



By Cibyl & Wonkhe

I feel part of a community of students and staff

During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions and beliefs?

Very free	59% ↑	27% ↓	19% ↓	11% ↓
Free	36% ↓	61% ↑	51%	42%
Not very free	3% ↓	11%	25% ↑	31% ↑
Not at all free	1%	1% ↓	4%	16% ↑



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Why do students say they are not free to express themselves?

- Lack of personal confidence in general/fear of being judged
- Course not amenable to discussions re opinions and beliefs
- Feeling that personal characteristics or background not similar enough/fitting in
- Belief that personal opinions will be unpopular with other students (left wing bias)
- Different understanding of question (focussed on feedback about staff/course)



Why do students say they are not free to express themselves?

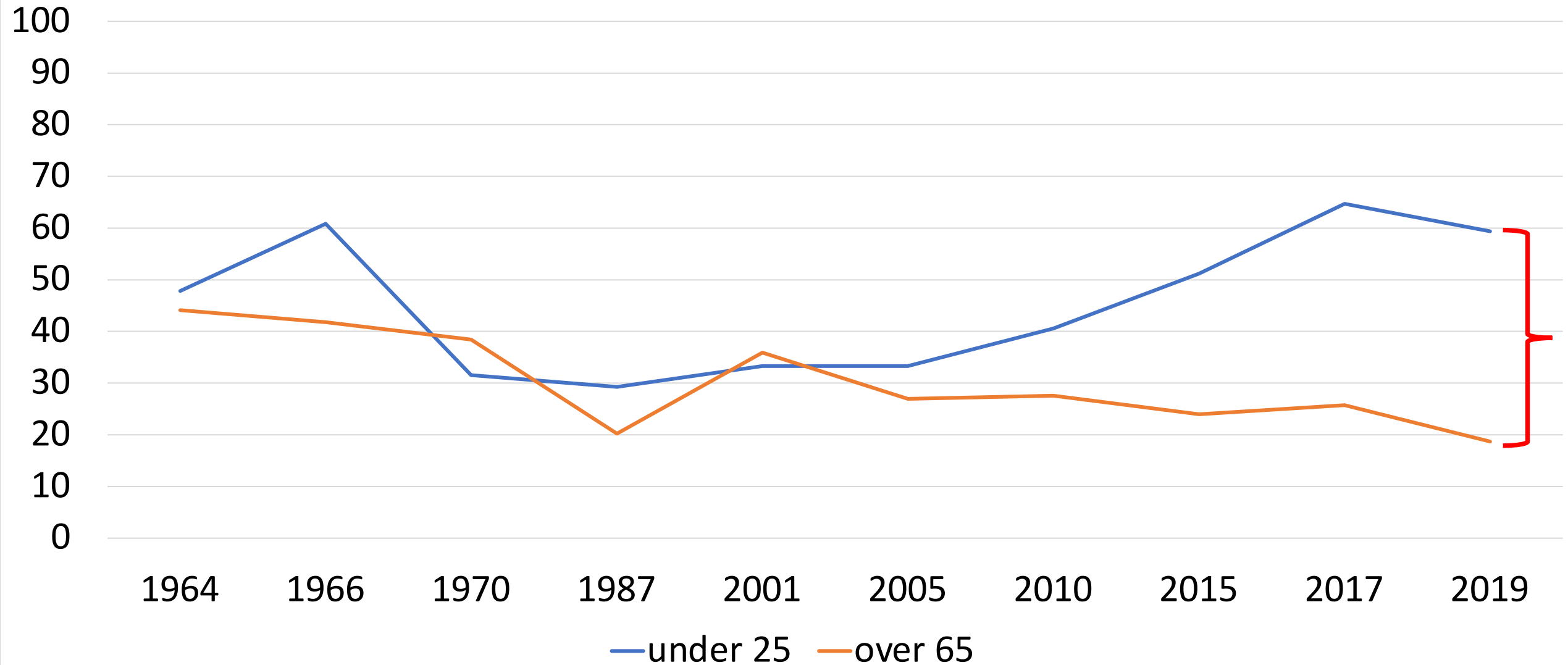
- I don't have the confidence to speak in seminars, everyone else has more interesting things to say. I still get nervous to express my opinion since I am new and trying to understand the people/colleagues.
- I feel only a certain type of opinion is allowed at university (extreme left wing), any other part of the political spectrum is condemned by students. I do not feel I can openly express my centrist opinions nor safely discuss them sometimes.
- My degree doesn't allow me to have much of an opinion on things as a lot of it is simply factual.
- Possibilities to express personal ideas, opinions and beliefs were given, but still, I felt limited doing that because of the judgements received after.
- Sometimes I voiced some of my opinions and concerns, and the most of the staff always responded to me in a hostile way.



