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# Life after lockdown: Getting back on track or charting a new course?

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How disruptive is Covid-19 to everyday life? How is the French population experiencing the lockdown? Is it magnifying inequalities and affecting social cohesion? The CoCo project sheds lights on these pressing questions by comparing living conditions in France before, during, and after the lockdown. This is the fourth of a series of research briefs, which now cover the entire lockdown period.

Has life under the lockdown been a parenthesis or is it the new normal? Beyond whether or not people began to resume their usual activities on 11 May, the consequences of the lockdown experience on people's attitudes and opinions are the core of this policy brief. Did the lockdown trigger new sociopolitical orientations? Or did it instead accelerate ongoing trends?

## Coping with Covid-19

Social distancing, cohesion and inequality in 2020 France

n°

4

## Summary

- 75% of people anticipate a second peak of the epidemic
- The expectation of a second peak depends very much on individuals' level of trust in others
- Self-reported well-being rose during the lockdown and increased even further two weeks after it ended
- One-third of our respondents are still working at home even though lockdown is over
- Two-thirds of our sample intend to limit their social interactions in the coming months
- There is very strong support for increased public spending on hospitals
- Wealthier people are more likely to support increased wages for nurses
- Globalization is increasingly seen in a negative light
- Pro-environment attitudes are growing

## Hopes and fears for a Covid Summer

Starting on 11 May, France began to ease the strict lockdown measures it had put in place 55 days earlier. New cases had continued to decline, and the number of people in intensive care had been reduced to a manageable level. Despite these positive signs, most people do not see this as the end of the Covid-19 crisis and doubt that life will go back to the way it was any time soon. The French are wary. Covid is not over.

When asked whether a second wave of the epidemic would occur once restrictions are eased, only 25% of our panelists are sure that it won't. The remaining 75% believe that France will experience a second peak but disagree on when it is likely to occur. The response to this question is closely related to trust in others -- how responsible one thinks others will be. Among those who say people can generally be trusted, only 22% believe that a second peak will occur between now and the end of summer, whereas, among those who say you can never be too careful when dealing with others, this share rises to 77%<sup>1</sup>. In line with the prevailing expectation of a second

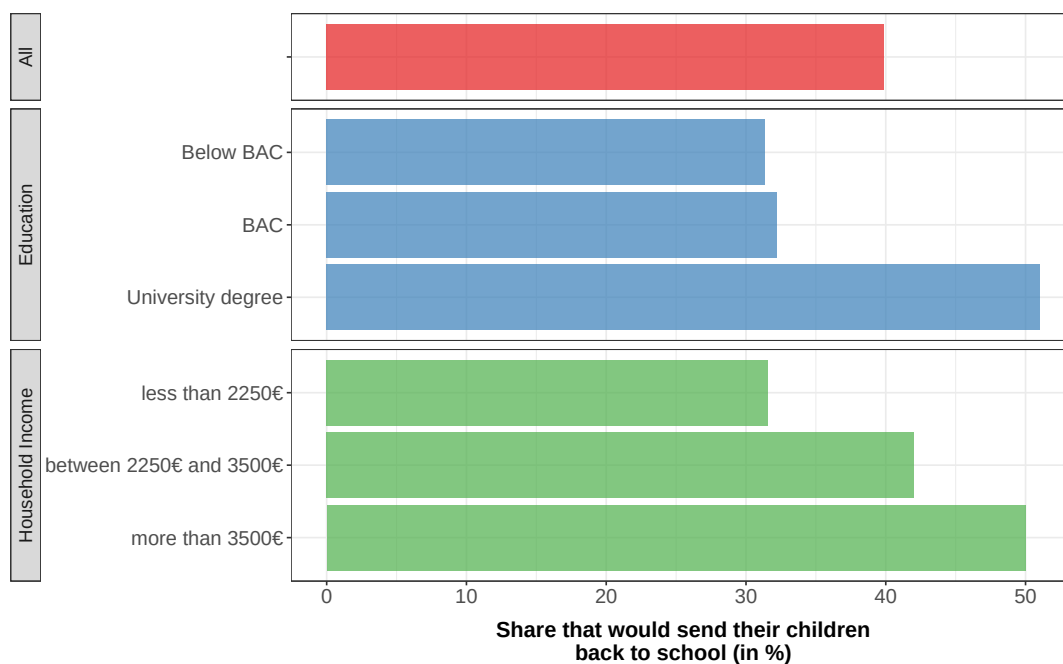
1. This is confirmed by a logit regression model that controls for age, income, education, household size and occupation.

