

10th November 2020

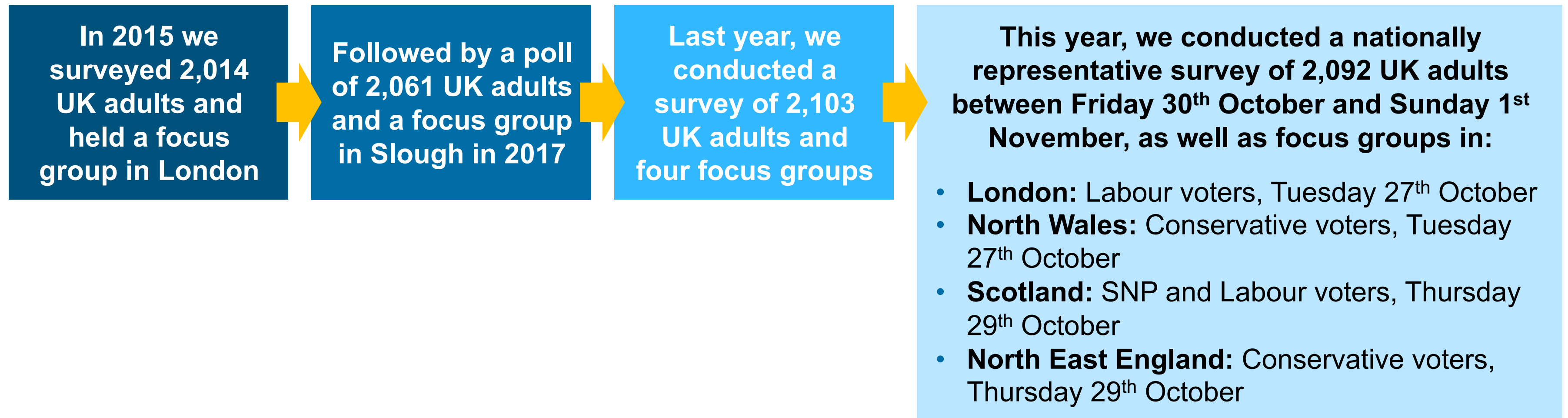
Leadership in times of crisis

BritainThinks Leadership Study 2020

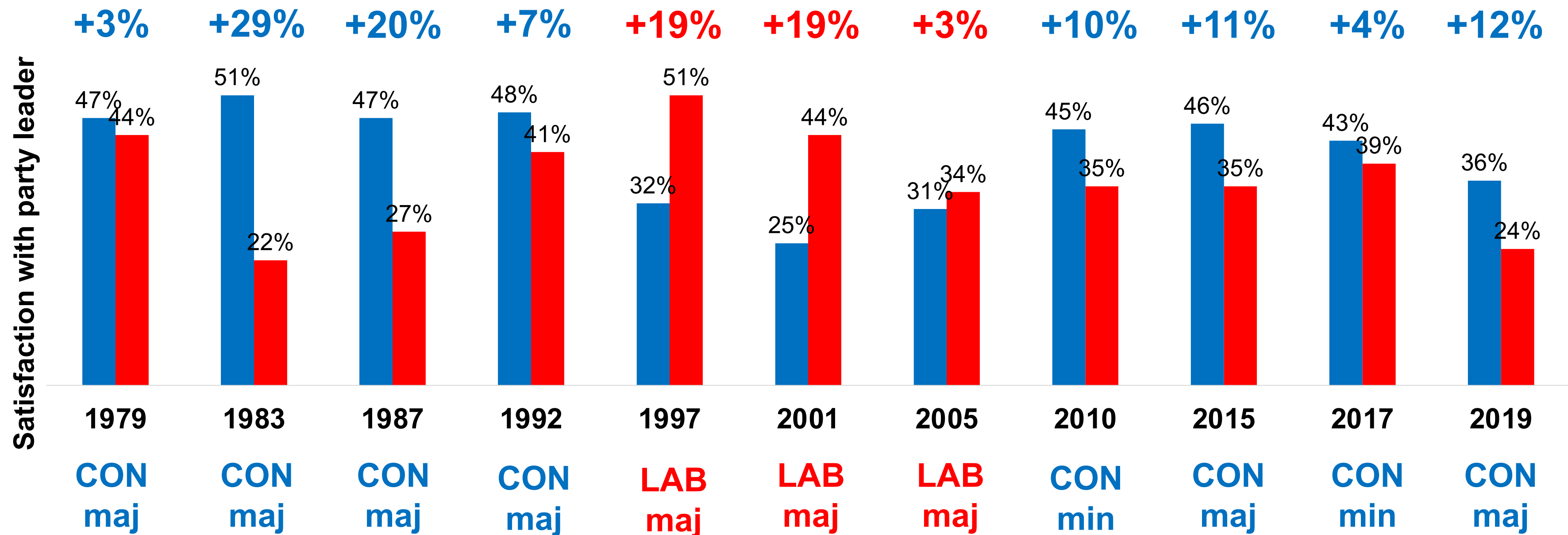
Report

britainthinks.com

We've been tracking public opinion on leadership since 2015. This year we conducted focus groups with voters across the UK, as well as a nationally representative survey



Leadership was a key predictor of the outcome of the 2019 election, as it has been throughout recent history



The most important findings from our latest research:

1

The pandemic has reinforced the importance of communication and decisiveness for effective leadership. The public also want leaders to show empathy during a crisis.

2

Female national leaders are seen as more effective in a crisis than their male counterparts. Non-political figures such as Marcus Rashford have also shown empathetic leadership.

3

Coronavirus has shone a light on Boris Johnson's weaknesses as a leader, while Nicola Sturgeon is setting the pace.

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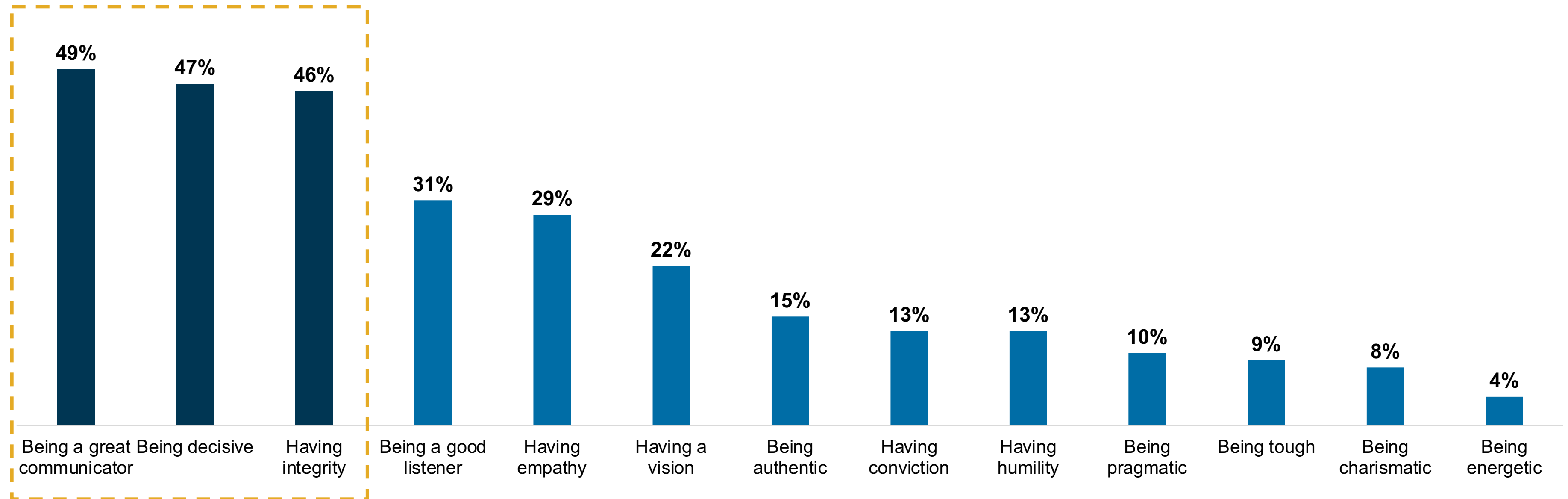
Keir Starmer has a way to go before his leadership style is established in the minds of the public.

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Businesses also need to demonstrate empathy during a crisis and look after their staff and customers. The most visible CEOs are recognised for the wrong reasons.

