

21st August 2020

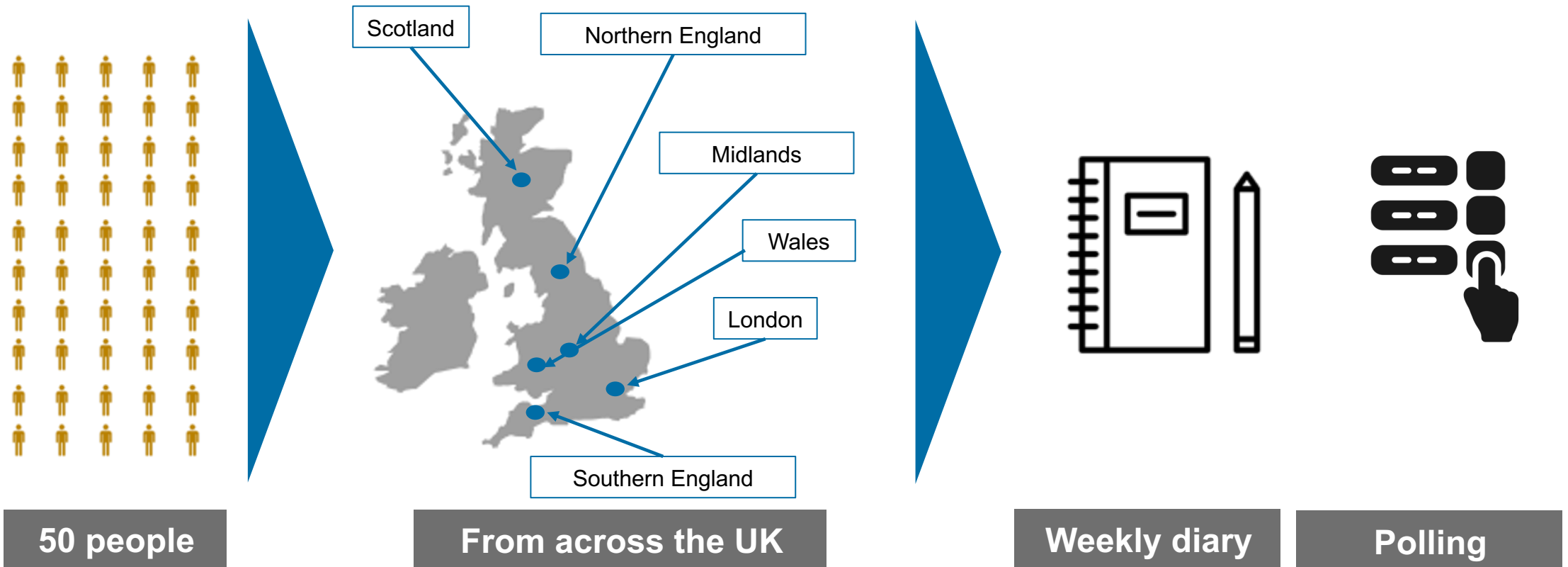
BritainThinks

Coronavirus Diaries

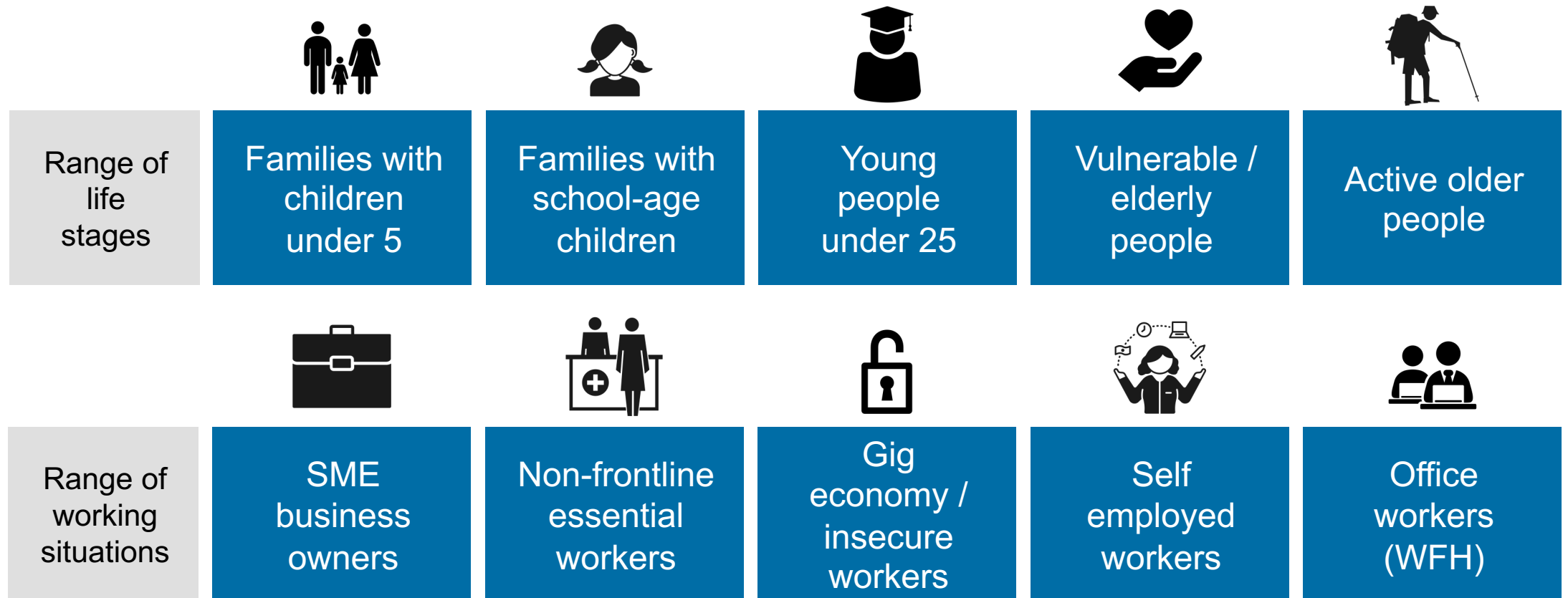
Week 20 Report

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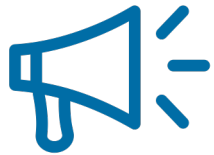
We have been following the crisis as it plays out in people's lives in real time since early April



Our Diarists come from different locations, lifestyles and backgrounds



Each week Diarists tell us about their views and experiences of the pandemic:



Context

The news stories that have stood out to Diarists each week



Mood

How Diarists are feeling each week and what's on their minds



Behaviour

What have Diarists been doing differently and how it makes them feel



Reputation

Perceptions of Government, politicians and brands at this time

Key findings

- 1 The mood continues to fluctuate, with the hope and optimism of July dissipating back into anger;** we haven't seen this level of anger since the Dominic Cummings story.
- 2 Progress in tackling the virus is seen to have stalled.** The expectation is that this will last long into next year.
- 3 Anxiety about the future is increasing.** The impact of the crisis on people's mental health is looming large and the economic outlook continues to be troubling, adding to the stress.
- 4 There is dismay about Government handling of the crisis.** The exams crisis is seen as just another example of mismanagement. However, this is not yet translating into support for Labour, who are felt to be conspicuously absent.

Exam results and new foreign travel quarantines have been the most dominant news stories this week

Domestic CV developments:

- **A Level and GCSE grading dispute**
- **New foreign travel quarantine restrictions (France most recently)**
- Cases rising in hot spots in UK (e.g. North East)
- Continued easing of lockdown (e.g. bowling alleys, soft play centres, small live events allowed to reopen)
- Replacing of PHE

International CV developments:

- Coronavirus cases on the rise in Europe

Mentions of international news dipped this week, as the focus returned to news in the UK (or associated travel issues)

News stories that gained most attention from Diarists include:

- UK exam result 'fiasco' with large numbers of students having their results significantly downgraded
- New quarantine restrictions for people returning to the UK from France and the Netherlands

"As an ex-teacher the fiasco over the exam results has been eye wateringly painful to watch."

