

Coronavirus fallout: blame, trust and the future of the UK

For more information, contact:

Bobby Duffy

bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk

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Introduction

This report includes findings from a survey of 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75 by [King's College London](#) in partnership with [Ipsos MORI](#), conducted on 17-20 July 2020. Some of these are compared with results from previous surveys, including two others that were carried out during the coronavirus pandemic.

It finds that:

- By 42% to 36%, people are more likely to think the pandemic has been handled badly than well in the UK.
- Those who think it has been mismanaged view it largely as a failure of political leadership, with the government as a whole (70%), the Prime Minister himself (65%) and the Conservative party (41%) seen as among the most responsible.
- There is a big partisan divide in perceptions of who is to blame: for example, Labour voters are much more likely than Conservative voters to blame the Prime Minister (78% vs 35%), and Conservative voters are much more likely to lay the blame at the feet of scientific advisors (32% vs 12%).
- Those who think the crisis has been handled well give by far the most credit (72%) to the NHS.
- The UK public themselves get both blame and credit, with rule-breakers and rule-followers seen as among the most blameworthy (55%) and praiseworthy (51%).

The crisis has also affected political, economic and scientific trust:

- Britons are relatively divided on whether to trust government claims that it's safe to resume activities which have been restricted throughout lockdown.
- While people are more likely to disagree than agree that the handling of the pandemic has inspired greater trust in the government, the public do say they have a newfound trust in scientific experts as a result of their work on the response to Covid-19.
- But it's not all bad news for the political class, as fewer people now feel that the traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like them, and fewer think the economy is stacked in favour of those with a lot of money and power.
- And although a majority think the UK is in decline, even more think the pandemic offers an opportunity to rebuild the country for the better.

Finally, looking further afield over the course of the pandemic, the public's perceptions of the US have worsened more than their perceptions of China following the two nations' responses to Covid-19.

Responsibility for the handling of the crisis

More people think the UK's Covid-19 crisis has been managed badly than do not, with opinions split hugely along political lines.

And when it comes to assigning responsibility for the handling of the pandemic, the government gets the blame, the NHS gets the credit, and the public gets both.

There is also a partisan divide with regard to who is seen as most culpable, with Labour voters much more likely than Conservative voters to say political leadership has been at fault.

By contrast, Tories apportion significantly more blame than do Labour voters to scientific advisors and organisations like the WHO and PHE.

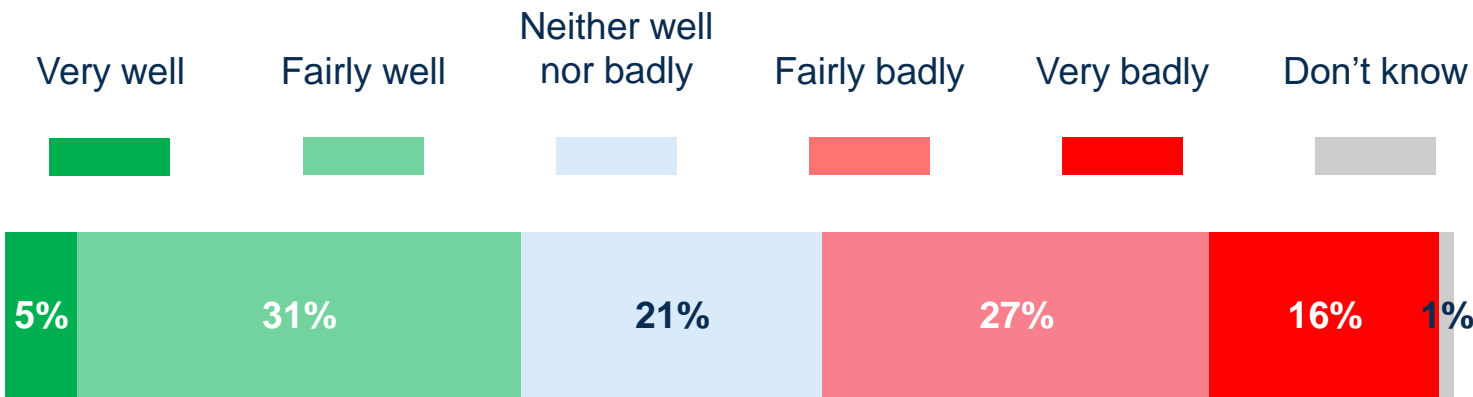
By 42% to 36%, people are more likely to think the pandemic has been handled badly than handled well in the UK.

There is a big partisan divide in opinion, with Labour voters three times as likely as Conservative voters to hold this view.

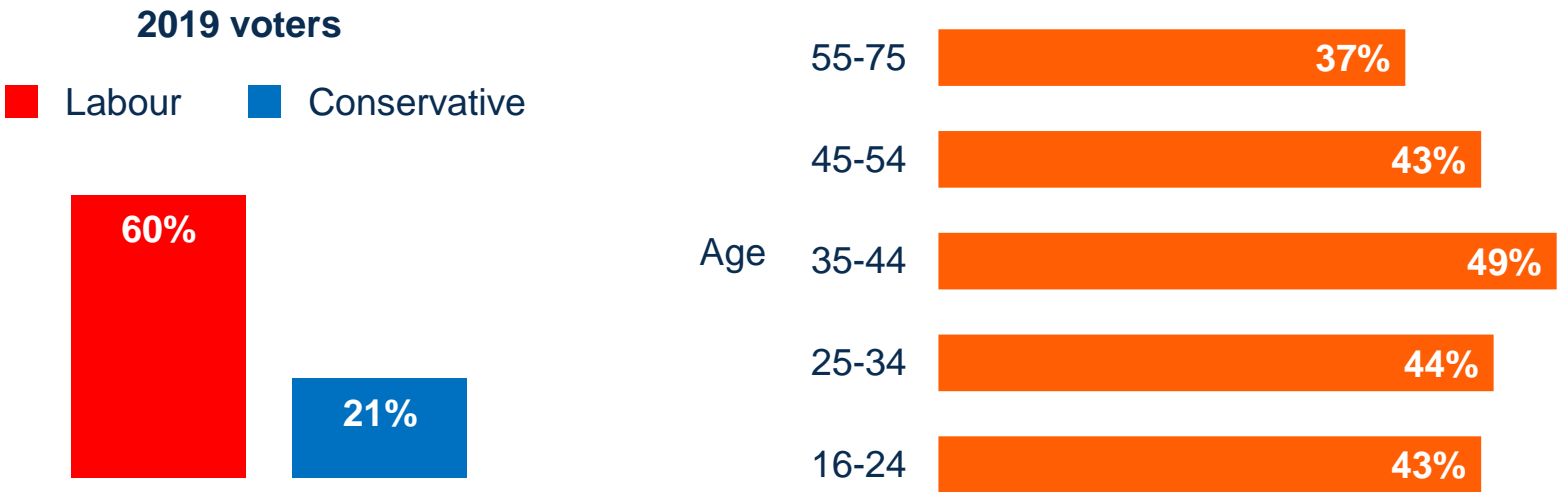
Those aged 55-75 are the least likely of all age groups to say the crisis has been mishandled.

Note some figures may differ from charts due to rounding.

Overall, how well or badly do you think the coronavirus crisis has been handled in the UK?



% who say handled badly

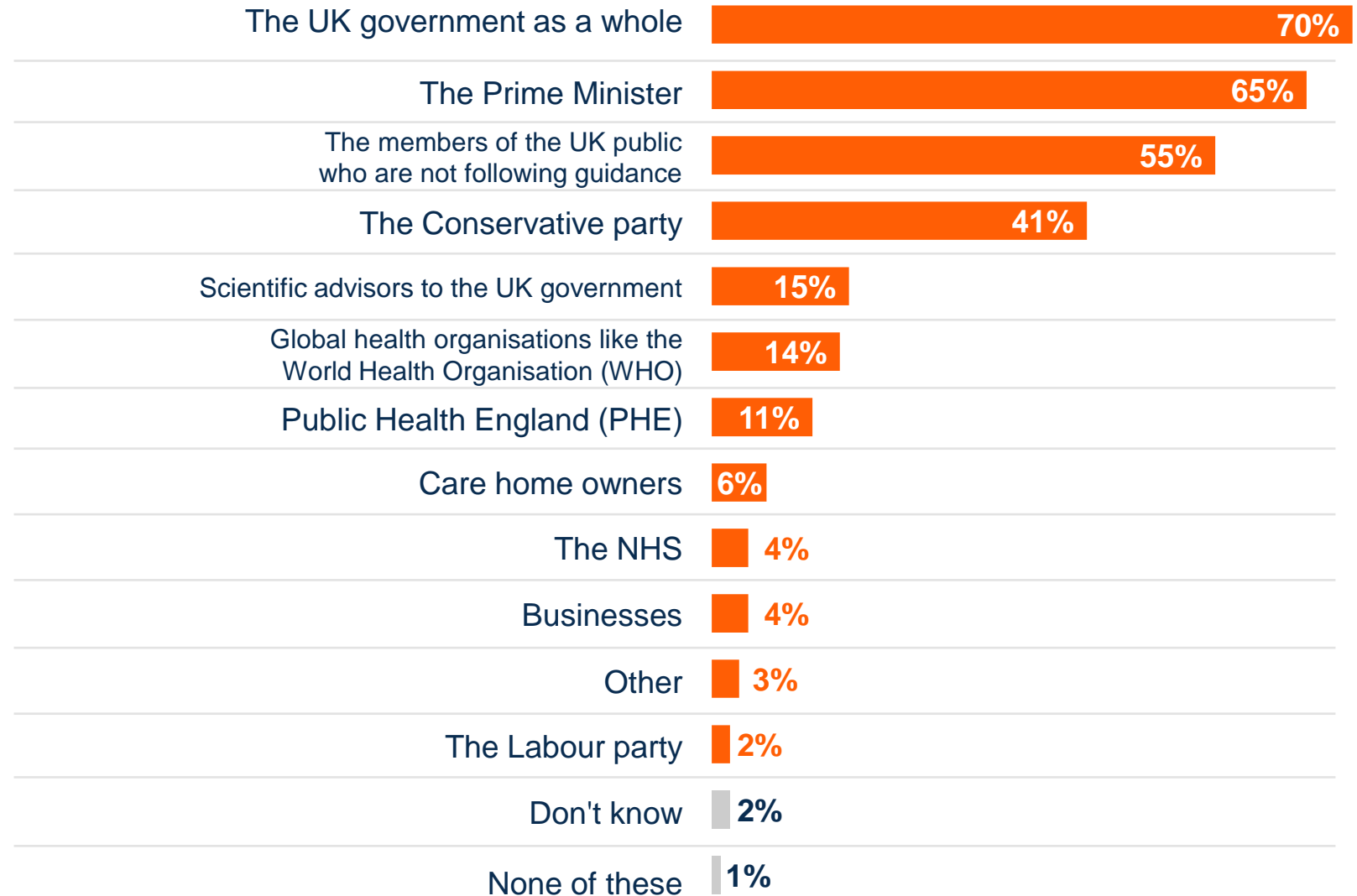


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

Among those who think the crisis has been handled badly, most of the blame is assigned to politicians, with the UK government, the Prime Minister and the Conservative party seen as among the most responsible.

