



What people think,
feel and do

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The Political Report

24th February 2021



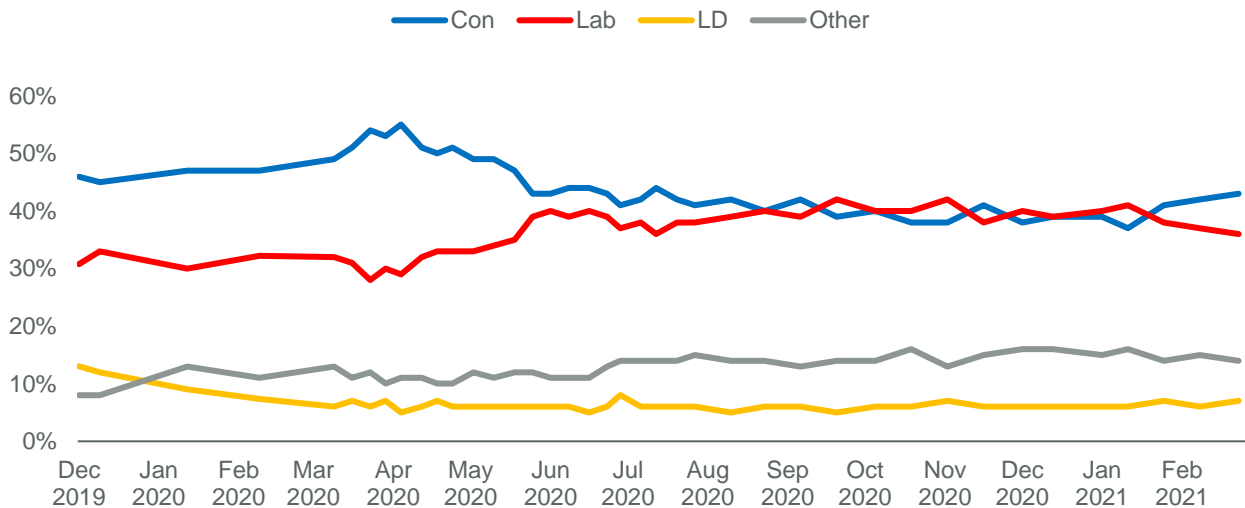
From the Opinium/Observer polling series

26th February 2020

One-minute takeaway

- Conservative lead extends to 7 points over Labour (43% vs 36%)
- The job approval of the two leaders has continued to converge, with Starmer now only just in positive territory (+5 net score) and Johnson only just in negative territory (-2 net score). Johnson holds a comfortable lead – 33% to 25% - on who would make the best Prime Minister.
- Support for how the government is handling Coronavirus continues to rise, with 33% now approving of the job they are doing. This is likely driven by the continued success of the vaccine rollout, with 68% approving of how the government are doing on that front.
- People broadly think the roadmap out of lockdown moves things at the right pace, although 58% think it is unlikely that all rules on social distancing will be gone by the end of June.
- The increased discussion about economics over the past fortnight have done little to move the dial, with people still more likely to think Johnson and Sunak (39%) are better to handle the economy than Starmer and Dodds (25%).
- More people think that taxes on corporations and high earners are too low, and would support a new tax to pay for the NHS.
- When it comes to government spending, the public want more money to go to the NHS and social care, and less to go on international aid.

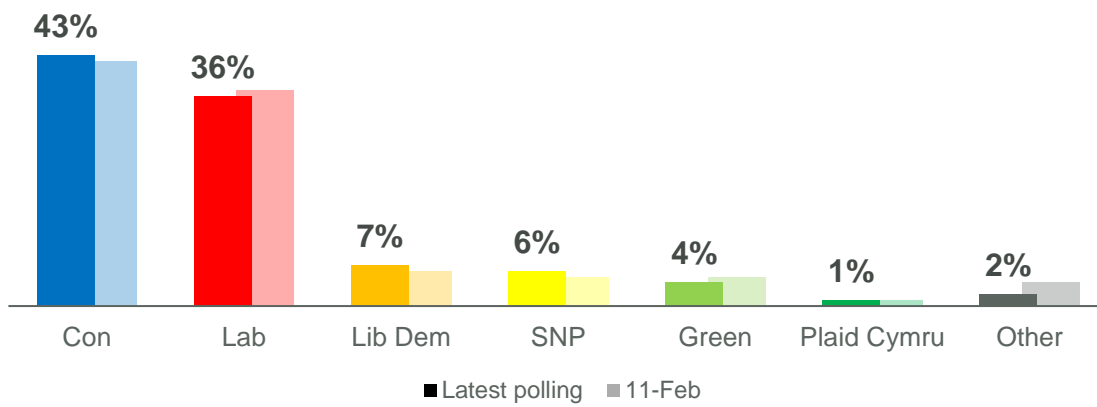
Voting intention since the 2019 general election



