

The Trusting, the Dissenting and the Frustrated: how the UK is dividing as lockdown is eased

For more information, contact:

Bobby Duffy
bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk

Daniel Allington
daniel.allington@kcl.ac.uk

Sunday 7 June 2020

About this study

The public are dividing into three groups, based on their views of the relaxation of the lockdown measures and their perceptions of the risks from Covid-19, as shown by a cluster analysis of a survey of 2,254 UK residents aged 18-75, conducted on 20-22 May, by Ipsos MORI:

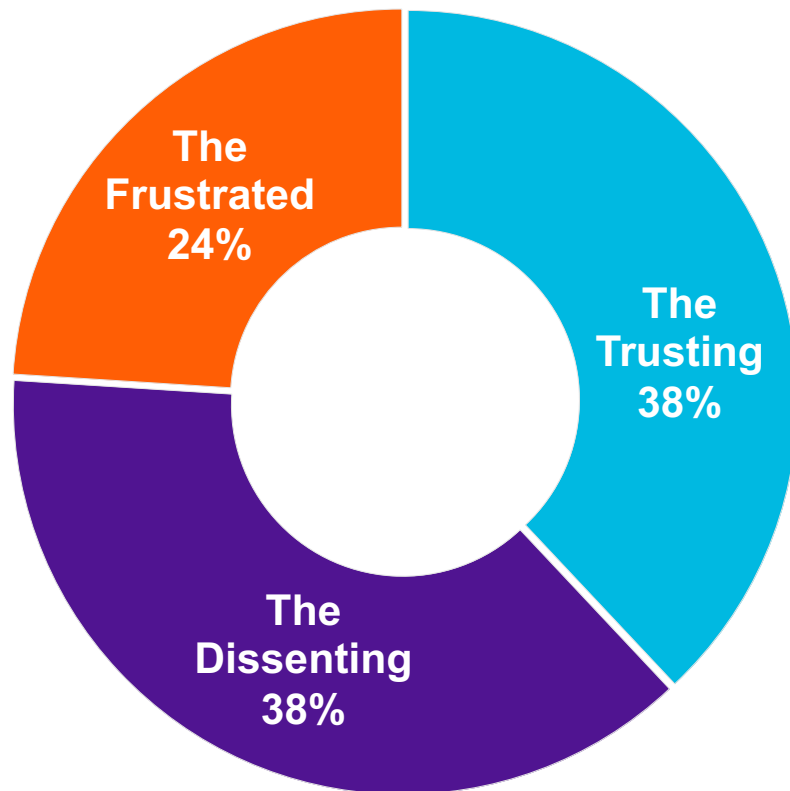
- **The Trusting:** while very worried about the health impacts of the virus, they are most likely to be putting their trust in government.
- **The Dissenting:** the group most worried about the health risks, and most critical of the government's response.
- **The Frustrated:** the least worried about the health impacts, and most likely to think we need to lift restrictions faster.

These groups are now much more aligned with party political loyalties, and Leave and Remain identities, compared with a similar segmentation we conducted on data from early April, where support for the lockdown measures cut across party and Brexit lines.

In particular, ratings of the risk to their own personal health from the virus are very similar between the Trusting and the Dissenting – but they have utterly opposing views of the response: 90% of the Trusting have confidence in the government, compared with 11% of the Dissenting.

The Frustrated, on the other hand, are by far the most likely to think that too much fuss is being made about coronavirus, that deaths are being deliberately exaggerated, and to prioritise the economic impacts over the health impacts.

The three groups of people responding to the coronavirus crisis as lockdown is eased



The Trusting

While very worried about the health implications of the virus, they are most likely to be putting their trust in government. They are the only group where a majority support the relaxation measures announced by government

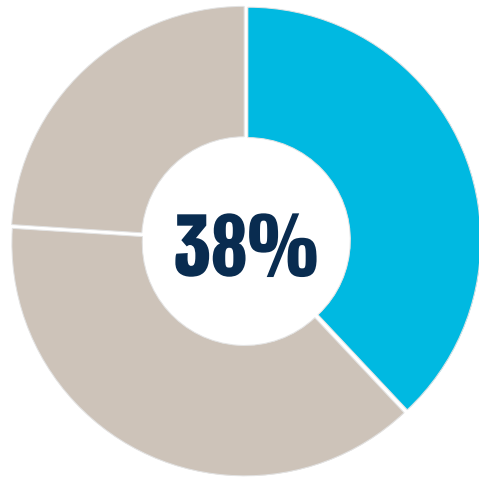
The Dissenting

The group most worried about the health risks, and most critical of the government's response. They are most likely to think the restrictions are being eased too quickly.

The Frustrated

The least worried, and most likely to think we need to lift restrictions faster. They see the risks of Covid-19 as much lower than the other groups, and are more ambivalent about the government's approach.

The Trusting



Among the most worried about the health impact of coronavirus:

- 9 in 10 see it as a risk to other people, and 6 in 10 as see it as a risk to them personally.
- 7 in 10 see direct deaths from Covid-19 as one of the two most serious problems, and half see indirect deaths as among most serious.

By far the most likely of the groups to be behind the government:

- 9 in 10 trust the government to handle the crisis and the information it provides on the virus.
- 7 in 10 say the government has done a good job of protecting people and its approach has adapted well.

Relatively divided on pace at which the lockdown is being relaxed:

- 46% say too quickly vs 42% who say it's about the right pace.
- But 6 in 10 support relaxation measures announced on 10 May – the highest of any group.

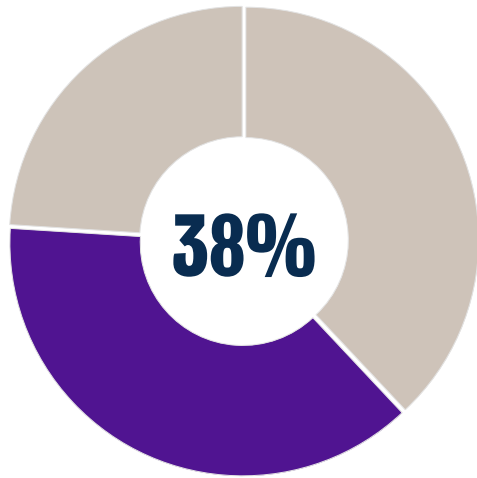
Among the most accepting of continuing restrictions long-term if a vaccine can't be found:

- Half say home-schooling children would be acceptable.
- 8 in 10 would be fine with restaurants and bars being made to enforce social distancing.

Key demographics

- 50% female, 49% male
- Mean age 46
- 64% employed
- 26% are parents/guardians
- Voted Conservative over Labour by 57% to 20%
- Voted Leave over Remain by 63% to 37%

The Dissenting



The most worried about the health impact of coronavirus:

- 9 in 10 see it as a risk to other people, and 6 in 10 as see it as a risk to them personally.
- 8 in 10 see direct deaths from Covid-19 as one of two most serious problems, and 7 in 10 see indirect deaths as among most serious.

The most critical of the government and its response:

- More than 9 in 10 agree the government response has been confused and inconsistent and that it was too slow.
- 1 in 10 trust the government to handle the crisis and 3 in 10 trust information it provides – the lowest of the groups.
- Just 4% say say the government has done a good job of protecting people.
- 44% think the authorities are deliberately reducing or hiding the coronavirus death toll – the most of any group.

Most likely to think lockdown is being relaxed too quickly:

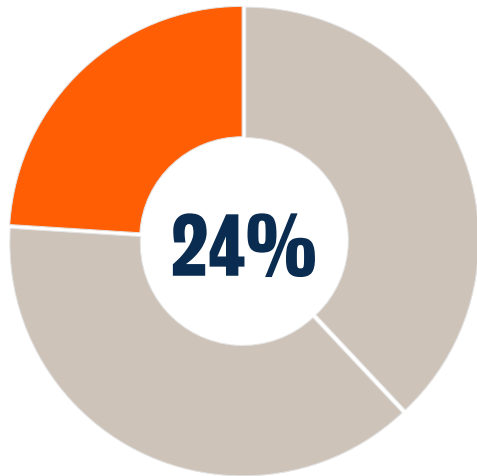
- 9 in 10 think it's being eased too fast, and just 1 in 10 support relaxation measures announced on 10 May.

The least relaxed about returning to work or children going back to school when allowed, and most accepting of restrictions continuing long-term if no vaccine is available.

Key demographics

- 54% female, 45% male
- Mean age 46
- 58% employed
- 21% are parents/guardians
- Voted Labour over Conservative by 52% to 16%
- Voted Remain over Leave by 67% to 33%

The Frustrated



The least worried about the health impact of coronavirus:

- Half see it as a risk to other people, and 3 in 10 see it as a risk to them personally.
- 6 in 10 say the economy and jobs are among most serious problems, compared with 3 in 10 who say increased deaths are most serious.
- Judge risk of hospitalisation from Covid-19 to be much lower than the other groups, which is a more accurate view of the likely risk
- Half think too much fuss is being made about the risk of the virus.

