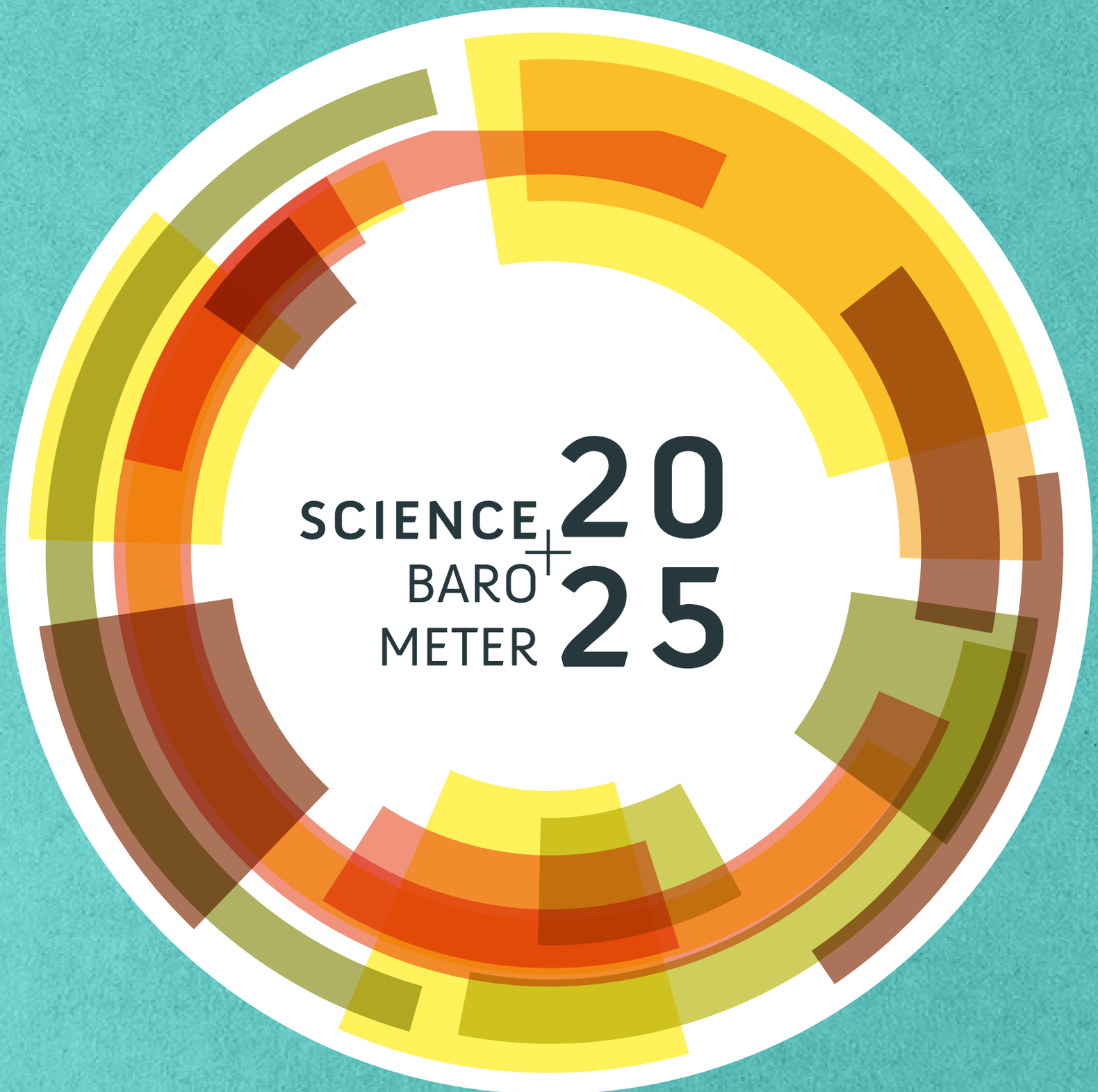
wissenschaft : im dialog



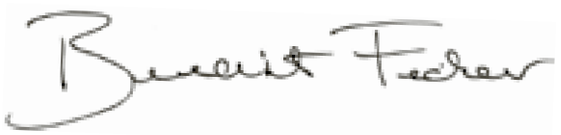
Dear readers,

In public debate, there is currently much talk of a divided society and hardening fronts between two opposing sides. What seems to matter most is not whether opinions are actually polarised, but rather the perception of polarisation itself. We have taken this as an opportunity to address this topic in the *science barometer 2025*, particularly the role that science can play in a society perceived as polarised (pp. 5–16).

A special feature is that, starting this year, the *science barometer* is no longer conducted by telephone but by an online panel. This means that direct comparisons with last year's results are limited in some cases (pp. 27–30). At the same time, the new survey method strengthens the reach and representativeness of the barometer. More detailed information can be found in a background paper on our website. We have also redesigned the graphics for even greater clarity.

Our special thanks go to the supporters and sponsors of the project – the Carl-Zeiss-Stiftung, the Klaus Tschira Stiftung, and the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft – as well as our scientific advisory board.

We wish you an inspiring read!



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science barometer


2025
Wissenschaftsjahr
ZUKUNFTS
ENERGIE

What is the science barometer?

Since 2014, the *science barometer* annually surveys public attitudes towards science and research in Germany. In close collaboration with an international scientific advisory board, a new questionnaire is designed each year which includes questions and items from previous survey waves but also new ones. For all results of the 2024 survey and all previous survey waves as well as further information, please visit **www.sciencebarometer.com**.

Who is responsible for the science barometer?

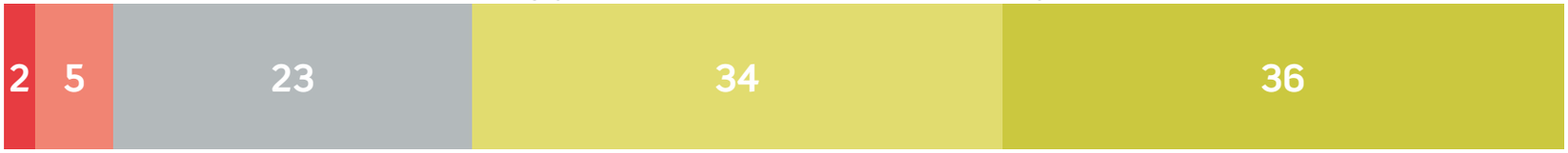
Wissenschaft im Dialog (*WiD*) is the central organisation for science communication in Germany. The non-profit organisation is committed to an open society that uses knowledge to shape change. To this end, it promotes a productive dialogue between science and the public: as a think-and-do tank for science communication, *WiD* develops practice-relevant knowledge, offers target group-oriented education and training, networks different stakeholders and develops innovative communication formats. *Wissenschaft im Dialog* was founded in 2000 by the most important German science organisations.
www.wissenschaft-im-dialog.de

Photo credits: Gerhard Kopatz/WiD (top left), Ilja Hendel/WiD (top right), David Ausserhofer/WiD (bottom left), David Ausserhofer/WiD (bottom right)

How do you feel about the following statements?

