




| **INSIGHTS**

MP, MSP & MEP Opinion Poll 2020

Insight Study:
The Politics of a Pandemic

New MP, MSP & MEP research sheds light on
UK, Scottish and EU handling of 2020



“We are waiting as if between the flash of lightning and the thunderclap for the full economic reverberations ... we must use this moment to fix the problems most brutally illuminated in that Covid lightning flash—in our social care system, parts of government that seemed to respond so sluggishly.”

–UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson

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Introduction:

An extraordinary year

2020 has been an extraordinary year for societies and economies across the world. Policymakers have been at the frontline of the global pandemic response, taking measures to cushion the financial blow – and to save lives. The COVID-19 pandemic will leave an estimated \$12 trillion hole in global economic output by the end of next year, while the number of deaths is now exceeding 1.3 million worldwide.

With such a burden of responsibility comes intense scrutiny. As we look to 2021 – not least, with the end of transition for the UK departure from the European Union on the horizon – politicians are taking stock and learning from the past year, as they plan for the next.

Against this backdrop, political intelligence specialist Dods recently ran an opinion poll among 279 members of the UK, Scottish and European parliaments, including 91 Peers, to obtain their views on how the UK governments and the EU

have fared in tackling the coronavirus crisis. In particular, the poll sought to gain views on the performance of policymakers, political leaders and healthcare systems, as well as their preparedness for further waves of the virus. The new data also shines light on various aspects of government policy, economy and society that have been altered by the ongoing pandemic.

The study analyses these findings from MPs, MSPs and MEPs in the following categories:

- Handling of the crisis
- In the spotlight: organisations & individuals
- Economic recovery priorities



Insight 1: Handling of the crisis

With a second wave of COVID-19 hitting the UK and Europe in the autumn of 2020, there has been a renewed focus on the handling of the crisis so far by governments in Westminster, Holyrood and the EU leadership in Brussels.

For Westminster, the pandemic unearthed a UK-wide crisis with no respect for borders - but in an area where policy was not controlled from the centre. This, as time runs out on continuing Brexit trade deal negotiations. For Scotland, it has caused an increased distillation of its independence debate. And for the European Union, COVID-19 has raised the challenge of fair funding – that doesn't ignite inequalities and animosities in the EU28.

Pandemic response

UK

Public criticism of the UK government's handling of the pandemic is well documented. Our new statistics reveal that **62%** of UK Members of Parliament say they are dissatisfied with its COVID-19 response. Only **9%** are 'very satisfied'. To lose so much good will internally, within just a year since Boris Johnson won a landslide victory, may have alarm bells ringing at Number 10.

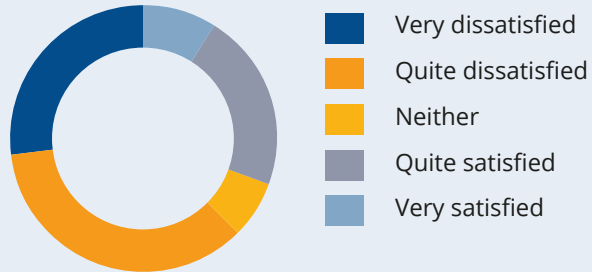
UK

Handling of COVID-19

MPs: 62%
quite or very dissatisfied

MPs: 9%
very satisfied

Q2: How satisfied are you with the way the UK Government has handled the COVID-19 crisis?



With speculation rife about a possible third wave of the coronavirus pandemic in 2021 and further lockdowns, **59%** of UK MPs do not believe the UK government is prepared. There is, however, greater faith in the National Health Service, with the majority (**53%**) having confidence in its ability to cope with future emergencies.

