

**THE
POLICY
INSTITUTE**

KING'S
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LONDON

The UK government's handling of the coronavirus crisis: public perceptions

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Introduction

This report includes findings from a survey of 2,244 UK residents aged 16-75 by [King's College London](#) and [Ipsos MORI](#), conducted on 20-24 November 2020. It finds that:

- 57% of the public say they do not trust the UK government to control the spread of coronavirus – the first time in this series of studies, which began in April, that distrust has become the majority view in the country.
- The proportion who feel this way has doubled since the start of the crisis, when 28% said they did not trust the government's handling of the pandemic.

Other trends paint a negative picture for the government:

- 68% believe that the response to Covid-19 has been confused and inconsistent, up from 42% at the beginning of the crisis.
- 40% of people think the government's plan for tackling the virus has adapted badly to the changing scientific information and situation – more than double the 15% who said the same in early April.

And specific aspects of the official response have been called into question:

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) think the government failed to prepare properly for a second wave of coronavirus infections.

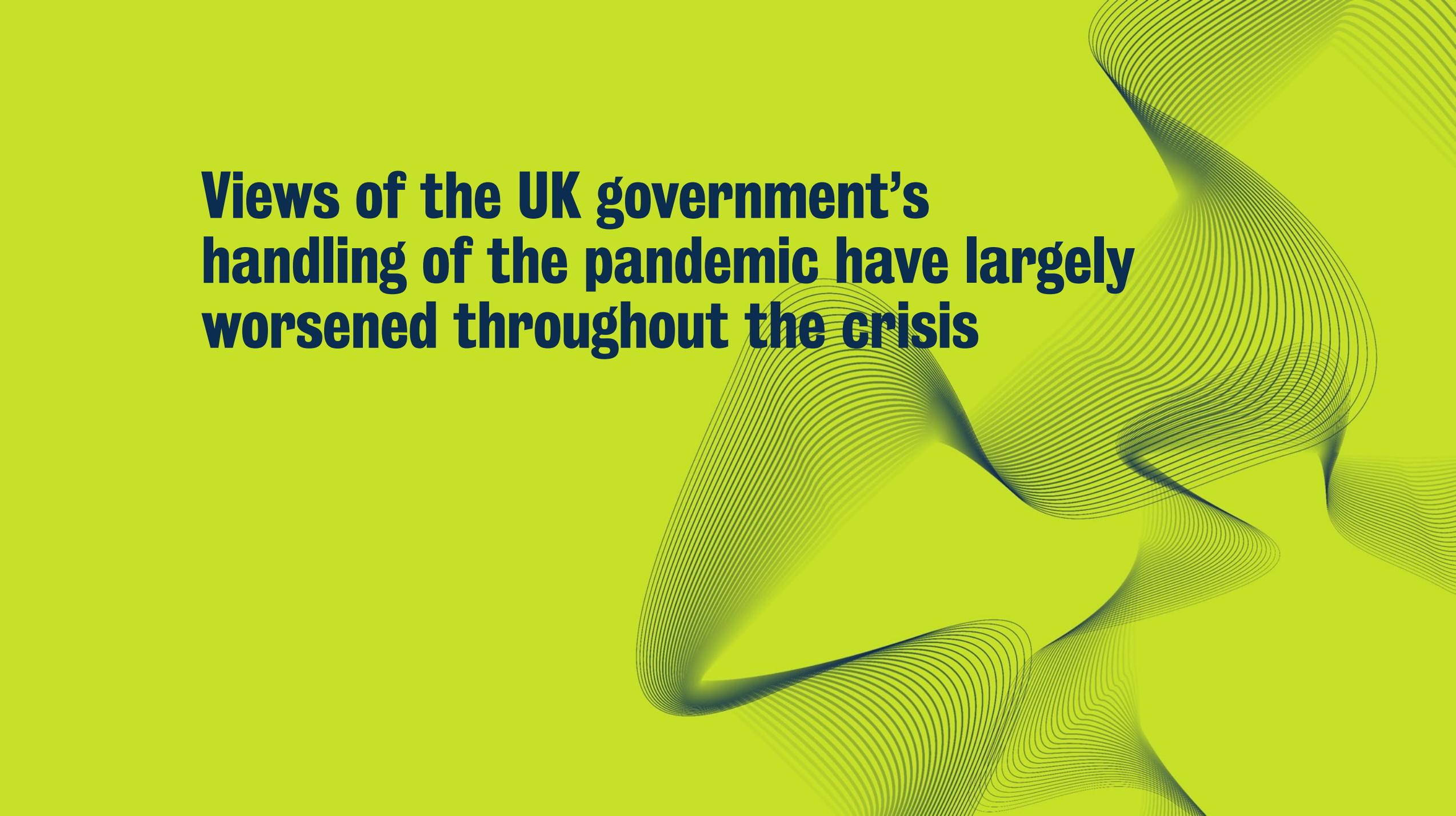
- 47% think the government has prioritised some parts of the country over others in its response to the crisis – more than double the 19% who think it hasn't.
- 45% think the government has done a bad job of protecting young people's futures during the pandemic – almost twice as many as the 23% who think it has done a good job.
- 46% think the government has done a bad job of protecting elderly or vulnerable people's health during the crisis, compared with 28% who say the opposite.

These perceived failings have provoked strong feelings in many people:

- Half the population (51%) think the handling of the coronavirus crisis has been a national humiliation – twice as many as those who disagree (26%).
- Half (50%) also say they're angry with the government because of how it's handled the crisis, compared with a quarter (25%) who do not feel this way.

However, despite these negative views, more people still say they support (44%) than oppose (25%) the UK government's current approach to controlling coronavirus – virtually unchanged since July, when this question was last asked.

