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News Media Broadly Trusted as Source of Coronavirus Information, Views of UK Government Response Highly Polarised

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Key findings

In this RISJ Factsheet we examine people's attitudes towards how news organisations, government and other institutions are responding to the coronavirus pandemic in the UK based on a survey fielded from 10 April to 14 April.

We find that:

- More than one-third (37%) think that the news media is doing a good job of responding to coronavirus. This is higher than the equivalent figure for technology companies (15%) but lower than the figure for the NHS (92%) and the UK government (54%).

- Approval for the government response is very polarised, with 82% of those on the political right saying they think the government has done a good job, compared to just 14% of those on the left.

- Most people (60%) think that the BBC is doing a good job, and TV outlets like ITV (36%), Channel 4 (32%), and Sky (28%) get a higher proportion of positive evaluations than many newspapers. Most, but not all, major UK news outlets have net positive ratings.

- More people are worried about the threat of coronavirus to the wider society (the economy, the health of the population, and life in their community) than to their own health or their own finances.

- 39% think that the coronavirus situation in the UK is heading in the right direction, and 10% think the UK is on the wrong track. Just under half (45%) think the picture is mixed.

Overview

This is the first in a series of ten factsheets based on an ongoing online panel survey of a representative sample of the UK population. The survey was designed by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford to collect data on how people navigate news and information during the coronavirus pandemic and was fielded by YouGov. Ten waves will be fielded at two-week intervals, top-line findings from each will be published soon after in a factsheet, with more in-depth analysis to follow. More details about the project and the methodology can be found on the project website https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news-media-broadly-trusted-source-coronavirus-information-views-uk-government-response-highly. The factsheet appendix provides more detailed data on responses to some of the main questions in this wave.
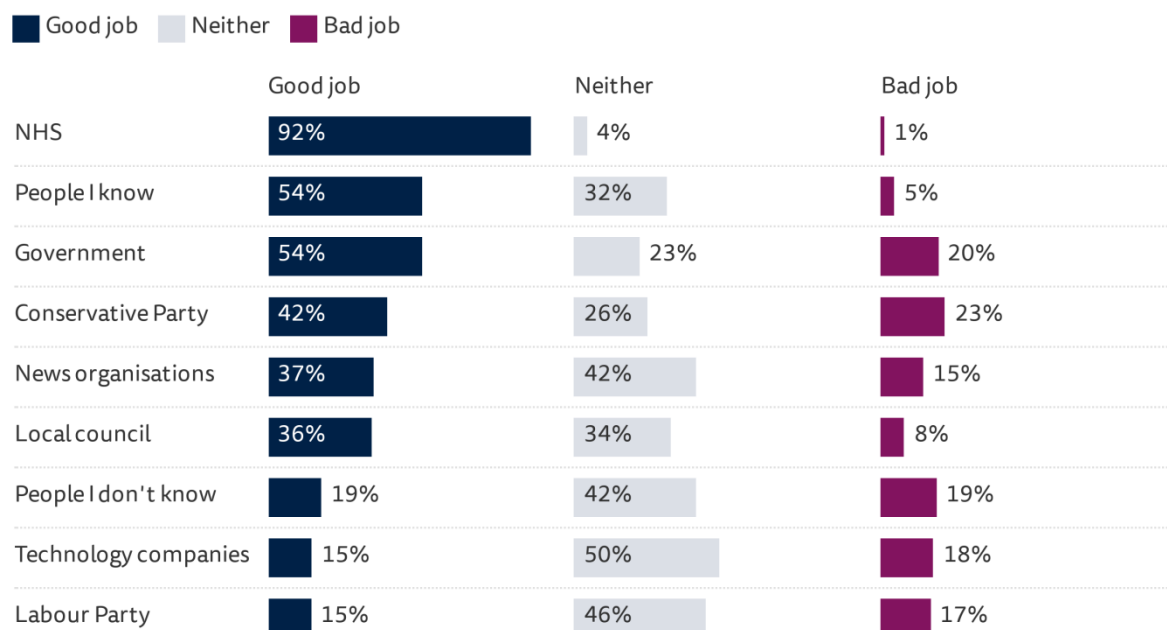
Findings

Most people in the UK rely heavily on news organisations for information about the coronavirus, and while only a minority (38%) feel they can trust most news most of the time, a majority (57%) rate news organisations as trustworthy sources of information specifically on coronavirus.

