



What people think,  
feel and do

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# The Political Report

## 13th May 2020



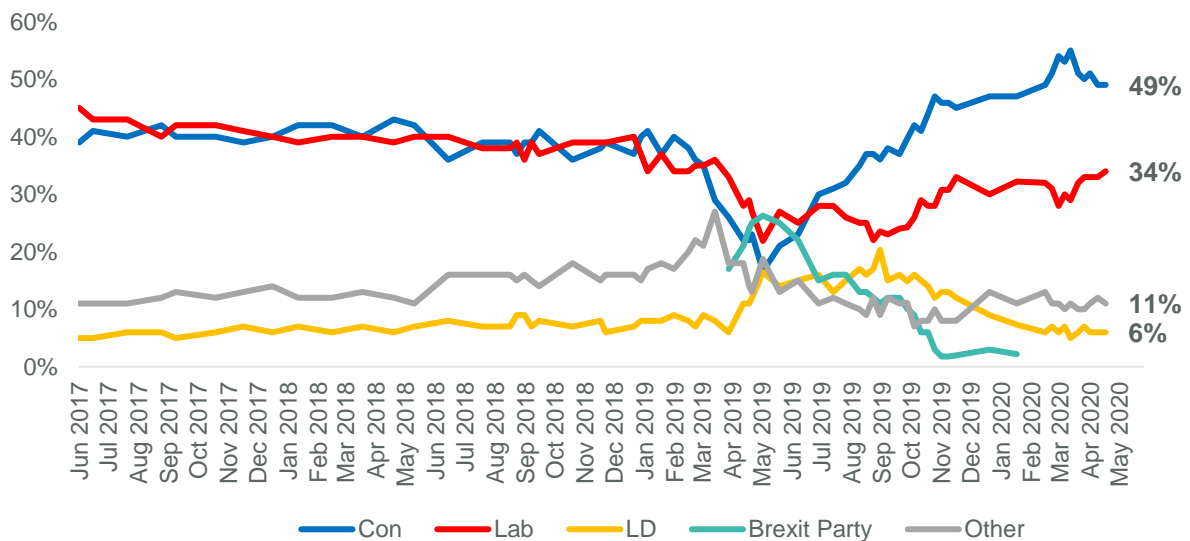
From the Opinium/Observer polling series

13<sup>th</sup> May 2020

# One-minute takeaway

- Government approval on coronavirus has plummeted 9 percentage points, with net approval now in minus numbers for the first time since the crisis began.
- Confidence in the UK governments ability to handle the crisis has also taken a significant hit, also dropping 9 percentage points.
- The majority of the public could correctly identify the advice given by the government going outside and exercising and meeting with friends and family, although only 51% could identify the correct advice for returning to work.
- Only 44% of the English public think that the new slogan of Stay Alert > Control the virus > Save lives is clear.
- Only 31% were able to correctly identify that the UK currently is on level 4 of the Covid Alert System
- Over half of the public (56%) are not clear on how many people they can meet from outside their household when outdoors
- As Johnson’s rally-around-the-flag effect dissipates, Starmer gradually wins over the undecided
- Significant numbers will not feel comfortable using public transport when lockdown is lifted, but there looks to be little change in travelling behaviour

