The future under coronavirus: long-term changes and immediate expectations

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 two other surveys that were carried out during the coronavirus pandemic.

It finds that, **if it becomes clear over the next year or two that a Covid-19 vaccine or treatment cannot be produced**, people say they would accept certain very long-term changes to children's education:

- 55% say it would be acceptable for **parents to have to follow government instructions on when their child must go back to school**, up from 41% in May. Acceptance of this is virtually the same among parents themselves (56%), and is highest among 2019 Conservative voters, with 71% saying it'd be OK, much higher than Lib Dem (56%) and Labour (45%) voters.

- But at the same time, 56% also say they'd accept **parents being able to choose whether to send their child back to school** – although this is down from 63%. Acceptance of this rises to 65% among parents themselves, while 66% of 2019 Labour voters say they'd accept this, compared with 54% of Lib Dem voters and 44% of Conservative voters.

- Half the population (49%) still think **home-schooling most children long-term** would be acceptable – virtually unchanged from May (51%). 2019 Labour voters (58%) are more likely than Lib Dems (48%) and Conservatives (38%) to say they'd accept this, and parents are slightly more likely (56%) than the public overall to find it acceptable.

And in the nearer term, the majority of the public say that, if a second wave of Covid-19 occurs, they support **keeping schools closed for many months to reduce the risk to vulnerable adults**, almost three times as many as those who oppose such a measure.

The public also say they'd accept very long-term changes to ways of working and day-to-day life, if a vaccine or treatment cannot be found:

- 86% say they would find it acceptable for **employees to choose where they work**, compared with just 8% who say they would not.

- People are more divided over whether **employees should have to return to their workplace when the government tells them to**, with 47% saying it would be acceptable and 39% saying it would not. 60% of 2019 Conservative voters say they'd find this acceptable, compared with 44% of Lib Dem voters and 41% of Labour voters.

- 87% say they'd accept **local lockdowns being imposed long-term**, and virtually the same proportion – 85% – say they'd find it acceptable if their own local area was subject to these kinds of restrictions.

- Views on the acceptability of taking part in various forms of entertainment, such as **attending live events** (52%), are largely unchanged since May, as are views on whether **young people should be subject to fewer restrictions** due to their lower risk from coronavirus (46%).

- Finally, and more immediately, despite the prospect of the government's furlough scheme being wound down in the next couple of months, there has been **little change in people's perceptions of their financial outlook** since May, and, if anything, people are now showing slightly less concern.

The future under coronavirus: what would people consider acceptable for children's education?

There has been an increase in the proportion who say it'd be acceptable for the government to decide when children must return to school over the very long term, if it becomes clear in the next year or two that a vaccine or treatment for coronavirus can't be developed.

But at the same time, almost the same proportion say it'd be acceptable for parents to choose, indicating that at least some people hold both beliefs.

And despite the pressures that home-schooling is placing on families, half the population say they'd find it acceptable to continue it for the long-term future – virtually unchanged from May – while opinion on these issues is split along partisan lines.

More immediately, 6 in 10 people would also support schools being closed for many months, in the event of a second wave of coronavirus infections, with only 2 in 10 opposing such a measure. But support for this varies depending on how people are asked, with fewer in favour of it when it is explained that children are very unlikely to become seriously ill from Covid-19.

There are some signs that people are becoming more comfortable with children returning to school for the very long term, in the absence of a Covid-19 vaccine.
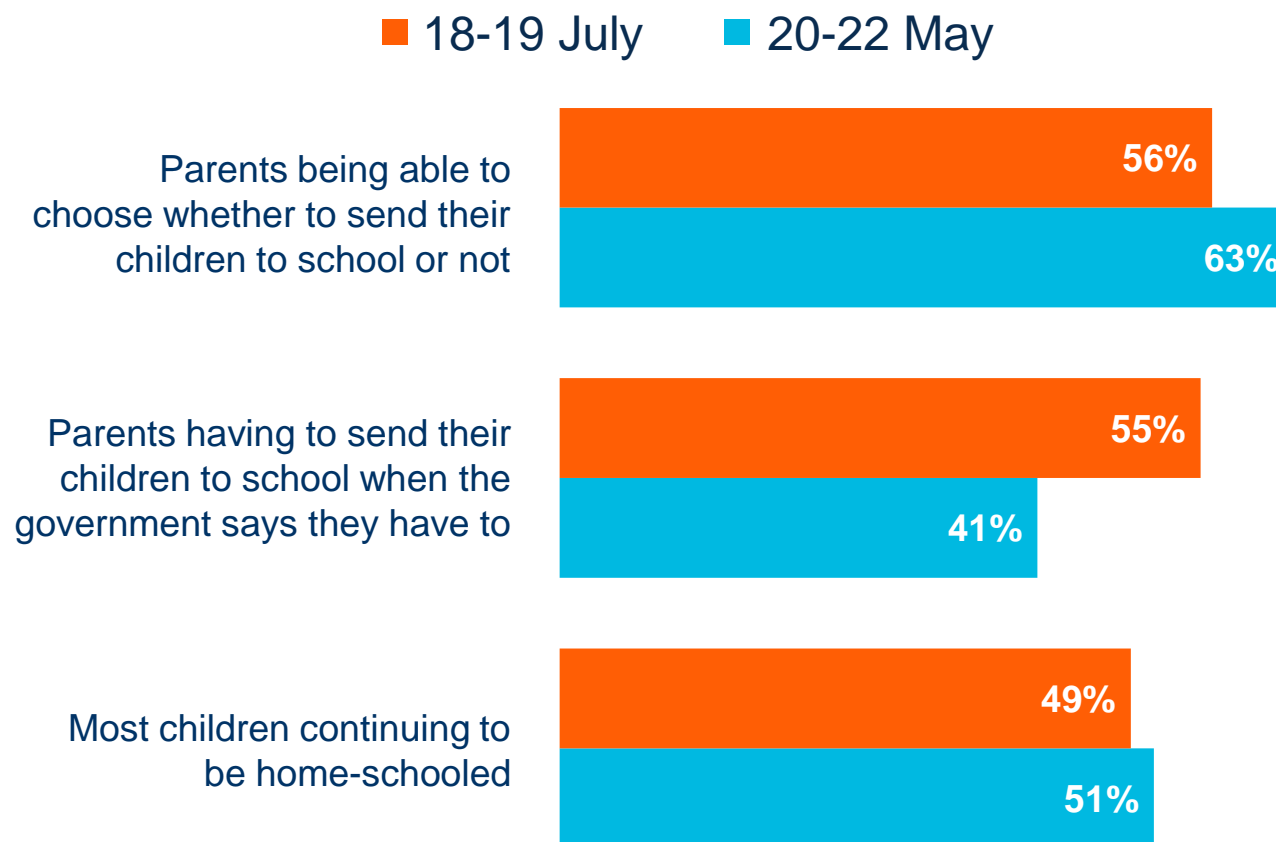
A majority of 55% now say it would be acceptable for parents to have to follow government instructions on when their child must go back, up from 41% in May.