However, members of the public who are not following Covid-19 guidance are also seen as blameworthy by more than half those who think the pandemic has been mismanaged.

Which three or four of the following, if any, do hold most responsible for the coronavirus crisis being **handled badly** in the UK?

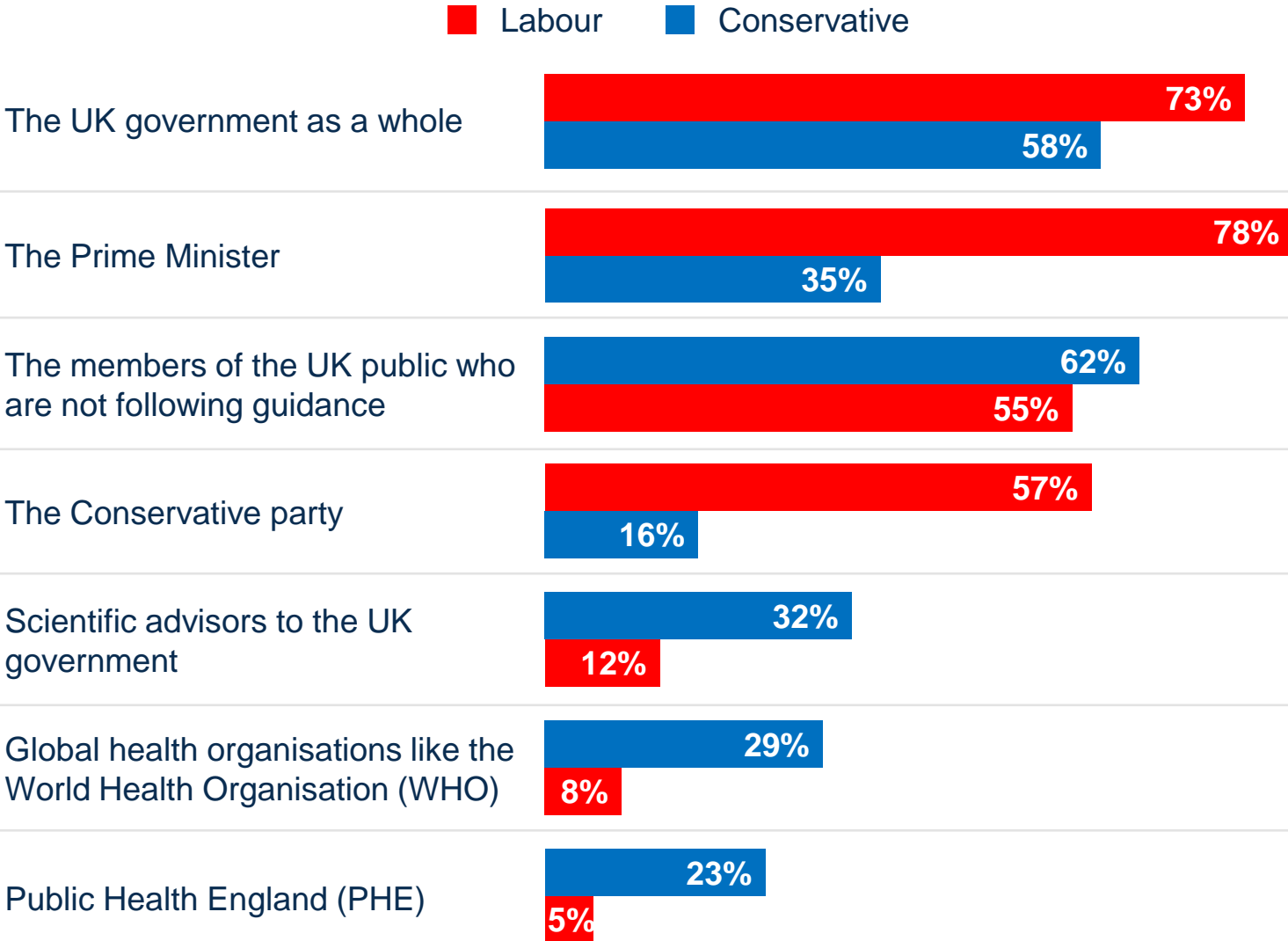


Base: 987 UK residents aged 16-75 who think the coronavirus crisis has been handled badly, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

Those who think the crisis has been handled badly are divided along party lines when it comes to who is most responsible.

Labour voters are much more likely to blame political leaders, while Conservative voters are much more likely to blame the scientists advising the government and external bodies involved in the pandemic response.

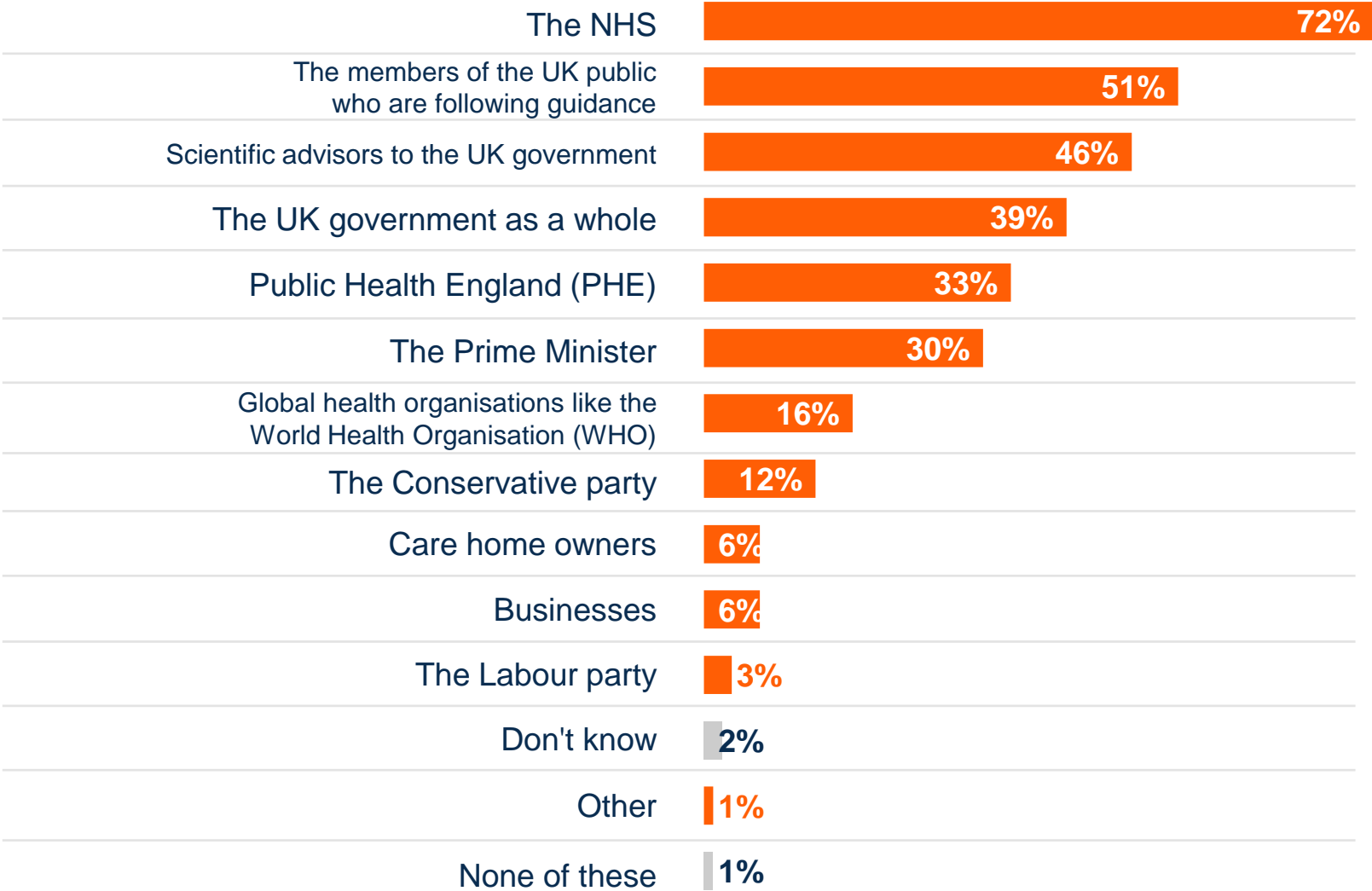
Which three or four of the following, if any, do hold most responsible for the coronavirus crisis being **handled badly** in the UK?



The NHS gets by far the most credit among those who think the crisis has been handled well.

And while rule-breakers get a great deal of blame from those who think the pandemic has been mishandled, rule-followers get the second-highest amount of praise among those who have a positive view of how the crisis has been managed.

