

STATE OF THE NATION REPORT

CORONAVIRUS BRIEFING #1

The Coronavirus emergency will have a severe medical, economic and political impact on society over the next few months and possibly years. To better understand the effect it will have on British people HOPE not hate Charitable Trust is planning to conduct regular polling to gauge opinion and measure attitudes towards the authorities and even one another.

In our first poll, we explore the issues of trust towards our political leaders and medical experts, test out conspiracy theories, examine how it should impact on the Brexit negotiations and investigate how we are relating to one another.

We are particularly concerned about how Covid-19 will inflame a racist and anti-immigrant backlash. There are already numerous stories of people of Chinese heritage being attacked and certainly a far right rhetoric is emerging of both using this to whip up dislike to China and blaming so-called liberal immigration policies for quickening the spread of the infection. Our polling finds that 54% of Britons blame China for Covid-19, with just 23% disagreeing.

There is no question coronavirus is going to radically alter how we live and the society we live in. It might bring us closer together, but at the same time it could further divide us. While we hope it is the former, we fear it could be the latter. As our polling clearly demonstrates, people are scared and looking to the Government for leadership and medical experts for understanding. But as more people die and livelihoods disrupted, how long will this last? The Chancellor has unveiled a huge financial package to soften the economic impact of COVID-19, but hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps even millions, will lose their jobs and be outside of help. And then there is the

future, what happens when the disease – or at least this wave – has passed? It is inconceivable that the Government will keep the financial taps running and then many people will be financially destitute and we will all be faced with large tax rises or a return to austerity.

Of course nothing is certain and it is pointless to predict what is going to happen, but what we can do is to monitor and track public opinion in the hope it gives us early warning of future problems. We hope that these regular briefings will go some way to doing that.

COVID-19 risks causing the largest societal upheaval since the Second World War and an economic meltdown comparable to the 1930s. And if history teaches us anything is that it is in times like these that societies are susceptible to extremism and prejudice. We are facing difficult times now, but post-pandemic politics have the risk of being both dangerous and very nasty.

HOPE not hate Charitable Trust will conduct a poll every month for the foreseeable future. We will have a number of tracking questions, so we can see how opinion is changing over time, but then each poll will also focus on two of three distinct themes and topics to allow us to dive deeper into people's attitudes and better understand how Coronavirus is impacting on society. As part of our mission to make our data operation of use to partner organisations, we will invite two or three groups to ask questions that are pertinent to their work.

For more information on our polling and to suggest questions, please email Nick Lowles at nick@hopenothate.org.uk

POLL RESULTS

Britain is in crisis mode, and are worried about what is to come

Are you worried that you or someone in your household could lose your/their job as a consequence of the economic fallout from Coronavirus?

■ Yes ■ Don't know ■ No



- Many are feeling extremely fearful about coronavirus and think it represents the fact we are living in dangerous times. Almost three-quarters of people (73%) agree that Coronavirus is the latest sign that the world we live in is become increasingly dangerous, while only 10% disagree.
- Three-quarters of people (77%) agree that Coronavirus will lead to a big increase in unemployment and poverty. Just 5% don't think that this will be the case.
- The public are split over the government's response to the Coronavirus: 49% feel that the Government is dealing with the Coronavirus as well as could be expected, while 51% think the Government has been too slow in dealing with the Coronavirus. This unsurprisingly splits along party lines, with almost three quarters of 2019 Conservative voters think that the government's response has been as well as can be expected, while only 29% of Labour voters agree.
- The public are clearly frustrated about how the impact of cuts to the NHS has shaped responses. A huge 78% of people think that austerity and cut backs to NHS funding means that it will struggle to cope with Coronavirus. Just a fifth of people think that the NHS is well resourced and able to cope with the Coronavirus outbreak.
- Despite the concerns over Coronavirus, people are more optimistic than pessimistic about their futures. Now, 52% say they are optimistic about the future (48% are pessimistic), up from 46% in our December 2019 YouGov poll.
- However, at the same time, many are feeling a sense of lost control. A majority (66%) still feel that how well they do in life is first and foremost down to them, but 34% think that how well they do in life is primarily decided

by forces outside of their control, an increase from 29% of people in December 2019. Those who voted Brexit party in 2019 are among those least likely to feel in control of their own lives (47% feel their life is determined by external forces)

- Almost half of people (47%) are worried that they or someone in their household could lose their job as a consequence of the economic fallout from Coronavirus. 43% are not. Those who are already struggling most are feeling most nervous about this. 57% of people in social class C2 and 54% of people in social class D are worried that you or someone in their household could lose their job, compared to 43% of social class A and 45% of social class B

People are split over the government's immediate response to the crisis, but there is consensus on action to deal with the long term consequences

Are you worried that you or someone in your household could lose your/their job as a consequence of the economic fallout from Coronavirus?