Views of the UK government's handling of the pandemic have largely worsened throughout the crisis

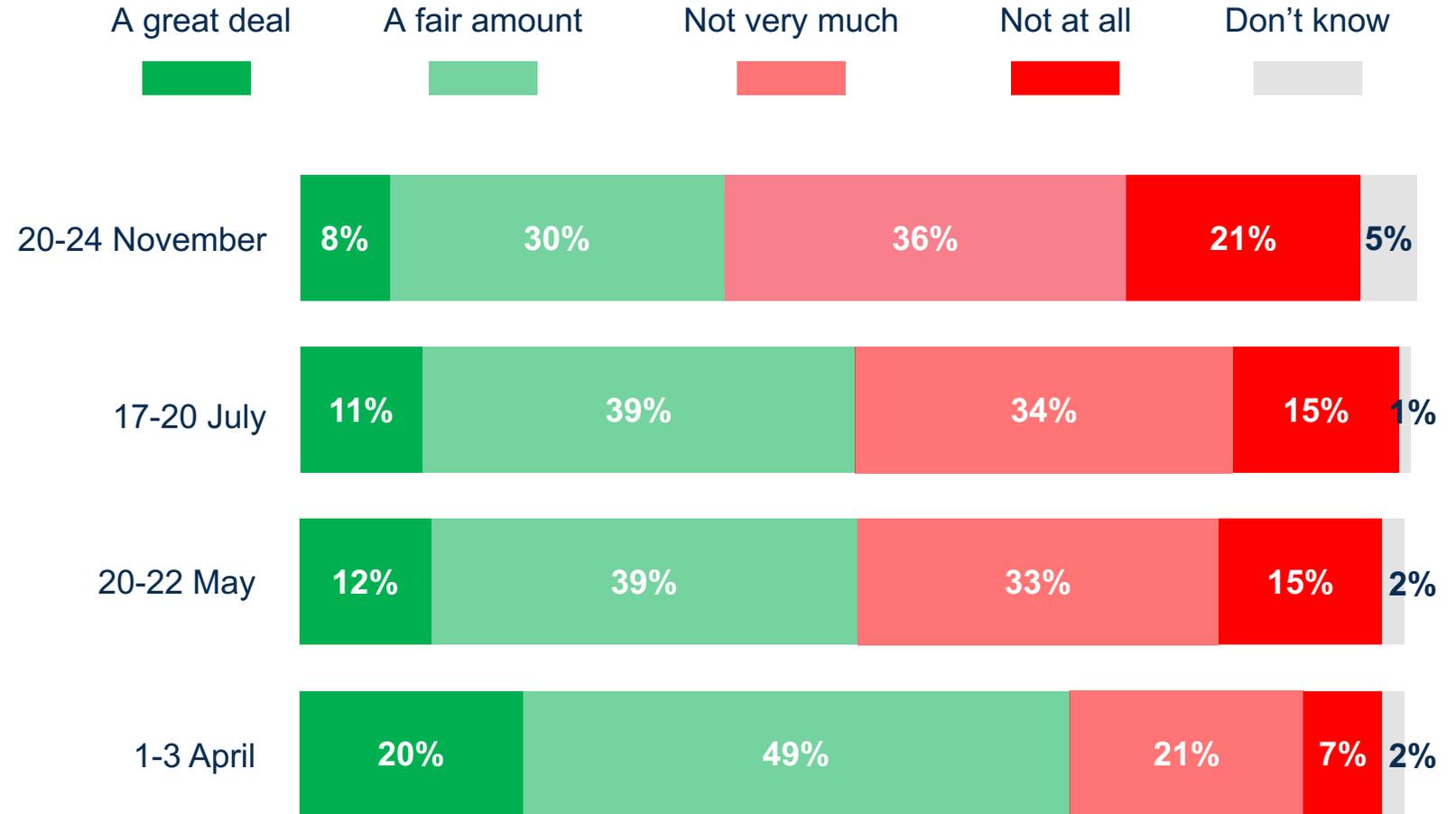
The background of the slide is a vibrant lime green. On the right side, there is a complex, abstract graphic composed of numerous thin, dark green lines that flow and curve together to form a series of overlapping, wavy shapes, resembling a stylized, multi-layered ribbon or a series of concentric, undulating paths.

Trust in the government's ability to manage the Covid-19 pandemic has declined steadily since the beginning of the crisis.

38% now say they have trust in it, down from 69% in April.

For the first time, a majority – of 57% – say they do not trust the government to control the spread of the virus. This is up from 49% in July.

To what extent, if at all, do you trust the UK government to control the spread of the coronavirus?

