



What people think,
feel and do

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The Political Report

28th January 2021



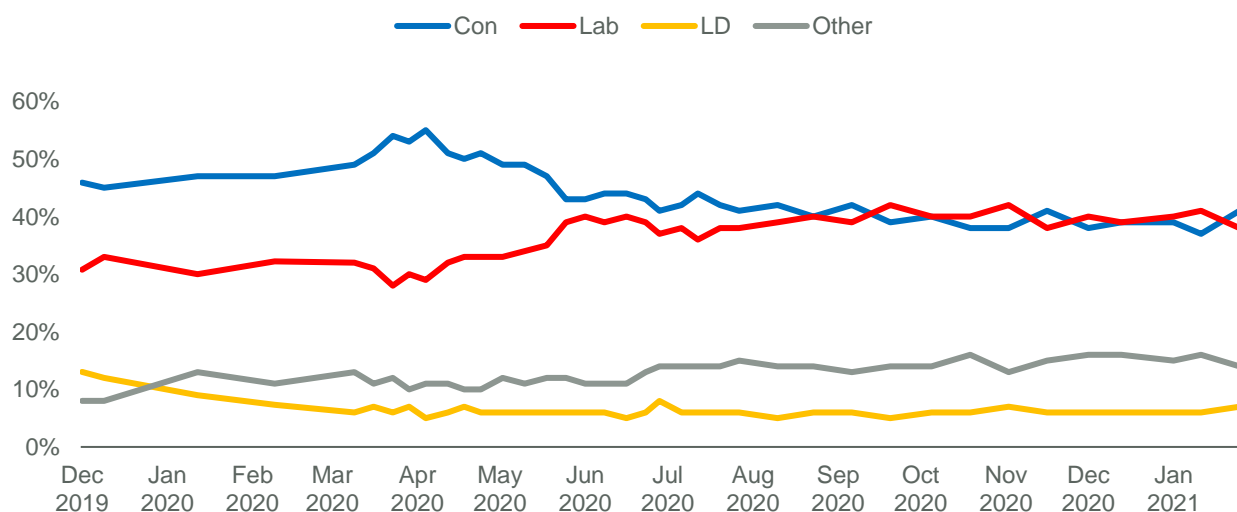
From the Opinium/Observer polling series

29th January 2020

One-minute takeaway

- The Conservatives have reversed the Labour lead from last week, pulling ahead by 3 points with the Tories on 41% to Labour's 38%.
- One explanation is that the government might be getting the anticipated vaccine boost. While net approval of their overall crisis handling hasn't moved very much, the proportion that approve of how they've handled the vaccine roll out is up to 60%, from 47% a fortnight ago.
- Another explanation is that the two parties are still statistically tied and the constant swapping of the lead is mostly down to standard sampling variation than anything concrete.
- The Conservative poll lead has appeared in the same week that the UK had reached the terrible mark of 100,000 deaths. An explanation for why this has not damaged their poll rating could be that despite their poor decision making, 54% still think the government generally followed the scientific advice.
- This is despite two thirds (68%) agreeing that government should have done more to stop the spread of Coronavirus and 61% believing the government had the information available to make better decisions.
- When asked what aspects of the crisis the government has handled worst, the public are more likely to point to poor decision making on restrictions such as lockdown (42%) and travel restriction (40%) rather than directly failing to minimise loss of life (28%).
- Perceptions of UK handling of the crisis in relation to other European countries remains much improved on the summer. However, perceptions of the UK's Covid handling in relation to countries outside Europe has deteriorated in the past fortnight.
- 82% would get the vaccine if they were offered one, while 12% would not.
- Just over half (54%) back including teachers on a list of priority occupations for the vaccine, including 53% of 2019 Conservative voters.