Voting intention since the 2017 general election

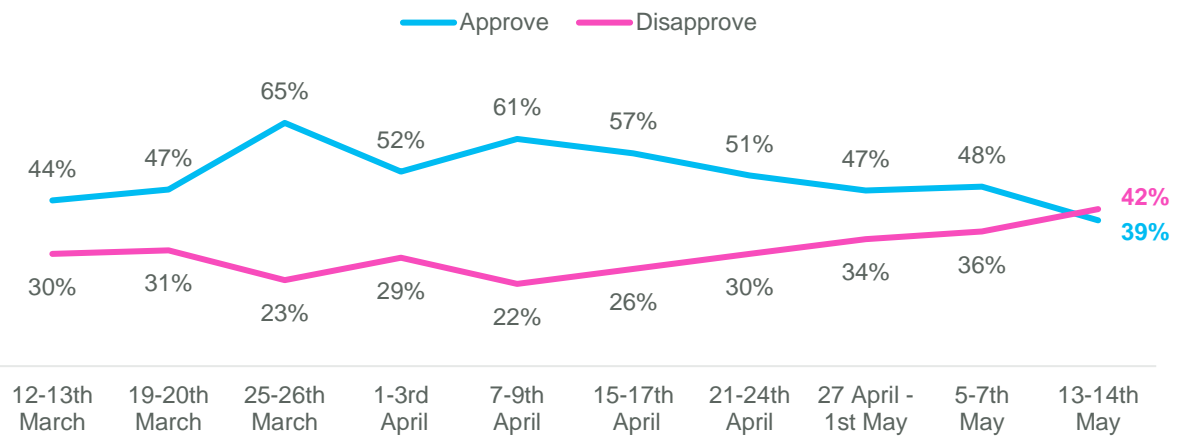


# The government's crisis response

## Net approval of the governments handling of the crisis is now negative

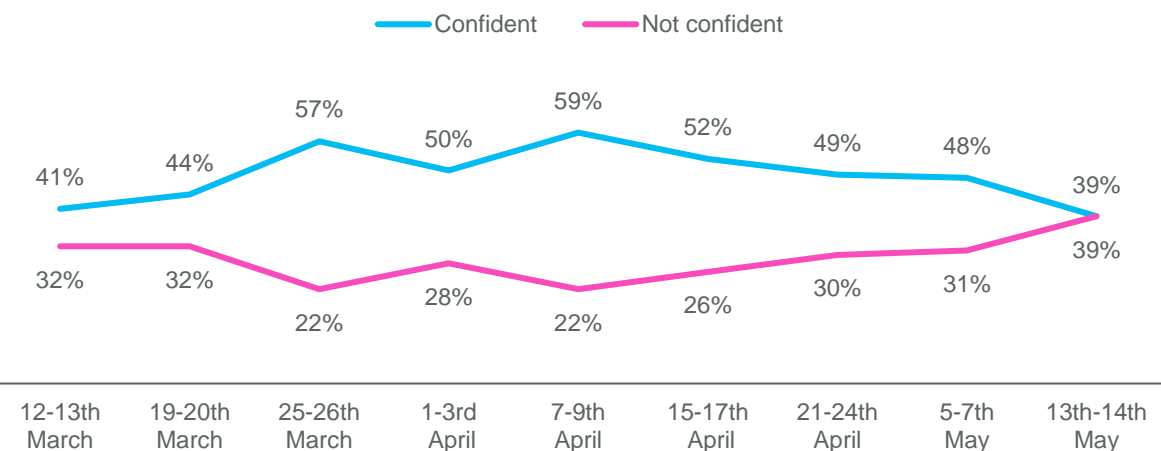
Approval of the government's handling of the situation has plummeted 9 points, resulting in a net approval dropping from +11% to -3%. This is the first time these approval ratings are in negative territory.

**Approval of government's handling of the crisis**



Confidence in the government's ability to handle the crisis has also dropped 9 points and is now at its lowest point so far. This is a drop from a net +16% confidence rating to a net 0%.

**Confidence in the government's ability to handle the Coronavirus situation**



Meanwhile, 35% approve of Keir Starmer and the Labour Party's response to the government handling of the Coronavirus pandemic, while 20% disapprove, and a third (33%) are neutral.

## Clarity of new advice

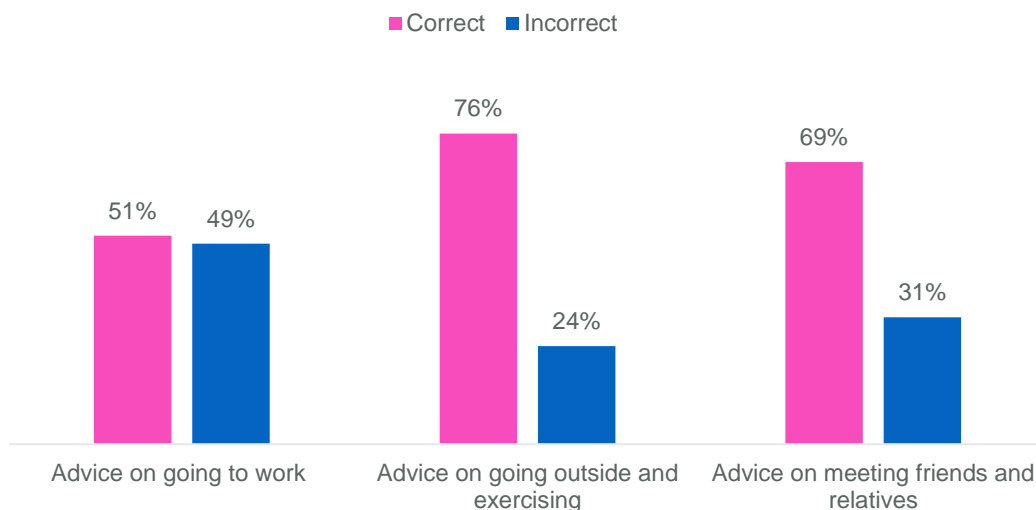
On Sunday 10<sup>th</sup>, Boris Johnson unveiled a 'conditional plan' to reopen society, which included a number of announcements:

