

SCHOOLS SUSTAINABILITY SURVEY

2019-20 & 2020-21

RESEARCH INTO PUPILS' VIEWS ON ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY

GREEN
SCHOOLS
PROJECT



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM

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SUMMARY

In 2020 and 2021, pupils across the UK at primary (year 5 and 6), secondary and 6th form level completed an online survey on their views on environmental sustainability. Whilst views and perceptions can vary according to different respondent characteristics, here's an overall summary of what they told us...

Interest in learning more is high, despite over half of respondents saying they have already learnt lots or quite a bit about the environment.



58% say they have learnt lots or quite a bit about the environment at their *current* school or college



71% are interested in learning more about the environment

Respondents expect action and support from their place of study on the environment...

“All schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment.”

85% agree

“All schools and colleges should be encouraging and helping pupils like me to do things to help the environment.”

84% agree

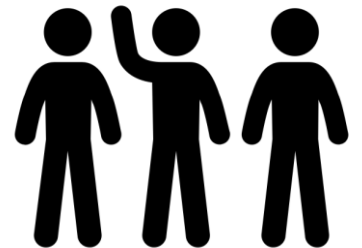
Actions to help the environment that pupils say they are encouraged or supported to take by their school or college include:

- **80%** recycling
- **65%** reducing litter
- **61%** reducing plastic waste



Thinking about opportunities to help the environment...

51% say they would like to be involved with projects or activities at their school or college that help the environment.



Survey respondents were also asked about their views on environmental issues more broadly, telling us...

Thinking about climate change...



86% Say they have heard of climate change and know a bit or a lot about it

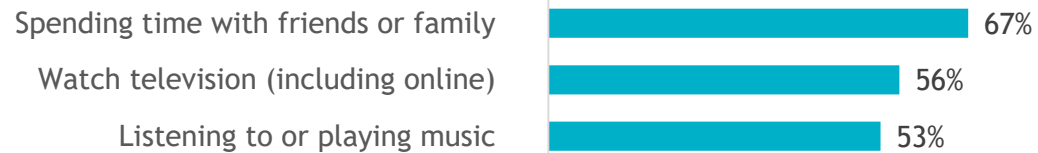
62% Say they are very or fairly concerned about climate change

83% Say it is fairly or very important for world leaders to do more to tackle climate change

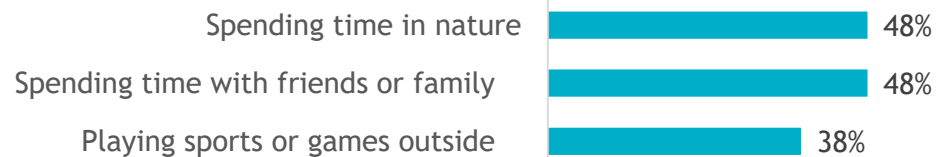
The most important issues facing the world today include...



Respondents mainly spend their spare time...



If they had the chance, respondents would spend more time...



Respondents report low recognition of international sustainability initiatives. Prior to answering the survey...



32% Say they had heard of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the Global Goals

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

About the research

Since 2010, NUS' Sustainability Team - now Students Organising for Sustainability UK - has carried out annual research with students in higher education on their experiences of and expectations for learning for sustainable development. In 2015, the same research was started with students in further education. This research, aims to complete the picture, and understand perspectives from all levels of education.

To complete the research, a partnership was formed between SOS-UK and [Green Schools Project](#), which supports schools to set up and run student-led environmental projects. An online survey was designed to be completed by pupils in primary (years 5 and 6) and secondary (years 7 to 13) education, and focuses specifically on environmental sustainability. This report provides an update to the first round of research with this audience carried out in 2018-19.

The survey was distributed by SOS-UK and Green Schools Project to a range of contacts, who were asked either to directly participate in the research, or to distribute the opportunity to participate amongst their networks. All schools who wished to participate in the research were required to complete a consent form on behalf of the respondents. Respondents of all ages were also asked to provide consent when participating in the survey. It was suggested that schools could encourage participation by including completion of the survey within lessons.

To incentivise participations, two prize draws were offered of funding towards sustainability-focused projects within the schools - one for primary schools and one for secondary / 6th form colleges. Schools and colleges were also provided with a report of the data from their pupils.

Over 4600 responses were received from pupils studying at primary and secondary schools, and 6th form colleges in two rounds of research. The survey was initially opened in October 2019 and closed in March 2020. All responses (c.3500) during this period were from pupils studying in England. The survey was reopened between January and March 2021 where it was promoted in Scotland and Wales through contacts involved in the [Teach the Future](#) climate education campaign. The pupils study at a range of different types of education institution, including state and private schools, academy and non-academy. **No weighting has been applied to the data.**

Throughout the report, the responses are presented for overall respondents, respondents studying in primary education (years 5 and 6), respondents studying in secondary education (years 7 to 11 - lower secondary), and respondents studying in 6th form (years 12 and 13 - upper secondary).

LIMITATIONS

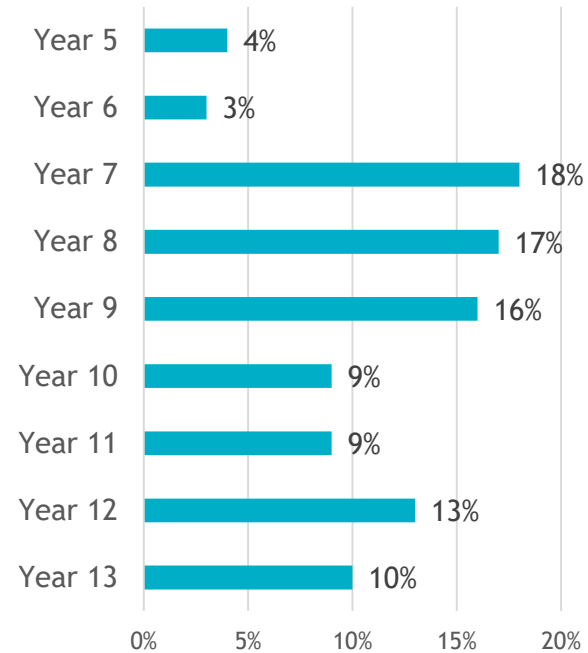
When reading the findings of this report, it's worth noting the following about the respondents:

- The majority of responses were secured prior to the COVID-19 pandemic however the responses gathered from students in Wales and Scotland were collected during a period of significant disruption to their education.
- It is likely that those schools that did respond are those at the more engaged end of the spectrum when it comes to environmental sustainability, often with specific staff members with a responsibility for the issue within the school or college who were able to drive participation in the research within the school.

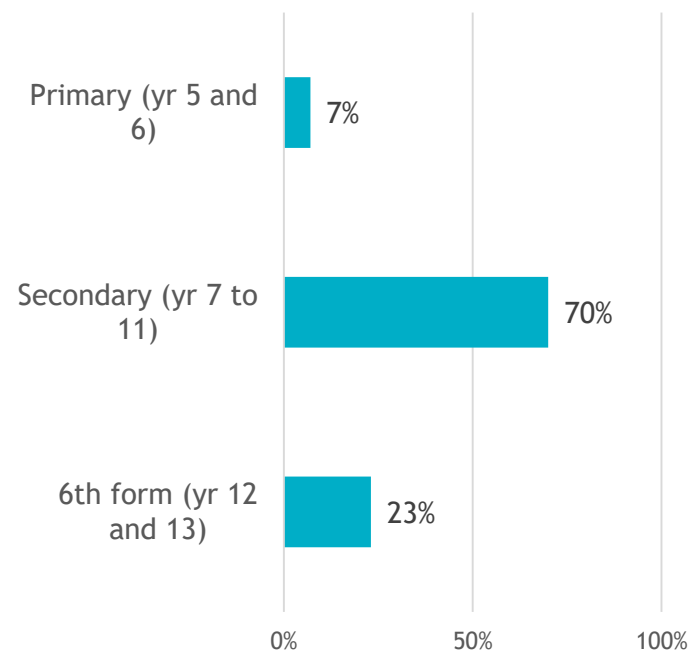
RESPONDENTS

THE RESPONDENTS

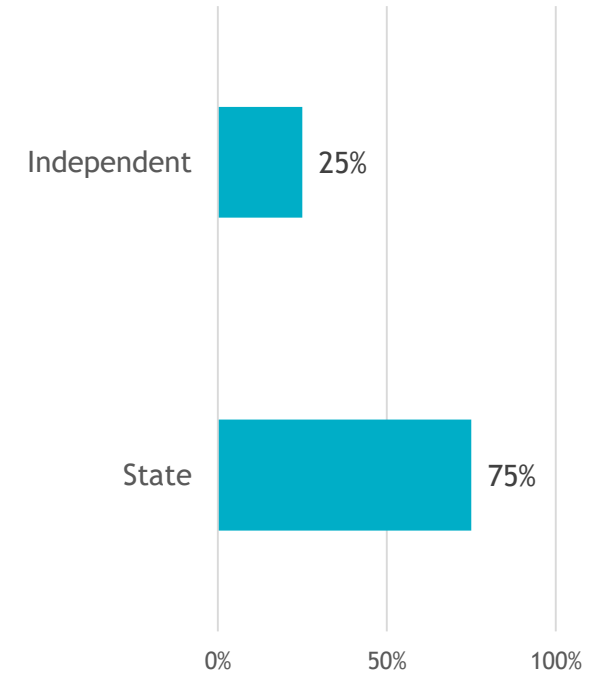
YEAR



EDUCATION LEVEL

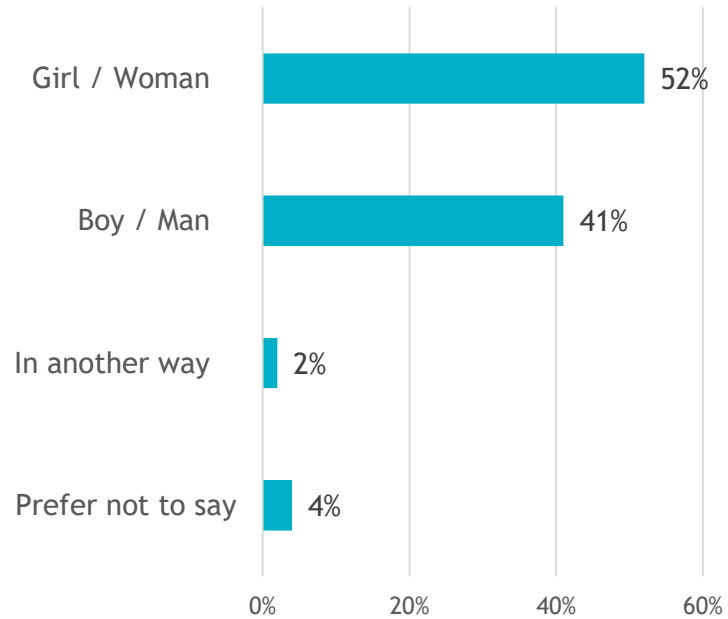


SCHOOL TYPE

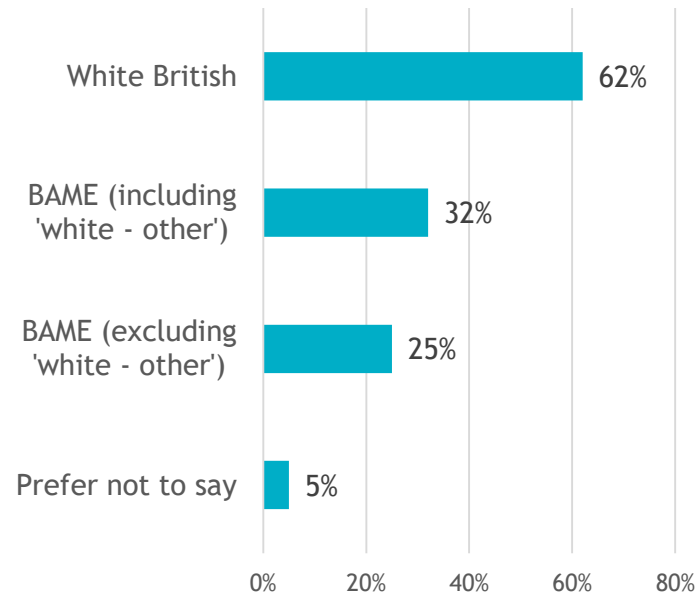


THE RESPONDENTS

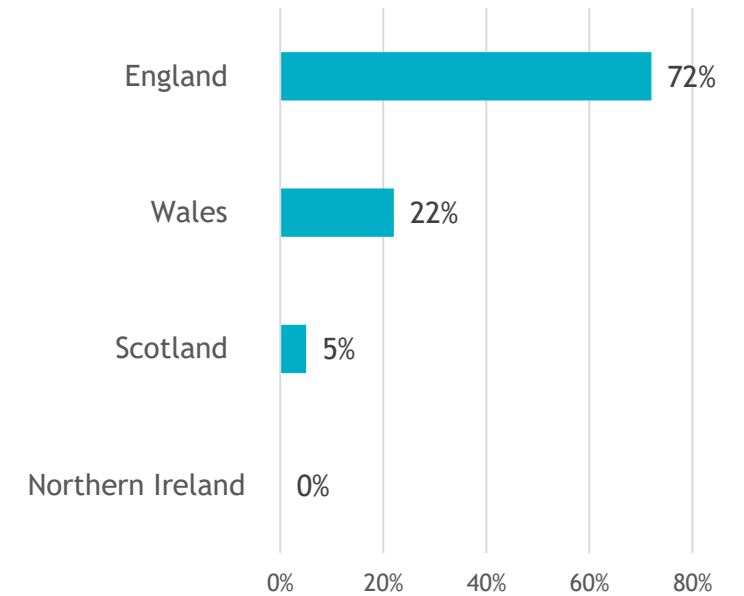
GENDER IDENTITY



RACE / ETHNICITY



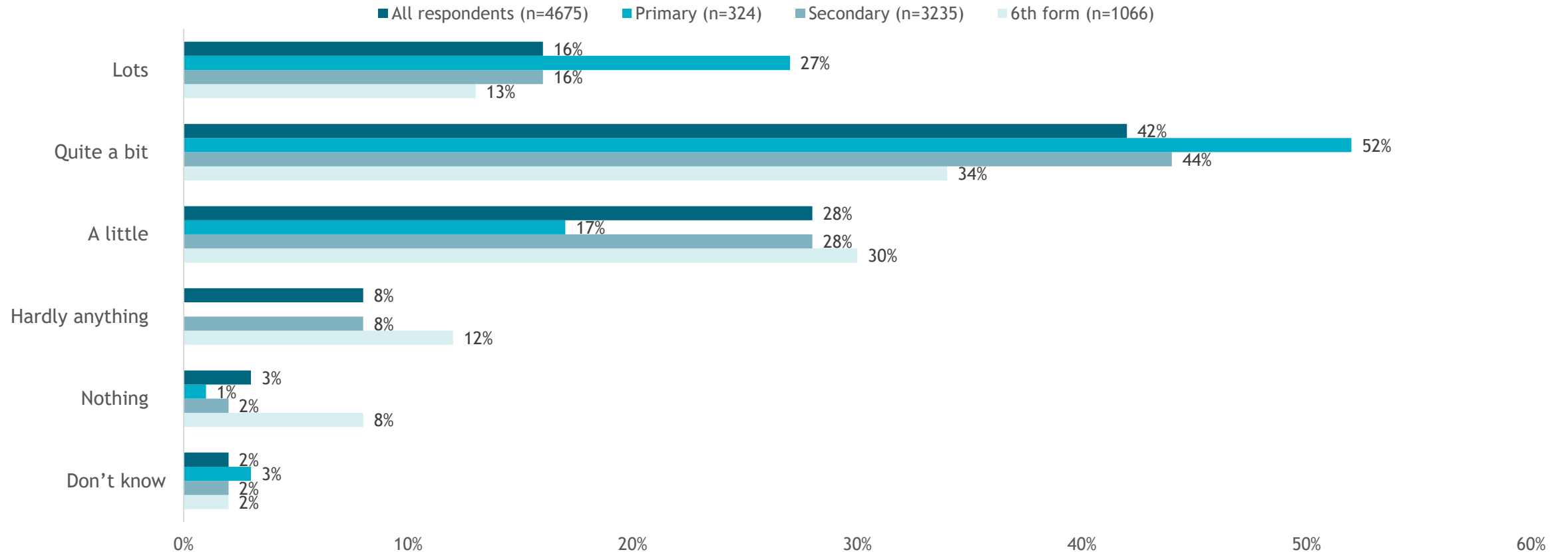
UK RESIDENCE



RESEARCH FINDINGS:

Education level

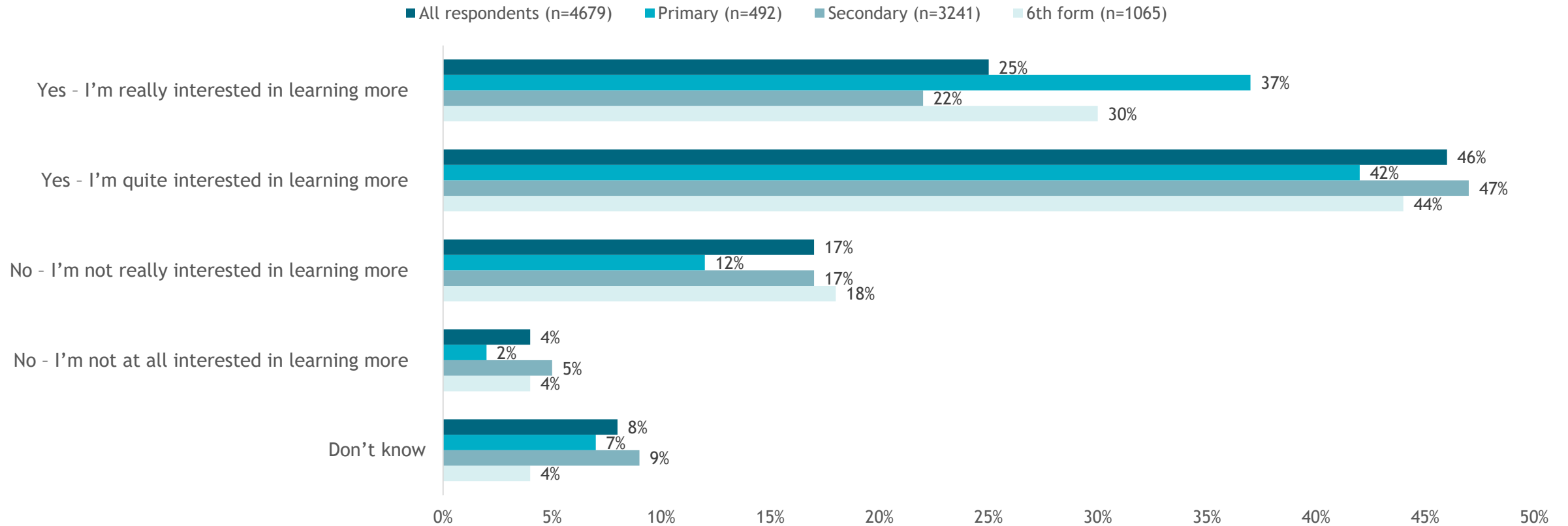
Over half (58%) say they have learnt lots or quite a bit about the environment at their *current* place of study, however over a third (39%) say they have learnt only a little, hardly anything or nothing.