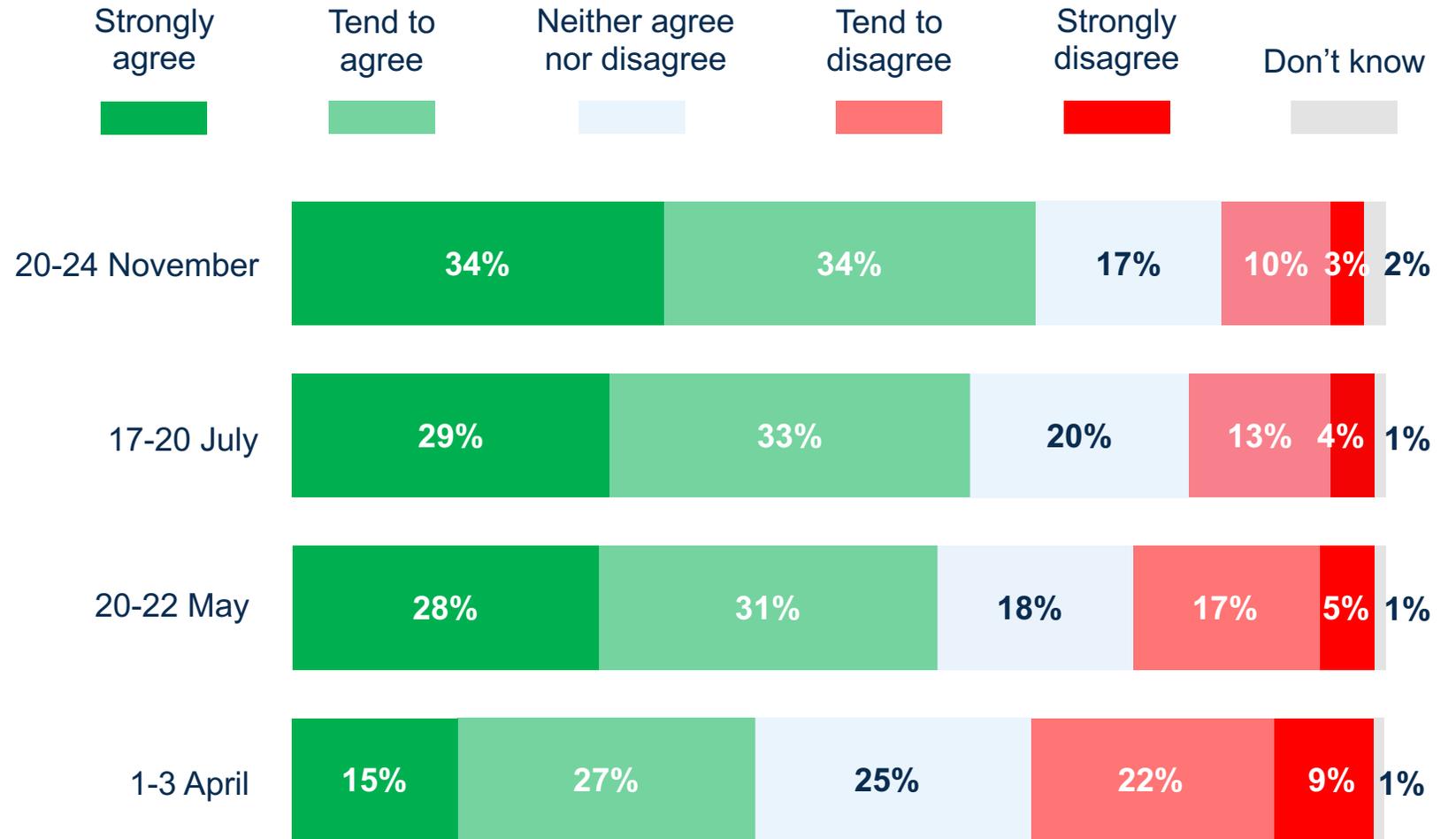


Base: 2,244 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-24 November 2020; 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020; 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020; and 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 1-3 April 2020. Question asked in April referred to “the government”, rather than “UK government”

At the same time, over the course of the crisis, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of people who believe that the response to the virus has been confused and inconsistent.

68% now agree this is the case, up from 62% in July and 42% in the early stages of the pandemic.

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



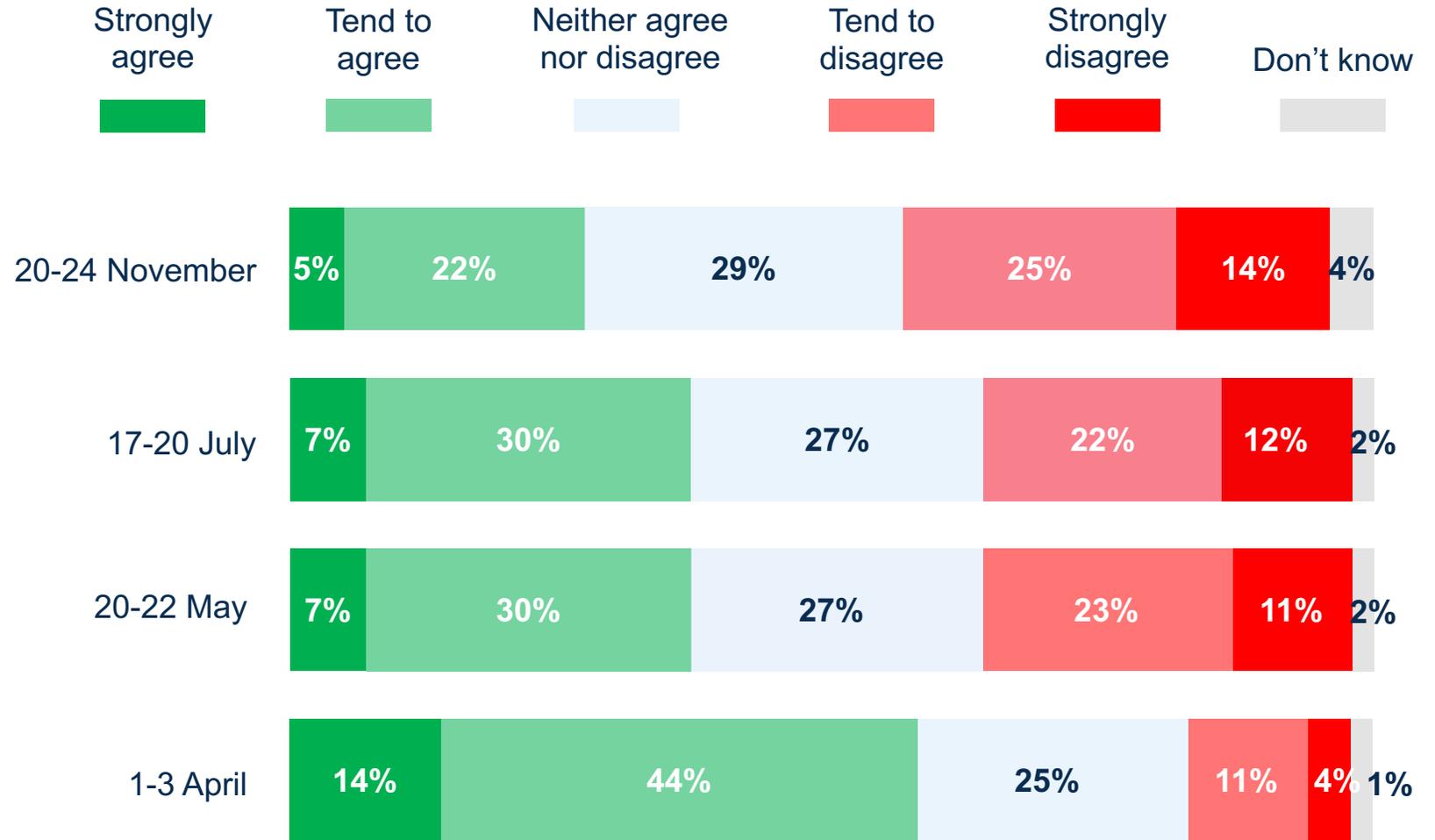
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40% of people think the government's plan for tackling Covid-19 has adapted poorly to new scientific evidence. This compares with 15% who thought this in early April.

