

Understanding public perceptions of homelessness in the UK


**ROYAL
FOUNDATION**
OF THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS
OF WALES


homewardas

Key findings

An independent report produced by Ipsos
on behalf of The Royal Foundation

June 2023

Image: Centre for Homelessness Impact – ResourceSpace chi.resourcespace.com



Overview and summary of key findings

Image: Centre for Homelessness Impact – ResourceSpace
chi.resourcespace.com



Background

Homewards is a UK wide programme that aims to demonstrate that homelessness can be ended – making it rare, brief and unrepeated.

- Prince William has made a personal commitment to the issue and wants to utilise his platform to improve understanding and inspire optimism that homelessness can be ended.
- **Homewards** will take a transformative approach, with collaboration at its heart, to demonstrate that together it's possible to end homelessness.
- The programme will be locally led, working in partnership with six flagship locations. It will involve convening experts, community leaders, media, private sector, philanthropists and other key people at a local level to create coalitions to develop and deliver tailored action plans.
- Through national campaigns, local storytelling and by placing those with lived experience at the heart of the programme, Homewards will raise awareness of the breadth and complexities of homelessness and inspire optimism for change.
- Ipsos was commissioned by The Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales to undertake independent research to baseline public attitudes on homelessness, including their motivation to end it, knowledge of what is currently being done and what action needs to be taken in the future.

Methodology

- This survey followed a programme of qualitative research (published under a separate cover) conducted during November 2022. The qualitative research was designed to explore public perceptions of homelessness and the survey to establish a baseline from which to track changes in opinion as the Foundation supports actions to tackle homelessness.
- Ipsos interviewed 3,473 adults aged 16+ across the UK from 5-10 May 2023.
- The data was collected via the Ipsos UK KnowledgePanel, an online random probability panel.
- Data are weighted by age, gender, UK nation (region in England), Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile, education, ethnicity and number of adults in the household in order to reflect the profile of the UK population.
- As this is a sample of the population, all results are subject to a 'margin of error', which means some differences between sub-groups may not be statistically significant.
- Where results (or combinations e.g. % very + % fairly serious problem) do not sum to 100%, this may be due to computer rounding, multiple responses, or the exclusion of "don't know" categories.
- In some cases, questions were asked of 'half samples' (indicated in base labels throughout this report). The sample of respondents was split, allowing us to explore differences in responses to questions including the terms 'tackling' and 'ending' homelessness.

Key finding 1: Most people acknowledge homelessness is a serious issue and in need of more attention.

- Across the UK, 8 in 10 think homelessness is a serious issue in their country; almost 9 in 10 in Scotland and England.
- People are more likely to see it as a problem in their country than in their local area.
- Most believe more should be done - 7 in 10 think, as a society, we are not devoting enough attention to addressing homelessness and a higher proportion agree that homelessness should be given top priority than disagree, but 2 in 10 are unsure.
- Half think that charities are doing about the right amount, one in ten think they are doing too much. There is a strong sense that others are doing too little.

Key finding 2: People believe homelessness can happen to anyone – 2 in 10 have some experience of homelessness - and most understand the range of types and causes of homelessness.

- 8 in 10 believe homelessness can happen to anyone and that it is unfair to take a negative view of those who are homeless.
- 2 in 10 have had experience of homelessness either themselves or through someone close to them.
- The majority do not see homelessness as a choice: 68% disagree that people who are homeless could find somewhere to live if they really tried and just 4% select 'personal choice' as a 'main cause' of homelessness.
- 9 in 10 think there are lots of causes of homelessness. Poverty and alcohol or drugs problems were selected most frequently from a list of potential causes of homelessness.
- Most people recognise that homelessness goes beyond sleeping rough/sleeping on the streets but 3 in 10 incorrectly think that street homelessness is more common than other types of homelessness (the same proportion are unsure).
- Despite most believing homelessness can happen to anyone, only 7% consider themselves at personal risk of ever experiencing homelessness in the future.

Key finding 3: There is strong public support for making homelessness rare, brief and unrepeated. Most believe there are plenty of ways to do this.

- 7 in 10 support ending homelessness when defined as making it rare, brief, and non-recurring.
- Two-thirds think that as a society there is plenty we can do to either tackle or end homelessness.
- People support a range of action including preventative measures, but just 13% are confident that councils, government, charities, businesses and others will work together to end homelessness.
- 7 in 10 see homelessness as affecting the whole of society, not just those experiencing it. Over half think that tackling homelessness would alleviate pressures on public services and improve the sense of community locally.
- 7 in 10 say they don't know what is being done to tackle/end homelessness, and most don't think, or are not sure, there is anything they can do personally to help.

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1. Most people acknowledge homelessness is a serious issue and in need of more attention.

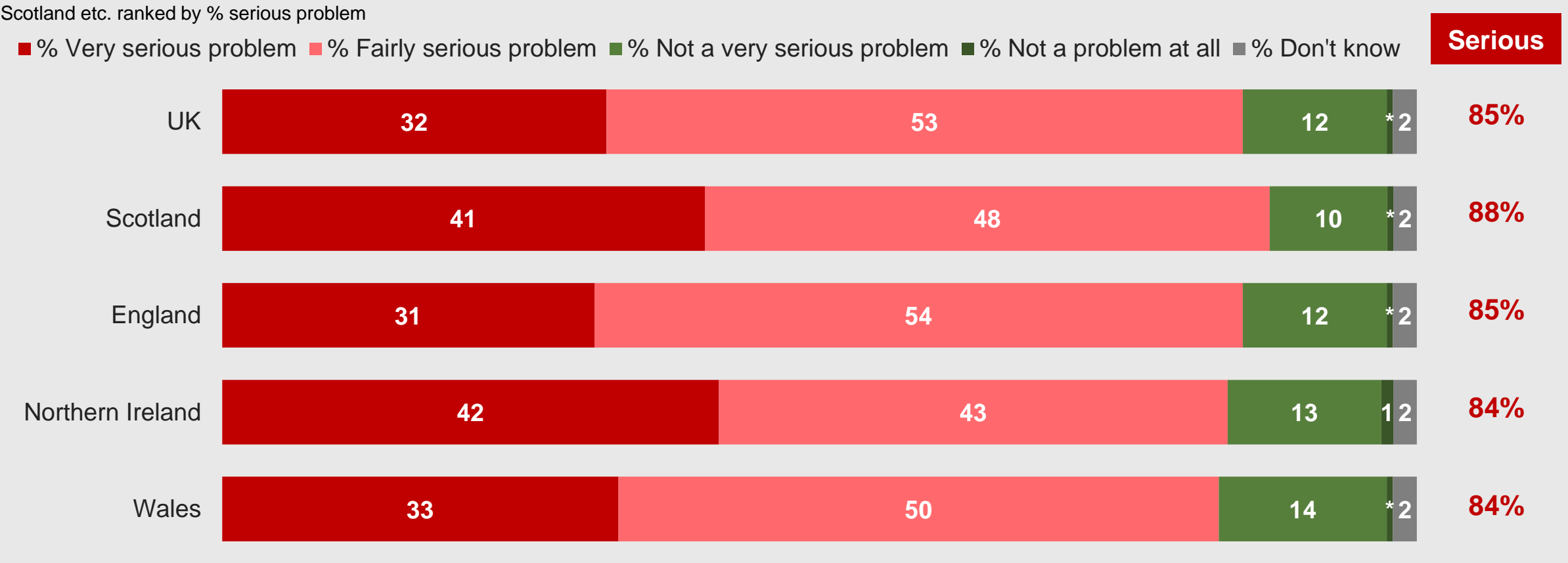
Image: Centre for Homelessness Impact – ResourceSpace
chi.resourcespace.com



8 in 10 think homelessness is a serious issue in the UK



Now thinking about homelessness, how serious a problem, if at all, do you think it is in...*the UK as a whole?*

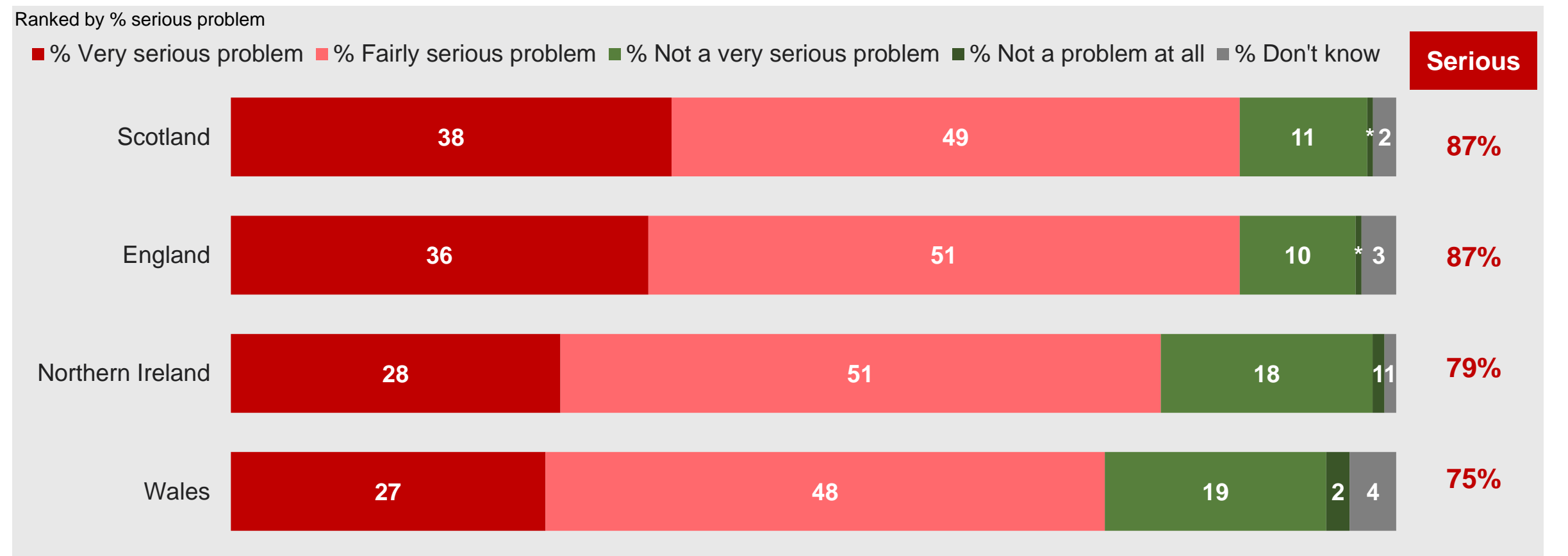


Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473); England (1805), Scotland (561), Wales (572), Northern Ireland (535)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023



When asked about homelessness in their country, almost 9 in 10 think it is a serious issue in Scotland and England.

