



School Food Review Working Group Poll Results

September
2023

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About this Research



The School Food Review Working Group commissioned Public First to explore public opinion on the government's provision of free school meals in England, views on a number of options for increasing the number of children who receive free school meals, and explore the best way to frame such a policy to appeal to the electorate.

The Group is a coalition of 36 organisations spanning charities, educational organisations, catering companies, unions and academics, committed to working together to improve children's health by reforming the school food system.



Fieldwork Information

In this deck, we have given the headline results from our fieldwork.

Public First surveyed 3,011 members of the public across **England** from 27th June - 4th July 2023.

The results used throughout this presentation are weighted using iterative proportional fitting, or 'raking'.

The results are weighted to ensure the sample is nationally representative by the following criteria;

- Interlocking age and gender
- Region
- Socio-economic grade



Poll Results



Relative
importance of
Free School
Meals



Which do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please select up to three.

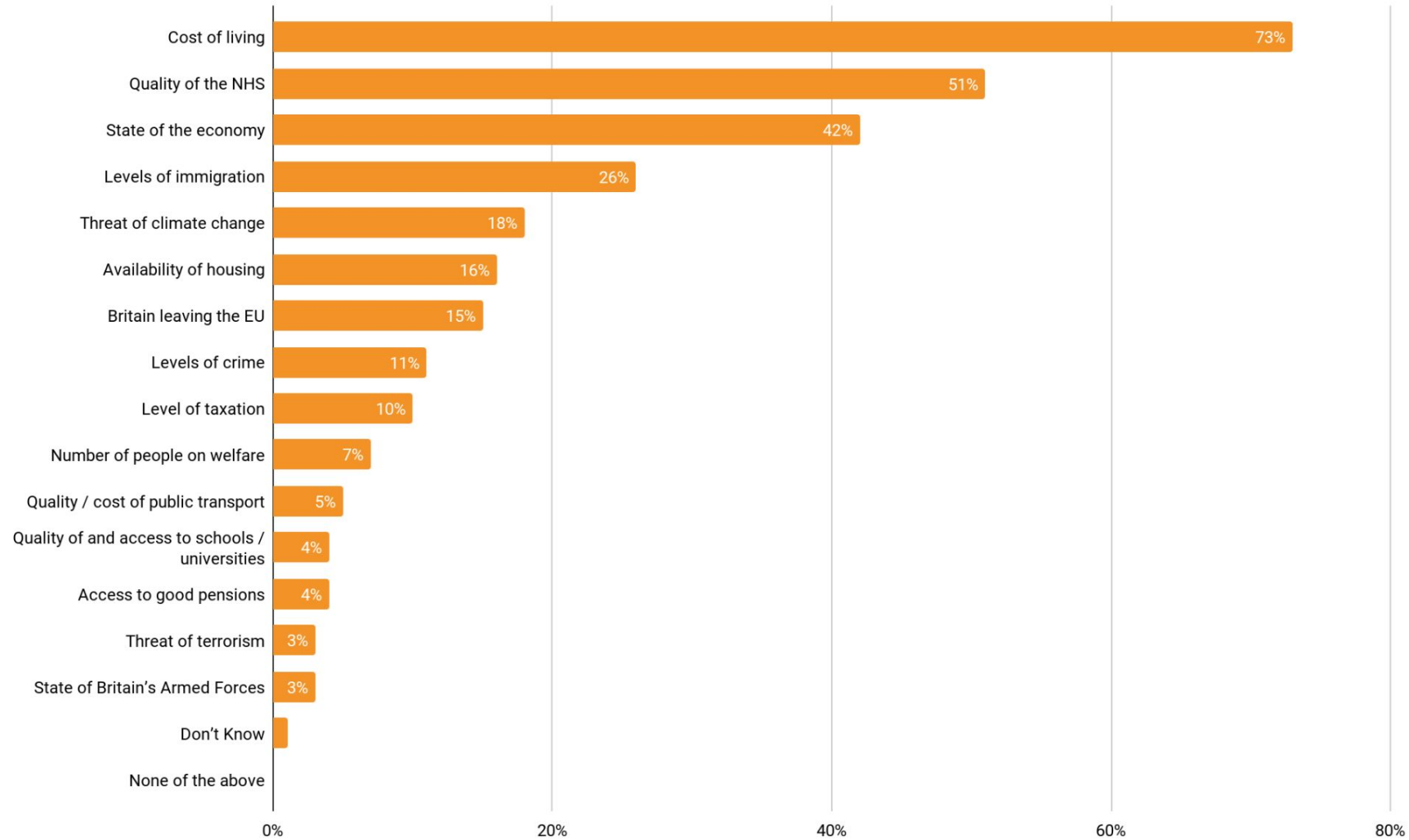


Table 1

Thinking about schools in the UK, which of the following do you think are the most important issues affecting schools at this time? Please select up to three.

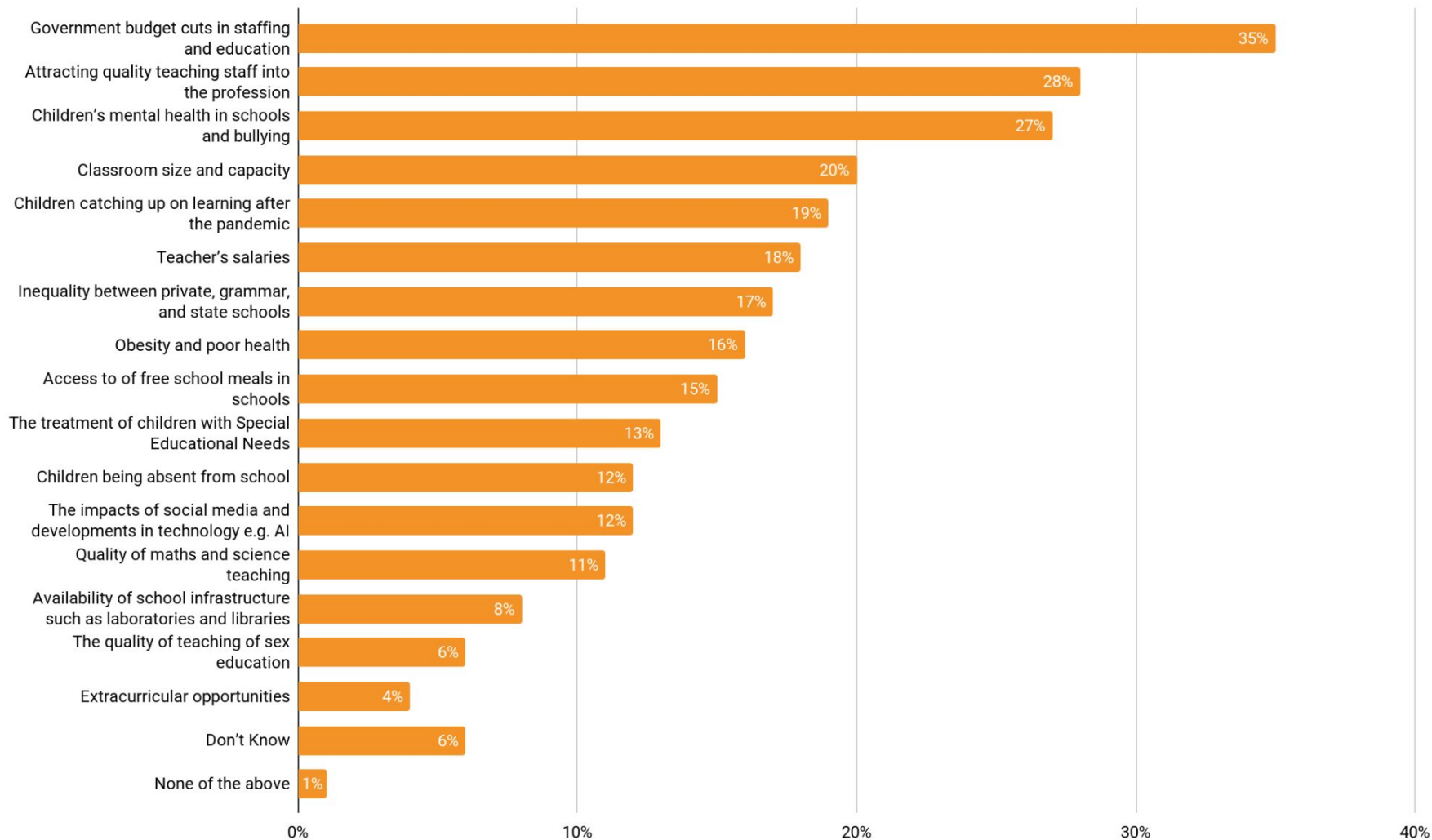


Table 2

Thinking about the things that the Government funds, which of the following do you think the Government should and should not provide?

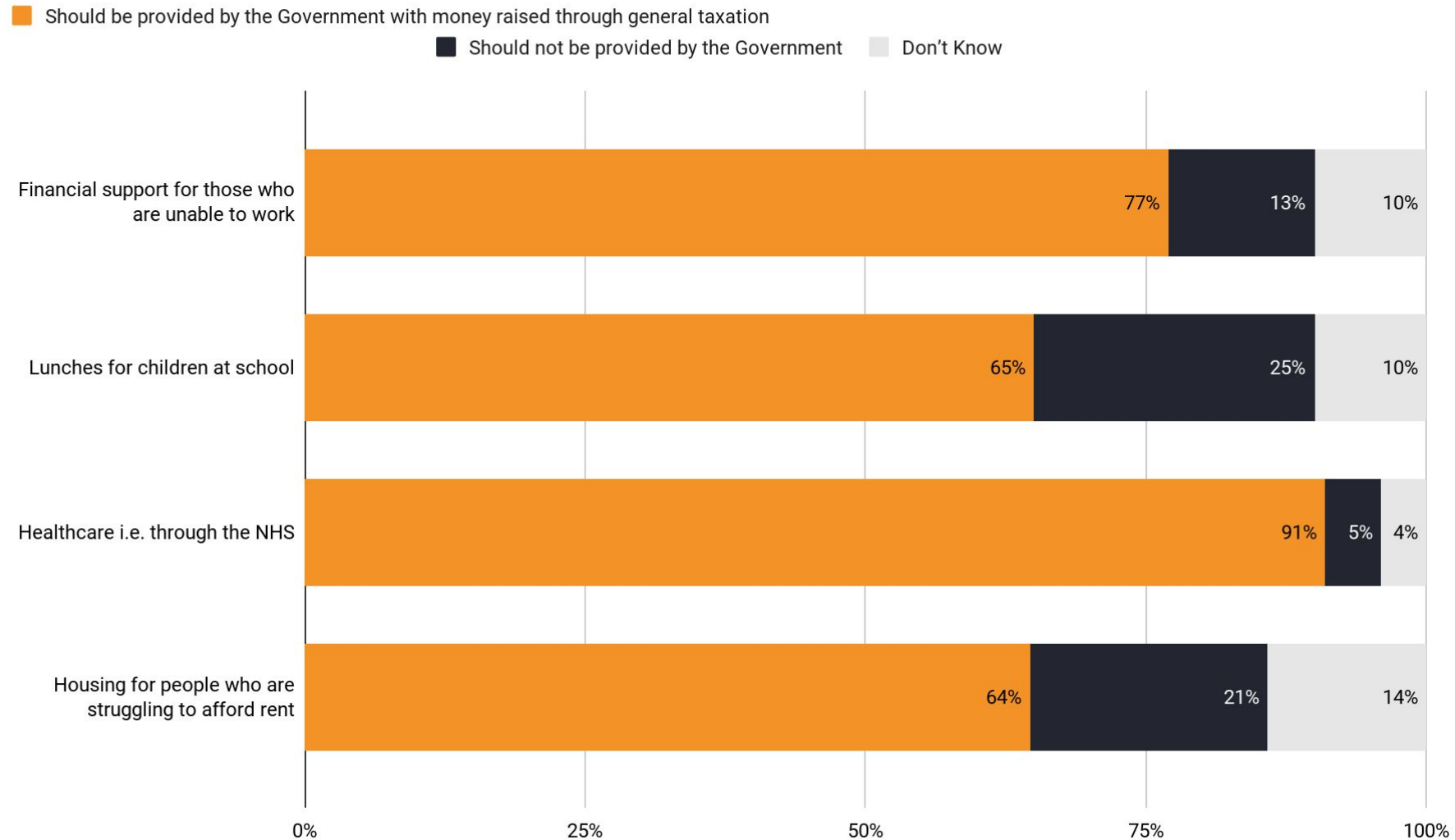


Table 3

Thinking about the things that the Government funds, which of the following do you think the Government should and should not provide? : Lunches for children at school

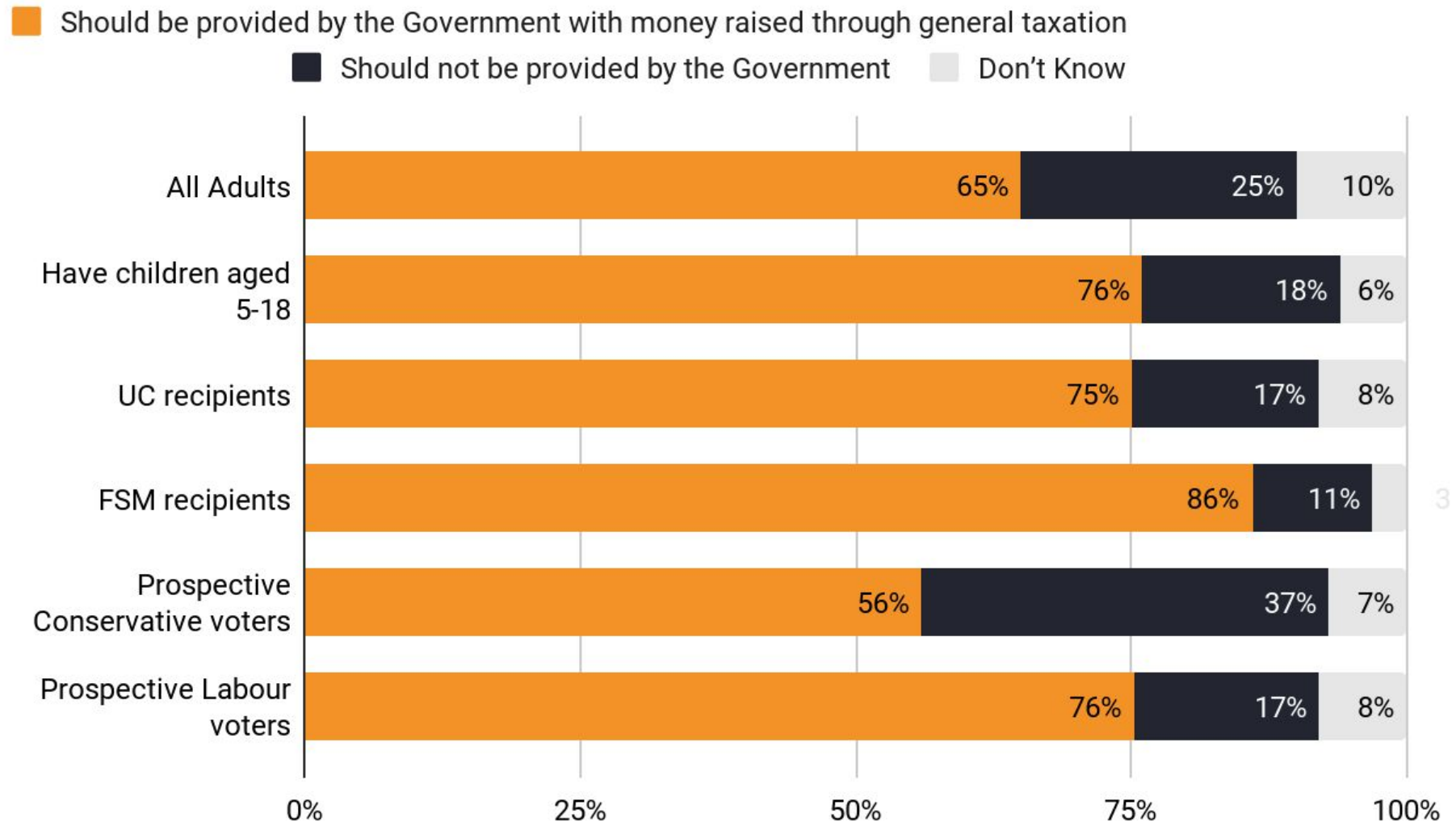
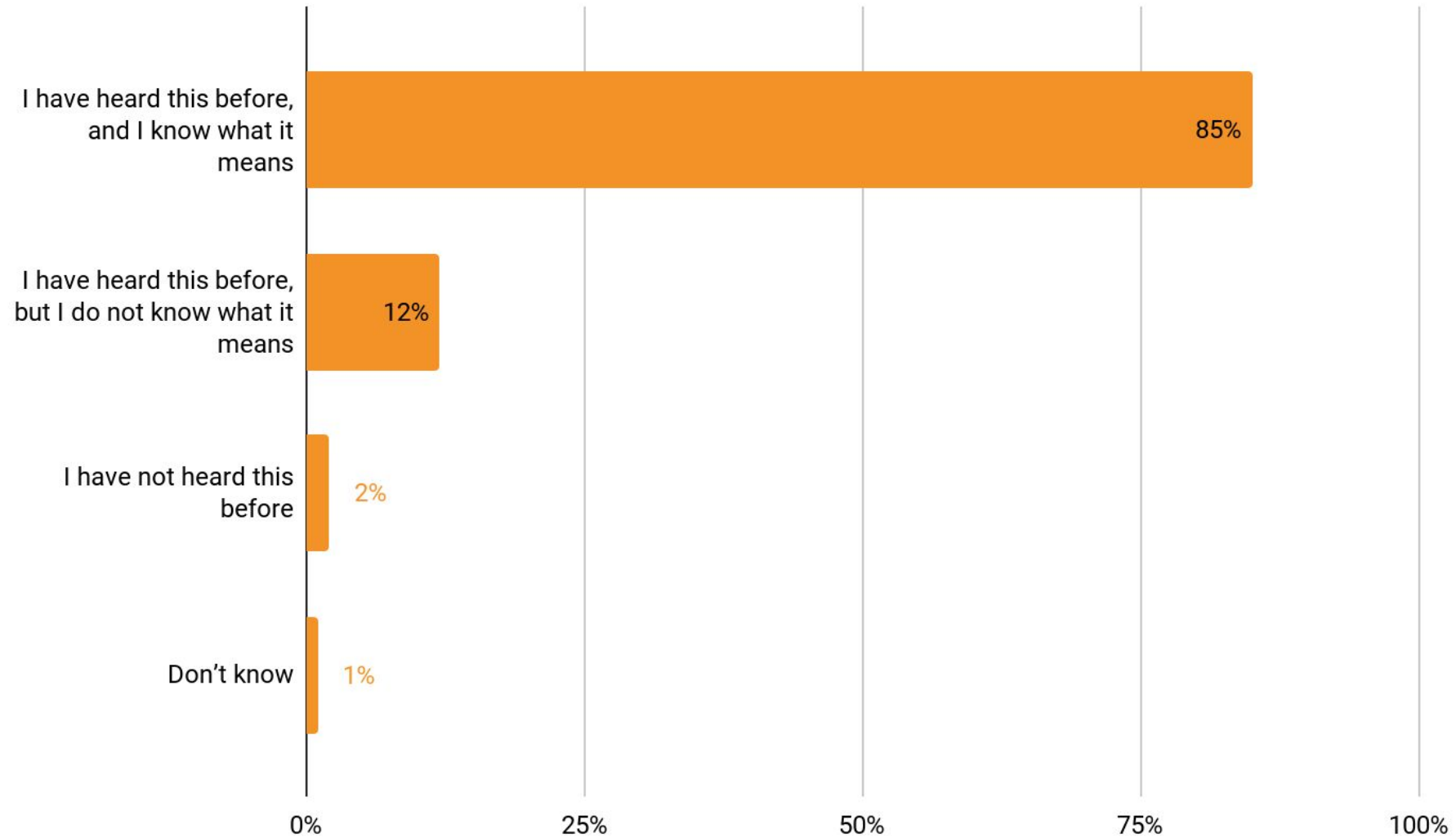


Table 5

Views and Knowledge of Free School Meals



Before taking this survey, how familiar were you with the term 'Free School Meals'?



Currently in England, some children, from low income families, are entitled to Free School Meals during the school day, meaning their parents do not need to pay for school lunches. In addition, all children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 receive free school meals, not on a means-tested basis. There are currently over 2 million children eligible for Free School Meals. Do you support or oppose the current approach to Free School Meal provision in England?

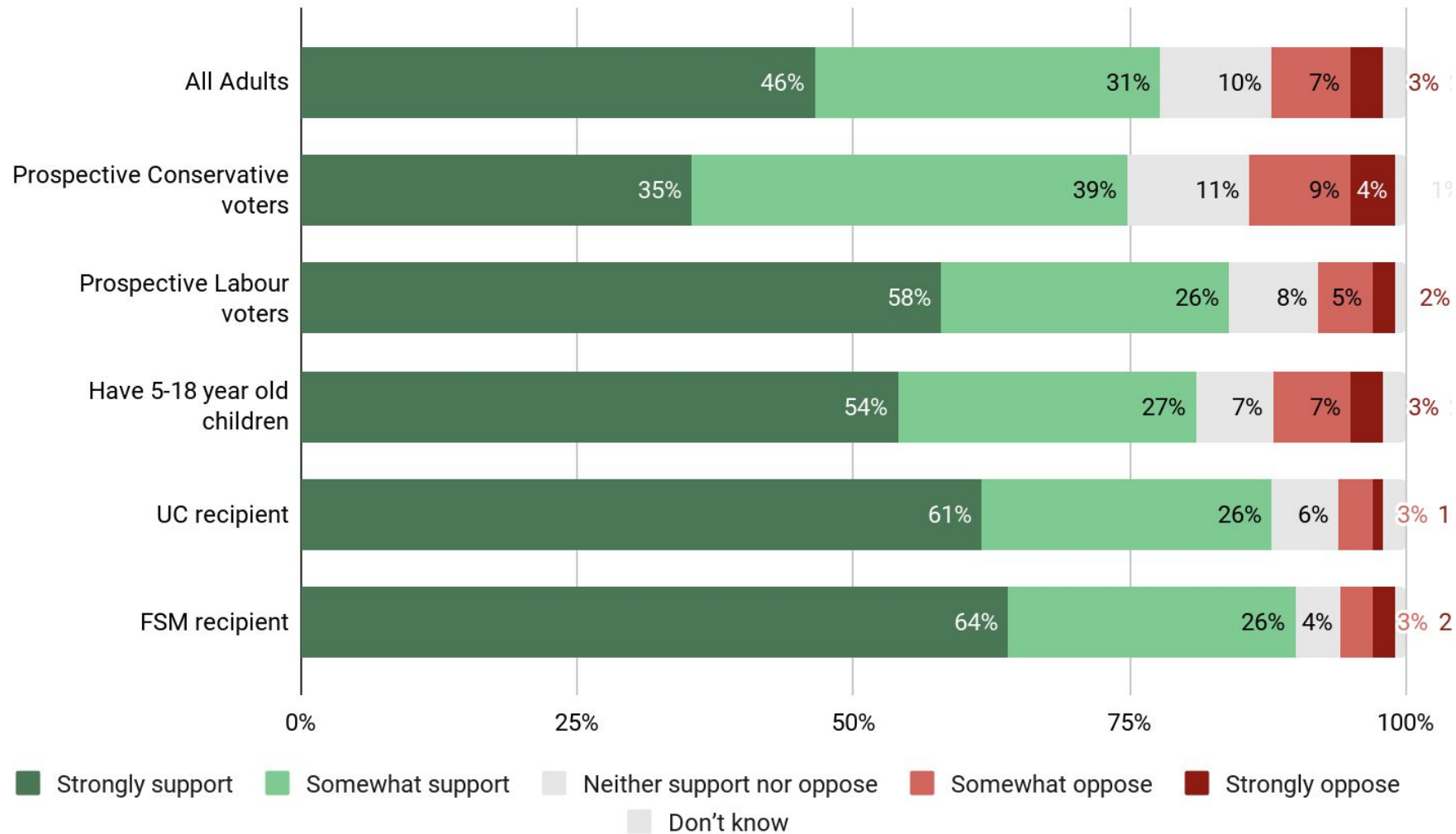


Table 9

And which of the following comes closest to your view?

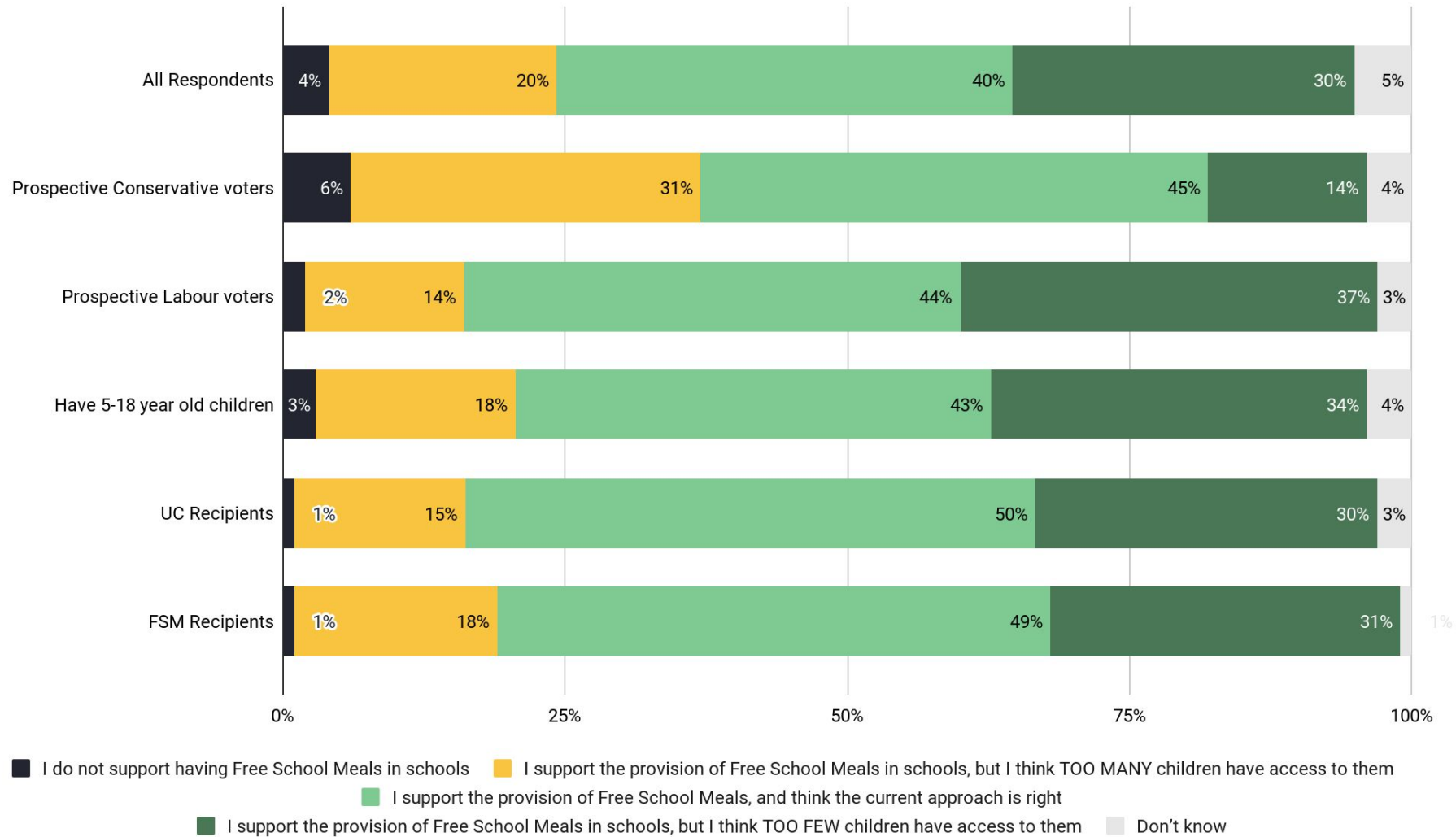


Table 10

Currently children from low income families are entitled to Free School Meals. In your view, what level of income should qualify a family to receive Free School Meals, if any?

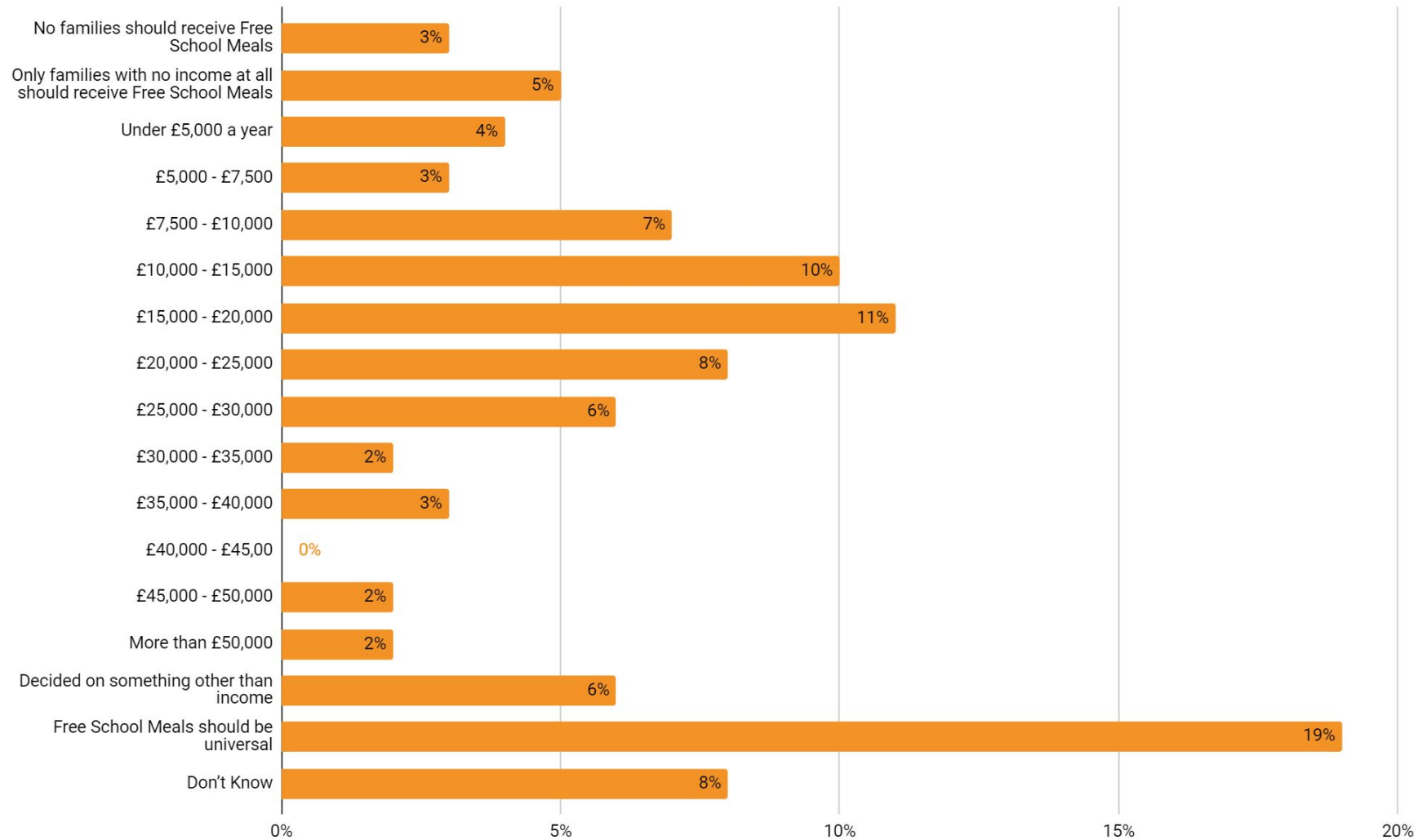


Table 11

What do you think the benefits of providing Free School Meals for children at school are, if any? Select any which apply.

