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**THE  
POLICY  
INSTITUTE**

**KING'S**  
*College*  
**LONDON**

# How polarised is the 2019 general election?

For more information, contact:  
**Bobby Duffy**  
[bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk)

**General  
election  
2019**



# About this study

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This analysis by the [Policy Institute at King's College London](#) reveals the extent of divisions in Britain during the 2019 general election campaign.

Using data from a survey of over 2,000 adults conducted by Ipsos MORI between 27 and 29 November, the analysis finds that:

- People's Brexit identities have grown stronger.
- Opposing groups have very negative views of each other and the two main parties' leaders.
- There are widespread misperceptions about how the "other side" feels about important political issues such as the NHS and climate change.

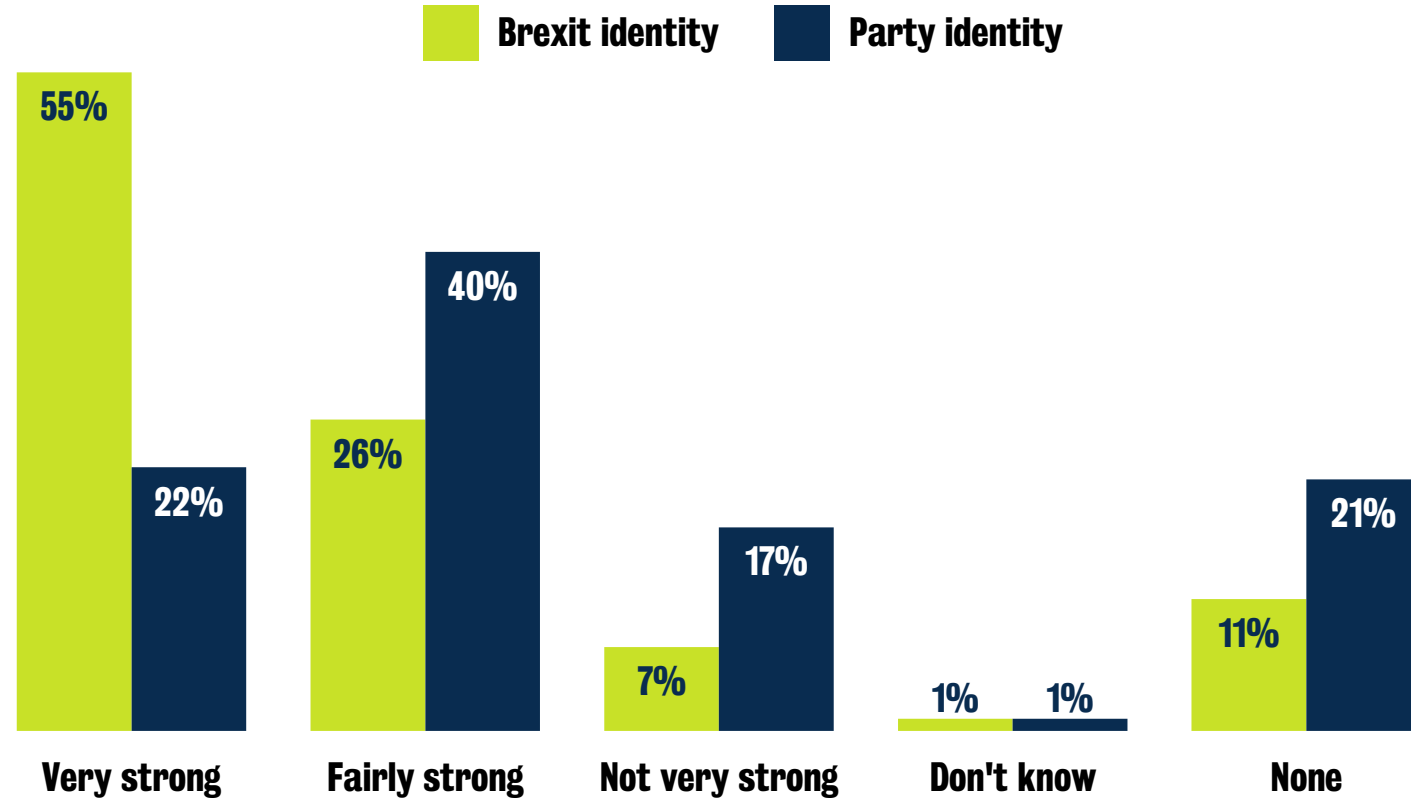
**People's Brexit identities are stronger than their political party identities – and this strength of feeling has increased since 2018**

An abstract graphic on the right side of the image, consisting of numerous thin, wavy, yellow-green lines that create a sense of movement and depth against the dark blue background. The lines are arranged in a way that suggests a three-dimensional, flowing structure, possibly representing a stylized wave or a complex, organic form.

In this general election campaign, the British public's **Brexit identities are dramatically stronger than their political party identities.**

22% say they identify very strongly with their party, while **more than double** – 55% – say they identify very strongly with their side of the Brexit debate.

**Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong or not very strong supporter of your party?**  
**Would you call yourself a very strong [Remainer/Leaver], fairly strong or not very strong?**

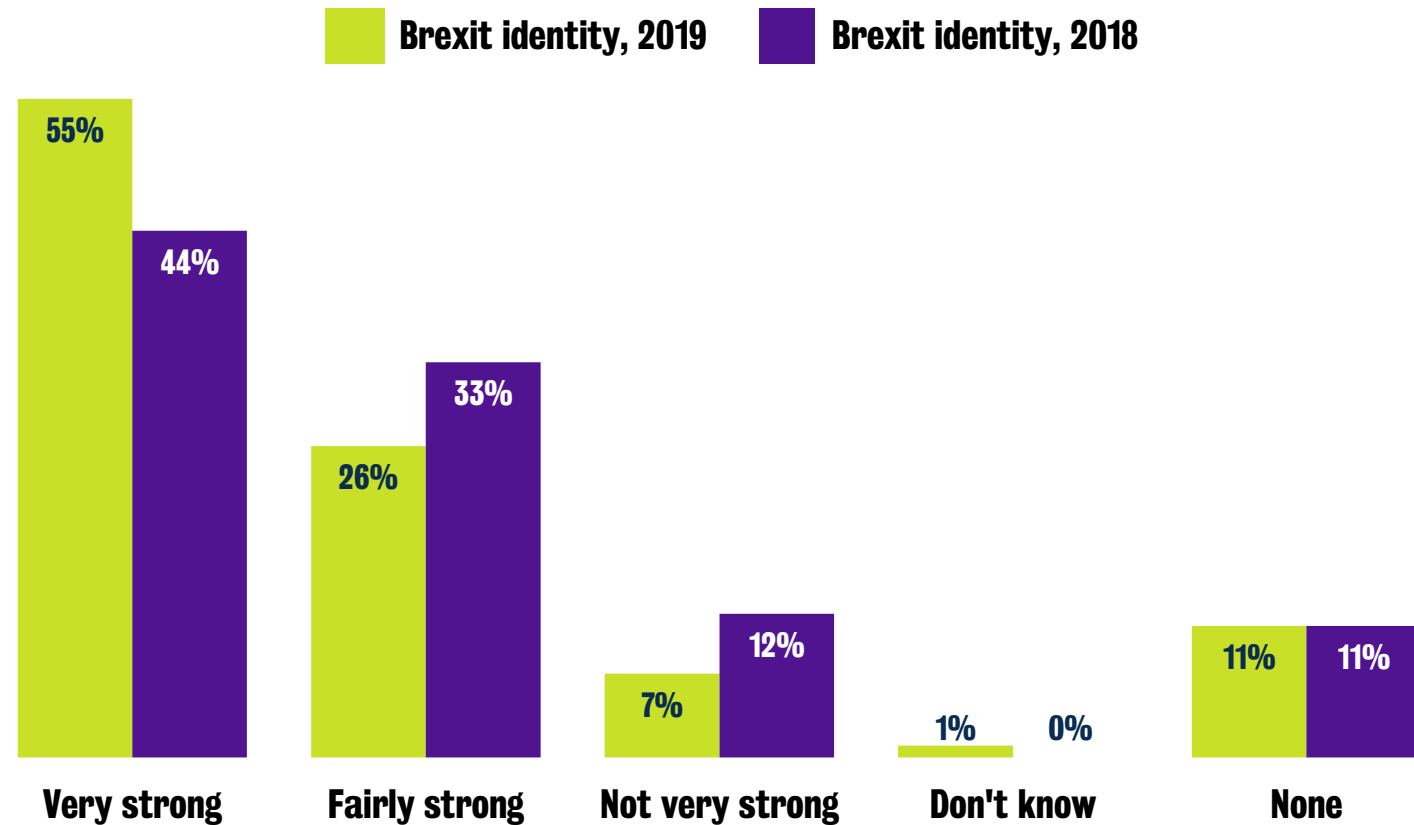


Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

The proportion who **very strongly identify** with their side of the **Brexit** debate has **increased since 2018**.

This may be due to a focus on issues relating to Brexit during the general election campaign.