Q Now thinking about homelessness, how serious a problem, if at all, do you think it is in... *ENGLAND/ WALES/ SCOTLAND/ NORTHERN IRELAND?*

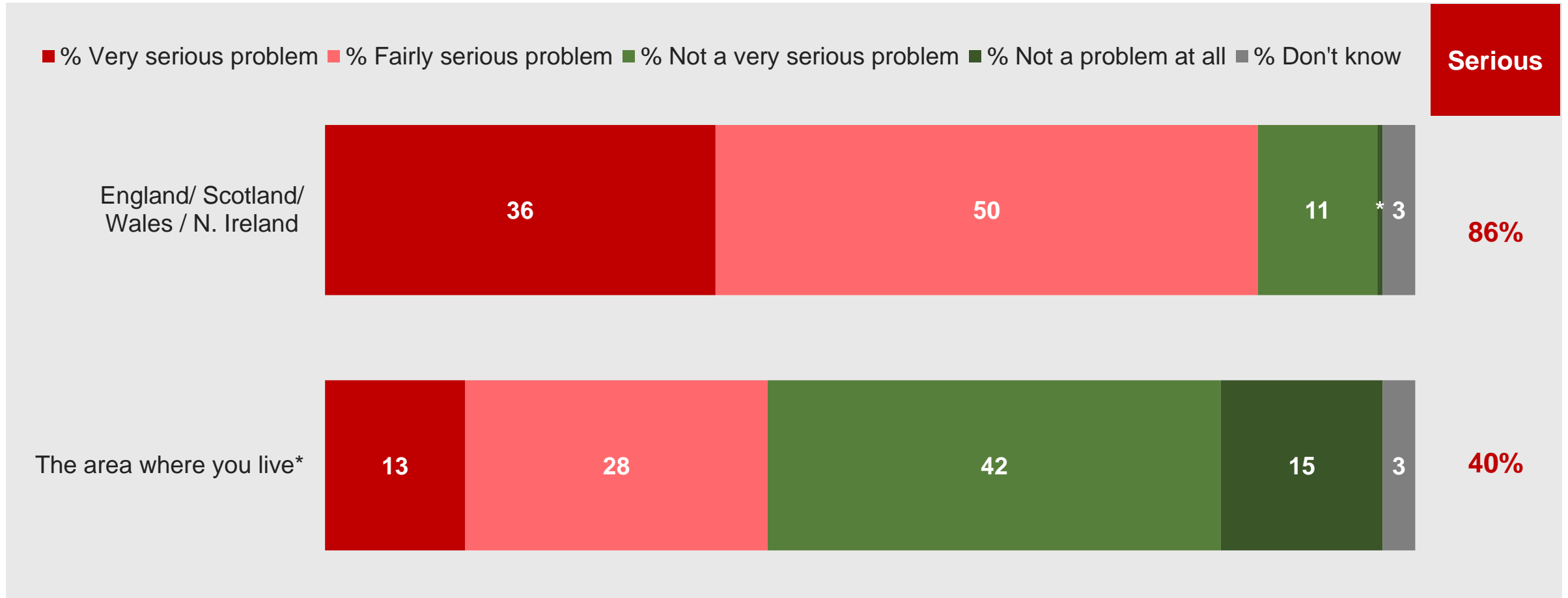


Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473); England (1805), Scotland (561), Wales (572), Northern Ireland (535)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

People are more likely to see homelessness as a problem in their country than in their local area.



Now thinking about homelessness, how serious a problem, it at all, do you think it is in the following areas?

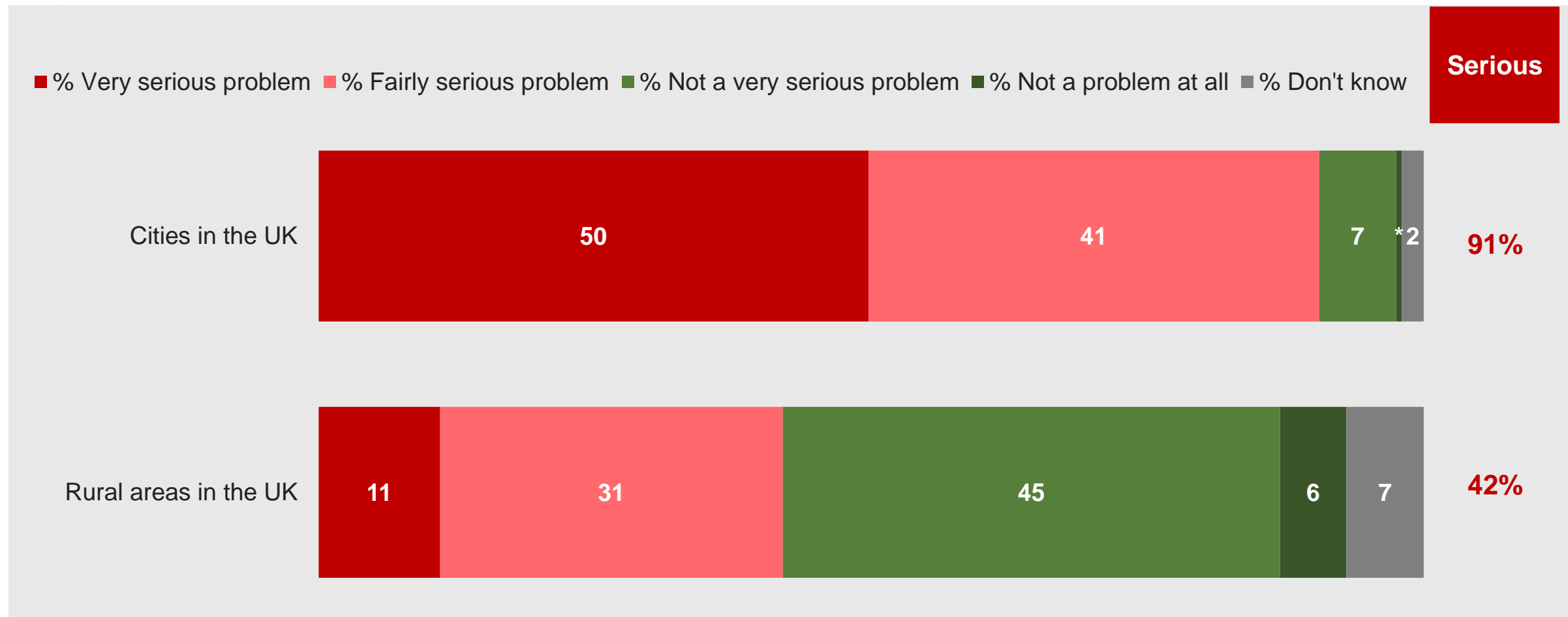


Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

*Defined as '...that is within 15-20 minutes' walk away'

Half think homelessness is a very serious problem in UK cities, only 1 in 10 say the same in terms of rural areas.

Q Now thinking about homelessness, how serious a problem, it at all, do you think it is in the following areas?

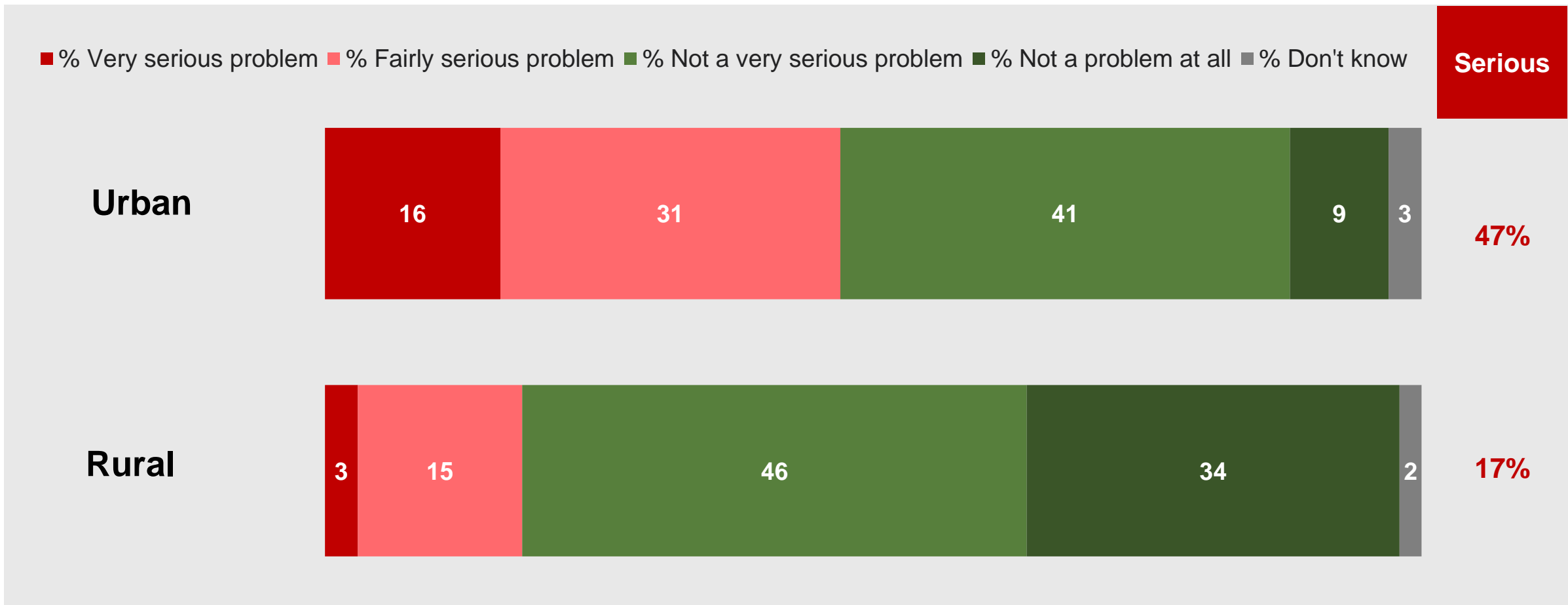


Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023



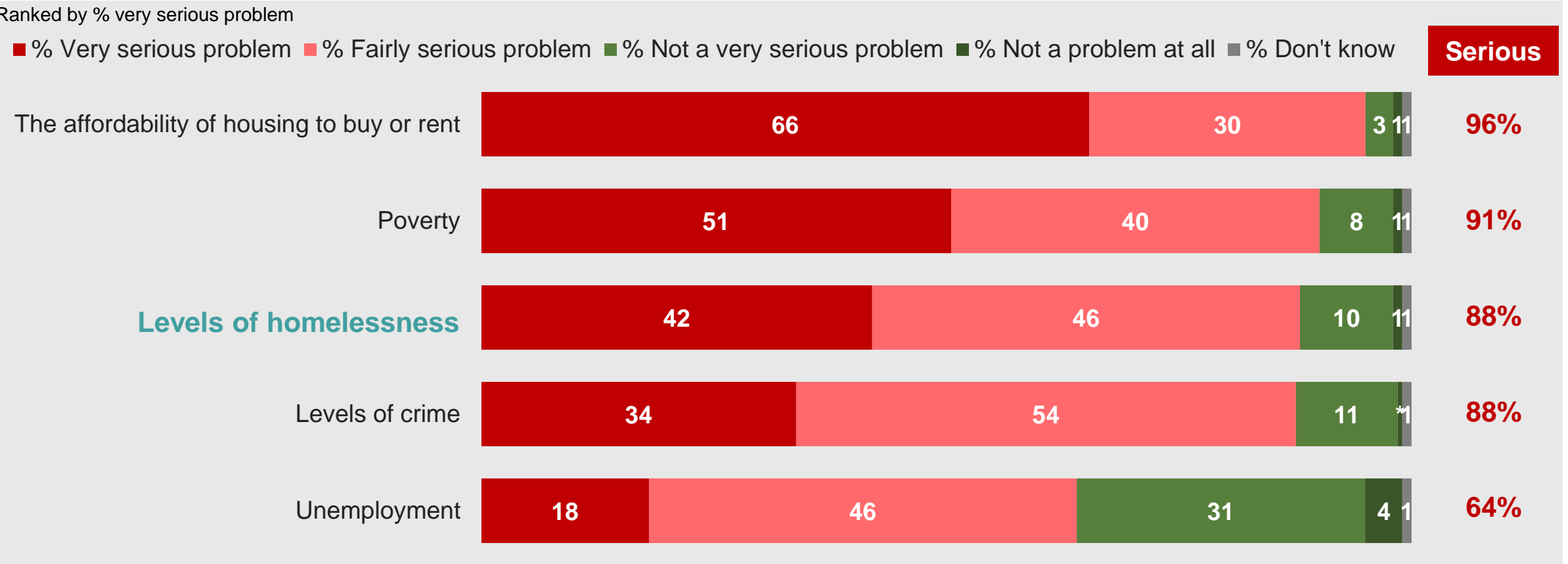
Those in urban areas are much more likely than those in rural areas to consider homelessness to be a serious problem in their local area.

Q Now thinking about homelessness, how serious a problem, it at all, do you think it is in the following areas...
The area where you live*?



Homelessness is seen as a relatively more serious problem than crime and unemployment, with 4 in 10 saying it is a very serious problem.

Q Here is a list of issues facing the UK these days. Please indicate how serious a problem, if at all, you think each one is?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

Poverty and the affordability of housing are also seen as important structural causes of homelessness – see [slide 26](#).

