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**UNLEASHING  
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# **SMK Campaigner Survey 2025/26: results**

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# About the results

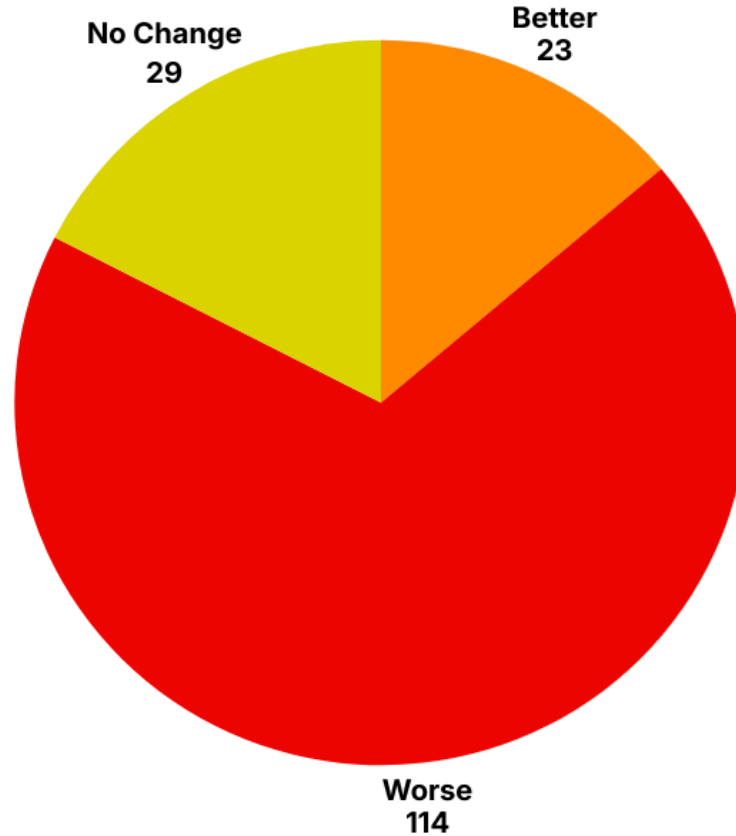
**Survey conducted between  
3 Nov 2025 and  
5 Dec 2025**

**166 respondents**

# External Environment:

**This section is about the context that you work in and whether things like political will or public opinion is making it harder or easier to carry out your campaigning or changemaking work.**

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



The majority of campaigners surveyed (69%) believe campaigning has got worse in the past year. Only 14% of campaigners say it has improved and 17% saw no change.



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

Those who answered "Worse" cited a hostile legislative environment, polarisation and the rise of far right, lack of funding, and public apathy / lack of engagement.

*"Mass far-right demonstrations, click-bait social media and growing apathy for conventional government makes it difficult to campaign for a nuanced issue."*

*"As protests have become harder to ignore, Government has made it harder to protest."*

*"The political environment and landscape make policy change increasingly difficult, with Labour leaning into the right and away from progressive alternative narratives to counter the far right."*

*"It's feeling increasingly hard to cut through with campaigning messaging - things that you think will shock and inspire action don't seem to work anymore as everything seems to be in crisis! Feels like policy makers and the general public have perhaps become a bit desensitised."*

*"I think the whole sector has been co-opted by government. Boards and CEOs are too worried about income to actually go out and advocate for change."*



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

Those who answered "Better" cited the new Labour government and more receptive MPs, better collaboration with other campaigning organisations, more motivation, and opportunities for greater public engagement.

*"The Labour Government is more accessible and responsible than the previous one. There have been some meaningful policy consultations."*

*"There have been some big wins like the rebellion over PIP cuts which I think give people motivation / hope that their actions can make a difference - it shows Labour can be moved."*

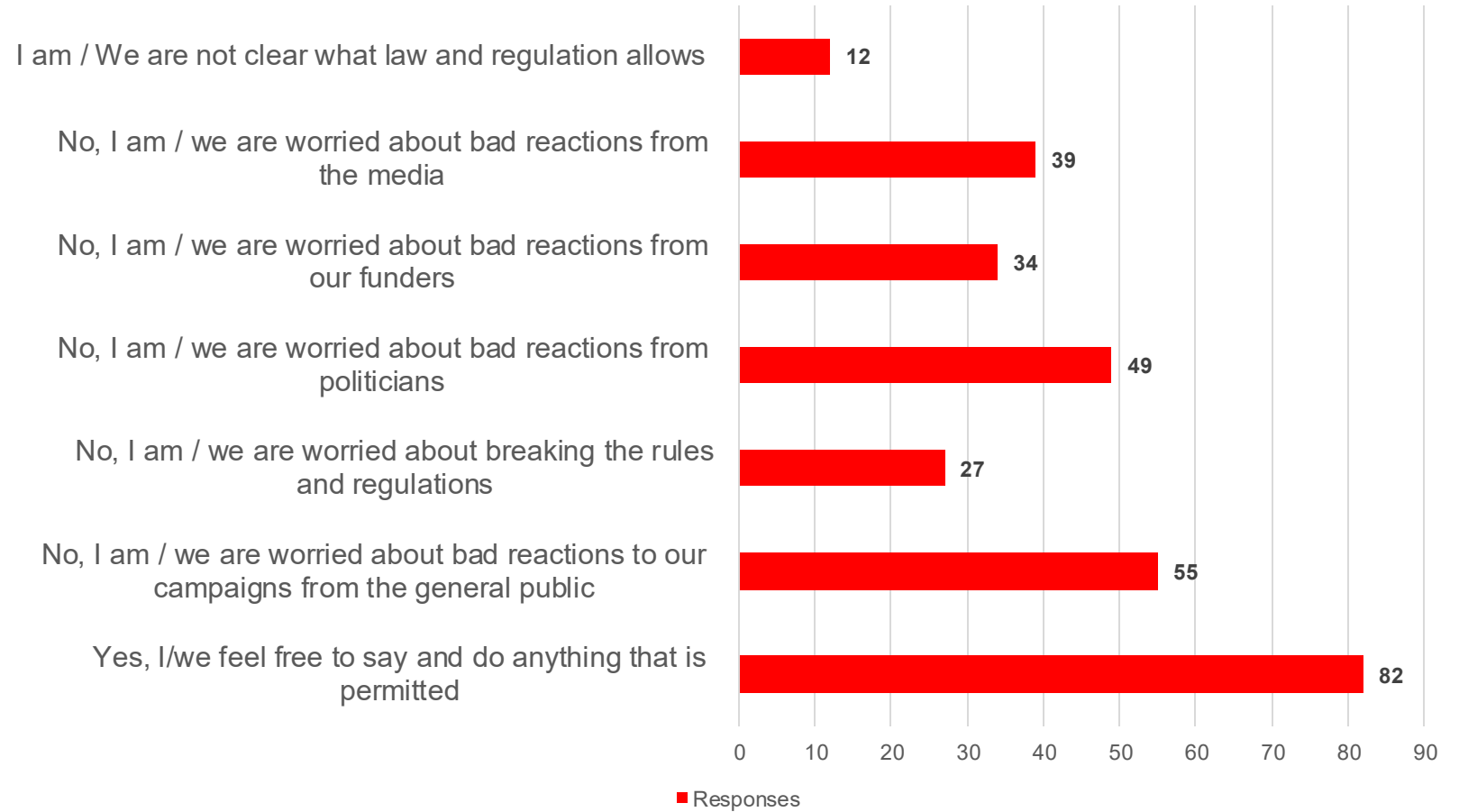
*"Campaign leaders are offering more resources to make it easier to take part. It feels more joined up."*

*"It's been very frustrating that a Labour Government has been so far off what we might have hoped for, but I'm starting to see organisations celebrating more wins, more breakthroughs, and now I'm a consultant working across the sector I'm seeing some amazing practice out there."*

*"There is increased polarisation among the public, which is risky but offers campaigning opportunities."*



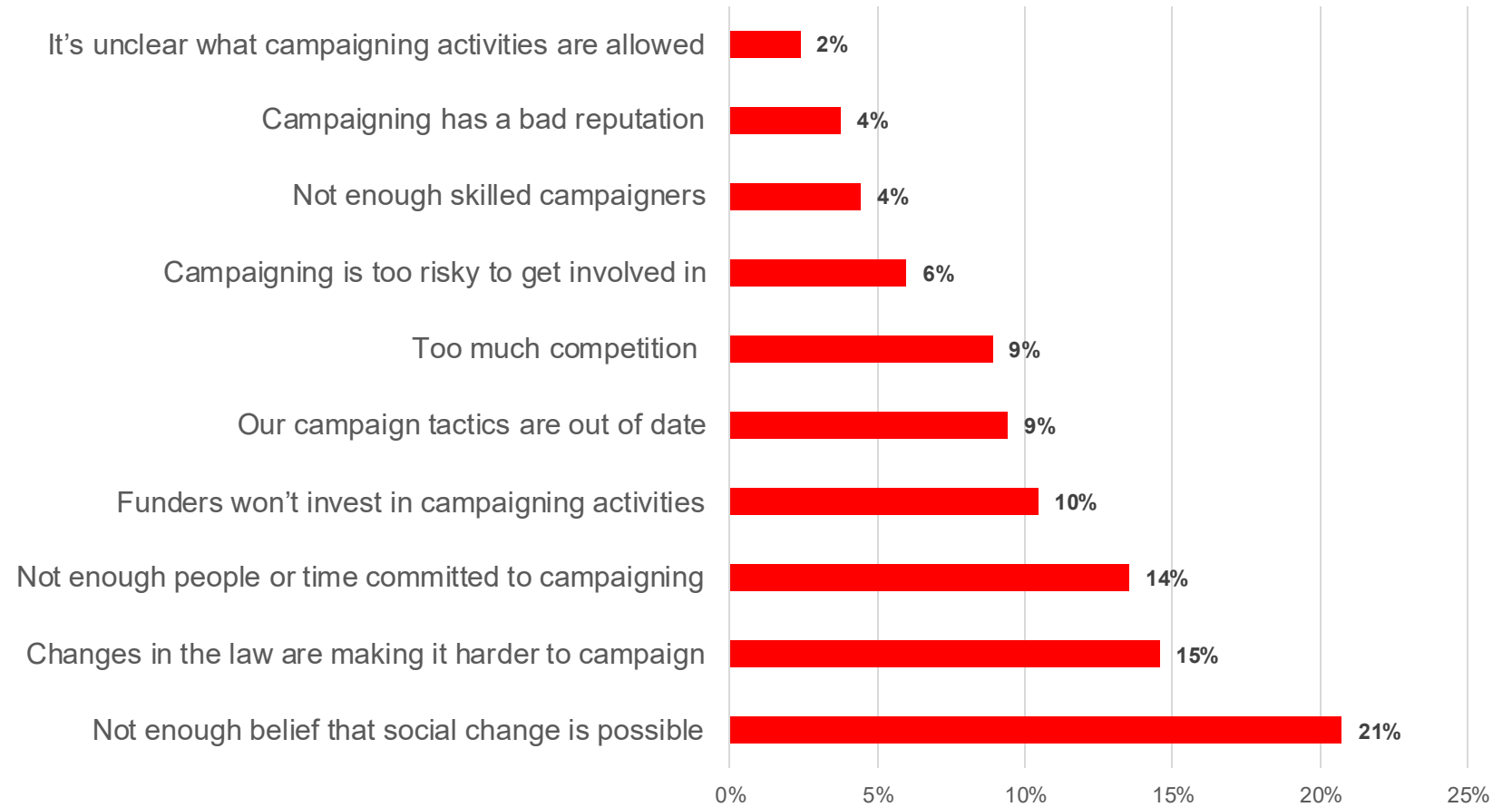
## Do you / Does your organisation feel free to campaign and speak out, as far as law and regulation allow?



The campaigns community is pretty evenly split, with 49.4% saying they feel free to campaign and speak out, as far as law and regulation allow. Even within those people, they are still worried about how others might react. A third of campaigners are worried about how the public might react (33.1%), followed closely by worries about politicians (29.5%), the media (23.5%), and funders (20.5%). 16.3% of campaigners feel restricted by laws and regulations around campaigning.