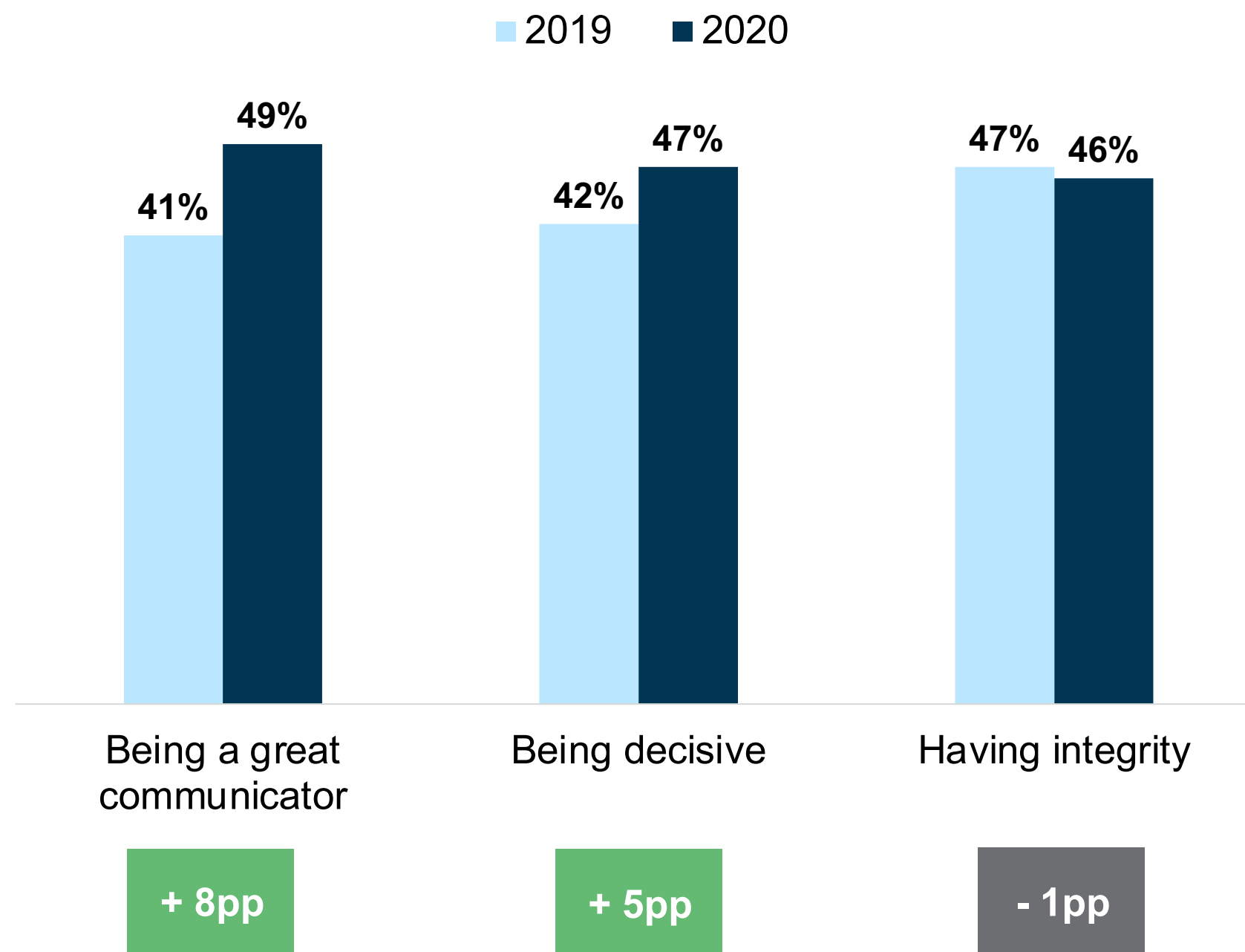
01 The pandemic has reinforced the importance of communication and decisiveness for effective leadership. The public also want leaders to show empathy during a crisis.

Having integrity, being decisive and being a great communicator continue to be the three most important leadership attributes



These have consistently been the most important leadership attributes since our first leadership study in 2015.

Since last year, we have seen an increase in the importance placed on great communication and decisiveness



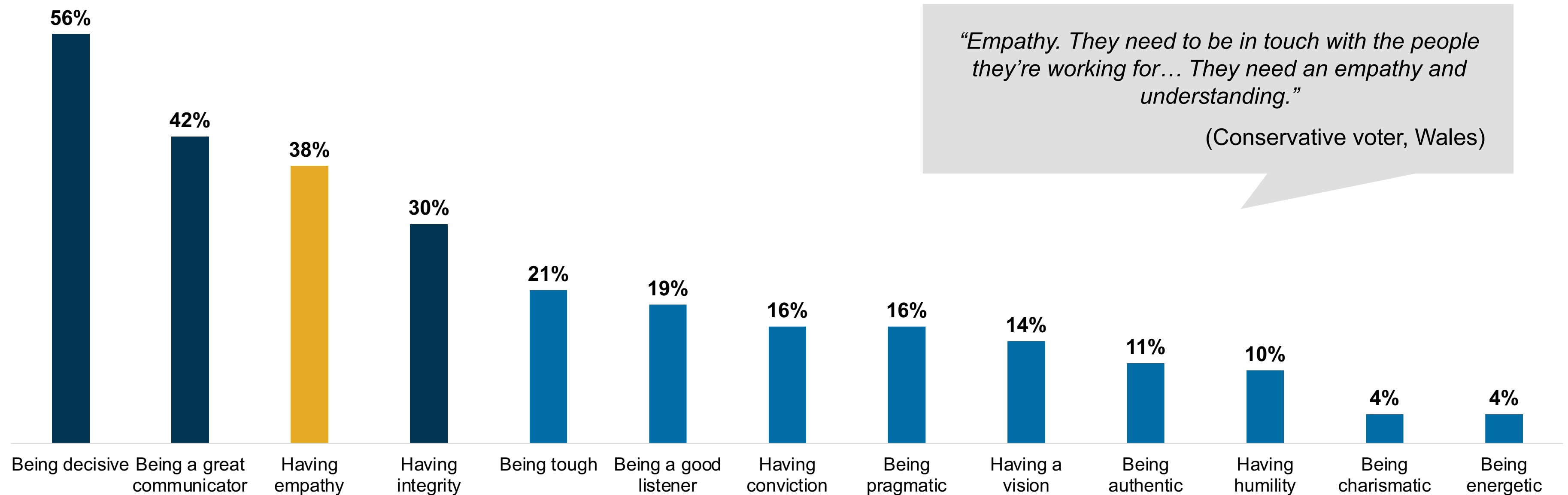
“Strong, very positive, what she says is what she wants, and she does it.”
(Conservative voter, Wales)

“Again, same as what’s been said. [Thatcher] was not for turning, she was quite straightforward, stuck by her principles.”

(Conservative voter, Wales)

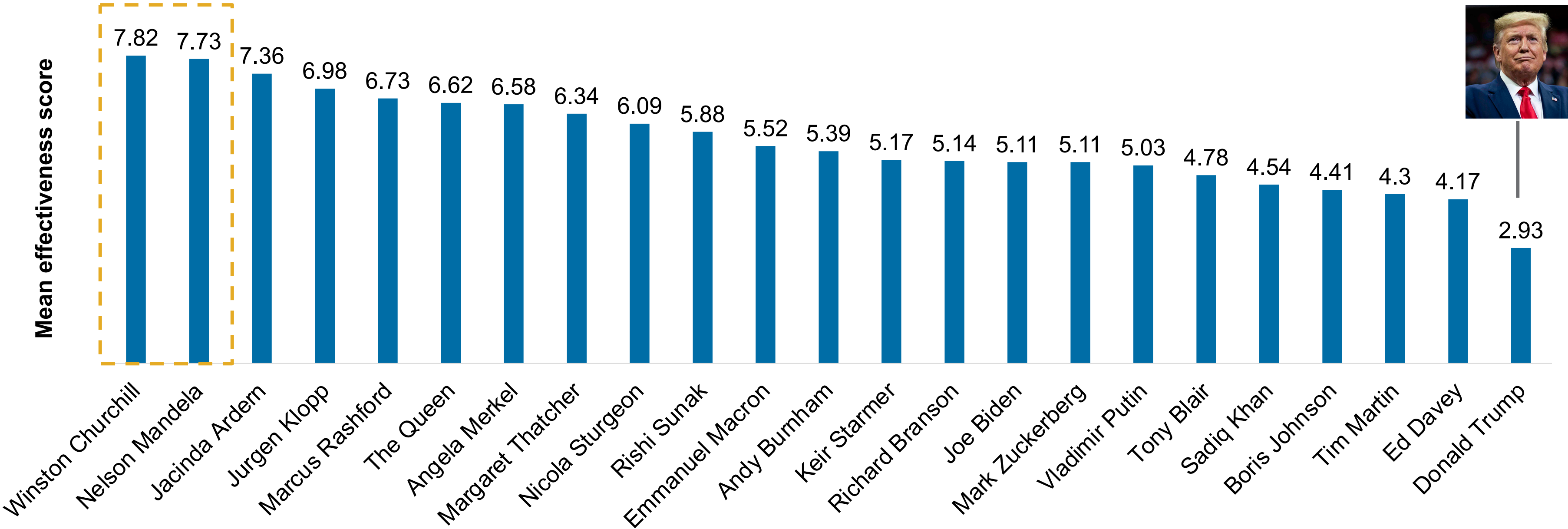


During the pandemic specifically, decisiveness and communication remain key to effective leadership. The need for empathy is also enhanced