But at the same time, 56% also say they'd accept parents being able to choose whether or not their child returns – although this is down from 63%.

And half the population still think long-term home-schooling would be acceptable in such a scenario – virtually unchanged from May.

If it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find the following options being in place for the very long term?

% who find it either completely acceptable or acceptable

■ 18-19 July   ■ 20-22 May

Parents being able to choose whether to send their children to school or not
- 56%
- 63%

Parents having to send their children to school when the government says they have to
- 55%
- 41%

Most children continuing to be home-schooled
- 49%
- 51%

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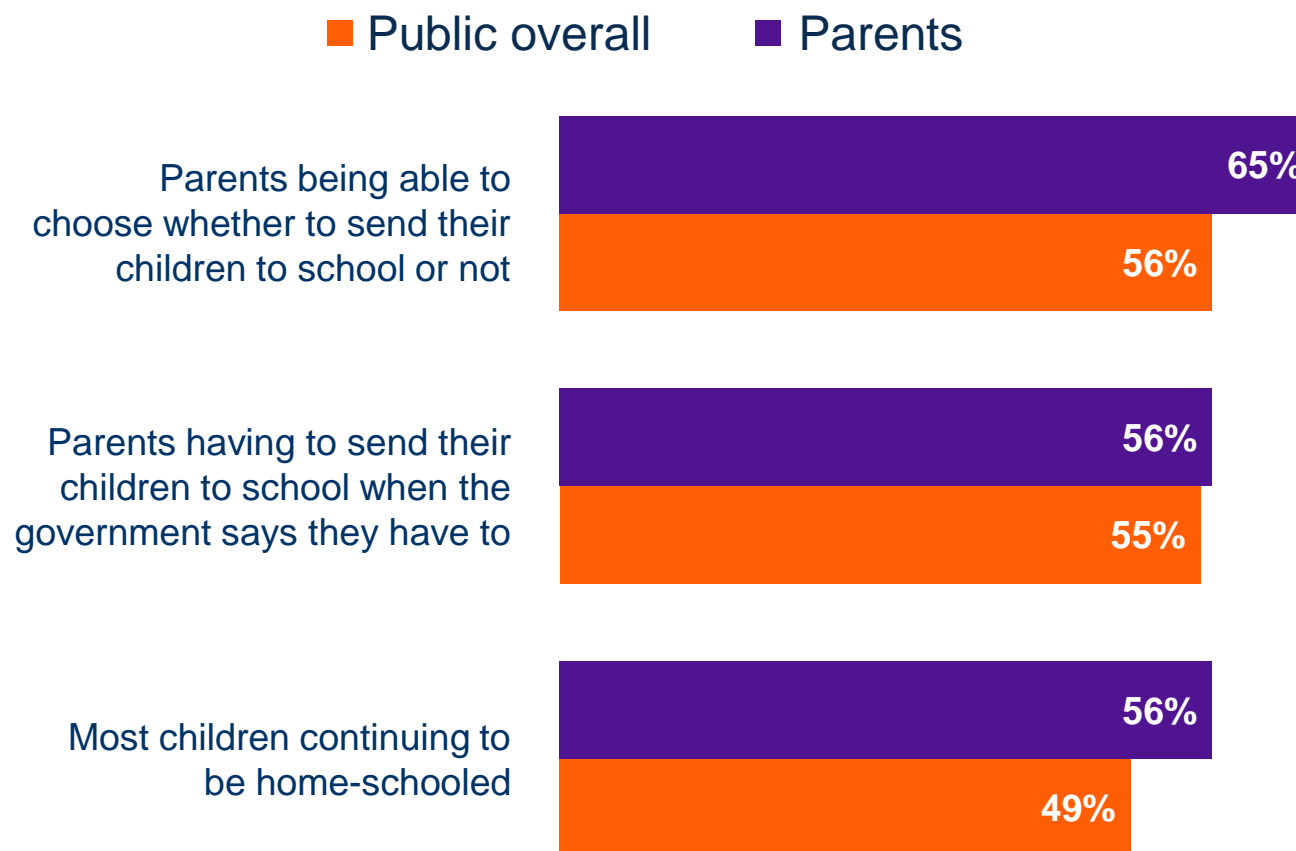
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By 65% to 56%, parents with at least one child aged 17 or under at home are more likely than the public overall to say they'd accept parents choosing whether their child goes to school as a long-term option.

They are also slightly more likely to find it acceptable for children to be home-schooled long-term, but there is virtually no difference with the public when it comes to views on having to follow government instructions on returning to school.

If it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find the following options being in place for the very long term?

% who find it either completely acceptable or acceptable

■ Public overall   ■ Parents

Parents being able to choose whether to send their children to school or not
- Parents: 65%
- Public overall: 56%

Parents having to send their children to school when the government says they have to
- Parents: 56%
- Public overall: 55%

Most children continuing to be home-schooled
- Parents: 56%
- Public overall: 49%

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There is a political divide in opinion on whether parents should have the final say over their children's return to school.

2019 Labour voters are most likely to say it'd be acceptable for parents to make the choice, while Conservative voters are most likely to accept parents having to follow the government's instructions.

% who say they would find the following acceptable over the very long term if it becomes clear that a vaccine or treatment for coronavirus cannot be produced

■ Conservative   ■ Labour   ■ Lib Dem

Parents being able to choose whether to send their children to school or not
- Labour: 66%
- Lib Dem: 54%
- Conservative: 44%

Parents having to send their children to school when the government says they have to
- Conservative: 71%
- Lib Dem: 56%
- Labour: 45%