## Would you call yourself a very strong [Remainer/Leaver], fairly strong or not very strong?

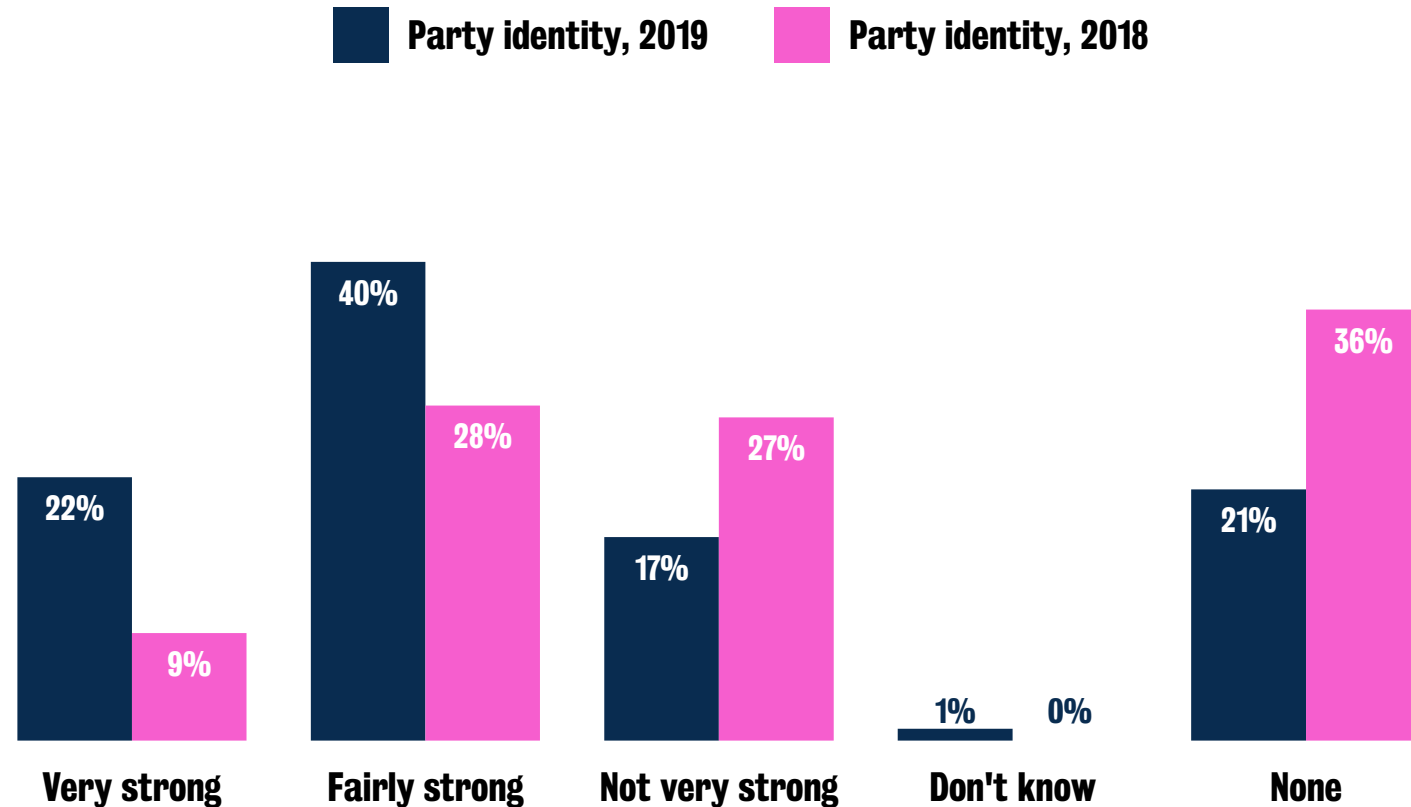


Sources: 1) Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov 2019, 2) NatCen, 2,090 interviews with adults aged 18+ in England, Wales and Scotland (via NatCen mixed mode random probability panel), 7 Jun-8 Jul 2018.

The proportion who very and fairly strongly identify with their **political party** has also **increased since last year**.

This is not unexpected given the focus on party politics during the election campaign.

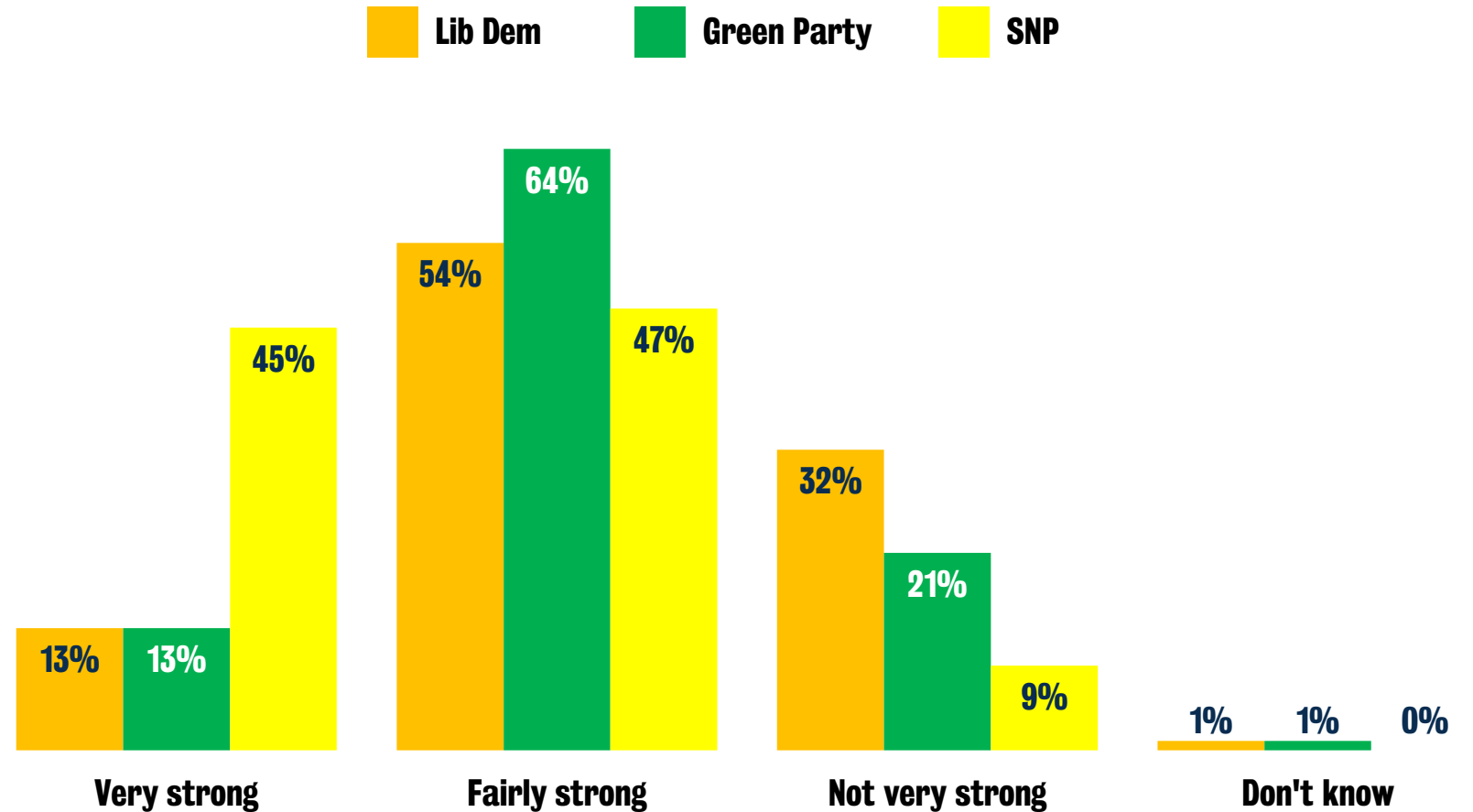
### Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong or not very strong supporter of your party?



The **Lib Dems** and **Green Party** have the **lowest proportion of supporters** who say they very strongly identify with their parties – both at just 13%.

By contrast, **strength of support for a political party is highest among SNP supporters**, 45% of whom say they very strongly identify with the party.

### Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong or not very strong supporter of your party?

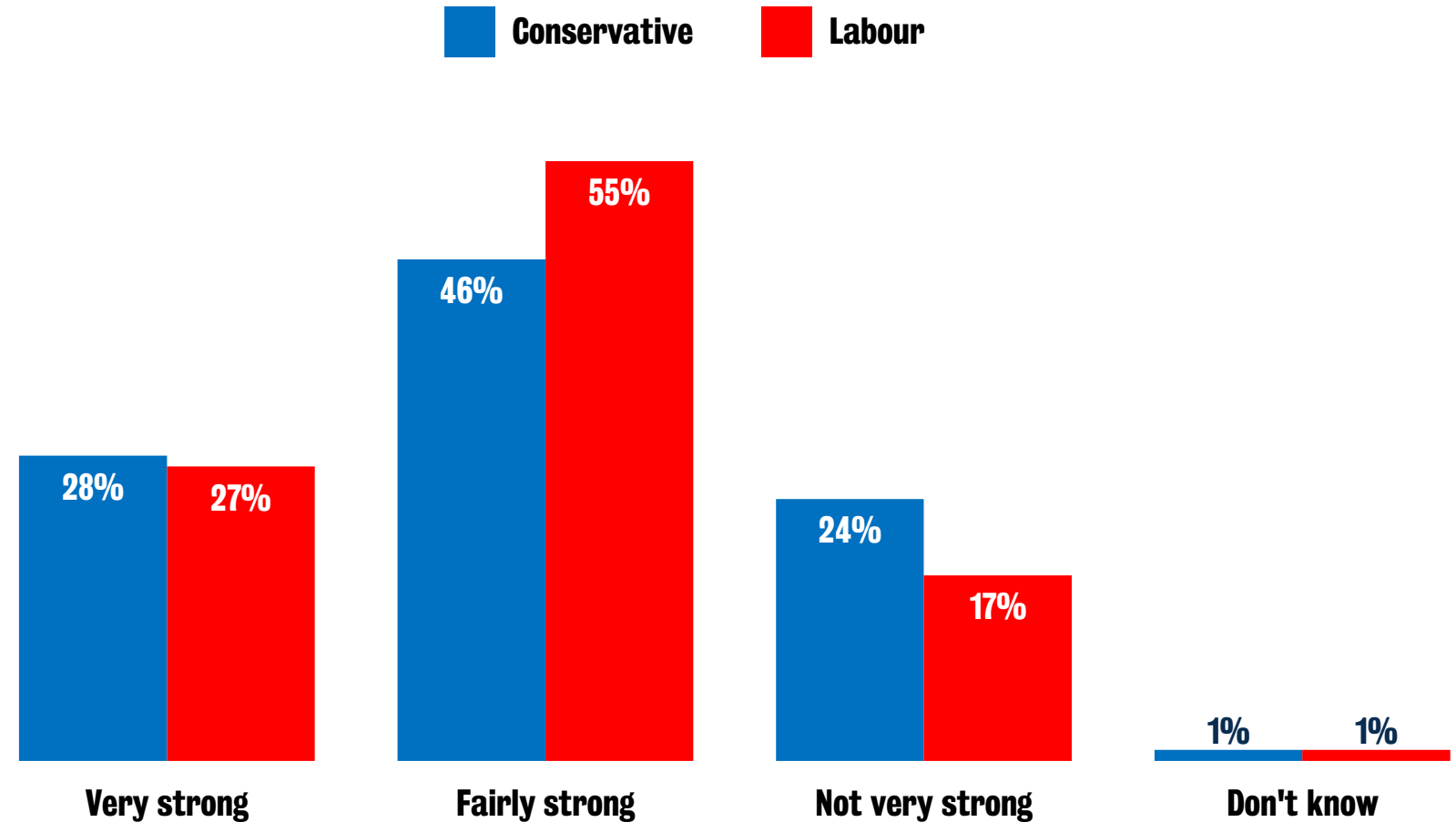




**Conservatives (28%) and Labour supporters (27%) very strongly identify with their respective parties to virtually the same extent.**

However, Labour supporters are more likely than Conservatives to identify with their party fairly strongly.

### Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong or not very strong supporter of your party?