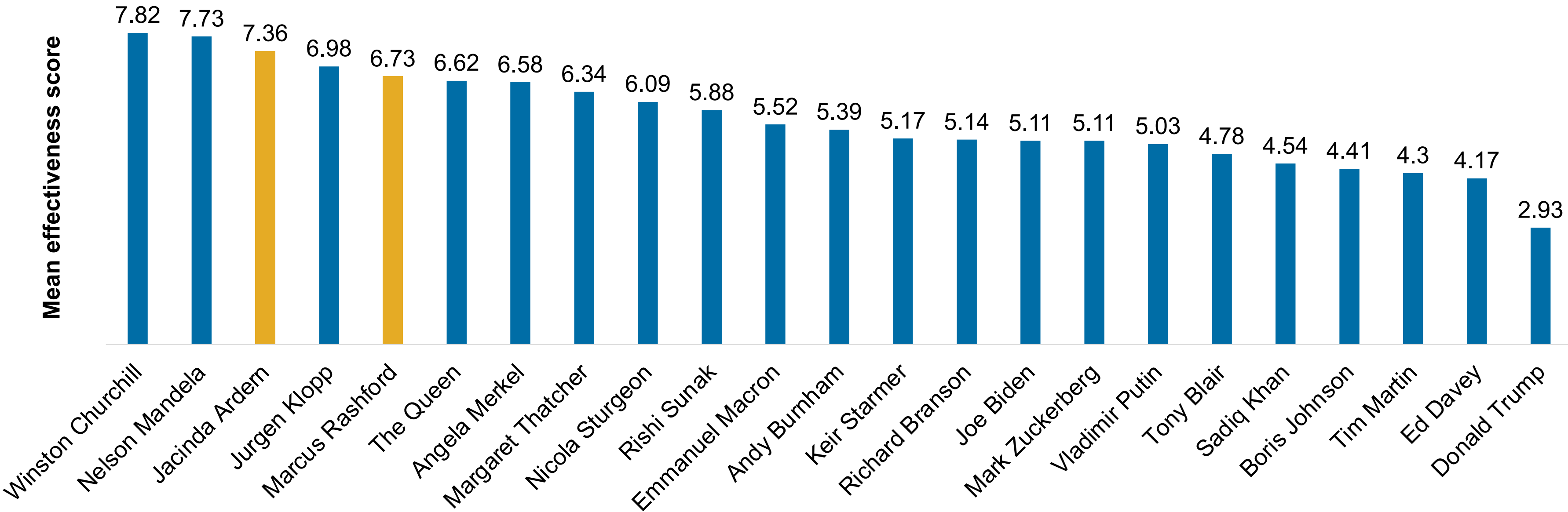
02 Female national leaders are seen as more effective in a crisis than their male counterparts. Non-political figures such as Marcus Rashford have also shown empathetic leadership.

As previously, historical leaders are rated as more effective than current UK political leaders. The UK public are less impressed with Trump than voters across the pond



Q.3 For each of the individuals below, thinking about what you know about them, please say how effective each is/ was as a leader. Answers given on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is 'Not at all effective' and 10 'Very effective indeed'. Base: Randomly selected for each leader [n=905-913]

Jacinda Ardern and Marcus Rashford are felt to have offered leadership during the pandemic



While very different examples, Ardern and Rashford are both seen to have demonstrated clear communication and empathy during the crisis



"She has been very open and honest. That has stood out to people. Very approachable and honest. Communicates very well."

(Conservative voter, North East)

"A decisive leader, she seems to be someone who has compassionate leadership."

(Labour voter, London)



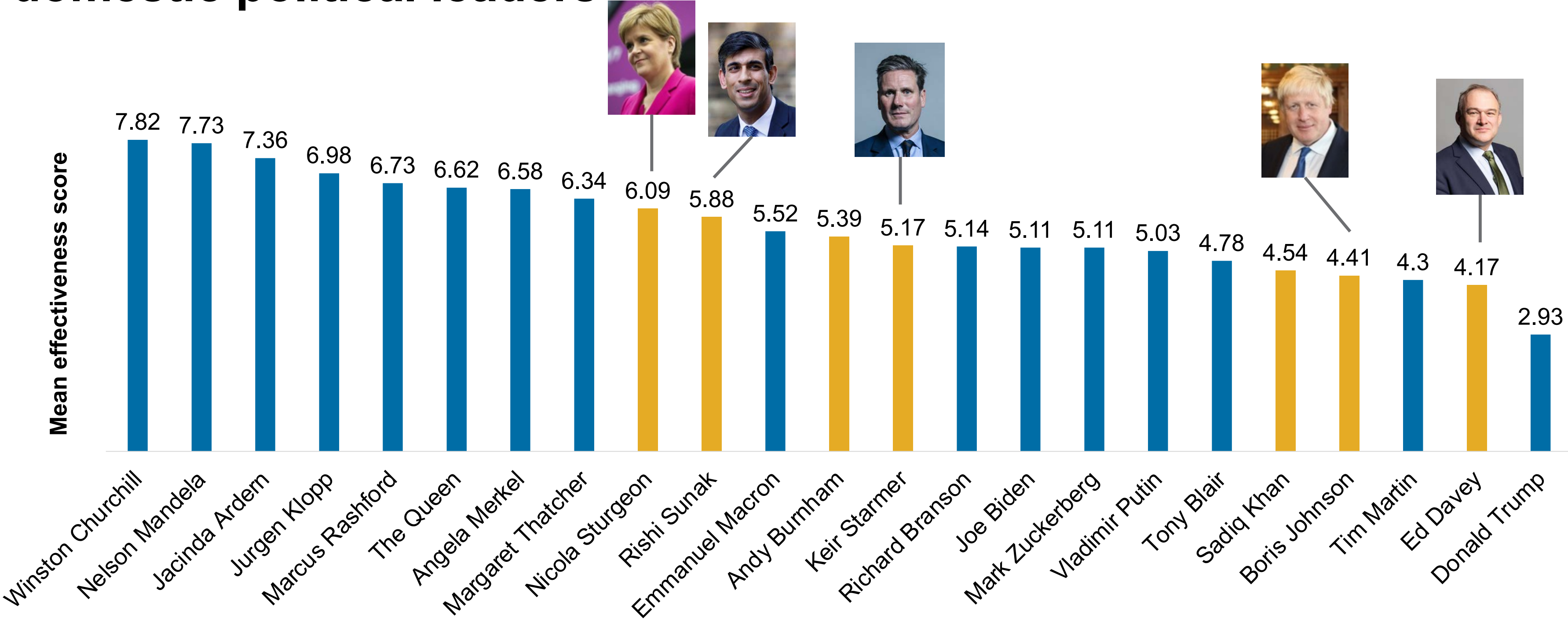
"He's making the right noises and movements. The way he has gone about it. He's a sportsman but he knows where he came from, he relied on school meals."

(Conservative voter, North East)

"He's taking on the responsibility of the Government by bringing all these restaurants together to provide food for children from low-income families."

(Labour voter, London)

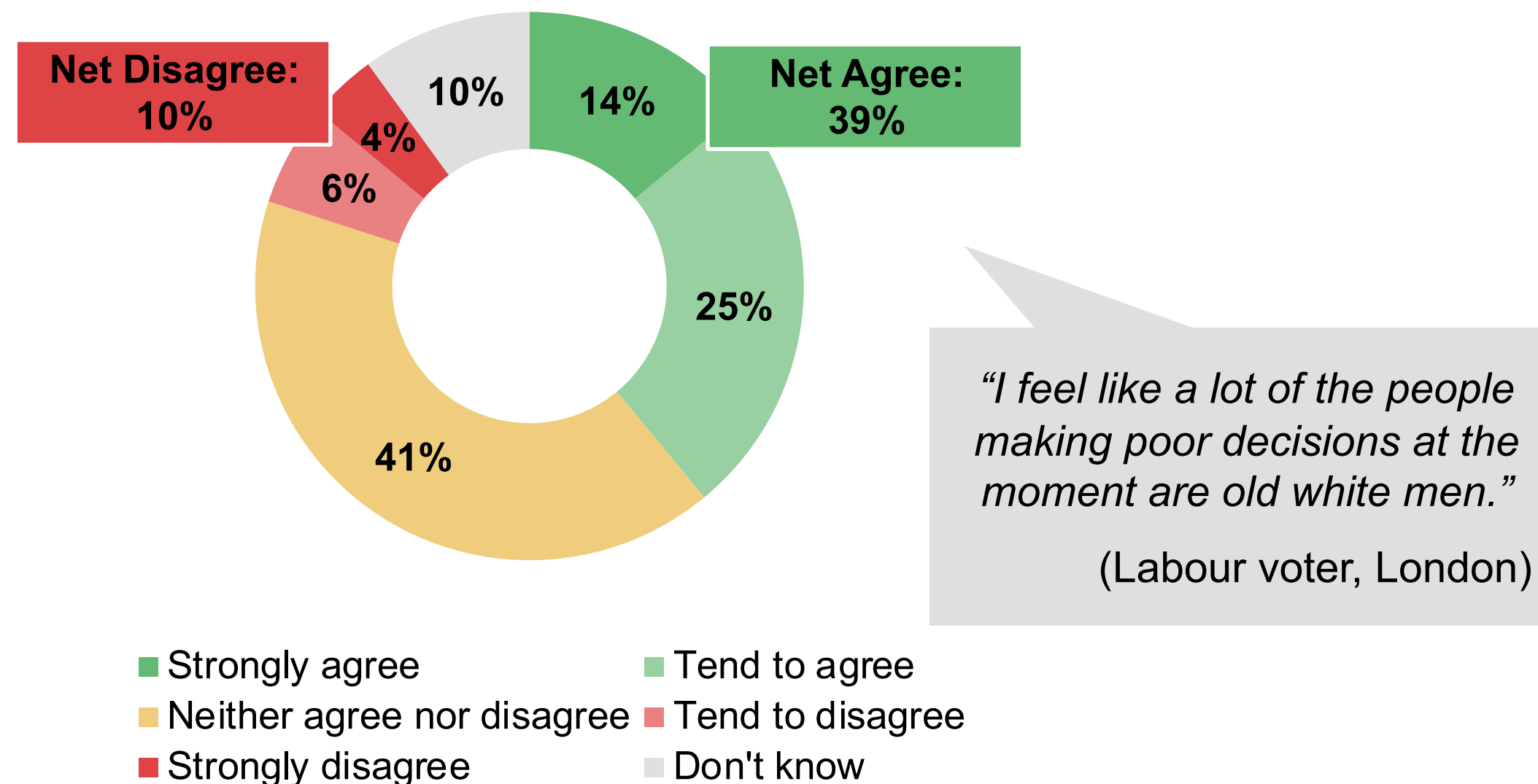
Nicola Sturgeon is more likely to be seen as effective than other domestic political leaders



