

**MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND HYPOTHESES  
FROM**

**THE NATIONWIDE OPINION POLL**

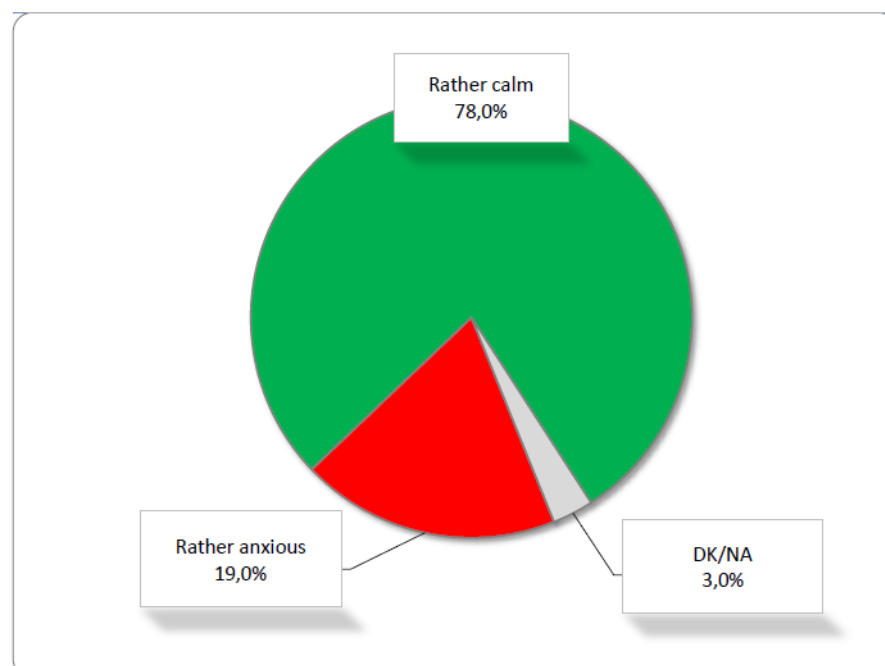
**VALUES, SOLIDARITY AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES  
DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS**

**27 May - 02 June 2020**

**Dimensions of anxiety**

Almost three months after the first cases of prevalence of Covid-19 in Bulgaria and a month after the end of the state of emergency declared in the country, by late May and early June there is a clear majority of people who perceive the situation in the country rather calmly. 19% assess the situation in our country as rather anxious, and more than three quarters of the respondents (78%) find it rather calm. 3% cannot answer.

**In your personal opinion, what is the current situation in Bulgaria - rather anxious or rather calm?**



Among those who think that the situation is rather anxious, pensioners, for example, seem to be more clearly distinguished. It turns out that respondents who are employed – both in the private and the public sector – seem closer to the general picture.

This indicator does not contain an explicit reference to the coronavirus: to avoid automatism of the crowd consciousness on the subject, but also to check whether and to what extent the epidemic develops as a parallel social plot or organically affects the mass outlook.

As Gallup International's previous research practice suggests, there are reasons for people to rather choose the first answer. The coronavirus topic seems to create a momentary, situational and even separate agenda compared to the usual political and economic perceptions in the country.

This may explain the fact that with an abstract question such acute fears are not registered. Of course, pensioners logically make an exception, but even among them general anxiety is not prevalent.

Of course, it should be clarified here that the data were registered before information on the discovery of new outbreaks of infection in the country came out. The situation is developing dynamically and therefore it should always be reminded that such surveys are rather quick "snapshots".

Finally, valid is the hypothesis that without deliberately mentioning the situation with the coronavirus infection in the country, by the end of the summer the coronavirus topic will probably leave the status of immediate first association; signs of normalization and calming down are observed.

An indirect indicator of the latter is the relatively higher approval of everything that respondents recognize as easing the measures, for example, the possibility of lifting all restrictions (average score 3.5 on a 1 to 5 scale, where 3 is the "centre of gravity" between negative and positive attitudes), the general easing of measures against coronavirus (average score 4) or even the provision for the elderly to shop freely (score 3.7, presumably due to the age structure of our society). At the other "pole" is the restriction of free movement in our country: a majority of 53% chooses option 1, i.e. does not approve at all (average 2.3).

Free movement between countries – the movement of tourists is taken as an example (a topic that is sensitive enough for the Bulgarian economy) – is rather rejected only in relation to countries outside the European Union. When it comes to EU countries, most respondents are calm.

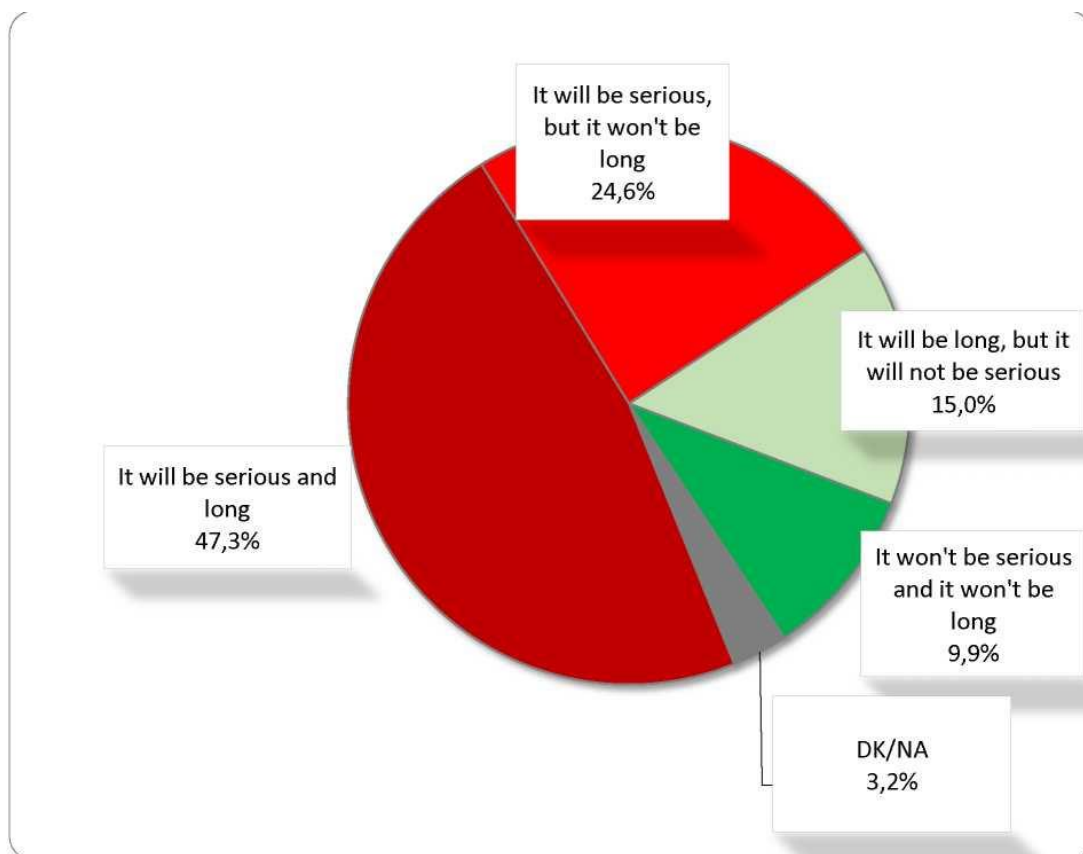
Finally, it is clear that immediate health concerns no longer play the role that a series of surveys revealed at the beginning of the emergency measures.