THE SECRET LIFE OF STUDENTS

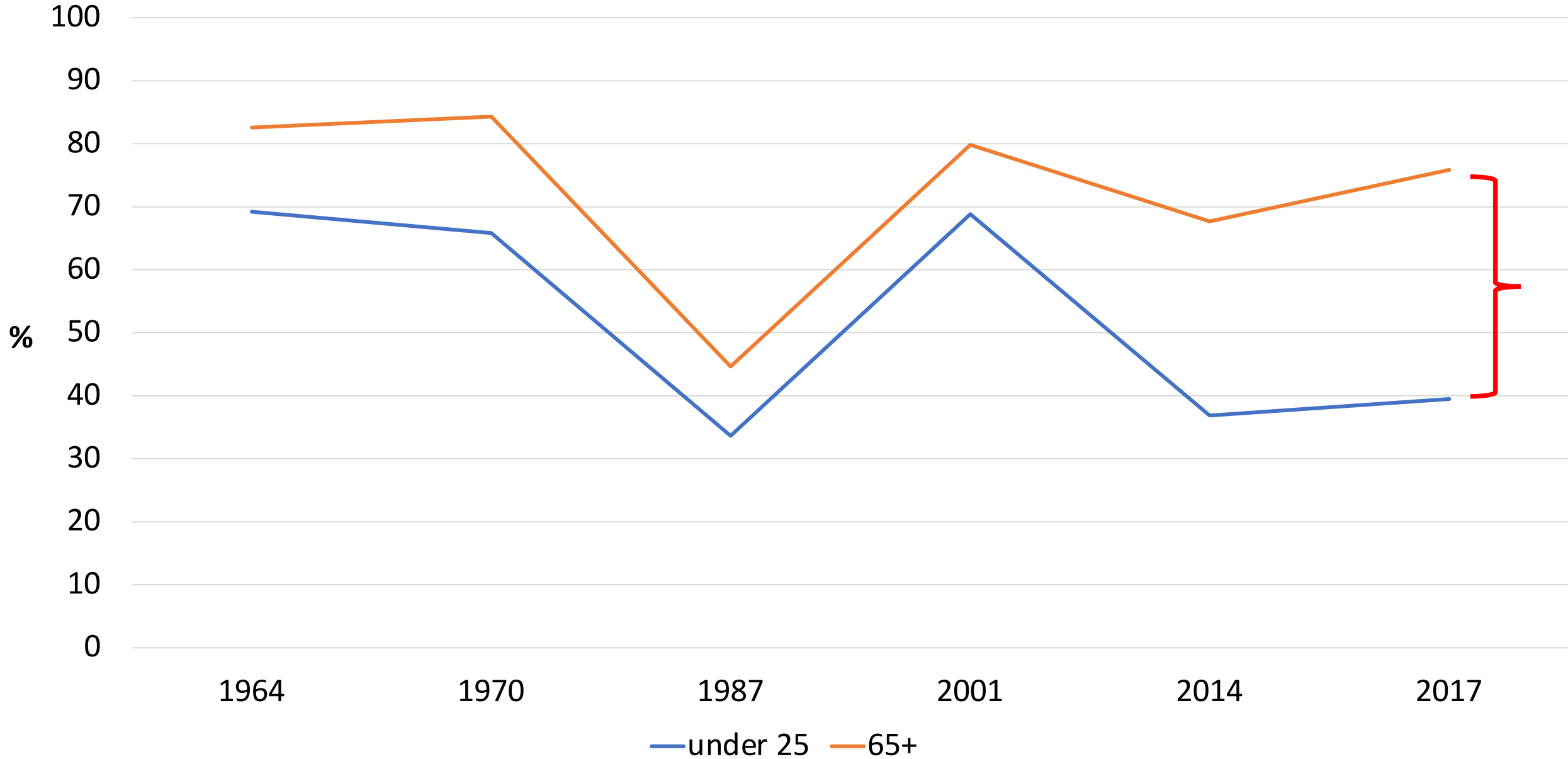
WONKHE

Labour Vote Share among decideds, by Age, 1964-2019 British Election Studies

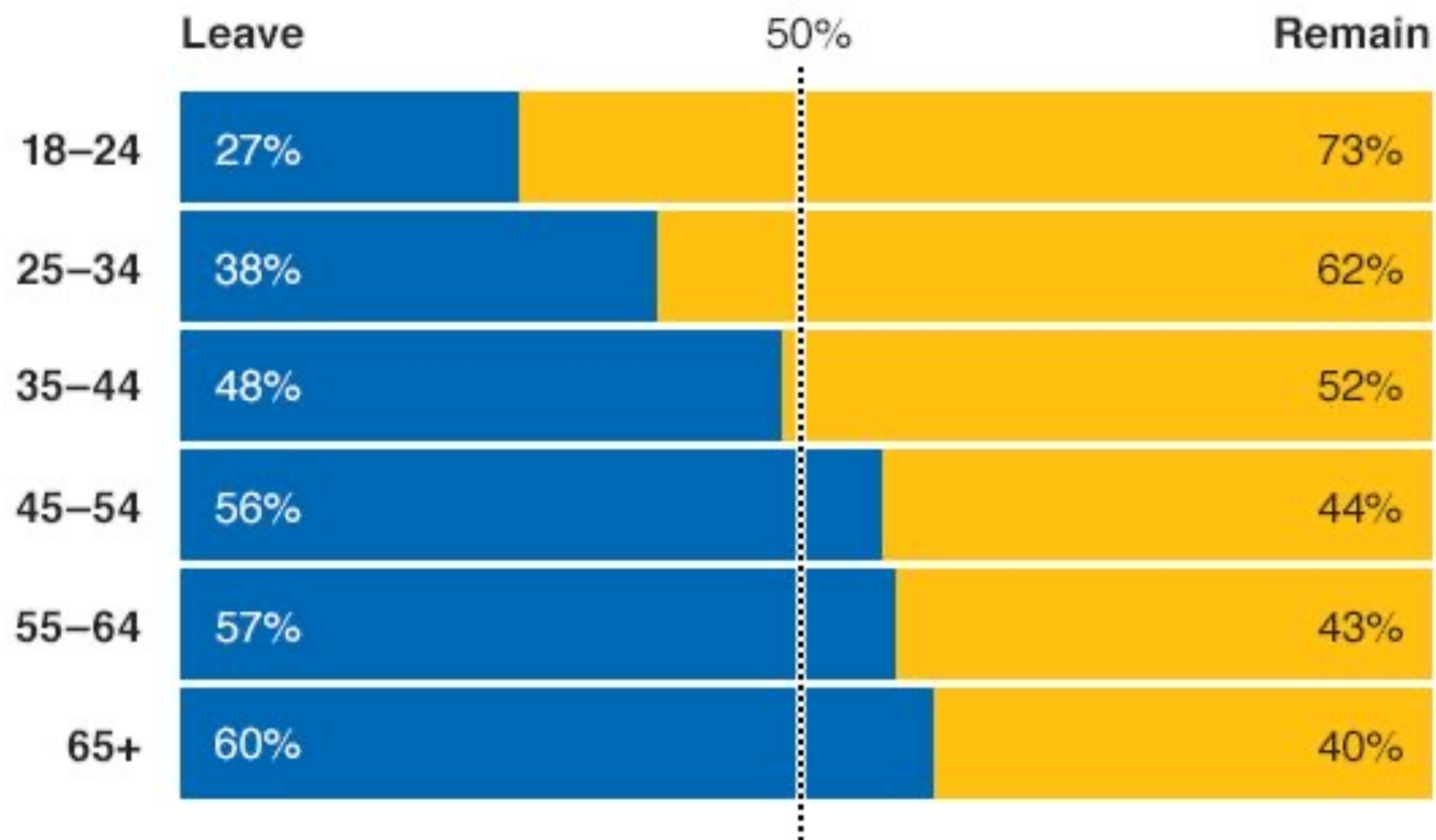


Reduce Immigration, by age, 1964-2017

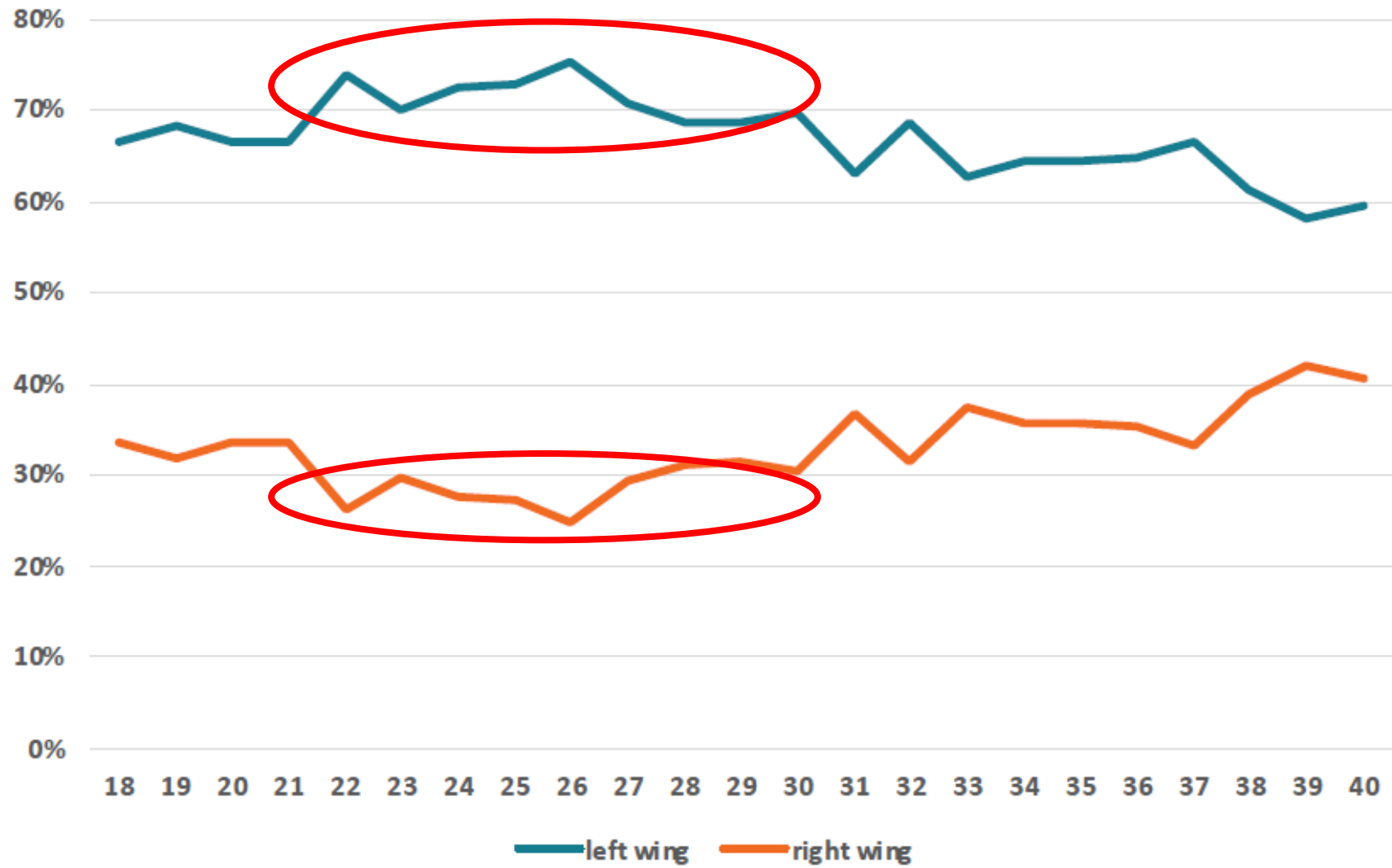
(British Election Studies, various questions)