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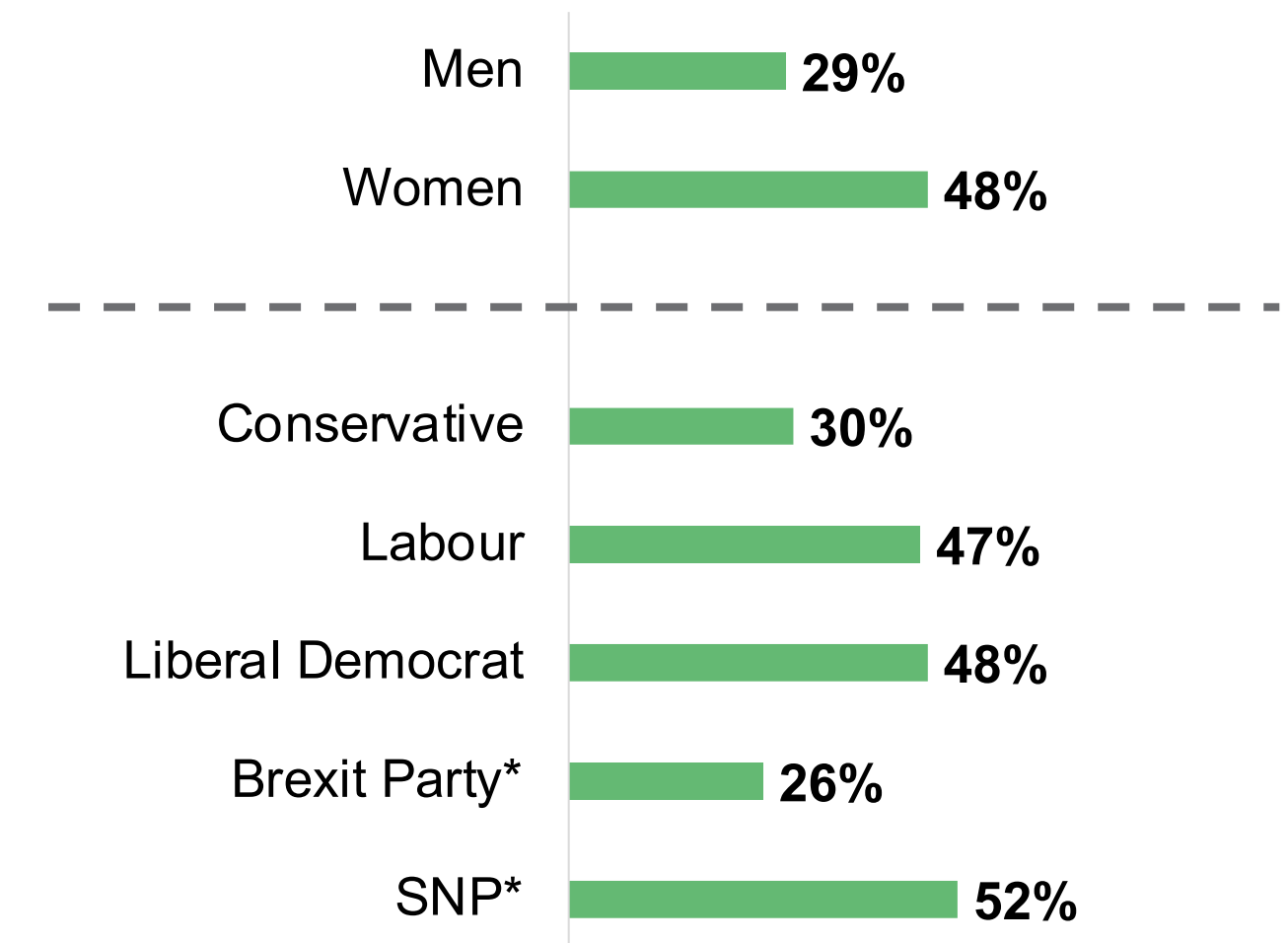
Female leaders have stood out, and a significant minority agree that they fare better than men in a crisis

'Female leaders fare better in response to a crisis'



Men and Conservative voters are less likely to agree

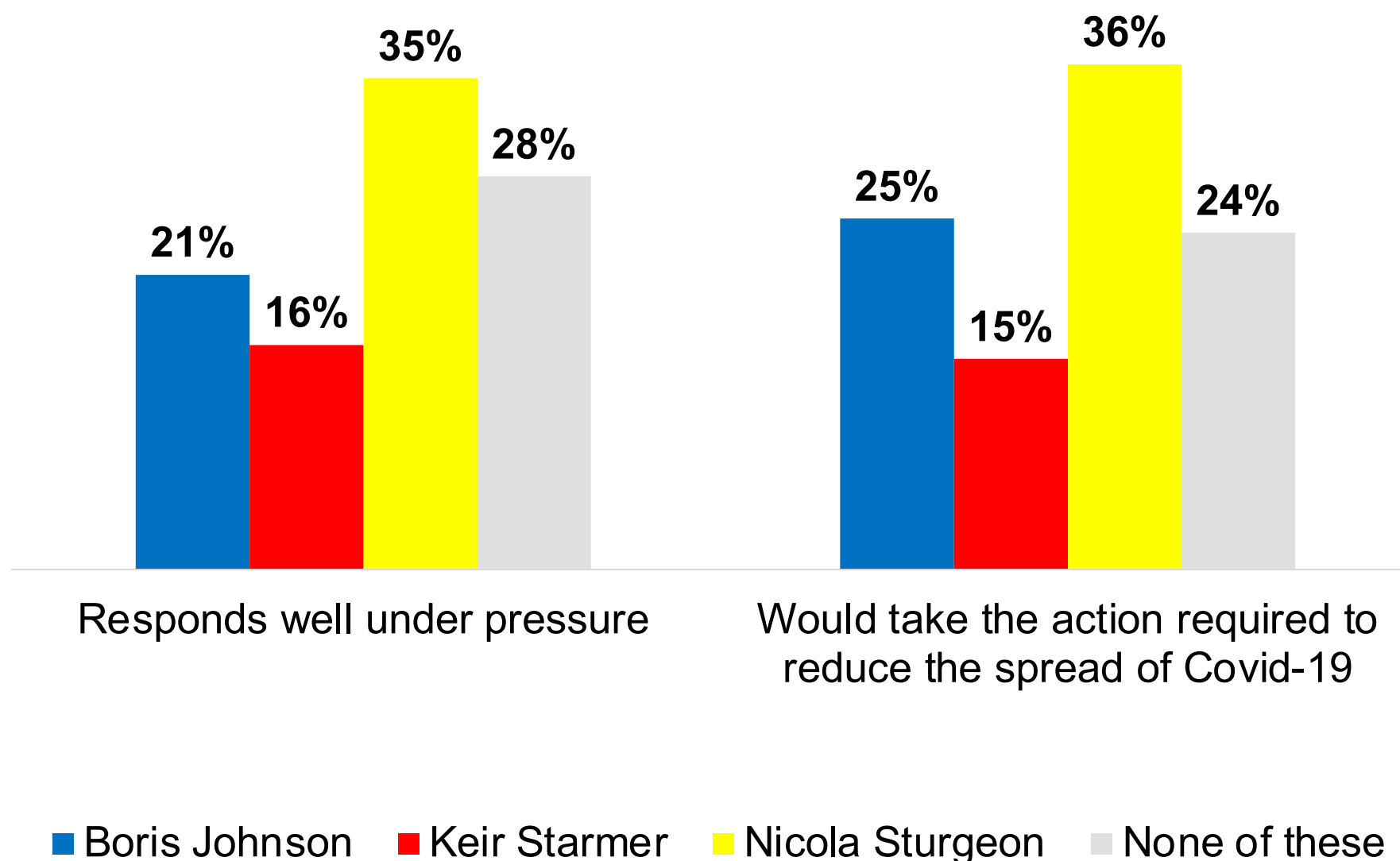
Showing % who agree (Net)



03

Coronavirus has shone a light on Boris Johnson's weaknesses as a leader, while Nicola Sturgeon is setting the pace.

Sturgeon is seen to have responded to the crisis most effectively, while Johnson's vulnerabilities have been exposed



- When it comes to responding to a crisis, it is Sturgeon who is setting the pace.
- She is most likely to be seen to respond well under pressure, and to take the action required.
- There are doubts about whether Johnson is well-equipped to deal with a crisis.

"I think Nicola Sturgeon has stood out. She's gone against the grain in being a bit firmer. She's been a lot clearer about what the rules mean and she's gone a step further than Boris has and taken responsibility for her area."
(Labour voter, London)

"[Johnson] follows everyone, he's fed so much information, he gurgles it out. You know you can't trust him because he doesn't know what he's talking about."
(SNP voter, Scotland)



The public see Sturgeon as decisive, uncompromising and likely to ‘roll her sleeves up’ and get the job done

Most applicable attributes

Being decisive

Being tough

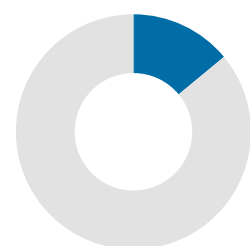
Being a great communicator

Least applicable attributes

Having humility

Being charismatic

Being a good listener



14% say none of the leadership attributes apply to Sturgeon

If Nicola Sturgeon was manager of a football team 3-0 down at half-time...



