

# Bioethics Research

September 2005



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# Introduction

# Background & Objectives

- The Irish Council for Bioethics was established in 2002 as an independent body whose primary function is the consideration of ethical issues revised by recent developments in science and medicine.
- Pursuant to this, the Council now wishes to examine awareness, understanding and interest levels in bioethics amongst the public.
- As such, knowledge, understanding and attitudes towards a variety of bioethical areas were investigated; organ donation, stem cell research, patenting, IVF and end of life issues.

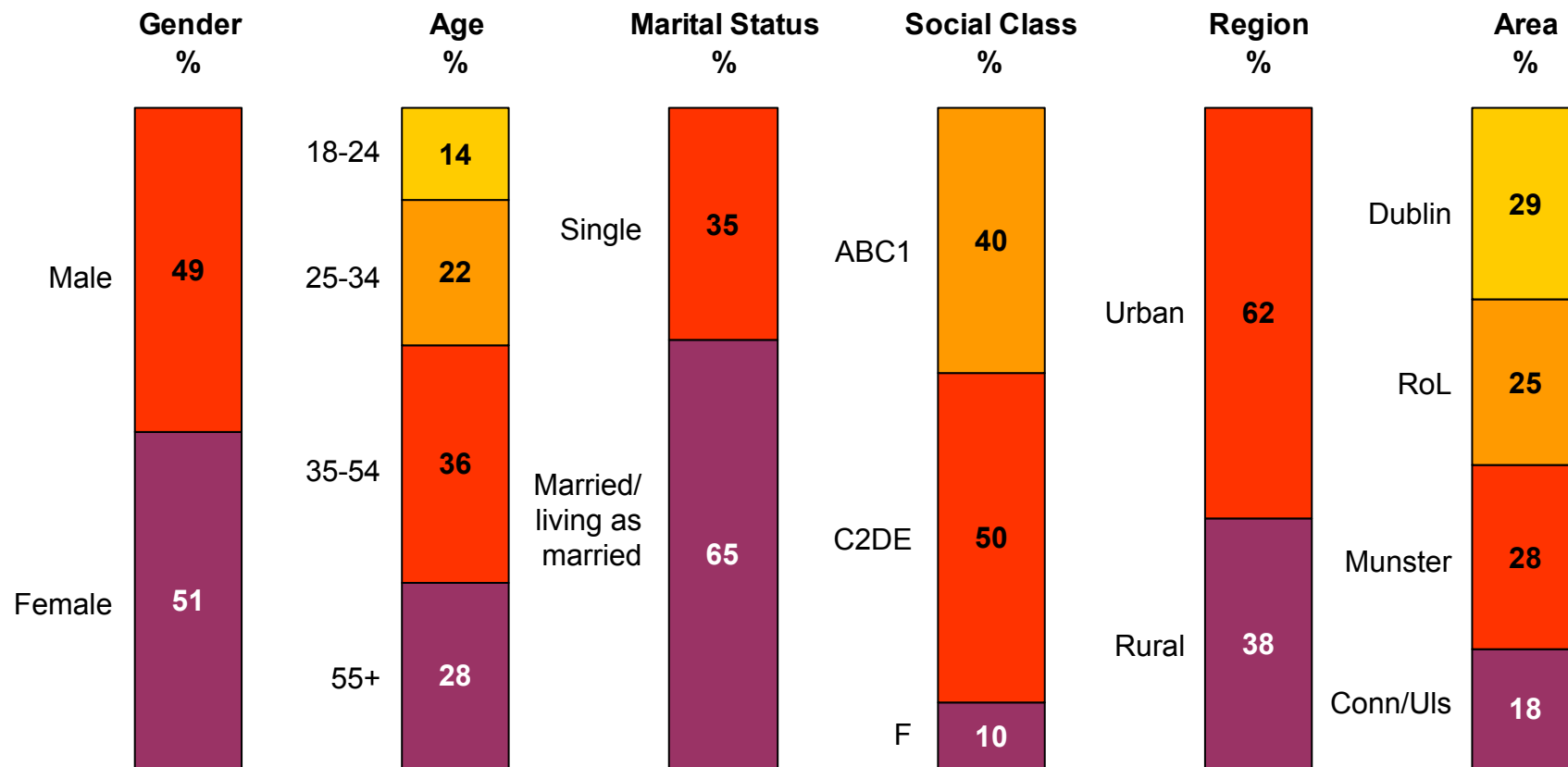
# Research Methodology

- A quantitative methodology was selected, consisting of face-to-face interviews, conducted nationwide.
- 500 adults of 18 years and over were interviewed using a structured questionnaire.
- The sample was quota controlled in terms of: gender within age within region. Overall socio-economic controls were incorporated.
- Fieldwork was conducted between 19<sup>th</sup> August and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2005.

# Findings

# Sample Profile

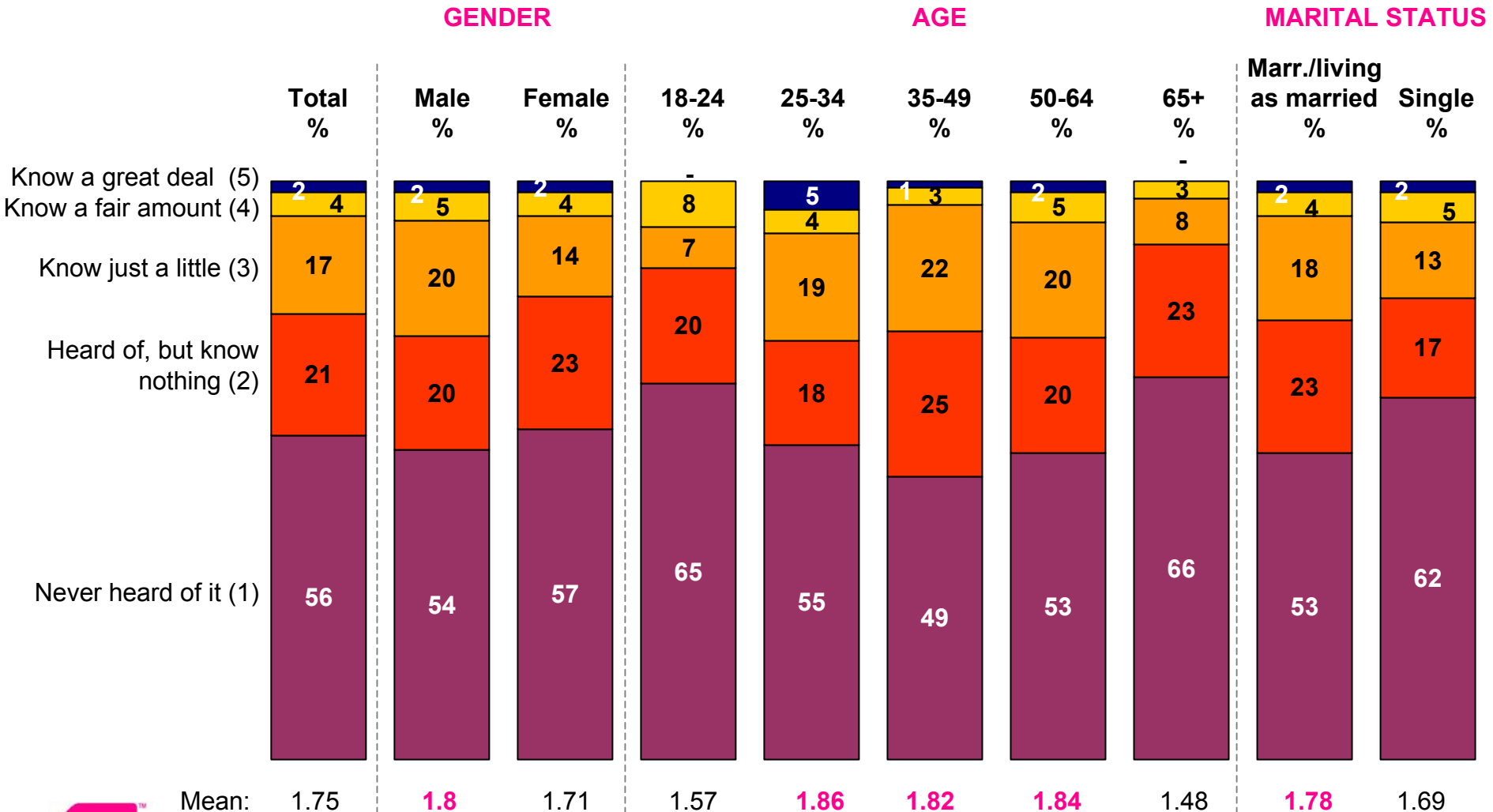
Base: All Adults 18+: 500



# Awareness Of Bioethics

# Knowledge Of Bioethics

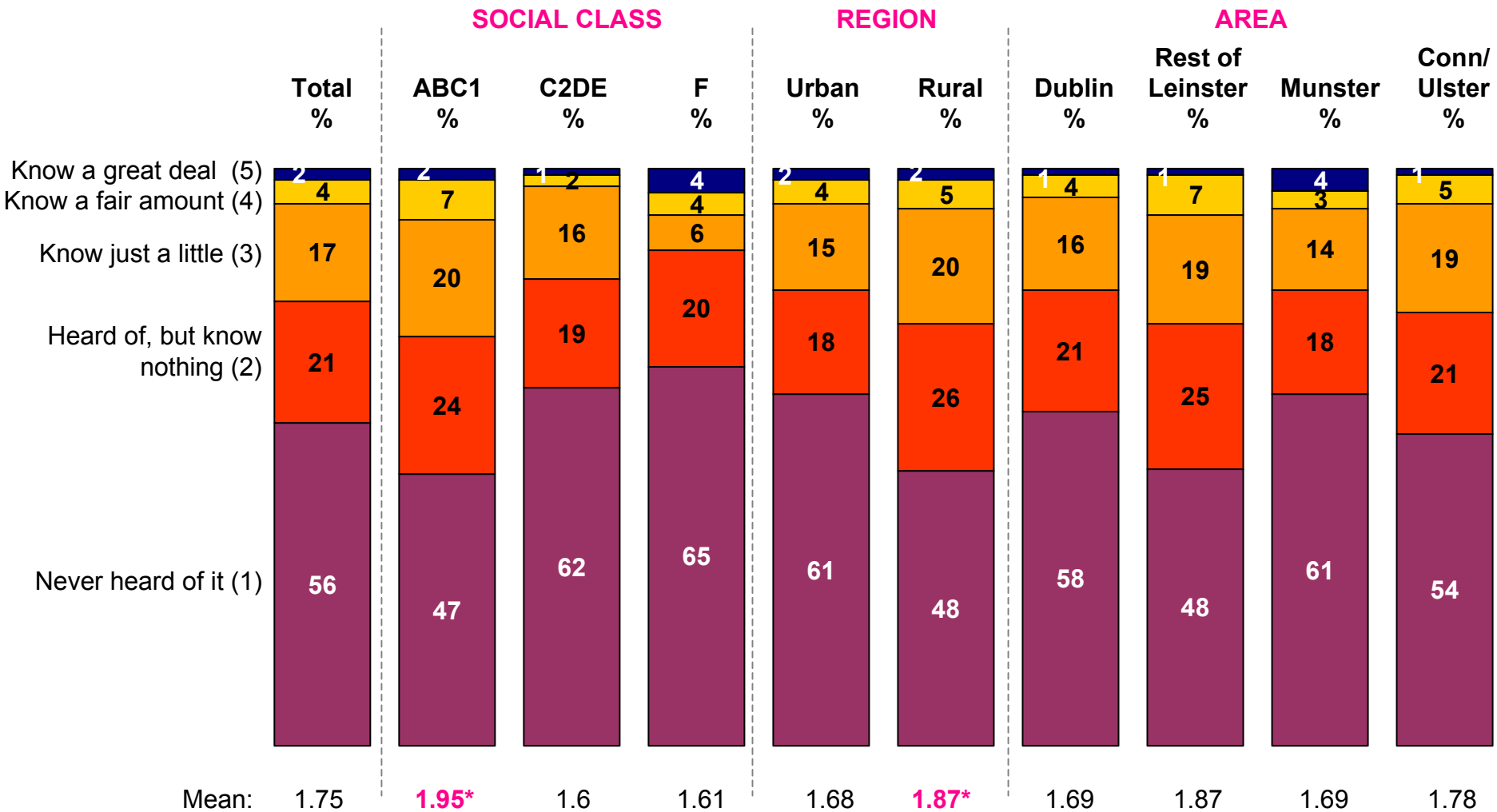
Base: All Adults 18+: 500



Q.1 How much do you feel you know about the term "bioethics"?

