



Power and Knowledge: Shifting Public Perspectives

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Outline

1.0 The Priority of Knowledge and Expertise

2.0 Knowledge Underrepresented and Undervalued

3.0 Faith and Reason

4.0 Limits to Knowledge and Understanding

5.0 The Future and Conclusions

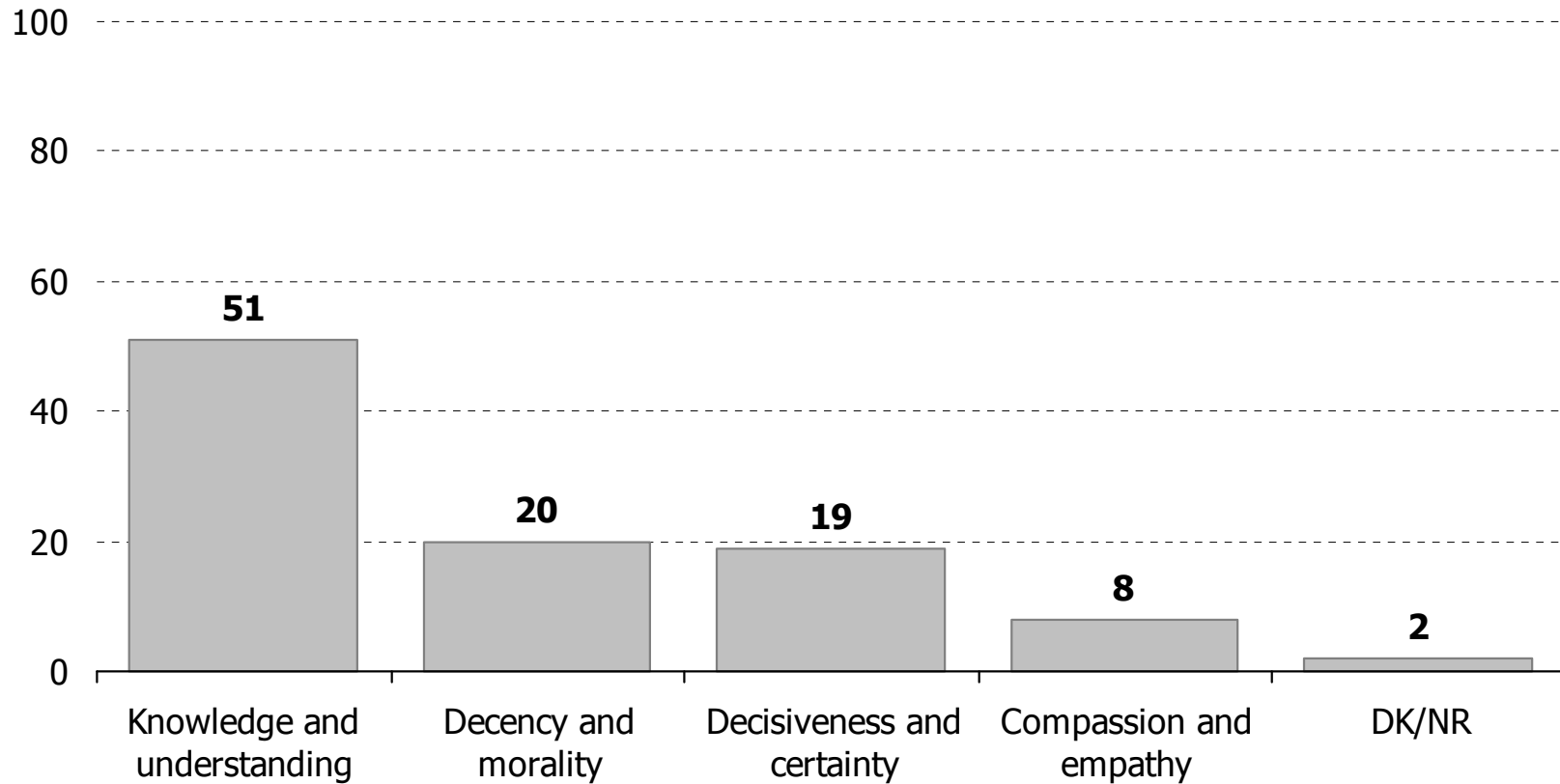
1.0 The Priority of Knowledge and Expertise



- Knowledge is important
- Linked to social class, age, and gender
- Strongly linked to political ideology and vote intention

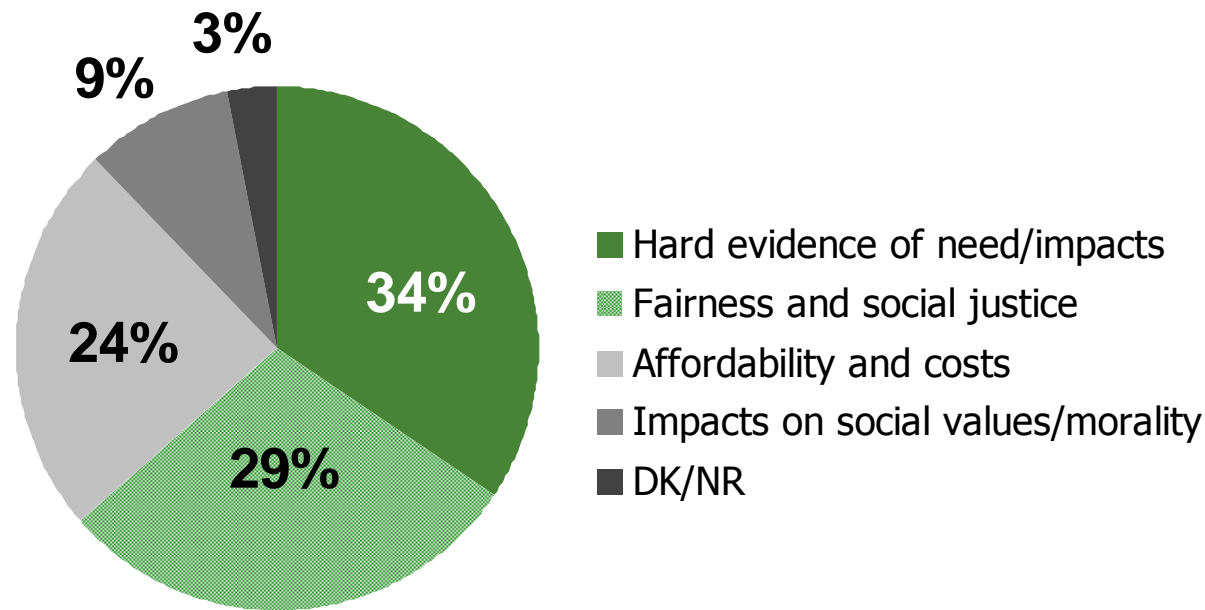
Most important trait in a national leader