Headline Voting Intention

Conservatives increase their lead

The Conservatives have increased their lead to 7 points, up from 5 points a fortnight ago. This is the largest lead they have held since July last year. The Conservatives are now on 43% (+1), while Labour are on 36% (-1) and the Lib Dems are on 7% (+1)

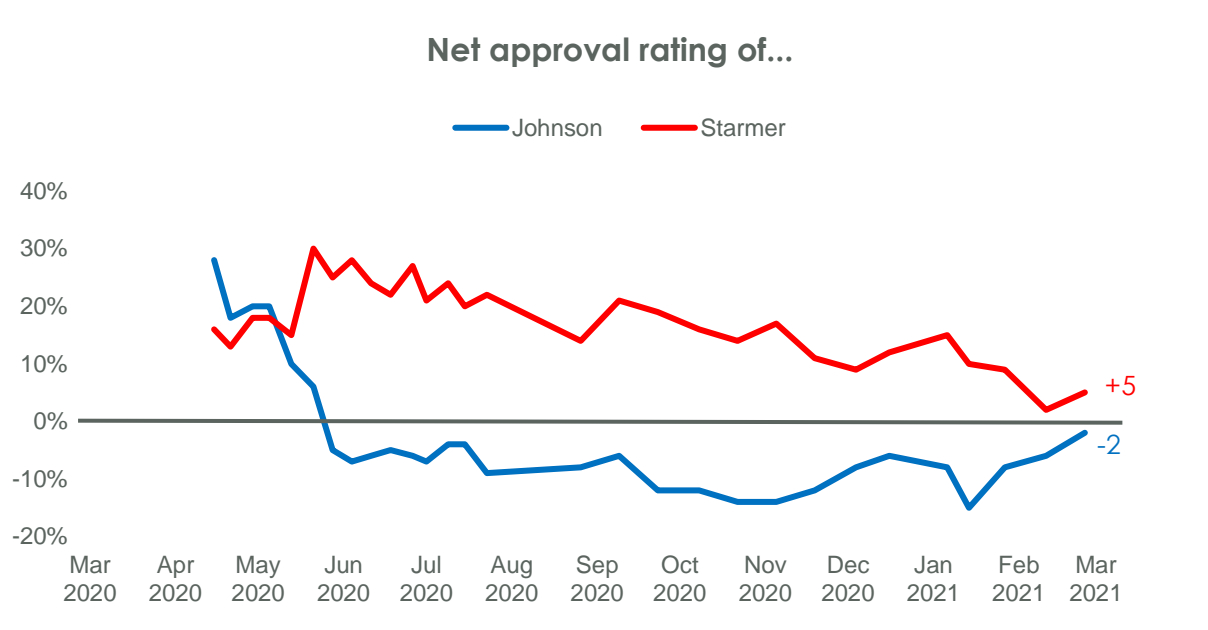


Leaders Approval

Johnson approval continues to rise

Johnson’s job approval is getting dangerously close to being in positive territory this week, with 39% approving of the job he is doing (+1) and 41% disapproving (-3) – giving him a net score of -2.

Meanwhile Starmer’s approval is also up slightly, with 33% approve of the job he is doing (+1) and 28% disapproving (-2). This gives him a net score of +5.



Johnson maintains his lead on ‘best PM’ question

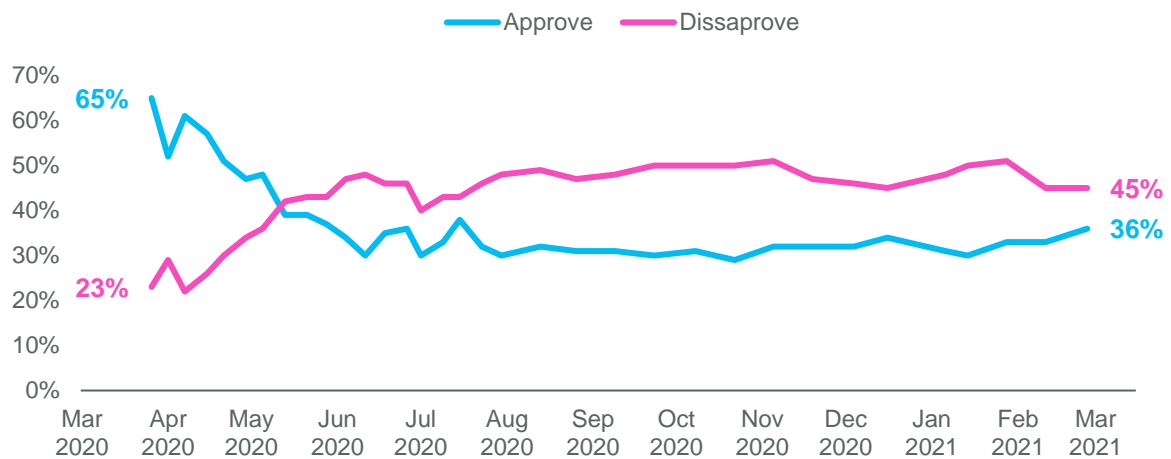
Despite Starmer hovering on the positive side of job approval, and Johnson on the negative side, the latter does hold a lead when it comes to who would make the best Prime Minister. While 33% think Johnson would make the best Prime Minister (+1), 25% think that Starmer would (-2). Meanwhile 27% said neither and 15% said don’t know.

