The Political Report

9th September 2020

From the Opinium/Observer polling series

11th September 2020
One-minute takeaway

- The Conservatives lead returns to three points, 42% to 39% for Labour. Boris Johnson’s approval rating remains negative (net rating of -7% compared to -8% in late August) while Keir Starmer has recovered from his temporary dip, returning to +20% approval.

- “Health / NHS” remains the most important issue (59%) but “European Union and Brexit” has risen from 39% in August to 46% now, overtaking the “Economy” which is on 45%.

- The proportion saying the UK is coming out of lockdown too fast has risen from 45% to 51% while the proportion saying “at the right speed” has dropped from 31% to 24%.

- 81% expect a second outbreak of coronavirus later on this year vs. 12% saying it is unlikely. 66% support the “rule of six” restrictions coming into play on the 14th September.

- 42% disapprove of the way Boris Johnson is handling Brexit and 32% approve. Keir Starmer’s numbers are neutral with 28% approving and 26% disapproving with 32% neutral.

- 33% say that the government’s proposal to breach international law is acceptable vs. 46% saying it is unacceptable. Among Leave voters, 45% say “acceptable” and 31% “unacceptable”.

- 52% believe the UK is likely to leave the transition period without a trade deal. 50% believe this would be bad for the economy but only 27% believe it would be bad for their personal financial situation.

Voting intention since the 2019 general election

Fieldwork 9th to 11th September 2020 | The Political Report | 9th September 2020 | 1
Headline voting intention

The Tory lead returns

The Conservatives have a 3 point lead after the two parties were tied in the last poll on 40%. Given natural sample variation, this suggests that the “true” figure remains a tiny Conservative lead with poll results coming in within a confidence interval of that.

The Lib Dems remain becalmed on 6% while the Greens have risen to 4%.
Covid-19 crisis

Net approval remains negative and static

Approval/disapproval remains static with a net rating of -17%.

Riding that second wave

As the R-rate climbs back above 1, 51% believe we are coming out of lockdown too fast, up from 45% in August. The proportion saying we are coming out at the right speed has dropped from 31% to 24% over the same period.

81% of UK adults say it is quite likely (41%) or very likely (40%) that there will be a second outbreak of coronavirus later on this year vs. just 12% saying it is unlikely. This is uniform across party supporters and only varies slightly by age group with 19% of 18-34s saying it is unlikely vs. just 6% of those aged 65+.

The joy of six

In the latest iteration of a consistent trend throughout the coronavirus crisis of Britons supporting any and all lockdown measures, 66% say that they support the change in the law to make gatherings of more than 6 people illegal from the 14th of September.

This is highest among Conservative voters (79%) and even among Remainers and Leavers (74% and 72% respectively).

The only age group even close to being opposed are again 18-34 year olds where 49% support it, 20% oppose it and 22% are neutral.

56% say the guidance on this is clear vs. 38% saying it is unclear.
Leadership ratings

Starmer recovers while Johnson stays still

Boris Johnson’s approval rating remains statistically unchanged with a net rating of -7%, up from -8% last time. To be tediously technical, while 38% minus 44% is -6%, the actual figures are 37.78% approve vs. 44.35% disapprove, giving us -6.57%.

Although Starmer’s net approval (+14) remains much stronger than Johnson’s his approval has slipped to it’s lowest since early May at 38%. Those who neither approve nor disapprove has risen to the same figure (38%).

Keir Starmer has recovered from his momentary dip in our last poll in which his approval rating dropped below 40% for the first time since April. The Labour leader’s net rating is +20%.
On the question of who would be the best prime minister, Johnson and Starmer remain, again, close with 33% choosing the incumbent, 32% choosing the Labour leader and 21% answering “none of these”.

**Brexit returns**

**Leave voters split on whether it’s acceptable to break international law**

Among all adults, 33% say that the UK reneging on commitments made in the withdrawal agreement would be acceptable while 46% say it would be unacceptable. While Leave voters are more likely to approve than disapprove, they are split with 45% saying ‘acceptable’ and 31% saying ‘unacceptable’.

The exact text of what was shown to participants is below:

*The UK and EU signed a “withdrawal agreement” treaty which committed both sides to certain obligations. By doing so, these things became international law.*

*The UK government now wants to change some things in that treaty by passing a UK law that would contradict the treaty they signed.*

*This would make any divergence from the treaty legal under UK law but illegal under international law. Is this generally acceptable or unacceptable to you?*

**44% say stay with Europe, 40% say sail away**

In an update of our “preferred Brexit outcomes” question, the options have changed from “remain in the EU”, “supportive of a Brexit where the UK is closely aligned with the EU” and “supportive of a Brexit where there is a clear break from the EU” to the following options.

These were shown as a “which would you prefer” question first. We then asked those who **did not select** each option whether that would be acceptable or unacceptable to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>% SAYING THIS IS THEIR PREFERRED OUTCOME</th>
<th>% OF THOSE NOT PREFERING IT WHO WOULD FIND IT ACCEPTABLE</th>
<th>TOTAL WHO PREFER IT OR FIND IT ACCEPTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asking to re-join the EU</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A trade deal where the UK is closely aligned with the EU</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>59%</td>
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</table>
A trade deal where the UK has a clear break from the EU  
26%  39%  55%

Ending the transition period without a trade deal  
15%  32%  42%

Don’t know  
16%  -  

Overall, leaving the transition period without a trade deal was the least acceptable option with 42% of UK adults preferring it or finding it acceptable. Only 15% chose it as their first choice. Re-joining the EU, while the most popular first preference, is only the third most popular final option as most who did not choose it find it unacceptable.

A trade deal where the UK remains closely aligned with the EU is the most popular and most acceptable option, followed by a trade deal where the UK has a clear break from the EU.

**Mixed views on what to do if there is no deal by December but a clear view of what Johnson wants**

When asked what should happen if December 31\textsuperscript{st} comes around and no deal has been reached, the most popular individual answer is to leave without a deal (34%), followed by cancelling Brexit and requesting to re-join the EU (27%) and extending the transition period (24%).

We then asked what people think individual leaders want to happen in this situation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT YOU WANT TO HAPPEN?</th>
<th>WHAT DO YOU THINK BORIS JOHNSON WANTS TO HAPPEN?</th>
<th>WHAT DO YOU THINK KEIR STARMER WANTS TO HAPPEN?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave the single market and customs union on December 31\textsuperscript{st} even if it means leaving with no trade deal</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend the transition period until we can negotiate a deal that is acceptable to both sides</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancel Brexit and request to re-join the European Union after all</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While Boris Johnson’s preference is apparently extremely clear, Keir Starmer has so far avoided being seen by voters as a committed re-joiner with only 23% believing he wants to re-join the EU. However, 31% saying they do not know what he would want to happen in this situation speaks to his relative silence on the issue.

No deal: bad for the economy, not so bad for me

50% of UK adults say leaving without a trade deal with the EU would be bad for the economy with 19% saying it would be good.

However, only 27% say this would be bad for their personal finances and 18% good. 46% say neither, seeing little connection between the macro economic picture and their household situation.

On other measures, the plurality believe no-deal would be bad rather than good:

- The UK’s international reputation (43% bad, 25% good)
- The UK’s relationship with other EU countries (46% bad, 18% good)
- The ability of UK companies to trade in the EU (45% bad, 20% good)
- The ability of UK companies to trade outside the EU (29% bad, 33% good)
- Your ability to travel to the EU (34% bad, 17% good)
About Opinium

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