

# MIND AND MOOD OF NEW ZEALANDERS:

## THE ARRIVAL OF OMICRON

An Ipsos Survey – February 2022

18 February, 2022



GAME CHANGERS



# BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

# BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Two years into the pandemic, the world continues to deal with COVID-19 and its impact on people and society. Globally, many countries have moved to a 'live with the virus' approach, re-opening their borders and loosening or removing restrictions.

In New Zealand, we are currently in the early stages of experiencing the Omicron wave.

During the early stages of the pandemic, New Zealand adopted an alert level system to help stop the spread of the virus. With the arrival of the Delta and Omicron variants in New Zealand, the Government introduced the COVID Protection Framework ('traffic lights') and a three phase approach to dealing with Omicron.

Ipsos has tracked public reaction and attitudes towards the state of the virus and perception of management since February 2020.

## THIS REPORT

This reports looks at the attitudes and behaviours of New Zealanders, including:

- Perceived threat of COVID-19
- Performance of the Government, businesses and employers in managing COVID-19
- Views on the current COVID-19 Protection Framework
- Emotional state of New Zealanders
- Views on face masks



# METHODOLOGY



## Sample size

**1,004**



## Fieldwork dates

- 27–30 March, 2020
- 3–6 April, 2020
- 8–11 May, 2020
- 3–6 July, 2020
- 11–14 Sept, 2020
- 16–19 Oct, 2020
- 13–17 Nov, 2020
- 8–14 Dec, 2020
- 10–15 Feb, 2021
- 4–11 Feb, 2022



## Methodology


Interviews were conducted online (self-completion). Respondents were recruited from Ipsos & Ipsos partner panels.

## OTHER NOTES

- Significantly **higher** / **lower** figures are reported at 95% confidence.
- The precision of Ipsos online polls is calculated using a credibility interval with a poll of 1,000 accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points.
- Where results do not sum to 100 or the 'difference' appears to be +/-1 more/less than the actual, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of 'don't know' or 'not stated' responses.



# FINDINGS

 Do not lean on door

(an excerpt) Alberto  
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ting clouds  
they saw horse



# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

## Omicron changes New Zealanders' views of COVID

- There are high levels of concern around what Omicron will bring over the next month, with only 15% not worried at all.
- New Zealanders are much more likely to believe either themselves or close friends / family will catch the virus than when before Omicron arrived.
- There is now less concern from New Zealanders about how COVID affects the rest of the world and more concern around our own country, communities, whanau, and ourselves.
- While there is increased feelings of impatience around getting back to normal life, there is also increased concern for those who are weak or vulnerable.
- The majority of New Zealanders would not feel comfortable leaving their house without a mask now – significantly more than during previous COVID waves.



# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

## Lower perceptions of government management and restrictions

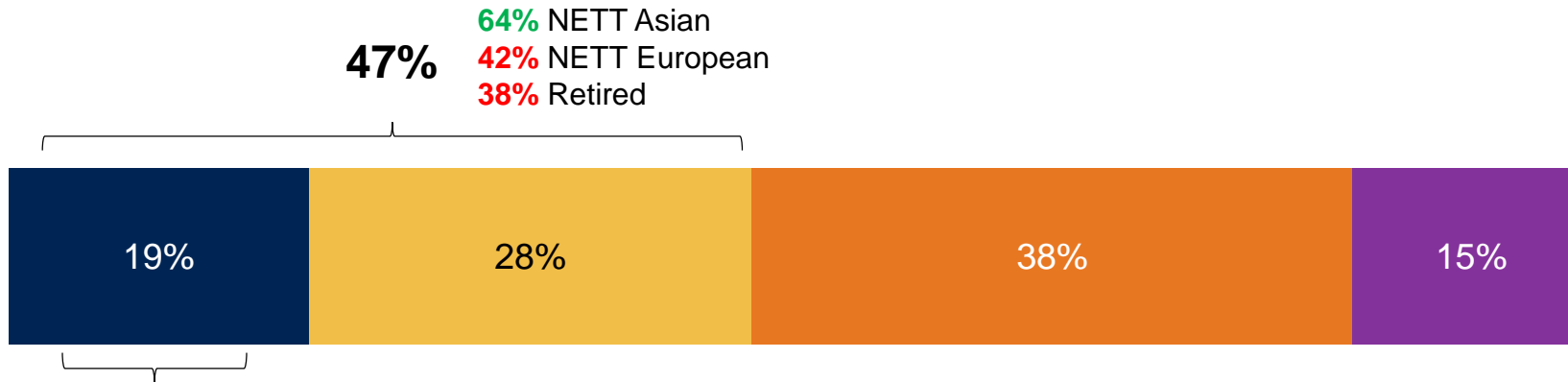
- Half of all New Zealanders believe the red traffic light setting has the right balance between restrictions and freedom. A quarter would like to see restrictions tightened and a further quarter loosened.
  - Those who would like **tighter restrictions** would like greater use of lockdowns, masks, border closures, and online learning for schools
  - Those who would like **looser restrictions** would like to see the removal of border restrictions, masks in schools, hospitality limits and vaccine mandates. They are keen to see a full return to normal with no restrictions.
- Nearly two-thirds of New Zealanders would like to see restrictions on how businesses operate removed.
- While 63% of New Zealanders currently rate the performance of the government positively, this has reduced from high levels of 80's and 90's over the last two years.



# COVID-19 – CONCERN ABOUT THE OMICRON VARIANT WAVE

Nearly half of all New Zealanders are very concerned about what the Omicron wave will bring within the next month. Those of Asian ethnicity are more likely to be concerned. Just 15% are not worried.