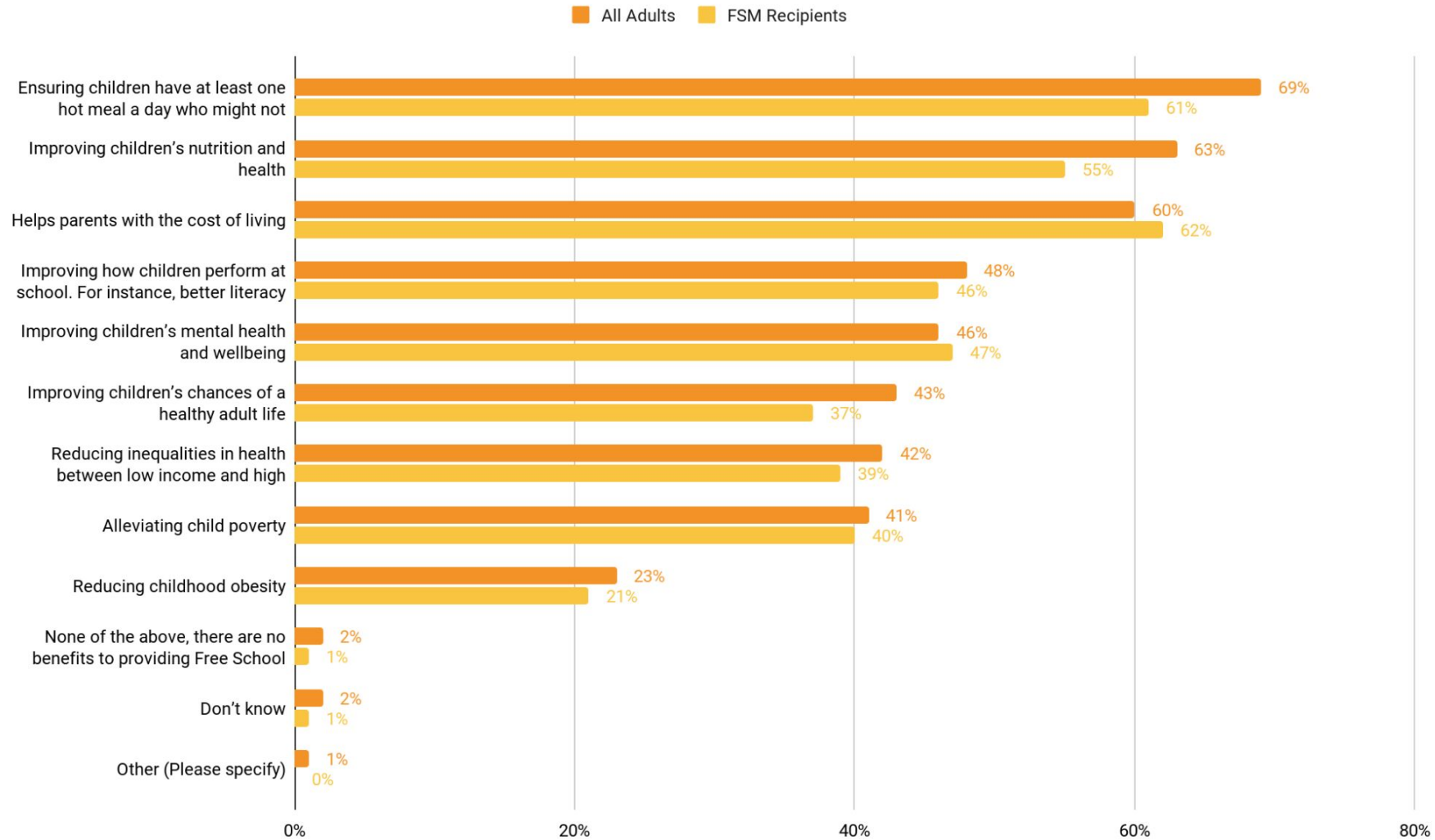


Table 12

What do you think are the main negatives of providing Free School Meals to children are, if any? Select any which apply

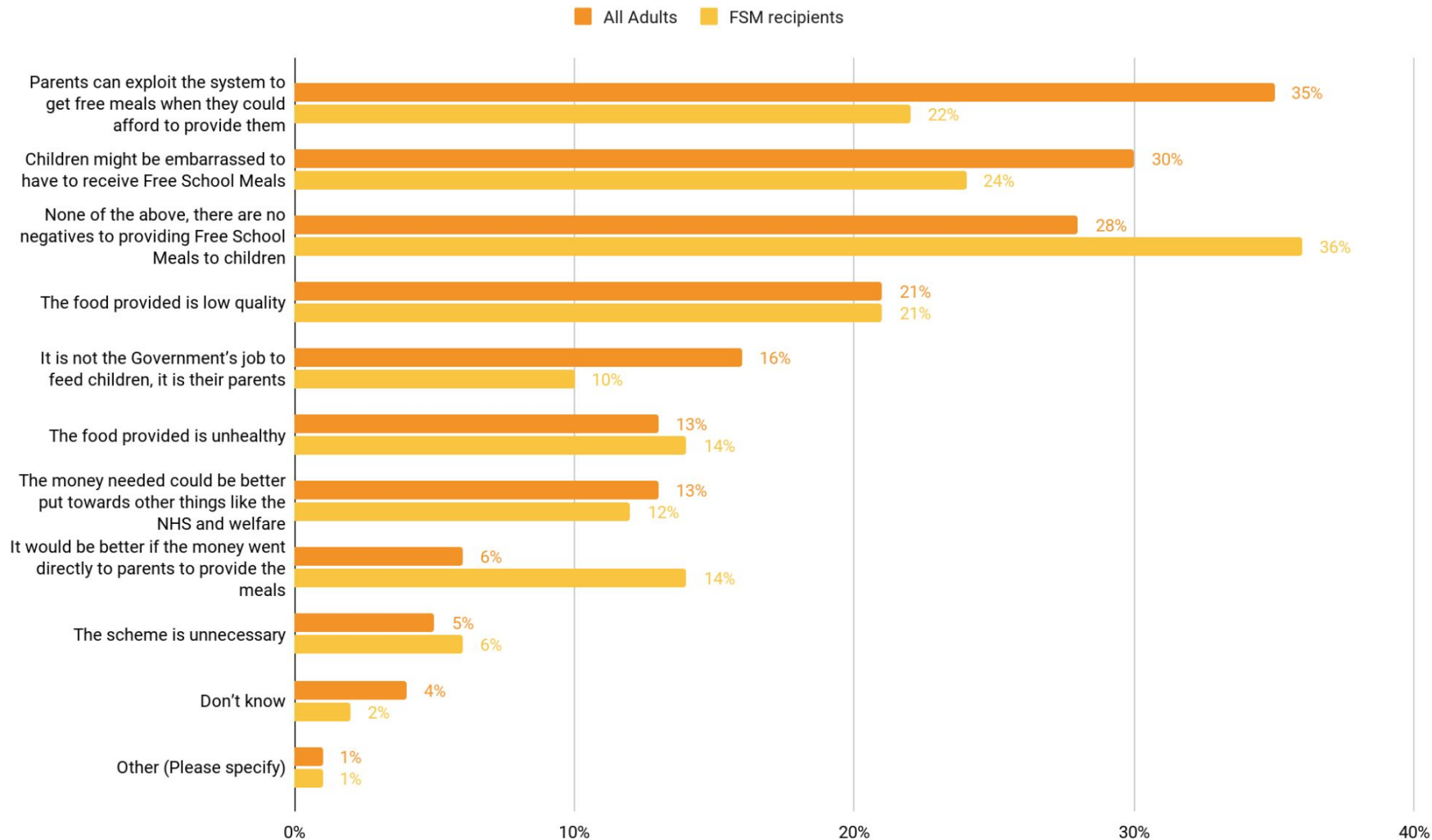


Table 13

Have any of your children ever received Free School Meals? This does not include free school meals provided to all children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.

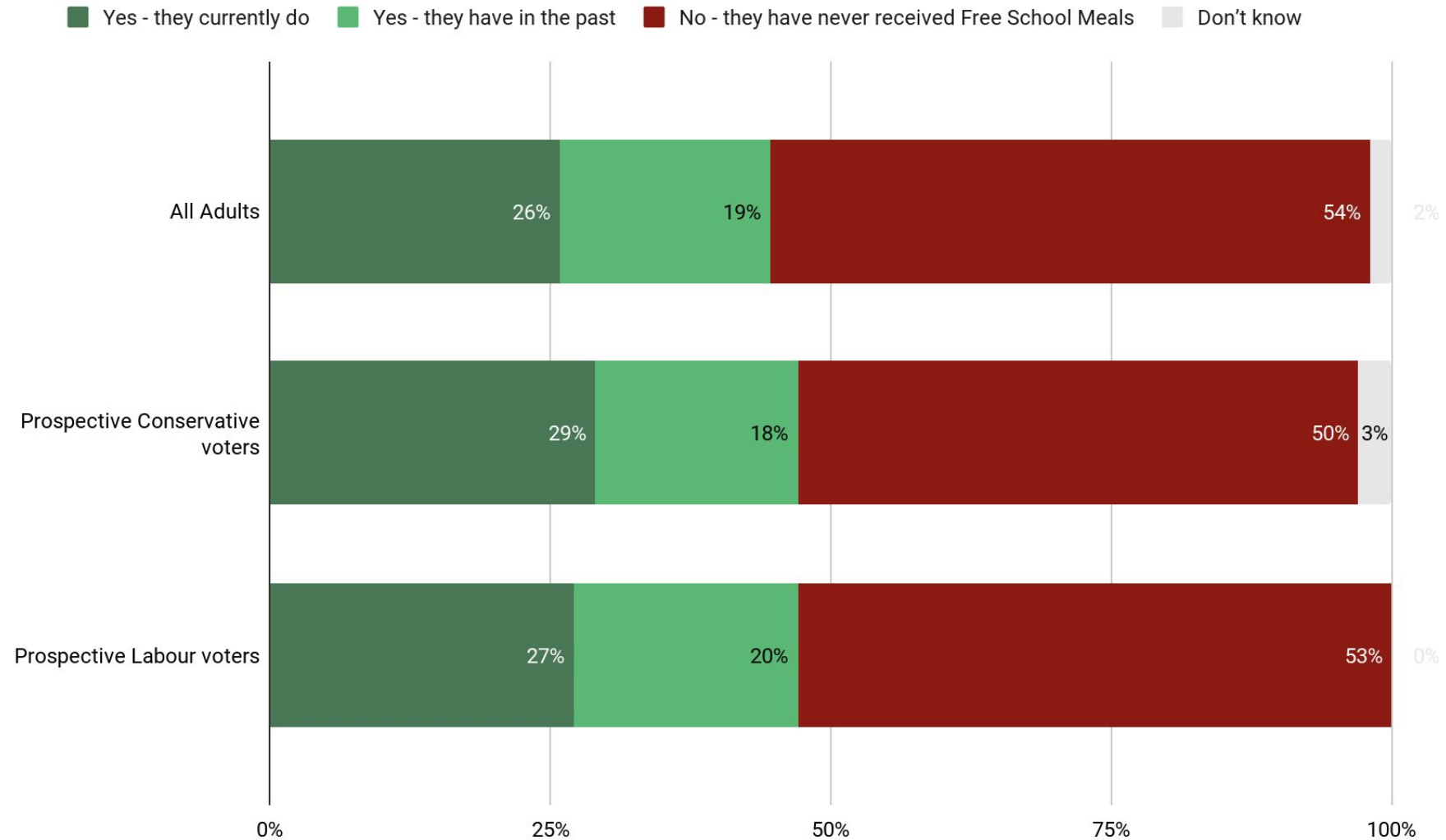


Table 14

Diet and Nutrition



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?

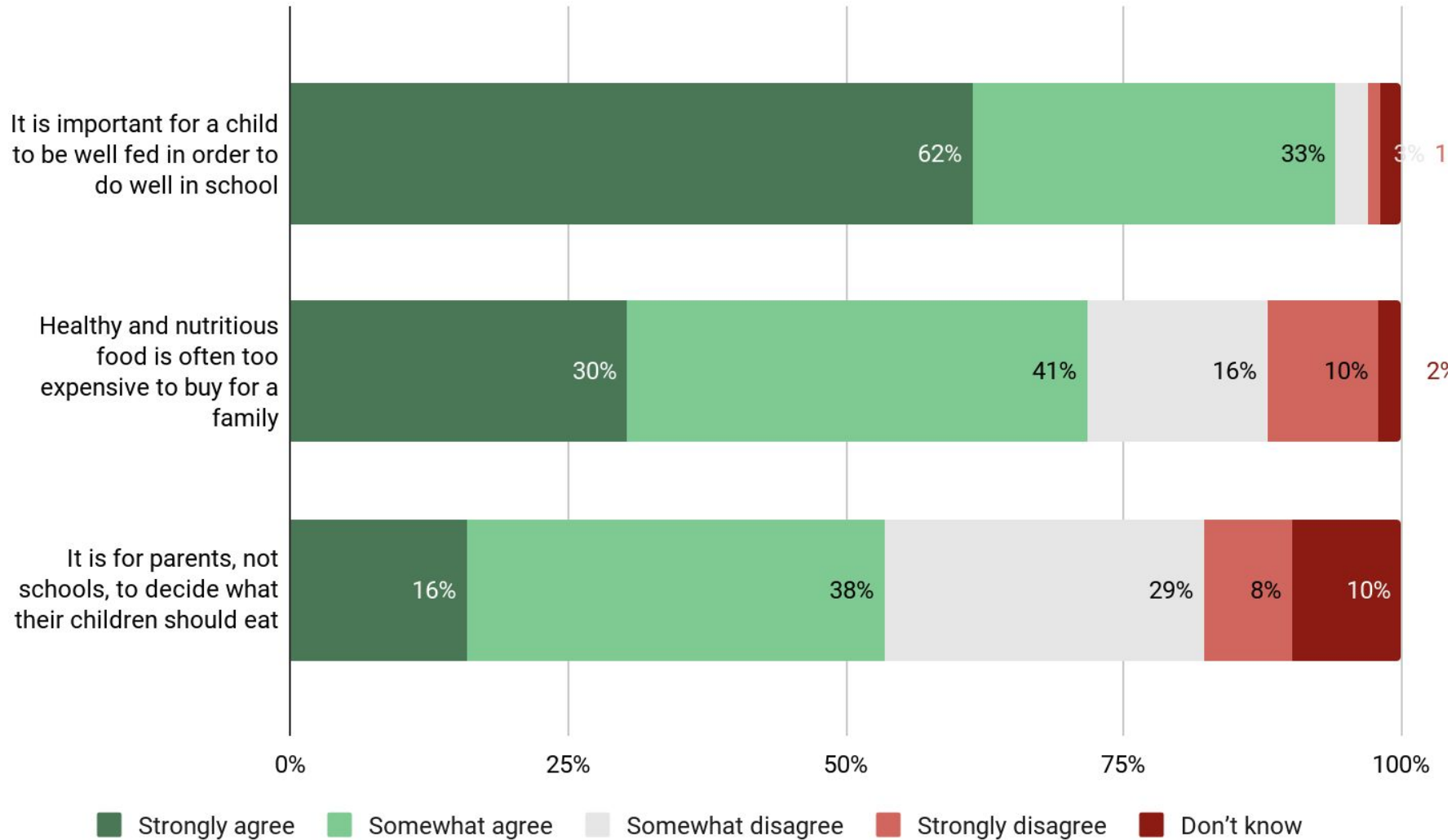


Table 15

You said that you have children attending school. Which of the following do they typically eat for lunch on a school day? Please select all that apply

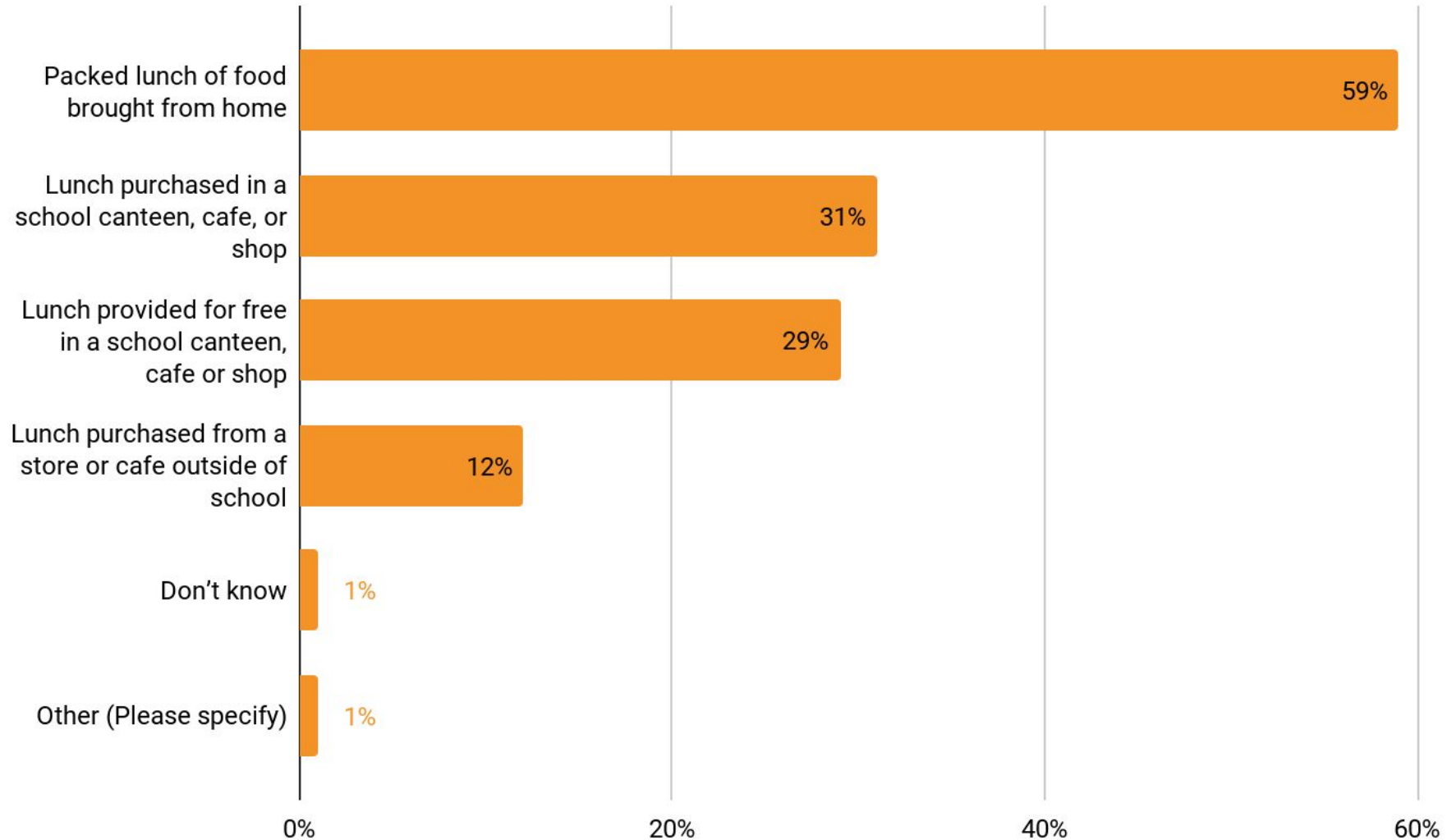


Table 19

You said your child typically receives their lunch from a school canteen, cafe, or shop. On a scale of 1-5, how nutritious would you say this food is? Answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “Very nutritious” and 5 is “Not nutritious at all”.

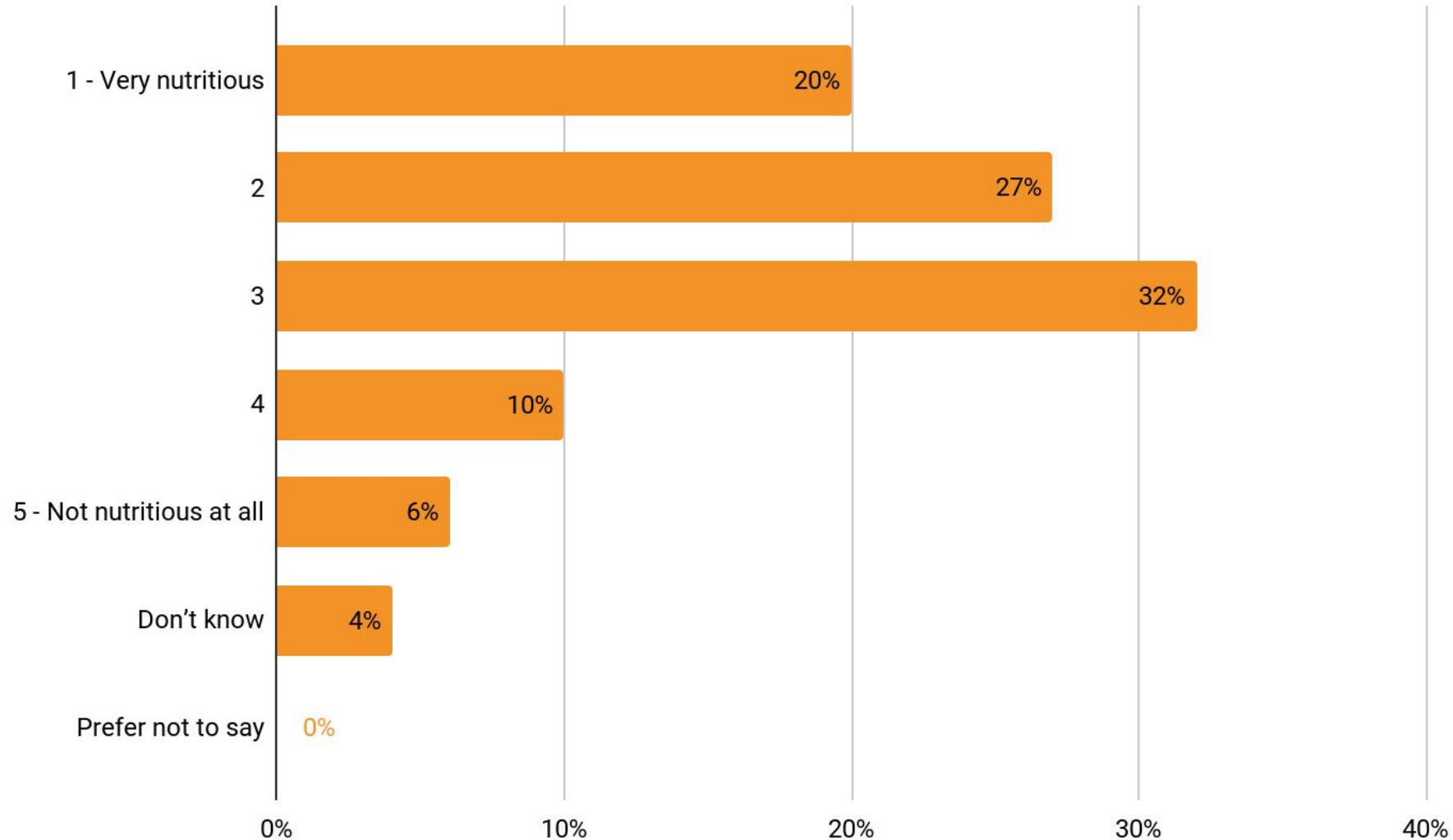


Table 20

Overall, would you say your child's diet is nutritious? Answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Very nutritious" and 5 is "Not nutritious at all".

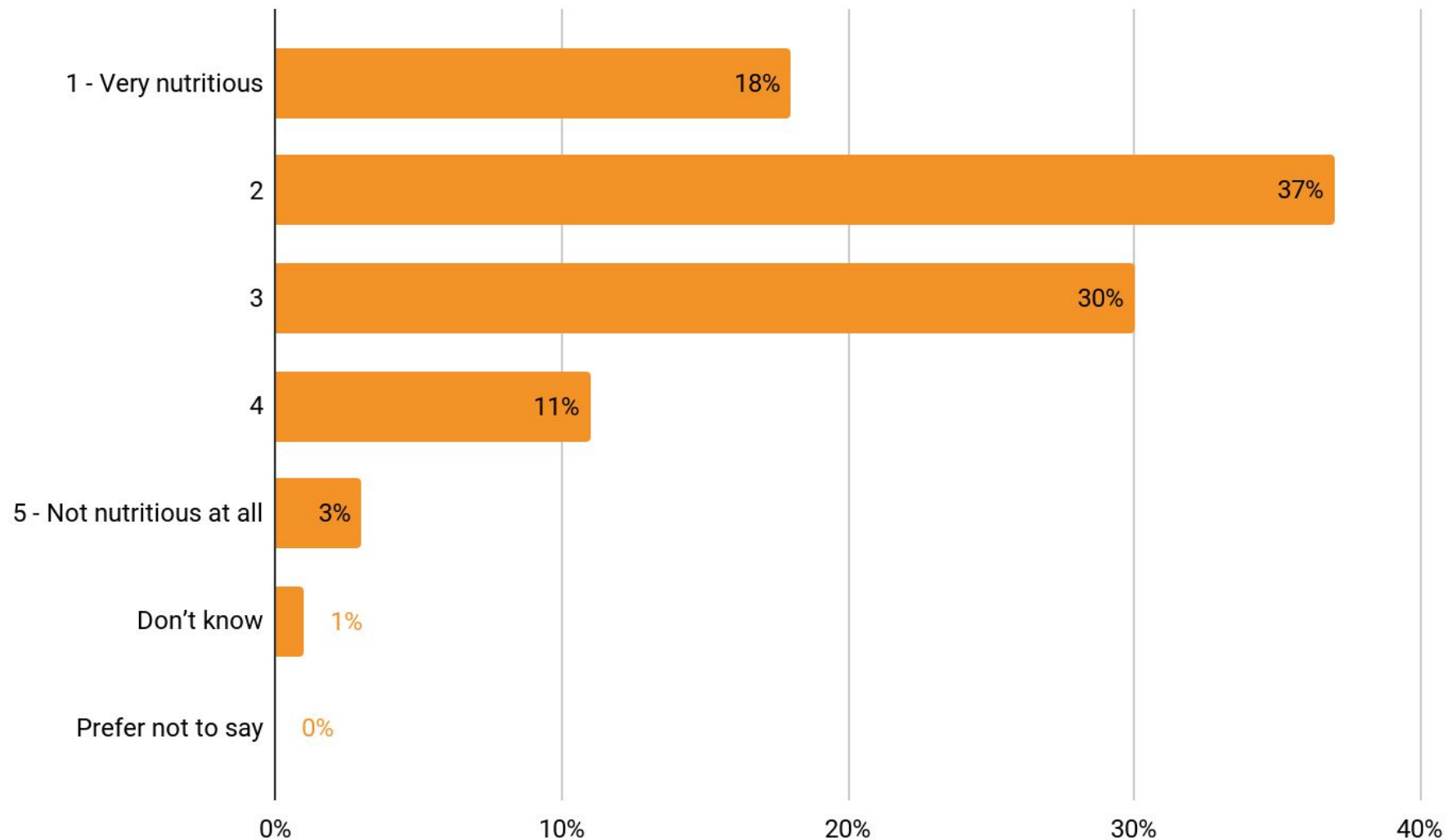


Table 21

What, if anything, would you say are the barriers to your child having a more nutritious diet? Please select all that apply.

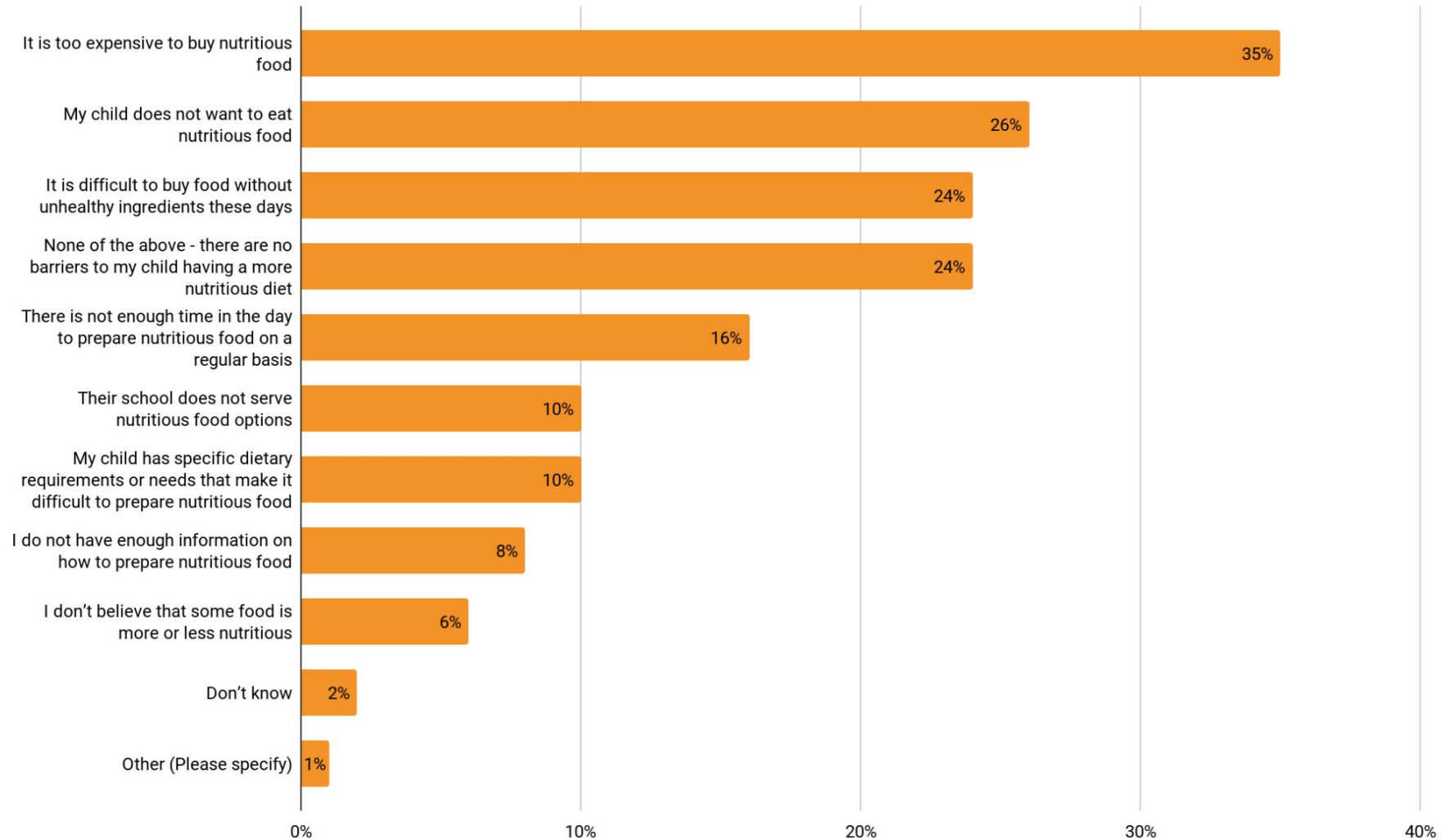


Table 22

Breakfast Clubs



As far as you are aware, does your child's school offer a Breakfast Club to children?