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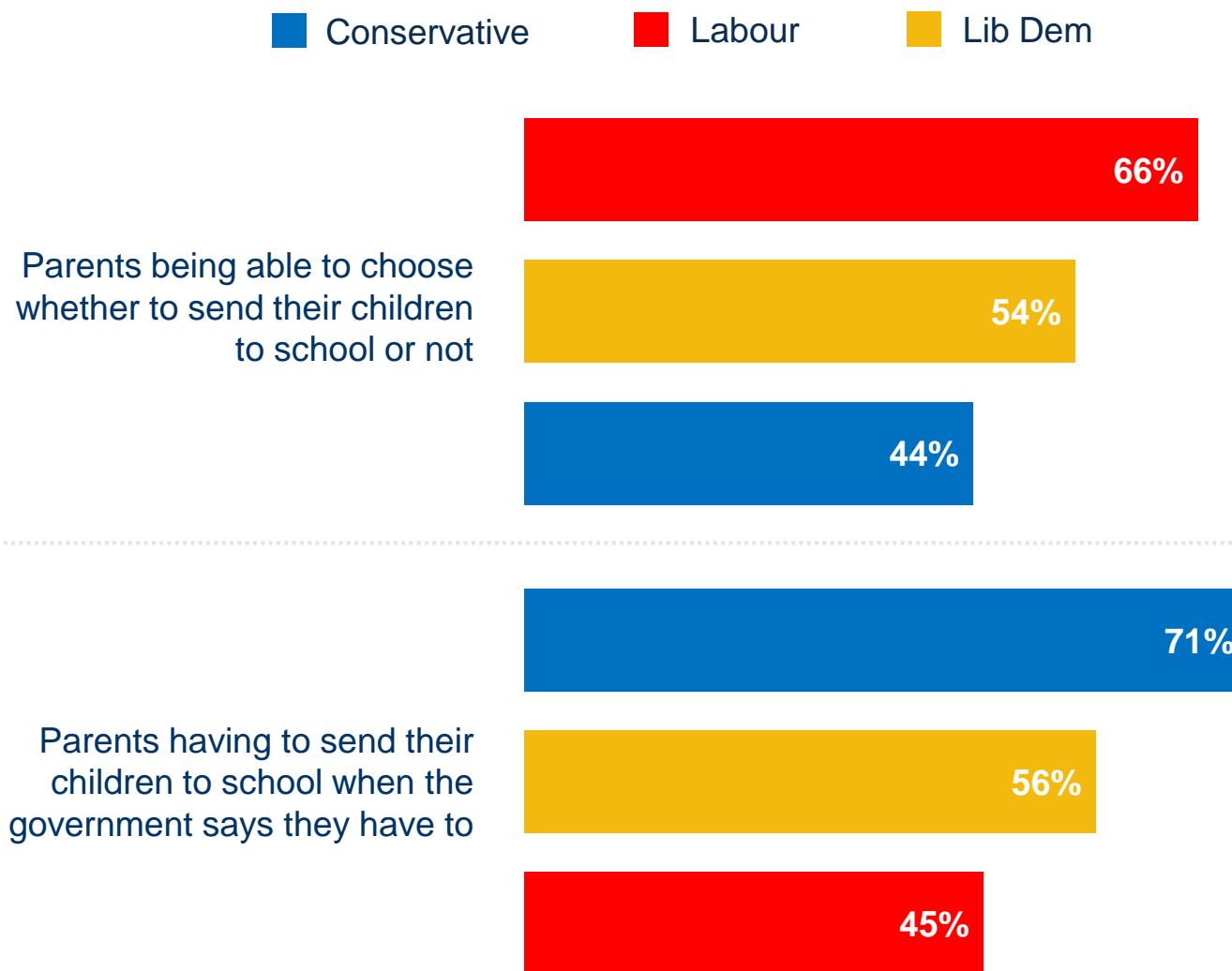
2019 Labour voters are also most likely to accept long-term home-schooling, with 58% saying this would be OK, compared with 48% of Lib Dem voters and 38% of Conservative voters.

And despite the pressures that the need to educate children at home is placing on families, those who live with at least one child are more likely than those who don't to say they'd accept it continuing long-term.
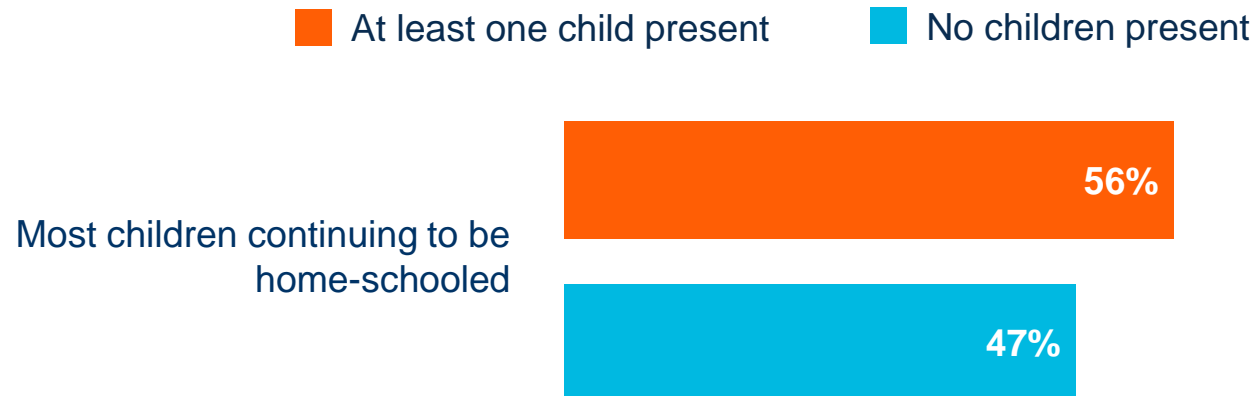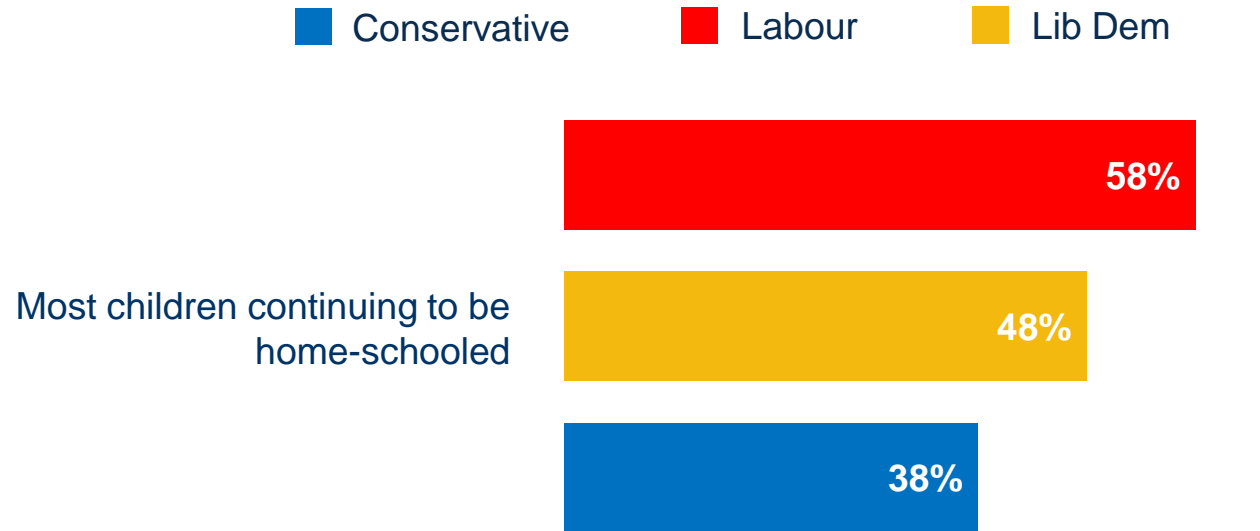
% who say they would find the following acceptable over the very long term if it becomes clear that a vaccine or treatment for coronavirus cannot be produced

■ Conservative　　■ Labour　　■ Lib Dem

Most children continuing to be home-schooled

- 58%
- 48%
- 38%

■ At least one child present　　■ No children present

Most children continuing to be home-schooled

- 56%
- 47%

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The public respond differently to a question about months-long school closures in the event of a second wave of Covid-19 when it is presented with an introductory statement explaining that children are at lower risk than adults of becoming seriously ill from coronavirus.

