

# ScotCen

Social Research that works for society

## Public attitudes to police use of biometrics data

A study for the Scottish Biometrics  
Commissioner

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Fieldwork Nov/Dec 2021



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# Background to the study

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# Background

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- One of the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner's functions (under Section 2 (3) (b) of the SBC Act 2020) is **to promote public awareness and understanding of how, and why, the Police in Scotland collect and use biometric data.**
- Lack of existing UK-wide research on the topic to draw upon
- Need for robust baseline measures with the potential to measure change over time
- Collection of statistically robust data on public attitudes enhances public participation in the consultation exercise.

# Study aims

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- Include 8 questions in the ScotCen Panel to provide robust data on public attitudes towards Police use of biometrics data in Scotland.
- Exploring:
  - Understanding of the reasons for, and legal powers which allow, Police collection of biometrics data in Scotland
  - Views on the effectiveness of biometrics data collected by the Police in helping solve crimes in Scotland
  - Attitudes towards:
    - Retention periods
    - Collection from those aged under 16 arrested
    - Independent oversight

# About the ScotCen panel

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2.



# What is the ScotCen Panel?

- Only probability-based research panel in Scotland open to be used for data collection by the social research community
- A panel of around c2,300 adults 18+
- Representative sample of 1144 people (49%) took part
- Run short surveys on an ad-hoc basis
- Produces reliable estimates for the Scottish population in a shorter time-frame and at a lower cost than the 'traditional' probability-based approaches
- Obtain a large quantity of background data on panellists



# Recruitment

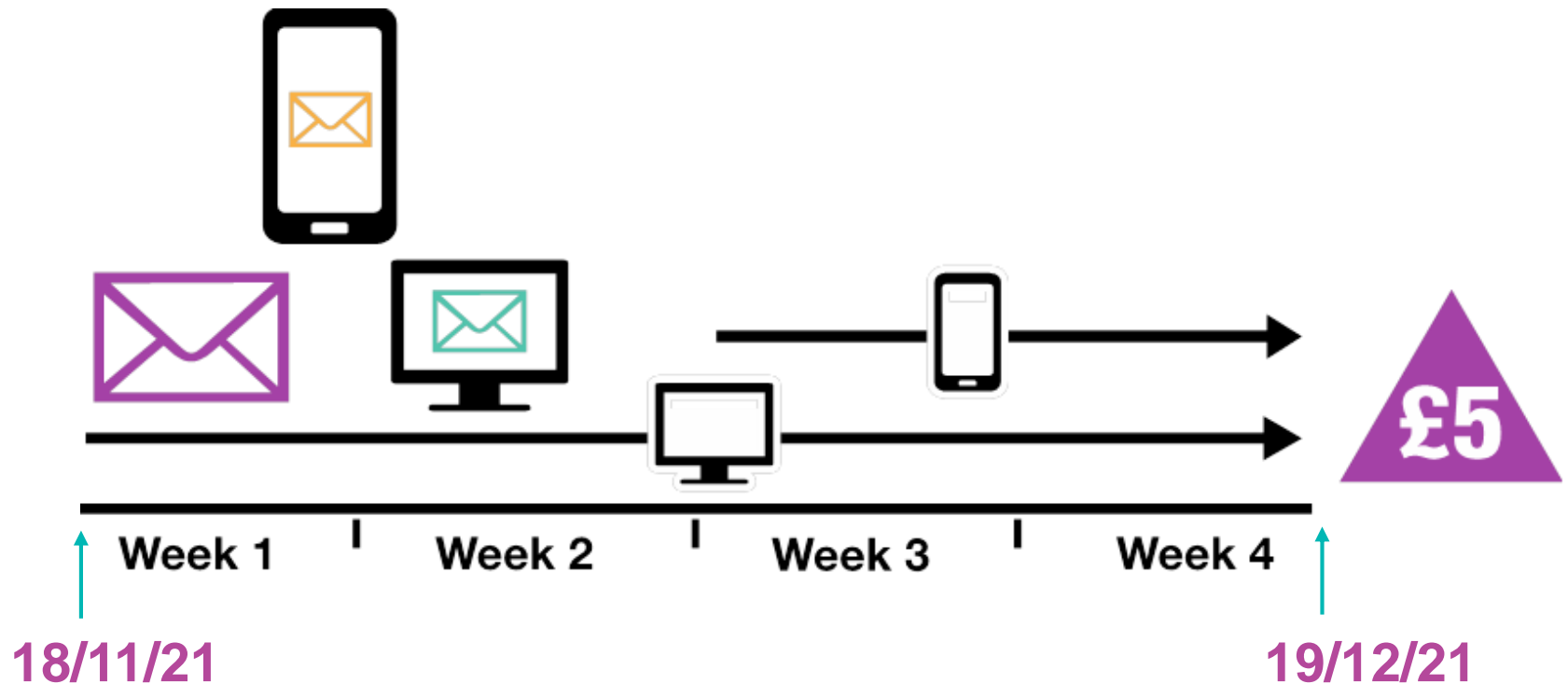


- Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) uses random probability sampling
- SSA participants, at end of interview, asked to join the panel





# Fieldwork – Nov/Dec 2021



- Sequential mixed-mode approach

# Survey questions



3.

# Questions on public understanding

To what extent, if at all would you say that you understand **the reasons why the police take fingerprints, photographs, and DNA samples of people who have been arrested in Scotland?**

To what extent, if at all would you say that you understand **the legal powers that the police use to take fingerprints, photographs and DNA samples of people who have been arrested in Scotland?**

# Questions on effectiveness

To what extent, if at all, do you think that **fingerprints and DNA samples collected at crime scenes help the police in solving crimes in Scotland?**

To what extent, if at all, do you think that **taking fingerprints, photographs, and DNA samples of people who have been arrested by the police helps with solving crime in Scotland?**

# Questions on public attitudes

For how long, if at all, do you think that the **police should be able to keep the fingerprints, photographs or DNA samples of people who have been convicted of a crime in Scotland?**

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the **police should be able to take fingerprints, photographs and DNA samples of people aged under 16 who have been arrested in Scotland?**

How much do you agree or disagree that the **police in Scotland should use technology that can identify people's faces in public spaces to help identify persons who may be wanted by the police?**

# Question on independent oversight

To what extent do you agree or disagree that a **body, separate to the police, should be responsible for examining how fingerprints, photographs and DNA are used for policing and criminal justice purposes in Scotland?**

# Findings



4.

# Guidance on interpreting findings

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- Terminology
  - The term '**biometrics data**' used here was defined in survey questions as '**fingerprints, photographs, and DNA samples**'
  - Each survey question asked specifically about biometrics data collection '**in Scotland**'
- Findings described here as 'significant' were statistically significant at 95% where  $p < 0.05$



# **Public understanding of police use of biometrics data**

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**5.**

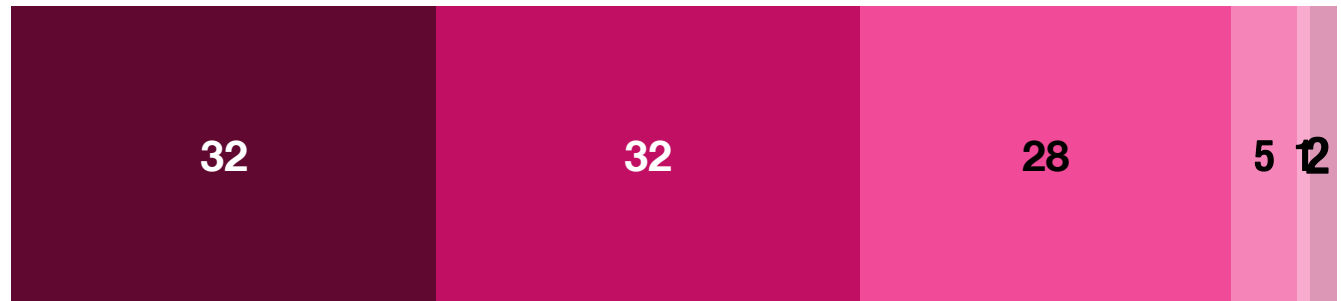
# How much does the general public know about ...

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- (1) ... the **reasons** police collect biometrics data from those who have been arrested in Scotland?
- (2) ... the **legal powers** used by the police to collect biometrics data from those who have been arrested in Scotland?

# Six in ten understand 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' about....

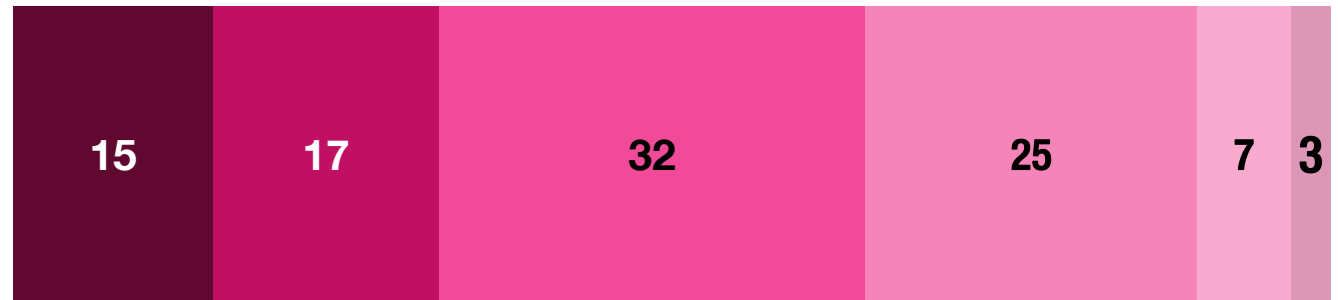
...the reasons why the police take fingerprints, photographs, and DNA samples of people who have been arrested in Scotland?



■ A great deal ■ Quite a lot ■ Somewhat ■ Not very much ■ Not at all ■ Don't know

# Around a third understand 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' about...

...the legal powers that the police use to take fingerprints, photographs and DNA samples of people who have been arrested in Scotland?



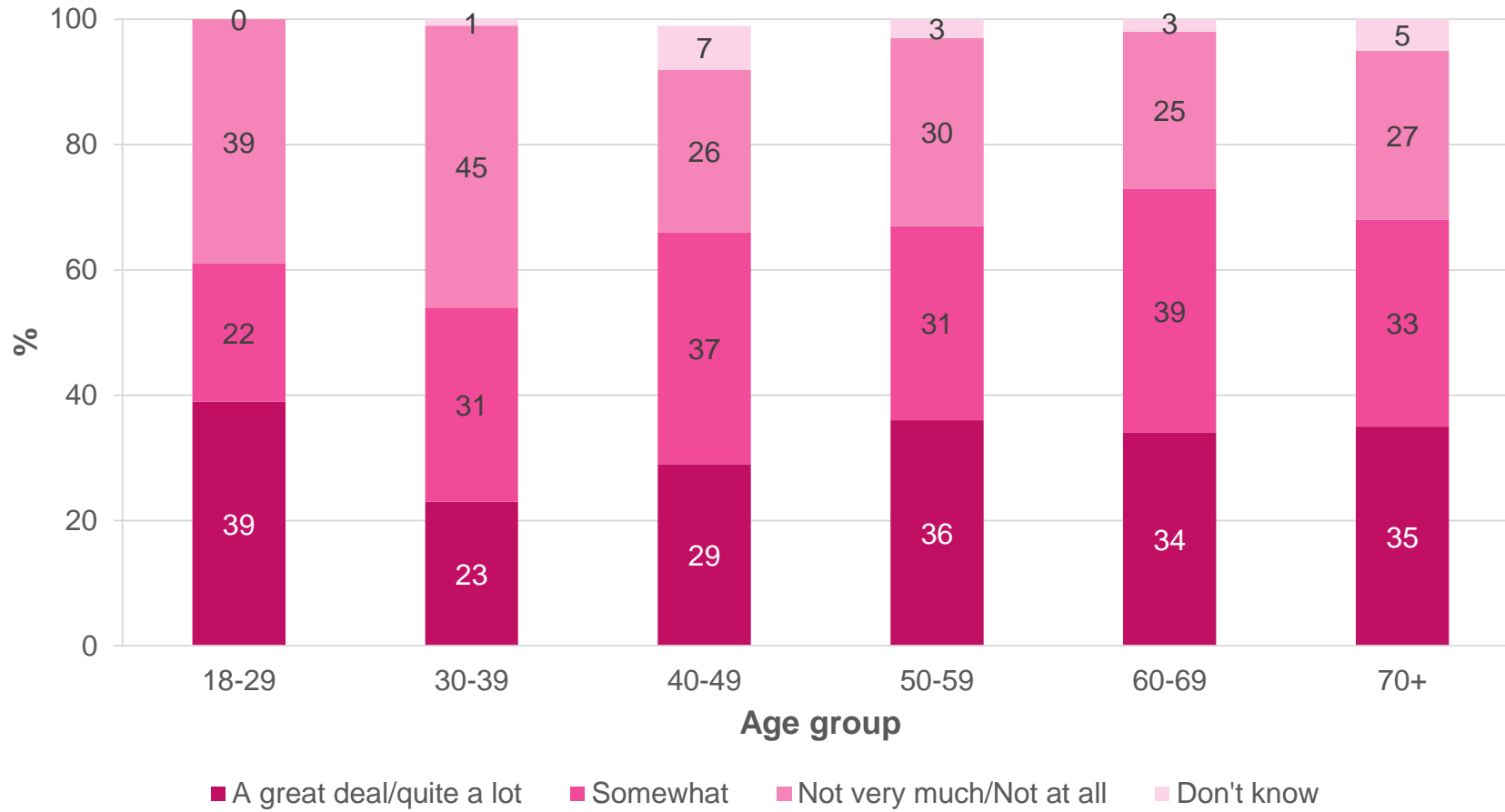
■ A great deal ■ Quite a lot ■ Somewhat ■ Not very much ■ Not at all ■ Don't know

