Research Centre Trust, Peace and Social Relations | Coventry University | Rethinking Security for a just and peaceful world | Alternative Security Review

HOW DO THE BRITISH PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THEIR SECURITY?

RESPONSES FROM A NEW APPROACH TO PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the findings from two representative public opinion surveys conducted in January-March 2023 across the UK by Savanta on behalf of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at the University of Coventry as part of Rethinking Security's Alternative Security Review project. One survey used a sample of 1,091 respondents between the ages of 16 and 30; the other used a sample of 2,004 respondents between the ages of 31 and 75.

Objective and approach

In contrast to conventional methods of polling opinion on security issues, which tend to use leading questions on 'threats' and a constrained range of response options, the CTPSR-designed surveys aimed to elicit the public's own understanding of 'security' through the use of open questions; to avoid closed questions that limit the public to selecting threats and responses pre-identified by security elites; and to use methodologies that elicit the perspectives of a diverse UK public, including minority and marginalised groups.

Findings

Overall, responses to the surveys suggest that members of the general public think very differently about their own 'security' and that of the UK when allowed to shape their own definitions. Unprompted, they are much more likely to be concerned about their own wellbeing and socioeconomic conditions than about external threats. They are also ambivalent, and often deeply sceptical of, the protection nominally provided to them by the British state. While the findings are likely to reflect the specific context of early 2023 – including cost of living crisis, two recent changes of prime minister, and the disruptive legacies of COVID and Brexit – they highlight deep concerns about human insecurity and the adequacy of government protection and assistance measures.

While the majority of respondents **defined their own 'secure life' in positive terms**, rather than in terms of absence of or protection from threats, a context of economic precarity was apparent. Half of the respondents of both age groups cited financial security, predominantly from the perspective of having 'enough' to cover the basic cost of living, including housing and food. Nearly a quarter of respondents under 30 specifically mentioned having a job or employment security as integral to their security, and 27% of them cited security of housing. Unprompted, a statistically insignificant proportion of respondents cited absence or war or terrorism and only 4% cited concerns about crime.

In both surveys just over one-fifth of respondents stated that **living in the UK did not give them the security they described.** This proportion was highest among 25-30 year olds (over 30%), with this rate being slightly higher among young men than young women. Respondents under 30 from minoritised ethnic groups were also nearly 50% more likely than White British respondents to say they lacked this secure life.

Asked to choose from a list of eight **definitions of security** which most closely cohered with their own definition, respondents overwhelmingly chose those related to human security rather than national security. "Ability to go about my daily life without threat" and "Financial and economic wellbeing" were the two very clearly preferred definitions among both age groups.

Definitions related to protection, international relations and strong military power were favoured by only 17% of respondents under 30 and less than 27% of older respondents.

When asked to consider their own wellbeing, people value community, environment, public services and civil liberties. Asked to rate 28 issues as they impacted their own **quality of life** (negatively, positively or don't know) seven issues were rated positively by a majority of respondents in both age groups: having supportive communities and friends ('people to ask for help'), access to food, healthcare, education and the natural environment, living in a multicultural society, and freedom of speech.

Rather than external threats, respondents overwhelmingly identified corruption and their own government's actions as threats to UK national security. Asked to rate (significant, neutral, not significant) the same 28 issues as **threats to UK national security** there were seven key issues identified, each attracting at least a plurality (if not outright majority) who rated them as significant. The lead issue for both age groups was corruption, followed closely by the actions of the UK government, pandemics, climate change and the state of the economy. The surveys did not elucidate what kind of corruption or which actions of government people felt were most threatening but the responses indicate a significant lack of trust in the UK government among citizens. This is magnified among 16-30 year olds, more than two-thirds of whom rated corruption (74%) and the actions of their own government (68%) as significant threats to national security.

Asked to choose **between pairs of opposing words or phrases that best define security,** respondents mainly chose those characteristics of higher levels of visibility, policing, surveillance and open space, but with some notable differences between age, gender and ethnic groups. Attitudes towards food banks were a surprise. There is greater acceptance of food banks amongst younger generations than older ones, and both groups saw them as mainly positive. Whether they see them as a sign of a caring community, rather than of underlying social crisis, is unclear.

People are generally not opposed to the police, but want them to be better as well as to be more present. Asked unprompted to choose **three things that would make them feel safer** living in the UK, almost half of respondents mentioned policing. Younger respondents were more focused on improvements in policing, while older respondents were more likely to call for a higher police presence. Responding to or ending crime were also mentioned by one-fifth of all respondents. A similar proportion of under-30s called for better lit spaces or greater surveillance of the public realm.

Younger people, and especially young women, are more likely to have experienced personal security threats. 27% of under-30s and 17% of 31-75 year-old respondents reported that they had **personally experienced security threats** in the last year. Most commonly, these related to various forms of sexual harassment or intimidation and disproportionately impacted female respondents under 30. Physical assault and robbery (actual or attempted) were also commonly cited threats experienced. Experiences of homelessness and home or economic insecurity were cited by smaller minorities of respondents.

Asked for any other comments, the most commonly cited related to immigration, policing, international security threats (including from Russia, China, terrorism and nuclear weapons), financial concerns, and criticisms of the government. However, none was representative of more than 1% of all survey participants since only 7% answered this final question.

SECTION I – INTRODUCING THE SURVEYS

Rethinking Security Alternative Security Review (ASR) aimed to gather, analyse and articulate priorities for future security policy on the basis of consultations with a wide sample of UK society and communities, as well as people in countries affected by UK policy. For the ASR, a team of academics from Coventry University used a clutch of methods including creative methods to visualise security, focus group discussions, gathering public opinion through a call for evidence, and the implementation of two national surveys. This report sets out the draft findings from these two surveys:

- 16-30 Survey – 1,091 respondents between the age of 16-30
- 31-75 Survey – 2,004 respondents between the age of 31-75

SECTION I – INTRODUCING THE SURVEYS

The survey questionnaire was developed by the project team. In designing the survey we drew heavily on a literature review conducted by Zsofia Hacsek for this review[1] and Lillah Fearnley's critical exploration of how public opinion on security is surveyed in the UK. We responded to Fearnley's recommendations to: elicit the public's own understanding of 'security' through the use of open questions; avoid closed questions that limit the public to selecting threats and responses pre-identified by security elites; and use methodologies that elicit the perspectives of a diverse UK public, including minority and marginalised groups.[2] Drawing on Fearnley and Hacsek, and in order to gather meaningful data to inform security policy, we aimed to:

1. create a survey that was open to the priorities of respondents
2. leave it open to respondents to define security
3. capture data on macro, meso or micro security concerns

In designing the survey questionnaire, rather than prioritise the survey as the first method that informed qualitative approaches, we chose to allow the findings of the qualitative visualisation of security to inform the questionnaire design for the survey. The questionnaire design was also informed by a survey of the literature including the eight pillars of positive peace from the Global Peace Index,[3] definitions of security and human security and, drawing on Fearnley, ensuring that there was sufficient space within the survey for respondents to articulate their understanding of the survey.

1 https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Towards-More-Inclusive-Understandings-of-Security-in-the-UK-FINAL-1.pdf

2 https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/2023/05/18/thinking-inside-the-box/

3 https://www.visionofhumanity.org/weaving-the-8-pillars-of-peace-through-ambassador-peace-projects

Both the 16-30 and 31-75 surveys included a first section that explored participants' perceptions and understandings of security in the UK. This section started with an open question that asked participants to "Please describe what a secure life looks like for you." (Q1). Q2 then asked respondents whether living in the UK gave them the security they had described in question 1. These were followed by questions that drew on the literature to explore participants' attitudes in relation to more literature-based understandings of security. Section 2 explored respondents' perceptions and understandings of state security policy in the UK using two questions, Q8 and Q9. Section 3 captured participant's demographic details as listed in table 1 below:

Age	Gender	Sexual orientation	Ethnicity	Employment	Education
Accommodation	Religious belief	Annual household income	Physical and mental health issues	Postcode	Political leaning

Table 1: Demographic Details

2. SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

After securing ethical approval, the survey was trialled at two pilot focus group discussions consisting of members of staff and students at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University. The survey was administered by the independent survey company Savanta, which specialises in professional data collection. The survey was administered in January to March 2023, making use of a quota sampling system in order to ensure a response that was representative of the UK population in terms of gender, age and ethnic diversity. The research team adhered to Coventry University's Data Protection and Principles and Standards of Conduct on the Governance of Applied Research Policies. Participation was voluntary and anonymous to safeguard confidentiality. Participants in the 16 to 30 survey were required to indicate that they consented to participate in this research by ticking three boxes: 1) I have read and understood the above information; 2) I agree to take part in this questionnaire survey; and 3) I am aged between 16 to 30. Participants in the 31 to 75 survey had the same first two questions, question 3 for them, required them to confirm that were aged 18 or over.

This survey data provides us with the first nationwide picture of how ordinary people in the UK perceive and understand security. Q1 in both surveys privileges respondents' understanding of security. The scale of these surveys (n=1091 and n=2004) allows us to make claims that are representative of the UK population and we can have some confidence that its status as an evidence base is strong. Throughout the report, when reporting on statistical significance, the 0.05 significance level (p) is used (standard in social science research), which means that we can be 95% confident that findings have not occurred by chance.

However, working at a national level has its limitations; important localised variations can be missed, it has been hard to recruit respondents above the age of 70 and attempting intersectional explorations is difficult as layering different characteristics reduces the size and therefore significance of the group being explored. There are certain kinds of questions that are not answerable using survey evidence. We can find out, for example, that corruption is the issue that most negatively impacts respondents' quality of life in both the 16-30 and 31-75 surveys. Both surveys also identify it as the most significant threat to national security. However, we cannot easily identify why this might be the case. The issue of corruption and its impacts on everyday security is impossible to reduce to a single factor or set of factors, and so is not amenable to questionnaire responses that request a simple answer, such as a rank or a tick in a box. The answers to such questions may be achieved through more nuanced qualitative work.

In Section II below, we start to introduce the findings of both surveys, answering the questions that can be answered. In doing so, we follow the progression of the questions. At this stage, discussion is rich.

SECTION II – THE FINDINGS

Question 1 – Please describe what a secure life looks like for you

(Open question with word limit of 100 words)

Money and finance was the most prevalent theme consistently across both surveys, with 50% (544 out of 1092) of 16-30 respondents and 49% (986 out of 2004) of 31-75 respondents making reference to it, indicating the overwhelming importance of financial security in the current context of security issues. The predominant sub-theme for both groups was that of "enough", carrying the suggestion that security is more about sufficiency than excess or wealth. The comments were strikingly similar across both age groups, with people referring to "Consistently have all the necessities for survival available including food, water and shelter because I have enough money". A number of people in both groups described the idea of security as having a little more than enough, so that there was something left after the essentials had been paid for: "Living somewhere decent (as in no major damage), and not worrying about bills, food, water and electricity month to month, with a little bit of money for niceties".

Another related sub-theme across both groups concerned the absence of fear about not having money "not having to count money whilst grocery shopping and not to worry about bills". A smaller group of respondents referred to financial resilience, with comments such as "A secure life to me is being able to avoid hitting hard times and being able to withstand hardship". Again, this latter appeared across both groups though it was more prevalent in the older age group. Finally, a smaller group of respondents referred to finance in terms of the ability to provide for others; while this was more frequent in the 31-75 survey the theme did appear in both groups.

