

Extremism, Discrimination & Gender Roles

A Survey on Young People's
Views on Emerging Social
Issues in Modern Ireland



Foreword

What children hear and see at home, online and among their peers has a huge influence on how they form their own opinions on issues and indeed, how they view the world around them. This has always been the way, but today, children have so many more ways to communicate- and be communicated to- through messaging apps and social media. A rise in recent years in the popularity of so-called far-right or ‘extremist’ views has been well documented in the media and public discourse, and Ireland, albeit on a much smaller scale, hasn’t been immune from the global trends. We saw this in the most extreme way with the riots in Dublin in November 2023 as well as riots in Citywest this year, which were fuelled by misinformation and hate online.

As with most issues that impact society, racism, misogyny and discrimination are also children’s rights issues. A child’s right to be protected from discrimination is one of the four general principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as is their right to be protected from harm. Last year to mark the 20th anniversary of the OCO, we asked over 1,000 young people for their [views on life in Ireland today](#) and the changes they would like to see for the future. The results of the 2024 survey, in which 36% of children said they had experienced

discrimination and 15% racism, highlighted how young people in Ireland were also being impacted by a rise in this negative sentiment. [An EU study](#) also found that 39% of children of African descent in Ireland had experienced verbal abuse and 23% physical abuse due to their ethnic or immigrant background, significantly higher than the EU average of 23 and 8%. Our own consultations with [children growing up in Direct Provision](#) noted that they consistently faced discrimination and racism, both in schools and in wider society. We noticed too that issues around discrimination were coming up at our rights awareness workshops with schools. Until now, there has been very little data or information as to how much children are encountering these views and how it affects their development, well-being and rights. With this in mind and through focus groups with our Youth Advisory Panel and consultation with stakeholder groups, we created a survey to hear from young people themselves on these topics.

Looking at the results of our latest Survey, it is reassuring that over half, 61%, of children believe Ireland is a good place to be a young person today. However, young people who have experienced discrimination personally, or through family members, are unsurprisingly less positive

about growing up here. When it comes to viewpoints and attitudes, 50% of children said their parents were the main influence in their lives, while 63% of students told us they hear more extreme views online than in person (6%). A quarter of students agreed that many of their friends have views that some people would think of as extreme.

There also appears to be a clear gender divide coming through, with 64% of students associating views they would consider extreme with men and boys. Of the 69% of young people who feel that discrimination is a major issue in Ireland today, girls feel this more at 76% while boys are at 58%. Strikingly 55% of students also feel that boys have more extreme views than girls.

This theme around gender continues when it comes to the actual sentiment of the views, with 61% of students reporting they often hear views that society should revert to ‘traditional’ gender roles for men and women. Similarly, 56% of students report hearing views that men are more entitled than women to authority. This is reflected in research by the [European Movement Ireland](#), which found that modern far-right groups in Ireland target young men and boys, by combining racist anti-migrant attitudes with violent misogyny and demonisation of the LGBTQ+ community. It showed that the Irish chapter promote a return to more ‘traditional’ gender roles, whereby men are expected to be leaders and physical protectors of the family unit, with women seen solely as homemakers.

There is no doubt that in this current climate of shifting attitudes and uncertainty there is an increased need to bed down on Ireland’s commitment to protecting children’s rights. As always, children have provided an extremely useful insight into these issues, pointing out that more education is needed and highlighting the responsibility of social media companies to ensuring they are protected online. Our Office will use the findings of this survey to inform our own work and research on these issues and ensure they are reflected to policy makers. We have also commissioned research to develop a rights-based

educational resource aimed at supporting teachers and youth workers to engage in discussions with young people around discrimination, racism, and misinformation about immigration. This resource will be grounded in the principles of the UNCRC, informed by the lived experiences of young people directly affected by these issues, and developed in consultation with our Youth Advisory Panel (YAP).

Finally, I would like to thank all 626 children in schools around the country who took part in this survey and shared their experiences with us. Also, to our YAP who gave their time to focus groups when putting this survey together to ensure young peoples’ experiences were reflected in the questions.

Dr. Niall Muldoon
Ombudsman for Children



Methodology

Extremism, Discrimination and Gender Roles – an online survey of young’s people’s views on Emerging Social Issues in Modern Ireland was carried out by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO) in conjunction with Amárach Research from May 5- 23rd 2025.

- A total of 626 children aged 12-18 years from 28 secondary schools around Ireland took part.
- Two focus groups were carried out with the OCO Youth Advisory Panel in March 2025 to help with the development of the survey questionnaire. The discussion guides used were created in collaboration with the OCO. The focus groups included one group of eight girls and one group of four boys. The discussions raised within these groups made it clear that there were different perceptions and impacts on boys and girls and we would need to explore this further in the quantitative survey. For this reason, we added distinct options for male and female friends in the survey.
- We also found in our focus groups that there was not one agreed definition of extremist views but that everyone agreed there was an increase

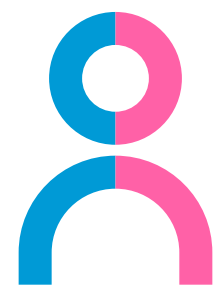
in what they personally saw as extremist views. Therefore for the purpose of this survey we did not define extremism for the young people

- Interviews were also carried out with children’s stakeholder groups including EPIC and Just Ask. One common theme raised was the influence of social media among young people. Online influencers were identified as having a real impact, especially among younger males. Social media and this type of messaging was seen as being an important area to explore further in the quantitative survey.
- An online survey questionnaire was then developed with the OCO to reflect the focus group and interview findings, as well as from the OCO’s own work with children and young people. A list of 200 schools was created, with demographic and regional profiles guided by CSO data. This featured DEIS and non-DEIS schools, private schools, gaelscoileanna, as well as schools that have taken part in OCO Rights Education Workshops and the OCO YAP. The OCO contacted schools to invite them to take part in the survey, with 28 schools in total signing up.

- Once a school agreed to take part in the survey, it was still up to the individual student whether they wanted to participate. Children’s participation was anonymous and only the school was identifiable. An information sheet for students and parents/guardians was supplied at the beginning of every survey that included a list of support services for the student if needed. Every effort was made to ensure that questions were simply phrased and understandable to all age groups, and to ensure that children were not led or encouraged to opt for any particular outcome.



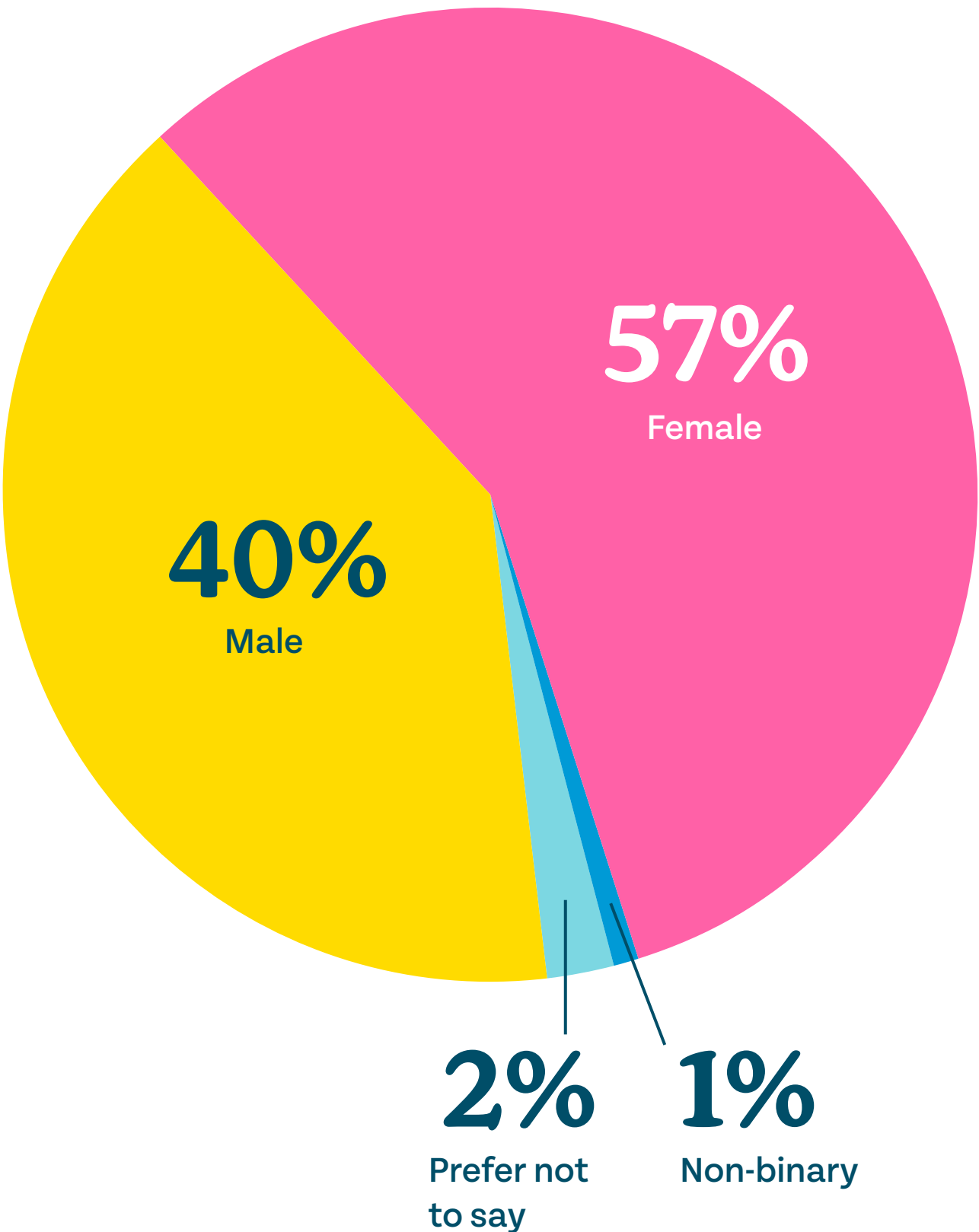
Who took part?