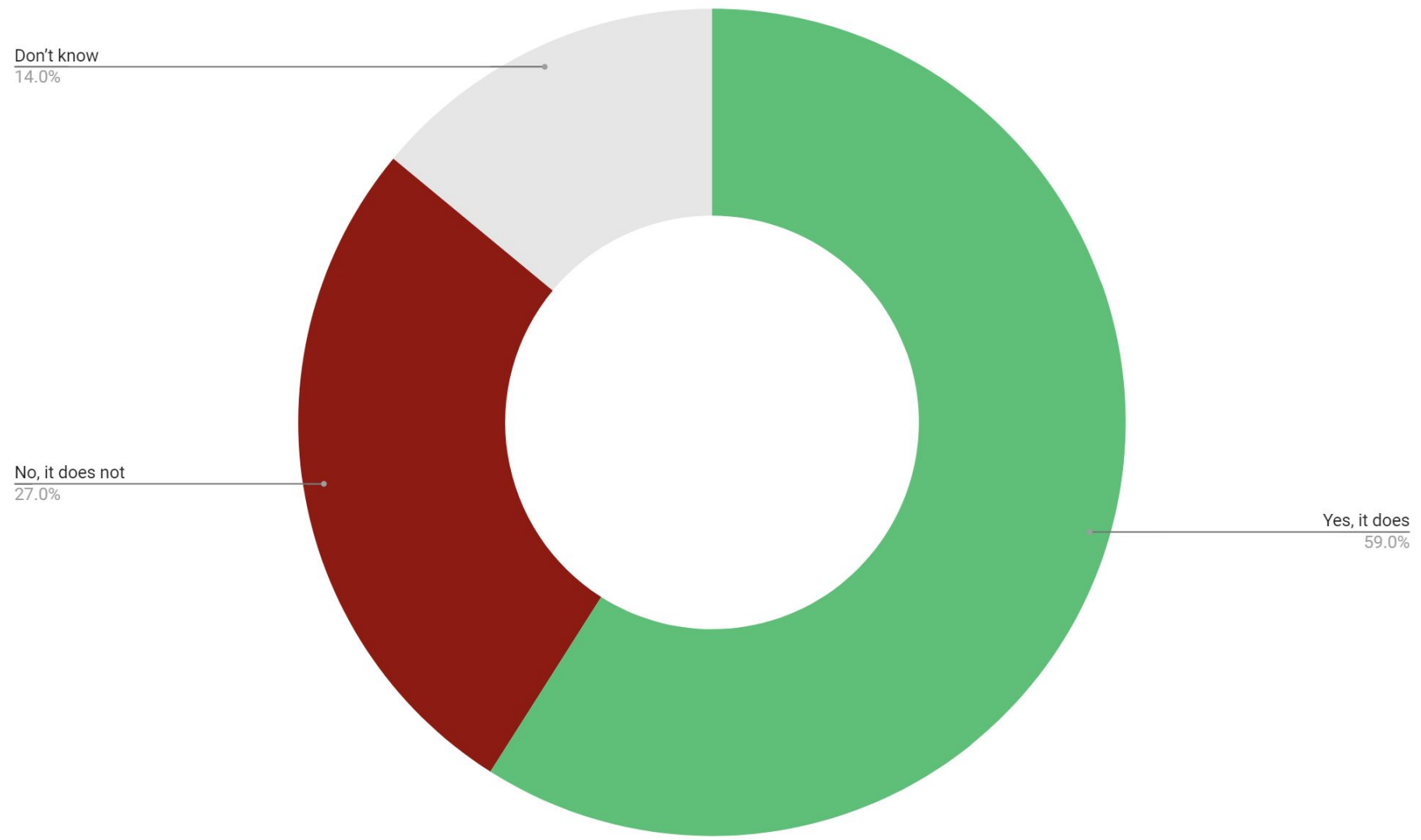


Table 23

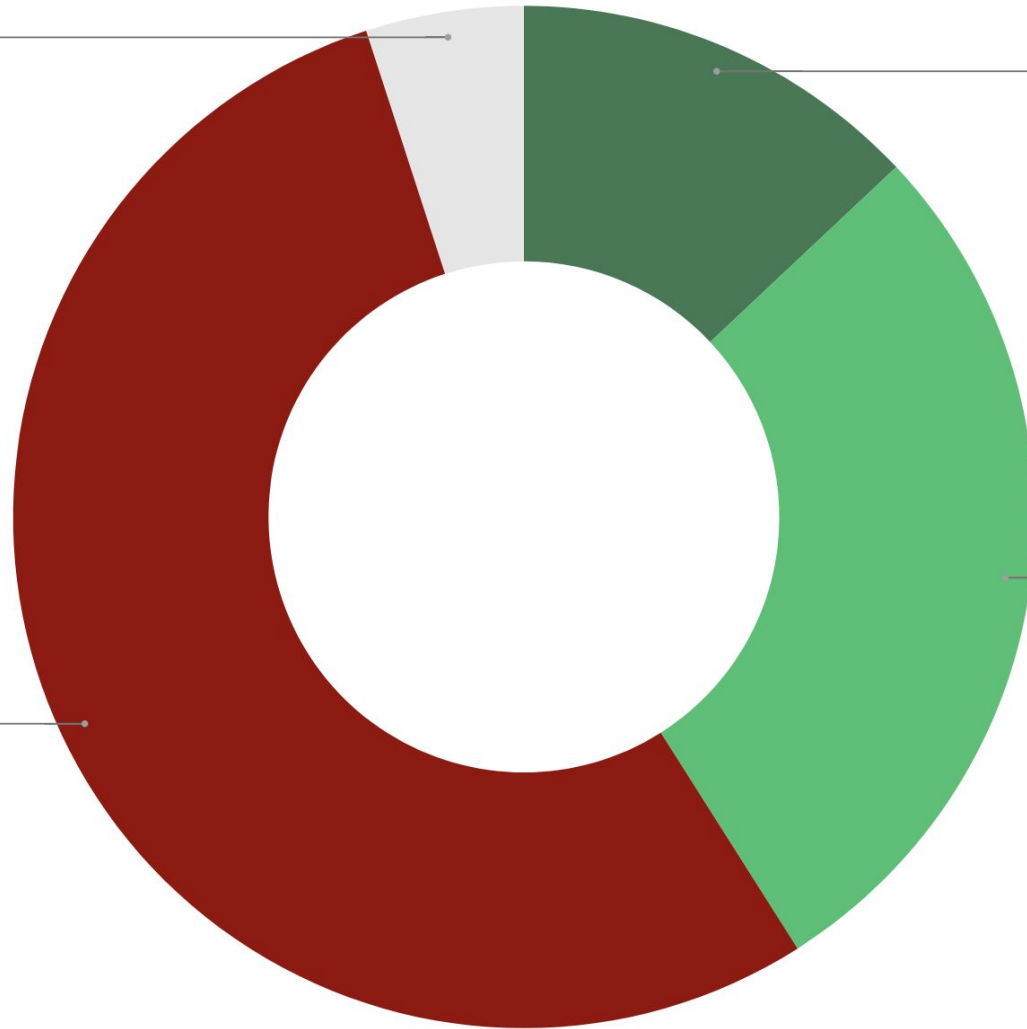
Have any of your children ever attended a Breakfast Club at their school?

Don't know
5.0%

Yes - they currently do
13.0%

Yes - they have in the past
28.0%

No - they have never
54.0%



How important do you think it is for schools to provide free breakfast clubs for all children?

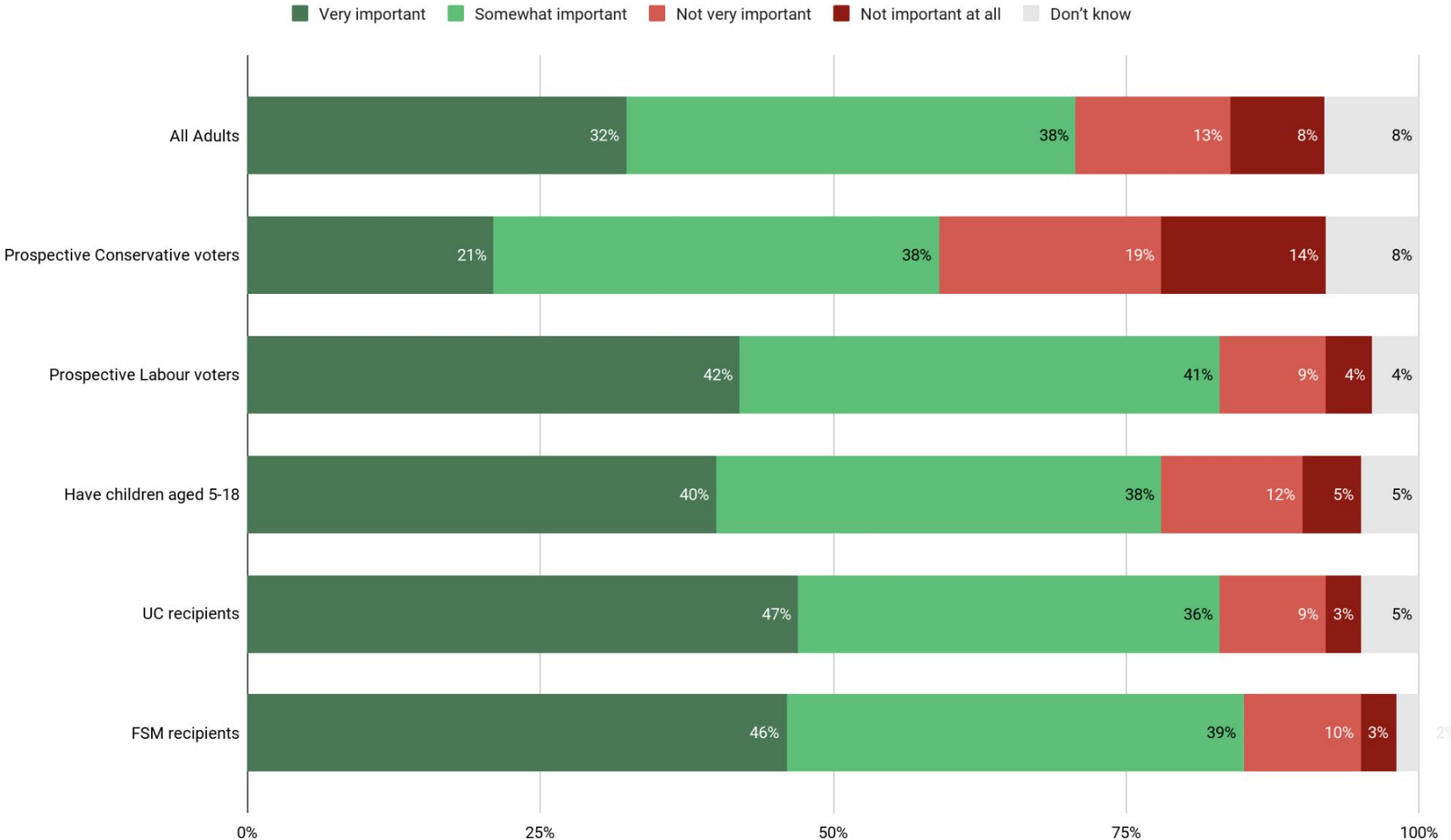


Table 25

Quality and
type of food
provided at
schools



Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- The food provided by schools tends to be MORE healthy than the food which parents provide for their children
- The food provided by schools and the food which parents provide for their children are equally healthy
- The food provided by schools tends to be LESS healthy than the food which parents provide for their children
- Don't Know

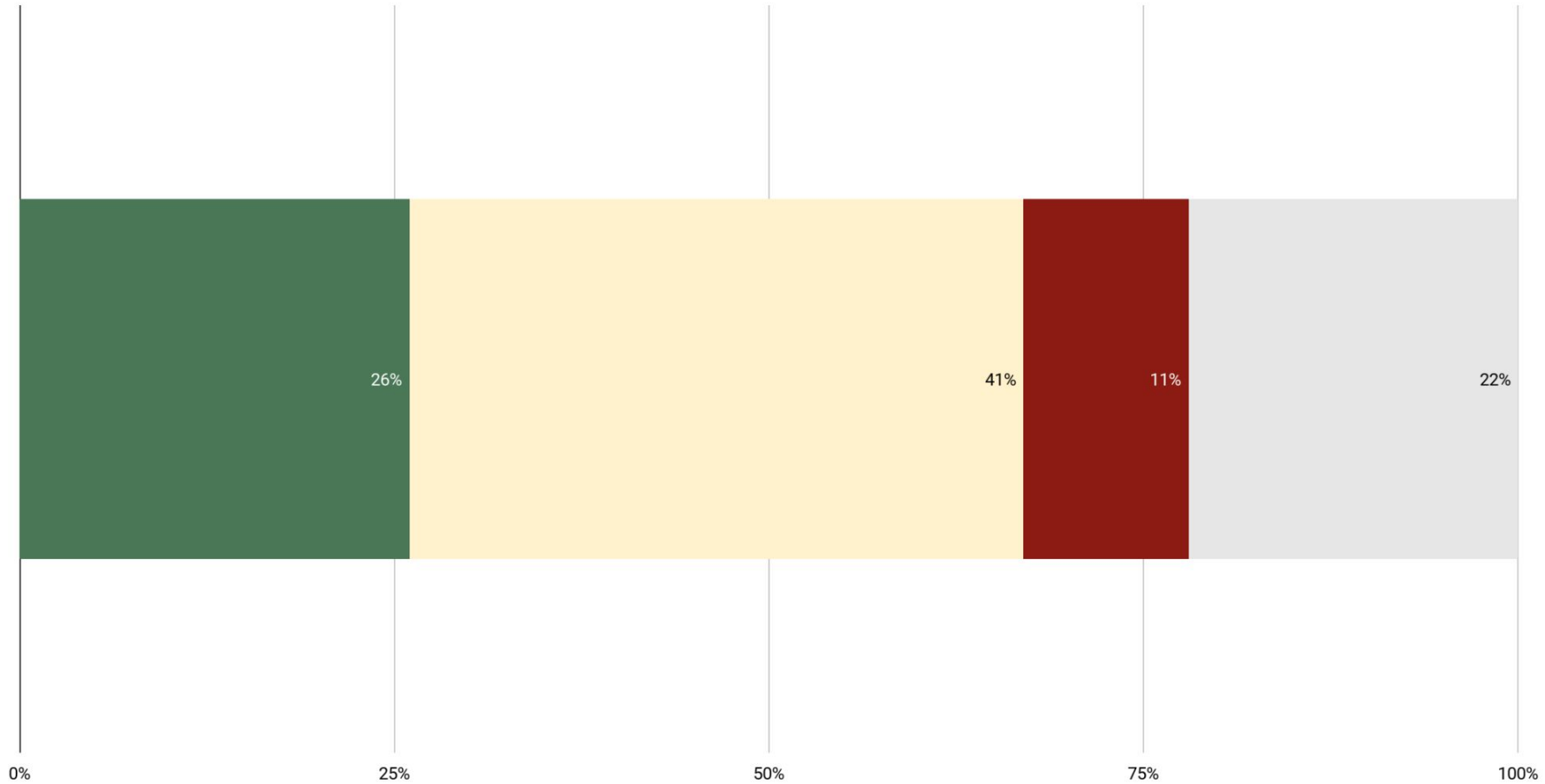


Table 26

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

■ Food provided should be made more healthy than it currently is ■ Food provided through schools is already healthy enough ■ Don't Know

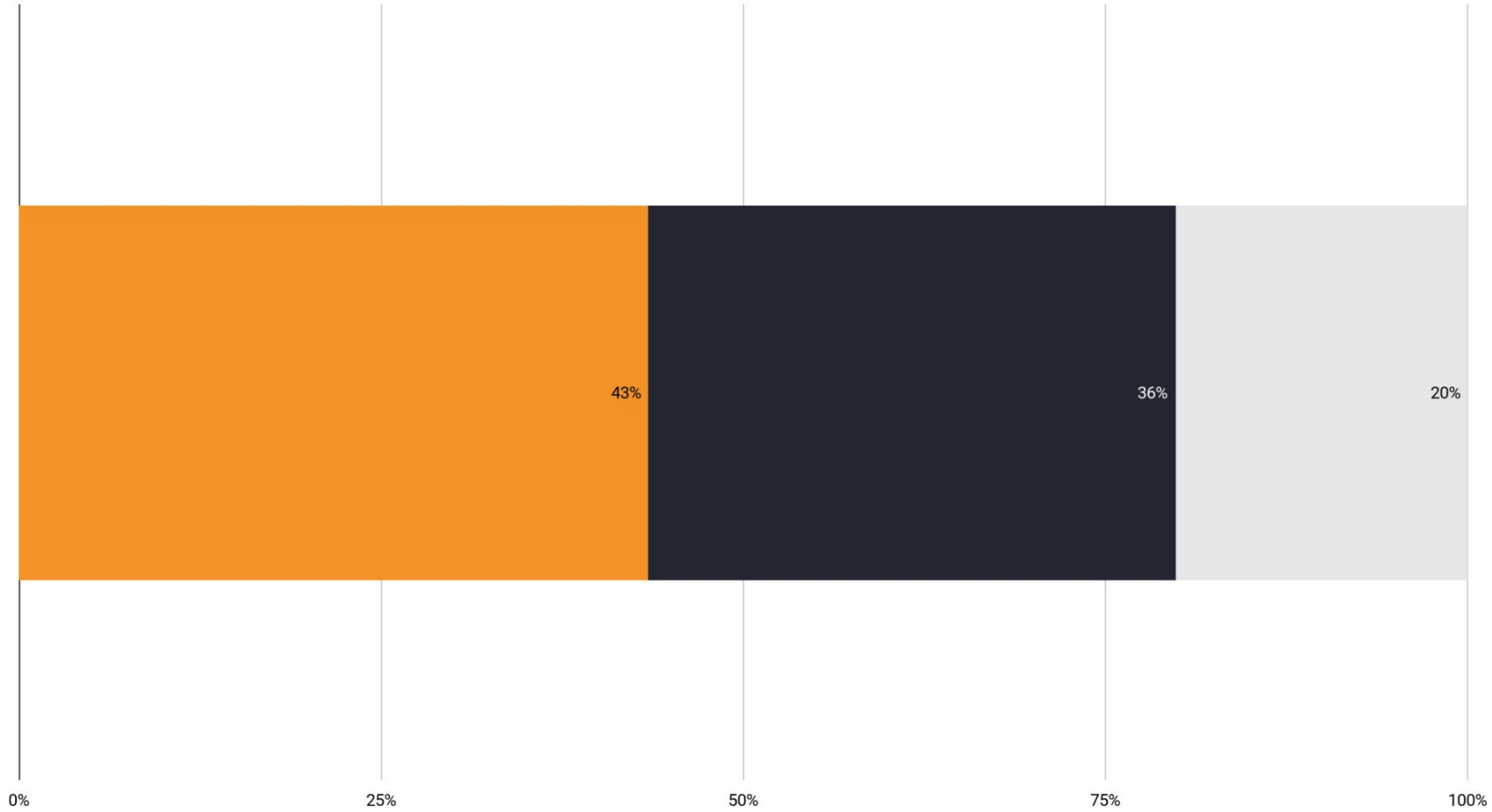


Table 27

Imagine there was a proposal to change the food which was provided at schools. For each of the following, please indicate if you would support or oppose the following?

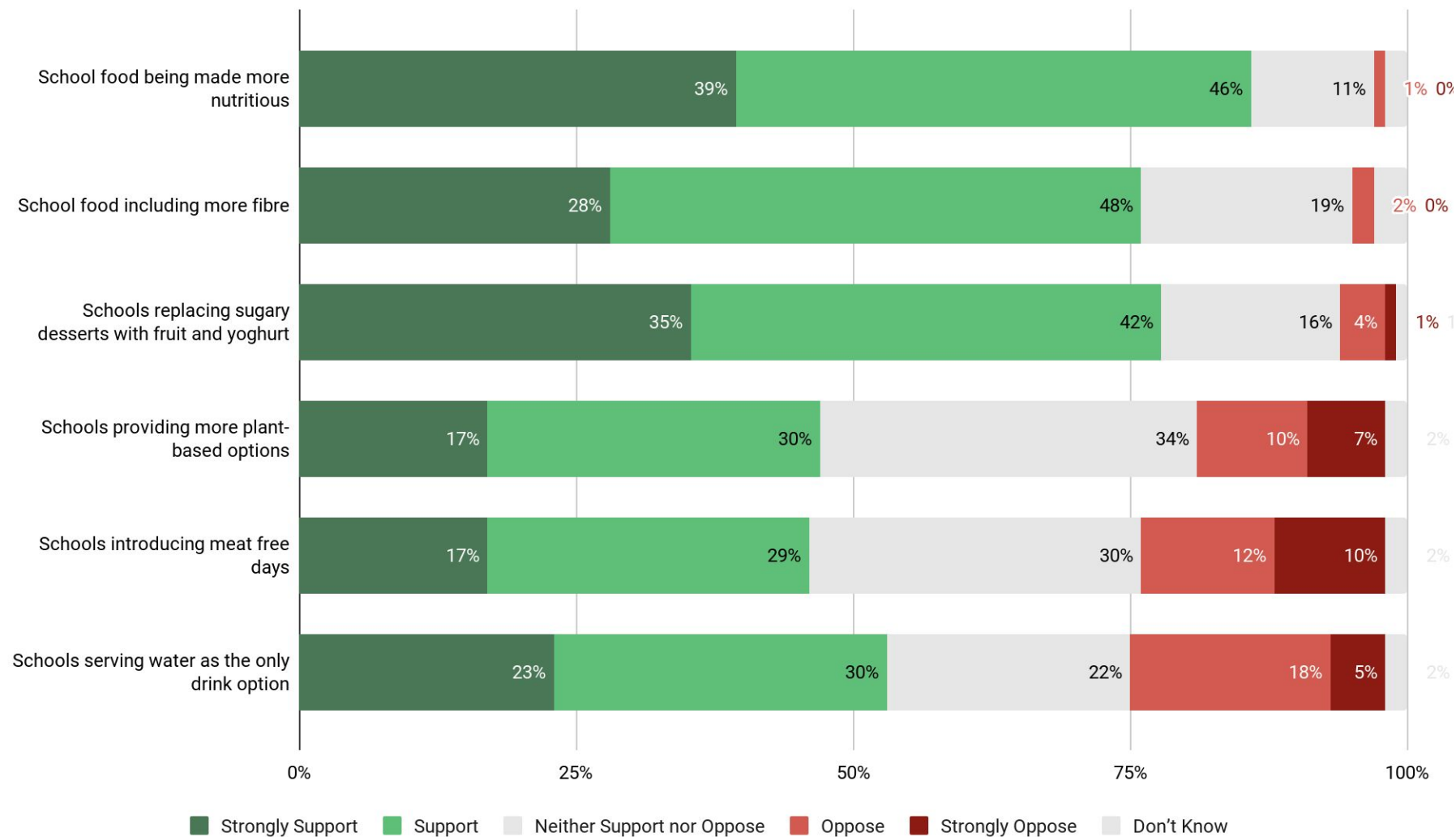


Table 27

Message
Frames



Imagine the Labour Party proposed extending access to free school meals at the next general election, and made the following argument... "We will extend free school meals to improve the nutrition of our children, letting them live healthier and happier lives now and grow into healthy adults." Would this make you more or less likely to vote for the Labour Party in the next general election?

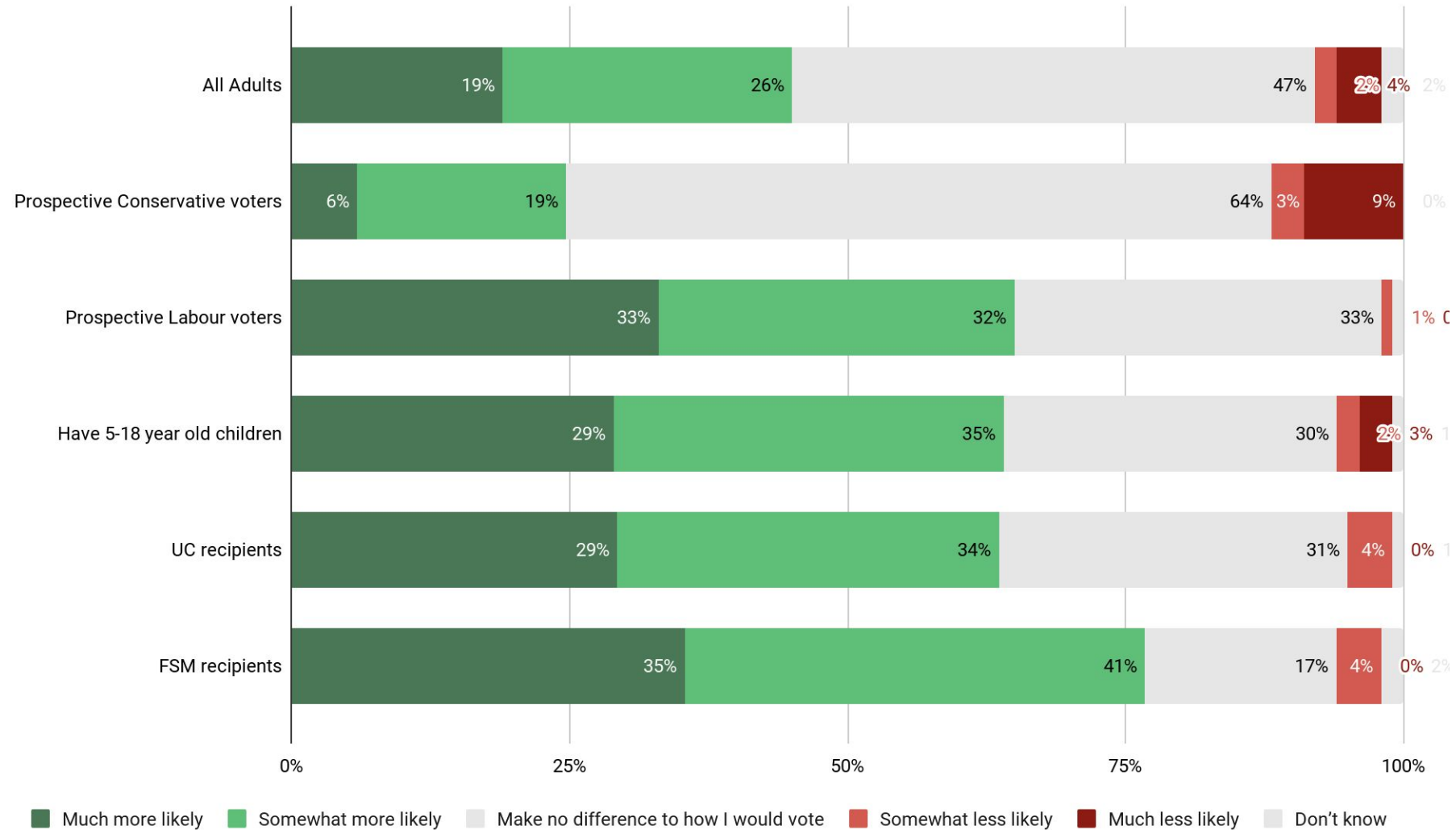


Table 35

Imagine the Labour Party proposed extending access to free school meals at the next general election, and made the following argument... "We will extend free school meals to improve children's health and reduce childhood obesity, so more children grow up to live healthier and happier lives." Would this make you more or less likely to vote for the Labour Party in the next general election?

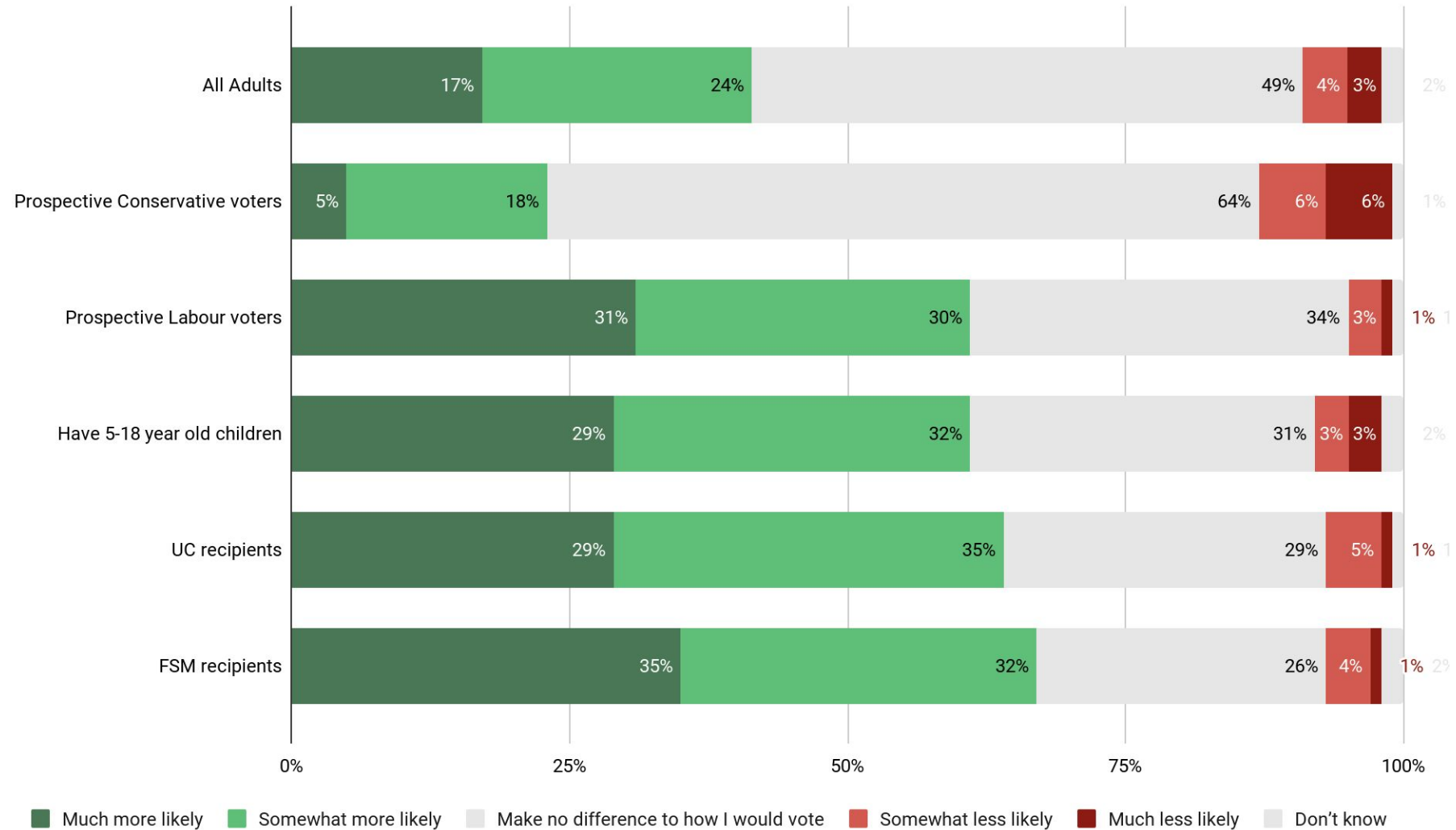


Table 36

Imagine the Labour Party proposed extending access to free school meals at the next general election, and made the following argument..."We will invest in children's futures by extending free school meals to improve their academic progress at school." Would this make you more or less likely to vote for the Labour Party in the next general election?

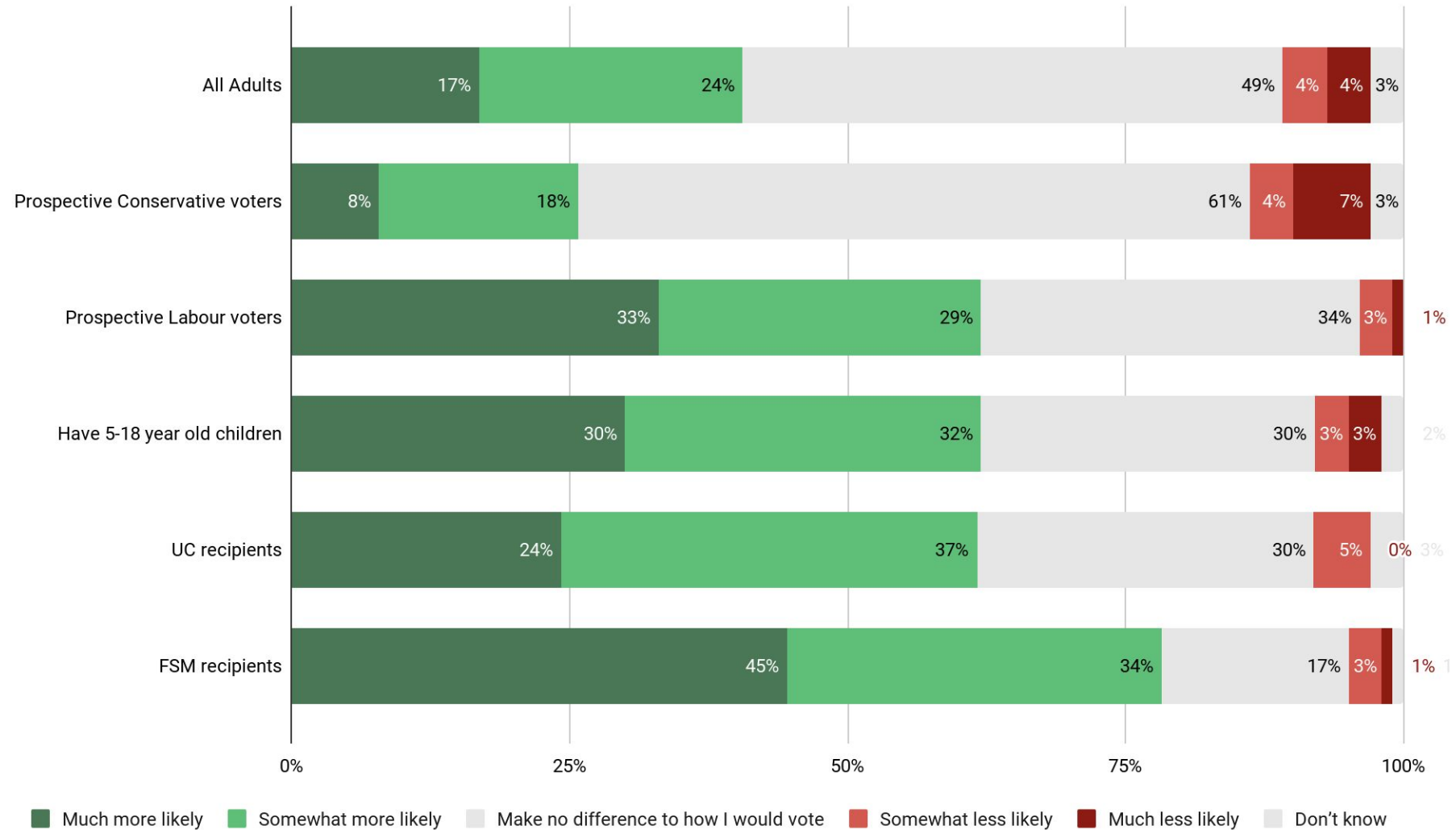


Table 37

Imagine the Labour Party proposed extending access to free school meals at the next general election, and made the following argument... "Research has shown that children who have had a full breakfast and lunch perform better at school. We will extend free school meals to make sure no child is too hungry to learn and improve their educational outcomes." Would this make you more or less likely to vote for the Labour Party in the next general election?

