

**THE  
POLICY  
INSTITUTE**

**KING'S**  
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# Coronavirus: growing divisions over the UK government's response

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# Introduction

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This report includes findings from a survey of 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75 by [King's College London](#) in partnership with [Ipsos MORI](#), conducted on 20-22 May. These results are compared with a similar survey conducted 1-3 April.

It finds the public were losing faith in the UK government's response to coronavirus, even before the Prime Minister's adviser Dominic Cummings was widely reported to have travelled to Durham during the lockdown.

Trust in the UK government's ability to deal with the crisis and the information it provides has declined. This information is less likely to be seen as helpful and effective, and is increasingly viewed as confused and inconsistent. The public are also more likely to disagree than agree that the government has handled the pandemic better than other countries.

These findings reflect a much more divided view of the relaxation of measures to control the virus: 9 in 10 had supported the lockdown, but only 38% support the current measures. The results also reflect the public's focus on controlling the health impacts of the virus ahead of wider societal impacts, with a majority saying we're relaxing the measures too quickly and substantial concern about easing the rules, particularly among parents on sending their children back to school.

The guidelines and future plans are also less clear to people, with substantial proportions incorrectly thinking they can exercise outside in groups, that all children are returning to school on 1 June, and that bars and restaurants will be open from 1 July. There is widespread confusion in Scotland and Wales on whether measures announced by the PM apply to them.

# We're losing faith in the UK government's response

Trust in the government's ability to control Covid-19 and the information it provides on the virus has declined significantly over the past six weeks.

The public also now have a much less favourable view of the overall response, and many think the UK government has performed less well when compared with other countries.

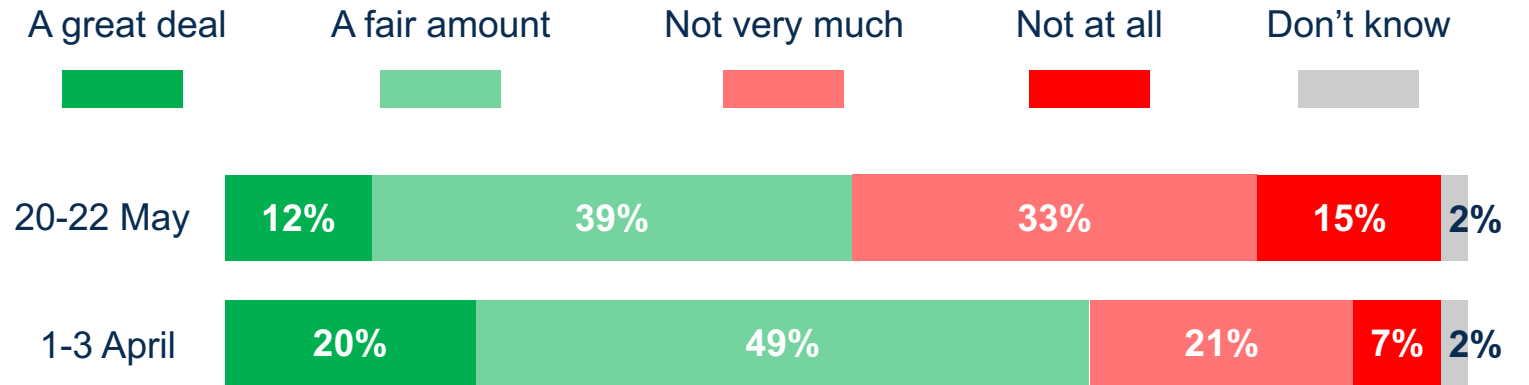


In the past six weeks, the proportion of people who trust the UK government to control the spread of Covid-19 has **declined by 18 points**, from 69% to 51%.

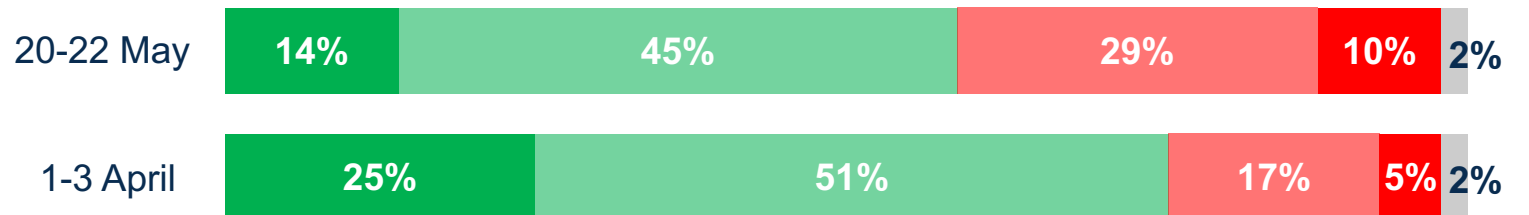
The proportion who trust the information it provides on the virus has fallen by a similar amount, **down 17 points**, from 76% to 59%.

## To what extent, if at all, do you trust...

### ...the UK government to control the spread of the coronavirus?



### ... the information provided by the UK government on the coronavirus?



Base: 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020  
 Base: 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 1-3 April 2020

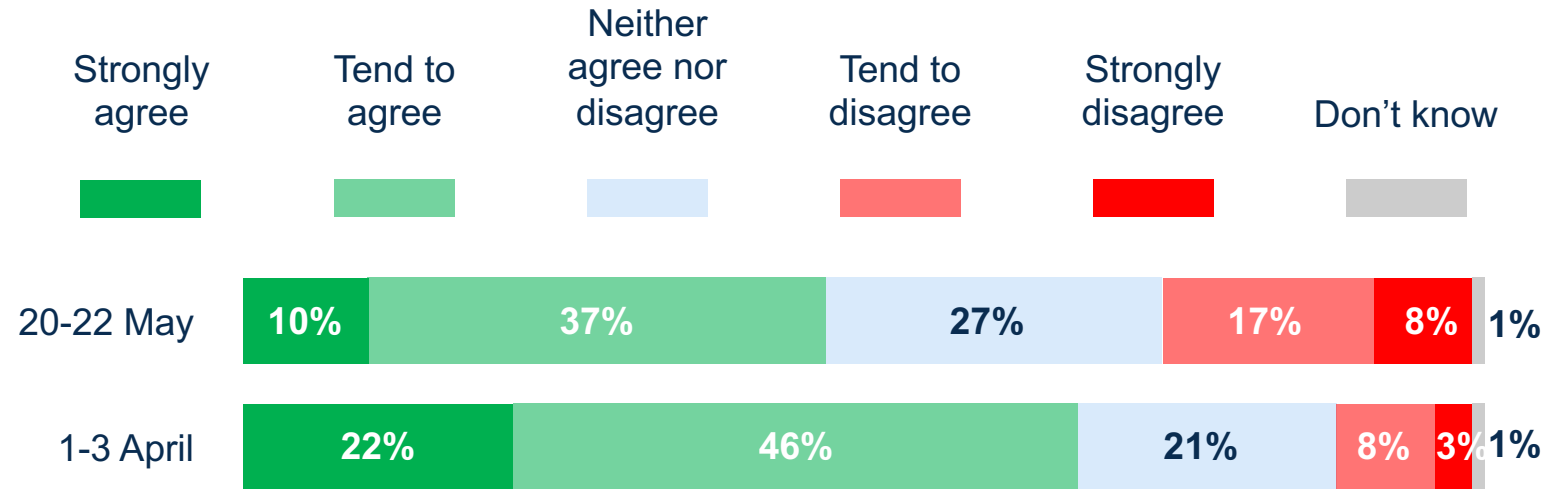
Questions asked in April referred to "the government", rather than "UK government"

In early April, 68% of the public found the UK government's communication and advice on coronavirus helpful. This has **fallen by 21 points**, to 47% in the third week of May.

