

# YOUTH SCIENCE SURVEY

Summary Report

Canada Foundation for Innovation

2021-12-03

**INNOVATION**

Canada Foundation  
for Innovation

Fondation canadienne  
pour l'innovation



**Acfas** Faire avancer  
les savoirs

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# Background

Commissioned by the Canada Foundation for Innovation, in partnership with Acfas.

## KEY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- Which sources have the greatest influence on attitudes and behaviours toward science-related issues, with focus on the following topics:
  - COVID-19 vaccine safety
  - sustainability/recycling
  - climate change
  - importance of STEM for the future
- Youth sources of information

# Survey Methodology



## WHO WAS INTERVIEWED? AND HOW?

- A nationally representative sample of Canadian youth ages 18-24.
  - A total of n=1500 youth were surveyed.
  - The data has been weighted by age, gender, and region to reflect Statistics Canada 2016 Census data.
  - The data was collected online via panel.



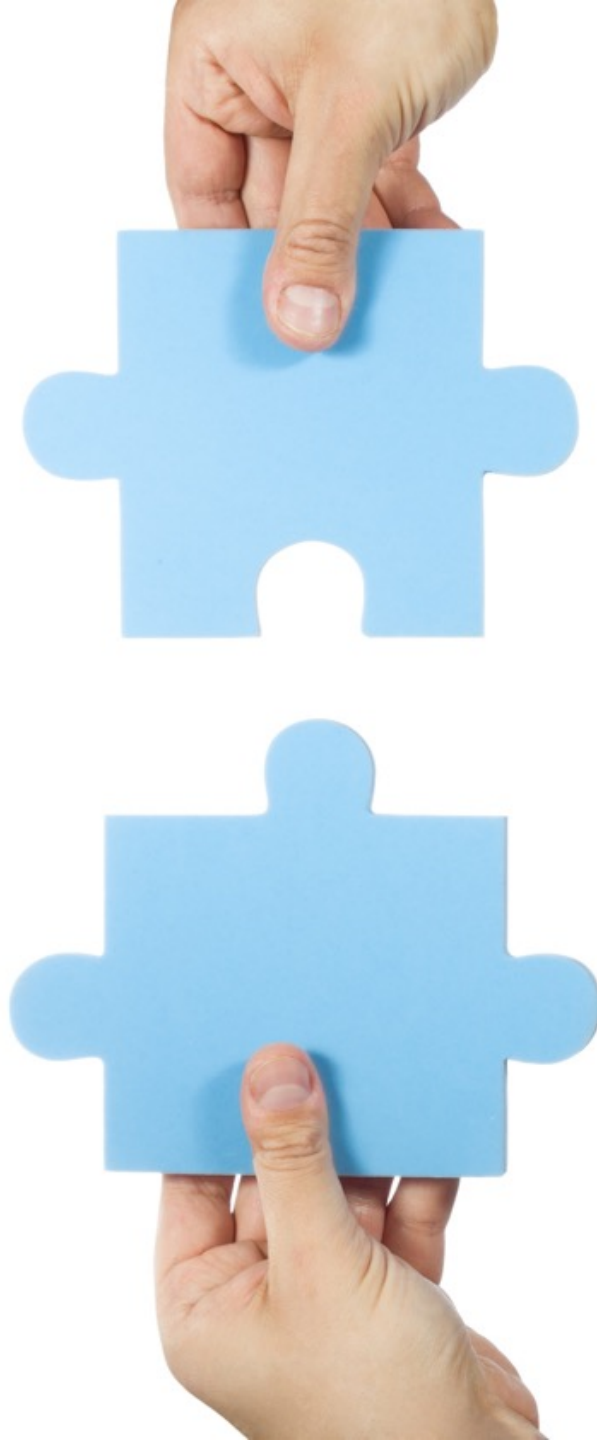
## FIELDWORK DATES

- October 12 to 26, 2021



# KEY FINDINGS





# science matters

## Majorities of youth hold opinions consistent with science...

- COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are safe
- Single use plastics should be banned
- Curbing the use of fossil fuels will help reduce the impacts of climate change
- Critical for Canadian politicians and governments to rely on science when making policy decisions

## Yet: belief in science is not consensual



# influences

## **...but many are influenced by other factors**

May hold views that are consistent with science despite coming across influences that are NOT aligned with science

Youth navigate a very diverse information ecosystem: social media, peers and people around them, news and media, as well as being informed by their own beliefs or culture





# influencers

## **Social media influencers holding anti-science views are prevalent and pervasive**

73% of youth follow at least one social media influencer that has expressed anti-science views\*

\*Represents the calculated aggregate “agree” score across 3 statements: “At least one of the influencers I follow...”