“I think she’d put her boots on and get on the field.”

(Conservative voter, North Wales)



There is some sympathy for Johnson, but also a sense that he is beleaguered and has been pulled in different directions

Most applicable attributes

Being charismatic

Being energetic

Having a vision

Having conviction

Least applicable attributes

Having humility

Being a good listener

Having integrity

Being authentic



36% say none of the leadership attributes apply to Johnson

If Boris Johnson was the captain of the Titanic...

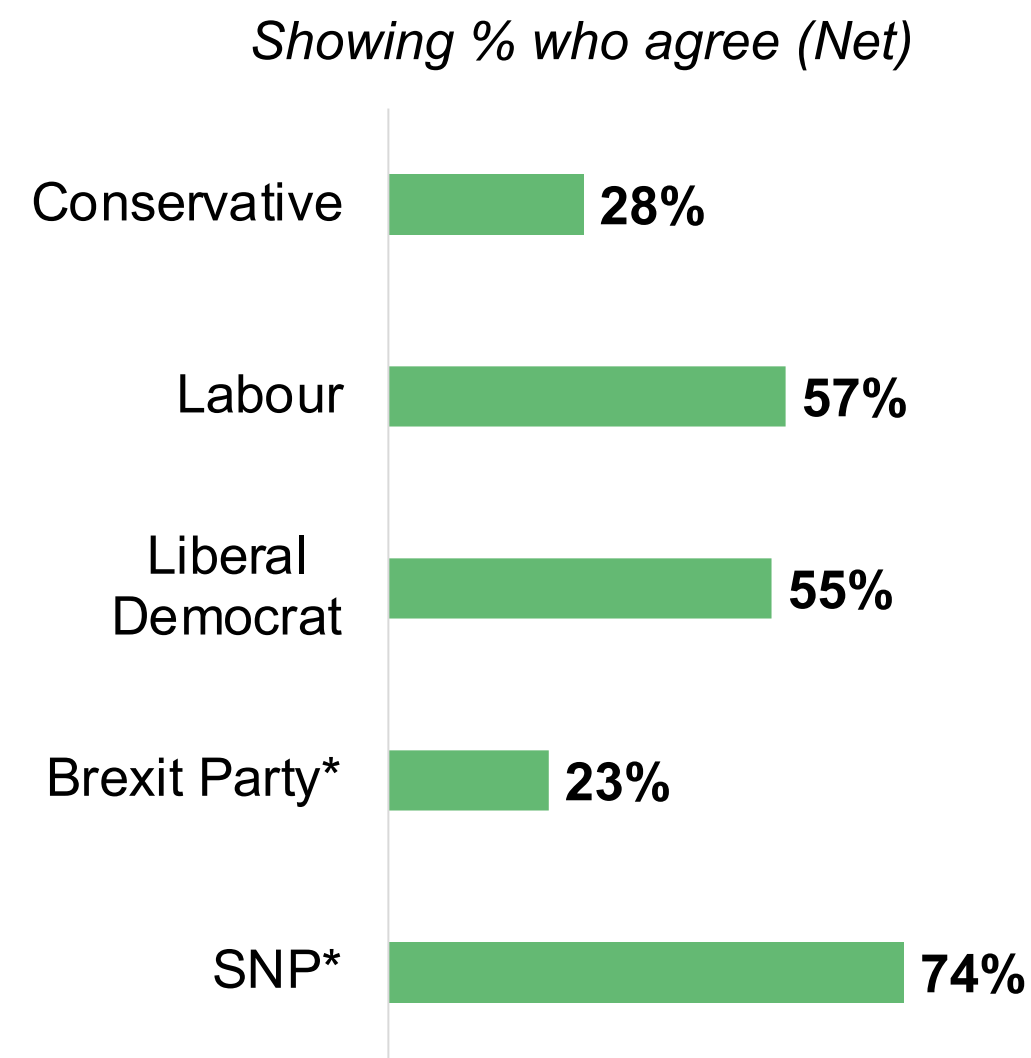
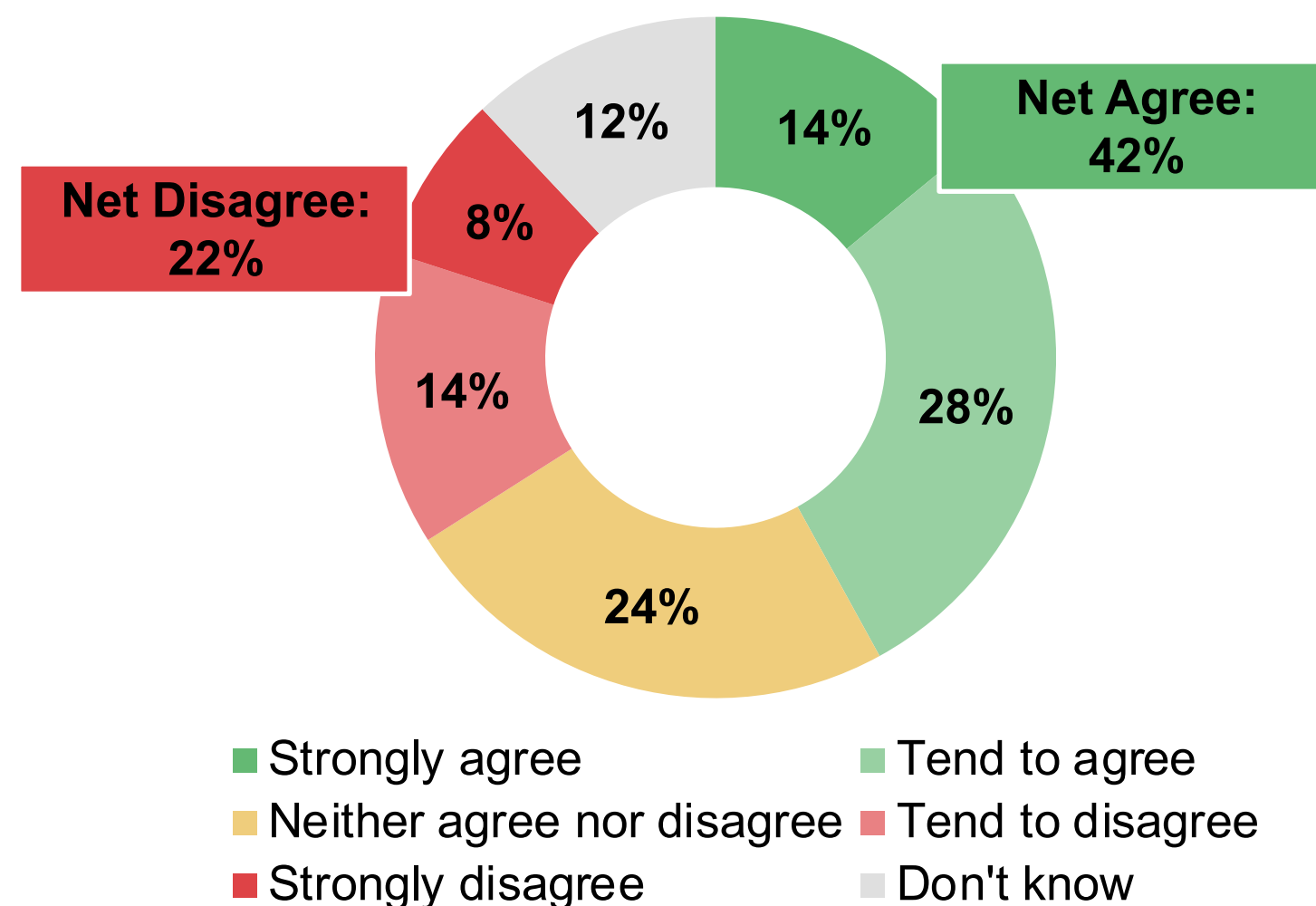


"It wouldn't have got out the dock. I don't think he is organised enough. Unless Dominic was there as first mate."

(SNP voter, Scotland)

In line with Sturgeon's success, regional leaders are felt to have provided effective leadership during the pandemic

'Regional mayors and leaders in the devolved administrations have provided more effective leadership during the pandemic than the UK government'