- People who could not work from home should return to the workplace - but avoid public transport.
- A new Covid Alert System with five levels would govern how quickly lockdown restrictions could be eased.
- The next step "at the earliest by 1 June" would be for some primary pupils to return to school in England.
- This stage would also involve reopening shops - but Johnson cautioned this would only happen if supported by science.
- The next step could see some hospitality businesses and other public places reopen - "if the numbers support it" - but not earlier than 1 July.

(Source: BBC)

We tested some announcements to understand whether the English public could correctly identify what the government advice was on working, going outside and exercising and meeting with friends and family. To do so, we gave 3 incorrect options, and 1 correct and asked people to select which one they thought the latest advice was.

### Identification of the latest government advice

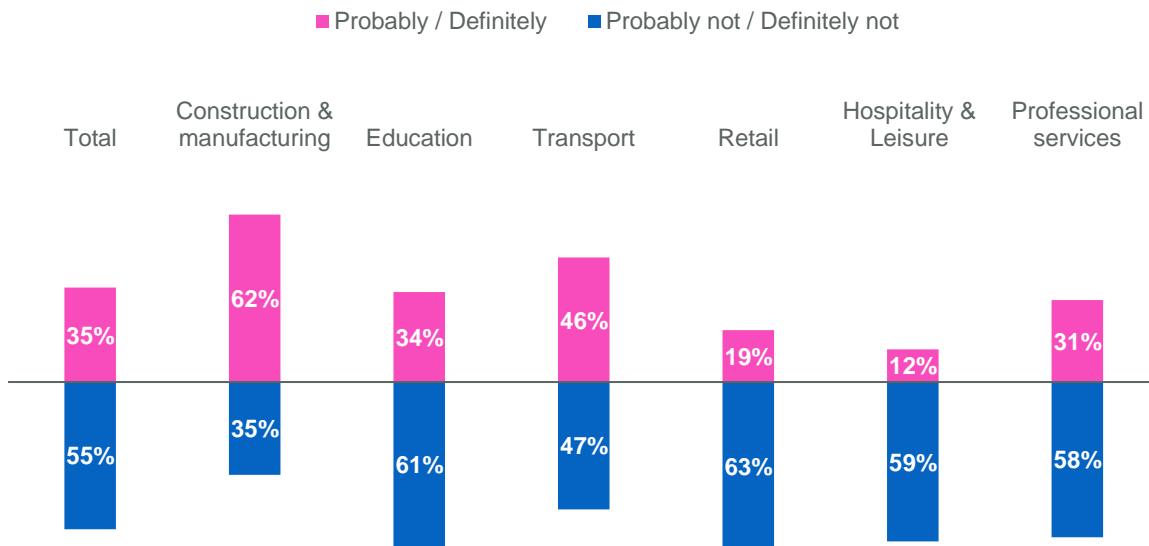


Although the majority of the English public could identify the correct advice given on going outside, exercising and meeting friends and relatives, one of the primary messages of the speech on going back to work is far more muddled in the minds of the public.

Whilst 51% of the English public correctly identified the advice to be “Where employees cannot work from home, they should look to go back to work. Non-essential retail, restaurants, pubs, bars, gyms and leisure centres will remain closed though.”, almost a third (32%) currently believe the advice to be “All employees should work from home where possible and, if not, are allowed to go to work but should take necessary steps to keep themselves safe.”.

The confusion around this messaging becomes even more apparent when looking at whether workers in different industries think that they have been actively encouraged to return to work. Whilst Johnson mentioned the construction and manufacturing industry, many in other industries, including almost a third of professional services workers, believe this statement to be applicable to them.

### Do you think that Johnson's statement that "those who can't work from home should be actively encouraged to do so" applies to you?