I have the impression that opinions in society are increasingly drifting apart.

Public discussions are increasingly more emotional and less objective.



In our society, two camps face each other irreconcilably.

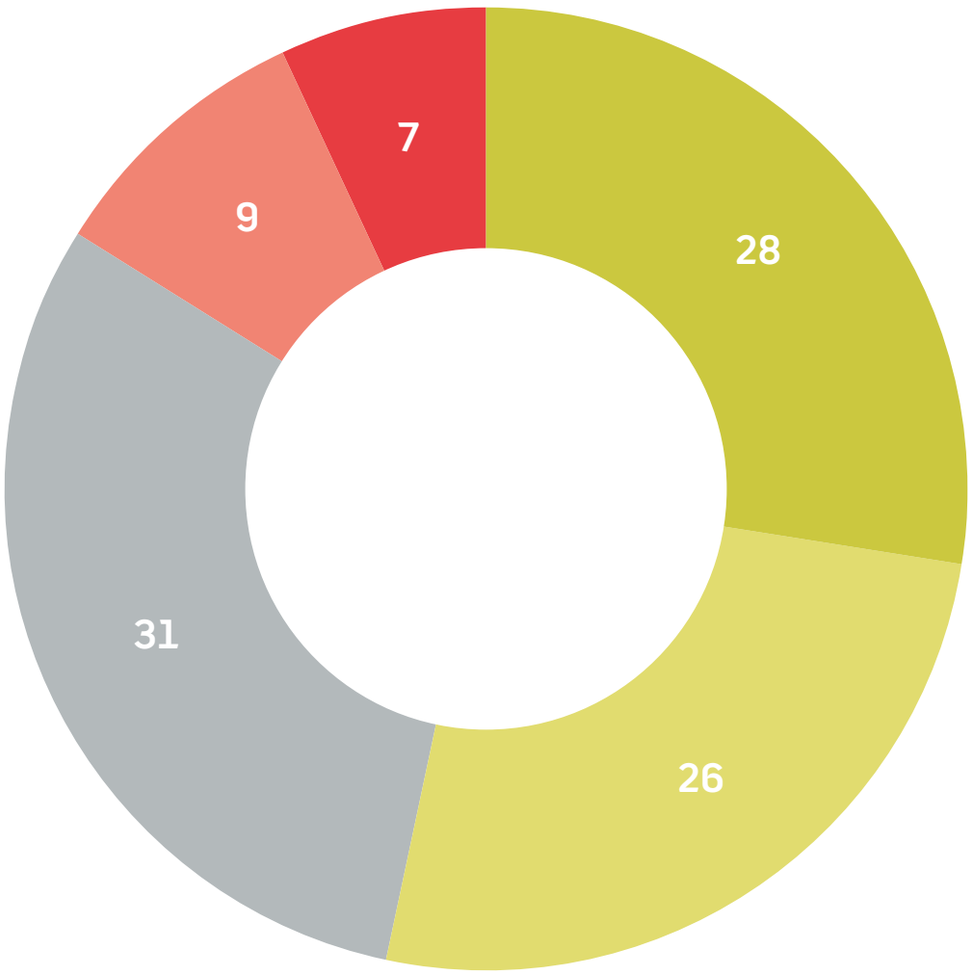
completely disagree completely agree

Numbers for 'don't know, no answer' excluded;
Number of respondents: 2,011;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

The *science barometer 2025* shows that society is perceived as polarised by large parts of the population. A good three-quarters of respondents have the impression that opinions in our society are increasingly drifting apart. Almost as many (70 per cent) also indicate that public discussions are increasingly conducted emotionally and less objectively. That two opposing sides in our society face each other irreconcilably is assumed by fewer respondents (54 per cent).

However, when comparing this with other results from the *science barometer 2025*, it also becomes clear: The population is less strongly divided into opposing sides than is often assumed. While there are opposing positions on controversial topics, a majority holds similar positions on most of these issues. In between lies a broad middle ground that does not clearly identify with either pole, but instead takes differentiated positions.

I am open to conversations with people who have a completely different opinion on this topic.*



*Agreement with this statement was measured using the topics 'migration', 'climate change', 'gender-inclusive language' and 'inequality between rich and poor'. The average agreement values across all topics are shown.

Numbers for 'don't know, missing answer' excluded;
Number of respondents: 1,879;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Despite their perception of a pronounced social division, respondents' willingness to engage in conversation is high. The majority (54 per cent) is willing to enter into conversation with people who have different views on a topic that appears polarised to them. In contrast, 16 per cent show no willingness to do so. Willingness to engage in conversation thus appears to be a resource that can be used to strengthen social cohesion and counteract polarisation.

As central prerequisites for such a dialogue with a person who holds a completely different opinion respondents primarily cite mutual trust (62 per cent), agreement on basic facts (59 per cent), sympathy (54 per cent), and sharing similar values (51 per cent). A similar educational background (32 per cent) or similar political attitudes (29 per cent) play a significantly lesser role.

How do you feel about the following statements?

Scientific findings are important for informing social debates.

Science is the best method for obtaining reliable information about the world.

We should rely more on common sense and less on scientific studies.