Thinking one month from now, how concerned are you about the Omicron variant wave of COVID-19?



Aucklanders (24%) and Māori (28%) are significantly more likely to be *extremely concerned*. Those in the Canterbury (12%) and Waikato (10%) regions are significantly less likely to feel the same.

■ Extremely concerned   ■ Very concerned   ■ Somewhat concerned   ■ Not concerned at all

Q9D. Thinking one month from now, how concerned are you about each of the following?

Base: total sample

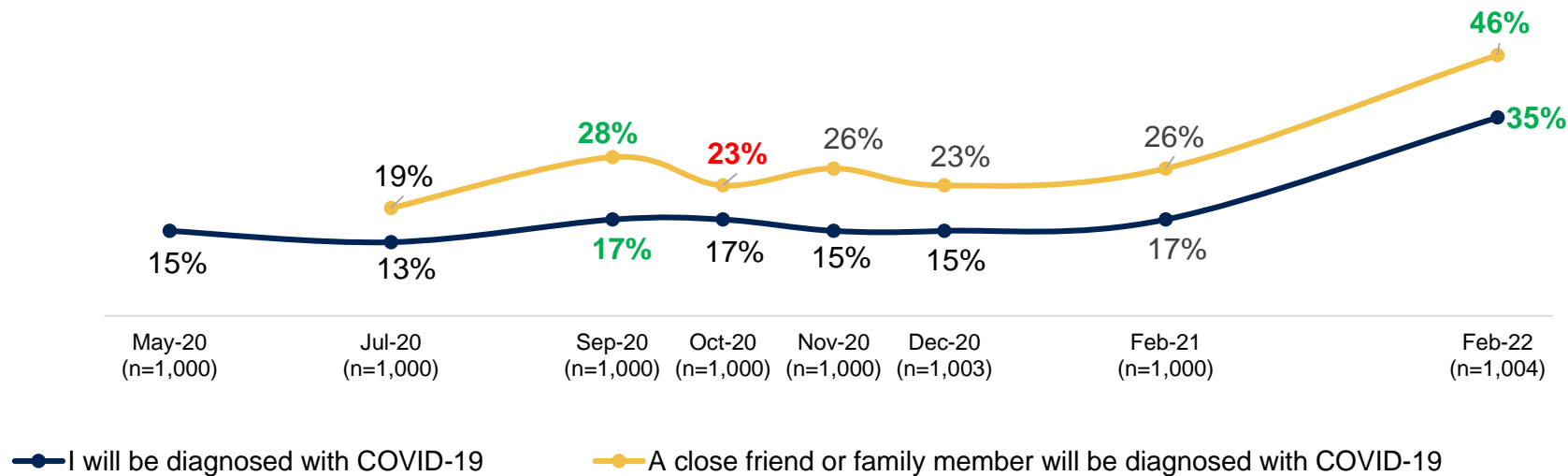


# COVID-19 – CONCERN ABOUT GETTING INFECTED WITH COVID-19

Concern about catching the virus is highest since the pandemic began, with a third of all New Zealanders feeling concern they will be diagnosed in the next month.

Thinking one month from now, how concerned are you about each of the following?

% extremely concerned + very concerned



## Key demographic differences

I will be diagnosed with COVID-19

- ↑ 57% NETT Asian
- ↑ 45% Auckland
- ↑ 40% Full-time worker
- ↓ 29% NETT European
- ↓ 28% 55+ years
- ↓ 22% Retired

A close friend or family member will be diagnosed with COVID-19

- ↑ 61% NETT Asian
- ↑ 53% Under 35 years
- ↑ 53% Auckland
- ↑ 52% Full-time worker
- ↓ 41% NETT European
- ↓ 36% 55+ years
- ↓ 30% Retired

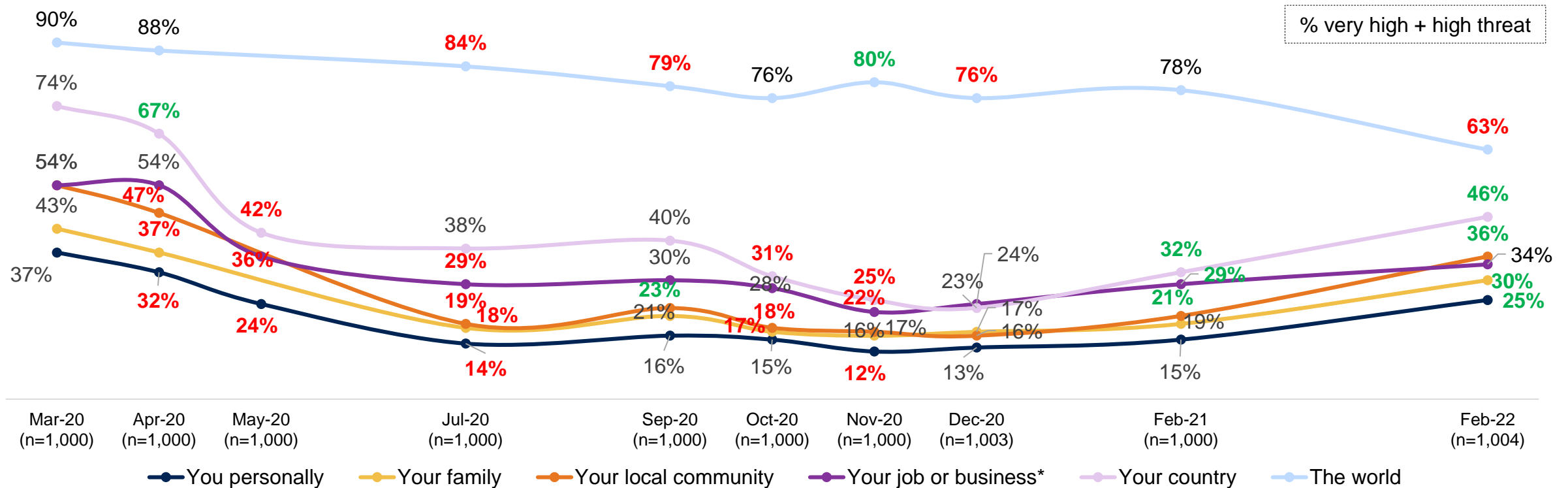
Q9D. Thinking one month from now, how concerned are you about each of the following?  
Base: total sample

