

**THE
POLICY
INSTITUTE**

KING'S
College
LONDON

Freedom of expression in UK universities

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Universities increasingly face criticism over freedom of expression, from a perceived increase in regulation, such as safe-space policies and no-platforming, to claims they are succumbing to demands of a new generation of “snowflake” students. Yet the extent of this commentary is often disproportionate to the number of instances where freedom of expression has actually been violated – and, more importantly, is seldom informed by what students themselves actually think about the issue.

This study finds that students are far more concerned about freedom of expression in wider society than in their own university. Only a minority have heard about incidents where freedoms have been restricted in their institutions and most are broadly supportive of how their university supports freedom of expression. Moreover, there is significant agreement between university students and the general public on the value of freedom of expression and related issues.

However, there is a small, yet important group who are more ambivalent and resist intervention from their university’s administration in all but extreme cases. There are also signs of a “chilling effect”, where some students are reluctant to express their views for fear of repercussions, and one in four students (26 per cent) think that violence can be a justifiable response to hate speech or racially-charged comments. However, this is not dramatically higher than the 20 per cent of the general public who feel the same.

This study was produced by the [Policy Institute at King’s College London](#). Fieldwork was conducted by [YouthSight](#) between 29 July and 2 August 2019, with 2,153 online survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled in UK Higher Education institutions. A parallel online survey was conducted by [Ipsos MORI](#) with 2,179 members of the public between 26–30 July 2019.

Headline figures

1. 81 per cent of students think that freedom of expression is more important than ever, with 86 per cent specifically concerned that social media is enabling people to express intolerant views – mirroring trends in the UK population overall (78 per cent and 84 per cent, respectively).
2. Most students consider freedom of expression to be more threatened in the UK overall than in their own university. On average, just 12 per cent of students hear about such incidents very or fairly often. By contrast, 46 per cent say they have never heard of such incidents and 31 per cent say they don't hear of them very often.
3. We identified three clusters of attitudes, splitting the student population into three groups: the “Contented” (56 per cent), the “Activist” (23 per cent) and the “Libertarian” (20 per cent). These groups differ based on whether they feel the need to self-censor, the type of trust they place in their university to support freedom of expression and the acts they consider justifiable to shut down offensive or intolerant viewpoints.
4. The Activists and Libertarians, while mostly holding conflicting views on other measures, are both more likely to think that violence and shouting down speakers can be an appropriate response to counter viewpoints that they find offensive or intolerant. 30 per cent of Activists and 33 per cent of Libertarians support these more extreme forms of action.

Students think freedom of expression is under threat, but not in their own university

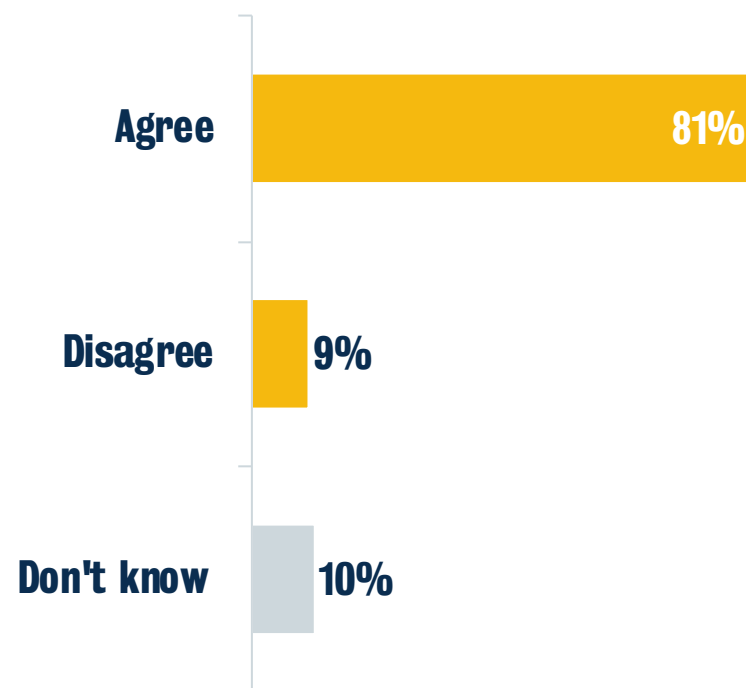
Students in the UK are far more concerned about threats to freedom of expression in society than in their own universities, with only a minority having heard about incidents where freedoms have been restricted on their own campuses. The majority of students believe that debate is civil in their institution but are concerned about the role of social media in spreading intolerant views.



81 per cent of students in the UK agree with this statement on freedom of expression.

The statement is jointly used by King's and its Students' Union, and was inspired by the '[Chicago Principles](#)', which have been widely adopted by universities in the US to demonstrate commitment to freedom of expression. The [King's statement](#) has been modified to reflect the different jurisdictions and laws of the UK.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement on freedom of expression in universities?



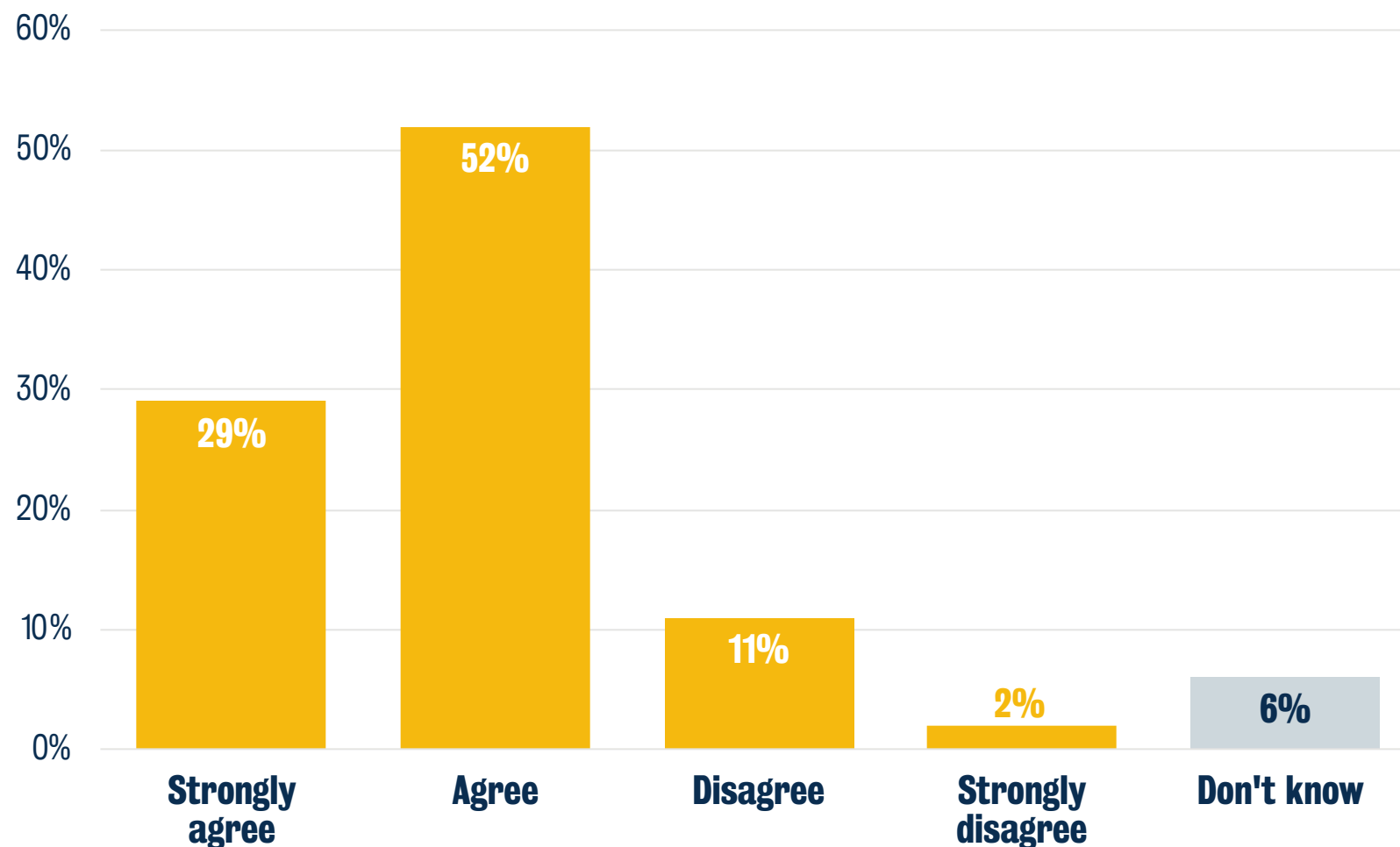
“ Intellectual inquiry necessarily involves ideas that are in dispute, that may cause controversy, that may cause offence and that may provoke a reaction amongst audiences in the university community and beyond. Universities should be committed to a safe and civil environment for the exchange of ideas and the cultivation of knowledge.

This commitment will at times see universities serving as places in which intellectual, moral, or political disputes come to the fore. At such times, the role of a university is to ensure that all parties feel confident and safe in expressing their views except when this speech discriminates based on race, class, disability, sex, age, gender, identity, transgender status, religion or sexual orientation. ”

Overall, **81 per cent of students think freedom of expression is more important than ever.**

We defined freedom of expression as including **four freedoms**: freedom from hate, free speech, freedom to protest and academic freedom – each of which can sometimes be in tension with one another.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
In today's world, freedom of expression is more important than ever

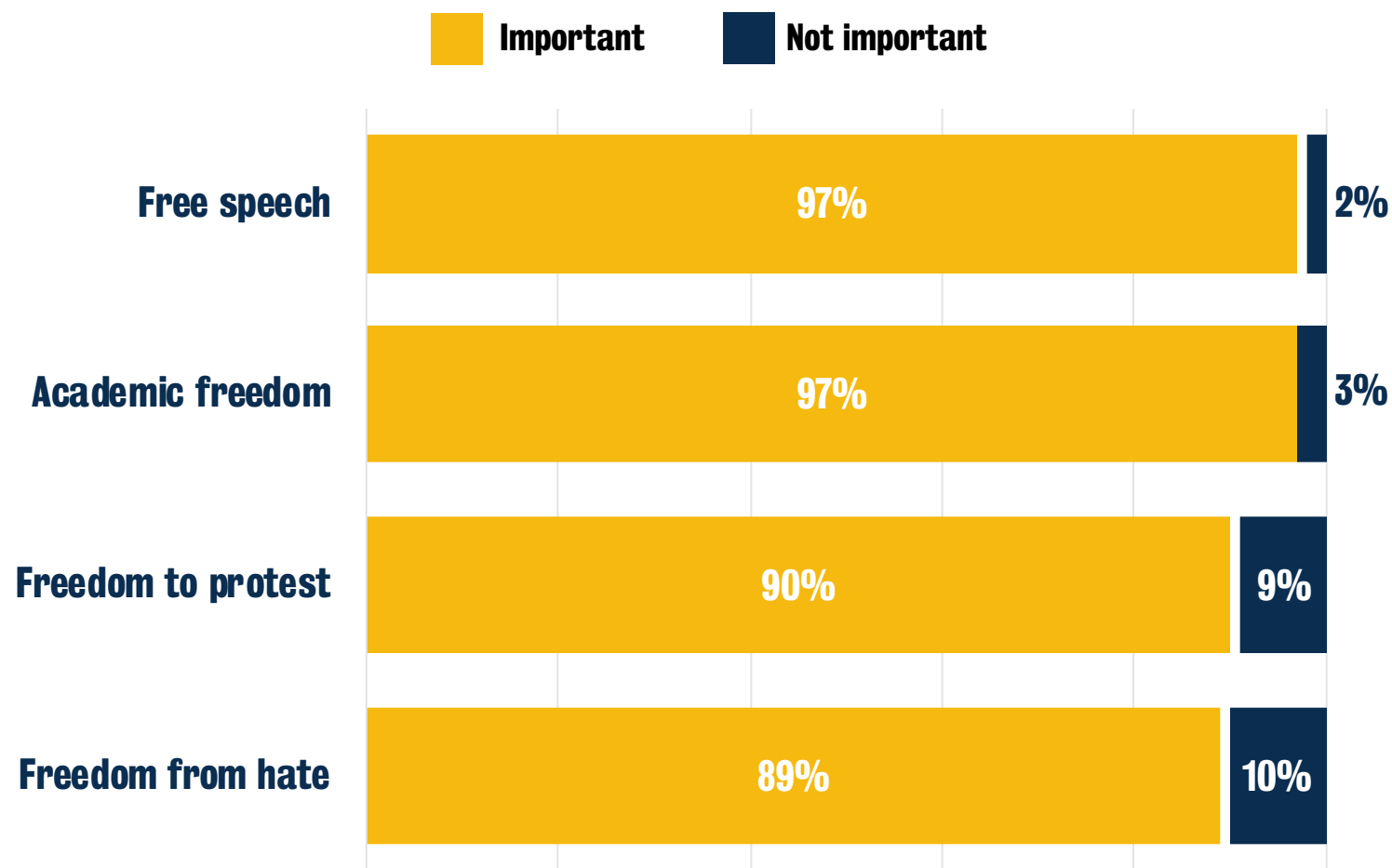


Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019).

Most students think it is important for **all four freedoms to be protected** in universities, particularly free speech and academic freedom.

And 79 per cent think **it is a university's role to balance these tensions to protect freedom of expression**, rather than protect one or some elements more than others (21 per cent agree).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? How important do you think it is for the following freedoms to be protected in universities?



Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Don't knows not shown. 7

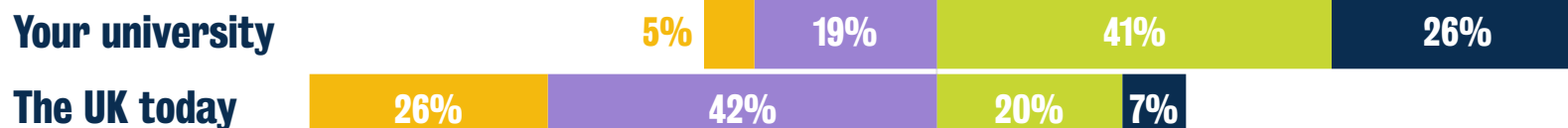
Students felt that **all four freedoms are more threatened in the UK overall than in their own university.**

On average across the four freedoms, 51 per cent of students think freedom of expression is threatened in the UK, compared with 22 per cent who say the same of their own universities.

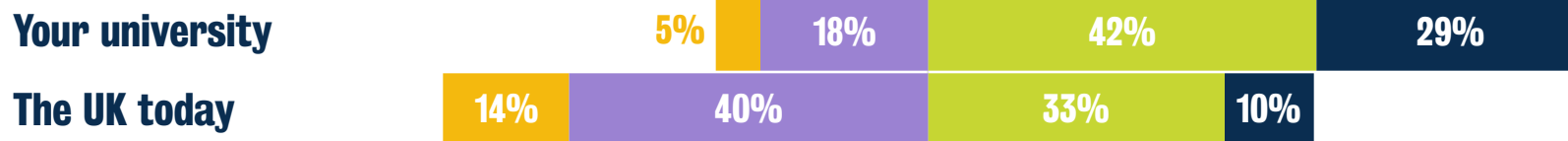
How threatened, if at all, do you think each of the following freedoms are in ...

■ Very threatened
 ■ Fairly threatened
 ■ Not very threatened
 ■ Not at all threatened

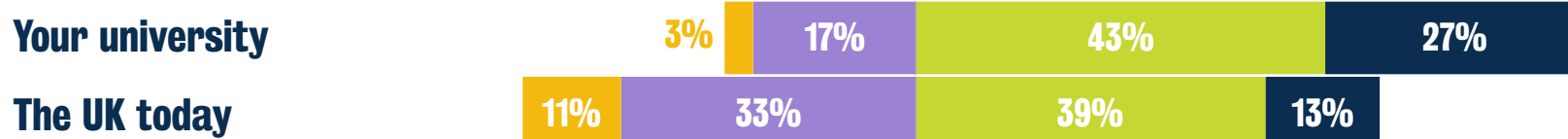
Freedom from hate



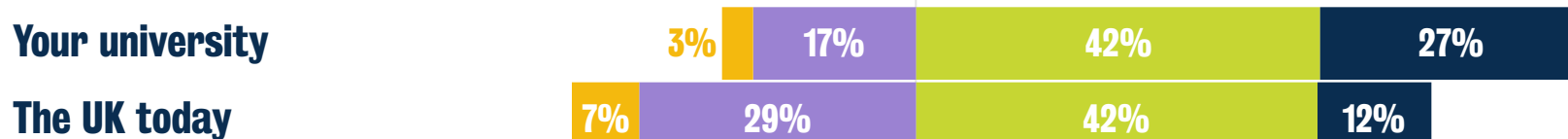
Free speech



Freedom to protest



Academic freedom



On average, just 12 per cent of students say they hear about these four freedoms being inhibited in their own university very or fairly often.

