

# Student Opinion | Climate change



STUDENTS  
ORGANISING FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY  
UNITED KINGDOM

# Introduction

# Background and methodology

Since April 2014, the National Union of Students (NUS), and now Students Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS-UK) has been tracking students' attitudes towards climate change. This report presents the results from quarterly surveys carried out between April 2014 and September 2024.

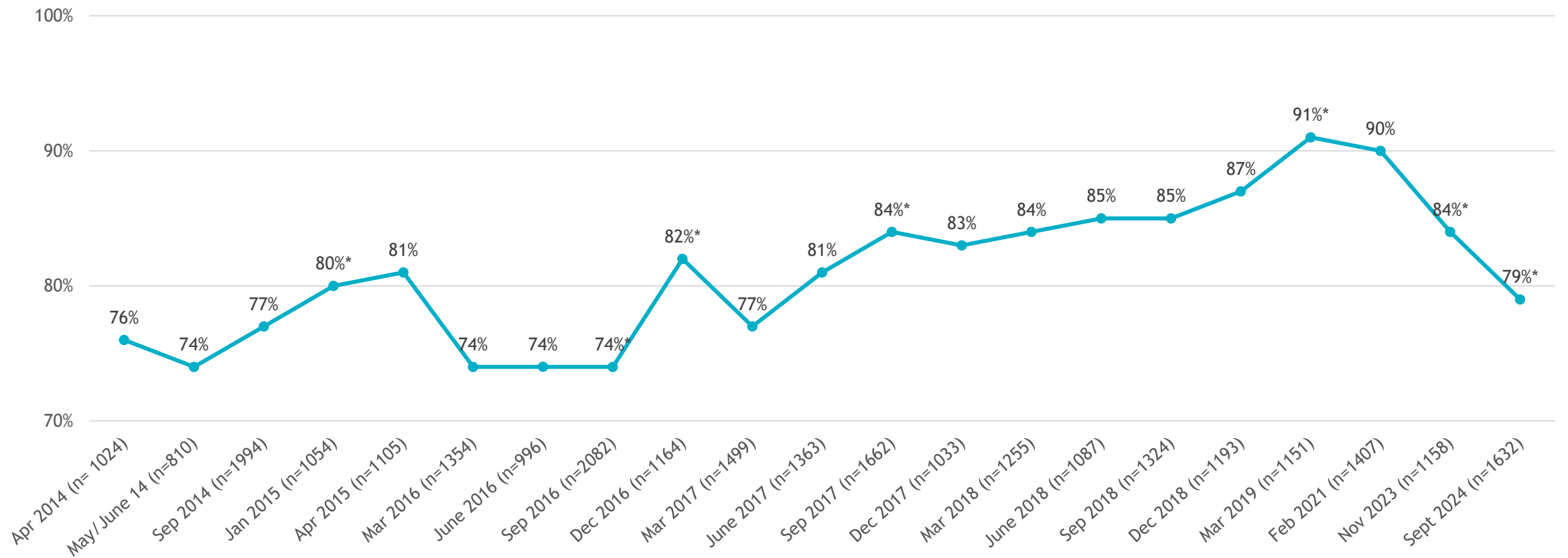
The questions are based on the DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker, a nationwide tracker survey related to the policies of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ). The latest survey ran from 11 July to 15 August 2024. Between 2012 and 2022, the survey was run by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. This allows for comparison between the student population, and a nationally representative survey of those aged 16+ in the UK.

The surveys are distributed through the database of TOTUM cardholders and NUS' student database and form part of a wider omnibus survey containing questions on a variety of topics. Respondents are incentivised to complete the survey with a cash prize draw. Responses have been weighted to reflect the demographic make up of the UK student population.

# Attitudes towards climate change

Across all waves of research, respondents have consistently shown high levels of concern about climate change, with a majority saying they are fairly or very concerned. A significantly lower proportion of students say they are concerned about climate change in September 2024 compared to the previous result.