Green / red indicates significantly higher / lower than previous time period

# COVID-19 – PERCEIVED THREAT OF COVID-19

With the arrival of Omicron in New Zealand, there is less concern about how COVID affects the rest of the world and more concern around our own country, our community, whānau and ourselves.

## What level of threat do you think the coronavirus or COVID-19 poses to each of the following?



Green / red indicates significantly higher / lower than previous time period

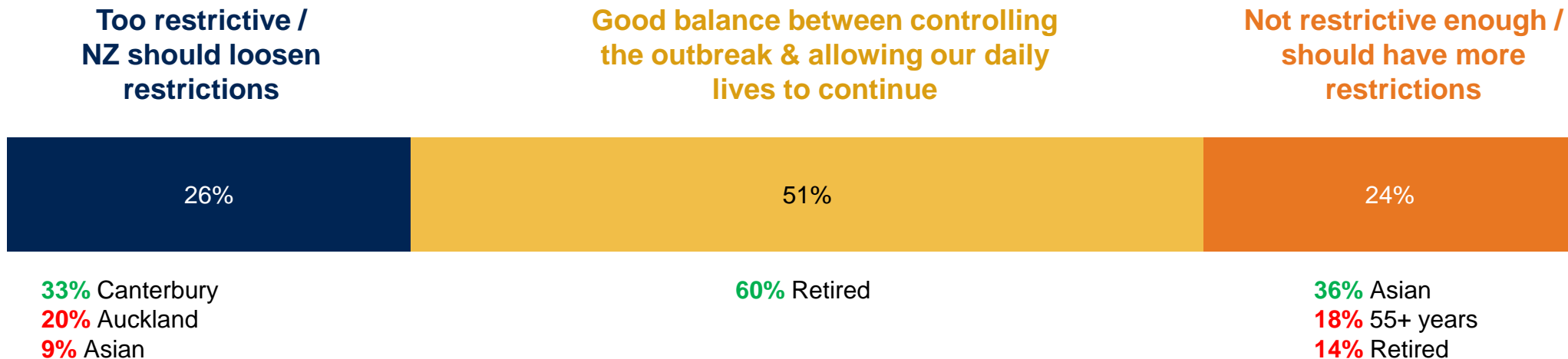
Q2. What level of threat do you think the coronavirus or COVID-19 poses to each of the following?

Base: total sample. \*Note: only asked of those who are employed / self-employed – Mar-20 (n=691), Apr-20 (n=668), May-20 (n=668), Jul-20 (n=636), Sep-20 (n=639), Oct-20 (n=667), Nov-20 (n=598), Dec-20 (n=598), Feb-21 (n=665), Feb-22 (n=645)

# COVID-19 – PERCEPTION OF RED LEVEL OF COVID PROTECTION FRAMEWORK

Half of New Zealanders say they are happy with the balance between restrictions and freedom of the red traffic light system. A quarter think restrictions are too loose and a further quarter think they are too tight. People living in the South Island are more likely to think restrictions are too tight, while those of Asian ethnicity would prefer tighter restrictions.

Which statement do you most agree with when it comes to the **red alert level** of the COVID-19 Protection Framework (traffic lights)?



Q. Which statement do you most agree with when it comes to the red alert level of the COVID-19 Protection Framework (traffic lights)?

Base: n=1,004

# COVID-19 – FURTHER RESTRICTIONS NEW ZEALANDERS WOULD LIKE TO SEE

## Common themes include:

- Lockdowns
- Wider use of masks
- Closing of borders
- Restrictions of regional channels
- Online learning for schools



*"I don't think it's restrictions we need I think **we just need a full lockdown** and a complete ban on travel via planes etc."*

Female, under 35 years, Canterbury



*"**No one entering the country.** There are far too many positive cases at the border when they should have had a negative test before entering."*

Female, 35–54 years, Manawatu-Whanganui



*"Home isolation is a joke! Too many broke the rules when it was 'managed' ..so it's obvious multitudes will break the rules doing it from home!!!"*

Male, 55+ years, Auckland



*"I would like to see enforcement of **mandated mask wearing.** I went to two supermarkets yesterday and both had several unmasked people - they walked in - no-one asked for proof of exemption. Several people only had mouth coverings. I caught the bus same scenario. Really frightening!"*

Female, 55+ years, West Coast



*"I think all businesses including cafes, restaurants, non-drive through takeaways, public transports, airports and flights **should be closed until there are no reported cases of Omicron, Delta and COVID.** I think there is too much risk as those variants are currently active in the NZ climate. Allowing businesses to open when they are ready to is a good idea but I think this should be in line with what variants and strains of COVID are currently active."*