The most divided on the handling of the crisis:

- Half trust the government to control the virus and its information on it, but half also think the response has been confused and inconsistent.
- A third think the number of coronavirus deaths is being deliberately exaggerated by the authorities – the most of any group.

The most likely to think lockdown is being relaxed too slowly:

- 2 in 5 think this, around six times as many as the other groups.

The most likely to be struggling:

- Over half say the lockdown measures will become very difficult for them within 8 weeks, and they are the most likely to be facing job losses and financial difficulties.

The most comfortable about returning to work and children going back to school, and least accepting of restrictions continuing long-term if a vaccine can't be found.

Key demographics

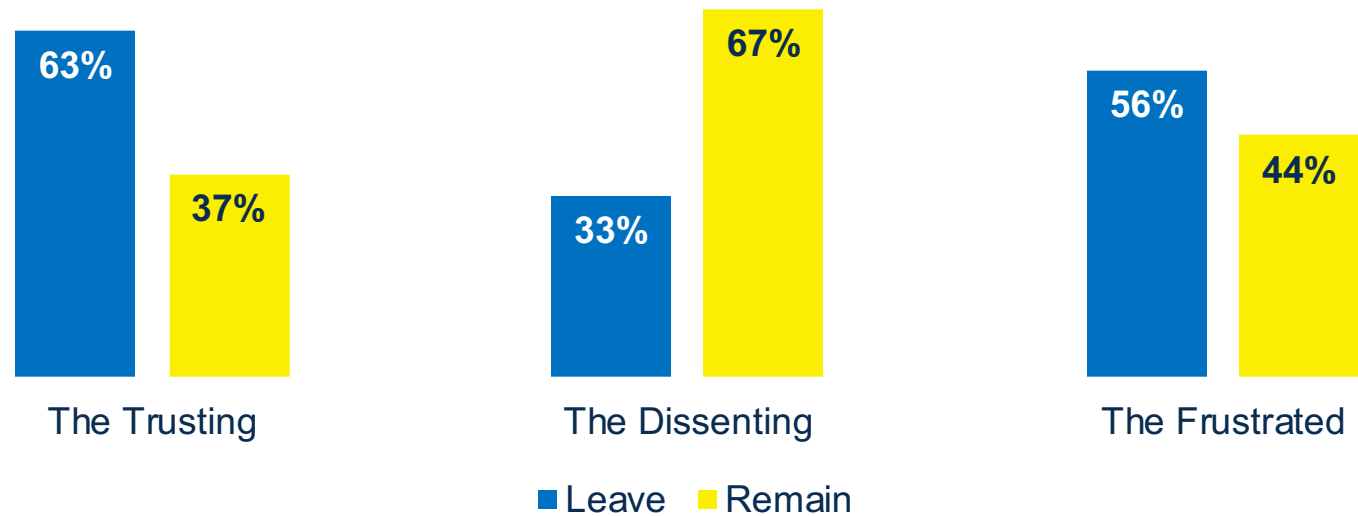
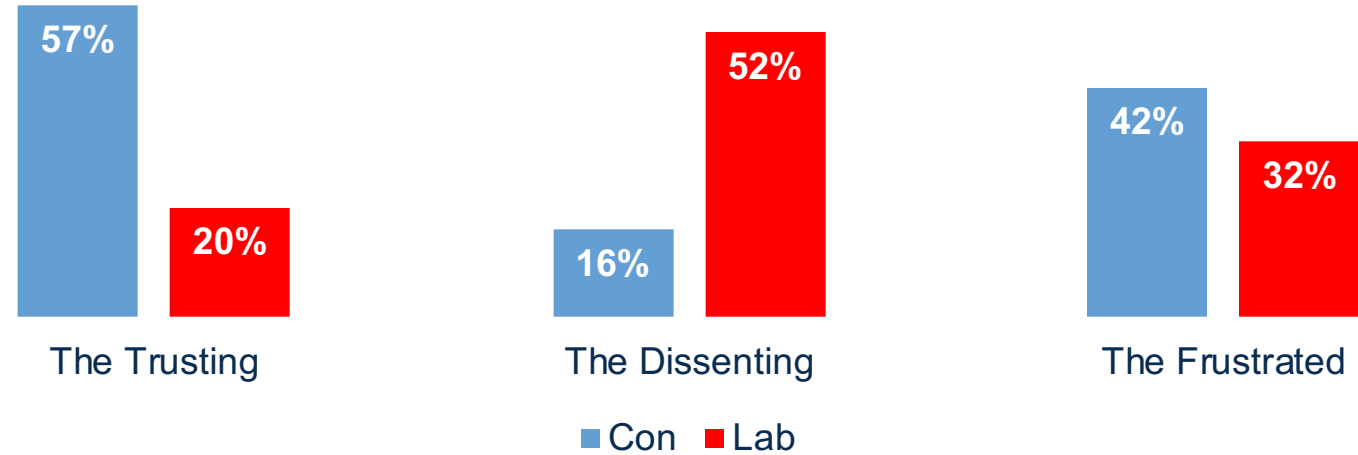
- 55% male, 44% female
- Mean age 39
- 70% employed
- 35% are parents/guardians
- Voted Conservative over Labour by 42% to 32%
- Voted Leave over Remain by 56% to 44%

The Trusting are almost three times as likely to have voted Conservative than Labour in 2019, and are much more likely to have voted Leave than Remain in 2016.

The Dissenting are virtually the mirror image of this, being much more likely to have voted Labour and Remain.

The Frustrated are more evenly split politically.

Composition of groups by vote at 2019 general election and 2016 EU referendum



Perceptions of risks, and priorities during the crisis

The Trusting and the Dissenting have nearly identical perceptions of the the risks of the virus to themselves and others.

The Trusting are also very likely to see direct and indirect deaths as the most serious problems, although not quite to the same extent as the Dissenting.

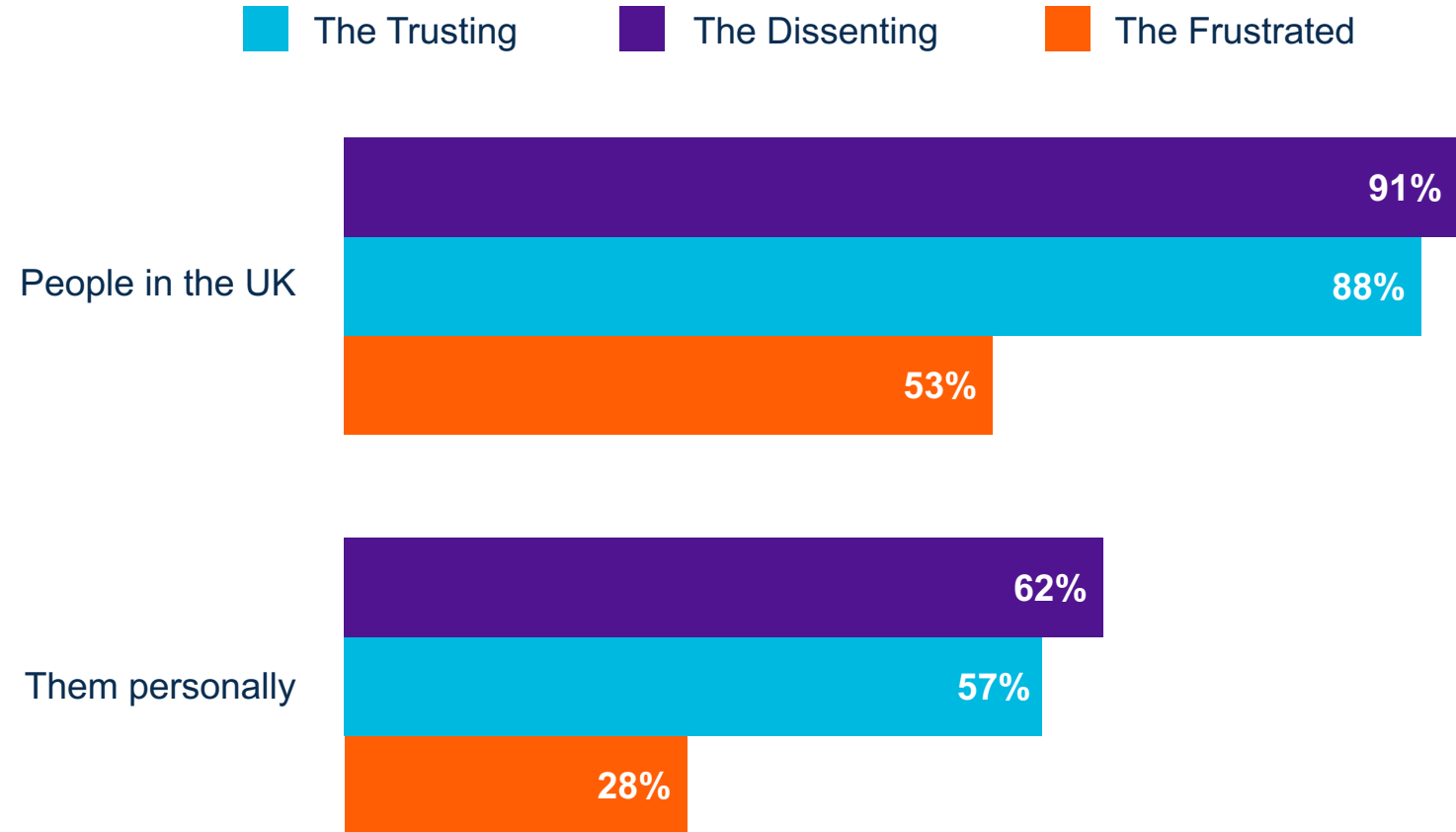
Both of these groups see the risk of being hospitalised from Covid-19 as very high, at just under 50%. But the Frustrated put this risk at 24% (while the actual risk is likely to be much lower, based on early estimates).

