

THE STATE OF POLARISATION
SEPTEMBER 2022

THE
NETWORKED
AGE_

MHP POLARISATION TRACKER

WAVE FOUR - Q3 2022

WHITEHALL
SW1

CITY OF WESTMINSTER

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mischief

INTRODUCTION ANTI-ELITE SENTIMENT UNITES LEFT AND RIGHT

Welcome to the fourth wave of our UK Polarisation Tracker, which measures the most divisive issues and sources in the country.

In this edition, we investigate the extent of the factional divides within the Conservative Party that Prime Minister Truss inherits, the level of public concern about free speech, and who wants business to become more politically activist.

Most importantly, we examine anti-elitist sentiment and its relationship to a wider scepticism towards business, media and government.

The research team at Cambridge University's Political Psychology Lab have found a strong correlation between concern about the economy and a suspicion of elites. Anti-elite sentiment is common among both left and right-wing voters and our data suggests that it will grow as the cost of living crisis and recession bite.

For businesses, rising levels of anti-elite sentiment, combined with scepticism about media impartiality and brand activism, pose significant questions for communications strategies

Nick Barron, Deputy CEO

METHODOLOGY-WAVE 4

Sample Size: 1011 people were surveyed. 701 were retained from Wave 3 (February 2022), and 310 were new participants.

Data Collection: 15th-26th July 2022

The survey was weighted to be representative of the Great British population in terms of Nationality, Ethnicity, Gender, Age Group, 2019 General Election vote (including 'Didn't vote'), 2016 EU Referendum vote (including 'Didn't vote'), and Graduate status.

This report was written by David Young, Cambridge University's Political Psychology Lab.

CONTENTS

5		AFFECTIVE POLARISATION	39		VACCINE SCEPTICISM
7		ISSUE POLARISATION	42		RUSSIA
14		INTERNECINE POLARISATION	45		THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS
16		CONCERN ABOUT FREE SPEECH	47		BORIS JOHNSON
20		BELIEFS ABOUT ELITE CONTROL	49		ABORTION
24		CORPORATE ACTIVISM	51		BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS OF ISRAELI GOODS
28		PERCIEVED MEDIA BIAS	54		BIAS AND SKEWED PERCEPTIONS IN OTHERS
31		DEMOGRAPHIC SPLITS	57		TECHNICAL NOTES
35		PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL BIAS			

AFFECTIVE POLARISATION

DIVISIONS BETWEEN GROUPS

AFFECTIVE POLARISATION POLARISING POLITICIANS

We asked people to rate how much they liked politicians on a scale from 0-10, then compared the average rating for people on the left and right (based on how they identified themselves).

Boris Johnson remains the country's most polarising politician. Carried out shortly after his resignation, this wave finds that Johnson's stock in fact rallied among right-wingers since February – perhaps as a reaction against the criticism he was receiving.

Our new Prime Minister, Liz Truss, makes a high entry on the polarisation scale, and although she is currently a far less polarising figure than Boris, she was a more divisive choice than Rishi Sunak.

Despite trying hard to stick to the centre ground of British politics, Kier Starmer has become more divisive since 2021, earning greater enthusiasm from the left but less from the right. As he becomes better known and his polling numbers improve, Conservative voters become more hostile.

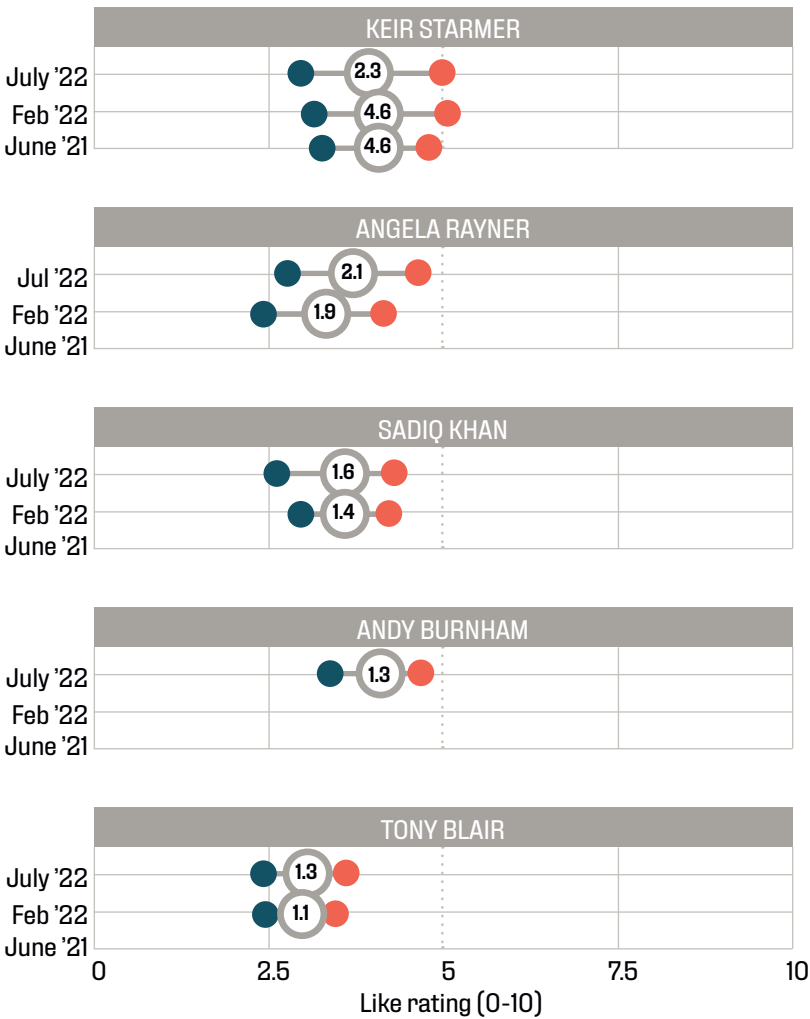
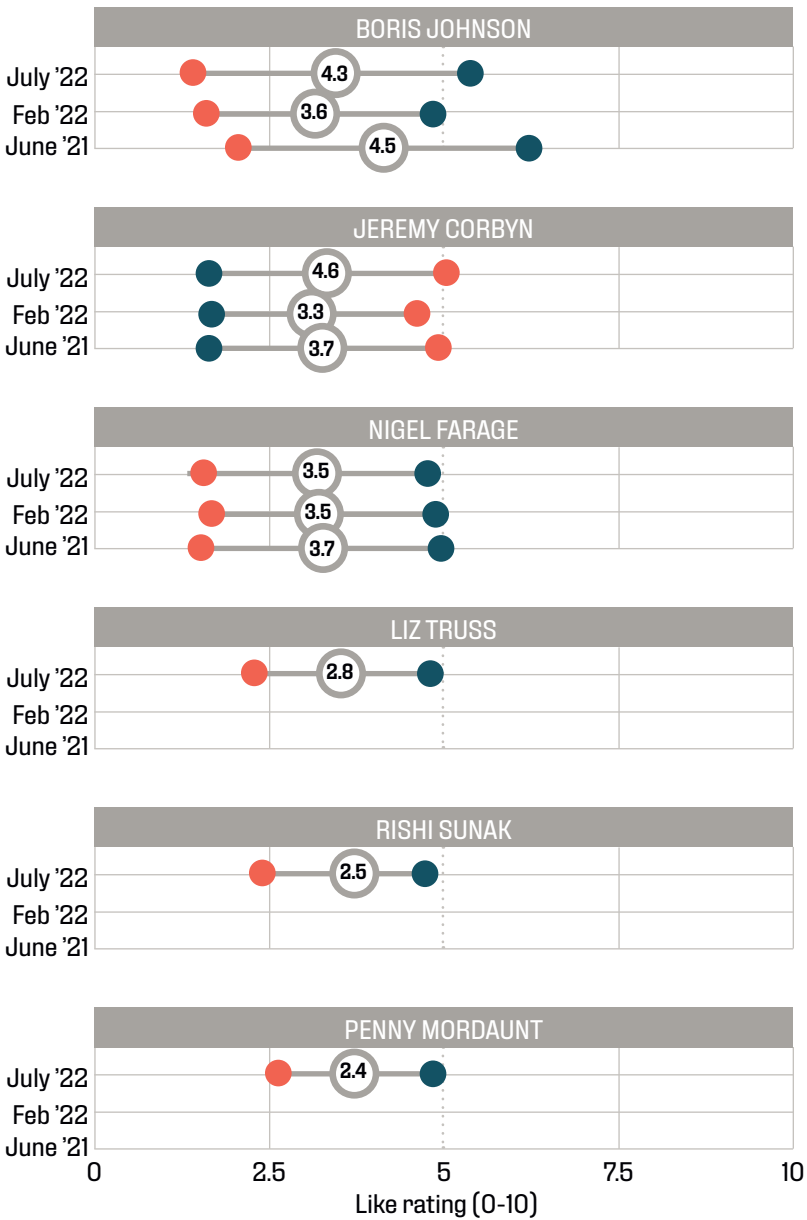
Elsewhere, Andy Burnham comes in as one of the least polarising figures, and the most-liked by their ideological opposition.

Notably, every politician included in the previous wave has become more polarising since then, except Nigel Farage.

Left-right affective polarisation over politicians

Numbers in the boxes show the difference between the average left and right rating

Mean position ● Left-wingers ● Right-wingers



source: MHP Polarisation Tracker
Note: The numbers in circles shows the difference between each group's mean



AFFECTIVE POLARISATION RISING POLITICAL HOSTILITY

We asked people to rate how much they liked people belonging to various political groups from 0 to 10, and also to indicate which group they belonged to. We then compared how much they preferred their own group over the outgroup.

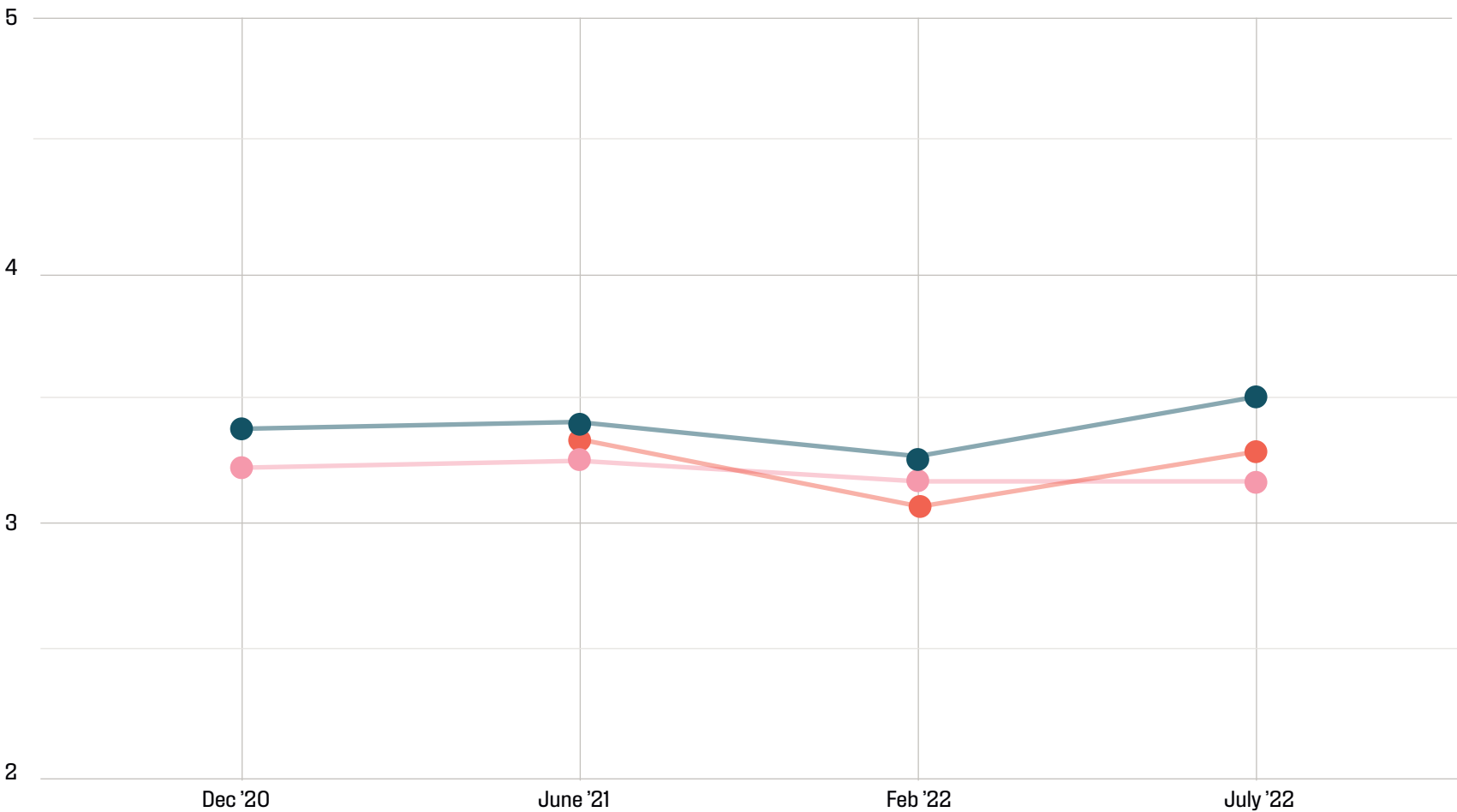
Whichever way you slice people into political groups, they clearly prefer their own group, but not by huge amounts, which is good news for the health of British political debate.

The biggest rivalry is between “Left-wing” and “Right-wing” voters, rather than Labour vs Conservative voters and Leavers vs Remainers, which suggests people are more exercised about competing values, rather than competing votes.

Political hostility increased slightly for Left vs Right and Labour vs Conservative since the previous wave, but hostility between “Remain” vs “Leave” seems to be in slow decline, perhaps as other major issues have come to the fore and memories of the referendum fade.

Average preference for political in-group vs out-group
Difference between 0-10 like ratings

● Labour vs Conservative Voters ● Left vs Right ● Leavers vs Remainers



AFFECTIVE POLARISATION
LABOUR VOTERS ARE MORE
INCLINED TO STICK TO THEIR
OWN, CONSERVATIVES ARE
GOING OFF EACH OTHER

Labour voters are more inclined to stick to their own, Conservatives are going off each other

A slightly different way of measuring affective polarisation is to group people by which party they identify as a supporter of, rather than just who they voted for (which might be confounded by things like tactical voting), and to get them to rate how much they like other parties, rather than people who vote for other parties. This rating allows them to pass judgment on the parties' politicians and policies rather than just their supporters.

Here, when looking at Labour and Conservative supporters and their parties, we find much harsher ratings.

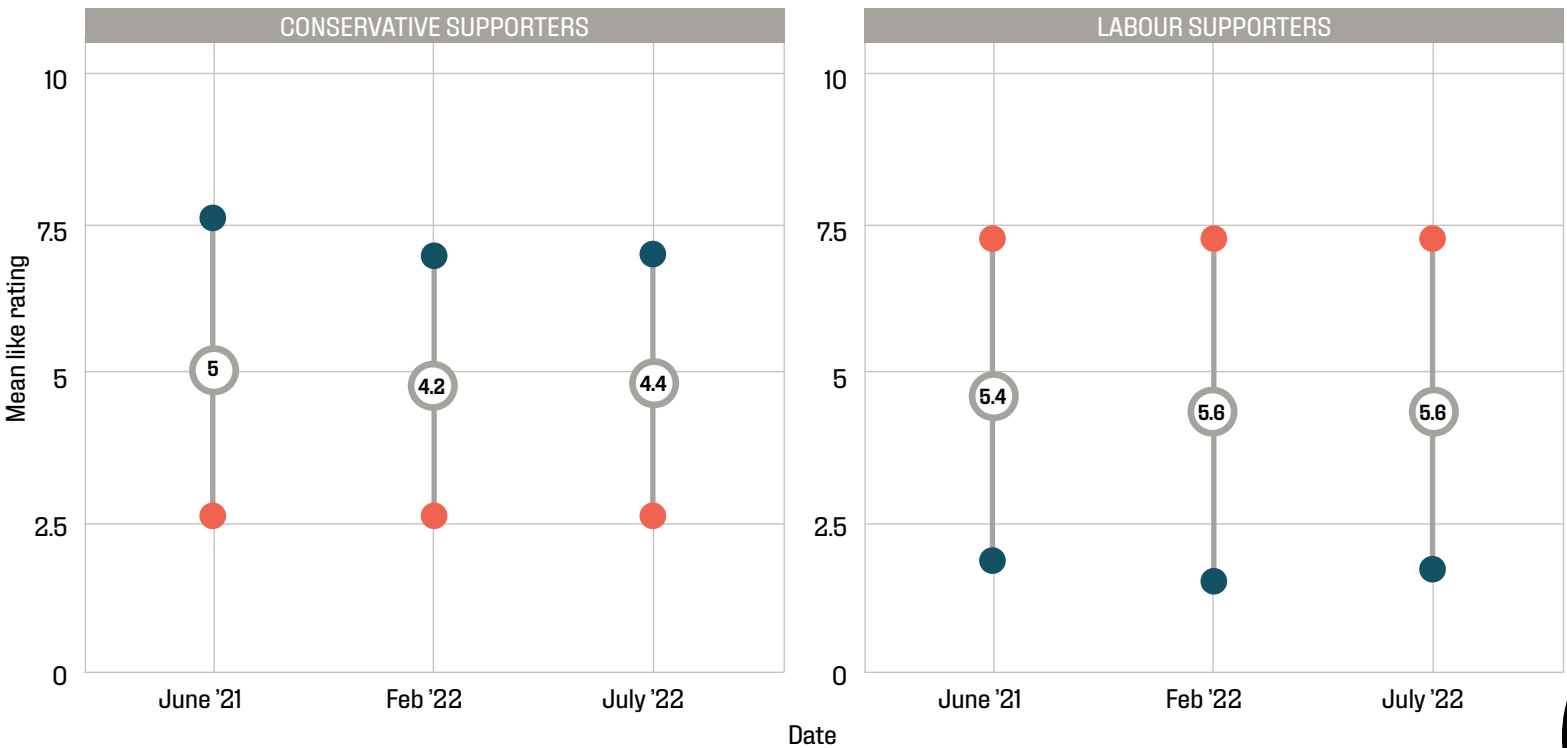
Conservative supporters prefer their own party by 4.4 points on average, and Labour supporters are even harsher – preferring their party by 5.6 points.

Since we first started collecting this kind of data in June 2021, Conservatives' preference for their party has waned, decreasing by 0.6 points. Labour has slightly increased, by 0.2 points.

Party polarisation

How much people prefer their own group over their rivals

Party ● Conservative ● Labour



ISSUE POLARISATION

DIVISIVE DEBATES

ISSUE POLARISATION

CORE ISSUE POLARISATION

SLOWLY WIDENING DIVISIONS

Another important aspect of polarisation is how far apart people from different political backgrounds are on the important issues.

To assess this, we ask the same nine ‘core issue’ questions in every wave. We place people’s answers onto a 7-point ‘Agreement’ scale, then see how many points apart they are on average.

Looking back over four waves, it is remarkable how little has changed in terms of polarisation between the average left-winger’s position and the average right-winger’s position.

Only on one issue has polarisation changed by more than 0.2 points since December 2020, and that is the 0.3 point drop for whether Britain is heading in the right direction.

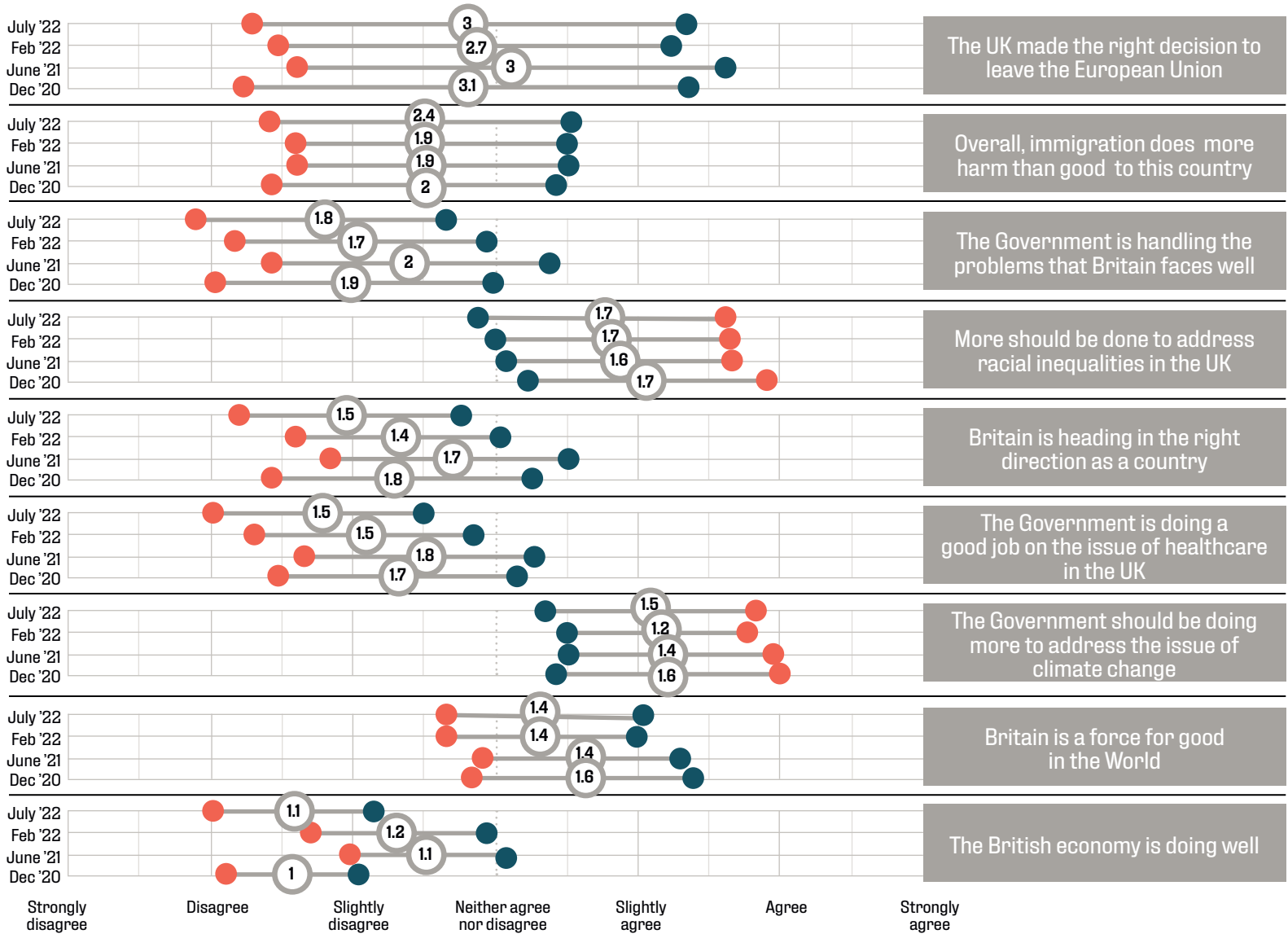
Mostly, left and right move in lock step, though at a distance. Brexit remains the most divisive issue, followed by immigration.