Female, 35–54 years, Waikato



*"If you have people that run around bullying retail staff ignoring mandates with no penalty it impacts the community a lot **so you need hard rules and very tough penalties** and kiwis some think they can do whatever they like."*

Male, 55+ years, Auckland



*"I don't think people should gather in big groups for anything; 100 people is still a lot."*

Male, under 35 years, Waikato



*"**Back to regional lockdown to stop spreading it.** People who have come into the country with the virus are known to escape from MIQ. How many people who have caught the virus are going to be honest and self isolate?"*

Male, 35–54, Manawatu-Whanganui



*There is increasing level of risk from children passing the virus on to adults. There is no mandate for children at school to be vaccinated; therefore; putting the adults they are around at risk. There needs to be Red 1; Red 2; and Red 3 restrictions.*

Female, 35–54 years, Nelson / Tasman



*"People still have the freedom to move around the community and in between cities as they please; and some treat it as if the country is back to normal. There should be more restrictions similar to the lockdown settings."*

Female, 35–54 years, Auckland

Q. You have indicated that you agree most with the statement 'The red alert level is not restrictive enough to control the outbreak and should have more restriction'. What further restrictions would you like to see?

Base: those who believe we should have more restrictions (n=238)

# COVID-19 – RESTRICTIONS NEW ZEALANDERS WOULD LIKE LOOSENERD

## Common themes include:

- Removal of MIQ and border controls
- Full return to normal – no restrictions
- Removal of masks in schools
- Removal of limits in hospitality
- Removal of vaccine mandates



*"Everything back to normal. Containing it is all about using common sense. Its not a matter of "if" we catch COVID, it's a matter of "when". This is our new normal. The sooner we live how we were, the sooner we can get on with everything and build our own immunity to it."*

**Female, 35–54 years, Auckland**



*Loosen in areas without a problem. Keep it stronger in areas with a problem. Don't treat the whole country as if it is Auckland."*

**Male, 55+ years, Canterbury**



*"Remove all masking requirements for people who have a 99% chance of recovery from the virus. Remove all work mandates since Omicron is a mild disease which 99% of the population will recover from."*

**Female, 35–54 years, Auckland**



*"I don't think unvaccinated people should have different restrictions from vaccinated people as the virus spreads through both. I don't like the vaccine passport and don't think it should be part of any New Zealand system."*

**Female, 55+ years, Auckland**



*"Remove masks so that we can see people smile again; and see their lips move when they speak. This week somebody said hello to me in the local hardware store; and I could not recognise my next door neighbour because his face was covered and his speech was muffled."*

**Male, 55+ years, West Coast**



*"Everything. Overseas data has proven that the Omicron variant although highly contagious has very little to no side effects and if anything the restrictions and mandates are worsening the mental emotional and physical well being for everyone. The vaccine is useless against this variant and it has been scientifically proven overseas yet our PM is still pushing for mandates vaccines that do not work."*

**Female, 35–54 years, Bay of Plenty**



*"I don't think that unvaccinated people shouldn't be allowed in hospitality. Every single hospitality business is struggling very hard because of this. It should be up to businesses to decide whether they allow unvaccinated people in or not."*

**Female, under 35 years, Canterbury**



*"You should be able to get on with your daily living without a vaccine passport."*

**Female, 35–54 years, Otago**

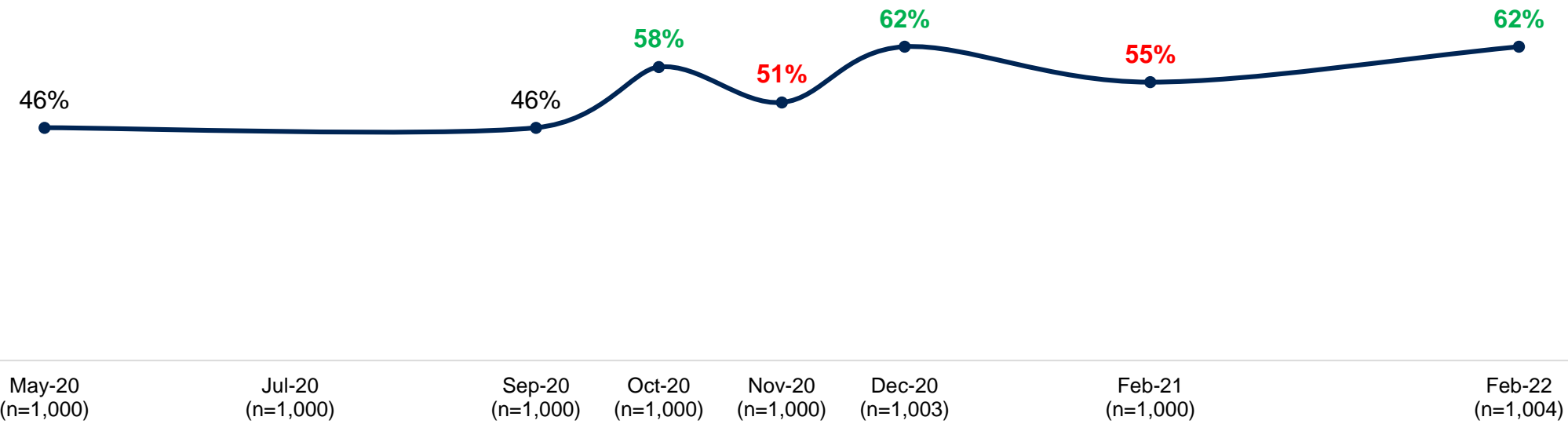
Q. You have indicated that you agree most with the statement 'The red alert level is too restrictive on our daily lives and New Zealand should loosen restrictions more'. What restrictions would you like to see loosened?