Overall, the Frustrated are much less likely than the other groups to see coronavirus as a risk, and as such are far more likely to think the economy and other secondary impacts of the virus are the most serious issues.

The Trusting's greater confidence in the government's response to Covid-19 doesn't mean they are less concerned about the risk of the virus. Their perception of the risk is very similar to the Dissenting's: among both groups, around 9 in 10 say coronavirus poses a fairly or very high risk to people in the UK and around 6 in 10 to them personally.

The Frustrated are much less convinced of the risks.

% who think the coronavirus poses a fairly or very high risk to _____

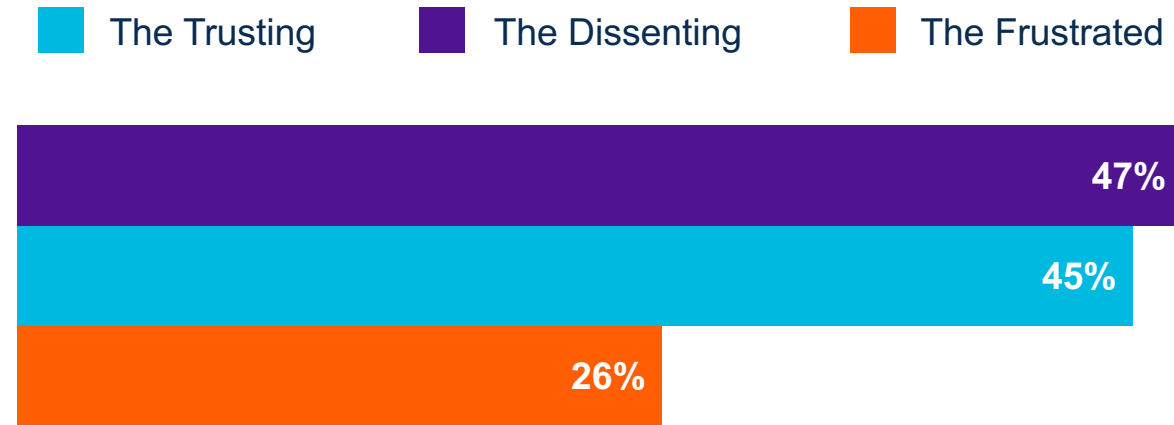


The Trusting also have a very similar view to the Dissenting when it comes to their chances of being hospitalised from Covid-19 and the proportion of those who catch the disease who will die from it.

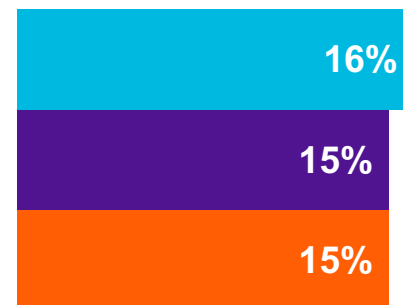
Although the Frustrated estimate the same proportion of deaths, they perceive their risk of hospitalisation to be much lower.

While researchers' estimates of the true hospitalisation and infection fatality rates vary, all three groups are likely to be significantly overestimating them.

Groups' median estimate of their personal chance of needing hospital treatment if they catch coronavirus



Groups' median estimate of the percentage of people in the UK who catch coronavirus that will end up dying as a result of the disease

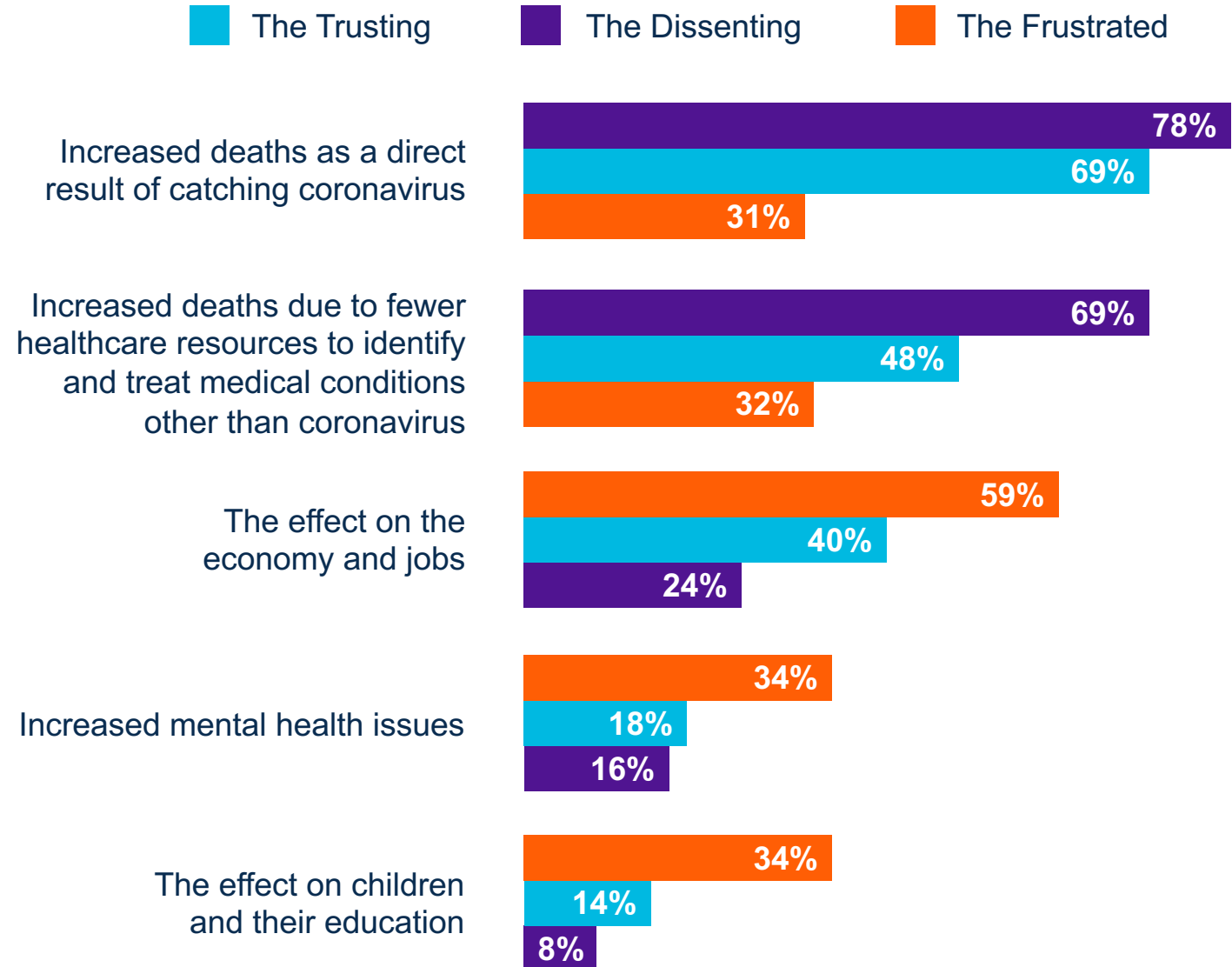


The Dissenting's worries about coronavirus are clearly driven by their concern about deaths directly and indirectly caused by the virus.

Such deaths are also one of the two most serious problems according to the Trusting, but this group is more divided, with a much bigger proportion saying the economy and jobs are more serious issues.

The economic impact is by far the biggest concern for the Frustrated, who are also much more focused than the other groups on mental health and education impacts.

% who say _____ is one of the top two most serious problems caused by the coronavirus crisis



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

How the groups view the UK government's response

Despite the Trusting and Dissenting having extremely similar views of the risks, their attitudes towards the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis are utterly different.