Student data

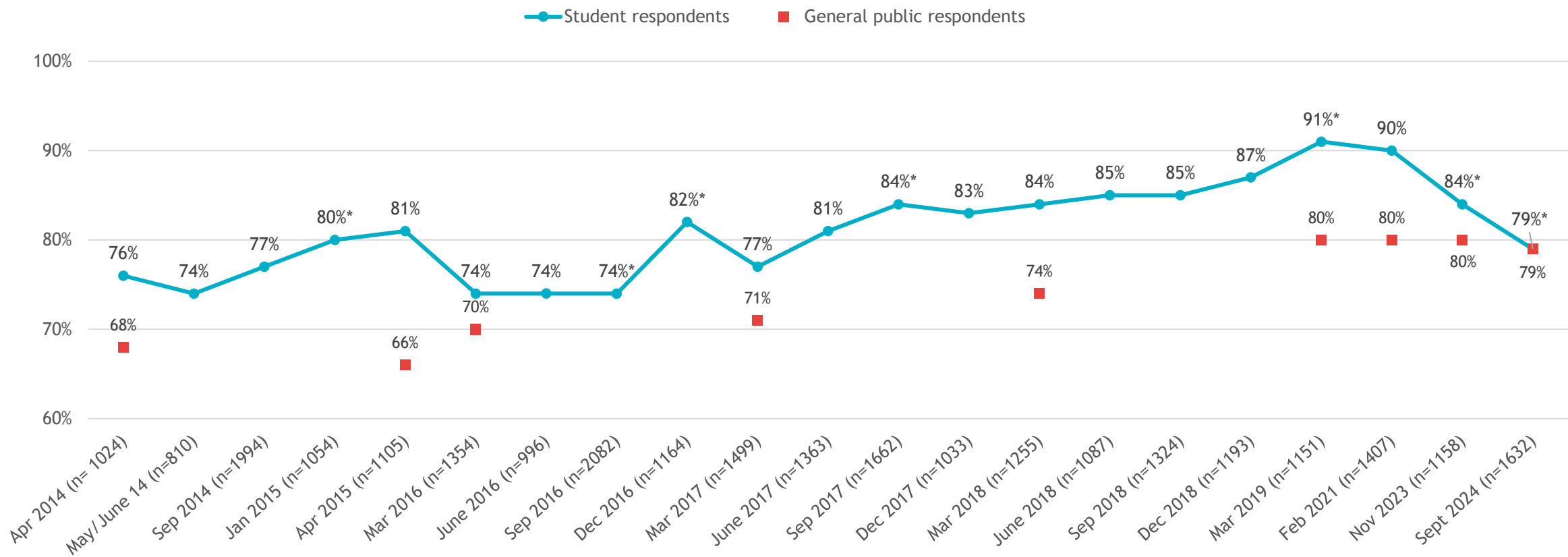


Q. How concerned, if at all, are you about climate change? [Responses shown for very or fairly concerned]  
\*Statistically significant change over the previous quarter (at 95% confidence level)  
Base: In brackets Balance: No response or not concerned



In previous years, concern among student respondents has been significantly higher than in research conducted across the UK respondents. In the latest round of surveying however, while there is no significant difference, student concern is equal to general UK respondents.

