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POLICY
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Coronavirus conflict: how the pandemic has fuelled anger and confrontation

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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](#) and [Ipsos MORI](#), conducted on 17-20 July 2020. It accompanies a [peer-reviewed article](#) published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. The research finds that:

- Over half the population (53%) say they've felt angry with other people they know because of their behaviour in relation to the pandemic. This rises to 69% among those who get a great deal of information on Covid-19 from Twitter, 64% among those who perceive coronavirus to be a very high risk to people in the UK, and 63% among those who say they've felt more anxious and depressed than normal.
- Nearly a quarter of the population (23%) say they've had arguments with friends or family about how to behave during the crisis. This more than doubles to half (49%) of those who get a lot of their information on coronavirus from WhatsApp, while those who get their information from other social media platforms such as Twitter (44%), Facebook (42%) and YouTube (42%) are also much more likely to have argued. Money worries could be a source of tension too, as 42% of people who think they're certain or very likely to experience financial problems have argued.
- This anger is having a very real impact on some people's relationships: 1 in 12 (8%) say they are no longer speaking to a friend or family member because of disagreements about the pandemic, which includes 1 in 5 (19%) people aged 16-24. And those who get their information on the virus from social media are four or more times as likely as the population overall to no longer be on speaking terms with someone close.
- Such anger has escalated to confrontations for some, again with greater social media use and concerns about money associated with being involved in such flashpoints...
- Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) say they've confronted someone for getting too close to them or for being in too large a group. This doubles, to 37%, among those who think they're certain or very likely to face financial difficulties because of Covid-19.
- 1 in 12 (8%) also say they have confronted someone for not wearing a face mask, and 1 in 20 (5%) have gone as far as reporting someone to the authorities for not wearing one.
- 1 in 12 (8%) say they have confronted someone for following the recommended coronavirus measures *too carefully*. 34% of those who get a lot of information on the pandemic from WhatsApp and 33% who use Facebook to the same extent say they've confronted someone over this.
- 1 in 11 (9%) say they themselves have been confronted for following the rules too carefully, including 1 in 5 (21%) of those think they've had Covid-19 or have had it confirmed by a test.
- 1 in 12 (8%) say they have been confronted for getting too close to others or being in too big a group, which rises to 1 in 5 (21%) among people who say they've not been keeping 2 metres away from others while outside.
- Just over 1 in 20 (6%) report having been confronted for not wearing a face mask, and 1 in 20 (5%) say they've been reported to the authorities for failing to do so. People who believe the government only wants us to wear masks as a way of controlling us are much more likely to say they've been confronted (25%) or reported (17%) for this reason.
- Finally, despite Covid-19 being a source of anger and disputes for many, there are some signs that the pandemic has brought people together, with 37% saying they feel closer to their neighbours or local community than they did before the crisis began.

Coronavirus as a source of anger

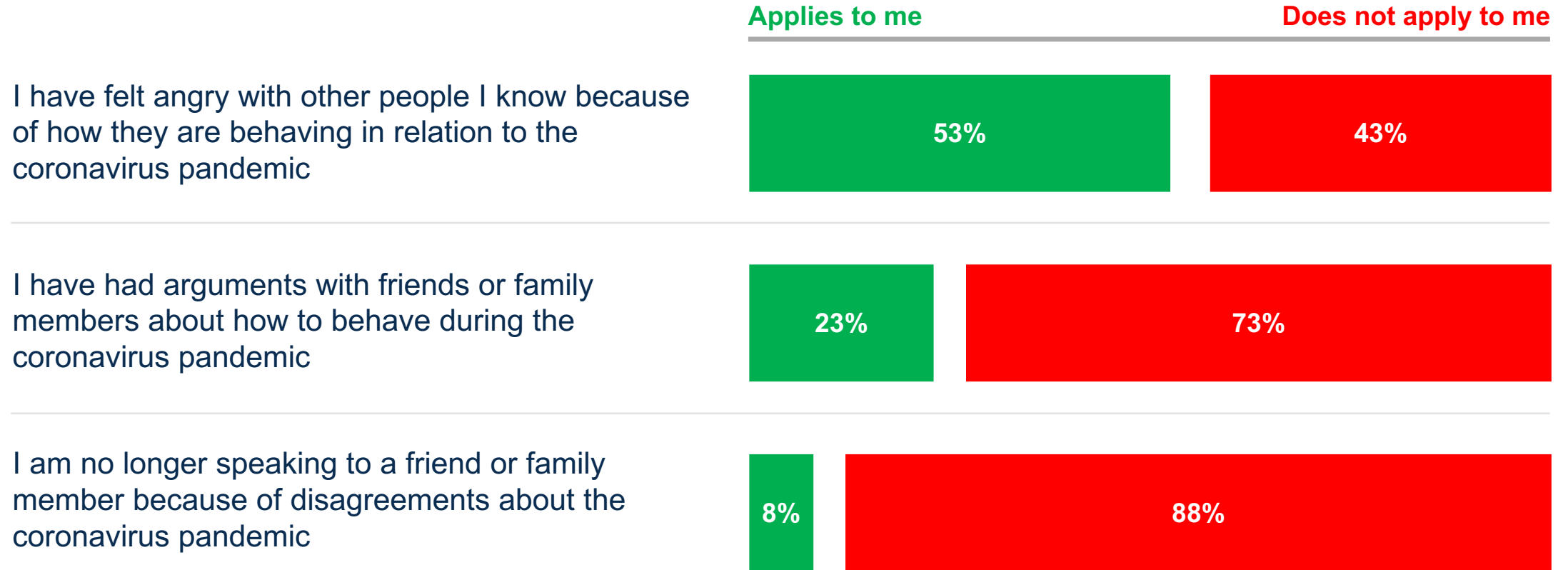
Covid-19 has fuelled anger and disagreements among the UK public, placing a strain on personal relationships.

Levels of anger about other people's behaviour during the crisis are higher among certain groups, including those who say they're certain or very likely to face significant financial difficulties because of the pandemic, those who perceive the virus to be a very high risk to themselves and people in the UK, and those who say they get a great deal of information on Covid-19 from Twitter.

A reliance on social media for such information is also linked with being much more likely to have argued with friends and family, and even to no longer be on speaking terms with loved ones. The same is true of perceived money problems.

Age is an additional factor in these disputes, with young people more likely than old people to have argued with and no longer be speaking to friends and family.

For each of the following, please say whether it does or does not apply to you?