However, throughout these themes it was rarely just money – there were other factors involved in people's vision of a secure life as shown here: "Safe. Sufficient money. Somewhere safe to live. People." "Happy family, good health and money to enjoy life". **Having a home** was identified as important by 27% of the 16-30 survey participants, as were **jobs and careers** (24%). Both of these were often coupled with words suggesting stability and security, with references to permanent employment. Having a home was also identified as important by 21% of the 31-75 survey participants with a slight shift of focus, including comments on having a home, having your own home, living without fear of losing your home, and having a secure home. "A safe place to call home with a roof over my head where I feel secure".

Jobs and employment were also mentioned by the 31-75 group (11%) but less often than by the younger cohort (24%). In contrast to the younger group, this group focused very much on feeling safe at work, having a safe work environment, and work life balance. A very small selection of responses spoke of not needing to work in their definition of a secure life.

Relationships featured in both surveys. In the 16-30 survey, many people referred to friends, family nearby, having someone you could count on and supportive relationships (16%). As the following quote shows, these themes often combined; “Living in a country with peace and safety and political stability and a criminal justice system we can trust. Being loved and having a supportive family and friends. Belonging. Not having mental or physical health issues. Having a stable job. Having financial security.” While 20% of the 31-75 group also referred to relationships, there was a stronger focus on family, intimate partner relationships, marriage and children (referring to children and partners being happy and safe), and often a desire for family to be nearby; “A secure life involves me being financially stable, my children feel safe and comfortable in school and other environments outside of our home and my marriage is stable, trustworthy and loving”. The word “love” (or “loving”) was mentioned twice as often in the 31-75 survey than in the 16-30 survey, and the idea of being able to provide for one’s family appeared in the 31-75 survey but not the 16-30 survey.

Issues around **health** (mostly in terms of enjoying reasonable physical and mental health and having access to healthcare) were raised by 9% of 16-30 respondents. Surprisingly, this was lower in the 31-75 survey (6%), although it had the same balance of having good health and access to healthcare, with the additional aspect of the family being healthy.

The kind of **words used to describe these different elements of security** were also interesting. A significant proportion of 16-30 participants used the word “safe” (31%) – these referred to the local environment, their home, and the idea of being safe to enjoy and carry out the activities of daily life. Linked with this, the word “free” came up 60 times, and the word “danger” (in the context of being free from danger). 9% used the word “comfortable” (mainly referring to finance and lifestyle), and a greater number (27%) used the word “stable”; often this referred to financial stability, but equally could refer to stability of relationships, household, employment, health and independence. This was mirrored in the 31-75 survey. These are summed up in this response:

> *“A secure life for me looks like having a steady job that I enjoy, living in a safe neighborhood with people I care about, and having enough money saved up to take care of my basic needs. It also means feeling physically and emotionally healthy and having access to quality healthcare. Finally, security for me includes the assurance that no matter what happens tomorrow or down the road-whether good or bad-I will have the tools necessary within myself and from those around me so navigate through whatever comes my way.”*

9% of respondents across both surveys used the word happy or happiness in the context of what a secure life would look like “Happiness and safety in a home where I feel right”. A small handful of respondents in both surveys referred to the police (1%), nearly all of those in the context of a trusted and accessible police force. A similar number referred to physical security in the form of locks and alarms. Only 2 respondents referred to the absence of war or terrorist threat. Very few respondents mentioned the ability to practice their faith and access places of worship, or access to rights. 4% mentioned the absence of crime or a low crime rate.

As you can see by the above discussion, **the majority defined their vision for a secure life in positive (what that life would include) as opposed to negative (e.g. the absence of fear, danger, crime) terms.**

There was a tension apparent between people wanting to live in a world that was safe: “Where I can safely go out for a run after dark; where I can leave my bag for five minutes and not worry about it being stolen”, and having the means to manage risks: “A locked house in a secure neighbourhood with no valuables on display. Street smarts. Self defense training”. This tension is exemplified in the following quote:

> *“A secure life is one where you ideally don't actually have to worry about security. You should be able to walk in dark urban areas without a risk of being robbed. Issues of security shouldn't prevent someone from living their everyday life, for example, women and the clothes they choose to wear. In the real world, a secure life is most likely to include precautions that ensure one's safety. Therefore a balance between security measures already in place and decisions made by an individual to avoid unsafe situations is what a secure life looks like to me.”*

Question 2 – Does living in the UK give you the security you described in Question 1?

2.1 Overall Response

In both surveys, the majority of respondents felt that living in the UK gave them the security that they described in Q1 – Table 2. Only 54% of respondents in the 16-30 survey felt that living in the UK gave them the security they described as compared to 63% of respondents to the 31-75 survey. The survey responses do not explain this difference. However, taking into account responses to the previous question, it may be that young people have anxieties around their finances,[4] relationships and their accommodation. Crucially, in both surveys just over a fifth of respondents stated that living in the UK did not give them the security they described. This needs to be explored through further qualitative work.

	16-30	**31-75**
Yes	54%	63.0%
No	20.20%	21.8%
Not Sure	25.80%	15.2%

Table 2: Comparing 16-30 and 31-75 Responses to Q1

4 https://www.libf.ac.uk/news-and-insights/news/detail/2022/03/17/why-do-young-people-worry-about-money

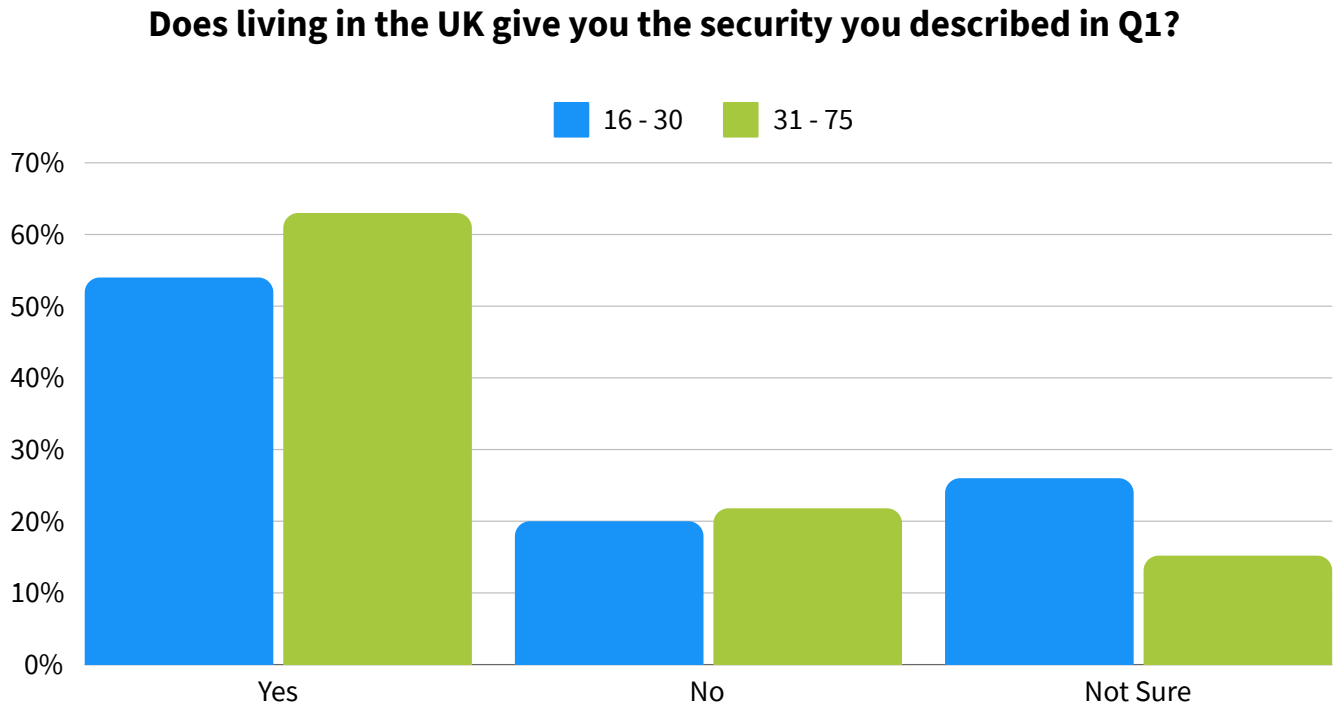


Figure 1: Does Living in the UK give you the security you describe? 16-30 and 31-75

Gender

In addition to male a female, participants had the option to choose gender positionalities other than male or female. Their options included the following options: nonbinary, transgender, agender, gender neutral, intersex and other. However the numbers of respondents choosing gender identities below other than male and female were too low to make any statistically significant comparisons. Therefore, the analysis presented in this report focusses only on male and female responses. We plan to undertake further qualitative work to unpick the choices of other marginalised gender groups.

In the 16-30 survey, women (57.9%) were more likely than men (51.1%) to say that living in the UK gave them the security that they described in Q1.
In the 31-75 survey, women (60.1%) were less likely than men (66.6%) to say that living in the UK gave them the security that they described in Q1.

Q2 Does living in the UK give you the security you described in question 1?

	Age	16-20	21-25	26-30
Q2 Does living in the UK give you the security you described in question 1?	Yes	56.7%	51.1%	43.5%
	No	16.7%	24.5%	30.6%
	Not sure	26.5%	24.5%	25.9%

Table 3: Does living in the UK give you the security you described, by age.

In the 31-75 survey, there was no significant variation in participants' responses as per their age, except for the category 71-75, who were more likely to agree that living in the UK gave them the security that they described in Q1. However as the number of respondents in the age range 71-75 is small (n=41), this is not statistically significant.

Ethnicity

In order to explore differences by ethnicity and to provide a statistically meaningful commentary all Black, South Asian and other minoritised groups were aggregated into a category “all minoritised groups”. Responses for this new aggregated group were then compared with responses for the category “White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British”.

Table 4 below correlates responses to Q2 as per these two categories in the 16-30 survey. It demonstrated that minoritised respondents are less likely to say that living in the UK gave them the security they described and more likely to say that it did not give them the security they described in Q1 than White British respondents.

		All Minoritised Groups	White British
Q2 - Does living in the UK give you the security you described in question 1?	Yes	47%	58%
	No	25%	17%
	Not sure	28%	24%

Table 4: Does Living in the UK give you the security that you described, by ethnicity, 16-30.

In the 31-75 survey, there were no significant differences in responses to this question when categorised by ethnicity.

		All Minoritised Groups	White British
Q2 Does living in the UK give you the security you described in question 1?	Yes	64.3%	62.6%
	No	19.1%	22.6%
	Not sure	16.6%	14.8%

Table 5: Does Living in the UK give you the security that you described, by ethnicity, 31-75.

Question 3 - Which of the following best describes what security means to you?

(Option to choose up to 4 options, then rank them)

This question moved away from open questions that sought to capture respondents' understanding of security. Instead, we provided respondents with a list of definitions of security as derived from the literature. Out of the eight options that respondents were presented with, four related to what are traditionally 'state' security concerns and the other four were 'human security' concerns.

