

**SHEILA  
MCKECHNIE  
FOUNDATION**

**UNLEASHING  
SOCIAL POWER**

# **SMK Campaigner Survey 2022: results**

**[www.smk.org.uk](http://www.smk.org.uk)**

**Twitter: @SMKCampaigners**

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# About the results

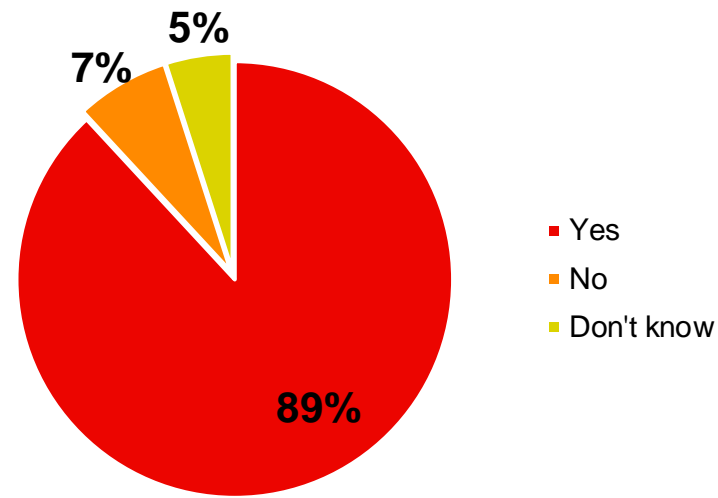
**Survey conducted between  
15 December 2022 and  
6 February 2023**

**123 respondents  
(breakdown in final section)**

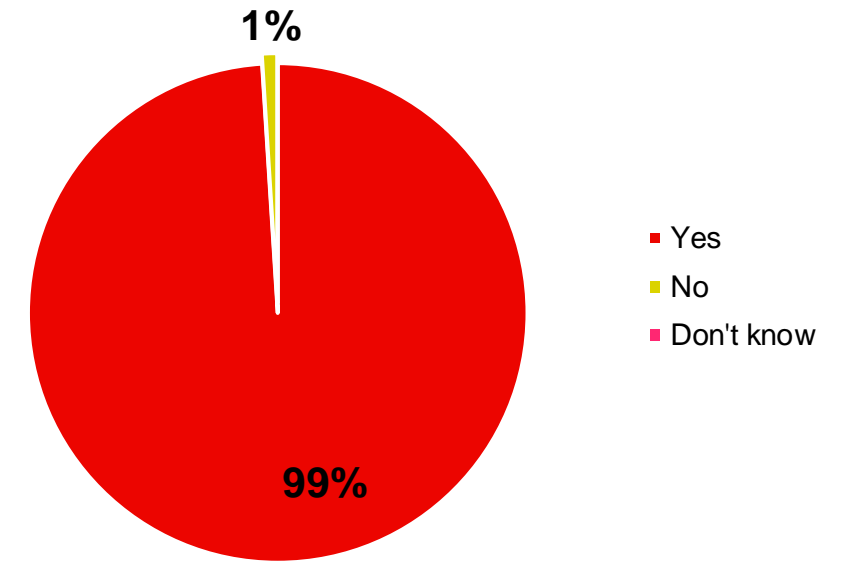
# Freedom to campaign

*NB Percentages may not total 100% as figures have been rounded to a whole number and where participants were able to select more than one answer*

**Does your organisation regard campaigning as a vital way to deliver its mission?**

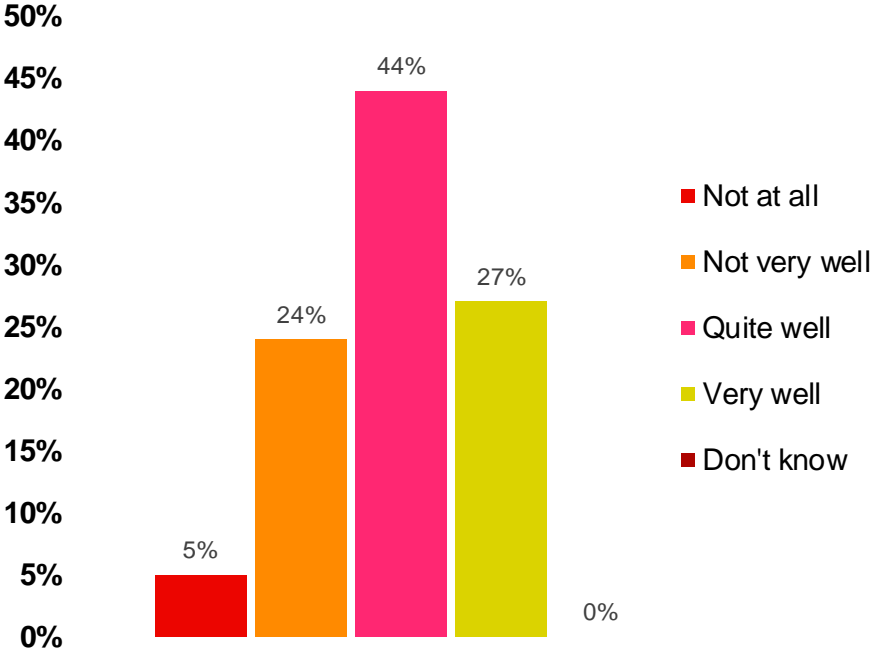


**Do you believe it's legitimate for civil society organisations, including charities, to campaign for changes to policy, law, attitudes and behaviours?**

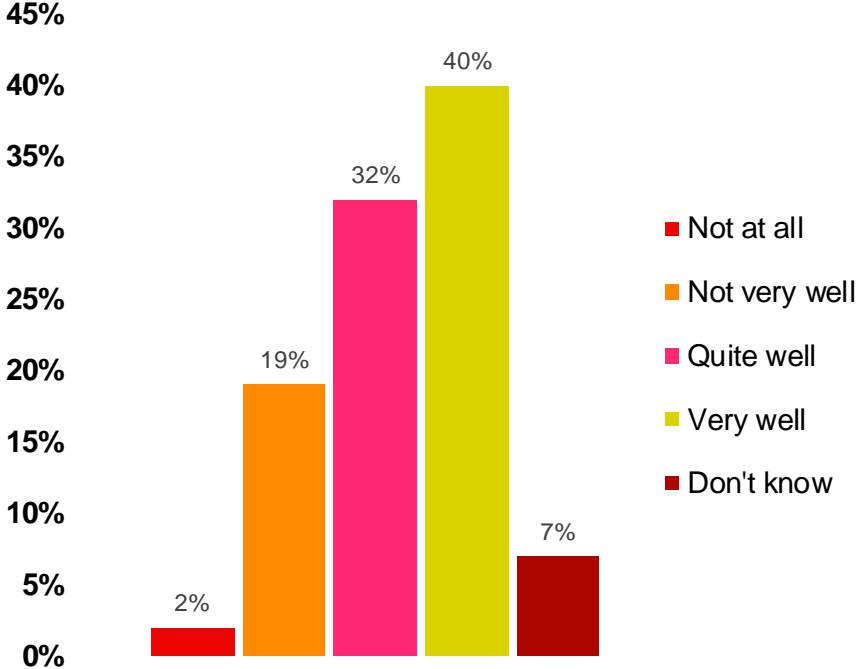


**Thinking about what is allowed by law or regulation on campaigning activity, e.g. the Lobbying Act or Charity Commission guidance, how far would you say it is understood by...**

**You**

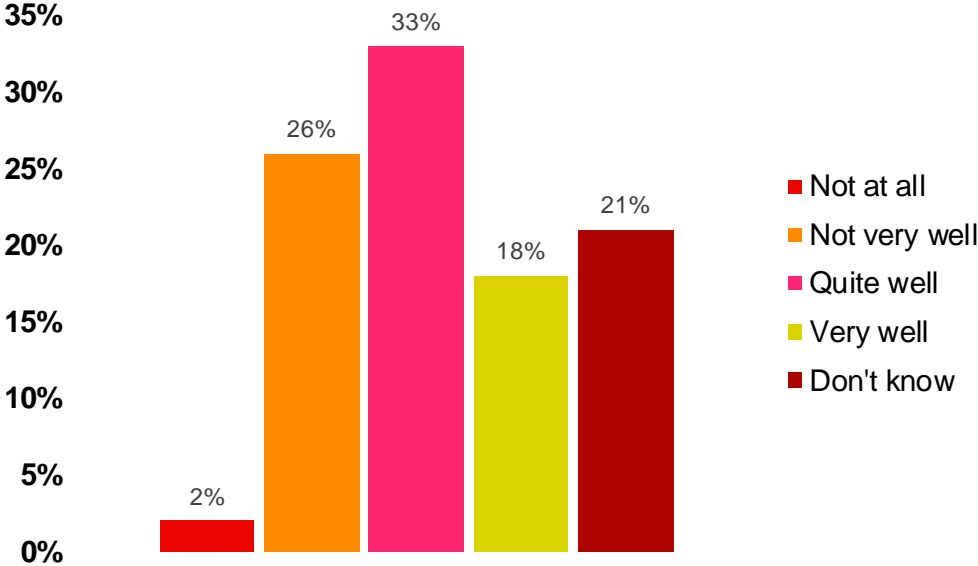


**Your senior management team**



Thinking about what is allowed by law or regulation on campaigning activity, e.g. the Lobbying Act or Charity Commission guidance, how far would you say it is understood by...

Your board/trustees



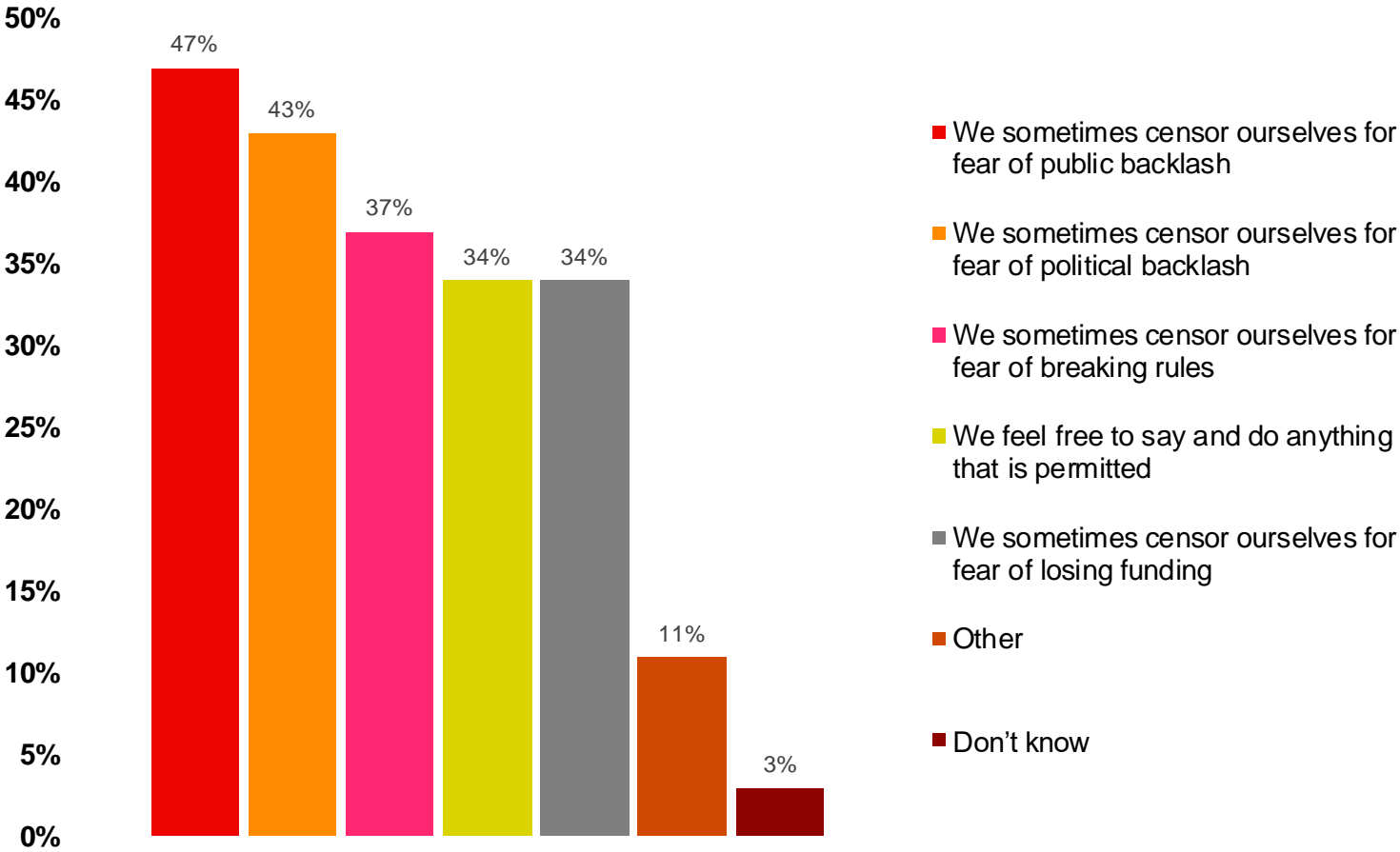
## Are there any areas that cause you or your organisation particular difficulty?

Top themes:

1. The regulatory environment and uncertainty in knowing what is and isn't allowed.  
*"At times there seems to be obfuscation from the regulator about what is the law and what they might like to be the law which is unhelpful."*
2. Specific pieces of legislation creating barriers to campaigning.  
*"The recent Policing Act changes, namely those around protest, have made an already risk-averse organisation even more risk-averse."*
3. The lack of public affairs potential under the current government.  
*"Lack of engagement from Conservative ministers and parliamentarians means that it looks as if our campaign work is not politically neutral, because it looks like we're only working with Labour."*



# Does your organisation feel free to campaign and speak out, as far as law and regulation allow?





**If you answered that you sometimes censor yourselves, can you tell us a bit about why?**

Top themes:

1. Fear of backlash (both public and political).

*“We have publicly backtracked on public statements due to fear of backlash from partners due to working relationships and funding.”*

2. To protect public affairs relationships.

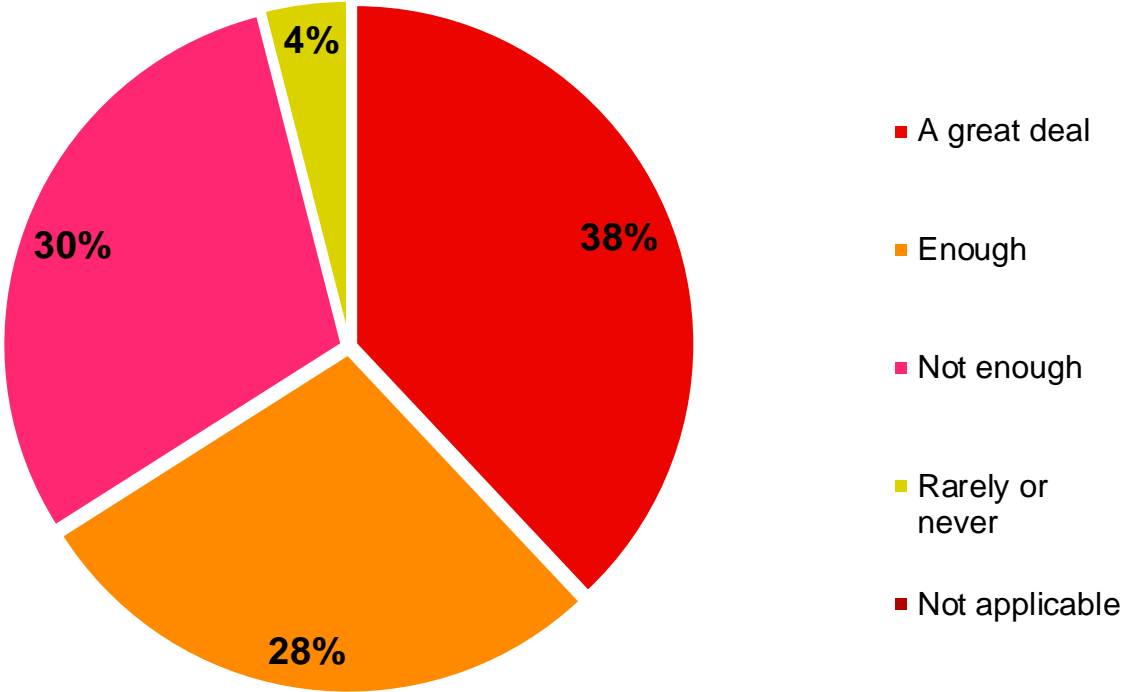
*“The organisation has worked hard to build relationships with political stakeholders and sometimes sees it as a risk to speak out before we've tried having direct conversations, as it could damage relationships”.*

3. Funding conditions.

*“We can't always openly declare the truth of a situation due to funding constraints and for fear of damaging public and political relationships.”*



**How much do you or your organisation talk publicly about the wider social or economic causes of the issues you work on?**



## If you answered 'not enough' or 'rarely or never', why do you think that is?

Top themes:

1. Lack of capacity

*“There’s limited time and resource to agree on the wording, staff not emboldened to speak to this.”*

2. Lack of evidence and the complexity of understanding.

*“No one is interested in looking at the bigger picture and there is a lack of evidence base to back up what we know.”*

3. Fear of falling outside their remit or appearing political.

*“Not wishing to comment on matters that could be seen as 'political', we are a charity that focuses on health yet we don't talk about wider determinants of health (eg. poverty) often as we fear it will put off supporters and make the government less likely to listen.”*

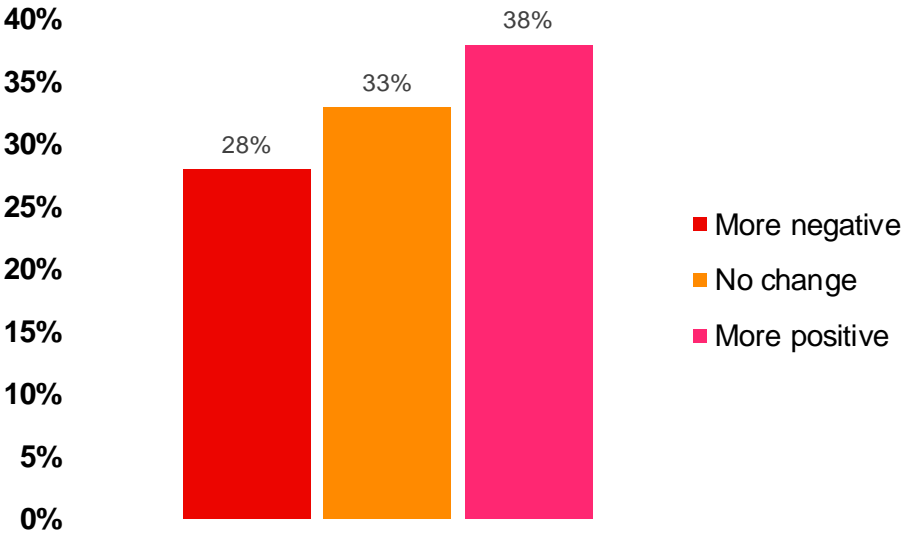


# Attitudes to campaigning

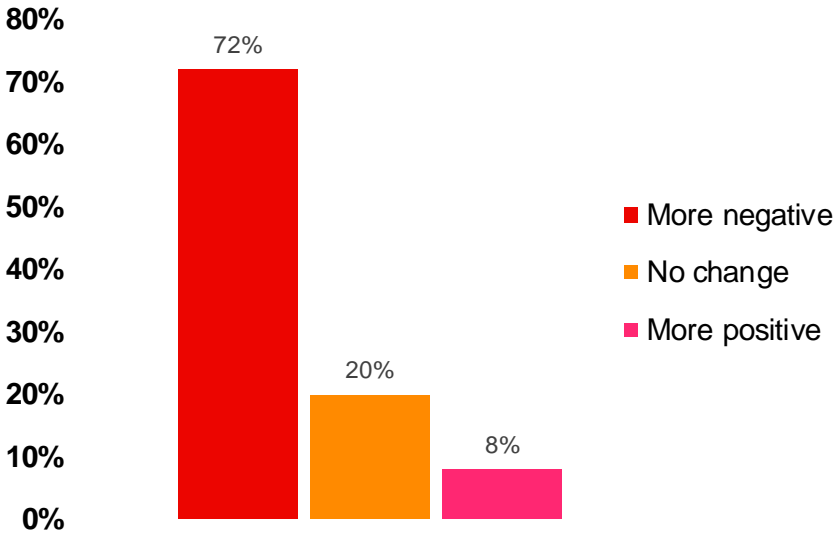
*NB Percentages may not total 100% as figures have been rounded to a whole number and where participants were able to select more than one answer*