Future waves of COVID-19

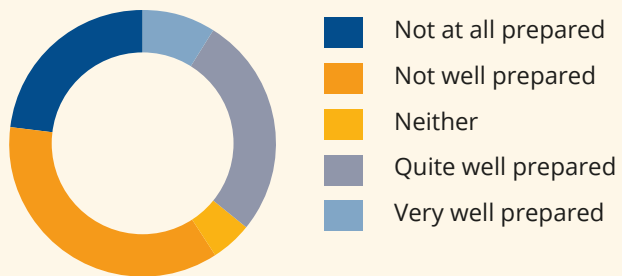
UK government preparedness

MPs: 59%
not prepared

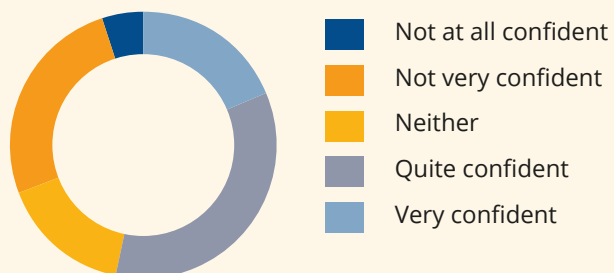
Confidence in NHS' coping ability

MPs: 53%
confident

Q3: To what extent do you think the UK Government is prepared to deal with further waves of the virus?



Q21: How confident are you that the NHS can cope with further waves of the virus?



Scotland

To the north in Scotland, however, the assessment of government seems more optimistic. A majority (**58%**) of Members of the Scottish Parliament say they're satisfied with the government's handling of the crisis; a large tranche (**40%**) goes as far as to say 'very satisfied'. Only **11%** are 'very dissatisfied' with the efforts vis-à-vis **27%** in the UK.

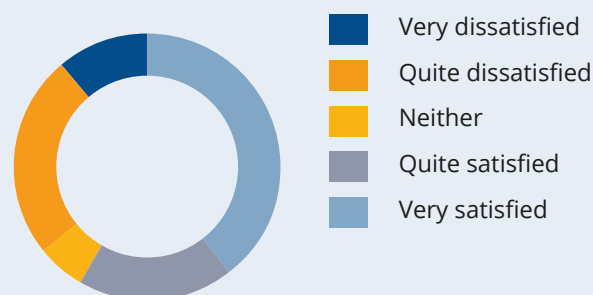
Scotland

Handling of COVID-19

MSPs: 58%
satisfied

MSPs: 11%
very dissatisfied

Q2: How satisfied are you with the way the Scottish Government has handled the COVID-19 crisis?



Future waves of COVID-19

Scottish government preparedness

MSPs: 57%
prepared

Confidence in NHS' coping ability

MSPs: 74%
confident

The mood from within Westminster and Holyrood also seems to be different when it comes to government readiness for future waves of COVID-19 – with **57%** of MSPs saying they believe the Scottish government is prepared. Even greater confidence in the NHS' ability to cope is also evident, with a big majority (**74%**) agreeing on this.

European Union

In Europe, however, there appears to be more of a middle ground attitude towards the political crisis response. This is perhaps indicative of MEPs regarding the EU's role as secondary to that of Member States, with a perceived early lack of leadership from Brussels. A larger percentage of MEPs are satisfied (**39%**) with the European Union's handling of COVID-19, compared to **27%** who are not.

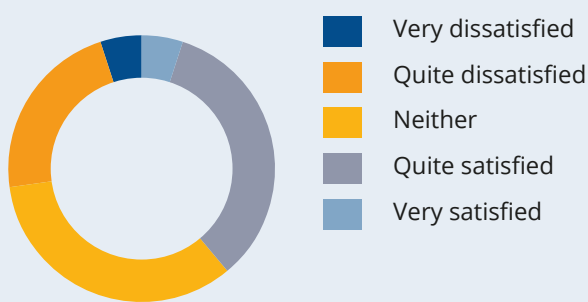
EU

Handling of COVID-19

MEPs: 39%
satisfied

MEPs: 27%
dissatisfied

Q2: How satisfied are you with the way the EU has handled the COVID-19 crisis?



Insight #1 Conclusion:

- **MPs critical of UK government's handling of COVID-19; greater confidence in NHS**
- **MSPs more satisfied with the response; more confident in National Health Service**
- **MEPs take a middle ground approach to critique**

Insight 2: In the spotlight: Organisations & individuals

Organisations

Our insight so far has shown that there is criticism within the UK government of how it has dealt with the pandemic. However, our new research shows that opinion to be wider in scope. In Europe, MEPs agree that its performance has been quite or very bad (**74%**). In the context of devolution, in Scotland, that figure is higher: **78%** of MSPs concur with that sentiment. This, despite the MPs (**44%**) saying the Scottish government has handled it quite or very well.

How has the UK government performed during the pandemic?