By contrast, 46 per cent say they have never heard about such incidents and 31 per cent say they have not heard about them very often.

How often, if at all, have you heard about incidents where...

■ Very often
 ■ Fairly often
 ■ Not very often
 ■ Not at all
 ■ Don't know

the **freedom to protest** has been inhibited by your university?



academic freedom has been inhibited in your university?



free speech has been inhibited in your university?



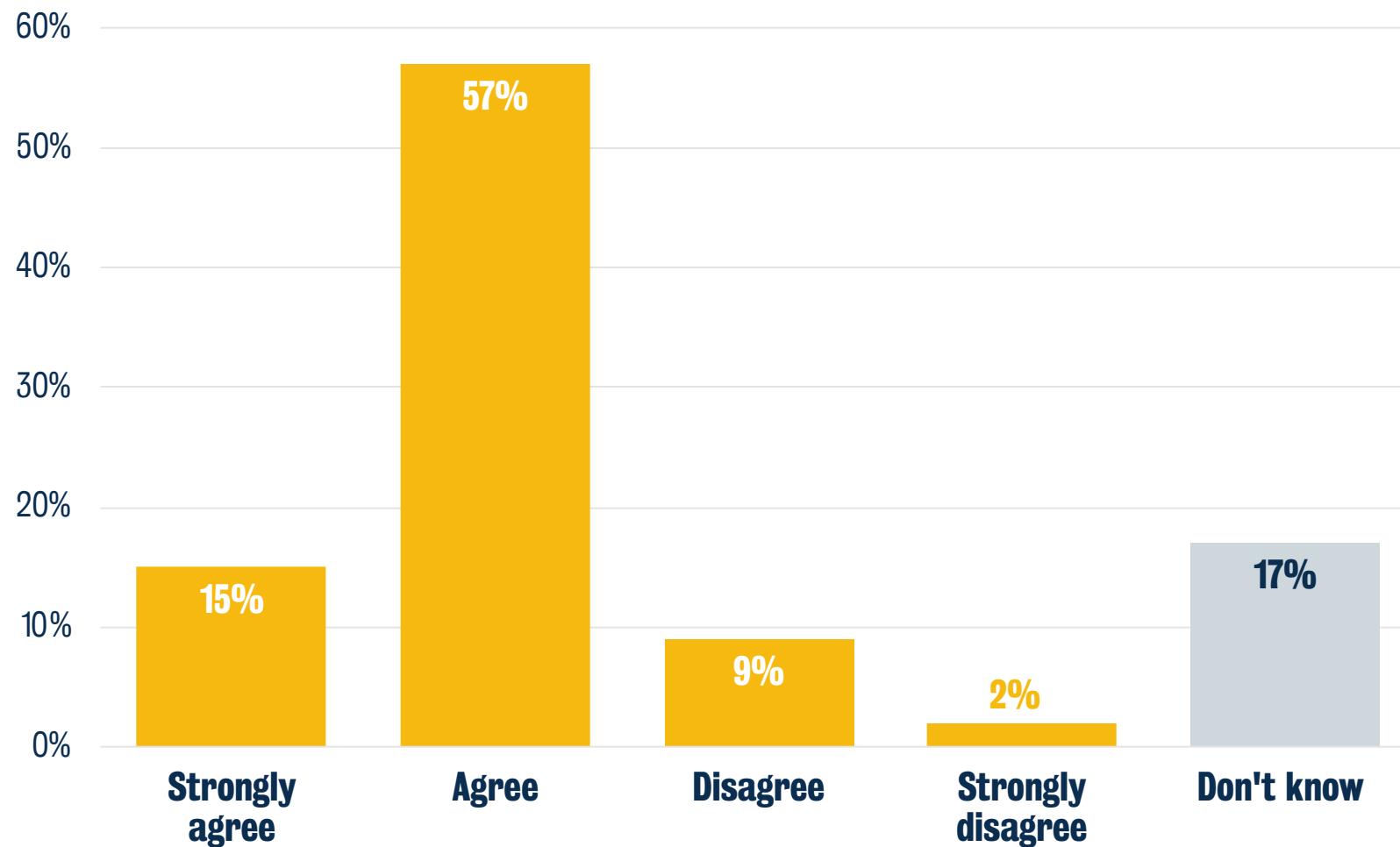
people have not been protected from **freedom from hate** in your university?



Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019).

Most students appear relatively content with how their university handles freedom of expression, with **nearly three in four students believing that debate and discussions are civil and respectful in their university.**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Debates and discussions in my university are civil, respecting the rights and dignity of others

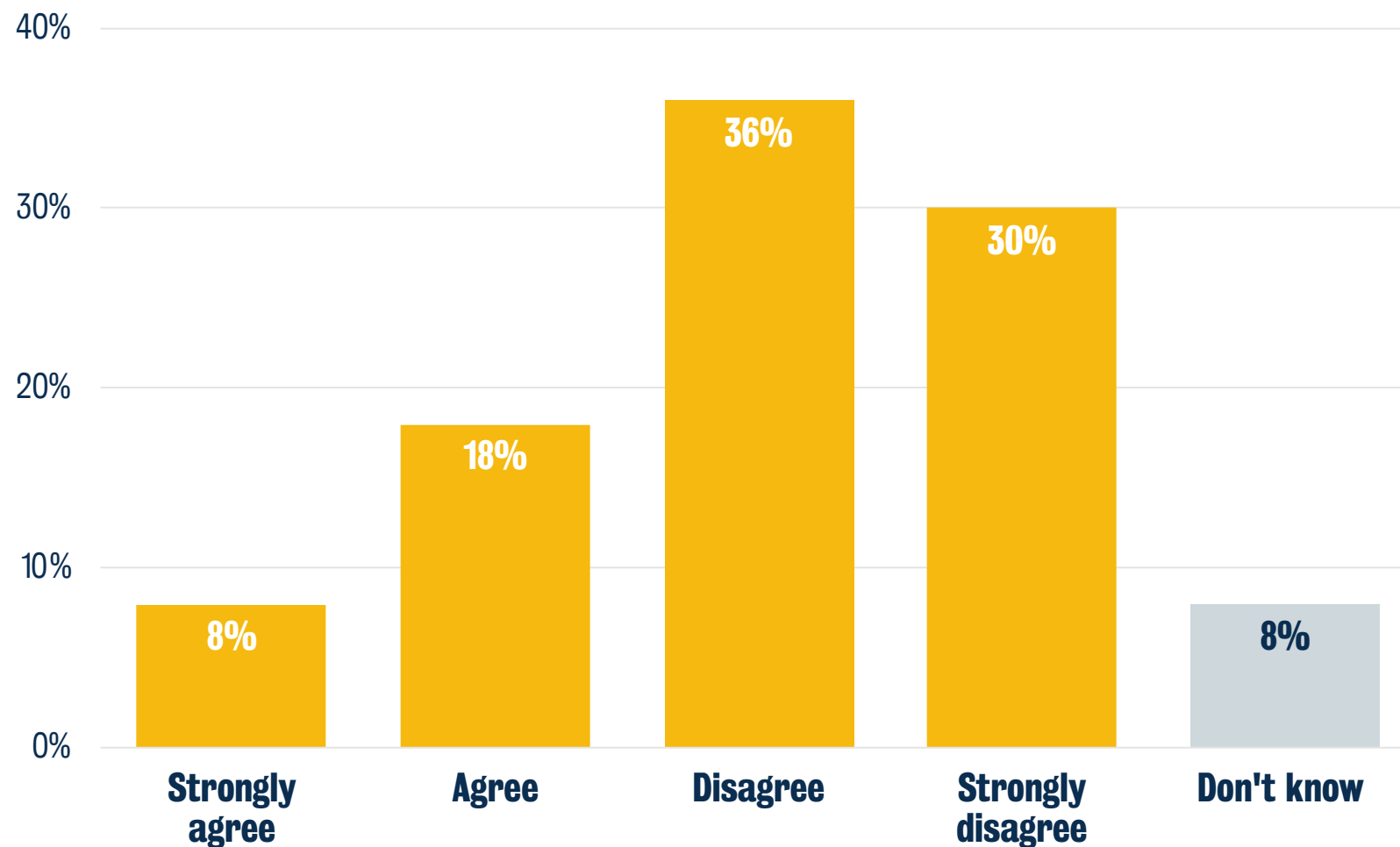


Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019).

The majority of students **disagree that physical violence can be a justified response to hate speech or racially charged comments.**

However, one in four students do still think violence can be justified to prevent hate speech and racially charged comments, higher than the one in five members of the public who think the same (see slide 22).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
If someone is using hate speech or making racially charged comments, physical violence can be justified to prevent this person from espousing their hateful views

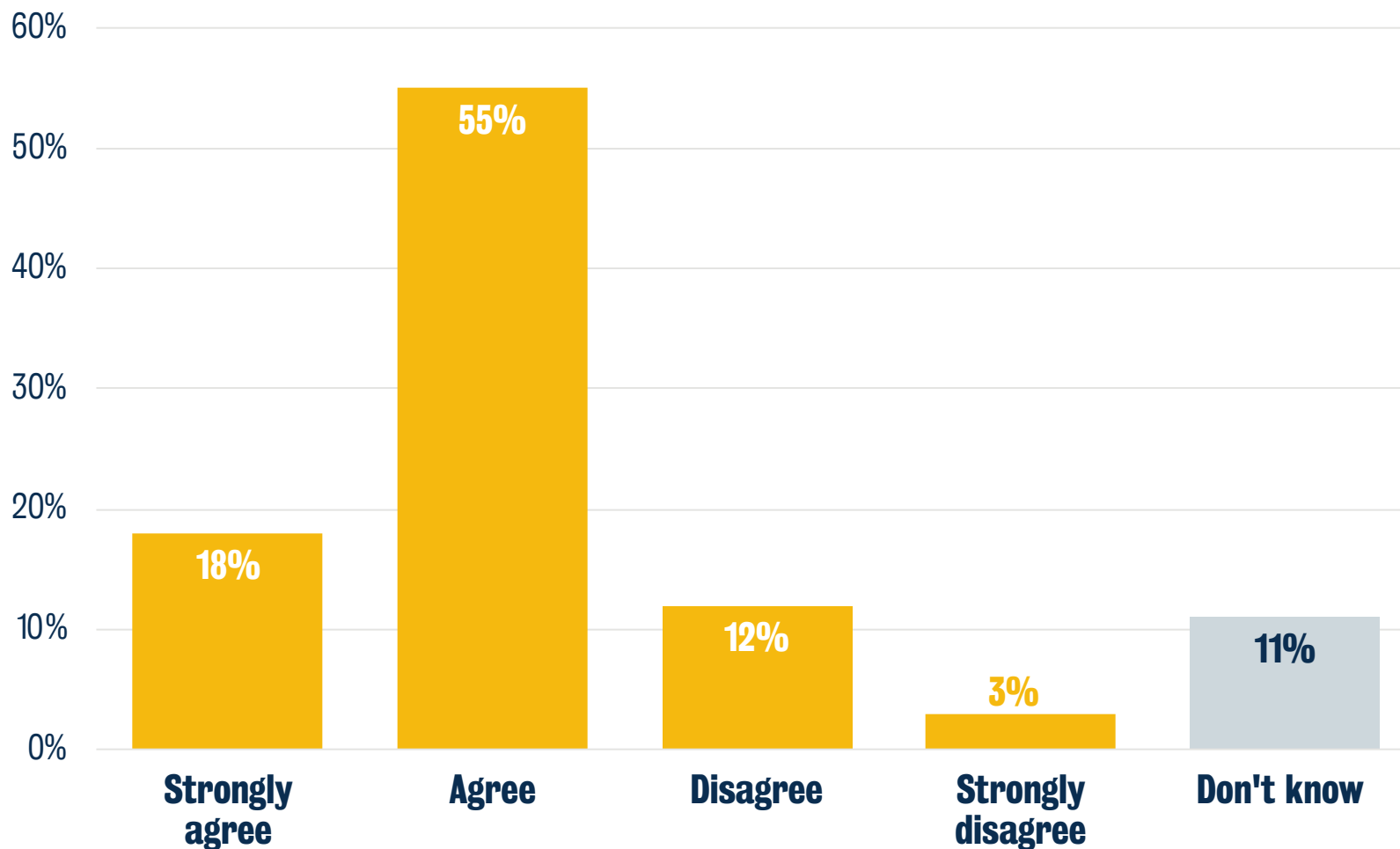


Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019).

When asked about the approaches taken by HE institutions to deal with issues arising on campus, **three out of every four students say universities are taking seriously the need to protect students from hatred.**

Similarly, **almost two-thirds of students say free speech and robust debate are well protected in their university (63 per cent).**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Universities are taking seriously the need to protect students from hatred so that everyone can enjoy an equal right to express themselves freely

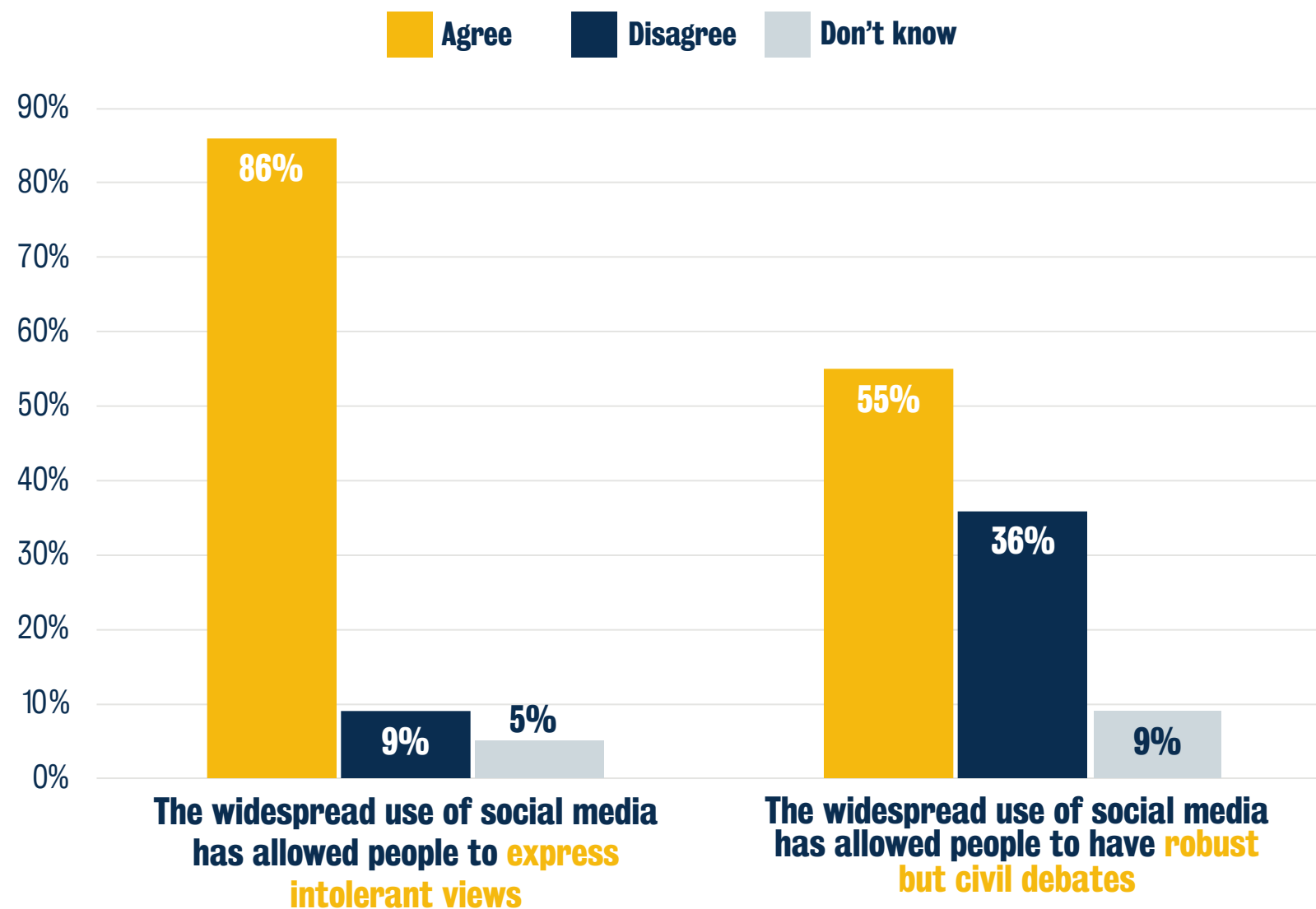


Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019).