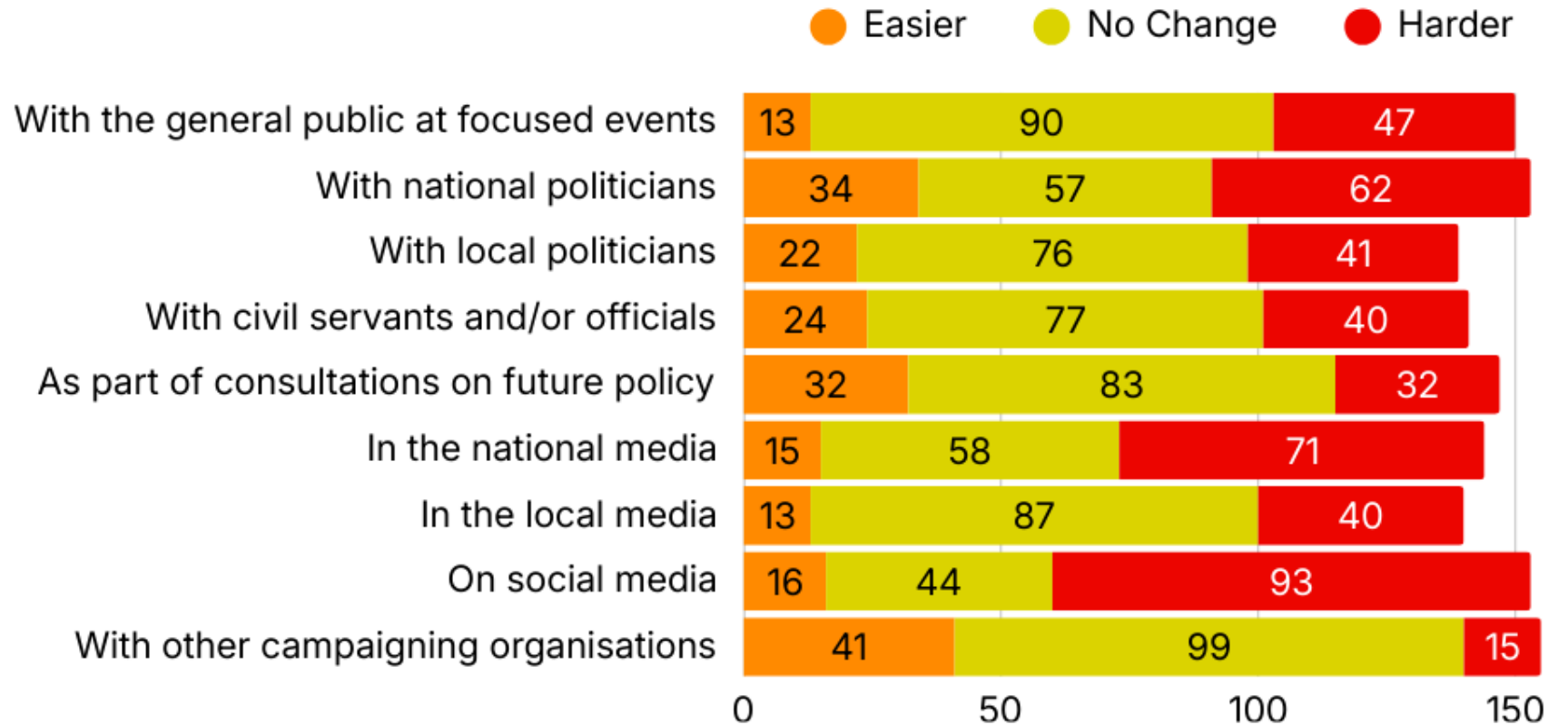
## What do you think are the main things that threaten our ability to campaign?



The top threat identified (21% of respondents) was not structural but psychological. Not enough belief that social change is possible is pouring cold water on the motivation and determination required to act. 15% of campaigning pointed to the changes in the law making it harder to do the work, and the next two highest categories (14% and 10%) pointed to an ongoing scarcity of resource and capacity that covered funding investment, time and people committed to campaigning.



**Over the past year, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard in any of these campaigning spaces that are relevant to you or your organisation?**



Our result indicate that, in every space, some campaigners are finding it harder to have the voice heard. This is most significant in the media especially social media (56%) followed closely by national media (43%). Whilst working with national politicians remains relevant for 96% of our campaigners, 37% felt that it was getting harder to have their voice heard by those politicians. The most encouraging trend was that a quarter of respondents (25%) were finding it easier to have their voice heard with other campaigning organisations.



**Tell us about any new barriers or problems you encountered during the past year that you think made campaigning harder.**

Campaigners in 2025 faced a perfect storm of financial, political, social, and organizational challenges. The intersection of funding crises, a hostile and polarized environment, negative media dynamics, public fatigue, and internal constraints has made campaigning significantly harder than in previous years.

*“Previously centrist or left-leaning press outlets chasing clicks, and publishing more far-right rhetoric as a result, means less space for progressive campaigns.”*

*“Over the past year, rising living costs and reduced funding opportunities made it harder to sustain long-term campaigning...Navigating complex funding systems consumed energy that could have been directed toward frontline advocacy.”*

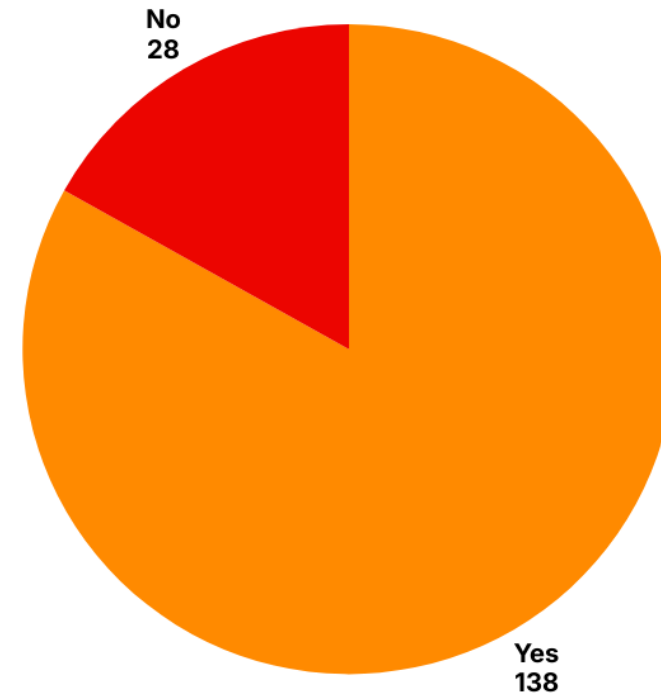
*“I think people are so happy to be on a better footing with government that in some cases people are slower to call out things we don’t agree with.”*

*“Hostility has concerningly increased - this year we’ve received threats and complaints from transphobic and xenophobic individuals and groups due to our public solidarity for all those oppressed.”*

*“Campaigners and activists are leaving in their droves, from burn out or no funding. It is starting to feel hopeless.”*



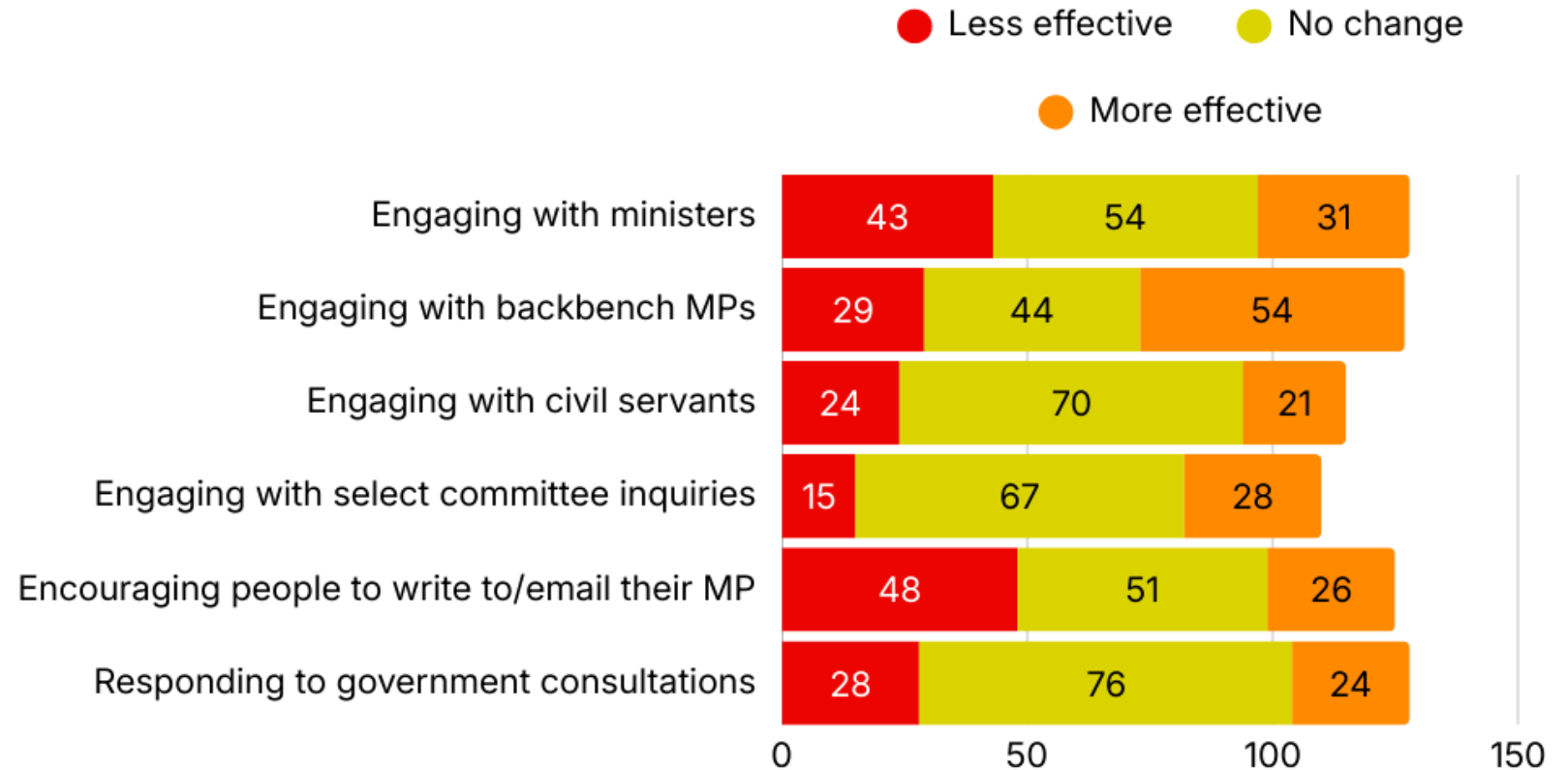
## Does your campaigning involve trying to influence the UK government?



83% of campaigners who responded to this survey said their campaigns try to influence the UK government.



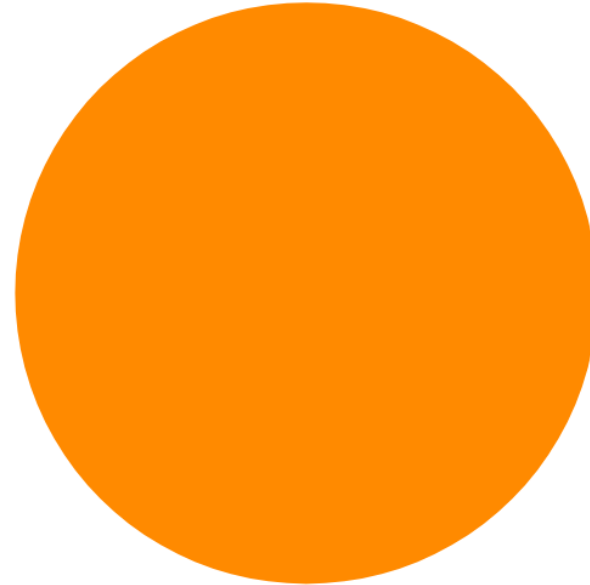
## If yes, do you feel the following types of influencing have become more or less effective in the last year?