Student and UK respondents

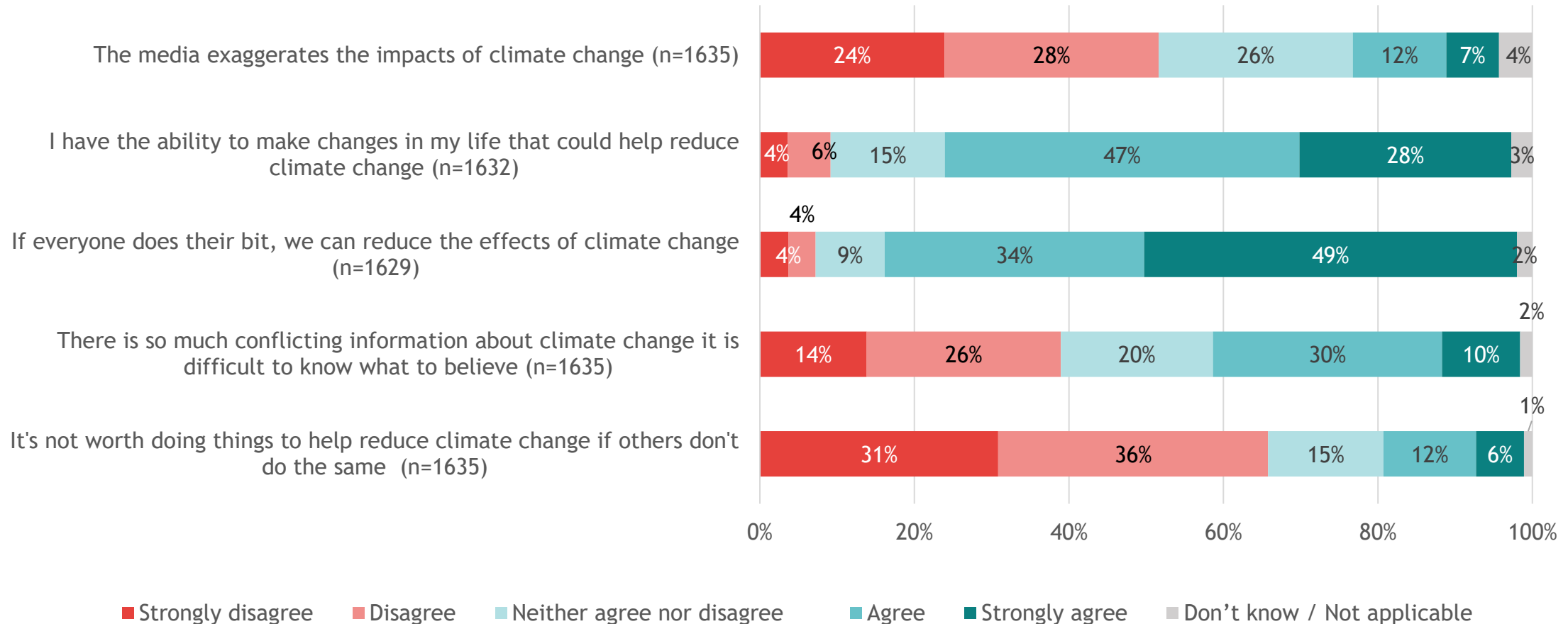


Q: How concerned, if at all, are you about climate change? [Responses shown for very or fairly concerned]  
\*Statistically significant change over the previous quarter (at the 95% confidence level)  
Base: In brackets / Balance: No response or not concerned (SOS-UK research)



The majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that individual efforts can reduce the effects of climate change\*, and disagree or strongly disagree that individual action is important, regardless of other people's behaviour\*.

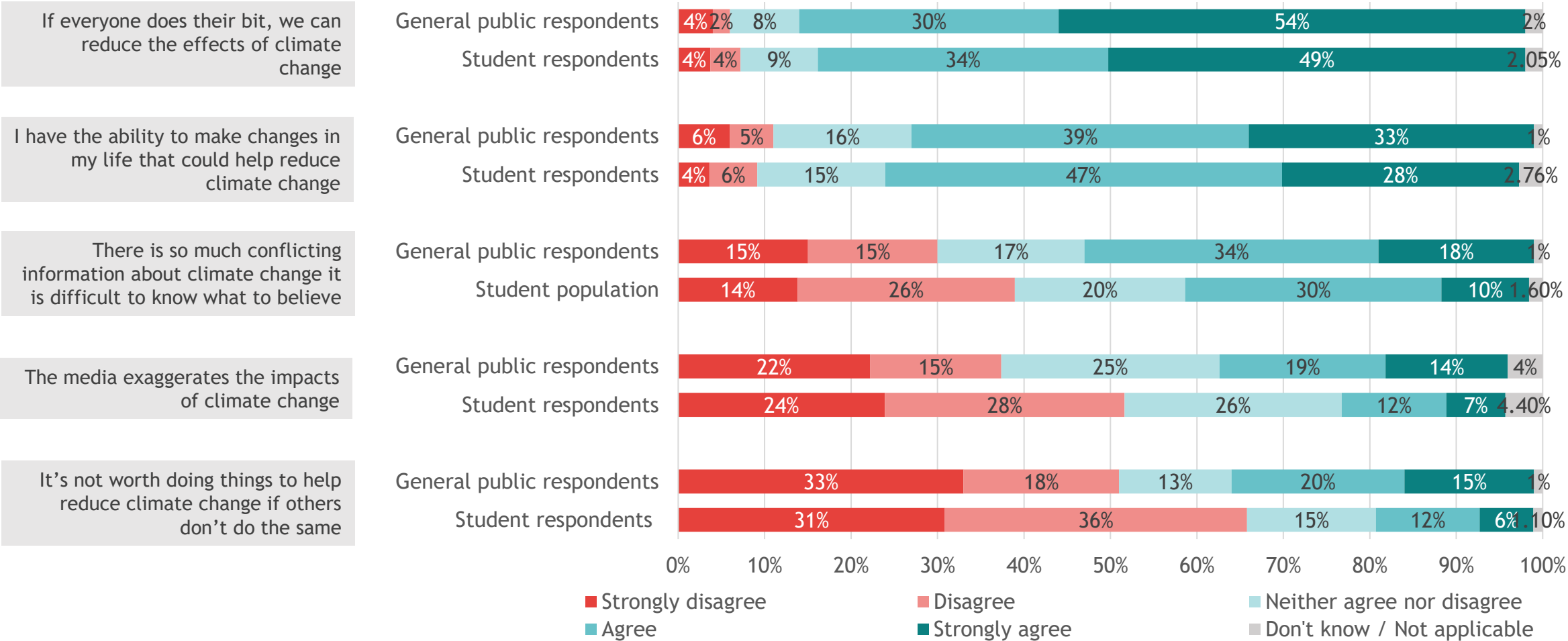
Student data



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
Base: in brackets \*Statistically significant difference (at the 95% confidence level)

