

Britons and Gender Identity

**Navigating
Common Ground
and Division**

**Stakeholder Briefing
June 2022**

Why is More in Common writing this report?

Current debate is helping no one – public conversation and elite/online debate couldn't be more different

Little engagement with what the public thinks on these issues.

Discussion currently dominated by those with the most extreme positions

How we handle change matters, finding common ground and a better conversation about change is possible

Our unique values-based perspective



Methodology

Polling

- The polling cited in this report was carried out by Public First. The results are weighted by interlocking age & gender, region and social grade to Nationally Representative. Details of fieldwork and sample size:
 - *Fieldwork (17/11/2021 – 23/11/2021), N = 2,046*
 - *Fieldwork (13/04/2022 – 21/04/2022), N = 3,140*

Focus groups

- Research from 20 focus groups has been used in this report. In spring 2022, More in Common convened a series of focus group discussions focusing on issues of sex and gender-based rights in Long Eaton, Witney, Cardiff, Glasgow, Bury and Manchester. We also ran a series of focus groups focused more generally on culture war topics – and where gender identity was discussed – in the summer of 2021 in Brighton, London, Manchester, Stoke and Blyth. We've also drawn insights from regular focus groups focused on current affairs.
- Participants for all focus groups were recruited from across the British Seven segments by our independent recruitment partners from across areas in England, Scotland and Wales. All focus groups were recorded, transcribed and analysed by More in Common team members.

**The starting
points**

The British public's starting points on gender identity

Compassion

Live and let live

1 in 4 know someone transgender

Case-by-case approach -
reject one size fits all
approaches

Balance inclusion with
fairness and safeguards

Solutions-focused

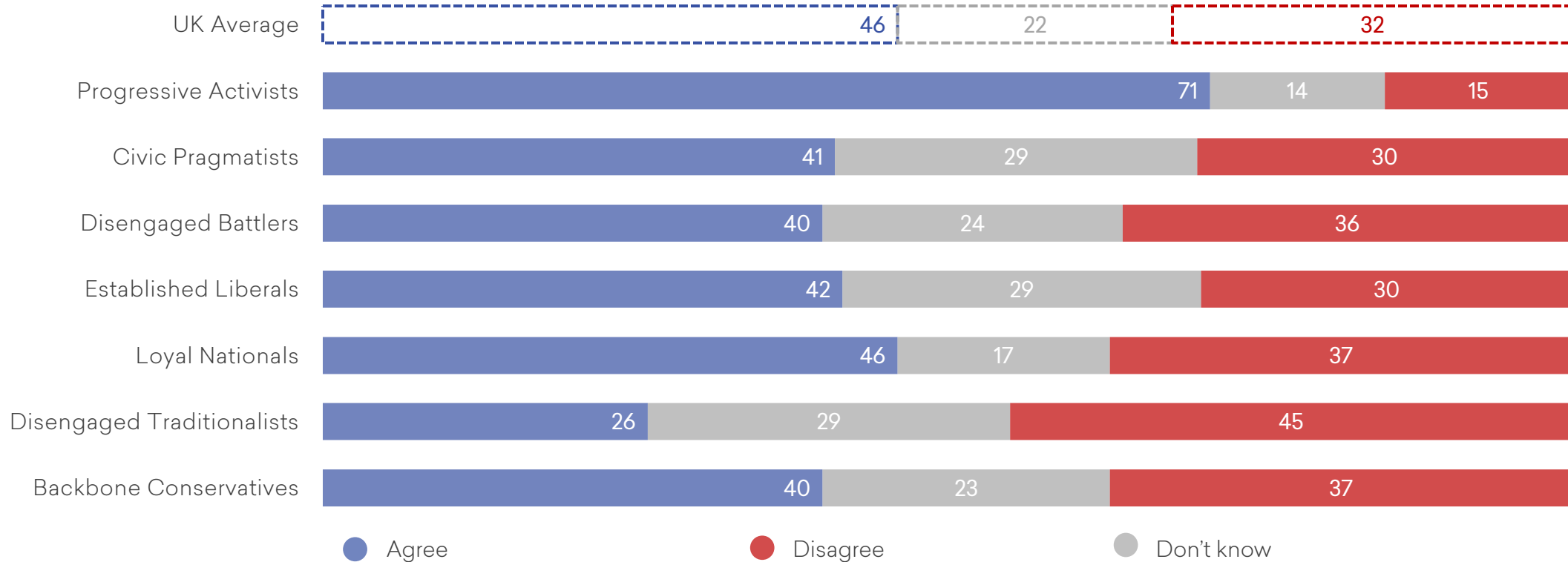
Informed about the issues,
not the elite debate

Only 2% think 'the debate
about trans' is a top issue
facing the country

Fear of saying the wrong
thing

Is a trans man a man and a trans woman a woman?

