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# International students in the UK

## Benefits, costs and numbers

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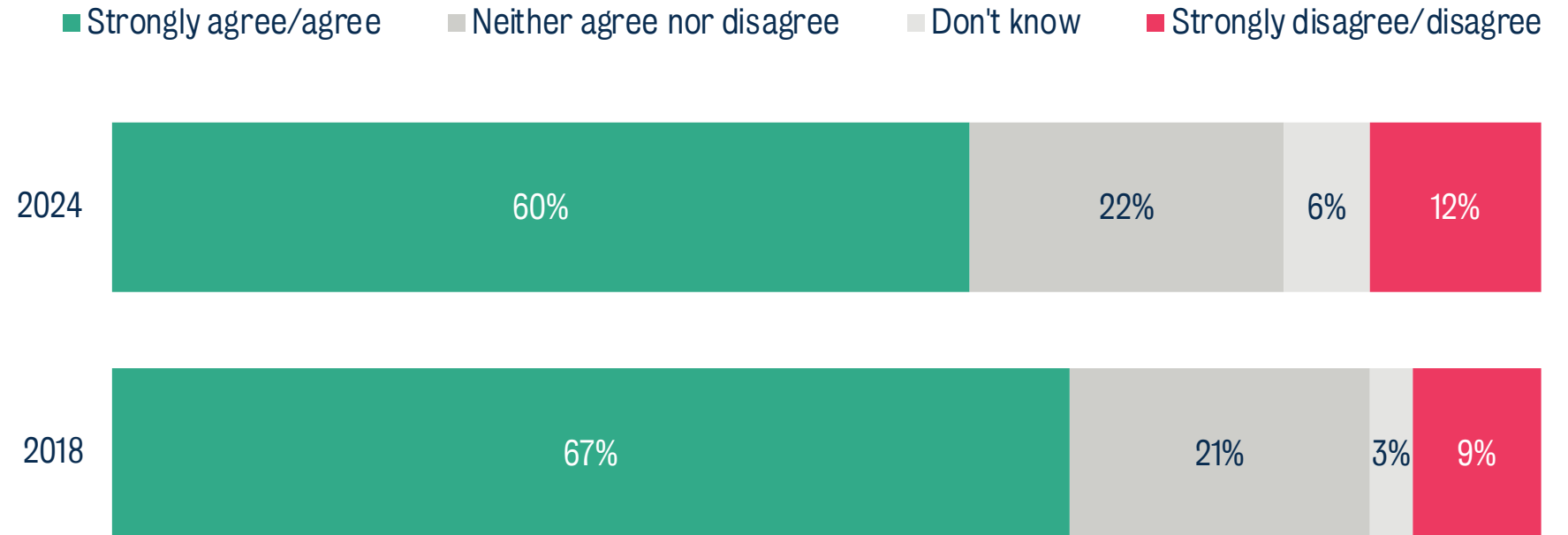


# The public are still far more likely to agree than disagree that international students bring economic benefits

Six in 10 people agree international students bring a significant benefit to the British economy, compared with just over one in 10 who disagree.

While the share of the public who agree with this view has declined slightly since 2018, people are still much more positive than negative about international students' economic contribution.