Both the UK general public and student respondents highlighted the belief that individual actions can reduce climate change\*, though there is variation in perception of the media’s role\*.

Student and UK respondents



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker (Summer 2024) (uses a scale of 'Strongly disagree, slightly disagree, neither, slightly agree, strongly agree, don't know'. Although this differs from our research, we present them together for comparison. Base: 3637. SOS research (September 2024), Base: c.1633.  
\*Statistically significant proportions (to the 95% confidence level)

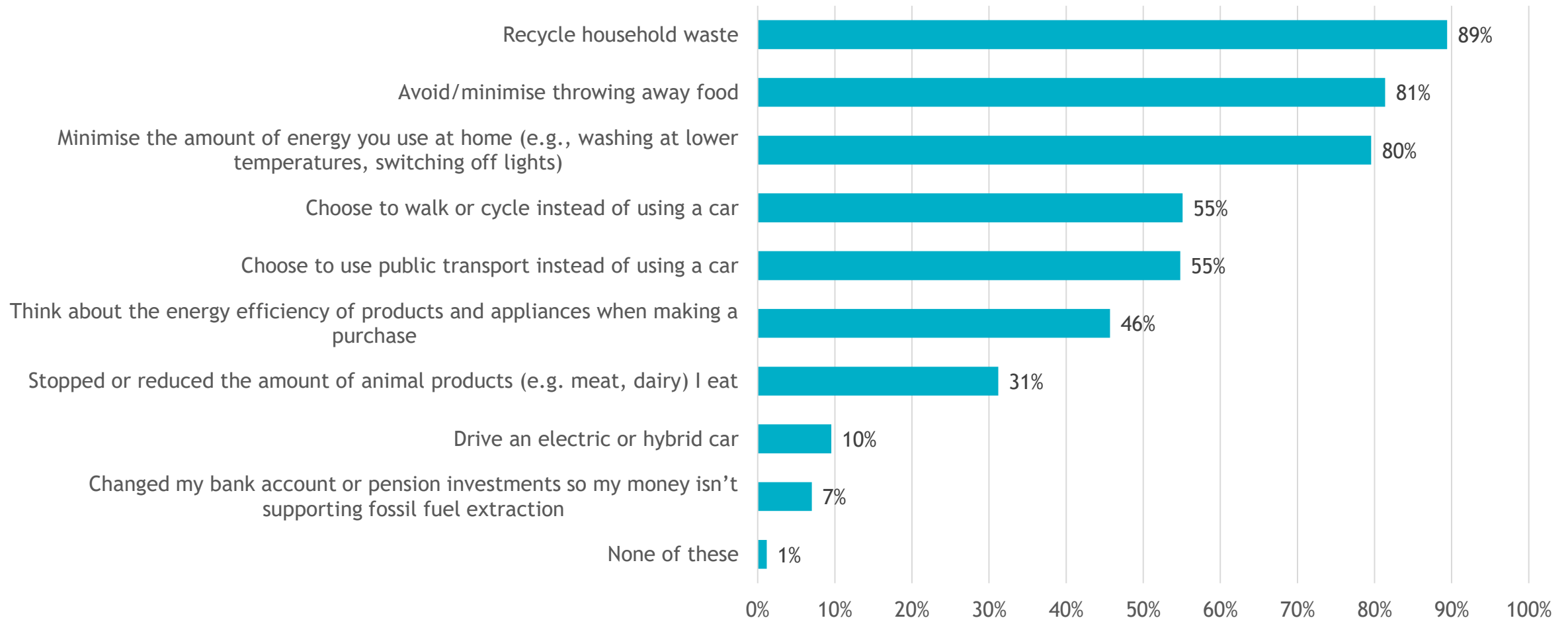




# Taking action to tackle climate change

The most enacted everyday behaviour is recycling household waste (89%), while the least enacted is changing bank account or pension investments to avoid supporting fossil fuel extraction (7%).