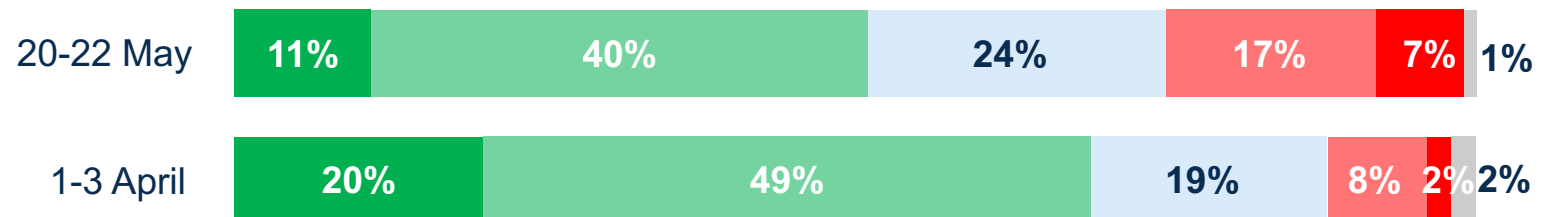
And 51% now agree the government's advice on protecting yourself and others has been effective, compared with 69% previously – **a fall of 18 points**.

## To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?

### I have found the communication and advice from the UK government helpful



### The UK government's advice on how to protect yourself and others has been effective



Base: 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020  
 Base: 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 1-3 April 2020

Questions asked in April referred to "the government", rather than "UK government"

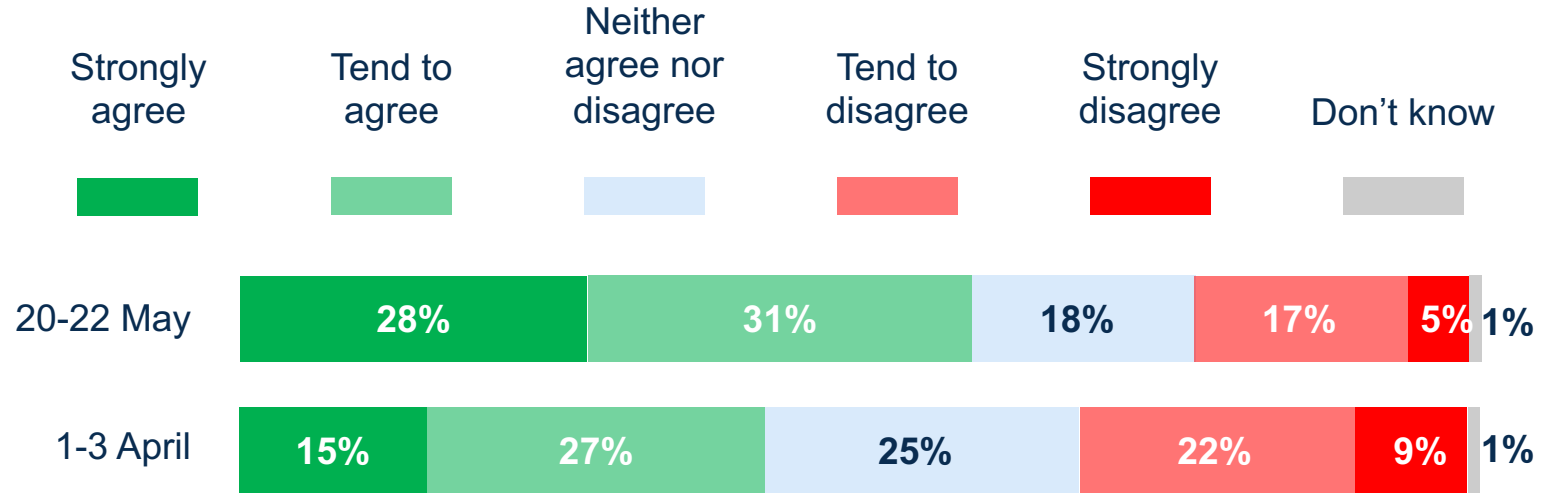
59% now agree that the government's response has been confused and inconsistent, **up 17 points** from early April.

3 in 10 people now **strongly agree** that this is the case. This follows widespread criticism of the communication and rollout of the changes to the lockdown rules that were announced by the government on 10 May.

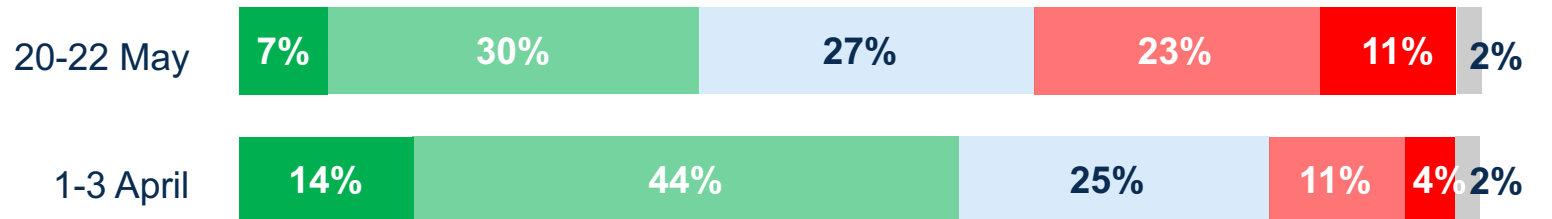
37% think the government's plan has adapted well in response to new science, **down 21 points** from 58% a couple of months ago.