Q. Thinking about your time at your current school or college so far, how much have you learnt about the environment?

Base: 4675 Balance: No response

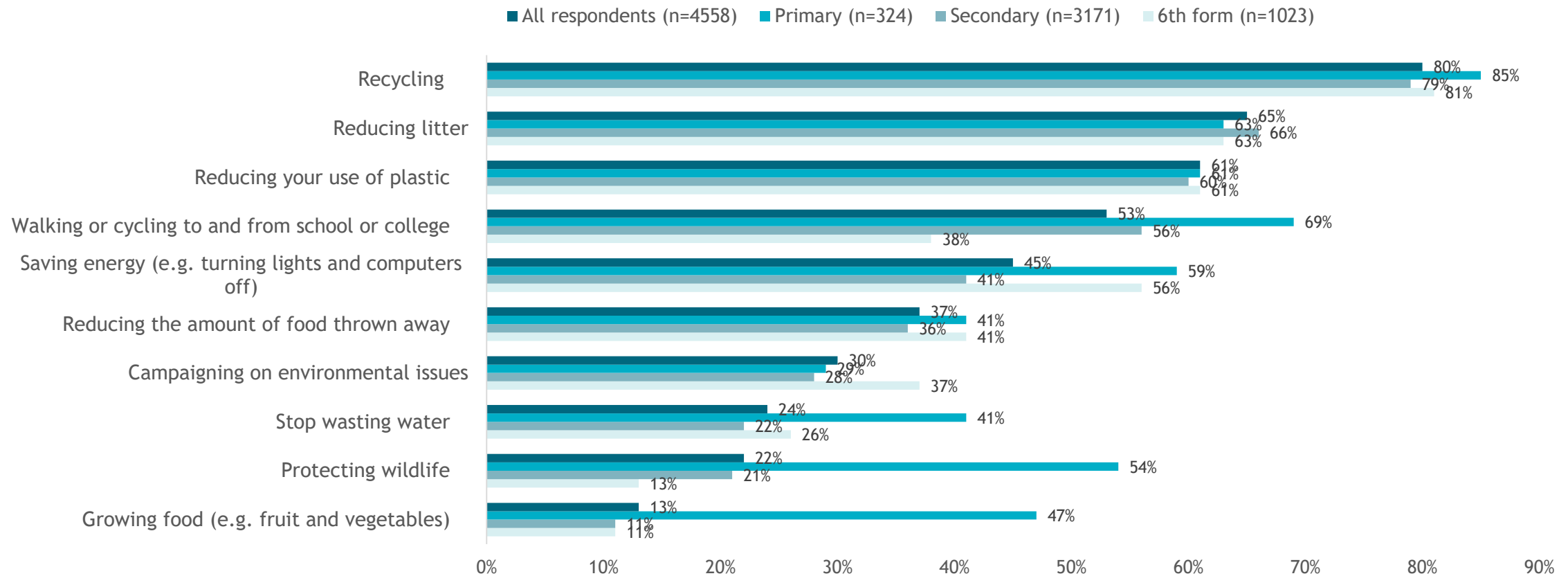
Over two thirds of respondents say they are interested in learning more about the environment (71% are really or quite interested).



Q. Would you like to learn more about the environment?

Base: 4682 Balance: No response

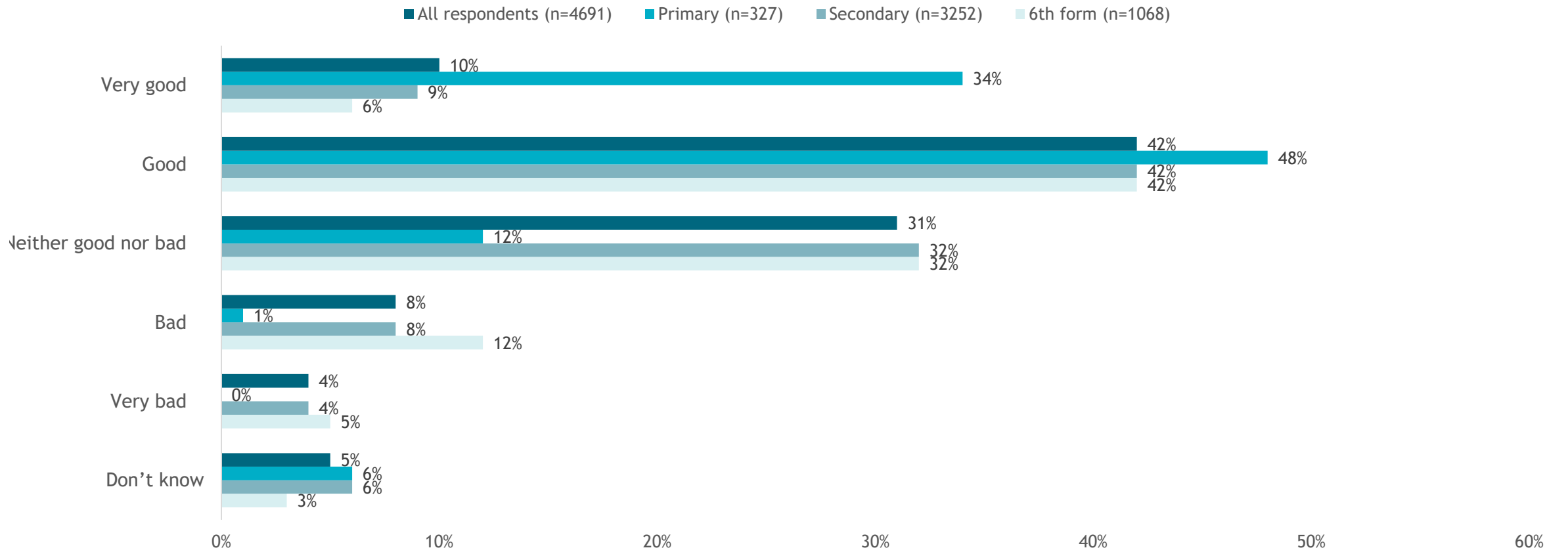
Recycling (80%), reducing litter (65%) and reducing plastic use (61%) are the most commonly reported actions to help the environment that respondents report being encouraged by their school or college.



Q. Does your school or college encourage you to, or give you a chance to, do any of the following things?

Base: 4560 Balance: No response

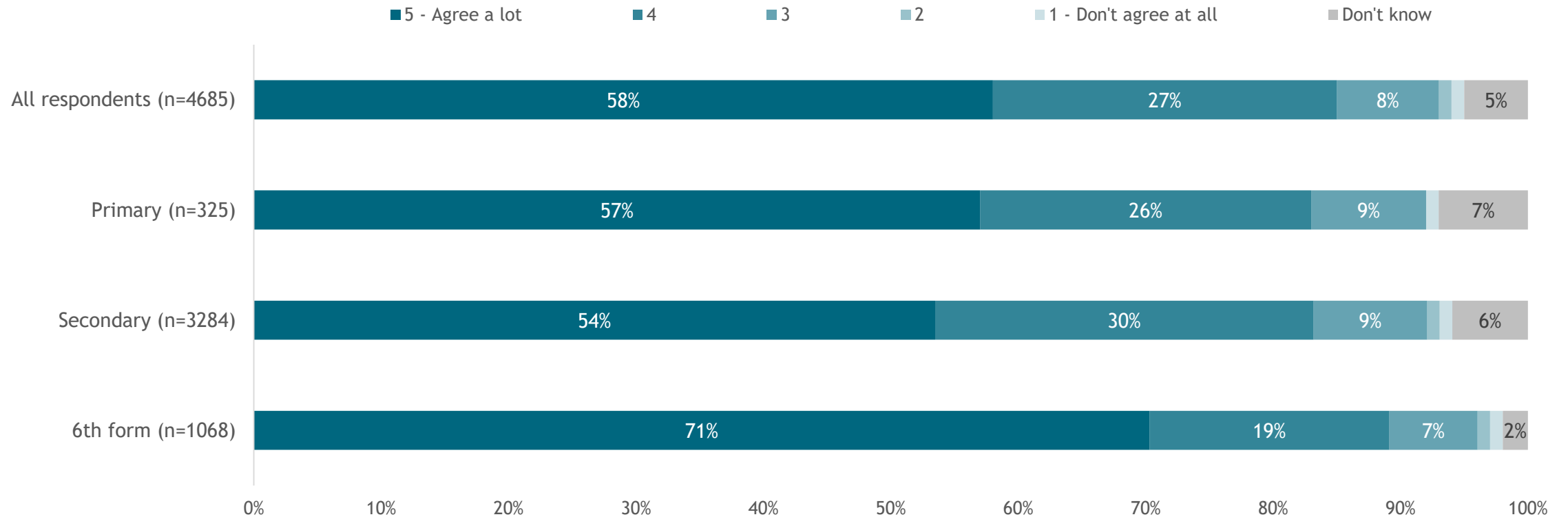
Overall, respondents report a positive view of their school or college in terms of its action to help the environment with 52% rating their school or college as very good or good.



Q. How good or bad do you think your school or college is at helping the environment?
Base: 4692 Balance: No response

The majority of respondents overall agree that all schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment (85%).

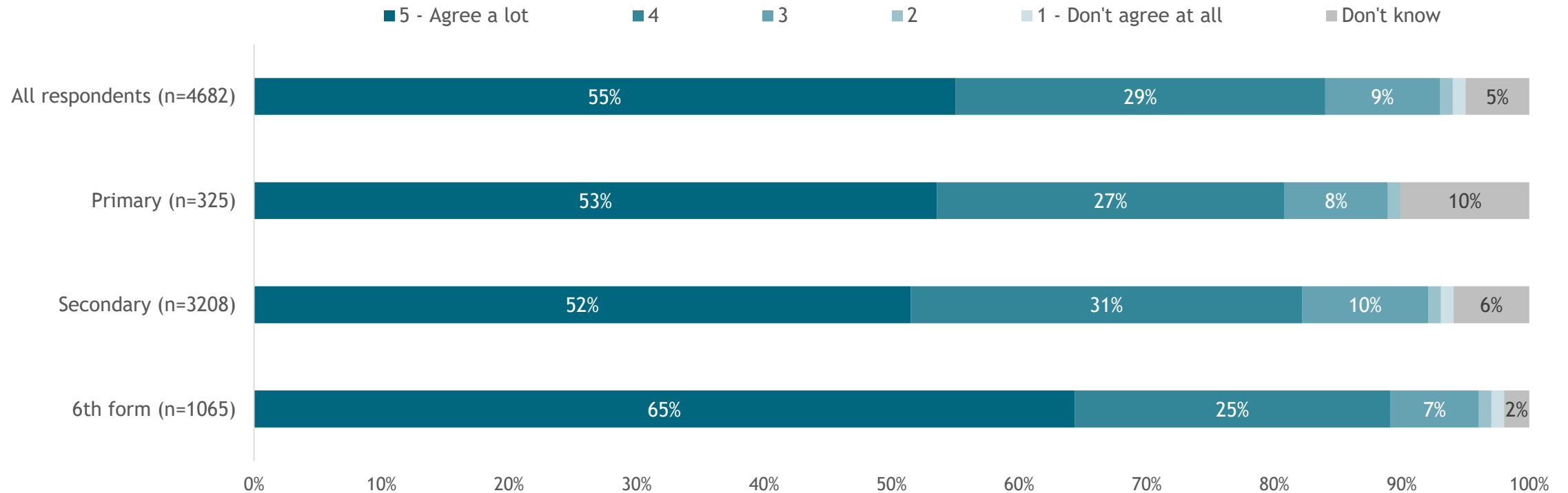
“All schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment.”



Q. What do think about this statement? All schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment.
Base: 4685 Balance: No response

The majority of respondents overall also agree that all schools and colleges should be encouraging and helping pupils to do things to help the environment (84%).

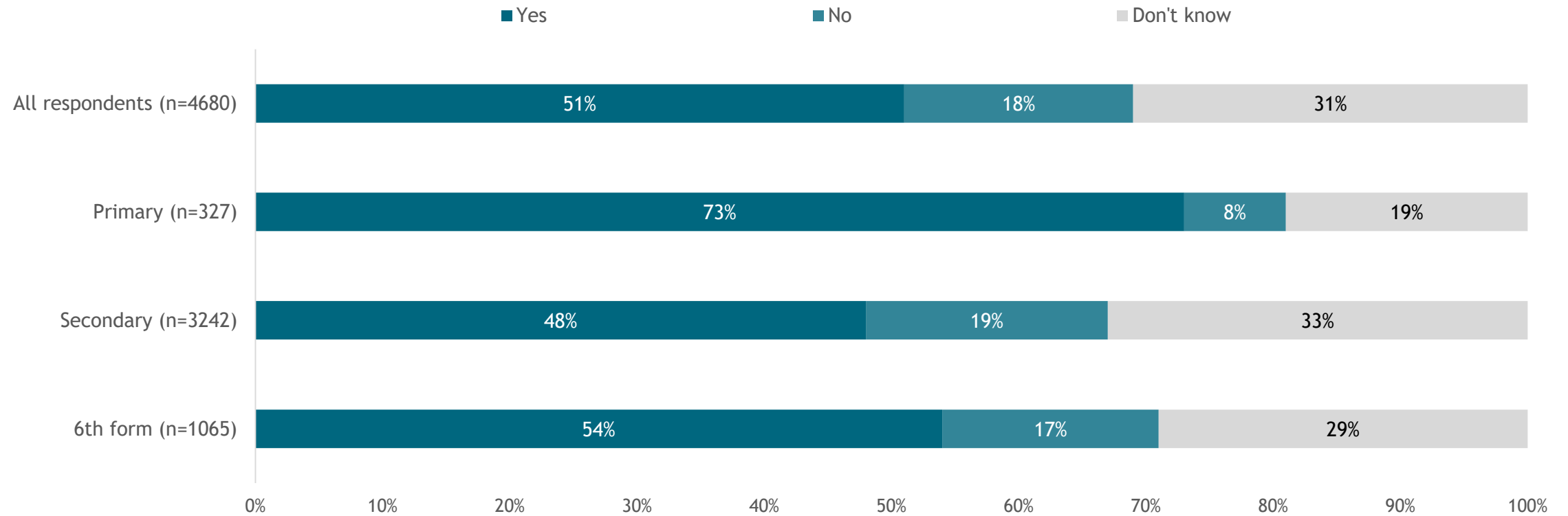
“All schools and colleges should be encouraging pupils to do things to help the environment.”



Q And what do you think about this statement? All schools and colleges should be encouraging and helping pupils like me to do things to help the environment.