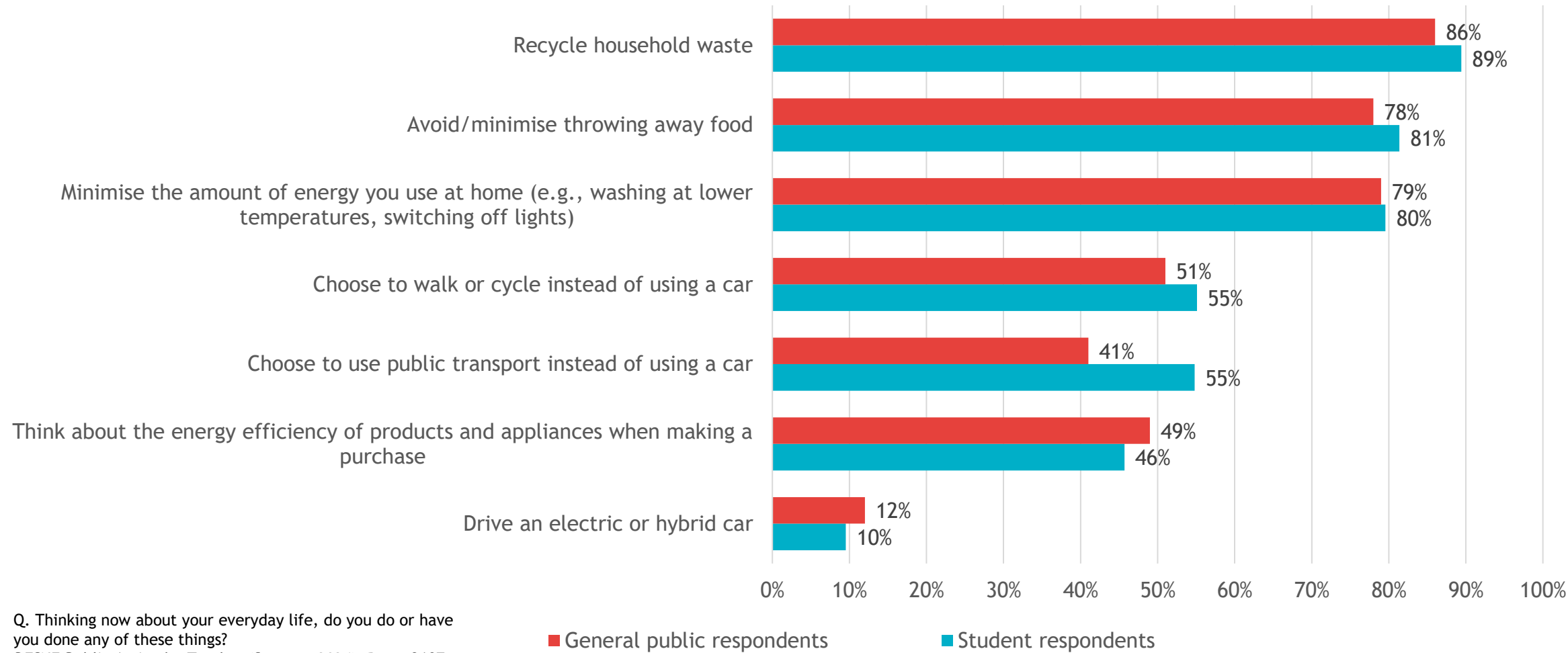
Student data



Q. Thinking now about your everyday life, do you do or have you done any of these things?  
Base: n = 1637

Both student's and UK population's most enacted behaviour is recycling household waste (89% and 86%, respectively) while the least enacted is driving an electric or hybrid car (10% and 12% respectively).