## To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?

### The UK government's response to the coronavirus has been confused and inconsistent



### The UK government's plan has adapted well to the changing scientific information and situation



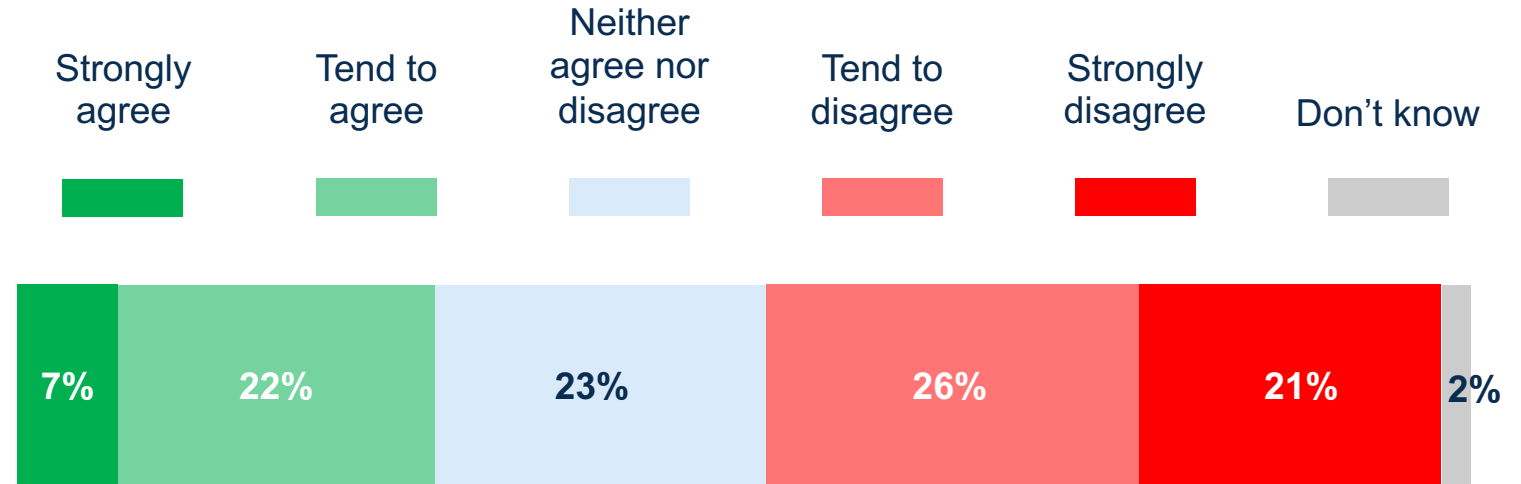
Base: 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020  
 Base: 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 1-3 April 2020

Questions asked in April referred to "the government", rather than "UK government"

Almost half (47%) the population disagree that the UK government has responded well to Covid-19 compared with other countries, with **one in five strongly disagreeing**. By contrast, 29% agree the response compares favourably with other nations’.

People are **more evenly split** on whether the government has done a good job of protecting UK residents, with 39% agreeing and 37% disagreeing. But 16% strongly disagree, compared 9% who strongly agree.

**To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?**  
**Compared with other countries, the UK government has responded well to the coronavirus outbreak**



**The UK government has done a good job of protecting UK residents through its response to the coronavirus**



Base: 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020

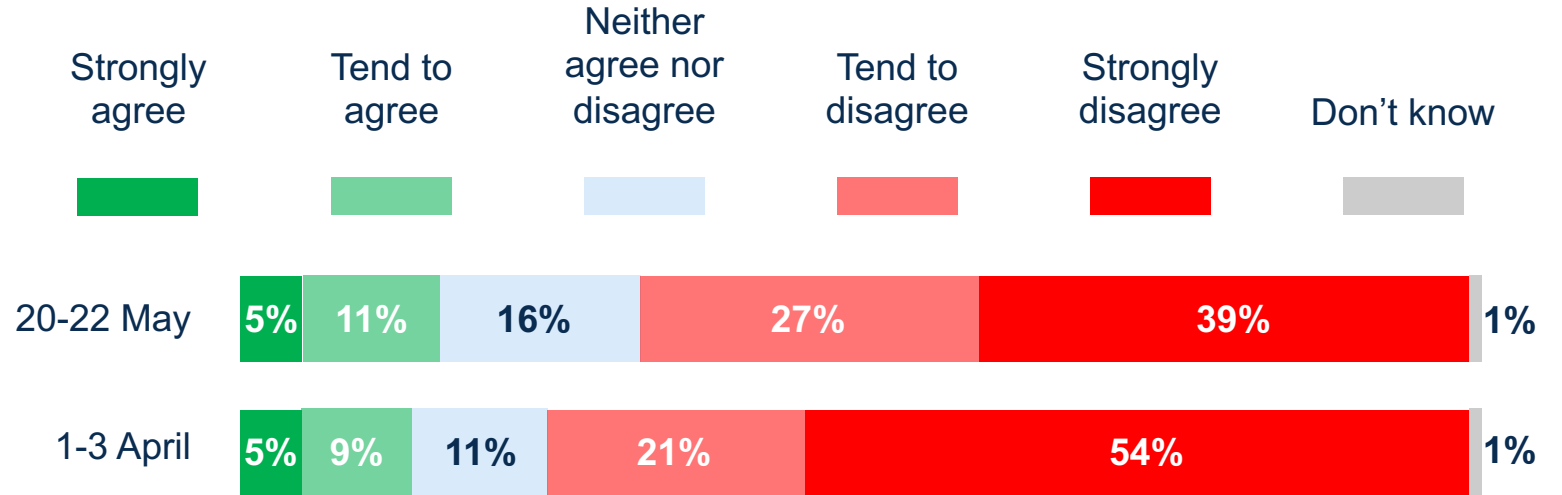
Questions asked in April referred to “the government”, rather than “UK government”

People still see Covid-19 as a serious risk: there has been **little change in the proportion who agree that too much fuss is being made** about the virus, although 66% now disagree, down from 75%.

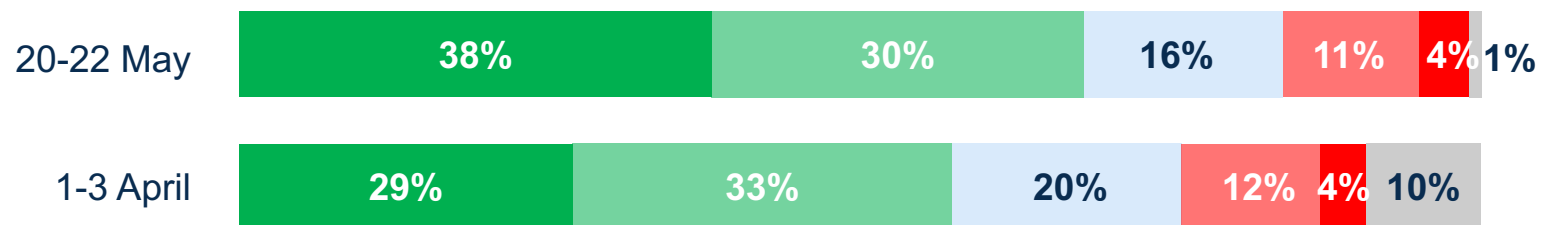
As the longer-term impact of the pandemic becomes clearer, people are more likely to say the **government acted too slowly**: 68% now think this is the case, up from 62% in early April.

## To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?

### Too much fuss is being made about the risk of coronavirus



### The UK government acted too slowly to control the spread of coronavirus



Base: 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020  
 Base: 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 1-3 April 2020

Questions asked in April referred to "the government", rather than "UK government"

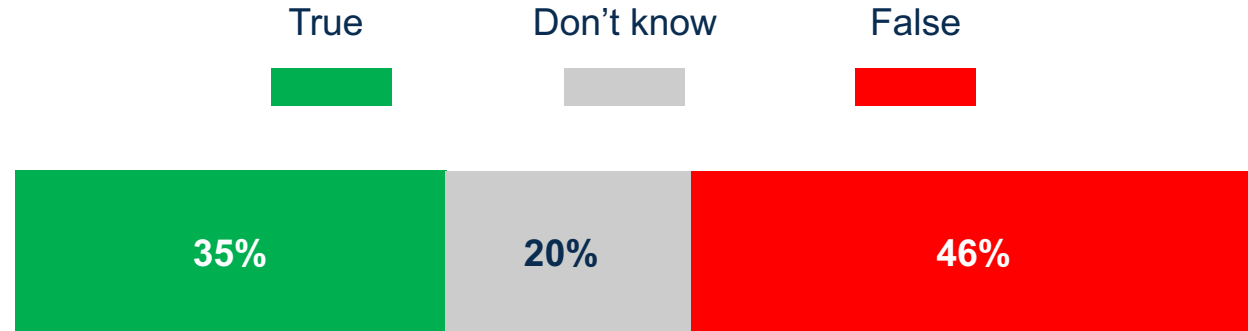


The public are **unconvinced that government is meeting its target of testing 100,000 people** for Covid-19 every day.