Base: 4682 Balance: No response

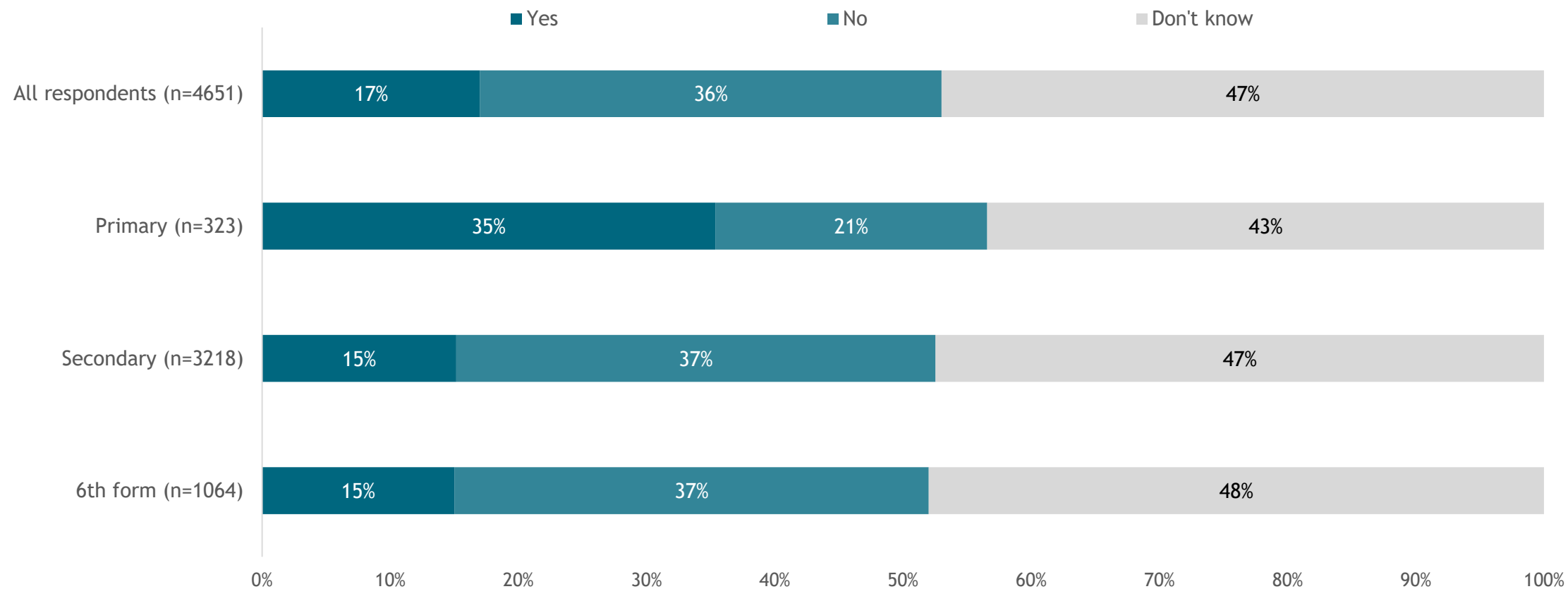
Half of all respondents (51%) would like to be involved with projects at their school or college that help the environment, with primary school children significantly more likely to say yes.



Q Would you like to be involved with projects or activities at your school or college that help the environment?

Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response

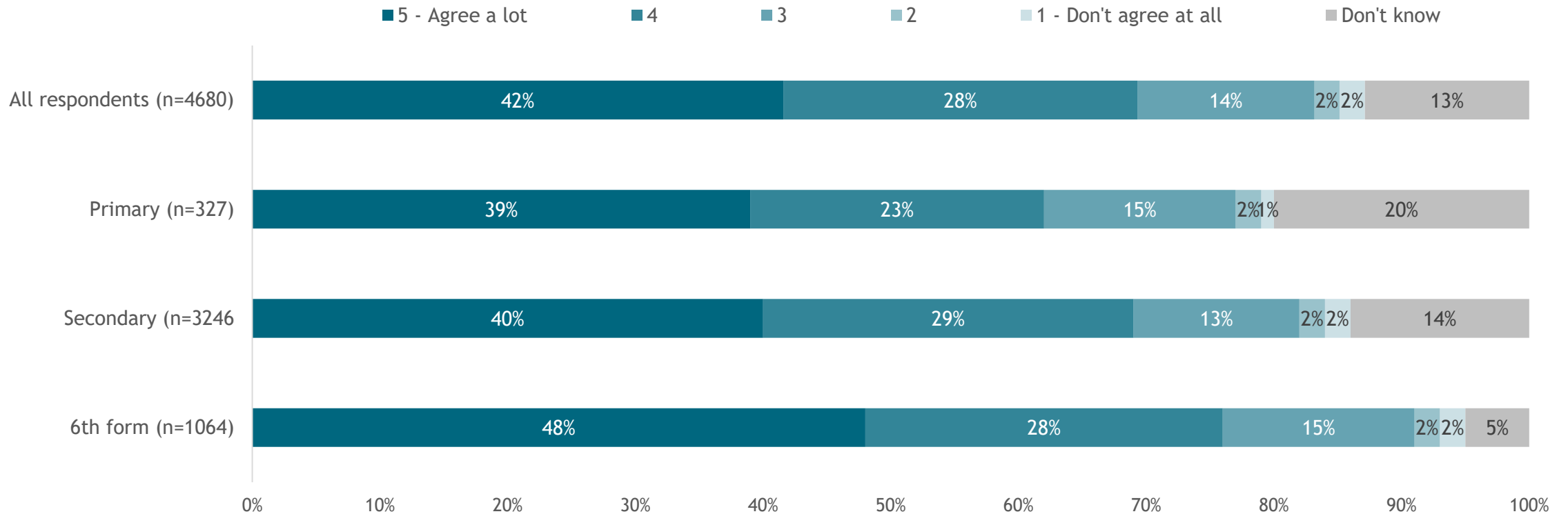
Almost half of respondents don't know if their school or college generates any renewable energy (47%), but primary school children are more likely to think they do.



Q Renewable energy is energy which comes from sources that will not run out any time soon, like the sun, wind, water and the natural heat of the earth. Does your school or college generate any renewable energy?
Base: 4651 Balance: No response

70% agree to some extent (5 or 4) that their school or college should be generating renewable energy.

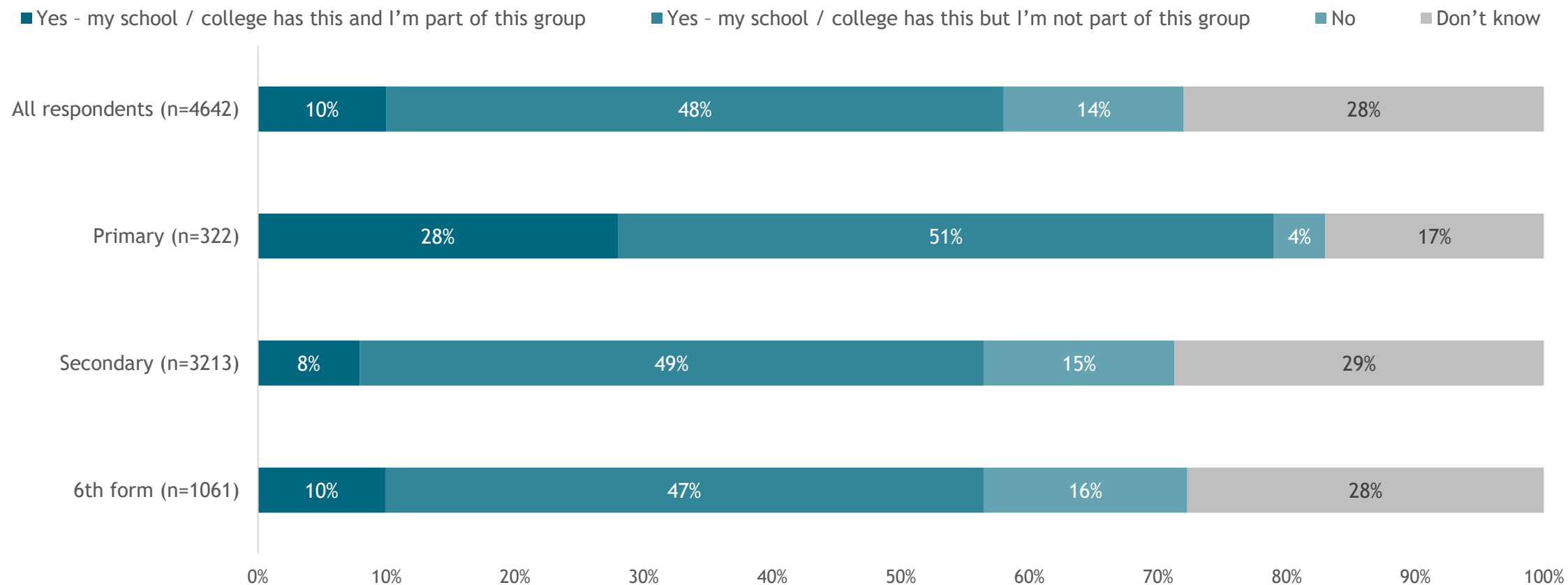
“Schools and colleges should be generating renewable energy.”



Q What do you thin about this? My school / college should be generating renewable energy
 Base: 4680 Balance: No response

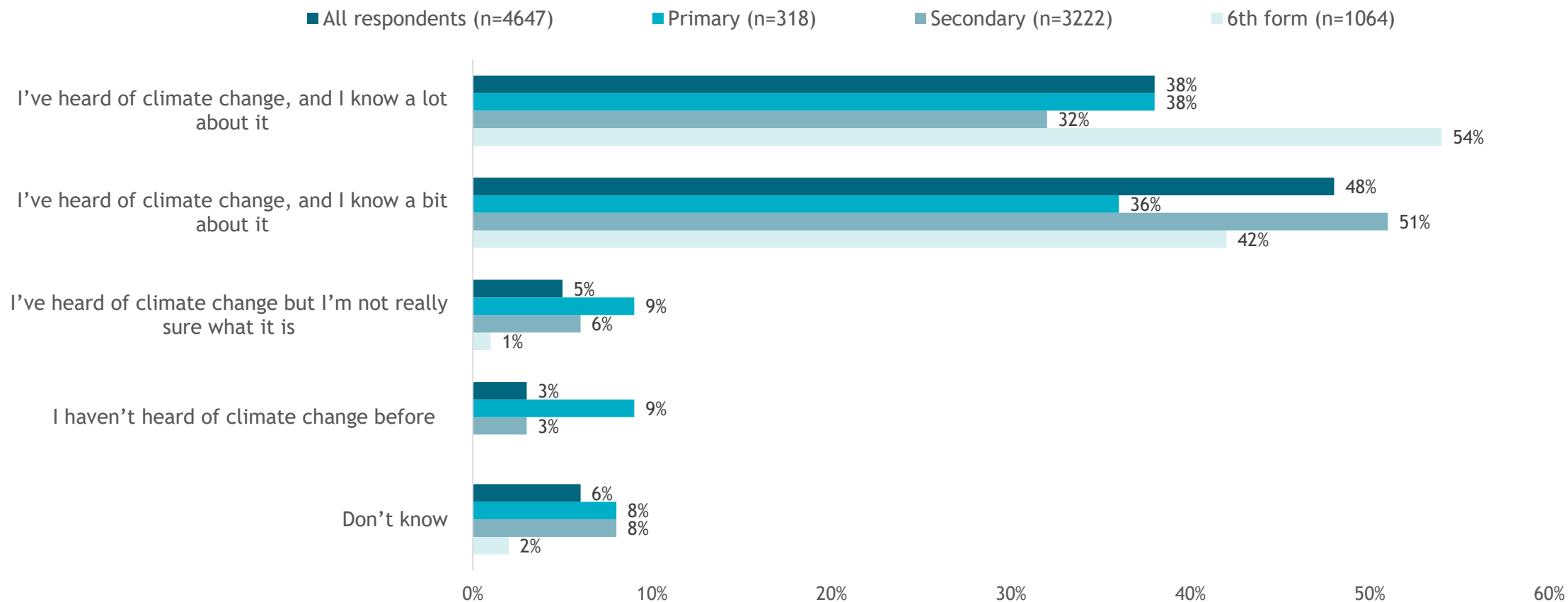


Over half of all respondents are given the chance to improve impact on the environment (58%), but only one in ten take the opportunity to do so.



Q Does your school or college give you the chance to get involved with trying to improve the impact it has on the environment (for example, being part of an Eco or Green Team or Club)?
Base: 4642 Balance: No response

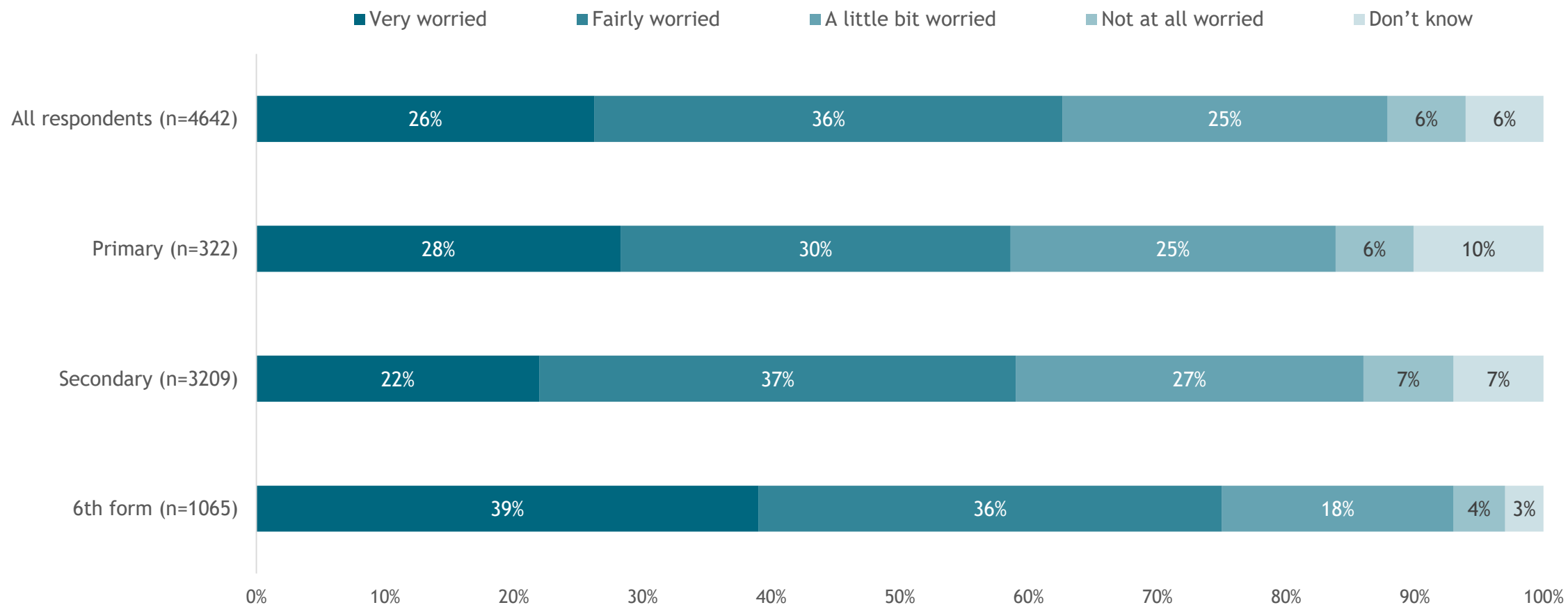
Climate change is familiar to the majority respondents with 86% saying they know either a bit or a lot about it. 8% say they haven't heard of climate change or they don't know what it is.



Q. Which of these options best describes what you know about climate change / the climate crisis?

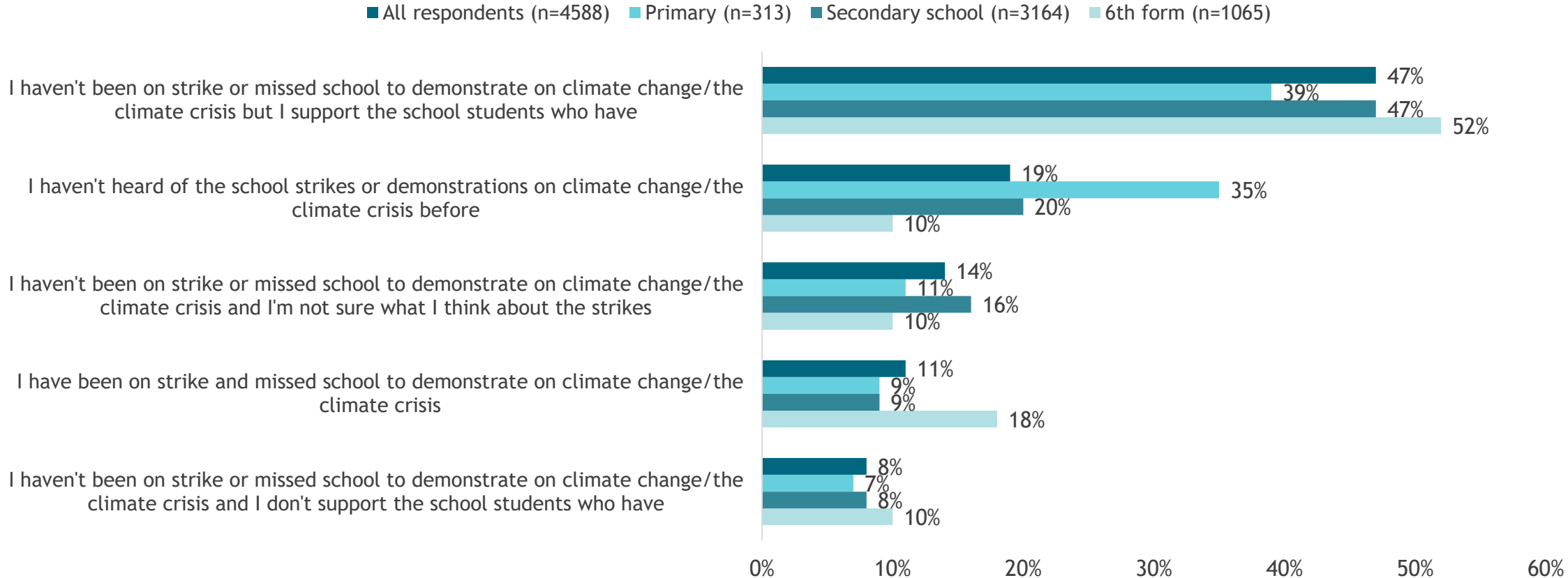
Base: 4647 Balance: No response

62% of respondents are either very or fairly worried about climate change, rising to 87% when all those who are worried at any level are included.



Q How worried are you about climate change / the climate crisis?
Base: 4642 Balance: No response

11% of all respondents attended the school climate strikes or missed school to demonstrate on the issue, however 47% support students who have been on strike, even if they didn't attend themselves.