Engaging with Backbench MPs has had the most increase in its efficacy, with 39% of those who used this strategy saying it's efficacy has increased and only 21% saying it's decreased. All other strategies saw comparable levels of increased efficacy. Encouraging people to write to their MPs saw the most decrease in efficacy, with 34.8% of those who used this strategy saying its efficacy has decreased and only 18.8% saying it's decreased. Engaging with Ministers also saw a significant decrease in efficacy, with 31.2% of those who used this strategy saying its efficacy has decreased and only 22.5% saying it's increased. The strategy that was most stagnant in its efficacy was responding to government consultations, with 55.1% seeing no change in its efficacy, 17.4% saying it's increased and 20.3% saying it's decreased.



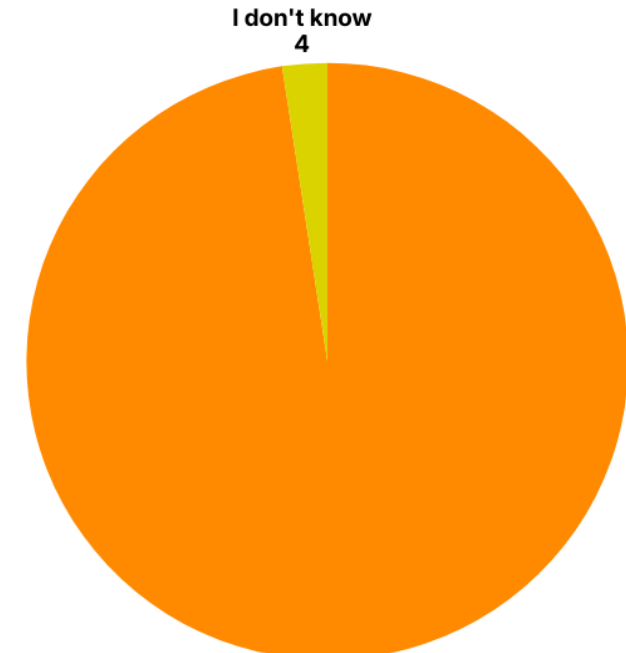
**Do you believe it's legitimate for civil society organisations, including charities, to campaign for changes to policy, law, attitudes, and behaviours?**



Yes  
166

Every single person who filled out the survey said it's legitimate for civil society organisations, including charities, to campaign for changes to policy, law, attitudes, and behaviours.

**Do you think that there will be a need for more campaigning by civil society in the next 12 months?**



I don't know  
4

Yes  
162

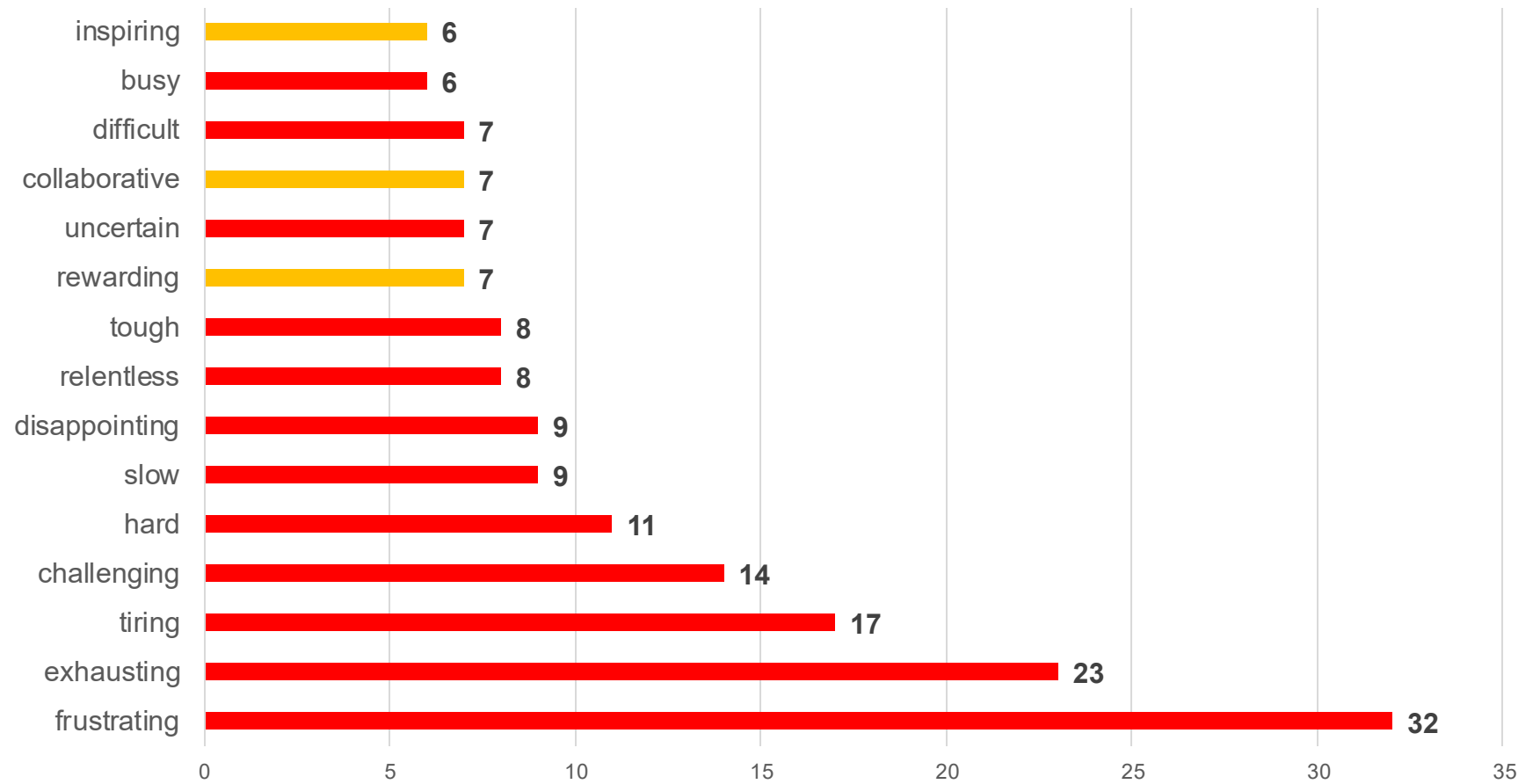
98% of survey respondents think there will be a need for more campaigning by civil society in the next 12 months, with the remaining 2% not knowing.



# The Past Year:

**This section is all about your personal experience and reflections and your thoughts on what you might need to support your work in the future.**

## If you could only use three words to describe what it has been like being a campaigner in 2025, what would they be?



Above are the words that were mentioned more than 5 times. Overall, campaigning in 2025 was difficult and exhausting, though with a few wins and potentially improved connections.



## **How do you maintain momentum and morale in your campaigning work, especially when change is slow or you face setbacks? What strategies have you found helpful?**

The key themes that emerged with this question were investing in connections, keeping focused on goals, celebrating wins, and actively looking for joy.

*“Having a strong relationship as a team and being honest about the challenges we are facing.”*

*“Remember the why/who will be impacted by the change we're trying to achieve, why is it needed.”*

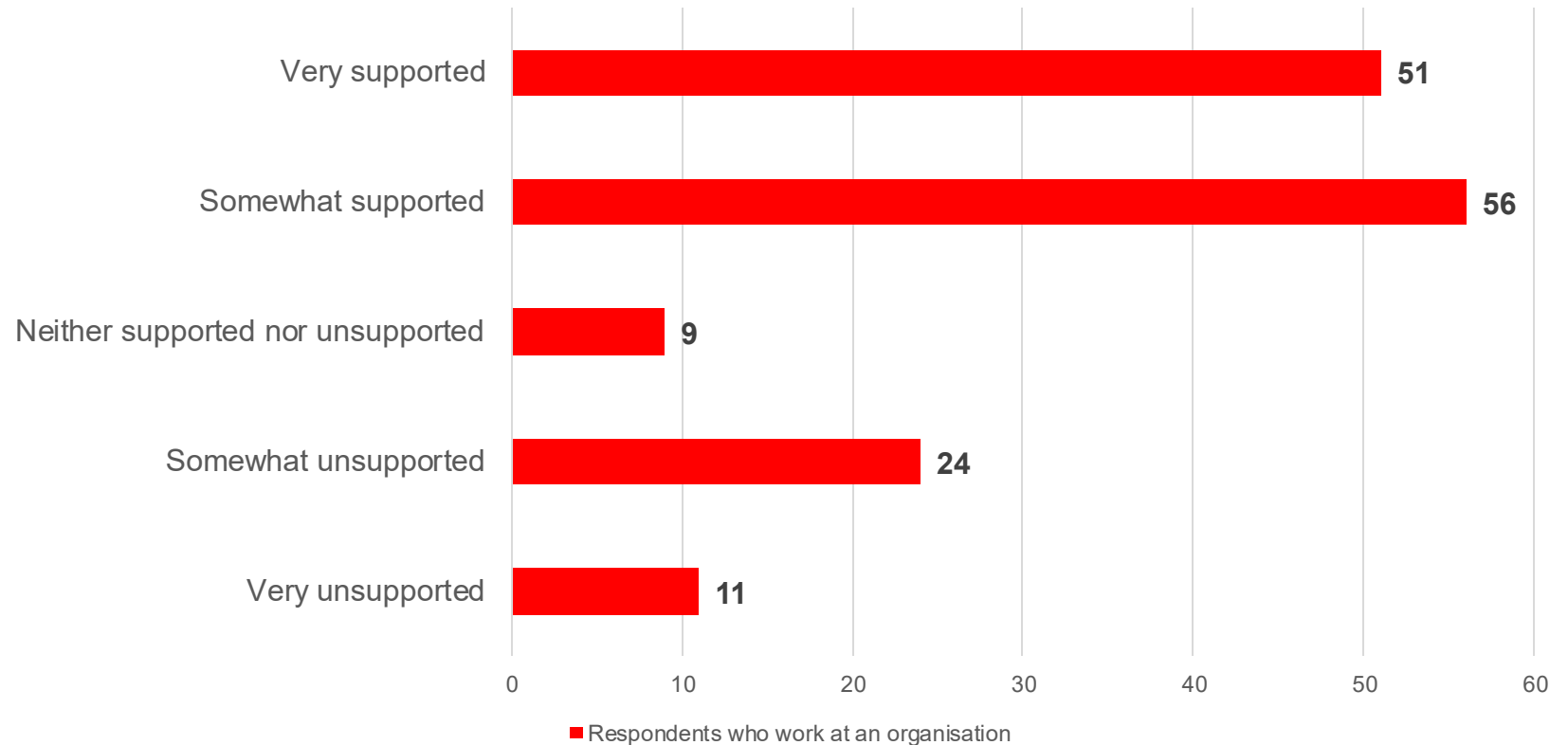
*“It's useful when other groups are also campaigning on similar things and we can work together.”*

*“Finding solace in coalition spaces ie. with campaigners from other organisations, to see there is hope and belief and get energy from other peoples energy.”*

*“Remind people of the journey, where we started and where we're going. Bring it back to the people we are campaigning with and for.”*



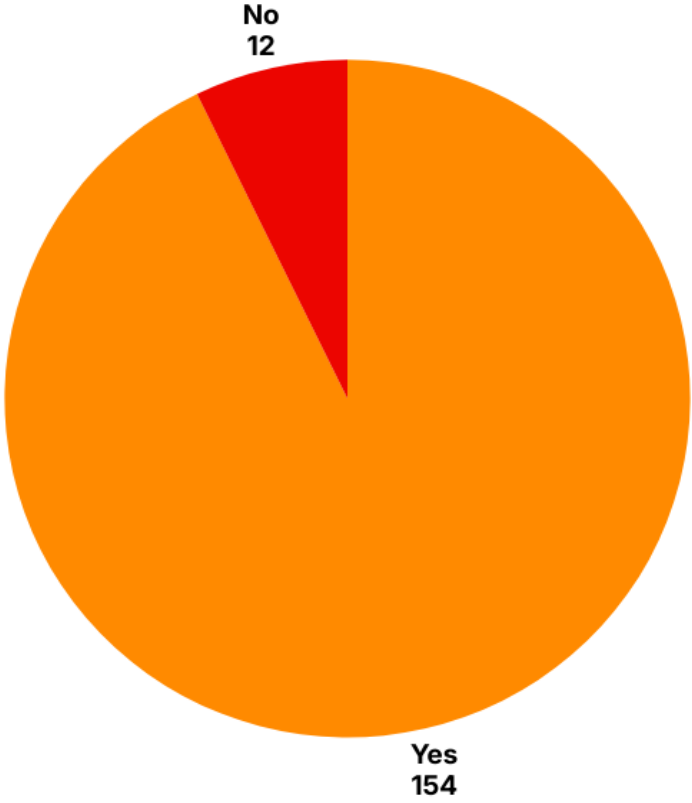
## If your work involves campaigning for an organisation, how supported do you feel?