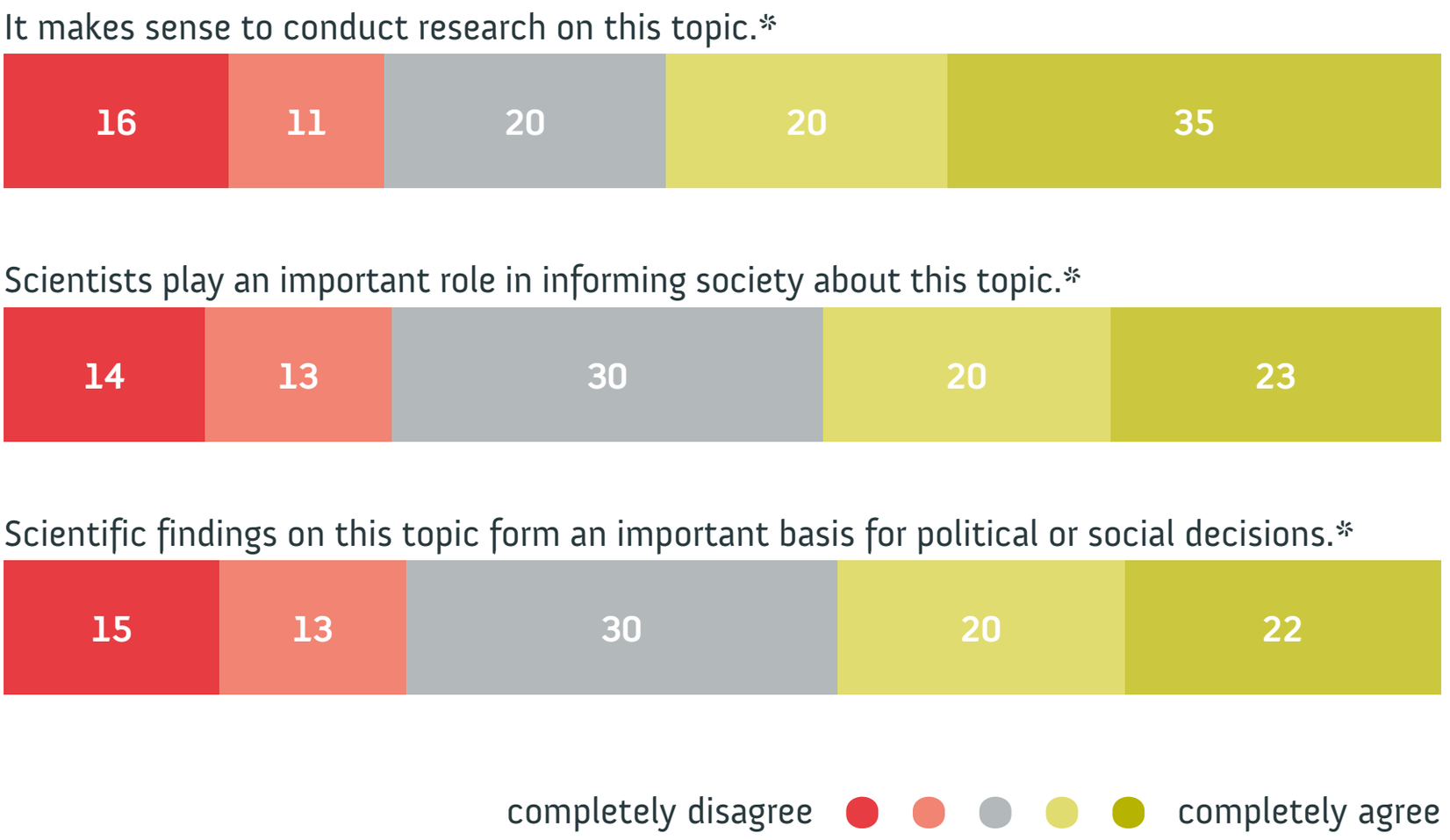
I prefer to rely on my intuition rather than scientific findings.

completely disagree completely agree

Numbers for 'don't know, missing answer' excluded;
Number of respondents: 2,011;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

The majority of respondents agree that scientific findings are important for informing social debates (61 per cent). Also, slightly more than half of citizens believe that science is the best method for obtaining reliable information about the world (55 per cent). That it is better to rely on common sense or one's intuition rather than on scientific findings is endorsed by about a quarter of respondents respectively. Slightly more than 40 per cent do not agree with these two statements. Thus, scientific findings – especially in polarised debates – can play an important role as a common reference point which different groups can relate to.

How do you feel about the following statements?



*Agreement with this statement was measured using the topics 'migration', 'climate change', 'gender-inclusive language' and 'inequality between rich and poor'.
The average agreement values across all topics are shown.

Numbers for 'don't know, missing answer' excluded;
Number of respondents: 1,879;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Slightly more than half of respondents (55 per cent) think it makes sense to conduct research on socially controversial topics such as migration or inequality between the rich and the poor. 43 per cent of respondents indicate that scientists play an important role in informing society about such topics. Almost as many (42 per cent) say that scientific findings form an important basis for political or social decisions.

Science should...

...contribute to making discussions more objective.

...provide orientation in controversial debates.

...help to better understand different opinions in a debate.

...contribute to reducing tensions in social discussions.

...actively intervene when facts are taken out of context or misrepresented in social debates.

...behave as neutrally as possible in highly polarised social debates.

completely disagree completely agree

Numbers for 'don't know, missing answer' excluded;
Number of respondents: 2,011;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

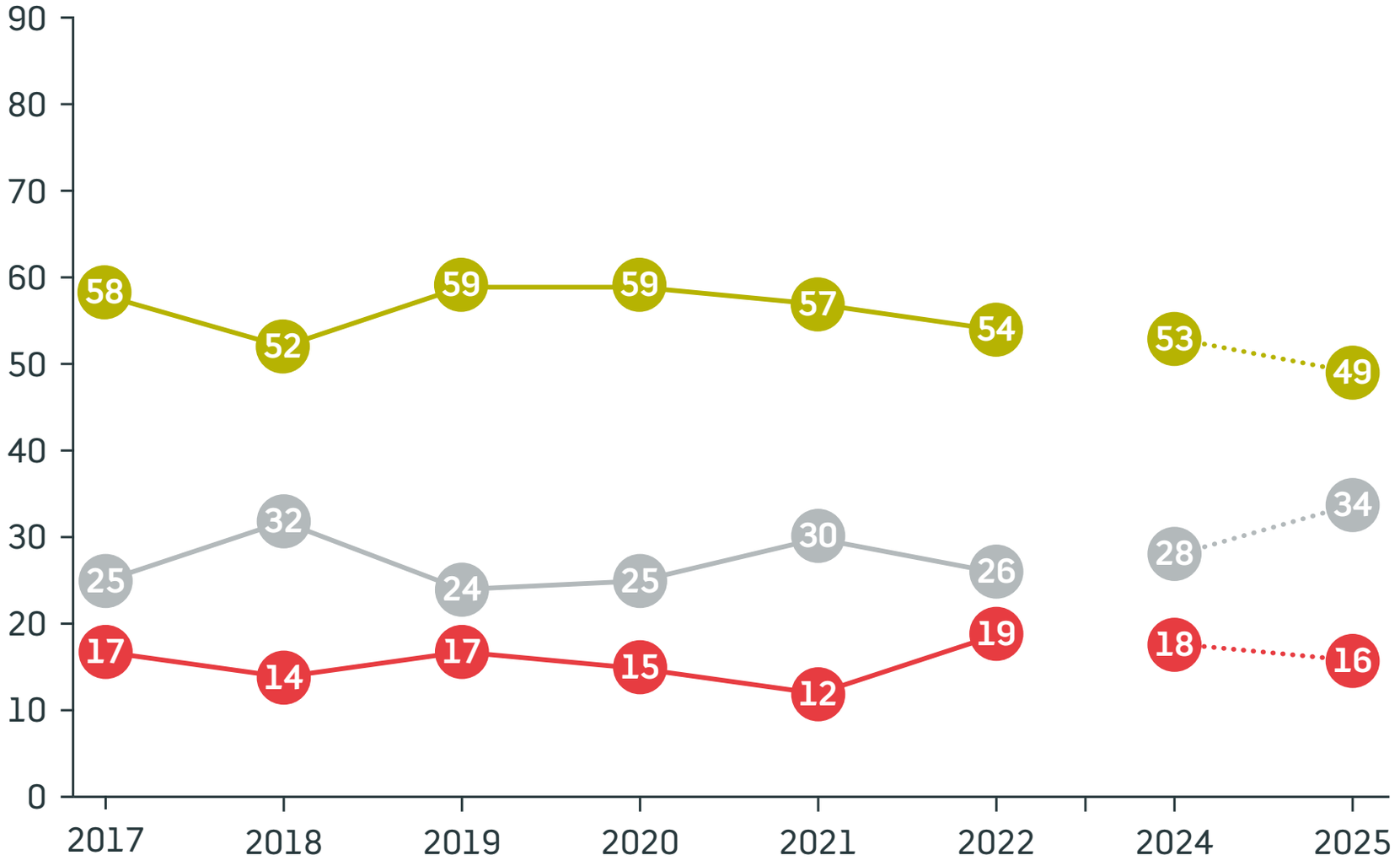
Expectations towards science regarding its role in polarised debates are high. According to a large majority of respondents, science should contribute to making discussions more objective (72 per cent) and support a better understanding of different opinions (71 per cent). 70 per cent of respondents also say that science should actively intervene when facts are taken out of context or misrepresented. For 63 per cent, the role of science also consists in providing orientation in controversial debates and reducing tensions. The statement that science should behave as neutrally as possible in highly polarised debates receives the least agreement (47 per cent). 18 per cent disagree with this.

