

SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY



Policing Lockdown: The Public's View

June 2020



Report produced by Blake Stevenson Ltd.
www.blakestevenson.co.uk

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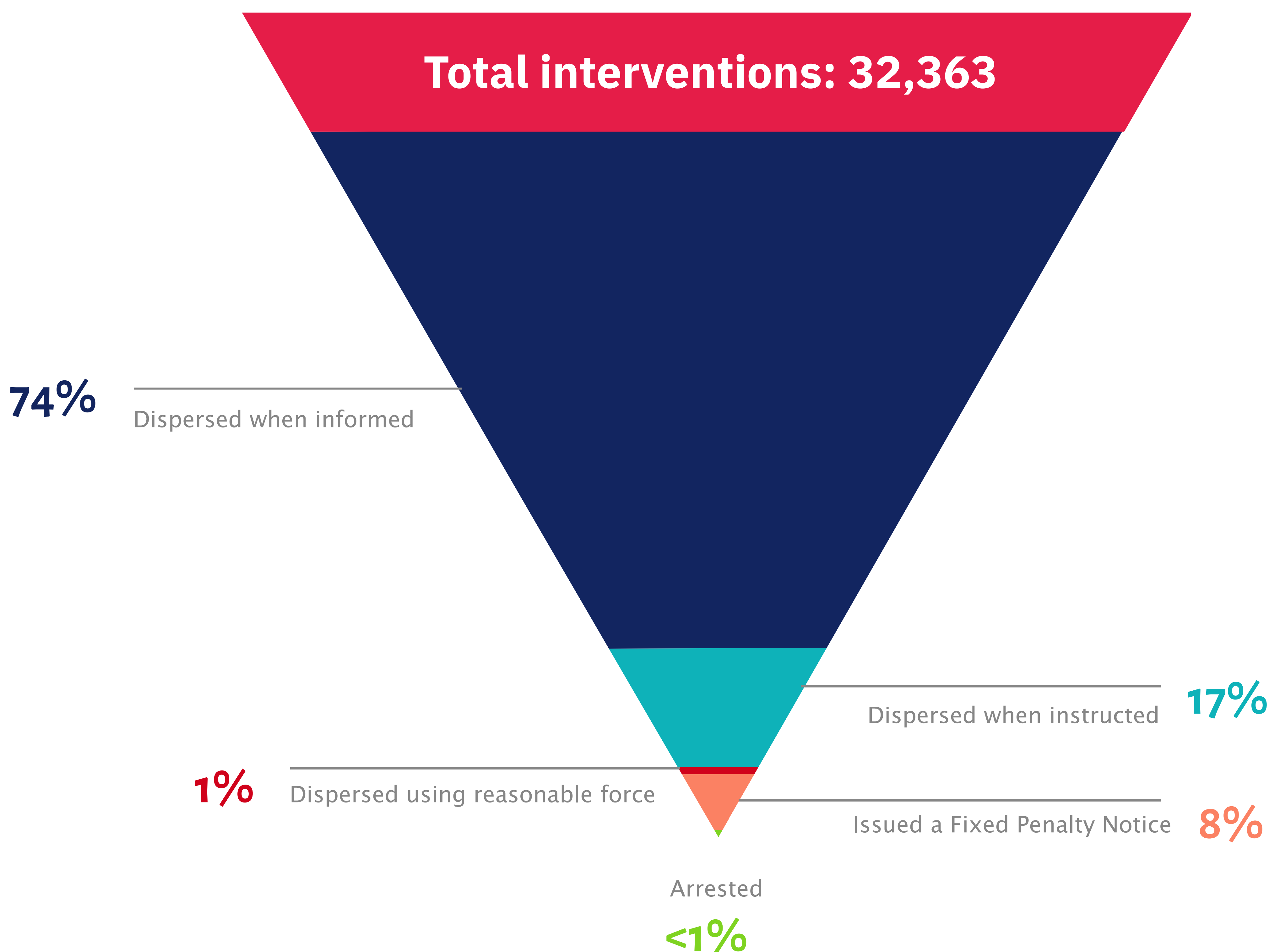
Introduction and context

We are living in extraordinary times, and for most people, if not everyone, the COVID-19 lockdown has placed unprecedented restrictions on their civil liberties.

The police have had a unique role to play, with new powers being introduced to support them to enforce the lockdown. The police's approach to all COVID-19 powers is for officers to engage, explain, encourage the public and only enforce as a last resort. This has been the overall approach and tone of policing in Scotland since the inception of the public health emergency. In practice however, enforcement has only been required in a relatively small number of cases with the vast majority of people having followed the guidance set by the Scottish Government to stay home and save lives.

According to indicative police data¹, the number of incidents relating to breaching the lockdown which have been dealt with by Police Scotland are low. Of the 32,363 interventions between 27th March and 13th May 2020, the majority of them were resolved without any need for a fixed penalty notice – some 74% resulted in people moving on when they were asked to and a further 17% moving on when informed. During this timeframe, only 2,644 fixed penalty notices were issued and 166 arrests made relating to breaches of the lockdown across Scotland.

Figure 1: Police use of COVID-19 powers (27th March - 13th May 2020)



¹ <https://www.scotland.police.uk/assets/pdf/138327/618500/CVI-Raw-Data-07-05-13-05>

Given the unprecedented powers given to the police in Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) felt it important to commission independent researchers to gauge the impact of these powers on public perceptions of confidence in policing and support for the use of the measures made available under the new legislation. They were commissioned to gather information on a small set of questions through two waves of surveys. The questions were designed to give comparators against Scotland before lockdown (Scottish Criminal Justice Survey) and Great Britain during lockdown (YouGov/Crest survey).

These surveys were conducted during the lockdown over two waves by Scotpulse, which is owned by Scottish Television (STV). It has a panel of 27,000 adults across Scotland and in conducting these surveys they contacted a representative sample of people. 3,236 people took part in the surveys across the two waves. The results of the surveys were weighted to the Scottish adult population by age and gender. Statistically significant variations by groups and area were analysed and gave a 95% confidence level. Data and high-level messages from the surveys have already been made publicly available on the SPA website.