This is a salutary reminder that once an issue becomes polarising, it is very difficult to bring people back together.

There is also evidence for a slight increase in polarisation since the previous wave, with five issues becoming more polarising, three staying steady and one dropping.

Left-right polarisation over the core issues

Average position ● Left-wingers ● Right-wingers



ISSUE POLARISATION

CURRENT ISSUE POLARISATION

CULTURE AND ANTI-ELITISM

TO THE FORE

We also ask about a rotating cast of additional issues, and measure polarisation in the same way.

This wave finds that the circumstances of Boris Johnson's resignation are highly polarising, which could cause problems for our new PM.

Left-wingers are adamant that there was nothing unfair about the way he was forced out, but right-wingers are more conflicted, leading to a large difference in average position.

Another highly-polarising is "Young people ought to show more respect for traditional British values". This is the issue that attracts the most agreement among those on the right, but left-wingers tend to disagree.

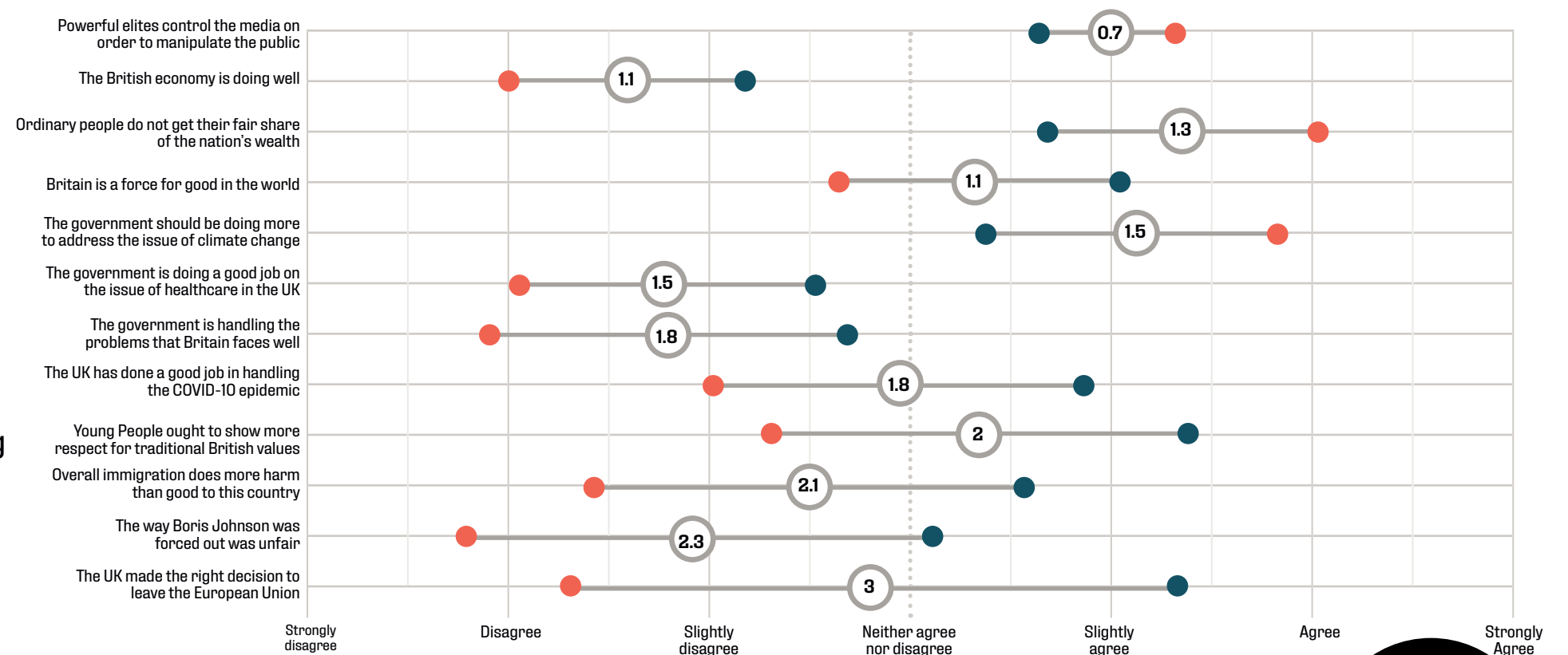
The item attracting the most agreement from the left is one used to measure how left-wing a person's economic views are – **"Ordinary people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth"**¹.

Interestingly, right-wingers also agree with this, suggesting that politics is mostly divided by socio-cultural issues rather than economics.

The least polarising issue is **"Powerful elites control the media in order to manipulate the public"** – something which both sides agree on.

Left-right polarisation over the core issues

Average position ● Left -wingers ● Right-wingers



ISSUE POLARISATION

POLICY POLARISATION

RWANDA IS THE HOT BUTTON TOPIC

For this wave, we introduced a new set of questions about specific government policies.

People could rate whether they disagreed or agreed with each issue statement, and how strongly, on an expanded scale from -5 to +5. Again, we compare how far apart left-wingers and right-wingers are in terms of their average position on this scale.

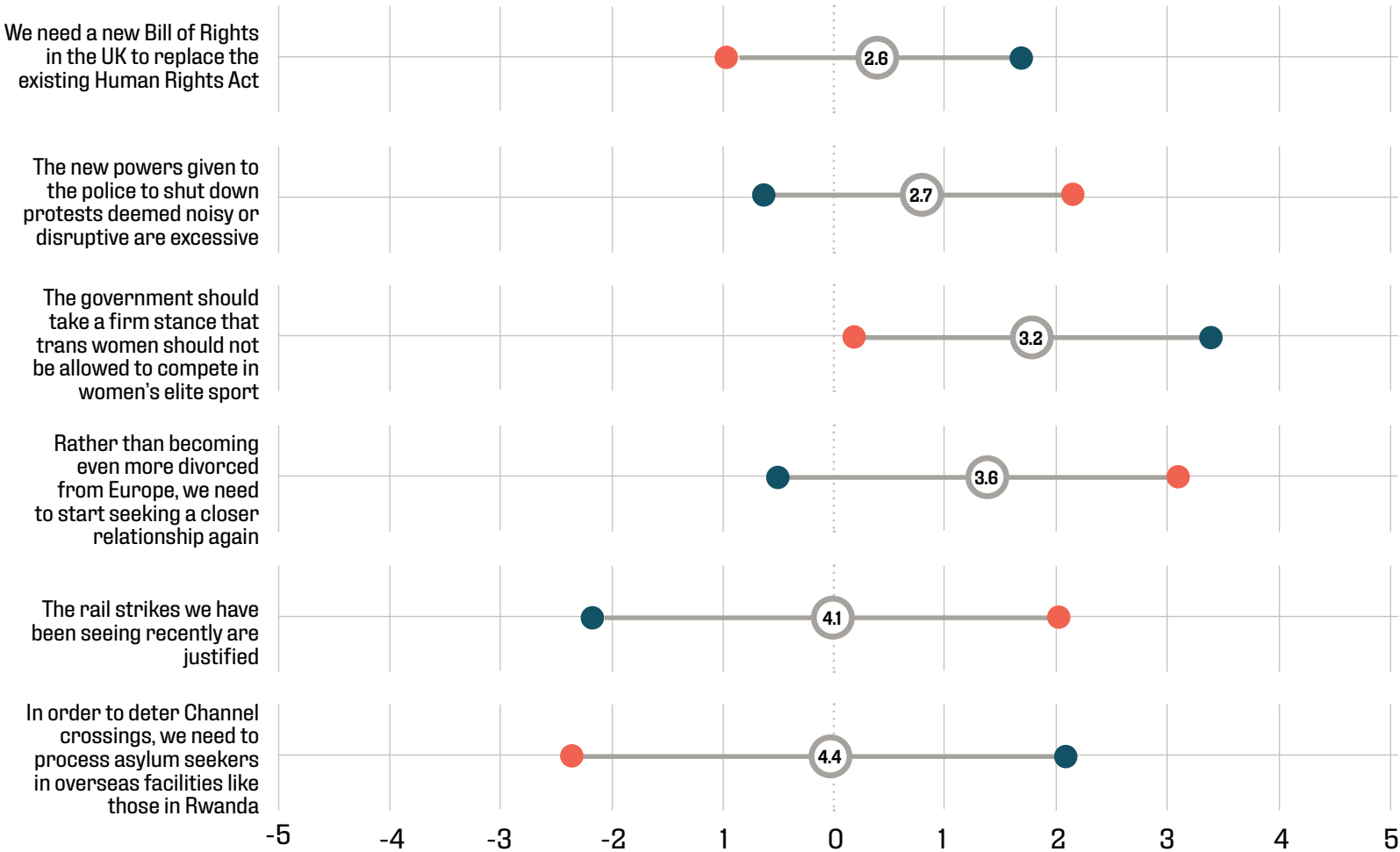
The policy of processing asylum seekers in Rwanda is the most polarising issue among those considered. It elicits the strongest negative reaction for any policy from left-wingers.

Whether the summer rail strikes are justified is almost as polarising, but in the opposite direction, with solid support from the left but disagreement on the right.

The question of whether trans women should be allowed to compete in elite women's sport is the only one that doesn't find left and right adopting opposing positions, with the left very slightly agreeing on average, and the right in fact agreeing more strongly than they do for any other issues.

Left-right polarisation over topical issues

Average position ● Left -wingers ● Right-wingers



ISSUE POLARISATION COMPARING ISSUE AND AFFECTIVE POLARISATION

We calculated two additional indicators of ‘Overall’ Affective and Issue polarisation.

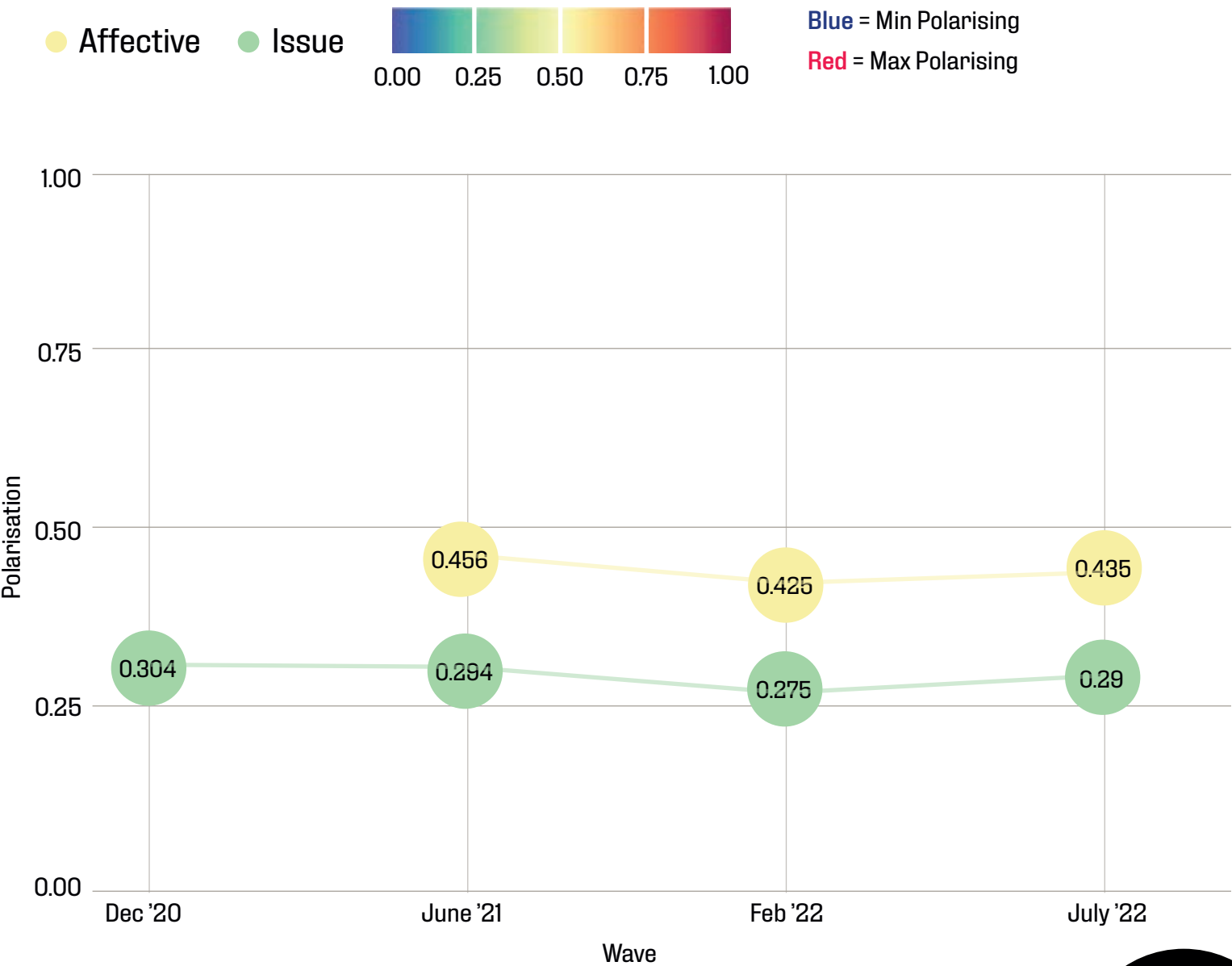
The overall issue polarisation measure is just the average difference between left-wingers and right-wingers on our nine ‘Core Issues’. The overall affective polarisation measure is calculated using a formula² that averages how much each person who identifies as a supporter of a political party likes that party more than every other party, taking into account the vote share of each other party, so that preferences for one’s own party over small parties, like the Greens or SNP, don’t count as much. Both measures were put onto a 0-1 scale so that they could be compared.

Affective polarisation levels outstrip issue polarisation, suggesting that political antipathy is about more than just policy disagreements.

What’s also clear is that both measures are fairly modest – respectively less than half and a third of their theoretical maximum – and have actually cooled off since December 2020, though only slightly.

And again, there is a slight increase in polarisation since the previous wave.

Affective and issue polarisation trends



INTERNECINE POLARISATION

FACTIONAL RIVALRY

INTERNECINE POLARISATION
A NEW CONSERVATIVE
FAULT-LINE

In Wave 3 we introduced a novel measure of polarisation – looking at how much Conservative and Labour factions dislike each other.

We divided Conservatives into those who thought the best way to level up was to invest in communities, and those who thought cutting taxes and red tape was best. We divided Labour supporters into pro-Starmer and pro-Corbyn factions. We found that Labour was much more internally divided than the Conservatives.

This time, we examined the divide between Conservatives who think Boris have resigned, and those who said he should have soldiered on.

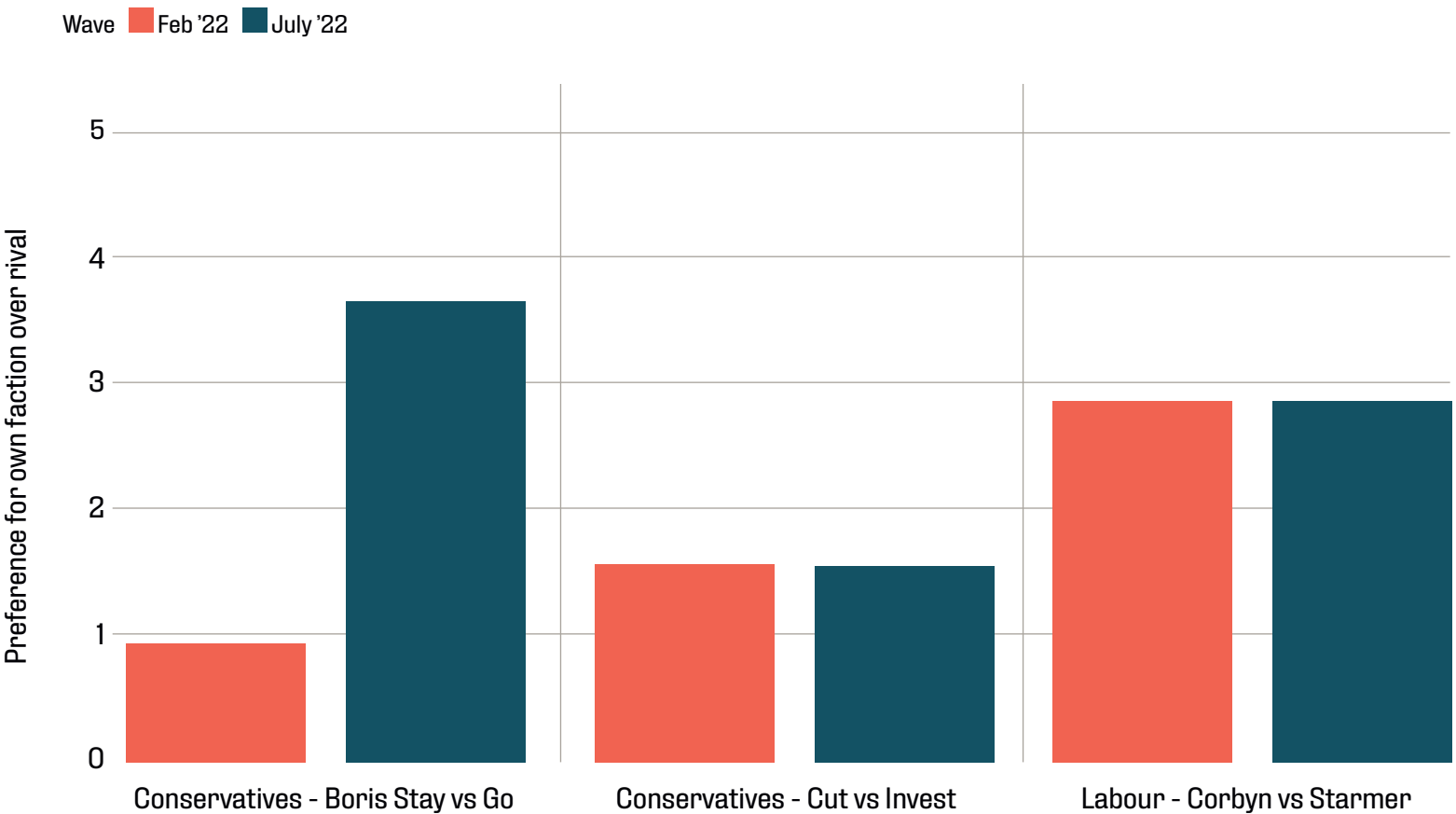
By dividing the Conservatives along these lines (Boris Stay vs Boris Go), we find that they have an even more toxic division than Labour.

These Conservative groups prefer themselves to their rival group by an average of nearly four points. That’s larger than the ingroup-

preference we observed for Leavers vs Remainers, Labour vs Conservative voters, and Left vs Right during this wave.

Managing Boris’s legacy may prove even more difficult for the Conservatives than handling Corbyn’s has for Labour.

Factionalism over Boris’s resignation turns
tories more toxic than labour



CONCERN ABOUT FREE SPEECH

THE FRONTLINE OF THE CULTURE WAR

CONCERNS ABOUT FREE SPEECH
THREATS TO FREE SPEECH AND
SELF-CENSORSHIP

A key talking point in political debate is that free speech is being stifled by over-censorious authorities, particularly in online spaces.

The Right increasingly embrace this view, while many on the Left respond that this is a confected outrage.