More agree than disagree, with little variation by segment

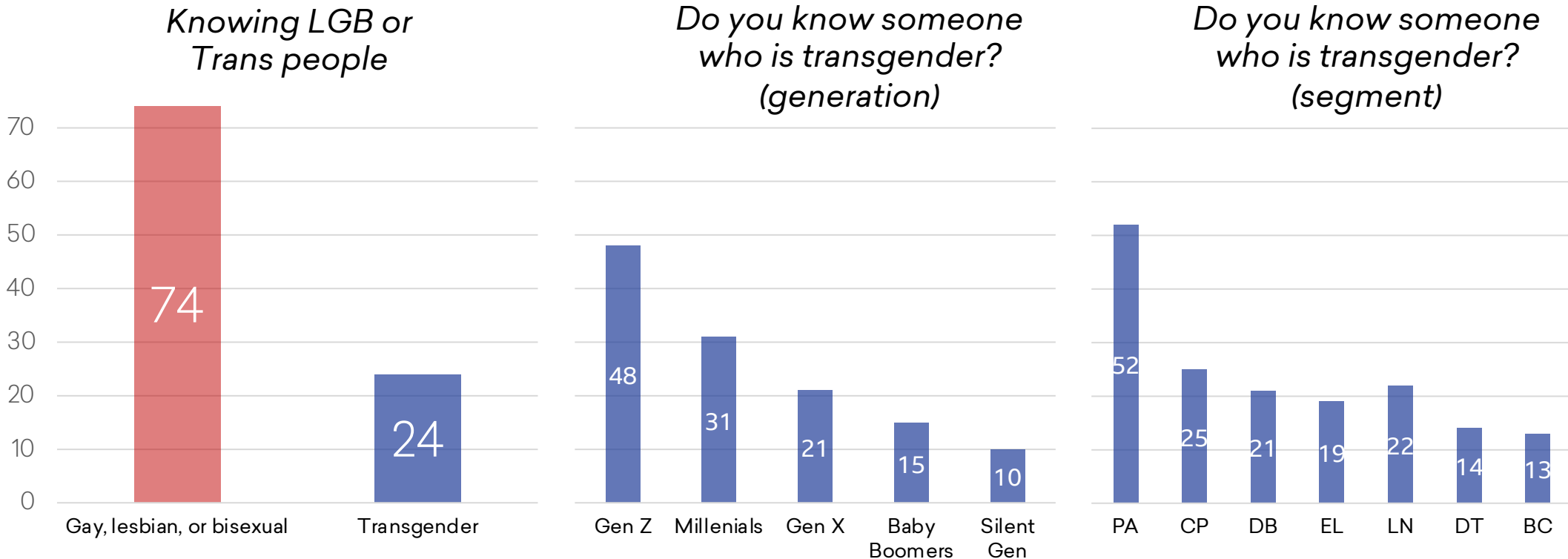


Question: To what extent do you agree with the following? A transgender man is a man. A transgender woman is a woman (Questions asked separately, but results presented together, as differences between them negligible)

Source: More in Common November 2021

Do you know someone who is...?

Almost three quarters of Britons know someone who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, compared to less than a quarter who know someone who is transgender. This clearly breaks down by age – with almost half of Gen Z knowing someone who is transgender



Question 1: Do you know someone who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

Question 2: Do you know someone who is transgender? [Gen Z = 18-24, Millennials = 25-40, Gen X = 41-55, Baby Boomers = 55-74, Silent Gen = 75+]

Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

The issues

Trans athletes in sport

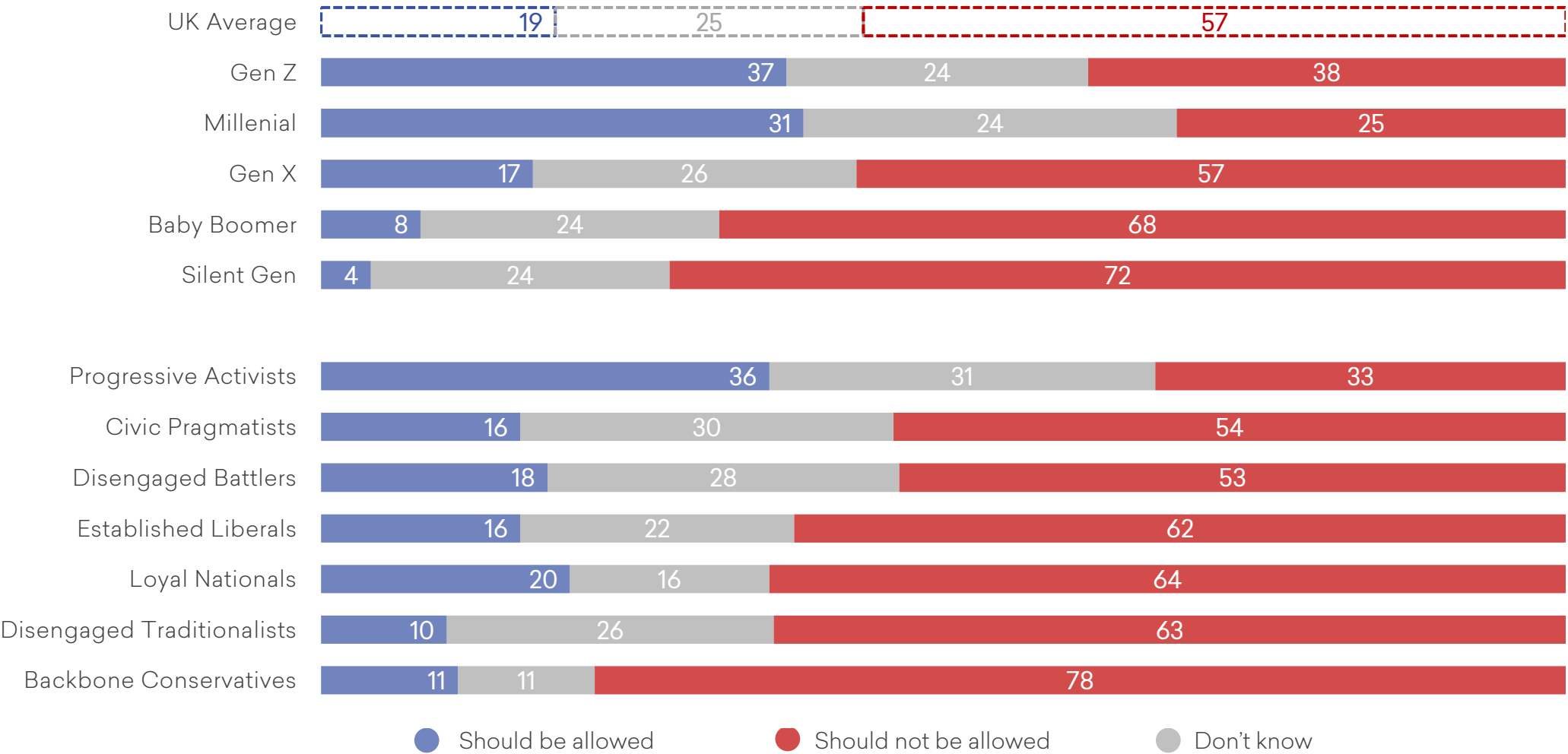


Trans athletes in sport

- Britons do not think that trans women should be able to compete in women-only sporting events – this is even true of groups who are supportive of full trans inclusion on all other measures
- The participation of trans women in elite women-only sport is regularly brought up unprompted in focus group conversations about gender identity – but focus is on elite level rather than grassroots.
- The public's concerns are not about definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman – but a question of fairness given the physiological advantages that people born biologically male have over females
- Most recognise the difficulty of offering inclusion in most areas – but not sport.
- Discussions about the participation of trans athletes in women-only sports have the potential to lead to broader polarisation in the gender identity debate.
- The immediate reaction of many participants was to think of other ways for trans athletes to compete in sports – with separate or mixed categories for trans athletes

Trans women in sport

Most Britons do not think that trans women should be able to participate in women-only sporting events



Should a trans woman be able to take part in women's sporting events? (More in Common Public First April 2022)

Children and young people



Schools

- Almost all Britons think that schools should have strong anti-bullying policies. Two fifths think that they should have a specific policy to tackle transphobia.
- A majority think schools - at least at secondary school - should talk to children about trans people
- In focus groups, it was clear the public expect schools to introduce children to people and families who might be different from them, and some were frustrated that schools made things worse by ducking the issues



"They should be talking about it. I teach my daughter, she's only six, and I've already explained to her about a man and a man can get married. I've even had the conversation of that. Not obviously into so much detail, because obviously she's still very young. But I've said that a man can sometimes feel that they're born inside ... Sorry. Yeah, a man would feel like they're like a woman born inside of a man's body, and they want to transition and live their life as a female. And that's their choice. And so I try and open her up to the idea of things like that. To be more accepting of it as she grows up."

Dave, Disengaged Traditionalist, 30, Bristol



"There's a school where one of my friend's child goes, and they had somebody who was transitioning from I think male to female. Basically, the school said, when Matthew leaves after the holidays, he's coming back as Alex. Don't ask them any questions, because if you do, you'll be suspended. And it was all like, they weren't allowed to ask questions. So, then they've obviously got questions, because they're children. So rather than teaching them and educating them about it or having a class about it or something, they just said, don't ask any questions. Which I just think is wrong because it just makes it even more of an alien thing for people then."