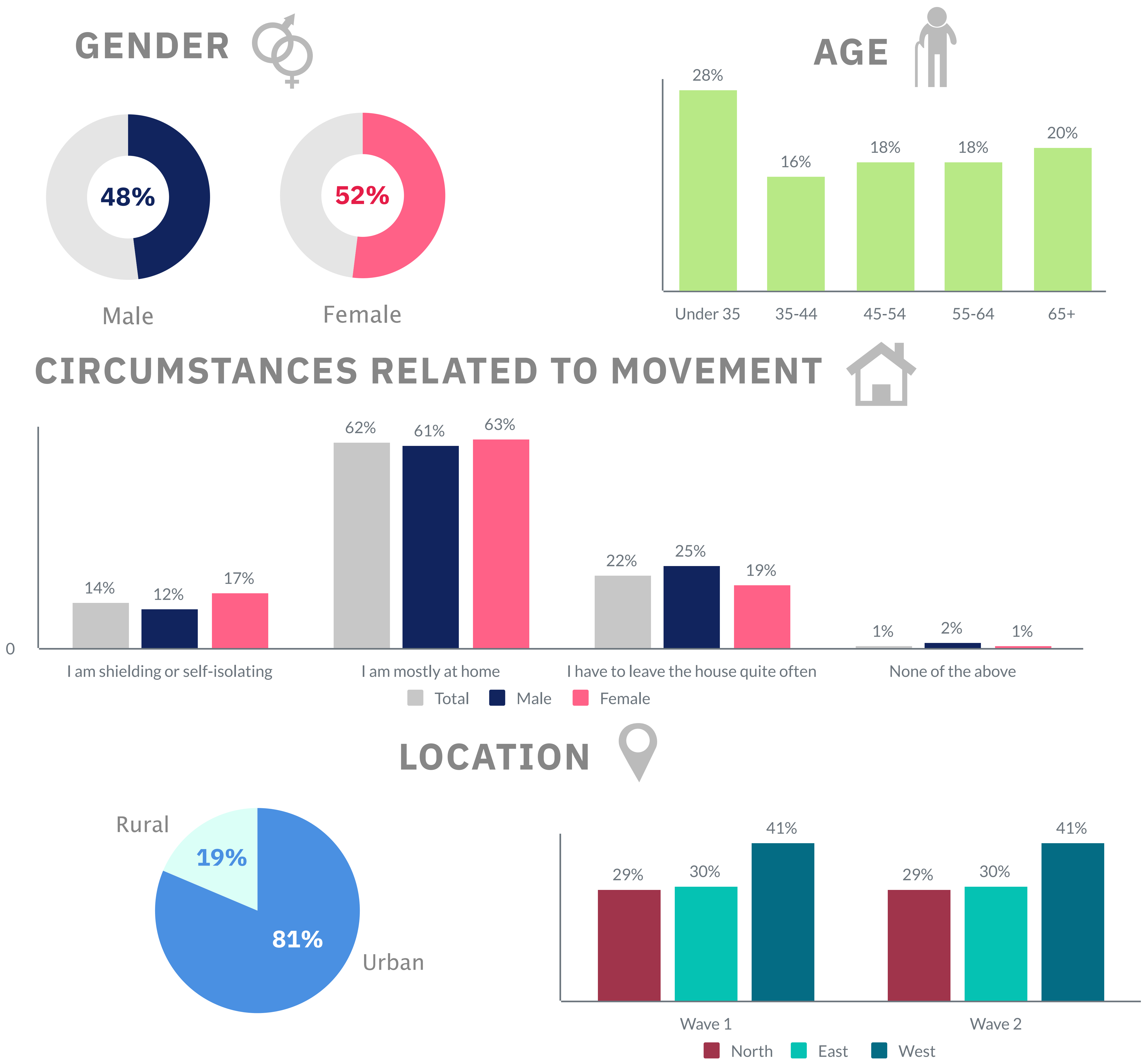
Using the results of these surveys, Blake Stevenson Ltd., a social research company, was commissioned to write this report which collates the key messages from the research. This report is an opportunity to share some of the high-level findings of this research into the public's confidence in the response by Police Scotland to the pandemic in Scotland.

Profile of survey respondents

The research was undertaken with a representative sample of people across Scotland. The research was informed by survey responses, received in two waves, from 3,236 people. The Wave 1 survey was conducted at the end of April 2020 and the Wave 2 survey was undertaken in the middle of May 2020.

When geographical areas are referenced throughout this report, the 13 police divisions are grouped into 3 areas – North (North-East, Tayside and Highlands and Islands), East (Forth Valley, Edinburgh, Lothians and Scottish Borders and Fife) and West (Greater Glasgow, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, Argyll and West Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire, Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway)². There was no duplication of participants across the two survey waves. The profile of the respondents was as follows:

Figure 2: Profile information



In looking across the data, there was some variation between responses and the differences that indicate a point of interest are highlighted in the next sections.

² <https://www.scotland.police.uk/your-community/>

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Perception of policing in local areas

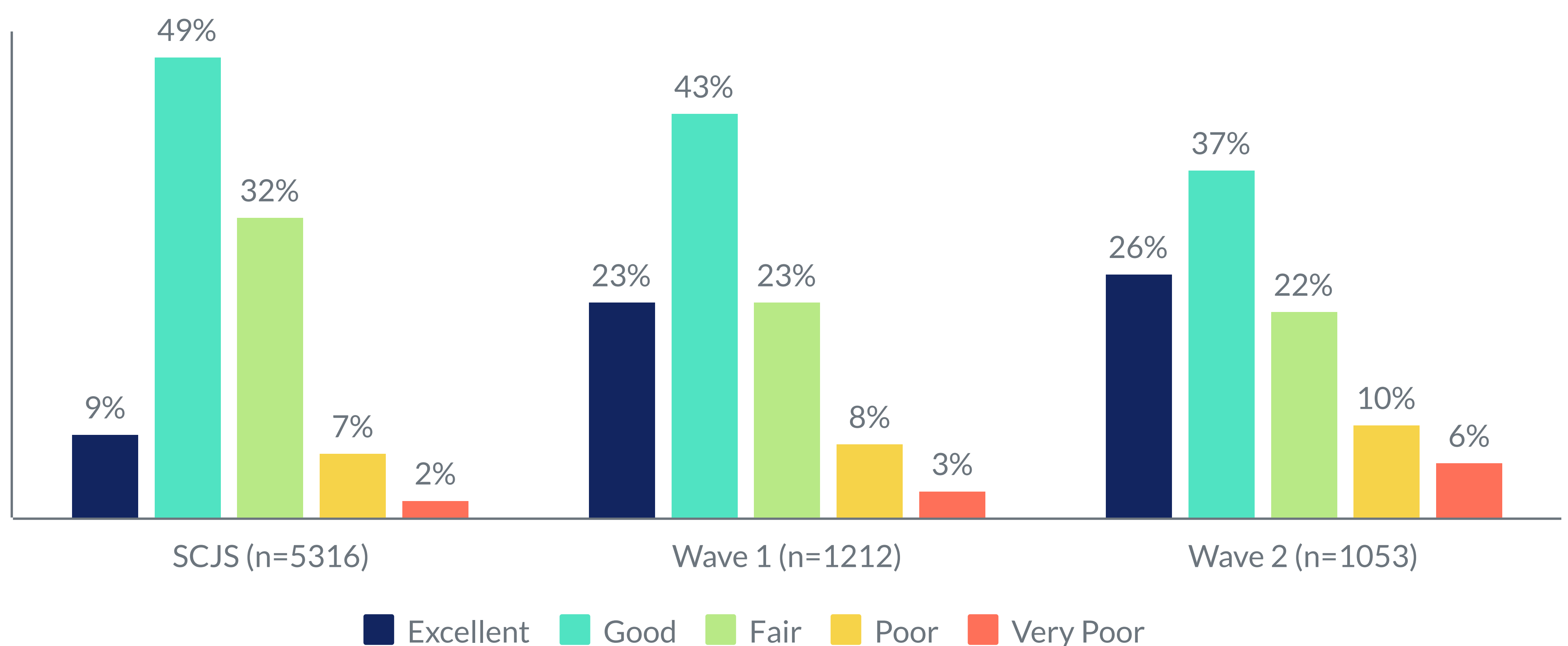
The approach and tone of policing in Scotland since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis has been to engage with people, explain the provisions and encourage them to comply with the necessary restrictions, only using enforcement as a last resort.

