

EVIDENCE MATTERS

**Attitudes to evidence among
the UK public and politicians**

December 2019

Ipsos MORI



Key findings



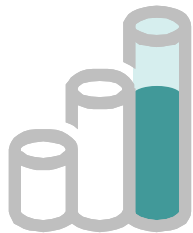
57%

of people say politicians pay too little attention to **the evidence** when making decisions



38%

of MPs rate their fellow politicians as very or fairly good at **interpreting evidence**



62%

of people say politicians pay too little attention to **public opinion** when making decisions



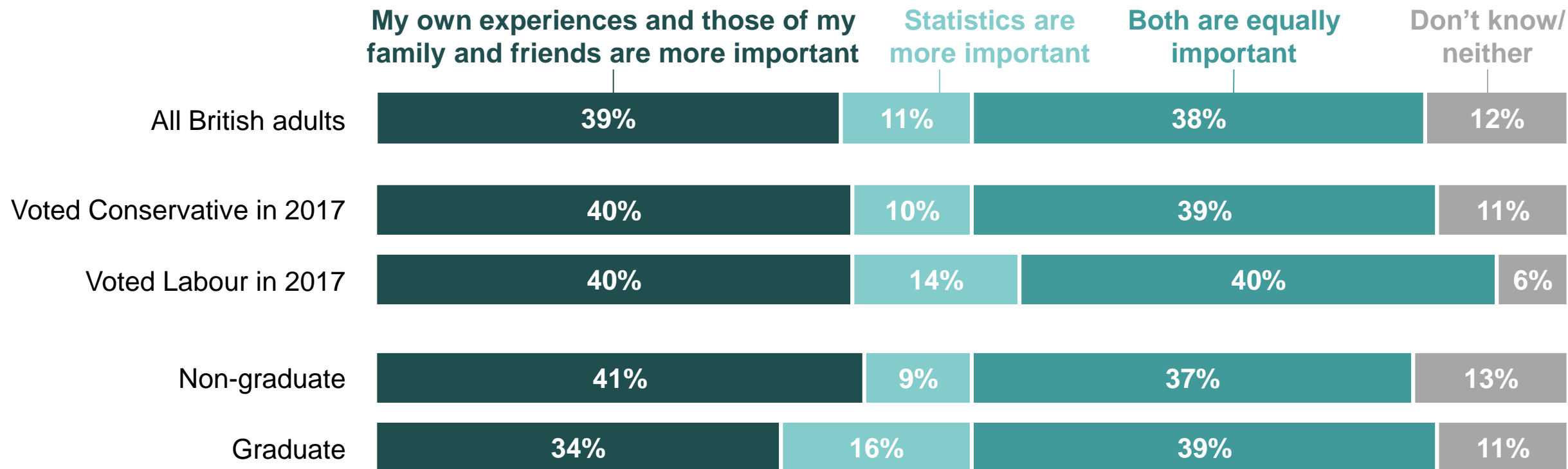
8%/47%

of **people/MPs** say politicians should pay most attention to **their own principles** when deciding what should be done

Bases: 1,140 British adults aged 18+; 86 MPs
Fieldwork dates: 15-18 November 2019 (general public); 3 June-2 August 2019 (MPs)

Across the political spectrum, and regardless of education, people respond more to stories than statistics when assessing Government performance.