Q. Which of the following traits would you most like to see in a national leader?



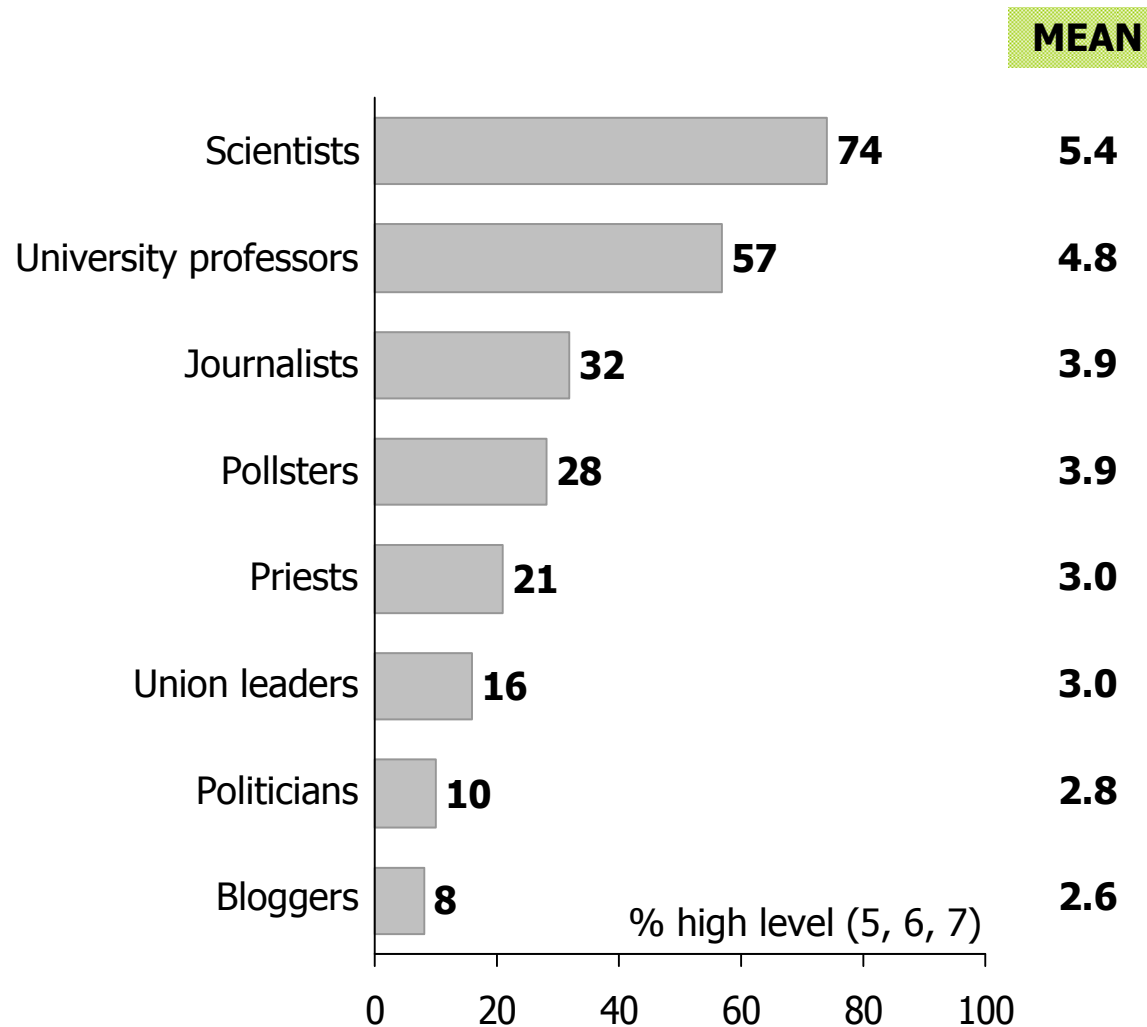
Most important factor in national decision making

Q. In making important national decisions, which of the following factors do you think should be most important?



Trust in occupations

Q. How much trust do you have in each of the following occupational groups or individuals?



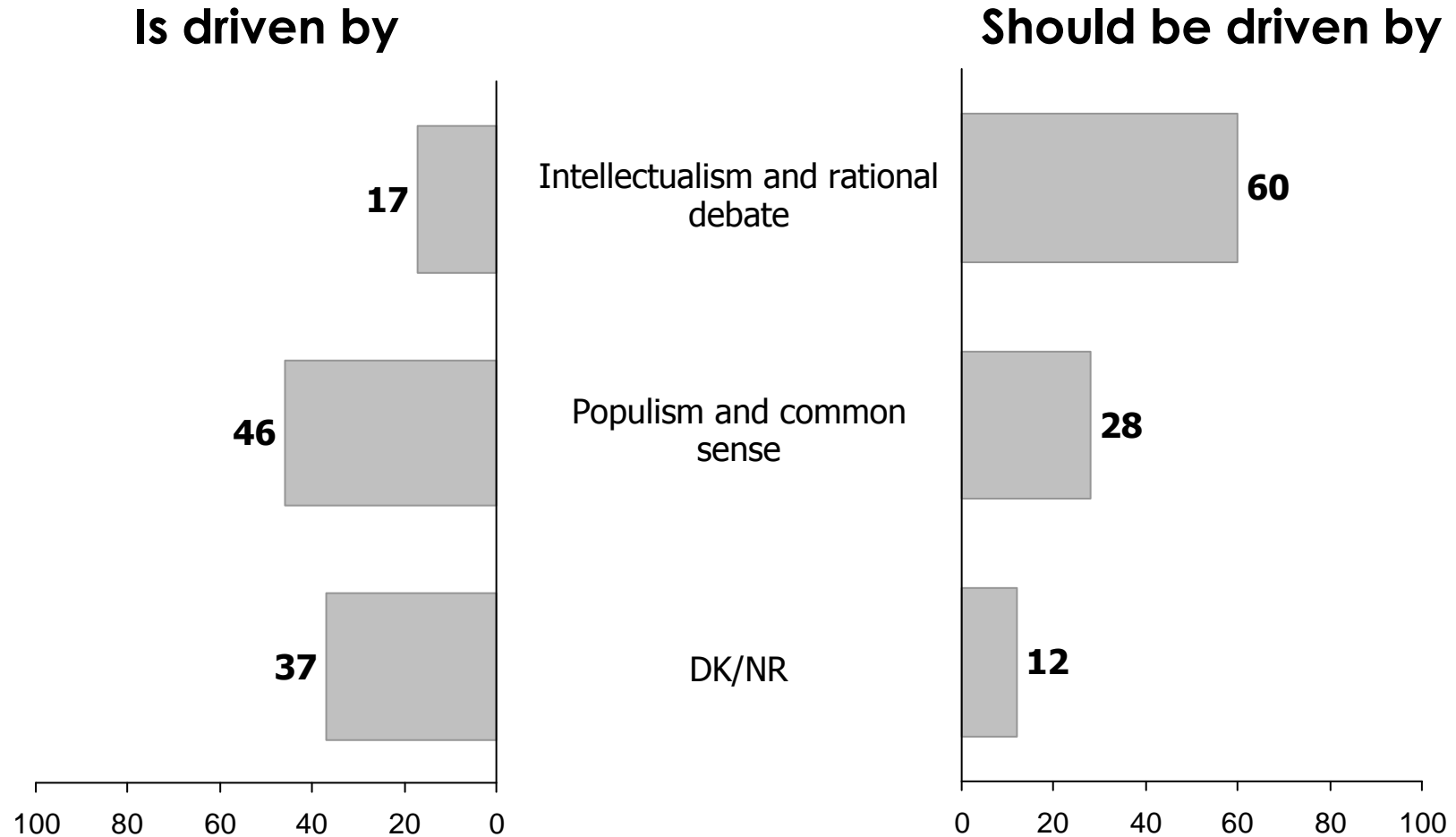
2.0 Knowledge Underrepresented and Undervalued