# In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning amongst...?

## The public

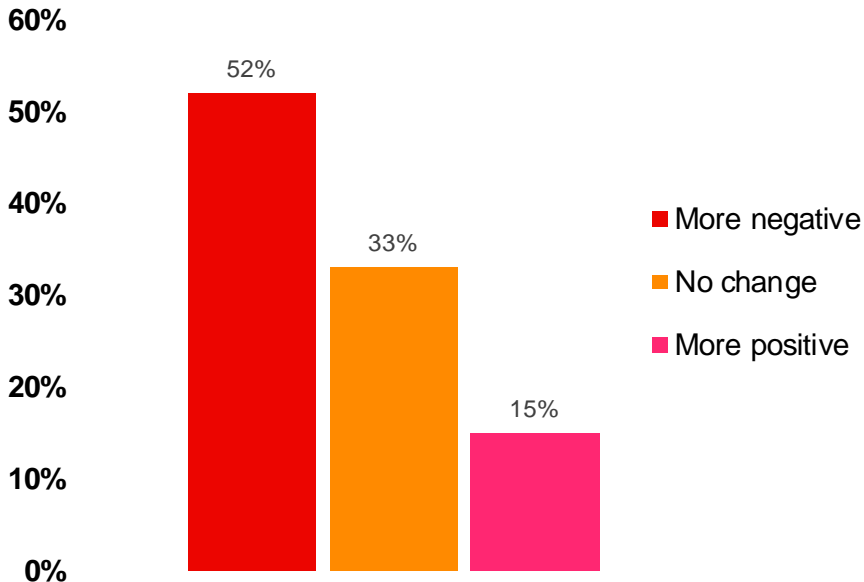


## Politicians

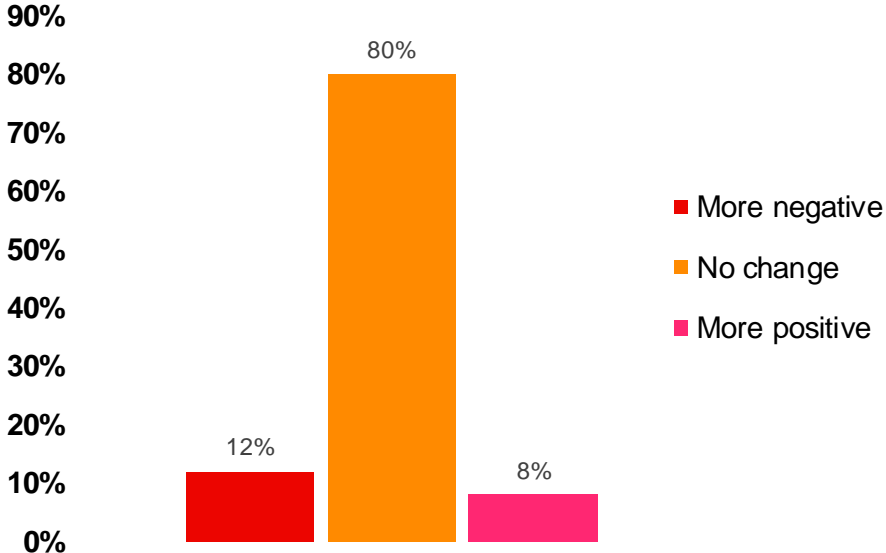


# In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning amongst...?

### Media

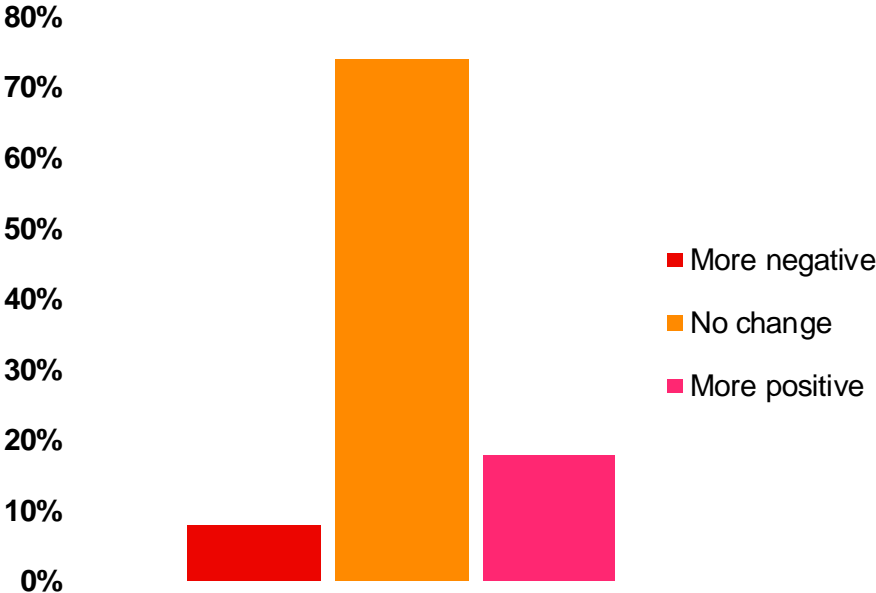


### Funders (public)

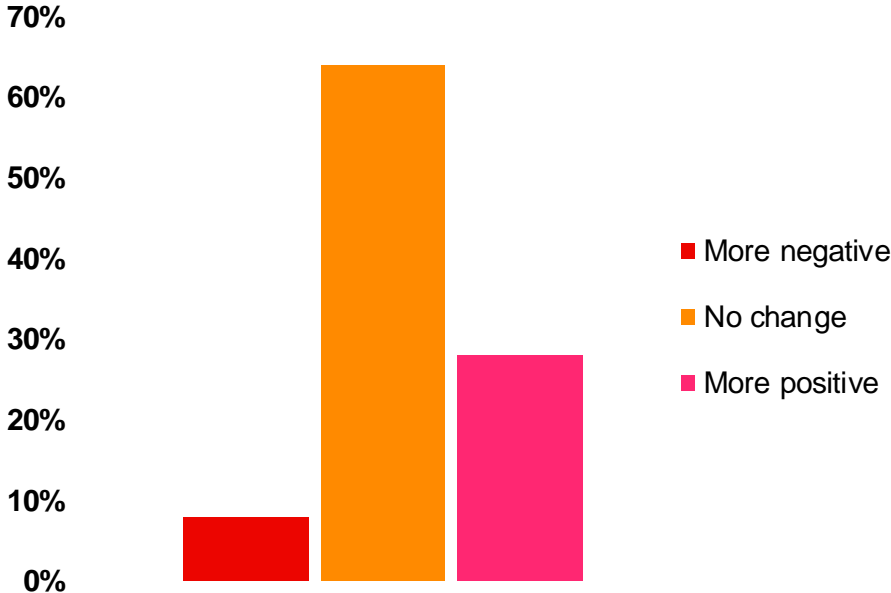


# In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning amongst...?

## Funders (independent)

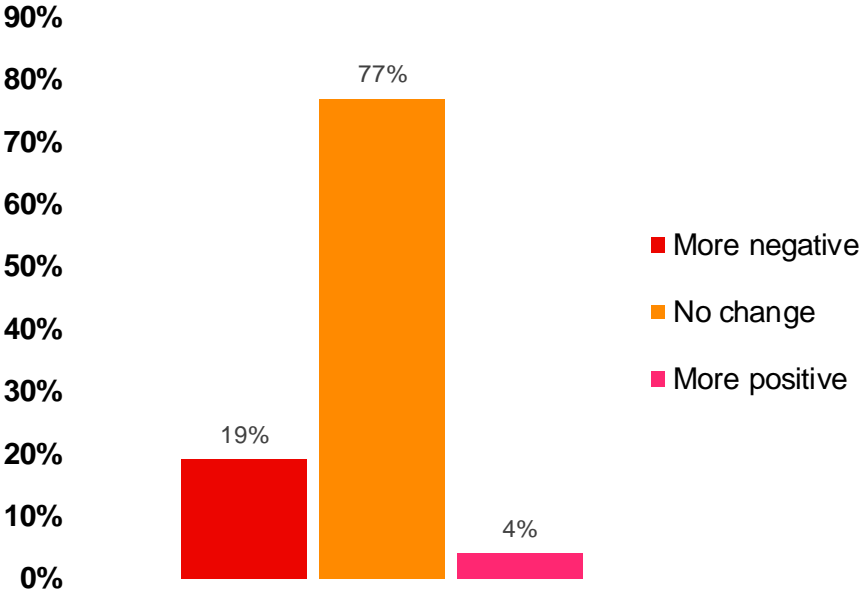


## Board & senior leaders

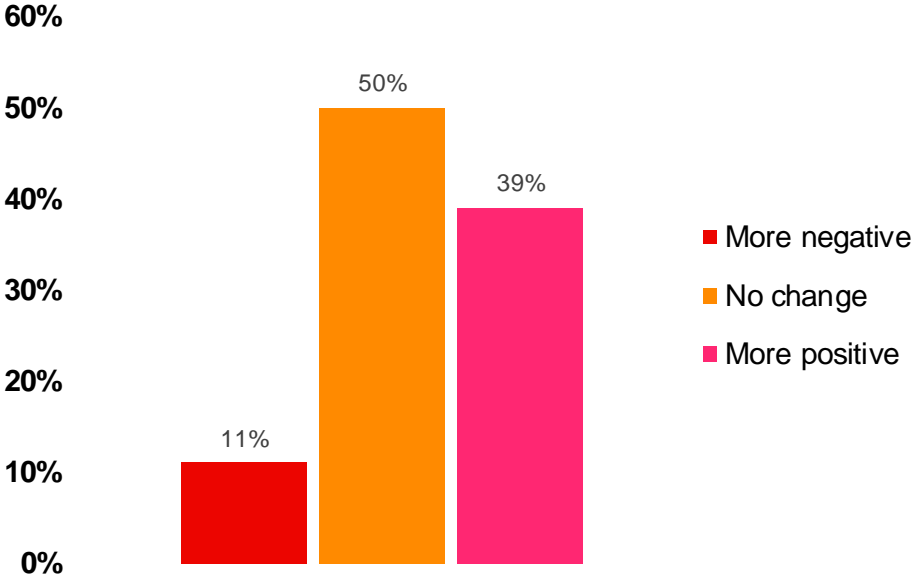


# In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning amongst...?

## Charity regulators (Charity Commissions or Scottish Charity Regulator)

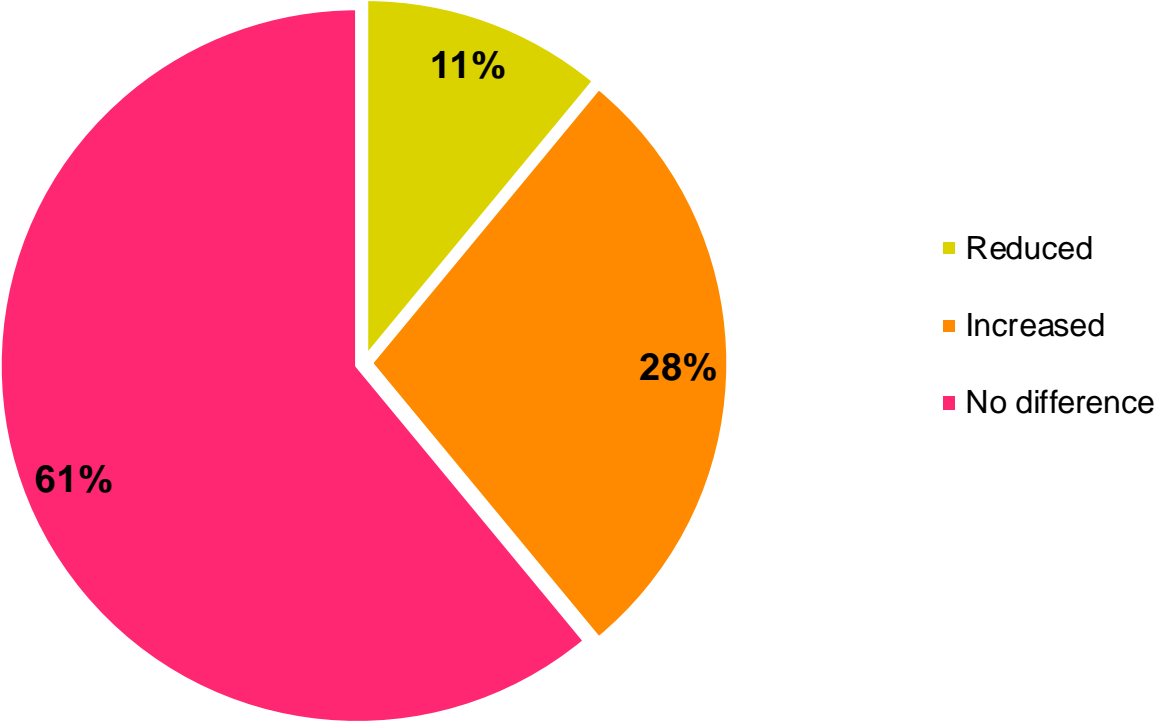


## Civil society more broadly

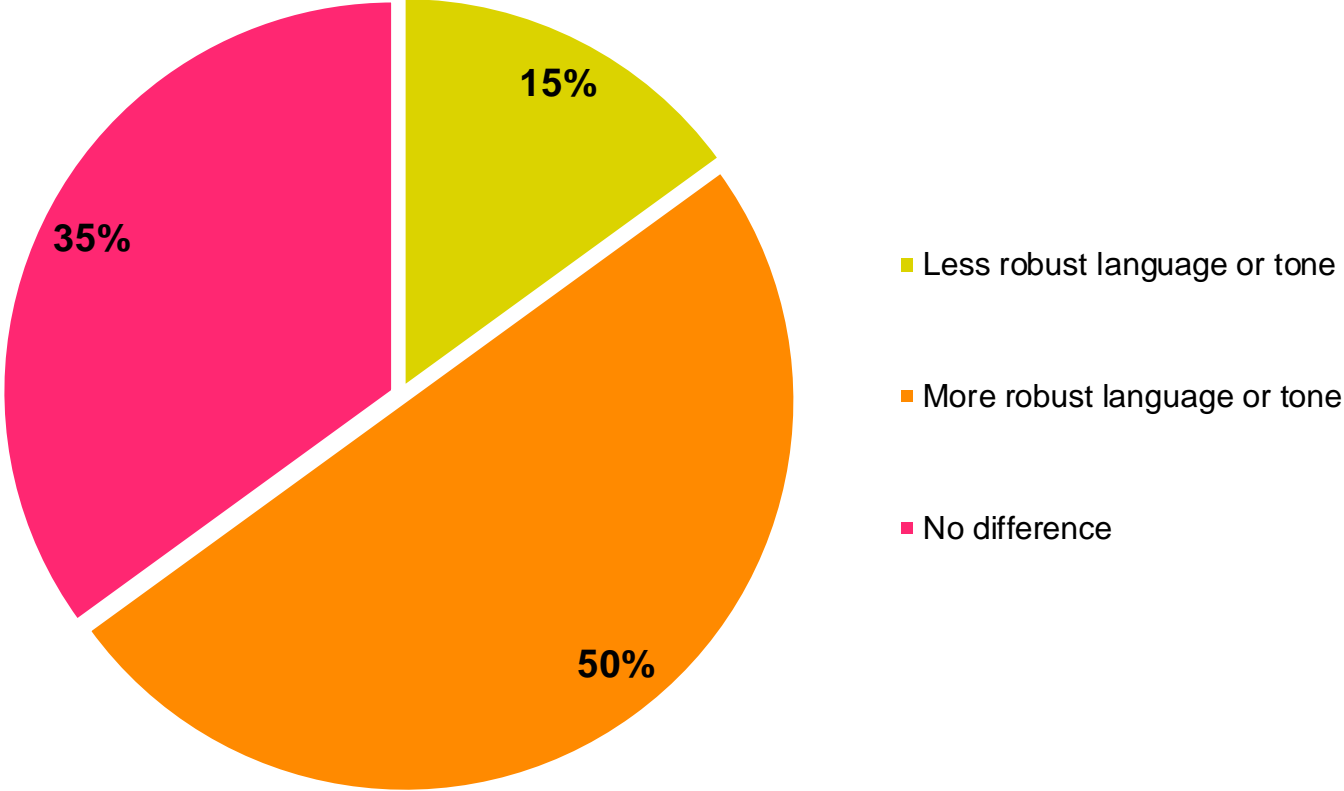




**Thinking about the past year, how have attitudes to campaigning affected the AMOUNT of campaigning your organisation does?**

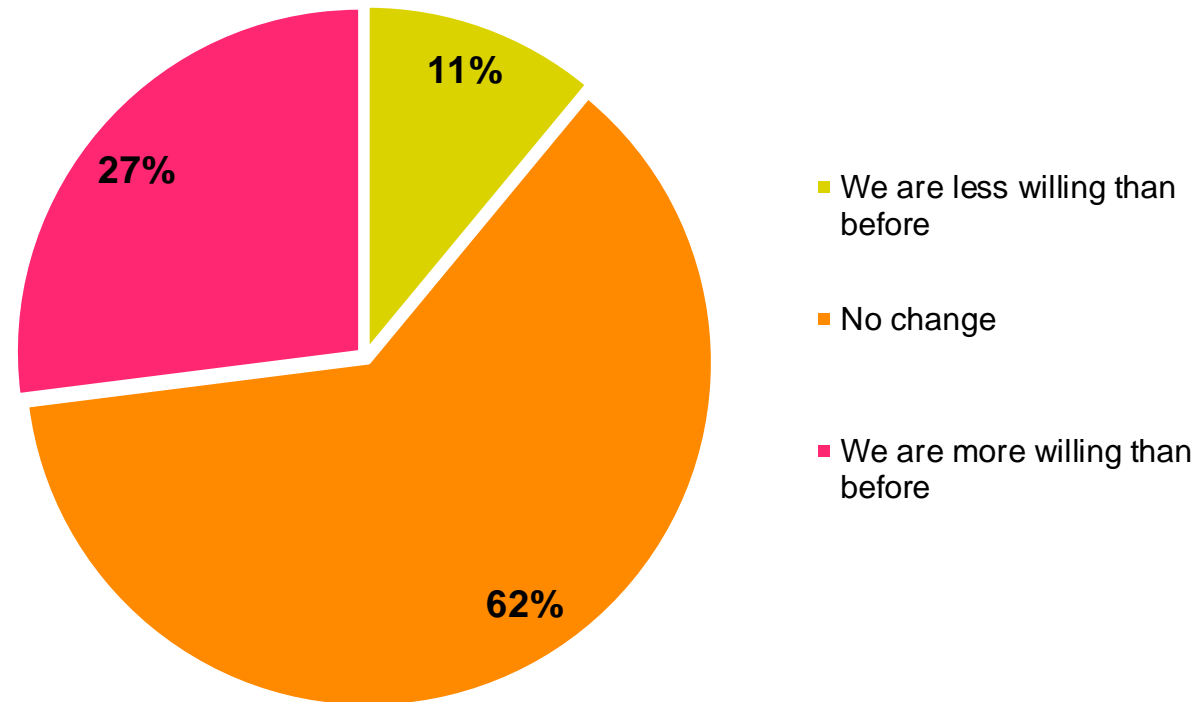


**Thinking about the past year, how have attitudes to campaigning affected the TONE of your campaigns?**

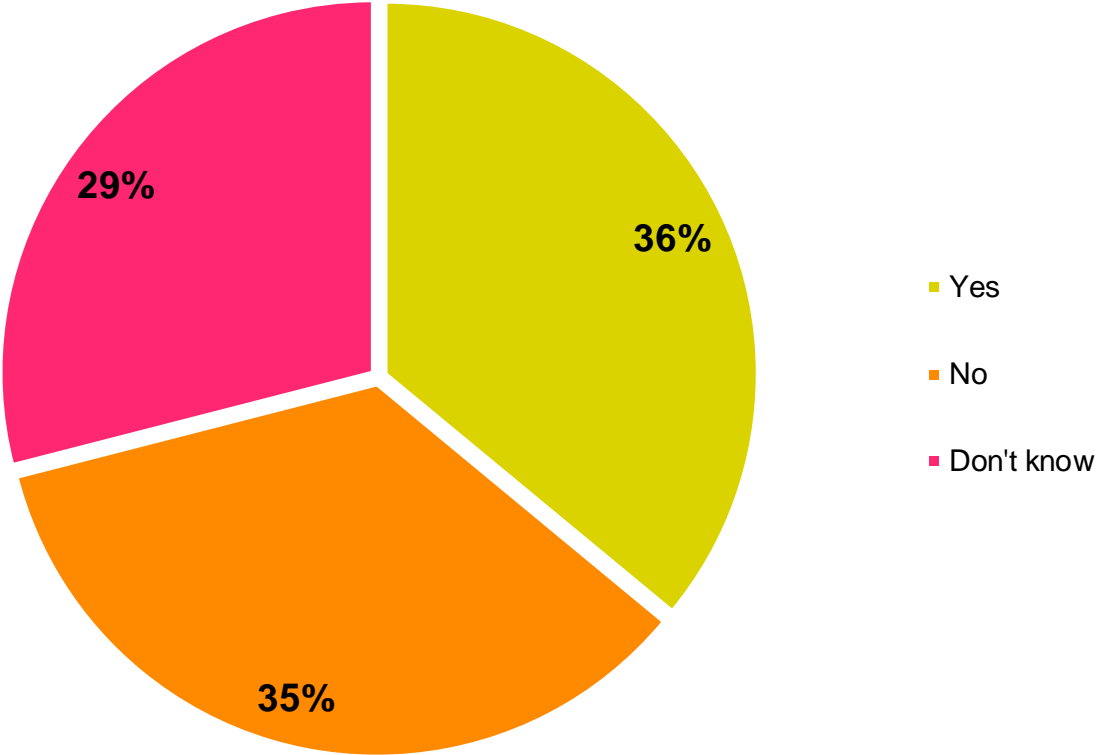


**There have been a number of notable attacks by media outlets on charities that have expressed views, published analyses or delivered services that some don't agree with (e.g., RSPB, the National Trust)**

**Have these media stories affected you or your organisation's willingness to speak out or act in ways that some might disagree with?**



**When organisations have been attacked, do you think the sector has been good at showing solidarity?**



## Is there anything you would like to add about how your organisation, or wider civil society, has reacted to these stories?