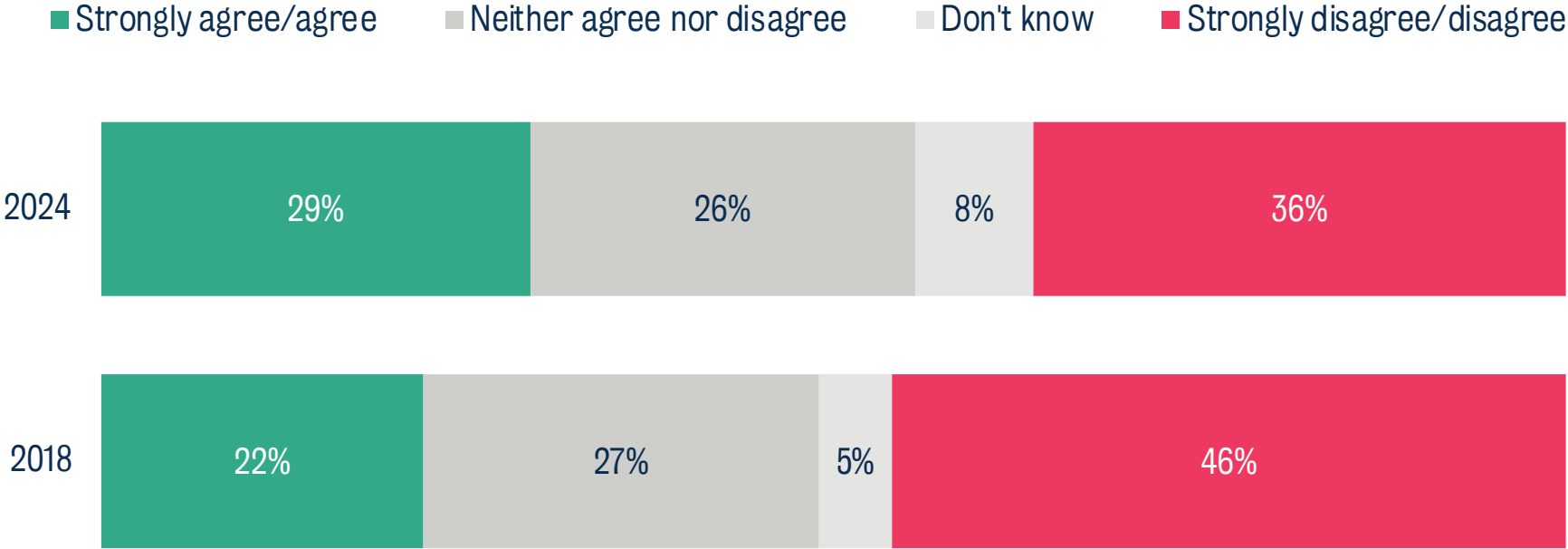
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:  
**International students bring a significant benefit to the British economy**



# More disagree than agree that international students cost the economy a great deal

The public are more likely to disagree than agree that international students impose a significant cost to the economy, but there has been a notable decline in the proportion who disagree since 2018 – from 46% to 36%.

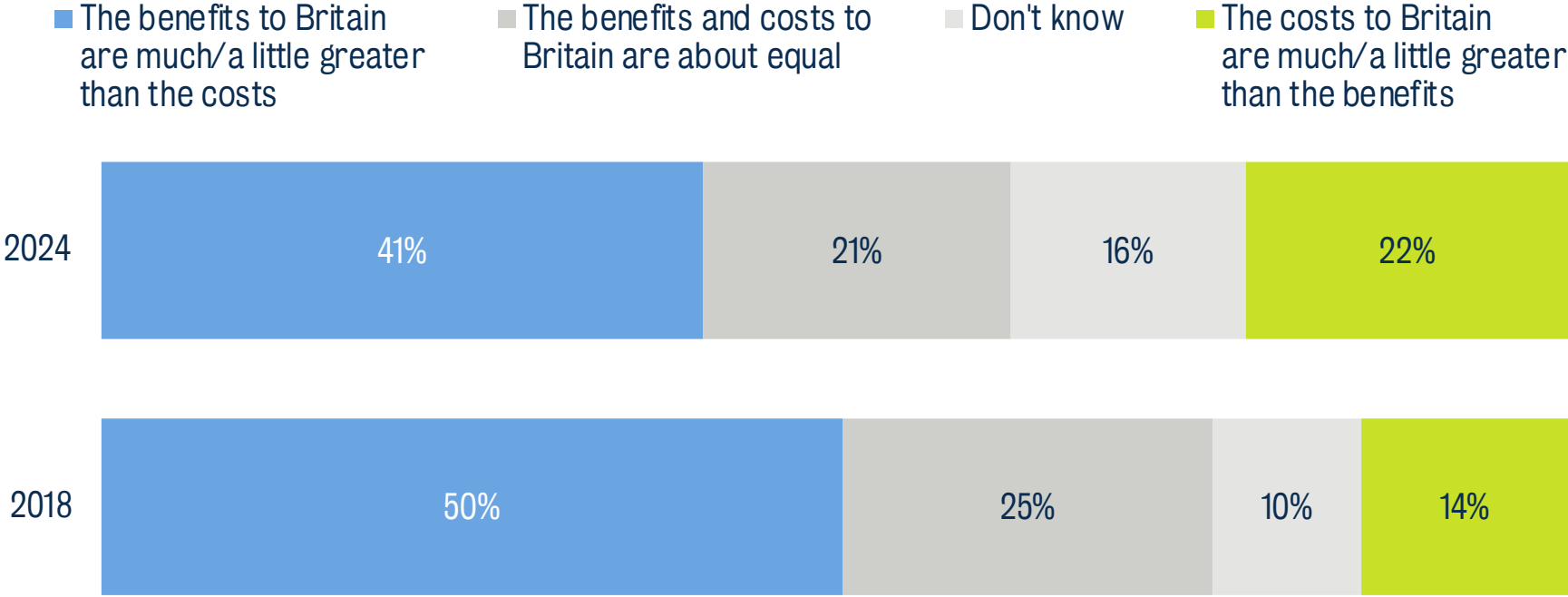
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:  
**International students impose a significant cost to the British economy**