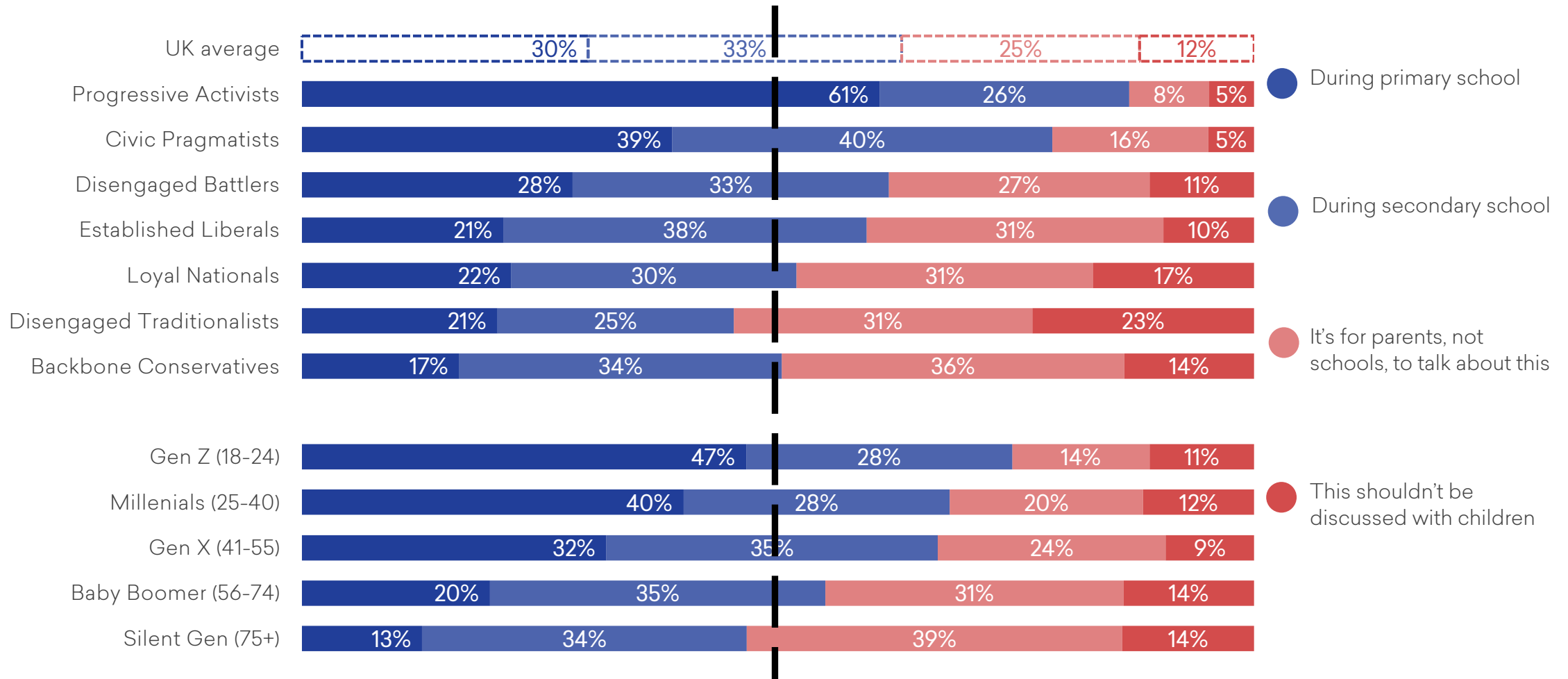
Nigel, Loyal National, 49, Manchester

"That's changed a lot since I was in Catholic school, it never was like that before. We weren't allowed to know anything about gays. There was no gays, there were no lesbians, there were no bisexuals, there were no transgender people."

Ailish, Loyal National, 30, Bristol

When is it appropriate for schools to tell children that some people are transgender

A majority think schools – at least at secondary level - should talk to children about trans people



Question: When is it appropriate for schools to tell children that...some people are transgender ('don't knows' of 12 per cent excluded)

Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

Children, young people and transition

- Most people are relaxed about children identifying as a gender different to the one they were assigned at birth.
- However, taking physical steps towards transition (such as permanent cross-sex hormones) is more controversial, with opinion more divided.
- While none of our focus groups mentioned high profile stories about the Tavistock clinic, there was an instinctive reaction against allowing children to make irreversible decisions without proper and impartial medical assessment and processes.
- In one focus group after the Government announced its plan to pause the ban on so-called 'trans conversion therapy' most were baffled that such practices could exist and pointed to the mental health problems 'trying to change people' was likely to cause.



"No, one of the places that I used to work in, the wee boy would come in and he had long hair and he used to wear clips and he's here, that was mom's choice. Mom would put the clips in the hair and there was a big girl who used to say, she's my friend, you're saying, but that's a boy. And she was going, "Yes, it's a boy. But she's my friend." The children didn't know if it was a boy or it was a girl. But that wasn't the wee boy's choice. That was the parent's choice. And I think that's wrong because that's not an individual's choice, that's being pushed on that child."

Tracey, Disengaged Traditionalist, 48, Glasgow



"They'll probably follow certain trends and then in a few years they might not feel like that anymore. So yeah, I think there should be some sort of age limit on it or something like that. But it's who kind of decides that? I don't know. It's quite an awkward subject really."