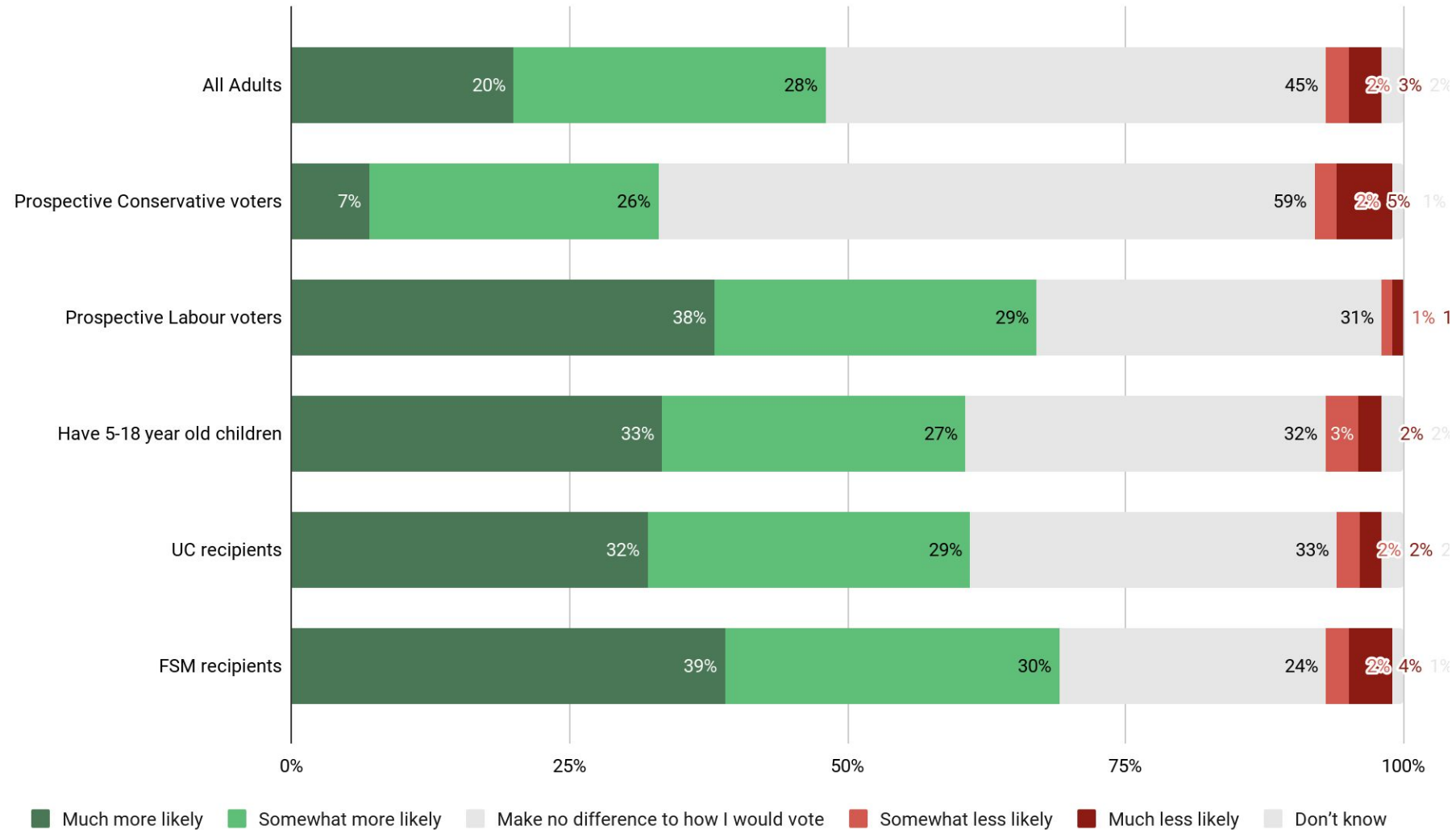


Table 38

Imagine the Labour Party proposed extending access to free school meals at the next general election, and made the following argument..." We will extend free school meals to help families struggling with the cost of living, making sure children get a healthy meal at school and saving parents vital money on their food bill." Would this make you more or less likely to vote for the Labour Party in the next general election?

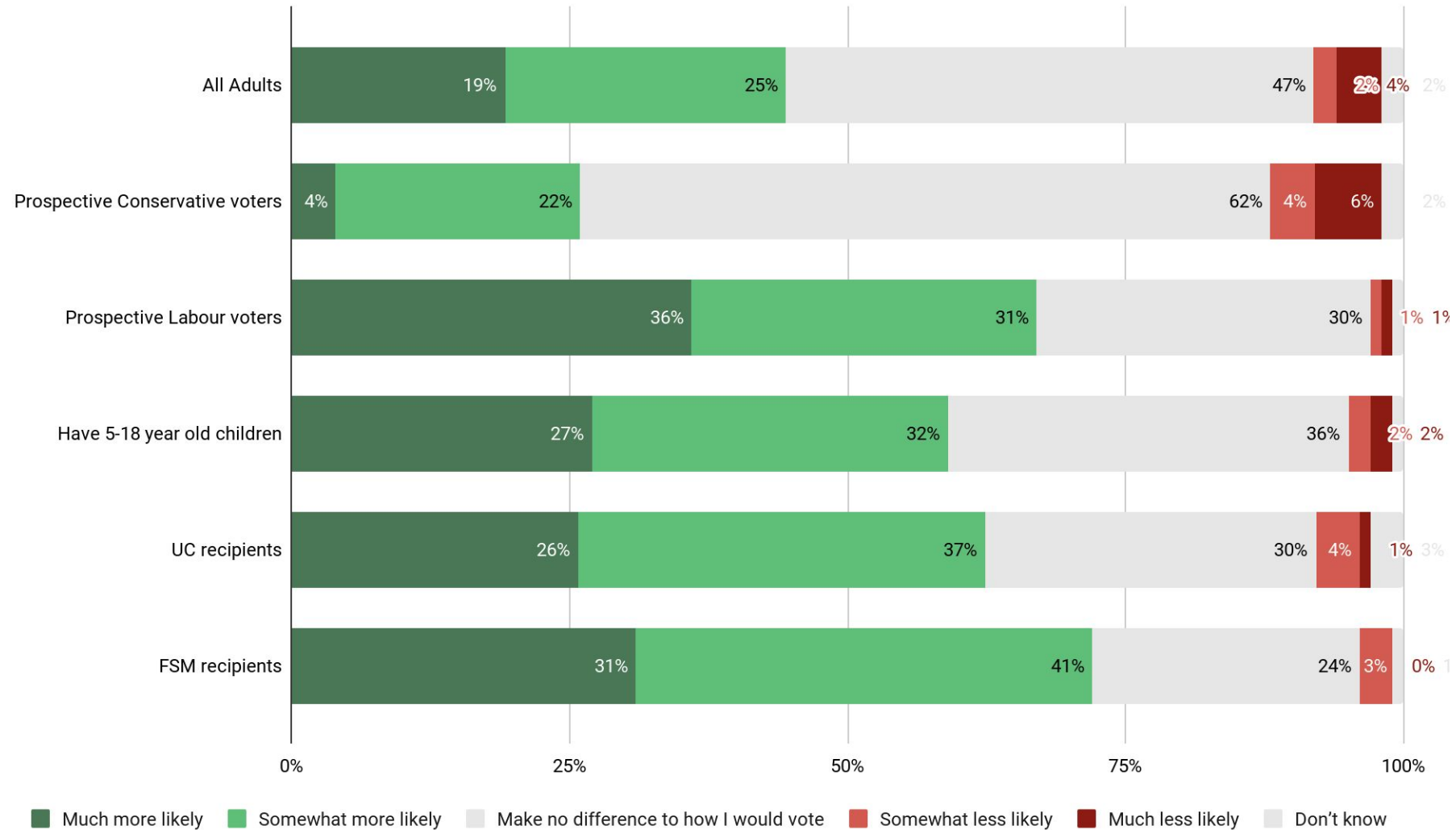


Table 39

Imagine the Labour Party proposed extending access to free school meals at the next general election, and made the following argument... "We will extend free school meals to make sure that no child in this country goes hungry regardless of their background and that every child has equal opportunity to learn, grow and thrive." Would this make you more or less likely to vote for the Labour Party in the next general election?

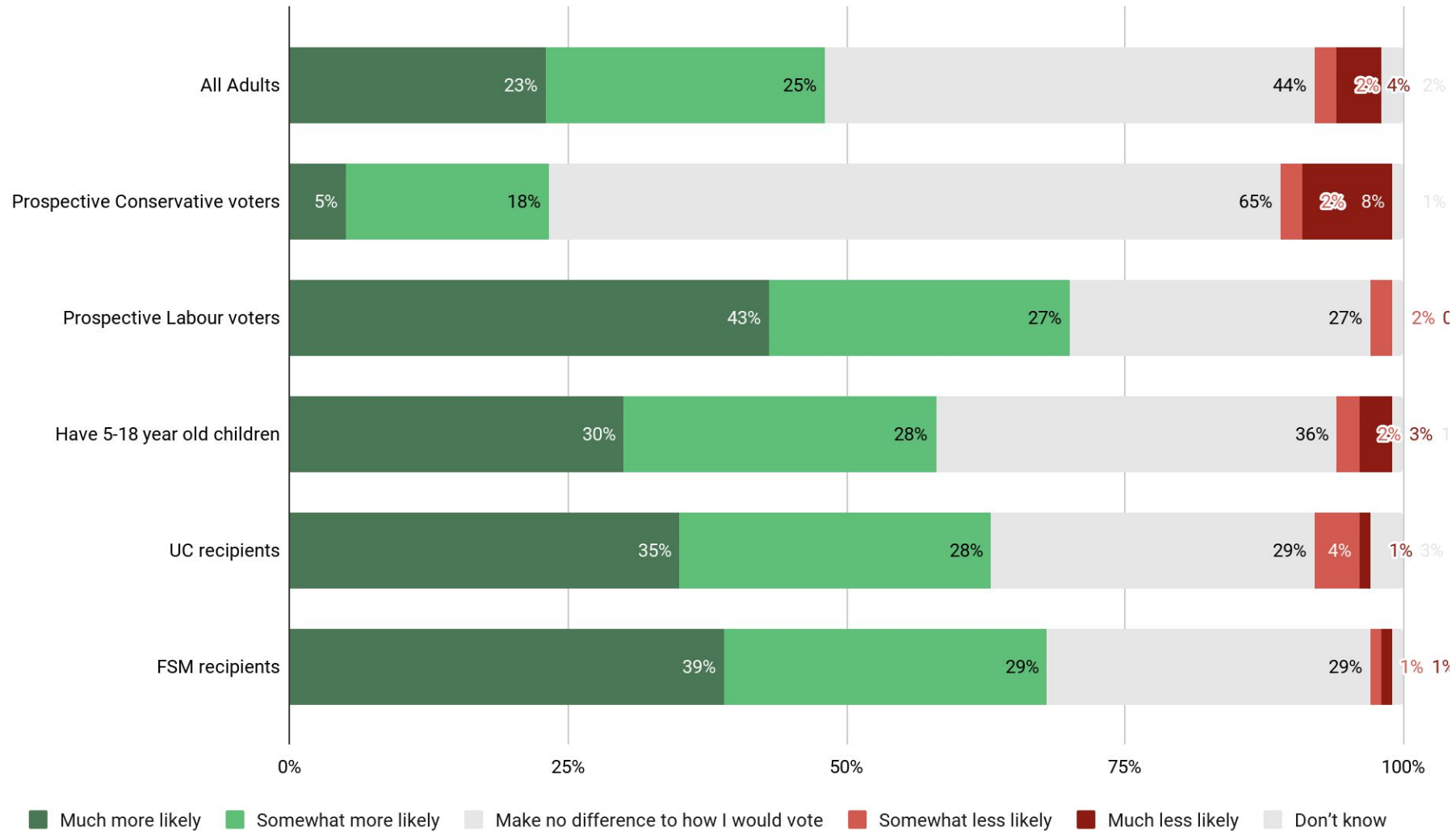


Table 40

Imagine the Labour Party proposed extending access to free school meals at the next general election, and made the following argument... "We will extend free school meals to end the stigma associated with receiving free school meals." Would this make you more or less likely to vote for the Labour Party in the next general election?

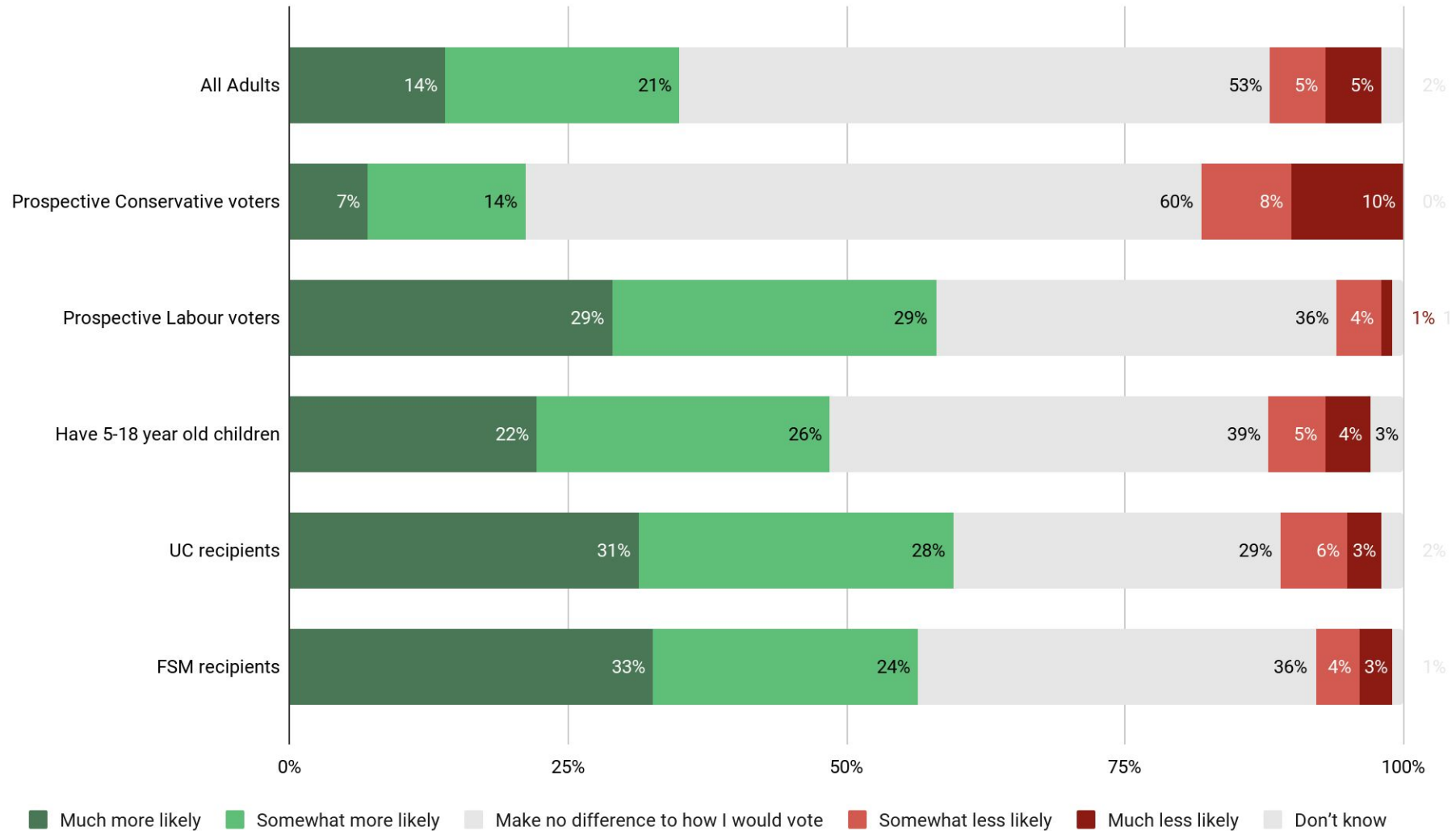


Table 41

Imagine the Labour Party proposed extending access to free school meals at the next general election, and made the following argument... "We will extend free school meals to improve children's health and attainment, as well as supporting local businesses by procuring more quality school food locally." Would this make you more or less likely to vote for the Labour Party in the next general election?

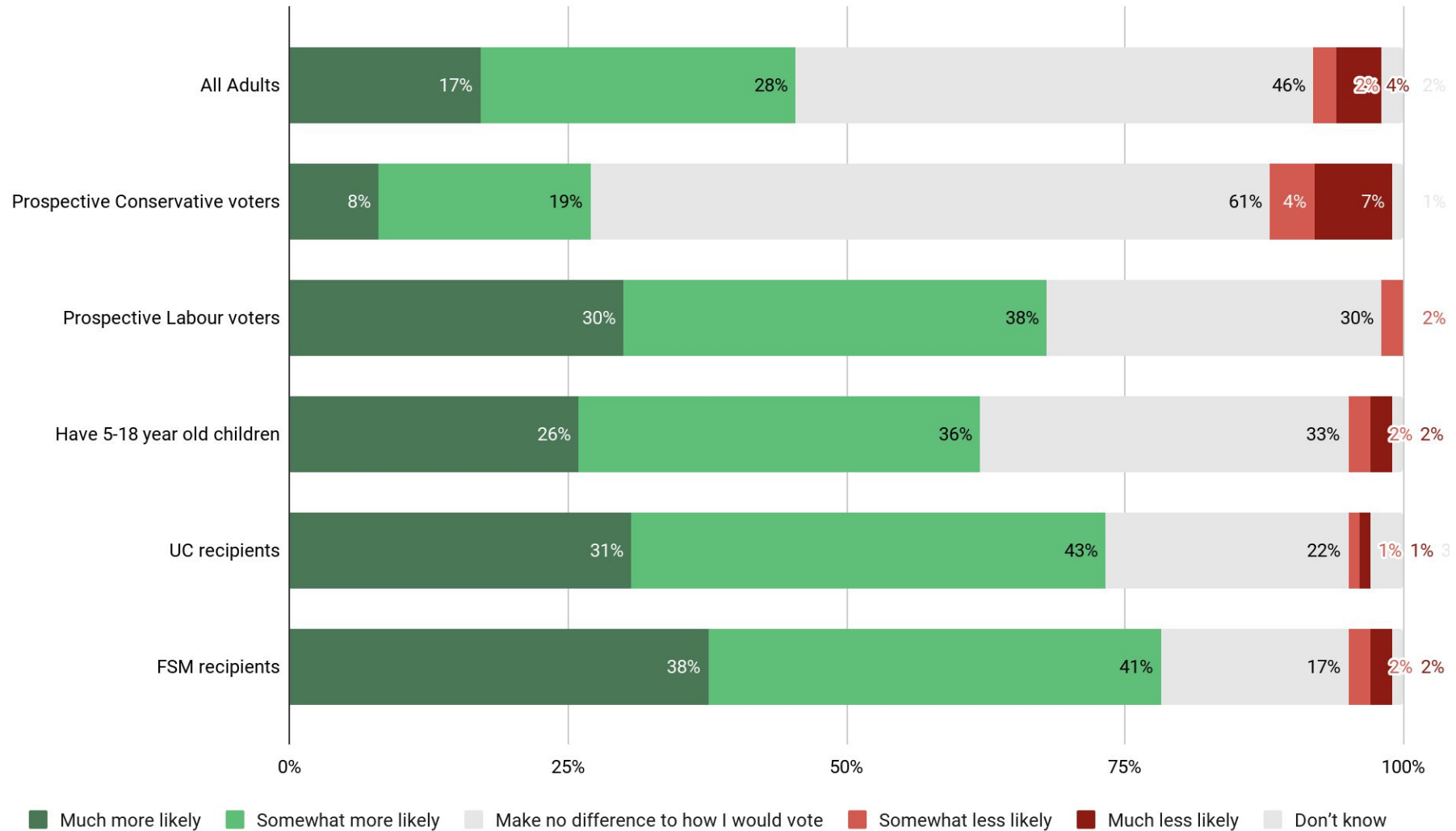


Table 42

And to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following arguments?

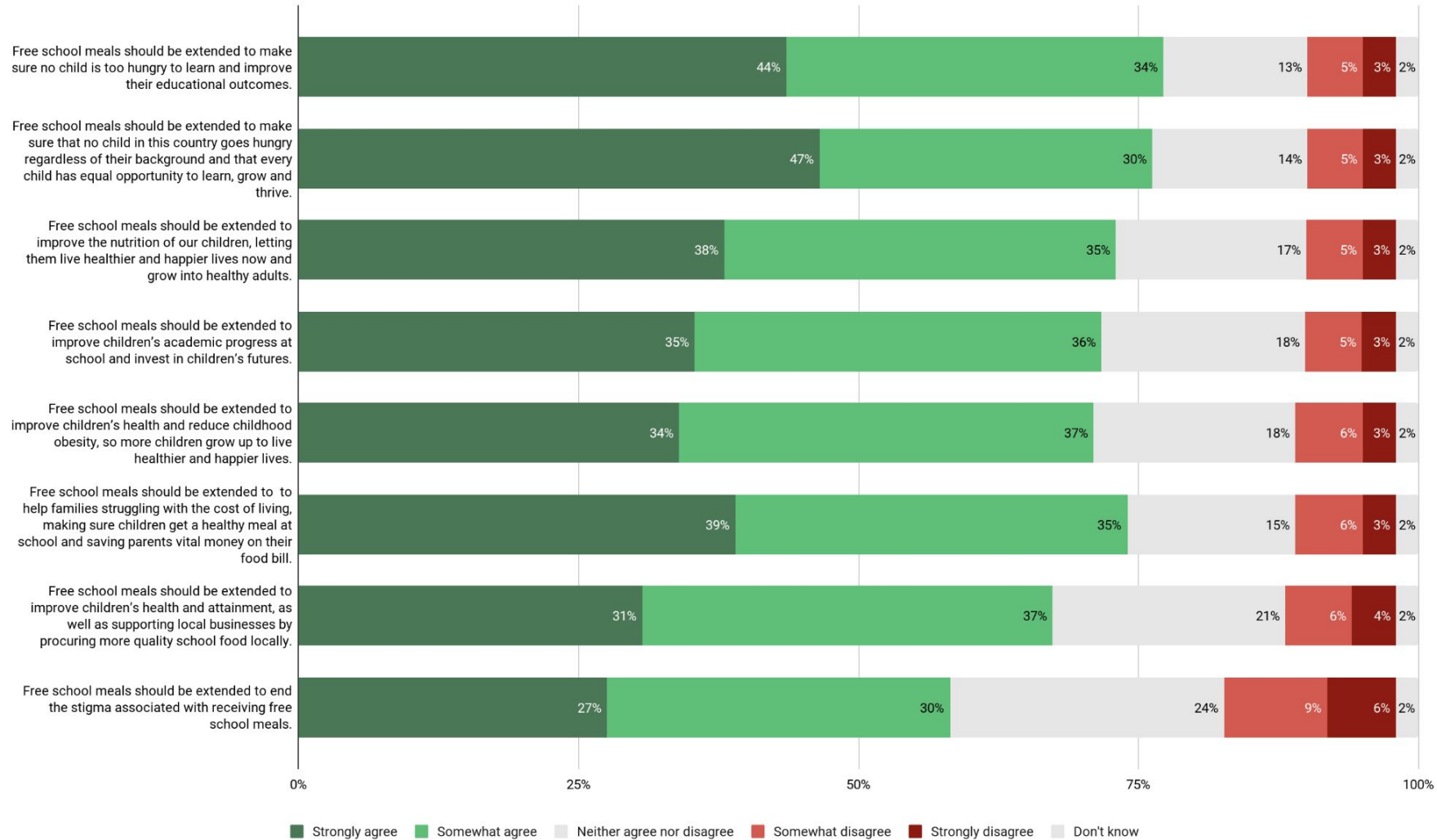
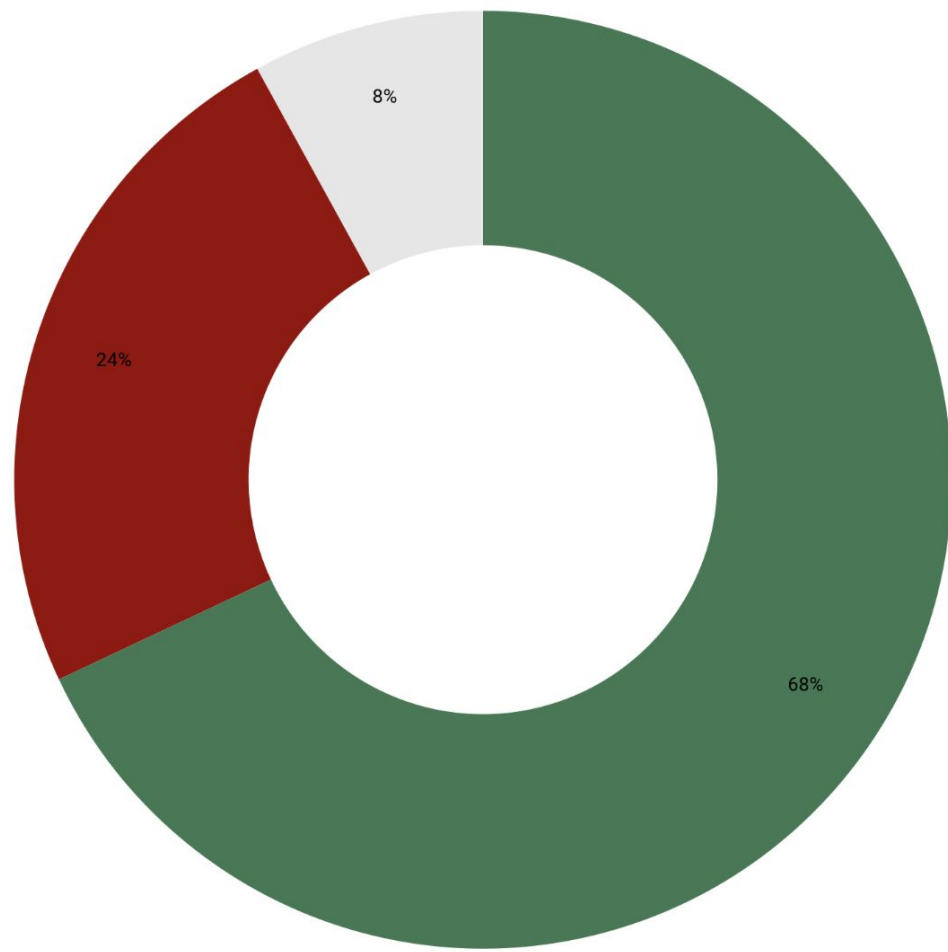


Table 43

Poverty,
Hardship, and
Cost of Living
Crisis

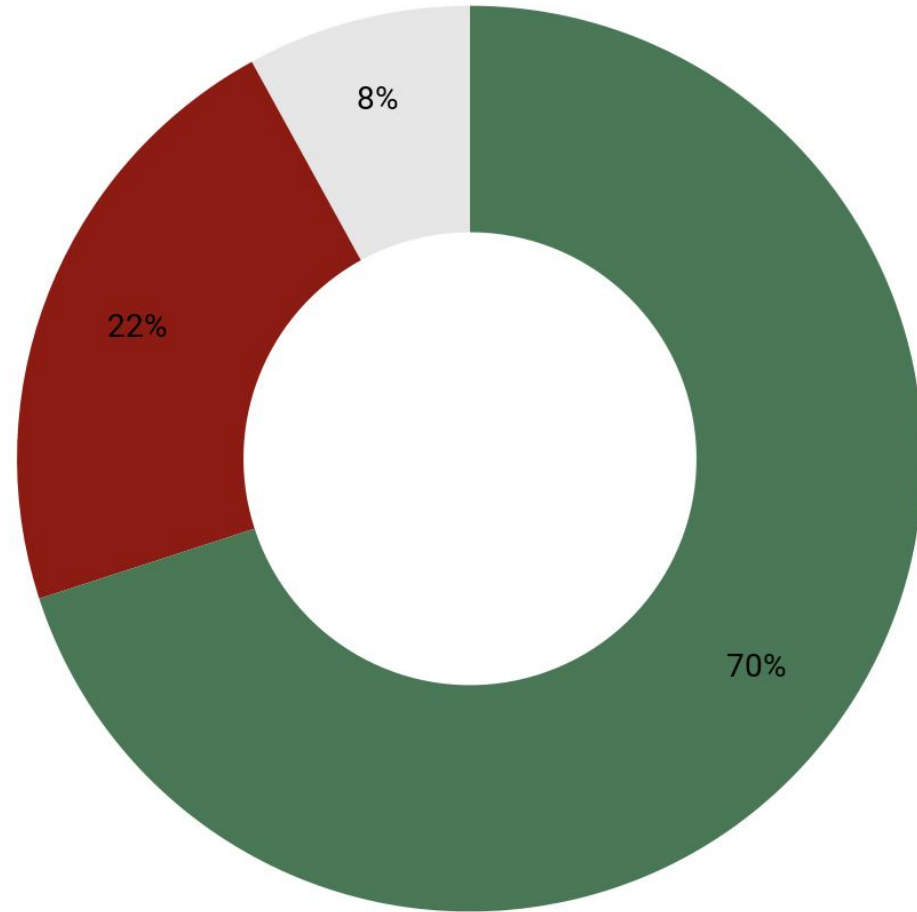


Which of the following comes closest to your view?



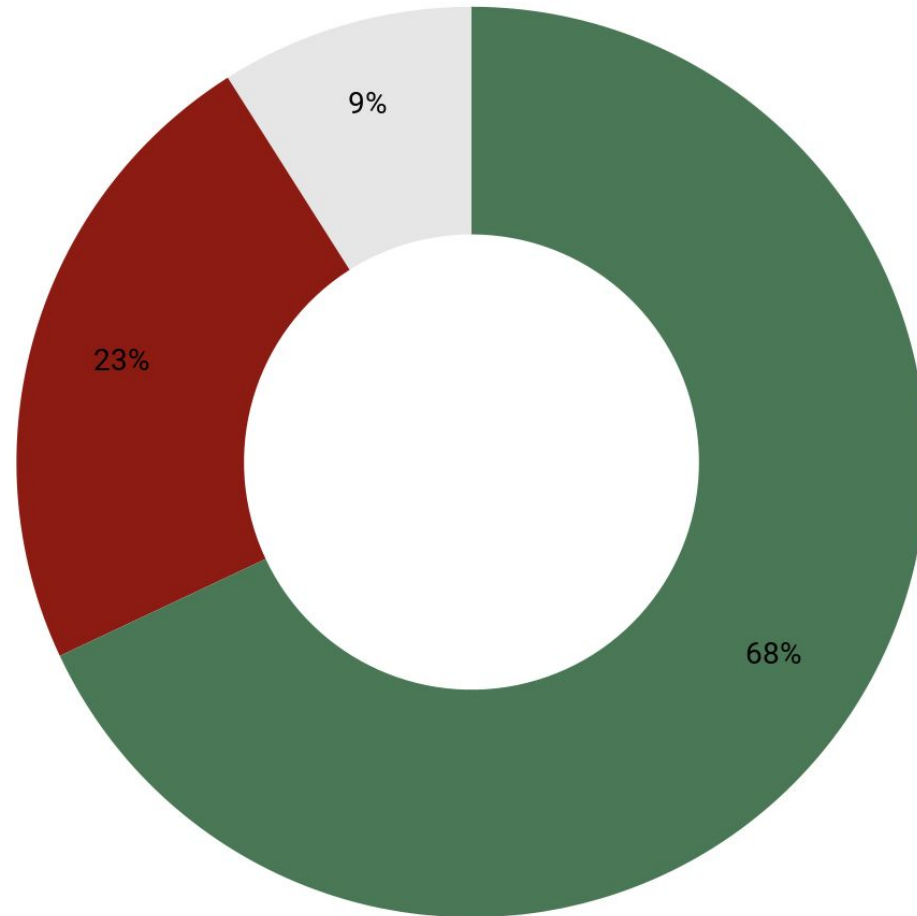
- Given the health benefits of providing free school meals, it is a good use of government spending to expand Free School Meal provision
- There are better uses for government spending than expanding Free School Meal provision
- Don't know

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



- Given the number of children growing up in hardship, it is a good use of government spending to expand Free School Meal provision
- There are better uses for government spending than expanding Free School Meal provision
- Don't know

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



- Given the benefits having a good meal have for children's education, it is a good use of government spending to expand Free School Meal provision
- There are better uses for government spending than expanding Free School Meal provision
- Don't know

In your view, which of the following would be the best way for the Government to support families during the cost of living crisis? Select up to three of the following.

