

Five years of unprecedented challenges

The impact of 2019-24 Parliament on public opinion

12th June 2024

Overview of British Social Attitudes (BSA)



NatCen's British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey has been conducted annually since 1983.



Longest-running measure of public opinion in Britain, providing authoritative data on a range of social and political issues. Each year the survey asks people what it's like to live in Britain and what they think about how Britain is run.



Since 2020 conducted as online survey with randomly selected sample of respondents. Option to be interviewed by phone if preferred. Prior to 2020 BSA was a face-to-face survey.

BSA 2023

- The latest BSA survey consisted of 5,578 interviews with a representative, random sample of adults in Britain and was conducted between 12 September and 31 October 2023.
- Survey covered range of topics including attitudes towards pensions, satisfaction with the NHS, disability benefits, national identity and citizenship, EU membership, devolution, electoral reform, trust in the political system and equal opportunities
- Multi-funder project:



nuffieldtrust

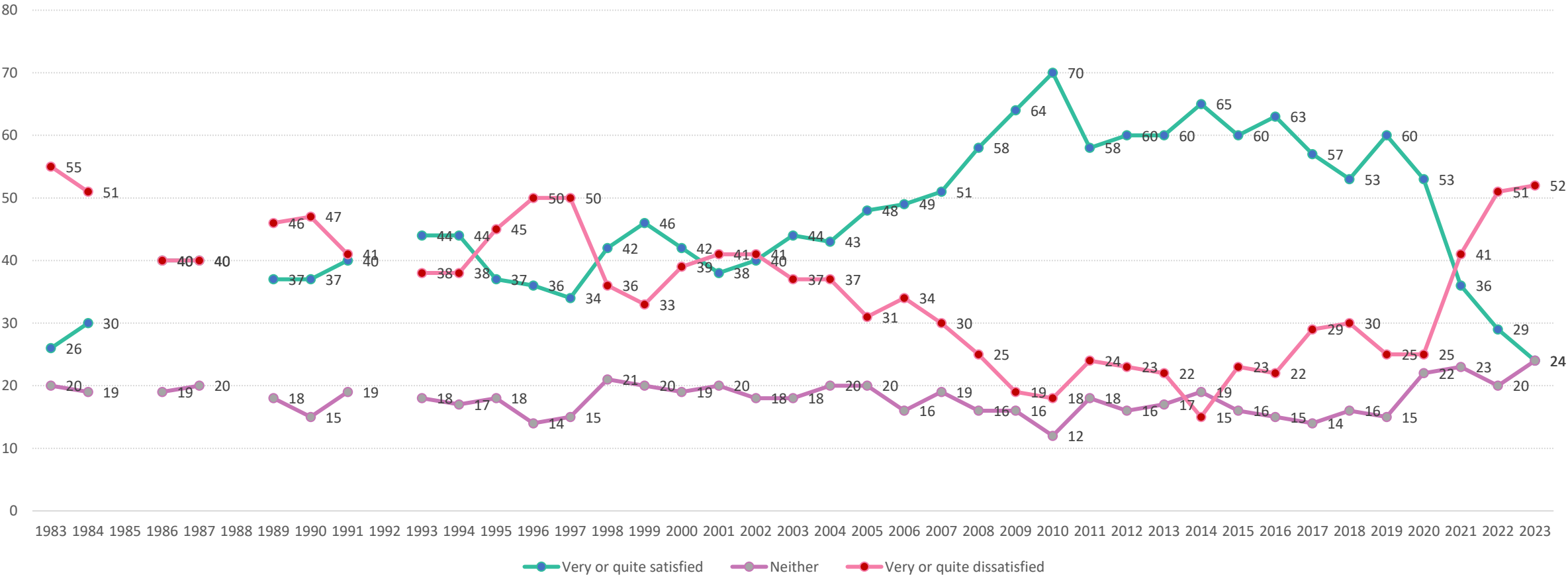


Introduction

- The 2019-24 parliament has witnessed unprecedented economic and political turmoil. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the associated ‘cost of living crisis’ have adversely impacted living standards and the economy. Public services have struggled to recover too. Meanwhile, two Prime Ministers were ousted from office.
- We assessed how far these developments have affected public opinion and the implications our findings might have for the next government.
- Four main sections:
 - Trends in attitudes towards **public services and taxes** need to pay for them
 - Public opinion towards some of the **economic challenges** faced by the country
 - Attitudes towards ‘**cultural**’ issues such as **Brexit and immigration**
 - Attitudes towards country’s **political institutions**

Satisfaction with the health service at record low

Satisfaction with the NHS, 1983-2023

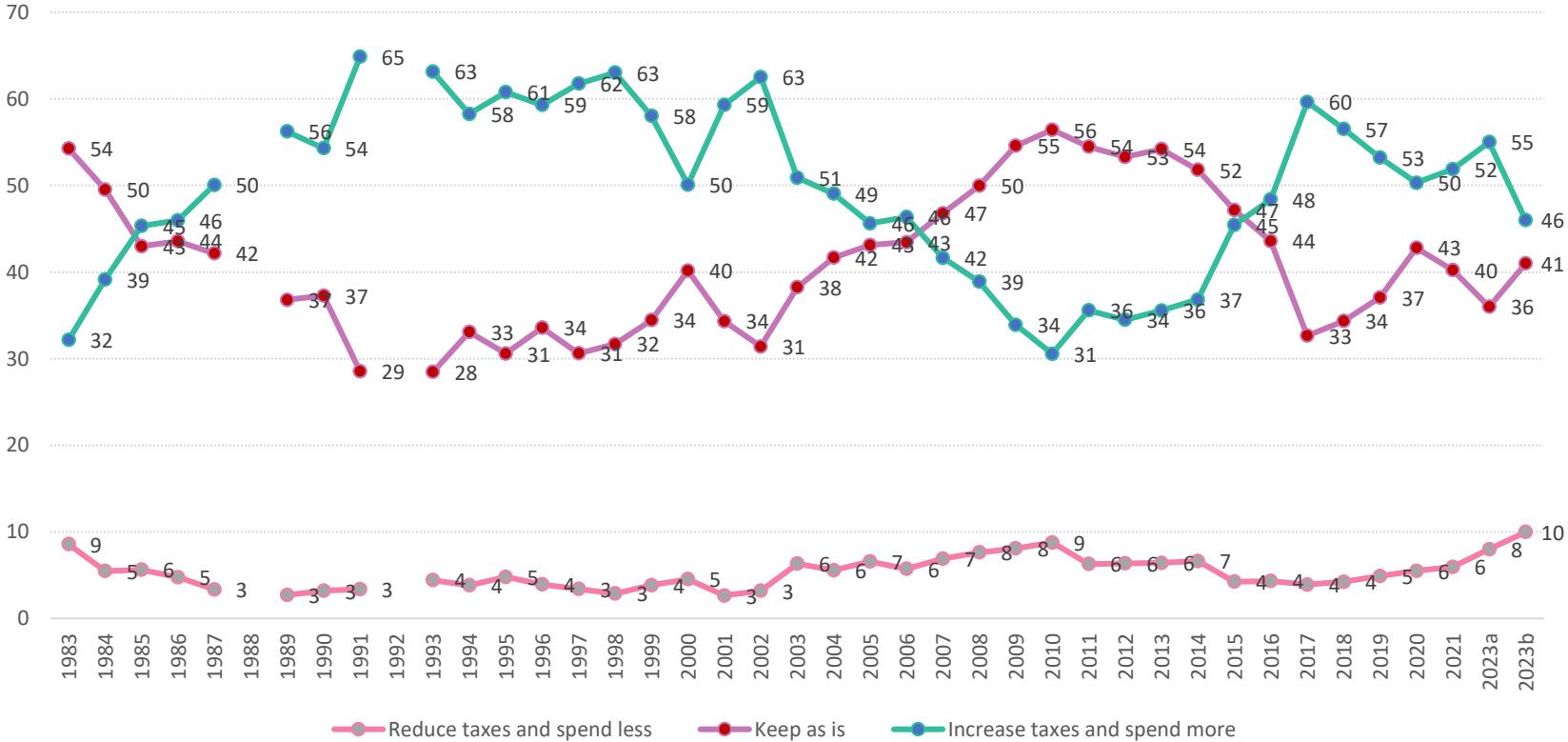


Limited reaction against heightened level of taxation and spending

46%

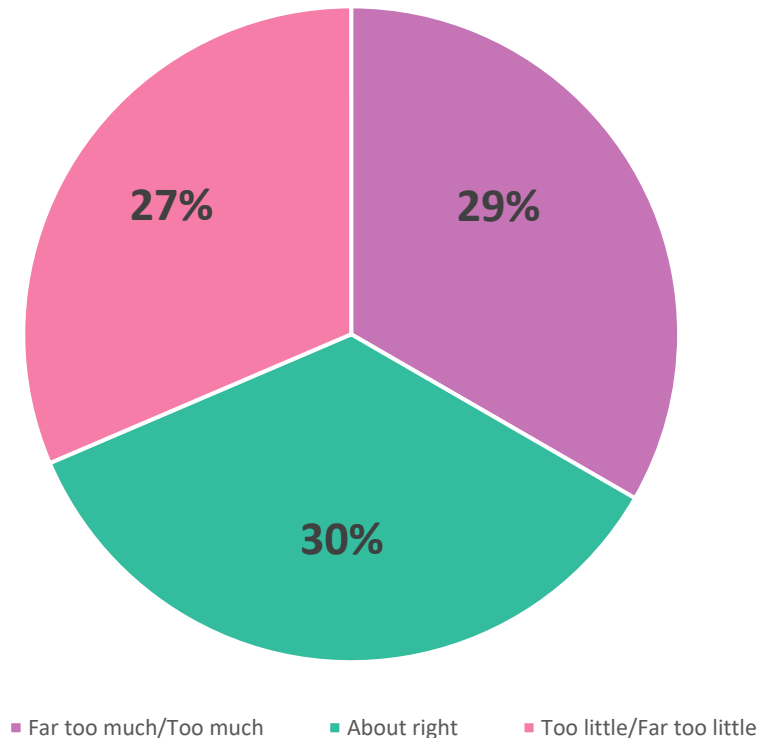
say the government should increase taxation and spending

Attitudes towards taxation and spending, 1983-2023



Britain is divided on role and function of trade unions

Perceptions of trade union power, 2023



- Around **3 in 10** feel that trade unions hold “**about the right amount**” of influence – figure last witnessed in 1980s
- When compared with 1980s and early 1990s more people now believe that too little power sits with trade unions and fewer people believe that unions are too powerful.

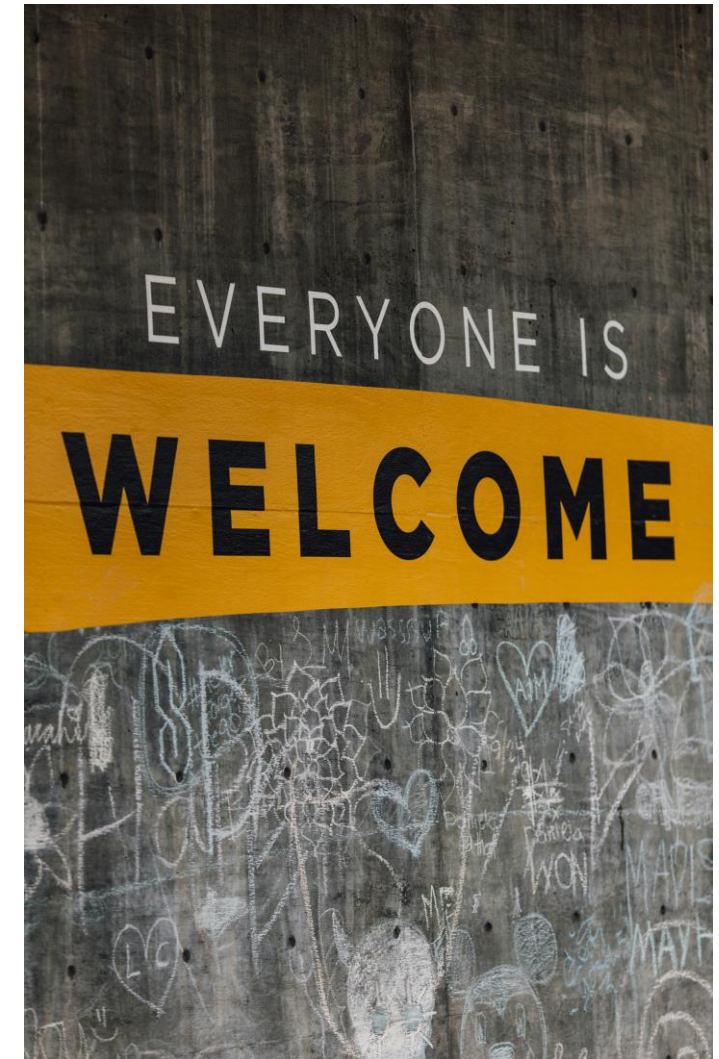
Fall in 'Eurosceptic' views

Attitudes to Britain's relationship with the EU, 1983-2023



Shift in positive views on immigration

- In 2010s electorate became more positive about migration's economic impact. In 2011 **21%** felt that migration had a beneficial impact on the British economy and by 2019 this had increased to **47%** and **50%** in 2022.
- BSA 2023 shows a marked reversal of this long-term trend, with the proportion who view immigration as good for the economy falling back to **39%**.
- Views towards the cultural implications of migration grew more positive in the 2010s. While in 2011 **26%** felt that migrants coming to live in Britain enriched the nation's culture, by the end of the decade this figure had climbed to **45%**. In 2023 this had fallen to **38%**.