Base: those who believe we should have more restrictions (n=257)

# COVID-19 – ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEW ZEALAND’S RESPONSE

Nearly two-thirds of New Zealanders are in favour of focusing on the economy and allowing businesses to operate as they choose.

### We should restart the economy and allow businesses to open or operate as they choose



Green / red indicates significantly higher / lower than previous time period

Q5. Do you agree or disagree with the following:  
Base: total sample

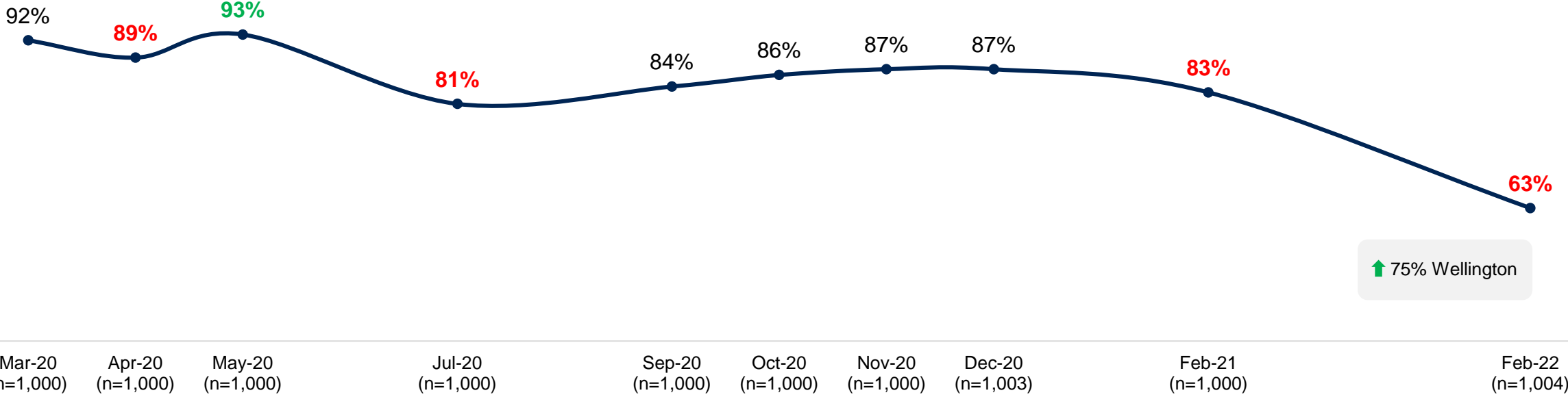
% Strongly agree +  
Somewhat agree



# COVID-19 – PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT’S PERFORMANCE

Perception of the Government’s performance in containing and dealing with virus recovery has decreased significantly from this time last year, with a drop of 20 percentage-points. However, those who live in Wellington have stronger ratings of performance.

How good a job is the **NZ Government** doing to help NZ contain the spread of the virus and deal with recovery?



Green / red indicates significantly higher / lower than previous time period

Q3. How good or poor a job is each of the following doing to help your country contain the spread of the virus and deal with recovery?  
 Base: total sample

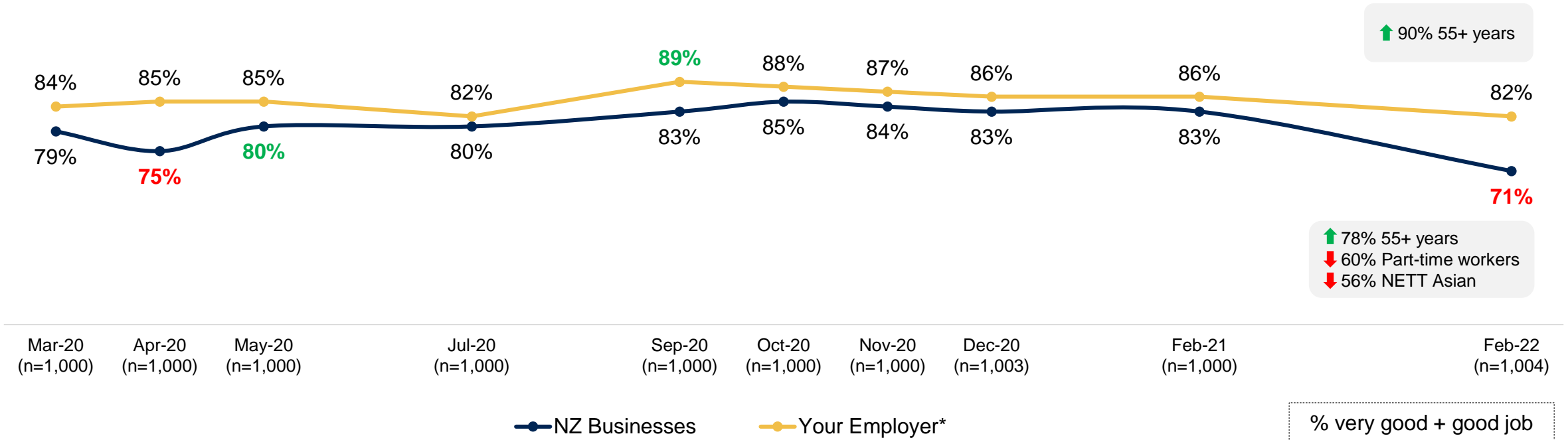
% very good + good job



# COVID-19 – PERCEPTION OF NZ BUSINESS' & EMPLOYER'S PERFORMANCE

Perceptions of NZ businesses' performance in helping contain the spread of the virus and deal with recovery has also reached a historical low. However ratings of their own employer remain high.