How different age groups voted

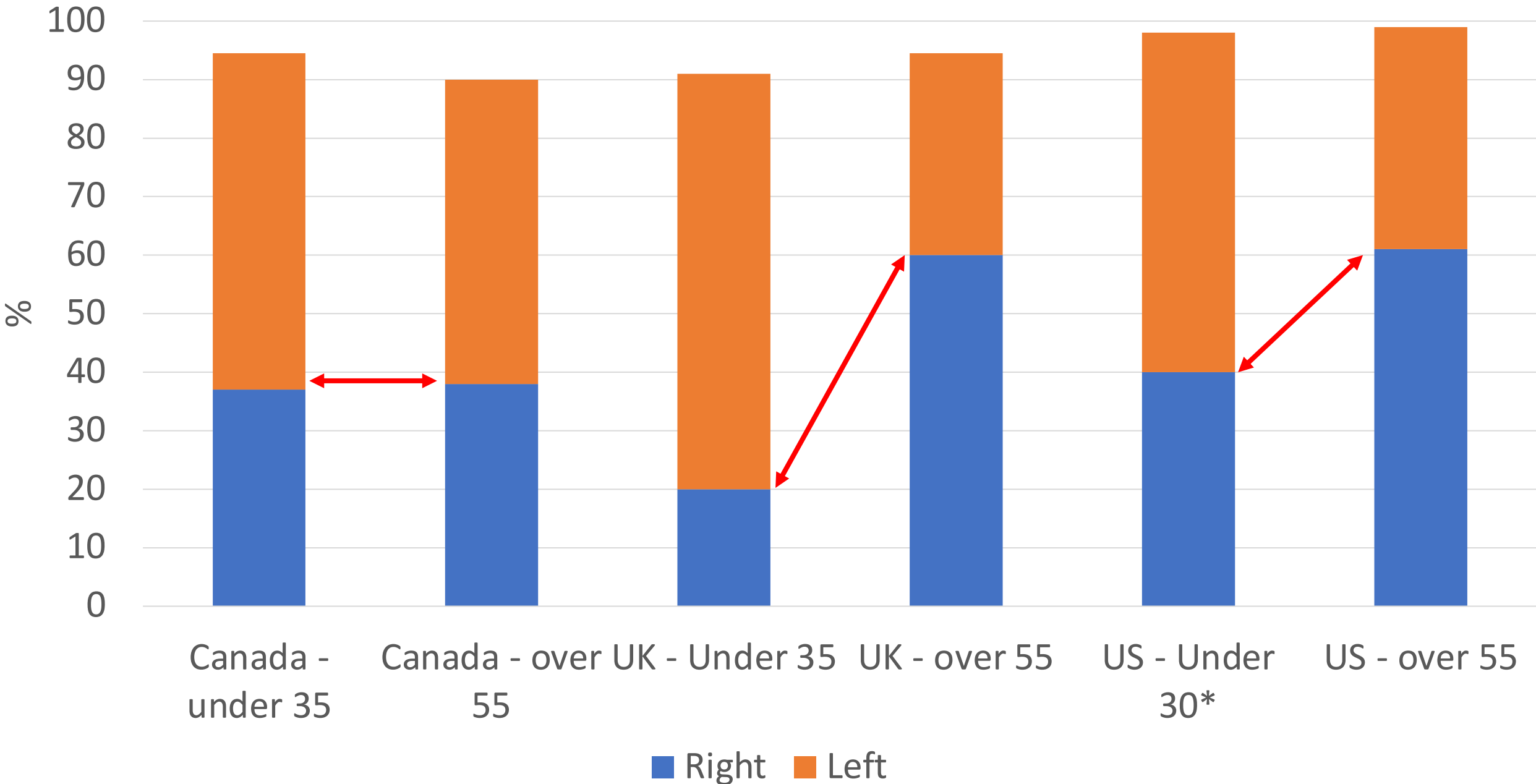


Left-Right Identification, by Age

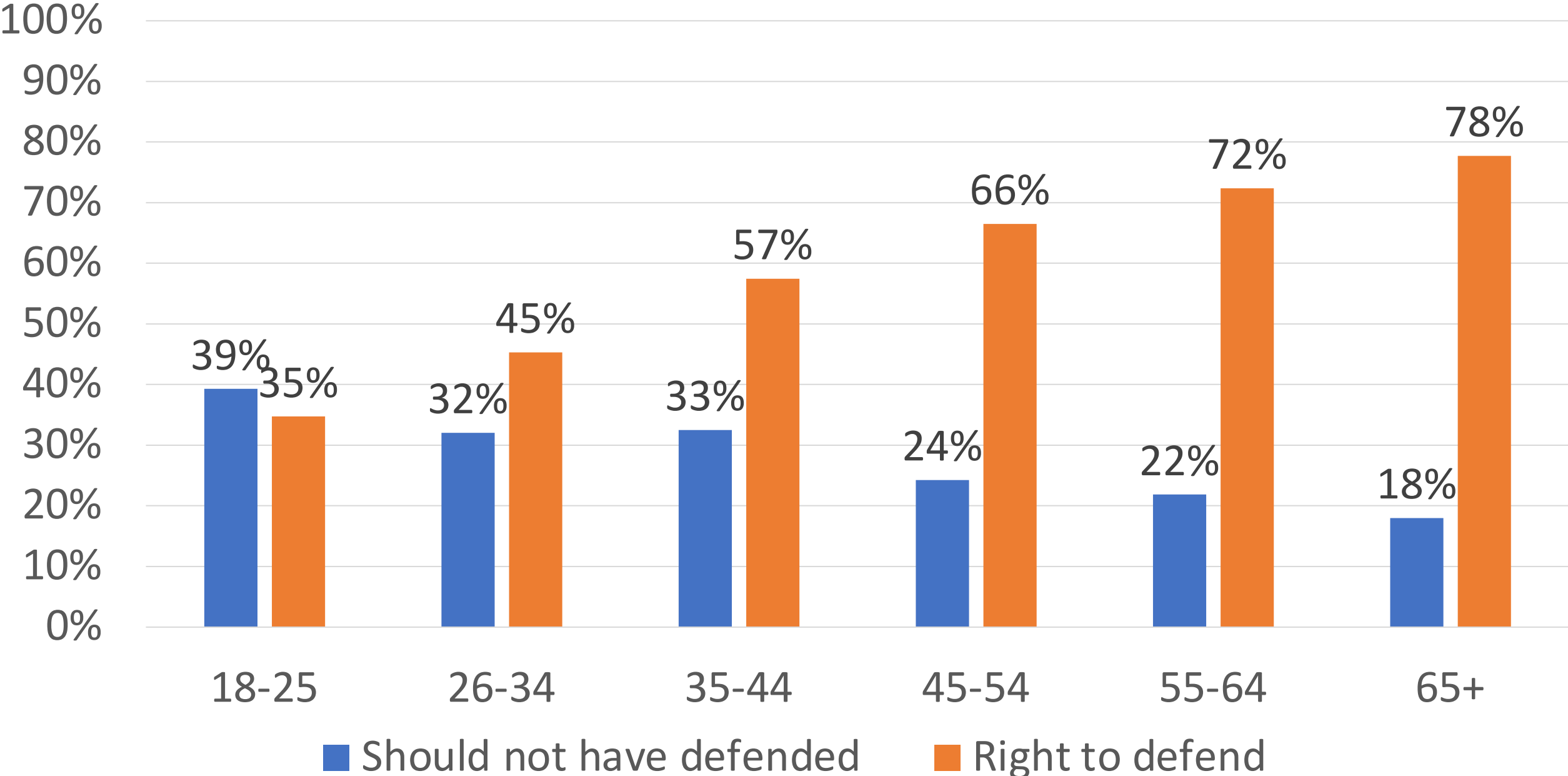


Source: YouGov Profiles, 15 June, 2022. N=52,140 excluding missing, centrist and don't know responses.

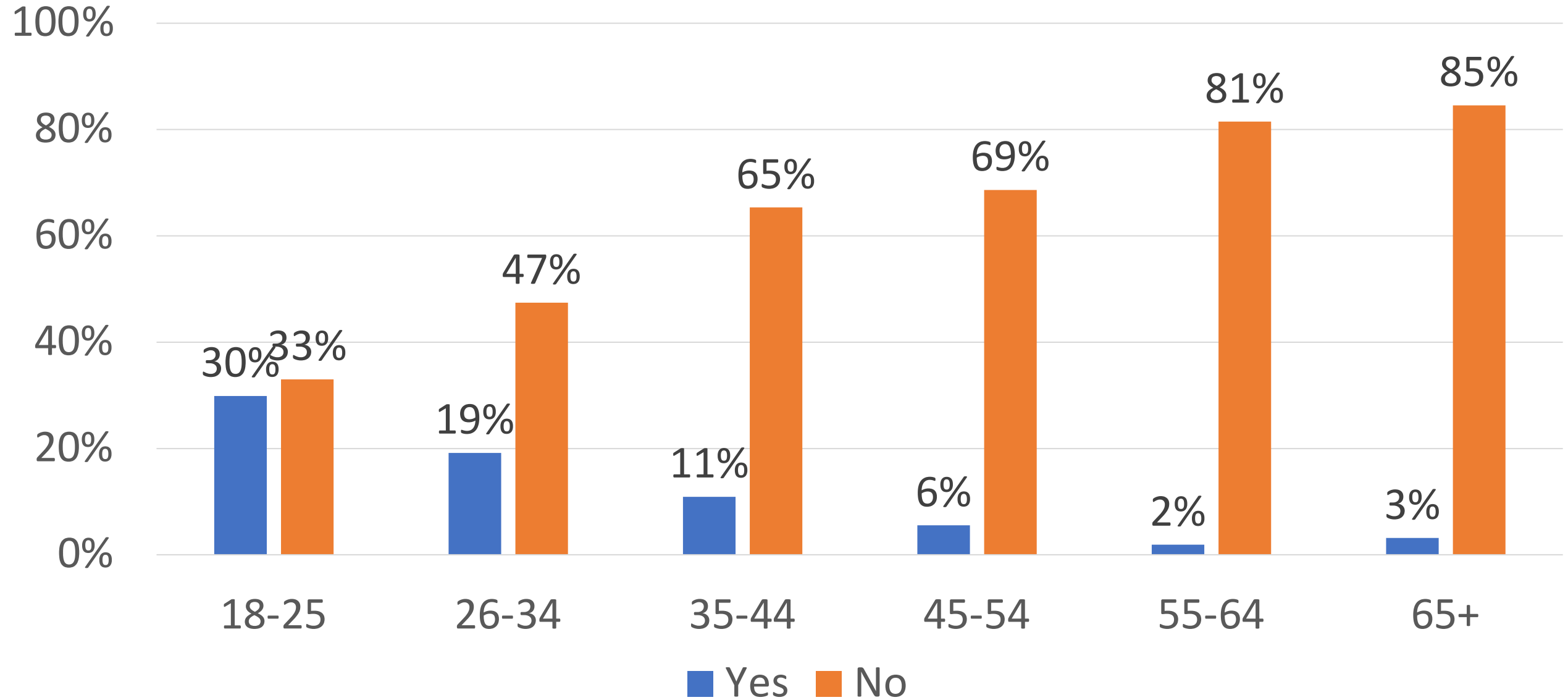
Anglosphere Age Gaps in Voting, c. 2020-22



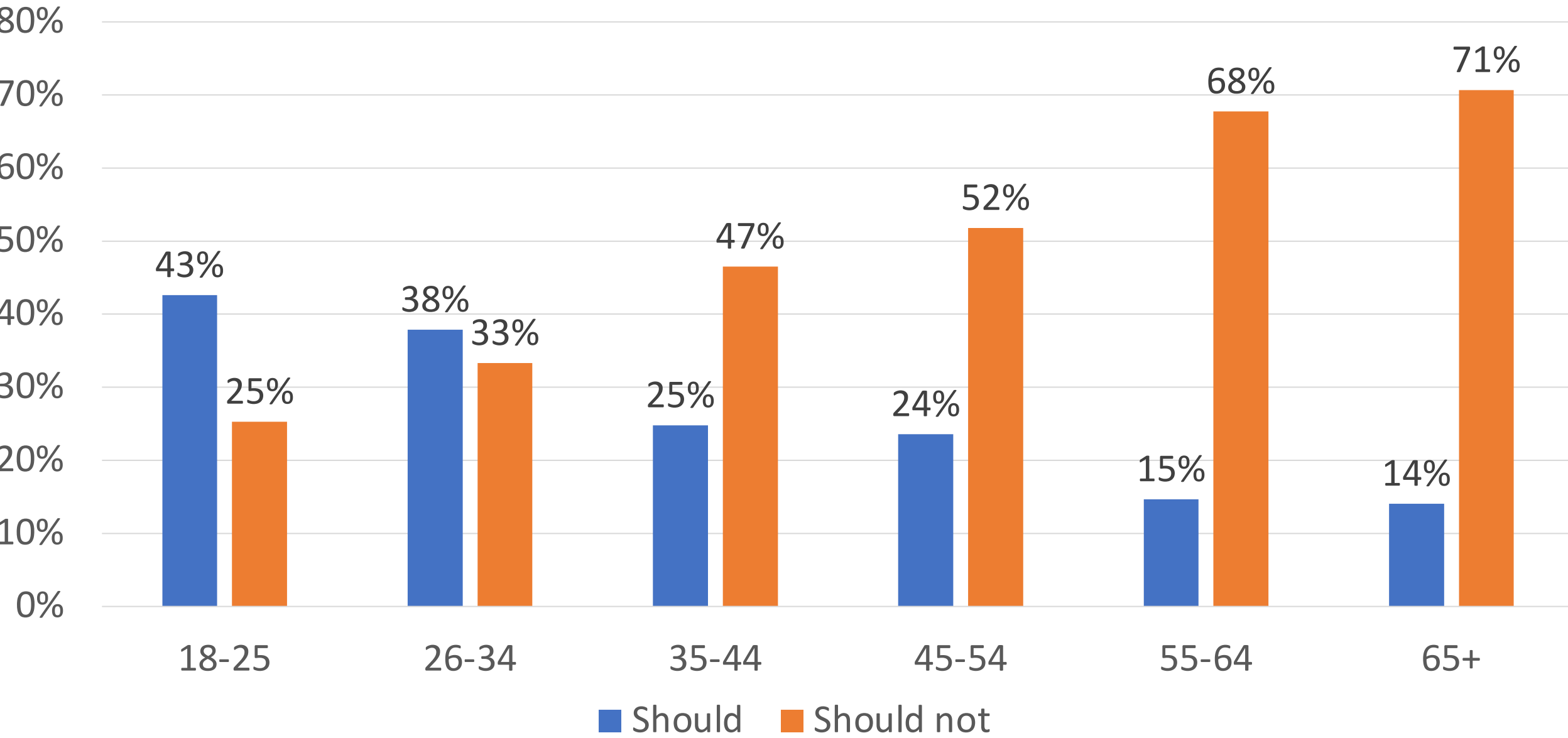
Should Sussex VC Have Defended Kathleen Stock?