# Knowledge Of Bioethics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



\* Significant difference vs. total scores

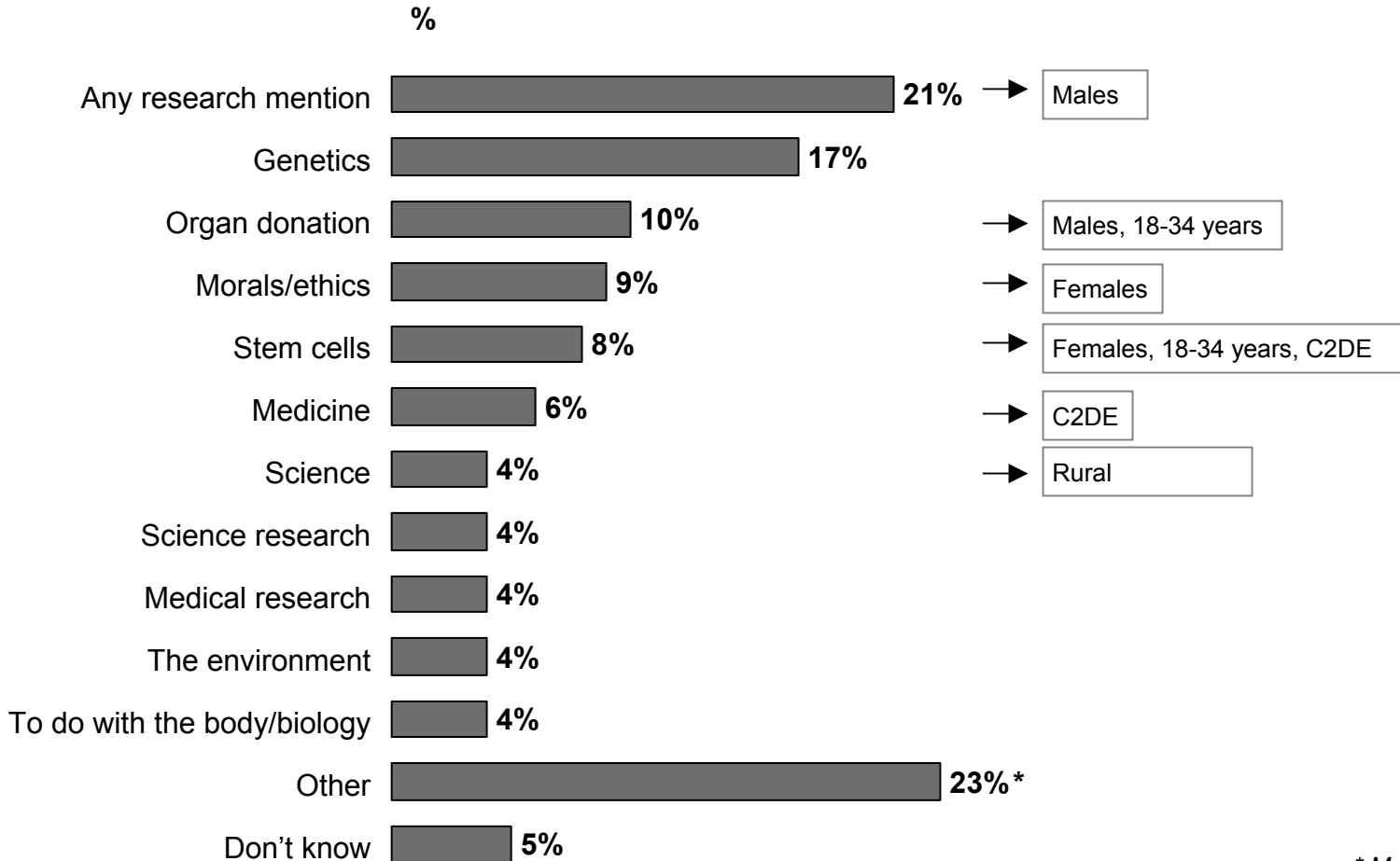
Q.1 How much do you feel you know about the term "bioethics"?



# Associations With Term 'Bioethics'

Base: All Who Know A Little/Fair/Great Amount About Bioethics: 115

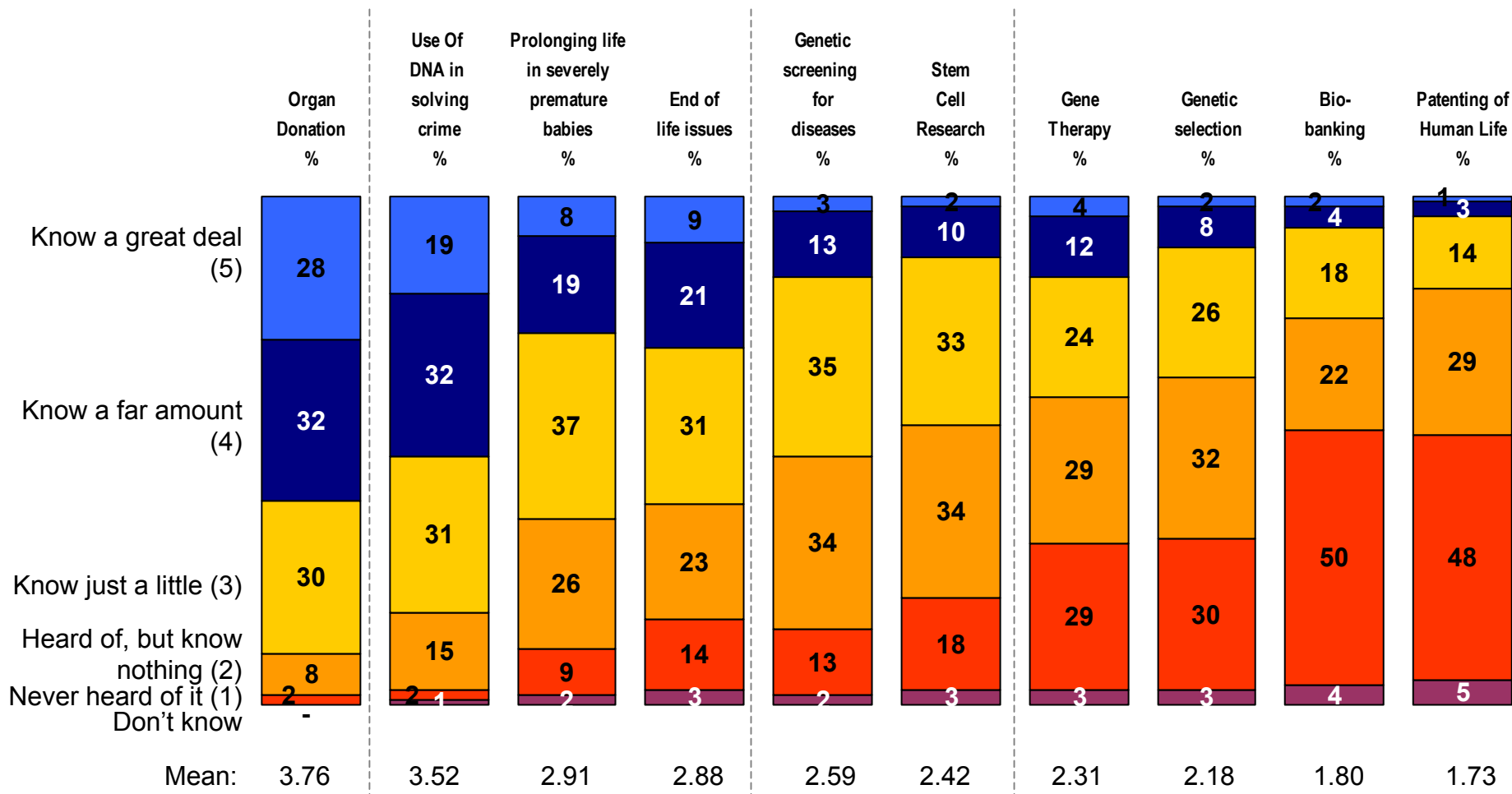
## Strongest associations amongst:



\* Made up of answers 3% or less

# Knowledge (Unprompted) Of Bioethical Areas

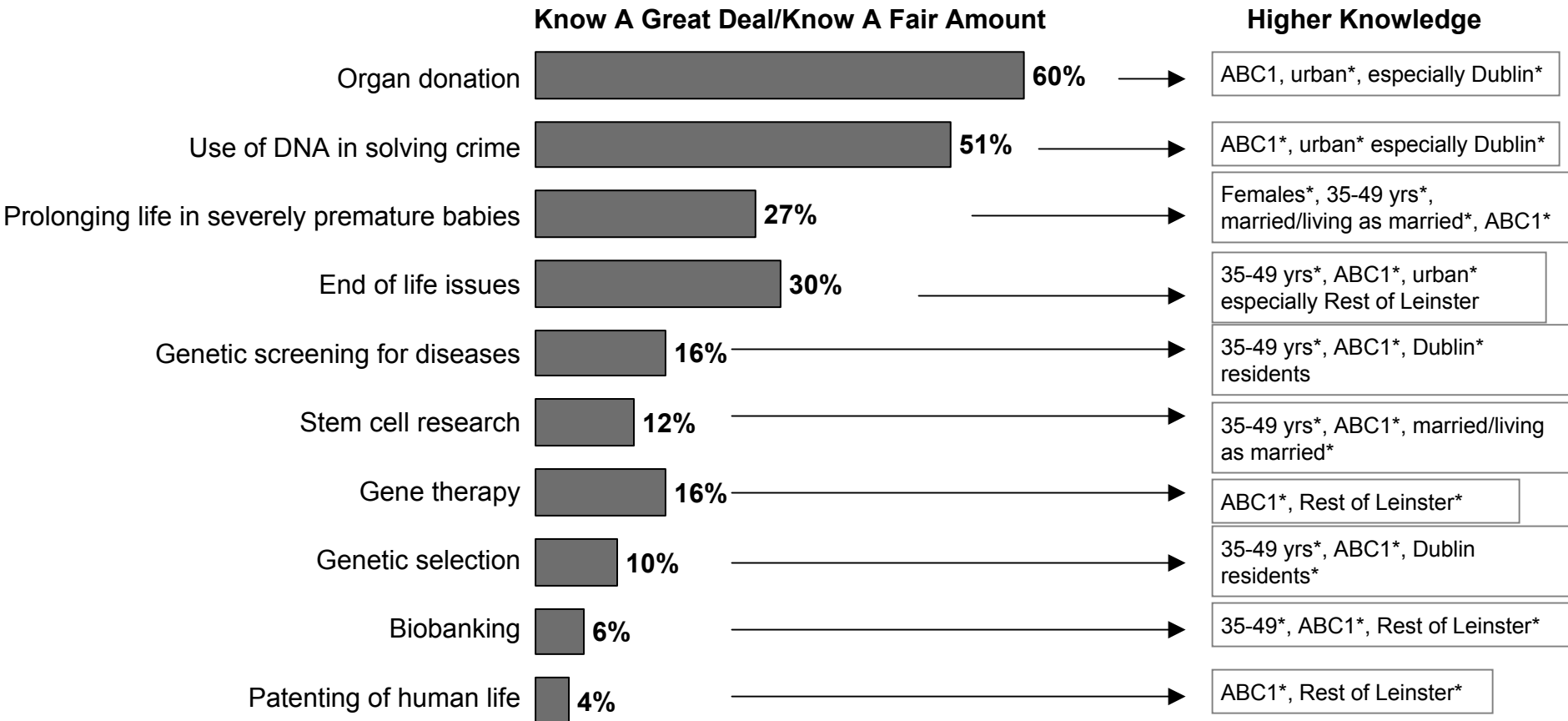
Base: All Adults 18+: 500



Q.3 I am now going to read out some areas of bioethical interest, and I would like you to tell me how much you feel you know about each area.