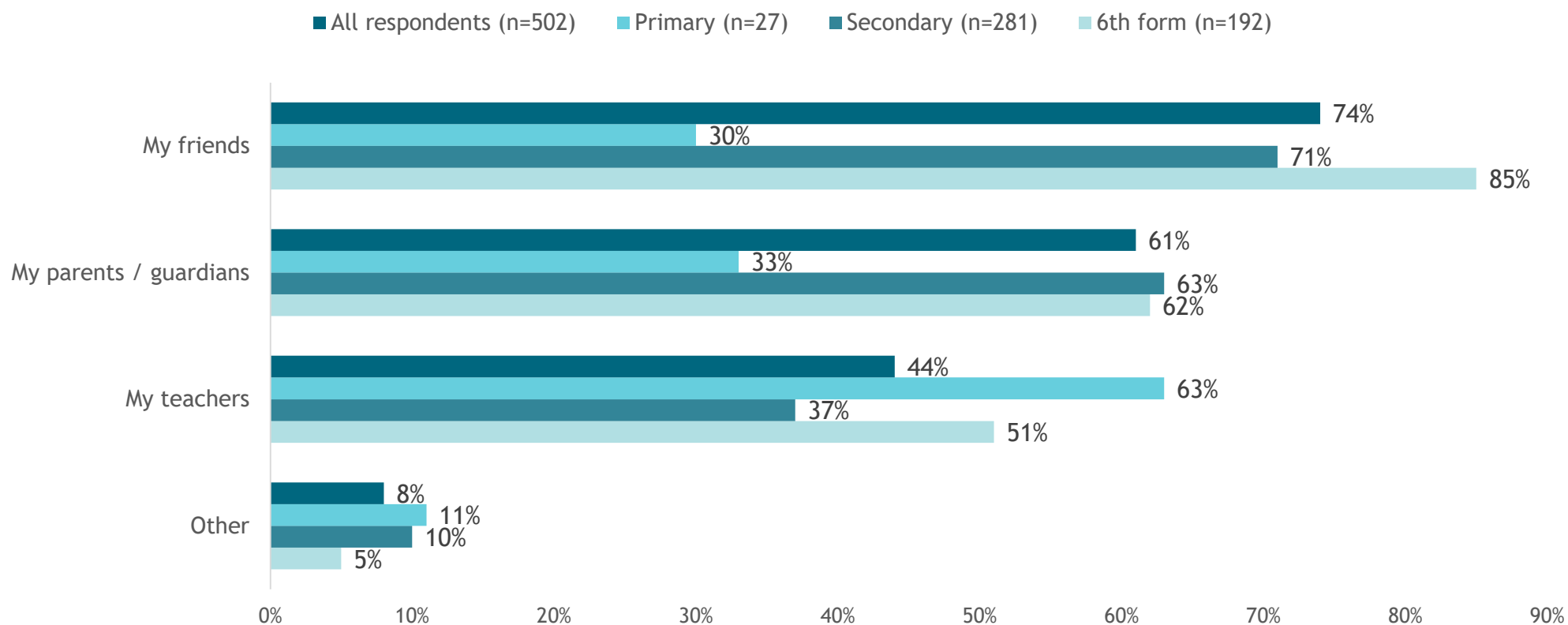


Q School Strike for Climate (also known as Fridays for Future, Youth for Climate and Youth Strike 4 Climate) is an international movement of school students who are deciding not to attend classes and take part in demonstrations to demand action on climate change/the climate crisis instead. Which of the following options is most like you? Have you gone on strike and missed school to demonstrate on climate change/the climate crisis?

Base: 4588 Balance: No response

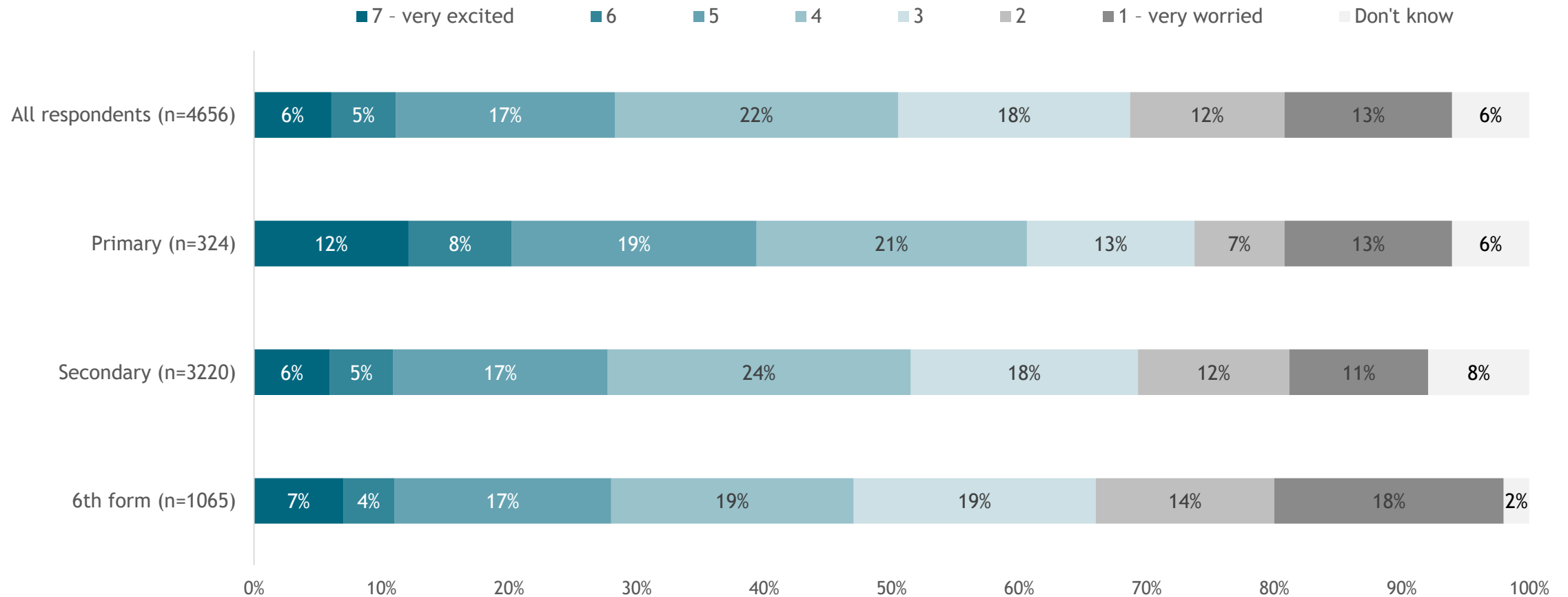


Respondents who have been on strike are most likely to say they were supported to do so by their friends (74% of all respondents). 44% say they were supported to demonstrate on climate change by their teachers.



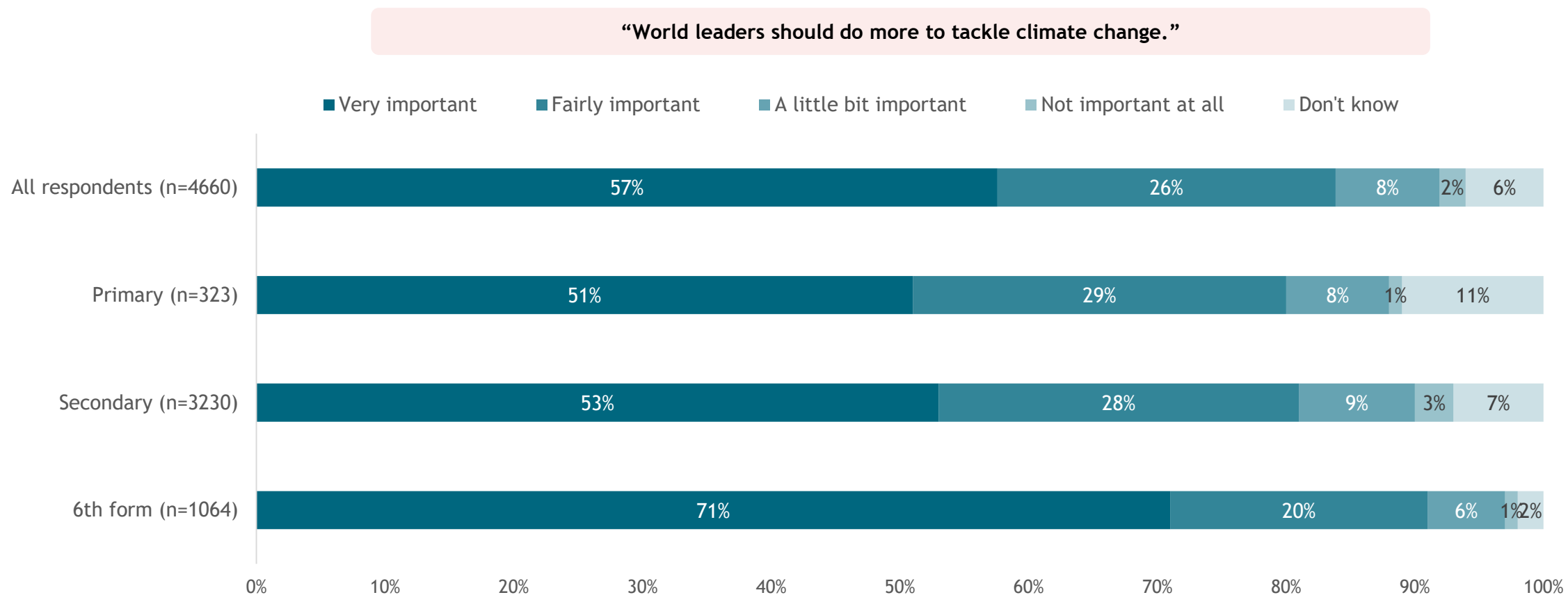
Q Who supported you to go on strike from school to demonstrate on climate change / the climate crisis?
Base: 502: Balance: Those who had not been on strike, no response.

When thinking about the future, 43% of all respondents say they're 'worried' compared to 28% who are 'excited'.



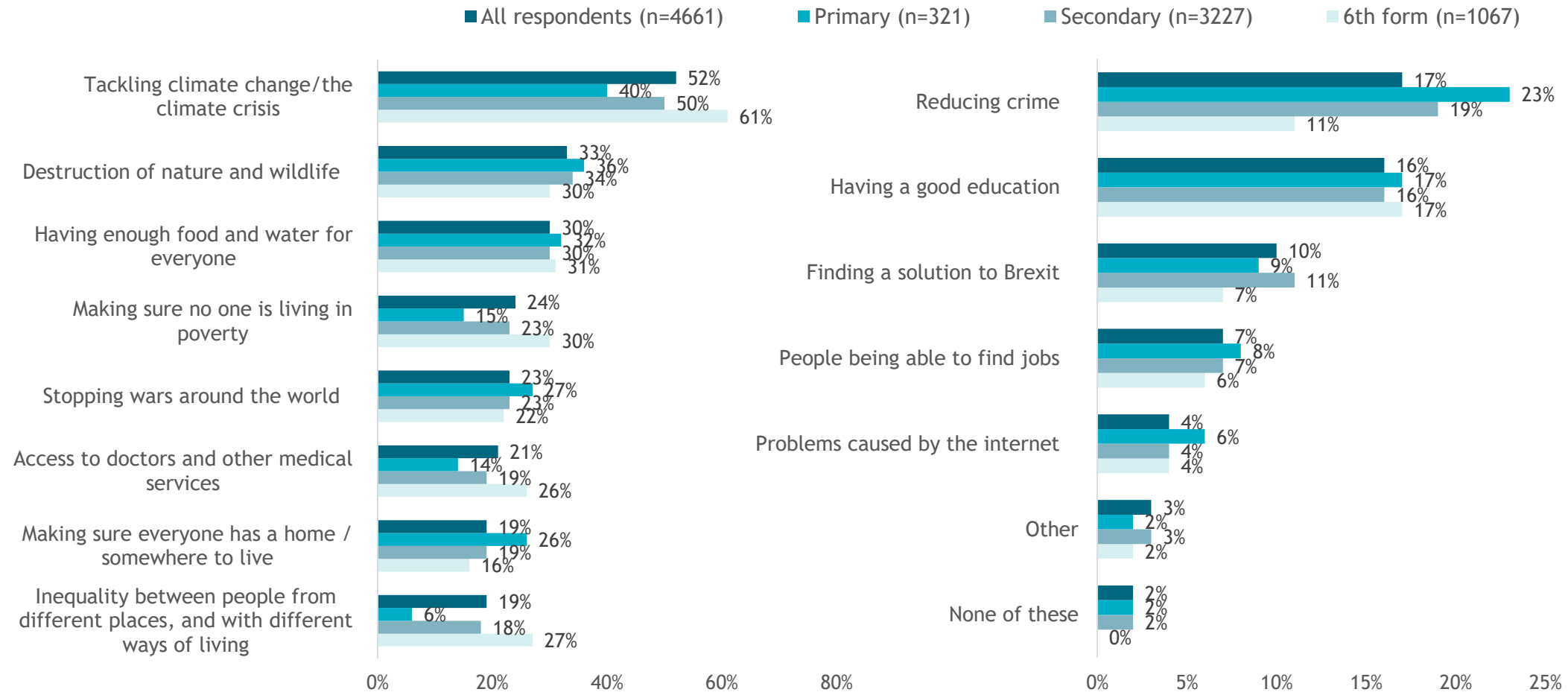
Q Using the scale below, where 1 is very worried about the future and 7 is very excited about the future, please show how you feel:
Base: 4656 Balance: No response

The majority of respondents overall (83%) think it is very or fairly important that world leaders should do more to tackle climate change.

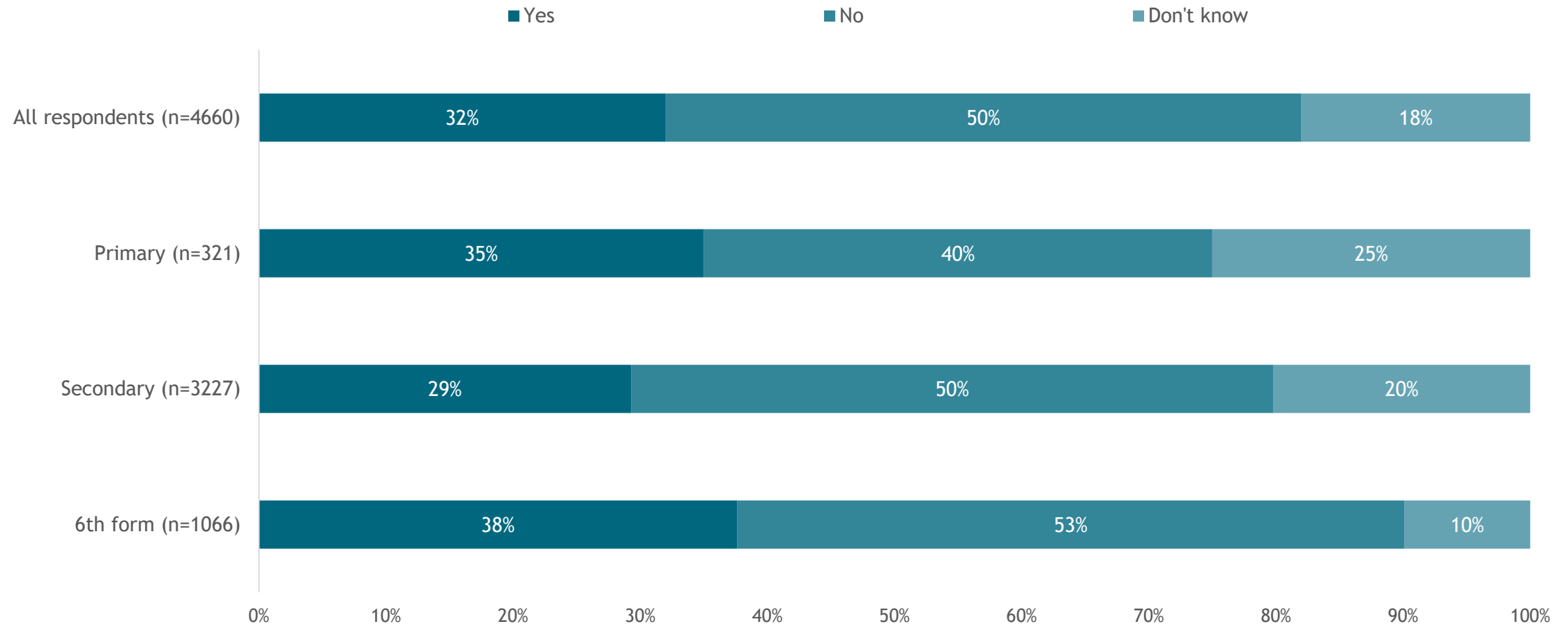


Q How important, or not important, do you think it is that world leaders do more to tackle climate change / the climate crisis?
Base: 4660 Balance: No response

Tackling climate change is considered to be the most important issue facing the world with 52% of respondents overall choosing this option. The next important options were destruction of nature and wildlife, and having enough food and water for everyone, each chosen by approximately a third of respondents.