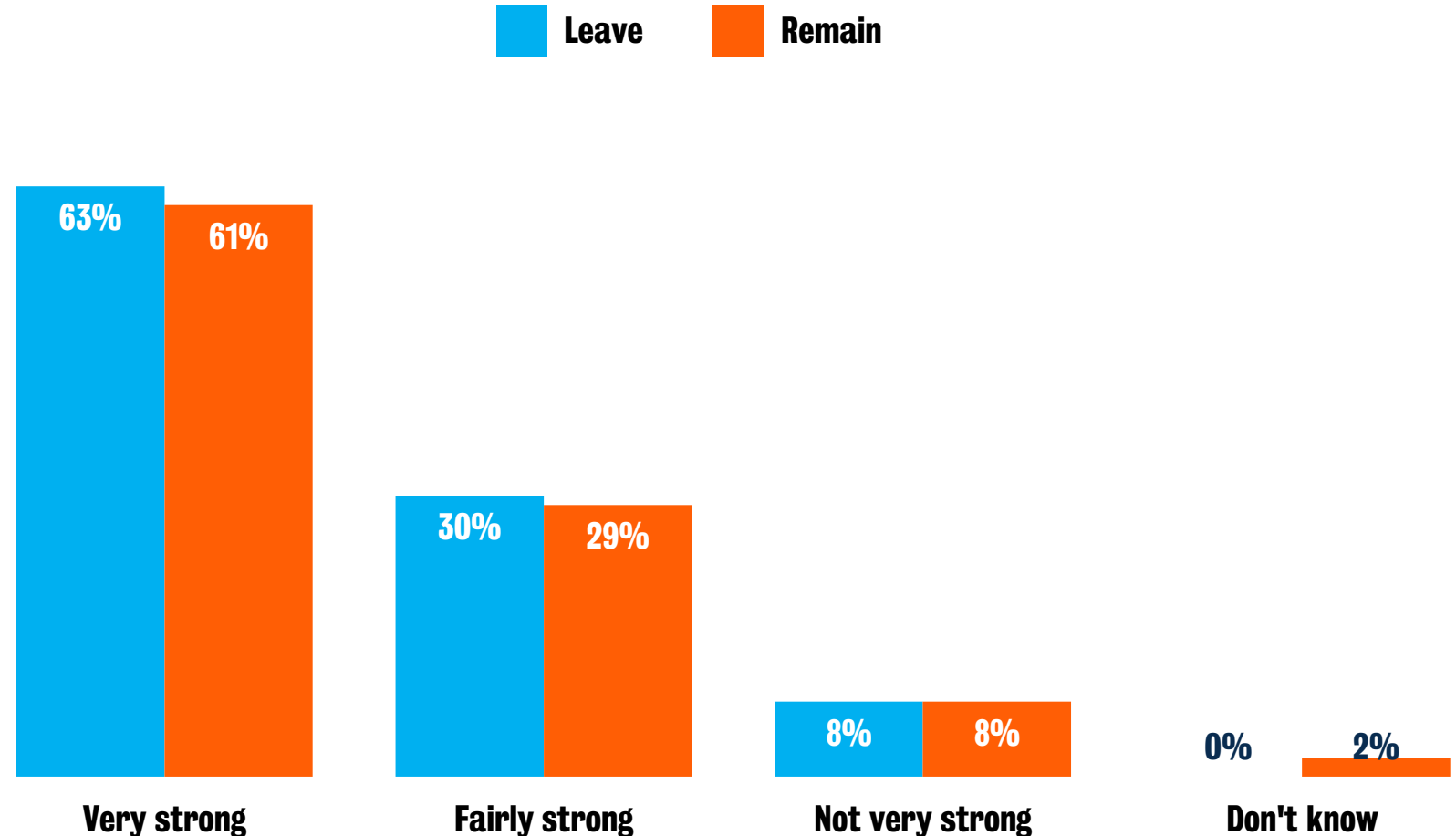


Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

The extent to which Leave and Remain supporters identify with their respective Brexit identities is **almost exactly the same**.

63% of Leavers and 61% of Remainers say they very strongly identify with their side of the Brexit debate, while 30% and 29% respectively say they identify with it fairly strongly.

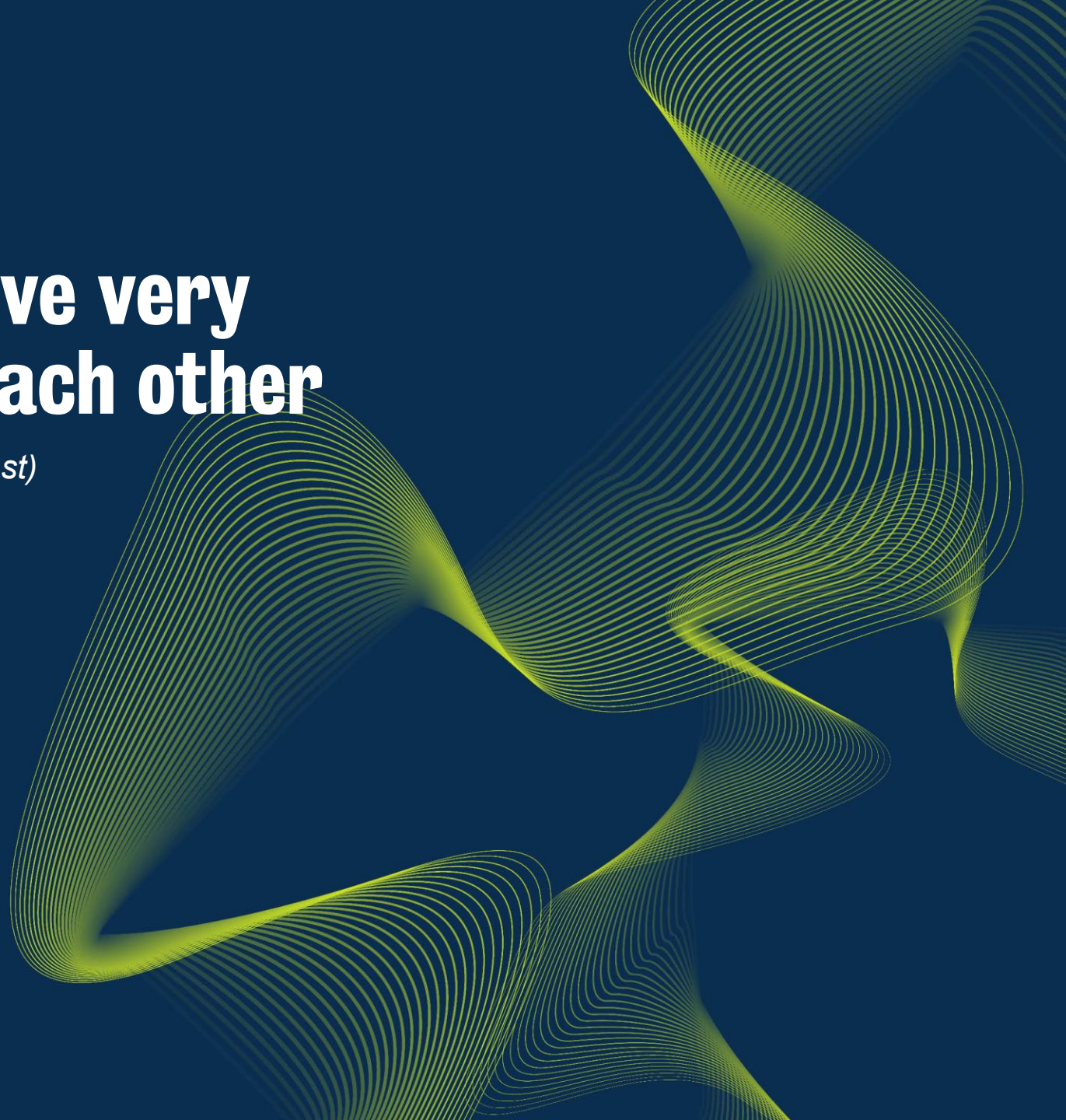
### Would you call yourself a very strong [Remainer/Leaver], fairly strong or not very strong?



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

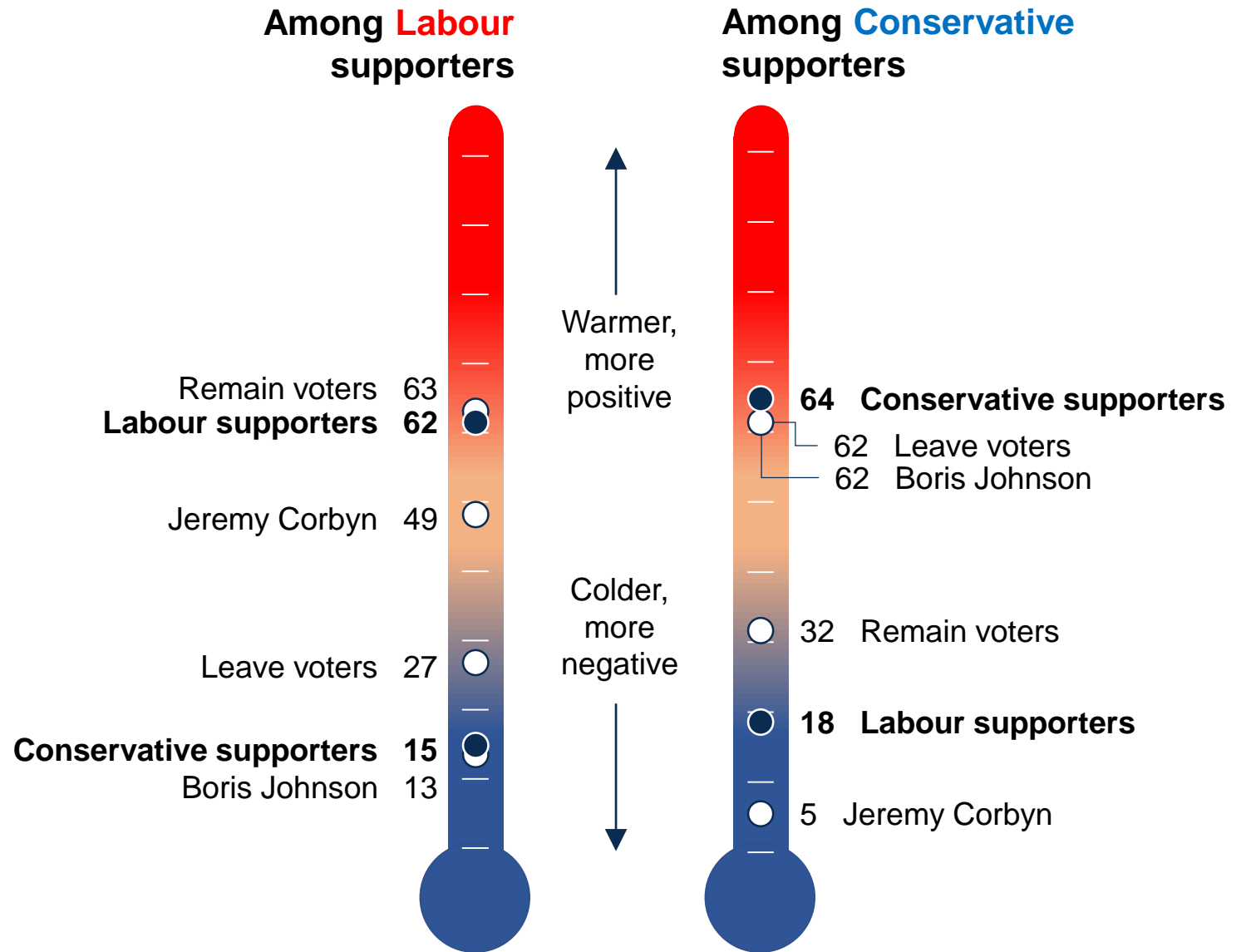
# Opposing groups have very negative views of each other