- ...has expressed the view COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are not safe or not safe for certain people (within the approved age group of 12 and up
- ...has expressed climate change is not the result of human behaviours and activities
- ...argues against using single-use plastic



# at risk

**Young males are at greater risk of being exposed to, and support, views that do not align with science**

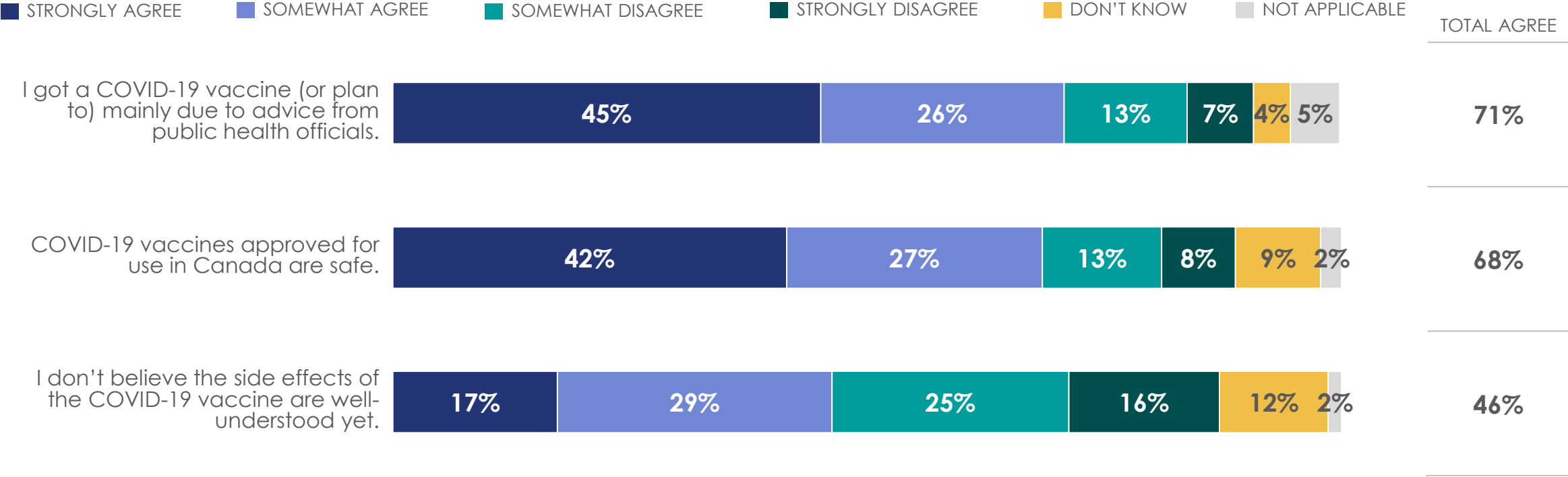
- So are those with less formal education or with less educated parents
- And those who are more religious