Correspondingly, back then 58% believed the official plan had adapted well, but this has now more than halved, to 27%.

Note some figures may differ from charts due to rounding.

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

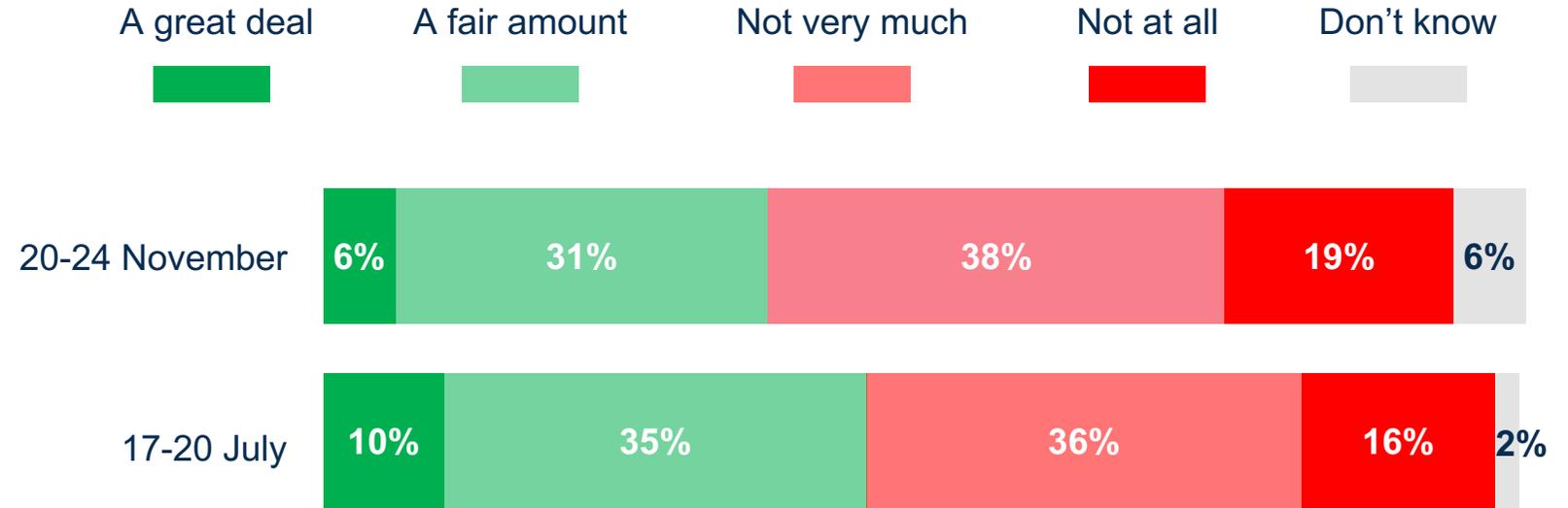


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56% now say they do not trust official guidance on when it's safe to resume aspects of normal life, up slightly from 52% in July.

The proportion who say they do trust this guidance has fallen from 45% to 37%.

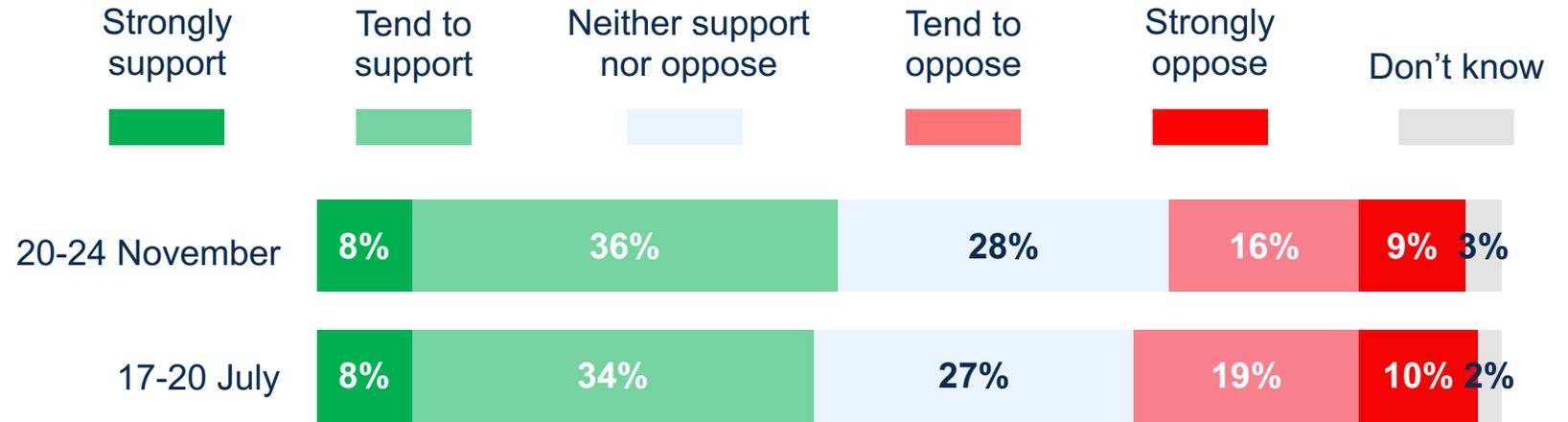
To what extent, if at all, do you trust the government's advice on when it's safe to return to work, school or leisure activities?



Note some figures may differ from charts due to rounding.

However, despite these increasingly negative views, more people still say they support (44%) than oppose (25%) the UK government's current approach to controlling coronavirus – virtually unchanged since July, when this question was last asked.

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?