Coronavirus

Support for governments handling on Coronavirus up again

Approval of the government's handling of Coronavirus has risen again this week, meaning that 36% now approve (+3) with 45% disapproving (unchanged).

Approval of the governments handling of Coronavirus

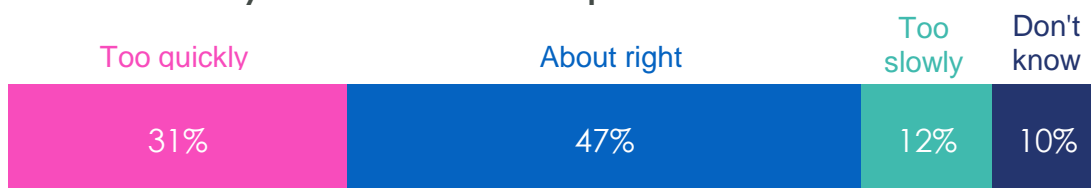


Approval of how the government is handing the supply of vaccines is also up, with 68% approving of the job they are doing (+6) and just 12% disapproving (+2). Even among Labour voters far more approve (69%) of how the government is doing than disapprove (15%).

People think the roadmap is moving things at the right pace

A plurality of people (47%) think the government's roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions in England is the right pace. As has been consistent throughout this pandemic, there are far more who think it goes too quickly (31%) than think it goes too slowly (12%).

Do you think the "roadmap" eases restrictions...