17% of workers (including those furloughed) have been asked by their employers to come back into work after Johnson’s announcement on Sunday, although 2% of these have refused to go back into their workplace. Reassuringly for those who have been asked to go back however, is that confidence in both travel and their workplace being COVID-secure (i.e. measures are in place to prevent the spread of Coronavirus) is high. As of this week, 68% of workers who have been asked to return are confident that their workplace is COVID-secure, and 65% are confident that their journey into work will be COVID-secure.

### The new slogan and COVID alert system

During the announcement, the prime minister introduced both a new slogan and Covid Alert System to the public, however there are doubts from the public around how clear and useful these are.

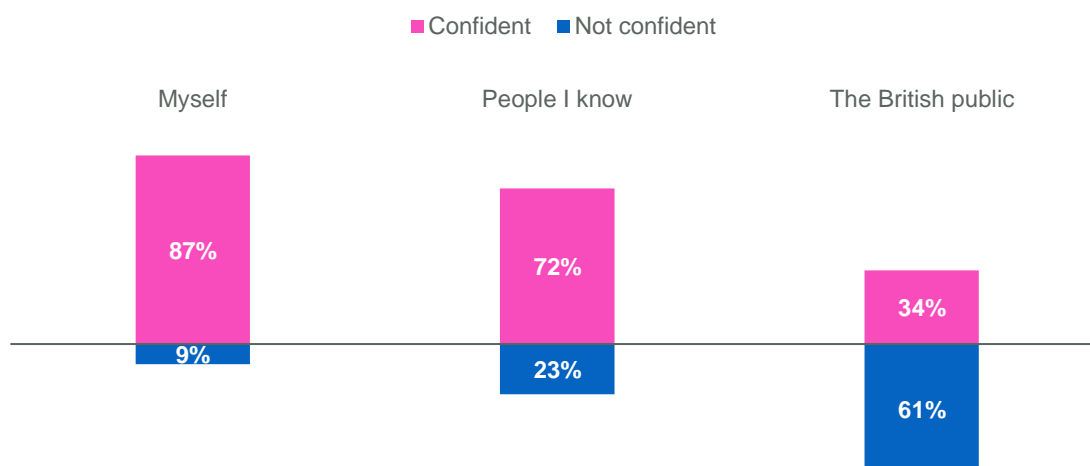
Only 44% of the English public think that the new slogan of Stay Alert > Control the virus > Save lives is clear, with the majority (53%) claiming that it unclear.

Turning to the Covid Alert System, whilst the majority of British adults think it useful (55%), almost 4-in-10 disagree, and claim it to not be useful (39%). Additionally, when asked to select where the UK is currently on the scale, only 31% were able to correctly identify that we are currently on level 4. Worryingly for the government, one in five (19%) think we are level 3 or below.

## Trust in other people is low

Despite almost 7-in-10 being able to correctly identify the right advice on meeting friends and relatives, only 56% say that they are clear on how many people they can meet from outside their household when outdoors. This lack of clarity extends further to other people, who many have less confidence in using their common sense when meeting relatives.

### How much confidence do you have in the following to use common sense when it comes to meeting relatives outside their household?