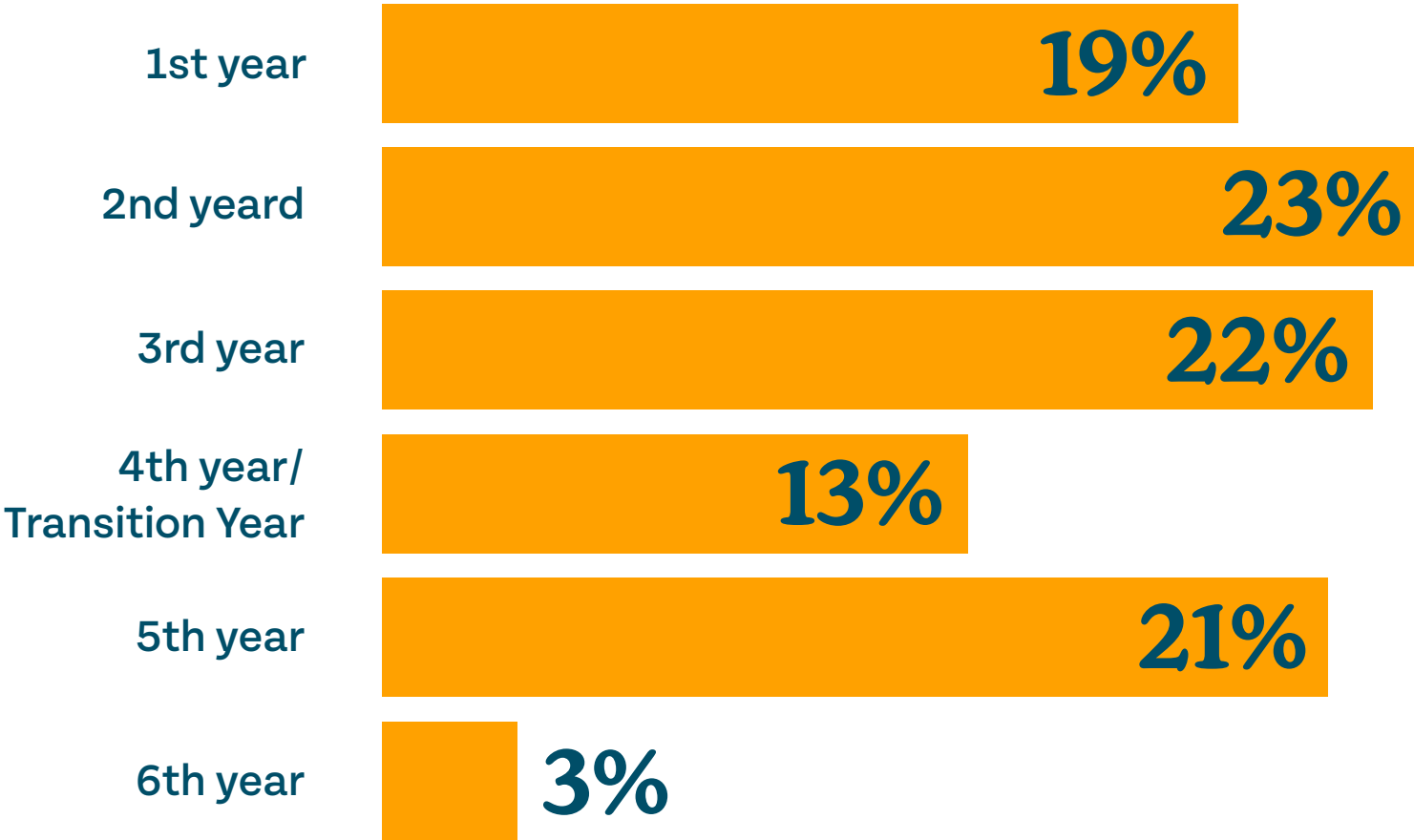
626
Students



28
Schools
around Ireland



School year



Age



Summary

61%

of students believe Ireland is a good place to be a young person today. However, young people who have experienced discrimination personally, or through family members, show significantly lower positivity, with only **49%** of those with personal discrimination experience saying that Ireland is a good place to be a young person.

50%

of students say their parents and guardians are the main influence in their life, while **30%** say it is their friends.

35%

consider social media platforms as important in helping them and their friends form opinions and **41%** rate information they receive through messaging apps as very or extremely important.

63%

of students report hearing more extreme views online than in person, with only **6%** coming across these views in real life.

25%

report that many of their friends have views that some people would consider extreme, with **64%** of students associating these views with men and boys.

46%

say students express extremist views because of online influencers and **36%** said it was because of friends.

34%

believe people share extremist views because they think it's funny and **32%** say people share extremist views because their parents hold similar views.

59%

say they find these extremist views and information from online and social media content creators, **36%** said from male friends and **12%** said from grandparents.

51%

of students agree that online conversations affect how safe they feel day-to-day. This was strongest amongst girls with **59%** saying online conversations impact their sense of safety.

Summary

44%

of students report sometimes feeling threatened by views expressed by others and **48%** said they find it difficult to push back against views they disagree with.

69%

of students agree that discrimination is a major issue in Ireland today. Girls feel this more at **76%** while boys are at **58%**.

41%

of students say discrimination against immigrants is the main concern. **24%** of students say they have experienced discrimination themselves.

84%

of students say they hear negative comments about immigration or housing often or sometimes, **80%** say they hear negative comments about immigration and employment, and **79%** say they are about immigration and community safety.

78%

of students said they hear negative comments about people who are gay/lesbian/queer, **77%** said they hear negative comments about transgender/non-binary individuals and **71%** hear negative comments about, Traveller/Roma people.

55%

of students said they hear negative comments about people with intellectual disabilities and **53%** said they hear negative comments about people with physical disabilities.

61%

of students report often hearing views that society should revert to 'traditional' gender roles for men and women.

56%

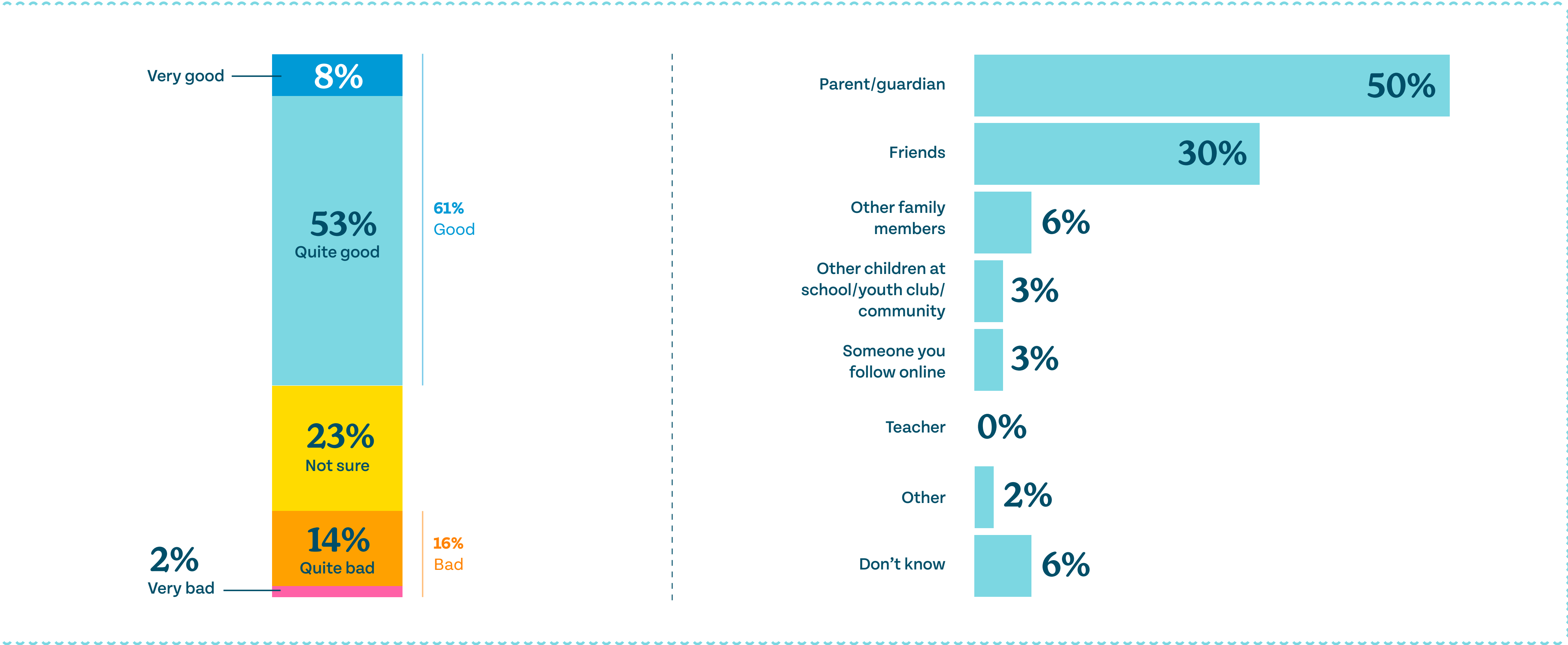
report hearing views that men are more entitled than women to authority.

Only 42%

see role models in their age group speaking out against extremism and discrimination.