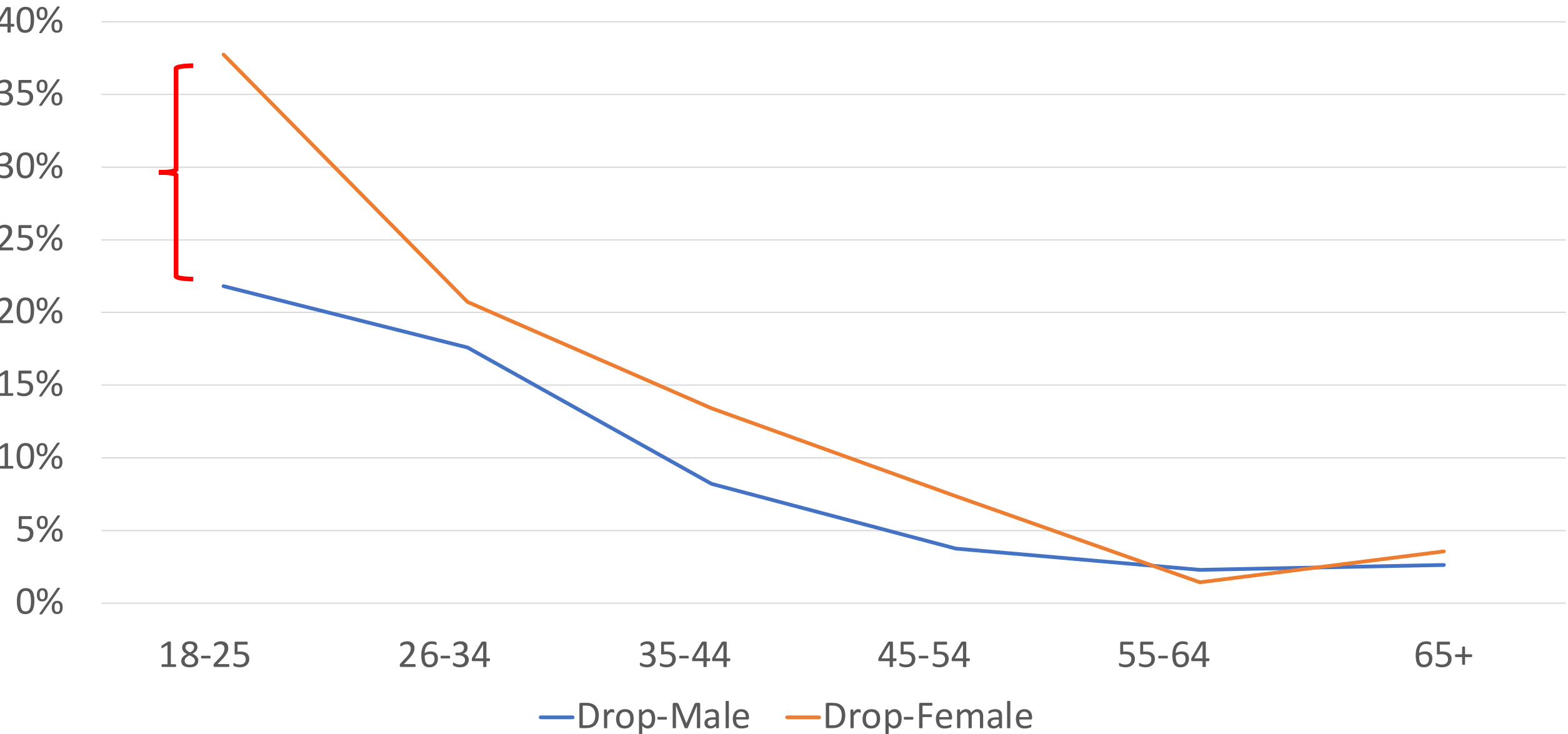
Should JK Rowling be Dropped by Publishers? (by age)



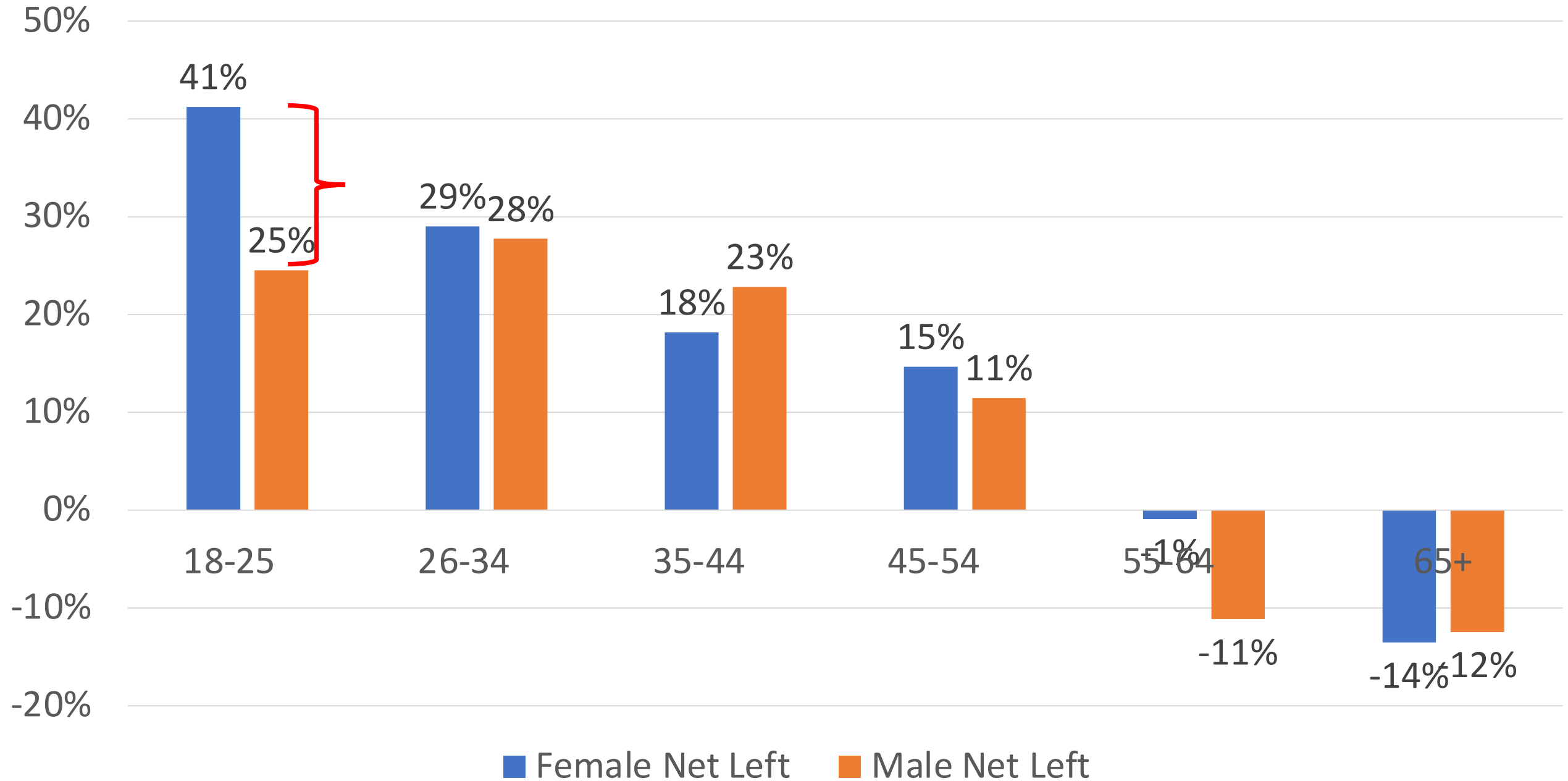
Teach students that Britain was founded on racism and remains structurally racist today



Should J.K. Rowling be Dropped by Her Publishers, by Age and Gender



Ideology, by Age and Gender



THE SECRET LIFE OF STUDENTS

WONKHE

Why are students so left wing?

Demystifying the link between higher education and liberal values

Dr Elizabeth Simon, Postdoctoral Researcher at the Mile End Institute

The Secret Life of Students 2023, 14 March 2023

Defining left wing

- Socio-political values do not have a unidimensional structure
- At a minimum, we must take a two dimensional approach to capture the subtleties of these values

Economic liberalism:

A left-right dimension concerned with issues of distribution, public ownership and the balance of power between employees and employer

Social liberalism:

A libertarian-authoritarian dimension concerned with issues of personal freedom and authority.