Self employed

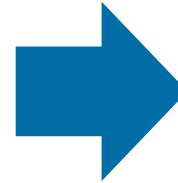
"More European countries added to the quarantine list, including France."

SME owner

The public mood continues to shift and has taken a turn from hope and optimism to frustration and anger

3 words used by Diarists to describe how they feel

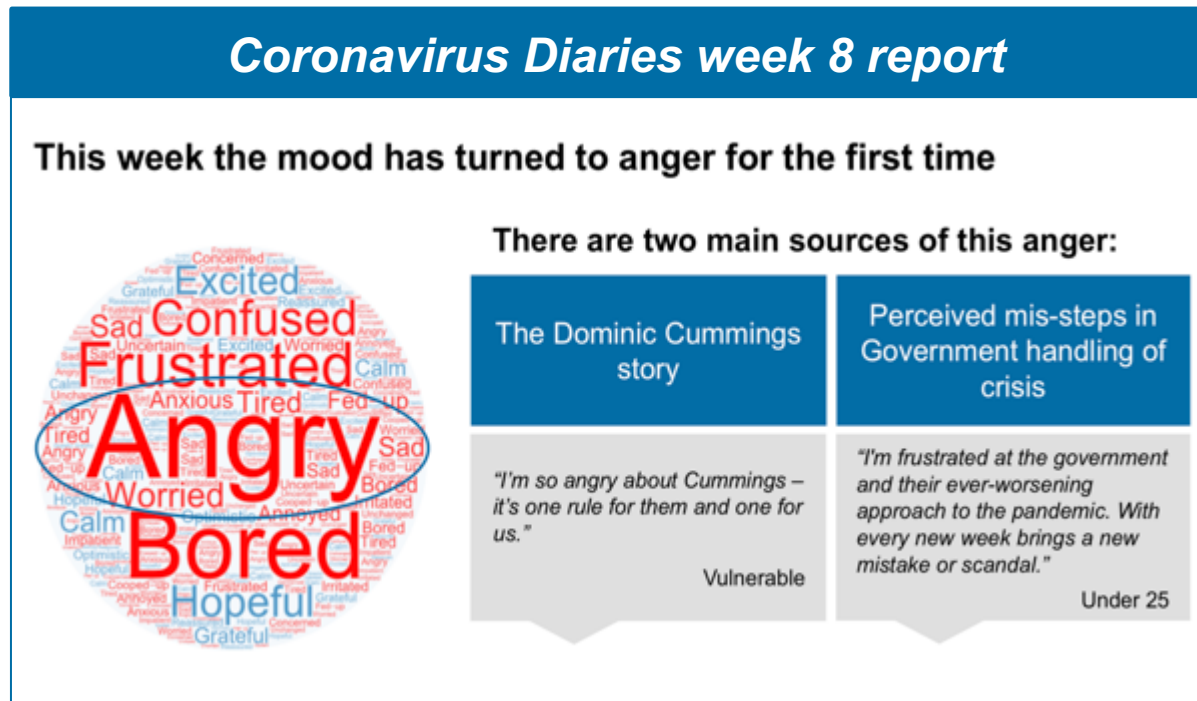
w/c 13th July

w/c 20th Julyw/c 3rd Augustw/c 17th August

"I'm angry. I blame the government's slow response to the pandemic for the mess we're all in now."

Parent with school age children

We haven't seen this level of anger since the Dominic Cummings story surfaced 3 months ago



- The Dominic Cummings story riled the public who felt there was 'one rule for them, another rule for us'
- The anger we're seeing from Diarists this week is driven by perceived persistent mishandling of the crisis (with the exams fiasco most recent)

"I feel angry about the weak and confused way in which the country is being led."

Active 65+

There are three key reasons for the worsening mood

1.

**Progress in tackling
the virus has stalled**

2.

**Anxiety about the
future is increasing**

3.

**Dismay about the
Government**

1. Progress in tackling the virus has stalled

Concern about the virus remains high

- Polling shows that the virus remains the top concern. Diarists also remain worried about health risks of the virus, even more so than impact on the economy.