This is significantly more than say the same about politicians (38%), or about technology platforms like messaging applications (9%), search engines (31%), social media (13%), and video sites (12%). These findings are broadly in line with what we found in an earlier survey conducted from 31 March to 2 April (Nielsen et al. 2020).

Overall, more than a third (37%) of respondents feel news organisations are doing a good job responding to the coronavirus pandemic, and the net picture is positive, though one in six (15%) feel news media are doing a bad job (see Figure 1).

Compared to other institutions, news organisations fare relatively well, far from the near universal sentiment that the NHS is doing a good job (92%) and the majority that says the UK government is doing a good job (54%), but better than technology companies (15%) and the Labour Party (15%) – both of which may not be front-of-mind for most people when it comes to coronavirus.

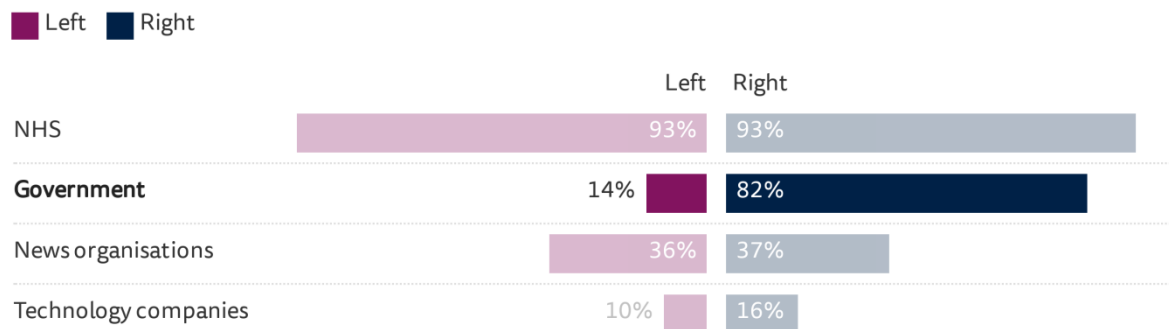Figure 1. Proportion that think each has done a good job of responding to coronavirus

	Good job	Neither	Bad job
NHS	92%	4%	1%
People I know	54%	32%	5%
Government	54%	23%	20%
Conservative Party	42%	26%	23%
News organisations	37%	42%	15%
Local council	36%	34%	8%
People I don't know	19%	42%	19%
Technology companies	15%	50%	18%
Labour Party	15%	46%	17%

UK_Political. Do you think each of the following is doing a good job or a bad job in responding to the coronavirus pandemic? *Base: Total sample: 2,823. Note: Don't knows not shown.*

However, the figures for attitudes towards the government's response to coronavirus hide an astonishing degree of political polarisation between those on the left and those on the right. The vast majority of those that place themselves on the right (82%) think that the

government has done a good job, but just 14% of those on the left say the same.

We do not see these differences for other actors. Even news organisations see similar levels of approval from both sides.

