

National
Volunteer
Management
Conference

Afternoon keynote
**Raising the profile of
volunteering: what public
attitudes tell us about winning
cross-party support**

Dr. Stuart Fox

Senior Lecturer in Politics
University of Exeter



Volunteering Paradox

Promotion of volunteering one of most efficient things any government can do to achieve widely supported policy goals

➤ Improved healthcare, employment, education, **political participation**

Yet resources are stretched, volunteer numbers are falling

Axe often falls first on support for volunteering, charities etc.

How can we build/protect support for promotion of volunteering?

What does the public think?

I told my friend: “we should find ways to harness public support for volunteering to-”

He said: “what do you mean ‘**public support for volunteering?**’”

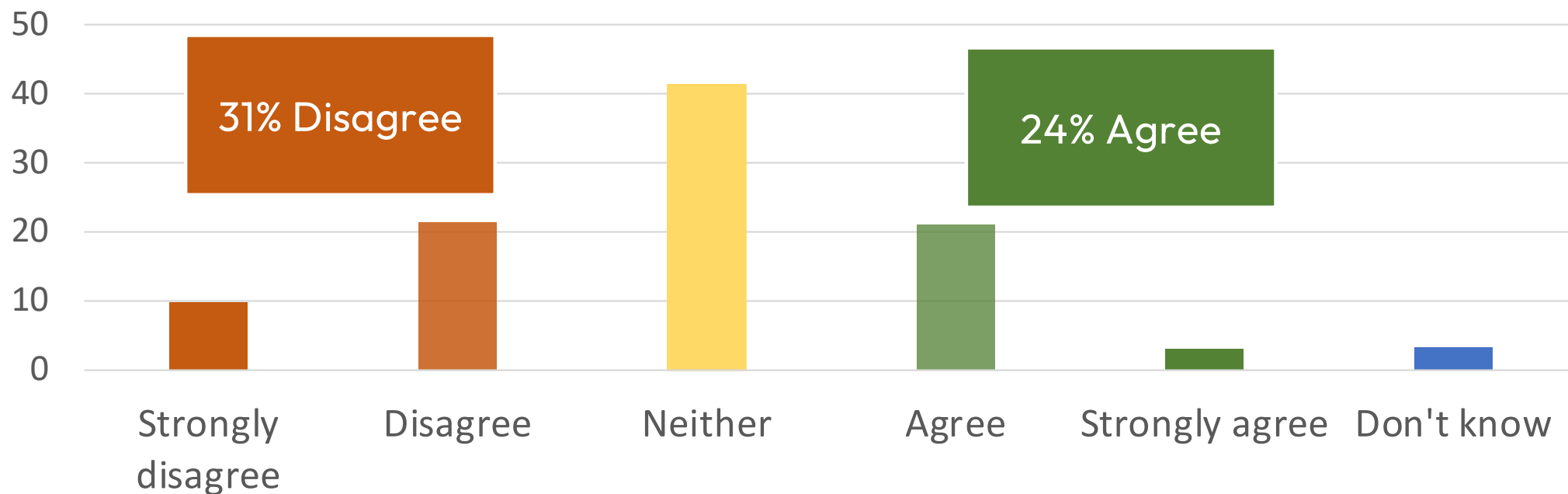
I couldn't answer him!

Lots of research into who volunteers & why, and we **assume** it is highly regarded → but **virtually no data on what public thinks**

Surveyed public opinion (in the UK) about volunteering & studied what changes support for volunteer policies

Most don't see volunteering as a **duty**...