How good a job are the police doing?

The survey asked respondents about their perception of the police. In both surveys, between a quarter to a third did not know how the police were doing in their local area, probably because of the physical restrictions on movement during this time and, as a result, the reduced engagement or observation of police activity.

For those that held a view, the majority, 66% in Wave 1 and 63% in Wave 2, thought the police were doing an excellent or a good job. When this is compared to the 2018-19 Scottish Criminal Justice Survey³ (SCJS) responses, which asked a similar question, it shows that positive responses of policing had not fallen, but were actually higher than before lockdown.

Figure 3: How good a job are the police doing?*



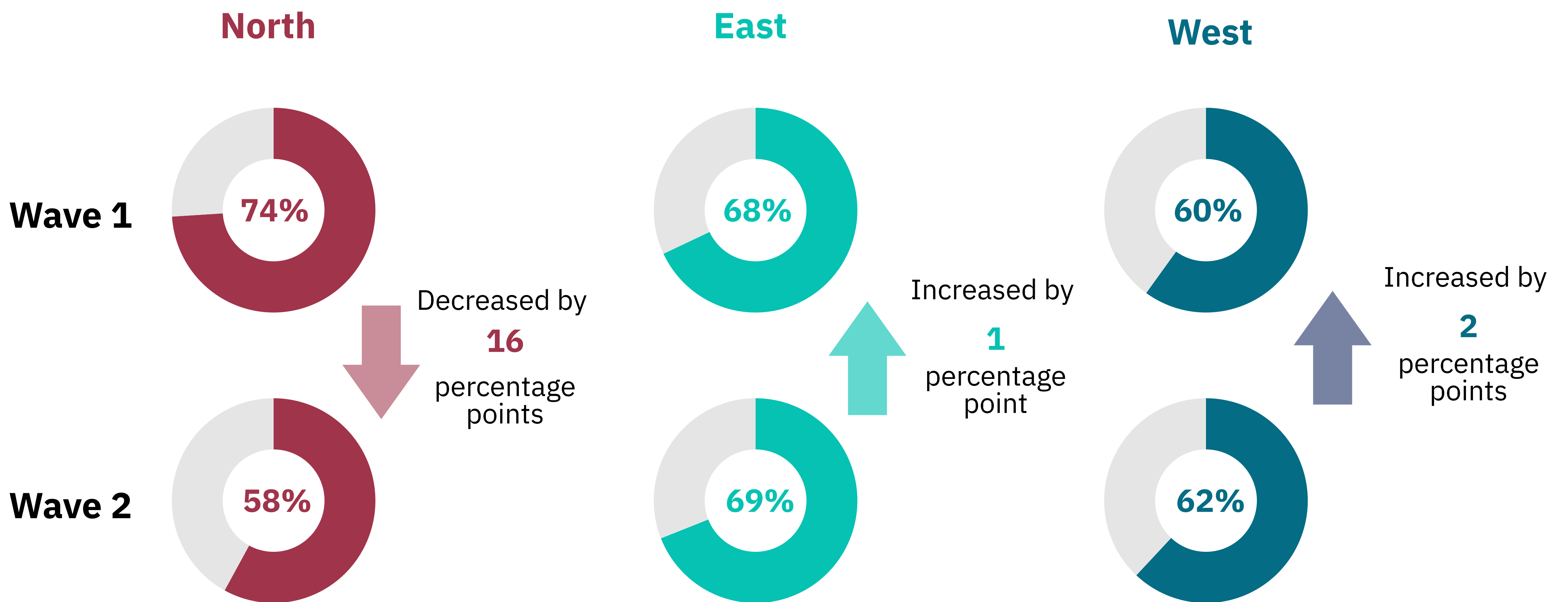
*excluding don't know and rather not say

When considering the type of respondents, the positive view was consistent amongst participants across gender and lockdown status.

However, in relation to age, the under 35s across both survey waves were least likely to select excellent or good and had a higher percentage of poor or very poor, especially compared to older age groups. There were also some geographical differences, the most significant of which was in the north where the percentage saying excellent or good decreased by 16%.

³ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2020/06/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2018-19-main-findings/documents/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2018-19-main-findings/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2018-19-main-findings/govscot%3Adocument/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2018-19-main-findings.pdf>

Figure 4: How good a job are the police doing? (Excellent and good responses by area)