# However, understanding of purpose and legal powers did vary significantly by ...

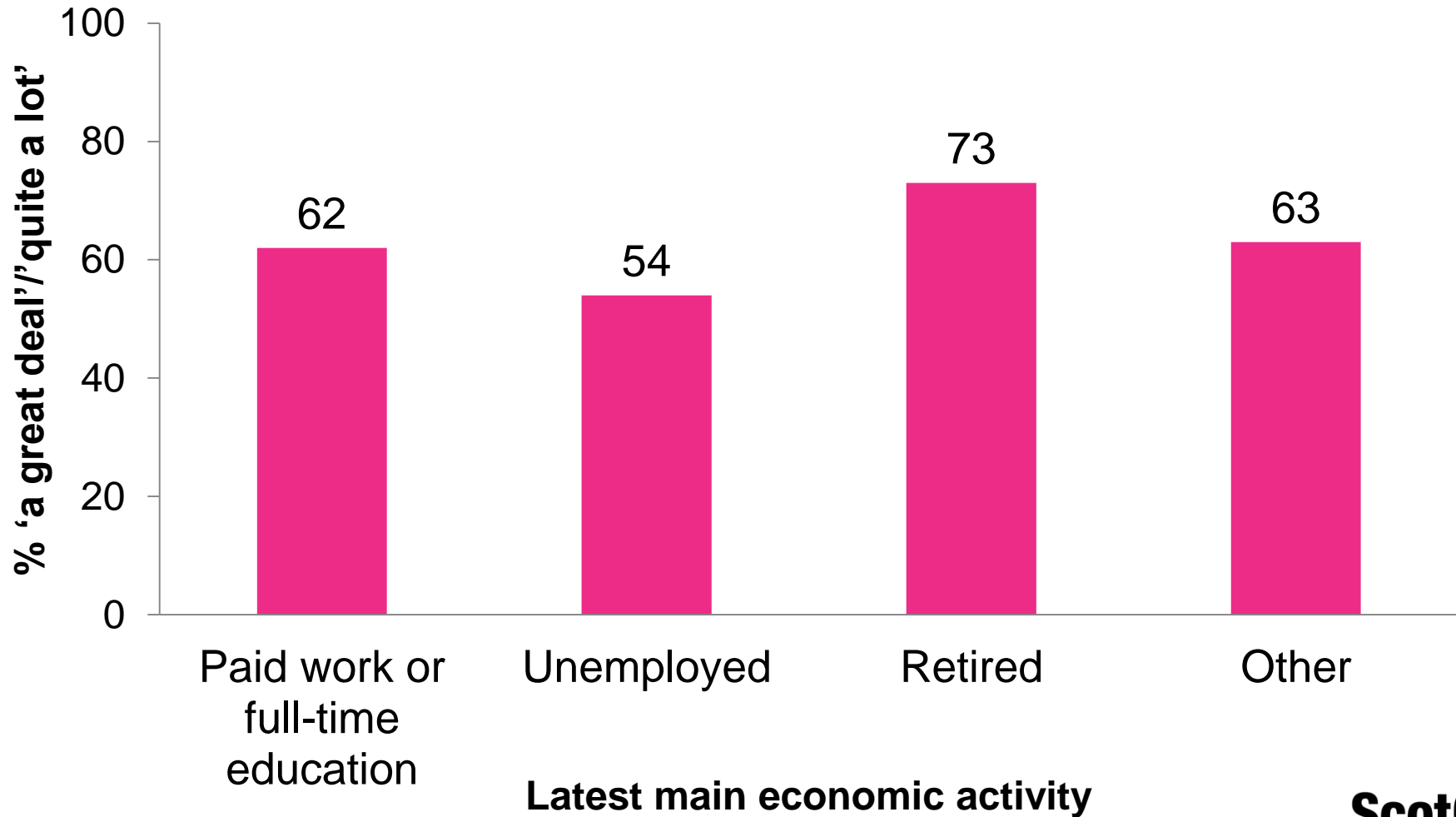
<b>Age group</b>	Under 40s were most likely to report understanding 'not very much/nothing at all' about the legal powers that the police use to take fingerprints, photographs and DNA samples of people who have been arrested in Scotland
<b>Economic activity</b>	Retired people were more likely than others to state knowing 'a great deal/quite a lot' about the reasons why police take fingerprints, photographs and DNA samples of people who have been arrested in Scotland

- Age and economic activity are also independently related to each other

# Extent understand **legal powers** police use to take biometrics data from those arrested, by age group



# Extent understand **reasons** police take biometrics data from those arrested, by economic activity



# Understanding: summary

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- The public have a greater understanding of the reasons why police collect biometrics data from those arrested than they do of the legal powers which allow such collection to take place
- Levels of understanding were **broadly similar** across society
- Exceptions being:
  - Younger people have a lower understanding of the **legal powers** that allow biometrics data collection
  - Older, retired people most likely to understand the **reasons** police collect the biometrics data from those arrested

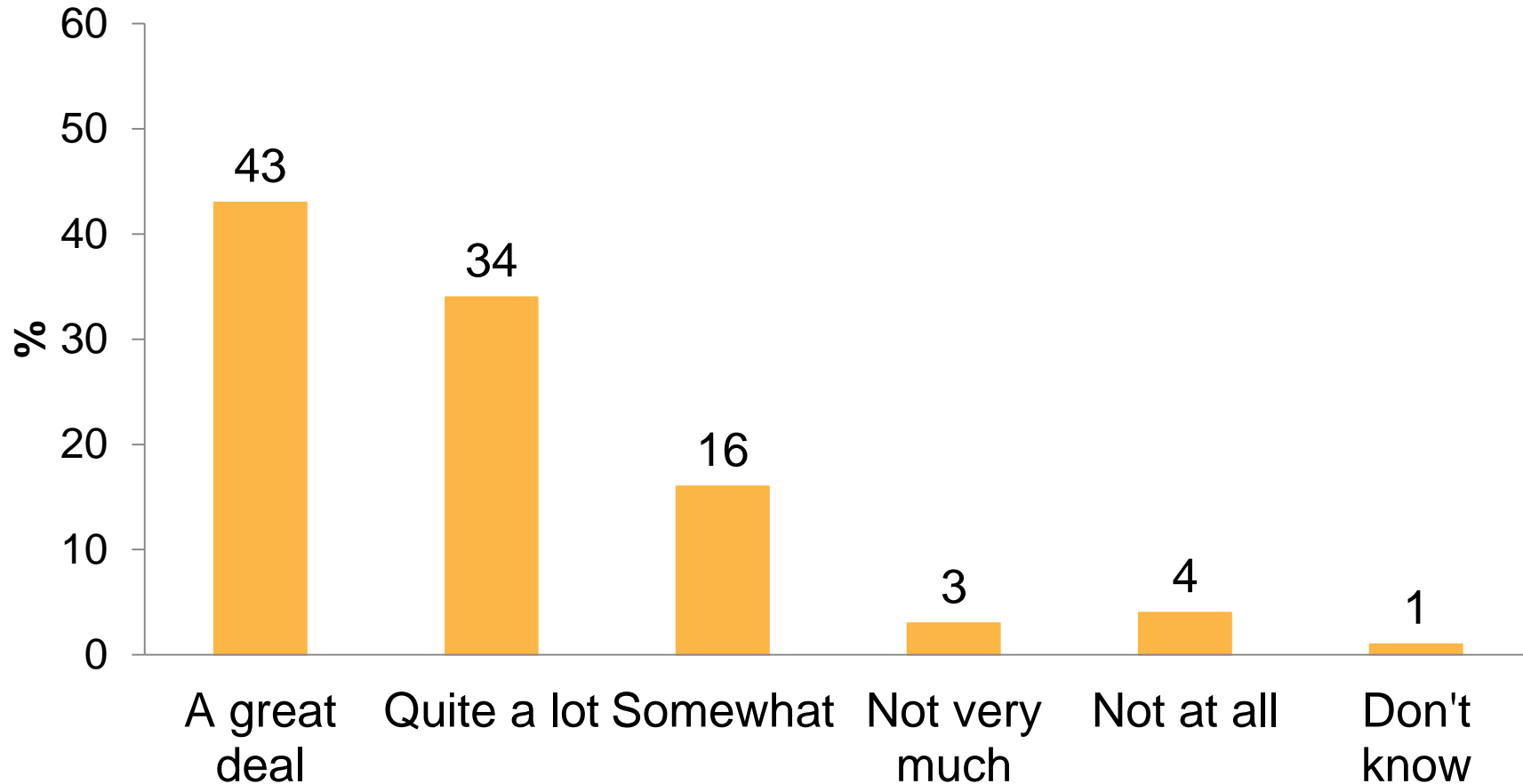


**Views on the  
effectiveness of  
biometrics data at  
helping police solve  
crimes**

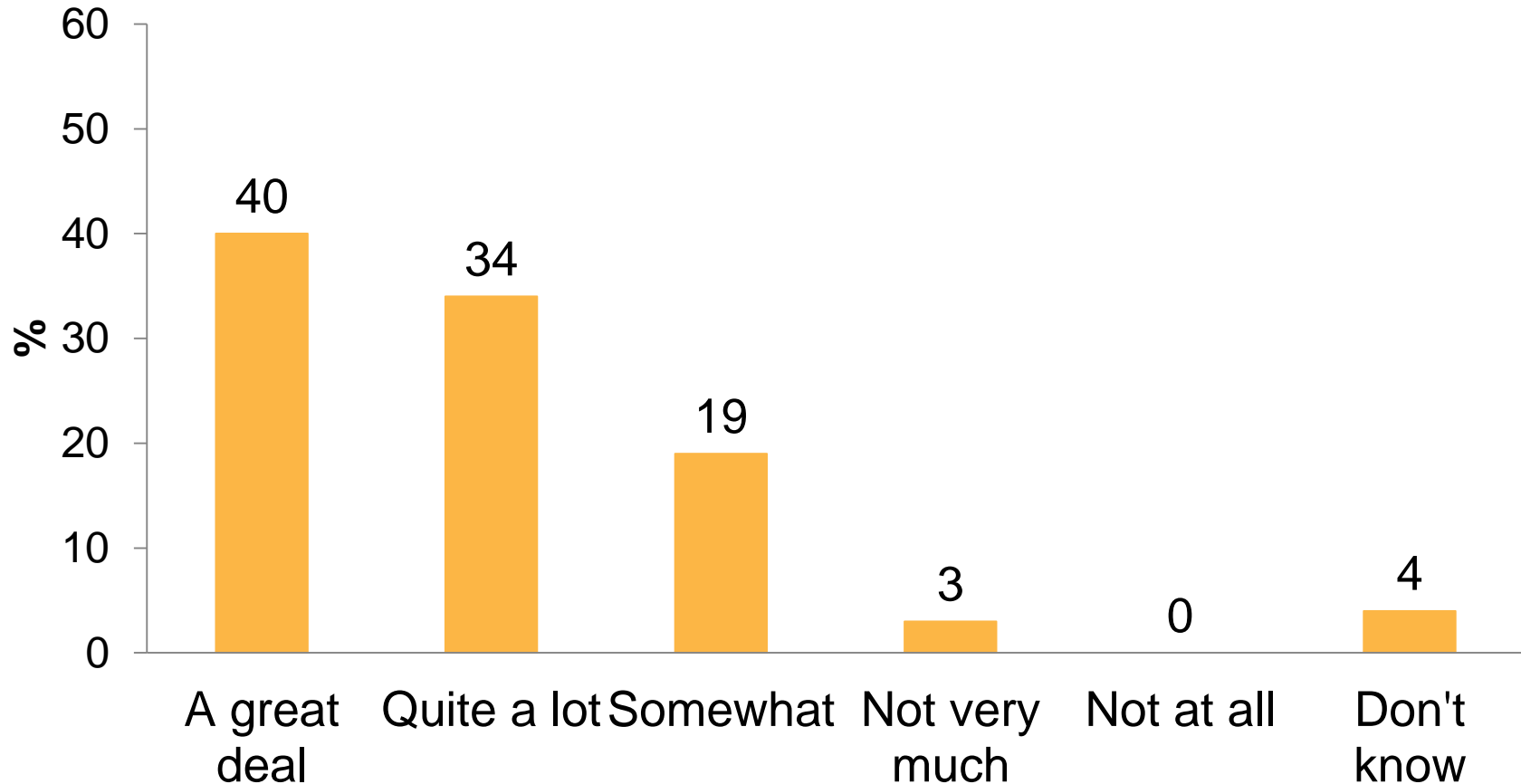
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**6.**