*“Feeling thermometer” ratings, from 0 (coldest) to 100 (warmest)*



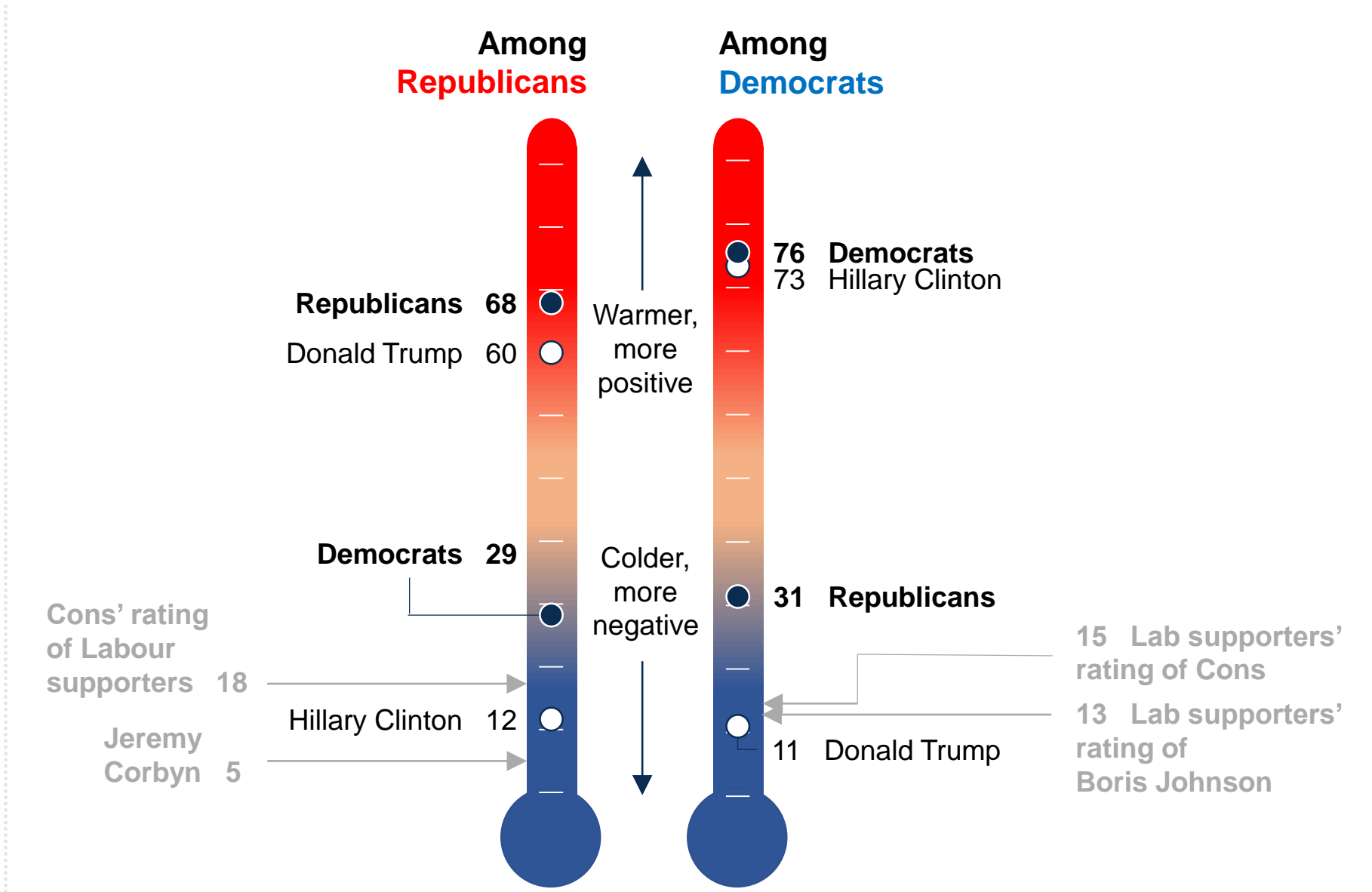
When asked to rate different groups on a “feeling thermometer”, **supporters of the two main parties rate each other almost equally negatively**: Labour supporters give Conservatives a 15 out of 100, while Conservatives give Labour supporters an 18.

**Labour supporters feel more negatively towards Jeremy Corbyn than Conservative supporters do towards Boris Johnson.** The two leaders receive a rating of 49 and 62 respectively from their own side. Conservative supporters score Corbyn at just 5.



The same question [was asked in the US](#) by Pew Research Center, in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election.

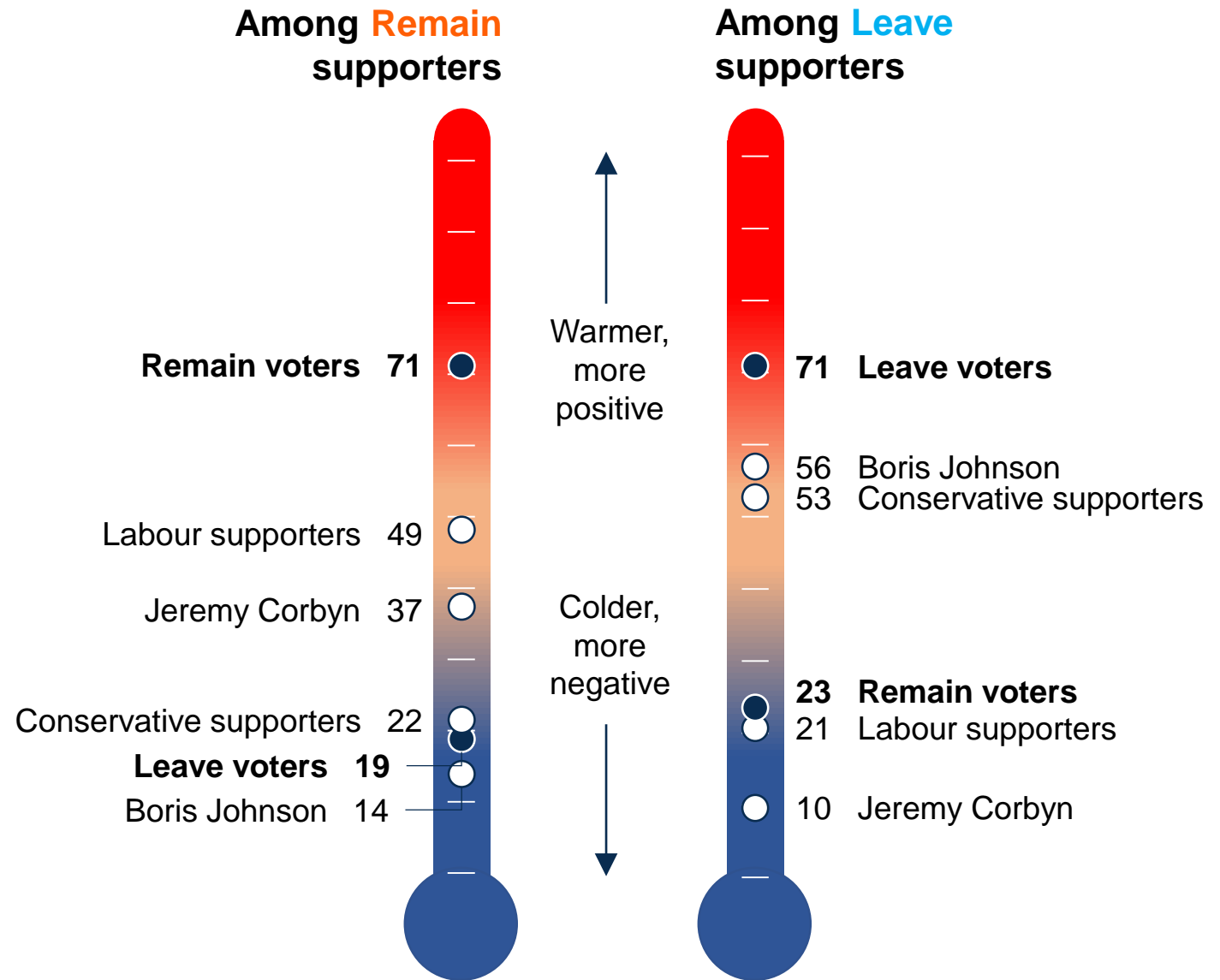
Perhaps surprisingly, during this election campaign **people in the UK are more negative about supporters of the “other side” than in the US in 2016, and Jeremy Corbyn is rated lower by Conservatives than Hillary Clinton was by Republicans.**



Sources: 1) Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov, 2) Pew Research Center, 4,385 interviews (American Trends Panel), conducted in two waves, 2-28 March 2016 and 5 Apr - 2 May 2016.