Q1:

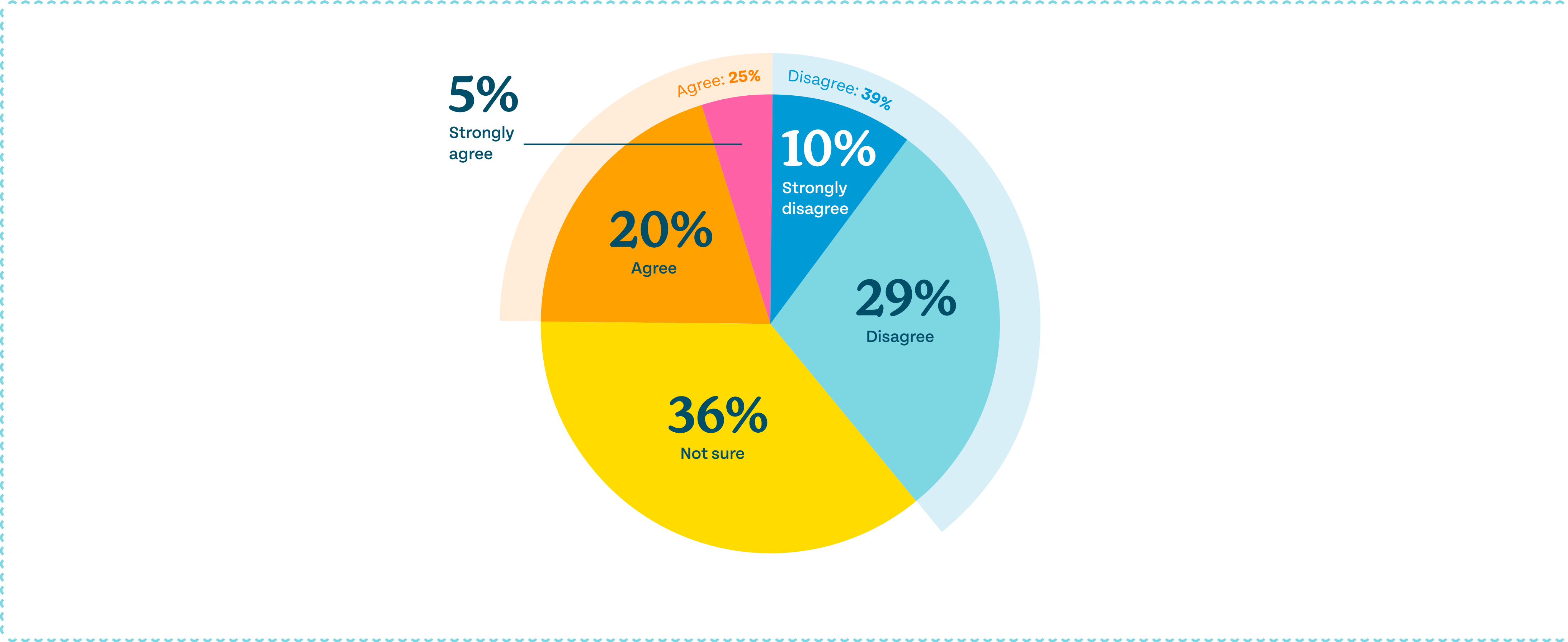
Overall, do you think that Ireland is a good or bad place to be a young person today?



Q3:

“Many of my friends have views that some people would think of as extreme.”

When you think of your own class in school or your friends outside of school, to what extent do you agree or disagree?



Q4:

Why do you say that?



Many of my friends have far-right views

I don't find their opinions extreme but others might

Friends influence what kids do nowadays and like what's the trend to talk about

My friends don't have extremist views and they are open to new ideas

A lot of people around me have extreme views on things they don't really know about like immigration

My friend group is very diverse, and I am friends with many members of the LGBTQ community including myself, to have extremist views would go against my moral code and theirs

My friends are not violent and they don't hate anyone. Of course they have opinions but not extreme ones.

I'm not friends with people who don't respect others

I am friends with people who are open-minded and do not spread hatred, violence or intolerance. If they did, I simply would not be friends with them, or I would try to explain to them why such views are bad

A lot of racism, especially casual racism

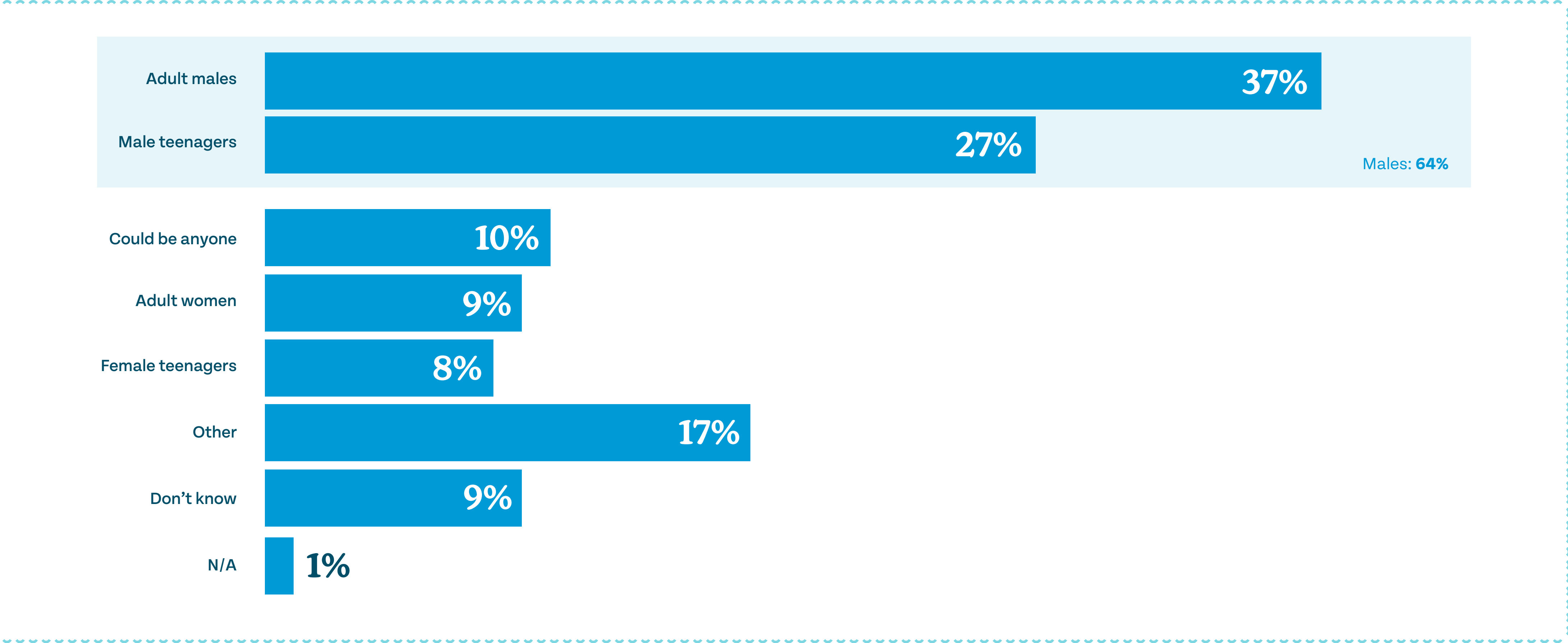
Some people don't think about how others feel about what they are saying

More young people are getting influenced by their friends into doing more and more unsociable activities which is bringing the community down

People think it's weird to be different

Q5:

When you think of someone who holds extremist views, what type of person do you see?



Q5:

Continued

**A man, usually white,
probably in teens or middle
age , usually racist or easily
swayed by others extreme
opinions. Unstable**