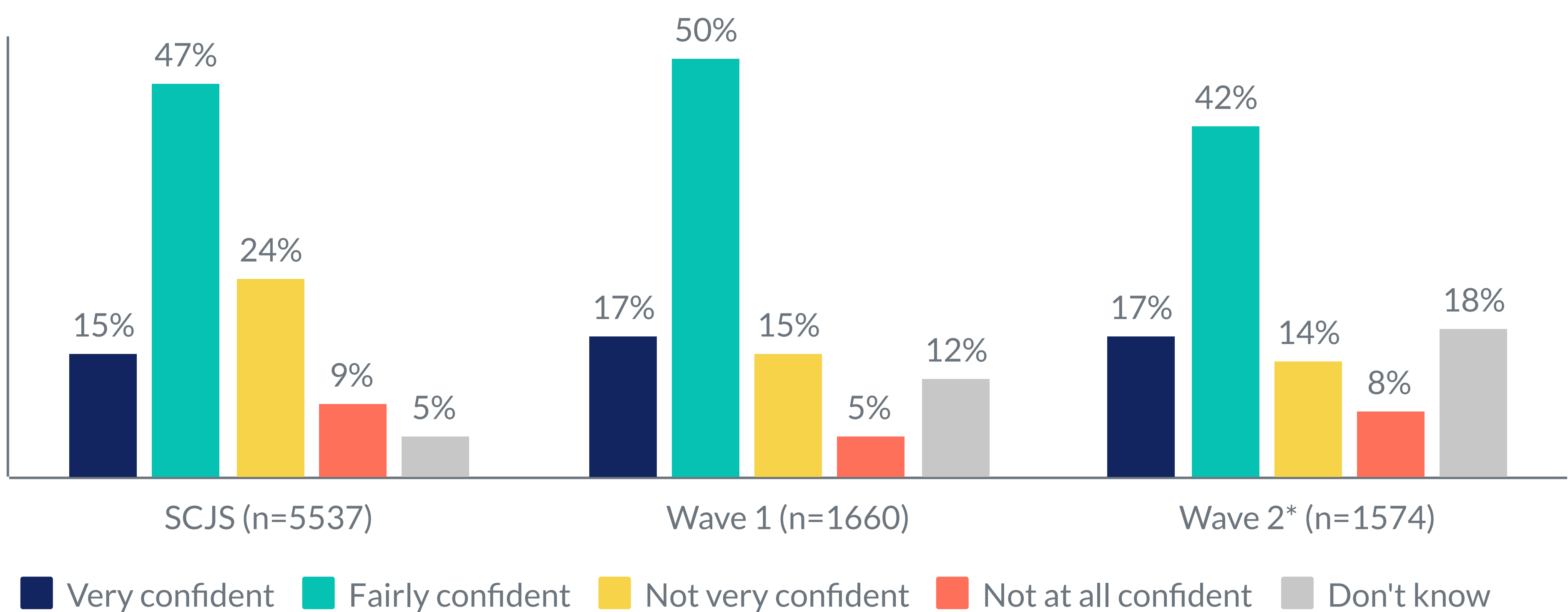


Throughout the public health emergency, Police Scotland has policed proportionately and sensitively to maintain public trust and confidence. This has required effective and responsive policing across all local divisions during a period of heightened concern and tension.

Responding quickly

In the survey, when asked about their confidence in the ability of their local police to respond quickly, the majority of people, across all ages and areas of Scotland, were very or fairly confident in policing ability in this matter. Whilst confidence decreased over the course of the two waves of the survey, the combined results (63%) show a slightly higher confidence level than those reported in the SCJS (62%) and in both waves those selecting very confident was higher than in the SCJS.

Figure 5: How confident are you in the ability of police in your local area to respond quickly?



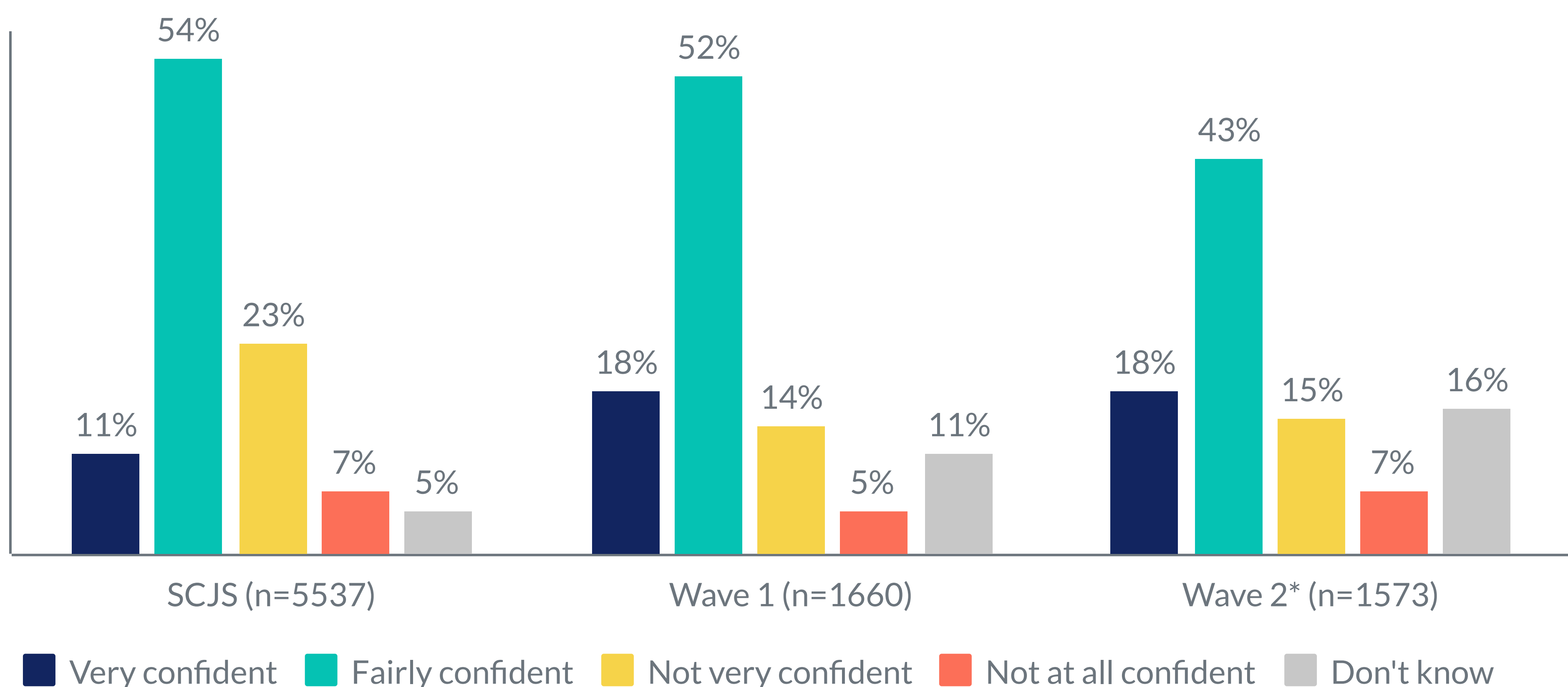
*In Wave 2, 1% responded with 'rather not say'

When considering the speed of the police response, there were few differences amongst the members of the public across both waves of the survey, however between Waves 1 and 2, the confidence in the ability of the police to respond quickly reduced from 69% to 54% for the under 35s but it remained steady across the other age ranges.

