qualifications (GCSE level or below), 74% who work as or know a scientist have high trust in scientists, compared with only 52% who don't.

- There is a **strong relationship between trust in a wide range of national institutions and trust in scientists**, which reflects how a general loss of trust can impact across domains: only 4% of those with low trust in scientists say they trust the courts and legal system, compared with 40% of those with high trust in scientists.

- **Perceived past 'betrayals' by scientific institutions also strongly undermine trust levels:** over half of those with low trust (55%) say they have often felt betrayed by scientific institutions they are supposed to trust, compared with just 10% of high-trusters.

- **Conspiracy beliefs are also highly associated with trust*** in particular branches of science, with low-trusters more likely to believe conspiracy theories about vaccines, climate change and the effects of 5G phone towers. But worryingly, it is not just this group who are vulnerable to such beliefs: for example, while 83% of those with low trust in vaccine scientists say the harmful effects of vaccines are being deliberately hidden from us, half (51%) of the middle-trust group do too – compared with only 15% of high-trusters.

3. Only a small minority actively distrust scientists – but some distrusting beliefs are widespread

- **Outright suspicion and cynicism is a minority position overall** – no group of scientists is actively distrusted by more than three in 10 of the public, and only 3% of the public say they're strongly suspicious of scientists in general, with a further 16% slightly suspicious.

- But on certain issues, distrust is widespread. Nearly half (46%) the public believe **scientists won't publish results their funders don't like**, compared with only 16% who disagree. This view is most prevalent among low- (70%) and middling-trusters (61%), but is also held by a large minority (38%) of high-trusters.

- A key difference between low-trusters and middle-trusters is the latter group's greater openness to adjusting their views: only 13% of middling-trusters say nothing would increase their level of trust in scientists, versus 35% of low-trusters.

*Our measure of 'conspiracy belief' is defined by belief in three specific conspiracy theories and it is possible that the regression results would have been different had other conspiracies been asked about.

Executive summary

4. Trust is most polarised for climate scientists

- Trust among the public as a whole **falls to around half (54%) for climate scientists**, well below scientists in general (63%) – and they draw the most active suspicion: 30% say they're suspicious or cynical about climate scientists, including 12% – one in eight of the public overall – who *strongly* feel this way.
- Climate scientists also show the **widest gap between those with high and middling trust on whether they're 'on the side of the public'**: 74% of high-trusters believe this, but only 21% of middling-trusters. This 53-point gap underscores that the challenge facing climate scientists is wider than niche science cynics.
- Between seven and eight in 10 Green (84%) Labour (76%) and Lib Dem (72%) supporters have high trust in climate scientists, but this falls to less than half of Conservatives (46%) and just two in 10 Reform UK supporters (19%). **This gap in trust between Reform and Green supporters is the largest for any type of scientists asked about in the study.**

5. Trust matters to support for science and personal actions

- Trust levels are also highly related to support for science and whether the public act on scientific advice. For example, of the 5% of the population who are low-trusters, a third (34%) **want public science funding cut** – compared with just 2% of high-trusters and 12% of those in the middle who say the same.
- **Agreement that governments should rely on scientific guidance when making decisions also rises steeply with trust** in scientists, with a big gap in views between those with high and middling trust (71% vs 30%).
- There are also **huge gaps on listening to and believing advice from scientists** between the three groups, which feeds through into actions:
    - 63% of high-trusters say they believe information from scientists in general without researching it further, compared with just 18% of those in the middle and 7% of low-trusters.
    - At the other end of the spectrum, 42% of low-trusters say they ignore anything scientists in general have to say, 56% ignore vaccine scientists and 69% ignore climate scientists.
    - 88% of high-trusters in vaccine scientists say they would always get a vaccine that was recommended to them by the NHS or a medical professional, compared with 55% of those in the middle and 16% of low-trusters.
    - 69% of high-trusters in climate scientists say scientific evidence of climate change influences their behaviour, compared with just 26% of those in the middle and 6% of low-trusters.
- And this **polarisation is reflected in political identities**: 81% of Green supporters say they are always willing to follow scientific guidance when it comes to how they live their life, compared with 32% of Reform UK supporters.

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6. The UK population ranges from 'Science Advocates' through to 'Science Critics'

- The study has developed a major new segmentation of the UK public into distinct groups, based on their level and nature of trust in scientists and their underlying values and mindsets. This reveals not only a wide range of trust levels, but also that even groups with similar levels of trust can have very different reasons for these responses – which matters for anyone trying to build trust rather than just measure it.

- There are five distinct groups within the UK population:

    - **Science Advocates** (17% of the population) – 94% have high trust in scientists in general
    - **Contented Trusters** (19%) – 79% have high trust
    - **Betrayed Trusters** (18%) – 78% high trust
    - **Disengaged Trusters** (25%) – 72% high trust
    - **Science Critics** (21%) – 7% high trust

- **Contented Trusters** have high levels of trust in institutions in general and relatively high contentment with their lives. In stark contrast, **Betrayed Trusters** trust science *despite* a strong sense of being let down by other institutions – their trust in science is the exception. **Disengaged Trusters** are generally not actively suspicious of science, but just pay much less attention, not just to science but in general.

- The entirely different mindsets of the groups are clear:

    - Nearly nine in 10 (86%) Science Advocates say they **challenge people when they say something scientifically inaccurate**, compared with just 16% of Disengaged Trusters, who are lowest on this.

    - Seven in 10 or more of all groups say they'd **always get an NHS-recommended vaccine** – except Science Critics, only 36% of whom say they would do this.

- Each group presents distinct challenges to scientists and research institutions who want to increase and demonstrate their trustworthiness – there is no one-size-fits-all model. There are big differences even among the middle segments: 68% of Betrayed Trusters think **scientists won't publish results their funders don't like**, but just 29% of Disengaged Trusters feel the same. This compares with even fewer Advocates (10%).

- As well as convincing on transparency and openness, there is a broad spectrum of views across segments on the **crucial sense of scientists 'being on my side'**: 88% of Advocates believe this, compared with 63% of Contented Trusters, 58% of Betrayed Trusters, fewer than half of Disengaged Trusters (41%), and only 13% of Critics.

Executive summary

7. What different groups say would actually build trust

- The top two actions the public as a whole believe would increase trust is scientists **actively correcting misinformation** (45%) and **explaining how their work improves ordinary people's lives** (44%).

- Actions the sector often reaches for – such as **scientists advising policymakers**, **involving the public in setting research priorities**, or **engaging with the local community** – rank near the bottom. For example, just 9% of middling-trusters and 7% of low-trusters say scientists giving policymakers advice on research findings would help increase their trust, with this measure faring worst across the two groups overall.

- The encouraging point is that **very few say that *nothing* will increase their levels of trust**: even among the Science Critics, only 17% actively say there is nothing scientists can do.

Introduction: the context and study design

Trust in scientists: the role of values and moral and political identities

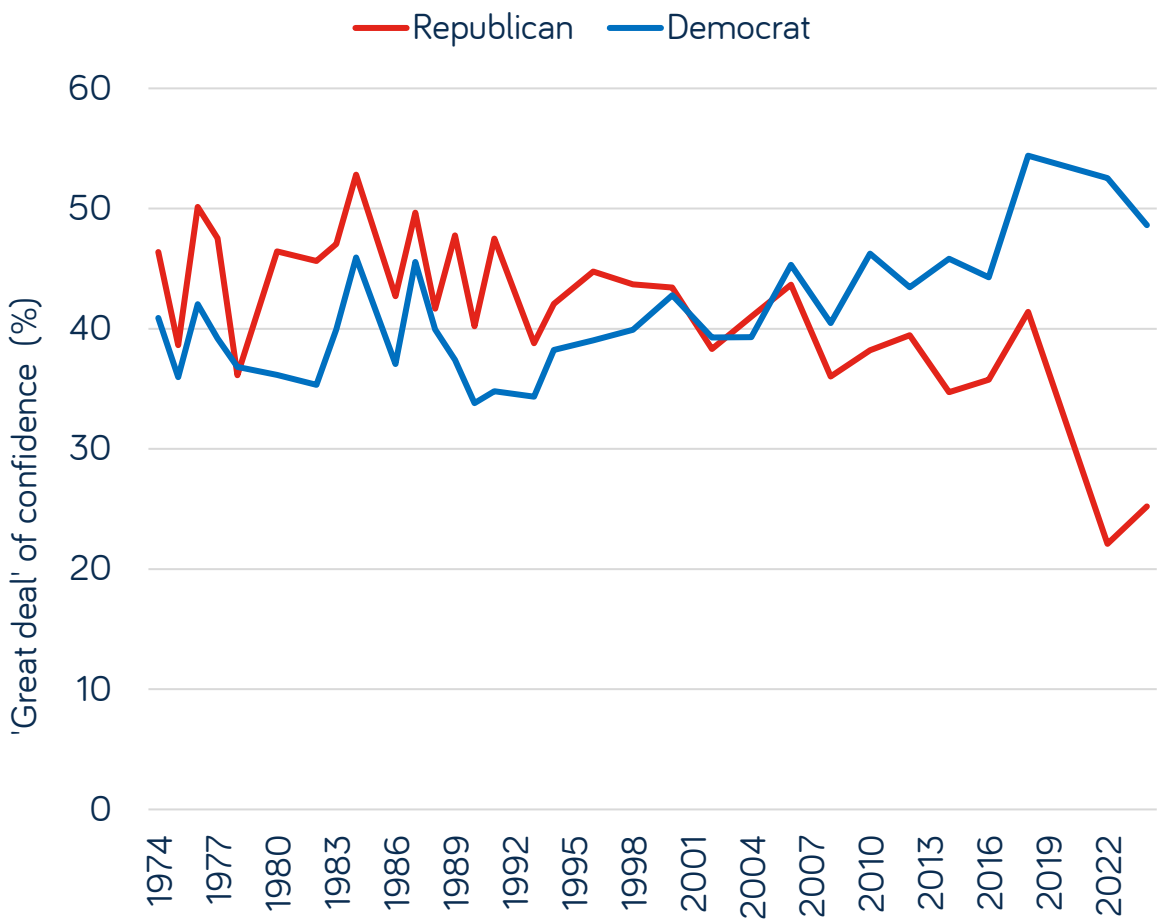
Our core focus for the study

Understanding and enhancing trust in scientists has emerged as a key priority, as seen in the growing number of studies that have attempted to identify the key drivers of trust and actions to support perceptions of trustworthiness.

A relatively underexplored area of increasing importance is the extent to which trust in scientists in the UK is driven by underlying values, moral perspectives and political identities. The combination of increasingly polarised societies and identity-driven politics alongside elements of science being pulled into 'culture war' debates presents a clear risk: when or if trust in science becomes part of a deeply held political identity, engaging those with sceptical views becomes much more difficult.

The core focus for our study is understanding the importance of underlying values, morals and political identities in driving trust in scientists in the UK, whether and how this varies for different types of scientists, how this varies across segments of the public and the implications for engaging with the public and demonstrating trustworthiness.

Trends in trust in the 'scientific community' in the US



Source: General Social Survey, 1974-2024.

The Policy Institute's own detailed studies of 'culture wars'[1] emphasise how much of an outlier case the US is, in its political context and structures – *but* also that nascent signs of similar political identity divisions are emerging in the UK.

This makes the recent striking divergence of trust in 'the scientific community' between Republican and Democratic supporters in the US, captured by the long-term General Social Survey, particularly worth noting.

Real-world actions have come alongside this deep polarisation: 7,800 grants have been terminated or frozen; 25,000 scientists & personnel cut from research agencies; proposed budget cuts of 35%, amounting to $32bn.[2]

1. Policy Institute at King's College London. (2025). *Culture wars in the UK.* King's College London.
2. Kozlov, M., Tollefson, J., & Garisto, D. (2026). US science after a year of Trump. *Nature.*

Building on what's known to develop a comprehensive study

Overall study design

In order to understand the relative importance of underlying values and moral and political identities, it is vital to measure a comprehensive set of possible drivers of trust in scientists.

The first stage of the study was, therefore, a Rapid Evidence Assessment of existing studies that have attempted to understand drivers of trust, empirically and theoretically. This built on the review conducted by RAND Europe for Wellcome on 'Public Trust in Science and Scientific Trustworthiness',[3] with a particular added focus on studies that have explored science-related populism, and other moral and ideological factors, such as social dominance and moral injury. An outline of key sources is included in the technical appendix.

In addition, further helpful empirical studies have been conducted and released during our study, including by More in Common for Wellcome[4], and the most recent round of the Public Attitudes to Science (PAS) survey[5], the conclusions of which have informed our analysis and interpretation.

This context and our aims resulted in the need for a large representative survey of **4,262 UK adults aged 18+, conducted though YouGov's online access panel, with a long questionnaire of c25 minutes**.

This questionnaire length allowed us to comprehensively measure the potential drivers of trust in scientists in a structured way, and the large sample allowed us to conduct robust statistical analyses, particularly **regression modelling** to identify the factors most associated with trust and **segmentation analysis** to break the public into groups with distinct positions on trust in scientists.

3. RAND Europe, & Wellcome. (2026). *Public trust in science and scientific trustworthiness.* Wellcome.
4. More in Common, & Wellcome. (2026). *Britain talks trust in science.* Wellcome.
5. Ipsos, British Science Association, & UK Research and Innovation. (2025). *Public attitudes to science 2025.*

The survey structure and analytical approach

The questionnaire for the study was structured into four sections:

A. overall measures of trust in scientists (our dependent variables);
B. measures of possible drivers of trust, drawn from the evidence assessment of existing work (our independent variables);
C. outcome variables including support for science, willingness to act on scientific advice;
D. and support for actions to increase trust.

In section A on overall trust, we measured trust levels in 8 types of scientist (in subject focus and institutional context), and in elements of section B, we followed up with detailed questions on 3 of these groups: scientists in general; vaccine scientists; and climate scientists. The aim was to understand whether the drivers of trust differed for different types of scientist.

Our analytical approach had three elements (more details in the technical appendix):

1. Descriptive analysis, focused on breaking down findings on each independent, outcome and action variable by high-middle-low levels of stated trust;
2. Regression modelling, to identify the factors that are most associated with trust, which also helped inform how we've ordered the findings in this report;
3. Segmentation analysis to identify distinct groups with different views on trust in scientists and their characteristics.

Questionnaire structure

The sections below outline the specific measures included in the questionnaire, in questionnaire order.

A. Dependent variable – Trust in 8 groups of scientist

- 0-10 trust scale, and follow-ups probing (dis)trust

B. Independent variables

1. Signals/cues/drivers – ABIT Model (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity, Transparency)
   - Novel focus on 'in-group' benevolence
2. Science-related populism
3. Political, ideological & cultural identities
4. Wider institutional trust
5. Civic / societal engagement and connection to science
7. Wellbeing and psychological measures
8. Information sources and levels of engagement
   a) General information and news
   b) Science information
   c) Levels of interest and perceived knowledge
9. Conspiracy beliefs
10. Socio-demographics

C. Outcome variables

1. Support for science
2. Willingness to accept and act on science
3. General values/benefits of science

D. Actions to increase trust

This report

This report has five sections:

1. Overall levels of trust. The overall findings on levels of trust, plus a deeper look at active 'distrust', a new finding from this study.

2. What factors are most associated with trust in scientists? The main focus for the report, which starts by outlining the results from the regression analysis, which provides a framework for understanding the relative importance of each factor, and then works through each of our independent variables in sub-sections, to provide a clear picture of the scale of differences.

3. General support for science. The outcome variables of support and willingness to act on advice, broken down by trust levels.

4. What would increase trust? Support for different types of action to increase trust, broken down by trust levels.

5. The five groups of science trusters that make up the UK. Pen portraits of the five segments from our analysis, and how they vary on key questions.

1. Overall levels of trust

1. Overall levels of trust

As seen in other studies, trust in scientists in general is high, with 63% giving a score of seven or above on an 11-point scale of 0-10. Only 5% give a score of 0-3.

This does, however, vary significantly by area of specialism and institutional connection, where scientists working in private companies and government and on climate have notably lower levels of trust among the public.

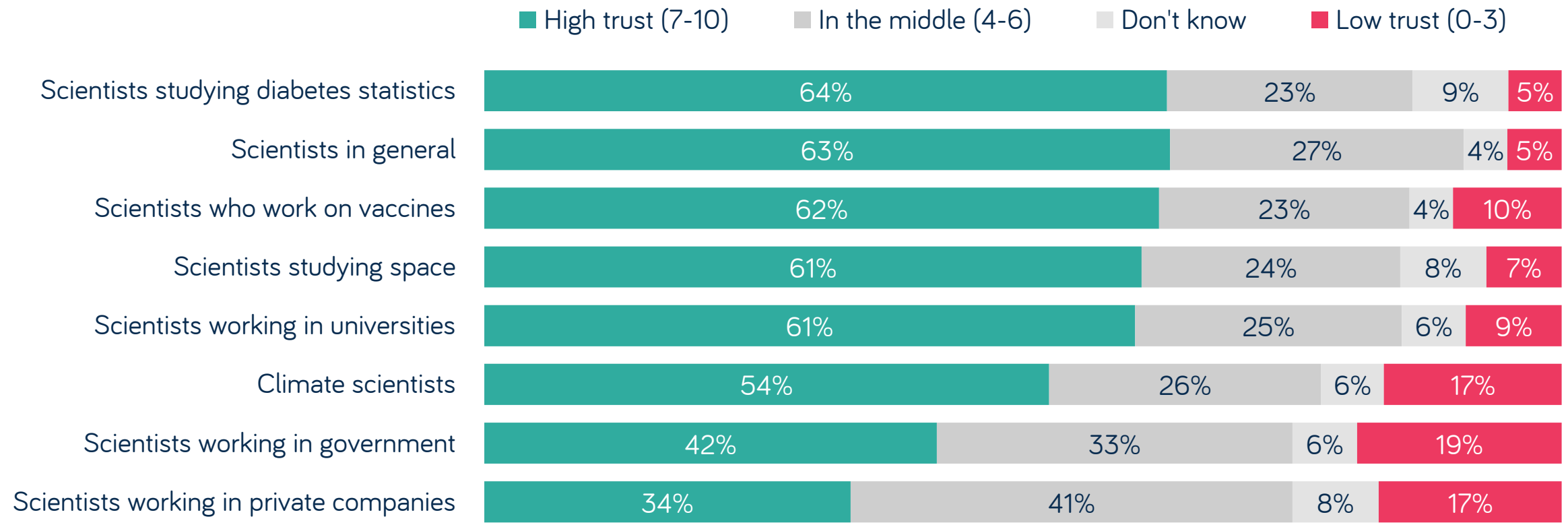
When asked directly why scientists tend to be more trusted than other professions, the top answers from respondents themselves focus on the motivations of scientists (to get to the truth), their integrity (in being more objective with fewer conflicts of interest) and their expertise. People are less likely to pick out their transparency or benevolence (in doing what is right), which contrasts with findings in the more detailed analysis, where perceptions of transparency and benevolence are highly related to trust levels.

There is growing interest in, but little empirical work on, whether active 'distrust' is distinct from low levels of trust, which we've explored by asking all those who selected 0-6 on the trust scale whether they were suspicious or cynical about scientists' statements, actions or intentions.

Across the population as a whole, only 3% of the public say they are strongly suspicious or cynical about scientists in general, but this increases to 12%, one in eight of the population, for climate scientists.

Nearly two-thirds of the public trust scientists in general. Trust levels are similar for other specific types of scientist, but fall to around half for climate scientists – while only a minority trust scientists who work in government and private companies

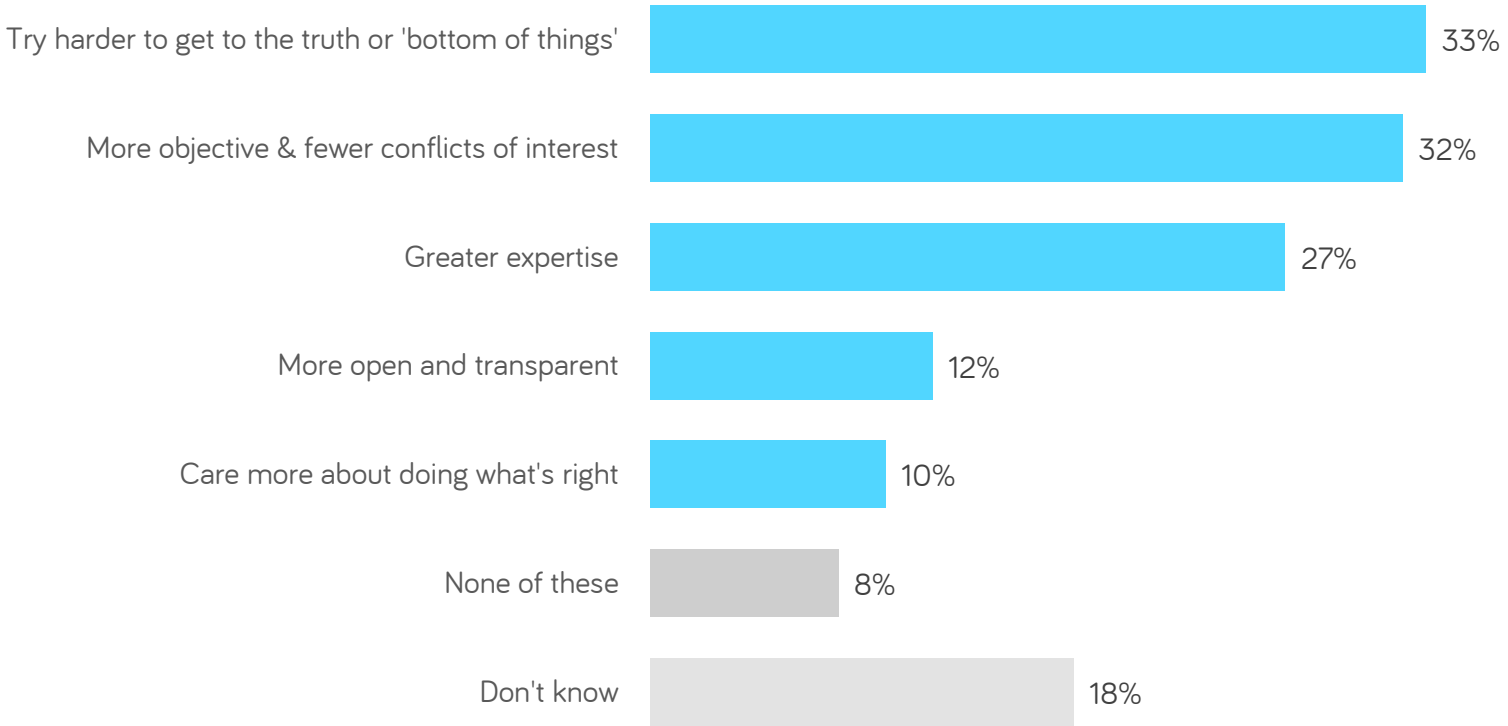
How much, if at all, do you trust the following...? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

The most common reasons selected for why scientists are more trusted than other professions is they try harder to get to the truth (33%) and are more objective (32%), while just one in 10 (10%) say it's because scientists care more about doing what's right

When asked in 2024, most Brits said they trust scientists more than they trust a range of other professionals, including teachers, judges, and the police. Which of the following, if any, do you think BEST explain why most people trust scientists more than these other professionals? Please select up to two options.

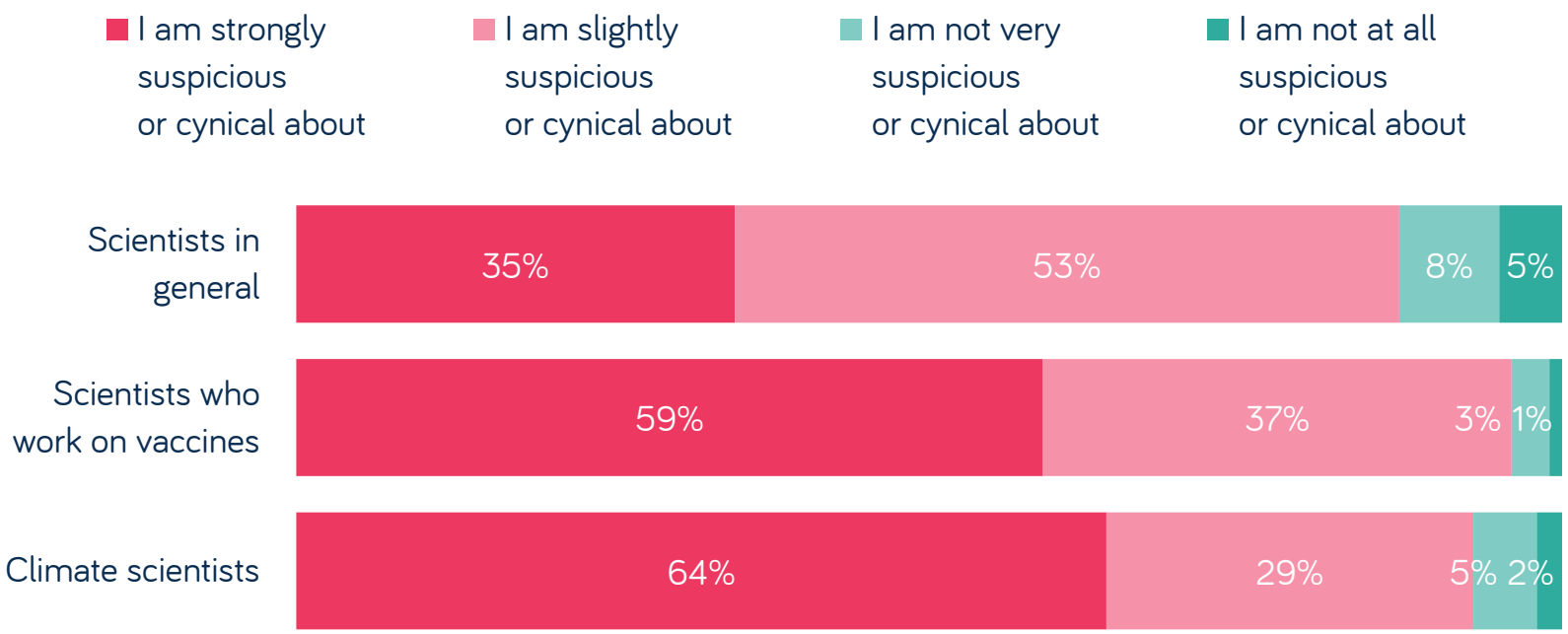


Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

Around nine in 10 who have low trust in scientists say they are suspicious or cynical about them

Distrust in another person or group can be defined as an attitude of being **suspicious or cynical about their statements, actions or intentions**. What would you say is your attitude towards each of the following groups?

Those who reported low trust (0-3) in each group of scientist



Those who expressed low trust in these scientists were asked a follow-up question to assess distrust, defined as 'a suspicious or cynical attitude' (Lenard, 2008).[6]

Nearly nine in 10 (88%) with low trust in scientists in general say they are suspicious or cynical about them – although most (53%) of this group say they only slightly feel this way.

By contrast, majorities of those with low trust in scientists who work on vaccines (59%) and climate scientists (64%) are *strongly* suspicious or cynical.

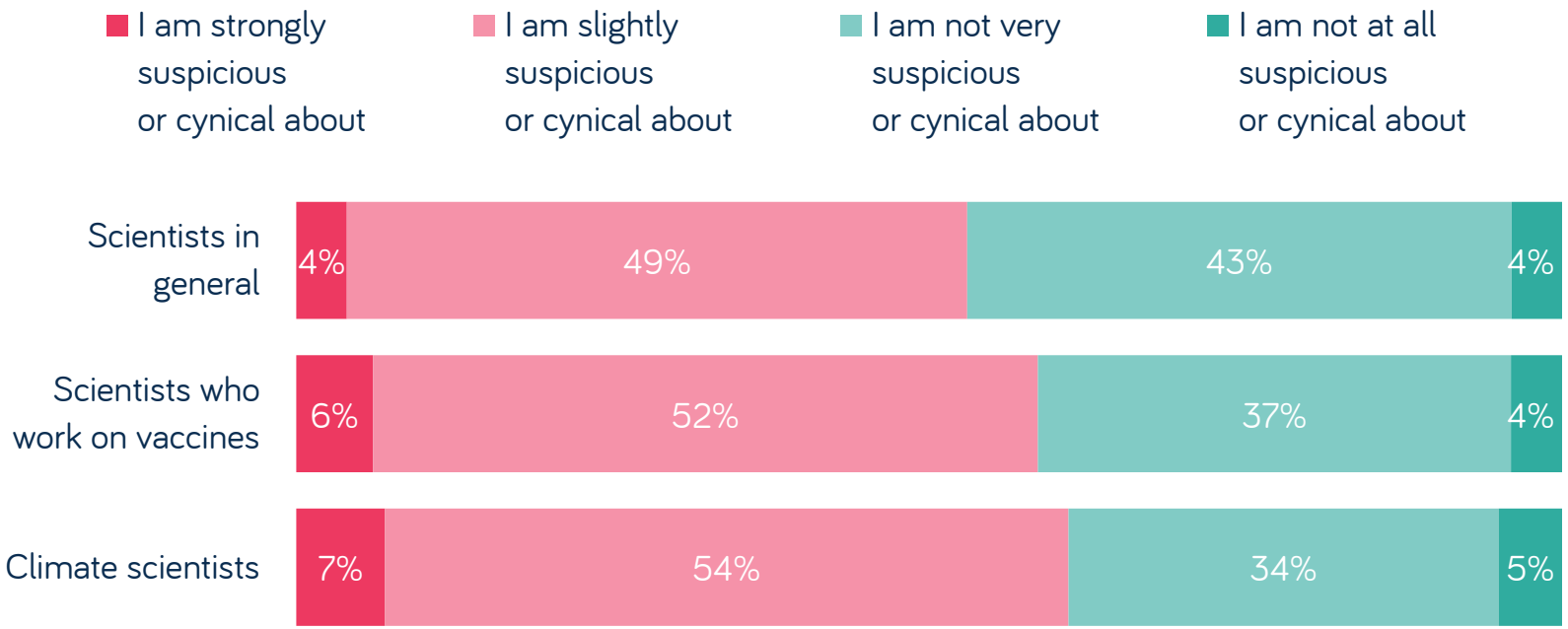
Base: 206 UK adults who selected 0-3 for 'scientists in general', 420 who selected 0-3 for 'scientists who work on vaccines', 631 who selected 0-3 for 'climate scientists', 8-11 May 2026.

6. Lenard, P. T. (2008). Trust your compatriots, but count your change: The roles of trust, mistrust and distrust in democracy. *Political Studies, 56* (2), 312–332.

Around half of those with middling levels of trust in these scientists are suspicious or cynical of them, with only small minorities strongly feeling this way

Distrust in another person or group can be defined as an attitude of being **suspicious or cynical about their statements, actions or intentions**. What would you say is your attitude towards each of the following groups?

Those who reported middling levels of trust (4-6) in each group of scientist



Just over half (53%) who have middling levels of level of trust in scientists in general said they were either slightly or strongly suspicious or cynical about them, rising to around six in 10 for those with the same amount of trust in scientists who work on vaccines (58%) and climate scientist (61%).

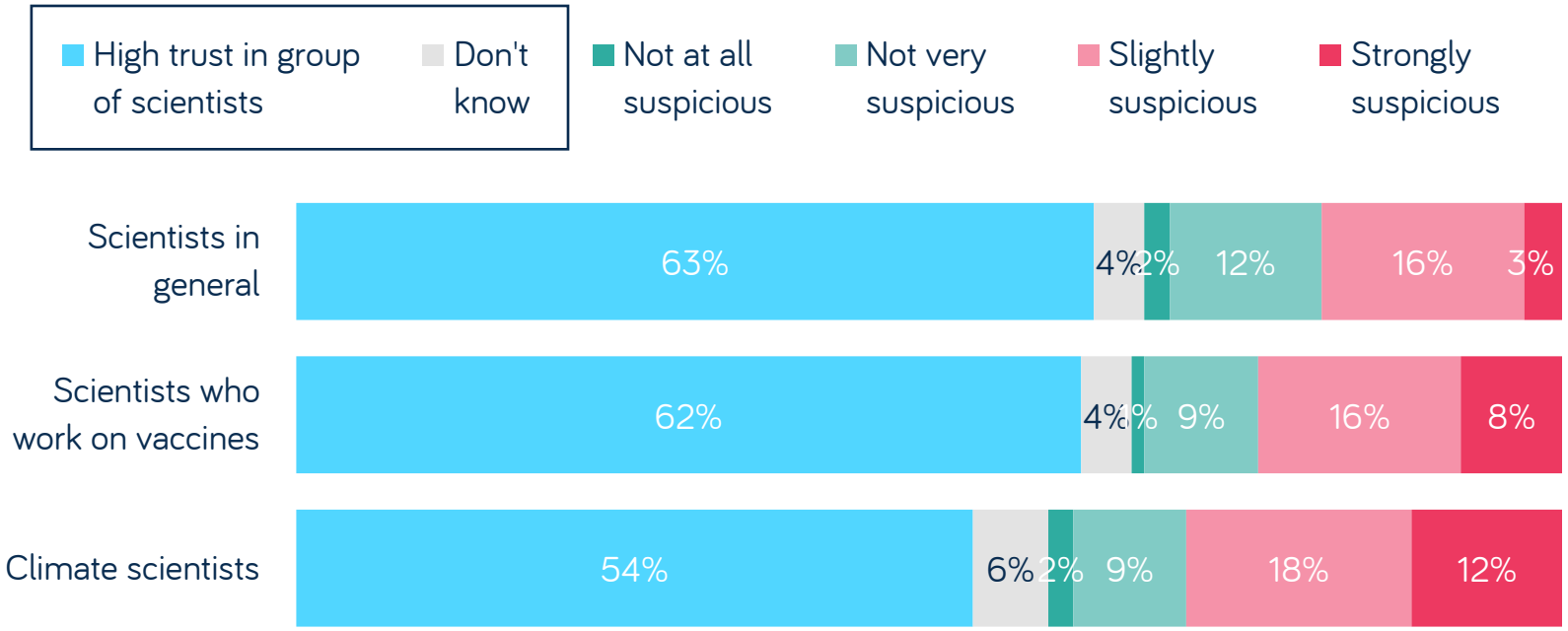
But for all three groups, only small minorities (4%, 6% and 7%, respectively) are strongly suspicious or cynical of them.

Base: 1,107 UK adults who selected 4-6 for 'scientists in general', 940 who selected 4-6 for 'scientists who work on vaccinees', 1,054 who selected 4-6 for 'climate scientists', 8-11 May 2026.

But combining results across questions shows outright suspicion of scientists is a minority view among the public overall

Distrust in another person or group can be defined as an attitude of being **suspicious or cynical about their statements, actions or intentions**. What would you say is your attitude towards each of the following groups?

Asked to those who reported low (0-3) or middling (4-6) levels of trust in each group of scientist



Base: 1,313 UK adults who selected 0-6 for 'scientists in general', 1,360 who selected 0-6 for 'scientists who work on vaccinees', 1,685 who selected 0-6 for 'climate scientists', 8-11 May 2026.

Rescaling levels of suspicion to the whole population – combining it with the majority who have high trust and were never asked the question – shows only around 3% are *strongly* suspicious of scientists in general, rising to 8% for vaccine scientists and 12% for climate scientists. Even combining 'slightly' and 'strongly' suspicious together, no group exceeds three in 10 of the public.

Climate scientists draw the most suspicion in population terms, reflecting their lower overall trust score, but even here the majority of the public is either highly trusting or only mildly sceptical rather than actively suspicious.

2. What factors are most associated with trust in scientists?

2. What's most associated with trust?

How to read the charts

Regression analysis is a statistical method which aims to determine how a dependent variable (trust in scientists) relates to other variables, controlling for the interrelationship between variables: it therefore provides an indication of what is *most* associated.

We use regression to identify factors that are statistically significantly associated with levels of trust in three of the groups of scientists asked about above: **scientists in general**, **scientists who work on vaccines**, and **climate scientists**.

In the following charts, we represent the proportion of variance in trust explained by each factor, to give an indication of their relative importance. We have included variance proportions only for factors that explain more than 2% of overall variance. The larger a predictor's share of the explained variance, the more of the model's explanatory power it accounts for.

Each of the models explains a high degree of the variation in levels of trust in scientists, which suggests that these give us a strong understanding of what's most associated: we would expect this to be the case, given the questionnaire has been built on a review of which factors are highly related to trust according to previous studies.

2. What's most associated with trust?

What the regression models tell us

There are some very clear messages on what is most important, with just three factors emerging as strongly associated with trust in all three types of scientists asked about:

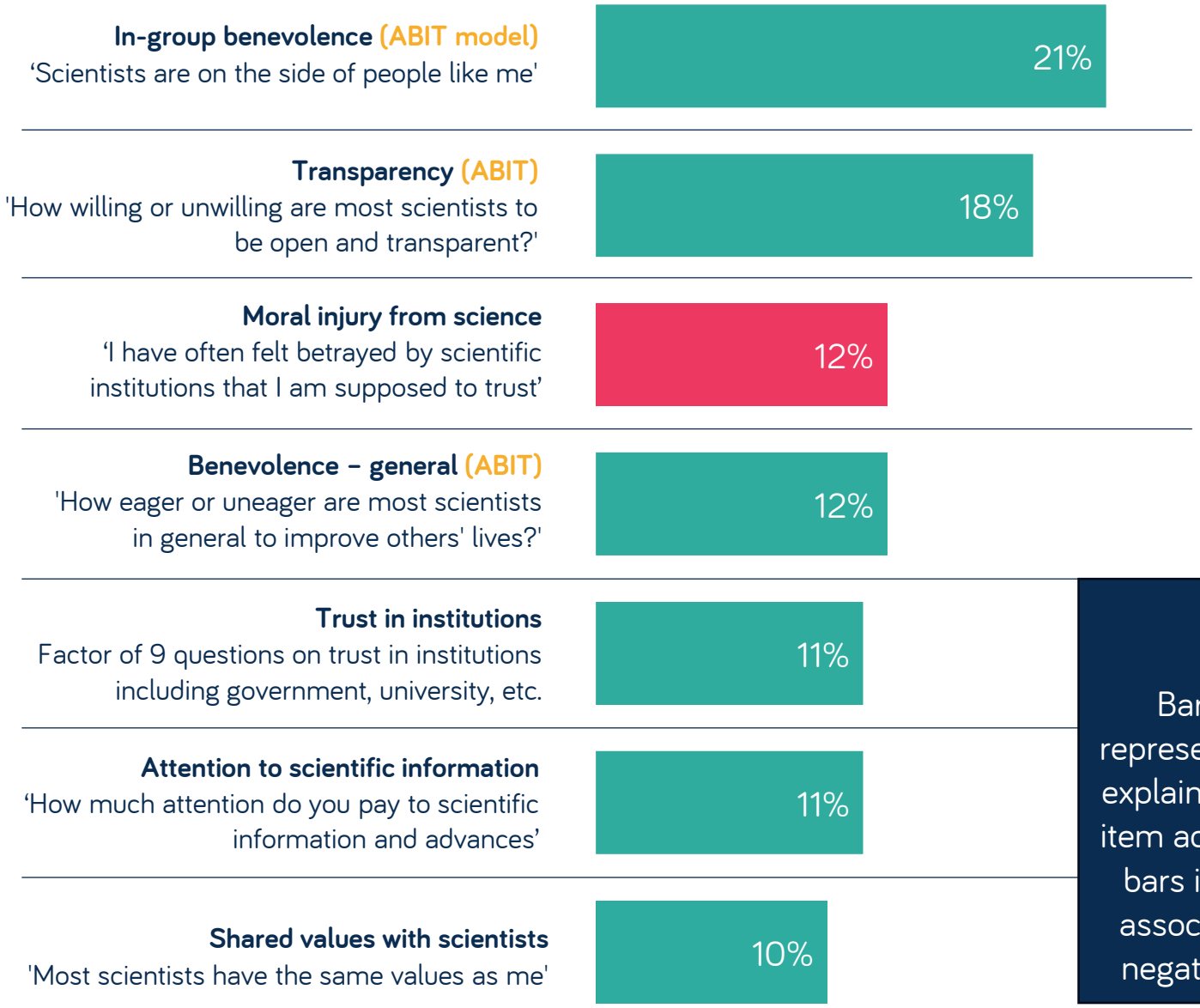
- **In-group benevolence**: this more personal benevolence measure – the sense of whether scientists are 'on the side of people like me' – is highly related to trust in all three types of scientist
- **Transparency**: this is a measure from the classic ABIT model of trust (see section 2.1) and comes out more strongly and consistently than other measures, such as expertise, suggesting perceptions of openness should be a key focus.
- **Trust in other institutions**: this confirms existing literature, that there is a link in mindsets between those with high/low trust in broader institutions and trust in science.

A further four factors come out strongly across two of the three scientist types:

- **Belief in conspiracies**: significantly related to trust in vaccine and climate scientists, which will reflect that two of the conspiracies focus on these areas.
- **Attention to scientific information:** as seen in other studies, interest in and attention to science is an important aspect of establishing trust.
- **Moral injury from scientific institutions**: a sense of past betrayal by scientific institutions, which is perhaps to be expected but illustrates the importance of past perceived experience
- **Integrity:** this is the other ABIT model element that comes out most strongly, for both climate and vaccine scientists.

In addition, some factors only appear for one type of scientist, with climate scientists standing out: in particular, a belief that **scientists care more about causes** is strongly associated, as is whether respondents support **Reform UK.**, both of which are negative drivers.

Trust in scientists in general is most strongly positively associated with perceived in-group benevolence, transparency, trust in a wider set of institutions, a sense that scientists want to improve lives and share our values – and is negatively associated with feelings of betrayal by scientific institutions

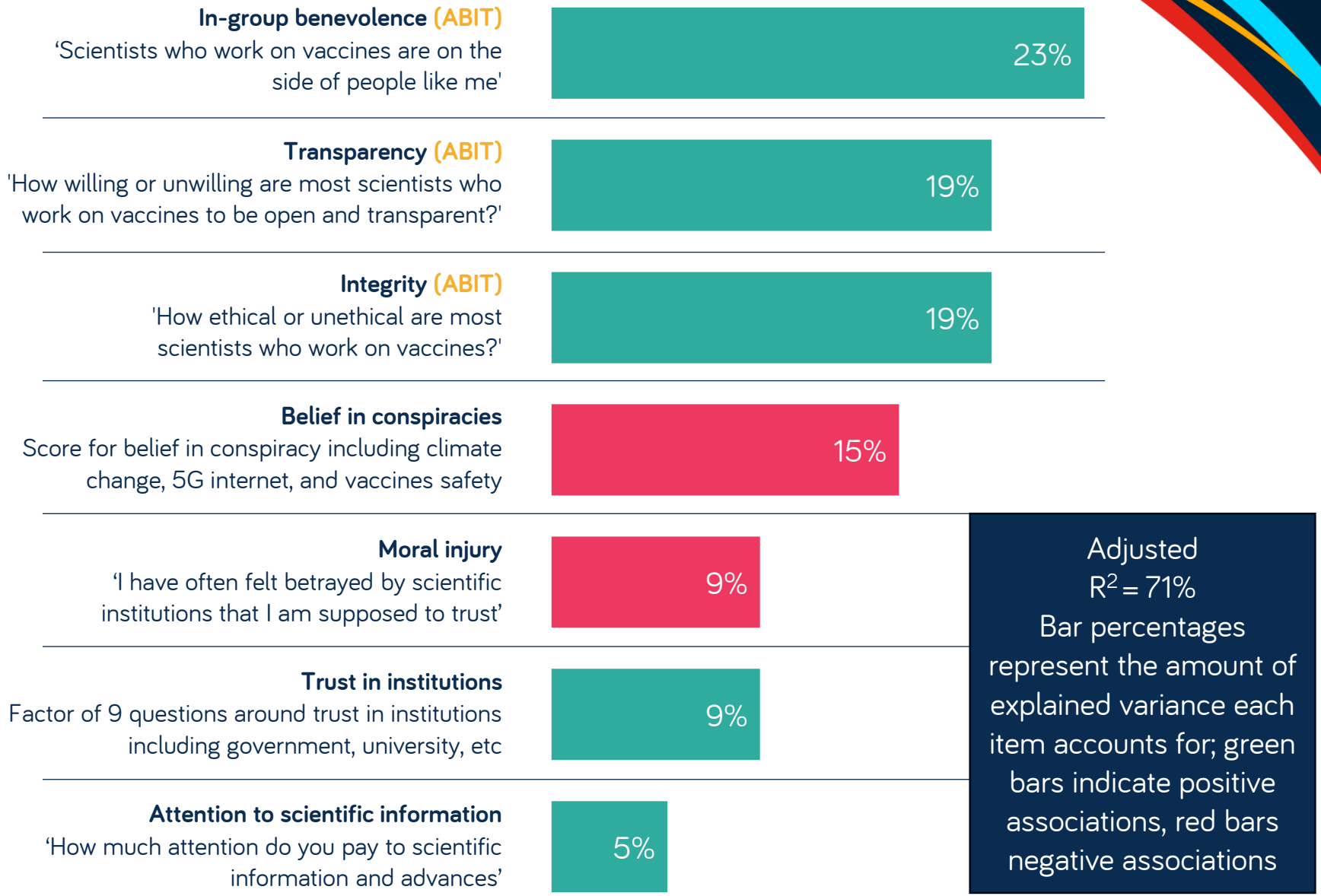


Adjusted $R^2 = 58\%$

Bar percentages represent the amount of explained variance each item accounts for; green bars indicate positive associations, red bars negative associations

General standardised dominance statistics (weighted regression, n=1,351). Only displaying effects significant at the 5% level and accounting for >2% of total R-squared.

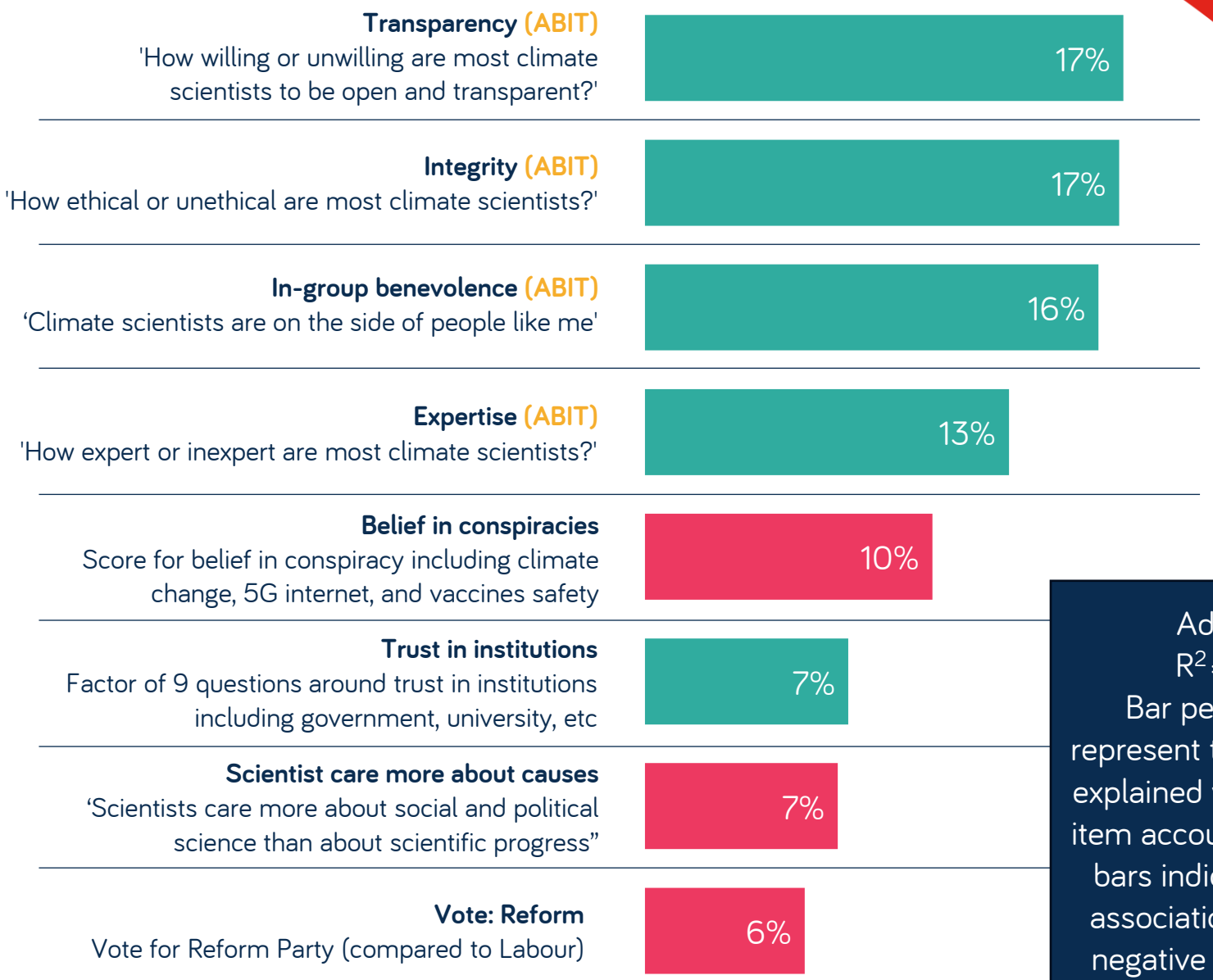
Trust in scientists who work on vaccines is most strongly positively associated with perceived in-group benevolence, transparency, integrity and trust in wider institutions - and negatively associated with conspiracy beliefs and feelings of betrayal by scientific institutions



Adjusted $R^2 = 71\%$
Bar percentages represent the amount of explained variance each item accounts for; green bars indicate positive associations, red bars negative associations

General standardised dominance statistics (weighted regression, n=1,341). Only displaying effects significant at the 5% level and accounting for >2% of total R-squared.

Trust in climate scientists is most strongly positively associated with perceived transparency, integrity, in-group benevolence, expertise and trust in wider institutions – and negatively associated with belief in conspiracies, thinking scientists care more about social and political issues than scientific progress, and intention to vote for Reform UK



Adjusted $R^2 = 79\%$
Bar percentages represent the amount of explained variance each item accounts for; green bars indicate positive associations, red bars negative associations

General standardised dominance statistics (weighted regression, n=1,339). Only displaying effects significant at the 5% level and accounting for >2% of total R-squared.

Understanding the scale of differences across the key drivers of trust

The following charts show how perceptions of scientists, as well as the other values and attitudes asked about in our study, vary by trust levels. These variables are shown for those with high trust in scientists (7-10 on the trust scale), low trust (0-3) and those who are in the middle (4-6).

The factors that the regression shows are most associated with trust are presented first, with less strongly associated variables presented later, followed by factors not found to be statistically significant.

There are two important points to bear in mind when reading through each section:

1. The regression results give us a useful understanding of the relative importance of different factors, **but that does *not* mean that factors that don't come out in the model are not relevant**: there are strong inter-relationships between our independent or explanatory factors, and as you will see, some that don't come out in the model still do have strong relationships with overall trust levels.

2. The 'low' trust group is a small proportion of the UK population, with only one in 20 people having low trust in scientists in general. It is, therefore, **important to pay as much or more attention to the 'in the middle' group** – more than one-quarter of the population. This group are closer to 'low' than 'high' trust on some measures, and vice versa on other measures. Understanding the nuanced views of this group is important, as this is likely to be a more reachable and engageable group.

2. What factors are most associated with trust in scientists?

2.1. Signals, cues or drivers of trustworthiness in common trust and distrust models

2.1.a The ABI(T) model of trust

In the widely used 'ABI(T)'[7] model of trust, trust is shaped by perceived Ability (A), Benevolence (B) and Integrity (I). The below questions apply this model to scientists, with Transparency (T) added having been demonstrated to be a relevant additional factor in science.[8]

An innovation in this study is the addition of a more personal Benevolence measure. Typically, this has been asked just as an intention to improve lives in general – we have added an item more specifically on whether scientists are 'on the side of people like me' to measure the importance of benevolence to in-group identities (partly building on Seyd and colleagues' work on the perceived relevance of science to 'people like yourself').[9]

A: **How expert or inexpert are the most scientists?** ('Very expert' to 'Very inexpert').

B: (general): **How eager or uneager are most scientists to improve others' lives?** ('Very eager' to 'Very uneager').