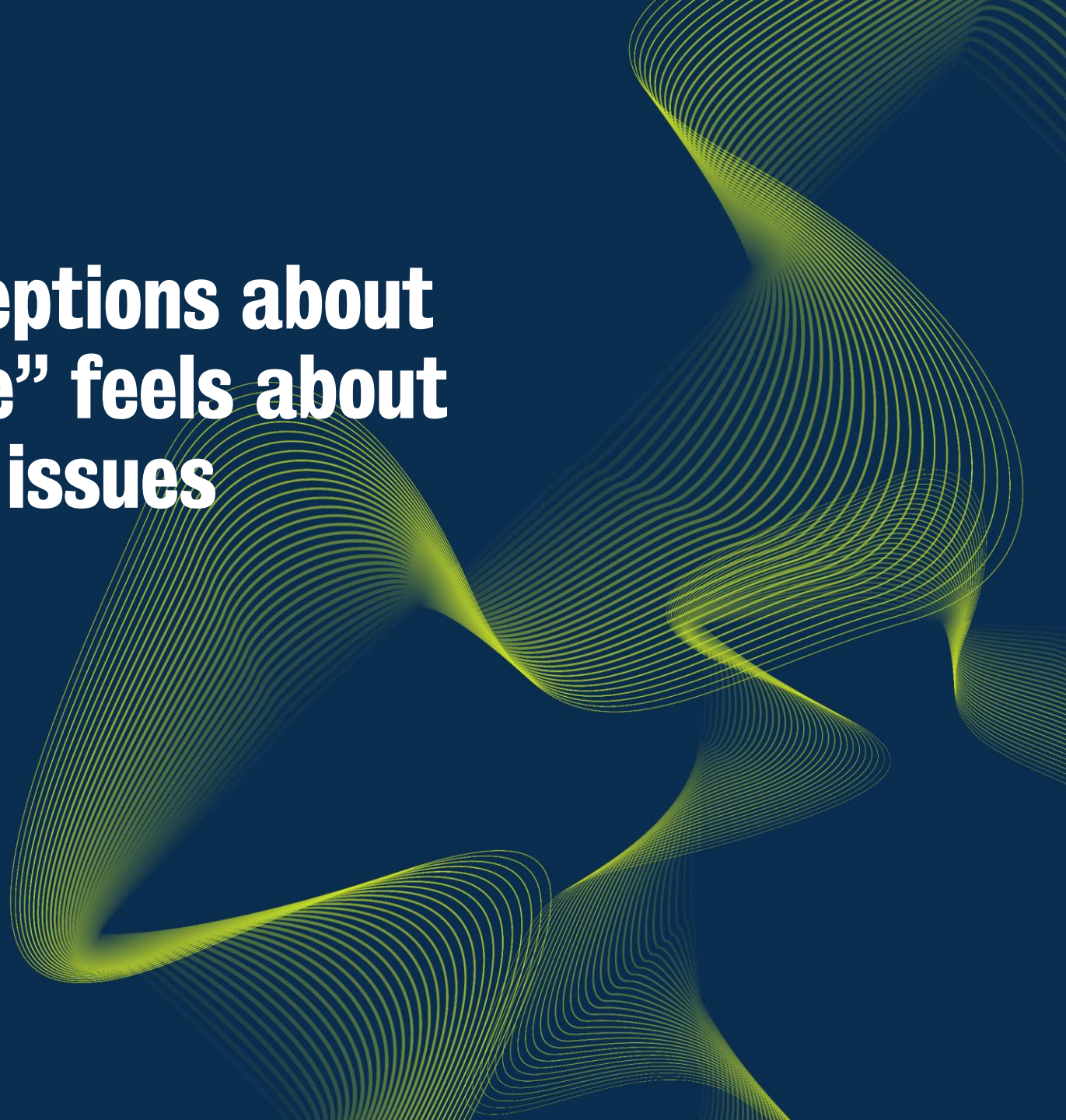
Leave supporters give Remain voters a thermometer rating of 23, while **Remainers give Leavers a slightly more negative rating of 19.**

And Leave supporters have a **much warmer view** of Boris Johnson (56) than Remain supporters have of Jeremy Corbyn (37).



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

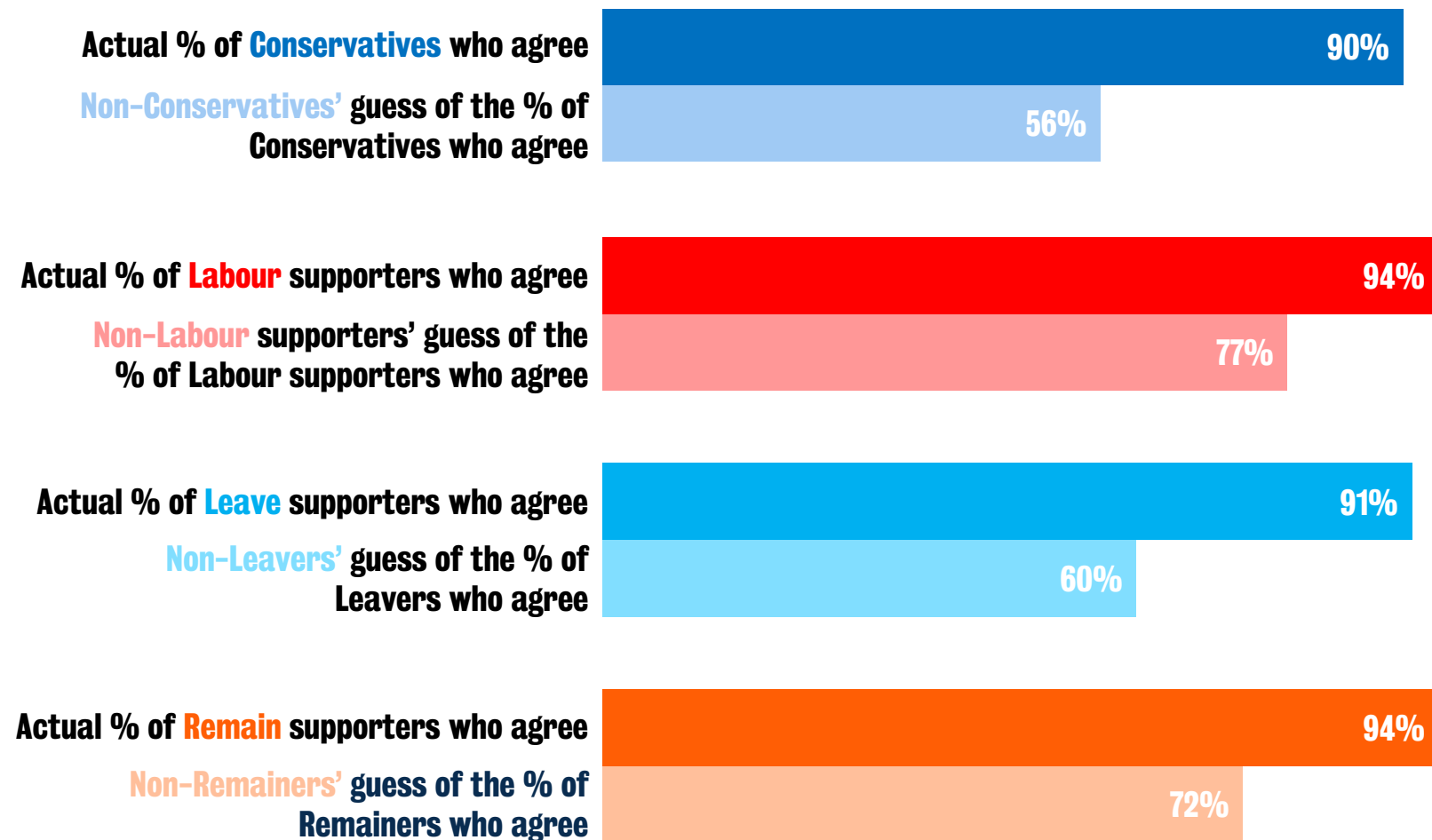
**There are misperceptions about  
how the “other side” feels about  
important political issues**



**90% or more** of the two main parties' supporters, as well as both Leavers and Remainers, all say the NHS is crucial and must be maintained.

**But people significantly underestimate levels of support for this view among all these groups**, with the biggest gap in perception for the Tories: non-Conservatives guess 56% of Tories hold this view of the NHS, when 90% actually do.

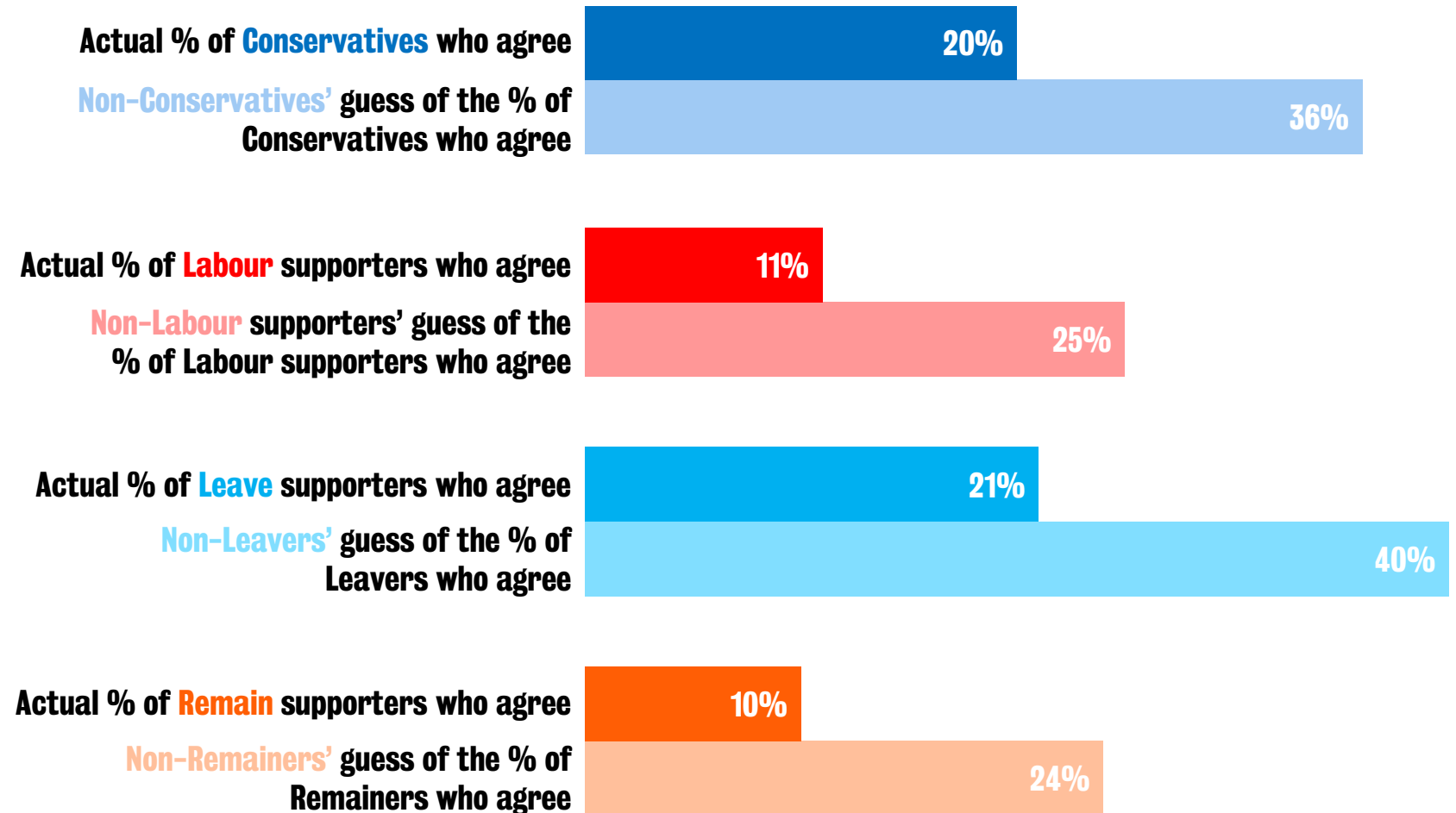
## To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The NHS is crucial to British society and we must do everything we can to maintain it





People significantly overestimate levels of climate change denial among these four groups, with the guesses around twice as high as the actual level for each group: more people think climate change is genuine than we realise.