Top themes:

1. More solidarity needs to be shown by the sector.

*“I think wider civil society needs to do more to show solidarity with organisations under attack, but can be worried about doing so, especially if the attack is framed as poor governance instead of politically motivated campaigning.”*

2. Can be hard to step into actions of solidarity.

*“Organisations could have been more vocally supportive, but I think they may have been worried about any backlash.”*

3. Shows of solidarity and its unifying effect.

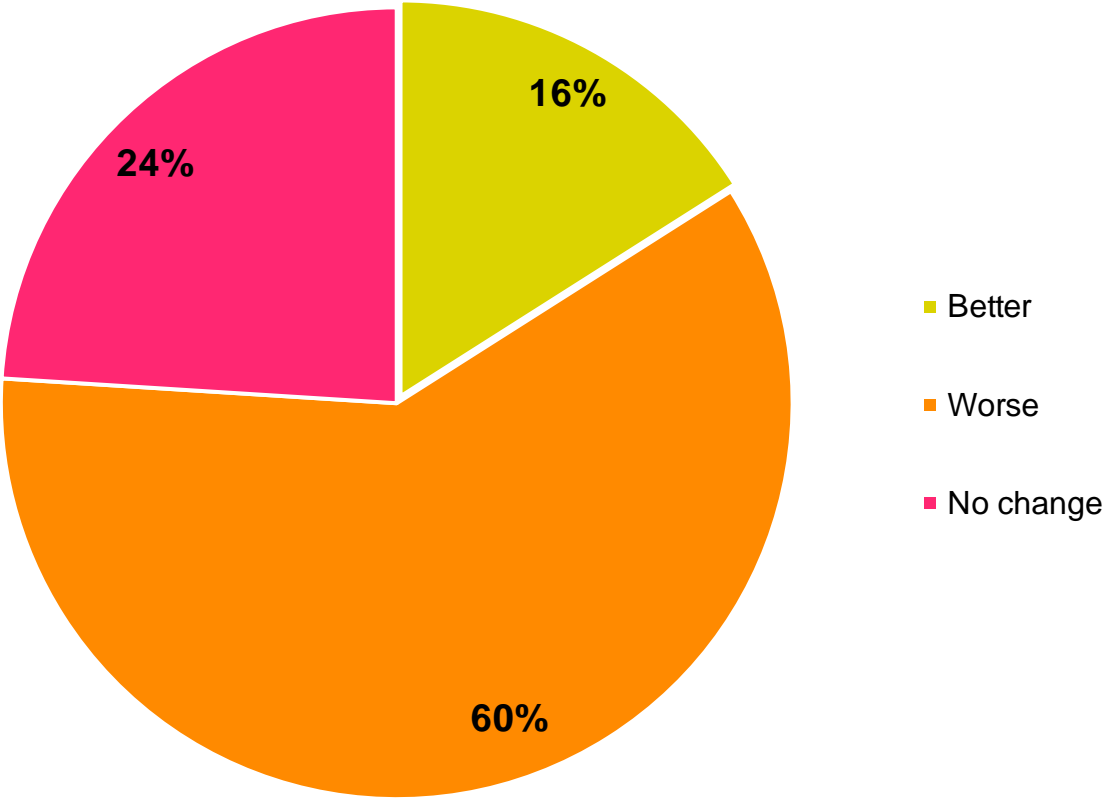
*“I have found that these attacks have actually united certain aspects of civil society e.g. charities coming together, and there's been a strong sense within our charity about the need to take a stand for what we believe in when it's under attack.”*

4. Solidarity might often be confined to similar issues.

*“It would seem odd for my charity which is medical to comment on the National Trust.”*



**Overall, have things got better or worse in the last year for campaigning?**



**Whether you answered 'worse', 'better' or 'no change' to the previous question, tell us a bit about why or how?**

Top themes for 'better':

1. Renewed willingness and support of campaigning.

*“It feels like there is more openness to campaigns. This may be because of the cuts in so many services which seems to have resulted in empathy and understanding along with more clarity on the good work charities and other organisations can provide, particularly for community work.”*

2. The Overton Window is shifting.

*“The public seem slightly more ready to listen and engage in campaigns due to a general sense of things being unjust.”*



## Whether you answered 'worse', 'better' or 'no change' to the previous question, tell us a bit about why or how?

Top themes for 'worse':

1. The most frequent answer for those who said things were getting worse cited government hostility and a clampdown on traditional campaigning tactics.
2. Many spoke specifically about repressive legislation with changes to protesting laws being particularly prominent.

*“The government's crackdown on campaigning is deeply alarming! The legislation attacking the right to protest, the charity commission's new advice on charity campaigning, and general comments from MPs is just really concerning and part of a wider drive to silence civil society and restore charities to this backwards idea of just being a service provider for a withdrawing state, without any actual campaigning response being allowed.”*

3. Campaigners also highlighted the continued negative rhetoric used by politicians and the media.



*“I think charities are less willing to speak out and put their voice out there and take risks for fear of being attacked publicly or this impacting their reputation, funding etc.”*



**Whether you answered 'worse', 'better' or 'no change' to the previous question, tell us a bit about why or how?**

Those who answered “no change” mentioned that a positive was the support from the public, but often still made reference to a challenging political environment.

*“Public support for pay strikes is encouraging.”*

*“The environment feels increasingly hostile in terms of the Government and parts of the media, but it also feels like there is increased willingness to campaign, and more appetite from the public.”*

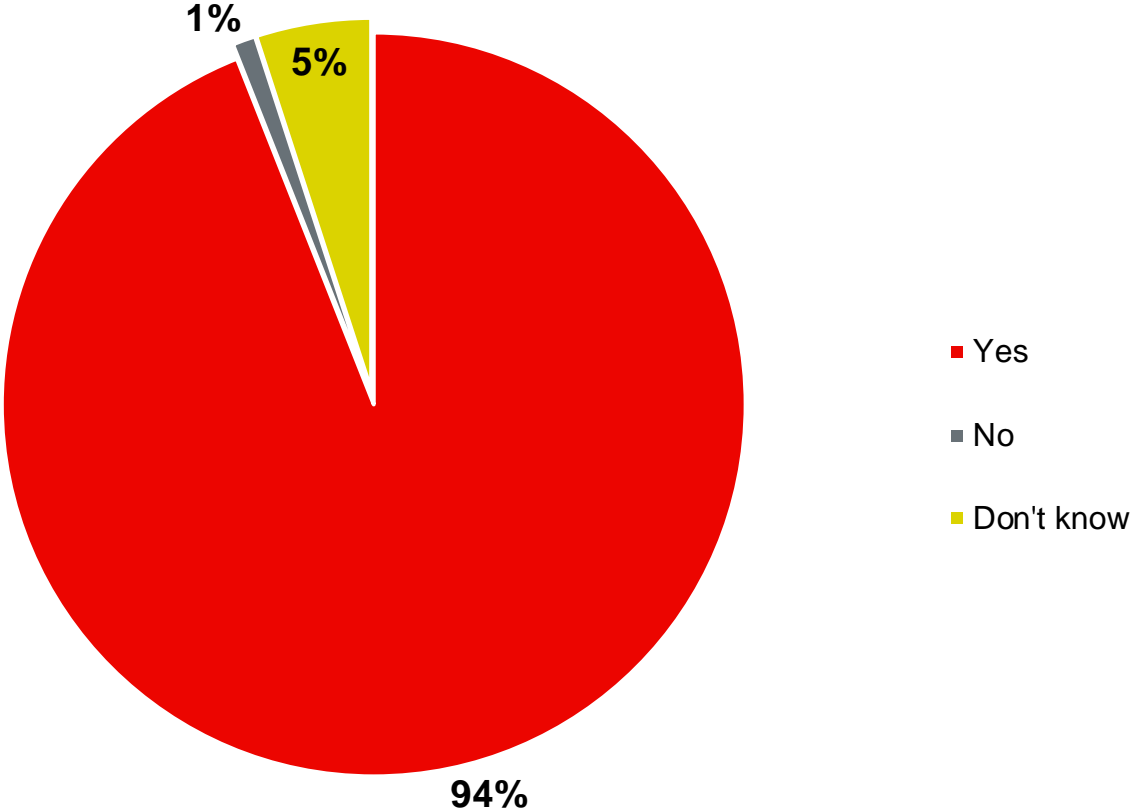
*“It's just hard to say - we're focused on our issues. The political context has been nigh on impossible however.”*



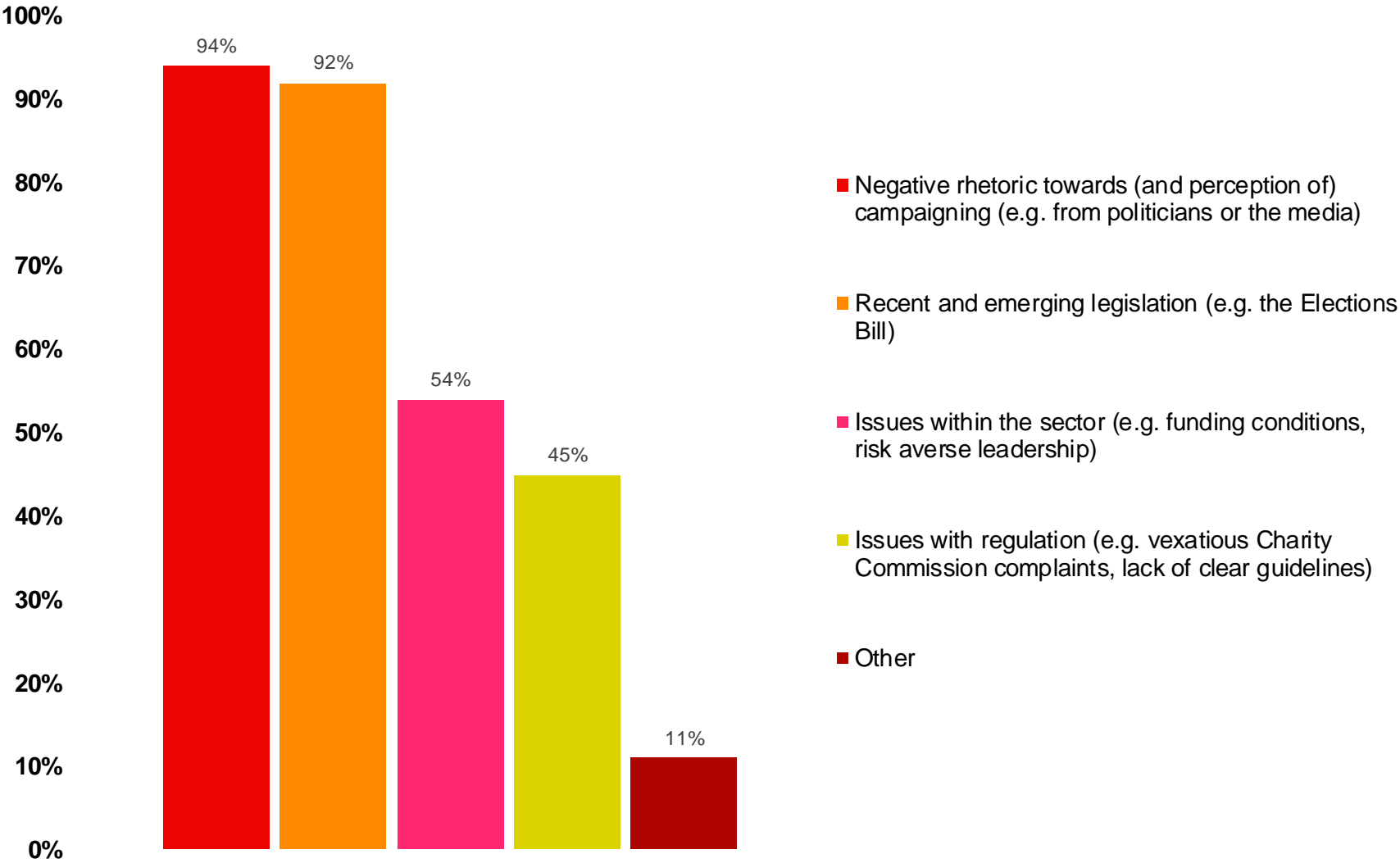
# The Campaigning Environment

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**Do you think that there are threats to the freedom to organise, contribute to public debate, influence political decisions, or protest (otherwise called 'civic space')?**



# What factors do you think are threatening our civic space?

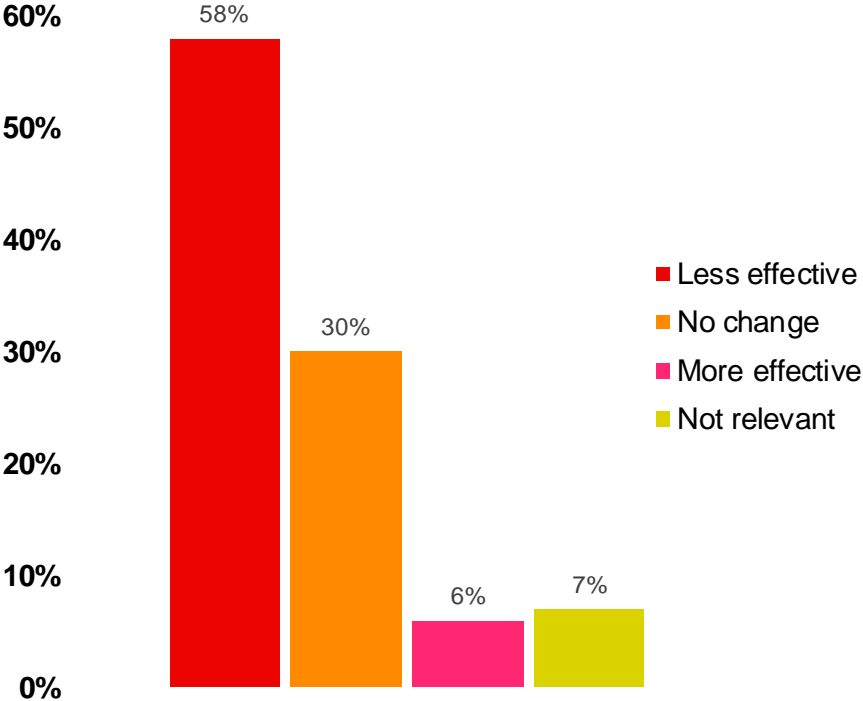


# Tactics & trends

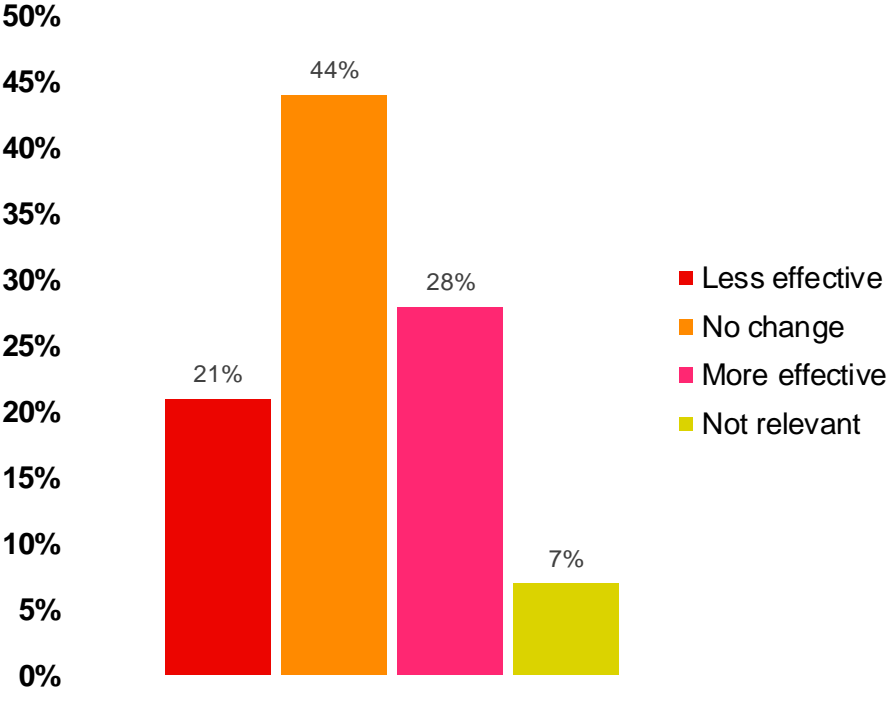
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# Over the past year, do you feel the following types of activity have become more or less effective in influencing UK Government decision-making?

## Engaging with ministers

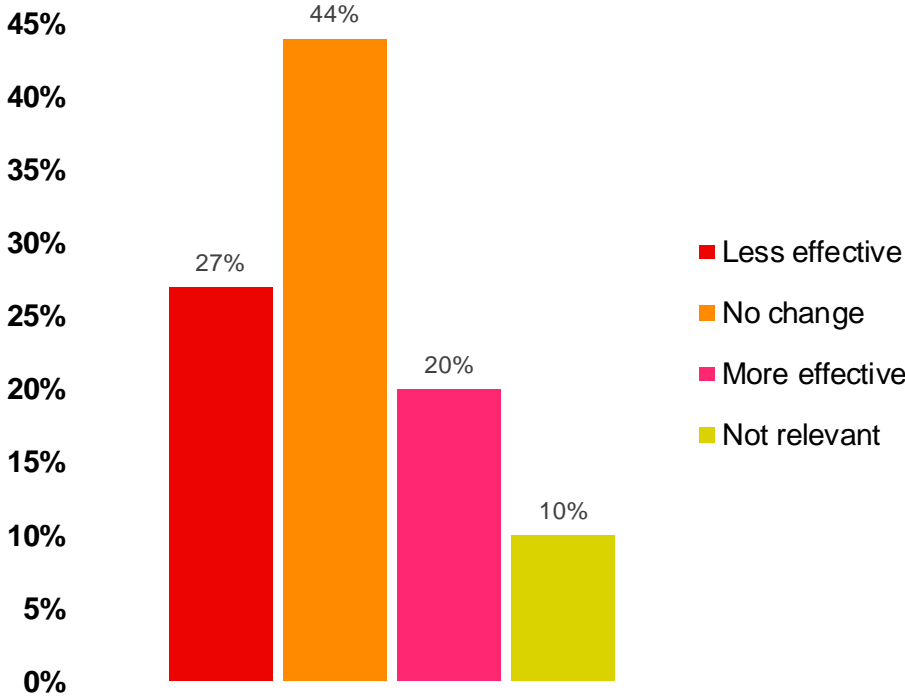


## Engaging with backbench MPs

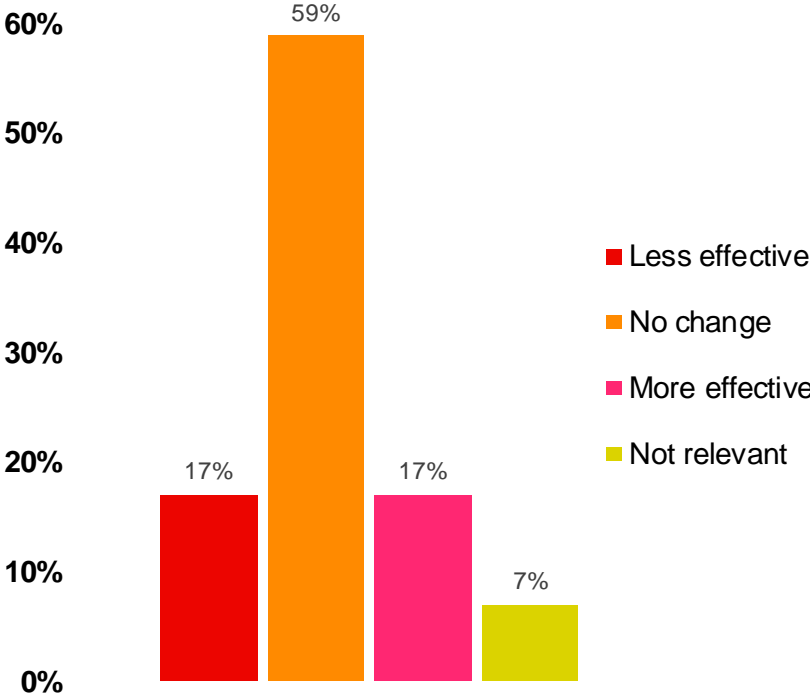


# Over the past year, do you feel the following types of activity have become more or less effective in influencing UK Government decision-making?