- Broad belief that populism is the dominant political mode
- Equally strong belief it should not be; knowledge should rule

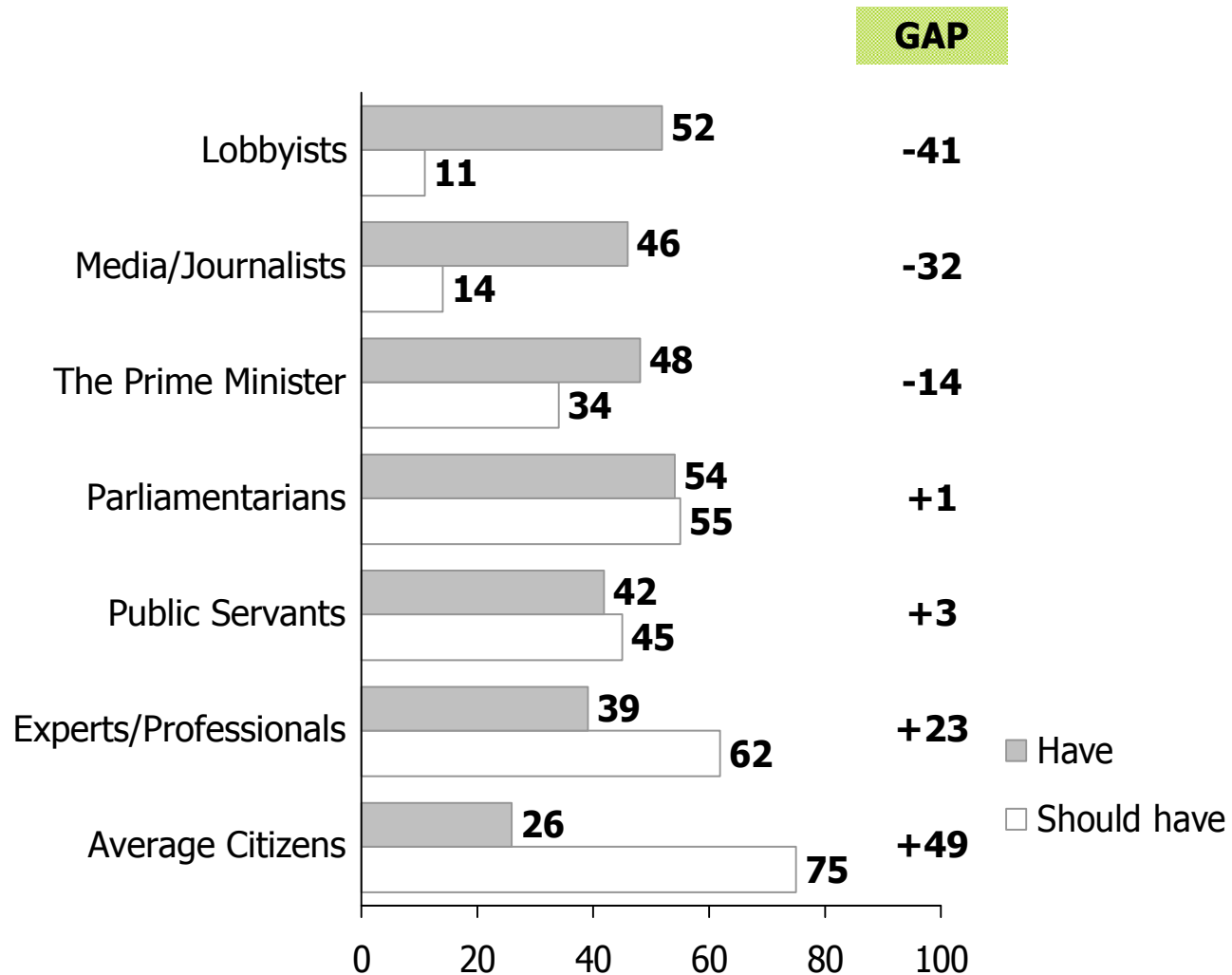
Intellectualism versus populism in politics

Q. Do you think that contemporary politics is/should be driven by intellectualism and rational debate or by populism and common sense?



Power gap: who has/who should have power

Q. Which of the following groups have/should have the most influence in defining public policies in Canada?*



*Presented in series of random paired choices. Per cent indicates average number of times option is selected over all others.