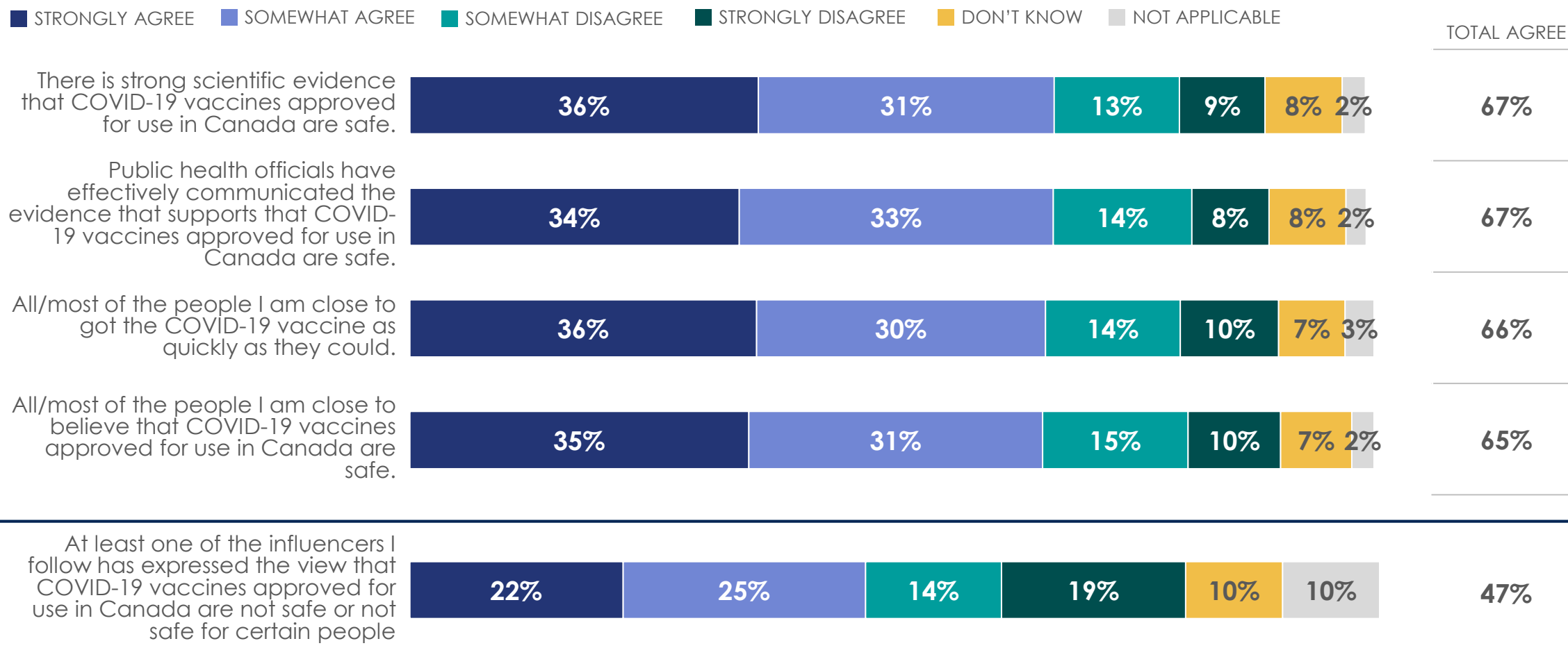
# OVERVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE



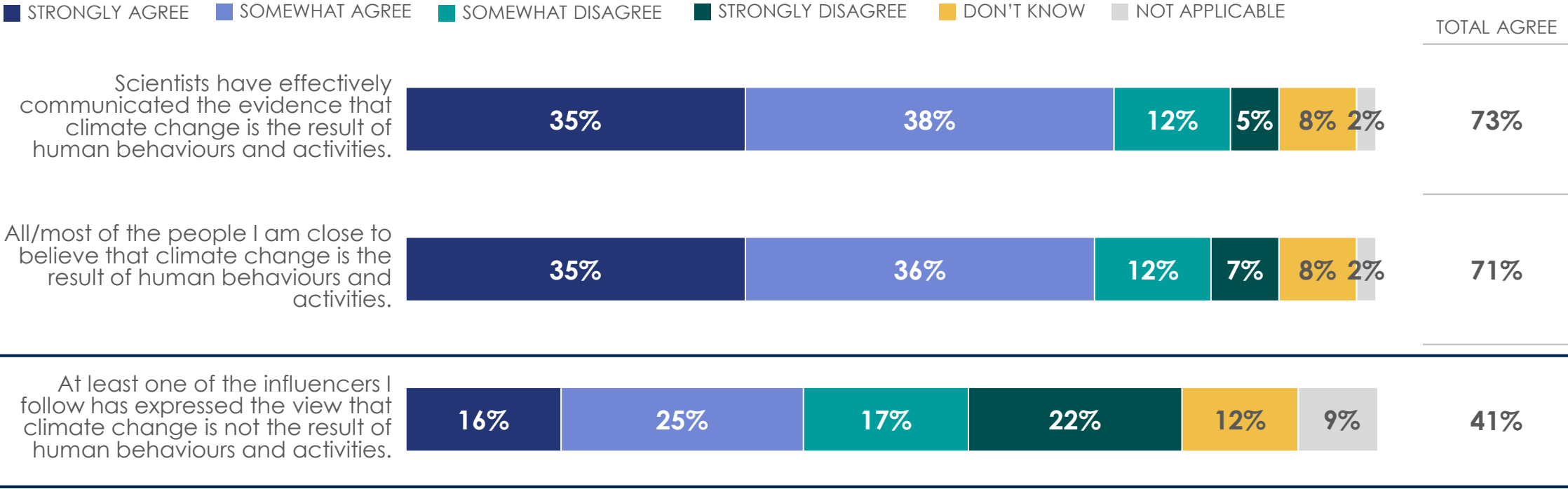
# A majority of Canadian youth believe COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are safe... but not all is good