Dealing with incidents

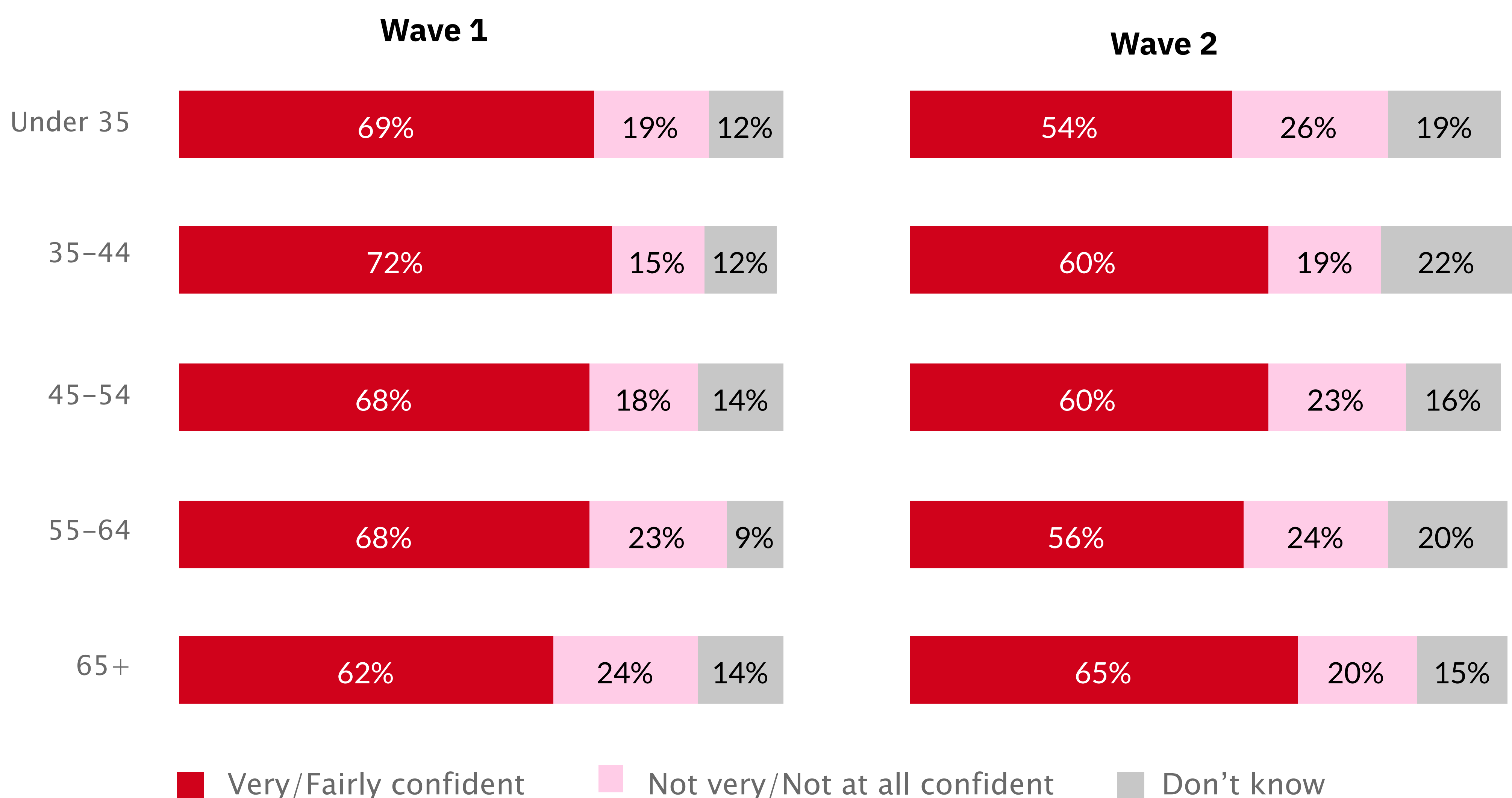
When exploring how police in the local area dealt with incidents, most respondents across both surveys had confidence in the ability of the police to deal with this matter. There was a higher proportion of very confident responses across both survey waves and a higher level of confidence in Wave 1 (70%) than among SCJS respondents (65%), but this decreased slightly in the second wave of surveying (61%).

Figure 6: How confident are you in the ability of police in your local area to deal with incidents as they occur?



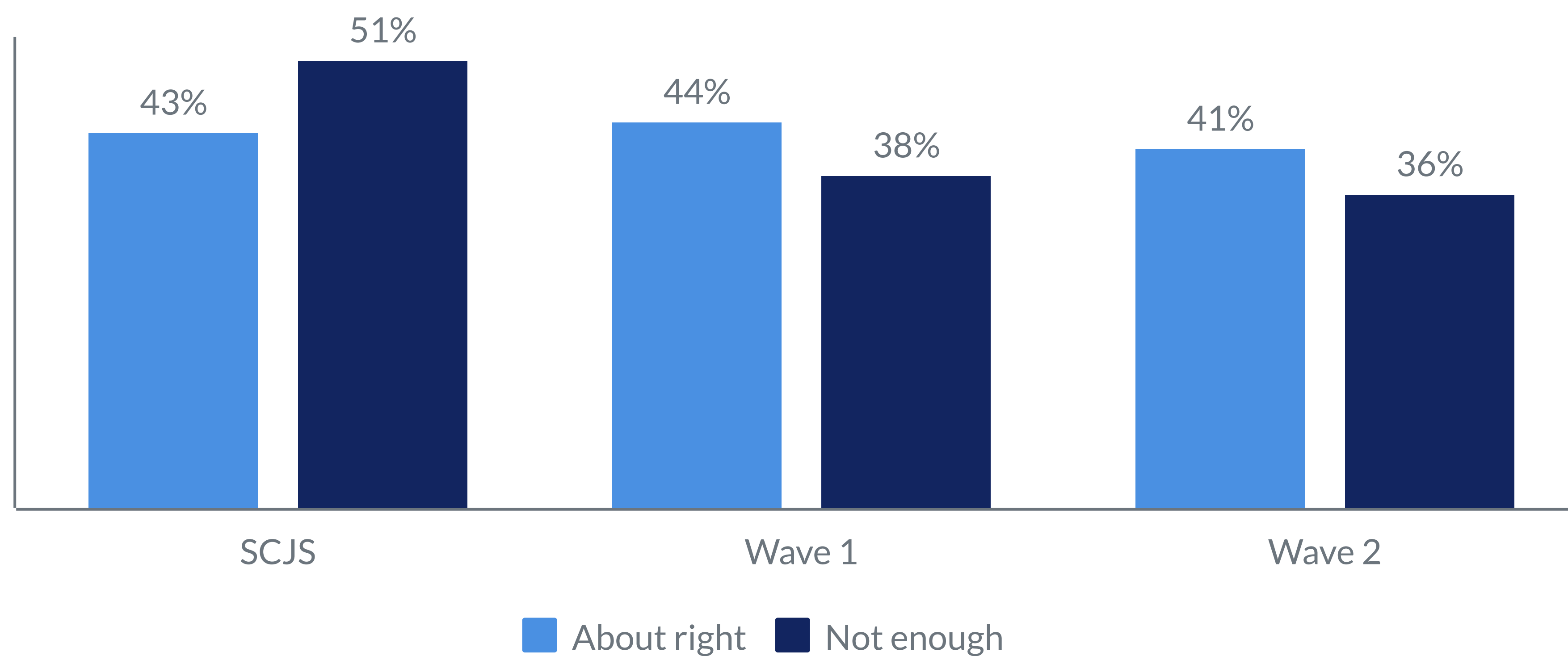
Further analysis showed that these views were consistent across location, gender and lockdown status. However, the views changed over the period of the two surveys among the under 35s, 35–44 and over 65 age groups.