Voting intention since the 2019 general election

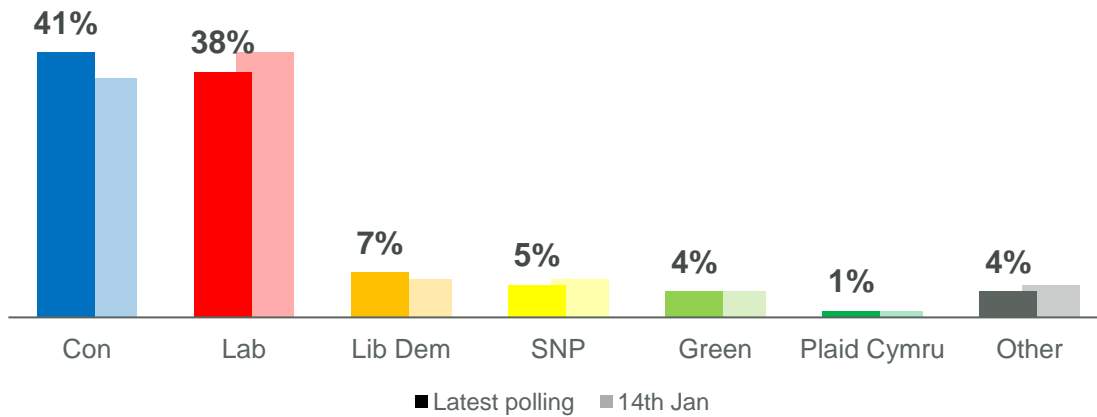


Headline Voting Intention

Conservatives back in the lead

The Conservatives have reversed Labour's lead from a fortnight ago to pull ahead by 3 points.

The Conservatives are now on 41% (up 4 points from two weeks ago), while Labour are on 38% (down 3 points). The Lib Dems are on 7%, their highest since early November.



Leaders' approval

Johnson recovers while Starmer stands still

Boris Johnson has recovered from his record low approval ratings from our last poll, with 38% now approving of how he is doing his job (up from 34%) and 46% disapproving (down from 49%). This gives the prime minister a net approval rating of -8%, up from -11% a fortnight ago.

Meanwhile, Keir Starmer has seen his ratings remain relatively stable. In total, 36% now approve of the job he is doing (-1), with 27% disapproving (no change). This gives the Labour leader a net approval rating of +9%, down from +10% a fortnight ago.

Party leaders also swap places on 'best PM' question

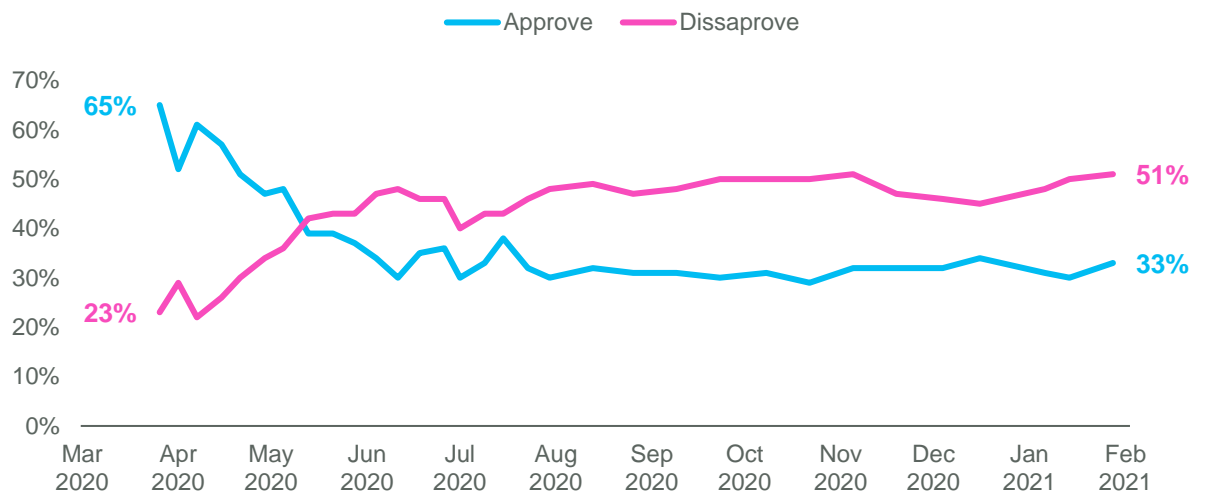
Boris Johnson has narrowly returned to the lead on who would be the best prime minister: 33% now select Johnson (+3) while 29% think Keir Starmer would make the best PM (-3). Meanwhile 25% said neither and 13% said they don't know.

The rights and wrongs of Covid

Overall approval of government handling still low, but many can still see positive aspects

Approval of the government’s Covid handling is up very slightly on last week, now at a net approval of -18% (51% disapprove, 33% approve) compared to -20% a fortnight ago (50% disapprove, vs 30% approve).

Approval of the governments handling of Coronavirus



This is in the context of two thirds (68%) agreeing that government should have done more to stop the spread of Coronavirus (25% believe they did ‘all they reasonably could’) and 61% believing the government had the information available to make better decisions (28% believe they made “the best decisions based on the information available to them at the time”). On the other side, 56% think the government generally did follow the scientific advice, 34% believe they generally did not.