## Engaging with civil servants

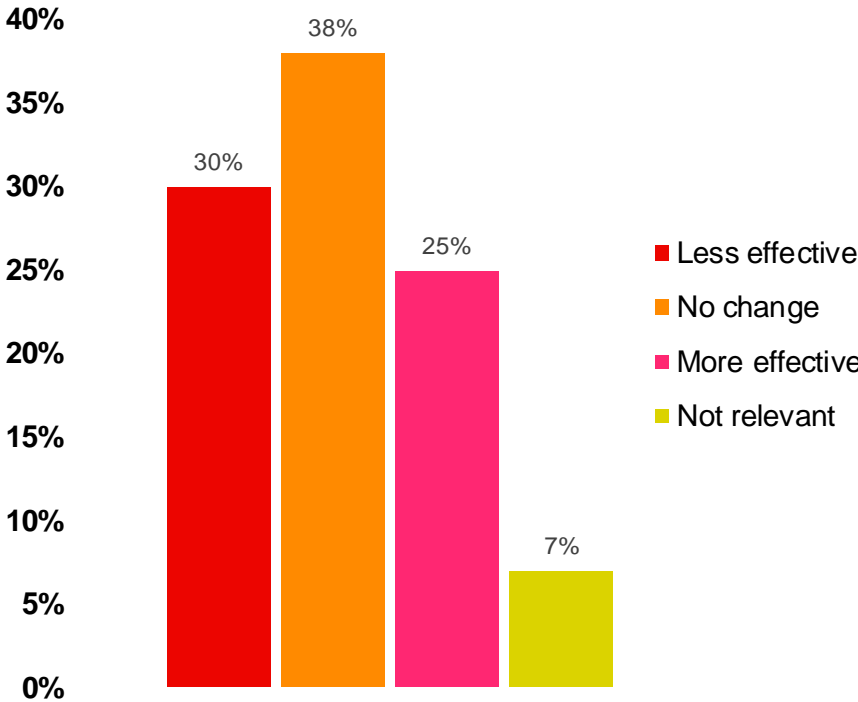


## Engaging with select committee inquiries

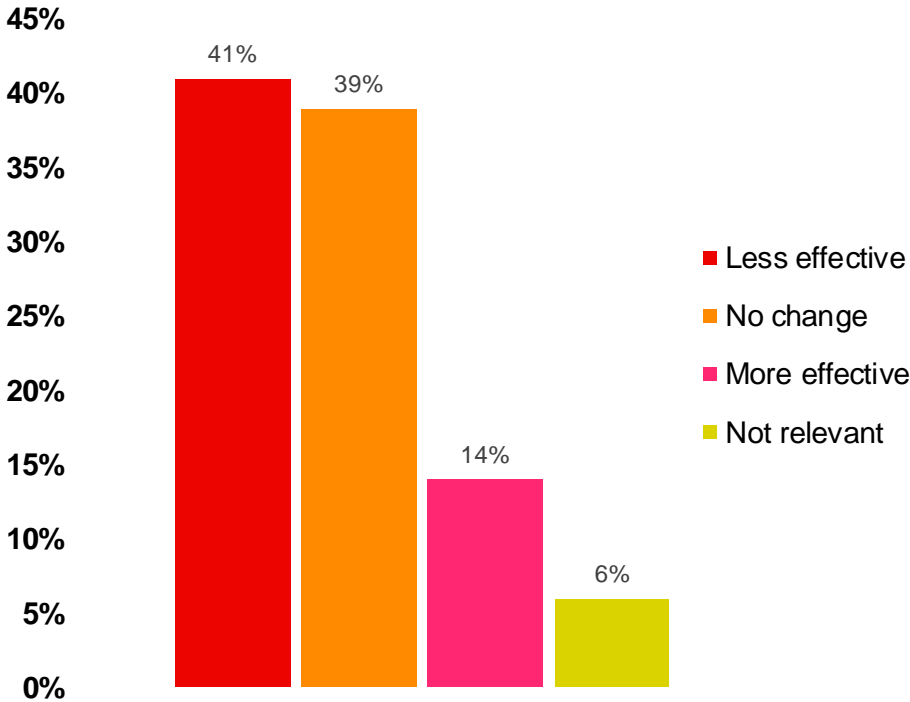


# Over the past year, do you feel the following types of activity have become more or less effective in influencing UK Government decision-making?

## Asking supporters to engage politicians directly (e.g. encouraging them to write to their MP)

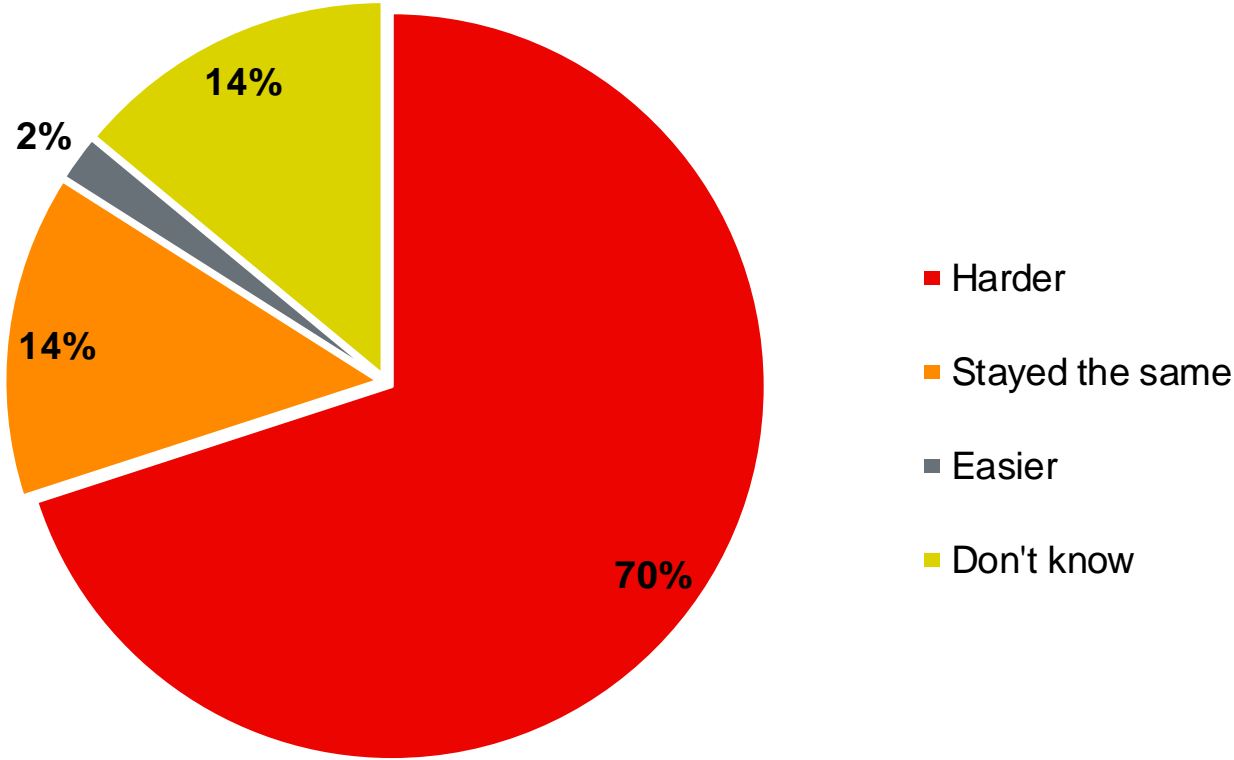


## Responding to government consultations

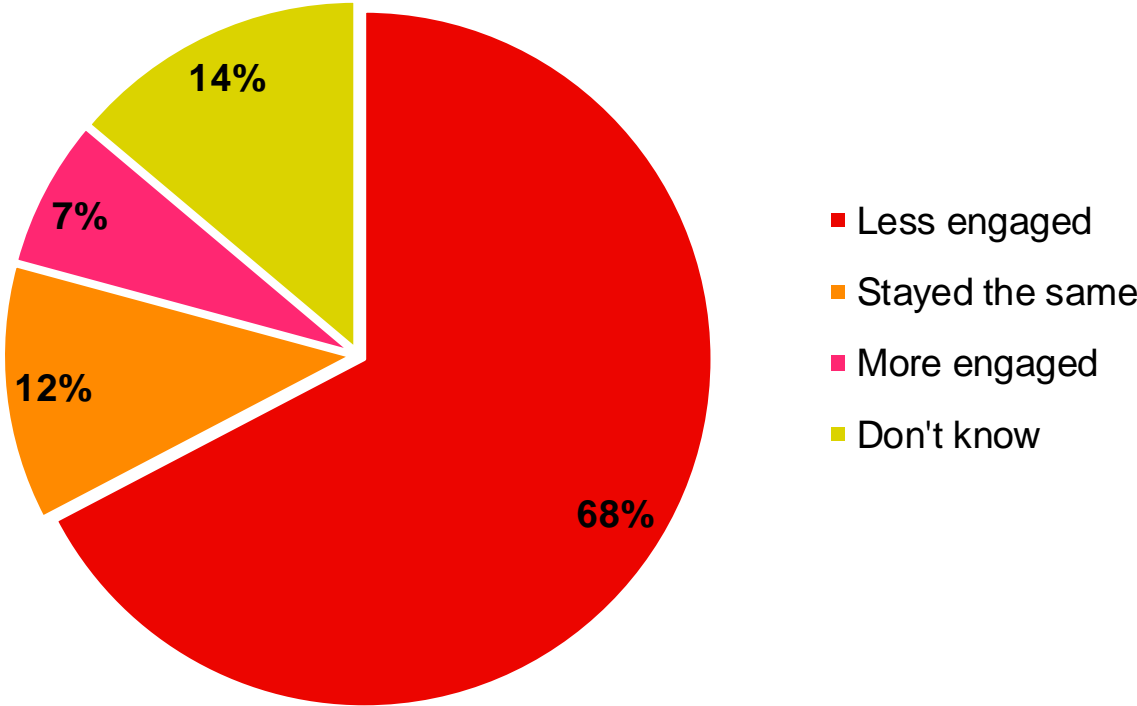




**Over the past year, do you think it has become harder or easier to influence UK Government thinking and decision-making?**

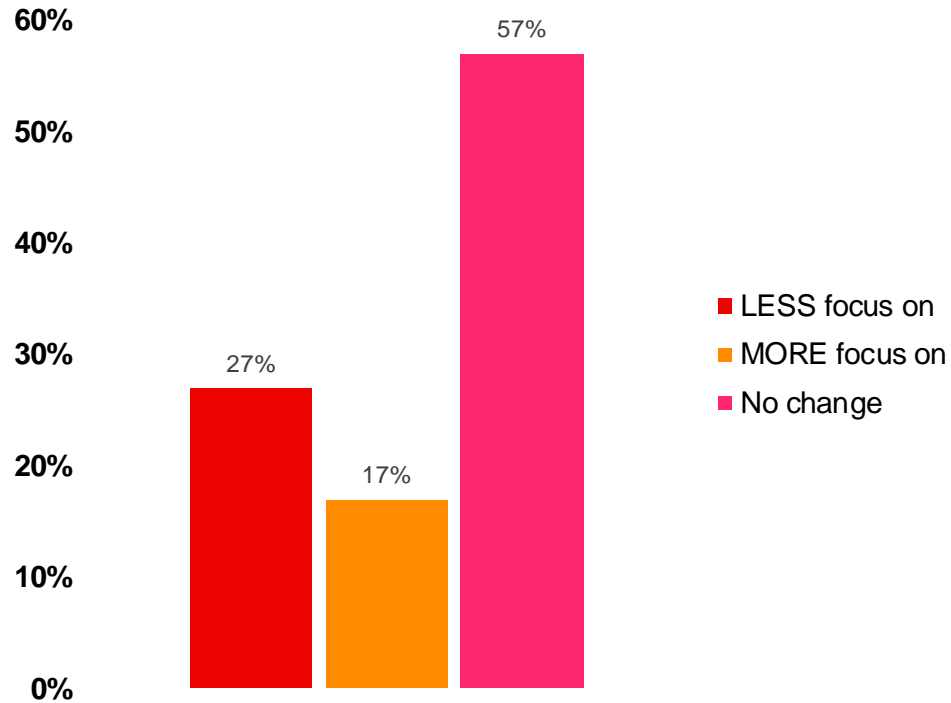


Over the past year, do you think the UK Government has become more or less engaged with charities and wider civil society?

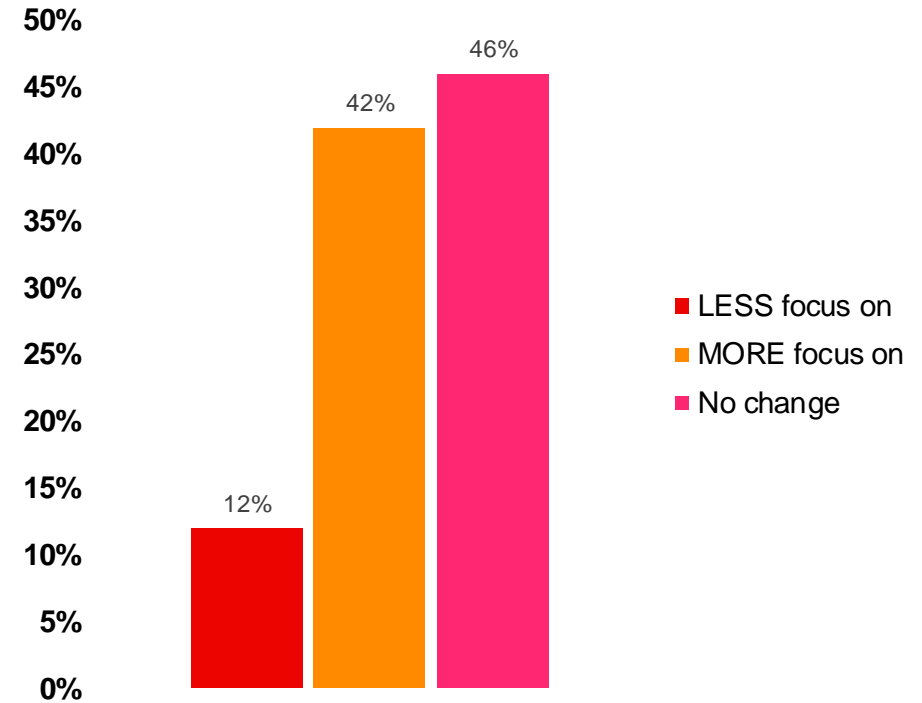


**You've said the UK Government has become less engaged with charities and wider civil society. Has this led you to increase or decrease your focus on the following groups?**

**UK Government**

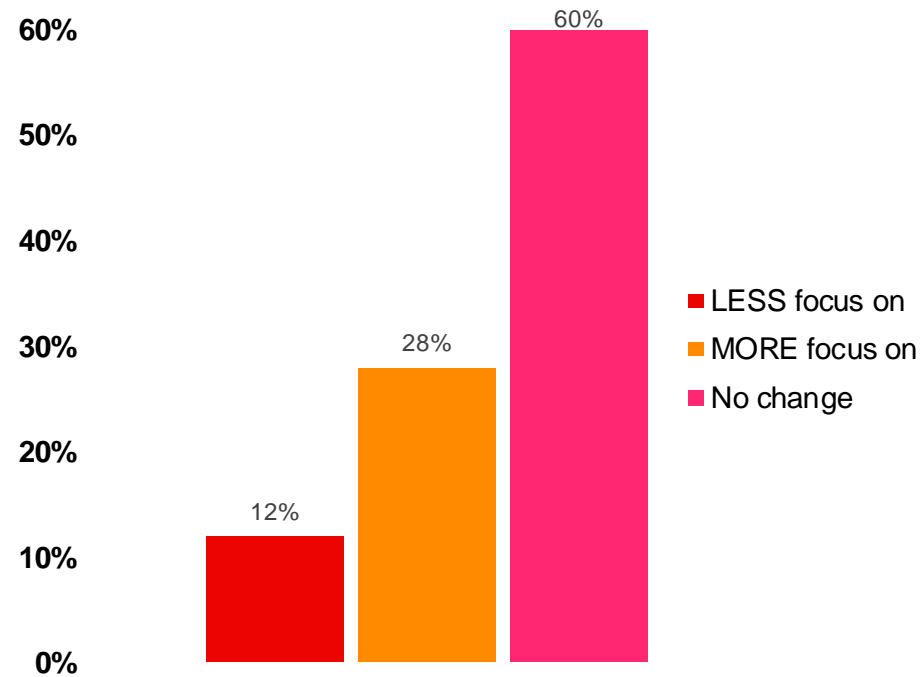


**Backbench politicians**

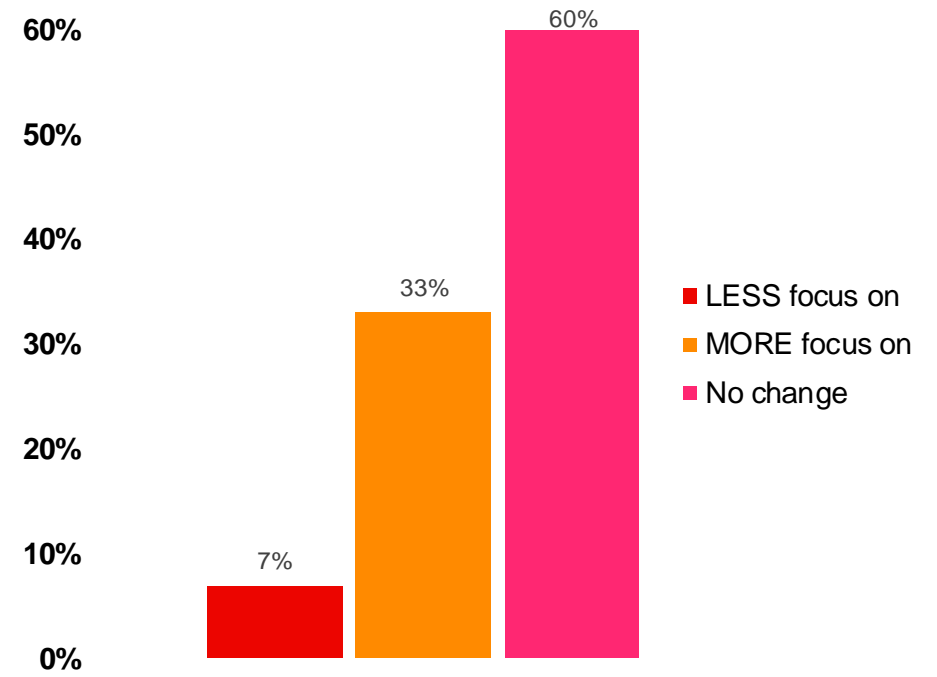


**You've said the UK Government has become less engaged with charities and wider civil society. Has this led you to increase or decrease your focus on the following groups?**

**Corporations and businesses**

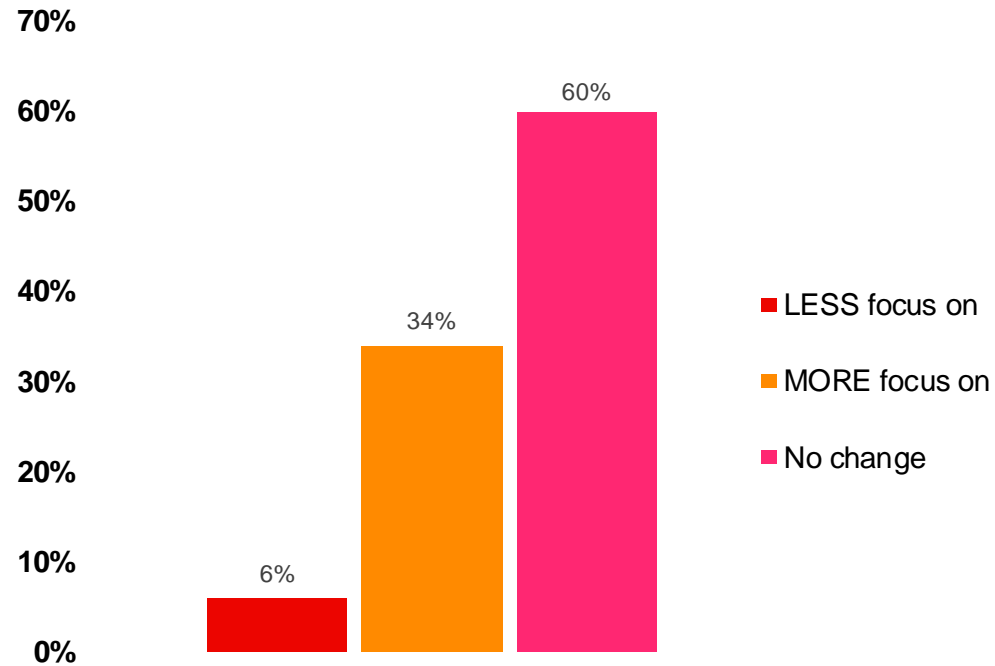


**Professional bodies and/or special interest groups**

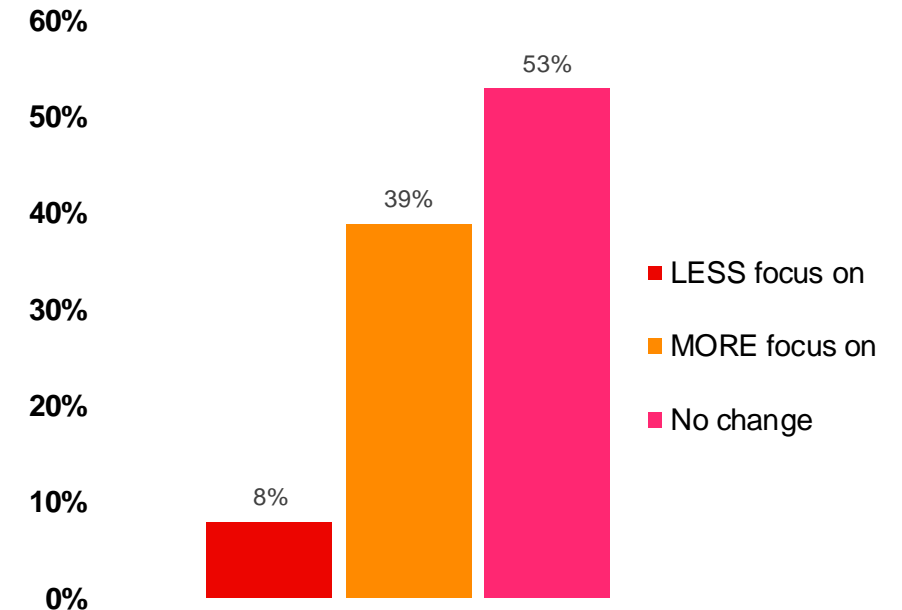


**You've said the UK Government has become less engaged with charities and wider civil society. Has this led you to increase or decrease your focus on the following groups?**