Figure 7: How confident are you in the ability of police in your local area to deal with incidents as they occur? (By age)



44% of people in Wave 1 and 41% in Wave 2 thought that the police presence in their local area was about right and this compares favourably to the SCJS respondents, where 43% felt that police presence was about right. Where the responses differ more markedly from the SCJS results is amongst respondents who think there is not enough police presence in their local area. In both waves, this is just over a third of responses – 38% in Wave 1 and decreasing to 36% in Wave 2 – compared to over half the respondents, 51%, in the SCJS.

Figure 8: Overall, do you think that the police presence in your local area is...



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Views of police approaches during lockdown

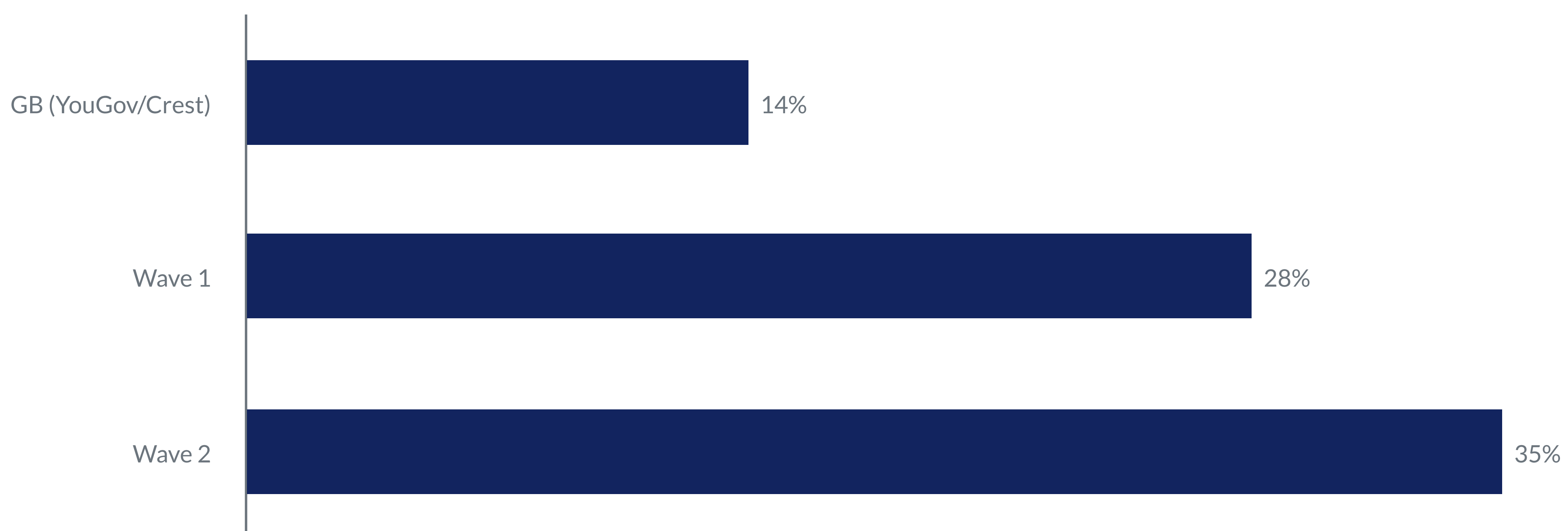
How well are the police in Scotland handling COVID-19 lockdown?

A significant number of people fully supported the approach being taken by the police during lockdown, with this number showing some decline between Waves 1 and 2 (going from 46% to 42%). People shielding indicated the highest level of support (56%) In Wave 1, a further 17% supported their approach but thought they were going too far.

The number of people who felt they were going too far declined, however, between the two waves (down from 17% to 10% in Wave 2).

Around one third of people felt that the police should take tougher action, with this number increasing over the two waves from 28% to 35%. There was very little variance in views between men and women, and between geographical areas. In Wave 1 the under 35 age group was most in favour of the police taking tougher action (32%), however in Wave 2 more people aged 35–44 years indicated that they wanted tougher action than in any other age group (41%). People aged over 65 years in both waves were least likely to indicate this (23% in Wave 1 and 27% in Wave 2). The YouGov/Crest survey indicates that the percentage of people calling for tougher action across Great Britain is significantly lower at 14%.

Figure 9: Proportion who believe that police should take tougher action



Only 4% of people in Wave 1 and 5% of people in Wave 2 thought the police were too heavy handed or should have no role.

Views on police measures

In an earlier YouGov/Crest poll conducted across Great Britain during lockdown 82% of people were supportive of the police asking people to provide a valid reason for being out of their home when challenged.

The same question was included in the SPA surveys in both Waves 1 and 2. Responses to the SPA surveys were steady across the two survey waves – with 84% in Wave 1 and 85% of people in Wave 2 indicating they were very or fairly content with the police asking people to provide a valid reason for being out of their home when challenged. 15% of people were fairly or very uncomfortable with this in Wave 1, decreasing to 13% in Wave 2.

Likewise, support for police arresting people who failed to comply with police instructions to return home remained relatively steady – 79% in Wave 1 and 77% in Wave 2 except for the under 35s whose support fell from 72% to 66% in Wave 2. Across Great Britain, the YouGov/Crest poll found that 72% of people were supportive of it which is lower than the overall response from both survey waves in Scotland.

Support for issuing fines was also higher in Scotland than across Great Britain as a whole. While 75% supported the issuing of fines to people breaching the lockdown across Great Britain, in Scotland support for this was 85% in Wave 1 and 86% in Wave 2.

In Wave 1 of the survey, people were also asked about the extent to which they were happy with a range of other possible measures.