Very large majorities of the Trusting, who are mostly Conservatives, have trust and confidence in the response, in stark contrast to the Dissenting, who are mostly Labour voters and are much more likely to be critical of the government.

The Dissenting are also overwhelmingly of the view that the lockdown is being eased too quickly, and are highly sceptical that the authorities are providing an accurate picture of the coronavirus death toll.

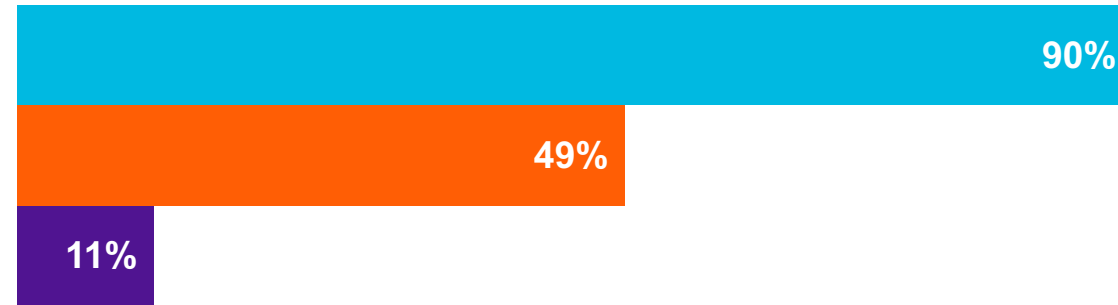
The Frustrated are more divided on the government's response and the easing of the lockdown, but are much more likely than the other groups to think the restrictions are being relaxed too slowly and that Covid-19 deaths are being deliberately exaggerated.

9 in 10 of the Trusting trust the government to control the spread of Covid-19 and the information it provides on the virus.

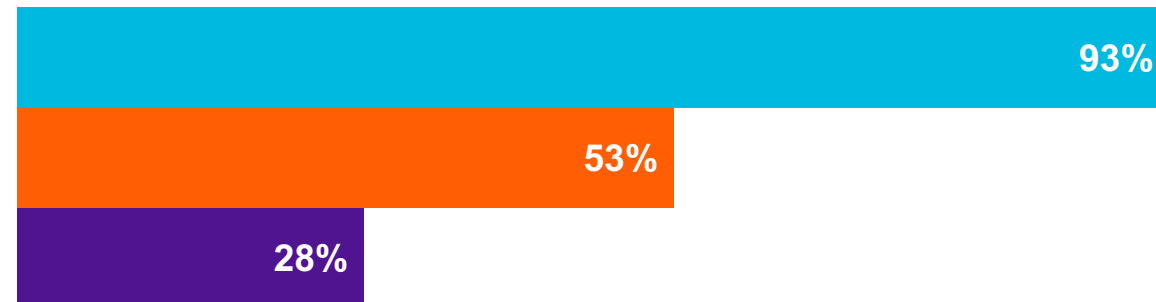
This declines to around half among the Frustrated, and much lower still among the Dissenting, who are most distrusting of the UK government when it comes to coronavirus.

% who say they trust the UK government to control the spread of the coronavirus

■ The Trusting ■ The Dissenting ■ The Frustrated



% who say they trust the information provided by the UK government on the coronavirus

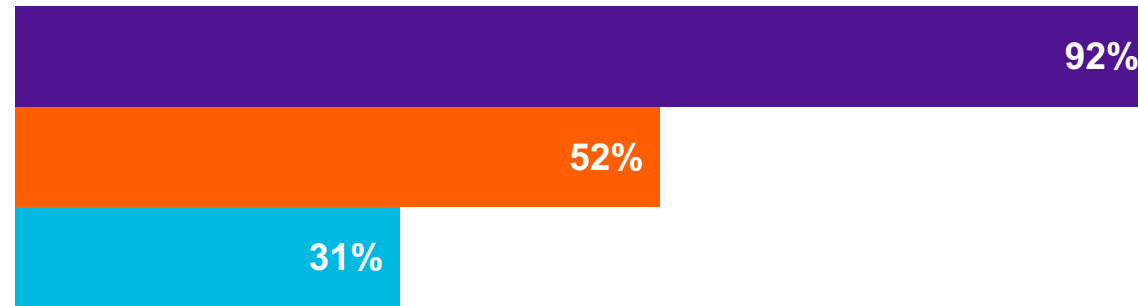


9 in 10 of the Dissenting agree the UK government's coronavirus response has been confused and inconsistent, compared with half of the Frustrated and 3 in 10 of the Trusting.

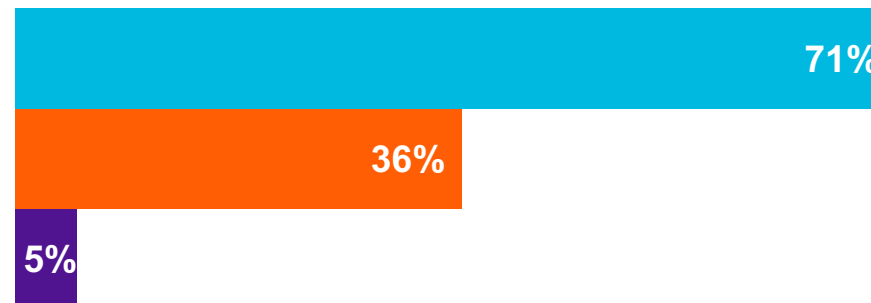
The Trusting are instead much more likely to agree the government's plan has adapted well: 7 in 10 agree with this view, while just 1 in 20 of the Dissenting feel the same.

% who agree that the UK government's response to the coronavirus has been confused and inconsistent

■ The Trusting ■ The Dissenting ■ The Frustrated



% who agree that UK government's plan has adapted well to the changing scientific information and situation

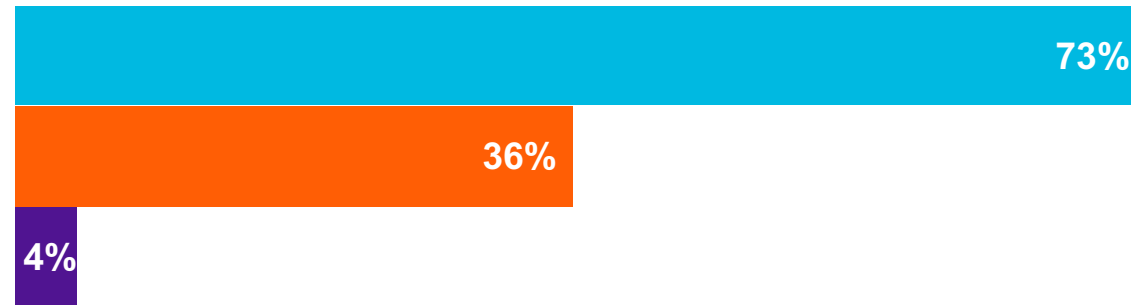


Views on whether the government have done a good job of protecting UK residents mirror those we've seen on trust levels – with the Trusting by far the most positive, and hardly any of the Dissenting rating the government highly.

Half of the Frustrated agree too much fuss is being made about the risk of Covid-19, reflecting their exasperation with the current situation compared with the other groups.

% who agree that the UK government has done a good job of protecting UK residents through its response to the coronavirus

The Trusting The Dissenting The Frustrated



% who agree that too much fuss is being made about the risk of coronavirus

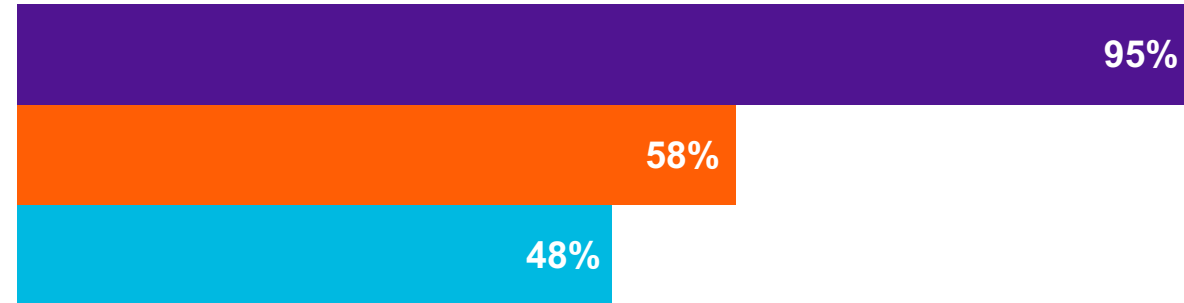


95% of the Dissenting think the government's coronavirus response was too slow, double the 48% of the Trusting who feel the same.