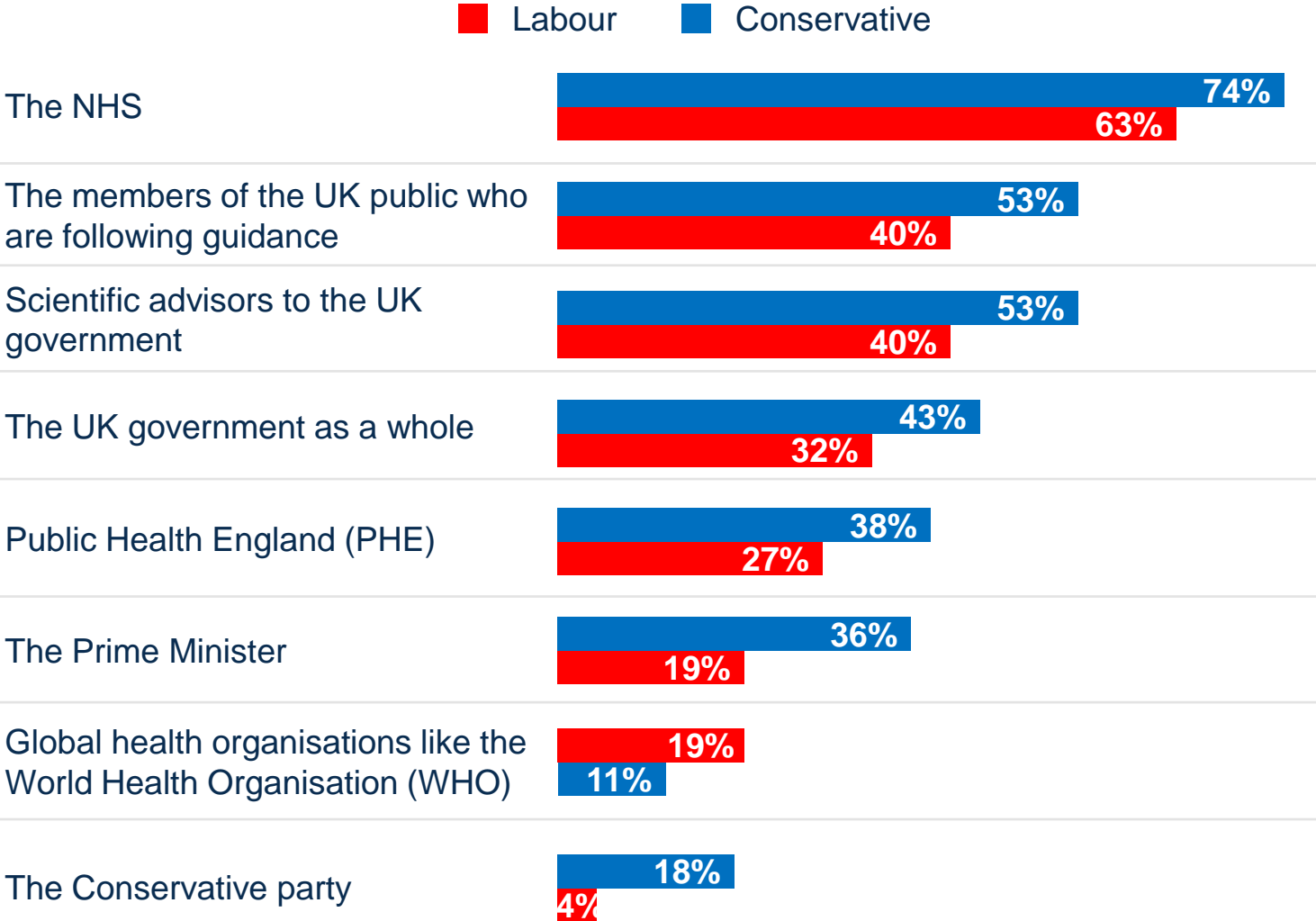
Which three or four of the following, if any, do you think are most responsible for the coronavirus crisis being **handled well** in the UK?



Base: 778 UK residents aged 16-75 who think the coronavirus crisis has been handled well, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

Conservative voters who think the crisis has been handled well give more of the credit to the health service, scientific advisers and members of the public than they do the government, the Prime Minister or their party.

Which three or four of the following, if any, do you think are most responsible for the coronavirus crisis being **handled well** in the UK?



Base: 369 UK residents aged 16-75 who voted Conservative and 125 who voted Labour in 2019 who think the coronavirus crisis has been handled well, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

How the crisis has affected political, scientific and economic trust

Britons are relatively divided on whether to trust government claims that it's safe to resume activities which have been restricted throughout lockdown.

And while people are more likely to disagree than agree that the handling of the pandemic has inspired greater trust in the government, the public say they have a newfound trust in scientific experts as a result of their work on the response to Covid-19.

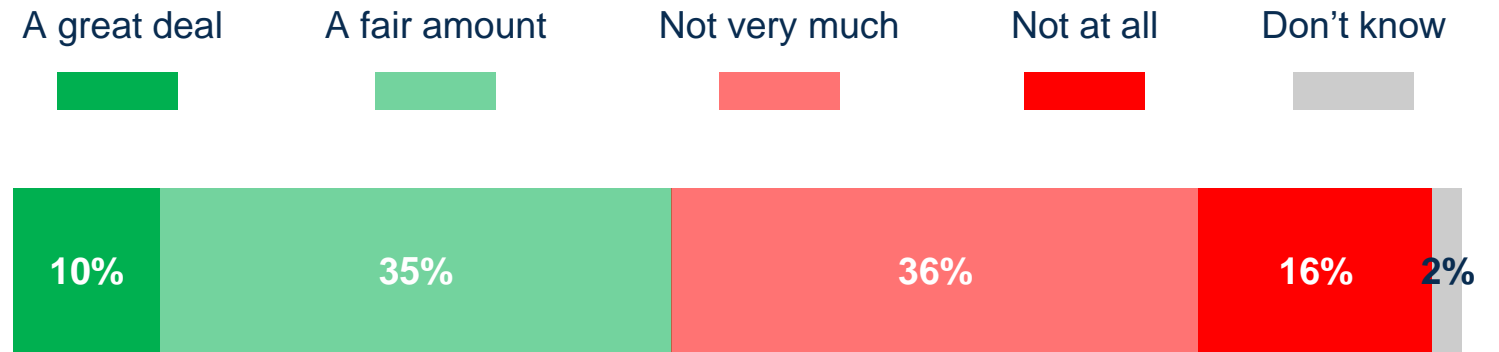
But it's not all bad news for the political class, as fewer people now feel that the traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like them, and fewer think the economy is stacked in favour of those with a lot of money and power.

Finally, although a majority think the UK is in decline, even more think the pandemic offers an opportunity to rebuild the country for the better.

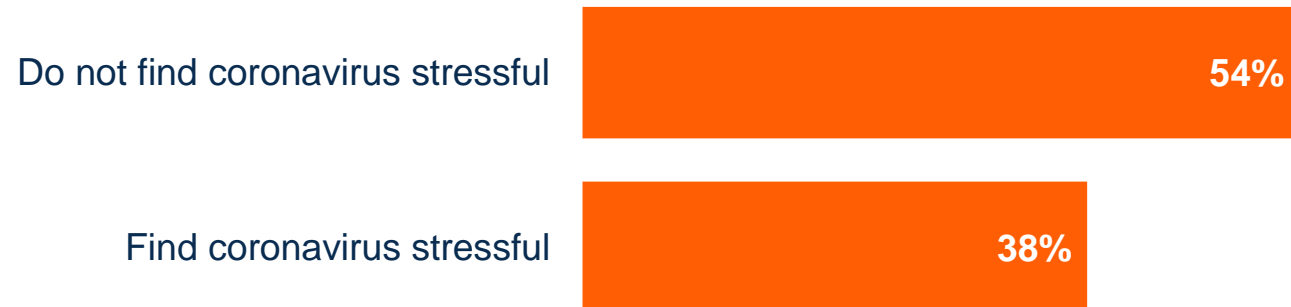
In keeping with the relative divide in opinion on whether the crisis has been handled well, 52% of the public do not trust the government that it's safe to start resuming activities that were previously restricted, compared with 45% who do.

Those who find coronavirus stressful are less likely than those who don't to trust the advice.

To what extent, if at all, do you trust...
**... the government's advice on when it's safe to return to work,
school or leisure activities?**

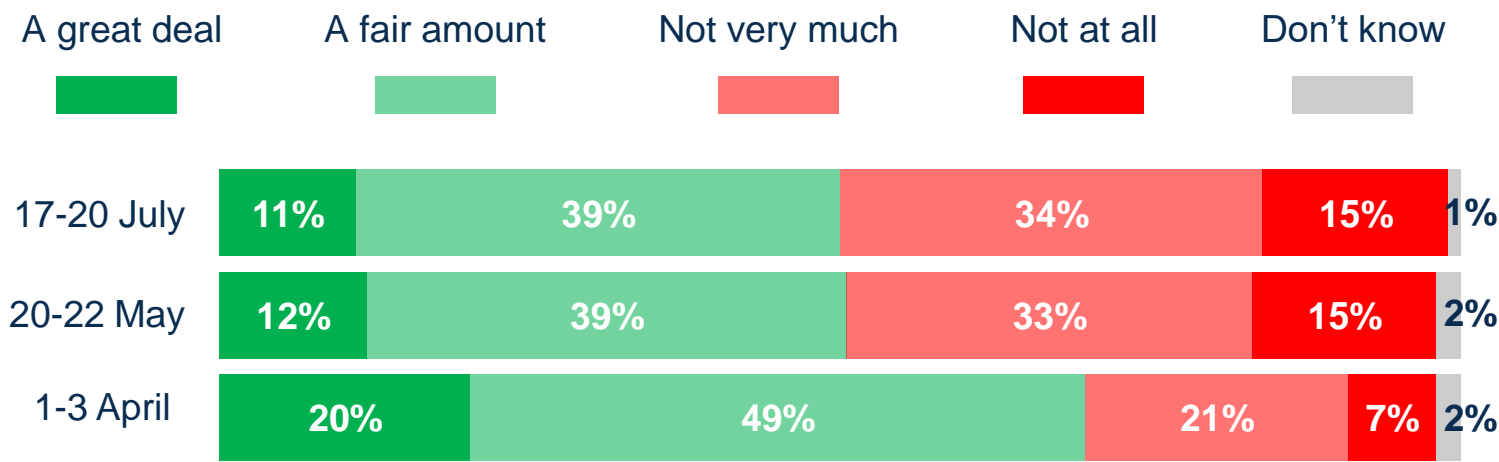


% who trust government advice that it's safe to return

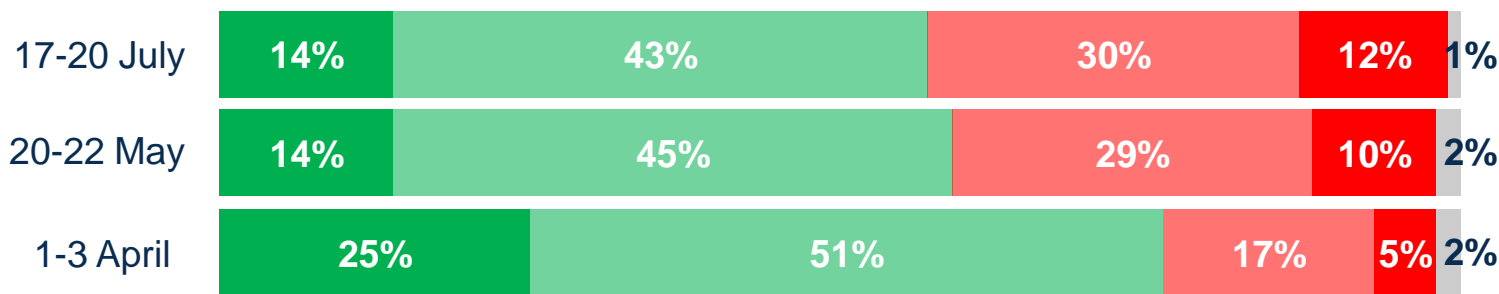


Meanwhile, there has been virtually no change since the third week of May in the extent to which the public say they trust the government to control Covid-19 or the information it provides on the virus.

