



UNFORGIVEABLE?

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC
April 2022

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METHODOLOGY

8,397 adults in Great Britain were interviewed online between 8 and 19 April 2022. Data have been weighted to be representative of all adults in Great Britain.

Full data tables are available at LordAshcroftPolls.com.

16 focus groups were held between 19 and 26 April 2022 in the following constituencies:

Cheltenham, Wimbledon

2019 Conservative, 2016 Remain, now undecided between Con and LD

Banbury

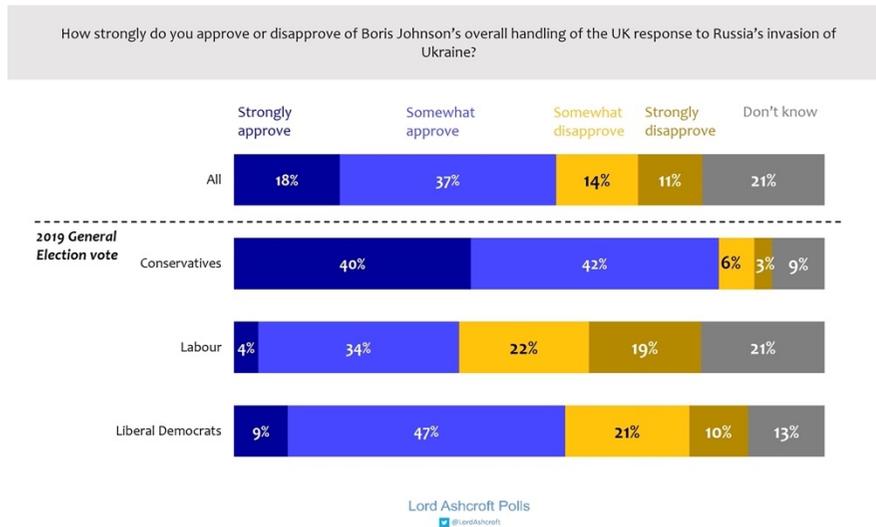
2019 Conservative – half 2016 Remain, half 2016 Leave

Redcar, Heywood & Middleton, Don Valley, Gedling, West Bromwich East

2019 Conservative, 2016 Leave – half first-time Conservatives in 2019

1: In the news

Ukraine



More than half of voters (55%), including 38% of 2019 Labour voters and more than 8 in 10 Conservatives, said they approved of Boris Johnson's overall handling of the UK's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In our focus groups, most thought Boris Johnson was handling this particular situation reasonably well and that the government had struck the right balance of offering support to Ukraine given the constraints ("when you've got someone like Putin you don't know how they're going to react"). Some hoped that more was happening on the ground than the public had been told.

"I think Boris seems to be getting this one pretty right at the minute. I'd like to think there are other things going on that are helpful to Ukraine that we don't know about."

"There are stories all the time about how difficult it is to get visas and things. People have offered their homes and got Ukrainian books for them to read and everything, but they can't get people to come and stay because it's so bureaucratic."

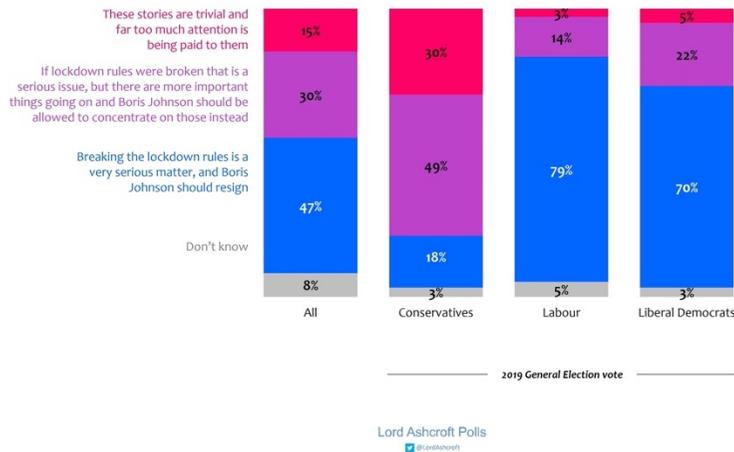
However, one area of criticism was the refugee scheme, which many believed was beset by unnecessary bureaucracy and long delays. A few also noted a difference between the government's attitude to Ukrainian refugees and those of different ethnicities coming from outside Europe.

"I don't have anything against Ukrainians, but we're opening the doors to them and there's a double standard, quite clearly. And on top of that, they're providing incentives for UK residents to host."

Partygate

Asked which of three statements came closest to their own view about the "Partygate" scandal, just under half of all voters (47%) – including nearly 1 in 5 of those who voted Conservative in 2019 – said they thought "breaking the lockdown rules is a very serious matter, and Boris Johnson should resign." This included more than 3 in 10 (31%) of those who switched from Labour to the Conservatives at the election.

