



THE
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Woke vs anti-woke? Culture war divisions and politics

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October 2023



Culture war divisions and debate

Note: some aggregate figures described in text differ from charts due to rounding

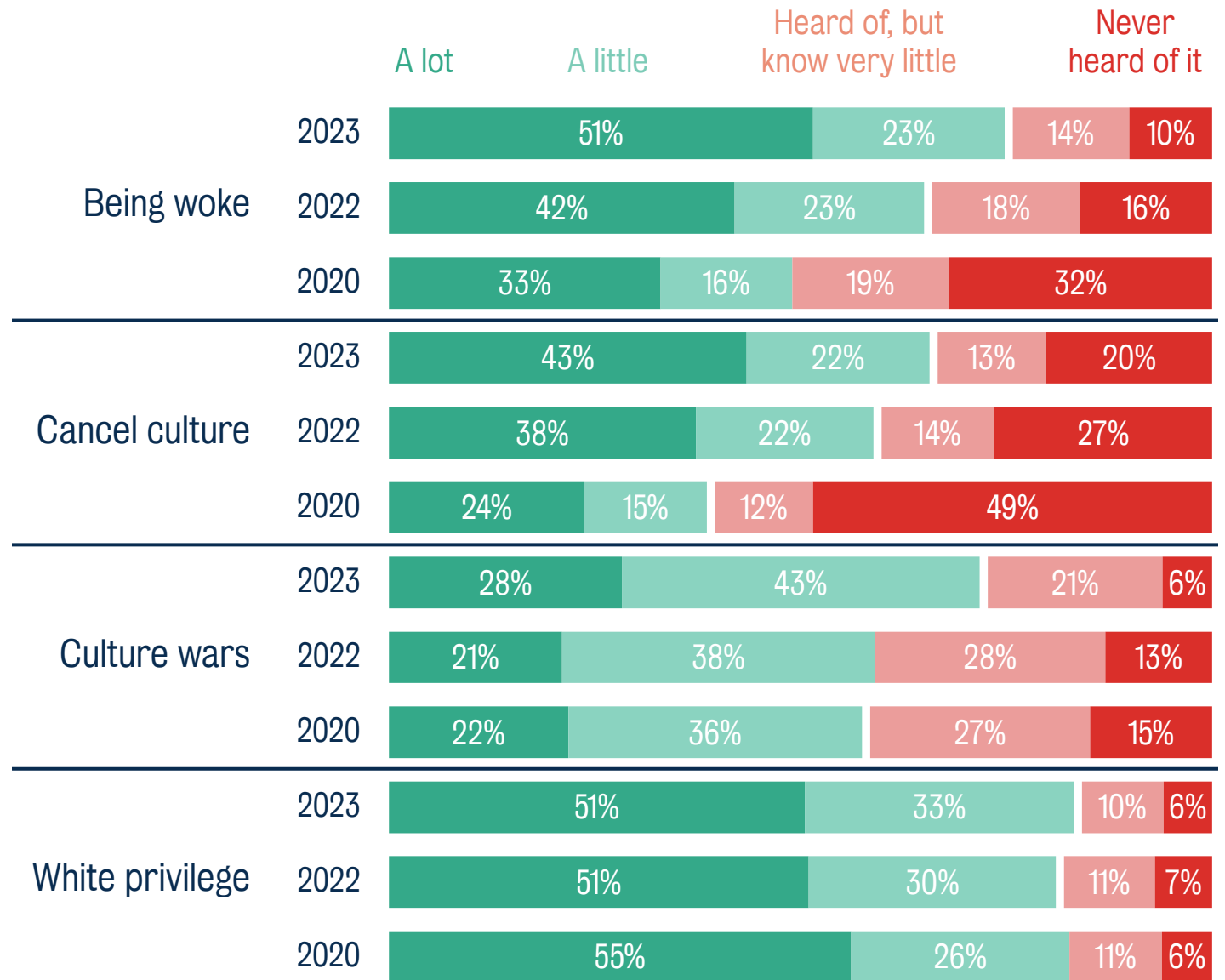
Awareness of several culture war terms continues to grow

The proportion of the public who say they have heard at least a little about “being woke” has risen from 65% to 74% over the past year, and around half (51%) the population now say they’ve heard a lot about it.

65% say they’ve heard a little or a lot about “cancel culture” – up slightly from 60% in 2022 – while awareness of the term “culture wars” itself has grown even more: 58% said they had heard a little or a lot about the phrase in 2022, but this has since risen to 71%.

Meanwhile, recognition of the term “white privilege” has remained broadly stable, with more than eight in 10 of the public relatively well aware of it.

How much, if anything, have you heard or read about the following terms or phrases?

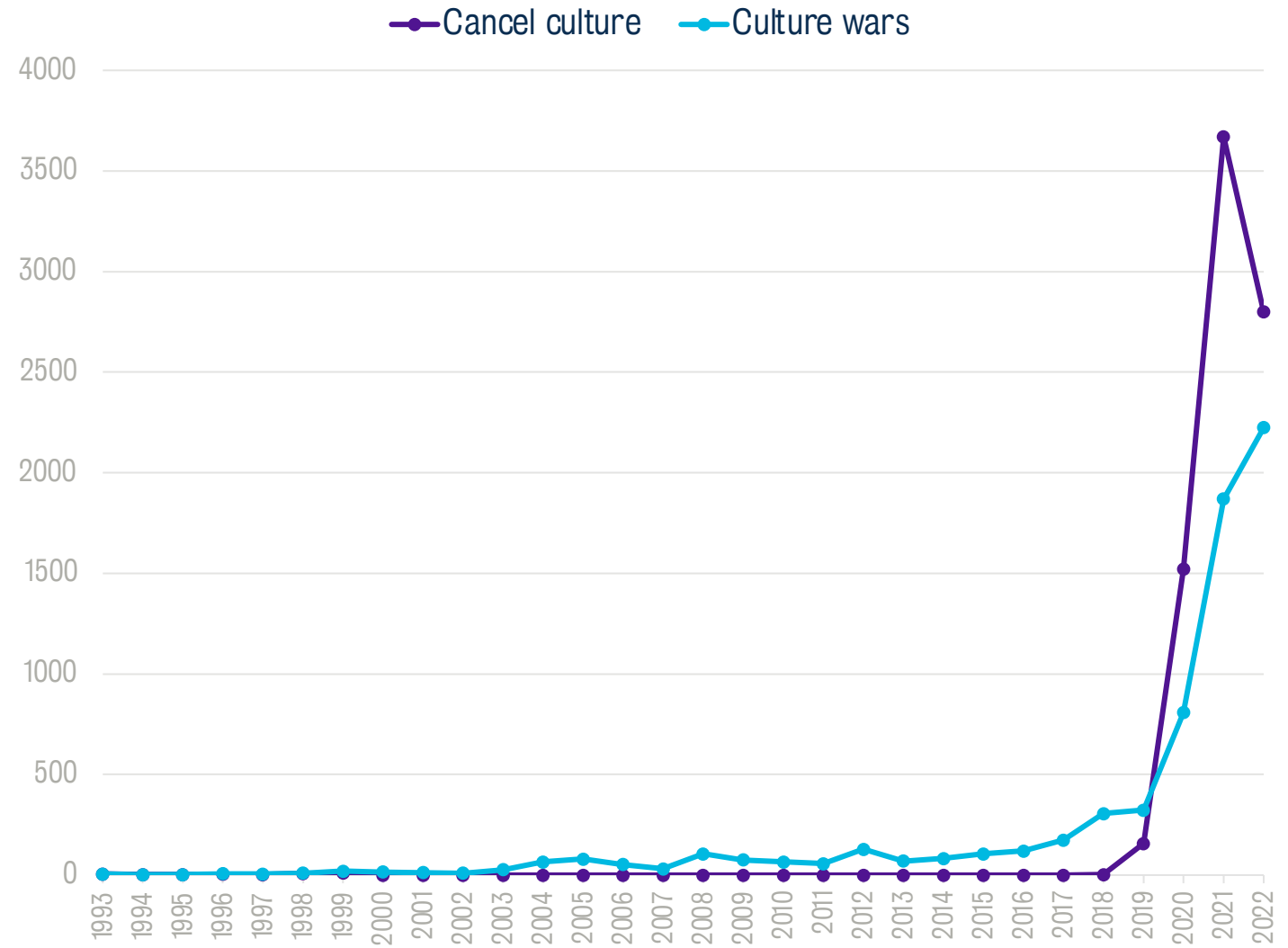


UK newspaper coverage of the term “cancel culture” declined between 2021 and 2022, though still outnumbers coverage of “culture wars”

The growing awareness of terms such as “culture wars” and “cancel culture” has coincided with continued use of these terms in UK newspapers.

The number of UK newspaper articles that featured the term “cancel culture” fell from a high point of 3,670 in 2021 to 2,800 in 2022. Over the same period, the number of articles mentioning “culture wars” continued to increase, rising from 1,869 in 2021 to 2,224 in 2022.

Number of articles mentioning “cancel culture” and “culture wars” in UK newspapers over time (1993-2022)

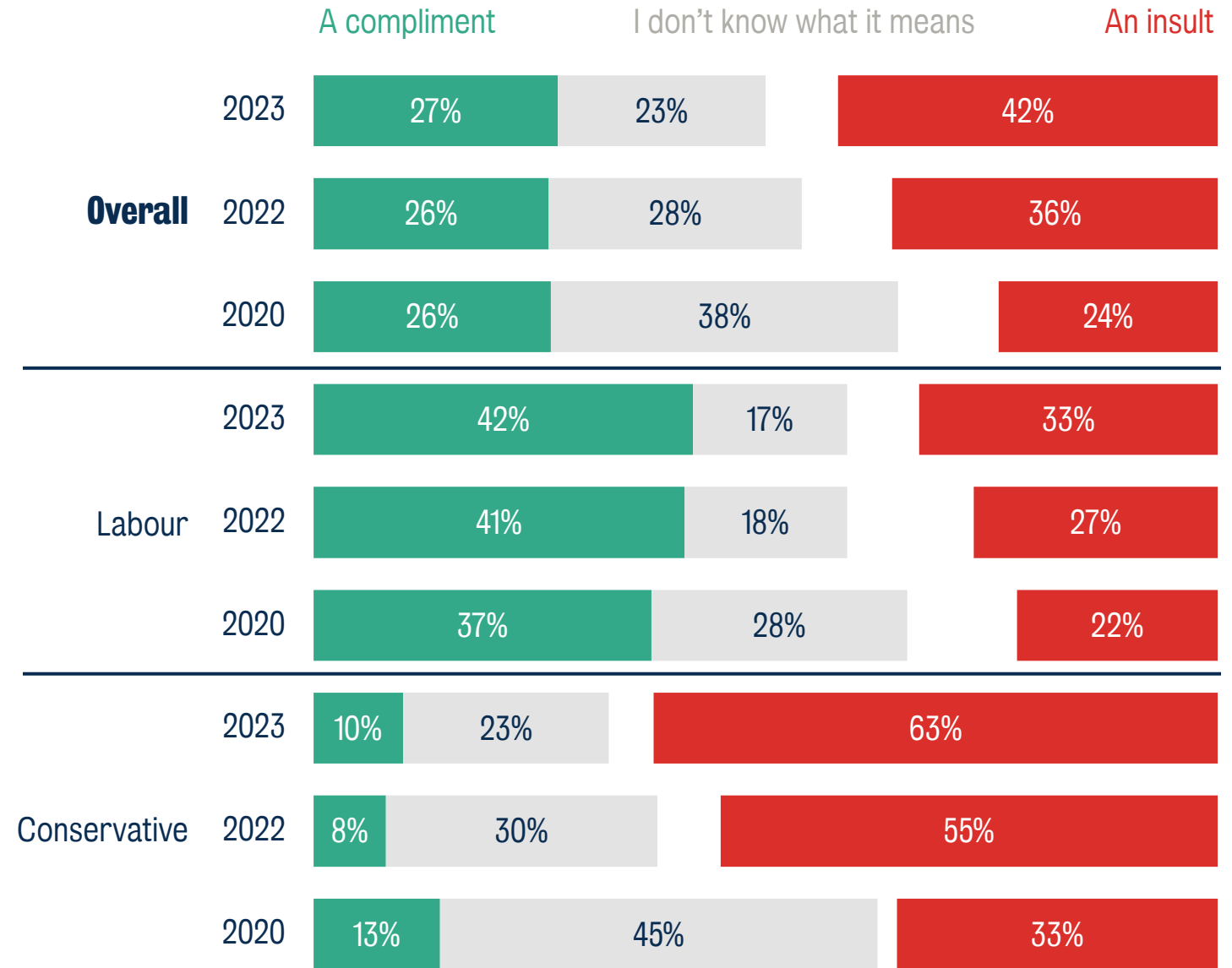


The term “woke” is increasingly seen as an insult

42% of the public say they would consider it an insult if someone called them woke, up from 36% in 2022 and 24% in 2020.