Suitability of strategies for reducing social division with the help of scientific information

Number of respondents: 2,011;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Respondents could select the three most effective strategies against polarisation from a list of strategies for reducing social division with the help of scientific information. Two approaches stand out: Explaining complex issues in an accessible language and uncovering misinformation and myths are each mentioned by most respondents (49 per cent each). Roughly one-third see the objective presentation of risks and uncertainties (35 per cent) or highlighting strategies for solving controversial topics (33 per cent) as additional suitable strategies. 27 per cent of respondents cite creating common factual and knowledge bases as a strategy against polarisation, while just over a quarter consider the use of fact checks and showing different perspectives to be useful.

Interest in science and research

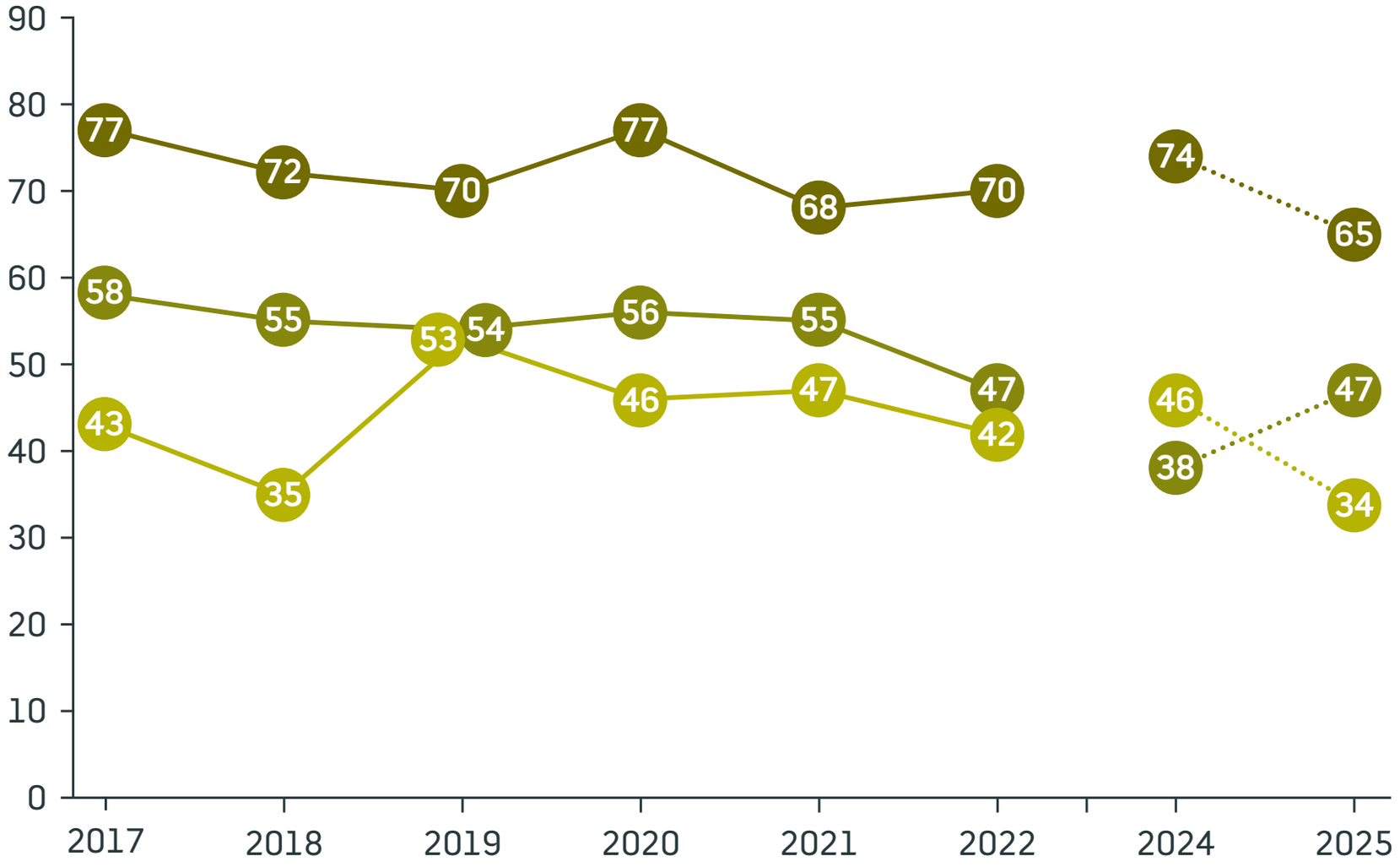


Numbers for 'don't know, missing answer' not shown;
No data collected in 2023;
Minimum of 1,000 respondents each survey wave;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Citizens' interest in science and research has hardly changed in recent years. In the science barometer 2025 – which was conducted via online panel for the first time – just over half of respondents indicate having a great or very great interest in science and research (49 per cent). In this year's telephone reference survey, 51 per cent indicated having a great or very great interest, compared to 53 per cent in the previous year. Slightly more respondents than in the previous year indicated having a moderate interest in science and research (34 per cent). In the telephone reference survey, it was also 33 per cent who answered this way.