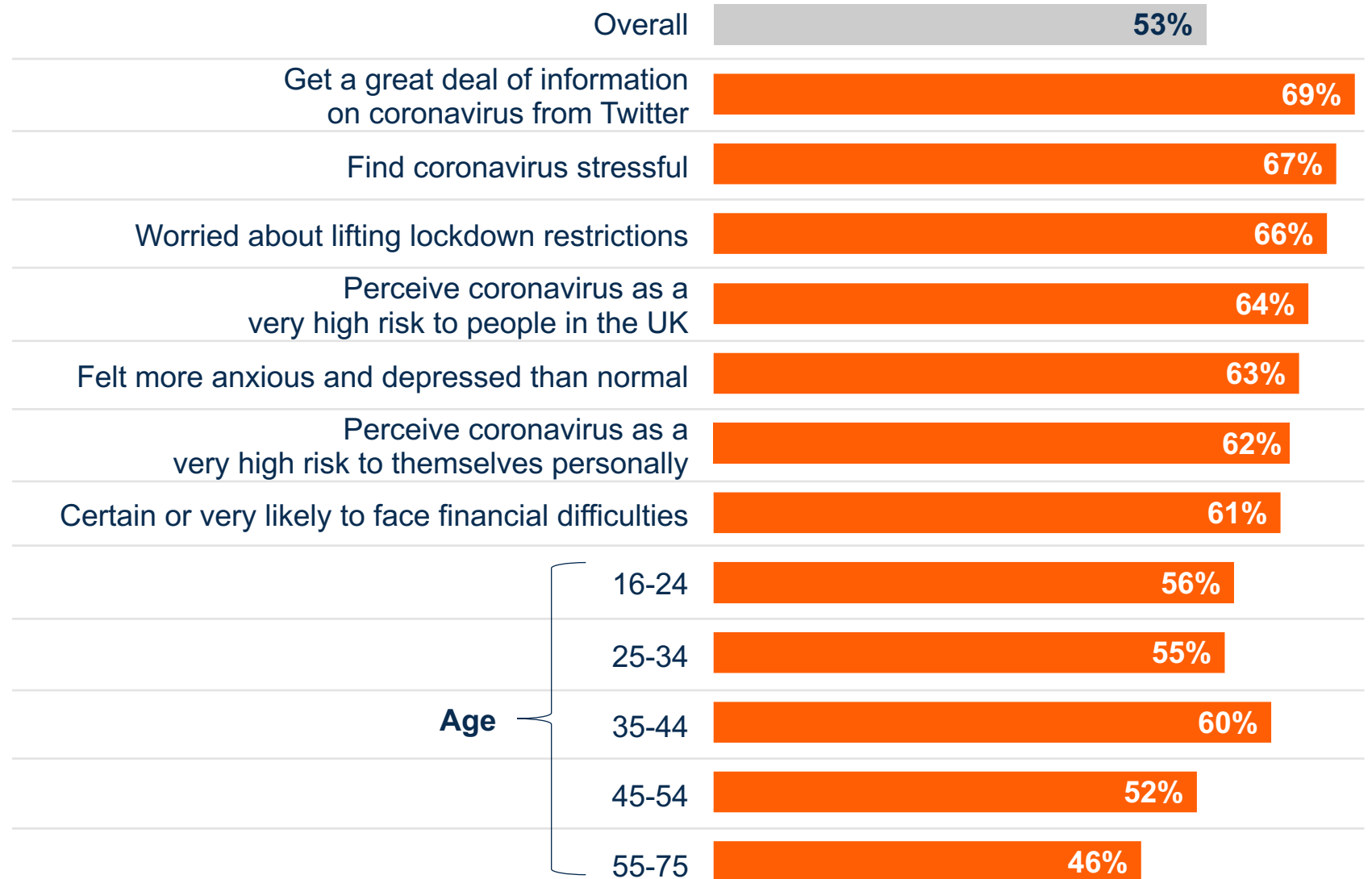


Over half the population (53%) have felt angry with someone they know because of their behaviour in relation to Covid-19.

This rises to more than two-thirds (69%) of those who say they get a great deal of their information on the virus from Twitter.

Perceptions of the virus as being a very high risk to people in the UK (64%) and on an individual level (62%) are also associated with greater levels of anger, as are feeling more anxious and depressed than normal (63%) and perceived financial difficulties due to disruption caused by the pandemic (61%).

% within each group who **have felt angry** with other people they know because of how they are behaving in relation to the coronavirus pandemic



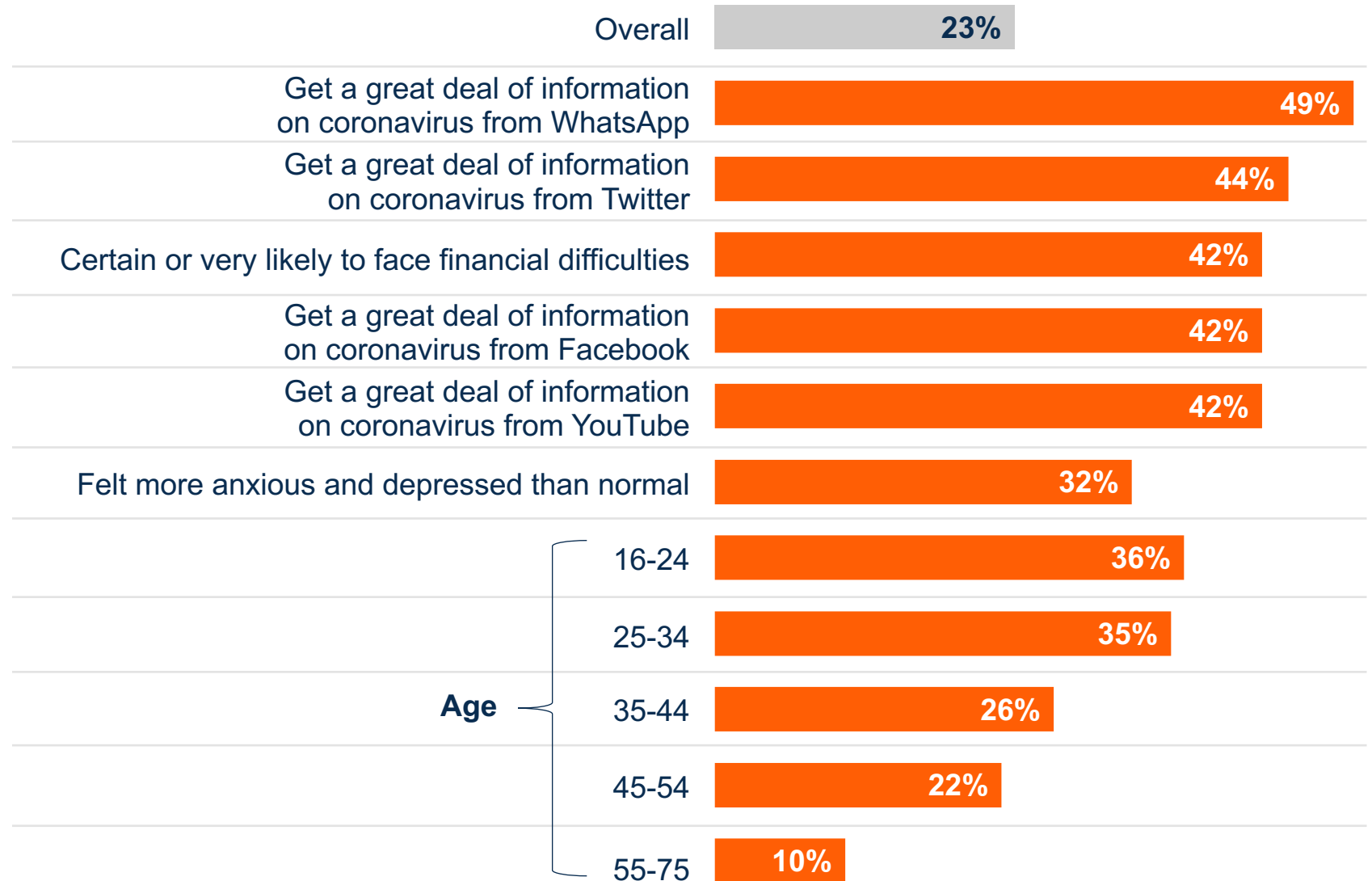
Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

Nearly a quarter of the population (23%) say they've had arguments with friends or family about their behaviour over the course of the crisis.

This more than doubles to half (49%) of those who get a great deal of information on Covid-19 from WhatsApp, while those who use other social media platforms such as Twitter (44%), Facebook (42%) and YouTube (42%) as key information sources are also much more likely to have argued.

And the likelihood of having had such arguments declines with age, with 16-34-year-olds (36%) more likely than other age groups to have done so.

% within each group who **have had arguments** with friends or family members about how to behave during the coronavirus pandemic



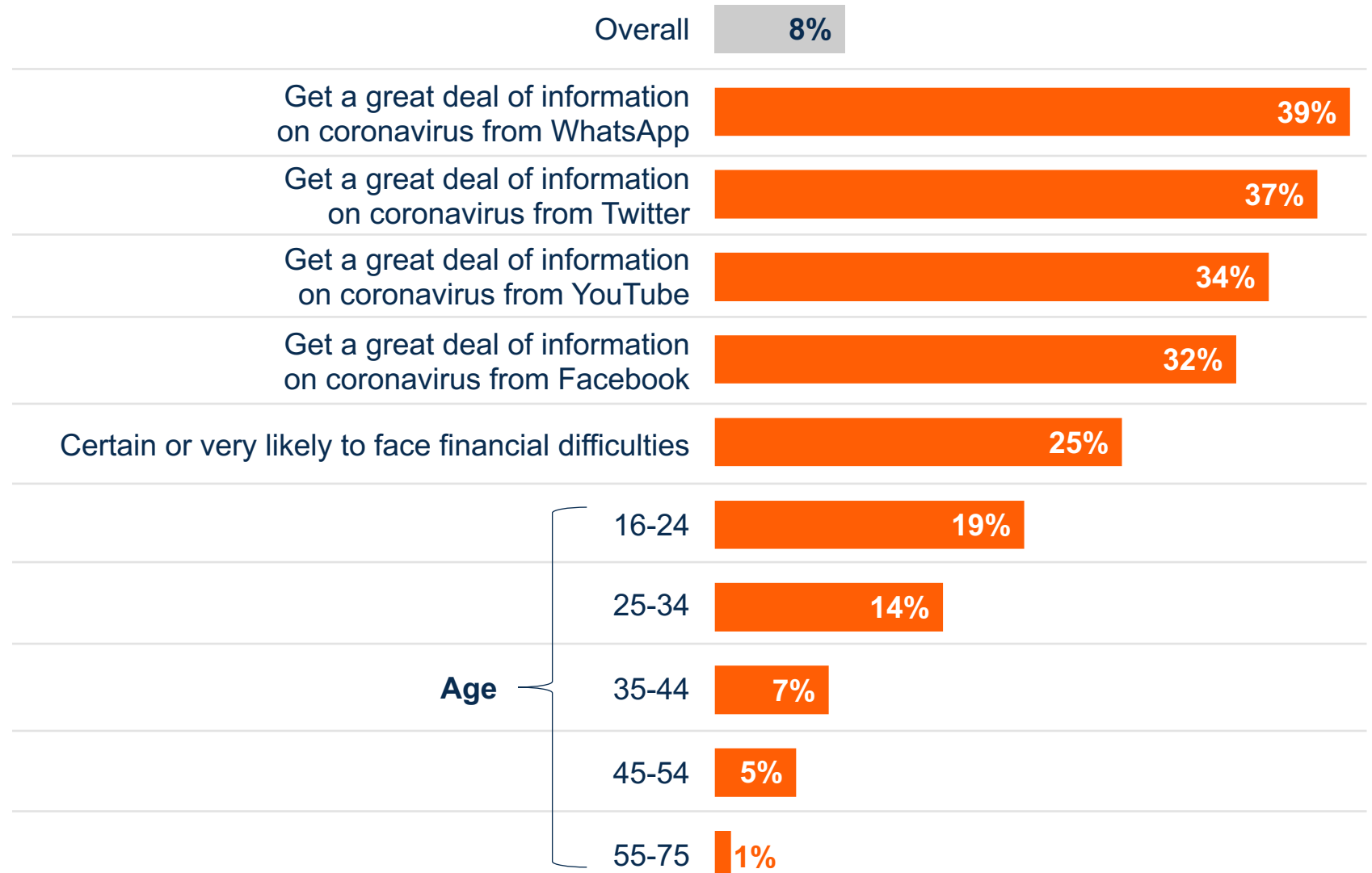
Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