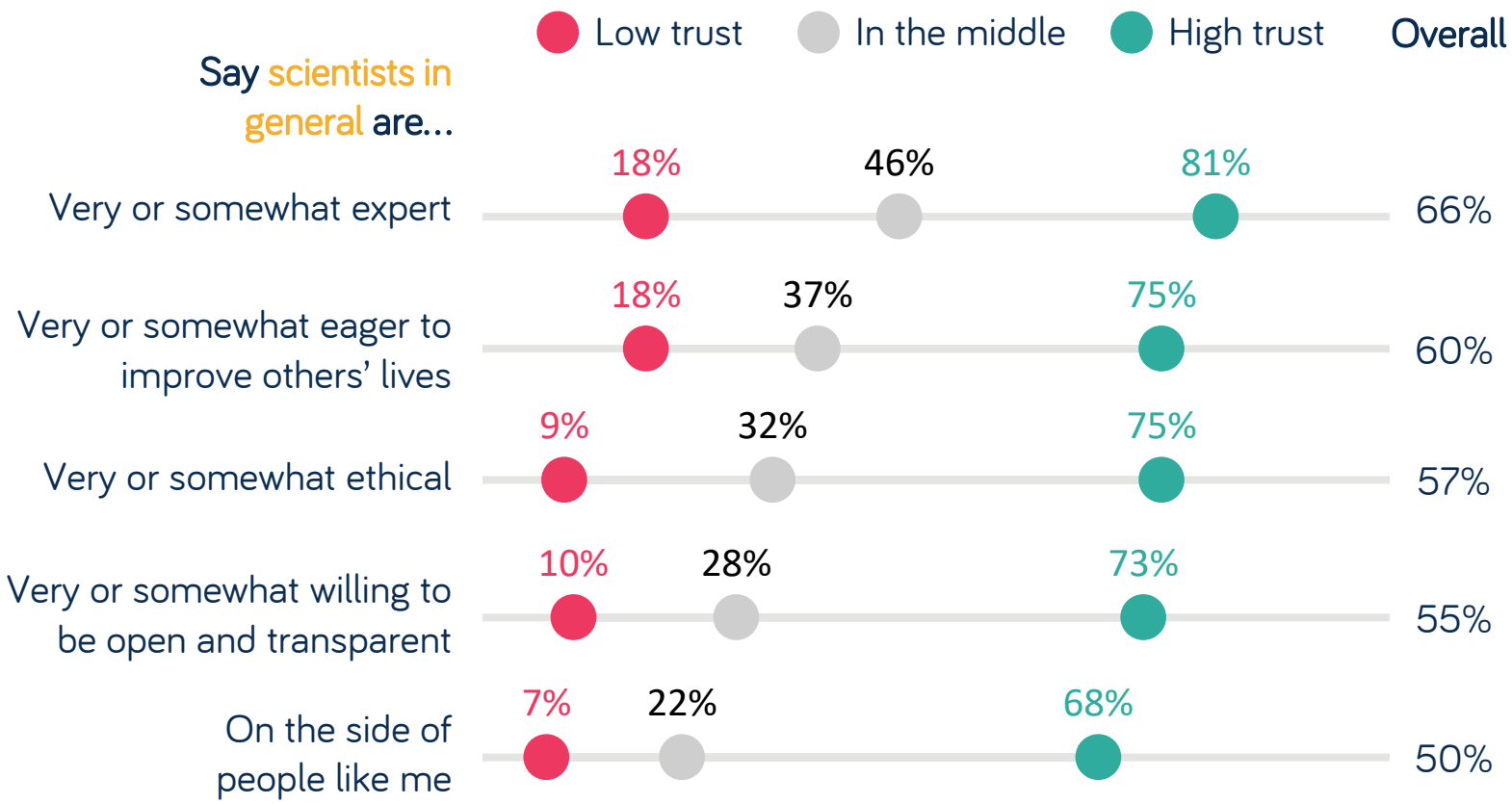
B: (in-group): **To what extent do you agree or disagree that most scientists are on the side of people like me?** ('Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree').

I: **How ethical or unethical are most scientists?** ('Very ethical' to 'Very unethical').

T: **How willing or unwilling are most scientists to be open and transparent?** ('Very willing' to 'Very unwilling').

7. Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 20 (3), 709–734.
8. Items other than B (in-group) are from Cologna, V., Mede, N. G., Berger, S., et al. (2025). Trust in scientists and their role in society across 68 countries. *Nature Human Behaviour.*
9. Seyd, B., Hamm, J. A., Jennings, W., McKay, L., Valgarðsson, V., & Anness, M. (2024). 'Follow the science': Popular trust in scientific experts during the coronavirus pandemic. *Public Understanding of Science.*

Believing that scientists in general are ethical, transparent, and 'on the side of people like me' are the main things dividing high-trusters from those with low or middling trust...



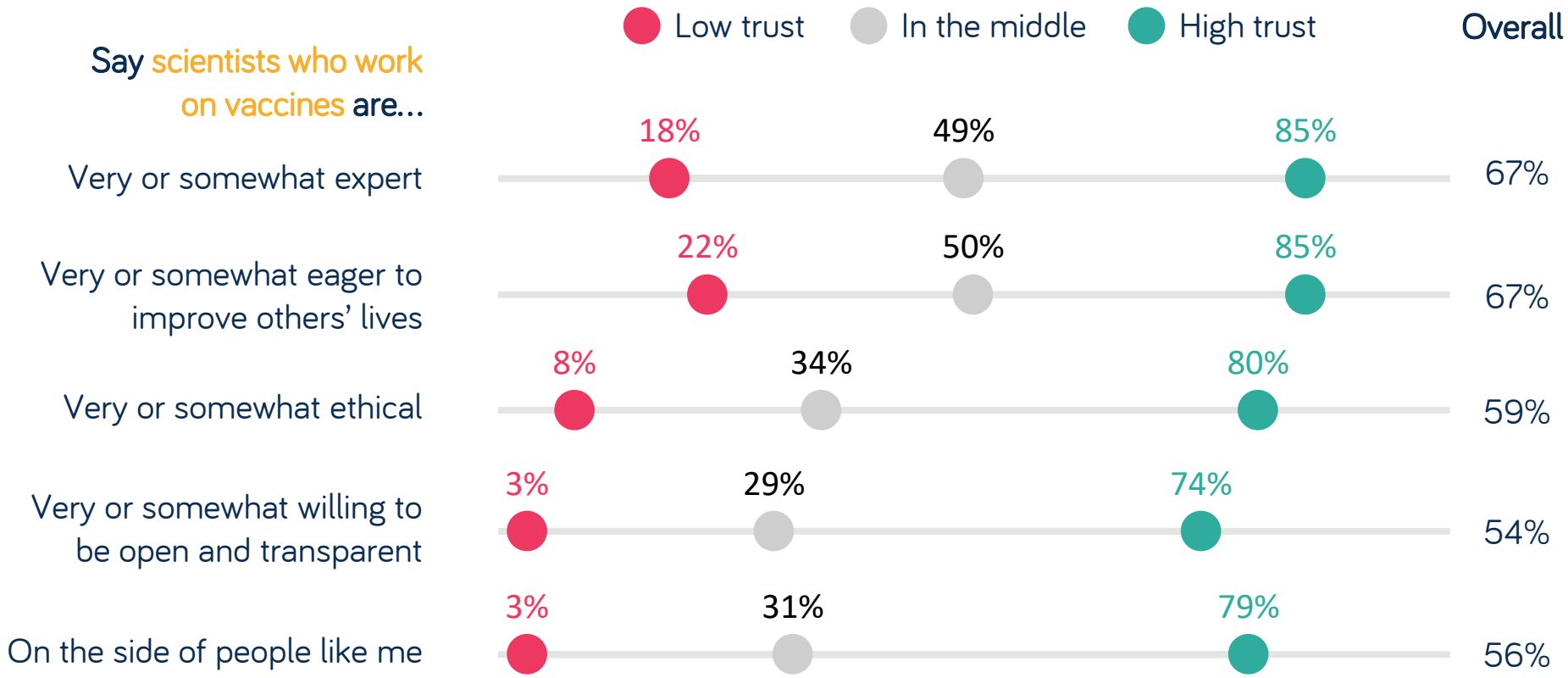
Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

The dimension that most separates people with high trust in scientists from those with more middling trust is the perception of scientists as on the side of 'people like me' – our measure of in-group benevolence. 68% of high-trusters have this perception, against only 22% of those in the middle – a 46-point gap.

There are similar gaps between these two largest groups when it comes to whether scientists are willing to be transparent (45 points) and ethical (43 points).

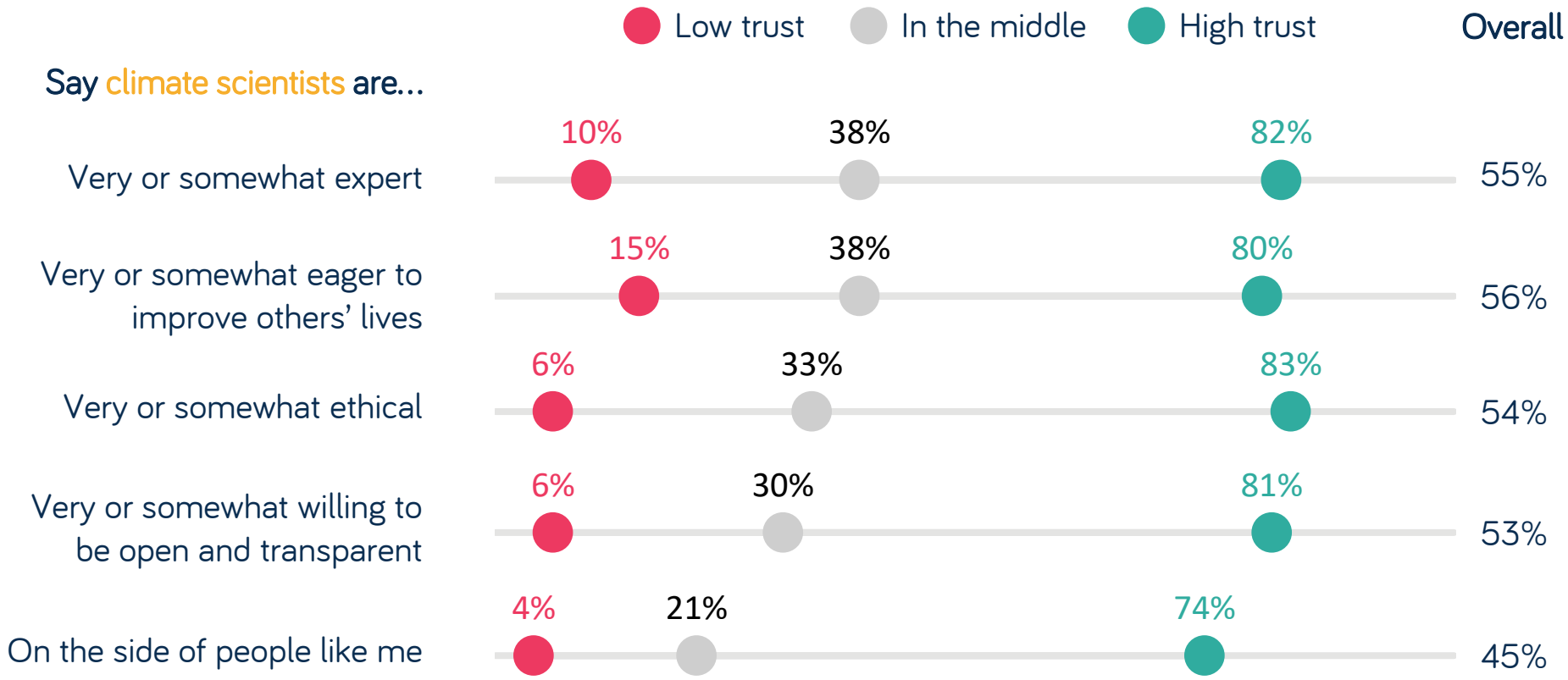
Meanwhile, just one in 10 or fewer of those with low trust in scientists share these perceptions.

...these are the same things that also mainly separate those with high rather than low or middling trust in scientists who work on vaccines



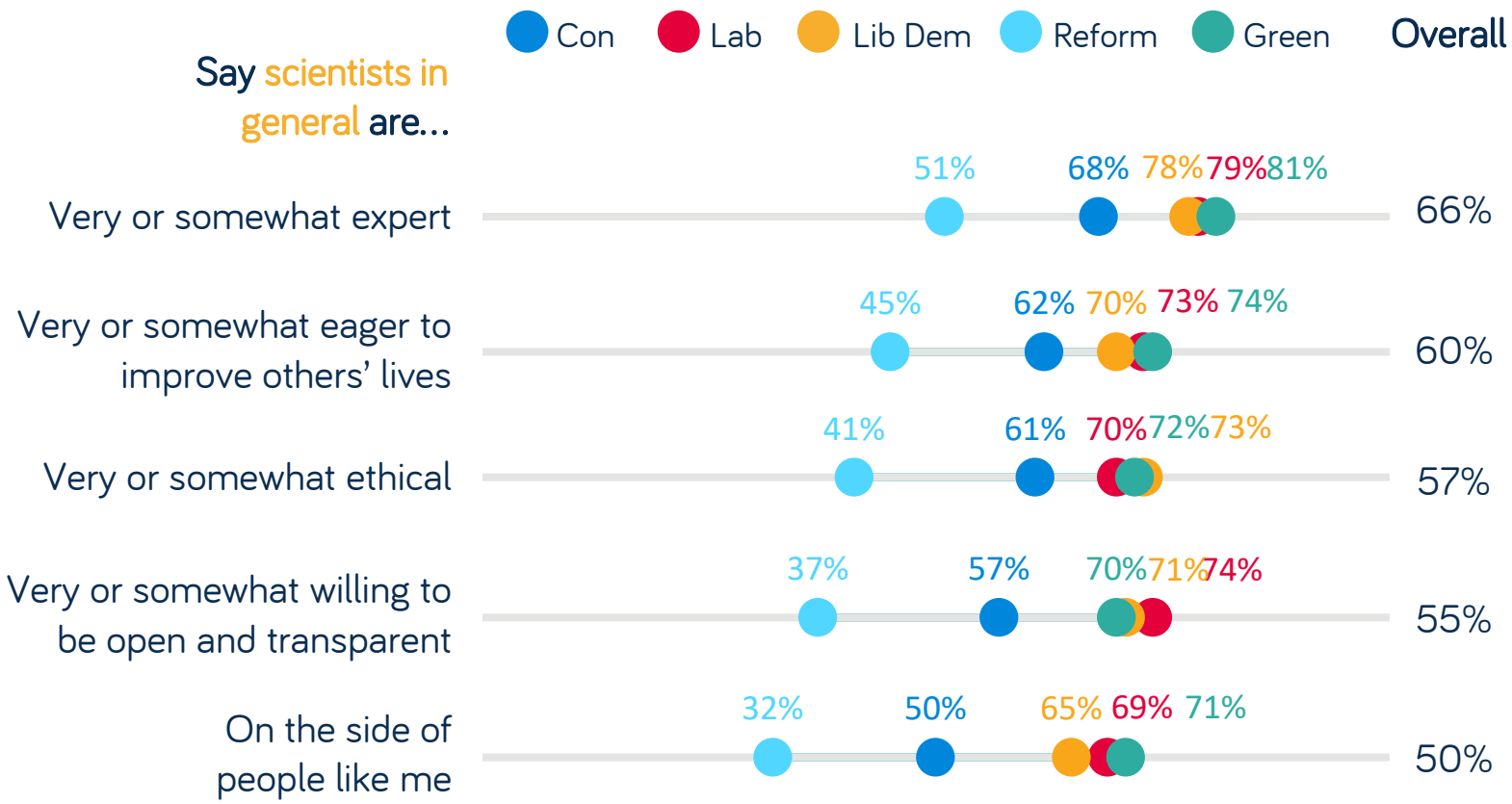
Base: 2,659 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists who work on vaccines, 458 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 974 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

On most dimensions, climate scientists show the biggest gap between high- and middling-trusters



Base: 2,255 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in climate scientists, 670 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,100 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Across political parties, Reform UK supporters are consistently the least positive about scientists in general



71% of Green supporters – that is, those who said they plan to vote Green at the next general election – say scientists in general are on the side of people like them. This is more than double the 32% of Reform UK supporters.

Even on expertise – typically the most generously rated dimension – there is a 30-point gap (81% vs 51%) between Green and Reform UK supporters, a pattern that holds across all five statements.

Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election, 8-11 May 2026.

2.1.b Measures of distrust

The **Trust in Science and Scientists Scale (TISS)** is a standardised survey instrument used by researchers to measure public confidence in the scientific method and scientific institutions or scientists. It has been widely used, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic as a measure of trust in science and scientists and how this drives outcomes such as behaviours related to preventing the spread of Covid and belief in Covid-related conspiracy theories.

These largely **map onto the ABIT model of trust, but with items phrased negatively**: for example, instead of asking about 'openness and transparency', TISS asks whether scientists 'won't publish results their funders don't like'.

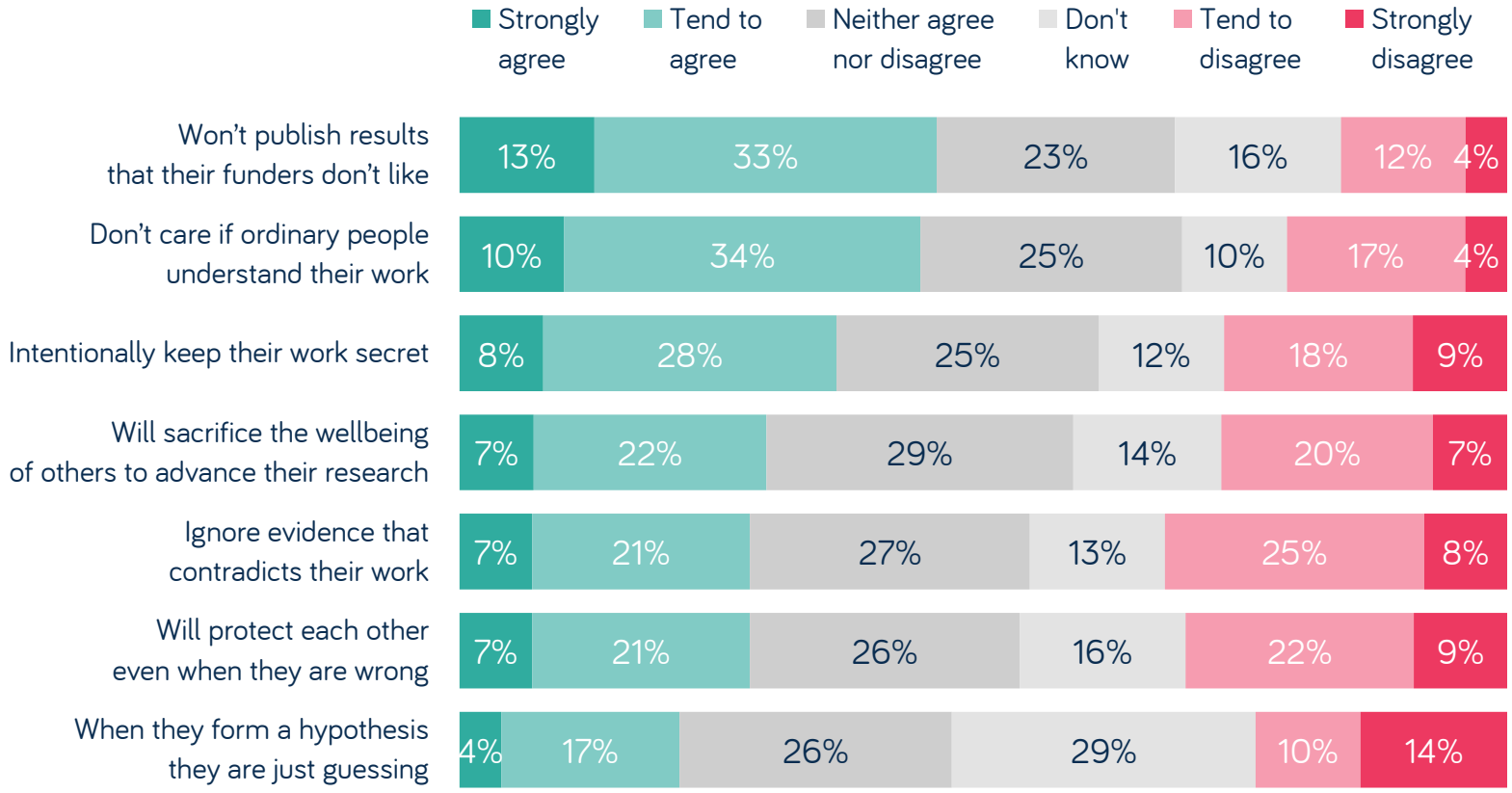
A psychometric assessment of the scale[10] concluded that the scale's negatively worded items appear to be measuring a distinct construct from the positively worded item. One explanation considered was that these items are capturing distrust in science, based on the view that distrust is a distinct construct from trust and not merely its opposite. We tested the distrust items specifically, to understand if these had a distinct relationship with distrust.

The items did not come out among the top associated factors in our model – which is likely to be partly because some are similar to other measures in our survey. However, they are still worth outlining, as the variation across high, middle and low trust groups is marked in many cases, and there is relatively high scepticism across the public as a whole on some measures.

10. Wolff, K., Breakwell, G., & Wright, J. (2024). Psychometric evaluation of the Trust in Science and Scientists Scale. *Royal Society Open Science*, 11 (4), Article 231228.

Nearly half (46%) agree scientists won't publish results their funders don't like, and around three in 10 (28%) say they ignore evidence that contradicts their work

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about scientists in general?



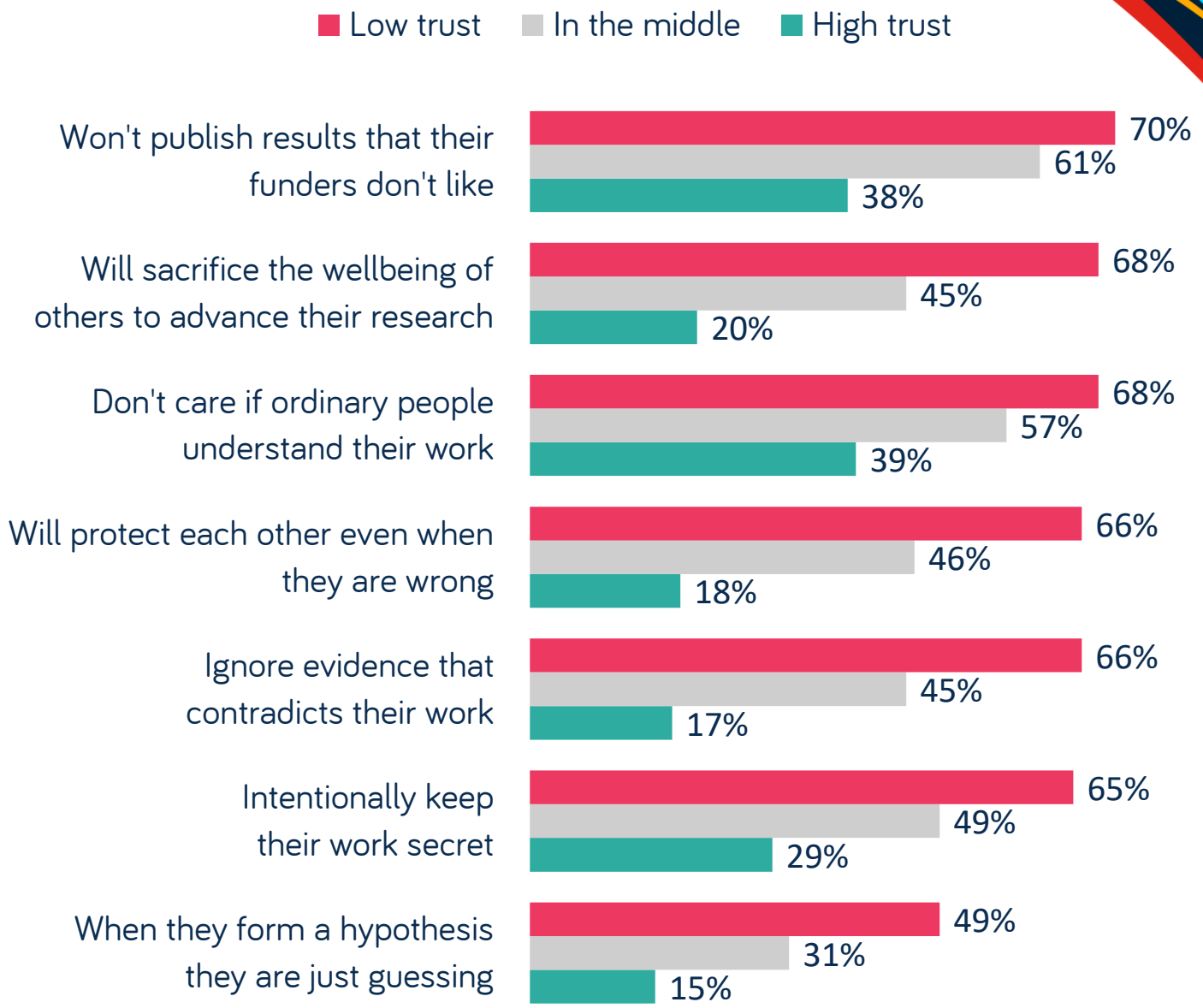
Close to half (44%) of the public also agree scientists don't care if ordinary people understand their work, and around a third (36%) say they intentionally keep their work secret.

Around three in 10 (29%) feel scientists will sacrifice the wellbeing of others to advance their research, and two in 10 say when scientists form a hypothesis they are just guessing (21%) – although more disagree than agree with this last statement.

Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

The sharpest divides between high-trusters and the rest relate to scientists' self-interest – whether they sacrifice the wellbeing of others to advance their research, protect each other even when wrong, and ignore evidence that contradicts their work, where there is at least a 20-point gap between the most trusting and those with middling trust

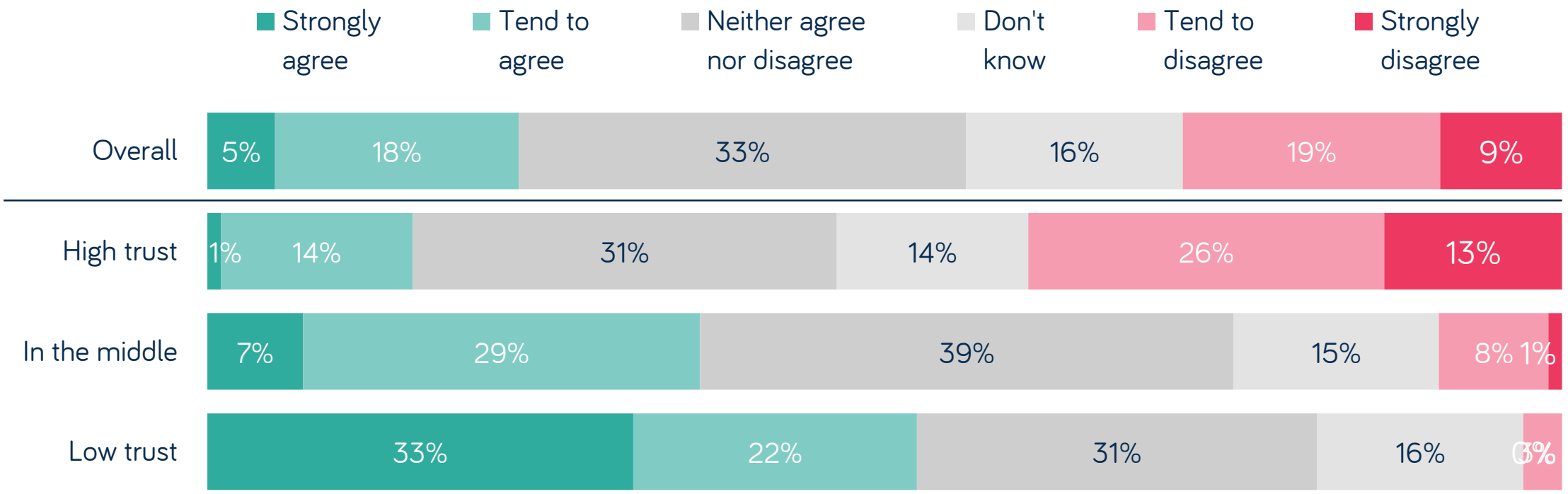
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about scientists in general?
% who strongly/tend to agree



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Those with low or middling trust in scientists are much more likely to agree than disagree that too many scientists just repeat the scientific consensus without thinking for themselves – though many neither agree nor disagree

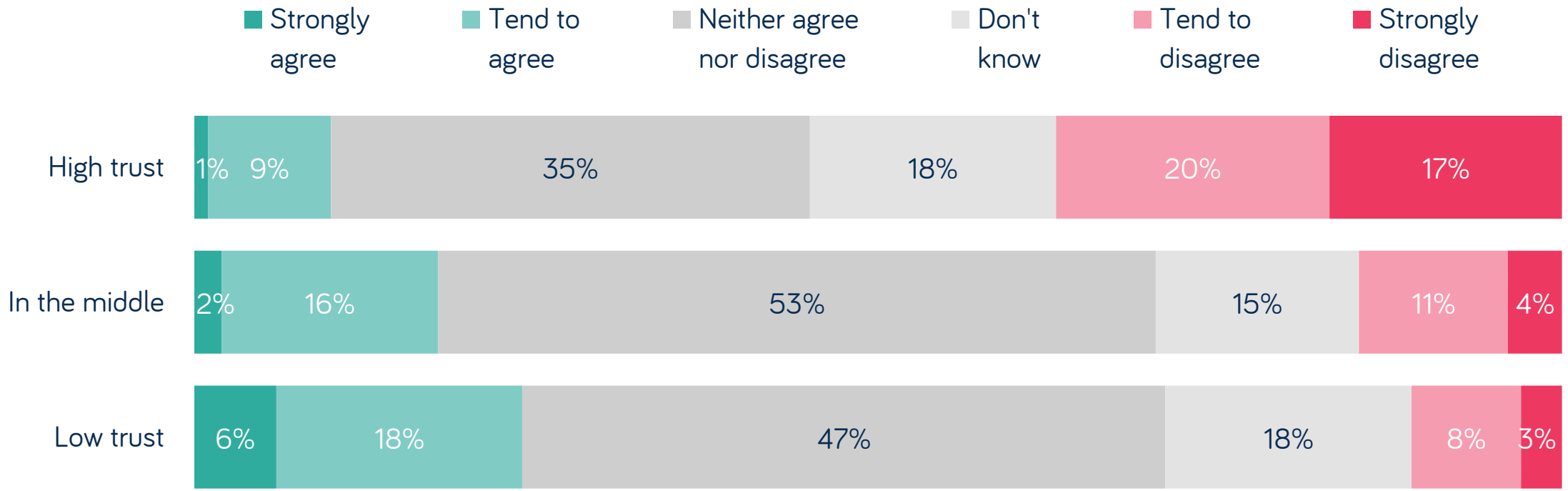
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? **Too many scientists just repeat the scientific consensus without thinking for themselves**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Low- (24%) and middling-trusters (18%) are around twice as likely as high-trusters (10%) to say there are particular scientists who reject the mainstream scientific consensus whom they trust a great deal – but again, many take neither position

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? **There are particular scientists who reject the mainstream scientific consensus whom I trust a great deal**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

2.2. Wider trust in institutions

2.2. Wider trust in institutions

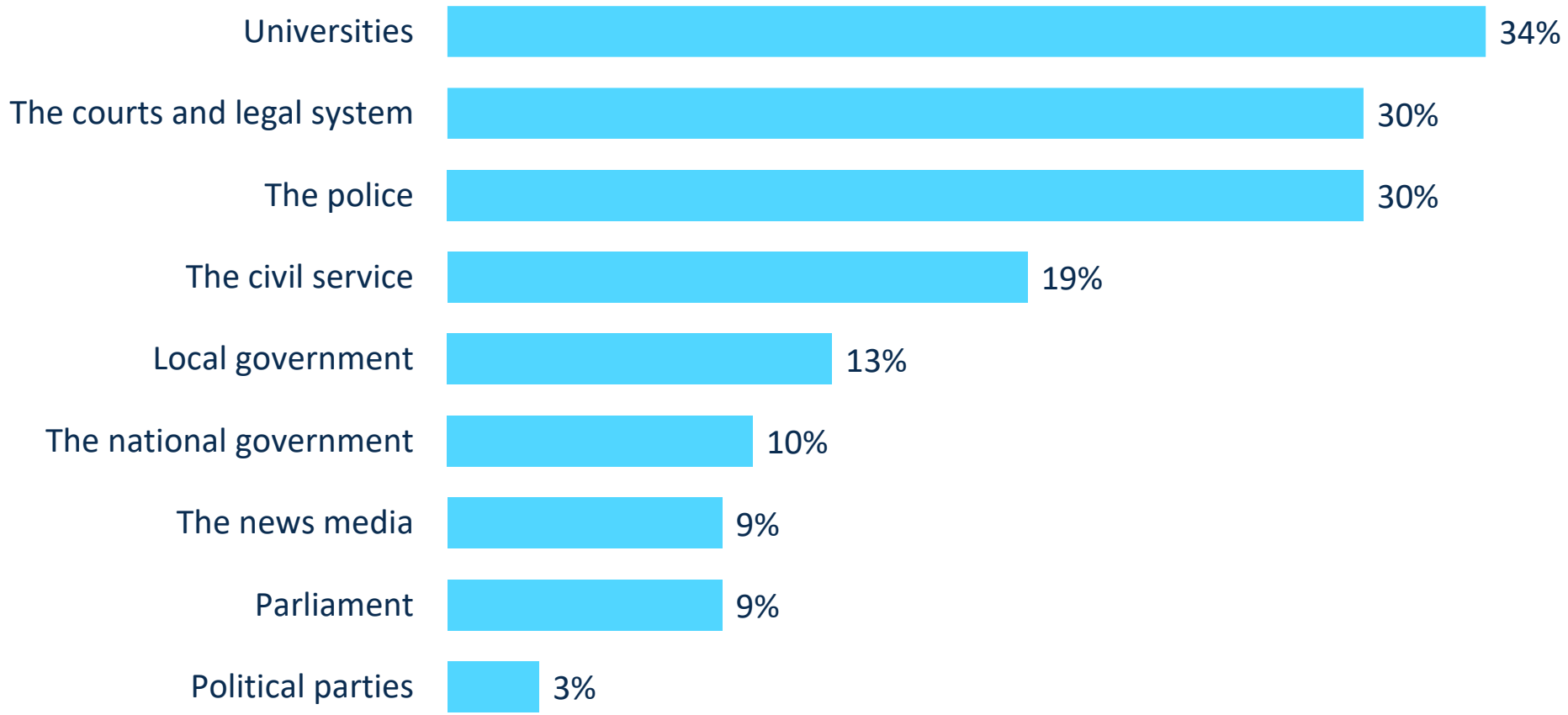
The Wellcome Global Monitor[11] highlights that trust in wider societal institutions is related to trust in scientists. Our study reinforces that finding, showing this to be one of the factors most associated with trust for all three groups of scientists. This was based on how much trust people said that they have in a range of other institutions – such as the police, the courts, the government and the media. We found that those who have high trust scientists are also much more likely than others to have high trust in other institutions.

The only exception to this was in the case of one of the specific media outlets we asked about, GB News. In this case, a slightly higher share of those with low trust in scientists (20%) than those with middling (18%) or high (11%) say that they trust GB News to tell the truth.

11. Wellcome Global Monitor.

Universities are the most trusted institution asked about – 34% score them 7+ on a scale of trust – above the courts and the police

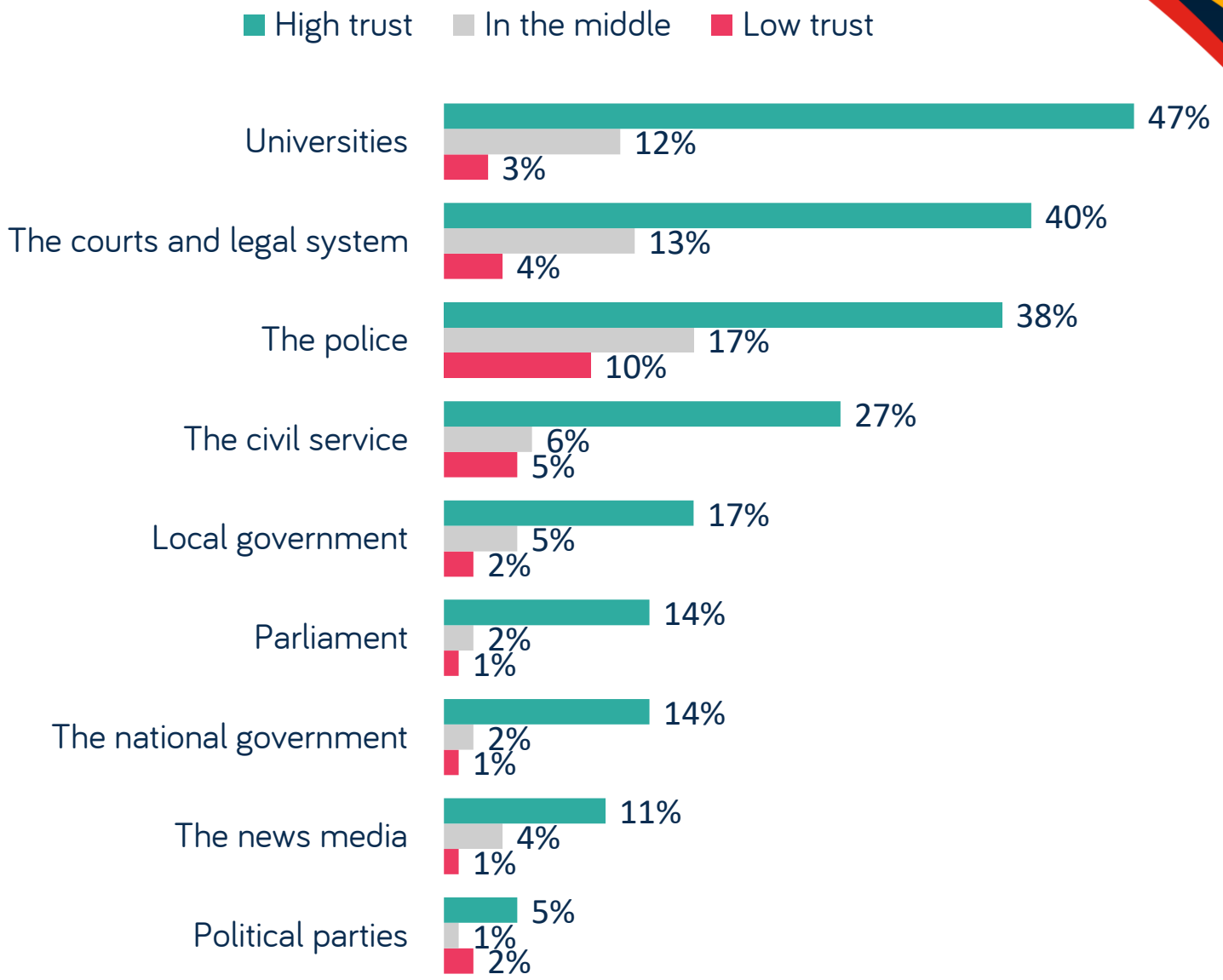
In general, how much do you trust each of the following...? **% with high trust (7-10)**



Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

Compared with high-trusters, those with low and middling trust in scientists are much less likely to generally trust institutions like universities, the courts and the civil service. The gap for the police is slightly lower

In general, how much do you trust each of the following...? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.
% with high trust (7-10)

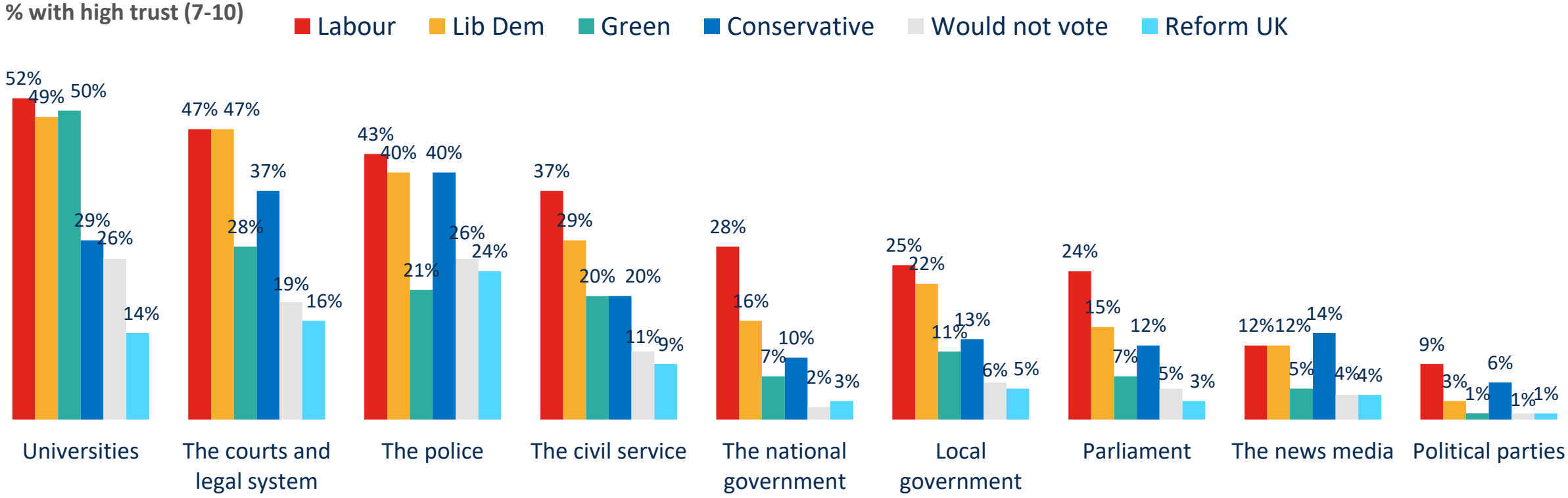


Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

Trust in institutions varies considerably by party – Labour and Lib Dem supporters are consistently the most trusting, and Reform supporters consistently the least, with the exception of the police, who Greens trust even less than Reform do (21 vs 24%). The widest gap in trust in any institution is for universities (52% Labour vs 14% Reform)

In general, how much do you trust each of the following...? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.

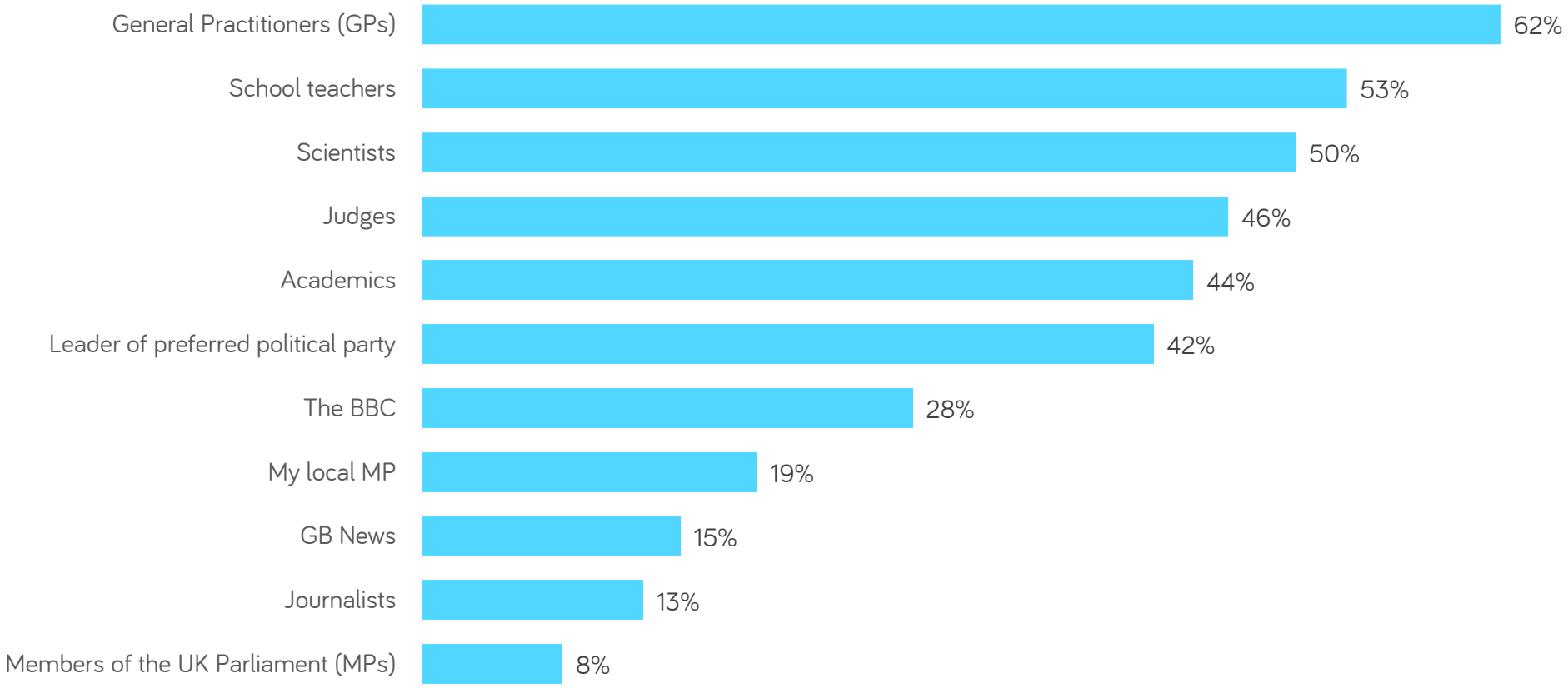
% with high trust (7-10)



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election. Would not vote: 368. 8-11 May 2026.

Half the public have high trust in scientists to tell the truth – behind only school teachers and GPs

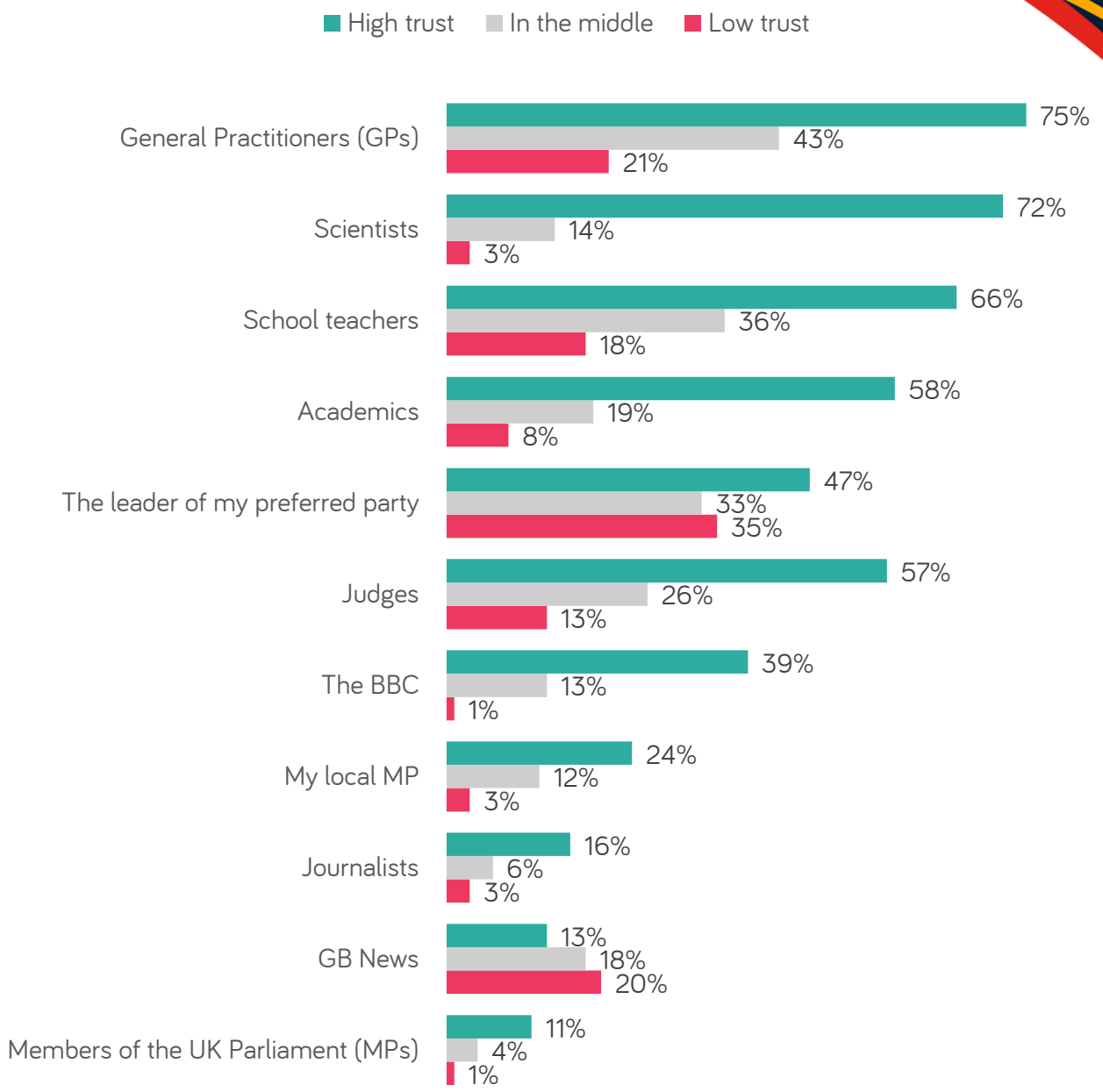
How much do you trust the following to tell the truth? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'. **% with high trust (7-10)**



Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

High-trusters are five times as likely as those with middling trust to have confidence in scientists to tell the truth – and on other institutions or groups, such as GPs, teachers, academics or the BBC, middling-trusters are closer to low-trusters in their views on whether they tell the truth

How much do you trust the following to tell the truth? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.
% with high trust (7-10)



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

2.3. Moral injury and general wellbeing

2.3. Moral injury and general wellbeing

The literature outlines a relationship between feelings of subjective wellbeing and trust.[12] Work on the more specific topic of moral injury and pain, often brought on by having done or experienced things that violate one's morals, also suggests a relationship between morally injurious events and trust.[13] We explored both of these in relation to trust in science.

Subjective wellbeing did not come out as strongly related in the regression model, and this is reflected in relatively small gaps between our three trust groups.

The general moral injury measures developed to explore general institutional trust also do not come out of the regression models as strongly related to trust in science, and again do not vary greatly between high-middle-low trusters in the descriptive analysis below.

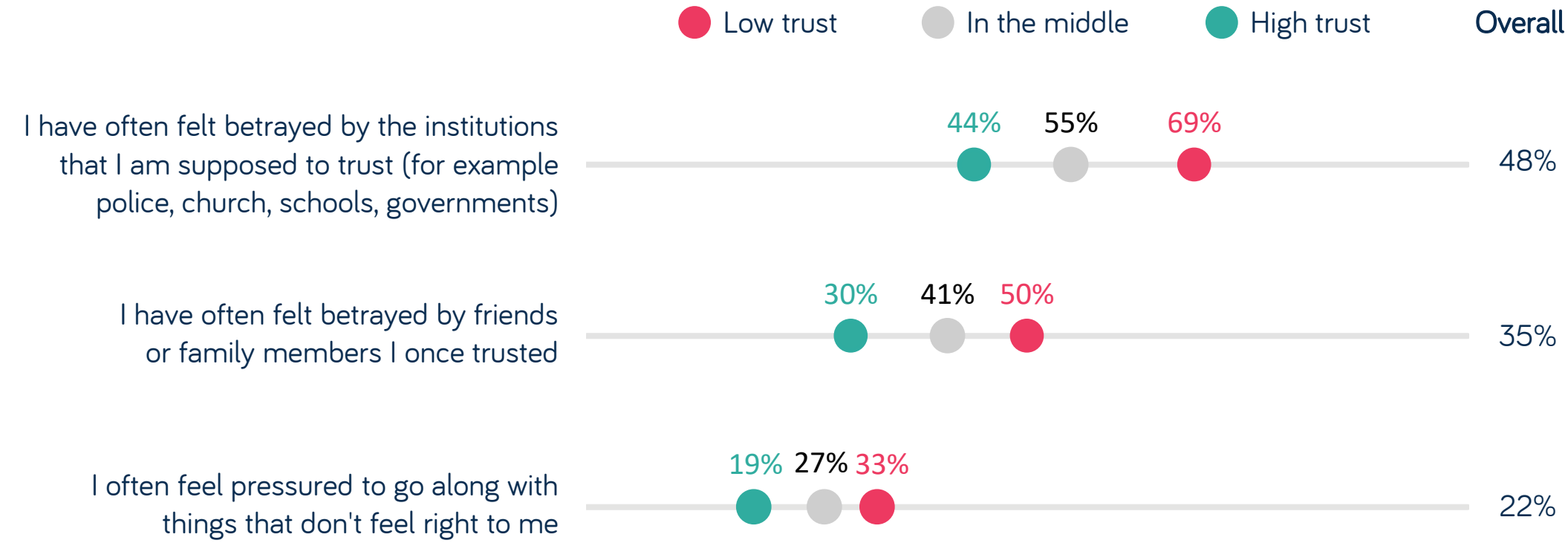
However, a new measure developed for this study, which asks specifically about feelings of past betrayal by scientific institutions *does* come out as significantly related.