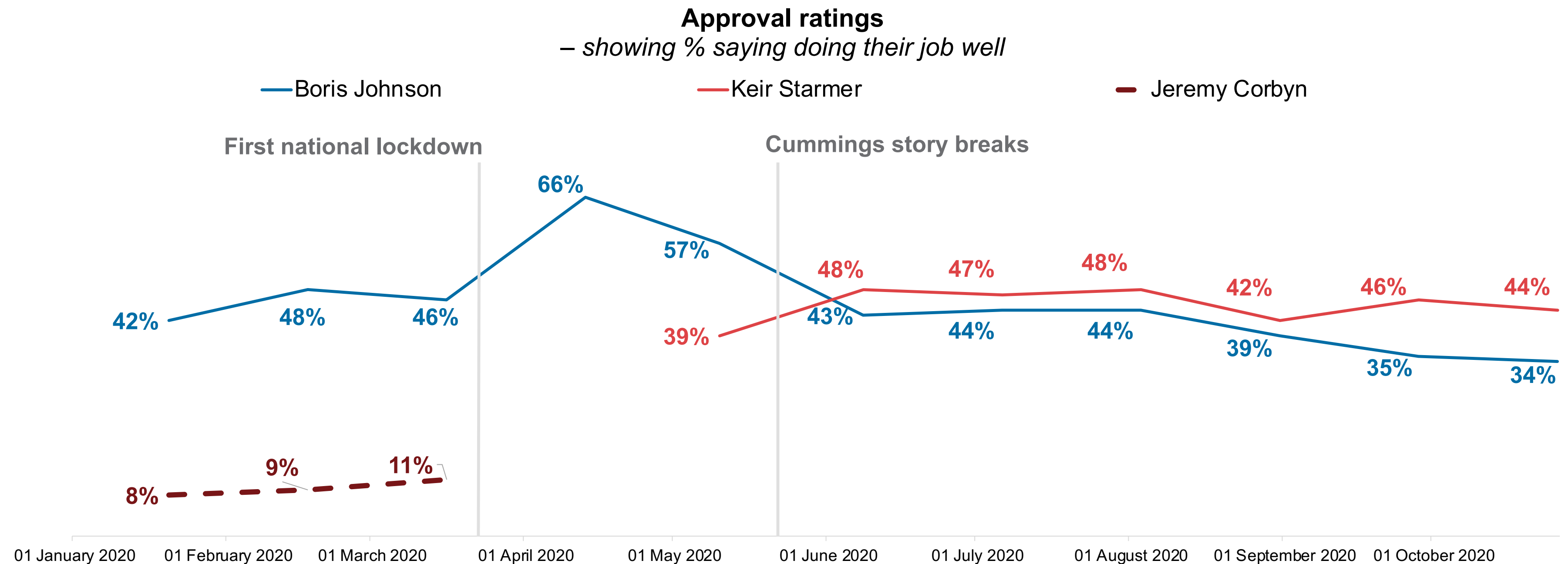


"[Burnham] didn't back down, he believed in something and stood his ground. That's a quality of a leader."
(Conservative voter, Wales)

04 **Keir Starmer has a way to go before his leadership style is established in the minds of the public.**



Starmer has recently enjoyed a higher approval rating than Johnson





But beyond this high-level positivity, most lack a clear sense of what Starmer offers as a leader

25%

don't know which leadership attributes apply to Starmer

Most applicable attributes

Having conviction

Having integrity

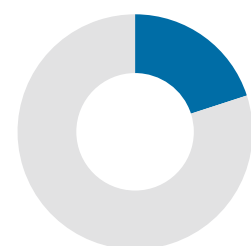
Having a vision

Least applicable attributes

Being charismatic

Being energetic

Having humility



20% say none of the leadership attributes apply to Starmer



"To be honest with you, I haven't given him a lot of thought... I haven't heard a lot from him."

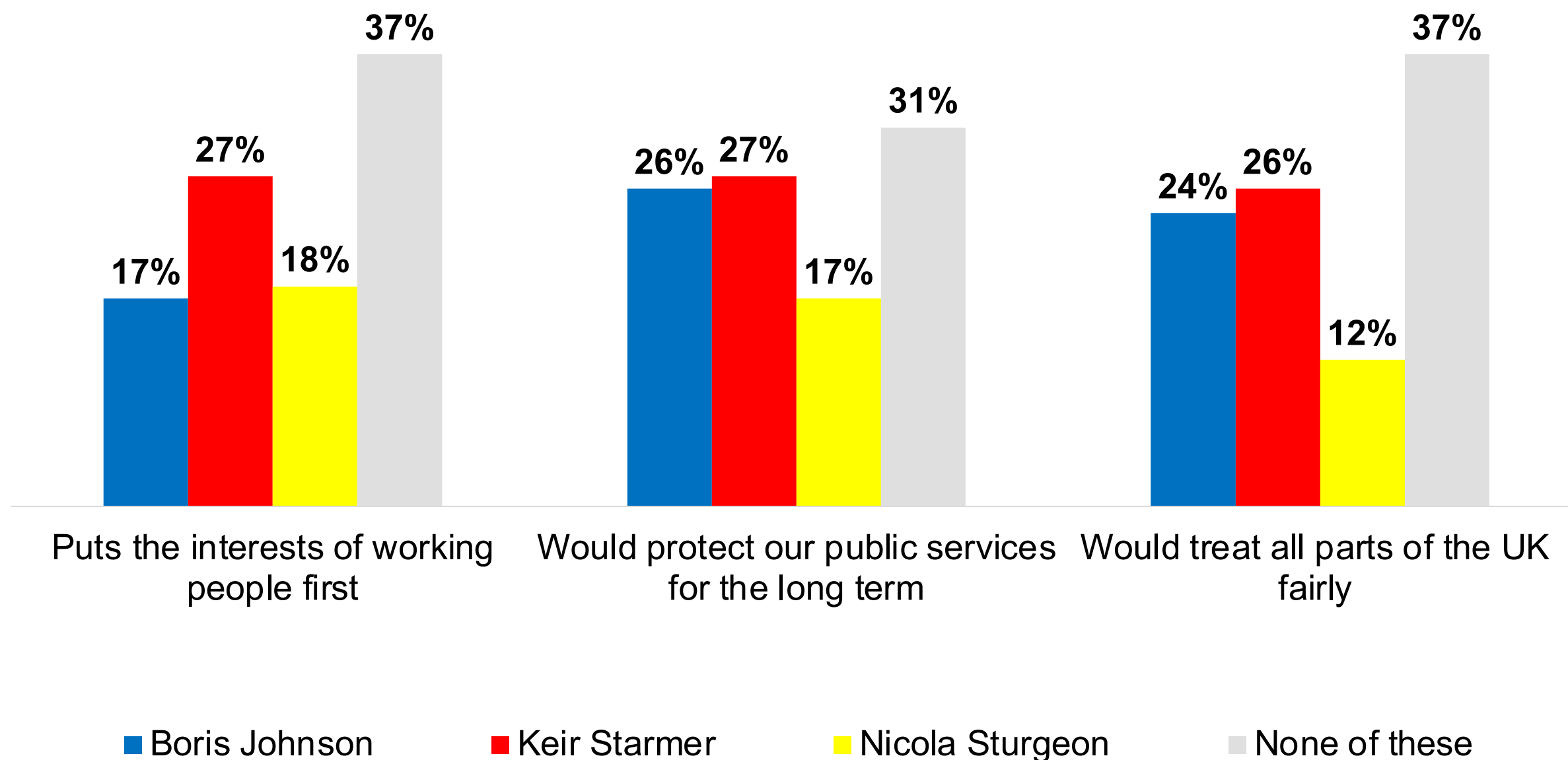
(Conservative voter, Wales)

"The fact I haven't got much to say about him probably says quite a lot. He's not very striking."

(Labour voter, London)



He outperforms Johnson and Sturgeon on traditional Labour qualities – but only just



- Starmer's lead over Johnson on specific measures is no better than Corbyn's was in 2019.
 - 'Would treat all parts of the UK fairly' was not asked in 2019.

"[He's] working class focused... [but] instead of pushing back he just points out all the ways things are wrong."

(Conservative voter, North East)



Most see the decision to suspend Corbyn as evidence of strong leadership, though the story cuts through less outside the Westminster ‘bubble’

51%

agree that the decision to suspend Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party shows Keir Starmer is a strong leader...

...though Labour voters are less likely to agree



- We conducted focus groups in the immediate aftermath of the decision, and it was striking how few people were aware of it.
- There is a sense that it is an example of political maneuvering more than anything, and some evidence that it may play better with Conservative voters.

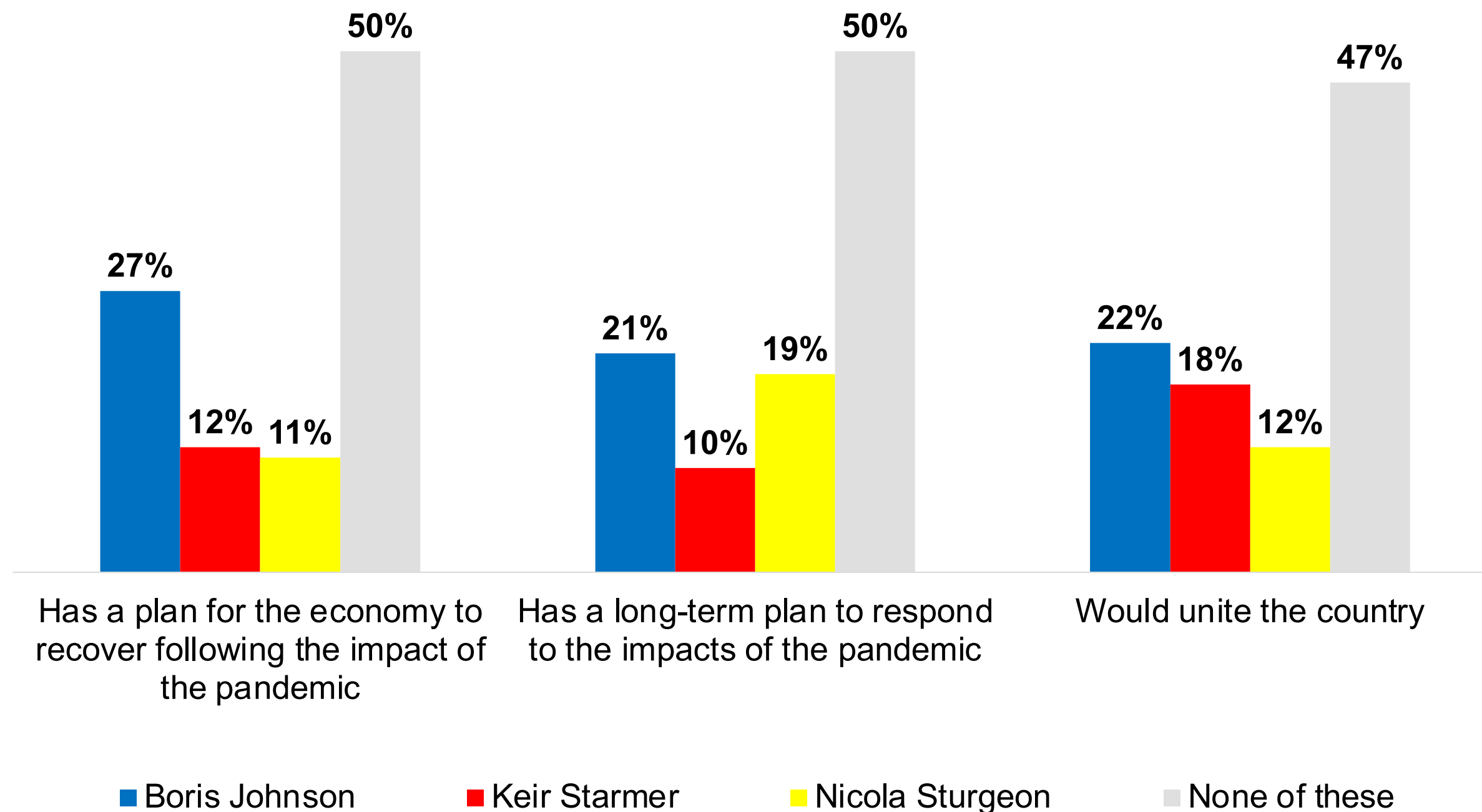
“It’s good for Starmer and for Labour. It draws a line under it. Corbyn has been discredited.”