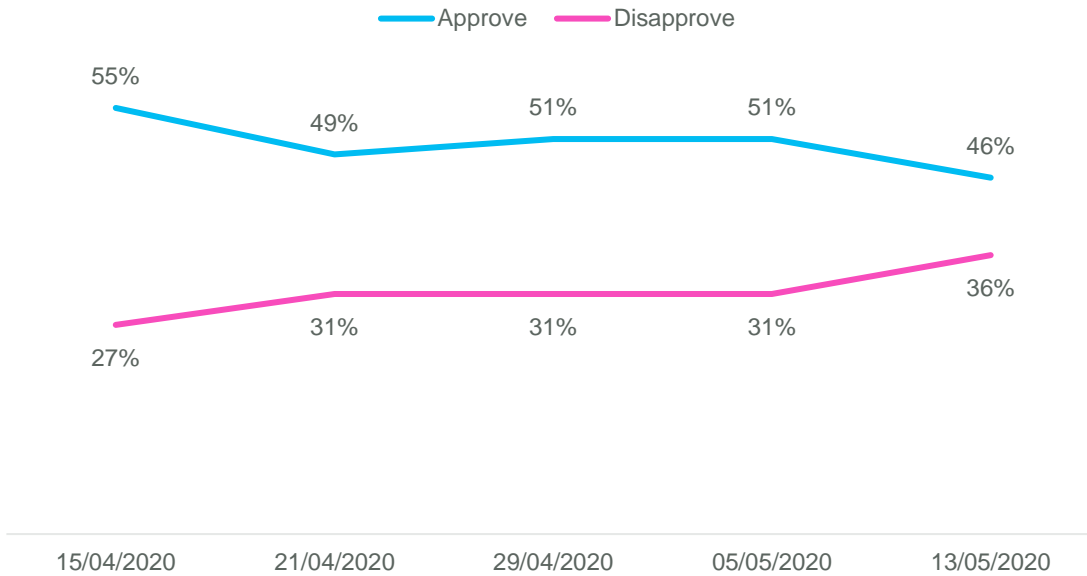
## Starmer vs. Johnson

### As Johnson's rally-around-the-flag effect dissipates, Starmer gradually wins over the undecided

When the coronavirus crisis first began Boris Johnson was in the midst of his post-election honeymoon and the rally in approval ratings that all leaders in the democratic world experienced saw his ratings move to a record positive.

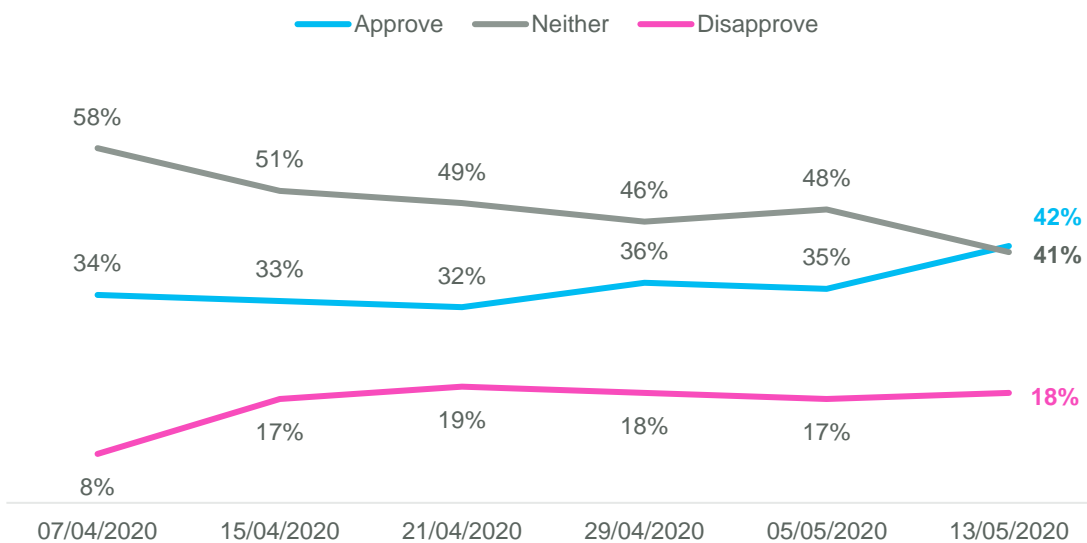
At the beginning of April, just before he was hospitalised with coronavirus, the prime minister's approval rating stood at 51% vs. 26% who disapproved. After rallying briefly after his recovery, the gap between approval and disapproval has narrowed slightly.

### Boris Johnson's approval rating since leaving hospital



Keir Starmer became Labour leader on 4<sup>th</sup> April and, understandably, most voters did not have a strong opinion about him. Since then however we have seen the number selecting “neither approve nor disapprove” steadily drift downward while the numbers approving or disapproving have increased. Now for the first time, the proportion approving of the Labour leader’s performance outnumbers those who have yet to make up their minds and the ratio of approvers to disapprovers has remained broadly constant. Although Opinium only started tracking approval ratings in 2012, this is a more positive picture than either of Starmer’s predecessors was able to point to.