# Canadian youth and their sources of influence share similar views regarding the COVID-19 vaccine... but not all



# Youth and their social circles also share similar views on climate change. But once again, influencers can play a negative role



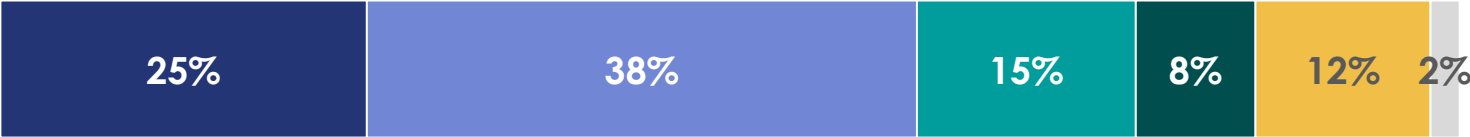


# Most Canadians youth acknowledge the value of STEM, even if it may not be their intended career path.

■ STRONGLY AGREE  
 ■ SOMEWHAT AGREE  
 ■ SOMEWHAT DISAGREE  
 ■ STRONGLY DISAGREE  
 ■ DON'T KNOW  
 ■ NOT APPLICABLE

TOTAL AGREE

In the coming decade, good-paying jobs will increasingly require an understanding of science, technology, engineering and/or math.



63%

I am pursuing or would like to pursue a career that requires a background in STEM.



46%

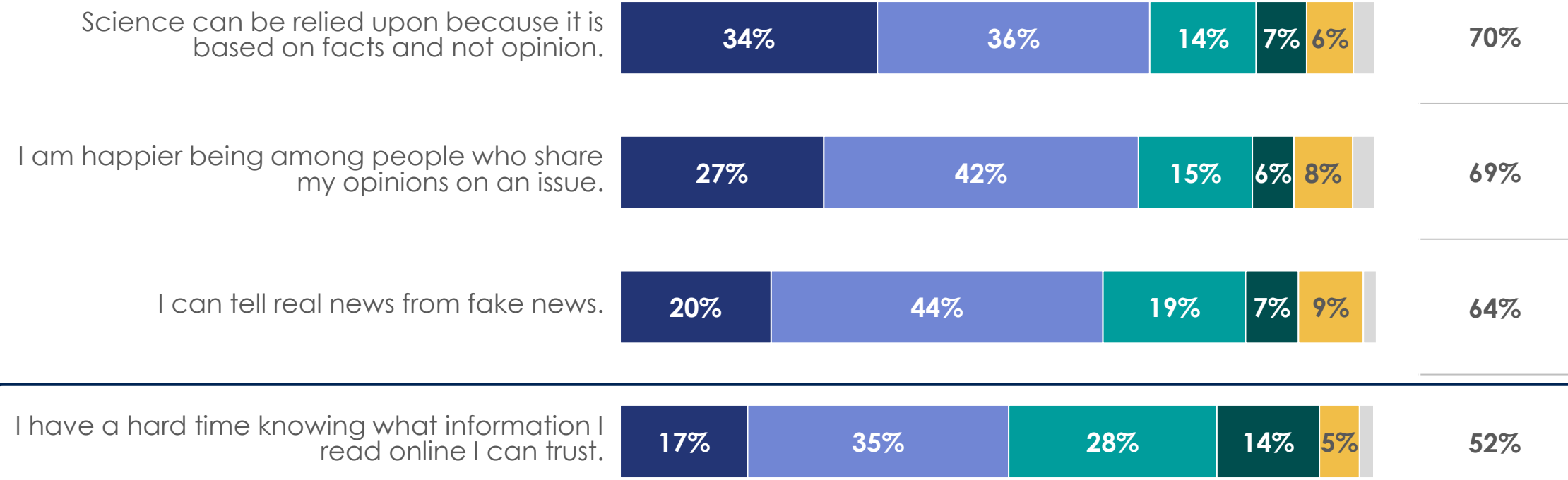
*Do you think that science is a good field for people in your age group to go into as a career?*

