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Empower communities. Empower yourself.

From Invisibility to Inclusion:
6th Wakamoso and Mams Radio Survey
Social Cohesion



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Acknowledgements



This **sixth Community Voices survey** was made possible through the ongoing partnership between Wakamoso and Mams Radio 92.9. The study reflects a shared commitment to inclusive, evidence-based community development and people-centred leadership grounded in lived experience.

Wakamoso Africa extends sincere appreciation to Mams Radio, including Sam Nkosi (DJ), and to the network of Wakamoso Trailblazers, whose efforts, trusted local relationships and on-the-ground presence helped ensure that the voices captured reflect the everyday realities, concerns & aspirations of community members.

We also acknowledge the Community Policing Forum (CPF) and the GBV Brigade, with whom Malusi Mazibuko on the Wakamoso team have begun constructive engagements. Their openness to dialogue and future collaboration is deeply valued. We hope the findings in this report strengthen their ongoing work and contribute to longer-term, data-driven partnerships that support safety, justice, and community wellbeing.

Our gratitude further extends to the 235 respondents - young people, community members & local trailblazers - who took the time to share their experiences and perspectives on safety, trust, inclusion & leadership.

Together, these contributions form part of a growing national conversation on social cohesion and the renewal of community-centred leadership in South Africa.

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Executive Summary

Wakamoso Trailblazer's Social Cohesion & Agency Insights

- This study provides a grounded, community-level picture of social cohesion, agency & everyday risk across households participating in this study, drawing on respondents' lived experiences
- The findings show that social cohesion in many communities remains surprisingly resilient, even under conditions of economic pressure & chronic stress
- Many respondents report strong support networks, a sense of belonging & willingness to work together, indicating that mutual care and collective identity persist despite hardship



Executive Summary

Wakamoso Trailblazer's Social Cohesion & Agency Insights

- However, the analysis reveals a critical distinction between economic strain and direct harm
- While lack of work, income insecurity & difficulty affording essentials are widespread and strongly associated with reduced wellbeing, these pressures do not uniformly undermine trust, belonging or participation
- In contrast, exposure to direct harm - particularly GBV, coercive debt practices & problematic gambling or substance use - has a far more corrosive effect
 - These risks are associated with sharp declines in both personal agency (the belief that one can influence one's life) & social cohesion, overwhelming the informal support systems that otherwise help communities cope



Executive Summary

Wakamoso Trailblazer's Social Cohesion & Agency Insights

- Importantly, the data shows that agency remains present even under strain, but it does not always convert into improved wellbeing or opportunity
 - Many people continue to express determination & belief in their own capacity to act, yet where harm & insecurity are present, this agency is suppressed or blocked
 - This finding aligns with Amartya Sen's capability framework and underscores a key policy insight: strengthening social cohesion alone is not sufficient
 - If people are not protected from acute risks such as violence, intimidation & exploitative practices, agency cannot translate into participation, resilience or development
- Overall, the findings point to a clear implication for policymakers & practitioners: interventions that reduce harm & protect safety are foundational, not complementary
 - Addressing GBV, gambling-related harm & coercive financial stress is essential to unlocking the full developmental potential of existing community cohesion & individual agency



Introduction & Purpose

This survey forms part of the 26-episode Community Voices series on Mams Radio 92.9

Every second week, the local Wakamoso team runs a community survey on topics identified by the community themselves, helping us listen more carefully to everyday life in Mamelodi & beyond

The responses shape the weekly radio conversations, where residents, local leaders & listeners reflect together on what is happening in their community

This survey focuses on **social cohesion**

As we enter 2026, we ask how people experience connection, trust & belonging and how these shape the kind of community we want to live in and raise our children in

The purpose of this Social Cohesion survey is to:

- Capture how respondents experience their quality of life, sense of agency & ability to influence their circumstances
- Understand levels of social support, trust, mutual help & everyday cooperation
- Explore experiences of belonging, inclusion, respect & safety across different groups
- Assess participation, collective action & willingness to work together
- Reflect how risk, stress & everyday pressures may affect trust and cohesion
- Provide a community-level snapshot to inform weekly radio dialogue

This is not a full academic study - it is a community pulse check, based only on the responses received

The findings reflect the views & experiences of the respondents who completed the survey



Methodology

The survey was conducted in two phases

PHASE 1: MAMELODI TRAILBLAZERS

- Distributed only to registered Wakamoso Trailblazers in Mamelodi to gather the first wave of local insights

PHASE 2: WIDER COMMUNITY

- Later the survey was opened to the broader Wakamoso community

All responses were captured via the Wakamoso WhatsApp platform and visualised in the Wakamoso analytics platform

235 responses were analysed for this report

Survey Results

- This Social Cohesion survey brings together the lived experiences of respondents from Mamelodi and the broader Wakamoso community, focusing on how people experience everyday life, relationships & connection
- Across themes of quality of life, social support, trust, belonging, participation & inclusion, respondents share what helps communities hold together and where strain or disconnection is being felt
- These results go beyond numbers, reflecting how people experience care, cooperation, respect & support PLUS pressures that shape daily interactions with community
- This report shares respondent views - who they can rely on, how safe & respected they feel, whether they belong and how willing people are to work together to build the kind of community we want to live in

Structuring the Analysis

- After the respondent profile, the analysis uses factor analysis to group related survey questions into dimensions of social cohesion
 - Rather than analysing each question in isolation, this approach allows us to understand how experiences cluster together in people's lived realities
- Four core factors emerged and are examined in sequence:

1. Inclusion, Belonging & Respectful Coexistence

- How people experience belonging, shared identity, inclusion across difference, trust, safety & everyday coexistence
- Respect across backgrounds
- Treatment of foreign nationals & minority groups
- Feeling of belonging & pride
- Peaceful conflict & trust in others

2. Support Networks & Day-to-Day Social Safety

- Who people can rely on emotionally & practically and how everyday pressures stretch these support systems
- People to talk to, rely on or ask for help
- Emotional & short-term practical support
- Safety, kindness & affordability stress clustering

3. Household Harm & Coercive Risk Exposure

- Forms of harm that place intense strain on households & undermine safety, trust and cohesion.
- Gambling-related harm
- Alcohol or drug-related harm
- Intimidation or coercion around debt repayment
- GBV indicators leaning into this space

4. Personal Agency (Capability)

- People's belief in their ability to make choices & influence the direction of their lives
- Sense of control & influence over circumstances
- Ability to act, even when facing challenges
- "Living my best life possible" sitting nearby, but more weakly

- Bringing the factors together
 - Final section collates factors into a matrix & profiles different agency pathways, showing how the same community conditions affect people differently
 - This allows us to move beyond averages and identify: Who is coping + Who is trying but blocked + Who is supported but stuck + Who is at serious risk
 - This structure explains why social cohesion, agency & wellbeing do not always move in the same direction and where targeted action matters most

Respondent Overview & Overall Happiness

This section provides an overview of the **people who took part in the Social Cohesion survey**

Understanding who responded - their age, gender & employment situation - helps us place the findings that follow in context

These characteristics shape how people experience belonging, trust, support, participation & everyday pressures in their communities

The profiles shown here reflect a **range of life stages and day-to-day realities**, offering important insight into **how social cohesion is experienced across different circumstances**