State Security Options	**Human Security Options**
Good relationships with other countries	Ability to go about my daily life without threat
A strong military power	Financial and economic wellbeing
Effective law enforcement	Equality between different groups in the UK
Protection (of a person, building, organisation or country)	Respect for human rights

Table 6: State and Human definitions of Security

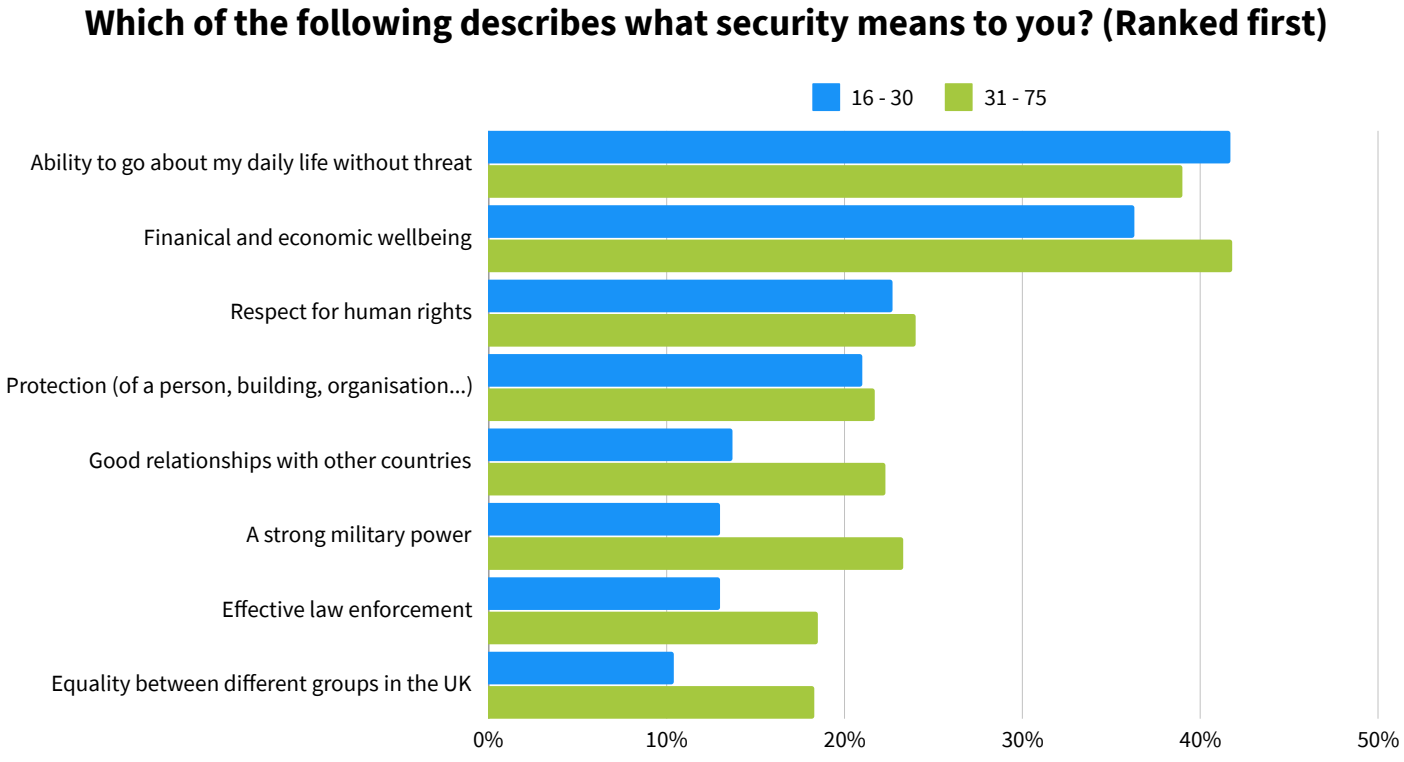


Figure 2: Definitions of Security ranked first by respondents

Figure 2 above represents the percentage of respondents in both the 16-30 (blue) and 31-75 surveys (green) who ranked the listed options as their first option from the four options they included in their list.[5] **Across both surveys, respondents have ranked "Ability to go about my daily life without threat" and "Financial and economic wellbeing" as their first choice more than the other choices.** This is consistent with responses to Q1 about respondents' understanding of security.

Furthermore, these are both 'human security definitions'. The figure below shows respondents' top ranked definitions categorised as state or human security definitions. **Respondents' preference for human security definitions is clear.** 73% of 16-30 survey respondents and 83% of the 31-75 survey respondents have ranked human security definitions first out of the eight definitions provided.

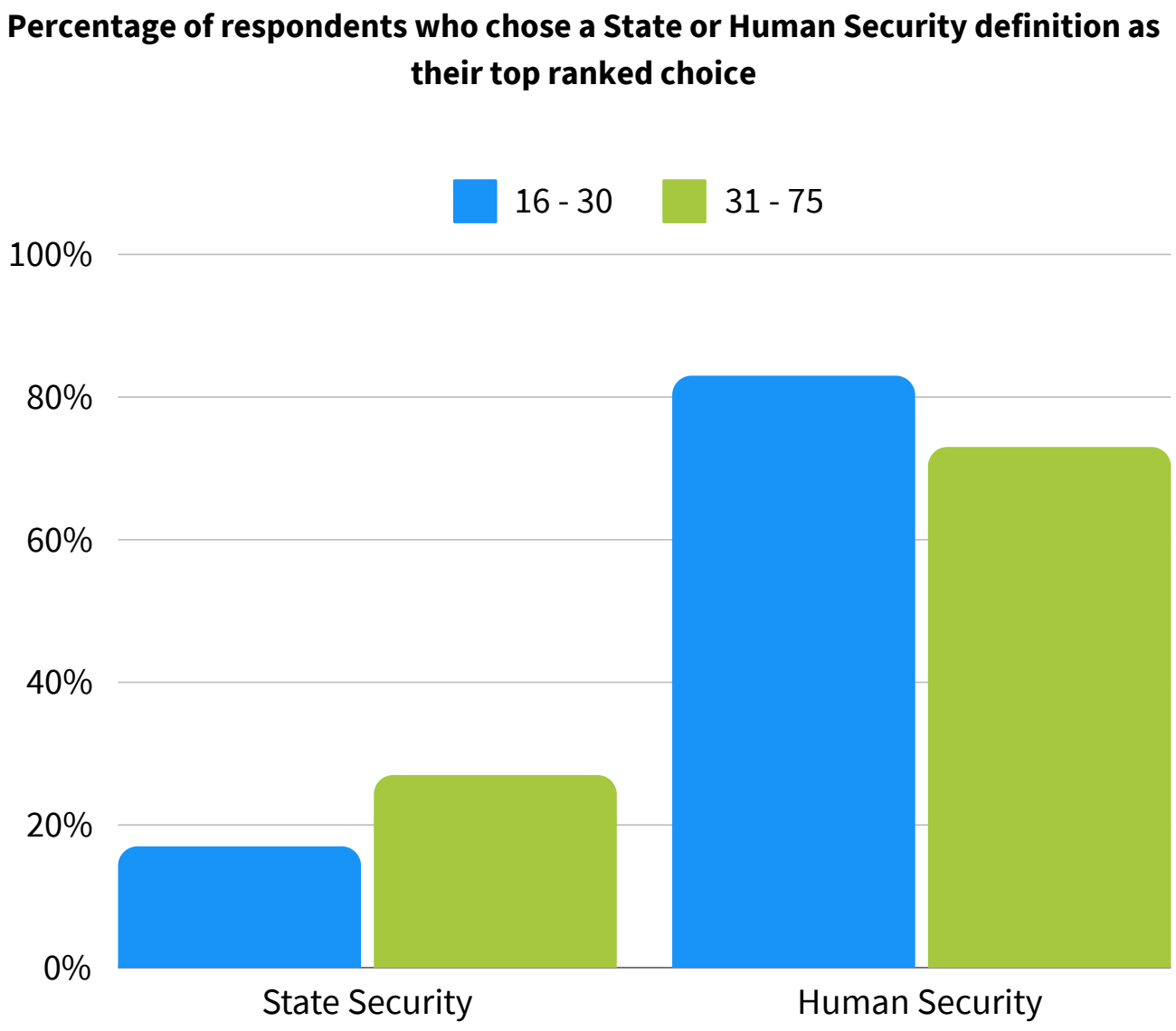


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who chose a State or Human Security definition as their top ranked choice

5 Percentages represent the proportion of people choosing each option among their list of up to four preferences who also rank it as of first importance. Total percentages in each age group therefore may exceed 100.

Question 4 - How is your quality of life affected by the following issues?

(Likert Scale 1-5. 1= very negatively / 2= negatively / 3= neutral / 4= positively / 5= very positively)

For this question, we presented respondents with 28 'issues' derived from the eight pillars of the Positive Peace Index[6] as well as other relevant literature. We then asked participants to indicate the impact of these 'issues' on their quality of life using a Likert scale. In analysing responses, we first present a visual representation. Figures 4 and 5 below visually represent responses to the 16-30 and 31-75 surveys respectively. Options 1 and 2, very negatively and negatively, have been combined, as have options 4 and 5, positively or very positively. Furthermore, for ease of visual representation, negative responses have been coloured red and positive responses have been coloured green. These two figures are fundamental in defining security in both positive and negative terms. We can see two standout aspects of these graphs:

- What is in red can be understood as 'what needs to change' for better security.
- What is in greed can be understood as 'what we need to preserve' for better security.

Moreover, with regard to those that are in red, there is a question as to whether these are things which we/our government have no control over, or whether they are a result of specific decisions/processes that decision-makers have enacted.

6 https://www.visionofhumanity.org/weaving-the-8-pillars-of-peace-through-ambassador-peace-projects