It is also apparent in 2025 that men in particular seem interested: 62 per cent indicate having a great or very great interest in science and research. Among women, it is 37 per cent.

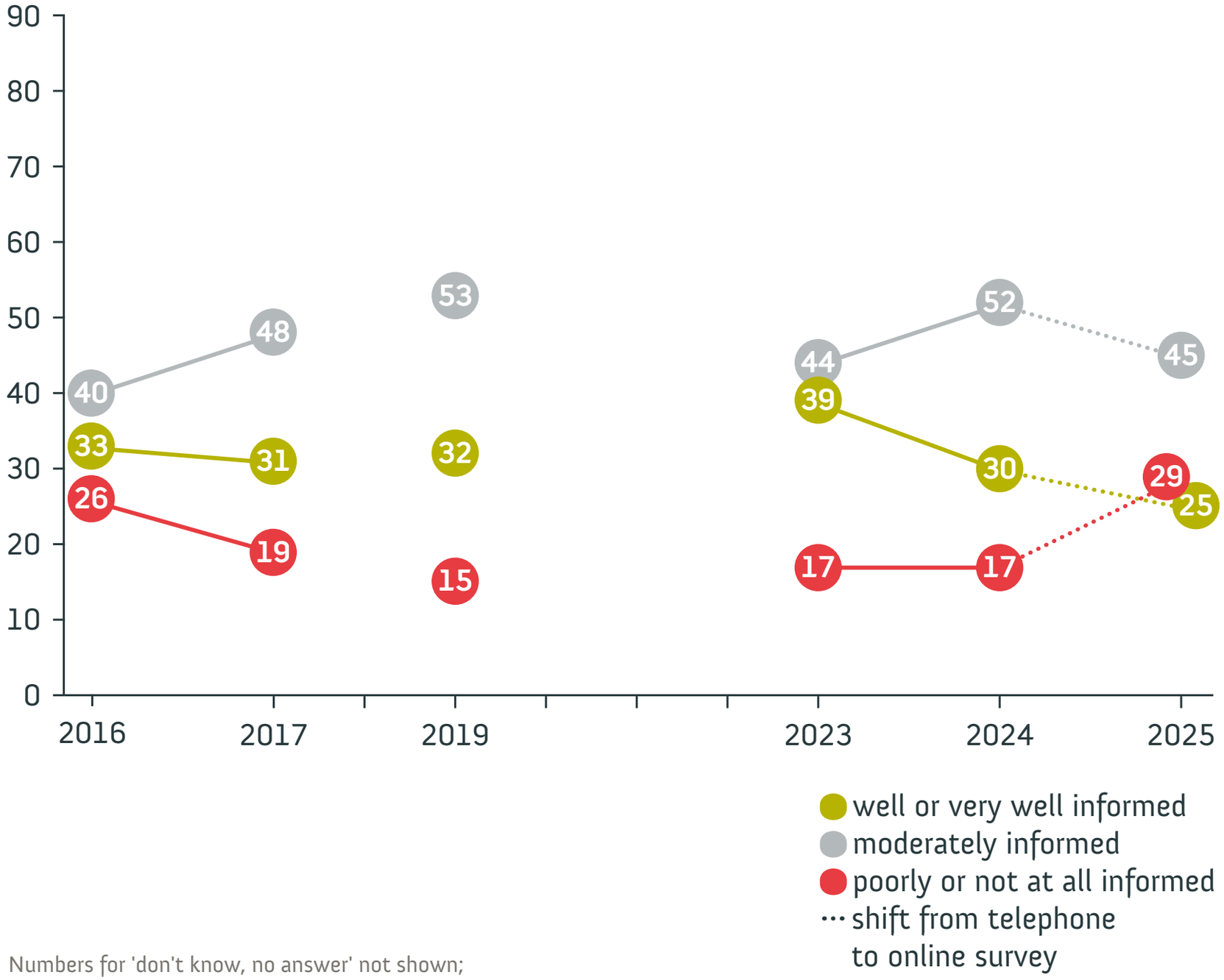
Interest in science and research by level of formal education



Aggregated numbers for strong and very strong interest shown;
Low level of formal education: elementary or lower secondary school;
Medium level of formal education: secondary school without high-school diploma;
High level of formal education: high-school diploma, entrance qualification for university or university of applied science, university degree;
No data collected in 2023;
Minimum of 1,000 respondents each survey;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

With regard to formal education level, differences can also be seen in interest in science and research between distinct groups. As in previous years, interest is most pronounced among respondents with high formal education levels: in 2025, about two-thirds indicate a great or very great interest. Respondents with medium or low formal education levels indicate being interested at a lower rate over the years. Just under half of respondents with medium formal education level and about one in three with low formal education level express a great or fairly great interest in science and research in 2025.