Covid-related anger is having a real impact on some people's relationships, with 1 in 12 (8%) saying they're no longer speaking to a friend or family member because of disputes about the pandemic.

Money worries may be a source of tension, as a quarter (25%) of people who think they're certain or very likely to experience financial problems report no longer being on speaking terms with a loved one.

And again, social media use is associated with such disputes: those who get a great deal of information on the virus from WhatsApp (39%), Twitter, (37%), YouTube (34%) or Facebook (32%) are four or more times as likely as the population overall to no longer be speaking to someone close.

% within each group who are no longer speaking to a friend or family member because of disagreements about the coronavirus pandemic



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

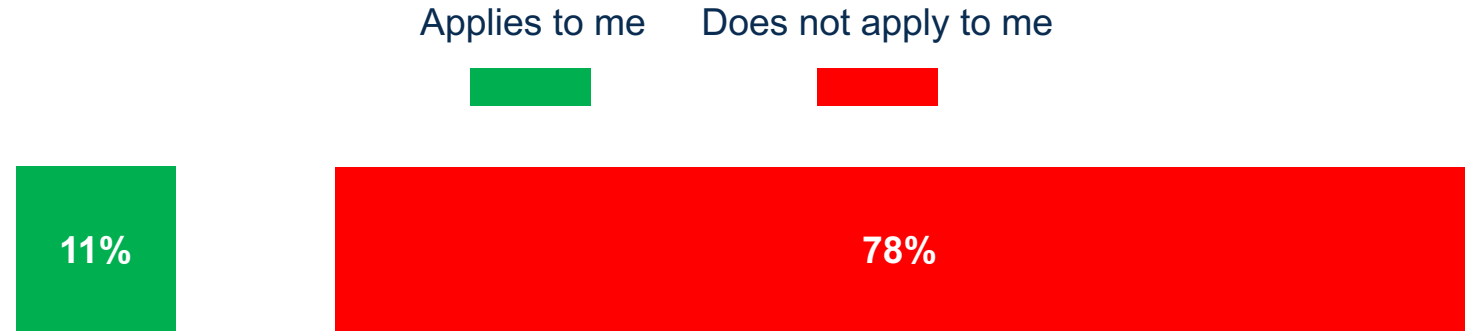
There may also be a degree of concealed anger among the population, with some suspecting other people have been angry with their behaviour in relation to the pandemic...



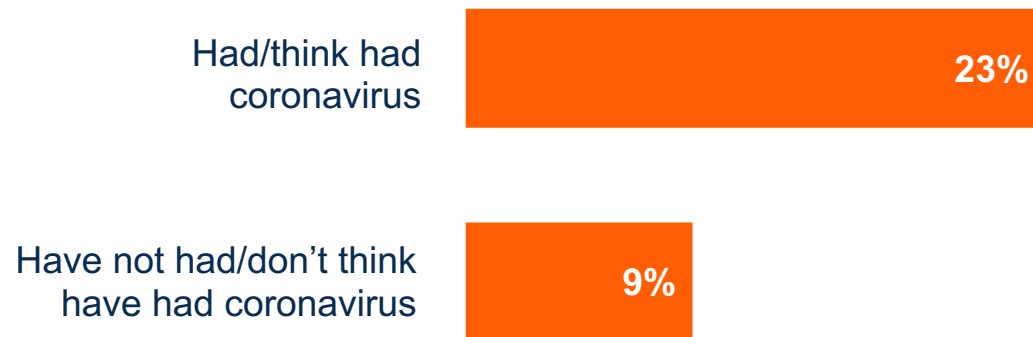
1 in 9 people (11%) think others they know have felt angry at them for their behaviour in relation to coronavirus.

This rises to almost a quarter (23%) among people who have had, or think they have had, coronavirus.

For each of the following, please say whether it does or does not apply to you?
I think other people I know have felt angry at me, because of how I am behaving in relation to the coronavirus pandemic



% who think others have felt angry at them



Coronavirus as a source of confrontation

The pandemic has also created flashpoints, leading some to confront others for their behaviour in relation to Covid-19, or to their being confronted themselves.

Those who say they are certain or very likely to face financial difficulties due to the crisis are more likely to have been involved in such confrontations, perhaps as a result of the pressures they are under.

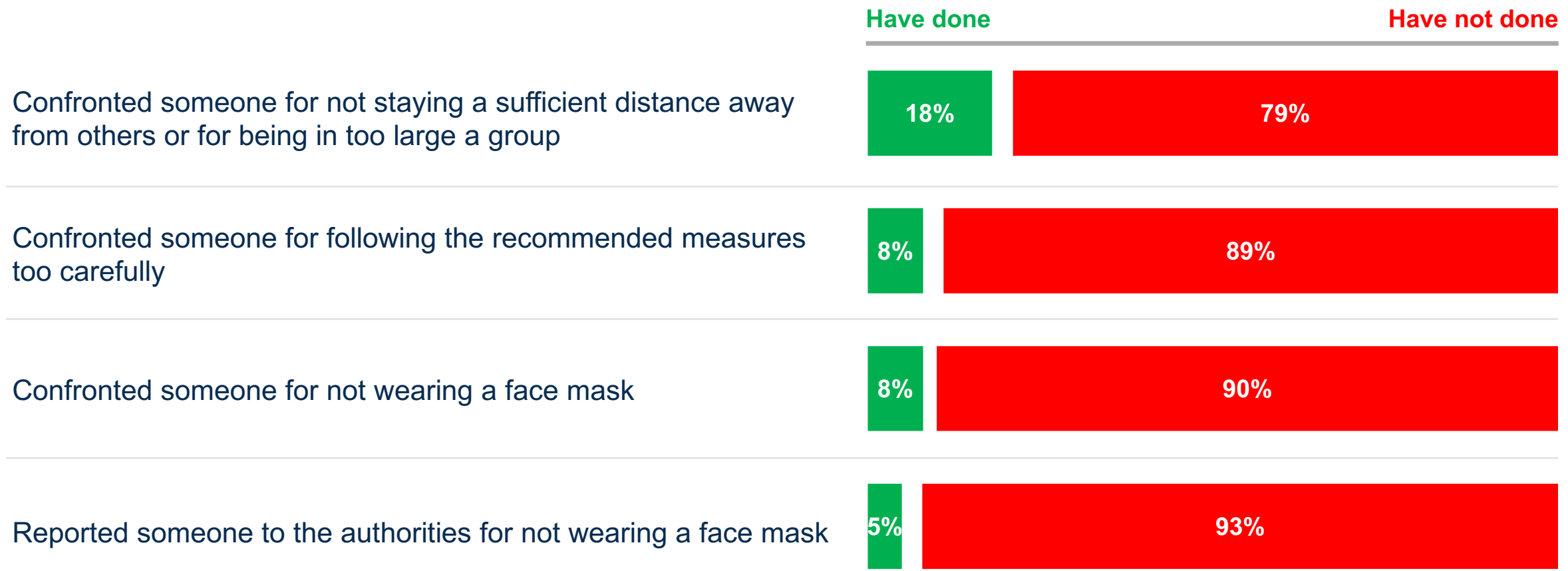
Social media use also appears to be a factor: those who get a great deal of their information on the pandemic from platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are much more likely to have confronted someone or been confronted themselves over the coronavirus measures.

There have even been confrontations because of a perception that people are sticking to the rules too closely.

Meanwhile, a majority of the population say they've had to remind other people to keep their distance, which could be a confrontational act or simply a polite reminder.

Confronting or reporting someone

Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?