Lack of public trust in government and politicians



- **45%** “almost never” trust British government to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party – highest figure in BSA’s history. **36%** trust government “only some of the time”
- **58%** “almost never” trust MPs to tell the truth when in a tight corner. **5%** trust politicians “just about always” or “most of the time”
- **79%** believe system of governing Britain needs “quite a lot” or a “great deal” of improvement

Conclusion

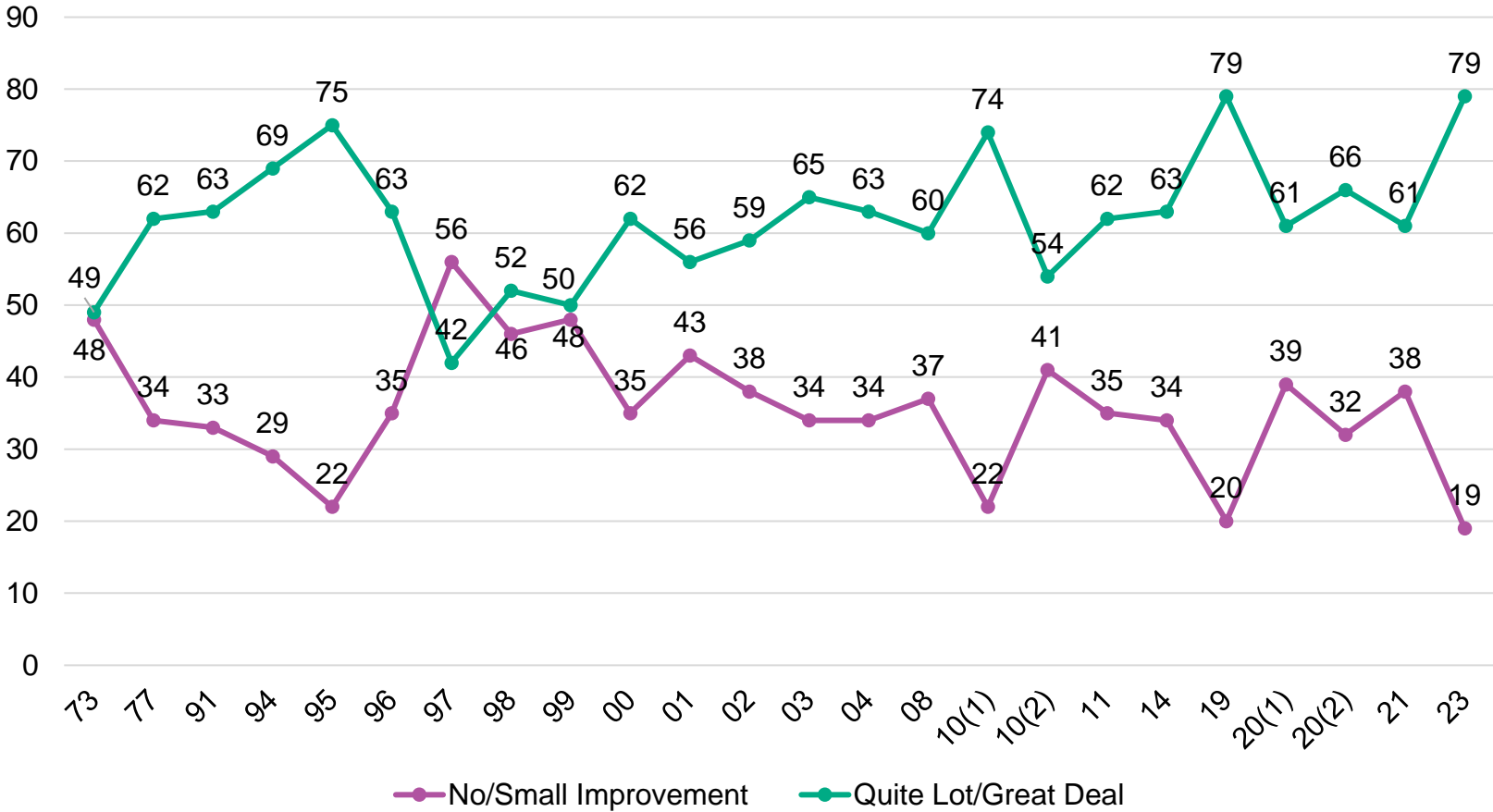
- The many challenges with which public policy has faced over the last five years have left their imprint on public opinion. Being outside the EU looks less attractive. New doubts have arisen about the benefits of having migrants come to Britain. The role of trade unions has re-emerged as an issue of some contention.
- Above all, trust and confidence in how the country is governed and by whom has fallen to as low as it has ever been. At the same time there is widespread dissatisfaction with the public services that government provides, most notably the NHS.
- Despite a substantial hike in taxation, so far there appears to be only a limited demand that the size of the state in the nation's economy should be cut back to its pre-pandemic level.
- Disappointment at the turn of events over the last five years has it seems not entirely eroded people's hope that, irrespective of its partisan colour, government will eventually be able to turn things around. That, at least, will be the challenge facing whoever wins the 2024 election.

Post-Brexit (?) Politics in Britain

Professor Sir John Curtice
with Ian Montagu and Chujan Sivathanan

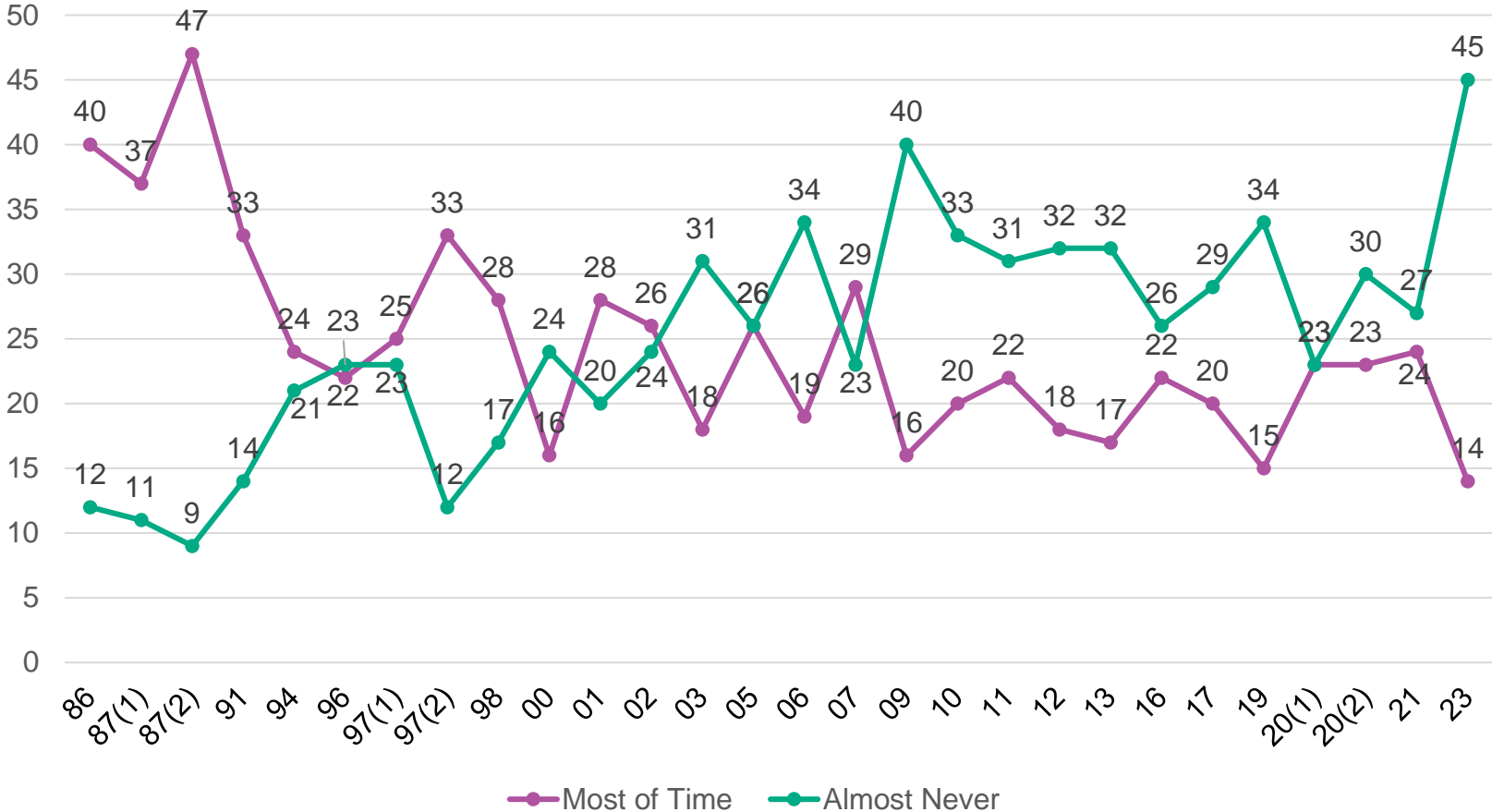


Governing Britain



Sources: 73 Kilbrandon; 77 ORC; 91,95,04,10(1),14 MORI/ICM; 97 BES; 20(1), 21 NatCen Opinion Panel. Otherwise, British Social Attitudes

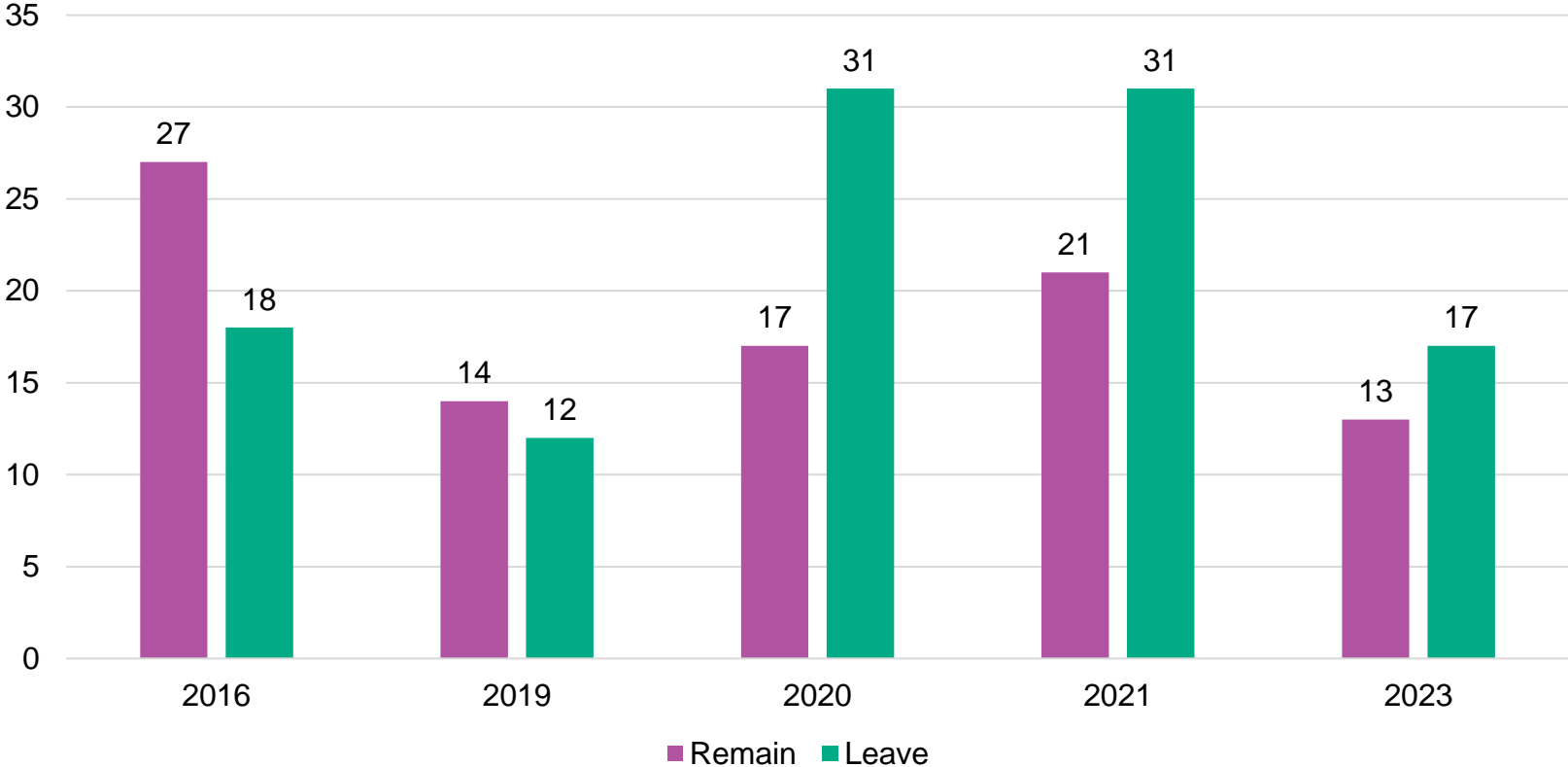
Trust in Governments to put nation before party



Source: British Social Attitudes except 87(2), 97(2), BES, 20(1), 21 NatCen Opinion Panel