Among those who voted for the two main parties in 2019, steadily increasing shares interpret “woke” pejoratively, while the proportion who say the term is a compliment has remained relatively stable across over the last three years.

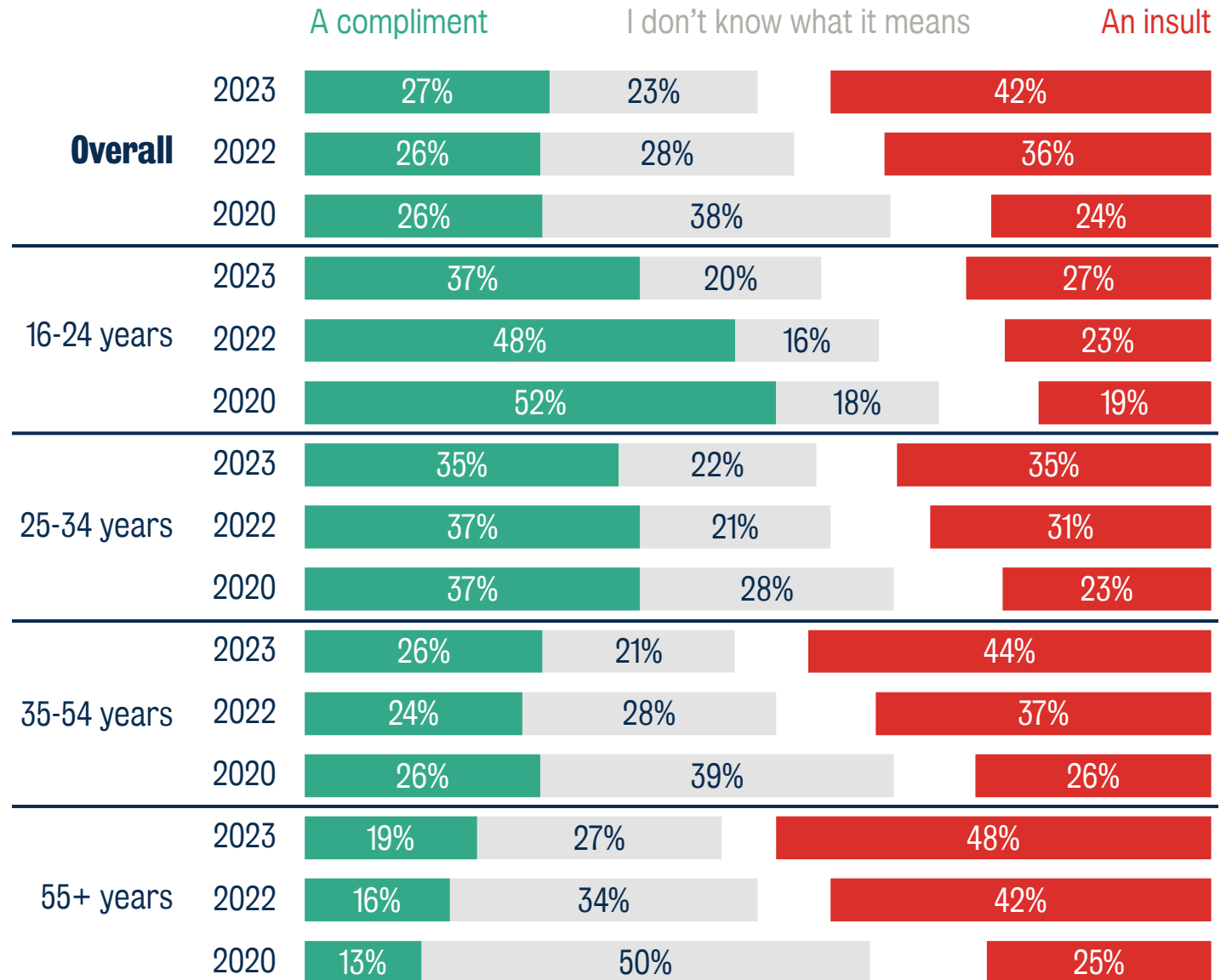
If someone described you as “woke” would you consider it....



All age groups have become more likely to interpret “woke” as a pejorative term

Since 2020, the share of each age group who say “woke” is an insult has gradually increased. At the same time, the proportion who see the term as a compliment has hardly changed – except among 16- to 24-year-olds, 37% of whom now have such a favourable view of the term, down from 52% three years ago.

If someone described you as “woke” would you consider it....

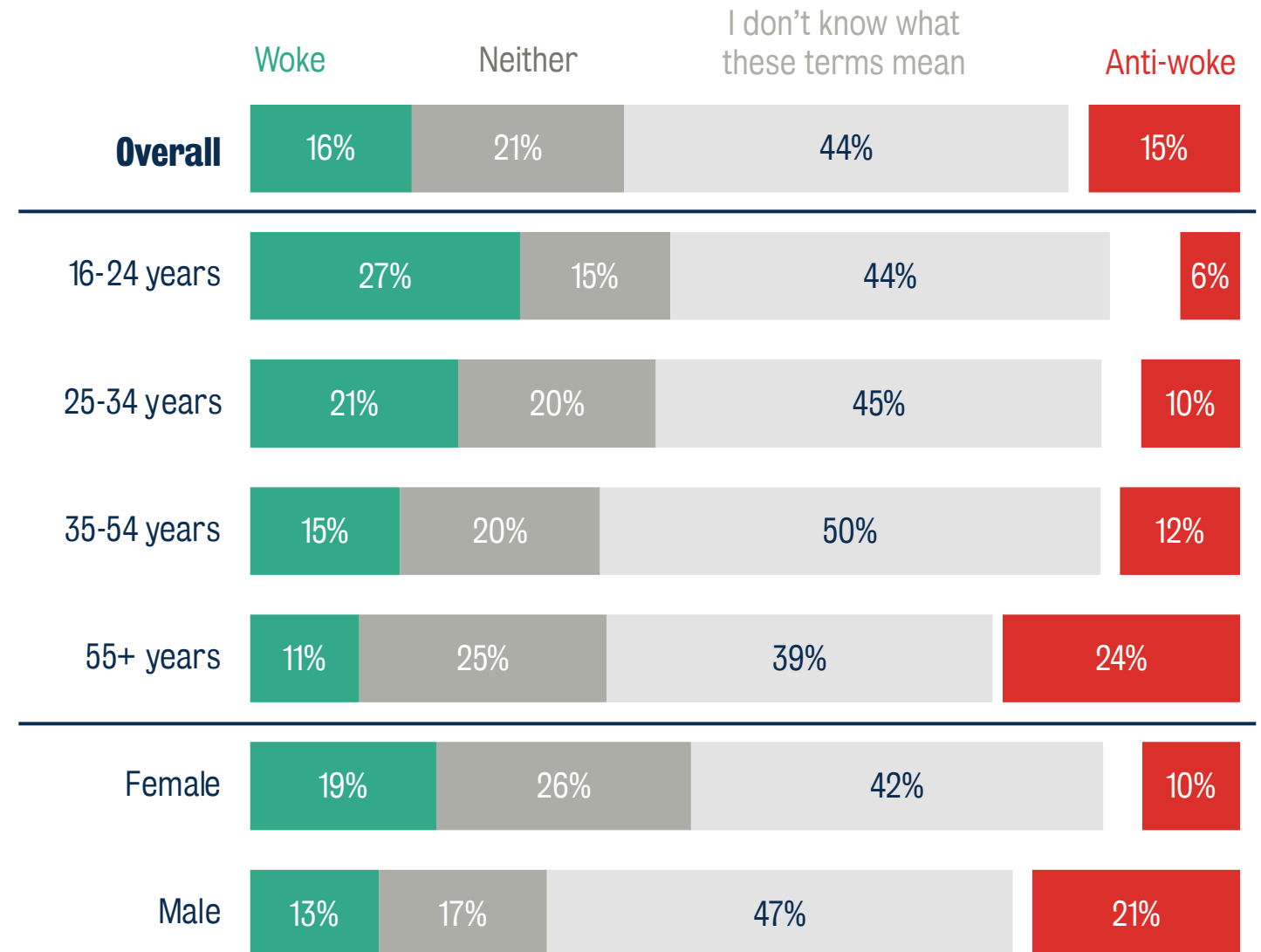


One in seven people think of themselves as being “anti-woke”, rising to one in five men and one in four of those aged 55+

15% of the public consider themselves to be anti-woke, and virtually the same proportion – 16% – consider themselves to be woke, but the most common response is that people don’t know what these terms mean. 44% give this answer, while another 21% say they don’t identify with either label.

Meanwhile, men (21%) are twice as likely as women (10%) to say they are anti-woke, and those aged 55 and above (24%) are four times as likely as 16- to 24-year-olds (6%) to say the same.

Do you consider yourself to be woke, anti-woke, or neither?