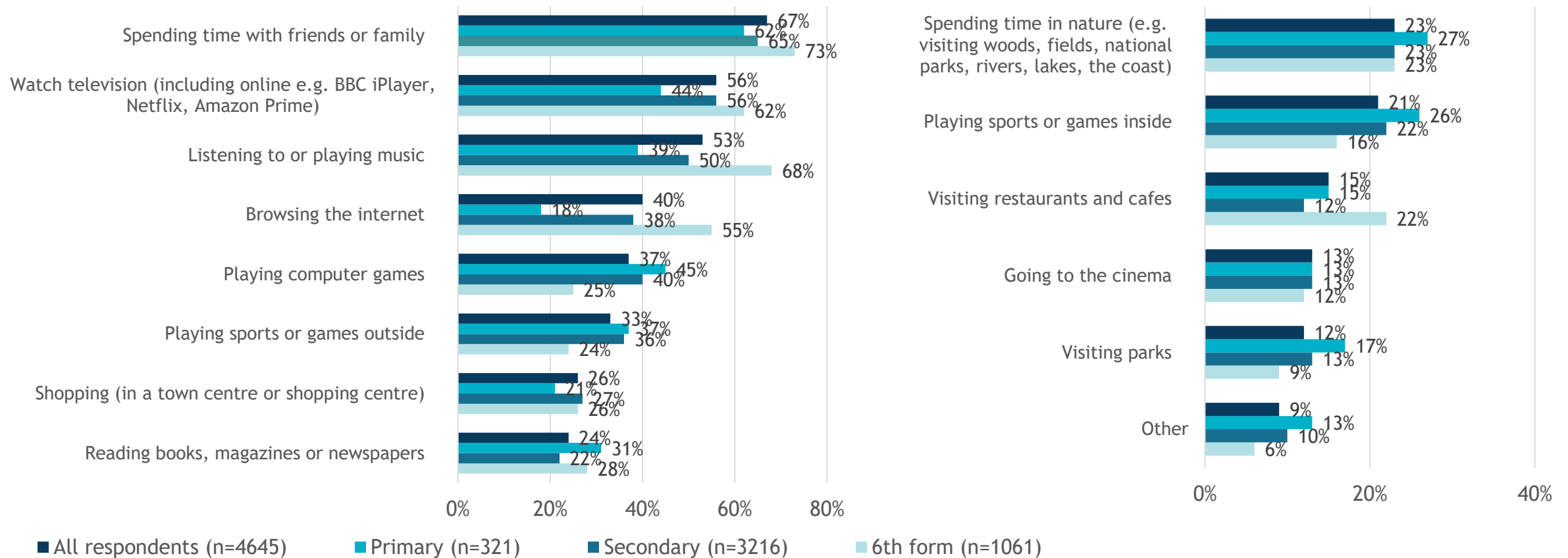
Only a third (32%) of all respondents had heard of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Q The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a set of 17 goals that countries around the world have agreed to work towards with the aim of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people live in peace and prosperity. Before answering this survey, had you heard of the Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the Global Goals?

Base: 4660 Balance: No response

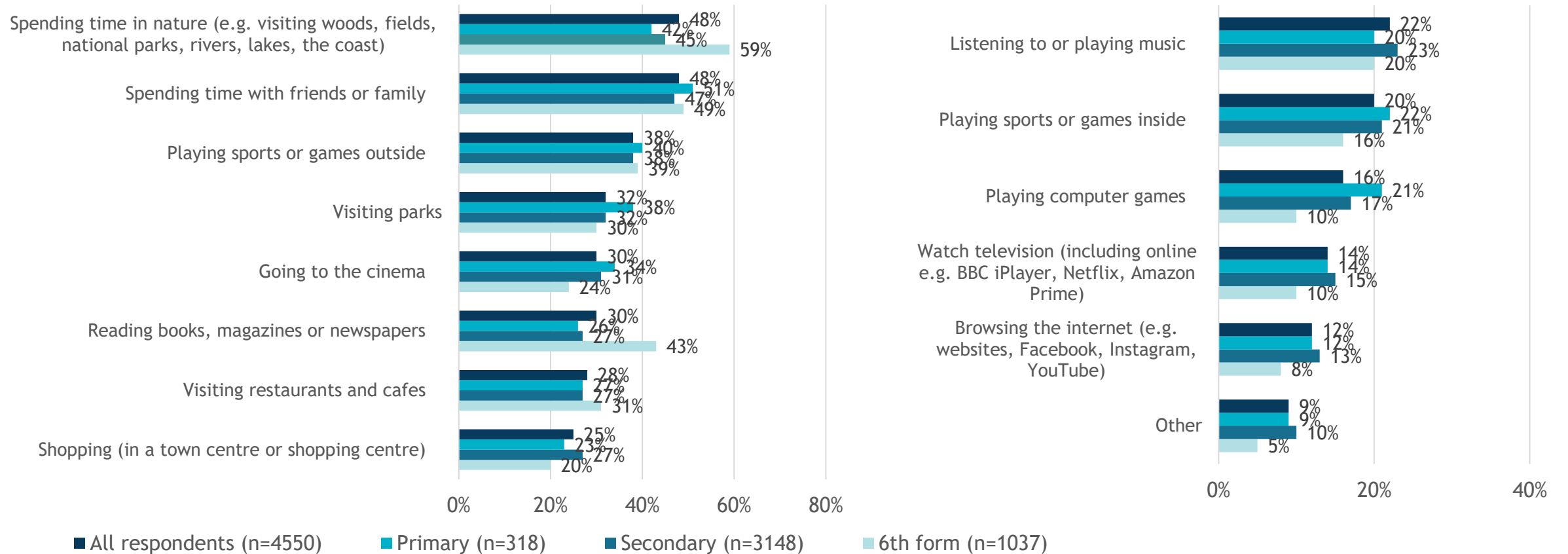
In their spare time outside of school time, respondents most commonly report spending time with friends or family (67%), watching television (56%) and playing music (53%).



Q. Thinking about your spare time, after school, at the weekend and during the school holidays, which of the following activities do you do most often?
 Base: In brackets Balance: No response



If they had a chance, respondents would like to spend more time in nature (48%), time with friends or family (48%) or playing sports or games outside (38%).



Q. If you had the chance, which of the following activities would you like to do more of?
Base: In brackets Balance: No response

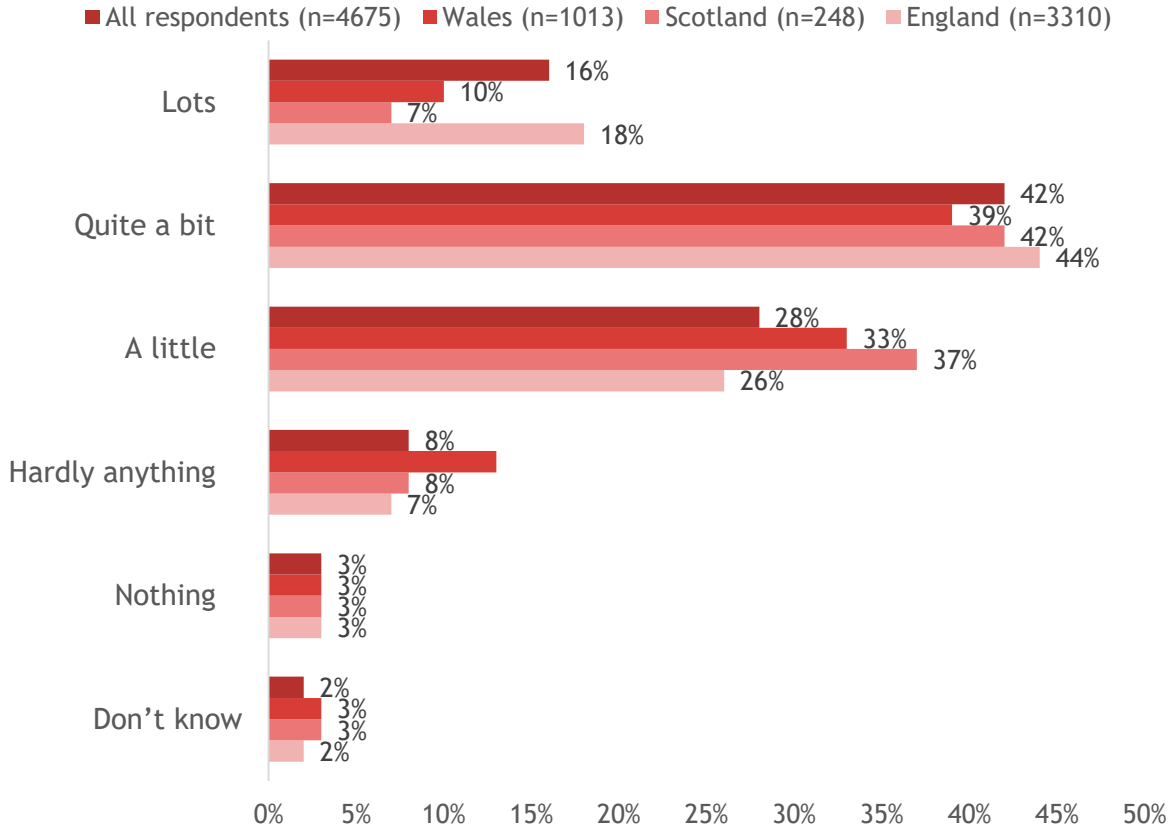
ANNEX: RESEARCH FINDINGS

UK NATION

Responses from students in England were gathered October 2019 to February 2020.
Responses from pupils in Wales and Scotland were gathered January to March 2021.

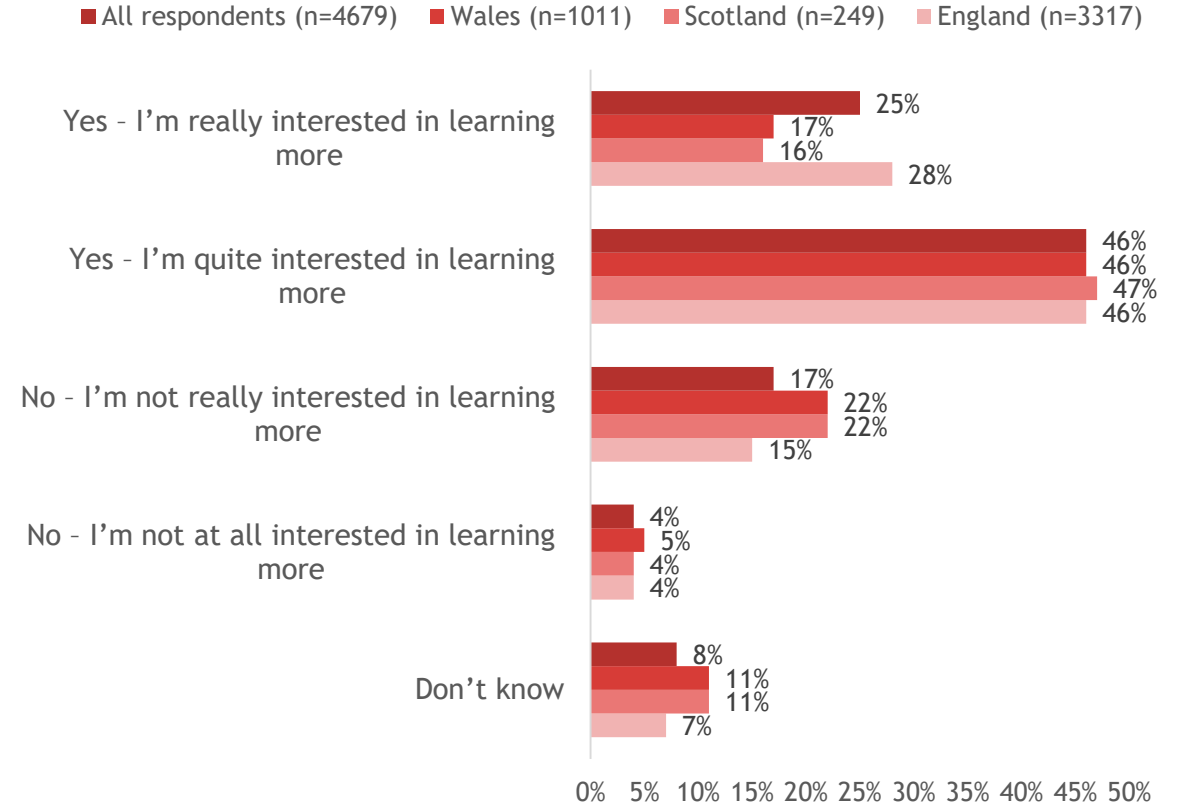
Q. Thinking about your time at your current school or college so far, how much have you learnt about the environment?

Base: 4675 Balance: No response



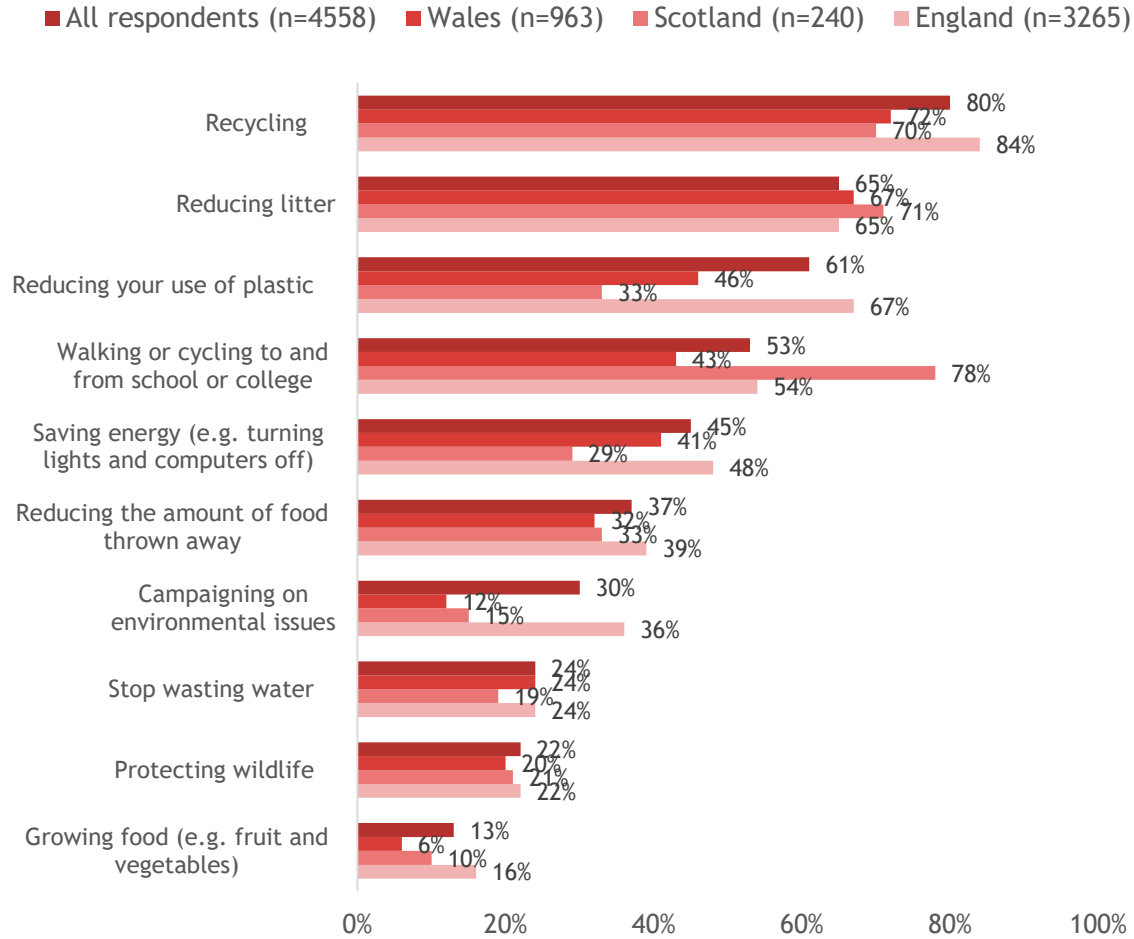
Q. Would you like to learn more about the environment?

Base: 4682 Balance: No response



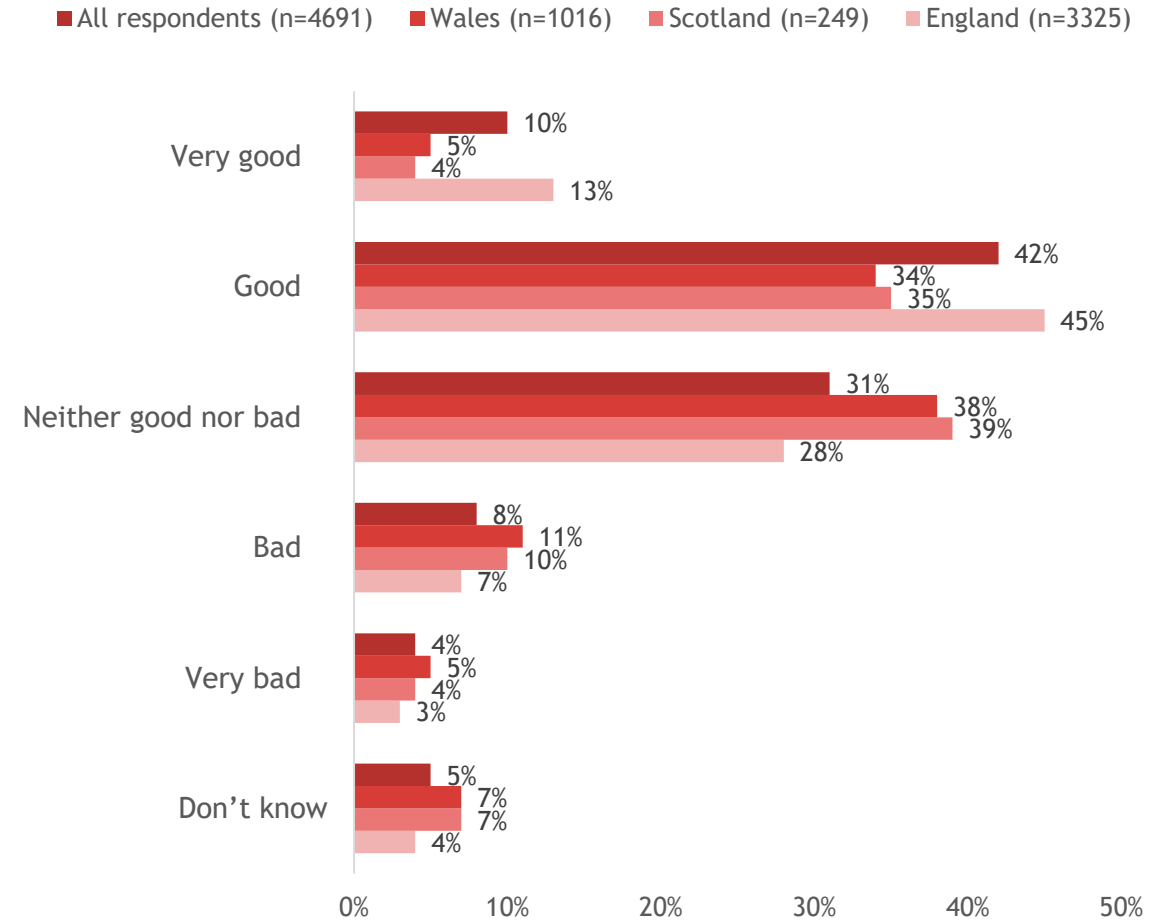
Q. Does your school or college encourage you to, or give you a chance to, do any of the following things?