Similarly those that disapprove of the government are evenly divided in their critique of the government: 48% of those that disapprove think the government has failed to handle any aspect well, while just over half (52%) of that group think there are aspects that the government has succeeded in doing relatively well, usually in relation to the vaccine or financial support for individuals and businesses.

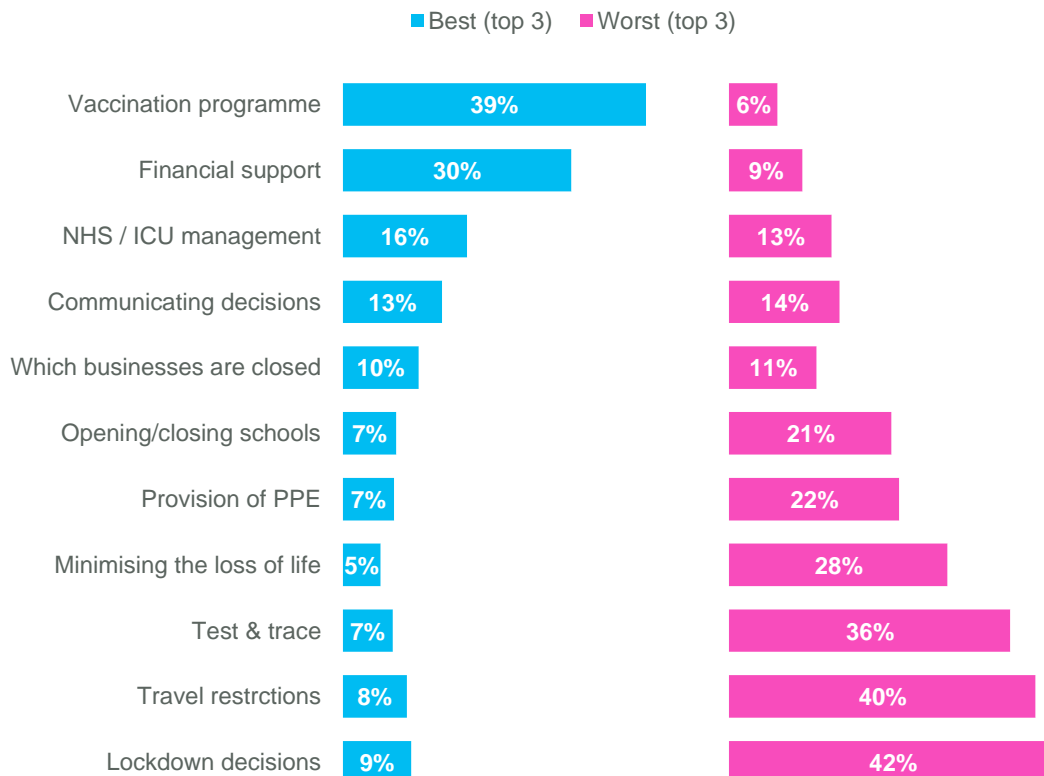
Public find fault in government's decision making on lockdowns and travel restrictions

In the week that the UK death toll past 100,000, another striking finding is how a lot of criticism remains on the decisions they made that could have been executed better than directly being blamed for some of the worst outcomes of the pandemic: namely the crisis in the NHS and the large death toll.

Relatively few think that the government's management of the NHS and intensive care situation is one of the worst aspects of their handling (13%), and a slightly higher proportion (16%) think it is one of the best parts of their crisis handling.

Similarly, while 28% think their inability to minimise the loss of life has been one of the worst aspects of the government's crisis handling, this is quite far behind other criticisms such as when to go into lockdown (42%), when to introduce travel restrictions in and out of the UK (40%) and the handling of test & trace (36%).

Which aspects has the government handled best/worst?