University graduates think differently to non-graduates

In Britain, university graduates are considerably more socially liberal than non-graduates

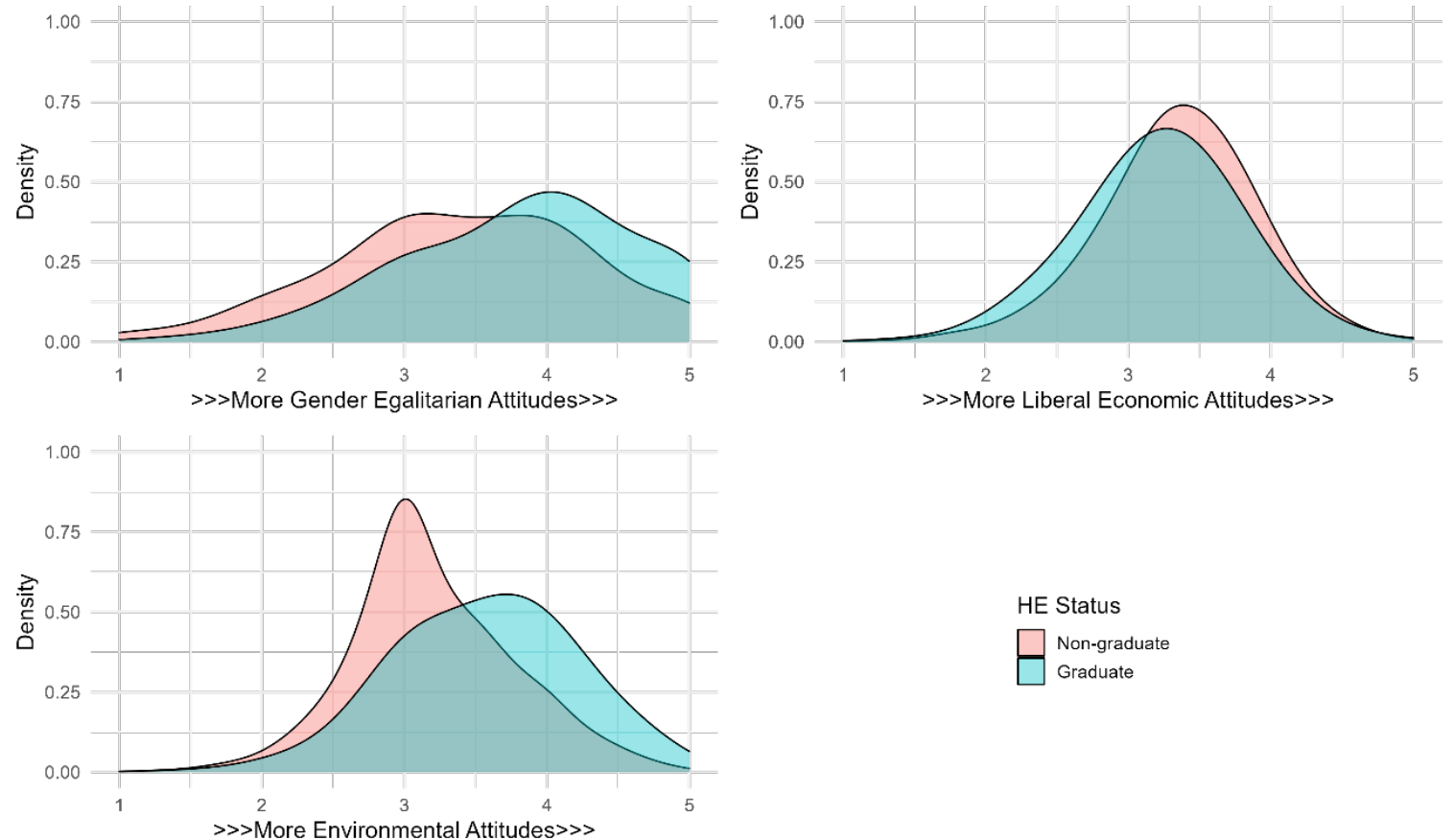
- They have more gender egalitarian and environmentally friendly attitudes

But slightly more economically conservative than non-graduates

- Graduates are somewhat more right-leaning economically

Graduates are not universally more left-wing

Distribution of Adult Attitudes by HE Status



Adult Attitudes in Britain by HE Status, Source: Harmonised British Household Panel and Understanding Society Data 1994-2020

Why do graduates think differently? (1)

HE has a *direct causal* effect on attitude formation:

Exposure to the educational content, or some other direct experiential aspect, of HE may lead students to develop a distinctive set of socio-political values

The effect of HE on attitude formation is *indirect*, in that *university study in itself is not the cause* of graduates' distinctive socio-political values:

Self selection: liberal people are more likely to enrol at, and graduate from, universities

Sorting: the social position conferred upon us by virtue of gaining a university degree shapes our attitudes

Why do graduates think differently? (2)

To understand *why* graduates think differently, we must separate the direct and indirect effects of HE on attitudinal formation

But this is a difficult task...we often don't have data on all of the important pre-university experiences needed to capture self-selection effects (e.g., information on early political socialisation or family socio-economic background)

Failure to fully control for self-selection leads to over-estimation of HE's direct effect on attitudes

Towards a more robust estimate of HE's effect on socio-political attitudes

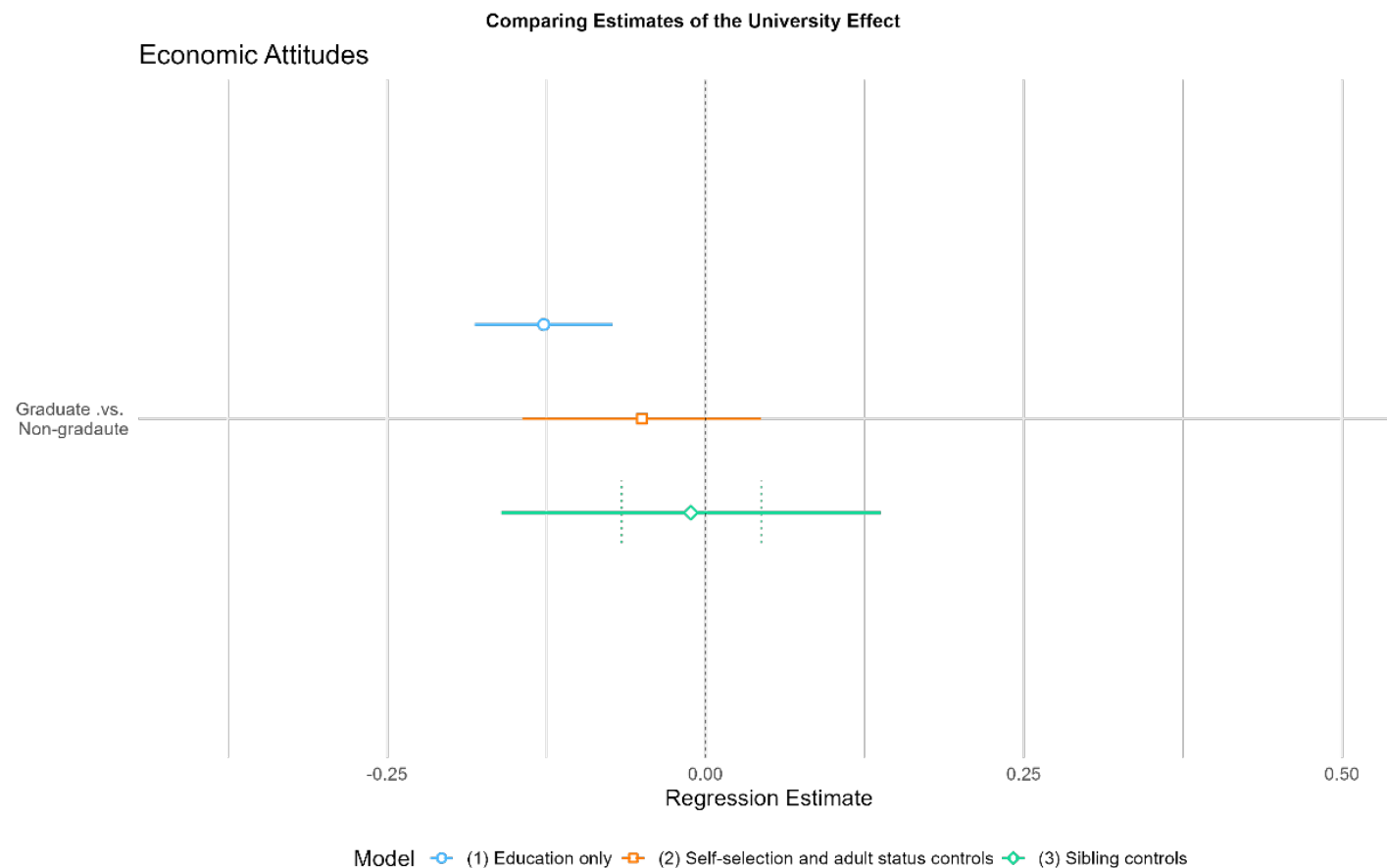
Siblings who grow up in the same household are likely to have similar pre-adult experiences

Exploiting the shared family backgrounds of siblings by estimating HE's effect on socio-political attitudes within-siblings allows fuller controls for self-selection

Taking this estimation approach allows my research to provide a more accurate estimate of the *causal* effect of university study on attitudes

HE's effect on economic liberalism

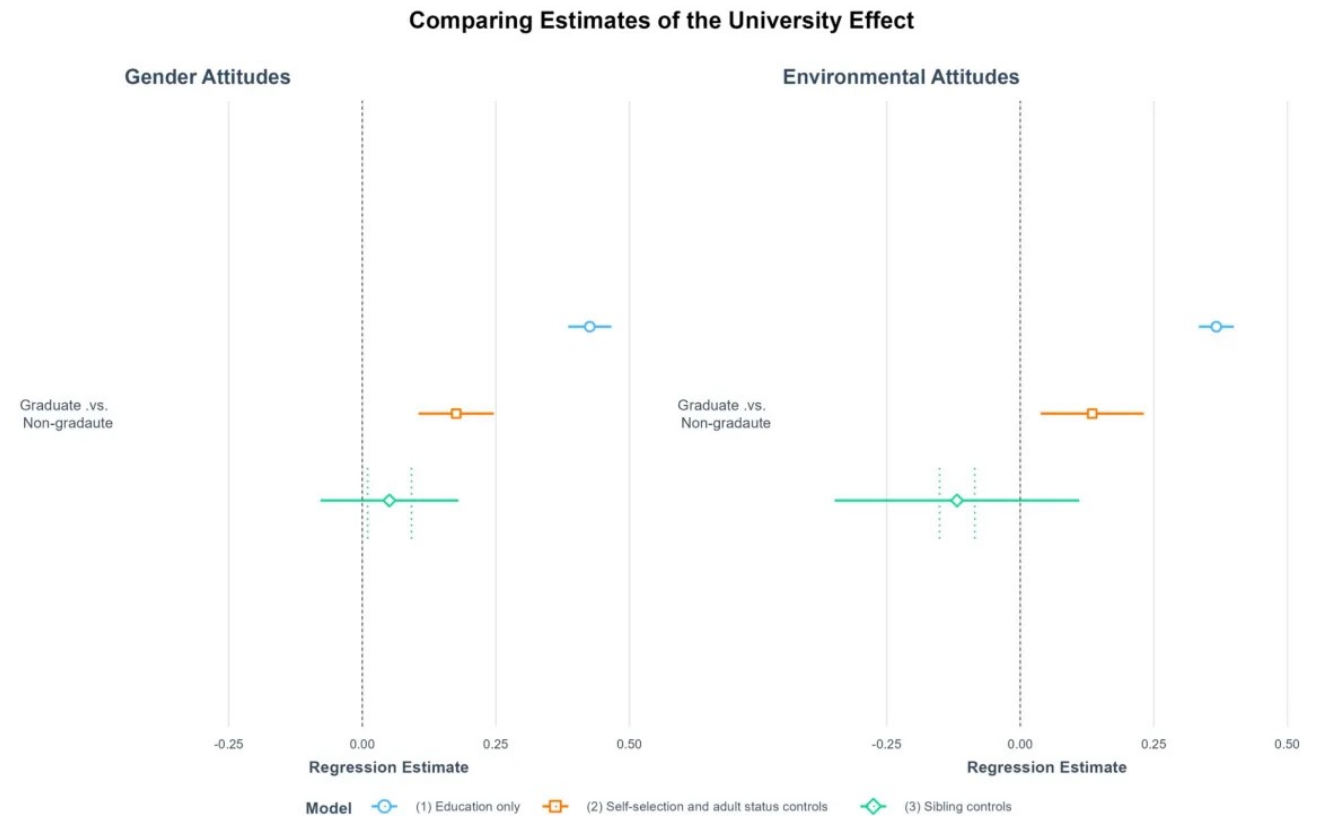
- The size of HE's direct effect on economic liberalism shrinks to almost zero in the within-sibling model
- Even after accounting for the lower precision of the within-sibling estimates, there is no evidence to suggest that HE has any direct causal effect on individuals' economic attitudes in Britain



