



Public Trust in Charities 2025

Prepared for the Charity Commission for England and Wales by BMG Research

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

- Overall average trust in charities has remained consistently high since 2020, with 57% of people having high trust (level with 2024) although the proportion with low trust has slightly increased since last year (up from 9% to 10%). Charities continue to be more highly ranked compared to other organisations, with only doctors outperforming them.
- Trust in charities is higher among those from higher socio-economic backgrounds and those with knowledge of the charity sector, for example, those that have heard of the Commission, those that have high knowledge of the Commission and those/those with a family member have had contact with a charity in the last year.
- Donations reaching the end cause and the purpose of the charity being achieved are still the most important factors in whether the public trust charities or not. Donations reaching the end cause is also the most likely factor in whether the public support a charity or not. This was a recurring theme through the focus groups, where participants emphasised the importance of donations being used for the stated purpose of the charity, and where this hadn't happened in specific high-profile cases they had read about, their trust was negatively impacted.
- How other charities act is more likely to make respondents support a charity more than make them support a charity less. Views were mixed in the focus groups as some felt high profile cases of charity scandals did impact on their support for other charities, but others felt charities could not be judged on the actions of other charities.
- A charity being regulated is also an important factor when the public consider donating money, but not as important as the purpose of the charity or most of their donation reaching the end cause.
- Regulation an important factor in whether the public trust a charity or not, as well as a key factor when considering donating money.

Executive Summary

- There has been an increase in public belief that charities they know about are acting positively (e.g making a difference or operating to high ethical standards). The largest increase has been in belief that most of the money raised goes on the end cause and that there is transparency around decision making.
- If a charity undertakes campaigning it doesn't negatively impact whether the public support it, in some cases participants were more likely to support the charity. Participants felt charities should be campaigning for long-term social change but also recognised the need for charities to also offer immediate relief, so felt a balance needed to be struck between the two.
- Awareness of the Charity Commission has remained stable, but claimed depth of knowledge has increased. The Captain Tom Foundation charity investigation is mainly how people have heard about the Charity Commission recently. How the Charity Commission has handled this investigation has increased positivity towards the Commission.
- Among those that know the Commission well, most have positive views of the Commission and trust it to make the right decisions and act impartially.
- While there have been high levels of awareness of the Captain Tom Foundation, overall trust in charities has not been impacted and has remained stable, maybe due to how the Charity Commission have handled the investigation. Focus group participants were balanced in their views as while actions of high-profile charities could impact their trust, there was also a sense that it wasn't fair to question all charities due to the actions of a few.

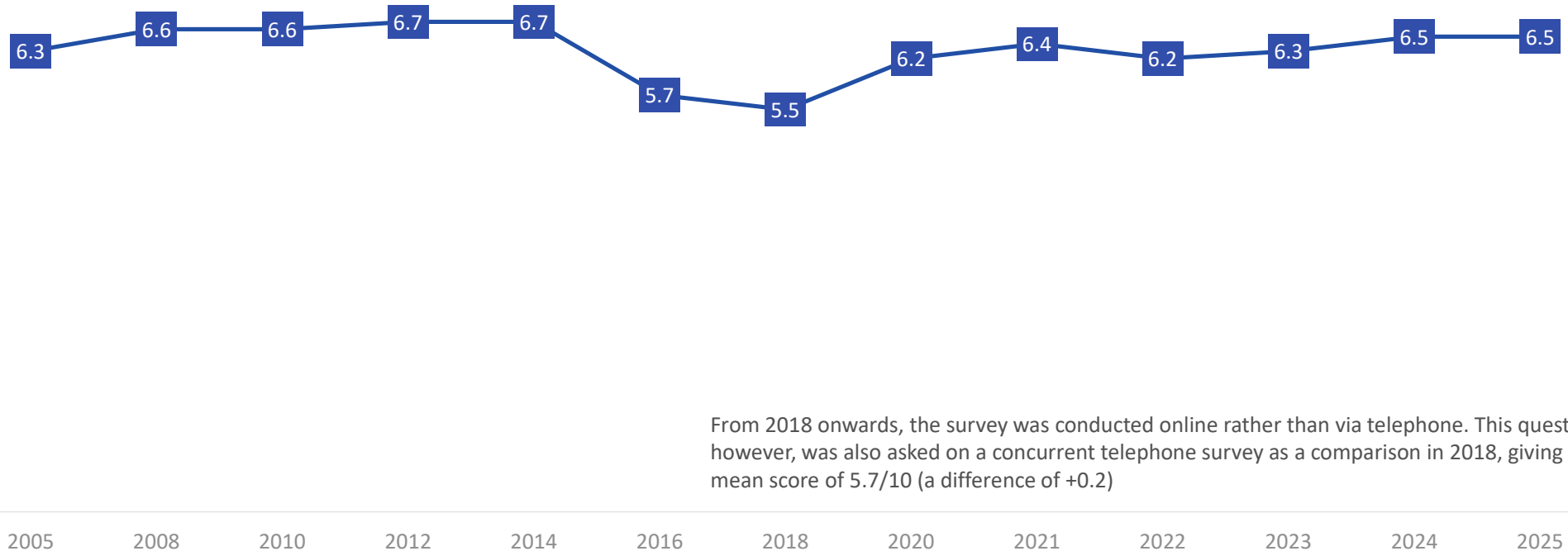
Executive Summary

- Awareness of the register of charities has increased slightly since 2024, but this hasn't translated into greater usage. Participants said they would only use the register if they wanted to check a charity that they wanted to donate to, but had never heard of, or they were sceptical about a charity. Most did not use the register before donating to a charity as they went by the reputation of the charity or a personal connection which led them to already have trust in the charity.
- Financial support for charities has declined post-covid as donations decline, while demand for charities' services has increased significantly over the last 5 years. Volunteering has seen an uplift post-covid, and of those that volunteered/family volunteered, 4 in 10 had long term involvement with the charity.

Overall Trust in Charities

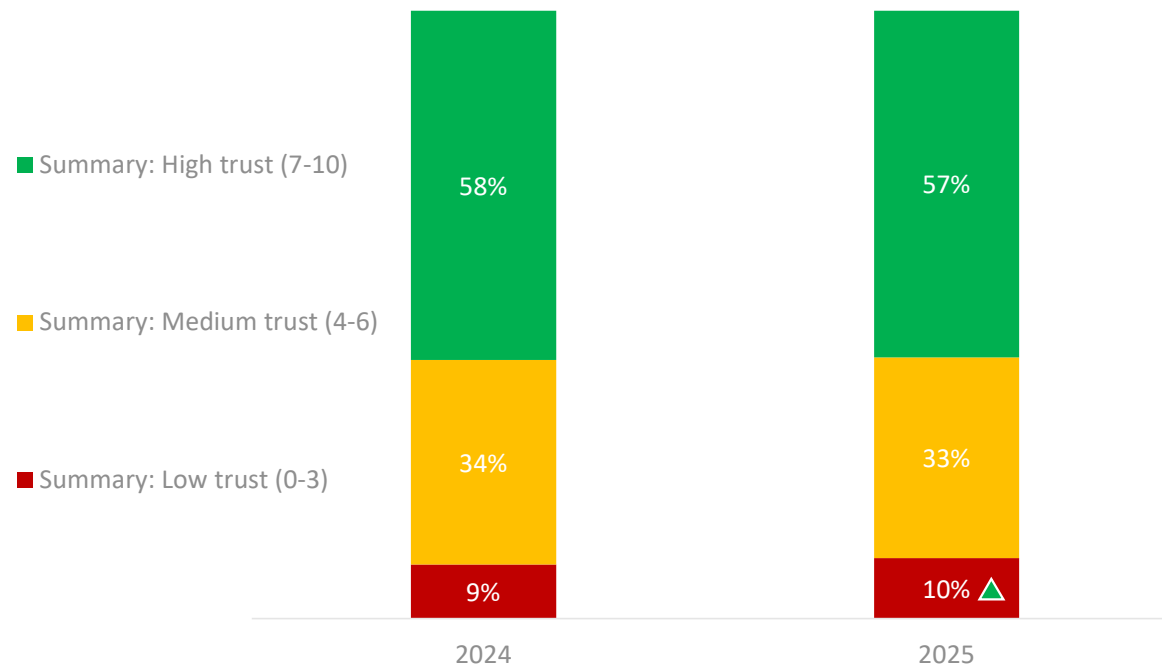
Overall trust has remained consistently high since 2020

Overall trust in Charities over time (mean score)



In 2025, almost 6 in 10 say they have high trust in charities while 1 in 10 have very low trust, an increase since 2024

Trust in Charities



Analysis

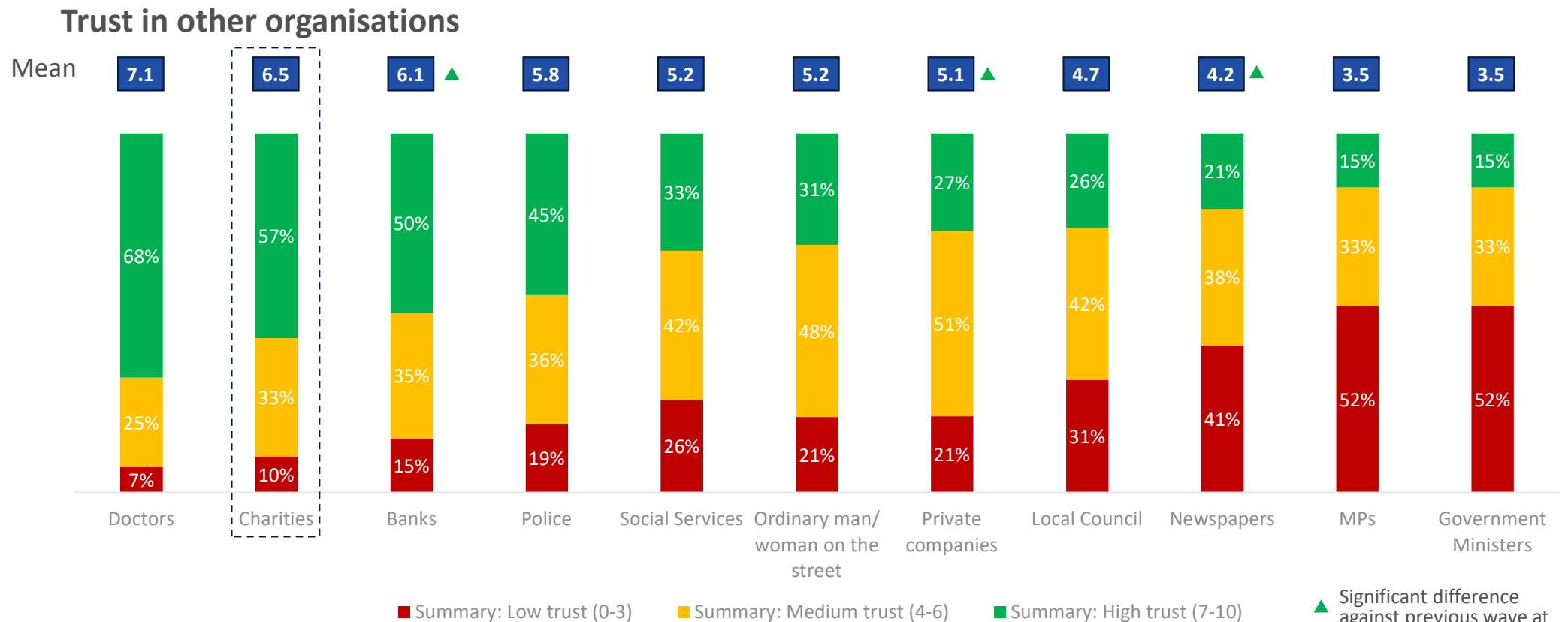
High trust in charities is higher among:

- Those with a degree or higher (64%)
- SEG AB (65%)
- Least deprived (62%)

Having knowledge of the charity sector also increases high trust:

- Heard of the Charity Commission (63%)
- High knowledge of the Charity Commission (83%)
- They or a family member have had contact with a charity in the last year (62%)

Trust in charities still ranks very high compared to other organisations, with only trust in doctors continuing to rank higher

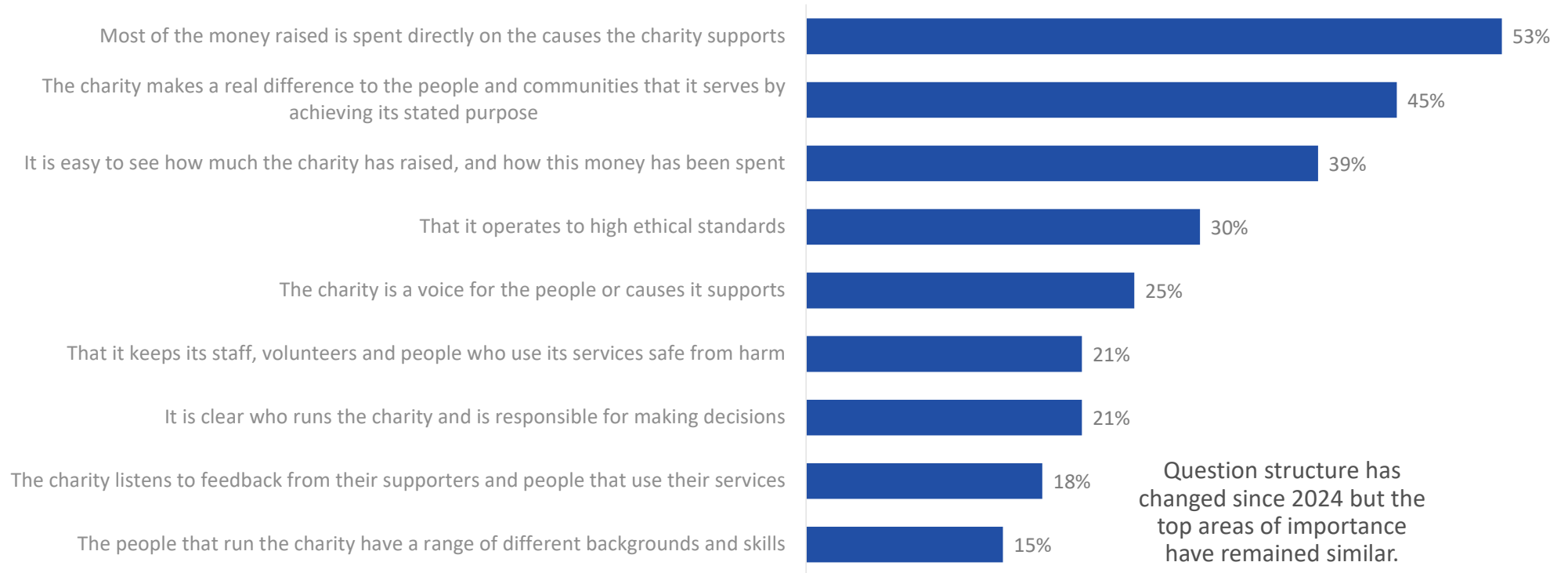


Summary: A2. On a scale of 0-10 where 10 means you trust them completely and 0 means you don't trust them at all, please tell me how much trust and confidence you have in each? Base: All respondents (4092)

Drivers of Trust in Charities

Donations reaching the end cause, and the charity making a real difference, are the most important factors for public trust in charities

Importance in whether to trust a charity or not





Focus Groups

Throughout the focus groups, participants emphasised the importance of donations being spent on the cause the charity supports, and where this hadn't happened their trust was impacted

Participants highlighted that it was important to them that their donations reached the end cause. They knew that operational costs and salaries were necessary, but most of their donation should go towards the purpose of the charity.

"the money I'm donating should go to the end cause, well, a lot of it, but again, you need people in the charities who are going to get paid a fair wage."

However, throughout participants described where they were concerned the end cause wasn't prioritised and discussed examples of when funds had been mismanaged, all of which led to some distrust:

Sceptical about type of fundraising: One participant was sceptical about charities that approach you on the street as they were concerned how much of their donation would go to commission for employees and not the intended cause.

"Then how much money actually goes for the charity because these people are paid employees, and they get commissioned for signing up people on direct debit. So, I'll be honest, I stay away from those people and do not engage in any conversations."

CEOs' salaries: Negative media exposure involving high salaries for charity executives impacted participants' trust. They were concerned about whether their donations were being used effectively to support the charity's purpose.

"I think somebody else said if a CEO or director has got a huge salary, then I don't really want to support them."

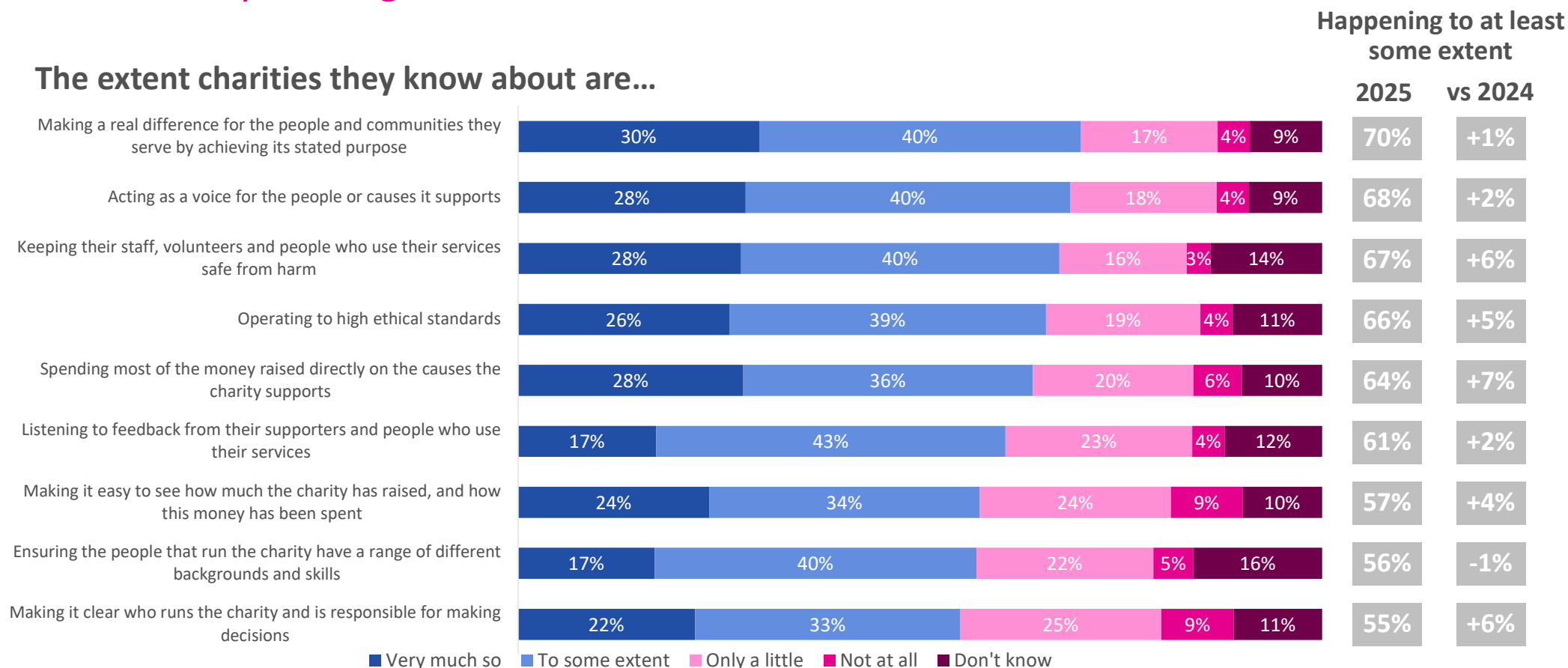
Charity scandals: Reports of scandals involving charities made participants question newer charities or charities with a lot of media exposure. Hearing examples of charities that had not spent the assumed proportion of funds on the end cause, made them disappointed and more sceptical about charities with high publicity.

"It's made me think any kind of new charity, even if they are kind of like, I don't know, kind of bigger and on the TV and more. I'm going to be sceptical more of those types of charities now after hearing the story."

Overall, participants valued transparency, accountability, and clear communication about how funds are used. Concerns about mismanagement, high executive salaries, and deceptive practices impacted their trust in charities. Participants preferred supporting organisations with a good reputation and those where they could see the direct impact of their contributions.

There has been an increase in almost all statements, with the largest in a belief that most of the money raised goes on the end cause

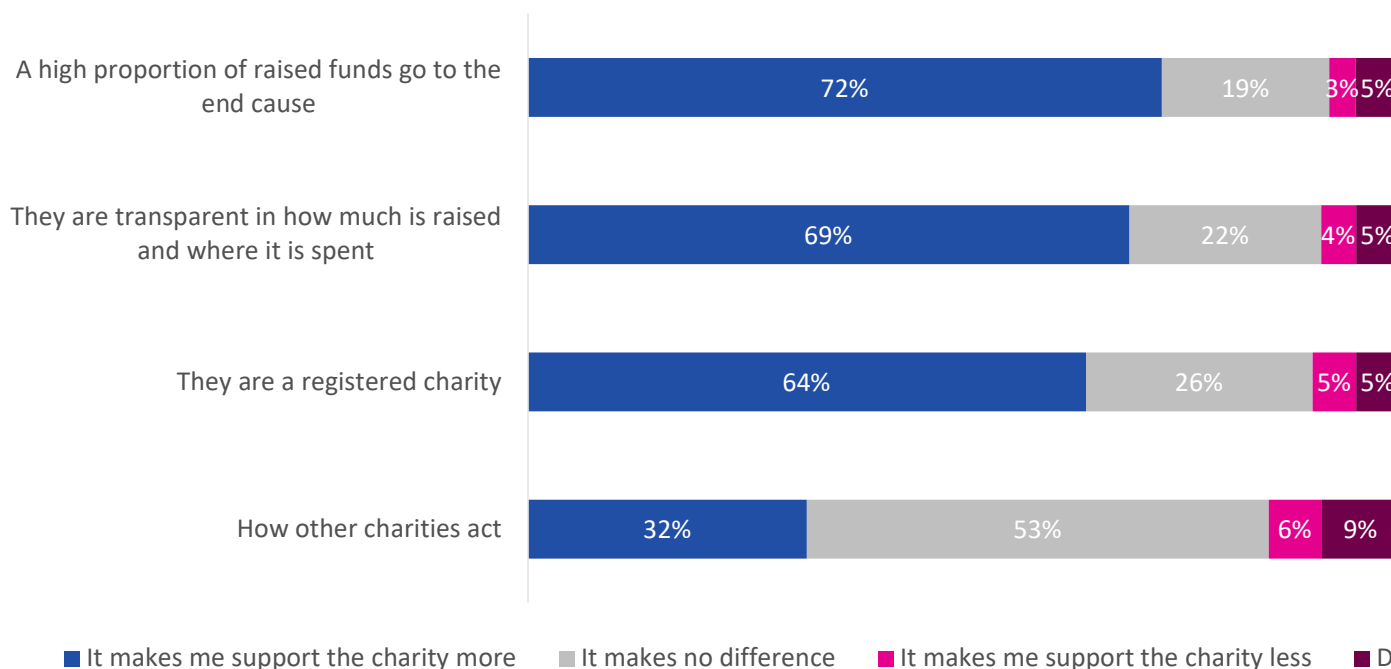
The extent charities they know about are...