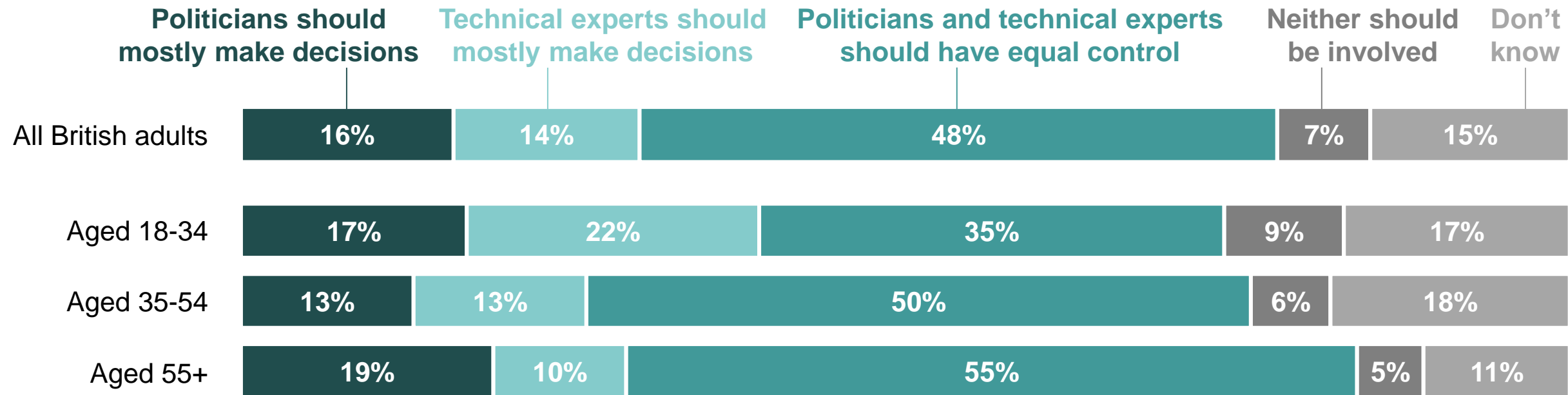
To help me keep track of how the Government is doing ...



Bases: 1,140 British adults aged 18+; 340 who voted Conservative in 2017; 326 who voted Labour in 2017; 579 non-graduates; 561 graduates
Fieldwork dates: 15-18 November 2019

People haven't had enough of experts. They think experts should play an important role alongside politicians in decision-making, though there are age differences.

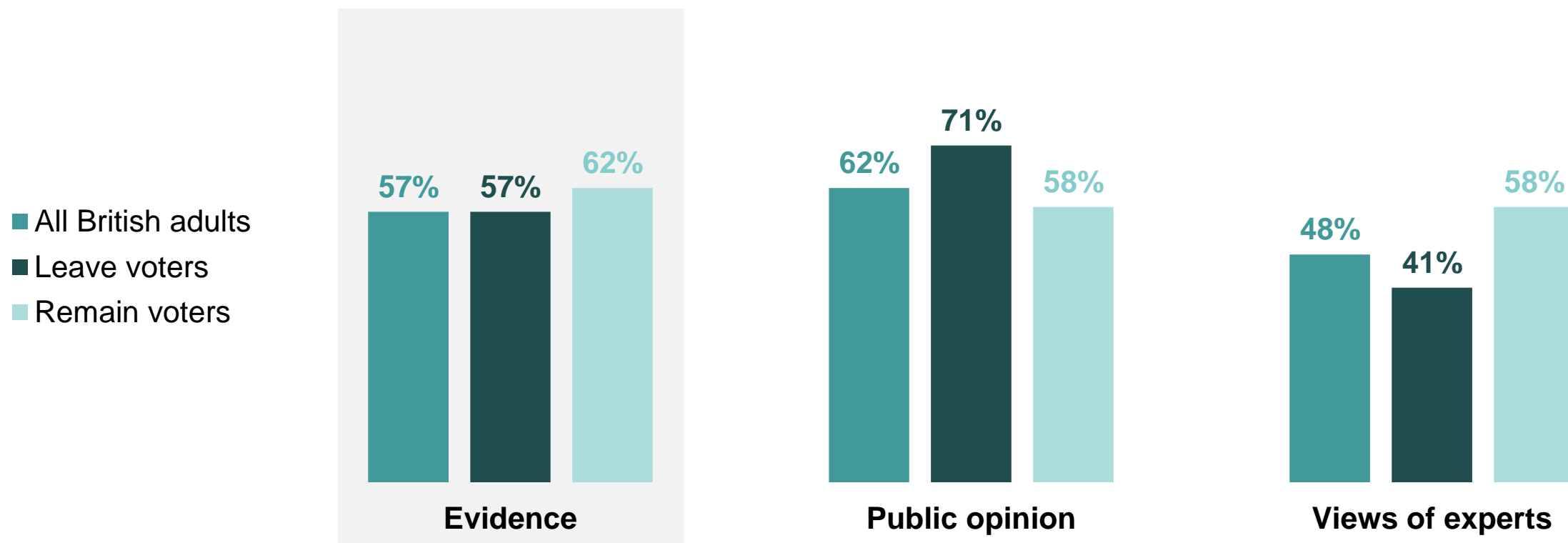
When it comes to making decisions about new Government-led projects ...