Student and UK respondents



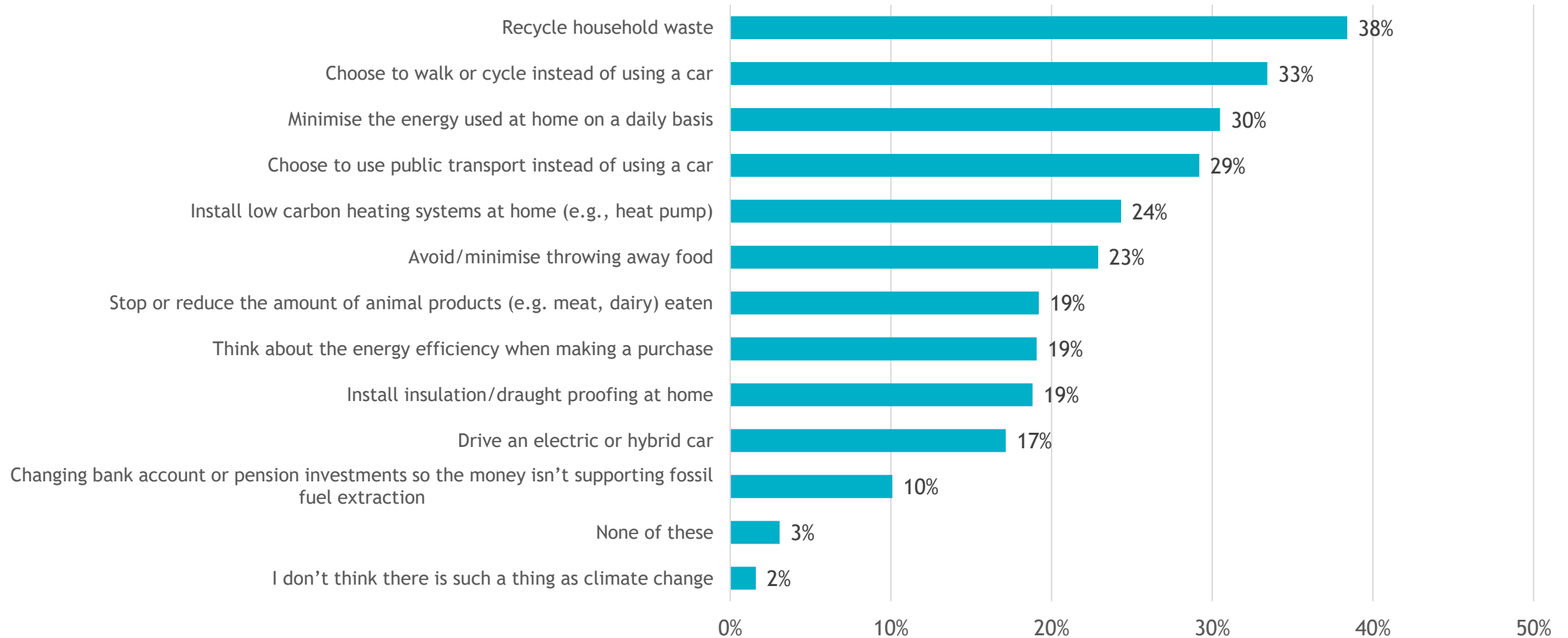
Q. Thinking now about your everyday life, do you do or have you done any of these things?  
DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker (Summer 2024), Base: 3607  
SOS-UK research (September 2024), Base: 1637



# Actions thought to have the biggest impact on tackling climate change

Student respondents believe that the action that would have the biggest impact on tackling climate change in the UK is recycling household waste (38%).