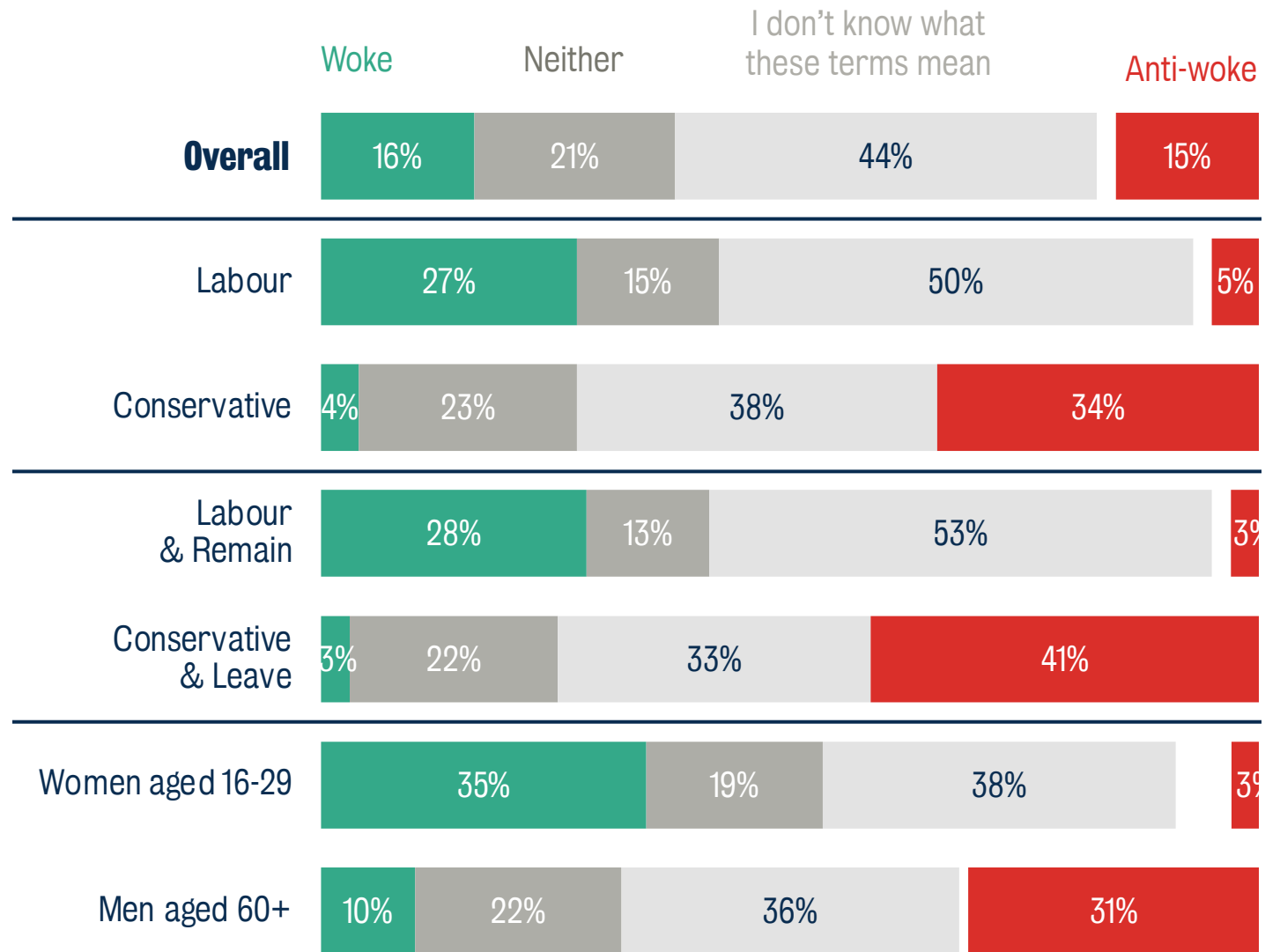


Four in 10 Conservative-Leave voters consider themselves to be “anti-woke”, as do three in 10 older men

Looking across other groups within the population, those who voted both Conservative in 2019 and Leave in 2016 are most likely to see themselves as anti-woke, with 41% identifying in this way.

Combining age and gender of respondents shows it is men aged 60 and above (31%) who are most likely to identify as anti-woke, while younger women aged 18 to 29 are least likely to (3%).

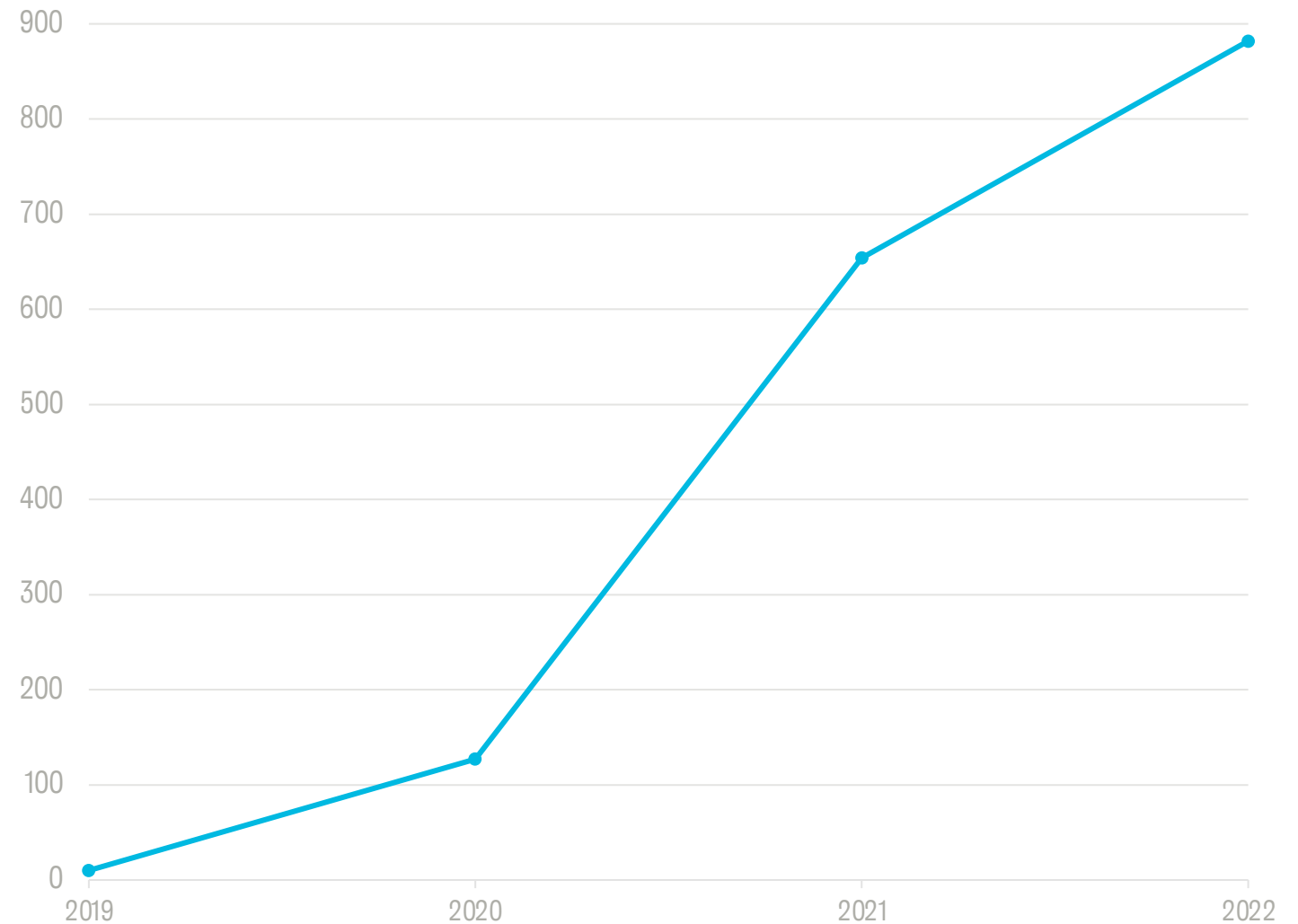
Do you consider yourself to be woke, anti-woke, or neither?



Media mentions of “anti-woke” have exploded in recent years

In 2019, there were just 10 UK newspaper articles that mentioned the term “anti-woke”. By 2022, this number had risen to 882, with the biggest year-on-year increase occurring between 2020 (127 articles) and 2021 (654 articles).

Number of articles mentioning “anti-woke” in UK newspapers



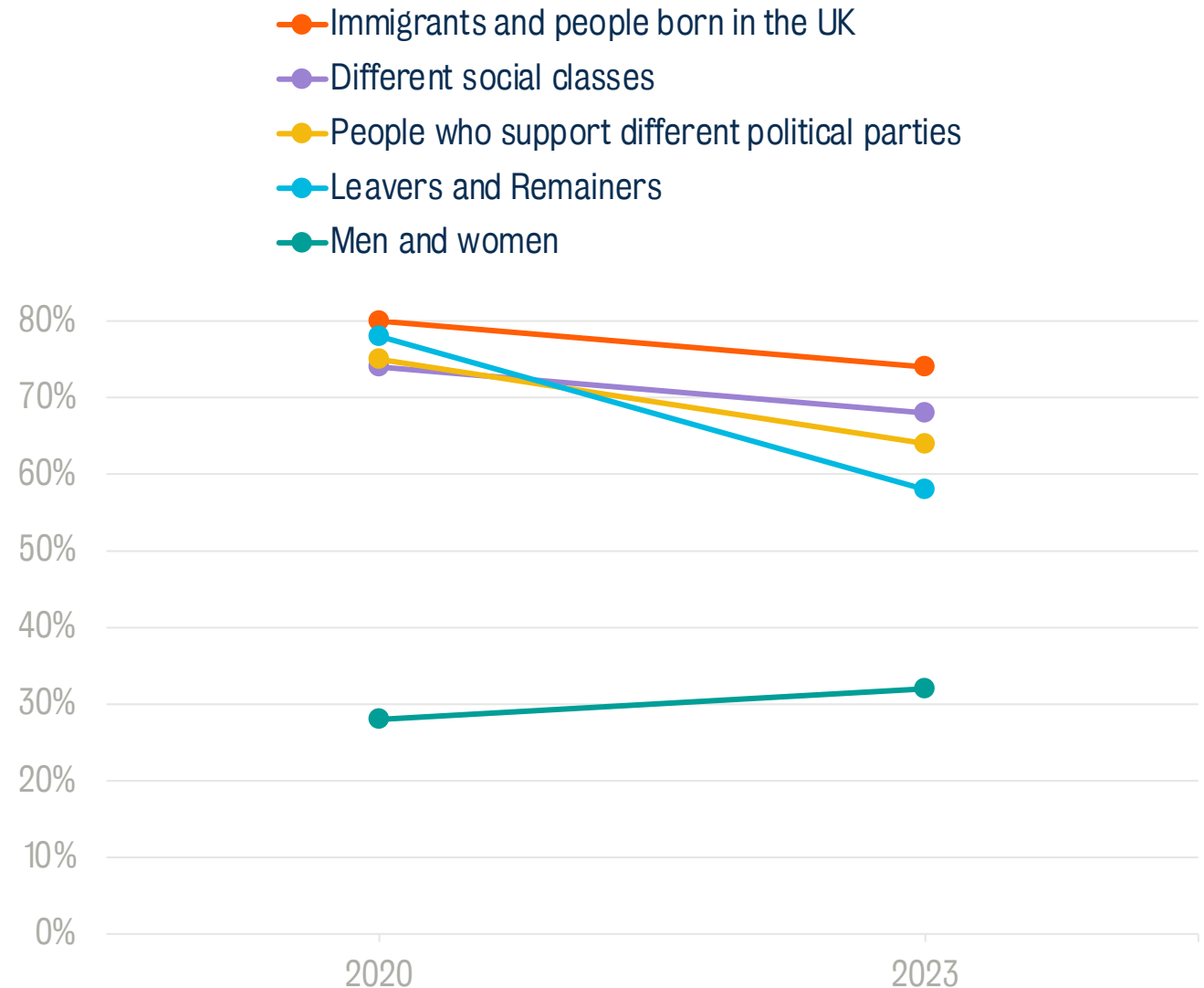
Perceived tensions between various groups have declined in recent years – except for between men and women, which remains largely unchanged

In the last three years the public have become less likely to say there is a great deal or fair amount of tension between various groups in the UK today, with the biggest change in perceived divisions between Leavers and Remainers. In 2020, 78% thought there was at least a fair amount of tension between these two groups, but this has since declined to 58%.