Thinking about the allegations of parties held at 10 Downing Street during lockdown, which of the following statements comes closest to your own view?



Three in ten – including just under half (49%) of 2019 Conservatives – agreed that “if lockdown rules were broken that is a serious issue, but there are more important things going on and Boris Johnson should be allowed to concentrate on those instead.”

A further 15% of all voters, including 3 in 10 Tory voters from 2019, said they thought “these stories are trivial and far too much attention is being paid to them.” Younger voters were more likely to say Johnson should resign, while older voters were more likely to think he should be allowed to concentrate on other things or that the stories were trivial.

This division of opinion was largely reflected in our focus groups. Longer-standing Conservatives, including those who had never been Johnson enthusiasts, often argued that the breach of the rules had not been that serious – or that serious as it had been, it was time to move on.

“It didn’t bother me. They went into the garden, had wine and cheese, and I wish I was invited.”

“If I was in that environment, working the hours they work, I can absolutely imagine having a drink with that group of people because they were working with them anyway. It’s a bit borderline, but the fact that this has gone on and on is crazy.”

“The police are doing their thing, they’re paying the fines. But it’s like, can we stop now? Compared to World War Three, a party that happened two years ago is down the list a bit.”

“It’s clearly not OK. But at the same time, we have to draw a line somewhere. We don’t want to hear about it every day of the week for the next month.”

First-time Conservative Leave voters in “red wall” seats were on the whole more critical, especially if they had been assiduous in following the lockdown rules or had been unable to attend events like weddings or funerals or been unable to visit sick relatives. Those who were angry complained that Johnson had clearly broken rules that he had imposed on other people, believed he had lied rather than taken an early opportunity to come clean, and did not feel that his subsequent apology had been sincere.

“He was laughing at us while he was partying.”

“If he’d been caught at a party and apologised, maybe people would have forgiven him. But lying constantly and being caught out and then being caught out again – we can’t accept any more excuses.”

“I can’t believe he’s still standing as PM. It’s an absolute liberty that he could have one rule for himself and one for the rest of us. I had family weddings and funerals I couldn’t attend. No sympathy at all.”

“He’s only sorry because he’s been caught. He’s still not bothered. He even had to read his apology off the idiot board.”

While some said they were disappointed but not surprised, a few said the stories had significantly changed their view of the Prime Minister. These people tended to say they had previously regarded Johnson as a maverick but not a liar or a lawbreaker, or that the episode showed him to be part of an elite which looked down on them, rather than being – as some had felt in 2019 – on their side against the political establishment.

“I never thought he’d be that bad. I never thought he could stand there and tell barefaced lies. But it’s black and white.”

“You know when you have a massive argument because little things have built up. I think that’s what it is with Boris, it’s like this is the final straw for a lot of people.”

“He was always known as a bit of a – for want of a better term – character, but I always felt that was a strength before. But it feels like it’s taken a turn now.”

“There’s complete disrespect and it says everything. I voted Conservative for many years but I’m not going to at the next election because of this. I just can’t bring myself to do it.”

What is a woman?

Poll participants were shown two statements on the issue of trans right and how to define a woman – one made by Johnson and the other by Starmer, but with no attribution – and asked how strongly they agreed with each one.

Overall, there was more and stronger agreement with Johnson’s statement that people wanting to make a transition should be treated with generosity and respect but “the basic facts of biology remain overwhelmingly important” than with Starmer’s view that a woman is a female adult and “in addition to that, trans women are women.”

62% agreed with Johnson’s statement (including 33% strongly agreeing) while 41% agreed with Starmer’s (19% strongly). 2019 Conservative voters were much more likely to agree with Johnson’s statement than Starmer’s (by 75% to 27%) while 2019 Labour voters were only slightly more likely to agree with Starmer’s than Johnson’s (by 59% to 54%).

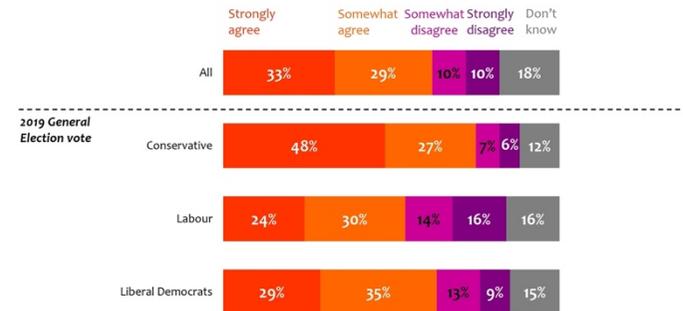
Among those who switched from Labour to the Conservatives in 2019, 72% agreed with Johnson’s statement and 32% with Starmer’s.

Women were more likely to agree with the Johnson statement by 61% to 46% and men by 62% to 37%. Voters aged 18-24 were the only age cohort expressing more agreement with Starmer than Johnson.