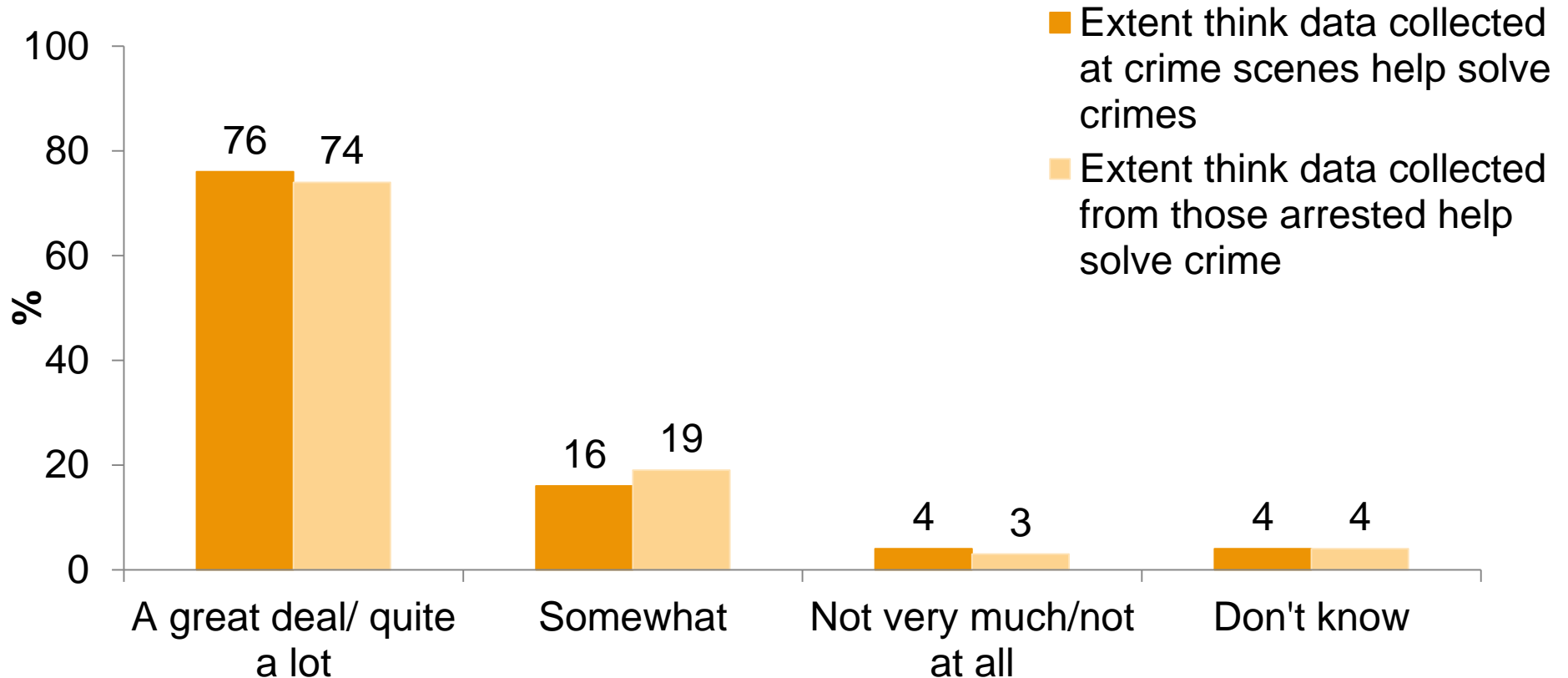
# Extent think biometrics data **collected at crime scenes** help the police in solving crimes



# Extent think biometrics data from **collected from those arrested** helps with solving crime



# Views on effectiveness of biometrics data collected in both these ways were **very similar**

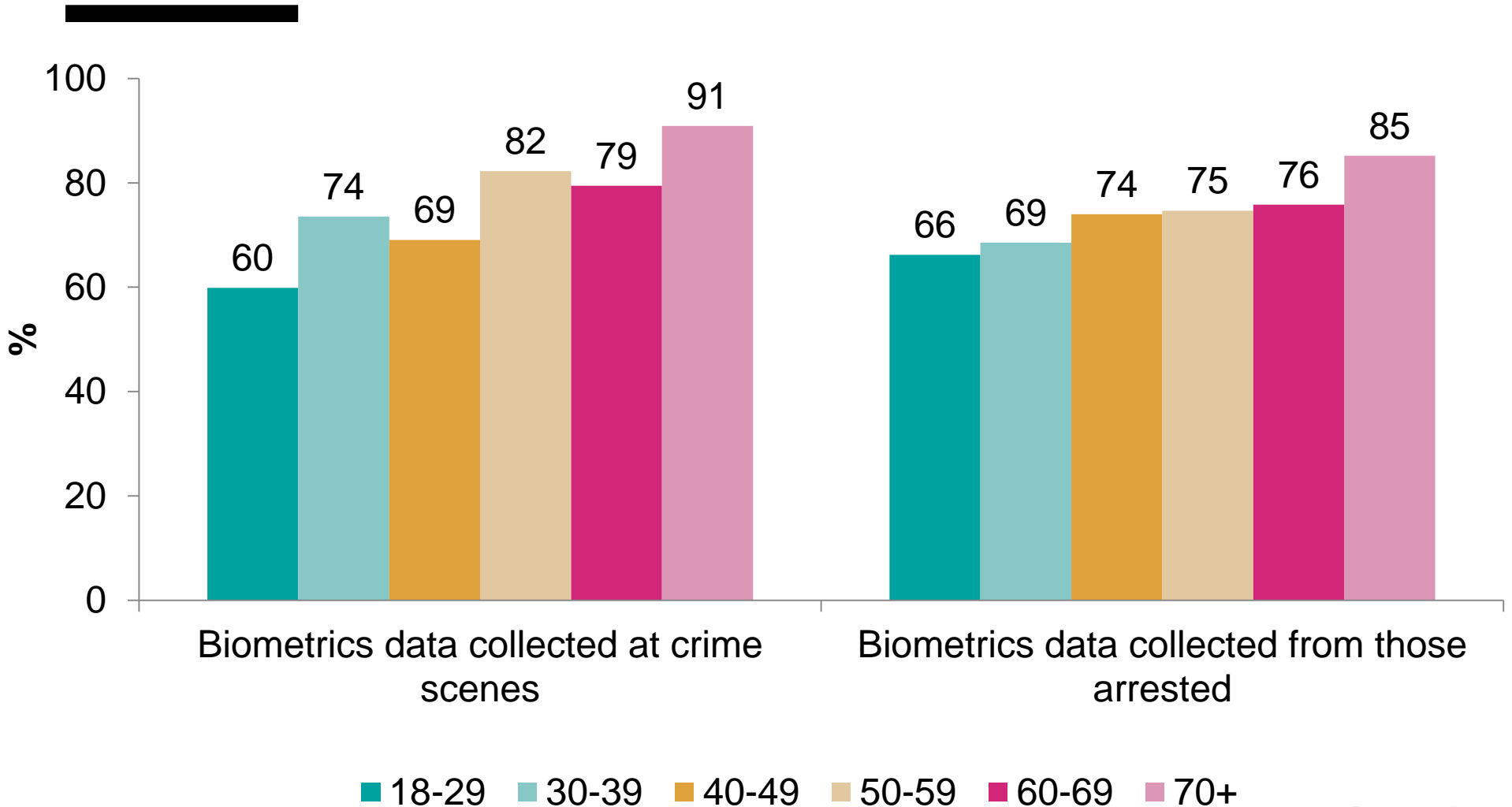


# Views on the effectiveness of biometrics data collection varied significantly by:

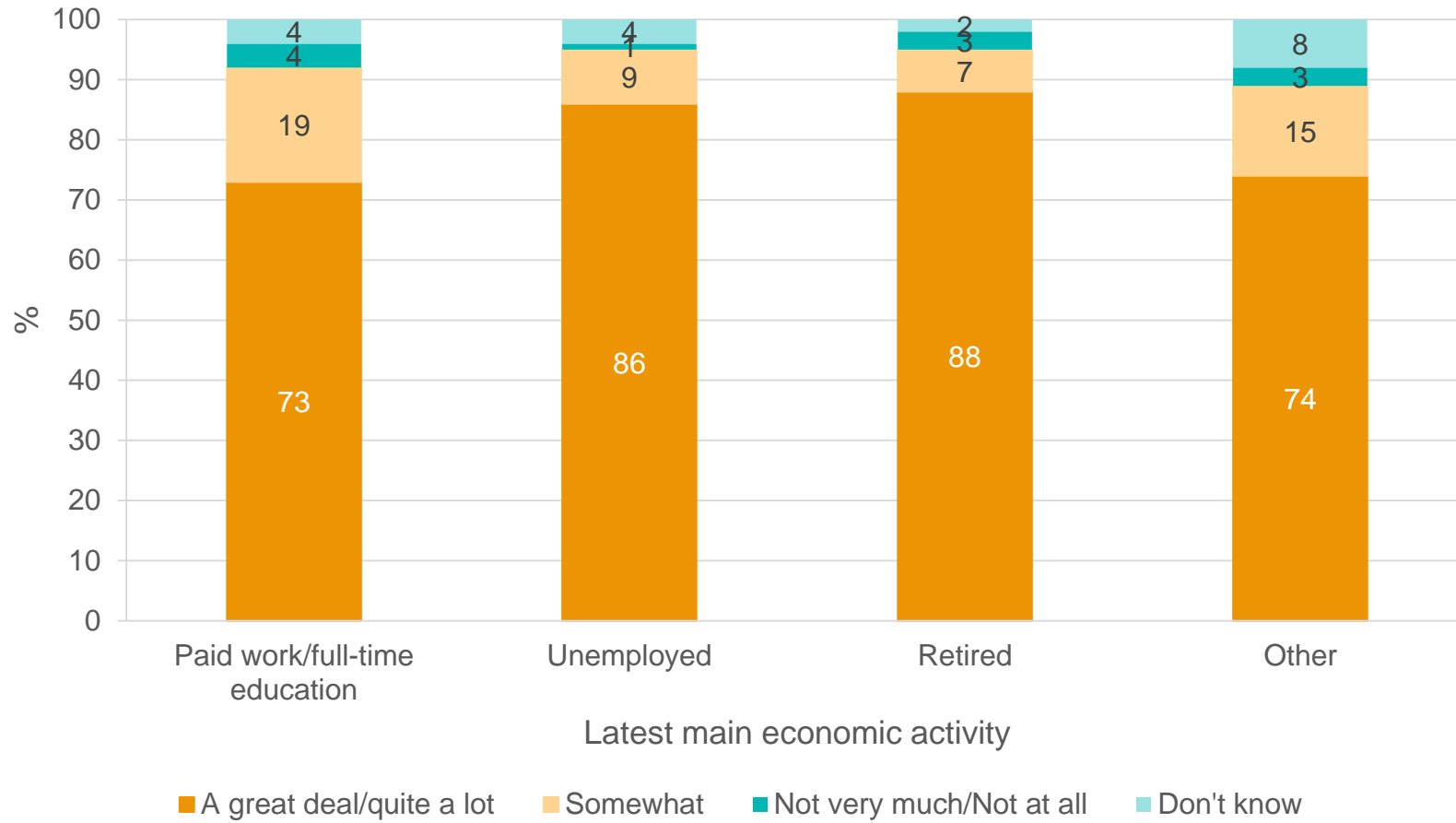


Biometrics data <u>collected from crime scenes</u> helps the police solving crimes	Biometrics data <u>collected from those arrested</u> helps with solving crime
Age group	Age group
Main economic activity	Main economic activity
Urban/ rural	Income
	Socio-economic classification

# % said biometrics data collection helps 'a great deal'/'quite a lot' in solving crimes, by age group



# Extent biometrics data **collected at crime scenes** help the police in solving crimes, by economic activity



% said biometrics data **collected at crime scenes** help 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' in solving crimes in Scotland is...