However, there is greater concern about online environments. On a range of issues relating to freedom of expression, **students appear most concerned about the role of social media in spreading intolerant views.**

Yet over half recognise that social media can play a positive role in allowing people to have robust but critical debates.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

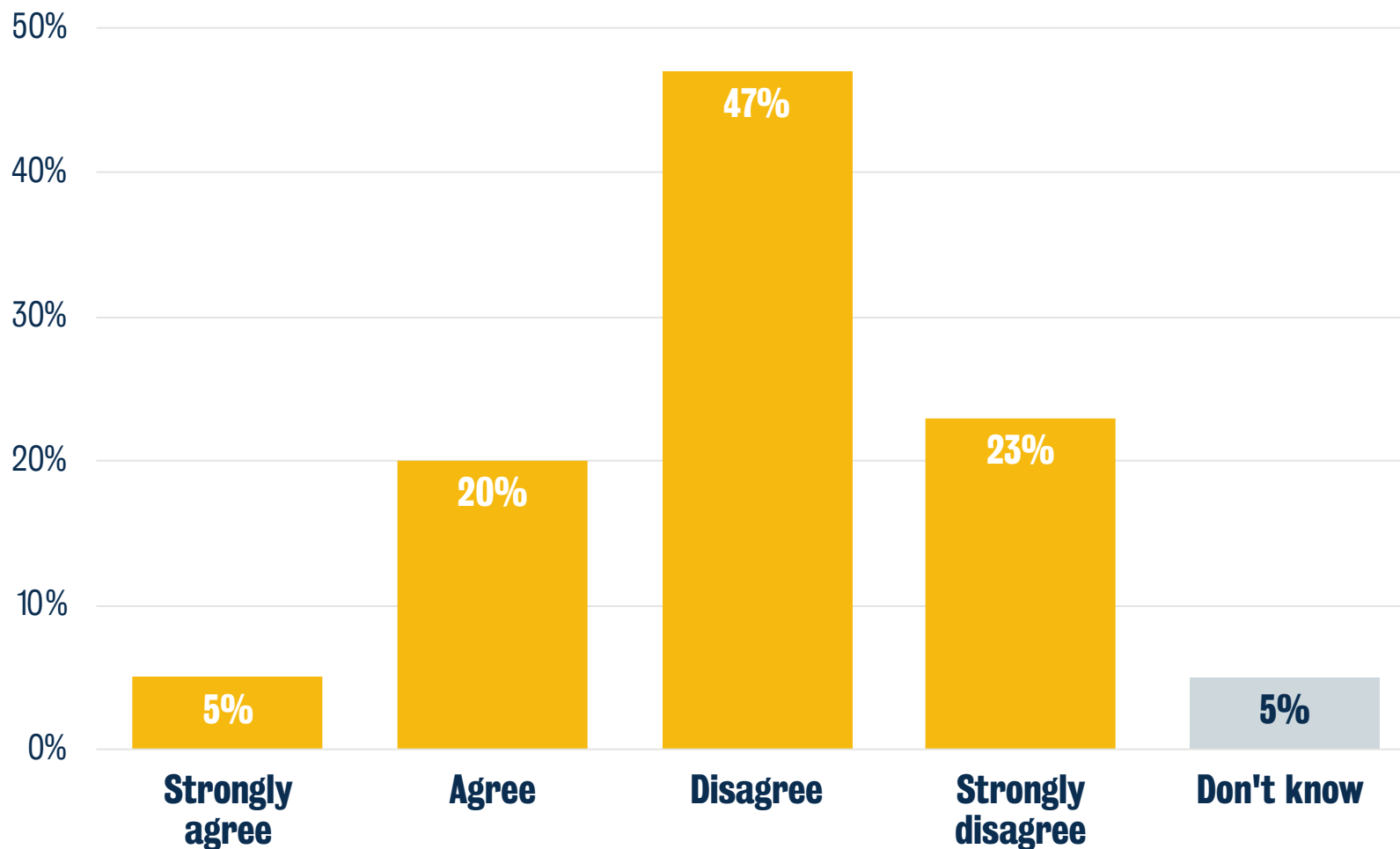


Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019).

That said, there is also a small group of students who do feel inhibited from voicing their opinions.

While the majority of students feel comfortable sharing their views with their peers (70 per cent), there is a clear chilling effect at play, whereby **one in four students are scared to express their views openly.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
I feel unable to express my views in my university because I'm scared of disagreeing with my peers**

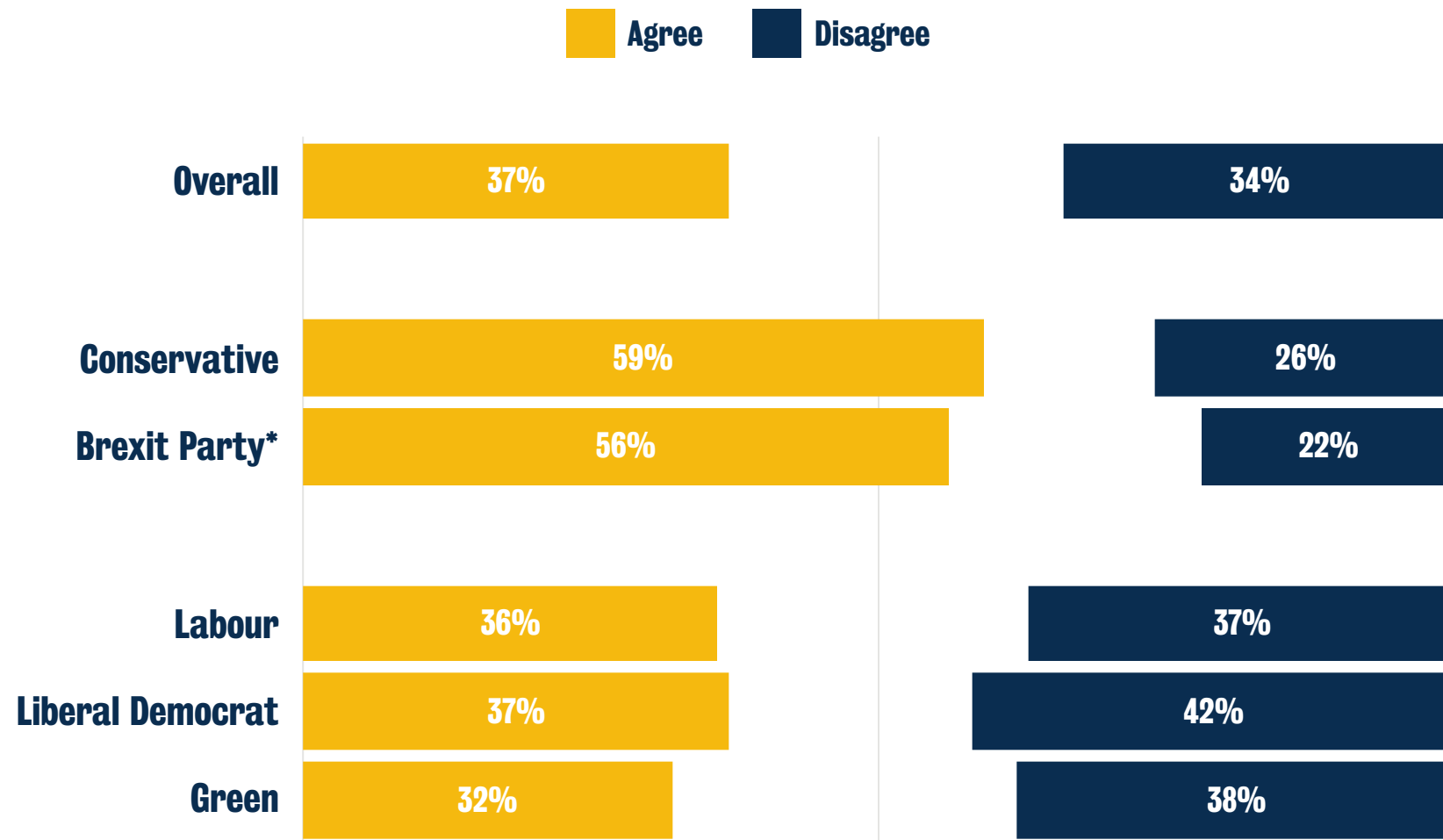


Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019).

There appears to be a political dimension to this chilling effect.

For example, **59 per cent of students who identify as a Conservative voter believe that students with conservative views self-censor on campus.** However, far fewer say they have been inhibited from expressing their own views...

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Students with conservative views are reluctant to express them at my university

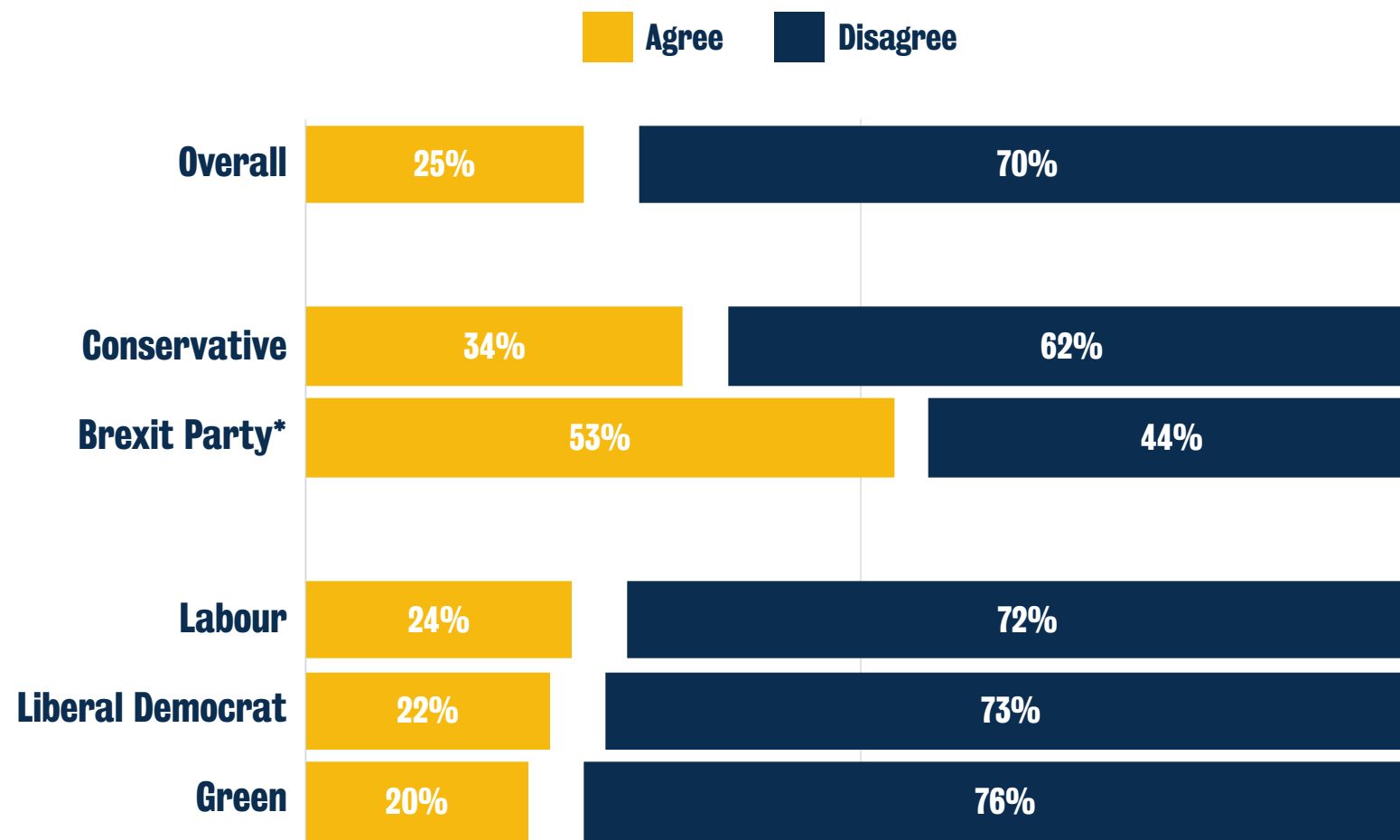


Base: For overall sample, 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Conservative, n=199; Brexit Party, n=47; Labour, n=618; Liberal Democrat, n=318; Green, n=295. * Proportions should be treated with caution due to small base size (n=47). Don't knows not shown.

... Roughly a third of Conservative-supporting students say that they feel unable to express their views on campus, compared with around one in five students with left-leaning views.

This is a similar split to that seen in relation to Brexit: 32 per cent of Leavers feel unable to express their views, compared to 23 per cent of Remainers.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I feel unable to express my views in my university because I'm scared of disagreeing with my peers



Base: For overall sample, 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Conservative, n=199; Brexit Party, n=47; Labour, n=618; Liberal Democrat, n=318, Green, n=295. * Proportions should be treated with caution due to small base size (n=47). Don't knows not shown.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?



The widespread use of social media has allowed people to express intolerant views

Debates and discussions in my university are civil, respecting the rights and dignity of others

In today's world, freedom of expression is more important than ever

Universities are taking seriously the need to protect students from hatred so that everyone can enjoy an equal right to express themselves freely

Free speech and robust debate are well protected in my university

My university manages students protests fairly

University officials have the right to ban persons with extreme views from speaking on campus

The majority of academics in my university are left-wing

Rising political polarisation is a threat to freedom of expression in the UK

Young people today are less accepting of challenging and offensive speech than young people were in the past

For every controversial speaker at my university, there should be another offering a different opposing view

I would be happy for my university to employ academics with a wide range of views, even when I find those views are offensive

Live-streaming and recording conversations or events without the permission of speakers is unacceptable

It is important to be part of a university community where I am not exposed to intolerant and offensive ideas

Students avoid inviting controversial speakers to my university because of the difficulties in getting those events agreed

The widespread use of social media has allowed people to have robust but civil debates

Universities should be able to establish policies that restrict expressing political views that are upsetting or offensive to certain groups

The climate in my university prevents some people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive

University bureaucracy is threatening freedom of expression through risk-adverse policies

Students with conservative views are reluctant to express them at my university

'Safe space' policies and a culture of 'safetyism' in universities is threatening freedom of expression

It is sometimes appropriate to shout down a speaker at my university

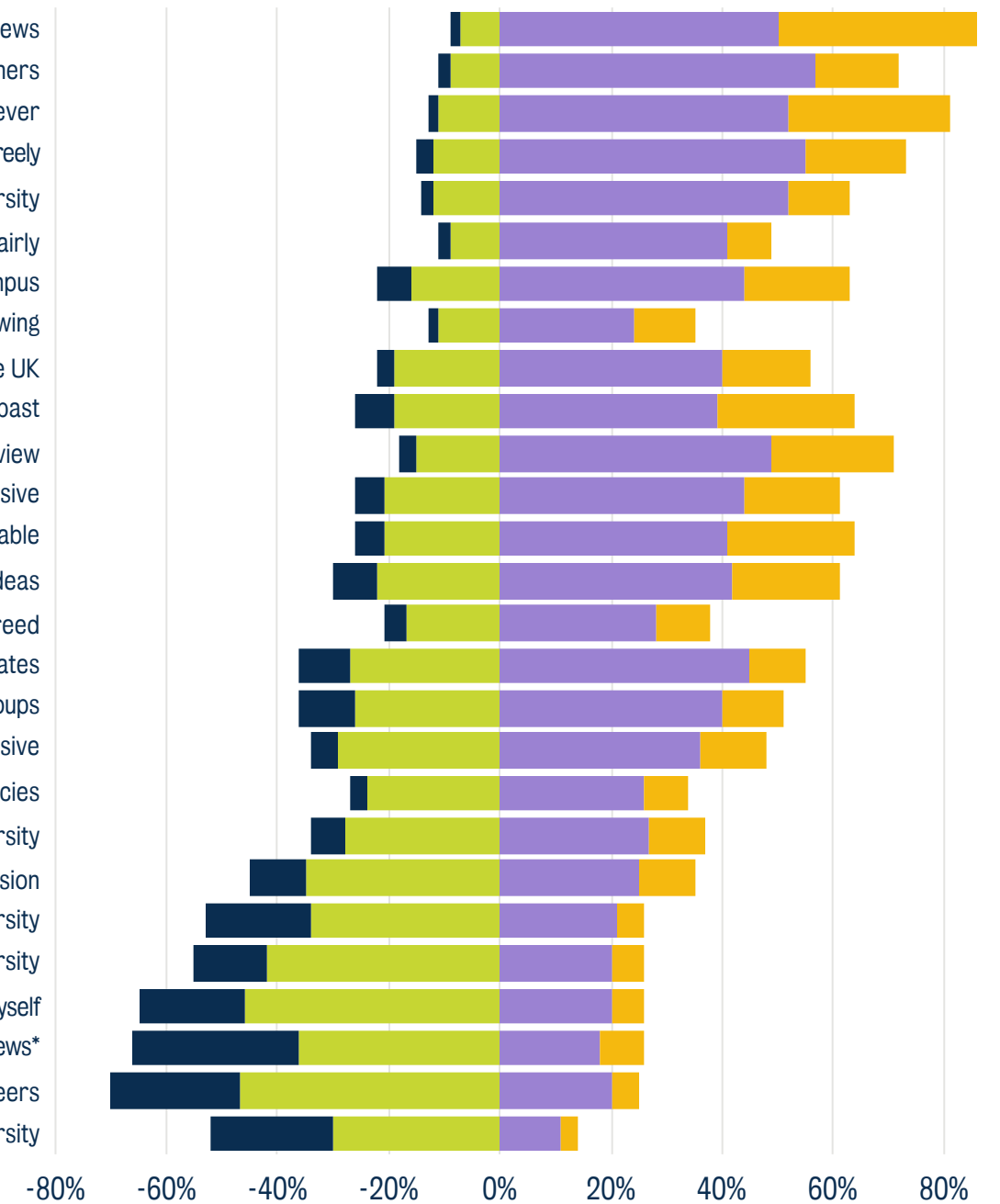
Demonstrations or rallies by unpopular political groups should be prohibited at my university