As in all the Wakamoso survey – the first question relates to happiness

This overview does not aim to represent the whole community

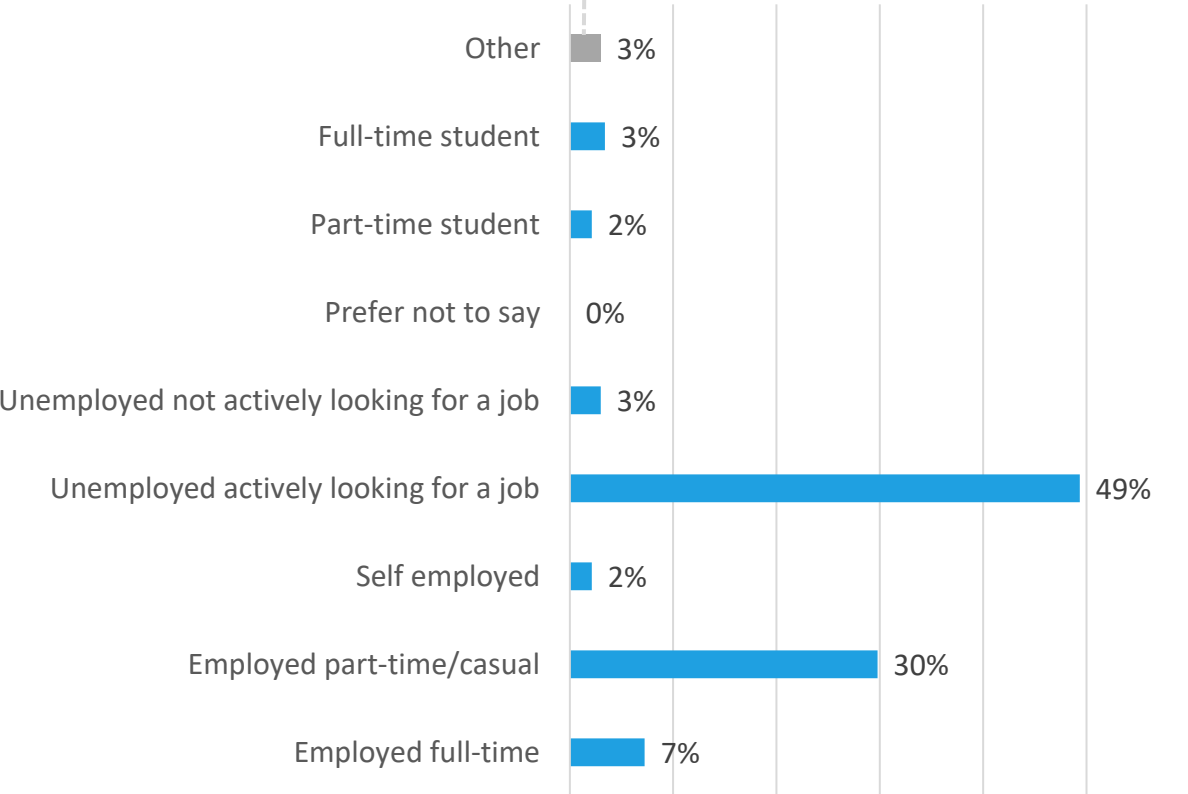
Rather, it helps us understand whose voices are reflected in this pulse check & how their lived realities inform the findings shared in the rest of the report



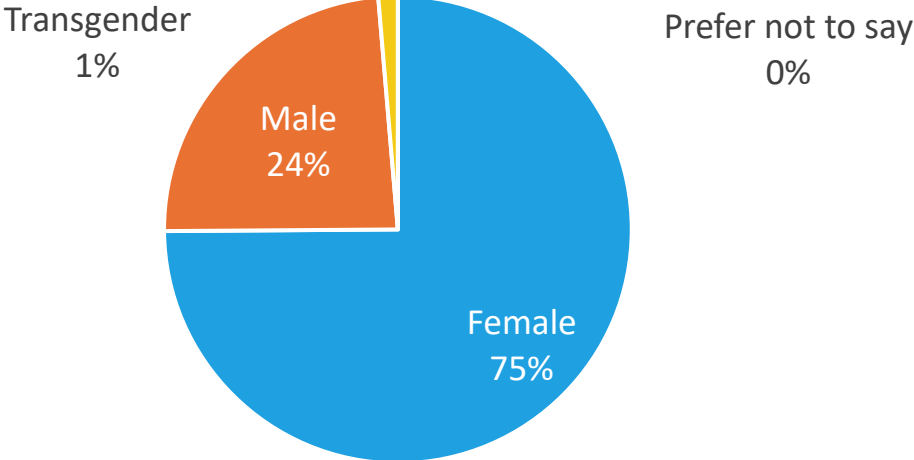
Respondents

Employment status

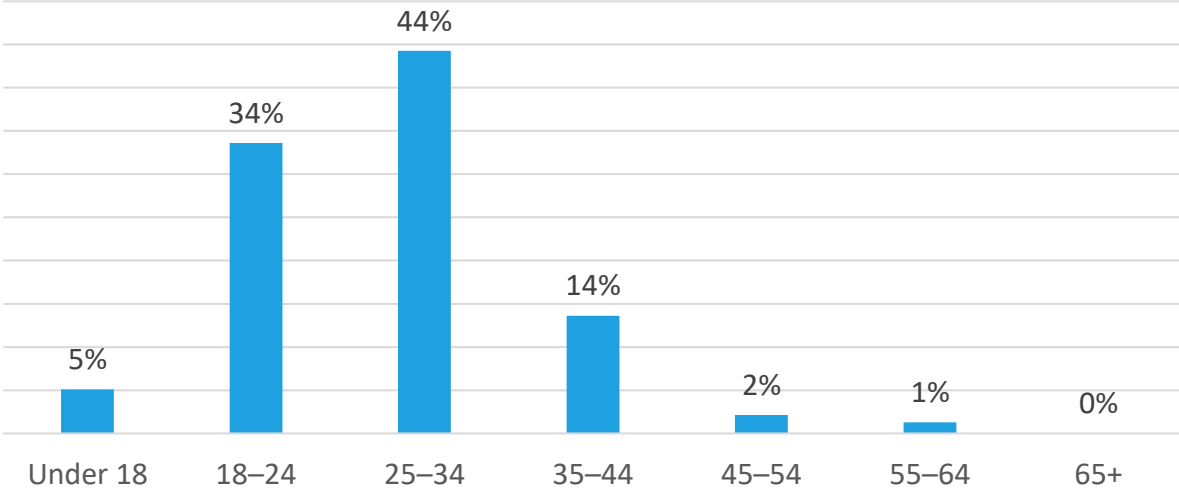
Most “Other” responses include learnerships or training programmes, contract or temporary work and recent matriculants waiting for admission to varsity



Gender



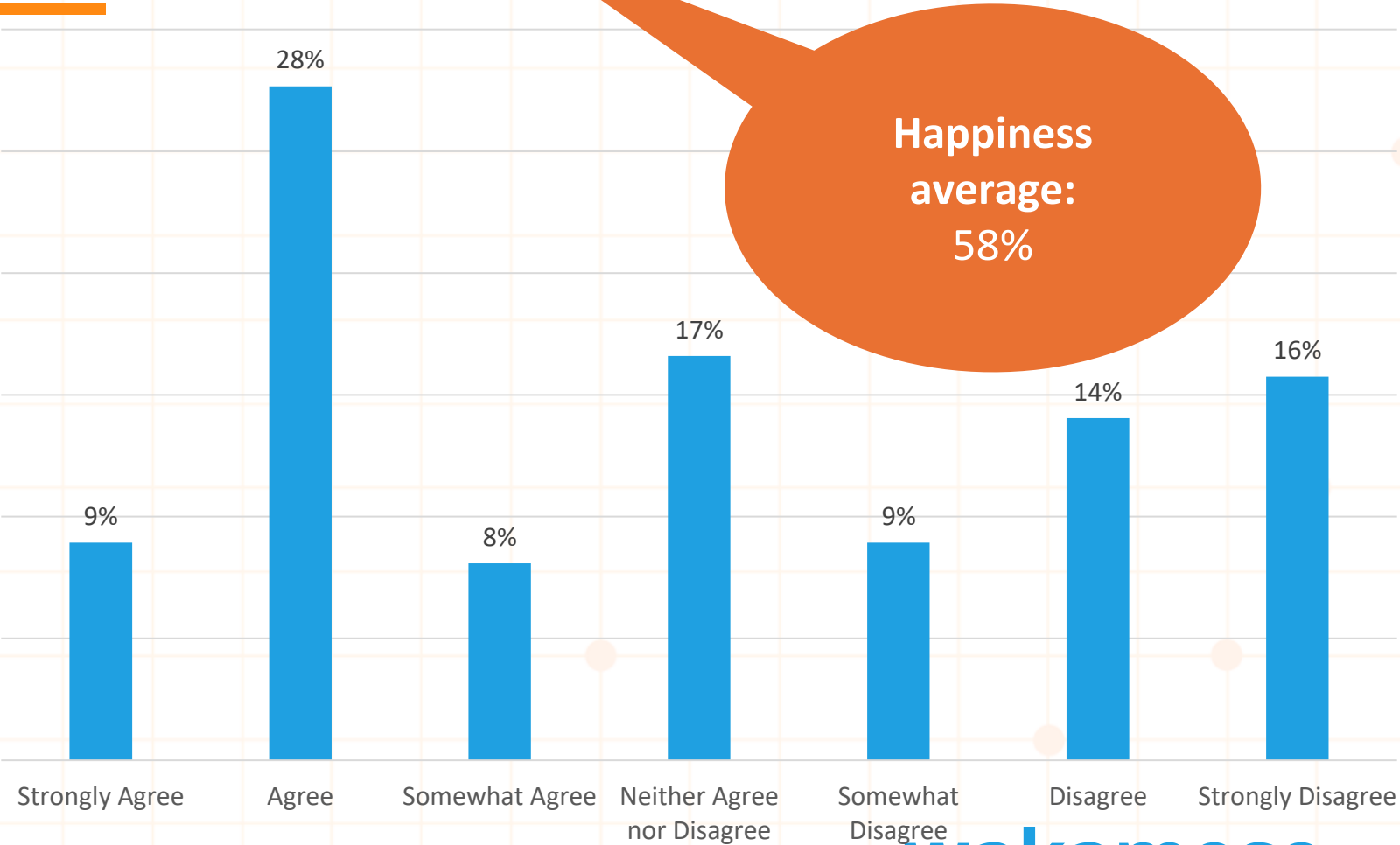
Age



Happiness



I am leading my best life possible



FACTOR 1: Inclusion + Belonging + Respectful coexistence

Respect across backgrounds, treatment of foreign nationals & minority groups, feeling you belong, pride and peaceful conflict