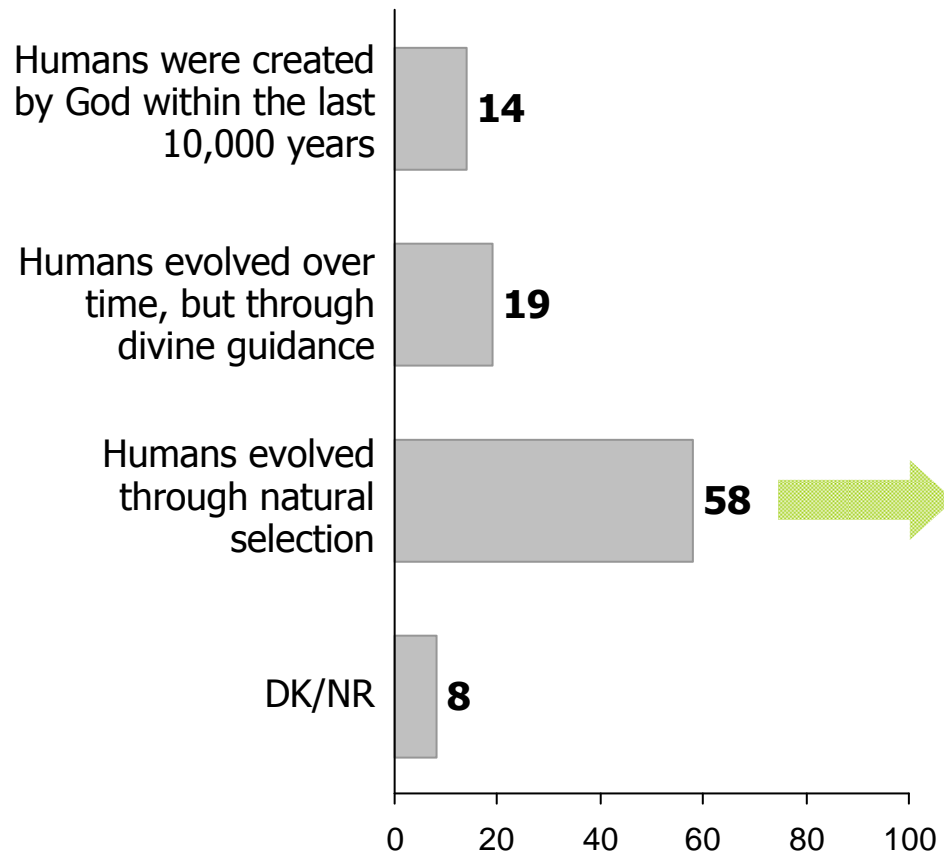
3.0 Faith and Reason



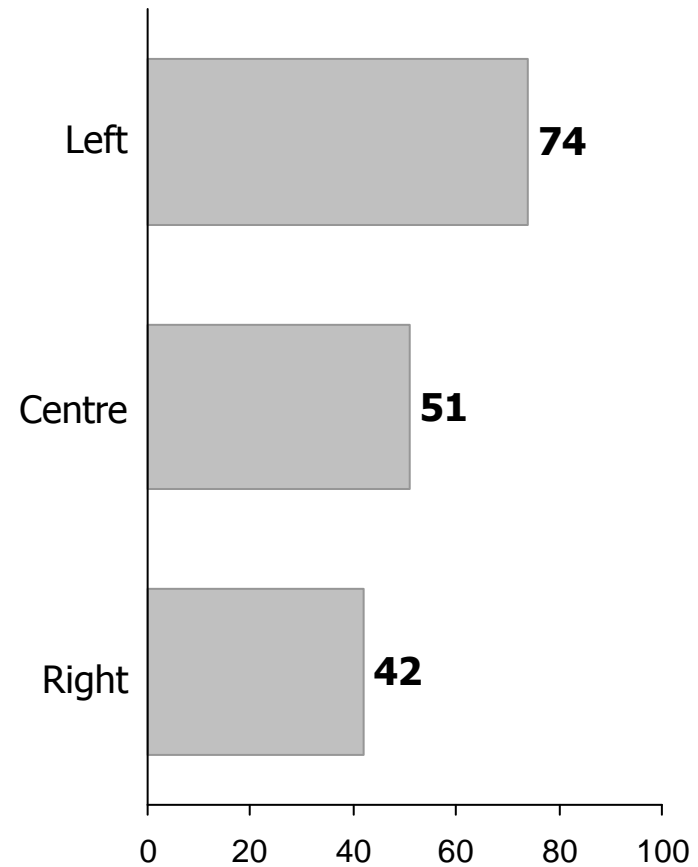
- Chief contest is between certainty/morality and evidence/reason
- Certainty and morality are strongly linked to conservatism and religiosity
- Links to gender and ethnicity (as well as social class)