**Devolved national administrations**

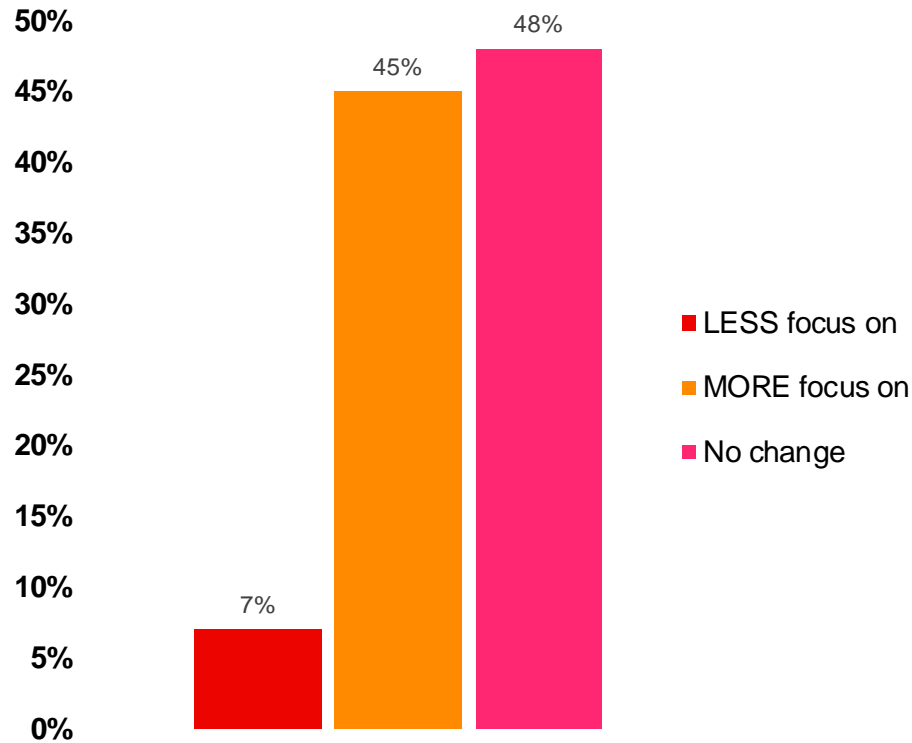


**Local/regional government (inc. metro mayors)**

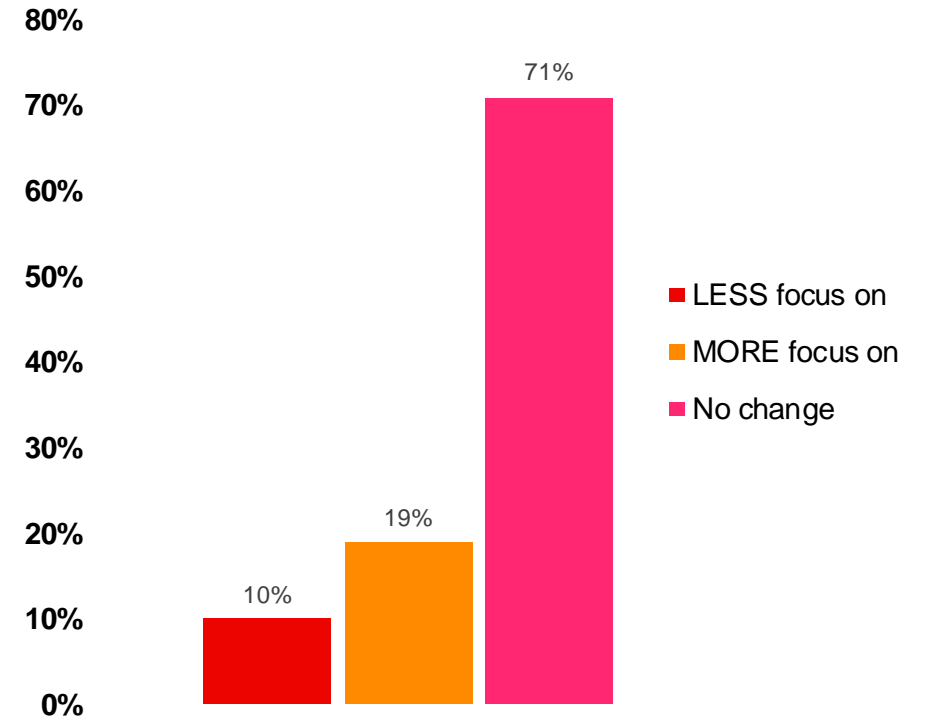


**You've said the UK Government has become less engaged with charities and wider civil society. Has this led you to increase or decrease your focus on the following groups?**

### Newspapers and media

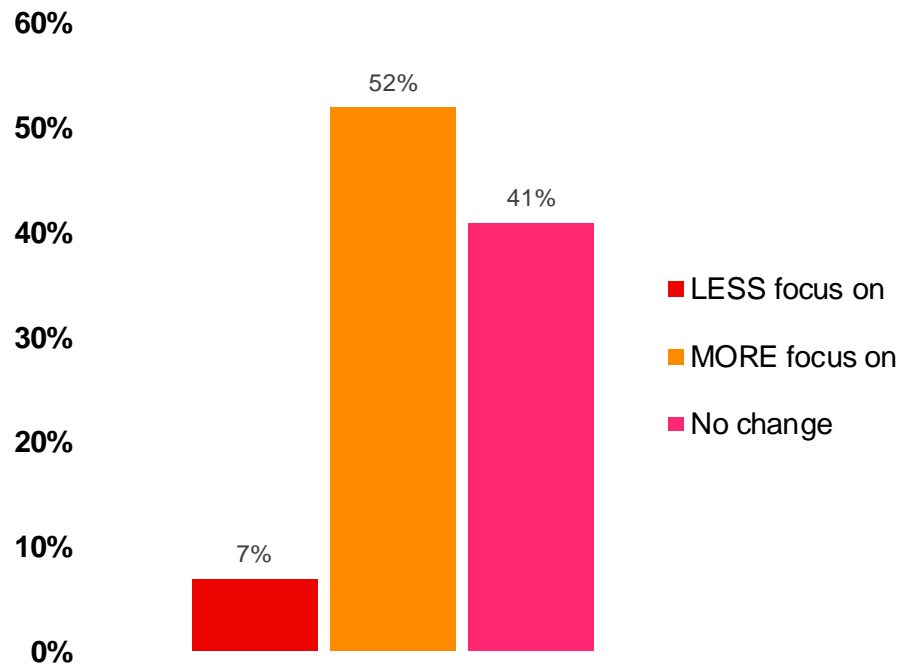


### Trade unions

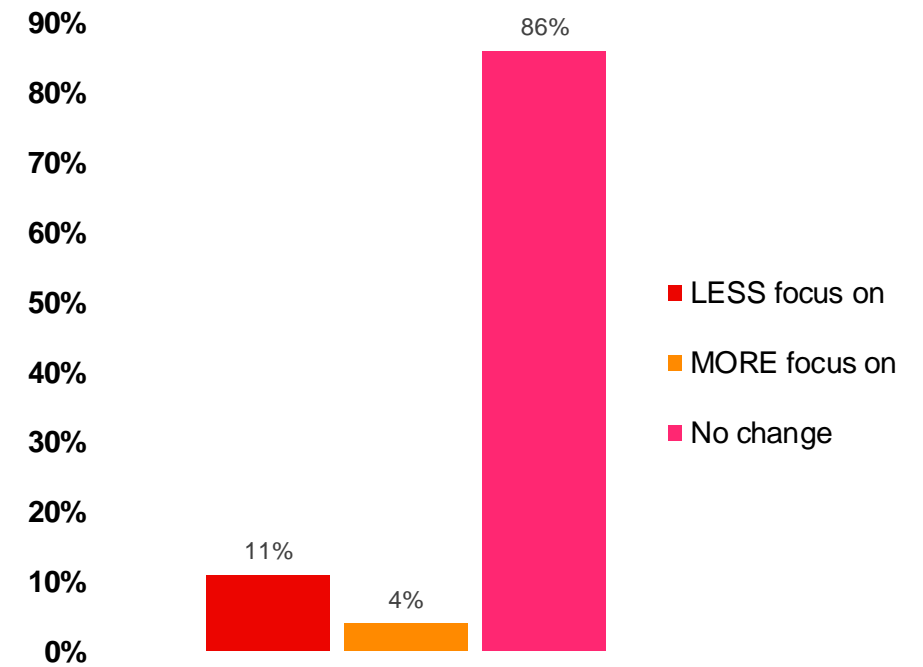


**You've said the UK Government has become less engaged with charities and wider civil society. Has this led you to increase or decrease your focus on the following groups?**