peak, only 39% of our respondents favor sending children back to school<sup>2</sup>. Figure 1 shows large variations in responses across income and education levels. Half of individuals living in high-income households or holding a university degree support sending children back to school compared to only one-third of those from low-income households or without a high school diploma. Oddly enough, those most in favor of keeping children at home are also those whose children are most likely to suffer from educational inequalities as a result. As shown in our second policy brief [<https://zenodo.org/record/3783990>], less educated parents appear to be less equipped to home school their children and tend to work in occupations incompatible with remote work.

*“Being able to get back some social contact has done me the greatest good. Also being able to go out more freely. I've been walking my daughter to school, which is something I never did before the lockdown.”*

2. All respondents were asked to respond 'yes' or 'no' to the question “Regardless of whether or not you have children, would you send children back to school as soon as classes re-open?”

Figure 1. Propensity to want to send children back to school after the lockdown by education and household income



Sources: *Coping with Covid-19 - 4th wave (CoCo-4)*, May 13-20 2020, ELIPSS/CDSP. N=778. Reading: 50% of households with a disposable income of more than 3500€ would send their children (independent of actually having children or not) back to school once they reopen.

Even if people are still worried about the possible return of the epidemic in France, their concerns about its economic impact have gradually overtaken health fears. On a scale from 0 (concerned entirely with health) to 10 (concerned entirely with the economy), the average response for our sample was about 4.7 at the beginning of the confinement. While views were almost perfectly balanced on the whole, they did lean toward worrying more about health. Since then, the average has been slowly increasing, reaching 5.6 at the end of the lockdown, which indicates that a majority of people now think the economy is the more pressing issue. People seem to have a rather gloomy outlook of the current situation, feeling that they are stuck between a rock and a hard place. Health risks still loom large, but at the same time the economy can no longer be ignored.

### Is it really over? Life in the early days of déconfinement

Overall, we found that the majority of people were coping relatively well, emotionally speaking, during the lockdown. After an initial rise in well-being at the be-

ginning of the lockdown, it remained high and stable up through the first few days of the post-lockdown period. Then, at the end of May, two weeks after lockdown ended, we saw another significant rise in well-being. *Déconfinement* seems to be a source of happiness for our respondents.

*“It was a beautiful day from start to finish. But really, the idea of going back to school wearing a mask and being given Kapo-like instructions, that had me worried around 8:00pm.”*

The end of strict lockdown measures did make a significant difference in some areas of respondents’ daily lives. The share of those working from home, for instance, decreased from 57% at the beginning of the lockdown to 36% by mid-May. People living outside of Paris and without young children are significantly more likely to have gone back to their workplaces.

Now that there is again freedom of movement, our respondents’ top priority was to see their relatives

-- this is especially the case for the elderly and women. When asked whom they would want to see first at the end of the lockdown, 60% said that they plan to meet up with family members, 39% said they will see friends and 17% colleagues. Even so, 20% of respondents said that they do not intend to see anyone outside of their household during the first week following lockdown. And if this is an indication of increased cautiousness regarding social life, then it is still in effect -- two weeks after the end of lockdown, two-thirds of our sample declare that they intend to limit their social encounters over the next three months.

### **What was that? Looking back on the lockdown**

Now that the lockdown is over, we can look back on how our panelists framed this historical moment. In general, views of the lockdown period were surprisingly positive. People may not have always enjoyed the time, but it has proven itself to be something of “an opportunity”.

In retrospect, 53% see the lockdown as a time that allowed them to reflect on their way of life and 21% say it made them focus on the essential things in life such as friends and family. The remaining 26% of respondents have a more negative view of their lockdown experience, with 6% describing it as a waste of time and 20% as nerve-wracking. Surprisingly enough, these figures have remained essentially unchanged since the beginning of the lockdown period. In other words, people’s perspective of this unprecedented experience was set in the very first days of the two months of lockdown. At the same time, this also means that lockdown was generally seen in a rather positive light and as an occasion to step back from “life as usual”.