This may not be particularly surprising, but is useful to highlight the importance of those past, highly emotive experiences of personal betrayal.

12. Bi, Y., et al. (2025). Trust and subjective well-being across the lifespan: A multilevel meta-analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal associations. *Psychological Bulletin.*
13. Williamson, V., et al. (2020). The impact of trauma exposure and moral injury on UK military veterans: A qualitative study. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 11*(1).

Low- and middling-trusters are more likely to feel a sense of betrayal by both institutions and loved ones, and pressure to go along with things that don't feel right – although the gap between those in the middle and high-trusters is not always large

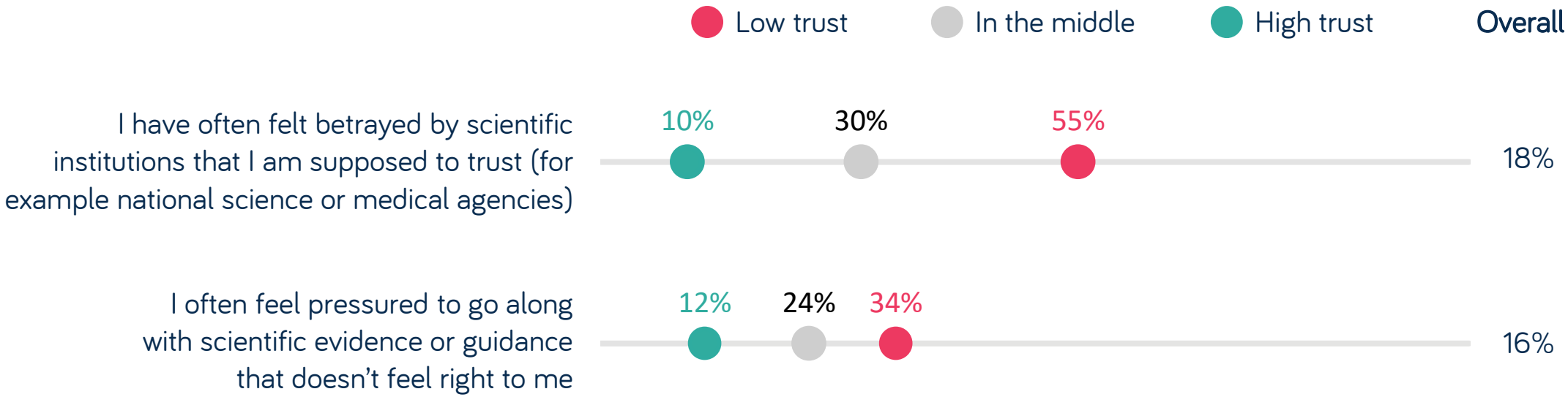
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
% of those who agree with the following statements



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

But when the question focuses on betrayal by scientific institutions, there is more of a gap between the different trust groups, with over half of the low trust group and three in 10 of the middle group feeling betrayed

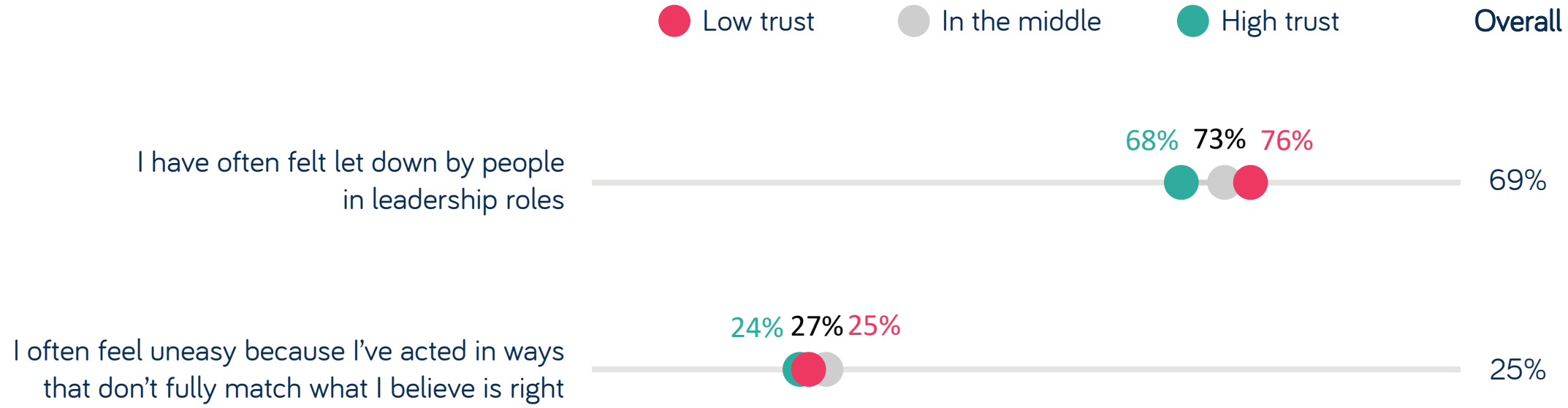
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
% of those who agree with the following statements



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

But on other measures of moral injury, there is less of a divide by trust in scientists

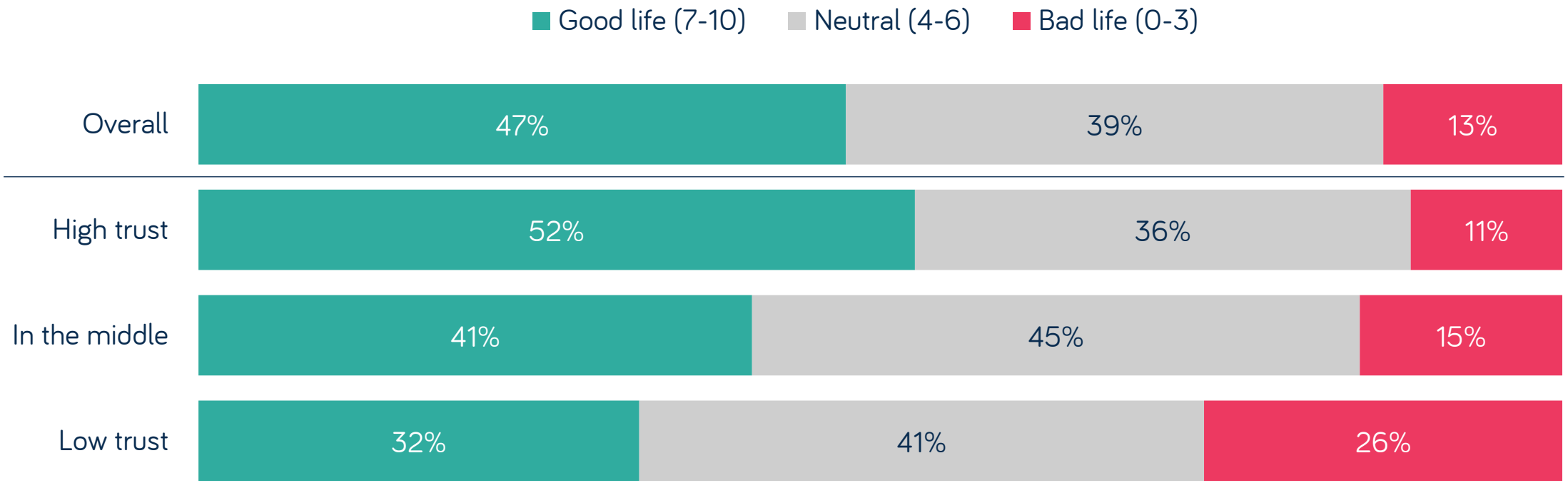
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
% of those who agree with the following statements



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

High-trusters are the only group where more than half say they have a good life (52%)

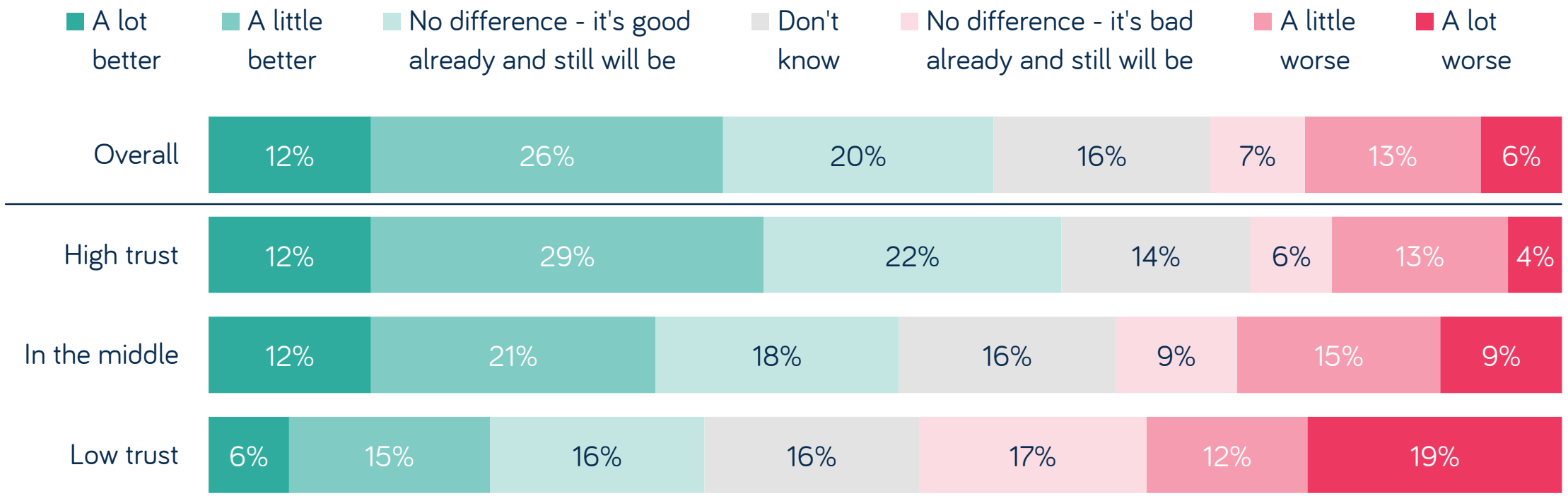
Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you stand at this time, assuming that the higher the step the better you feel about your life, and the lower the step the worse you feel about it?



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

And when it comes to what their life will be like in five years' time, middling-trusters (51%) are slightly closer to high- (63%) rather than low-trusters (37%), with a majority of this group having a positive view of how it will turn out

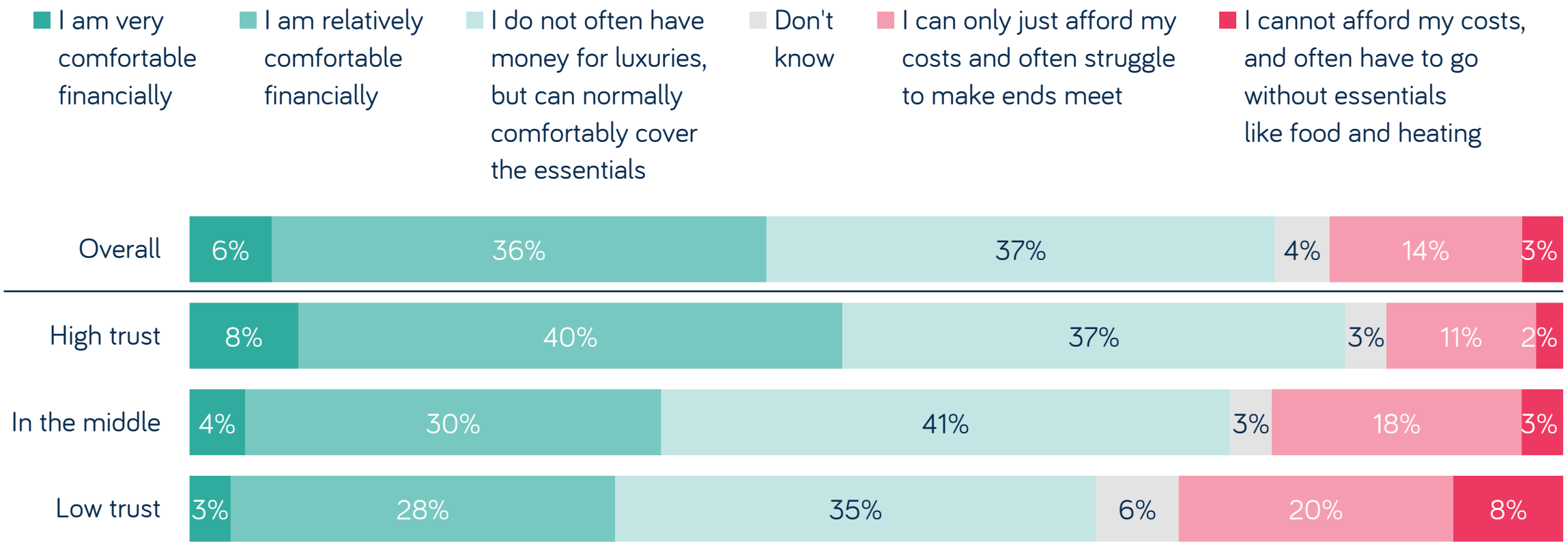
And how much better or worse do you think your life will be **in five years' time**?



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

Those with low trust in scientists (28%) are more than twice as likely to be struggling financially as those who have high trust in scientists (13%), with middling-trusters (21%) almost exactly in the middle of the two

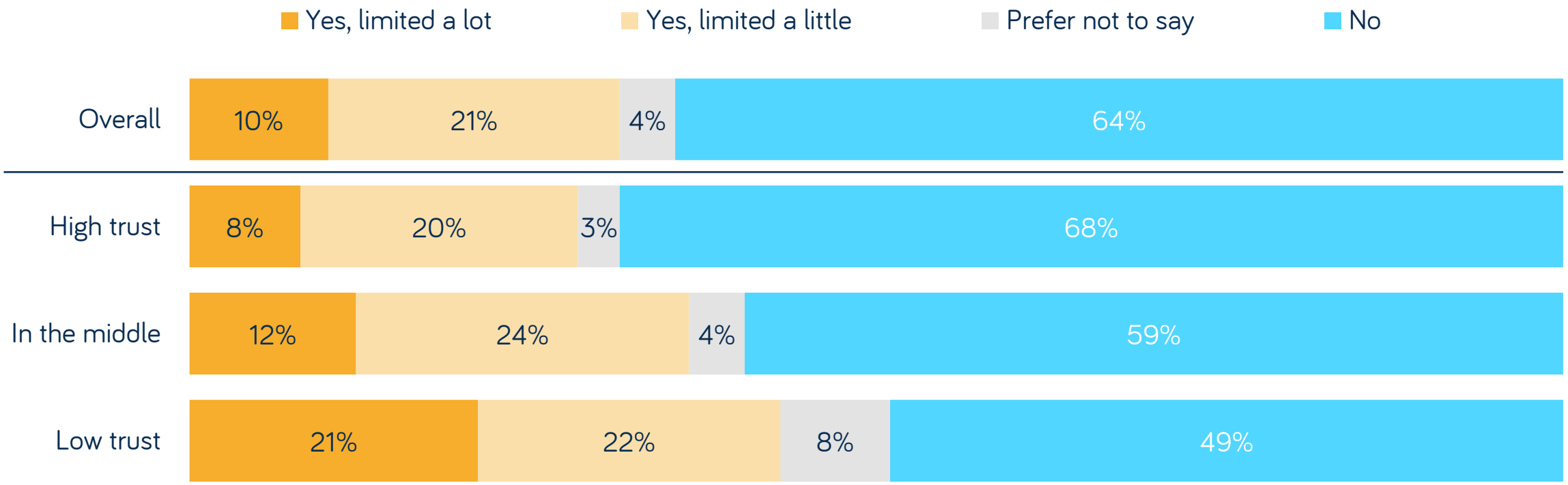
Thinking about your finances, which of the following best reflects your position?



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

More than four in 10 (43%) low-trusters live with a condition or disability that limits their daily activities – compared with fewer than three in 10 (28%) high-trusters

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a physical or mental health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

2.4. Belief in conspiracies about science

2.4. Belief in conspiracies

Recent studies identify a link between conspiracy beliefs and lower trust in scientists. Conspiracy belief has been shown to predict lower trust in relation to the science community generally[14] and in trust in science during the Covid-19 pandemic specifically.[15] Similarly, a study of 26 European countries[16] found that trust in scientists can contribute to a reduction in propensity to believe in conspiracies.

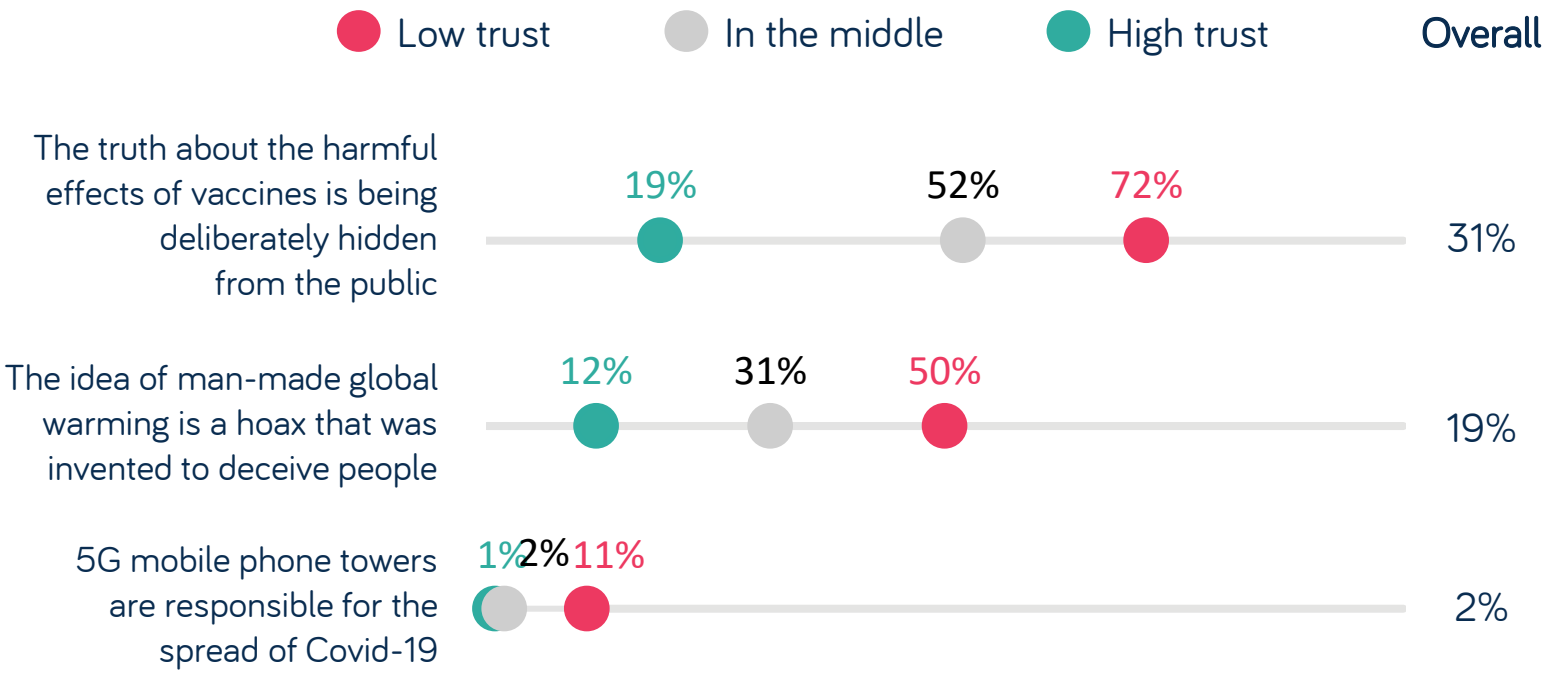
Our study reinforces this link. Belief in science-related conspiracy theories emerged as a statistically significant predictor of lower trust in climate scientists and in scientists who work on vaccines, although not in relation to trust in scientists in general

As an example of what this means in practice, nearly three-quarters of those with low trust in scientists, and just over half those with middling levels of trust, believe that the truth about the harmful effects of vaccines is being deliberately hidden from the public.

14. Plohl, N., & Musil, B. (2023). Assessing the incremental value of intellectual humility and cognitive reflection in predicting trust in science. *Personality and Individual Differences, 214*, Article 112340.
15. Alkış Küçükaydın, M., Esen, S., & Gürbüzer, S. (2023). Did we trust in science during the COVID-19 pandemic? Modeling the relationship between trust, awareness, and conspiracy theories. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 37*(6), 1266–1276.
16. Jabkowski, P., Domaradzki, J. & Baranowski, M. Exploring COVID-19 conspiracy theories: education, religiosity, trust in scientists, and political orientation in 26 European countries. *Sci Rep* **13**, 18116 (2023).

People with middling trust in scientists (52%) are closer to low-trusters (72%) than high-trusters (19%) for belief in a conspiracy theory about vaccine safety, and are right in the middle for belief that global warming is a hoax, with nearly a third (31%) holding this view

In your opinion, to what extent are the following statements true or false? % who say probably/definitely true

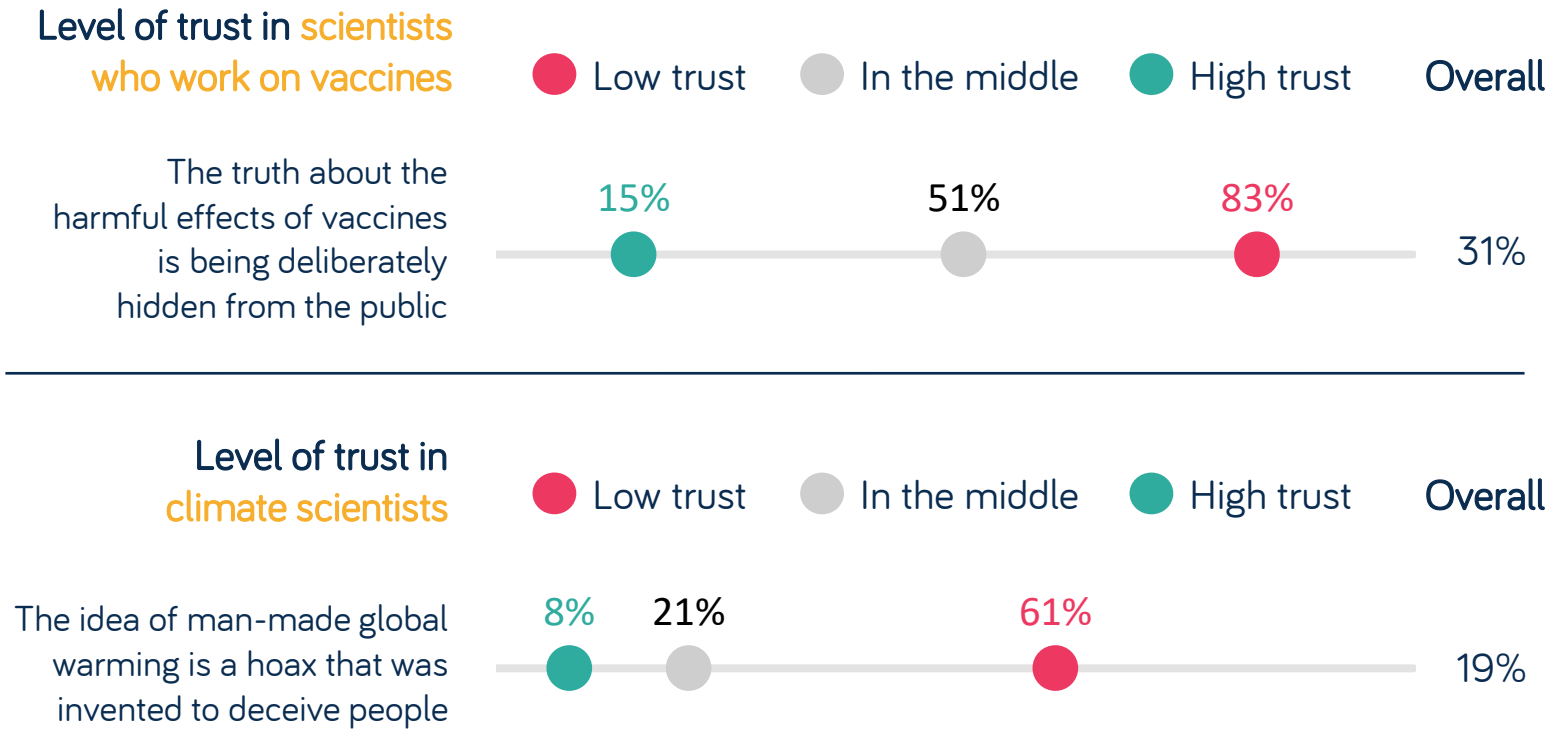


Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Conspiracy belief among the smaller low-trust group is particularly high, with seven in 10 (72%) believing the truth about vaccine harms is being deliberately hidden from the public and half (50%) saying global warming is a hoax. One in nine (11%) also say 5G towers spread Covid-19 – 11 times the 1% of high-trusters who say this is true.

Despite not being outright sceptics, as many as half (51%) of people with middling trust in vaccine scientists believe harmful effects of vaccines are being deliberately concealed from the public

In your opinion, to what extent are the following statements true or false? % who say probably/definitely true



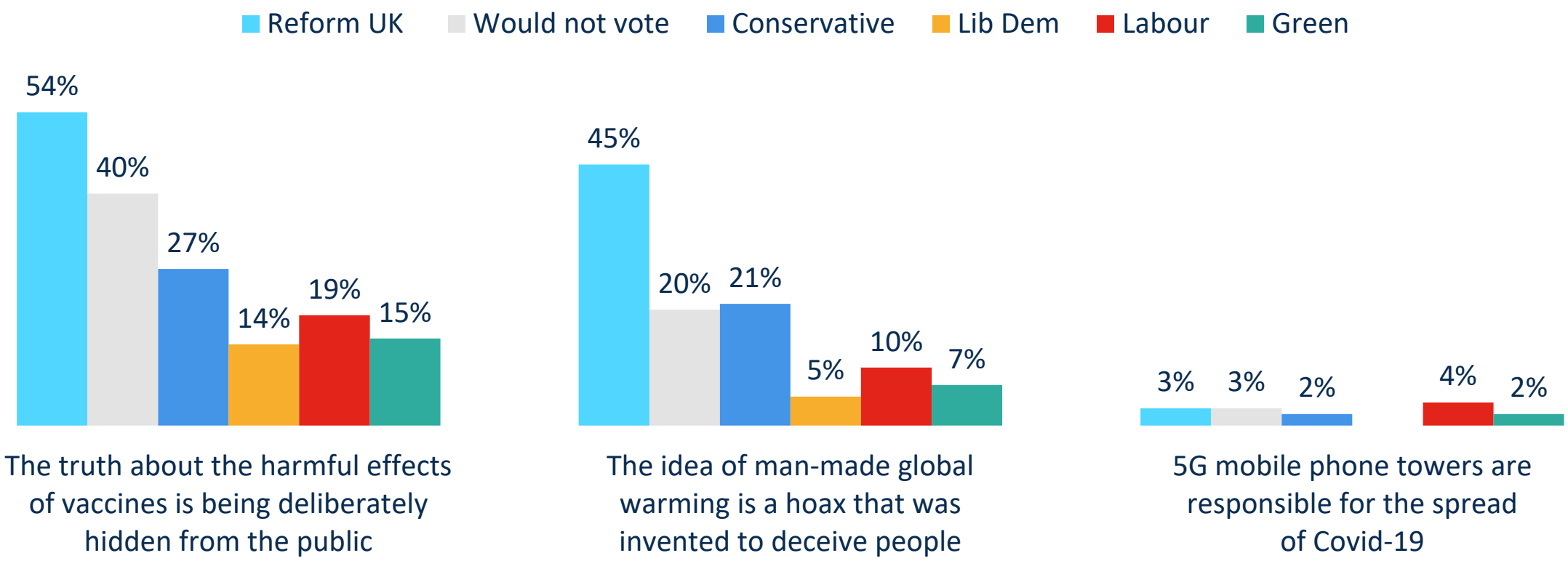
Base: 2,758 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists who work on vaccines, 940 'in the middle' (4-6) and 420 with 'low trust' (0-3). Climate scientists: 2,368 'high trust', 1,054 'in the middle', 631 'low trust'. 8-11 May 2026.

On this question, middling-trusters are closer to low-trusters (32-point gap) than to high-trusters (36-point gap).

In contrast, only one in five (21%) of those in the middle for trust in climate scientists say they believe global warming is a hoax – on this measure, they are much closer to high-trusters (8%) rather than low-trusters (61%).

Reform UK supporters are by far the most likely to say the truth about vaccines is being concealed from the public and global warming is a hoax, though non-voters also have high levels of suspicion about vaccines

In your opinion, to what extent are the following statements true or false? **% who say probably/definitely true**



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election. Would not vote: 368. 8-11 May 2026.

2. What factors are most associated with trust in scientists?

2.5. Information, engagement and direct connection to science

2.5. Information, engagement and direct connection to science

There are large differences between trust groups on the sources of information they rely on and trust, their levels of engagement and their direct connection to science through knowing scientists personally.

As seen in other studies, attention and interest in science comes out as having a particularly strong association with trust in science.[17] High-trusters stand out for the amount of attention they pay to scientific information, much higher than other groups.

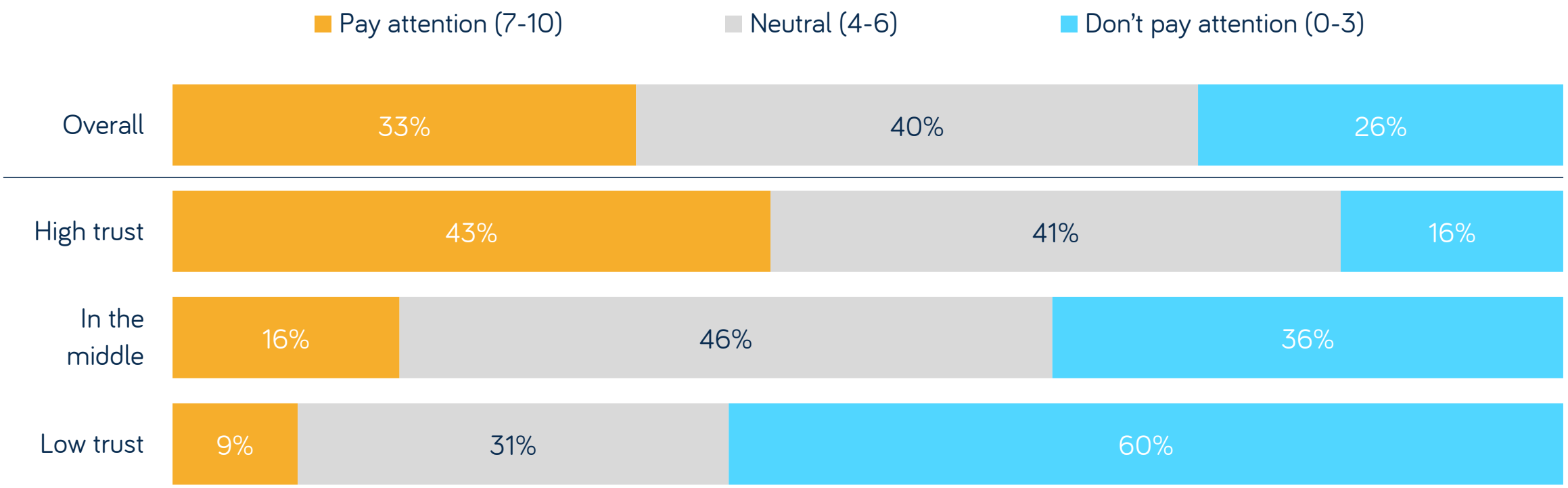
The BBC is a key source of trusted information by high-trusters, but it is a much more mixed view for other groups: it is clearly the most cited source for middling-trusters, but their level of trust in the BBC is closer to low-trusters than high-trusters.

Those with high trust in scientists are also much more likely to know someone who works in science or medicine than those with middling or low trust.

17. Iordanou, K., Antoniou, A., & De Vos, M. (2026). Public trust in science: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Academic Ethics.*

High-trusters stand out from the other groups for the attention they say they pay to scientific information and advances, being nearly three times as likely to report doing this than middling-trusters

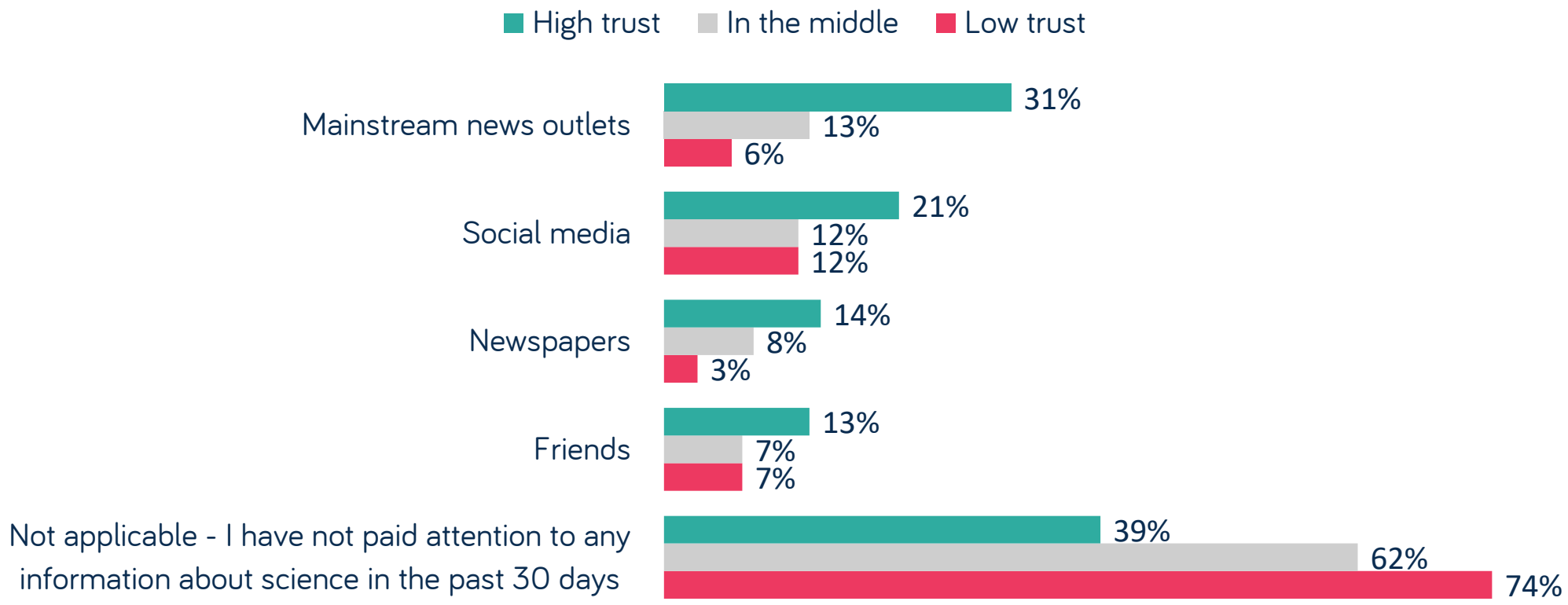
In general, how much attention, if any, do you pay to scientific information and advances? 0 - No attention at all, 10 - A great deal of attention



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Majorities of both middling- (62%) and low-trusters (74%) say they've not paid attention to any science information in the past 30 days – only a minority of high-trusters (39%) say the same

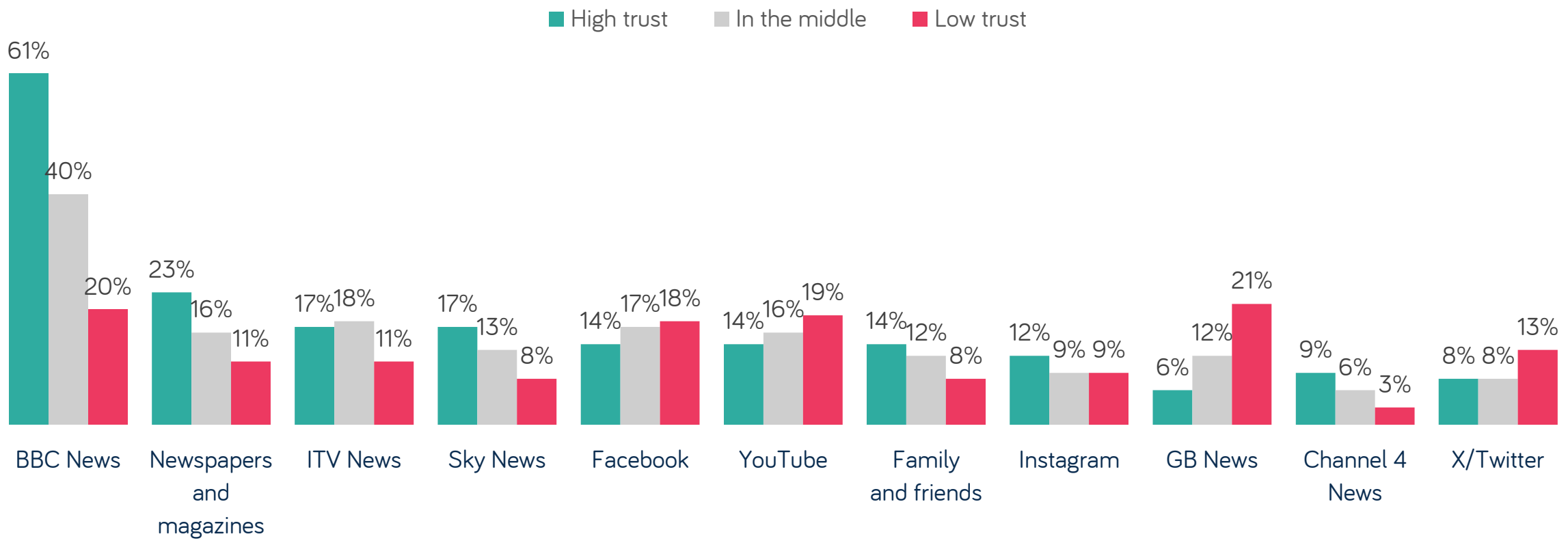
Have you personally paid attention to any information about science in the past 30 days from the following sources? Please tick all that apply.



*Including through their websites and online. Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Those with high (61%) and middling (40%) trust in scientists are much more likely to get their news from the BBC than other outlets – unlike low-trusters, for whom the BBC (20%) is tied with GB News (21%) and YouTube (19%) as a key news source

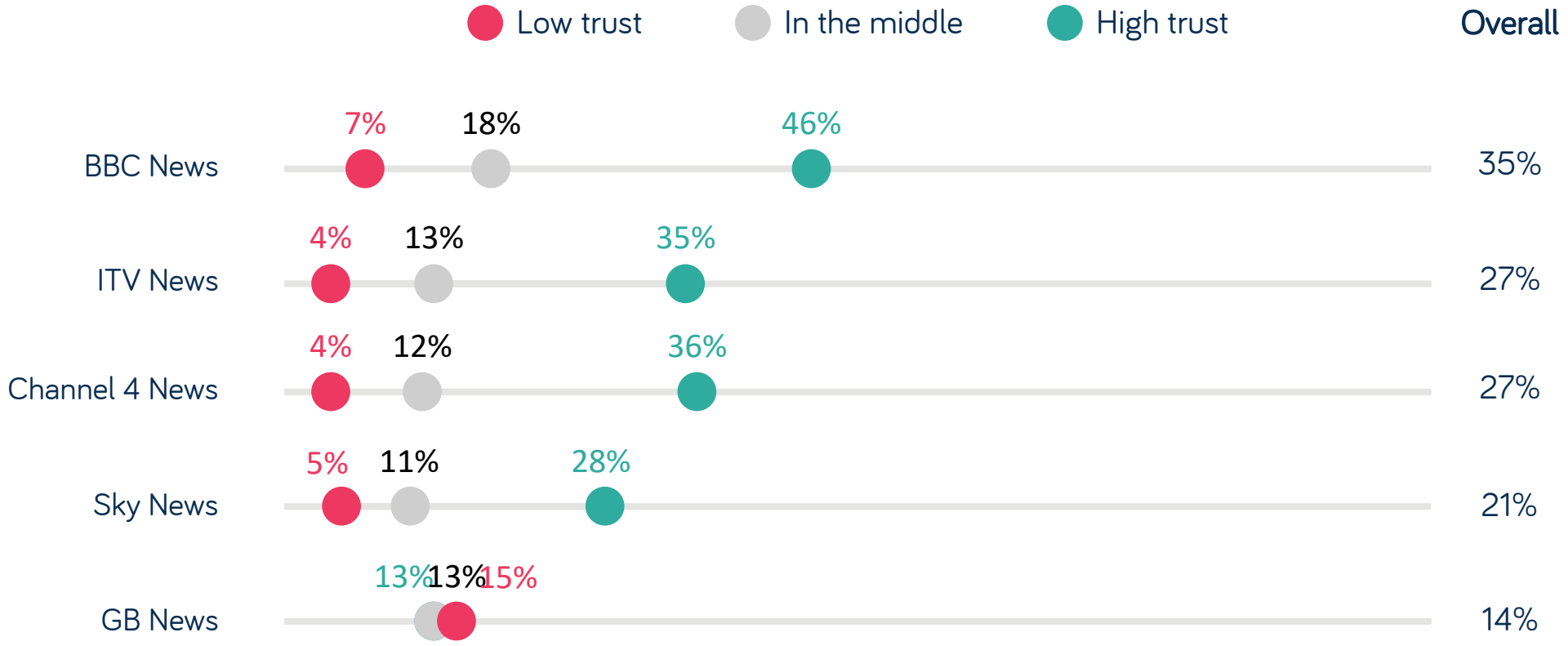
Which of the following do you use most often to find the news? Please tick all that apply.



*Including through their websites and online. Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

But despite middling-trusters being more likely to use BBC News, their trust in it as a reliable source (18%) is much closer to low-trusters (7%) than high-trusters (46%)

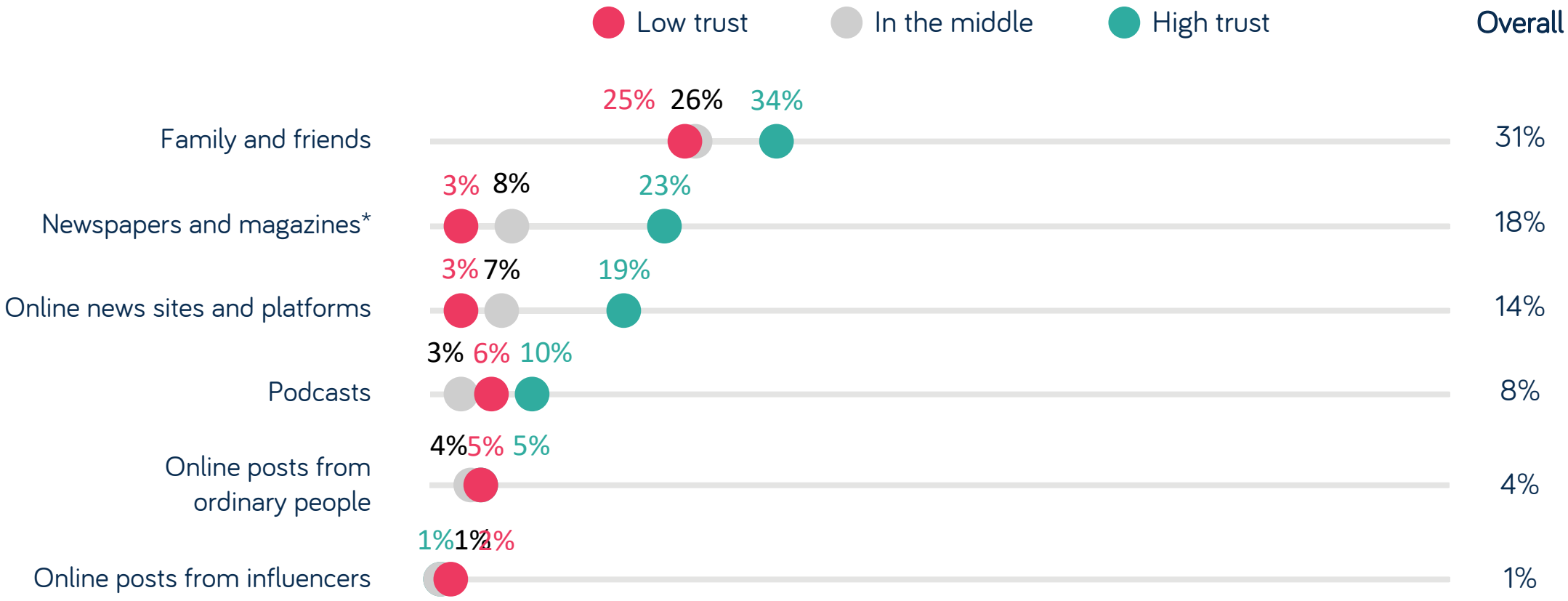
To what extent, if at all, do you trust each of the following to be a reliable source of news and information? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'. **% with high trust (7-10)**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Low-trusters and those in the middle don't seem to have much trust in other information sources either – except family and friends, who come top for both groups

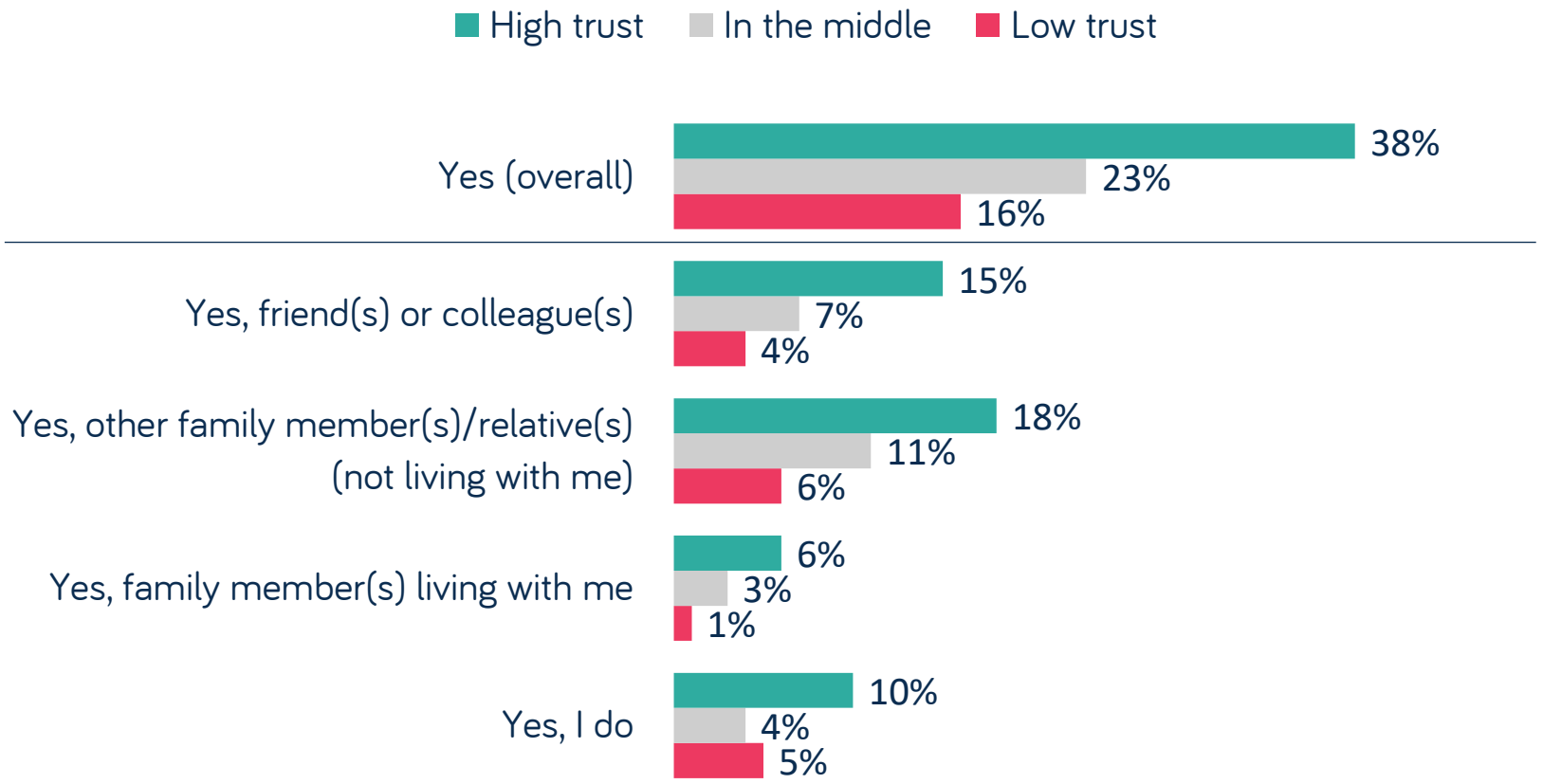
To what extent, if at all, do you trust each of the following to be a reliable source of news and information? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'. **% with high trust (7-10)**



*Including through their websites and online. Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Those with high trust in scientists are much more likely to know someone who works in science or medicine than those with middling or low trust...

Do you, or do any of your friends or family, work in a job using science or medicine? Please select all that apply.



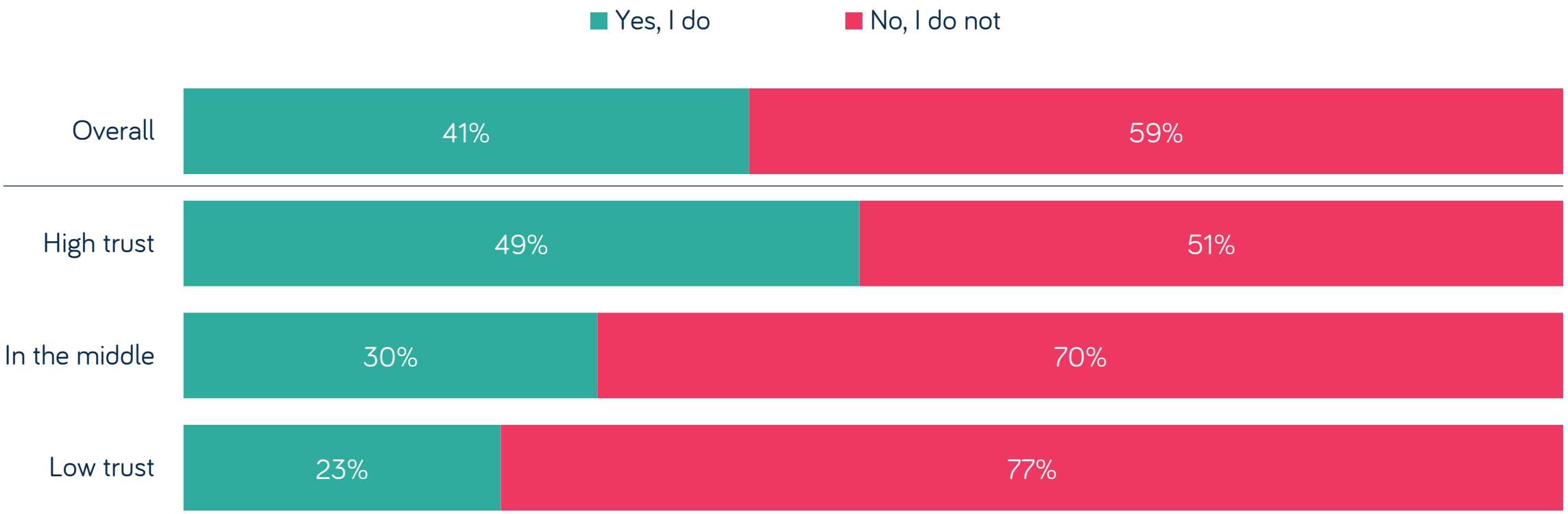
...and knowing someone in these professions is linked to greater trust *regardless* of occupational and educational levels

Among those with no or low qualifications (GCSE level or below), **74%** who know someone working in science or medicine have high trust in scientists, compared with only **52%** who don't.

Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Those with high trust in scientists are much more likely to have someone they could turn to for trusted advice on a scientific issue

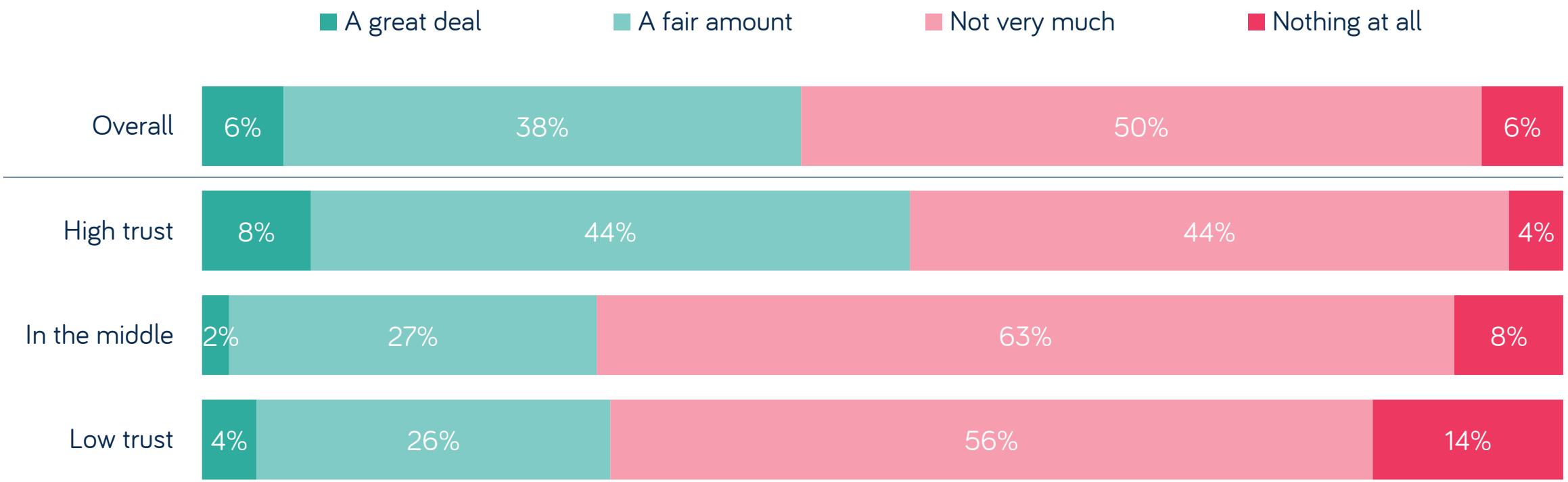
Do you have anyone you know and trust that you could ask for advice or an explanation around a scientific issue you were interested in, or not?



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

A majority (52%) of those who have high trust in scientists say they know a fair amount or more about science. Fewer than one-third of those who have low (30%) or middling (29%) trust say the same

How much do you, personally, know about science?



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

2.6. Party political identities and cultural divisions

2.6. Political identity and cultural divisions

There's substantial variation in levels of trust in scientists according to the party people say they intend to vote for at the next general election. For all eight groups of scientist asked about, Green supporters were the most trusting and Reform supporters the least. Climate scientists are by far the most polarising group.

Generally, those who say they don't intend to vote have low levels of trust in scientists, similar to the levels of Reform supporters.

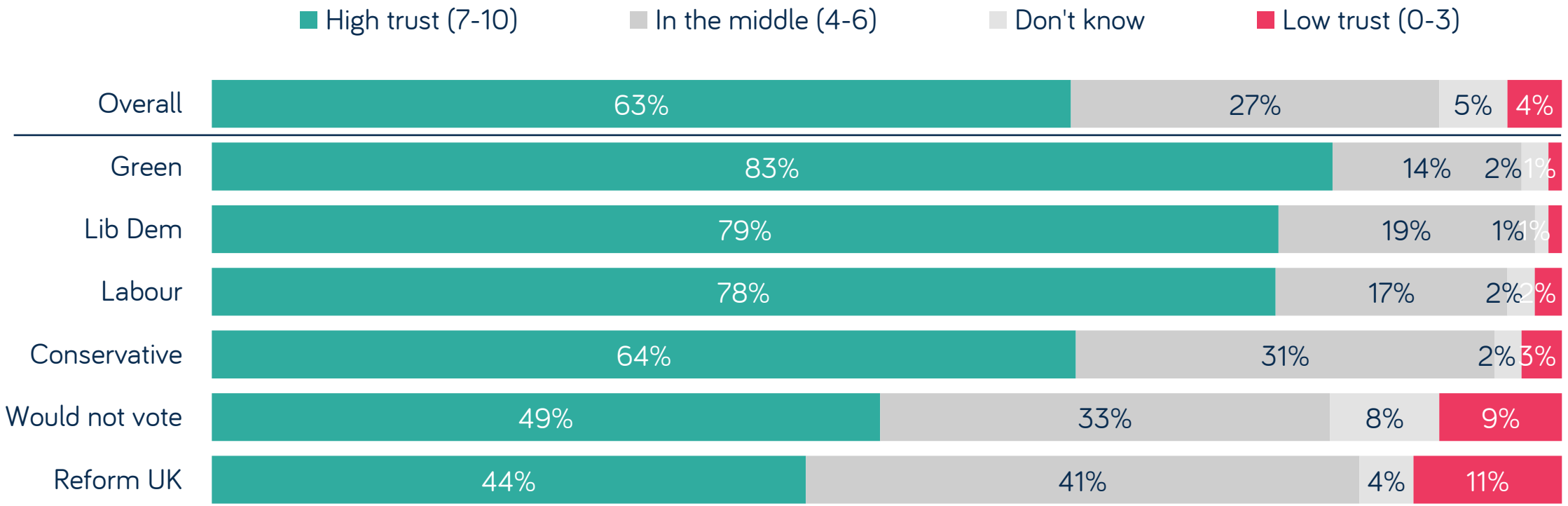
This also plays out in the left-right political spectrum. The high-trust group are more left-leaning than, while the opposite is true for low-trusters and those in the middle.

However, there are far more right-leaning people in the high trust group than left-leaning people in the low trust group. And there is a large proportion of people who define themselves as neither left-leaning nor right-leaning.

There's also a clear signal in our data that perceptions of the values that scientists hold can drive trust, both positively and negatively. The belief that most 'have the same values as me' predicts trust in scientists in general. While the view that scientists care more about social and political causes than about scientific progress is a negative driver of trust.

Around eight in 10 Green, Labour and Lib Dem supporters have high trust in scientists, compared with two-thirds of Conservatives and less than half of Reform UK supporters – though even with this latter group, high-trusters make up the greatest share (44%), slightly larger than middling-trusters (41%)

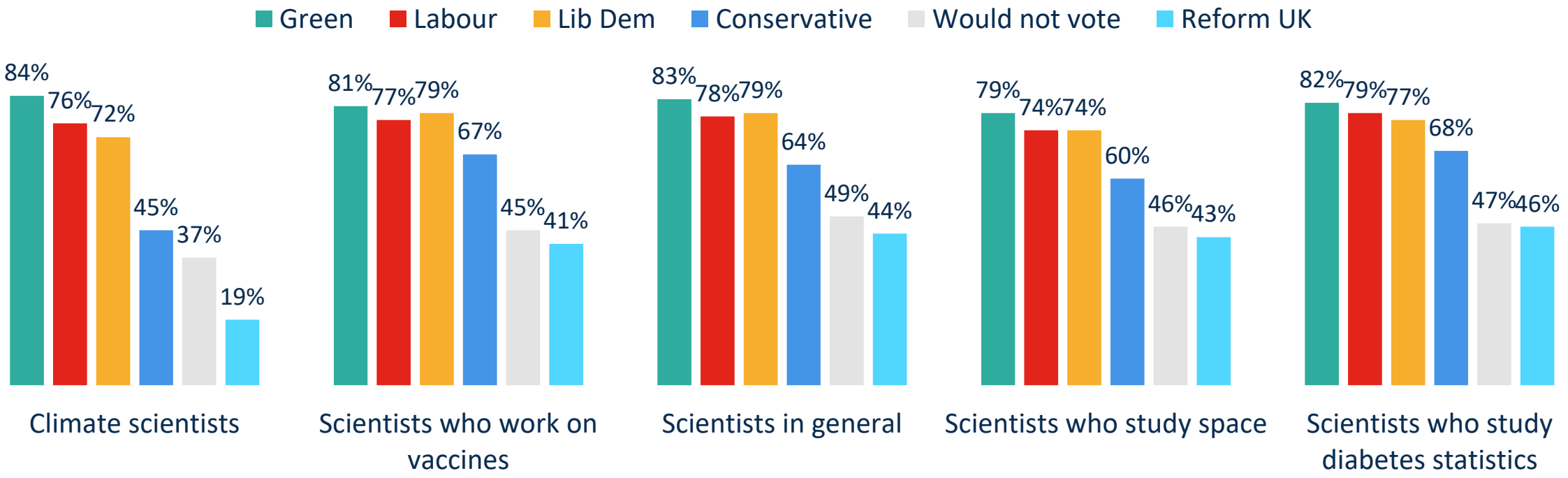
How much, if at all, do you trust scientists in general? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election. Would not vote: 368. 8-11 May 2026.

Green (84%) and Labour (76%) supporters are around four times more likely than Reform supporters (19%) to trust climate scientists – the most politically polarising group of scientists asked about. Non-voters are closest to Reform supporters on all, except for climate scientists, where they are closer to Conservatives

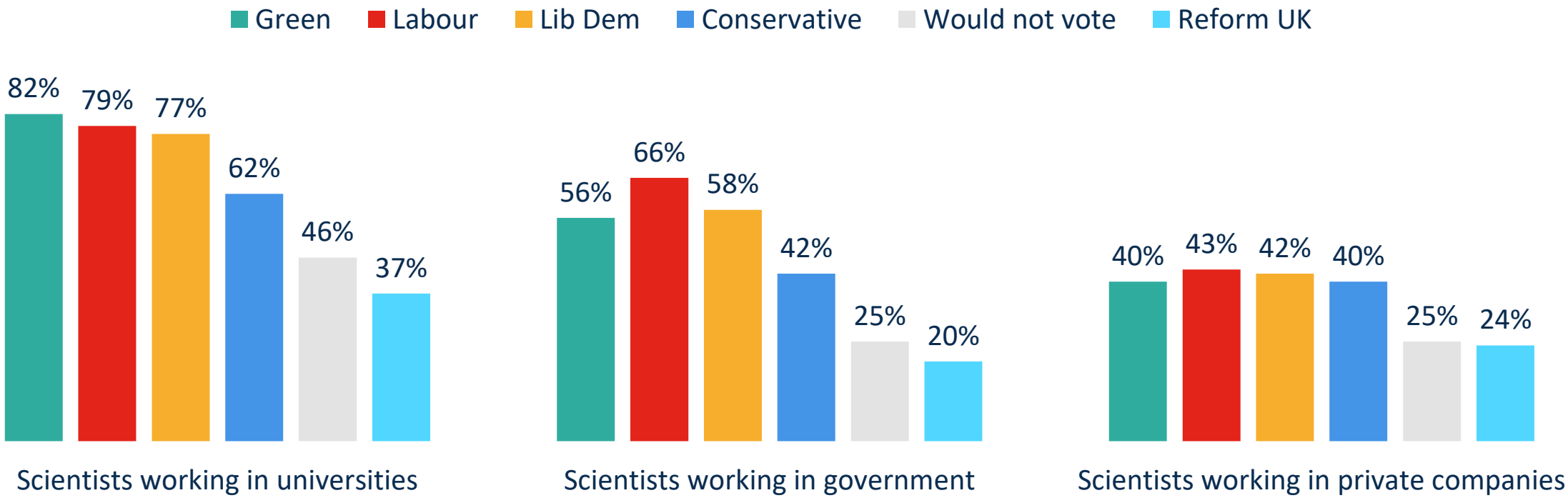
How much, if at all, do you trust the following...? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'. % with high trust (7-10)



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election. Would not vote: 368. 8-11 May 2026.

There is also a wide trust gap between Reform supporters and backers of other parties when it comes to university scientists. This narrows for those in private companies, where even Labour and Green supporters become relatively cautious in trusting

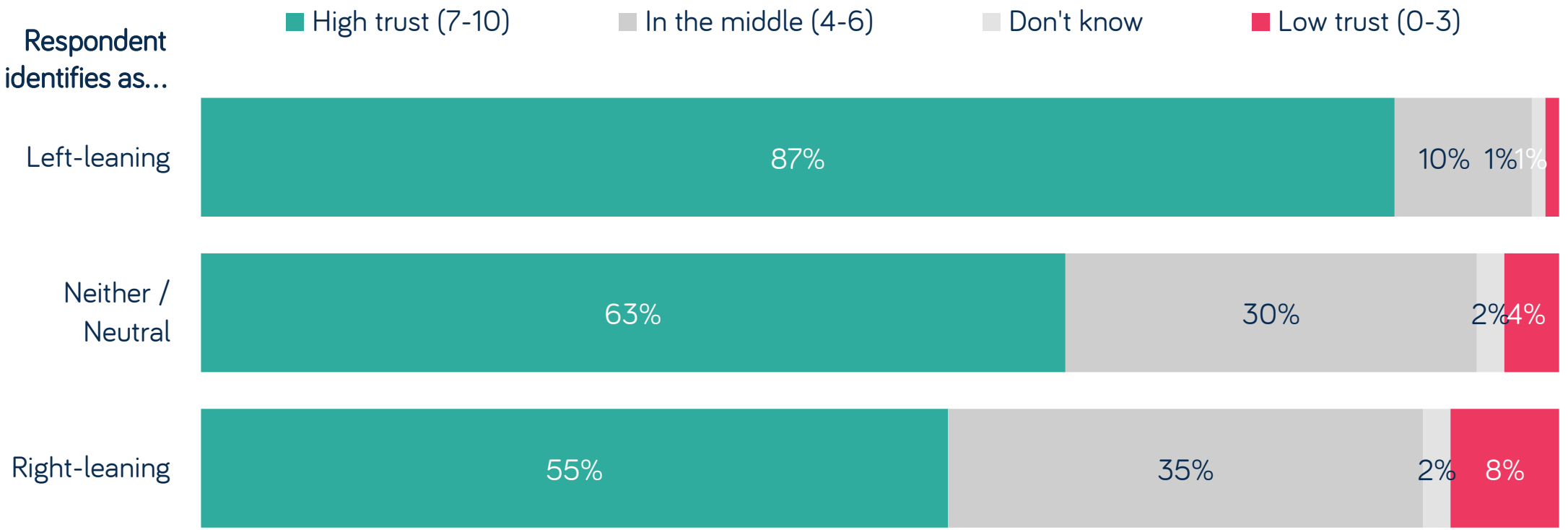
How much, if at all, do you trust the following...? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'. % with high trust (7-10)



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election. Would not vote: 368. 8-11 May 2026.

Nearly nine in 10 who are politically left-leaning have high trust in scientists, compared with just over half who are right leaning and two-thirds who identify as with neither side

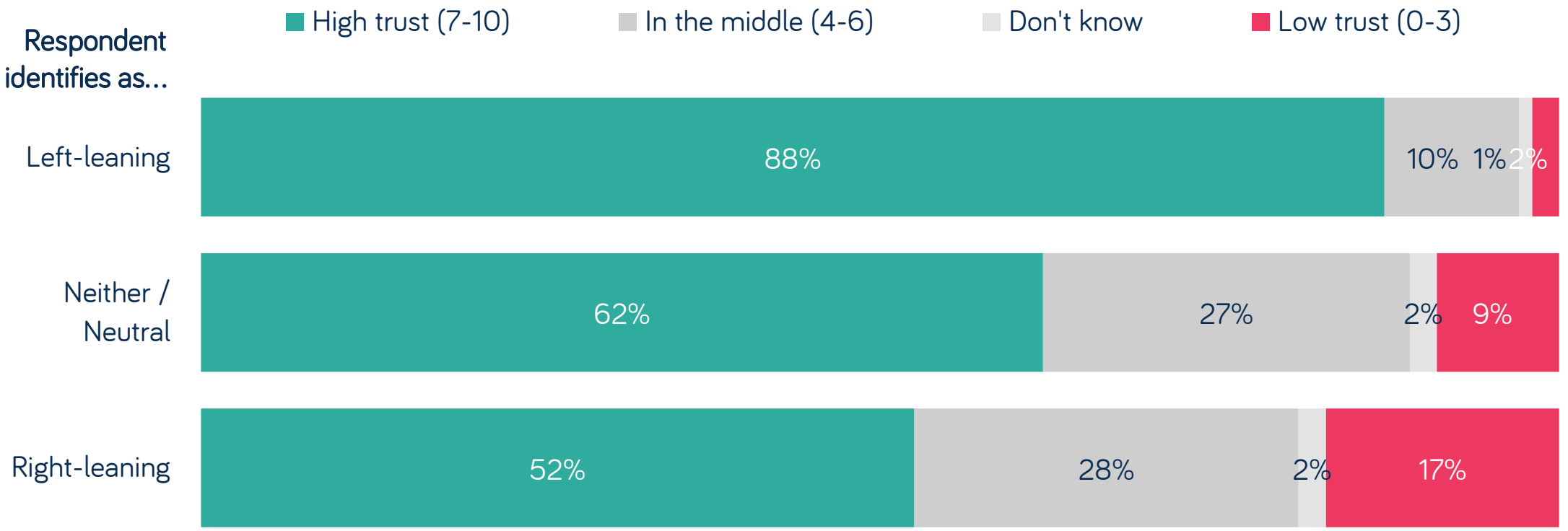
How much, if at all, do you trust **scientists in general**? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 1,220 identify as left-leaning (1-2), 983 right-leaning (4-5) and 1,277 neutral (3), 8-11 May 2026.

And there is a similar split in trust across the political spectrum on scientists who work on vaccines

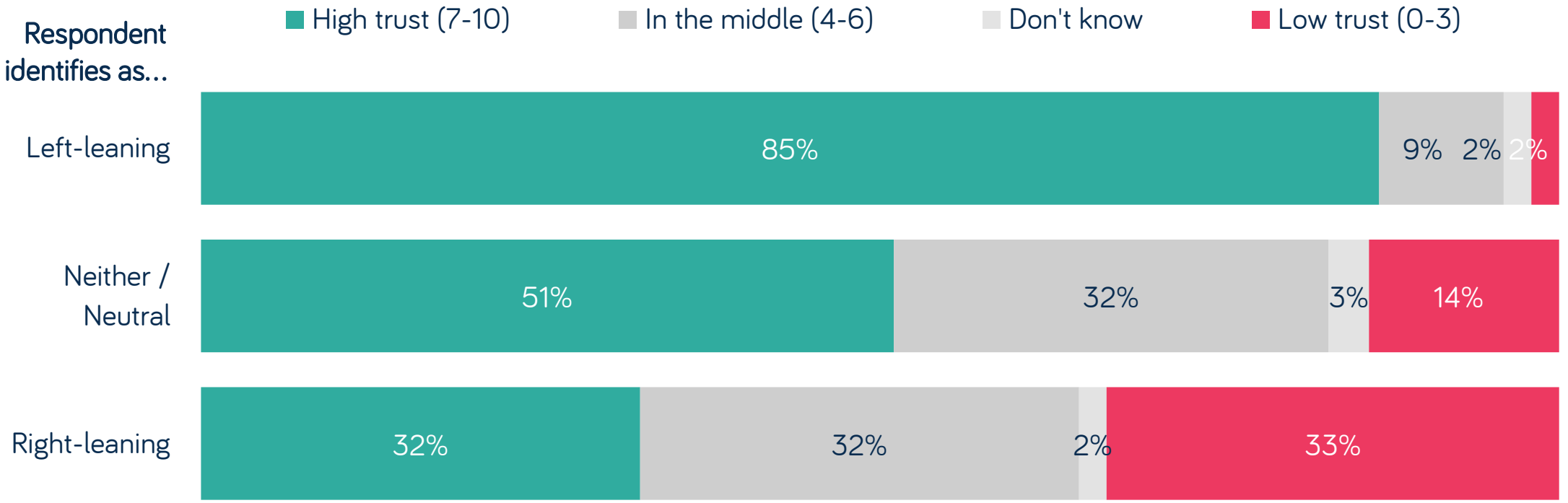
How much, if at all, do you trust **scientists who work on vaccines**? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 1,220 identify as left-leaning (1-2), 983 right-leaning (4-5) and 1,277 neutral (3), 8-11 May 2026.

But the biggest divide is on climate scientists, where there is a 53-point gap in high trust between those who identify as left-leaning and those who identify as right-leaning. Only around a third of the latter group have high trust in climate scientists, compared with a majority for other scientists

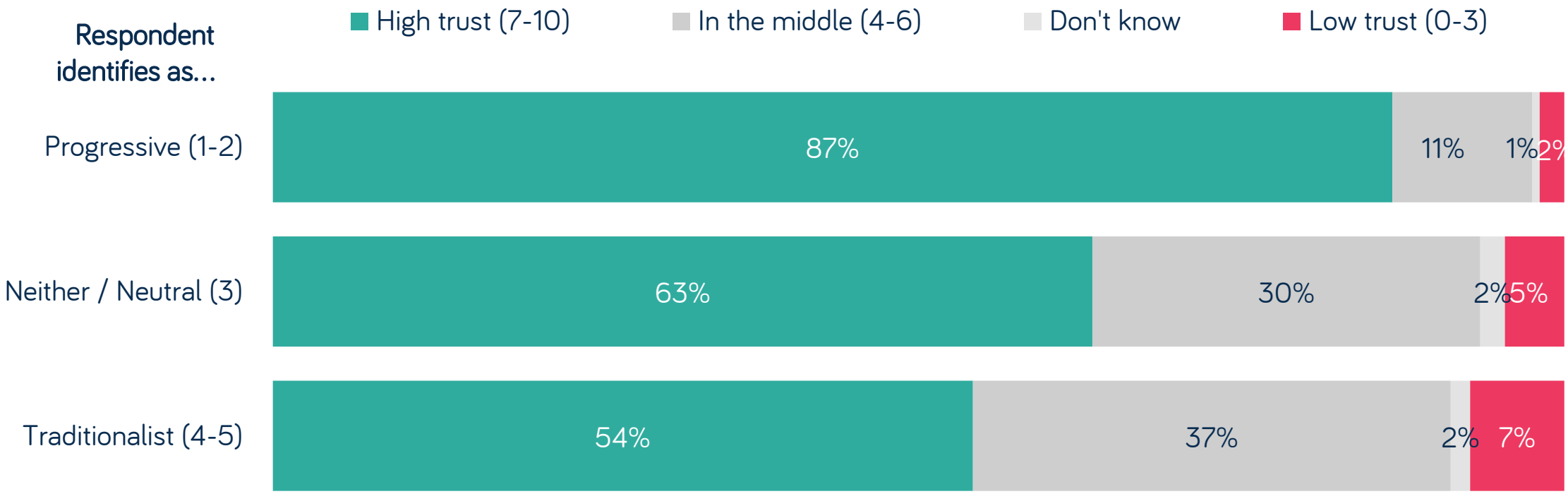
How much, if at all, do you trust **climate scientists**? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 1,220 identify as left-leaning (1-2), 983 right-leaning (4-5) and 1,277 neutral (3), 8-11 May 2026.

Those who identify as neutral on a political spectrum are closer to traditionalists when it comes to their trust in scientists in general. Around six in 10 of both groups report high trust, compared with nine in 10 progressives

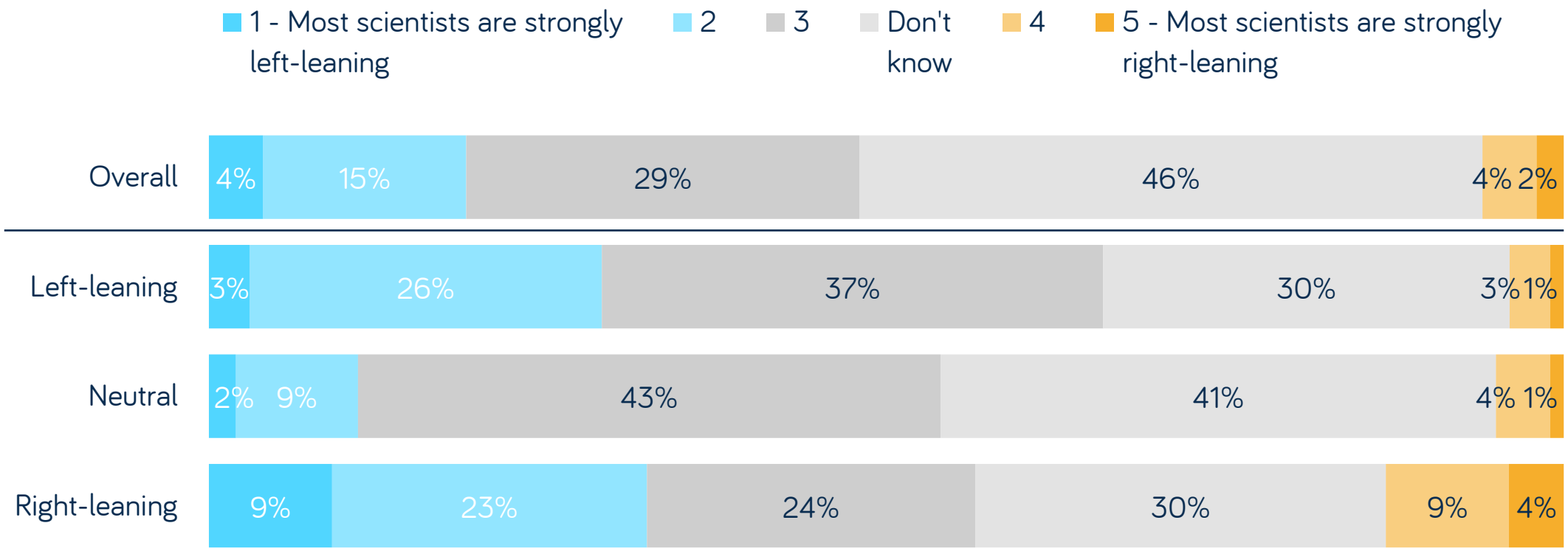
How much, if at all, do you trust **scientists in general**? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 1,208 identify as progressive (1-2), 1,002 as traditionalist (4-5) and 1,363 neither/neutral (3), 8-11 May 2026.

Three in 10 (29%) think that *scientists* are politically neutral, and nearly half say they don't know (46%). Right-leaning people are the most likely to think scientists have a political leaning, with one-third (32%) saying 'left-leaning'

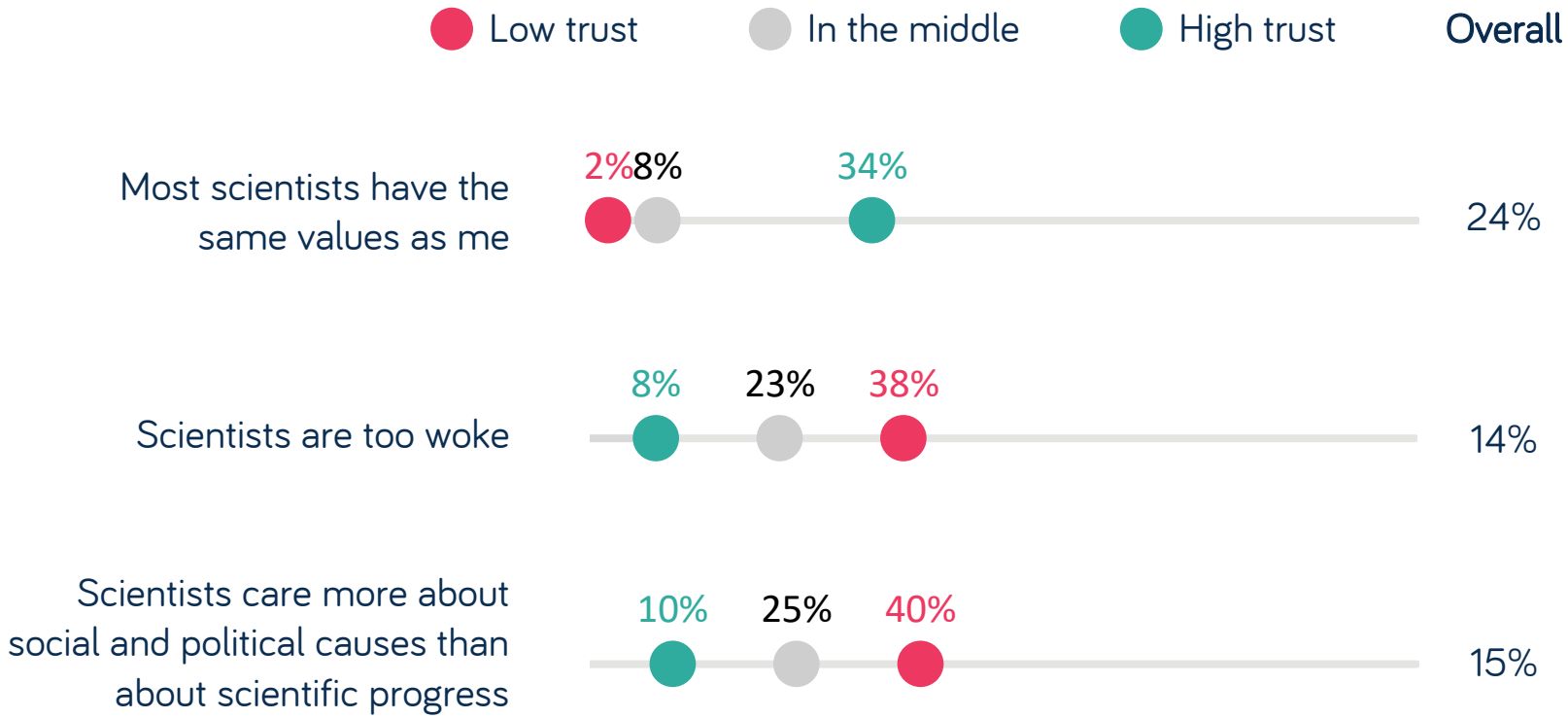
Political orientations are often classified on a left-right spectrum. Please indicate where you think most **scientists** tend to sit on a left-right spectrum, where 1 is 'Strongly left-leaning' and 5 is 'Strongly right-leaning'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 1,220 identify as left-leaning (1-2), 983 right-leaning (4-5) and 1,277 neutral (3), 8-11 May 2026.

Those with low and middling trust in scientists are notably more likely than high-trusters to agree scientists are 'too woke', and much less likely to say scientists share their values

% of those who **agree** with the following statements



Low-trusters (38%) are nearly five times as likely as high-trusters (8%) to say scientists are too woke, while middling-trusters (23%) are around three times as likely to agree with this view.

And just 2% of low-trusters think scientists have the same values as them, with middling-trusters only slightly more likely to agree (8%) – compared with a third (34%) of high-trusters.

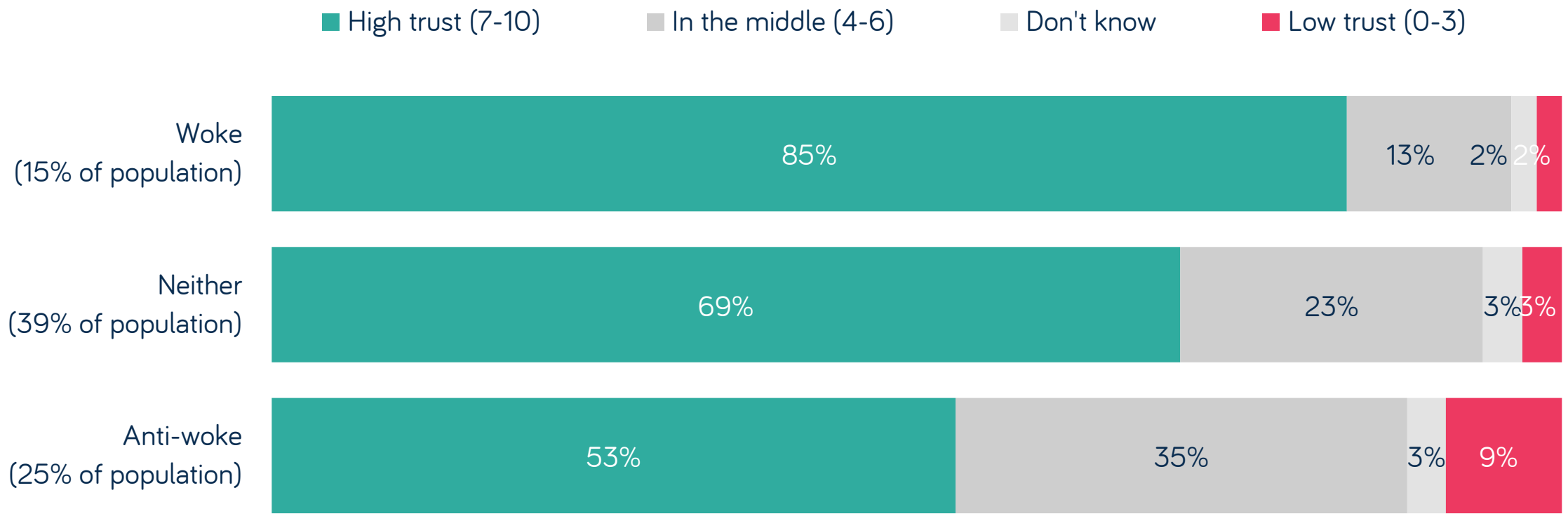
There is a similar divide in opinion between the three groups on whether scientists care more about social and political causes than scientific progress.

However, a large share of all groups (around 40% to 60%) respond to these three questions with 'neither' or don't know.

Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Those who identify as ‘woke’ are significantly more likely than those who consider themselves ‘anti-woke’ to have high trust in scientists

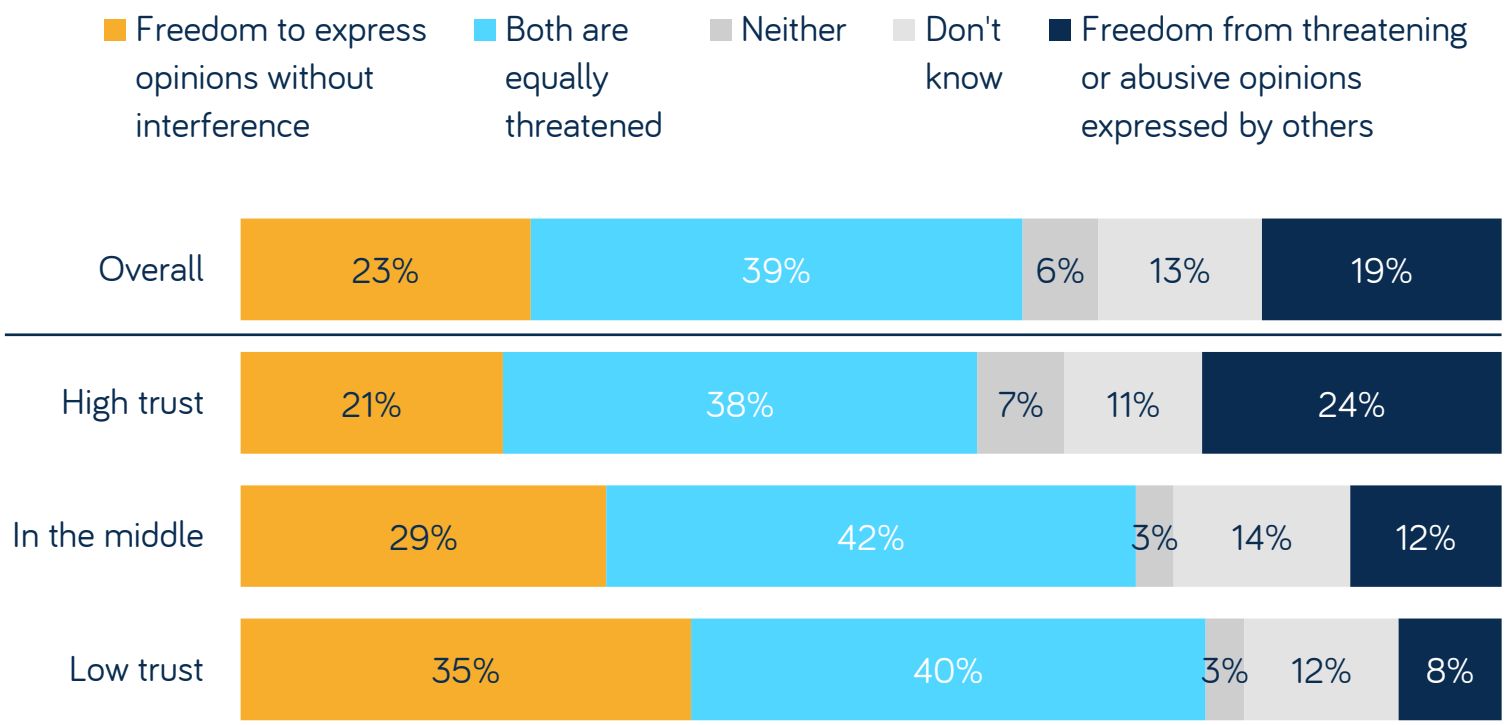
How much, if at all, do you trust scientists in general? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.



*21% of the population also said they don’t know what the terms ‘woke’ and ‘anti-woke’ mean. Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

Whatever the level of trust in scientists, all groups are most likely to say both freedom of expression and freedom from abusive opinions are *both* under threat

Generally speaking, which of these two freedoms, if either, do you think is the most threatened in the UK today?



Although low-trusters are almost as likely to say freedom of expression (35%) is under threat as they are to say both freedoms are at risk (40%).

Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

2.7. Science-related populism

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Previous studies have identified and tested dimensions of a measure of 'science-related populism'.[18]

Populism typically pits elites against 'the people'. This most commonly targets political elites but can also include others, such as economic elites, media elites and legal elites, or more generally 'the establishment' – any group perceived to be supporting the elites or the system that they benefit from.

Science-related populism has been studied as a recent variant of more general populism, targeting scientific or academic elites. Key features of science-related populist attitudes include:

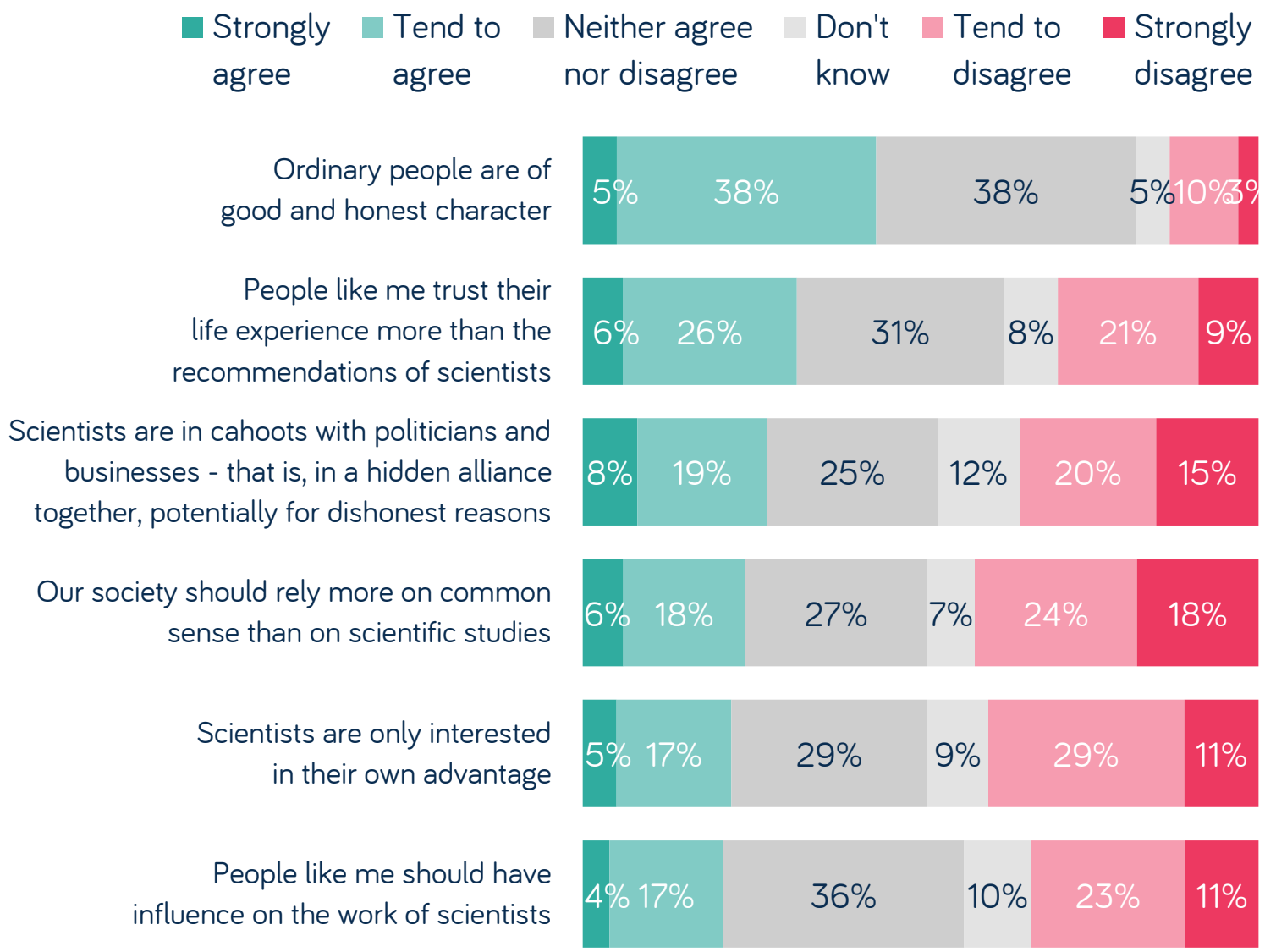
- A feeling that ordinary people do and should rely more on their own commonsense knowledge and everyday experience than on scientific research.
- A perception that scientists are interested in their own or other elites' advantage rather than that of ordinary people.
- A view that ordinary people should have the right to influence scientific research.

This has been measured as six-item question, outlined next.

It is worth noting that there is an element of circularity in elements of the science-related populism question set: it explicitly contrasts trust in scientists with trust in common sense and life experience. Given we are trying to explain trust, we would expect these to be highly related.

However, it does include other valuable elements that are also strong related to trust, including the perception that scientists are 'in cahoots' with politicians and businesses, and only interested in their own advantage.

18. Cologna, V et al. (2025). Op cit.

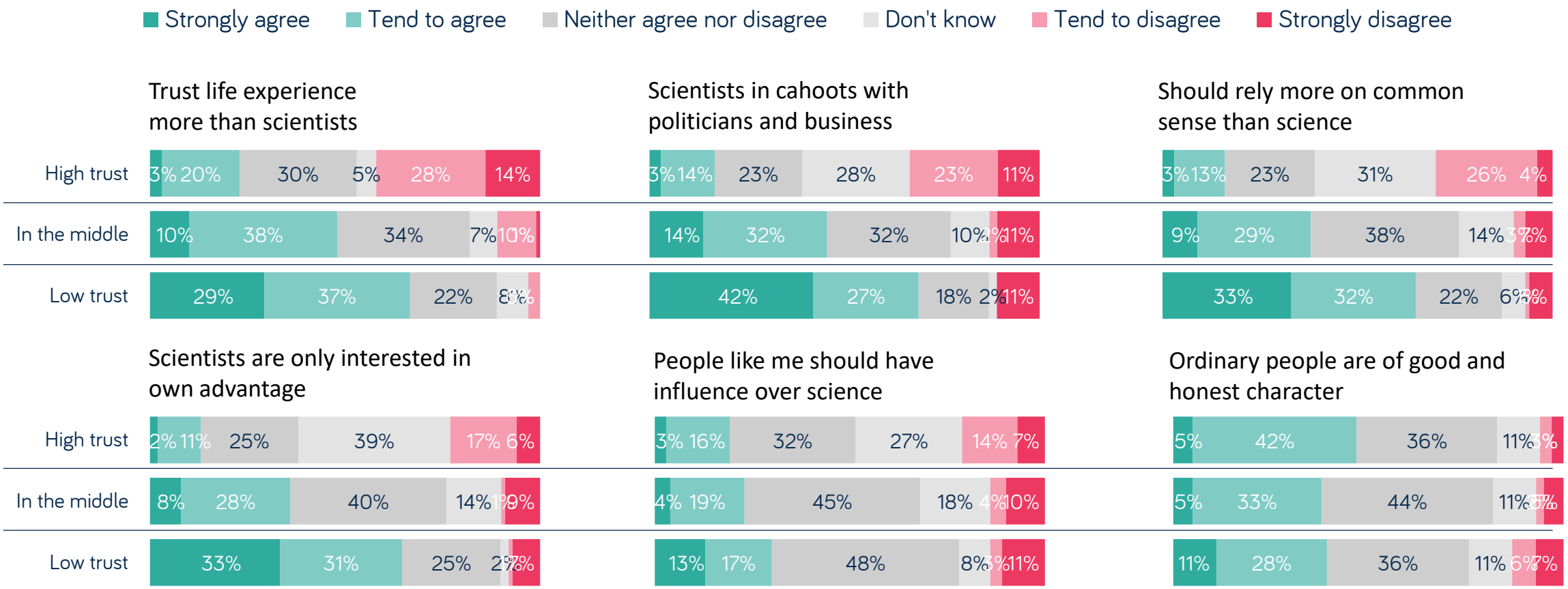


Between a third and a quarter of the public say people like them trust life experience over scientists, that scientists are 'in cahoots' with politicians and businesses, and that our society should rely more on common sense than scientific studies

The following statements are about the relationship between science and society. How much do you agree or disagree with them?

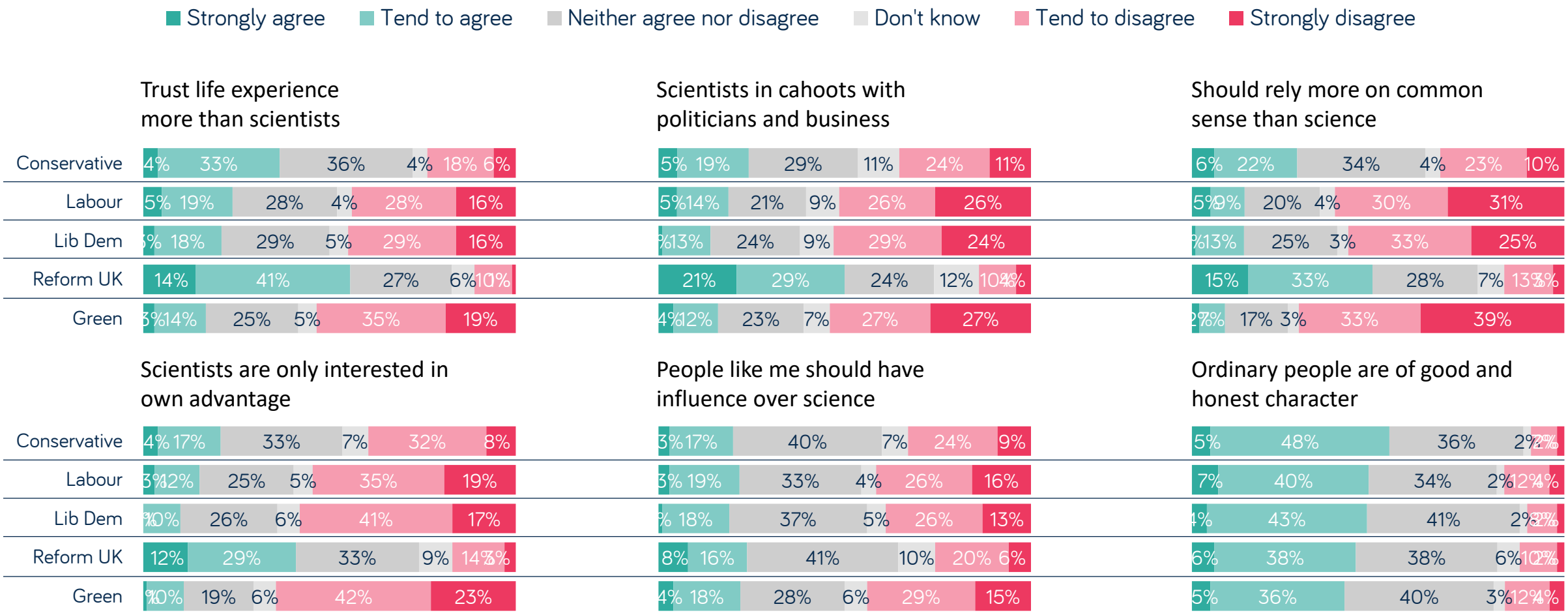
Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

Compared to those with high trust in scientists, people with middling or low trust are far more likely to place greater importance on life experience over science, believe scientists are in cahoots with politicians and business, say scientists are only interested in their own advantage, and think society should rely more on common sense



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Reform UK supporters stand out with far higher agreement on several of these statements: a majority trust life experience more than scientists (55%), while around half say scientists are in cahoots with politicians and business (50%) and we should rely more on common sense than science (48%)



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election, 8-11 May 2026.

2.8. Social and moral values: Social Dominance Orientation and Moral Foundations Theory

2.8. Social Dominance Orientation and Moral Foundations Theory

A recent global study found that social dominance orientation (SDO) predicts low trust in scientists.[19] SDO is a psychological trait associated with a preference for social hierarchies and therefore may distrust institutions like universities and science that can be seen as democratising and contributing to equal opportunities.

While SDO is not statistically significant in our analysis, our findings reinforce the link between SDO and low trust. High-trusters have a stronger preference for social equality than those with middling or low trust in science.

We also applied Moral Foundations Theory (MFT).[20] MFT, in its original form, identified five distinct sources of moral intuition, or 'moral foundations', which have evolved to enable us to navigate social life and maintain cooperation. These are: fairness, care, loyalty, purity, and authority.*

Joyner[21] argues that differences in moral values can influence moral evaluations of scientists, and that MFT may help to explain previously observed associations between individual differences and trust in science.

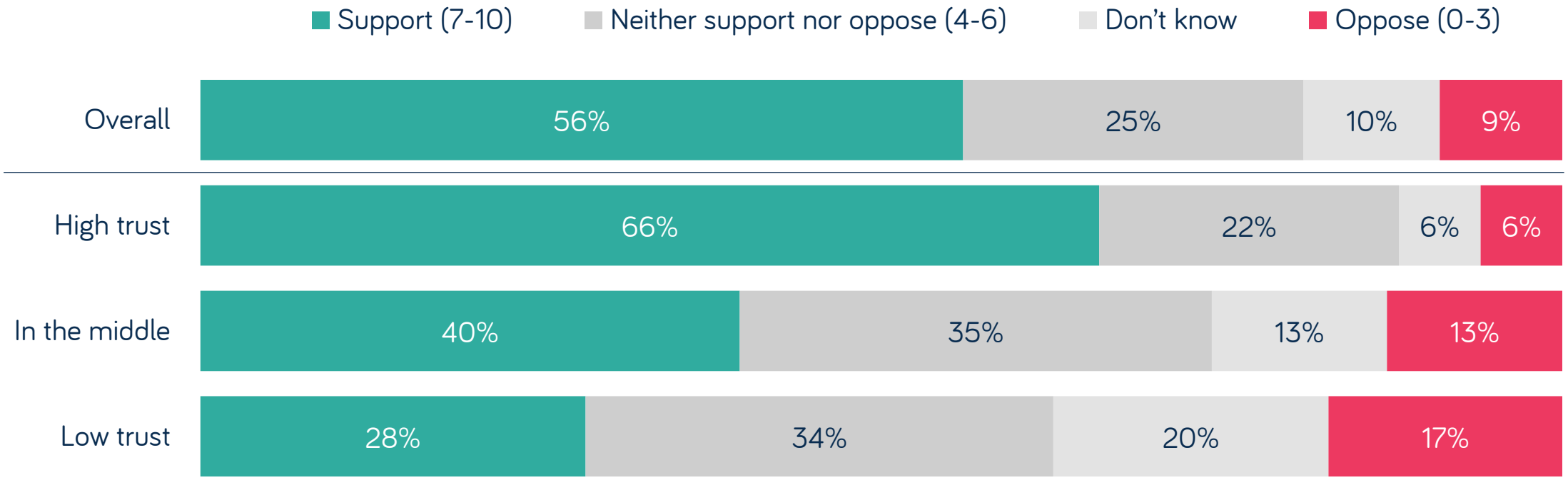
Differences in moral values did not emerge as a significant predictor of trust in our analysis. However, the results support Joyner's suggestion of an association between the two, with clear differences emerging in the values of those with high trust in scientists and those with lower trust.