Bases: 1,140 British adults aged 18+; 364 aged 18-34; 402 aged 35-54; 374 aged 55+
Fieldwork dates: 15-18 November 2019

Most people think politicians need to pay more attention to evidence. But evidence means different things to different people, with divisions between leave and remain voters.

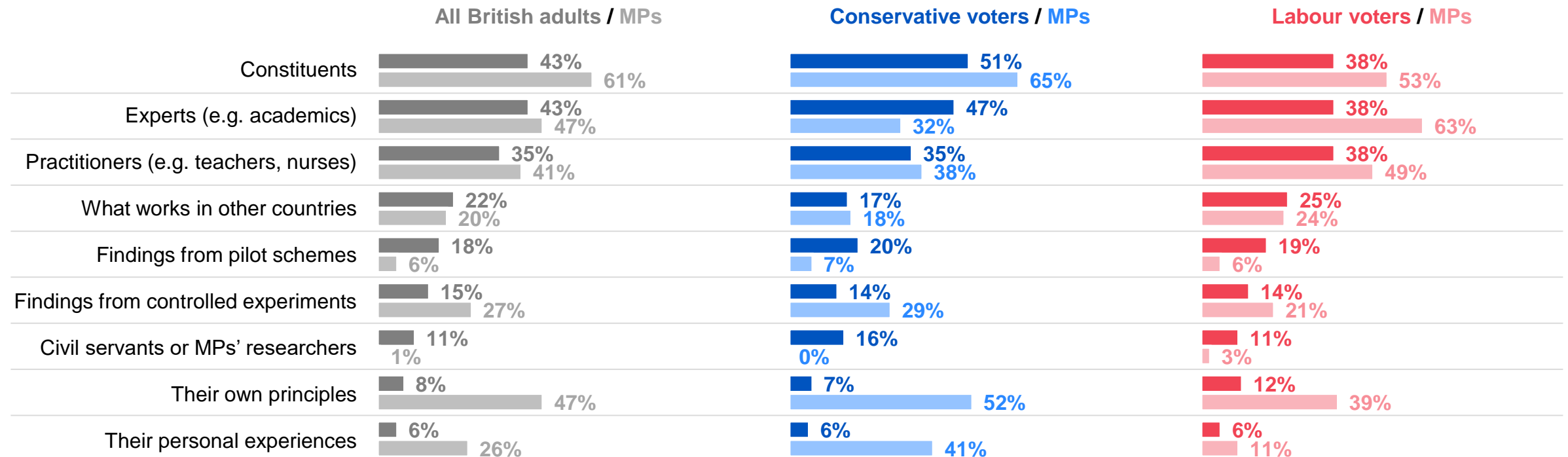
When politicians are making decisions, they pay too little attention to ...



Bases: 1,140 British adults aged 18+; 420 who voted to leave EU in 2016; 539 who voted to remain in EU in 2016
Fieldwork dates: 15-18 November 2019

Evidence also means different things to politicians than it does to the public. The public places far less weight on politicians' own principles and personal experiences.