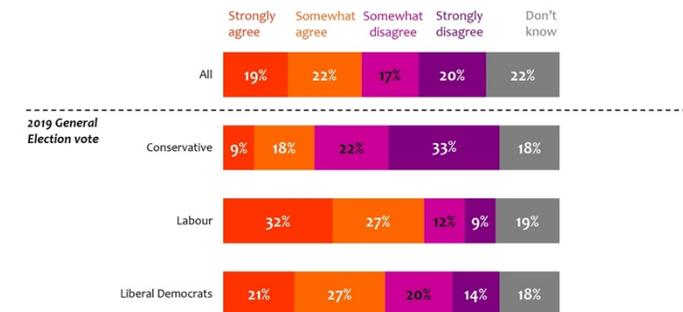
How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
[Statements shown to participants without attribution]



“We must recognise when people want to make a transition in their lives that they should be treated with the maximum possible generosity and respect but when it comes to distinguishing between man and woman, the basic facts of biology remain overwhelmingly important.”



“A woman is a female adult, and in addition to that trans women are women.”



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A number of focus group participants had noticed the controversy and the fact that Starmer had been questioned on the subject in recent interviews, and some mentioned it unprompted. While some gave Starmer credit for trying to be inclusive and avoid giving offence, more felt he was afraid to give a more definitive answer for fear of upsetting the more radical wing of his party.

“He’s a barrister and he can string the English language together, so it says a lot that a person like that is unable to have an answer. He’s scared to articulate it.”

“Not a single person on the Labour front bench could define what a woman is. It’s embarrassing, quite frankly. They’re so scared of being done by the left of the party.”

Some had also noticed what they regarded as Johnson’s more straightforward answer to similar questions and drew conclusions about the wider characteristics of the two politicians.

“It shows that Starmer as Prime Minister would be absolutely terrified of upsetting anyone at the core of his party. He left it pretty wishy-washy, and I don’t want a wishy-washy Prime Minister.”

“Boris has said what most people are thinking – a man is a man and a woman is a woman, and they shouldn’t be competing in these events... That’s what Boris has got, though. He’s not afraid to upset a few people. He’ll make a decision that he feels is right.”

“Keir Starmer not knowing what a woman is, that’s his gift to the Tories. He doesn’t seem to have an opinion himself. I don’t know what his policies are, I don’t really think he’s got any.”

Priority one: the cost of living

Across the board, voters identified the cost of living as the most important issue currently facing the country. Six in ten named it among their top three (including 60% of 2019 Tories and 65% of 2019 Labour voters).

The NHS, health and social care was second, chosen by 49% of all participants including 48% of 2019 Conservatives and 60% of 2019 Labour voters.

Those aged 65 or over were the only group for whom the cost of living did not top the list: 60% chose the NHS, compared to 52% for the cost of living.

For voters as a whole and 2019 Conservatives, the economy was the third most likely to be picked among the top three. 2019 Labour and Lib Dem voters were more likely to name climate change and the environment – the fourth issue on the list for voters overall.

Participants in our groups spoke at length about rising living costs, especially fuel and energy prices. While some believed this was an inevitable consequence of the war, covid and (for some) Brexit, many were puzzled as to the reasons. Many also noted that rising wholesale energy prices lead to rising household bills, the same never seems to apply in the opposite direction.

Many also felt the government should be doing more to help hard-pressed families, either with a more stringent cap (as some had noticed had been introduced in France) or through relief funded by windfall tax on energy companies, which must surely be enjoying a boom in profits.

“I think it would be nice to have a reason why everything’s going up. Martin Lewis said everything was going up before the war.”

“France have put a cap on EDF prices. The government doesn’t seem to be doing much intervention here.”

Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country? Please select three from the list below.
 [NB % naming in top three, 2019 General election vote]

All voters

	The cost of living	60%
	The NHS, health and social care	49%
	The economy	30%
	Climate change and the environment	23%
	Immigration	16%

 Conservative voters

	The cost of living	60%
	The NHS, health and social care	48%
	The economy	41%
	Immigration	28%
	Defence and security	23%

Labour voters 

	The cost of living	65%
	The NHS, health and social care	60%
	Climate change and the environment	33%
	The economy	23%
	Inequality	14%

 Liberal Democrats voters

	The cost of living	58%
	The NHS, health and social care	55%
	Climate change and the environment	40%
	The economy	29%
	Brexit	17%

Labour-Conservative switchers

	The cost of living	67%
	The NHS, health and social care	50%
	The economy	37%
	Immigration	29%
	Crime and policing	18%

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“The cost of oil rose when the Ukraine crisis started. But now it’s fallen, and we haven’t seen that in the prices we pay. So we’re being fleeced.”

“There was a windfall tax on banks a few years ago, why not put a windfall tax on the energy companies. Gas and electricity companies have benefited more than anyone.”