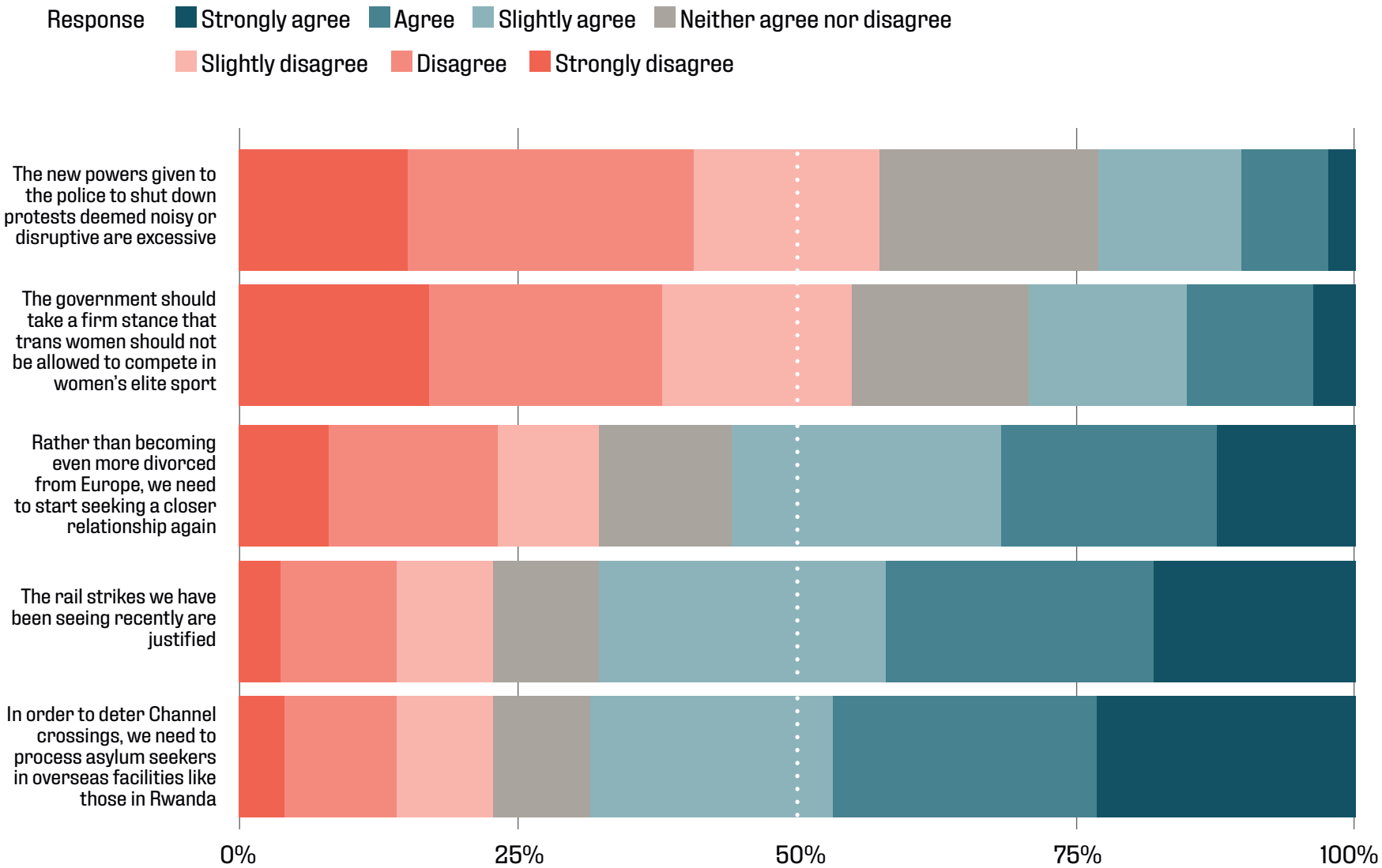
So what do citizens think? Most people are aligned with the right in their thinking.

Majorities disagree that only people with abhorrent views receive a backlash and that people’s concerns about free speech are overblown.

Around 70% believe that free speech is under threat and that expressing normal opinions can elicit a harsh response.

More than half express a reluctance to state their true views for fear of the response they might receive.

Beliefs about free speech



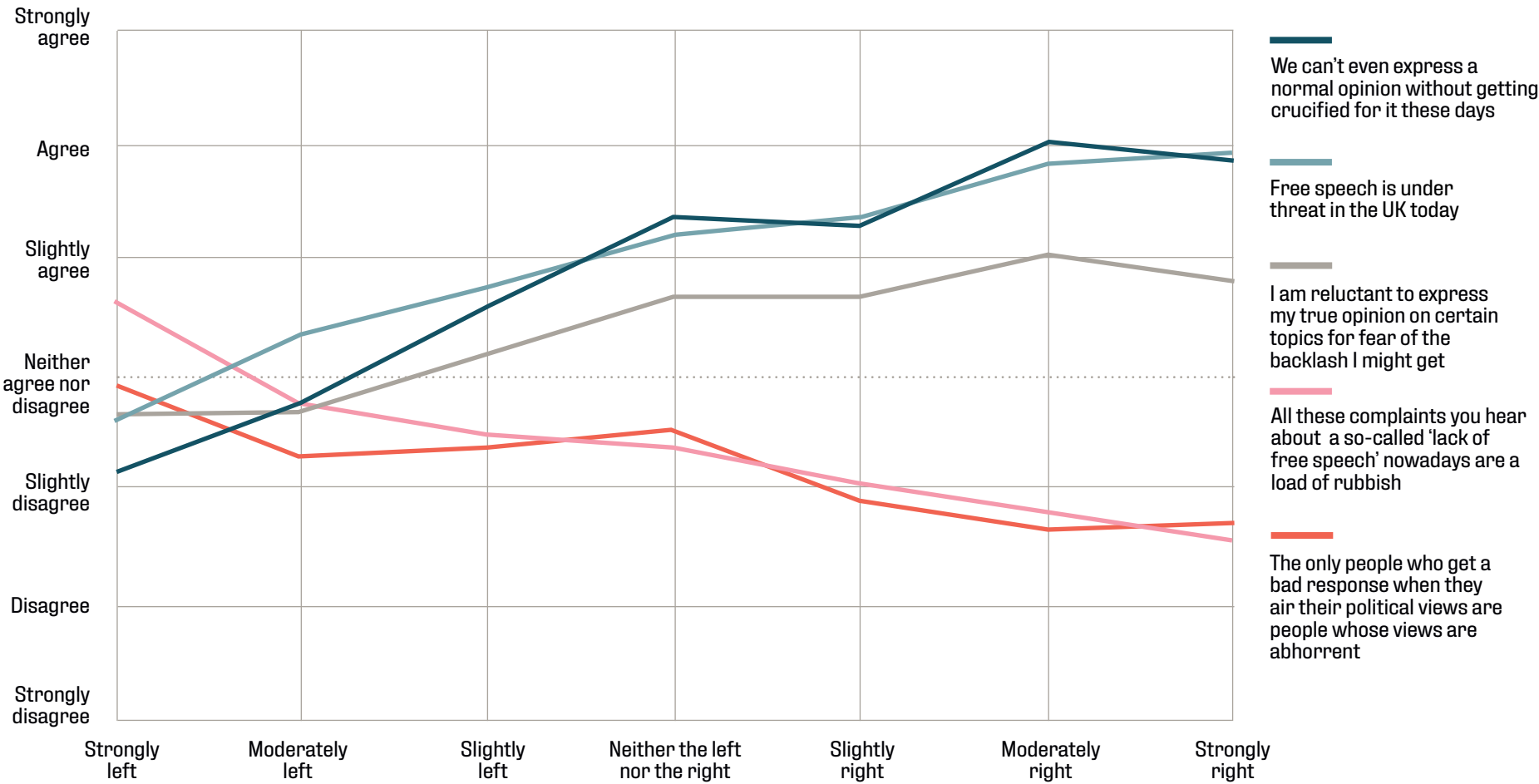
CONCERNS ABOUT FREE SPEECH THREATS TO FREE SPEECH AND IDEOLOGY

It is clear that beliefs about the threat to free speech are polarised, though perhaps less than might be expected.

The belief that free speech is truly under threat, and that even the expression of ‘normal’ views can be stifled by vitriolic responses, garners more support as people move further to the right.

But even on the left, people are equivocal rather than strongly in disagreement with these claims, and even those ‘moderately’ and ‘slightly’ to the left show clear concern.

Average position on free speech by left-right self-placement



CONCERNS ABOUT FREE SPEECH CORRELATES OF PERCEIVED THREATS TO FREE SPEECH AND IDEOLOGY

We combined people’s responses to the preceding Free Speech questions into a single ‘Perceived Threat to Free Speech’ score³, then looked at how this score related to other attitudes.

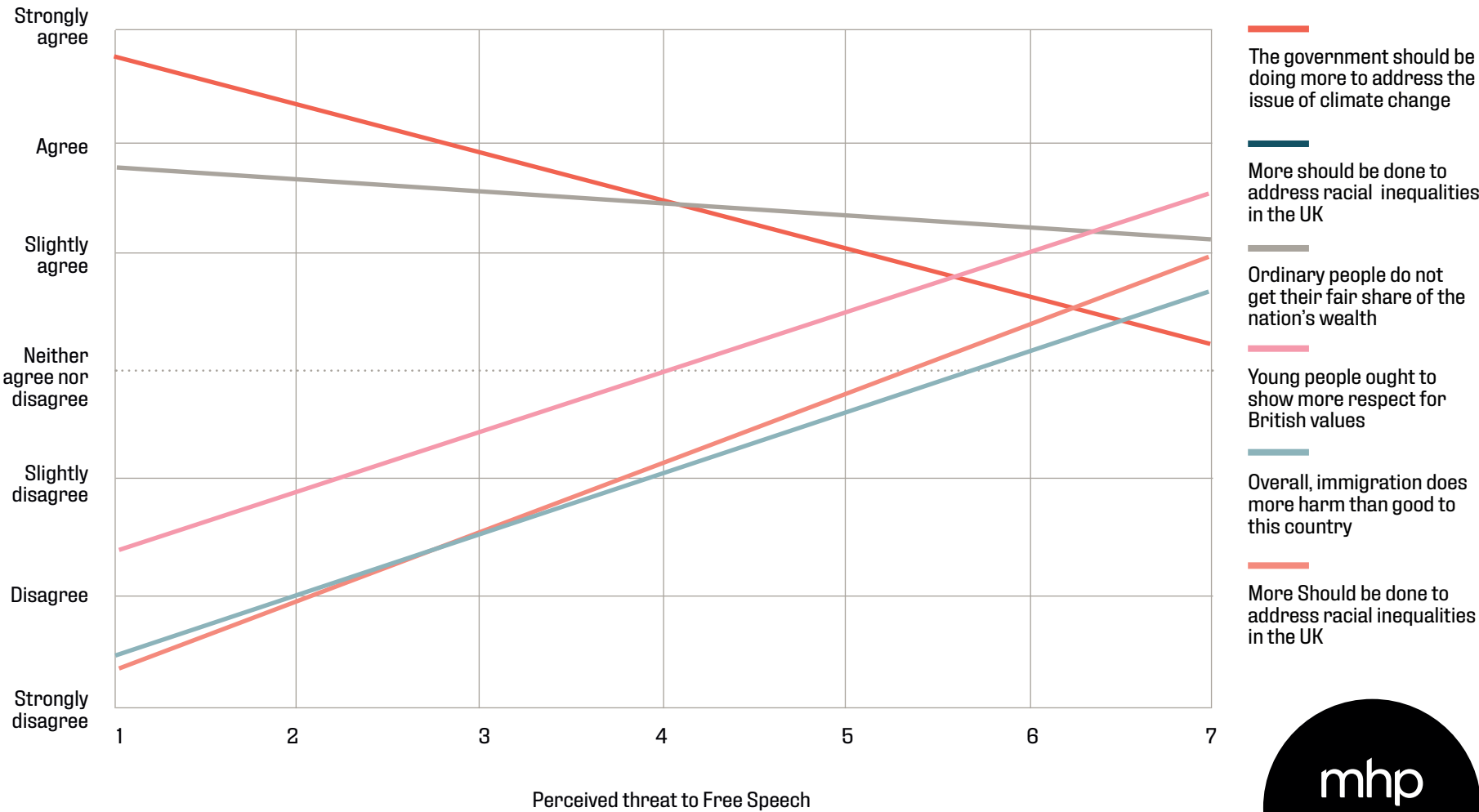
Believing that free speech is under threat correlates highly with several political issues, in particular the notion that young people should be more deferential to traditional British values.

It is also strongly related to other classic ‘Culture War’ topics - it is highly correlated with believing that Brexit was a good idea and that immigration is harmful, and scepticism about doing more to tackle climate change and racial inequality.

In contrast, it has only a small correlation with right-wing economic views about whether ordinary people receive their fair share.

Perceiving a threat to free speech, then, seems to be part of a wider backlash against changing cultural standards.

Correlates to perceived threats to free speech



BELIEFS ABOUT ELITE CONTROL

LEFT AND RIGHT UNITE

BELIEFS ABOUT ELITE CONTROL

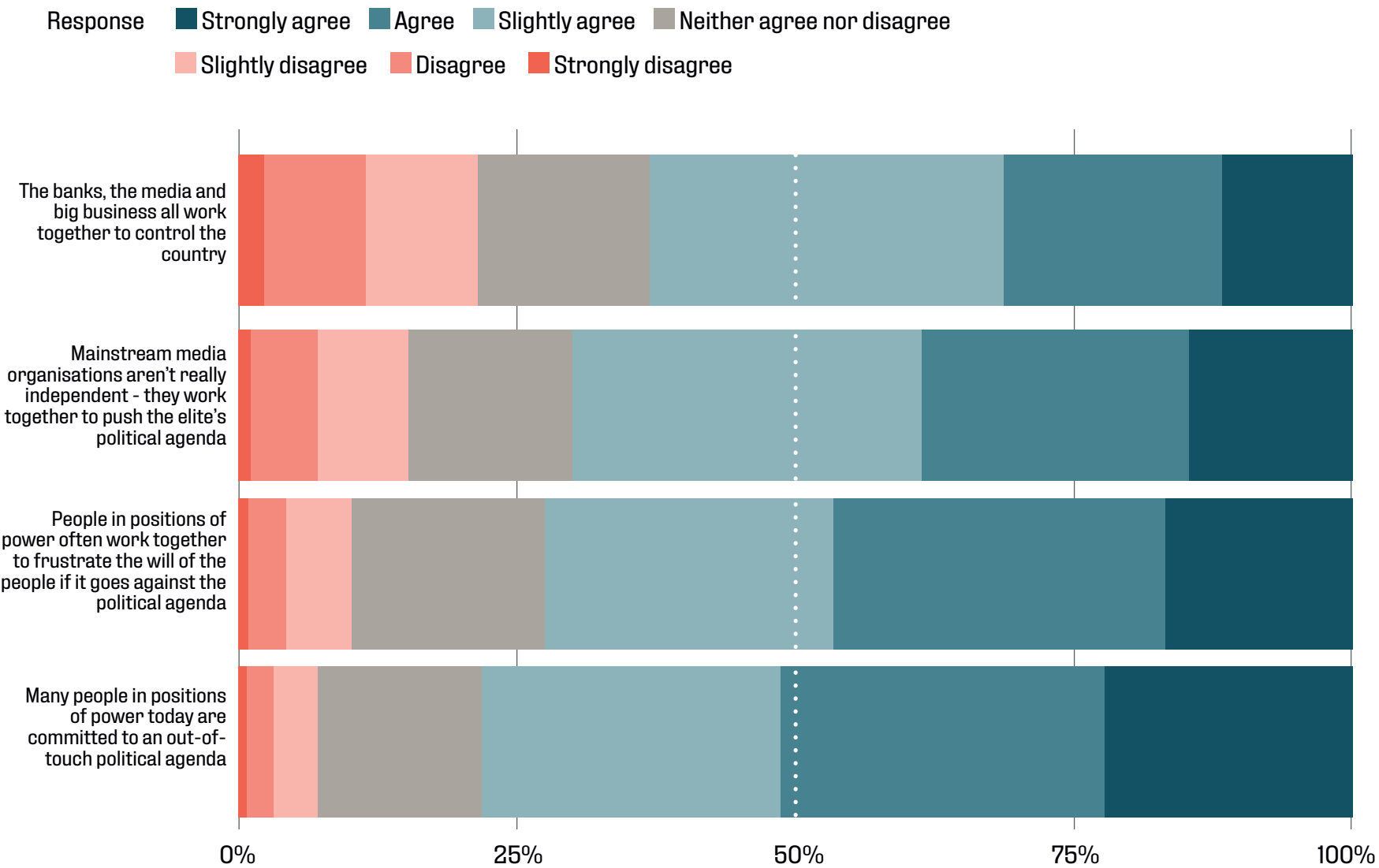
A common populist refrain is that society has been captured by a self-interested elite. On the left, this elite are ‘corporate titans’ and aristocrats who stitch up the system for their own gain. On the right, these are ‘lefty social justice warriors’ and the bureaucratic ‘blob’ intent on enforcing their postmodern ideals on the public.

Left and Right assert a shadowy network pulling strings on behalf of the elite – but do citizens at large worry about such a thing? It would seem so.

A large majority agree with the fairly-moderate position that many people in power are out of touch with the interests of the people.

While more conspiratorial ideas garner less support, they still win the agreement of majorities – the idea that the most influential people in society furtively work together to push a self-interested agenda is very widespread, though most only agree moderately or slightly.

Perceptions of the elite control



BELIEFS ABOUT ELITE CONTROL
POLARISATION OVER ELITE
CONTROL

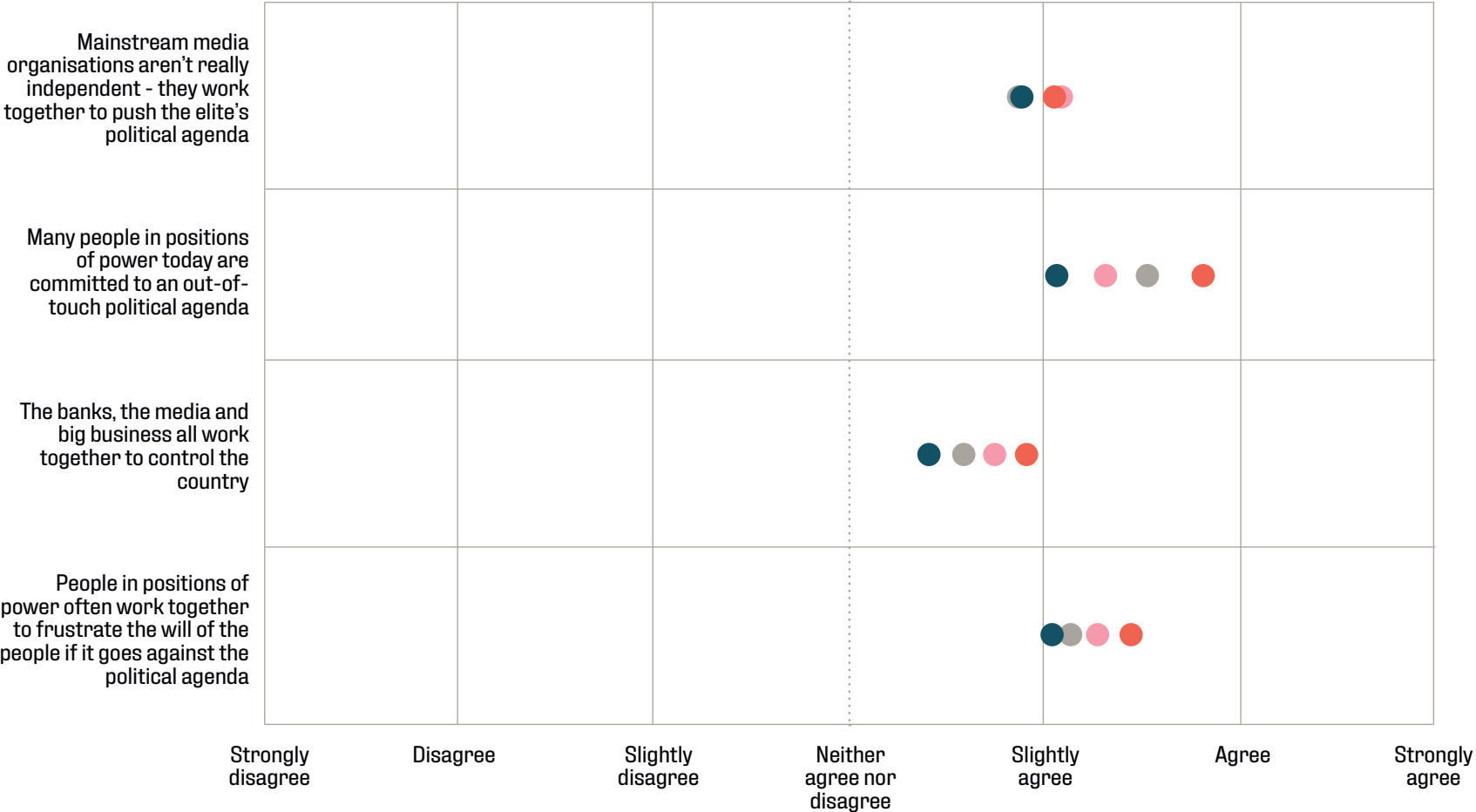
Perhaps surprisingly, beliefs about elite control are not very polarised. We looked at the average position of different political groups on these issues.

Left-wingers are most suspicious of elites controlling society, but these are issues that unite Leavers, Remainers, and Right-Wingers in agreement as well. No group disagrees with any statement on average.

Leavers and Right-Wingers, currently resident Downing Street, are accordingly least likely to think those in positions of power are out of touch, but they still agree that they are.