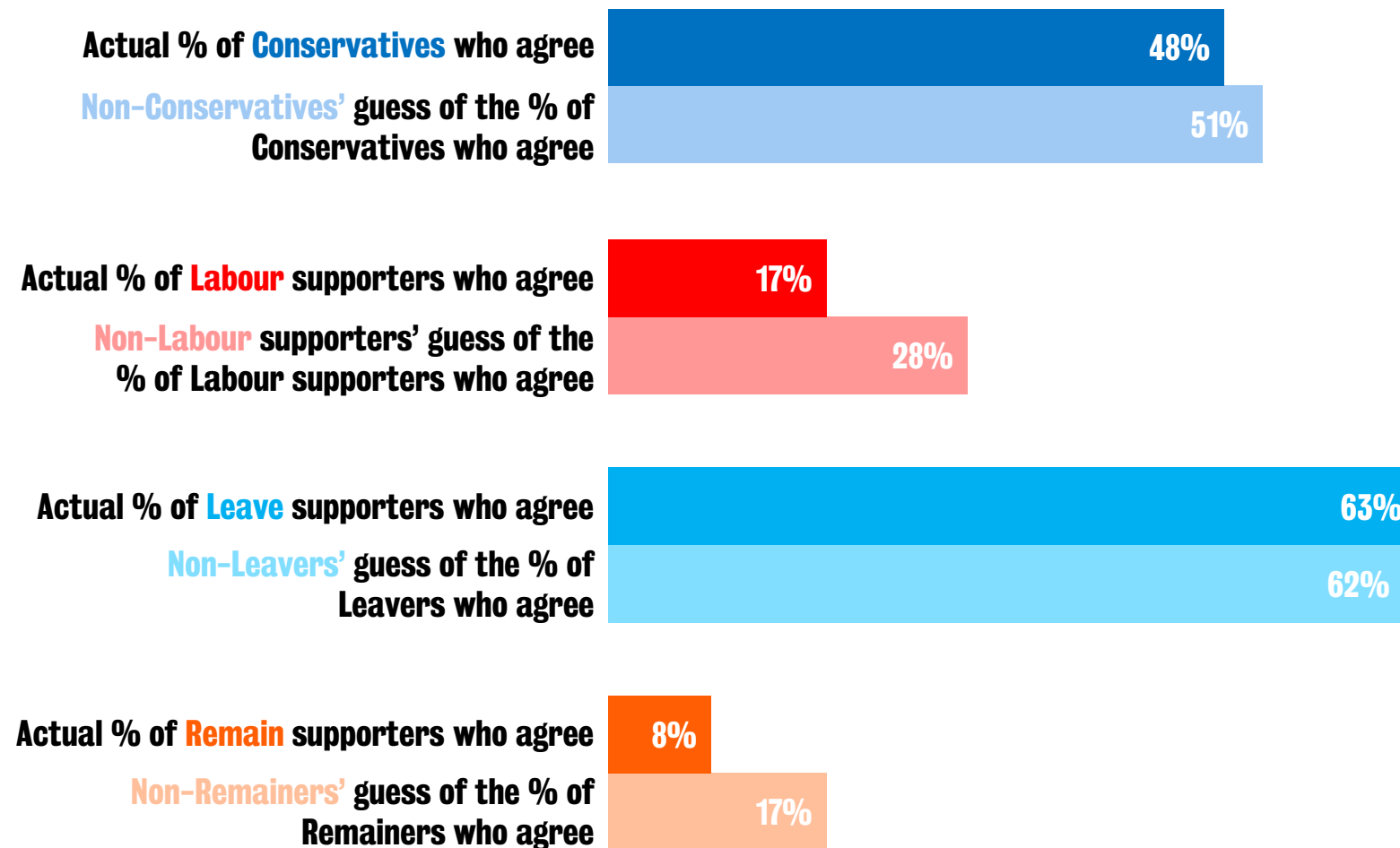
### To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Global warming is an expensive hoax



There are very different views on whether we should leave the EU without a deal between party and Leave/Remain supporters.

And people are **more accurate at guessing levels of support for a no-deal Brexit** among these groups. However, those who do not identify with the Labour Party overestimate the proportion of Labour supporters who favour such an option by 11 percentage points.

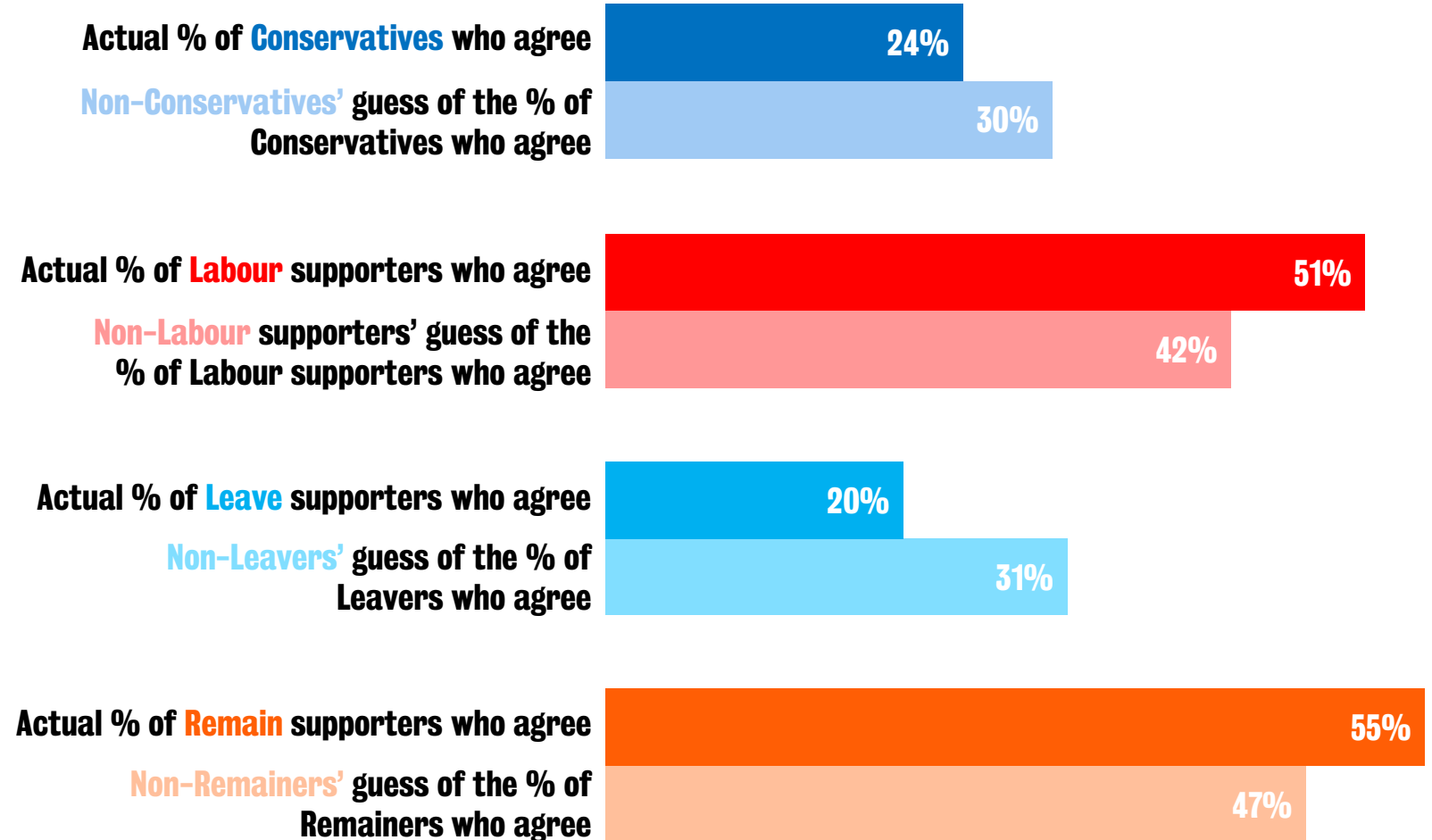
## To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? We should leave the EU without a deal



Calculations by the Migration Advisory Council show that EU migrants bring in significantly more in tax than they use in benefits and services. Only 24% of Conservatives and 20% of Leavers correctly identify this.

When others guess at these groups' views, they think that Leave supporters and Conservatives have a more positive view of EU immigrants' financial contribution to the UK than they actually do.