Figure 2. Proportion that think each has done a good job of responding to coronavirus by left-right self-placement
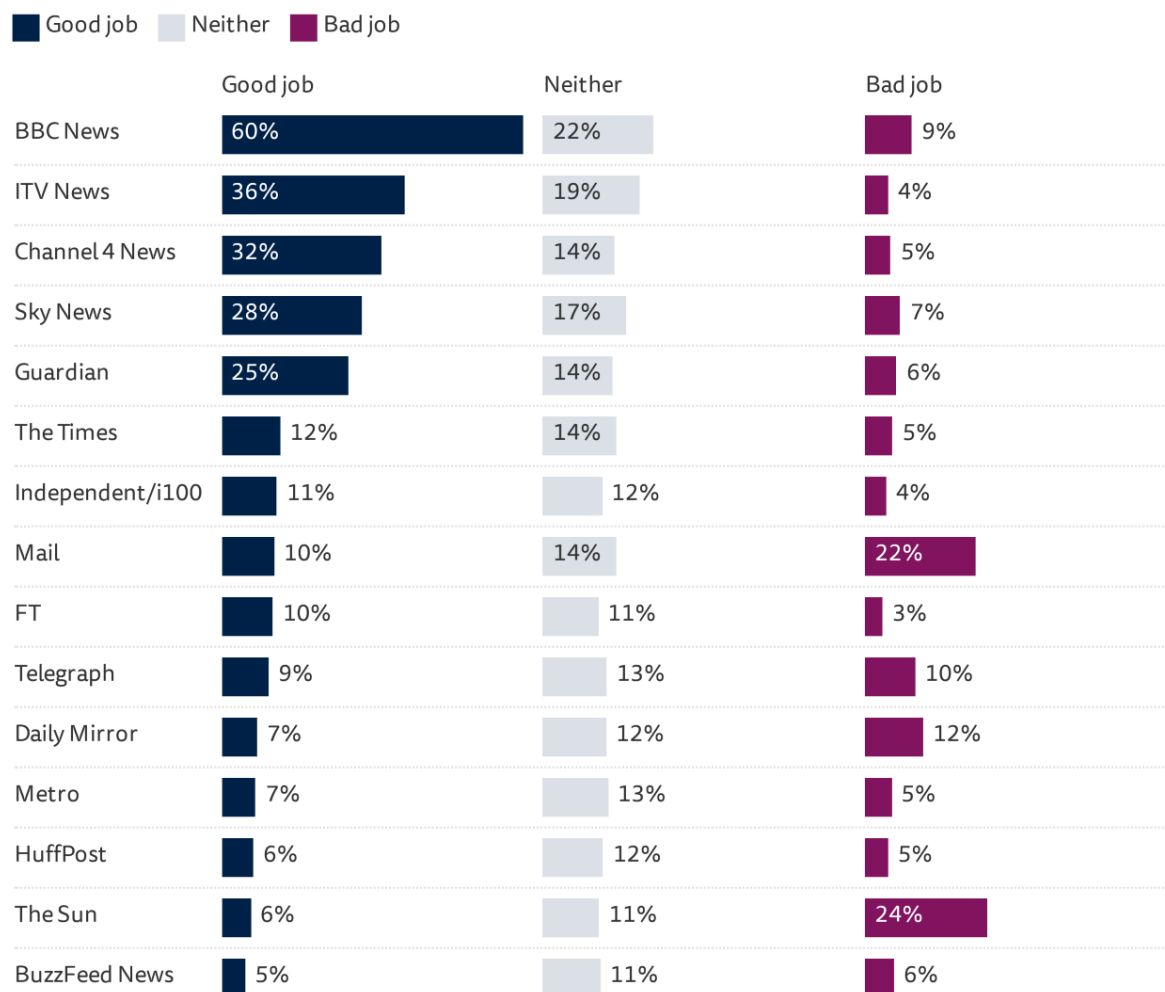

UK_Political. Do you think each of the following is doing a good job or a bad job in responding to the coronavirus pandemic? Q1F. Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale? *Base: Left = 686; Right = 438. Note: Left/right is 'fairly' or 'very' left-/right-wing. Don't knows not shown.*

When asked whether individual news outlets are doing a good job or a bad job covering the coronavirus pandemic, we find very significant variation. TV outlets like the BBC (60%), ITV (36%), Channel 4 (32%), and Sky (28%) get a higher proportion of positive evaluations than many newspapers (probably in part because they are more widely used). All the main TV news outlets also have net positives across the political spectrum, and the BBC is seen as doing a good job by a majority both on the political left, the political right, and in the centre.

Most major UK news outlets have net positive ratings (good job minus bad job), though for some the picture is more mixed, and for a few, more people feel they are doing a bad job than say they are doing a good job. As is clear from Figure 3, many people say they don't know when asked about coverage from specific outlets (unsurprising, as most people do not use them).

Figure 3. Proportion that think each has done a good job of covering coronavirus

	Good job	Neither	Bad job
BBC News	60%	22%	9%
ITV News	36%	19%	4%
Channel 4 News	32%	14%	5%
Sky News	28%	17%	7%
Guardian	25%	14%	6%
The Times	12%	14%	5%
Independent/i100	11%	12%	4%
Mail	10%	14%	22%
FT	10%	11%	3%
Telegraph	9%	13%	10%
Daily Mirror	7%	12%	12%
Metro	7%	13%	5%
HuffPost	6%	12%	5%
The Sun	6%	11%	24%
BuzzFeed News	5%	11%	6%

Legend: ■ Good job ▢ Neither ■ Bad job

BRAND_PERFORMANCE. Do you think each of the following news outlets is doing a good job or a bad job in covering the coronavirus pandemic? *Base: Total sample: 2,823. Note: Don't knows not shown.*

While a large majority (65%) say that news media have helped them understand the coronavirus pandemic and explained what they can do in a response to it (73%), a quarter feel news media have exaggerated the crisis (25%).