**To what extent do you personally approve or disapprove each of the following statements in the time of coronavirus crisis. Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "I do not approve at all" and 5 is "I completely approve"!**



However, when it comes to the expected economic impact, the most noticeable accumulations are in the option "It will be serious and long" (47%). 25% answered "It will be serious, but it won't be long". 15% say "It will be long, but it will not be serious." 10% still choose "It won't be serious and it won't be long". 3% don't know.

**Which of the following four statements is closer to your opinion regarding the impact of the coronavirus crisis on the Bulgarian economy?**



Of course, this type of question also reflects a certain inertial scepticism which is a well-known phenomenon of mass consciousness, in particular in a society with more serious poverty, social inequalities, etc.

It is both due to that inertial scepticism in question and – above all – due to objective economic circumstances that such concerns about the economy are not at all unprecedented in Gallup International's many years of research practice. The follow-

up of long-term trends in terms of mass perceptions, assessments and expectations for the economy and personal finances in our country shows that positive expectations are generally timid. This probably also reflects a kind of "insurance attitude" to the topic.

All these precisions, of course, do not mean that the economic anxiety due to the coronavirus should be ignored, but they remind that it is also a background setting of the prevailing public opinion in our country.

This is probably one of the reasons why older people also seem relatively less worried about the prospects of the economy. This could be due to the fact that people of economically inactive age, which are more dependent on pensions, do not recognize with the same intensity an immediate threat to their monthly income.

For the more economically active, uncertainties about employment status clearly lead to higher economic anxiety.

It seems that it is the highest among those who don't work: this is expected and is probably largely due to the group of unemployed.

Knowing this, as it could also be anticipated, the measures taken by the government to mitigate the economic crisis are assessed inconsistently with negative scores gaining weight (average 2.8 on a five-point scale where 1 is the lowest score and 5 is the highest).

The economically active Bulgarians whose incomes are most directly affected by the economic crisis caused by Covid-19 express the greatest disapproval of the measures.

**Finally, the survey captured the following picture: rather calm "today" (probably against the background of restless "yesterday"), but also expectations for a more anxious "tomorrow". However, they do not contrast so clearly against the background of the constant economic fears in our country "in principle", respectively there are probably circumstances mitigating the economic anxiety.**

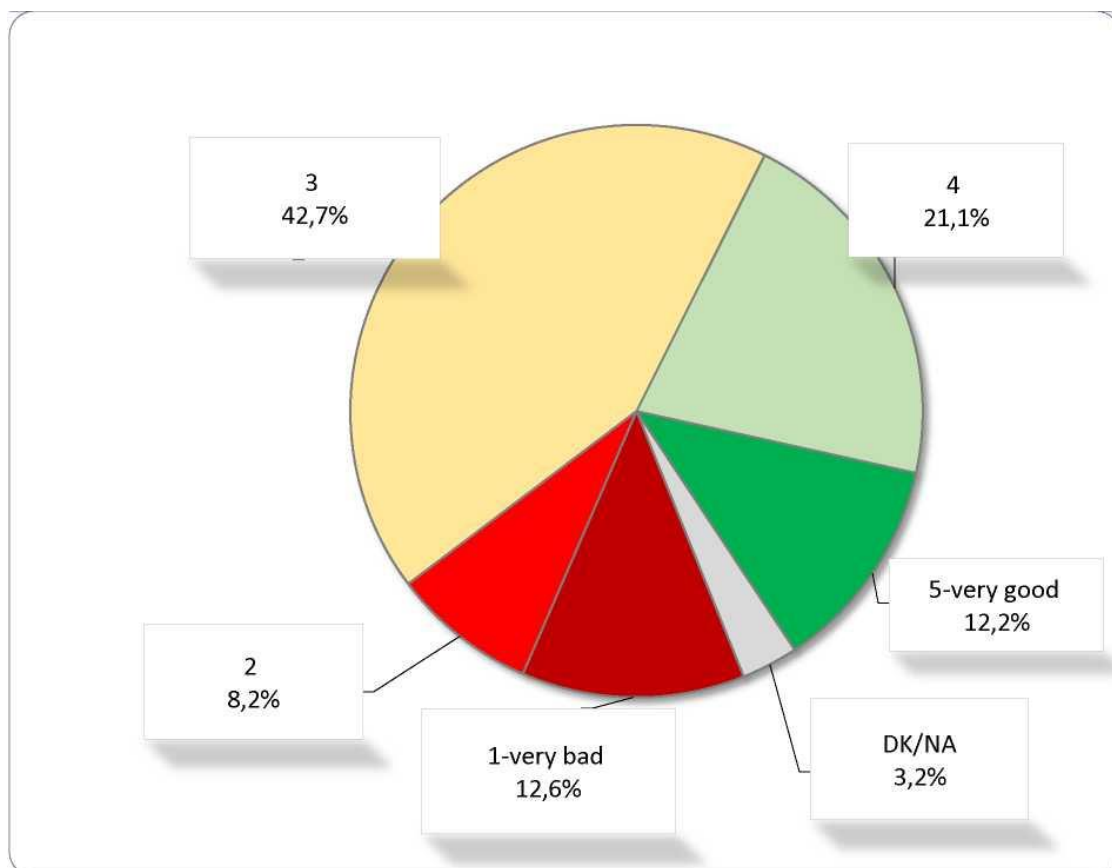
**In a more frivolous style: the alleviation of the anxiety about "money" is due to the fact that Bulgarian society seems to be accustomed to this anxiety for decades. That's why pensioners seem to be more afraid of "yesterday" than of "tomorrow". Because if "yesterday" is related to the virus, "tomorrow" will**

probably be related to the economy.

### General scores, conclusions, and risks

When asked how the generalized notion of "state of emergency" has affected everyone personally, naturally, the most serious accumulation is in the "average" option (3) on a five-point scale from 1 to 5. It is not easy to draw unambiguous conclusions. The lack of time distance to allow generalization probably also contributes to this.

Could you tell me, in general, how the situation of the so-called state of emergency has affected you? Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "very bad" and 5 is "very good"!



However, the balance seems to be slightly tilted in favour of positive assessments of the role of the state of emergency in private life. Most probably, this reflects the general assessment of the role that emergency measures have played in stopping the spread of coronavirus infection in our country. Thus, the public conclusion is inevitably added to the personal one.

This is probably the reason why older people, pensioners – the most vulnerable groups – give more positive answers compared to the general population. Conversely, students are the most dissatisfied. Apparently, these two groups see the situation from a very dissimilar perspectives: the former think about their health and life while the latter probably share the adversities due to specific restrictions to their lives.

Curiously, it seems that women tend to answer with more nuances (positive or negative), while for men most of the answers fall into the "middle" option.