# Knowledge (Unprompted) Of Bioethical Areas X Demographics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



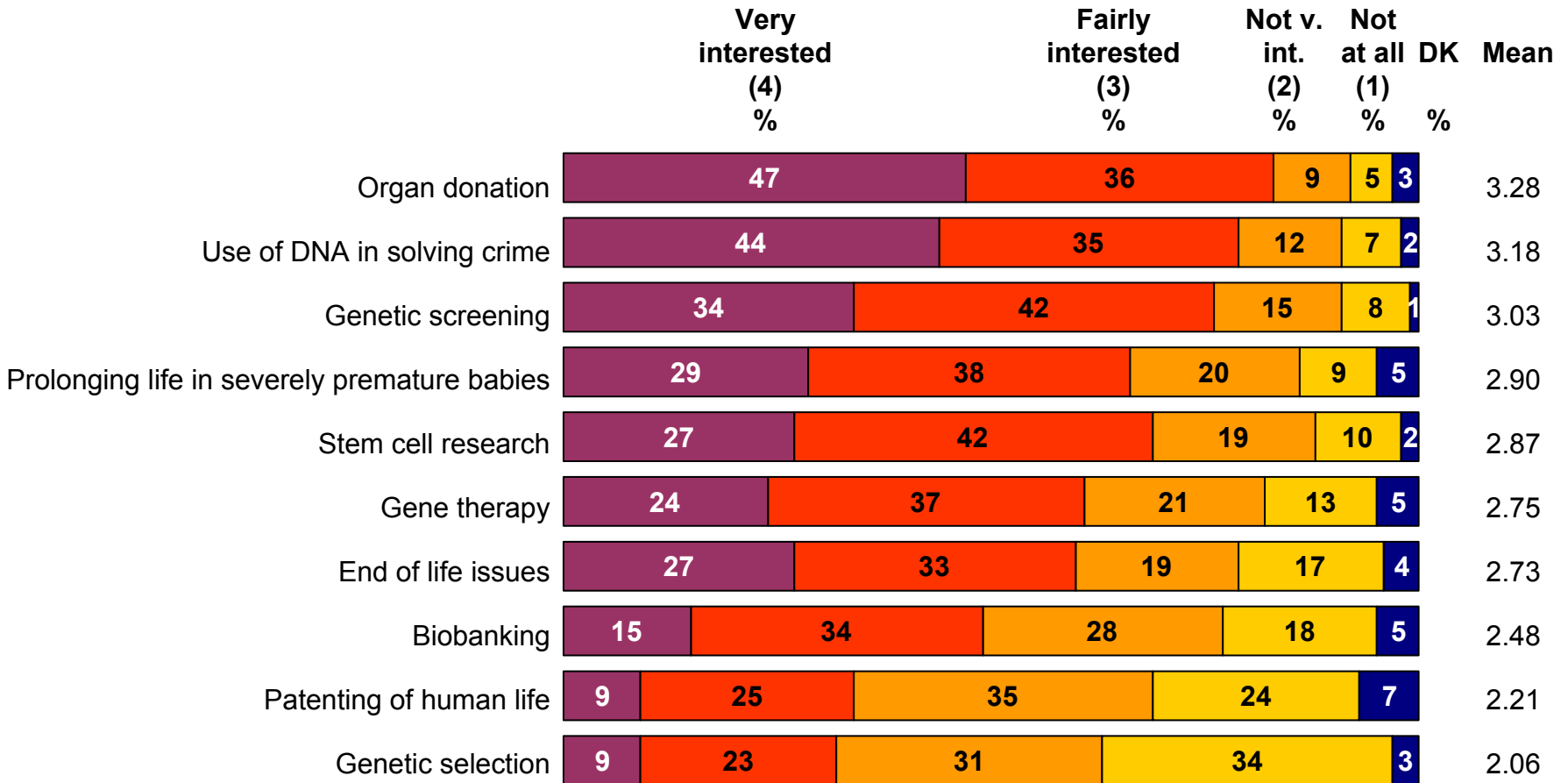
\* Significantly higher than total scores



Q.3 I am now going to read out some areas of bioethical interest, and I would like you to tell me how much you feel you know about each area.

# Levels Of Interest (Prompted) In Bioethical Areas

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

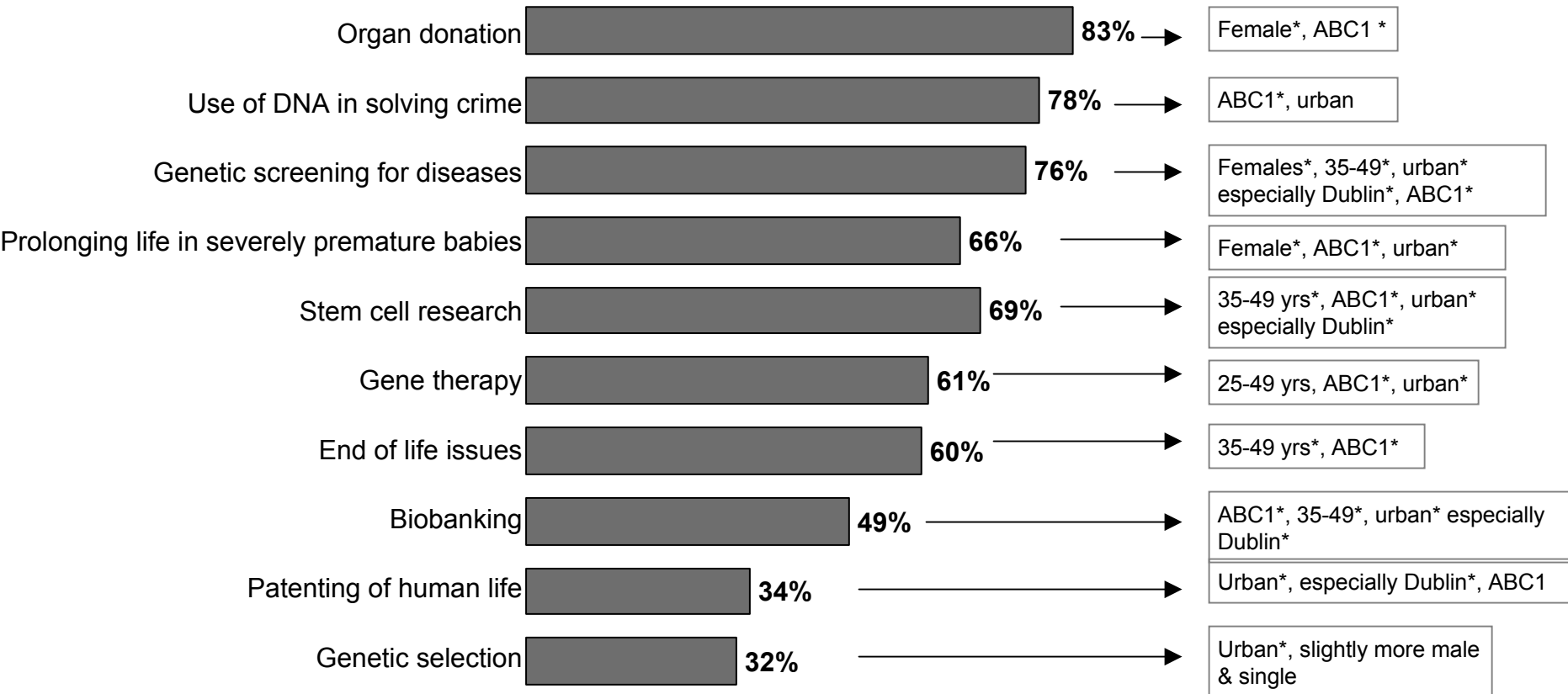


# Levels Of Interest (Prompted) In Bioethical Areas X Demographics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Very/Fairly Interested

Higher Interest Amongst



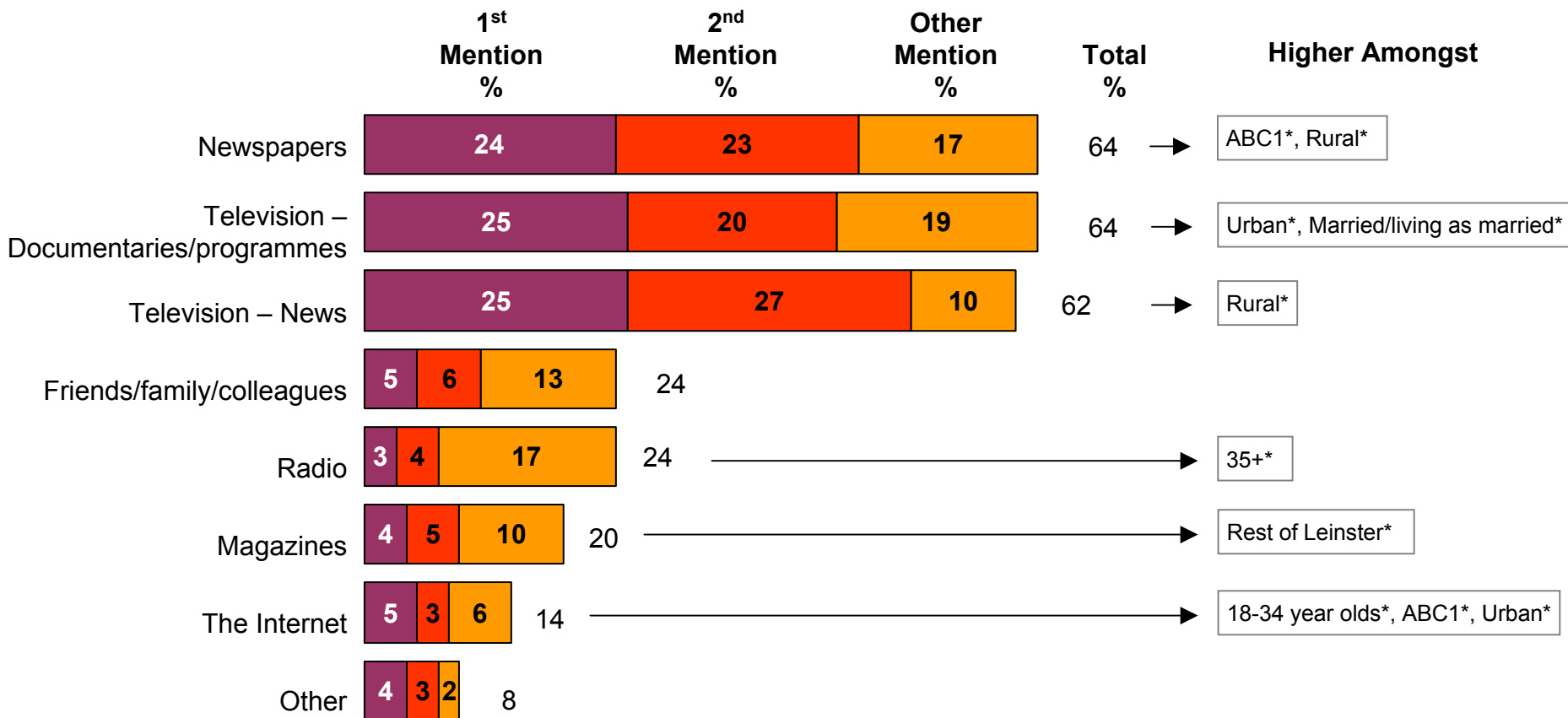
\* Significantly higher interest vs. total



Q.4 I am now going to show you the same list of bioethical areas with some explanations, and I would like you to tell me how interested, or not, you would be in finding out more about each area.

# Information Sources For Bioethical Areas

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



\* Indicates significantly higher levels



Q.5 Thinking about the bioethical areas we discussed, where do you tend to get information on or hear about these kinds of areas?

# Organ Donation



# Organ Donation Opinions

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Interestingly, about half of those who agree that Living Related Donation should be promoted in Ireland also agree that its promotion could put undue pressure on one sibling to donate a kidney to another sibling.



Q.6 I am now going to read out a number of statements relating to organ donation. I would like you to tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement?

# Organ Donation Opinions X Demographics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Strongly/Slightly Agree

Higher Agreement Amongst

Living Related Donation should be promoted in Ireland)



81%

Female, urban, especially Dublin\*  
35-64 yrs, ABC1\*

Paying people for donating their organs is morally wrong



63%

Female, 18-34 yrs, urban

Promoting Living Related Donation could put undue pressure on one sibling to donate a kidney to another sibling



55%

AB\*

Consent to organ donation should be assumed unless the person expressly states otherwise, in an effort to increase organ donation



46%

Female, 35-49 yrs\*, ABC1, rural

People should be paid for donating their organs



11%

Male\*, rural especially  
Connaught/Ulster\*, 18-34 yrs,  
single people, C2DE

\*Indicates significantly higher agreement



Q.6 I am now going to read out a number of statements relating to organ donation. I would like you to tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement?

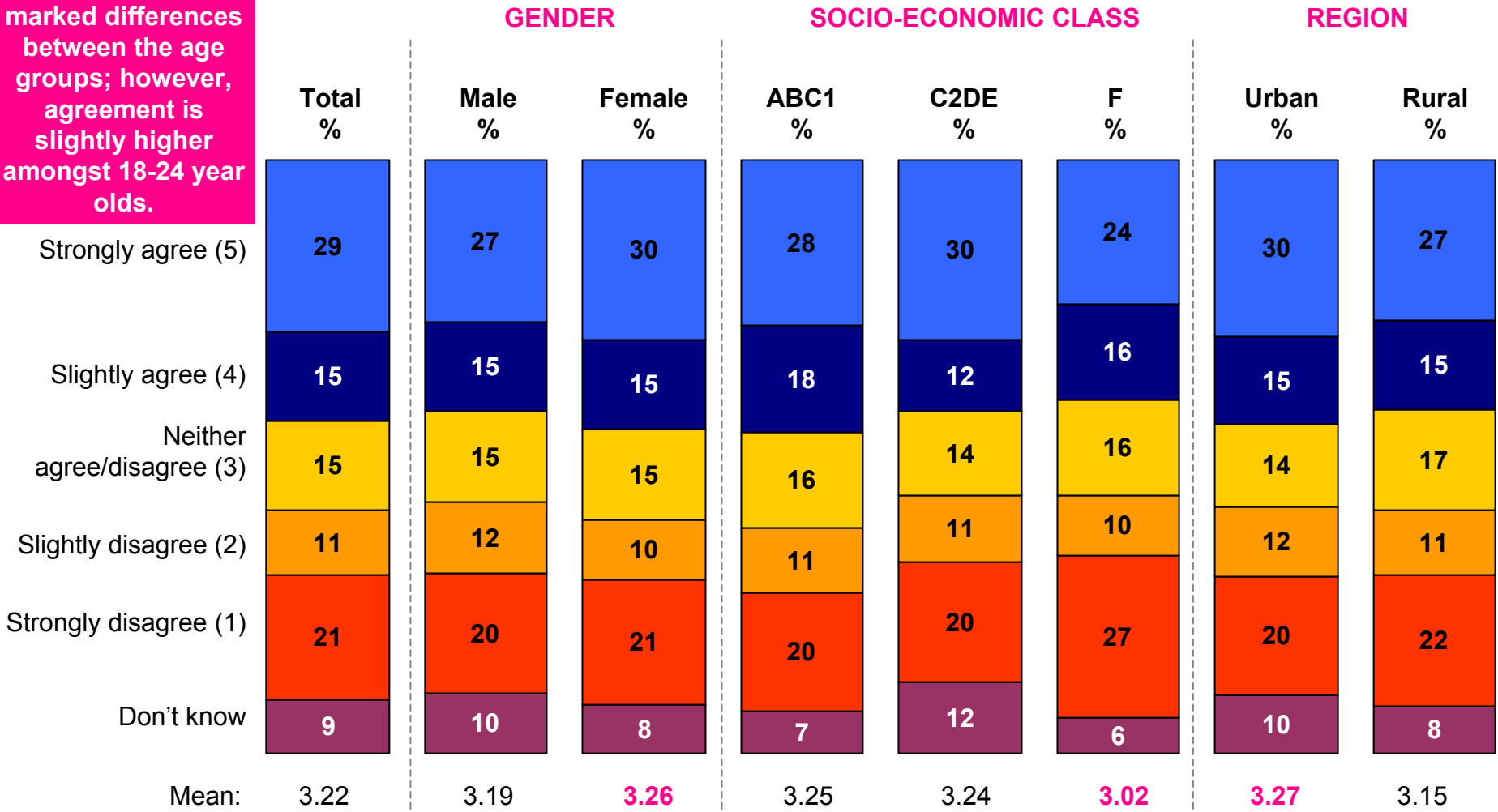
# Premature Babies



# Prolonging The Lives Of Severely Premature Babies

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

There are no marked differences between the age groups; however, agreement is slightly higher amongst 18-24 year olds.