# Four in 10 say the benefits of international students outweigh the costs – double the share who say the reverse

However, this is down on six years ago, when half the public felt the benefits of international students were greater than the costs.

Overall, do you think the benefits for Britain of international students outweigh the costs they bring, or do the costs outweigh the benefits?



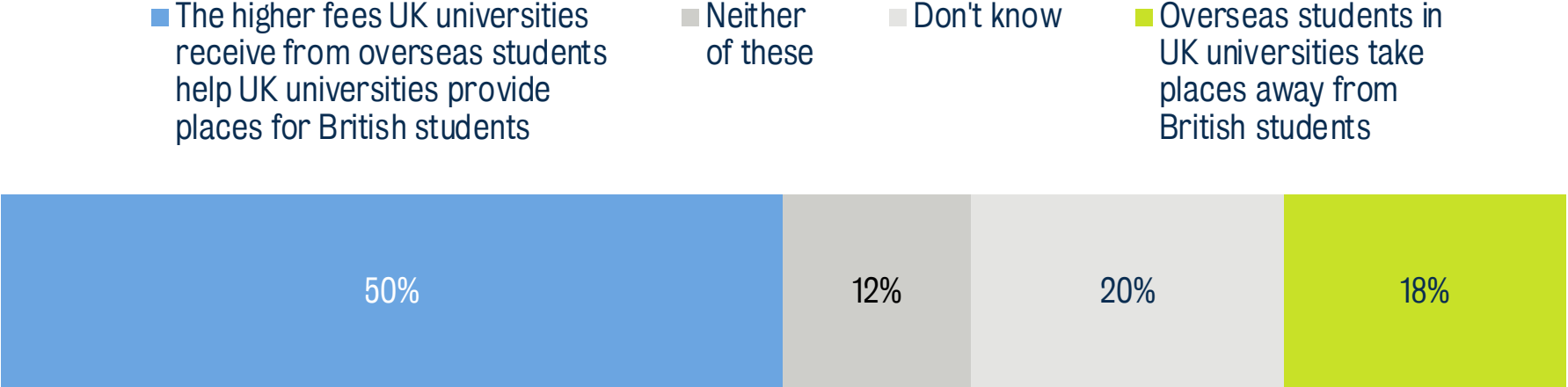


# Half the public correctly recognise that overseas students help universities provide places for home students

It is estimated that UK universities normally make a loss on educating British undergraduates. To balance the books, universities therefore use other income, especially from the higher tuition fees that they are able to charge international students.

50% of the public correctly recognise this, believing the higher fees UK universities receive from overseas students help them provide places for British students.

Which of the following, if either, is true?



# Knowledge of international students' economic contribution increases support for more of them

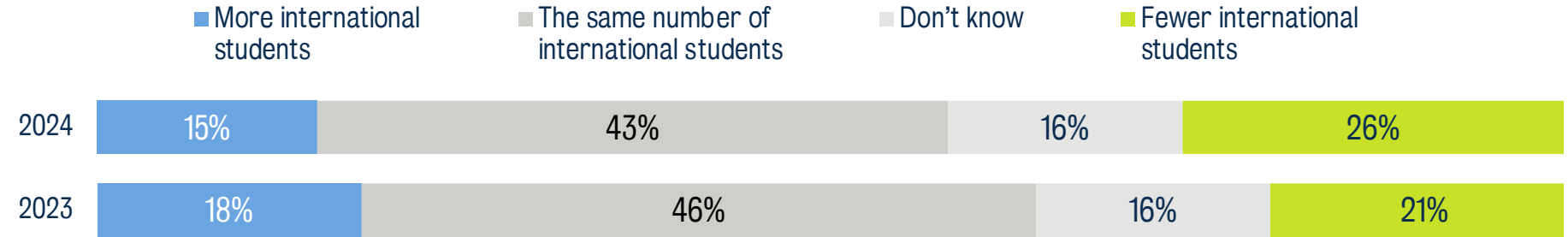
15% of the public say they want more international students in the UK, compared with 26% who say they want fewer.