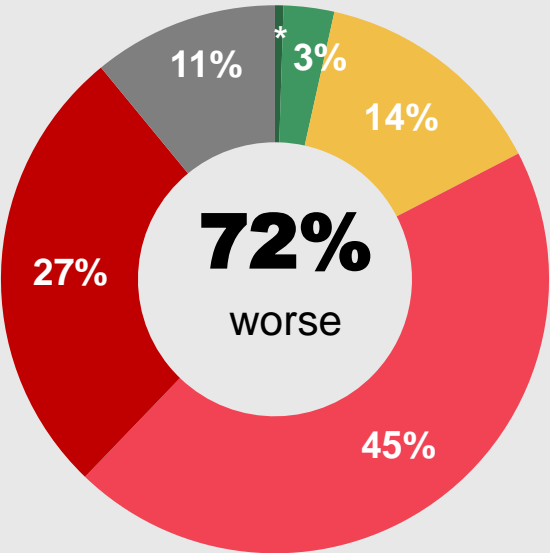
Most believe homelessness is getting worse: 7 in 10 think homelessness has got worse and a similar proportion think it will increase.



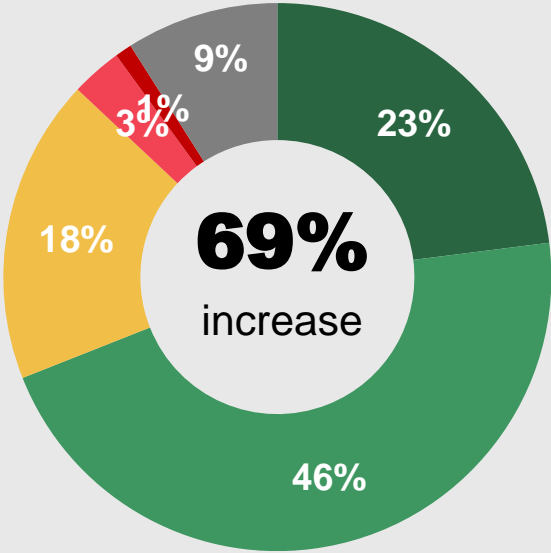
Do you think that homelessness has got better, got worse or has it stayed the same over the past 12 months... in the UK as a whole?

Now thinking about the next 12 months, do you think homelessness will increase or decrease or stay the same... In the UK as a whole?

- Got a lot better
- Got a little better
- Stayed the same
- Got a little worse
- Got a lot worse
- Don't know



- Increase a lot
- Increase a little
- Stay the same
- Decrease a little
- Decrease a lot
- Don't know



82% of those who think homelessness has got worse in the UK in the past 12 months also think it will increase in the next 12 months

Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

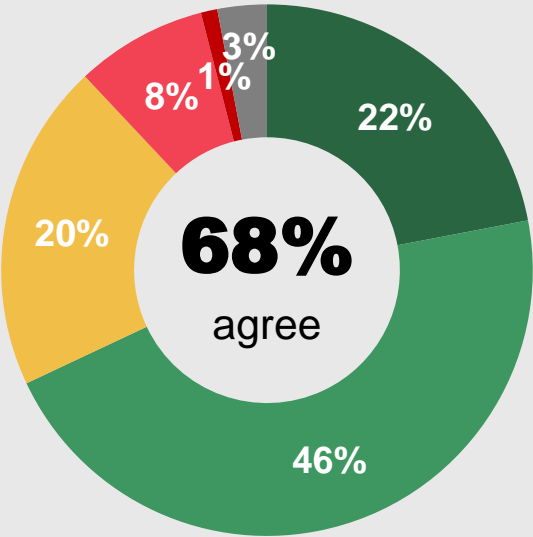


There is a strong sense that, as a society, we are not devoting enough attention to addressing homelessness...

Q Here are some things some people have said about homelessness in the UK. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each?

As a society we do not pay enough attention to tackling homelessness

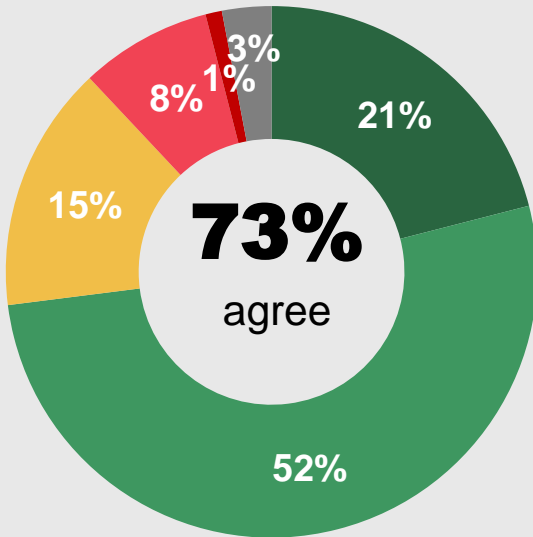
- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know



Source: Ipsos | Base: Half sample (1714)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

As a society we do not pay enough attention to ending homelessness

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

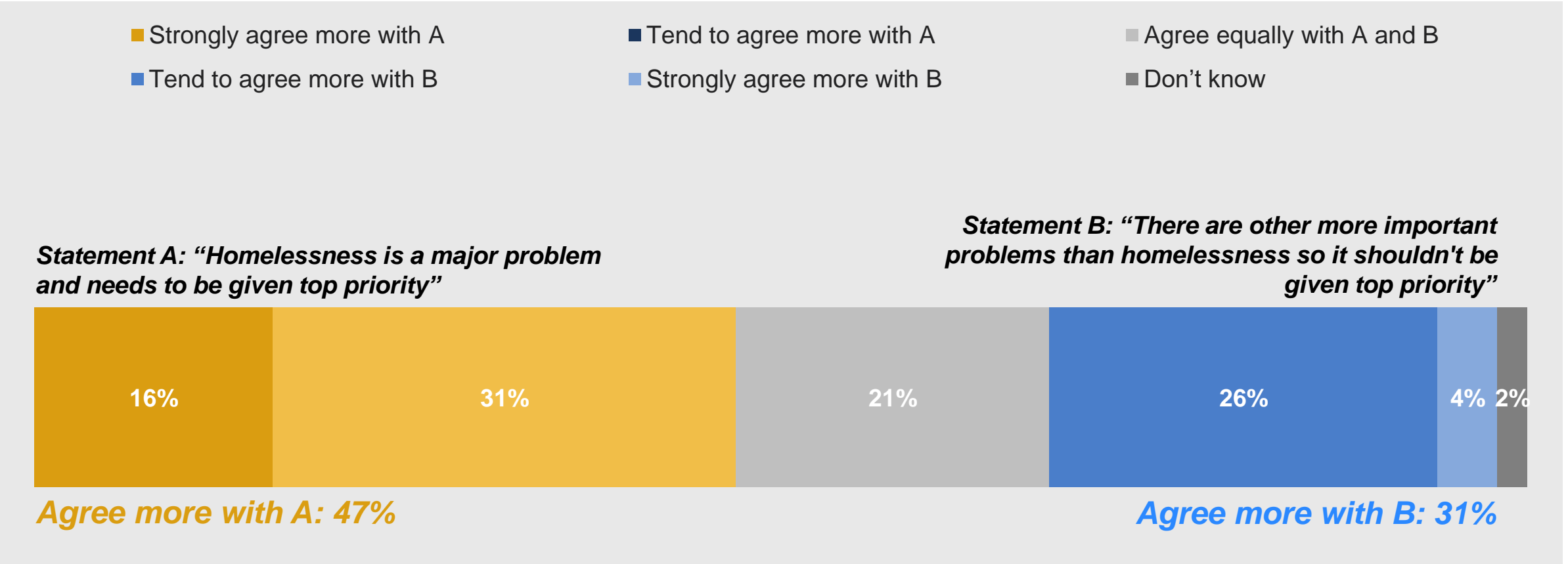


Source: Ipsos | Base: Half sample (1759)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023



...and almost half agree that homelessness should be given top priority while 2 in 10 are unsure.

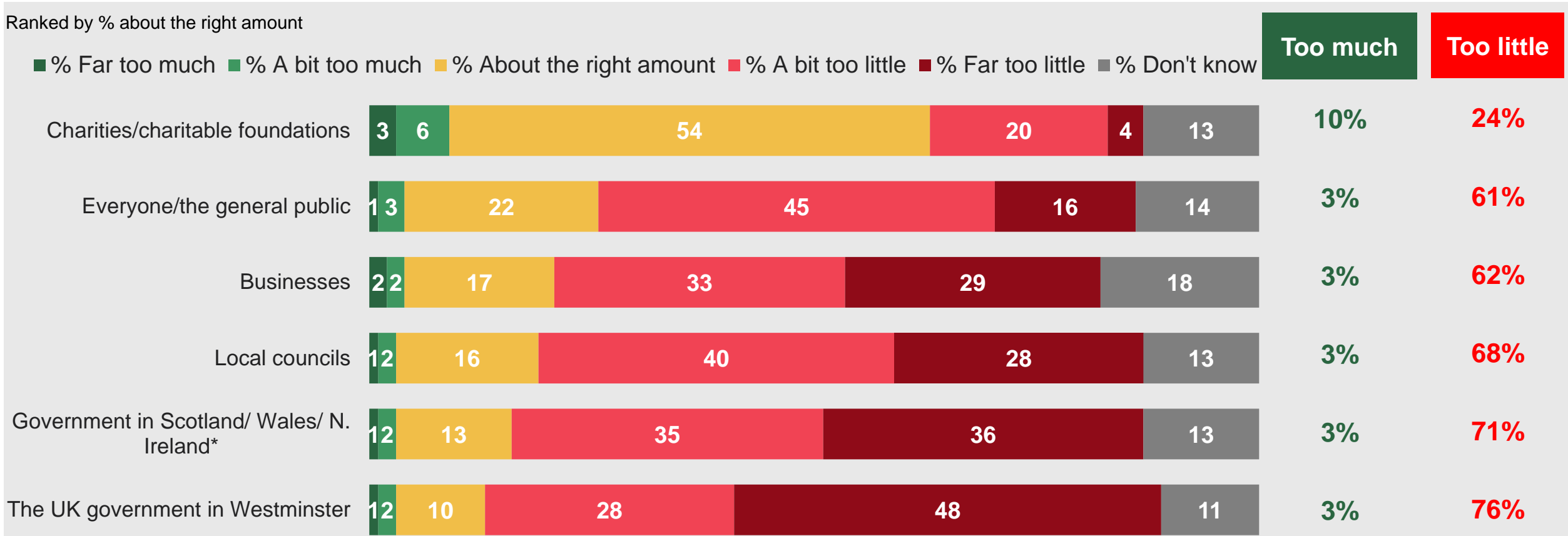
Q Please read the following pairs of statements about homelessness in the UK and decide which comes closest to your own opinion.



Half think that charities are doing about the right amount, one in ten think they are doing too much. There is a strong sense that others are doing too little.



Do you think that each of the following is doing too much, too little or about the right amount to tackle homelessness?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

*Asked in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

2. People believe homelessness can happen to anyone - 2 in 10 have some experience of homelessness - and most understand the range of types and causes.

Image: Centre for Homelessness Impact – ResourceSpace
chi.resourcespace.com

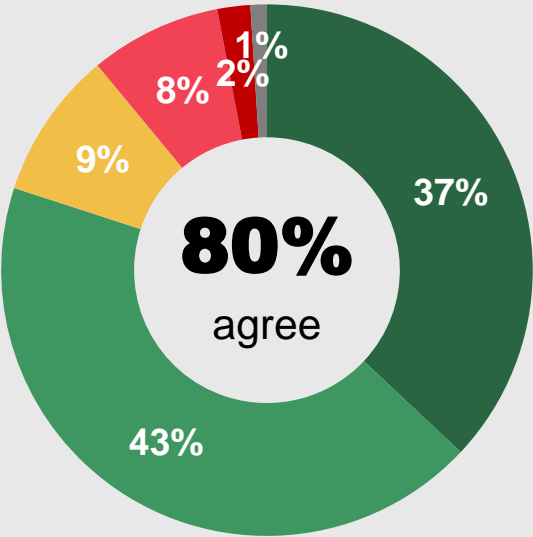


8 in 10 think that homelessness can happen to anyone and that it is unfair to take a negative view of people who are homeless.

Q Here are some things some people have said about homelessness in the UK. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each?