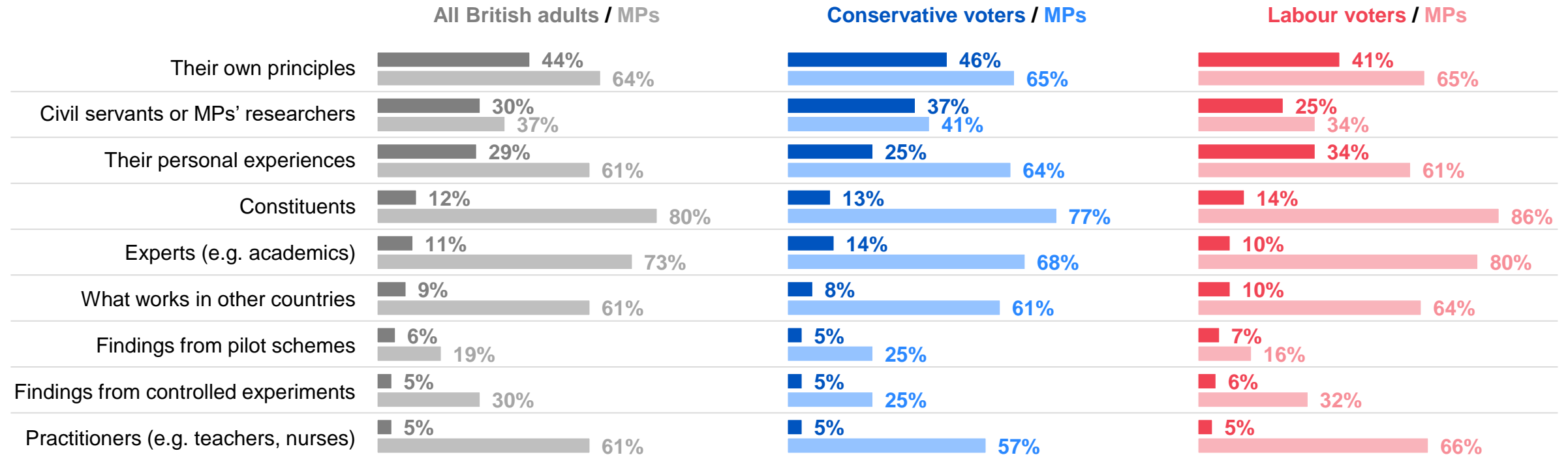
Which two or three, if any, of the following should politicians pay most attention to when deciding what should be done?



Bases: 1,140 British adults aged 18+ / 86 MPs; 340 who voted Conservative in 2017 / 42 Conservative MPs; 326 who voted Labour in 2017 / 35 Labour MPs
 Fieldwork dates: 15-18 November 2019 (general public); 3 June-2 August 2019 (MPs)

Politicians' use of evidence to date has not registered well with the public. Many people do not believe that politicians take in evidence beyond their own views and experiences.

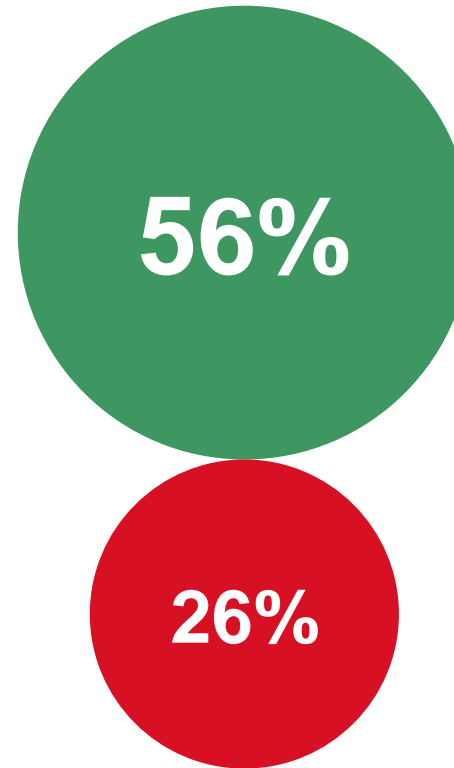
Which two or three, if any, of the following do you believe politicians actually pay most attention to, when deciding what should be done? / Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last three years to justify a policy that you support?