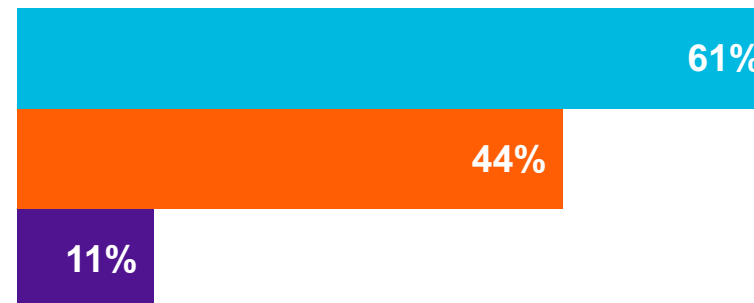
The Trusting are much more likely to support the latest approach to controlling the virus, which involves relaxing some of the lockdown measures: 6 in 10 support it, compared with more than 4 in 10 of the Frustrated and just 1 in 10 of the Dissenting.

% who agree that UK government acted too slowly to control the spread of coronavirus

The Trusting The Dissenting The Frustrated



% who support the current approach to controlling coronavirus announced by the UK Prime Minister on 10 May

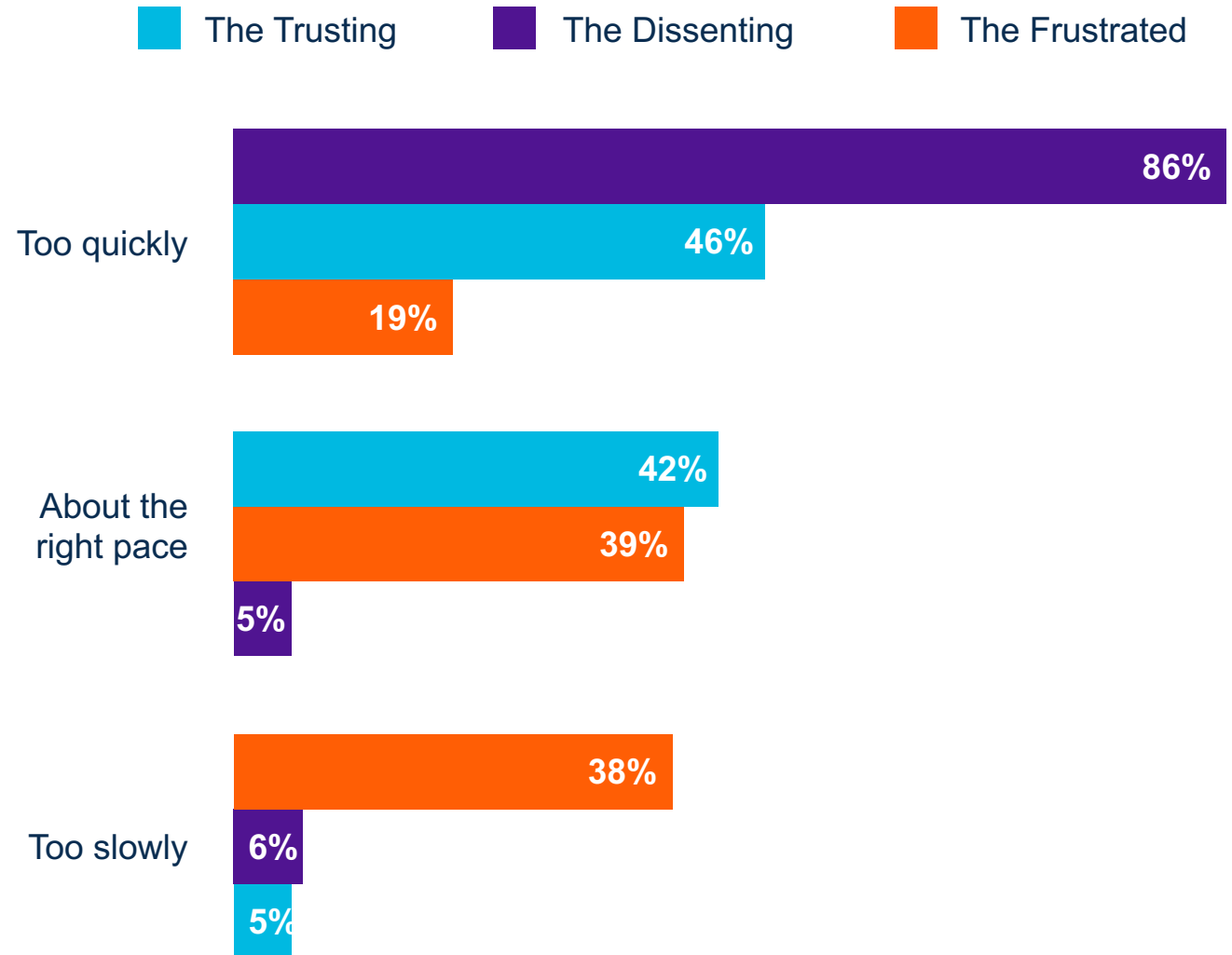


The Dissenting are hugely more concerned than the other groups that the lockdown measures are being relaxed too quickly.

The Frustrated, on the other hand, are much more likely to say the measures are being eased too slowly – although a similar proportion of this group are happy with the pace of the easing.

The Trusting are more evenly divided between thinking the relaxation is moving too quickly or at about the right pace.

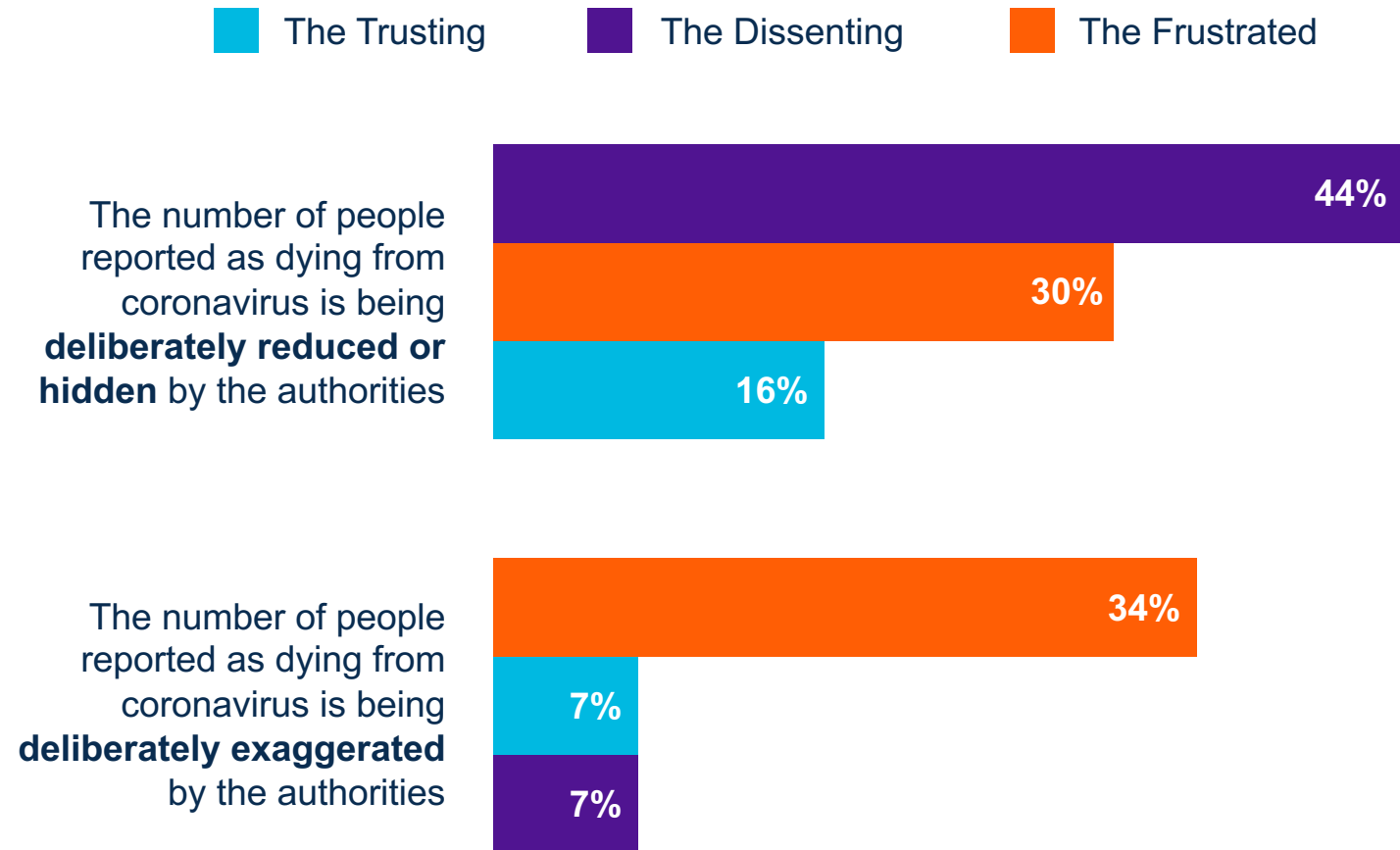
% who say the UK government is relaxing the measures to control coronavirus _____



In line with their much greater distrust of the UK government, the Dissenting are most likely to think the coronavirus death toll is being minimised or hidden by the authorities.