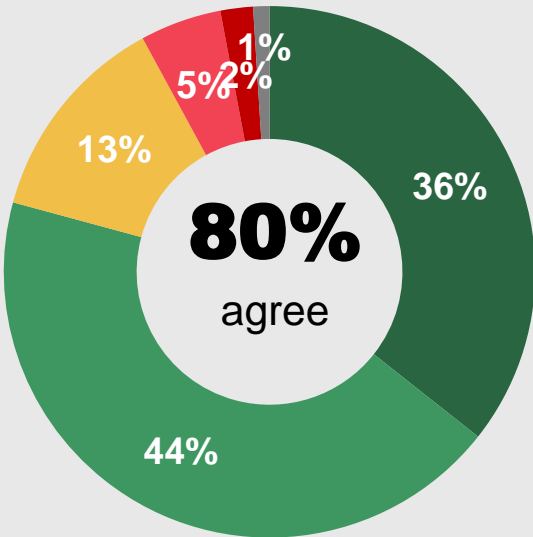
Homelessness can happen to anyone

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know



It is unfair to take a negative view of people who are homeless

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know



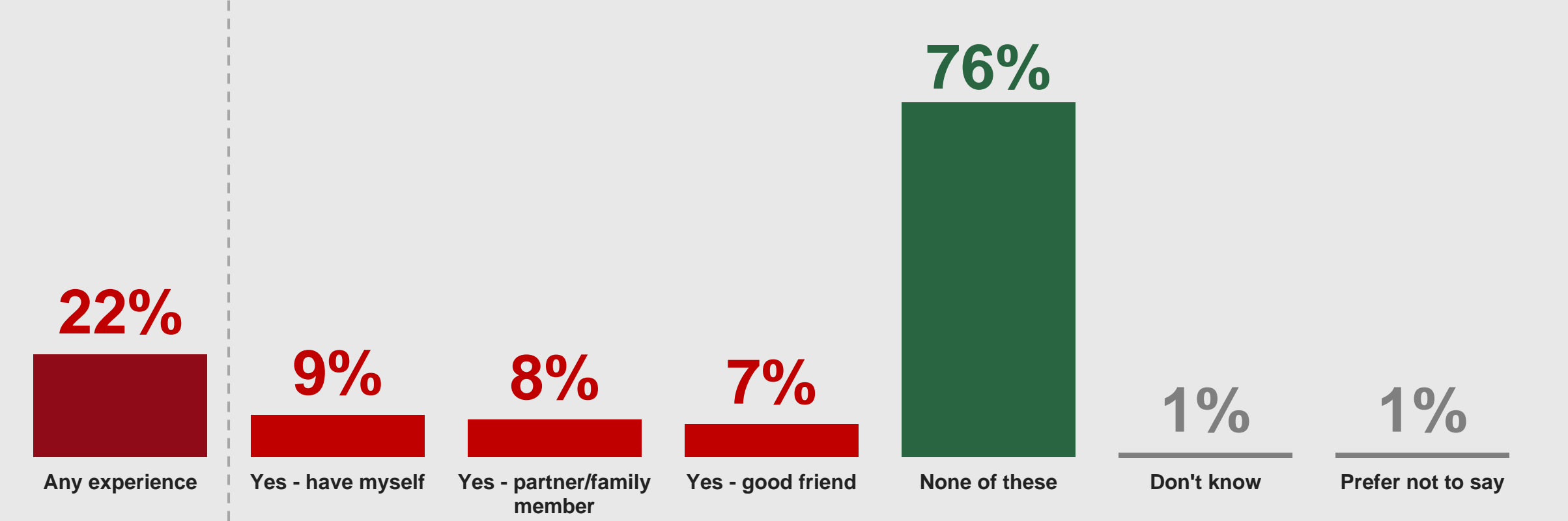
Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023



2 in 10 have experienced homelessness either themselves or through someone close to them...

Q Have you personally or someone close to you such as a partner, family member or a good friend ever experienced homelessness?

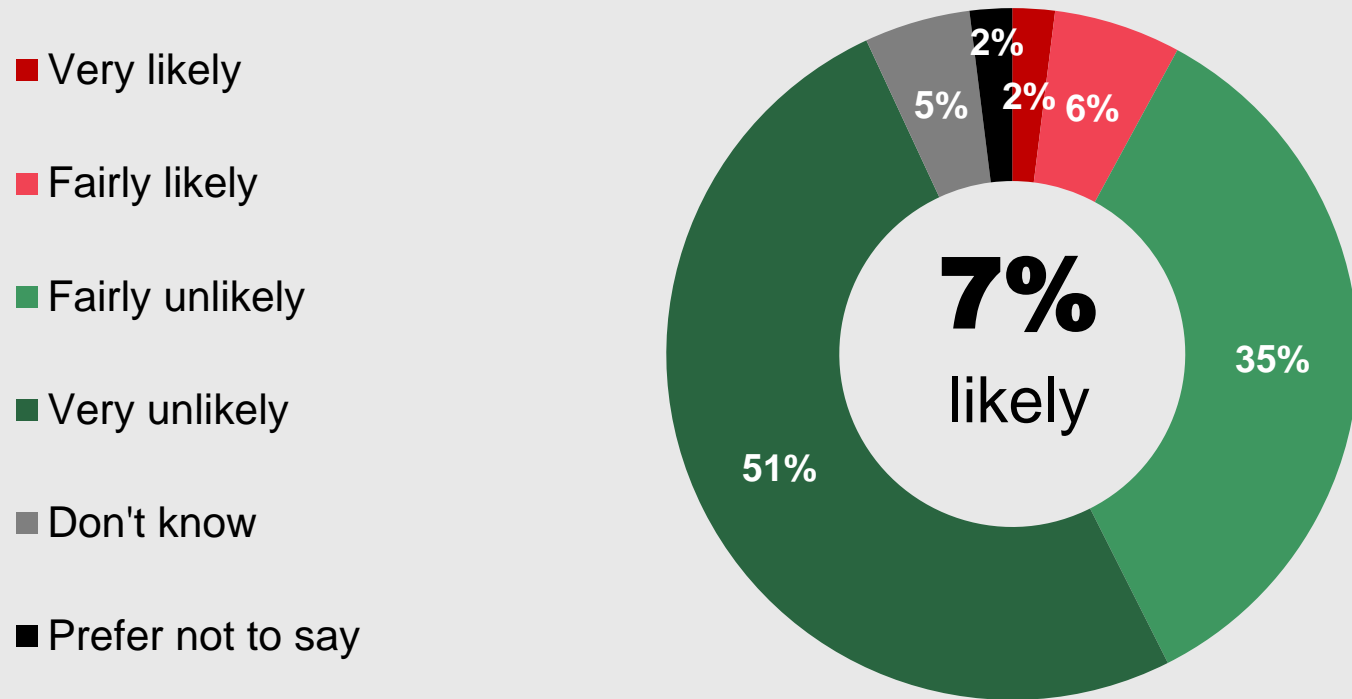
Homelessness includes people experiencing street homelessness, but you don't have to be sleeping on the streets to be considered homeless – people can be homeless if they are living in hostels, shelters, B&Bs, squatting, 'sofa surfing' i.e. staying with friends or relatives while attempting to find permanent accommodation.



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

...but only 7% consider themselves at personal risk of experiencing homelessness in the future.

Q How likely or unlikely do you think it is that you could personally ever experience homelessness in the future?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

Most don't think homelessness is a choice: more agree that people are homeless due to things outside their control than the result of bad choices...



Please read the following pairs of statements about homelessness in the UK and decide which comes closest to your own opinion.

- Strongly agree more with A
- Tend to agree more with A
- Agree equally with A and B
- Tend to agree more with B
- Strongly agree more with B
- Don't know

Statement A: “Most people who are homeless have probably made bad choices in life which has put them in that situation”

Statement B: “Most people who are homeless are probably in that situation because of things outside of their control”



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

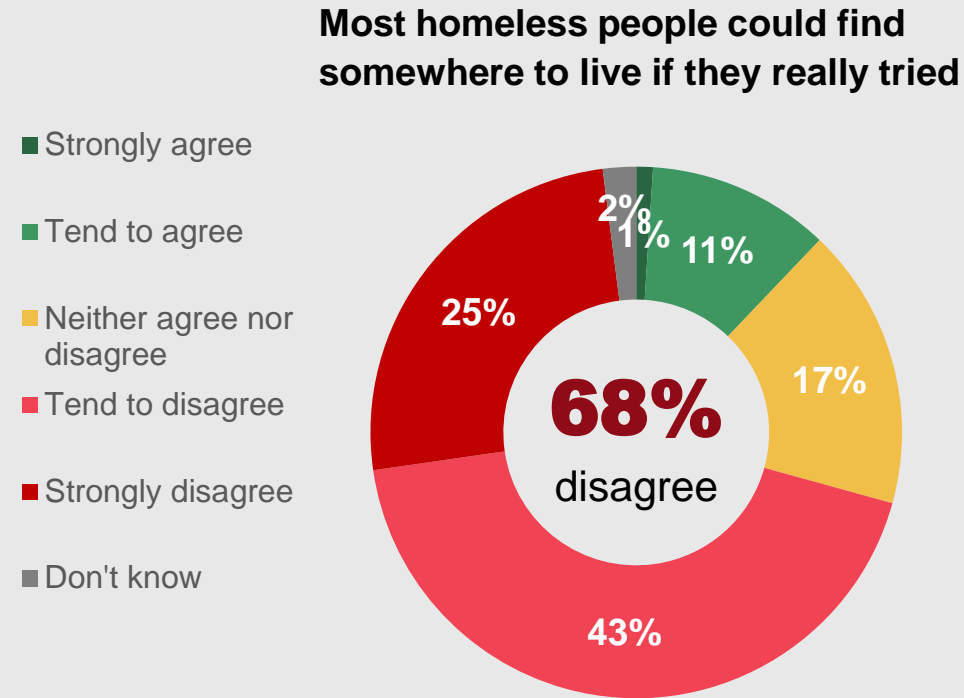
...and only 4% chose ‘personal choice’ as among the main causes – see [slide 28](#).



... and just under 7 in 10 disagree that most homeless people could find somewhere to live if they really tried.



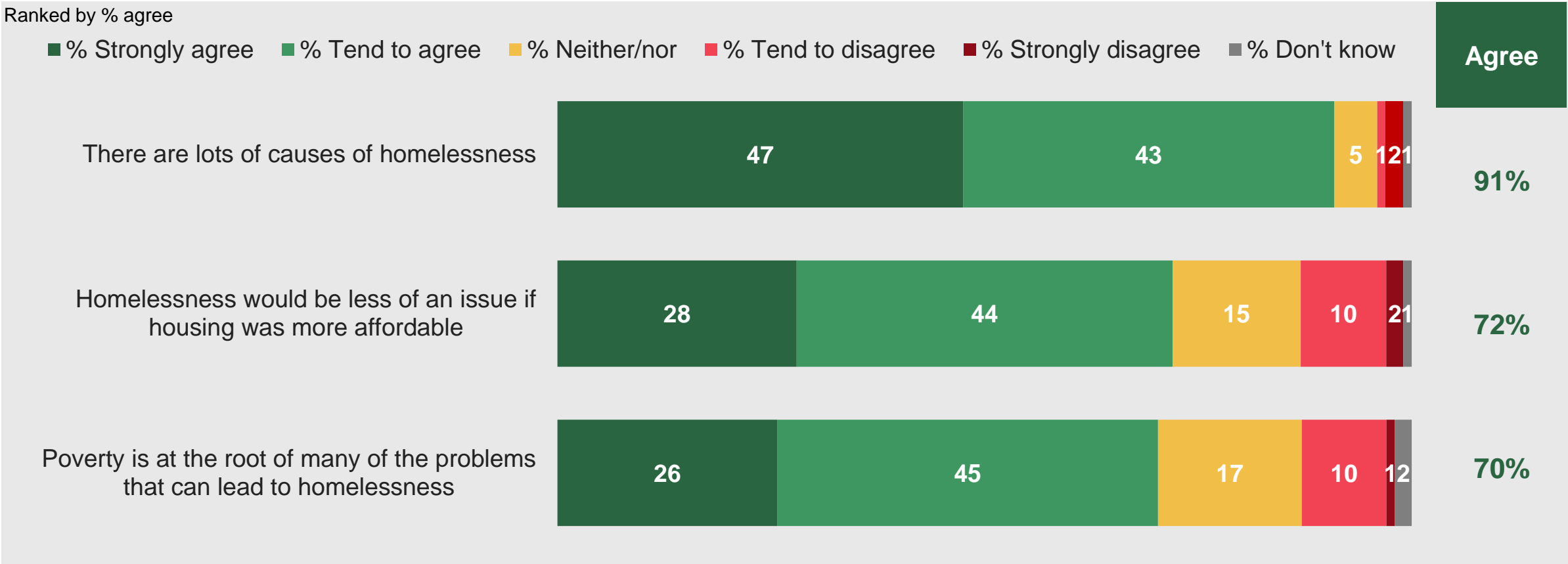
Here are some things some people have said about homelessness in the UK. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

9 in 10 think there are lots of causes of homelessness, 7 in 10 agree that affordable housing and poverty are contributing factors.