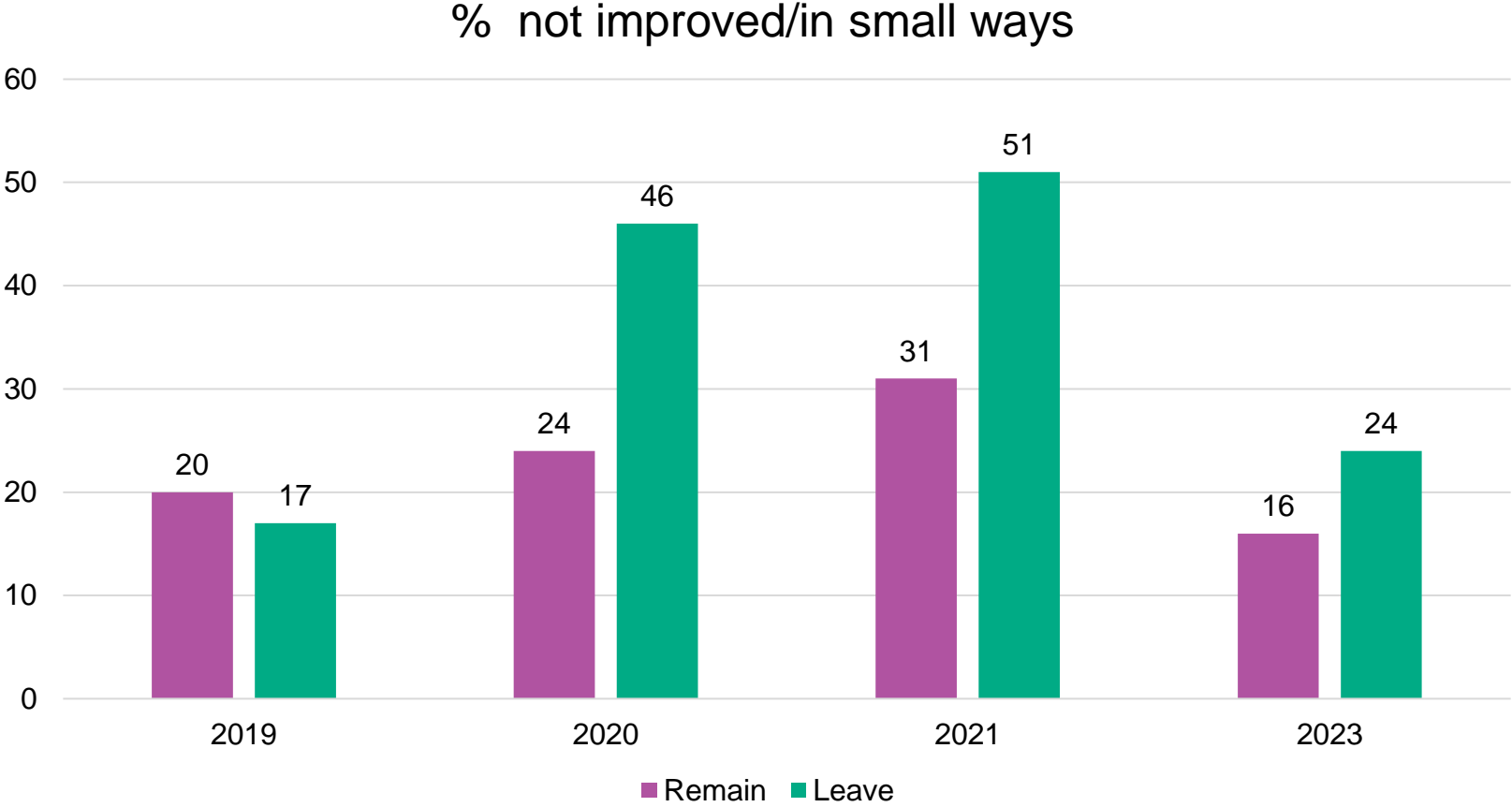
Trust Government by EU referendum vote

% trust just about always/most of the time



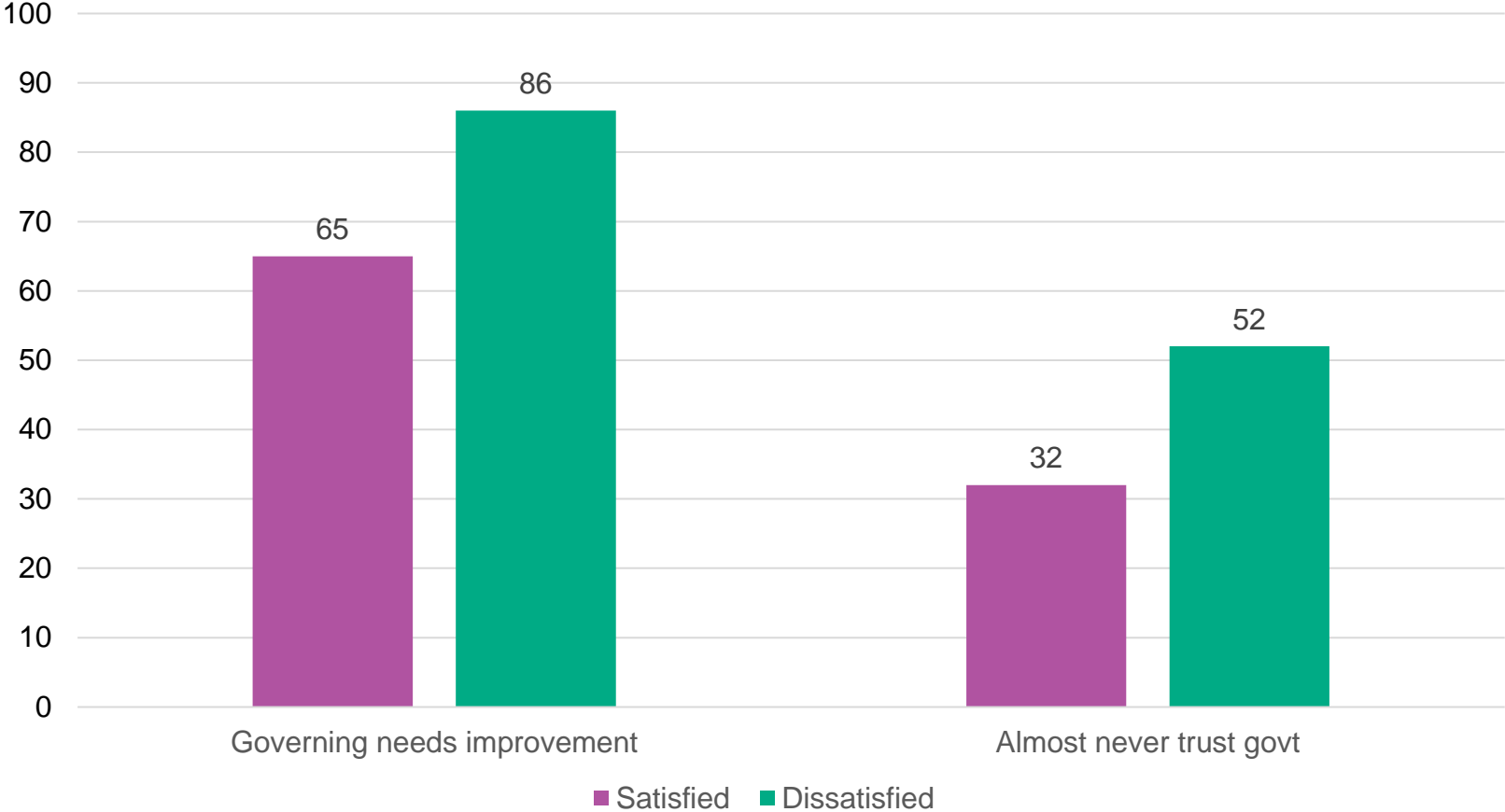
Source: British Social Attitudes except 2021: NatCen Opinion Panel

Governing Britain by EU referendum vote



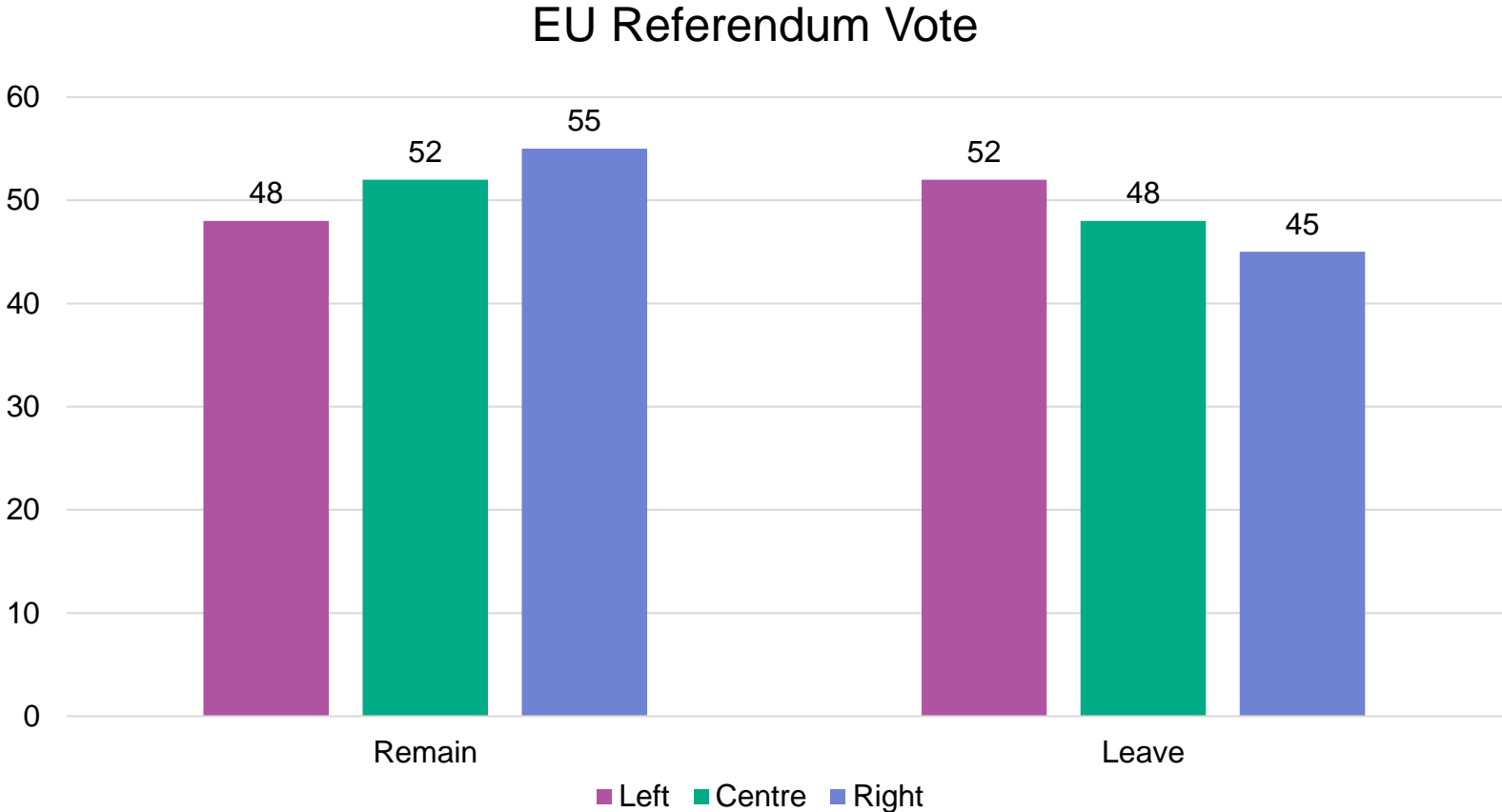
Source: British Social Attitudes except 2021: NatCen Opinion Panel

Trust and confidence by NHS satisfaction



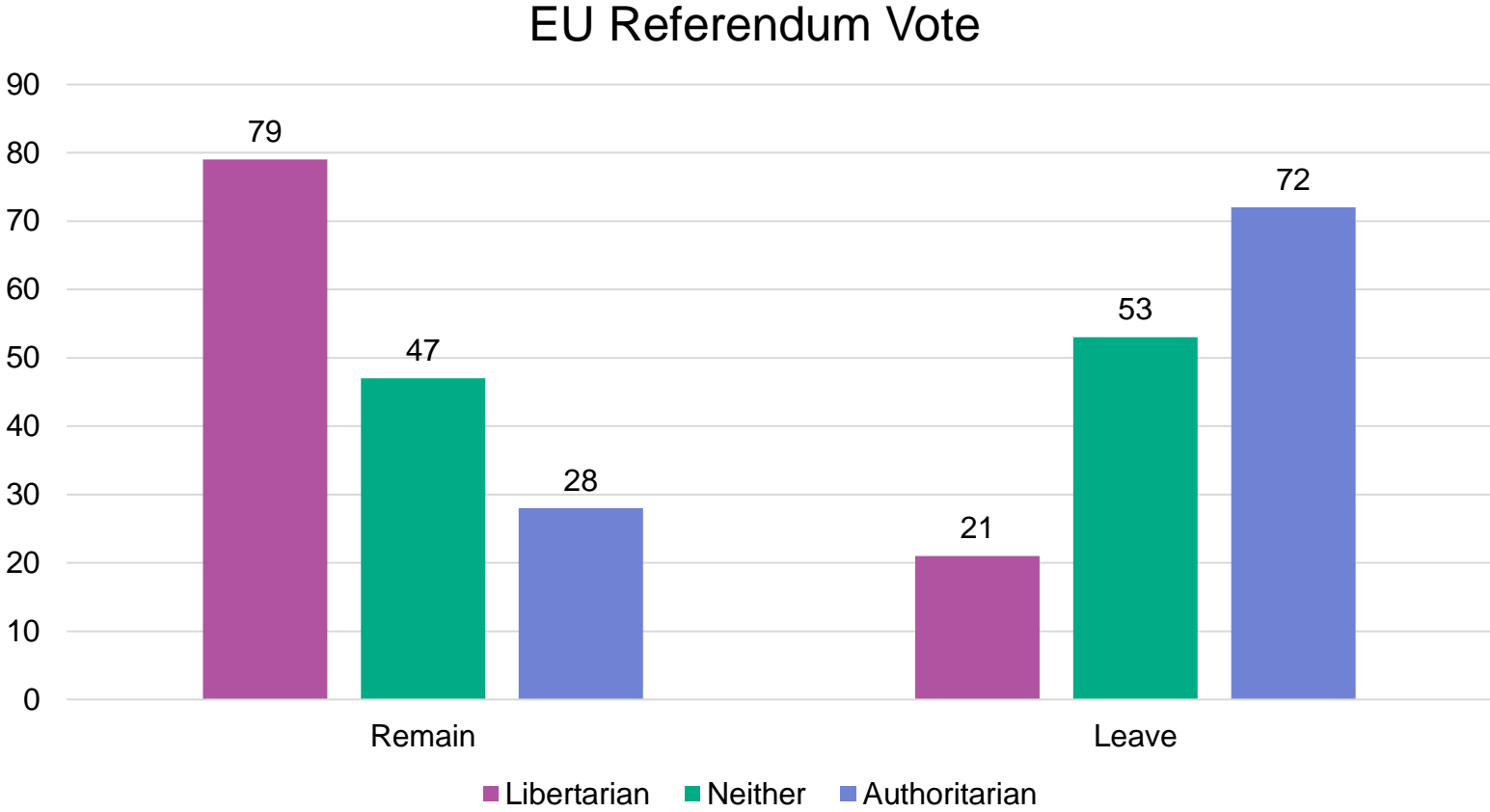
Source: British Social Attitudes 2023; In 2019 the difference between the two cols was 5-8 points.