Meanwhile, the Frustrated are five times as likely as the other groups to think the opposite, that the death toll is being intentionally exaggerated. This reflects their lower risk perception of the virus and eagerness to return to normal life.

% who think the following claims are true



The future under coronavirus

The Frustrated are by far the most likely of the groups to say that the lockdown measures will become extremely difficult for them to cope with soon, and that they are will probably face job losses and financial difficulties. They are therefore more comfortable with a return to normal across different parts of society, and are more supportive of restoring people's usual freedoms.

In line with their overriding concerns for health, the Dissenting are most concerned about relaxing the restrictions, and are much more accepting of them remaining in place for a long time – although they are closely followed by the Trusting on several issues.

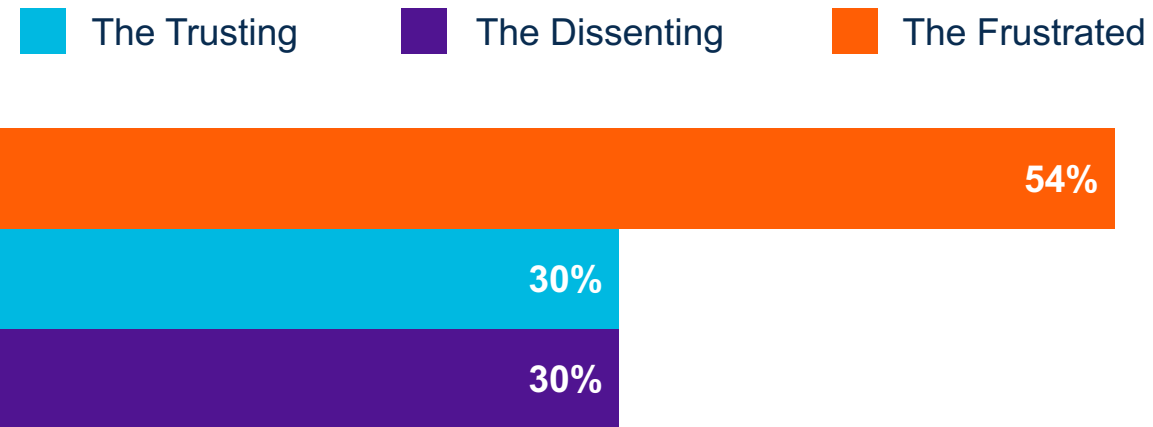
However, the Dissenting are by far the least comfortable about the idea of returning to their workplace and sending their children back to school when this is allowed.

The Frustrated's greater desire to relax the lockdown quicker seems to be driven to some extent by their personal struggles with the measures.

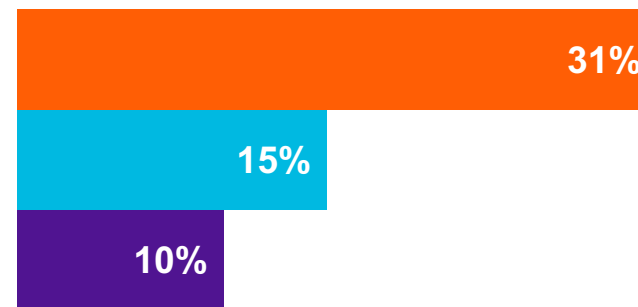
54% say the measures will become extremely difficult for them within the next 8 weeks, compared with 30% of the other groups who say the same.

The Frustrated are also much more likely to be experiencing negative impacts on their paid work as a result of domestic responsibilities.

% who think the measures now in place to control coronavirus, including remaining at home and school closures, will become extremely difficult for them to personally cope with within the next 8 weeks

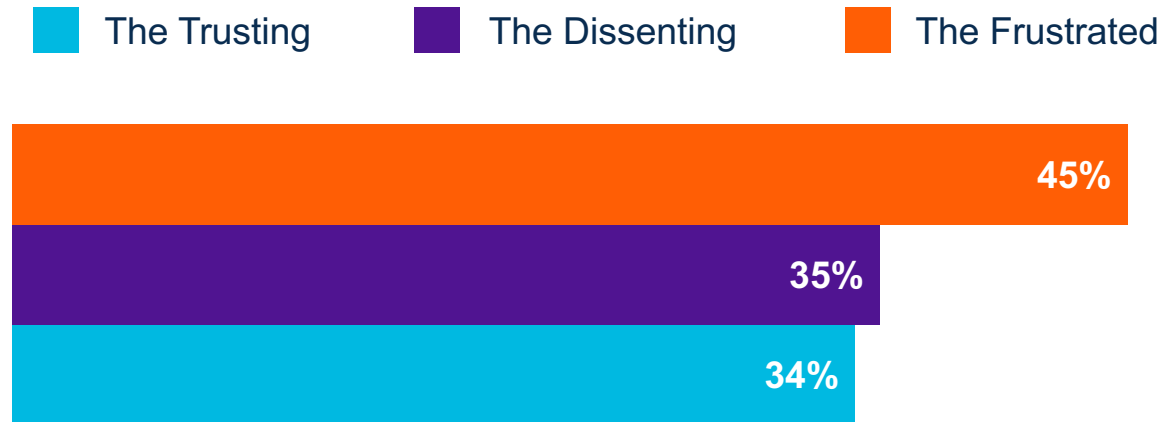


% who say their caring or domestic responsibilities are having a negative impact on their ability to do their paid job

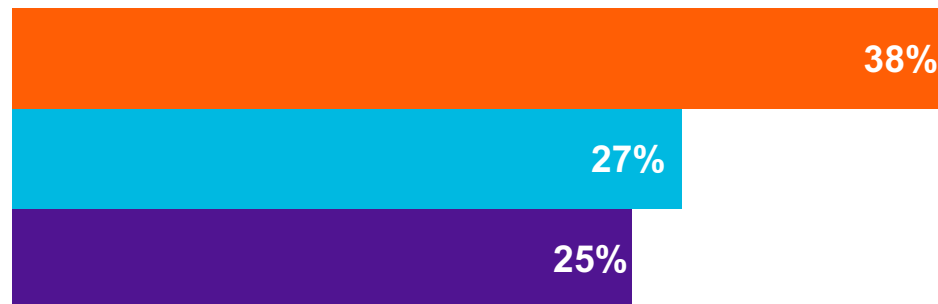


The proportion of the Frustrated who say they're certain, very or fairly likely to face financial difficulties or lose their job due to Covid-19 is around 10 percentage points higher than the proportion of the Trusting and the Dissenting who say the same.

% who say they are certain, very or fairly likely to face significant financial difficulties as a result of the disruption from coronavirus



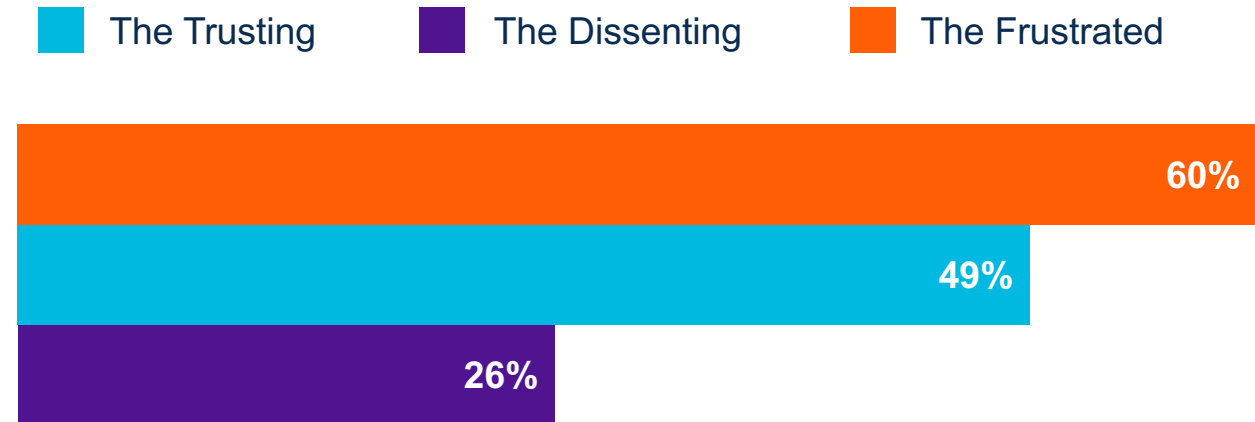
% who say they are certain, very or fairly likely to lose their job as a result of the disruption from coronavirus



The Frustrated are also more likely than the other groups to be comfortable with the idea of going back to their workplace, and more likely to be comfortable with their children going back to school.