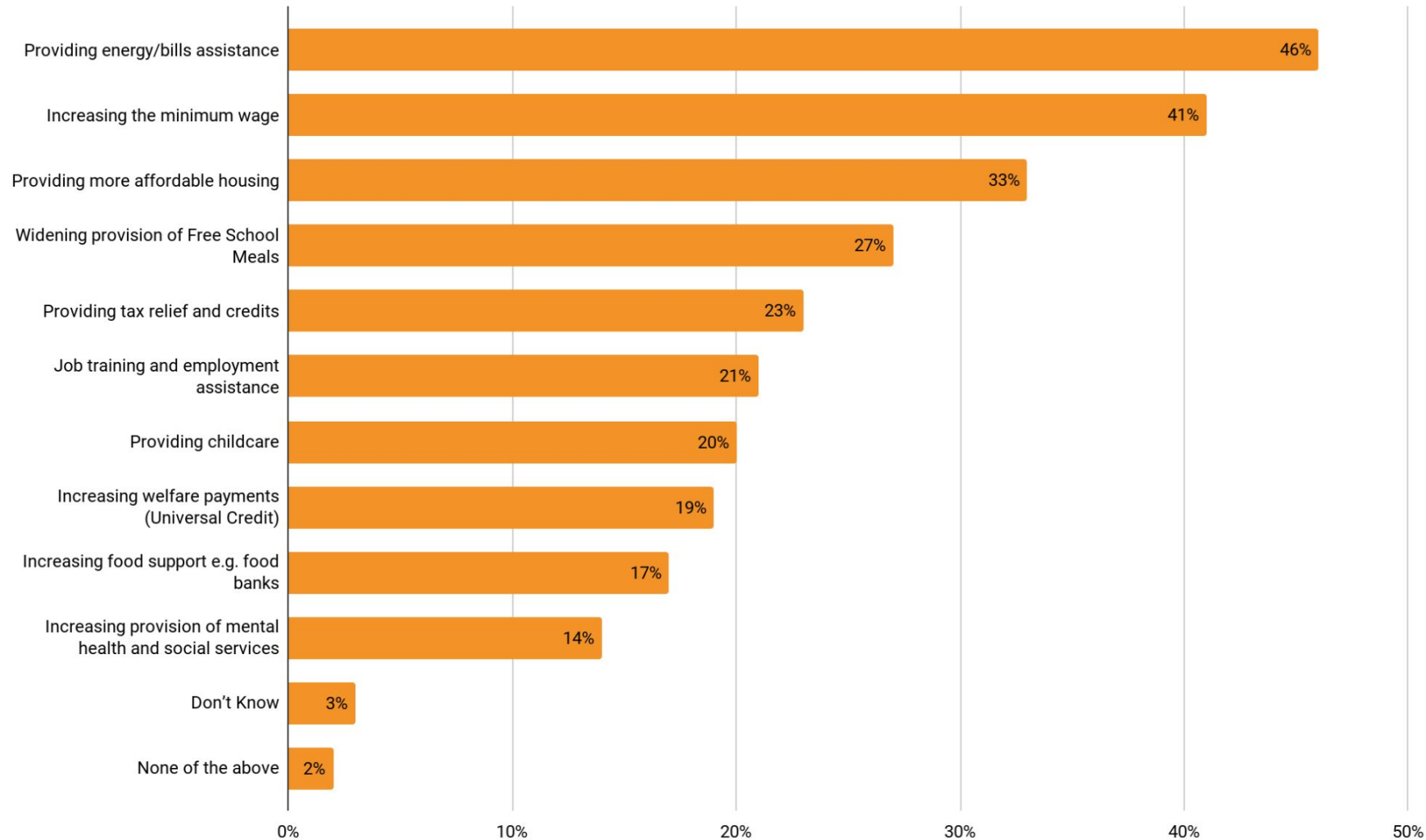


Table 55

In your view, which of the following would be the best way for the Government to improve children's health and address childhood obesity in the UK? Select up to three of the following.

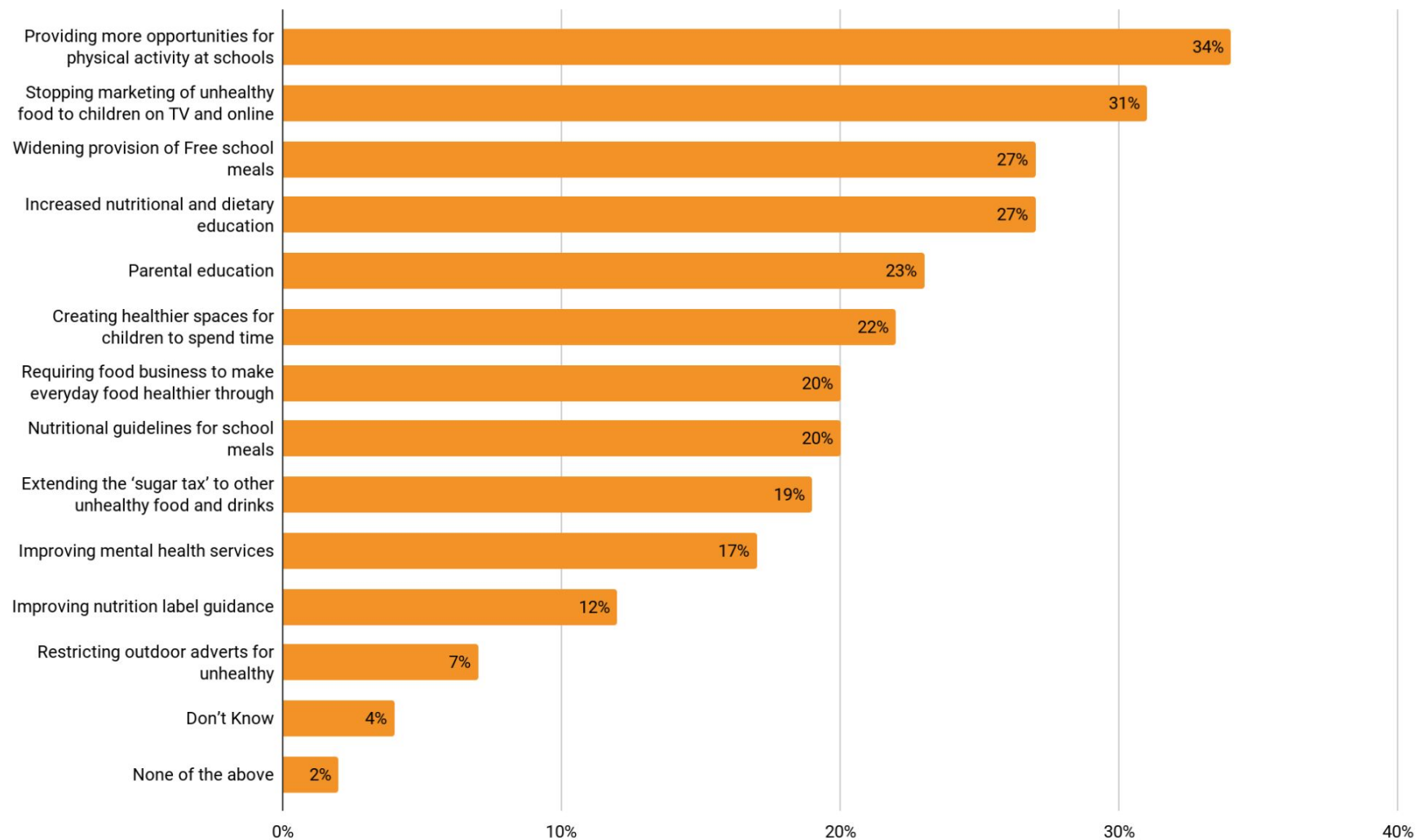


Table 56

Benefits of Free School Meals



Which of the following would you think of as long-term benefits of free school meals to the children who receive them, if any? Select any that apply.

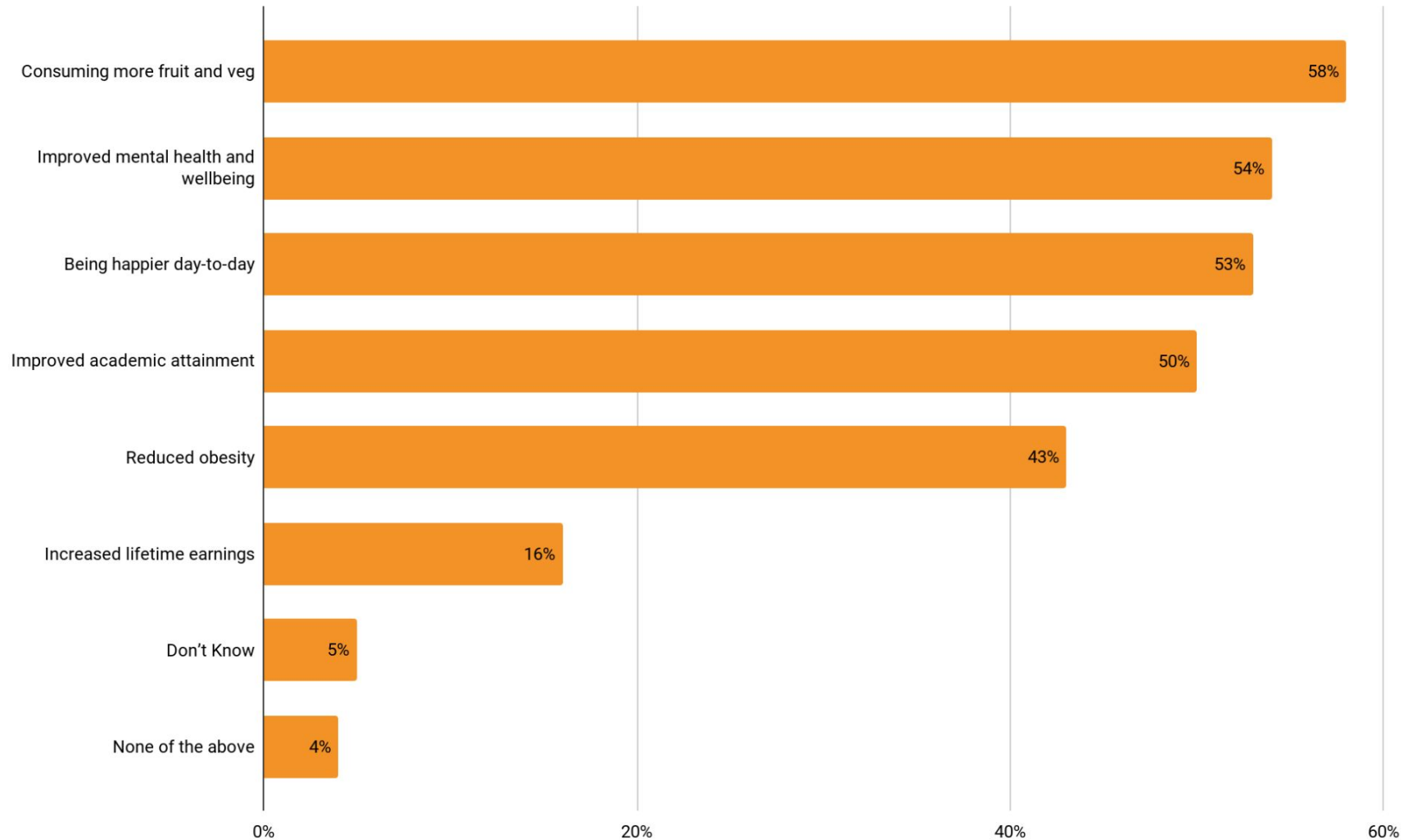


Table 57

Which of the following would you think of as long-term benefits of free school meals to UK society? Select any that apply.

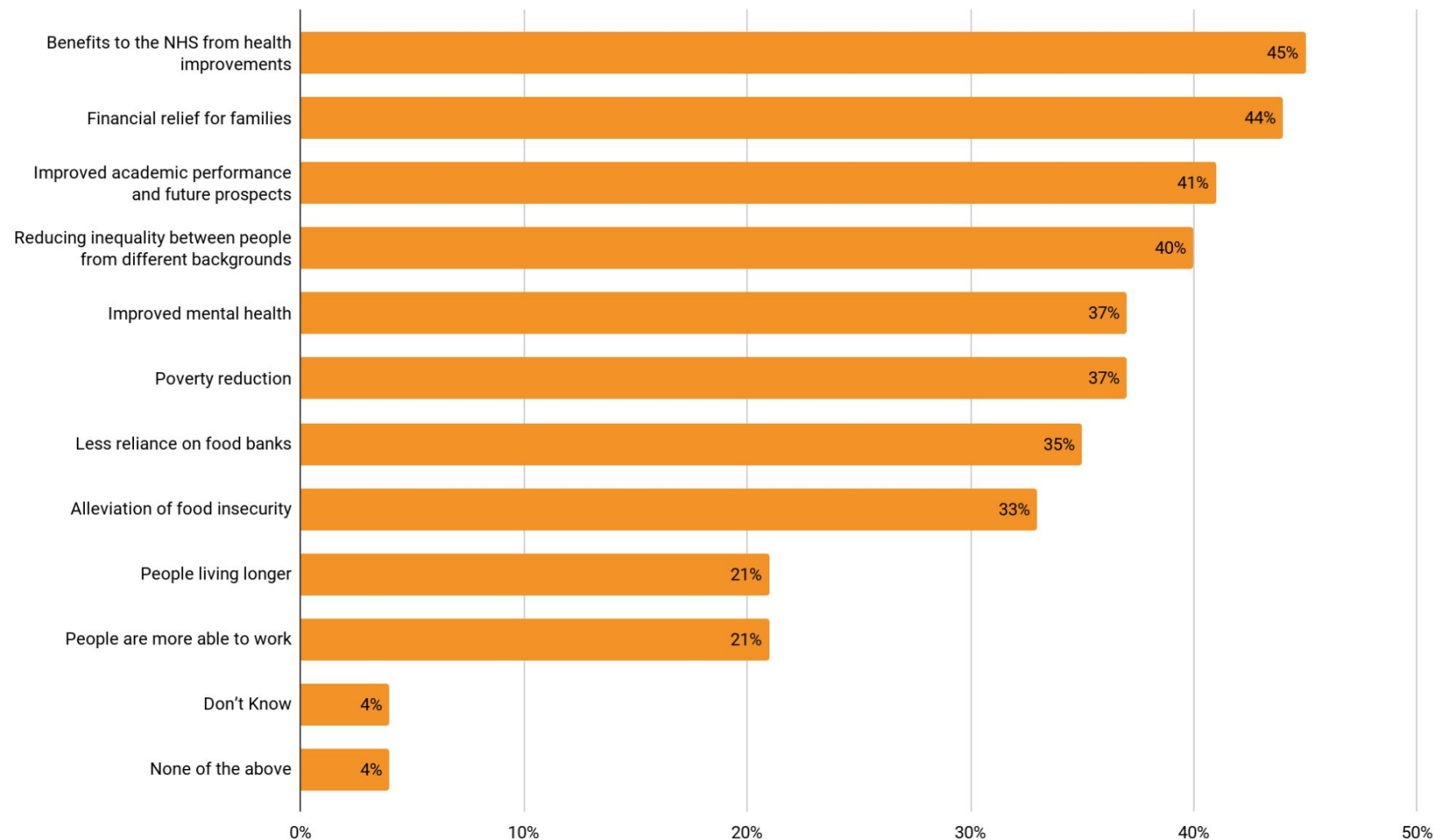


Table 58

Proposed
Extensions of
Free School
Meal
provision



Would you support or oppose a policy to immediately extend Free School Meals to Children from families on low incomes?

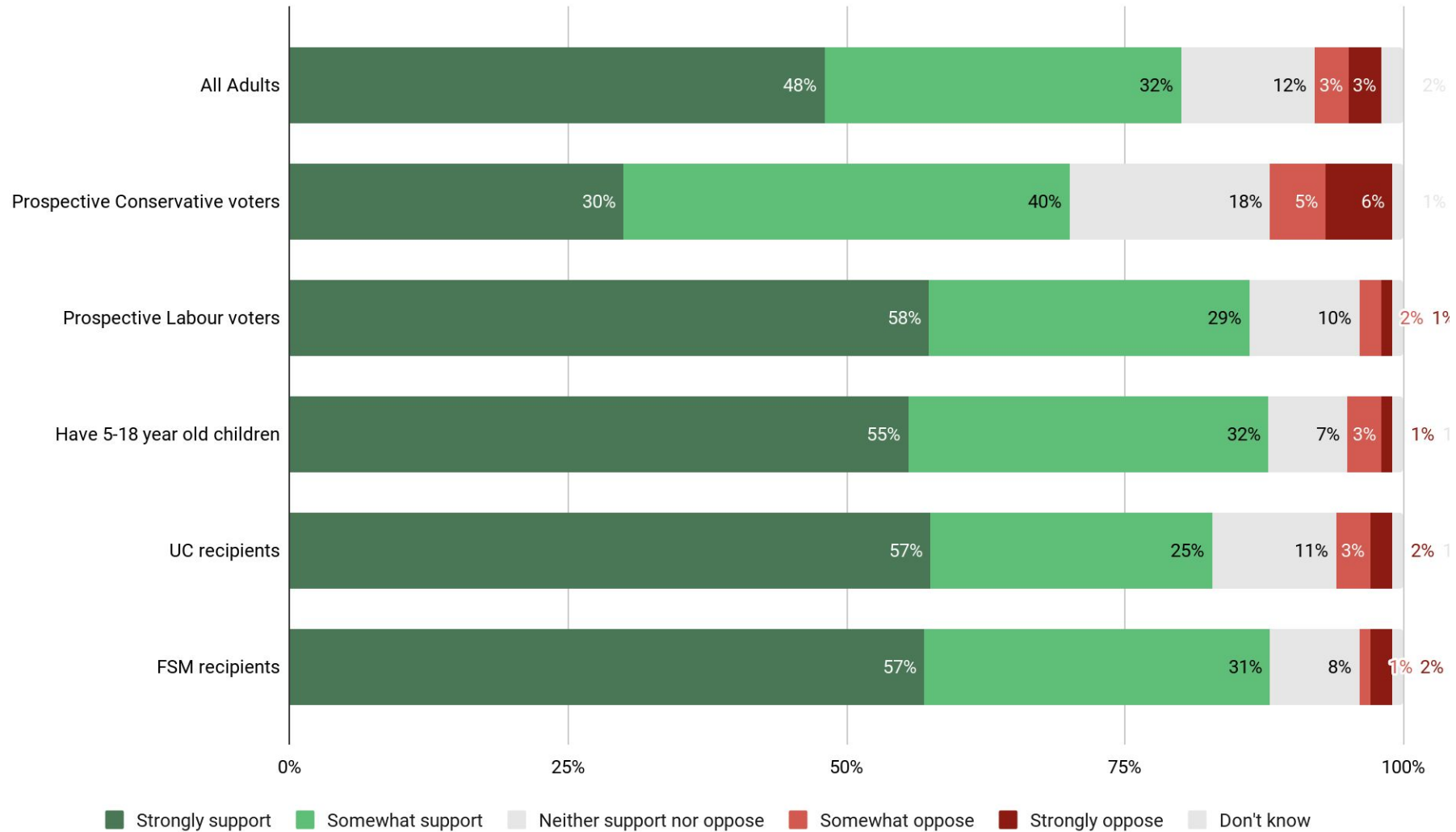


Table 59

Would you support or oppose a policy to immediately extend Free School Meals to Children in poverty?

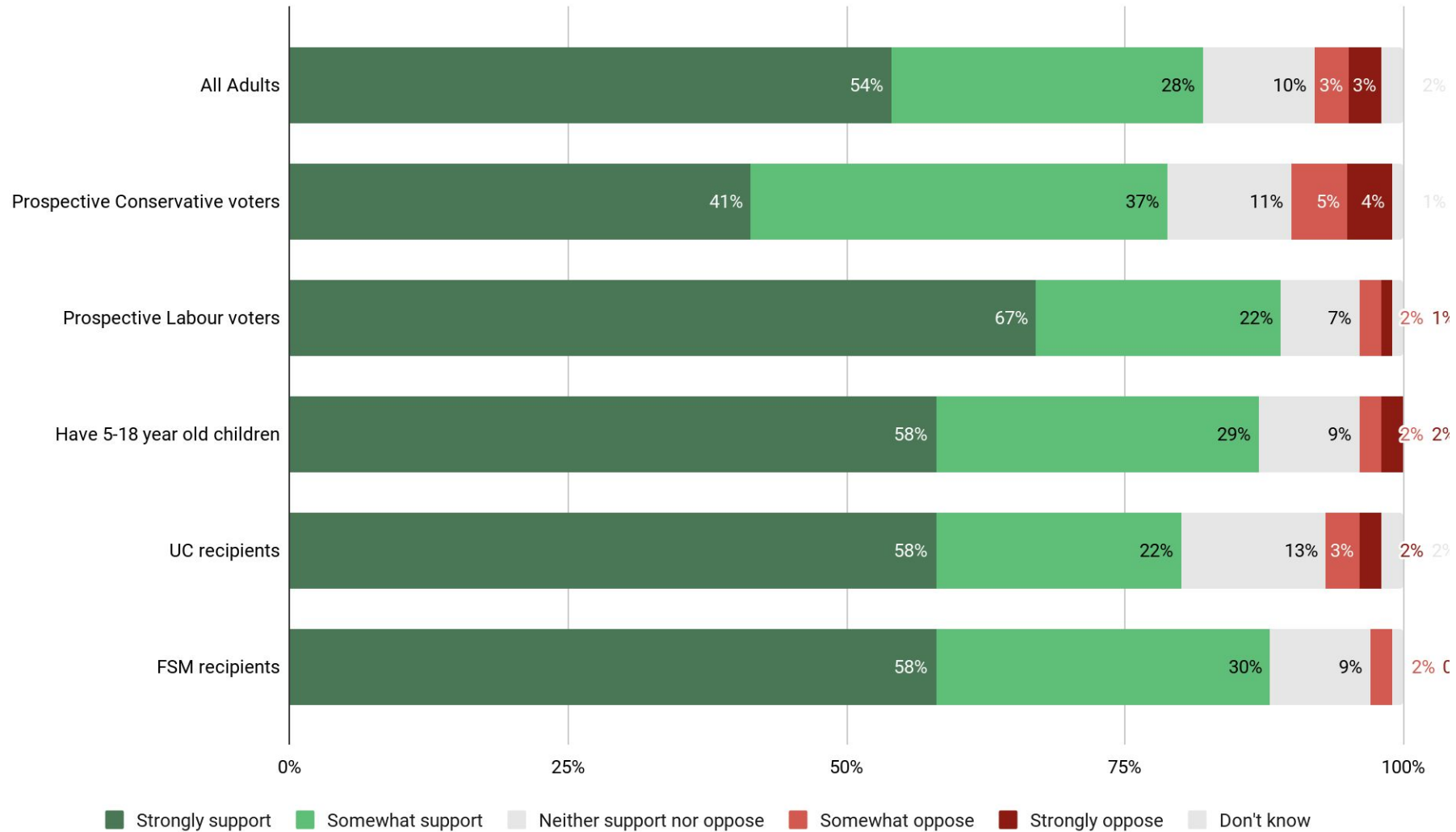


Table 60

Would you support or oppose a policy to immediately extend Free School Meals to Children from families which are struggling with the rising cost of living?

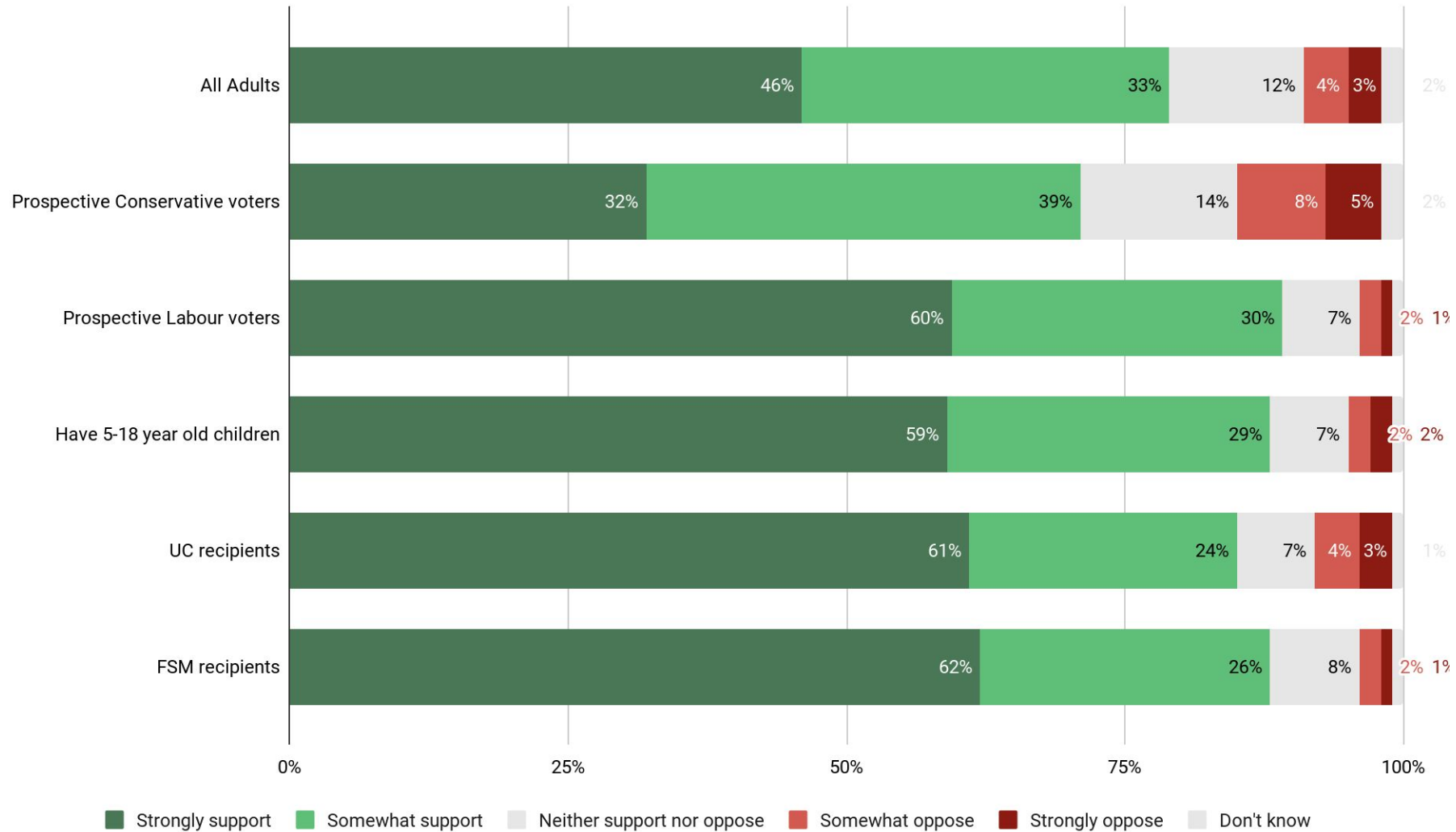


Table 61

Would you support or oppose a policy to immediately extend Free School Meals to Children from families experiencing hardship?

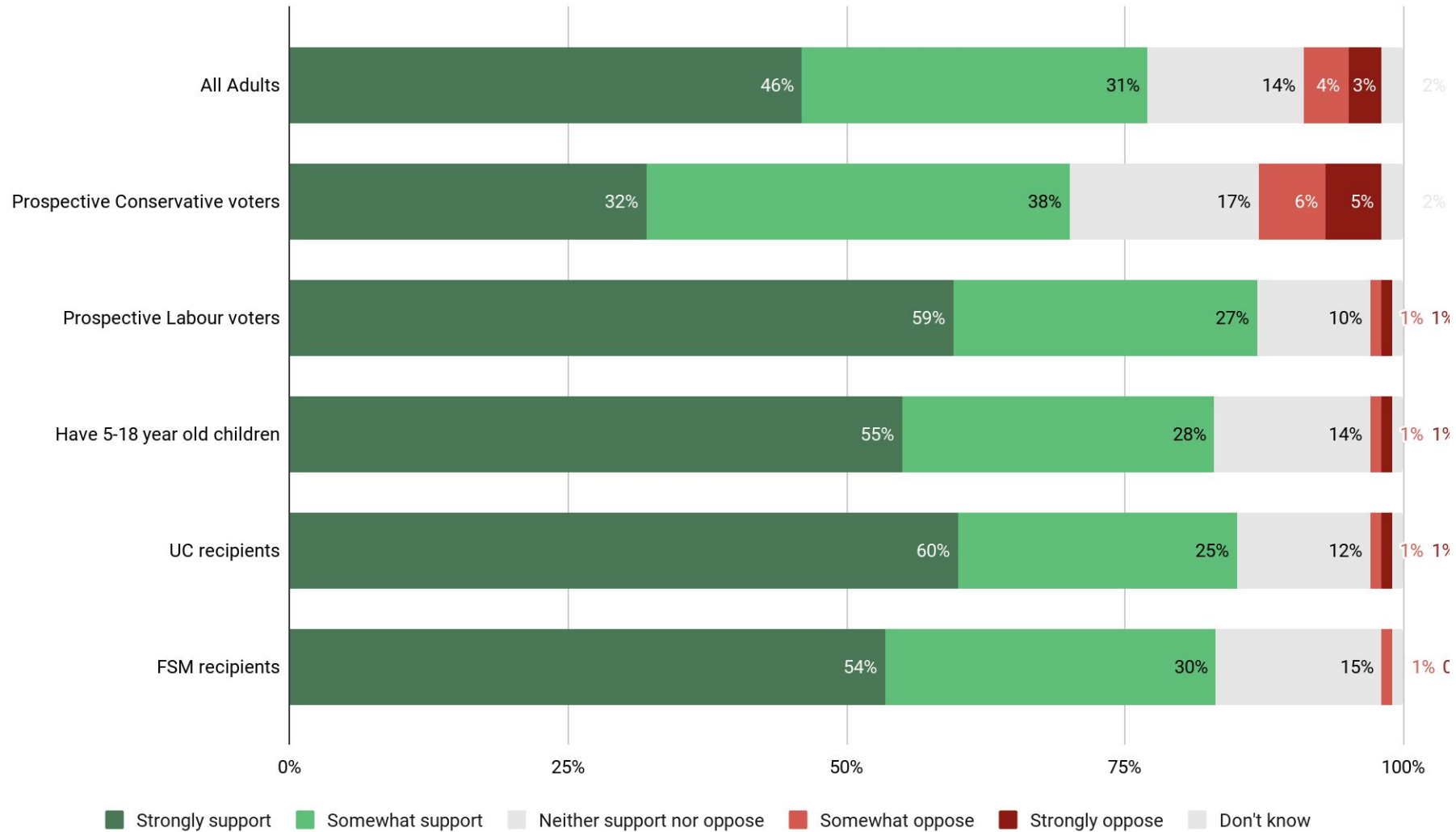


Table 62

Would you support or oppose a policy to immediately extend Free School Meals to Children from families on Universal Credit?

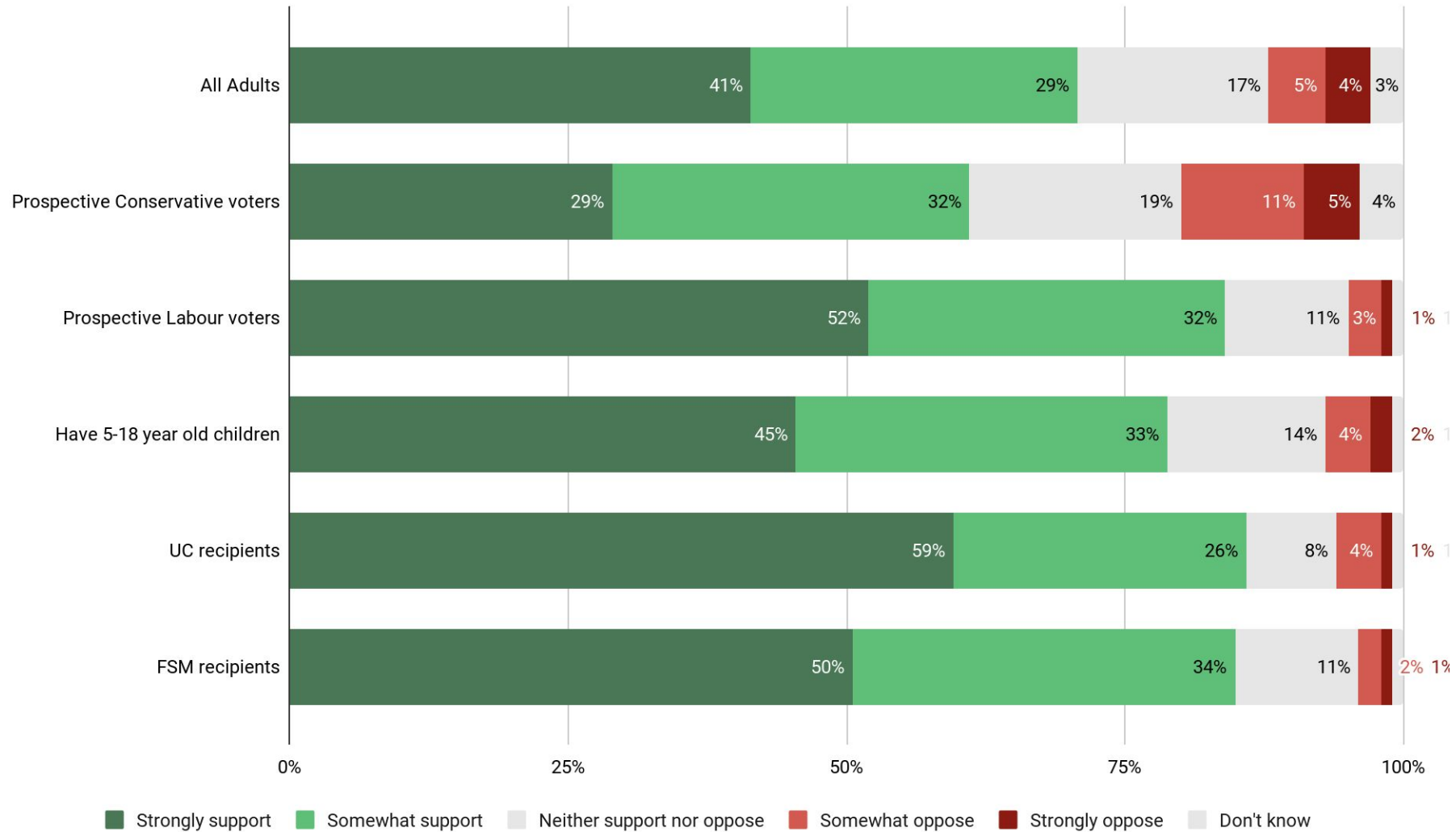


Table 63

Would you support or oppose a policy to immediately extend Free School Meals to Children from families who cannot afford the essentials?