Perceptions of elite control are not polarised

Average position ● Leave-voters ● Left -wingers ● Remain-voters ● Right-wingers



BELIEFS ABOUT ELITE CONTROL CORRELATES OF PERCEIVED ELITE CONTROL

Believing that an elite secretly controls society is correlated with other political beliefs. We averaged people’s responses to these questions to form an overall scale⁴.

Rather than correlating with socio-cultural issues, like the perceived threat to free speech did, suspicion of elite control is more correlated with beliefs about the economy and government performance.

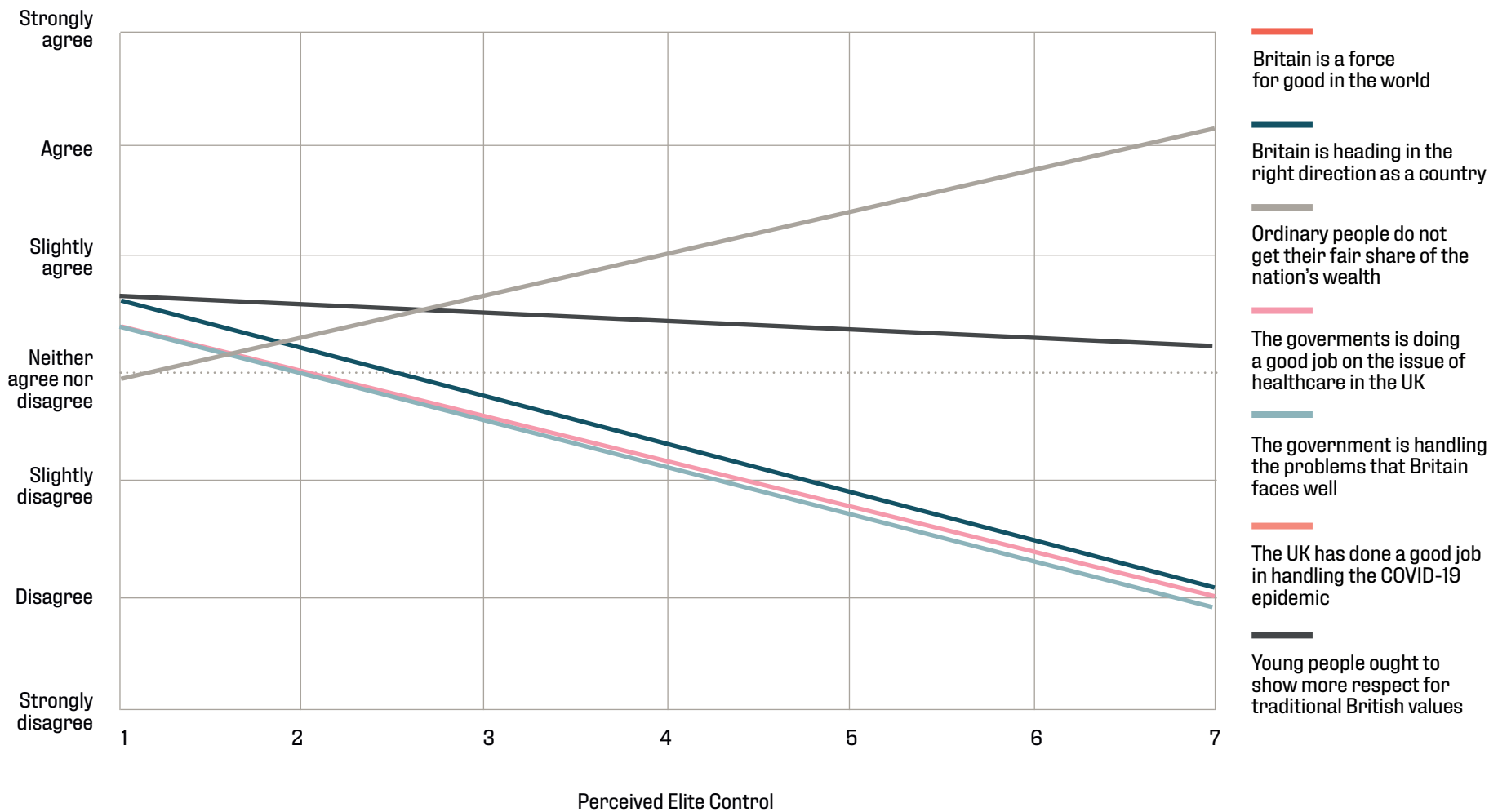
It is negatively correlated with believing that Britain is a force for good, is heading in the right direction, handled the pandemic well, is handling healthcare issues well, and is generally handling its problems well.

It is strongly positively correlated with concerns that people do not receive their fair share, but only weakly with the idea that young people should respect traditions more.

Overall, believing in a shadowy elite seems to arise from genuine concerns that Britain is not performing well – in this context, a self-interested elite are bogeymen for the country’s perceived malaise.

Correlates of perceived elite control

The worse you believe Britain is performing, the more likely you are to believe that elites control the country



CORPORATE ACTIVISM

CORPORATE ACTIVISM ATTITUDES TO CORPORATE ACTIVISM

It is increasingly common for businesses to adopt prominent public positions in favour of progressive social policy issues, like supporting Pride or anti-racism campaigns.

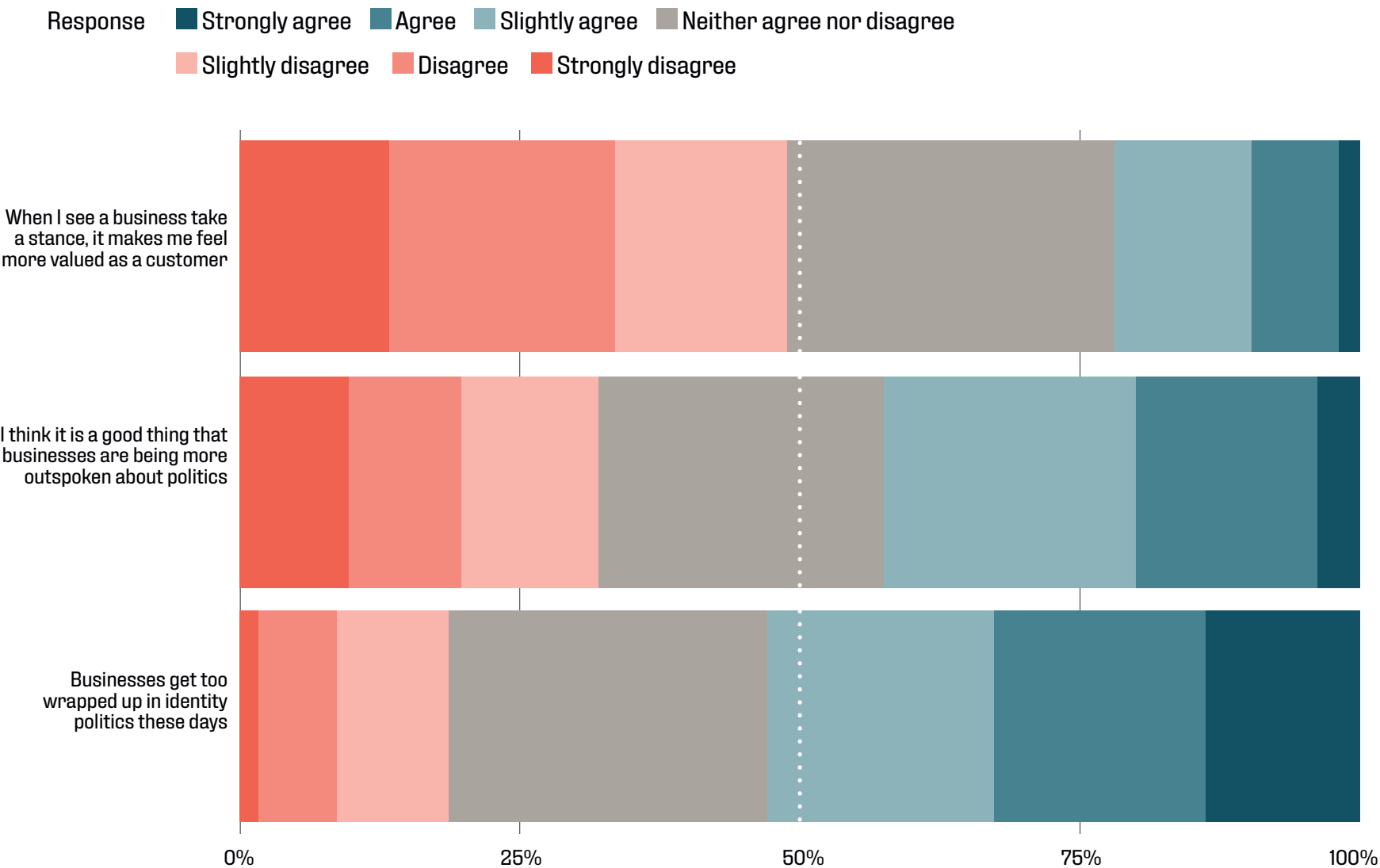
The public at large don't have strong views as to whether corporate activism is a good or bad thing generally, though they do tend more towards scepticism rather than enthusiasm.

A slim majority agree that businesses are “too wrapped up in identity politics”, though the largest group neither agree nor disagree.

Just under a majority disagree with the idea that businesses taking political stances makes them feel more valued as a customer, though this does not necessarily mean they feel devalued.

In more positive news for corporate activism, more people agree it is a good thing for business to be politically outspoken than disagree, though they fall short of a majority.

Perceptions of corporate activism



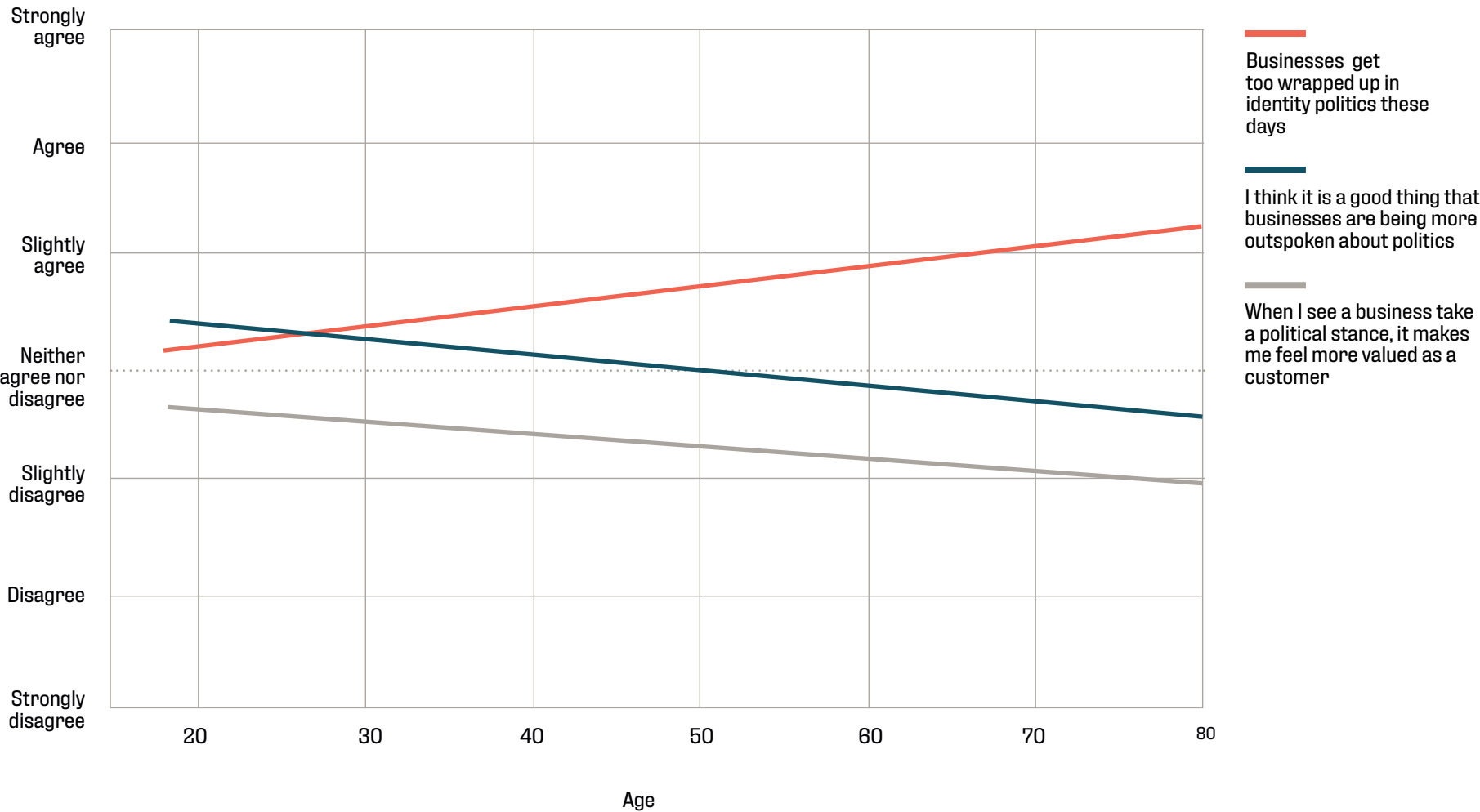
CORPORATE ACTIVISM AGE AND CORPORATE ACTIVISM

The issue of corporate activism is somewhat polarised by age.

When we looked at the relationship between age and corporate activism, it is clear that older people have a more negative view towards it.

Younger people are more likely to actively agree that businesses being outspoken about politics is a good thing.

Older people are more disgruntled by corporate activism



CORPORATE ACTIVISM
POLARISATION AND
CORPORATE ACTIVISM

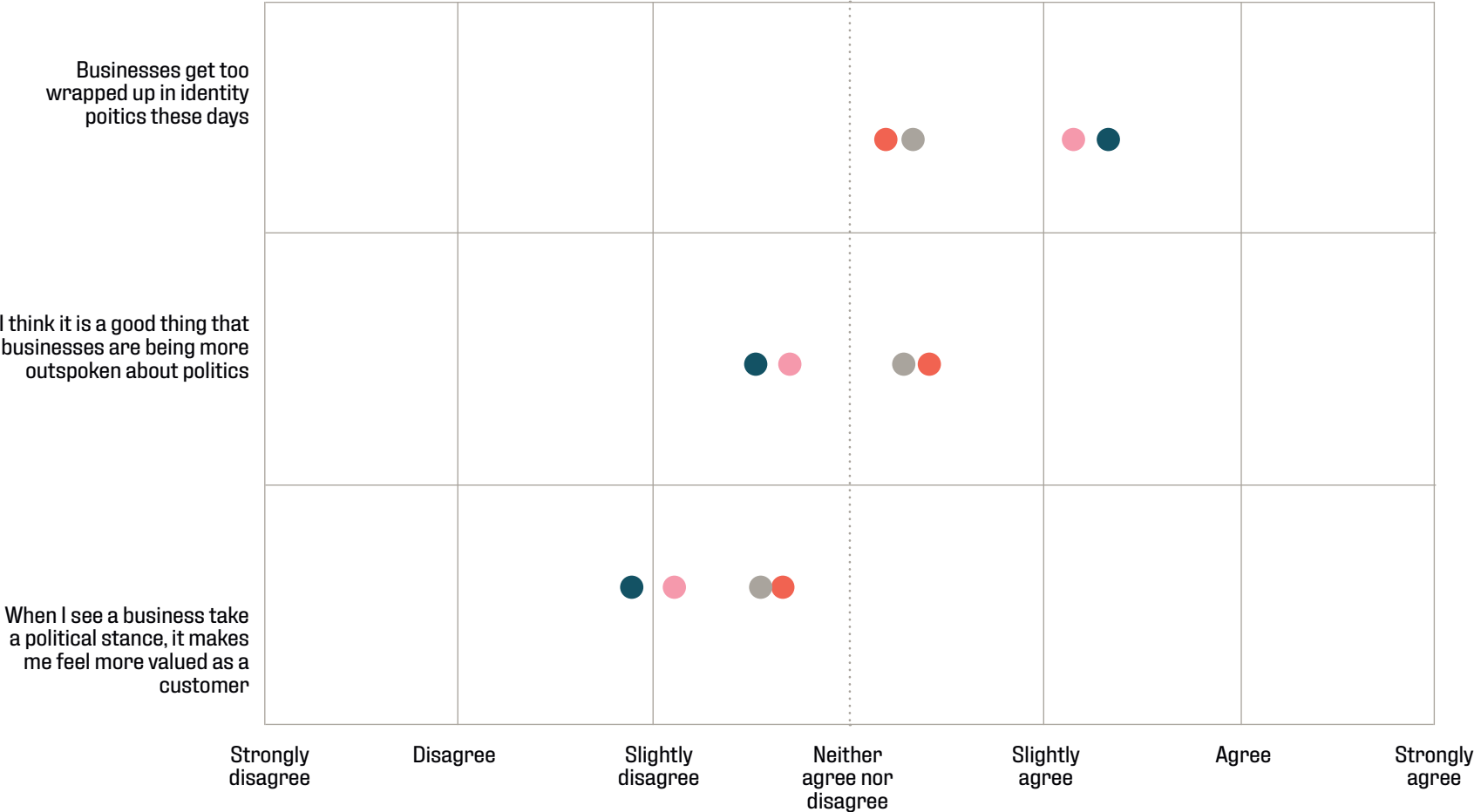
Attitudes towards corporate activism are also politically polarised.

Since corporate activism in the UK tends to take a progressive stance, it is perhaps not surprising that left-wingers and Remainers are more enthusiastic about it.

That said, it's notable that even they, on average, agree that businesses are too occupied with 'identity politics' and don't feel more valued by politically-active businesses.

Perceptions of corporate activism

Average position ● Leave-voters ● Left -wingers ● Remain-voters ● Right-wingers



PERCEIVED MEDIA BIAS

CRISIS OF AUTHORITY

PERCEIVED MEDIA BIAS
PERCEPTIONS OF
JOURNALISTIC BIAS

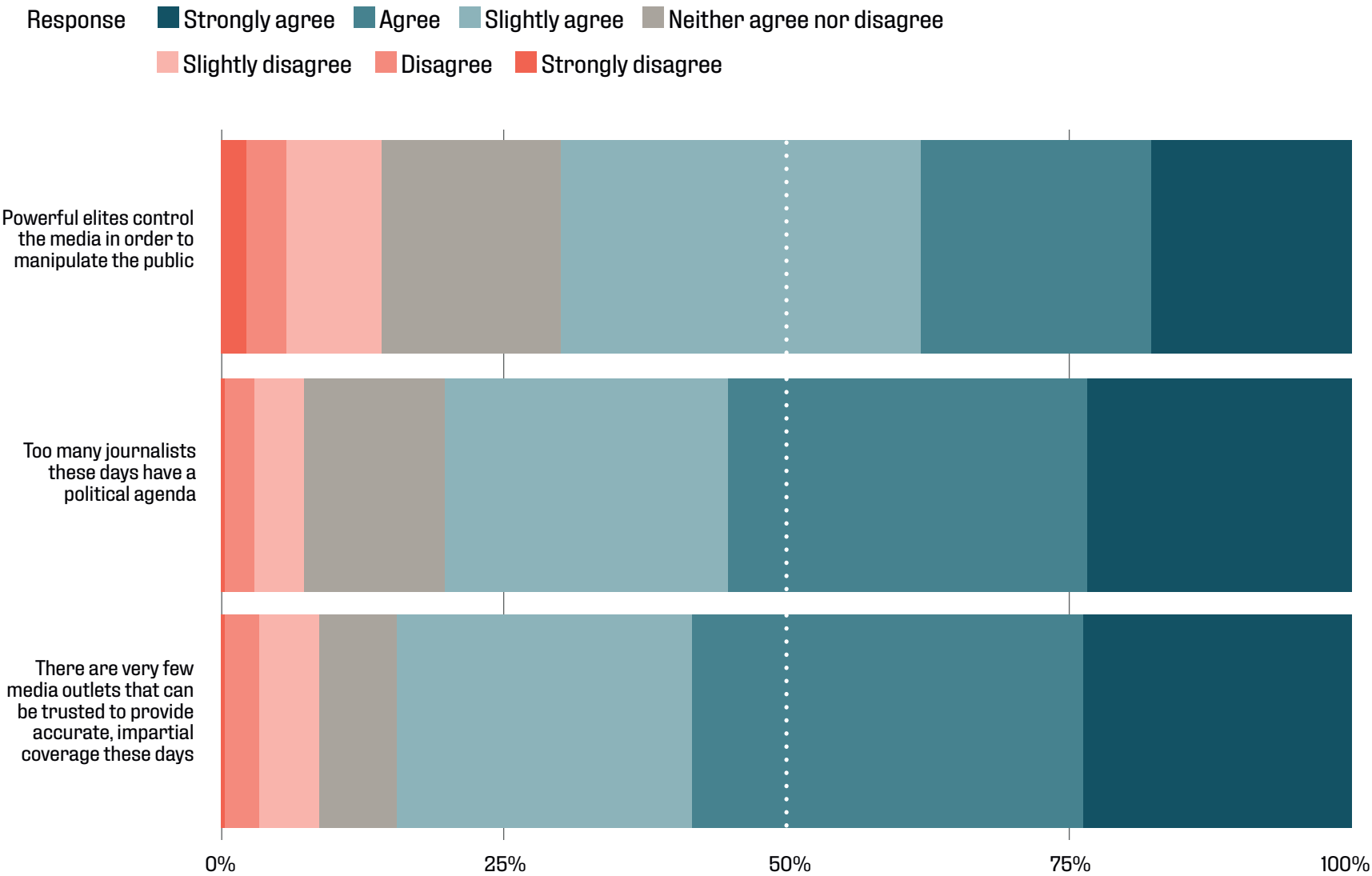
Concerns about bias in the media, or at least, people’s perceptions of bias in the media, are fairly widespread currently. They have motivated the launching of new TV channels, like GB News, and the government promising to shake up regulation of the BBC.