**The public**

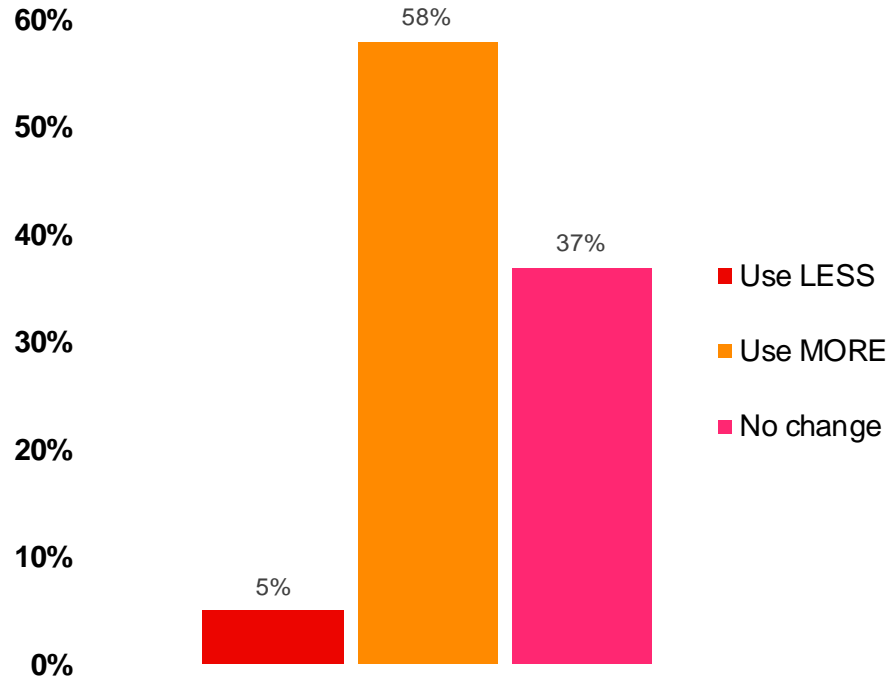


**Political donors**

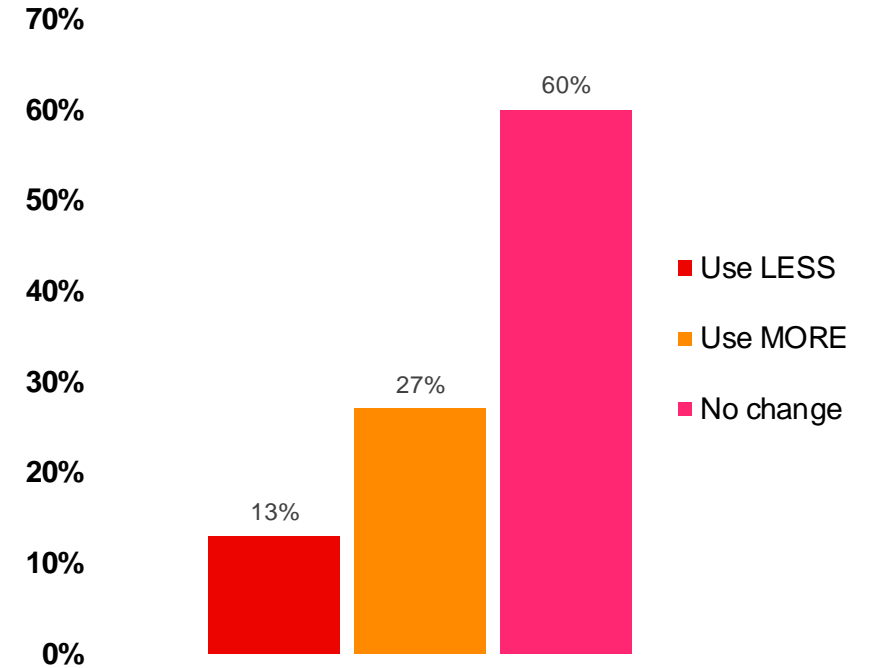


# How have changes in traditional government influencing methods shifted how often you use the following tactics?

## Community Organising



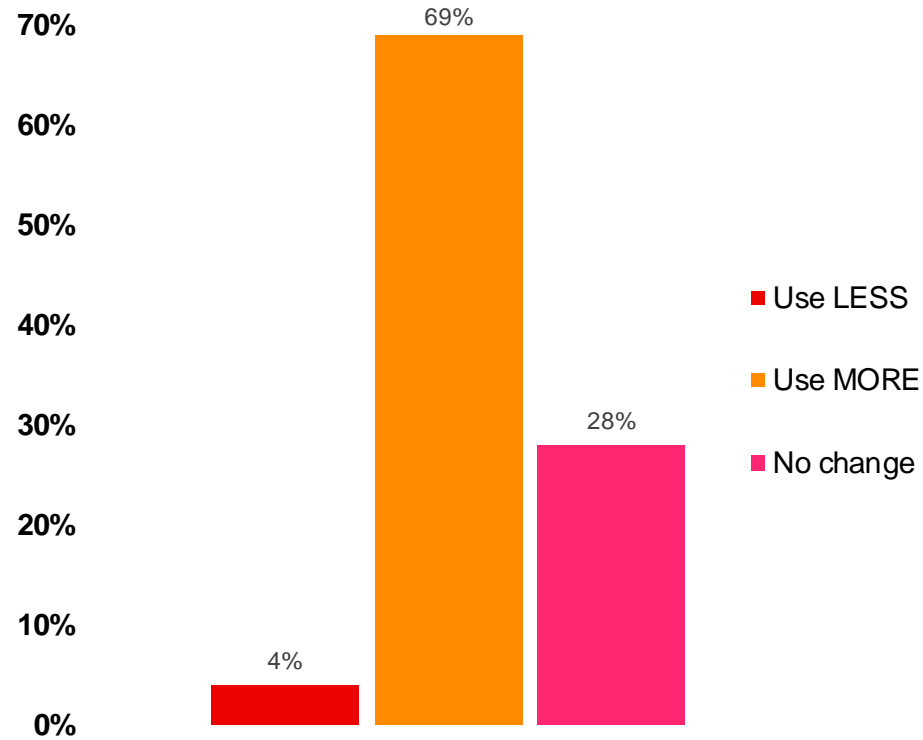
## Stunts



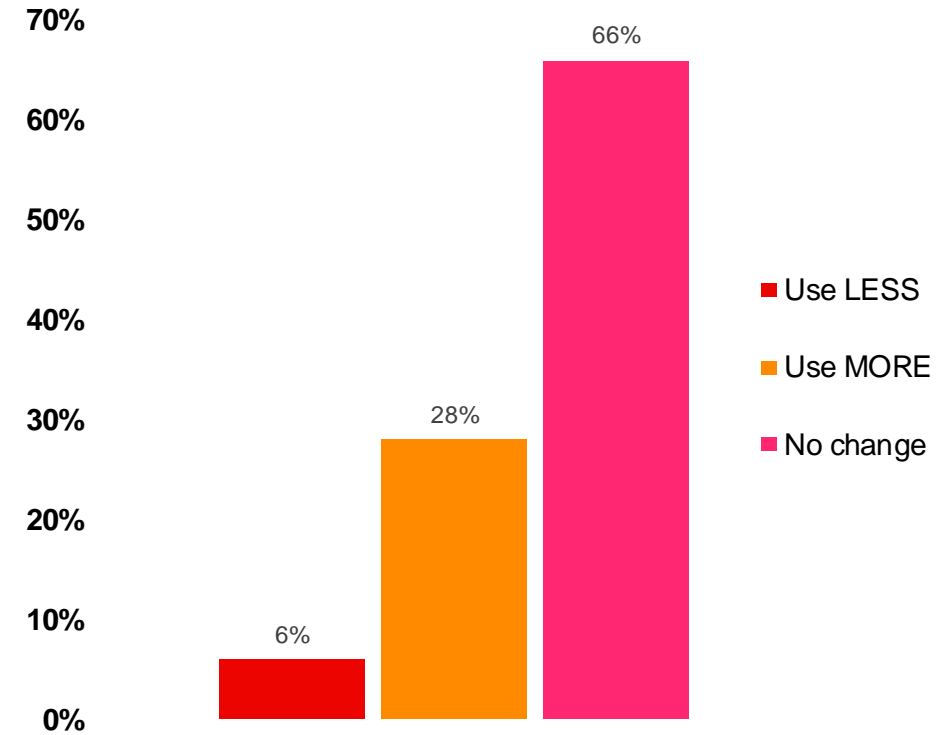


# How have changes in traditional government influencing methods shifted how often you use the following tactics?

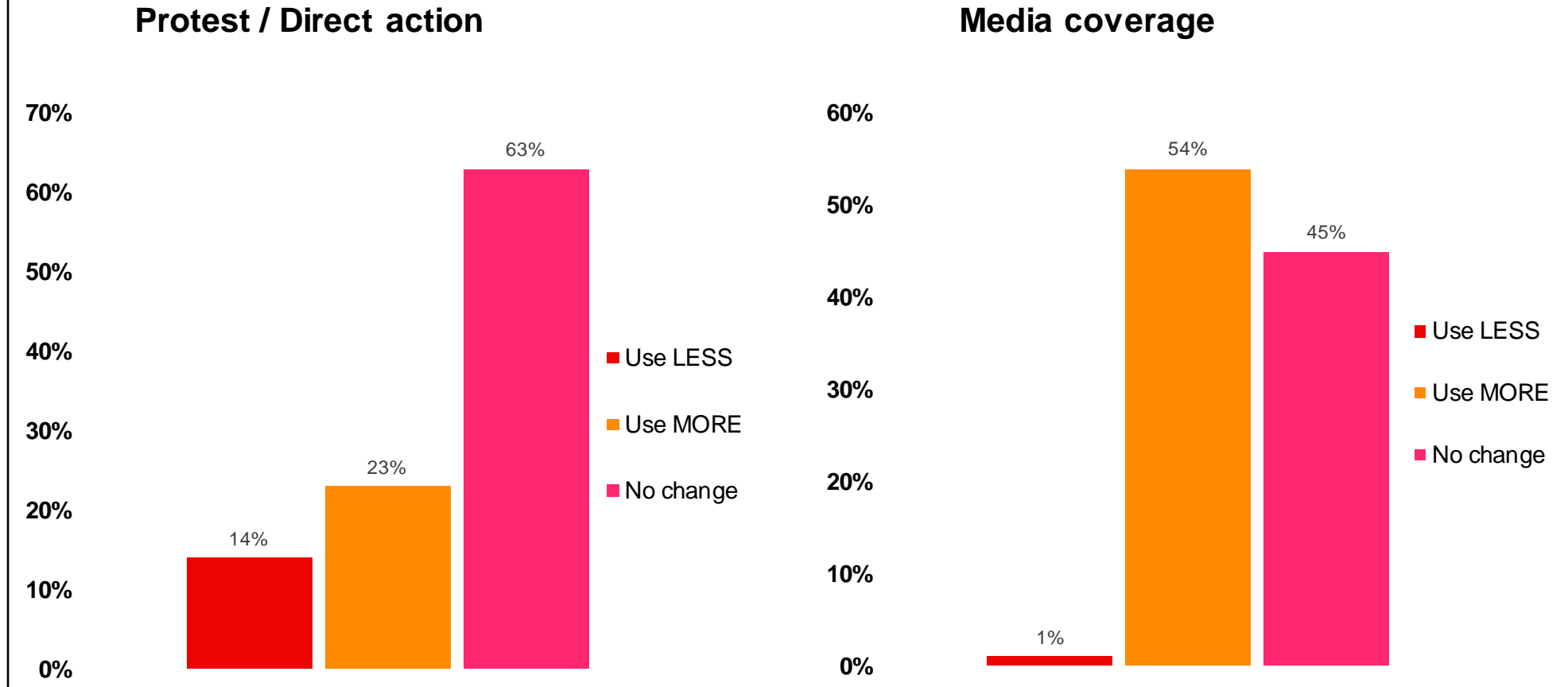
## Partnerships with other charities



## Partnerships with business

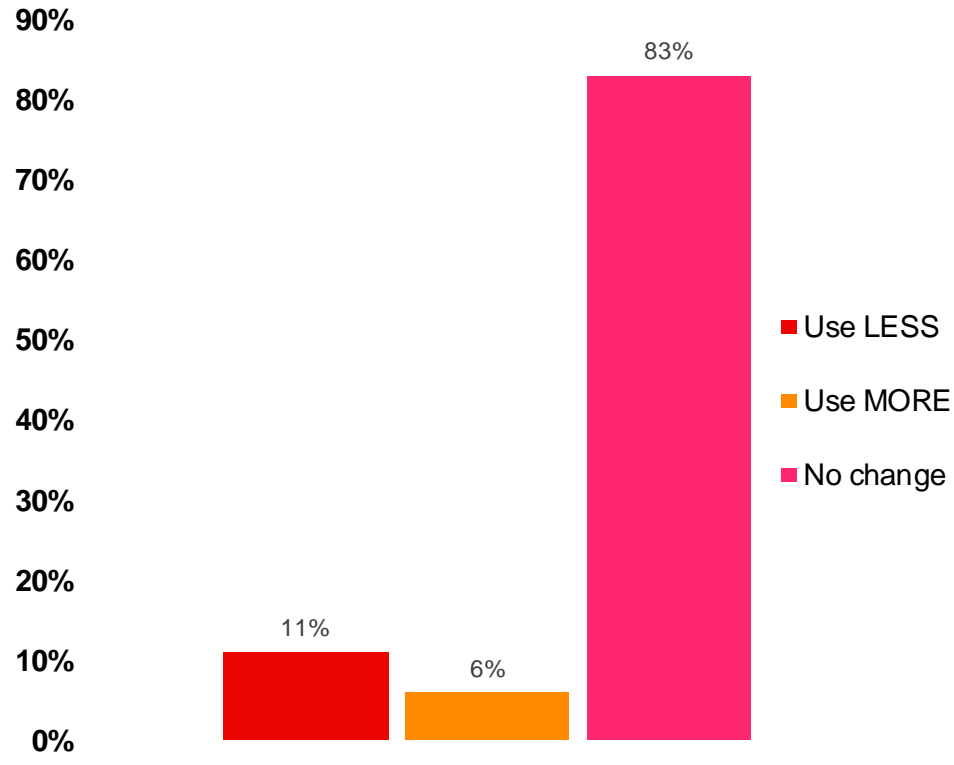


# How have changes in traditional government influencing methods shifted how often you use the following tactics?

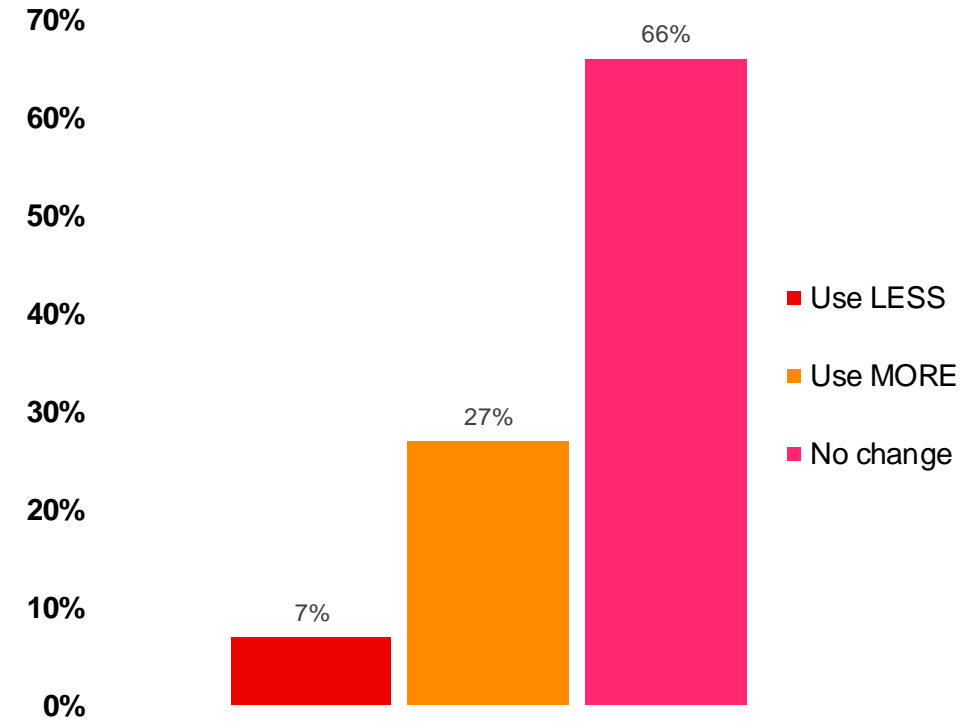


# How have changes in traditional government influencing methods shifted how often you use the following tactics?

## Boycott & divestment



## Arts & culture as catalysts of change



**Is there anything you would like to add about how your tactics have changed in the last year?**

1. Difficulty in establishing relationships with the Government.

*“With the volatility of regular changes in government this year it's been so difficult to establish relationships with ministers and MP.”*

2. Shift to more grassroots and community campaigning.

*“Tactics have definitely changed - Govt no longer responds to petitions and 38 Degrees and Change have cornered the market. We have become more grass roots focused and media focussed to bring lived experience into counter narratives.”*

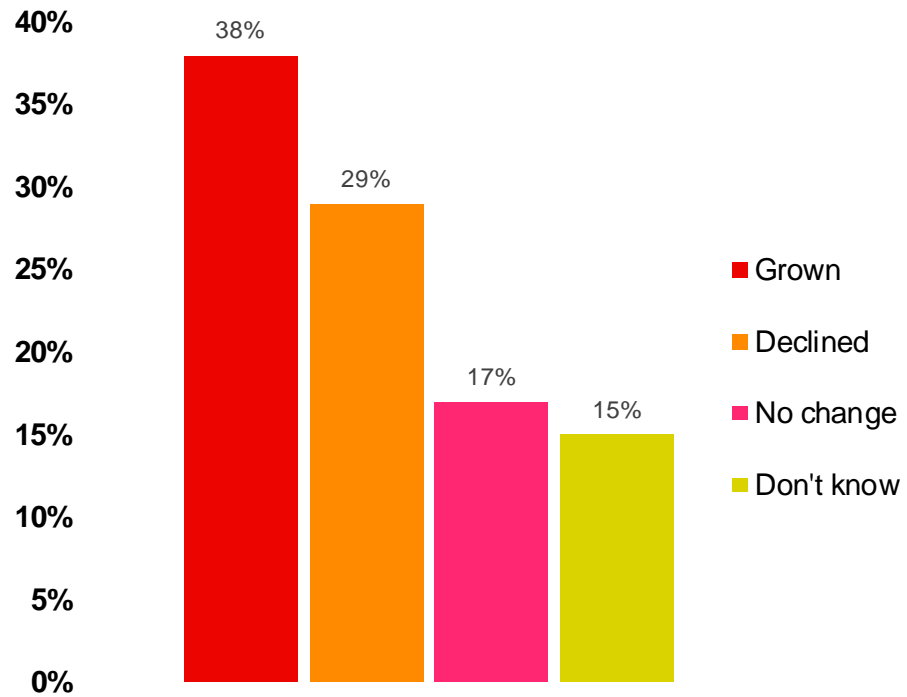
3. Building broader coalitions and networks was increasingly a priority.

*“We are actively seeking to collaborate with NGOs who are not traditionally in our space to build a larger force to speak to power.”*

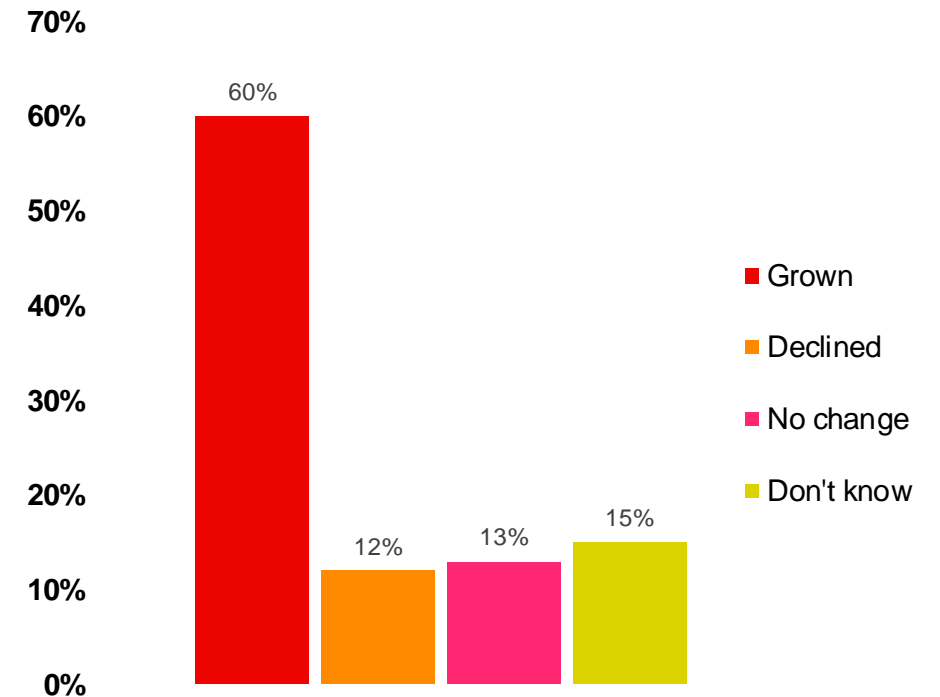


# Thinking about the past three years, do you think the influence of the following groups on UK Government decision-making has grown or declined?

## Backbench politicians

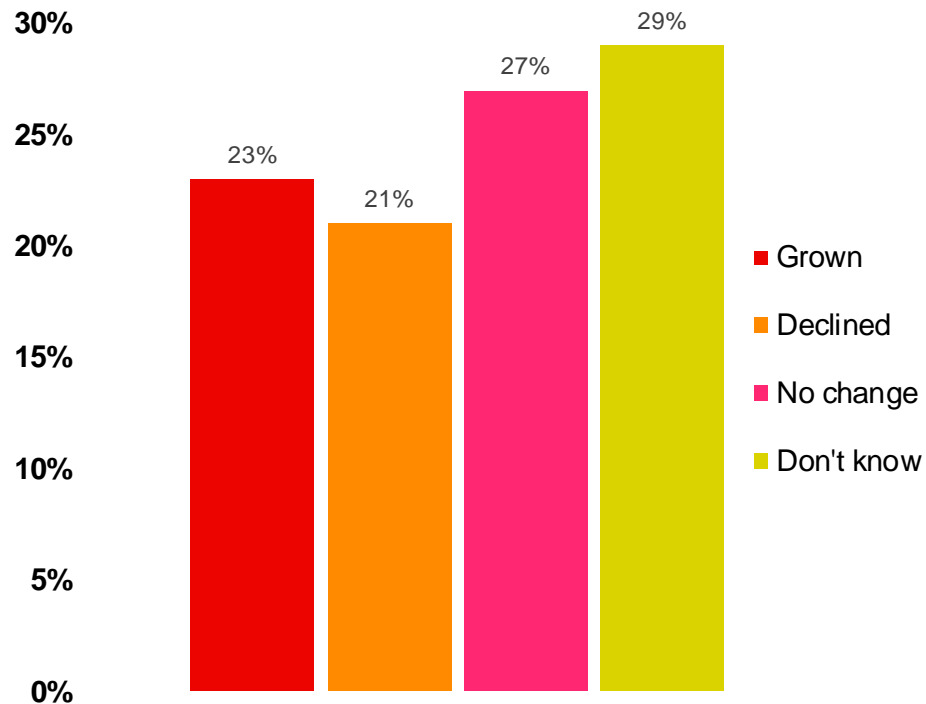


## Corporations and businesses

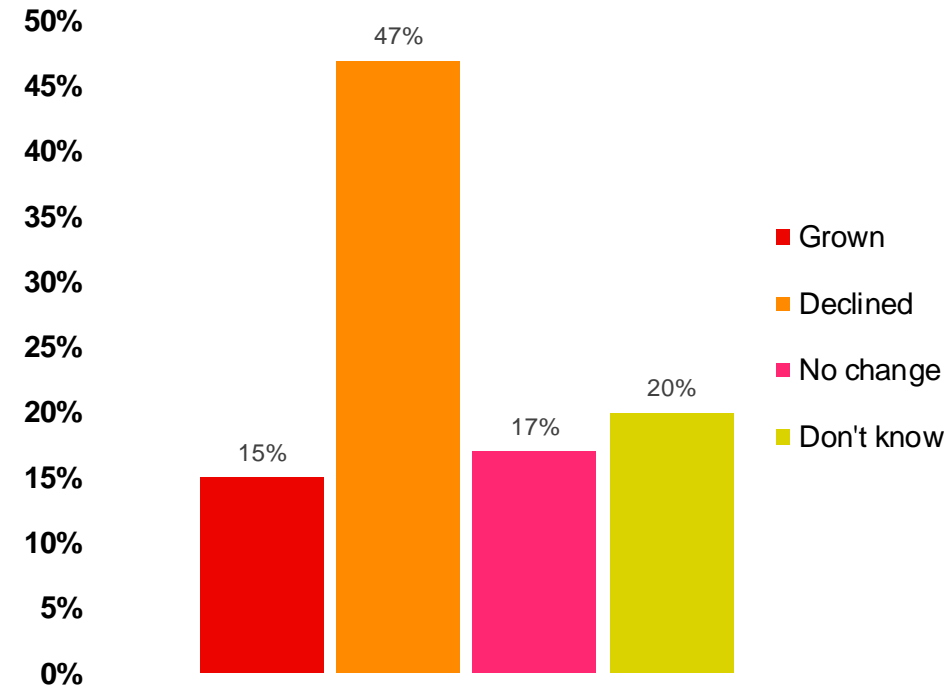


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## Professional bodies and/or special interest groups

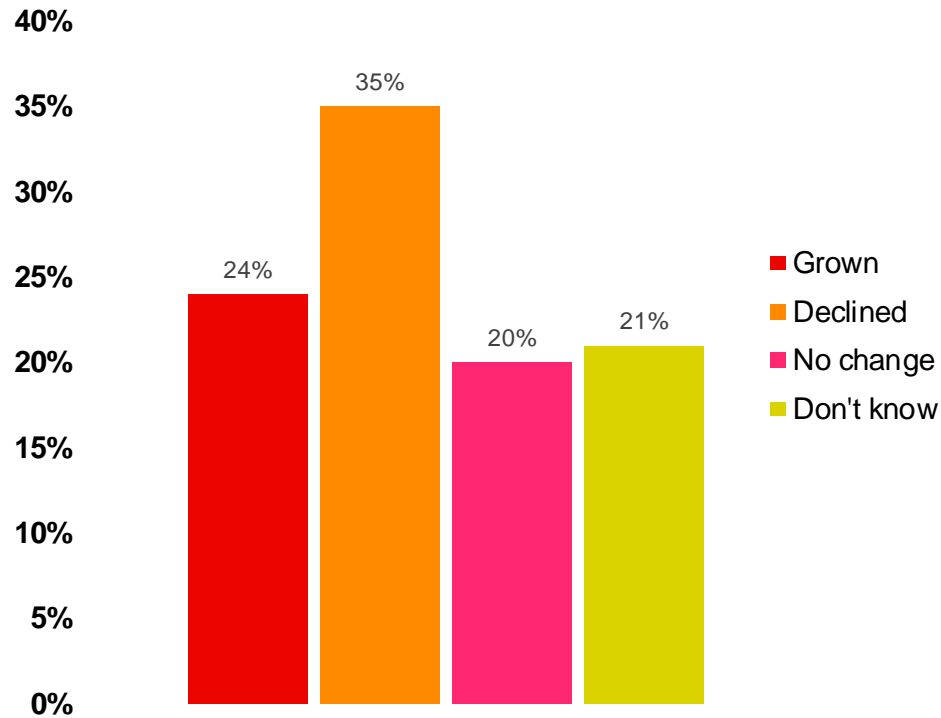


## Devolved national administrations

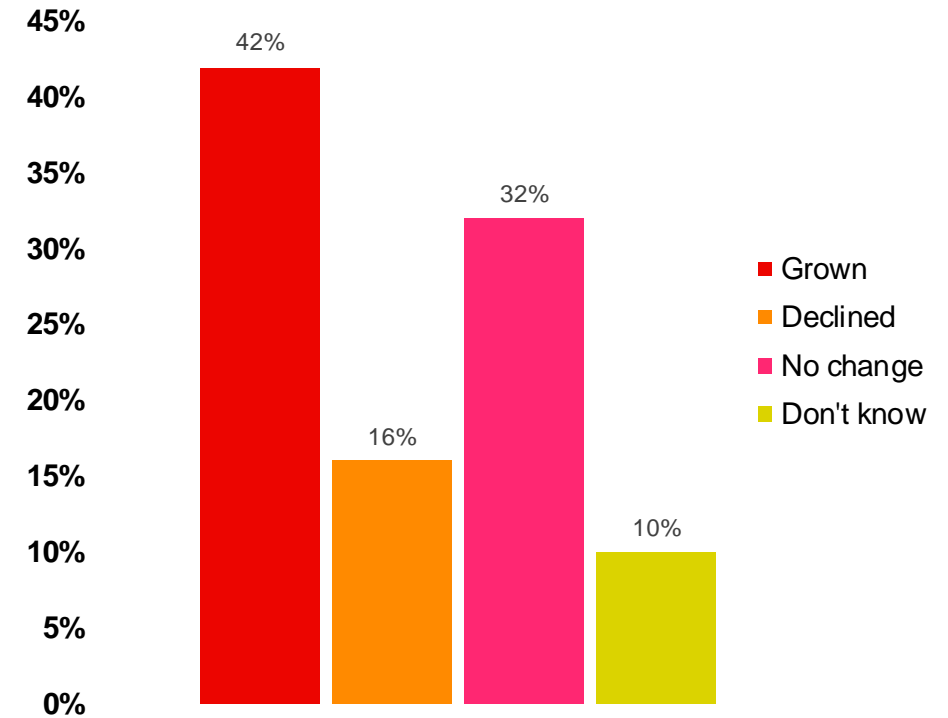


# Thinking about the past three years, do you think the influence of the following groups on UK Government decision-making has grown or declined?

## Local/regional government (inc. metro mayors)

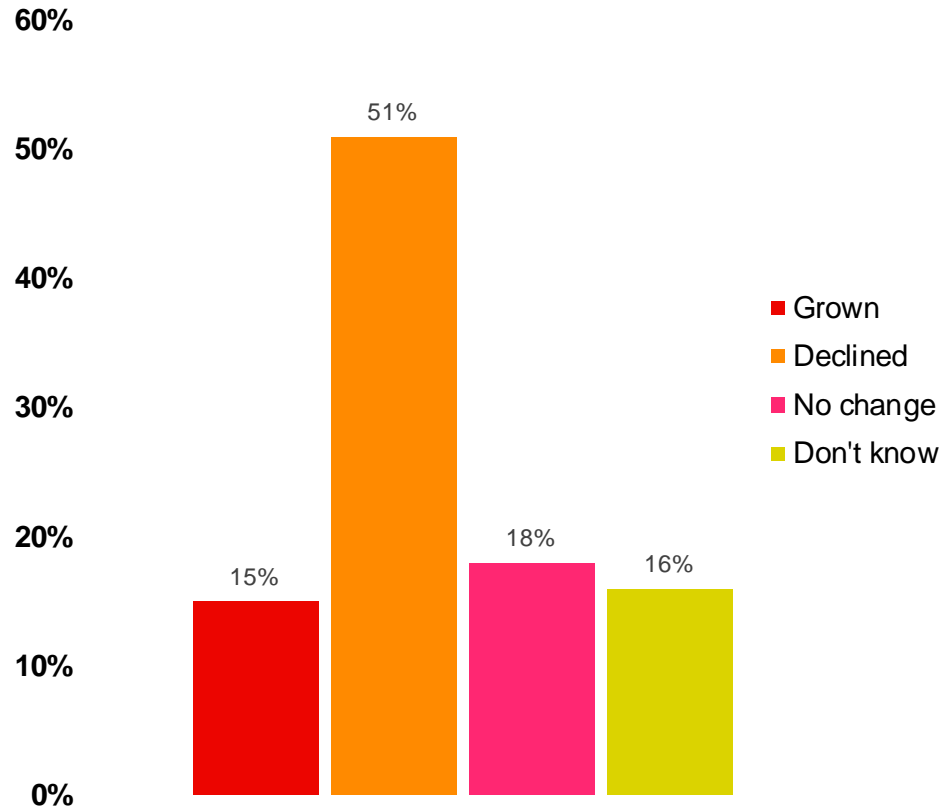


## Newspapers and media

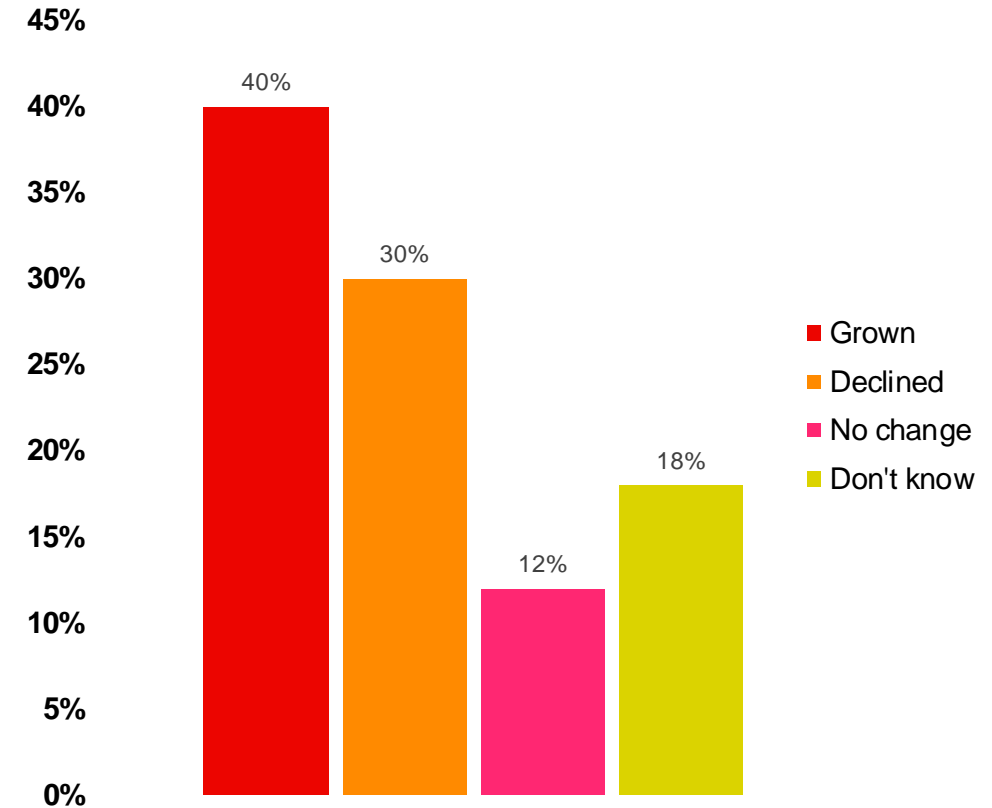


# Thinking about the past three years, do you think the influence of the following groups on UK Government decision-making has grown or declined?