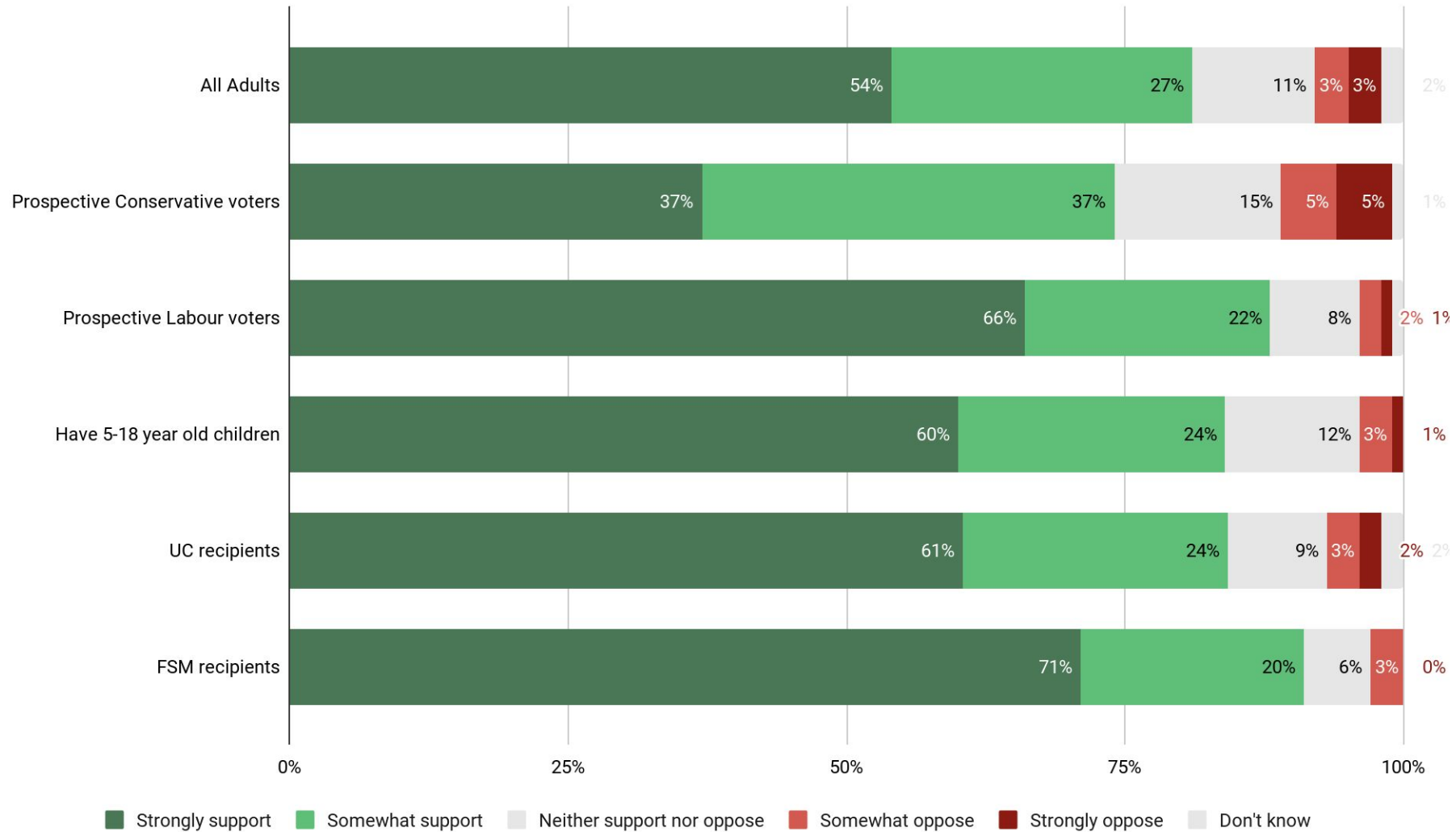


Table 64

Would you support or oppose a policy to immediately extend Free School Meals to Children from families which are struggling to get by?

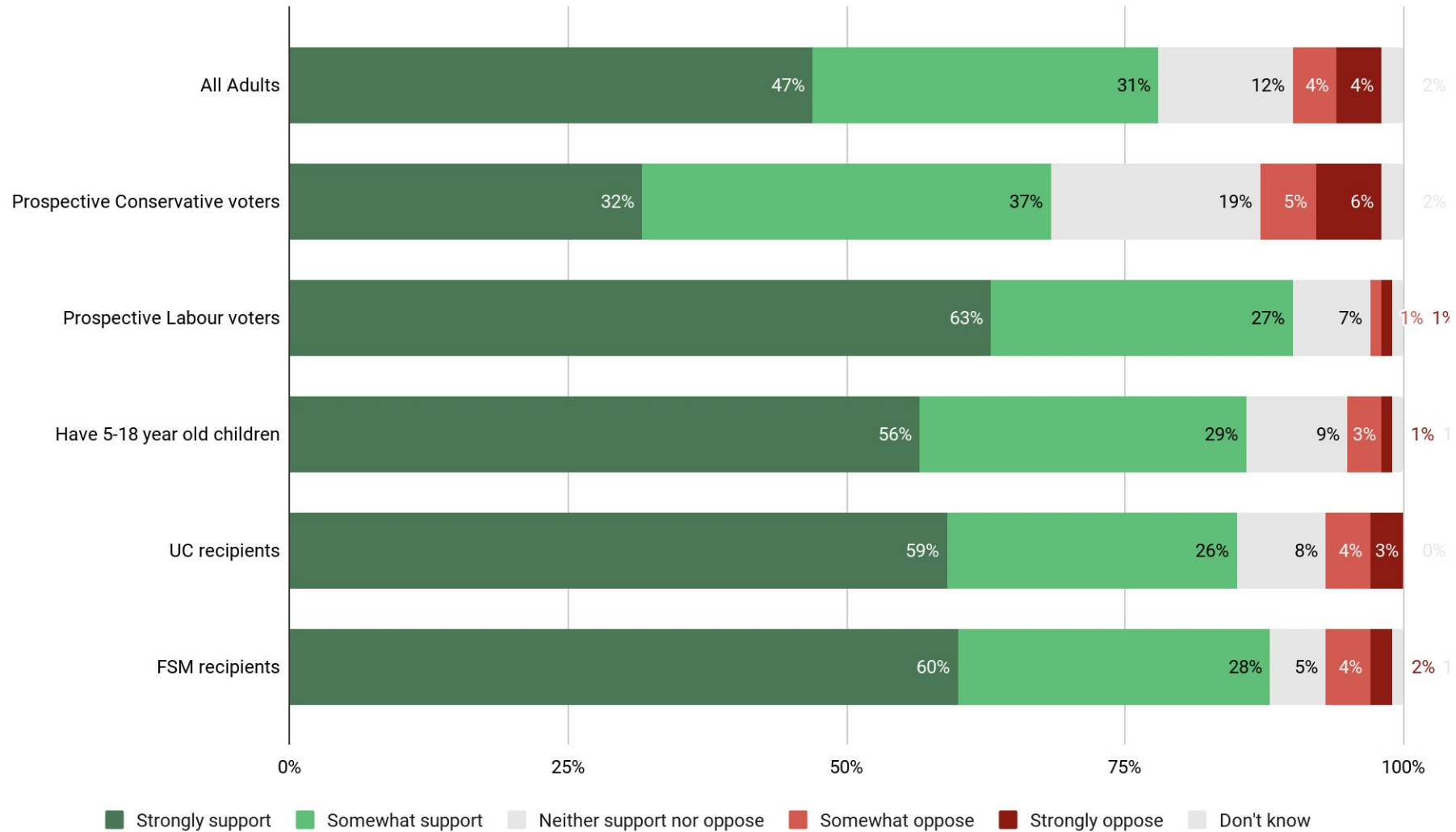


Table 65

Imagine a political party announced they would be expanding Free School Meals. For each of the following, please indicate whether you feel it is a good description of who should receive Free School Meals, or too broad or specific?

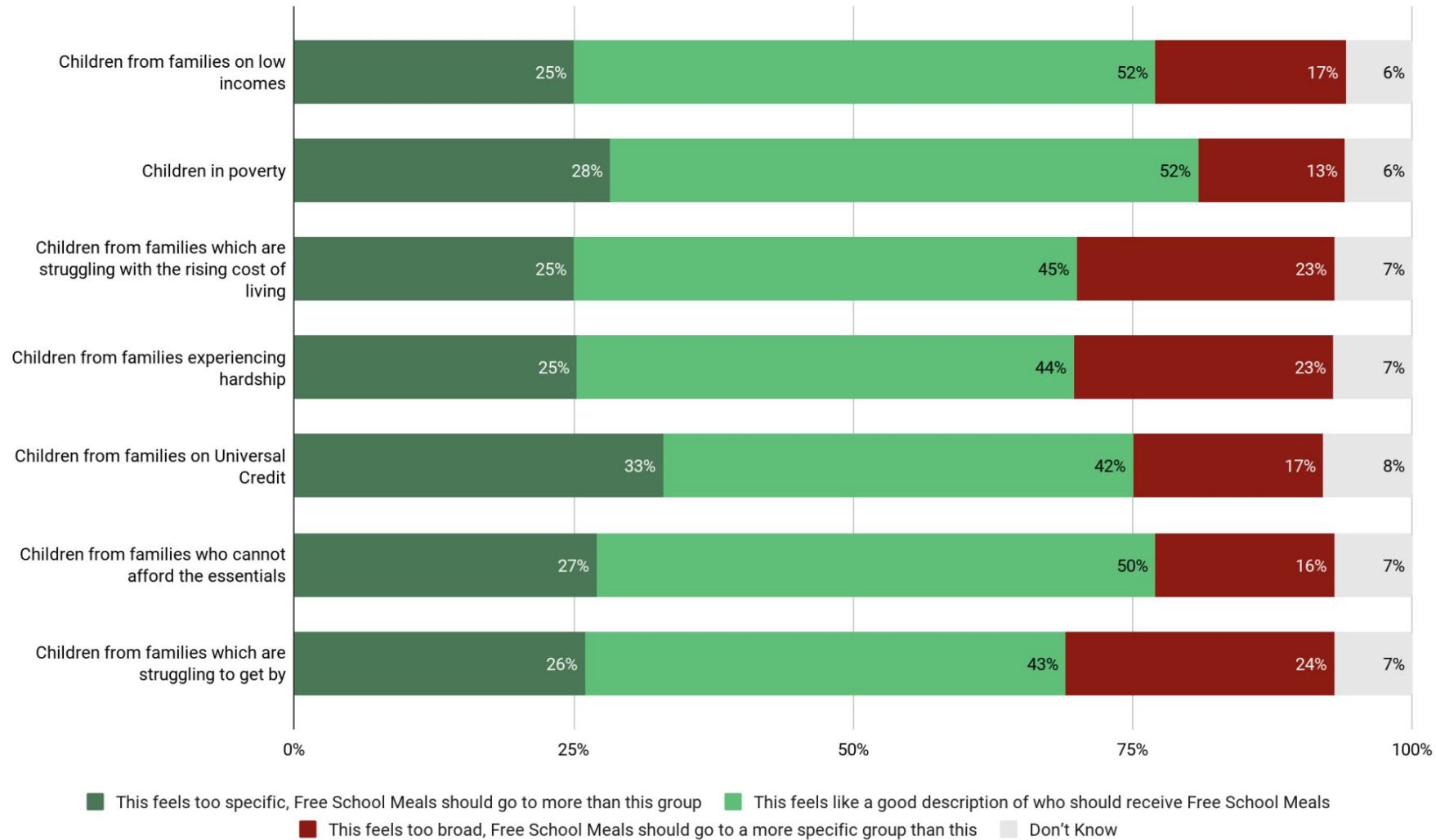


Table 66

Now for each of the following, please indicate if you think your own children would be eligible to receive Free School Meals?

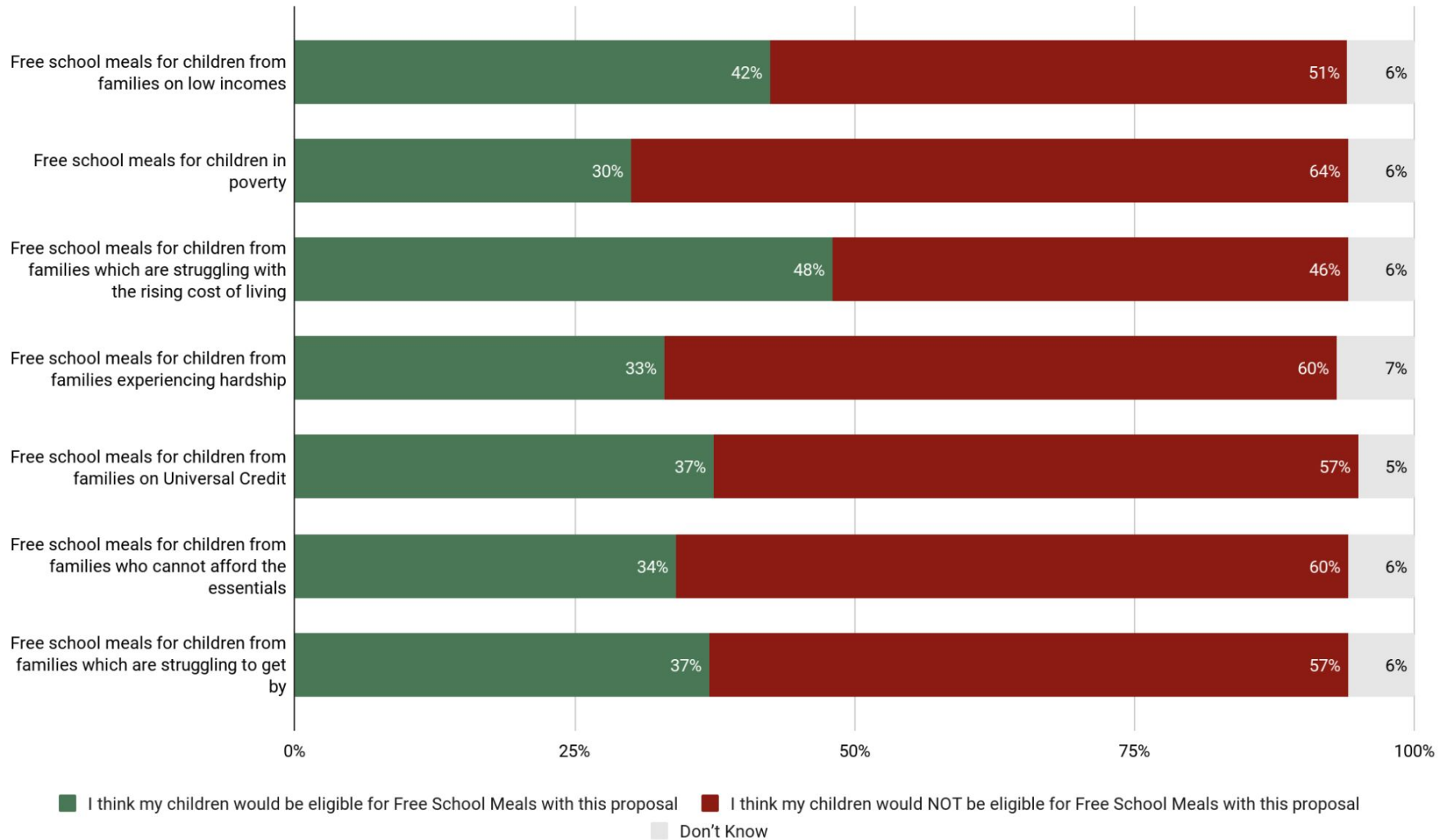


Table 74

Specific policy proposals



Would you support or oppose the following? Extending Free School Meals to all children whose families receive Universal Credit

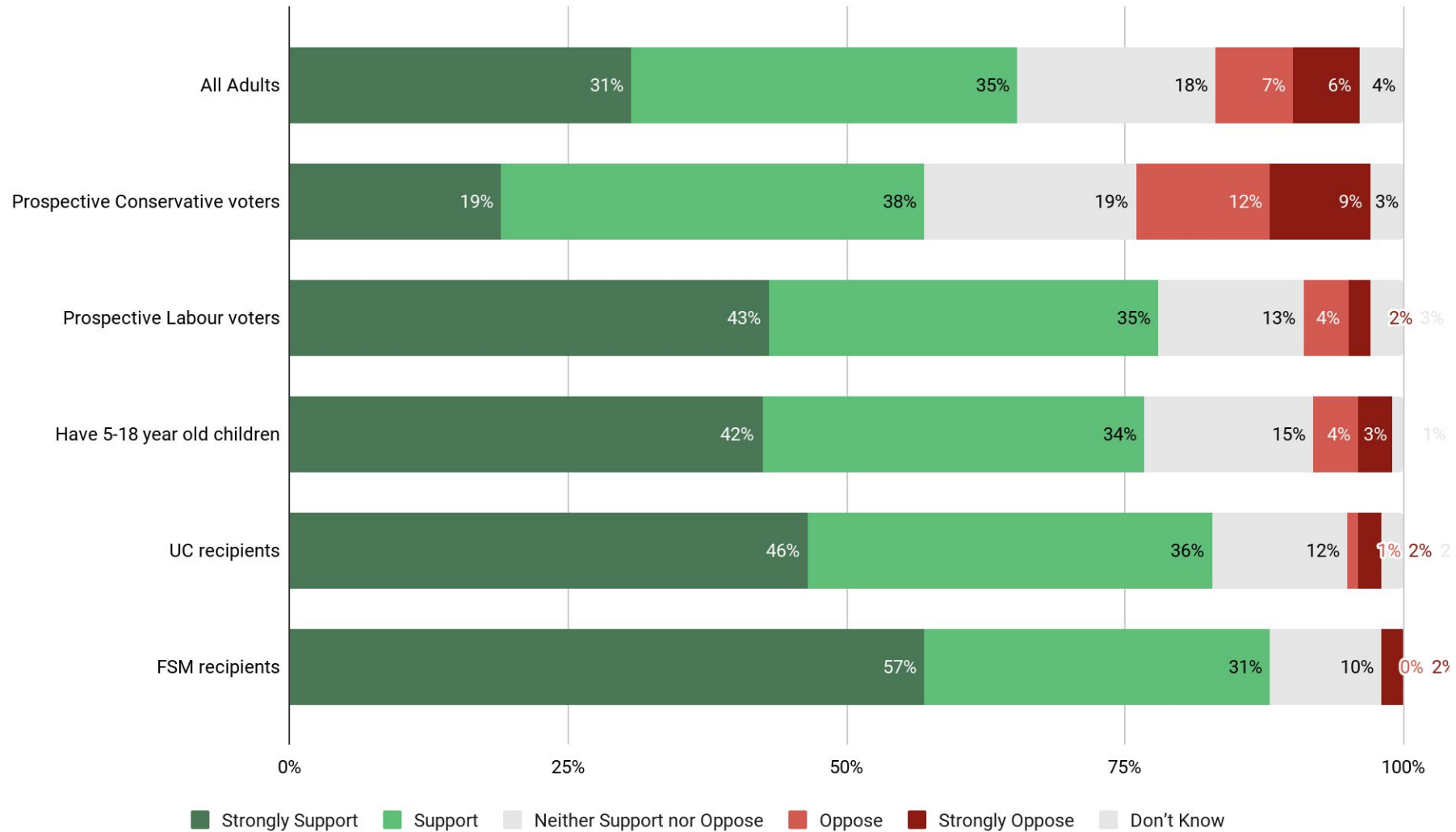


Table 82

Would you support or oppose the following? Extending Free School Meals to all children in primary and secondary education

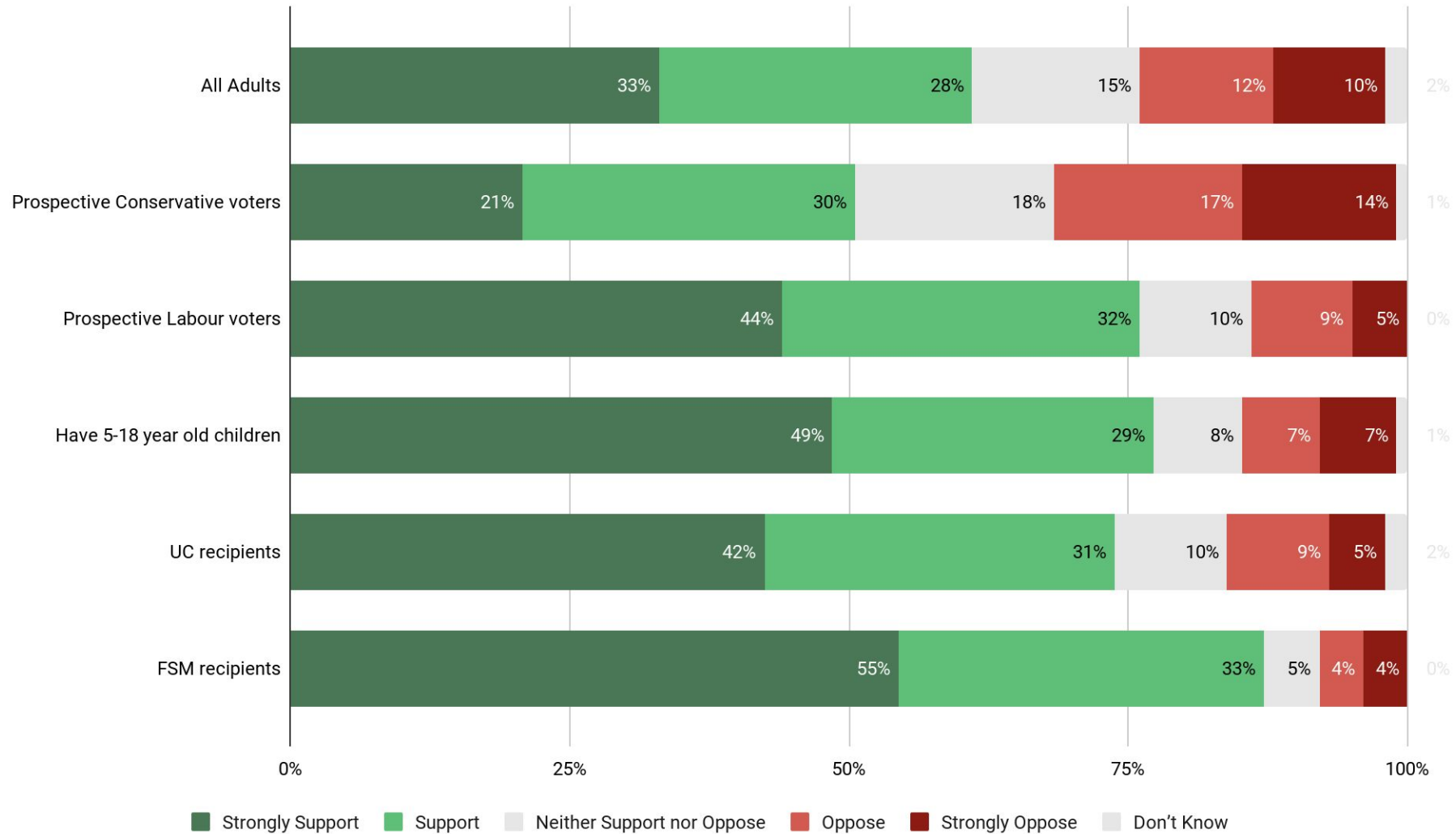


Table 83

Would you support or oppose the following? Immediately extending Free School Meals to all children whose families receive Universal Credit, and in the long term providing them for all children in primary and secondary education

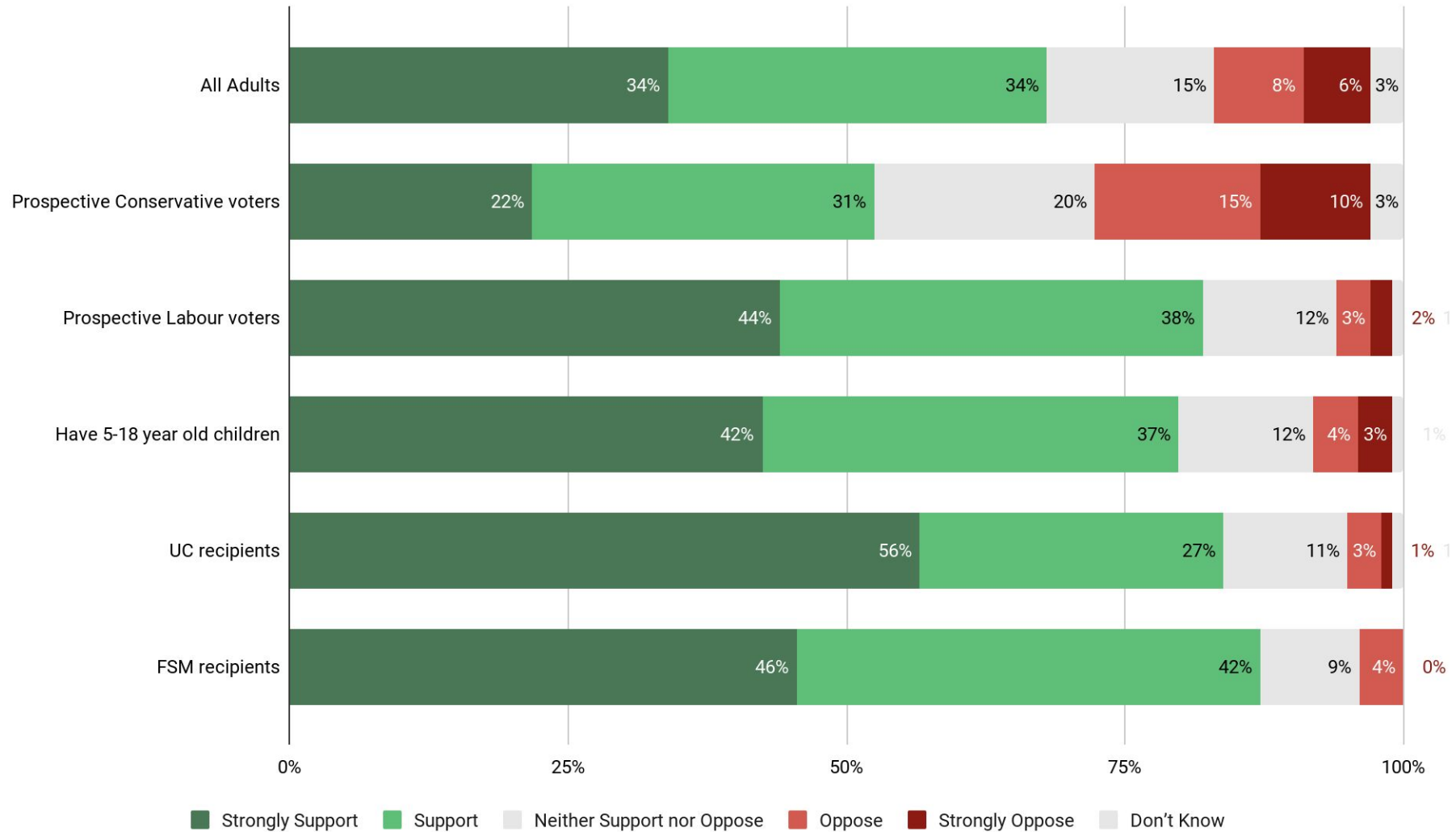
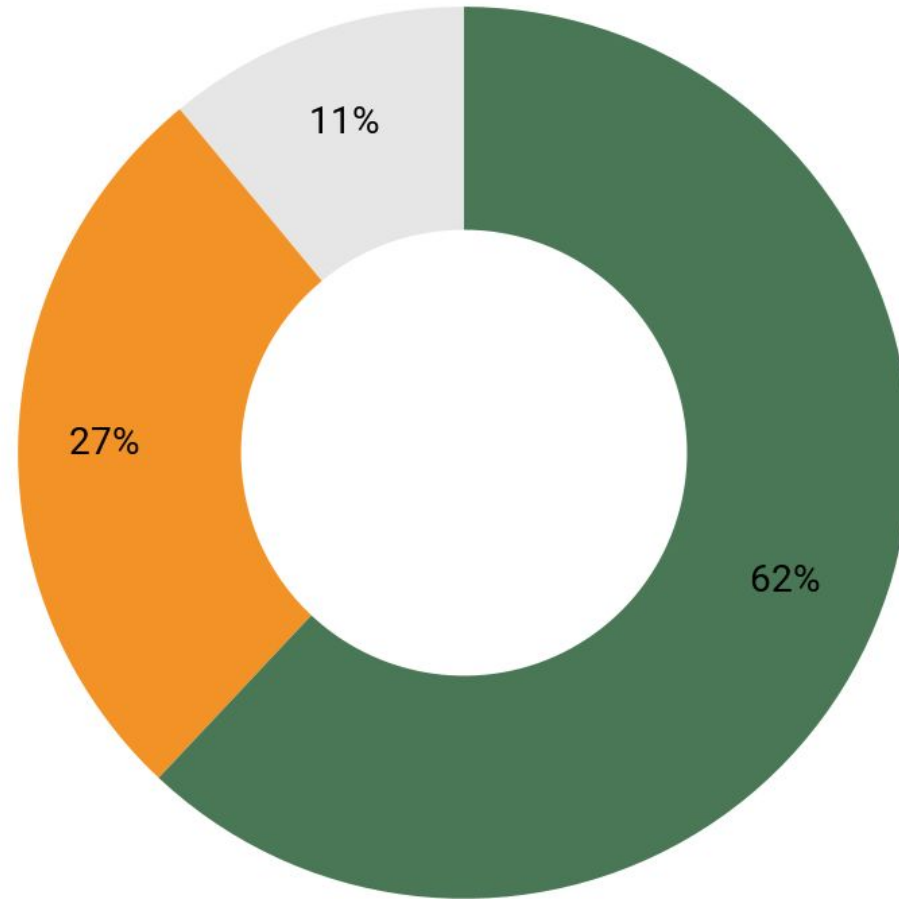


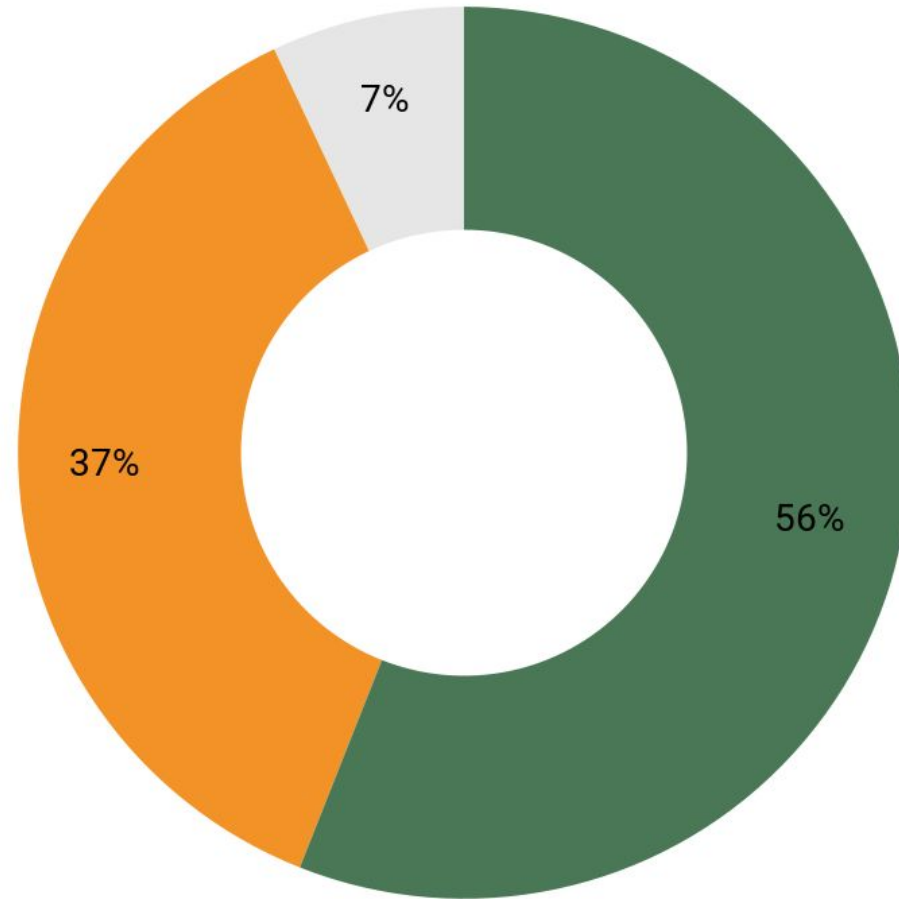
Table 84

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



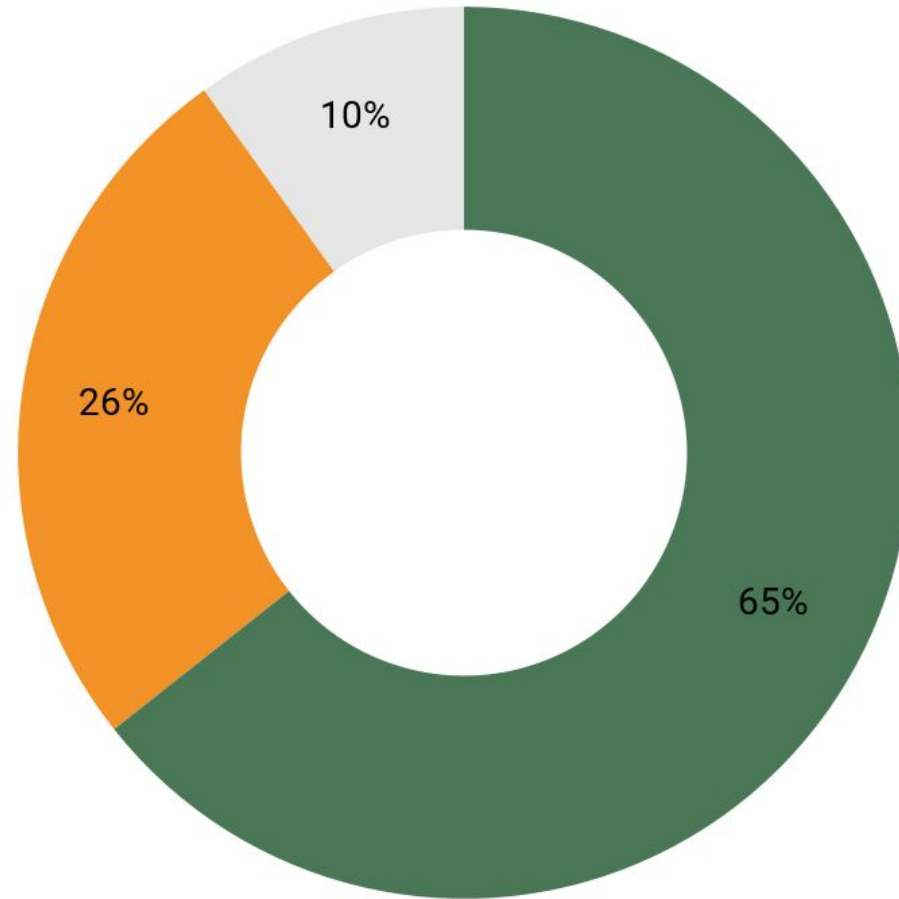
- Extending Free School Meals to all children whose families receive Universal Credit is a good use of taxpayer
- There are better uses for taxpayer money than this
- Don't know

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



- Extending Free School Meals to all children in primary and secondary education is a good use of taxpayer money
- There are better uses for taxpayer money than this
- Don't know

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



- Immediately extending Free School Meals to all children whose families receive Universal Credit, and in the long
- There are better uses for taxpayer money than this
- Don't know

Imagine that the Labour Party proposed extending Free School Meals to all children whose families receive Universal Credit before the next general election. How, if at all, would this impact your likelihood to vote for the Labour Party?