When this statement is included, people are less likely (54% of the public and 52% of parents) to support prolonged school closures, compared with when it isn't included (61% of the public and 64% of parents). This reflects the importance the public place on child safety.

A: If children catch coronavirus, they are very unlikely to become seriously ill. Schools have shut mainly to reduce the likelihood of the virus spreading in the community and then affecting more vulnerable adults.

If a second wave of the virus occurs, to what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose <u>keeping schools closed for many months in order to reduce the risk of vulnerable adults catching coronavirus?</u>

Strongly support	Tend to support	Neither support nor oppose	Tend to oppose	Strongly oppose

24%	30%	19%	14%	7%

B: If a second wave of the virus occurs, to what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose <u>keeping schools closed for many months in order to reduce the risk of vulnerable adults catching coronavirus?</u>

28%	33%	16%	12%	5%

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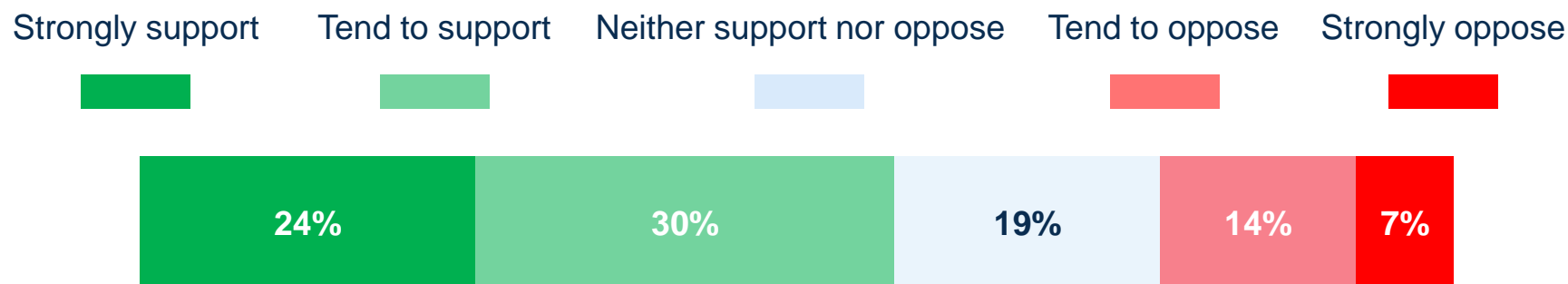
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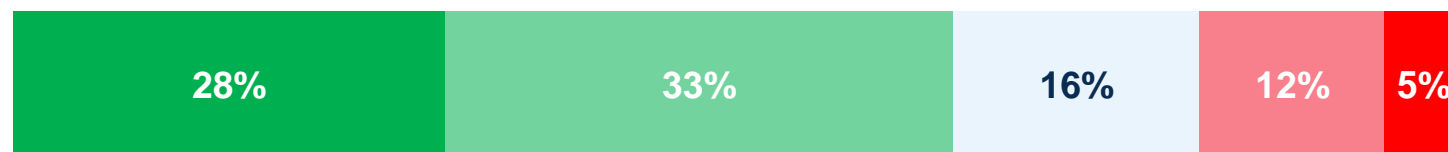
Overall, combining the split-sample figures, 58% of the public support prolonged school closures in the event of a second wave of Covid-19, almost three times as many as the 19% who oppose such a measure.

And support rises to 64% among those who say they don't trust government advice on when it's safe to resume aspects of normal life. This is compared with 51% of those who say they do trust the government on this issue.

If a second wave of the virus occurs, to what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose <u>keeping schools closed for many months in order to reduce the risk of vulnerable adults catching coronavirus?</u>
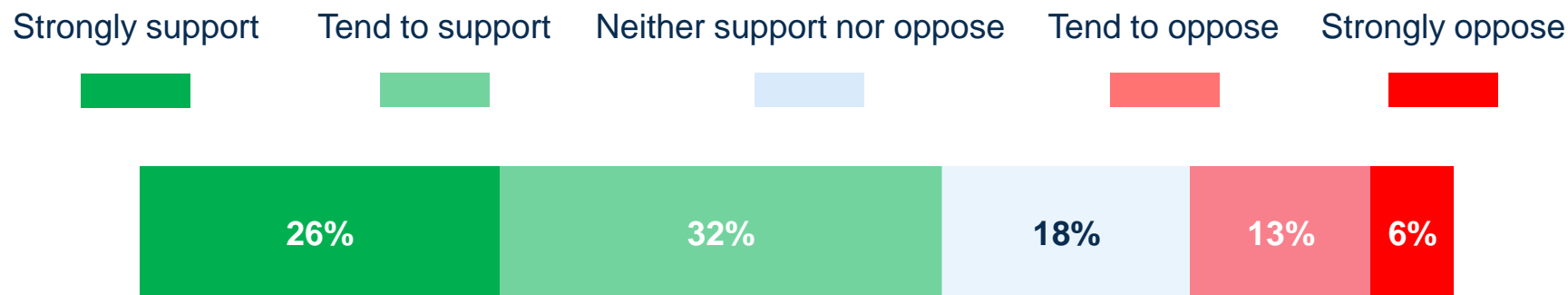
Strongly support	Tend to support	Neither support nor oppose	Tend to oppose	Strongly oppose
26%	32%	18%	13%	6%

% who say they support keeping schools closed in the event of a second wave

Do not trust government advice on when it's safe to return to work/school/leisure activities — **64%**

Trust government advice on when it's safe to return to work/school/leisure activities — **51%**

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The future under coronavirus: what would people consider acceptable for day-to-day life?

The vast majority of the public say they would find it acceptable for employees to choose where they work over the very long term, if a vaccine doesn't become available – and this belief is shared by very high proportions of voters of all three main political parties.

But almost half the public also say they'd be OK with employees having to follow government instructions on returning to their workplace, although at the same time a large minority would oppose this. Conservative voters are most likely to find this acceptable.

Meanwhile, big majorities say they would accept local lockdowns being in place long-term, even in their own local area, and views on the acceptability of taking part in various forms of entertainment, such as attending live events, are largely unchanged since May.

86% of the public say they would find it acceptable for employees to choose where they work over the very long term, compared with just 8% who say they would not.

People are more divided over whether employees should have to return to their workplace when the government tells them to, with 47% saying it would be acceptable and 39% saying it would not.

If it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find the following options being in place for the very long term?