Do citizens share this concern? It would seem so.

A very large majority, of over 80%, agree that very few media outlets provide accurate, impartial coverage nowadays, and only slightly fewer believe that too many journalists have a political agenda.

This issue is linked to perceptions of elite control too – a large majority think elites control the media to manipulate the public

Perceptions of journalistic bias



PERCEIVED MEDIA BIAS
POLARISATION OVER
JOURNALISTIC BIAS

Pretty much everybody gets exercised about perceived media bias – GB News enthusiasts argue that mainstream television news has a progressive bias, but with newspapers, the concern among liberals is that too many are conservative in outlook.

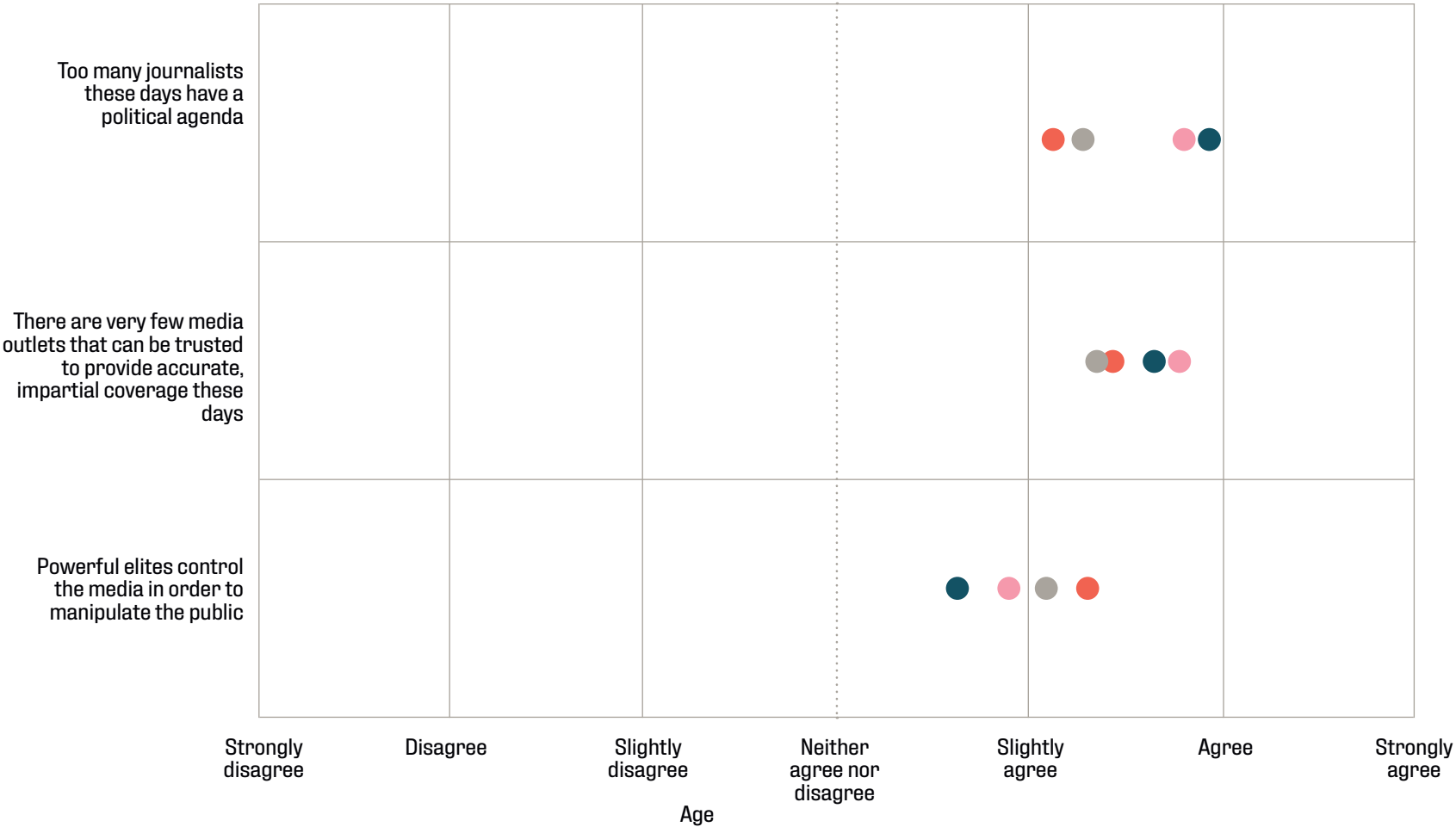
Unsurprisingly then, perceived journalistic bias is hardly polarised. All groups agree that media bias is a problem.

Right-wingers and Leavers are slightly more concerned about a lack of impartial journalism, but left-wingers and Remainers share the same fear.

Remainers and left-wingers are slightly more concerned about elite manipulation in the media, but Right-wingers and Leavers are worried too.

Perceptions of journalistic bias

Average position ● Leave-voters ● Left -wingers ● Remain-voters ● Right-wingers



DEMOGRAPHIC SPLITS

GENDER, EDUCATION AND AGE GAPS

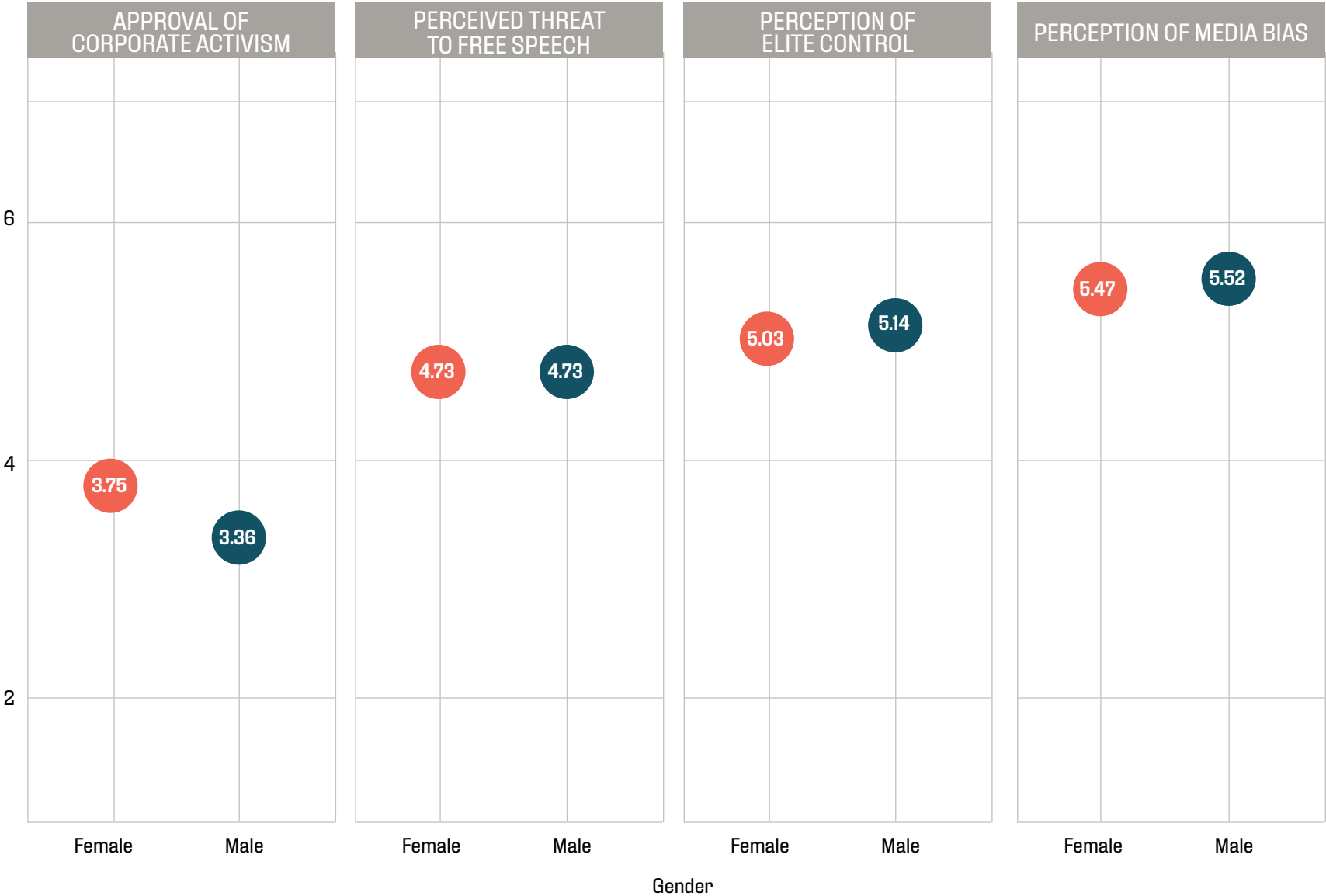
DEMOGRAPHIC SPLITS
GENDER POLARISATION OVER
CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY
MEN MORE ALIENATED

Alongside our scales for the perception of elite control over society and perceived threat to free speech, we averaged people’s responses to the questions about their approval of corporate activism⁵ and their perception of bias in the media⁶.

We then split our sample along different demographic lines to compare the differences, starting with men and women (although we did collect data from people with other gender identities, this group was too small to give us a reliable average).

Men are slightly more disillusioned with contemporary society on these scales than women are – but not by much. They are less approving of corporate activism, perceive greater bias in the media and are more wary of the influence of elites.

But women’s responses are qualitatively similar in every case.



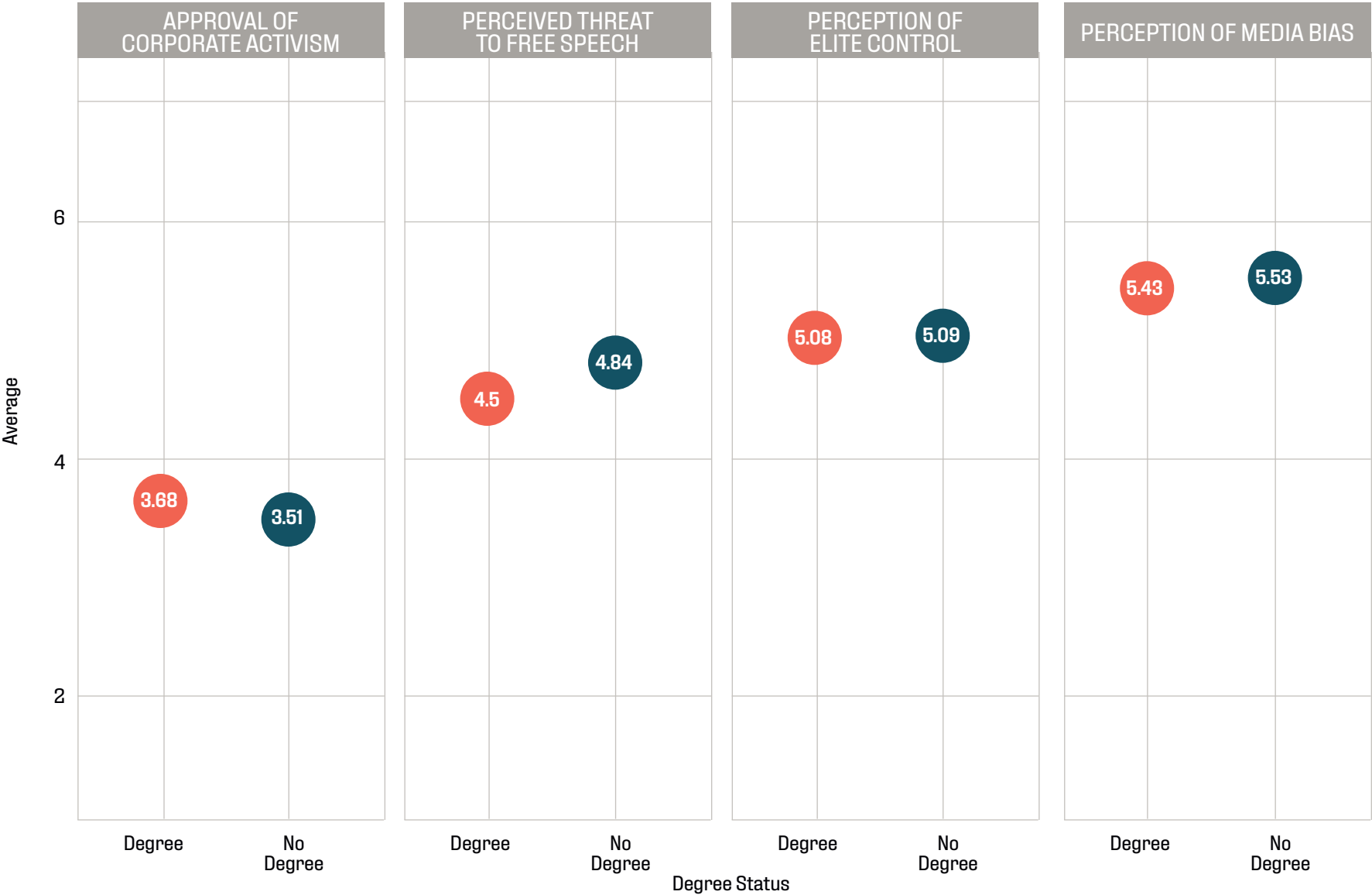
DEMOGRAPHIC SPLITS

EDUCATIONAL POLARISATION OVER CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

We also split the sample by whether people held a degree or not.

Evidently, people without degrees are slightly more disillusioned with contemporary society, but not by much, and their responses are qualitatively similar to those with degrees.

Those with degrees are more sceptical of free speech being under threat, more approving of corporate activism, and less suspicious of bias in the media.



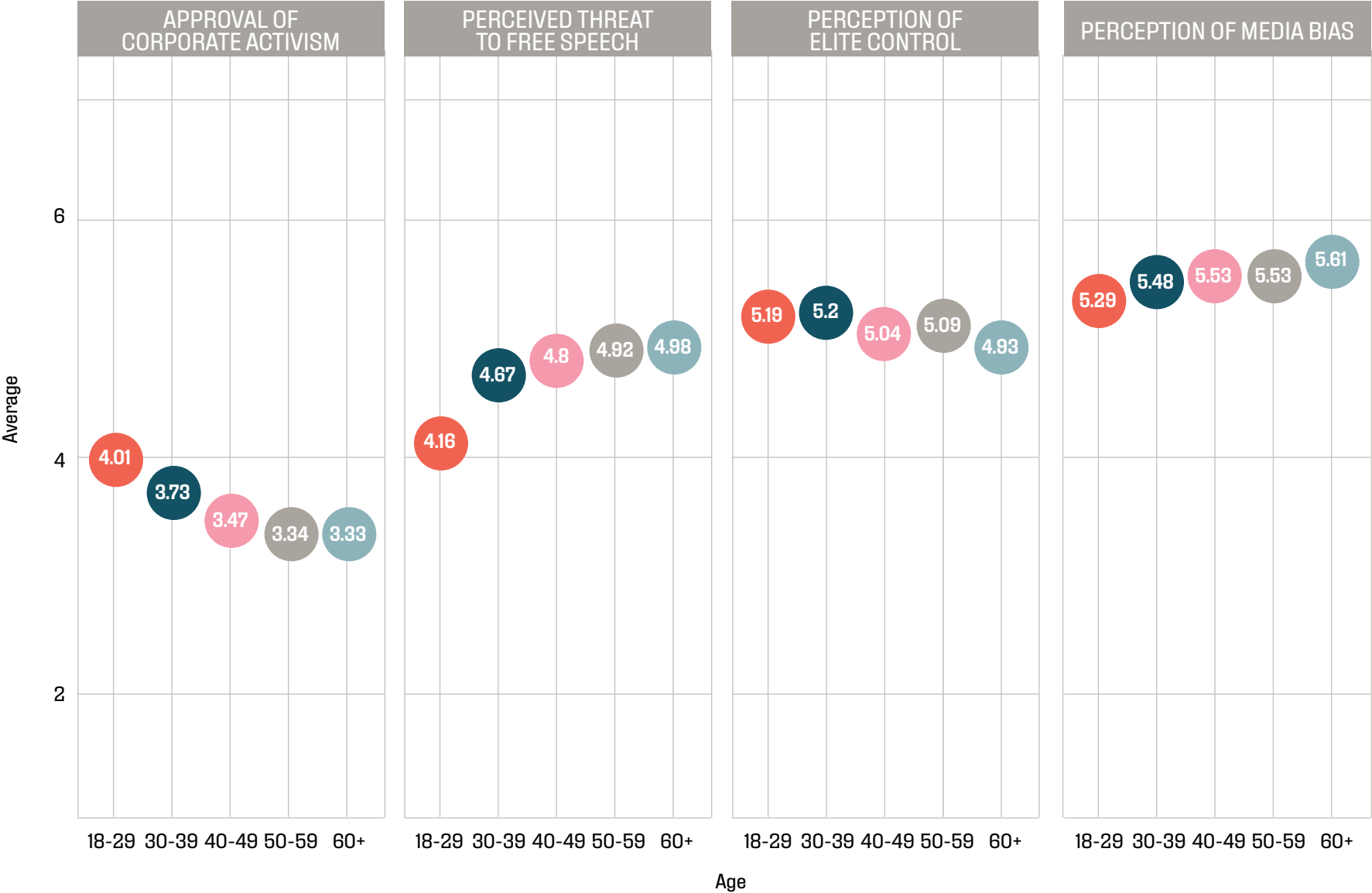
DEMOGRAPHIC SPLITS AGE POLARISATION OVER CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Finally we split our sample by age to look at the same trends, classifying people into five age groups.

Young people are more at ease with contemporary society in general – they are less concerned about media bias, see less of a threat to free speech, and are more approving of corporate activism.

This is perhaps unsurprising since much of the societal changes that may have stirred up suspicions regarding these topics have been pushed by the young progressives.

However, though the trend is rather weak, younger people are more suspicious about elites controlling society, perhaps because their experiences of struggling to buy homes has shaken their faith in Britain’s claims of meritocracy.



PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL BIAS

CONCERNS ABOUT ELITE CONTROL

PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL BIAS

ELITE INSTITUTIONAL BIAS

Populists allege that many national institutions have been captured by the elite. Does the general public still have faith in the neutrality of our institutions?

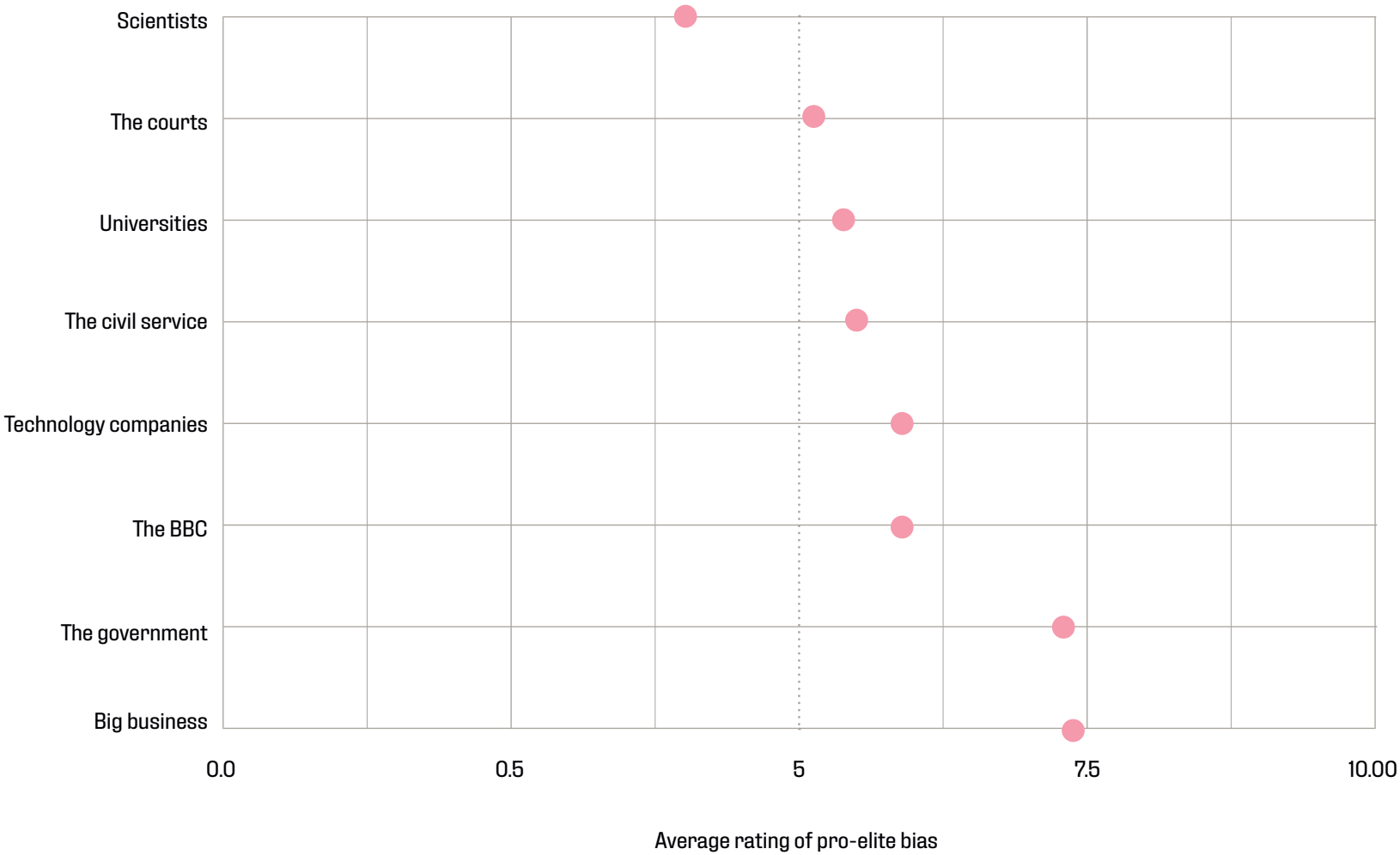
We asked people to rate numerous institutions in terms of whether they “pursue what is in the best interests of the people, or what is best for the elite”, from 0-10.