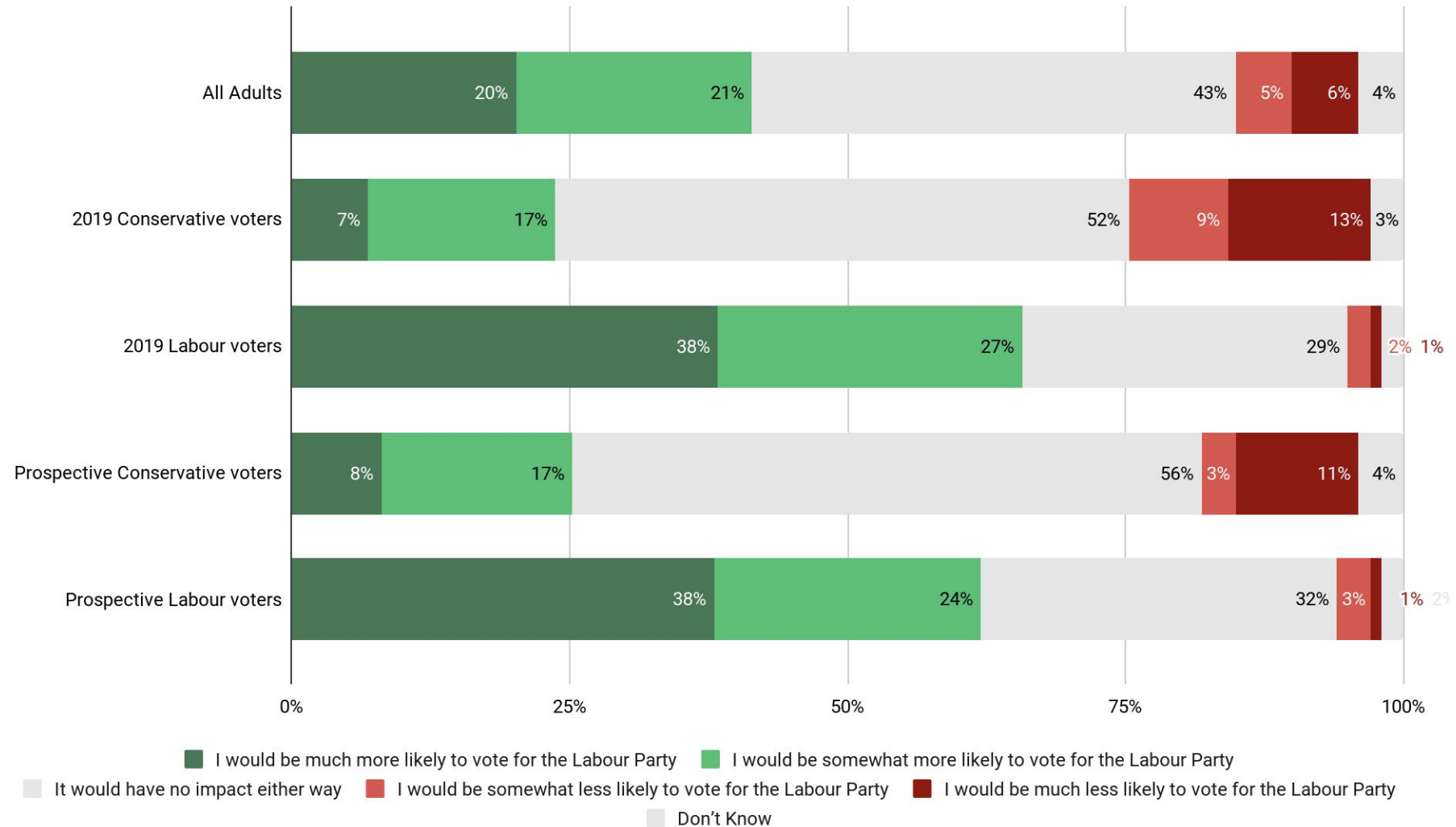


Table 88

Imagine that the Labour Party proposed extending Free School Meals to all children in primary and secondary education before the next general election. How, if at all, would this impact your likelihood to vote for the Labour Party?

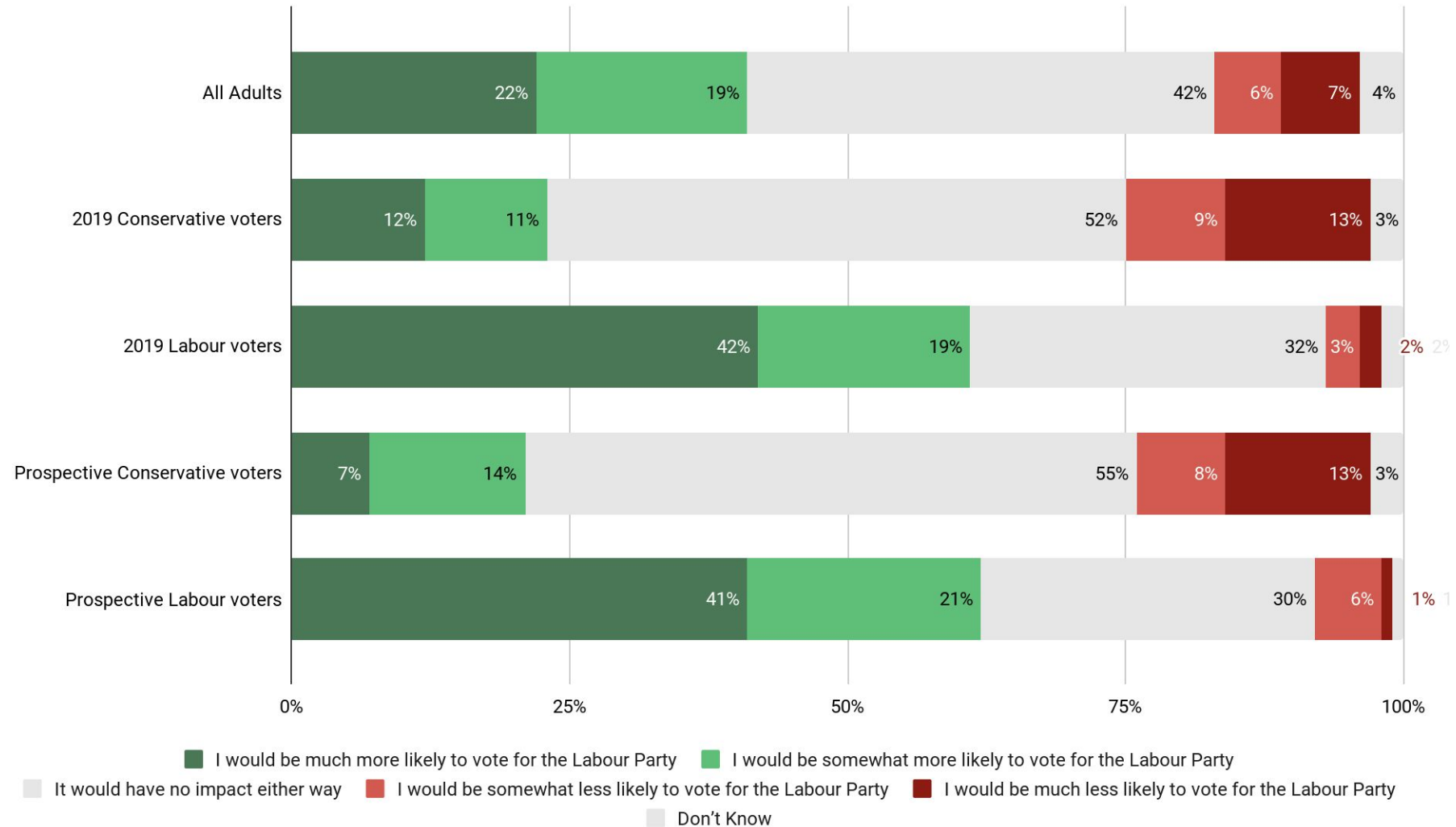


Table 89

Imagine that the Labour Party proposed immediately extending Free School Meals to all children whose families receive Universal Credit, and in the long term providing them for all children in primary and secondary education before the next general election. How, if at all, would this impact your likelihood to vote for the Labour Party?

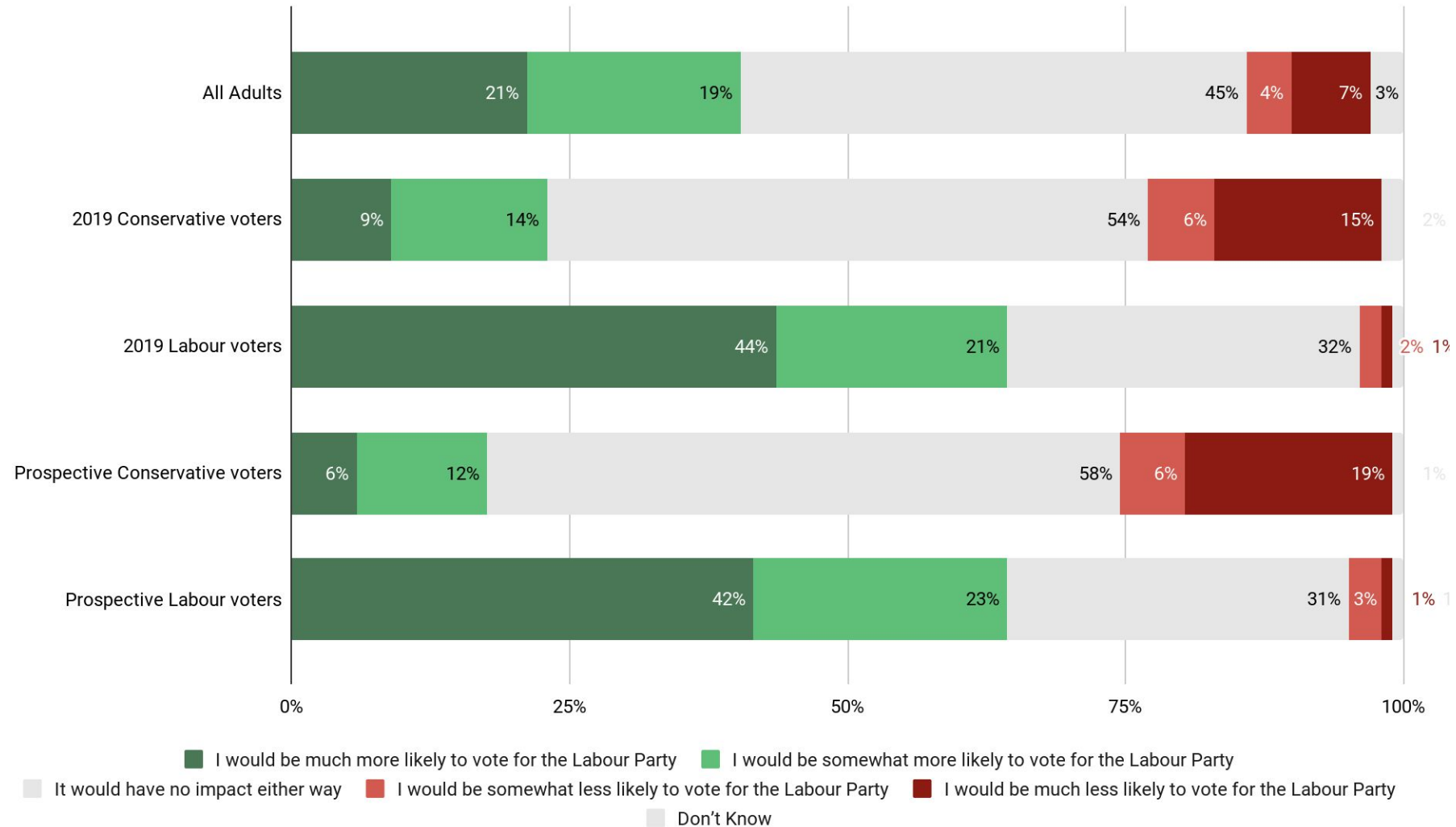


Table 90

Election Outcomes



Imagine it was the next general election and you were deciding how to vote. The Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, says they will extend free school meals coverage for children. The Conservative Party, led by Rishi Sunak, argues that this should not be a focus for government spending, which could instead be put towards other priorities such as the NHS. The political parties otherwise hold the same positions they do now on issues like crime, the environment, immigration, the NHS and the economy. How do you think you would vote in this situation?

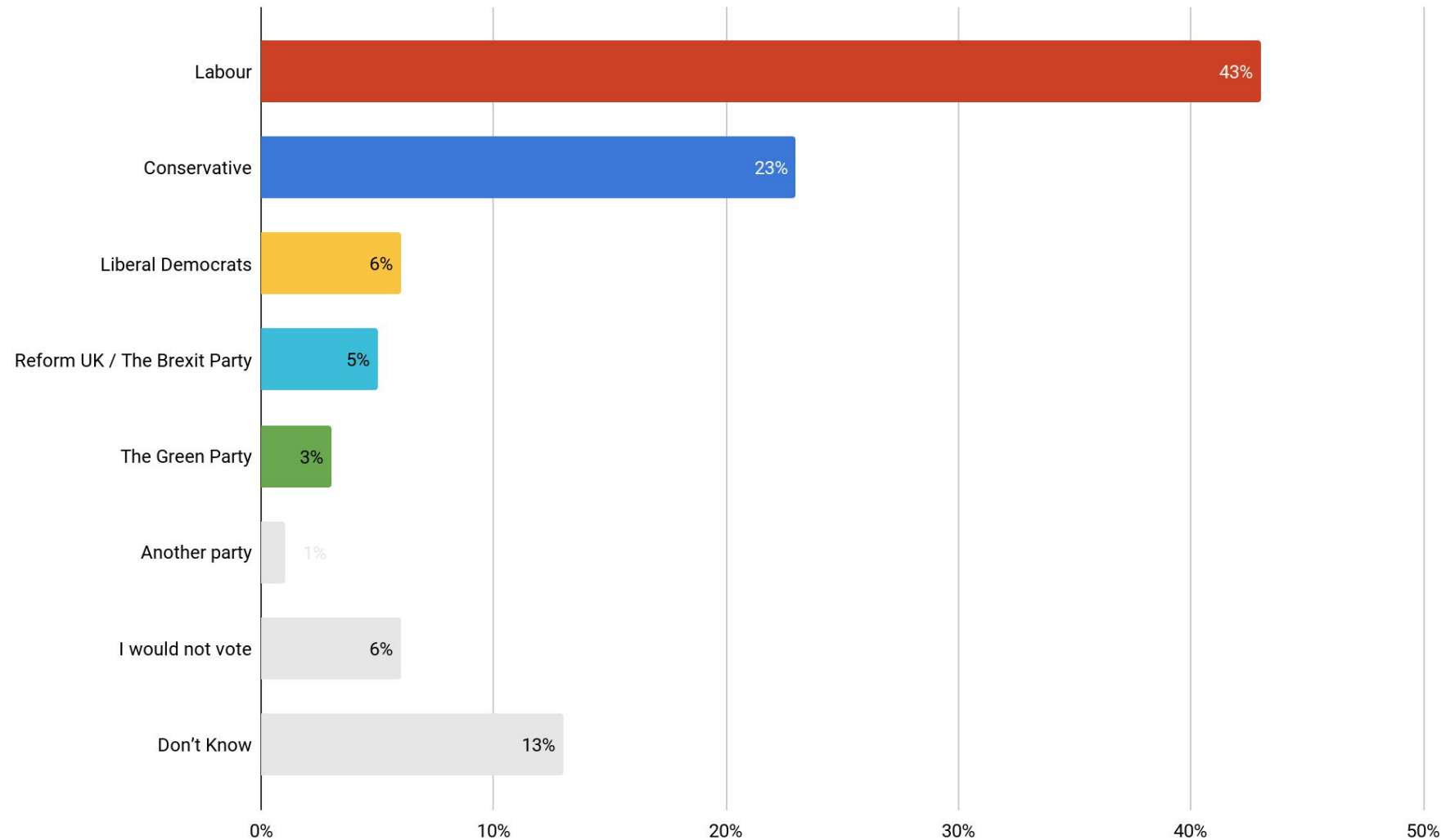


Table 91

Imagine it was the next general election and you were deciding how to vote. The Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, says they will give all school children free school meals, meaning parents would not have to pay for school lunches. The Conservative Party, led by Rishi Sunak, argues that this should not be a focus for government spending, which could instead be put towards other priorities such as the NHS. The political parties otherwise hold the same positions they do now on issues like crime, the environment, immigration, the NHS and the economy. How do you think you would vote in this situation?

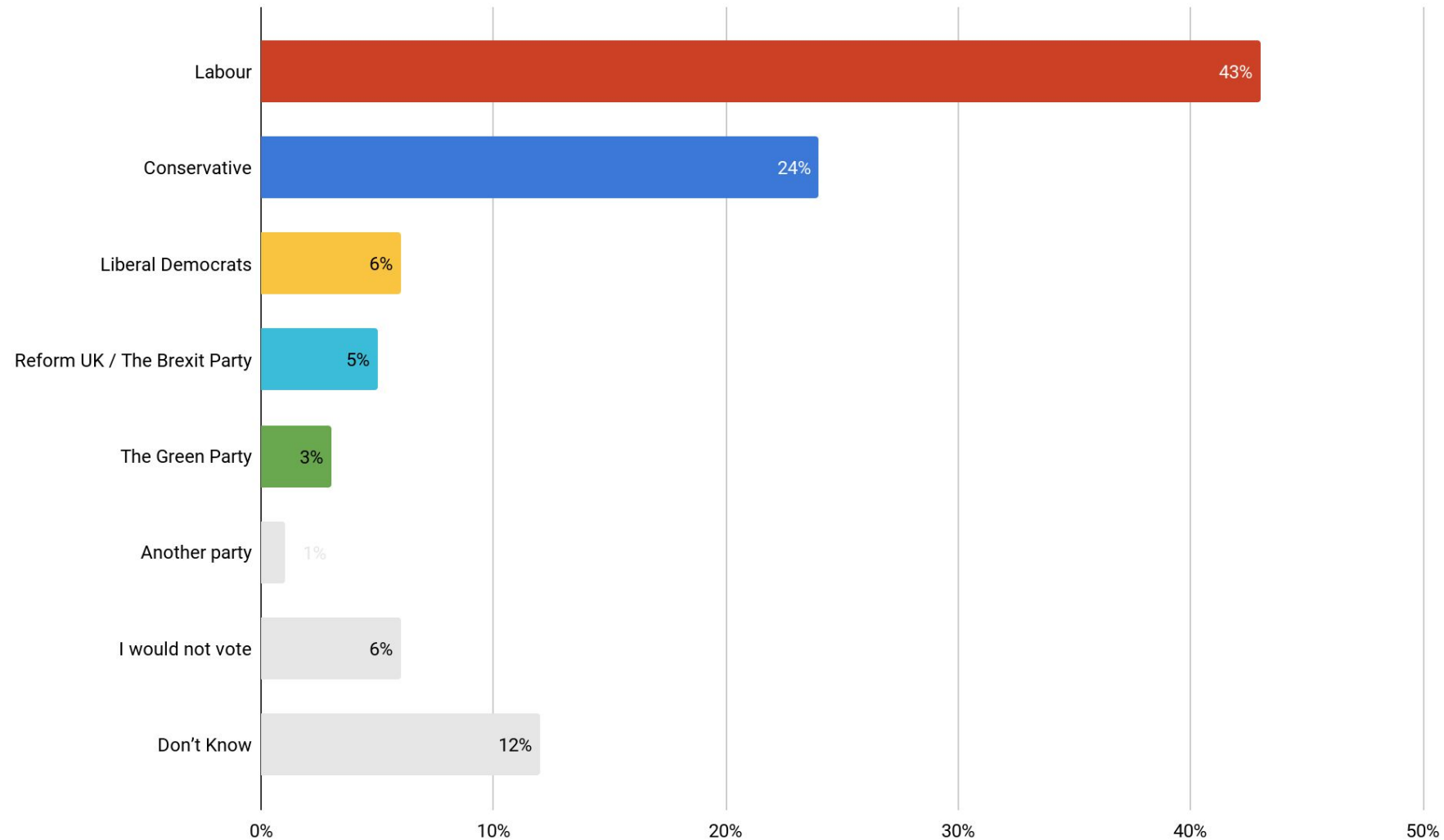


Table 92

Views on
extension and
welfare
alternatives



Currently, to be eligible for free school meals a child's household's income must be below £7,400 per year, after tax but before any Universal Credit payments. They may also be eligible if their family receives some other benefits. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

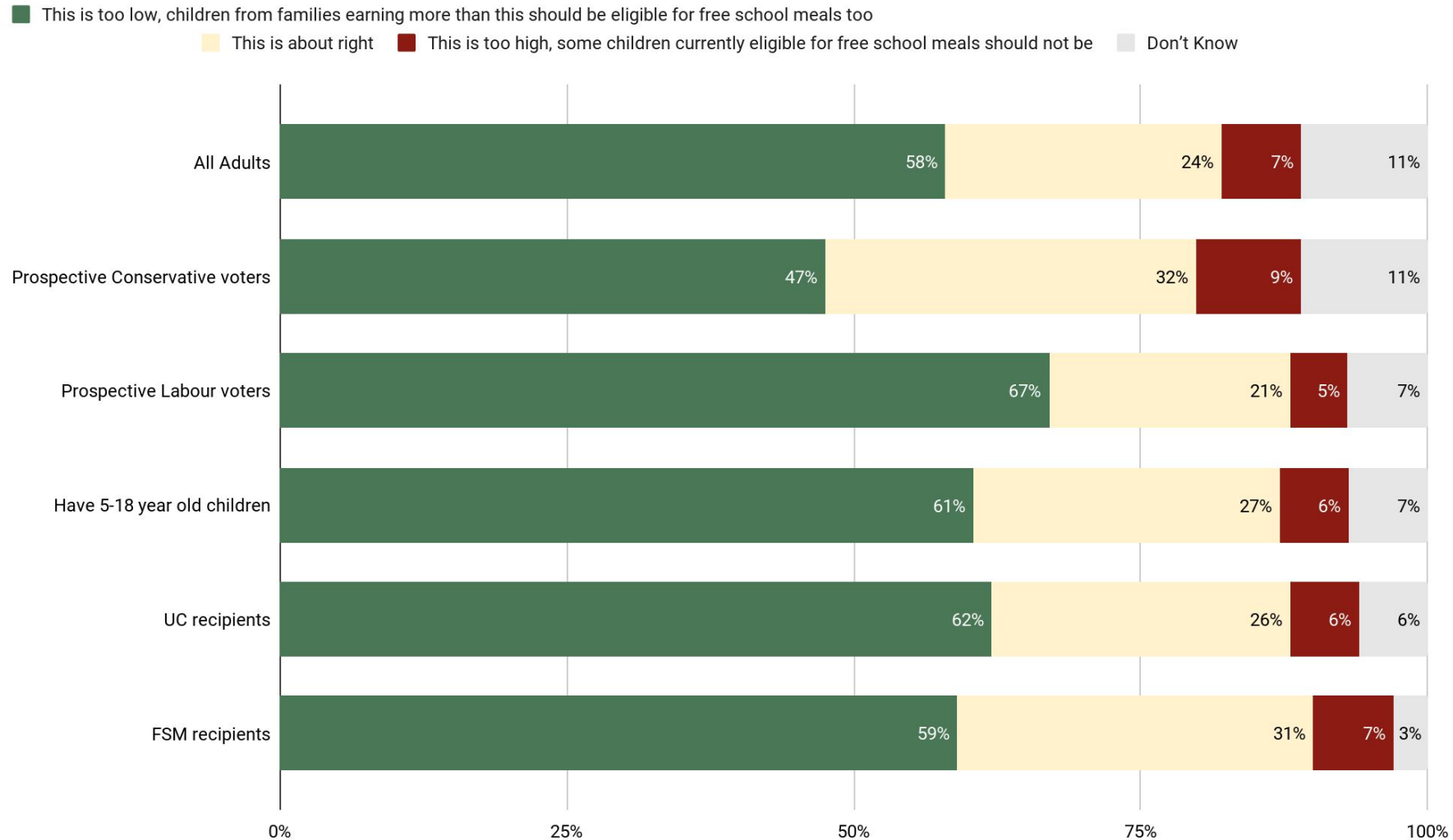


Table 93

To what extent would you support or oppose expanding access to free school meals in the following ways?

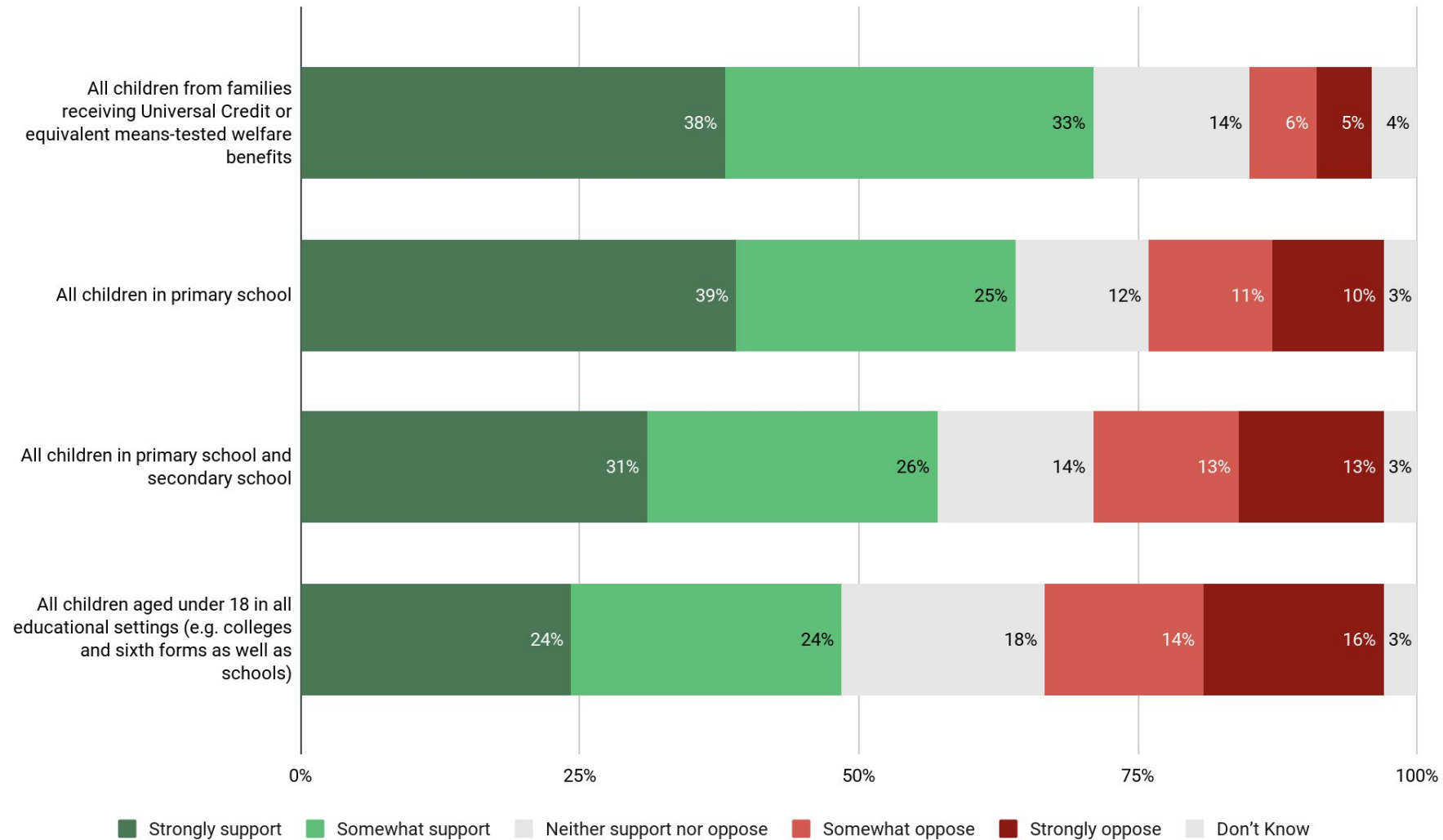


Table 94

Some people argue that instead of providing free school meals to children in schools, welfare payments should be increased so that parents have more money in their pocket to feed their children themselves. To what extent would you support or oppose this?