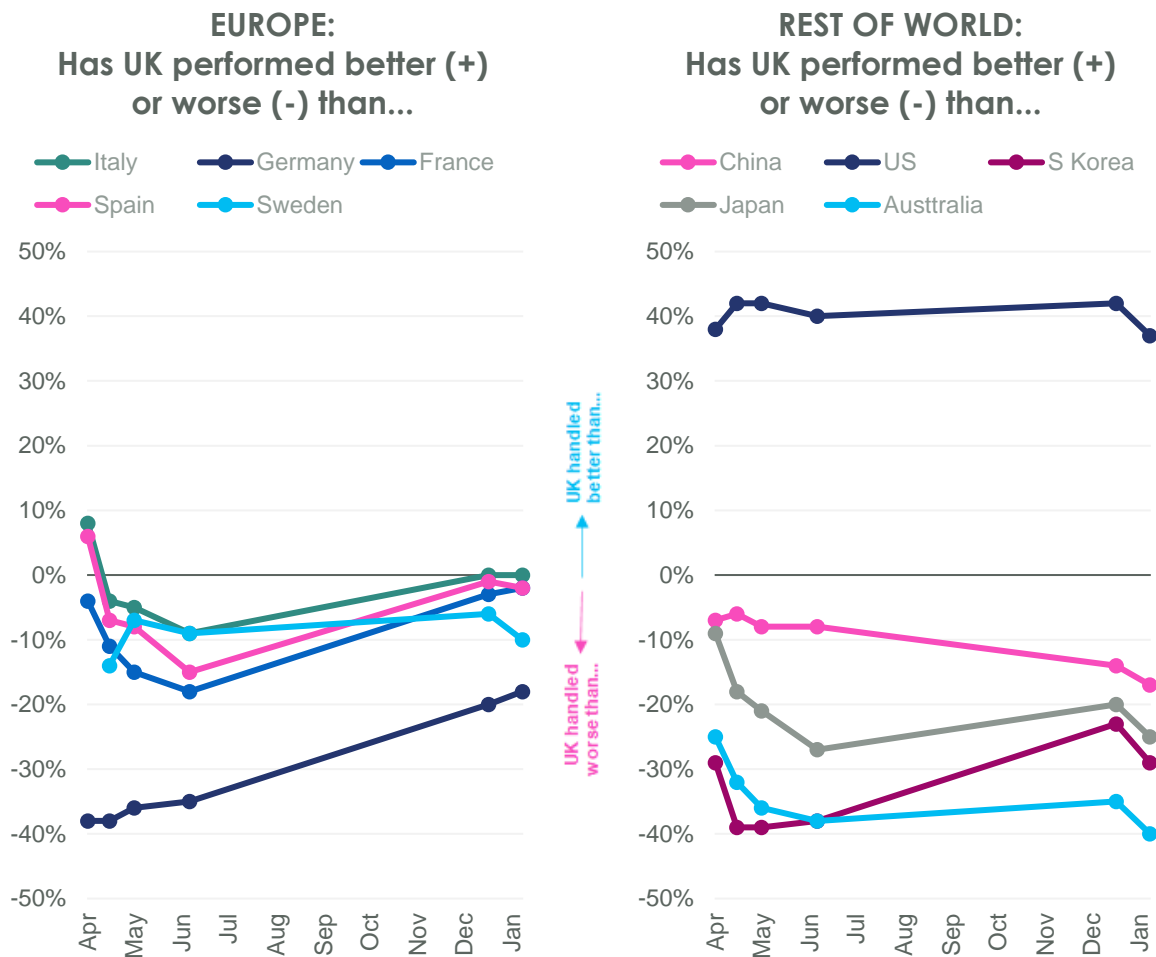
The vast majority of voters (93%) think there are aspects the government has handled relatively badly, including 90% of Conservatives. Another reason why some of the more scathing criticisms fall much further down the list is because these divide along much more partisan lines. For example, 40%

of 2019 Labour voters think the government has performed badly on preventing loss of life, compared to only 19% of 2019 Conservatives.

UK falling behind the rest of the world but improving on the rest of Europe

In British public opinion, the UK has performed relatively similarly to Italy (net 0% better or worse), France (net 3% worse) and Spain (net 2% worse), all of which are marked improvements since the summer when the public tended to think most European countries were performing better than the UK. Difficulties with the vaccination rollout in Europe are likely to have played a role here.

In particular, although the public still think the UK is performing worse than Germany (net 18% worse), this completely different magnitude compared to April or May (net 38% worse).



By comparison, views about the rest of the world has changed in the other direction. In the past fortnight, public views of Britain's Covid handling compared to the world outside Europe have declined. For example, now net 40% think we're handling Covid worse than Australia.

Vaccine

Three in five (60%) now approve of government's handling of the vaccine roll out

Net approval of the government's vaccine programme has shot up in the past fortnight: 60% now approve of their vaccine handling (up from 47% a fortnight ago), while only 15% disapprove (compared to 23% in our last poll). This raises the government's net approval rate on the vaccine up from +24% to +45% in two weeks.

This big shift in a short period, combined with a poll lead for the Conservatives, might be early evidence of a potential vaccine shot in the arm for the government politically.