The most elite-biased institutions were thought to be ‘Big Business’ and the government.

Scientists were thought to act more in the best interests of the people than the elite.

But all other institutions, including the courts (just), universities, and the BBC, were thought to have a pro-elite bias.

Perceptions of pro-elite bias



PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL BIAS ELITE INSTITUTIONAL BIAS AND BREXIT

Of course, no allegation of institutional bias has been more consequential in recent years than suspicion of the EU.

So after Brexit, which other institutions do Brexiteers have in their sights?

The pattern is polarised, with different institutions earning the trust of different groups. Culture war bêtes noires like universities, the BBC, and the civil service were deemed more-biased by Brexiteers, with the government and big business earning more suspicion from Brexit sceptics.

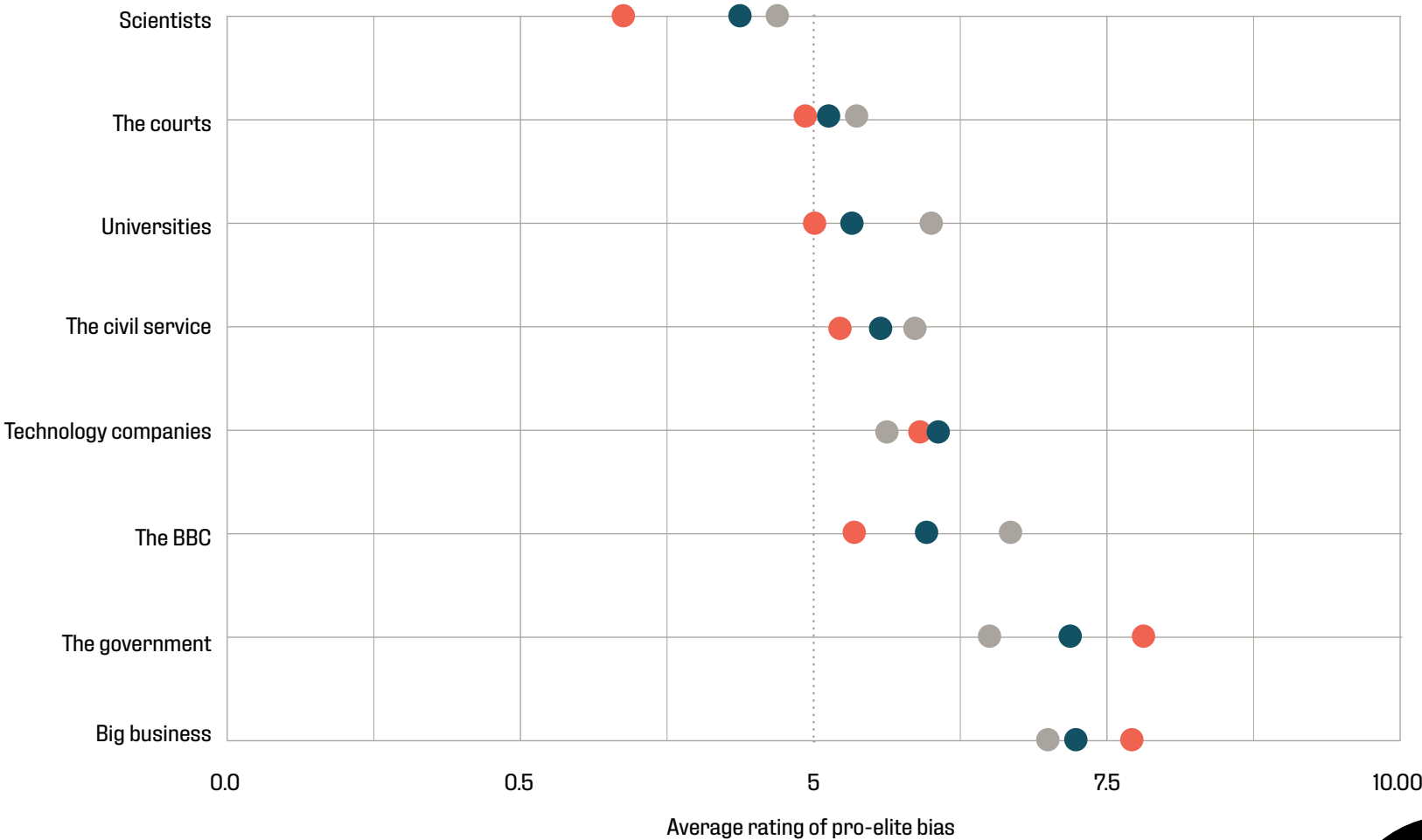
There were also regularities – all groups trusted scientists to be impartial, but were suspicious of tech companies, the BBC, the government, and Big Business.

So rather than being the antidote to Brexiteers’ suspicions of elite bias, the government are firmly in the firing line, despite being their ideological bedfellows.

Brexiteers thought the government was more biased than all but two of the other institutions, including universities and the civil service, and only slightly less so than the BBC.

Perceptions of pro-elite bias by belief that Brexit was the right decision

Brexit Attitude ● Anti ● Pro ● Unsure



Methodological Note

We grouped people who said “Strongly agree” or “Agree” to the question of whether Brexit was the right decision into a ‘Pro’ group, and those who selected “Strongly disagree” or “Disagree” into an ‘Anti’ group. Everyone else, who was either neutral or agreed/disagreed only “Slightly”, was labelled ‘Unsure’.



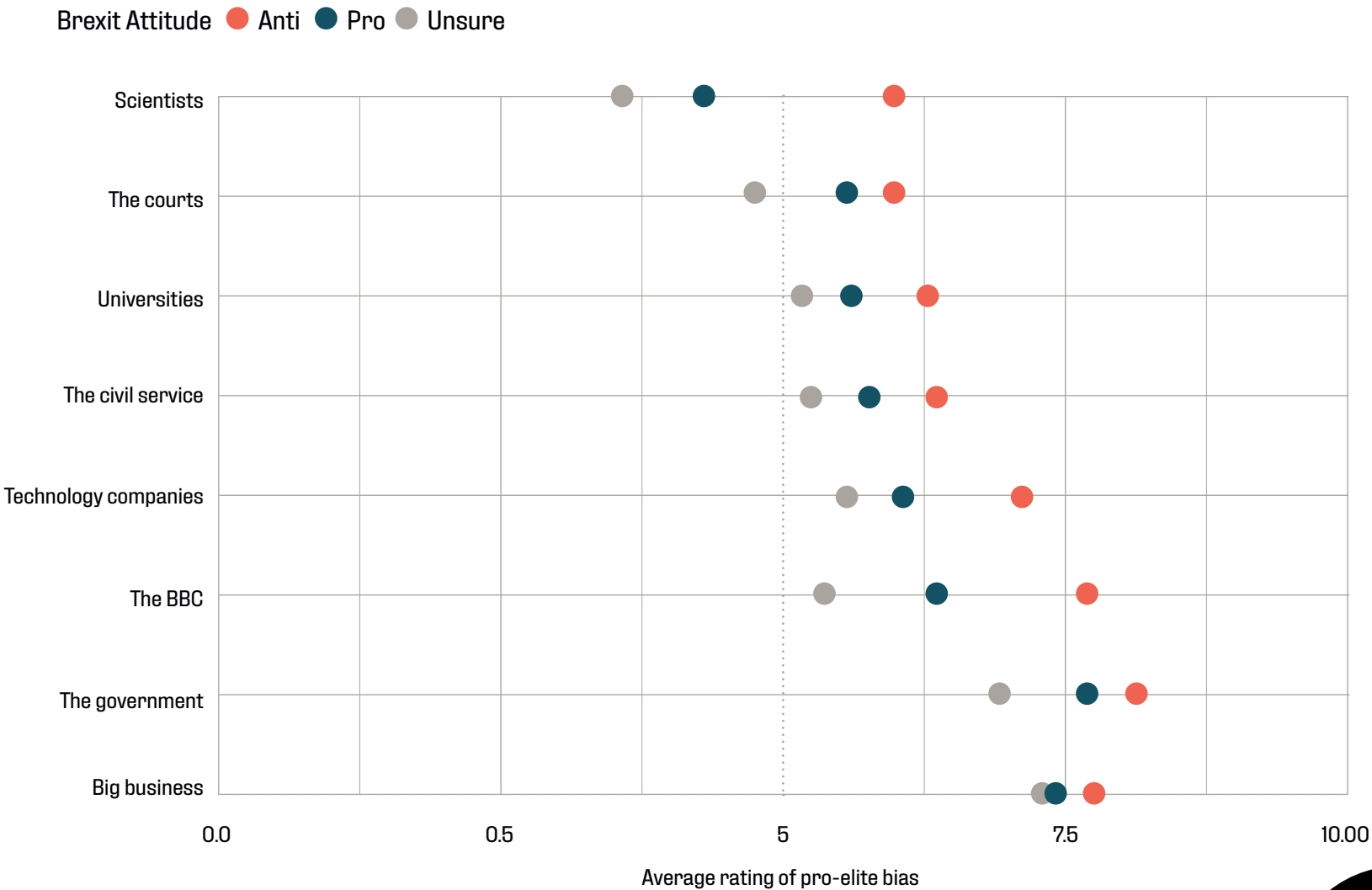
PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL BIAS ELITE INSTITUTIONAL BIAS AND VACCINATION

One group who have gained notoriety for their distrust in national institutions are vaccine sceptics. In this wave we asked people the extent to which they agreed with the statement “I have every faith that the Vaccine rollout was done for the benefit of the country” to identify vaccine sceptics.

Clearly, vaccine sceptics are distrusting of all national institutions, believing them beholden to elite interests. Their level of distrust in the government, big business, the courts, and universities is in fact equivalent to that of Brexit sceptics.

What marks them out is their level of suspicion for the institutions they deem complicit in nefarious vaccine-pushing – they distrust the BBC, tech companies, and scientists substantially, and much more than the pro-Brexit and anti-Brexit groups.

Perceptions of pro-elite bias by trust in vaccine rollout



Methodological Note

We grouped people who said “Strongly agree” or “Agree” to the question “I have every faith that the Vaccine rollout was done for the benefit of the country” into a ‘Trusting’ group, and those who selected “Strongly disagree” or “Disagree” into an ‘Distrusting’ group. Everyone else, who was either neutral or agreed/disagreed only “Slightly”, was labelled ‘Unsure’.



VACCINE SCEPTICISM

CORRELATION WITH OTHER BELIEFS

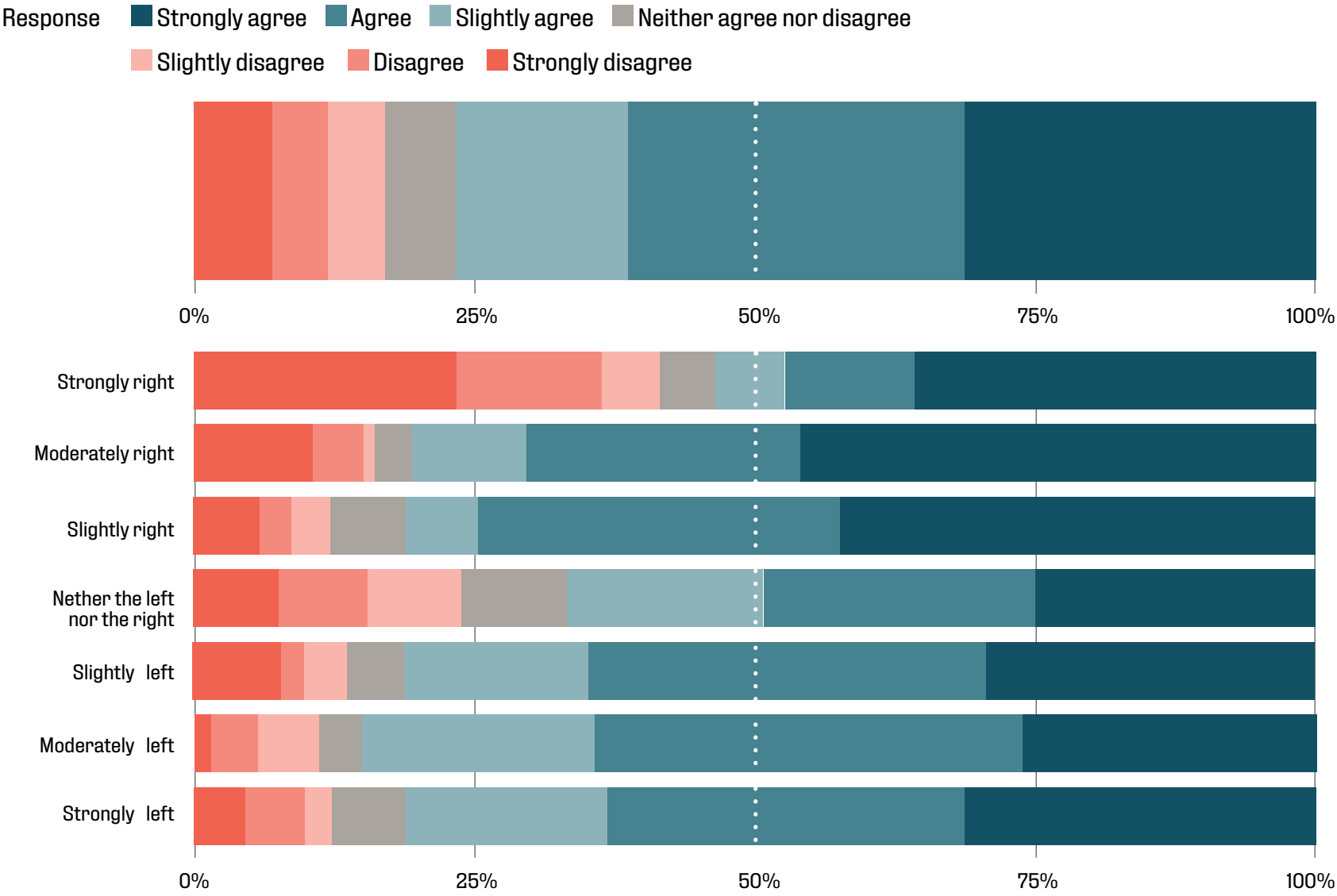
VACCINE SCEPTICISM

A vocal minority of Britons are sceptical about the efficacy of vaccines, and the reality of the pandemic in general.

Clearly, some believe the drive to get Britain vaccinated was a nefarious conspiracy, but they are a minority – fewer than 20% disagreed that the vaccine rollout was done for the benefit of the country.

Looking at how sceptics are spread across the ideological spectrum reveals an interesting pattern. There are low levels of scepticism across the spectrum, but it is most prominent among people who identify as “Strongly right”. However the second-most sceptical group are people who identify as “Neither the left nor the right”, suggesting scepticism may attract people who feel disaffected from our major parties.

“I have every faith that the vaccine rollout was done for the benefit of the country”



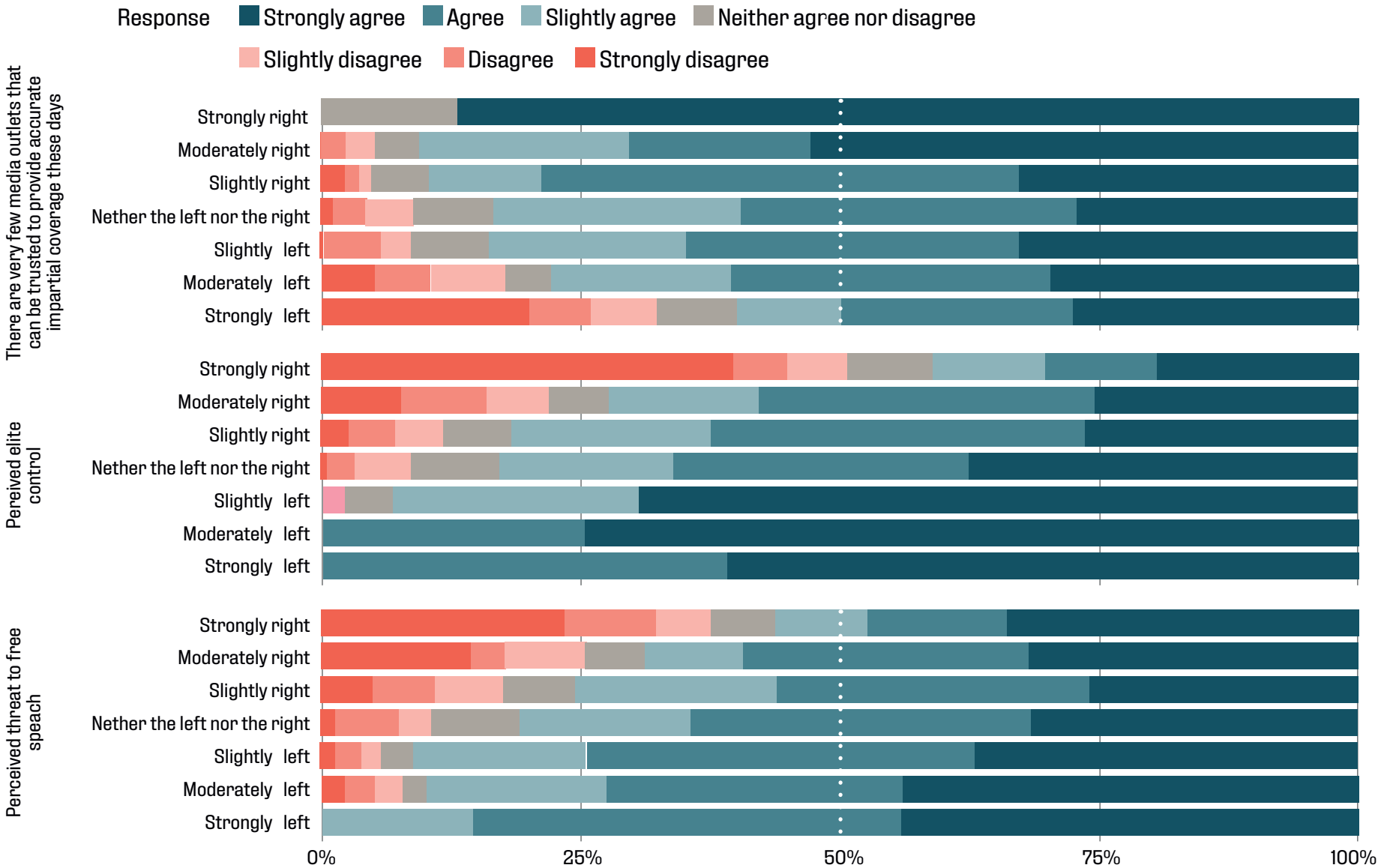
VACCINE SCEPTICISM AND OTHER BELIEFS

Looking at how vaccine scepticism relates to other beliefs, it is clearly correlated with the belief that few media outlets today provide impartial coverage (upper right) and that free speech is under threat (bottom right).

The strongest relationship however is with the perception that elites control society – where in fact a majority of those who score the highest on this measure are sceptical of the rollout (middle right).

A general sense of a society stifled by the elite is associated with vaccine scepticism – though the direction of causality is unclear. Does scepticism of vaccines act as a gateway to wider distrust, or vice versa?

“I have every faith that the vaccine rollout was done for the benefit of the country”



RUSSIA



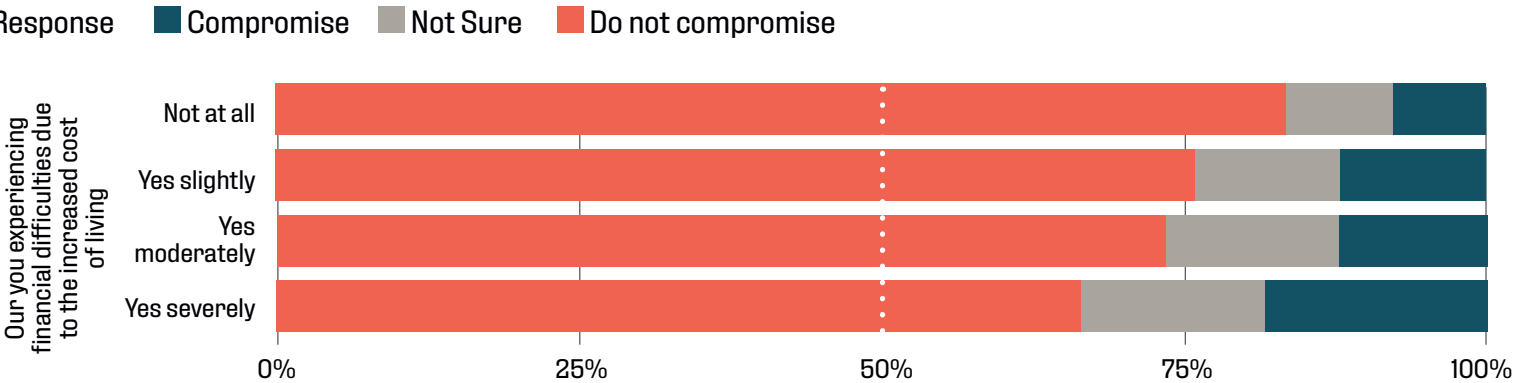
RUSSIA SHOULD WE COMPROMISE WITH RUSSIA?