Factor 1 shows that social cohesion in this community is **emotionally strong but structurally fragile**

- People largely feel they belong, value inclusion & are willing to act together
- Mutual care is reliable in moments of crisis & norms of peaceful coexistence exist
- However, everyday trust, consistent safety & confidence in institutions are uneven

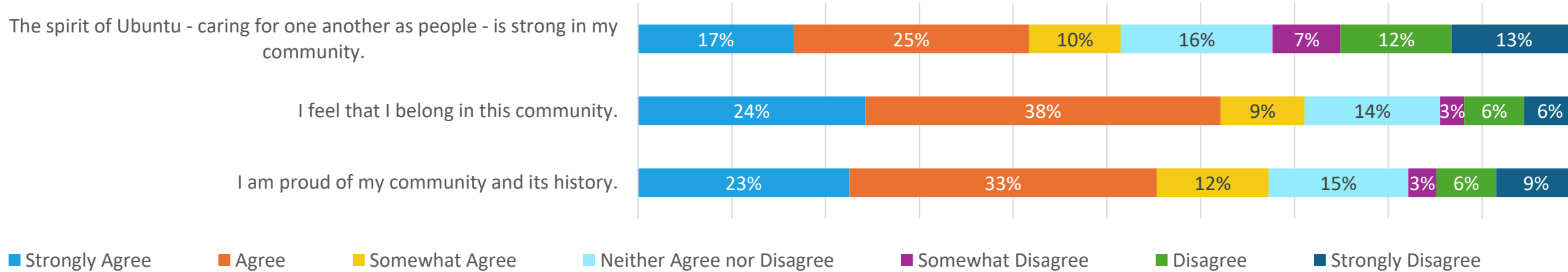
Cohesion here is REAL but it **depends heavily on people rather than systems**



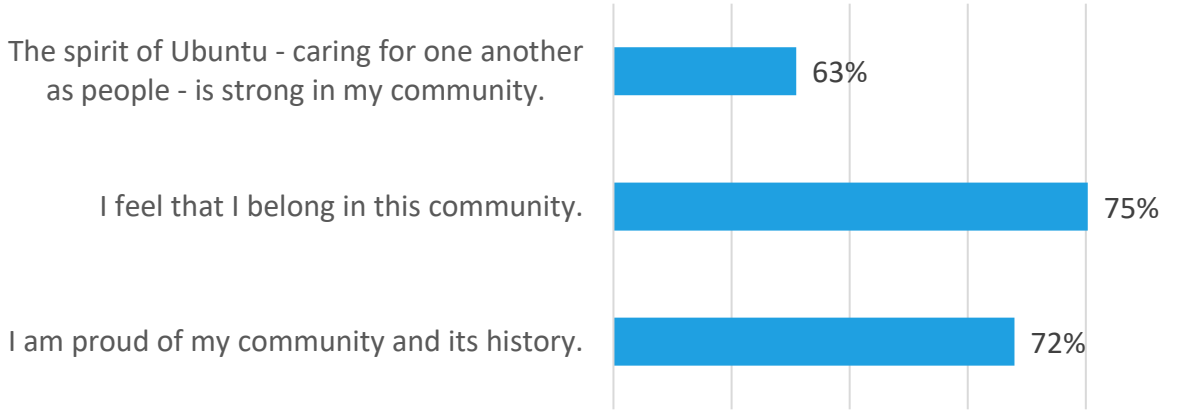
Belonging & Shared Identity

“Do I feel that this is my community?”

Nuance



Mean

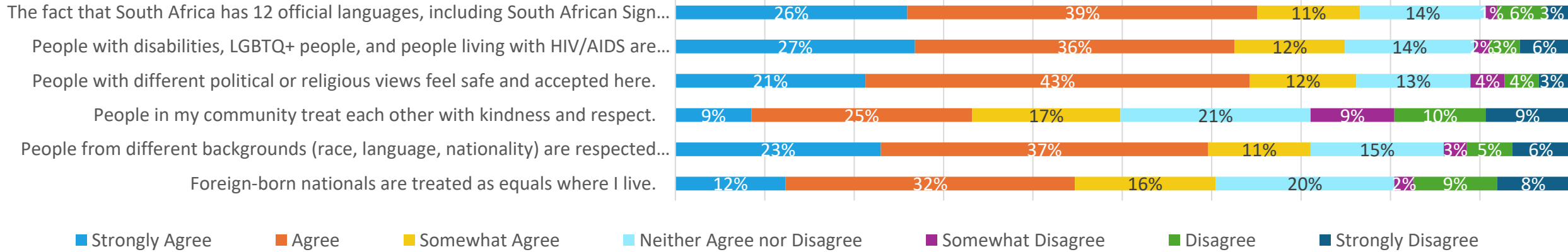


- Most respondents feel a strong sense of belonging and pride in their community
- However, the experience of Ubuntu is more uneven, suggesting that shared identity is strong in principle but not always consistently felt in everyday life

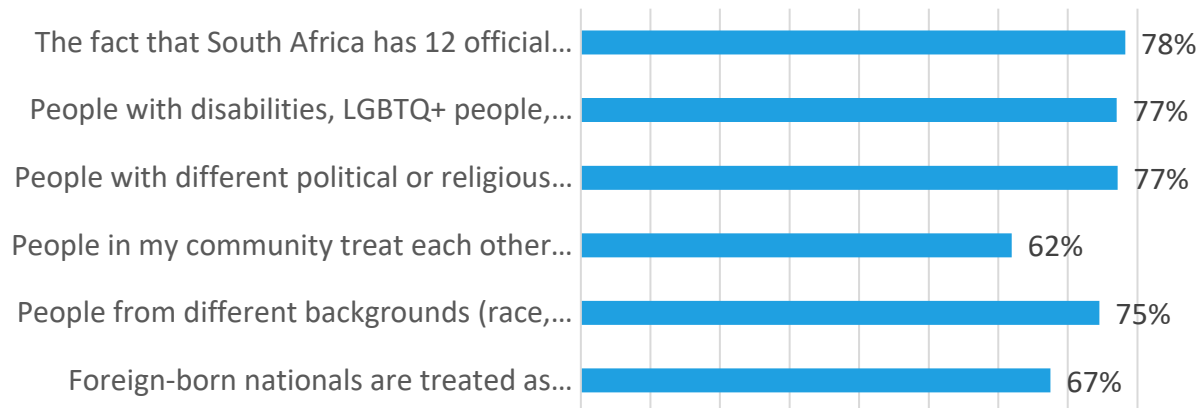
Inclusion, Equality & Respect Across Difference

“Are people like me - and people unlike me - treated with dignity?”