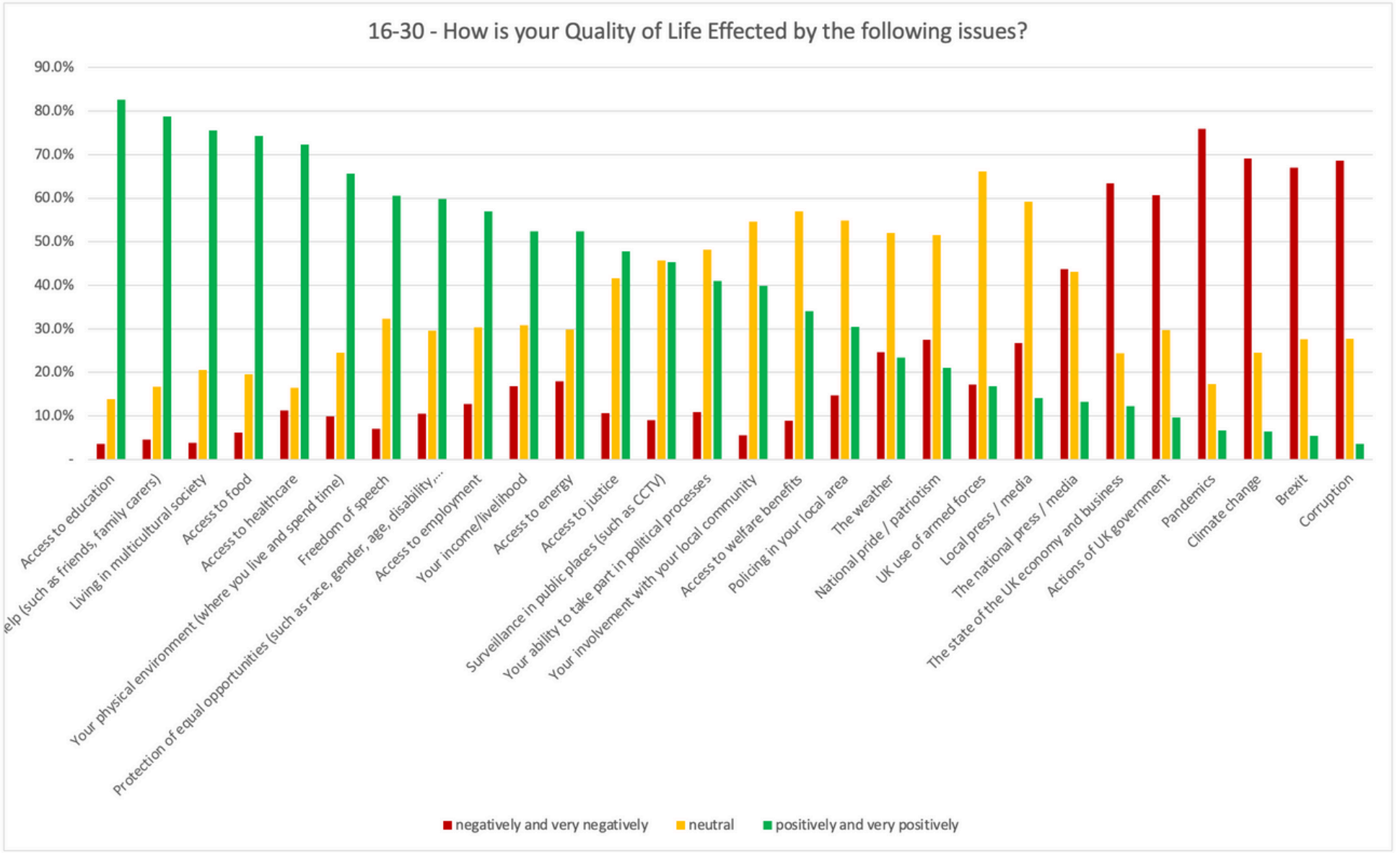


Figure 4: How is your quality of life affected by the following issues, 16-30

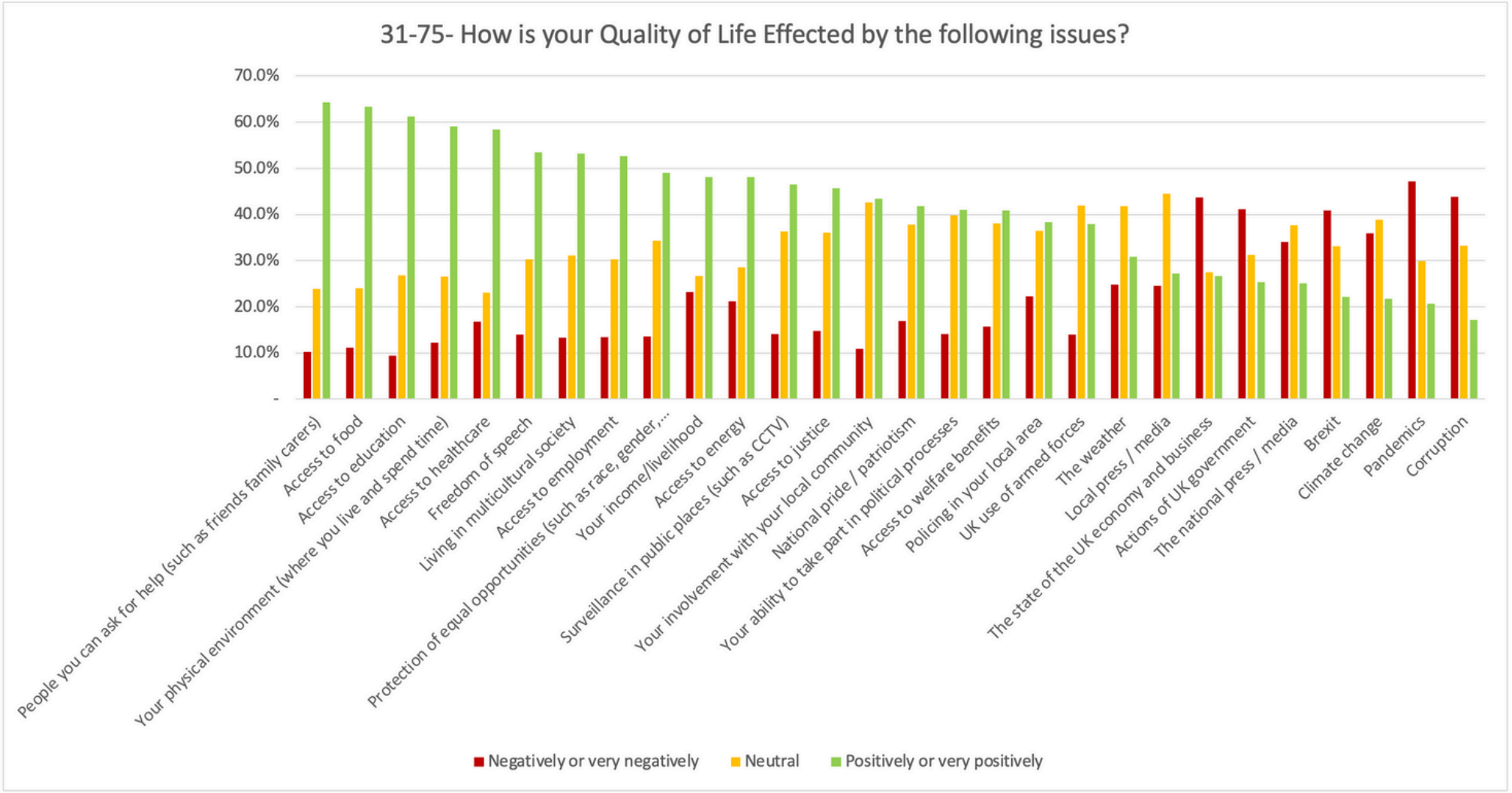


Figure 5: How is your quality of life effected by the following issues, 31-75

Across both Figures 4 and 5, it is significant to pay attention to the issues that appear on the left-hand side or green-side of the graph, that again align with human security definitions. Access to food, education and healthcare, as well as people you can get help from, are issues that have a positive impact on respondents' quality of life.

The other end of both graphs is populated by issues such as Brexit, pandemics, climate change, and actions of the UK government. Corruption is at the far right hand side of both graphs indicating that respondents feel this has a negative impact on their quality of life. However, as noted previously, the survey does not tell us why this is the case.

Actions of the UK government, by gender

For the 16-30 Survey, females were more likely to say that their quality of life was negatively affected by actions of the UK government.

		female	male
Q4_8 Actions of UK government: How is your quality of life affected by the following issues?	Negatively	63.3%	51.4%
	Neutral	28.0%	35.6%
	Positively	8.7%	13.1%

Table 7: Actions of the UK Govt by gender: 16-30

For the 31-75 Survey, females were more likely to say that their quality of life was negatively affected by the actions of the UK government.

		female	male
Q4_8 Actions of UK government: How is your quality of life affected by the following issues?	Negatively	45.7%	35.7%
	Neutral	33.0%	29.6%
	Positively	19.0%	32.7%

Table 8: Actions of the UK Govt by gender: 31-75

Actions of the UK government, by age

For the 16-30 Survey, as noted in the table below negative perceptions of actions of the UK government were reduced for the oldest respondents, those in the age range 26-30.

		16-20	21-25	26-30
Q4_8 Actions of UK government: How is your quality of life affected by the following issues?	Negatively	61.3%	64.0%	42.4%
	Neutral	28.6%	29.3%	40.0%
	Positively	10.1%	6.6%	17.6%

Table 9: Actions of the UK Govt by age: 16-30

For the 31-75 Survey, no significant difference emerged in responses when correlated by age.

Actions of the UK government, by ethnicity

For the 16-30 Survey, respondents from minoritised groups were less likely to say that their quality of life was negatively affected by actions of the UK government.

		All Minoritised Groups	English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
Q4_8 Actions of UK government: How is your quality of life affected by the following issues?	Negatively	53%	66%
	Neutral	36%	26%
	Positively	11%	9%

Table 10: Actions of the UK Govt by Ethnicity, 16-30

Table 11 below cross tabulates responses in the 31-75 survey as per respondents' ethnicity. Both surveys agree that minoritised groups were less likely to say that their quality of life was negatively affected by the actions of the UK government. It is possible that there may be variations between different minoritised ethnic groups.

		All Minoritised Ethnic Groups	White British
Q4_8 Actions of UK government: How is your personal quality of life affected by the following issues?	negatively	32.5%	43.8%
	neutral	32.3%	30.9%
	positively	32.3%	10.2%

Table 11: Actions of the UK Govt by Ethnicity, 31-75

Policing in your local area, by gender

For the 16-30 Survey, females were slightly less likely to respond that their quality of life was negatively affected by policing in their local areas. Females were also less likely to respond that they were positively affected than males.

		female	male
Policing in your local area: How is your quality of life affected by the following issues?	negatively	12.6%	16.7%
	neutral	57.4%	49.4%
	positively	30.0%	33.9%

Table 12: Policing in your local area, by gender; 16-30

For the 31-75 Survey, females were slightly more likely to respond that their quality of life was negatively affected by policing in their local areas.

		female	male
Policing in your local area: How is your quality of life affected by the following issues?	negatively	23.1%	20.9%
	neutral	38.0%	34.6%
	positively	35.8%	41.8%

Table 13: Policing in your local area, by gender; 31-75

Policing in your local area, by age

For both surveys, there was no correlation by age.

Policing in your local area, by ethnicity

For the 16-30 Survey, minoritised groups were slightly more likely to report that they were negatively impacted by policing in their local area.

		All Minoritised Groups	White British
Q4_18 Policing in your local area: How is your quality of life affected by the following issues?	negatively	16.9%	13.3%
	neutral	54.7%	55.0%
	positively	28.4%	31.7%

Table 14: Policing in your local area, by ethnicity; 16-30

For the 31-75 Survey, no significant correlation by ethnicity.

		All Minoritised Groups	White British
Q4_18 Policing in your local area: How is your personal quality of life affected by the following issues?	negatively	20.0%	22.9%
	neutral	35.2%	36.9%
	Positively	41.4%	37.4%

Table 15: Policing in your local area, by ethnicity; 31-75

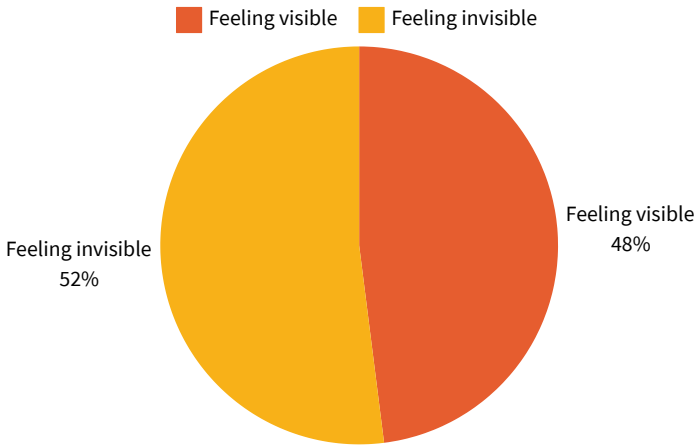
Question 5 - Thinking about your everyday life, for each of the following pairs click on the one that makes you feel most safe.

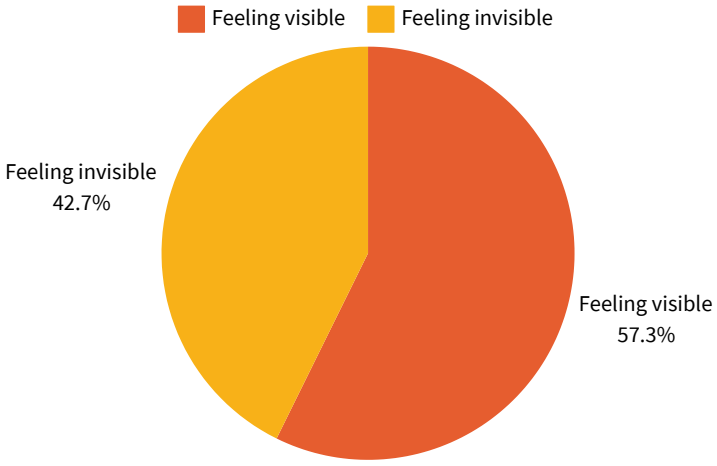
(Pairs of words with tick boxes to allow participants to choose an option. Only one choice allowed per pair):
The list below was informed largely by results from our photovoice focus groups.