We told people that one reason fuel costs have become more expensive is the war in Russia. Does that mean we should compromise with Russia?

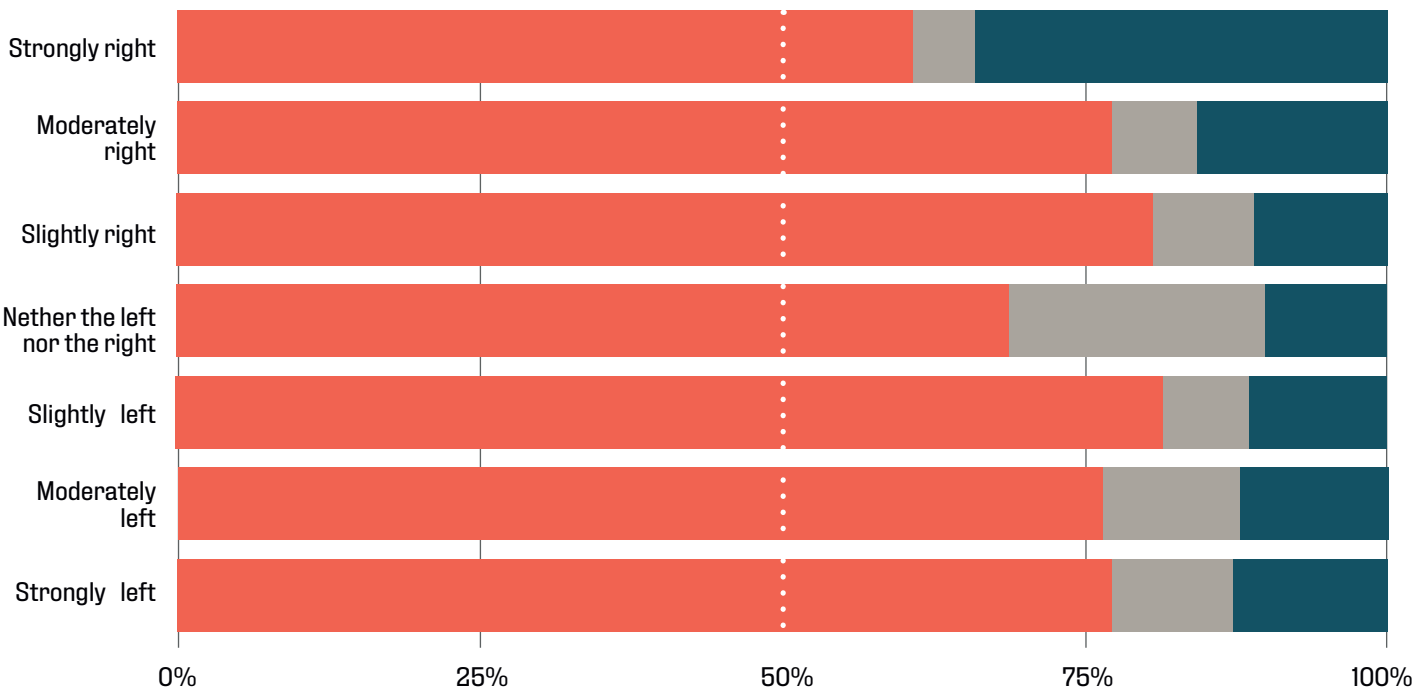
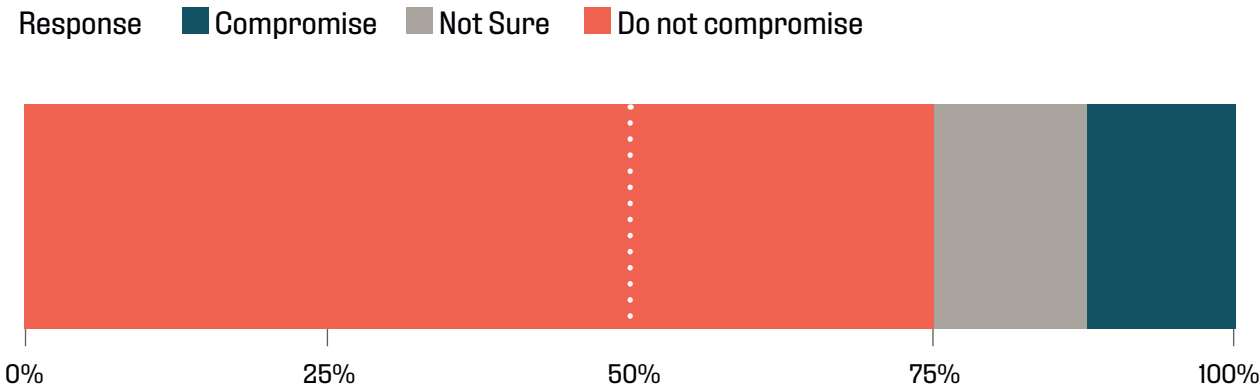
A large majority think not (upper right), but support is higher among those who are struggling more to pay their bills currently (bottom left).

Support for compromising with Russia is strongest among people who identify as “Strongly right” (bottom right).

Should we compromise with Russia in Ukraine?



Should we compromise with Russia to reduce fuel costs?



RUSSIA
“SHOULD WE COMPROMISE WITH
RUSSIA?” CORRELATION WITH
CONCERN ABOUT ELITE CONTROL

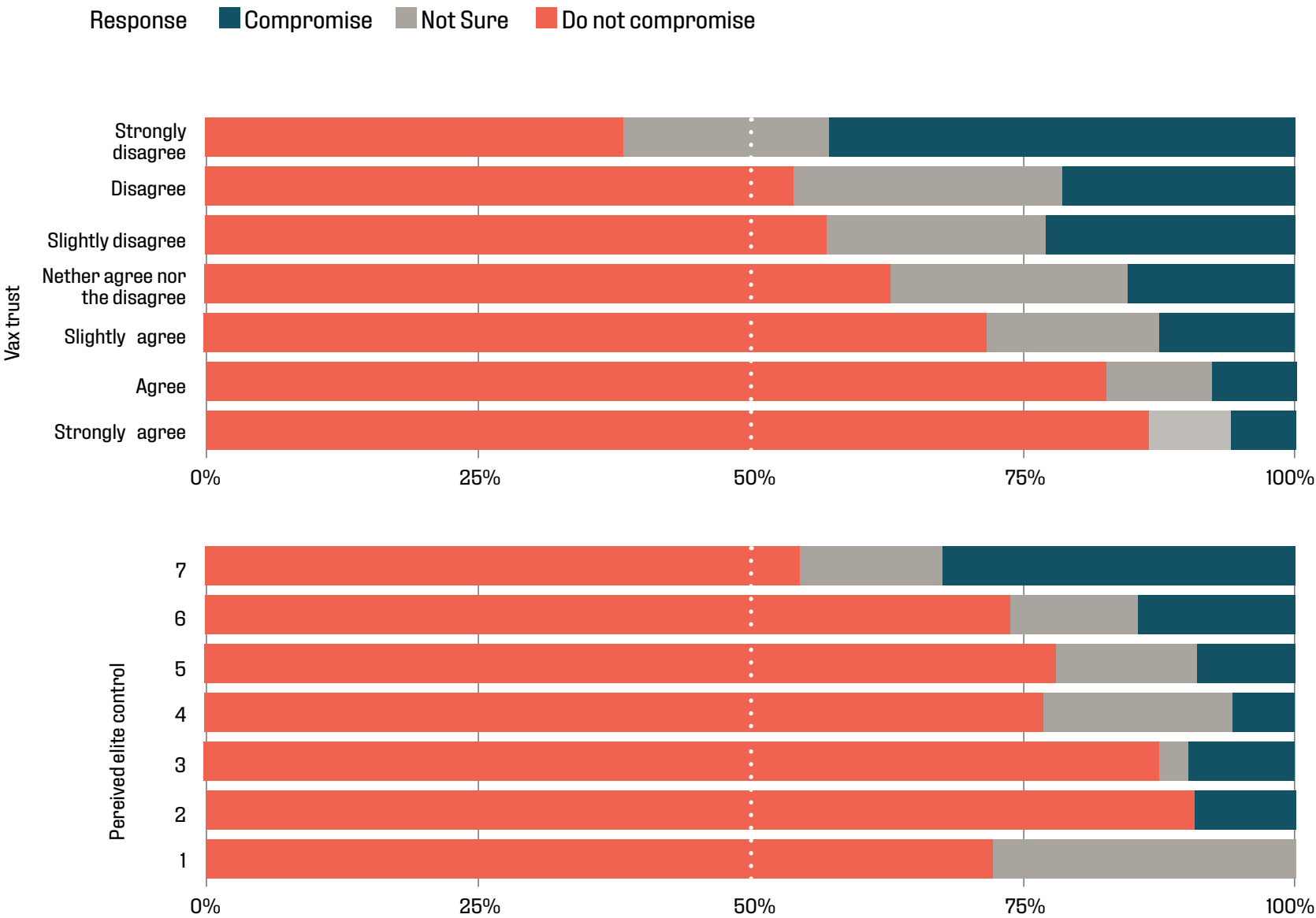
Compromising with Russia is more popular among people who have a conspiratorial view of British society.

Those who are most sceptical of the vaccine rollout are the most likely to advocate compromising (upper right).

Those who perceive elites to control society are also more inclined to advocate compromise (lower right).

These associations could arise for a few reasons. It could be that people who are sceptical of vaccines, elite control, and support compromise all tend to share the same underlying characteristics, like being right-wing or having authoritarian views. It could also reflect a belief in the narrative that UK society has become waylaid by malign influences, who misguidedly advocate for vaccines and conflict with Russia.

Should we compromise with russia to reduce fuel costs?



THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

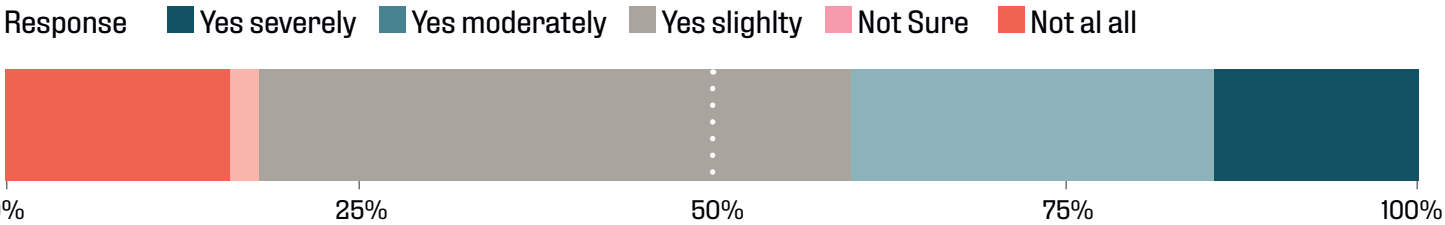
WHO IS TO BLAME

THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

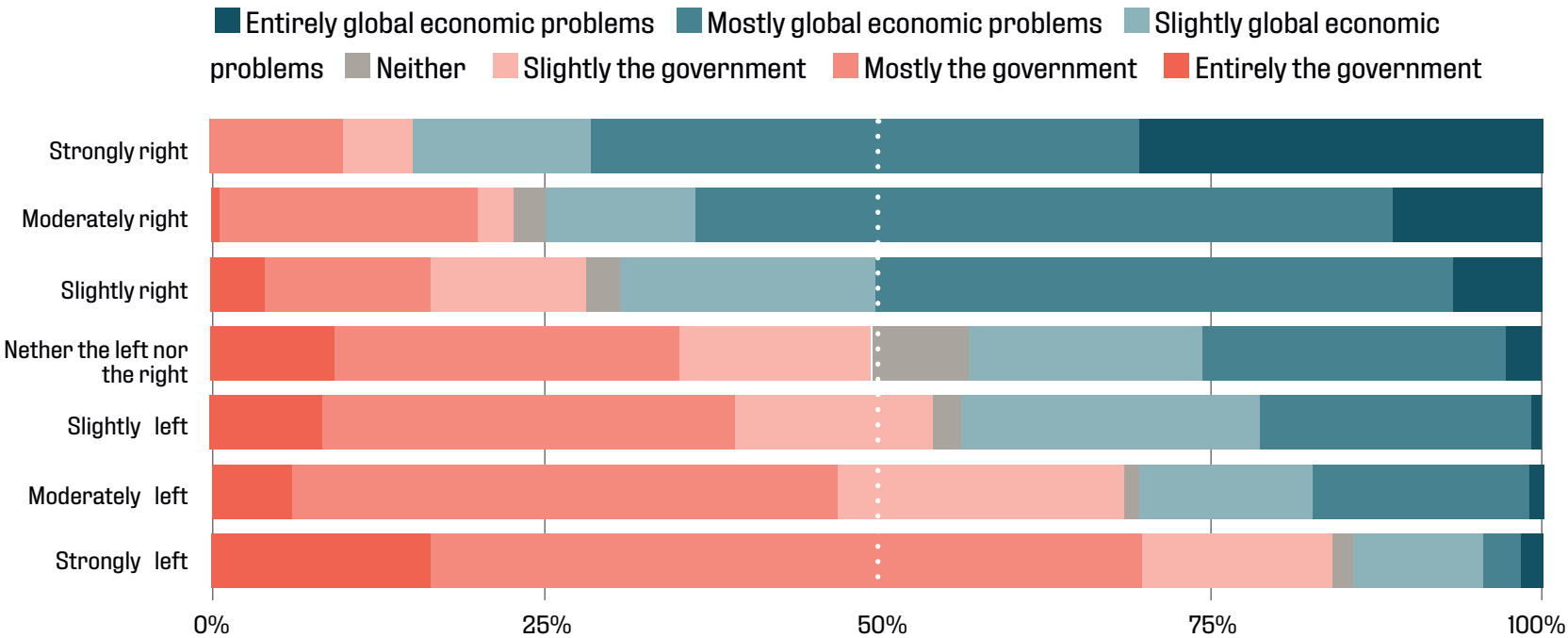
How polarised is the cost of living crisis? In this wave, we found that a majority of people are suffering some kind of financial difficulty due to the increased cost of living, but thankfully most of these are only slight.

In terms of who is to blame for the cost of living crisis, there is a clear polarised response – people on the right are more likely to attribute it to global economic problems, whereas people on the left are more likely to blame it on the government.

Are you experiencing financial difficulties due to the increased cost of living?



Who or what is responsible for the UK's 'cost of living crisis' - the government, or global economic problems?



BORIS JOHNSON

PLOT OR NOT?

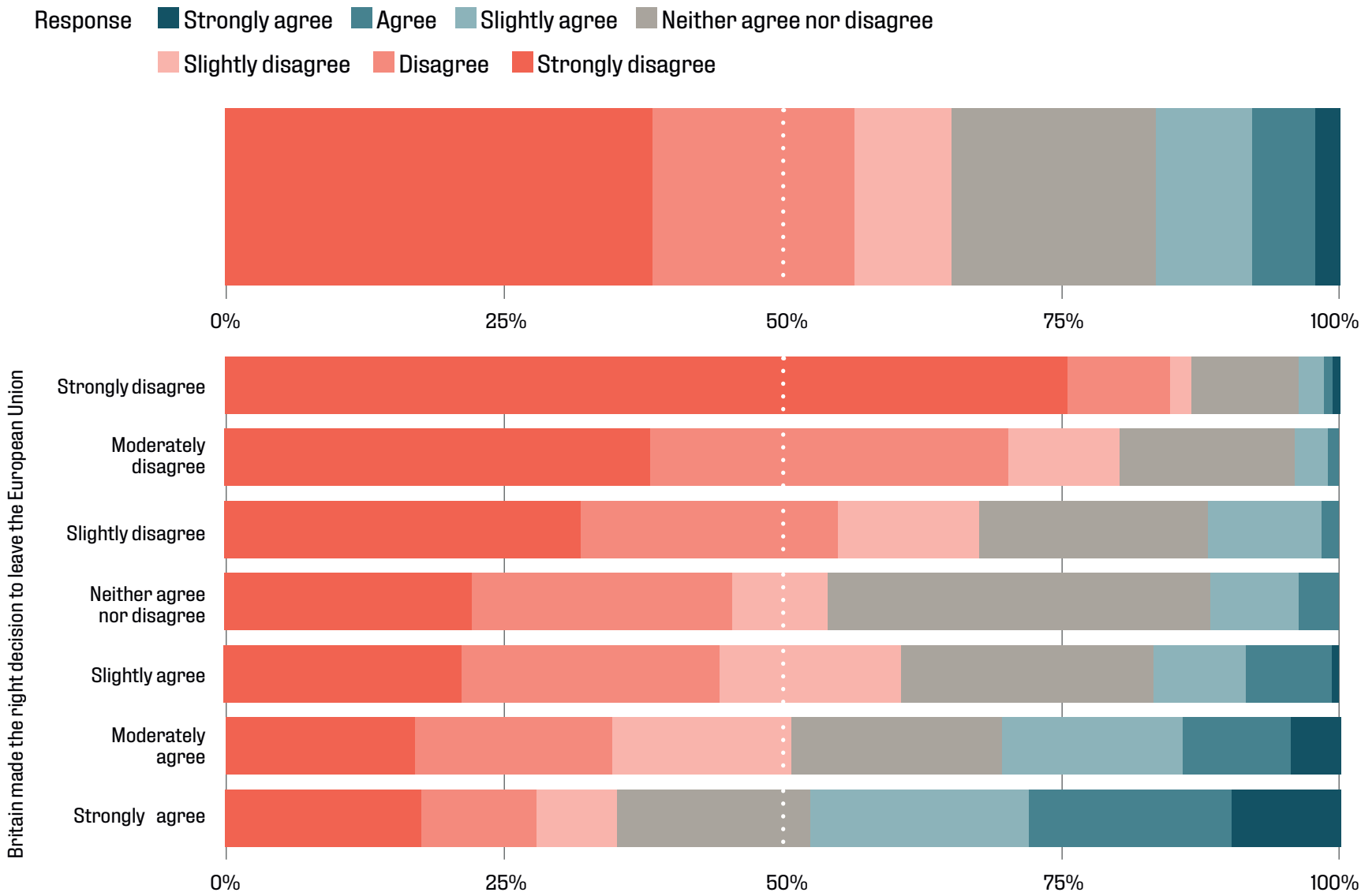
BORIS JOHNSON
WAS BORIS THE VICTIM OF A
REMAINDER CONSPIRACY?

Was Boris’s resignation just another example of the woke mob and bureaucratic ‘blob’ in action, pulling the strings to defenestrate him as a revenge for Brexit? By and large the public do not seem to buy it.

A majority disagree that Boris was the victim of a Remainer conspiracy, and in fact a plurality “Strongly disagree”.

Even among Brexiteers, this line is not particularly successful. It attracts more support among people who believe that leaving the EU was the right decision, but even among those who “Strongly agree”, those who think Boris was the victim of a Remainer conspiracy still fall short of a majority.