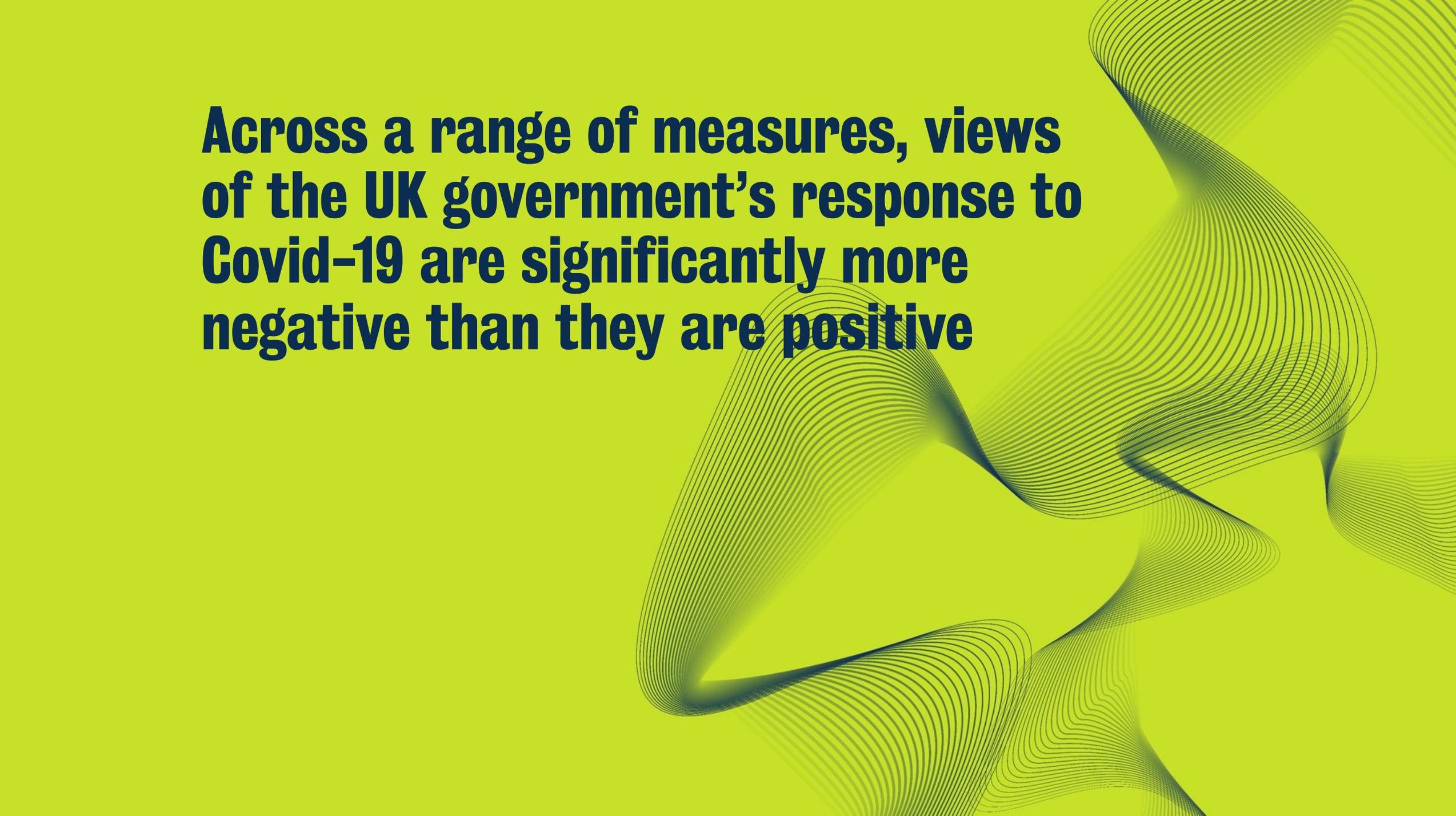


As you may know, the Prime Minister announced a range of measures on 23 March, where people have been asked to remain at home except for a small number of exceptions (described by some as a "lockdown"). To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose these measures?



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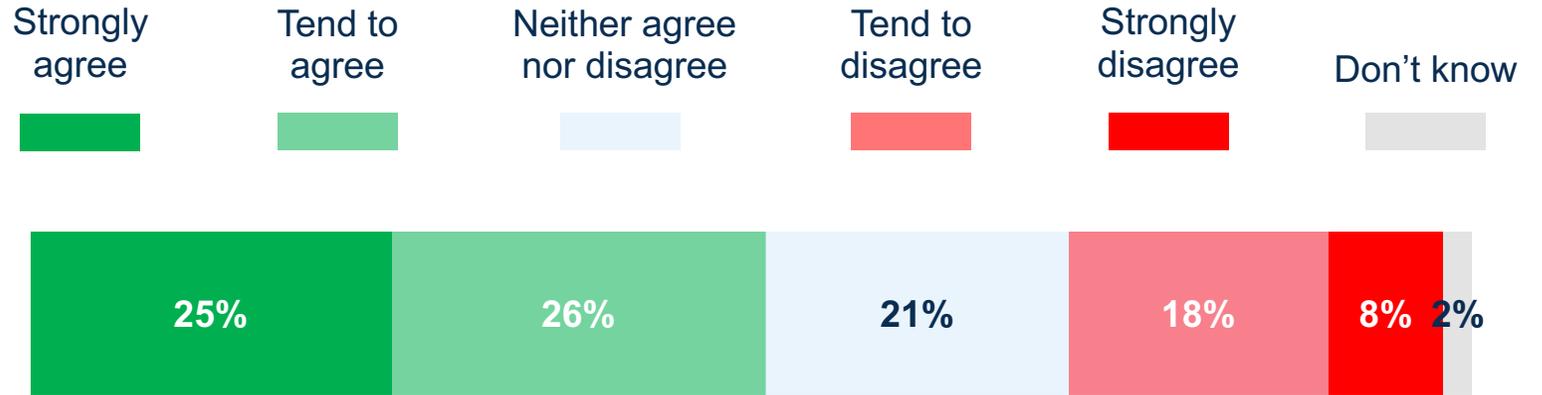
Across a range of measures, views of the UK government's response to Covid-19 are significantly more negative than they are positive

The background of the slide is a vibrant lime green. On the right side, there are several overlapping, wavy, ribbon-like shapes made of many thin, parallel lines. These shapes flow from the top right towards the bottom left, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lines are a slightly darker shade of green than the background.