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: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020; 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

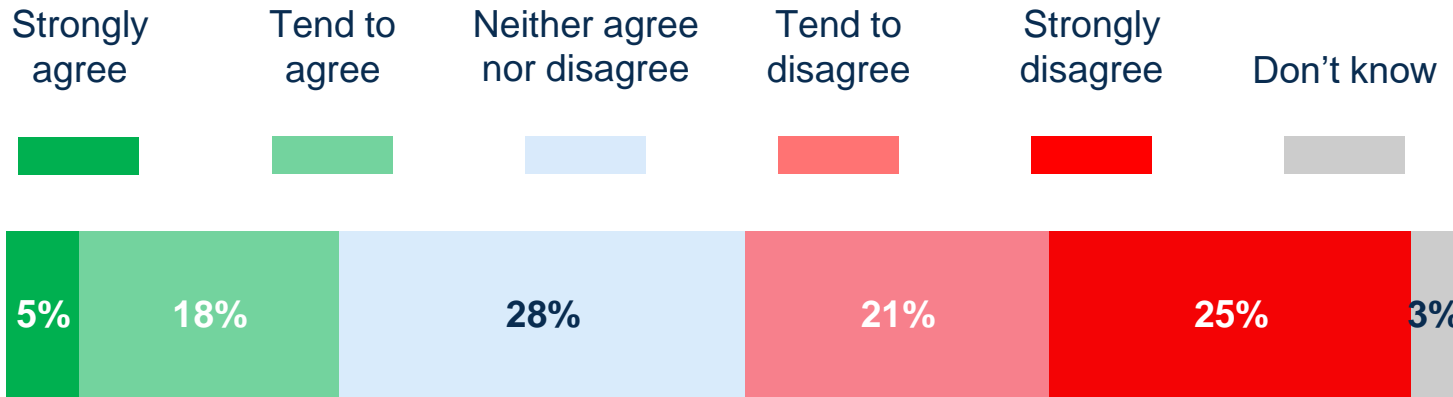
Questions asked in April referred to “the government”, rather than “UK government”

The public are twice as likely to disagree than agree that their trust in the UK government has increased because of its handling of the crisis, with a quarter strongly disagreeing.

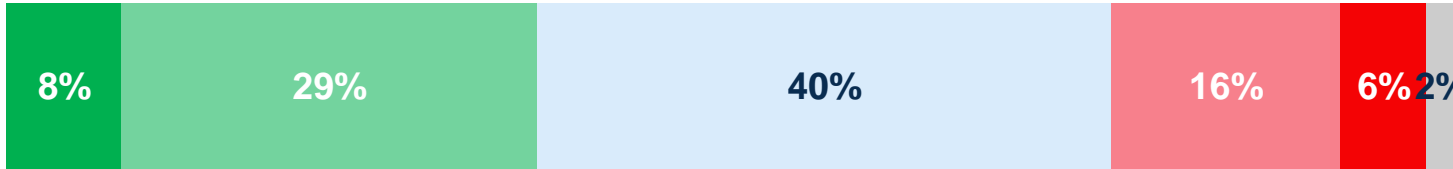
This is reversed among Conservative voters, with nearly two in five agreeing and one in five disagreeing.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

I trust the UK government more now as a result of how they've handled the crisis



2019 Conservative voters

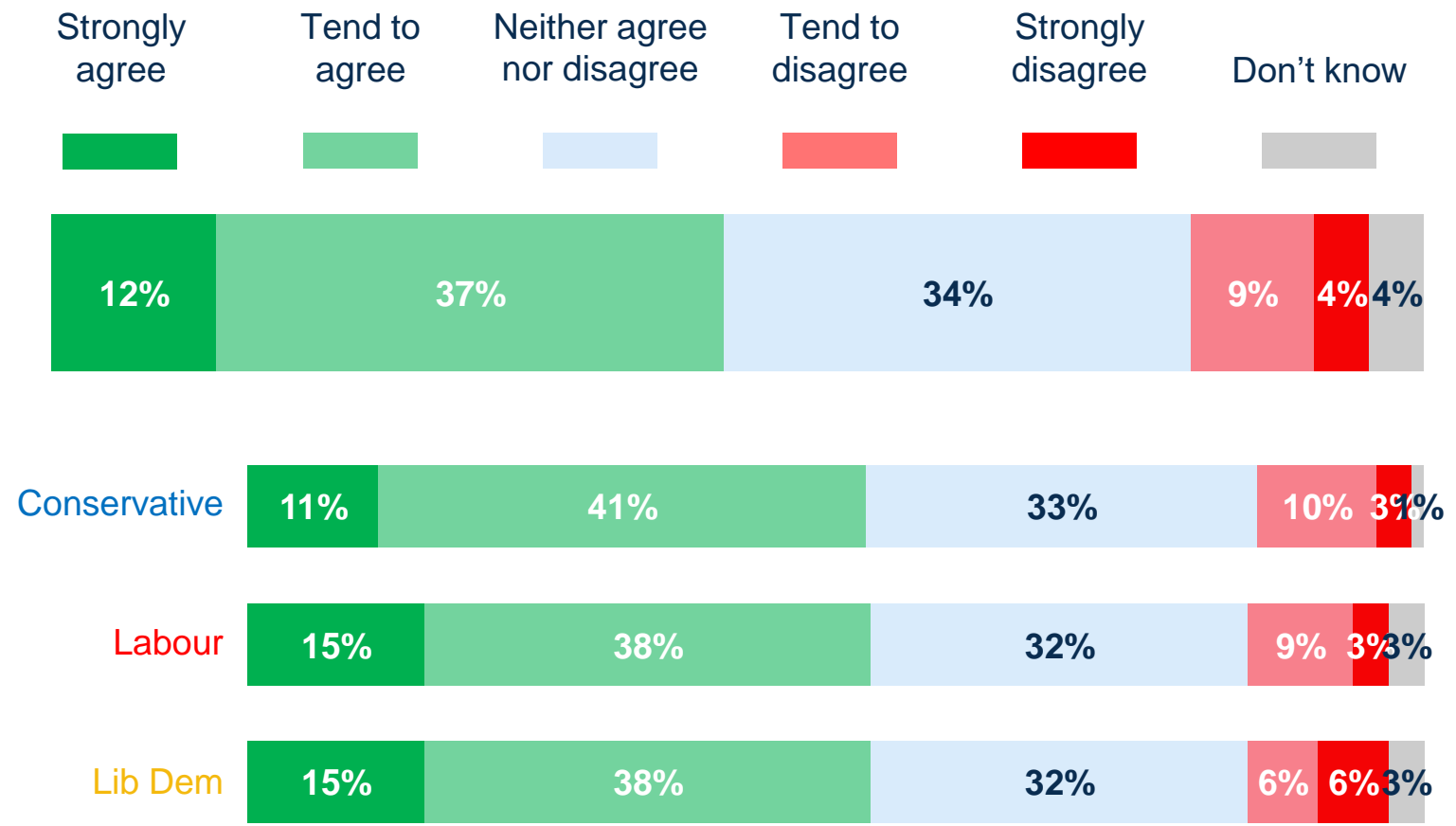


By contrast, the public say the scientific community's response to Covid-19 *has* inspired trust, with nearly half the saying they now have more confidence in scientific experts, compared with 13% who say they don't.

And this trust in scientists following the pandemic cuts across party lines, with nearly identical levels among voters for the three main parties.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

I trust scientific experts more now as a result of how they've helped us deal with the crisis



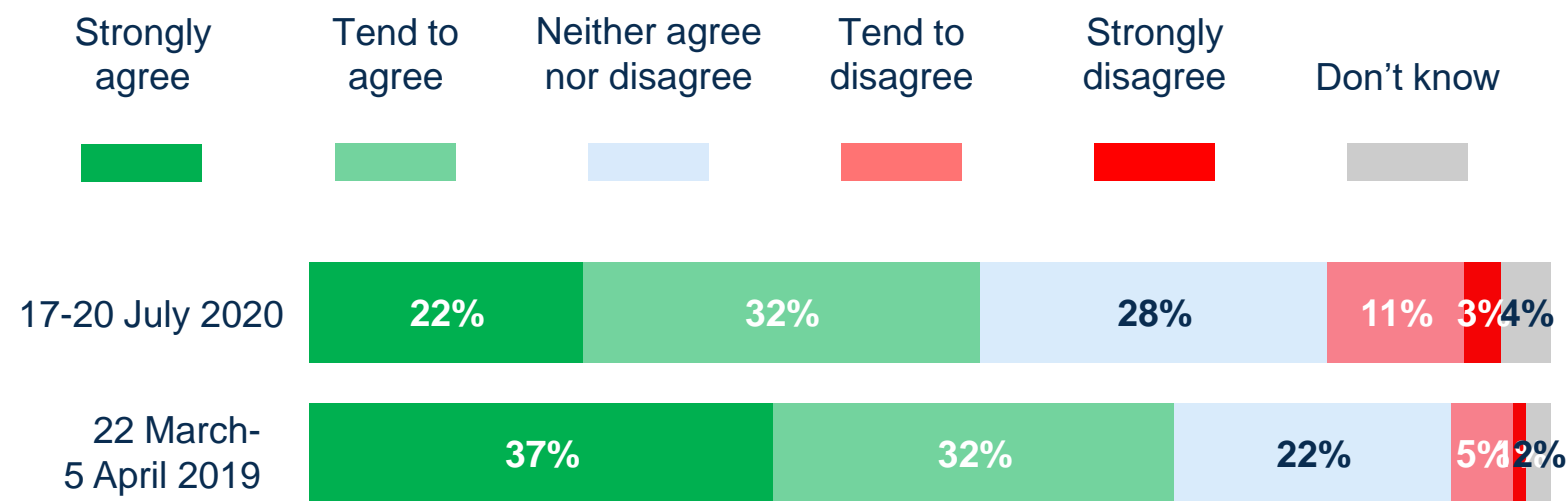
Despite the government's response to Covid-19 inspiring much less trust than scientists', people appear to have grown less cynical about some aspects of politics:

- 54% now say that traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like them, down from 69% the last time this question was asked, back in April of last year.