Q Here are some more things some people have said about homelessness in the UK. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each?

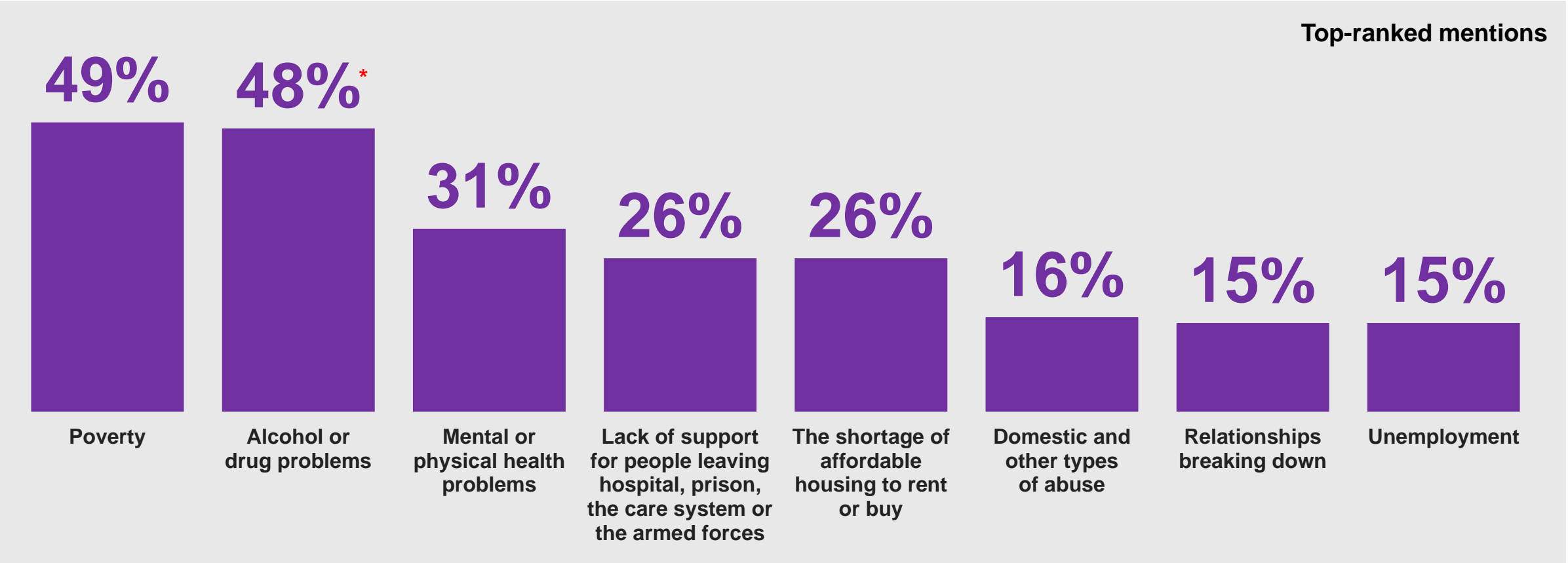


Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023



Structural (e.g. poverty) and individual factors (e.g. alcohol or drugs problems) were most commonly selected from a list of potential causes ...

Q Which, if any, of these do you think are the two or three main causes of why people are homeless?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

* Previous research by the Centre for Homelessness Impact suggests the public overestimates the proportion of people who experience homelessness who have alcohol or drug dependencies

...whereas few people felt lack of opportunities and discrimination were main causes of homelessness.



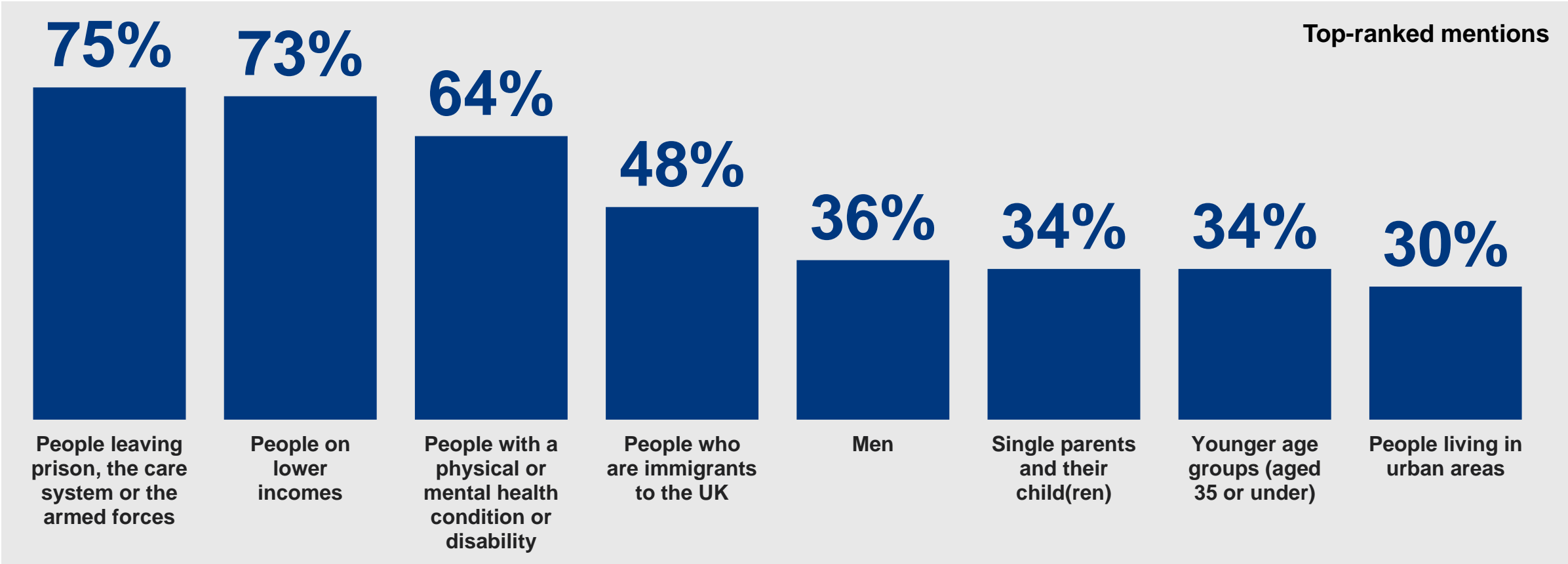
Which, if any, of these do you think are the two or three main causes of why people are homeless?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473) Don't know (2%), Other (2%) and No reason in particular (1%) not shown
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

Those perceived to be most at risk are people leaving prison, the care system, the armed forces, on lower incomes and those with physical/mental health conditions.

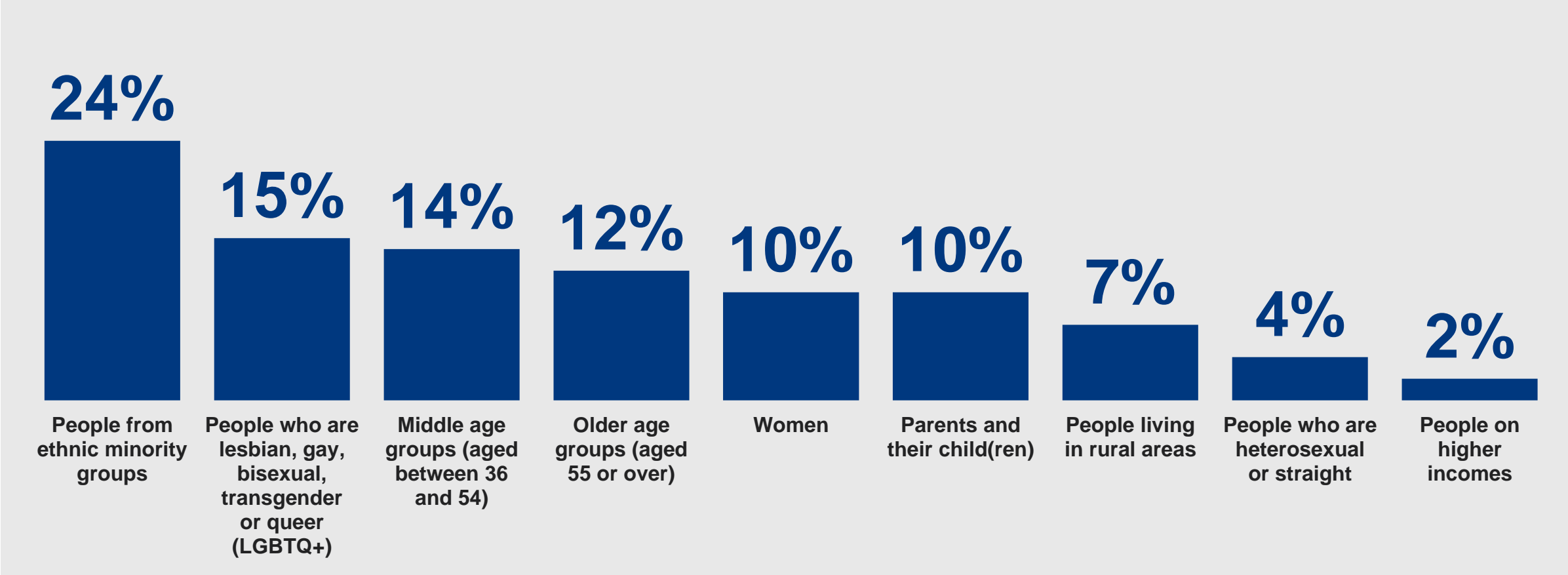
Q Which, if any, of these groups do you think are more likely to experience homelessness than the general population in the UK?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

The public believe men are more likely to experience homelessness than women, and younger people more than older people.

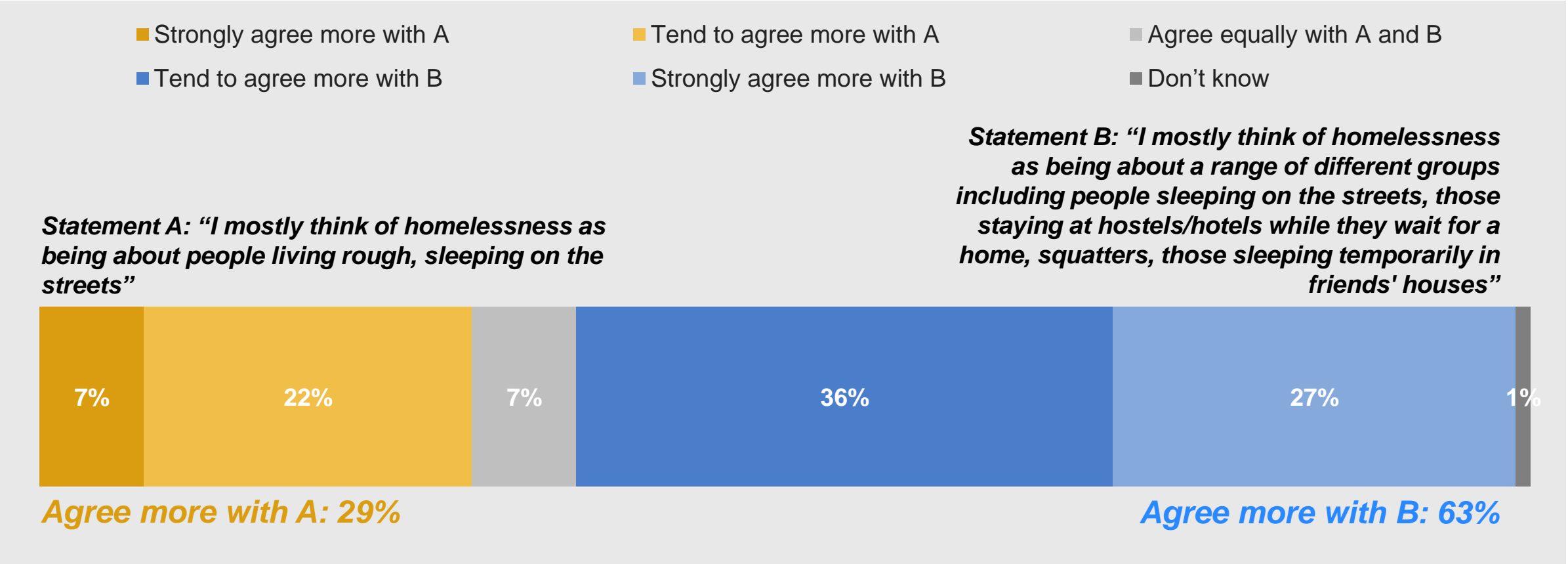
Q Which, if any, of these groups do you think are more likely to experience homelessness than the general population in the UK?
Bottom-ranked mentions



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473) Don't know (5%) not shown
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

Most people recognise that homelessness goes beyond sleeping rough/ sleeping on the streets...