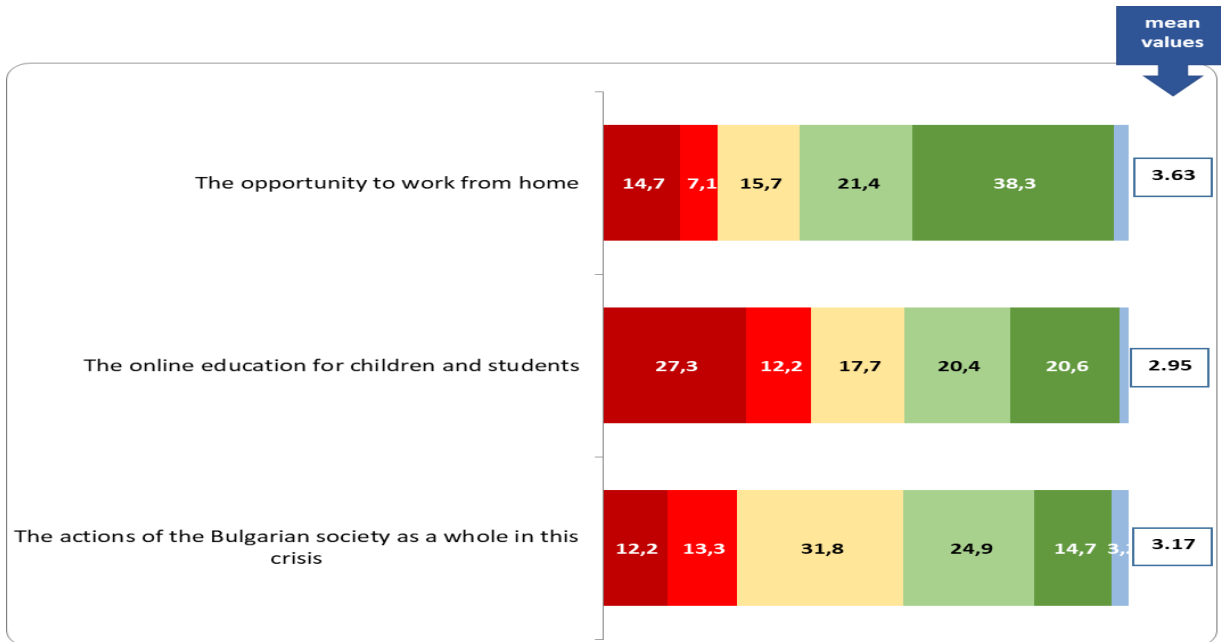
Bulgarian society gives a rather realistic self-assessment of their actions during this crisis as a whole (on average 3.2 on a scale from 1 to 5). It is important to note that otherwise traditional negativism does not prevail.

Generally, more (self-)criticism of public behaviour during the crisis show residents of the capital, where both keeping physical distance and limiting direct contacts were more difficult to achieve.

In the context of coronavirus, Sofia was a specific case compared to the rest of the country, but even beyond the state of emergency the capital is usually more critical to the authorities, which is characteristic of the most active social segments (as it is, of course, of those social groups that more unfortunate life prospects).

The opportunity to work from home scores rather well with an average of 3.6. However, distance learning obtains a more modest score with an average of 3. The reasons are probably utilitarian: working from home can be convenient while distance learning does not affect so many people and therefore, they don't have specific experiences; in addition, there is probably some general suspiciousness.

To what extent you do personally approve or disapprove each of the following statements in the time of coronavirus crisis. Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "I do not approve at all" and 5 is "I completely approve"!

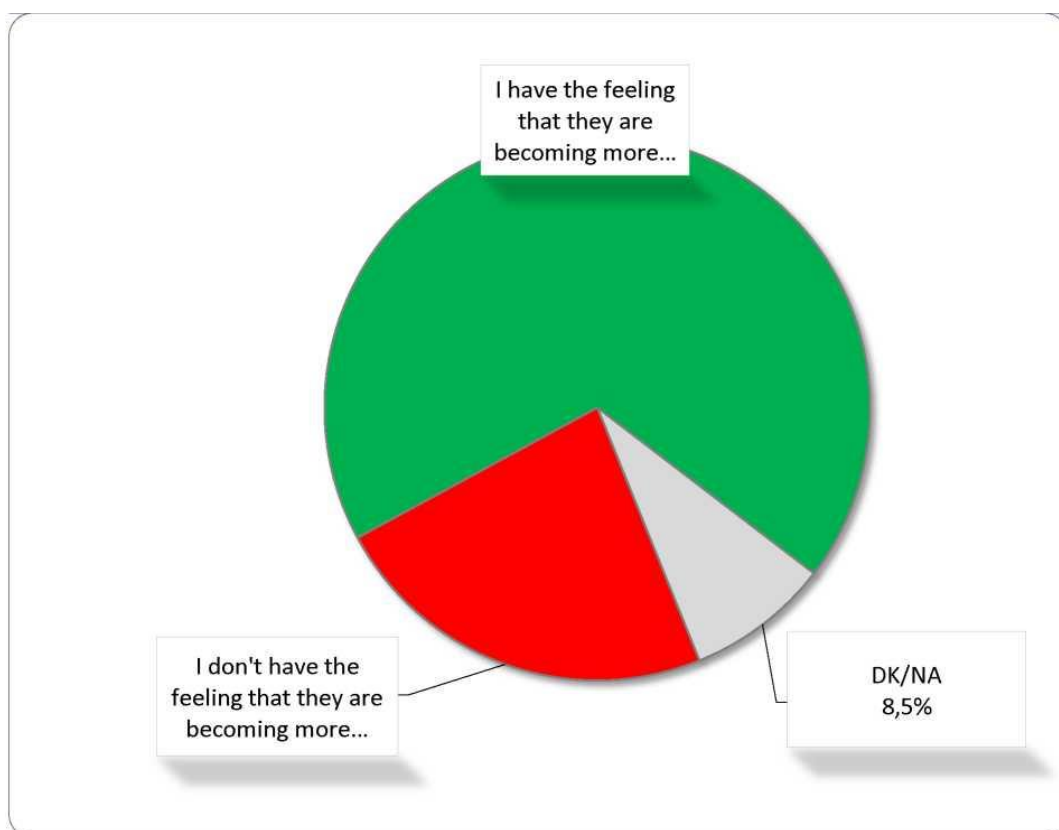


As expected, younger and more active people are less suspicious, but the assessment of distance learning appears to depend on the integration of innovations and technologies.



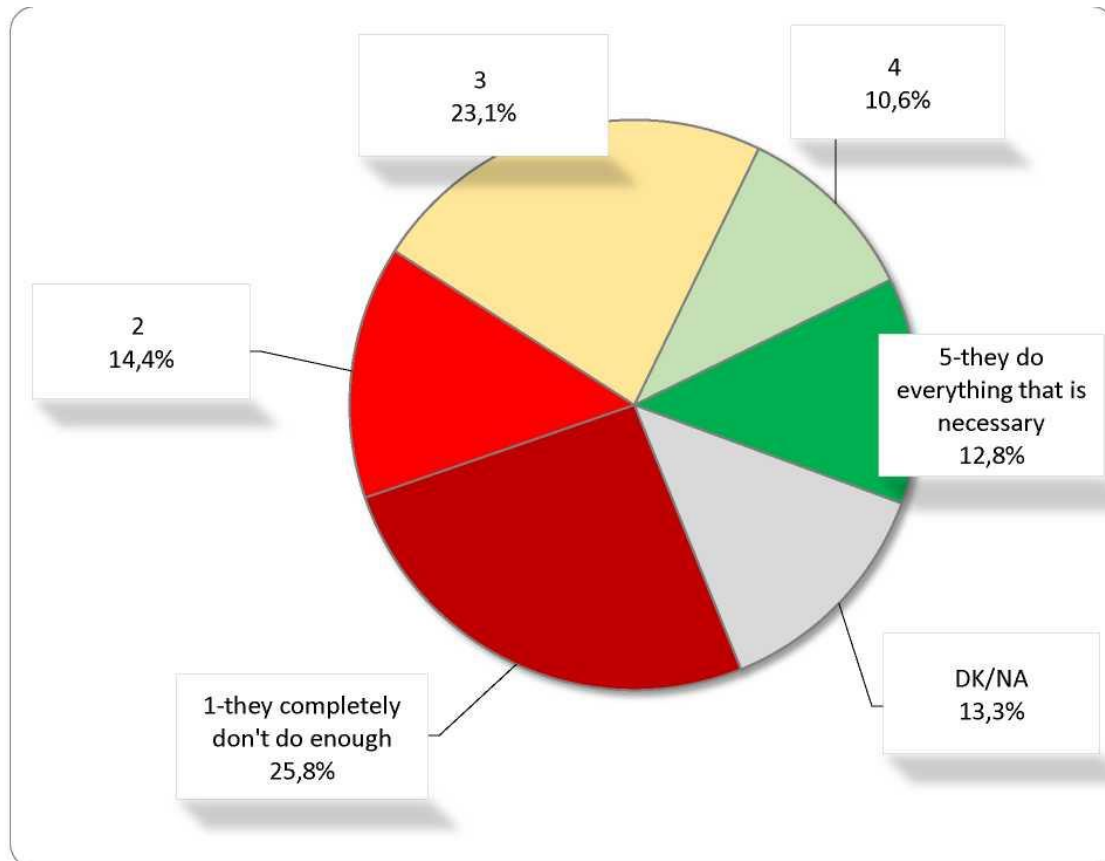
However, when it comes to technologies, “the other side of the coin” is also observed: the feeling that fake news is becoming more common is categorical. 68% answer so, against 23% who are of the opposite opinion. Even though this type of response may contain habitual negativism, a majority of more than two-thirds is indeed a serious indicator of anxiety.