Supporting Charities

Again, money donated going to end cause is what is most likely going to make somebody support a charity, and how other charities act is the least likely

Impact on likeliness to support a specific charity

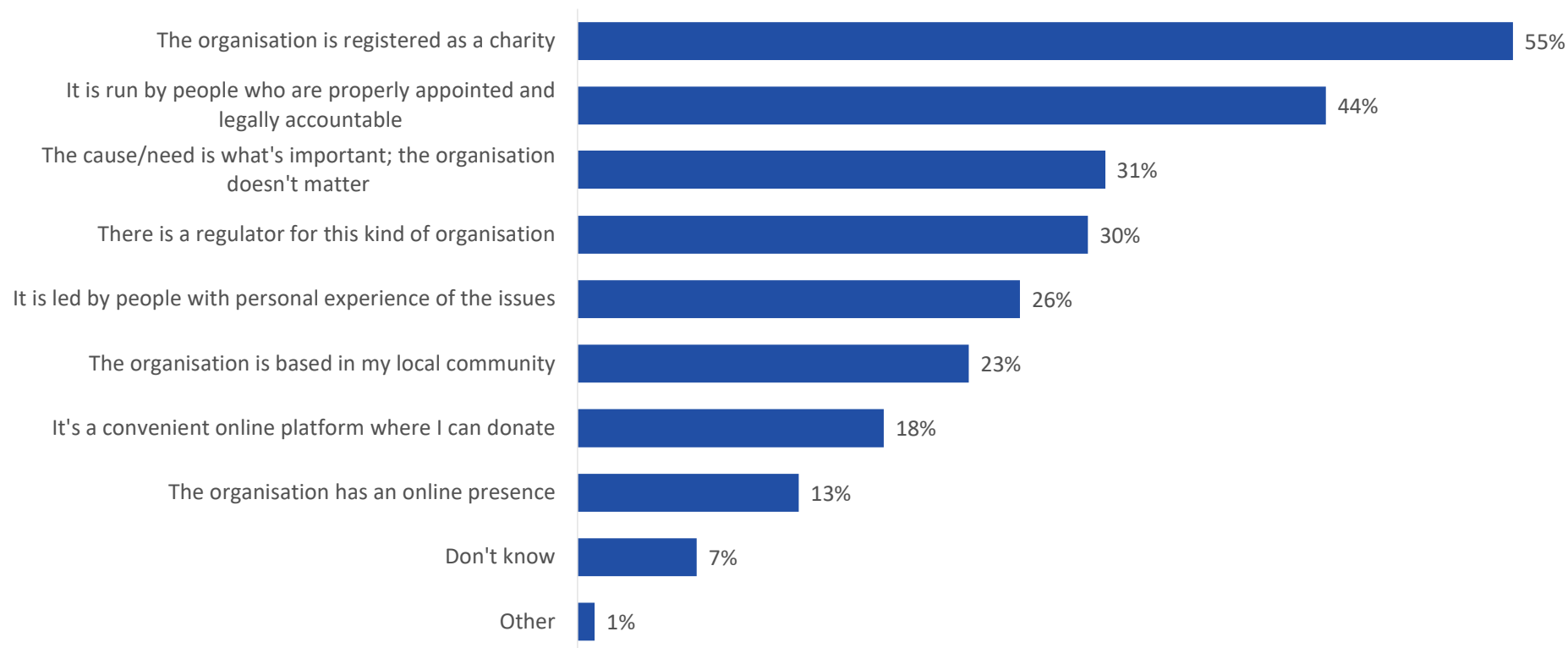


How other charities act is more likely to make respondents support the charity more than support them less.

In the qualitative research participants noted how high-profile charities with scandals attached to them could make them feel dubious about newer charities or ones that had gained significant publicity, but there was also a feeling that you “*can’t tarnish them all with the same brush*”, and just because one charity acts in a negative way, it doesn’t mean they all are.

If giving money, most people felt that an organisation being a registered charity, and being accountable, were the most important aspects of how it is set up and run

Importance of factors when giving money to a good cause (multi choice)





Focus Groups

Alignment with personal beliefs, reputation, transparency and personal connection were the main factors focus group participants considered when deciding which charities to support

How participants decide which charities to support with their time or money:

1

Alignment with Personal Beliefs: Participants were more likely to support charities that aligned with their values and interests, for example supporting charities associated with their local church, or causes that they personally cared about, such as the local community or animal welfare.

2

Reputation: Negative media exposure or scandals involving a charity could impact participants' likelihood to support. For instance, participants mentioned being wary of charities that had been involved in financial misconduct or other controversies.

3

Transparency: How funds were used and how much reached the end cause were key considerations. Participants emphasised the importance of transparency in where the money is spent and how much reaches the end cause. They preferred charities with a good track record and clear communication about how donations are spent.

4

Personal Connection: Direct involvement in the charity or knowing somebody impacted by the charity were reasons for support. Many participants had family members that had benefitted by health charities (e.g. hospices or cancer research) so were motivated to support the charities.

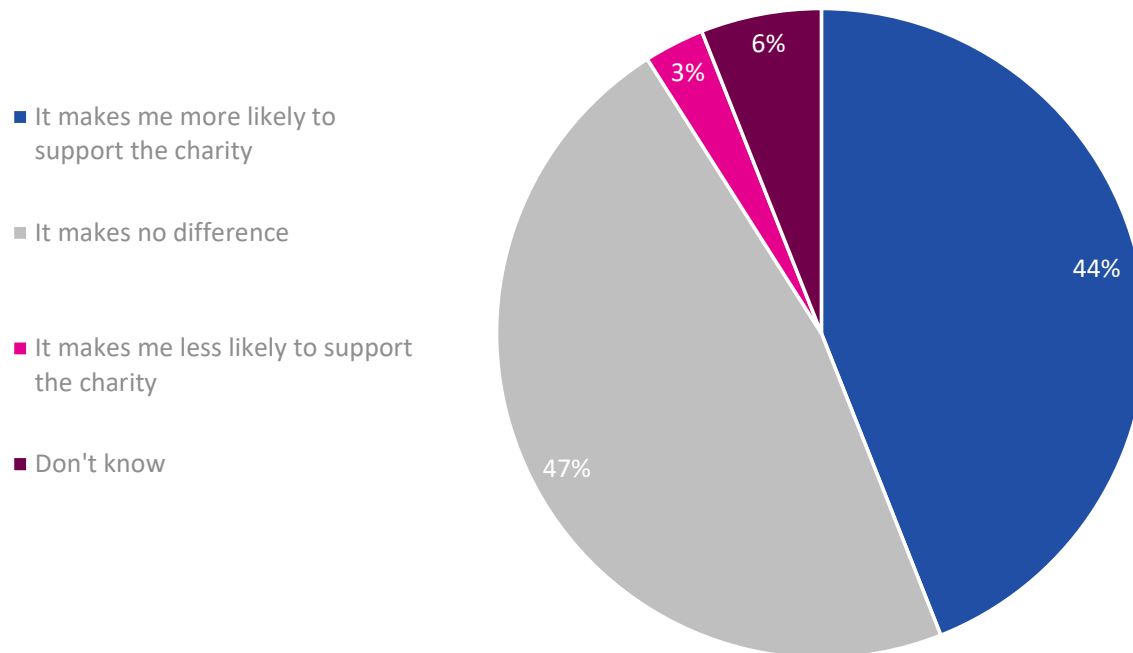
"You know, for example, Pakistani floods. I think that was about two years ago now. That was kind of a big matter. So, you know, I was moved to make a one-off contribution to that. So there's been kind of events that have happened where, you know, in poorer countries, like natural disasters, where I've often been just moved to send something on the whim."

"Well, I started a few years before lockdown. I started volunteering at our local country park, because it was somewhere I always visited. And it was not only was I helping the park, but whatever I was doing, I thought it gave me personal development. And it was really, really good for my mental health. So really, for me, it's to have this intrinsic personal interest in the cause. So I can make a difference as well."

"So for me I think it is just like some others have said, I do mainly choose who to support based on personal experience if there's something in particular that has affected me and that I know they've helped quite a lot or just you know from hearing from other people that these charities have helped so there is evidence that they do quite good work with the money that they raise."

Charities campaigning either makes participants more likely to support the charity or makes no difference. Fewer than 1 in 20 would be less likely to support a charity that campaigned

Impact of campaigning on support



Analysis

The impact of charities campaigning on support differed by the following:

- **Age:** 16 – 34-year-olds more likely to support (54%), 65+ are more likely to say it makes no difference (61%)
- **Education:** those degree educated are more likely to support (52%), those with no qualifications more likely to say it makes no difference (55%)
- **Contact with a charity:** those that have had contact are more likely to support (50%), those with no qualifications more likely to say it makes no difference (62%)

For those that are less likely to support a charity after it campaigns, they are more likely to be male (5%) and have low trust in charities (9%).



Focus Groups

Focus group participants felt charities should strike a balance between immediate relief and campaigning for long term social change

Participants emphasised the importance of charities in addressing immediate needs and providing essential services to vulnerable populations, such as the homeless, refugees, and those affected by natural disasters overseas.

"I'd say focusing on the current issue more than like trying to help for in the future because they need all these causes, they need a lot of money at the current time."

"I think at the moment a lot of charities are just surviving day-to-day, aren't they? I mean I don't think with the money that's they're raising and all that has gone on with the government that they can look too far in advance. I think they've just looked to help the people they can, to help the people they can in the future, and do the best they can with what they've got."

Participants also noted charities had to fill the gaps where government support was lacking so if they were to switch focus to long term social change, no other organisation would be able to provide this help.

"I think this time that we're living in is sort of plugging the gaps where the government can't or won't enable help."

However, participants could also see the value in advocating for social change. By advocating for social change, the root causes could be addresses which would reduce the need for immediate relief in the future.

"I think charities should be focusing on long-term solutions to societal problems. It's important to address immediate needs, but without tackling the root causes, we're just putting a band-aid on the issue."

On balance, most decided that both were important roles for charities as they need to effectively address urgent needs, but also work on improving societal issues.

"I think they've got to focus on it all, haven't they? They've got to focus on the now and the medium and the long-term, because if they don't focus on the long-term, they're going to be in trouble, but you can't forget now and then, so you've got to do everything you can for now, but you've also got to hope that in the future things would change and you can help that change."

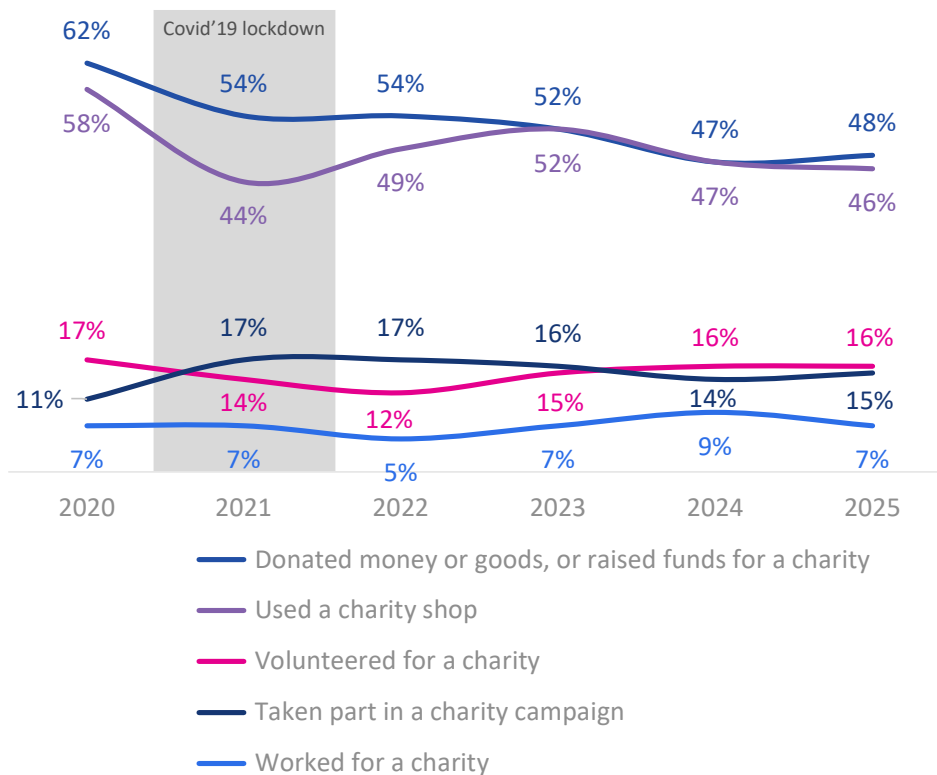
There was also consideration for how the charity is set up and what it aims to achieve. Charities that try to relieve urgent situations should continue with that purpose, but for long-term standing societal issues, there should be some focus on addressing the root causes.