Base: 4560 Balance: No response



Q. How good or bad do you think your school or college is at helping the environment?

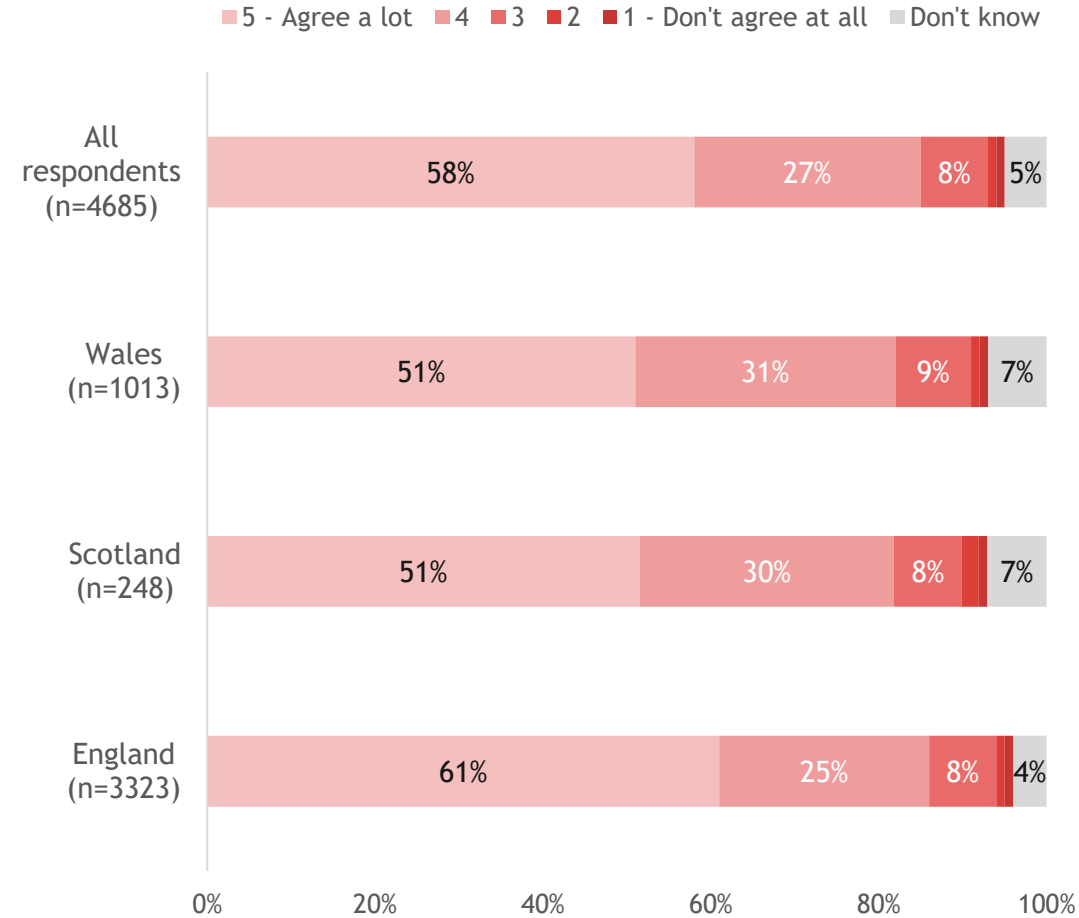
Base: 4692 Balance: No response



Q. What do think about this statement?

All schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment.

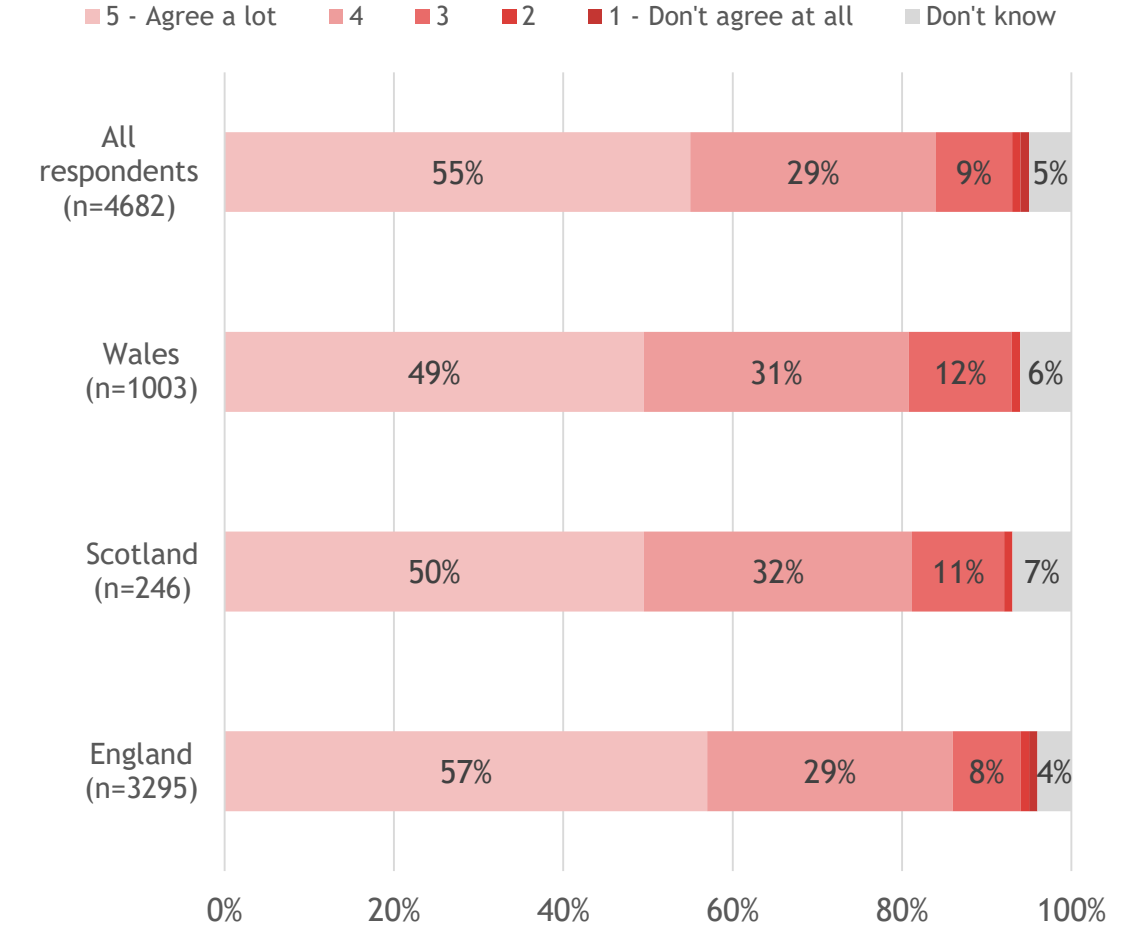
Base: 4685 Balance: No response



Q And what do you think about this statement?

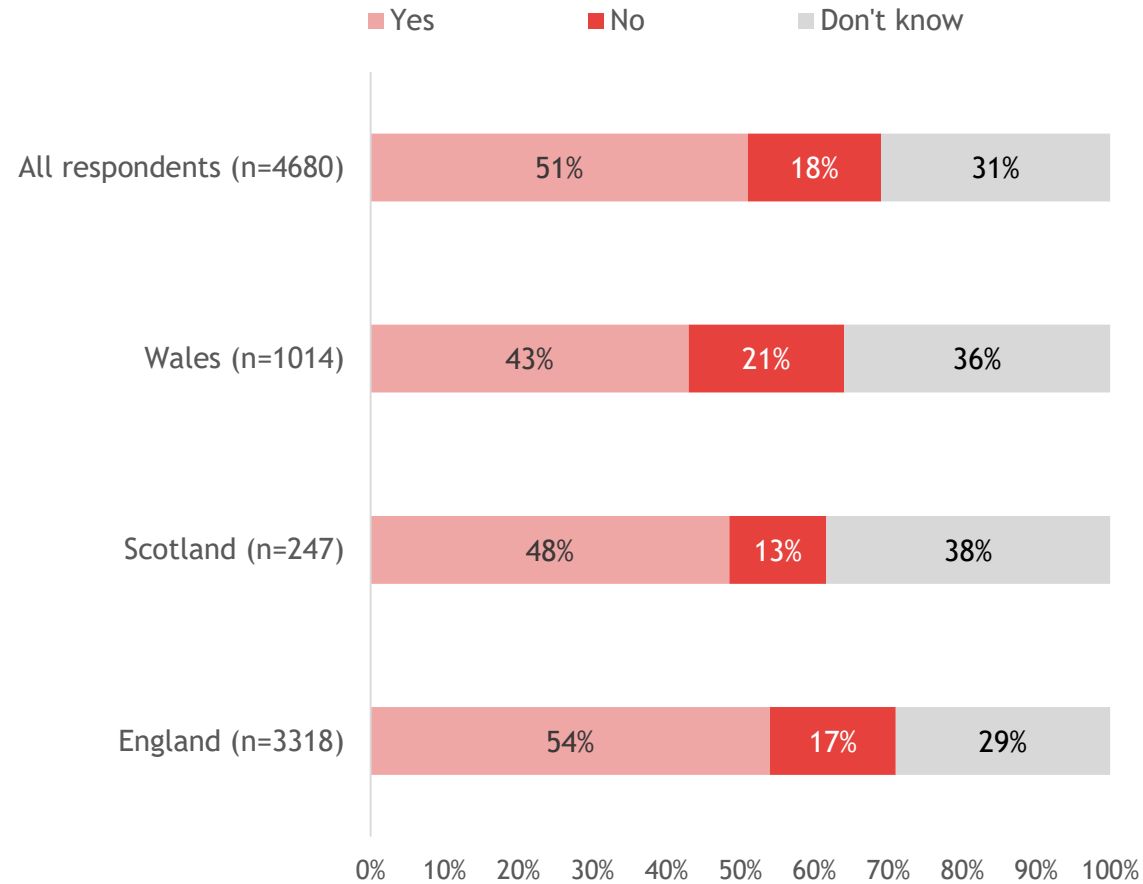
All schools and colleges should be encouraging and helping pupils like me to do things to help the environment.

Base: 4682 Balance: No response



Q Would you like to be involved with projects or activities at your school or college that help the environment?

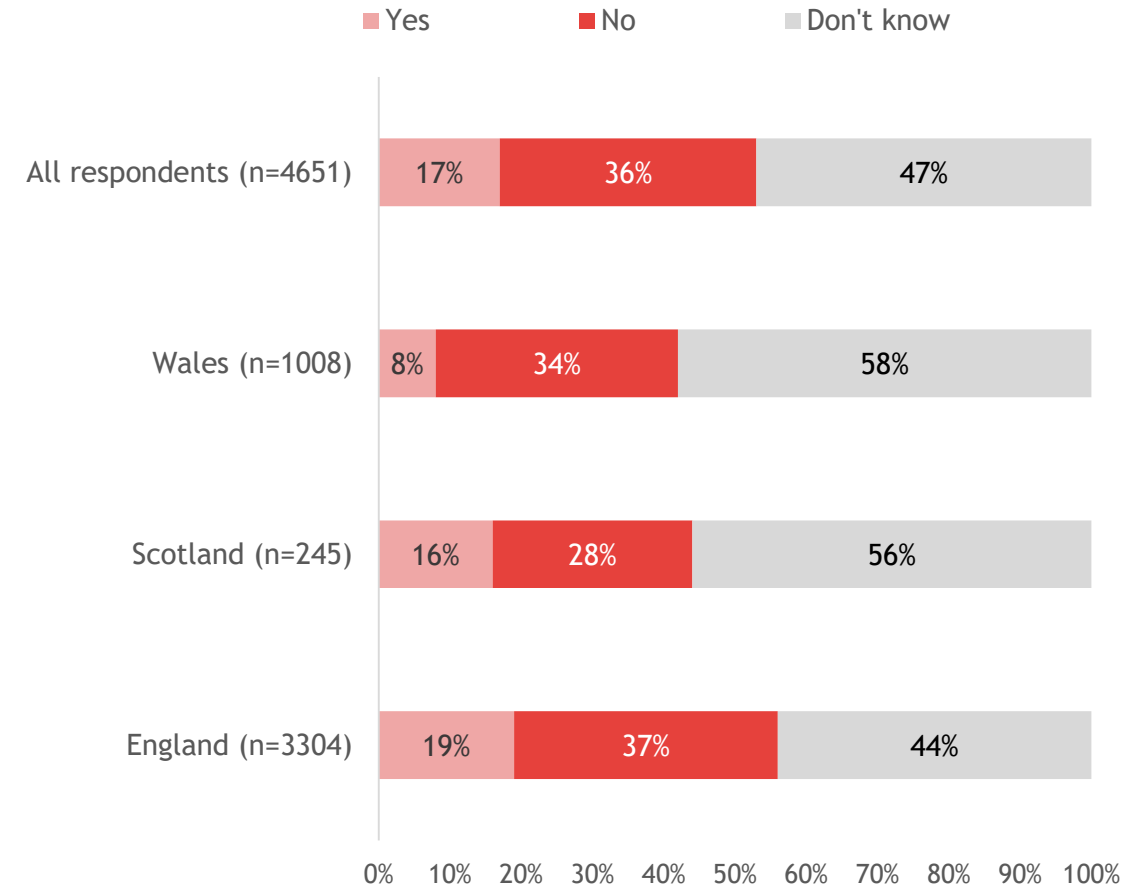
Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response



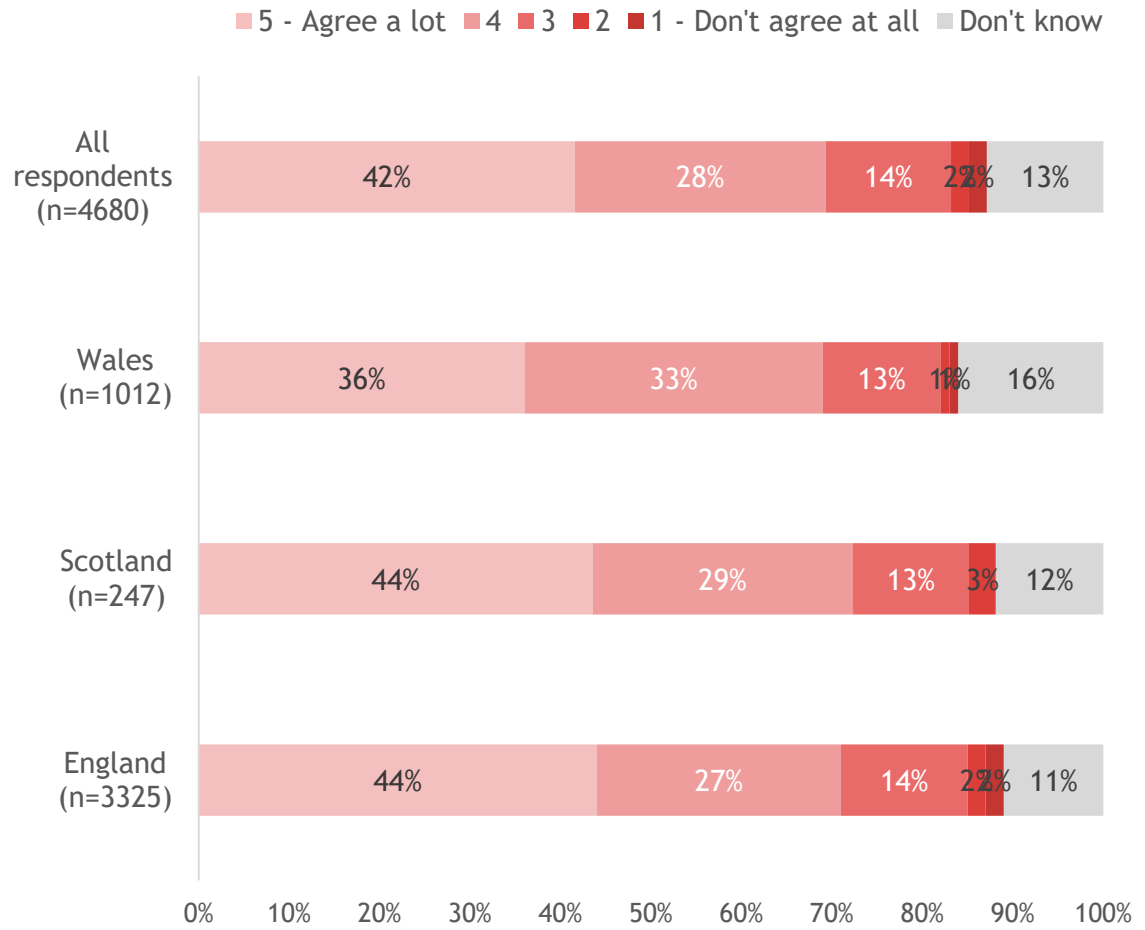
Q Renewable energy is energy which comes from sources that will not run out any time soon, like the sun, wind, water and the natural heat of the earth.