Origins of mankind

Q. Which of the following statements comes closest to your point of view?



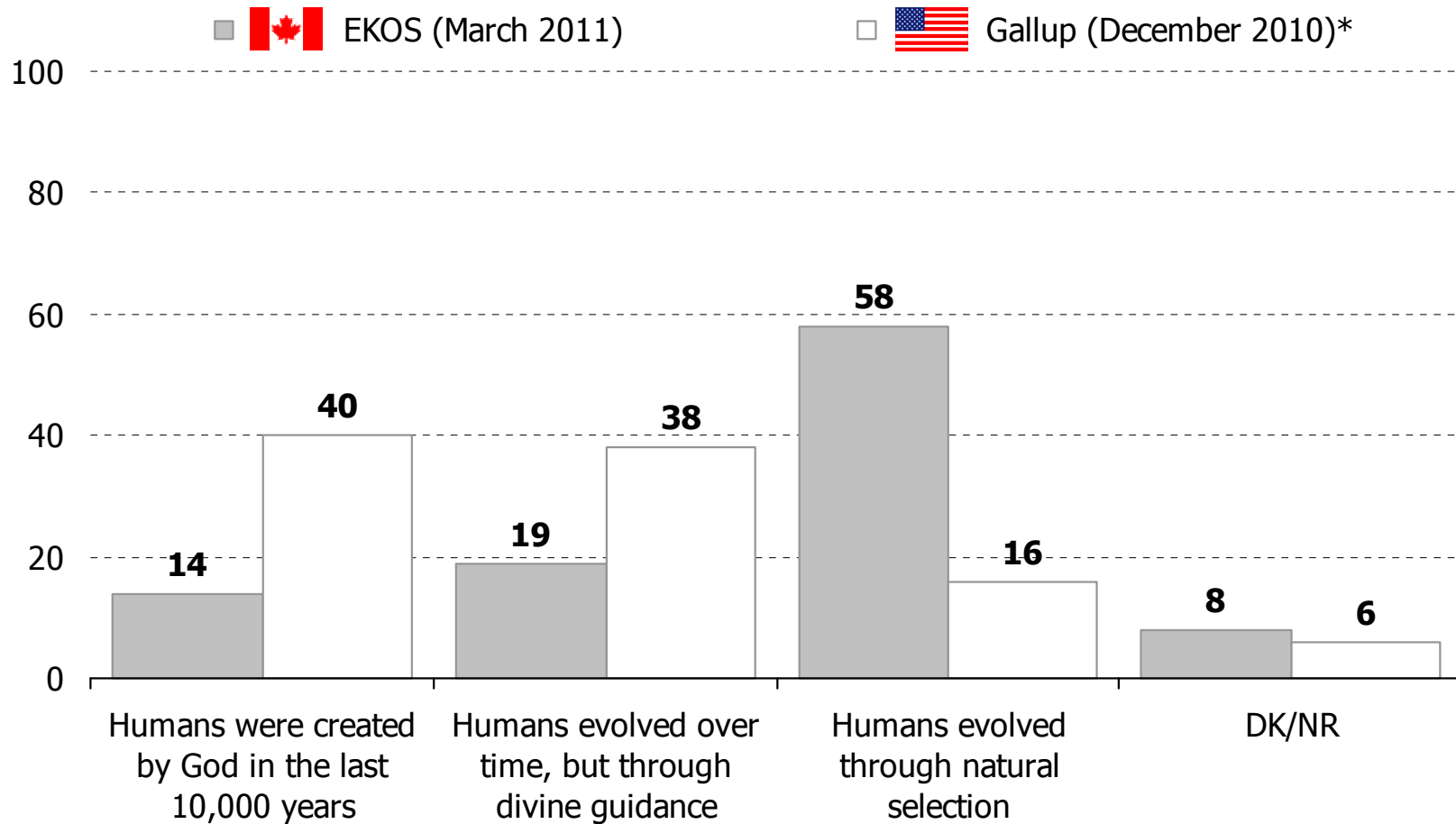
Breakdown by ideology



Base: Those who say humans evolved through natural selection

Origins of mankind: Canada versus US

Q. Which of the following statements comes closest to your point of view?



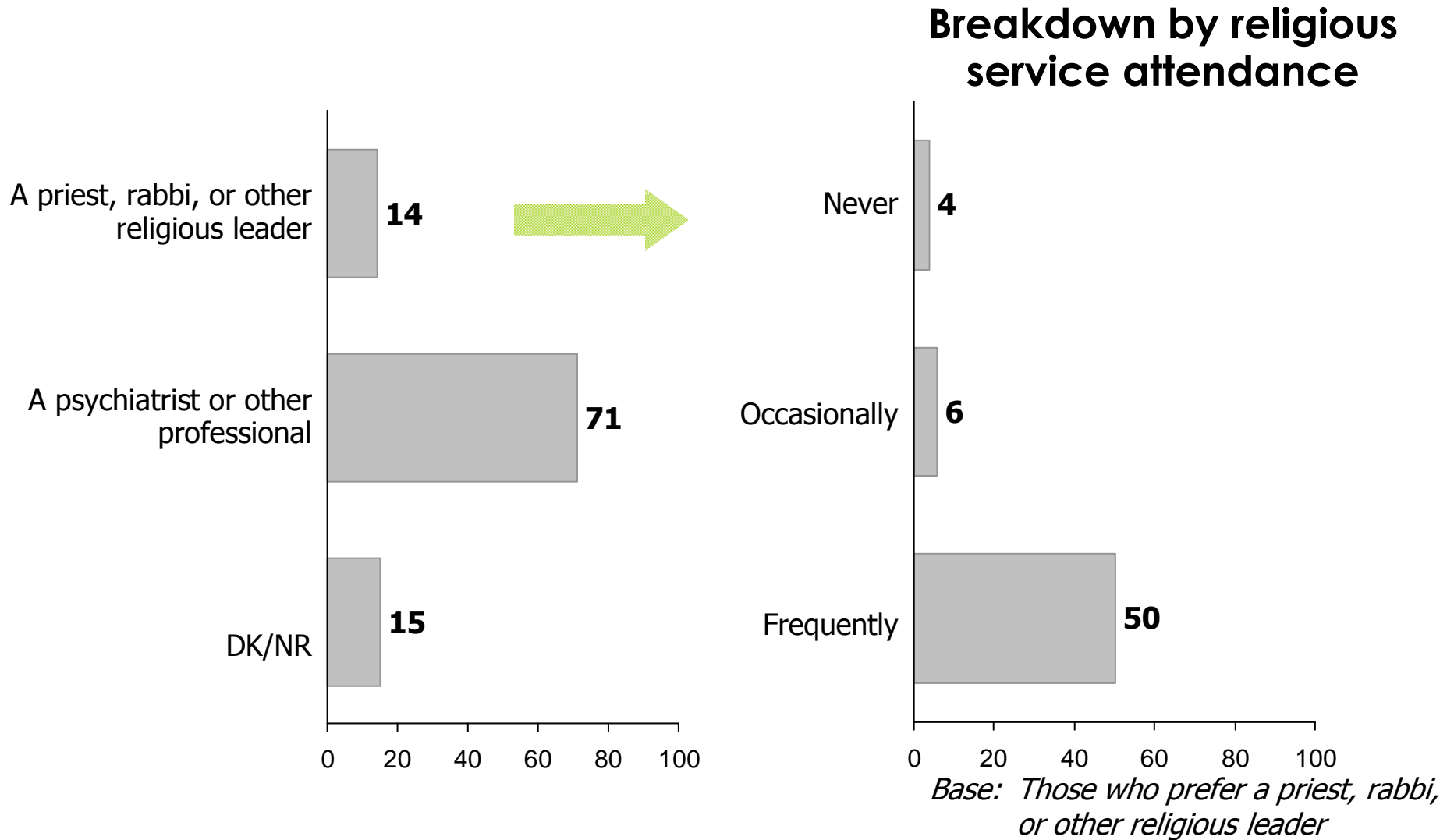
*Source: Gallup poll; December 10-12, 2010 (n=1,019). Question worded as follows:

"Which of the following statements comes closest to your views on the origin and development of human beings:

- 1) Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process;
- 2) Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God had no part in this process; or
- 3) God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so?"