## Pressure groups and charities



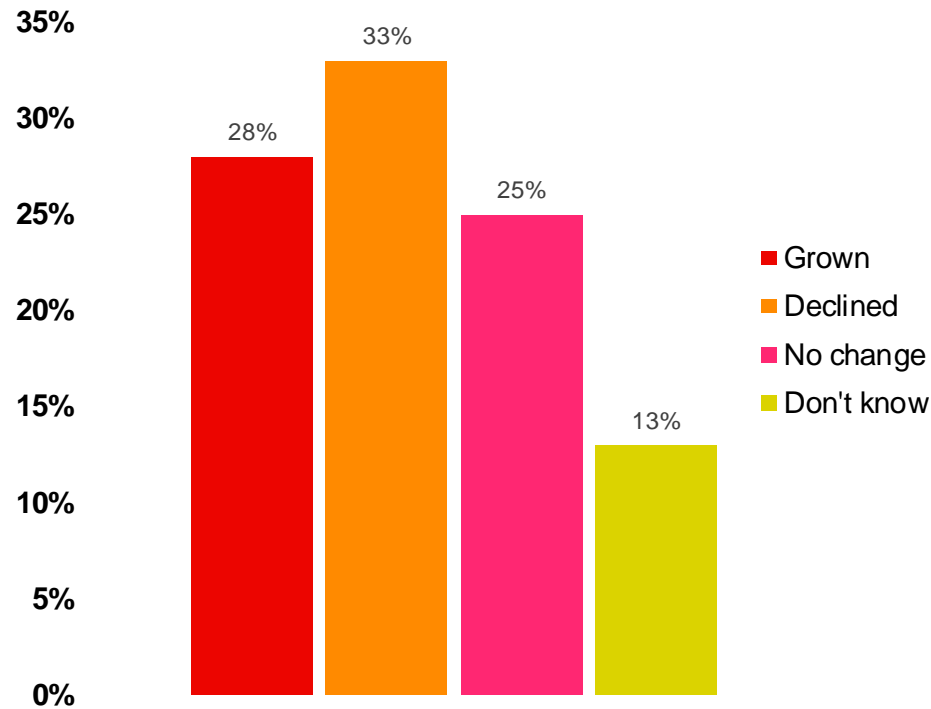
## Trade unions



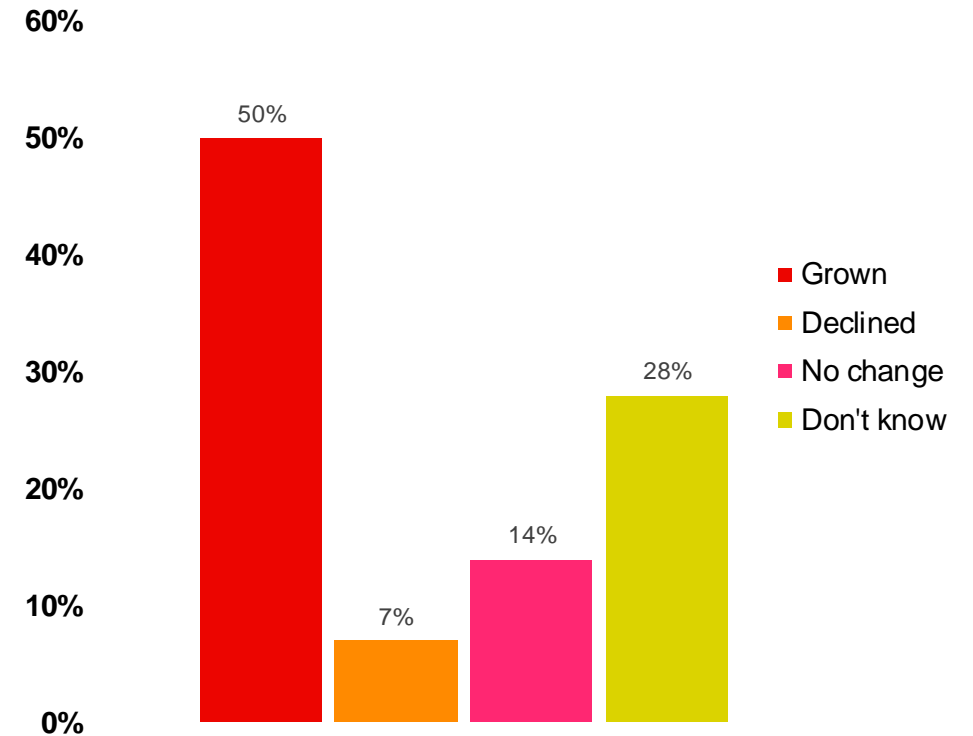


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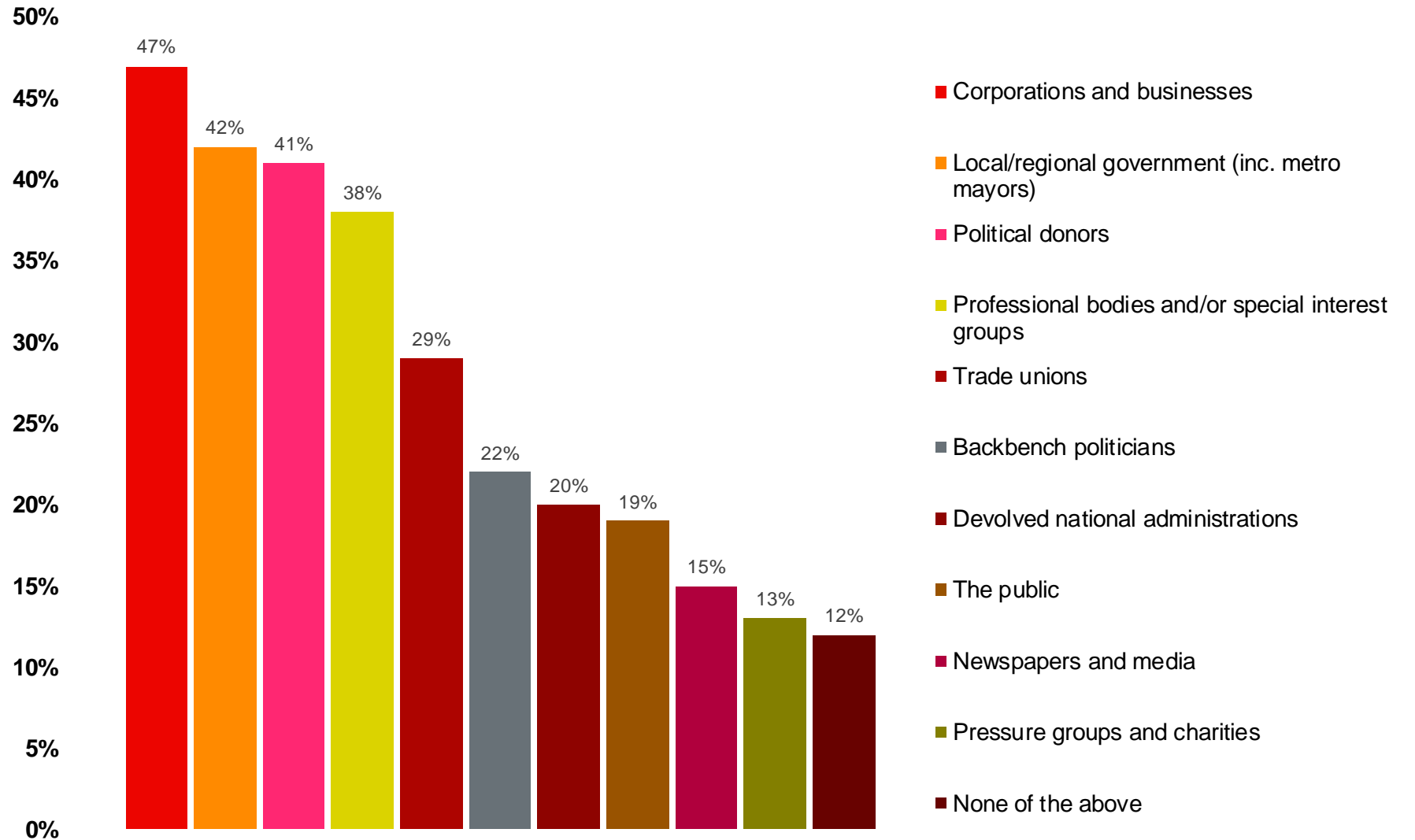
## The public



## Political donors



# Thinking about the same groups, do you think that any of them have influence on UK Government decision-making but are under-targeted in civil society campaigning?



## Is there anything you would like to add about the current ability of campaigners to influence UK Government decision making?

The overwhelming sentiment was that engaging with government has become harder, that they appear not to care, and that it was to some extents pointless.

*“Government doesn't seem to care!”*

*“It is hopeless to try to influence government.”*

Some did say that civil society needed to do more in this current context.

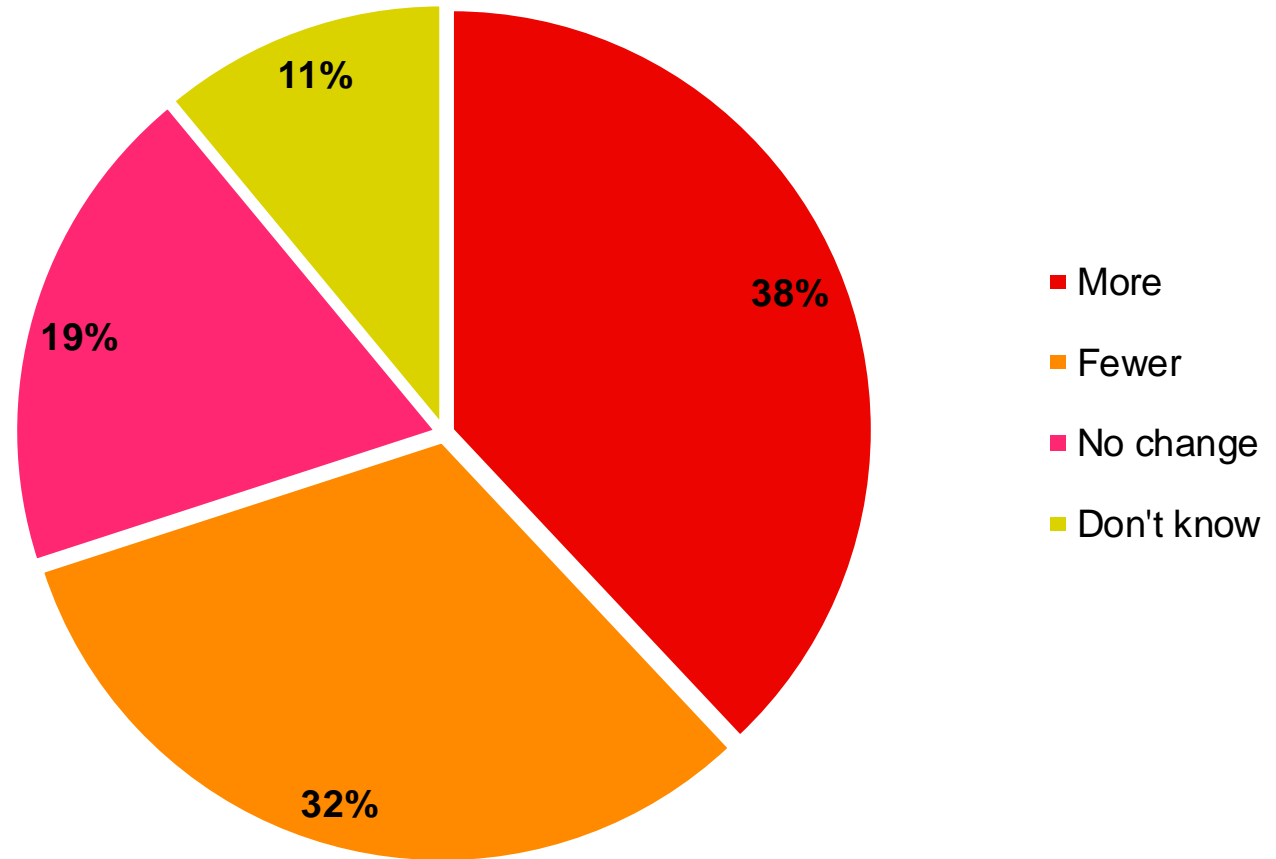
*“We have to work together, and be smarter. WE need to make sure inexperienced new campaigners are willing to learn from those who have gone before them, and that more experienced ones are also willing to take on new ideas. WE need to engage better with academics and tech visualisations of facts & figs - and be fleet of foot about tackling misinformation. We need to join up, in short, like never before.”*



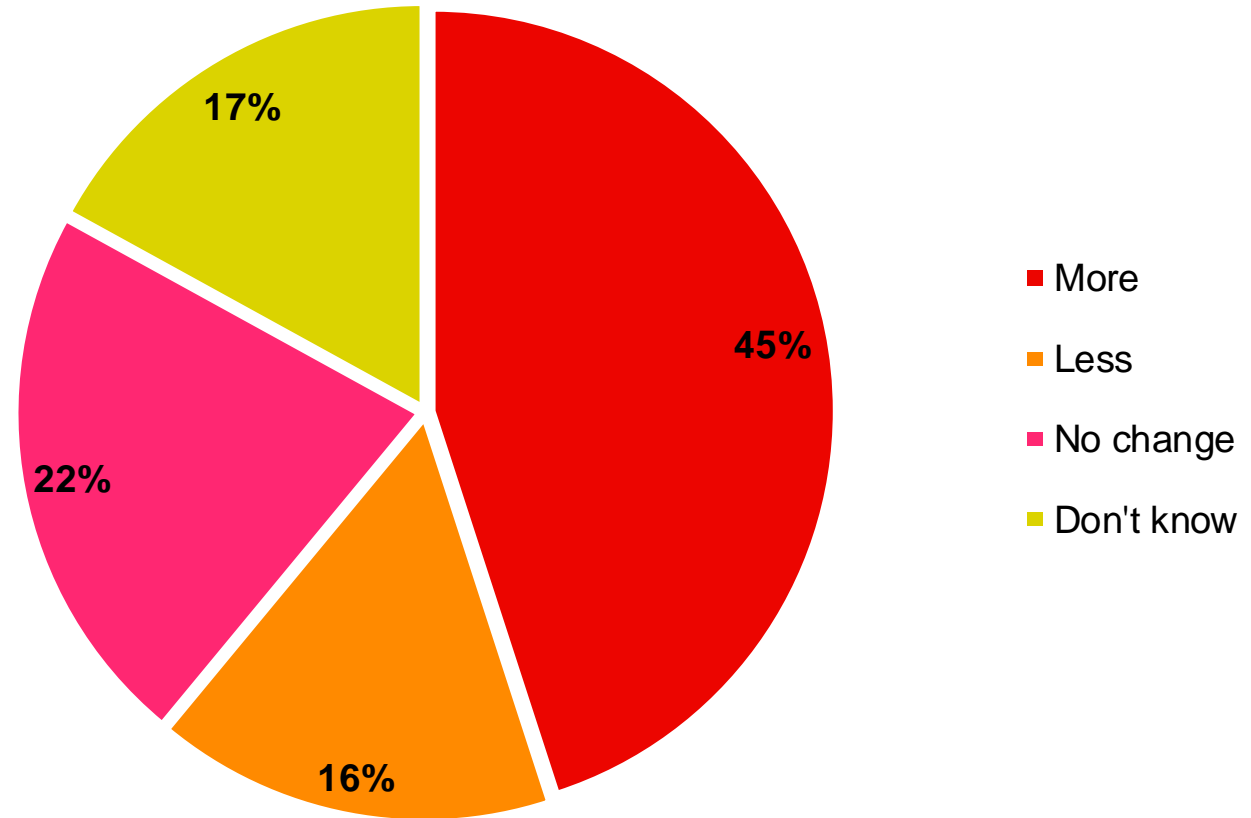
# Charities & public debate

*NB Percentages may not total 100% as figures have been rounded to a whole number and where participants were able to select more than one answer*

**Overall, do you think you've heard more or fewer charity voices in public debate over the past year?**



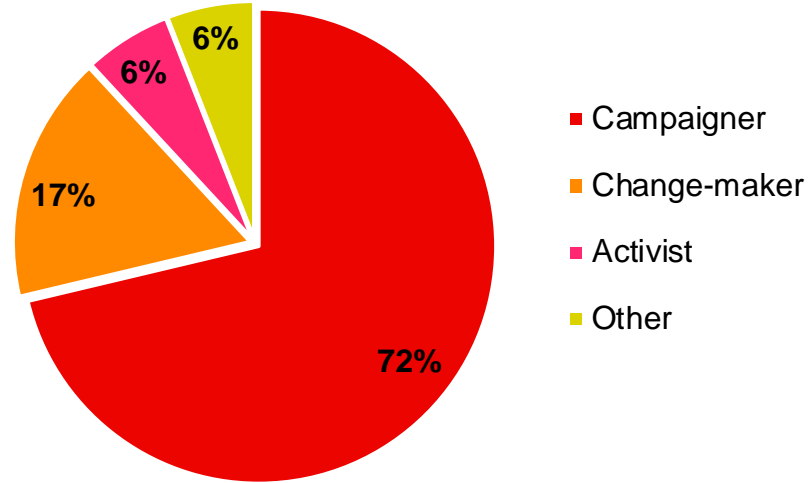
**When they do appear on public platforms, do you think charity voices have become more or less confident?**



# About you

*NB Percentages may not total 100% as figures have been rounded to a whole number and where participants were able to select more than one answer*

Do you think of yourself as a campaigner, a change-maker, an activist, or something else?