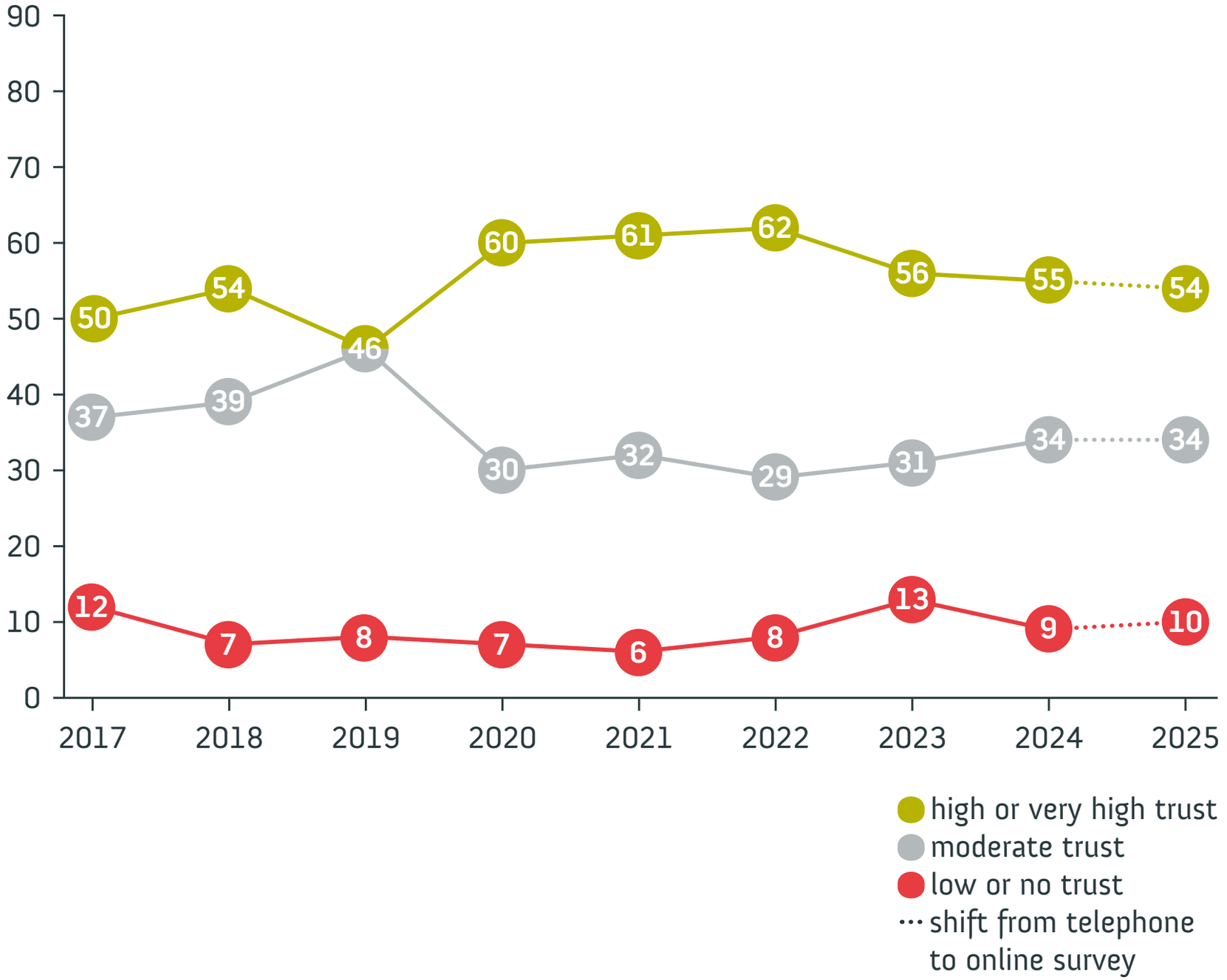
Being informed about new developments in science and research



Numbers for 'don't know, no answer' not shown;
No data collected in 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2022;
Minimum of 1,000 respondents each survey wave;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

One in four respondents indicates in the *science barometer 2025* that they feel well or very well up to date about new developments in science and research. This proportion is identical to this year's telephone reference survey (25 per cent). In the previous year, 30 per cent still felt well or very well informed, and in 2023 it was even 39 per cent. The proportion of respondents who feel poorly or not at all informed has risen to 29 per cent. This proportion is also nearly identical to the telephone reference survey (28 per cent). In previous years, it was below 20 per cent.

Trust in science and research

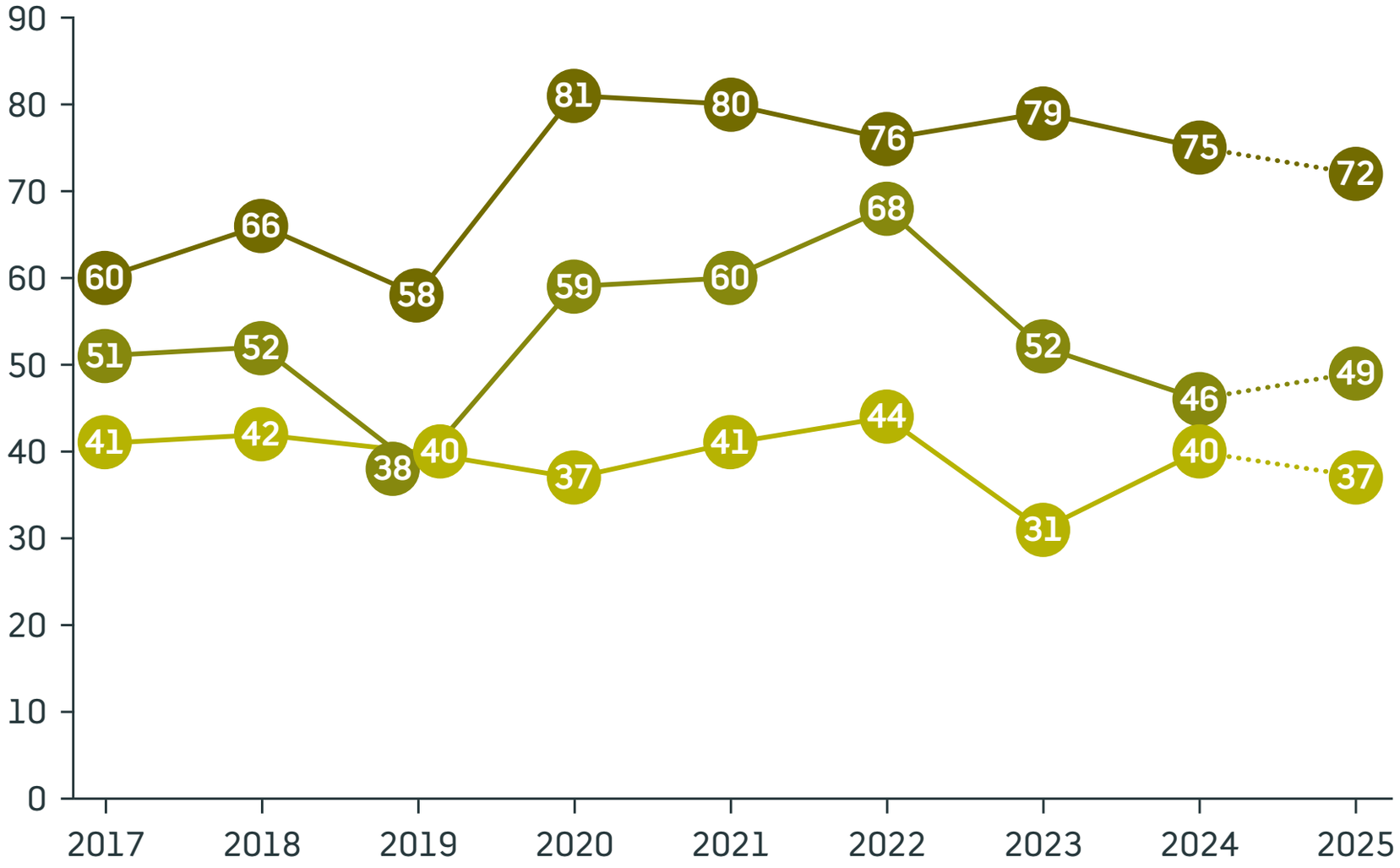


Numbers for 'don't know, no answer' not shown;
Minimum of 1,000 respondents each survey wave;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Trust in science and research remains stable. Also in 2025, slightly more than half of respondents indicate having high or very high trust in science and research (54 per cent). One in ten trusts science and research little or not at all. In the telephone reference survey, 53 per cent said they trusted science and seven per cent had little or no trust.