*A sixth moral foundation, liberty, was later added. However, in our data we could not replicate liberty as a distinct foundation, so we here focus only on the original five.

19. Cologne et al. (2025) Op. cit.
20. Iyer, R., Koleva, S., Graham, J., Ditto, P., & Haidt, J. (2012). Understanding libertarian morality: The psychological dispositions of self-identified libertarians. *PLoS ONE, 7*(8), Article e42366.
21. Joyner, L. (2026). Moral values & trust in science. *Current Opinion in Psychology.*

Those with high trust in science are more likely than those with middling or low trust to back the statement ‘group equality should be our ideal’ – although all groups are more likely to support than oppose this view

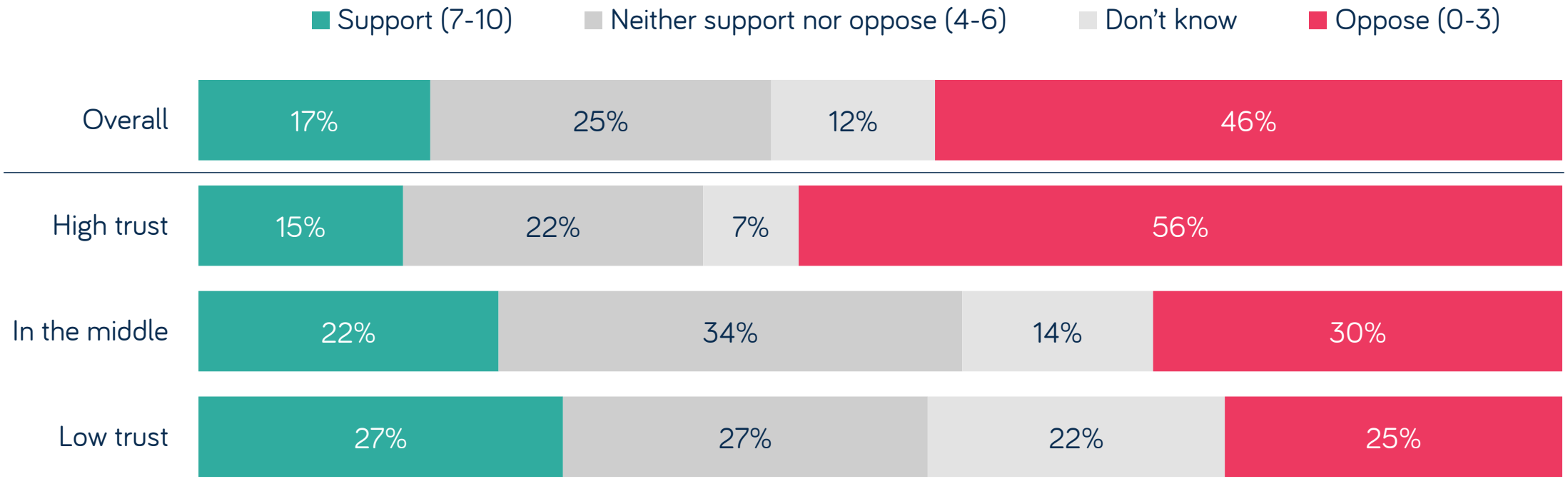
There are many kinds of groups in the world: men and women, ethnic and religious groups, nationalities, political factions, wealthy and poor, etc. How much do you support or oppose the following ideas about groups in general? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Strongly oppose' and 10 is 'Strongly support’. **Group equality should be our ideal**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with ‘high trust’ (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with ‘low trust’ (0-3) and 1,107 ‘in the middle’ (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

And when presented with a similar but opposing statement – that we should not push for group equality – people with middling trust in scientists are much closer to low-trusters than high-trusters in their views

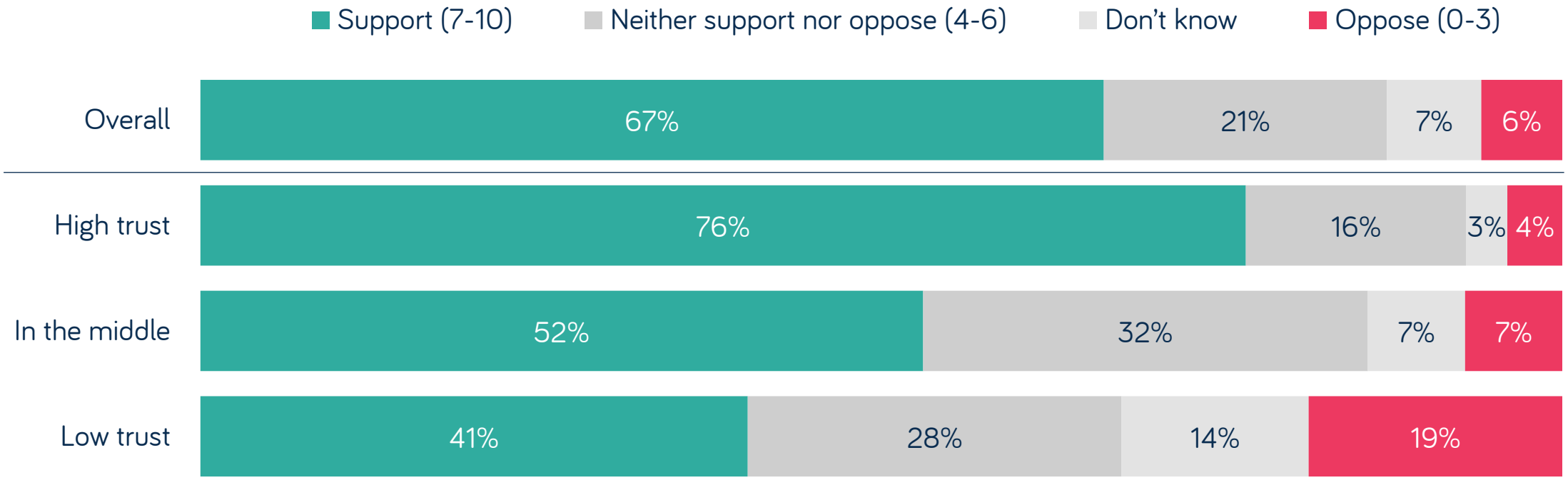
There are many kinds of groups in the world: men and women, ethnic and religious groups, nationalities, political factions, wealthy and poor, etc. How much do you support or oppose the following ideas about groups in general? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Strongly oppose' and 10 is 'Strongly support'. **We should not push for group equality**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Those with middling trust in scientists are also closer to low-trusters than high-trusters in their view that we must consider all groups when setting priorities

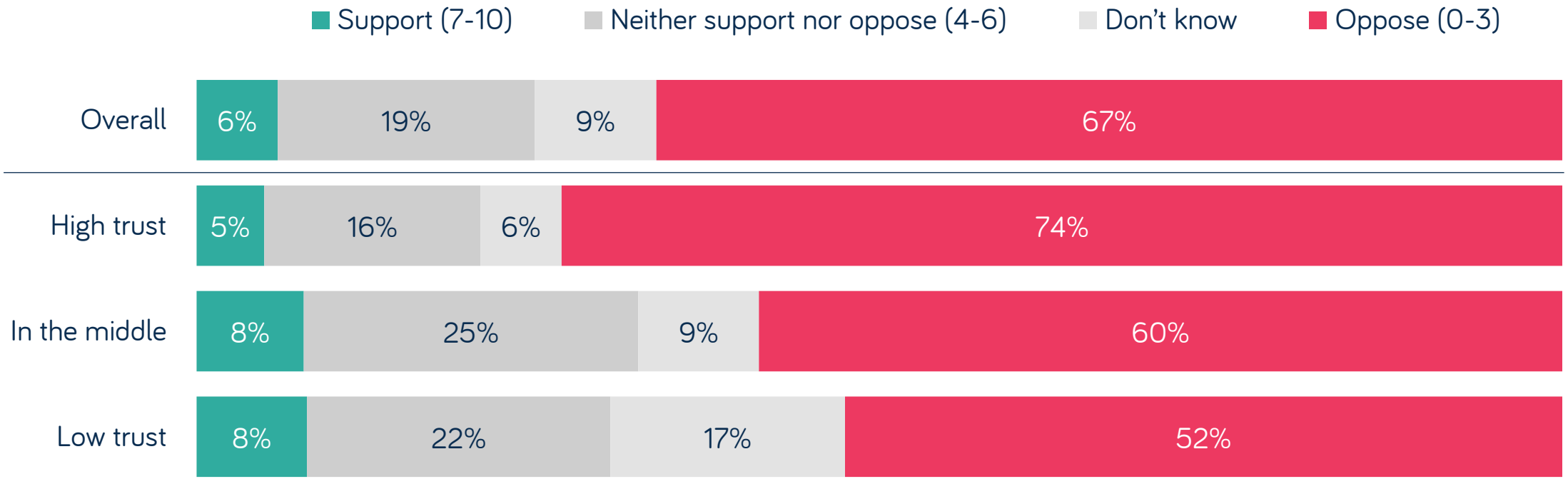
There are many kinds of groups in the world: men and women, ethnic and religious groups, nationalities, political factions, wealthy and poor, etc. How much do you support or oppose the following ideas about groups in general? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Strongly oppose' and 10 is 'Strongly support'. **In setting priorities, we must consider all groups.**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

A majority of all groups of trusters say they're against 'superior' groups dominating 'inferior' groups – though there is still a notable gap in opposition across the three

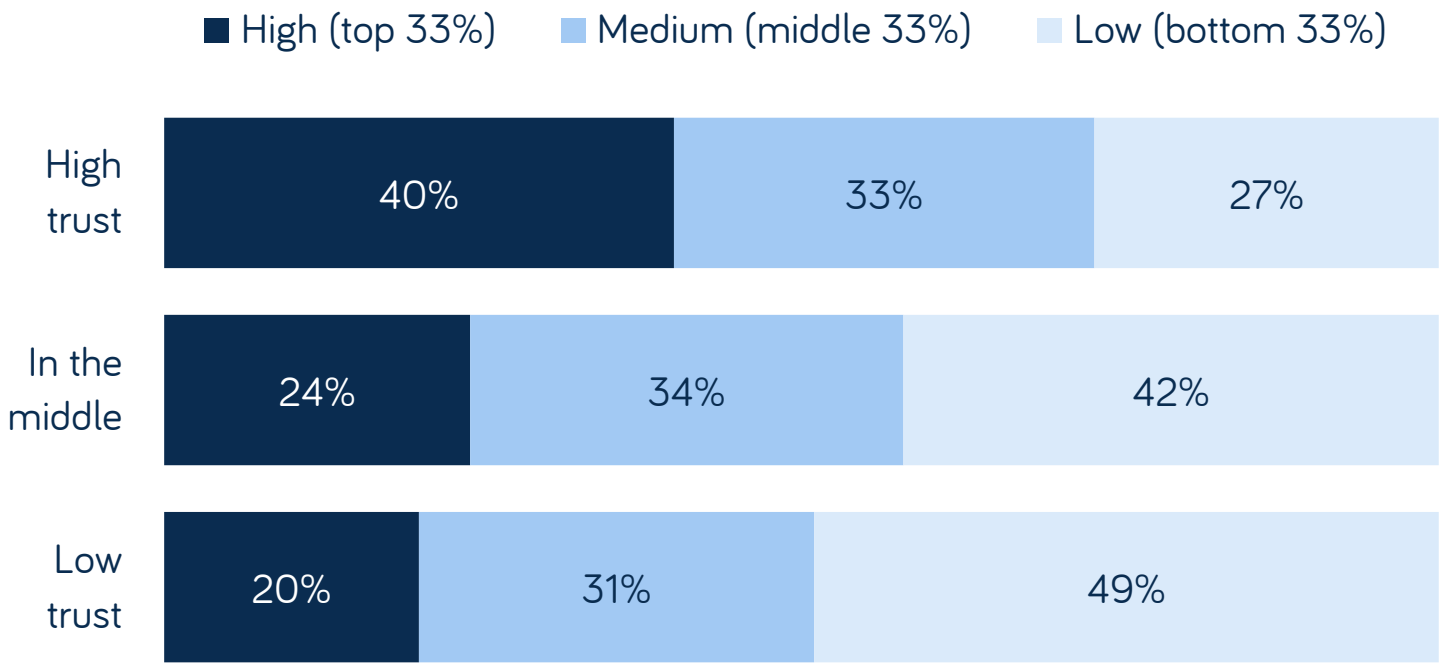
There are many kinds of groups in the world: men and women, ethnic and religious groups, nationalities, political factions, wealthy and poor, etc. How much do you support or oppose the following ideas about groups in general? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Strongly oppose' and 10 is 'Strongly support'. **Superior groups should dominate inferior groups**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Fairness: High-trusters are much more likely than middle- and low-trusters to highly value fairness

Fairness is based on questions about how relevant **unfair actions** and **unequal treatment** are to whether something is right and wrong, and agreement that **equal treatment** and **justice** are key features of a society and its laws.



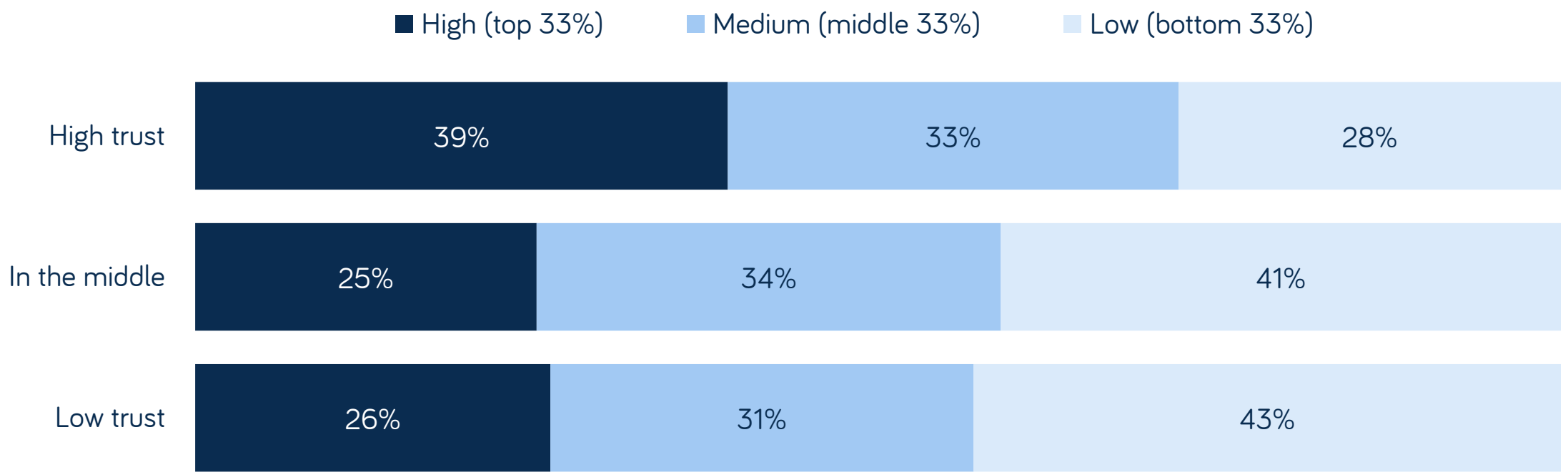
In Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), the 'fairness' foundation underlines the virtues of justice and rights. Its role in human evolution is to promote reciprocal altruism in societies. This moral value can be triggered by unfair or unequal treatment of oneself or others, or by a failure to reciprocate.

Those with high trust in scientists (40%) are twice as likely as low-trusters (20%) to be in the top third of the population in terms of how strongly they value fairness. Those in the middle (24%) are much closer to low-trusters than high-trusters.

Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Care: high-trusters are also the most likely to value care for others – although the gap between them and the rest is smaller than in the case of fairness

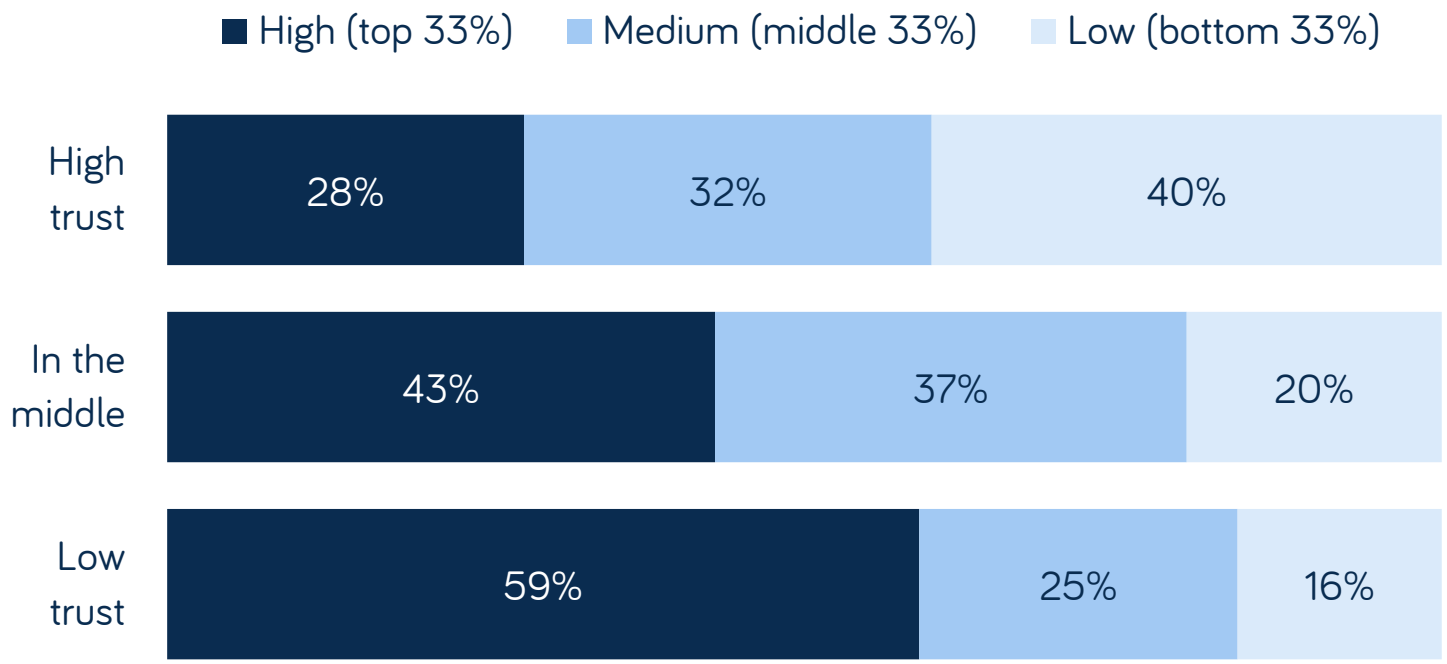
Care/harm is measured by questions related to the relevance of **caring for those who are suffering** or **vulnerable**, and whether **hurting a defenceless animal** is one of the worst things a person could do.



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

In-group loyalty: low-trusters are twice as likely as high-trusters to highly value loyalty to one's group, with middling-trusters falling in between the two

In-group loyalty is measured by questions about the moral importance of **love for one's country** and **pride in its history**, as well as **betrayal of one's group** and **loyalty to family** even when they've done something wrong.



The moral foundation 'in-group loyalty' is related to the formation of coalitions or 'tribes' of people. It underlies the virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice in the face of threats to one's group.

Six in 10 (59%) people who have low trust in scientists are in the top third of the population on this dimension – around twice the share of high-trusters (28%).

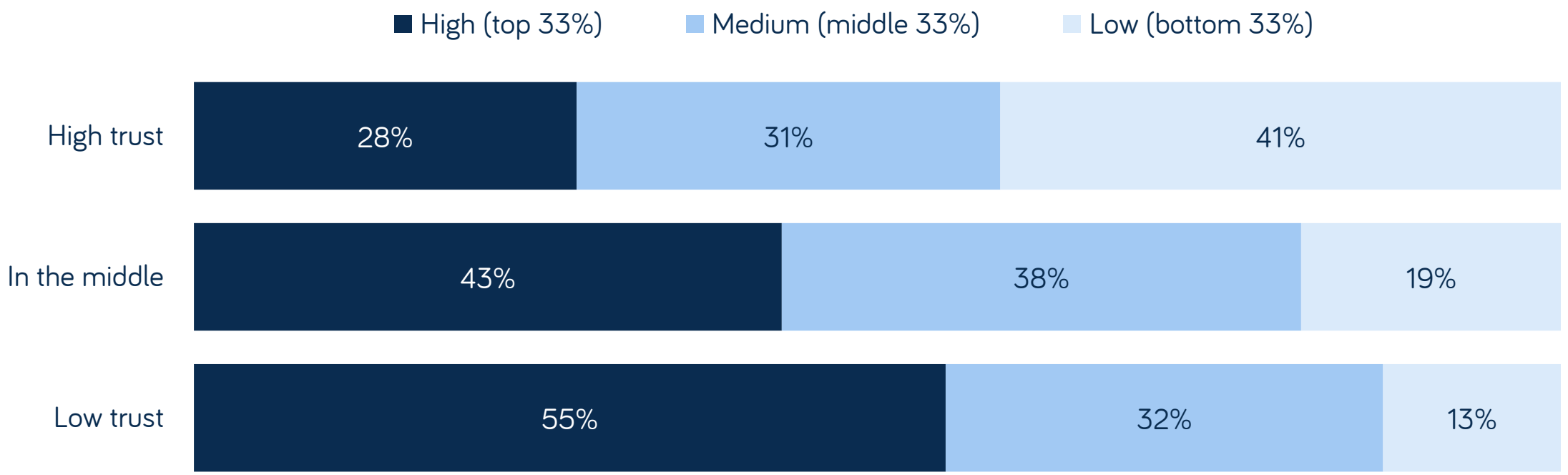
Low trust in scientists often coincides with placing a high value on in-group loyalty.

Those with middling trust in scientists are in the middle in terms of the extent to which they hold this value.

Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Purity: As with in-group loyalty, low-trusters (55%) are the most likely to highly value purity, followed by middling-trusters (43%) and high-trusters (28%)

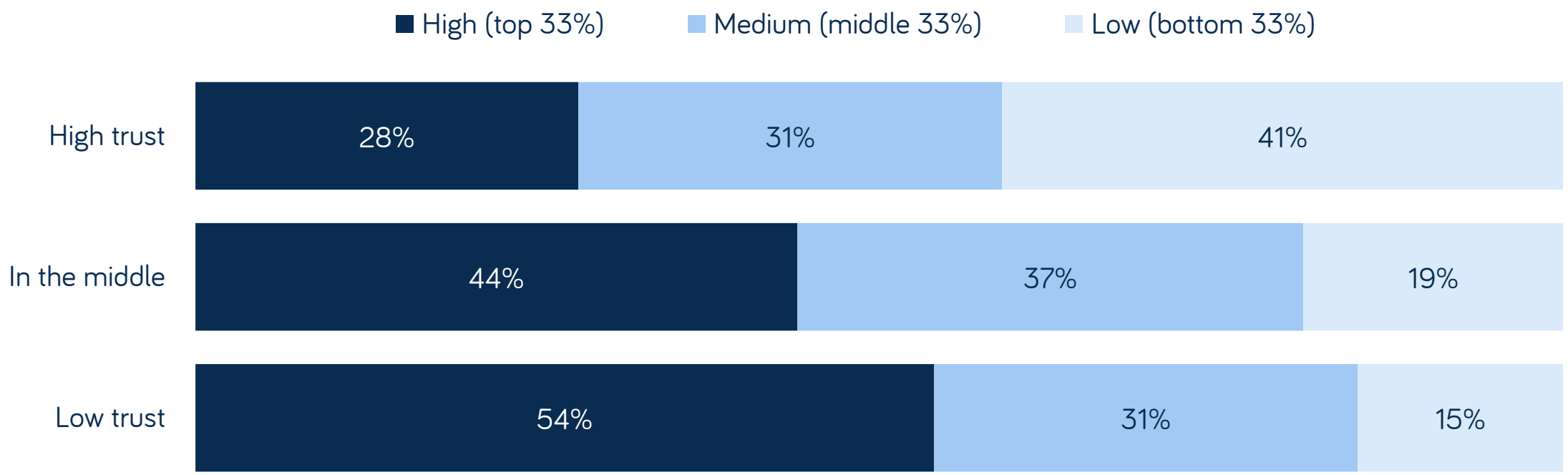
Purity questions ask how morally relevant it is whether someone **did something disgusting** or **violated standards of purity and decency**, and whether an act can be called morally wrong **on** the grounds that **it is unnatural**. This value protects against the threat of the unknown or 'unnatural'.



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Authority: Similarly, low-trusters value authority more highly than middling-trusters and high-trusters do

This foundation was shaped by hierarchical social structures that characterise human and pre-human evolution. It is measured by asking about the moral relevance of **respect for authority** and **traditions** in general, and about the importance of **traditional roles for men and women.**



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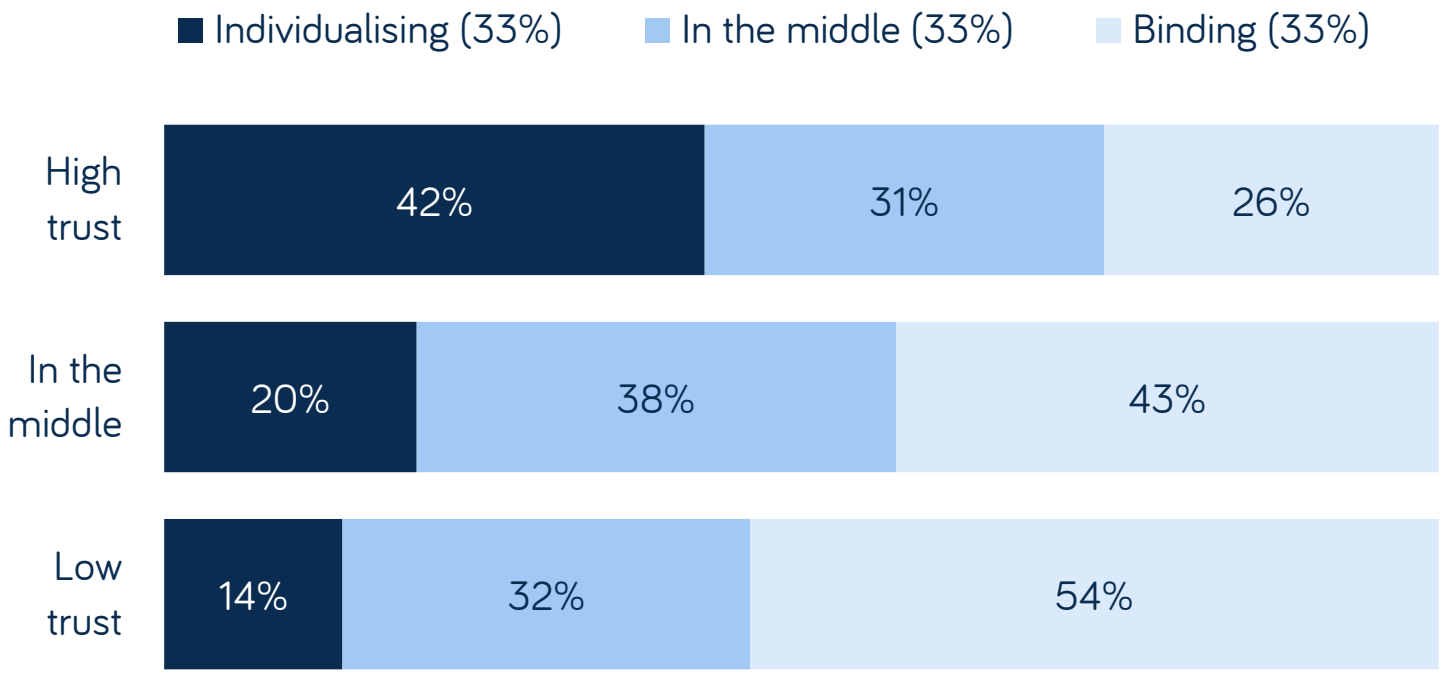
Individualising and binding foundations: High-trusters' moral values focus on treatment of individuals, while low- and middle-trusters' orient towards group cohesion

Individualising foundations: Care and Fairness
Binding foundations: Loyalty, Purity and Authority



MFT posits two higher-order moral value orientations: *Individualising* and *Binding*.

Care and fairness are *individualising* – they focus on the rights and treatment of the individual.

Loyalty, purity and authority are *binding* – they focus on cohesion of the group.

Breaking the population down into a spectrum of the most individualising-oriented to the most binding-oriented, we see that high-trusters are much more oriented to individualising (42%) than binding (26%) values.

This distinguishes high-trusters from middle and low-trusters, both of whom are much more oriented towards binding values (43% and 54%, respectively).

Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

2.9. Trust in others and civic engagement

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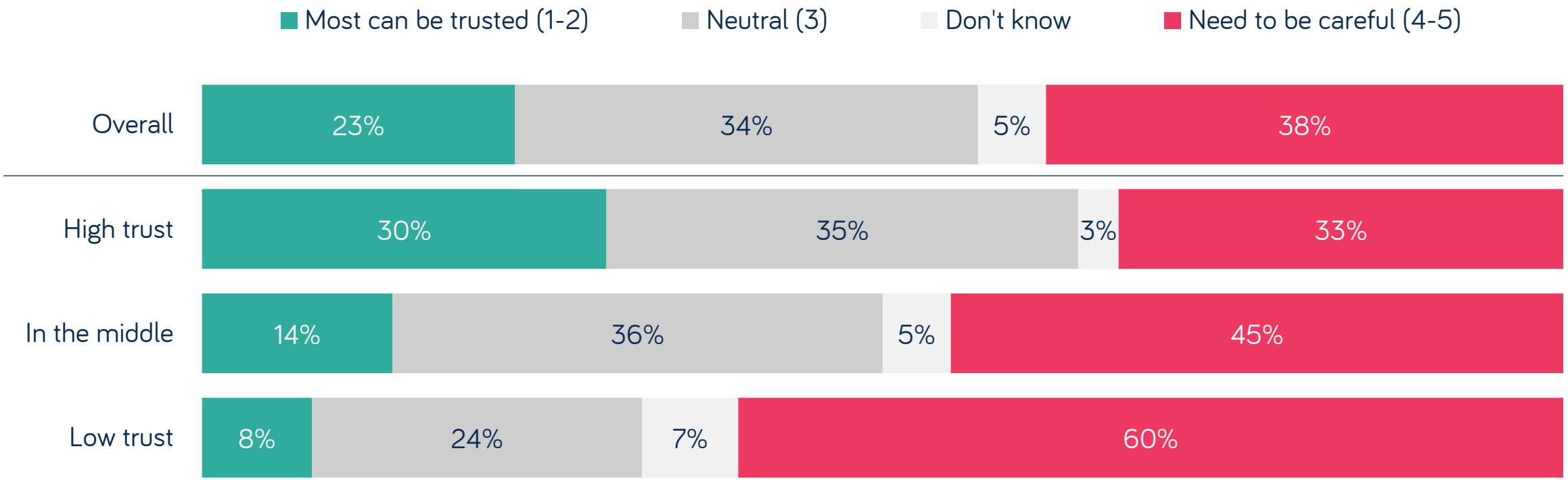
OECD's surveys on drivers of trust in institutions in general reveals an association between trust levels and civic and political engagement. For example, people who report lower trust in institutions tend to be less likely to be involved in volunteering and less likely to vote.[22] And as the original authors of the ABI model of trust argued, people have different propensities to trust others in general.[23] Our study measured levels of civic engagement and also asked whether other people in general can be trusted or not.

These factors do not come out as significantly related to trust in science in our model, and the differences are smaller than those we see on institutional trust – but, again, there are still marked differences, where, in particular, trust in others is positively associated with trust in scientists.

22. OECD. (2024). *Survey on drivers of trust in public institutions – 2024 results* (Figure 2.3). OECD Publishing.
23. Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). Op. cit.

Those with low trust in scientists are much less likely to say that, generally speaking, most people can be trusted, with middling-trusters much closer in views to this group than high-trusters

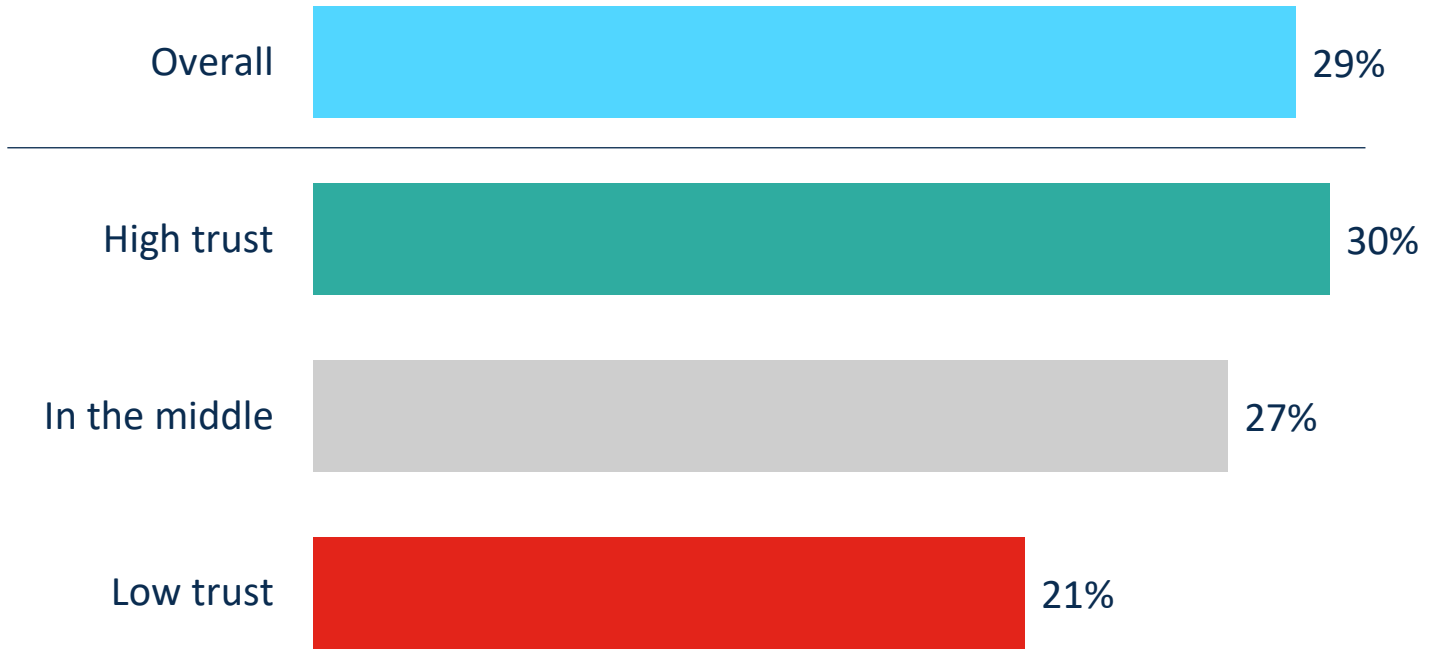
Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Most people can be trusted' and 5 is 'You need to be very careful in dealing with people'.



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

There is little difference in reported rates of volunteering between the three trust groups – although people with low trust in scientists are slightly less likely than the other groups to say they've done any in the last 12 months

For which of the following types of groups, clubs, or organisations, if any, have you done voluntary or unpaid work during the last 12 months? Please tick all that apply. **% who say yes**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

3. General support for science

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Understanding what's driving the very different levels of trust in science we've seen is important partly because trust levels are also highly related to a range of dimensions of support for science, which we outline in this section.

For example, around a third of low-trusters want public science funding cut – compared with just 2% of high-trusters and 12% of those in the middle.

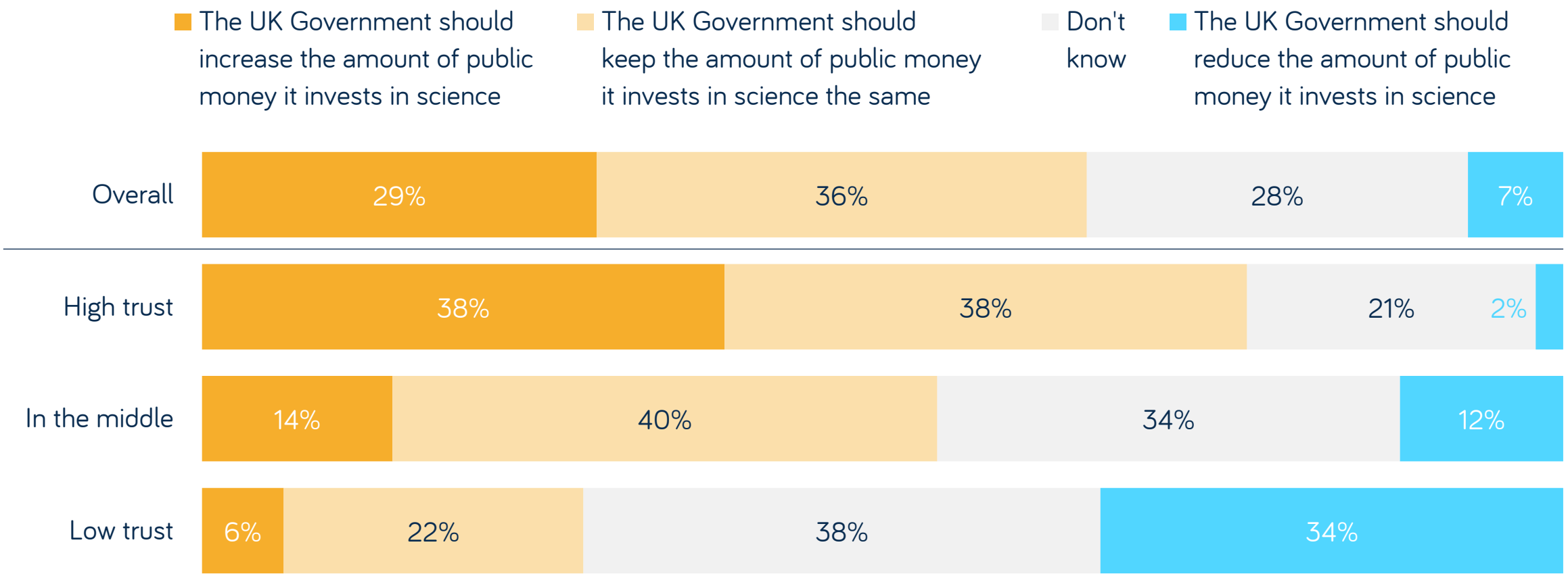
Agreement with the idea that governments should rely on scientific guidance when making decisions also rises steeply with trust in scientists, with a big gap in views between those with high and middling trust (71% vs 30%).

There are huge gaps on listening to, believing and acting on advice from scientists between the three groups: for example, 74% of high-trusters say they believe information from climate scientists without researching it further, compared with just 19% of those in the middle and 8% of low-trusters.

This is mirrored in stated actions, with 84% of high-trusters saying they would always get a vaccine that was recommended to them by the NHS or a medical professional, compared with 54% of those in the middle and 22% of low-trusters

Around a third of low-trusters want public science funding cut – compared with just 2% of high-trusters and 12% of those in the middle

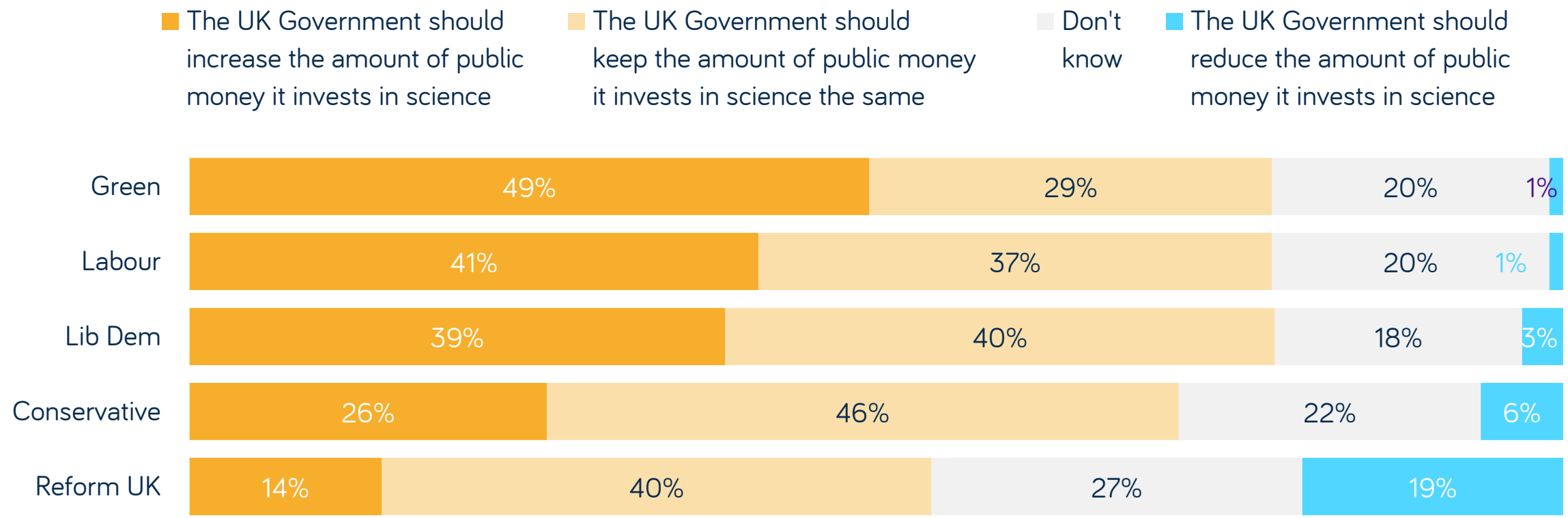
Do you think the UK Government should increase, reduce or keep at the same level the amount of public money it invests in science?



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Green party supporters (78%) are most enthusiastic about increasing science spending, while Reform supporters are least (54%)– though even among this latter group, a majority say funding should either stay the same or rise

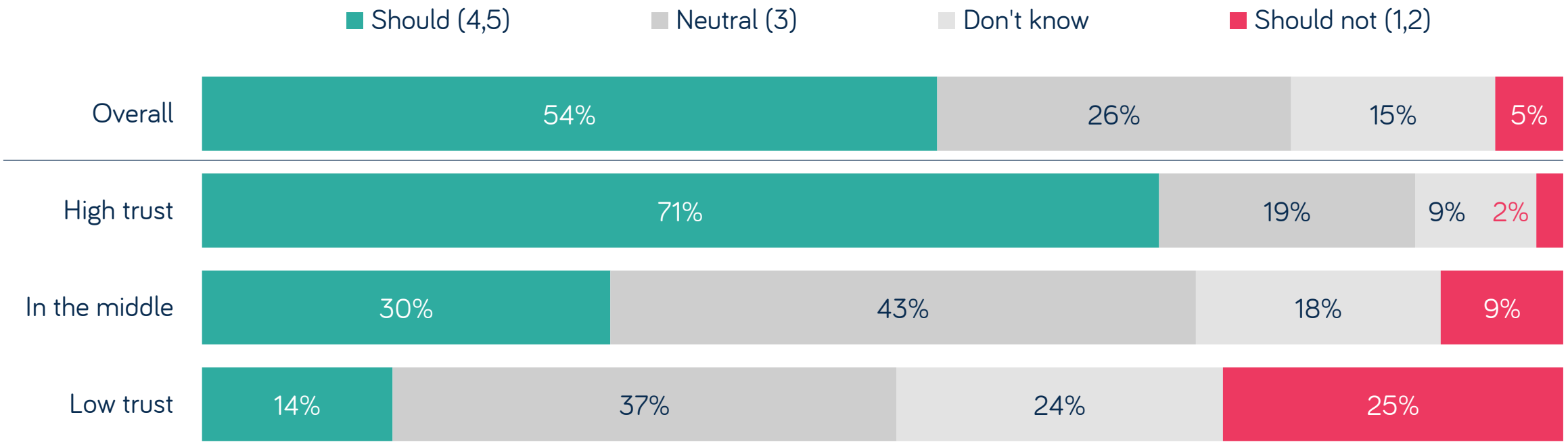
Do you think the UK Government should increase, reduce or keep at the same level the amount of public money it invests in science?



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election, 8-11 May 2026.

Agreement with the idea that governments should rely on scientific guidance when making decisions rises with trust in scientists, with a big gap in views between those with high and middling trust – although large shares of the two lower-trust groups take neutral positions rather than actively opposing this statement

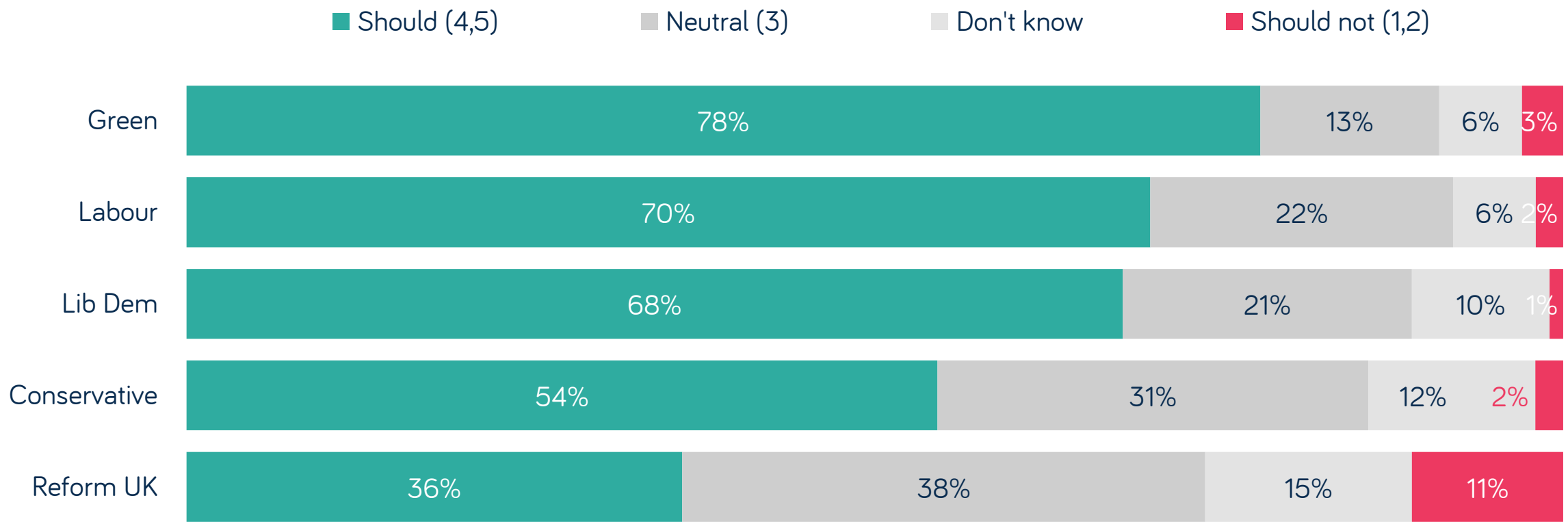
How much or how little should governments rely on scientists' guidance when making decisions? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Not at all' and 5 is 'Completely'.



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Reform UK supporters are the only political group without a majority who feel governments should base decisions on scientists' guidance

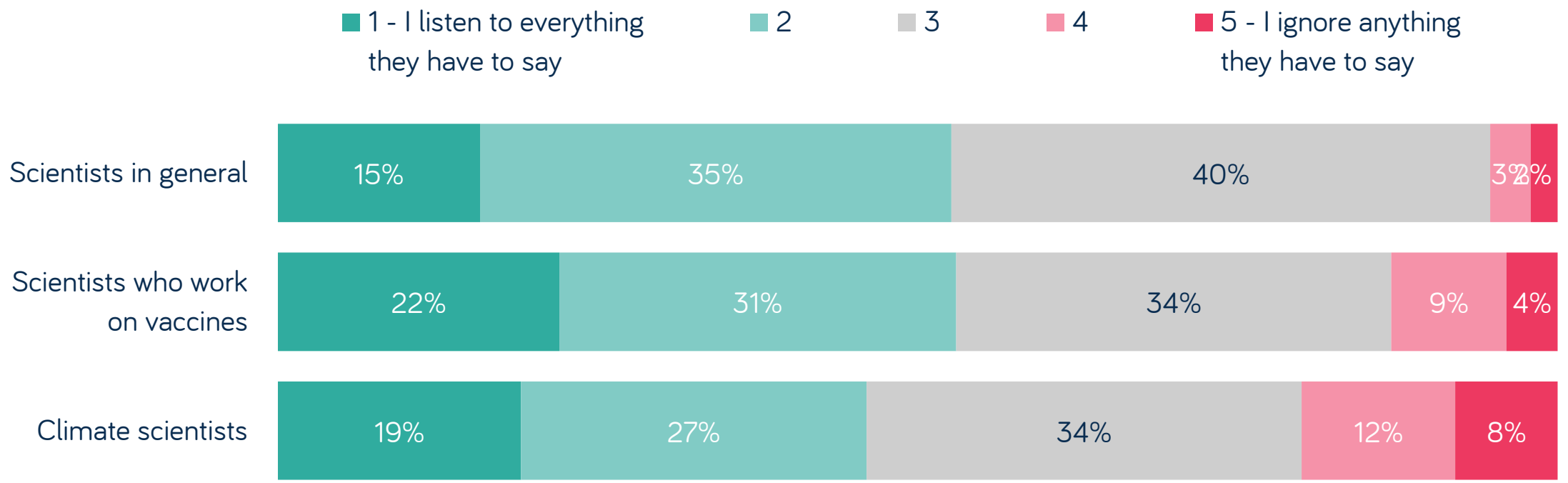
How much or how little should governments rely on scientists' guidance when making decisions? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Not at all' and 5 is 'Completely'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election, 8-11 May 2026.

Around half say they listen to what scientists in general (50%), vaccine scientists (53%) and climate scientists (46%) have to say – although two in 10 (20%) say they tend to ignore anything from the latter group

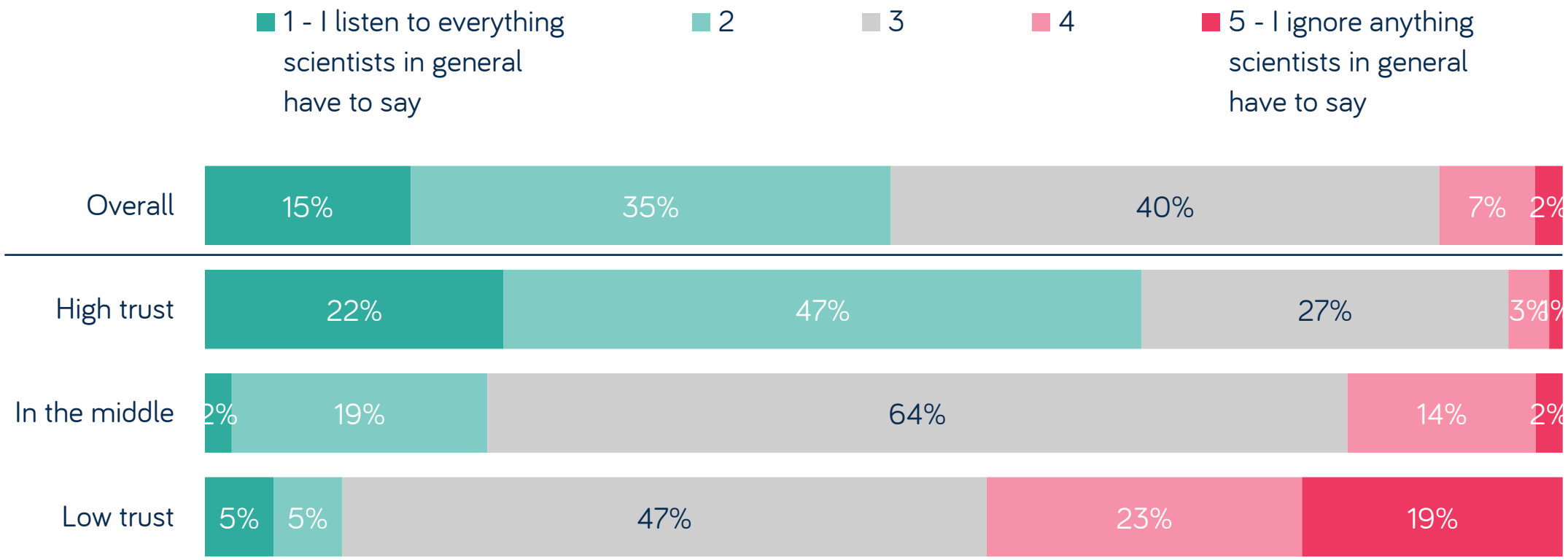
Where would you place yourself on this scale?



Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

Among those who trust scientists in general, seven in 10 (69%) listen to everything scientists in general have to say. This compares to only two in 10 (21%) who are in the middle and one in 10 (10%) of those who don't trust scientists

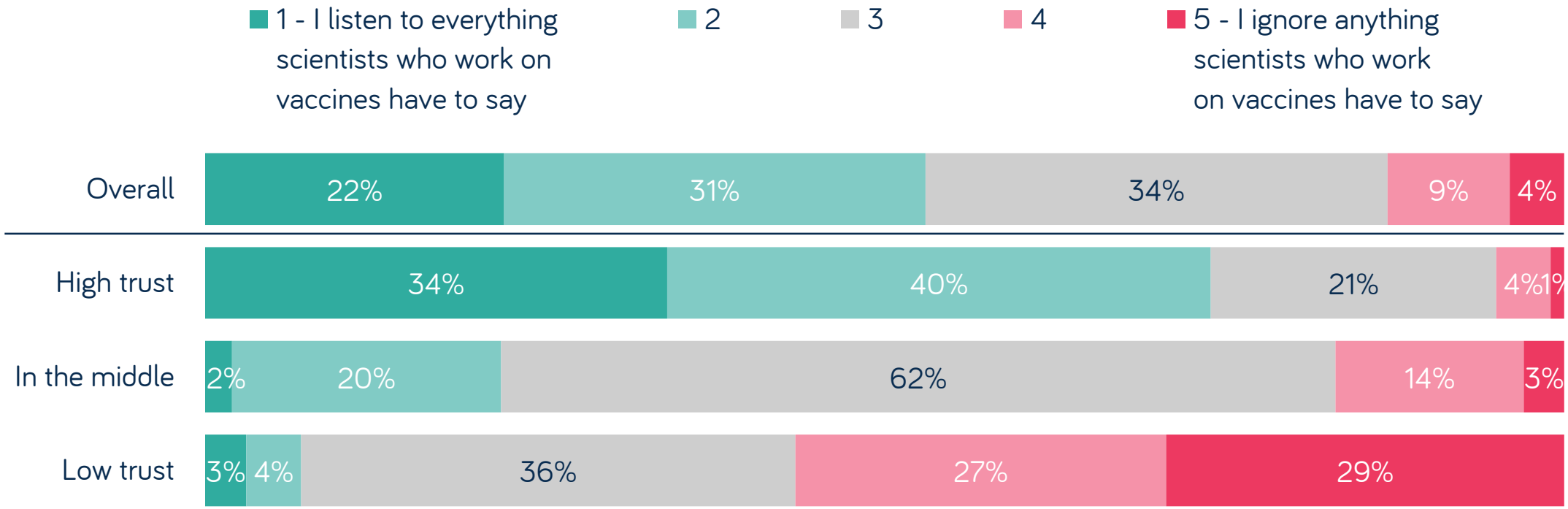
Where would you place yourself on this scale? **I generally …**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

There is a huge gap between those with high trust in scientists who work on vaccines and those with middling trust on whether they listen to what these scientists have to say, with most middling-trusters taking a neutral position – in contrast to low-trusters, most of whom say they ignore these scientists

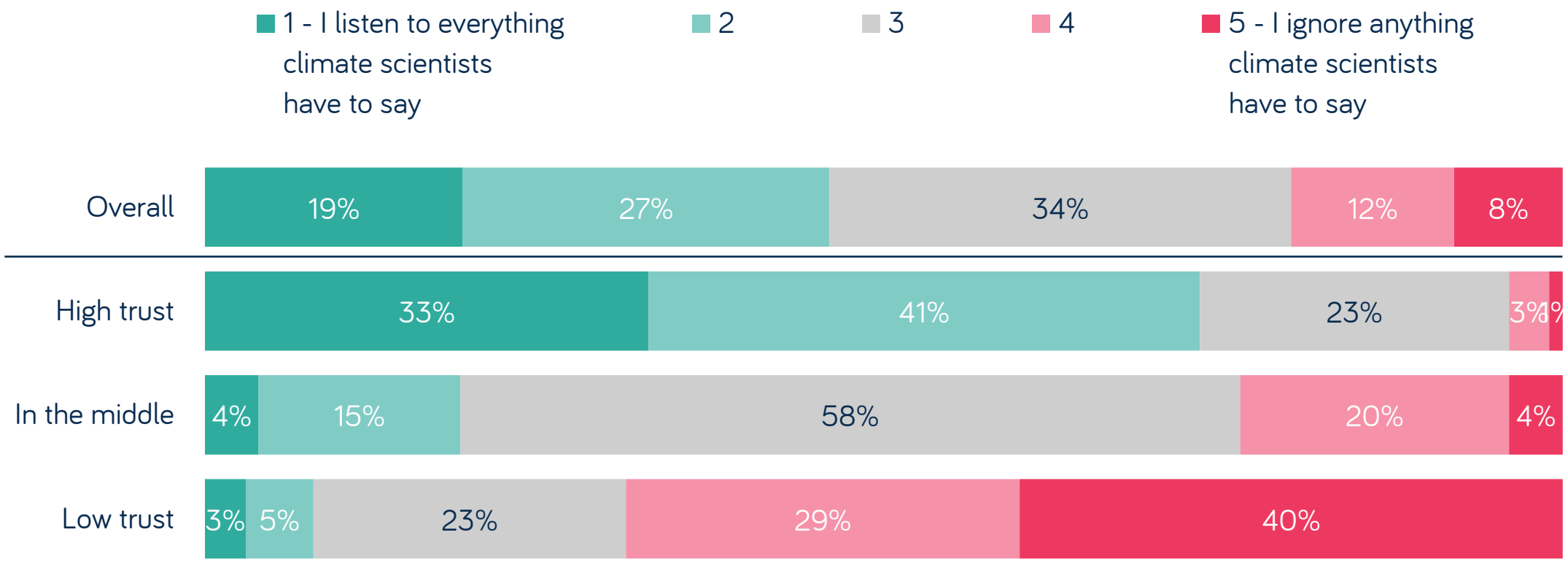
Where would you place yourself on this scale? **I generally …**



Base: 2,758 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists who work on vaccines, 420 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 940 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Similarly, most people who rank in the middle for trust in climate scientists give a neutral response (58%) when asked whether they listen to what they have to say – whereas seven in 10 (69%) of those with low trust report ignoring anything they say

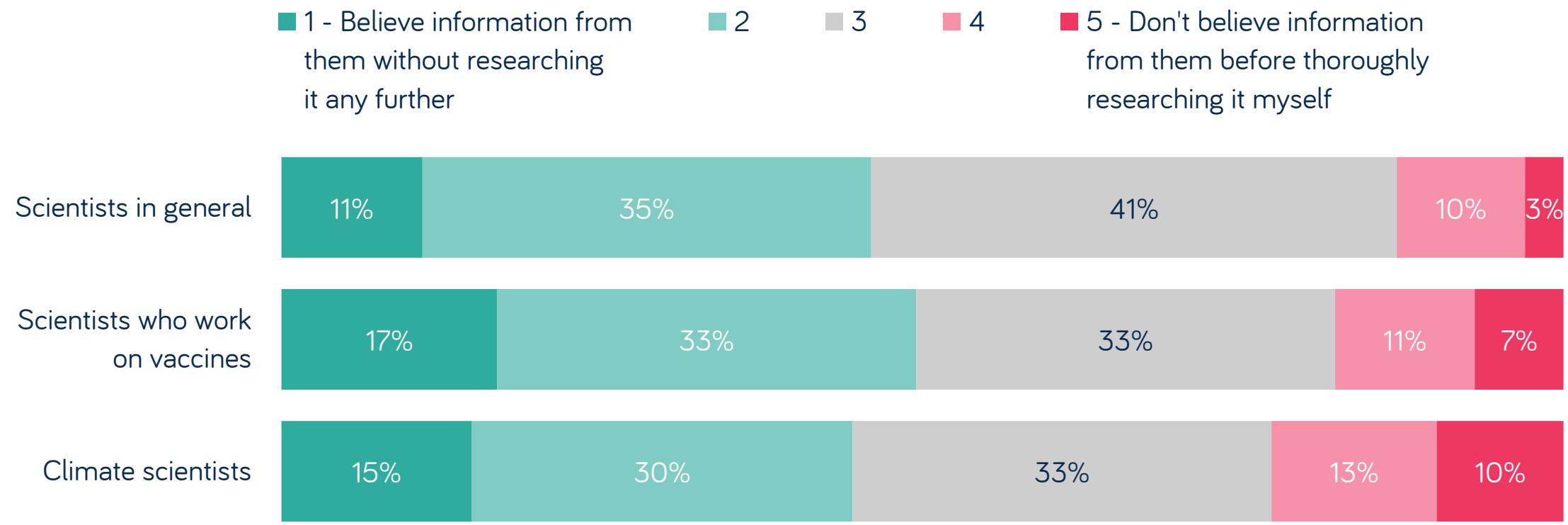
Where would you place yourself on this scale? **I generally …**



Base: 2,368 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in climate scientists, 631 with 'low trust' (0-3) and 1,054 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Just under half say they tend to believe information from scientists in general (46%) and from climate scientists (45%) without researching it any further. This rises slightly to half (50%) who say it about scientists who work on vaccines

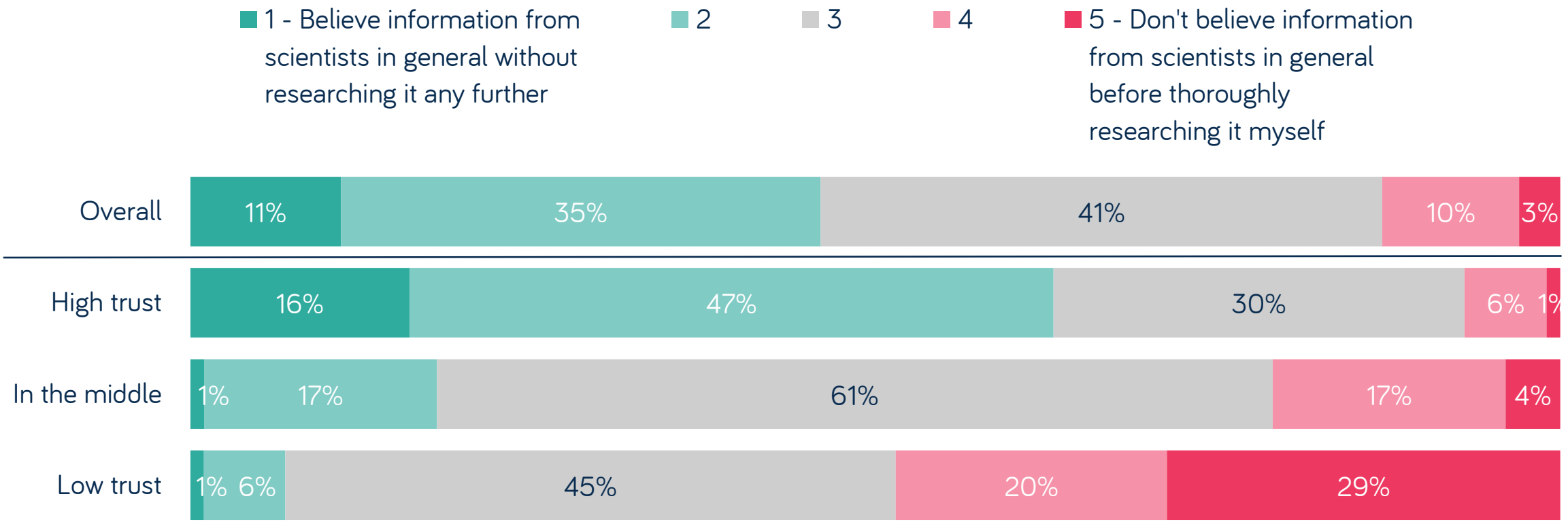
Where would you place yourself on this scale? **I generally …**



Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

18% of those with middling trust in scientists in general say they believe information from scientists without researching it further – closer to low-trusters (7%) than high-trusters (63%). But many in all groups, especially the middle, take a neutral position

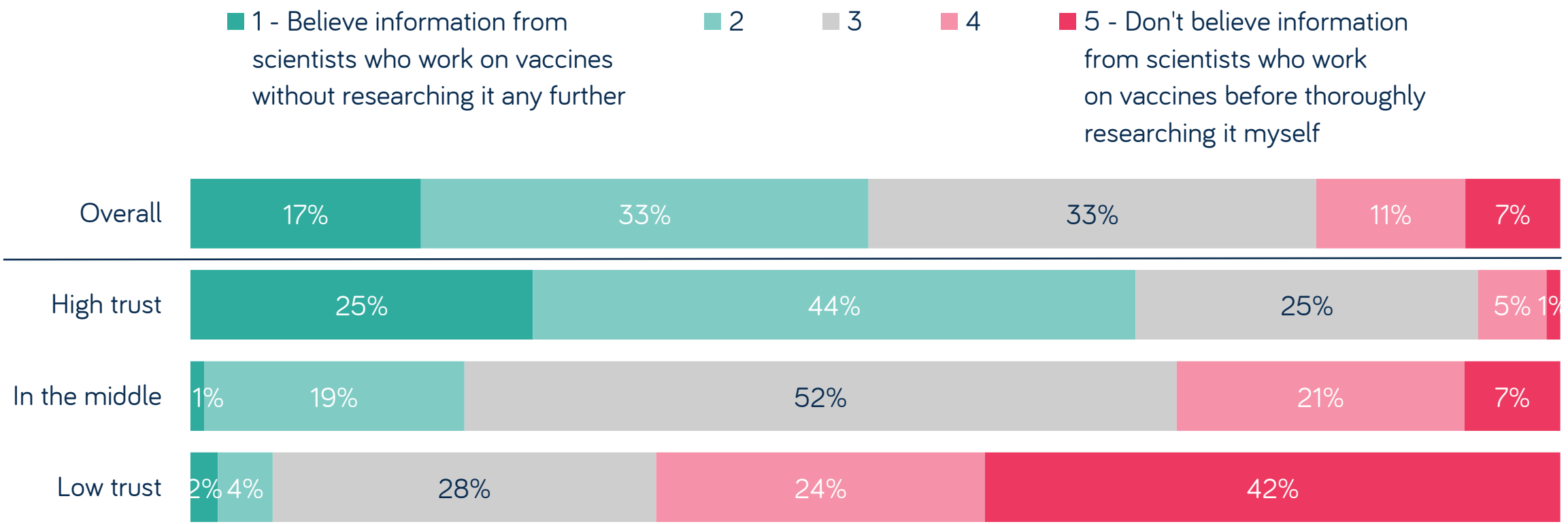
Where would you place yourself on this scale? **I generally …**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

A majority of those with middling trust in vaccine scientists also take a neutral position on whether they believe information from them without further investigation (52%). Most low-trusters (66%) say they don't believe them without thorough research

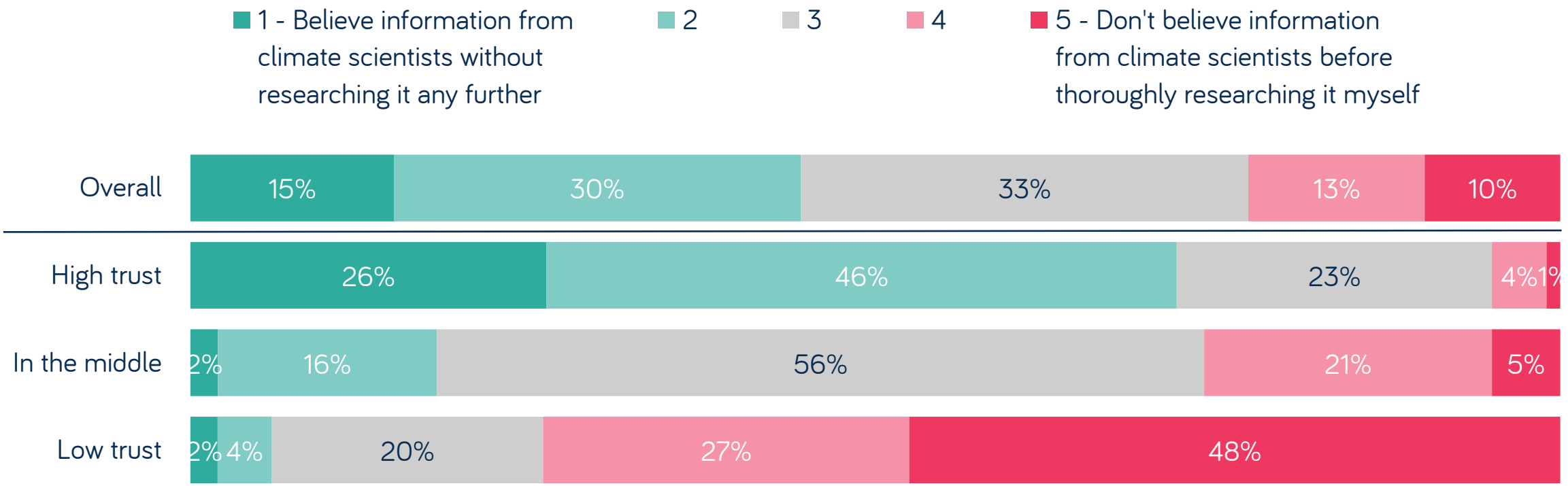
Where would you place yourself on this scale? **I generally …**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Climate scientists draw the deepest scepticism of all three types of scientists: 75% of those with low trust in this group say they wouldn't believe what climate scientists say without researching it themselves – higher than the equivalent groups who say the same about vaccine scientists (66%) and scientists in general (49%)

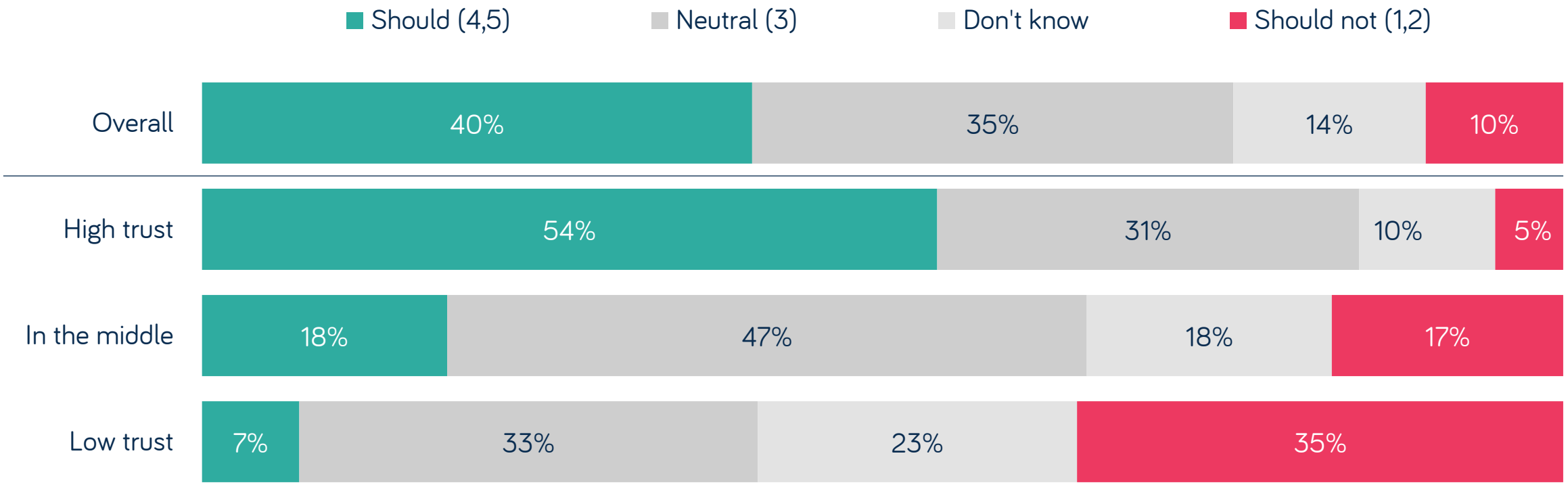
Where would you place yourself on this scale? **I generally …**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Just 7% of low-trusters think people should rely on science when making lifestyle choices – and those with middling trust are only slightly more supportive of this view (18%), even if they are less actively negative

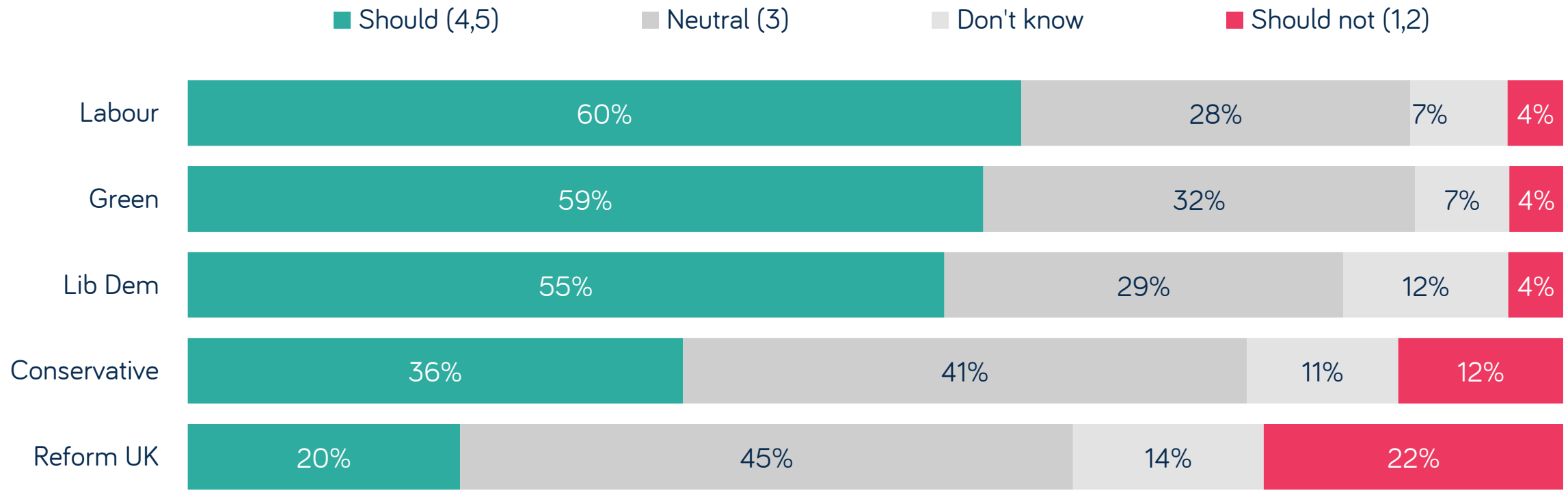
How much or how little should people rely on scientists' guidance when making lifestyle choices? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Not at all' and 5 is 'Completely'.



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Labour, Green and Lib Dem supporters are far more likely than Conservative or Reform supporters to say people should rely on scientists' guidance for lifestyle choices

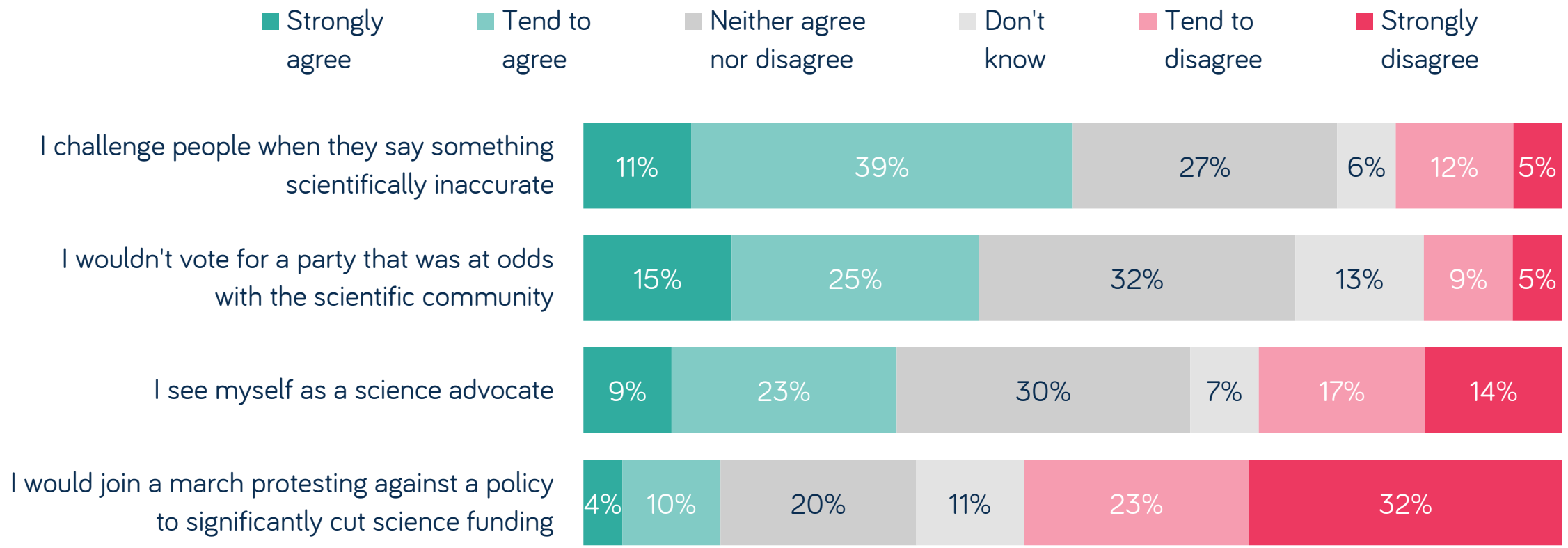
How much or how little should people rely on scientists' guidance when making lifestyle choices? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Not at all' and 5 is 'Completely'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election, 8-11 May 2026.

A third (32%) of the public identify as science advocates, 40% say they wouldn't vote for a party at odds with scientists, and half (50%) say they challenge scientific inaccuracies – but only 14% would protest science funding cuts

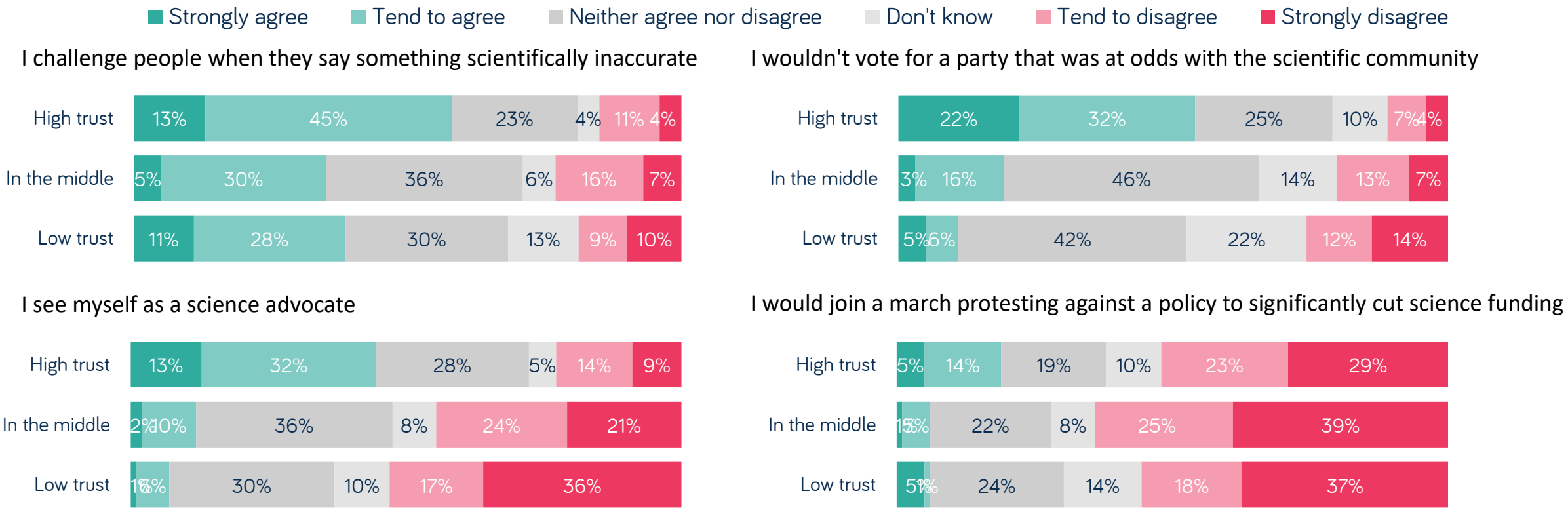
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

Even among high-trusters, few would march to protect science funding – but they're the only group where science advocacy and a rejection of anti-science parties command real support, with those in the middle much closer to low-trusters in views

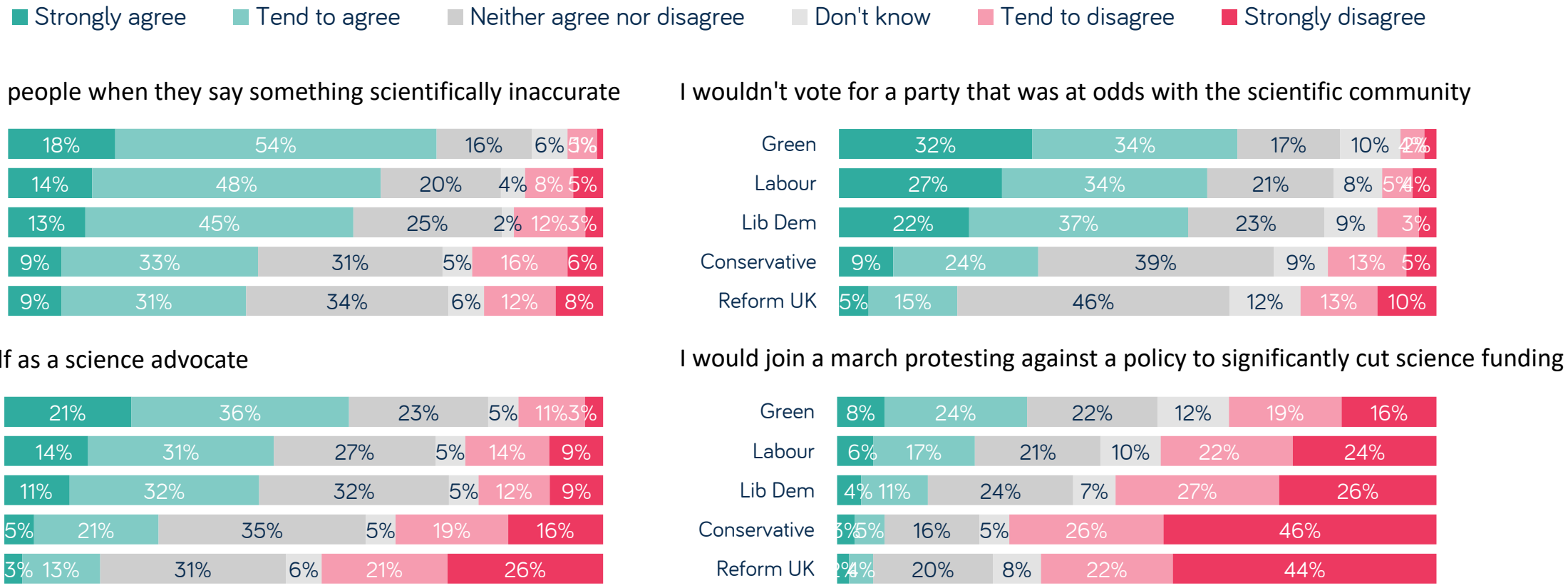
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Science advocacy splits clearly along party lines: Green, Labour and Lib Dem supporters are markedly more likely to challenge inaccuracies, identify as advocates and refuse to back an anti-science party than Conservative or Reform UK voters

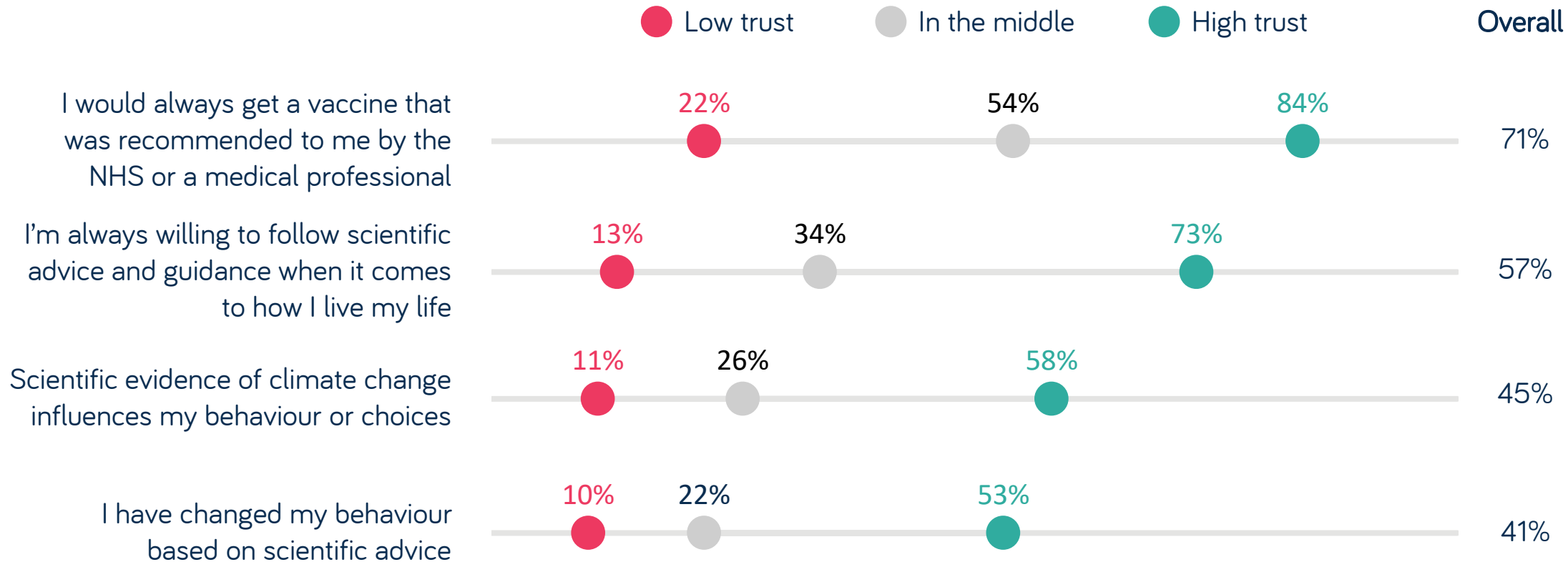
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election, 8-11 May 2026.

Those with low trust in scientists are almost four times less likely to say they would always get an NHS vaccine than those with high trust, while those with middling trust are often closer to low-trusters on how they apply science in their personal lives

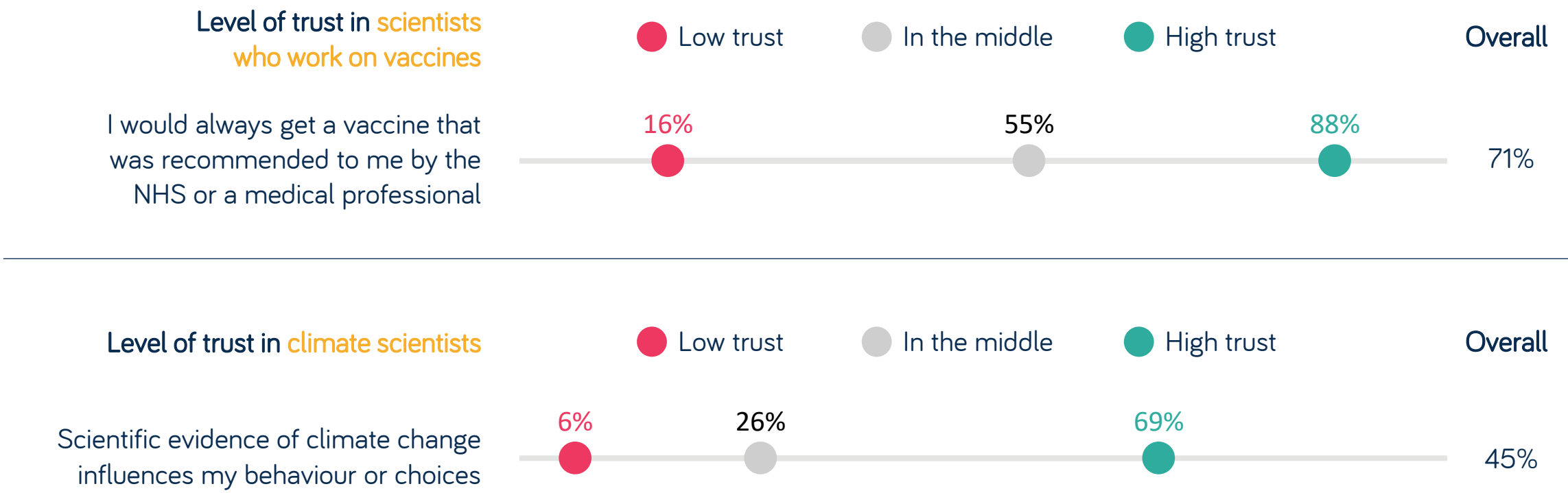
To what extent do the following apply to you personally? **Those who say a great deal or fair amount**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

A majority of people in the middle for trust in vaccine scientists say they'd always get an NHS vaccine, putting this group nearer to high-trusters than low-trusters. But on climate change, those with middling trust in climate scientists are far closer to low-trusters in their views

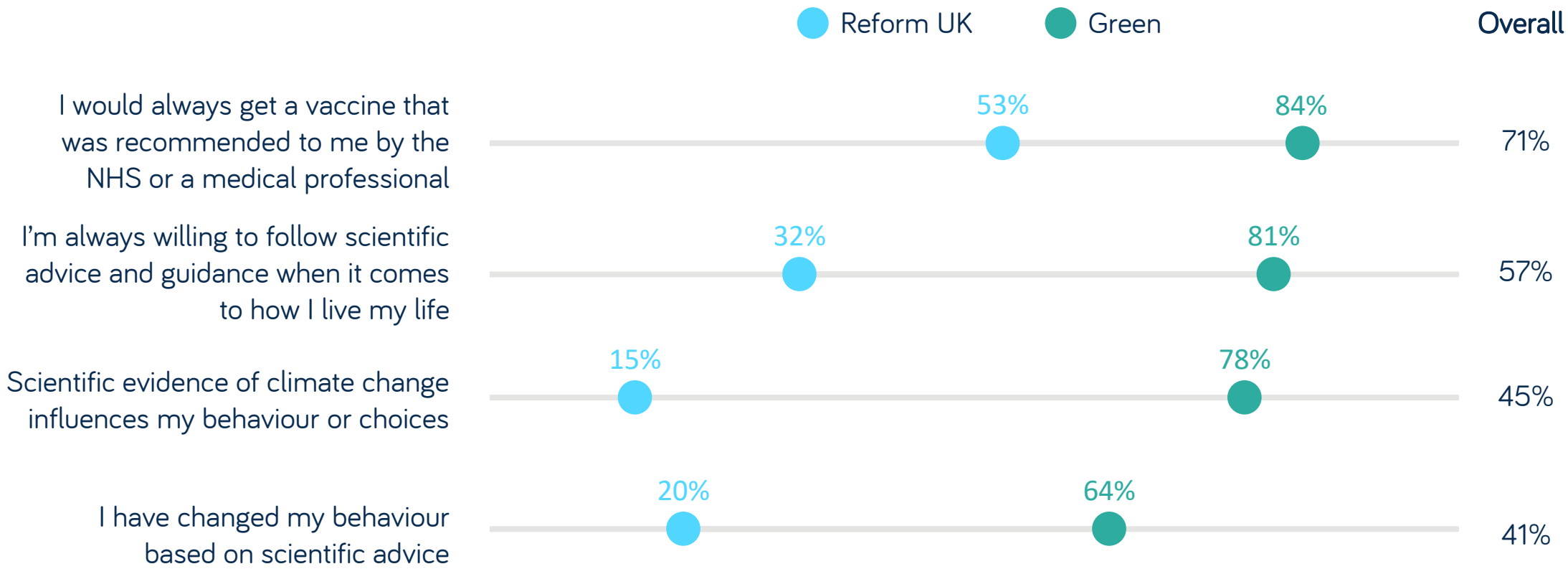
To what extent do the following apply to you personally? **Those who say a great deal or fair amount**



Base: 2,758 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists who work on vaccines, 940 'in the middle' (4-6) and 420 with 'low trust' (0-3). Climate scientists: 2,368 'high trust', 1,054 'in the middle', 631 'low trust'. 8-11 May 2026.

Green and Reform UK supporters are near-polar opposites when it comes to putting science into practice in their personal lives

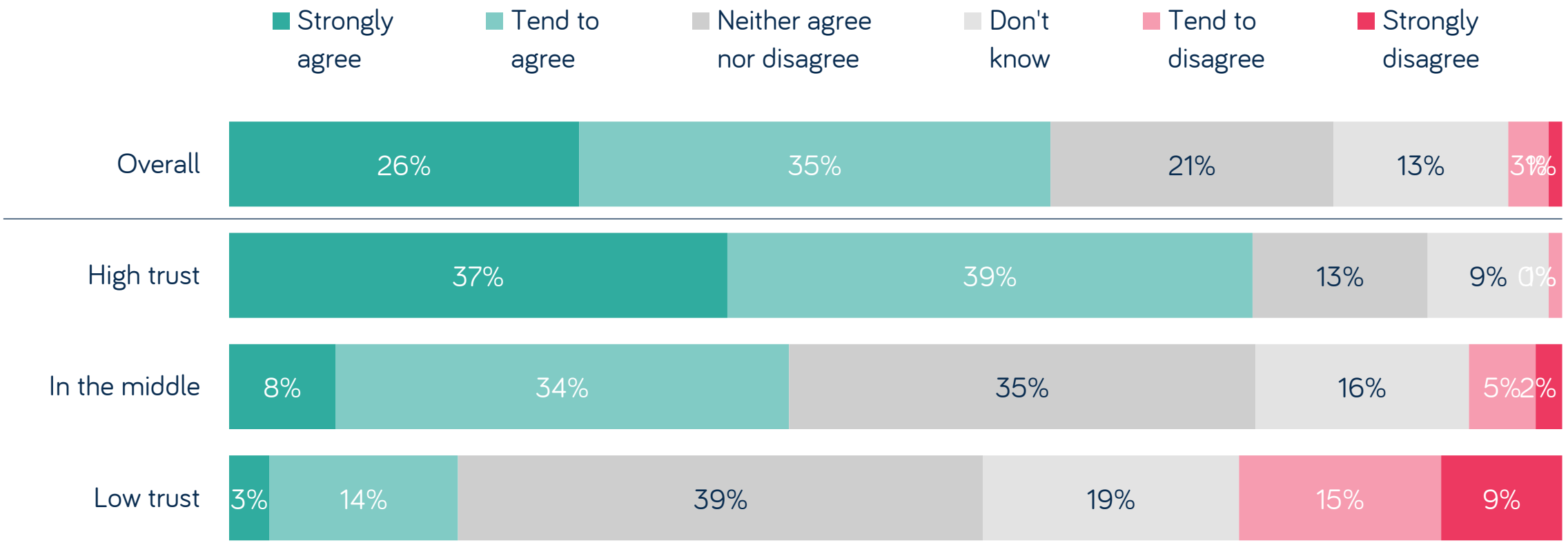
To what extent do the following apply to you personally? **Those who say a great deal or fair amount**



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 778 say they intend to vote Reform UK and 626 Green at the next general election, 8-11 May 2026.

Belief that science has increased the prosperity of society as a whole rises with broader trust in scientists. A large majority of high-trusters think it has (76%), while most middling- (51%) and low-trusters (58%) take a neutral position or don't know

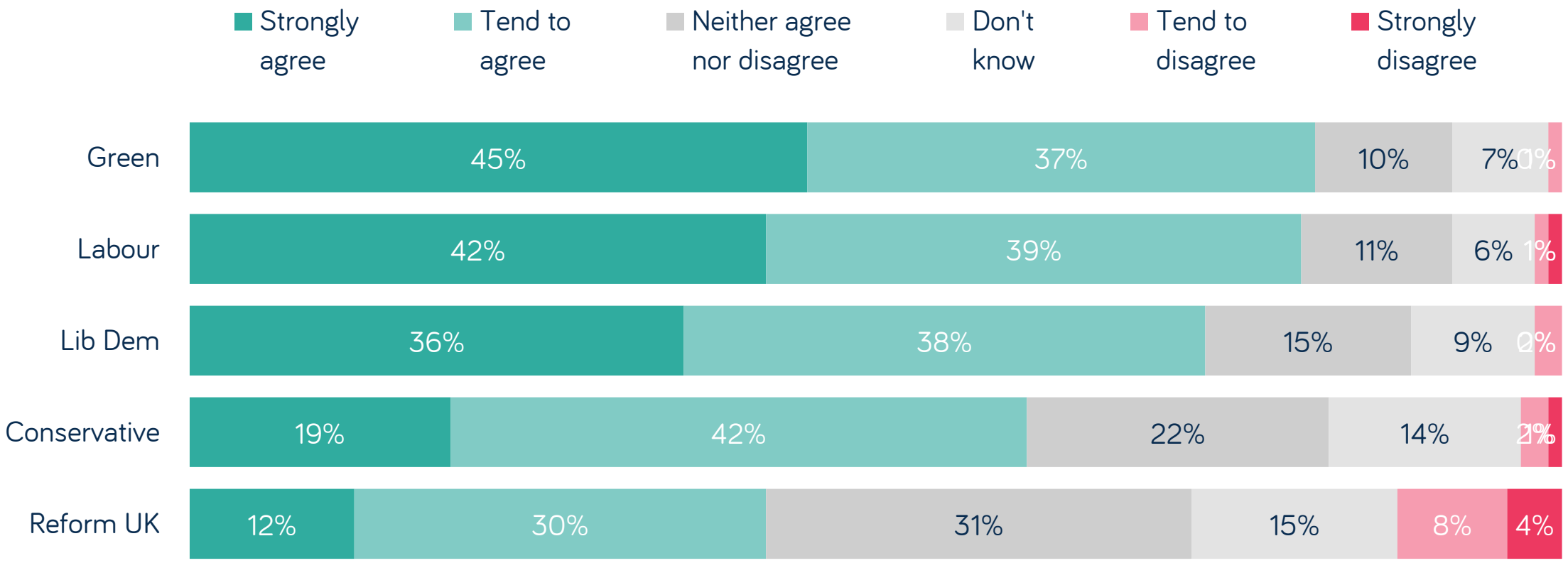
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? **Science has increased the prosperity of society as a whole**



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Large majorities across nearly all parties agree science has boosted society's prosperity – but support falls from over eight in 10 among Green and Labour supporters to just over four in 10 Reform UK supporters

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? **Science has increased the prosperity of society as a whole**

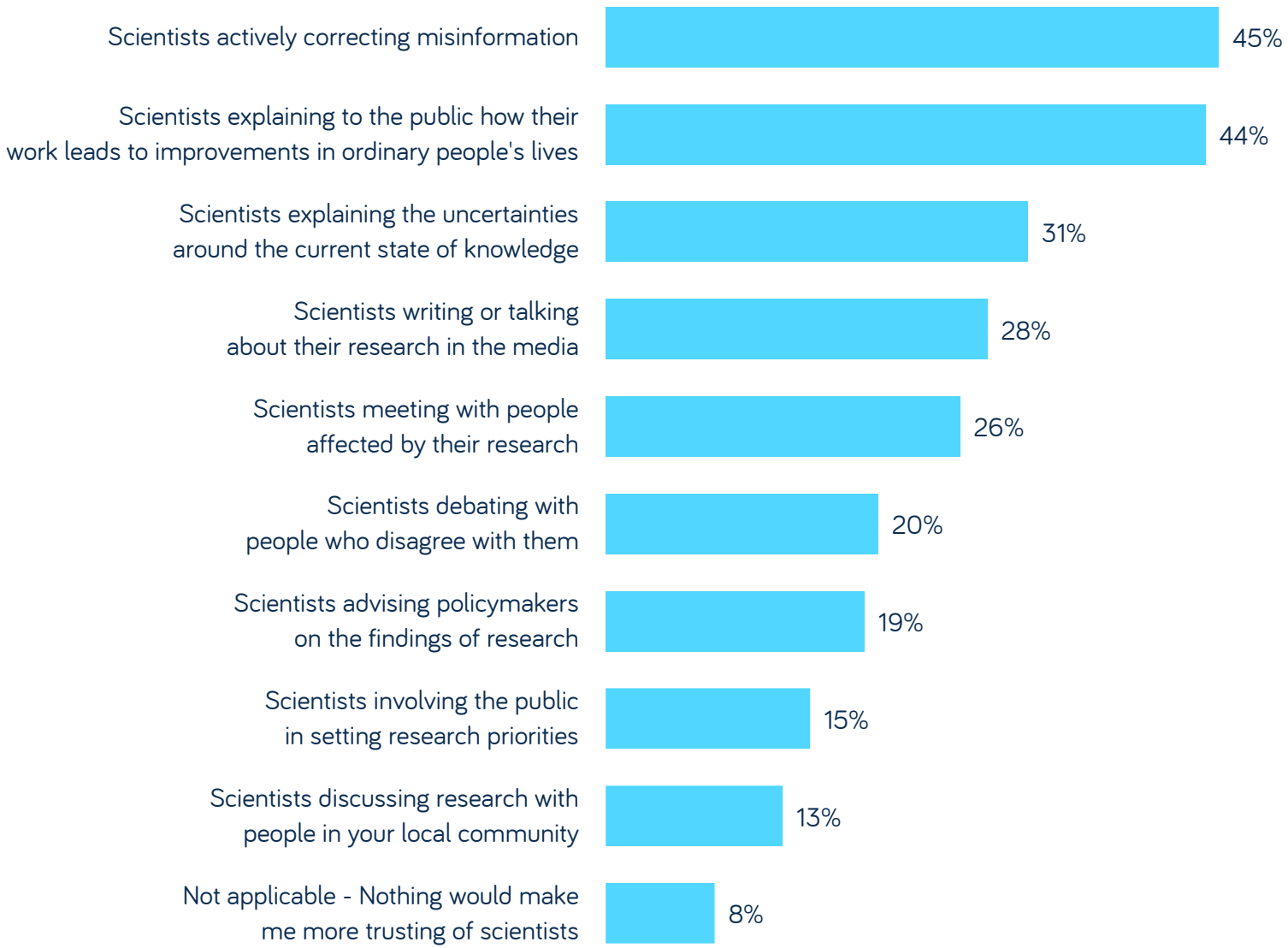


Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 524 say they intend to vote Conservative, 590 Labour, 483 Liberal Democrat, 778 Reform UK, and 626 Green at the next general election, 8-11 May 2026.

