



What people think,
feel and do

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The Political Report

16th December 2020



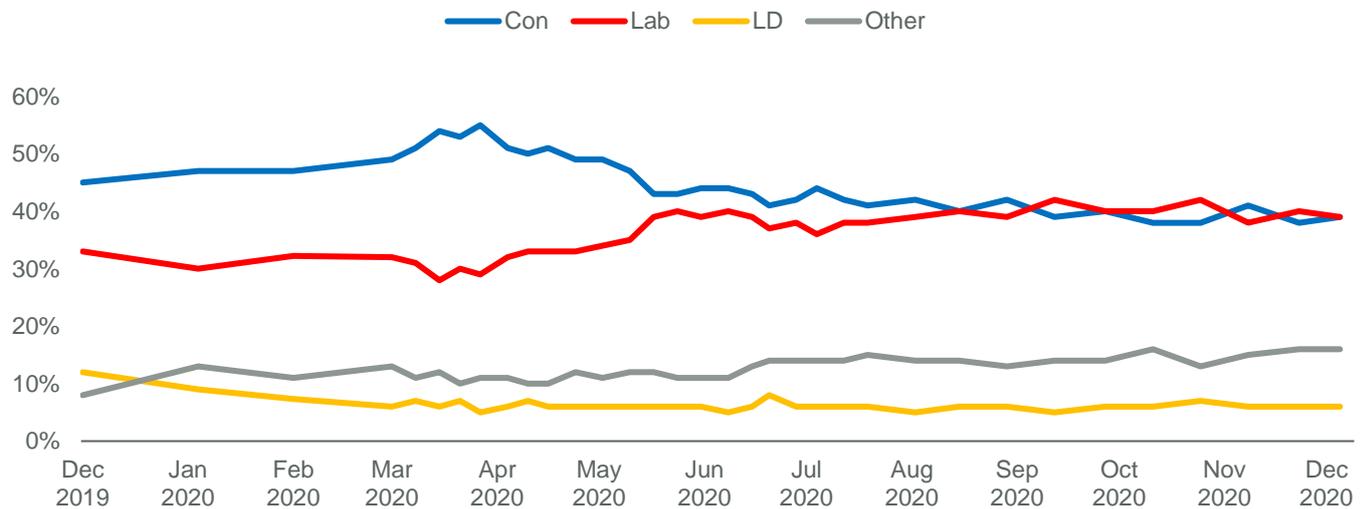
From the Opinium/Observer polling series

18th December 2020

One-minute takeaway

- Both main parties are tied on 39% each with the Lib Dems on 6%, SNP on 5% and Greens on 4%
- Boris Johnson ends the year with a -6% approval rating (38% approve, 44% disapprove). This is another slight increase from -8% two weeks ago and -12% two weeks before that.
- Keir Starmer’s net rating is +12%, reversing some of his November drop. He went from +17 in early November to +11 then +9 so his numbers are at least stabilising.
- Mixed views on the “Christmas break” loosening of restrictions with 36% supporting the current plans and 37% opposed. 48% say the restrictions should not be eased during Christmas, 29% saying it’s about the right level and 11% thinking they should be eased even more.
- Government approval on the coronavirus situation remains net negative with more positive views of the economic support and vaccine rollout vs. negative views of PPE provision and testing
- When asked about famous incidents of politicians shedding tears in public, Theresa May and Margaret Thatcher’s displays of tears upon leaving Downing Street were more likely to evince public sympathy (39%, 35% respectively) than Matt Hancock on Good Morning Britain (17%)

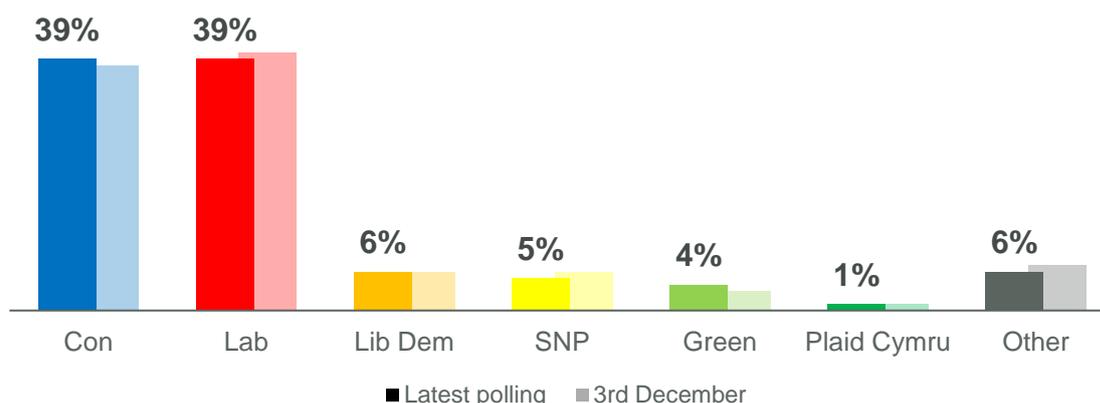
Voting intention since the 2019 general election



Headline Voting Intention

The main parties end 2020 in a dead heat

Labour have dropped a point and the Tories have gained one, changing a 2 point Labour lead into a 39% tie, continuing the pattern of the two parties being effectively tied with any leads largely the result of statistical noise and sampling variation.