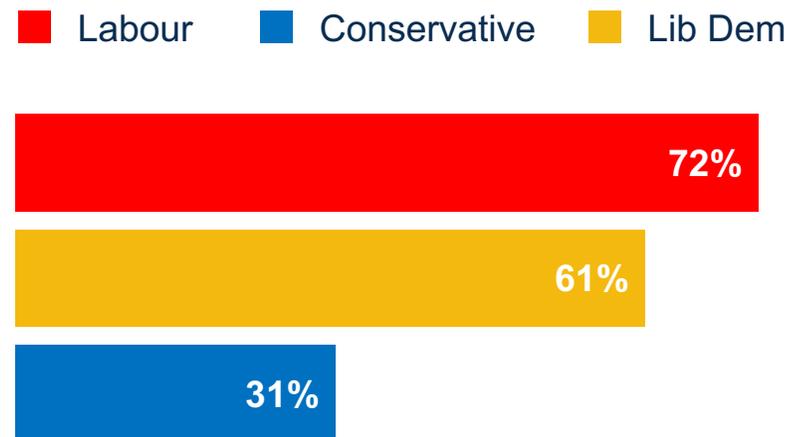
Half the population (51%) agree that the UK government's management of the Covid-19 crisis has been a national humiliation, with a quarter (25%) strongly agreeing. Another quarter (26%) disagree.

Among those who agree with this statement are 3 in 10 (31%) 2019 Conservative voters.

**To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?
The UK government's handling of the coronavirus crisis has been a national humiliation**



% who agree

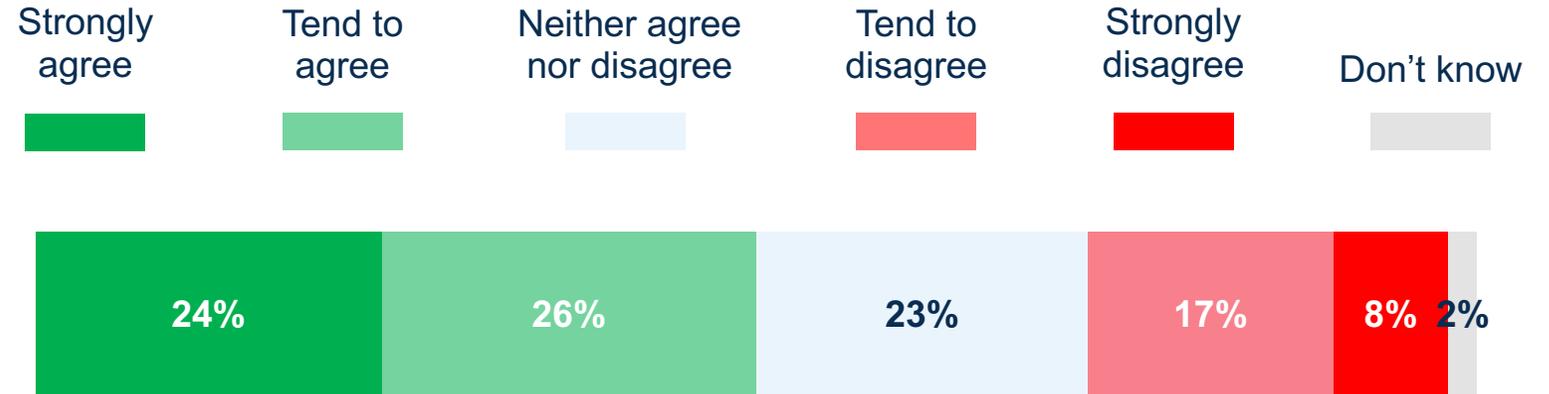


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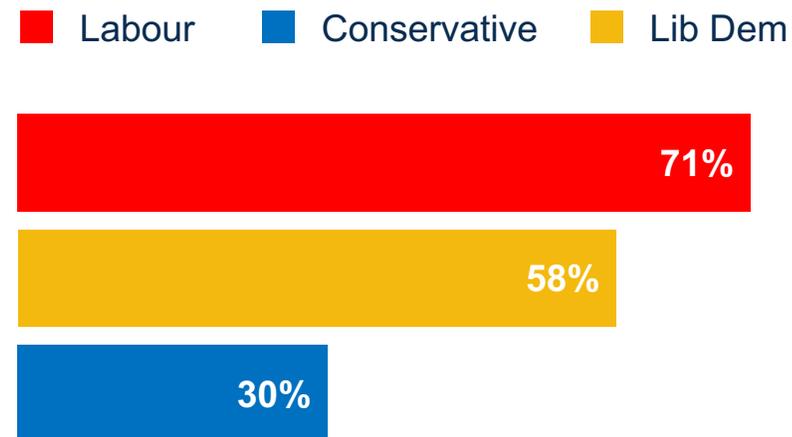
Half the population (50%) also say they're angry with the UK government because of how it's dealt with the crisis, with a quarter (24%) strongly feeling this way.

2019 Labour (71%) and Lib Dem (58%) voters are much more likely than Conservative voters to feel angry.

**To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?
I am angry with the UK government because of its handling of the coronavirus crisis**



% who agree



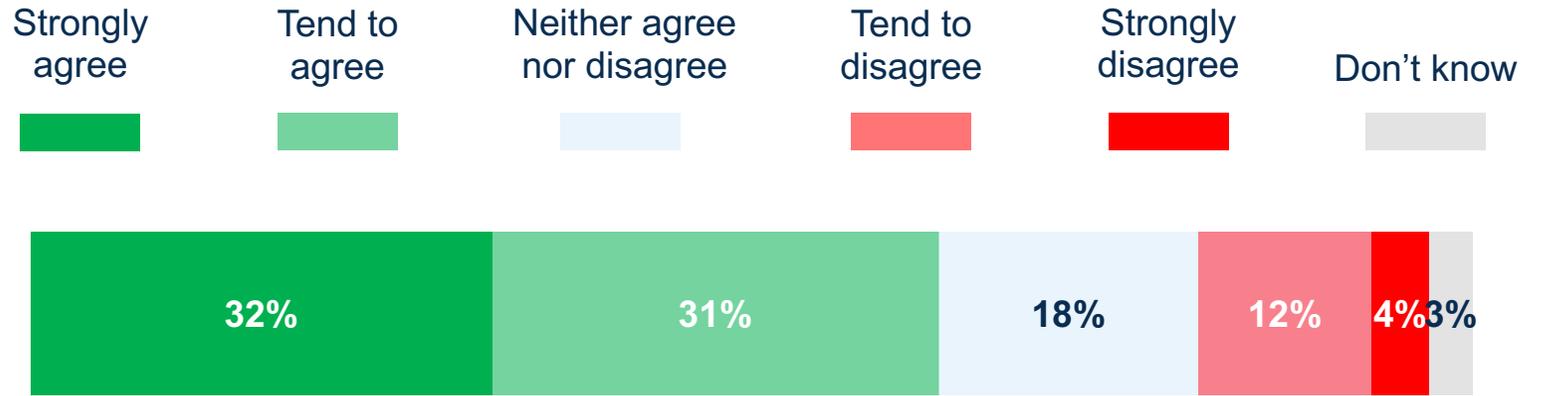
Base: 2,244 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-24 November 2020