## To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? EU immigrants in the UK pay in more in taxes than they receive in welfare benefits and public services

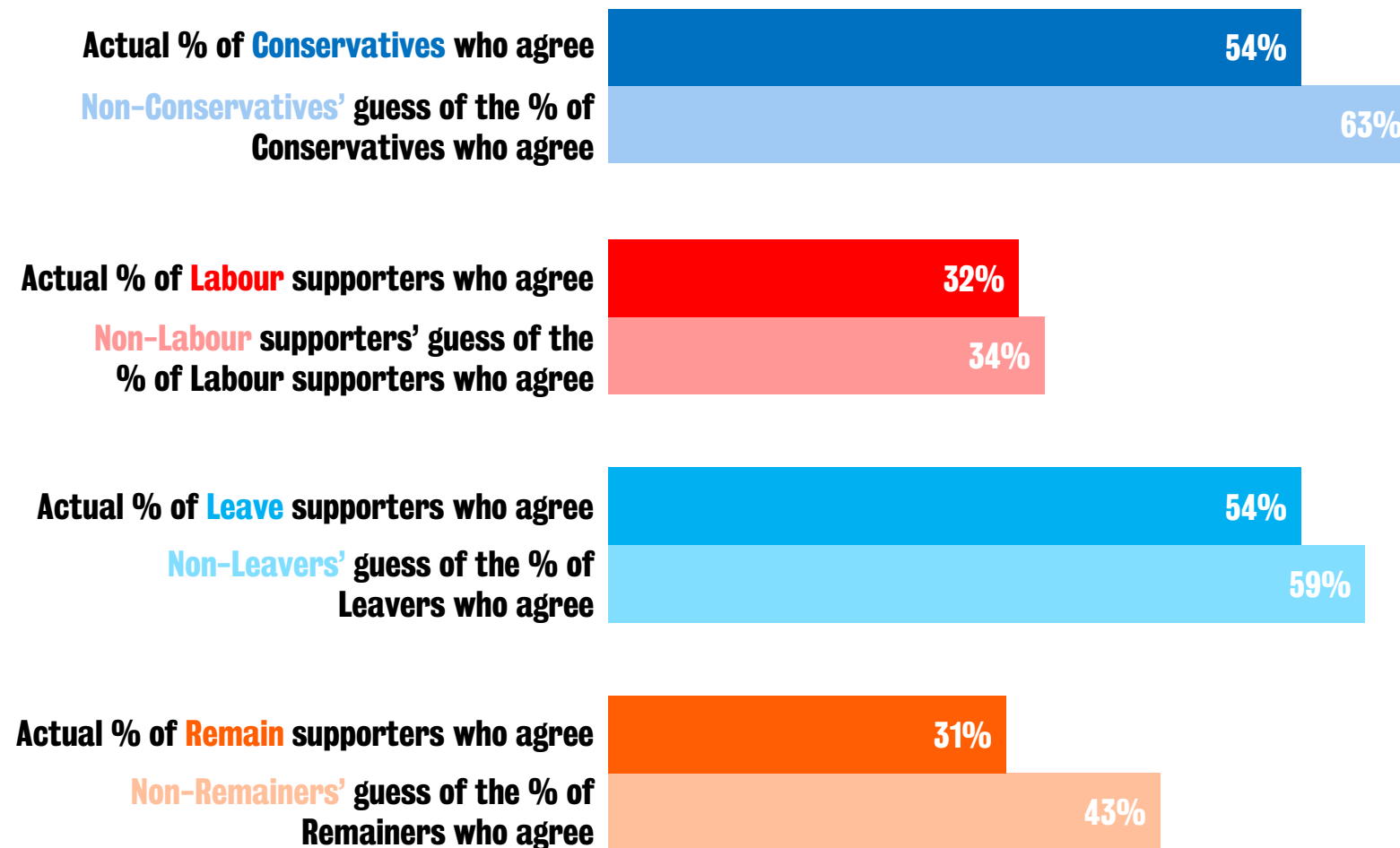


Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

The actual levels of agreement with whether people should be able to make as much money as they want clearly split into two groups: Conservative and Leave supporters hold very similar views, as do Labour and Remain supporters.

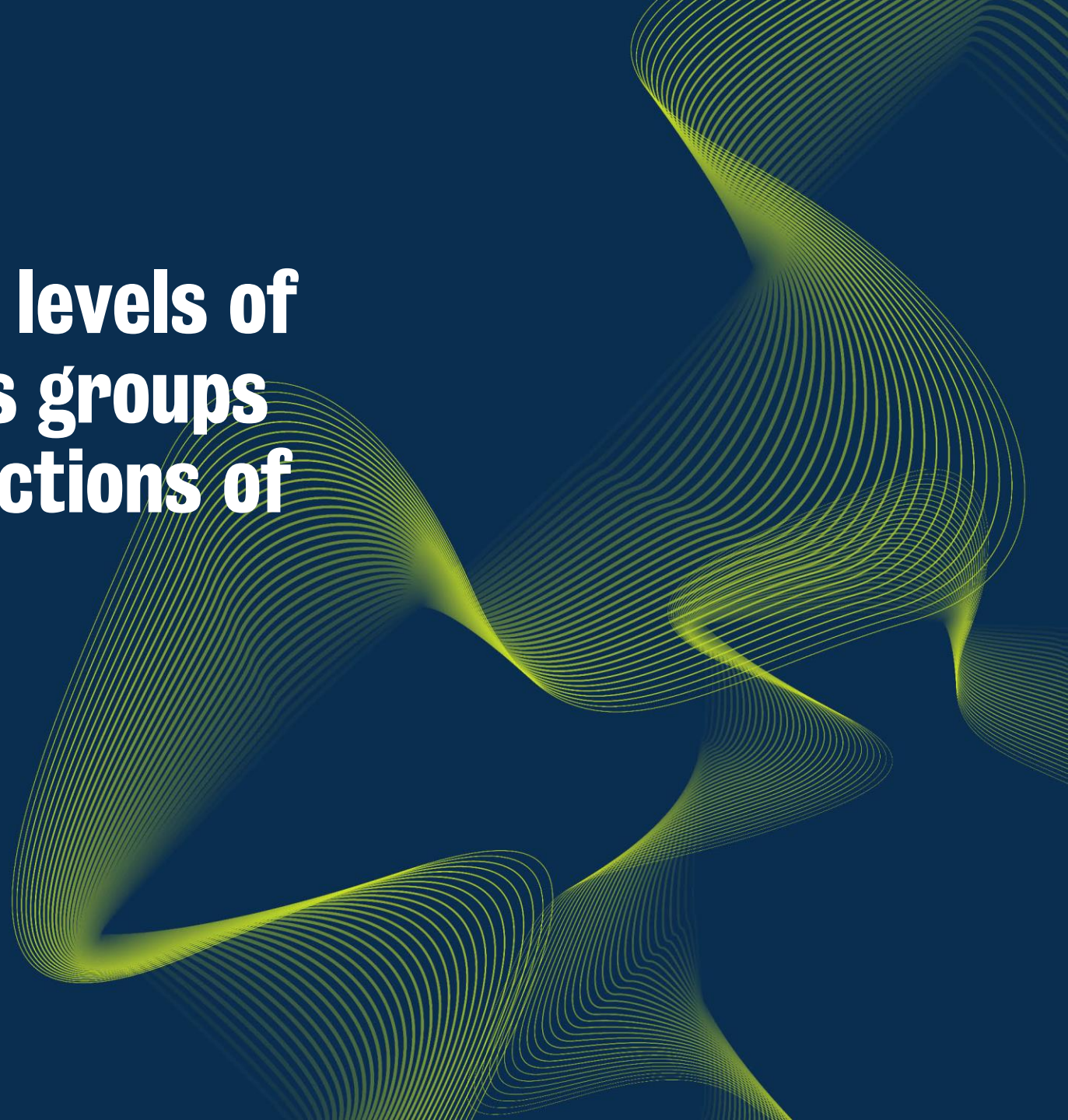
People overestimate the proportion of Remain supporters who favour a **society that enables people to make and keep as much money as they want**, guessing 43% when the reality is 31%.

## To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The ideal society is one in which people can make and keep as much money as they want



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

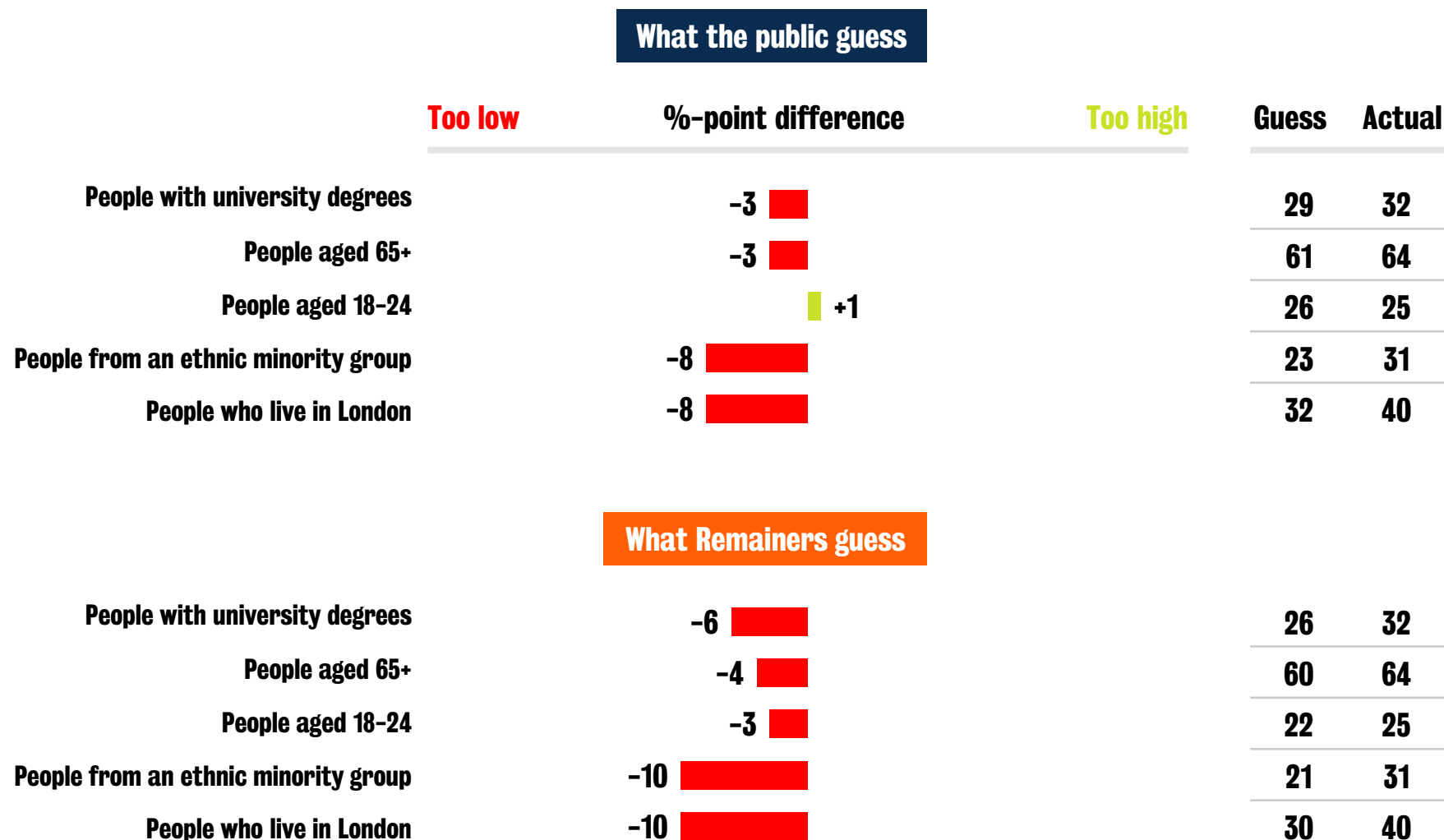
**People misperceive levels of support for various groups among different sections of the population**



The public are **relatively good at guessing the proportion of Leave supporters** among different groups.