Many in the groups had not registered the Chancellor’s Spring Statement or “Mini-Budget”. Most of those that did were unimpressed, feeling that any help was vastly outweighed by tax rises and price increases.

“He took 5p off petrol and everyone was laughing. It’s an absolute joke. What they do is always a tenner here or a tenner there, but the cost of living for most people has gone up £300 or £400 a month. I’ve never known so many conversations in the pub dominated by ‘how are we going to pay our bills?’”

For some, the absence of more help was evidence of a government out of touch with normal people’s lives. This view had been reinforced by recent stories about Rishi Sunak’s family’s wealth and his wife’s tax status (though some rejected this as simple envy).

“They’re unbelievably out of touch with the common person. Watching Sunak filling up his assistant’s car at the petrol station and having no clue how to use a contactless debit card. I think that infuriated me more than the actual budget.”

“All of them are wealthy and that’s fine, but you’ve got to have some level of commonality with someone on a normal standard of living. He’s far removed from that reality. There was that great photo of him with the coffee mug where you press a button on your phone and get it to heat up, which you can get for £400. It’s like, Rishi Sunak, man of the people.”

“During the lockdown he did fantastic, furlough was a massive help to us as a family. But he could have done so much better. He’s not listening to the people anymore.”

“At least he’s worked in the private sector, he’s not gone through politics his whole life. He’s lived in the real world, then become an MP. How many MPs have done that?”

However, some said they were not surprised that the government had been unable to do more given the state of the public finances following the huge spending during the pandemic.

“When the furlough scheme came in, I said to my wife that we’re going to pay for this. That’s an awful lot of money, paying people to sit on their arse for two years. When it’s all over we’re going to be hit in the pocket.”

“It was all great having 50% off a burger, but I think everybody always knew we were going to have to pay that back.”

“They gave out an awful lot of help. It was obvious that was going to come at a cost. I don’t think they get credited as much as they should for the good that they did.”

“I wouldn’t want to be balancing their budget... Although we might say the Tory party isn’t doing very well, and I would probably agree with that, I don’t really know what Labour has to suggest.”

However, some participants, especially in “red wall” groups, felt the government was making the problem worse than it had to be through high energy taxes and the pursuit of net zero – though even some who had complained about rising energy costs disagreed.

“There’s a 20% levy for the green stuff. Well, this perhaps isn’t the time to have a levy.”

“We should be going into wind and other fuels, but it shouldn’t be that we all get thrown into poverty.”

“I do think it’s a priority. And maybe if we concentrated more on producing our own energy we might not be paying quite so much for gas and oil and things we’re importing so we’re a hostage to whatever the international prices are.”

Looking at the economy more broadly, the groups tended to feel that there were plenty of jobs available for those who wanted them. Many said they were struggling to recruit in their own industries, or had observed staff shortages as customers, especially in travel and hospitality.

Migrants to Rwanda

Participants in all groups had heard about the government’s plan to send some categories of migrants to Rwanda. They were also aware of opposition to the plan, notably from Theresa May and the Archbishop of Canterbury – not that these interventions had swayed any participants’ views on the issue.

Views among our 2019 Conservative voters were very mixed. In general, there was support for the idea that something needed to be done to cope with the number of illegal migrants already in the UK and to deter others from making the journey, especially on small boats across the Channel. Many also argued that people could no longer be said to be fleeing persecution if they had already made their way to France.

“In international law, the refugee should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach, but they’re not doing that. They’re coming through the European Union, through Germany and France, to get to us because we’re a soft touch.”

“When it was first announced I thought, well that doesn’t sound too great. But then I thought, they’ve probably tried everything else and while it might not sit too well, we need a deterrent.”

“It’s only the illegal ones who are going there. We’ve basically run out of room to house them. Social services and hospital care are at breaking point.”

“The Tories handle these things better. If Labour could let the whole world come here and give them everything for free, they would. They love to give money to people who are on the ponce, don’t they?”

“People like the Archbishop of Canterbury say it’s immoral but from a government point of view, what are you supposed to do? More and more people are coming and taking advantage. Is he saying Rwanda is worse than where they are now? I think God’s alright with it all.”

Most of those who objected to the scheme had concerns about Rwanda itself. Though several had noticed the “Visit Rwanda” marketing on display at Arsenal’s Emirates Stadium, the country was still largely associated with the 1994 atrocities and a poor record on human rights.

Some also thought the plan sounded expensive, and (as noted above) contrasted it with the scheme to house Ukrainian refugees in Britain.

“Where did Rwanda come from? I don’t understand why it’s even an idea. I thought it was a hoax.”