I feel pressured to share my position on controversial topics in circumstances where I would prefer to keep my views to myself

If someone is using hate speech/racially charged comments, physical violence can be justified to prevent this person from espousing hateful views*

I feel unable to express my views in my university because I'm scared of disagreeing with my peers

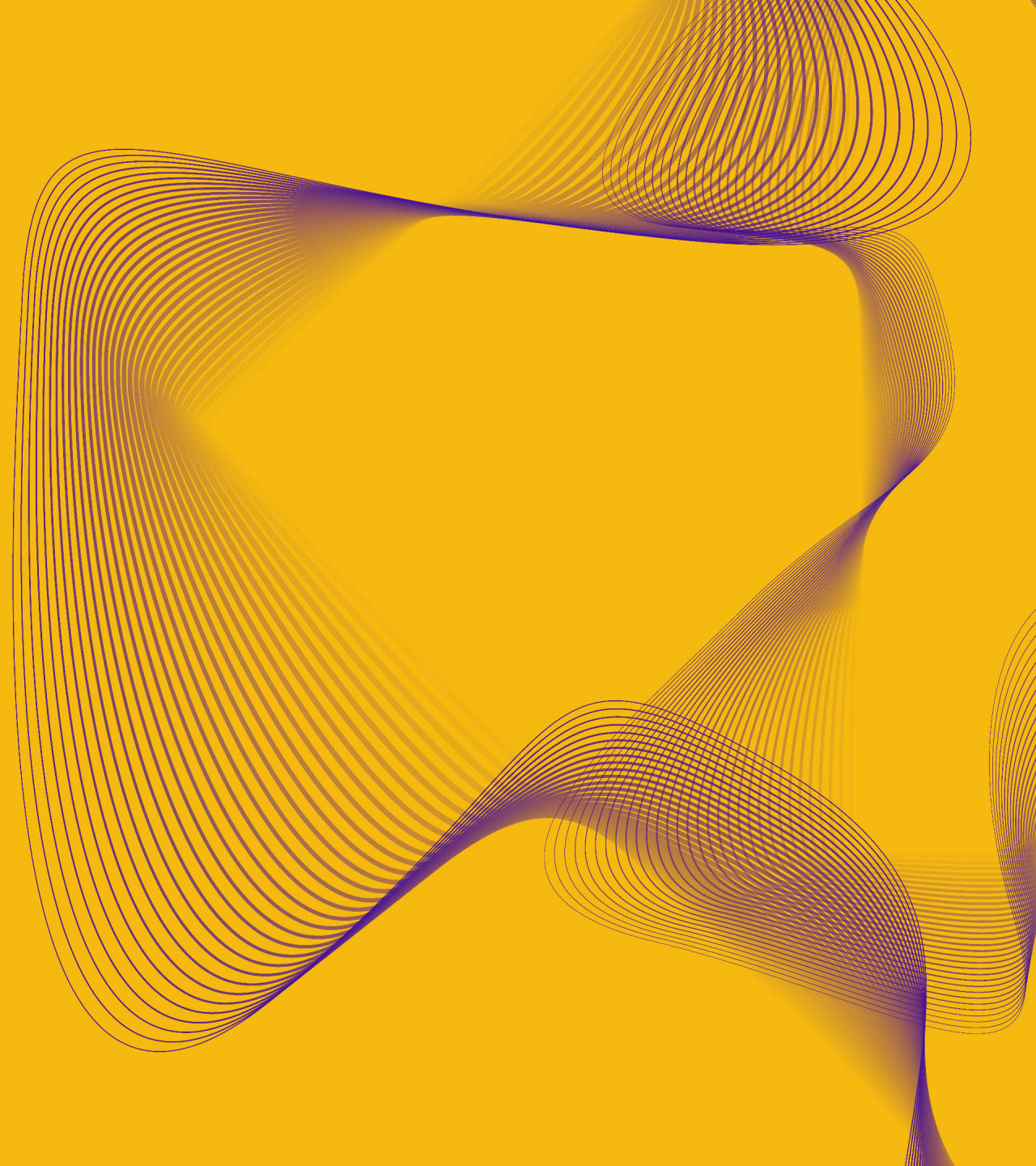
Students with left-wing views are reluctant to express them at my university



Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Don't knows not shown, * question wording truncated.

Students hold similar views to the general population on freedom of expression

There is significant agreement between university students and the general public on the value of freedom of expression and related issues: we find little difference in views across a range of more generic statements, as well as those specific to the university context.



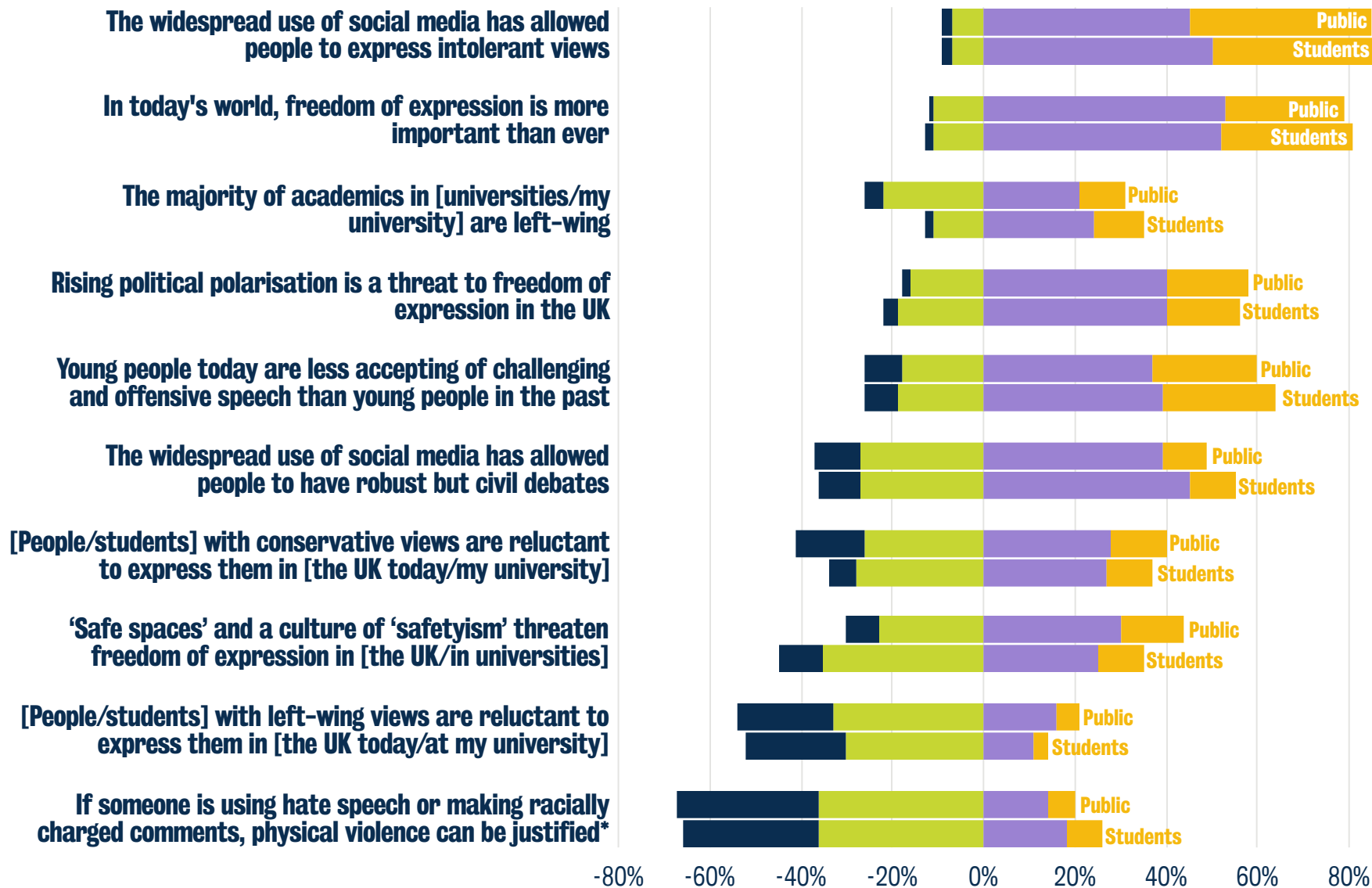
In the UK, there is considerable agreement between students and the general public on a range of issues relating to freedom of expression.

Across 10 statements asked to both the general public and student population, there was broad agreement on all but three measures (statements 3, 8 and 9).

Base: for students – 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019); for general public – 2,179 online survey responses from a representative sample of adults aged 16-75 in Great Britain (26-30 July 2019). Don't knows not shown. * question wording truncated.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

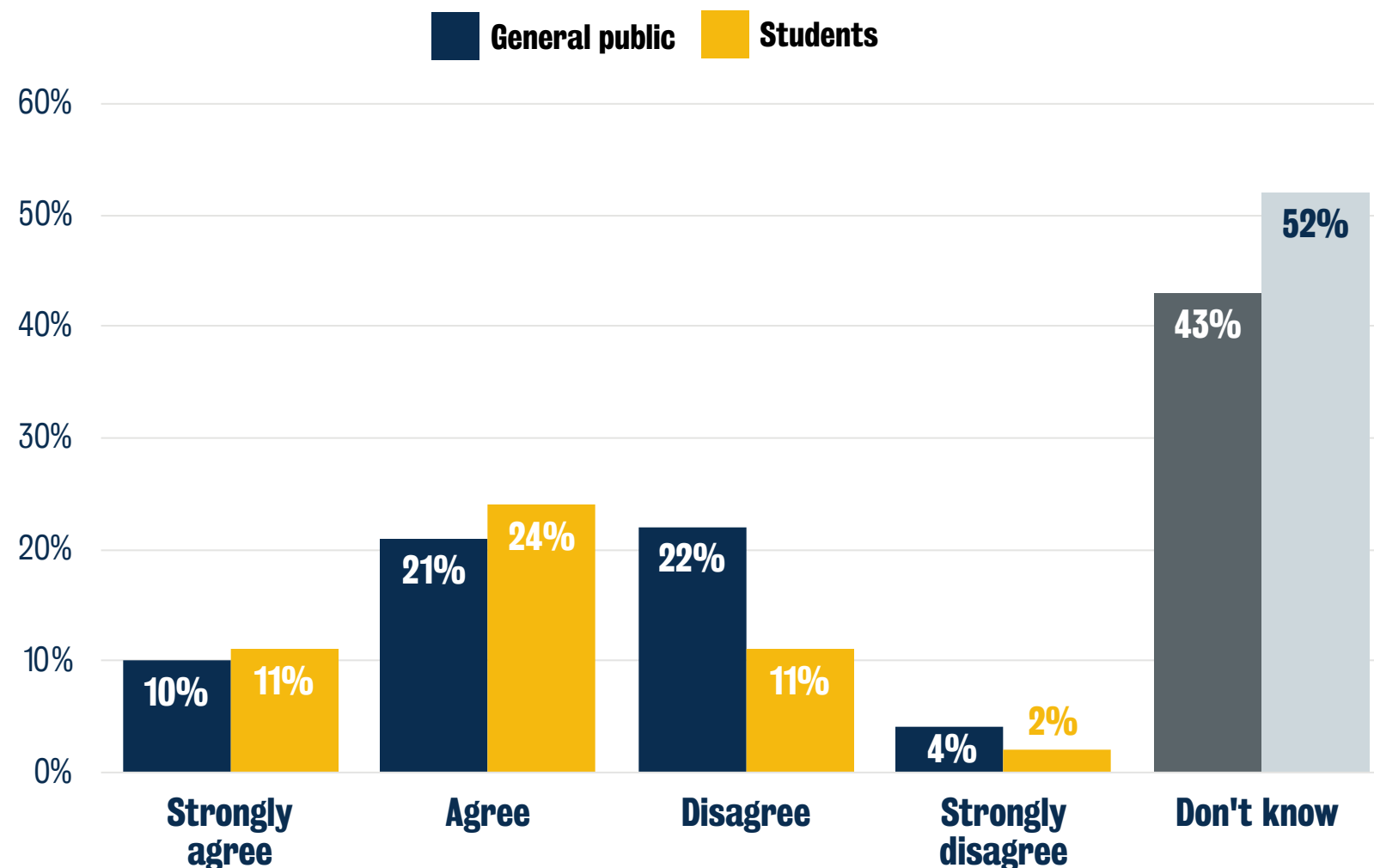
Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Agree
 Strongly agree



One area where there is less agreement is the political views of faculty members, with the public more likely than students to disagree that most academics are left-wing.

But most students, and a plurality of the public, don't know if the majority of academics at their university/universities in general are left-wing.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The majority of academics in [universities/my university] are left-wing

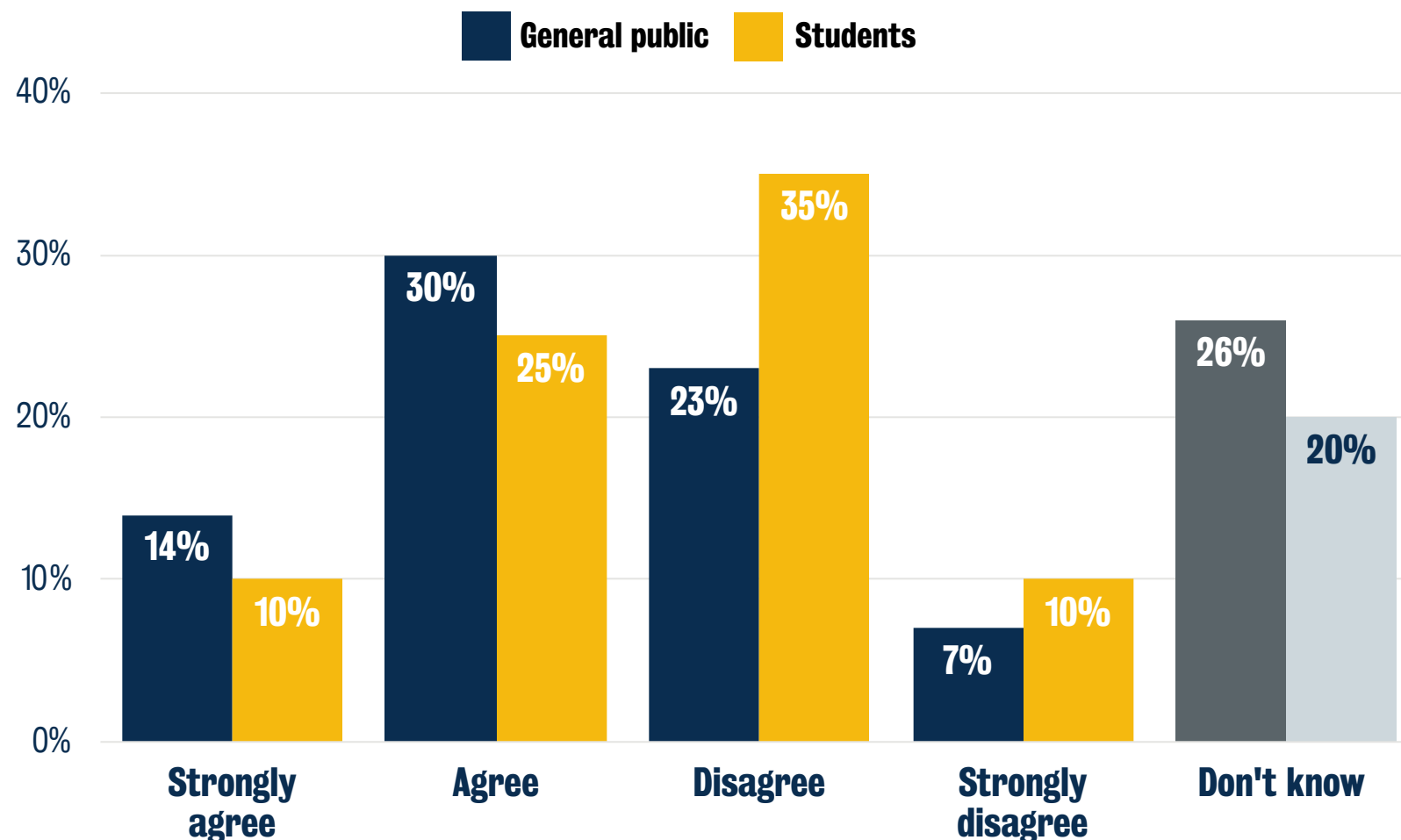


Base: for students – 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019); for general public – 2,179 online survey responses from a representative sample of adults aged 16-75 in Great Britain (26-30 July 2019).