**77% YES**

# Youth trust science and are confident in their ability to tell real from fake news... until they have to?

■ STRONGLY AGREE  
 ■ SOMEWHAT AGREE  
 ■ SOMEWHAT DISAGREE  
 ■ STRONGLY DISAGREE  
 ■ DON'T KNOW  
 ■ NOT APPLICABLE

TOTAL AGREE

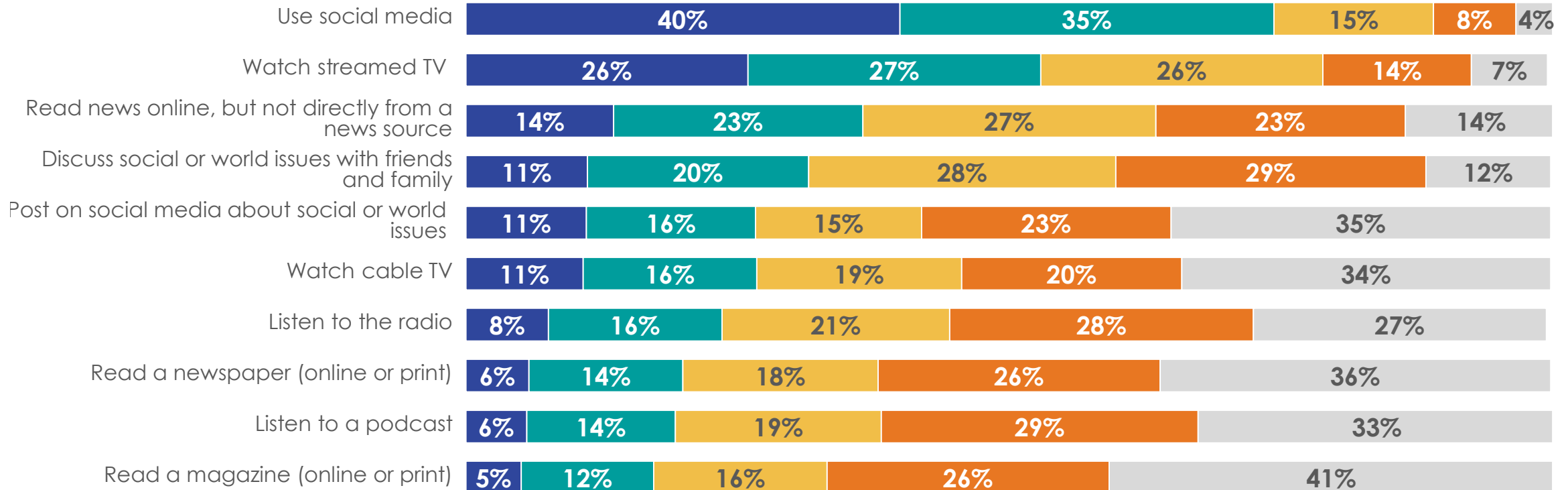


Percentages 4% and below not labelled.