**Either a middle
aged man or a
young adult male
around the age of 17.**

**15+ males, majority of them
have misogynistic views on
humanity and make women
uncomfortable as a 'joke'.**

**Just your average guy
you know, anyone can
have these opinions**

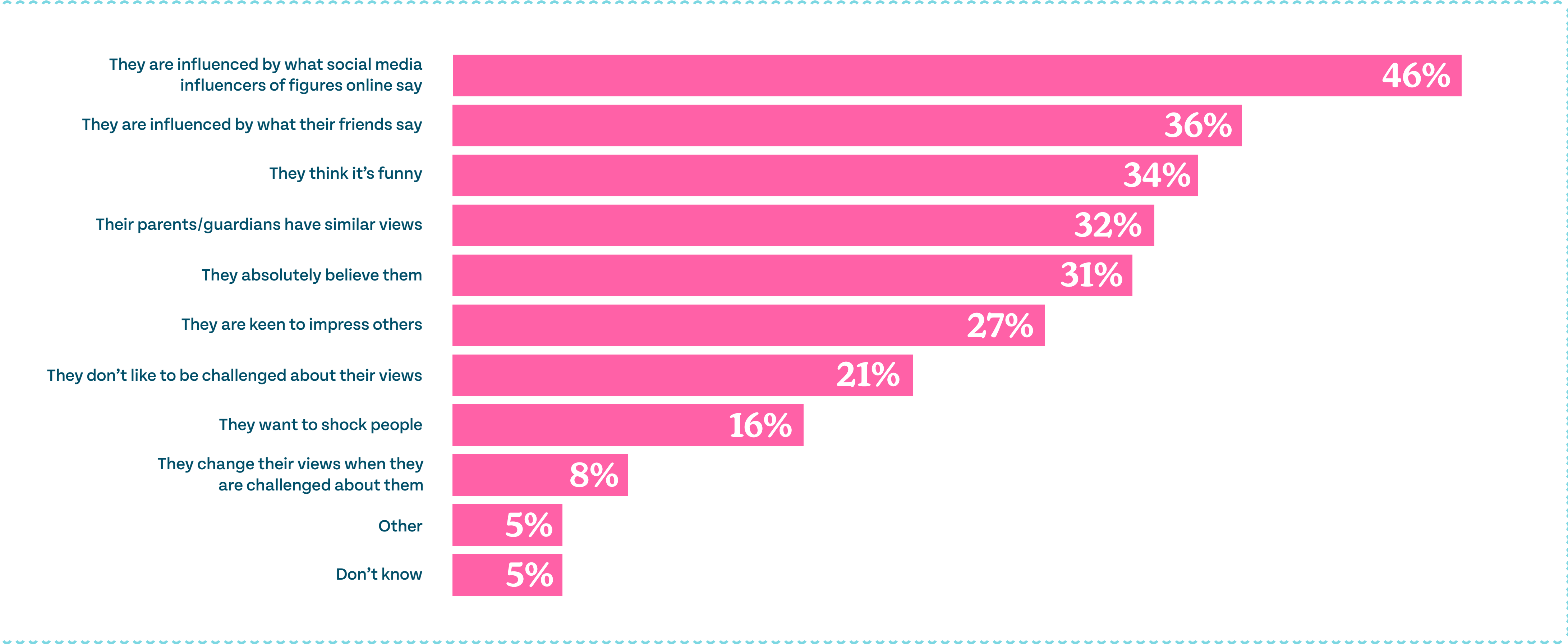
**Fireann, daoine
tionchair, amadán**

Fear fásta

**A 30 year old man
who is being sexist
towards a woman**

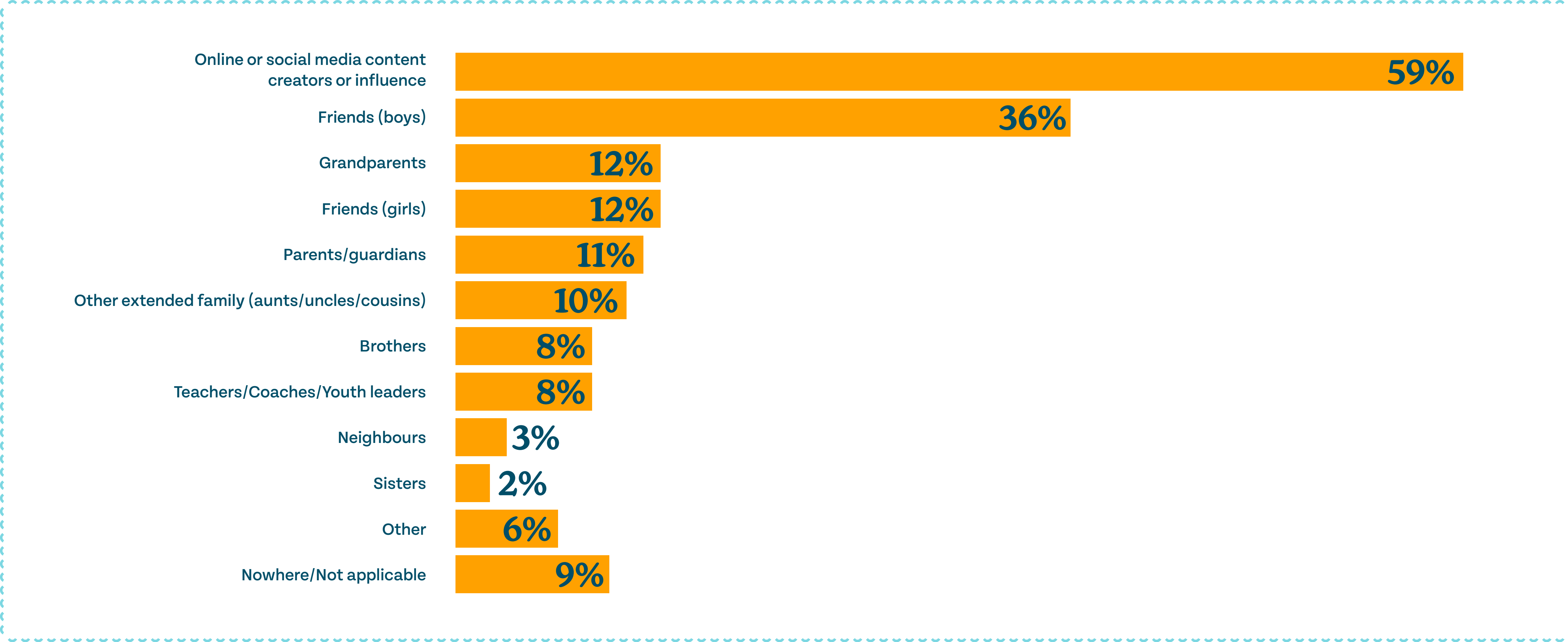
Q6:

Why do you think people share extreme views or opinions?



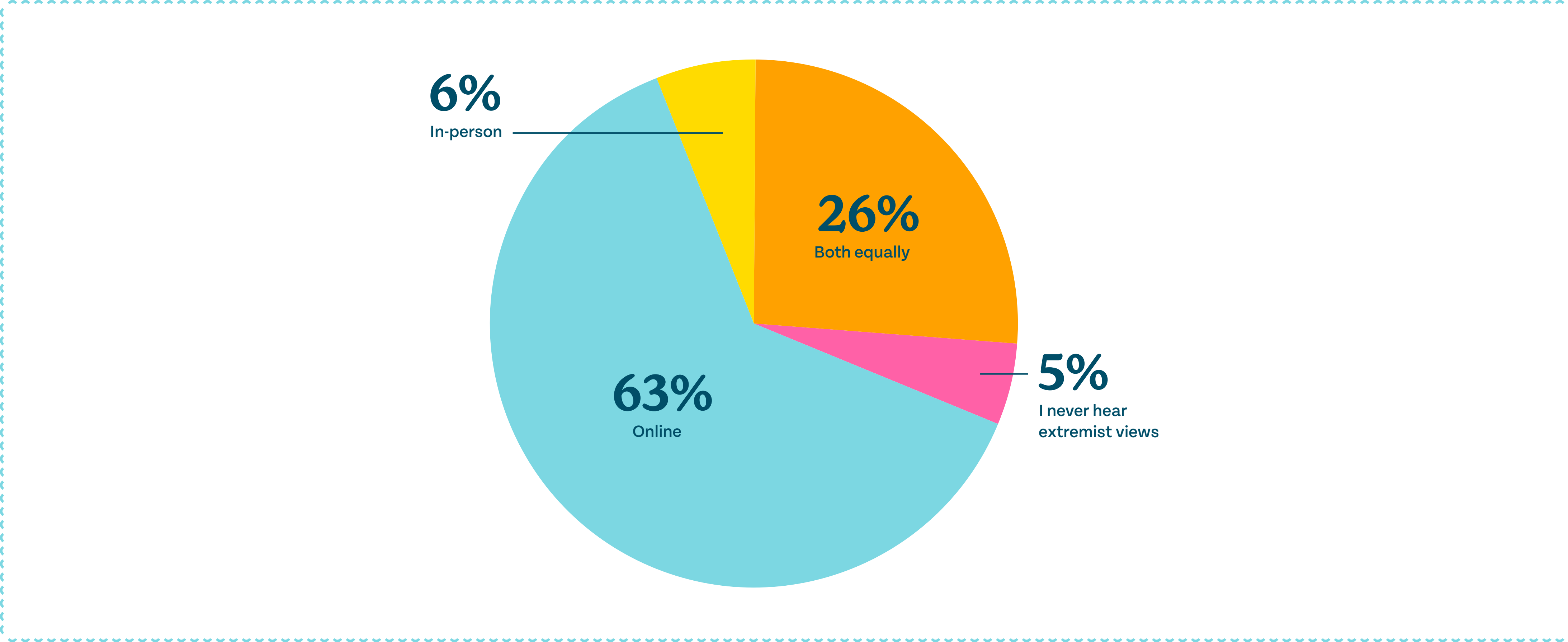
Q7:

Where do you most often hear or see views that you feel fit with the definition of extremism?



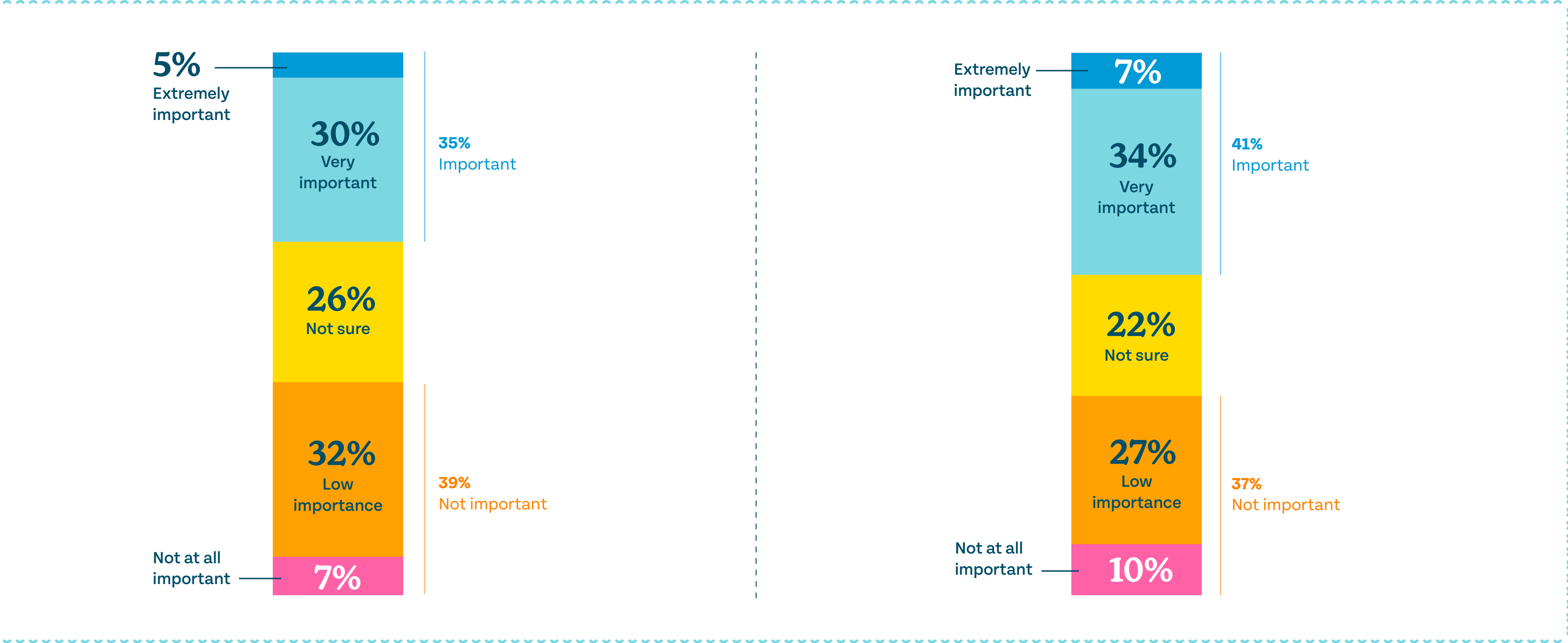
Q8:

Do you hear more extremist views online or in-person?



Q9:

How important are social media platforms e.g. TikTok or YouTube in helping you and your friends to form your opinions?