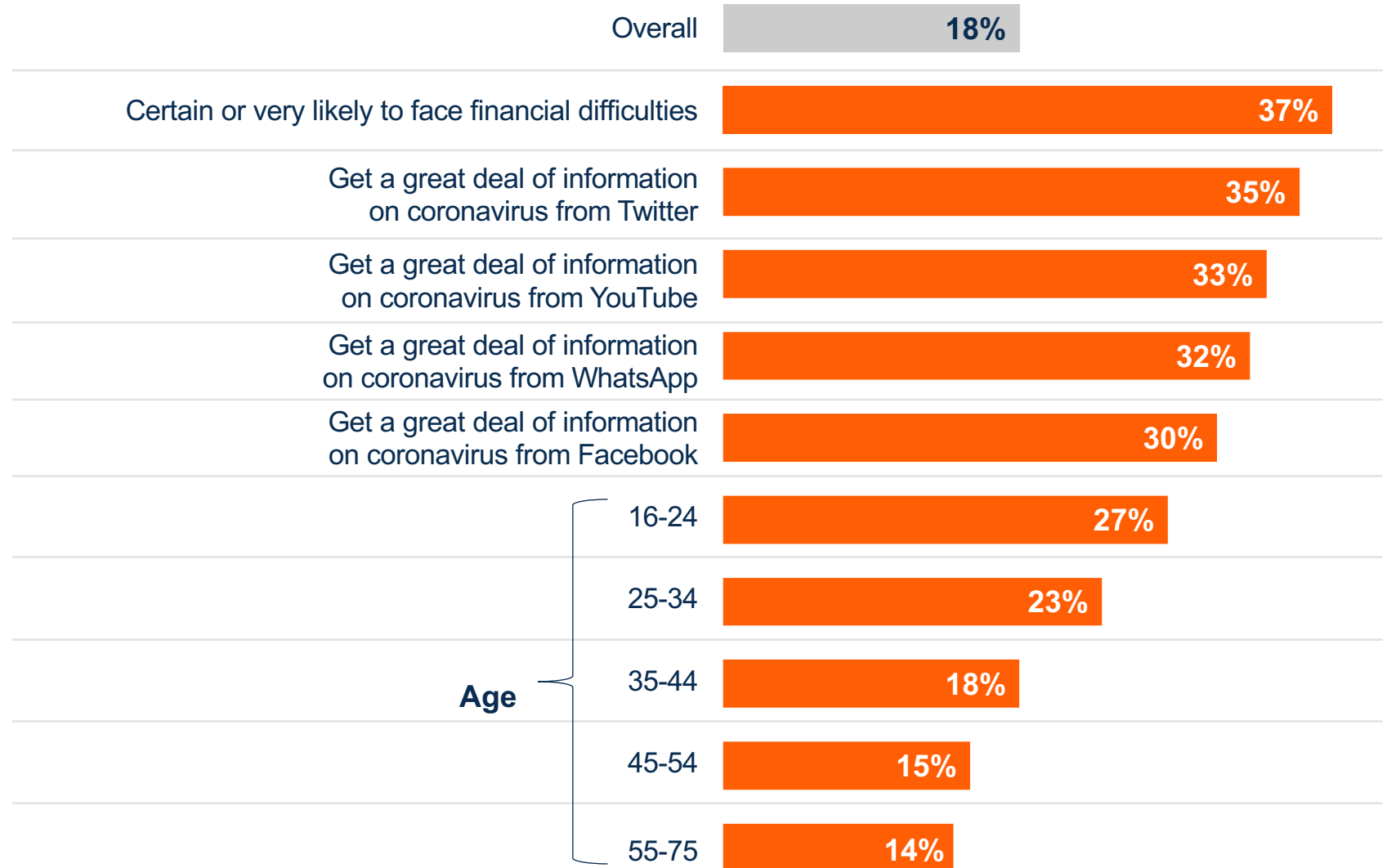


18% – or nearly 1 in 5 people – say they’ve confronted someone for failing to keep their distance or for being in a big group.

This doubles, to 37%, among those who think they’re certain or very likely to face financial difficulties because of Covid-19.

People who get a lot of information on the pandemic from social media are also more likely to have confronted others, as are people aged 16-24.

% within each group who have confronted someone for not staying a sufficient distance away from others or for being in too large a group



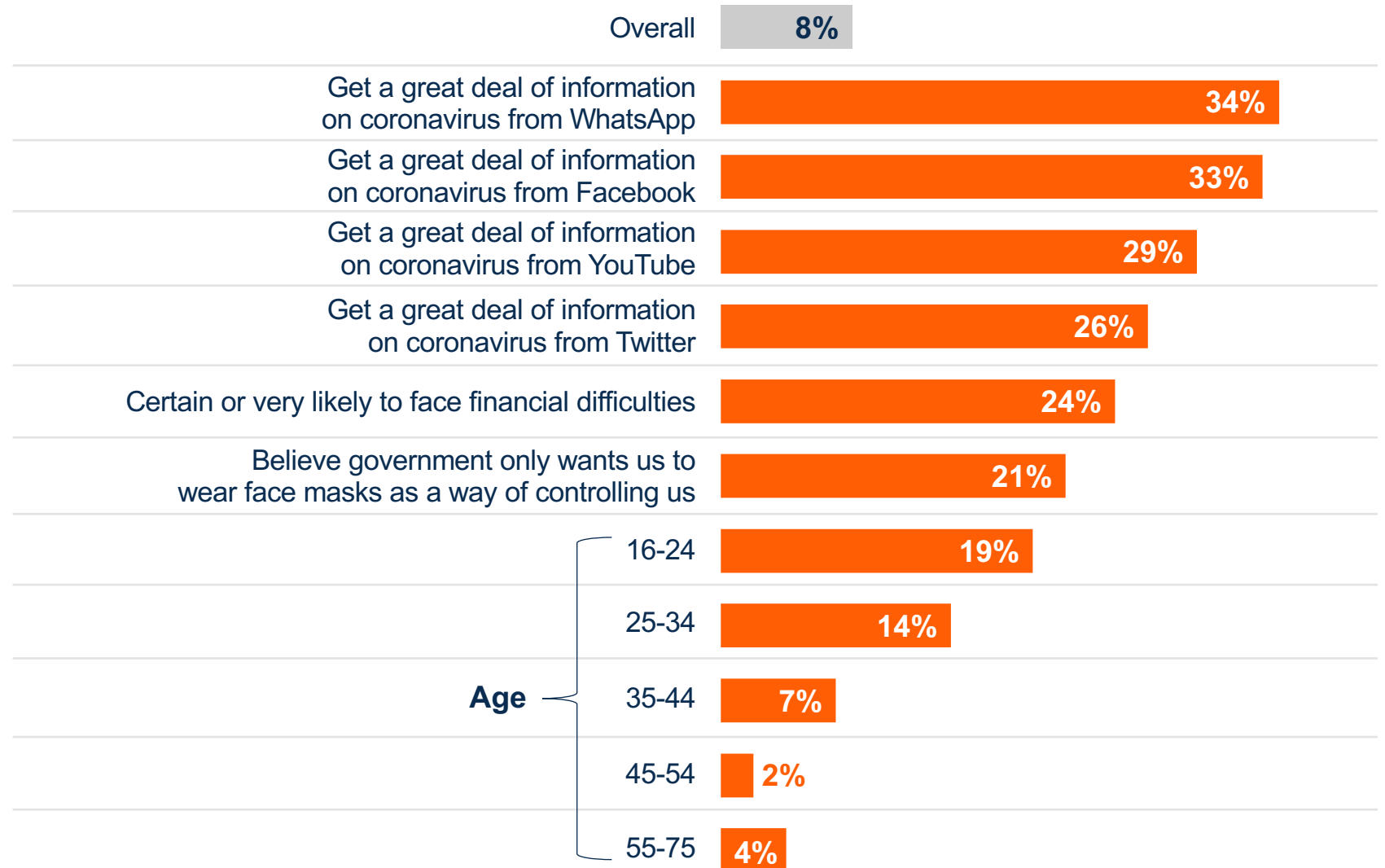
Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

1 in 12 (8%) even say they've confronted someone for sticking to the rules too closely.

Those who get a great deal of information on coronavirus from WhatsApp (34%) and Facebook (33%) are around four times as likely to have confronted someone for this reason, while people who say they're certain or very likely to face money problems (24%) are three times as likely to report having done so.

Belief in a conspiracy theory about face masks is also associated with confronting someone for sticking to the rules too closely, with 21% of believers saying they've done so.