Lizzie is 79 and lives in Essex. She is a retired schoolteacher. Throughout the crisis she has been shielding as she currently has cancer and high blood pressure. She is very concerned about catching the virus due to her age and health condition, and fears that the current situation will deteriorate with the onset of winter.

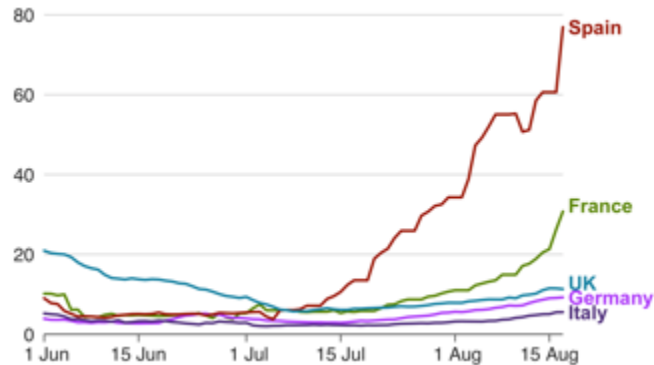
"I'm very worried about the virus as I am shielding. I'm still trying to not leave the house so at present we only shop online."

What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain today?*



1. Progress in tackling the virus has stalled

Evidence points to the virus remaining a clear and present risk



MailOnline

Up to 135,000 Britons may catch the coronavirus every day during the peak of the second wave this December, scientists claim

40%

think it will take **more than 1 year** before things feel like they are getting back to normal (Ipsos)

Cases are rising in Europe and local lockdowns prove the problem is far from over

"I'm feeling anxious about the amount of rising cases all over Europe."

Gig economy worker

Most think there's a high possibility of a second wave and another lockdown in the Autumn

"After seeing the statistics, I am worried about a second wave coming and it's quite scary."

Office worker

'Normality' feels further and further away

"I don't know when this madness will end. I need the world to go back to normal."

Parent with school aged children

1. Progress in tackling the virus has stalled

Most think we are going to have to learn to live with the virus



55%

think that parents should have to send their children back to school when the Government says they have to, **up from 41% in May** (KCL)

"I'll be sending my child back. My 13 year old is bored stiff and home and it's impacting on her mental health, not socialising with friends."

Parent with school aged children

Whereas previously we were seeing a high aversion to risk, now people seem to have come to terms with risk as a fact of life

Reactivity and swift behaviour change are accepted as necessary, with strong support for local lockdowns

86%

say it is acceptable in the long-term for "local areas that experience outbreaks having stricter restrictions on activities than the country as a whole" (KCL)

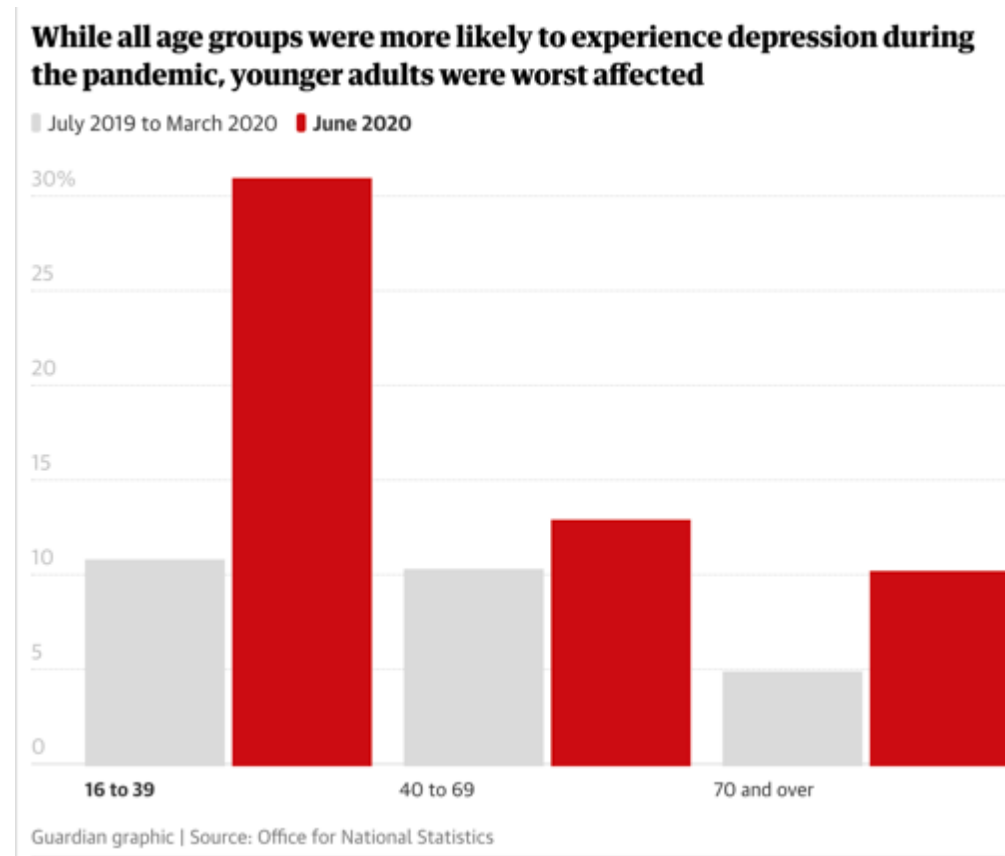
"You have to find a balance between taking precautions but also having some sort of normal existence, otherwise you'll just end up neurotic and never leave the house."