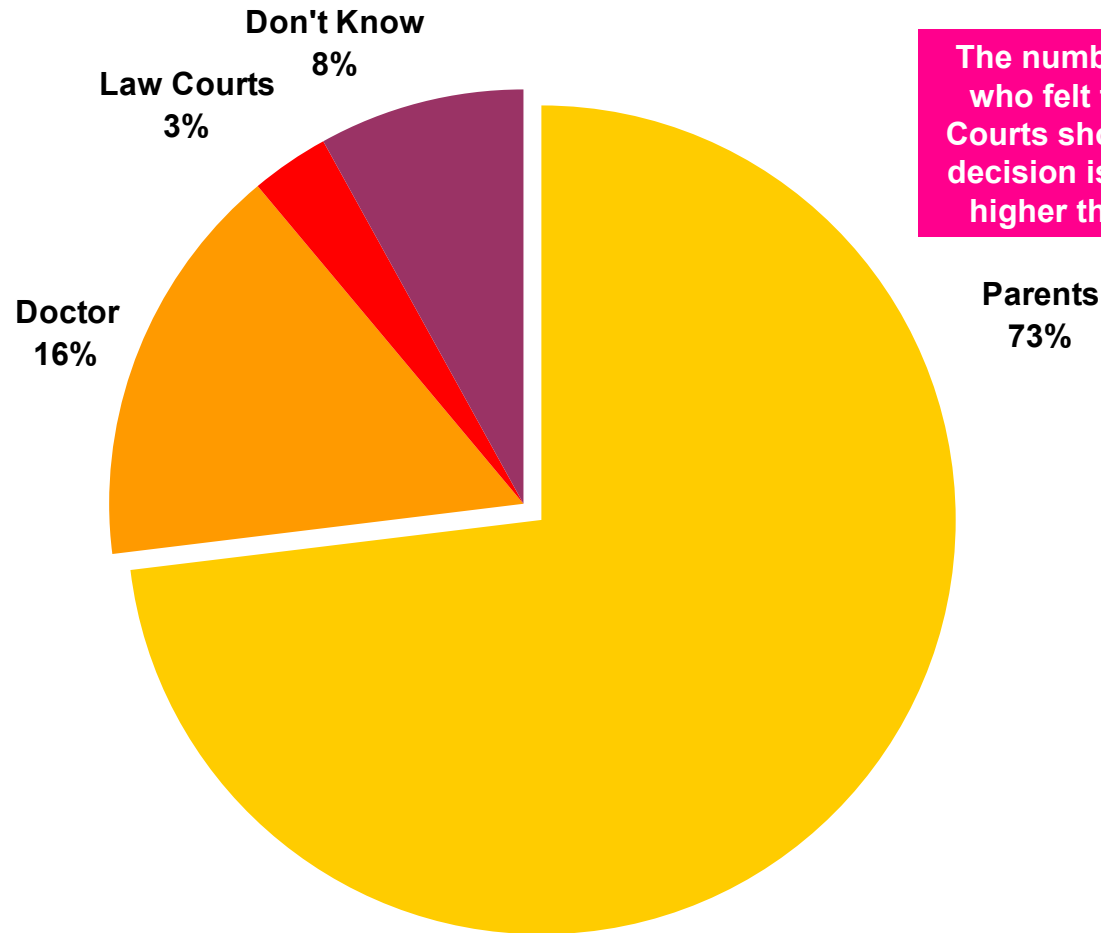


Q.7 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the lives of severely premature babies should be preserved even if there is a risk that they will have a very poor quality of life?

# Responsibility For Decision On Whether To Prolong The Life Of A Severely Premature Baby

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Interestingly, 4 in 5 of those who believe that the lives of severely premature babies should be preserved (even if there is a risk they will have a very poor quality of life) feel that parents should make the decision on whether or not to prolong life in the baby.



The number of ABC1's who felt that the Law Courts should make the decision is significantly higher than the total.

Q.8 In your opinion, which one of the following should have the final decision on whether or not to preserve the life of a severely premature baby?

# Biobanking



# Attitudes Towards Biobanking

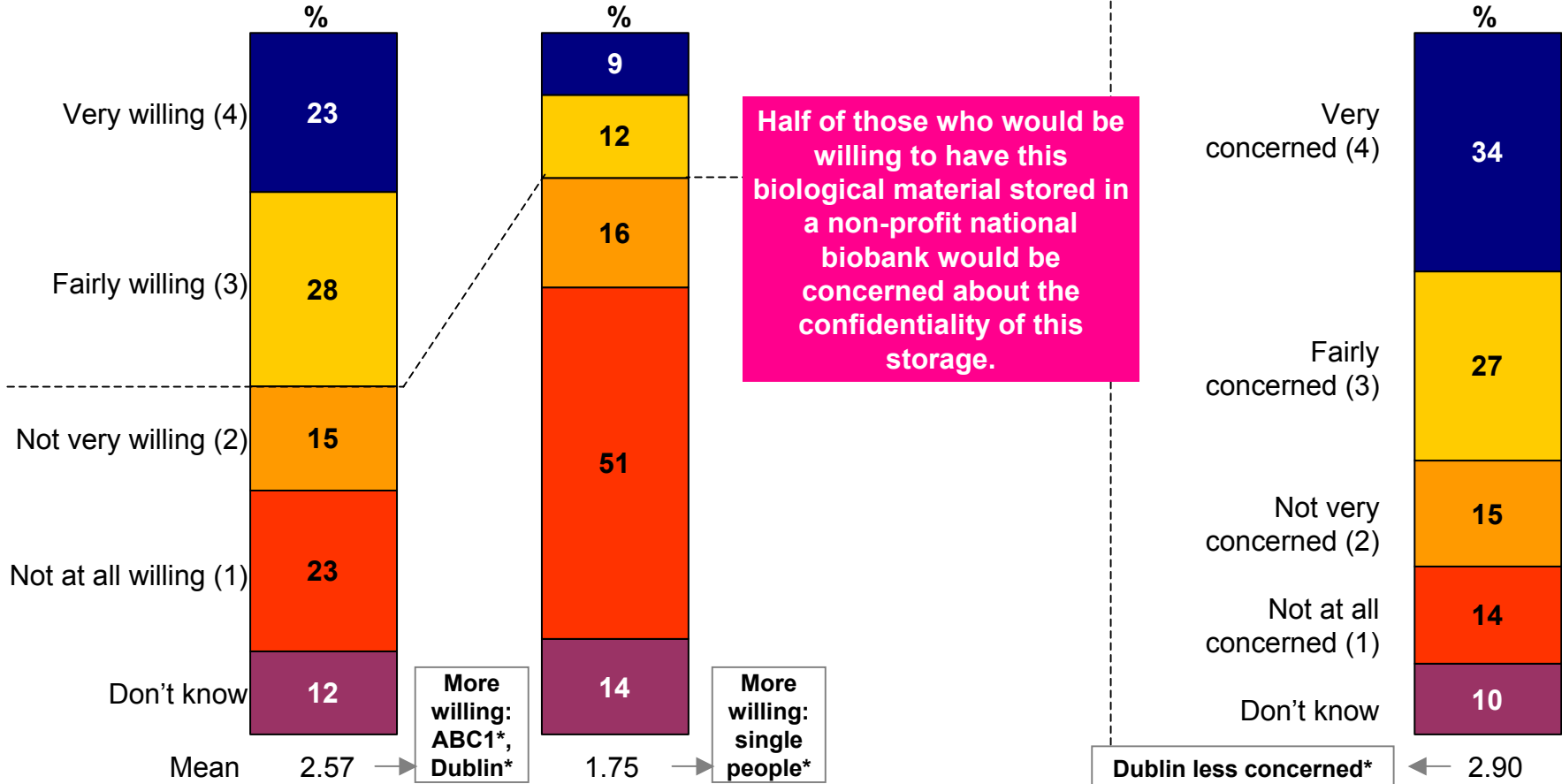
Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Just over half of those who would be willing to have their biological material stored in a National Non-Profit Biobank would reject having it stored in a commercial biobank.

Willingness to have biological material stored in a national non-profit bio-bank

Willingness to have biological material stored in a commercial bio-bank

Concern about confidentiality of biological material being stored in a national non-profit bio-bank



Q.9 How willing or not, would you be to allow your biological material be stored in a National non-profit biobank in the future?

Q.10 How willing or not would you be to allow your biological material be stored in a commercial biobank?

Q.11 And would you be concerned or not regarding the confidentiality of having your personal and sensitive information stored in a national non-profit biobank?



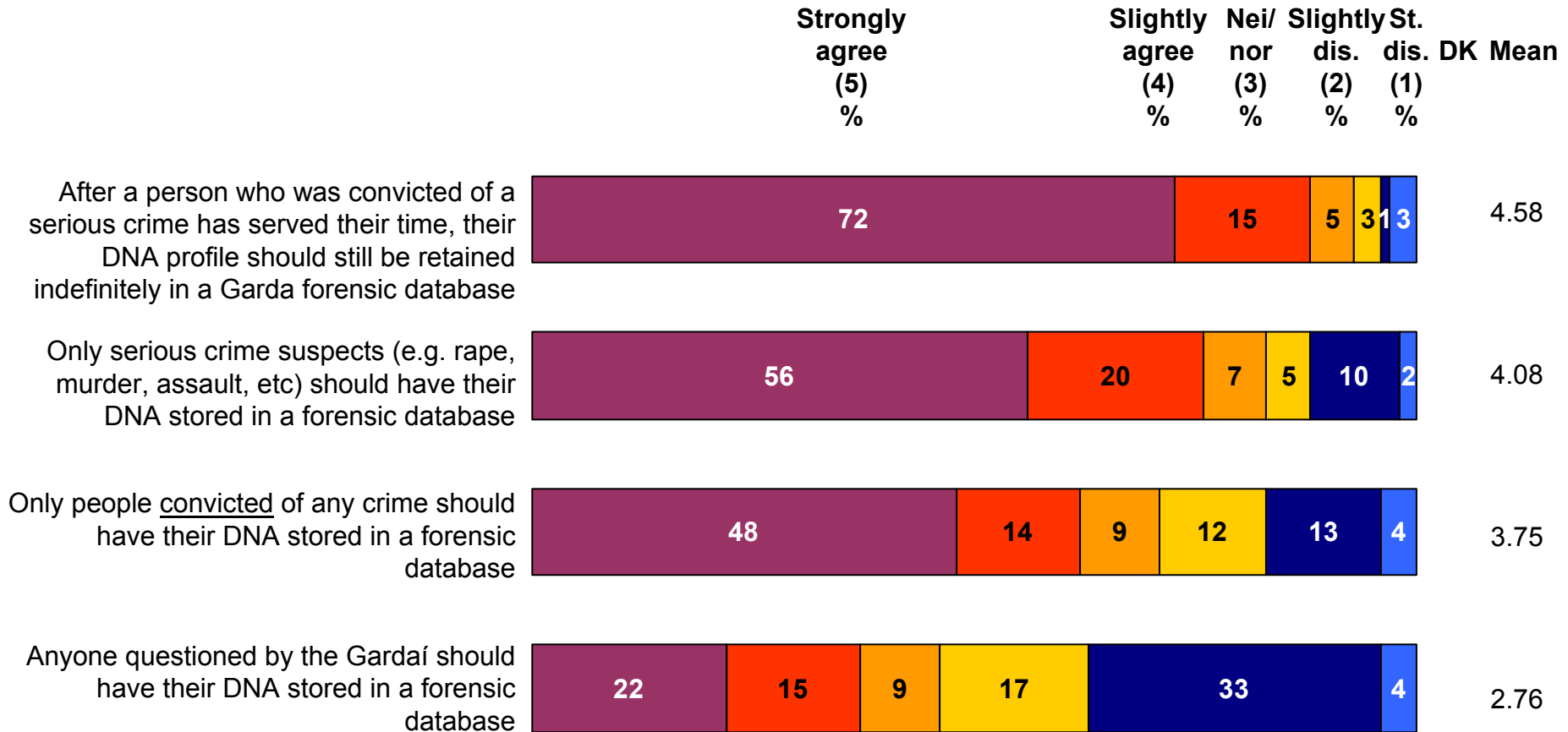
\* Significant difference vs. total

# Use Of DNA In Solving Crime



# Use Of DNA In Solving Crime

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



# Use Of DNA In Solving Crime – Opinions X Demographics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Strongly/Slightly Agree

Higher Agreement Amongst

After a person who was convicted of a serious crime has served their time, their DNA profile should still be retained indefinitely in a Garda forensic database



87%

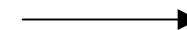


Urban\*, ABC1, female

Only serious crime suspects (e.g. rape, murder, assault, etc) should have their DNA stored in a forensic database



76%



35+, single people

Only people convicted of any crime should have their DNA stored in a forensic database



62%

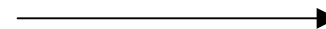


Farmers\*, rural, 65+

Anyone questioned by the Gardaí should have their DNA stored in a forensic database



37%



Rural\*, female, 65+

\* Significantly higher than total



Q.12 The Government is discussing the possibility of DNA being stored in forensic databases (e.g. in Garda Headquarters) in the future. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements I am going to read out to you?