By contrast, the share of the public who say there is tension between men and women has remained relatively steady, at 32% in 2023, compared with 28% in 2020.

And some groups perceive divisions more than others. For example, 2019 Labour voters (74%) are more likely than their Conservative counterparts (59%) to say there is tension between supporters of different political parties, women (39%) are more likely than men (26%) to say there is tension between genders, and 2016 Remain voters (64%) see more Brexit-based tension than Leave voters (51%).

How much tension, if any, would you say there is between the following groups in the UK today?
(% who say a great deal/fair amount)

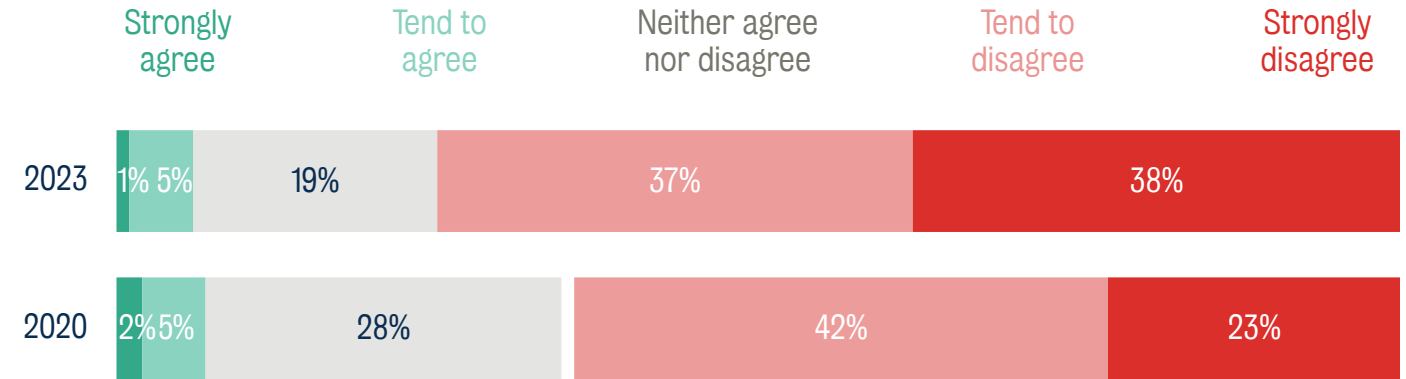


Relations between Conservative and Labour supporters have thawed to some extent

75% of people who support or say they feel closer to the Conservative party now disagree that it's hard to be friends with Labour voters – up from 65% in 2020.

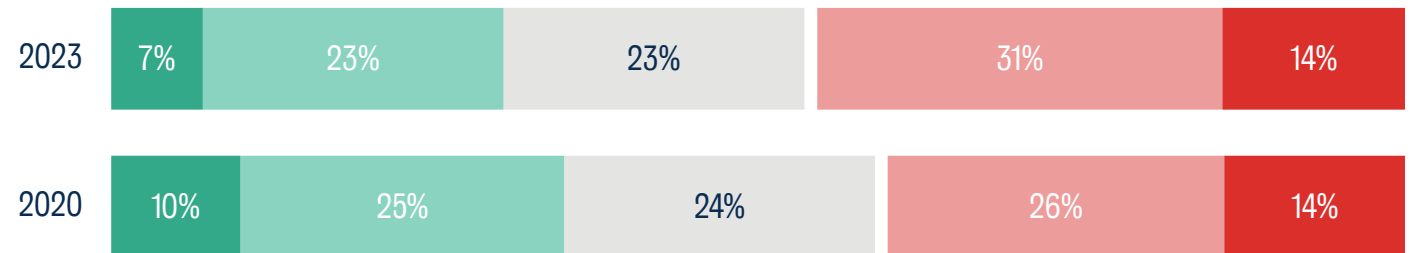
There has been a similar, albeit smaller, shift in attitudes among those who support or feel closer to the Labour party, with 46% disagreeing it's hard to be friends with Conservative voters, compared with 40% who felt this way three years ago. Correspondingly, 30% of this group agree it's hard to be friends with those who vote Conservative – down from 35%.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who vote for the **Labour** party



* Asked to **Conservative** supporters

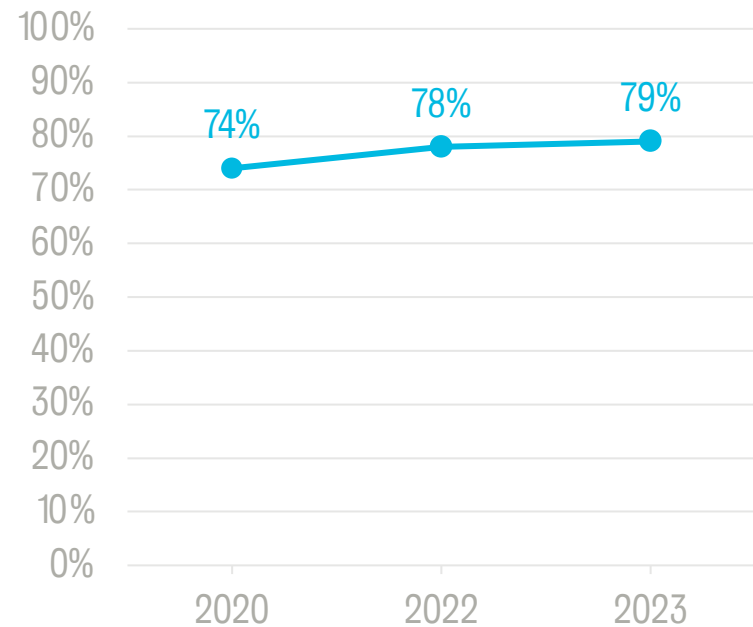
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It's hard to be friends with people who vote for the **Conservative** party



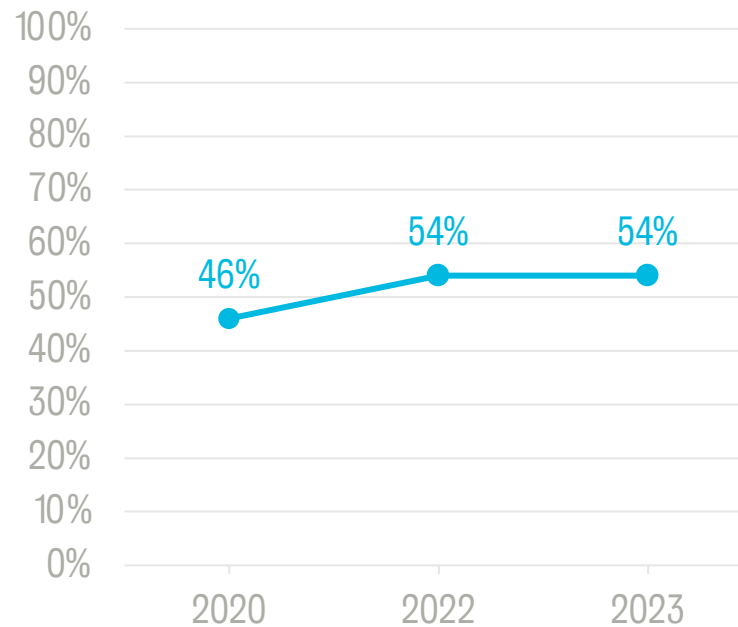
* Asked to **Labour** supporters

On the other hand, general perceptions of division remain higher than three years ago – apart from by class

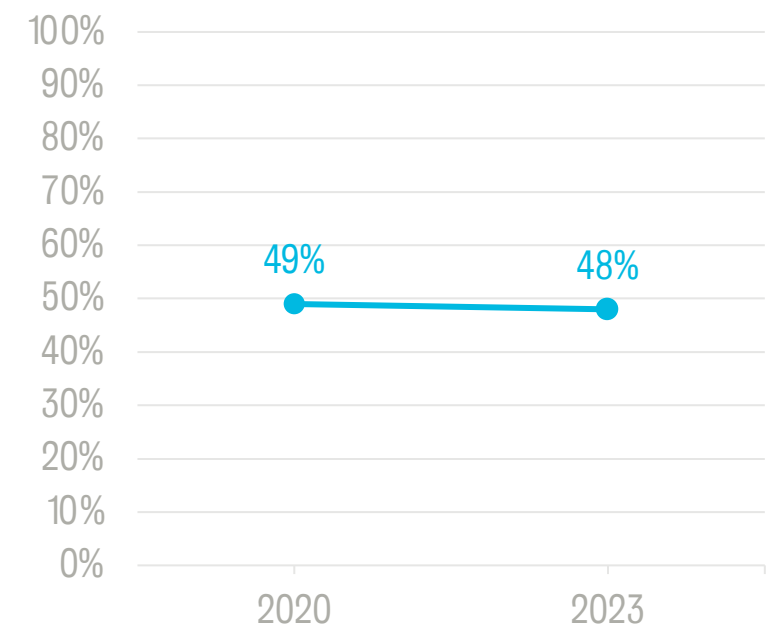
How united or divided does the UK feel to you these days?
(% say divided)



From what you see on TV, in the news media and online, and in your conversations with others, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the UK is divided by “culture wars”? (% who agree)