The general public are more concerned that freedom of expression in the UK is threatened by a culture of “safetyism”.

While 35 per cent of students consider this to be an issue in their university, 44 per cent of the public are concerned about it.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
‘Safe spaces’ and a culture of ‘safetyism’ are threatening freedom of expression in [the UK/universities]*

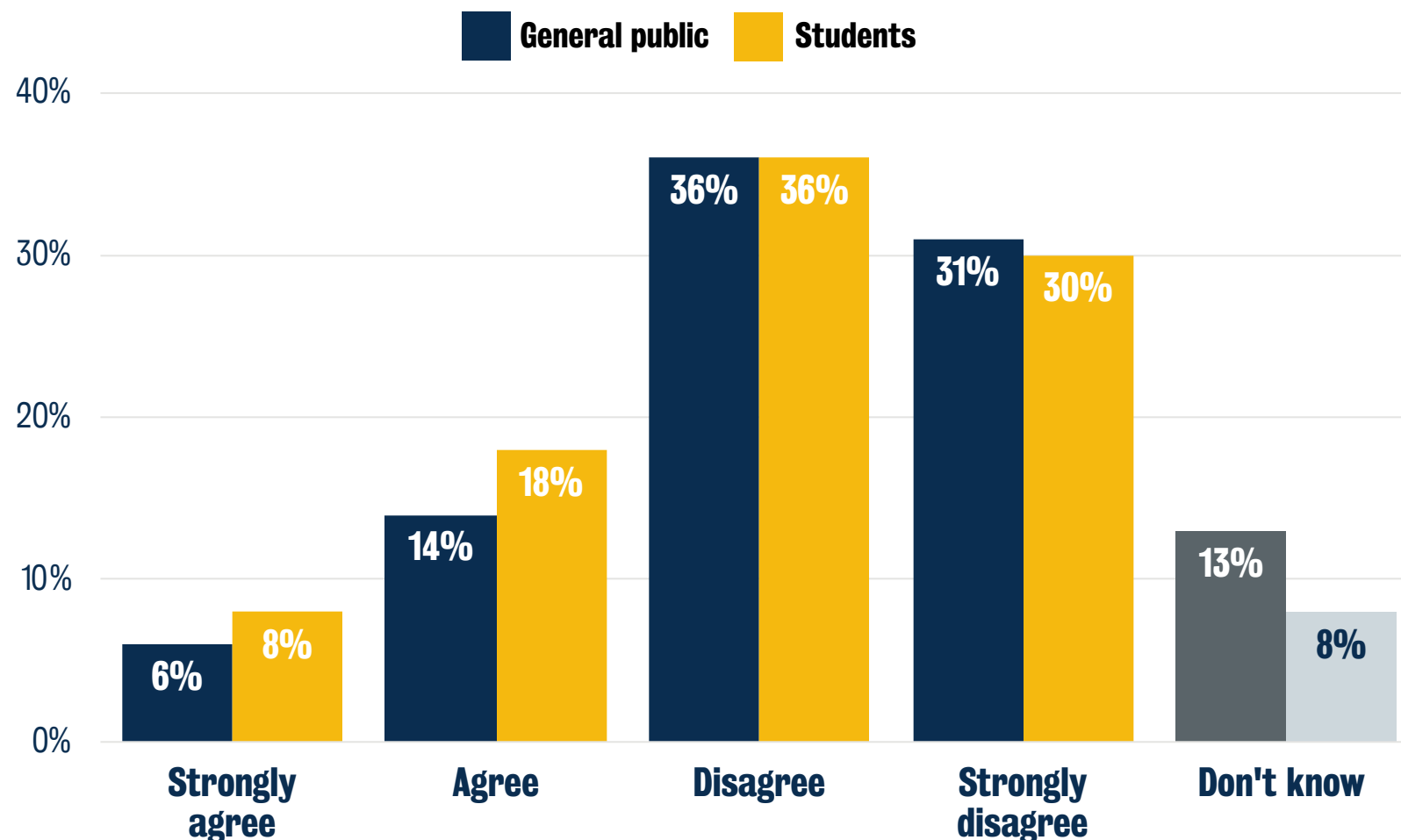


Base: for students – 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019); for general public – 2,179 online survey responses from a representative sample of adults aged 16-75 in Great Britain (26-30 July 2019).
* Slight wording change for comparison; see Technical Appendix for original wording.

The majority of students and the general public agreed that violence should not be used to suppress hate speech.

However, **26 per cent of students and 20 per cent of the public think it is acceptable to use violence.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
If someone is using hate speech or making racially charged comments, physical violence can be justified to prevent this person from espousing their hateful views**

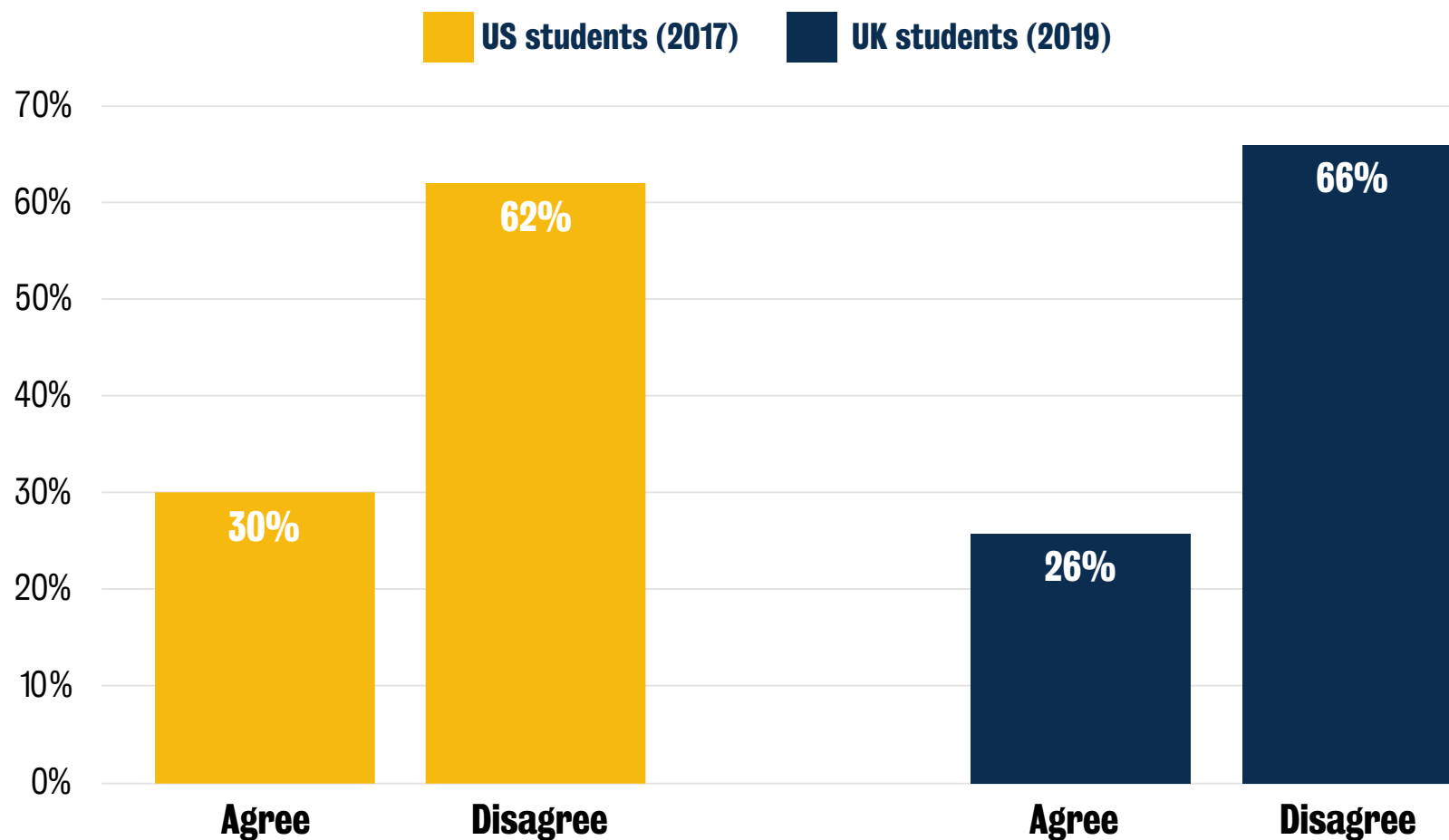


Base: for students – 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019); for general public – 2,179 online survey responses from a representative sample of adults aged 16-75 in Great Britain (26-30 July 2019).

Similarly, the proportion of students who think violence is a justifiable response in this specific context is remarkably similar in both the UK and the US.

Levels of agreement in our data are only marginally lower than those reported in the US in 2017 in the National Undergraduate Study.

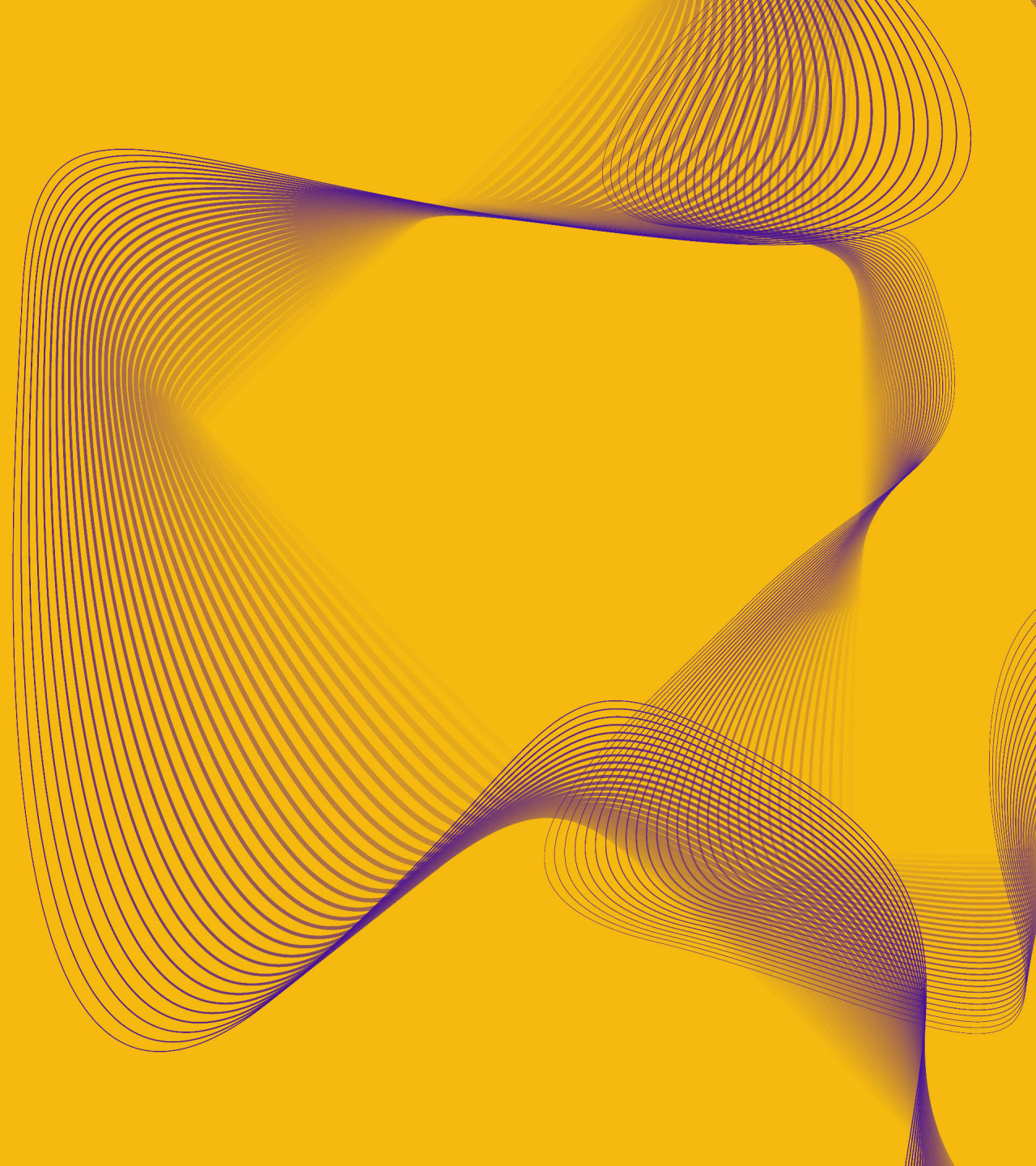
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
If someone is using hate speech or making racially charged comments, physical violence can be justified to prevent this person from espousing their hateful views



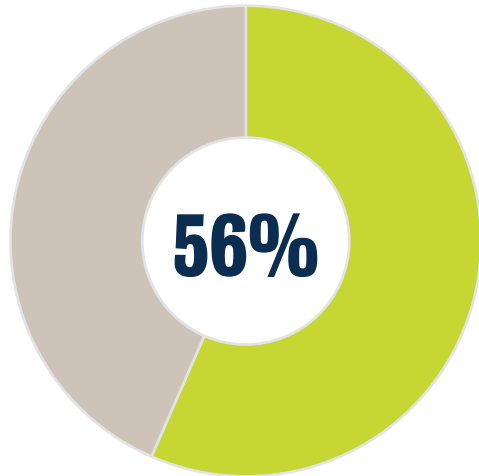
Base: for UK students – 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019); for US students – 800 undergraduate students (all aged under 25), 16-24 Sep 2017, National Undergraduate Study, McLaughlin & Associates.

Students in the UK do not share a single, homogeneous view on freedom of expression

We identified three clusters of attitudes among the student population, which we refer to as the Contented, the Activist and the Libertarian. These are distinguished by three characteristics: the degree to which they perceive a chilling effect in their university, the type of trust they place in their university to support freedom of expression, and the acts they consider justifiable to counter offensive or intolerant viewpoints.



The Contented



This group of students generally feel free to express their views at their university and expects they would be free to protest if they wanted to.

They implicitly trust that their university is taking seriously the need to protect students from hatred so that everyone can enjoy an equal right to express themselves freely. They broadly agree that university officials should have the right to ban people with extreme views from speaking on campus.

As an individual, they feel free from harm, hatred and discrimination. They prefer to be part of a community where they are not exposed to intolerant or offensive ideas, but do not have a strong opinion on the impact of safe-space policies or safetyism in universities on freedom of expression.

Key demographics

Gender

Female – 64%
Male – 35%

Voting intention if general election held tomorrow

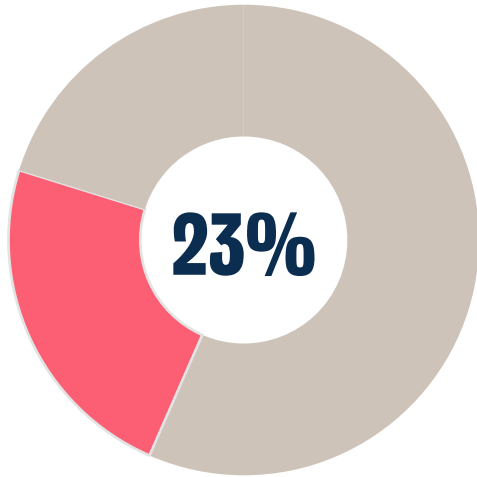
Labour – 31%
Liberal Democrat – 17%
Green Party – 15%
Don't know – 12%
Conservative – 8%
Would rather not say – 7%
Would not vote – 6%
SNP/Plaid Cymru – 3%
Brexit Party – 1%
Other – 1%

Voting intention if referendum on EU membership tomorrow

Remain – 80%
Leave – 11%
Don't know – 6%
Would not vote – 3%

The combined % of the three clusters does not add to 100% due to rounding errors.

The Activist



This group of students believe strongly that they and others are free to express their views at their university. They feel able to protest and are knowledgeable about their rights and the structures in place to support this.