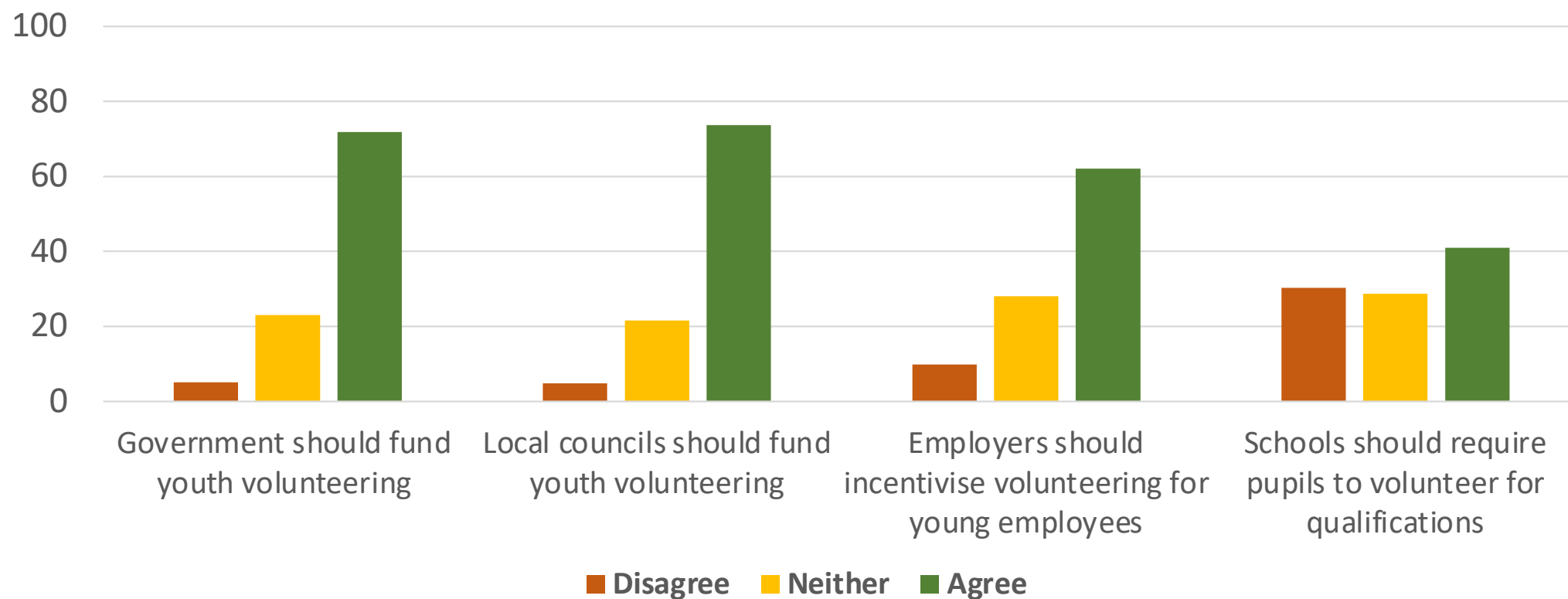
It is every citizen's duty to help their community through volunteering



For comparison, 60% agree that voting in elections is a citizen's duty

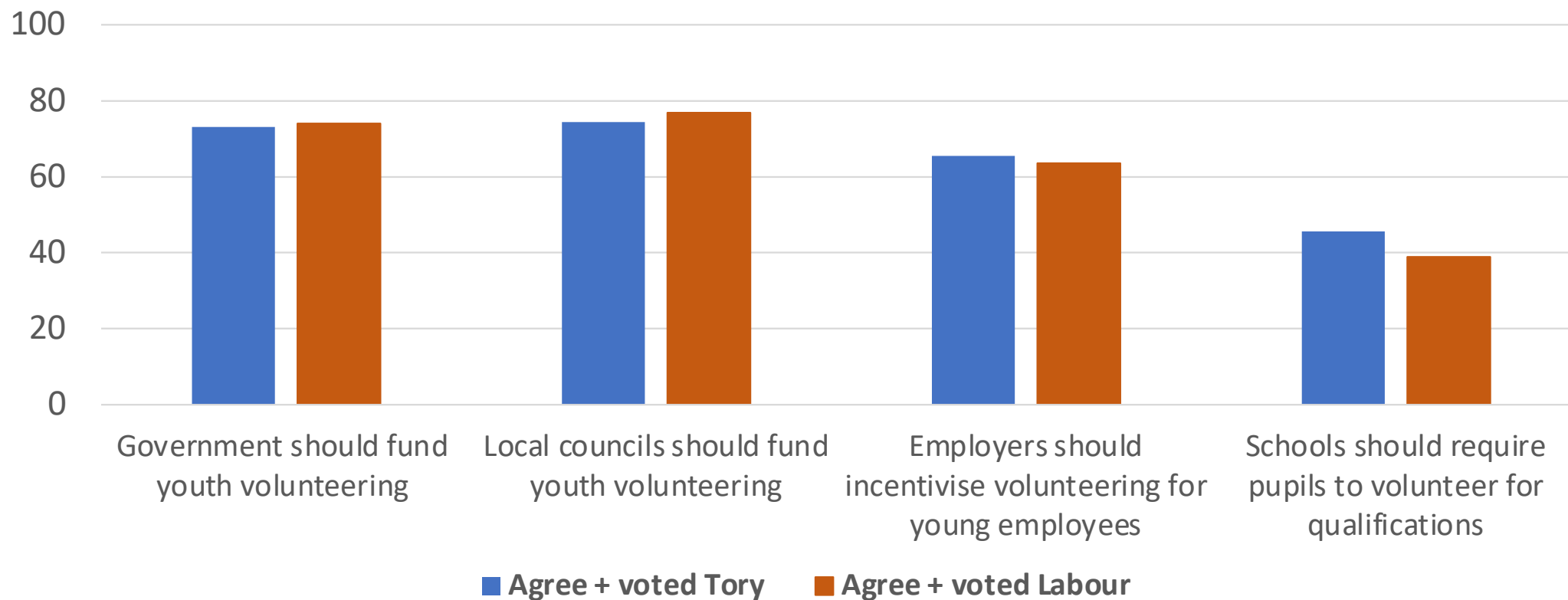
...but support government efforts to **encourage** it

To what extent do you agree with the following policies to promote youth volunteering?