MPs: 63%
quite or very badly

MSPs: 78%
quite or very badly

MEPs: 74%
quite or very badly

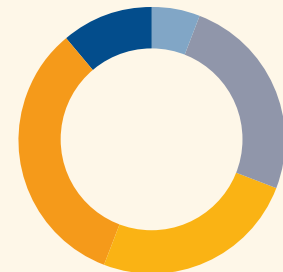
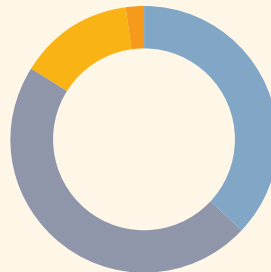
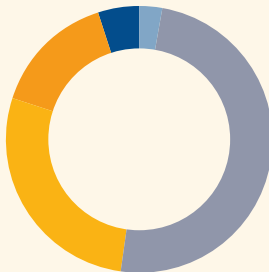
In the European Union, however, the performance of the World Health Organization (WHO) during the pandemic appears to be of concern, with **44%** of MEPs citing it to be quite or very bad. In comparison, **84%** of MSPs and **53%** of MPs felt the WHO had handled the crisis well.

How has the World Health Organization performed during the pandemic?

MPs: 53%
quite or very well

MSPs: 84%
quite or very well

MEPs: 31%
quite or very well

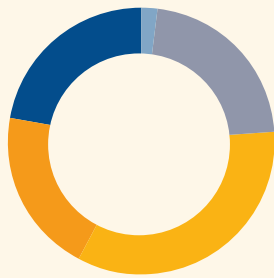


Very badly Quite badly Neither Quite well Very well

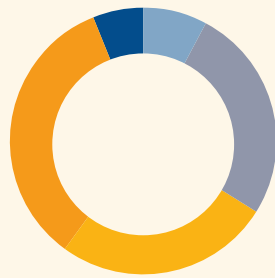
While in Scotland, our insight has shown that the 'organisation' that is criticised above all, is the media, with **40%** agreeing it has performed quite or very badly.

How has The Media performed during the pandemic?

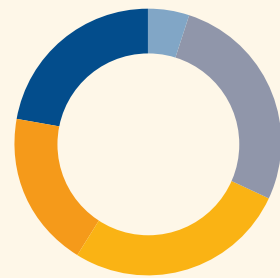
MPs: 42%
quite or very badly



MSPs: 40%
quite or very badly



MEPs: 41%
quite or very badly



■ Very badly ■ Quite badly ■ Neither ■ Quite well ■ Very well

Individuals

When it comes to the performance of individual political figures, our fresh insight has unearthed some interesting analysis. In Europe, the majority of MEPs agree the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen has handled the pandemic well (**51%**), although fewer say the same for EU Parliament President, David Sassoli (**43%**). These 'middle of the road' figures may be reflective of what many MEPs deemed as a poor early response from the EU, that improved with time.

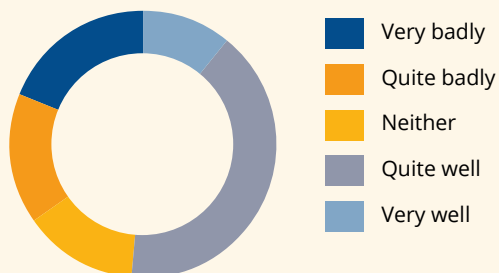


President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen

Performed very or quite well:

MEPs: 51%

How do you think the following individuals have performed during the pandemic?

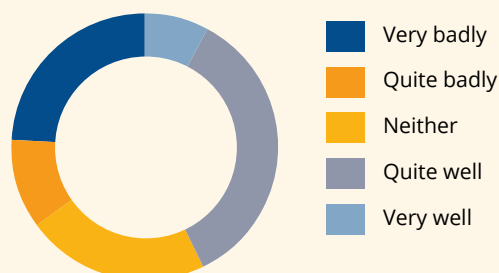


EU Parliament President, David Sassoli

Performed very or quite well:

MEPs: 43%

How do you think the following individuals have performed during the pandemic?



In the UK, Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, also seems to be hitting the right notes, with both UK MPs (**58%**) and MSPs (**67%**) impressed by her performance during the COVID-19 crisis, followed by UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak and then Labour Party Leader, Keir Starmer.