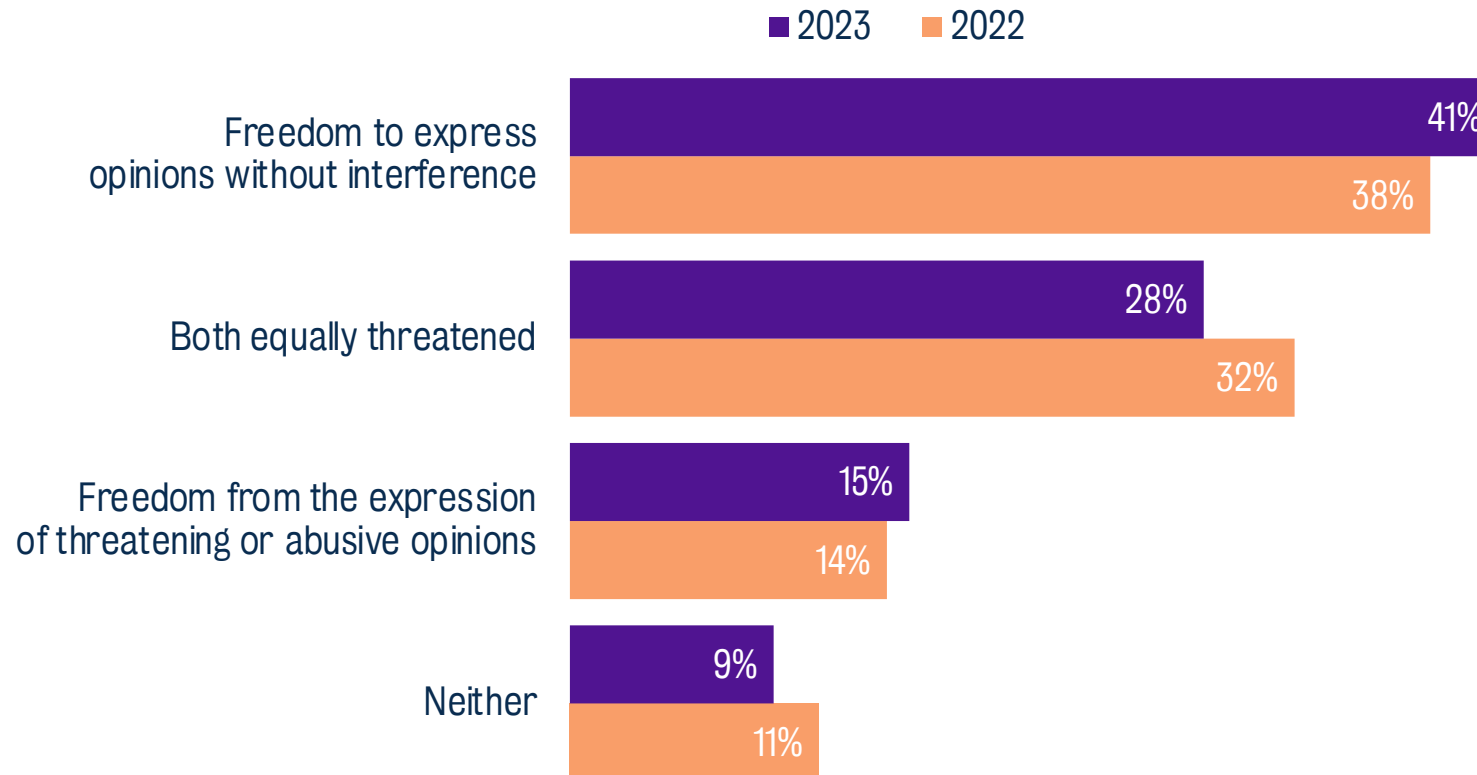


On balance, do you think the UK is more or less divided by class than it was 20 years ago?
(% say more divided)



There has been little change in perceptions of free speech over the past year: freedom to express opinions without interference is still seen as more at risk than freedom *from* threats and abuse

This question asks about the expression of people's opinions, for example through speech, online, in the media and on social media. Generally speaking, which of these two freedoms, if either, do you think is the most threatened in the UK today?



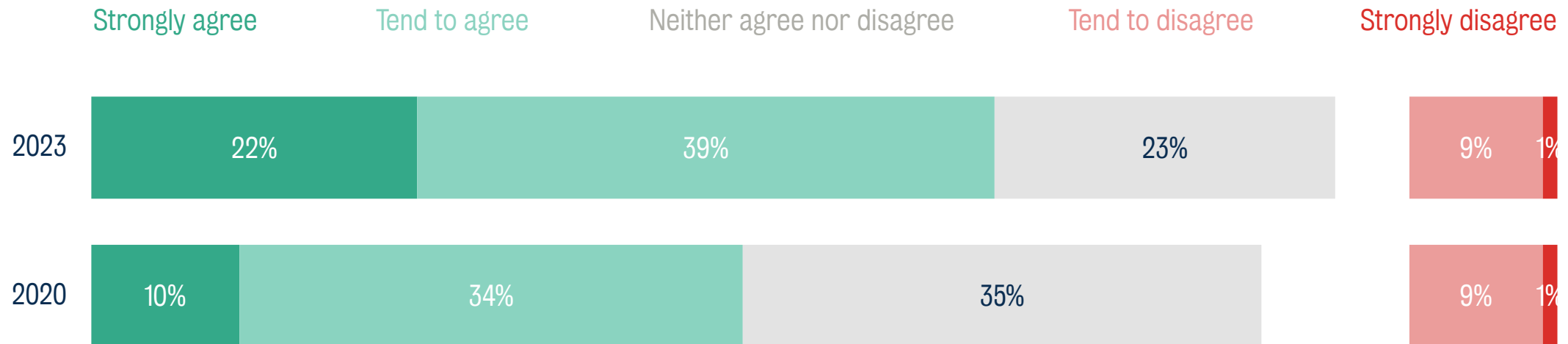


Culture war politics

The public increasingly think politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars

Six in 10 (62%) people now agree politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic – up from around four in 10 (44%) three years ago.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic

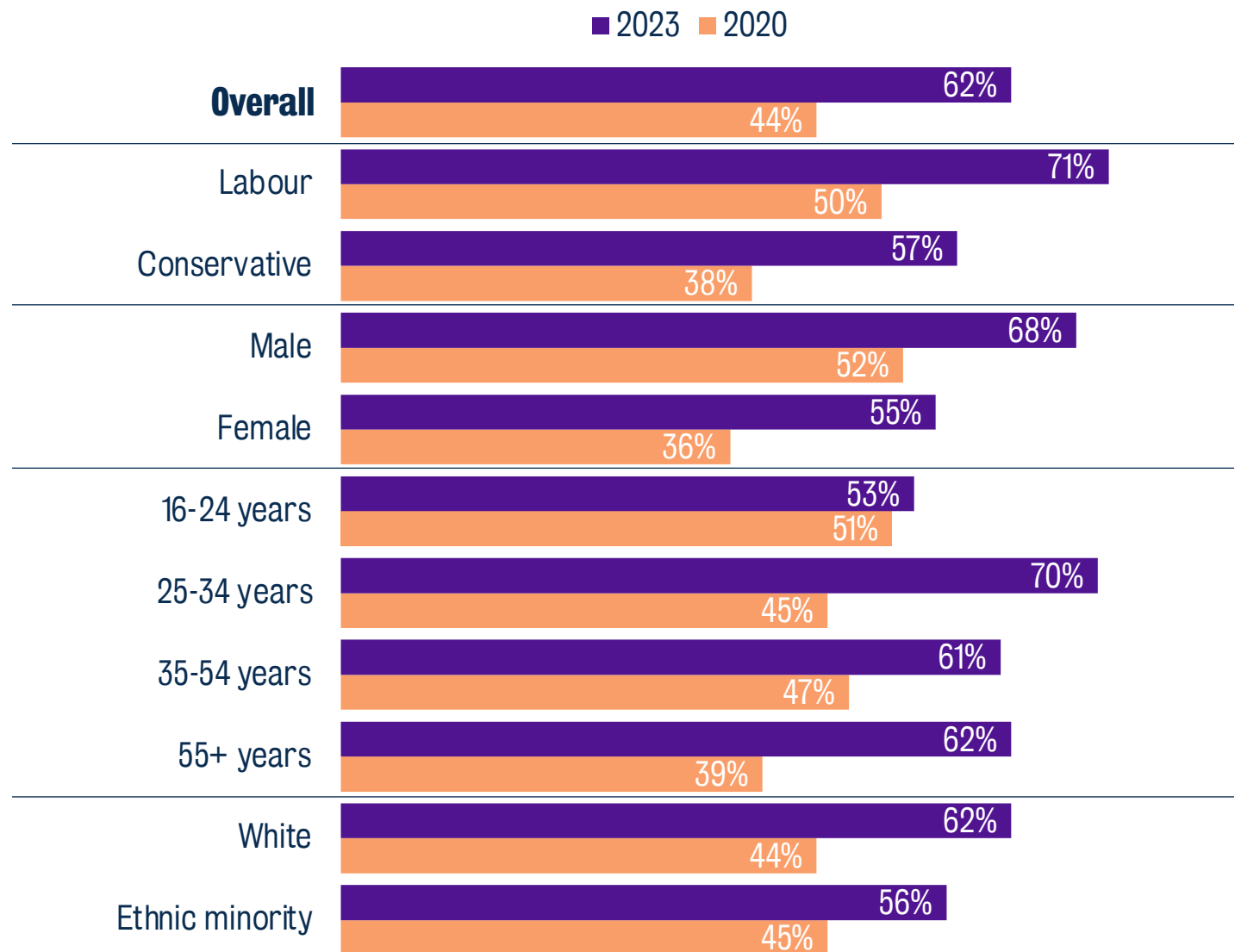


Many different sections of society have become much more likely to agree politicians fuel culture wars

The belief that politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic has become more widespread among a range of different groups, and is also now shared by a majority of voters for the two main parties.

16- to 24-year-olds are the exception, with hardly any change in agreement with this view compared with three years ago.

% who agree politicians invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic



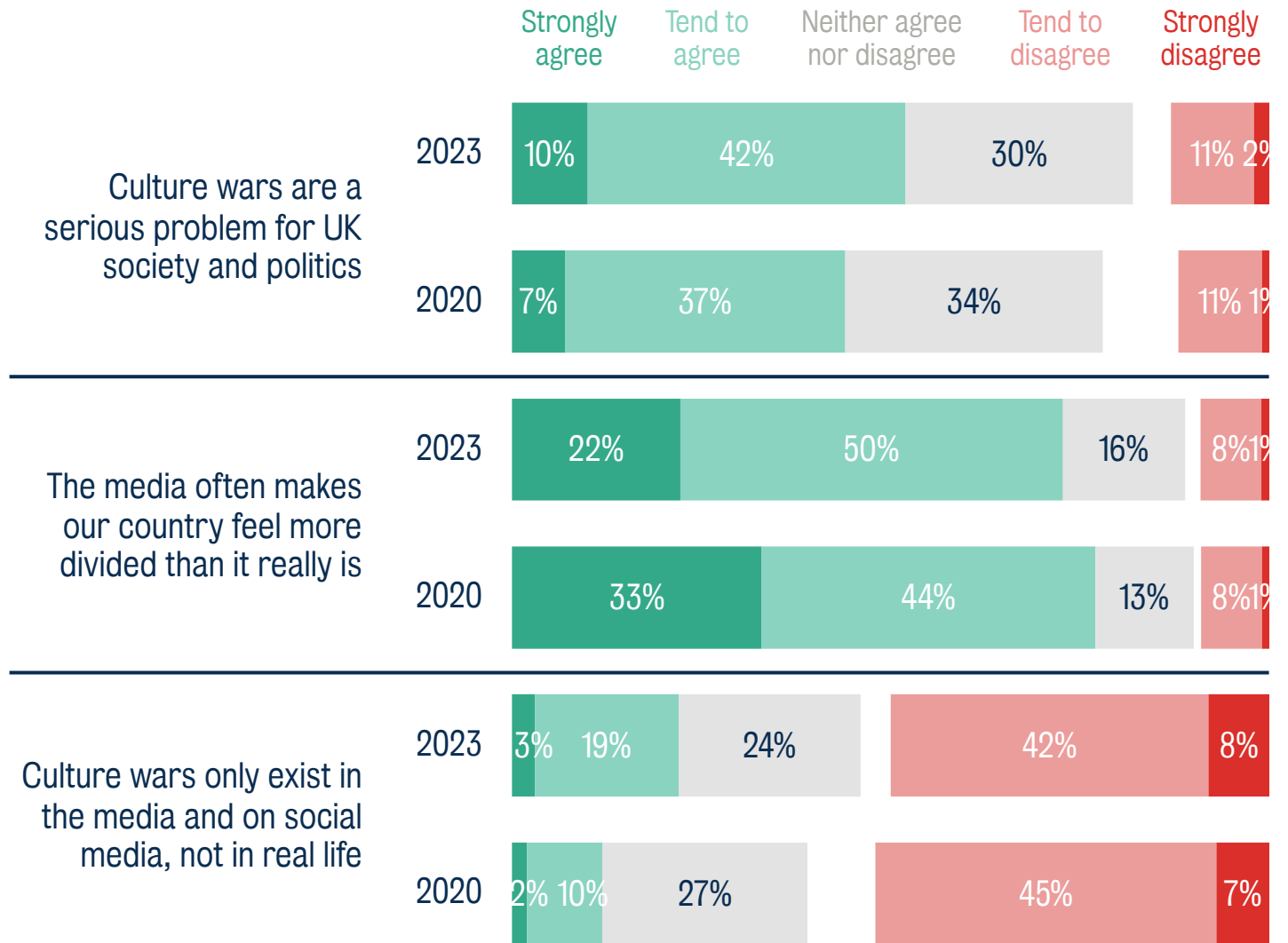
For the first time, a majority now say culture wars are a serious problem

There is a growing sense that culture wars are a serious problem for UK society and politics, with a majority of 52% now holding this view, compared with 43% in 2020.