Completely acceptable   **Acceptable**   **Unacceptable**   **Completely unacceptable**

Employees being able to choose whether to work in an office or work from home
- 33%
- 53%
- 6% 2%

Employees having to go to their workplace when the government says they have to
- 9%
- 38%
- 31%
- 8%

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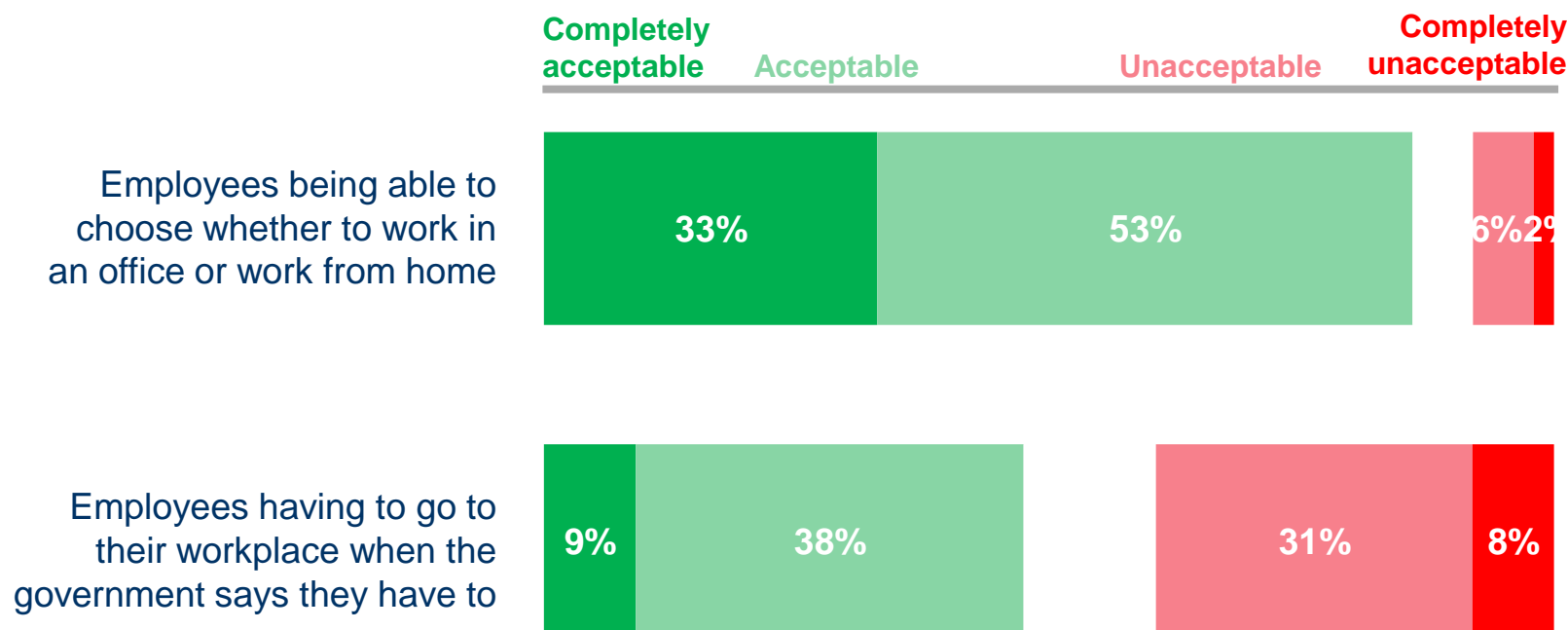
Around 9 in 10 voters of each main party at the 2019 general election say it'd be acceptable for employees to choose where they work long-term.

But there is more of a partisan divide when it comes to employees having to follow government instructions on returning to their workplace: 60% of 2019 Conservative voters would find this acceptable, compared with 44% of Lib Dem voters and 41% of Labour voters.

% who say they would find the following acceptable over the very long term if it becomes clear that a vaccine or treatment for coronavirus cannot be produced

■ Conservative ■ Labour ■ Lib Dem

Employees being able to choose whether to work in an office or work from home
- Labour: 89%
- Conservative: 88%
- Lib Dem: 87%

Employees having to go to their workplace when the government says they have to
- Conservative: 60%
- Lib Dem: 44%
- Labour: 41%

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The vast majority of the public – 87% – say they'd accept local lockdowns being imposed long-term, and virtually the same proportion – 85% – say they'd find it acceptable if their own local area was subject to these kinds of restrictions.