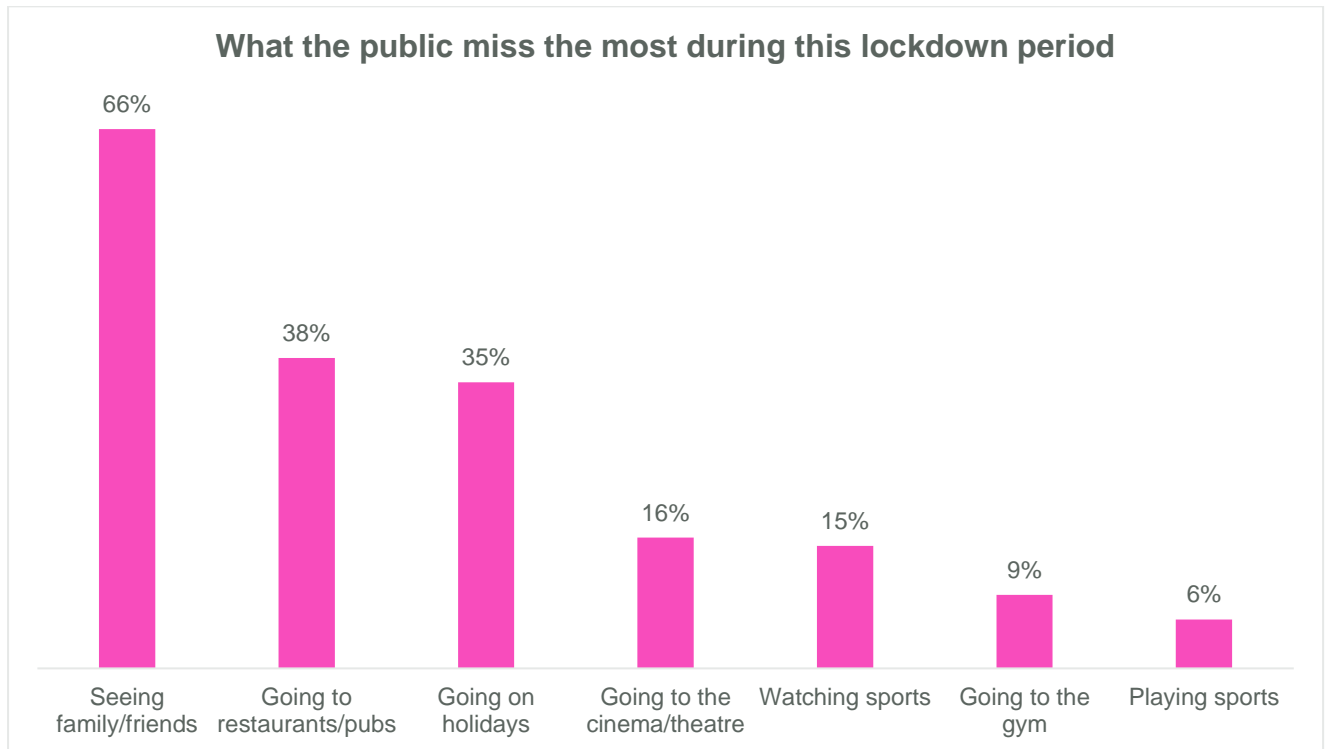
### Keir Starmer's approval rating since becoming Labour leader



# Lockdown

## With holidays looking unlikely for a while, a third are missing vacations the most during lockdown

With lockdown extended further, there are many things that the public are missing during this period. Unsurprisingly, first and foremost people are missing seeing their friends and family (66%), although there is a little reprieve now with the allowance of meeting one member outside your household during this next phase of the lockdown. Almost two in five (38%) are missing being able to go to restaurants and pubs, which do not look like they will open until after June. Holidays look even further out of the picture- a third (35%) are missing going on holiday.



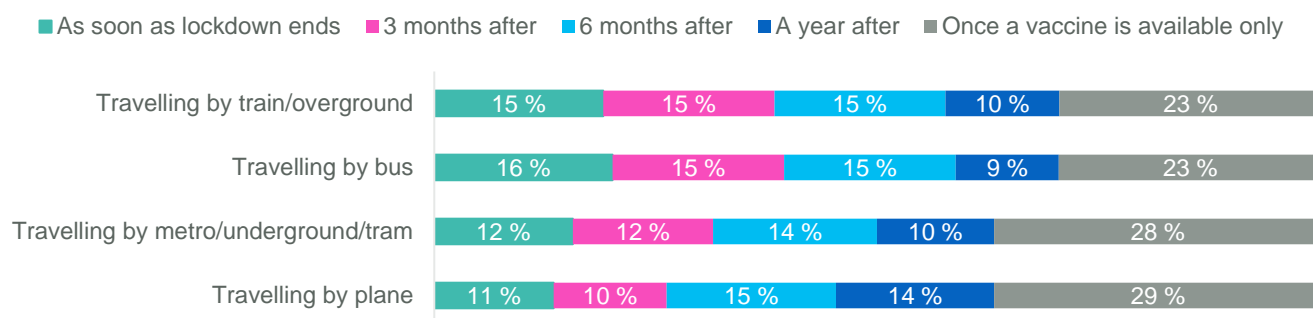


# Transport

Whilst many will not feel comfortable using public transport when lockdown is lifted, there looks to be little change in travelling behaviour

Once lockdown is lifted, it will take some time for the public to feel comfortable travelling by public transport again. Only one in seven would feel comfortable travelling by train/overground or bus (15% and 16% respectively) which falls further to 12% feeling comfortable immediately travelling by metro/underground and 11% for travelling by plane. There are also a significant number of people (one in four or more) who would not feel comfortable using any of these forms of public transport again until a vaccine is available.