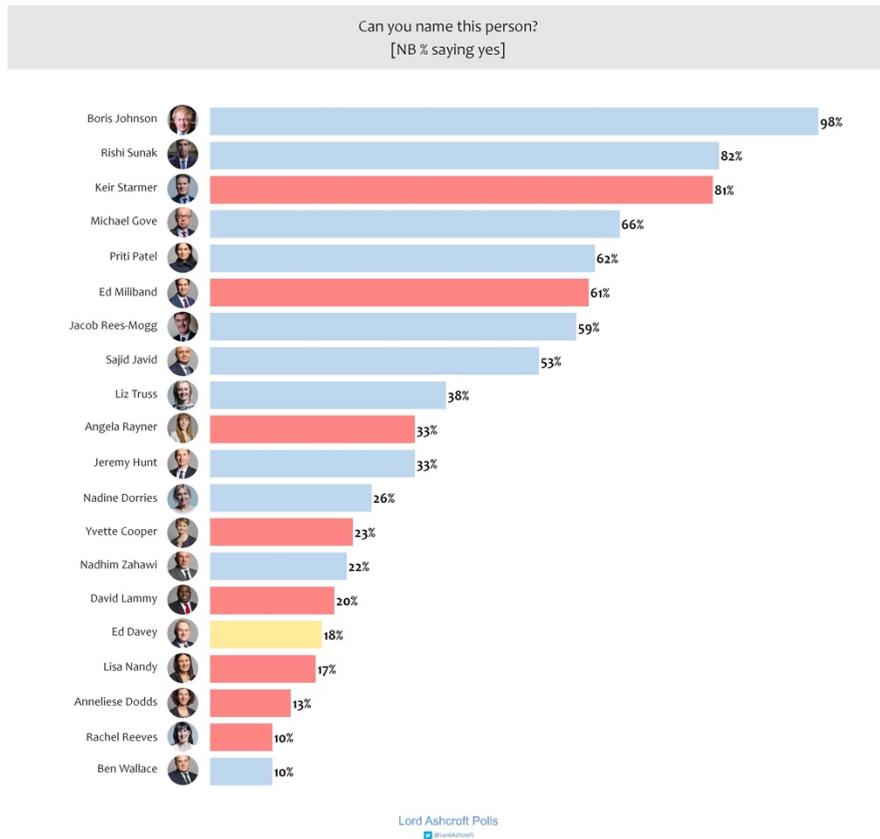
“I think it’s totally immoral. I’m not saying they are all genuine refugees, but to go through what they’ve been through so they will risk doing what they’re doing, and then sending them 4,000 miles to be processed – it’s a problem. We need a more speedy, efficient way of processing them here.”

“It sounds like a very expensive way to do it, transporting them over there. It’s pushing the problem out of the way.”

“It’s a financial transaction with a country that’s got a poor record on human rights. It’s like Turkey, putting people in tents in the desert because they’re being paid to do the EU’s dirty work.”

2: Parties and leaders

Name that politician



In our poll we showed respondents pictures of politicians and asked who they were. On the Conservative side, Boris Johnson was correctly identified by 98%, with Rishi Sunak on 82%. Michael Gove was the third most widely recognised Tory on 66%, followed by Priti Patel with 62% and Jacob Rees-Mogg on 59%.

Keir Starmer was the most widely recognised Labour politician, named correctly by 81%, followed by Ed Miliband (61%) and Angela Rayner (33%). Only 10% recognised shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves. Just under one in five (18%) could name Lib Dem leader Ed Davey.

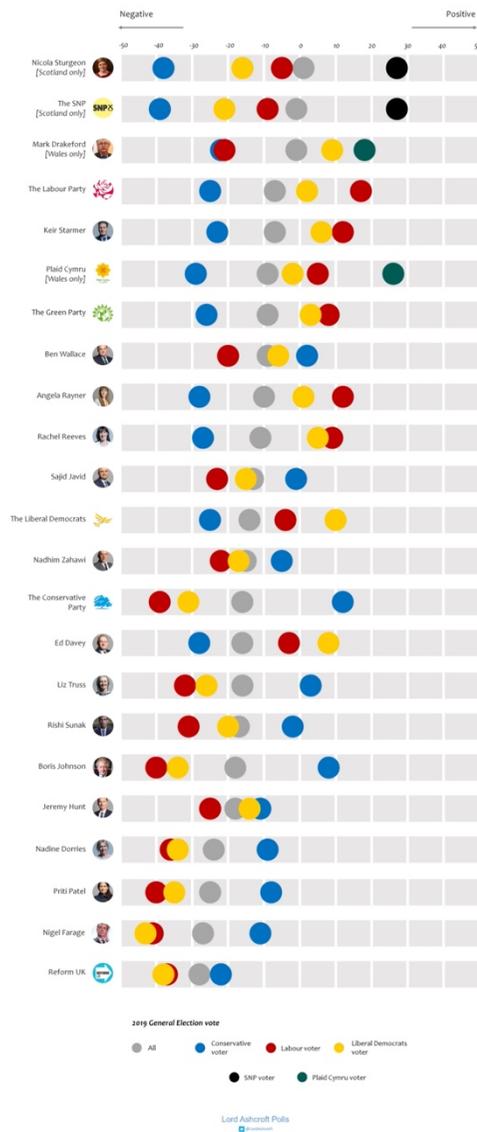
Party and leader ratings

Asked how positive or negative they felt about parties and politicians, voters in Scotland and Wales gave their current leaders notably higher ratings than their counterparts in England. Nicola Sturgeon was the only politician to receive a net positive rating from her electorate overall (+1) and received the highest marks of any leader from her own party's voters (+27). Mark Drakeford received a nearly neutral score of -1 from Welsh voters in general.