Bases: 1,140 British adults aged 18+ / 86 MPs; 340 who voted Conservative in 2017 / 42 Conservative MPs; 326 who voted Labour in 2017 / 35 Labour MPs
 Fieldwork dates: 15-18 November 2019 (general public); 3 June-2 August 2019 (MPs)

Although politicians consider themselves to be open to evidence, the public thinks they will more often make decisions based on their existing views than on the evidence.

Politicians will take decisions based ...



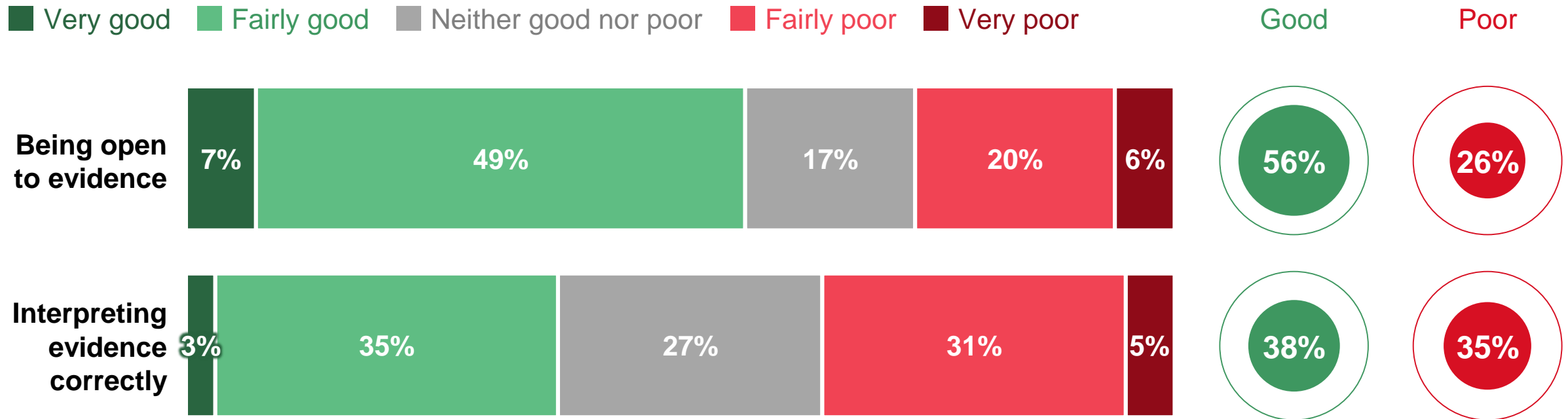
of MPs rated their fellow politicians as very or fairly good at being open to evidence

rated their fellow politicians as very or fairly poor at this

Bases: 1,140 British adults aged 18+; 86 MPs
Fieldwork dates: 15-18 November 2019 (general public); 3 June-2 August 2019 (MPs)

Politicians feel that they are less good at interpreting evidence correctly than they are at being open to evidence.

Thinking about the use of evidence when deciding what should be done, how would you rate your fellow MPs on the following?



Base: 86 MPs
Fieldwork dates: 3 June-2 August 2019

What do politicians say about themselves interpreting the evidence?

“

I don't see MPs being even taken through the basics of understanding trials and statistics. There is a real lack of very basic knowledge, which means that MPs are easily swayed by exceptionally poor quality evidence.

“

Most MPs don't know the difference between cause and correlation. They look for evidence to buttress their own opinion rather than to actually change their mind. Mind you I am guilty of that too.