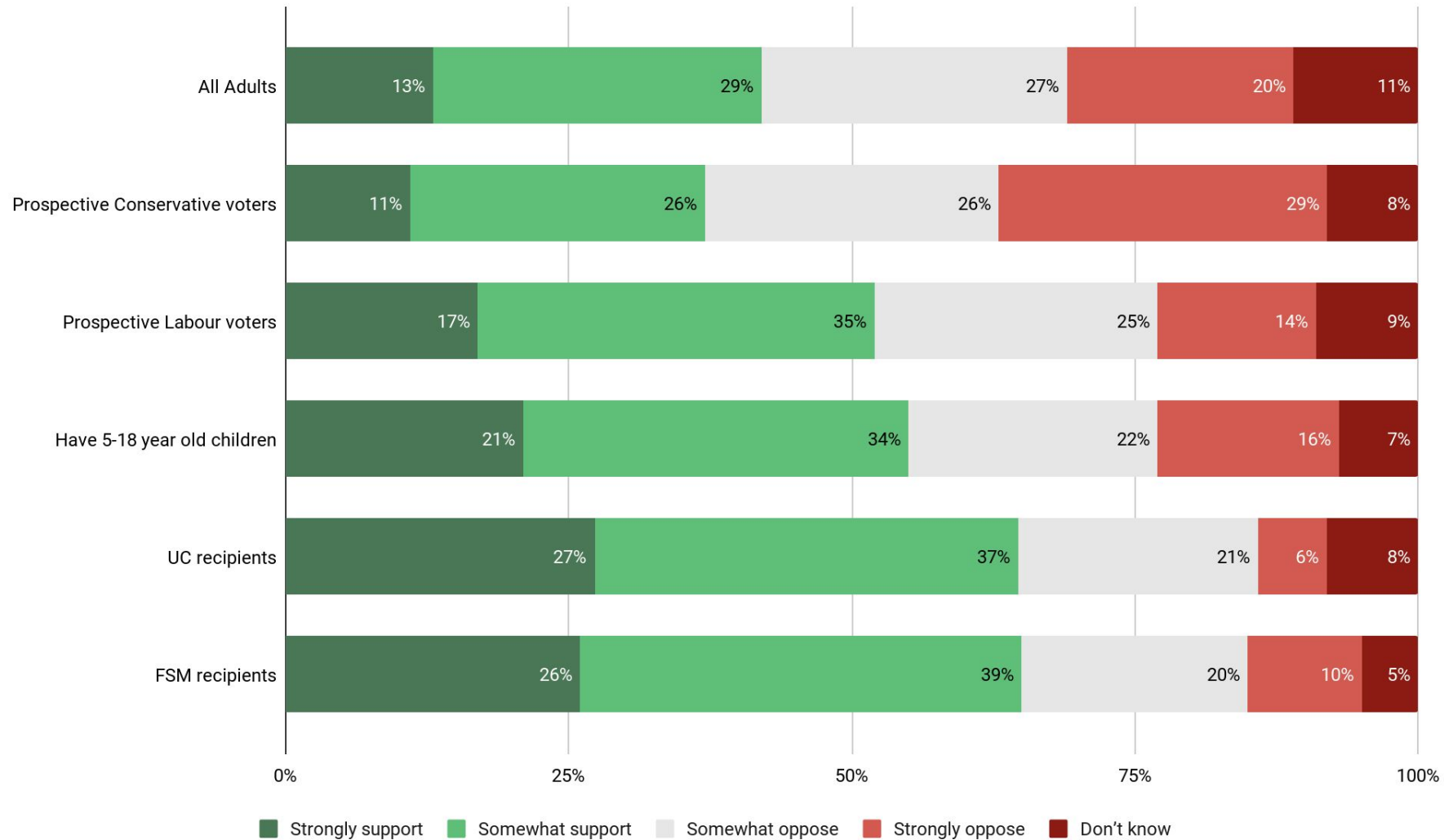


Table 99

You said you would oppose replacing free school meals with direct payments to low income families. Why is this? Please select all that apply.

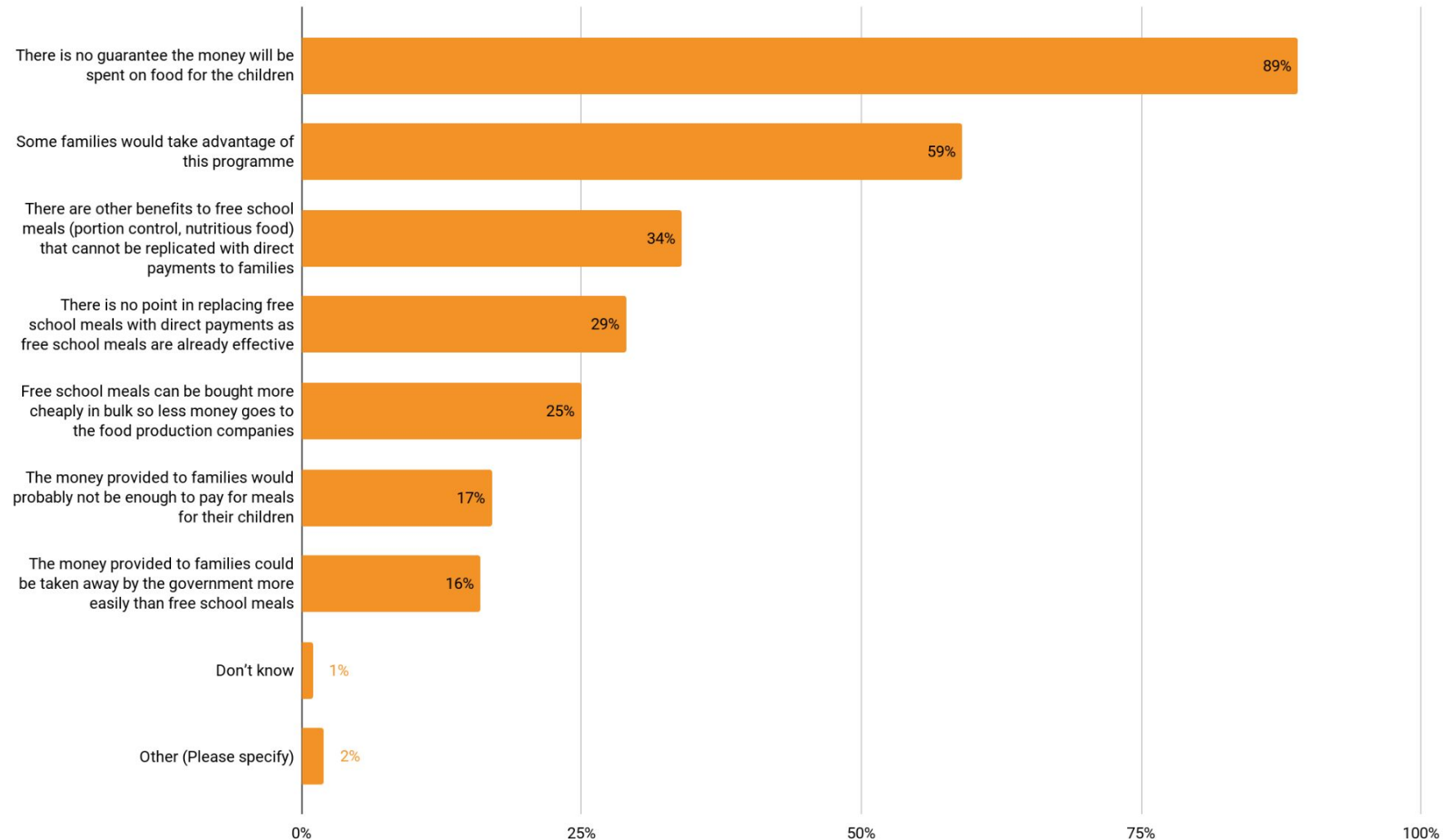


Table 100

Spending
priorities



Imagine a political party was deciding what to prioritise for public spending in education ahead of a general election. Which of the following areas do you think should be prioritized? Select up to three of the following

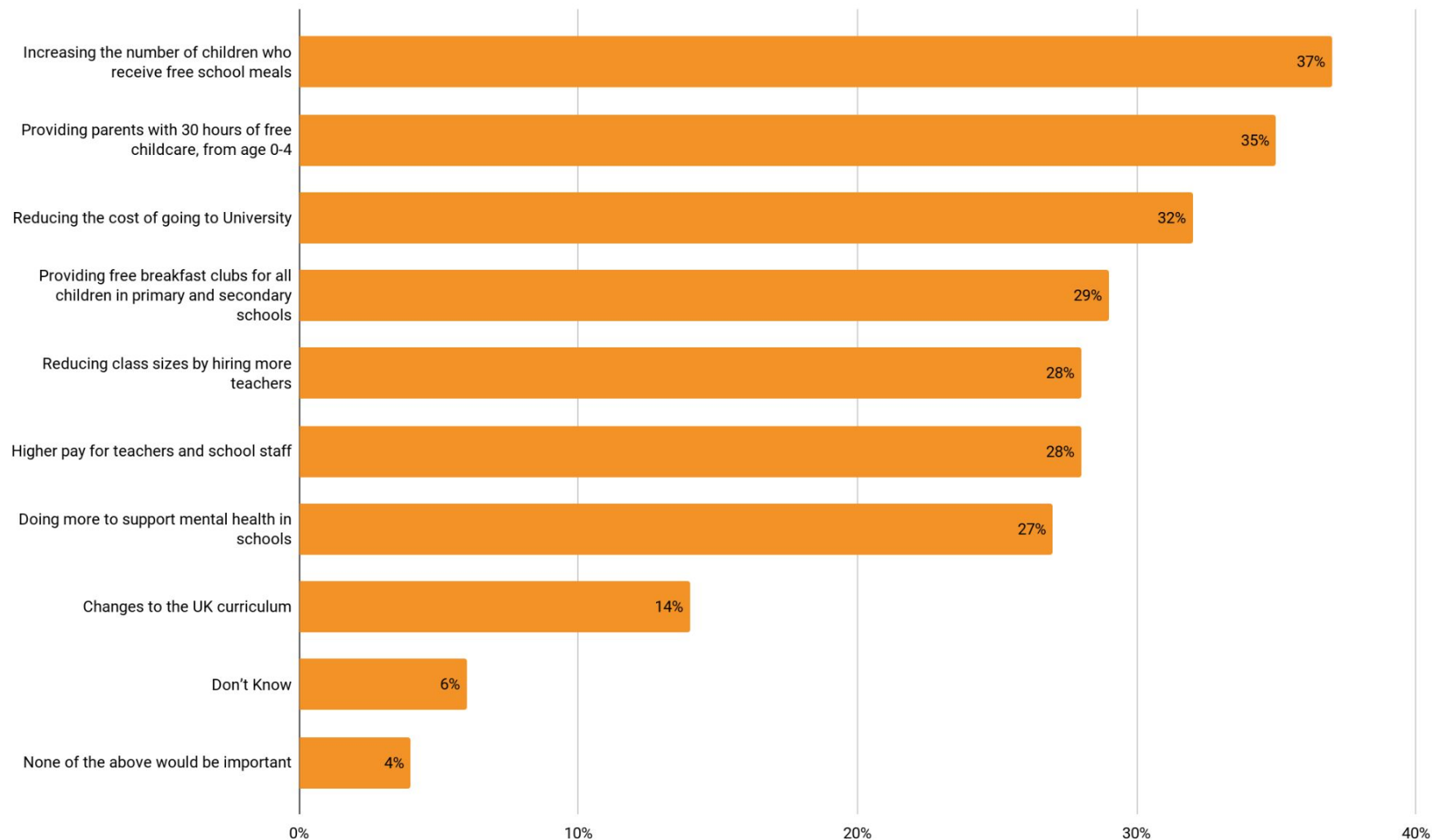


Table 101

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

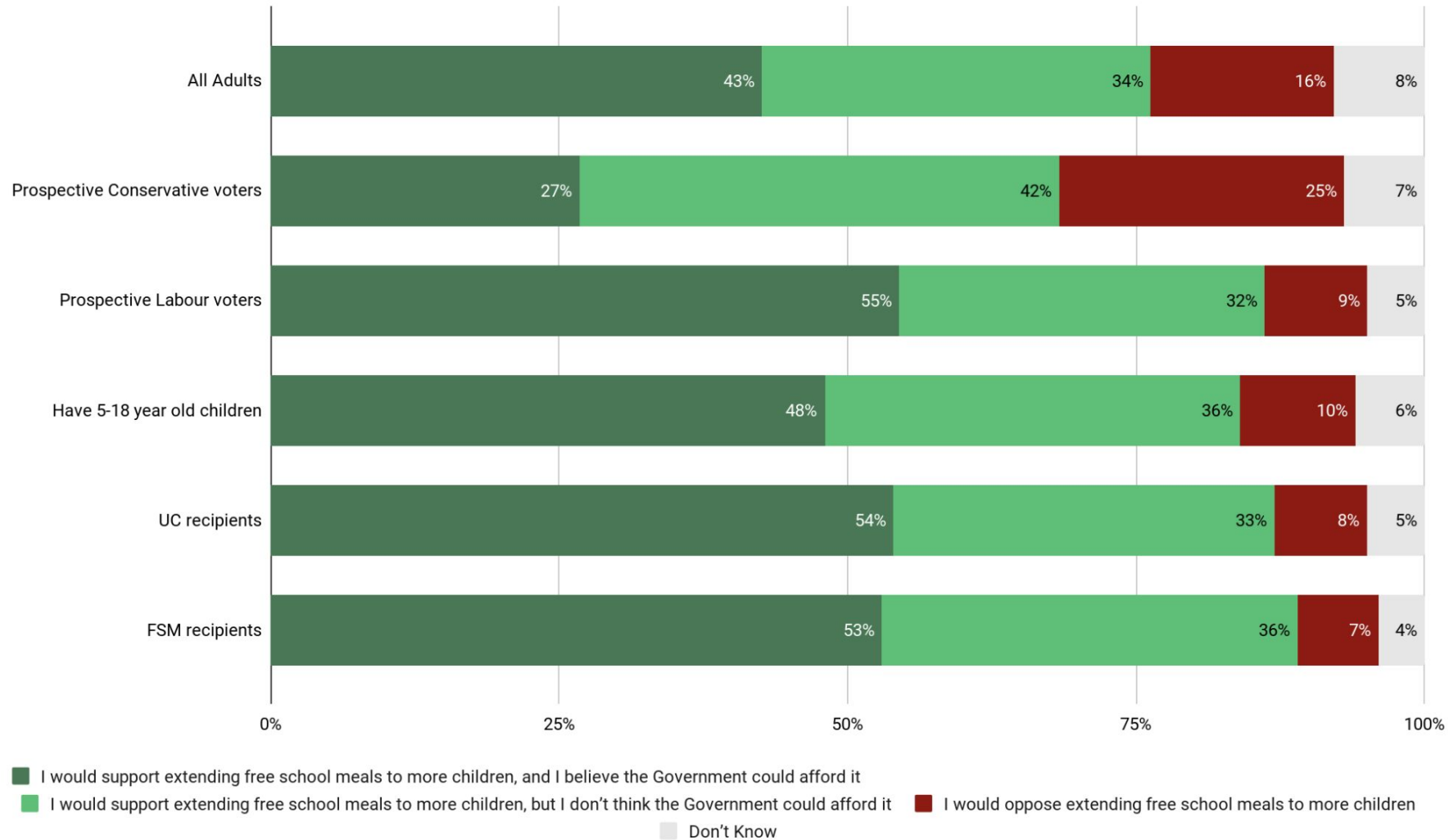


Table 102

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

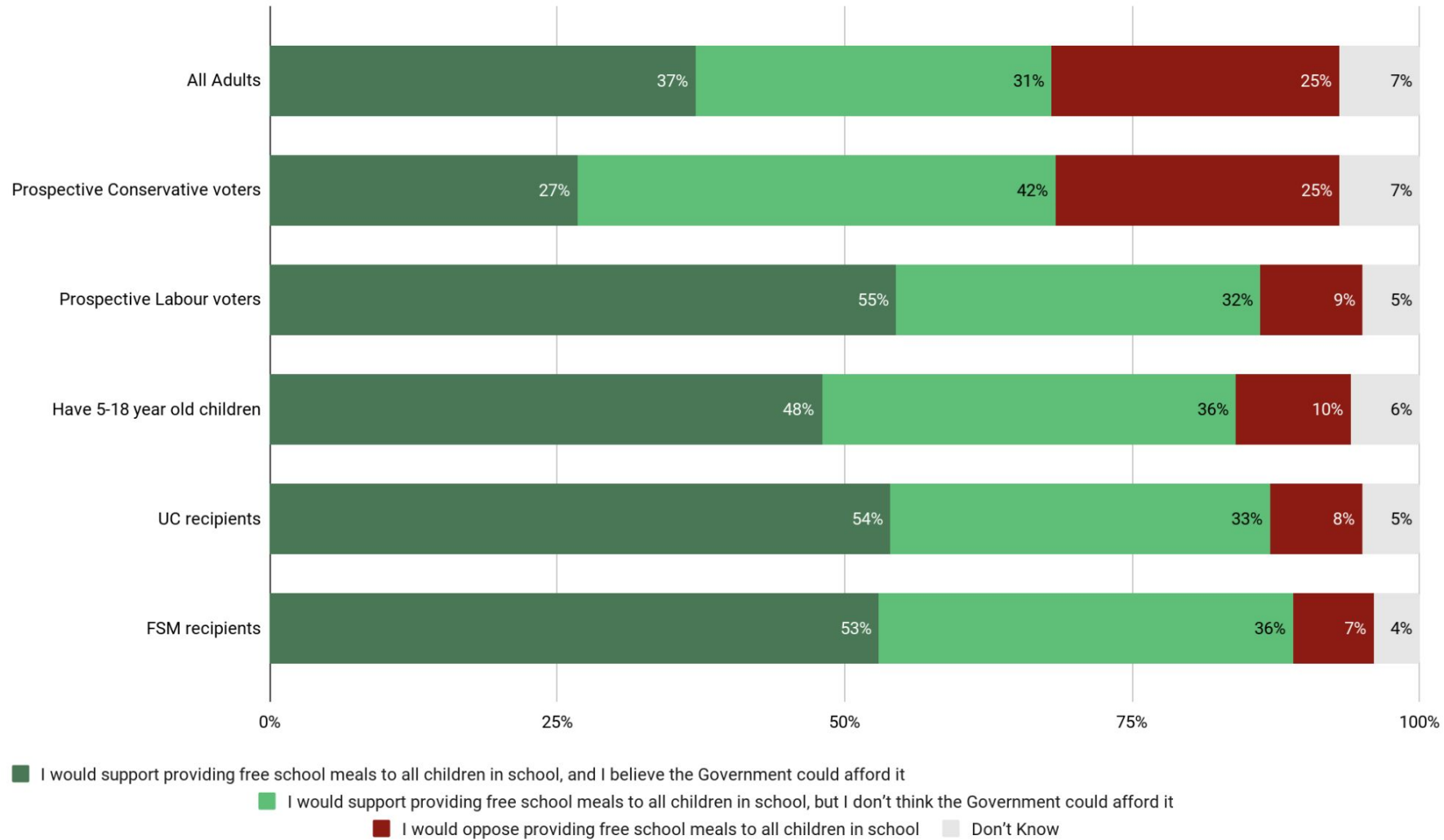


Table 103

And which of the following comes closest to your view?

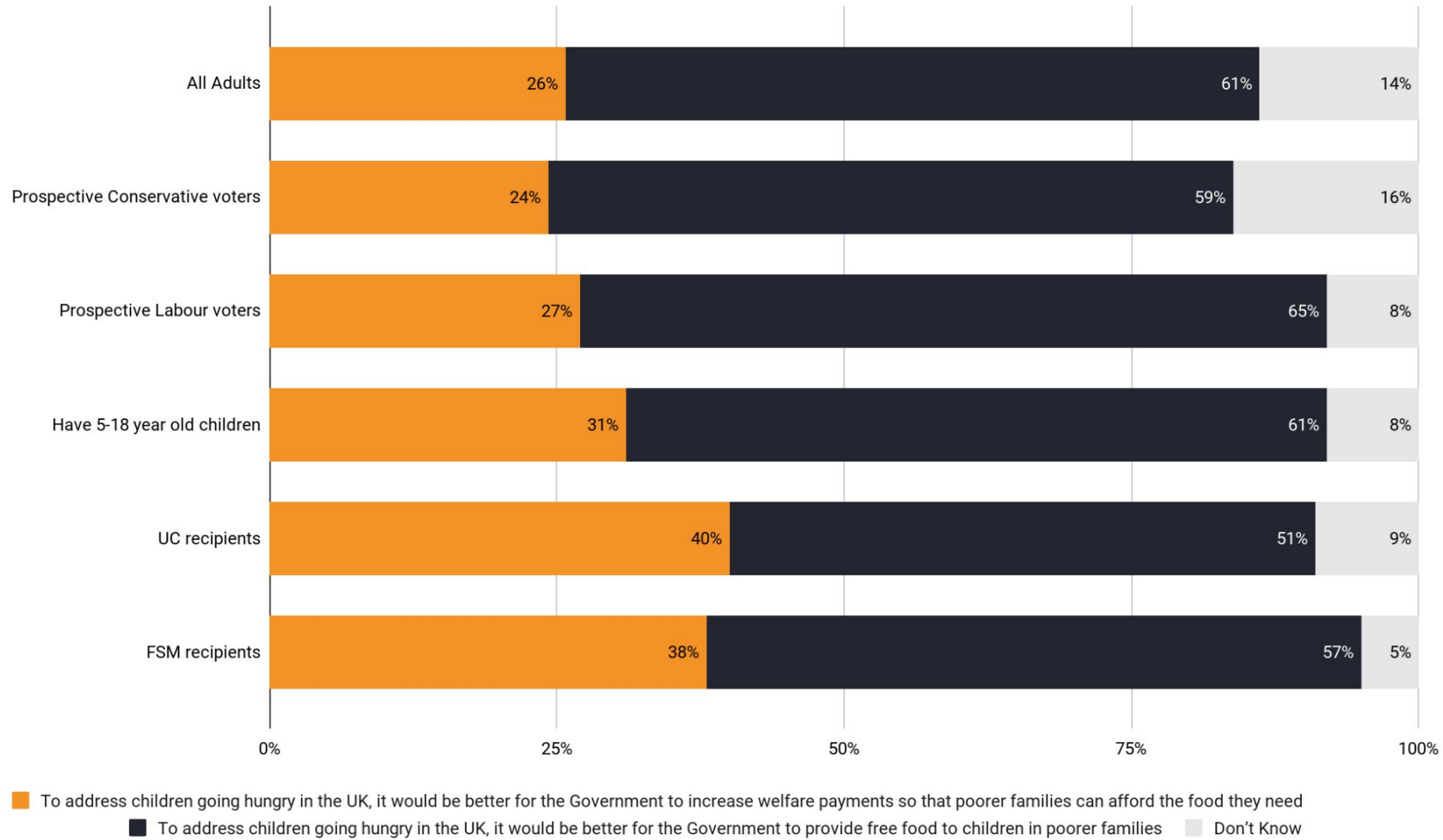


Table 104

Do you agree or disagree with the following?

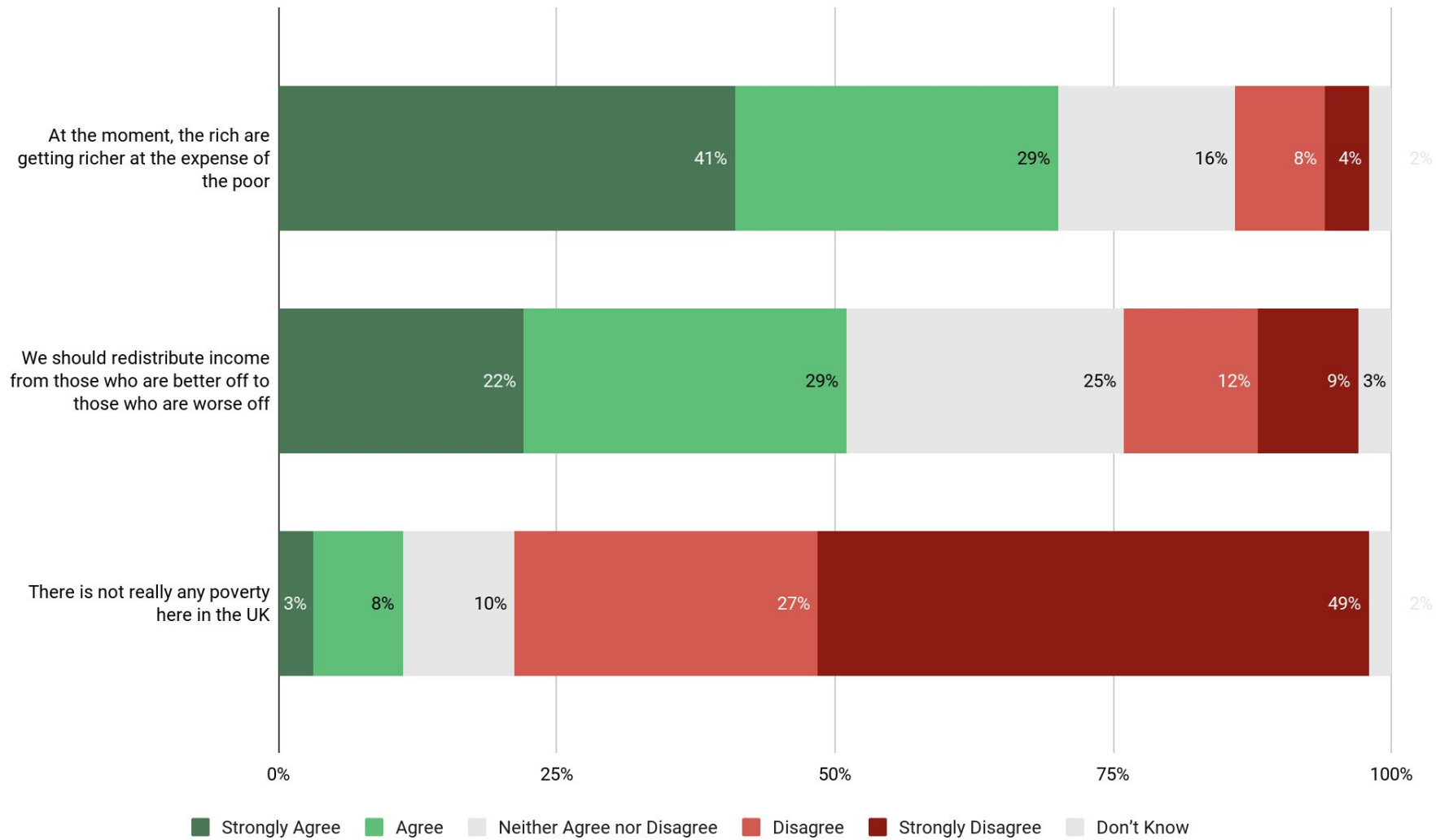


Table 105

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

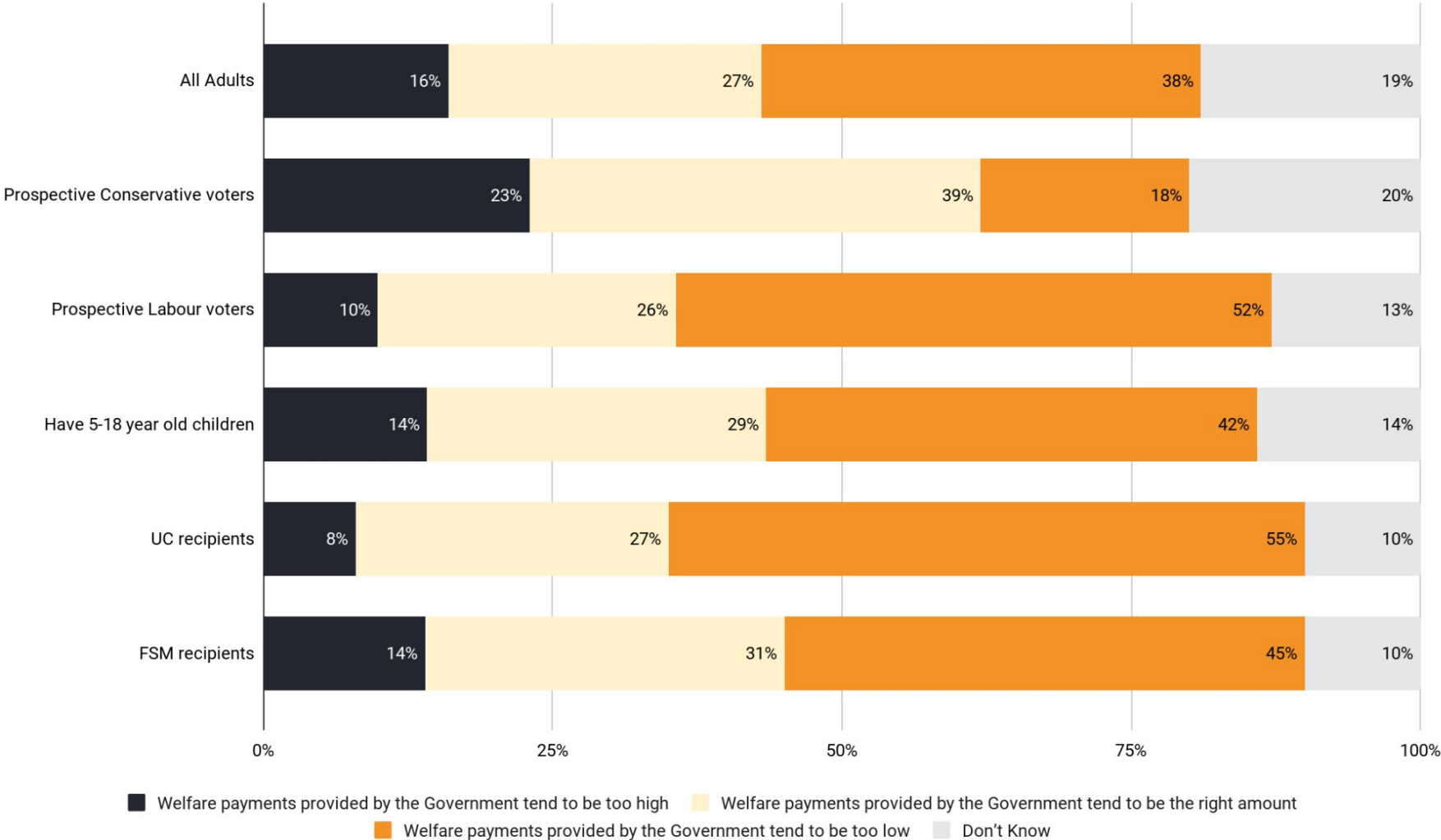


Table 109

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

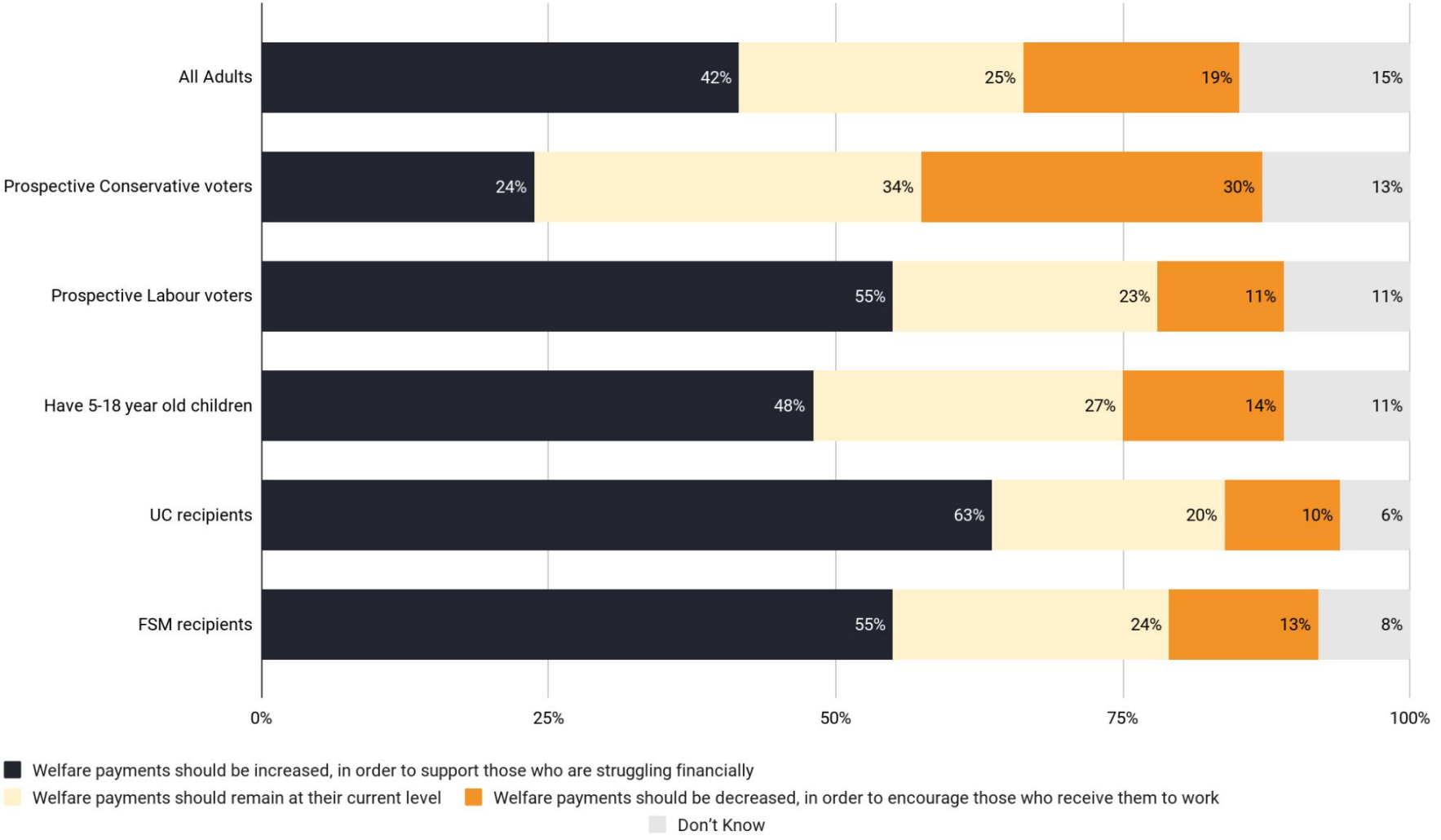


Table 110



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