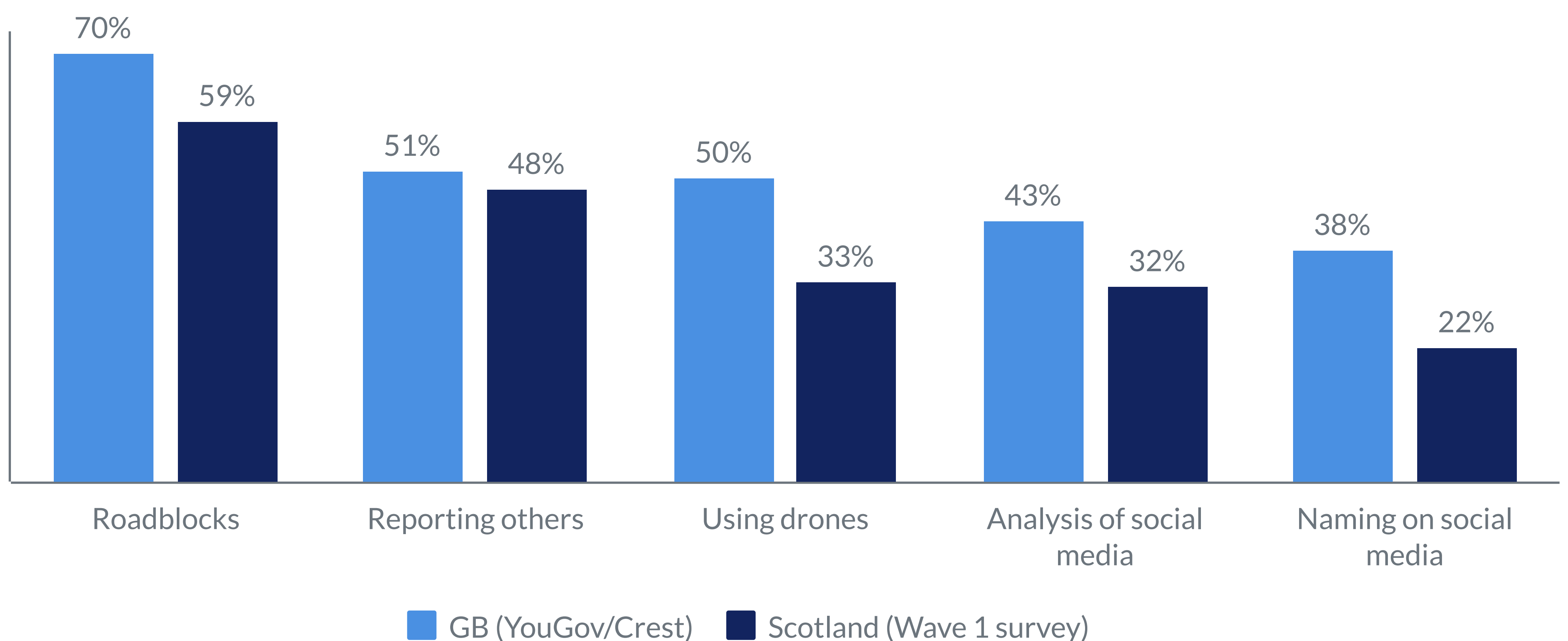


Almost 80% supported the police arresting people who failed to comply with police instructions to return home



85% of people supported issuing fines

Figure 10: Support for further police action



As the figure above shows, support for these across the board in Scotland was mixed, and lower than in Great Britain more widely.

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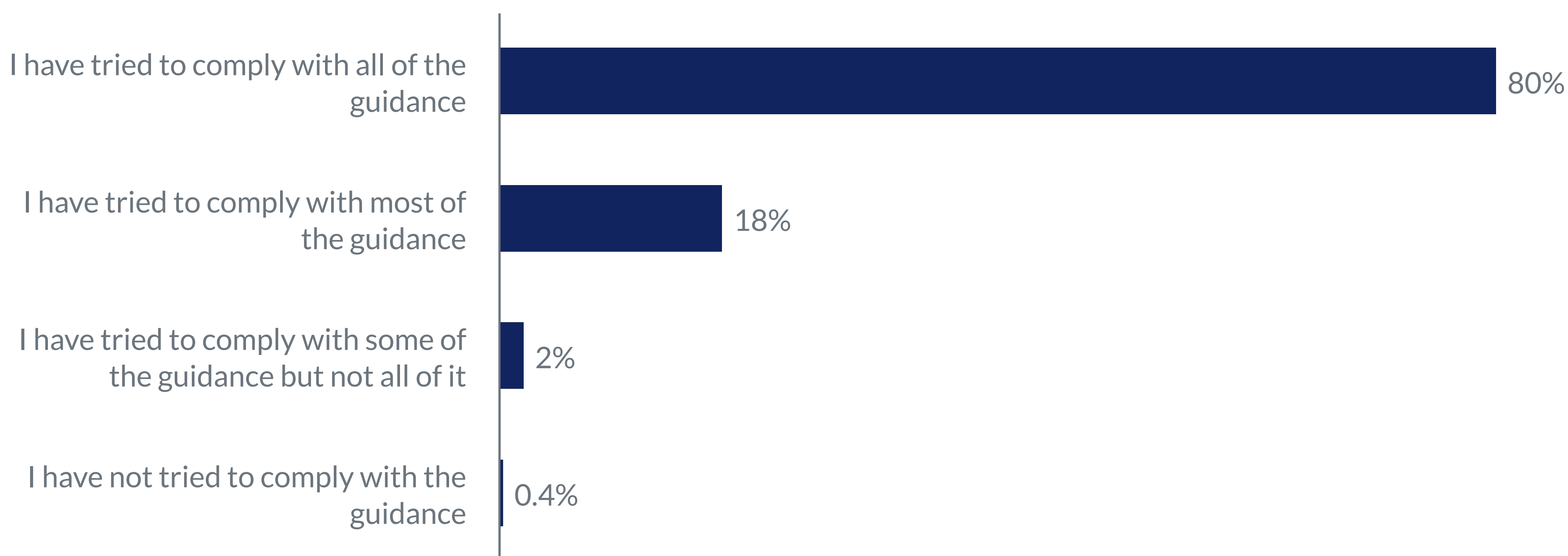
Extent of compliance with lockdown measures

In Wave 2 of the SPA survey, additional questions were asked relating to people’s level of compliance with lockdown measures at that time, and how they expected to behave in future.

The results show that people have been overwhelmingly compliant with 80% of people indicating that they have tried to comply with all of the guidance, and a further 18% indicating that they have tried to comply with most of the guidance. People aged 55–64 years were most likely to indicate that they have tried to comply with all of the guidance (87%), and, unsurprisingly, compliance is highest amongst those people who are shielding with 98% of this group indicating that they have tried to comply with all of the guidance.

Only 0.4% of respondents indicated that they have not tried to comply with the guidance.

Figure 11: Since the lockdown measures came into effect, how would you best describe your own degree of compliance with public health guidance?



Views as lockdown continues

People were asked to consider how their views may change as lockdown continues. Even faced with the prospect of lockdown continuing, the vast majority of people indicated they would follow the public health guidance – with 65% indicating that the length of lockdown would not affect how likely they were to follow the guidance, and a further 29% indicating that if lockdown continued they would find it more difficult but would still try to follow the public health guidance. Only 6% suggested that in these circumstances they would be less likely to follow the guidance.

There was little variation in responses by gender. However, the under 35s (59%) were least likely to say the length of lockdown would not affect their compliance compared with 66%–69% for the other age groups and as would be expected, those shielding (80%) again indicated most frequently that they would be likely to follow the public health guidance if lockdown continues.