46% think the claims are false, compared with 35% who think they are true.

## Are the following statements true or false?

**The UK government is testing 100,000 people for coronavirus each day**



# The new measures are more divisive than the lockdown measures

The approach announced by the Prime Minister on 10 May enjoys far less support than the range of lockdown measures that were announced on 23 March.

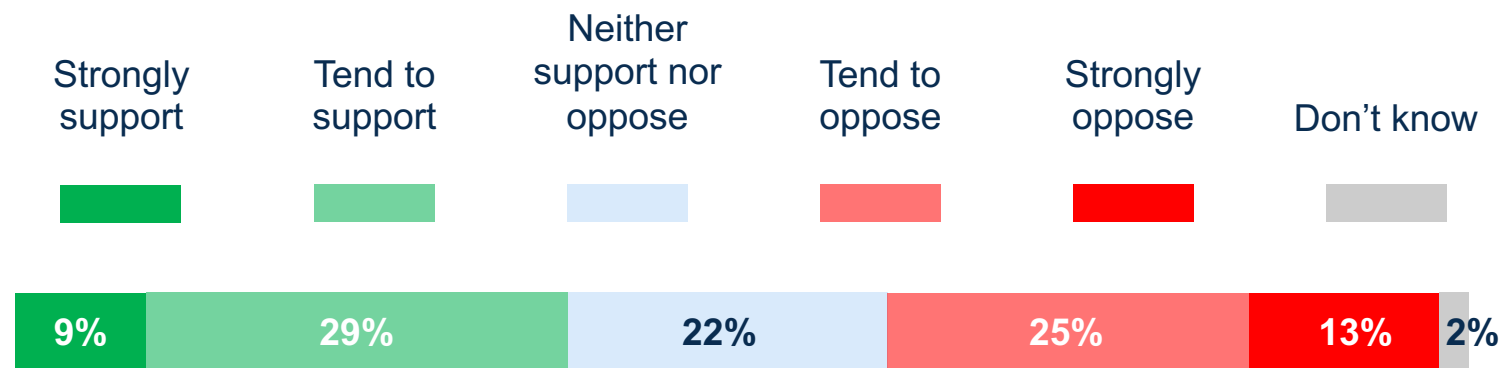
There is also trepidation about further relaxing the measures to control coronavirus, and some confusion about the new rules.

**38%** support the new rules and plans announced on 10 May. This is matched by **38%** who oppose them.

This level of support is far lower than that for the lockdown measures announced on 23 March, which **9 in 10 supported and 7 in 10 strongly supported** (although the questions are not exactly comparable).

**As you may know, the Prime Minister announced a range of measures to respond to the coronavirus on 10 May, which maintained some lockdown restrictions while announcing conditional plans to relax other measures in England.**

**To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose this current approach to controlling coronavirus?**



**As you may know, the Prime Minister announced a range of measures on 23 March, where people have been asked to remain at home except for a small number of exceptions (described by some as a “lockdown”).**

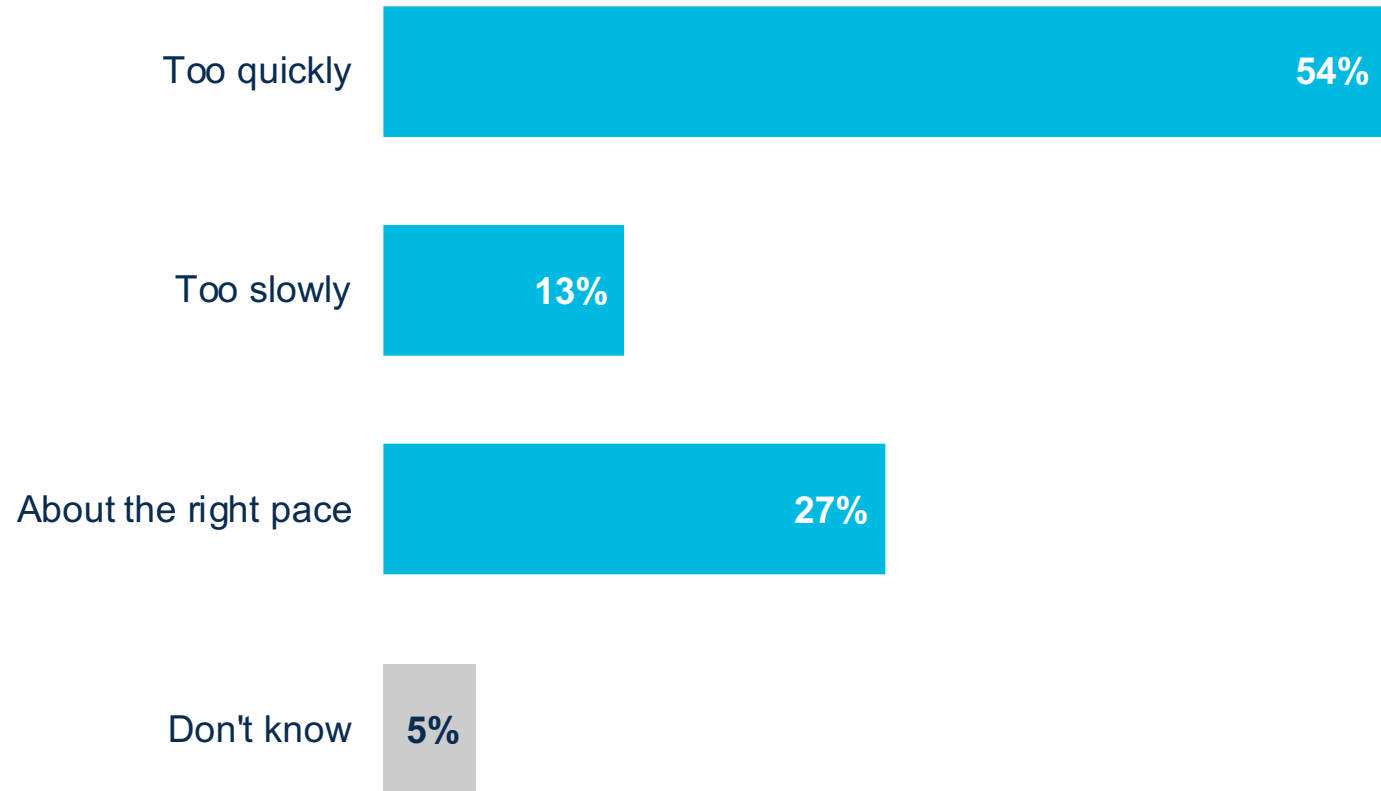
**To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose these measures?**



Base: 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020, and 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 1-3 April 2020

The speed of change is a factor in lower support for these new measures: 27% think the government is relaxing the rules at about the right pace, but **twice as many people – 54% – think it is relaxing the measures too quickly.**

## Do you think the UK government is relaxing the measures to control coronavirus too quickly, too slowly, or at about the right pace?