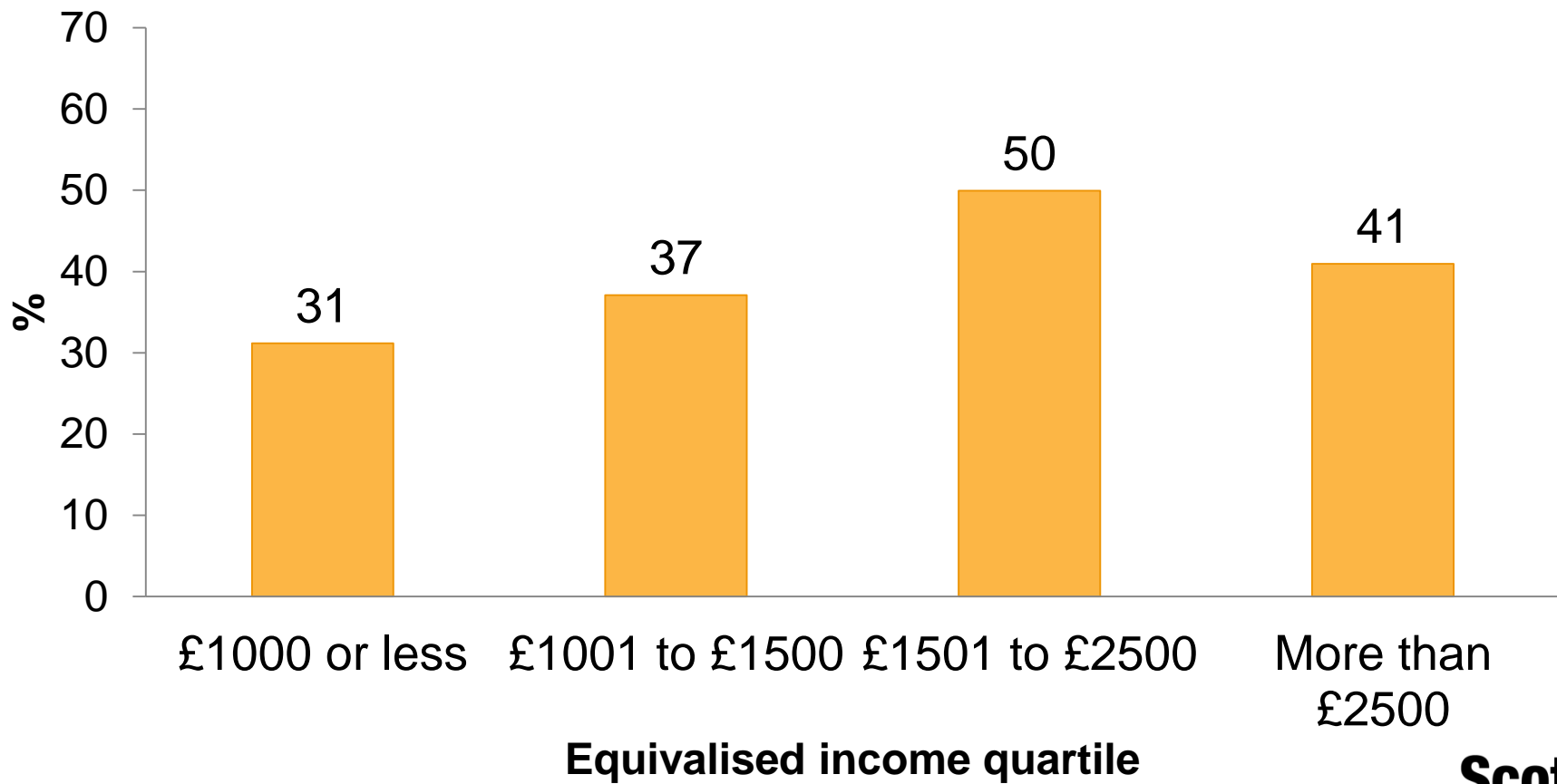
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**74%**  
in urban  
areas

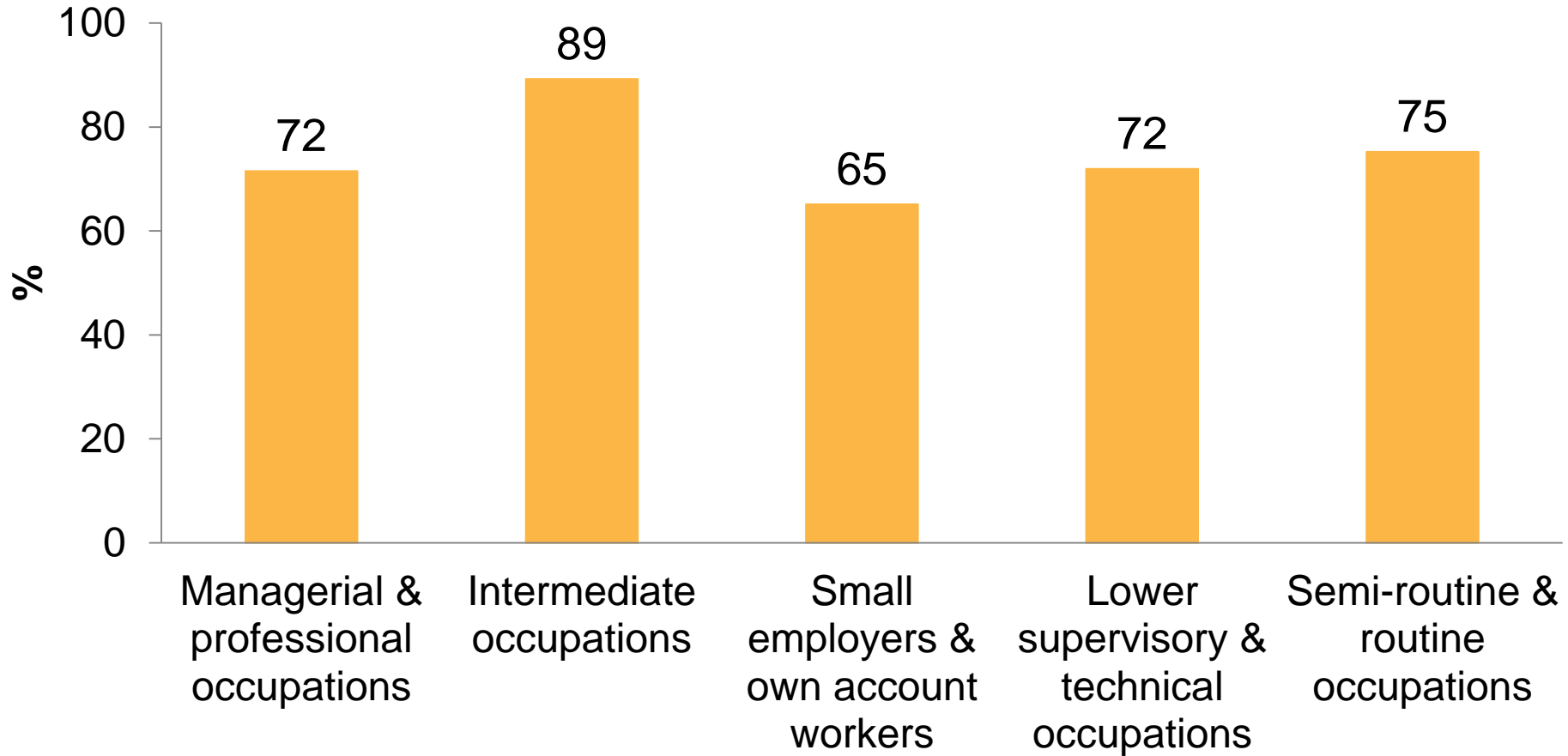
**84%**  
in rural  
areas



% think biometrics data **collected from those arrested** helps 'a great deal/quite a lot' in solving crimes, by income



% think biometrics data **collected from those arrested** helps 'a great deal/quite a lot' in solving crimes, by socio-economic classification group



**Socio-economic classification**

# Effectiveness - summary

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- Most people think biometrics data collected by the police helps 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' at solving crimes in Scotland
- Views on the effectiveness of biometrics data collected at crime scenes versus those collected from adults who have been arrested are very similar
- Older people and retired people were, on the whole, more likely than others to think that biometrics data collection positively contributed to solving crimes.

# Views on retention period for biometrics data collected by the police

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7.

# Half of people think the police should be able to keep biometrics data of those convicted of a crime **forever**

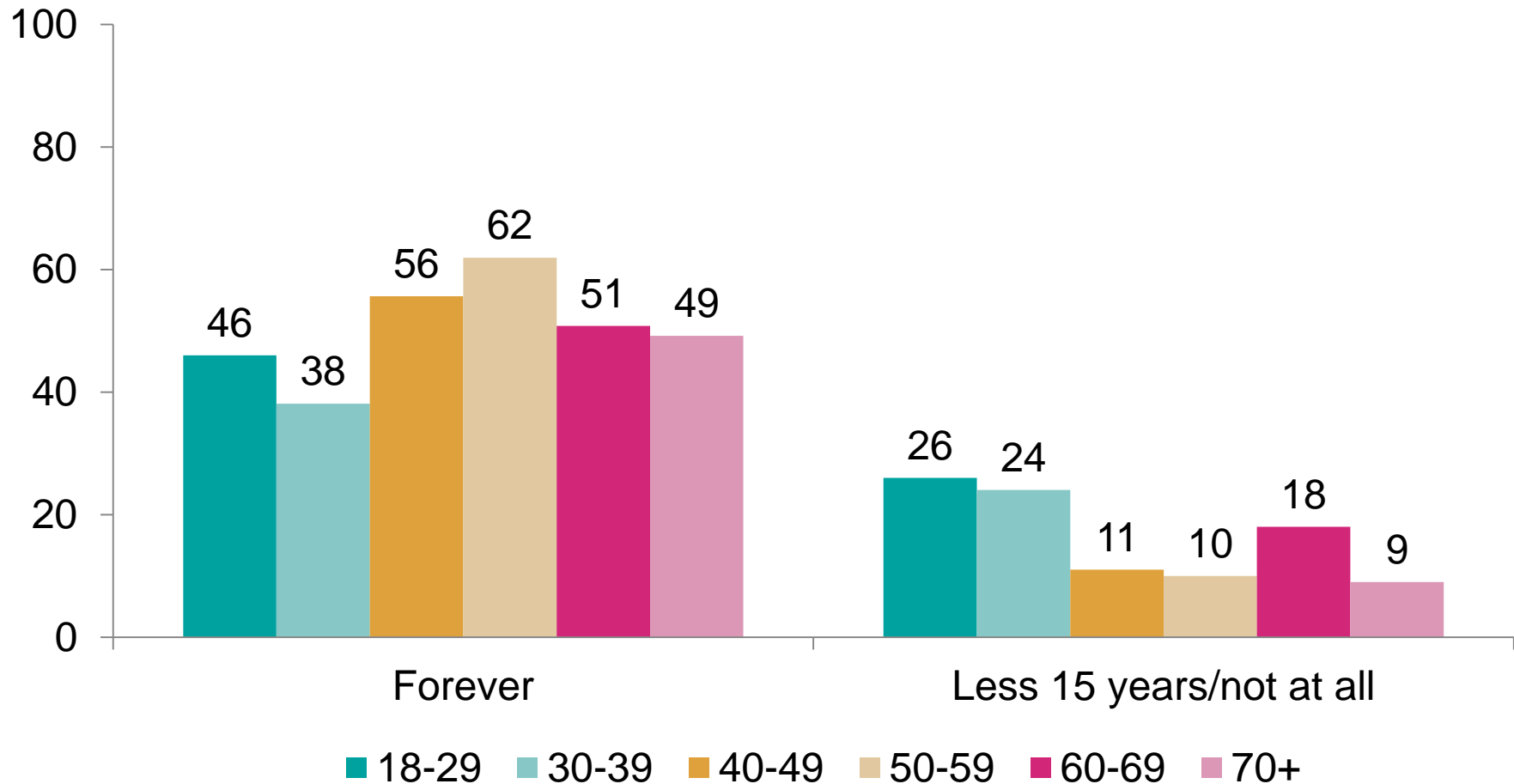
	%
Forever	50
More than 30 years, but not forever	14
20 to 29 years	4
15 to 19 years	6
Should be kept, but for less than 15 years	15
Should not be kept at all	1
Don't know	9