Leaders' approval

Johnson inches up and Starmer stabilises

Boris Johnson's net approval rating continues to edge in a more positive direction with a net rating of -6% (38% approve of the job he is doing as prime minister while 44% disapprove). This compares to -8% in our last poll, -12% in the poll before that and -14% at the beginning of November.

The Labour leader's net approval rating is +12% (37% approve, 25% disapprove) which is an improvement on our last poll when it was +9% (35% approving and 26% disapproving) and the +11% seen in the poll before that. Nevertheless, the real change occurred in early November when his approval rating dropped from +17% and his current 37% 'raw' approval number remains lower than the 41% he had at the beginning of November.

On the question of who would make the best Prime Minister, Boris Johnson retains a small lead with 33% choosing the incumbent and 31% choosing the Labour leader.

Good marks for vaccinations so far

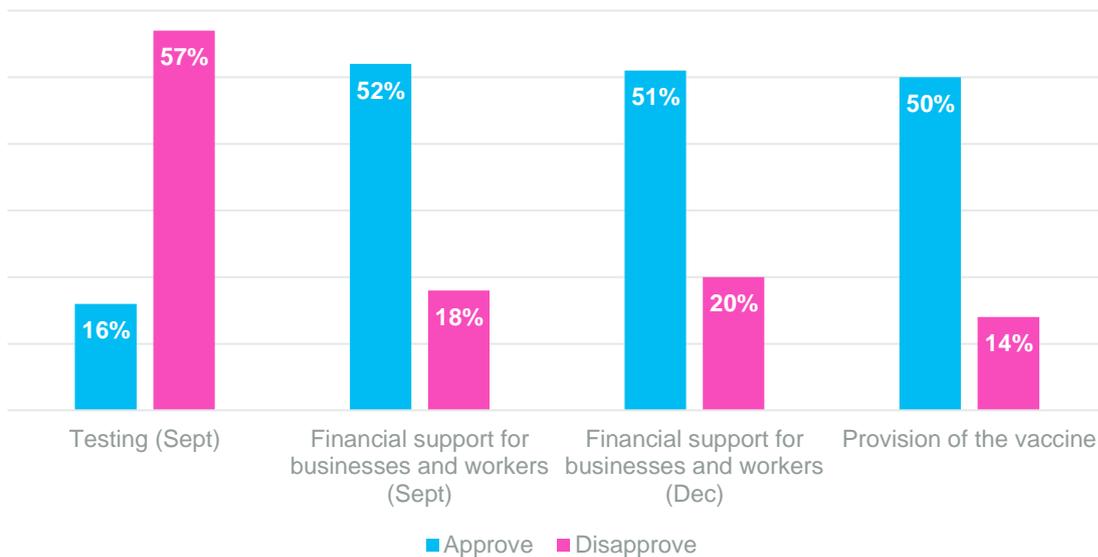
Voters currently think the government are doing a good job on the vaccine rollout

Throughout the pandemic, even when net approval of how the government was handling the crisis was hugely positive, when we asked about individual aspects of tackling the health crisis (such as PPE provision for NHS workers, testing generally or test & trace specifically), the response was much more negative. However, when we asked about how they were handling the economic crisis, views were much more positive.

While the vaccine rollout has only just begun, the government will be encouraged by the fact that the pattern of public approval for their handling of it is much closer to views of the latter than the former.

The chart below shows figures from September on testing and financial provision, and figures from this week for financial provision and handling of the vaccine rollout.