And while the share of the public who say culture wars only exist in the media and on social media has risen from 12% to 22% during this period, people are still far more likely to see these as real-world problems (49%).

At the same time, the public have become slightly less convinced that the media is fuelling divisions in the country: 33% strongly agreed with this view in 2020, which has since declined to 22%. Yet overall, seven in 10 still think the media has such a negative impact.

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



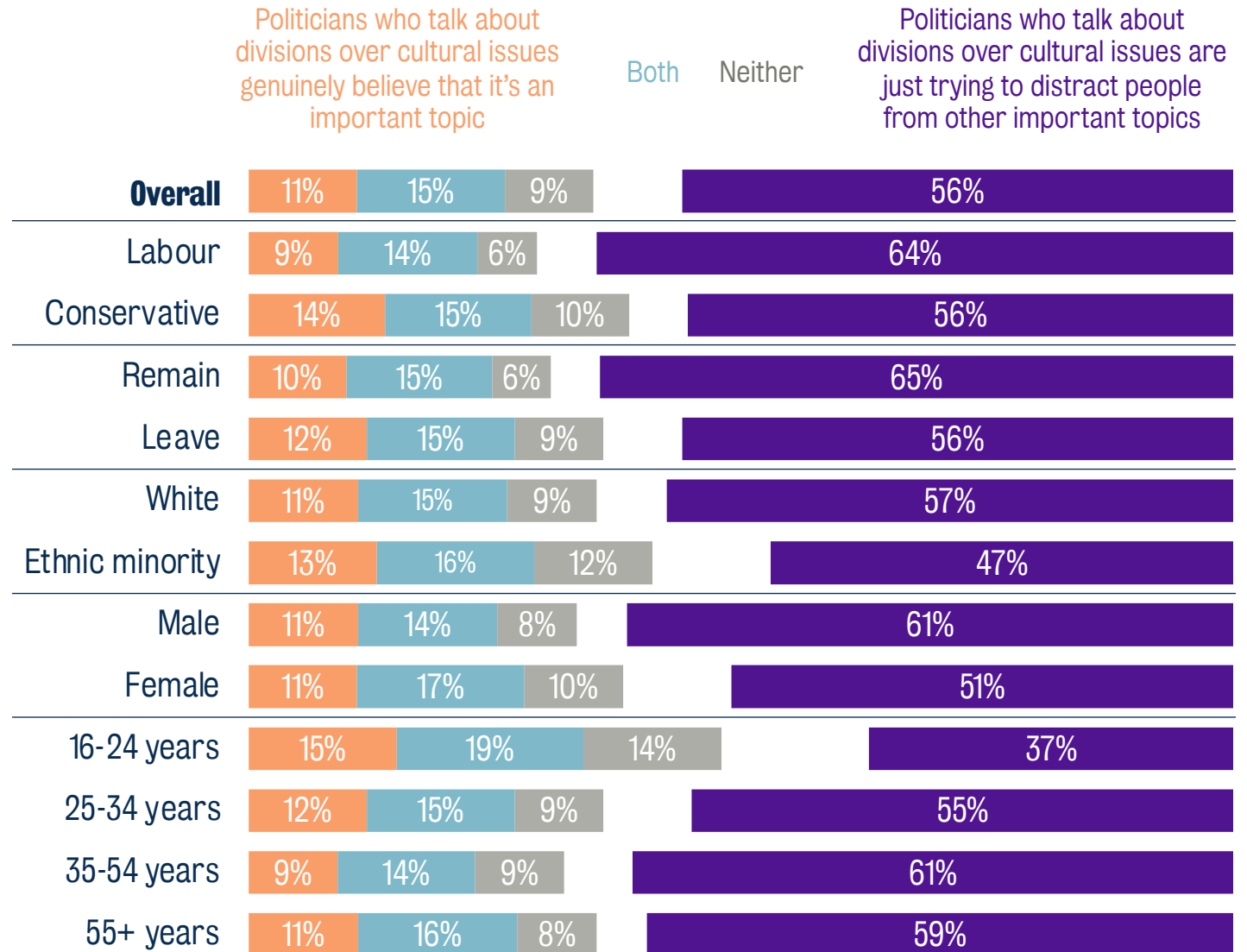
A majority think politicians use cultural divisions to distract from other issues

56% of the public say politicians who talk about divisions over cultural issues are just trying to distract people from other important topics, compared with 11% who say politicians genuinely believe such divisions are an important topic.

Labour and Remain voters are more likely than Conservative and Leave voters to think politicians use culture war debates as a distraction, though a majority of the two latter groups still hold this view.

And 16- to 24-year-olds stand out as considerably less likely to say these debates are being used to distract people from other important topics, with this age group more likely to not offer an opinion or select “both” or “neither”.

Which of the following, if any, comes closest to your view about politicians and divisions over cultural issues?



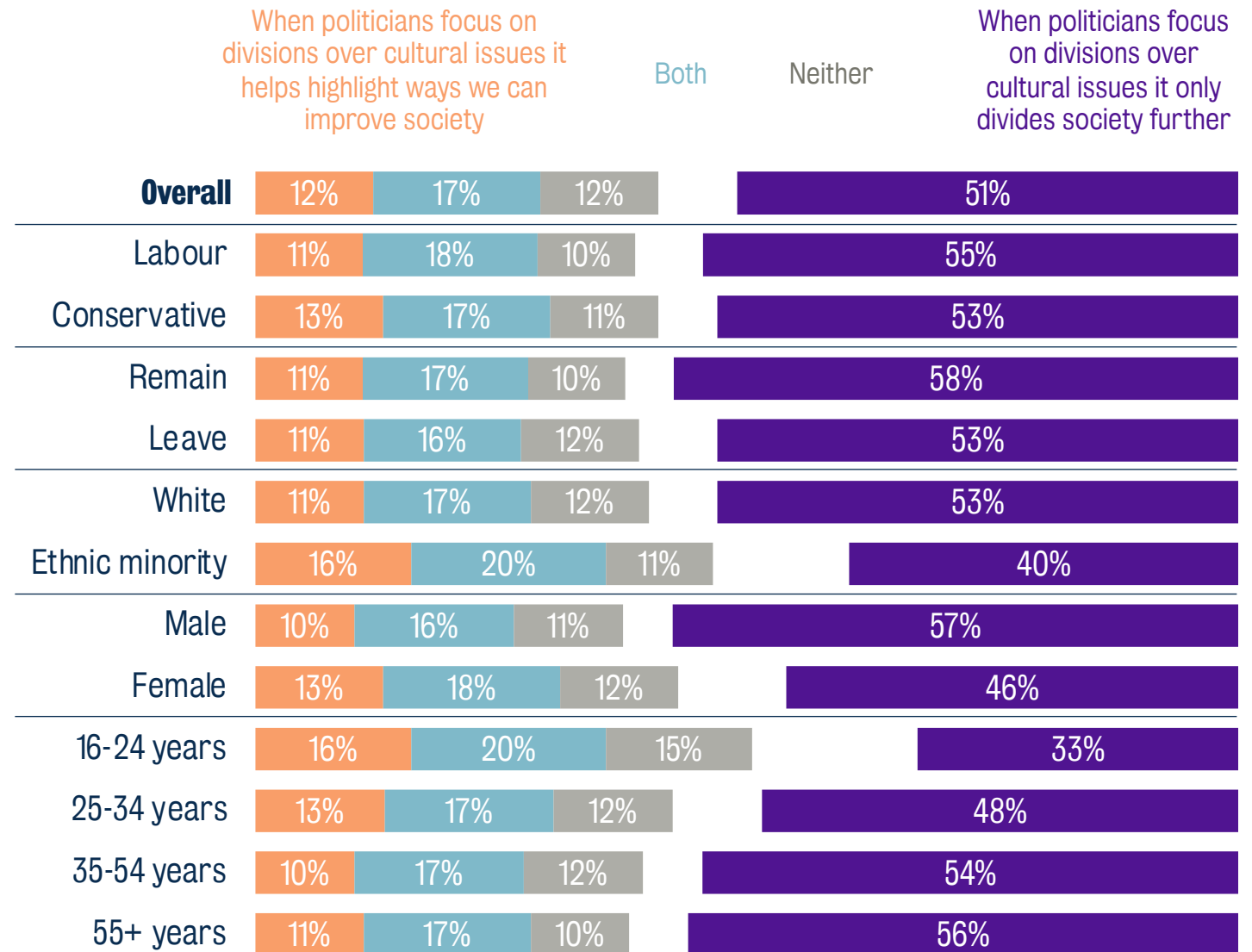
There is a clear view that politicians only divide society further by focusing on cultural divisions, which is shared across political lines

51% say that when politicians focus on divisions over cultural issues it only divides society further – far greater than the 12% who say this focus helps highlight ways we can improve society.

And there is a consensus on this question across party and Brexit lines, with most taking a negative view of how politicians’ focus on these divisions impacts society.

However, there are greater differences across other groups. For example, men (57%) are more likely than women (46%) to say it simply divides society further, as are people from a white ethnic background (53%) compared with those from an ethnic minority background (40%).

Which of the following, if any, comes closest to your view about politicians and divisions over cultural issues?