# How did views on retention periods vary across society?

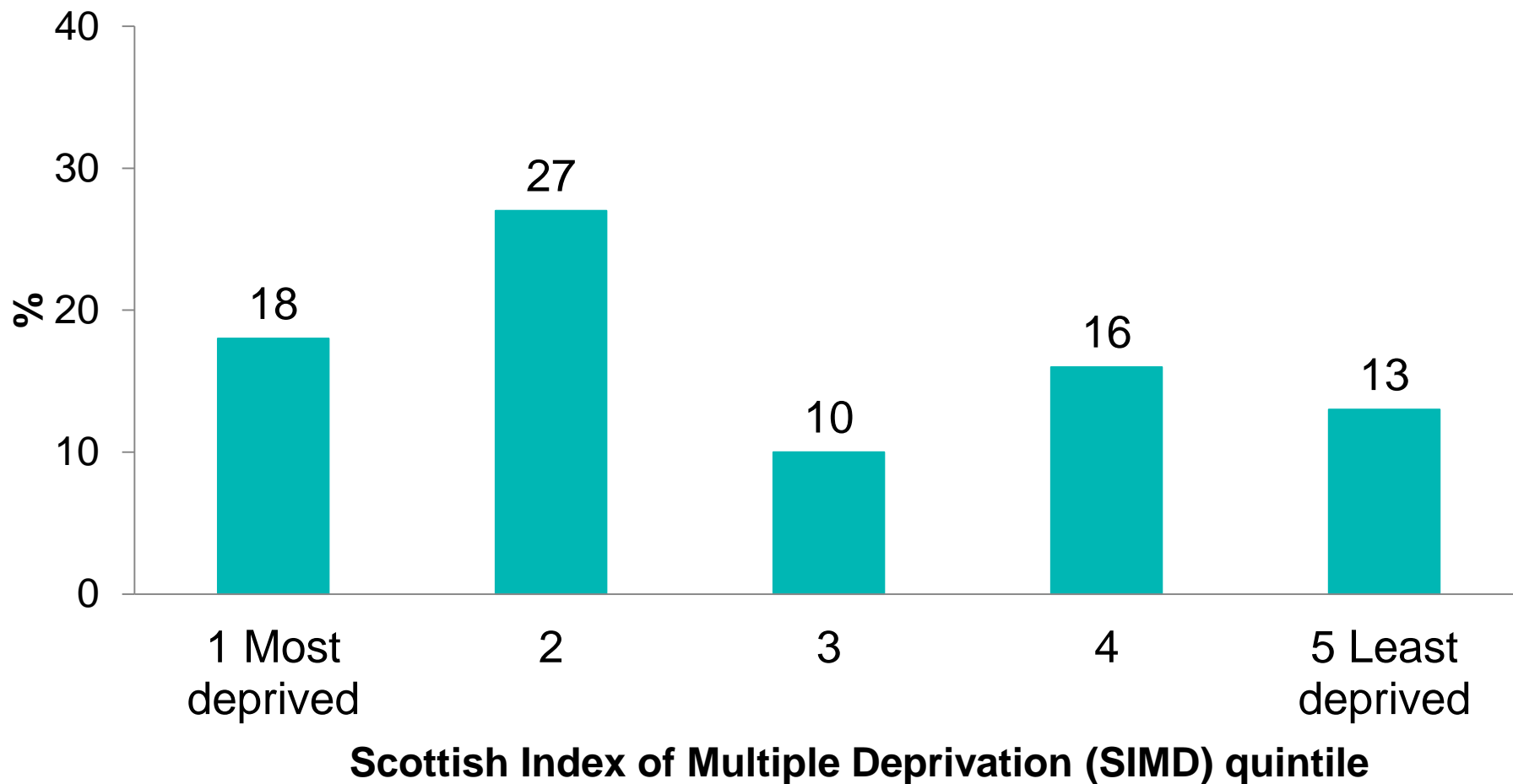
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- Views on how long biometrics data collected from someone convicted of a crime were **broadly similar** across key groups in society.
- However, significant differences were apparent by:
  - age group, and
  - main economic activity
  - area deprivation

# Length of time police should be able to keep biometrics data of those convicted of crime, by age group



# % saying police should be able to keep biometrics data of those convicted for 'less than 15 years' or 'not at all', by area deprivation (SIMD)





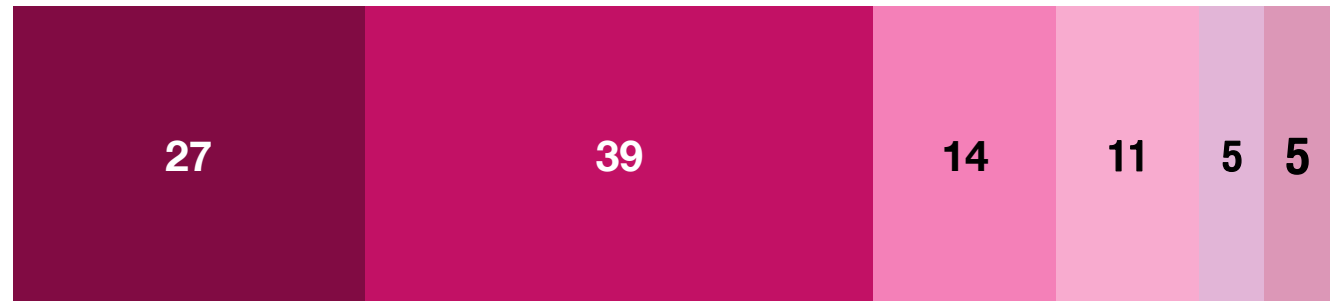
# Views on collection of biometrics data from under 16's arrested

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8.

# **Two thirds** agree police should be able to collect biometrics data from under 16's that have been arrested

Police should be able to take fingerprints, photographs and DNA samples of people aged under 16 who have been arrested in Scotland?



■ Strongly agree

■ Disagree

■ Agree

■ Strongly disagree

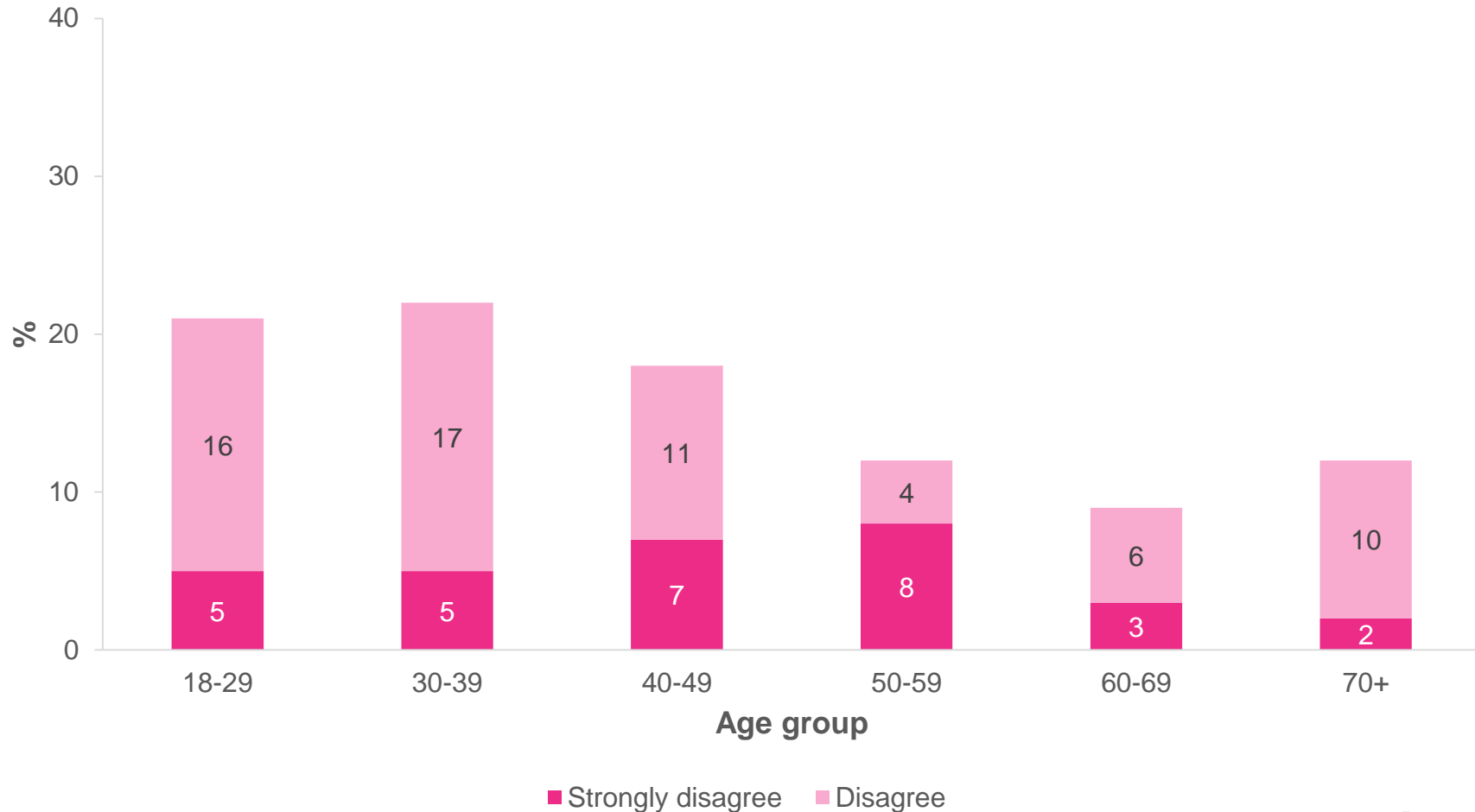
■ Neither agree nor disagree

■ Don't know

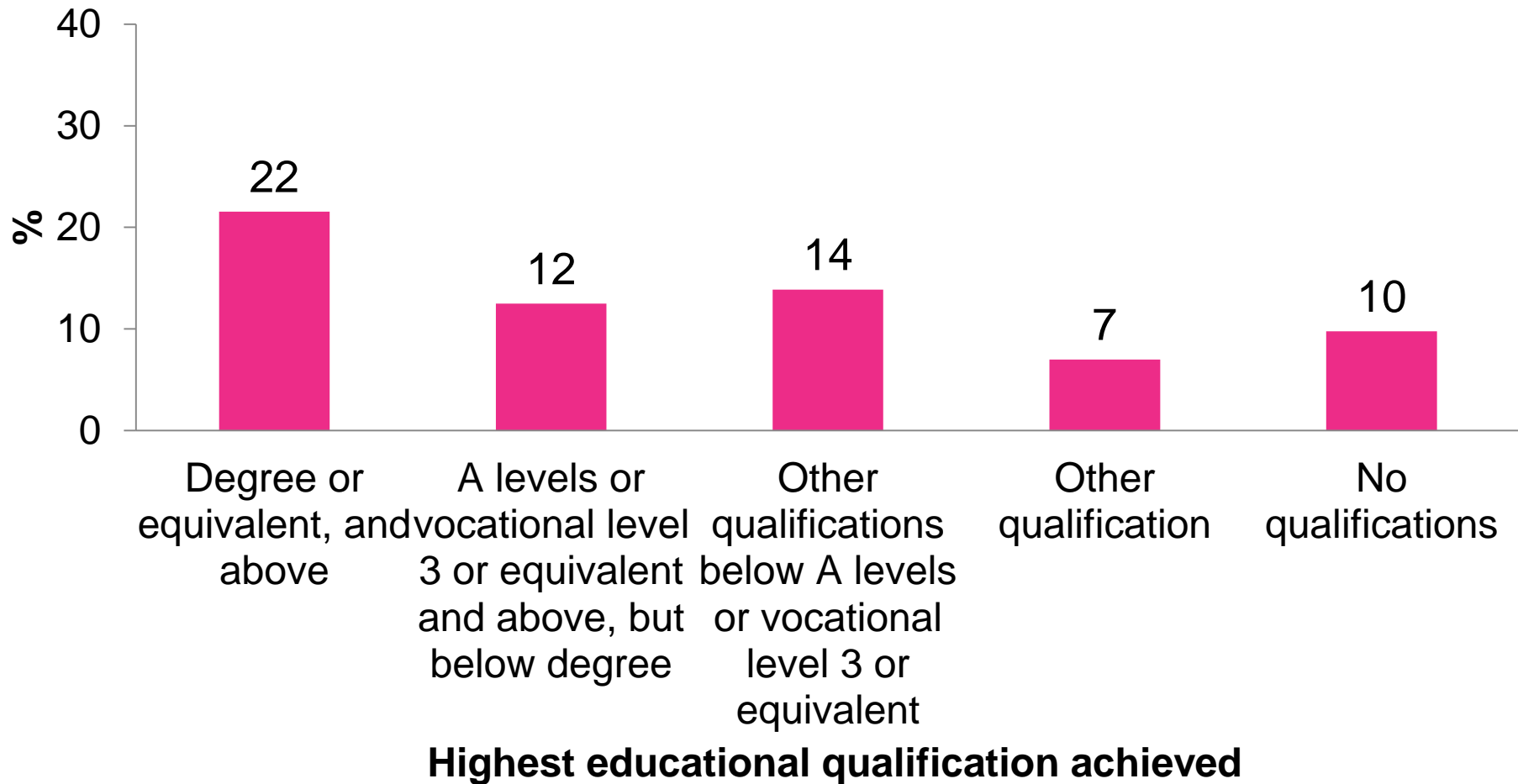
# Do views on biometrics data collection from under 16's vary across society?