"I guess it kind of depends on the situation. Obviously, for example, like fundraising for Gaza there's kind of immediate need, but overall, I think probably long-term changes better, because I think it'd be more sustainable and better in the long run, if that makes sense."

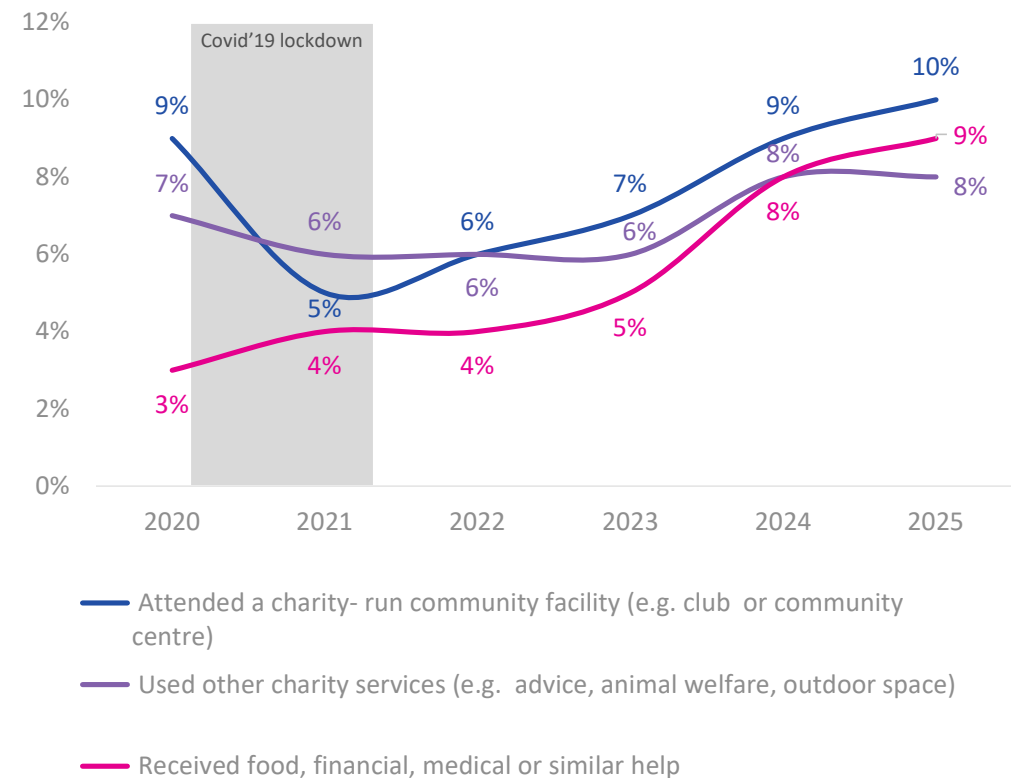
"I think it very much depends on the basic area that the charity has chosen to operate in. Some issues lend themselves to immediate care and raising funds for, or whatever, and others, do you know what the way we fix this is by campaigning and getting the government to step up or getting people to step up?"

Financial support for charities has declined post-covid, while demand for charities' services has increased significantly over the last 5 years

Charitable giving over time



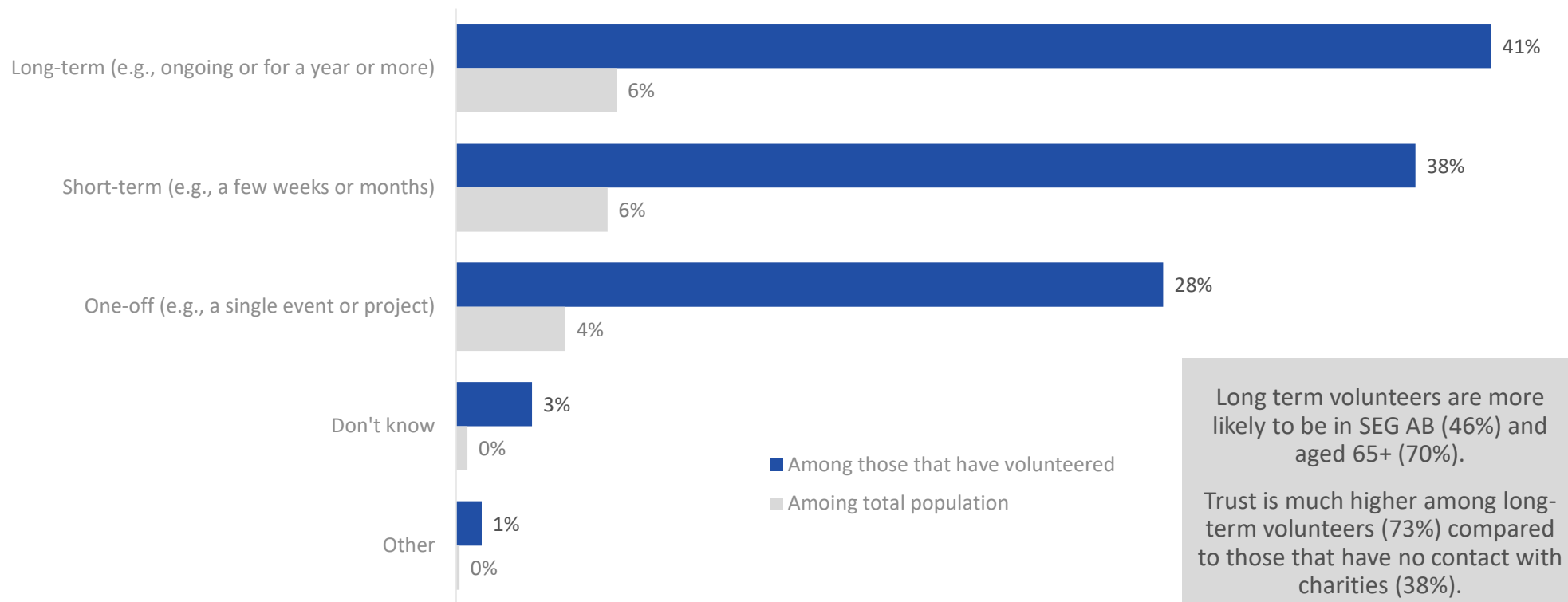
Receiving from charities over time



E1. Have you or any of your close family had contact with a charity in the last year? Base: All respondents: 2024 (4599), 2025 (4092)

Of those that volunteered/family volunteered, 4 in 10 had long term involvement with the charity

Volunteer involvement

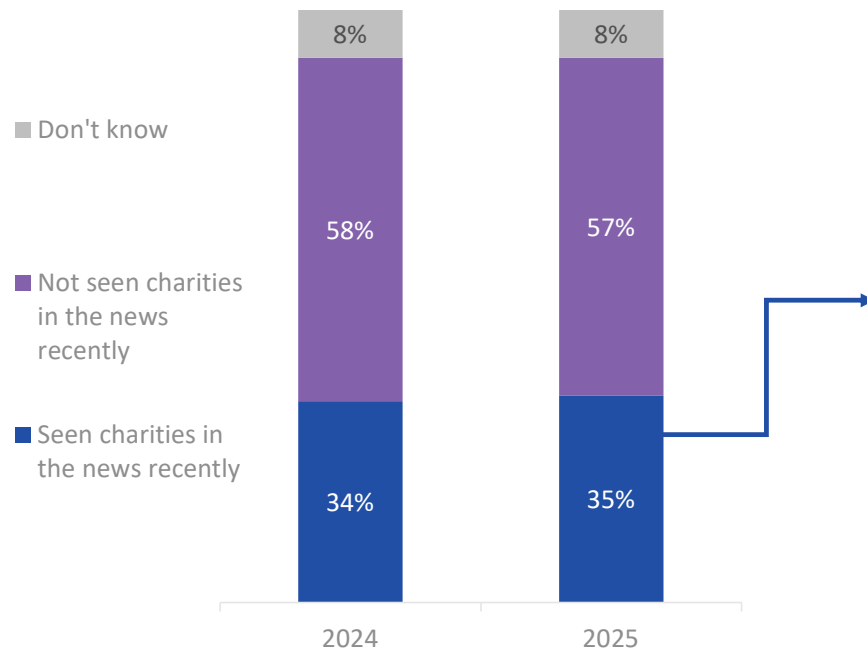


E4. How would you describe your/your family members volunteer involvement with the charity? Base: where volunteered for a charity (702)

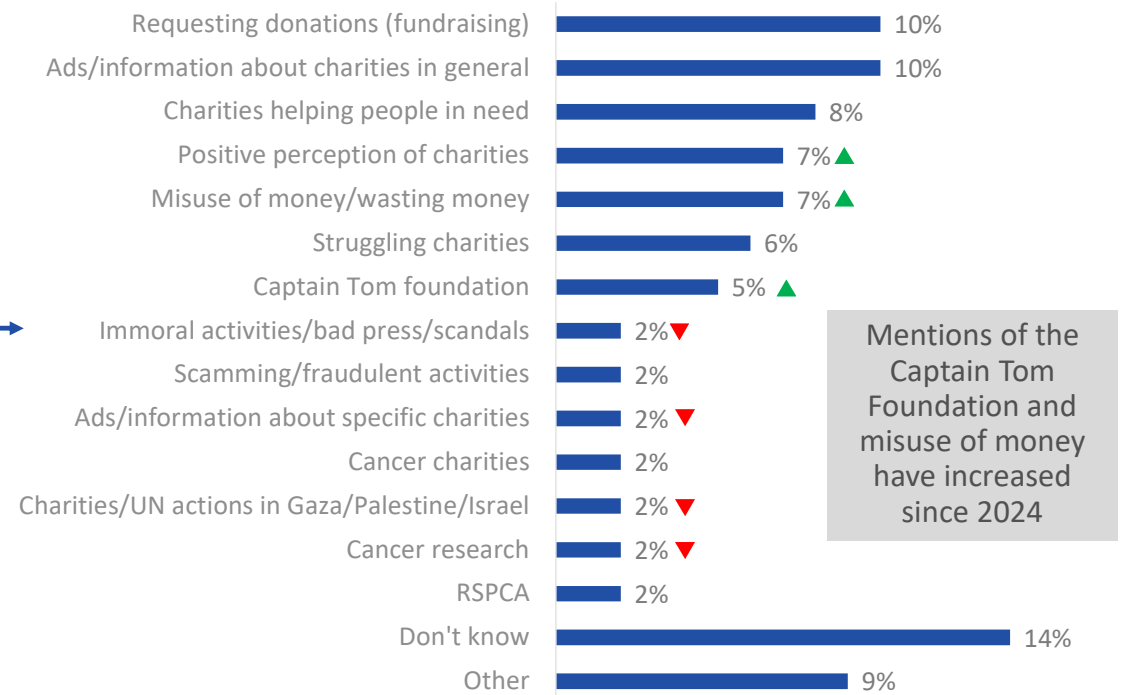
Charities in the news

35% claim to have seen something in the news about charities recently, in line with 2024. Most coverage has been about fundraising, information or advising what charities do