Comparing Estimates of the HE Effect on Economic Liberalism, Source: Harmonised British Household Panel and Understanding Society Data 1994-2020

HE's effect on social liberalism

- The size of HE's direct effect on social liberalism is much reduced in the within-sibling models
 - HE now only has only a very small direct 'liberalising' effect on gender egalitarianism and a negative effect for environmentalism
- Accounting for the lower precision of the within-sibling estimates, it seems fair to conclude that HE has only a very subtle direct causal effect on individuals' social attitudes in Britain, and that this effect is not universally liberalising.



Comparing Estimates of the HE Effect on Social Liberalism, Source: Harmonised British Household Panel and Understanding Society Data 1994-2020

Why then are students more left-wing?

My research provides a clear, and strong, refutation of the indoctrination hypothesis.

- The experience of studying at university, in itself, only has a small direct causal effect on British individuals' adult attitudes

Instead, self-selection is the key driver of the British education-liberal values linkage

- Differences between graduates' and non-graduates' attitudes materialise largely because individuals with pre-adult experiences predisposing them to develop a particular set of attitudes disproportionately go on to obtain degrees.

Students are more left wing than the general population because left wing people disproportionately select to enrol in HE

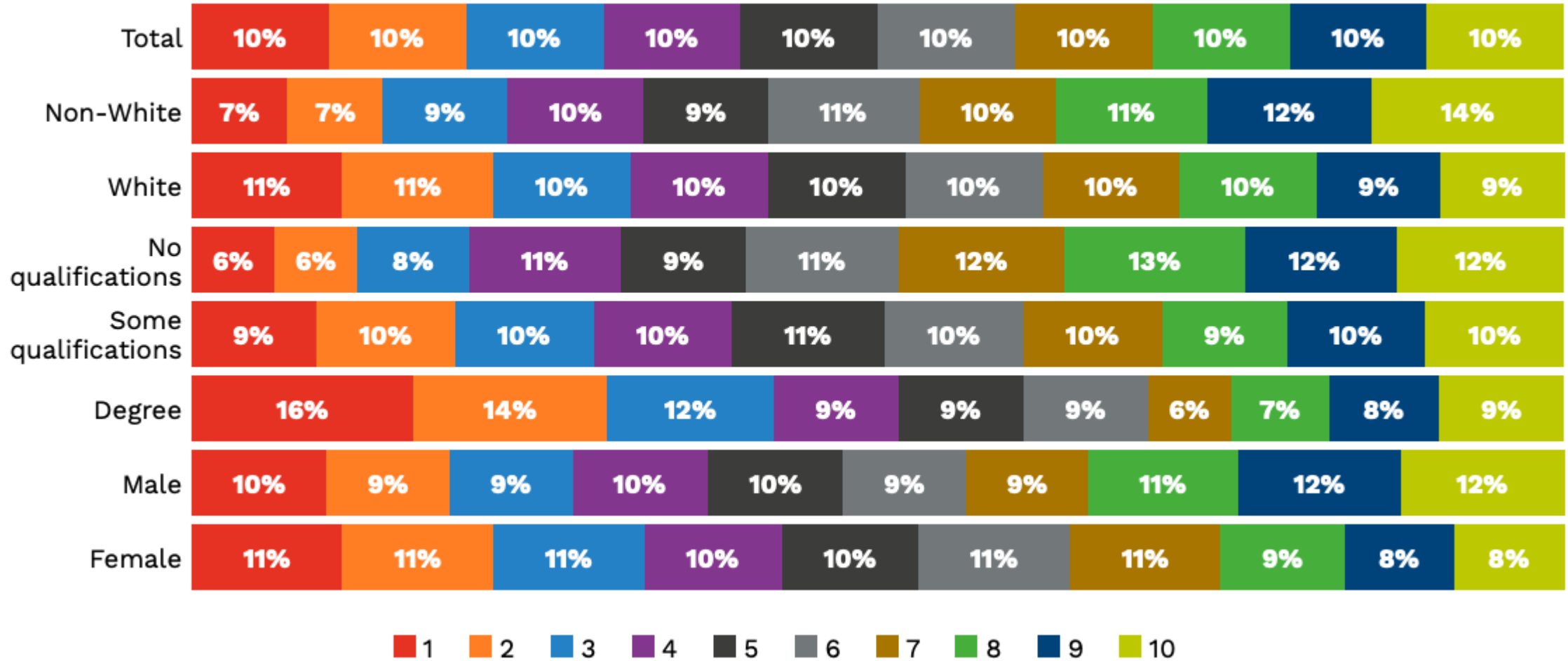
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Index deciles by demographics/education

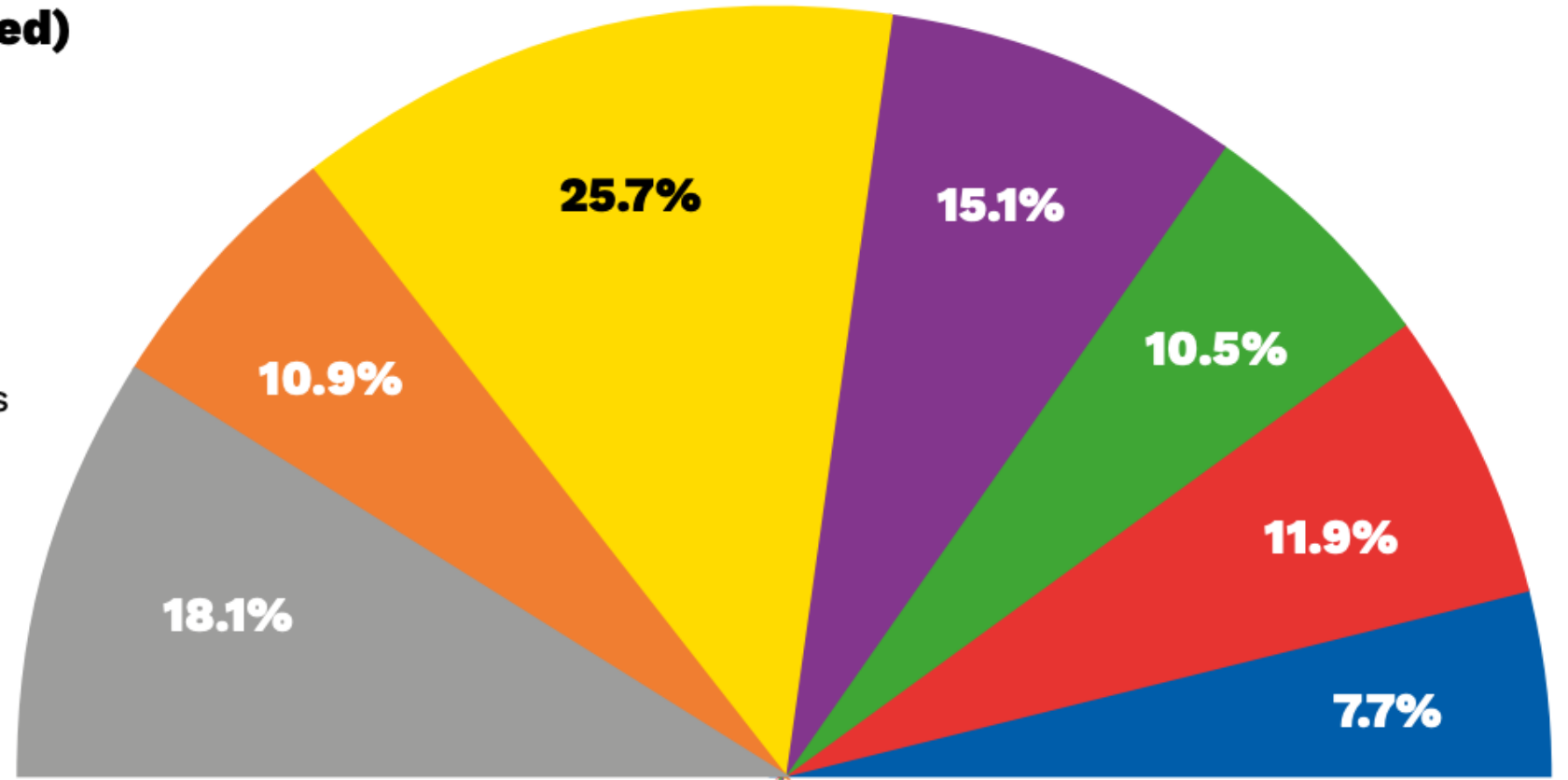


Belong

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The tribes (% weighted)