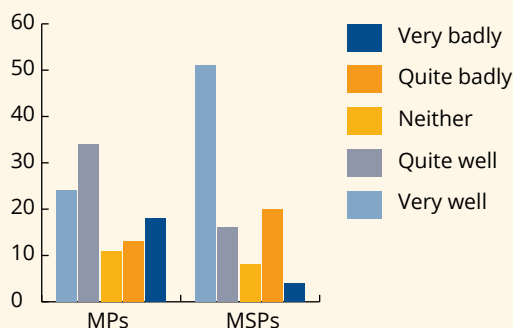


Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon

Performed very or quite well:

MPs: 58%
MSPs: 67%

How do you think the following individuals have performed during the pandemic?

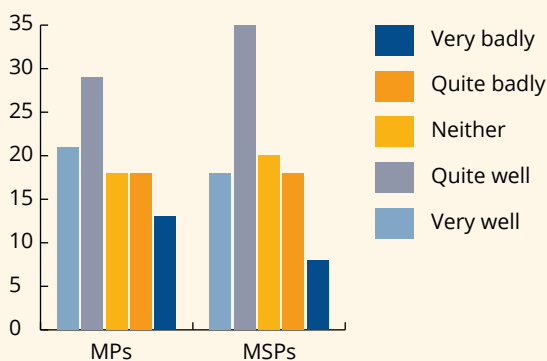


UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak

Performed very or quite well:

MPs: 50%
MSPs: 53%

How do you think the following individuals have performed during the pandemic?



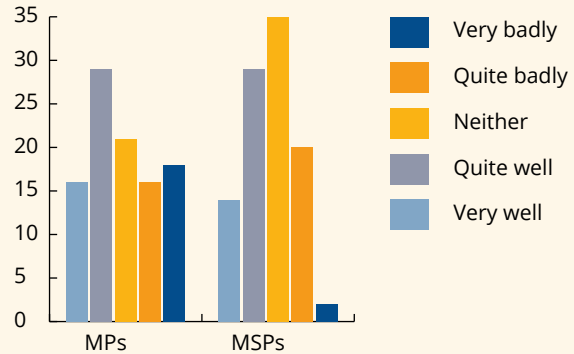


UK Labour Party Leader, Keir Starmer

Performed very or quite well:

MPs: 45%
MSPs: 43%

How do you think the following individuals have performed during the pandemic?



UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, however, has received a majority bad performance verdict and has not impressed respondents during the pandemic – both from within the UK and in Europe. Two thirds of MPs (**66%**) believe he’s handled the situation badly; this, despite winning a large majority in the House of Commons in December 2019. However, respondents in the UK feel that the worst performer has been the US President, Donald Trump – echoed in his loss of the presidency to Democrat, Joe Biden.

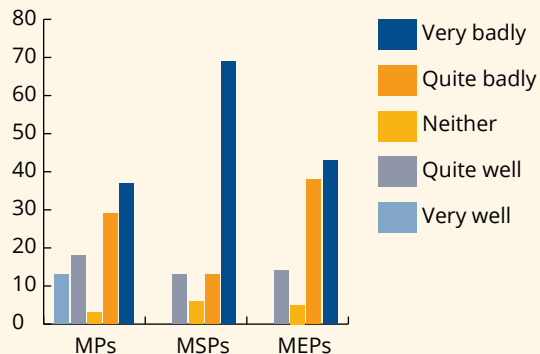


UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson

Performed quite or very badly:

MPs: 66%
MSPs: 81%
MEPs: 81%

How do you think the following individuals have performed during the pandemic?



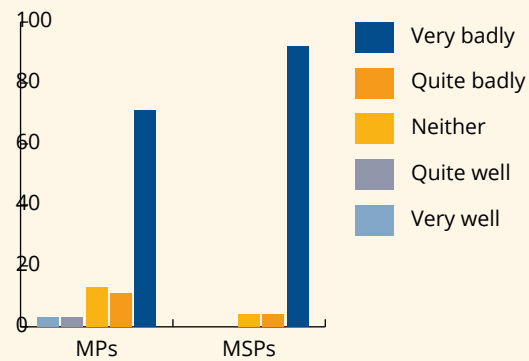


**US President,
Donald Trump**

Performed quite or very badly:

MPs: 82%
MSPs: 96%

How do you think the following individuals have performed during the pandemic?