# Patenting



# Attitudes Towards Patenting

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



Higher levels of don't knows regarding patenting, and stem cell research

Q.13 To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements on patents?

# Attitudes Towards Patenting X Demographics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Strongly/Slightly Agree

Higher Agreement

The use of patents promotes public interest by stimulating the discovery of new medicines



53%

Married/living as married\*, 35+\*, ABC1

The use of patents makes medicines prohibitively expensive and therefore harms public interest



51%

Single\*, 35+, female, DE\*

Scientists should be allowed to profit from knowledge which they have generated



59%

Urban\*, 18-24 yrs, ABC1

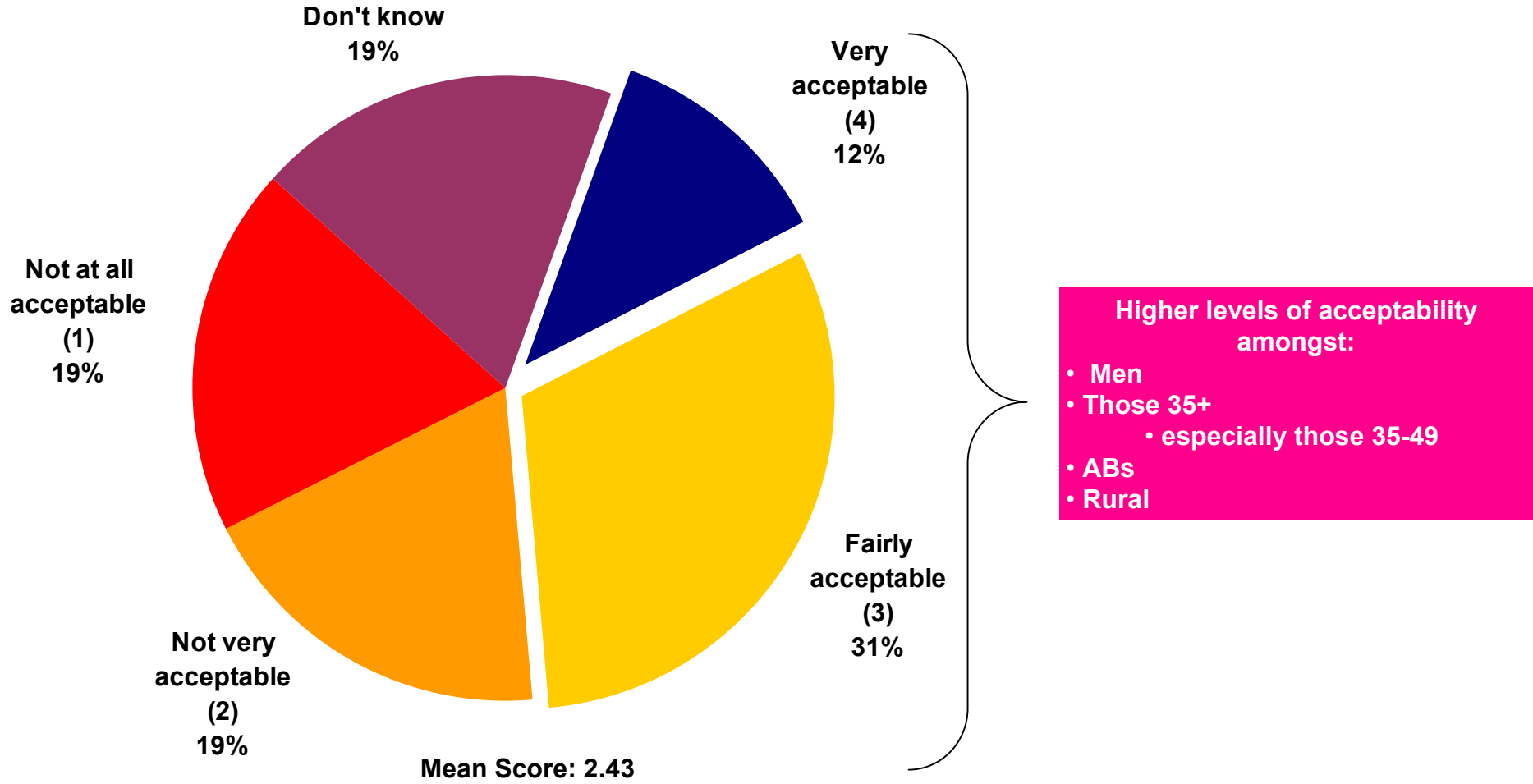
\* Significantly higher agreement



Q.13 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on patents?

# Acceptability Of Patenting

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



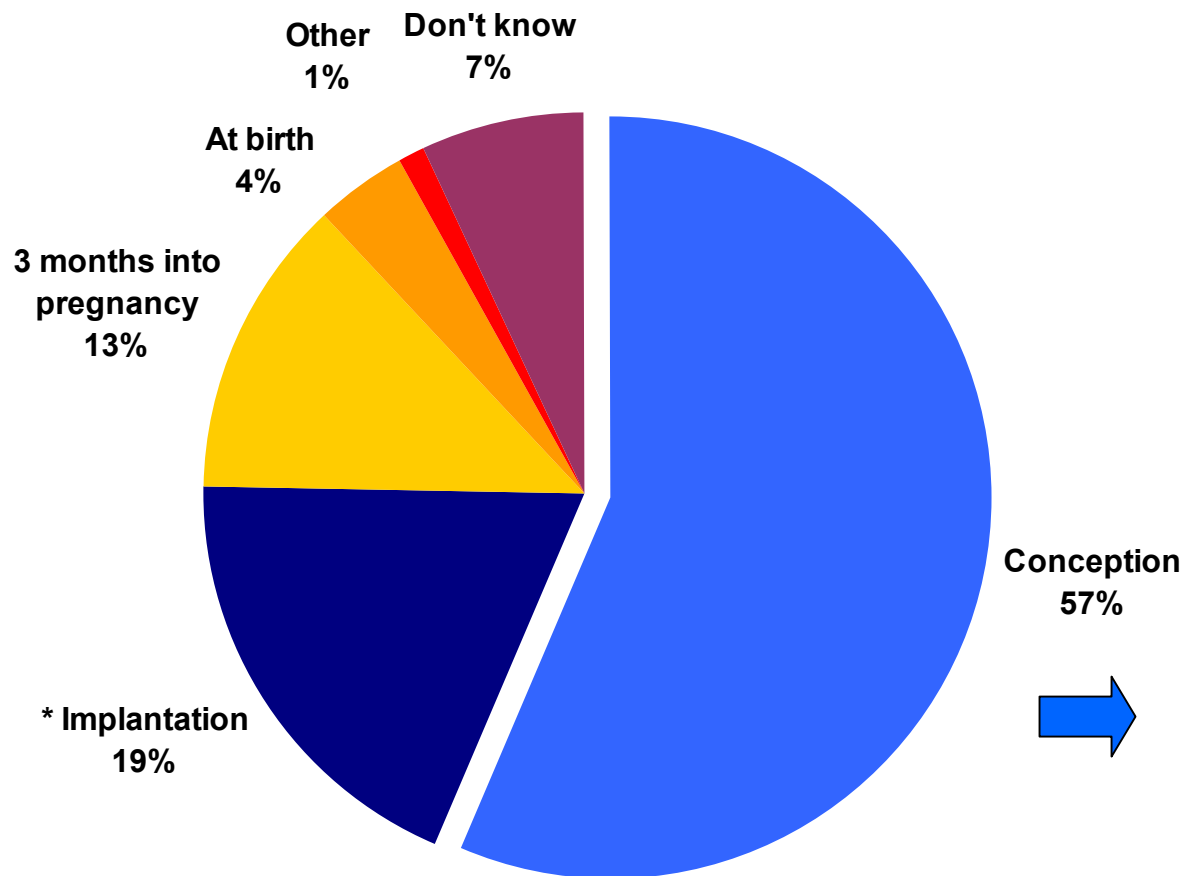
Q.14 How acceptable or not do you think this patenting is?

# Stem Cell Research



# Point Where Human Life Begins

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



More women (60%) than men (53%) believe life begins at conception. 6% of men believe life begins at birth, compared to 2% of woman.

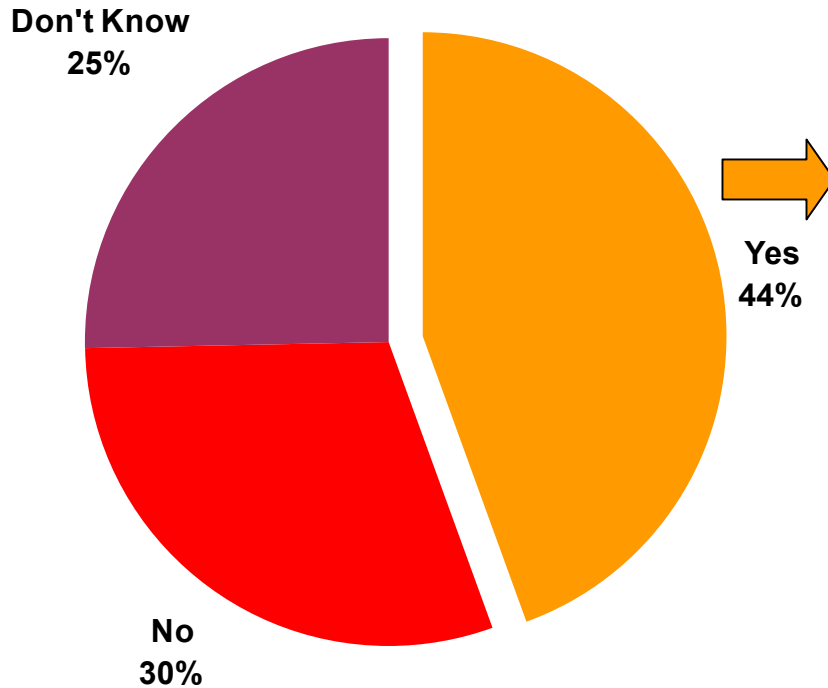
\* Implantation: when the fertilised egg implants itself onto the wall of the womb.

Q.15 At what point in the reproductive process do you believe human life begins?

# Attitudes To Use Of Surplus Embryos In Research

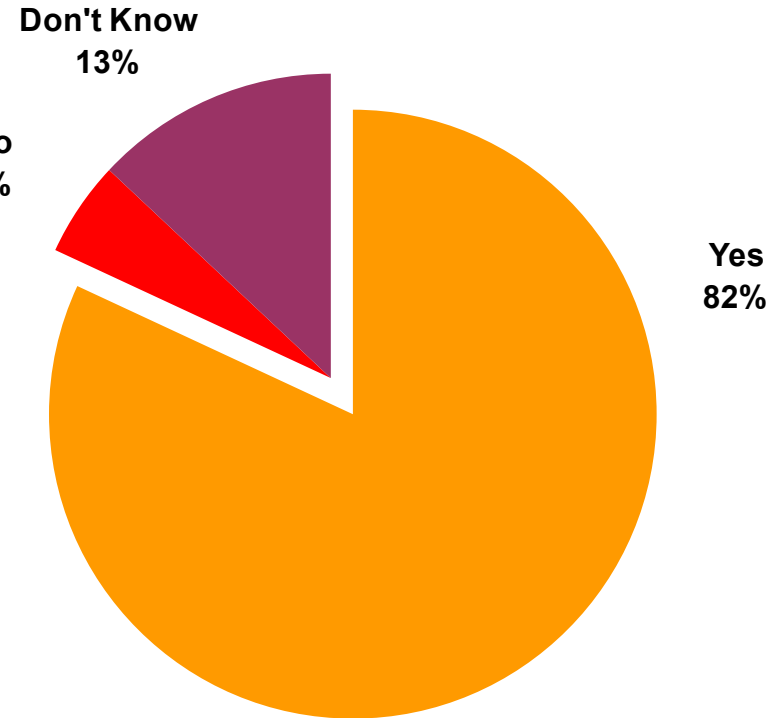
Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Should surplus embryos be used for medical research into disease?