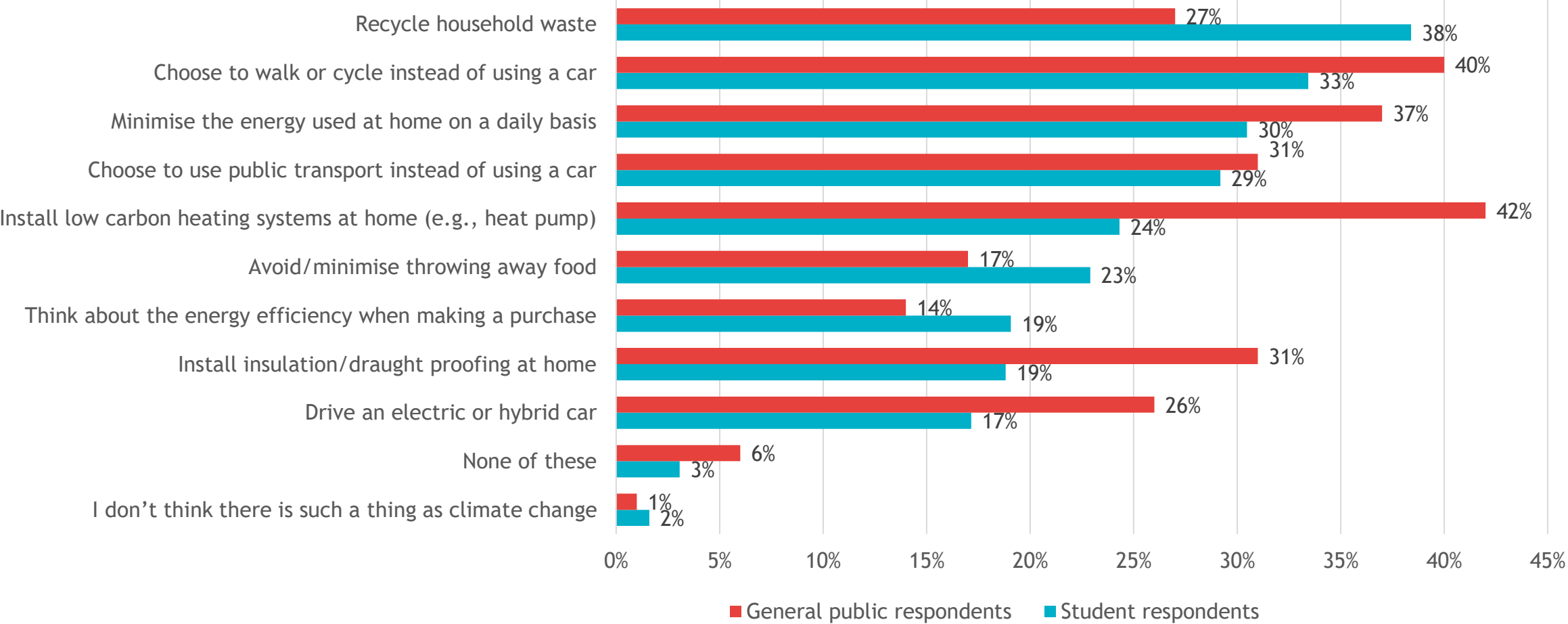
Student data



Q. If most people in the UK did the following, which three of these do you think would have the biggest impact on tackling climate change in the UK?  
Base: 1632

Both the UK public and student respondents are prioritising sustainable actions such as reducing energy consumption and using alternative transportation, with significant differences in the perceived impact of installing low-carbon heating\* and recycling household waste\*.

Student and UK respondents



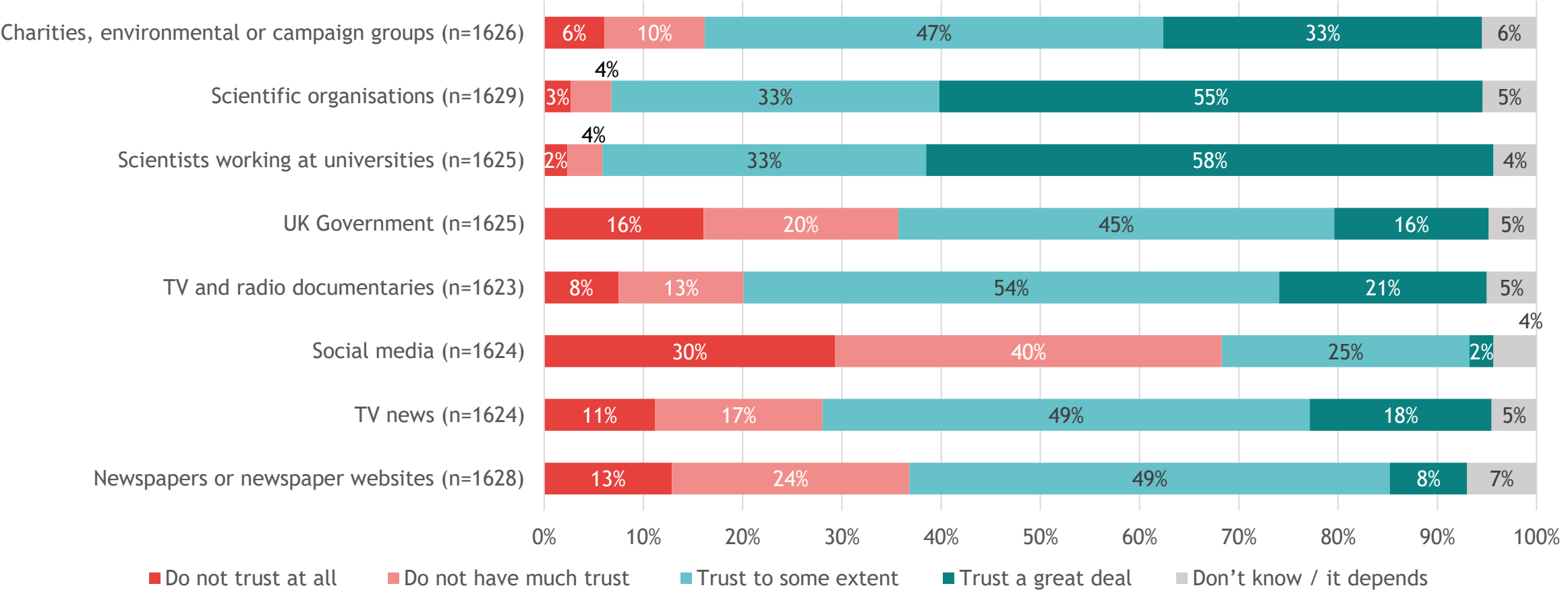
Q. If most people in the UK did the following, which three of these do you think would have the biggest impact on tackling climate change in the UK?  
DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker (Summer 2024), Base: 3607, SOS-UK research (September 2024), Base: 1632  
\*Statistically significant difference (to the 95% confidence level).