Preferred source of personal guidance

Q. If you were facing a deep personal crisis, which of the following individuals would you prefer to consult?



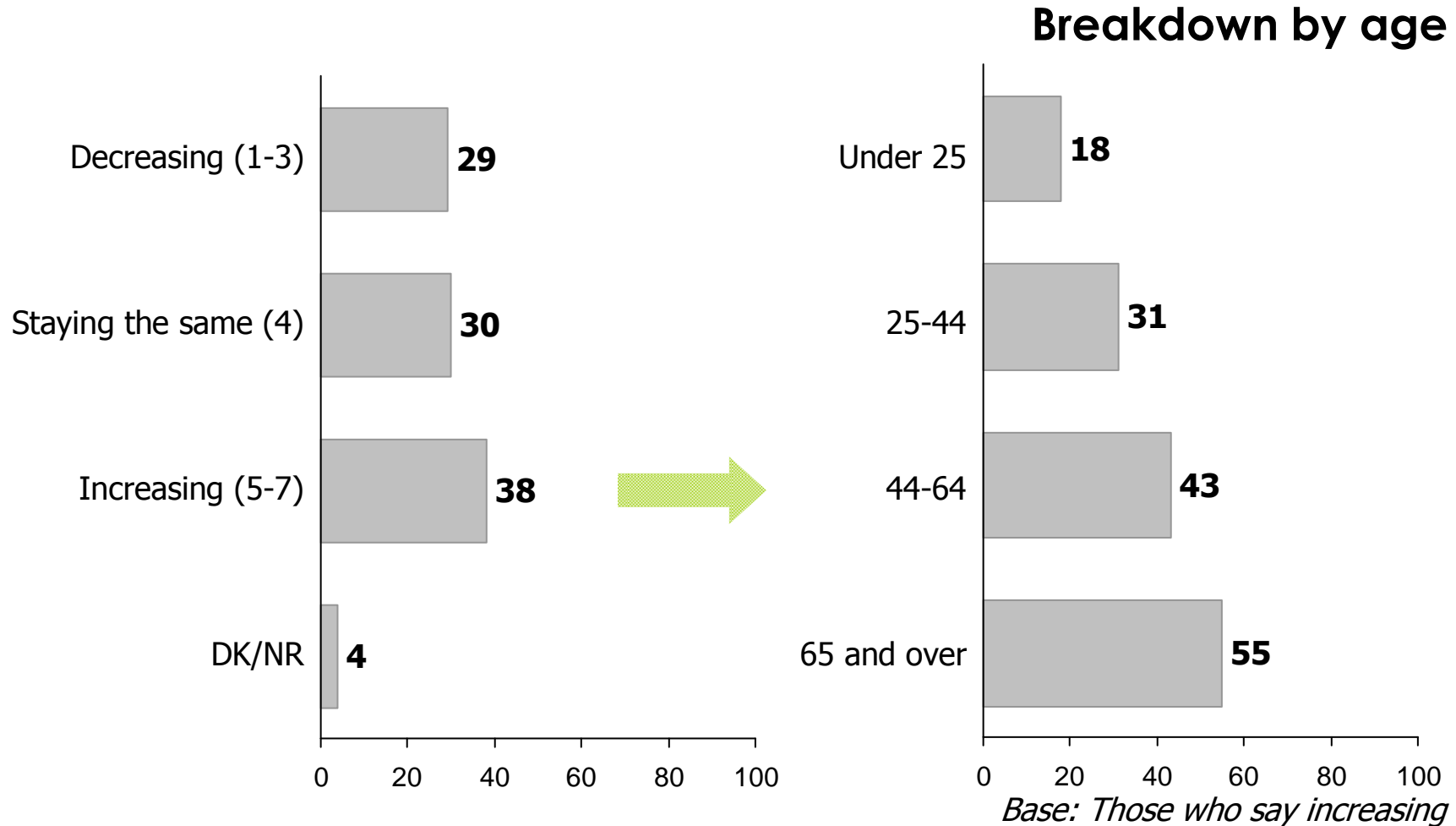
4.0 Limits to Knowledge and Understanding



- Lagged rebound effect on evidence and crime
- 1 in 4 Canadians are anti-science, anti-expertise
- Broad but mixed concerns about impacts of democracy and equality

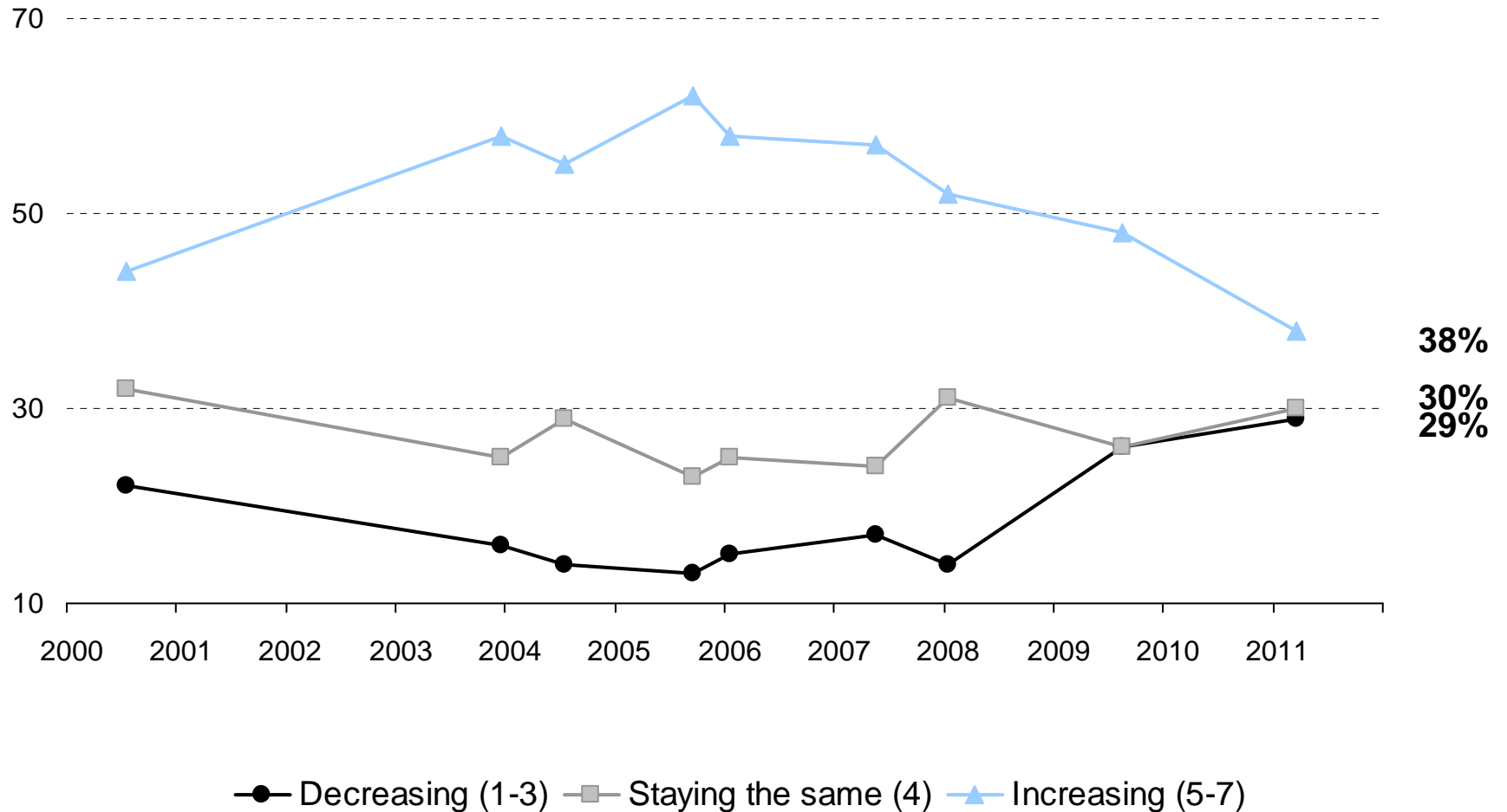
Perceived changes in violent crime rates