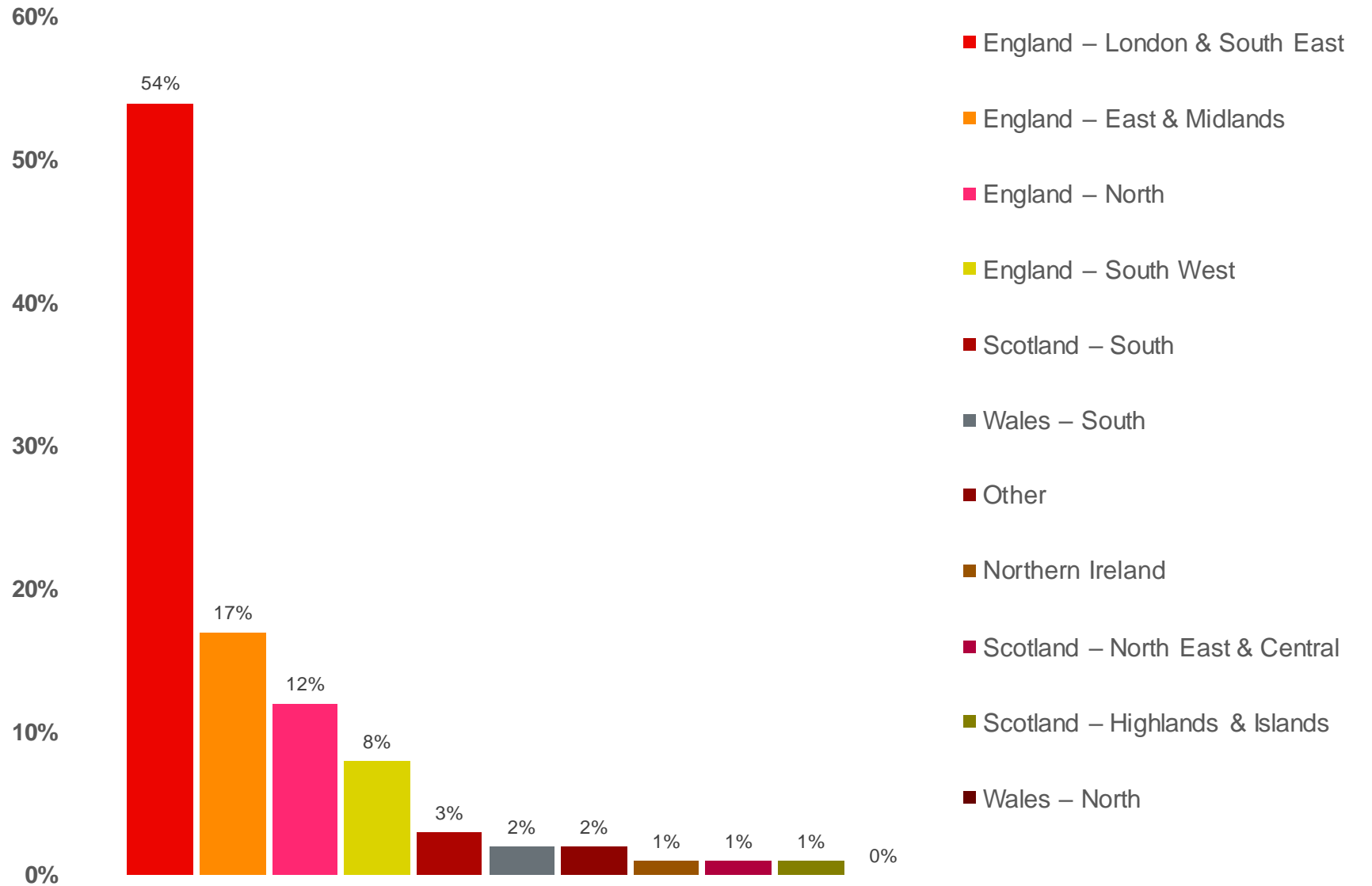
Change agent  
Activist  
Charity worker  
Change-maker  
Public affairs professional  
Supporter of other campaigners

# Campaigner

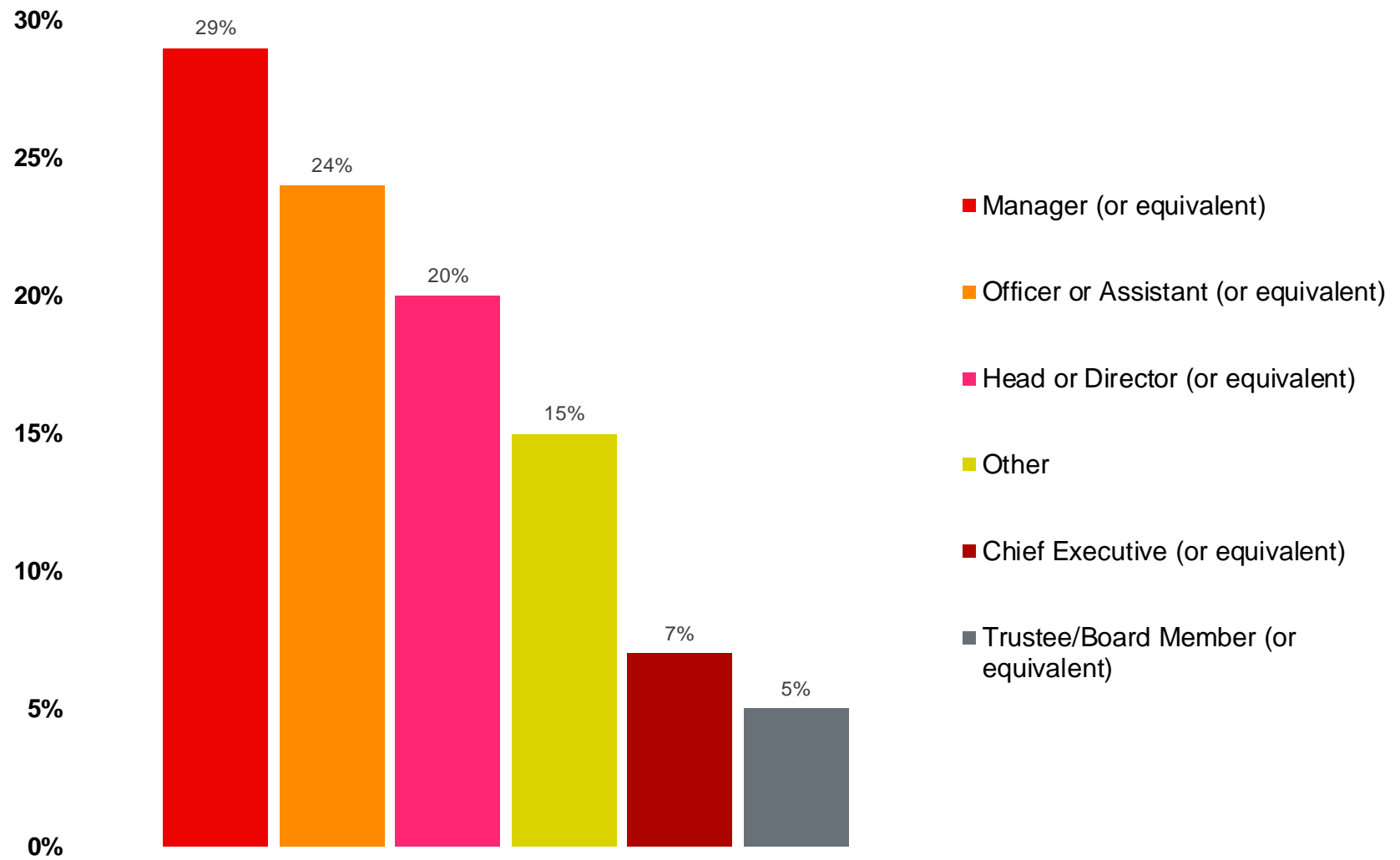




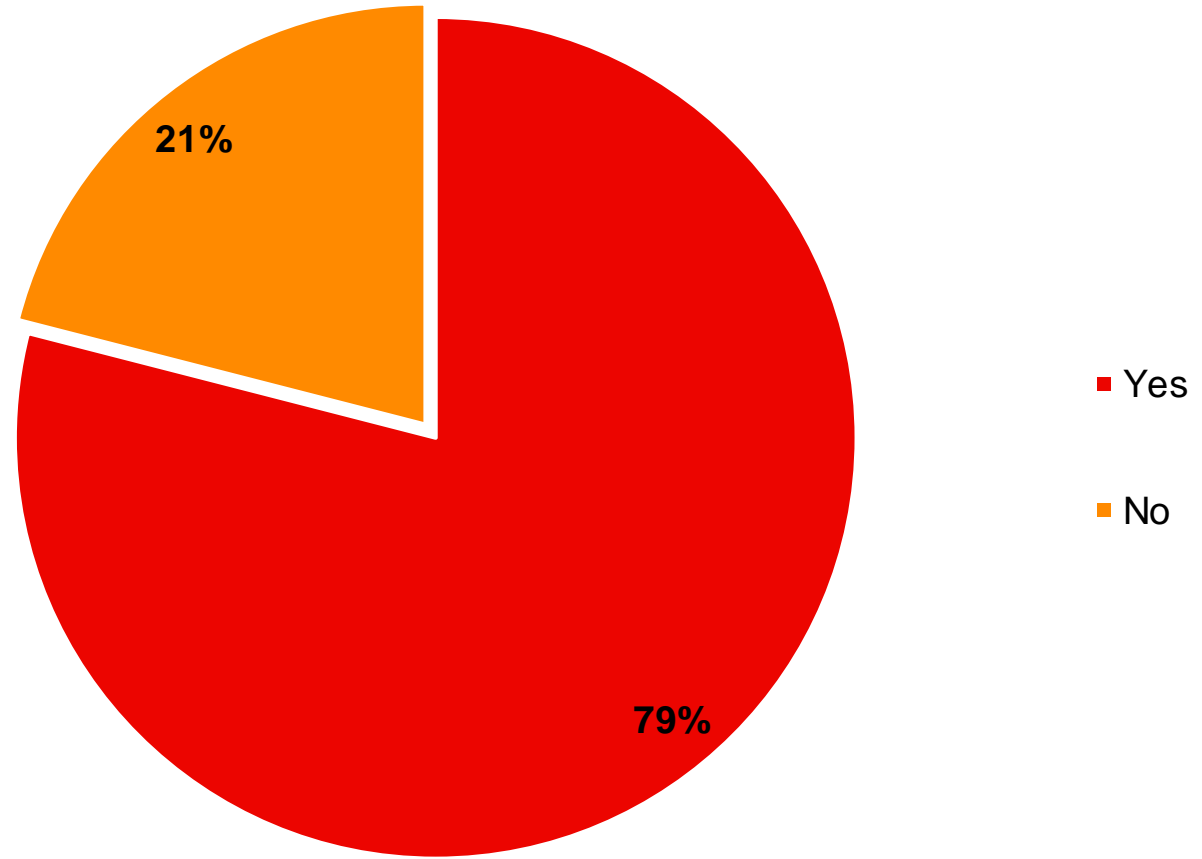
# Where are you based?



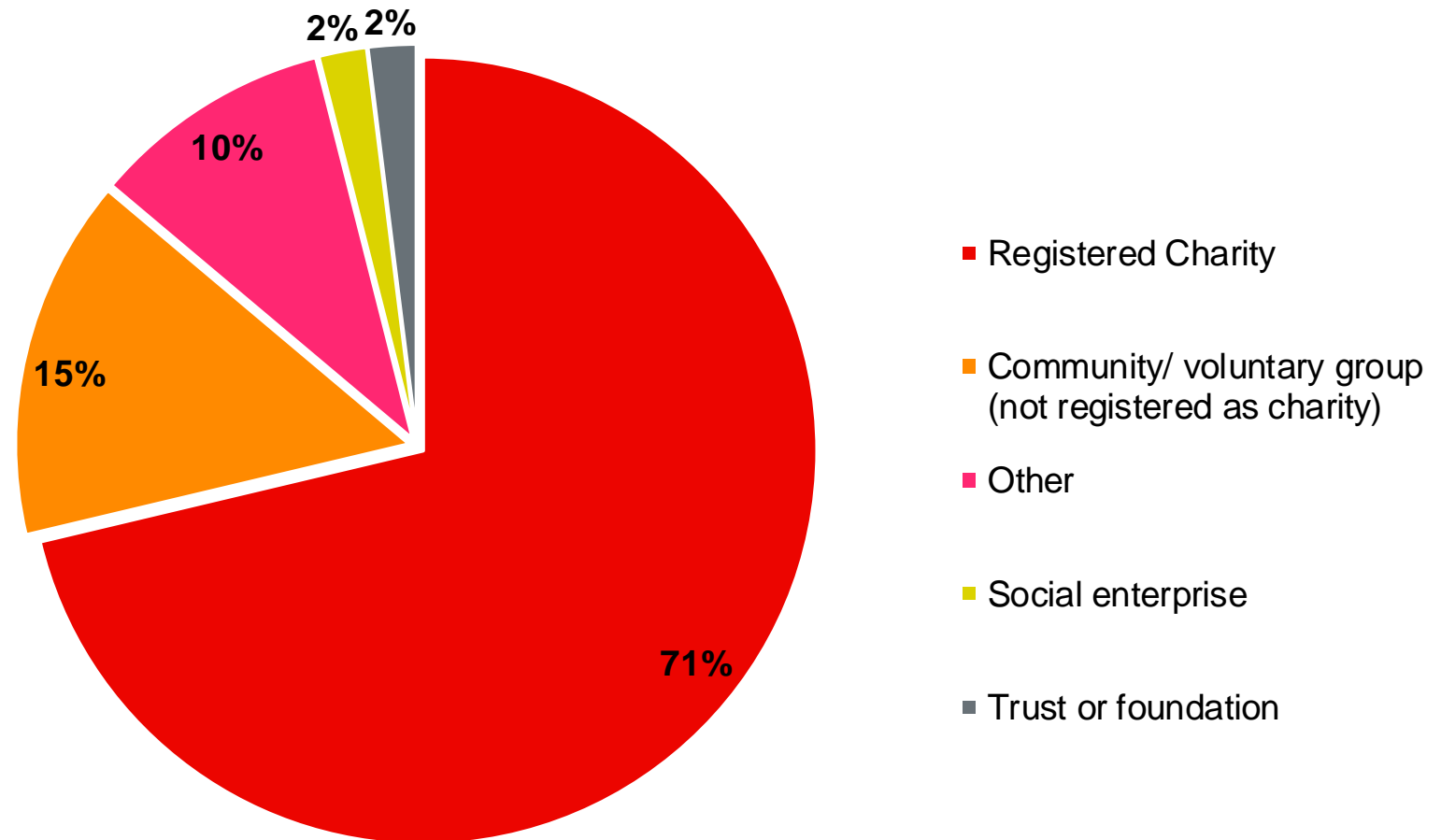
# What is your role? (regardless of whether or not you are paid)



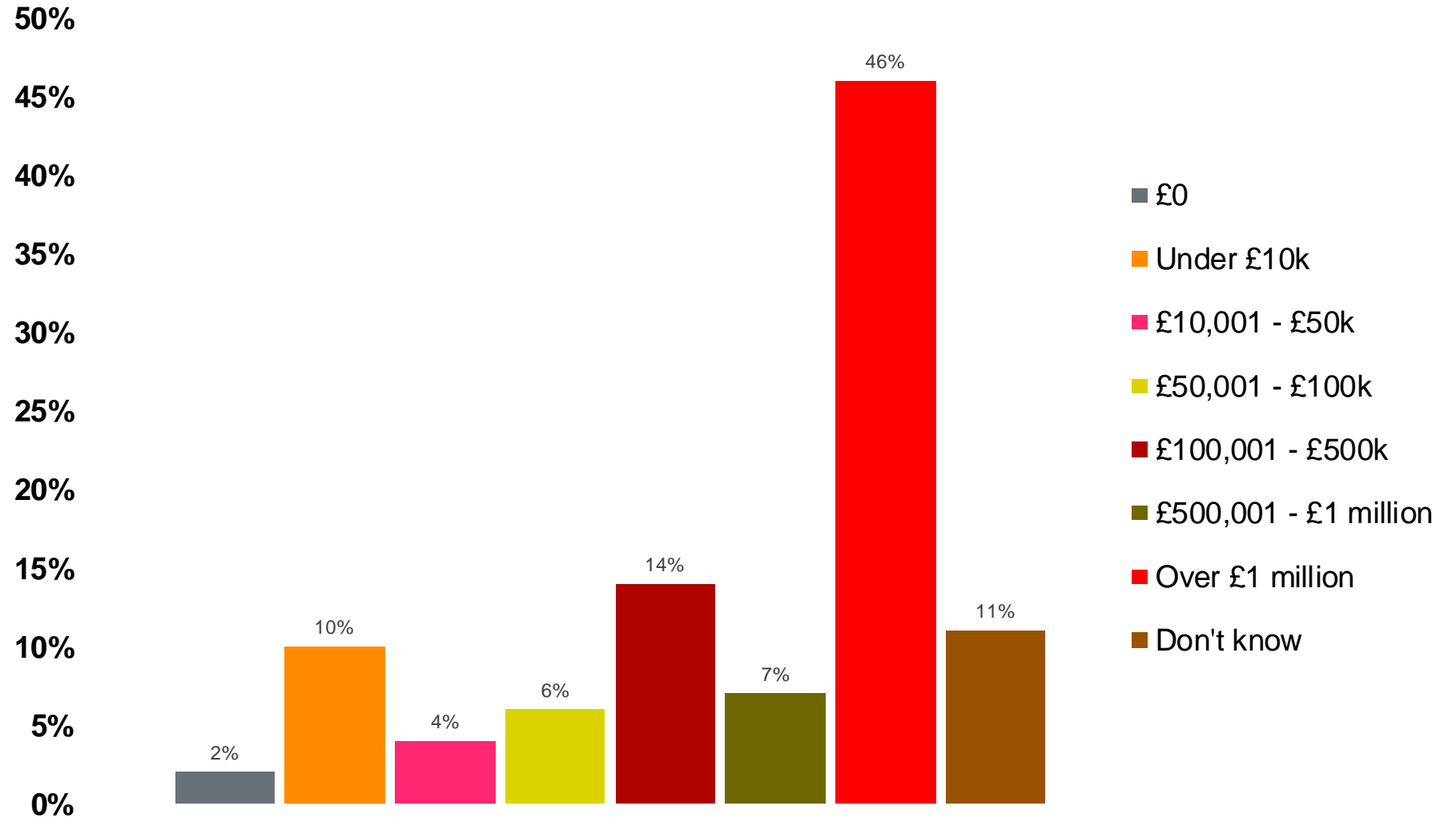
## Are you paid for this role?



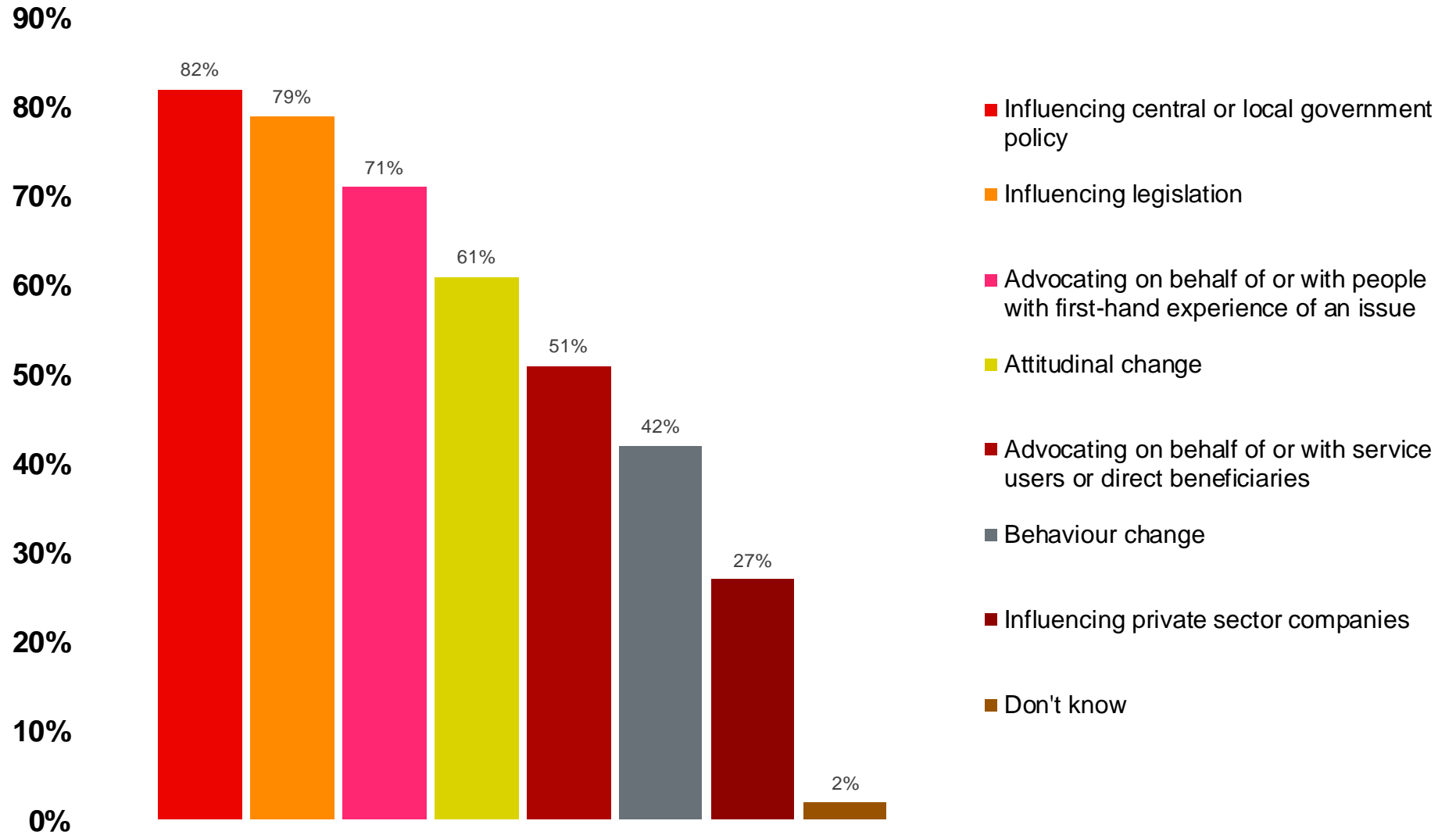
## What type of organisation is the role in?



## What is the turnover of the organisation?



# What kinds of campaigning are you and your organisation involved in?



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