By contrast, the Dissenting are much more reluctant – 11% feel comfortable about their children returning to school and 26% about returning to work.

% who think they will feel comfortable about returning to the workplace when it happens



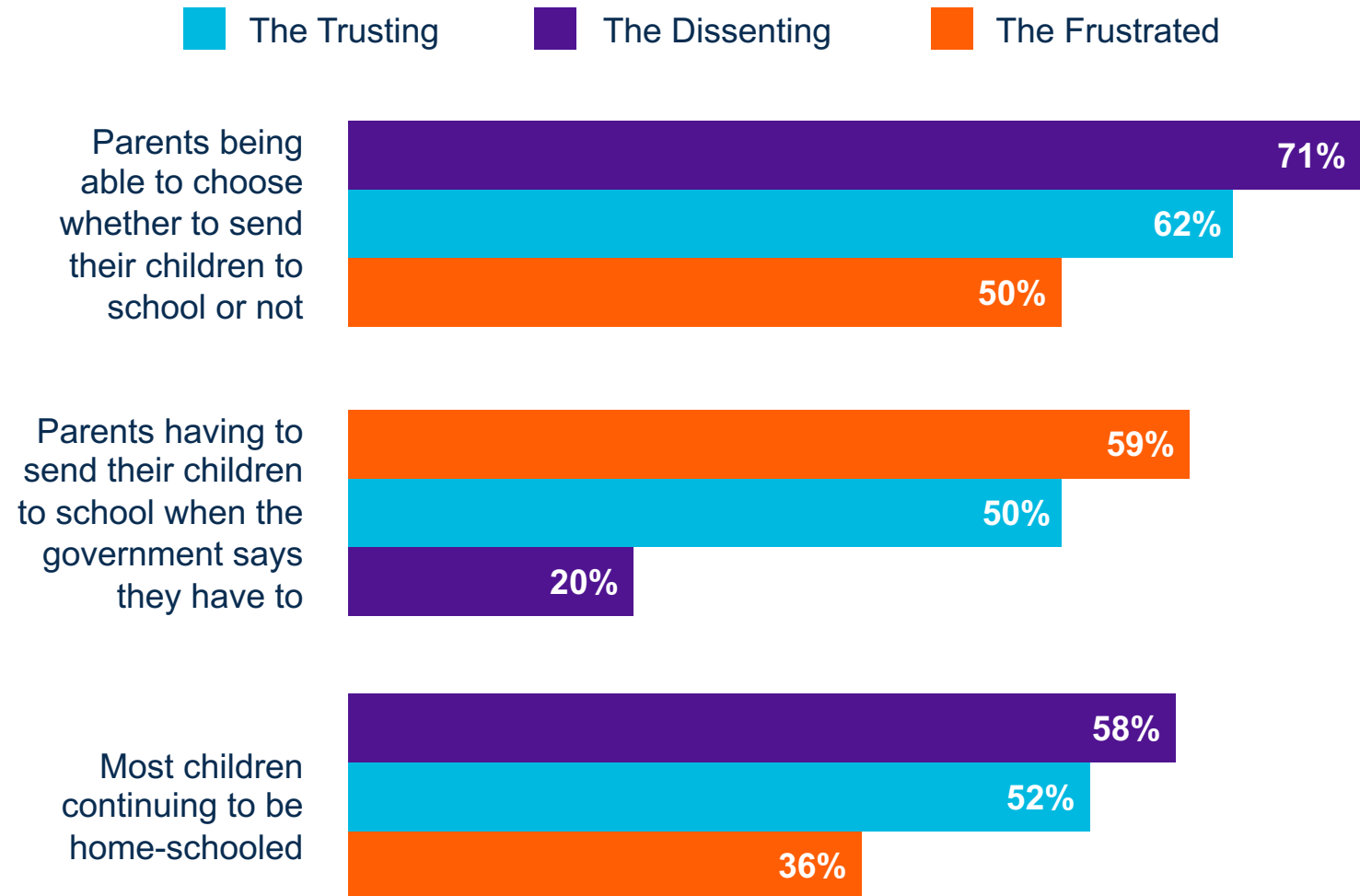
% who think they will feel comfortable about sending their children to school when it happens



The Dissenting's reluctance to ease the lockdown measures is reflected in their other views on children's education, which clearly prioritise keeping children at home and giving parents more say over their education.

By contrast, the Frustrated prioritise a return to normal schooling, which may be linked to more of them being parents or guardians.

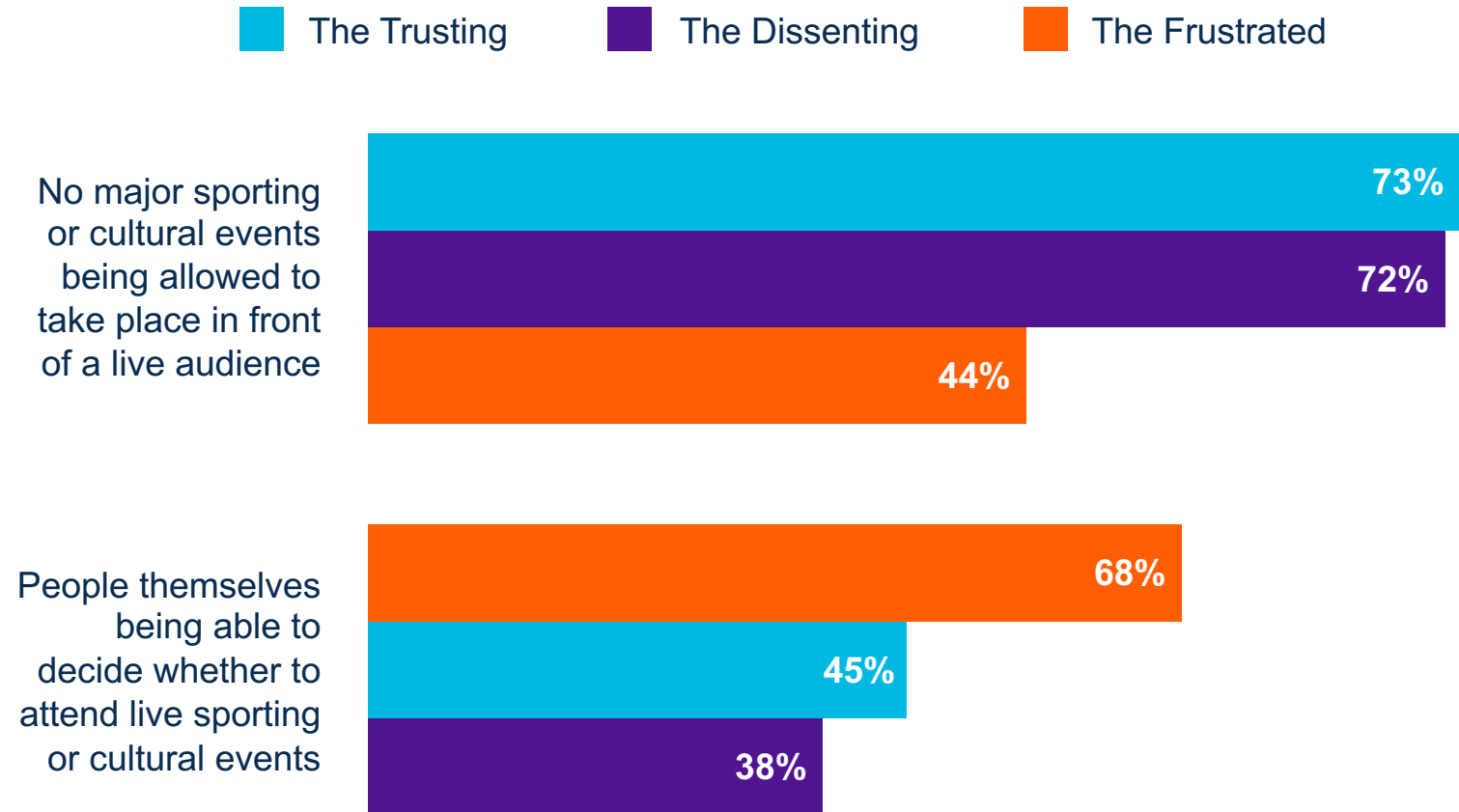
% who find _____ acceptable for the very long term if it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus



Given their greater focus on protecting lives, the Trusting and the Dissenting both favour public events with a live audience being banned over letting people themselves decide whether to attend.

The reverse is true of the Frustrated, 7 in 10 of whom are content to let people make up their own minds on such events, compared with under half who support a ban.