Respondents were asked to further reflect on their lockdown experience and to indicate to what extent the phrase “I will learn from this experience to im-

prove my life” applies to them (on a scale from 1 to 5, ‘not at all’ to ‘completely’). Overall, 74% of respondents said this describes their experience. But those who continued going to their usual workplace during lockdown were significantly less likely to indicate that this applies to them (no more than 60% say so).

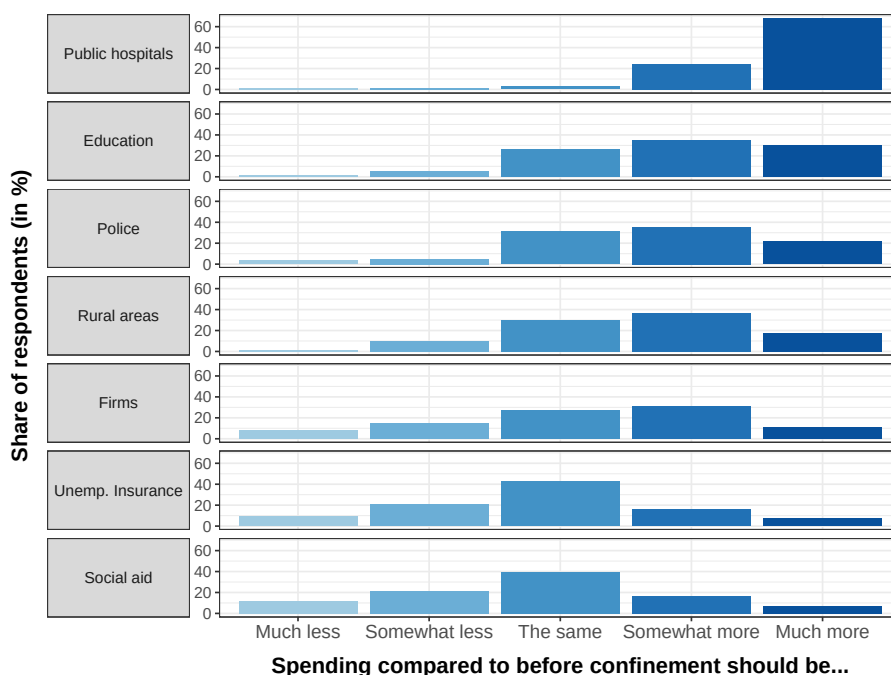
### **Spending more on public health**

Covid-19 has undoubtedly shifted the public’s attention towards the public health sector. At a time when demand for health services has been exceptionally high, expressions of gratitude towards health workers have been loud and clear worldwide. In our data, this recognition has also translated into support for more public health spending.

We asked respondents to indicate how funding should be allocated to various public services now, compared to before the crisis. 68% say that France should spend “much more” on hospitals in the future (Figure 2). Although many believe that education, the police, rural infrastructure and businesses should receive more public funding as well, there is no contest when it comes to the support people show for spending more on hospitals. By contrast, far fewer respondents support the idea of allocating additional money to unemployment insurance and social security (true for only 8% and 7% of respondents respectively, and even less for people working from home and with high incomes). Although our data show that people are increasingly more concerned with the economic situation than the health situation, they are far less interested in allocating additional public funds to businesses than to hospitals. While they are aware that many jobs are at risk, respondents do not support a massive increase of public expenditures to either subsidize firms directly or soften the blow of unemployment by spending more on insurance schemes.

In general, women are more likely to favor more pu-

Figure 2. Willingness to diminish or increase public spending by policy areas



Source: *Coping with Covid-19 - 4th wave (CoCo-4), May 13-20 2020, ELIPSS/CDSP*.  
*N=940. Reading: 68% of respondents think spending on public hospitals should be much higher than before confinement.*

blic spending -- a trend that dates back to before the crisis. Meanwhile, shopkeepers and especially blue-collar workers are far less likely to favor a significant increase in spending on hospitals. Blue-collar workers are also more in favor of increasing subsidies for businesses. This view also reflects their higher than average concern for the economy, possibly due to the threat of massive lay-off plans, which are likely to affect them before anyone else.

Moreover, 90% of survey participants think that nurses should earn more than they do, and 87% argue in favor of higher salaries for those who care for the elderly. The elderly and those living in high-income households are particularly likely to support raising nurses' salaries.