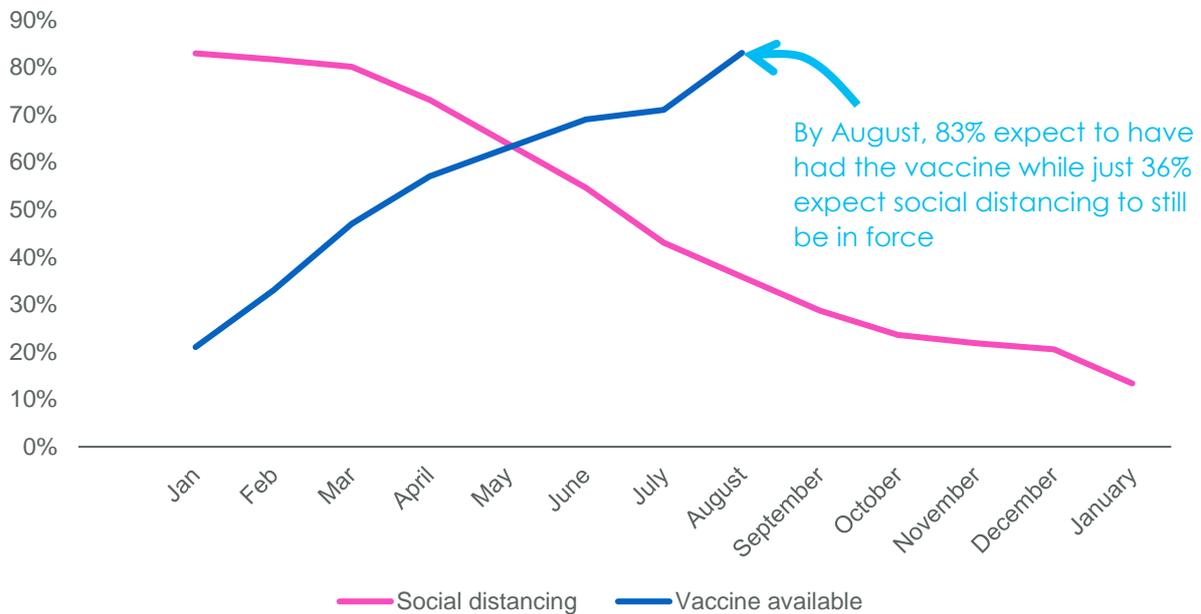
Approval for how the government has handled...



Hoping for a Covid-free summer

We asked people two questions with a date scale as the answers. The first asks how long they expect social distancing to be in place while the second asks when they expect a vaccine to be made available to 'people like you'. The chart below shows the cumulative answers, showing what proportion expect social distancing to be in place in each month and what proportion expect to have been offered the vaccine by that point:

When people expect social distancing to last until vs. when they expect to get the vaccine



“Crossover” occurs around May when 63% expect to have had the vaccine made available to them and 64% expect social distancing to still be in place.

Long-Covid effects will linger though

52% of UK adults expect high unemployment to be the long-lasting after effect from this crisis with 49% expecting tax rises and spending cuts, 36% expecting an ongoing mental health crisis and 29% expecting the collapse of the UK hospitality industry.

In a less negative light though, 42% expect many workers to continue working from home and 33% expect a general shift to spending more money in online shopping.

(Not) driving home for Christmas

Mixed views on relaxing the rules over Christmas

When we describe the way in which social distancing rules will be relaxed over Christmas (with three households being able to form a 'bubble' and restrictions on mixing in outdoor places being eased), they get a mixed response.

- 36% are supportive
- 37% are opposed
- 21% are neutral and 6% don't know

In general, more people believe the restrictions should not be eased over Christmas (48%) than should be (29% saying the current plans are 'about right') or loosened further (11%)

Adapting to a Corona-Christmas

Cancelling planned meet-ups and celebrations is the most common adaptation people have made to their Christmas plans this year.

- 26% saying they have done this
- 21% are sending Christmas cards in the post rather than delivering in person
- 18% plan to buy fewer presents
- 17% are having a family Zoom call instead of meeting in person
- 17% are eating at home when they would usually eat out
- 17% are posting presents instead of hand-delivering them

14% say they are even delaying Christmas to be rescheduled for when they are able to meet up with their loved ones again.

Cry havoc

Politicians should be able to express emotion but their motives are questioned

To try to get an idea of whether the response to Matt Hancock tearing up on Good Morning Britain in response to news of a vaccine was simply a Twitter-bubble phenomenon, we picked three other well known instances of politicians shedding tears in public and asked for public reactions to them.

The first point is that there are relatively few instances of this to choose from with our examples being Mr Hancock, Theresa May leaving Downing Street for the last time, Margaret Thatcher leaving Downing Street for the last time, and George Osborne at Margaret Thatcher's funeral.

While most had heard of the first three, only a small minority were aware of the last one.

When we asked those who had heard about each instance what their reaction was, the most common reactions to May and Thatcher were "sympathetic" (39% for May, 35% for Thatcher) and "indifferent" (23% for May, 19% for Thatcher).

In contrast, for Matt Hancock, the most common answers were "suspicious" (29%), embarrassed (20%) before "sympathetic" (16%)

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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