As in previous years, it is primarily younger people who place a high level of trust in science and research: 68 per cent of those under 30 and 60 per cent of 30–39-year-olds indicate trusting science. Among the older age groups, it is between 46 and 48 per cent of respondents.

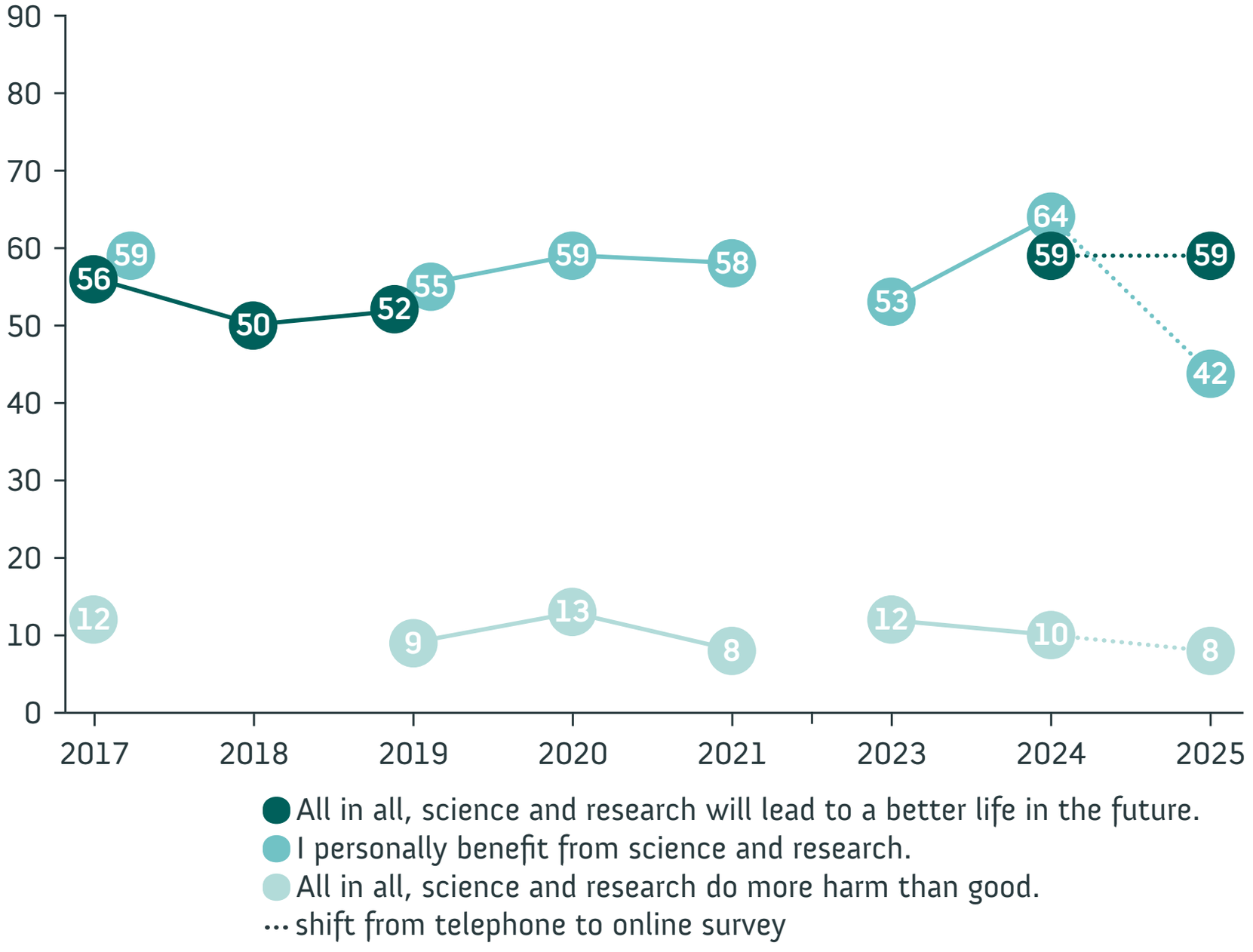
Trust in science and research by level of formal education



Aggregated numbers for high and very high interest shown;
Low level of formal education: elementary or lower secondary school;
Medium level of formal education: secondary school without high-school diploma;
High level of formal education: high-school diploma, entrance qualification for university or university of applied science, university degree;
Minimum of 1,000 respondents each survey;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

As with interest in science and research (pp. 19/20), there are clear differences in trust in science and research with regard to the respondents' formal education level. Among respondents with high formal education levels, 72 per cent this year express high or very high trust. This means this proportion is below 75 per cent for the first time since the outbreak of the coronavirus-pandemic, but is still higher than before 2020. For respondents with medium and low formal education levels, however, the level of trust has returned to the value before the outbreak of the pandemic: 49 per cent of respondents with medium and 37 per cent of respondents with low formal education level indicate trusting science and research in 2025.