% within each group who have confronted someone for following the recommended measures too carefully

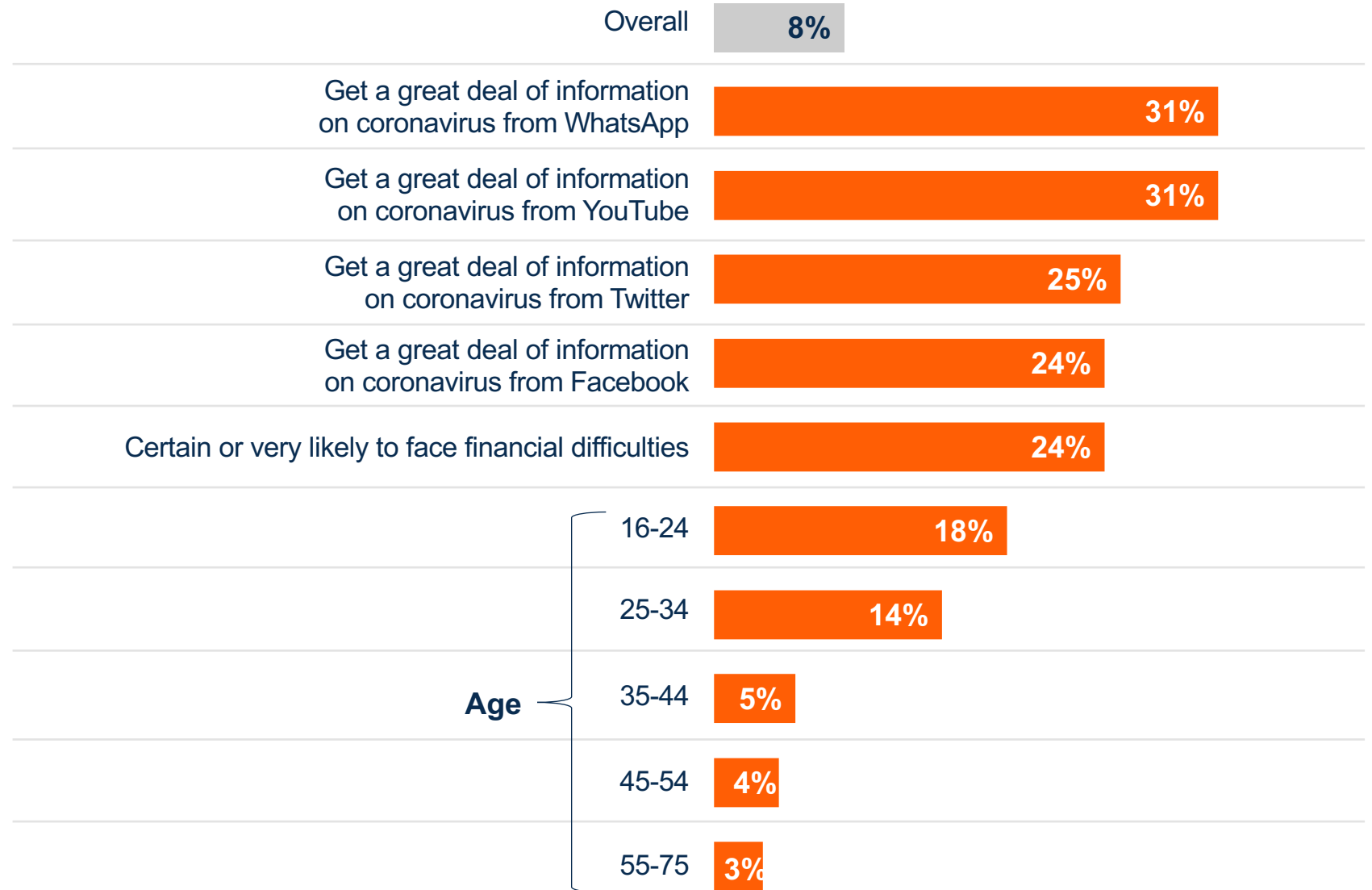


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

1 in 12 people have (8%) confronted someone for not wearing a face mask.

Again, those who use social media as a main information source are much more likely to say they have done this, while 16-34-year-olds are twice as likely as the population overall to have confronted someone for this reason.

% within each group who have confronted someone for not wearing a face mask

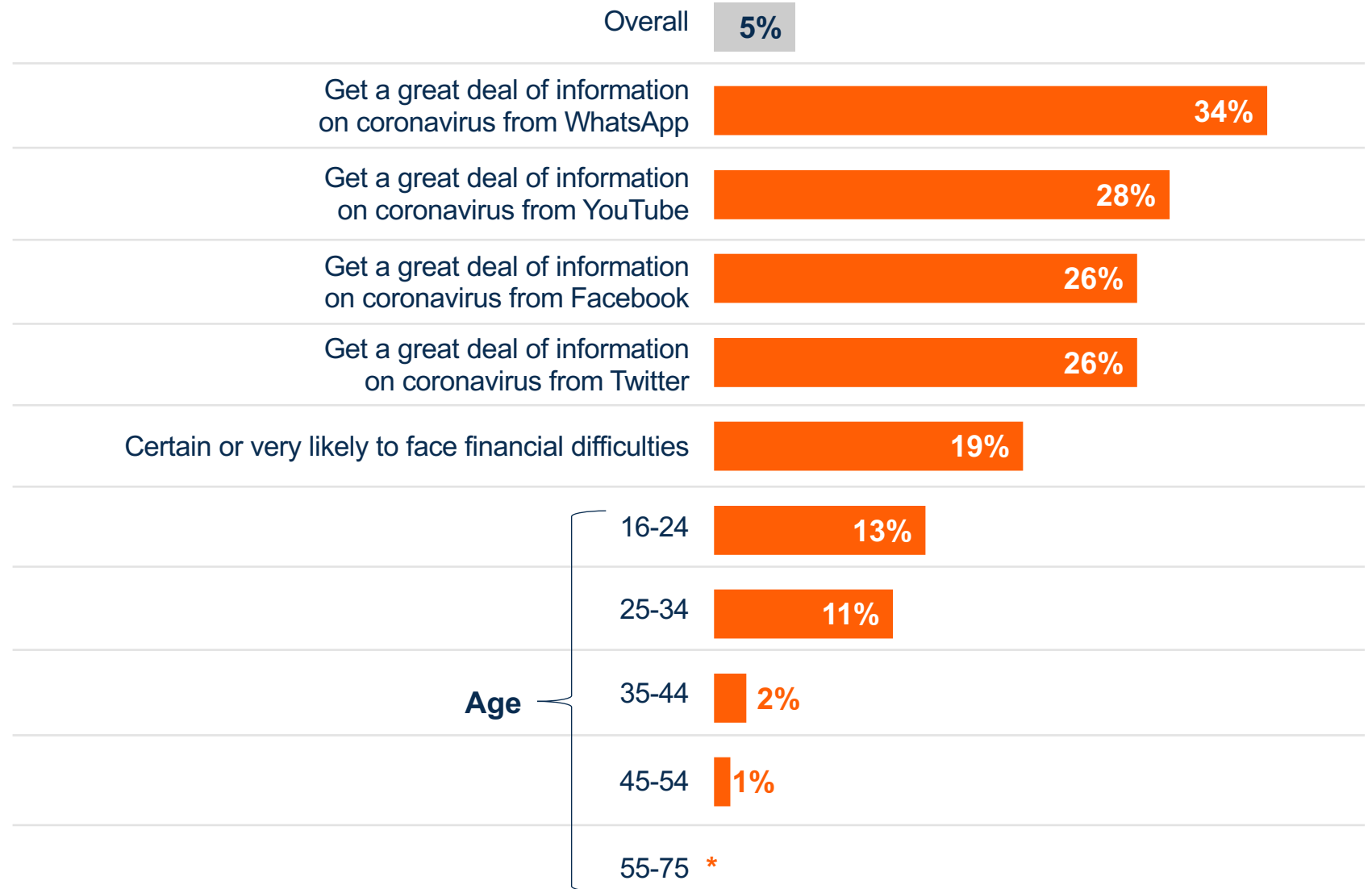


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

1 in 20 (5%) have reported someone to the authorities for not wearing a mask.

Those who get a great deal of information on the virus from WhatsApp (35%) are seven times as likely to say they've reported someone for this reason.