Daniel, Progressive Activist, 29, Manchester

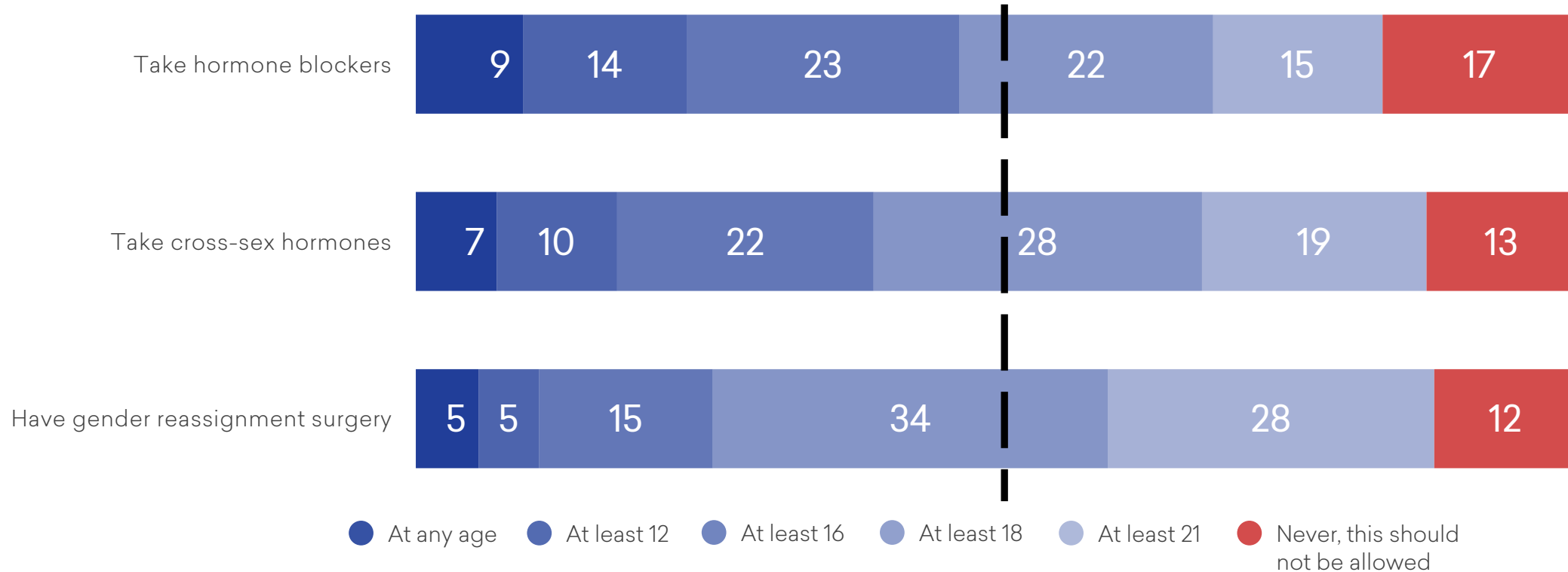


"When I first left the navy I retrained as a teacher. So I worked about six or seven years as a teacher teaching D and T. And I had a girl in my tutor group who changed twice. She wanted her name twice. So she wanted to be called a boy first. Then she went back to being an original girl, and then she wanted to be called a different boy's name. So I think that what I found basically is sometimes they follow the trend, because they think it makes them different...I was quite surprised how prevalent it is. I would say virtually there's one or two people in every class now...And I don't think they actually know, so I actually think there should be an age limit."

Tony, Disengaged Traditionalist, 62, Bury

What age should someone be able to...?

A majority of Britons believe physical medical interventions towards transitioning should not start below the age of 18



Question: Hormone blockers temporarily but not permanently delay changes associated with puberty Cross-sex hormones are hormones given to permanently change someone's physical appearance to be more consistent with their gender identity (e.g. facial hair or voice deepening) Gender reassignment is the surgery by which a transgender person's physical attributes are altered to match the gender they identify with (e.g. breast and genital surgery) At what age should someone be able to... [Don't know scores of 25, 23, and 20 per cent excluded]

Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

Single sex spaces

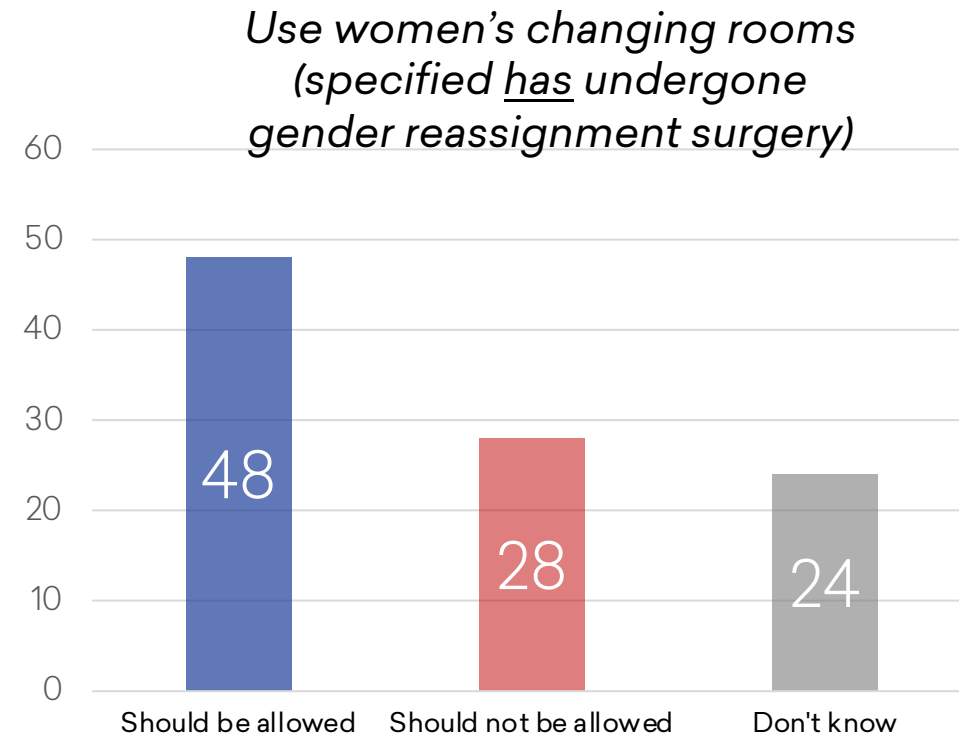
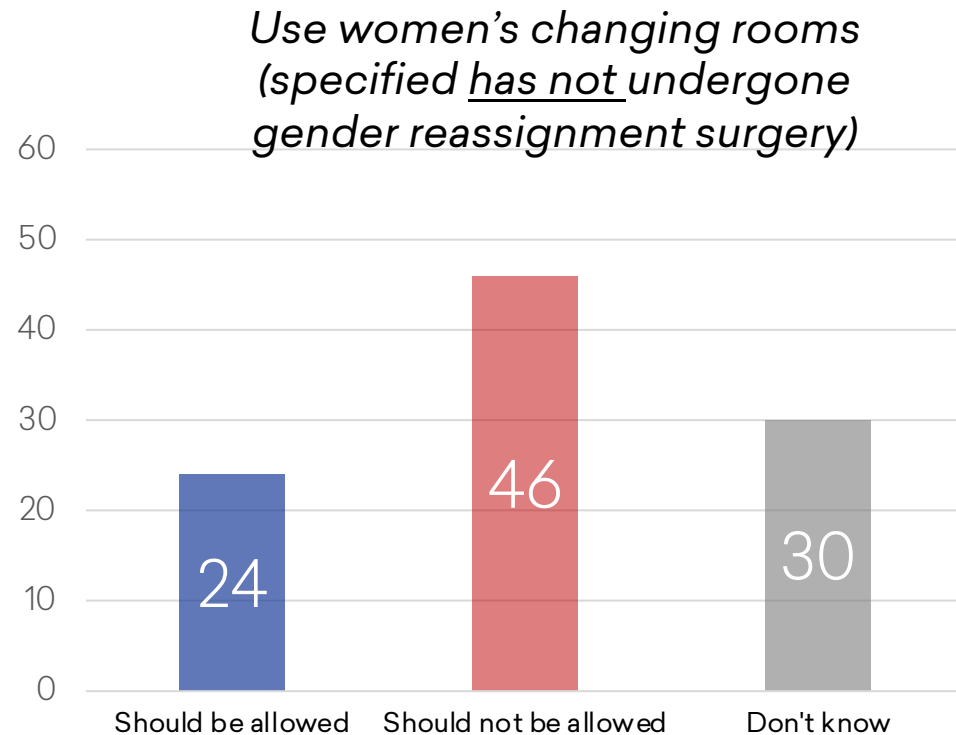