Nuance



Mean

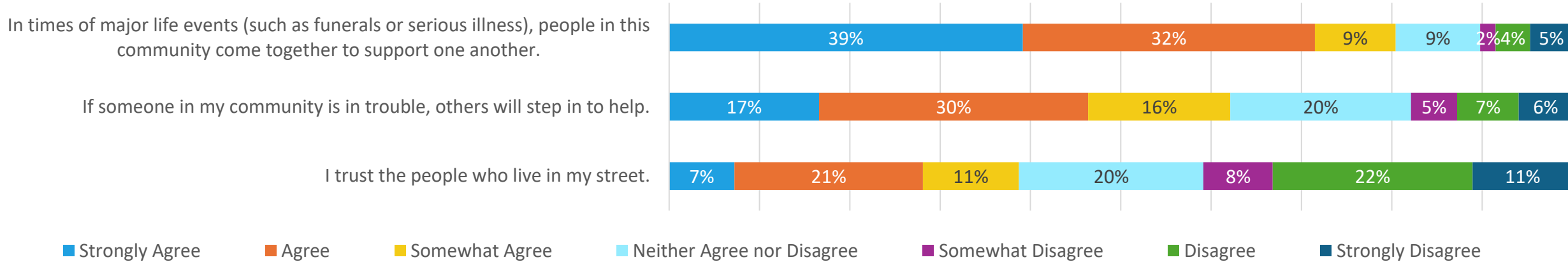


- Respect across difference is generally strong, particularly around language, disability & differing views
- However, everyday kindness and the treatment of foreign-born residents are more uneven, pointing to gaps between values & daily experience

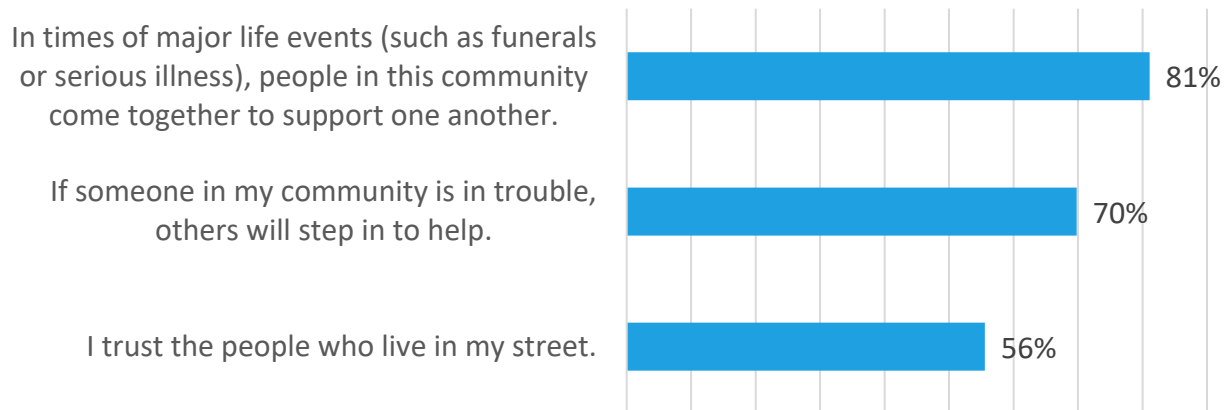
Interpersonal Trust & Mutual Care

“Can I rely on people around me?”

Nuance



Mean

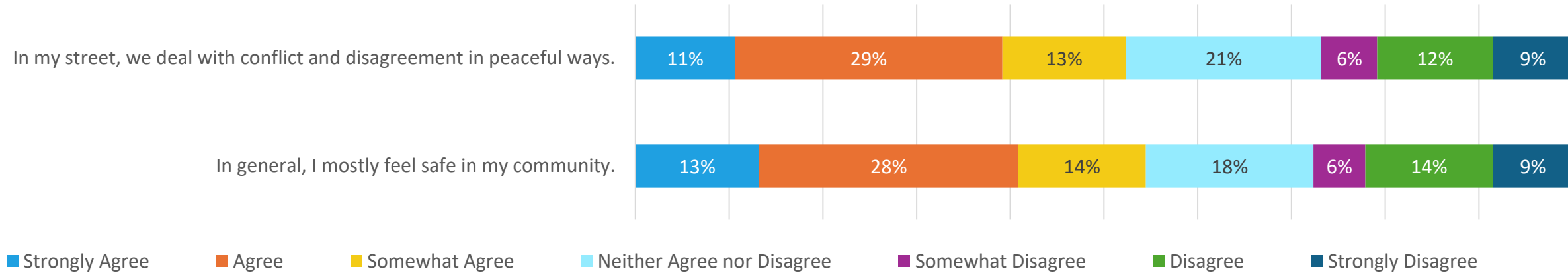


- Mutual care is strongest in moments of crisis, but everyday trust between neighbours is weaker, suggesting that support is reliable in emergencies but less certain in daily life

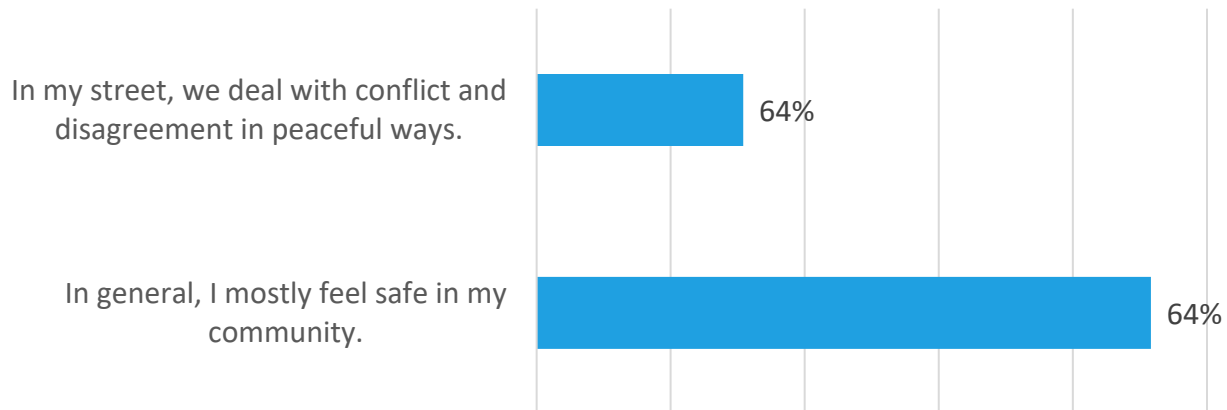
Safety & Peaceful Co-existence

“Is this a place where conflict is managed and people feel safe?”

Nuance



Mean

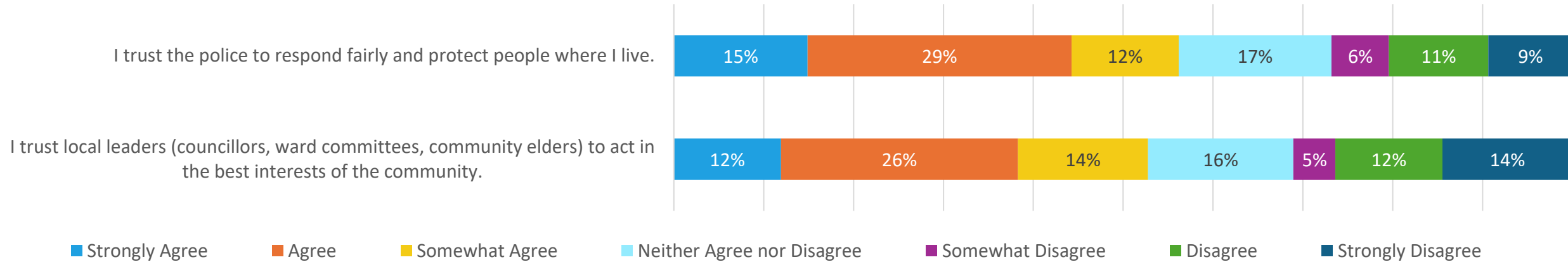


- A majority feel generally safe & believe conflict is handled peacefully, but a sizeable minority remain uncertain or feel unsafe, highlighting safety as a fragile foundation for cohesion

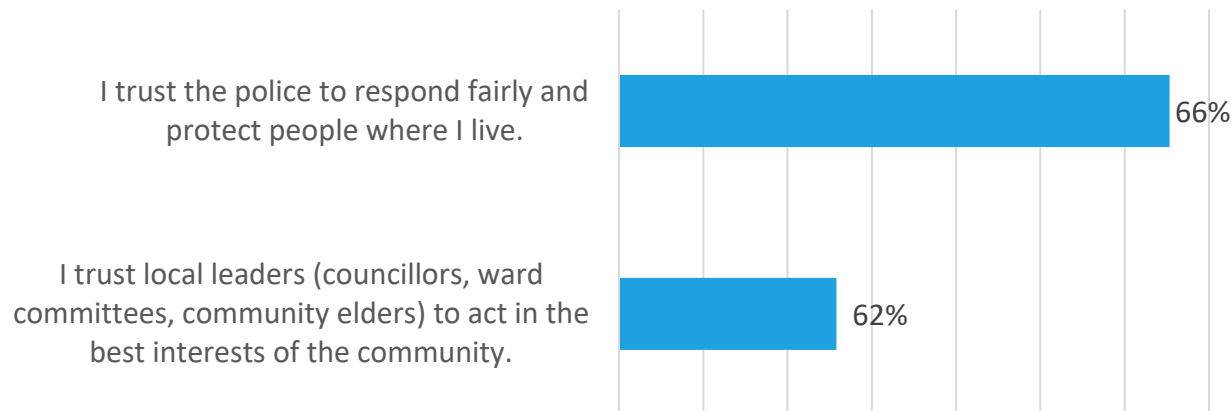
Institutional Trust (Linking Social Capital)

“Do those with authority act fairly and in our interests?”

