

The September Welsh Political Barometer poll repeated our long-standing question in which respondents were asked 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 then newly-installed Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey. At the Welsh level, we asked about the Welsh leader for Labour, the Conservatives, and Plaid Cymru.

As I have discussed frequently on this blog in the past, a first interesting thing to look at in such findings is how many people simply answer Don't Know for each leader. Although some respondents will choose this option because they are genuinely undecided, just as some may bluff about a leader they know nothing about, the overall percentage of people saying Don't Know is a pretty good rough-and-ready measure of their public visibility. Last time around our poll showed Sir Keir Starmer still lagging well behind Prime Minister Johnson in visibility; it also showed Mark Drakeford having made considerable ground in this respect. What do we find this time?

The table below shows the percentage of Don't Know responses for each leader (with in brackets the change on our last poll in June):

| Leader                | % Don't Know   |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>Boris Johnson</b>  | 7 (+2)         |
| <b>Keir Starmer</b>   | 24 (-1)        |
| <b>Ed Davey</b>       | 58             |
| <b>Mark Drakeford</b> | 23 (-1)        |
| <b>Paul Davies</b>    | 65 (-2)        |
| <b>Adam Price</b>     | 55 (no change) |

There are several interesting features of this table, even though it shows minimal changes since June. The first is that, even though he has now been Leader of the Opposition for several months, Sir Keir Starmer still lags well behind the Prime Minister in public profile. This is not necessarily either surprising or a bad thing: current circumstances have obviously limited the Labour leader's ability to get out and about to connect with the public; while it is much better for some of the public to be undecided about you than for them to have decided that they don't like you, as most of the public did with Sir Keir's predecessor.

Also of interest is that there is clearly now a substantial gulf in public visibility between the First Minister and the opposition party leaders in the Senedd. There have been precious few positives to come out of the Covid-19 crisis, but for Welsh Labour it has at least provided a means for Mark Drakeford to become much better known with the Welsh public than he was during his first twelve months in the role of First Minister.

What about the answers given by respondents who had a view on each leader? Here are the average ratings for each of the six leaders (with changes since June, where relevant, once again shown in brackets):

| Leader               | Average /10 |
|----------------------|-------------|
| <b>Boris Johnson</b> | 3.9 (-0.2)  |
| <b>Keir Starmer</b>  | 5.1 (-0.5)  |

| Leader         | Average /10     |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Ed Davey       | 3.7             |
| Mark Drakeford | 5.3 (+0.2)      |
| Paul Davies    | 3.7 (no change) |
| Adam Price     | 4.7 (-0.1)      |

Once again, the changes here since the last poll are mostly small. Our new poll confirms the substantial decline in Boris Johnson's ratings with Welsh voters since April, and also reinforces June's poll in suggesting that Keir Starmer is currently much more popular than the Prime Minister across the Welsh electorate as a whole. The details of the poll, though, show very different profiles for the two main UK party leaders. Prime Minister Johnson is a deeply divisive figure: a majority of Labour supporters, and a near majority of Plaid Cymru supporters give him the lowest possible score, a 0 out of 10; by stark contrast, a 26 percent plurality of Conservative supporters score the Prime Minister at the maximum 10 out of 10. Sir Keir does not yet evoke such stark reactions. Fewer than a quarter of Conservative voters score him at 0 out of 10, while only 15 percent of current Labour supporters put him at the maximum 10.

Our new poll also confirms that June's Barometer poll was not a fluke in indicating a substantial improvement in the First Minister's public standing. For his first year and more in the job one could summarise public reactions to Mark Drakeford by saying that lots of people had little idea who he was, and most of those who did have an idea were not very impressed. Now, not only is the Welsh Labour leader much more well known, but he has also become substantially more popular among the (greatly enhanced) group of those with a view about him. Interestingly, positive evaluations of Mr Drakeford are not confined only to Labour supporters; even among Plaid Cymru supporters he averages above 6 out of 10. This may suggest the potential for the Welsh Labour leader to reach out effectively to Plaid sympathisers for the Senedd election next May. However, the converse is also generally true for Labour and Adam Price: the Plaid leader is quite favourably evaluated by many Welsh Labour voters. Plaid Cymru will hope that greater attention on their leader in the Senedd election campaign will allow him to build further on ratings that have already been consistently strong for most of his period as party leader.

Our new Barometer poll also asked about some questions about how well leading UK and Welsh political figures have handled 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. I have also shown (in brackets) the changes since this question was asked in June:

|                        | % Very Well / Fairly Well | % Very badly / Fairly badly | % Don't Know | Well - Badly |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Boris Johnson</b>   | 34 (-3)                   | 56 (-1)                     | 10 (+3)      | -22          |
| <b>Rishi Sunak</b>     | 50 (-1)                   | 25 (+2)                     | 25 (-1)      | +25          |
| <b>Matt Hancock</b>    | 24 (-5)                   | 48 (+1)                     | 28 (+4)      | -24          |
| <b>Mark Drakeford</b>  | 57 (+8)                   | 22 (-3)                     | 21 (-5)      | +35          |
| <b>Vaughan Gething</b> | 35 (+3)                   | 26 (-1)                     | 39 (-3)      | +9           |

When we first asked this question in April, public sentiments in Wales towards the UK government ministers was much more positive than for their Welsh Government counterparts. Public attitudes had substantially changed by the time of our June poll, and if anything over the summer that position has been reinforced. Chancellor Rishi Sunak is the only UK government figure about whom we polled who has an overall positive rating for his response to the Covid-19 crisis, while the ratings for the Prime Minister and UK health minister are poor and, if anything, worsening. The handling of Covid-19 by the Welsh First Minister, by contrast, receives mostly positive public evaluations - a finding supported by evidence elsewhere in our poll which indicates that the overall approach of the Welsh Government in handling the crisis is seen as having been much better than the UK government.

Overall, the findings regarding leaders in the latest Welsh Political Barometer poll are notably more positive for Labour than the Conservatives. They currently have the two most popular party leaders in Wales, and the handling of the current crisis by the leadership of the Welsh Government is generally viewed positively. Several months out from the Senedd election, this is not a bad place for Labour to be.