(Conservative voter, North East)

“It’s underhanded. The only thing I’ve heard about Starmer is suspending Jeremy Corbyn.”

(Labour voter, Scotland)

In the longer term, there is little confidence that any of our current political leaders has a plan for the country



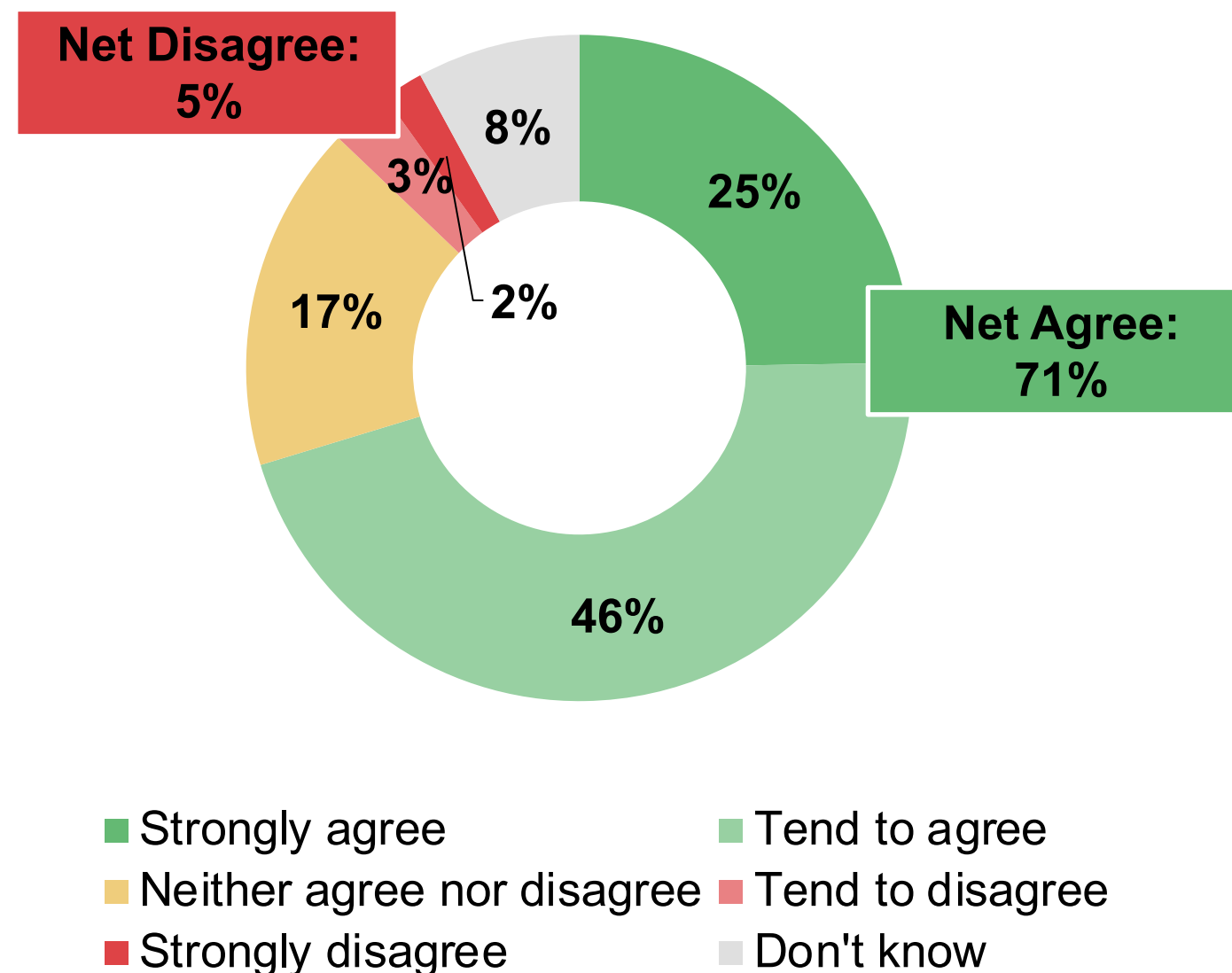
"I think I'm yet to see a Prime Minister deliver and do well in a crisis. Has Boris delivered? At the moment I don't think so... No one really springs to mind for me, all I can think about is what is going on at the moment."

(Conservative voter, North East)

05 Businesses also need to demonstrate empathy during a crisis and look after their staff and customers. The most visible CEOs are recognised for the wrong reasons.

The public recognise the brands and businesses which have shown empathy during the pandemic

‘The most successful businesses show leadership and innovate at a time of crisis’



- There is a desire for brands and businesses to play a leadership role during a crisis.
- The public feel they can do so by showing that they are on the side of their **customers** and **staff**.

*“Brands do better when it’s [about] the **welfare of the customer**, we’ve seen that a lot more with Covid. Not just ‘buy our stuff’ but more about caring for welfare, make them seem like they appreciate you.”*

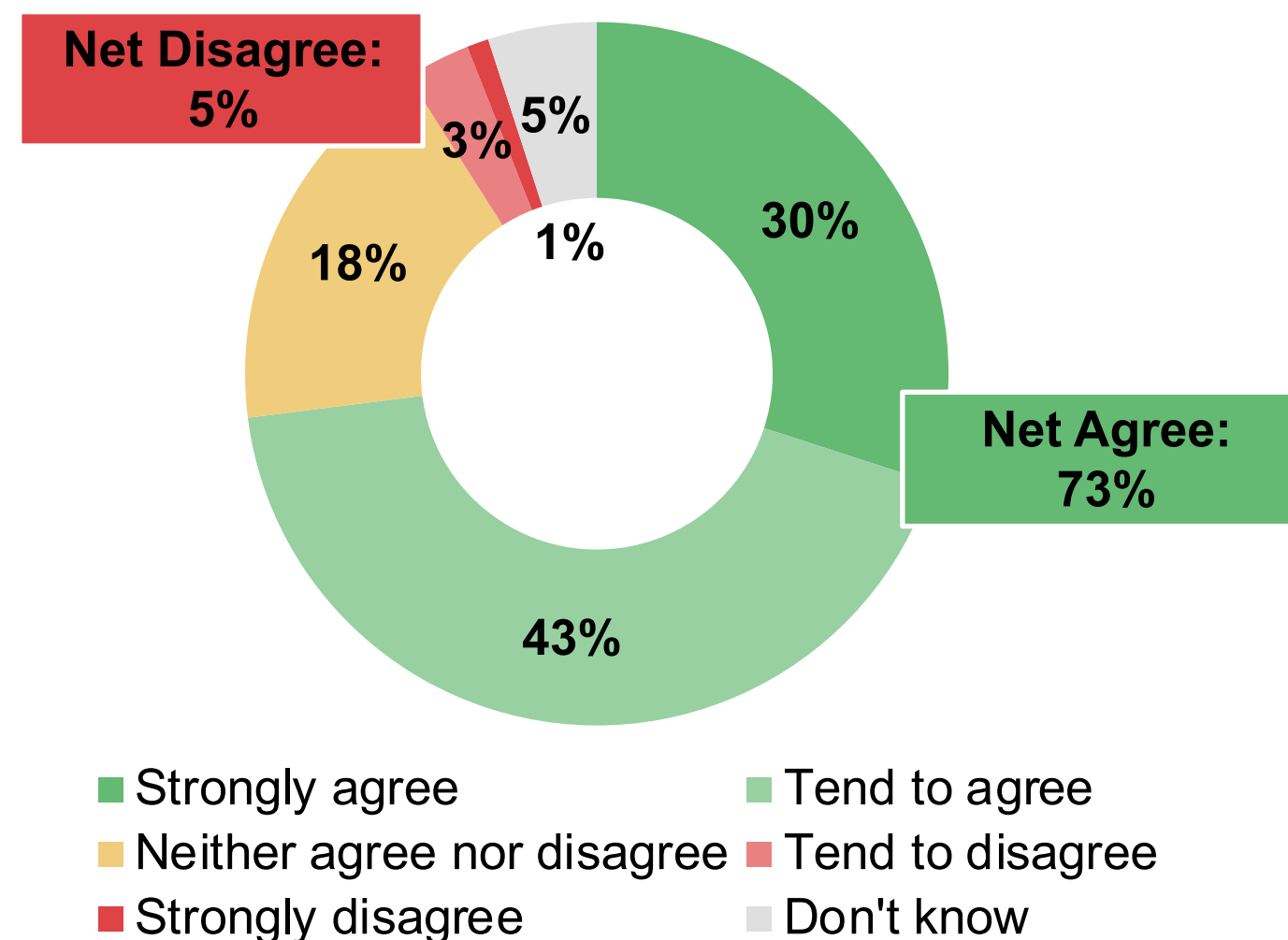
(Conservative voter, North East)