Base: 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020



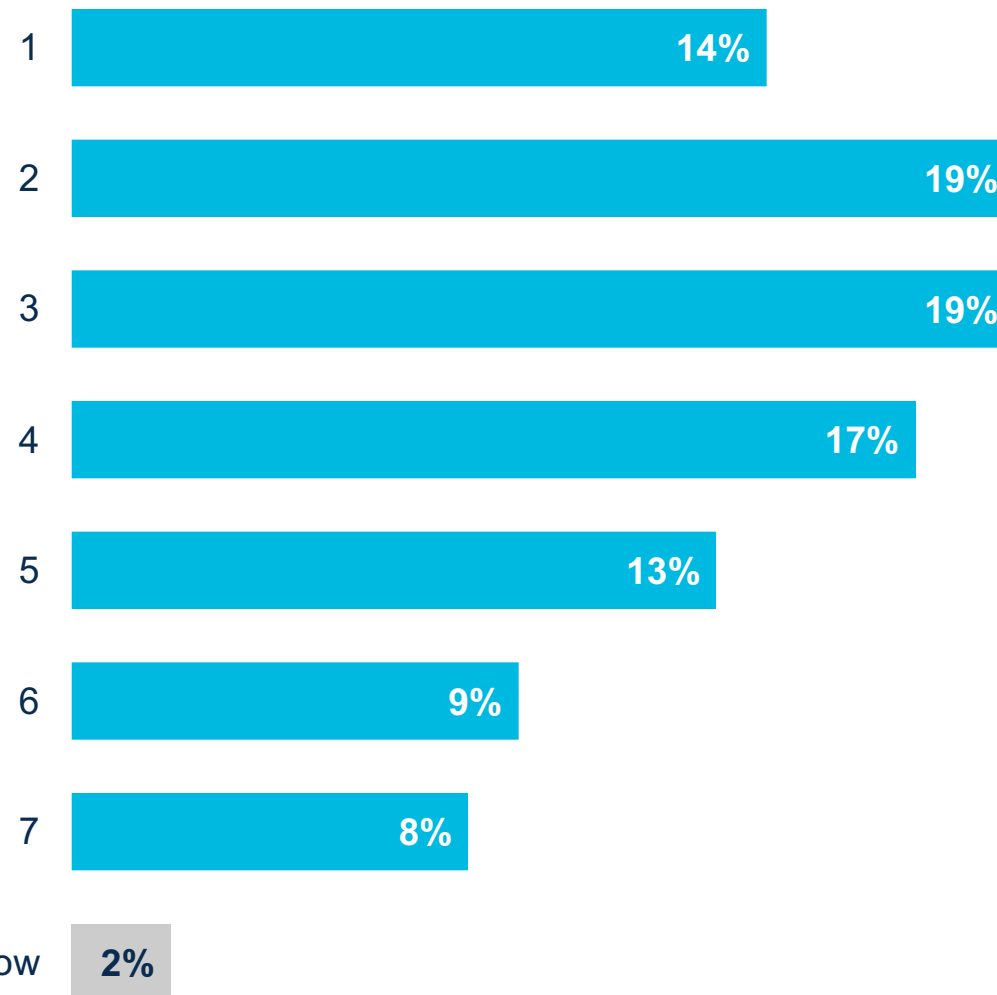
52% of the public say that “I am very worried about the restrictions being lifted” is closer to their view, compared with 30% who say “I am not worried about the restrictions being lifted” is closer to their view

## Which of these is closest to your view...?

I am very worried about the restrictions being lifted



I am not worried about the restrictions being lifted



The public prioritise reducing the immediate negative health impacts of coronavirus over limiting negative effects of the lockdown measures.

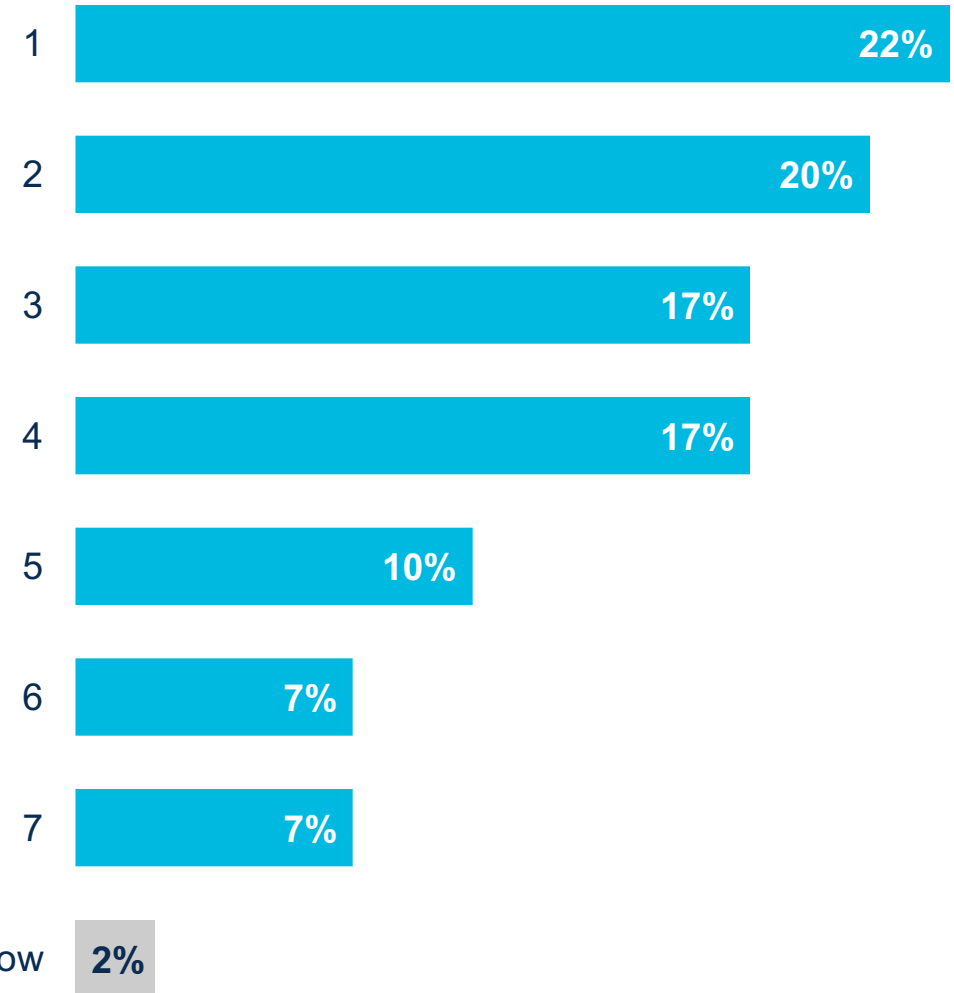
59% say “We need to take any measures necessary to prevent further infections and reduce deaths” is closer to their view, compared with 24% who say “We need to relax the lockdown measures now” is closer to their view.