And that supports transcends party lines

To what extent do you agree with the following policies to promote youth volunteering?



Public Opinion & Volunteering

Most see volunteering as a good, but not a duty

- It is **low salience**: valued, beneficial, but not of key importance

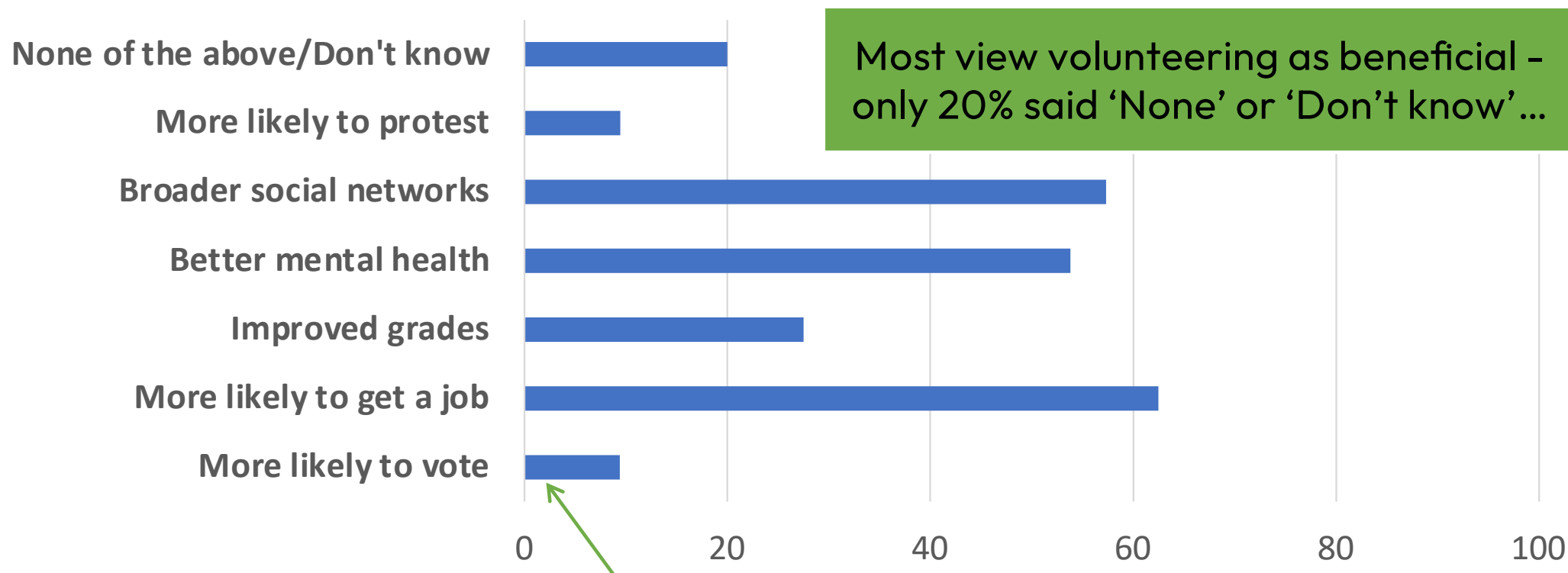
Support for volunteer funding policies is **high & cross-party**

But that doesn't mean people will care if funding is cut or support increased funding

- **Low salience**: there are more important issues to voters
- Example: Labour government scrapped National Citizen Service