More worryingly, almost half of our respondents say they sometimes actively try to avoid the news (47%). This figure is much higher than what we have found in previous research (Newman et al. 2019) and may suggest the beginnings of coronavirus news fatigue after the initial wave of interest.

The UK public is clearly very worried about the impact of the coronavirus. Large majorities see the virus as threatening or very threatening to both the UK population as a whole, the UK economy, and day-to-day life in their local communities. Half say the same about their personal financial situation.

Overall, more people are worried about the society-wide impact on public health (shaded blue on Figure 4), the whole economy, and their local communities than are worried about their personal health and personal financial situation (shaded turquoise).

Figure 4. Proportion that think coronavirus is 'quite' or 'very' threatening to each
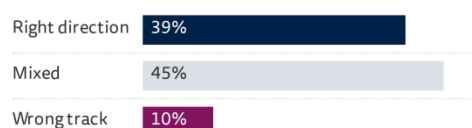
UK economy
95%

Health of UK population
90%

Day-to-day life in my local community
82%

My personal health
64%

My personal financial situation
51%

COVID_Threat. How threatening, if at all, is the coronavirus pandemic to each of the following? *Base: Total sample: 2,823. Showing 'very' or 'quite' threatening.*

Finally, our survey was in the field from 10 April to 14 April, a period in which hospital deaths from COVID-19 in the UK grew from 7,978 to 11,329 (Roser et al. 2020), and where there was growing news coverage of and public discussion of possible shortcomings in the UK's response to the coronavirus crisis.

Overall, just 10% of respondents thought that the coronavirus situation in the UK was on the 'wrong track', with the vast majority saying either they thought the UK was heading in the 'right direction' (39%), or that the picture was mixed (45%). However, this could change fast, as news coverage of coronavirus is relentless and sometimes identifies significant problems, and each new day brings new events and new challenges.

Figure 5. Proportion that think the coronavirus situation in the UK is generally heading in the right direction

Right direction   39%
Mixed   45%
Wrong track   10%

Q19. All in all, do you think the Coronavirus situation in the UK is generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel things are off on the wrong track? *Base: Total sample: 2,823. Note: Don't knows not shown.*

References

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Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Nielsen, R. K. 2019. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019.* Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Roser, M., Ritchie, H., Ortiz-Ospina, E., Hasell, J. 2020. 'Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)'. *Our World in Data.* https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus.

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Appendix: News Media Broadly Trusted as Source of Coronavirus Information, Views of UK Government Response Highly Polarised

Author's note: due to a scripting error, the original data in Table 4 was incorrect. Table 4 was amended on 6th May 2020.

Overview

This appendix provides more detailed data on responses to some of the main questions in the first of ten waves fielded as part of an ongoing online panel survey of a representative sample of the UK population.

The survey was designed by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford to collect data on how people navigate news and information during the coronavirus pandemic as part of the UK COVID-19 news and information

project funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The survey was fielded by YouGov and was in the field from 10 April to 14 April. More details about the project and the methodology can be found on the project website https://reutersinstitute. politics.ox.ac.uk/news-media-broadly-trusted-source-coronavirus-information-views-uk-government-response-highly.

More detail can be found in the tables below.

Table 1. Proportion that think each is the most important issue facing the UK

What do you see as the most important issue facing the UK today? Please select one	%
Coronavirus/Covid-19	69
NHS/hospitals/healthcare	13
Economy	5
Poverty/inequality	3
Pollution/environment/climate change	3
Brexit/Europe	2
Immigration/immigrants	1
Housing	1
Public Services	1
Education/schools	0
Crime/law and order	0
Don't know	1
Sample size	2823

Table 2. Proportion that avoid the news

Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days?	%
Always	2
Often	12
Sometimes	34
Occasionally	23
Never	27
Don't know	1
Net: Yes (always/often/sometimes)	47
Sample size	2823

Table 3. Proportion that used each outlet offline for COVID-19 information in the last 7 days

Which of the following have you used offline in the last 7 days to get news and information about coronavirus (COVID-19) (via TV, radio, print, and other traditional media)?	%
BBC News (TV & Radio)	50
ITV News	23
Sky News	16
Channel 4 News	9
Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday	8
Guardian/Observer	6
A regional or local newspaper	6
Commercial radio news	5
The Times/Sunday Times	5
Sun/Sun on Sunday	4
Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph	3
Metro	3
Daily Mirror/Sunday Mirror/Sunday People	2
CNN	2
i	2
Other newspaper from outside the UK	2
Sample size	2823

Table 4. Proportion that used each outlet online for COVID-19 information in the last 7 days
Author's Note: due to a scripting error, the original data in Table 4 was incorrect. Table 4 was amended on 6th May 2020.