**In the coronavirus situation, do you have or do you not have the feeling that fake news is more widely spread?**



It is even more serious given the fact that the average score for social media performance is 2.7 on a scale of 1 to 5 from negative to positive – which means that the balance is slightly "shifted" to the negative part of the scale. As can be expected, older age groups are also less familiar, so the clearest indicator is the economically active age groups, where scepticism is of greater importance.

Do you think that social networks do enough to delete the fake news from the websites? Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "they completely do not do enough " and 5 is "they do everything that is necessary".



After all, from the distance of time (self-)assessment of society of the response to coronavirus shows signs of some optimism. Knowing the traditional, or even inertial, scepticism of our society, registered throughout a number of surveys over decades, even the fact that the negativism is not dominant is a positive sign.

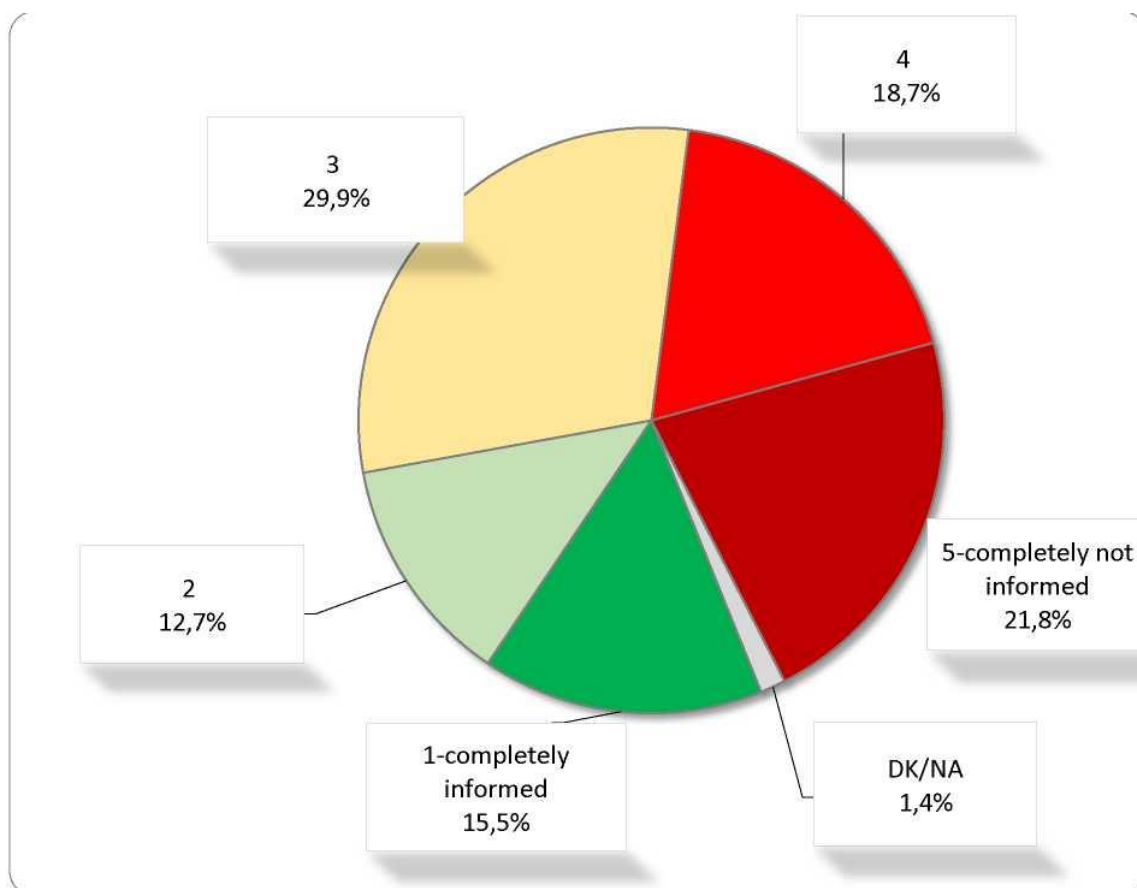
However, in terms of devaluation of the information the perspective is not positive. This is a significant problem, given that it is a relatively less known domain, where it is namely the lack of verified information that becomes a major issue. This is also a part of the more general issue of devaluation of authority in times of mosaic media accessibility.

On the other hand, the authority of education and employment is even better appreciated against the background of coronavirus challenges. This virus has actually created opportunities in the eyes of society or at least of its most active members.

### European Union

The majority of respondents are not sufficiently informed about the measures taken by the EU. The expected degree of sincerity of answers of the different groups of respondents varies, but it should be noted that the lowest awareness is declared among the youngest, and in the capital.

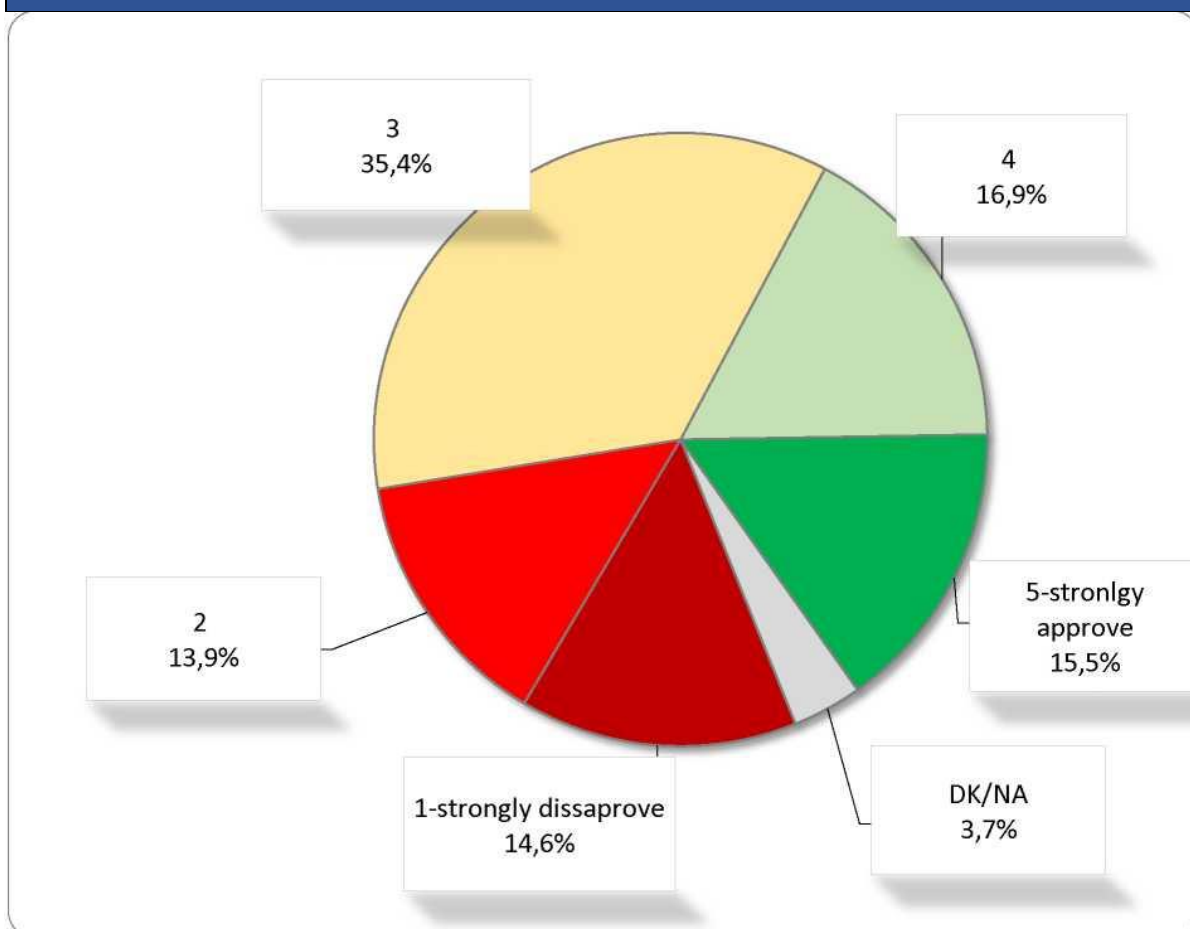
**The European Union has introduced a number of measures (social and financial) to mitigate the effects of the corona crisis. How informed about them do you feel? Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "very informed" and 5 is "completely not informed"!**