### Assuming that the lockdown ends before a vaccine is available, how soon after would you feel comfortable travelling by the following?

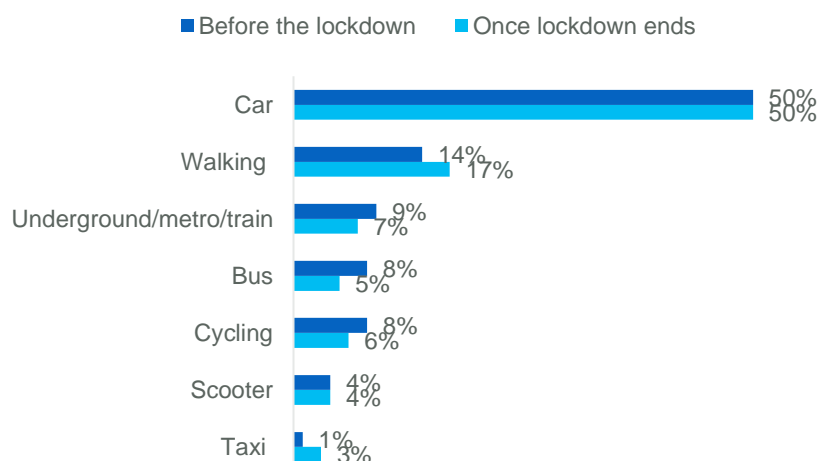


However, the impact of comfort levels on changes in travel behaviour look to be limited, likely reflecting a lack of alternatives for many. Of those who are working (including those who are furloughed), 16% primarily used public transport to get to work before the lockdown, and this will reduce slightly to 12% once they go back to work.

The proportion saying they will walk has increased from 14% before lockdown, to 17% once they go to work

In London, 30% of workers before lockdown said underground/metro was their primary form of travel to work. It looks like there could be a slight

### How did you get to work before the lockdown, and how do you think you'll primarily get to work once you do go back?



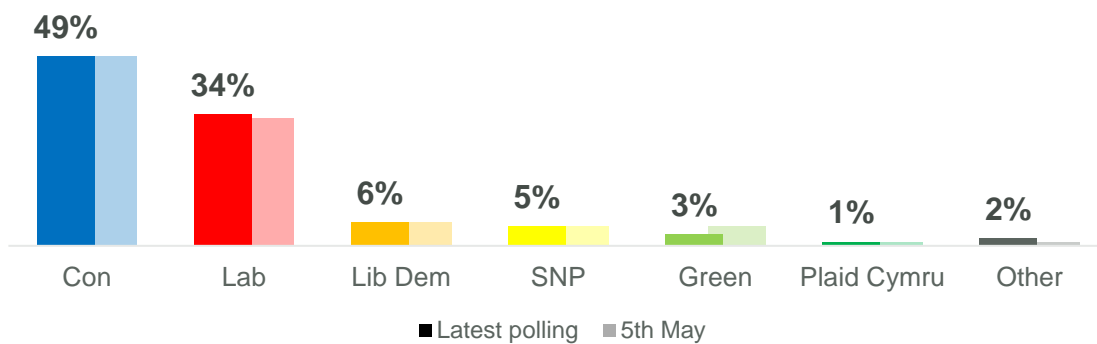
decrease in numbers using the tube once back at work, with 23% saying they will continue to use the tube once they go back

In line with the above, few people have bought alternative forms of transport. 6% of UK adults have or intend to purchase a bike because of Coronavirus, rising to 11% of Londoners.

## Headline voting intention

### Conservatives maintain strong lead in the polls

The Conservatives are on half of the GB vote share, on 49%, steady from last week. Meanwhile, Labour has increased 1 point to 34% of the vote.



# About Opinium

**OPINIUM** is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people **think, feel** and **do**. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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