4. What would increase trust?

Correcting misinformation and showing real-world relevance top the list of what the public say would build trust in scientists – and only 8% say nothing could move them

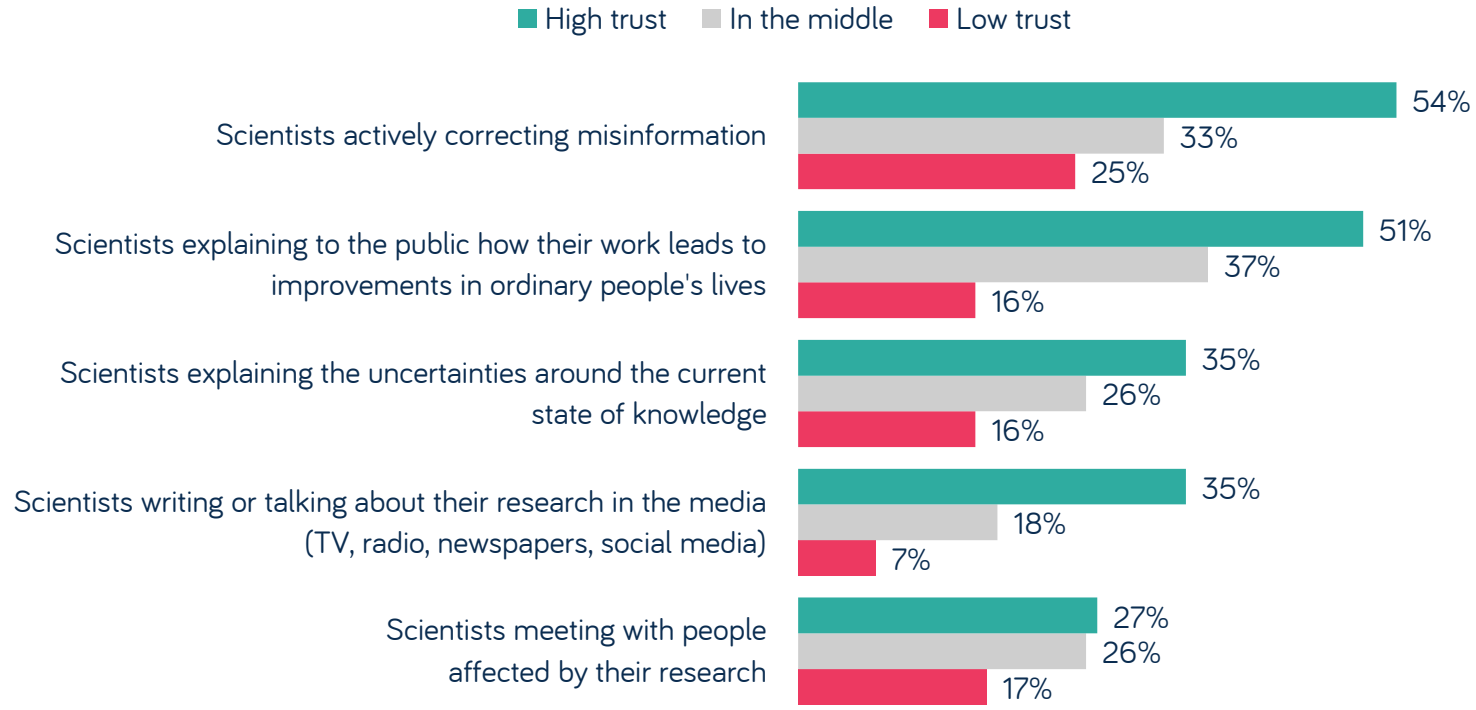
Scientists need to decide how to spend their time between doing their scientific research and engaging with the public and other groups to explain their research or its implications, so that people understand and trust their work. Which of the following, if any, is most likely to make you more trusting of scientists? Please select up to four.



*Don't knows and 'others' not shown. Base: 4,262 UK adults, 8-11 May 2026.

Scientists explaining to the public how their work improves ordinary people's lives would make the biggest difference to trust for those in the middle

Scientists need to decide how to spend their time between doing their scientific research and engaging with the public and other groups to explain their research or its implications, so that people understand and trust their work. Which of the following, if any, is most likely to make you more trusting of scientists? Please select up to four.



*Don't knows and 'others' not shown. Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

37% of middling-trusters say explaining the benefits of science in this way would make them more trusting of scientists – the top answer given among this group. This compares with just 16% of the smaller low-trust group who say the same, suggesting a key point of difference that could help move the needle for the more persuadable middle.

There are also gaps of at least 10 points between the two groups on scientists explaining uncertainties and using the media, though they are closer together on the usefulness of scientists actively correcting misinformation and scientists meeting people affected by their research, even if smaller proportions of each favour these actions.

Scientists advising policymakers on research findings would make little difference to middling- and low-trusters, while around a third of the latter group say nothing would make them more trusting

Scientists need to decide how to spend their time between doing their scientific research and engaging with the public and other groups to explain their research or its implications, so that people understand and trust their work. Which of the following, if any, is most likely to make you more trusting of scientists? Please select up to four.

*Don't knows and 'others' not shown. Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), and 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6), 8-11 May 2026.

Just 9% of middling-trusters and 7% of low-trusters say scientists giving policy advice on research would help increase their trust, with this measure faring worst across the two groups overall.

Both are also relatively united on scientists debating people who disagree with them, involving the public in setting research priorities and discussing their work with local communities, with just one in five or fewer saying these would actually make a difference.

And while one in three (35%) low-trusters say nothing would make them more trusting of scientists, only one in eight (13%) middling-trusters say the same, a signal of their greater openness to being moved.

5. The five groups of science trusters that make up the UK

5. The five groups of science trusters that make up the UK

The preceding sections have only split the UK population on one dimension, their stated level of trust, to show how their views vary across different questions. This section takes a richer approach to understanding how we divide, by including a number of different measures and identifying what most distinguishes groups, using a technique called K-means clustering.

This has resulted in five distinct groups, outlined in this section, starting with a pen portrait and then showing how they differ on key questions.

It is worth noting three points about this:

1. The segmentation model has produced five groups that are roughly similar in size. Given that the majority of our sample has relatively high levels of trust in scientists in general, this has allowed us split this high group more finely, where the most trusting are true **Science Advocates**.

2. Given earlier points about the truly low trust group being relatively small, we have focused on distinguishing the characteristics of a middle trust group, which has been split into three segments, which run in trust order from **Contented Trusters**, **Betrayed Trusters**, through to **Disengaged Trusters**. They do have different levels of trust, but for different reasons, and all are in some sense in the middle and not outright rejectors of science.

3. The least trusting group, **Science Critics**, are larger than those who score low trust in our simple question, but do present some real challenges to engagement.

5. The five groups of science trusters that make up the UK

Who are the five groups?

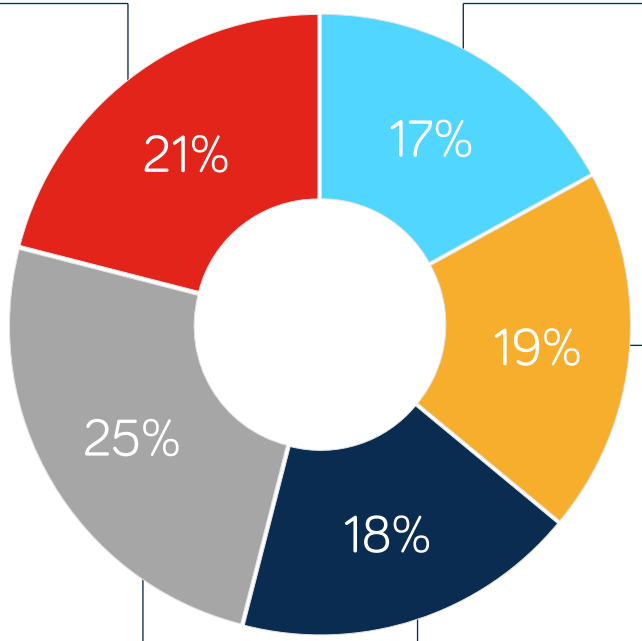
The five groups of trusters that make up the UK

Science Critics (21%)

Lowest trust in every type of scientist measured, and most likely to believe scientists are dishonest or self-serving. Skew right-leaning and Reform-voting

Science Advocates (17%)

Trust scientists almost universally and act on it – most likely to challenge misinformation, back science funding, and see scientists as sharing their values. Majority left-leaning



Contented Trusters (19%)

Trust in scientists generally, but less convinced on climate science specifically – the least likely group to feel let down by leaders or institutions

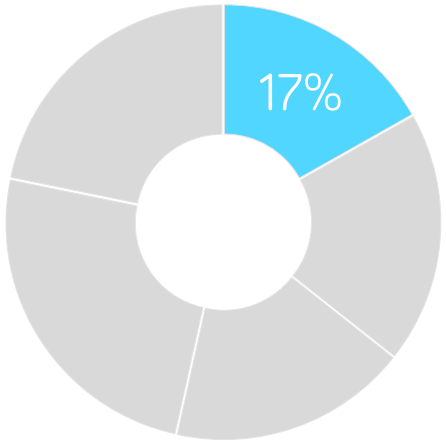
Disengaged Trusters (25%)

Moderate trust in scientists, but the lowest engagement of any group – most likely to have paid no attention to science news and least likely to act on it.

Betrayed Trusters (18%)

Trust scientists almost as much as advocates do, but feel deeply let down by leaders and institutions, with distrust more about betrayal, rather than scepticism about science itself

Science Advocates



Key characteristics

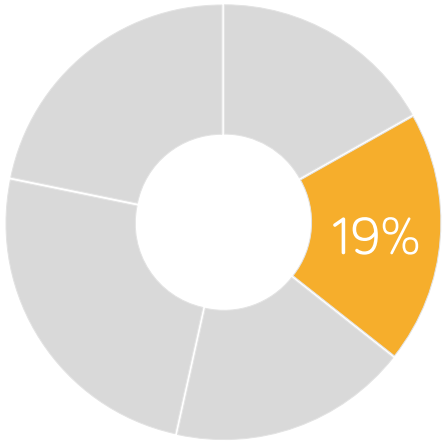
- Highest trust across every type of scientist measured: 94% trust scientists in general, 93% trust vaccine scientists, even 75% trust government scientists, compared with only 42% of the overall public.
- Most likely to act on scientific information: 79% see themselves as science advocates, 86% would challenge someone who said something scientifically inaccurate, and 65% want government investment in science increased.
- Almost entirely reject the idea that scientists behave badly – only 1% think scientists ignore evidence that contradicts their work, and just 3-5% agree scientists protect each other when wrong or are secretive about their research.
- 57% identify as politically left-leaning – the only segment with a majority who identify clearly as either right- or left-leaning.

Key demographics

- Most male of the groups (57%)
- Majority aged 25 to 49 (52%)
- 83% white vs 17% ethnic minority
- Highest proportion of Green supporters (28%) and most Remain-voting group (57%)
- Group with the highest levels of HE qualifications (55% vs 34% average)
- By far most likely to know someone who works in science (73%)

Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 8-11 May 2026.

Contented Trusters



Key characteristics

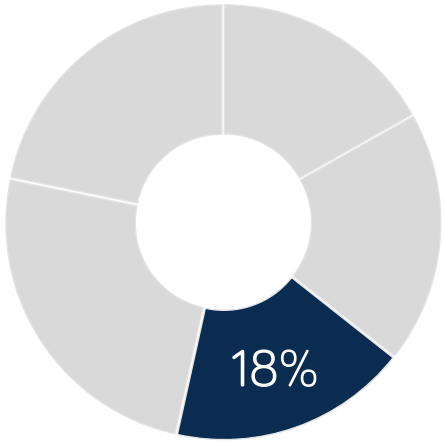
- Moderately high-trust group – 79% have high trust in scientists generally, but a noticeable dip for climate scientists specifically (62%).
- Most likely of all five groups to say most people in general can be trusted (42%) and to report having a good life (61%).
- Least likely to feel let down by leaders (44%) or betrayed by institutions (18%) – the most settled, least aggrieved segment of the five.
- High action and engagement with science, without the more vocal edge of Science Advocates. About half as likely as that group to say they see themselves as a science advocate.

Key demographics

- Most gender-equal group (51% male vs 49% female)
- Older than Science Advocates (51% vs 33% aged 50+)
- 86% white vs 14% ethnic minority
- Evenly split between Labour (18%), Con (16%), Reform (16%) and Lib Dem (15%) supporters
- 40% have HE qualification
- Second most likely to know someone working in science (47%), along with Betrayed Trusters (45%)

Base: 811 'Contented Trusters', 8-11 May 2026.

Betrayed Trusters



Key characteristics

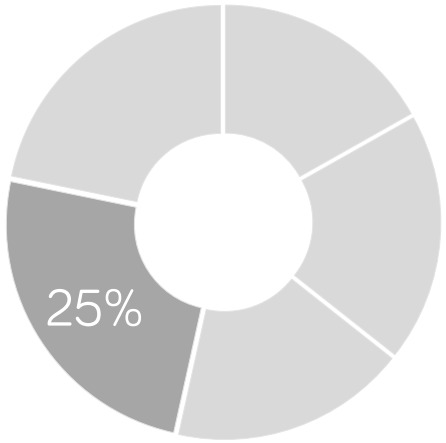
- Moderate trust in scientists generally (78%) but a sharp gap for scientists working in private companies (27%) and government (41%).
- Defined by grievance, not science scepticism: highest of all segments on feeling let down by people in leadership roles (94%), feeling betrayed by institutions like the police, church, schools, or government (82%), and feeling betrayed by friends or family (51%).
- Also stand out on specific reasons to distrust scientists – highest agreement that scientists intentionally keep their work secret (49%), don't care if ordinary people understand their work (61%), and won't publish results their funders don't like (68%).
- Despite all this, still take actions informed by science – 65% would challenge a scientific inaccuracy, and 75% would get a recommended vaccine, so the sense of betrayal sits alongside continued engagement, not withdrawal, from science.

Key demographics

- Group with largest ethnic minority share (20%)
- Second-largest proportion of under-50s (61%)
- Majority female (53%)
- Second-highest share of Green supporters (26%)
- 39% have HE qualification – virtually the same as Contented Trusters (40%)
- Second most likely to know someone working in science (45%), along with Contented Trusters (47%)

Base: 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 8-11 May 2026.

Disengaged Trusters



Key characteristics

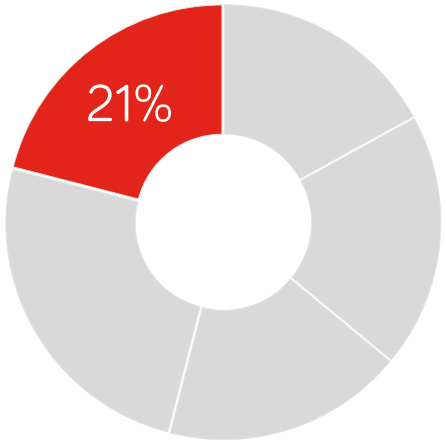
- Moderate trust in scientists generally (72%) but it doesn't translate into action – lowest of all segments on identifying as a science advocate (5%), willingness to challenge scientific inaccuracies (16%), or joining a march to protest science funding cuts (3%).
- Most disengaged from science: 67% haven't paid attention to any science information in the past 30 days, and have the lowest score of any segment when it comes to rating their own knowledge of science (18%).
- Largest 'don't know' group politically too – 32% don't know their political leaning and 14% don't know who they'd vote for, suggesting a broader pattern of disengagement rather than something specific to science.
- Best described as trusting but checked-out, rather than actively sceptical.

Key demographics

- Oldest of the groups (58% aged 50+)
- Most female group (57%)
- Highest share of white people (90%) across groups
- Second-most Reform-supporting (22%) and second most likely to say would not vote (11%)
- Virtually joint-lowest proportion of people with HE qualifications (20%).
- Lowest likelihood of knowing someone working in science (19%)

Base: 996 'Disengaged Trusters', 8-11 May 2026.

Science Critics



Key characteristics

- Lowest trust on every single type of scientist measured – only 7% have high trust in scientists in general, falling to just 1% for scientists working in government.
- Most likely to believe scientists are dishonest or self-serving: 52% think scientists work in cahoots with politicians and businesses, 47% think scientists ignore evidence that contradicts their work, and 43% think scientists are only interested in their own advantage.
- Right-leaning skew (36%) and most likely to say they'd vote Reform (37%) or to use GB News as their main news source (17%).
- Despite the cynicism, not entirely closed off – around a third (36%) would still get a vaccine recommended to them by the NHS or a doctor, so there is still some willingness to act on scientific advice, although significantly lower than average.

Key demographics

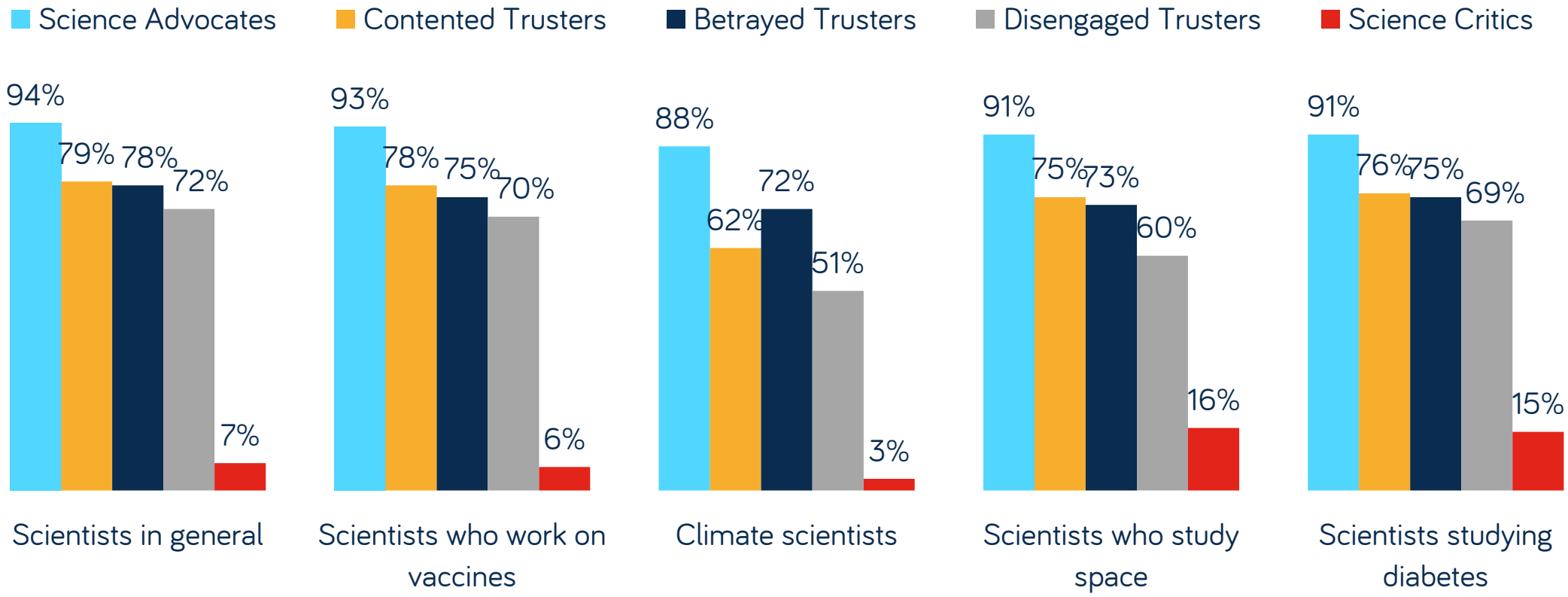
- Most Reform UK-supporting (37% vs 22% among Disengaged Trusters) and most likely to say they wouldn't vote (14%)
- Most Leave-voting group (50%)
- More female (53%) than male (47%)
- Second-oldest of the groups (54% aged 50+)
- 21% have an HE qualification – virtually joint lowest with Disengaged Trusters (20%)
- Few personally know someone working in science (22%)

Base: 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

5.1. Levels of trust in scientists across the five groups

Advocates almost all have high trust in scientists across disciplines, as do a smaller majority of the three middle segments. Very few Critics have high trust, but there is a jump for scientists studying space and diabetes statistics

How much, if at all, do you trust the following...? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.
% with high trust (7-10)

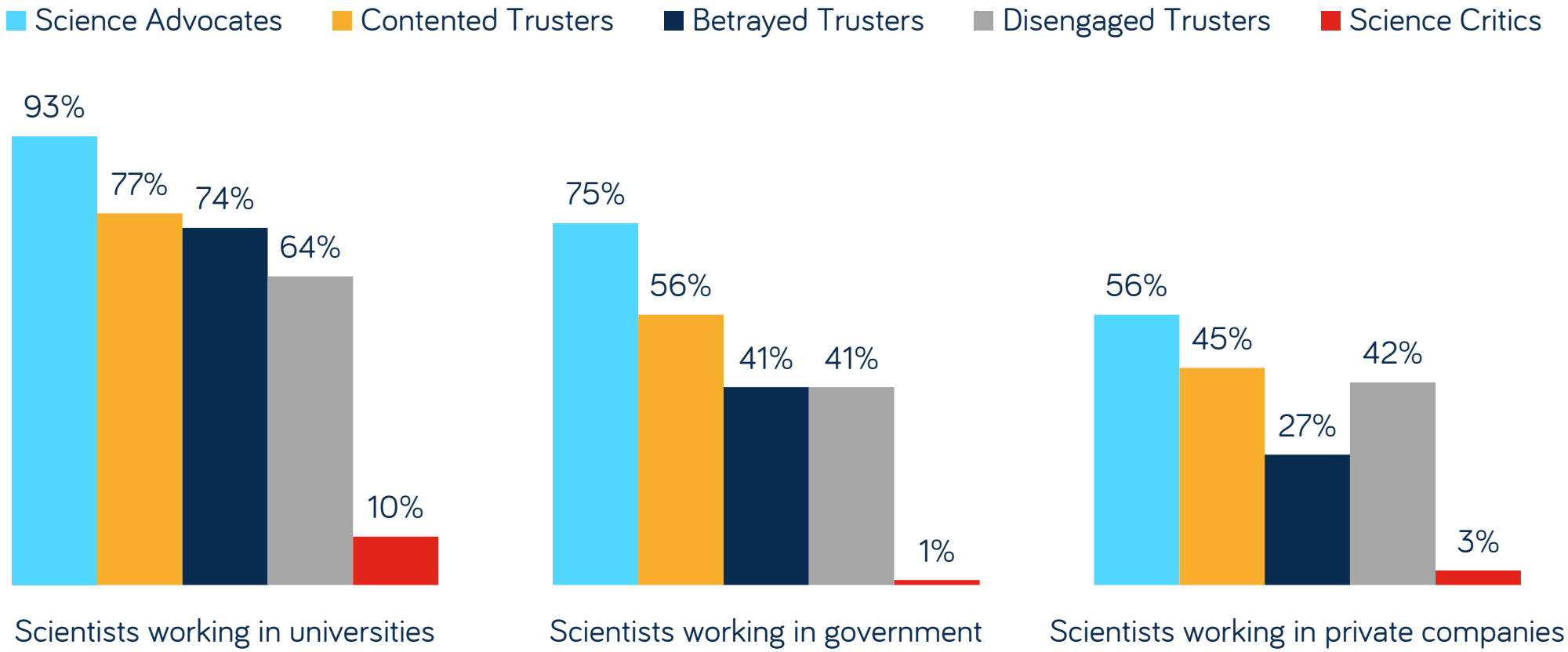


Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Scientists in universities receive higher trust than those in government and the private sector, from all segments

How much, if at all, do you trust the following...? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.

% with high trust (7-10)

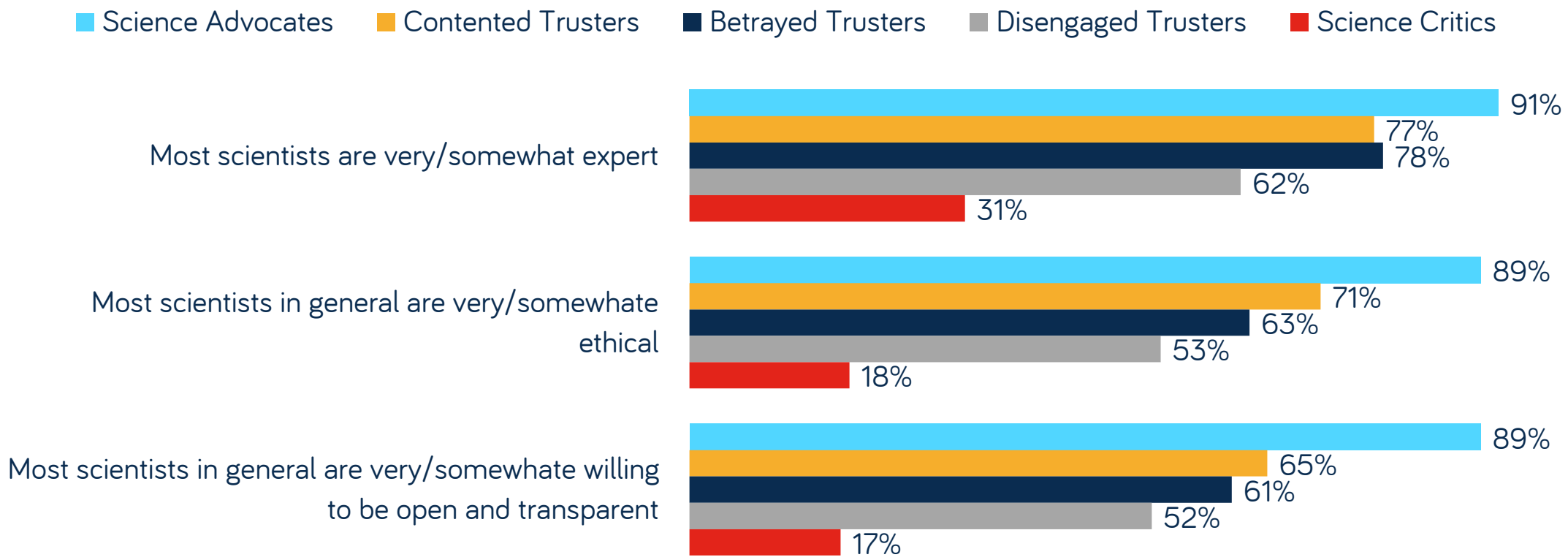


Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

5.2. Signals, cues or drivers of trust in common trust models and measures of distrust

Fewer people think scientists are ethical and transparent than think they're expert. The biggest difference is amongst Betrayed Trusters, from 78% saying expert to 61% saying open and transparent. But its Critics' negative views that stand out

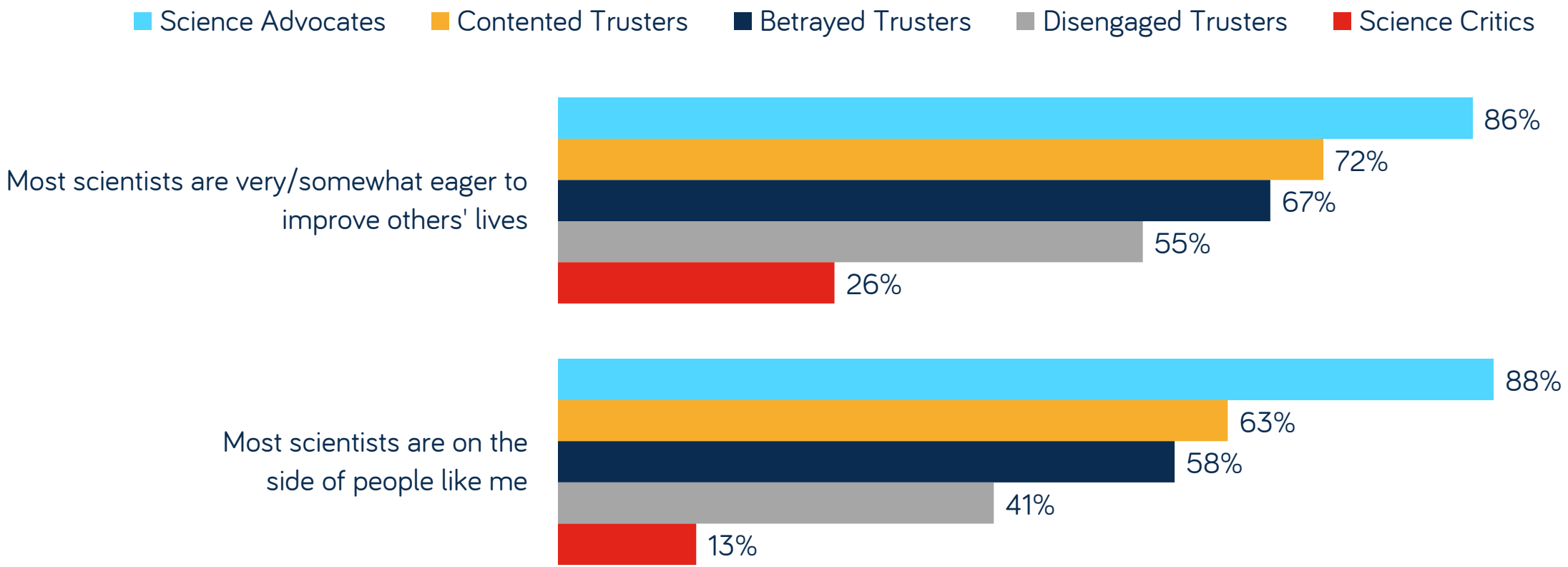
How [expert or inexpert] / [ethical or unethical] / [willing or unwilling to be open and transparent] are most scientists in general?



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

There are clear steps down from the most to least trusting and engaged groups on whether scientists want to improve others' lives and are on the side of 'people like them'

How eager or uneager are most of the following groups to improve others' lives? / To what extent do you agree or disagree that most scientists are on the side of people like me. **% who strongly/tend to agree**

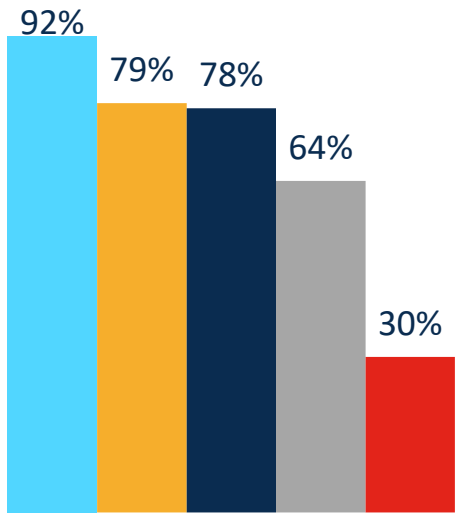


Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

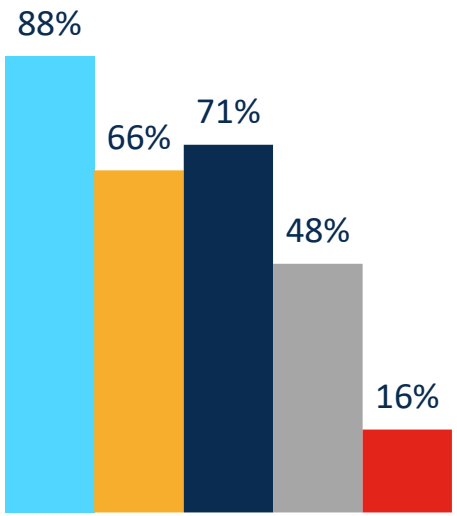
Most segments see climate scientists as much less expert and 'on their side' than scientists who work on vaccines

Science Advocates | Contented Trusters | Betrayed Trusters | Disengaged Trusters | Science Critics

How expert or inexpert are most of the following groups?

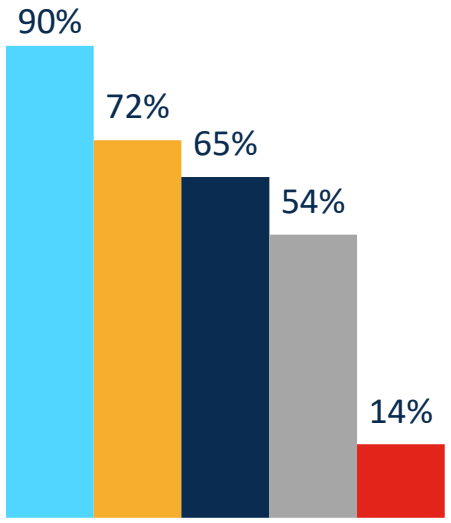


Scientists who work on vaccines are very/somewhat expert

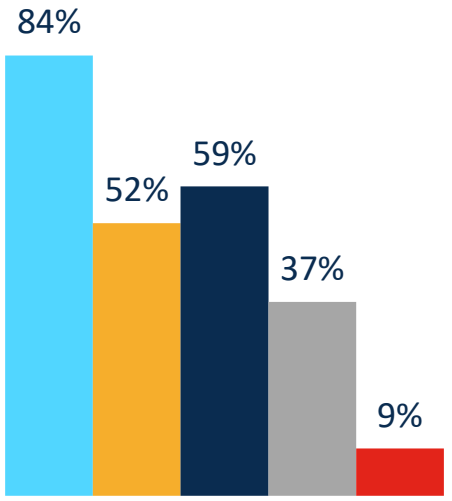


Climate scientists are very/somewhat expert

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following scientists are on the side of people like me? **% who strongly/tend to agree**



Scientists who work on vaccines are on the side of people like me

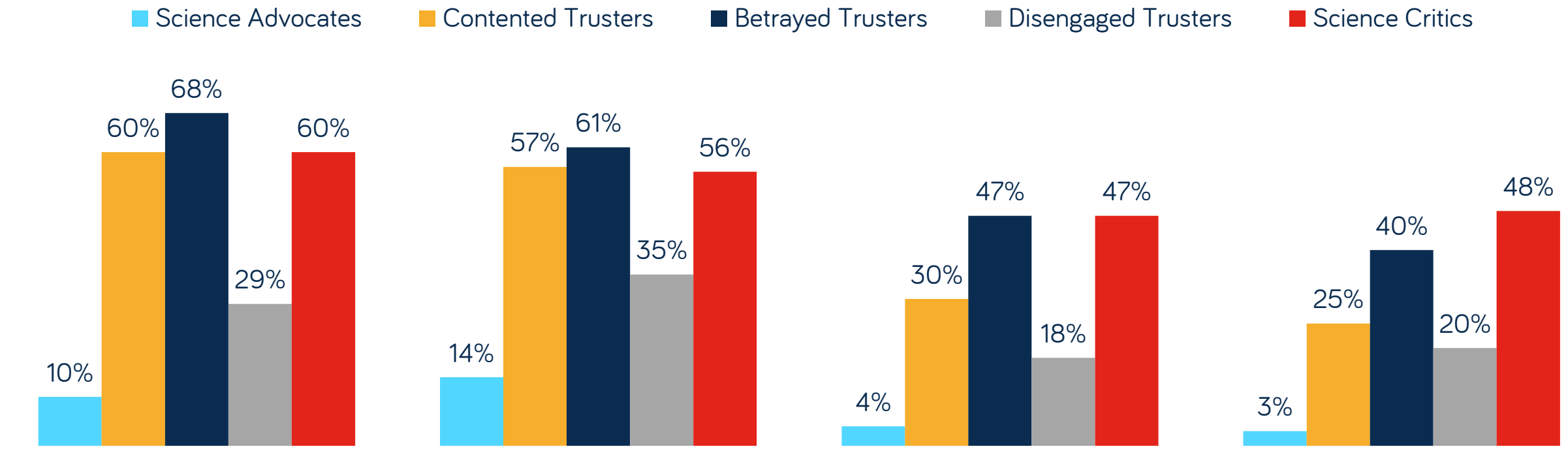


Climate scientists are on the side of people like me

Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Contented and Betrayed Trusters are united with Science Critics by a suspicion about whether scientists have the best interests of society in mind and are disinterested in ordinary people

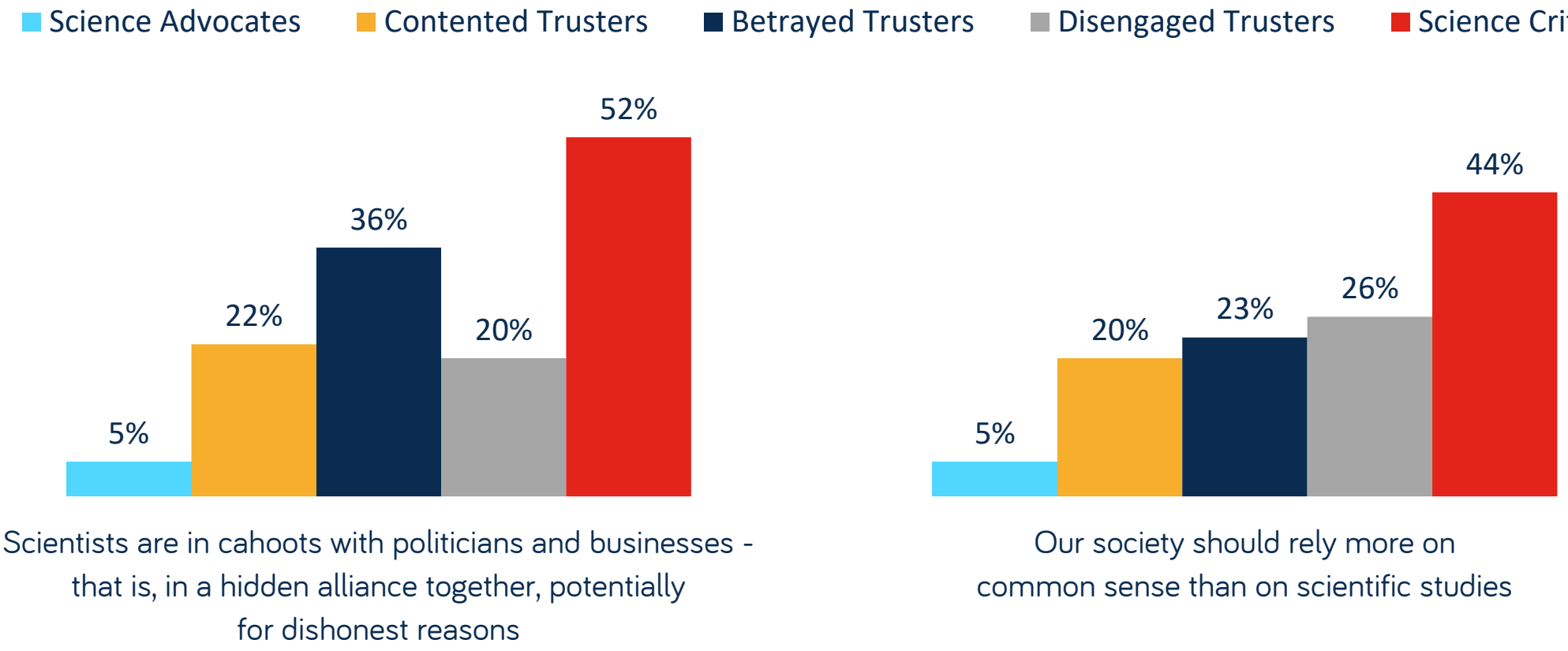
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about scientists in general? **% who strongly/tend to agree**



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Betrayed Trusters and Critics are also the most likely to hold certain 'science-related populist' beliefs, such as scientists being 'in cahoots' with politicians and businesses. But the middle groups are more aligned on 'common sense' vs science

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about scientists in general? **% who strongly/tend to agree**

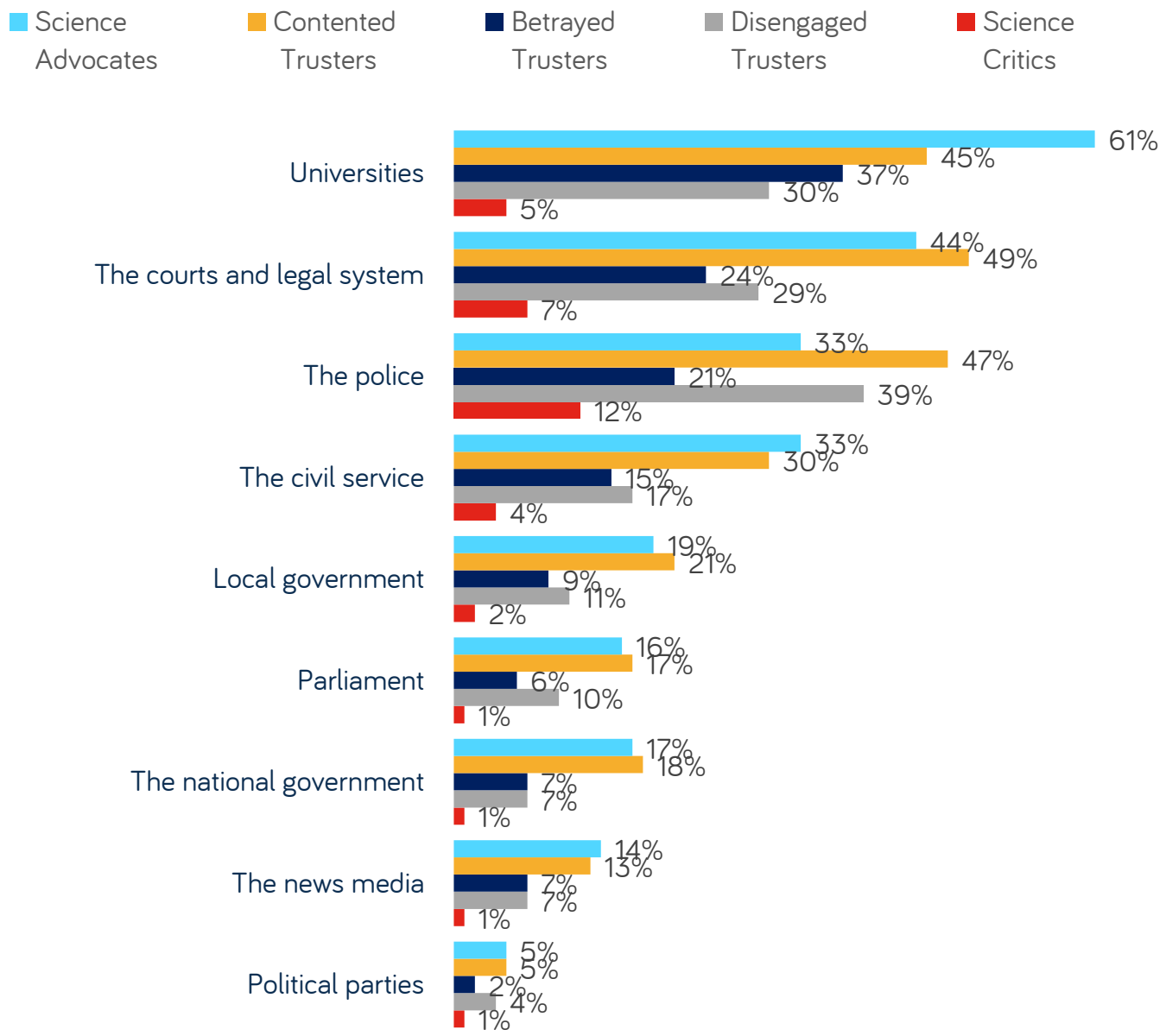


Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

5.3. Wider feelings of trust, moral injury and wellbeing

Science Advocates and Contented Trusters have the highest trust in most institutions asked about, and Science Critics the lowest.
Disengaged Trusters tend to have higher trust than Betrayed Trusters

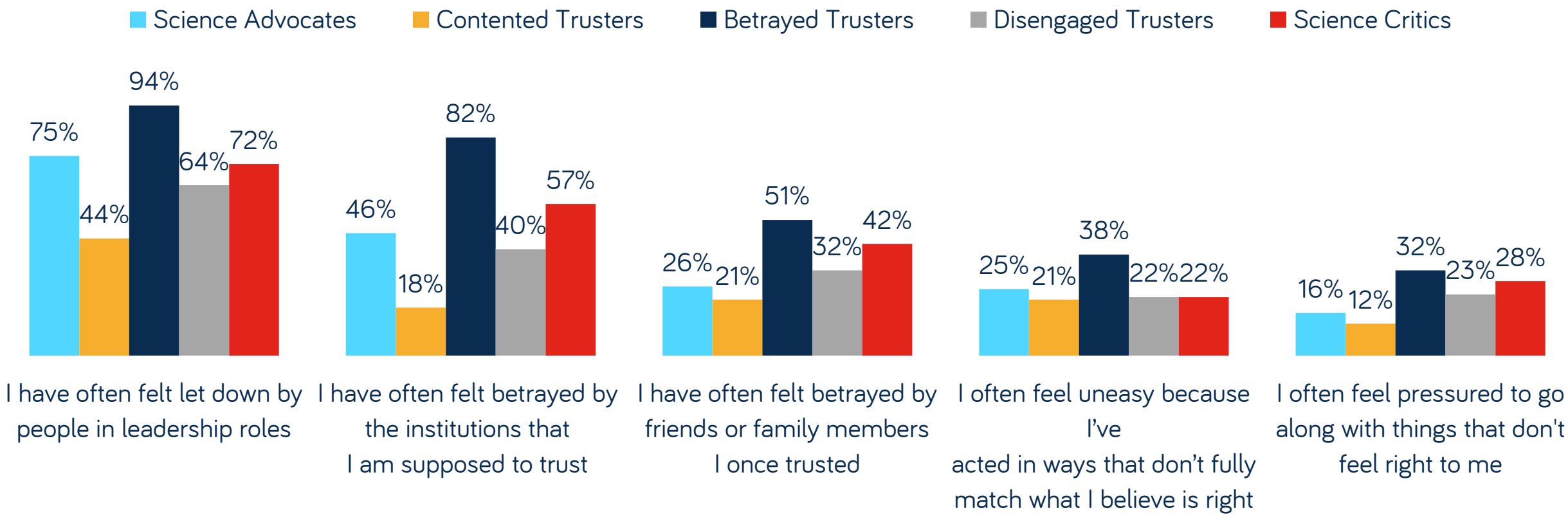
In general, how much do you trust each of the following...? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.
% with high trust (7-10)



Base: 2,817 UK adults with 'high trust' (7-10) in scientists in general, 1,107 'in the middle' (4-6) and 206 with 'low trust' (0-3), 8-11 May 2026.

Betrayed Trusters score highest on moral injury/harm measures, such as feeling let down by those they should be able to trust, and pressure or unease about doing things that don't feel right. Contented Trusters are least likely to feel this way

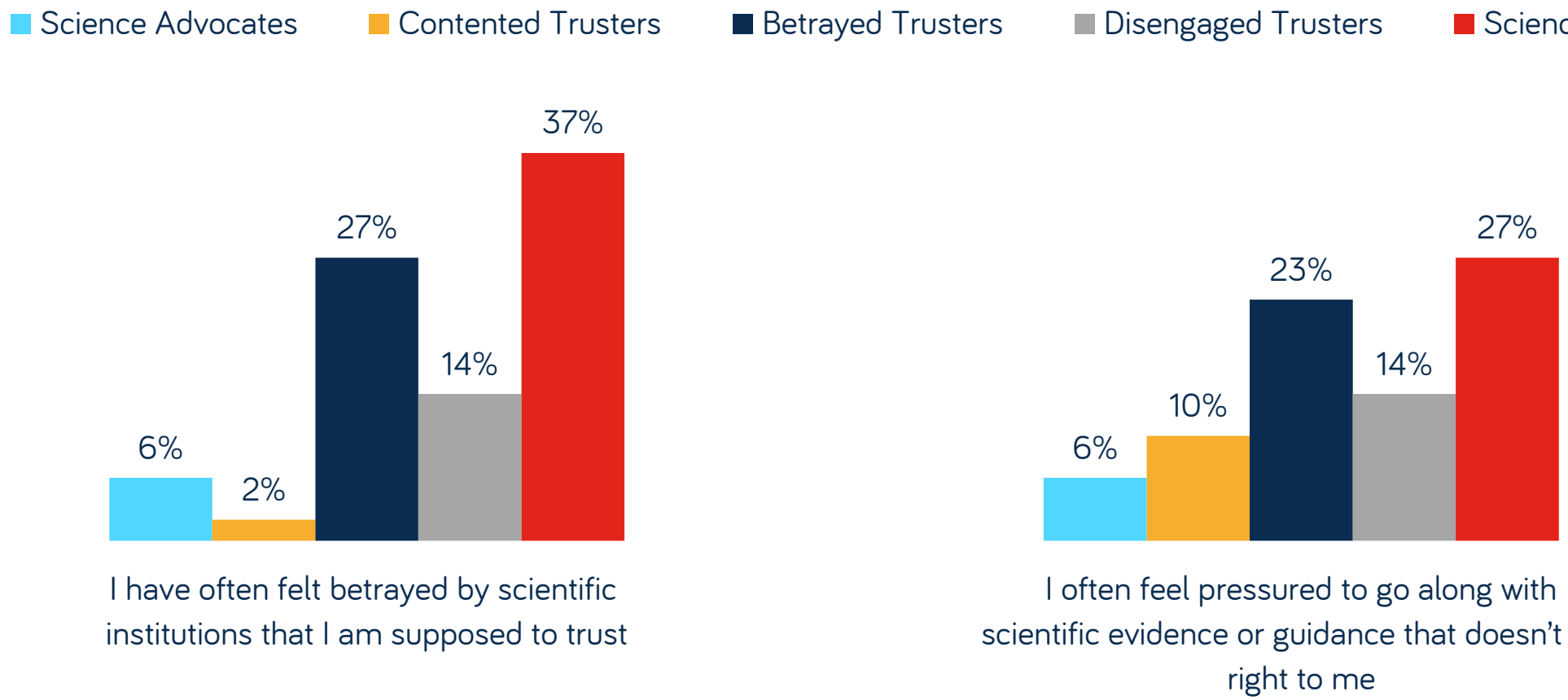
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? **% who strongly/tend to agree**



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

When moral injury measures are adapted to focus on science and scientific institutions, Critics overtake Betrayed Trusters

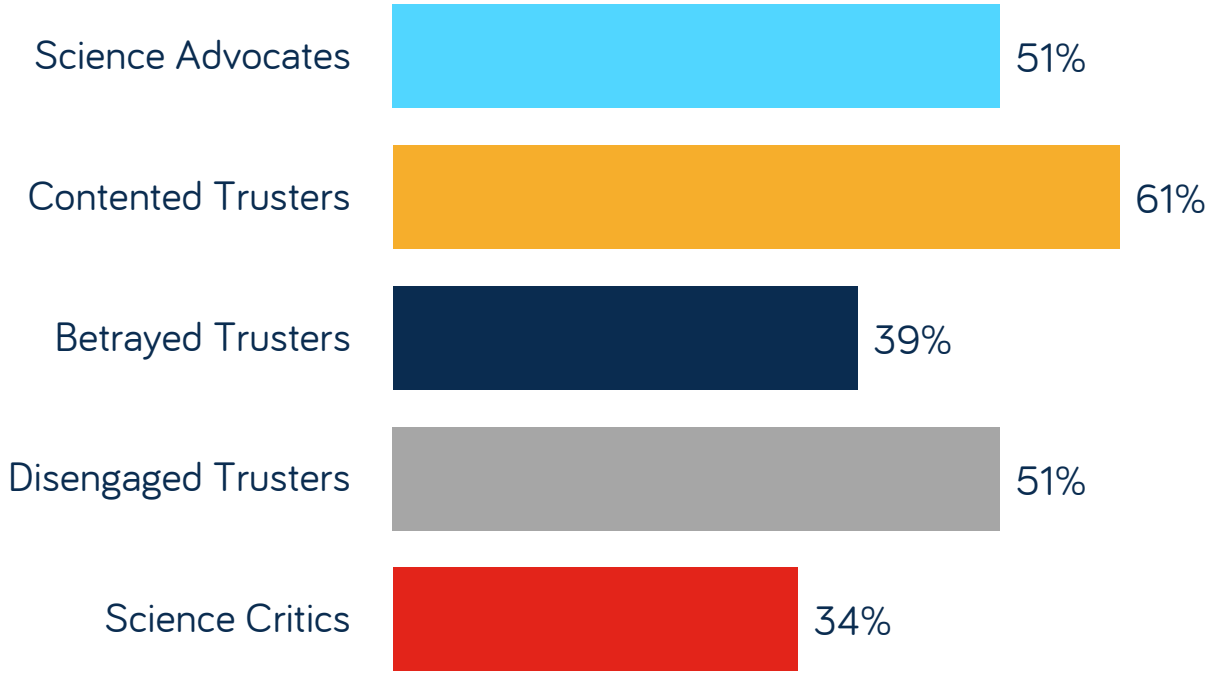
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? **% who strongly/tend to agree**



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Contented Trusters are most likely to feel that they have a good life, while only minorities of Science Critics and Betrayed Trusters feel this way

Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you stand at this time, assuming that the higher the step the better you feel about your life, and the lower the step the worse you feel about it?
% who say they have a good life (7-10)

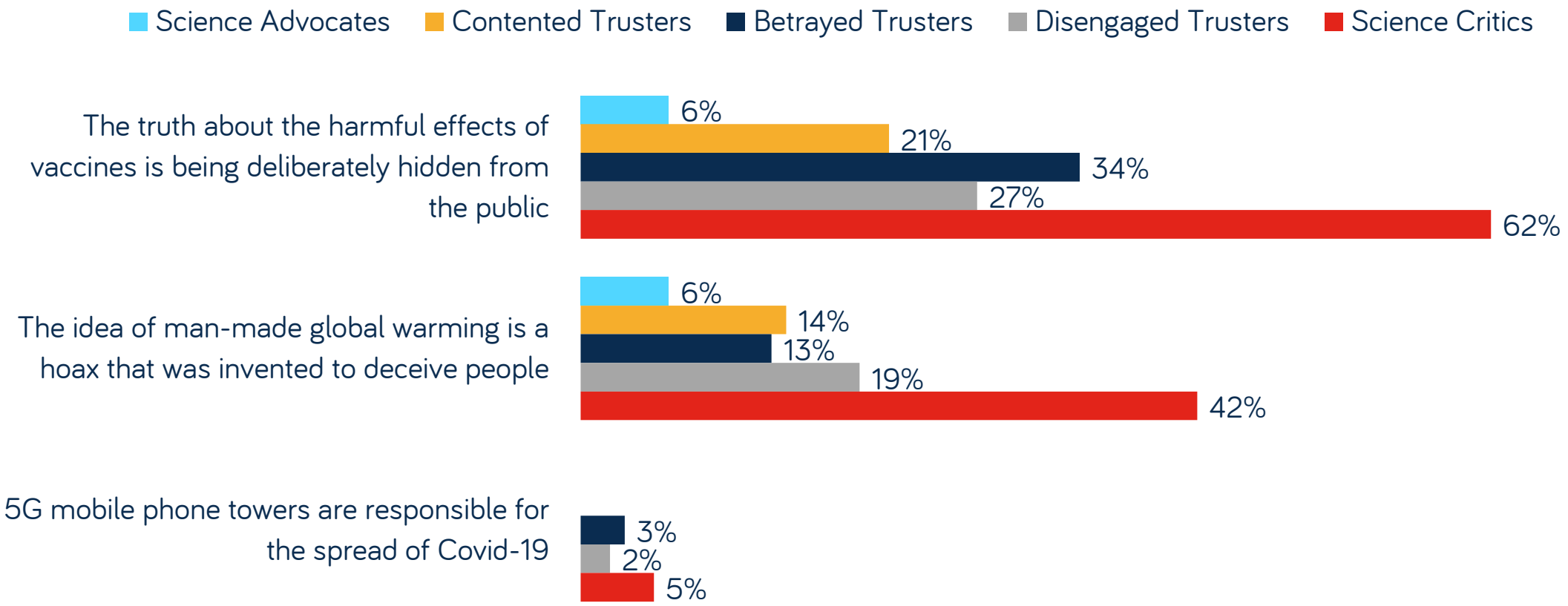


Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

5.4. Belief in conspiracies about science

Four in 10 Science Critics believe man-made global warming is a hoax, and six in 10 that truths about vaccines are being deliberately hidden – in both cases around twice the proportion of any other segment. Almost no one believes 5G towers caused Covid

In your opinion, to what extent are the following statements true or false? **% saying probably/definitely true**

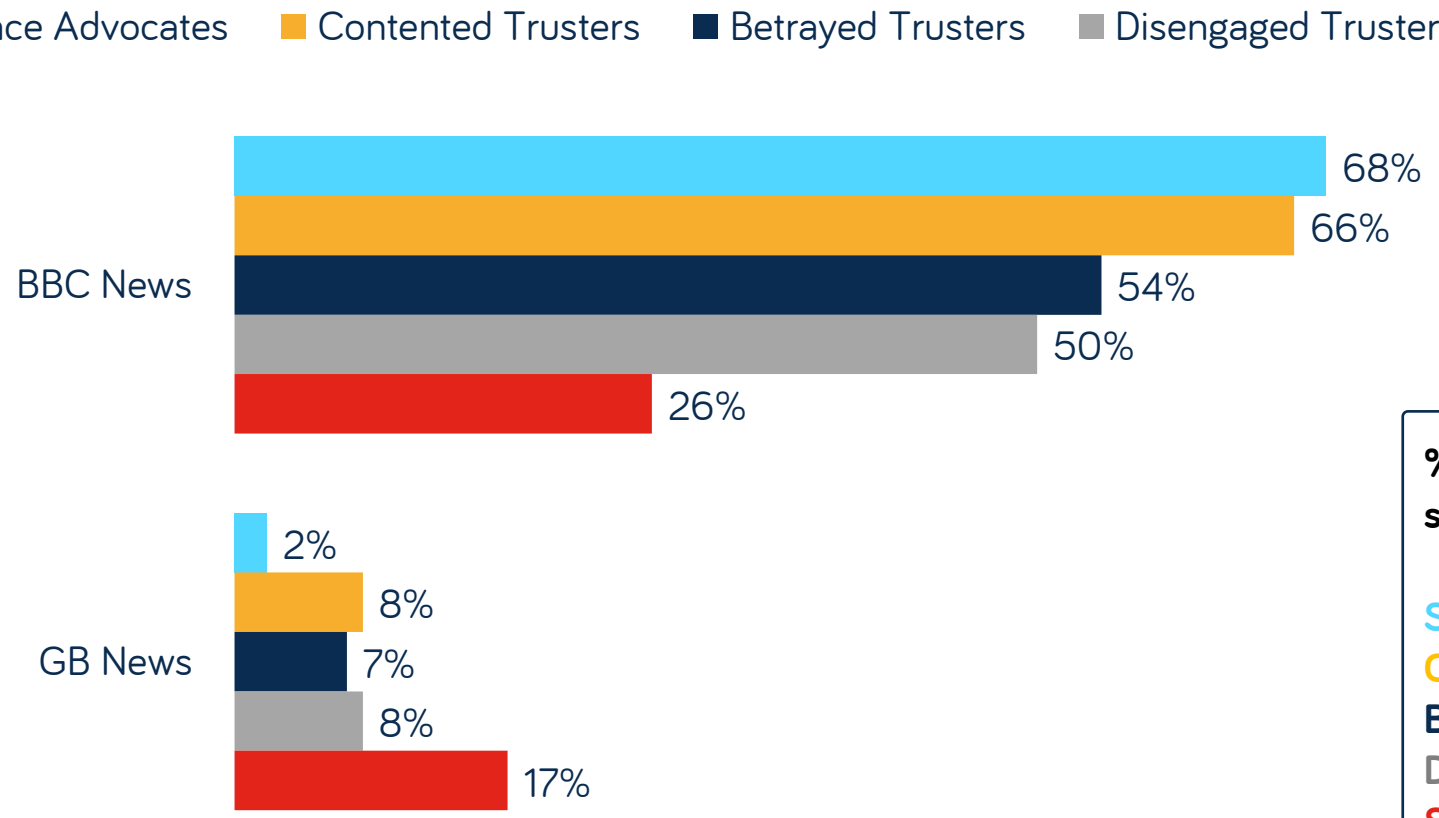


Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

5.5. Information, engagement and direct connection to science

The BBC is a significant source of general news for all groups, except Science Critics – although not all who use it think it's reliable. Few of any segment use GB News

Which of the following do you use most often to find the news? Please tick all that apply.