Brexit: Not a left vs. right divide



Source: British Social Attitudes 2016

But a clear division between Libertarians and Authoritarians



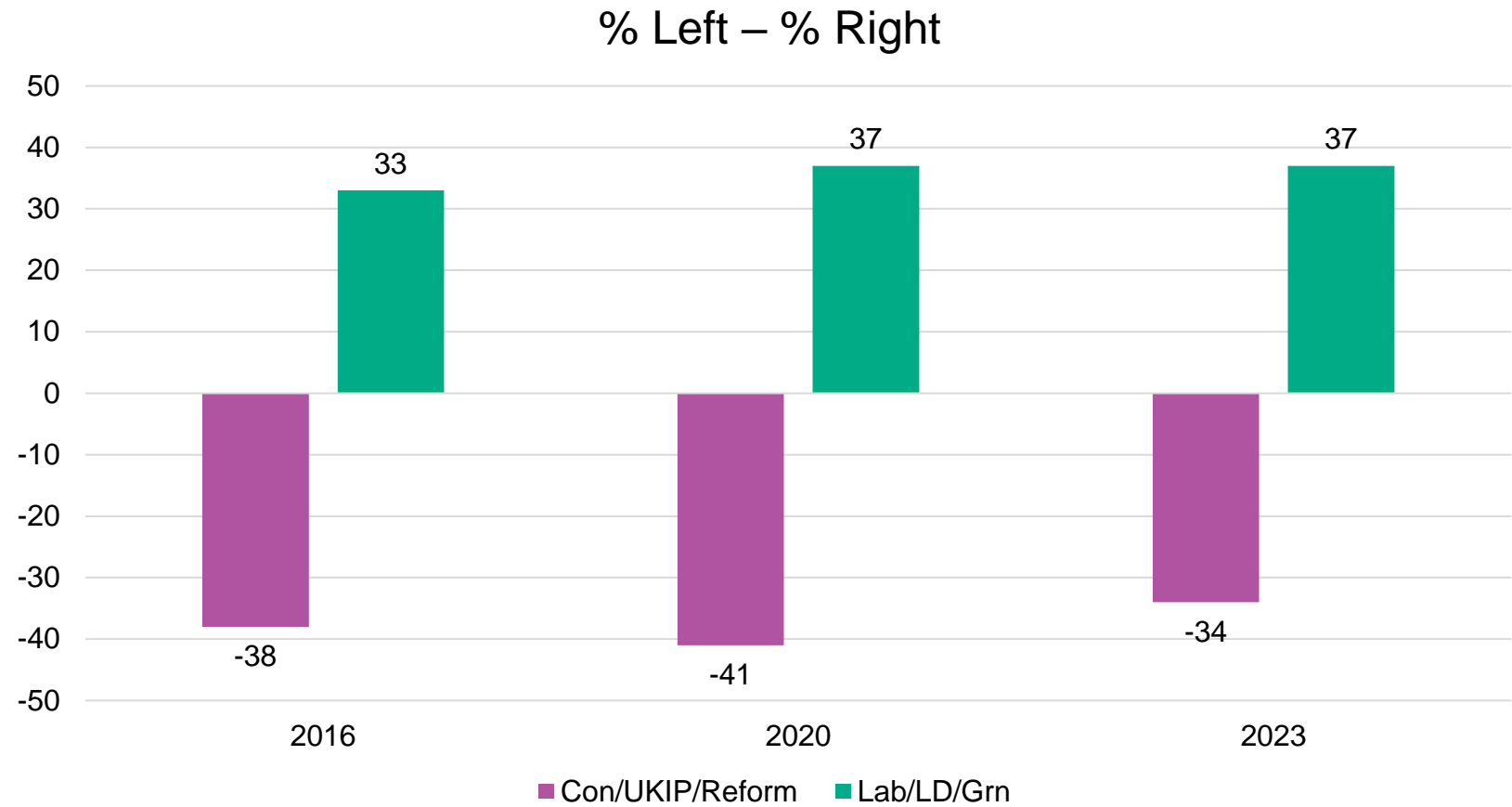
Source: British Social Attitudes 2016

Current Brexit preference and party identification

	Remain/For EU	Leave/Against EU
2016	%	%
Con + UKIP	17	53
Lab + LD + Green	67	30
2020		
Con + Reform + UKIP	17	67
Lab + LD + Green	66	20
2023		
Con + Reform + UKIP	16	65
Lab + LD + Green	66	18

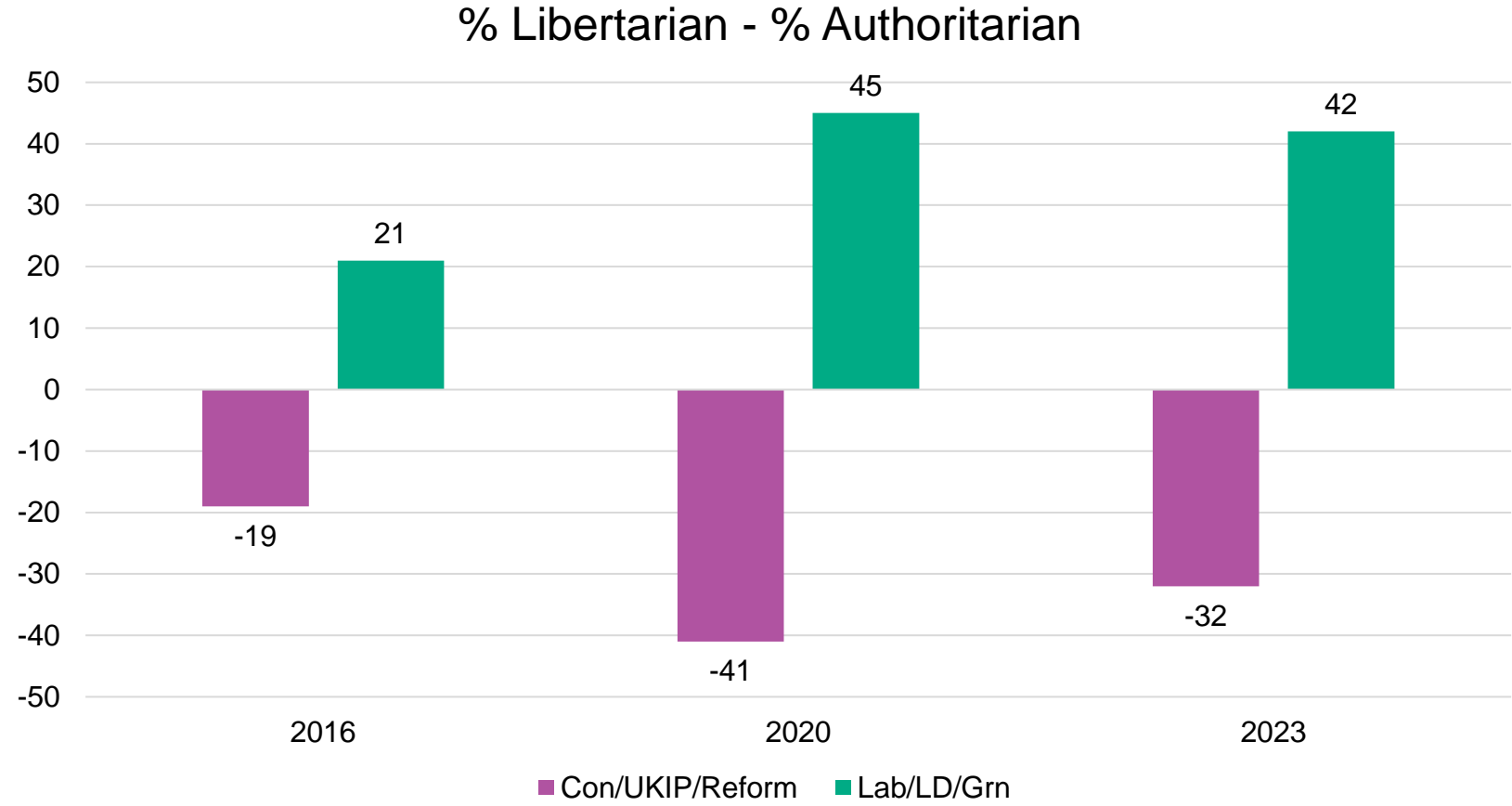
Source: British Social Attitudes

The left-right divide in party identification



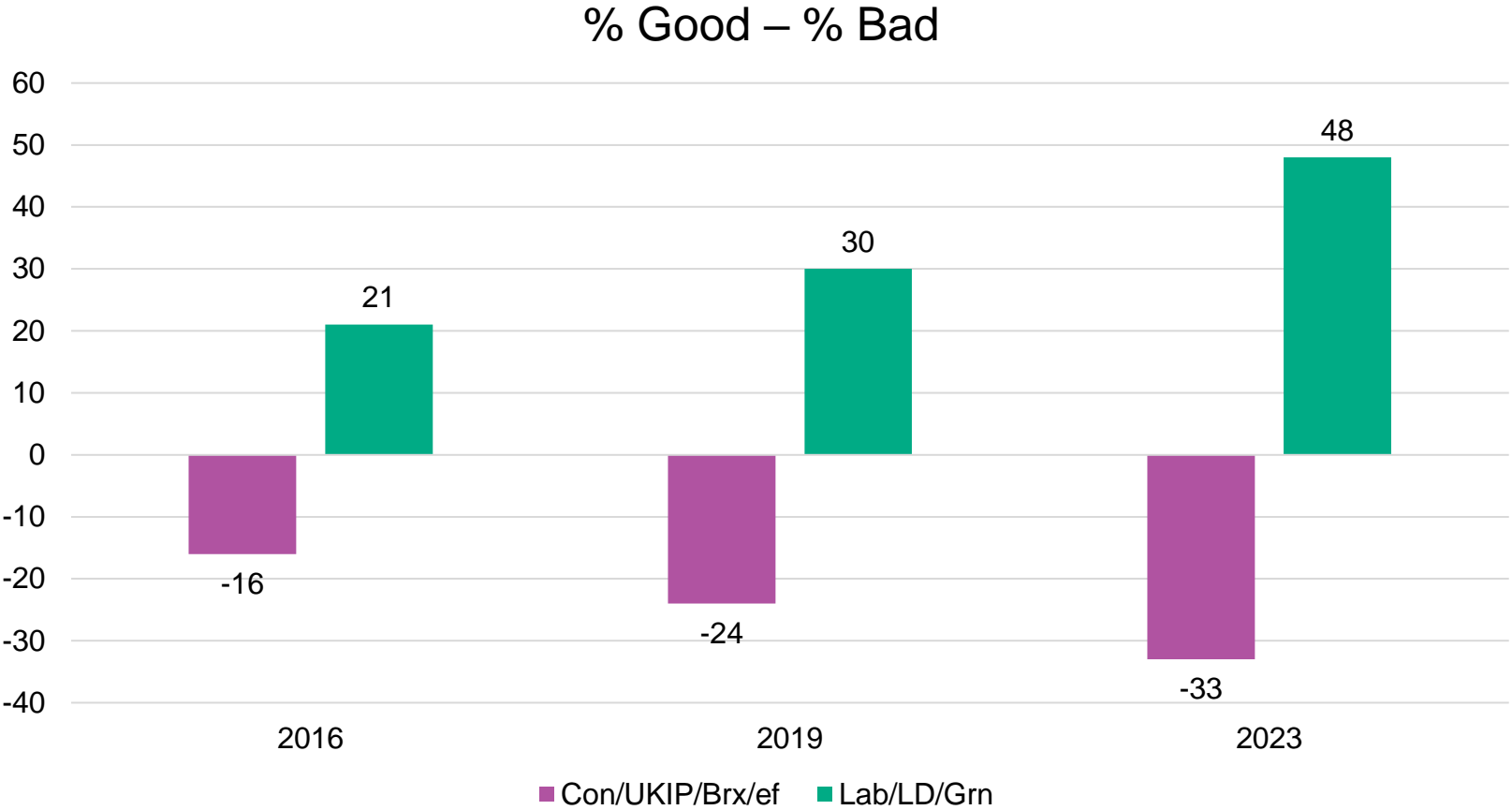
Source: British Social Attitudes

The Libertarian-Authoritarian divide in party identification



Source: British Social Attitudes

Perceived cultural consequences of migrants and party identification



Source: British Social Attitudes

Conclusion

The post-Brexit boost to trust and confidence has largely disappeared

- While other policy and political challenges have had an impact

The post-Brexit change in the ideological basis of party support is largely still with us