% within each group who have reported someone to the authorities for not wearing a face mask



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

Being confronted or reported by someone

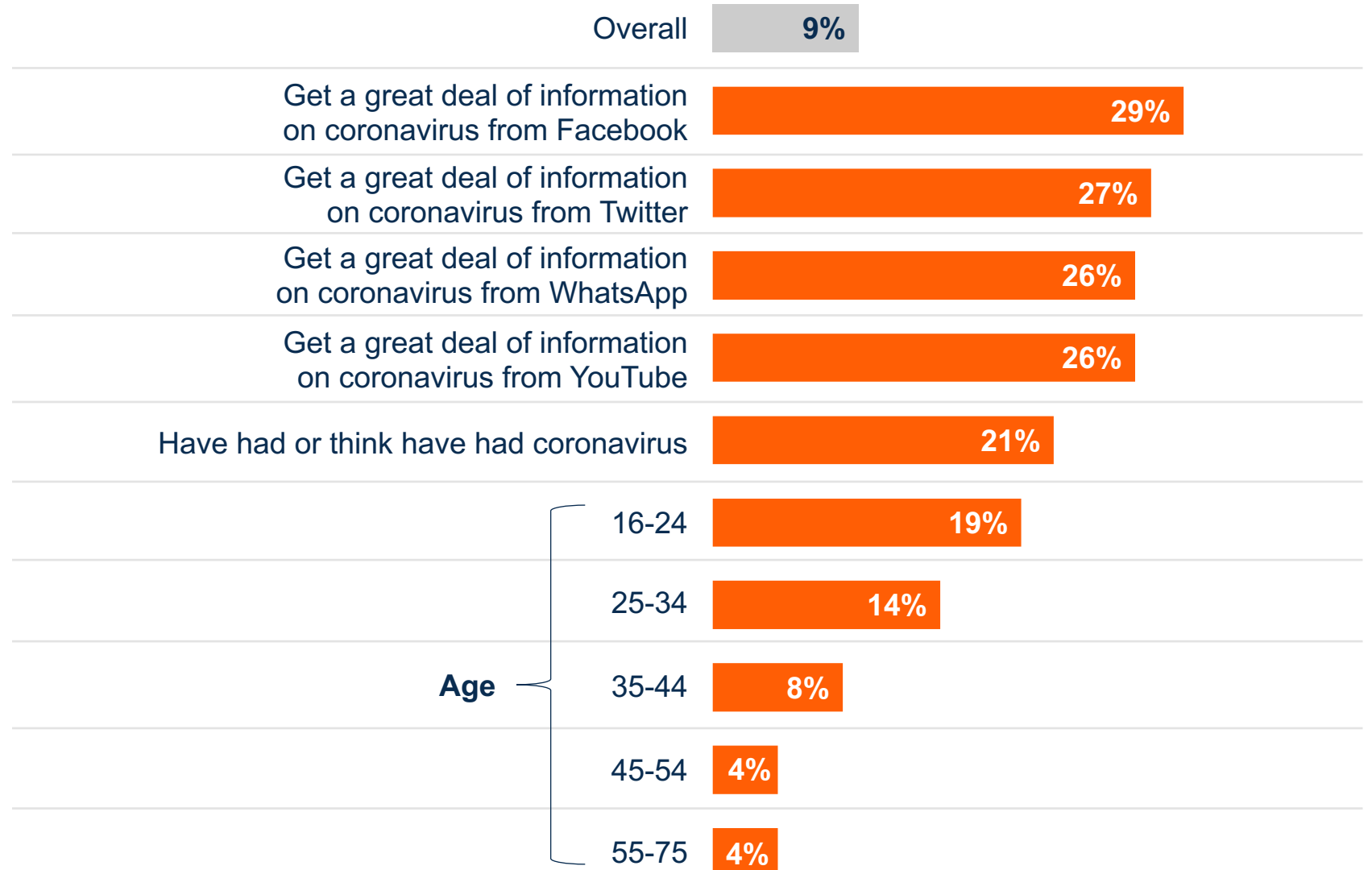
Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?



1 in 11 people (9%) say they themselves have been confronted for following the recommended measures too carefully.

This rises to 1 in 5 (21%) among those who suspect they have had coronavirus or have had it confirmed by a test.

% within each group who have been confronted by someone for following the recommended measures too carefully

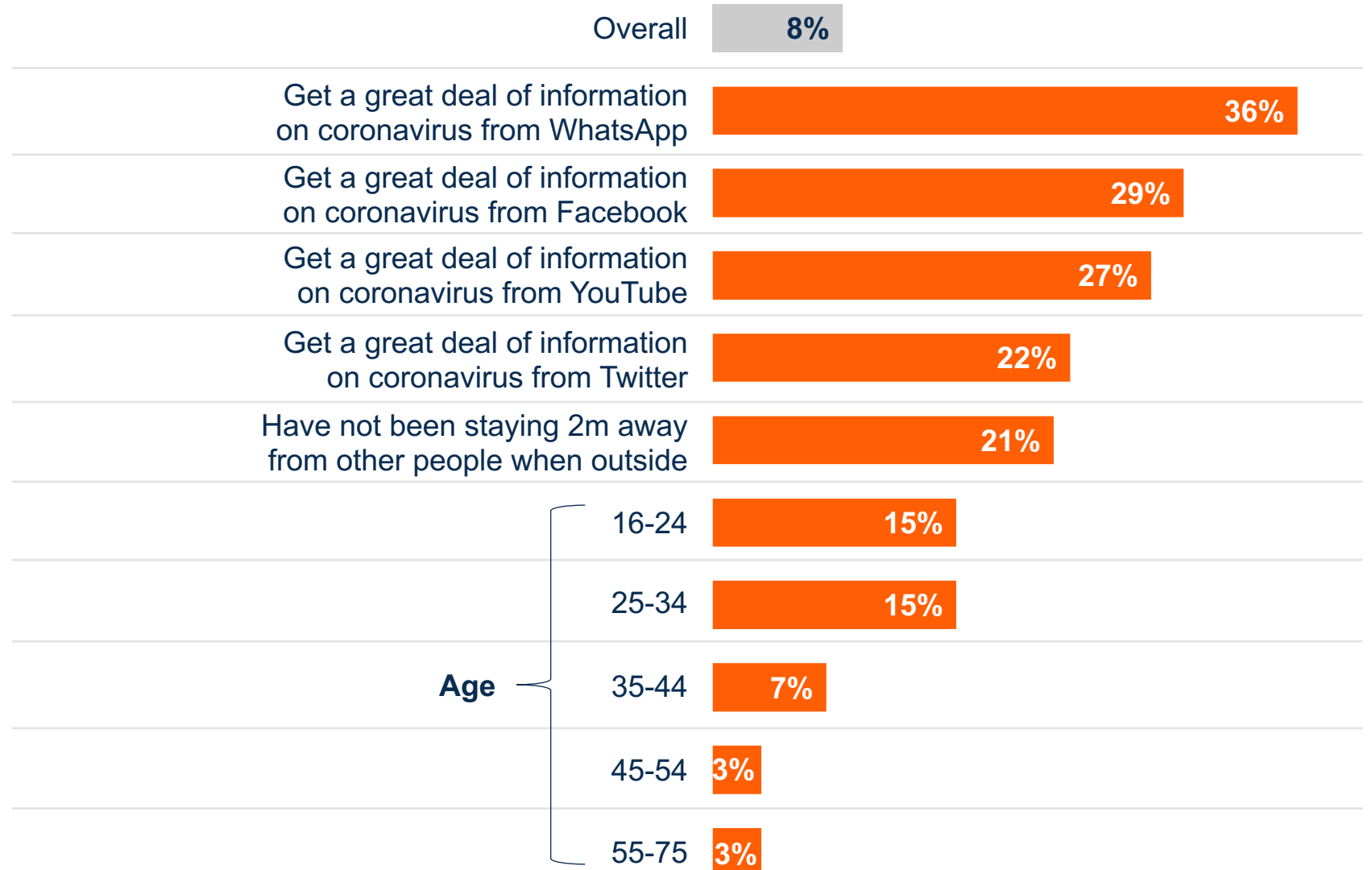


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

1 in 12 (8%) also say they've been confronted for not keeping their distance from others or for being in too big a group.

Unsurprisingly, this rises to 1 in 5 (21%) of those who say they've not been keeping 2 metres away from others while outside.

% within each group who have been confronted by someone because you were not staying a sufficient distance away from others or for being in too large a group