Benefits of volunteering are poorly understood

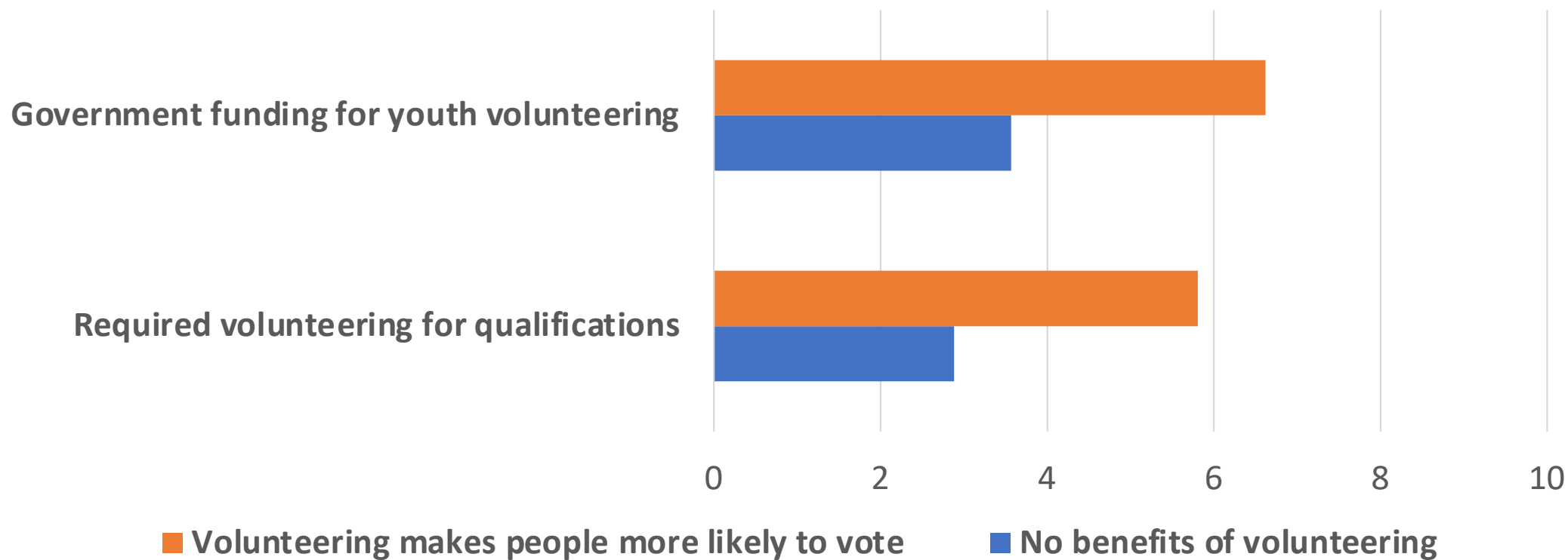
Which of the following are benefits of volunteering for volunteers?



...BUT these are **all evidenced benefits** of volunteering & many don't realise volunteering delivers them

But awareness of benefits increases support

One a scale from 0 to 10, to what extent would you support the following policies to help more young people vote?



Don't get the wrong message!

This doesn't mean that if we educate people about the benefits, support for pro-volunteering policies will increase

The key (once again) is **salience**

- People don't become informed about low salience matters through study, conversation, media etc.
- They rely on **elite cues**: messages from trusted sources of information

What grows support for volunteering?

We measured support for a **national youth volunteer programme** as a way of encouraging youth political engagement

We gave our respondents one of two pieces of information:

- 1) **Polling Data:** more young people vote & they're likely to support a particular party → *“my party is likely to benefit!”*
- 2) **Elite Cue:** political parties support or the policy → *“my party says this policy is a good/bad idea”*

Public Opinion & Volunteering

Elite cues moved opinions; the polling data had **no effect** at all

- People who supported the pro-NCS party became more supportive
- People who opposed the pro-NCS party became more hostile
- This was regardless of their initial support/opposition to the policy

Elite cues are the key to changing public opinion on volunteering

Support for volunteering will be higher if people are more informed about the benefits – but it's **elites** who need to inform them!

We need more **Elite Champions**

Volunteering is widely supported regardless of party politics

➤ **Don't underestimate how rare that is!**

But it is of **low salience**:

- Public aren't well informed of the benefits
- Support unlikely to translate into demand for more funding or resistance to cuts

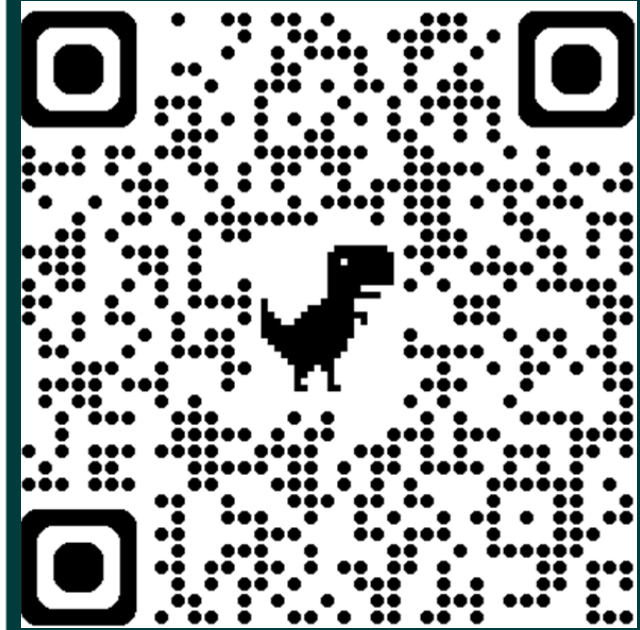
The route to building support and/or defending against cuts runs through **political elites**, not public education or appeals



University
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**Thank you for
listening!**

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S.Fox2@exeter.ac.uk