- The proportions agreeing (strongly agree/agree) did not vary significantly across the different groups of people in Scotland
- However, statistically significant differences in the proportion disagreeing (strongly disagree/disagree) were observed by age group, educational attainment, income and household composition

# % disagreeing that police should be able to collect biometrics from under 16's arrested, by age group



# % disagreeing that police should be able to collect biometrics from under 16's arrested, by education

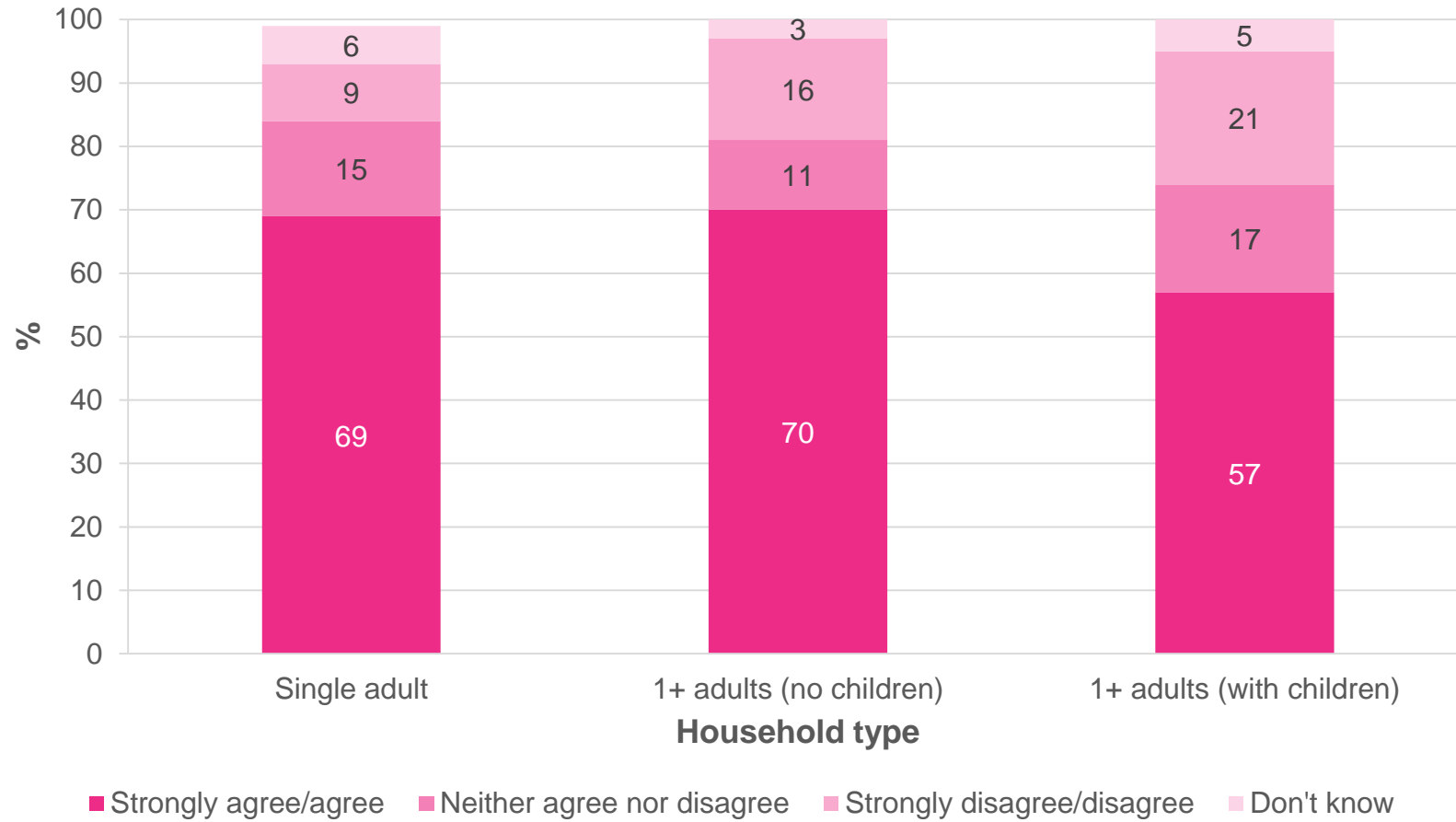


# % disagreeing that police should be able to collect biometrics from under 16's arrested, income



45 Base: All respondents (18+)

# Police should be able to collect biometrics from under 16's arrested, by household type



# **Views on police use of facial recognition technology**

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9.



**2 in 3** agree police **should** use facial recognition technology in public spaces to help identify those wanted by the police?

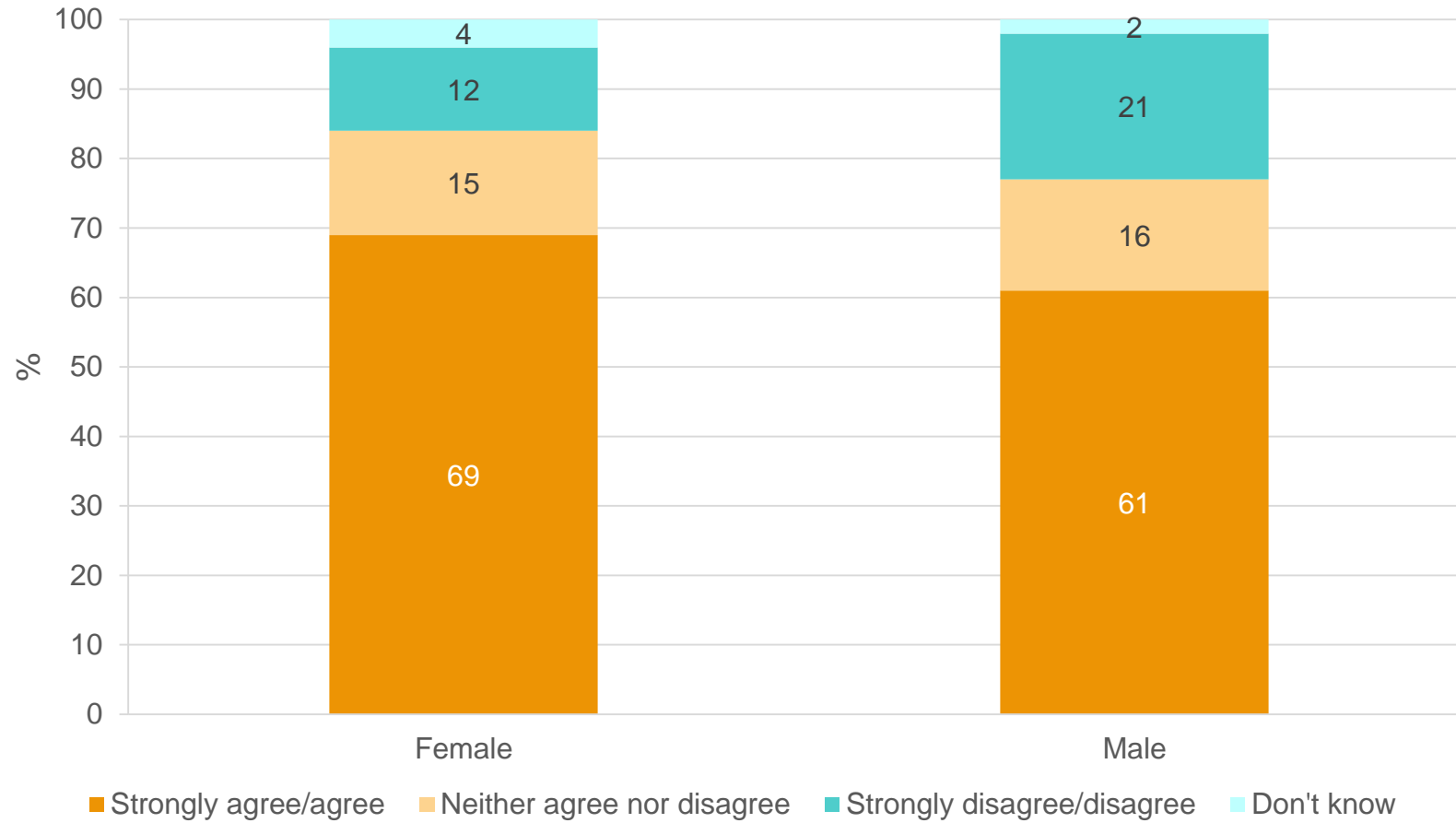
	%
Strongly agree	22
Agree	44
Neither agree nor disagree	15
Disagree	8
Strongly disagree	8
Don't know	3