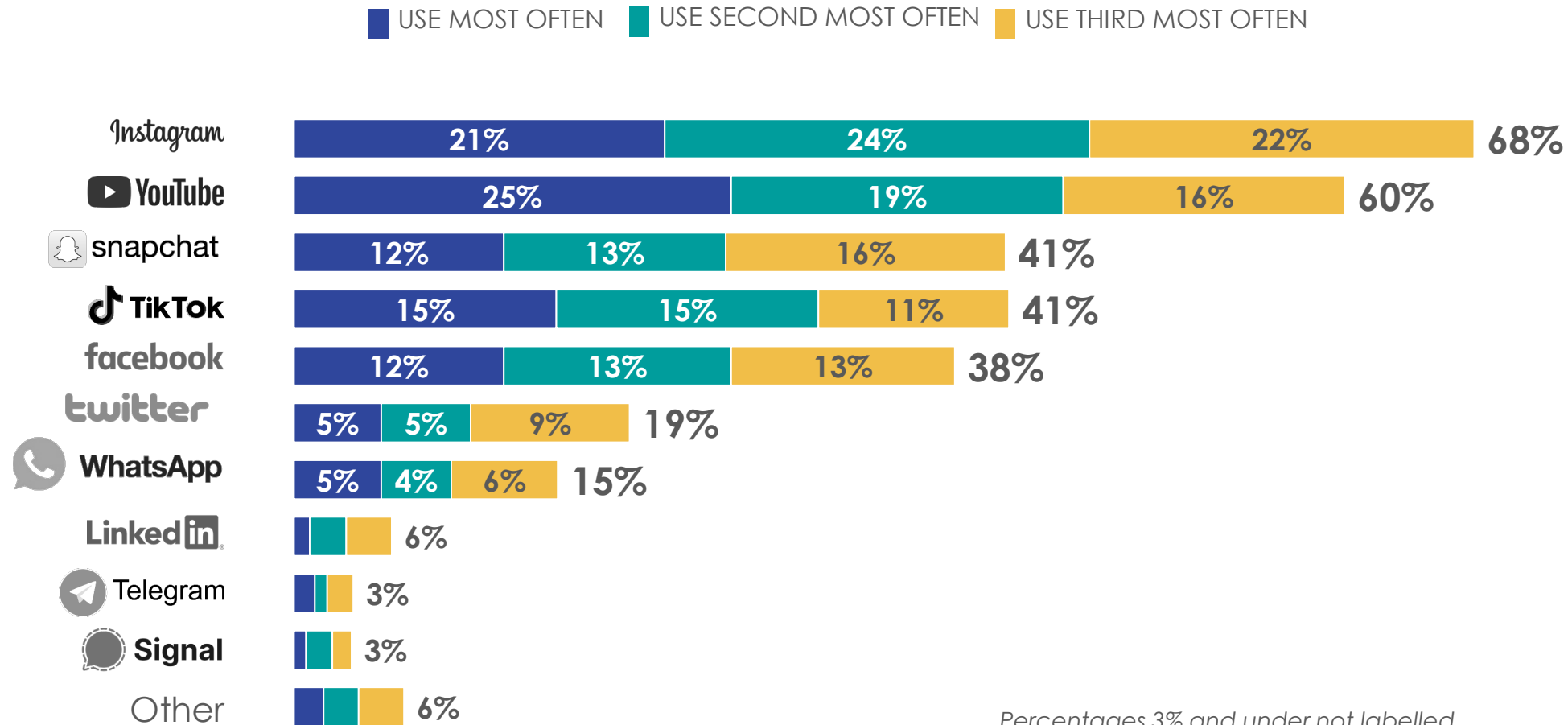


# Social media rules the day; nearly all Canadian youth are using it at least every day.

■ EVERYDAY FOR 4 HOURS OR MORE   
 ■ EVERYDAY FOR LESS THAN 4 HOURS   
 ■ SEVERAL DAYS PER WEEK   
 ■ ONCE OR TWICE PER WEEK OR LESS   
 ■ NEVER



# Canadian youth favour Instagram and YouTube, eschew Facebook.





# SEGMENTING YOUTH ON VIEWS OF SCIENCE



# PROMOTES SCIENCE

Science advocate, interested and believes in climate change

17%

## KEY DIFFERENTIATORS

- Consensus around the importance of science to lead social policy
- Consensus around the importance of science for the future
- 2 out 3 are pursuing a career in STEM
- Can tell real from fake news & valid science from pseudoscience
- Surrounds themselves with like-minded people

Moving Forward: **EMPOWER**

# TRUSTS SCIENCE

Struggles to be independent, leans toward science despite outside pressures

22%

## KEY DIFFERENTIATORS

- Science is a good field for a career
- Believes that a scientifically proven fact is the truth
- Feel pressure to express same opinions as family and friends
- Hesitant to correct someone who holds an inaccurate view
- Embarrassed when people know more about a topic

Moving Forward: **ENCOURAGE**

# FOLLOWS SCIENCE

Intimidated by science, but trust what scientists and news media say about it



20%

## KEY DIFFERENTIATORS

- Opinions generally align with science
- More likely to read articles and coverage in the news media
- Least likely to discuss social or world issues with family or friends
- Most likely to admit they may not be able to tell valid science from pseudoscience
- Are not good at math

Moving forward: **EDUCATE**



# QUESTIONS SCIENCE

Questions science, independent thinker who looks at all sides of an issue

16%

## KEY DIFFERENTIATORS

- Only 6 in 10 agree COVID-19 vaccines approved in Canada are safe
- Believe scientific proof doesn't equal truth
- Uses intuition to make personal decisions
- Don't feel pressure to express the same opinions as family or friends
- Confident they can tell real news from fake news

Moving forward: **CONNECT**

# MAY IGNORE SCIENCE

May not even listen to the science, follows those who have influence in their life



25%

## KEY DIFFERENTIATORS

- Least likely to support science-led views
- Most likely to feel pressure to hold same opinions as family and friends
- Least able to determine real news from fake news
- Most likely to follow someone on social media who has anti-science views

Moving forward: **INFORM**

## In conclusion... from the words of a respondent



*I think that science should continue to try to make efforts for information to be deliverable **to people with different education backgrounds**. At the end of the day, if the only people reading journal articles about climate change are the people who can understand the material, how many people are you reaching?*

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