Remainers are slightly less accurate, with the biggest misperceptions being an underestimating of the proportion of ethnic minority groups and Londoners who are Leave supporters.

## What percentage of the following groups in the UK do you think are **Leave supporters**?

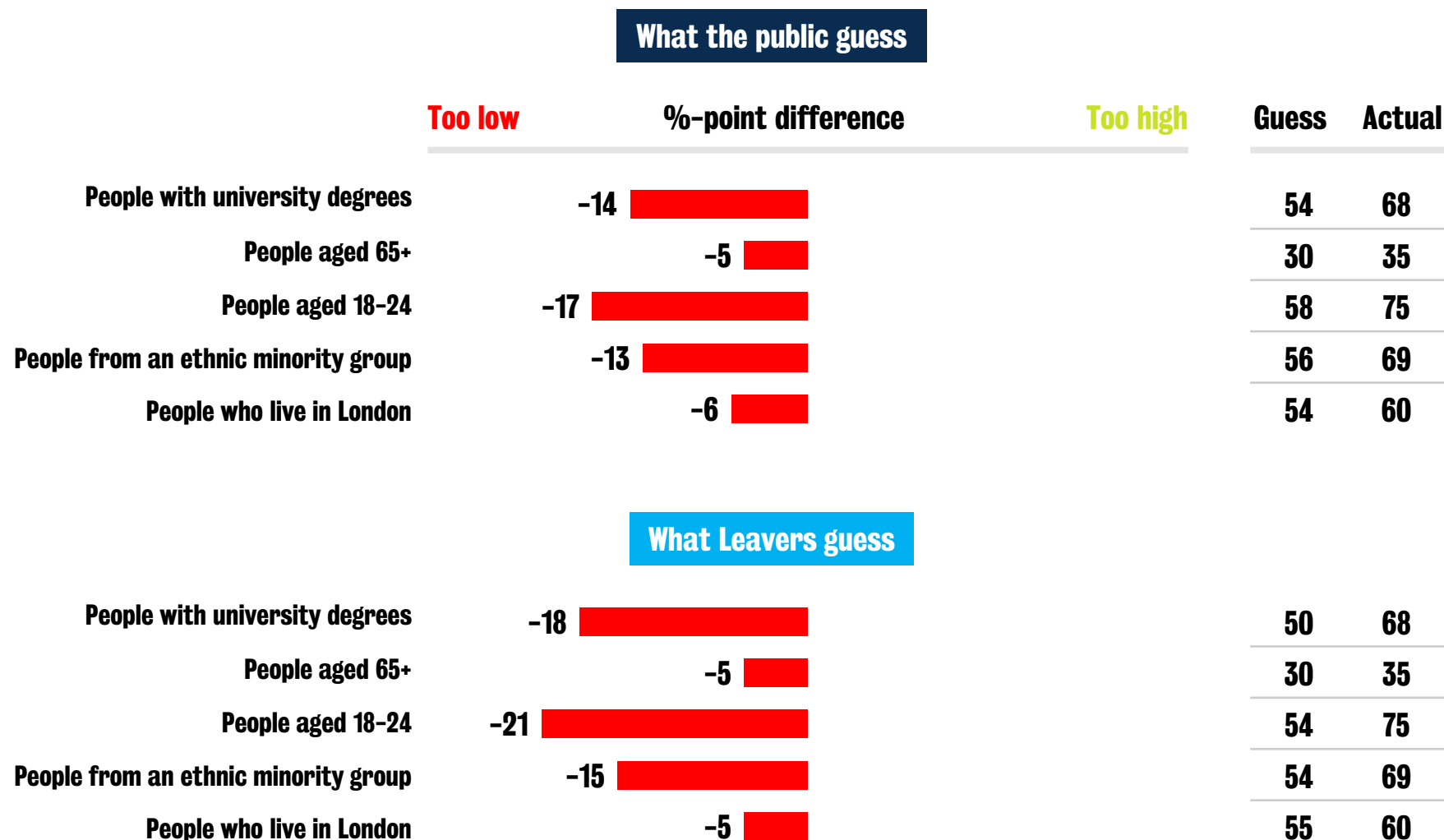


Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

The public are **less good at guessing levels of support for Remain** among different groups, significantly underestimating the proportion of 18-24-year-olds who are Remainers in particular. They guess 58% when the reality is 75%.

Leave supporters are a little worse at guessing Remain support, underestimating the extent of it among young people and those with degrees.

## What percentage of the following groups in the UK do you think are **Remain supporters**?



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

Both the general public and Labour supporters overestimate levels of Conservative support – particularly among people who live in London. Both groups think Londoners are much more likely to be Conservative supporters than they are in reality.

## What percentage of the following groups in the UK do you think are Conservative supporters?

### What the public guess

	Too low	%-point difference	Too high	Guess	Actual
People with university degrees		+13		41	28
People aged 65+		+5		55	50
People aged 18-24		+7		27	20
People from an ethnic minority group		+12		27	15
People who live in London		+15		42	27

### What Labour supporters guess

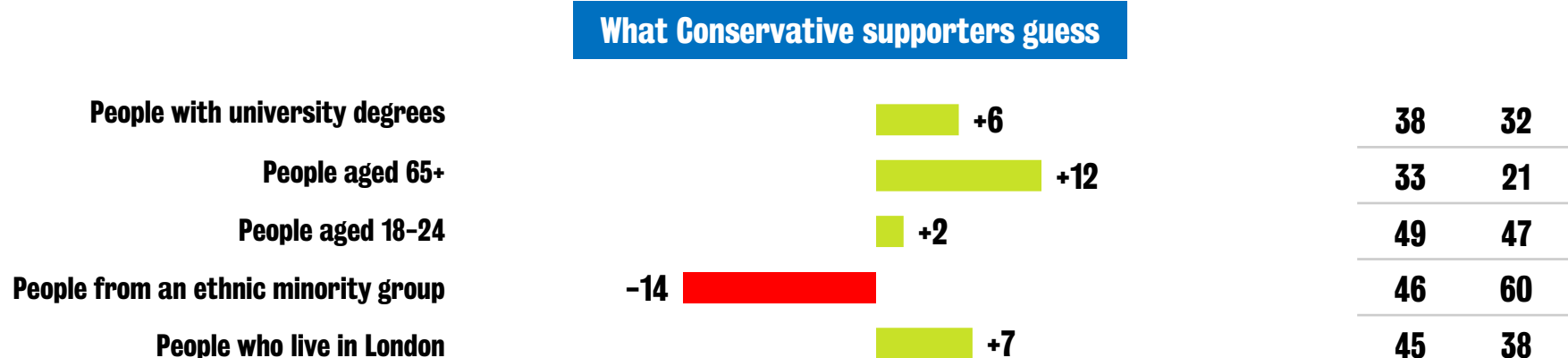
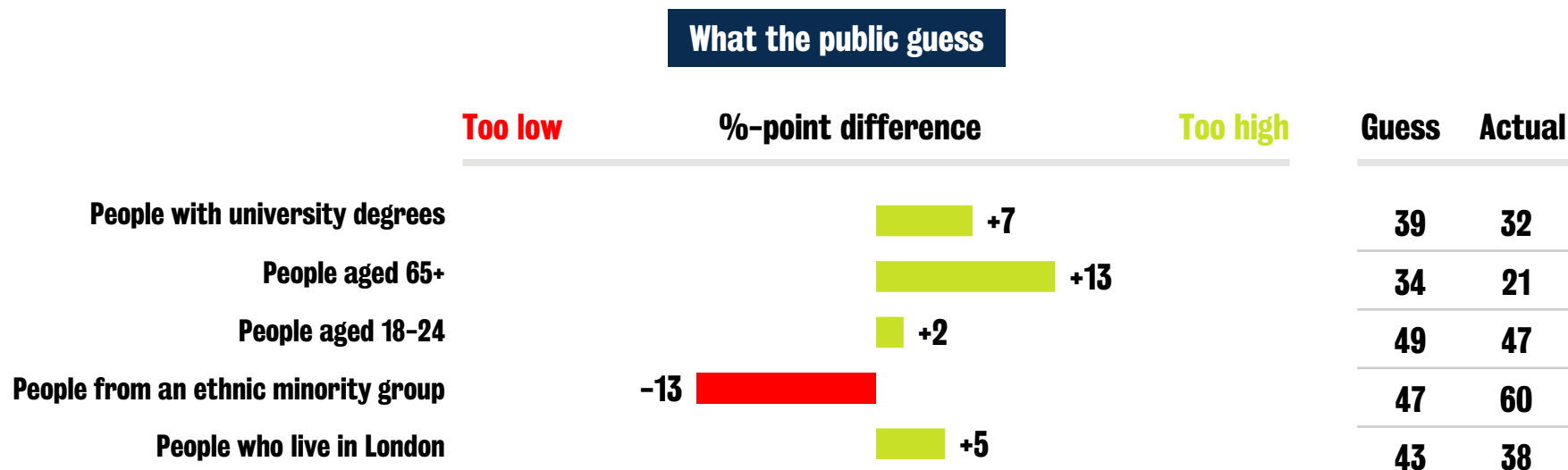
People with university degrees		+11		39	28
People aged 65+		+3		53	50
People aged 18-24		+5		25	20
People from an ethnic minority group		+8		23	15
People who live in London		+12		39	27

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.



And perceptions of Labour support are also inaccurate for some groups, most notably ethnic minorities. **The public guess that 47% of minorities are Labour supporters, and Conservatives guess 46% – but the reality is 60%.**

## What percentage of the following groups in the UK do you think are **Labour supporters**?



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2,213 interviews with adults 18-75 conducted online, 27-29 Nov.

# Technical information

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1. 2,213 interviews with adults aged 18-75 were conducted online by Ipsos MORI, between 27 and 29 November 2019.
2. 2018 figures for strength of Brexit and political party identities taken from: Curtice, J. (2018) *The emotional legacy of Brexit: How Britain has become a country of 'Remainers' and 'Leavers'*, NatCen and UK in a Changing Europe. 2,090 interviews with adults aged 18+ in England, Wales and Scotland (via NatCen mixed mode random probability panel), between 7 June to 8 July 2018.
3. 2016 feeling thermometer figures for supporters of US political parties taken from: Pew Research Center (2016) *Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016*. 4,385 interviews (American Trends Panel), conducted in two waves between 2 and 28 March 2016 and 5 April and 2 May 2016.

# THE POLICY INSTITUTE

For more information, contact:

**Bobby Duffy**

Director

The Policy Institute

King's College London

[bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk)

[@bobbyduffyking](#)

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