Heard/read/see charities in the news recently

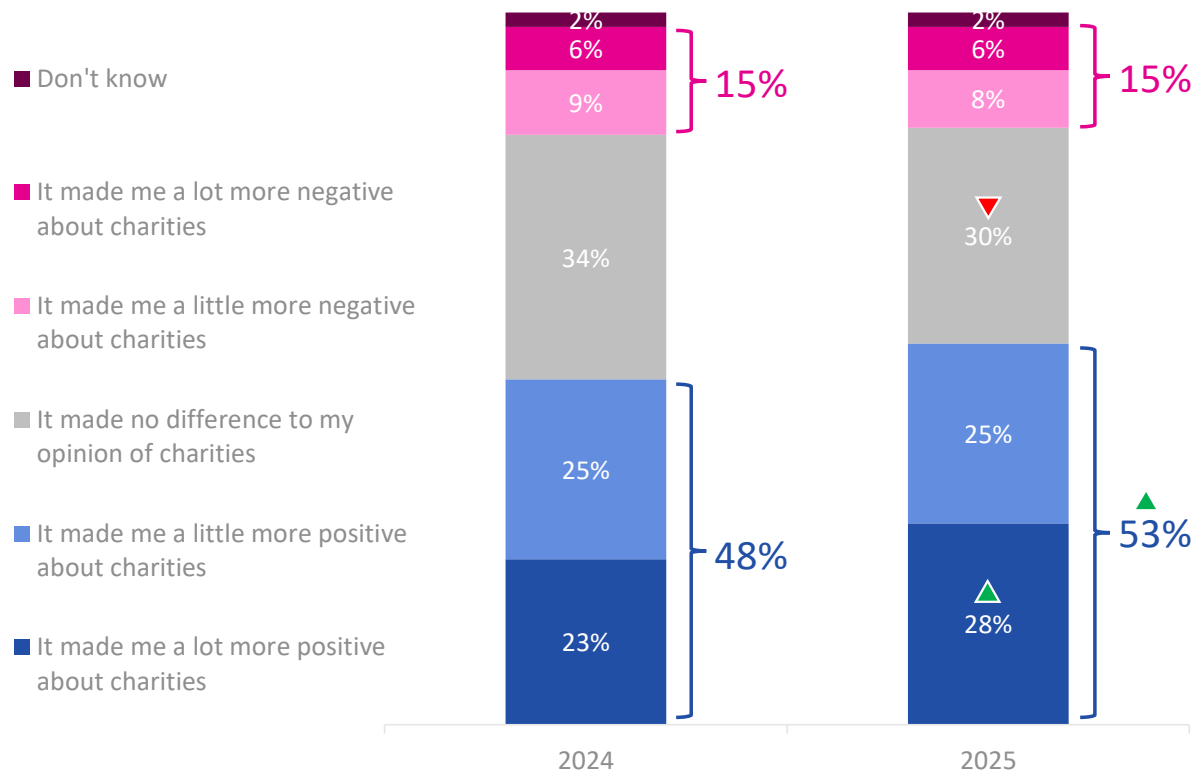


What has been heard/seen about charities in the news (coded responses)



Most recent news coverage of charities has left the public feeling more positive about charities, despite more people seeing news about misuse of money

How what they have seen has changed opinions of charities



Analysis

53% of those that had heard/read/seen anything about charities in the news recently said it left them feeling more positive about charities.

Of those that had also heard/read/seen something about the Charity Commission in the news recently, 72% said the charity news made them feel more positive about charities while those who had not heard anything about the Charity Commission recently were more likely to say the charity news made them feel more negative about charities (22%).

B3. How, if at all, did this change your opinion of charities? Base: Where heard, read or seen something about charities: 2024 (1643), 2025 (1525)

▲ Significant difference against previous wave at 95% confidence interval
▼



CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES



Focus Groups

Most participants were ok with 'bad' funding sources as the end justified the means, but they were wary of reputational damage and the ethical implications

Participants were shown news articles reporting controversies about charities accepting donations from organisations associated with fossil fuels or linked to international conflicts.

Accepting 'bad' donations

Participants were conflicted about whether charities should accept controversial donations. Some were opposed to taking the donations due to morally opposing where the donation had come from. This tended to divide by age, with those younger believing the donations should not be accepted ethically, while those older accepted the ethical dilemma, but still felt the money should be used. They felt that the need for donations was greater, and charities should only turn it down if they could get the donation elsewhere.

"I think it's a very difficult question to answer. So maybe it's about the need and if other funding sources are available to them."

"I think it would be a shame if the beneficiaries suffered because of where the money came from."

Participants also considered the reputational damage of taking the donations, and the impact it would have on the beneficiaries. This was especially pertinent when discussing one charity that holds a festival. Participants noted how celebrities had pulled out of the lineup in protest, which could impact if people go and therefore how much is raised. The sentiment was that is a donation starts to negatively impact donations from elsewhere, charities should not accept it.

The ends justifying the means

Most participants believed that the ends (supporting beneficiaries) could justify the means (source of donations), while younger participants generally felt that the ethical considerations should not be compromised. The majority felt that the goal of helping beneficiaries could justify accepting controversial donations.

"It's a tough decision. Sometimes the immediate need to help beneficiaries can outweigh the concerns about the source of the funds."

"I believe that if the money is used for a good cause and makes a real difference, it can justify accepting it, even if the source is controversial."

Showing gratitude

Names on the wall were seen as outdated. Some felt everybody deserved to be thanked, while others felt no body should be thanked as it wasn't why people donated and may encourage donating for the wrong reasons, such as notoriety.

One participant felt names on the wall didn't consider how much people could give. By just focusing on the large donations, it ignores those that gave a smaller donation, but it was a larger proportion of what they had available.

One participant suggested a thank you note was a great way to show gratitude to everybody, but those that had received a thank you note felt it was a waste of the charities' money.

For one participant, the charity being transparent about how they used the donations and showing the impact, it was having was a good way to show gratitude.

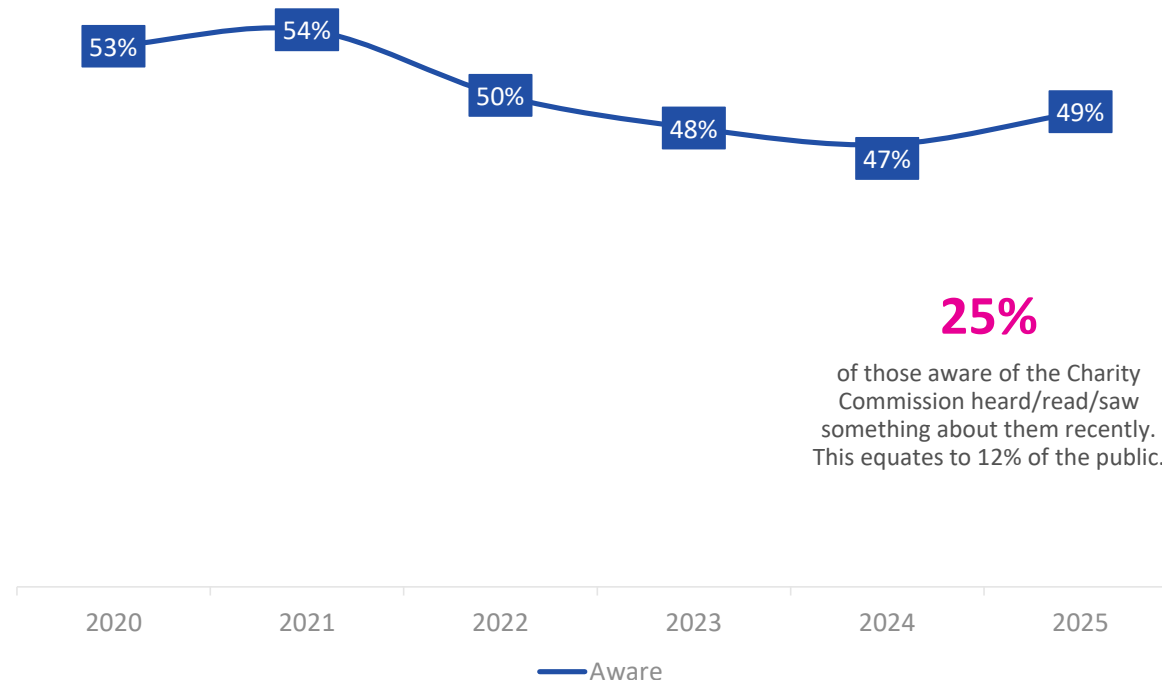
"I think it's important for charities to show how the donations are being used and the impact they're having. It makes donors feel valued."

No participants were able to name any grant makers.

Awareness and knowledge of the Charity Commission

Around half of the public have heard of the Charity Commission, in line with 2024

Heard of the Charity Commission



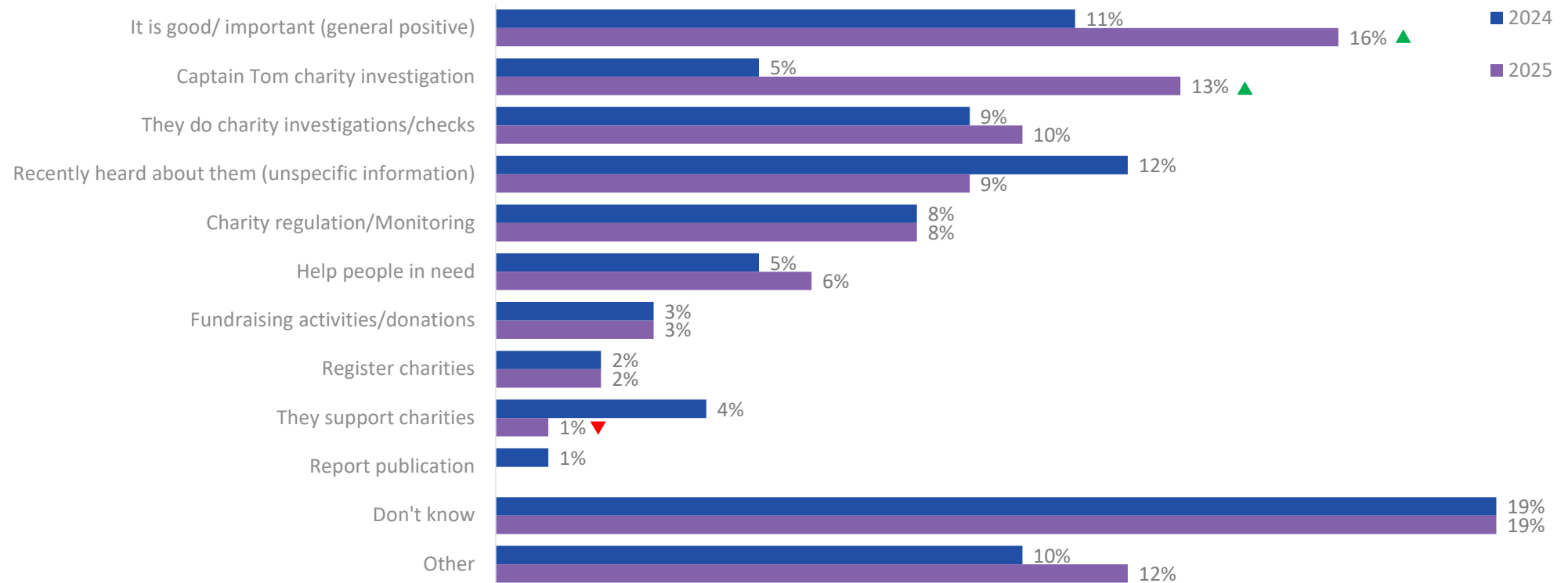
Analysis

Those that are older and come from higher socio-economic backgrounds remain the most likely to have heard about the Charity Commission:

- 65+ (66%)
- Live in the least deprived areas (59%)
- White (56%)
- Have a degree or higher (63%)
- Social grade AB (66%)
- Had contact with a charity in the past year (53%)

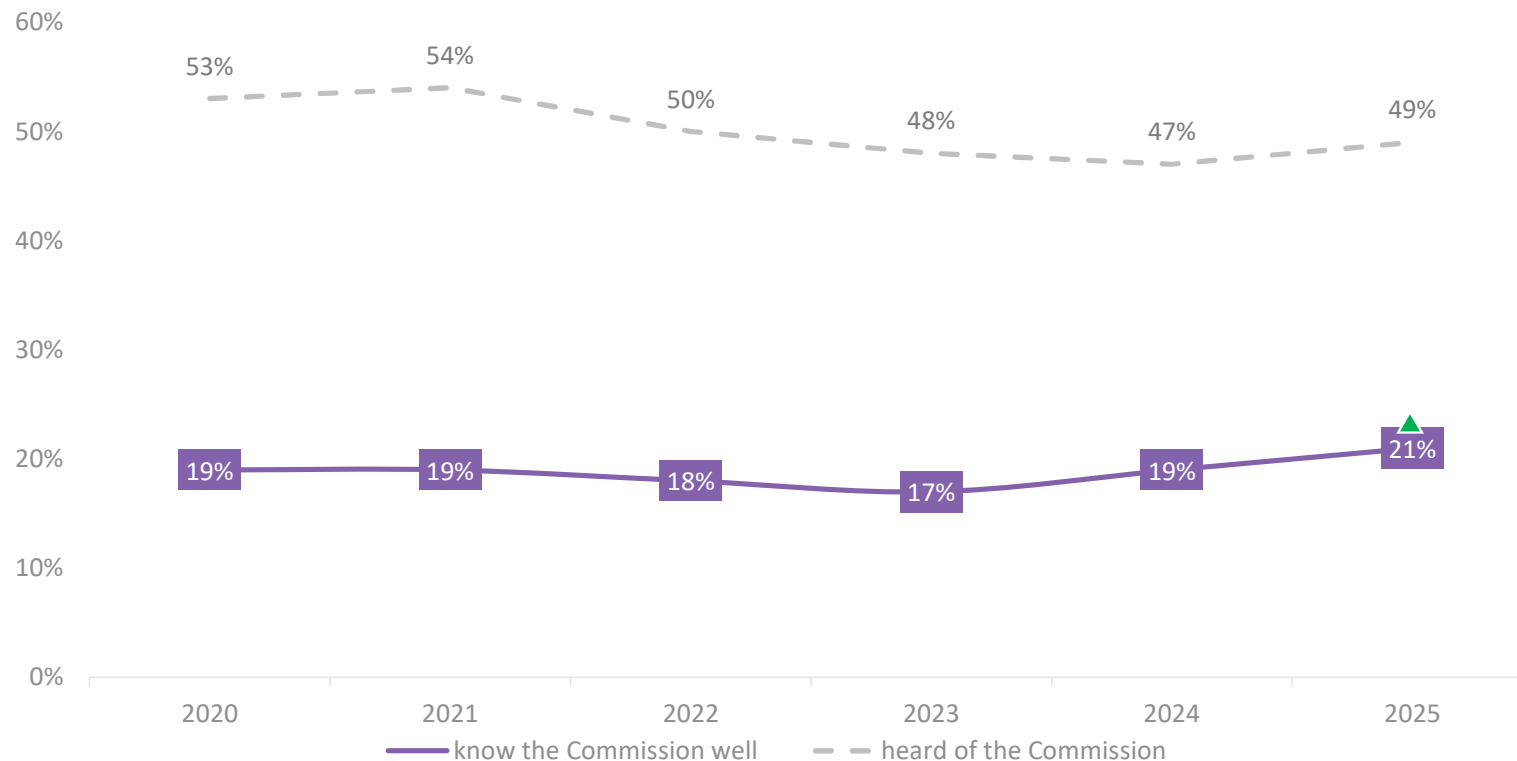
Positive sentiment for the Commission, and the Captain Tom charity investigation, are the most heard/read/seen things about the Charity Commission recently

What they have seen recently about the Charity Commission (coded responses)



Overall, 43% of those that have heard of the Commission claim to know it well, which equates to a fifth of the total population, an increase since 2024

Percentage that claim to know the Charity Commission well



Analysis

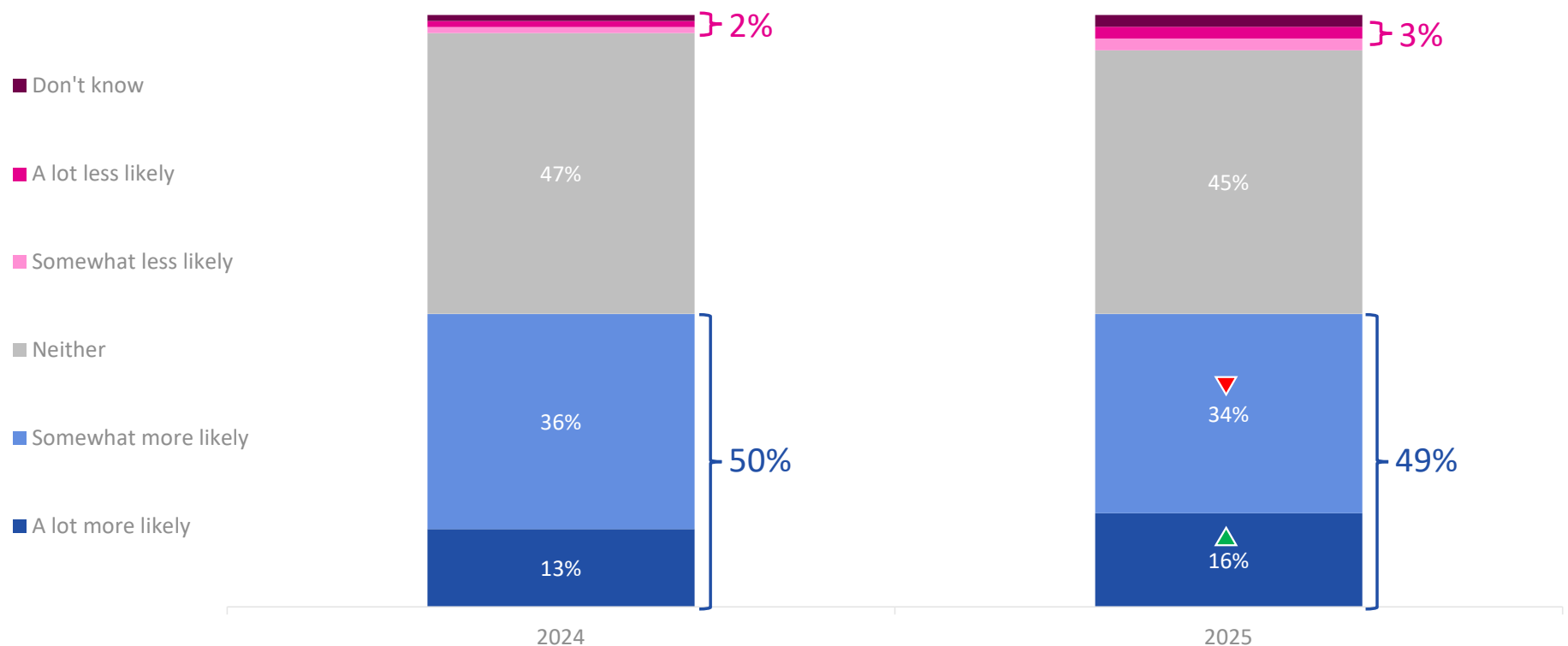
Those who claim to know the Charity Commission well are still more likely to be:

- Male (50%)
- 16 – 34 (65%)
- Live in London (59%)
- Live in the most deprived quartiles (50%)
- Social grade AB (55%)
- High trust in charities (50%)
- Have had contact with a charity in the past year (46%)

The impact the Charity Commission has on trust

Half are more likely to support charities after learning about the role of the Charity Commission, in line with 2024

Likelihood to support charities after learning about the Charity Commission



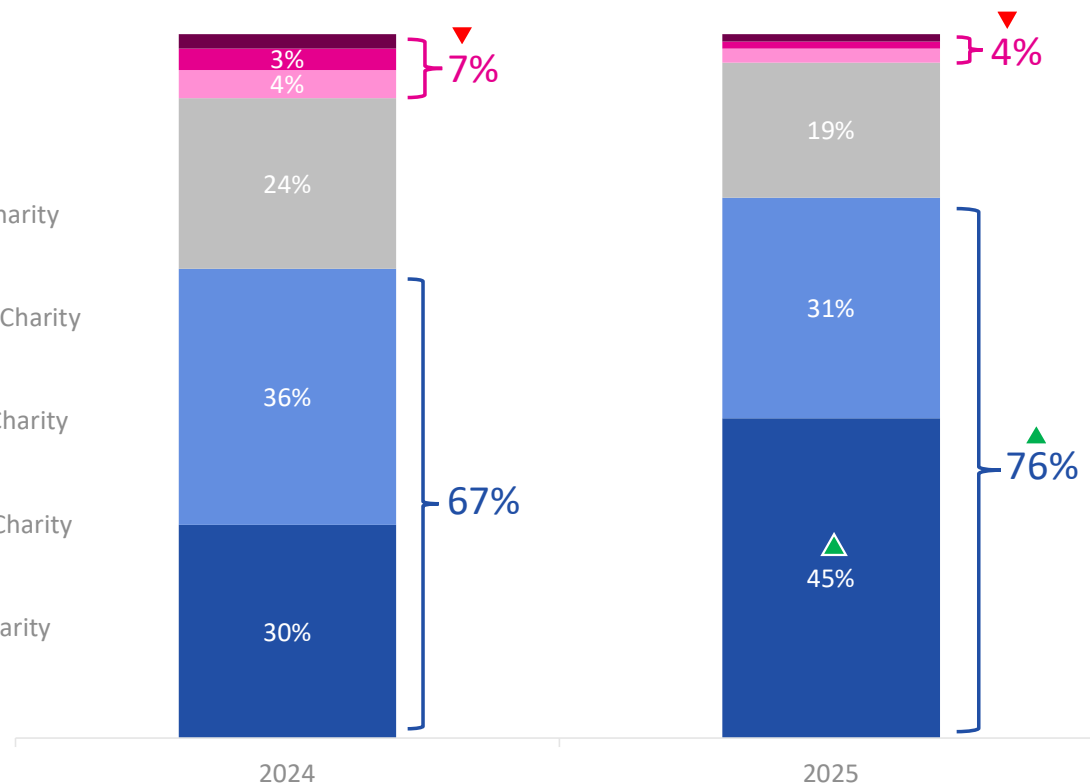
B9. After reading the above, are you more or less likely to support charities? Base: All respondents (4092)

▲ Significant difference against previous wave at 95% confidence interval
▼

All the recent coverage of the Charity Commission has increased positive sentiment towards them

How what they have seen has changed opinions of the Charity Commission

- Don't know
- It made me a lot more negative about the Charity Commission
- It made me a little more negative about the Charity Commission
- It made no difference to my opinion of the Charity Commission
- It made me a little more positive about the Charity Commission
- It made me a lot more positive about the Charity Commission