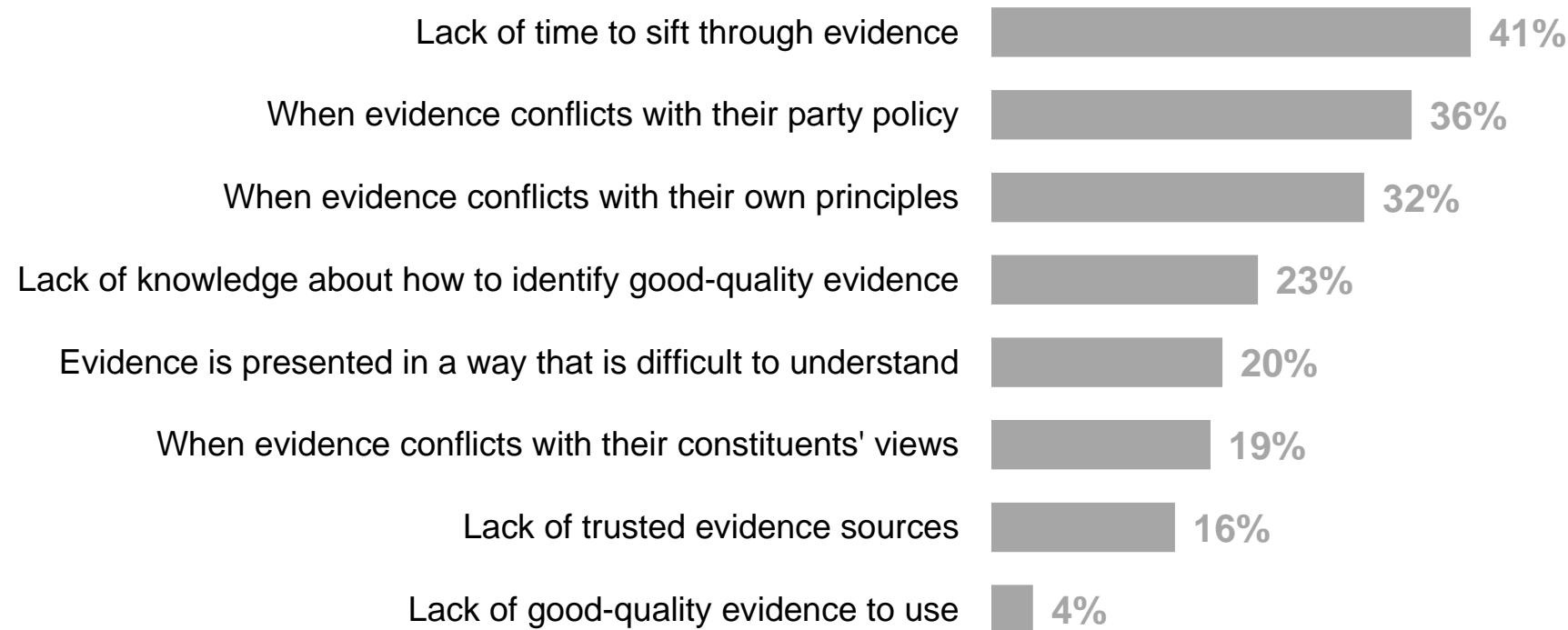
“

We are pushed very quickly into definitive and absolute positions ... And we don't take time to consider the broadest range of evidence available at that moment, to reach a more considered position.

Source: Ipsos MORI summer 2019 MPs survey
Fieldwork dates: 3 June-2 August 2019

Politicians think that it's not only a lack of time that stops them making better use of evidence, but also a requirement to adhere to party policy or their own principles.

In your opinion, what prevents MPs from making better use of evidence?