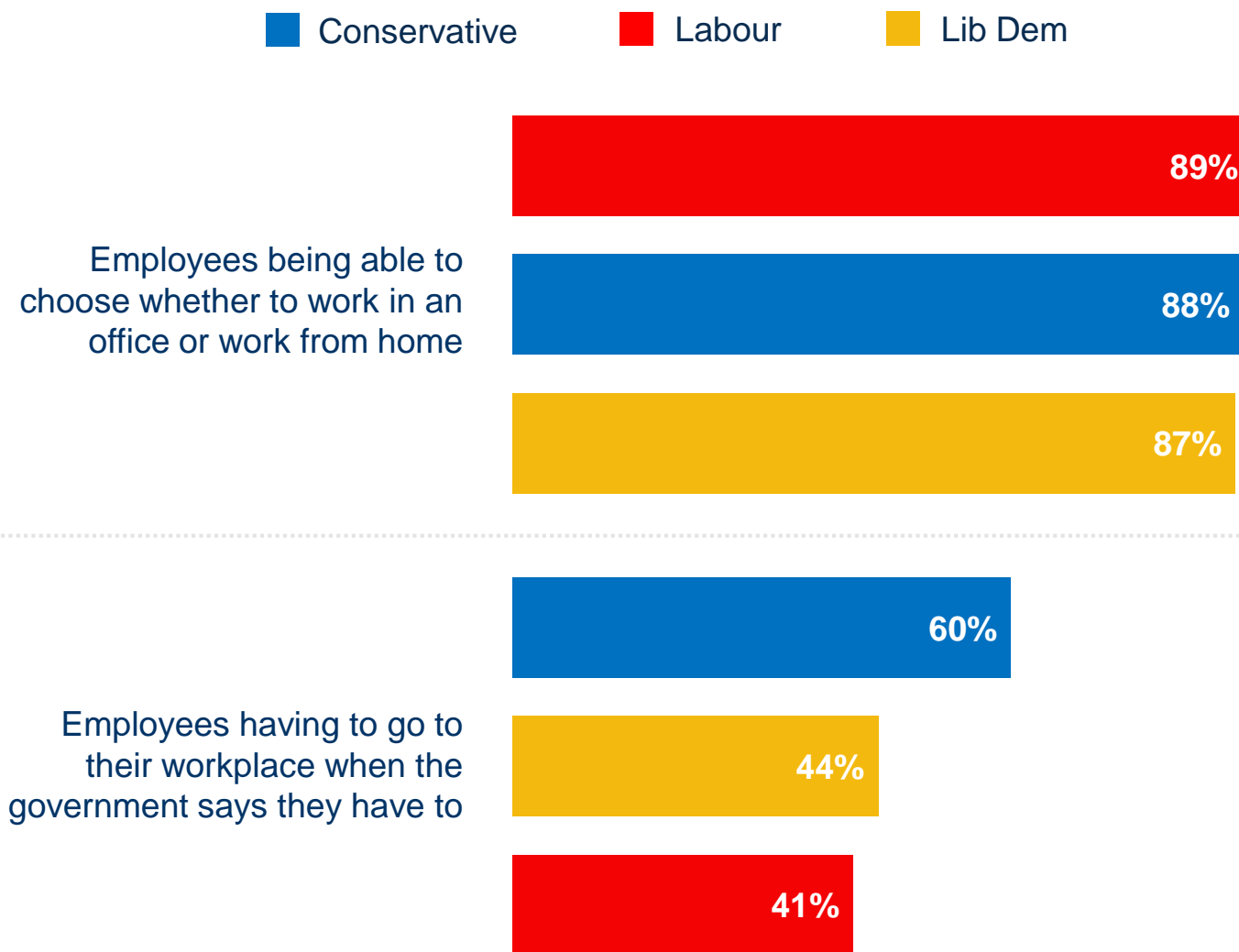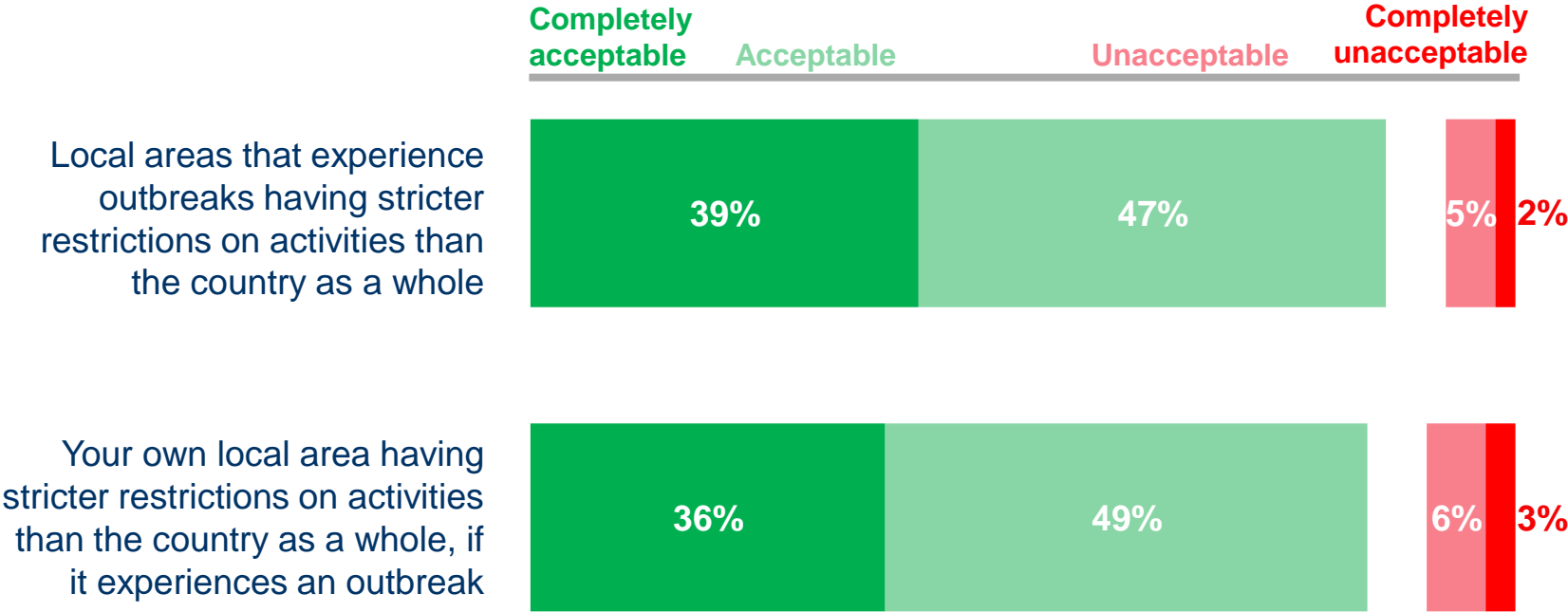Note some figures may differ from charts due to rounding.

If it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find the following options being in place for the very long term?

Completely acceptable | **Acceptable** | **Unacceptable** | **Completely unacceptable**

Local areas that experience outbreaks having stricter restrictions on activities than the country as a whole
39% | 47% | 5% | 2%

Your own local area having stricter restrictions on activities than the country as a whole, if it experiences an outbreak
36% | 49% | 6% | 3%

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There has been a slight increase in the proportion who say they'd find it acceptable for people to make their own decisions about attending live events over the very long term, rising from 48% to 52%.
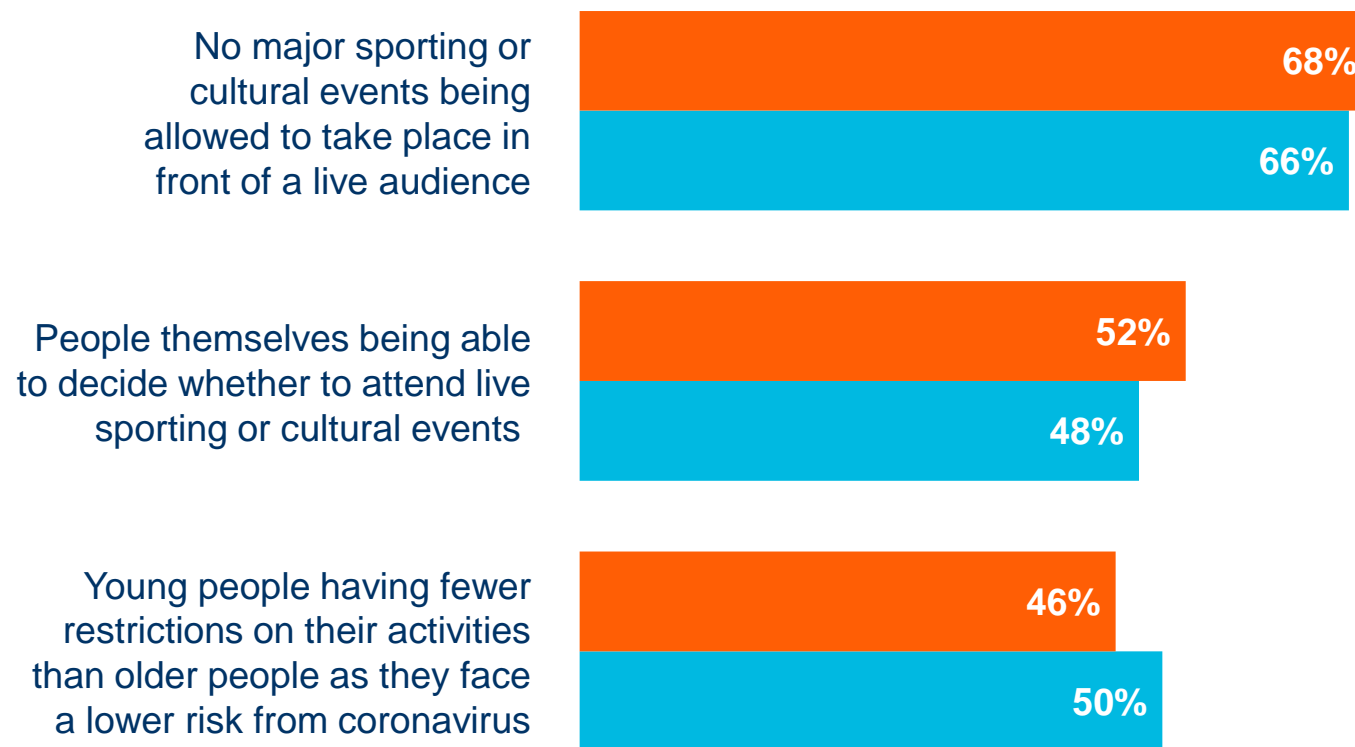
And there has been a slight decrease in the proportion who say it'd be acceptable for younger people to be subject to fewer restrictions than older people, down from 50% to 46%. Millennials (53%) and gen xers (48%) are more likely than baby boomers (39%) and the pre-war generation (38%) to find this acceptable.