Does your school or college generate any renewable energy?

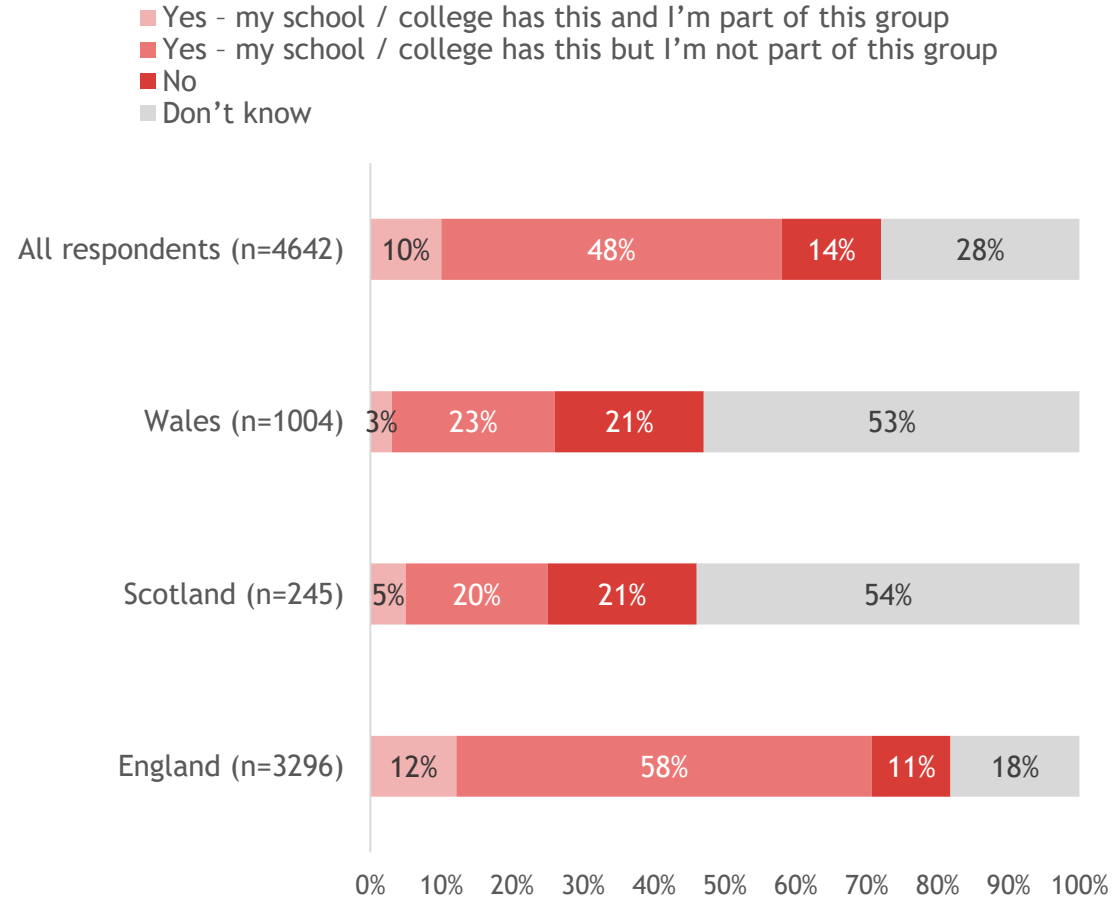
Base: 4651 Balance: No response



Q What do you think about this?
My school / college should be generating renewable energy
 Base: 4680 Balance: No response

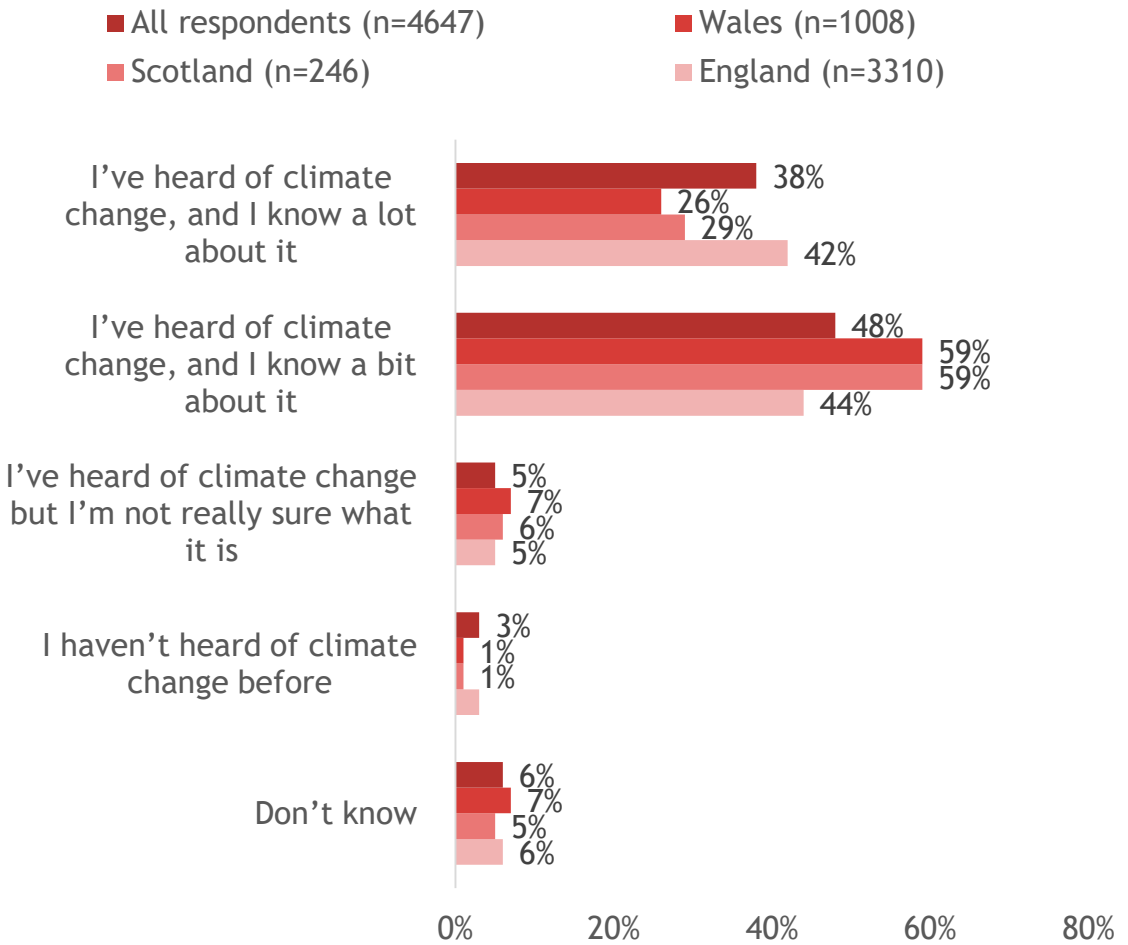


Q Does your school or college give you the chance to get involved with trying to improve the impact it has on the environment (for example, being part of an Eco or Green Team or Club)?
 Base: 4642 Balance: No response



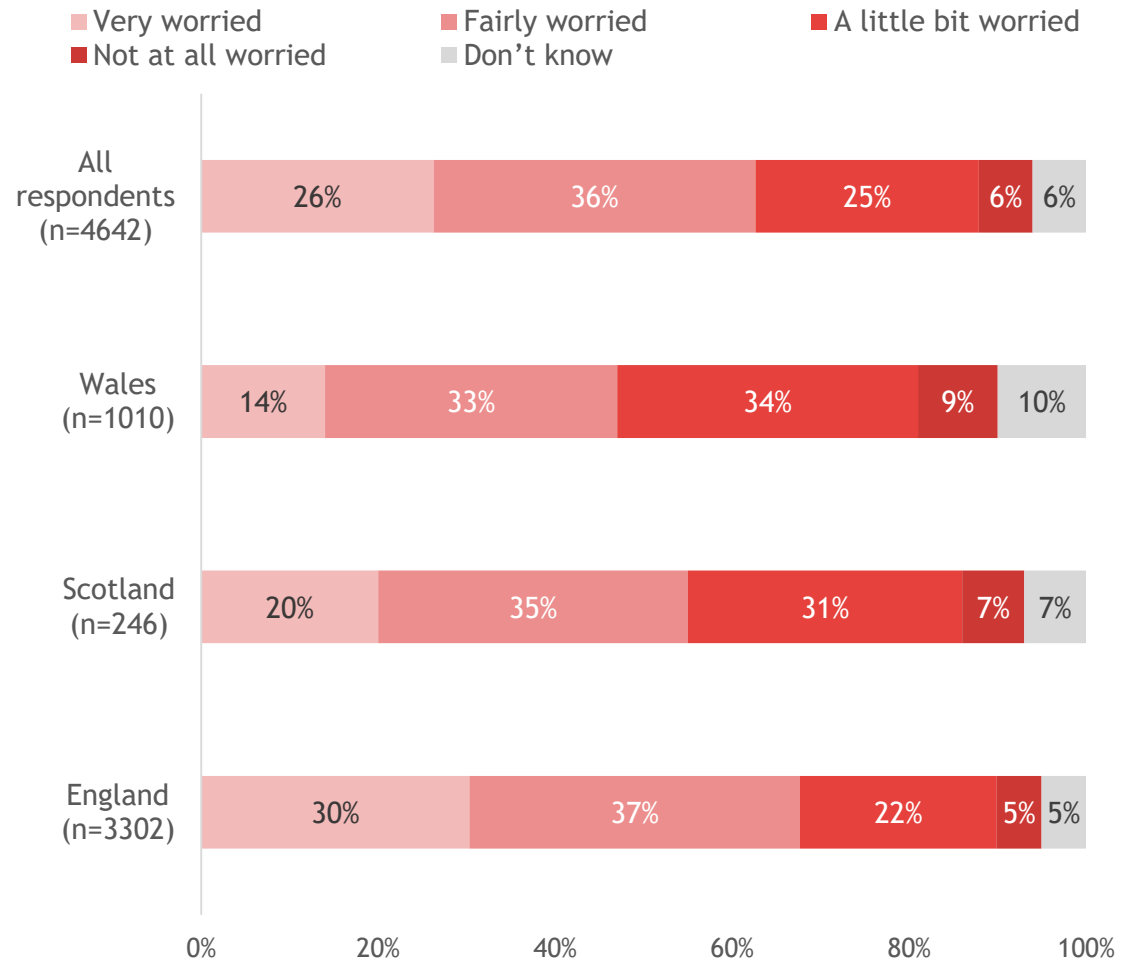
Q. Which of these options best describes what you know about climate change / the climate crisis?

Base: 4647 Balance: No response



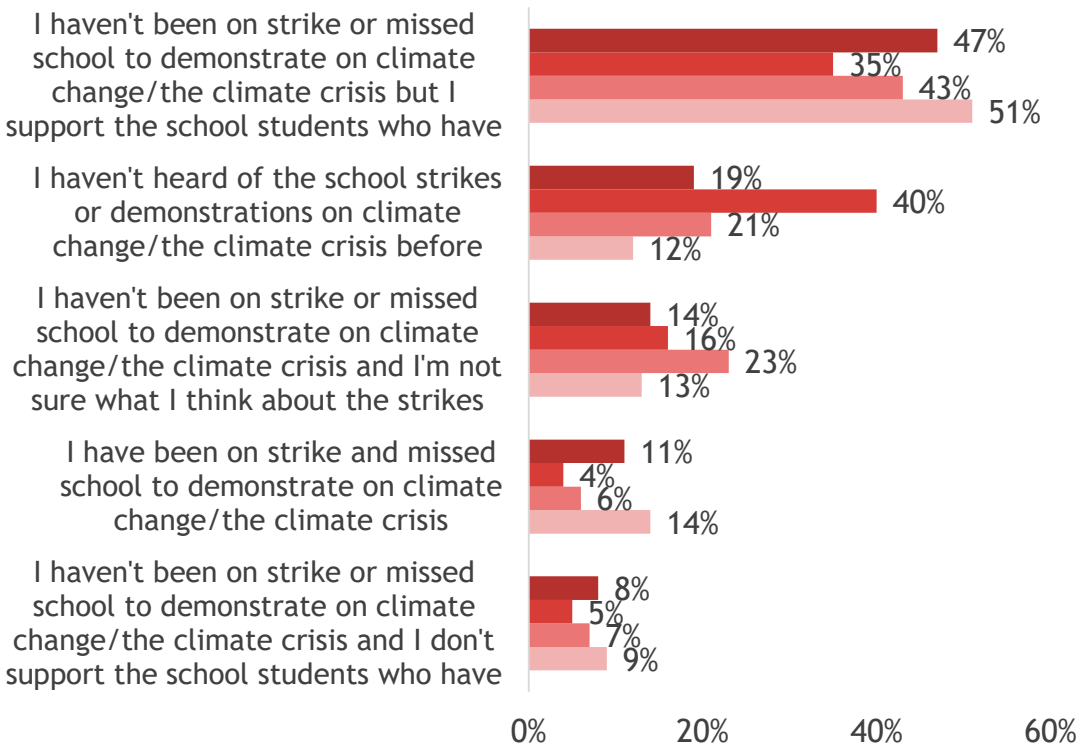
Q How worried are you about climate change / the climate crisis?

Base: 4642 Balance: No response



Q School Strike for Climate (also known as Fridays for Future, Youth for Climate and Youth Strike 4 Climate) is an international movement of school students who are deciding not to attend classes and take part in demonstrations to demand action on climate change/the climate crisis instead. Which of the following options is most like you? Have you gone on strike and missed school to demonstrate on climate change/the climate crisis?
 Base: 4588 Balance: No response

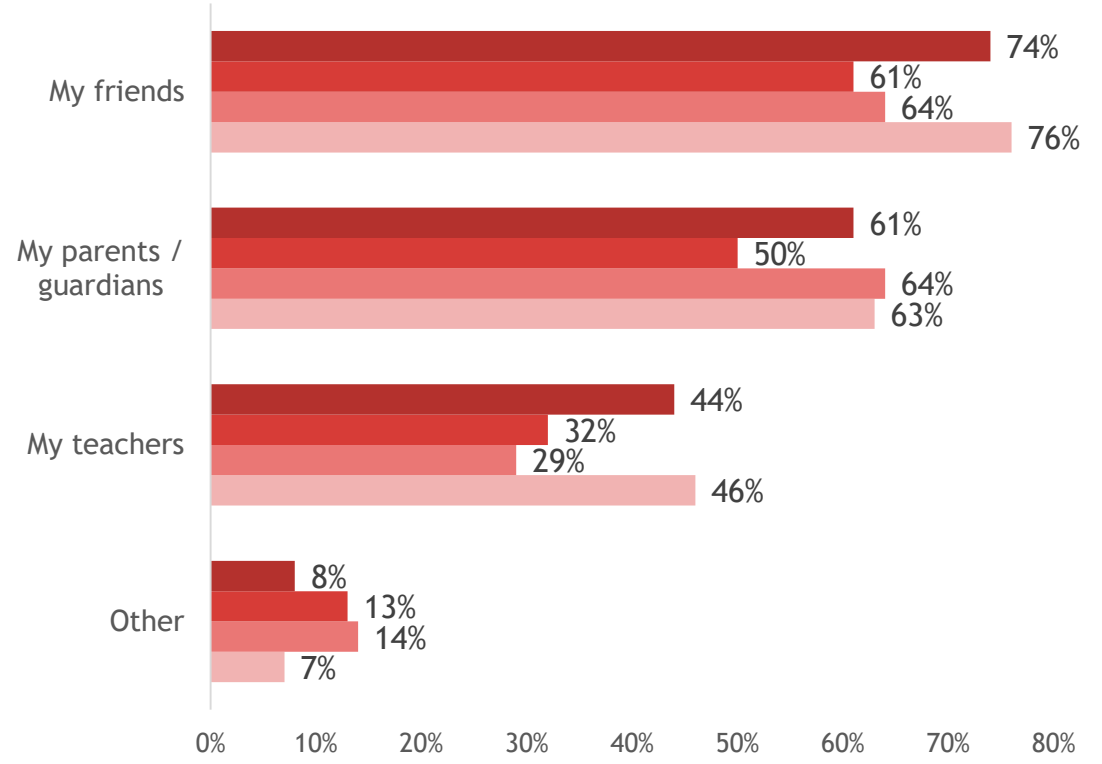
■ All respondents (4588) ■ Wales (n=986) ■ Scotland (n=242) ■ England (n=3276)



Q Who supported you to go on strike from school to demonstrate on climate change / the climate crisis?

Base: 502: Balance: Those who had not been on strike, no response.