The data shows that most campaigners feel positively supported in their roles, with 65% reporting they feel either somewhat or very supported. This indicates that many organisations are creating environments where campaigners can operate with confidence. However, 21% feel unsupported to some degree, highlighting a meaningful minority whose needs are not being met. A further 5% sit neutrally, neither supported nor unsupported, suggesting mixed or inconsistent experiences.



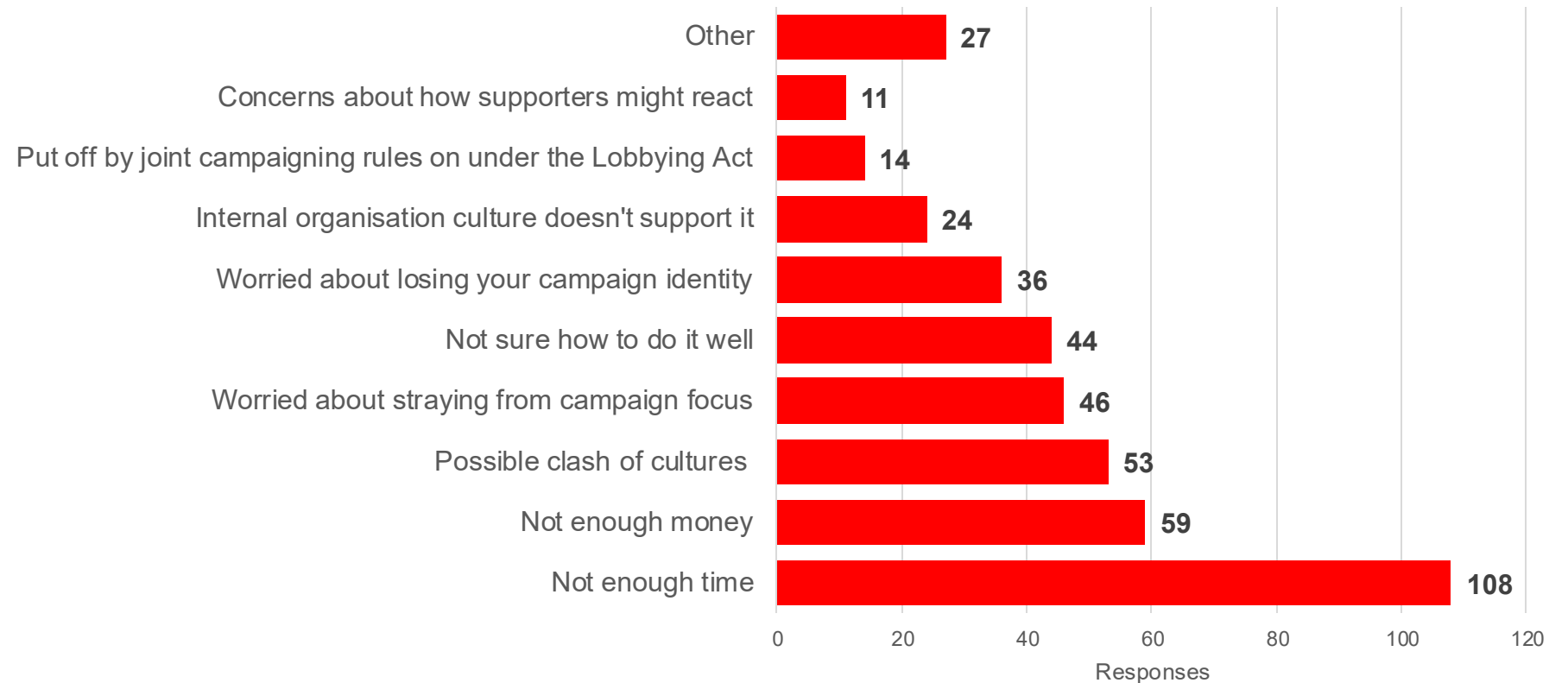
# Would you like to collaborate more with other campaigning or social change organisations?



Campaigners' appetite for collaborating with other organisations remains very high. In 2025, 93% of respondents said they would like to collaborate more, almost unchanged from previous years and consistently above 90% since we began tracking this question in 2019.



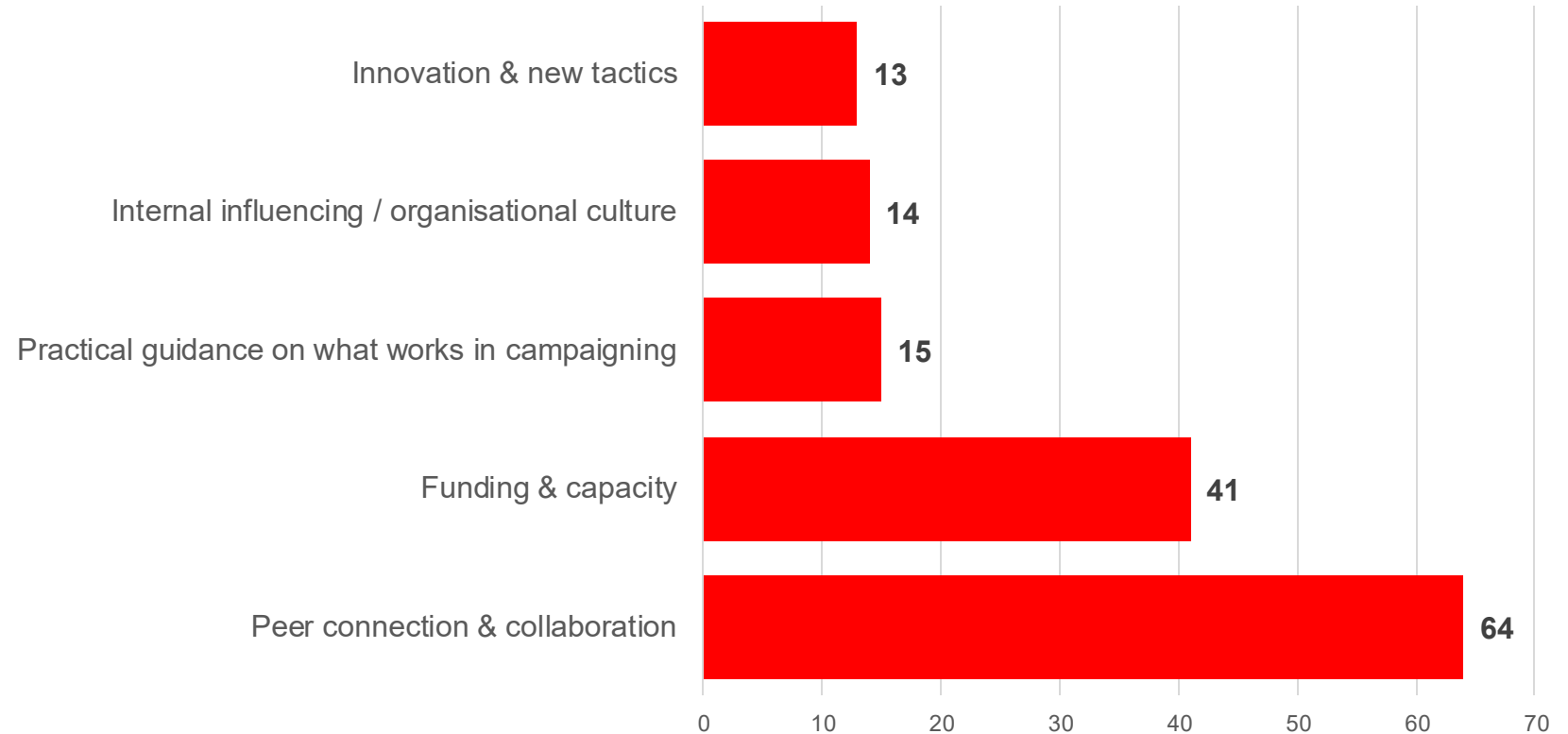
## What do you think is getting in the way [of collaborating] now?



While appetite for collaboration remains very high (93%), the gap between intention and action is driven mainly by capacity constraints (time and money) and confidence in how to collaborate without losing focus or identity. This suggests that the biggest unlocks are reducing coordination load (e.g., lightweight partnership processes, ready-to-use templates/MOUs, clearer roles) and de-risking collaboration (e.g., practical guidance on governance, culture fit, and joint planning). Regulatory and audience-reaction worries exist but are not the main blockers. In short: people want to collaborate, but they need it to be easier, lighter-weight, and safer.



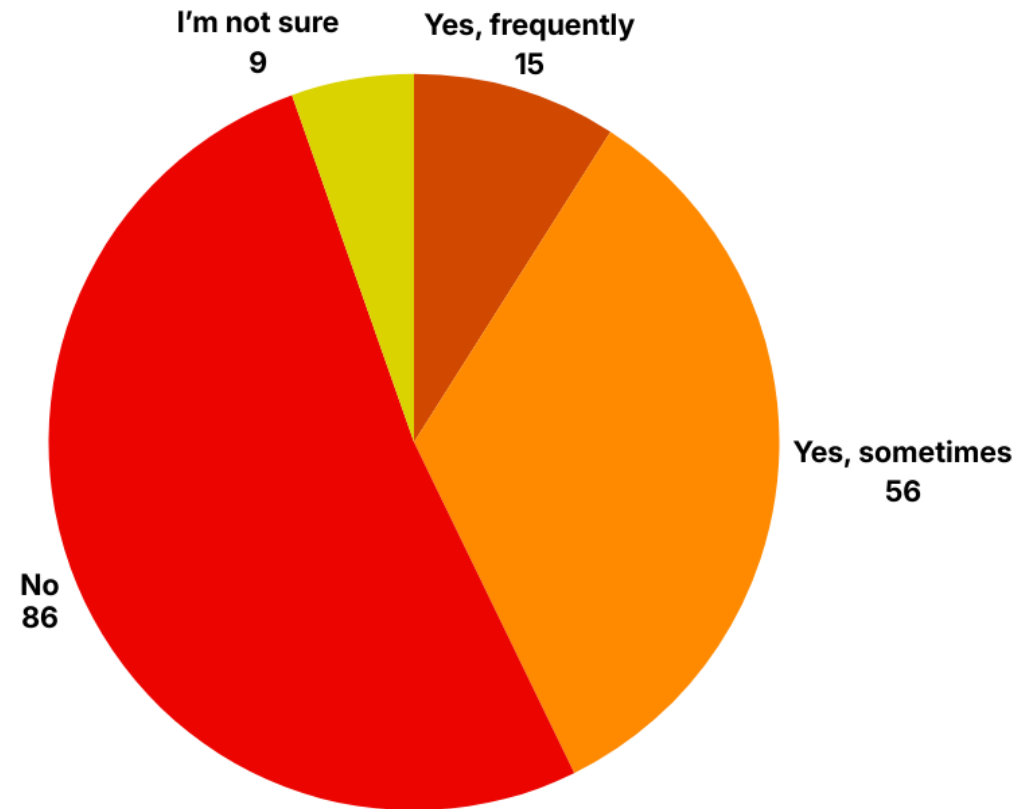
## What more do you need to improve the effectiveness of your campaigning in terms of training, support or advice?