If it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find the following options being in place for the very long term?

% who find it either completely acceptable or acceptable

■ 18-19 July   ■ 20-22 May

No major sporting or cultural events being allowed to take place in front of a live audience
- **68%**
- **66%**

People themselves being able to decide whether to attend live sporting or cultural events
- **52%**
- **48%**

Young people having fewer restrictions on their activities than older people as they face a lower risk from coronavirus
- **46%**
- **50%**

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Those who identify with hedonistic values, such as excitement and risk-taking (62%), having a good time (58%) and seeking fun at every opportunity (57%), are more likely to accept the public making their own decisions about attending live public events.

By contrast, those who identify more with values of conformity and security, such as rule-following (46%), protection from threats (48%) and behaving properly (50%), are less likely to find this acceptable.

% who say they would find the following acceptable over the very long term if it becomes clear that a vaccine or treatment for coronavirus cannot be produced

People themselves being able to decide whether to attend live sporting or cultural events

Very much like me / like me:

They look for adventures and like to take risks. They want to have an exciting life	62%
Having a good time is important to them. They like to "spoil" themself	58%
They seek every chance they can to have fun. It is important to them to do things that give them pleasure	57%
It is important to them always to behave properly. They want to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong	50%
It is important to them that the government ensures their safety against all threats. They want the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens	48%
They believe that people should do what they're told. They think people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching	46%

And more immediately…

Despite the prospect of the government's furlough scheme being wound down in the next couple of months, there has been little change in expectations of financial difficulties and job losses as a result of the coronavirus crisis: people's perceptions of their own risk of experiencing such hardship or unemployment are not far off what they were in May and, if anything, now reflect slightly less concern.
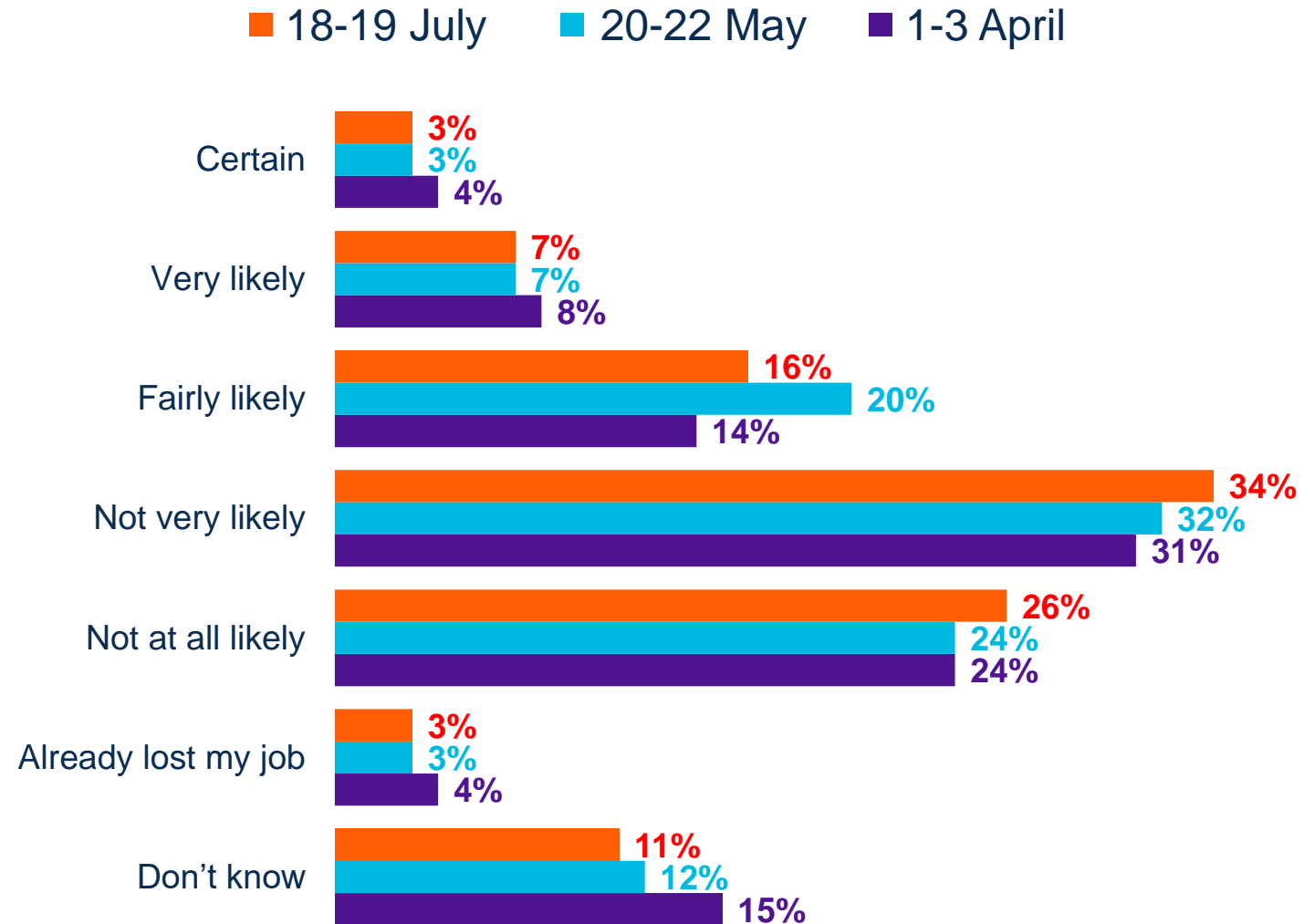
Finally, more people expect it'll take longer than a year than less than a year for life to return to normal.