Q. Over the past 10 years, would you say that the crime rate in Canada has been ... ?



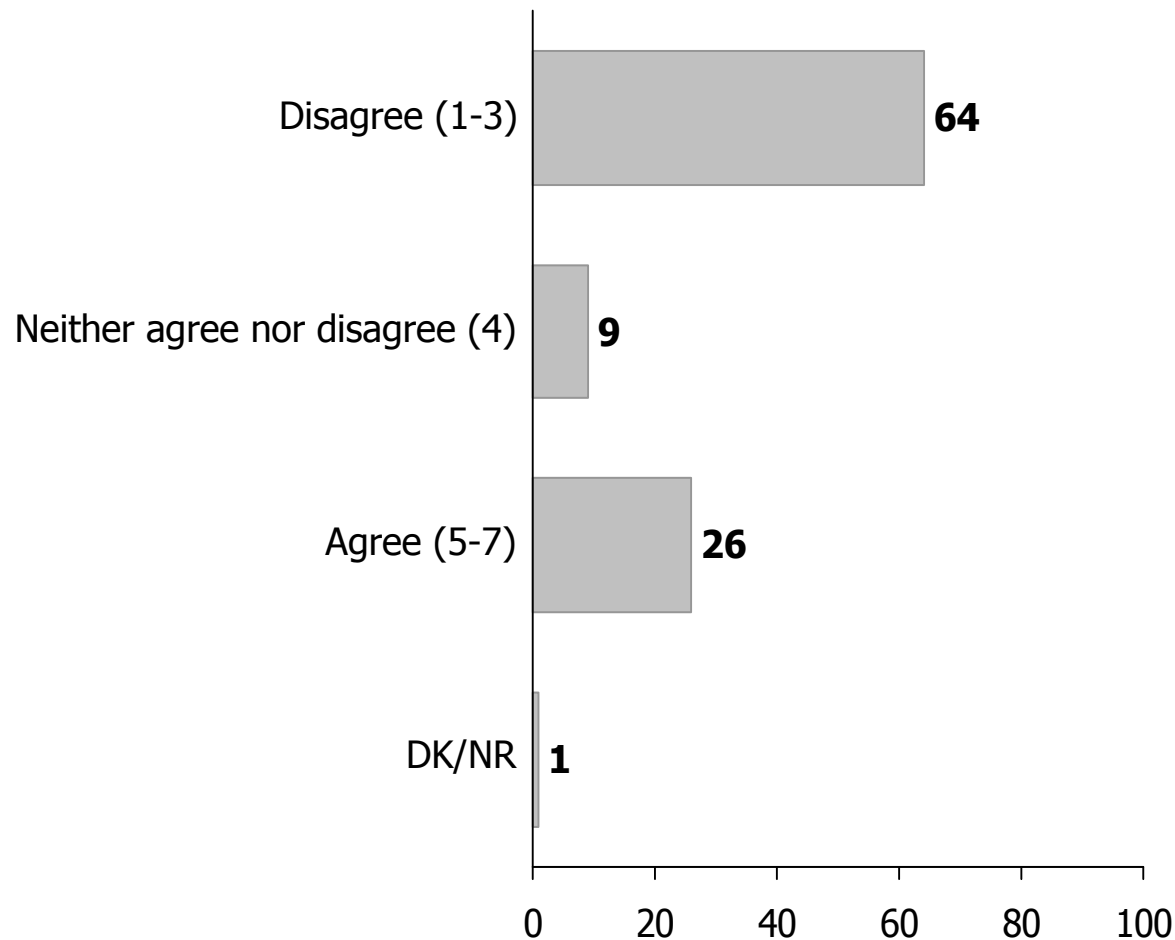
Tracking perceived changes in violent crime rates

Q. Over the past 10 years, would you say that the crime rate in Canada has been ... ?



Attitudes towards climate change

Q. *To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I don't believe all this talk about greenhouse gas emissions causing global climate change."*



Concerns over science and expertise

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

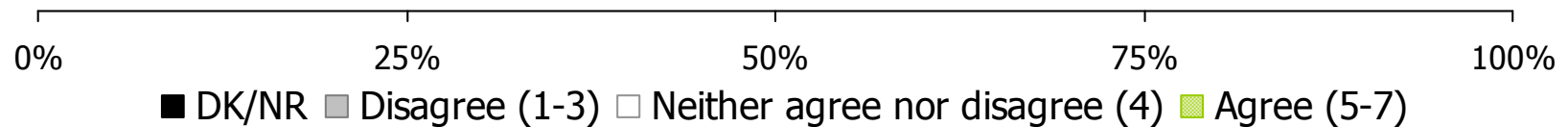
"It really bothers me that hard scientific evidence isn't shaping public policy to the degree that it should be."



"I worry that the rule of experts and professionals produces elitism and inequality."



"I am worried that science is going too far and is hurting society rather than helping it."