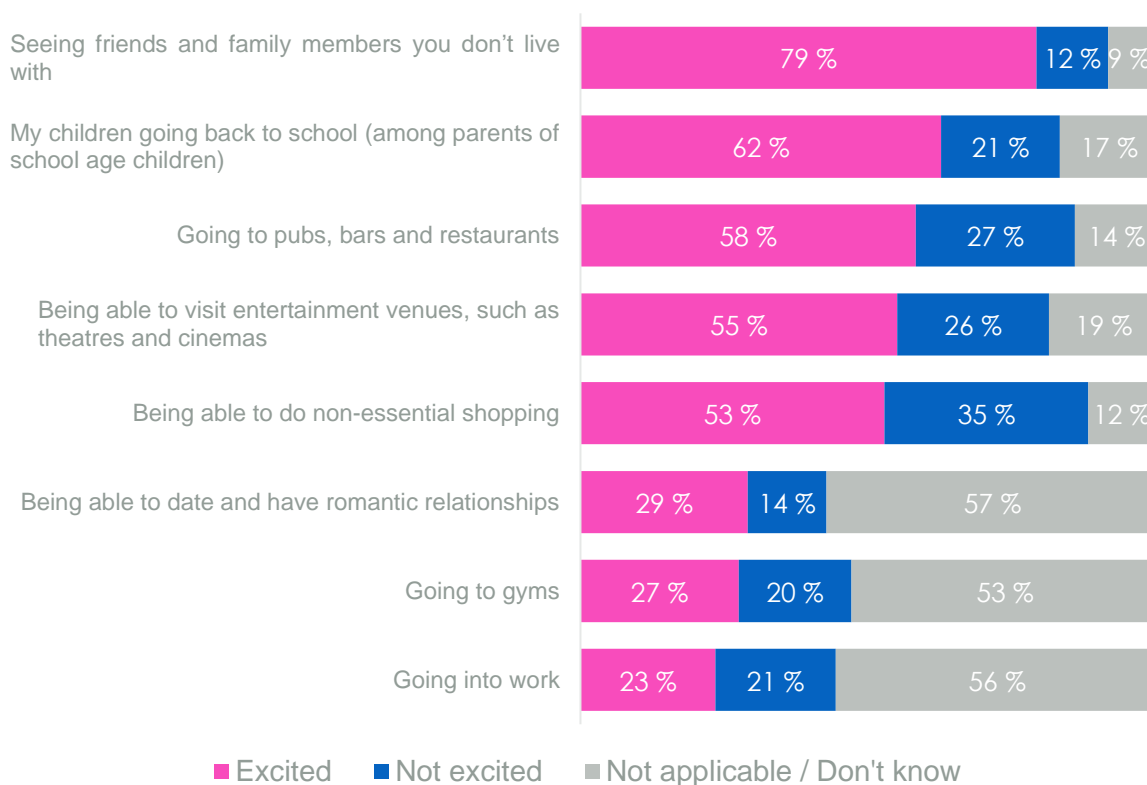


Having said that, the public are not optimistic that the government will meet its earliest possible timetable. In total 58% think it is unlikely that all limits on social contact will be removed by the end of June, compared to just 31% who think it is likely.

People most excited to see friends and family

In terms of the new freedoms themselves, people are most excited about seeing friends and family members they don't live with (79%), going to pubs, bars and restaurants (58%) or, where relevant, children going back to school (62%).

How excited are people to...



However, perhaps driven by working from home starting to drag, more people even say they are excited (23%) than not excited (21%) to go back to work later this year.

The beginning of lockdown easing comes as we are starting to see more people breaking lockdown rules. Perhaps driven by slightly nicer weather, the number of people who say they have intentionally broken the rules in the last week has increased from 28% to 33%. Among those aged under 44, this rises to 43%.

In most of these cases (20% out of the 33%) people still say they have generally followed the rules but "broke them in a minor way on occasion".

The budget

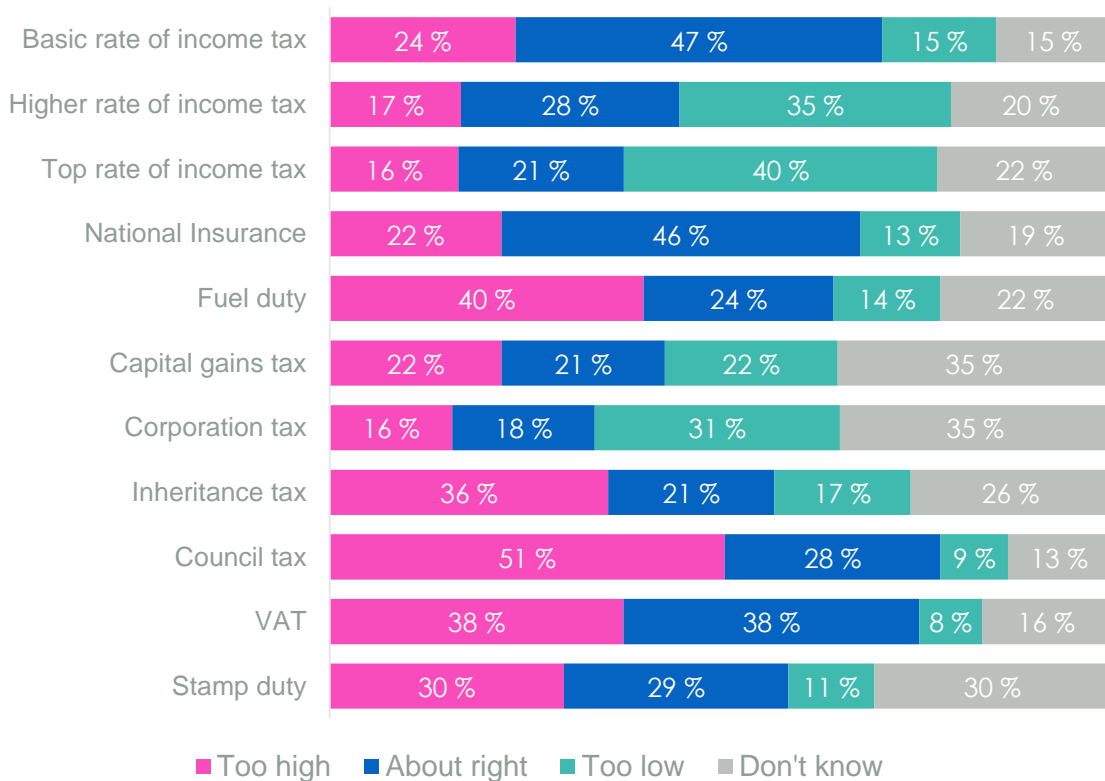
The Conservatives are still seen as better on the economy than Labour

In terms of handling the economy, 39% say they trust Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak the most to handle the economy, while a quarter (25%) trust Keir Starmer and Anneliese Dodds the most. Despite more of a focus from both sides on the economy, these numbers are almost unchanged on the results from a fortnight ago.