Gig economy worker

2. Anxiety about the future is increasing

Mental health took a big hit over lockdown – with anxiety highest amongst young people

- ONS data shows that the number of adults in Britain with depression doubled during lockdown
 - Almost 1 in 5 adults (19.2%) experienced depression in June, which has doubled from around 1 in 10 (9.7%) before the pandemic
- Younger adults, women, key workers and disabled people were among those most likely to suffer depression during the pandemic



2. Anxiety about the future is increasing

Diarists have talked about the impact of the crisis on their mental health

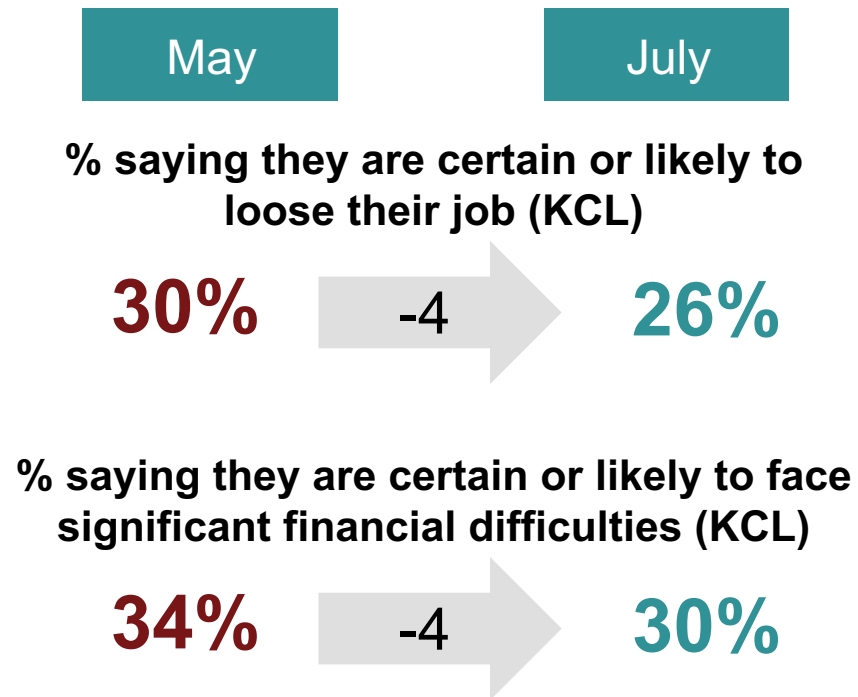
Tom* is 32 and lives in Sheffield. He took a work break at the start of the year to travel, prior to this he had been working at a University on a temporary contract. He returned to the UK just before lockdown and was unable to secure a job. He has been struggling financially during the crisis, getting by on Universal Credit. During lockdown he had been living on his own and found the experience of the crisis particularly lonely, and he has been very worried about catching the virus so has avoided social contact with friends as lockdown eased.