It should be clarified that such self-assessment questions traditionally lead to prestigious or socially desirable answers.

Probably due to this relatively lower general awareness, at first glance, the otherwise traditionally high trust in the EU is almost invisible - the assessment of the EU's response to the crisis is only vaguely positive.

**And to what extent do you approve the management of the COVID 19 crisis by the EU? Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "strongly disapprove " and 5 is "strongly approve "!**



However, this would be a superficial observation because the well-informed respond visibly more positively to the EU's role in the crisis.

This means that the potential denial of the EU is more inherent in the low interest and the lack of reasoning and depth in the subject. On the contrary, the active attitude towards the topic allows a more detailed rather than a general political response, and it is more positive.

Research experience, indeed, has long shown that general political responses often contain inertial scepticism. However, the magnitude of the differences in opinion between well-informed and poorly informed here suggests, that this is not just inertia, but a symptom of a more serious issue: higher denial of the EU may be due to lower awareness.

The attitude towards several EU measures for dealing with the crisis was checked against the background of the mentioned low level of declarative awareness. One would scarcely expect a particularly detailed public attitude on the various measures, but it was important to capture the first impression of the idea of each measure, and not so much an assessment or expectation of its application. And to make a general comparison in the attitude between types of measures as well.

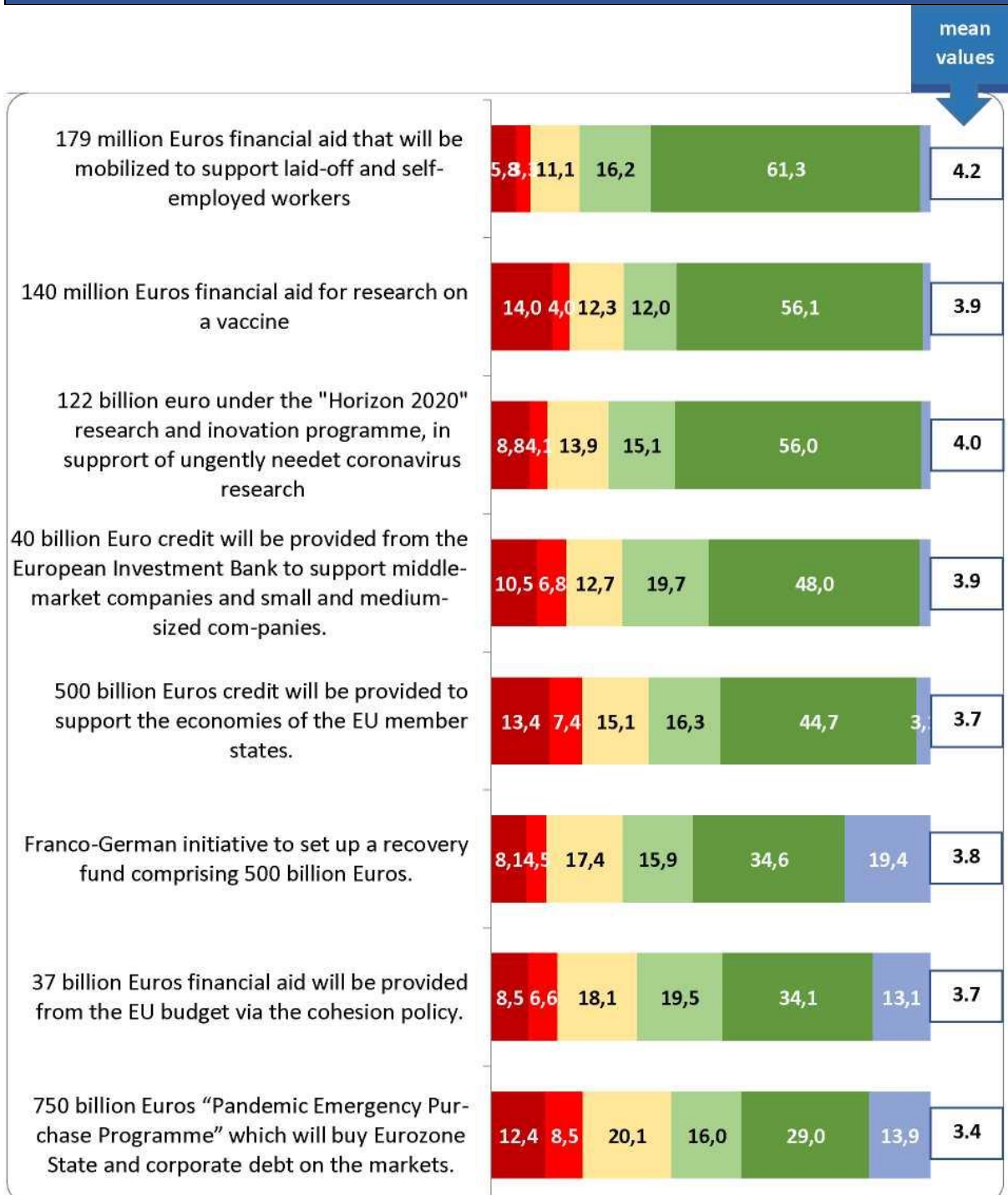
As it might be expected, the approval of all measures under scrutiny is almost "by definition": when asked to state their opinion when acquainted with a measure, most respondents are in favour of all of them. This is obviously, mostly about automatism, and not so much a manifestation of public opinion.

Nevertheless, this type of question is a sufficiently reliable indicator of what social instincts are, i.e. not an active public opinion, nor an informed position, but rather public intuition and sympathy.

Measures that seem aimed at working people or at finding a vaccine receive the highest approval. At this point we are clearly witnessing a combination of fears about jobs and health.

Measures and proposals of the EU on more abstract for the masses financial, economical and business issues are at the other end of range of Bulgarians' assessment.