The public aren't averse to higher taxes

Raising taxes has often been considered political suicide, and yet the public appetite for tax rises is generally higher than it is for spending cuts. When asked about current taxes, more people say that corporation tax, the higher rate of income tax, and the top rate of income tax are too high rather than too low.

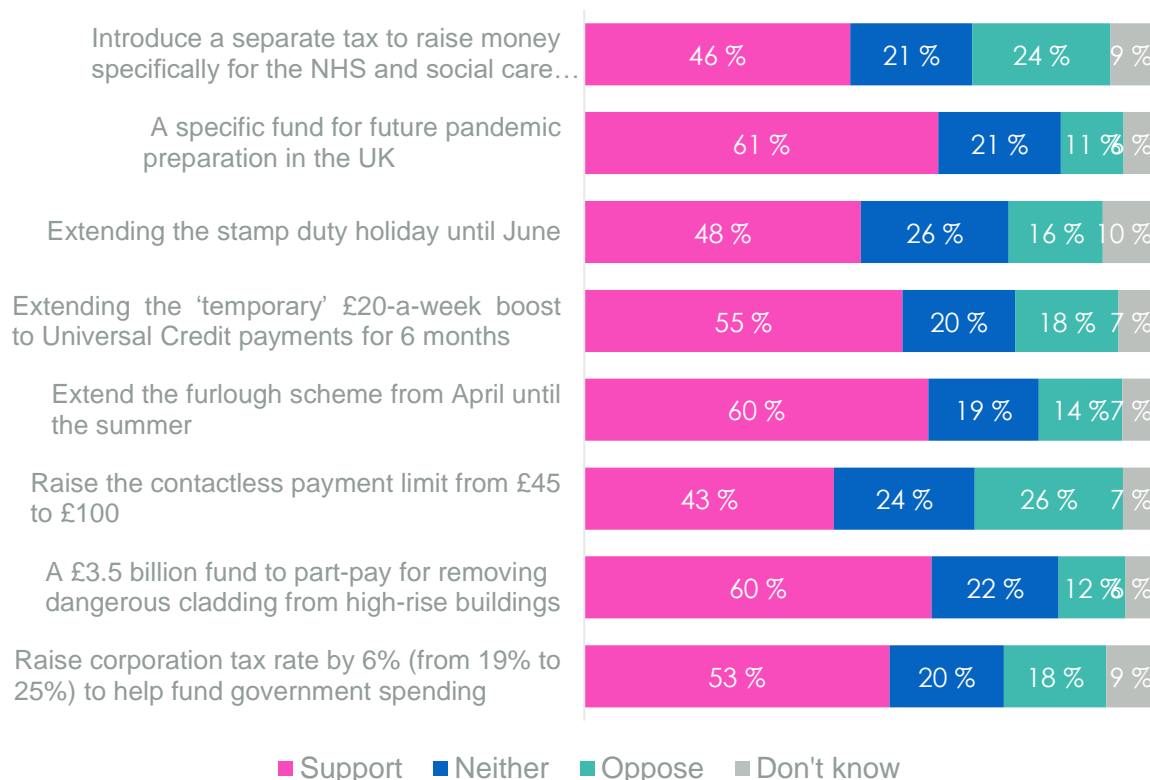
Are the following taxes...?



The median position on most taxes though is that the current level is about right.

However, if you ask more generally about the introduction of a new tax to pay for NHS and social care services, 46% would support, compared to 22% who would oppose. Labour voters (54%) are more likely to support such a tax compared to Conservative voters (46%), but in both cases far more support than oppose.

Support for topical economic policies



When it comes to other topical economic policies, the policies we looked at with the highest levels of support are “A £3.5 billion fund to part-pay for removing dangerous cladding from high-rise buildings” (60%), “extending the furlough scheme from April until the summer (60%), and “a specific fund for future pandemic preparation in the UK” (61%).

The public want more spending on the NHS, and less on foreign aid

Unsurprisingly, when asked which areas of government spending should receive more cash, the NHS (62%) comes head and shoulders above any other area. Social care (24%) is in a distant second, followed by schools (21%) in third. Environmental subsidies / programmes (16%) is in fourth, followed by the police (15%) in fifth.

When we ask the reverse, international aid (41%) is the area which most people would like to see the government reduce spending on. This is followed by defence / armed forces (23%) in a distant second, and universal credit (15%) in third place.