- Reactionary conservatives
- Sceptical ambivalents
- Apathetics
- Aspirational liberals
- Disengaged progressives
- Established liberals
- Leftist activists



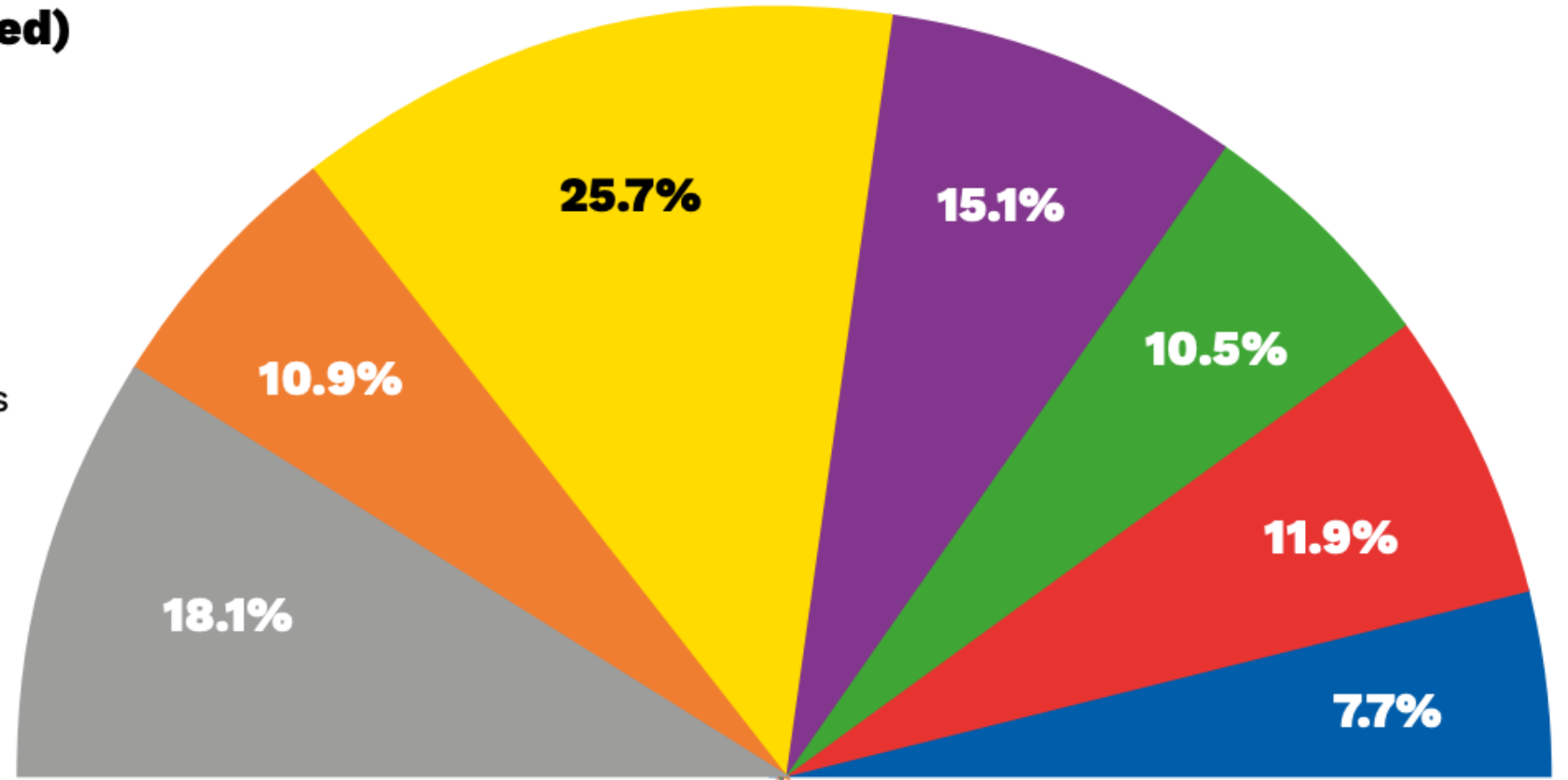
Reactionary conservatives (18 per cent) – hold the most conservative views – more likely to feel disenfranchised and reject political correctness and there is a proportion, although small, within this group who engage with racist conspiracies and far right ideologies.

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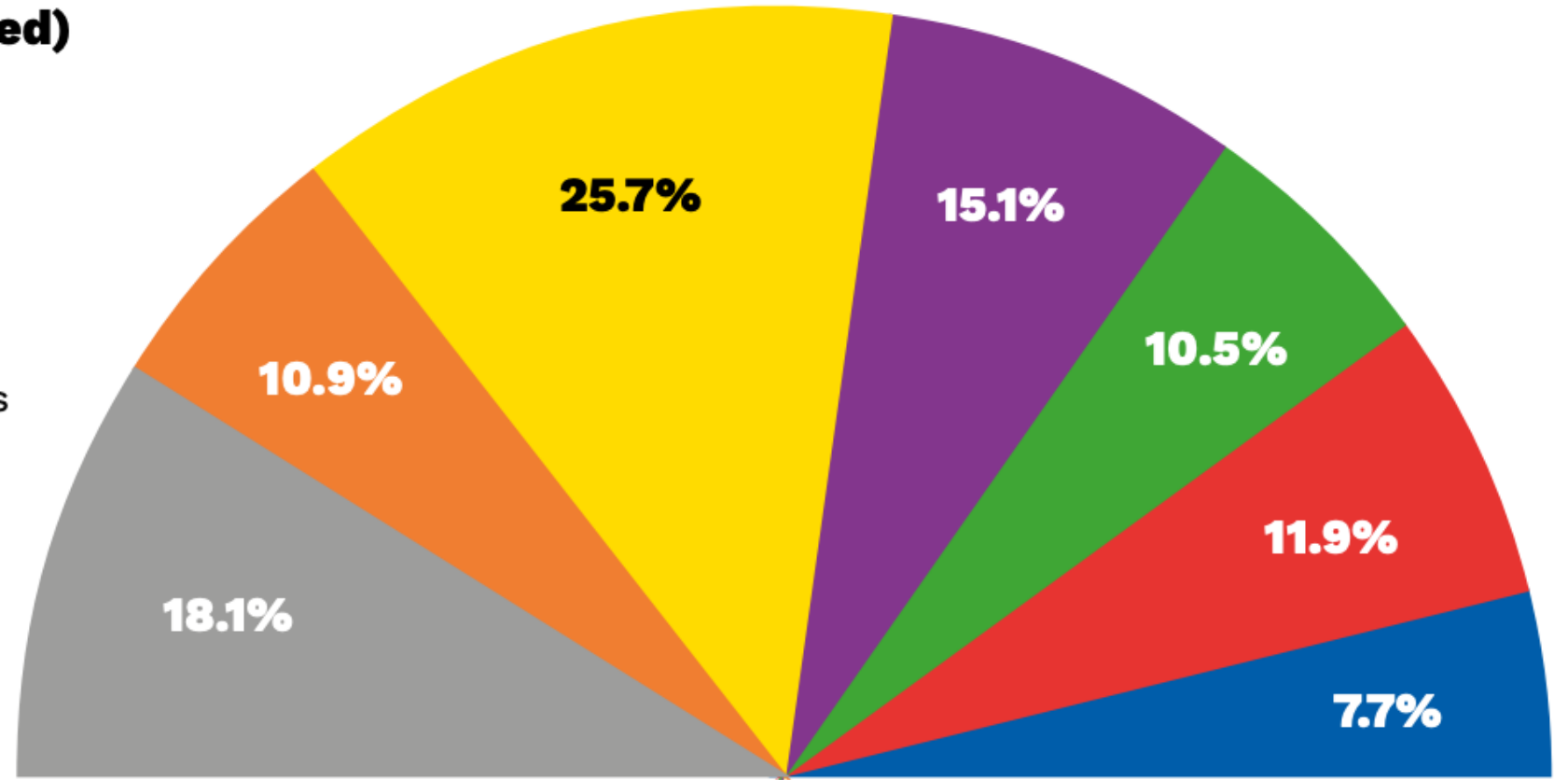
Sceptical ambivalents (11 per cent) – have mixed views on social issues, but generally feel they are well represented by the political system.

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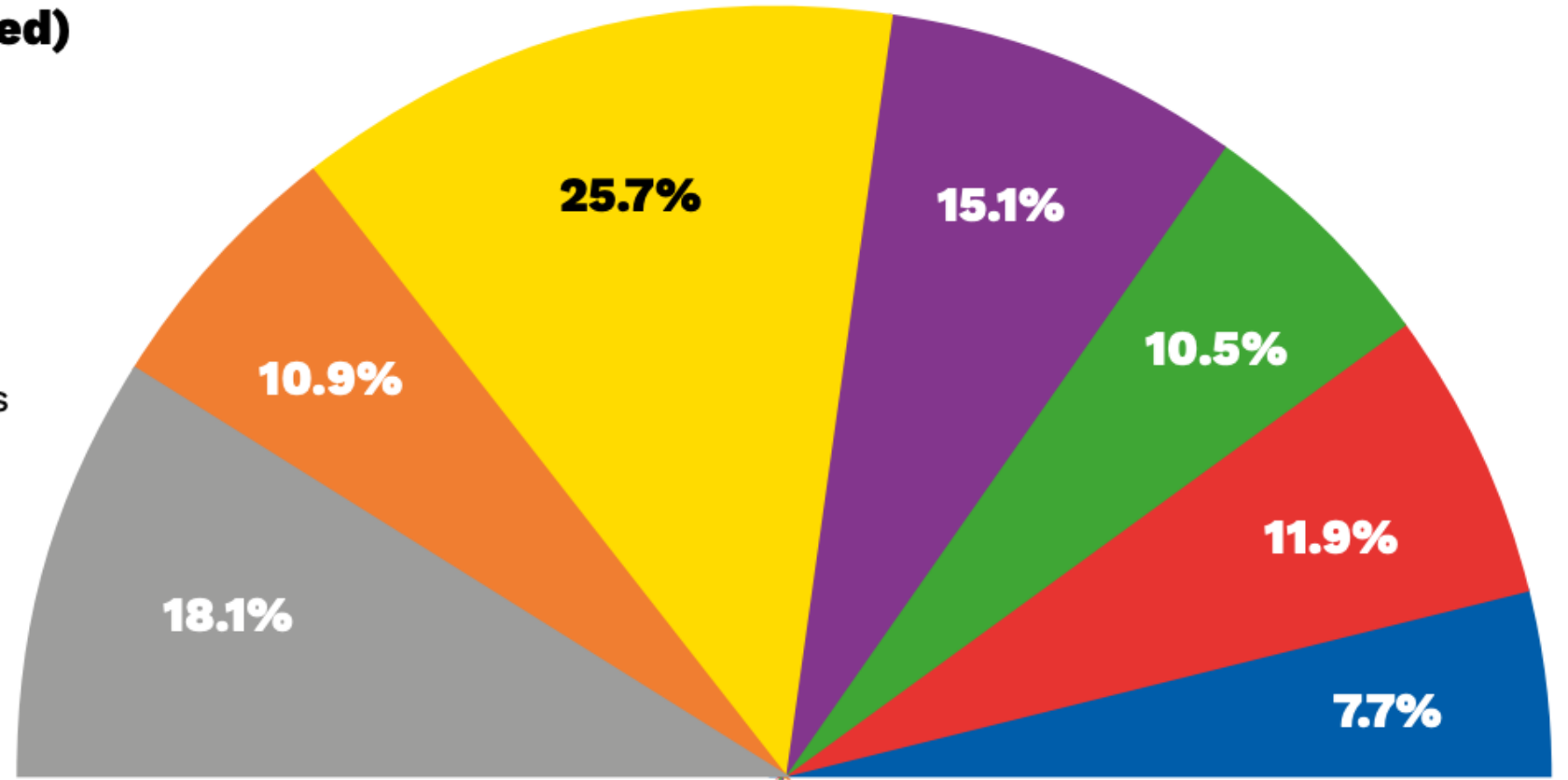
Apathetic (26 per cent) – a relatively large section, who are largely indifferent around political issues.