Nuance



Mean

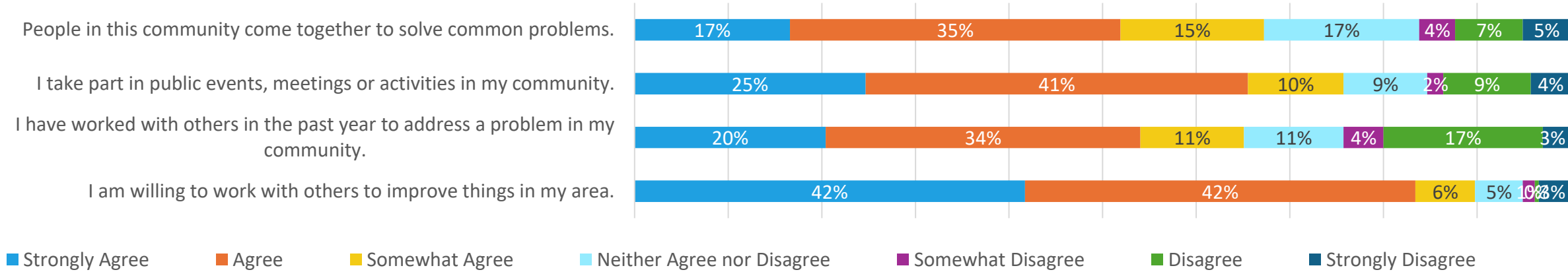


- Trust in institutions is moderate rather than strong, with significant uncertainty & maybe skepticism toward both police and local leadership, indicating fragile linking social capital

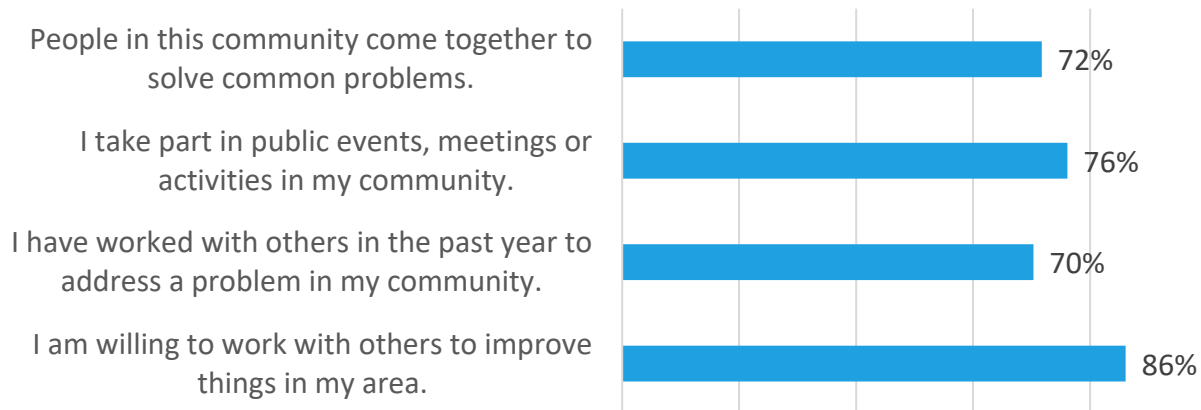
Collective Action & Civic Participation

“Do we act together - not just feel together?”

Nuance



Mean



- Willingness to act together is very high, but actual participation & recent collective action are lower, pointing to a gap between intention & lived opportunity

FACTOR 2: Support networks + Day-to-day social safety/wellbeing

People I can rely on / ask for help / talk to cluster together, and they sit close to safety/kindness items (plus affordability stress tends to pull into this space too)

Factor 2 shows that **emotional support is present**, but it is being **stretched by persistent economic pressure and everyday vulnerability**

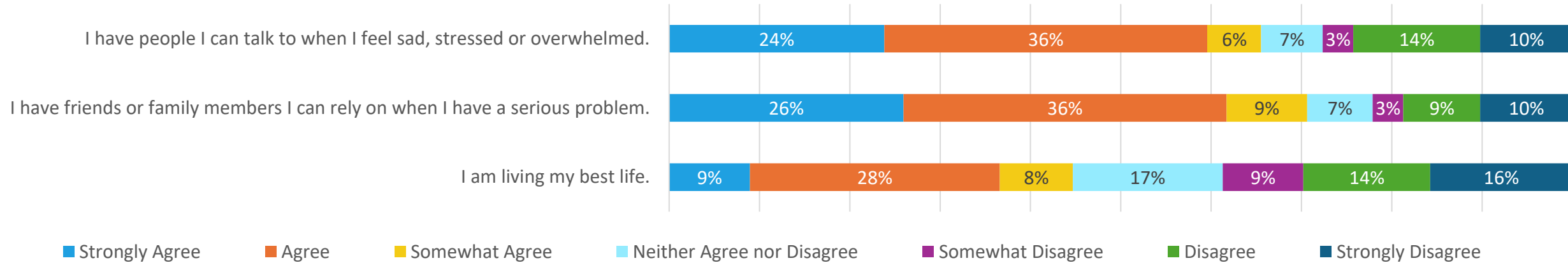
- Many respondents have people they can rely on for emotional support & short-term help, which provides an important buffer against stress
- However, high levels of income insecurity, difficulty affording essentials & ongoing safety concerns mean that **support networks help people cope but often cannot lift them into a sense of stability or wellbeing**



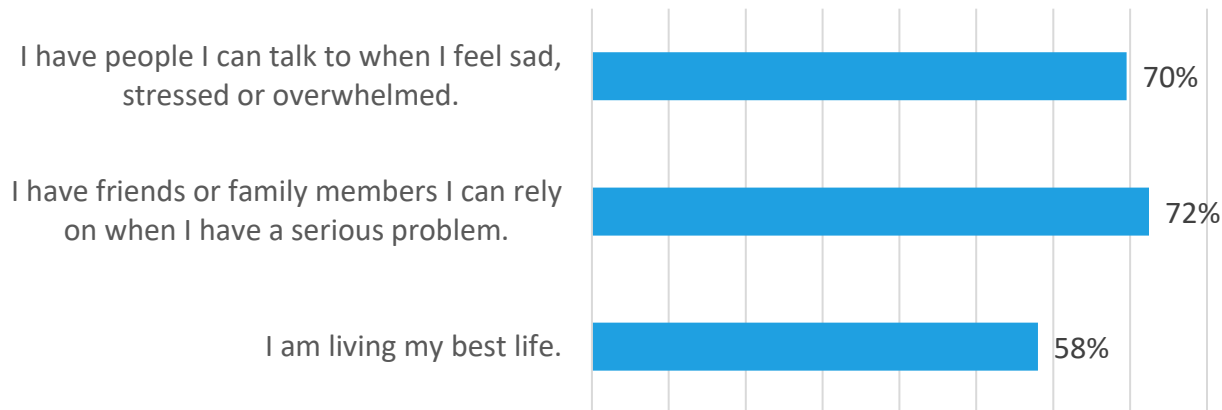
Overall Wellbeing & Emotional Support

“How am I coping, and who do I lean on emotionally?”