There has been a slight change in workers' perceptions of the risk of losing their job since May.

25% now say they're certain or likely to, down from 29%, and 60% say they're not likely to, up from 56%.

How likely or unlikely do you think you are personally to lose your job as a result of the disruption from coronavirus?

- 18-19 July
- 20-22 May
- 1-3 April

Certain
- 3% (18-19 July)
- 3% (20-22 May)
- 4% (1-3 April)

Very likely
- 7% (18-19 July)
- 7% (20-22 May)
- 8% (1-3 April)

Fairly likely
- 16% (18-19 July)
- 20% (20-22 May)
- 14% (1-3 April)

Not very likely
- 34% (18-19 July)
- 32% (20-22 May)
- 31% (1-3 April)

Not at all likely
- 26% (18-19 July)
- 24% (20-22 May)
- 24% (1-3 April)

Already lost my job
- 3% (18-19 July)
- 3% (20-22 May)
- 4% (1-3 April)

Don't know
- 11% (18-19 July)
- 12% (20-22 May)
- 15% (1-3 April)

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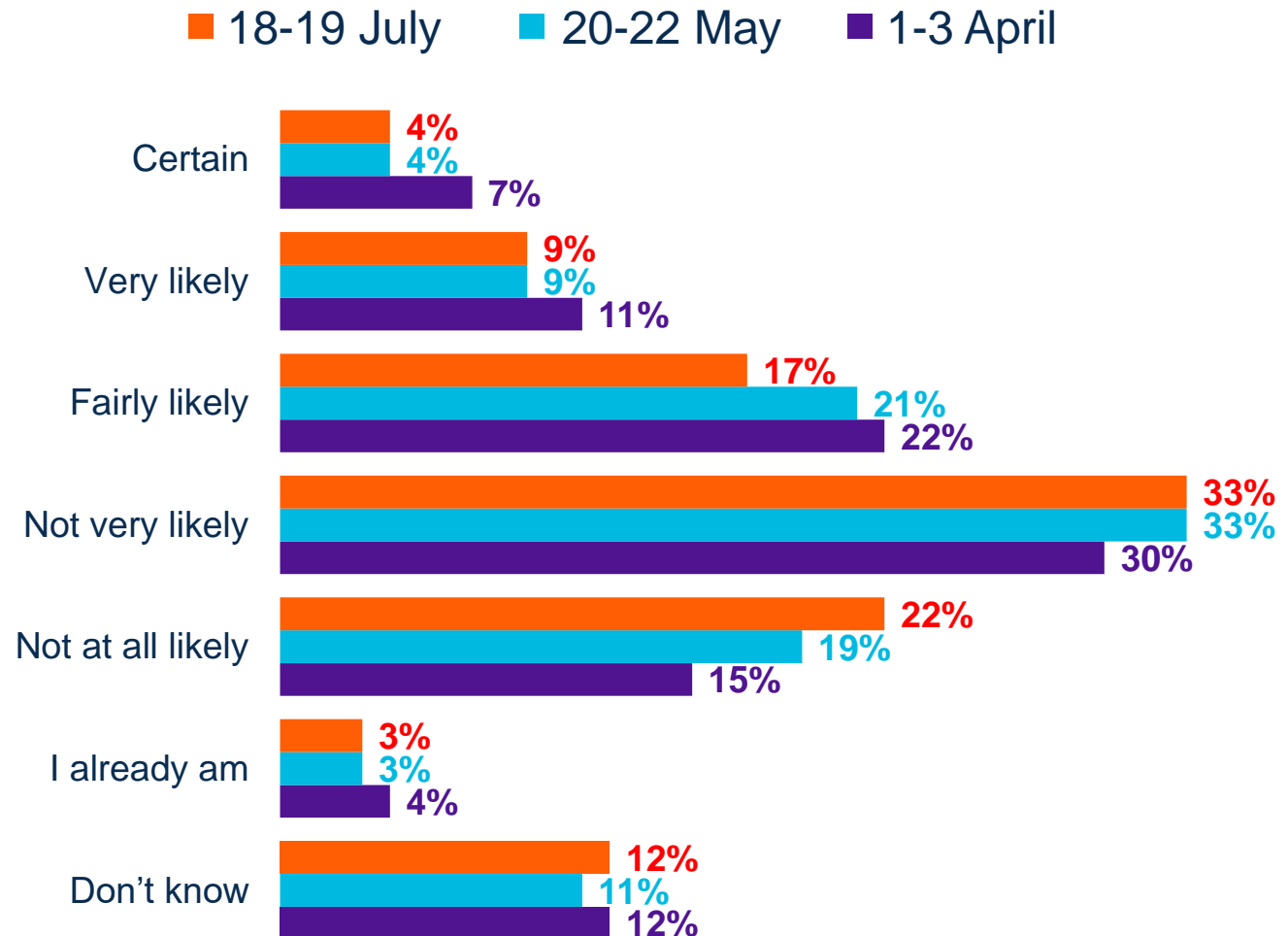
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There have also been only small changes in how people see their risk of facing financial difficulties: 29% now say they're certain or likely to, down from 34% in May.

And 55% say they're unlikely to face such difficulties, similar to the 52% who said the same in May.

How likely or unlikely do you think it is that you will face significant financial difficulties such as not being able to pay for your housing or essential items as a result of the disruption from coronavirus?

■ 18-19 July   ■ 20-22 May   ■ 1-3 April

Certain
- 4%
- 4%
- 7%

Very likely
- 9%
- 9%
- 11%

Fairly likely
- 17%
- 21%
- 22%

Not very likely
- 33%
- 33%
- 30%

Not at all likely
- 22%
- 19%
- 15%

I already am
- 3%
- 3%
- 4%

Don't know
- 12%
- 11%
- 12%

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Finally, people are more likely to think it'll take longer than a year than less than a year for life to return to normal, with 9% saying normal life will never resume.

When, if at all, do you think the following will happen?

Life to return to "normal", with people living much as they did before...

1-2 weeks	1%
3-4 weeks/around 1 month	2%
12 weeks/around 3 months	6%
6 months	14%
12 months	20%
18 months	17%
2 years	13%
More than 2 years' time	11%
Never	8%
Don't know	9%

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For more information, contact:

Bobby Duffy
Director
The Policy Institute
King's College London

bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk

@bobbyduffykings

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🐦 @policyatkings 🖱 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