■ Yes ■ Don't know ■ No



- The majority of people support immediate action to save the economy, with almost half of people fearing the loss of work for themselves or someone else in their household.
- Almost two-thirds of people (63%) say that Coronavirus will cause huge long-term disruption to the British economy.
- Four out of five people (80%) support a publicly funded government initiative (such as in Denmark) where the government helps guarantee people's incomes during the coronavirus crisis. Only 7% would not support this. This support comes from 75% of 2019 Conservative voters as well as 86% of people who voted Labour and even 74% of people who voted for the Brexit party.
- Over four-fifths of people (82%) do not believe that statutory sick pay (current £94 per week) is enough to meet living costs including food/rent/mortgage/energy/water/council tax and other essential living costs. Just 10% of people think that this is adequate.

- There is a consensus that the Government must ensure that children entitled to a school meal have access to hot meals during the school shutdown. 81% of people agree with this while only 6% disagree. There is almost no variation here among demographic and political breaks
- Three-quarters of people (74%) think health care workers and other frontline staff should receive additional payments for the work they are doing. Just 15% disagree.

People are pulling together, but are already feeling the social impacts of disconnection

Coronavirus will bring our family closer together

■ Agree ■ Neither agree or disagree ■ Disagree



- The coronavirus has highlighted the importance of community. A huge 83% of people agree that having a strong community around you is important. Just 4% disagree.
- But people are feeling disconnected. Because of the virus, 48% of people say they are having less contact with their families, 46% are having less contact with their neighbours, and 63% are having less contact with others in the wider local community. Older people are most likely to say that they are having less contact with all of these groups.
- A staggering 88% of people agree that it is incumbent on us all to look after our family, friends and neighbours, while only 2% disagree. Young people are slightly less likely to agree than older people, though a large majority agree across all political and demographic breaks
- More than three times as many people (43%) think that Coronavirus will bring our family closer together than think it will not (13%)

There is a real risk that this crisis has led to a further spread of fake news and disinformation, with trust in the mainstream media fragile

The coronavirus is not as serious as media and government makes it out to be.
(Attitudes of 18-24 year olds)

■ Agree ■ Neither agree or disagree ■ Disagree



- Coronavirus is testing people's relationship with mainstream media. Two-thirds of people (65%) agree that it is important that we seek alternative opinions about Coronavirus and not just rely on what we get told through the mainstream media, just 12% disagree. Younger people are most likely to want to seek alternative media, 74% of people aged 18-24 agree.
- Just over half of people (55%) agree that the Government will prioritise helping big business and the banks deal with coronavirus over helping ordinary people. Just 18% disagree with this, with very little political and demographic variation.
- Although older people are more likely to be at higher risk from the virus, they are less concerned than younger people with the government's response. Just 38% of over 65s say that the Government has been too slow in dealing with the Coronavirus compared with 68% of 18-24 year olds.
- While most people (64%) believe that the coronavirus is as serious as it is made out to be, 19% of people agree that the coronavirus is not as serious as media and government makes it out to be. Almost a third (30%) of those aged 18-24 think that this is the case.
- The majority of people (71%) trust that the experts at the Department of Health are competent and take appropriate action based on the information available. Labour voters are among the least likely to trust this, 15% say they do not, while only 4% of Conservative voters think the same.
- Half of people (50%) trust Boris Johnson and the Government to deal with coronavirus appropriately. 32% of people say that they do not hold trust in Johnson and his government to respond appropriately.

Coronavirus is making the public rethink post-Brexit Britain, both in supporting continuing links with EU agencies and in being more flexible with the deadline for ending the transition period

- The Government should request an extension to the Brexit transition period in order to focus properly on the Coronavirus
 - The Brexit transition period must end on 31 December whether a deal has been reached or not



- Two-thirds of people (64%) say that the Government should request an extension to the Brexit transition period in order to focus properly on the Coronavirus. This included 44% of 2019 Conservative voters, suggesting many of those most committed to leaving the EU would agree.
- Fewer than one in ten (8%) think that the Government are ‘very likely’ to get a good trade deal if it refuses to extend the transition period to deal with Coronavirus. Conservative voters still believe that the Government are likely to get a good trade deal in this circumstance. A lot of people remain uncertain about how Coronavirus will affect Brexit.
- Two-thirds (65%) people think the Government should seek to be a member of the EU’s early warning system for medical emergencies, while only 12% think they should not. This support comes from across political divides, including 55% of Conservative voters.
- Despite this support, many make no connection between Brexit and the coronavirus crisis. Over half of people (59%) say that leaving the EU has made no difference to the UK’s response to coronavirus, while 8% say it has helped the UK’s response and 20% see it as having hurt the UK’s ability to respond.

The majority of Britons blame China for the coronavirus outbreak, which perhaps explains why we are witnessing a growing number of attacks on people of Chinese-heritage

China is to blame for Coronavirus

■ Agree ■ Don’t know ■ Disagree



- A majority of Britons (54%) blame China for coronavirus, with only 23% of people believing this is not the case. This view is universally held by both men and women, and also amongst age groups, though a slightly more young people believe China is not to blame (54/27) whereas slightly more older people believe it is (58/20).
- There is a bigger difference geographically, with 67% of people in East Anglia blaming China and just 15% not. In London, the gap is far smaller, with 41% blaming China and 31% not. Scotland is the only UK region where more people disagree with this statement (39%) than agree (37%).