Single sex spaces – changing rooms and toilets

- Public discussion about single sex spaces is more nuanced than the elite debate – where much of public support depends on whether or not a person has had gender reassignment surgery
- For those who have undergone gender reassignment surgery, most people do not express concerns about them using facilities for their expressed gender
- However, when it comes to trans people who haven't undergone gender reassignment surgery, there is greater opposition to their accessing of single-sex spaces – driven, for many, by a concern that men may abuse it, rather than a specific threat perceived from trans people using single sex spaces
- But even then, these groups look for common sense ways of finding solutions – including the wider availability of unisex toilets.
- Support for increasing the availability for unisex toilets is more supported in workplaces and public places, but there is more opposition in schools and gyms
- Many people think about single-sex spaces through beyond the narrow gender identity lens – including many people not liking communal changing areas and view that men are less hygienic than women

Has / has not undergone gender reassignment surgery: changing rooms

Support for trans women using women's changing rooms doubles, when it is specified that they have undergone gender reassignment surgery

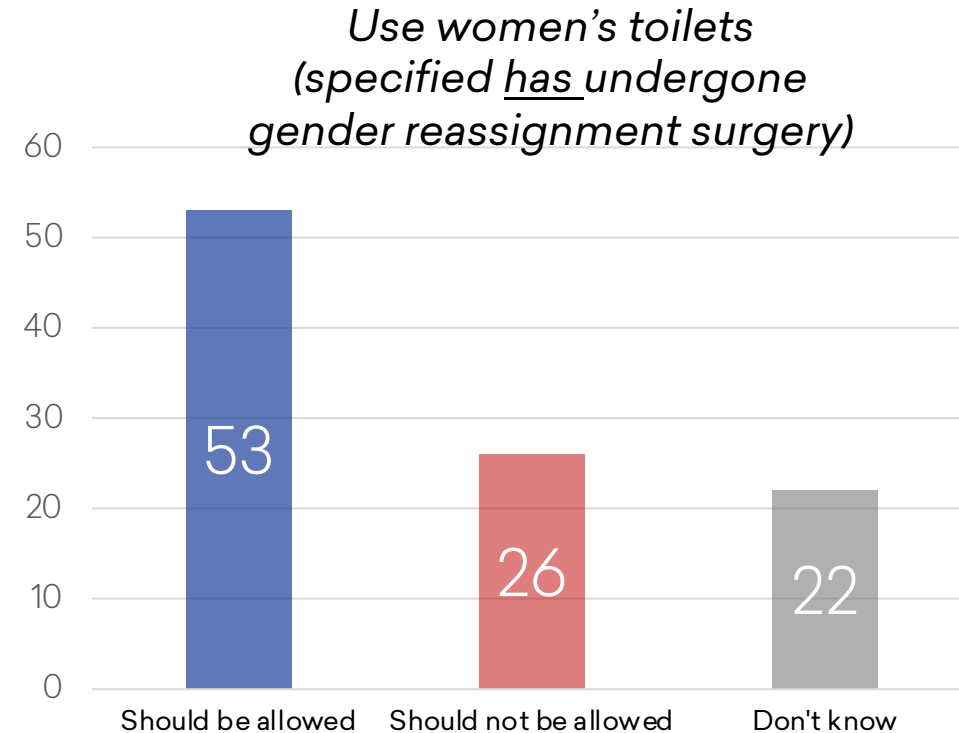
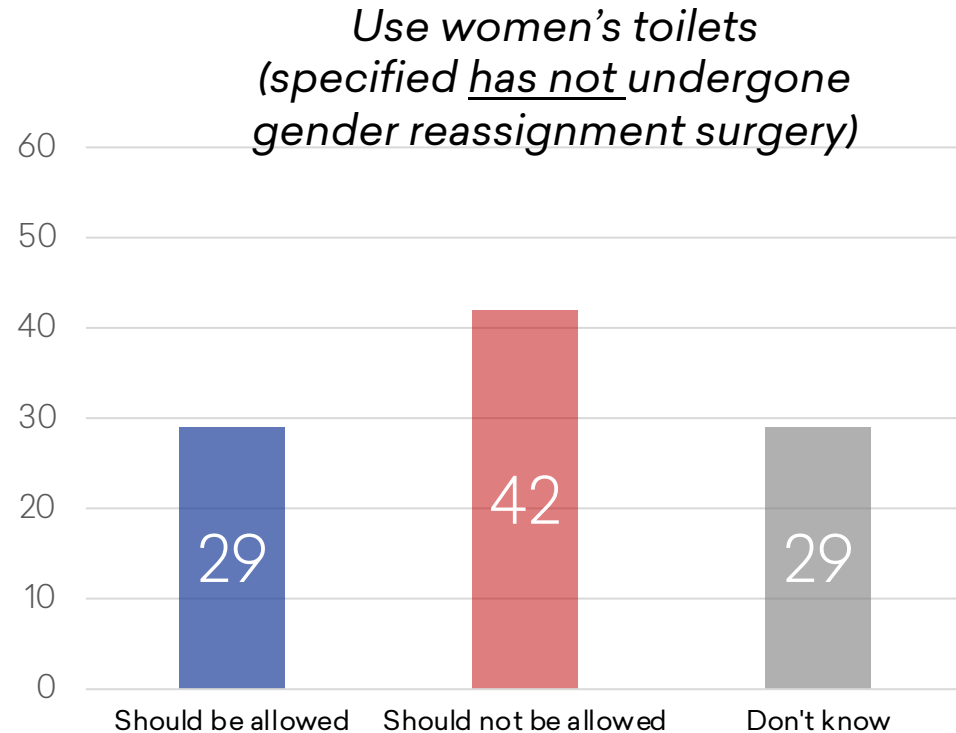