Keir Starmer received the same rating as the Labour Party as a whole (-7), while Boris Johnson (-18) and Rishi Sunak (-17) received similar ratings to the Conservative Party (-16).

2019 Labour voters gave their party a higher score (+17) than 2019 Conservative voters gave the Tories (+12). Those who switched from Labour to the Tories in 2019 still gave Labour a lower rating (-15) than the Conservatives (-1).

How positive or negative do you feel about each of the following, where -50 means 'very negative indeed' and +50 means 'very positive indeed'?
[NB Mean scores]



Best Prime Minister

Which of the following do you think would make the better Prime Minister?



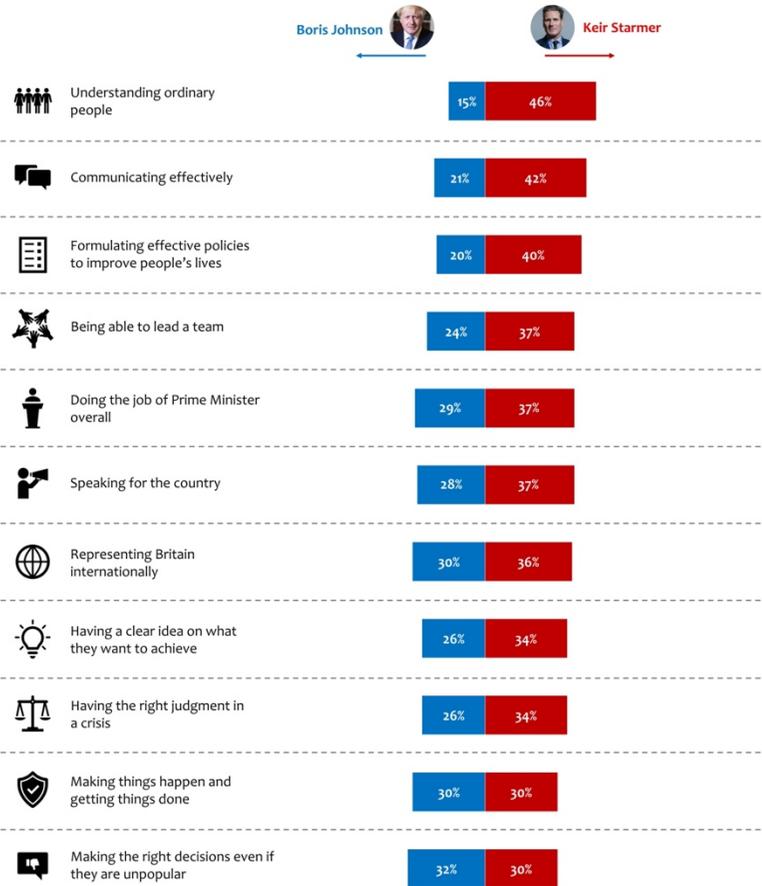
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Asked whether Johnson or Starmer would make the better Prime Minister, a plurality (38%) said “not sure”. Among the remainder, Starmer led by 35% to 27%.

30% of 2019 Conservatives and 27% of 2019 Labour voters said they were not sure who would make the better PM. 36% of those who switched from Labour to the Conservatives in 2019 were also unsure, though Johnson led among this group by 47% to 17%.

Prime Ministerial roles

Who do you think would do a better job as Prime Minister when it came to each of the following – Boris Johnson or Keir Starmer?



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Asked who they thought would perform better in roles sometimes associated with the Prime Minister, Johnson was thought more likely to do a good job when it came to “making the right decisions even if they are unpopular” (though by only 32% to 30%), and the two were tied on “making things happen and getting things done” (with only 3 in 10 thinking this applied to either).

Otherwise, Starmer led by 6 points on representing Britain internationally, by 8 points on having a clear idea what he wants to achieve and having the right judgment in a crisis, by 9 points on speaking for the country, by 13 points on being able to lead a team, by 20 points on formulating effective policies to improve people’s lives, by 21 points on communicating effectively, by 31 points on understanding ordinary people, and by 8 points on “doing the job of Prime Minister overall”.

In each case, however, around 4 in 10 respondents answered “don’t know”.

The Boris question

Thinking back to your opinion of Boris Johnson at the last election, which of the following best describes you:

Thinking about your opinion of Boris Johnson and the next election, which of the following best describes you:



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16% of our poll participants said of Boris Johnson at the last election “I thought he was a rogue and a chancer, but I voted for him anyway,” compared to 19% saying they voted for him not thinking he was a rogue and a chancer.