Insight 2 conclusion:

- A 'bad' pandemic performance verdict for the UK government from MPs, MSPs and MEPs
- Middle of the road performance of European Commission President
- MPs and MSPs consider US President, Donald Trump, the worst performer



Insight 3: Economic recovery priorities

This year, the global health crisis of COVID-19 quickly turned into a global economic shock. Despite increasingly positive vaccine news, the economic repercussions are now threatening to far outlive the medical emergency.

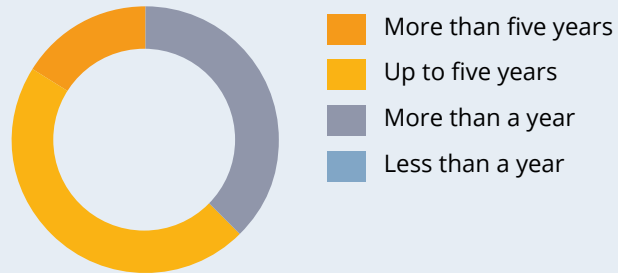
Britain looks on course to enter a double-dip recession this winter, as data shows economic growth almost halting, even before the latest lockdown was announced. The Eurozone is also experiencing a steep downturn, despite a 750 billion stimulus package to aid the EU's 27 member nations.

Against this backdrop, the general consensus in both the European Union and Scotland is that economic recovery will take up to five years, with **47%** of MEPs and **58%** of MSPs agreeing to that respectively. In the UK government, however, **36%** of MPs predict that the UK's overall economy will take more than five years to bounce back.

EU speed of recovery:
Up to five years:

MEPs: 47%

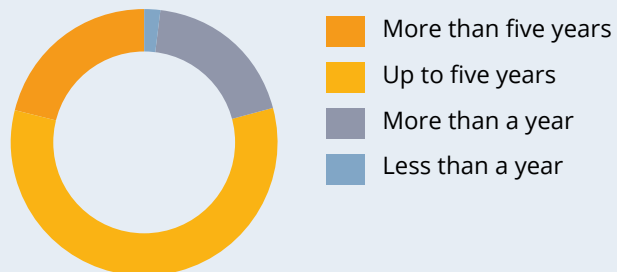
Q13: How long do you think it will take the EU's overall economy to recover?



Scotland speed of recovery:
Up to five years:

MSPs: 58%

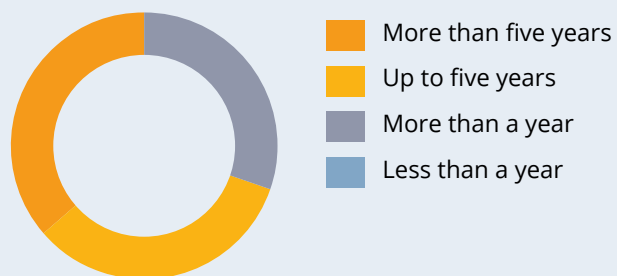
Q13: How long do you think it will take Scotland's overall economy to recover?



UK speed of recovery:
More than five years:

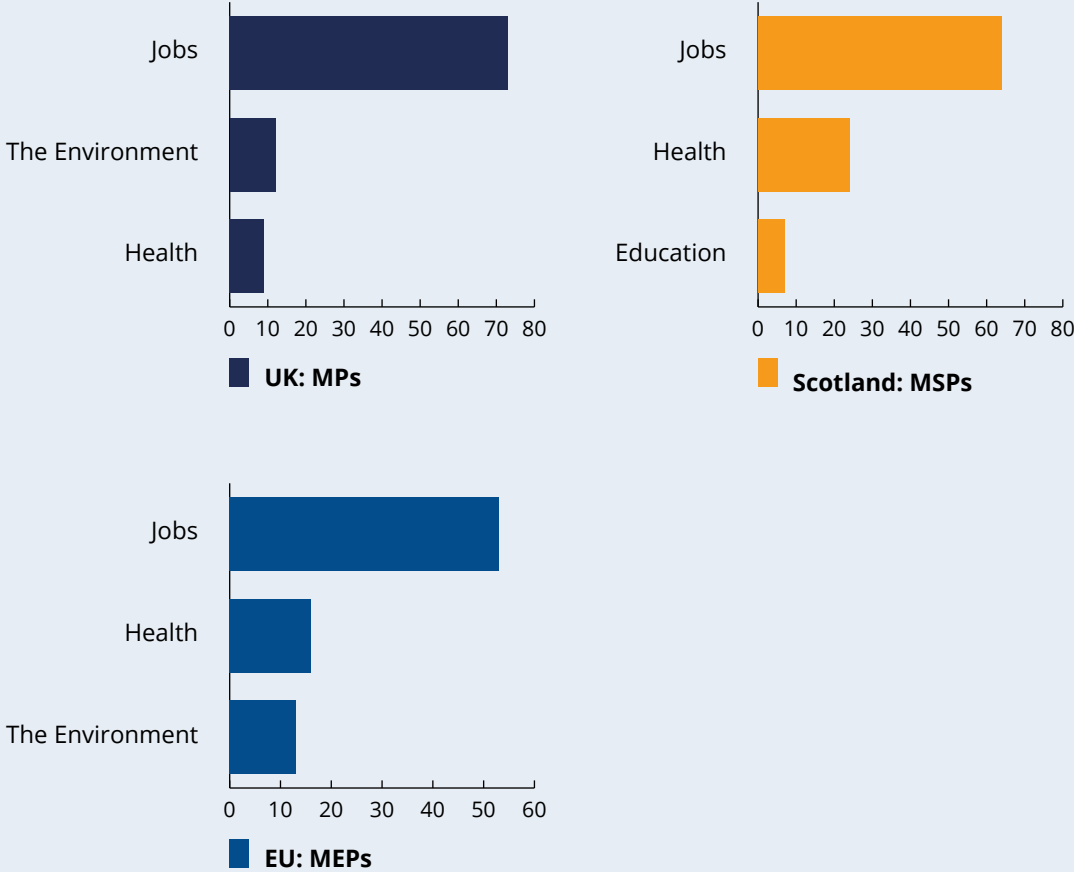
MPs: 36%

Q13: How long do you think it will take the UK's overall economy to recover?



As the UK and Europe rapidly expand their economic recovery plans, there is much debate as to what needs to take centre stage: jobs, the environment, education, health, technology or travel? From our respondent insight, it's clear that jobs are at the epicentre of all recovery strategies. However, for MPs the environment is a greater priority than for MSPs, coming in above health; for MEPs and MSPs health is second in importance to employment. Travel and technology appear to be much lower on the agenda for members of all the parliaments.

Recovery plan priorities (Top 3)



Business support

Although members of parliaments are predicting different timelines for economic recovery, perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of MPs, MSPs and MEPs think that jobs should be prioritised.

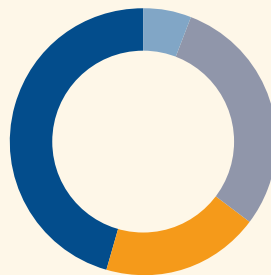
Despite this, a lion's share of MPs (**65%**) and MEPs (**52%**) do not think their respective leaderships are doing enough to support SMEs through the COVID-19 crisis. In contrast, the majority of Scottish Members of Parliament (**51%**) believe their government is bolstering SMEs well.

SME support

Are governments and the EU doing enough to support SMEs through the Coronavirus crisis?

MPs: 65%
disagree

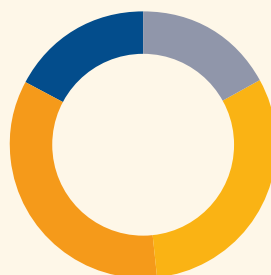
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the UK Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

MEPs: 52%
disagree

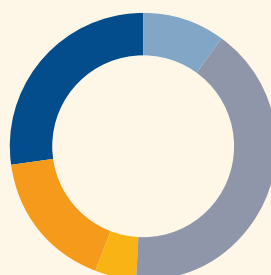
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the European Union's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

MSPs: 51%
agree


To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about The Scottish Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

Universal Basic Income

Regarding the introduction of a Universal Basic Income (something that certain economists have called for), under which all adults receive a guaranteed income irrespective of employment status, **53%** of MPs would not support the introduction of such a measure; MSPs (**56%**) and MEPs (**47%**) meanwhile would.



“Our role as Europe's institutions, policy makers and leaders is to show that same trust, that same unity and that same leadership. We all share this responsibility. None of us can do it alone and certainly no Member State can handle this crisis on their own.”