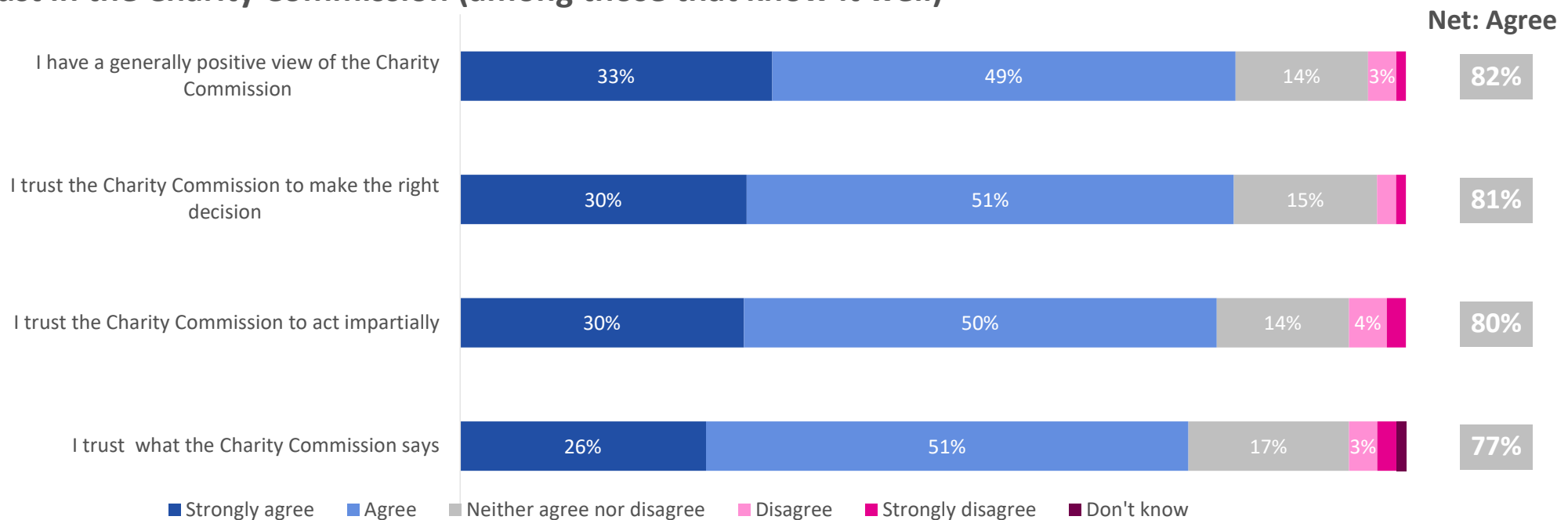


B6. How, if at all, did this change your opinion of the Charity Commission? Base: Heard, read or seen something about the Charity Commission: 2024 (455), 2025 (538). Labels under 3% not shown.

▲ Significant difference against previous wave at 95% confidence interval
▼

Among those that know the Commission well, around 8 in 10 have positive views of the Commission and trust it to make the right decisions and act impartially

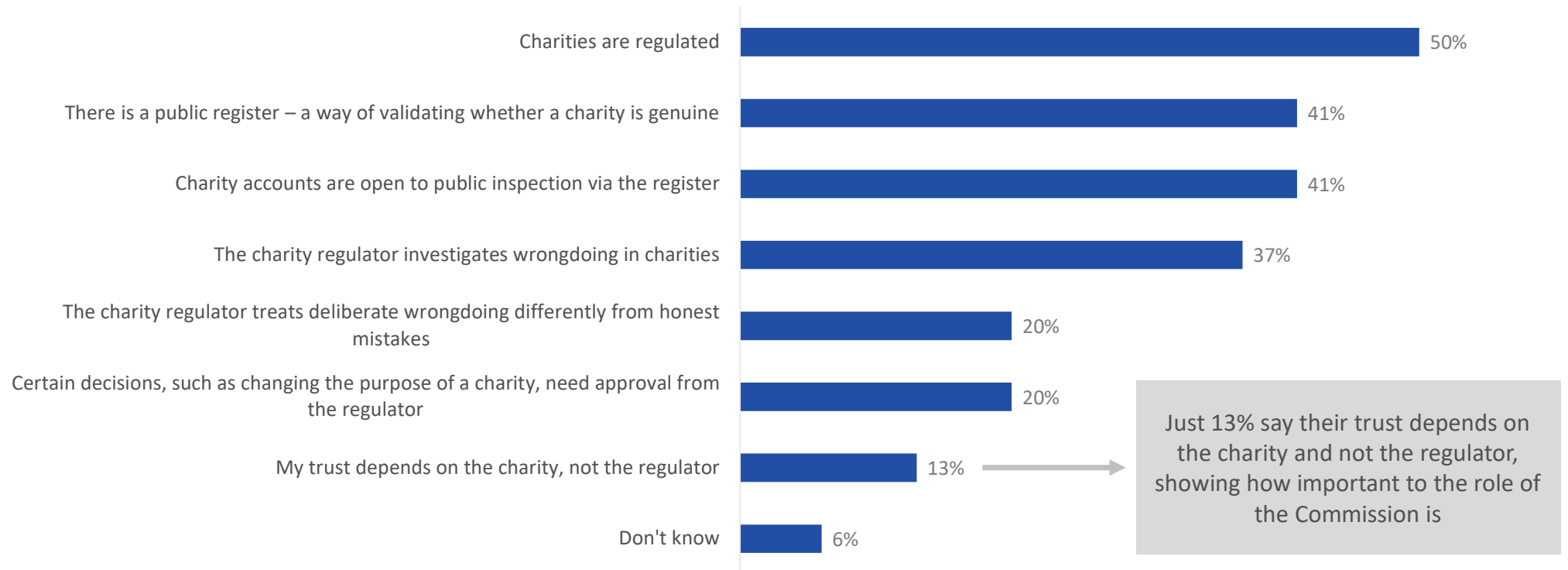
Trust in the Charity Commission (among those that know it well)



The small proportion that disagree tend to be male, aged 16-24 and have low trust in charities

Charities being regulated and the charity register are the most important factors related to oversight of charities when it comes to impact on public trust

Importance for trust in charities

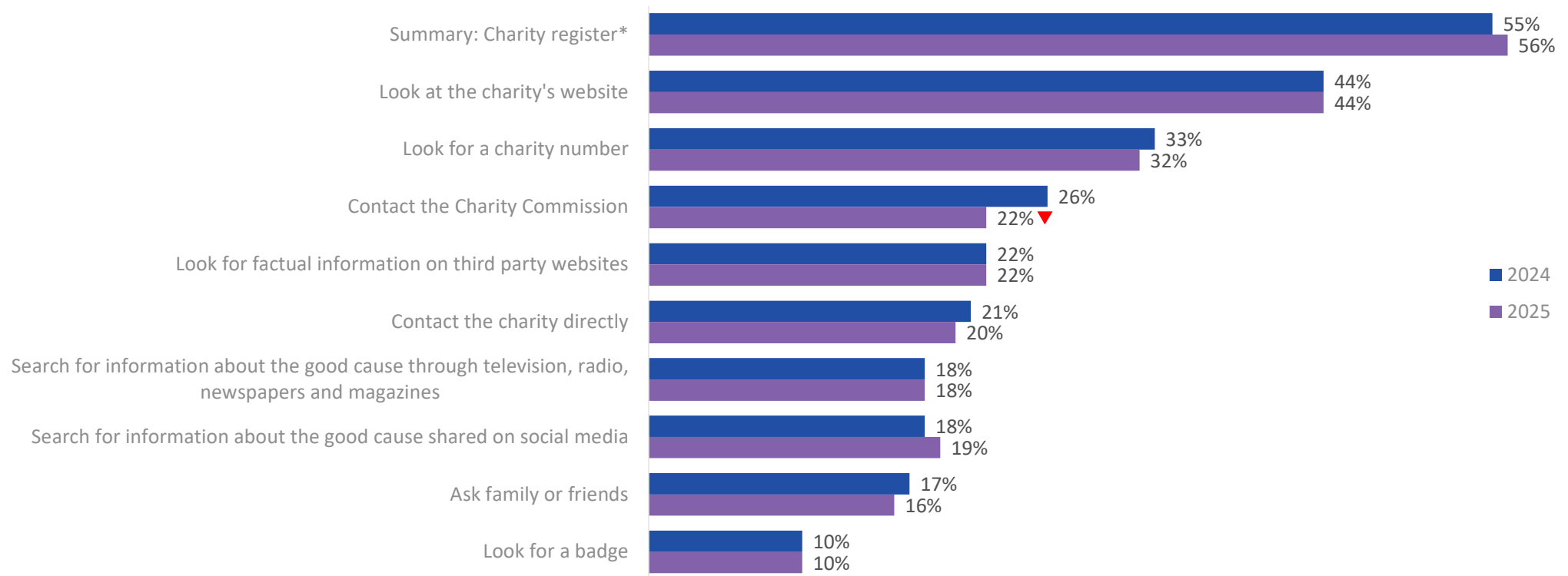


B14. Which of the following do you think are most important to your trust in charities? Base: All respondents (4092)

Register of Charities

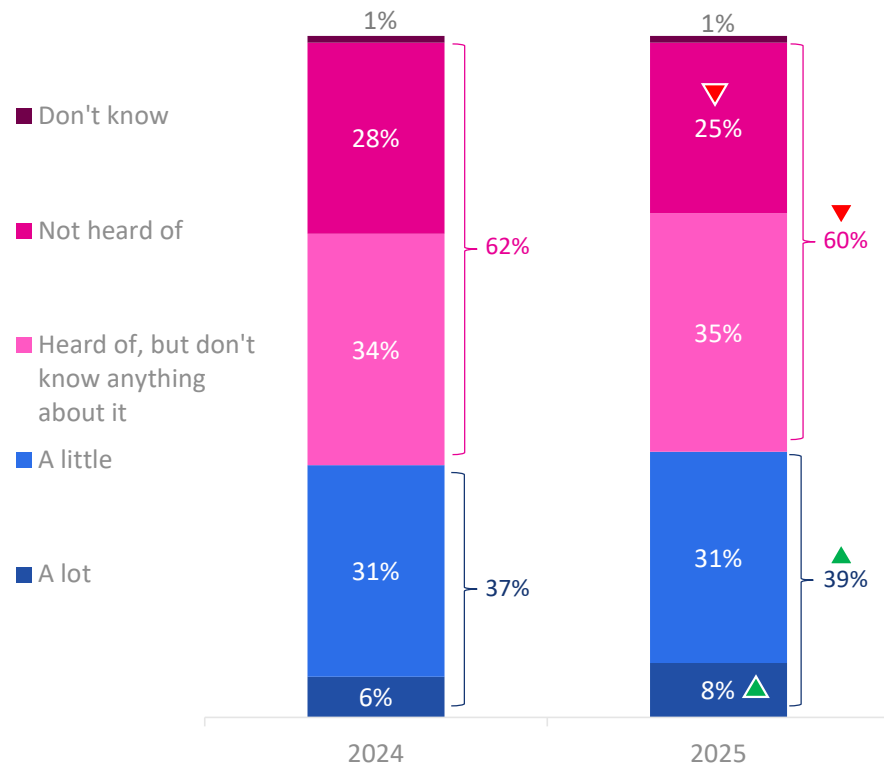
The charity register is still where the majority would go to verify a charity is real, followed by the charity's website, but fewer said they would contact the Charity Commission directly

How would you check a charity was real?