They feel strongly that their university is taking seriously the need to protect students from hatred so that everyone can enjoy an equal right to express themselves freely, even though they support banning people with extreme views from speaking on campus.

As an individual, they care strongly that they are free from discrimination, harm or hatred at their university, and believe it is important to be part of a university community where they are not exposed to intolerant or offensive ideas.

Key demographics

Gender

Female – 56%
Male – 44%

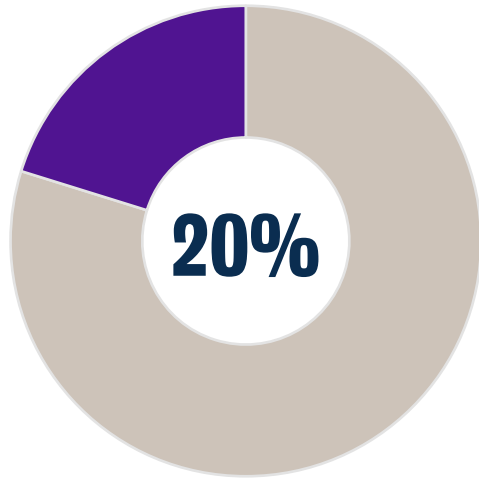
Voting intention if general election held tomorrow

Labour – 37%
Green Party – 18%
Liberal Democrat – 14%
Don't know – 8%
Conservative – 8%
SNP/Plaid Cymru – 5%
Would not vote – 5%
Would rather not say – 4%
Brexit Party – 2%
Other – *%

Voting intention if referendum on EU membership tomorrow

Remain – 83%
Leave – 10%
Don't know – 5%
Would not vote – 2%

The Libertarian



This minority group of students are less certain about whether they and others are free to express their views at their university. They feel confident – but not certain – that they are free to protest, yet are not convinced that their university is taking seriously the need to protect students from hatred so that everyone can enjoy an equal right to express themselves freely.

They are also unsure of whether university officials should have the right to ban people with extreme views from speaking on campus. While they largely feel free from discrimination, harm or hatred, they do not believe that it is a university's place to shield people from intolerant or offensive ideas. They feel that safe-space policies or safetyism in universities pose a threat to freedom of expression and oppose the suppression of demonstrations or rallies representing unpopular political views.

Key demographics

Gender

Male – 62%
Female – 38%

Voting intention if general election held tomorrow

Labour – 29%
Conservative – 18%
Liberal Democrat – 16%
Green Party – 11%
Brexit Party – 8%
Don't know – 6%
Would not vote – 5%
Would rather not say – 4%
Other – 2%
SNP/Plaid Cymru – 1%

Voting intention if referendum on EU membership tomorrow

Remain – 65%
Leave – 29%
Don't know – 4%
Would not vote – 2%

Characteristic 1: The chilling effect and uncomfortable ideas

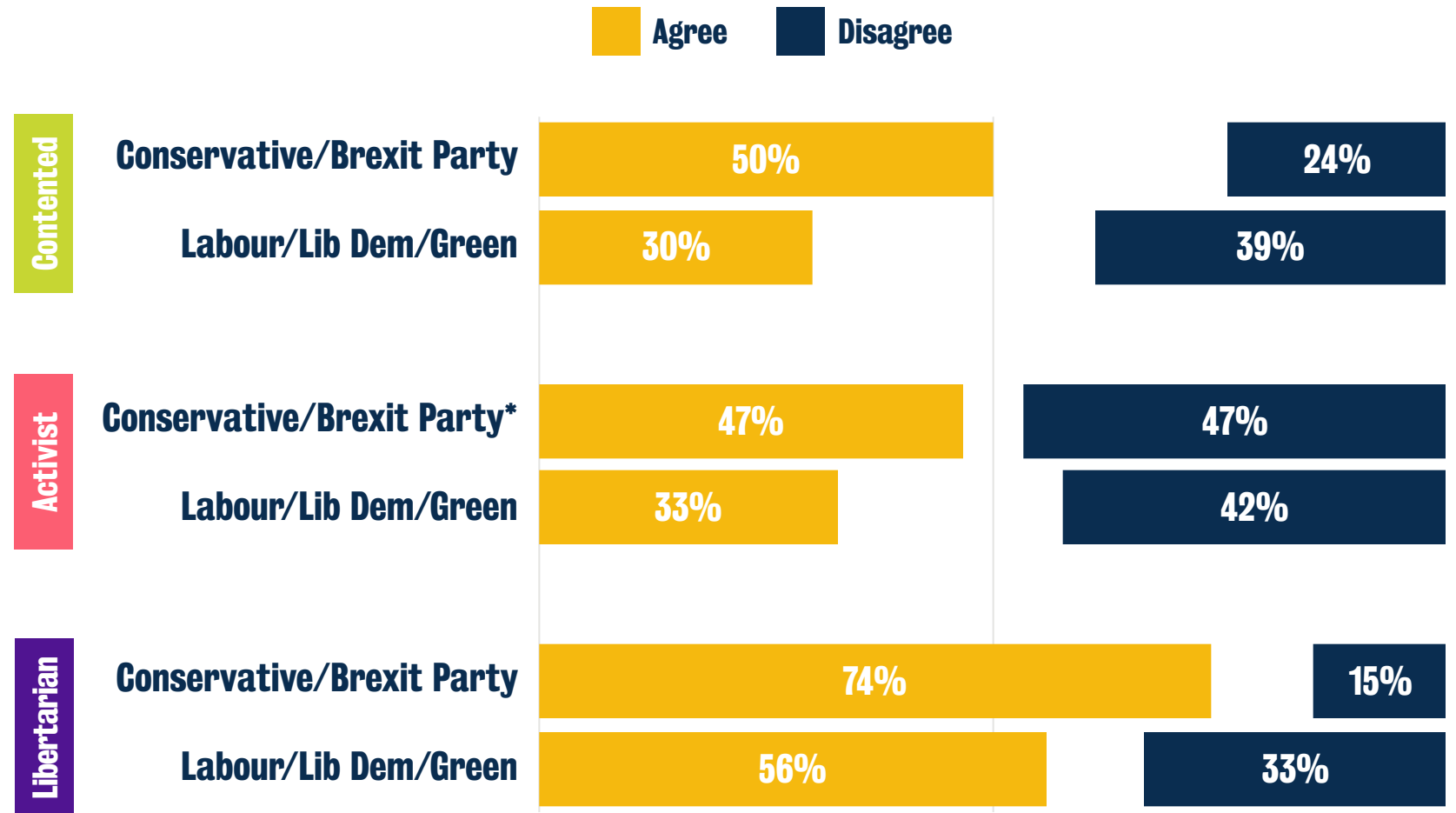
The political parties with which students identify clearly influences the degree to which they feel free expressing their views on campus. However, the extent to which this translates to two polarised groups is less clear, with perceptions of a chilling effect and preferences on being exposed to uncomfortable ideas cutting across partisan lines.



The role of political identity in creating a chilling effect on campus becomes less clear cut when viewed in the context of a student's overall disposition towards freedom of expression.

For example, students who are Libertarian in outlook are more inclined to think that their peers are reluctant to express their views because of their political preferences.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Students with conservative views are reluctant to express them at my university**

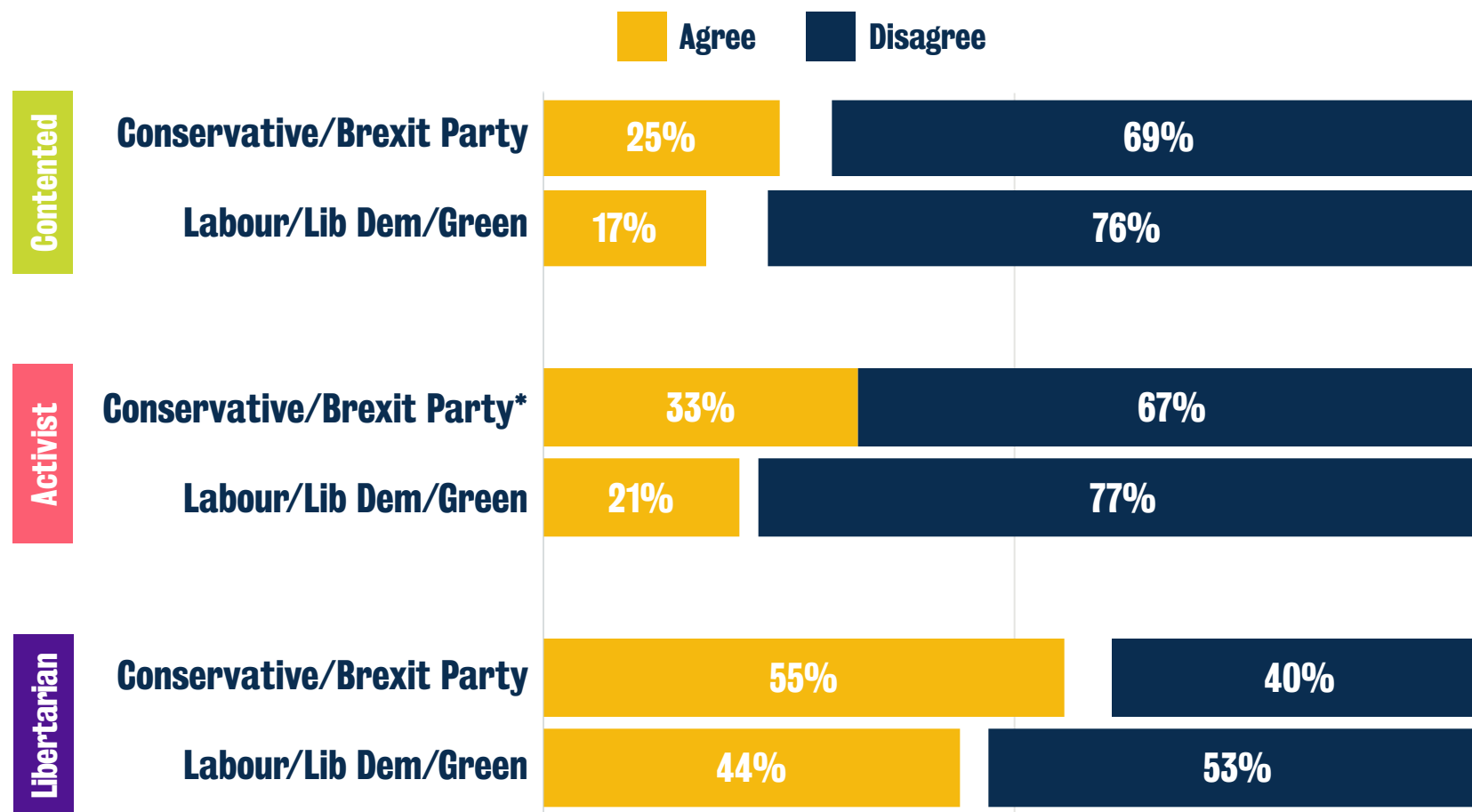


Base: For overall sample, 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Contented Conservative/Brexit Party, n=108; Contented Labour/Lib Dem/Green, n=708; Activist Conservative/Brexit Party, n=45; Activist Labour/Lib Dem/Green, n=314; Libertarian Conservative/Brexit Party, n=96; Libertarian Labour/Lib Dem/Green, n=213. Don't knows not shown. * Proportions should be treated with caution due to small base size (n=45).

On the other hand, both **Activist students and the Contented** are more confident in expressing their views, regardless of the political party they identify with.

The concern among Libertarian students about whether their university supports an open exchange of views therefore seems, at least in part, to transcend their political identity.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
I feel unable to express my views in my university because I'm scared of disagreeing with my peers**

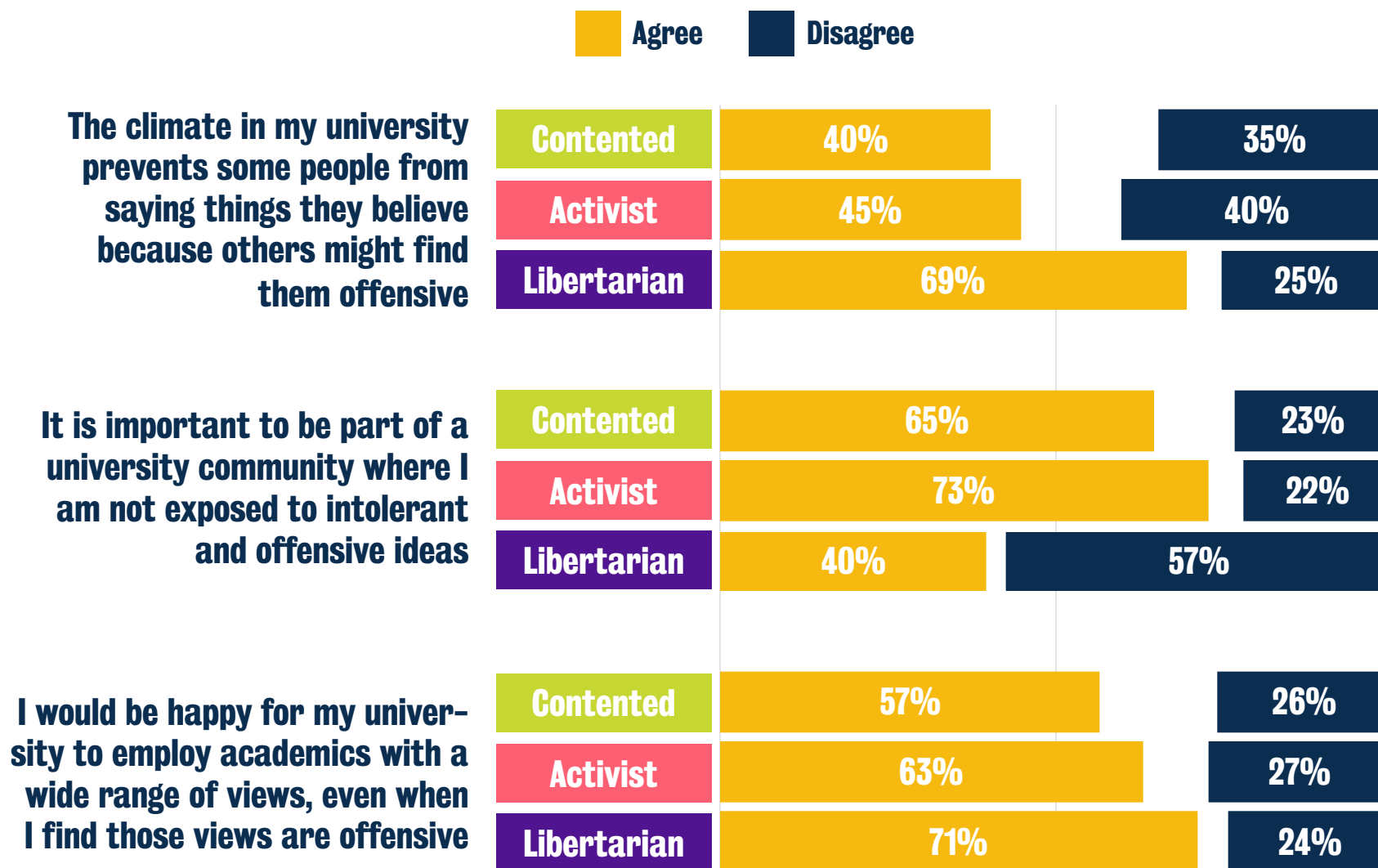


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Libertarians also prefer to be exposed to a wide range of opinions.