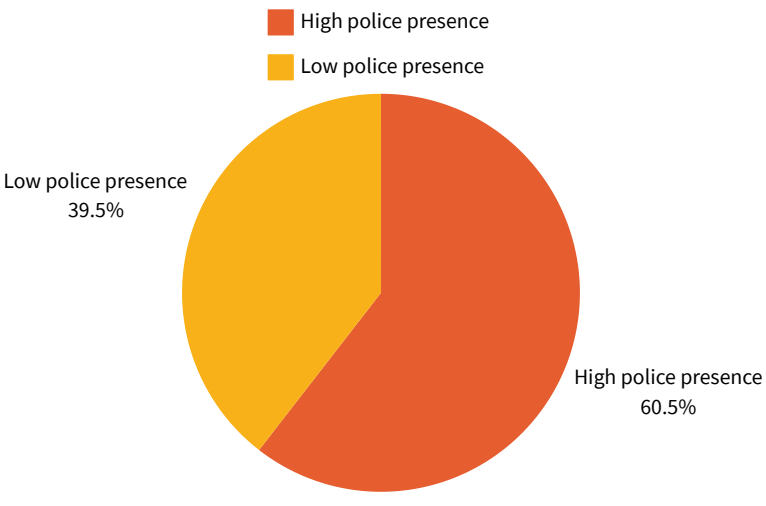
- Feeling visible / feeling invisible
- Dark spaces / well-lit spaces
- High police presence / low police presence
- Security cameras / absence of security cameras
- Bouncers and security guards / absence of bouncers and security guards
- Fences, barriers, restrictions / free access
- Open space / enclosed space
- Existence of food banks / no foodbank

Below are a selection of the responses we received:

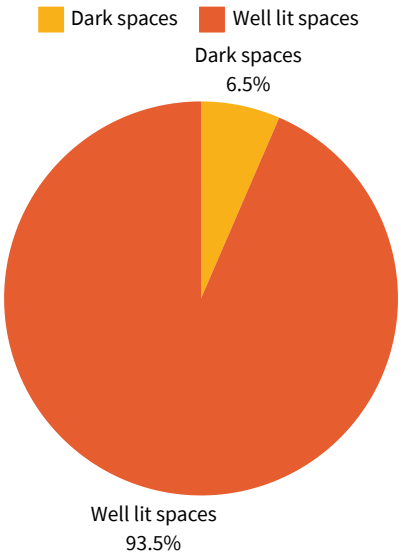
16-30 Responses

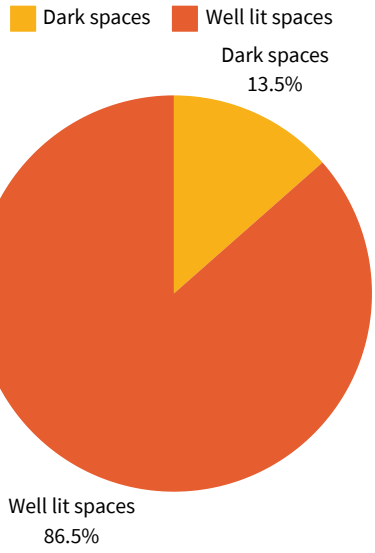


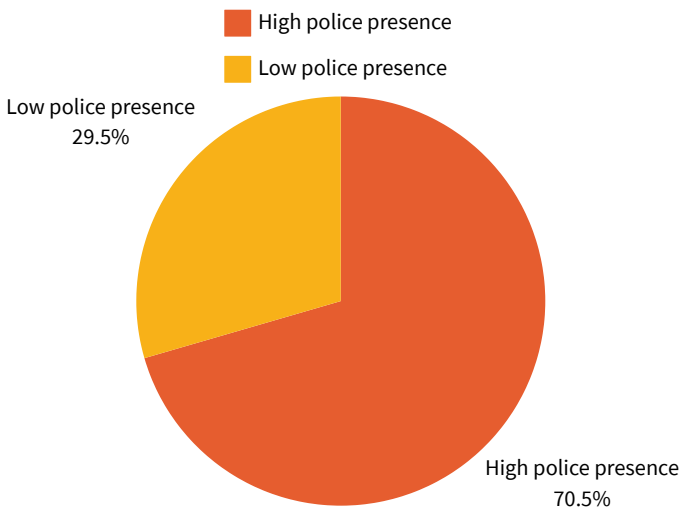




31-75 Responses







16-30 Responses

Gender: Women (64.6%) were more likely than men (58.3%) to say that they felt safer with a high police presence.

Age: As participants got older they said that they felt safer with a high police presence.

	Age		
	16-20	21-25	26-30
High Police Presence	58.1%	63.4%	68.2%
Low Police Presence	41.9%	36.6%	31.8%

Ethnicity: There was no significant difference between how minoritised and white British groups perceived the presence of police.

	All Minoritised Groups	White British
High Police Presence	61.2%	60.1%
Low Police Presence	38.8%	39.9%

31-75 Responses

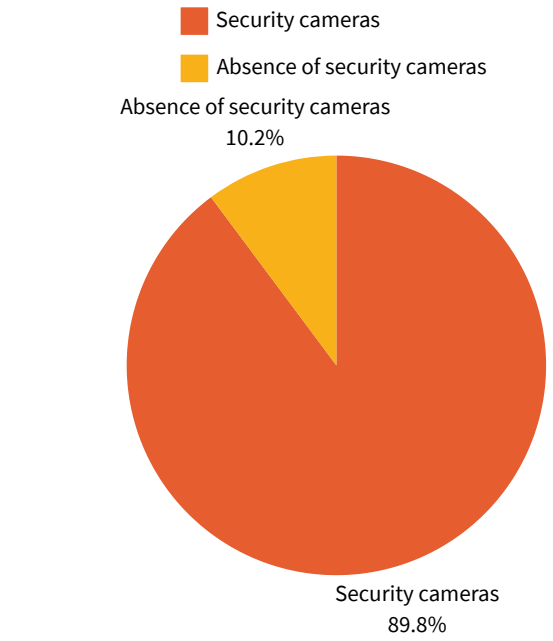
Gender: Women (75.4%) were more likely than men (65.9%) to say that they felt safer with a high police presence.

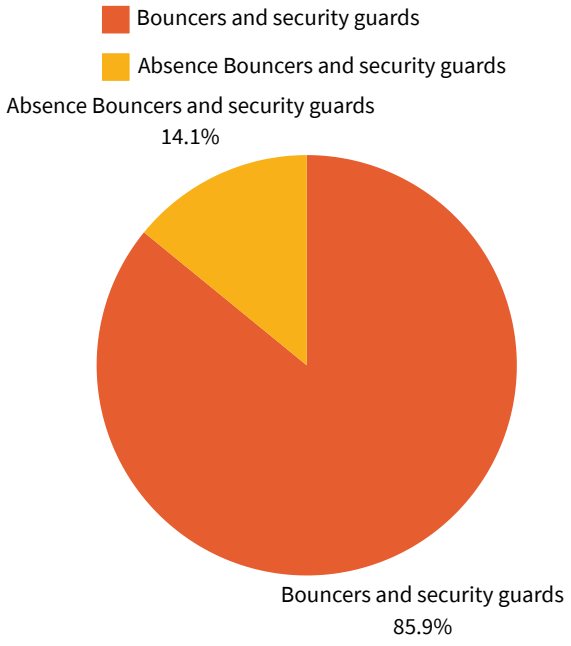
Age: There is no evident pattern correlating age and participants' responses in relation to feeling safe with high police presence. Respondents aged 61 to 70 were most likely to say that they felt safe with a high police presence (80.3%). Respondents ages 31 to 40 were the least likely to say that they felt safe with high police presence (65.5%).

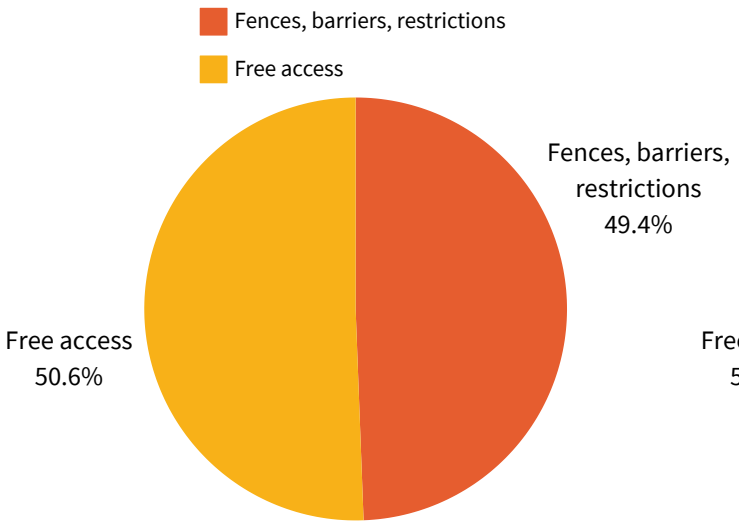
Ethnicity: Respondents from minoritised groups were less likely to feel safe in high police presence.

	All Minoritised Groups	White British
High Police Presence	62.4%	72.9%
Low Police Presence	37.6%	27.1%