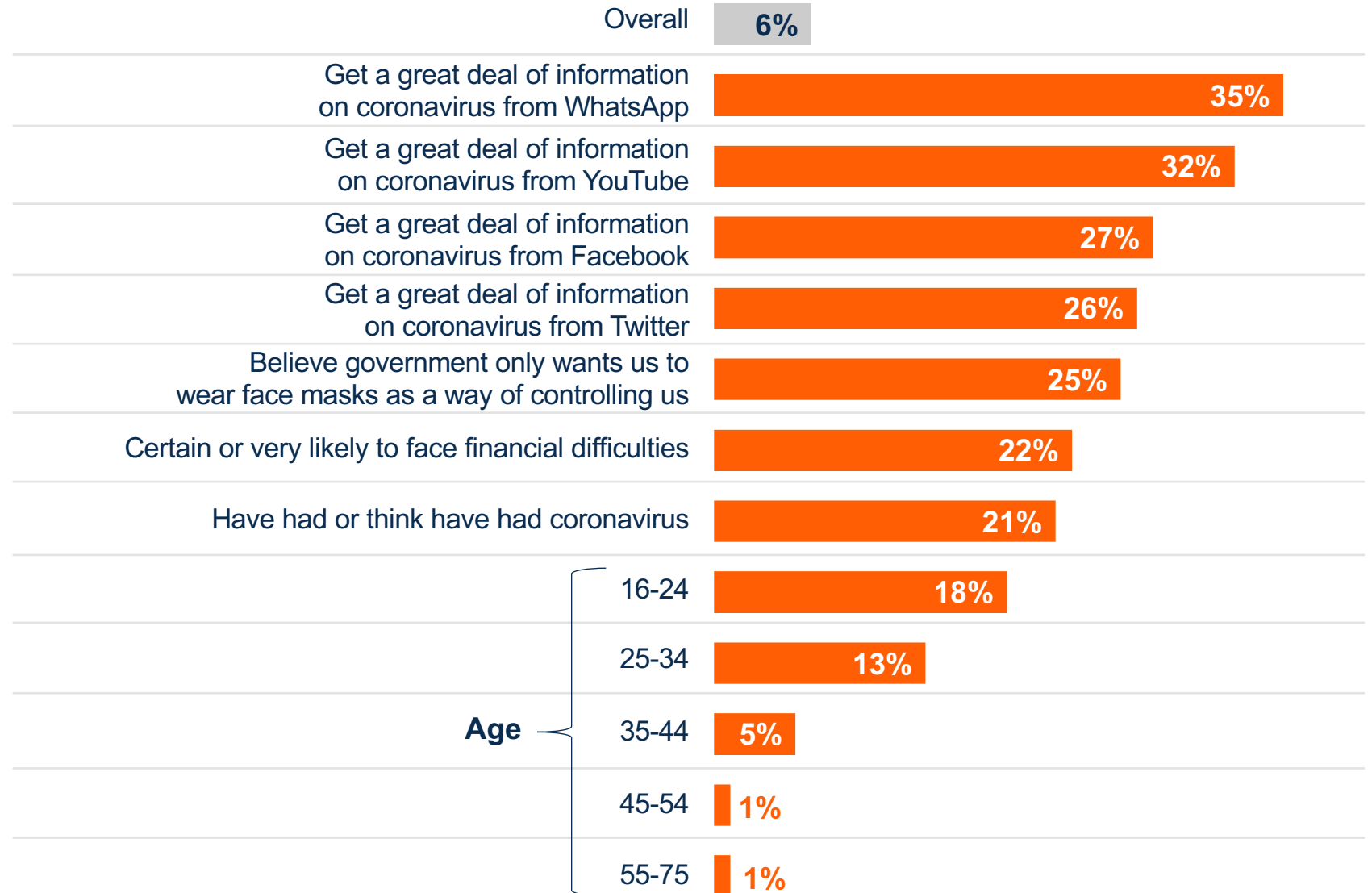


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

Just over 1 in 20 people (6%) say they've been confronted by someone for not wearing a mask.

This increases to a quarter (25%) of those who believe the conspiracy theory that the government only want us to wear face masks in order to control us, and to around 1 in 5 of those who've had or think they've had coronavirus (21%).

% within each group who have been confronted by someone for not wearing a face mask

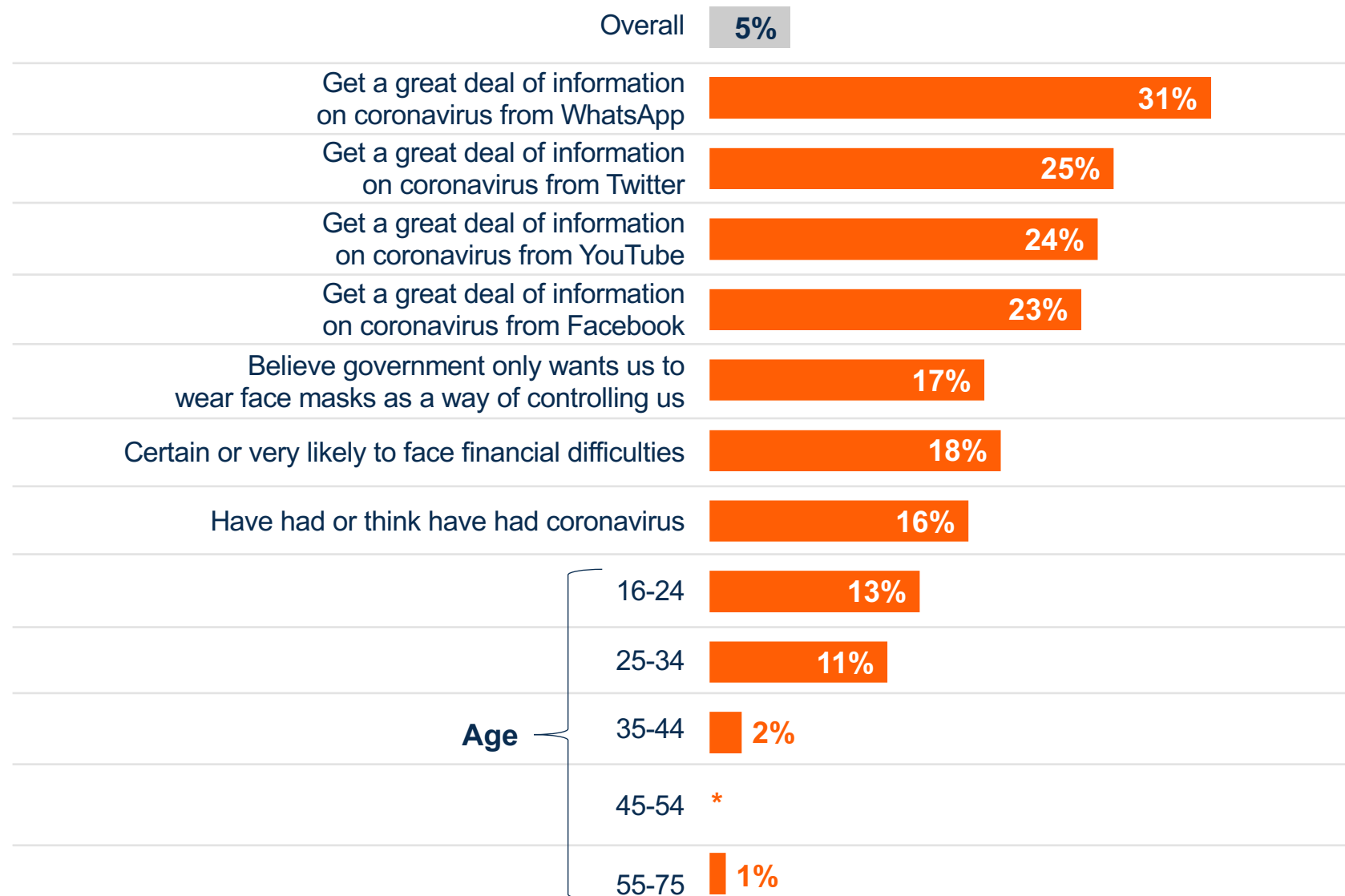


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

1 in 20 people (5%) say they have been reported to the authorities for not wearing a face mask, which increases to nearly a third (31%) of those who get a great deal of information on coronavirus from WhatsApp, and to around a quarter who use Twitter (25%), YouTube (24%) and Facebook (23%) a great deal.

Those who believe the government is just using masks as a means of control (17%) are more than three times as likely as the population overall to say they've been reported for this reason.

% within each group who have been reported to the authorities because you were not wearing a face mask

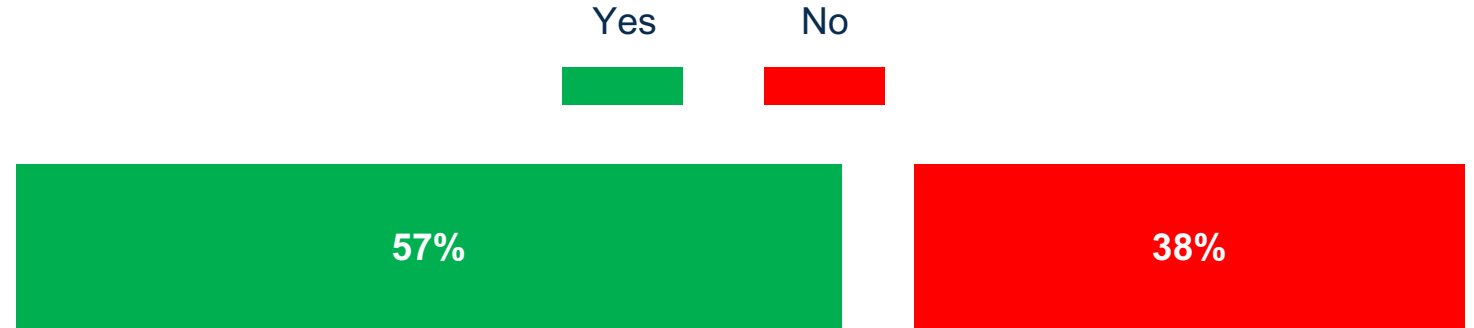


Finally, a majority of the population (57%) say they have asked other people to keep 2 metres away from them or reminded them they are social distancing, which could be a confrontational act or simply a polite reminder.