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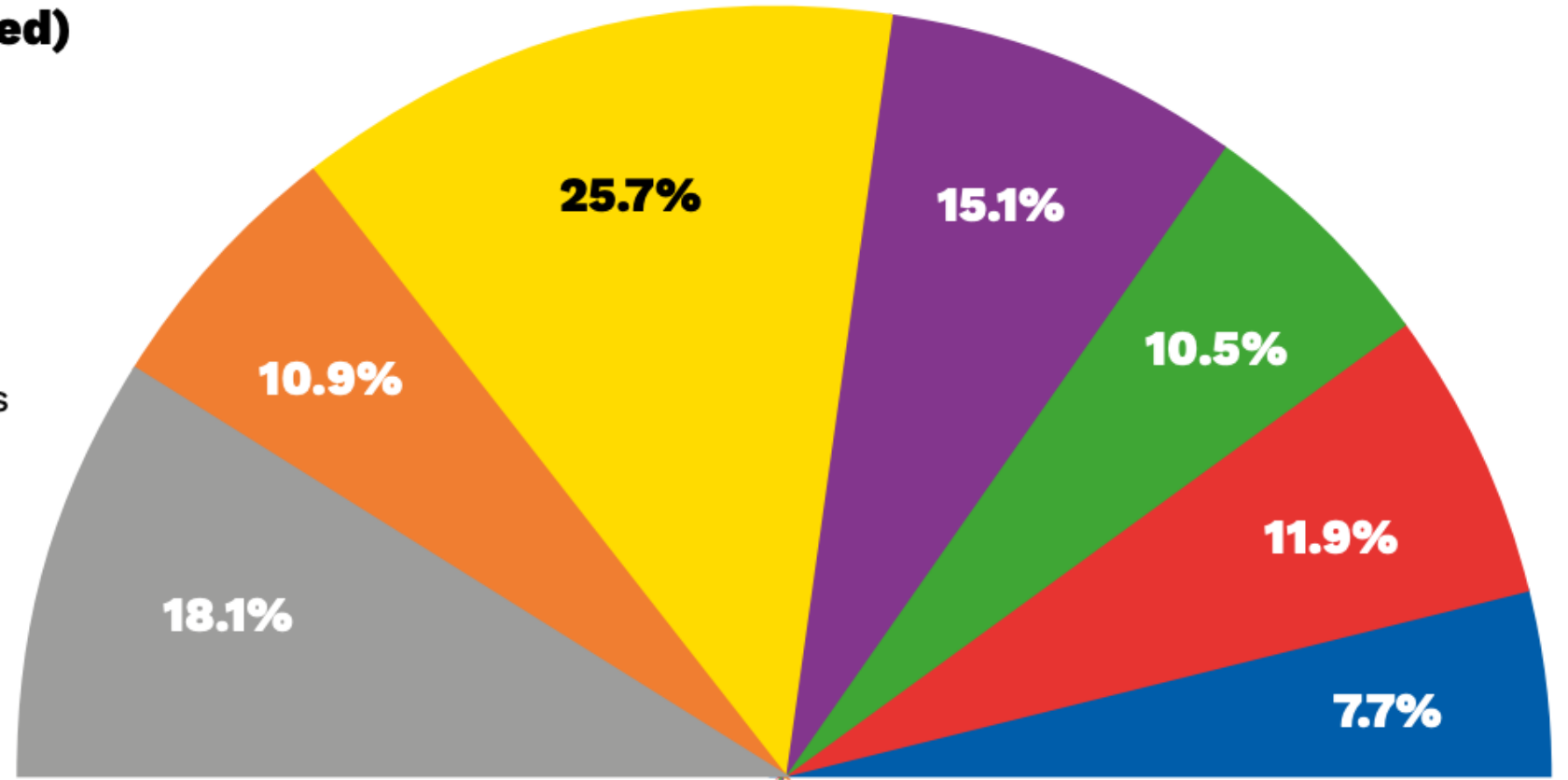
Aspirational liberals (15 per cent) – hold socially progressive views, but their focus is away from politics and more towards their own prospects.

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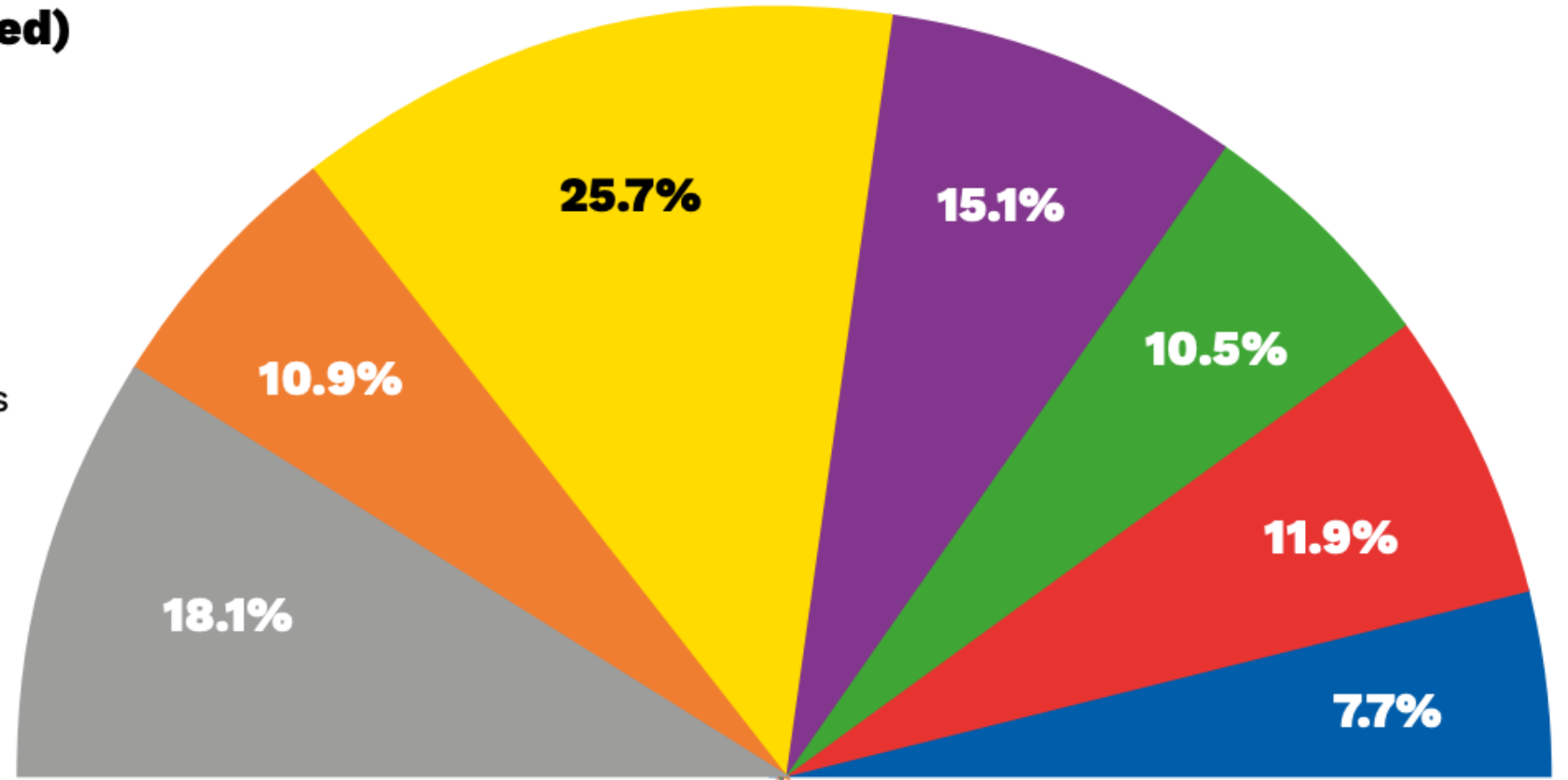
Disengaged progressives (11 per cent) – share similar social views, but feel detached from the political system.

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Established liberals and leftist activists (about 12 and 8 per cent respectively) – hold very strong progressive values, although the former embrace the political system whereas the latter reject mainstream politics and don't trust the government.

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WHY ARE STUDENTS SO LEFT WING?

ERIC KAUFMANN, BIRKBECK, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

ELIZABETH SIMON, QUEEN MARY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

CHAIR: JIM DICKINSON, WONKHE