Q Please read the following pairs of statements about homelessness in the UK and decide which comes closest to your own opinion.

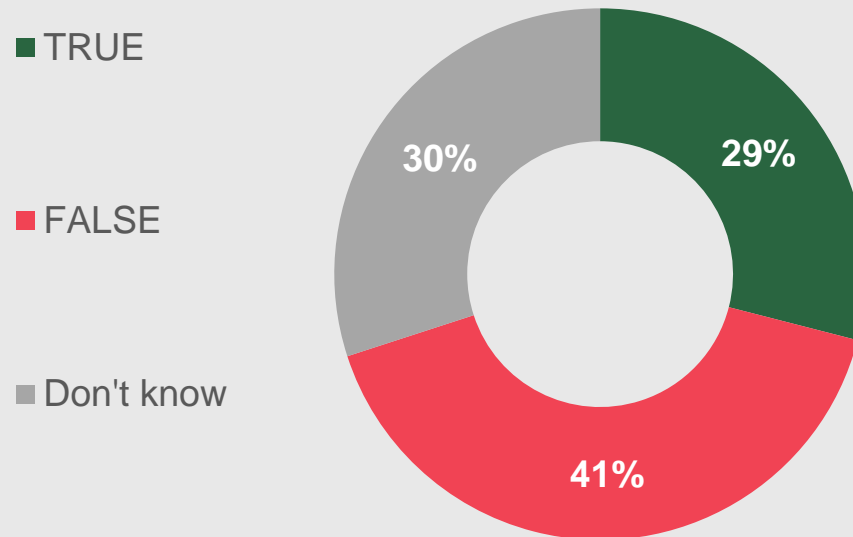


...however, 3 in 10 incorrectly think that street homelessness is more common than other types of homelessness (the same proportion are unsure).



Here are some statements about homelessness in the UK. For each one we would like you to tell us whether you think it is true or false or whether you don't know?

In the UK, there are more people experiencing street homelessness than other groups



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

3. There is strong public support for making homelessness rare, brief and unrepeated; most believe there are plenty of ways to do this.

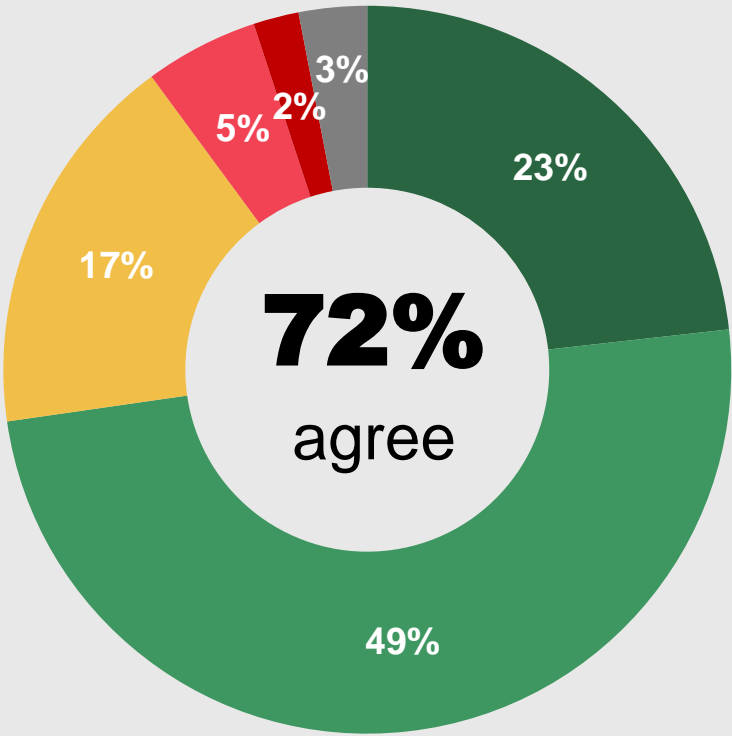
Image: Centre for Homelessness Impact – ResourceSpace
chi.resourcespace.com



7 in 10 support *ending* homelessness when defined as making it rare, brief, and unrepeated.

Q Some people say that instead of aiming to end homelessness, we should work to a different aim. This should be to make sure that homelessness is rare, brief and doesn't happen again and again to the same people. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this as an aim?

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023



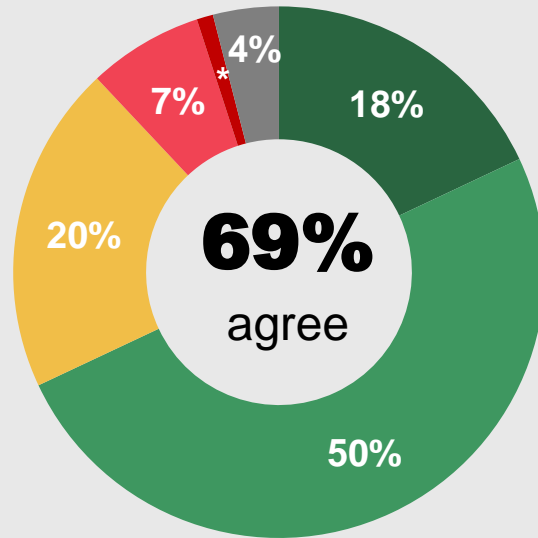
Two-thirds think that as a society there is plenty we can do to either *tackle* or *end* homelessness.



Here are some things some people have said about homelessness in the UK. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each?

As a society there are plenty of things we can do to tackle homelessness

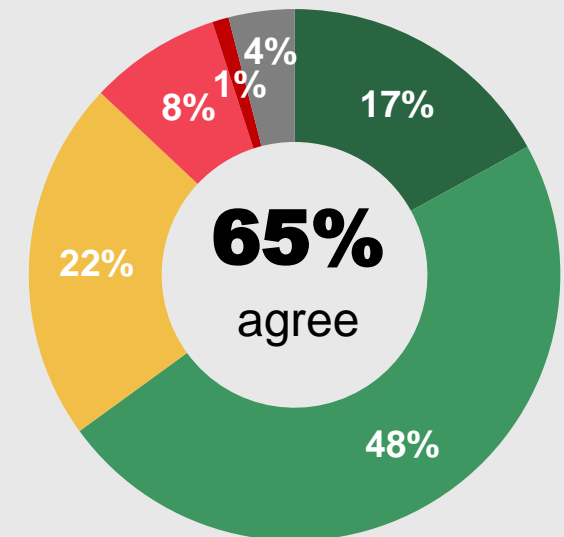
- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know



Source: Ipsos | Base: Half sample (1714)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

As a society there are plenty of things we can do to end homelessness

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know



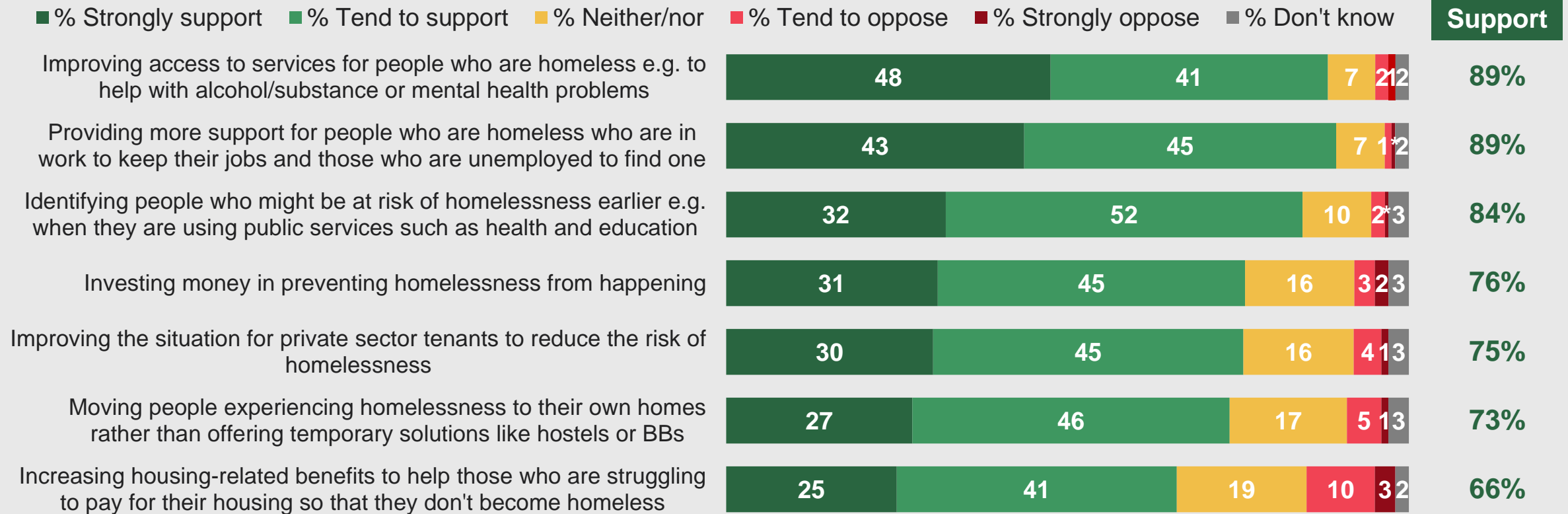
Source: Ipsos | Base: Half sample (1759)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

There is support for a holistic range of interventions and policies, including preventative measures, to tackle homelessness...



In principle, to what extent do you support or oppose the following?

Ranked by % support



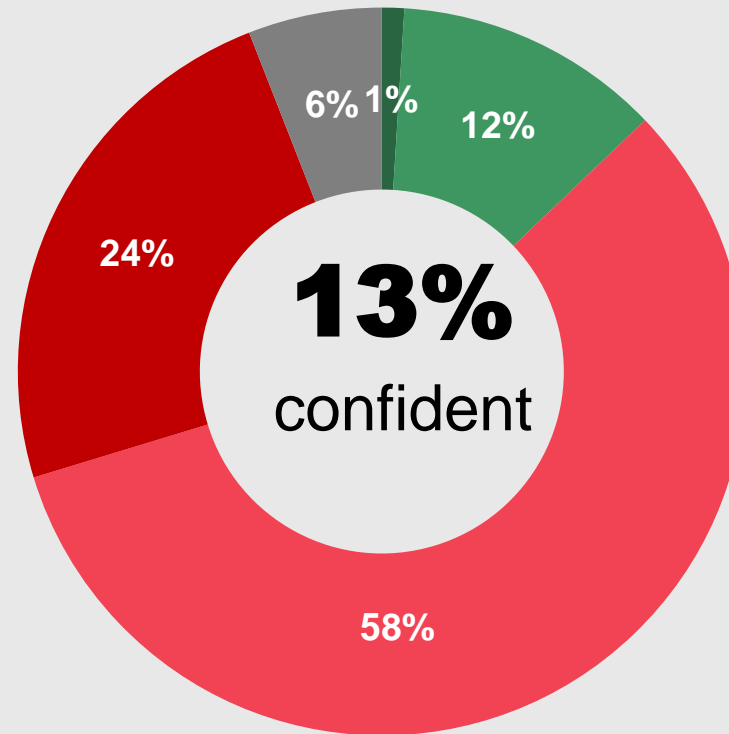
Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (Half sample: 1714)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

...although just 13% are confident that a collaborative response will happen in the next few years.