How good a job are **NZ businesses** and **your employer** doing to help NZ contain the spread of the virus and deal with recovery?



Q3. How good or poor a job is each of the following doing to help your country contain the spread of the virus and deal with recovery?

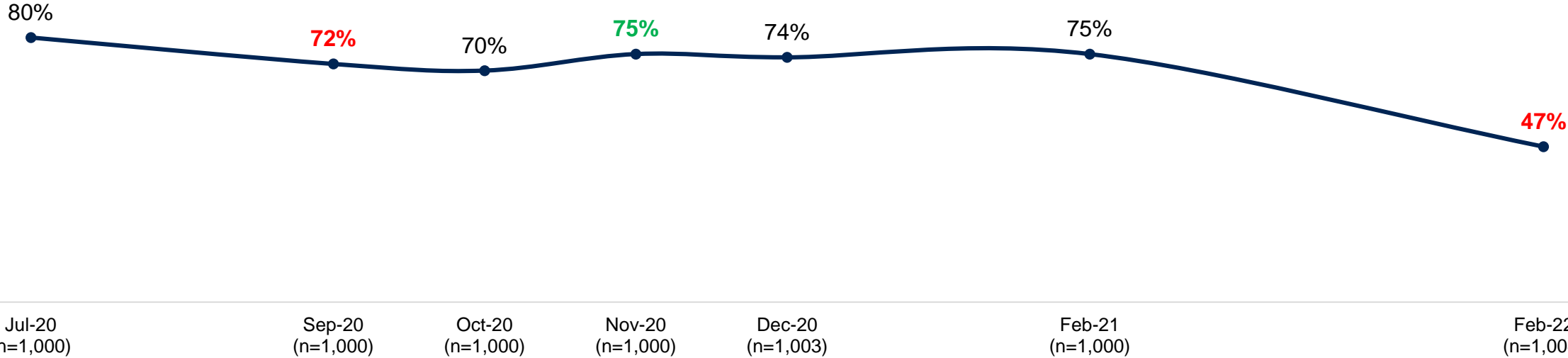
Base: total sample. \*Note: asked only to those who are employed: Mar-20 (n=628), Apr-20 (n=597), May-20 (n=593), Jul-20 (n=595), Sep-20 (n=566), Oct-20 (n=566), Nov-20 (n=592), Dec-20 (n=546), Feb-21 (n=593), Feb-22 (n=578)



# COVID-19 – ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEW ZEALAND’S RESPONSE

Despite Omicron becoming more prevalent in the community and at our borders, less than half of New Zealanders want our borders to remain closed.

**We should keep the borders closed, and not allow anyone in or out until the virus is proven to be contained**



Green / red indicates significantly higher / lower than previous time period

Q5. Do you agree or disagree with the following:  
Base: total sample

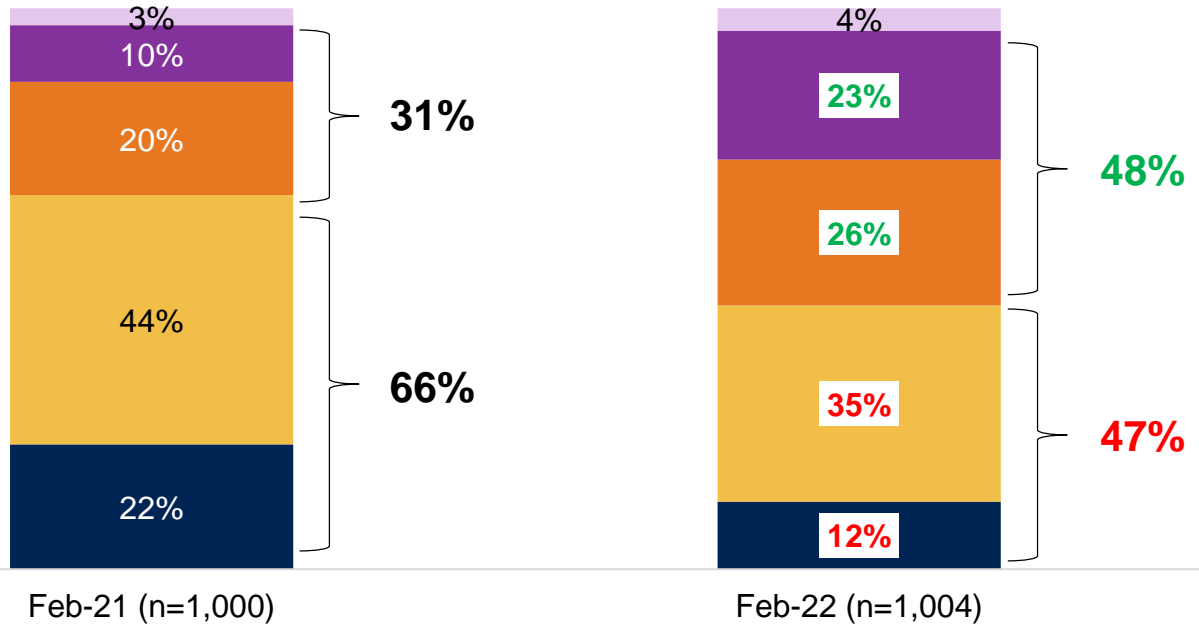
% Strongly agree +  
Somewhat agree



# COVID-19 – ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEW ZEALAND’S RESPONSE

Confidence in the management of borders had dropped significantly since this time last year, with those not feeling confident rising from 31% to nearly half (48%).