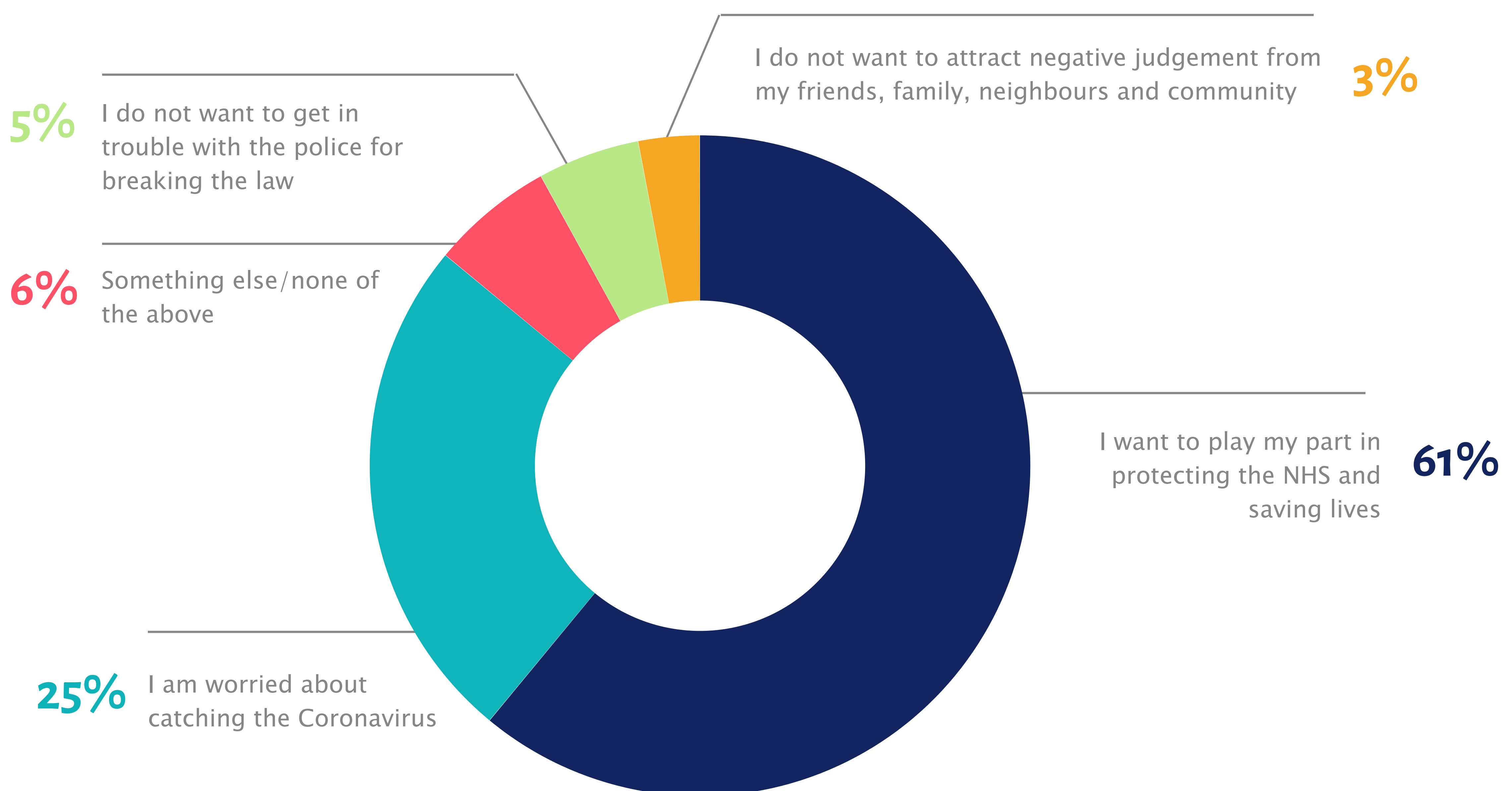
Views if lockdown continues to apply to all people equally

If the lockdown continues to apply to all people equally in Scotland in the weeks ahead, people surveyed were asked to indicate how likely it was that they would continue to comply with the public health guidance on staying at home and avoiding unnecessary travel. 80% indicated that they would continue to try to comply with all of the guidance. There was some variation by gender with 74% of men and 84% of women indicating that they would continue to do so, and those shielding were most likely to comply with all of the guidance (95%). A further 15% of people indicated that they would try to comply with most of the guidance.

Reasons for decisions on whether to comply with public health guidance

Wave 2 survey participants were asked to indicate the main reason for deciding on whether to comply with the public health guidance on staying at home and avoiding unnecessary travel. The majority, some 61%, indicated that the main reason for them was wanting to play their part in protecting the NHS and saving lives. There was little variation by age or gender. 25% indicated that the main reason was that they were worried about catching COVID-19, but this rose to 52% for people shielding.

Figure 12: Main reason for complying with public health guidance (Wave 2 survey only)



Views on likely behaviour if the public health guidance is relaxed for some groups

Respondents to the Wave 2 survey were asked about the extent to which they would continue to comply with the guidance in the case of public health guidance being relaxed so that some people have more freedom of movement, for example because of their age or because of where they live.

The results again show a high level of willingness to comply – 69% of people indicated that they would still try to comply with all of the guidance (63% of men and 75% of women), and a further 23% indicated that they would still comply with most of the guidance. People shielding were again most willing to comply, with 90% indicating they would still try to comply with all of the guidance.

The data gathered through the Wave 1 and 2 surveys gives an interesting picture of the public's views of approaches to policing during lockdown and changes in these over time. The findings are positive overall and an endorsement of the discretionary approach being taken by Police Scotland.

Through very high levels of compliance, members of the public are effectively self-regulating. When combined with the proportionate and de-escalatory approach taken by Police Scotland, this has meant that there has been little need for enforcement. The central role played by the police has been to protect the general public from those people who are finding it difficult to or are not following the health protection guidance; and acting to prevent any escalation of behaviour.

Overall, the findings are an endorsement of the proportionate, supportive, measured and engagement-focused approach being implemented in Scotland.

Looking forward to the Wave 3 survey, which will take place in the later stages of the phased roadmap to recovery, there are a number of groups whose experiences of lockdown could be looked at more closely by the SPA to examine impact on those citizens who are likely to have been disproportionately affected by lockdown. These include BAME groups, people living in areas of multiple deprivation, people with disabilities and people with caring responsibilities. To ensure that the survey remains representative and allow for disaggregation this will require a higher number of responses to be gathered in the third wave. In addition, the Wave 3 survey could also seek to explore the extent to which people or any member of their household have experienced policing during lockdown.

These findings have been significant in contributing to SPA's oversight of and insight into the impact of policing during these unprecedented times. This suggests that there may be merit in the SPA considering undertaking more regular independent surveys to gauge public mood in relation to policing in general and any contemporaneous measures or issues which could inform developments in practice.