39% of those who voted Conservative in 2019 said they did so despite thinking Johnson was a rogue and a chancer.

While the total considering Johnson a rogue and a chance has risen overall, 13% in our poll said that they now think he's a rogue and a chancer but that won't stop them voting for him at the next election. Among those leaning towards the Conservatives at the next election, 4 in 10 said "I think he's a rogue and a chancer but that won't stop me voting for him."

Several in our focus groups – again, often first-time 2019 Conservatives – said their opinion of Johnson had deteriorated sharply in recent months. As well as the party controversy, they felt that apart from Brexit he had not delivered as expected, that he seemed to have no plan to improve things for them, and that the Conservatives had shown themselves to be out of touch with their lives and concerns.

"I wasn't a big fan of Jeremy Corbyn so I thought I'd give the Conservatives a try. And now I think what an absolute mistake to make. They've just been tough working people. The party stuff, he way they seem to dance to their own tune. The rules aren't for them. They're unbelievably out of touch with the common person."

"It comes across as though he's winging it. When covid first struck I thought God, you wouldn't that job, but now it's like he's making it up as he goes along."

"I saw him as someone capable and different – 'we'll get this done, we'll get that done'. I really believed he was going to deliver. And I feel like he's let everybody down."

However, even some who had been critical of the government still defended Johnson, praising his handling of Brexit, covid and particularly the vaccine programme, or arguing that his ability to weather controversy was an important component of leadership. Others said Boris had not been a factor in their decision to vote Conservative in 2019, and would not be next time either.

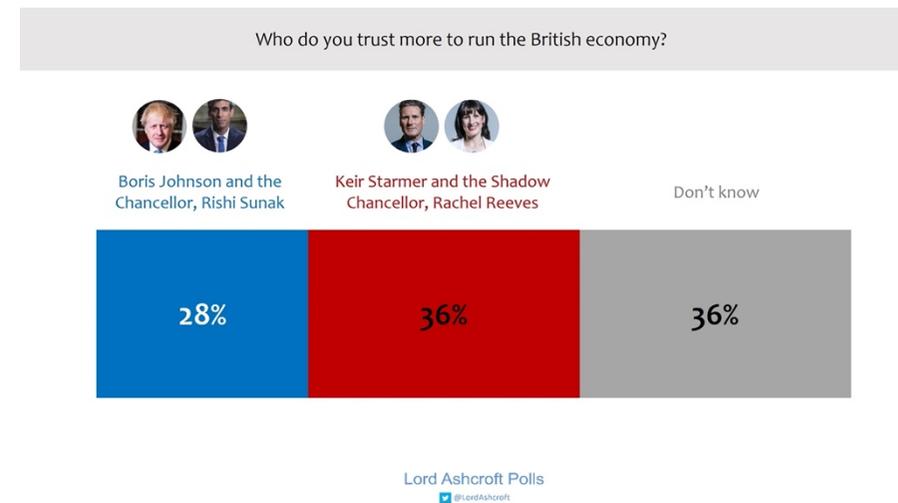
"He said he'd get Brexit done, and he did."

"Although Boris takes a lot of criticism, I don't see anyone stronger in terms of personality and leadership. He's proved he's got leather skin. He still gets out there and makes his point stronger than anyone else. He's Mr. Resilient."

"I feel as if I got him right from day one. I knew he was an oaf, but I wanted to vote Conservative."

Who would do a better job on...?

Asked who would do a better job on the economy, the PM and Chancellor or their respective shadows, Starmer and Rachel Reeves led Johnson and Sunak by 36% to 28%. Nearly a quarter (24%) of 2019 Labour voters and nearly 3 in 10 (28%) 2019 Conservatives said they didn't know.