These are virtually the same as the results we get when asking this question with a **negative framing** that highlights how international students are a key driver of the rise in net migration.

But when the same question is asked with a **positive framing** that outlines the scale of the economic contribution that these students make to the country, the share in favour of more international students in the UK doubles, to 28%.

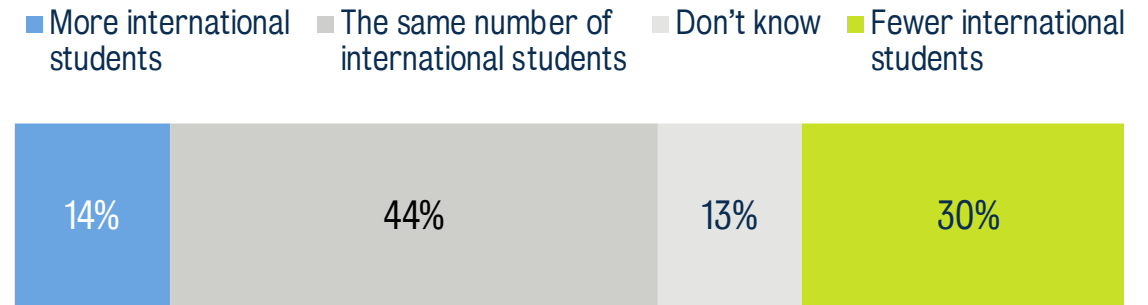
Yet the most common view, no matter how the question is asked, is that the number of international students attending UK universities should remain the same.

Thinking about the number of international students attending UK universities, in your view which of the following, if any, would you like to see in the UK?

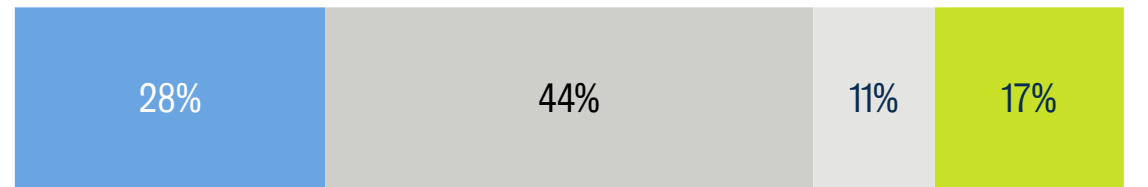


2024 base: 2,683 UK respondents aged 16+, surveyed 1–9 May 2024. 2023 base: 2,011 UK respondents aged 18+, surveyed 28 February–3 March (source)

**Negative framing:** It has been reported that the rise in international student numbers is the largest single factor accounting for the rise in net migration, and that more students are staying on to work in the UK after their studies than in the past, including increasing numbers switching to work visas. In light of this, in your view which of the following, if any, would you like to see in the UK?



**Positive framing:** It has been reported that international and EU students support university teaching and facilities for UK students and contribute nearly £41.9 billion to the UK economy, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs across all parts of the UK. In light of this, in your view which of the following, if any, would you like to see in the UK?