Across the responses, five dominant needs emerge: 1) Peer connection & collaboration – Strong demand for spaces to meet, learn from, and work with other campaigners, including networks, solidarity, and cross-sector collaboration. 2) Funding & capacity – A persistent lack of time, staff and financial resource, limiting the ability to train, strategise, innovate or collaborate. 3) Practical guidance on what works in campaigning – Clear appetite for evidence-based tactics, case studies, applied skills, and support to sharpen campaign strategy and execution. 4) Internal influencing & organisational support – Many campaigners feel blocked by internal culture, lack of buy-in, or misunderstanding of campaigning within their organisations. 5) Innovation & adapting tactics – Requests for help staying ahead of a fast-changing landscape, including new methods, updated approaches, and ways to cut through crowded narratives.



## Do you ever worry about your personal safety as a campaigner or changemaker?



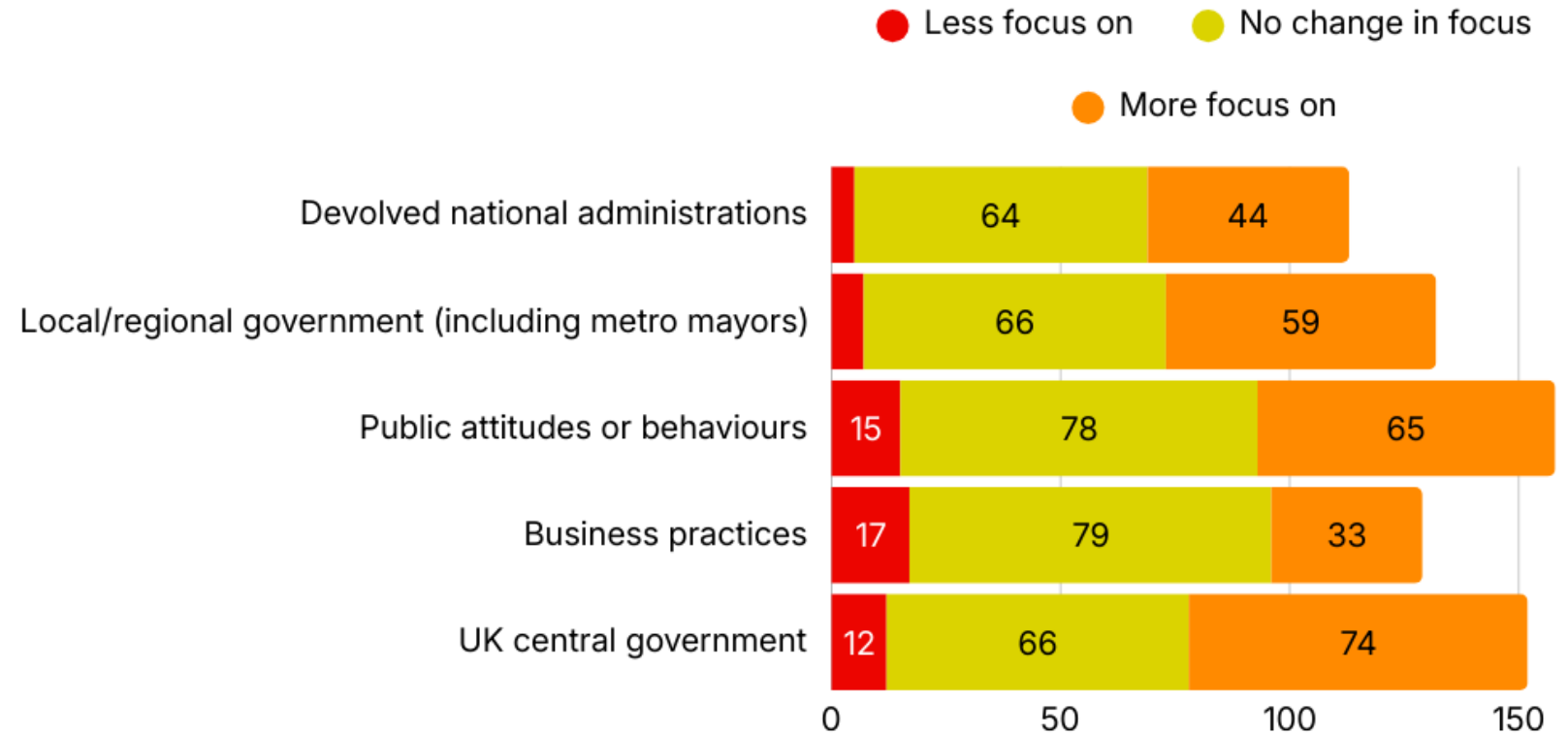
Most campaigners do not feel personally unsafe: just over half (52%) say they *never* worry about their safety. However, a sizeable minority do experience concern — 43% worry either sometimes or frequently — showing that personal risk is a real and present factor for many people engaged in social change. While not the majority, this level of concern is high enough to signal that safety anxiety is becoming a normalised part of campaigning, even in a country that sees itself as a safe democracy.



# **Campaigning Targets and Approaches:**

**This section is all about how you are adapting the way you work and a chance to share any successes you have had, this is a key section for sharing best practice with your fellow campaigners and changemakers.**

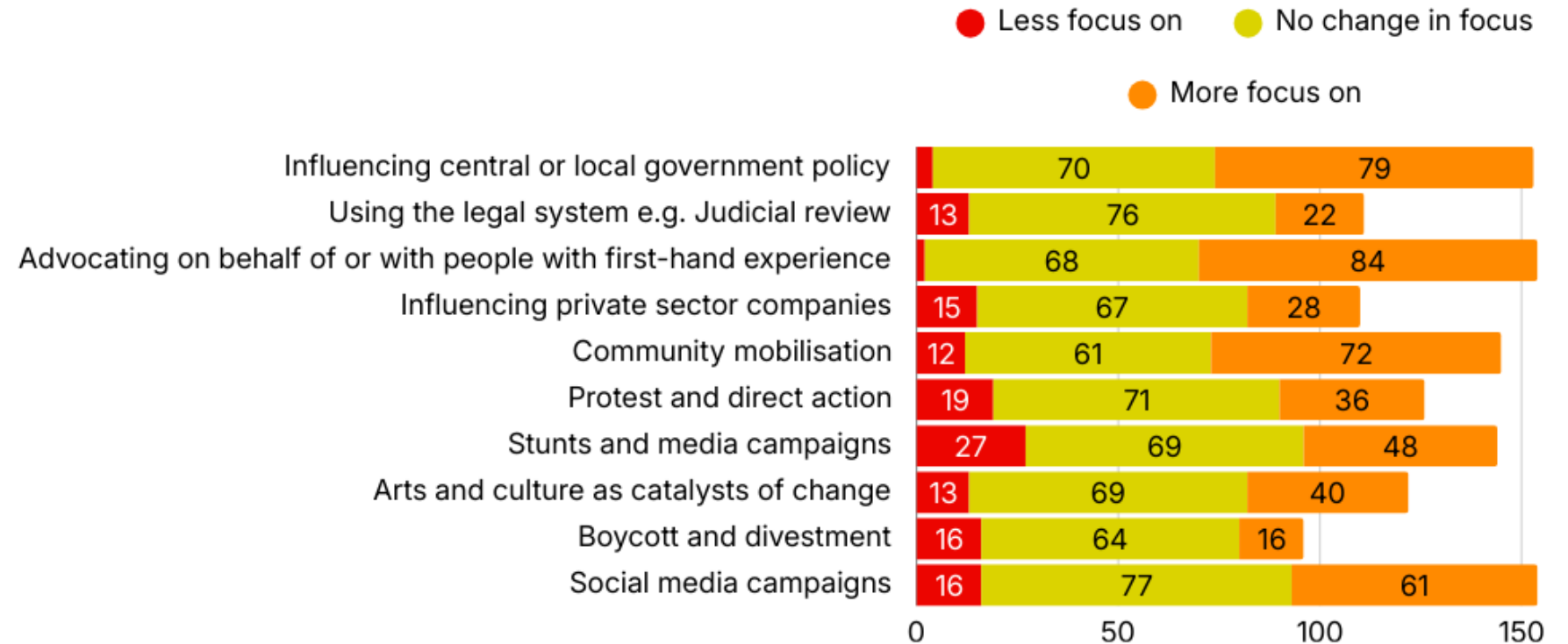
## Thinking about the past year, have the targets of your campaigning changed?



Overall the main trend for each category of target is to keep focused on the same targets for campaign - with one exception UK Central Government. The second biggest trend is to increase focus on specific targets; the biggest increases were for the UK Central Government, the public (attitudes and behaviours), and local/regional government, although all targets had respondents that were increasing their focus on them. Another key trend is that the most popular target for campaigns was the public, with 95% of respondents seeing this category as relevant for them (although 9% are reducing their focus here), closely followed by UK Central Government with 92%. The target that has the greatest reduction in focus are business practices, although this is still a small percentage (10% of respondents).



## Thinking about the past year, have the approaches of your campaigning changed?



For each approach, there is a core of campaigners that are maintaining their focus. This worked out as an average 42% of respondents for each campaign approach (ranging between 37% and 46% of responses). The top three approaches where campaigners were increasing their focus were Advocating on behalf of people with first-hand experience of an issue (84 responses), influencing central or local government policy (79 responses) and Community mobilisation (72 responses). The approaches with the biggest decrease in focus were Stunts and media campaigns (27 responses) and protest and direct action (19 responses).



## Can you tell us a bit about why you have made any changes to your approaches in the last year?

The key themes that emerged with this question were a changing external environment (politically, policy-wise, or socially), wanting to focus on those with lived experience, experimentation, responding to the needs of media platforms, and adapting to changes in the organisation's capacity.

*"We've had to focus more on right to protest and judicial review because of the increasing restrictions on protest, the proscription of Palestine Action, and the legal cases that have come as a result of the proscription and the arrests of protesters."*

*"Recognition that supporting more people with lived experience brings more legitimacy and stronger narratives to the case for change."*

*"We've found art to be a really powerful catalyst of change after launching a campaign on winter energy debt focussed on a spoken word piece."*

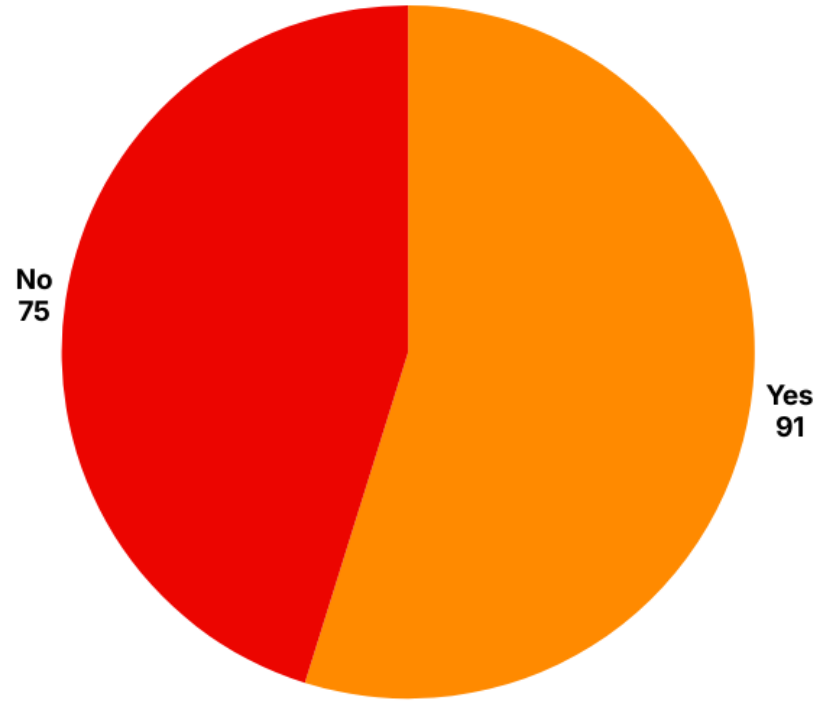
*"People are engaging less on certain social media platforms (i.e. X) because of the influx of fascism. We now focus on LinkedIn, connecting with professionals, making a change from the inside out."*

*"NGOs do not have the digital presence to achieve necessary change. Content creators [are] now a focus for us."*

*"We have more capacity - the organisation is investing in these approaches (even if the internal culture to fully support them hasn't caught up yet!)"*



**Have you had a breakthrough moment or campaigning success in the past year where you felt your campaigning made a real difference?**



Despite some grim trends, over half of our campaigners had a breakthrough moment or campaigning success in 2025. This is important not just for the social change we want to see, but also the motivation of campaigners themselves, public opinion about the value of campaigning and belief that social change is possible.



