

Nicola Sturgeon Is Leading Scotland Out of Lockdown, and Out of the UK

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Global Research, May 21, 2020

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has been voted the UK's 'most impressive' politician according to a recent poll. The [survey](#), carried out by Press Gazette, asked 2700 people who they thought was doing best at handling the current crisis. Sturgeon came out top, with 29% of the vote, ahead of Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Labour opposition leader Keir Starmer. The poll follows on from a recent Scottish Government survey which gave Nicola Sturgeon a rating of 84% for her slow and measured approach to lockdown. For in defiance of Westminster's lifting of lockdown restrictions earlier this month, Scotland has until now kept them in place, only hinting recently that some may be lifted on 28th May.

The statistics regarding Sturgeon's performance will not come as a surprise to many, given the contrast with her Westminster counterpart. Boris Johnson has faced a barrage of criticism in recent weeks over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic in Britain. And with the highest death rate in Europe, and second highest death toll in the world, it's no surprise that questions are being raised. Yet the PM has of late, not provided the consistent, strong leadership required at this time. In contrast to his Scottish counterpart, who gives a daily briefing on the Covid-19 situation in Scotland, without fail; Boris Johnson has not given a press conference for days, and has not been seen in public for days, prompting #WhereisBoris to trend on Twitter. The difference between the two leaders could not be greater; every time Boris puts a foot wrong, it boosts Sturgeon, and the case for Scottish independence.

Unlike the Scottish government, which has yet to make any change to the current social distancing guidelines, other than being able to leave home now twice a day for exercise – instead of once as previously stated – Boris Johnson announced last week that people from different households could now meet; that if required, workers could return to work, and that from 1st June some shops would reopen and some pupils would return to school. The messaging also changed – rather confusingly, from 'Stay Home' to 'Stay Alert' – with no-one quite clear as to what the latter actually means. The motivation for beginning to lift lockdown measures is no doubt, mainly, economic, with experts warning that the UK is headed for a recession like no other. But there are concerns that Johnson has acted too soon, as with the death toll rising to the virus every day, we could be faced with another 'peak' if we return to normality too soon.

For the reality is the virus is still with us, and is likely to remain with us for years to come. Boris Johnson himself gave the example of SARS, for which, he highlighted, a vaccine has not been found in the last 18 years. Although scientists across the globe are working tirelessly in a bid to discover a vaccine as soon as possible, there are no guarantees that they will succeed in the short term. The key in the meantime, will be testing – both for those

infected with coronavirus and for immunity, with antibody testing. But the UK government has only recently started to take testing seriously. Early on in the pandemic it downplayed the importance of it, favouring 'herd immunity' instead. This was in contrast to countries like China and South Korea that saw testing as a vital way of managing the crisis. Back then, Britain's Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir Patrick Vallance, [said](#)

'We think this virus is likely to be one that comes year on year, becomes like a seasonal virus. Communities will become immune to it and that's going to be an important part of controlling this longer term. About 60% is the sort of figure you need to get herd immunity'.

Britain has paid dearly for this 'laissez-faire' approach.

The case against the UK government is building by the day. Aside from the overall death toll of 35,341, it has been established that an additional 23,000 deaths took place this year in care homes. Far from putting a 'protective ring' around care homes as Health Minister Matt Hancock has said, the government has been accused of putting a '[noose](#)' around them, with elderly patients effectively like sitting ducks in the wake of the pandemic. It has been observed that no real attempts were made to prevent the spread of coronavirus throughout Britain's nursing homes, with patients regularly admitted into homes from hospital, without being tested for the virus. Recently it was even reported that Personal Protective Equipment originally intended for care homes was diverted to NHS hospitals. Justice Secretary Robert Buckland admitted on Wednesday that:

"We needed to make a choice about testing, we did decide to focus upon the NHS."

Choices indeed have been made. And increasingly, questions are being raised as to whether the right decisions have been taken – both before and during the pandemic. For at a time when the country is 'clapping for carers' every week, in a display of public support for NHS staff, the government is passing its immigration bill, targeting the very migrants who play such an important role in Britain's health service. As MP Valerie Vaz put it: 'With this immigration bill the government is effectively clapping them out of the country'. Indeed the harsh reality of Tory policy cannot be escaped during this pandemic. The under-funding of public services over the years, particularly the NHS, primarily by the Conservative government is manifesting itself during this crisis like at no other time. We have entered an era where capitalism is under more strain than ever, where the only solution to this crisis comes from state interference – with the transport industry to care homes to universities all set to require substantial financial aid to survive. A different Britain will emerge from the pandemic.

As for Scotland, it must decide whether it wants to continue being at the receiving end of Tory policies which favour business over people, or whether it will finally carve out for itself a fairer society with welfare at the fore. With a resurgence of coronavirus potentially looming on the horizon, I know which society I'd prefer to live in...

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This article was originally published on [InfoBrics](#).

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