Nuance



Mean

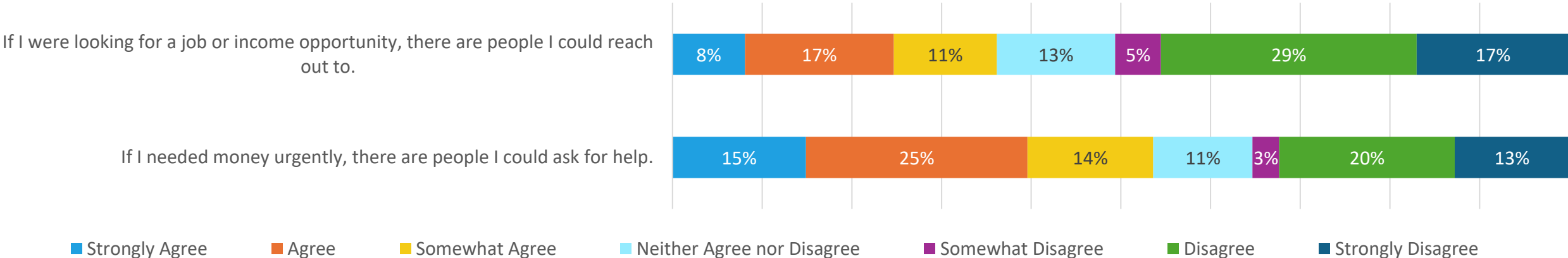


- Most respondents report having people they can rely on for emotional support, with around seven in ten saying they have someone to talk to or depend on during difficult times
- However, overall wellbeing is notably lower, with fewer respondents feeling they are living their best life
- This suggests that while emotional support networks are present, they do not fully offset the broader pressures shaping daily life

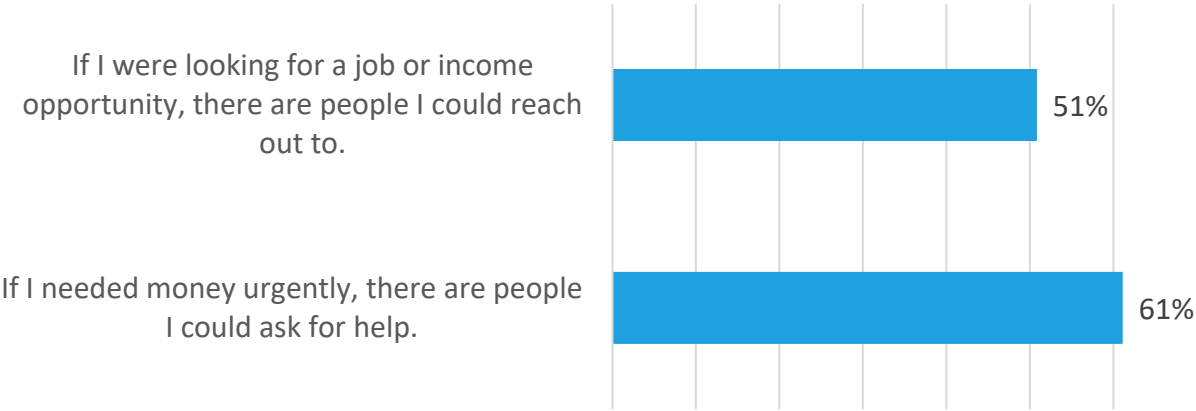
Practical & Opportunity-Based Support

“Can my network help me survive and move forward?”

Nuance



Mean

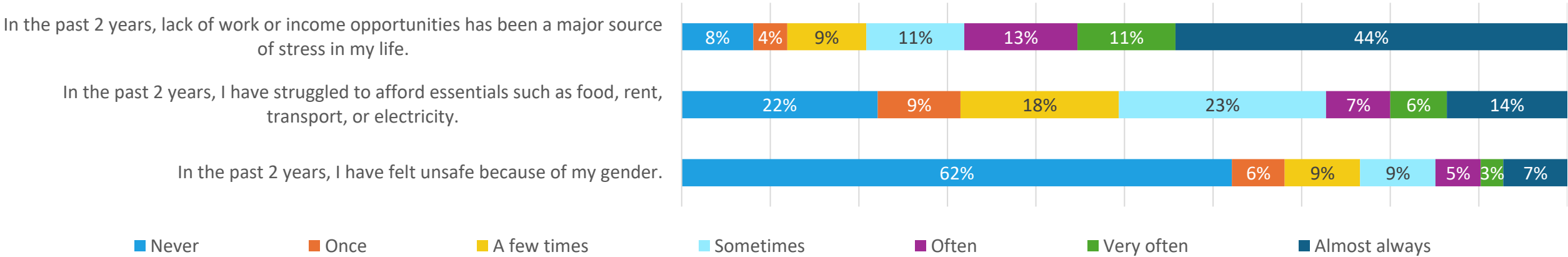


- Practical support is more uneven than emotional support
- While a majority feel they could ask for urgent financial help, far fewer believe they have strong networks to help them access jobs or income opportunities
- This points to support systems that help people cope in the short term but are less effective at enabling longer-term economic progress

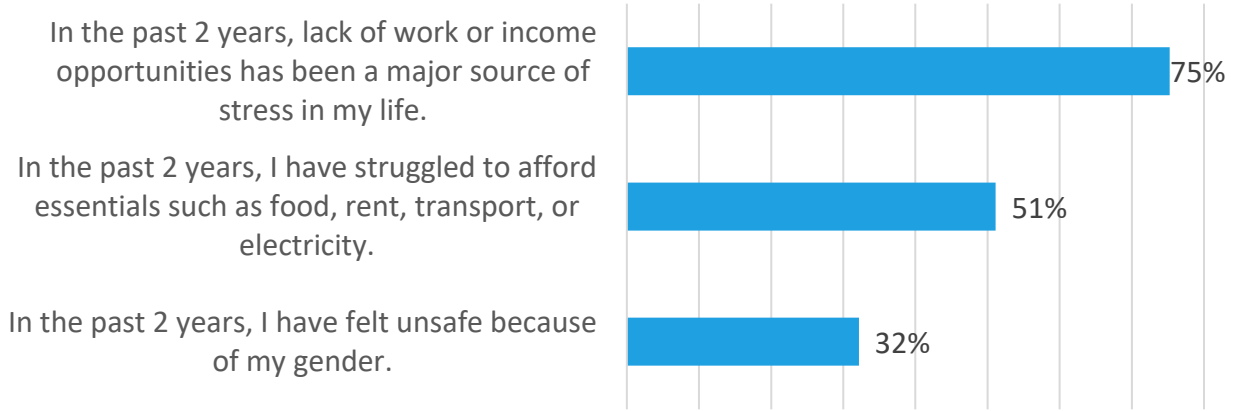
Everyday Strain & Vulnerability

“What pressures stretch or overwhelm support systems?”

Nuance



Mean



- Everyday strain is widespread and persistent, with lack of work or income opportunities emerging as the dominant source of stress
- More than half of respondents have struggled to afford basic essentials, indicating sustained economic pressure on households
- While gender-based safety concerns affect a smaller share, they remain significant & point to vulnerabilities that can overwhelm even strong support networks

FACTOR 3:

Household harm / coercive risk exposure

Gambling harm, alcohol/drug harm, intimidation around repayment (with GBV indicators leaning in this direction too)

Factor 3 surfaces **forms of harm that often remain hidden** but have a **powerful impact on wellbeing & social cohesion**

While most respondents do not experience these harms, a **significant minority report exposure to gambling-related problems, substance abuse, coercive debt practices & gender-based violence**

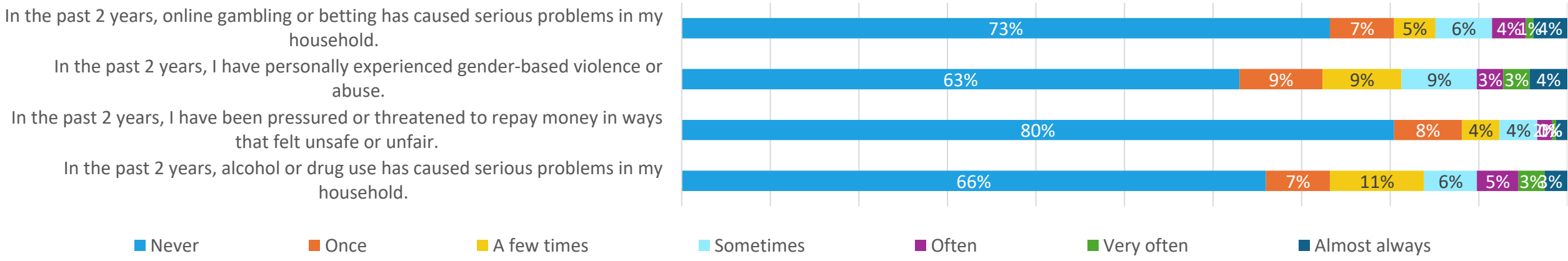
These risks are **concentrated rather than widespread**, but where they exist, they place intense strain on households, undermine feelings of safety & weaken trust within families and communities