The majority of students in this group **feel it is not their university's role to shield them from views they might find offensive or intolerant.**

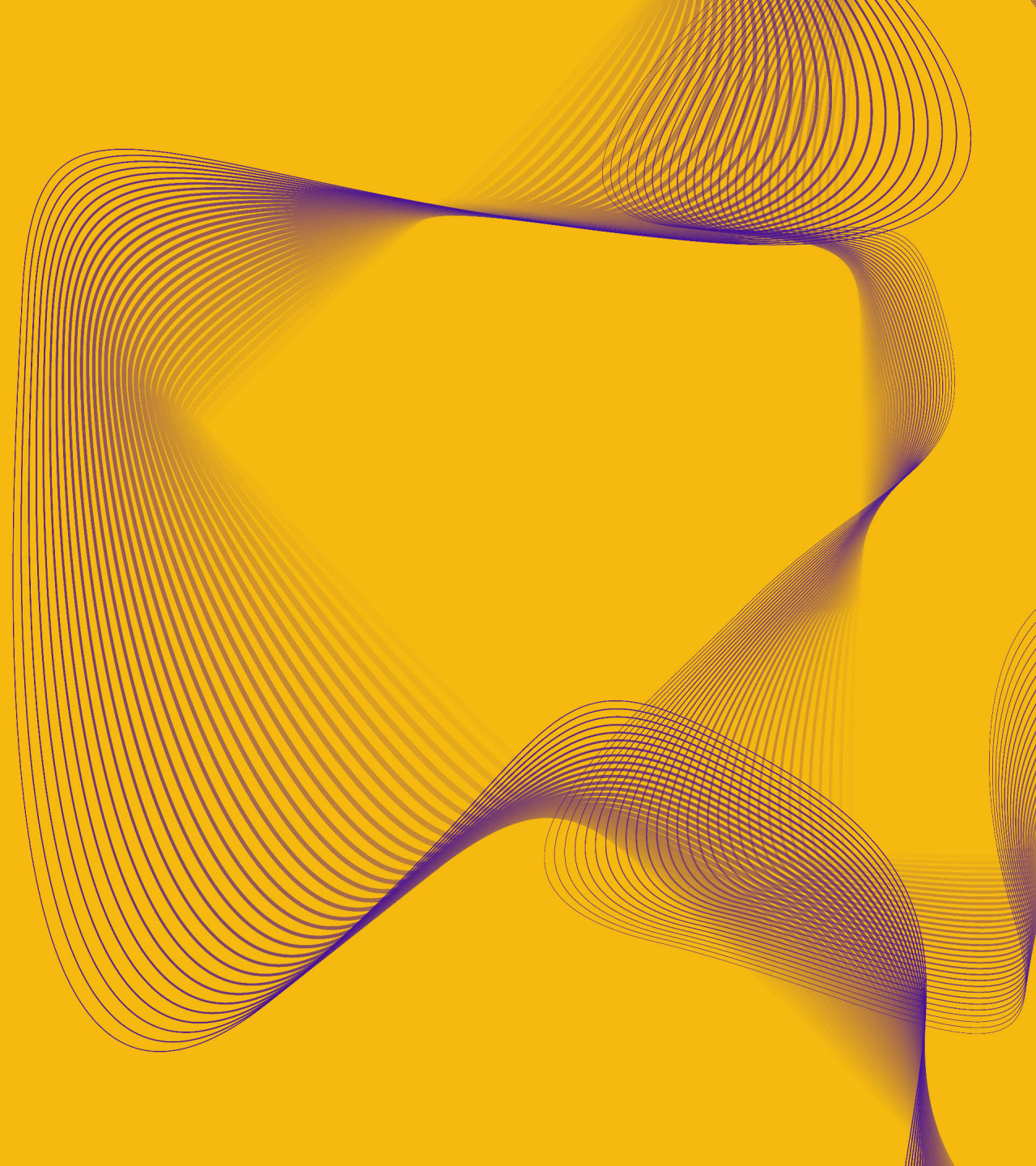
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Contented, n=1,214; Activist, n=501; Libertarian, n=438.

Characteristic 2: Trust in the institution

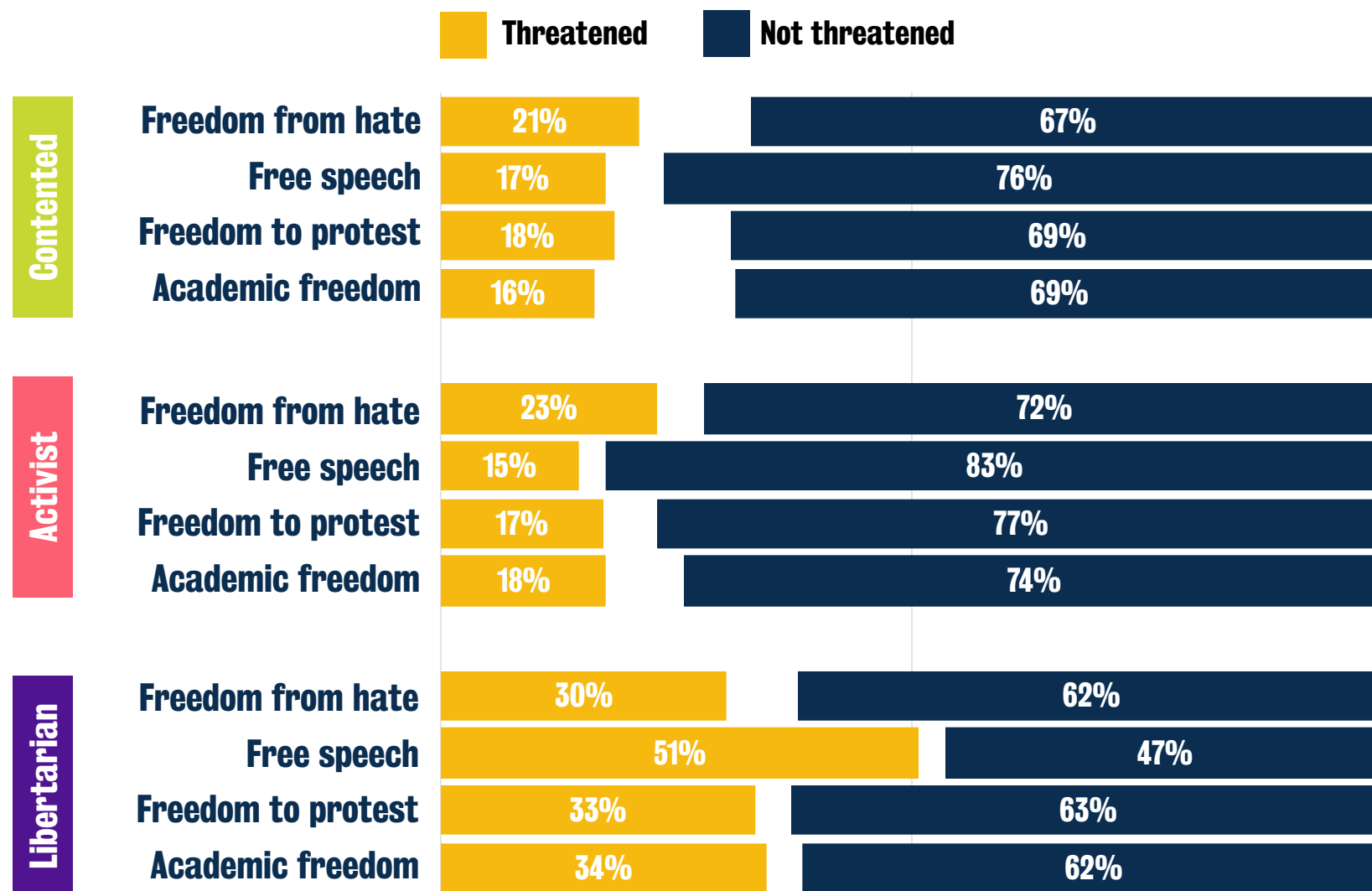
A distinguishing factor between each group is the degree to which they support intervention from their institution in matters relating to freedom of expression. We define three types of trust: implicit trust, earned trust and conditional trust.



Across all four freedoms, the **Contented** and the **Activist** believe their university is protecting freedom of expression.

On the other end of the spectrum, the **Libertarian** student is less certain – in particular, over half of Libertarian students feel that free speech is under threat in their university.

How threatened, if at all, do you think each of the following freedoms are in your university today?



Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Contented, n=1,214; Activist, n=501; Libertarian, n=438.

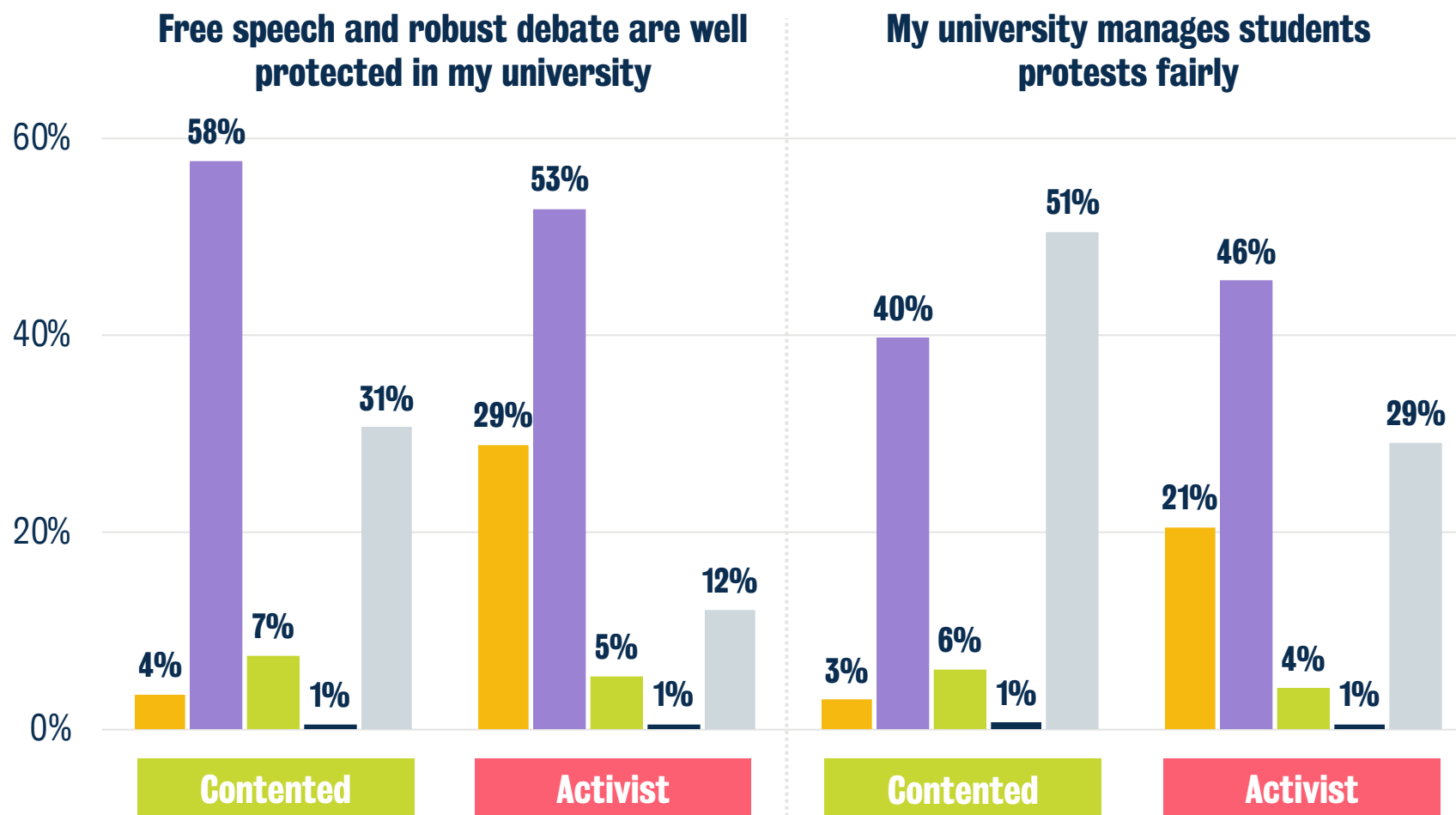
Activist students exhibit earned trust.

This may stem from exposure to mechanisms designed to protect freedom of expression, such as the right to protest.

The Contented show a more latent form of trust, taking it on faith that their institution is taking appropriate action, showing more ambiguity in their awareness of these mechanisms.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

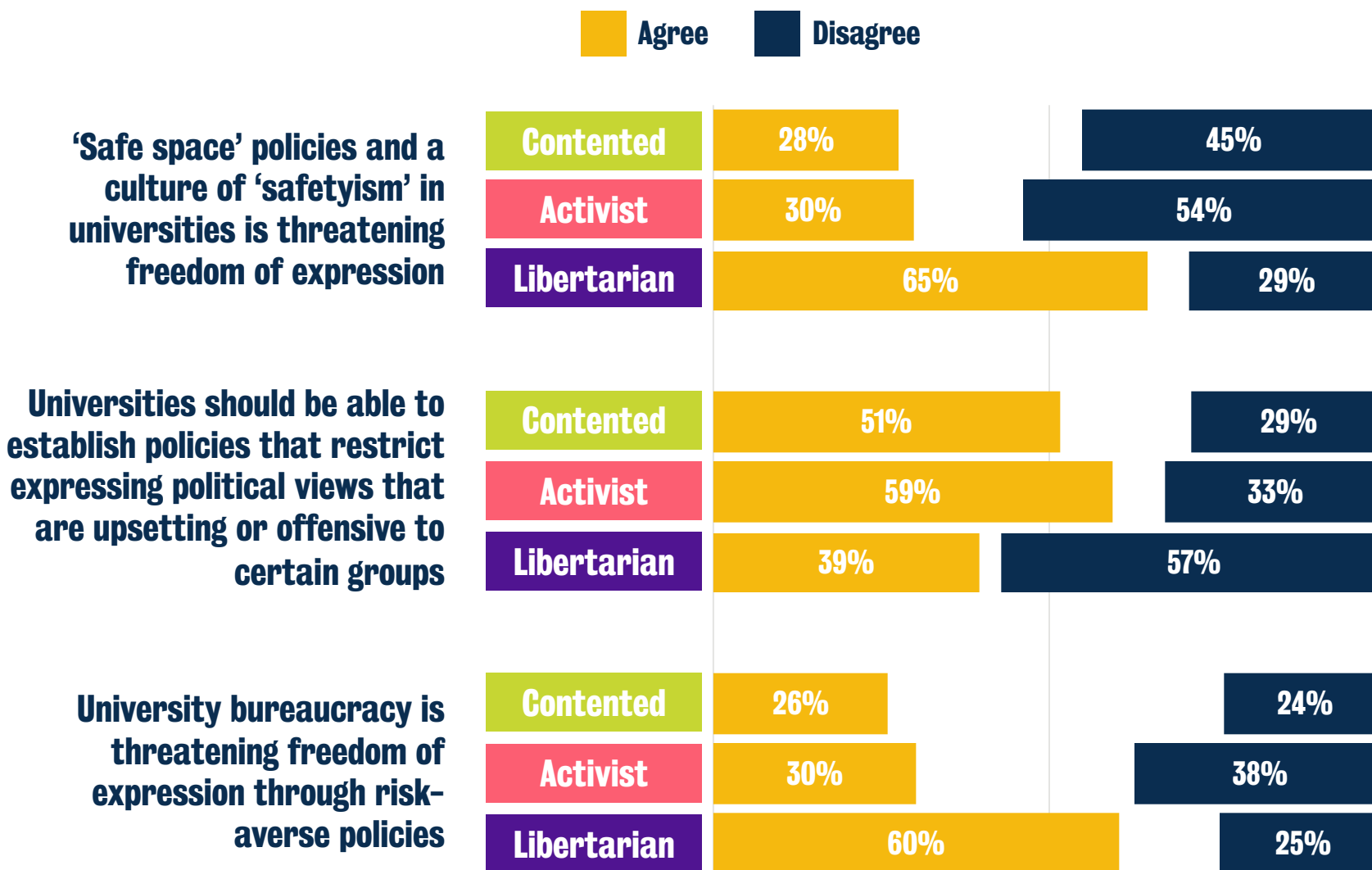


Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Contented, n=1,214; Activist, n=501.

Yet Libertarian students differ considerably in their attitude towards these measures, placing more **conditional trust** in their institution to intervene to protect the four freedoms.

They **resist intervention from their university in all but extreme cases**, such as protecting against hate speech and racism.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Contented, n=1,214; Activist, n=501; Libertarian, n=438.

Characteristic 3: Justifiable reactions

The third characteristic relates to the acts that students consider justifiable to counter offensive or intolerant viewpoints. This unites the Activist and Libertarian groups, who while mostly holding conflicting views on other measures, hold similar views towards violence and shouting down speakers.