How confident, if at all, are you that councils, government, charities, businesses and others will work together to tackle homelessness in the next few years?

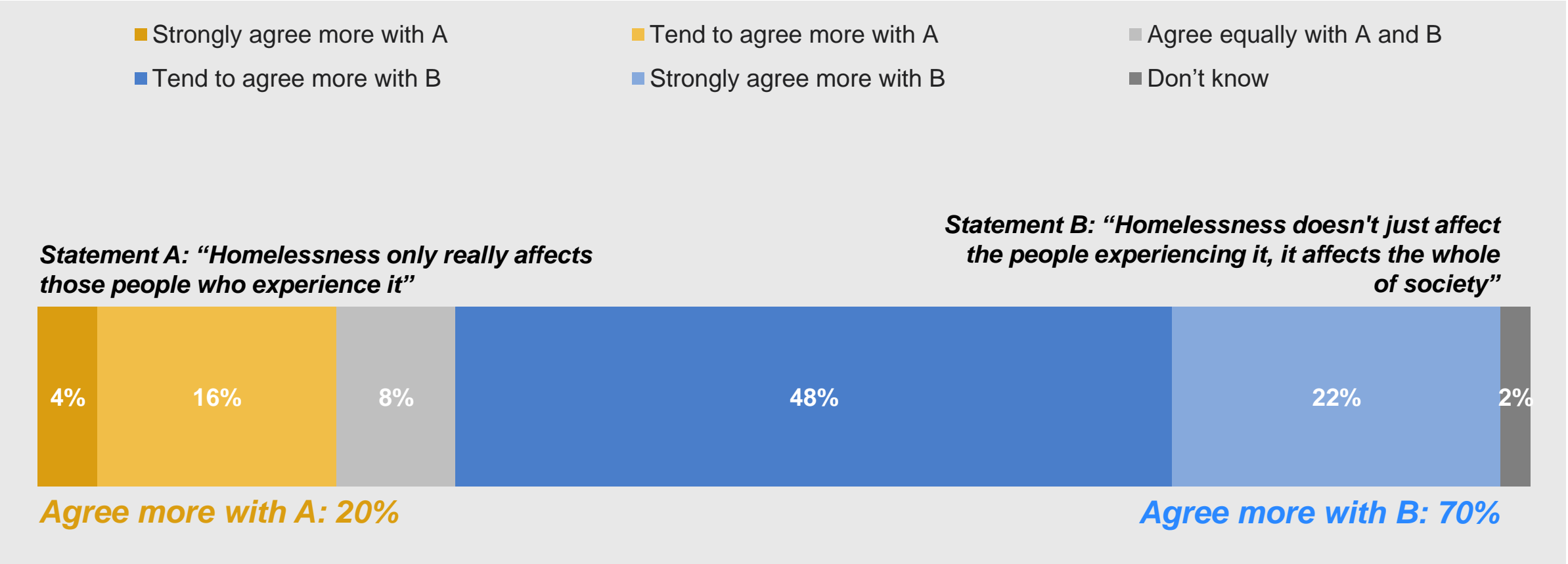
- Very confident
- Fairly confident
- Not very confident
- Not at all confident
- Don't know



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

Most agree that homelessness affects the whole of society, not just those experiencing it....

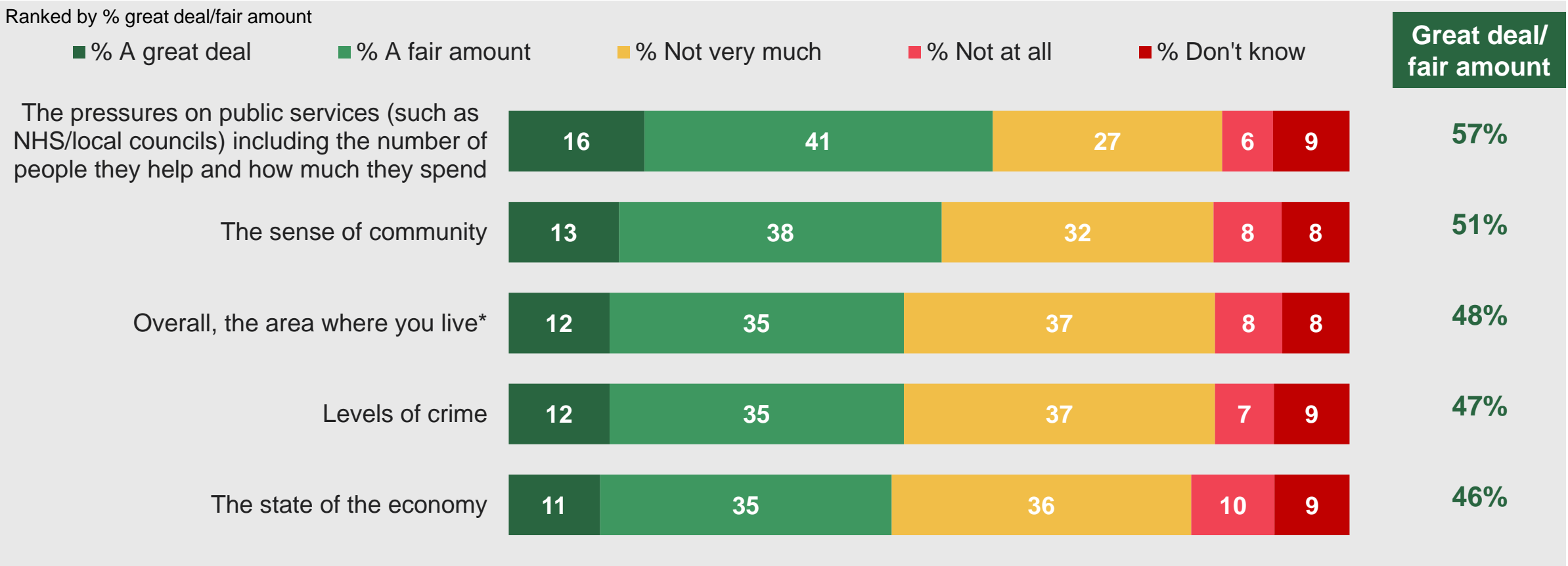
Q Please read the following pairs of statements about homelessness in the UK and decide which comes closest to your own opinion.



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

...and efforts to tackle homelessness are seen to have benefits for wider society, e.g. for public services and the sense of community.

Q How much, if at all, do you think that tackling homelessness would improve the following in the area where you live - that is within about 15-20 minutes' walk away?



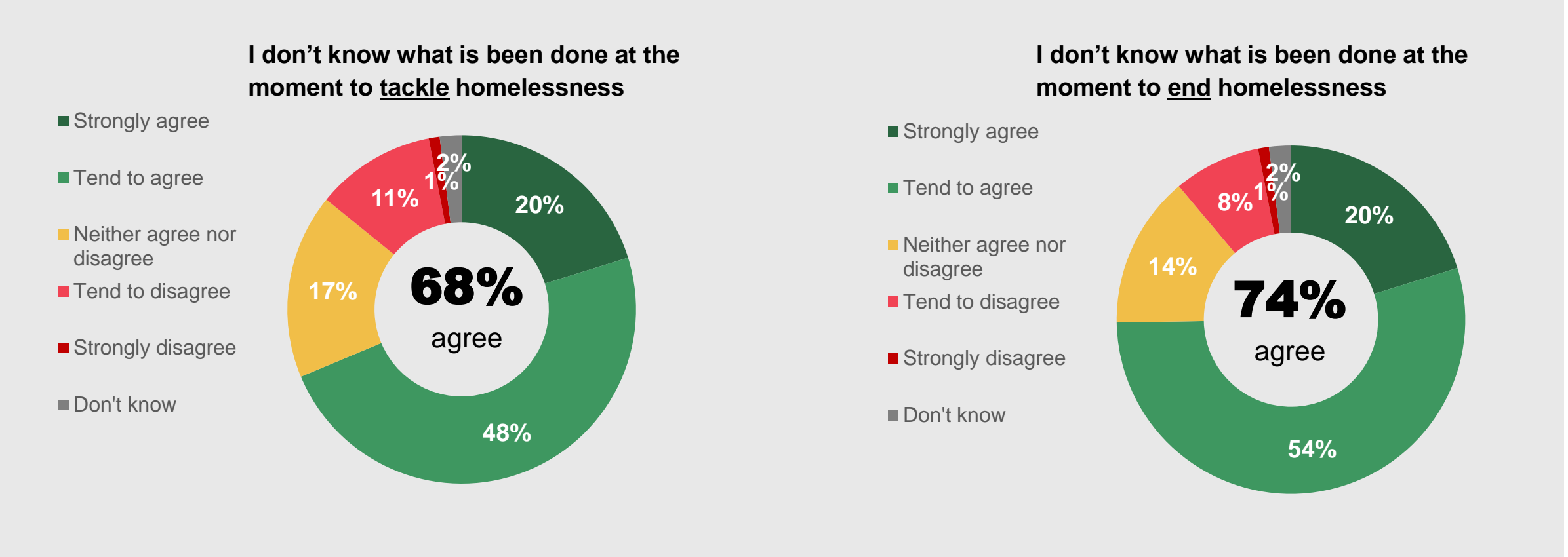
Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

*Overall, the area where you live' was asked last while the order of others was randomised.



There are gaps in information: 7 in 10 say they don't know what is being done to tackle/end homelessness in the UK.

Q Here are some things some people have said about homelessness in the UK. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each?



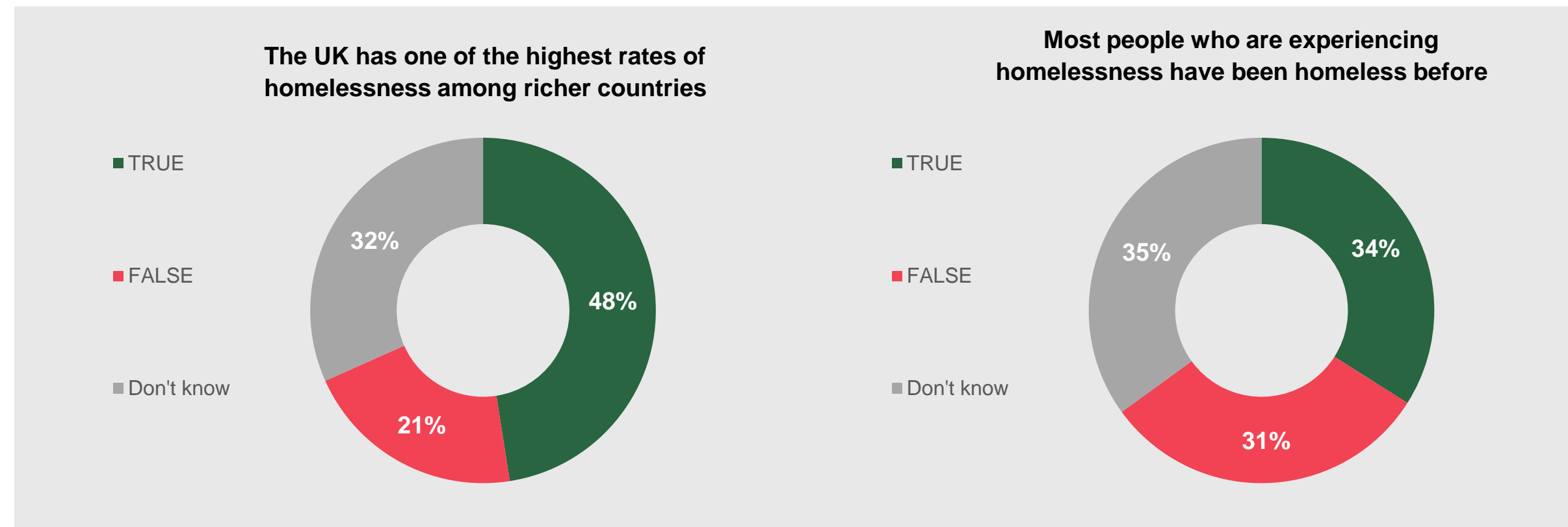
Source: Ipsos | Base: Half sample (1714)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

Source: Ipsos | Base: Half sample (1759)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023



1 in 3 believe most have experienced homelessness before, and a similar proportion don't know if the UK has one of the highest rates of homelessness

Q Here are some statements about homelessness in the UK. For each one we would like you to tell us whether you think it is true or false or whether you don't know?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023



Just 2 in 10 recall seeing or hearing anything in the past 3 months about actions to tackle homelessness...