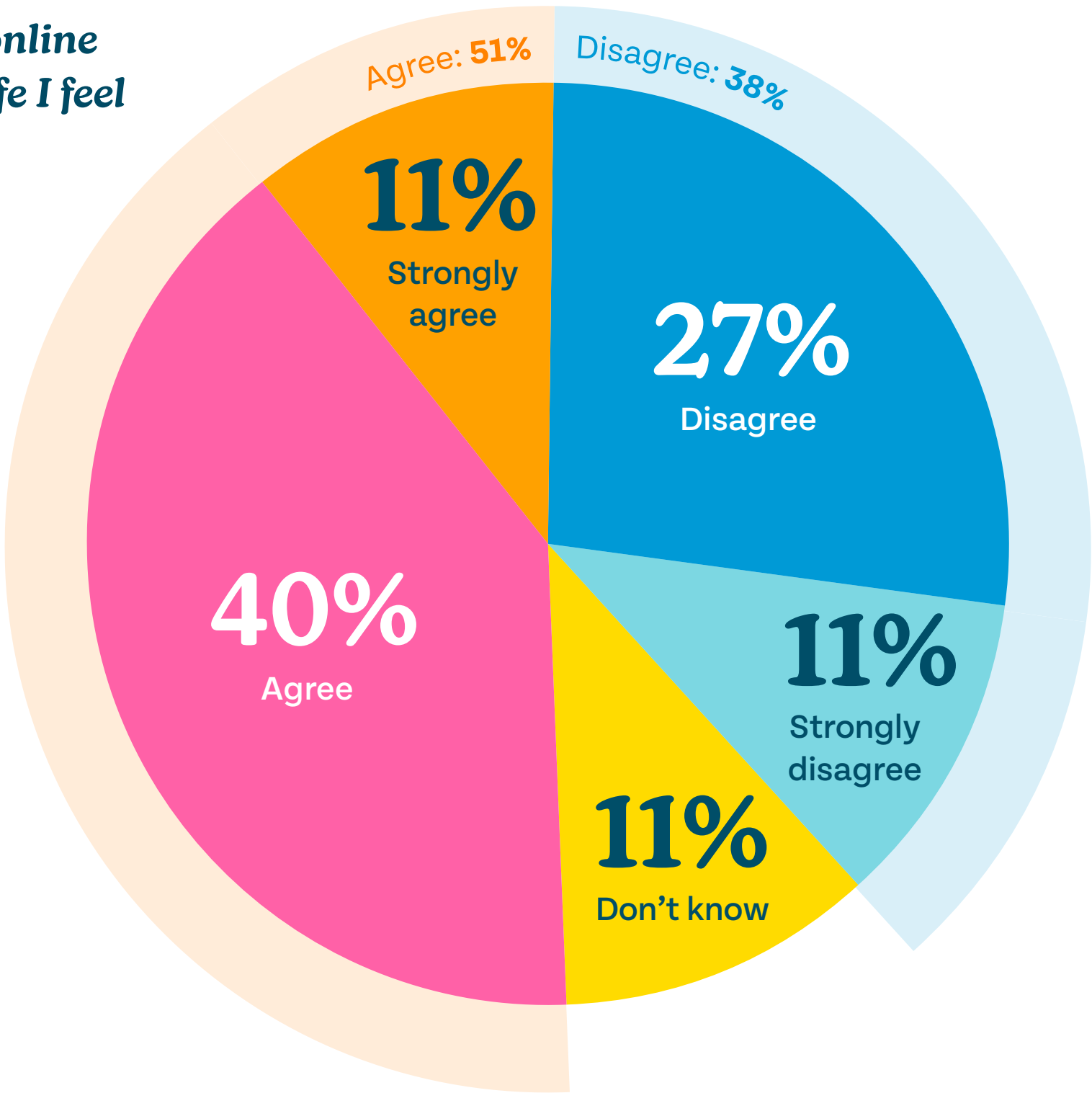
Q10:

How important are online chats and messaging apps e.g. Snapchat and WhatsApp in helping you and your friends to form your opinions?

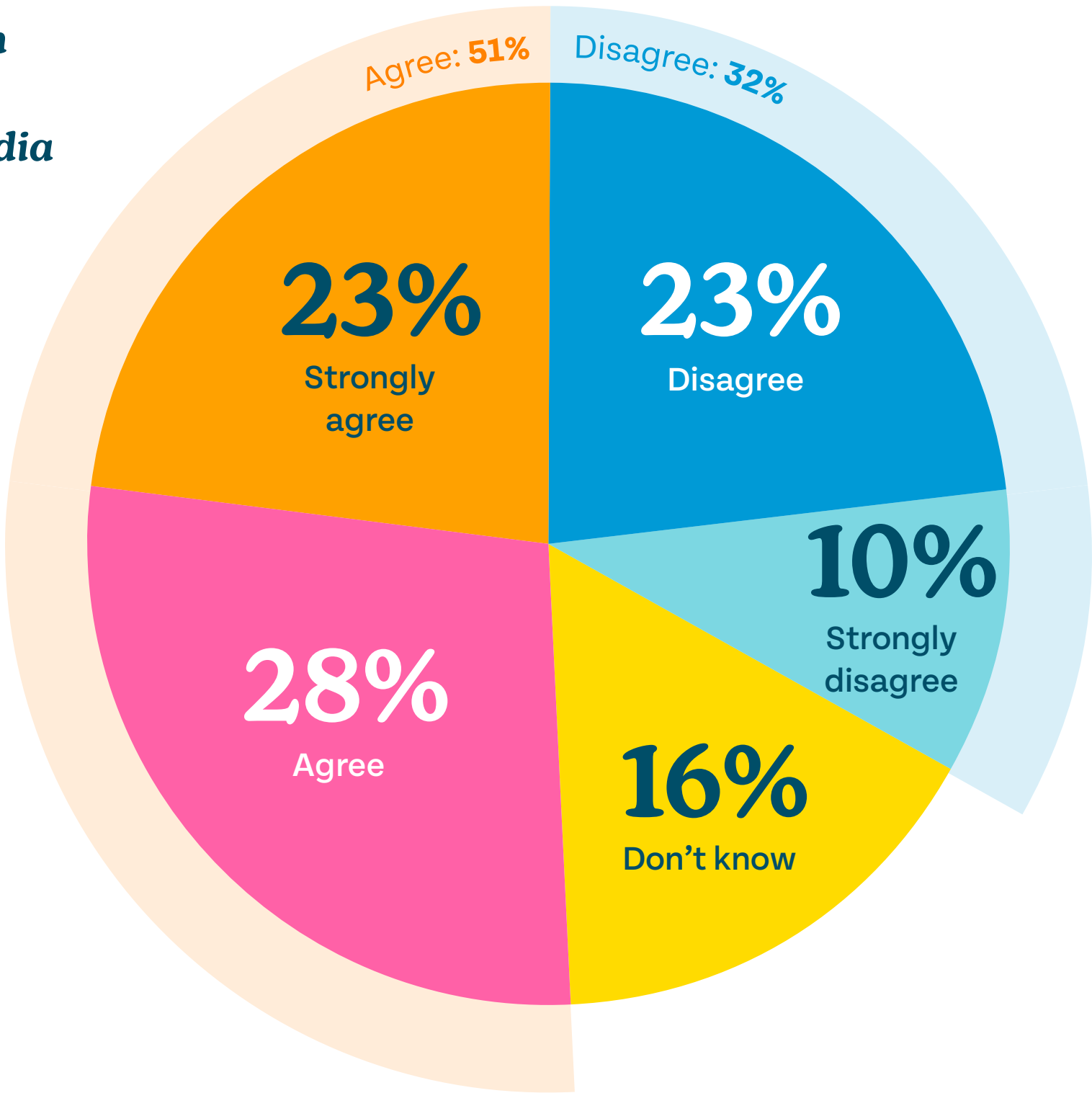
Q11:

How much do you agree or disagree with the below statements?

The conversations I see or hear online affect how safe I feel day to day

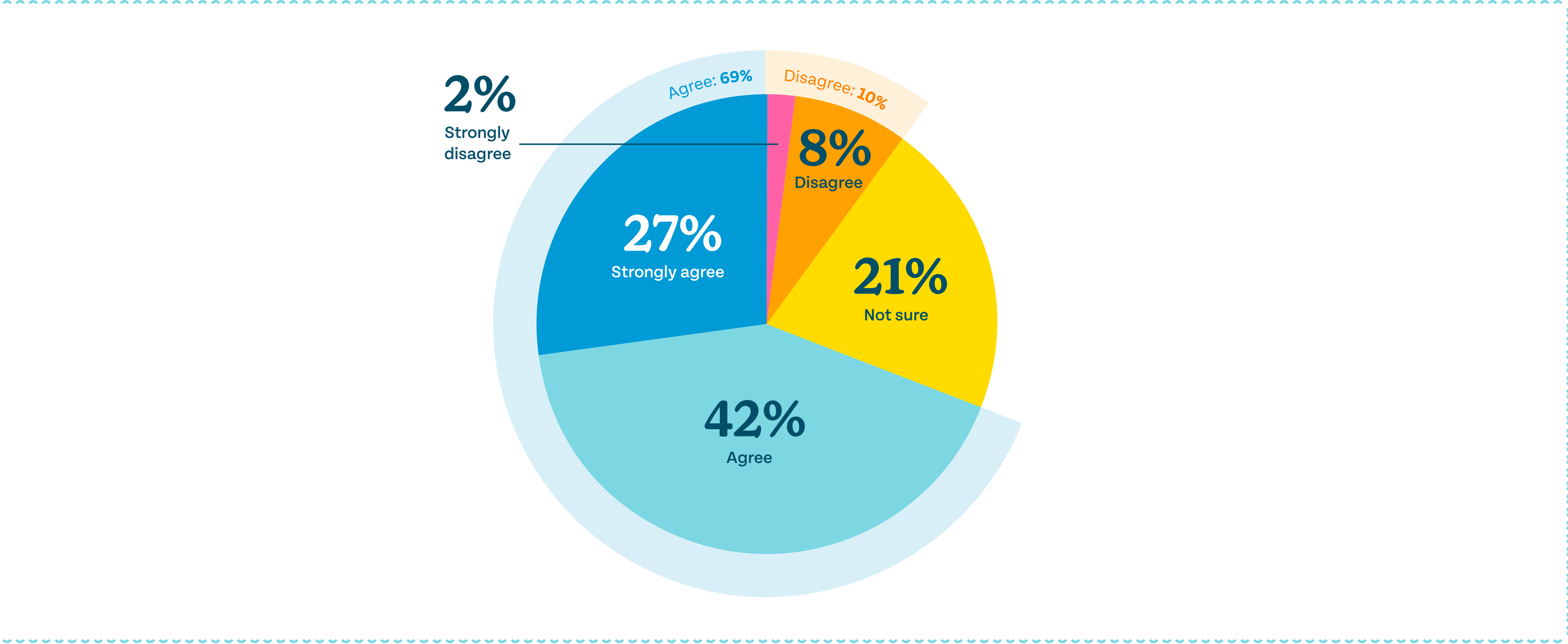


I believe that boys are more targeted than girls by extremist views on social media



Q12:

How much do you agree or disagree that discrimination is a major issue in Ireland today?



Q13:

Why do you say that?