## What made this happen? And, what have you learnt?

The key themes that emerged with this question were elevating the voices of the community, collaborating with others and using your strengths, and being persistent.

*“Community grassroots voices and stories make an impact.”*

*“We've learned a lot, including the power of working together in partnership with other organisations who share our values.”*

*“I was just stubborn and wouldn't stop complaining to the local council about why their suggested policy change was discrimination. Eventually they stopped trying to implement it in our area.”*

*“Slow patient effort over a long time, not giving up, being persistent in finding answers to problems as they arose.”*

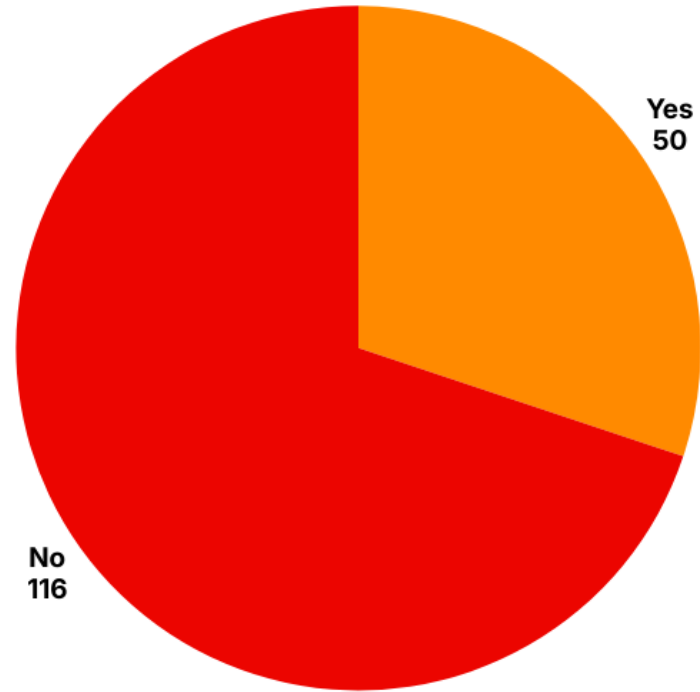
*“We had a brilliant event to introduce refugees and people in local communities –worked because of the strength of relationships built up over time.”*



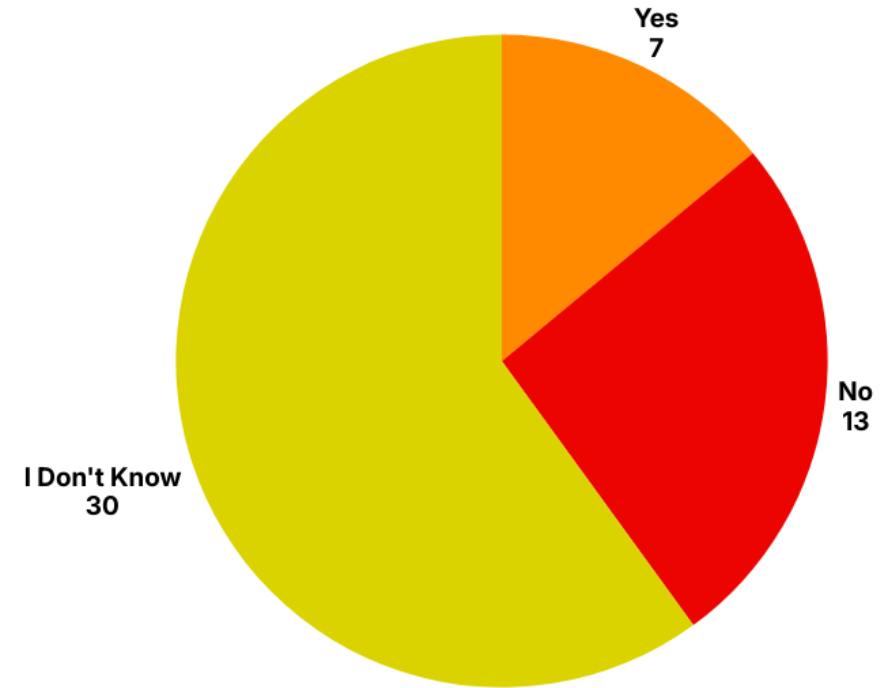
# The Year Ahead:

**This section briefly looks at a few of the key changes that could impact changemaking and campaigning in 2026.**

**Have you heard of the Civil Society Covenant, launched in July this year?**



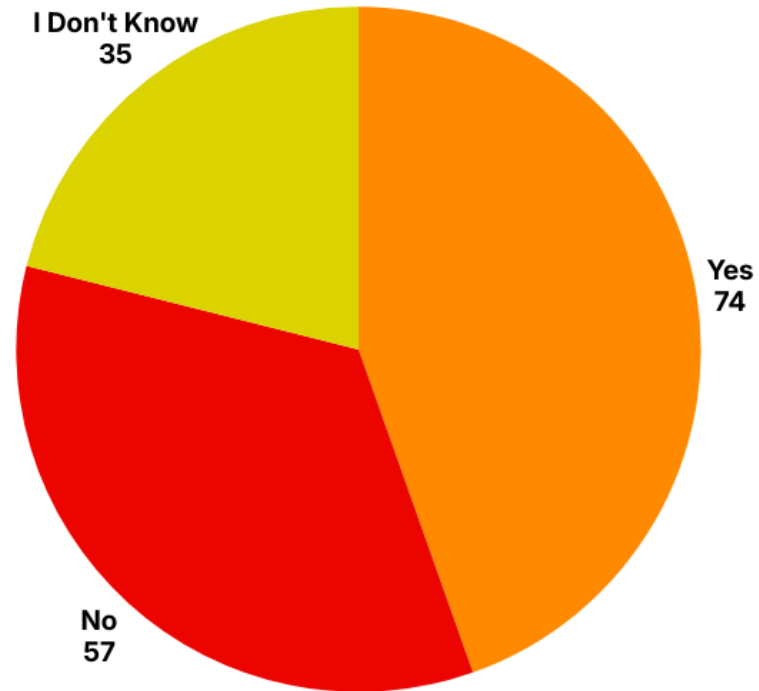
**If you answered yes, do you think it will have a positive impact on your campaigning in 2026?**



Less than a third of respondents (30%) had heard of the Civil Society Covenant. This could be an indicator that the covenant is yet to have any noticeable impact on the campaigns sector. Of those that did know about the covenant, the majority (60%) remain unsure about whether its impact will be positive, and a further 26% think that the impact of the covenant will not be positive on campaigns in 2026.



**Have your own views about the role of protest and direct action changed in response to the proscription of Palestine Action and the rise of the far right?**



Whilst 34% remain steady in their views around protest and direct action, the rise of the far right and the proscription of Palestine Action are shaping campaigning work in the UK, with 45% of respondents reporting a change.



## **If you answered yes, please could you explain your answer and how it might impact your work in 2026?**

The key themes that emerged with this question were increased anxiety/fear around protesting, a hostile environment, with many believing these circumstances make action all the more important, as well as legal protections for it.

*"We want to have our say but are worried about arrest."*

*"...the Government has gone mad and started arresting people for legitimate political protest."*

*"[The] far-right pose a threat where they are able to mobilise a fascist street presence (there have been physical and online attacks on our network members), but they are polarising society more generally."*

*"I feel we need to reclaim language and tactics and recognise where we are unified as people in order to stop divisions growing."*

*"It also solidifies the continued need for education and solidarity raising, as well as helping people take hold of their agency and take action - if we had more of this, perhaps we wouldn't find ourselves where we are?"*

*"It made me understand just how hard the current administration wants to hold onto the status quo - so shaking them out of it will require something more creative than a stiff letter."*

*"We are worried about the far right's ability to shift the Overton window and influence public opinion on social security, including through divisive narratives."*



**Has your work been impacted by the devolution of power to national governments, local authorities, and regional mayors?**



There is considerable uncertainty about the impact of devolution (23%), although 28% are already feeling the impact.



**If you answered yes to the question above, please can you tell us a bit more about how you think it will impact your campaigning work?**

The key themes that emerged with this question were shifting power from national to local/regional areas, increased complexity, and adaptations to strategies/targets.

*“We need a better understanding of how we can influence regional mayors and where their powers and responsibilities lie.”*

*“... we think there could be opportunities to engage with a different group of decision-makers and better opportunities to mobilise at a more local level.”*

*“Housing is devolved, but welfare isn't. That makes it harder for us to campaign for effective solutions to the housing emergency.”*

*“Wondering how lots of local action groups will collaborate/merge/etc when many have different styles of campaigning.”*

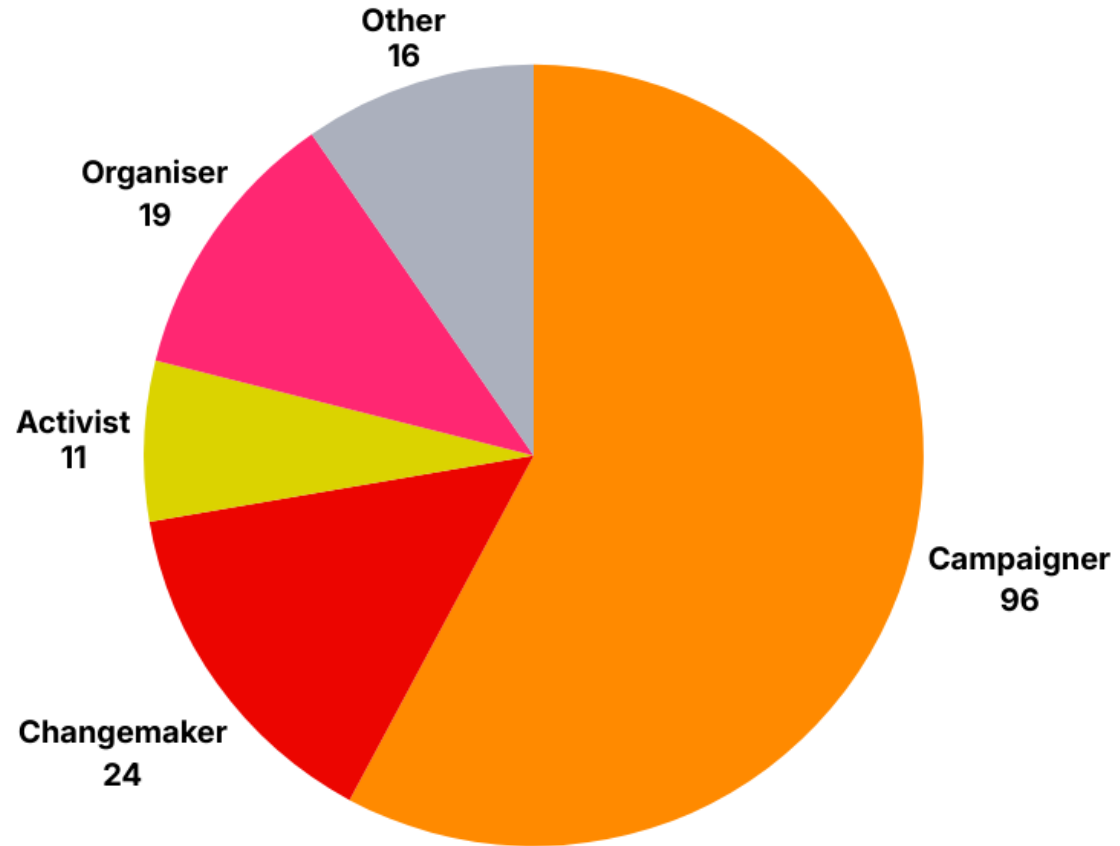
*“We need a better understanding of how we can influence regional mayors and where their powers and responsibilities lie.”*