Which of the following have you used online in the last 7 days to get news and information about coronavirus (COVID-19) (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)?	%
BBC News online	53
Guardian online	26
Sky News online	14
Mail online	13
Local newspaper website	11
Telegraph online	8
HuffPost	7
Independent/i100 online	7
ITV News online	5
Times online	5
Metro online	5
Sun online	5
Mirror online	5
Financial Times online	5
Buzzfeed News	4
MSN News	4
Sample size	2823

Table 5. Proportion that used each outlet online for COVID-19 information in the last 7 days

Which of the following have you used in the last 7 days to get news or information about coronavirus (COVID-19)?	%
RT (Russia Today) online	2
The Canary	2
Another Angry Voice	2
Novara Media	1
Evolve Politics	1
Breitbart	1
Wings over Scotland	1
Skwawkbox	1
Sputnik online	0
Sample size	2823

Table 6. Proportion that used each as a source of COVID-19 information in the last 7 days

Which of the following have you used in the last 7 days to get news or information about coronavirus (COVID-19)?	%
The national government	43
National health organisations (eg NHS)	43
News organisations	41
Scientists, doctors, or other health experts	31
Global health organisations (eg WHO)	24
Ordinary people that I know personally	21
Individual politicians	10
Ordinary people that I do not know personally	6
None of these	23
Sample size	2823

Table 7. Proportion that used each for COVID-19 information in the last 7 days

Which of the following have you used in the last 7 days for news and information about coronavirus (COVID-19)?	%
Google search	32
Facebook	25
Twitter	18
YouTube	12
WhatsApp	10
Facebook Messenger	6
Instagram	4
Bing	2
Snapchat	2
LinkedIn	2
Nextdoor	2
Zoom	1
Microsoft Teams	1
Skype	1
TikTok	1
Houseparty	0
Sample size	2823

Table 8. Proportion that trust each for COVID-19 information

How trustworthy would you say news and information about coronavirus (COVID-19) from the following is? Please use the scale below, where 0 is 'not at all trustworthy' and 10 is 'completely trustworthy'.	Trustworthy (6-10) (%)	Neither (5) (%)	Not trustworthy (0-4) (%)	Don't know (%)
National health organisations (eg NHS)	90	5	3	2
Scientists, doctors, or other health experts	88	6	3	3
Global health organisations (eg WHO)	79	8	9	4
The national government	67	13	17	2
News organisations	57	22	18	3
Individual politicians	38	30	27	5
Ordinary people that I know personally	34	38	24	5
Ordinary people that I do not know personally	8	36	49	8
Sample size	2823			

Table 9. Proportion that trust each for COVID-19 information (search and social media)

How trustworthy would you say news and information about coronavirus (COVID-19) from the following is? Please use the scale below, where 0 is 'not at all trustworthy' and 10 is 'completely trustworthy'.	Trustworthy (6-10) (%)	Neither (5) (%)	Not trustworthy (0-4) (%)	Don't know (%)
Search engines (eg Google or Bing)	31	39	23	8
Social media (eg Facebook or Twitter)	13	27	54	7
Video sites (eg YouTube or Vimeo)	12	30	47	11
Messaging applications (eg WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger)	9	29	50	11
Sample size	2823			

Table 10. Proportion concerned about COVID-19 misinformation from each source

How concerned, if at all, are you about false or misleading information about coronavirus (COVID-19) from each of the following?	Very/extremely concerned (%)	Somewhat concerned (%)	Not concerned (%)	Don't know (%)
Ordinary people that I do not know personally	37	32	22	10
Individual politicians	30	38	26	6
News organisations	29	39	27	5
The national government	27	26	42	5
Ordinary people that I know personally	18	37	37	8
Global health organisations (eg WHO)	17	18	59	5
Scientists, doctors, or other health experts	15	17	63	4
National health organisations (eg NHS)	14	14	68	4
Sample size	2823			