Agreement with various statements on the role of science in society

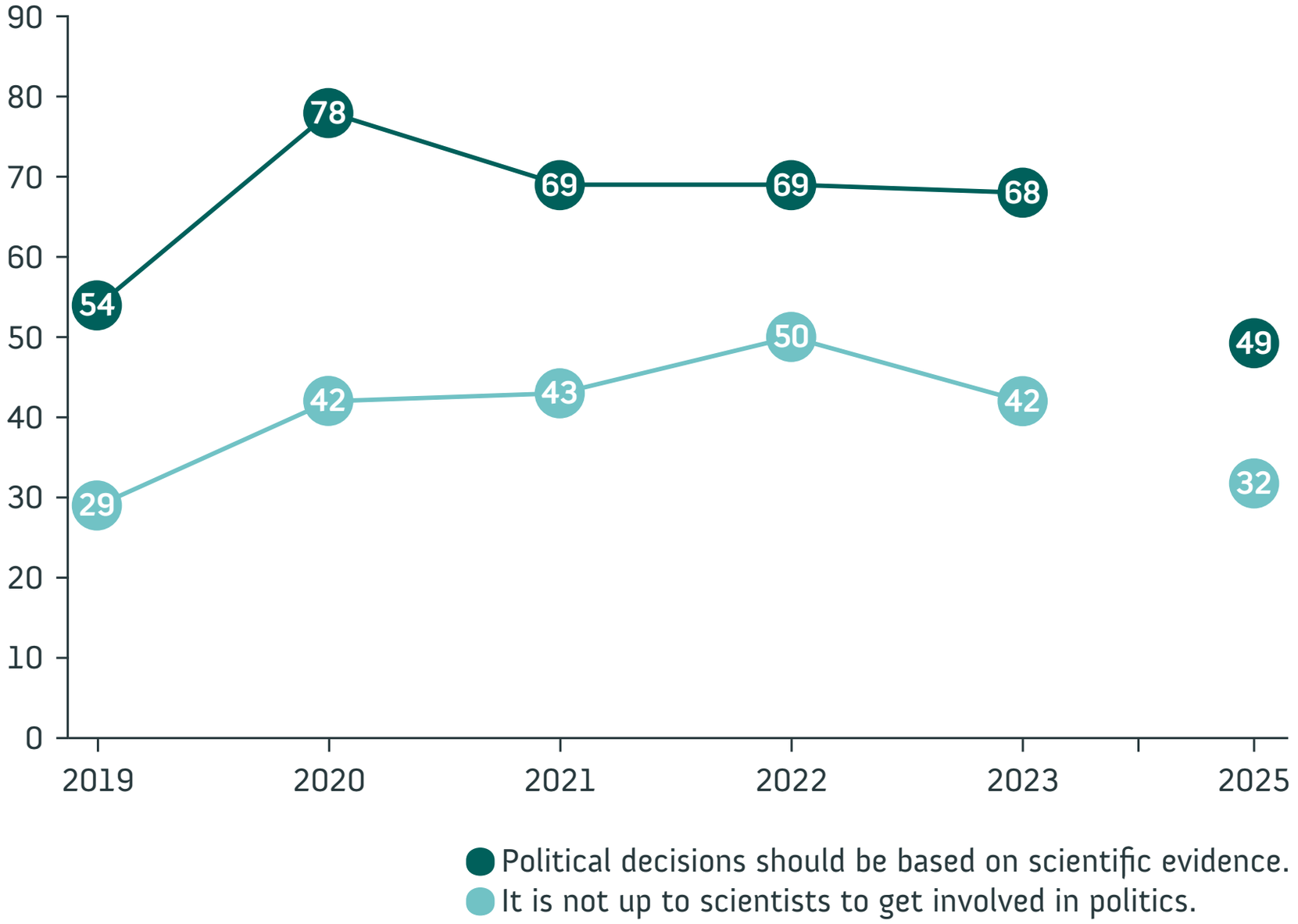


Aggregated numbers for high and very high agreement shown;
Numbers for 'don't know, missing answer' not shown;
Minimum of 1,000 respondents each survey wave;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Only eight per cent of respondents in the *science barometer 2025* indicate that science and research do more harm than good overall. In contrast, 59 per cent say that science and research will lead to a better life overall. These proportions are comparable to those in previous years. A clear difference becomes apparent in respondents' agreement with the statement that they benefit from science and research: While this proportion was at the highest value ever recorded by the *science barometer* at 64 per cent last year, it is only 42 per cent this year in the online sample. In this year's telephone reference survey, 62 per cent of respondents indicated benefiting from science and research. Here, the comparability of results seems to be hampered by the changed survey method.

Looking at different population groups, differences emerge regarding the personal benefits of science: Just over half of those under 40 indicate benefiting from science and research, while it is 37 per cent among the 50–59-year-olds and 33 per cent among respondents aged 60 and over. Formal education also seems to make a difference: 26 per cent of respondents with low formal education levels and 39 per cent of respondents with medium formal education levels agree that they benefit from science and research. Among respondents with high formal education levels, it is 60 per cent.

Agreement with various statements on the relationship between science and politics



Aggregated numbers for high and very high agreement shown;
No data collected in 2024;
Different wording 2020: 'Political decisions *on handling the coronavirus pandemic* should be based on scientific evidence.';
Minimum of 1,000 respondents each survey wave;
Figures are in per cent. Numbers may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Citizens' assessment of the relationship between science and politics this year differs slightly from earlier years: From 2021 to 2023, about two-thirds of respondents believed that political decisions should be based on scientific findings. This year, just under half of respondents agree with this statement. In the telephone reference survey, it was 58 per cent. That it is not the task of scientists to interfere in politics was endorsed by between 42 and 50 per cent from 2020 to 2023. In 2025, only 32 per cent agree with this statement. Comparable to previous years, however, is the proportion in the telephone reference survey: here, 44 per cent agree. This may indicate an influence of data collection on these results.

There are hardly any differences between population groups in agreement with this statement. However, there is a marked difference when asked whether political decisions should be based on scientific findings: Here, the attitudes of respondents with low and high formal education levels differ. Almost two-thirds of respondents with high formal education levels agree, while only one-third of respondents with low formal education levels agree.

Data on the survey design of the science barometer 2025

Representative population survey

Population	Continuing the previously telephone-based science barometer, the survey target group is defined as the German-speaking residential population of the Federal Republic of Germany in private households aged 14 and over. The base population for sample selection consisted of panel members of the Payback Online Panel in the defined age group.
Number of respondents	2,011 respondents
Type and period of the survey	The interviews were computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI – Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) conducted from July 4 to 18, 2025. Programming of the fully structured survey instrument regulated uniform implementation of the surveys.

Sampling

The sample selection for the CAWI survey was based on the quota method. Within the quota method, the base population is divided into different subgroups based on certain predefined characteristics (quotas). The aim of the procedure is for the sample to reflect the defined characteristics of the base population in a certain ratio. In the present study, this was a proportional and thus representative quota approach, meaning that the target size of individual characteristics within the net sample corresponds as closely as possible to the proportion within the base population or survey target group. The target sizes were based on the structural figures of the 2024 Microcensus or the update of the Microcensus from December 31, 2023, and included the characteristics of gender, age, federal state of residence, and school education.

Weighting and representativeness

As part of structural adjustment weighting, possible selectivities due to lack of accessibility or non-response were compensated for. Weighting was performed using the characteristics of federal state, city size, gender, age, employment status, school education, and household size, ensuring that the sample underlying the analysis is representative of the structure of the base population in its composition.

Documentation

The original text of the questionnaire as well as all result tables are available online via the following link: **www.sciencebarometer.com**.

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