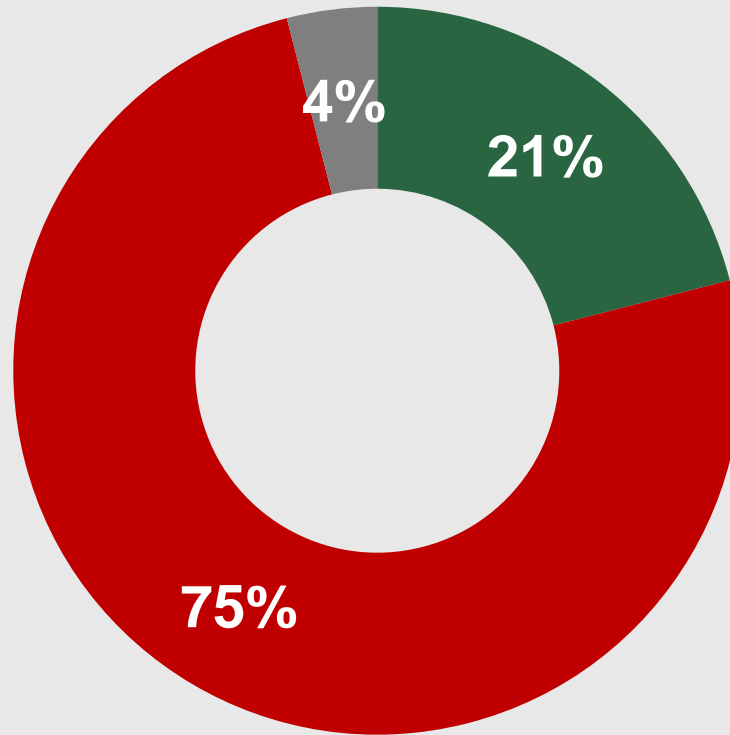


Before today, do you recall seeing or hearing anything about actions to tackle homelessness in the past 3 months, or not? It might have been in the media or from family and friends, or somewhere else?

■ Yes

■ No

■ Don't know

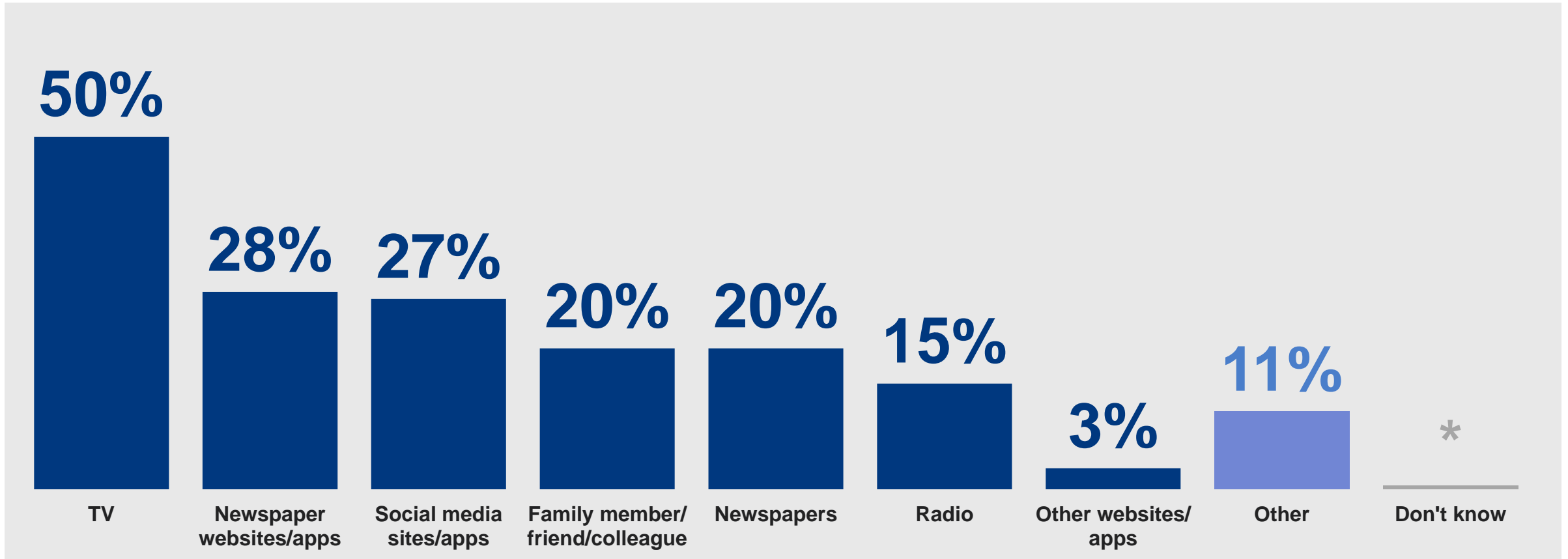


Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ (3473)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

...with the most common sources of information on this being the media or word of mouth through friends or family.



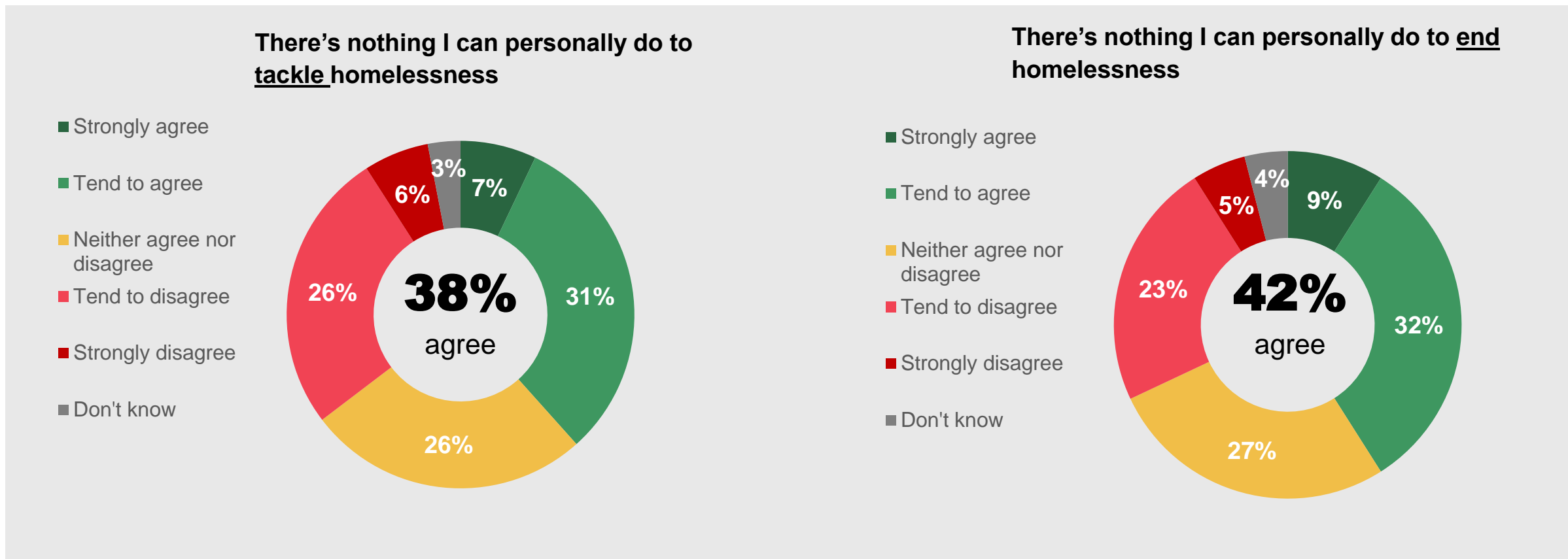
You said you recall seeing or hearing something about actions to tackle homelessness in the past 3 months. Where did you hear or see this?



Source: Ipsos | Base: All UK adults 16+ who have seen or heard something about actions to tackle homelessness in the past 3 months (726)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

People are not aware of what they can do to help – 4 in 10 agree there is nothing they can do personally and 3 in 10 are not sure/don't know.

Q Here are some things some people have said about homelessness in the UK. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each?



Source: Ipsos | Base: Half sample (1714)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

Source: Ipsos | Base: Half sample (1759)
Fieldwork dates: 5-10 May 2023

Conclusions

Image: Centre for Homelessness Impact – ResourceSpace
chi.resourcespace.com



- Ipsos was commissioned by The Royal Foundation to undertake research to support a **“bold new mission to demonstrate that together we can end homelessness in the UK”**.
- The survey shows that the public are sympathetic towards this mission and its potential to generate socio-economic and community benefits as well as improve the lives of individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- The public see homelessness in the UK as a serious problem, one that has got worse and is likely to deteriorate in the future. Most people recognise that homelessness goes beyond rough sleeping and can happen to anyone. 2 in 10 have some experience of homelessness themselves or through someone close to them.
- People think we should devote more attention to the issue and almost half think it should be given top priority over other important problems. They are sure that there is more we can do as a society to address homelessness and there is strong support for ending homeless when 'ending' is defined as making it rare, brief, and unrepeatable.
- While the public recognises that homelessness is a complex challenge with many causes (including structural and individual factors) there is strong support for a range of interventions and policies including preventive measures.

- The survey supplements findings from qualitative research conducted for The Royal Foundation last year. These studies show that people need convincing of the willpower and resources behind publicised efforts to tackle homelessness, about the efficacy of actions and, as a first step, about how co-ordinated that action is. This is also likely to be related to low levels of awareness of *what* has been done to tackle homelessness to date, *how* it has been done and *who* has done it.
- The survey findings point to opportunities to engage and involve the public (who are also unsure of the role they can play). Similarly, qualitative research showed the potential to reframe perceptions through the use of case studies and demonstrations of success.
- The research underlines the need to achieve balance when engaging the public about homelessness. It will be important to be upbeat, principles-led and ambitious while avoiding over-claim, staying transparent and realistic about ‘ending’ homelessness and what this means.

Appendices

Sample profile

	Sub-group	Unweighted sample	Weighted sample
Ethnicity	White (including white minorities)	3250	3028
	Ethnic minorities	188	412
Gender	Male	1681	1666
	Female	1766	1782
Age	18-24	117	422
	25-34	295	586
	35-44	467	543
	45-54	593	587
	55-64	855	529
	65-74	792	441
	75+	354	365
Location type	Urban	2504	2738
	Rural	969	735
Housing tenure	Owned outright / mortgage	2745	2519
	Rent from private landlord	310	457
	Rent from council / HA	319	327
Country	England	1805	2918
	Scotland	561	292
	Wales	572	166
	Northern Ireland	535	96

Ipsos Standards & Accreditations

Ipsos's standards & accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Moreover, our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a 'right first time' approach throughout our organisation.



ISO 20252 – is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911 / MRQSA & incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme); it covers the 5 stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos UK was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



MRS Company Partnership – By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos UK endorse and support the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commit to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation & we were the first company to sign our organisation up to the requirements & self regulation of the MRS Code; more than 350 companies have followed our lead.



ISO 9001 – International general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994 we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.



ISO 27001 – International standard for information security designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos UK was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.



The UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) & the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) – Ipsos UK is required to comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the UK Data Protection Act; it covers the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.



HMG Cyber Essentials – A government backed and key deliverable of the UK's National Cyber Security Programme. Ipsos UK was assessment validated for certification in 2016. Cyber Essentials defines a set of controls which, when properly implemented, provide organisations with basic protection from the most prevalent forms of threat coming from the internet.



Fair Data – Ipsos UK is signed up as a 'Fair Data' Company by agreeing to adhere to ten core principles. The principles support and complement other standards such as ISOs, and the requirements of Data Protection legislation.

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for market research, ISO 20252 and with the Ipsos UK Terms and Conditions.

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