# Information on climate change

Student respondents trust in sources of information about climate change varies widely, with scientists and scientific organisations having the highest levels of trust, while social media platforms and newspapers have less.

Student data



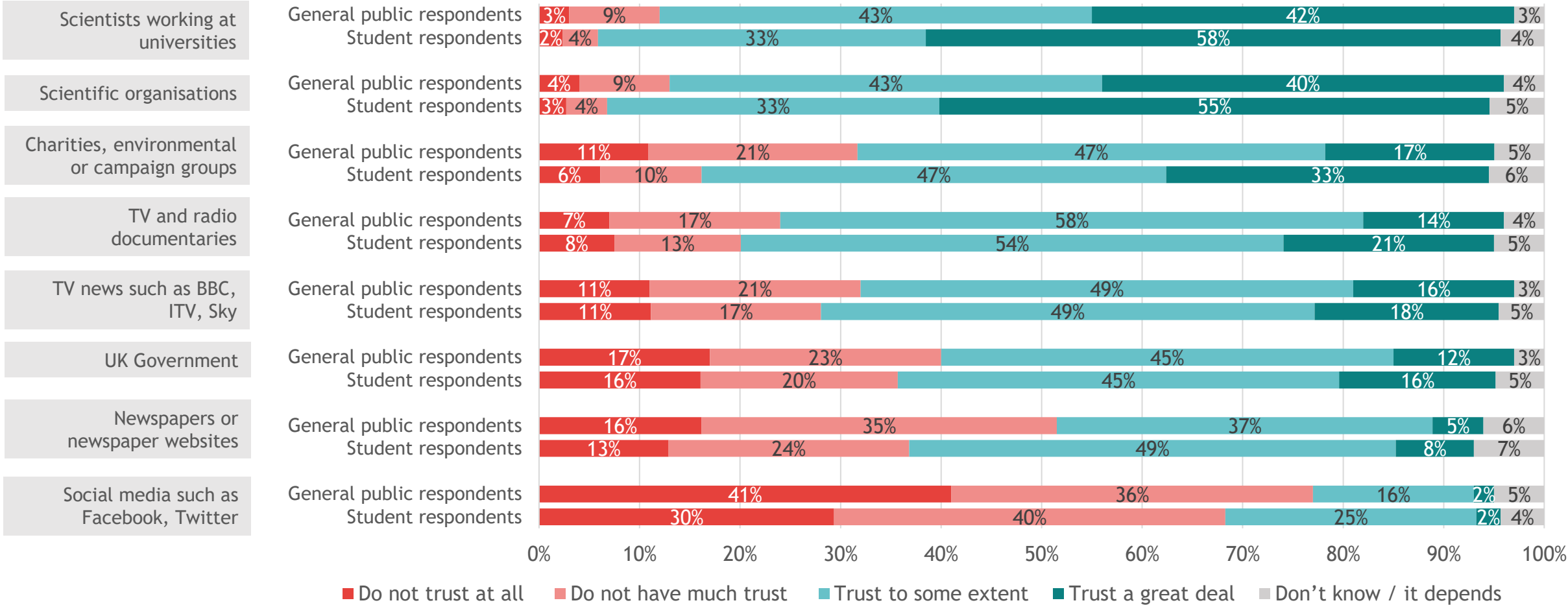
Q. How much do you trust each of the following to provide accurate information about climate change?  
Base: in brackets





Scientists working at universities (42% in public respondents, 58% in student respondents) and scientific organisations (40% and 55%) maintain relatively high levels of trust across both groups, while social media has low levels of trust (2% say they trust this a great deal in both respondents).

Student and UK respondents



Q. How much do you trust each of the following to provide accurate information about climate change?  
DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker (Summer 2024), Base: c.3621. SOS-UK research (September 2024), Base: c.1626



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