Should these embryos still be used, although it may result in some of them being destroyed?

Base: All Who Think Surplus Embryos Should Be Used For Medical Research Into Disease: 222



\* Note: high levels of don't know

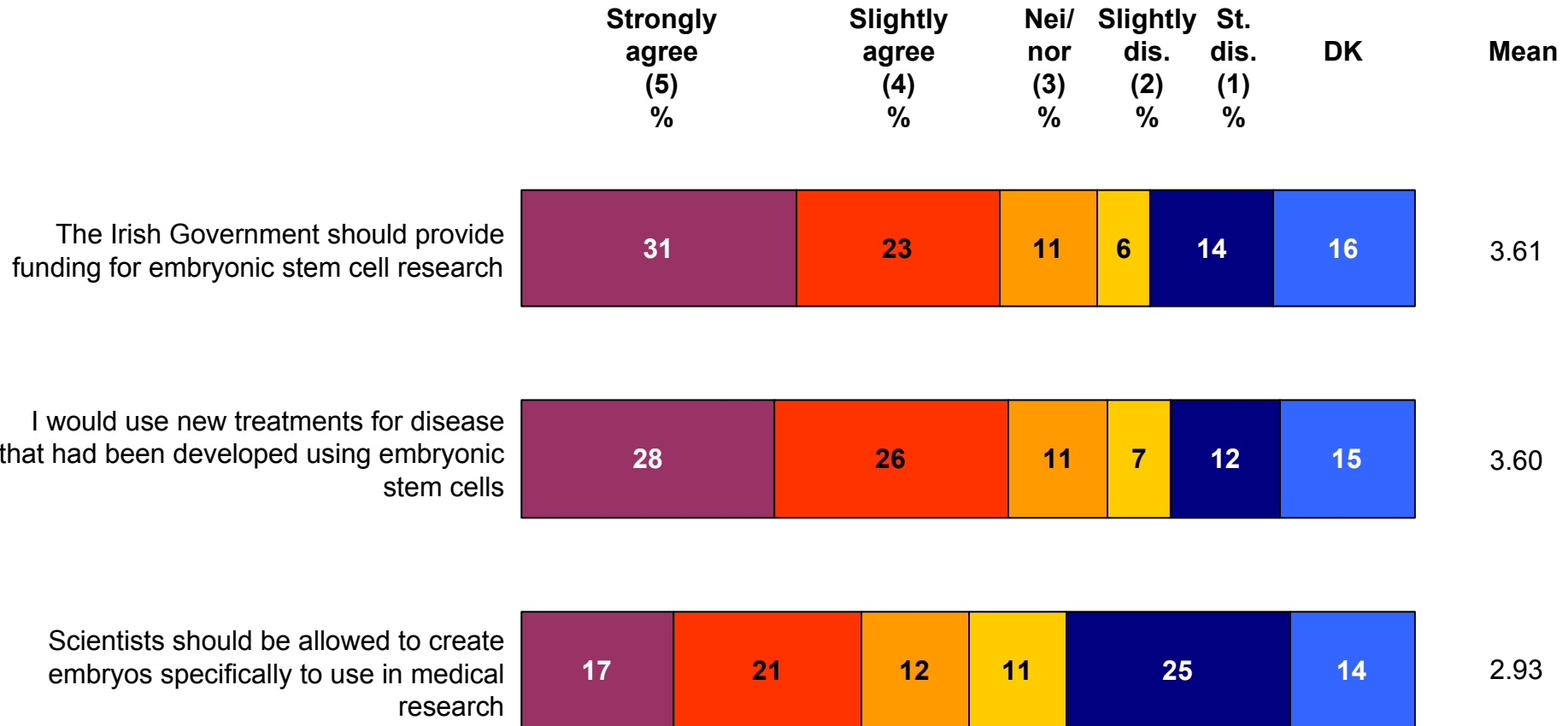
Q.16 In general do you agree or not, that these "surplus embryos" should be used for medical research into developing new treatments for disease (e.g. cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's, etc.)?

Q.17 Using these surplus embryos for medical research would involve destroying some of them. Do you still feel that these "surplus embryos" should be used for medical research into developing new treatments for disease?



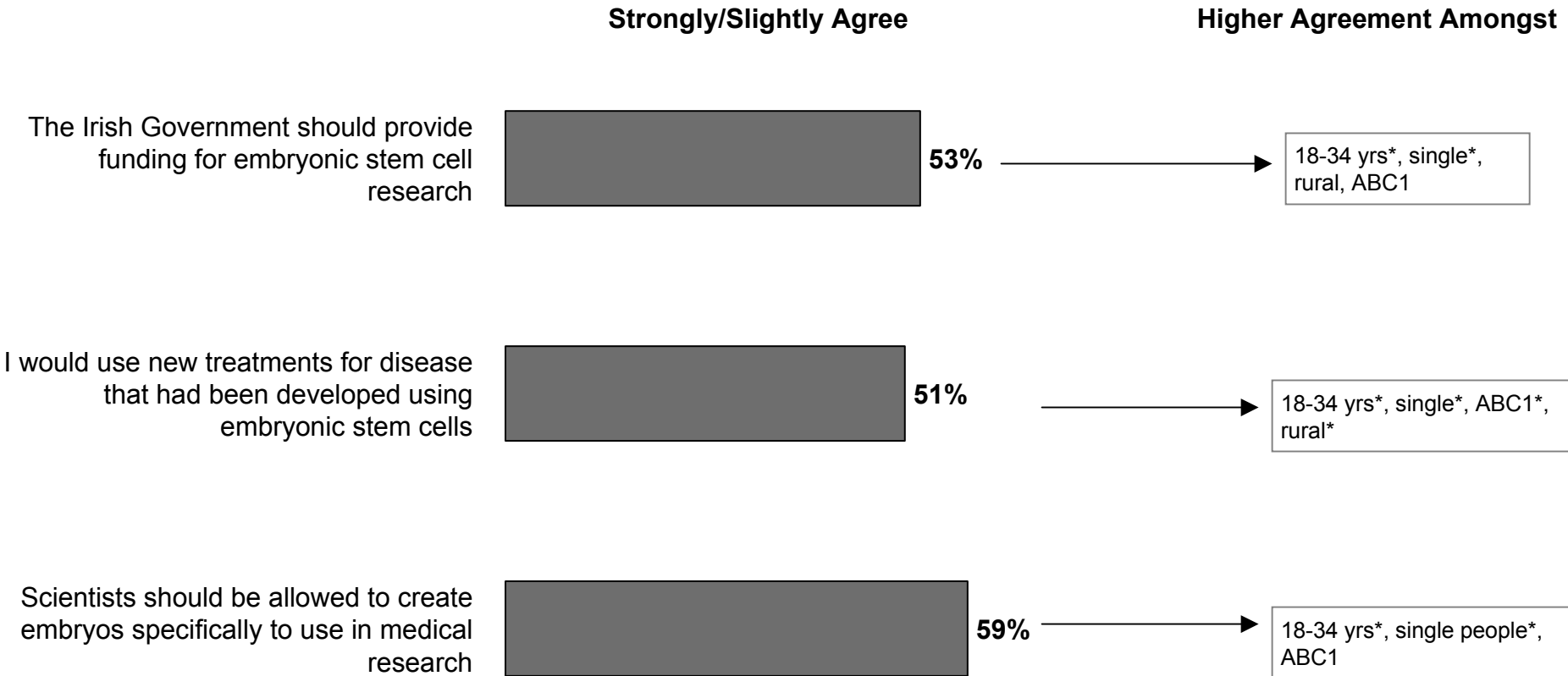
# Attitudes Towards Stem Cell Research

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



# Attitudes Towards Stem Cell Research X Demographics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



\* **Significantly higher agreement**



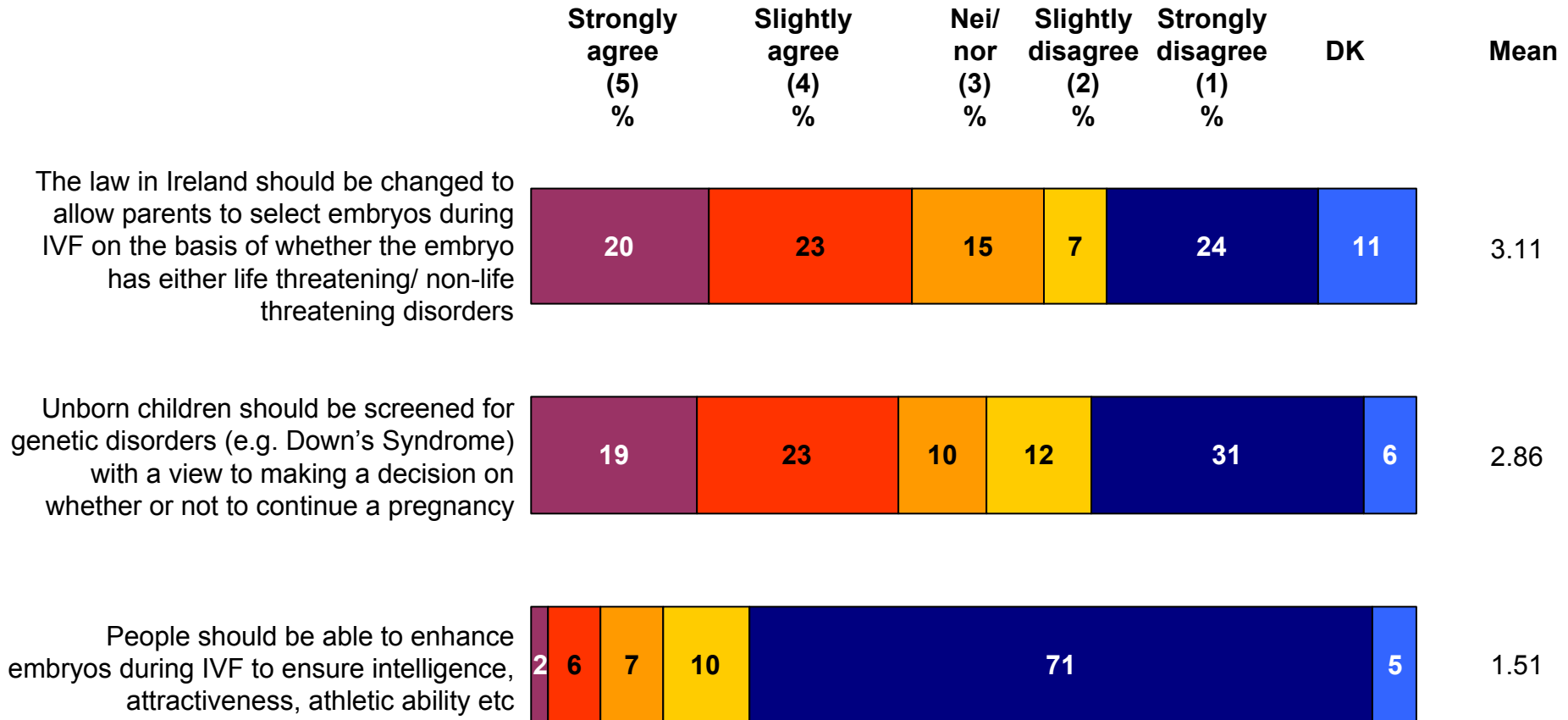
Q.18 I am now going to read out a number of different statements people have made about scientific research. I would like you to tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement?

IVF



# Attitudes Towards IVF

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



Q.19 And to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following scientific statements?