*–President of the European Commission,
Ursula von der Leyen*

The Environment

Green recovery

As our insight has shown, MPs have put the environment as a priority second only to jobs; in many ways they are inextricably linked. This is echoed in the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's recent ten-point plan for a 'green industrial revolution', that mobilises £12 billion of government investment to create and support up to 250,000 'green jobs'.

In comparison, the European Union has a recovery deal that devotes nearly €550 billion to green projects over the next seven years - the largest single climate pledge ever made.

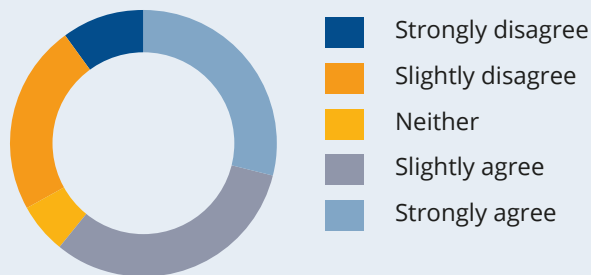
Despite these pledges, a significant number of members from all parliaments agree that tackling climate change has been side-lined in terms of financing and as a priority due to COVID-19.

Tackling climate change

Tackling climate change has been sidelined in terms of financing and as a priority due to COVID-19

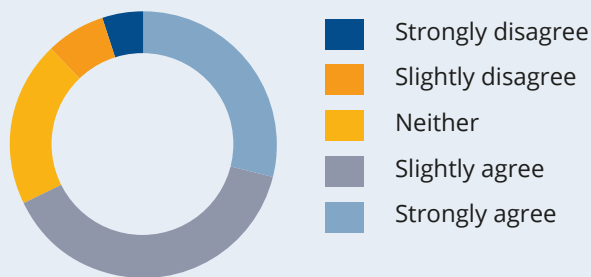
MPs: 61%
agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the UK Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



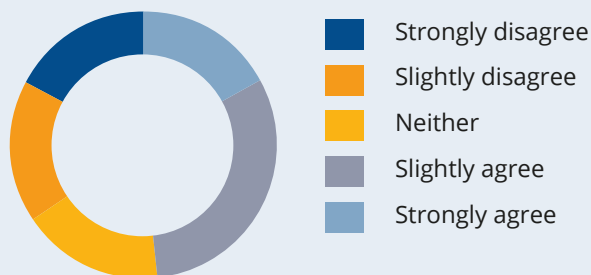
MSPs: 68%
agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about The Scottish Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



MEPs: 48%
agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the European Union's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



Plastic pollution

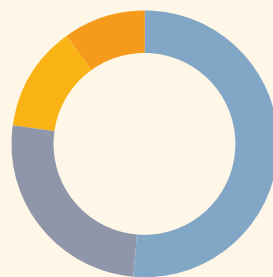
MPs, MSPs and MEPs are also on the same page when it comes to the need for their respective leaderships to invest in finding alternative solutions to combat plastic pollution.

Increasing use of plastic

Need to invest in finding alternative solutions to the increasing use of plastic

MPs: 77%
agree

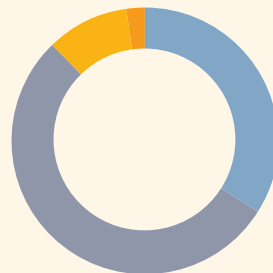
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the UK Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

MSPs: 88%
agree

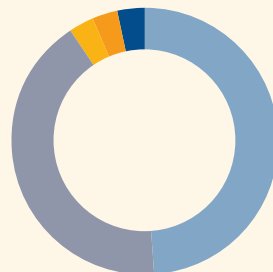
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about The Scottish Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

MEPs: 90%
agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the European Union's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

Technology

In just a few months' time, the COVID-19 crisis forced businesses to accelerate the digitisation of their customer and supply-chain interactions and of their internal operations by an estimated three to four years.

Accelerated digital transformation

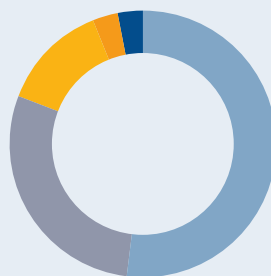
Interestingly, our insight has shown that technology is low down on recovery priority lists. However, despite this, given the unprecedented shift to remote working, access to technology is seen as increasingly crucial. **81%** of MPs, **71%** of MSPs and **76%** of MEPs agree that their respective leaderships should be doing more to ensure digital technology is accessible to everyone.