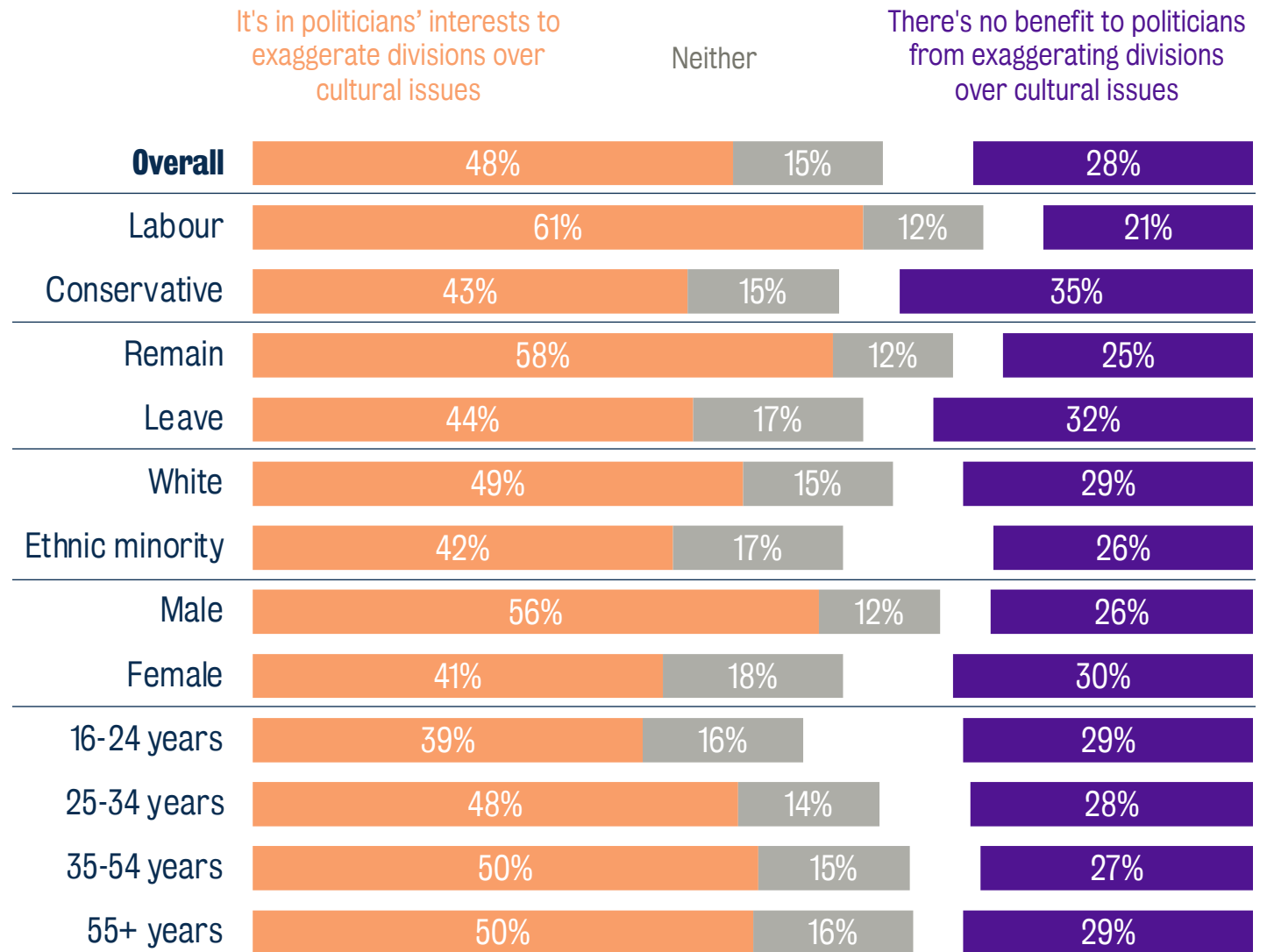


Around half the public say it's in politicians' interests to exaggerate cultural divisions, with Labour and Remain voters even more likely to hold this view

48% say it's in politicians' interests to exaggerate divisions over cultural issues, a figure which rises to 61% among Labour voters and 58% among Remain voters.

Far fewer – 28% of the public overall – take the opposite view that there's no benefit to politicians from exaggerating divisions over cultural issues.

Which of the following, if any, comes closest to your view about politicians and divisions over cultural issues?



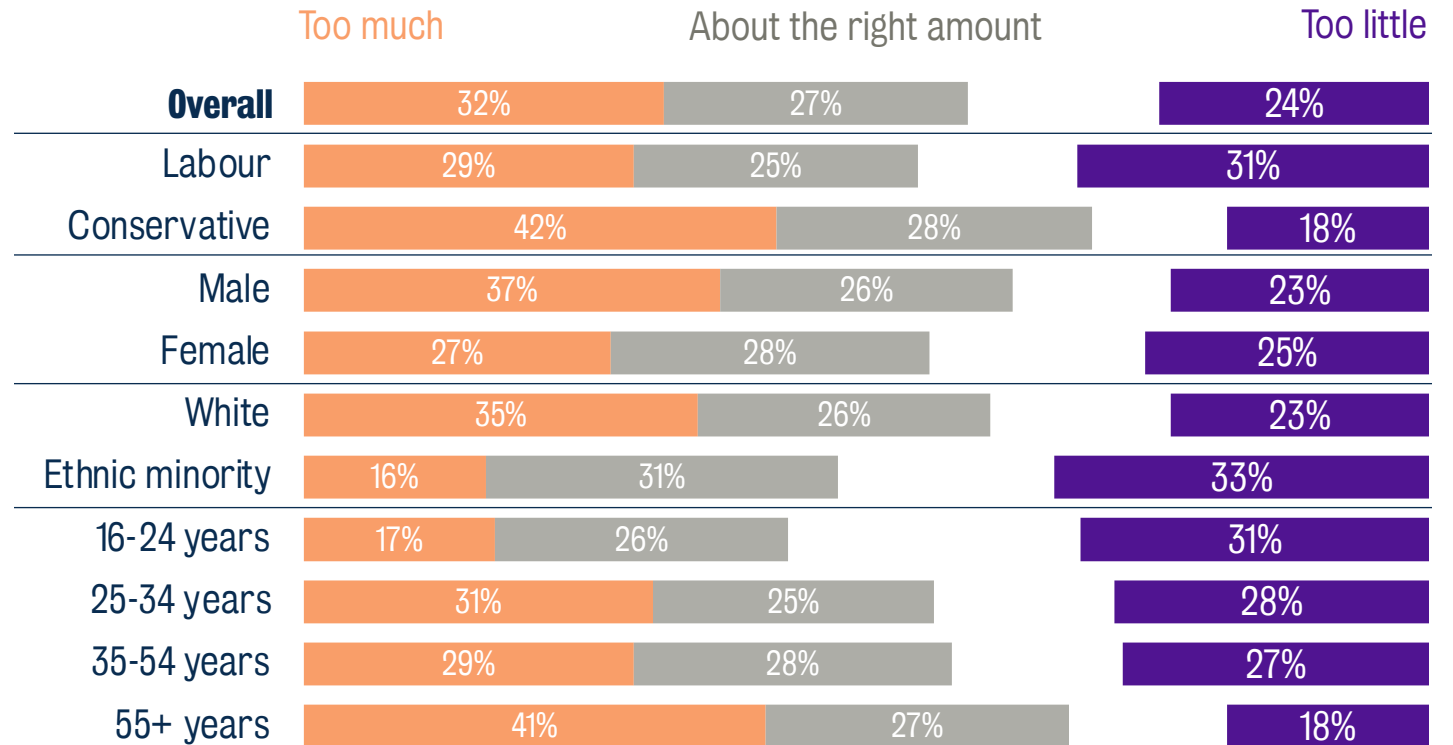
The public are relatively split over whether cultural divisions have been discussed an appropriate amount recently, with views varying among different groups

32% of the public think divisions over cultural issues have been discussed too much over the last few months, but a similar proportion – 27% – say they’ve been discussed at about the right amount and 24% say they’ve been talked about too little.

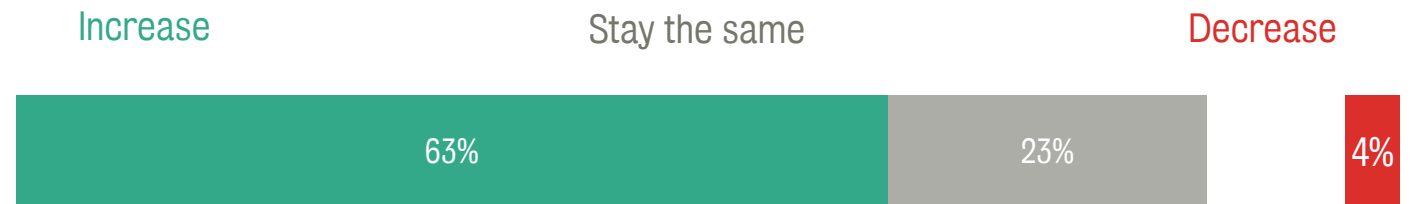
Conservative voters, men and people from a white ethnic background are all more likely to think we’ve heard too much about cultural divisions recently. By contrast, Labour voters and those from an ethnic minority background are more likely to think we’ve heard too little. And there is a generational divide in views, with those aged 55 and above more than twice as likely as those aged 16 to 24 to say cultural divisions have been discussed too much.

There is also a clear sense among the public that discussion of such divisions will increase in the run-up to the next general election, with a majority of 63% feeling this way.

Do you think divisions over cultural issues have been discussed too much, too little, or about the right amount in Britain over the last few months?

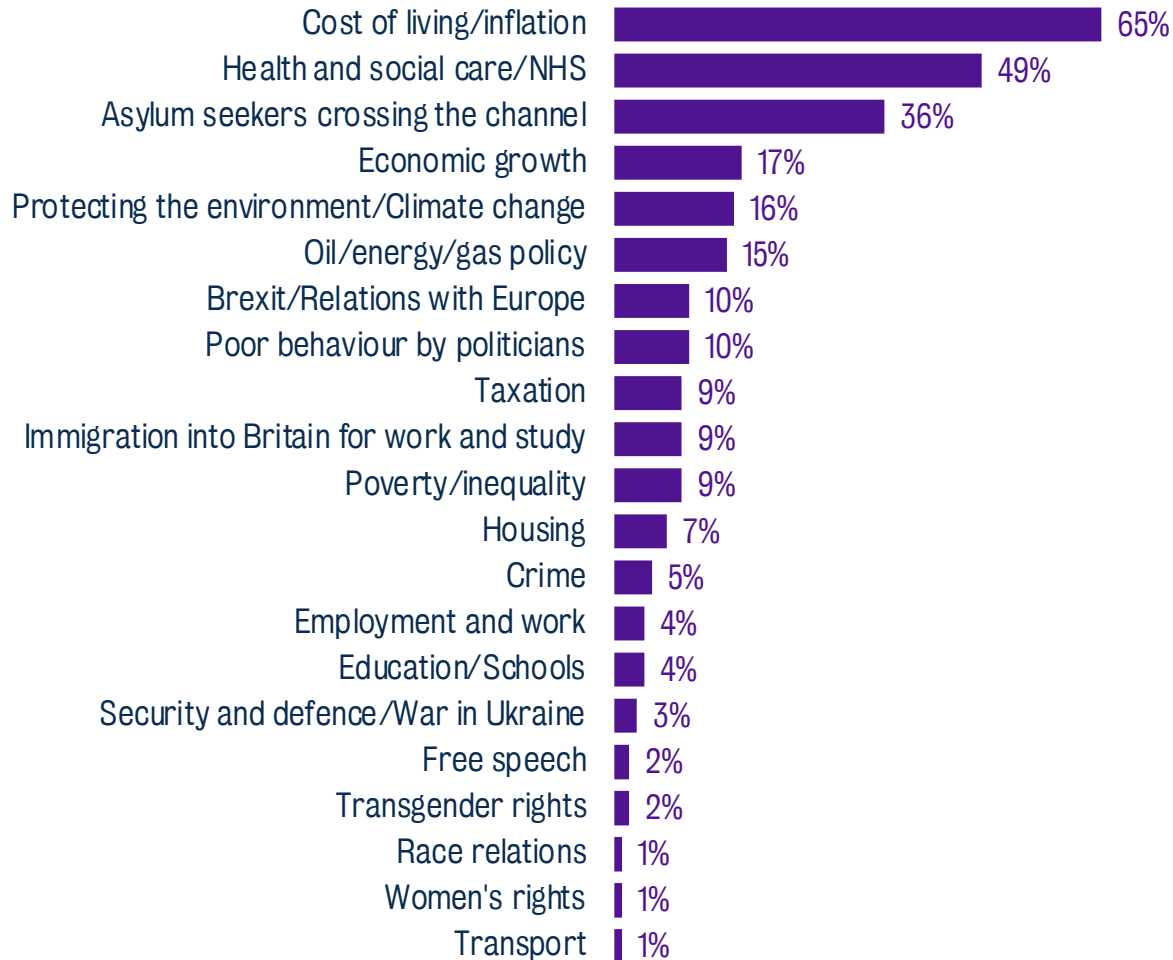


Do you think discussion of divisions over cultural issues will increase or decrease in the run-up to the next general election, or stay at the same level as it is now?