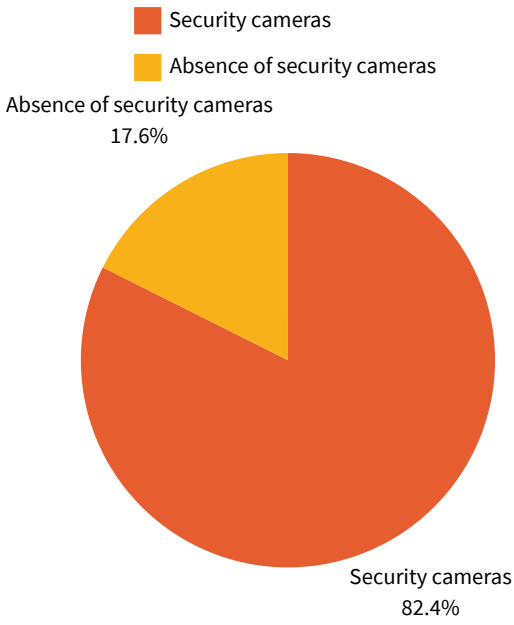
16-30 Responses

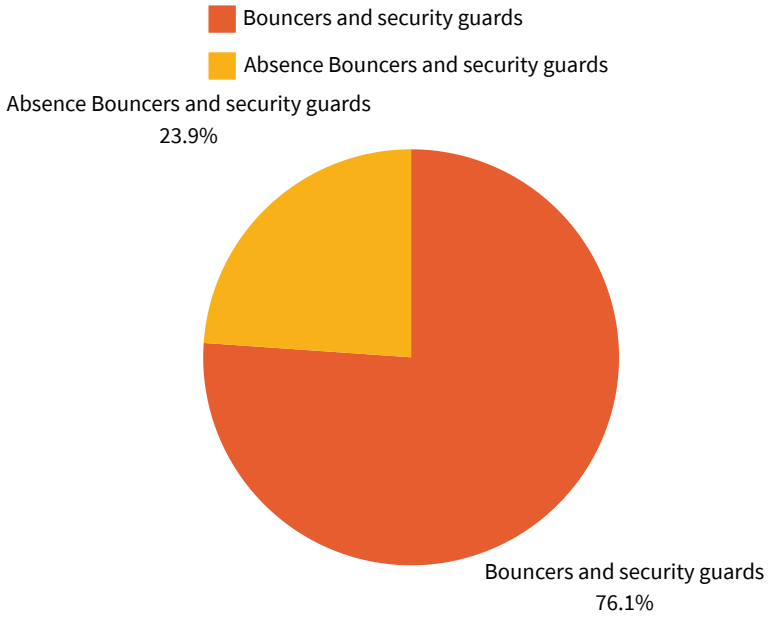


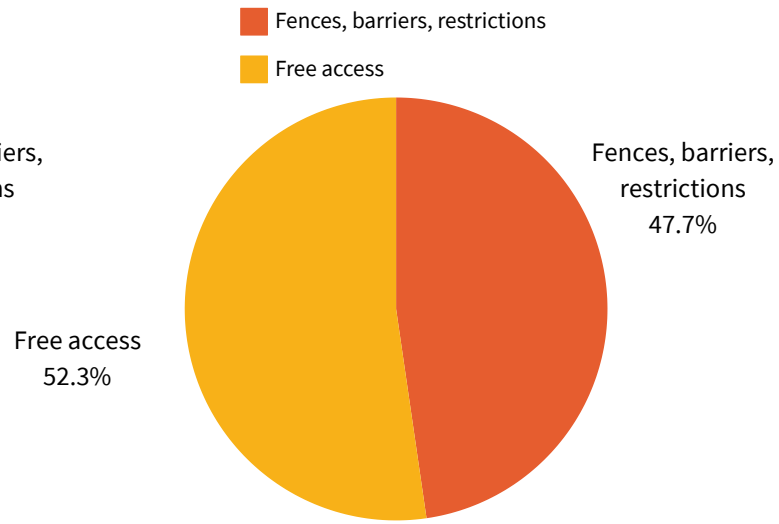


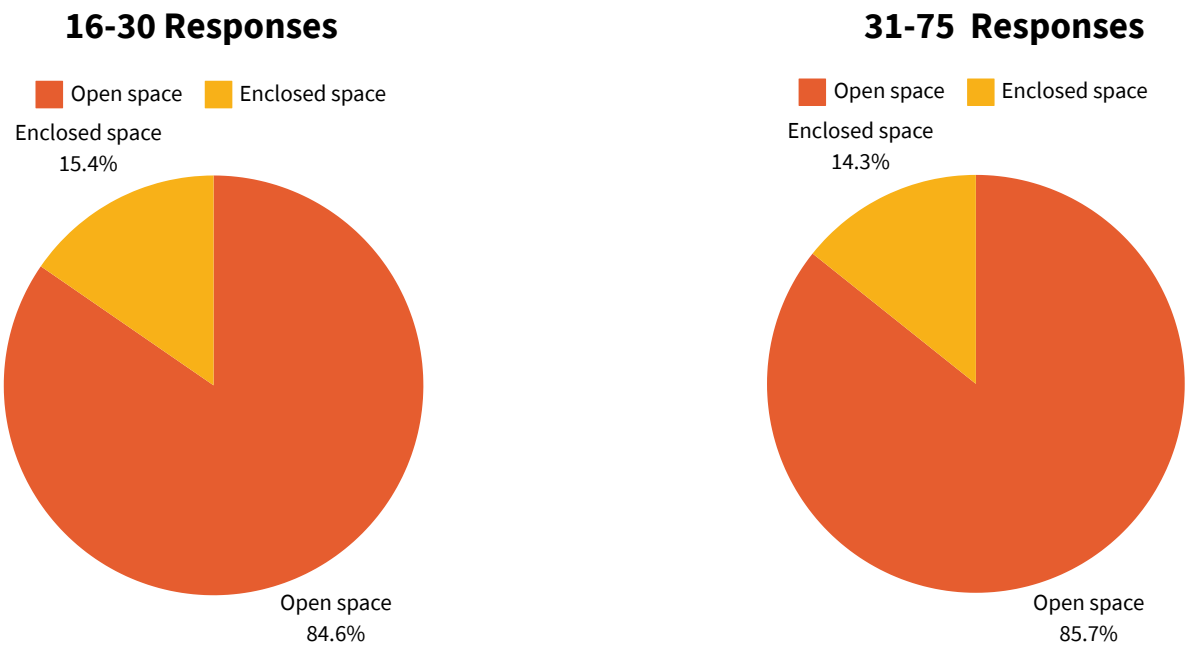


31-75 Responses









We found that attitudes towards food banks were a surprise. There is greater acceptance of food banks amongst younger generations than older ones, though in both cases the number who see foodbanks as a sign of security far outweighs the number who see no food banks in a similar light. This leads to the question of whether they see them as a sign of a caring community, which in question 1 was a significant factor in security. However, the existence of food banks in some way is a result of significant levels of poverty and food insecurity in the UK. Could this therefore be an example of the government not being seen as a leading provider of security for the everyday lived experiences of the UK population? Making this argument brings in data from question 4 (above) which sees the actions of the UK Government as something which negatively affects the quality of life amongst respondents in both surveys.

Food Banks

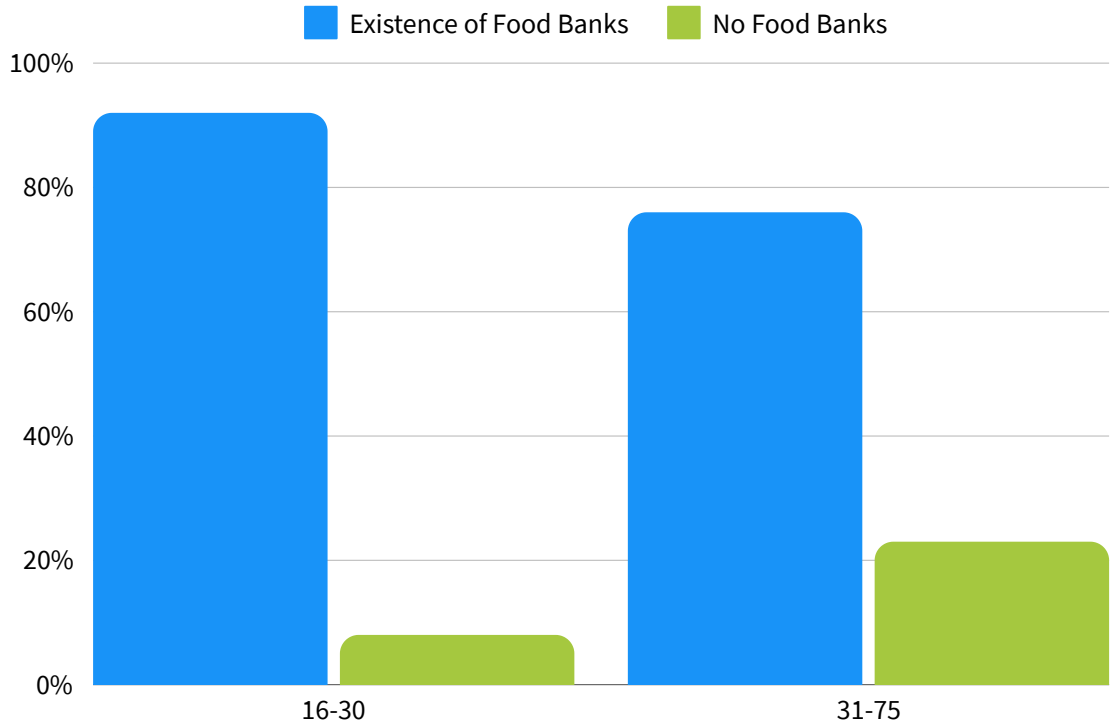


Figure 6: Participants responses in relation to food banks

Question 6 - What 3 things would make you feel safer living in the UK?

(This question provided three open text boxes. Participants could fill in as many or as few as they liked)

17% of 16-30 respondents did not answer this question, either indicating that they were unsure or that they already felt safe and couldn't think of things that would make them feel safer. This was significantly different in the 31-75 survey where over 99% responded. Analysis shows a broader range of responses to this question although some key themes emerged as outlined below:

Issues to do with **policing** were the most frequent, being mentioned in 49% of 16-30 responses and 47% of 31-75 responses. The position in relation to the police varied. Most were asking for more and 'better' police. "Better police forces that hold officers accountable" with a consistent focus on police being visible and accessible, on foot, providing more support and protection, transparency and integrity, women and minority groups being taken seriously and a trusted police force. "Police always have to be in pairs so you won't be alone with a police officer". Compared to the 16-30 survey, the 31-75 had a stronger focus on higher police presence than on better policing. On further examination, this referred to the visibility and accessibility of the police and of community policing. "More police, bring back the village bobby". A small minority were asking for tougher policing / more police powers. "More action and powers to the police".

Crime also appeared frequently (19% in the 16-30 survey and 20% in the 31-75 survey). While the majority of these simply asked for less crime, the same division was apparent here, with some calling for tougher sentencing and others asking for more education and support in crime prevention.

There seemed to be a slightly stronger leaning towards punitive measures in the 31-75 than the 16-30 survey, with phrases such as "tougher jail terms" and "proper justice". As with policing, this was a minority – the majority just wanted less crime, some specifying knife crime or drugs.

The Government was mentioned in 10% of responses across each survey. People were calling for more representation, protection of rights, stability, trustworthiness and competence, less corruption, and a very few comments indicating less intervention in foreign affairs and doing more to reduce the terrorist threat. Comments included a "government which looks after people", and "a government who uses diplomacy instead of creating more security threats".

Young people regularly referred to **concerns about the night and dark/unlit areas** (191 times, 21%). (This was also apparent in the 31-75 survey though far less frequently). They were asking for more lighting, and many were asking for increased surveillance / more cameras (although there were some asking for fewer cameras). There were many diverse references to place, showing that the places people occupy on a day to day basis are important to them in relation to needing to feel safe. This included mention of libraries, parks, streets, communities, train stations, bars, rural areas and quieter areas.

Healthcare was also raised (8% of 16-30 and 6% of 31-75), nearly all respondents who mentioned it asking for better access to healthcare and more investment in the NHS.

It should be noted that participants were able to list up to 3 items in response to this question. Responses to do with policing were massively dominant as the first comment, while responses 2 and 3 were much more diverse. Issues to do with policing were still the most common; other regular responses centred on CCTV, money, the justice system and crime, the government and the NHS.

Question 7 – What security threats have you personally experienced within the last year?

(three text boxes, optional question)

The majority of respondents didn't have a comment to make for this question. 294 16-30 respondents (27%) and 331 31-75 respondents (17%) acknowledged having experienced security threats. The responses were very diverse and often individual, but a few themes were apparent. The greatest of these seemed to be **gender-related harassment** (32% of 16-30 responses, 7% of 31-75). This included experiences of being followed, catcalled, touched, harassed, grabbed, threatened, stared at, followed in cars, whistled at, beeped at, and everything from general experiences of sexism and misogyny or feeling unsafe walking alone. (This did not include sexual assault or domestic abuse):

> *"Not major but catcalling, being honked at by cars, stared up and down by men as walking or waiting and sometimes approached by them, cars slowing down to stare and drive slowly past me". "Any time I've walked home alone from somewhere (mostly when it gets dark), being approached by strangers and not knowing if I'm safe".*

This was particularly prevalent in the 16-30 survey, and these responses came predominantly from women, including a transgender woman. **Harassment** also impacted people in other minority groups, specifically anti-LGBT, racism and transphobia.

Assault, actual or threatened, formed another cluster of responses. This included **physical assault** (being hit/kicked), actual or **attempted muggings**, people being **armed with knives** (or in one case a gun), people having their **drinks spiked, verbal abuse** in public spaces or at work, and behaviour of others (**anti-social behaviour**). This formed 19% of 16-30 responses and 18% of 31-75 responses (although the 31-75 responses were predominantly threats more than actual assault. **Sexual assault or intimate partner violence** were analysed separately; together, they were mentioned on 9 occasions in 16-30 responses, and 10 occasions in the 31-75 responses. **Relationship breakdown** appeared in the 31-75 survey but not in the 16-30 responses.