A lot of young people are influenced by older people discriminating against migrants in our country

Undocumented people are being let into the country

A lot of people are very racist and don't want to welcome people from other countries in

There still is a bit of a problem with it

As a minority in Ireland I believe that discrimination in Ireland is so normalized that Irish society fails to realize what is a joke and what is flat out discriminatory

Discrimination in young people is on the rise

I always hear it in school

While there is discrimination in Ireland it's gotten significantly better and better than a lot of places

I believe racism, homophobia, transphobia and all other forms of discrimination are still experienced frequently in Ireland or at least of concern to people in such minority groups, although I believe that it can be seen as slightly less of an issue in Ireland than other countries, as Ireland is quite progressive.

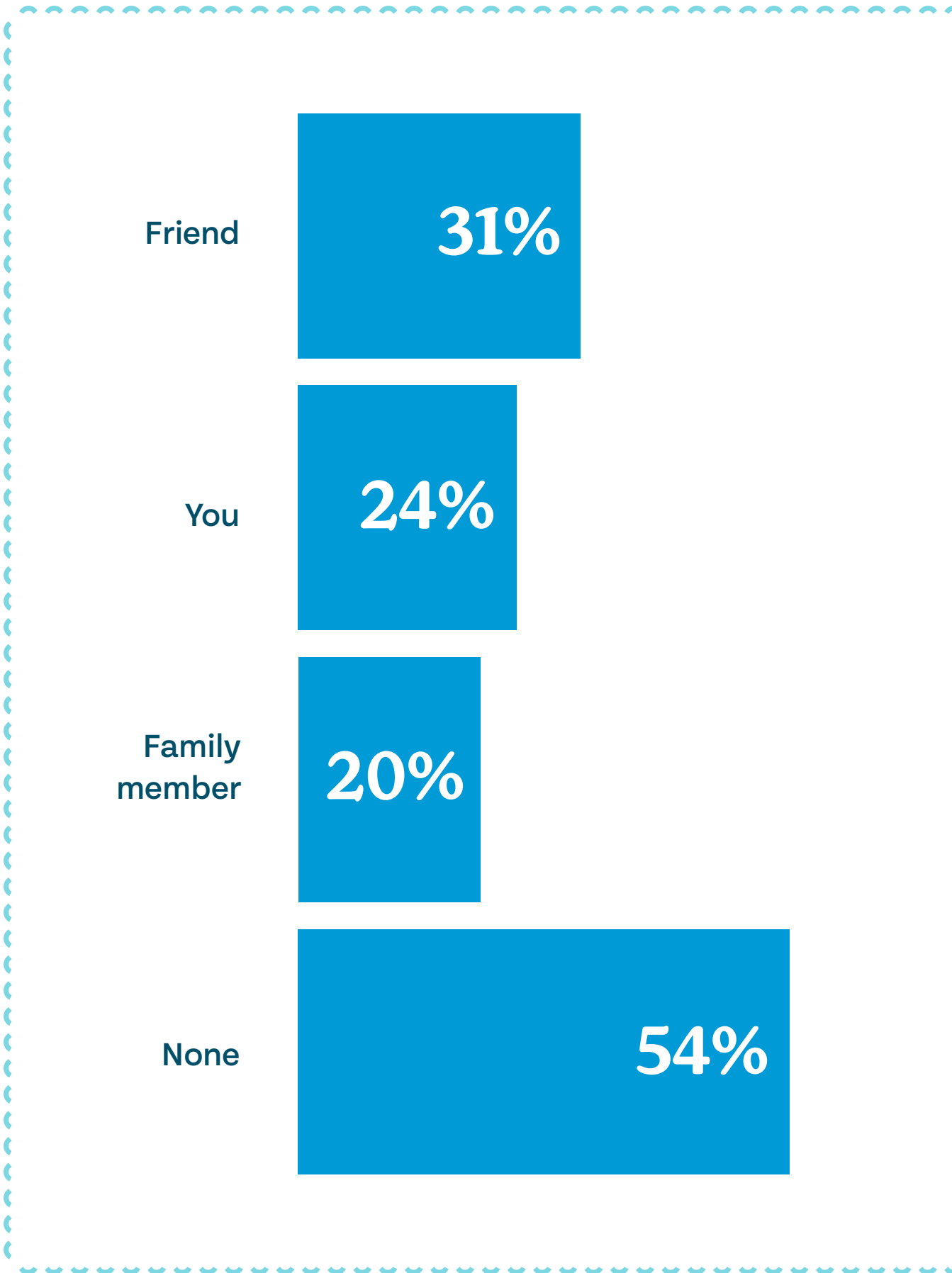
It always has been a major issue in Ireland

Discrimination is normally disguised as the butt of a joke but in reality the person saying it isn't actually joking



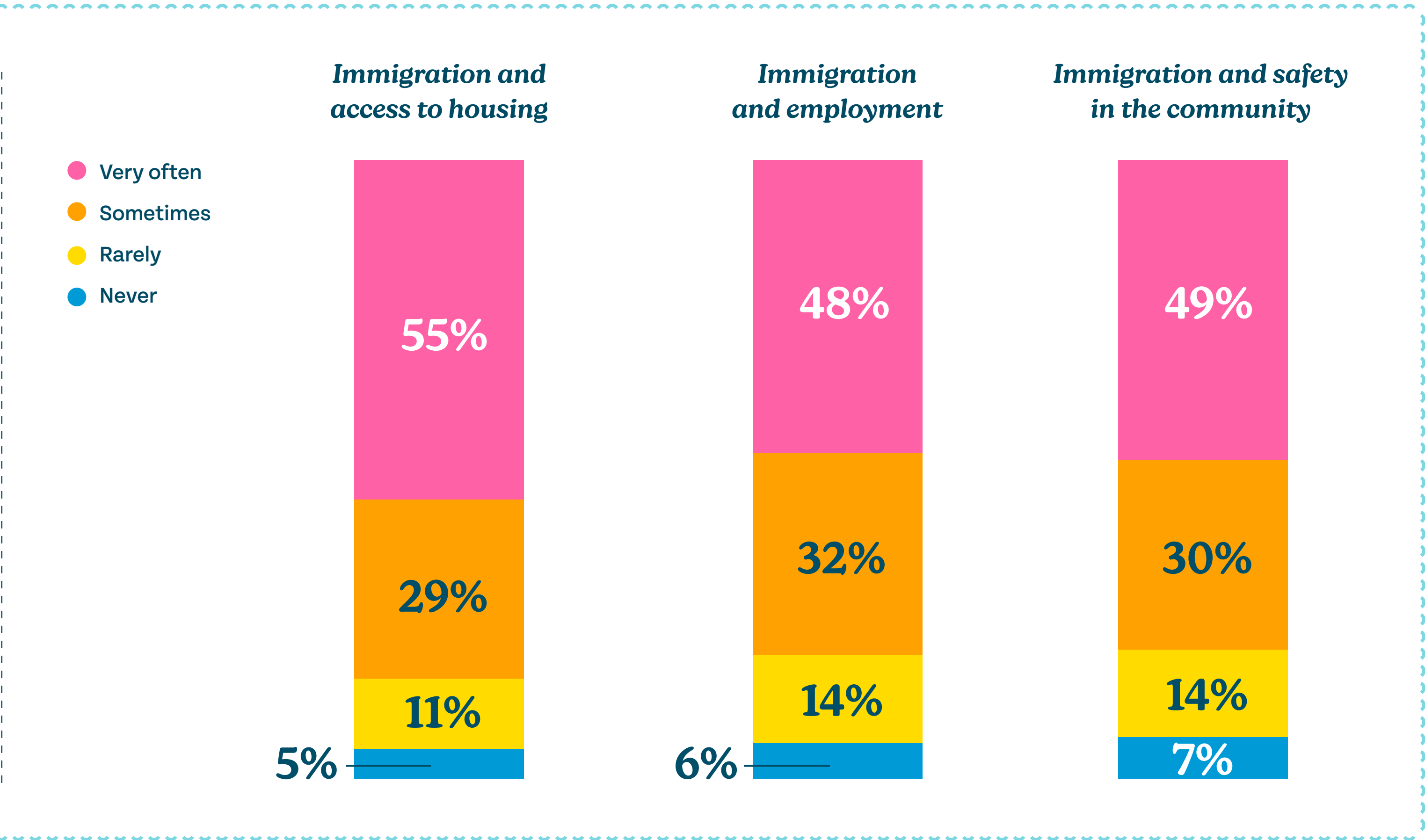
Q14:

Have you, a family member, or a friend experienced discrimination?



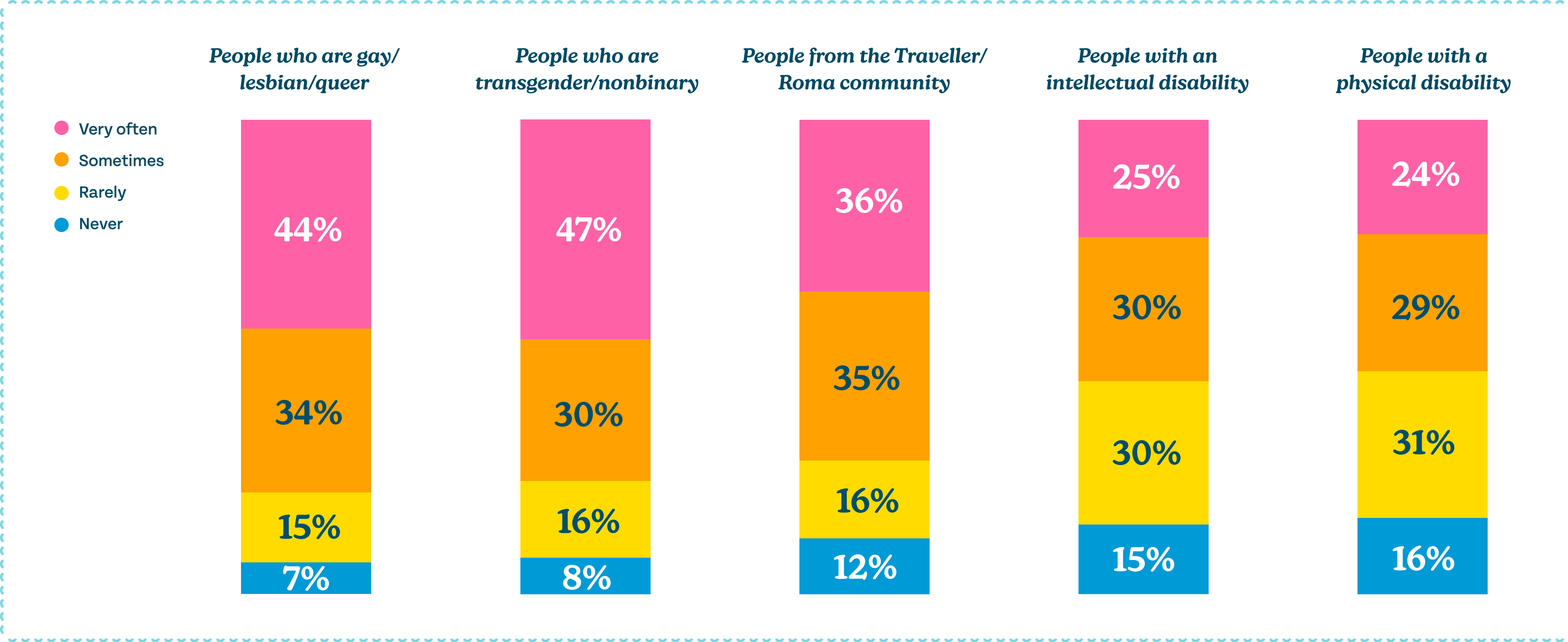
Q15:

How often, if ever, do you hear negative comments or phrases about the following issues, groups or people?