# About you:

Demographic questions

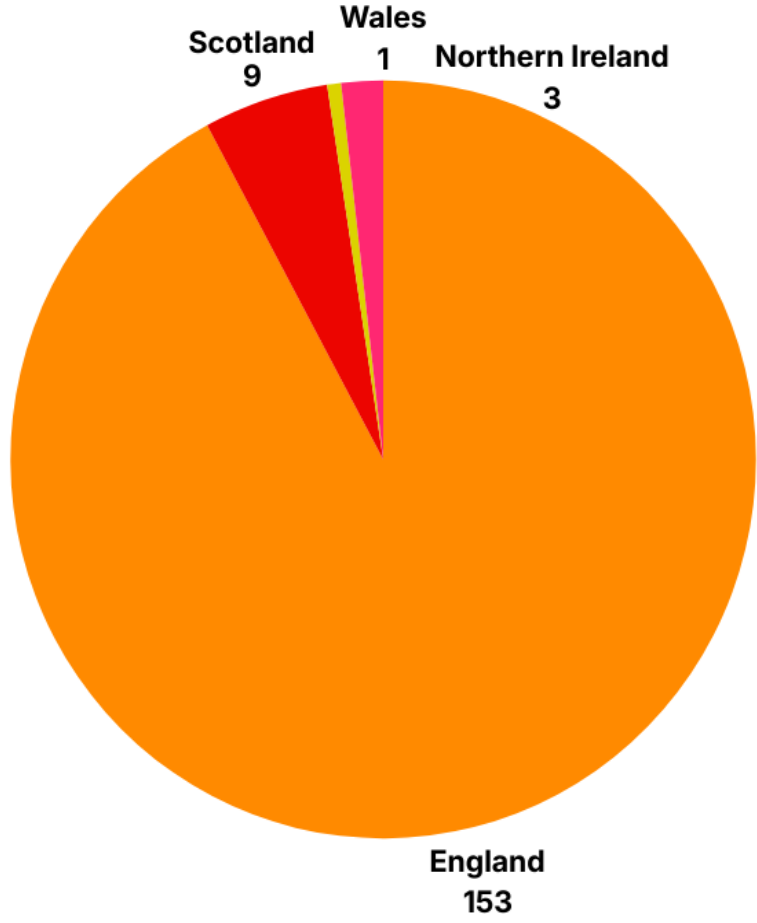
**Would you describe yourself as a campaigner, changemaker, activist, organiser, or something else?**



Two thirds of respondents refer to themselves as Campaigners, with the second most-used titles, Changemaker and Organiser, nearly tying. Slightly fewer identify as Activists, and 10% of respondents use a different word than those provided.



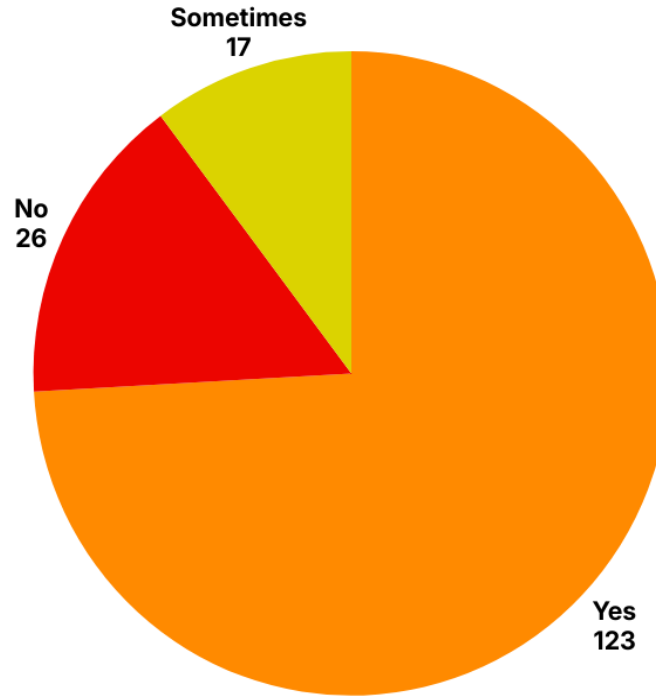
### Where are you based?



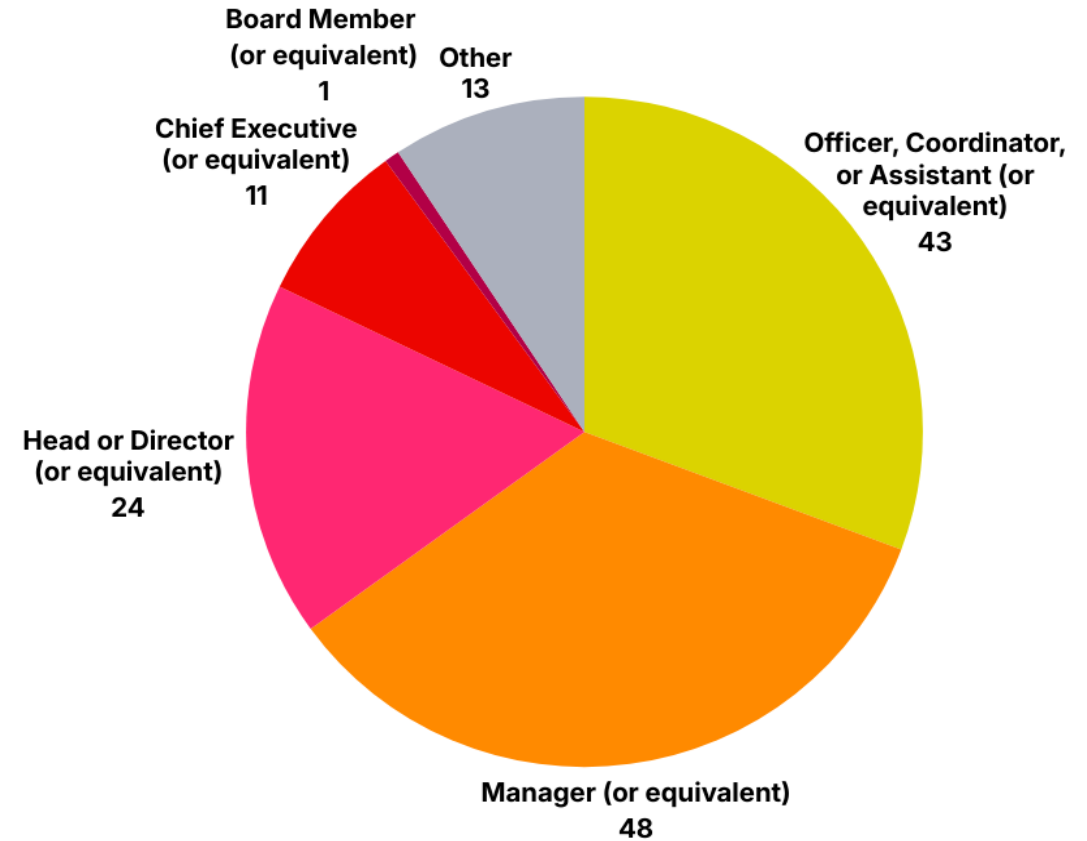
Most respondents to this Survey were based in England, with only 4 in Scotland, 2 in Northern Ireland, and 1 in Wales.



## Are you paid for your campaigning work?



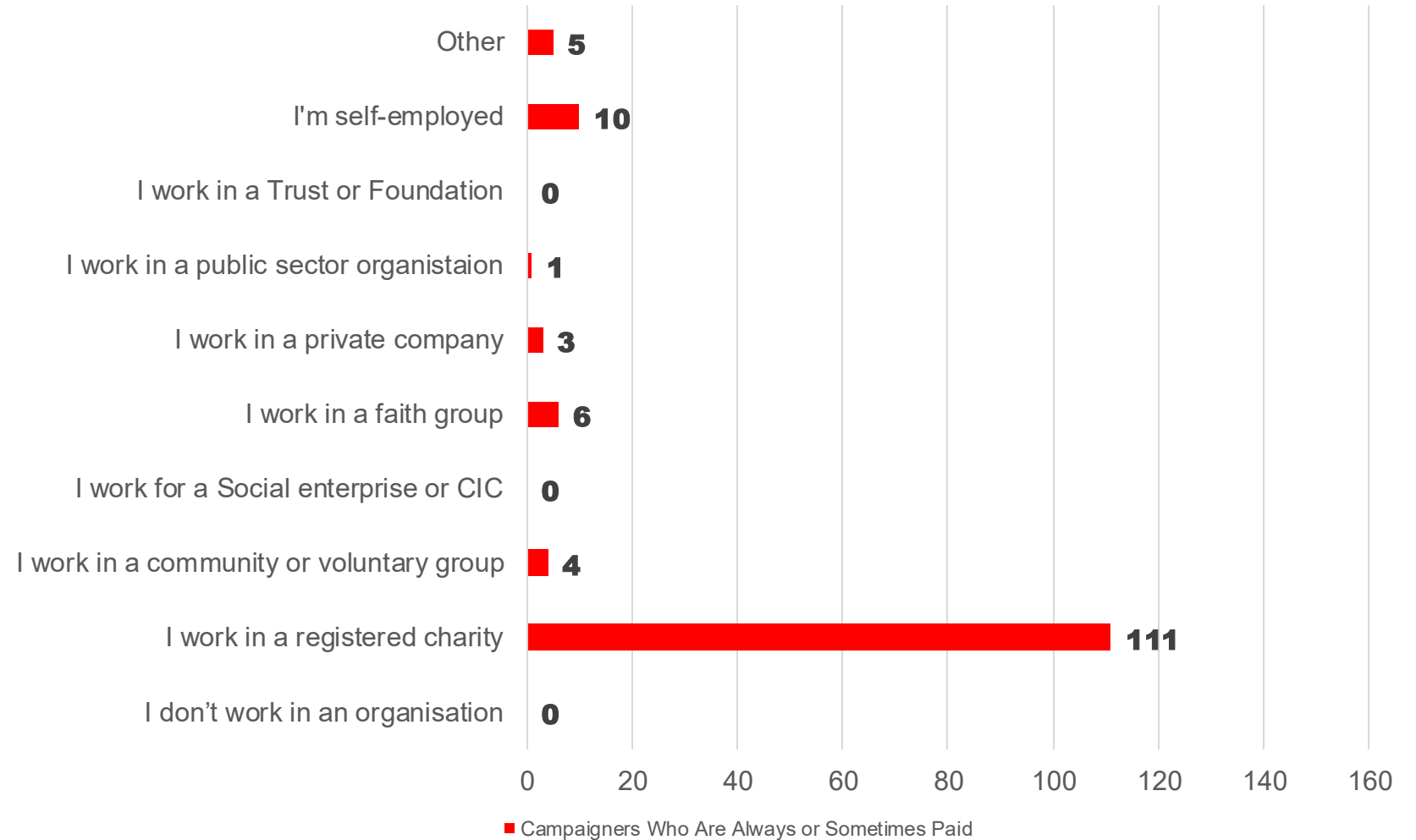
## What is your role?



Three quarters of respondents are always paid for their campaigning work, while 10% of respondents are only paid sometimes. 16% of respondents to this survey are unpaid, grassroots campaigners. Of the respondents who were paid for their campaigning work, they were nearly evenly split among seniority levels. 30.7% of respondents were Officers, 34.3% were Managers, 17.1% were Directors, and 7.9% were CEOs.