■ All respondents (n=502) ■ Wales (n=38) ■ Scotland (n=14) ■ England (n=437)



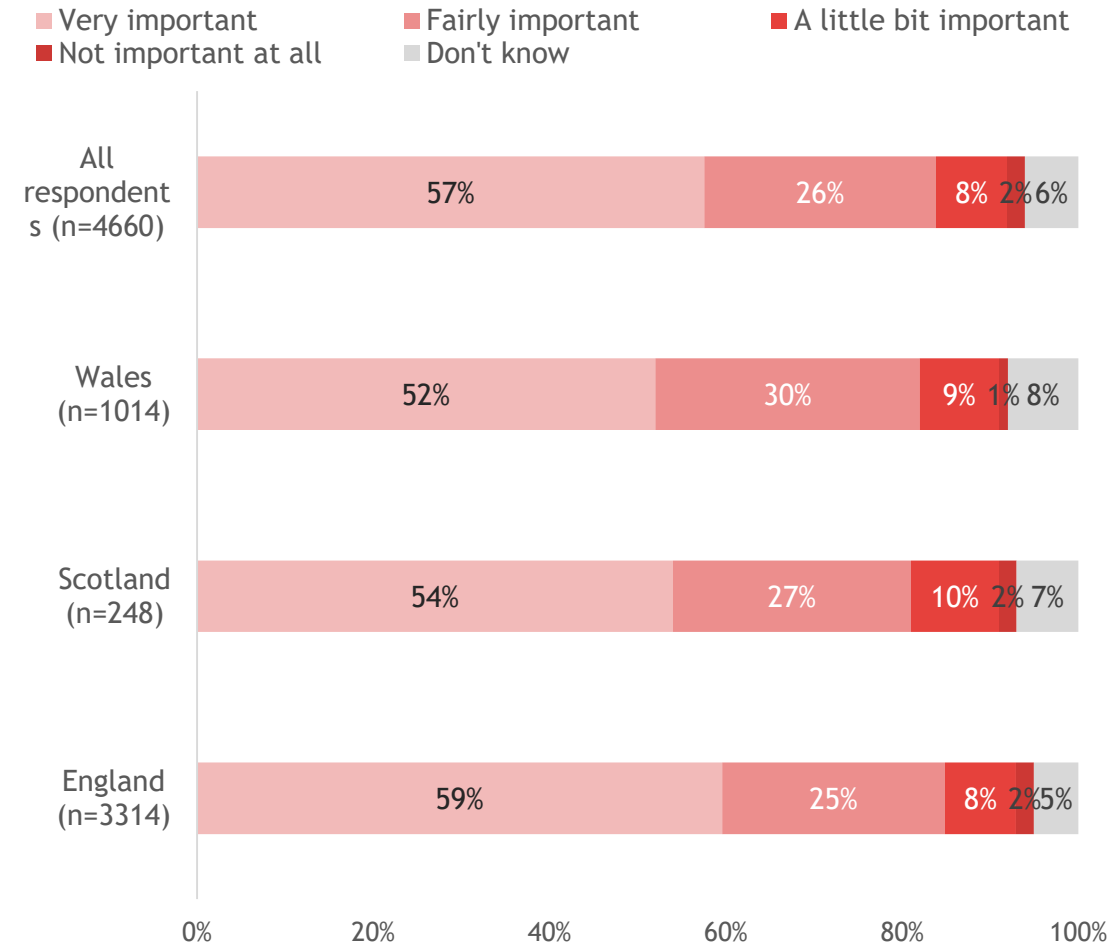
Q Using the scale below, where 1 is very worried about the future and 7 is very excited about the future, please show how you feel:

Base: 4656 Balance: No response



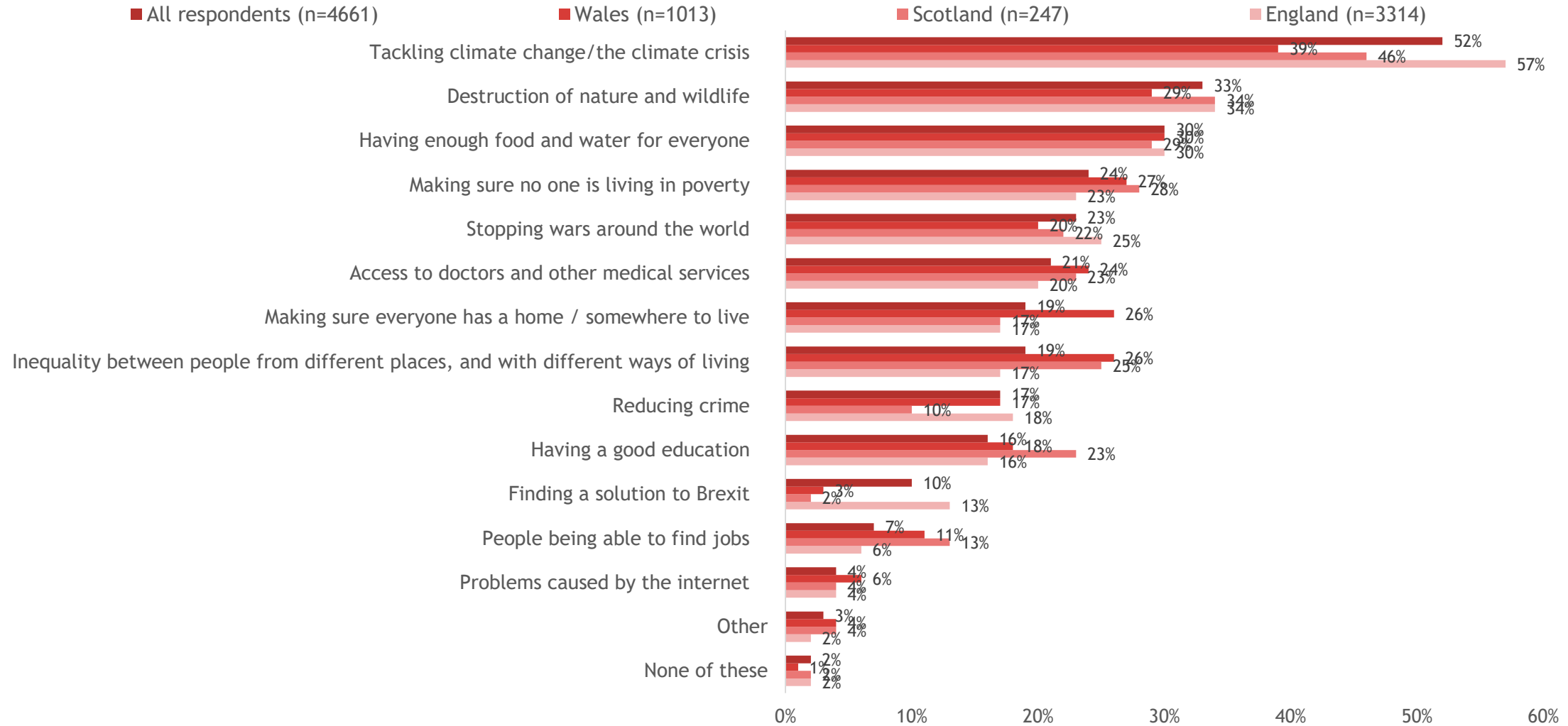
Q How important, or not important, do you think it is that world leaders do more to tackle climate change / the climate crisis?

Base: 4660 Balance: No response



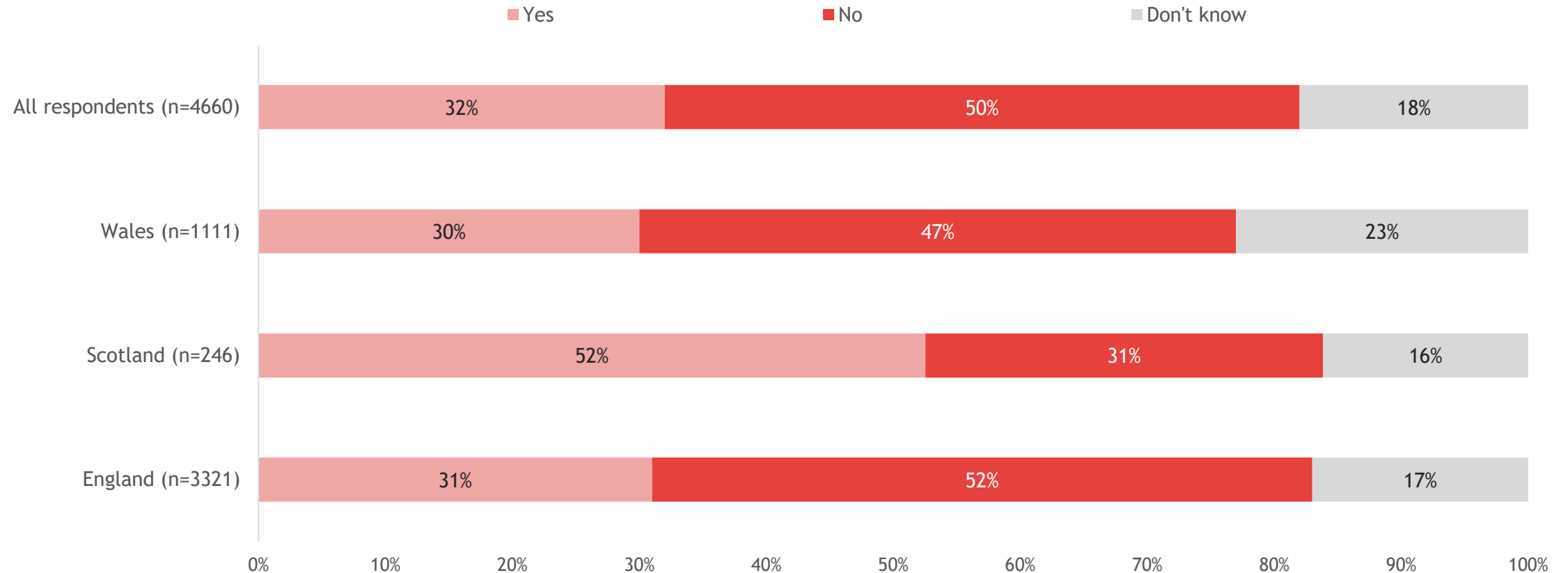
Q. What do you think are the most important issues facing the world today?

Base: 4661 Balance: No response



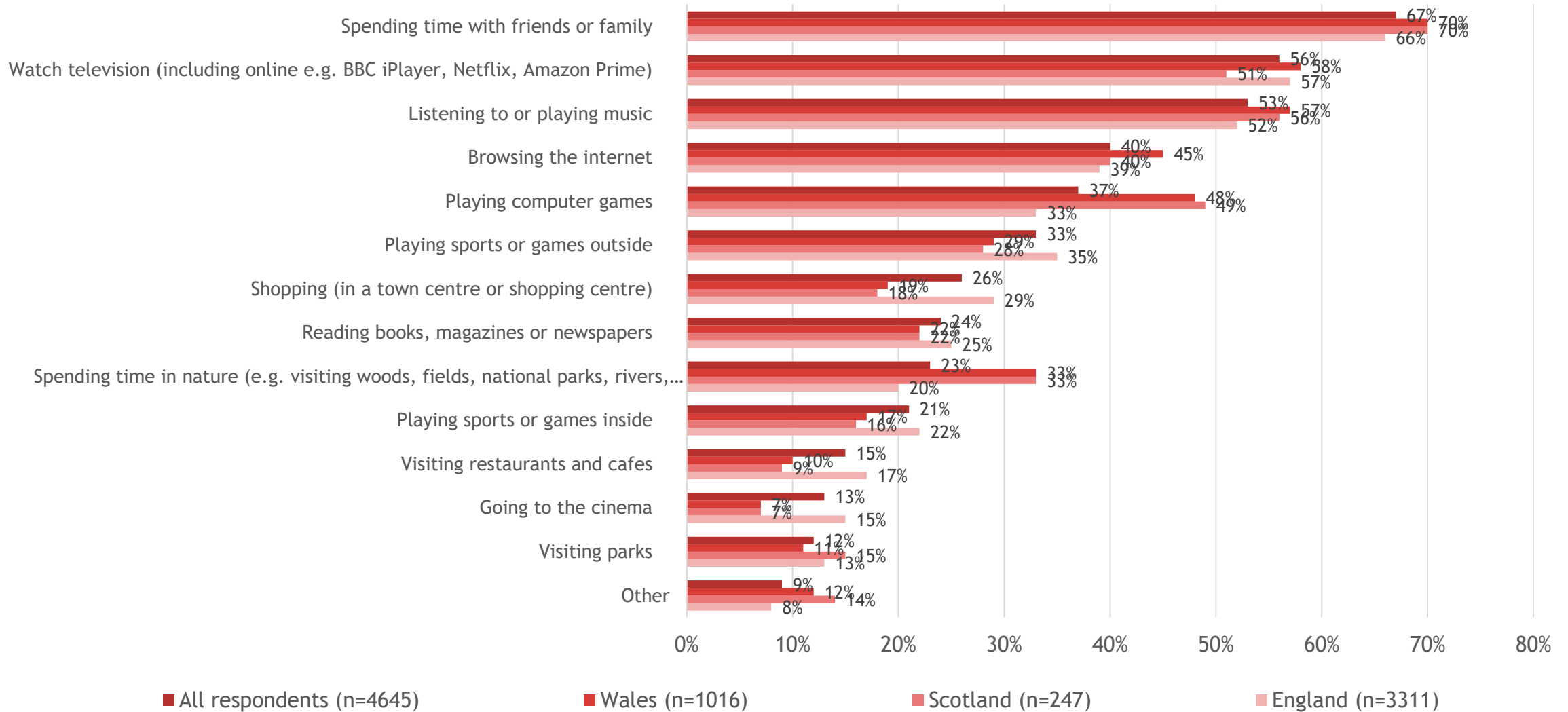
Q The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a set of 17 goals that countries around the world have agreed to work towards with the aim of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people live in peace and prosperity. Before answering this survey, had you heard of the Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the Global Goals?

Base: 4660 Balance: No response



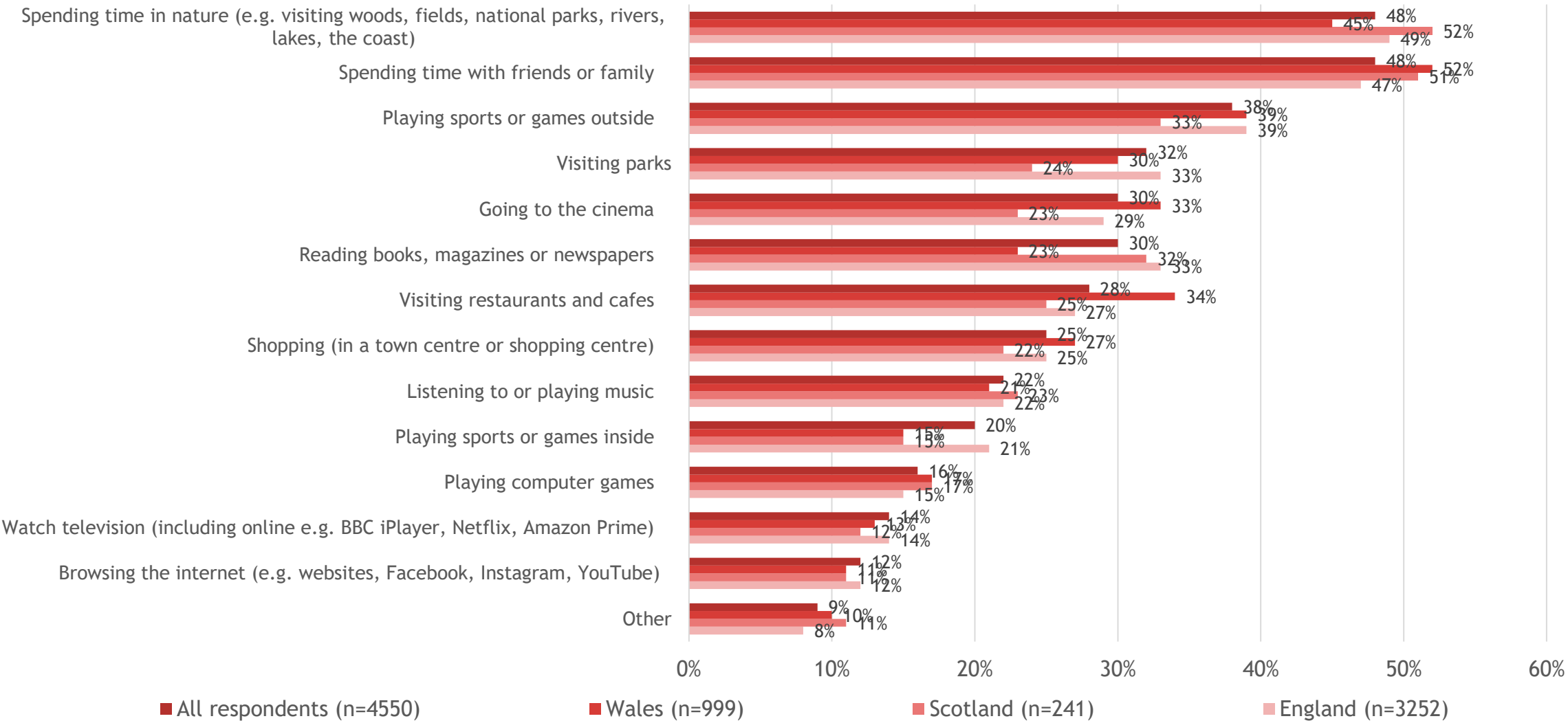
Q. Thinking about your spare time, after school, at the weekend and during the school holidays, which of the following activities do you do most often?

Base: In brackets Balance: No response



Q. If you had the chance, which of the following activities would you like to do more of?

Base: In brackets Balance: No response



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