Table 11. Proportion that think COVID-19 is threatening to each

How threatening, if at all, is the coronavirus pandemic to each of the following?	Very threatening (%)	Quite threatening (%)	Not very threatening (%)	Not threatening at all (%)	Don't know (%)
The UK economy	76	19	1	0	3
The health of the UK population as a whole	53	36	7	1	3
Day-to-day life in my local community	39	43	12	2	4
My personal health	25	39	27	5	4
The UK financial situation	19	32	33	10	6
Sample size	2823				

Table 12. Proportion that agree with each statement about the news media

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)
The news media has explained what I can do in response to the pandemic	73	16	8	2
The news media has helped me understand the pandemic	65	20	13	2
The news media has exaggerated the pandemic	25	24	46	4
Sample size	2823			

Table 13. Proportion that agree with each statement about the UK government

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)
The government has explained what I can do in response to the pandemic	78	11	9	2
The government has helped me understand the pandemic	67	17	14	2
The government has exaggerated the pandemic	10	19	68	4
Sample size	2823			

Table 14. Proportion that think each has done a good job of covering coronavirus

Do you think each of the following is doing a good job or a bad job in responding to the coronavirus pandemic?	Good job (%)	Neither good nor bad job (%)	Bad job (%)	Don't know
The NHS	92	4	1	3
Ordinary people that I know personally	54	32	5	9
The UK Government	54	23	20	4
The Conservative party	42	26	23	10
News organisations	37	42	15	6
My local council	36	34	8	22
Ordinary people that I do not know personally	19	42	19	20
Technology companies (e.g Facebook, Google)	15	50	18	16
The Labour party	15	46	17	22
Sample size	2823			

Table 15. Proportion that think each news outlet has done a good job of covering coronavirus

Do you think each of the following is doing a good job or a bad job in responding to the coronavirus pandemic?	Good job (%)	Neither good nor bad job (%)	Bad job (%)	Don't know (%)
BBC News	60	22	9	9
ITV News	36	19	4	40
Channel 4 News	32	14	5	49
Sky News	28	17	7	49
Guardian	25	14	6	55
The Times	12	14	5	68
Independent/i100	11	12	4	73
Daily Mail/MailOnline	10	14	22	53
FT	10	11	3	75
Daily Telegraph	9	13	10	68
Daily Mirror	7	12	12	69
Metro	7	13	5	75
HuffPost	6	12	5	77
Sun	6	11	24	59
BuzzFeed News	5	11	6	78
Sample size	2823			

Table 16. Proportion that did each activity on the previous day

Which of the following, if any, did you do yesterday?	%
I exercised or went for a walk	50
I went to the supermarket/food shop	20
I went to a concert	0
I participated in a sporting event	0
I went to a restaurant	0
I went to a religious event	0
I attended a sporting event	0
I went to the cinema	0
I went to the pub	0
None of these	41
Sample size	2823

Table 17. Proportion that identified each statement about COVID-19 as true or false

The following statements have been said about coronavirus (COVID-19). To the best of your knowledge, do you think each one of them is true or false?	True (%)	False (%)	Don't know (%)
Coronavirus can be transmitted in areas with hot weather	64	17	19
Eating garlic can help prevent infection with coronavirus	2	88	11
Older people are more susceptible to becoming seriously ill from COVID-19	93	4	3
Antibiotics are effective in treating coronavirus	3	78	19
Coronavirus was made in a laboratory	13	57	29
5G helps transmit coronavirus	2	88	10
COVID-19 is more severe than flu	89	4	7
Children can catch coronavirus	96	1	3
Sample size	2823		

Table 18. Proportion that think the coronavirus situation in the UK is generally headed in the right direction

All in all, do you think the Coronavirus situation in the UK is generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel things are off on the wrong track?	%
Right direction	39
Mixed	45
Wrong track	10
Don't know	6
Sample Size	2823

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Table 4. Proportion that used each outlet online for COVID-19 information in the last 7 days
This is the original data before it was amended on 6th May 2020 (see Table 4 above)

Which of the following have you used online in the last 7 days to get news and information about coronavirus (COVID-19) (via websites, apps, social media, and other forms of Internet access)?	%
BBC News online	36
Guardian online	16
Sky News online	9
MailOnline	9
Local newspaper website	8
Telegraph online	5
HuffPost	5
Independent/i100 online	5
ITV News online	4
Times online	4
Metro online	3
Sun online	3
MSN News	3
Financial Times online	3
Buzzfeed News	3
Yahoo! News	2
Sample size	2823