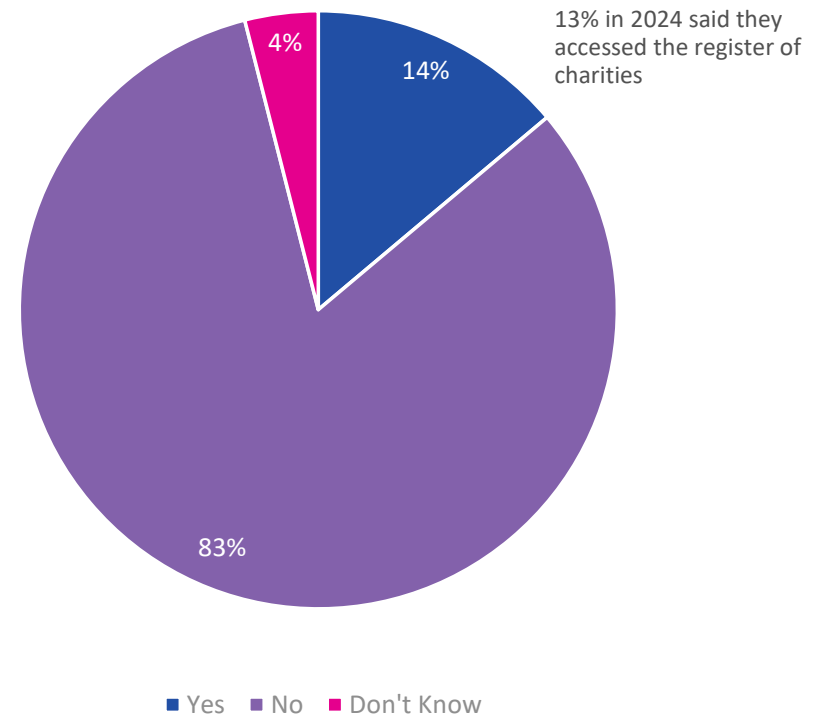


Knowledge of the register of charities has increased slightly, but just 14% have ever accessed it, in line with 2024

Knowledge of the register of charities



Accessed the register of charities





Focus Groups

The main motivation for using the register was to check a charity they wanted to support but didn't know much about was genuine

Awareness of the charity register

- Half of participants were aware of the charity register and a quarter had accessed it.
- Of those aware, they described the register as a *"list of charities that are registered"* and *"it does what it says on the tin"*.
- The register was also likened to companies' house, but for charities. They added that it shows when charities were incorporated and when they were lapsed.
- For those unaware of the register, they guessed it was where a charity became registered and vetted and where the charity number originates from.

Reasons for accessing the register

- Of those that had used the register, they were checking to see if a charity they had not heard of before was legitimate as they were considering donating money to it.
- The motivations were the same among those who hadn't used the register. They indicated they would use the register if they wanted to donate to a charity, but they had either never heard of it, it was a new charity or there was something leading them to have doubt over it.

"I would only use it if I felt like I was being fooled, like a new kid on the block that I want to donate to but just need reassurance"

Alternative methods for verifying a charity

- Participants did not have another method to check if a charity is real and felt it was only needed if they knew nothing about the charity or something lead them to doubt the legitimacy of it.
- Where they have donated to a charity but not checked the register first, participants relied on word of mouth and the reputation of the charity to know whether they could trust it or not. Participants has implicit trust in many charities, especially larger ones, so didn't feel they had to look up the charity on the register.
- This trust also stretched to crowd funding platforms. Usually there was already trust in the person/organisation raising money, so they didn't need to verify the charity before donating.

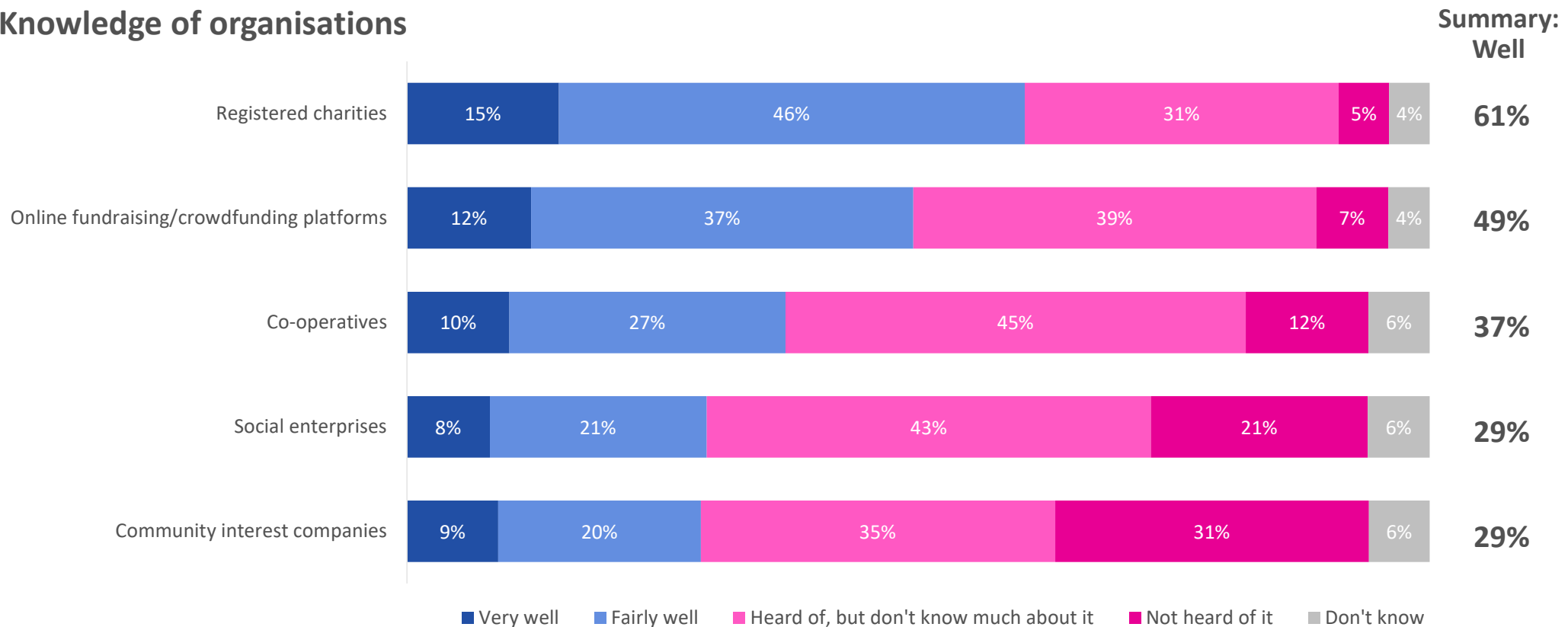
Information on the register

- For those that accessed the register, they agreed they got all the information they needed and were searching for.
- For those that hadn't accessed the register, they would want the following information to be available:
 - How much they raise a year; how much is spent on salaries and how much money per £ goes to the end cause
 - If the trustees of the charity are affiliated with any business and their relationship

Knowledge of other organisations that do good

6 in 10 say they know registered charities well, but for all other organisation types the majority have heard of them but don't know much about them

Knowledge of organisations



E5. How well, if at all, do you feel you know about the following types of organisations? Base: all respondents (4092)



Focus Groups

This was also the case in the focus groups, participants were less familiar with other types of organisations but would support them if they believed in the cause and trusted the people involved

Awareness and usage

- Most participants were familiar with crowdfunding platforms like JustGiving and GoFundMe, but less familiar with social enterprises and cooperatives. Examples such as 'fairtrade organisations' were given, but they didn't understand how they operated.
- Some had used crowdfunding platforms to support family/friends or colleagues, while others had not used them personally but were aware of them. No examples of using other types of organisations that do good were given.

How charities are different

Despite not being as familiar with other types of organisations that do good, participants were able to note some differences to charities:

- Structure:** Traditional charities are often registered while crowdfunding campaigns can be set up by individuals without anybody overseeing it. *"Sites like GoFundMe, anyone can just raise or create a campaign."*
- Funding:** Charities rely on donations but also have shops that can generate revenue, whereas crowdfunding is primarily donations. Crowdfunding platforms also take part of the donation whereas a charity keeps it all.
- Purpose:** While both aim to do good, charities are often focused on the long-term and specific causes, whereas crowdfunding campaigns can be more personal and immediate

Participants also said if they were to try and distinguish between a charity and another type of organisation, they would look for the charity number. Some participants also said they would consider the reputation of the organisation when trying to determine if it was a charity or not.

Trusting/supporting organisations

Participants expressed mixed feelings about trusting and supporting these organisations in the same way they trust and support charities.

- Some participants were more cautious of the non-traditional charity organisations, particularly crowdfunding campaigns, due to concerns about accountability and the potential for scams. They said they would do their own research and verify the legitimacy of these organisations before offering support.
- Others were more open to supporting non-traditional organisations if they had a personal connection to the cause or knew the individuals involved. While some participants valued the registration and regulation of traditional charities, others were willing to support non-traditional organisations if they believed in the cause and trusted the people behind it.

Overall, participants were either aware of or had used crowdfunding platforms but were less knowledgeable about social enterprises and cooperatives. Participants liked that charities were more formal and had to be registered so had accountability but were open to supporting non-traditional organisations if they believed in the cause and trusted the people involved, again showing the importance of the end cause as factor in supporting a charity/organisation.

Background and Methodology

Background and Methodology

- **Background:** The Charity Commission has been collecting data on public trust in charities since 2005. BMG Research were commissioned by the Charity Commission to run 3 waves of their public tracker, from 2024 to 2026. Impact measures were updated in 2025.
- **Research objectives:** To understand public trust in charities, what affects public trust in charities, and awareness and knowledge of the Charity Commission.
- **Methodology:** Research was split into two phases, a quantitative and qualitative phase. In the quantitative phase, an online panel was used to achieve a nationally representative split of participants from England and Wales. Weighting has been applied to give a representative view of England and Wales. The qualitative phase was then conducted to explore the themes from the data. 2 focus groups were conducted with between 5 and 6 participants in each group. Each group had a mix of genders, ages, ethnicities and regions. The focus groups were split into those with high and low knowledge of the Charity Commission.
- **Fieldwork dates:** Quantitative fieldwork took place between the 7th and 13th of January and the focus groups took place between the 26th February and 4th of March.
- **Number of completes:** 4092 completes were achieved.
- **Weighting:** The data was weighted by age by gender, region, education and ethnicity. Checks were also carried out to ensure the data collected was broadly representative by IMD and urban/rural. Targets were set to be nationally representative.

Comparability Over Time

It is important to note that the survey contents, and its administration have undergone a number of changes in 2024. These changes were necessary to improve the relevance and robustness of the data collected, and to facilitate a new research partner.

Throughout this report comparisons are made to previous waves where there have been no substantial changes to the question wording or routing. However, these comparisons should be treated as indicative only as there is likely to be some impact on the data from the changes detailed below. A such, statistical significance testing across waves has not been carried out.

The changes include:

- **A number of new questions:** These have been added to reflect the current needs of the Charity Commission. As new questions have been added at various points throughout the survey there is a risk that responses to existing questions could have been impacted by the presence of the new questions. Some questions from previous waves have also been removed from the survey.
- **Some small changes to existing questions:** These changes have been made to improve the quality of the data collected, and include changes such as adding in 'don't know' options to allow respondents to answer more accurately. Direct comparisons to previous years data for questions have not been made.
- **A change in research partner:** BMG were commissioned as a new research partner in 2023. Due to this change in research partner, there has also been a change in the panel providers that have been used. Although quotas have been used to ensure the sample is as representative of the population as possible, and a mix of panels have been used, each panel introduces their own inherent bias.
- **Likely change in weighting criteria:** Although the survey results have been weighted to population statistics in previous years it was not clear what weighting criteria were used. Therefore, it was not possible to replicate the weighting scheme used previously.