Please answer to what extent do you personally approve or disapprove of any of the following coronavirus measures. Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "strongly disapprove" and 5 is "strongly approve"



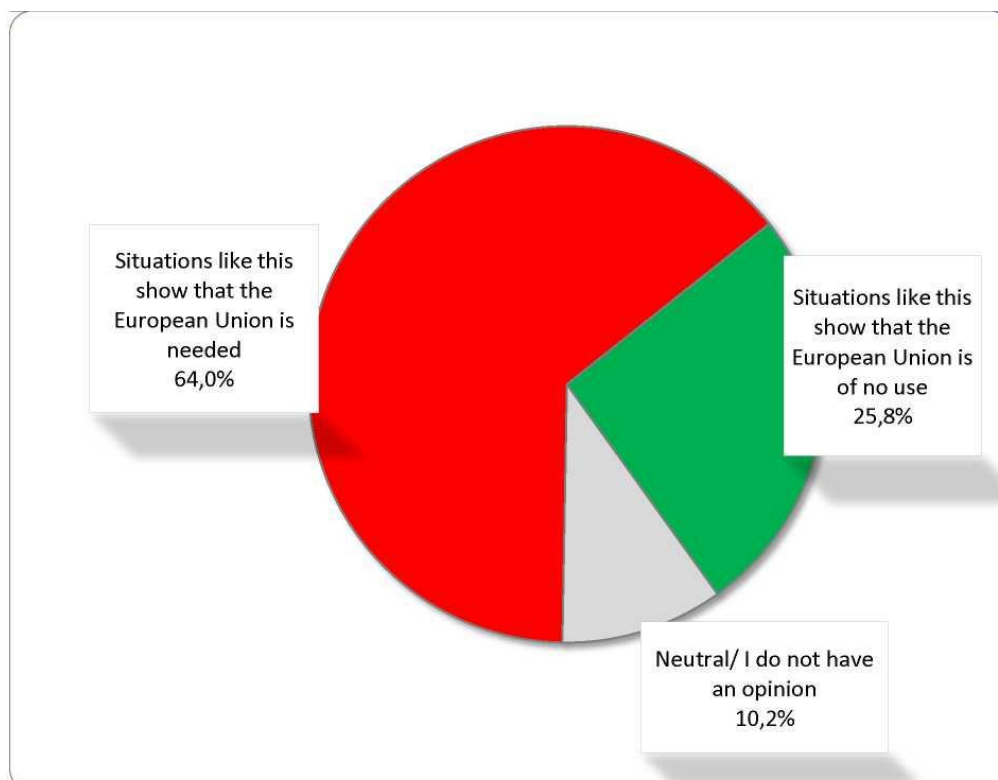
However, the same correlation applies here: the better informed the respondent is, the more is he/she inclined to accept a measure. This may be a natural mechanism of public opinion, but it reveals a specific potential issue: poor knowledge of EU's schemes in the country, which also affects the authority of the EU.

A kind of sociological experiment was conducted. Respondents were asked to determine which of two provocative statements was closer to their thinking even though they might find the statements to be equally extreme, equally true, equally false, and so on.

For example, two thirds of respondents approve the statement "Situations like this show that the EU is needed." A quarter of respondents choose the alternative option "Situations like this show that the European Union is of no use." The remaining share adopts a neutral position.

**I will read you pairs of statements. Please tell me which one is closer to your personal opinion?**

**"Situations like this show that the European Union is needed." OR "Situations like this show that the European Union is of no use."**



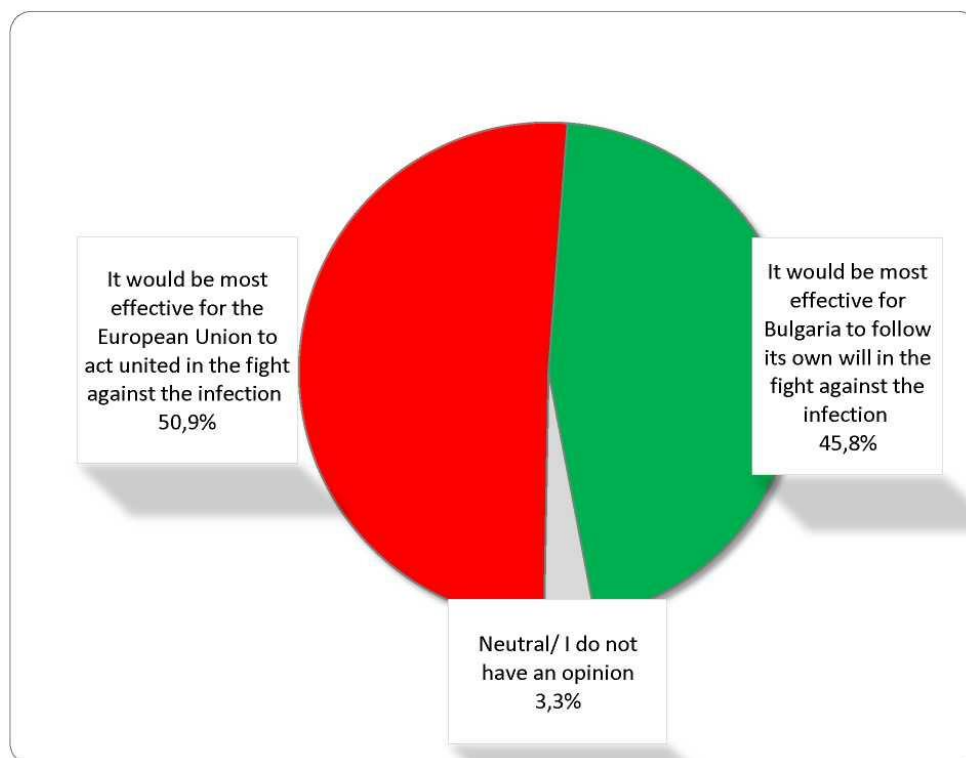


These two options summarize the two possible interpretations of the national self-isolation situation, accusing Brussels of late response, etc. that have emerged over the last weeks. Negative clichés have clearly not found favourable social ground.

However, the choice between two statements turned out to be difficult for the respondents: "It would be most effective for the European Union to act united in the fight against the infection" and "It would be most effective for Bulgaria to follow its own will in the fight against the infection." 51% are of the opinion that it would be most effective for the European Union to act together in the fight against the infection, but a significant share (46%) believe that the will of Bulgaria should be leading in decision-making to combat the pandemic more effectively.

**I will read you pairs of statements. Please tell me which one is closer to your personal opinion?**

**"It would be most effective for the European Union to act united in the fight against the infection." OR "It would be most effective for Bulgaria to follow its own will in the fight against the infection."**





This probably reflects the natural instinct to lock within national borders because of the virus. It should therefore be noted that such an attitude is probably associated with fears and concerns about preserving one's own health and economy rather than distrust or criticism of the EU as a whole.

Nevertheless, the propensity for sovereignty is clearly not small. It is also an echo of the more general nationalist tendencies in many countries in Europe and North America.

The pro-European feeling is more inherent in people with higher education and in larger settlements.