Nearly two-thirds of the public (64%) think the government did not adequately prepare for the second Covid-19 wave in the UK.

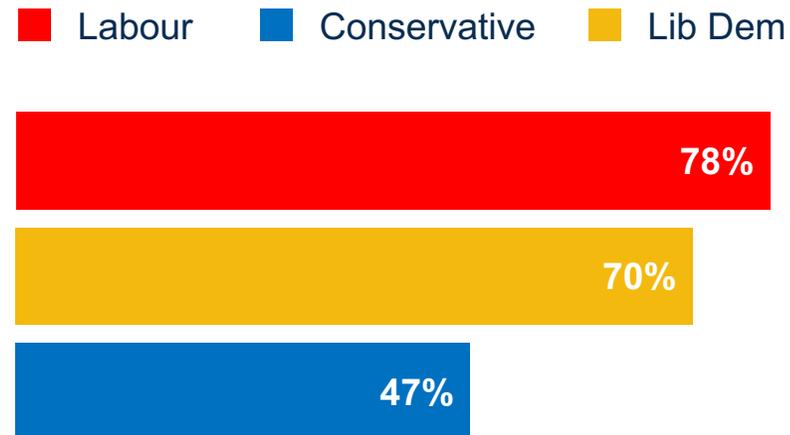
This includes almost half (47%) of 2019 Conservative voters, 70% of Lib Dem voters and 78% of Labour voters.

Note some figures may differ from charts due to rounding.

**To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?
The UK government failed to prepare properly for a second wave of coronavirus infections**



% who agree

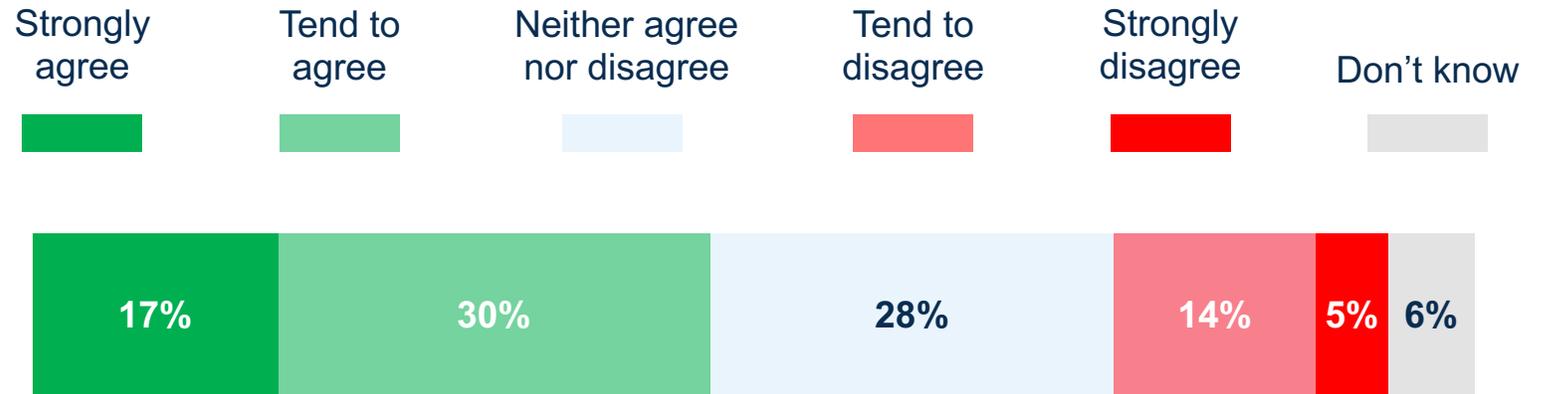


47% think the UK government has favoured some parts of the country over others with its response to the pandemic.

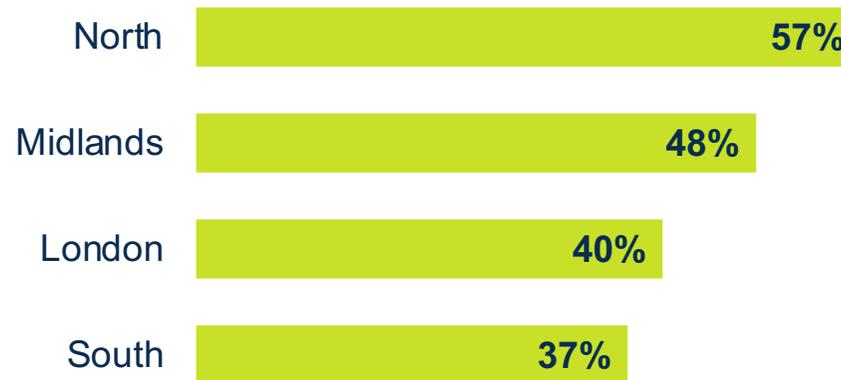
This rises to 57% among those living in the north of England – significantly higher than the 37% in the south and the 40% in London who say the same.

19% think the government has not prioritised some places over others.