# Did views on use of facial recognition vary across different groups of people?

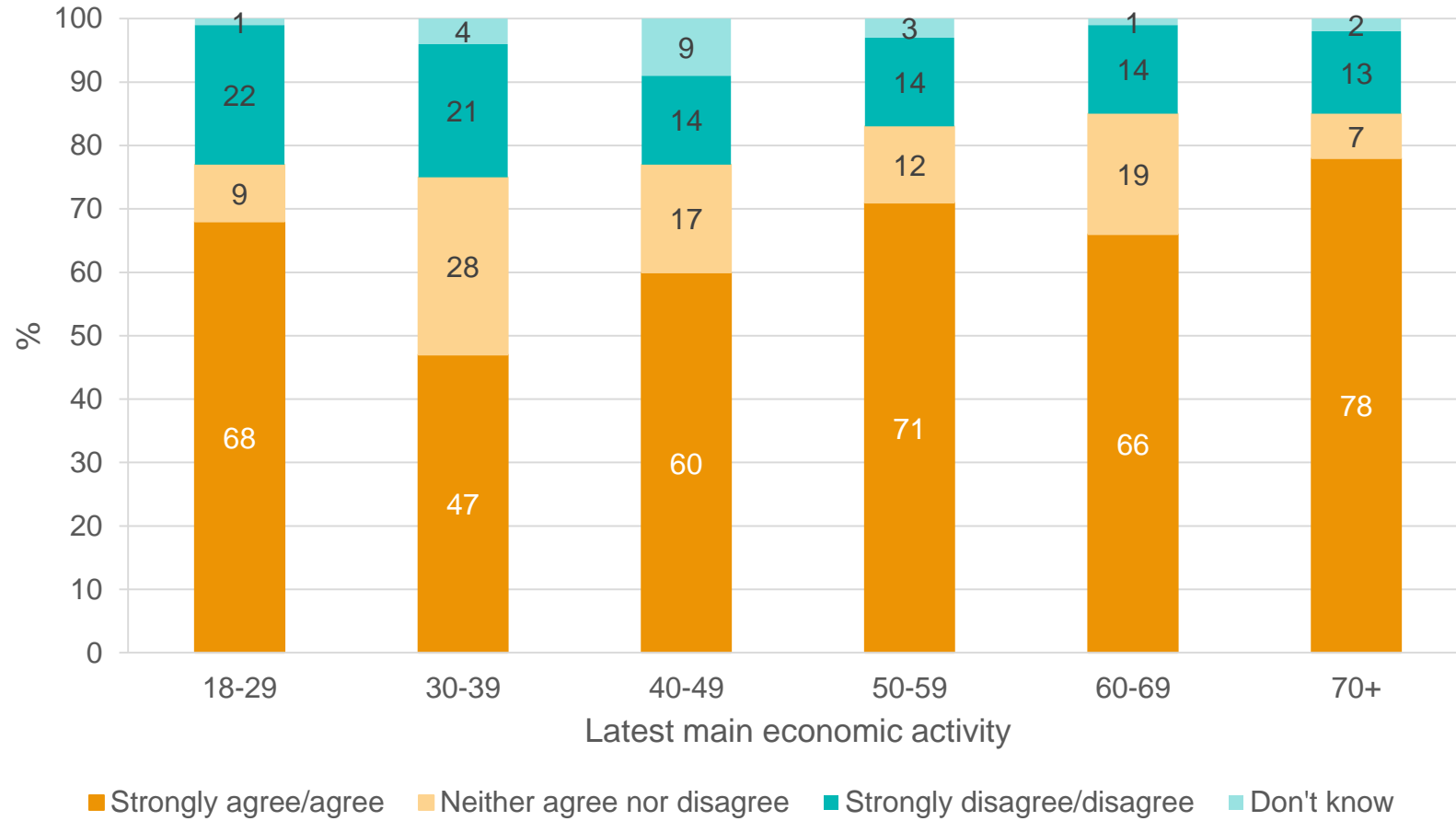
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- Two thirds agree that police in Scotland should use facial recognition technology to help identify persons who may be wanted by the police.
  - 16% disagree that facial recognition should be used and a similar proportion neither agree nor disagree
  - Significant differences in views on use of facial recognition were observed by:
    - Sex
    - Age group
    - Main economic activity
    - Urban/rural
-

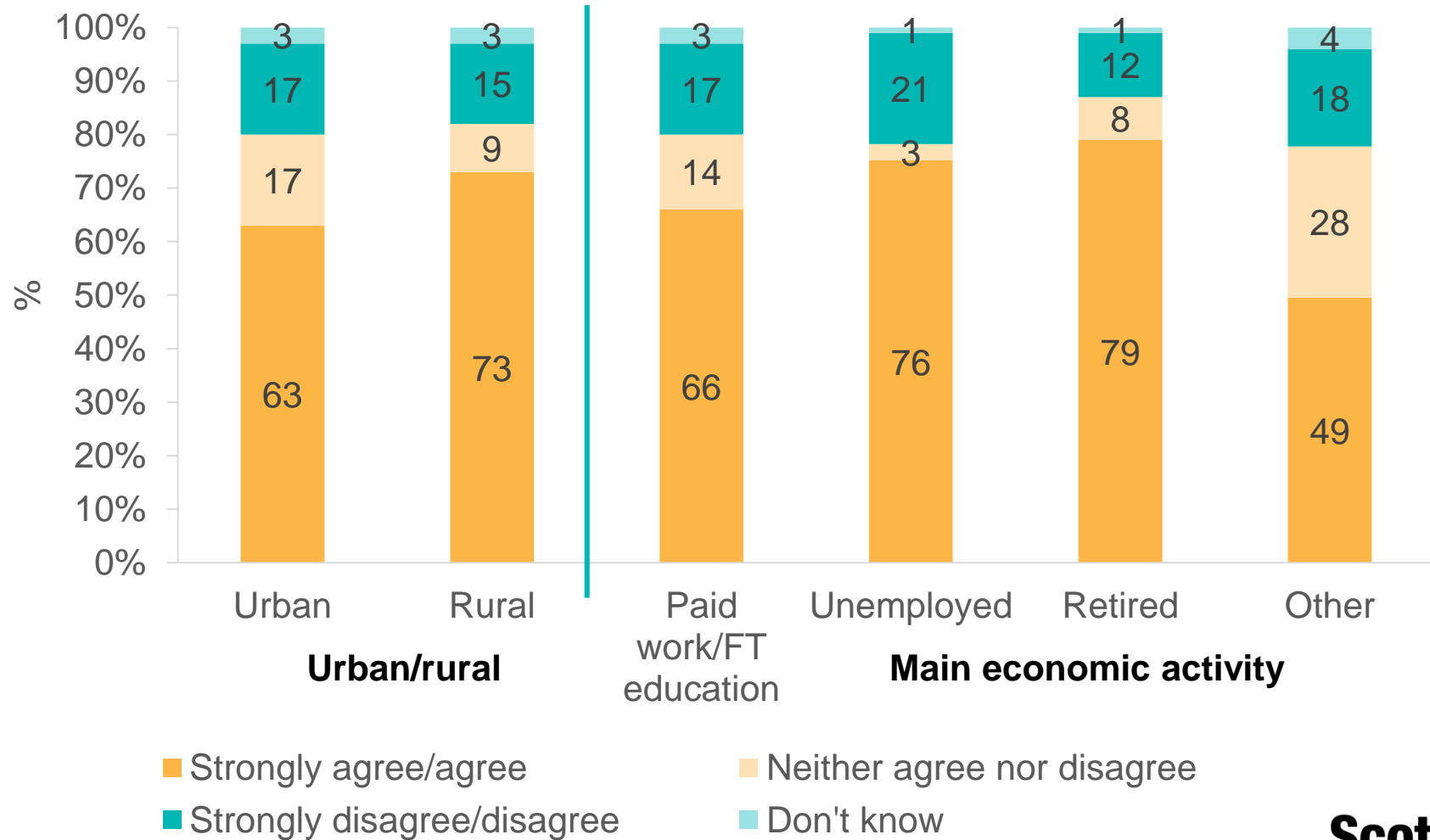
# Females more likely than males to **agree** police should use facial recognition technology



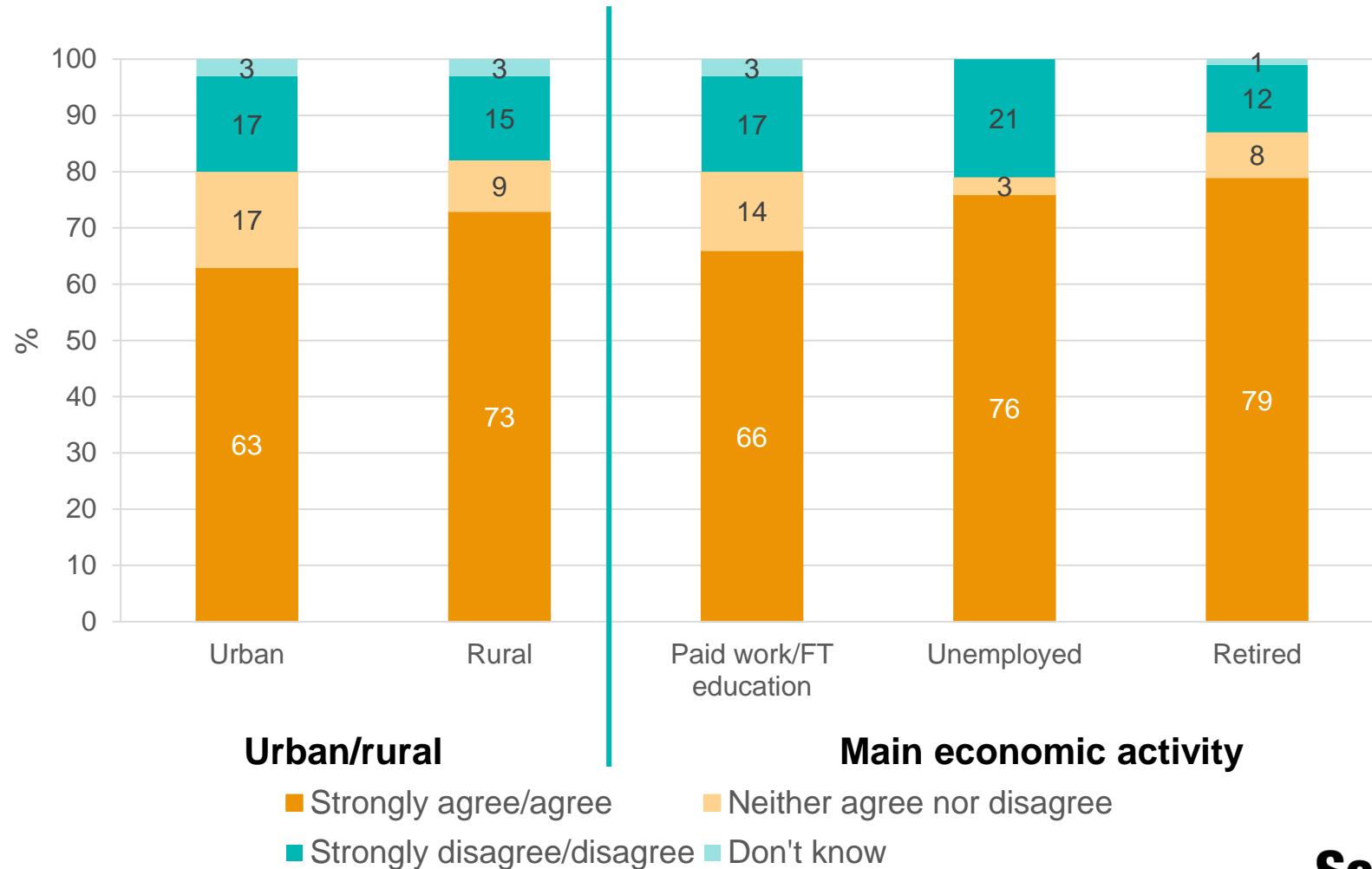
# Over 50s most likely to **agree** police should use facial recognition technology



# Views on police use of facial recognition technology, by urban/rural and main economic activity



# Views on police use of facial recognition technology, by urban/rural and main economic activity



**Relationship  
between  
understanding,  
views on  
effectiveness and  
attitudes**

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**10.**

## **Understanding** of the reasons for biometrics data collection, and the legal powers that allow it...

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... was highest among those:

- most likely to think that biometrics data make a positive contribution towards solving crime
- who think biometrics data should be kept forever
- in favour of collection from under 16's and
- in favour of police use of facial recognition technology



## Views on the contribution biometrics data makes towards solving crime...

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.. were more positive among those:

- with greater understanding of the reasons for biometrics collection and the legal powers that allow it
- who think biometrics data should be kept under 15 years or not at all
- in favour of collection from under 16's and
- in favour of police use of facial recognition technology

# Attitudes varied by levels of understanding and views on effectiveness

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Agreement with both collection from under 16's and with the use of facial recognition technology was **highest** among...:

Those:

- with greater understanding of the purpose and legal powers of collection
- who think biometrics data contribute a great deal/quite a lot to solving crime
- Of the view that biometrics data of those convicted of a crime should be kept forever.

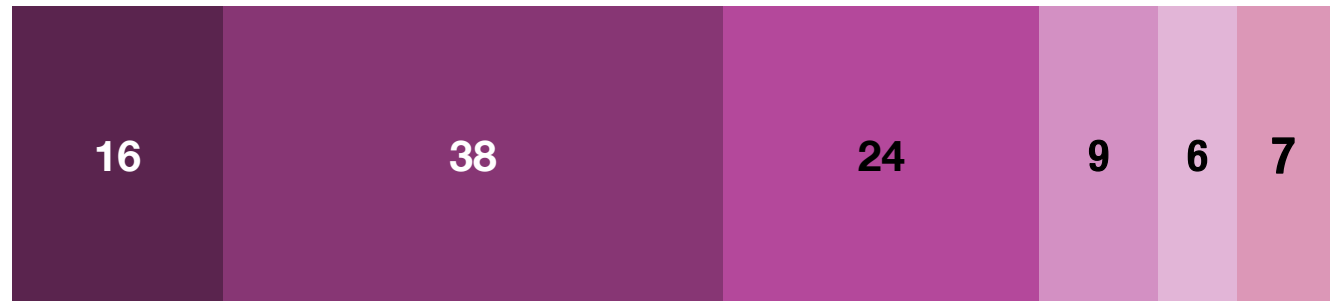
**Views on  
independent  
oversight of how  
biometrics data  
are used**

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**11.**

# Around half **agree** an independent body should examine how biometrics data are used

To what extent do you agree or disagree that a body, separate to the police, should be responsible for examining how fingerprints, photographs and DNA are used for policing and criminal justice purposes in Scotland?