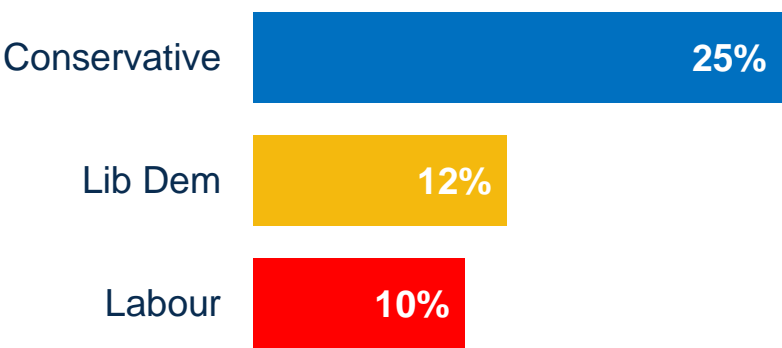
And Conservative voters are around twice as likely as Lib Dem and Labour voters to feel cared about.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me



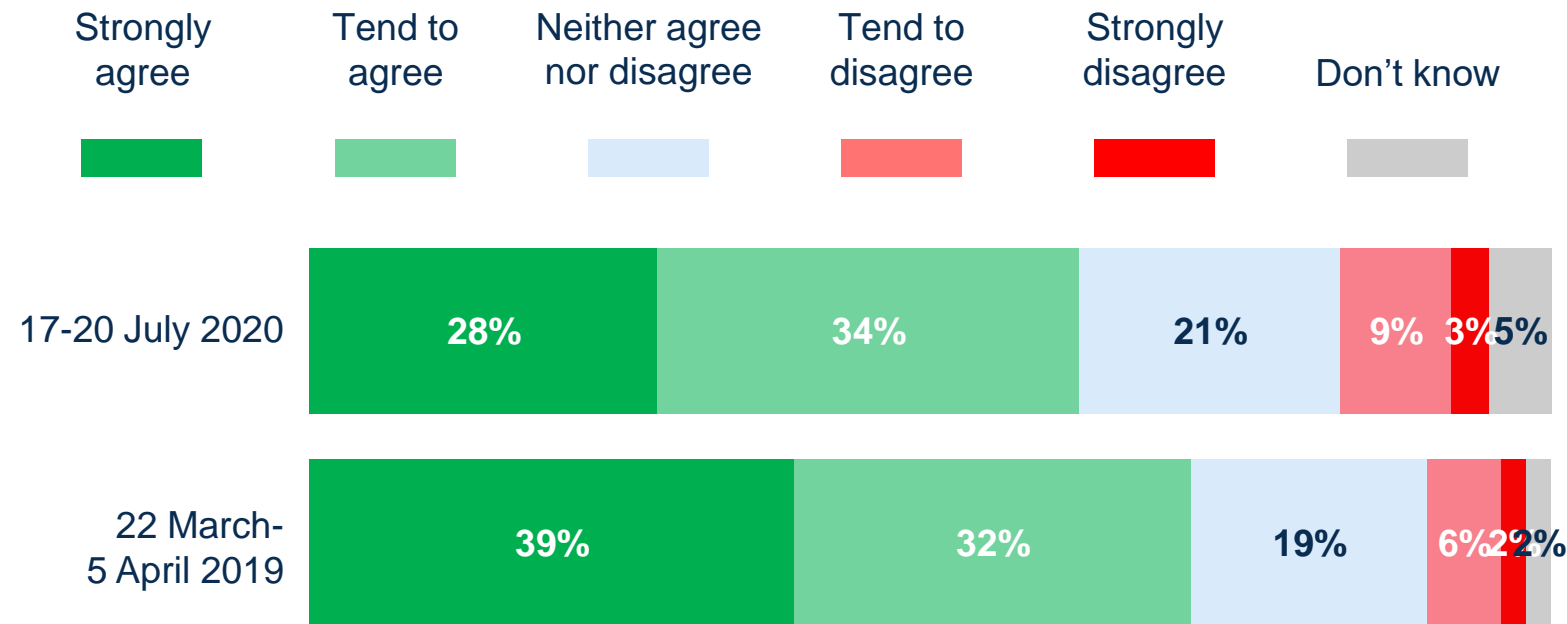
% of 2019 voters who disagree



The public also now have a more positive view of the fairness of the UK economy: 71% said it was rigged to advantage the rich and powerful in 2019 – the last time the question was asked – compared with 62% today.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

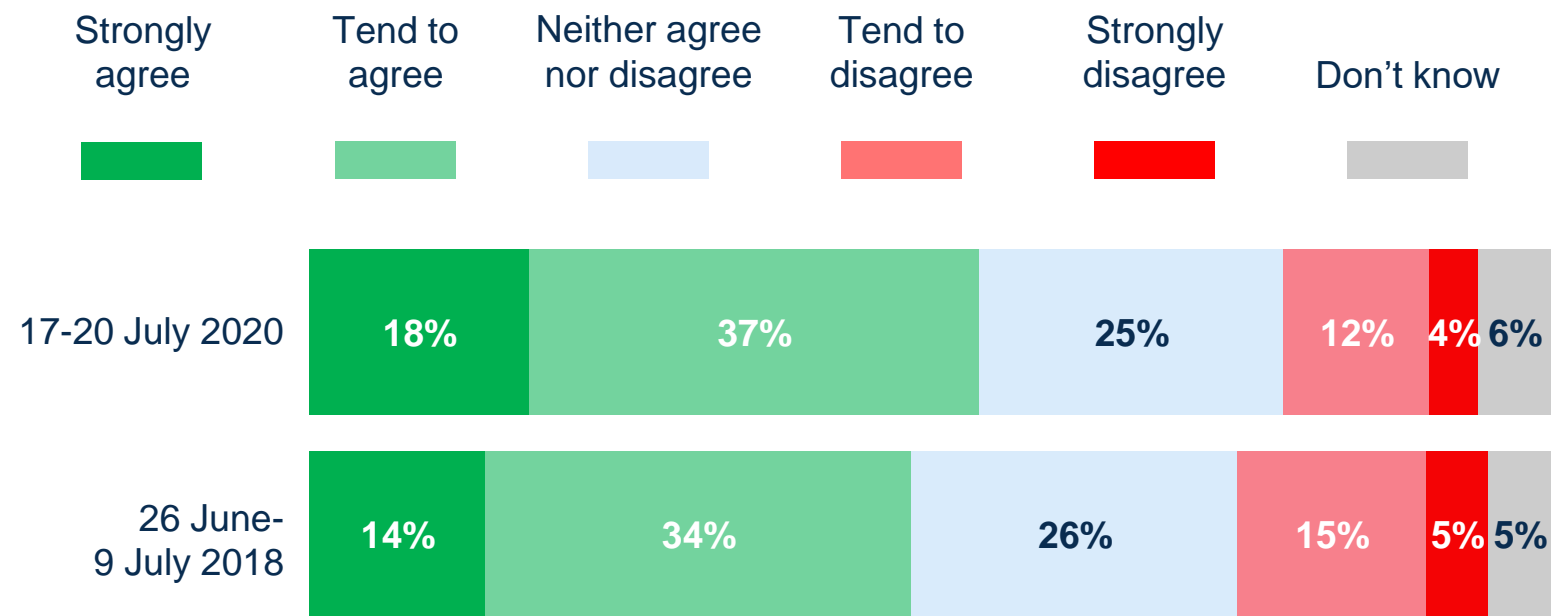
The UK economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful



54% of the public now think the UK is in decline, up from 48% when this question was last asked, in 2018.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The UK is in decline