## I feel confident New Zealand borders are being managed well



## What are New Zealanders saying?

- “If NZ had shut the borders properly in the first instant we wouldn't have any problems. Now Government has let in virus but not the workers [or their families]. It is too late to make much difference. The red light should let NZ be open within 21 days; either in government facility or at home with monitoring bracelet or similar.”*

**Female, 55+ years, Bay of Plenty**
- “Strong controls at borders and higher penalties for transgressing any restrictions.”*

**Male, 55+ years, Northland**
- “Close the borders to everybody but NZ citizens.”*

**Male, 35–54 years, Wellington**
- “Open the borders and we just need to live and catch up on the rest of the world.”*

**Female, 55+ years, Canterbury**

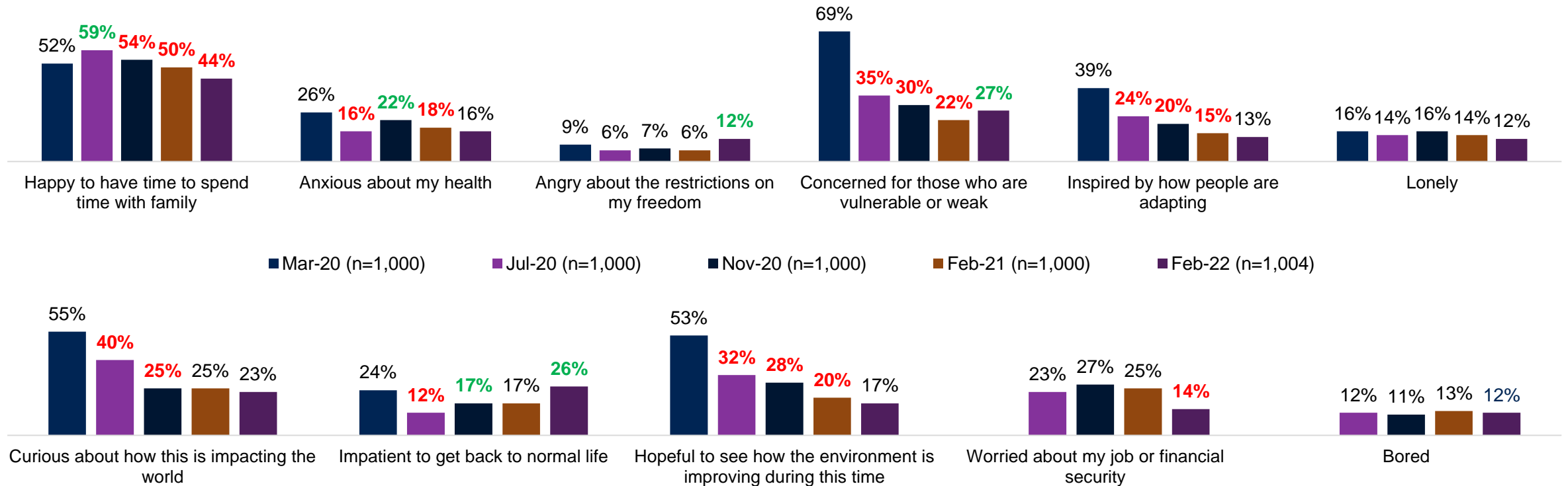
Q5. Do you agree or disagree with the following:  
Base: total sample

Green / red indicates significantly higher / lower than previous time period

# COVID-19 – CURRENT MOOD

Over a quarter of New Zealanders are feeling impatient to get back to normal life, with a similar level feeling concerned about vulnerable people. The novelty factor of the virus driving feelings being happy to spend more time with family, being curious about how the virus affects the world, feeling inspired from adaption and hopefulness around environmental are steadily decreasing. There is also less concern about jobs and security than in the earlier days of the pandemic.

