

Our latest Welsh Political Barometer poll repeated our long-standing question in which we asked respondents to rate political leaders on a 0-10 scale (where 0 means ‘strongly dislike’ and 10 means ‘strongly like’, with a Don’t Know option also available.) This question was asked about the main Britain-wide leaders for the Conservatives and Labour, plus the Welsh leaders of both those parties and Plaid Cymru. With our April poll having begun sampling before the Labour leadership announcement, our new poll thus present the first verdict from Welsh voters on Sir Keir Starmer - and allows us to compare his ratings directly with those of Jeremy Corbyn.

As I have often discussed in the past, a first interesting thing in such findings is the proportion of people who answer Don’t Know for each leader. Though some respondents will choose this option because they are genuinely undecided – and some will bluff on a leader about whom they know nothing – overall the percentage of people saying Don’t Know provides a good rough-and-ready measure of their public visibility. There are at least two particular reasons for being interested in that this time around. As this is the first poll asking about Keir Starmer, it is interesting to see the extent to which the public have been able yet to form a view about him. Second, it has been notable since he became First Minister that large proportions of Barometer respondents have failed to offer a view on Mark Drakeford; with the Covid-19 crisis having pushed him rather more into the public eye, has this changed?

The table below shows the percentage of Don't Know responses for each leader (with in brackets the change on our last poll, in April; for Starmer, the figure represents the change on the April figure for Corbyn):

Leader	% Don't Know
Boris Johnson	5 (-2)
Keir Starmer	25 (+16)
Mark Drakeford	24 (-16)
Paul Davies	67 (+3)
Adam Price	55 (+1)

These sorts of tables normally show a gulf between the two main UK party leaders and those at the devolved level. But this time it is different. Nearly all of our sample have a view on the Prime Minister: given recent circumstances, that can hardly be a surprise. But while the majority of people appear willing to offer a view on Keir Starmer, a full quarter of our sample did not; the new Leader of the Opposition has, also quite understandably, not yet achieved the visibility of his predecessor.

However, the prominence into which the current crisis has thrust him has produced a substantial further increase in the visibility of First Minister Mark Drakeford; the proportion of respondents feeling unable to offer a view on him has declined appreciably since our April poll, which itself has seen a notable fall in the share of Don't Knows about the First Minister in all polls during his first year in office. Mark Drakeford is now a long way ahead of the other main devolved party leaders in public visibility.

But what about the answers given by those respondents who did have a view? Here are the average ratings of those who did offer an opinion about each one of the five leaders (with changes since April once again shown in brackets, and the figure for Keir Starmer representing the change on the April reading for Jeremy Corbyn):

Leader	Average /10
Boris Johnson	4.1 (-1.2)
Keir Starmer	5.6 (+2.3)
Mark Drakeford	5.1 (+1.1)
Paul Davies	3.7 (-0.3)
Adam Price	4.8 (-0.1)

Our previous poll, conducted at their height of the ‘rally to the flag’ boost in Conservative fortunes, had shown Boris Johnson as the most popular party leader in Wales - and managing what few politicians ever do, averaging more than 5 on this 0-10 scale. His ratings have declined in the last two months - and to an extent that is rarely seen in polling. The last time we saw a decline of this scale so quickly in a leader’s ratings in Wales was when the wheels rather spectacularly came off Theresa May’s general election campaign in summer 2017. Little of this decline has come from Conservative supporters, among whom he still polls very well. But among other voters his ratings have declined appreciably. Thus, we see the 1.2 point fall in the Prime Minister’s ratings across the whole sample replicated among 2016 Leave voters, whom we might expect to be particularly well disposed to Boris Johnson.

Our April poll also had the extraordinary finding that the UK Conservative leader was a full two points higher on personal ratings than the UK leader of Wales’ long dominant party, Labour. Since then not only has Mr Johnson fallen in public favour; Labour’s new leader has also made a better impression on voters than his predecessor managed more than four years as Labour leader. Keir Starmer’s average rating of 5.6 is higher than Jeremy Corbyn *ever* recorded in any Welsh Political Barometer poll. It is also striking that the Leader of the Opposition’s appeal does not seem to be confined to Labour supporters alone: he also averages above six out of ten among Plaid Cymru voters, for instance. While there is a very long way to go for Sir Keir, and also for his party, he has made a very good first impression on Welsh voters.

The other striking findings in these results is the improvement in Mark Drakeford’s ratings. For his first year and more in the job, it was a consistent finding that not only did many Welsh voters not have a view on him, but those who did were generally fairly unimpressed. Now, not only have more Welsh voters begun to be aware of the First Minister, but those with views have become much more positive. Moreover, it is not only Labour supporters who are please with Mr Drakeford: indeed, Plaid Cymru Westminster supporters rate him every bit as highly as Labour voters do.

Our new Barometer poll also asked about some questions about how well a number of leading UK and Welsh political figures were handling the coronavirus crisis. The table below summarises responses into ‘well’, ‘badly’ and ‘Don’t Know’ for each politician about whom the question was asked; finally, there is also a ‘net well minus badly’ figure, for which I have also shown in brackets the change since this question was asked in April:

	% Very Well / Fairly Well	% Very badly / Fairly badly	% Don’t Know	Well - Badly (Change since April)
Boris Johnson	37	57	7	-20 (-54)
Rishi Sunak	51	23	26	+28 (-13)

	% Very Well / Fairly Well	% Very badly / Fairly badly	% Don't Know	Well - Badly (Change since April)
Matt Hancock	29	47	24	-18 (-46)
Mark Drakeford	49	25	26	+24 (+17)
Vaughan Gething	32	27	42	+5 (-6)

When we last asked this question in April, public sentiments in Wales towards the UK government ministers about whom we polled were strongly positive; however, the pattern of evaluations was clearly much less positive for the Welsh First Minister, and for Welsh Health Minister Vaughan Gething. While there were plenty of Don't Knows in responses for the Welsh Government ministers, at that point in the crisis those who had developed a view of the Welsh Labour government's response were, on average, significantly less impressed than they were with that of the Conservative UK government.

Public attitudes in Wales have certainly changed. Sentiments towards the handling of Covid-19 by all the UK government ministers have declined, and to a quite astonishing extent in the cases of Health Secretary Matt Hancock and Prime Minister Johnson. Support for the Prime Minister's handling of the crisis has declined across the board: even to some extent among Conservative supporters, but particularly strongly among supporters of other parties. By contrast, for the First Minister, we see rising approval of how he has been handling the issue. Sentiments for his conduct have become much more positive across not only Labour supporters but also those of Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats. Only among Conservatives has there not been a substantial improvement.

In short, with regard to leaders, this poll shows very positive news for the Labour party, but offers distinctly negative tidings for the Conservatives. The brief wave of Welsh support for Prime Minister Johnson early in the crisis now appears to have disappeared. Voters in Wales are less supportive of him than they were two months ago, and very substantially less supportive of how he is handling the Covid-19 crisis. Meanwhile, in these gloomy times there is at least something to cheer for Labour supporters. Their party currently possesses the two most popular party leaders in Wales. Sir Keir Starmer has made a very positive first impression on Welsh voters, managing a better public rating in his first poll than Jeremy Corbyn ever did. And the current crisis appears to have brought the First Minister's positive qualities to the fore for many people in Wales as well.