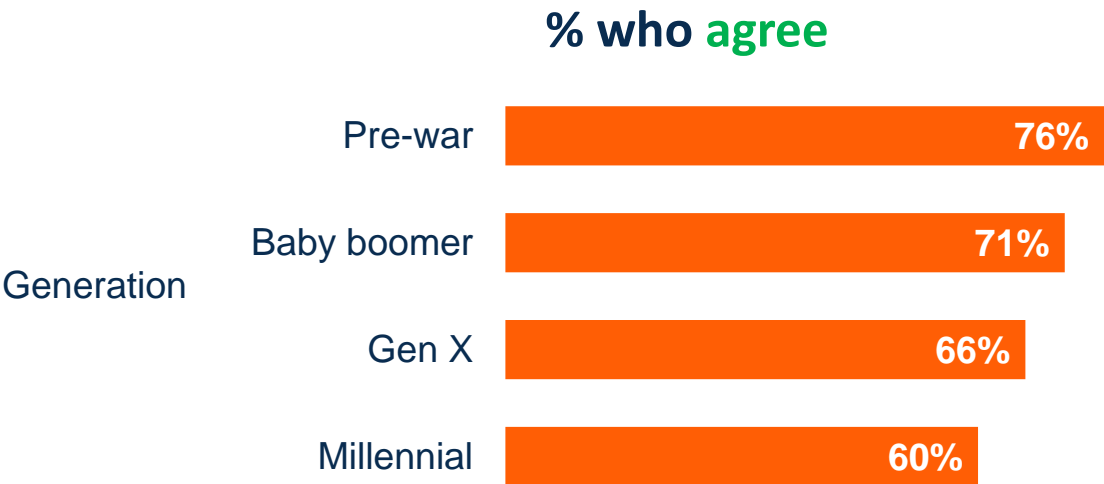
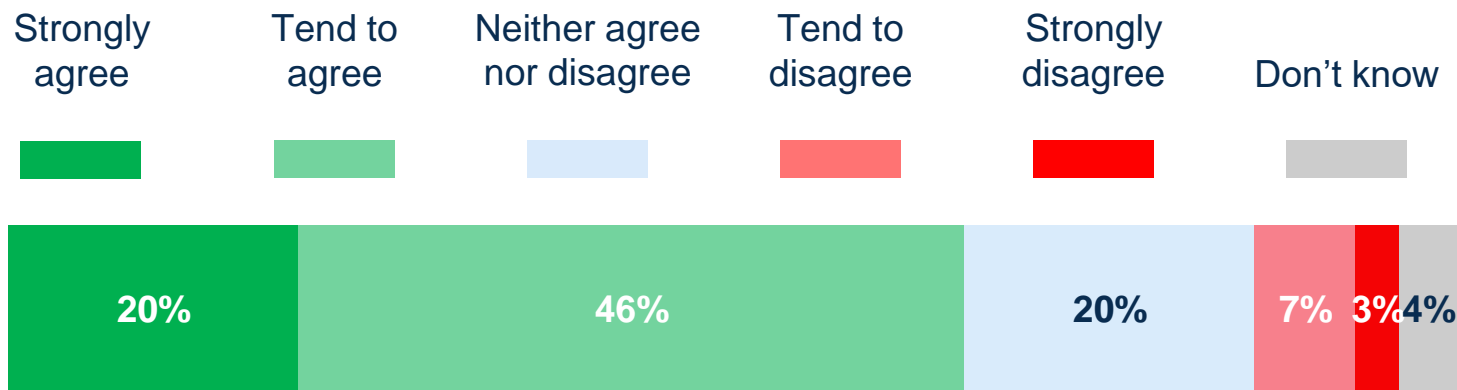
Note some figures may differ from charts due to rounding.

But while a majority think the UK is on a downward path, a bigger majority – 66% – think the crisis provides an opportunity to turn things around and build a better country.

Optimism that this is possible declines by generation, with those born in the pre-war period the most likely to agree and millennials least likely.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The coronavirus crisis gives us the chance to change how we've done things and build a better UK in the future



Views of the government's response to Covid-19

The public think the government has done a better job of protecting the economy than of protecting children's education.

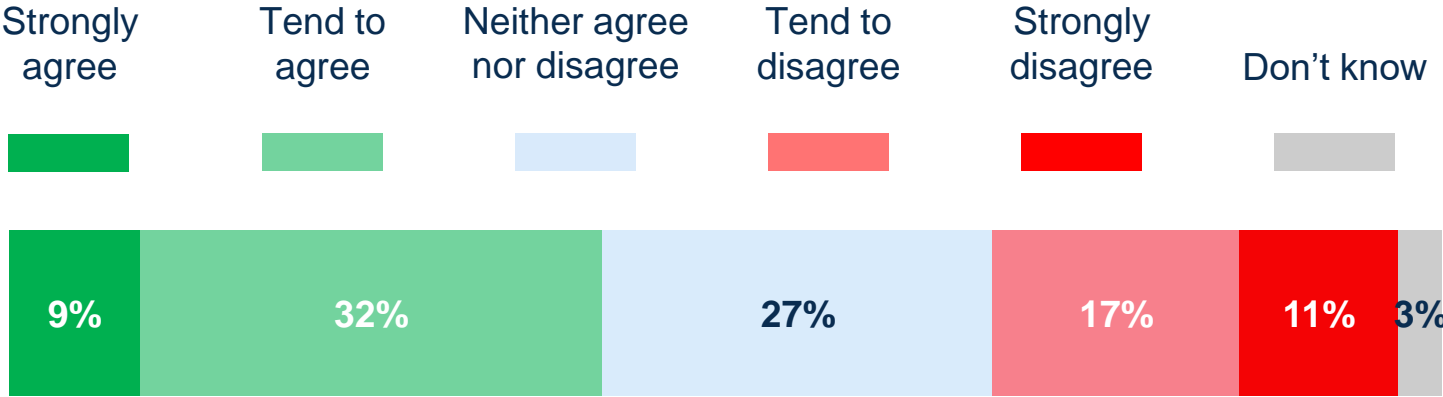
Meanwhile, across a range of measures, views of the official response are virtually unchanged from the third week of May, by which point support for the government's management of the crisis had declined significantly from its high point at the beginning of the lockdown.

The public have a more favourable view of the government's economic response than they do of its approach to supporting children's education during the pandemic.

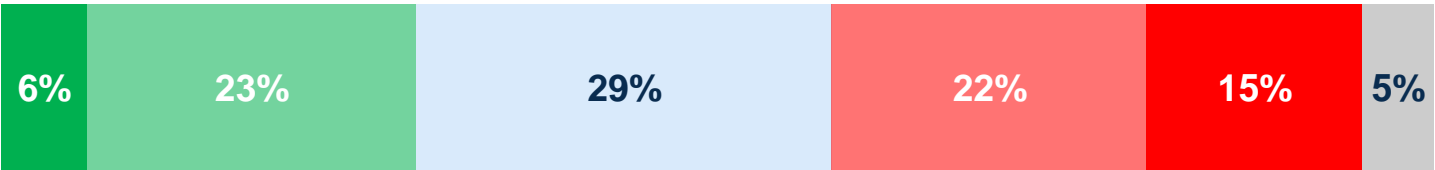
By 37% to 29%, people think it has not done a good job on education.

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

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

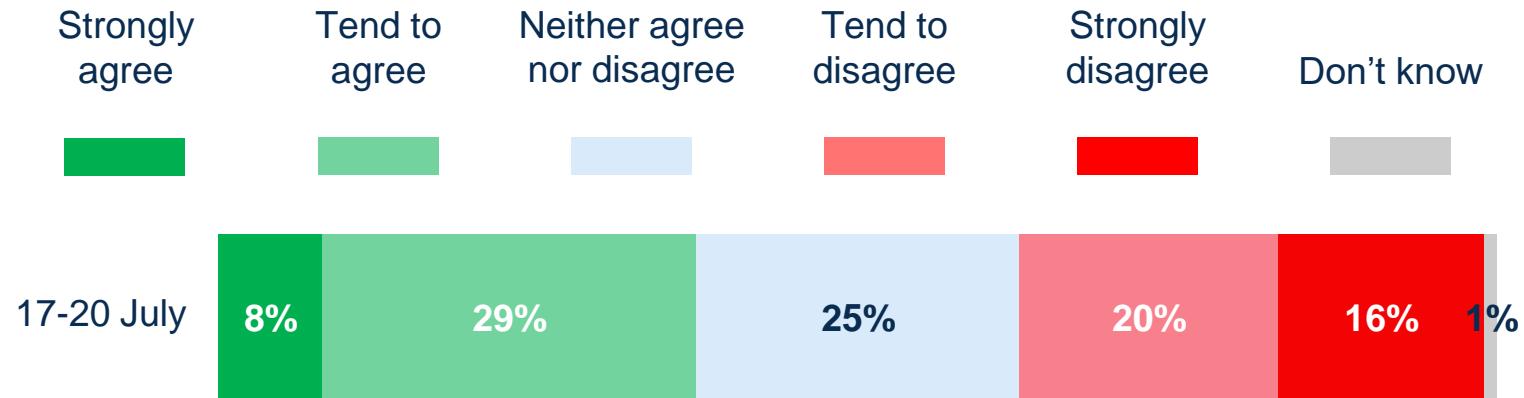


The UK government has done a good job of supporting children in their education during the coronavirus crisis

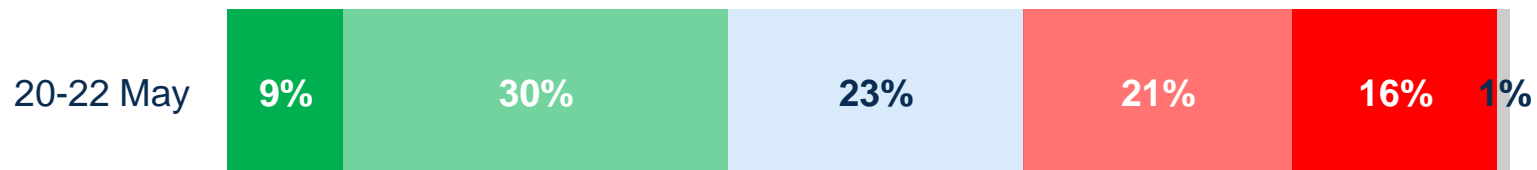


To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?