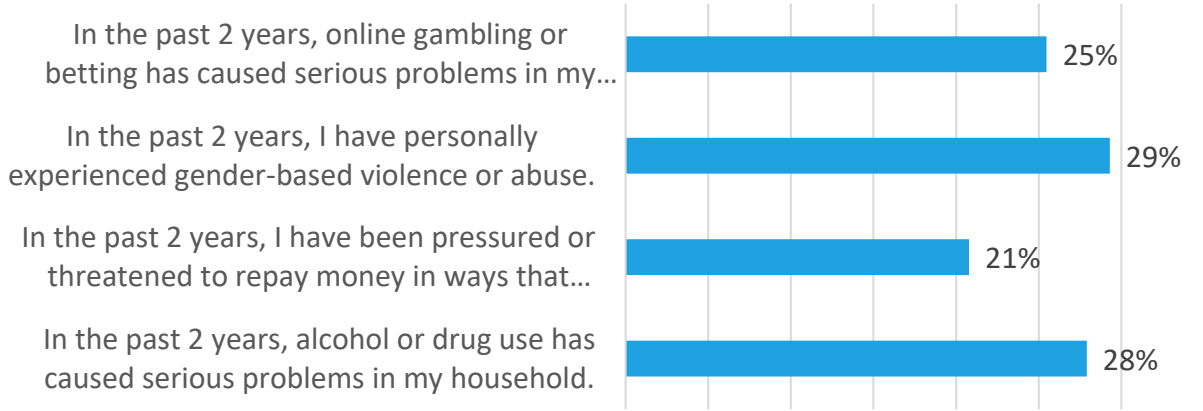
Household Harm & Coercive Risk

“What forms of harm undermine safety, stability & trust at home?”

Nuance



Mean



- While most respondents report not experiencing severe household harm, a significant minority have been affected by gambling-related problems, substance abuse, coercive debt practices or gender-based violence
- These risks are not evenly distributed and often overlap, creating concentrated pockets of vulnerability
- Even when not widespread, such harms have an outsized impact on wellbeing, safety & social cohesion

FACTOR 4:

Personal agency (capability)

Ability to make choices + Influence
circumstances (with “best life possible”
sitting nearby, but a bit weaker)

Factor 4 captures **people’s sense of agency** - their
belief that they can make choices and influence the
direction of their lives

While most respondents **express strong agency**, this
does not always translate into feeling that they are
living their best life

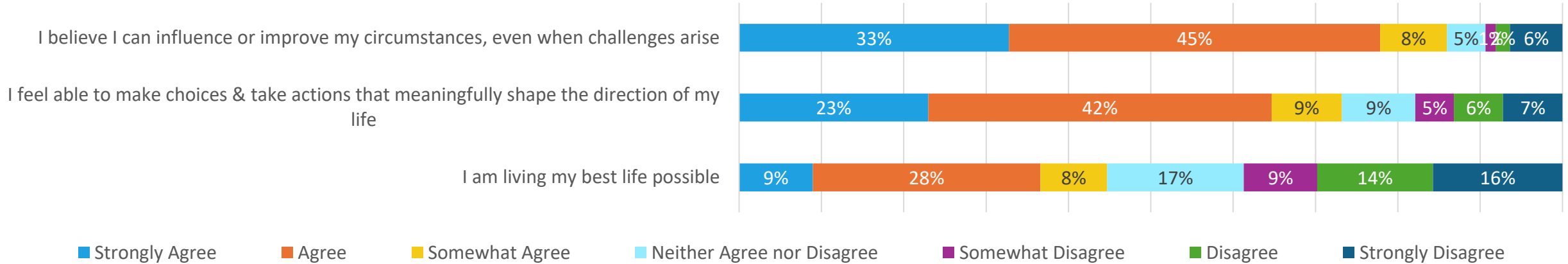
This gap tells an important story: **determination &
resilience exist but structural pressures often limit
how far agency can convert into lived wellbeing**



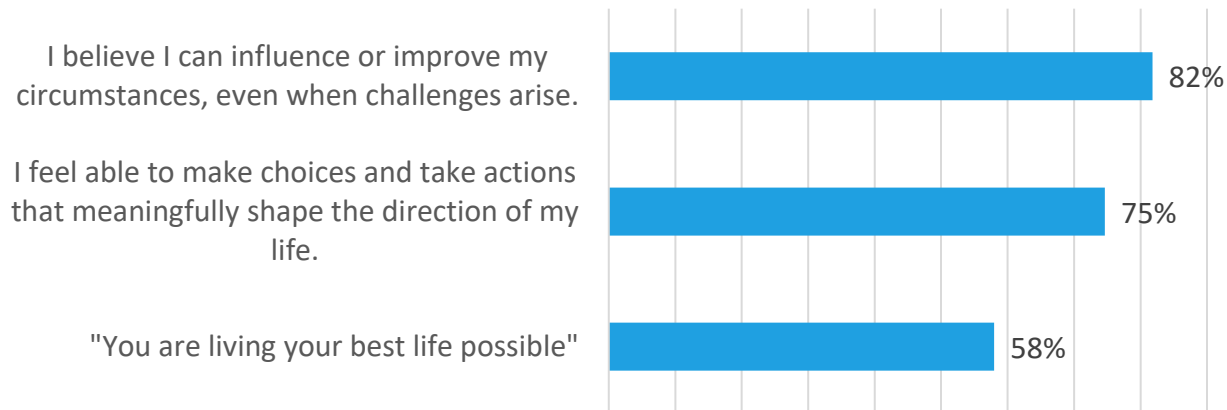
Personal Agency & Sense of Control

“Do I feel able to shape my life, even in difficult circumstances?”

Nuance



Mean



- Most respondents report a strong sense of personal agency, with many believing they can influence their circumstances & make meaningful choices, even when facing challenges
- However, this sense of control does not always translate into feeling that they are living their best life
- This gap suggests resilience & determination, alongside constraints that limit how far agency can convert into lived wellbeing



Summary Insights

This section brings together the key findings from across the four factors to highlight what most strongly shapes social cohesion, wellbeing & agency in people's everyday lives

Rather than repeating individual statistics, the summary focuses on patterns, contrasts & pathways - showing where cohesion is resilient, where it is under strain & where harm overwhelms both personal agency and community support

Taken together, these insights explain why strong social bonds can coexist with hardship, why agency does not always translate into improved wellbeing & where targeted interventions can have the greatest impact

The findings point clearly to the conditions under which people are able to cope, participate & move forward and where protection and support are most urgently needed





Amartya Sen on Agency

- Drawing on the work of Amartya Sen, agency refers to a person's real ability to make choices and take actions that shape their own life
- Sen argues that development is not only about resources, services or outcomes but about whether people are genuinely free to act on what they value
- Someone may have support, live in a cohesive community or even feel motivated, yet still lack agency if poverty, insecurity, harm or structural barriers prevent them from turning effort into progress
- From this perspective, agency is a critical driver of development: it explains why people facing similar conditions can experience very different life trajectories & why strengthening agency requires not only personal resilience, but also supportive social, economic & institutional environments

Agency Profiles:

Why Some People Progress While Others Struggle

Empowered Navigators

High agency + low strain + low harm)

- Agree they can influence their life
- Do NOT report high income stress or affordability struggles
- Do NOT report household harm
- Often also score well on belonging and participation (Factor 1)

These are respondents for whom agency converts into wellbeing

Strained Strivers

High agency + high strain + low/moderate harm

- Strong belief in personal agency
- High agreement that lack of work/income causes stress
- Struggles with essentials
- Limited job/income networks
- Yet still “trying”

This group explains the key finding:

- High agency but only moderate wellbeing
- This is Sen’s “blocked conversion” in practice

Supported but Stuck

Low agency + emotional support present + moderate strain

- Do NOT feel able to shape life direction
- Do have people to talk to & rely on
- Do not show extreme harm exposure
- Often neutral or disengaged on participation