Unsurprisingly, the more people think someone earns in any given occupation, the less likely they are to support an increase in wages for that occupation. Nevertheless, this negative correlation is weaker when it comes to evaluating the salaries of nurses and domestic helpers, which is presumably

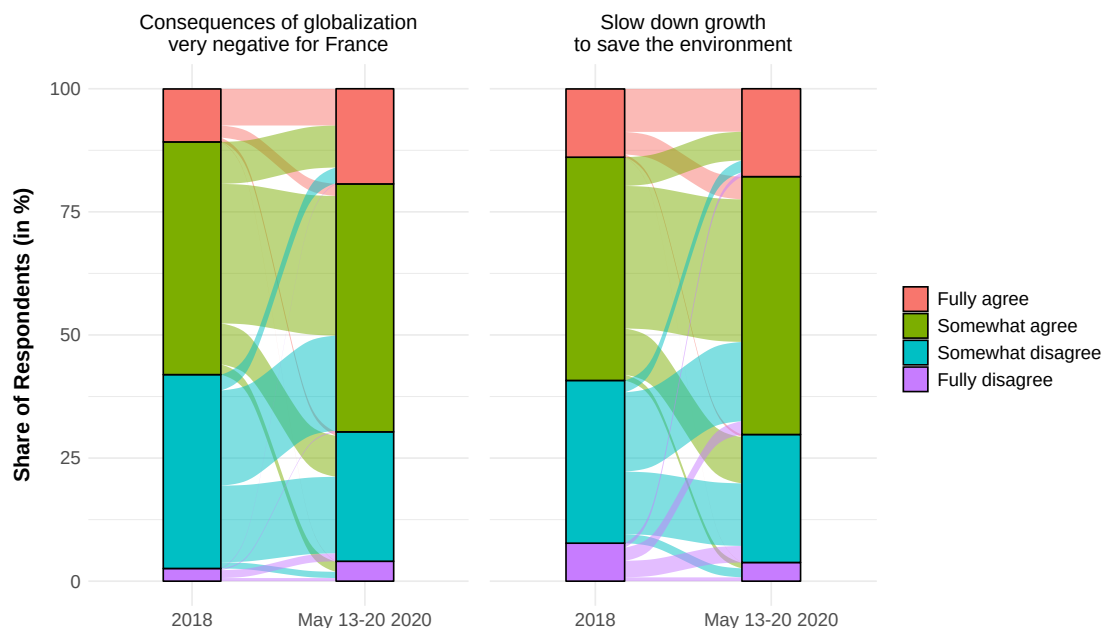
due to the current context of Covid-19. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues as the cogency of the health crisis lessens with time.

### Opinions shift after the lockdown

Immediately after the lockdown ended, people's attitudes to some broader policy and political issues began to shift. The lockdown appears to have fostered both solidarity with migrants and animosity towards globalization. At the same time, we found increased polarization on the issue of redistribution and greater attention focused on the environment.

The number of people thinking that globalization has very negative consequences for France has grown since 2018 (from 58% to 70%, see Figure 3, left panel). Regression analysis shows that this negative view of globalization has become especially prominent among those who were or strongly suspect that they were infected with Covid-19 (after controlling for socioeconomic characteristics). It is possible that direct exposure to the epidemic will usher in a

Figure 3. Attitudes to globalization and environmentalism in 2018 and after the lockdown



Sources: *Coping with Covid-19 - 4th wave (CoCo-4), May 13-20 2020, « Dynamiques de mobilisation - vague 18 », 2017, ELIPSS/CDSP. N=906 & 910. Reading: The right-hand panel shows that 45% of respondents in 2018 and 52% in May 2020 somewhat agreed with the statement that we should slow down growth in order to save the environment. Flows between the left and right bar of each panel show how individual opinions changed from 2018 to 2020.*

period of renewed anti-globalization sentiment and a subsequent preference for border closures and short-haul life arrangements.

In particular, women are increasingly against globalization. When faced with threats to life and livelihood, it may be that women -- along with those who have faced the most severe health or economic consequences of the epidemic more generally -- are focusing their attention on basic needs. This would explain an increased preference for localism and state-backed solutions to social problems.

Willingness to transfer more power to European institutions has remained constant (37% in 2018 against 38% now), but the economic impact of the crisis seems to have impacted attitudes towards European integration. Those who became fully or partially unemployed in the first weeks of the lockdown were against transferring more power to the EU. The state's role in managing unemployment subsidies has reinforced its legitimacy vis-à-vis broader

EU governance. Overall, our evidence suggests that those directly affected by the epidemic have adopted more nationalist views.