# Attitudes Towards IVF X Demographics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Strongly/Slightly Agree

Higher Agreement Amongst

The law in Ireland should be changed to allow parents to select embryos during IVF on the basis of whether the embryo has either life threatening/ non-life threatening disorders



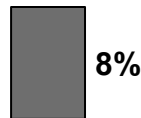
18-34\*, single\*, urban especially Dublin\*

Unborn children should be screened for genetic disorders (e.g. Down's Syndrome) with a view to making a decision on whether or not to continue a pregnancy



18-34 yrs\*, urban especially Dublin\*, C1C2, slightly more female

People should be able to enhance embryos during IVF to ensure intelligence, attractiveness, athletic ability etc



Male\*, DE\*, 18-34 yrs, single

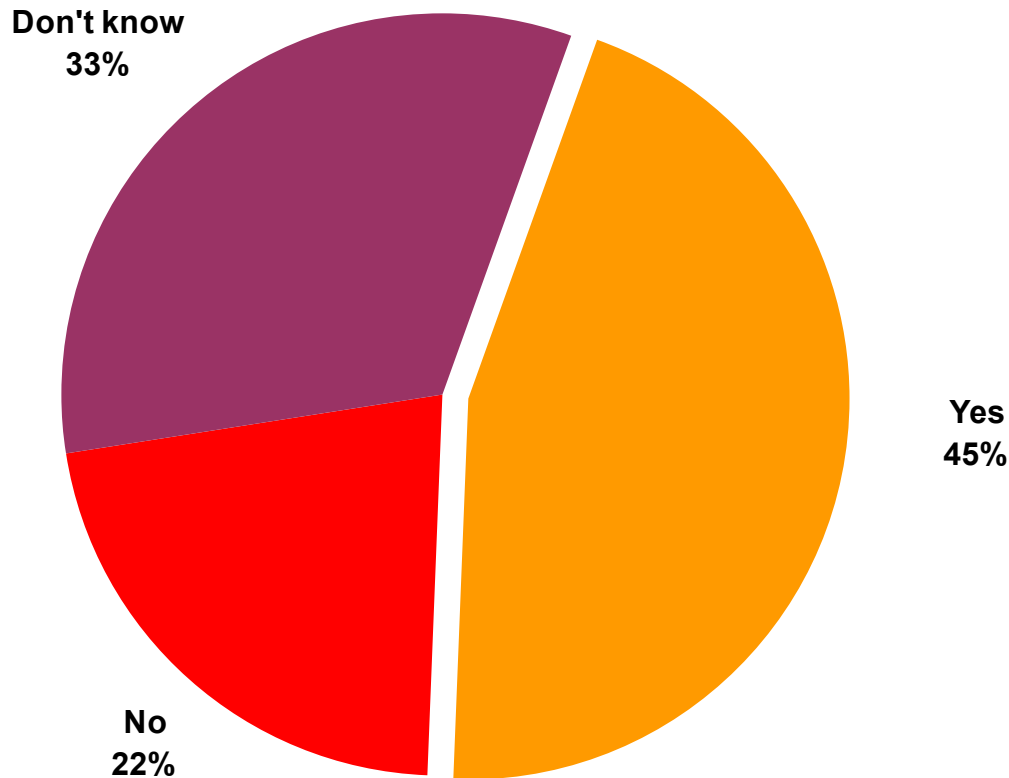
\* Significantly higher than the total



Q.19 And to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following scientific statements?

# Acceptability Of The Use Of Saviour Siblings

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



Older people are less likely to find it acceptable (28%), with those 25-34 most likely to find it so (55%). Those with children in the household are more likely to find it acceptable (49%).

*Definition: IVF allows parents of a child with a genetic disorder to choose an embryo which does NOT have that disorder, AND whose tissue matches that of their existing sick child, so that the resulting baby can provide stem cells to help the seriously ill brother/sister. These babies are saviour siblings.*

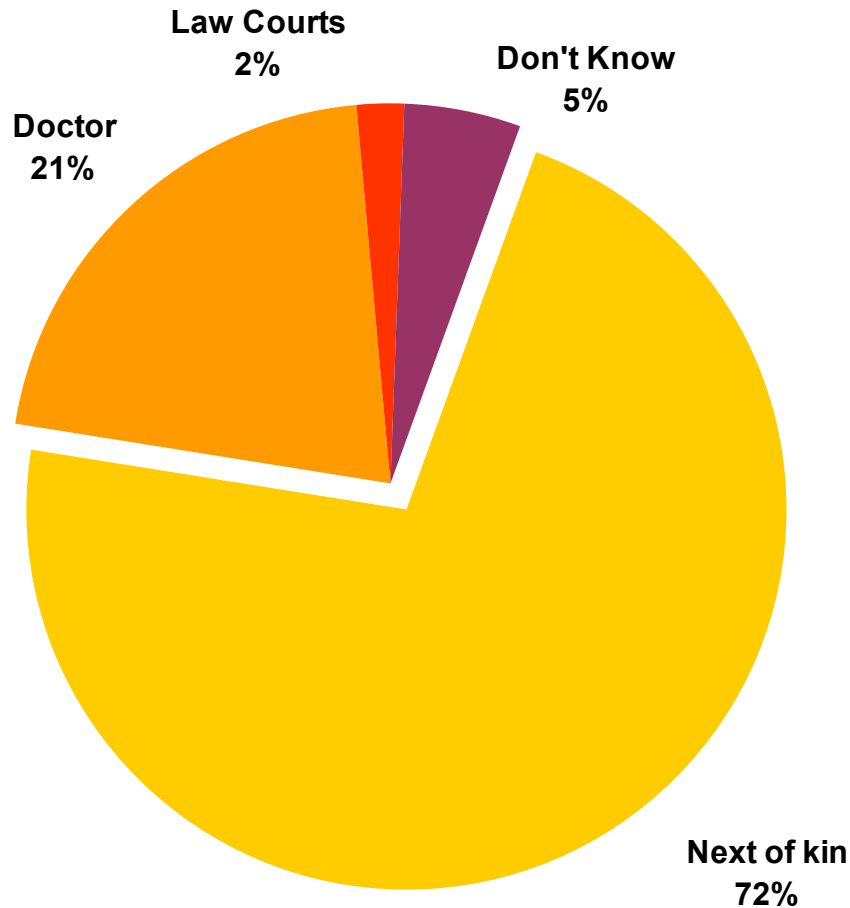
Q.20 In your opinion is the use of saviour siblings acceptable, or not?

# The Elderly & End Of Life Issues



# Responsibility For Healthcare Decisions

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



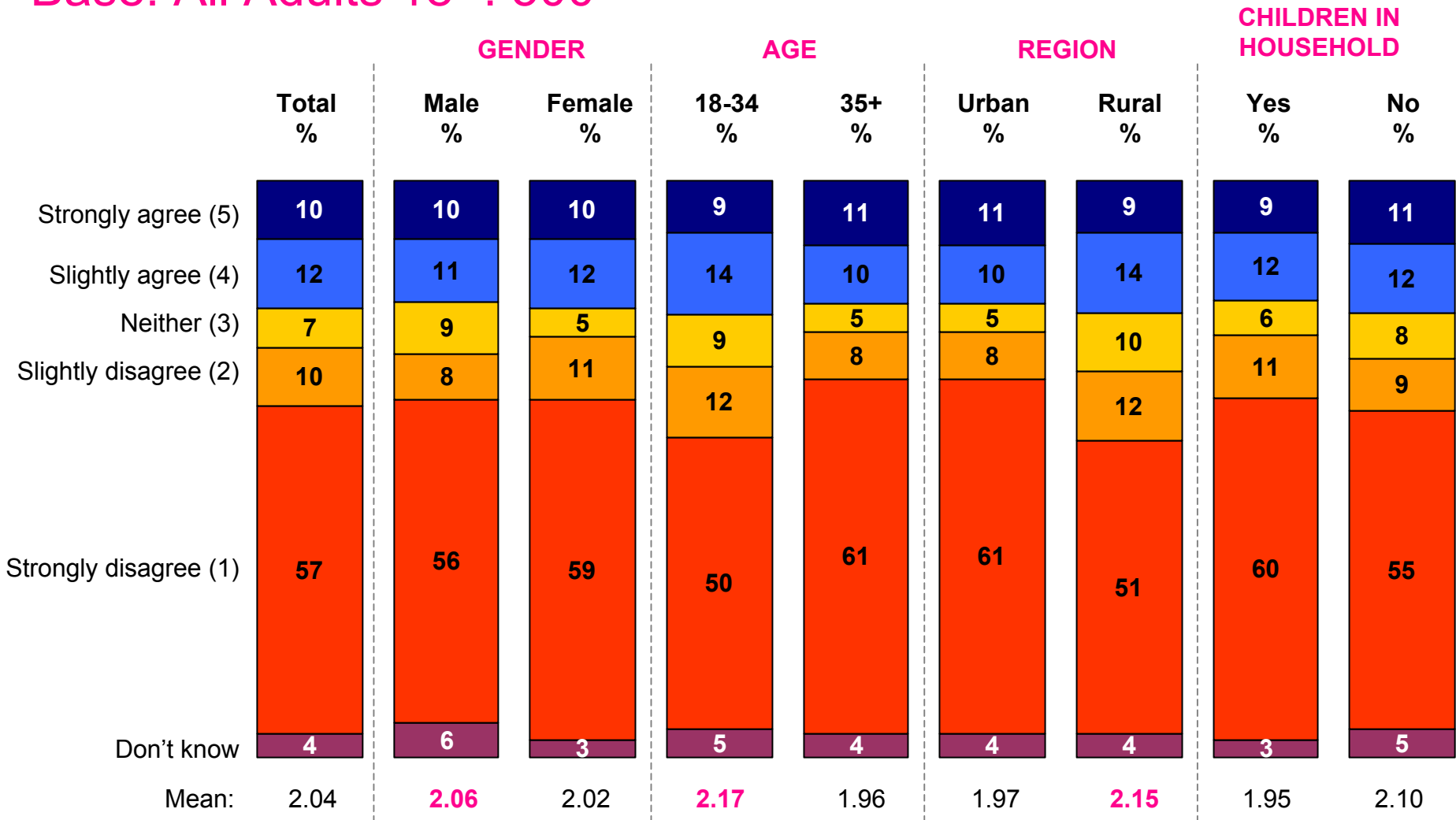
Those between 50-64 are most likely to want next of kin to make decisions (77%) and least likely to want doctor to make decisions (18%).

ABC1's are most likely to want their doctor to make decisions (25%) compared to 19% for C2DE's.

Those without children are more likely to want a doctor to make decisions (23%) than those with children in the household (18%).

# Attitudes To Withdrawal Of Expensive Treatments From Old People, On Medical Advice

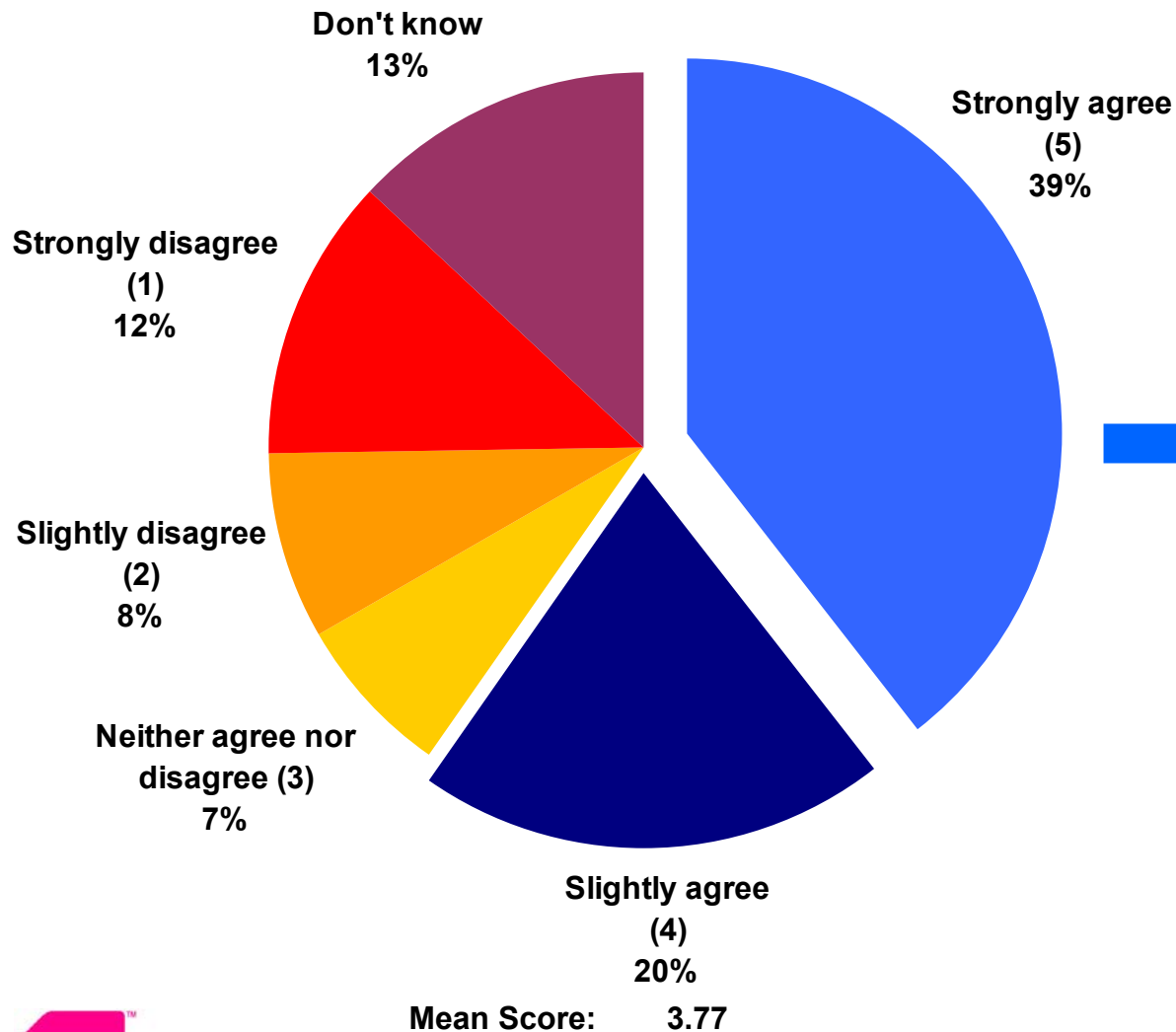
Base: All Adults 18+: 500



Q.21 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement I am going to read out?  
 "Expensive treatments should be withdrawn from old people if a doctor feels the chance of success are low."