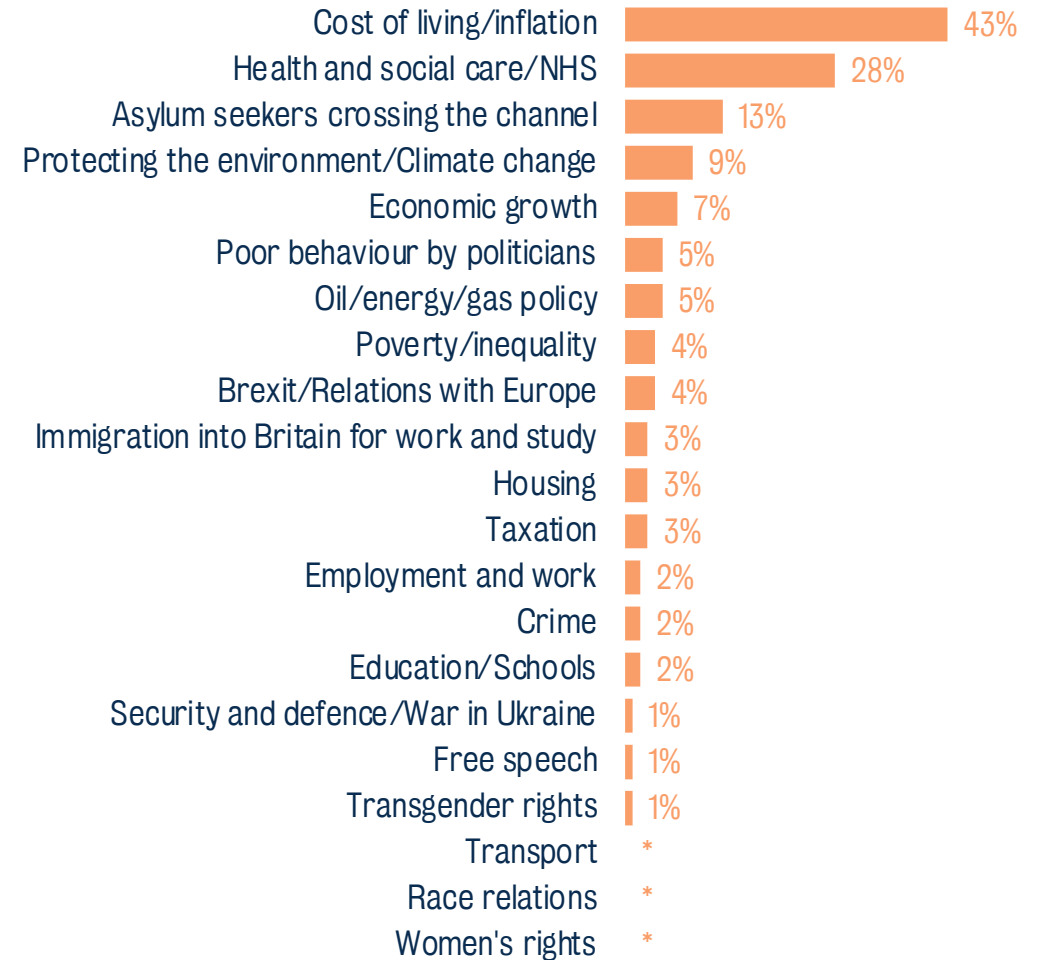


Some culture war issues, like trans rights and race relations, are low down the list of voters' priorities at the next general election – but others, such as asylum seekers crossing the channel, are seen as potentially bigger issues

Which of the following, if any, do you think will be the main issues the next UK general election will be fought on?



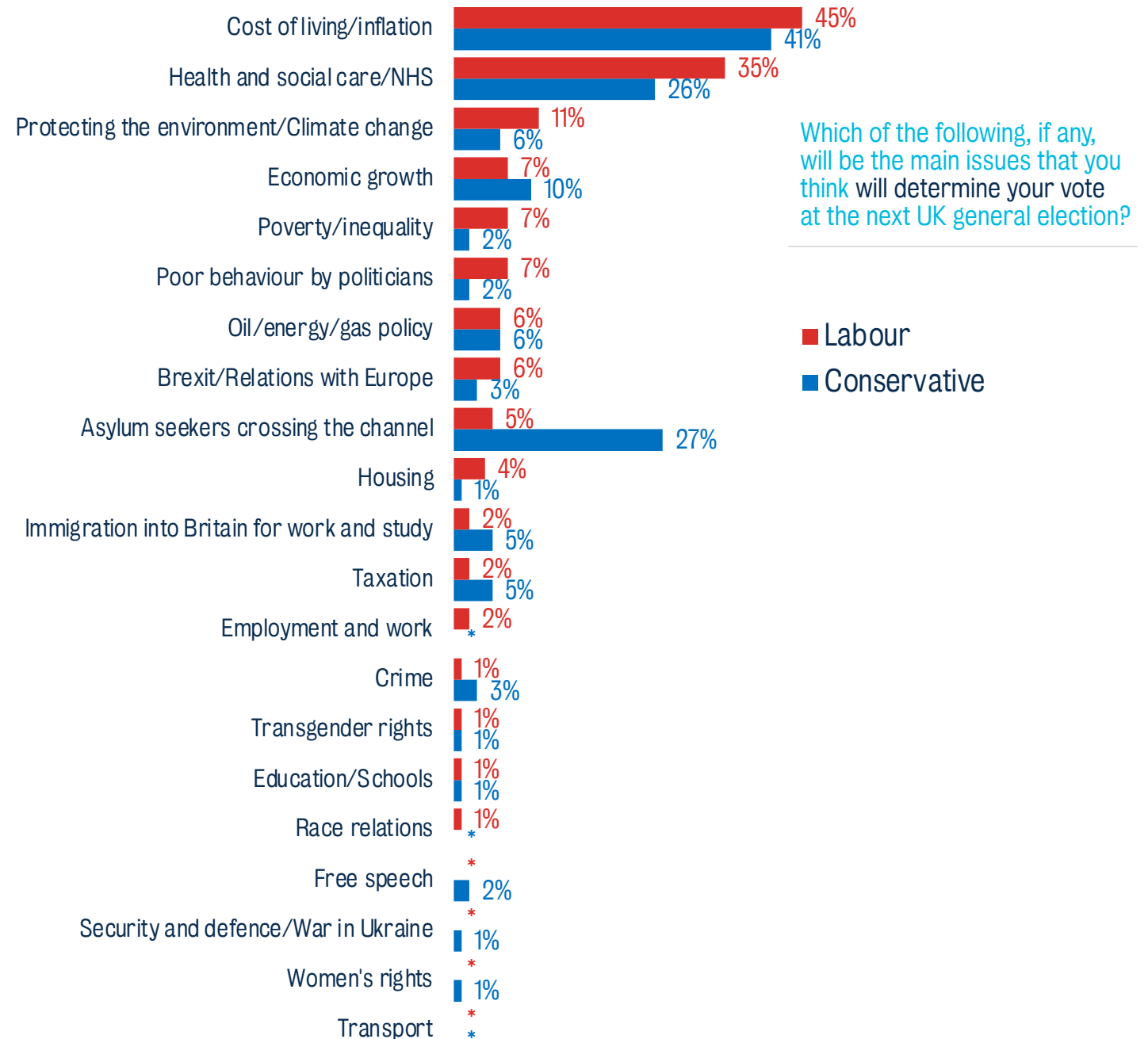
Which of the following, if any, will be the main issues that you think will determine your vote at the next UK general election?



Very few Labour or Conservative voters choose culture war issues as their priorities at the next general election – but asylum seekers crossing the channel are a focus for Conservative voters

There is little difference in views between 2019 Labour and Conservative voters on what they say will determine their vote at the next general election, and several issues that are typically seen as being part of culture war debates in the UK – such as transgender rights, free speech or race relations – are seen as priorities for only tiny proportions of each.

Slightly more see immigration and Brexit/relations with Europe as likely to influence their vote, but one issue that stands out and might be seen as part of culture war debates in the UK is asylum seekers crossing the channel. This is selected by one in four (27%) Conservative voters, but just one in 20 (5%) Labour voters.



Technical details



Survey

Ipsos UK interviewed online a representative sample of 3,716 adults aged 16+ across the United Kingdom between 17 and 23 August 2023, following previous surveys of 2,931 adults aged 16+ between 13 and 19 January 2022, and 2,834 between 25 November and 2 December 2020. This data has been collected by Ipsos’s UK KnowledgePanel, an online random probability panel which provides gold standard insights into the UK population, by providing bigger sample sizes via the most rigorous research methods. Data are weighted by age, gender, region, Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile, education, ethnicity and number of adults in the household in order to reflect the profile of the UK population. All polls are subject to a wide range of potential sources of error.

The Ipsos UK KnowledgePanel is the UK’s largest online random probability panel, providing total understanding of the UK public for businesses and organisations looking for cutting edge insight at the gold standard of online research methods. It is important because it includes both online and offline participants selected at random from every address in the UK, the first of its kind, with a single interface to eliminate modal effects and produce accurate data rapidly.

UK KnowledgePanel utilises a panel of 15,000+ participants to provide a new innovative tool for all those organisations who wish to garner greater insights into the behaviours, beliefs and attitudes of not just the UK population as a whole, but also into the specific communities which make up the UK’s diverse population.

Studies completed on UK KnowledgePanel will be fully representative of the UK population including the 4% of households who are considered “offline”. This is made possible by recruiting offline and supplying participants with a tablet, internet access and the tech support needed to get online. As a result of this approach the panel utilises a single online data collection method, with no differential mode effects – a pioneering advancement which enhances the ability to understand our society.

The UK KnowledgePanel builds on [work done](#) by Ipsos in the US on their own, which has been operating since 1999, utilising that experience and blending it with Ipsos’s own research and methodological expertise to produce a tool which delivers robust nationally representative data at speed. [Find out more.](#)

Media analysis

Counts of media mentions of culture war terms were drawn from the Nexis database of UK national and regional newspapers, with duplicates removed from the sample.

Subgroups

Variable	2023	2022	2020
Gender			
Male	1,766	1,468	1,386
Female	1,904	1,443	1,439
Age			
16-24	359	101	145
25-34	806	262	322
35-54	811	935	973
55+	1,740	1,633	1,394
Age and gender combined			
Women aged 16-29	221		
Men aged 60+	789		
Ethnicity			
White	3,332	2,755	2,644
Ethnic minority	329	149	164
2019 general election vote			
Conservative	1,014	937	879
Labour	897	661	649
2016 Brexit vote			
Leave	1,012		
Remain	1,797		
General election and Brexit vote			
Labour & Remain	686		
Conservative & Leave	618		
Age and gender			
Women aged 16-29	410		
Men aged 60+	789		



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Thanks also to Connie
Woollen and Kyla Mittal.

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DOI: 10.18742/pub01-163