Robbery and theft (actual or attempted) of houses, cars, money, and data were mentioned in 15% of 16-30 responses (43 occasions) and in 19% of 31-75 responses. In a parallel category, hacking and scamming were mentioned in 8% of 16-30 responses and 12% of 31-75 responses.

Homes and homelessness were mentioned a number of times but in different ways. 1% of people under age 30 expressed the feeling that people experiencing homelessness posed a threat to them, but 3% in the same survey expressed concerns about unsafe housing or the risk of becoming homeless. In the 31-75 survey, threats regarding housing included having lost their home or the threat of increased mortgage costs (2% of respondents). Linked to this, to cost of living, **financial stability and the economy** were referred to in 9% of both groups' responses. A small number of these referred to specific areas of poverty such as food and energy; "poverty, using foodbanks".

Finally, other than various single responses, there were small clusters of responses around **crime** and around **discrimination**. Rising crime rates, knife crime and hate crimes were mentioned on a number of occasions, and then there were specific comments to do with discrimination incorporating racism, homophobia, transphobia, lack of support for LGBT and women's rights, and government policy around rights (specifically mentioning trans rights, protest rights and voting reform).

A different theme appeared through the 31-75 survey. This was a tendency to express fear about **witnessing or hearing about events** (particularly in the local area) even if they hadn't impacted the person directly (including fear around terrorist attacks and the Russian invasion of Ukraine), and **fear generated from the presence of particular people or groups**, with mentions of "hoodies", "gypsies", "immigrants" and "drunks". These issues were mentioned by 20% of respondents.

Another theme appearing in the 31-75 survey which was not apparent in the 16-30 survey was around **negative experiences at the hands of the police, security guards and bouncers**, although this was only mentioned by 3% of the general population respondents.

Question 8 - How much do you think each of the following are a threat to the national security of the UK?

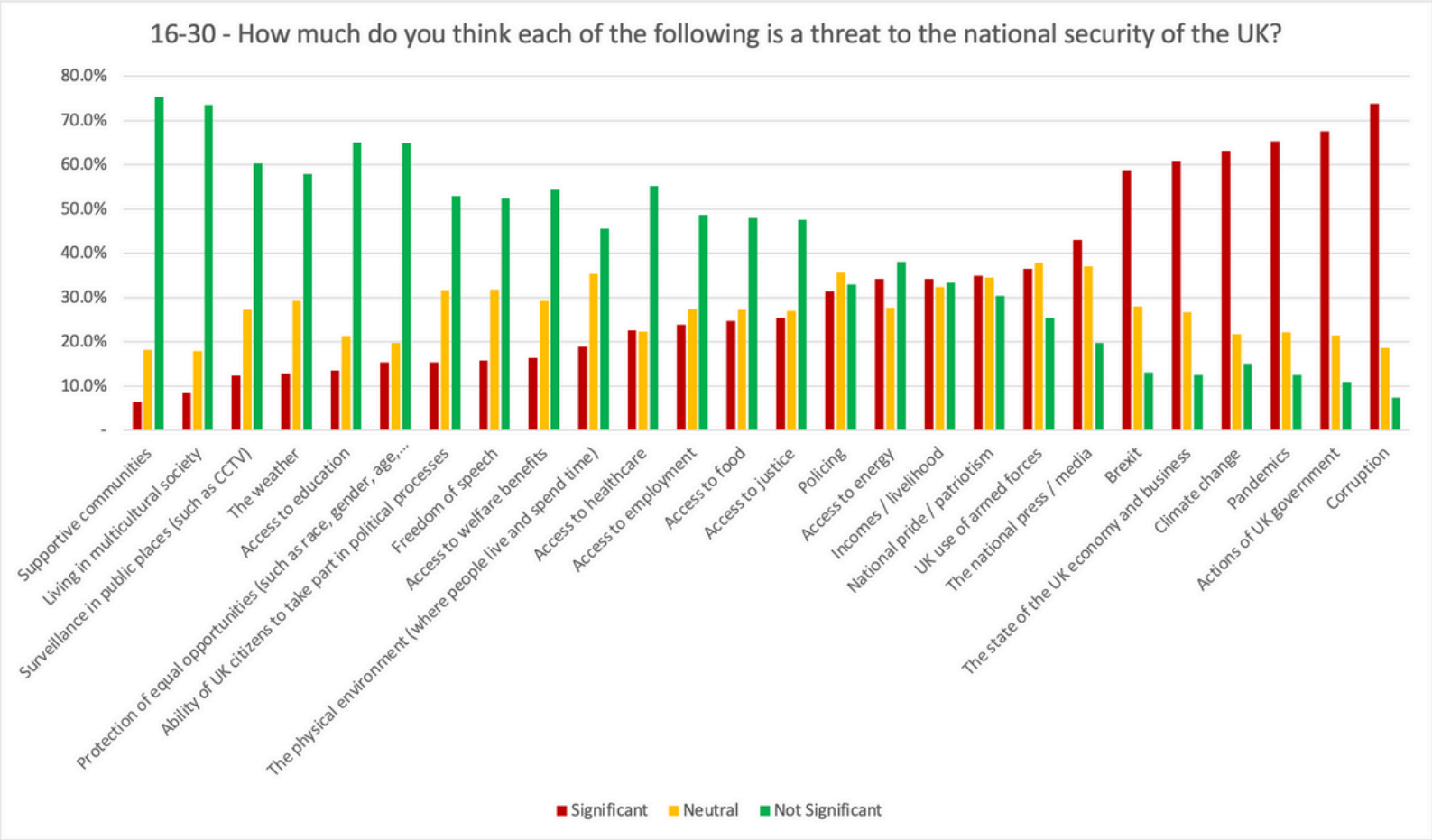


Figure 7: 16-30 - How much do you think each of the following is a threat to the national security of the UK?

Both the 16-30 and 31-75 survey responses to Q8 mirror responses to Q4, in that participants value human security concerns and consider these as least threatening to the national security of the UK. Survey respondents in the age range 16-30 considered the following six issues as the most significant threats to the national security of the UK: Corruption, Actions of the UK government, Pandemics, Climate Change, the state of the UK economy and business, and Brexit.

Survey respondents in the age range 31-75 considered the following six issues as the most significant threats to the national security of the UK: Corruption, Pandemics, Actions of the UK Government, the state of the UK economy and business, Climate Change, and Brexit. This mirrors the threats identified by younger participants. Each of these six issues would benefit from further qualitative research to unpack respondents' perception of the meaning and sense of significance of these issues.

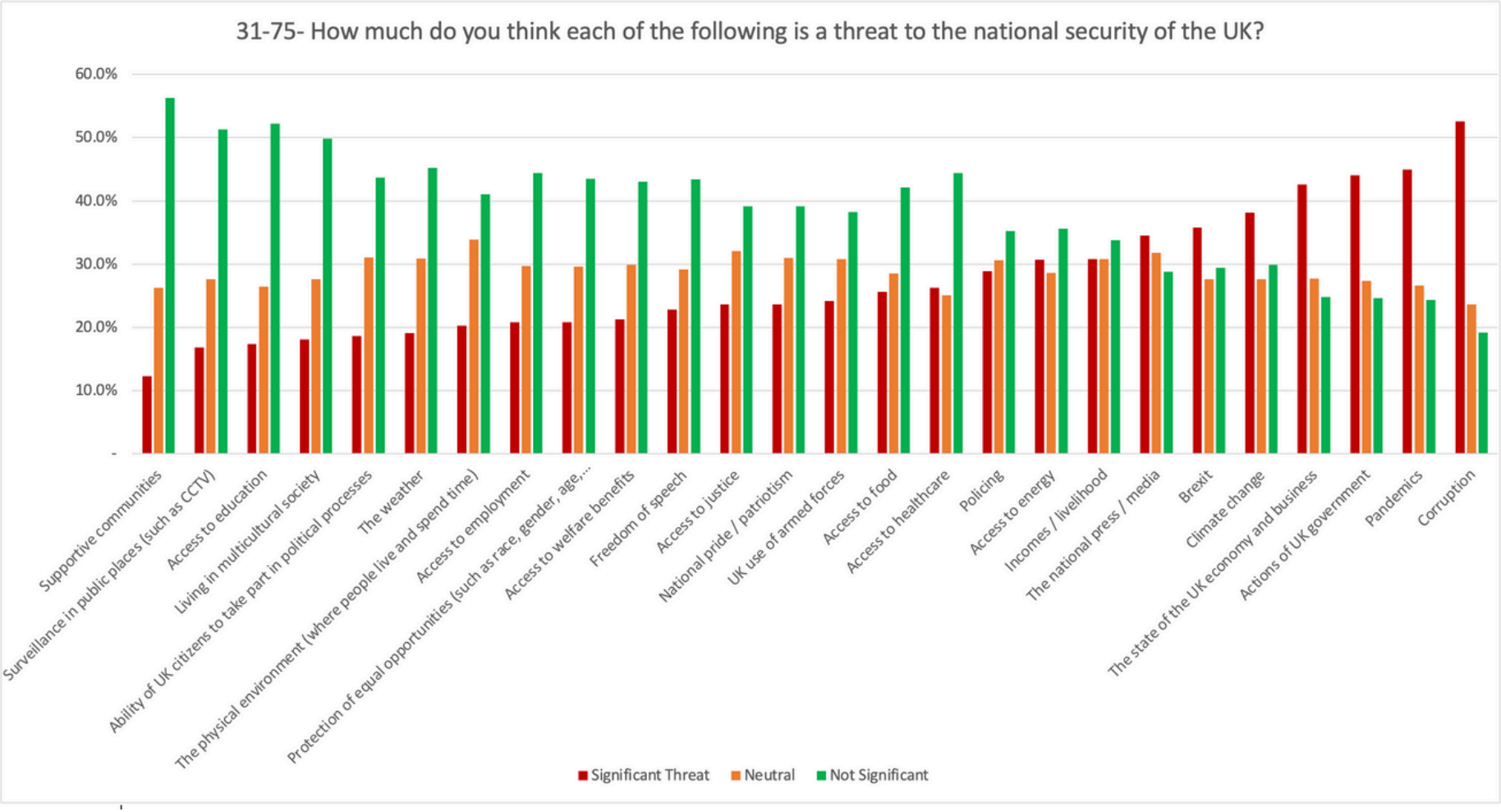


Figure 8: 31-75 - How much do you think each of the following is a threat to the national security of the UK?

Question 9 - This question asks you to think about how funding should be prioritised and spent. Imagine you have £100,000. How would you allocate this money to the budget areas below?