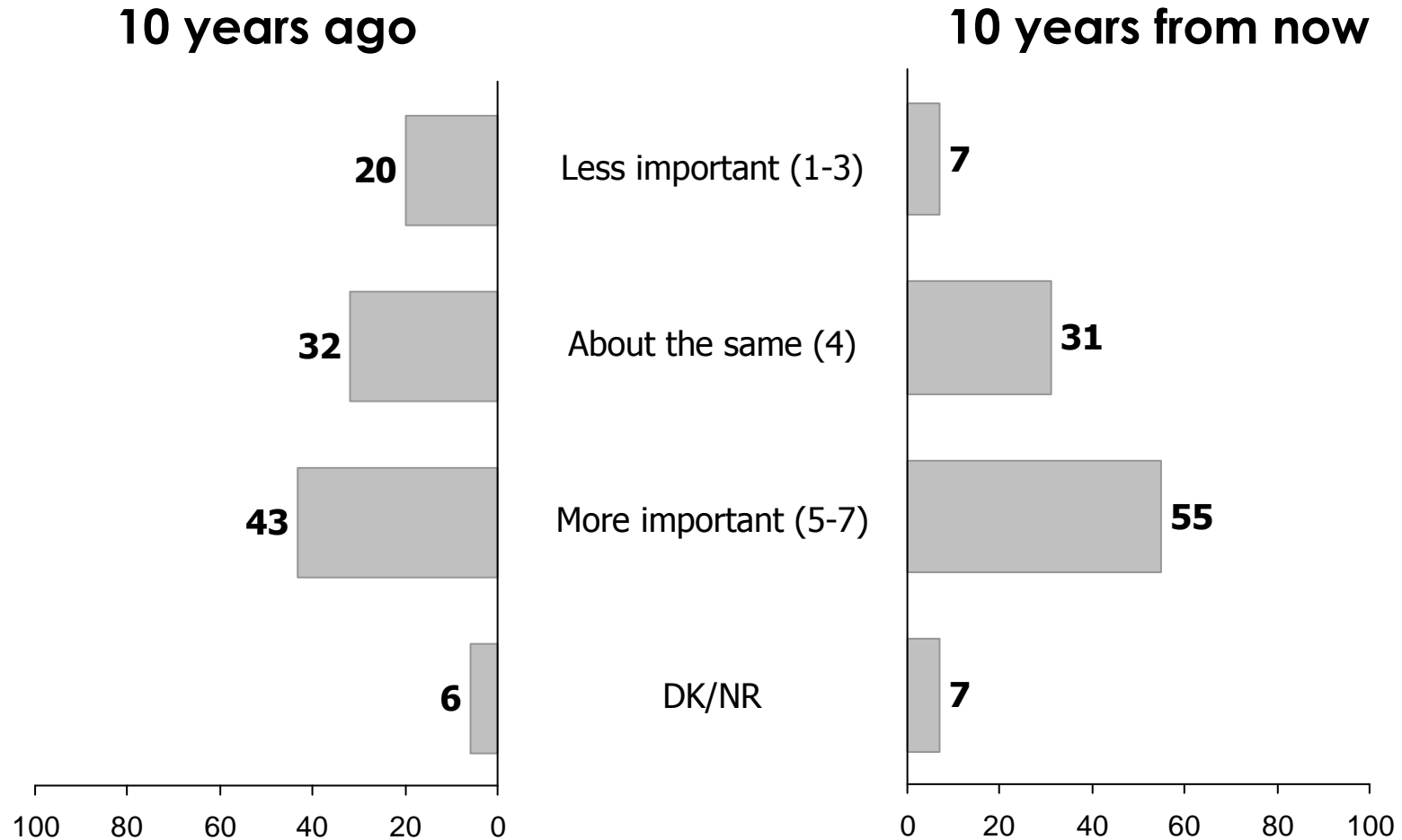
5.0 The Future and Conclusions



- The public strongly believes that intellectual-scientific approaches will dominate in the future
- Social media and Web 2.0 are pro-knowledge but eschew traditional vertical authority (anti-gate keeping)

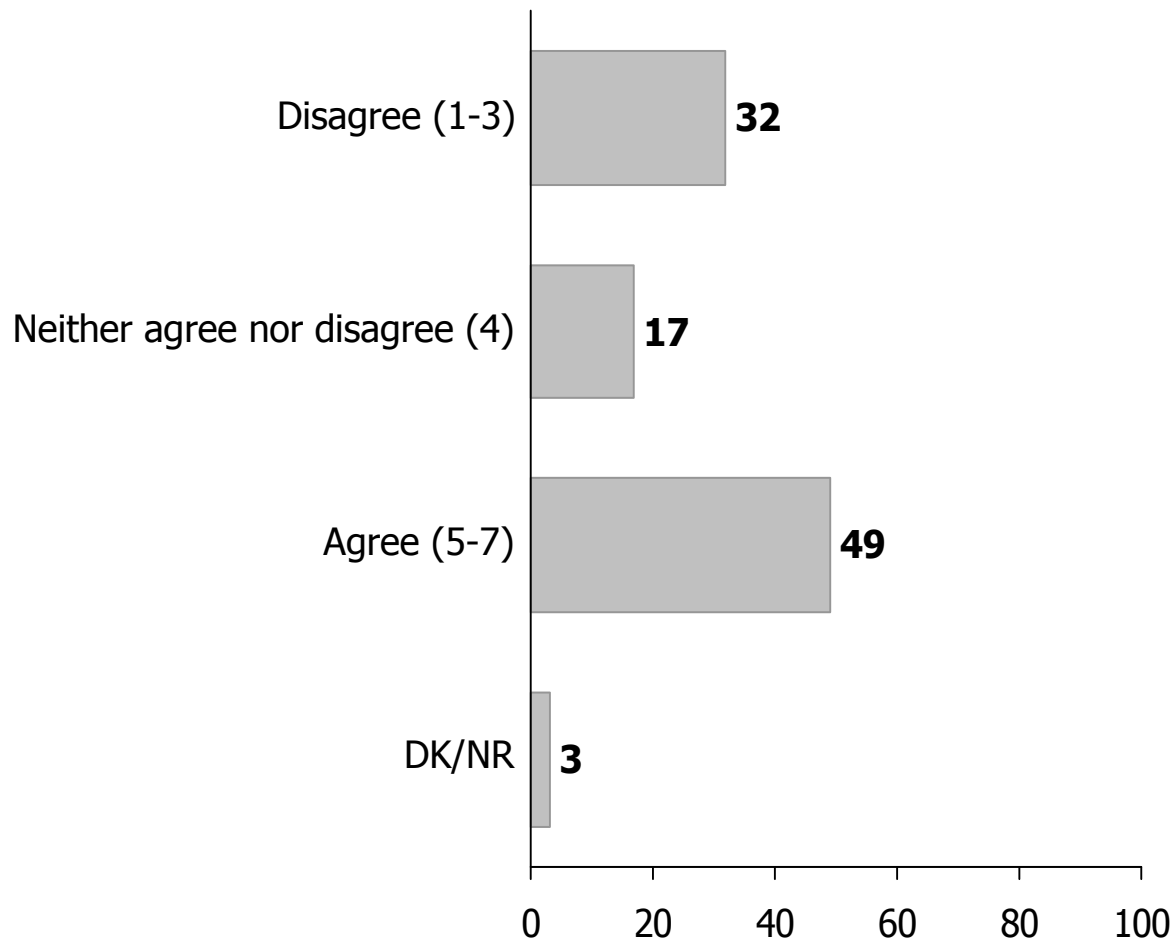
Perceived importance of hard evidence in decision making

Q. Overall, do you think that the use of hard evidence and professional expertise in public decision making is/will be more or less important than it was 10 years ago/10 years from now?



Use of social media in constructing knowledge and expertise

Q. *To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In an era of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Wikipedia, knowledge and expertise can be constructed from ordinary citizens."*



Conclusions (i)

- Hard knowledge is seen as hugely important principle for societal decision making (trailing only democracy)
- There is a strong sense that knowledge, science, and expertise are undervalued
- Contested terrain revolves around relative salience of reason and knowledge versus moralism and certainty
- The fault lines are deep and these world views are relatively incompatible
- The rational-empirical view is much more prevalent, particularly among younger, more educated Canada
- There is a dramatic left-right split and it is also strongly connected to secularism and religiosity

Conclusions (ii)

- The recent political success of populism is paradoxical and may reflect low recognition and the weakness of the rational view to handle values
- The challenge to reason and knowledge comes from the political right; it is rooted in a search for certainty and morality and a discomfort with evidence and ambiguity
- Populism is viewed as an interruption, not a structural shift
 - Public conviction about the future
 - Demography forces favour educated
 - Lagged but rational rebound on crimes rates
- Future complicated by the digital generation and the flattening of intellectual authority

FOR MORE INFORMATION:



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