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

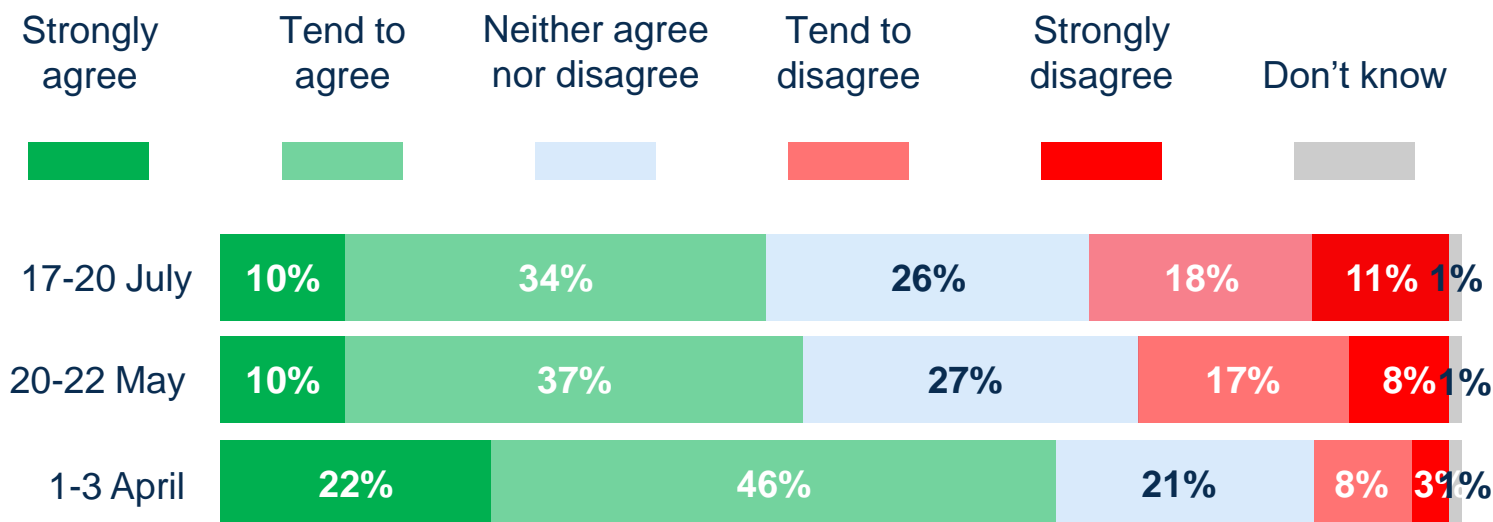


The UK government has done a good job of protecting UK residents through its response to the coronavirus

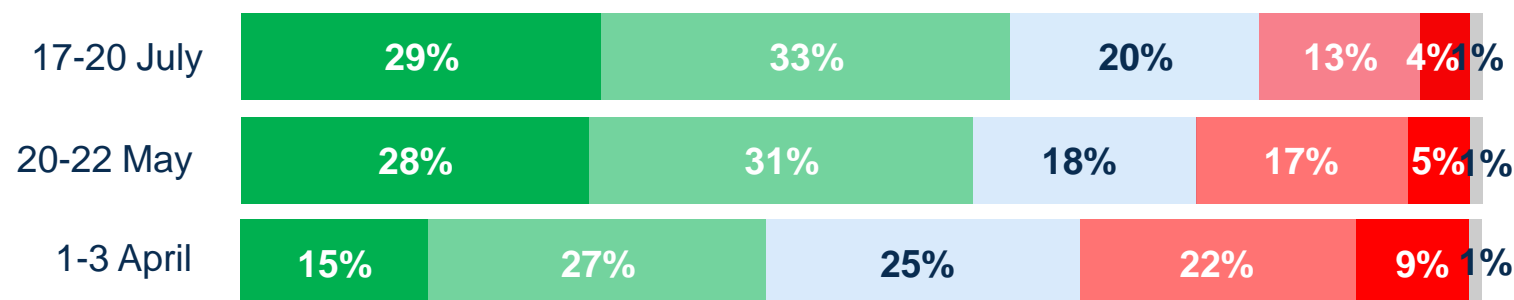


To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?

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



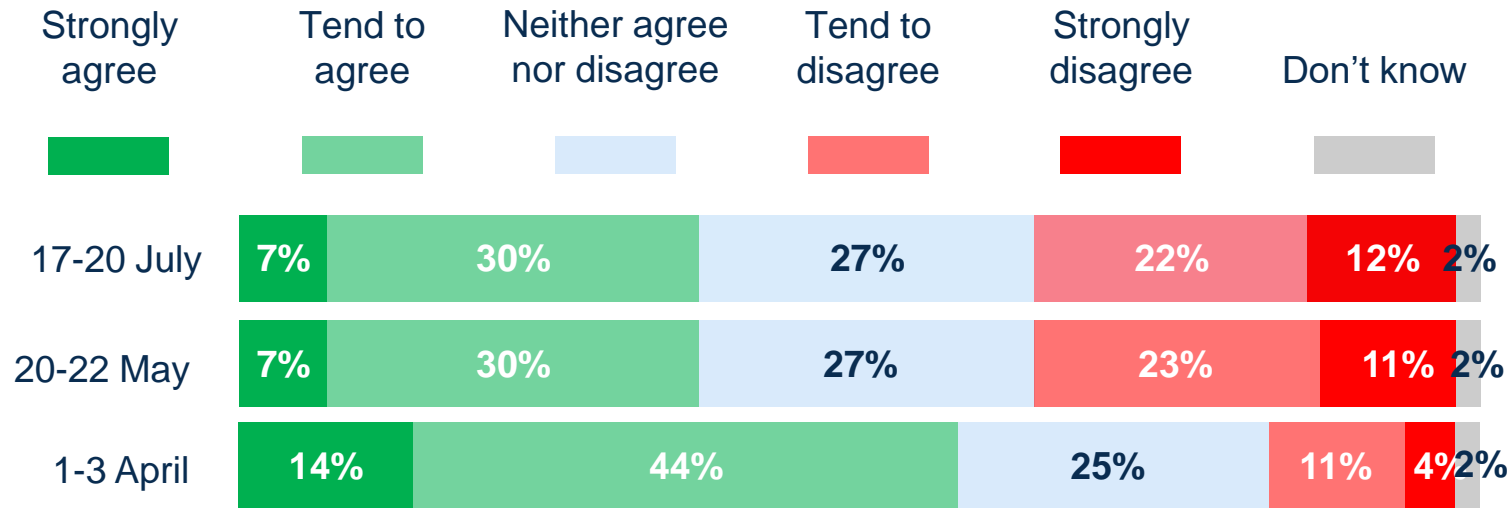
The UK government's response to the coronavirus has been confused and inconsistent



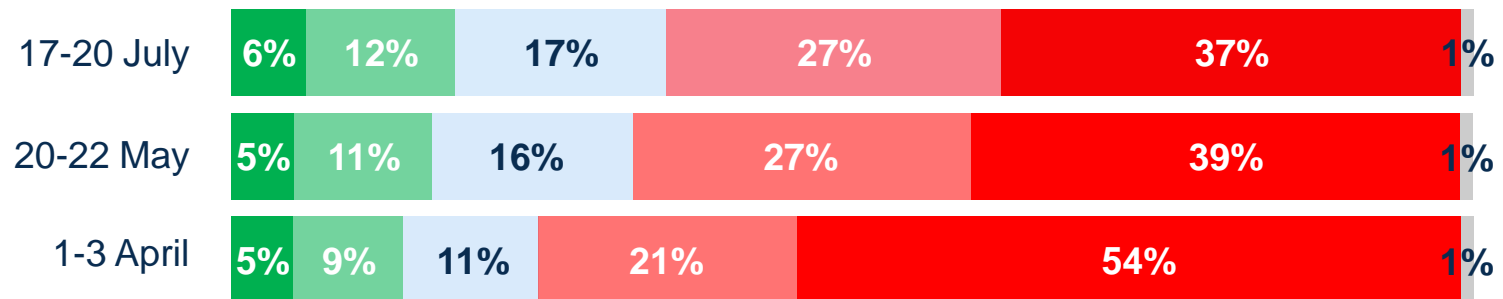
Questions asked in April referred to "the government", rather than "UK government"