- The issue has proved a harbinger of the emergence of cultural/identity politics
-

Changing attitudes to immigration

Robert Ford

University of Manchester and Senior Fellow, UK in a Changing Europe

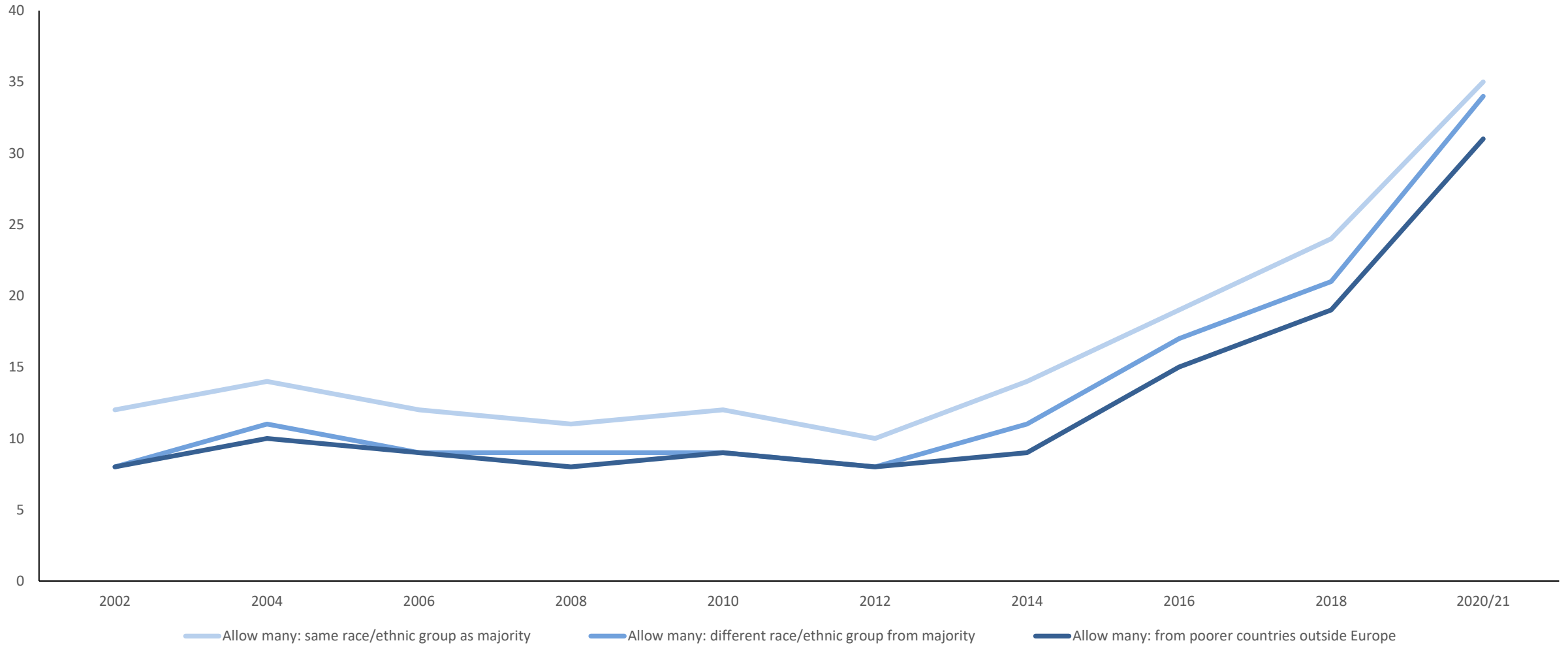
Rob.ford@manchester.ac.uk

Based on chapter co-authored with Alun Humphrey and Helena Wilson

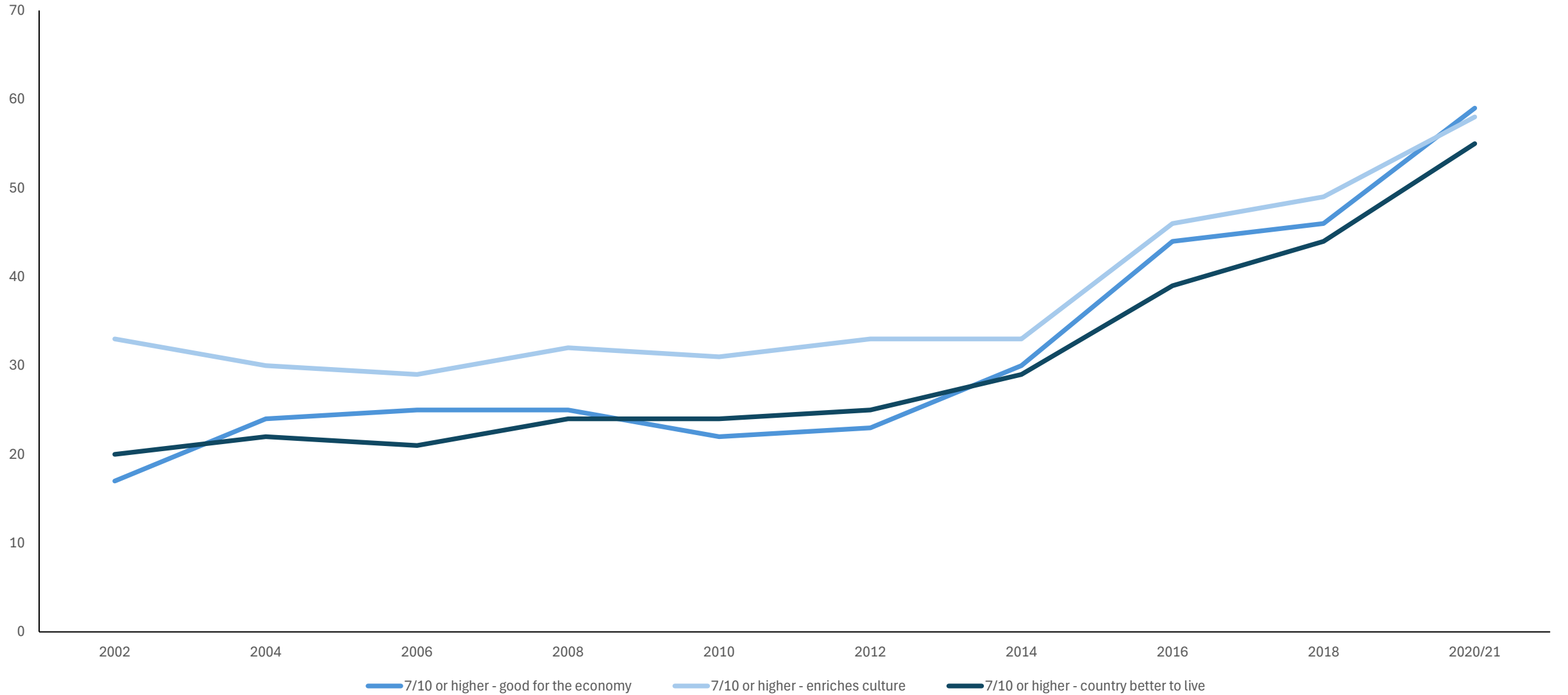
Plan of the talk

- 1. Attitudes to immigration over time
- 2. Possible drivers of long term change
- 3. Shifts since 2021
- 4. Current attitudes: policy preferences and polarisation

Public support for “allowing many” migrants rose in the 2010s, for all migrant groups

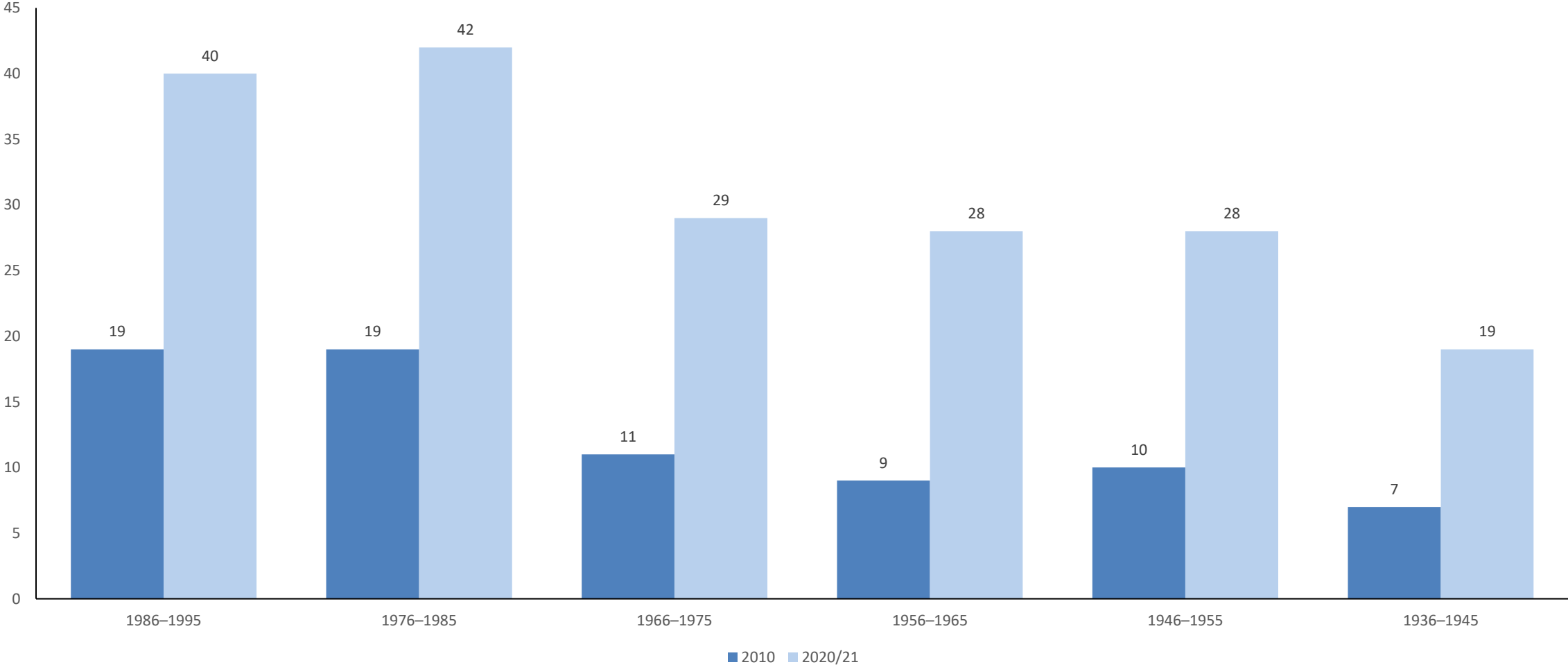


Positive views about the impacts of migration became more widespread in the same period

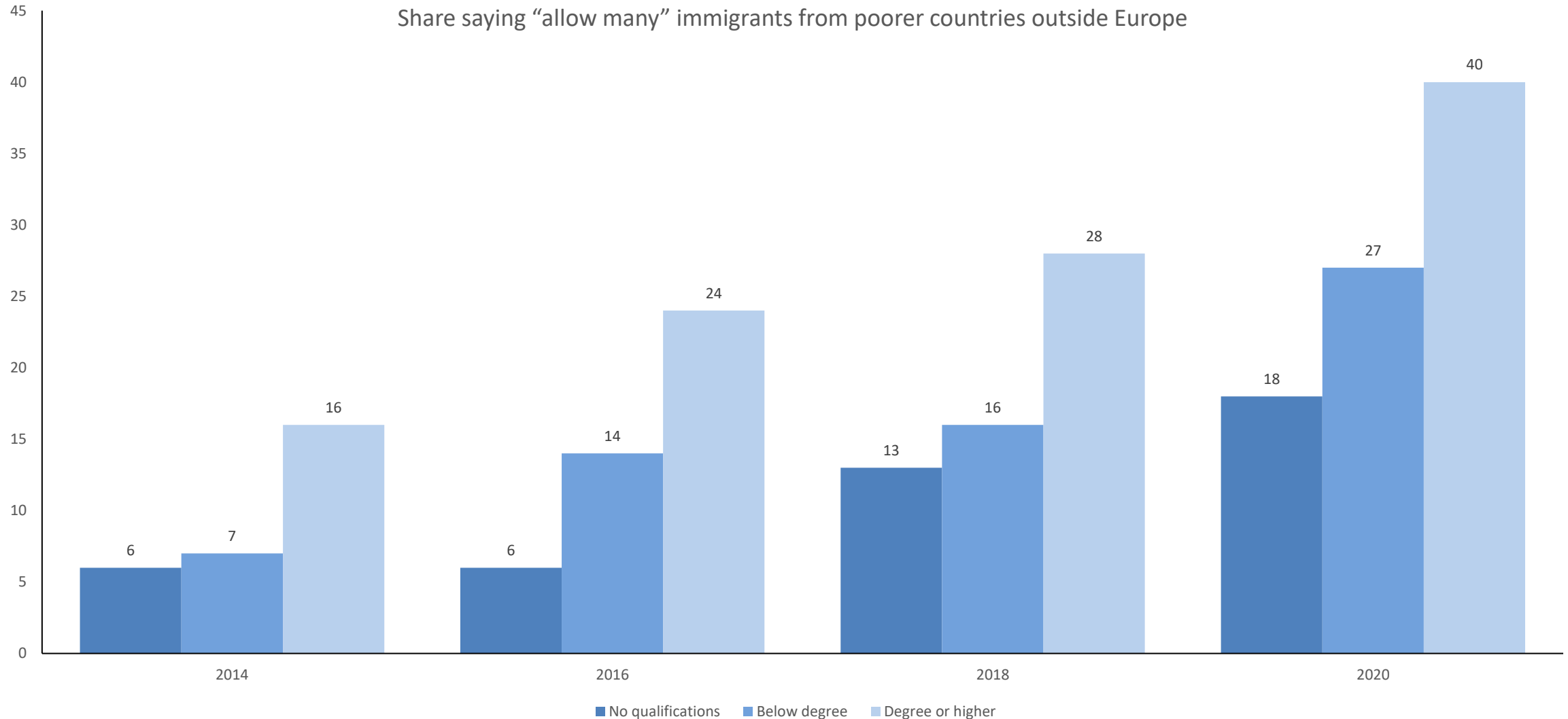


Liberal attitudes have risen in all cohorts, but have risen more in younger cohorts