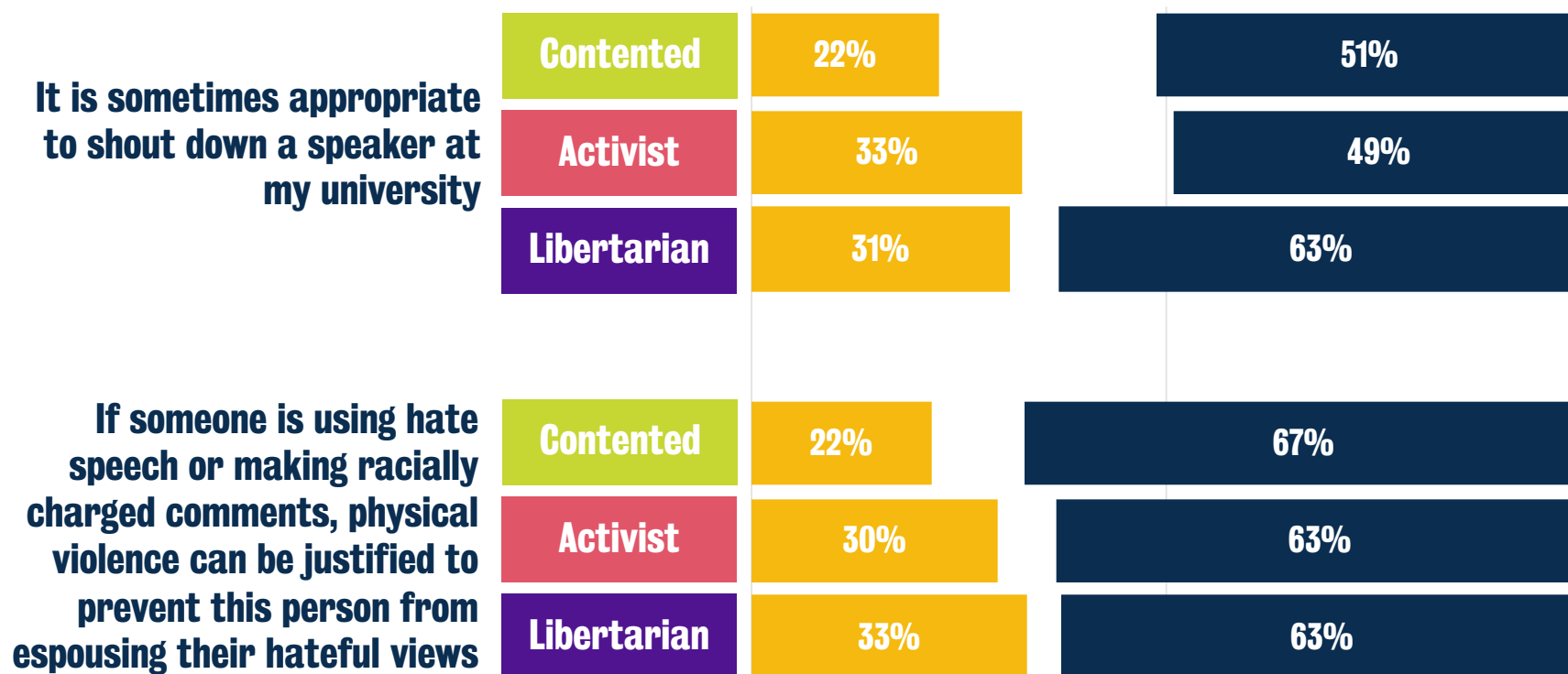


While most students do not support violence or “shouting down” speakers as methods to respond to incidents on campus, it is important to recognise the small, yet noteworthy differences between the Contented group and the Activists and Libertarians.

On both measures, these more engaged groups are more supportive of violent or aggressively disruptive action.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Agree Disagree

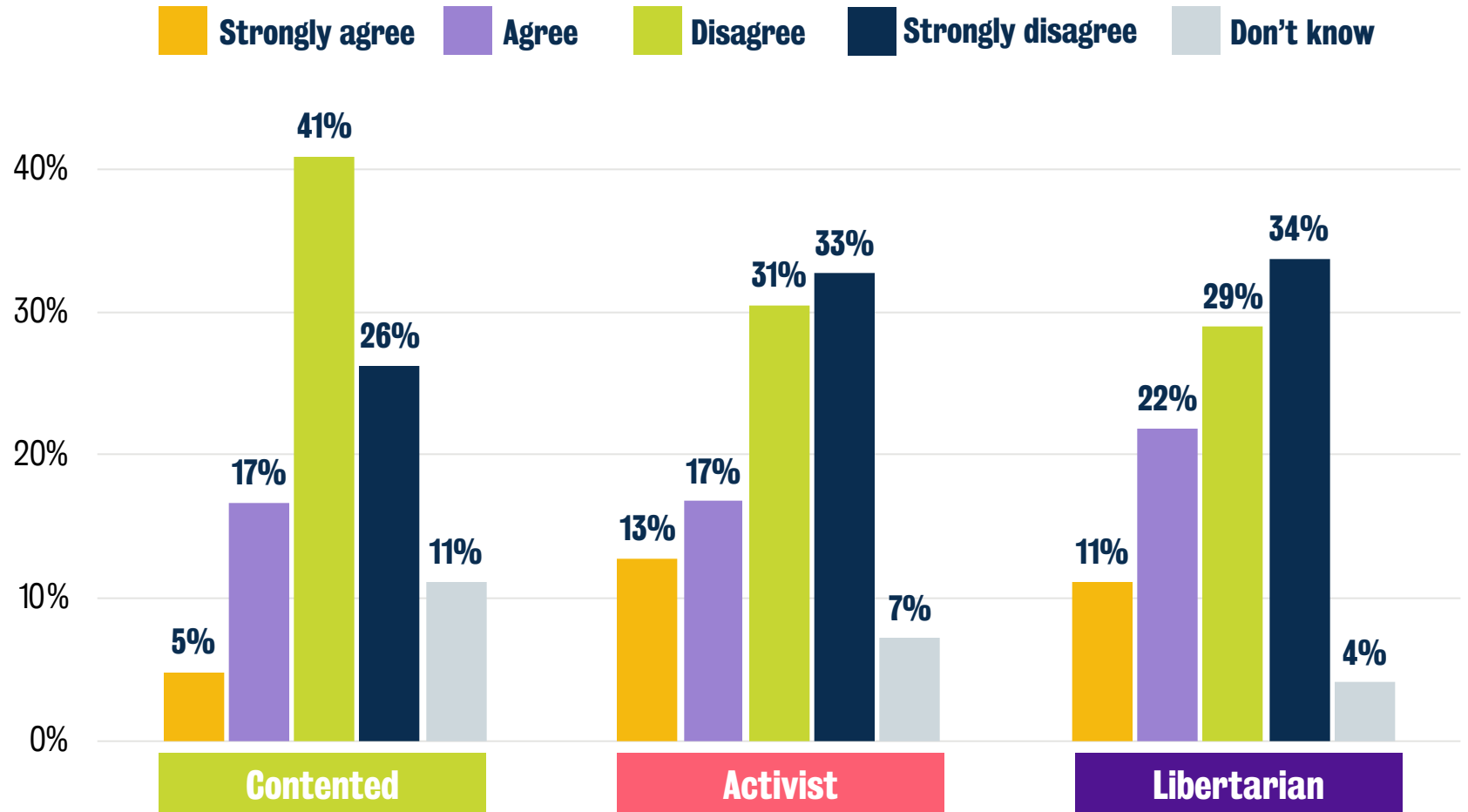


Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Contented, n=1,214; Activist, n=501; Libertarian, n=438.

When it comes to justifying physical violence, the Contented are much less certain – with the highest rate of “don’t knows”.

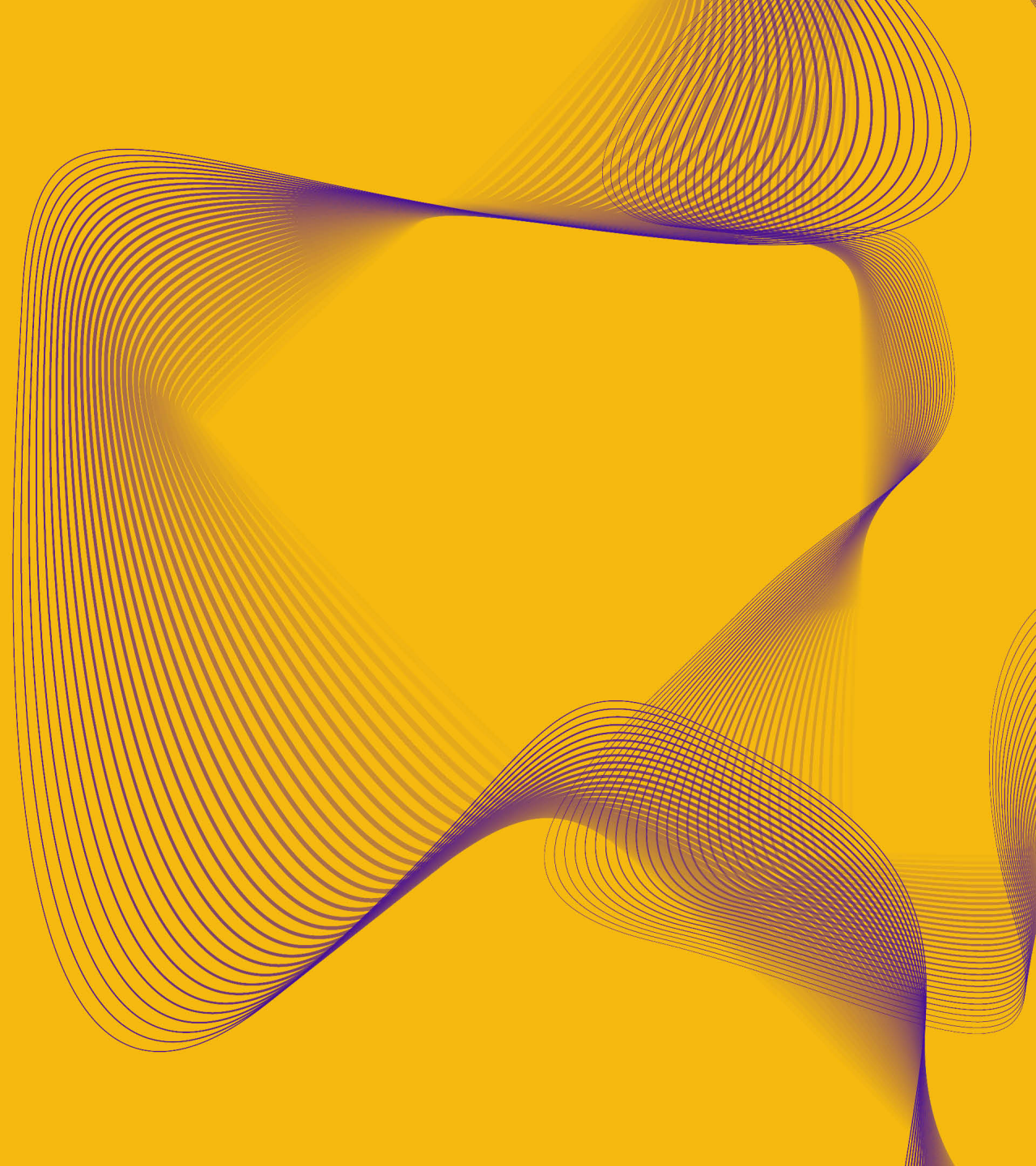
The proportion of Activist and Libertarian students who “strongly agree” is much higher. **Both show similar levels of support for more extreme forms of action, despite holding otherwise contradictory attitudes on freedom of expression.**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
If someone is using hate speech or making racially charged comments, physical violence can be justified to prevent this person from espousing their hateful views



Base: 2,153 survey responses from a representative sample of students enrolled at UK HEIs (29 July – 2 August 2019). Base sizes for subgroups are as follows: Contented, n=1,214; Activist, n=501; Libertarian, n=438.

Methodology and next steps



This study is based on some of the most comprehensive survey data for the UK on student attitudes towards freedom of expression. The total number of students surveyed (n=2,153) is larger than the [Higher Education Policy Institute's \(HEPI\) 2016 study](#), which surveyed 1,006 undergraduates using YouthSight's OpinionPanel Community, YouGov's [2018 survey of UK students](#) (n=1,004), and the more recent 2019 [Policy Exchange study](#) (n=505) using the Prolific Academic survey platform.

The larger sample size in our study allows a more sophisticated examination of student attitudes. That said, as with all research, there are important limitations that need to be acknowledged:

1. While the survey instrument contains many measures that have been validated in existing studies on freedom of expression, it was not formally piloted.
2. There are some instances where the base size used in our analysis falls below 100 (as indicated in the footnotes to relevant charts). We have nevertheless chosen to present these findings, as they help nuance our understanding of what underlies student attitudes; but note that the findings may not accurately reflect the opinion of the entire population.
3. The cluster descriptions have been derived from outputs of a two-step cluster analysis (see Technical Appendix). However, these descriptions have not been tested or iterated with the student population.

To address these limitations, we will be looking to undertake further research that will qualitatively unpick some of the issues identified in this report and supporting data (for example, what constitutes 'violence' or 'extreme views?'); repeat the survey over time, with increased participation to better understand the attitudinal groups in more depth; engage students in the co-production of findings and recommendations; and we will look to undertake similar surveys with academics and professional services staff, alongside students and the public.

Technical appendix



Developing the survey instrument

The student survey (YouthSight) was the main instrument, with a subset of questions asked in the general public survey (Ipsos MORI).

The survey instrument was developed by reviewing the limited number of studies and surveys on freedom of expression, consultations with colleagues and informed by our own experience. This resulted in the inclusion of seven comparative statements that are routinely used in surveys on freedom of expression in US universities, and a 15-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire, which enables the data to be interrogated by underlying moral profile.

The definition of freedom of expression uses the framing adopted by [King's College London](#), which was developed through extensive consultation with the Students' Union.

Timing of fieldwork

Fieldwork for the student survey was carried out between 29 July and 2 August 2019, and the general public survey between 26 and 30 July 2019.

Sample

The **student sample** for this research was selected from YouthSight's Student Panel. Based on HESA statistics, the sample comprises national representation of gender, course year, and university type. The data is weighted on these factors. After fieldwork, the sample collected was checked for quality, and any 'straight-liners' were removed from the final total. The total student sample size is 2,153 respondents.

The **general public sample** was selected from Ipsos MORI's online omnibus, which is representative of all adults aged 16-75 in Great Britain. The total general public sample size is 2,179 respondents.

Cluster analysis

We chose a two-step cluster analysis in order to identify group structures within the data. We chose this approach as it is better fitted for data in which the intended grouping may not be apparent nor is it previously known. This method was suitable for our purpose, as our aim was to produce a set of identities that correspond with freedom of expression as it is measured in each of the questions.

Sample demographics

| | Student sample (%, n=2,153) | Public sample (%, n=2,179) |
|------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 57 | 50 |
| Male | 43 | 50 |
| Other | * | - |
| Ethnicity | | |
| White | 73 | Not available |
| BAME | 25 | |
| Region | <i>Uni region</i> | <i>Home region</i> |
| North | 25 | 24 |
| Midlands | 26 | 26 |
| South | 24 | 23 |
| London | 10 | 14 |
| Wales | 4 | 5 |
| Scotland | 9 | 9 |
| Northern Ireland | 1 | - |
| None | 1 | - |

| | Student sample (%, n=2,153) | Public sample (%, n=2,179) |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Voting Intention | | |
| Conservative | 9 | 22 |
| Labour | 29 | 20 |
| Lib Dem | 15 | 17 |
| Brexit Party | 2 | 7 |
| Green Party | 14 | 5 |
| Other | 3 | 13 |
| Would not vote | 5 | - |
| Would rather not say | 5 9 | - |
| Don't know | | |
| EU referendum | <i>Preference:</i> | <i>Actual vote:</i> |
| Remain | 71 | 43 |
| Leave | 13 | 37 |
| Other | 7 | 20 |

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

1. Rising political polarisation is a threat to freedom of expression in the UK
2. In today's world, freedom of expression is more important than ever
3. 'Safe space' policies and a culture of 'safetyism' in universities is threatening freedom of expression
4. Young people today are less accepting of challenging and offensive speech than young people were in the past
5. University bureaucracy is threatening freedom of expression through risk-adverse policies
6. Free speech and robust debate are well protected in my university
7. Students avoid inviting controversial speakers to my university because of the difficulties in getting those events agreed
8. For every controversial speaker at my university, there should be another offering a different and opposing view
9. Students with conservative views are reluctant to express them at my university
10. Students with left-wing views are reluctant to express them at my university
11. Debates and discussions in my university are civil, respecting the rights and dignity of others
12. Live-streaming and recording conversations or events without the permission of speakers is unacceptable
13. I feel pressured to share my position on controversial topics in circumstances where I would prefer to keep my views to myself
14. The widespread use of social media has allowed people to express intolerant views

15. The widespread use of social media has allowed people to have robust but civil debates
16. The majority of academics in my university are left-wing
17. I would be happy for my university to employ academics with a wide range of views, even when I find those views offensive
18. My university manages student protests fairly
19. Demonstrations or rallies by unpopular political groups should be prohibited at my university
20. I feel unable to express my views in my university because I'm scared of disagreeing with my peers
21. Universities are taking seriously the need to protect students from hatred so that everyone can enjoy an equal right to express themselves freely
22. The climate in my university prevents some people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive
23. Universities should be able to establish policies that restrict expressing political views that are upsetting or offensive to certain groups
24. University officials have the right to ban persons with extreme views from speaking on campus
25. It is sometimes appropriate to shout down a speaker at my university
26. If someone is using hate speech or making racially charged comments, physical violence can be justified to prevent this person from espousing their hateful views
27. It is important to be part of a university community where I am not exposed to intolerant and offensive ideas

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Download the data:

<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.11108978>

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