Strongly agree

Disagree

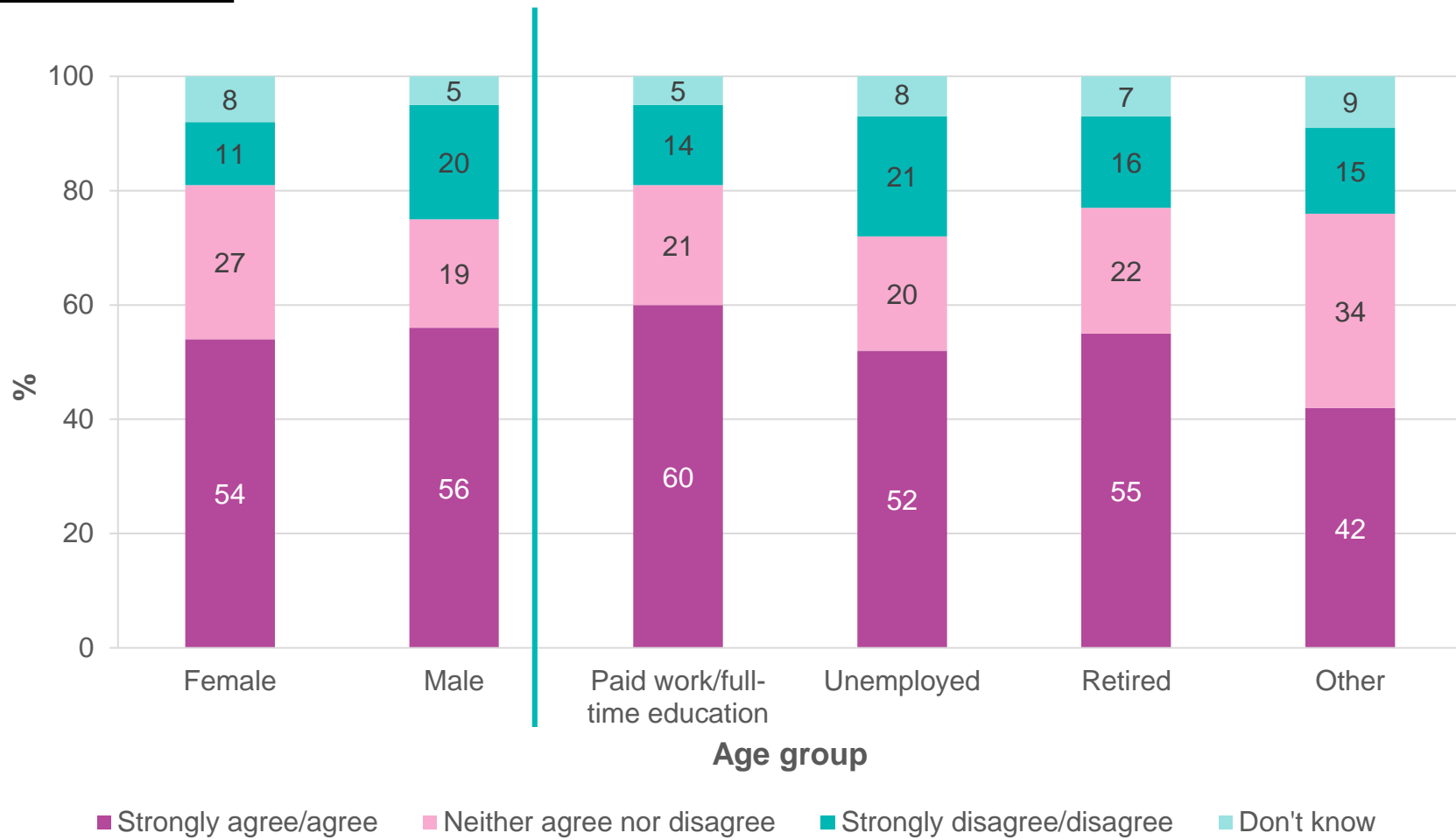
Agree

Strongly disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

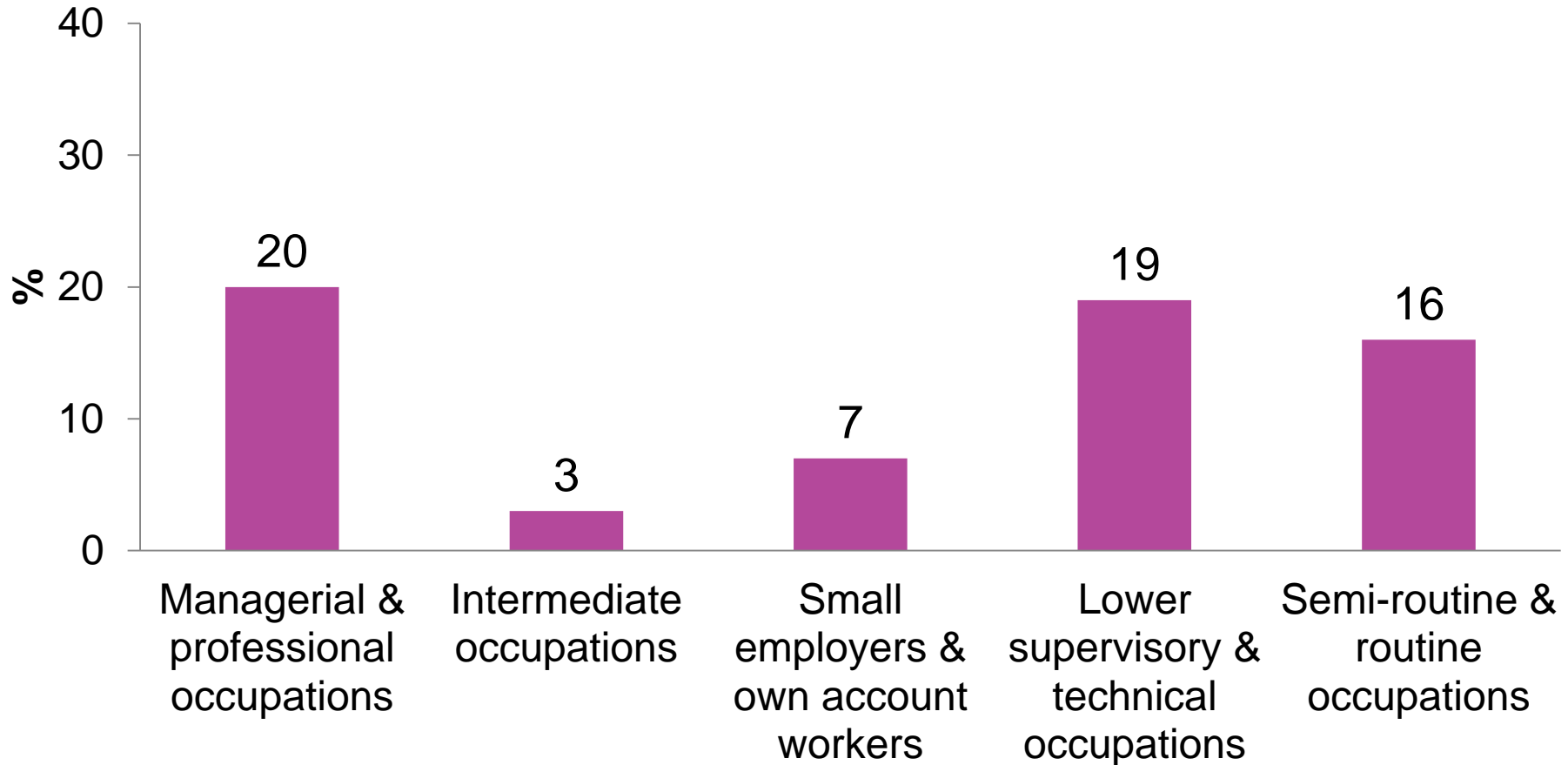
Don't know

# Independent body should examine how biometrics data are used, by sex and economic activity



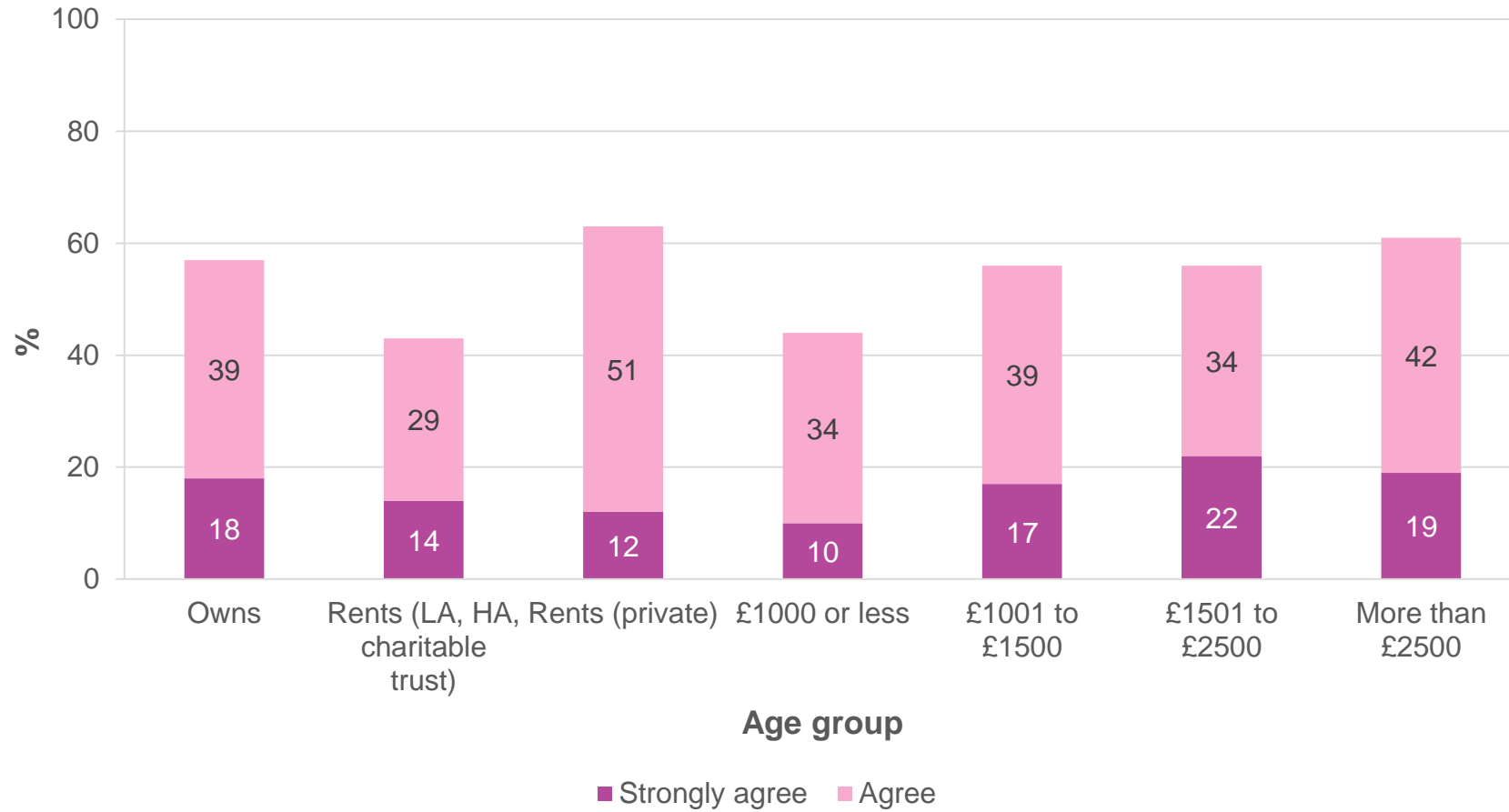
60 Base: All respondents (18+)

# % 'strongly agree' independent body should examine how biometrics data are used, by socio-economic classification



**Socio-economic classification**

# % agree independent body should examine how biometrics data are used, by housing tenure and income



# Do views on independent oversight vary by levels of understanding, views on effectiveness or attitudes?

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- Those with greatest understanding on the purpose of biometrics data collection, and the legal powers that allow it, were most likely to agree there should be a separate body to examine how biometrics are used
- Views on independent oversight were not related to attitudes or views on how effectively biometrics data helps solve crime.



# Contact

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