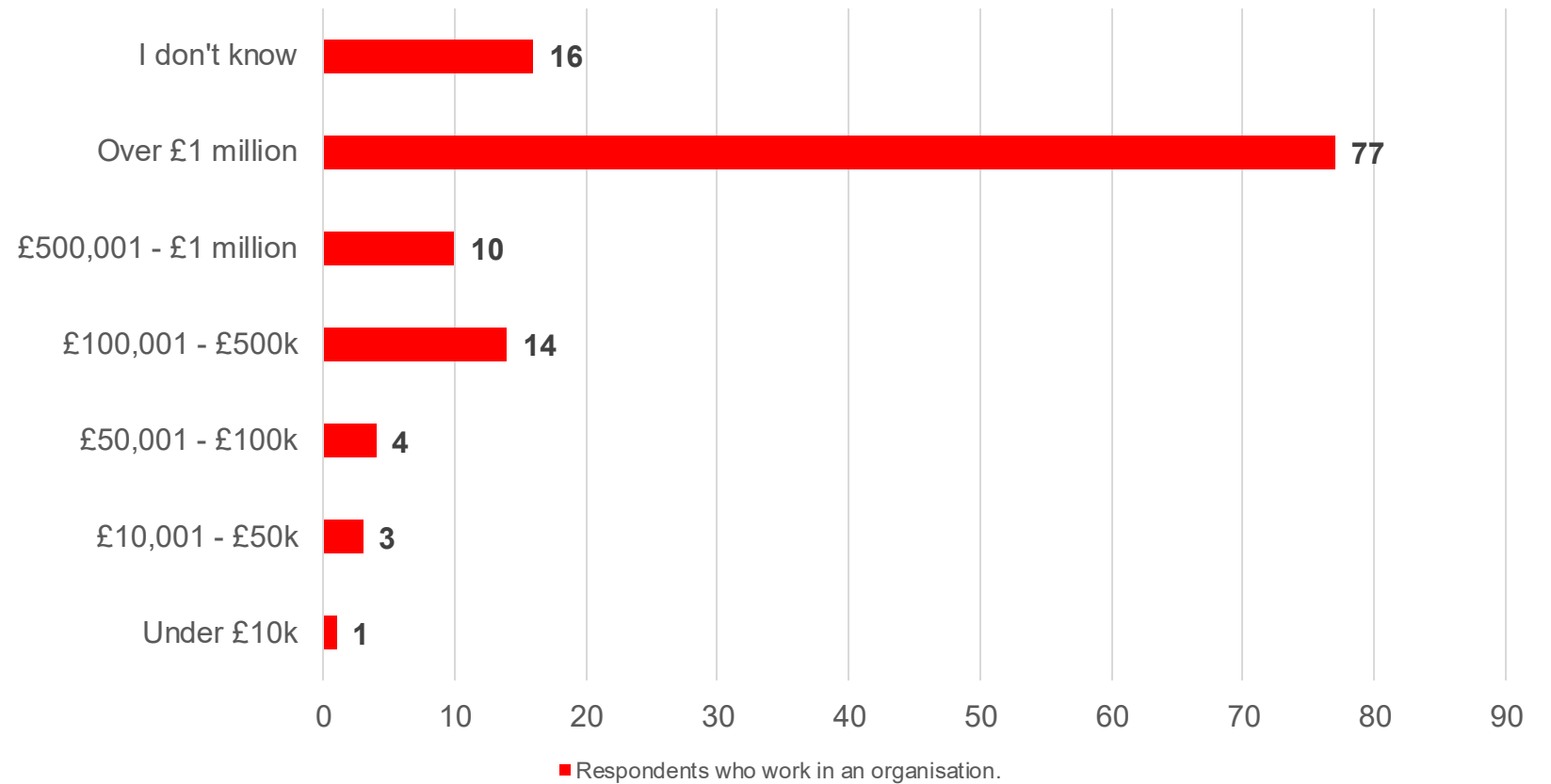


## Do you work in a campaigning organisation?



This question was only answered by those who answered Yes or Sometimes to "Are you paid for your campaigning work?" Of those people, 79% work in registered charities. Of those who do not work in charities, most are Self-Employed campaigners, with others working in community or faith groups, and a few in private companies.

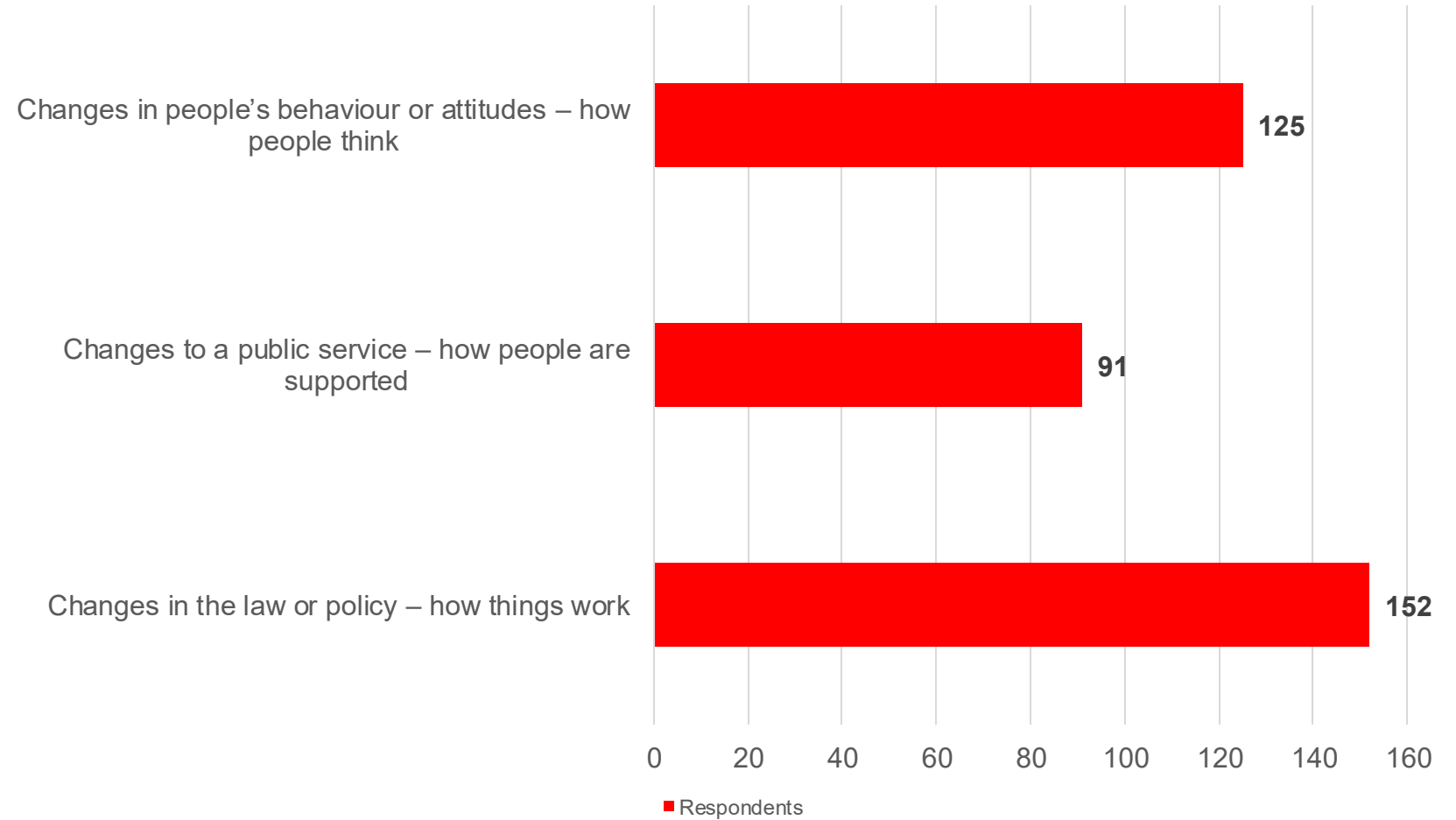
## What is the annual turnover of the organisation?



This question was only asked to respondents who work in an organisation. Most of those respondents work in organisations with a turnover exceeding £1 million, with the next largest category being £100k-500k, and £500k to £1 million. A total of 8 respondents work at organisations making under 100k per year.



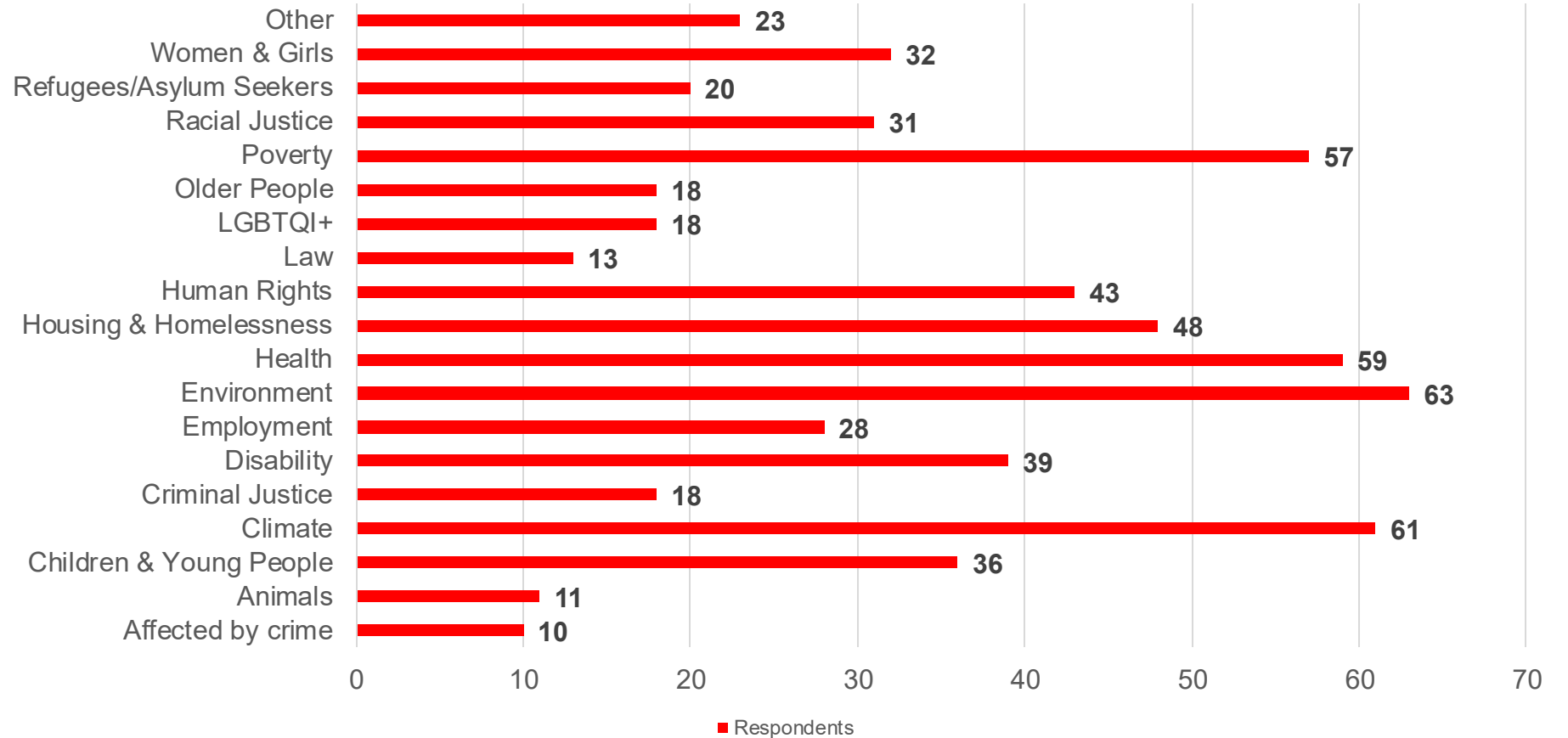
## What kinds of campaigning are you involved in?



This question allowed multiple responses. Over 90% of respondents to this Survey are campaigning to change a law, with three quarters campaigning to change people's attitudes and behaviours, and just over half campaigning to change how people are supported.



## What areas of social change is your work involved in?



Environment, Climate, Health, Poverty, and Homelessness were the most campaigned-on issues by Survey respondents. Affected by Crime, Animals, Law, Criminal Justice, LGBTQI+, and Older People were the least. 13% of respondents campaigned on issues not provided, with the most common "Other" answers being Economics, International Development, Conflict & Peace, Fair Trade, and Democracy.



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