"I'm sad and lonely at the moment, particularly as I don't feel comfortable with bigger gatherings. Life and reality continue to be really hard."

Unemployed

2. Anxiety about the future is increasing

Looking ahead, the economic situation continues to stress Diarists



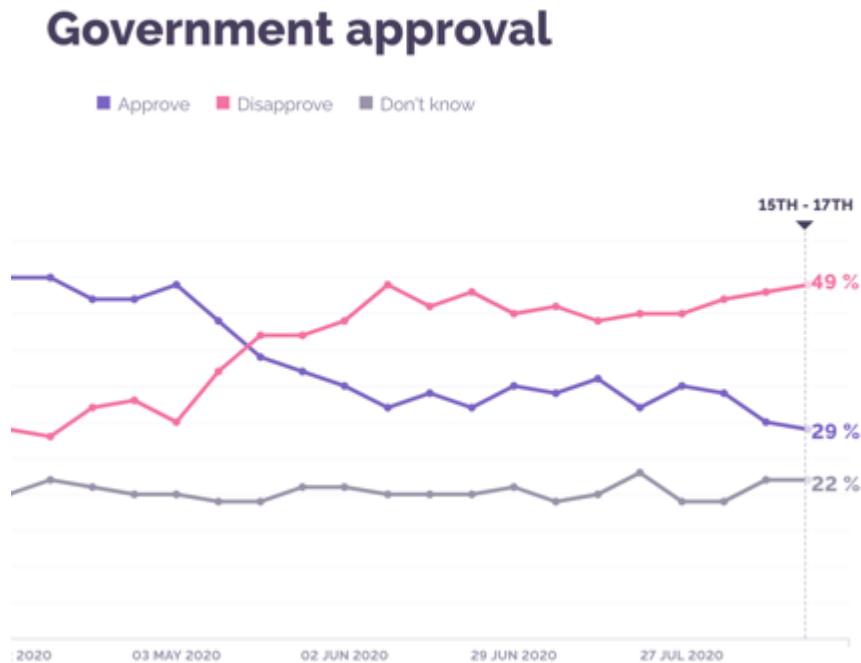
- On the one hand, slightly fewer people are reporting that they think they are going to lose their jobs than in May
- But the direction the country is headed in has many worried as they've seen the Government lurch from one disaster to the next
- Recent news that the UK is officially in recession for the first time in 11 years is a source of concern even for those who currently feel financially secure

"I am very concerned about the economy. We are reaching the end of the furlough period which means probably a spike in unemployment. If a second wave of coronavirus hits, I fear it may be the end of many businesses, especially retail and hospitality."

Gig economy worker

3. There is dismay about the Government

Government approval is declining once more



- Last month it seemed that Government support had reached a steady state at around 35% approval (YouGov)
- However, approval has declined steeply more recently, with 29% saying they approve of the Government this week (YouGov)

3 words to describe the
Government at the moment



3. There is dismay about the Government

We asked Diarists to tell us what type of car Government would be...



*“Alfa Romeo Giulietta, looks sleek and in control but **never far away from mechanical problems.**”*

Parent with young children



*“A flashy looking, brand new shiny car on the outside, with a useless engine that billows clouds of black smoke...basically **all image, no substance.**”*

Young person



*“Nissan Navara. A pick-up truck that barrels along minor roads and that **doesn't care about anyone in it's path.**”*

Active 65+

3. There is dismay about the Government

The exams crisis encapsulates the concerns many people have



“The Government had plenty of time to prepare and still they mismanaged it. The unfairness towards young people who have suffered so much this year is another example of their uncaring attitude.”