**In summary, the trust of Bulgarians in the EU remains stable. The crisis has not caused serious damage to the overall image of the Union.**

**However, awareness of the European agenda is insufficient. Being far from the centre does not favour trust. There are other challenges as well, perhaps exacerbated at a time when national states were being called upon to make different decisions. Among these challenges is, for example, national preference.**

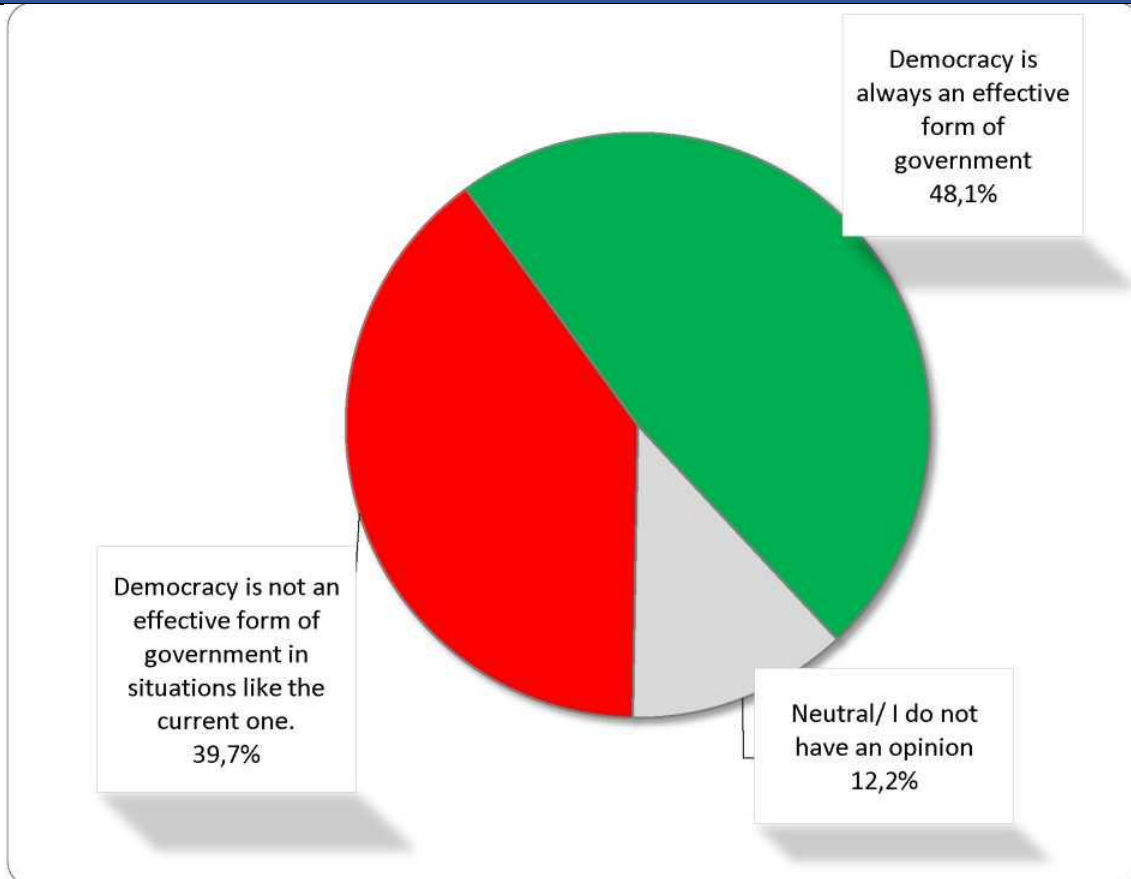
**The instinctive desire to help the "ordinary man" is evident. The automatic adoption of any financial measures to deal with the crisis is also visible.**

## **Values**

Attitudes towards various other values were also checked at "laboratory" scale. For example, 40% of the surveyed agreed with the opinion "Democracy is not an effective form of government in situations like the current one". However, 48% accept the other option: "Democracy is always an effective form of government".

I will read you pairs of statements. Please tell me which one is closer to your personal opinion?

"Democracy is not an effective form of government in situations like the current one." OR "Democracy is always an effective form of government."



As it could be expected, the respondents with a more favourable life outlook, i.e. higher education and living in larger settlements are also more distant from potential anti-democratic sentiments.

Research provocations like this reveal two important facts: 1. The politically correct worldview remains predominant; 2. The challenge is not small: two fifths who agree with a substantial critique of democracy are a very important symptom.

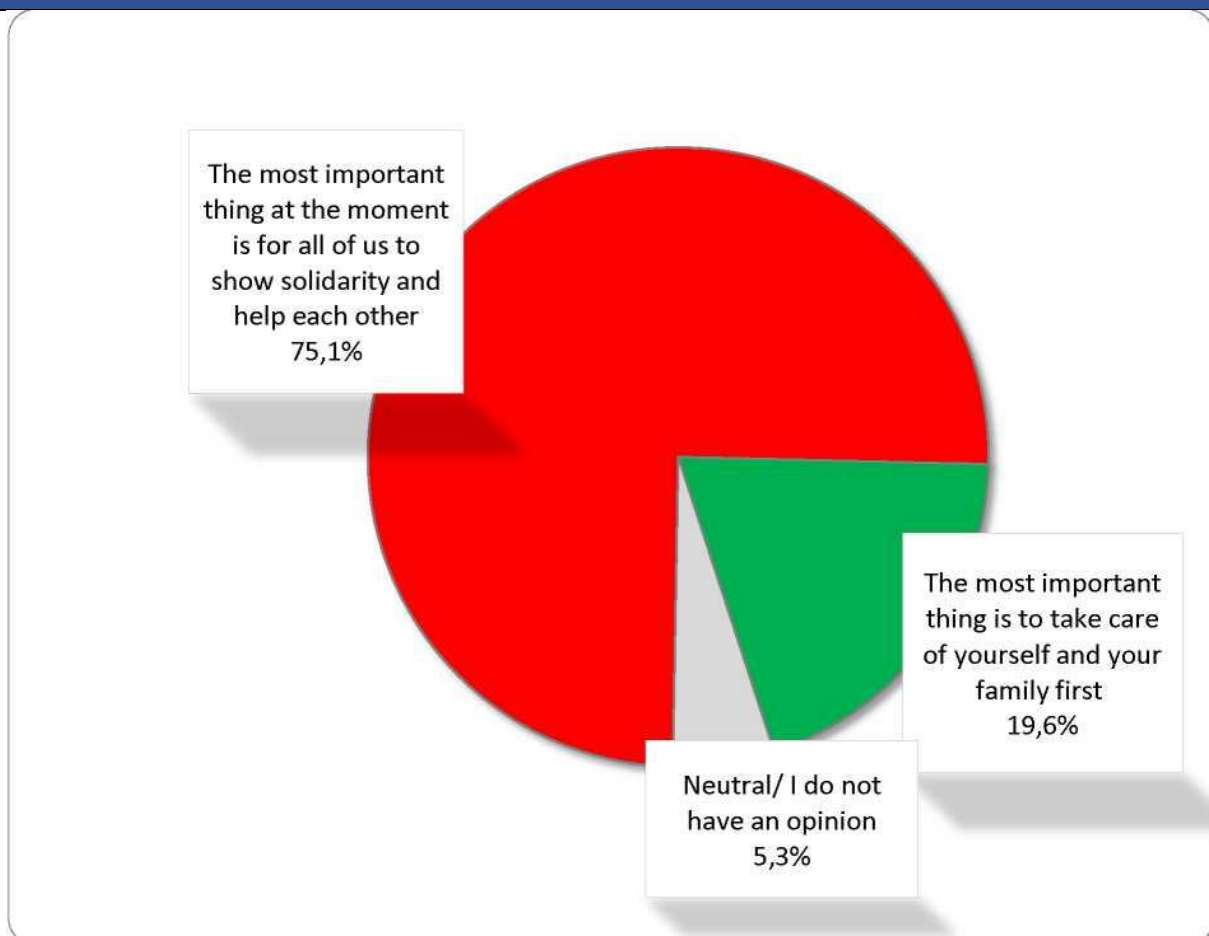
"The most important thing is to take care of yourself and your family first" was chosen by 19%. In the capital, this share is visibly higher. This may be related to higher levels of concern for both the economic and health status of Sofia residents, especially in due to the fact that during the peak levels of the infection, the capital was the most affected.