Digital technology

Should be doing more to ensure everyone has access to digital technology

MPs: 81%
agree

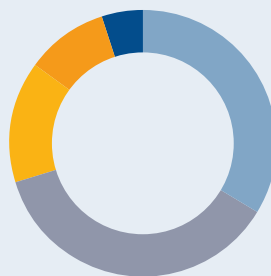
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the UK Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

MSPs: 71%
agree

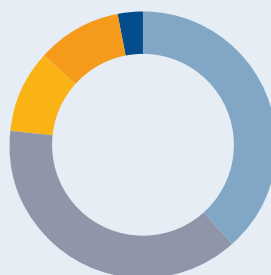
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about The Scottish Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

MEPs: 76%
agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the European Union's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

Cybersecurity

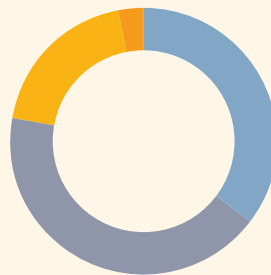
Another important consideration for respondents, however, is implementing a review of existing cybersecurity legislation. In a similar vein, sentiments are aligned regarding 5G technology not being entrusted to companies headquartered overseas (**MPs: 61% / MSPs: 51% / MEPs: 62%**).

Fighting cybercrime

Should implement a review of existing cybersecurity legislation

MPs: 77%
agree

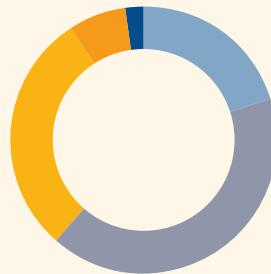
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the UK Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

MSPs: 61%
agree

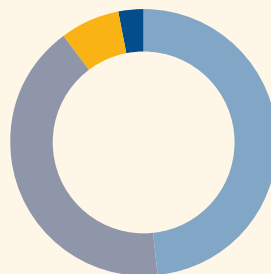
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about The Scottish Government's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

MEPs: 90%
agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the European Union's priorities and considerations in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic?



- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

Insight 3 conclusion:

- **Jobs a priority, but MPs, MSPs and MEPs say leaderships not doing enough to support SMEs**
- **UK/ Europe consensus on side-lining of climate change; more investment needed in plastic fight**
- **MPs, MSPs and MEPs agree access to digital tech is vital; travel not regarded as a prerogative**



Conclusion: Beyond COVID-19

Our new research has revealed divergences of opinion within the UK governments and the EU when it comes to the handling of the crisis, the response of certain organisations and individuals and economic recovery priorities.

There is some common ground on what life will look like after the pandemic, but it's a collectively pessimistic picture from within Brussels, Holyrood and Westminster: taxes are likely to increase, public finances will be tight, with some tough spending choices to be made, and unemployment will rise. MPs, MSPs and MEPs all agree that against this backdrop, trust in politicians is low.

And yet, 2021 is an opportunity for policymakers to learn from the mistakes of an extraordinary year for global economies and societies – and rebuild future prosperity, competitiveness and resilience for the UK and Europe.

Appendix:

Data methodology

An online survey was sent via email to all sitting MPs, Peers in Westminster, MSPs in Holyrood and MEPs in the European Parliament. This data was sourced using the Dods UK and EU monitoring team databases. The fieldwork was undertaken in October and November 2020, providing a total sample of 279 MPs (45), Peers (91), MSPs (63) and MEPs (80).

Dods Group PLC

For more than 180 years, Dods has provided essential information and connections to the UK and EU political and public affairs sectors. With unique access to the corridors of government and public sector, Dods monitors what policymakers are saying and helps clients to navigate through the noise to find solutions to solve complex problems, mitigate major risks and secure competitive advantage. With neutrality and transparency underpinning everything we do; we are a trusted source of political intelligence and debate through our portfolio of political titles and our leading events, business intelligence and training services.

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And if you'd like to discuss any of the findings of this Insight Study, please contact Suzy Richards, Director of Marketing at Dods: Suzy.Richards@dodsgroup.com



“We are all involved in an emergency which touches people’s lives. This crisis must push all of us, including the institutions, to set a good example.”

–European Parliament President, David Sassoli