## Which of these is closest to your view...?

We need to take whatever measures are necessary to control the spread of coronavirus and reduce the number of deaths



We need to relax the measures to control coronavirus now, they are doing more harm than good



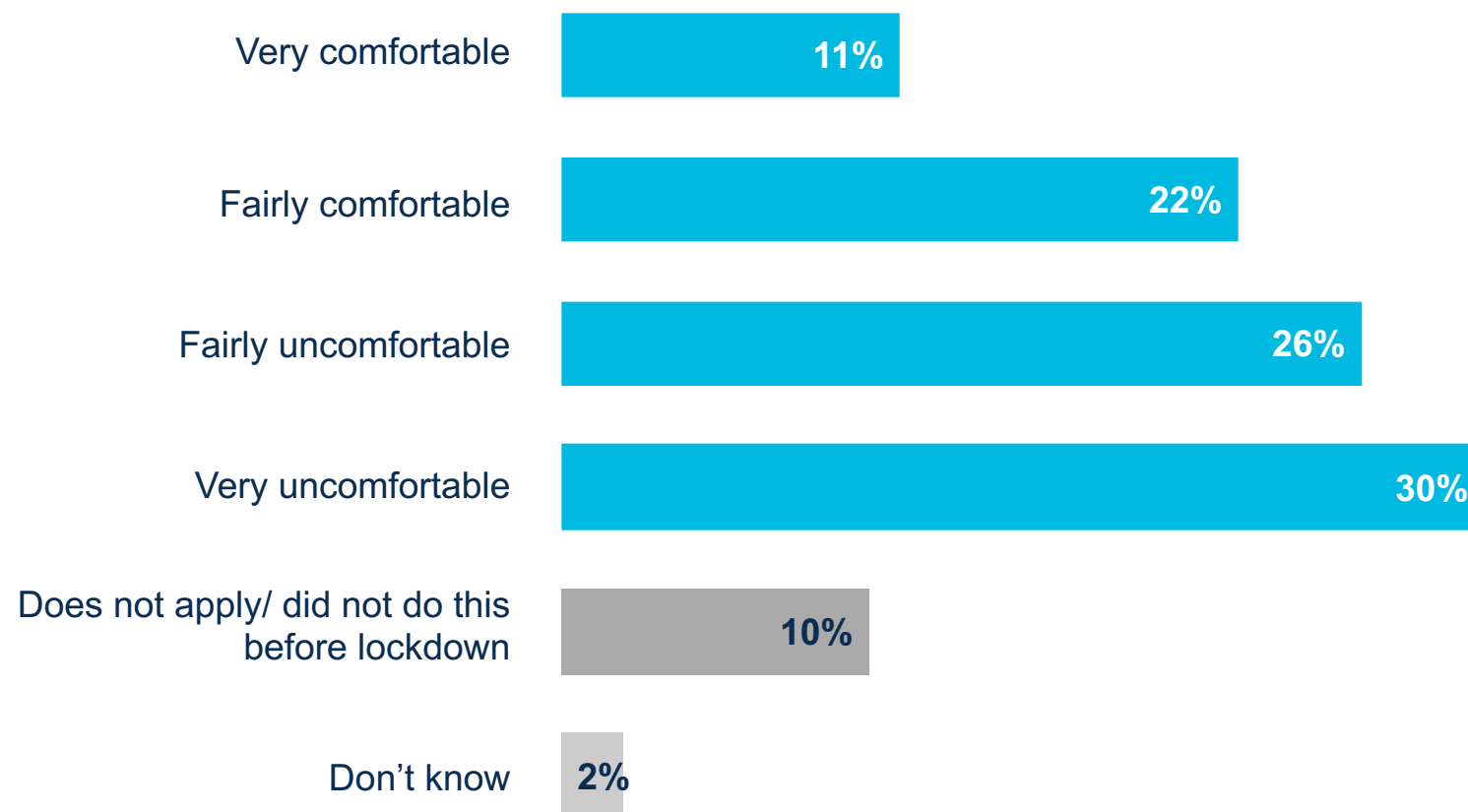
Base: 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020

56% of parents are uncomfortable with sending their child back to school, compared with 33% who are comfortable with it.

And parents are **three times more likely** to feel **very uncomfortable** than very comfortable with the idea.

## When the following happen, how comfortable or uncomfortable do you think you will feel about...?

### Sending your child to school



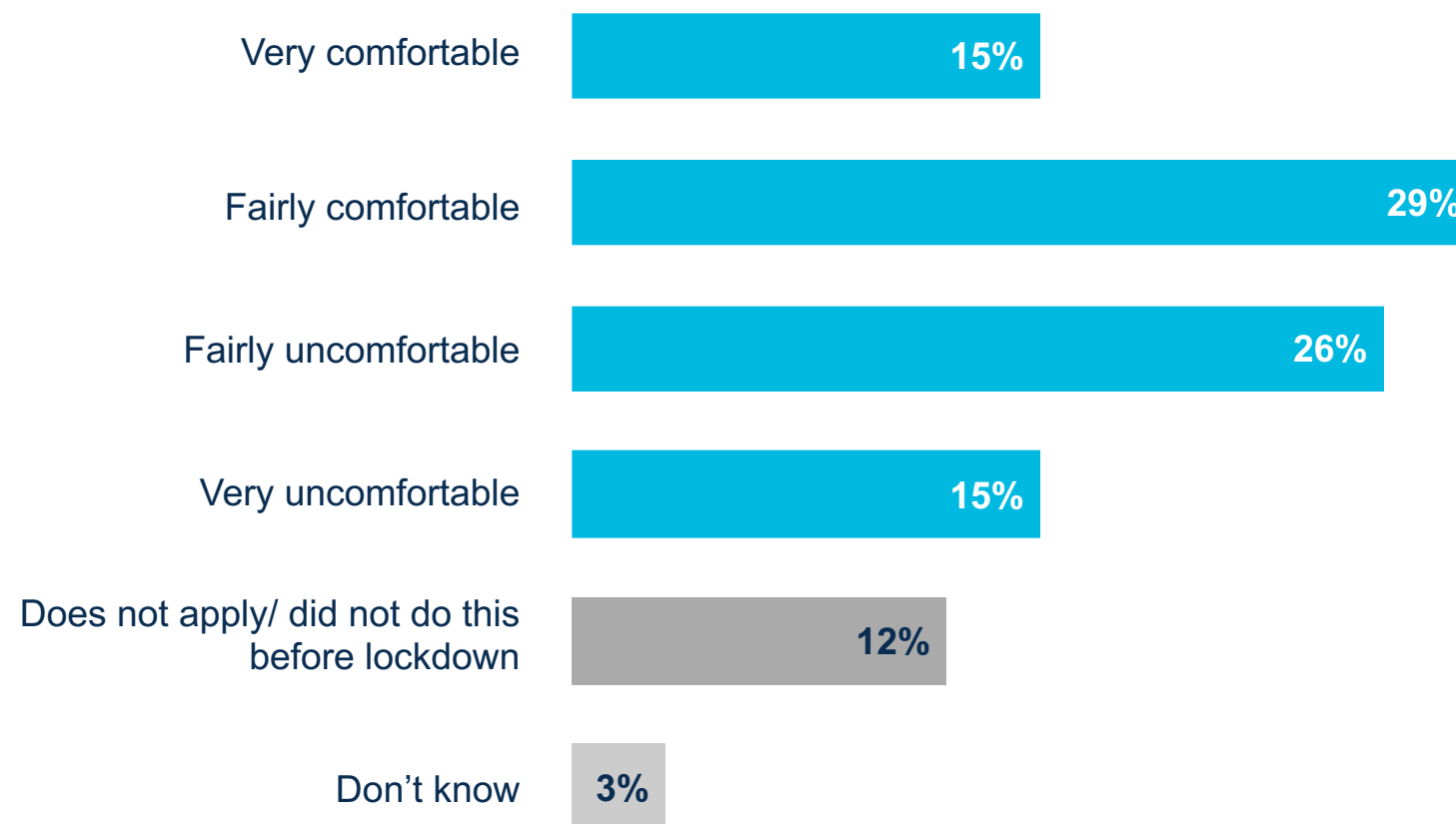
Base: 599 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020

People are **more relaxed about returning to their workplaces**, although the public is still divided on the issue.