Q15:

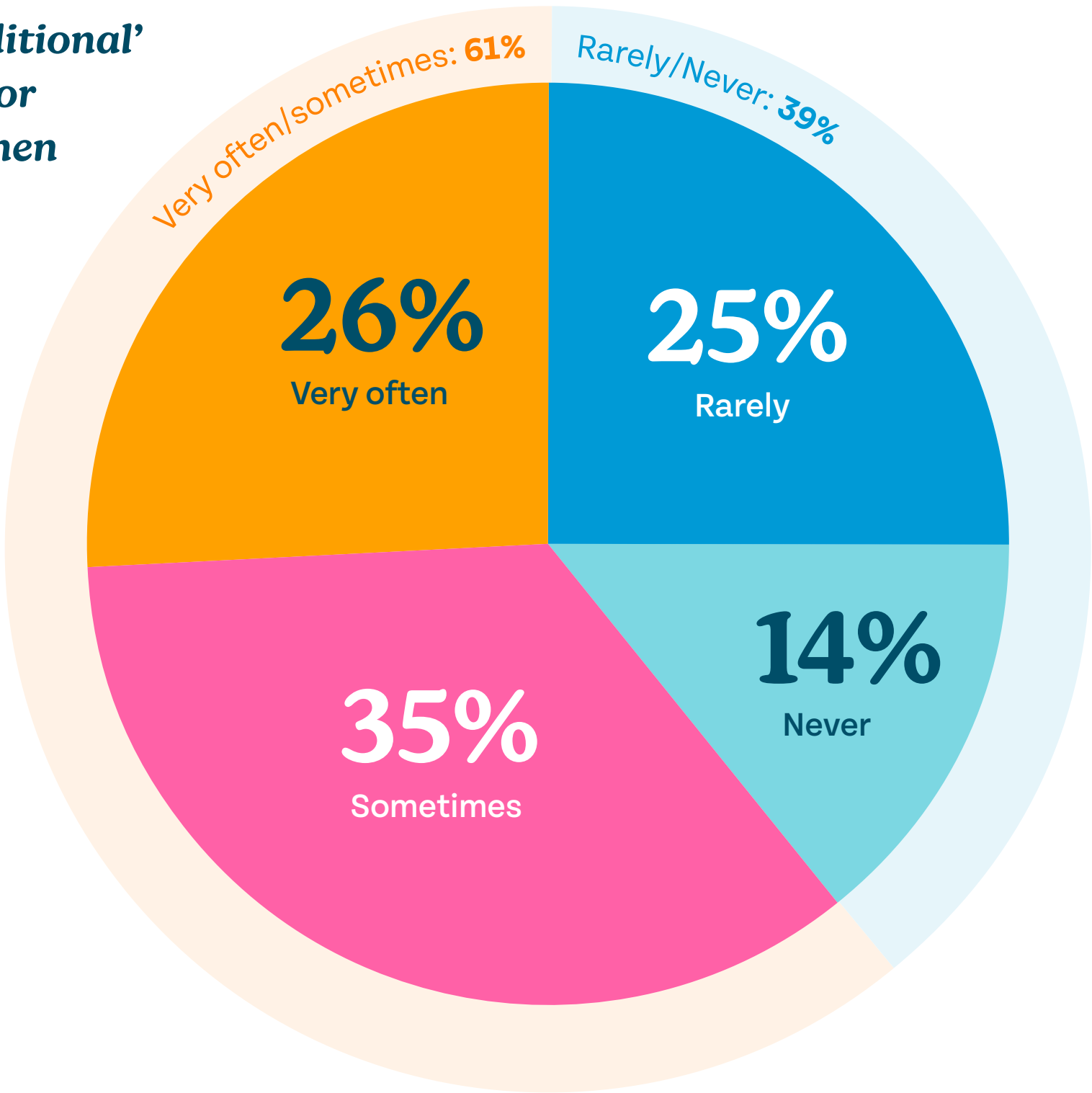
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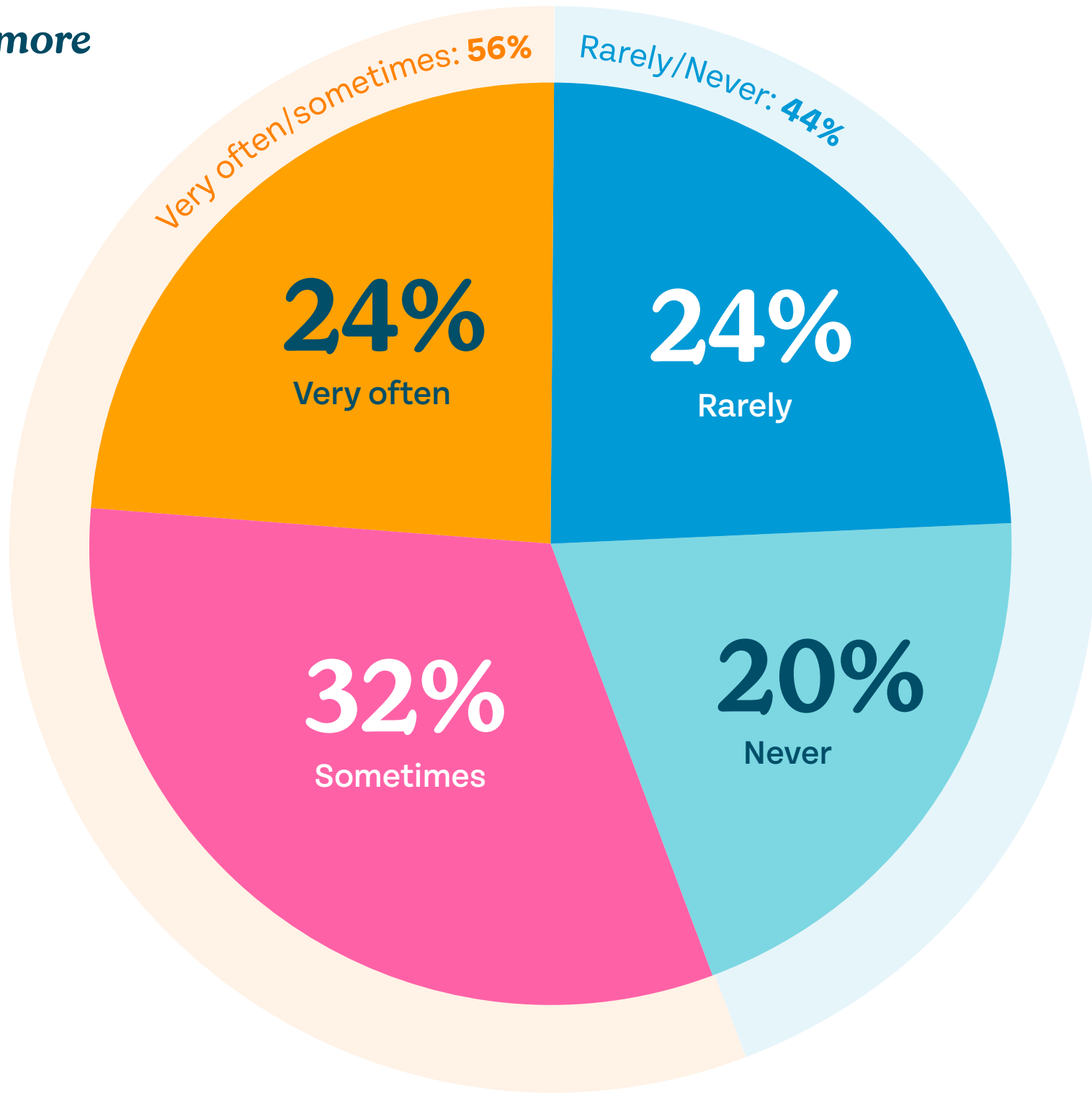
Q16:

How often, if ever, do you hear or see comments or views expressed like the ones below?