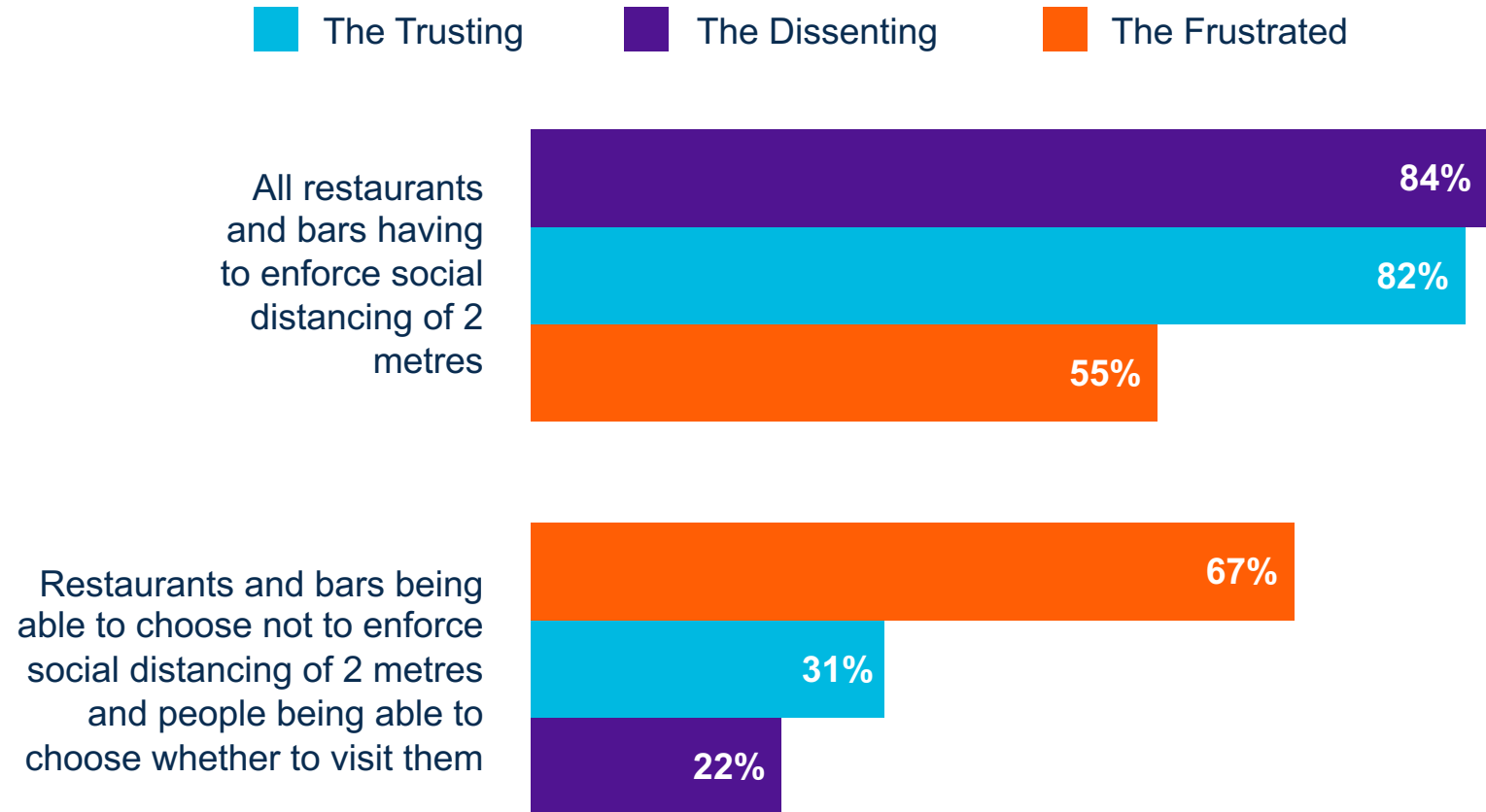
% who find _____ acceptable for the very long term if it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus



It's a similar picture with views on if and how restaurants and bars should adapt to the long-term threat of coronavirus.

The Frustrated are more than twice as likely as the other groups to be OK with venues not enforcing social distancing, and are much less likely than the others to think it's acceptable for venues to be made to do so – although a majority do still find this idea acceptable.

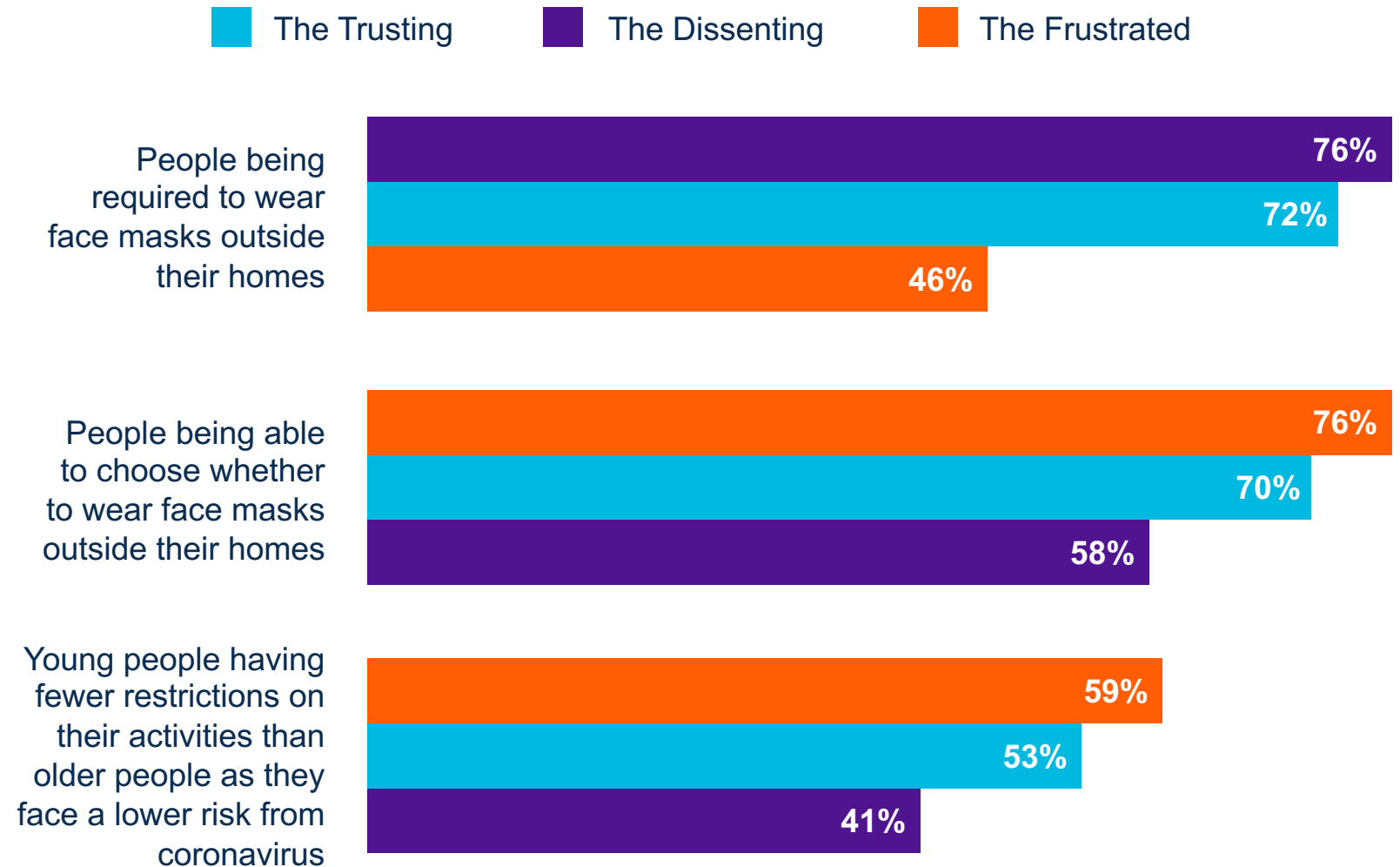
% who find _____ acceptable for the very long term if it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus



The Dissenting show a clear preference for prioritising health over a return to normal, while the Frustrated seem to place a greater value on personal freedoms.

The Trusting are more evenly divided, with similar proportions accepting of compulsory face masks on the one hand, and the freedom to not wear them on the other. Compared with the Dissenting, they are also more accepting of young people being subject to fewer restrictions.

% who find _____ acceptable for the very long term 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



Technical details

Respondents were grouped through k-means clustering using R v. 3.6.1. All ordinal and numeric variables concerning experiences of life under lockdown, expectations for the future, assessment of problems and risks, and views of the government's handling of the crisis were given equal weight in determining similarities between survey respondents. Demographic information, voting history, and questions used to assess knowledge of the coronavirus and the official response were not used for clustering purposes. However, once the clusters were identified, these variables were used to supplement the analysis of the clusters themselves.

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)

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

Connect with us

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