*“Brands which **stand by their staff** show that their business is not about profit, especially when something like this happens... Staff are the most important asset in your business.”*

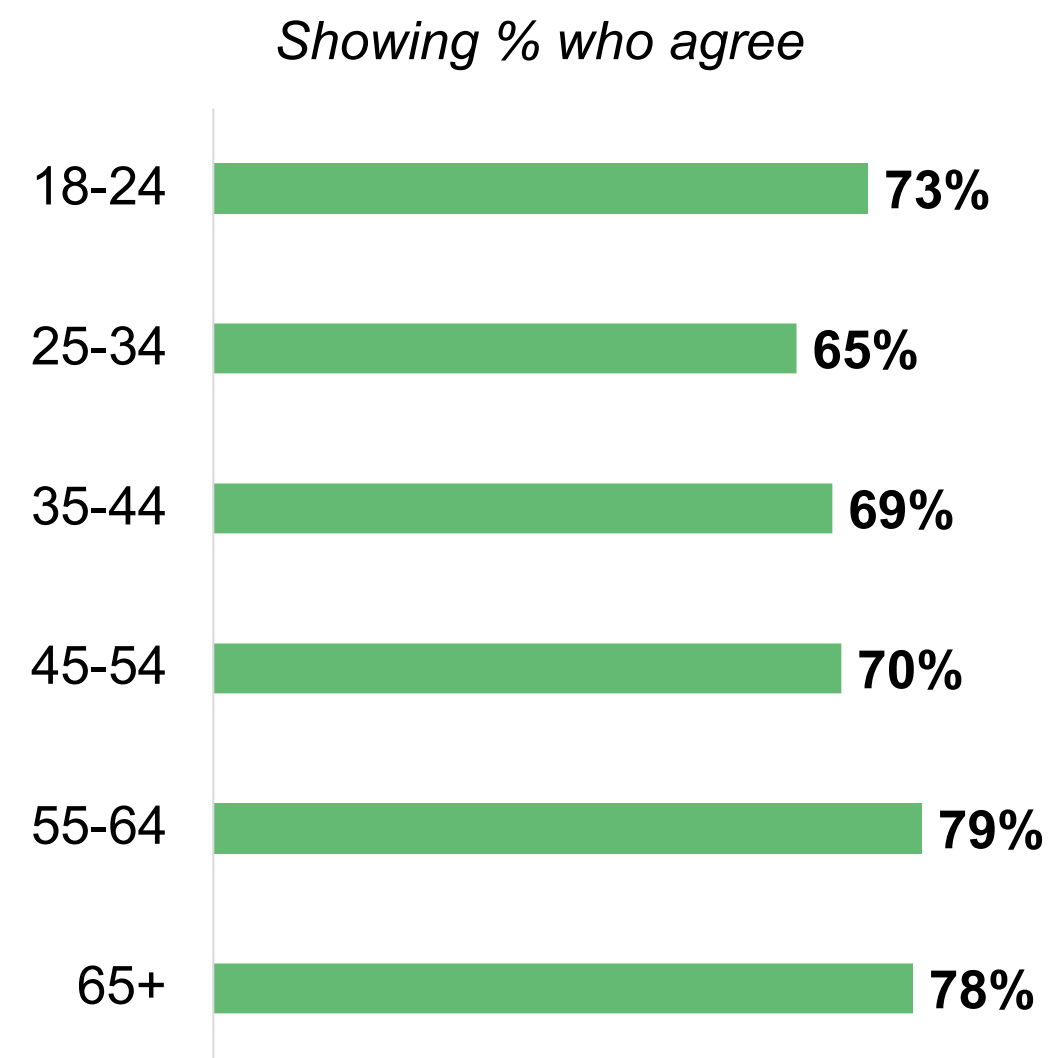
(SNP voter, Scotland)

Local businesses have stood out and are seen to have shown empathy and served their communities during the pandemic

‘Local businesses have been the heroes of this crisis and many have served their communities well’



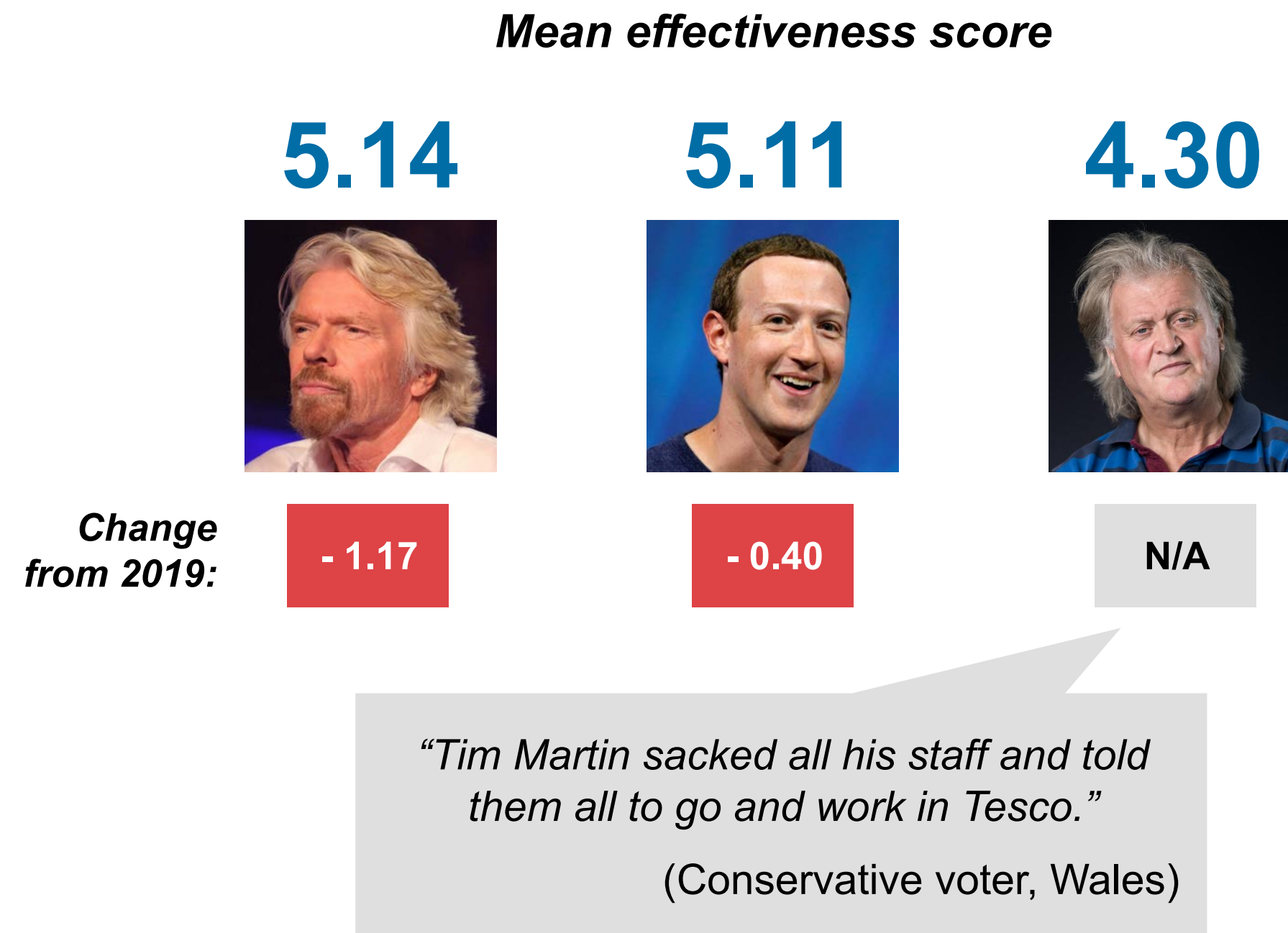
Older generations are more likely to agree



“Small businesses have given their stock away to people who need it, either via food banks or through their own contacts. There are many people out there who have done good things.”

(Conservative voter, Wales)

Typically, the business leaders the public are familiar with are those seen to have cashed in or shown a lack of responsibility



- If the public recognise a CEO, it tends to be for the wrong reasons.
- Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos and Tim Martin are given as examples of poor leaders during the crisis.
- These leaders have not demonstrated they are on the side of their staff or customers, and instead focused on their personal wealth.

“Richard Branson [and] all of these people that pay next to nothing in tax, they all just let their staff go. I think a lot of businesses are not taking full accountability.”
(Labour voter, London)

Recap: the most important findings

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Thank you

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