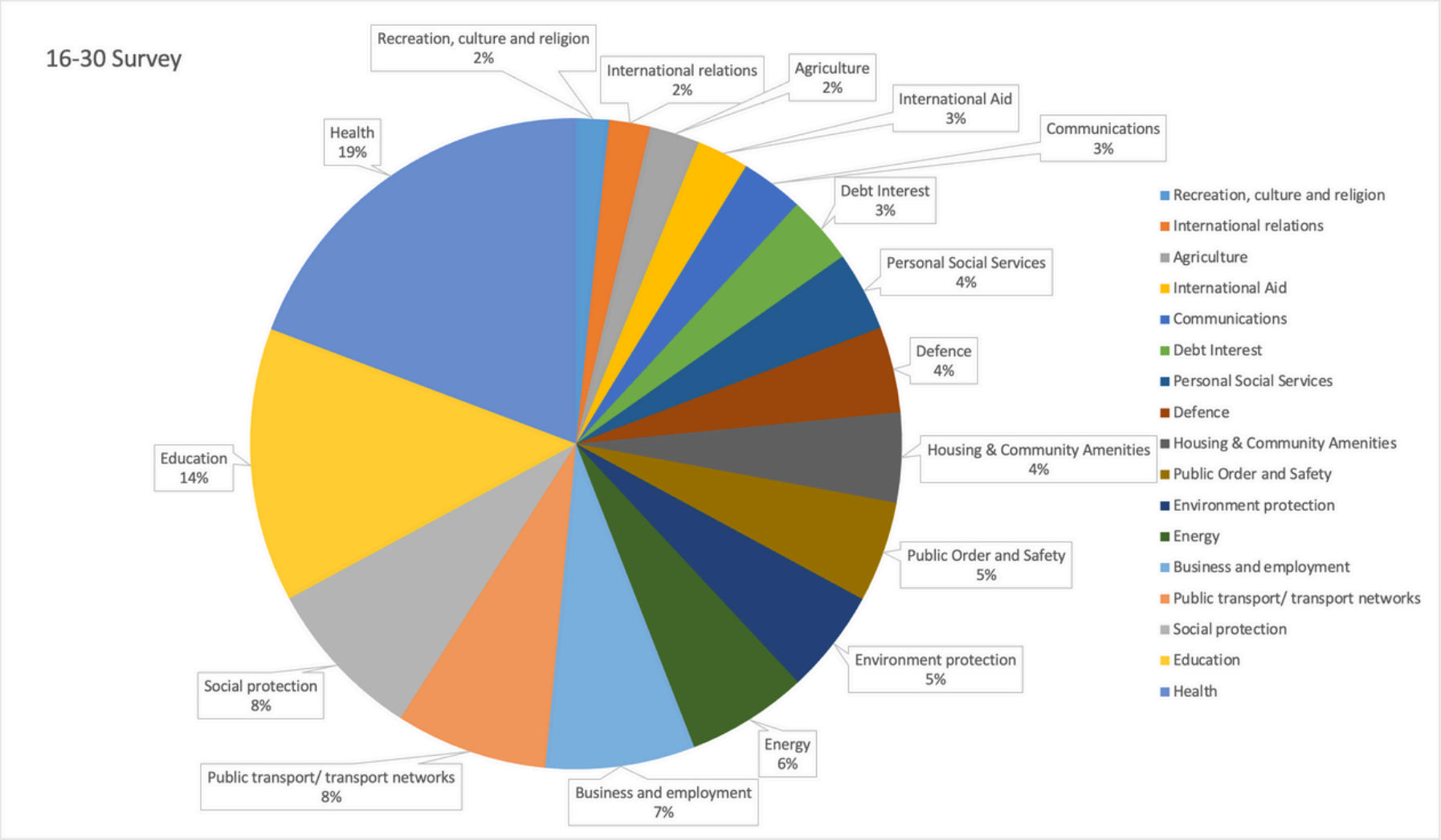


Figure 9: Imagine you have £100,000. How would you allocate this money to the budget areas below?, Responses from 16-30

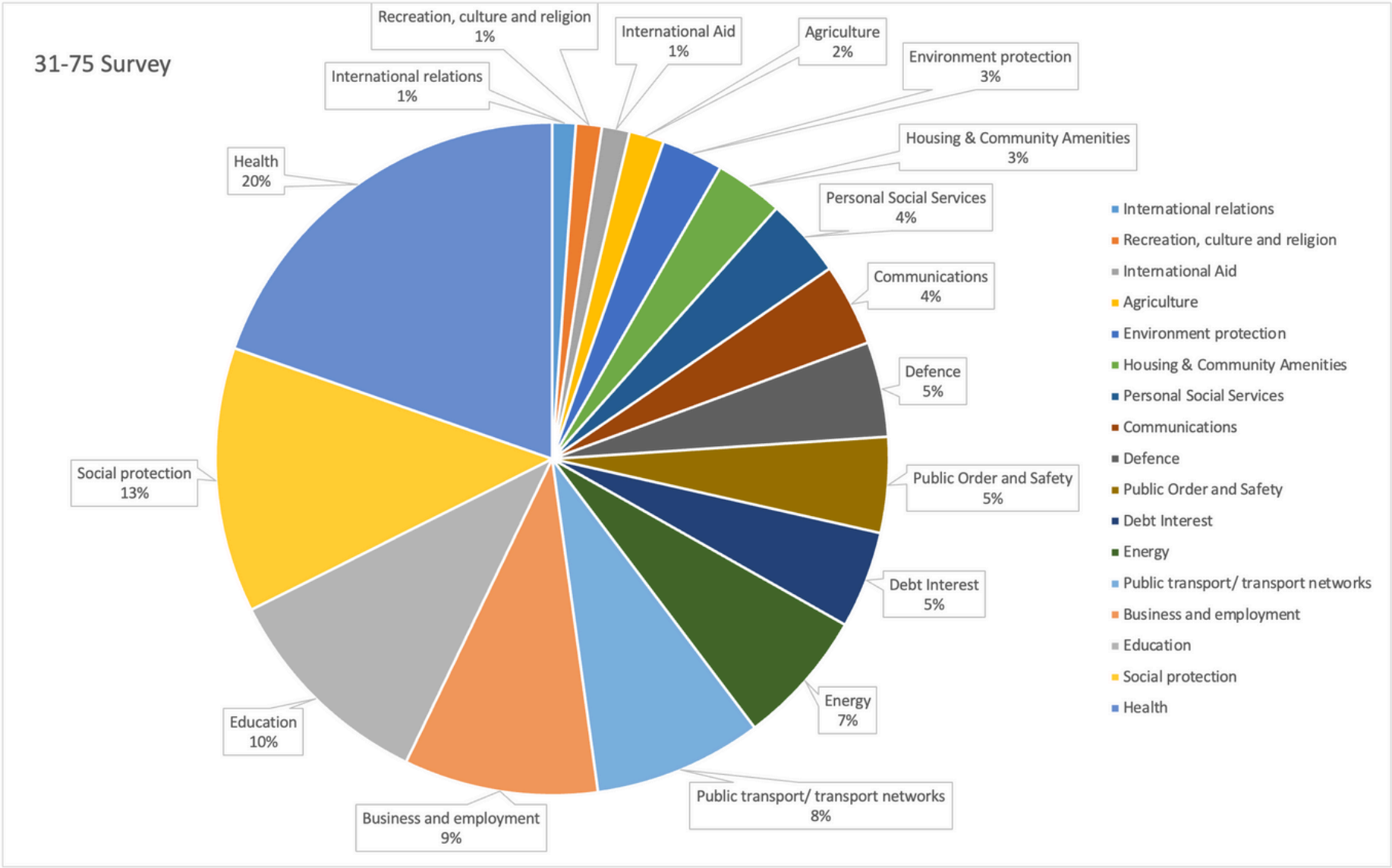


Figure 9: Imagine you have £100,000. How would you allocate this money to the budget areas below?, Responses from 31-75

Question 10 – is there anything else you want to tell us?

This was an optional question, so one can surmise that those who answered it were those who had opinions that they felt a need to express. As such they cannot be seen to represent majority views. Only 17 16-30 year olds (less than 2%) provided a response to this final question and these covered issues such as misogyny, racism and corruption in the police force and more generally (8 comments), a perceived threat from the Conservative party and the far right (2 comments) and a concern about security being compromised through immigration (3 comments).

In the 31-75 survey there were 199 responses (10%), and therefore it was easier to identify themes. Of some concern, the biggest theme identified was about **immigration** (13%). Respondents' concerns mirrored the political and media rhetoric, including comments like “have to stop the influx of immigrants, bit by bit our way of life is being destroyed”. A couple of comments countered this, such as “the negative outlook on the current influx of immigrants is creating distrust within our country”, but the concerns expressed about immigration outweighed the concerns expressed for asylum-seekers.

The same views were also picked up in a few comments suggesting that a **Human Rights** focus was damaging to our security; “mass immigration and wokery has wrecked this once great country”; “Woke offences being giving more airtime and being taken more seriously than physical crimes such as abuse, rape, domestic violence”. “Yes English people that have worked and paid their way seem to be treated like second class citizens compared to all the immigrants and none English, would even go as far as saying that being white and English is a hindrance in this country”. These comments represent a very small minority of the general population sample. In contrast, there were some comments expressing concern about “People turning on each other as they’re different” and criticisms of the governments' hostile approach towards refugees “I feel that the government are targeting working people and undocumented immigrants”. Criticisms and worries about the **government** made up 7% of responses.

Policing continued to remain a theme (11%). While a number of comments just mentioned police or policing, the majority were once again asking for increased police presence “There needs to be more visible policing”. In addition, concerns were expressed over aggressive policing and “police corruption and failures”. Violence against women from the police and more generally was part of this theme and their need for protection.

People’s **financial worries** were represented here too, accounting for 9% of comments and ranging from issues of the national economy to individual everyday costs. Finally, **international security themes** were represented here, with 10% of comments ranging from concerns about Russia, China, the war in Ukraine, the nuclear threat and terrorism.

SECTION III - CONCLUSIONS

The volume of data generated by these surveys creates scope for further enquiry and analysis. One key conclusion which can be drawn is that of a strong and generalised leaning towards broad human security concerns over those typically addressed within state security policy, across demographics. This finding emerged repeatedly throughout responses to questions in a variety of formats. It confirms, in line with Fearnley's (2023) concerns, that previous security surveys have failed to ask the questions which would allow the general population to express their main priorities, and that faced with a question that goes beyond the binary, UK citizens have a range of views.

Limitations have been identified throughout this report. The results, as highlighted, do not enable us to identify what respondents mean by corruption, or to clarify their positions. We believe that these apparent shortcomings are valuable in terms of identifying areas for further exploration in areas where a deeper understanding would be of benefit. For example, there is scope for future research in identifying concerns about foodbanks, and in clarifying peoples' positions as to the relative security of visibility or invisibility, and the presence or absence of fences and barriers (Q3). It would also be of value to explore where the UK public believe the responsibility lies for ensuring these different aspects of security.

The charts presented in response to questions 4 and 8 provide a powerful tool for identifying areas which need either protecting or challenging in order for the residents of the UK to feel more secure and these priorities were consistently echoed through responses to other questions. Overall, the findings presented here demonstrate that people have a clear notion of what security means to them - a notion centred on financial stability, a secure home, employment, relationships, health and safe spaces. While at least half of participants across both age groups felt that the UK gave them this security, a significant number did not feel this was the case, that number increasing with age. There were a number of security issues arising through the survey indicating areas for action in enabling people to feel safer.

The anomalies highlighted in Hacsek's (2022) review are echoed here. For example, while many respondents felt strongly about climate change as an issue impacting security, question 10 picked up concerns about immigration which seem to echo government and media rhetoric. Security policy does not appear to recognise the interrelationship between concepts such as climate change and migration, and our survey has equally not addressed this issue.

In conclusion, while the Integrated Review started with a seemingly open definition of its approach to security "the protection of our people, territory, critical national infrastructure, democratic institutions and way of life" (Integrated Review, 2021), it appears that "our people" do want the security that enables them to go about their daily lives as opposed to a narrow focus on military and terrorist threats.

HOW DO THE BRITISH PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THEIR SECURITY?

RESPONSES FROM A NEW APPROACH TO PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYING

Research Centre
Trust, Peace and
Social Relations

Coventry University

Rethinking Security
for a just and peaceful world

Alternative
Security
Review