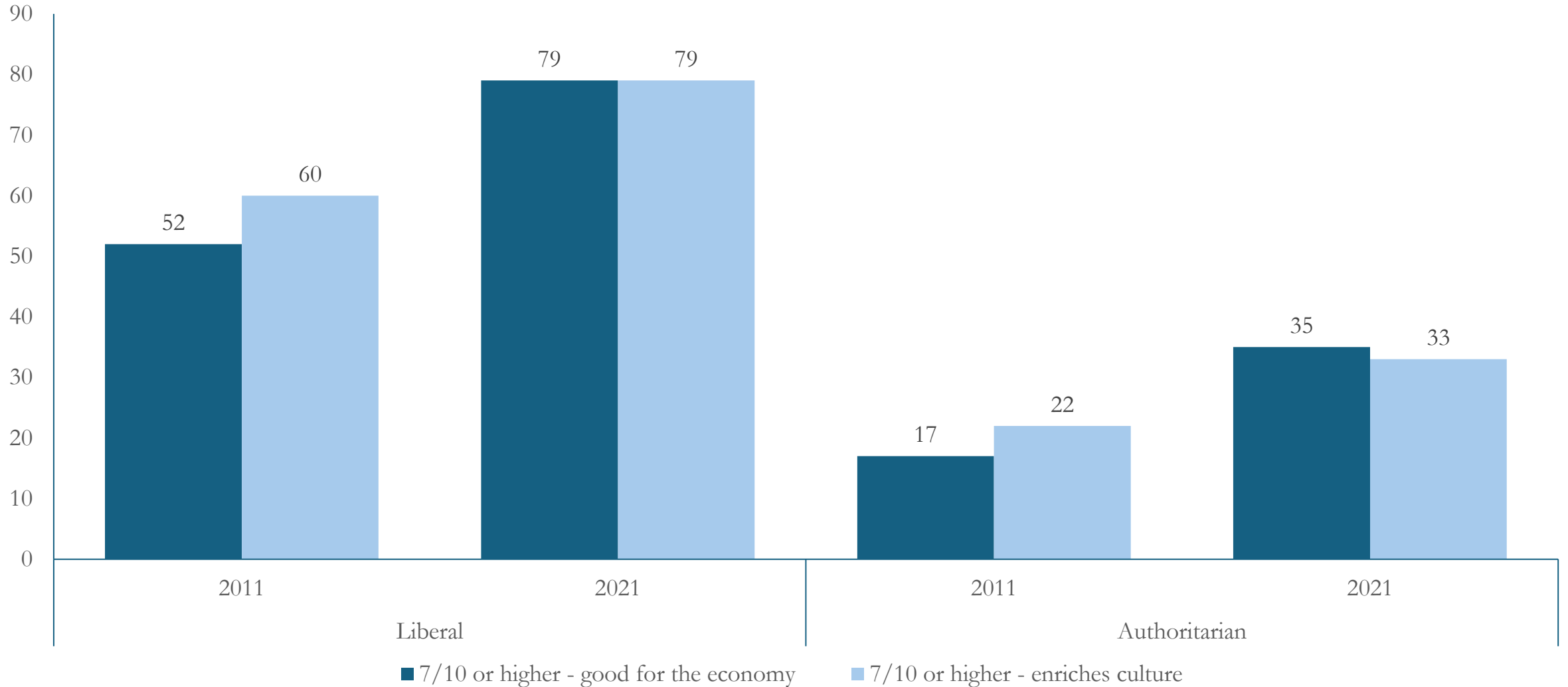
Share saying "allow many" immigrants from same race/ethnic group in 2010 and 2020/21



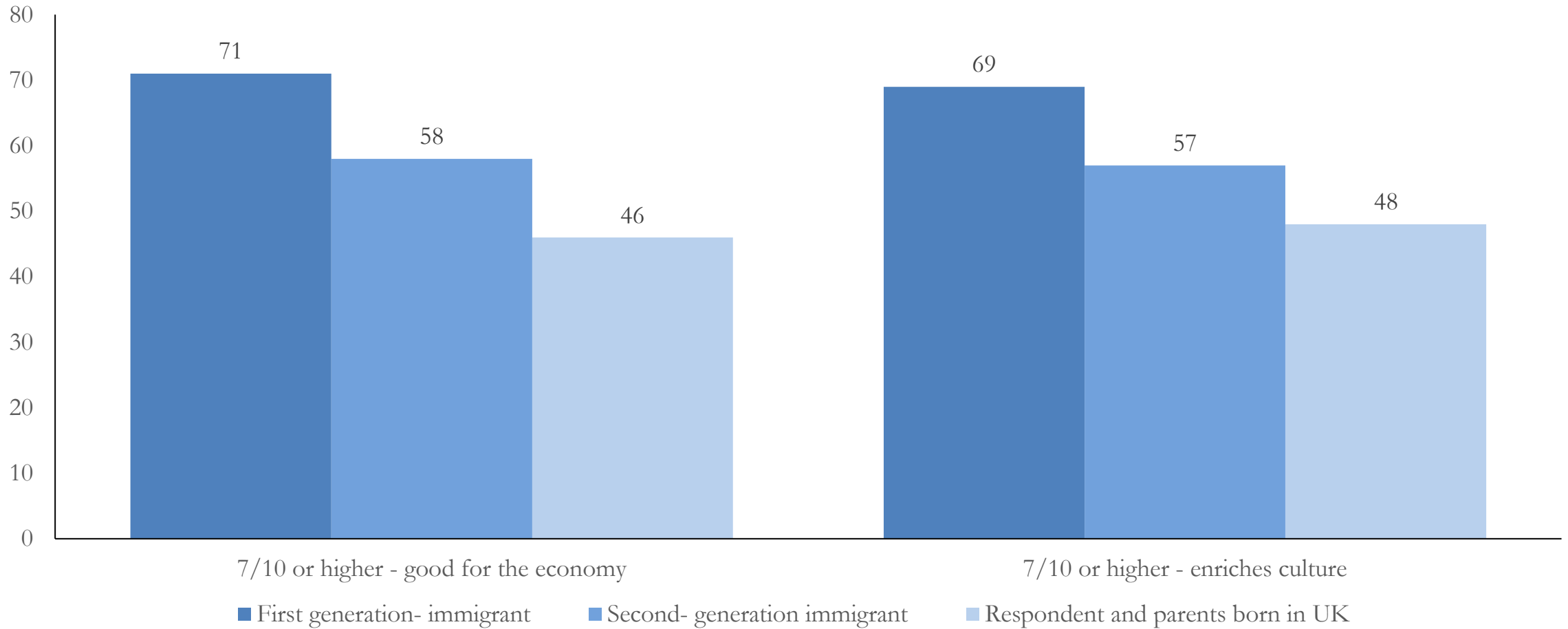
Graduates have consistently more liberal views on immigration and education divides have grown on some measures



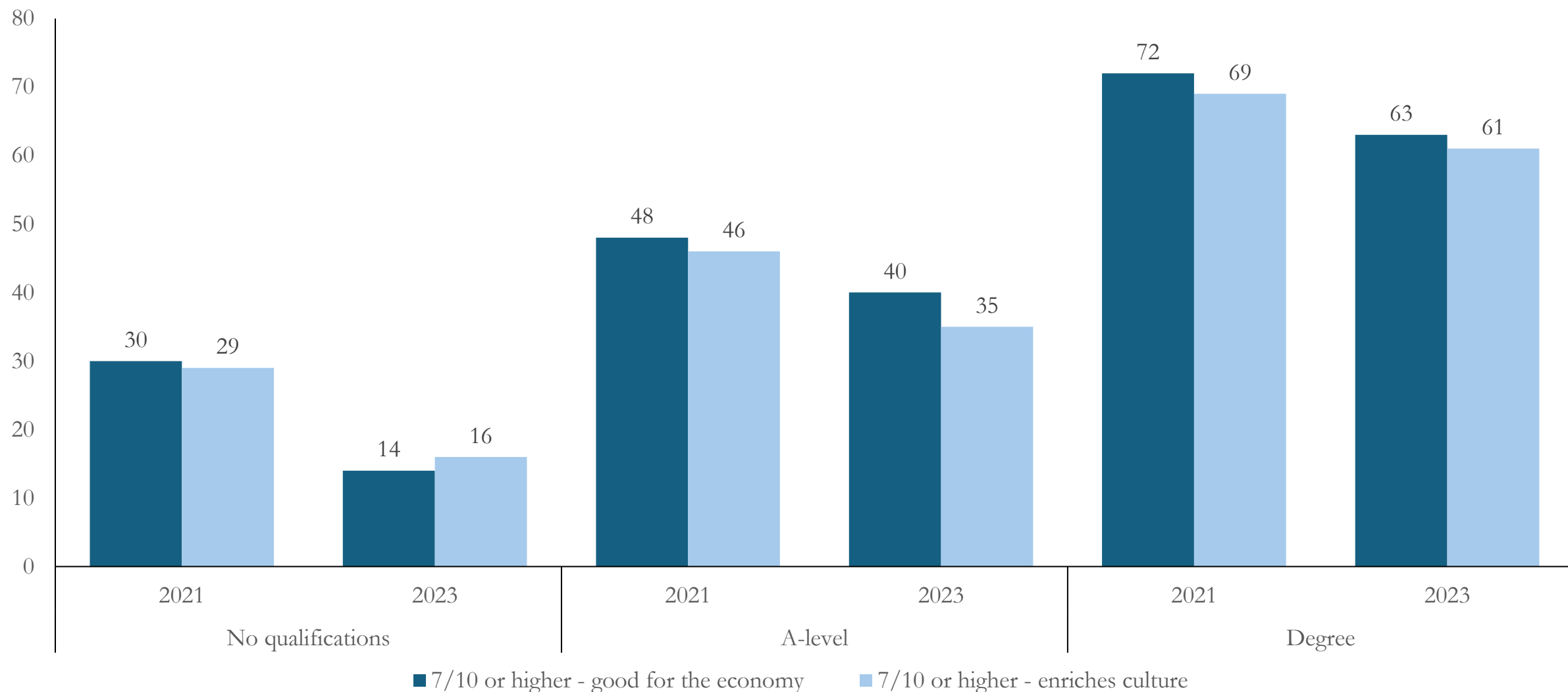
“Two speed liberalisation” has deepened value divides - social liberals’ views have liberalised faster than authoritarians’ views