Cohesion & care exist, but capability is underdeveloped

At Risk & Disempowered

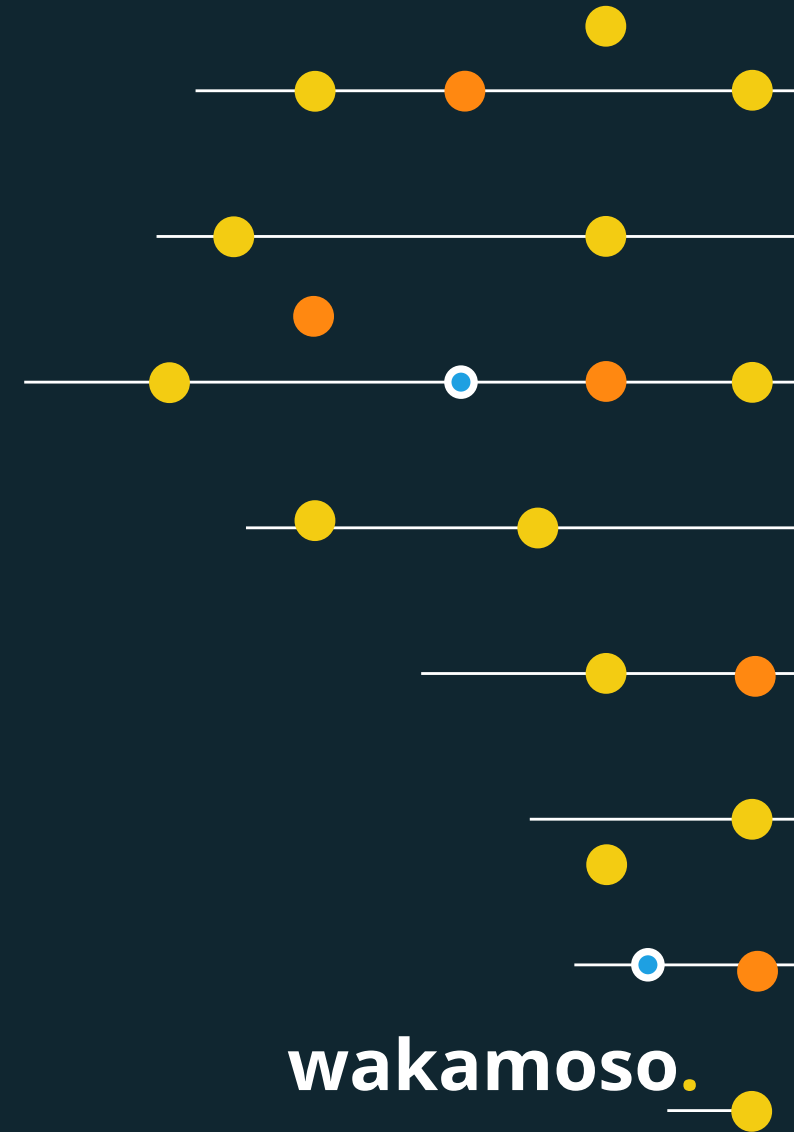
Low agency + high strain + high harm

- Low belief in influence or choice
- High income stress & affordability struggles
- Exposure to GBV, coercive debt or substance harm
- Weak or overwhelmed support networks

This group anchors Factor 3:

- Harm suppresses agency & overwhelms cohesion

Do different types of risk & strain erode people's sense of agency and social cohesion in the same way or in different ways?



Type of Risk / Strain	Impact on Personal Agency (Factor 4)	Impact on Social Cohesion (Factor 1)	Interpretive Insight
Lack of work or income stress	Moderate-High negative impact	Low-Moderate impact	Agency is strained by economic pressure, but community belonging & mutual support often remain intact
Struggling to afford essentials	Moderate negative impact	Low-Moderate impact	Material hardship reduces sense of progress but does not automatically break trust or social ties
Feeling unsafe because of gender	High negative impact	Moderate impact (especially safety & trust)	Safety concerns directly suppress agency & confidence even when broader cohesion appears present
Gender-based violence or abuse	Very high negative impact	High negative impact	Acute harm undermines both agency & cohesion, eroding trust, safety & sense of control simultaneously
Coercive or unsafe debt pressure	Very high negative impact	High negative impact	Threat & coercion sharply reduce agency and fracture trust, overwhelming informal support systems
Alcohol or drug-related household harm	High negative impact	Variable but often moderate-high	Harm creates instability that weakens agency & selectively damages cohesion within households
Online gambling-related harm	Moderate-High negative impact	Variable / indirect	Financial & emotional strain affects agency more than outward cohesion, often hidden from the community.

* Data-informed comparative interpretation

Not all risks undermine cohesion & agency in the same way

Economic strain (lack of work, income stress, difficulty affording essentials) is widespread and strongly linked to lower wellbeing and a reduced sense of agency

- However, it does not consistently break social cohesion as many people under economic pressure still report belonging, mutual support & willingness to participate
- This explains why strong community spirit can coexist with persistent poverty & stress

Direct harm (gender-based violence, coercive debt, unsafe environments) has a far more damaging effect

- These experiences are linked to sharp declines in both personal agency & social cohesion, undermining trust, safety and mutual care
- Where harm is present, social systems that normally buffer hardship are often overwhelmed

This helps explain why agency does not always translate into improved wellbeing

- Many people remain determined & believe they can act, even under strain but harm and insecurity suppress agency regardless of effort or community support
- Strengthening social cohesion alone is therefore not enough
- Reducing harm & protecting safety are essential for agency to turn into real progress

Social Cohesion Driver-Detractor Matrix

The matrix on the next slide synthesises the survey findings, showing how different factors strengthen or undermine social cohesion & where targeted action can have the greatest impact



Social Cohesion Driver-Detractor Matrix

Dimension	Key Drivers (Strengthening Cohesion)	Key Detractors (Undermining Cohesion)	Importance	High-Leverage Action Areas
Inclusion & Belonging	Feeling respected across backgrounds; acceptance of difference; pride in where one lives	Discrimination; fear of being judged or excluded	Inclusion acts as a multiplier - when respect rises, trust & participation follow	Community dialogues; inclusive messaging; visible norms of respect
Trust & Safety	Kindness between neighbours; peaceful conflict handling; trust in local leadership	Fear, intimidation, gender-based safety concerns	Safety is a precondition - without it, cohesion cannot be sustained	Local safety initiatives; trusted intermediaries; safe reporting
Support Networks	People to rely on; emotional and practical support; mutual help	Isolation; lack of someone to turn to in crisis	Support buffers stress & enables participation	Make support visible; strengthen peer-to-peer help
Personal Agency	Feeling able to make choices; belief in influencing one's life	Hopelessness; loss of control due to constant stress	Agency converts cohesion into action & progress	Skills, information access, and pathways to participation
Household Risk & Stress	Primarily a risk domain; mitigation matters more than activation	Gambling harm; substance abuse; debt intimidation; economic strain	Risk collapses trust inward & crowds out collective life	Harm reduction; financial stress relief; protection mechanisms
Participation & Collective Action	Willingness to work together; past community problem-solving	Burnout; fear; lack of perceived impact	Participation grows when people feel safe & capable	Small, achievable collective actions

Top 10 Insights

1. Social cohesion is present — but unevenly experienced

- Most respondents report a sense of belonging, pride in their community & shared norms of kindness and respect
- These experiences are not uniform, with trust, safety & participation varying significantly

2. Communities show strong values of inclusion, but practical trust is thinner

- Respect for diversity & shared identity scores relatively high, yet trust in neighbours, local leadership & institutions is more fragile
- Gap: Values alone do not automatically translate into reliable everyday trust

3. Mutual care is strongest in times of crisis

- Support networks activate most clearly during major life events such as illness or funerals
- While this reflects deep social bonds, results also indicate that everyday support is less consistent outside moments of crisis

4. Participation willingness is high, but actual collective action is harder to sustain

- Many people express a strong willingness to work with others to improve their community
- Fewer report sustained participation or successful collective problem-solving, pointing to barriers between intention & action

5. Economic strain is widespread and persistent

- Lack of work, income insecurity & difficulty affording essentials = most reported pressures
- These strains significantly affect wellbeing & people's sense of progress in life

6. Economic hardship does not automatically break social cohesion

- Despite high levels of economic stress, many respondents continue to report belonging, care & mutual support
- This explains why strong community spirit can coexist with ongoing poverty & hardship

7. Direct harm has a far more damaging effect than economic strain

- Experiences of GBV, coercive debt pressure, substance abuse or gambling-related harm are associated with sharp declines in both personal agency & social cohesion
- These risks overwhelm informal support systems & erode trust and safety

8. Personal agency is widespread, but unevenly rewarded

- Most respondents believe they can influence their circumstances & make meaningful choices
- However, far fewer feel they are living their best possible life, highlighting a gap between belief & lived outcomes

9. Agency does not convert into wellbeing when harm & insecurity are present

- Where people face violence, coercion or persistent fear, agency is suppressed regardless of effort, resilience or community values
- This confirms that safety & protection are prerequisites for development

10. Strengthening social cohesion alone is not enough

- Evidence shows that social cohesion, support & agency must be accompanied by harm reduction, economic relief & safe pathways to opportunity
- Without addressing acute risks, community strength cannot translate into sustained participation or improved life outcomes

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Thank You.

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