Question: Do you think a transgender woman who [has / has not] had gender reassignment surgery should or should not be allowed to... [split sample]

Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

Has / has not undergone gender reassignment surgery: toilets

Specifying that a trans woman has undergone gender reassignment surgery leads to a 24-point increase in support for using women's toilets – the exact same pattern as is seen for changing rooms

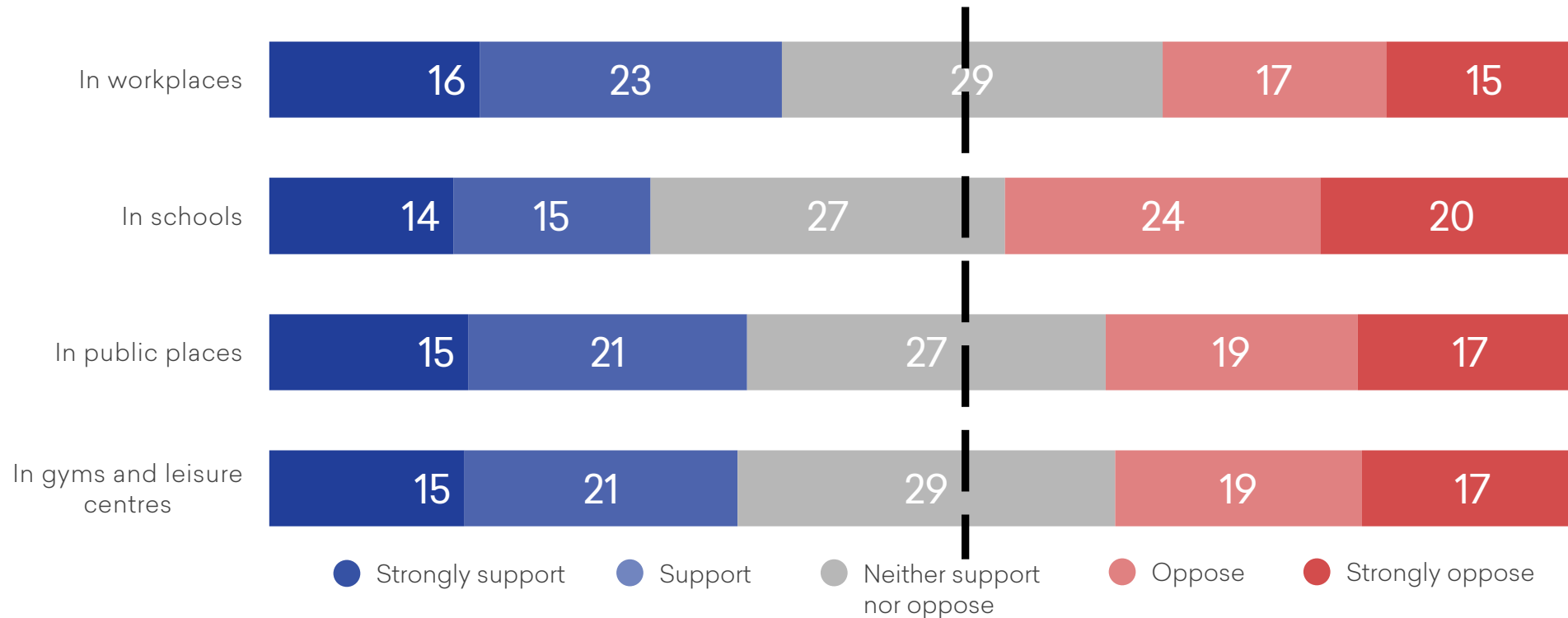


Question: Do you think a transgender woman who [has / has not] had gender reassignment surgery should or should not be allowed to... [split sample]

Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

Do you support or oppose increasing the availability of unisex toilets in the following locations...