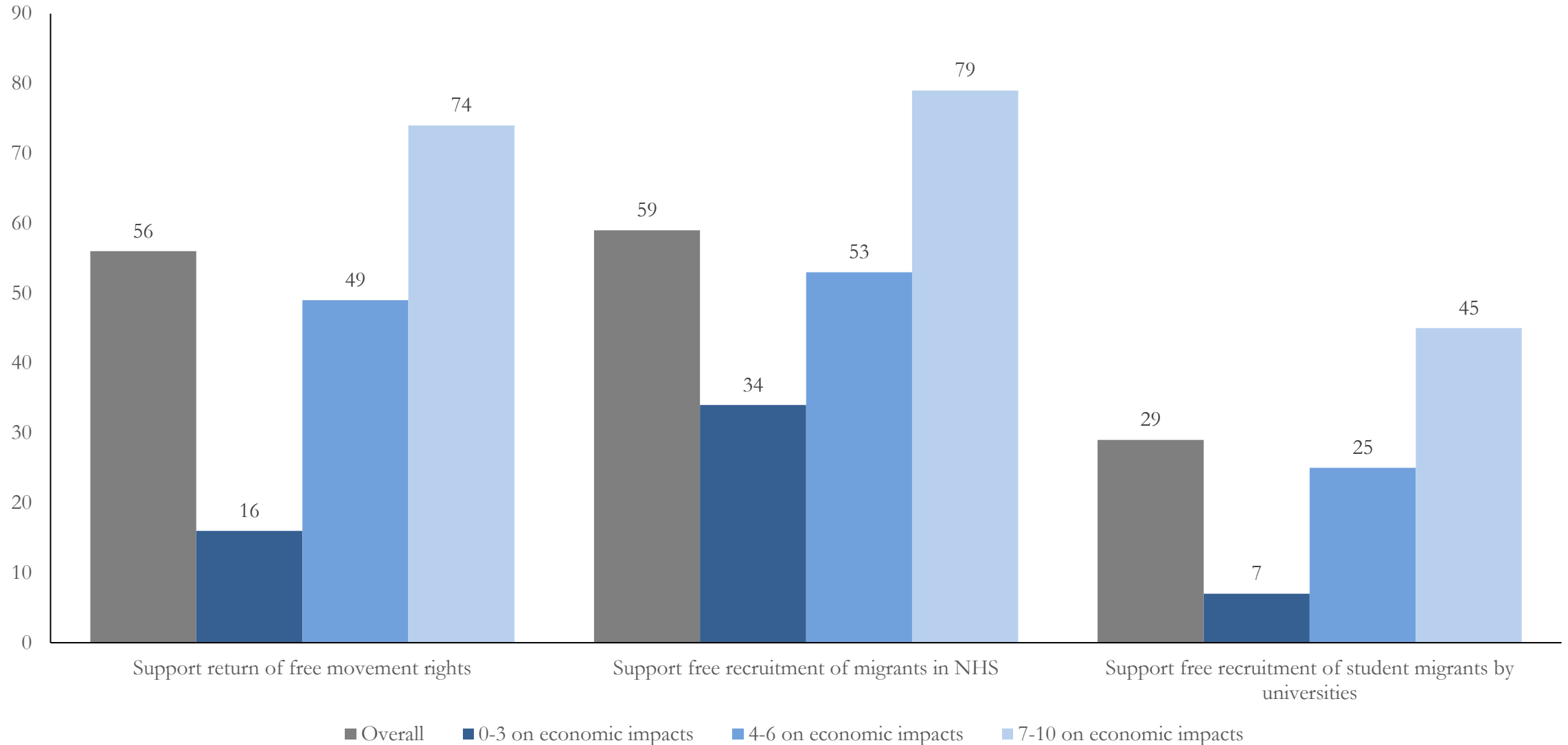
Rapid rise of migrant origin populations encourages more liberal attitudes, as people with migrant heritage have more liberal views on immigration (though this fades over time/across generations)...



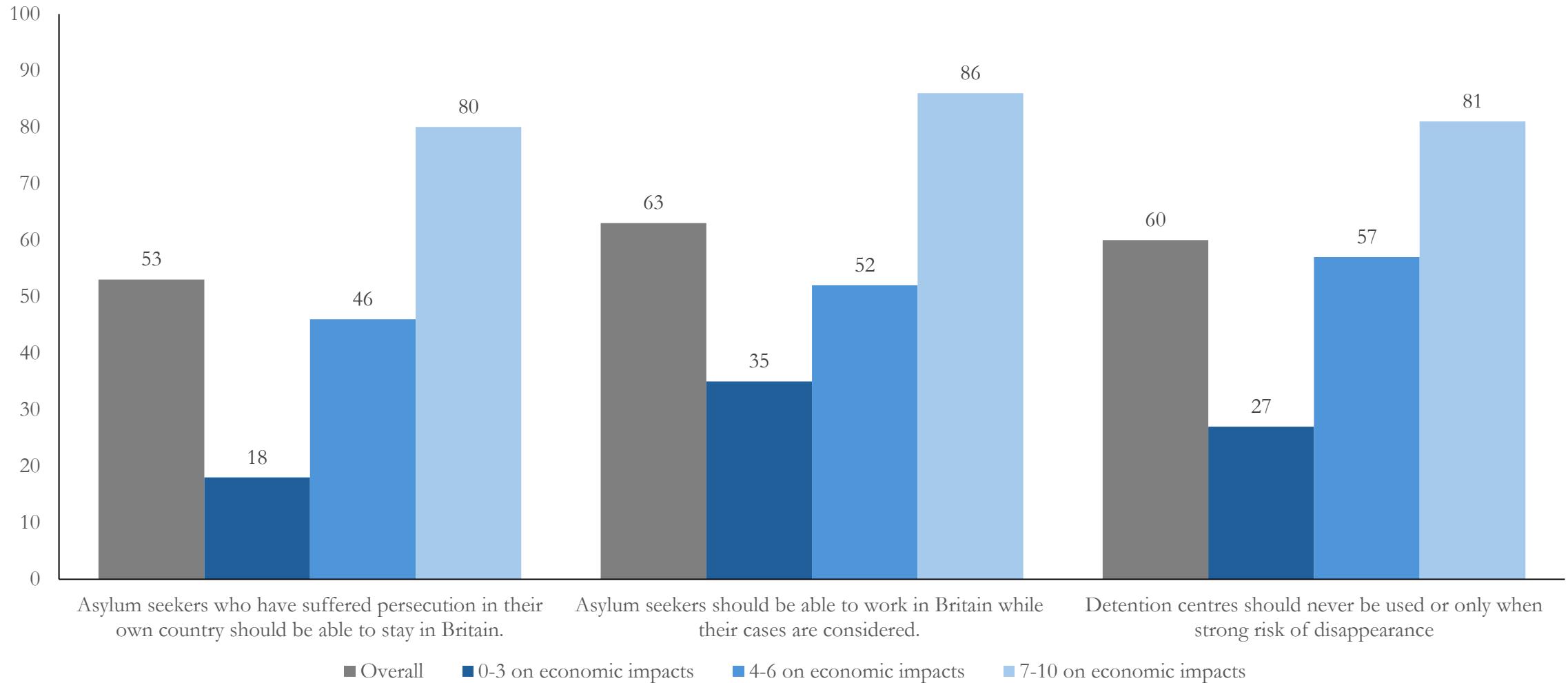
Since 2021: negative shift overall and rising polarisation on some dimensions (e.g. education)



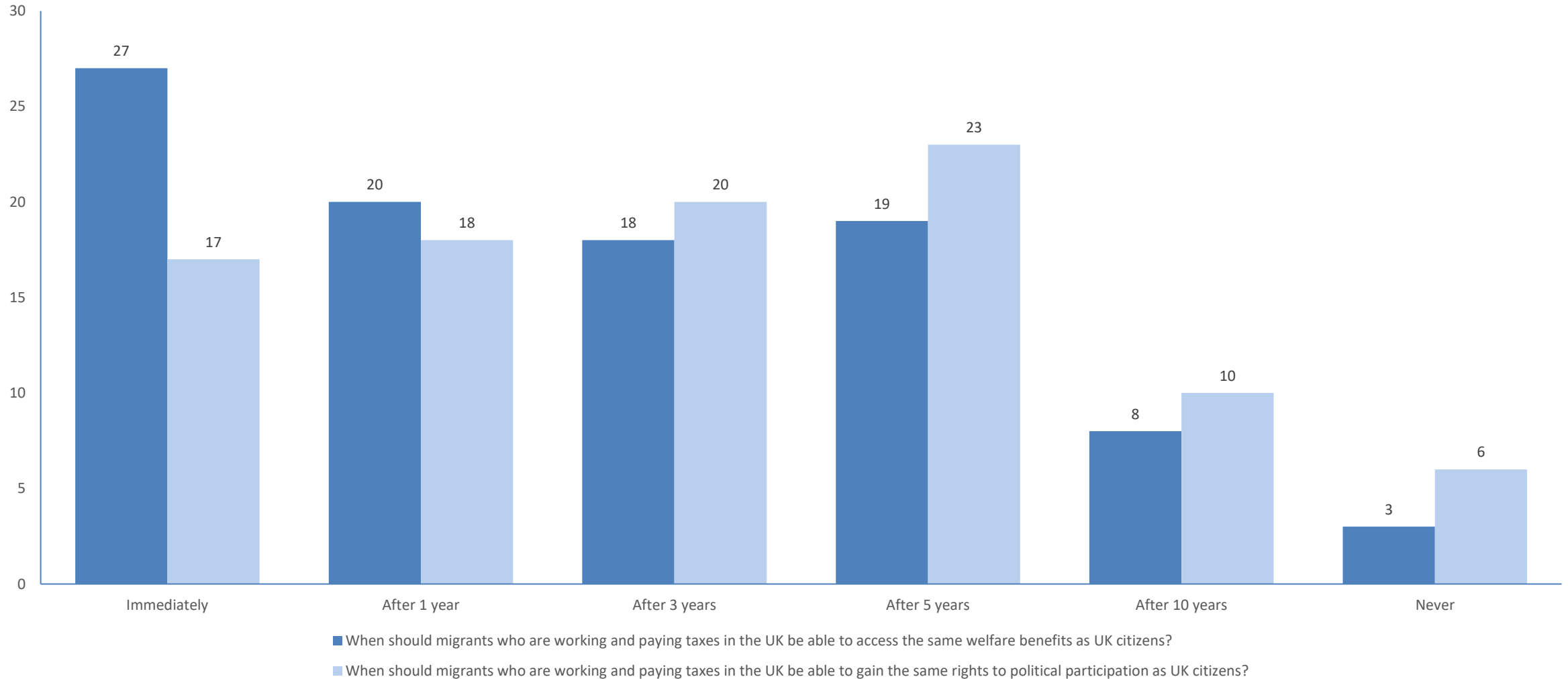
Current views: support for very liberal migration policies