This is consistent across all generations, but is associated with anxiety about Covid-19, as those who find coronavirus stressful (70%) and those who are worried about the rules being eased (69%) are more likely to have had such encounters.

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?

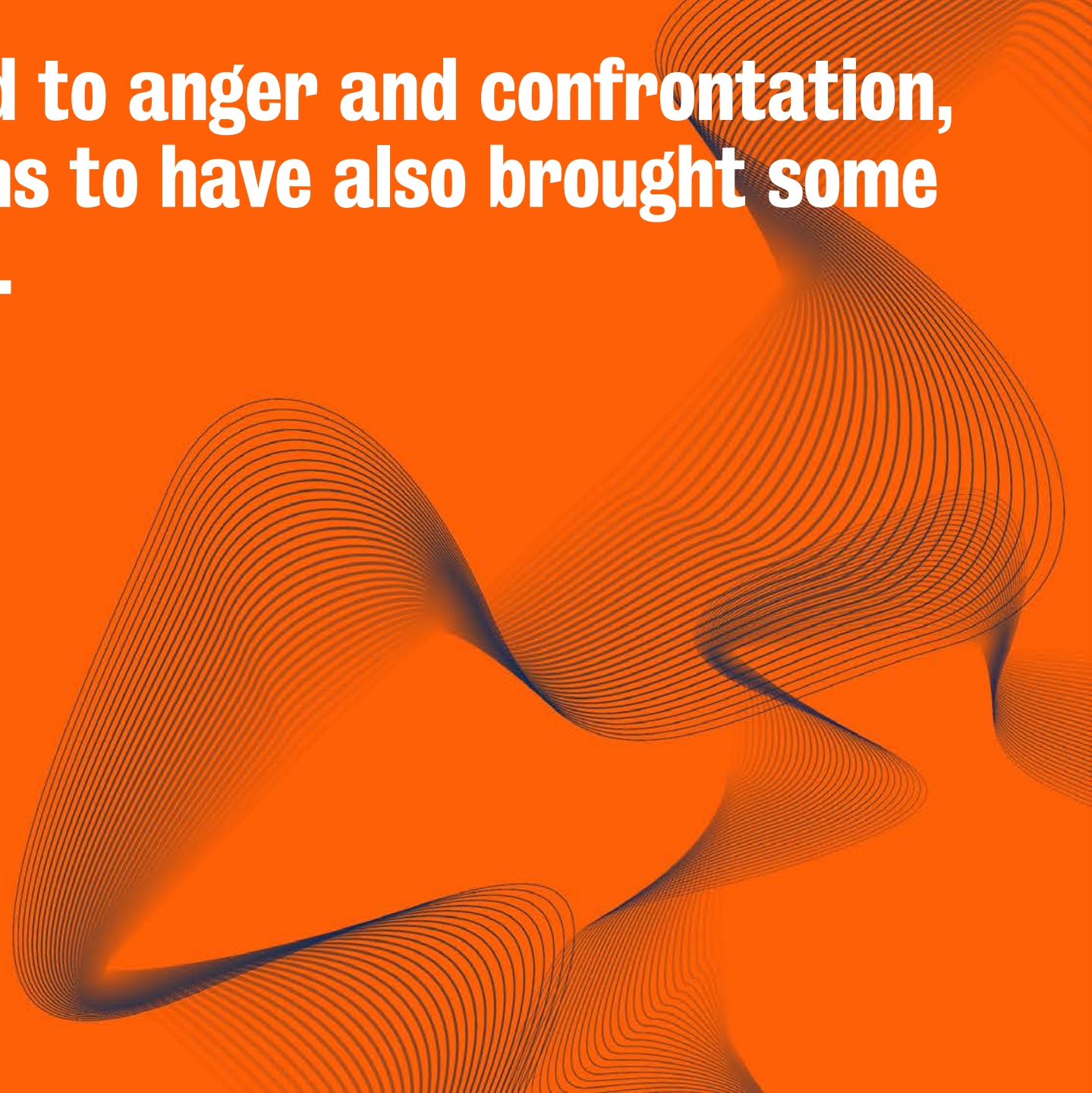
Asking others to keep 2m away from me/reminding them that I am social distancing



% who have done so



However, while it has led to anger and confrontation, the Covid-19 crisis seems to have also brought some people closer together...



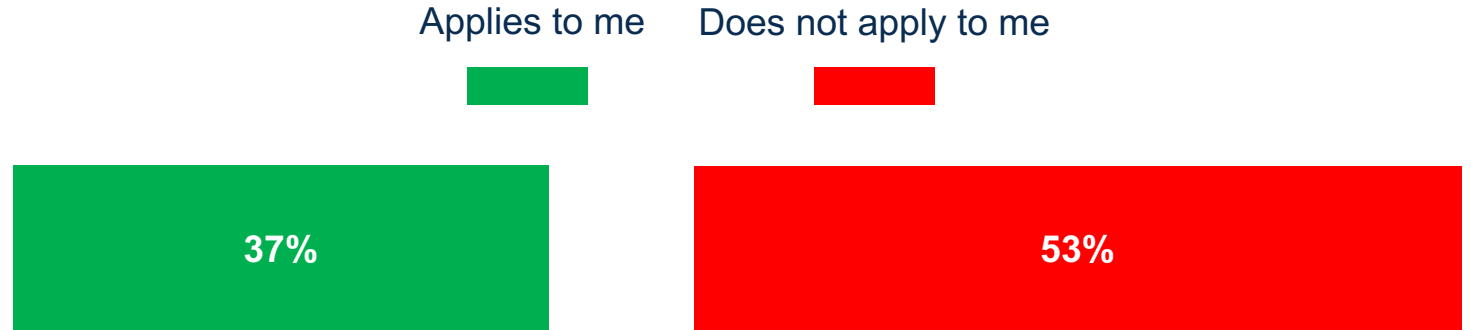
Despite Covid-19 being a source of anger and disputes for many, there are signs that the pandemic has brought people together, with 37% saying they feel closer to their neighbours or local community than they did before the crisis began.

Baby boomers (42%) are most likely to say this applies to them, while millennials are least likely to (33%).

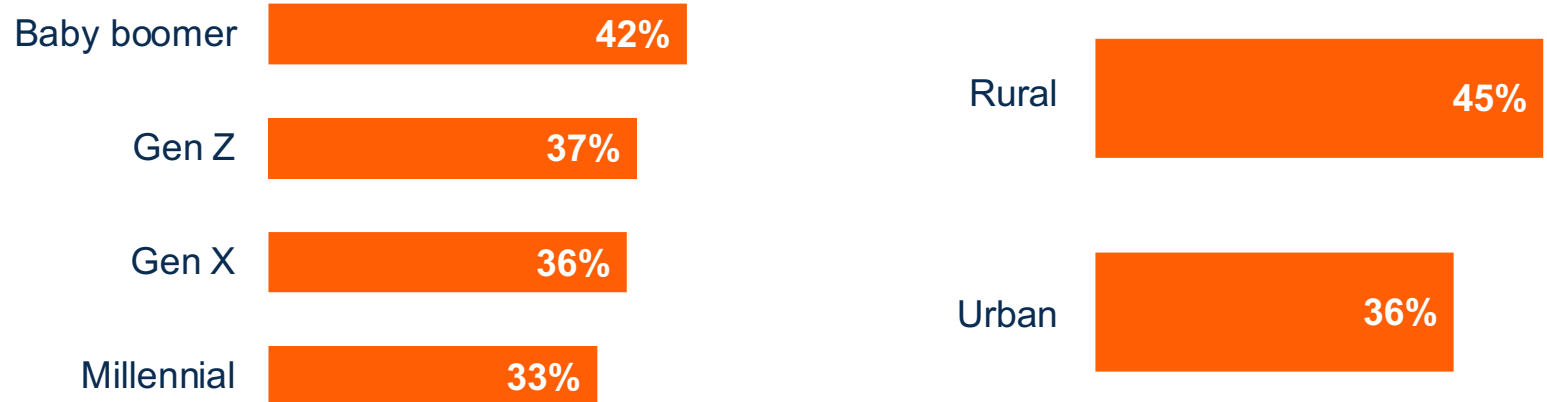
And those living in rural areas are also more likely than those living in urban regions to say they now feel closer to neighbours or their local community.

For each of the following, please say whether it does or does not apply to you?

I feel closer to my neighbours or local community than before the coronavirus pandemic



% who feel closer to neighbours/community



Technical details

Ipsos MORI interviewed a sample of 2,237 adults aged 16-75 in the United Kingdom using its online i:omnibus between 17 and 20 July 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 surveys are subject to a range of potential sources of error.

For further details and results of statistical analyses investigating factors associated with anger and confrontation, see [“Anger and confrontation during the COVID-19 pandemic; a national cross-sectional survey in the UK”](#) by Louise Smith, Bobby Duffy, Vivienne Moxham-Hall, Lucy Strang, Simon Wessely, and James Rubin, in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*.

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