## Which best describes how you are feeling today?

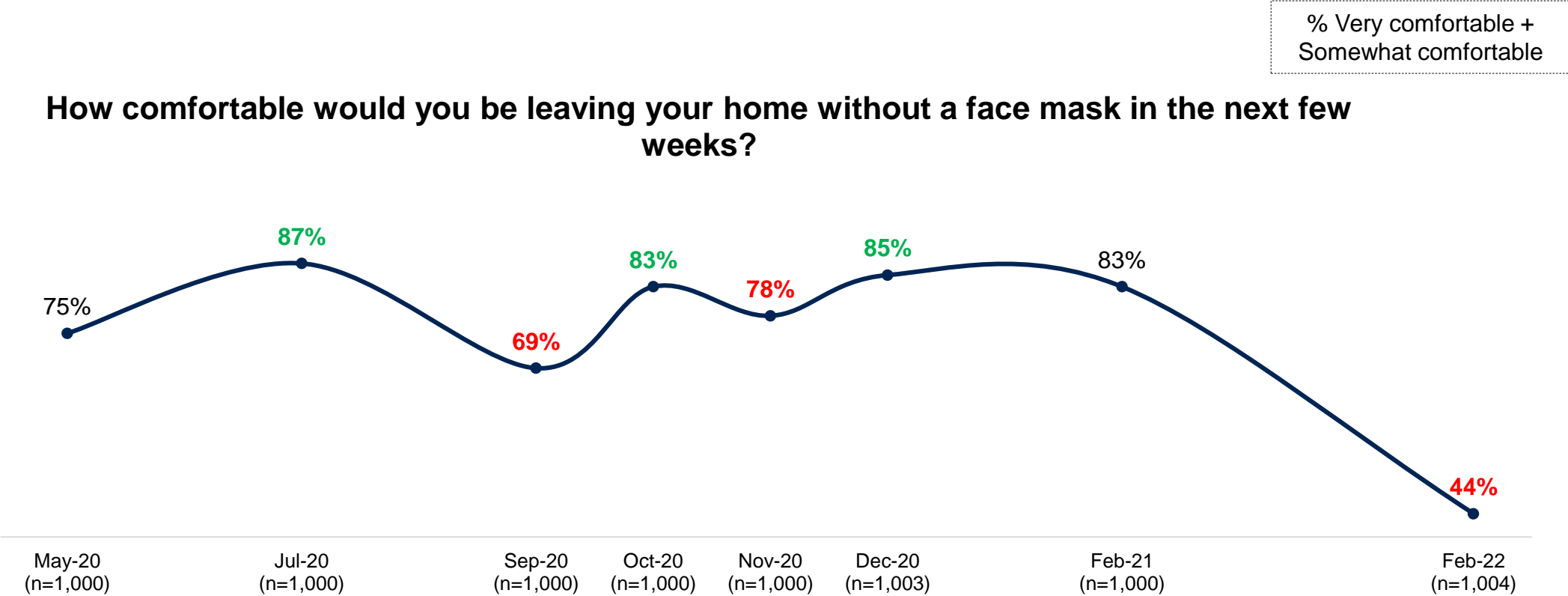


Q23A. Which best describes how you are feeling today?

Base: total sample

# COVID-19 – COMFORT LEAVING HOME WITHOUT A MASK

New Zealanders' level of comfort with leaving home without a face mask has dropped significantly since the arrival of Omicron.



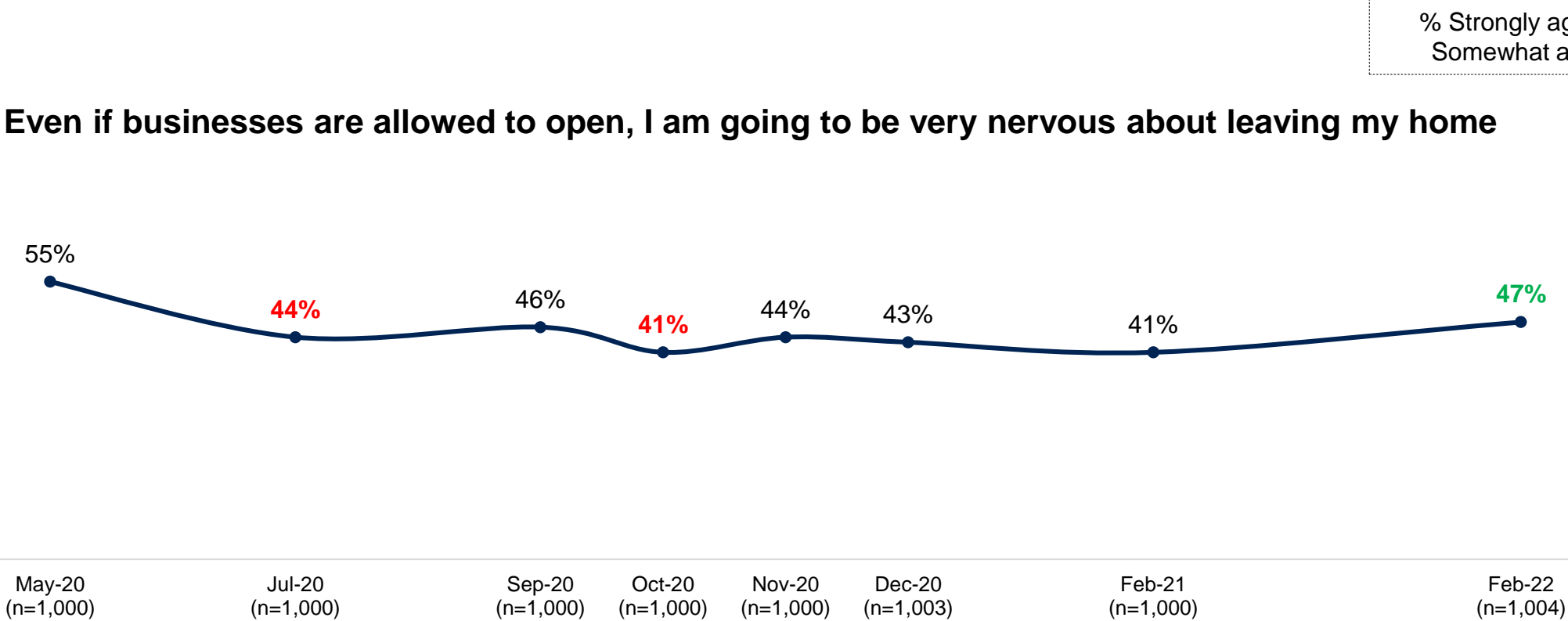
Green / red indicates significantly higher / lower than previous time period

19NEW. How comfortable would you be leaving your home without a face mask in the next few weeks?  
Base: total sample



# COVID-19 – ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEW ZEALAND’S RESPONSE

There has been a small increase in the number of people who are nervous about leaving their home since Omicron has arrived, however this is still lower than when COVID-19 first peaked in early 2020.



Q5. Do you agree or disagree with the following:  
Base: total sample



Green / red indicates significantly higher / lower than previous time period

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# GAME CHANGERS

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**You act better when you are sure.**

**THANK  
YOU**

**GAME CHANGERS**