“Boris was the victim of a Remainer conspiracy”





ABORTION

NO US CONTAGION EFFECT

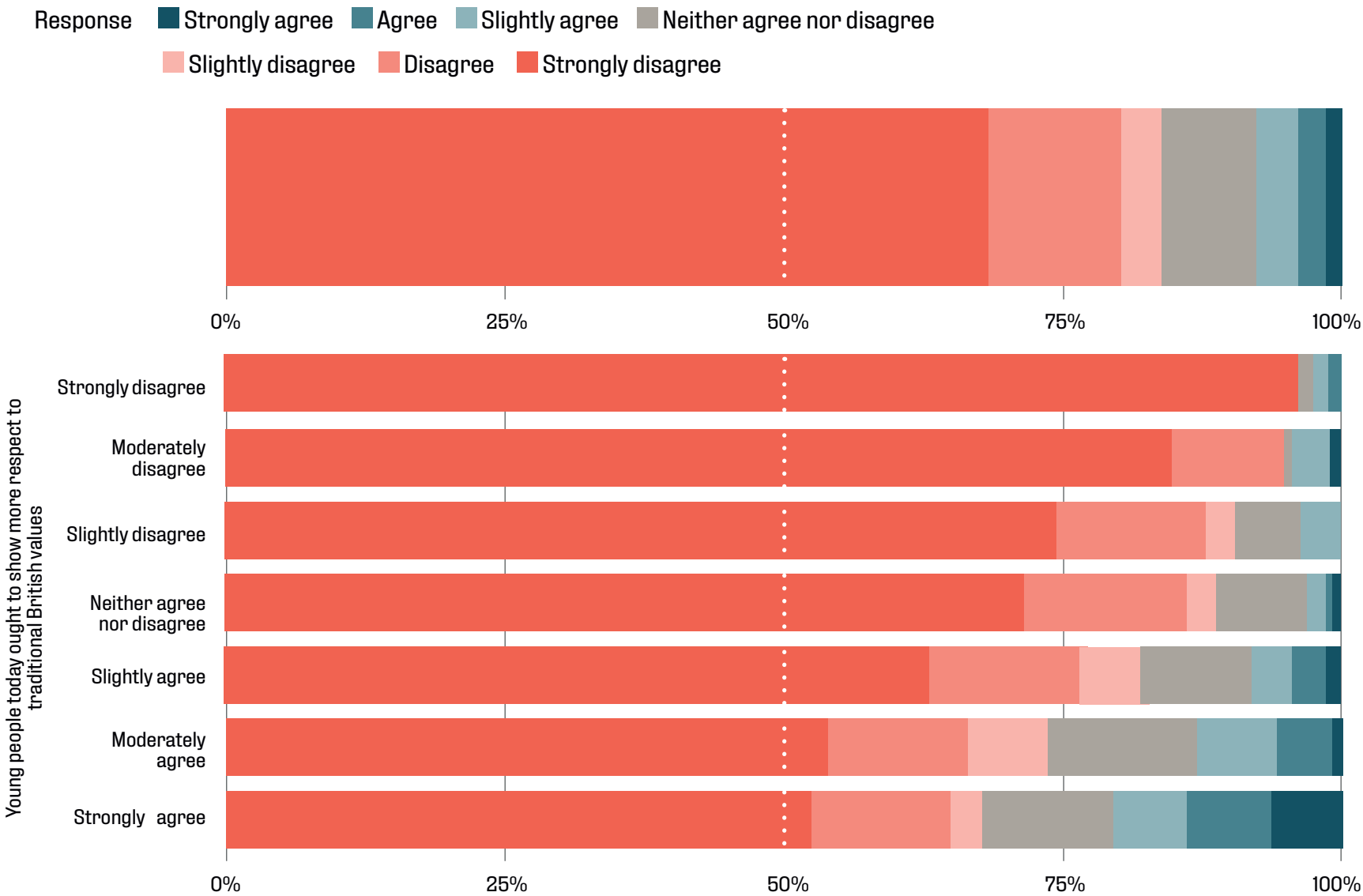
ABORTION WILL ABORTION BECOME A CULTURE WAR ISSUE?

With the United States Supreme Court’s decision in Dobbs, abortion law has become a “State’s rights” issue once again, and headline news across the world.

So might we see pushback against abortion rights in the UK next? Almost certainly not – a large majority of citizens not only disagree with the idea that access to abortion should be more restricted in the UK, but “Strongly disagree”.

Looking at how support for restricting abortion access correlates with authoritarianism, support is higher among those who are more authoritarian. But even among those who are the most authoritarian, a large majority disagree.

Now that the abortion law in the US has changed, it is time we considered whether access to abortion should be more restricted in the UK



BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS OF ISRAELI GOODS

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CAMPAIGN

BDS
BOYCOTTING ISRAELI GOODS

The anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, or BDS, is well-known on the left, but does it have any national prominence?

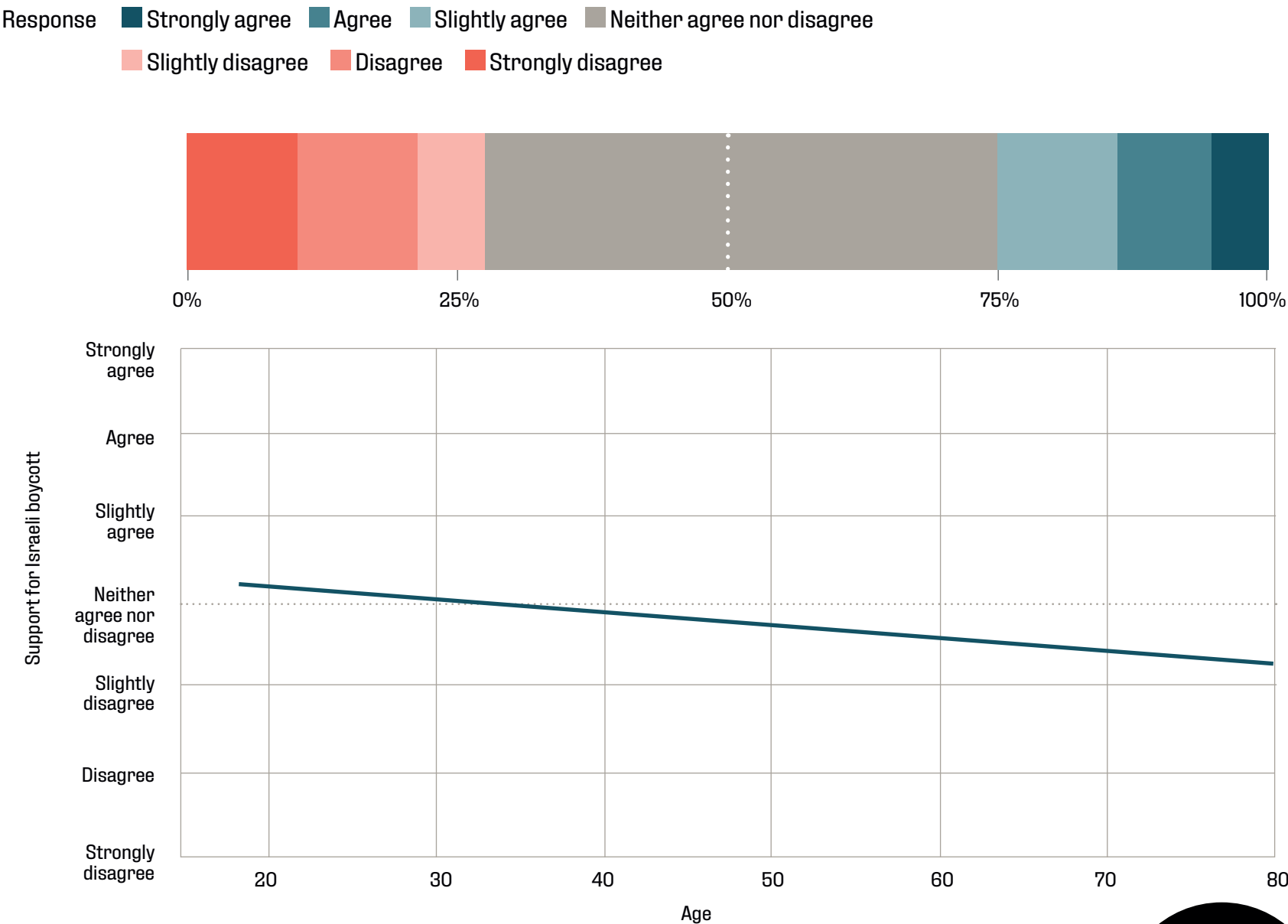
In general, the public don't have strong views on boycotting Israeli goods, with just under 50% saying they neither agree nor disagree.

This is surprising, since we normally don't boycott any nation's goods – perhaps this reflects a vague awareness that Israel is thought of as controversial by some people, making the notion of a boycott at least worth considering.

Roughly equal numbers of the remainder agree and disagree with the boycott, with those in disagreement being slightly larger.

The notion of a boycott is less popular among older people, and essentially viewed with equivocation by younger people.

“I support the movement to boycott Israeli goods”



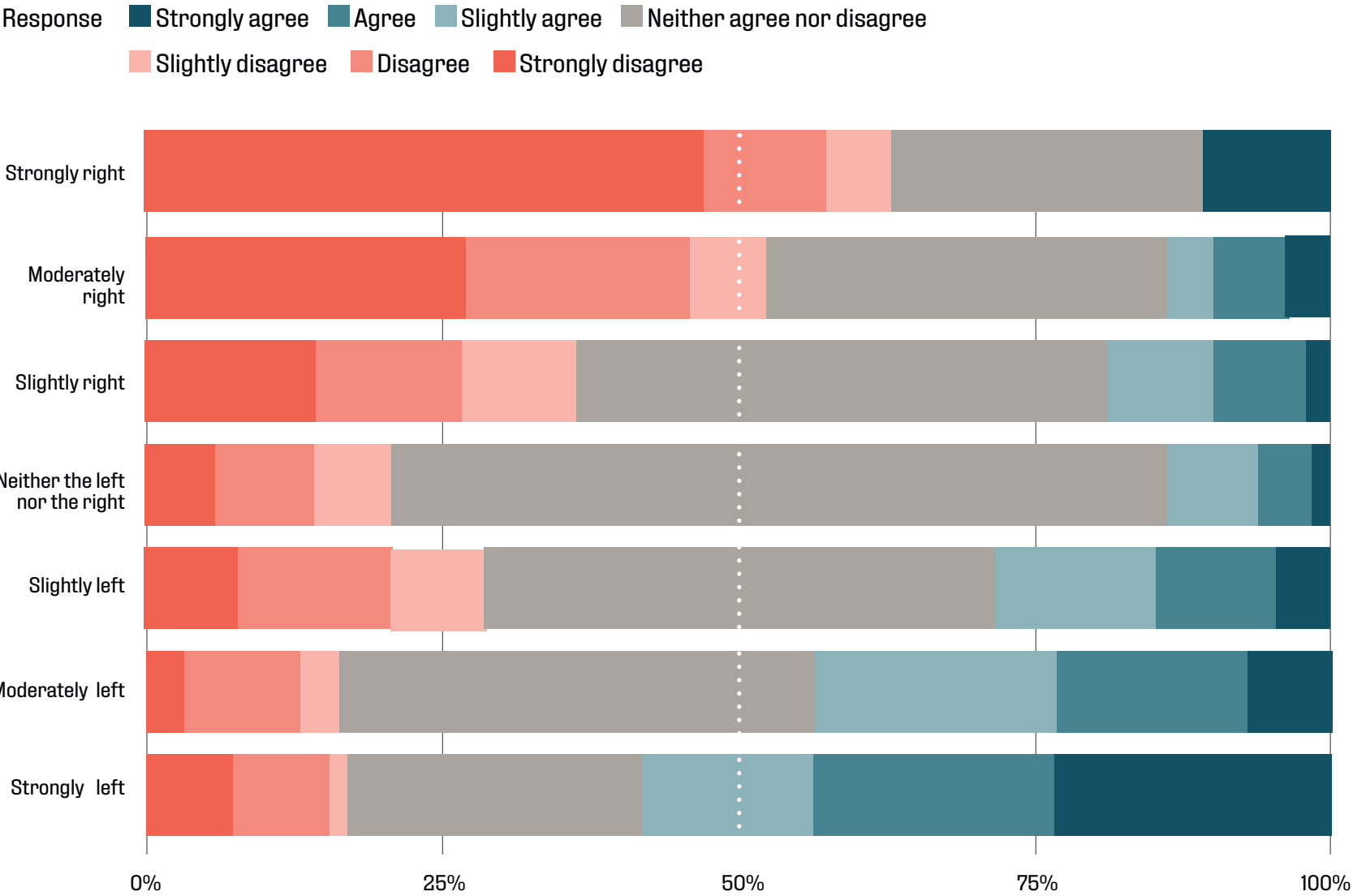
BDS
BOYCOTTING ISRAELI GOODS ON
THE LEFT AND RIGHT

So who does and who doesn't support boycotting Israeli goods?

There is a clear trend as you move from left to right – the movement has more supporters on the left, and more detractors on the right.

However it is also clear that most people are neutral towards the whole idea. Only among people “Strongly” on the left do a majority support the movement, and only among people “Moderately” or “Strongly” on the right do a majority oppose it.

“I support the movement to boycott Israeli goods”



BIAS AND SKEWED PERCEPTIONS IN OTHERS

BIAS AND SKEWED PERCEPTIONS IN OTHERS WHO SEES SOCIAL ISSUES FROM A SKEWED PERSPECTIVE?

One aspect of the 'Culture Wars' that makes them particularly entrenched is the idea that our opponents adopt their positions because they are biased people who see the world from the 'wrong perspective'. They are 'wokesters, doomers, gammons, and boomers', always destined to skew their view of social issues in the same misleading manner.

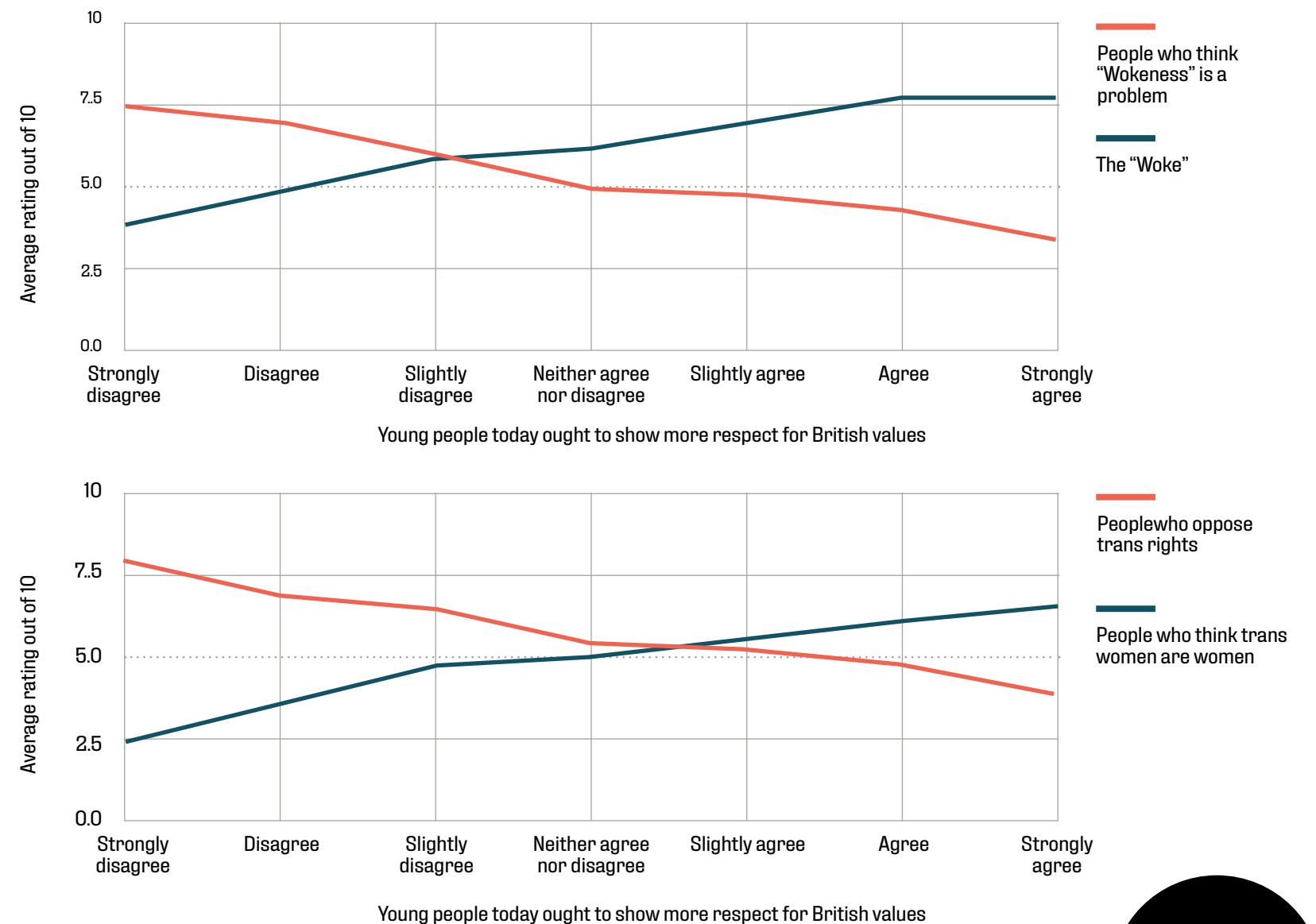
So in this wave we asked participants to rate groups in terms of how much they are "biased towards seeing the world from a skewed perspective".

Perceptions of who is skewed are highly polarised:

- + Among people who have low authoritarianism, and so are permissive and progressive on social issues, they view people who oppose trans rights and those who think "Wokeness" as a problem as the ones who see things incorrectly.
- + Among people who are authoritarian, prizing traditionalism and conformity, it is precisely the opposite way around: the "Woke" and people who think trans women are women are the ones who always see things incorrectly.

"They are biased towards seeing the world from a skewed perspective"

Agreement from 0-10



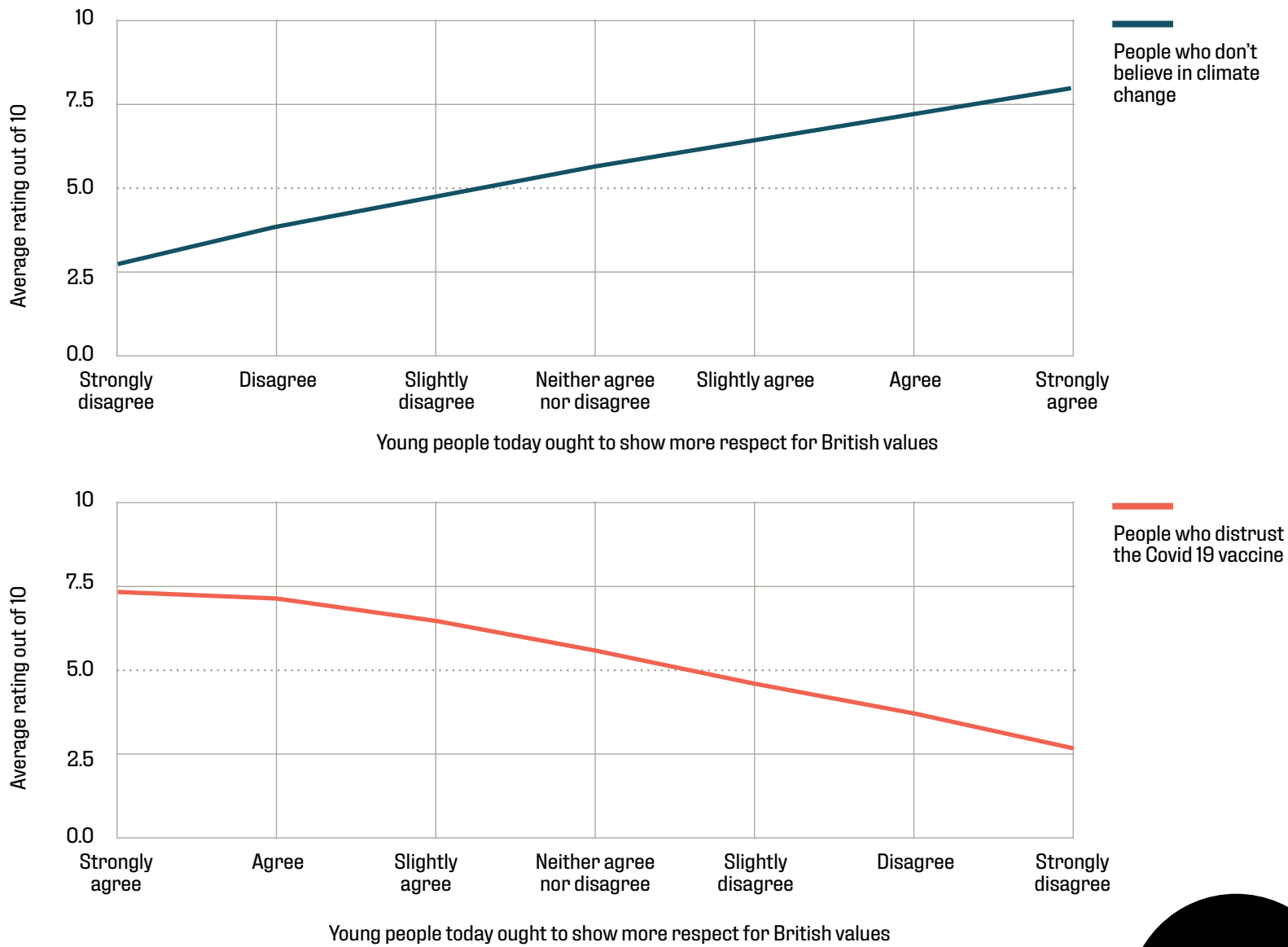
BIAS AND SKEWED PERCEPTIONS IN OTHERS
WHO SEES SOCIAL ISSUES FROM A
SKEWED PERSPECTIVE? (NOT ME)

Believing our critics to be biased essentially inoculates us against their arguments. Sometimes that is a good thing – if they are wrong, dismissing them because they are biased saves us grief.

In this wave, we can see quite clearly that people who are sceptical of climate change and the Covid-19 vaccination rollout have ended up in the situation where they believe it is their critics who are the ones who see things incorrectly. Among those who think the government should be doing more to tackle climate change, it is climate change sceptics who are viewed as skewed, but among climate change skeptics, they believe they see things from the correct perspective.

“They are biased towards seeing the world from a skewed perspective”

Agreement from 0-10



TECHNICAL NOTES

- ¹ These items are usually just one item in a multi-item scale that is used to measure political ideology by averaging people's responses to every item. We have selected the single item from each scale which is most highly-correlated with the overall scores according to longitudinal data collected by the British Election Study (The British Election Study).
- ² The formula is taken from the working paper 'Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization' by Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro (cross-polar.pdf (stanford.edu)).
- ³ This involved reverse-coding the "The only people who get a bad response..." and "All these complaints..." items, then averaging. The alpha reliability coefficient after reverse-coding was 0.78.
- ⁴ All items were kept as-is. The alpha reliability coefficient was 0.84.

The Networked Age Guide to Communicating in a Polarised World can be downloaded at **mhpc.com/networked-age**

To find out more about our Networked Age research programme contact **nick.barron@mhpc.com**

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