# Legal Status Of Advance Directives

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

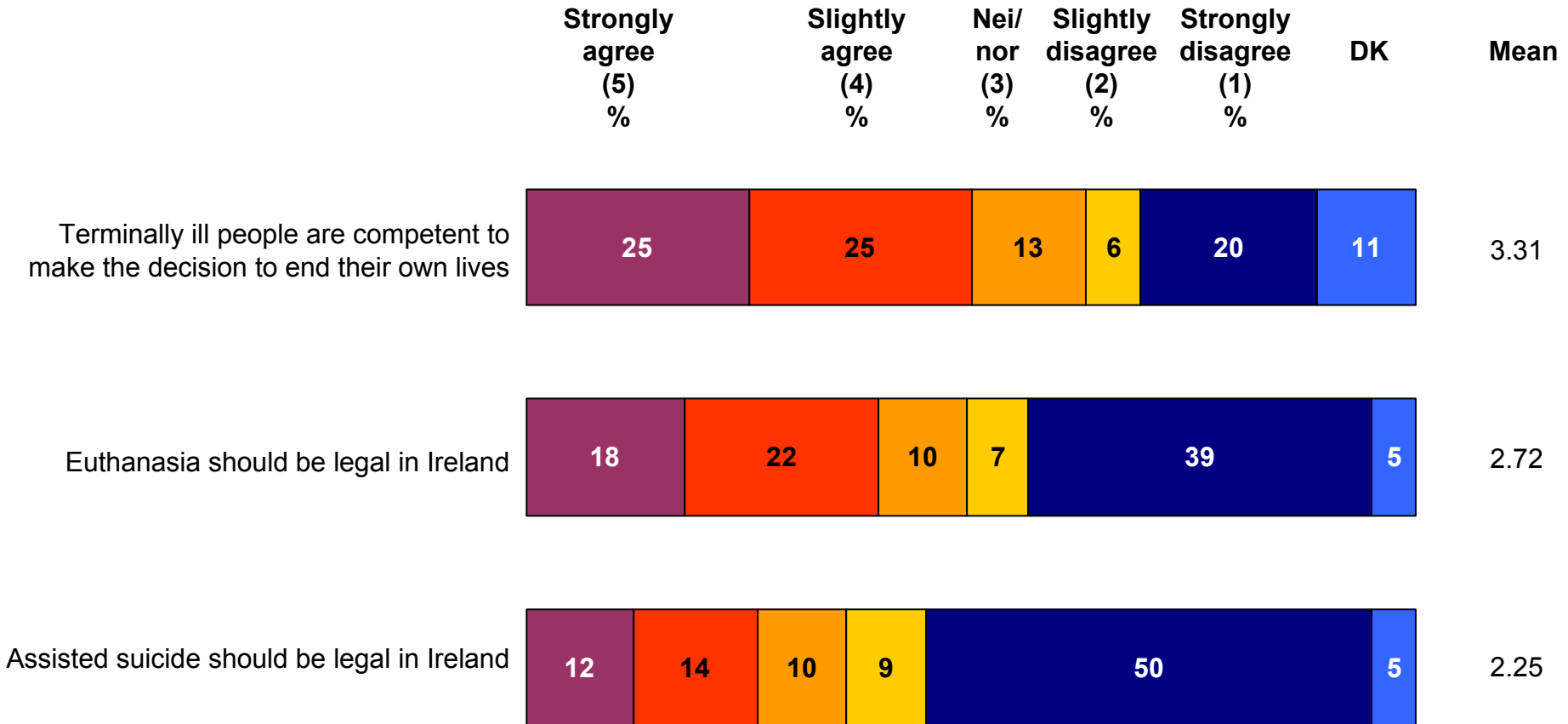


**Most likely to agree:**

- Females
- 18-34 years olds
- Those with children

# Attitudes Towards End Of Life Issues

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



Q.24 Now, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

- Euthanasia should be legal in Ireland
- Assisted suicide should be legal in Ireland
- Terminally ill people are competent to make the decision to end their own lives

# Attitudes Towards End Of Life Issues X Demographics

Base: All Adults 18+: 500

Strongly/Slightly Agree

Higher Agreement Amongst

Terminally ill people are competent to make the decision to end their own lives



50%



35-49 yrs\*, single, C1C2, rural

Euthanasia should be legal in Ireland



40%



18-34 yrs\*, Dublin\*, female, single

Assisted suicide should be legal in Ireland



26%



18-34 yrs\*, C1C2, rural

\* **Significantly higher than the total**

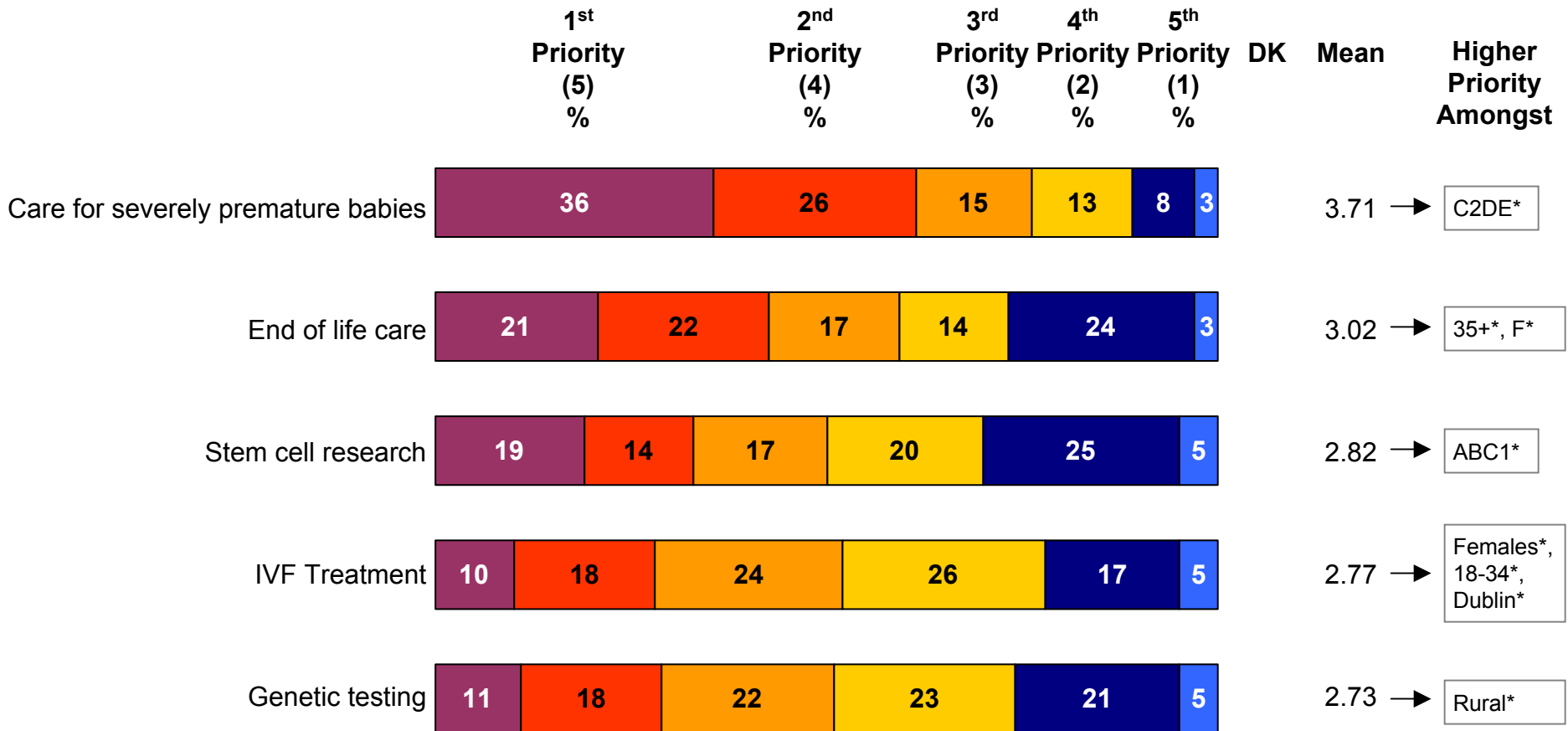
Q.24 Now, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

- Euthanasia should be legal in Ireland
- Assisted suicide should be legal in Ireland
- Terminally ill people are competent to make the decision to end their own lives



# Perceived Funding Priorities For Government

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



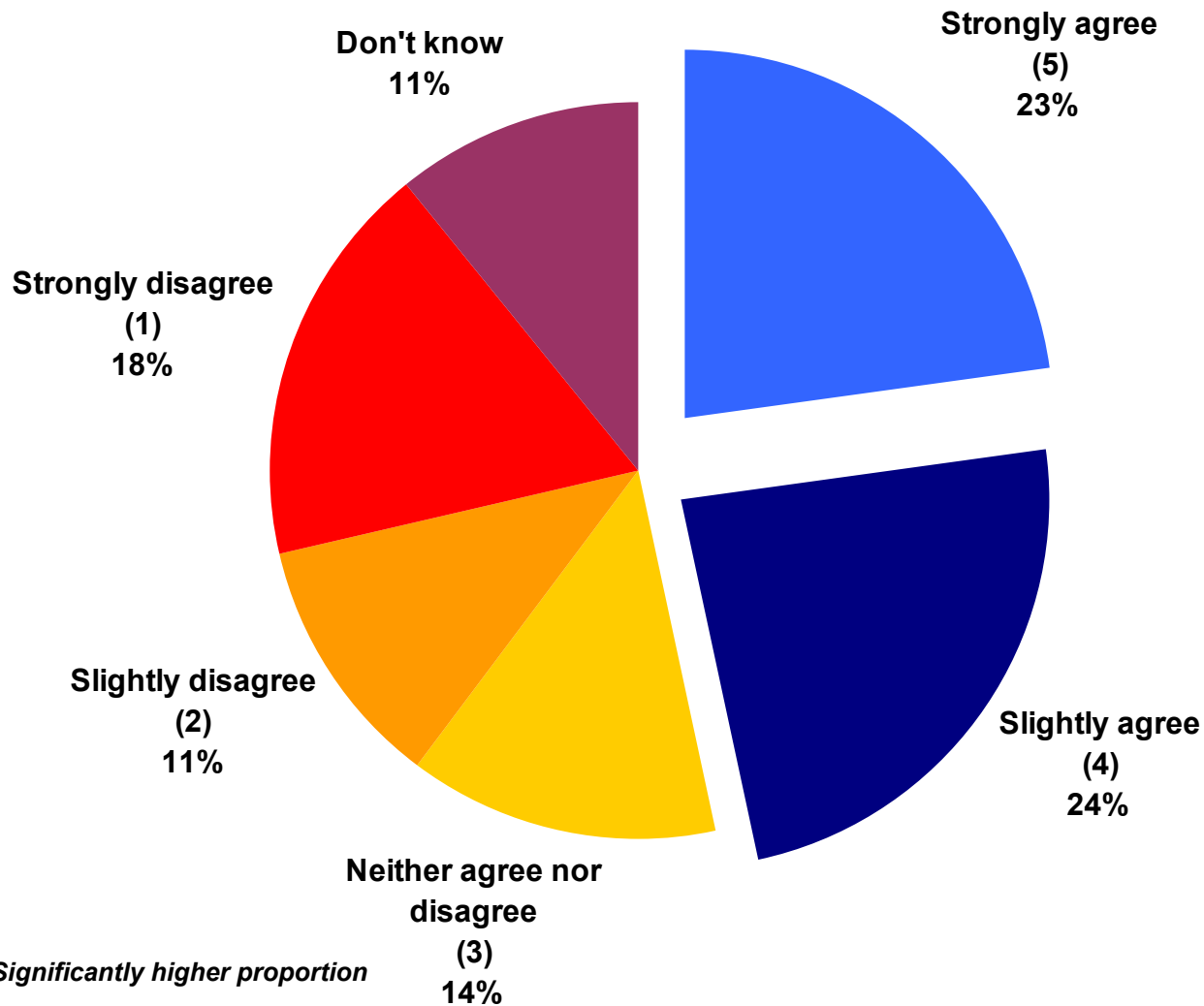
\* Significantly higher proportion



Q.25 I would like you to look at the areas on this card which could receive Government funding. Now I would like you to rank them in order, starting with the one you feel should receive priority funding from the Government, the area you feel should be 2<sup>nd</sup> priority for Government funding and so on, until all are ranked

# Speed Of Progress: Science Vs. Ethics & Law

Base: All Adults 18+: 500



**Higher agreement amongst:**

- Older people – especially 65+\*
- DEs\*
- Rural\*

Mean: 3.28

Q.26 And finally, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I feel that science needs to slow down its progress and allow ethics and law catch up.