Society should revert to 'traditional' gender roles for men and women

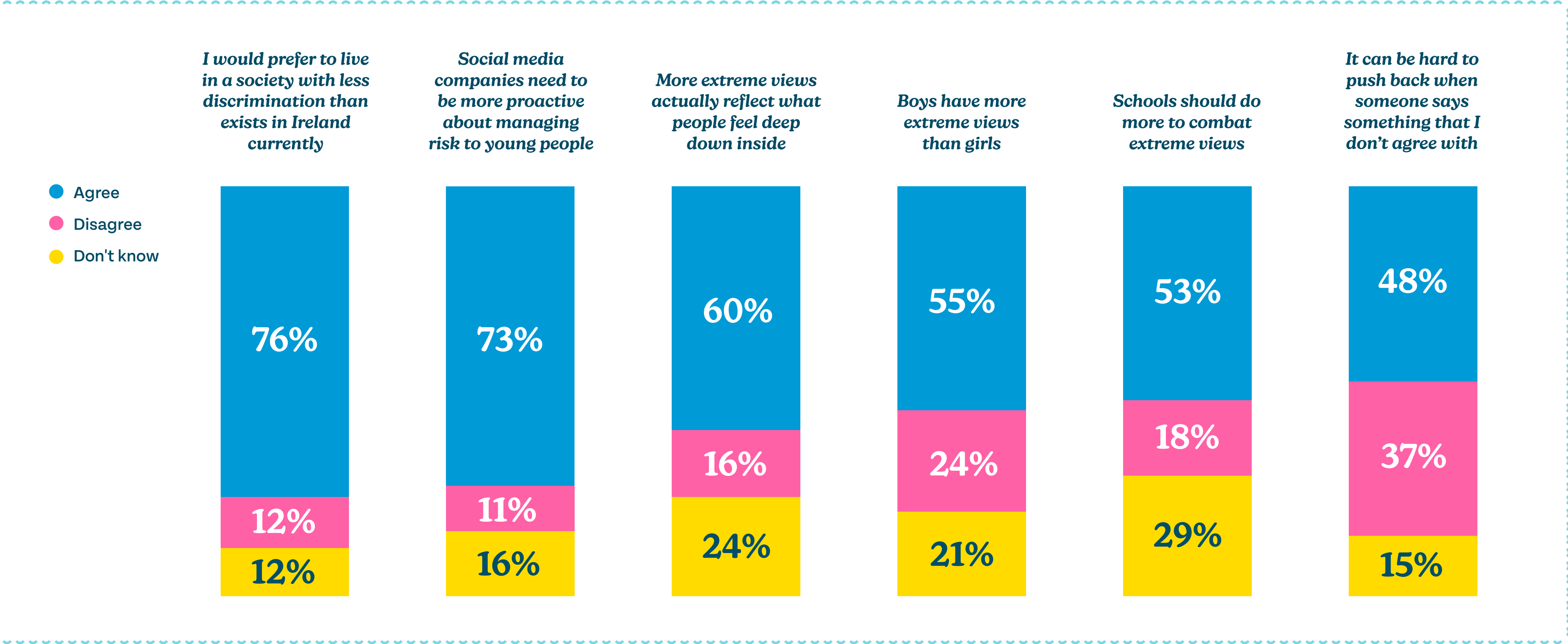


Men are more entitled than women to more authority



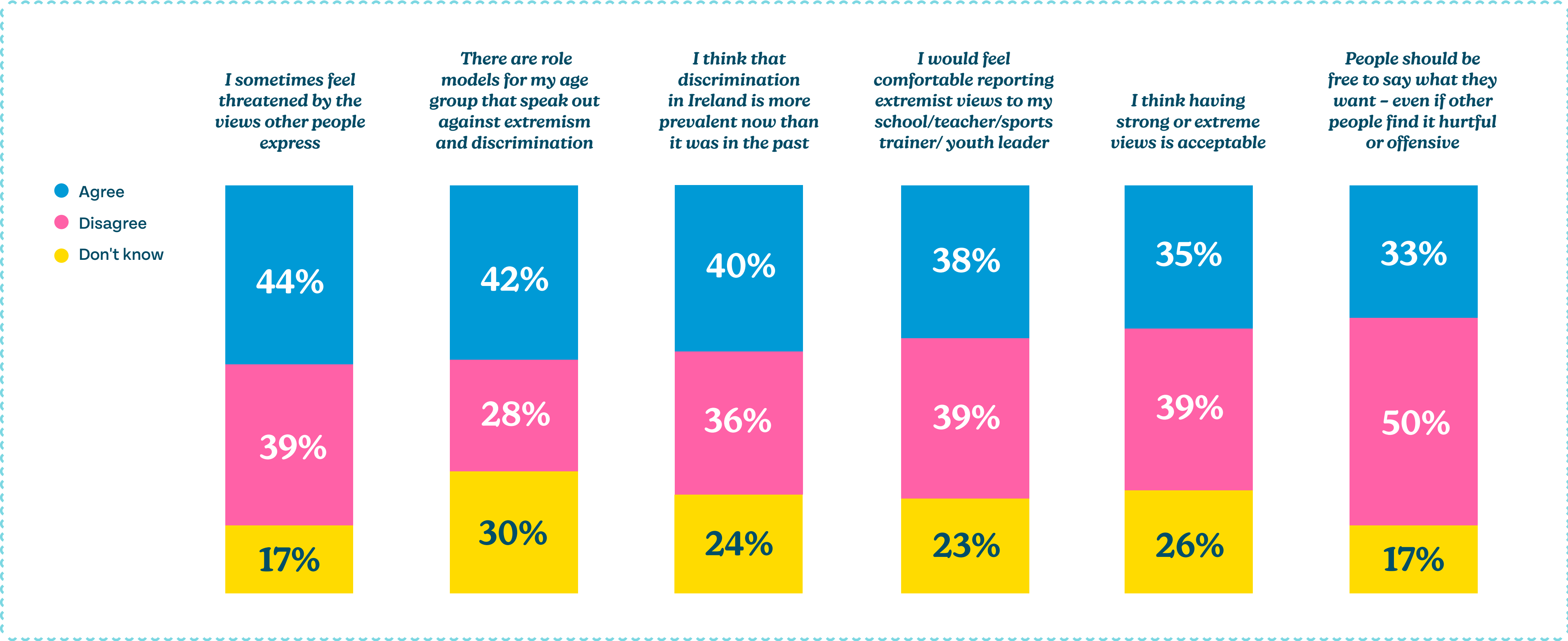
Q17:

Here are some statements we heard from our focus groups and from young people who come into our office. Do you agree or disagree?



Q17:

Continued



Q18:

Are discrimination, integration or extreme views impacting young people in Ireland?
What needs to happen?

Young people are becoming ensnared in very problematic views...the government seems apathetic and powerless....social media companies need to be regulated and the government should be doing more to combat the spread of disinformation

People have their own views and people have to deal with it

Everyone talks about how bad it is but not much is actually done to change it. The same people who might discriminate against immigrants might not discriminate against LGBTQ people. They tend to pick and choose what is right and wrong

I believe that discrimination isn't as big of a problem as people make it out to be

Discrimination against immigrants is growing, this can influence and divide groups of young people.

It's grand everyone is allowed an opinion

I don't think it's a big issue

No, nothing needs to happen, I don't believe there are many people with extreme views in Ireland

Extreme views are harmful because they focus on hate rather than progression. People need to become more educated on these matters to prevent misinformation that can be harmful

I don't believe it to be a serious issue as I haven't heard many with extreme views however I don't know enough on the topic

I am not too aware of discrimination going on in Ireland

I believe it is a big issue because im afraid Ireland will follow in the footsteps of America and will go backwards in terms of right for women, men and others

I believe discrimination is terrible but the term extreme views is way to broad to judge and I believe people are entitled to their own view. It is definitely impacting young people in both good and bad ways. I think we need to listen to each others opinions and try to understand their point of view

I believe that discrimination and extreme views have become more prevalent in Ireland. I've also seen a lot more young people discriminate or express extreme views. I believe that it is going to become a big issue

I don't think discrimination is a problem in Ireland at all anymore.

A lot of young people think it's okay to joke about people's race and sexuality. However it can be hurtful to people

I feel more people are being sucked into the viewpoints and it's scary for everyone. I hear boys say stuff to my friends and I am like disgusted and they think its funny and before there wasn't many girls but now more and more are reposting foreigners out on TikTok and all and making fun of gay people.

It negatively impacts young people as it puts extreme ideas in their head when they dont fully understand what it means, while i do agree with free speech I think it is unfair what those who seek refuge from desperate circumstances face in our country

It's not too much of a big issue, as Ireland is quite a safe country, but some things need to be controlled to stop it from impacting young people negatively.

I feel that more can be done to combat discrimination and a lot of young people are exposed to stuff like that on social media so more should be done to censor social media

Discrimination is impacting young people in Ireland but I think that people should learn how to ignore ignorant people's opinions and keep on with their lives.

Yes, it impacts young people and it's a big issue

I think discrimination is a massive issue. People need to learn tolerance! It's badly effecting young people, who by just existing seem to offend grown adults who should know better

It isn't massive in Ireland but still could be better

Conclusion

The findings of this survey suggest that the emerging social issues of discrimination, extremism and misogyny are filtering down to our young people through what they hear and see at home, among their friends and peers and predominantly, online.

We should be encouraged by the fact that parents and guardians are still the biggest influence in a young person's life. This is a responsibility that must be taken seriously to combat dangerous ideals and to teach children about how they should treat others.

Make no mistake that much of the sentiment on display during the Dublin riots and the attacks on IPAS centres is racism thinly disguised as 'concern' and it needs to be called out as such. Many of the young people we surveyed talk about how discriminatory 'jokes' are becoming more commonplace, and worryingly some of their comments accept as facts things that are not true, or at least not 100% accurate.

We are concerned to see that boys are not only perceived to be more likely to express extreme views but are also likely to be more targeted by people expressing these views online. This needs to be taken into account by Government, social media companies and us all when it comes to educating and protecting our young men.

This is also something that needs to be considered in discussions around AI and how algorithms are targeting particular groups of people, in this case boys and young men.

Worryingly we are also seeing that a sentiment around a return to so-called 'traditional' gender roles is gaining traction, suggesting the need for discussions around gender at home and at school.

This is the third survey carried out by the Ombudsman for Children's Office through schools in Ireland. Each survey has built on the last. First there was a covid survey and then an overall wellbeing survey to sense check the issues for children following the pandemic, arising from that survey came this one. Never before have we included recommendations in our surveys, simply because it is a survey – a snapshot of an issue and an opportunity to get children's views directly. In this case however, the Office has made two recommendations as the results of the survey point to some very concerning findings that have not yet been addressed:

Recommendations:

- The Government should further explore the growth of extremist views amongst children and put in place a plan to tackle this problem from an early age. 69% of the young people we spoke to agree that discrimination is an issue in Ireland today. In the current climate of shifting attitudes and misinformation, it is more important than ever to bed down our commitment to human rights and decency, and we all have a role to play.
- The findings of our survey highlight a clear link between extremist views and online. Therefore with the growth of the AI landscape in particular, the Government and regulators must hold social media companies to account and include a special focus on children in its work on AI to ensure that children are protected from harm. Up until now the focus on children and children's rights in relation to AI has been marginal at best. This must be addressed to ensure children are safe online and that they are not being targeted through harmful algorithms.



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