44% of workers feel comfortable about doing so, while 41% do not.

## When the following happen, how comfortable or uncomfortable do you think you will feel about...?

### Returning to the workplace



Base: 1,433 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020



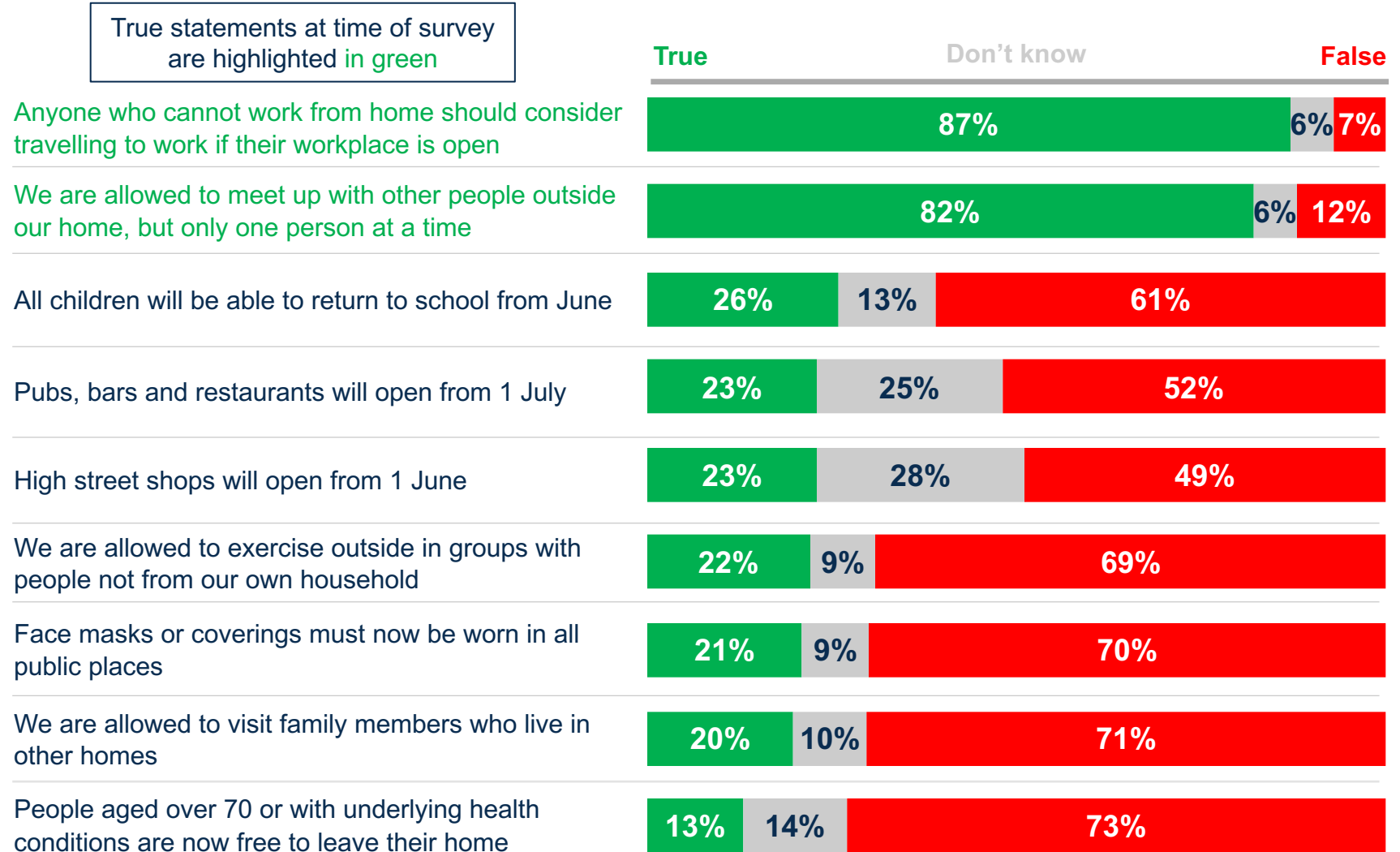
New government guidelines for England on going to work and meeting up with one other person outside the home have cut through, with large majorities recognising them.

But there is some confusion about others:

- 26% think all children will be able to go back to school on 1 June, when it is actually just early years pupils, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 who will be.
- 23% think pubs, bars and restaurants will open from 1 July, but at the time of the survey the government had not set a date for their reopening and only said that they must remain closed until 4 July at the earliest.
- 22% think people can exercise outside in groups with people not from their own household, but the guidance states that you can only play some sports – such as tennis, basketball and golf – with one other person from outside your household.

Base: 1,895  
England residents  
aged 16-75,  
interviewed 20-22  
May 2020

**As you may know, on 10 May the Prime Minister announced the current government guidelines on the actions people should take in response to the coronavirus. Thinking about the announcement, which of the following do you think are now true government guidelines for ENGLAND, and which are false?**