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

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

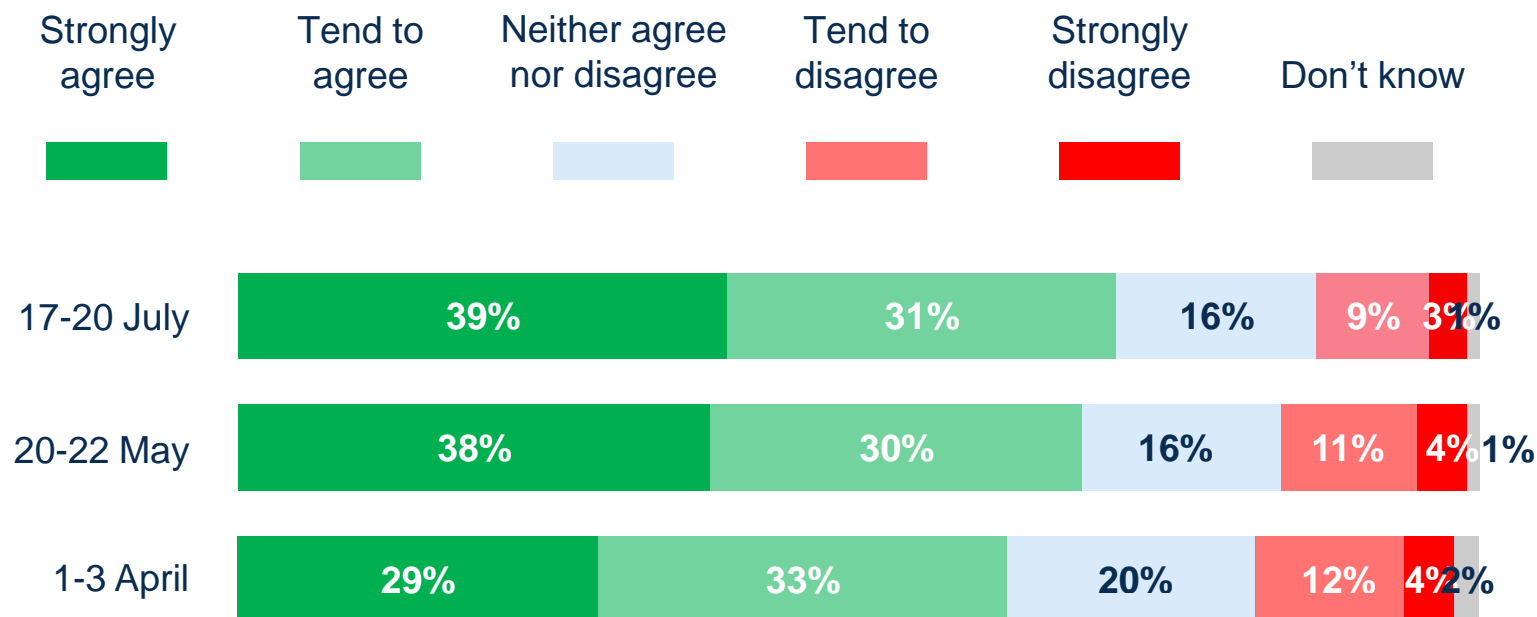


Too much fuss is being made about the risk of coronavirus



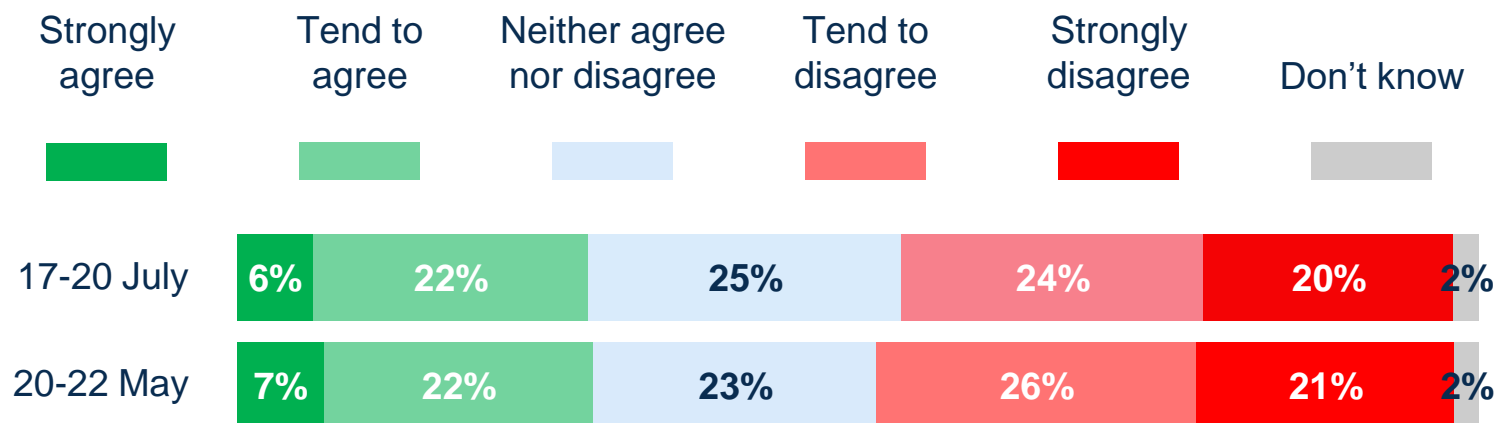
To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?

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

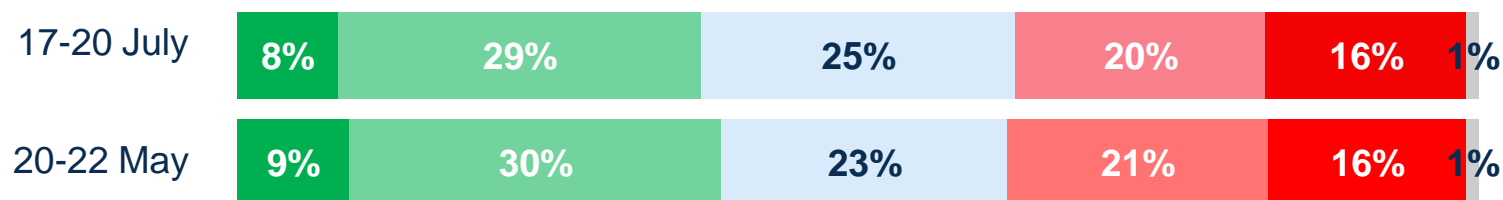


To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?

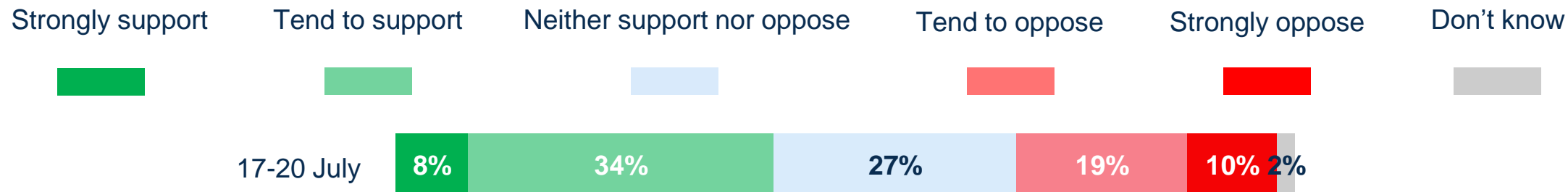
Compared with other countries, the UK government has responded well to the coronavirus outbreak



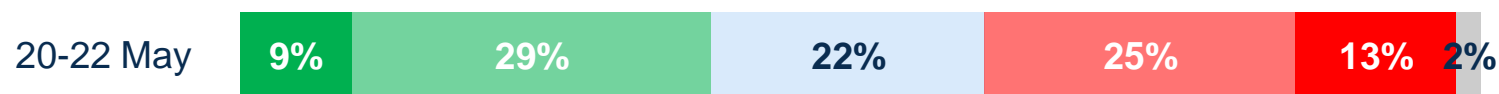
The UK government has done a good job of protecting the health of UK residents through its response to the coronavirus



From what you know or have heard, to what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose the UK government's current approach to controlling coronavirus?



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?



Views of other countries following their responses to Covid-19

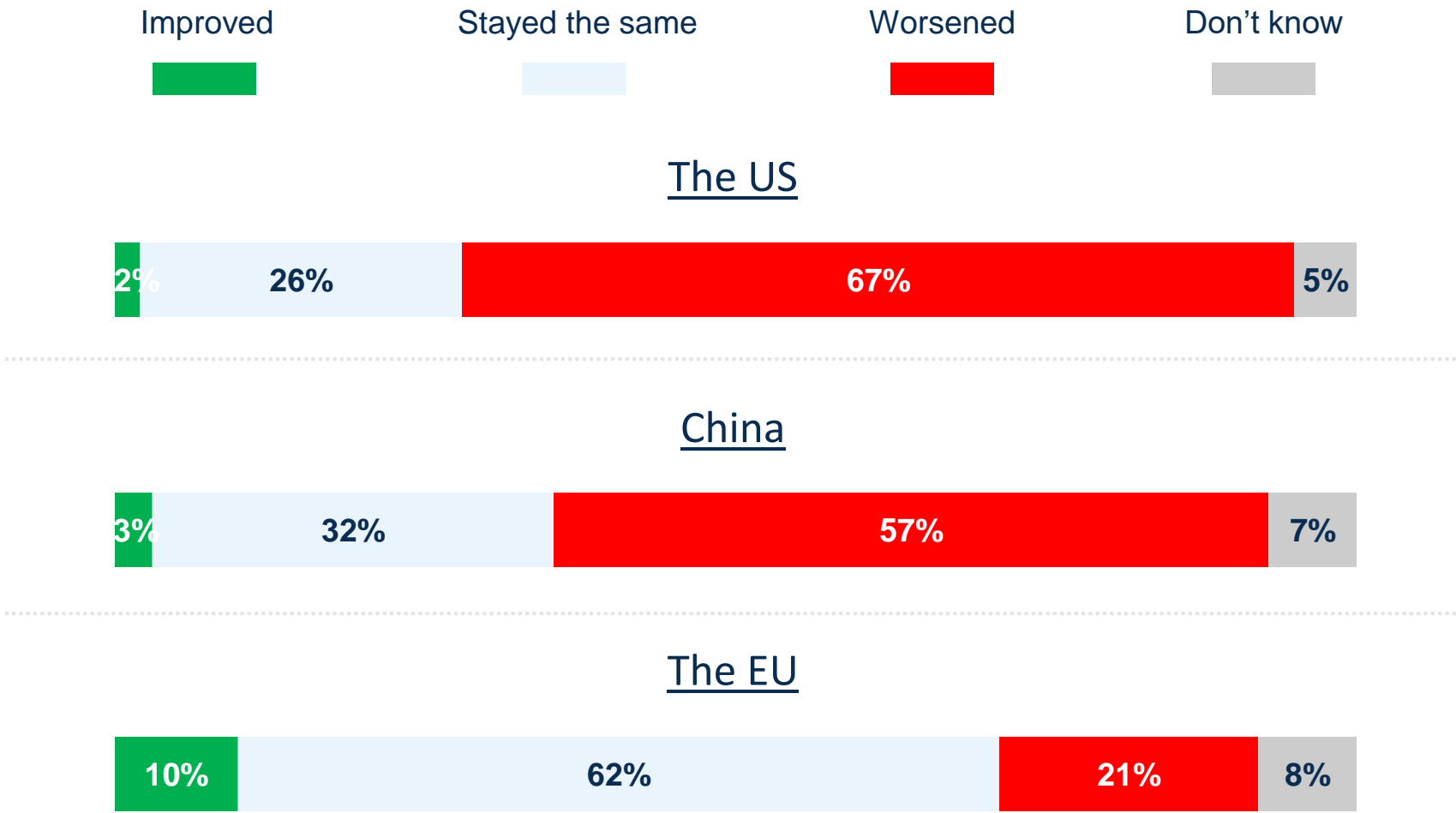
In the UK, people say their perceptions of the US have worsened more than those of China, while views of the EU have remained more stable.

The UK public are more likely to say their view of the US has worsened during the pandemic than they are to say the same of China.

The 67% of Britons who say their view of the US has worsened is also higher than the average of 58% who say the same across nine EU countries, as found in a previous survey from June. That poll additionally found 52% across those countries said their views of China had deteriorated.

The UK public's reported views of both the US and China have worsened considerably more than their views of the EU.

How, if at all, has your view of each the following changed during the coronavirus crisis?



THE POLICY INSTITUTE

For more information, contact:

Bobby Duffy

Director
The Policy Institute
King's College London

bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk

[@bobbyduffyking](https://twitter.com/bobbyduffyking)

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[@policyatking](https://twitter.com/policyatking) [kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute)

Daniel Allington

Senior Lecturer in Social and
Cultural Artificial Intelligence
King's College London

Kelly Beaver

Managing Director of Public
Affairs
Ipsos MORI

Bobby Duffy

Director
The Policy Institute
King's College London

Christoph Meyer

Professor of European &
International Politics
King's College London

Vivienne Moxham-Hall

Research Associate
The Policy Institute
King's College London

George Murkin

Senior Communications
Manager
The Policy Institute
King's College London

James Rubin

Assistant Director
NIHR Health Protection
Research Unit in
Emergency Preparedness
and Response

Gideon Skinner

Research Director
Ipsos MORI

Louise Smith

Senior Research
Associate
NIHR Health Protection
Research Unit in
Emergency Preparedness
and Response

Lucy Strang

Research Associate
The Policy Institute
King's College London

Simon Wessely

Professor of
Psychological Medicine
King's College London