Finally, concerns about the environment have gained traction in recent years and have only grown with the current crisis. Whereas in early 2018 59% agreed with the statement that in order to protect the environment we need to slow down growth, 70% do so now (see Figure 3, right-hand panel). This heightened environmental concern is, however, lower among those who were unemployed (either partially or fully) during the lockdown, suggesting that those hit hardest by the crisis would go against the prevailing trend if forced to choose<sup>3</sup>.

3. Economic modeling has shown that environmental protection and economic growth do not have to be mutually exclusive (see for example Feiock, R., & Stream, C. (2001). "Environmental Protection versus Economic Development: A False Trade-Off?", *Public Administration Review*, 61(3), 313-321.) Moreover, it is possible to think of the environment in terms of the economic value of the goods and services it provides (see the key messages of the EFESSE for more information).

*“The day before yesterday, as you know, I went back to work. I woke up at 4:45am and from 6:00am until 2:00pm, I was all alone in my office. There are usually 15 of us in this open-plan office, but since Wednesday the experience has been a bit different in my firm.”*

## Conclusion

Was this lockdown period a sociocultural watershed moment? Or have on-going tendencies been reinforced? As is often the case, conclusions are mixed and to a large extent premature.

Lockdown, and the mandatory behavioral changes it necessitated, has not been particularly depressing for most people in France. Well-being not only increased during the lockdown but also increased further after the lockdown ended. Even if people have been worried, and still are, the lockdown seems to have given them an opportunity to step back and reflect on their own existence. It has not dramatically changed views of themselves or the world. Rather, it has magnified trends that had already been in place. People want more time for themselves, more protection for the environment and more emphasis on local issues and responses. When their security is at risk, human beings fall back on more basic values and more local solutions. At the same time, the lockdown has also been a period of polarization and increased inequalities. Besides the near unanimous support for increasing spending on the public health sector, social groups have been affected differently by lockdown restrictions and by fears of the forthcoming economic crisis. The people who were most impacted by the crisis -- those who have been infected, been unemployed or continued to go their workplace, not to mention women more generally -- are also the ones to see a more significant change in their values. Across the board, these changes go in the direction of a demand for more protection. In

France, this means expecting more from the State. Understanding the long-term consequences of this specific moment in time is a question that can only be fully examined with time. The CoCo project will provide some answers in this respect when it carries out a new survey wave in six months' time.



## Methodology

Data for this Brief come from the first four waves of the CoCo survey, which is part of the project “Coping with Covid-19: Social Distancing, Cohesion and Inequality in 2020 France”, funded by the French Agence nationale de la recherche (Flash Covid-19 call). For details on the project:

<https://www.sciencespo.fr/osc/fr/content/faire-face-au-covid-19.html>

The CoCo survey is part of ELIPSS, a probability-based panel launched in 2012 thanks to ANR support (Grant for infrastructures ANR-10-EQPX-19-01). ELIPSS is maintained by CDSP, the Center for Socio-Political Data of Sciences Po. ELIPSS currently relies on a sample of 1400 French residents. The sample has been drawn from census data collected through face-to-face interviews at the initial stage with an acceptance rate superior to 25 per cent. Panelists participate in about 10 surveys a year, with a response rate close to 85 per cent on average. Data from ELIPSS is calibrated through a combination of various weighting strategies. Final weights, as used in this brief, have been computed to take into account design effects from the initial stage, bias due to acceptance rate in the enrollment phase, and post-stratification taking into account sex, age, education and region. Detailed information regarding this procedure is available here:

[http://quanti.dime-shs.sciences-po.fr/media/ckeditor/uploads/2018/03/21/ponderationselipss\\_documentation.pdf](http://quanti.dime-shs.sciences-po.fr/media/ckeditor/uploads/2018/03/21/ponderationselipss_documentation.pdf).

### How to cite the data:

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Florent Gougou, Vincent Tiberj, Dynamob team, ELIPSS team [authors] : Electoral choices and political values - 18th wave (December 2017) [computer file], Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (FNSP) [producer], Centre de Données Socio-Politiques (CDSP) [distributor], Version 1.

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