**To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?
The UK government has prioritised some parts of the country over others in its response to the coronavirus crisis**



% who agree



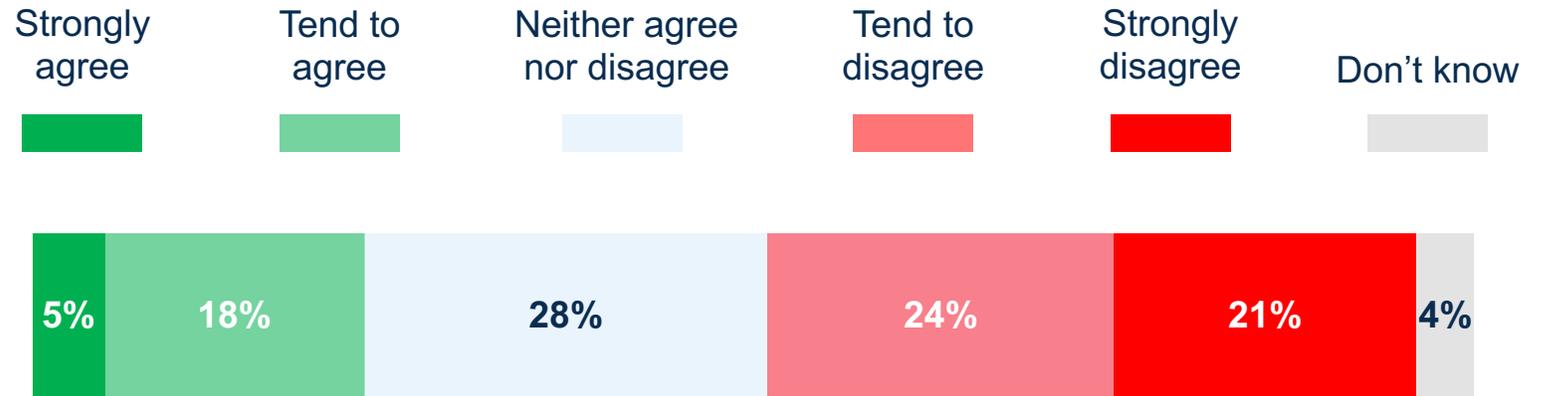
Base: 2,244 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-24 November 2020

45% think the UK government has not protected young people's futures during the pandemic – almost twice as high as the 23% who think it has.

A fifth (21%) strongly disagree that the government has performed well on this measure.

Support for this belief is relatively consistent across all age groups.

**To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?
The UK government has done a good job of protecting young people's futures during the coronavirus crisis**



% who disagree

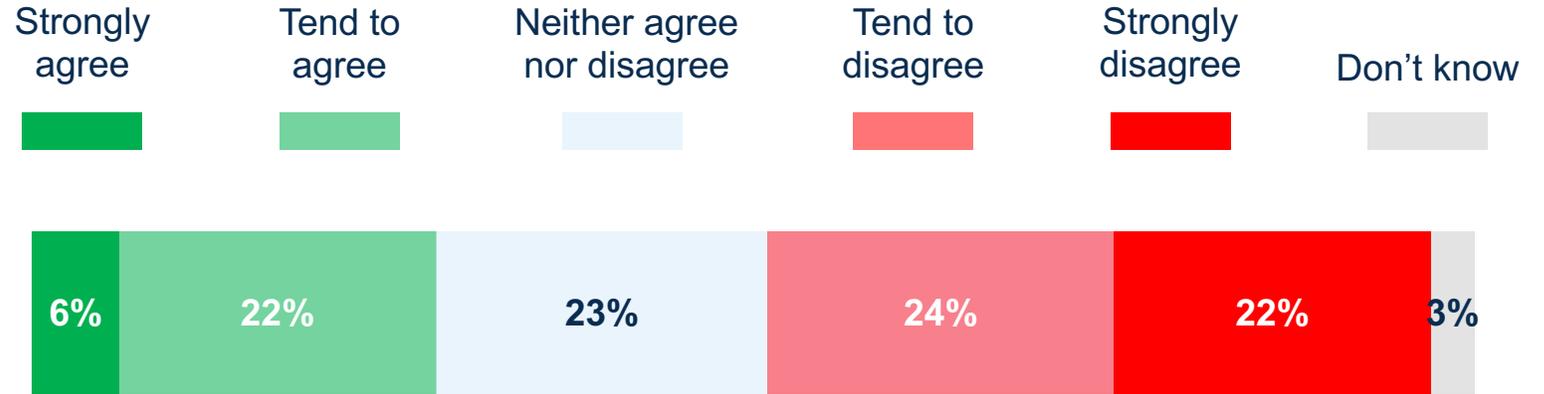


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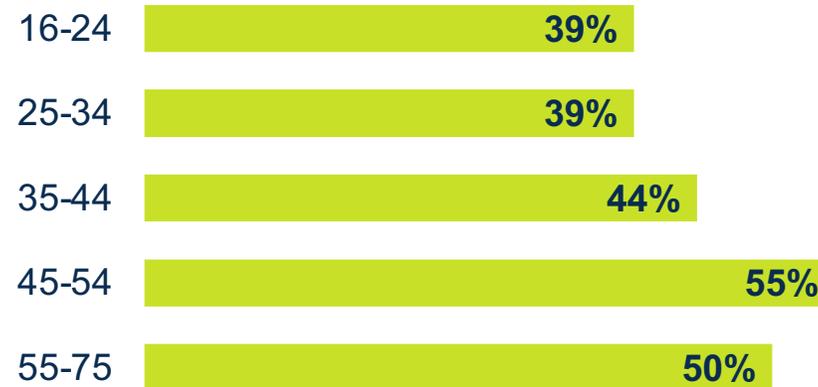
Almost the same proportion – 46% – think the government has done badly in protecting the elderly and vulnerable. This compares with 28% who think it has done a good job.

53% of 45-75-year-olds think the government has done a bad job, while 41% of 16-44-year-olds say the same.

**To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following?
The UK government has done a good job of protecting elderly or vulnerable people’s health during the coronavirus crisis**



% who disagree



Base: 2,244 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-24 November 2020

Technical details

Ipsos MORI interviewed a sample of 2,244 adults aged 16-75 in the United Kingdom using its online i:omnibus between 20 and 24 November 2020. Data has been weighted to the known offline population proportions for age within gender, government office region, working status, social grade and education. All polls are subject to a wide range of potential sources of error.

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