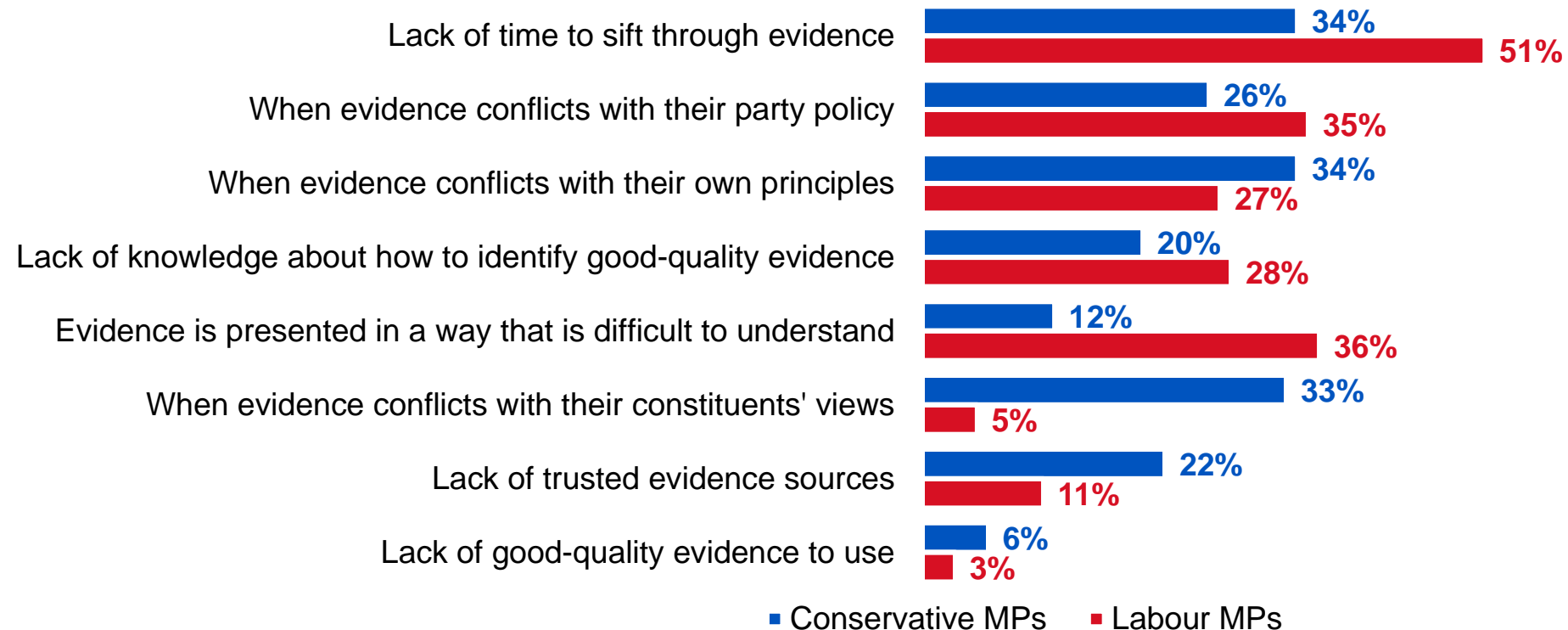


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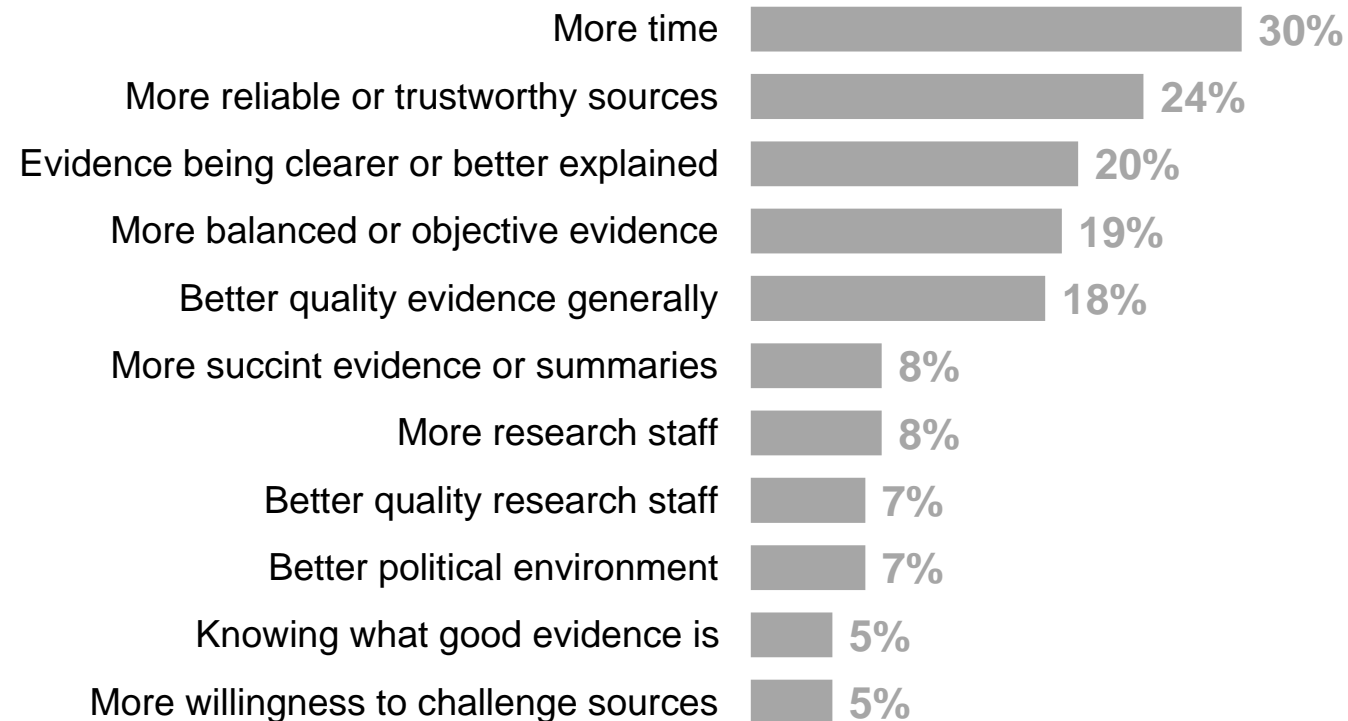


Bases: 42 Conservative MPs; 35 Labour MPs

Fieldwork dates: 3 June-2 August 2019

Politicians see no silver bullet to improve their use of evidence in the future, beyond being given more time to sift through evidence and having more reliable or trustworthy sources.

What would support MPs to make better use of evidence? (unprompted)



Base: 86 MPs

Fieldwork dates: 3 June-2 August 2019

What do politicians really want to help them use evidence better?

“

Everything given to us has to be sharper and punchier and made relevant ... Stop sending big glossy briefing documents through the post. It's a waste!

“

Present information that is simple to understand. The best way to do that is to relate evidence to case studies or actual events. That's a really good way of demonstrating it.

“

We are bombarded with information but a lot of it is from lobby groups and pressure groups with their own particular angle ... What you want is something authoritative and impartial.

Source: Ipsos MORI summer 2019 MPs survey
Fieldwork dates: 3 June-2 August 2019

Technical details



Ipsos MORI general public iOmnibus

- Ipsos MORI surveyed 1,140 British adults (excluding Northern Ireland) from 15 to 18 November 2019.
- Interviews are carried out using Ipsos MORI's iOmnibus, an online omnibus survey.
- We apply age, gender, region and working status quotas to represent British adults.
- We weight data to the population profile by age, gender, region, working status and education.



Ipsos MORI summer 2019 MPs survey

- The Ipsos MORI summer 2019 MP survey took place from 3 June to 2 August 2019.
- We contacted 475 MPs and interviewed 148 face-to-face. A total of 86 MPs answered these questions.
- We apply quotas and weight results to reflect the political makeup of the House of Commons in summer 2019.

For more information

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