Over half of Conservative and Labour voters back prioritising teachers for the vaccine

On the debate about key workers being put on a vaccine priority list, almost 94% of the public agree that there must be some workers that qualify for vaccine priority, either equally with or above some older age groups. However, precisely who should qualify depends.

Health care workers such as doctors and nurses (82%) and care home staff (72%) appear at the top of the list. Teachers (54%) and police (53%) appear a little further down the list, suggesting not all agree with placing them on the priority list but a sizeable proportion of both 2019 Conservative (53%) and Labour (62%) voters agree with prioritising teachers for vaccines.

Public still concerned about virus mutation

The biggest public concern about the vaccine by far is that the virus will mutate and the vaccine will become ineffective (60% are worried about this). On the other hand, 31% are actually worried that the public information on the vaccine isn't trustworthy.

Reluctance to take the vaccine is declining

Four in five (82%) would now get the vaccine if they were offered one, up from 77% a fortnight ago. Conversely, the proportion who would not get the vaccine has dropped from 16% to 12%.

How Brexit has gone

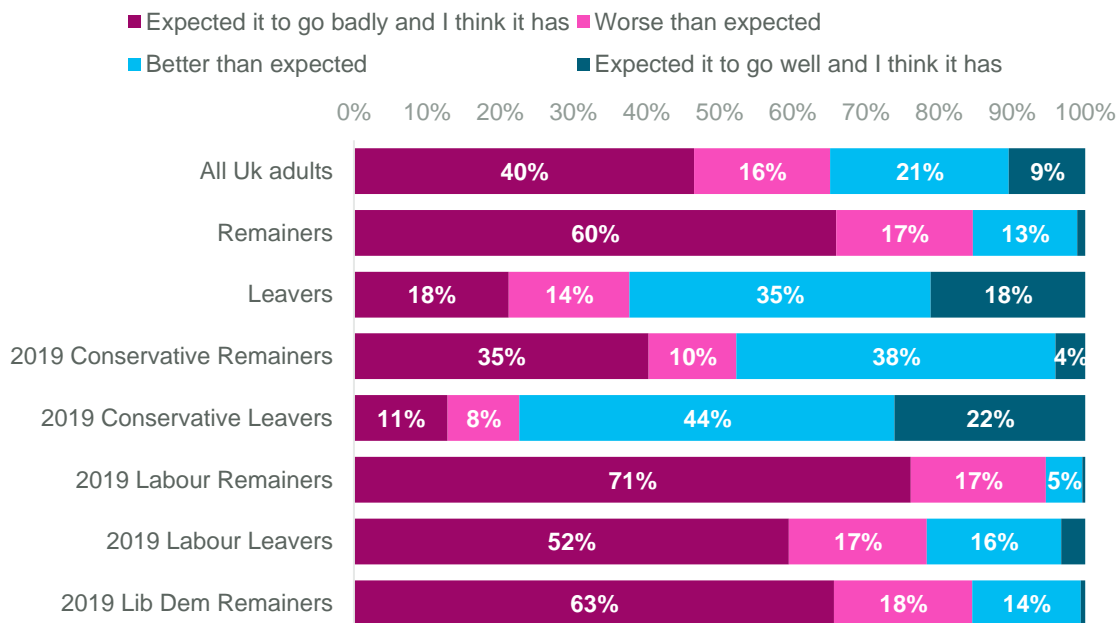
Leavers' low expectations exceeded

True to form, the public are relatively evenly divided on how the government has handled the Brexit process, with 36% approving of their Brexit handling and 39% disapproving. 63% of Leavers approve and 64% of Remainers disapprove.

However, the public are clearer in that 52% think Brexit has gone badly so far, while only 38% think it is going well. Amongst Leave voters specifically, 64% think Brexit has gone well while 27% think it has gone badly.

With only 9% saying Brexit was going well and that they *expected this* suggests expectations were pretty low, even amongst Leavers. 60% of Remainers feel like their negative expectation of Brexit has been confirmed by events.

How Brexit has gone



Generally, Conservatives were the most likely to say it was going better than expected, with a large chunk of both Tory Remainers (38%) and Tory Leavers (44%) saying this.

Future of Brexit

Almost a third (31%) say that Brexit has had a negative impact on them, although half (50%) say it has not affected them.

The public are marginally optimistic about the future, with 43% believing the problems that have been caused so far by Brexit will be solved over time, while 34% think they will not be.

About Opinium

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