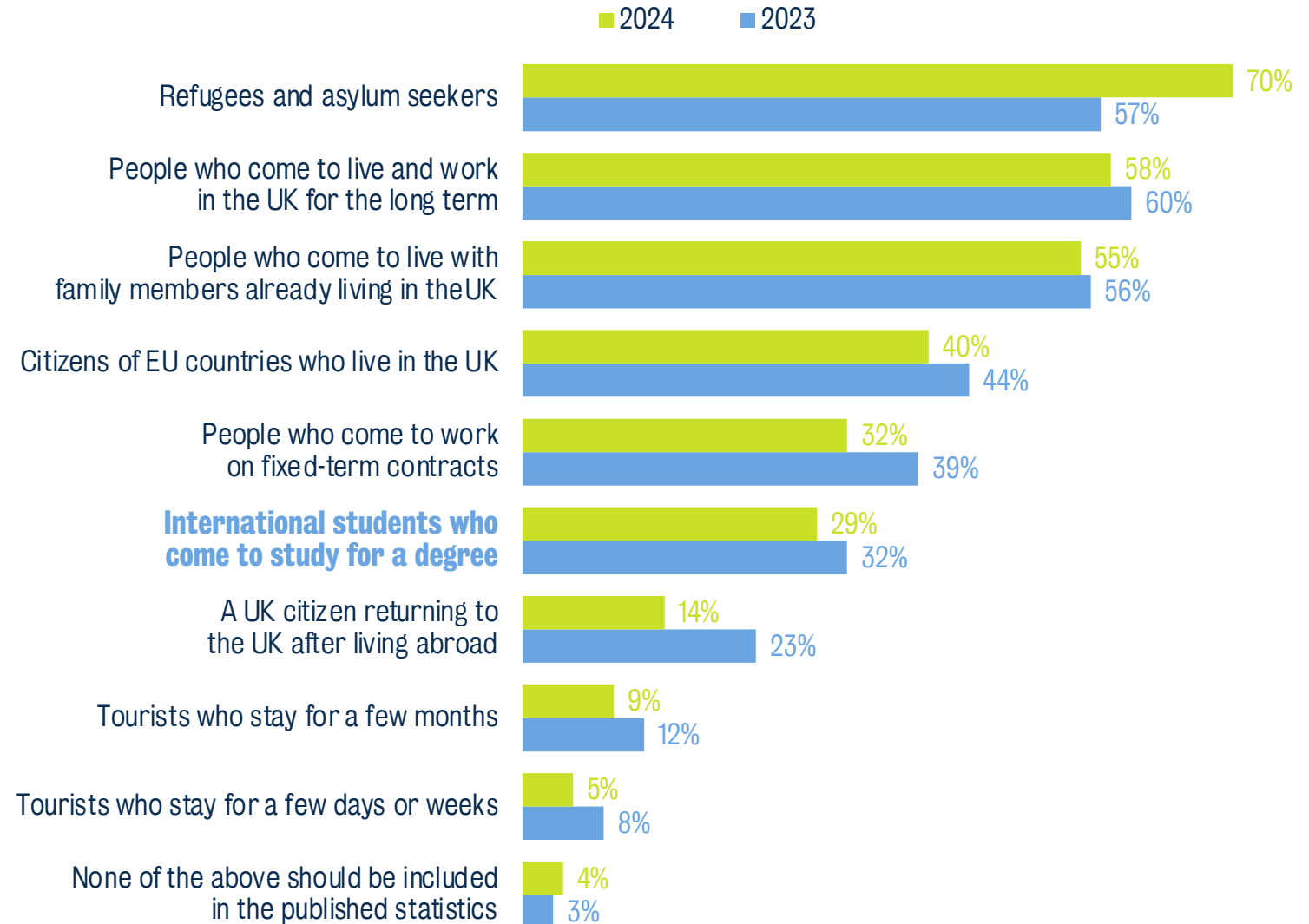


Base: 1,338 UK respondents aged 16+ (negative framing), and 1,345 (positive framing), surveyed 1–9 May 2024

# Only three in 10 think international students should be included in immigration statistics

Just 29% of the public feel international students should be included in official immigration figures – far lower than the share who say the same of other groups coming to the UK, such as refugees and asylum seekers or people who come to live and work in the country for the long term, where seven and six in 10 respectively think they should be counted in this way.

Of those people who come to the UK – ranging from people who come temporarily for short periods on holidays to people who move to the UK to settle permanently – which of the following groups do you think the government should include in the published statistics for “immigrants”?



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## Survey details

Fieldwork was conducted via Focaldata's in-house platform, with API integration to an online panel network. Data collection took place over two fieldwork periods: 1–9 May (2,683 respondents) and 6–10 June (1,049 respondents). Respondents were from a nationally representative group of those aged 16+ in the UK, with data weighted by age, gender, region, ethnicity and education status.

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