Britons are more likely to support than oppose the introduction of more unisex toilets in workplaces and public spaces, but there is more opposition in schools and gyms



Question: One solution to people's usage of toilets is to have unisex toilets. Do you support or oppose increasing the availability of unisex toilets in the following locations
Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

In their own words...single sex spaces



"It's not just chop it off, you know what I mean, or have the op, it is a massive deal to go through an operation like that...it's a massive op, so obviously they know what they want, so they should be called what they want to be called."

Dan, Disengaged Traditionalist, 33, Long Eaton



"I think if they're post-op, as you was saying, they've gone through psychological testing, they've gone through all the financial cost of being changed to the female... so you have to have all the surgeries. They've gone through every step of that way. Being post-op, I think there's very little difference in regards to women's spaces and women's rights, difference to, say, someone who was someone who was born biologically a woman, in my view."

Mike, Civic Pragmatist, 30, Witney

"Somebody who's gone through all of that, like we were just saying, has finally accepted who they are. They've built up their own identity. And surely, if you were then to then say that they couldn't use those female... Say a man had become a woman, and so you weren't allowed to use the female toilet, surely that would make them feel a little bit violated, even stripped of their identity, rather."

Georgina, Civic Pragmatist, 42, Witney



"Without sounding rude or disrespectful, you can still tell a trans person. You can. You can tell if a male transitions to a female and vice versa, I personally can. And the thing is, it's all right to say, "But he thinks like a woman." The fact is he's not a woman, regardless, and vice versa. She thinks like a man, but she's not a male. She male, but she's not male, and he's not female regardless. And that's anatomy. That's nothing to do with ignorance."

Debbie, Loyal National, 43, Glasgow



"I hate coming to changing rooms as it is, but you go in there and if you're going to come in a changing room and another female, regardless of whether it is you were born a female or you transitioned into a female, somebody in there watching you getting ready? No, I don't want. I would rather take the item home, try it on at home and then take it back. But I do think that having separate changing rooms would make a lot more people feel comfortable."

Tracey, Disengaged Traditionalist, 48, Glasgow



"My old high school recently brought them in. The only people unhappy with it are the women because of the smell. That's why they're unhappy."

Daniel, Backbone Conservative, 20 Cardiff

Pronouns

HELLO
MY PRONOUNS ARE

_____ / _____

Pronouns

- Most people are happy to call people what they want to be called and use their proper pronouns
- Most people's experience of using pronouns is shaped by their experience with colleagues and classmates
- Some find the development of using pronouns confusing, but don't want to be shouted at when they inadvertently use the wrong pronoun or misgender someone
- Many do not believe they should be forced to display their own pronouns if they do not want to
- Most people think this is an issue where patience is required and where time is taken to explain why pronouns are important to some people – rather than labelling people bigots

**Diversity,
equality and
inclusion in the
workplace**

Diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace

- There is growing scepticism among the public about the effectiveness of current workplace diversity and inclusion training efforts
- Some are worried that training is oversimplistic – reducing DEI to tick-box exercises and half-day workshops
- Others are worried that training shuts down debate and fails to create spaces for open discussions
- Many draw the distinction between school based diversity initiatives (which they view as successful) and workplace-based diversity initiatives (which they view with some scepticism)
- Some worry that workplace diversity programmes embrace the latest popular cause in an uncritical way



"I used to work for the NHS. It was relentless. The amount of money that was spent on diversity training. Raise awareness by all means, but entire departments, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pounds, regular training being told that I'm racist, I'm sexist. What I really didn't like was this culture where it's like a witch-finding culture that's being spread."

Brenda, Civic Pragmatist, 42, Brighton



"They should do conscious bias training as well though, shouldn't they? Because that's the real problem, I think. Yeah, we've done some, I've been involved in a little bit myself, and at the end of the day it depends on how the individuals accept it. As you picked up on, Billie, a lot of people will feel like they're being picked on, made to feel as though them and their families and their grandparents, whatever, are all racist or all sexist, and it shouldn't be like that. Yeah. It's a difficult one."

Paul, Established Liberal, 43, Brighton

"I think one of the things I enjoyed most about it was that it was triggering those thoughts again. And it triggered me to start thinking about it. But you need triggers, don't you?"

Jane, Established Liberal, 64, London

**The way
forward**

Consciously make things worse – political wedge issue, or motivate base

Ignore and avoid the issues and leave the debate to be frame by extremes

4 Choices

Make well-intentioned intervention will resonate with activists, but not the public

Recognise most Britons start from place of good will and make informed, strategic engagement to better navigate debate

Ten recommendations

Emphasise shared starting points

Put elite sport in perspective

Build upon areas of consensus

Create space for discussion

Embrace case by case approach

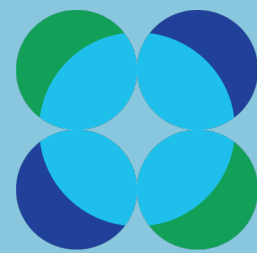
Listen to those worried about the pace of change

**Magnify experiences of those
finding a way through**

**Stop bad faith actors
framing the discussion**

Acknowledge the progress made

Remember this is a debate about people



**More in
Common**