Active 65+

- Exams results were seen to be unfair and badly managed, leading to yet another government U-turn at the last moment
- This builds on perceptions of previous mis-steps e.g. late announcement of local lockdowns, arbitrary deadline for wearing facemasks in shops
- In addition, news about the UK economy performing worse than other G7 compounds the view that Government has consistently taken the wrong approach

3. There is dismay about the Government

Labour is struggling to cut through and many feel they don't understand what Keir Starmer's Labour stands for

- Some feel that Labour has been quiet and somewhat absent
- Many of our Diarists say that they are still forming their opinion of Labour

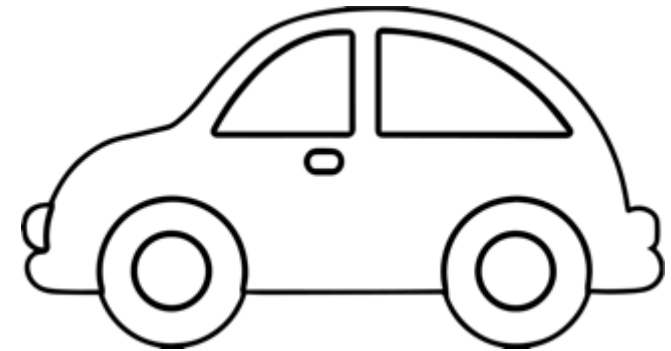
“Not really heard anything from Labour at the moment, perhaps they are scared of saying the wrong thing.”

Vulnerable

3 words to describe the Labour at the moment



*If Labour were a car it would be
a...*



"An invisible car - no presence."

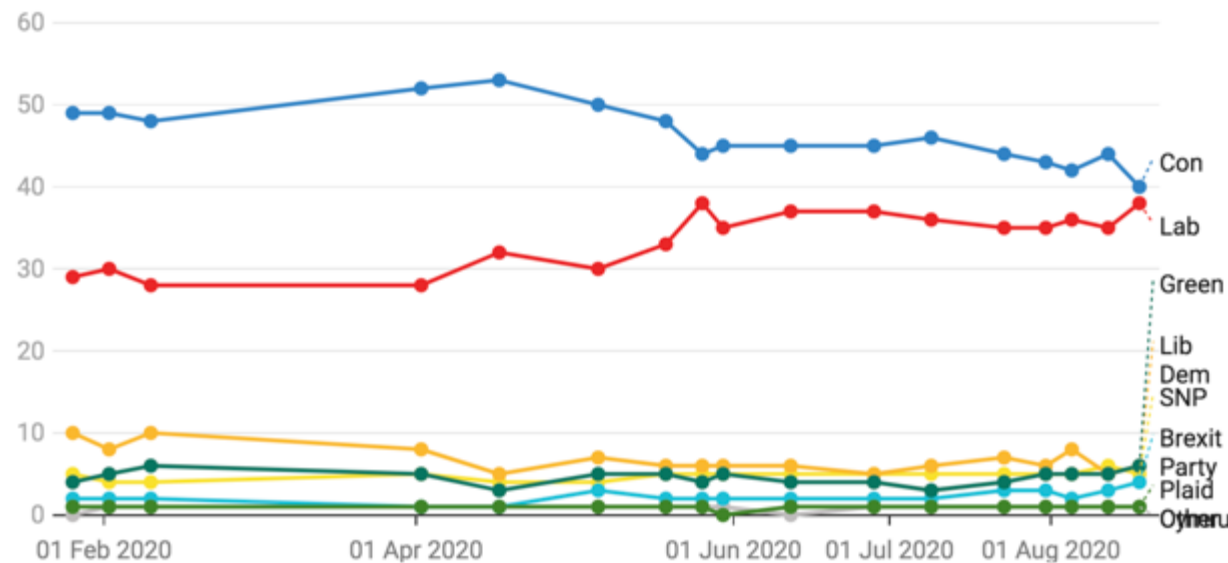
Essential worker

3. There is dismay about the Government

Despite all the criticism, Conservatives continue to maintain a slim lead in the polls

YouGov Westminster voting intention tracker

If there were a general election held tomorrow, which party would you vote for? %



- Following the exam results fiasco, the Conservatives have seen their lead over Labour drop by nine points last week to just two
 - Currently the Conservatives are on 40% of the vote to Labour's 38%
- Support is holding up amongst Conservative voters

"They have given huge financial support to millions of people and businesses. I don't believe any other Government would have performed any better."

SME owner, Conservative voter

Thank you

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