75% chose "The most important thing at the moment is for all of us to show solidarity

and to help each other." This opinion seems to be shared more widely by those living in smaller towns and villages, as well as by economically more active respondents.

I will read you pairs of statements. Please tell me which one is closer to your personal opinion?

"The most important thing at the moment is for all of us to show solidarity and help each other." OR "The most important thing is to take care of yourself and your family first."



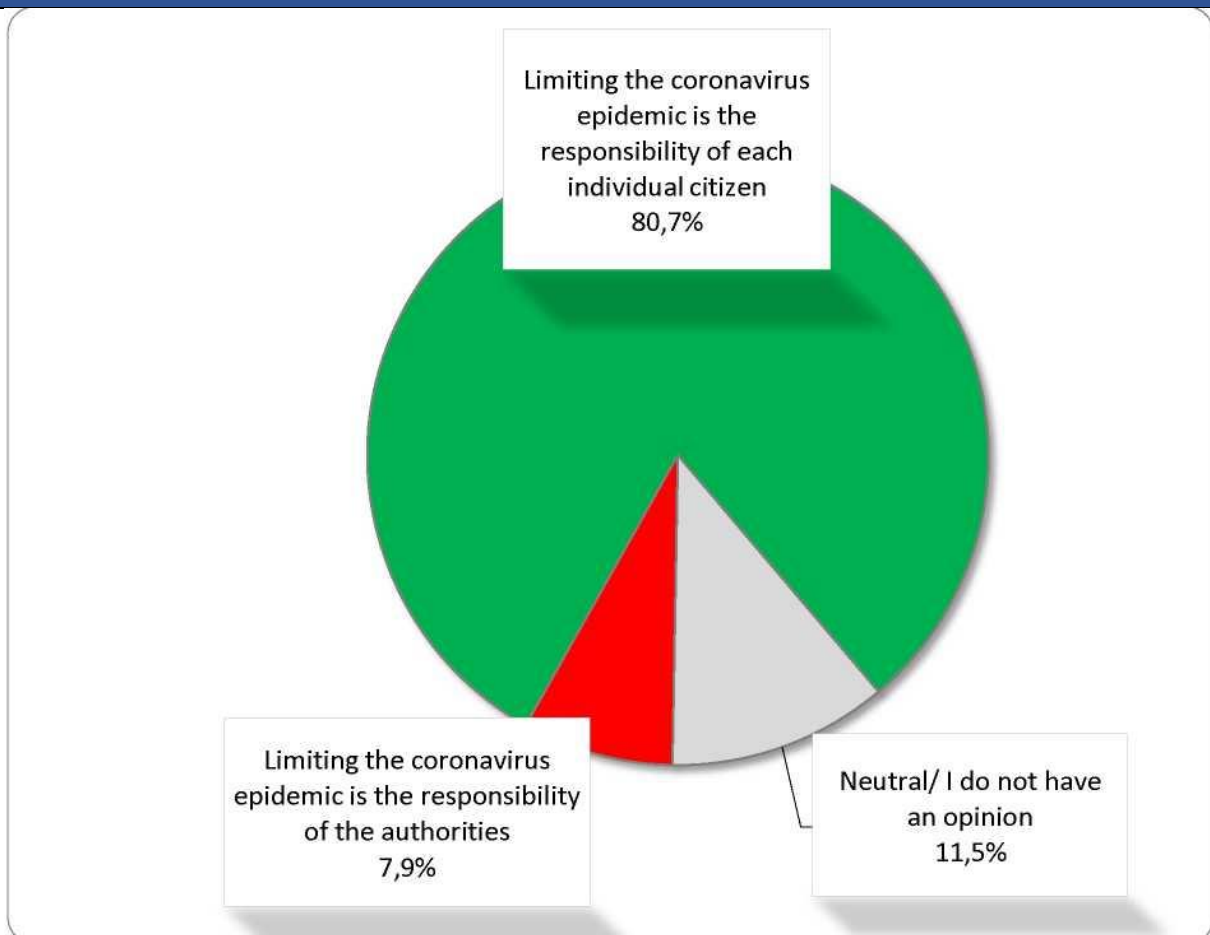
Even if there is an attempt for political correctness here, the fact that this is definitely the prestigious option proves that the dimensions of fear are currently not too high and that there indeed is a solidarity instinct.

The active position is further evidenced in the dilemma of "personal responsibility /

responsibility of the authorities". 81% prefer "Limiting the coronavirus epidemic is the responsibility of each individual citizen." 8% choose "Limiting the coronavirus epidemic is the responsibility of the authorities".

I will read you pairs of statements. Please tell me which one is closer to your personal opinion?

"Limiting the coronavirus epidemic is the responsibility of the authorities." OR  
"Limiting the coronavirus epidemic is the responsibility of each individual citizen."



Measures during the state of emergency in the country, such as restrictions on free movement and travel, were initially rather supported by Bulgarian society, although to some extent they contradicted concepts of democracy. It seems that in times of crisis, preferences for a stronger hand and greater rigor are visible, as they give the impression of security in a crisis situation. However, values

such as solidarity, democracy in decision-making, personal responsibility remain highly valued by Bulgarians. And now, after the end of the more acute phase of the spread of the virus (or in its lull), it can be seen that there is no irreparable damage to the social fabric. Perhaps this is also due to the reduction of fears.

The crisis situation has also created premises for serious concerns about attitudes towards democracy and the values associated with it. Anxiety symptoms are present but not prevalent.

**Some possible summaries, assumptions and discussion**

*The survey "found" a relatively calmer social picture. This corresponds to other surveys of the agency conducted over the same period. The coming weeks will show whether it is a momentary feeling or a lasting structure of mass attitudes.*

*Whichever it is, however, it is obvious that negativism that is traditional for our nation is present in terms of economic prospects but does not prevail in terms of the overall self-perception of society in this intermediate assessment of the coronavirus crisis. This is a good sign of public confidence. Bulgarian citizens seem to be coming out of the emergency situation with a good balance. Or at least from this stage of the crisis.*

*Mobilization is taking place, although some potential problems are becoming more visible: for example, concerns about democratic practices. However, social instincts for democracy are not at risk and people do not show a predominant preference for non-liberal methods.*

*Pro-European sentiments in Bulgaria remain strong despite the crisis. They face an expected challenge in the rhetoric of national sovereignty, but it is clear that for the majority in Bulgaria the democratic values that govern the EU continue to come first.*

*The fears and concerns about economic security caused by the coronavirus crisis have had an impact on society in the country and could only become premises for higher anxiety.*

*Therefore, it is essential in today's situation to see whether excessive economic damage, which would exceed the traditional perceptions of economic hardship of our society, will be allowed. Such damage would halt and reverse the trend of declining economic and income concerns in Gallup International's regular surveys in recent years.*

*Some potential threats stand out even more in the wake of the crisis: fake news is one of the examples.*

*One of the risks in the event of a new outbreak of the infection is the loss of solidarity and search for culprits, possible imputation of group guilt, etc. So far, such symptoms are not visible. Bulgarians remain far from the extremes.*

*At the same time, however, the combination of reassurance about the virus and the public desire for normalization on the one hand and the prospect of infection growth, on the other, creates the potential to escalate social tensions in the coming weeks. Along with worries about jobs, this could create a new painful situation in the country.*

*The latter is a hypothesis for the time being, and the accumulated social experience in the coronavirus crisis is already important. It is essential to maintain a sense of manageability of the health crisis, and at the same time to create a much more serious sense of manageability of the economic crisis.*

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