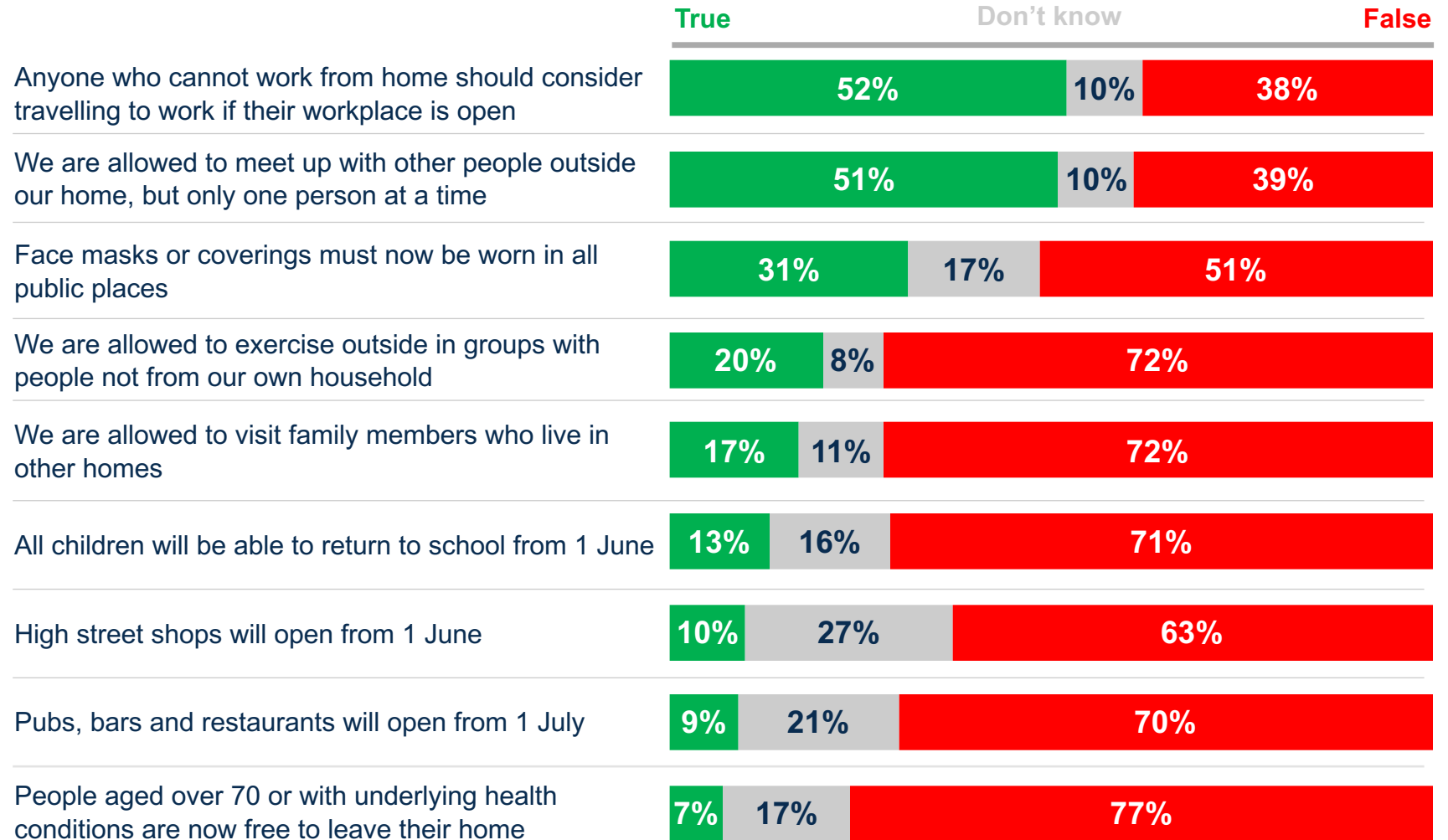


None of these guidelines applies in Scotland – but significant proportions of the Scottish public think they do.

In particular, half think they should consider going to their workplaces if they can't work from home, despite the Scottish government not endorsing the UK government's message to employees to return to work in such cases.

And half think they can meet up with someone outside their home, but the Scottish government is still telling people not to mix households when meeting up.

**As you may know, on 10 May the Prime Minister announced the current government guidelines on the actions people should take in response to the coronavirus. Thinking about the announcement, which of the following do you think are now true government guidelines for SCOTLAND, and which are false?**



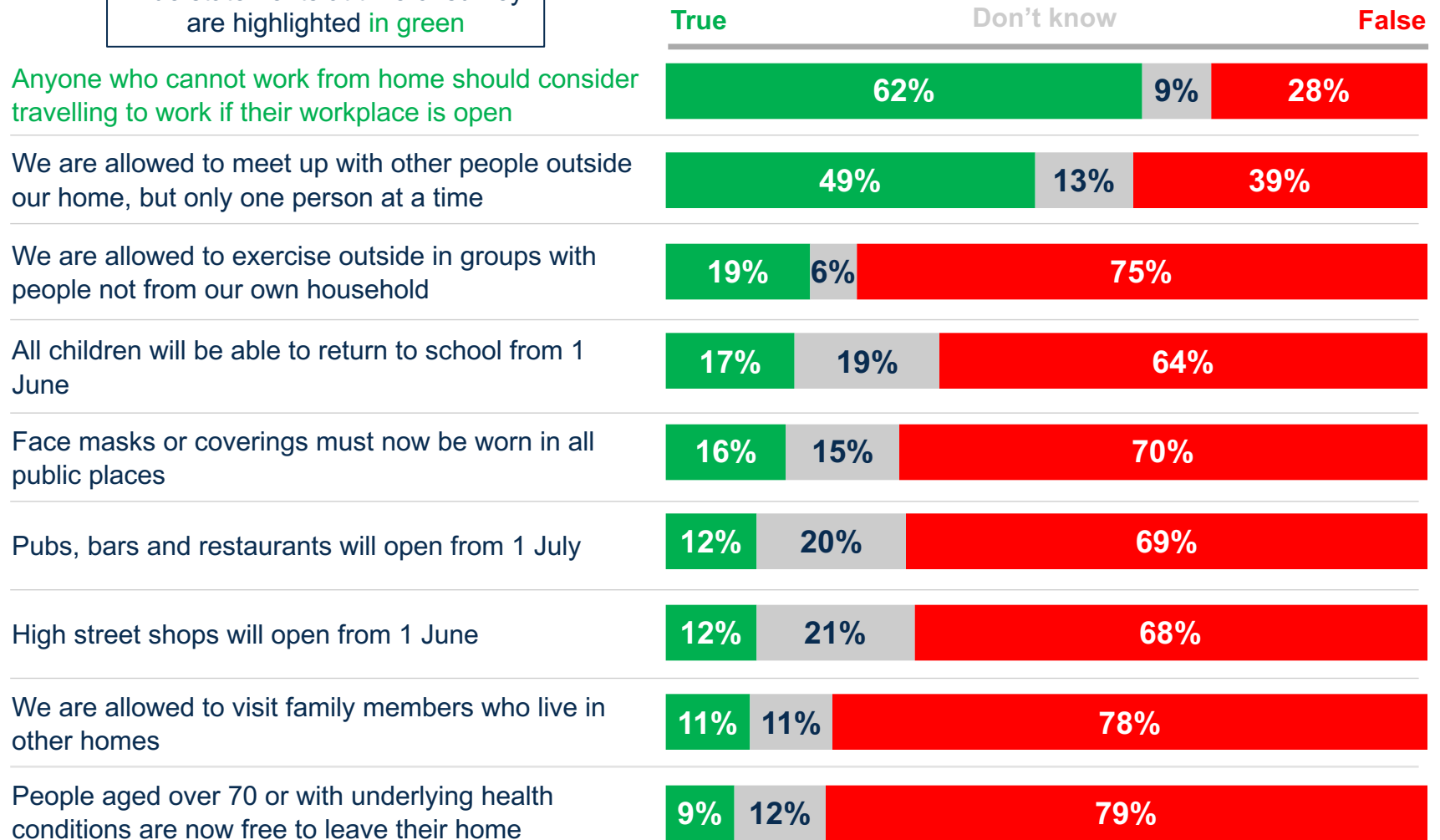
Base: 189 Scotland residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020. Note this base size is small

It is a similar situation in Wales, where half of the public think they are allowed to meet up with one person from outside their household – which in fact only applies to people in England. The Welsh government has said it's fine if you bump into someone you know while outside, but that you could not arrange to meet up with them.

However, the Welsh government is allowing people to go to workplaces if they are still permitted to be open, as long as employees can observe the 2-metre social distancing rule.

**As you may know, on 10 May the Prime Minister announced the current government guidelines on the actions people should take in response to the coronavirus. Thinking about the announcement, which of the following do you think are now true government guidelines for WALES, and which are false?**

True statements at time of survey are highlighted in green



Base: 107 Wales residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020. Note: this base size is small



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