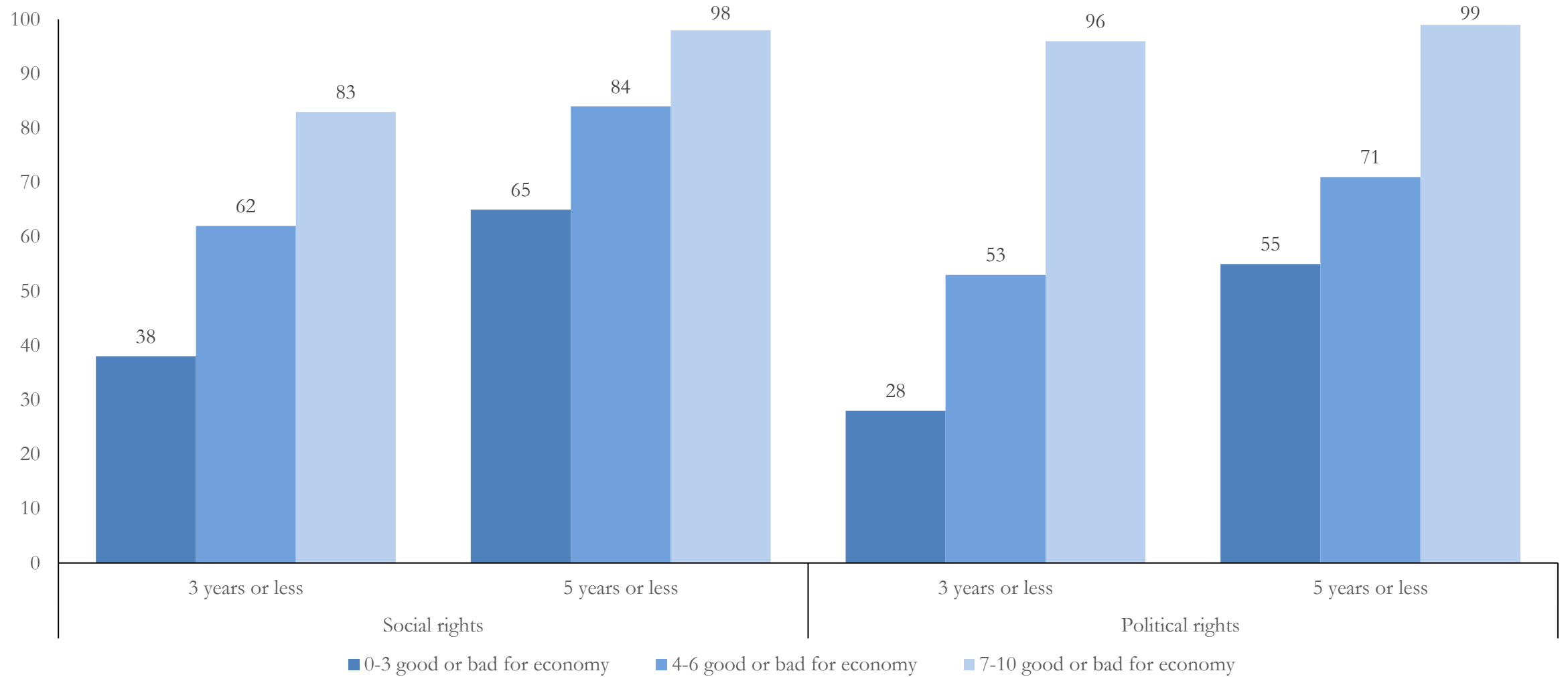
Current views: refugees and asylum



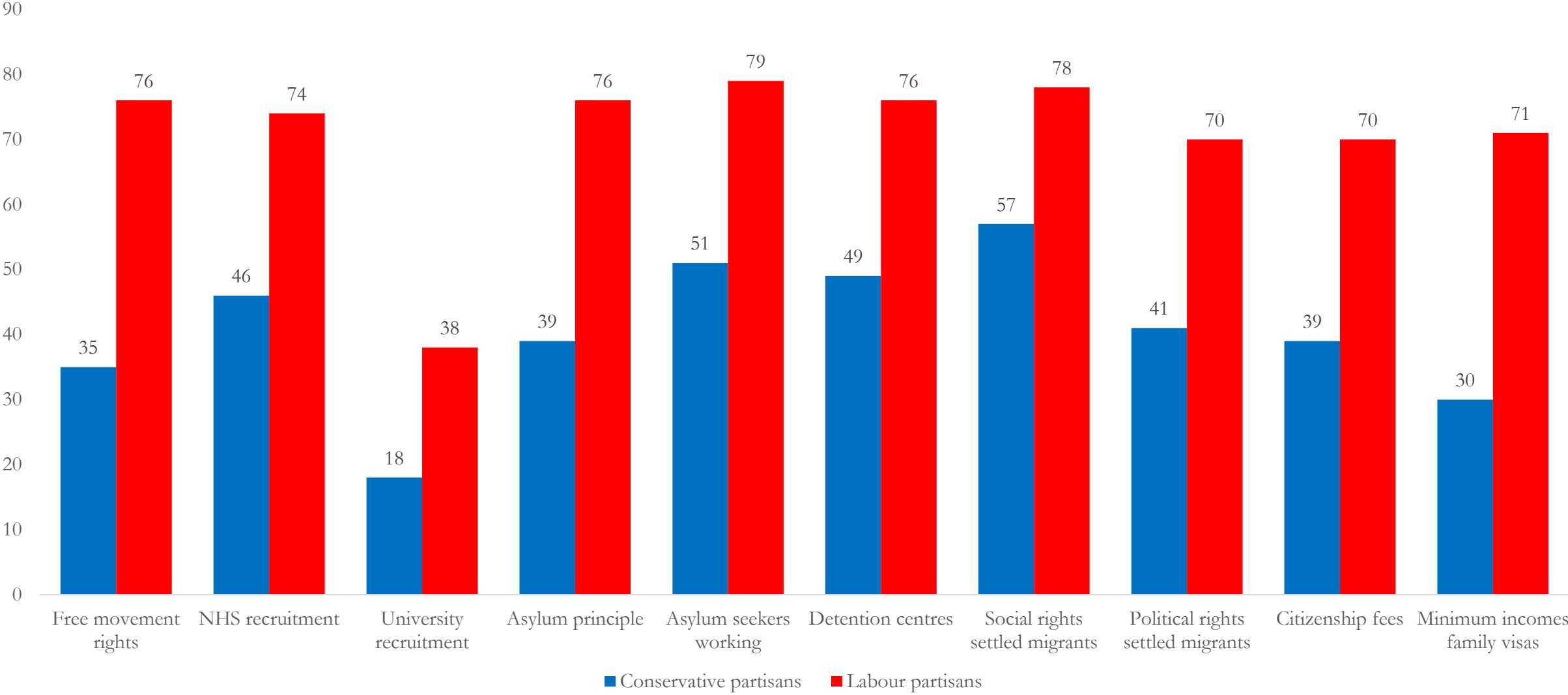
Current views: settled migrants – social and political rights



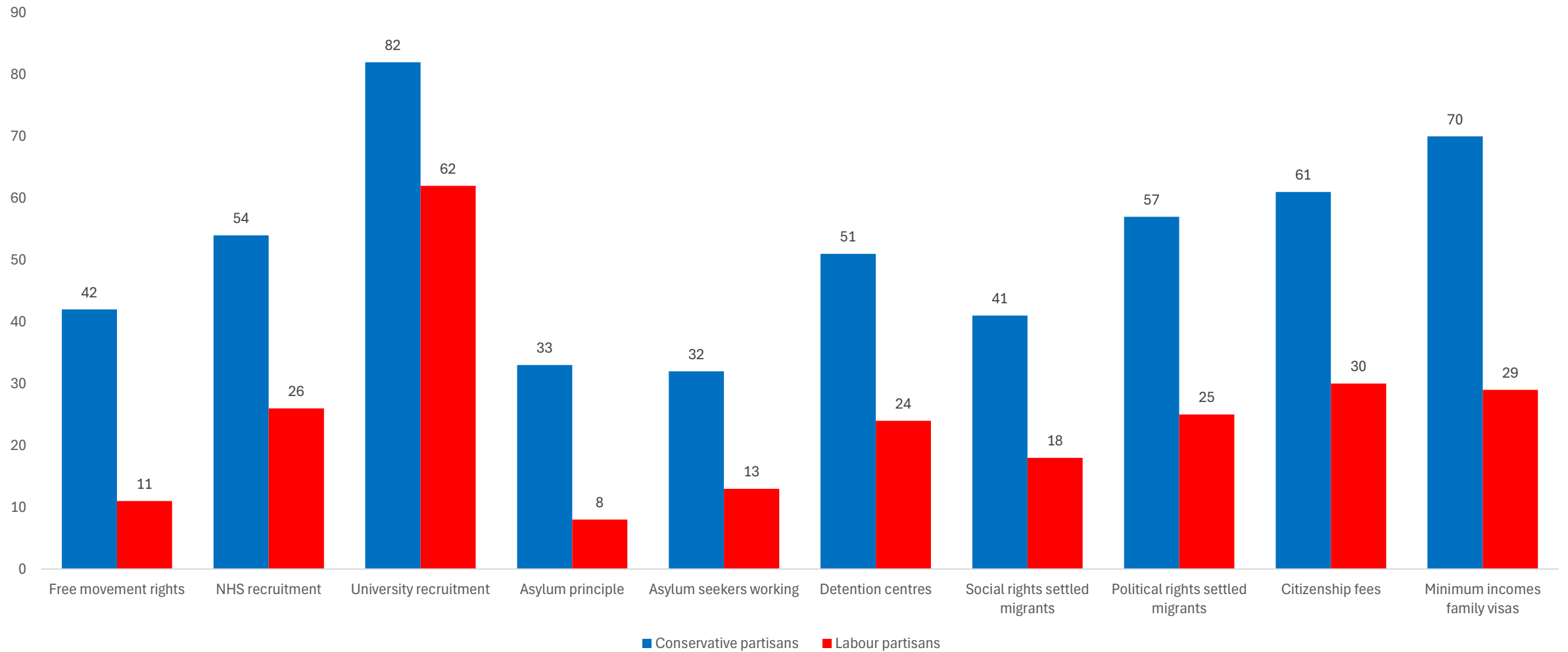
There is broad consensus for full rights for immigrants after 5 years qualifying residence or less



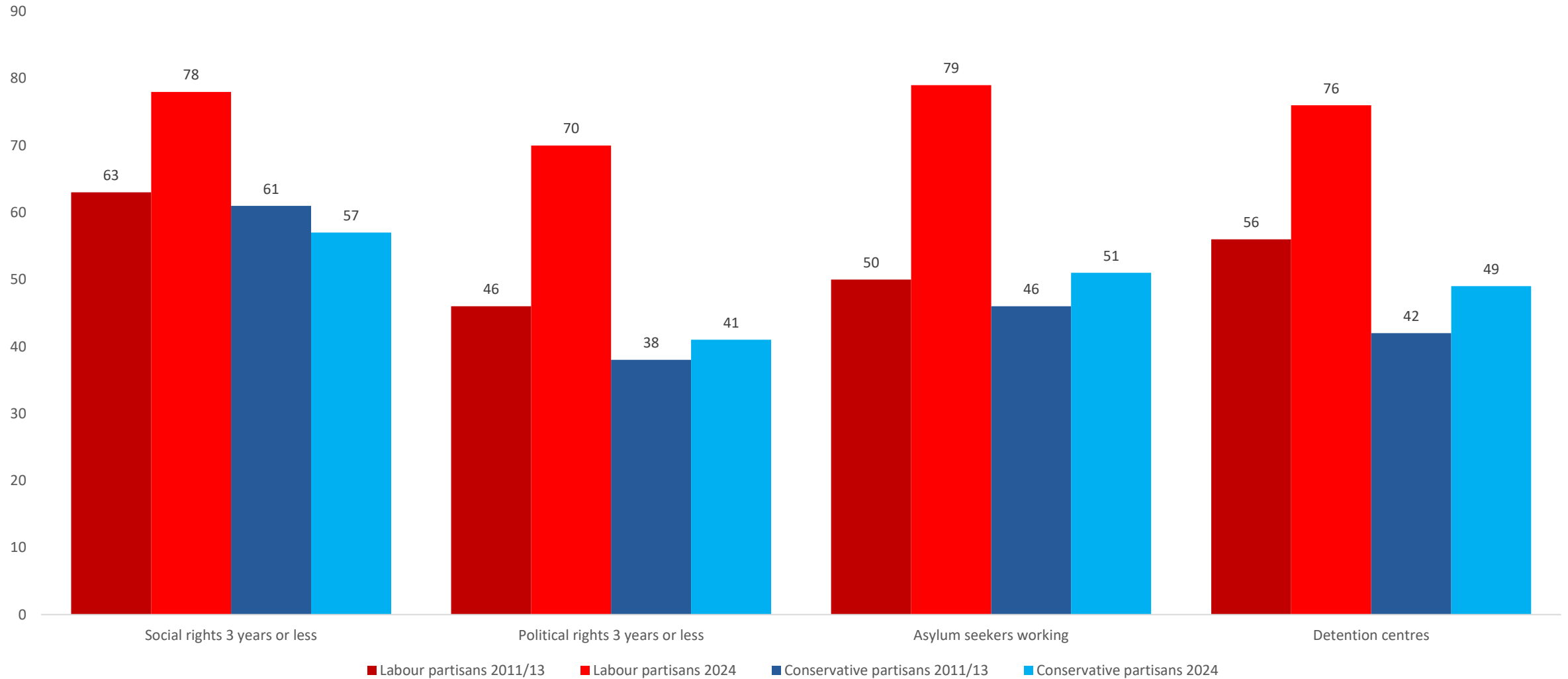
Political polarisation: Conservative and Labour partisans supporting liberal policy options



Political polarisation: many restrictive immigration policy options enjoy majority support from Conservative partisans



Attitudes become more politically polarised over time due to “two speed liberalisation”

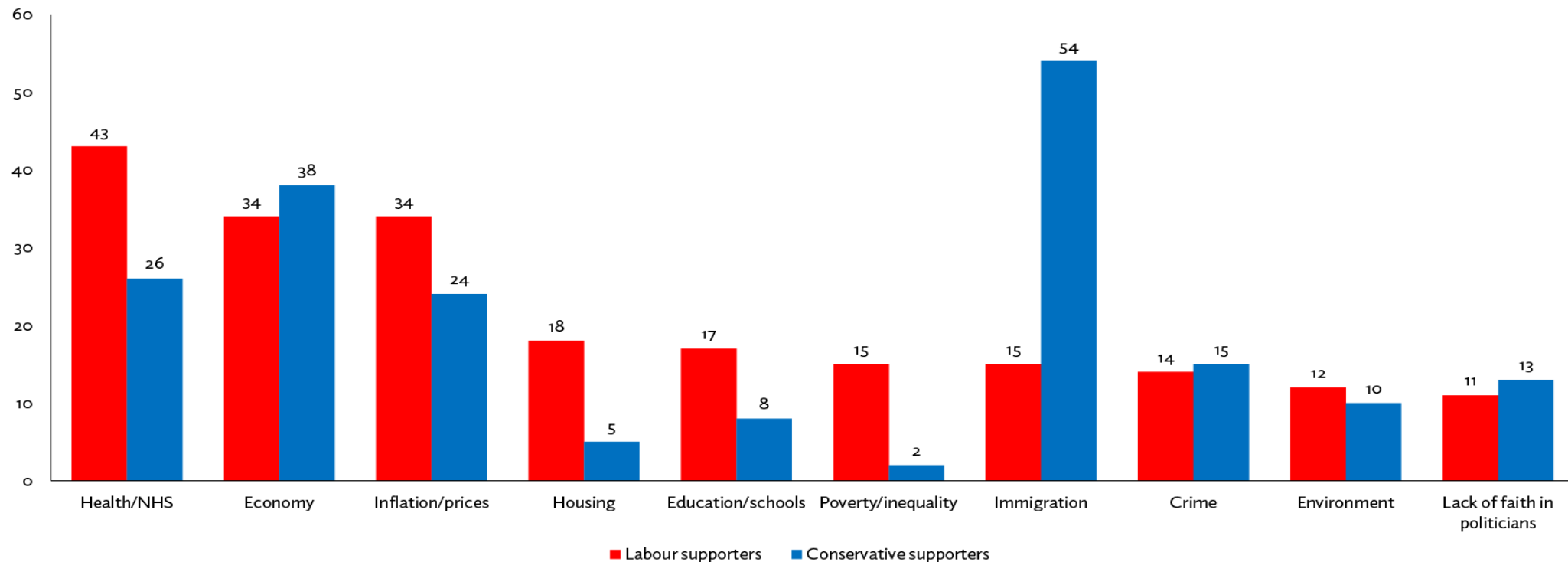


Attention to immigration is also highly polarised – in 2024 salience polling it has been the top issue for Conservative supporters, but not in the top five for Labour supporters

Immigration is the top issue for Conservative supporters but isn't even in the top five for Labour supporters

% of voters than see the following issues as top concerns

UK IN A
CHANGING
EUROPE



Source: IPSOS-MORI issues index May 2024

Immigration in the election campaign

- Immigration attitudes became more liberal across the board in 2010s
 - There has been some reversal of this in past few years
- “Two speed liberalisation” has deepened social divides in immigration attitudes
 - Everyone is becoming more liberal, but groups who start most liberal also shift fastest
- “Two speed liberalisation” has also deepened political divides
 - This is not due to more negative attitudes or support for restriction among Conservatives/on political right...
 - ...but rather Labour/left have shifted strongly in a liberal direction, while Conservatives/right have changed slowly or stayed put
- Immigration has in the past couple of years proved more politically difficult for the right than the left
 - The campaign may continue this trend...
 - ...but things may look different after a few years with a Labour/left government?