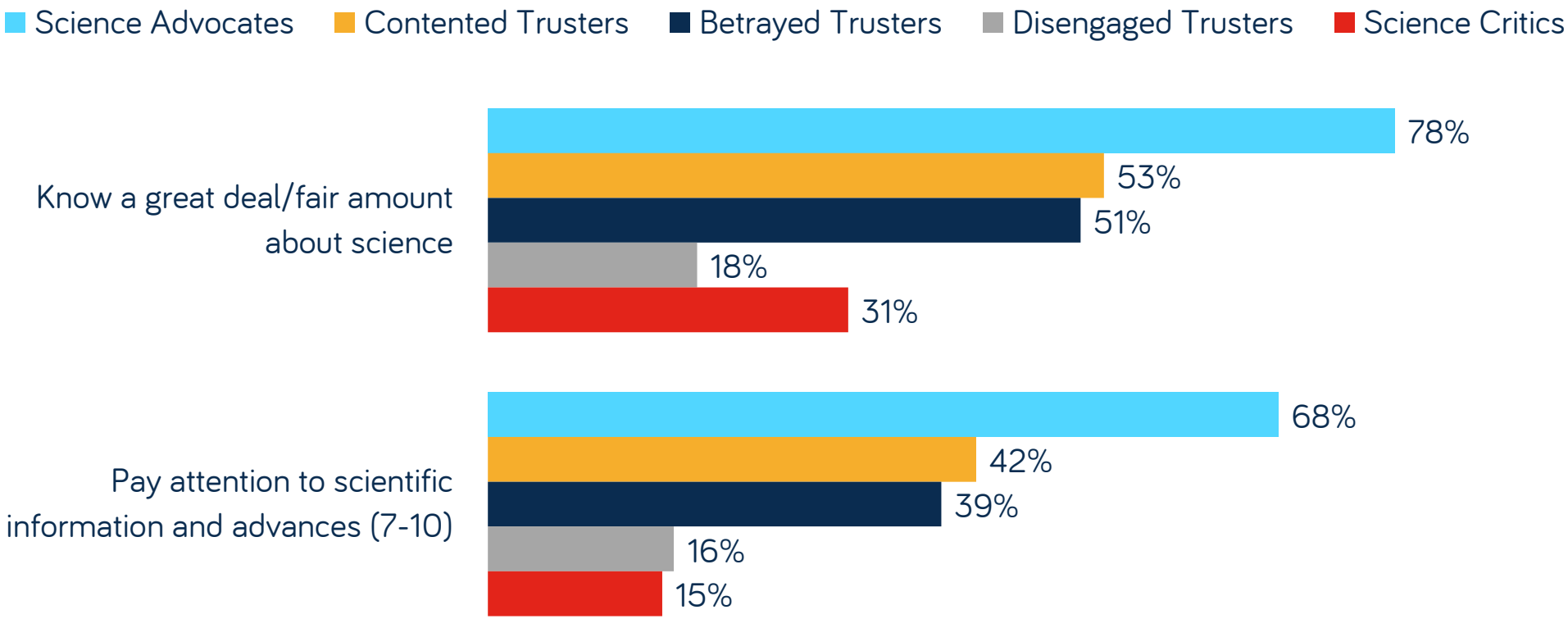
% who think BBC is a reliable source of information

Science Advocates: 55%
Contented Trusters: 52%
Betrayed Trusters: 33%
Disengaged Trusters: 36%
Science Critics: 9%

Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Self-rated knowledge about science generally aligns with levels of attention paid to science. The exception is Critics, who are twice as likely to say that they know at least a fair amount about science (31%) as to say they pay attention to it (15%)

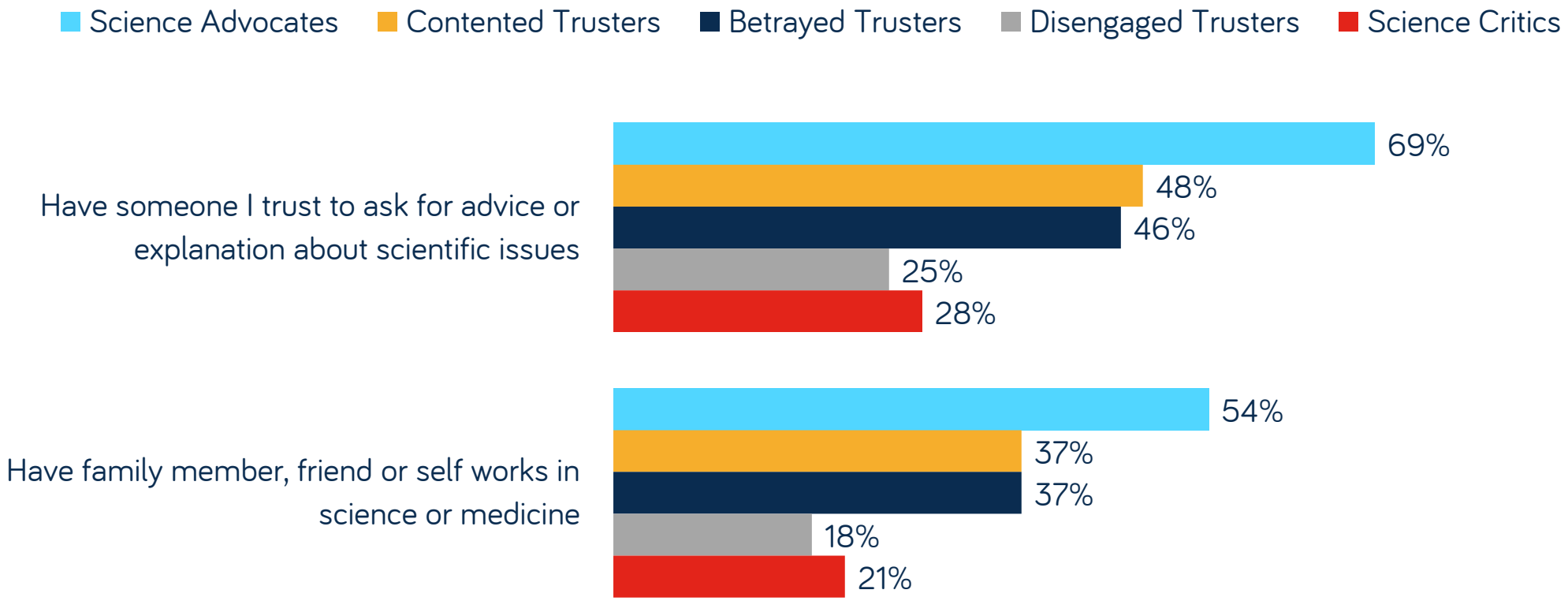
How much do you, personally, know about science? / In general, how much attention, if any, do you pay to scientific information and advances? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Most Advocates have a personal connection to a scientist, or someone they can get science advice from, while only minorities of other groups do

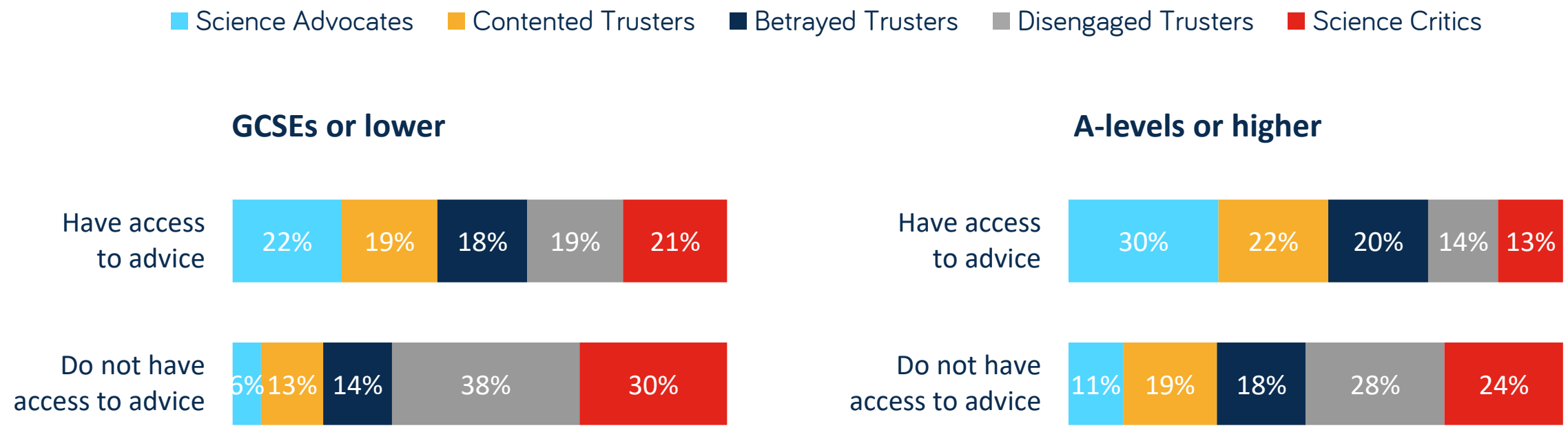
Do you, or do any of your friends or family, work in a job using science or medicine? / Do you have anyone you know and trust that you could ask for advice or an explanation around a scientific issue you were interested in, or not?



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Those who have someone they could ask for scientific advice are more likely to be in the higher-trust segments than those who don't – and that's true regardless of education level

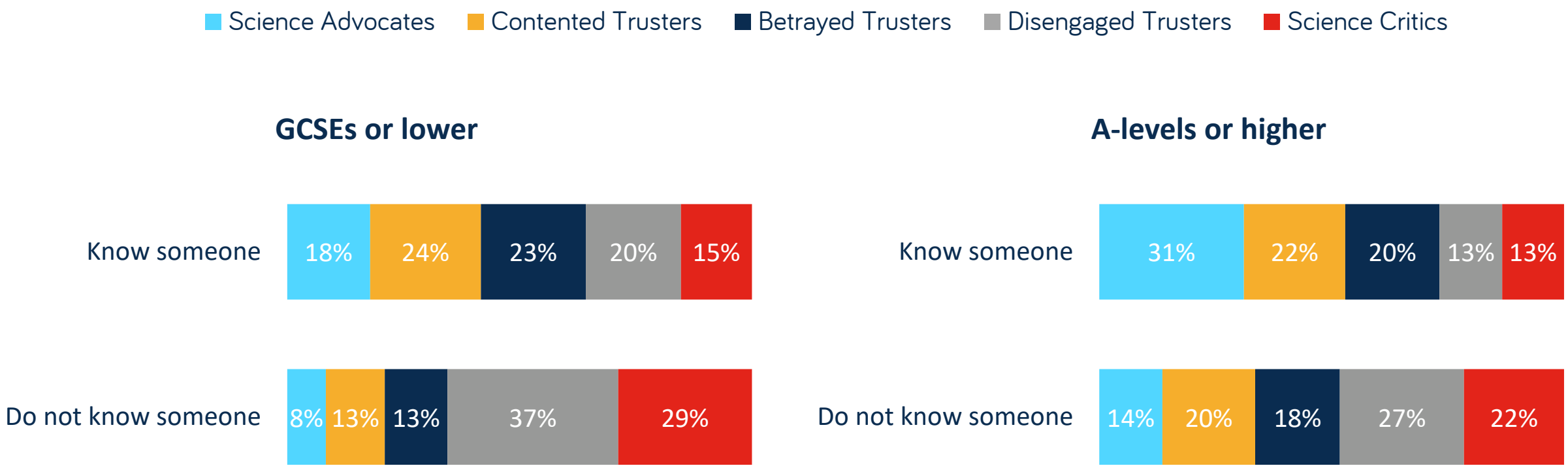
Do you have anyone you know and trust that you could ask for advice or an explanation around a scientific issue you were interested in, or not?



GCSE or lower base: 98 'Science Advocates', 139 'Contented Trusters', 156 'Betrayed Trusters', 329 'Disengaged Trusters' and 269 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.
A-levels or higher base: 692 'Science Advocates', 663 'Contented Trusters', 624 'Betrayed Trusters', 650 'Disengaged Trusters' and 587 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

The same pattern holds when it comes to working in science or medicine, or knowing someone who does

Do you, or do any of your friends or family, work in a job using science or medicine?

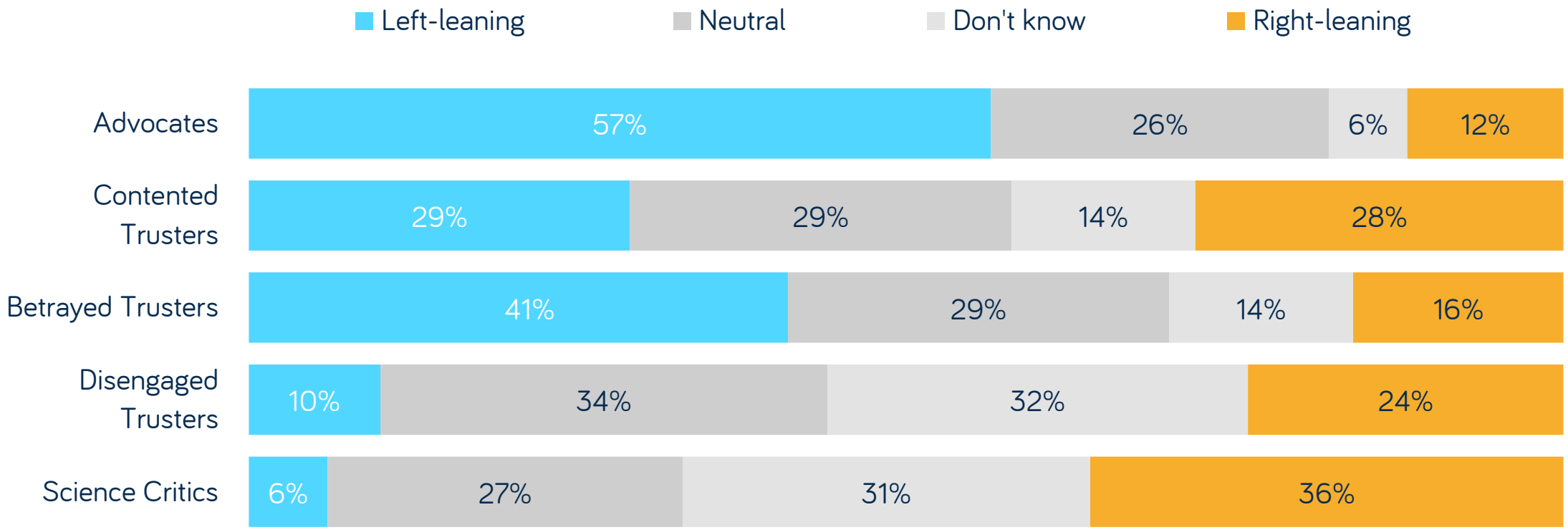


GCSE or lower base: 91 'Science Advocates', 134 'Contented Trusters', 139 'Betrayed Trusters', 327 'Disengaged Trusters' and 255 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.
A-levels or higher base: 626 'Science Advocates', 639 'Contented Trusters', 587 'Betrayed Trusters', 669 'Disengaged Trusters' and 568 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

5.6. Party political identity and cultural divisions

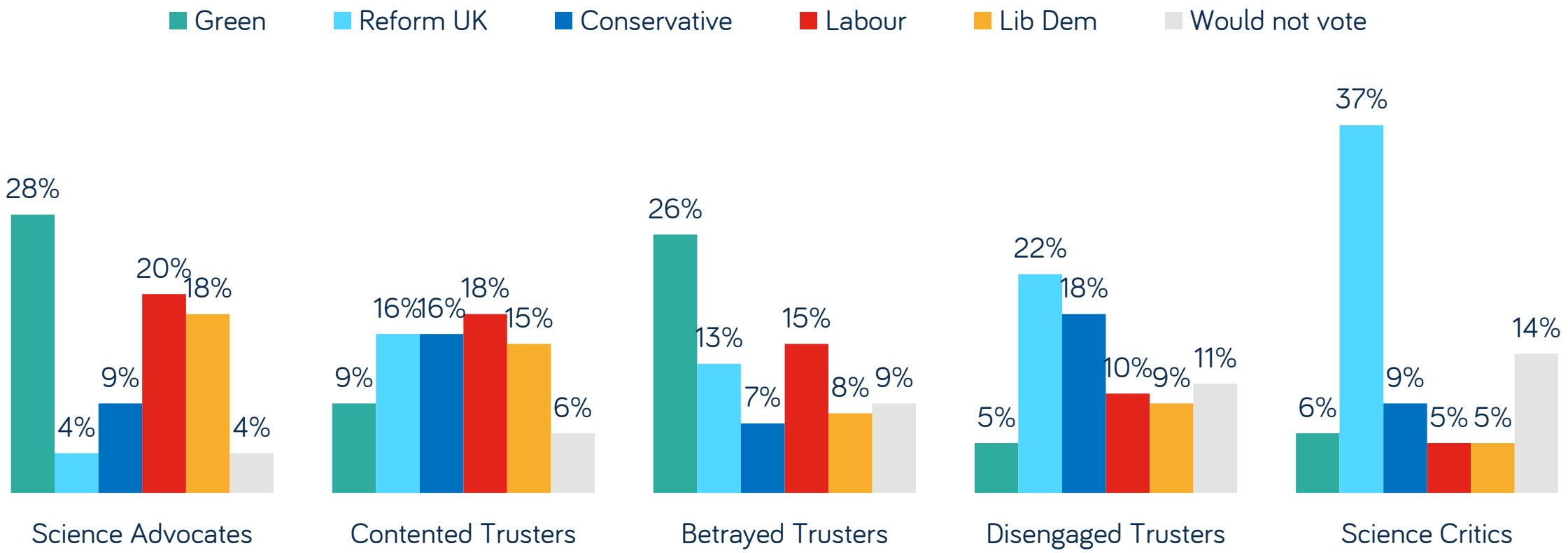
Advocates are the only group with a majority who lean left politically, while Contented Trusters are the most evenly split group. Betrayed Trusters are mainly left-leaning, while Critics and, to a lesser degree, Disengaged Trusters lean right

Political orientations are often classified on a left-right spectrum. Please indicate your political orientation on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is 'Strongly left-leaning' and 5 is 'Strongly right-leaning'.



Base: 4,262 UK adults, of whom 1,220 identify as left-leaning (1-2), 983 right-leaning (4-5) and 1,277 neutral (3), 8-11 May 2026.

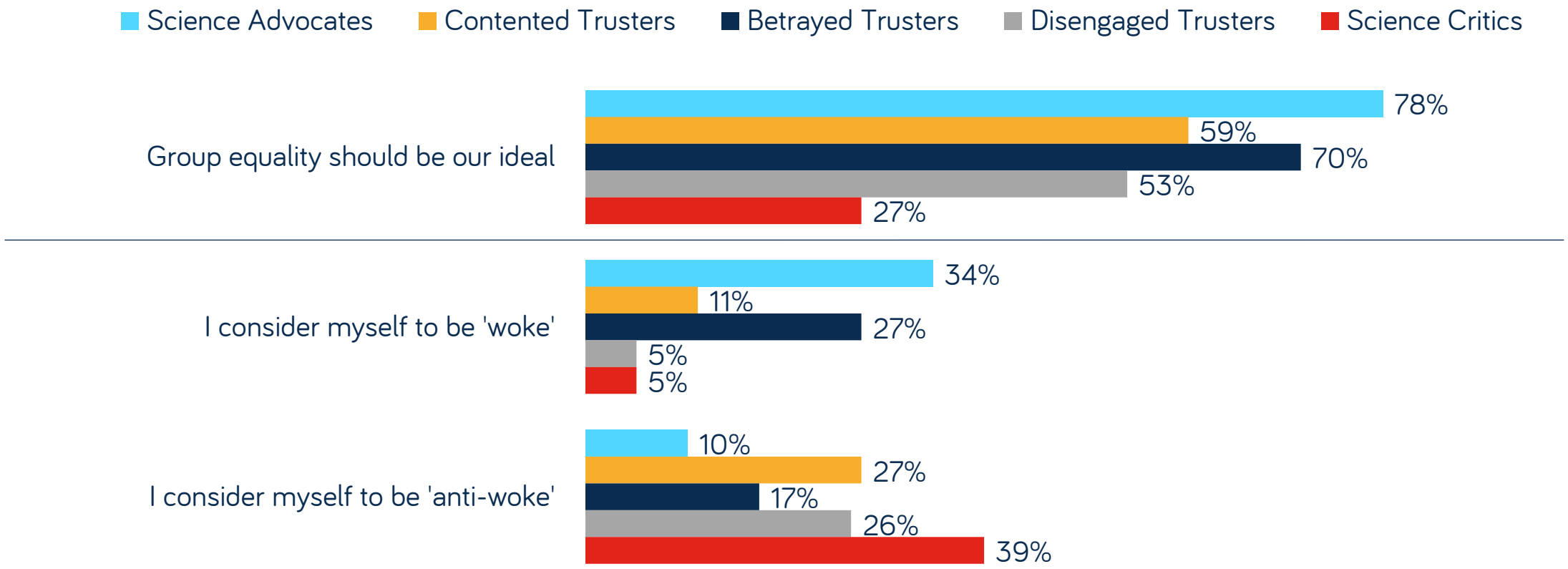
Nearly four in 10 Critics support Reform UK – the largest share of any segment supporting a single party. Green supporters represent more than a quarter of both Advocates and Betrayed Trusters, while Contented Trusters are the most politically balanced



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Other than Science Critics, majorities of all groups support the ideal of group equality. Advocates and Betrayed Trusters are the most in favour and are also the two groups most likely to identify as ‘woke’, while Critics are the most ‘anti-woke’

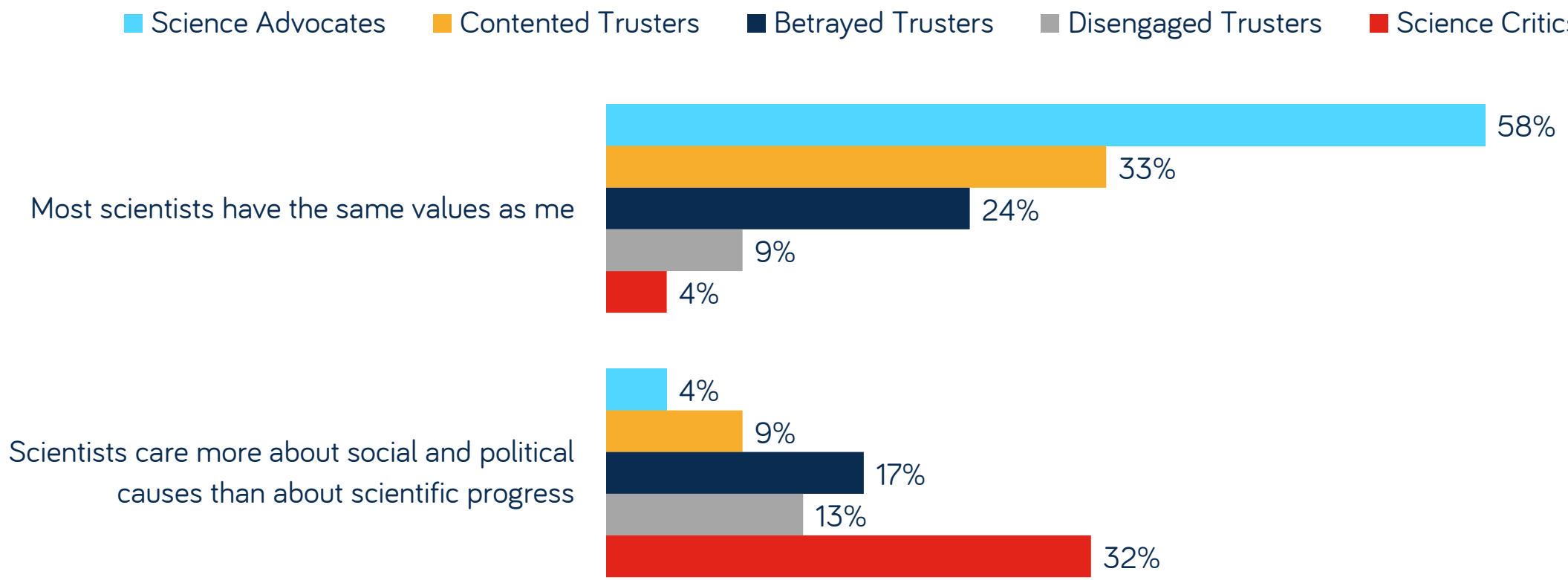
Please indicate your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'strongly oppose' and 10 is 'strongly support’ / Do you consider yourself to be ‘woke’, ‘anti-woke’ or ‘neither’?



Base: 795 ‘Science Advocates’, 811 ’Contented Trusters’, 788 ‘Betrayed Trusters’, 996 ‘Disengaged Trusters’ and 872 ‘Science Critics’, 8-11 May 2026.

Most Advocates think scientists share their values, with a steep gradient down to Critics, virtually none of whom feel that way. And Critics are eight times more likely than Advocates to think scientists care more about political causes than scientific progress

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? **% who say strongly/tend to agree**

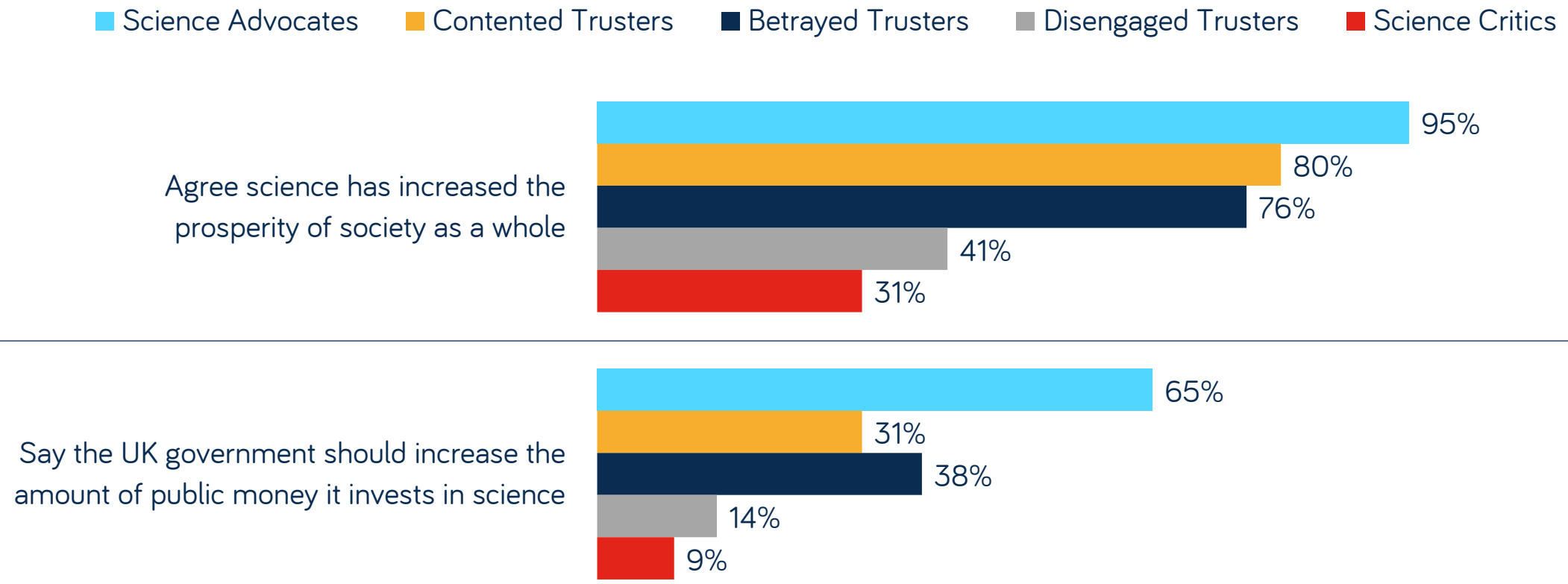


Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

5.7. General support for science

Most people believe science has added to prosperity, although this is a minority view amongst Critics and Disengaged Trusters. Advocates are the only group where a majority call for an increase in public funding for science

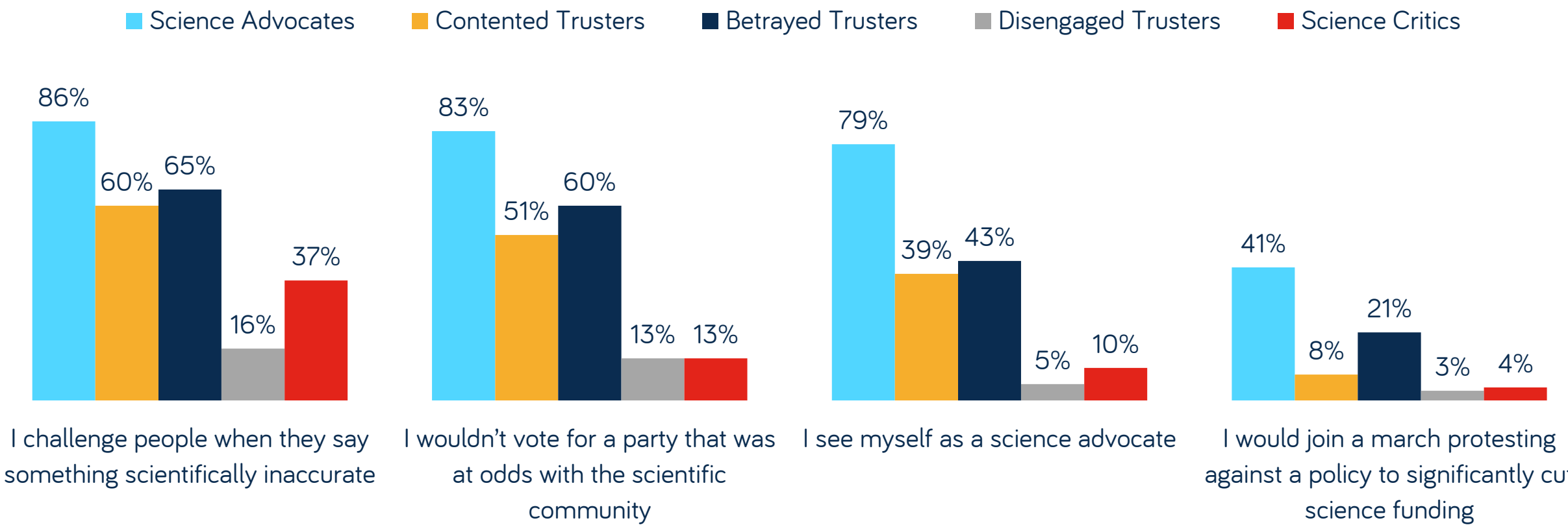
To what extent do you agree or disagree that science has increased the prosperity of society as a whole? / Do you think the UK Government should increase, reduce or keep at the same level the amount of public money it invests in science?



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

The commitment of Science Advocates is reflected in extremely high opposition to those who act in ways at odds with the scientific consensus or community – while hardly any Disengaged Trusters say they'd take action

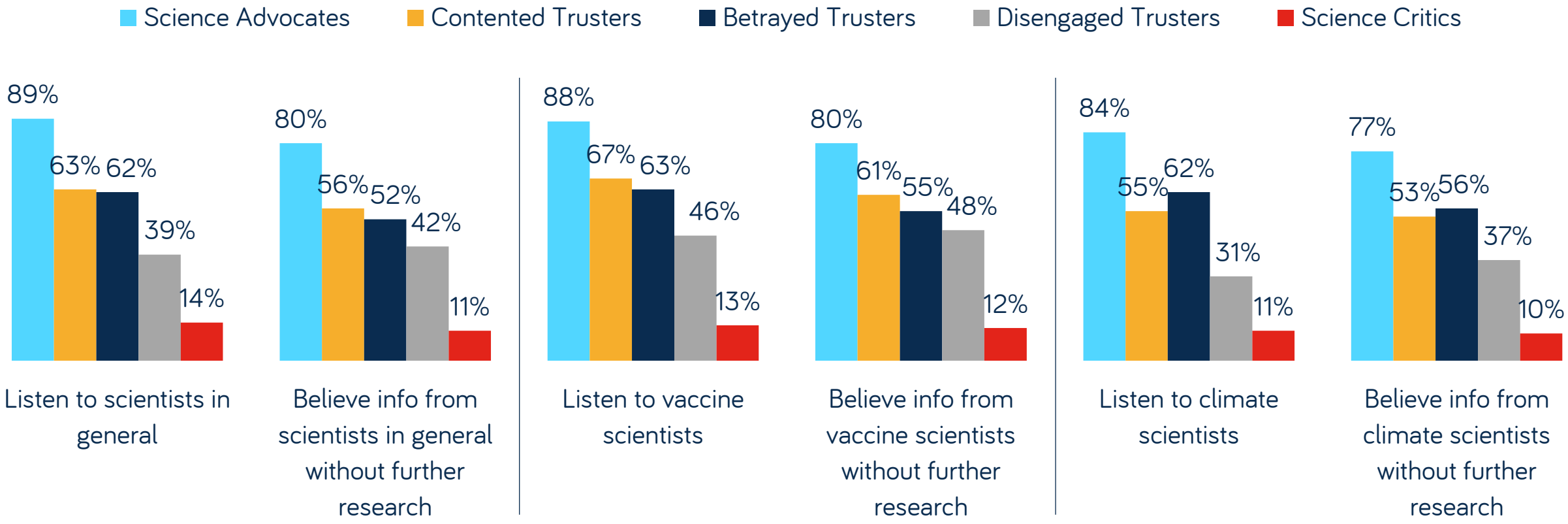
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about scientists in general? **% who strongly/tend to agree**



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Similarly, Disengaged Trusters – and especially Critics – are not inclined to listen to or believe information from scientists, in stark contrast to Advocates

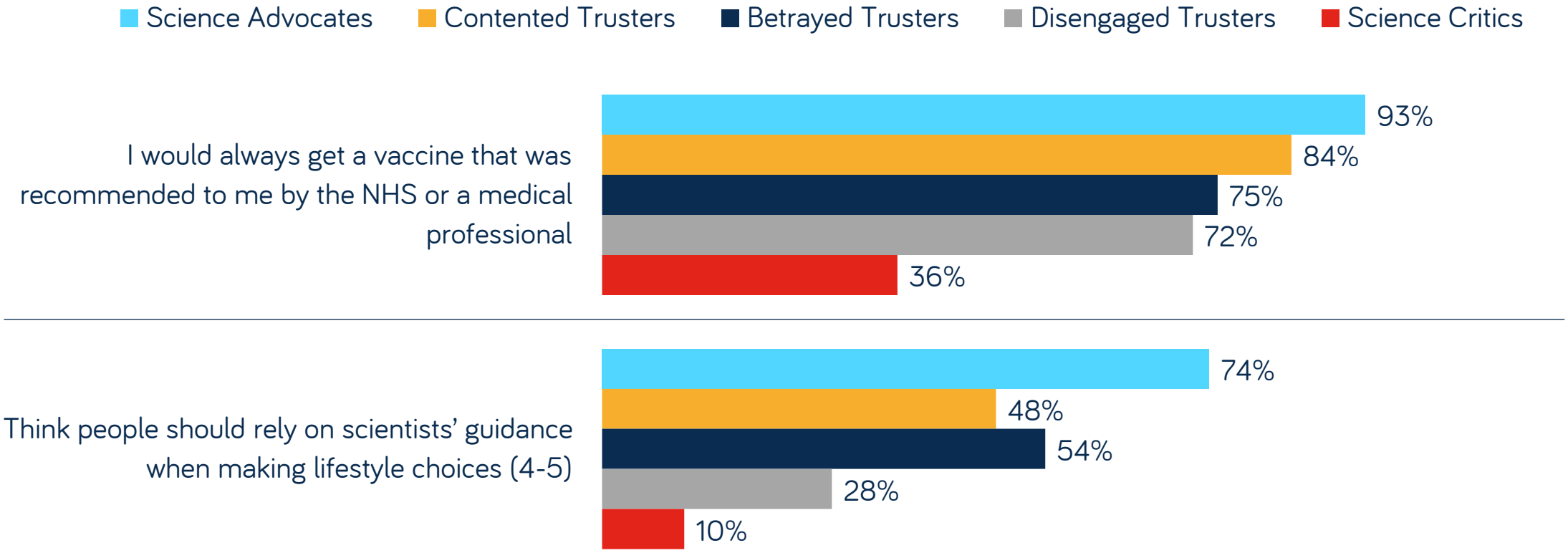
Where would you place yourself on these scales? 1 = I listen to / 5 = ignore everything scientists have to say.
1 = I generally believe / 5 = don't believe information from scientists without researching it further.
% selecting 1-2: listen to everything scientists say/believe information from scientists without researching it any further



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

All except Science Critics have large majorities who say they would always get recommended vaccines – although fewer of each group agree with relying on scientists' guidance when making lifestyle choices more generally

To what extent do the following apply to you personally? / How much or how little should people rely on scientists' guidance when making lifestyle choices? Please indicate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Not at all' and 5 is 'Completely'

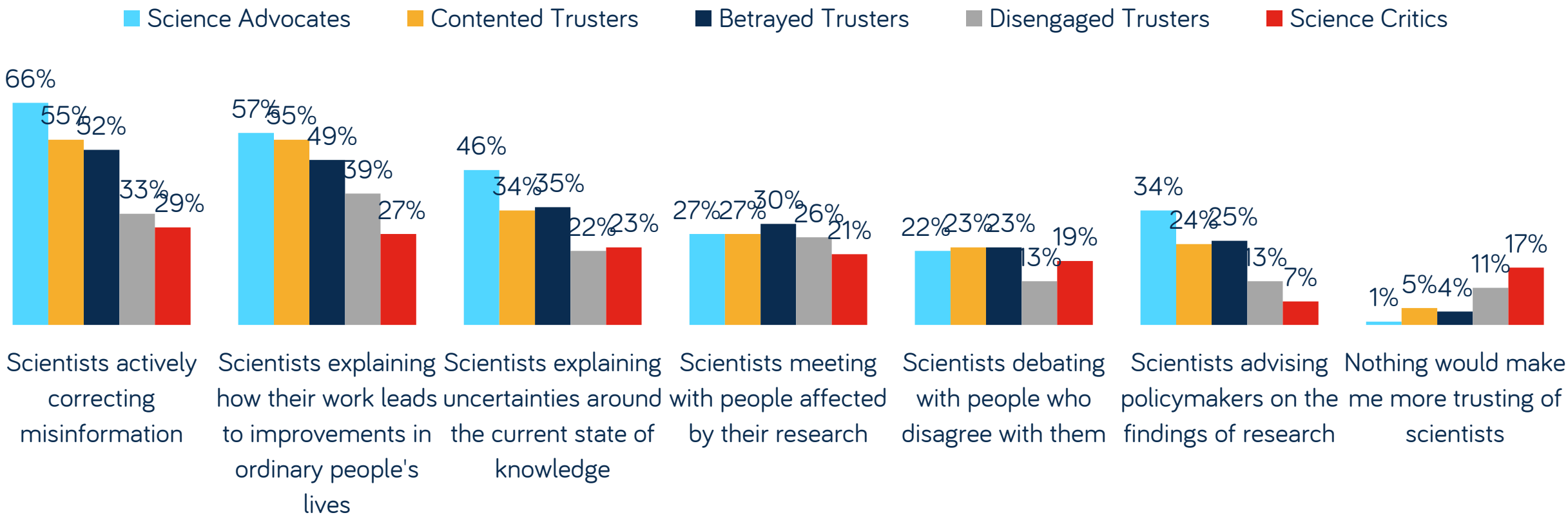


Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

5.8. What would increase trust?

The top actions to increase trust vary significantly by segment, but relatively few of any segment – even Critics – say *nothing* would make them more trusting

Scientists need to decide how to spend their time between doing their scientific research and engaging with the public and other groups to explain their research or its implications, so that people understand and trust their work. Which of the following, if any, is most likely to make you more trusting of scientists? Please select up to four.



Base: 795 'Science Advocates', 811 'Contented Trusters', 788 'Betrayed Trusters', 996 'Disengaged Trusters' and 872 'Science Critics', 8-11 May 2026.

Technical appendix

A. Regression models and dominance analysis

We fit three linear regression models explaining trust in scientists in general (n=1,277), climate scientists (n=1,268), and vaccine scientists (n=1,266) using the predictors listed below. Each model uses survey weights and heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. To assess the robustness of our findings to missing data, we re-estimated the models using multiple imputation by chained equations (MICE), generating 20 imputed datasets. The direction and significance of all the effects we report in this report were substantively consistent with the complete-case models.

Following the structure of the questionnaire, we identified variables from each group of independent variables to include in the models, outlined below:

1. Signals/cues/drivers – ABIT Model

- Expertise; Integrity; Transparency; Benevolence (general); Benevolence (in-group); TISS scale of negative views

2. Science-related Populism Index

3. Political, ideological & cultural identities

- Scientists share values; scientists are too woke; Scientists care more about social/political causes; Left-right scale; Progressive-traditional scale; anti-woke scale; voting intention; freedom of speech

4. Wider institutional trust: index of trust in nine institutions

5. Civic / societal engagement and connection to science

- Generalised trust; civil society membership; access to science advice; respondent/ family/ friends work in science

6. Moral Foundations and Social Dominance Orientation

7. Wellbeing and psychological measures

- Moral injury: betrayal by institutions/leaders; Moral injury: betrayal by scientific institutions; life satisfaction; financial outlook

8. Information sources and levels of engagement

- Attention to science; knowledge of science; BBC as news source

9. Conspiracy beliefs (5G, vaccines and climate)

10. Socio-demographics

- Region=London; education; age; gender; disability

B. Segmentation analysis

The process involved testing several approaches to segment the data, including varying the variables selected and their groupings, as well as using either raw data or factor scores.

All categorical data were converted into numerical form. For example, agreeability responses were recoded as follows: 'Strongly agree' = 1, 'Tend to agree' = 2, 'Neither agree nor disagree' = 3, 'Tend to disagree' = 4, and 'Strongly disagree' = 5. Two questions were combined into a single measure, following the approach used in prior KCL analysis. This involved summing the responses to both questions for each respondent and dividing the total by two.

Prior to segmentation, all 'don't know' responses were recoded to the midpoint of the relevant scale, with the exact value depending on the number of response options. We then conducted factor analysis on the question batteries, grouping items substantively – often in line with how they were presented in the survey. This identified meaningful latent factors, and segmentation was subsequently applied using factor scores, resulting in the final set of interpretable segments.

We used K-means clustering to derive the segmentation. K-means is an iterative method that groups respondents based on their similarity to one another. The approach begins by specifying a set number of clusters (K) and initializing corresponding centroids. Respondents are then assigned to the nearest centroid based on Euclidean distance, forming provisional clusters. The centroid of each cluster is subsequently recalculated, and respondents are reassigned based on the updated centroids. This process repeats until the cluster solution stabilises.

We tested solutions ranging from three to six clusters. While three- and four-cluster solutions were identified as optimal based on the PCA, a five-cluster solution was ultimately selected, as it provided the most meaningful and interpretable segmentation.

C. Rapid Evidence Assessment

Academic literature search on Scopus, 2010 to 2026

From January to March 2026, we reviewed relevant literature published since 2010 on trust in scientists. The search *trust AND (scien*, research and medic*)* yields over 3,000 results.

- We scanned 2,200 of these, including all studies which mentioned 'polit*', 'moral*' and 'ideolog*' within their titles or abstracts.
- 172 were considered potentially in scope. Based on their abstracts we extracted: Key arguments and conclusions; Methods and sample; Topic (eg climate science, polarisation). From these we retained the most relevant for the next review stage (n=84 studies).
- We reviewed their full methods, discussion and conclusions sections.

Summary of topics covered in the literature

We assigned simplified topics to the 84 academic articles, including: trust in science (17 studies); Covid (17); climate science (16); politicisation or polarisation (13); psychological factors (5); vaccines (4); measuring trust (3); religion (3); science communication (2); moral values (1), cancer information (1), science practice (1) and food science (1)

National focus: USA by far the most studied context

Half the academic studies reviewed focus on the USA context (42 studies). 14 had multinational focus (studying four or more nations), then Germany and UK (7 each), Italy (4), Switzerland (3), Australia and Norway (2), and Poland, Canada, Slovenia, Finland, Spain and Turkey (1).

Ideological and moral drivers of polarising trust: key concepts from the literature

One explanation of recent polarisation is that ideological attacks on science and its institutions from political elites are driving public opinion. While there is recent evidence for this,[24] it leaves unexplained why elite cues are suddenly now more effective than in past decades.[25] One possible longer-term factor may be a more general decline in trust. Trust in wider institutions is a key predictor of trust in scientists,[26] so general declines could 'spill over'[27] to science.

Science-related populism has been theorised as a variant of populism in which scientists are viewed as complicit in a wider alliance of elites acting in their own interests. The global TISP study found that science-related populist attitudes relate to low trust in scientists.[28] Though it also found that Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is even more strongly related. SDO is a preference for the social dominance of one's in-group over out-groups, which legitimates hierarchical ideologies.

Joyner[29] takes a different approach, using moral foundations theory, citing examples of how perceived moral violations and moral harm caused by scientists may help explain observed variations in trust.

Seyd[30] emphasises that science is not yet in crisis and that if scientists want to maintain trust, their focus should be on the 'features that render them trustworthy', referring to the ABIT trust model. Seyd, working with other trust theorists across USA and UK,[31] found a new trustworthiness cue: Scientists being 'in touch with people like yourself'. We built on this in our more personalised 'in-group' benevolence measure.

C. Rapid Evidence Assessment

Building on REA findings

The above key concepts feed directly into our questionnaire design. We measure: trust in preferred political elites relative to other politicians to explore the potential influence of elite cues; trust in a broad range of wider institutions; factors relevant to ideology, including science-related populist attitudes and social dominance orientation, as well as more direct questions designed to situate people in the context of British Culture Wars; people's alignment to different moral foundations and experience of moral harm; as well as applying the standard ABI(T) (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity, Transparency) model of trust, with a novel Benevolence measure designed to focus on the relative importance of perceiving scientists to be benevolent specifically towards 'people like me' rather than towards society in general.

Trust in scientists is not uniform but varies by field and sector

Trust in science and scientists is not a single viewpoint but rather varies significantly depending on the field of science at issue and the institutional context. Trust levels have been shown to vary, for example, depending on whether the focus is scientists in general, climate scientists or scientists who work on vaccines or disease. Institutional context also matters. Scientists based in universities are trusted far more than those in government or in private companies.[32]

These insights have informed our decision to ask about trust in different groups of scientists, including: scientists in general; four different disciplinary areas; three different institutional settings.

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