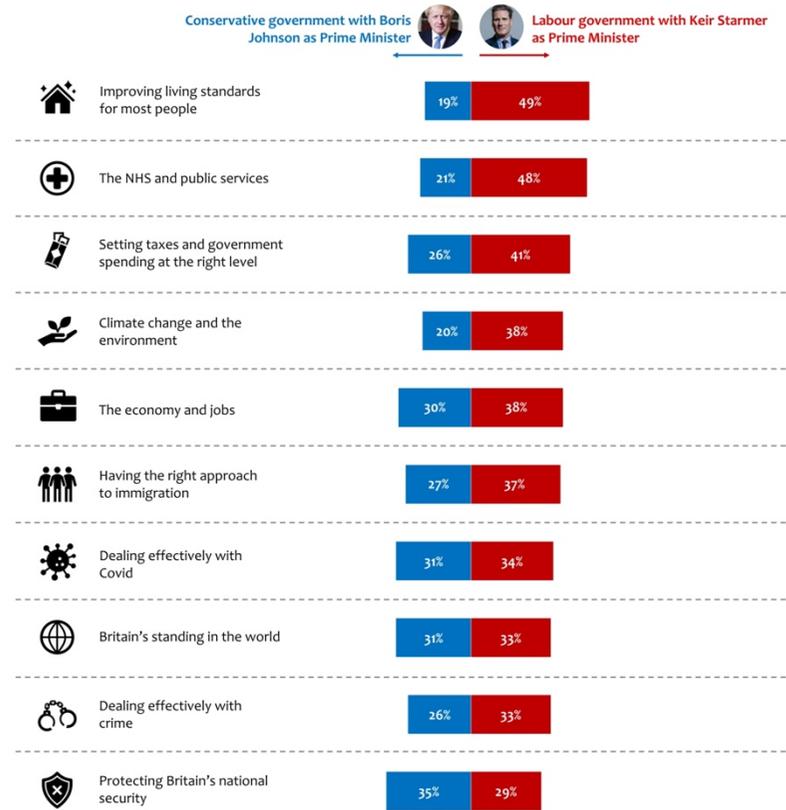


Asked which party would do a better job on various policy issues, poll participants put a Conservative government led by Boris Johnson ahead only on protecting Britain's national security (by a 6-point margin).

On other issues, a Labour government led by Keir Starmer was ahead by between 2 points (Britain's standing in the world) and 30 points (improving living standards for most people).

Labour led on traditional areas of strength for the Conservatives including crime (by 7 points), the economy (by 8 points) and immigration (by 10 points).

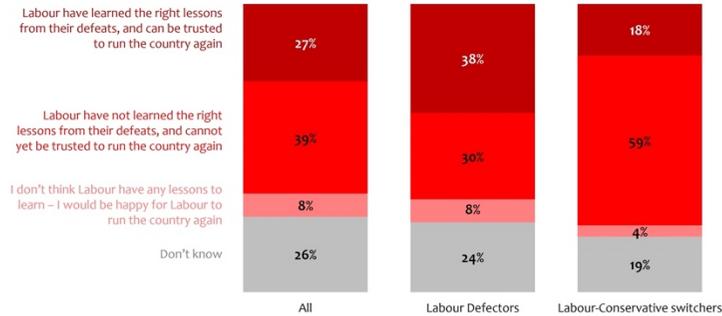
Which do you think would do a better job in each of the following areas – a Conservative government with Boris Johnson as Prime Minister, or a Labour government with Keir Starmer as Prime Minister?



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Is Labour ready?

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view about the Labour Party?



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Among previous Labour voters who moved away from the party at the 2019 election – either voting for another party or not voting at all – 38% said they thought Labour had learned the right lessons from their defeats and could be trusted to run the country again, while a further 8% said they had no lessons to learn. Three in ten said the party had not learned the right lessons.

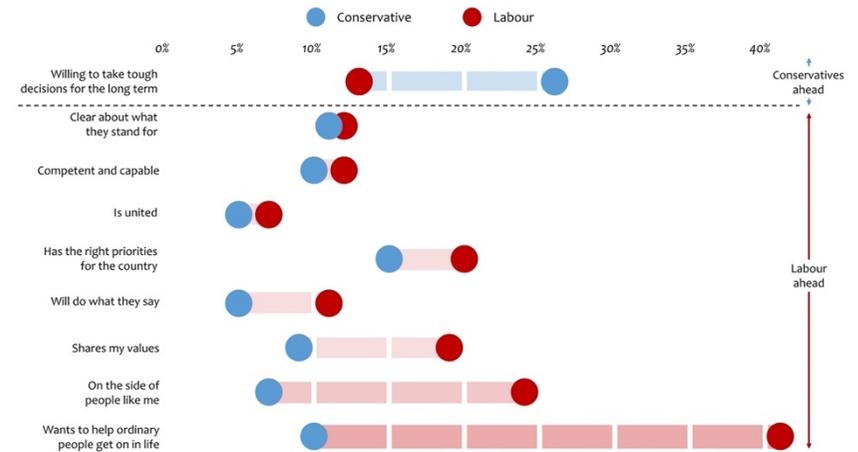
Within that group, voters who had switched directly from Labour to the Conservatives were much more doubtful. Nearly six in ten (59%) said they thought Labour had not learned the right lessons and could not yet be trusted to run the country again.

Party attributes

Asked whether a selection of positive attributes applied to each of the two main parties, voters considered only one – “willing to take tough decisions for

the long term” – to apply more to the Conservatives than to Labour (though only 26% of voters, and 55% of 2019 Tories) said they thought it was true of the party. By very narrow margins Labour were more likely to be “clear about what they stand for”, “competent and capable” and “united”, to have “the right priorities for the country” and to be trusted to “do what they say” – though with only 1 in 5 or less saying these were true of the party in each case.

Here are some things people have said about the political parties. Please tick all the descriptions you think apply to each of the following parties.

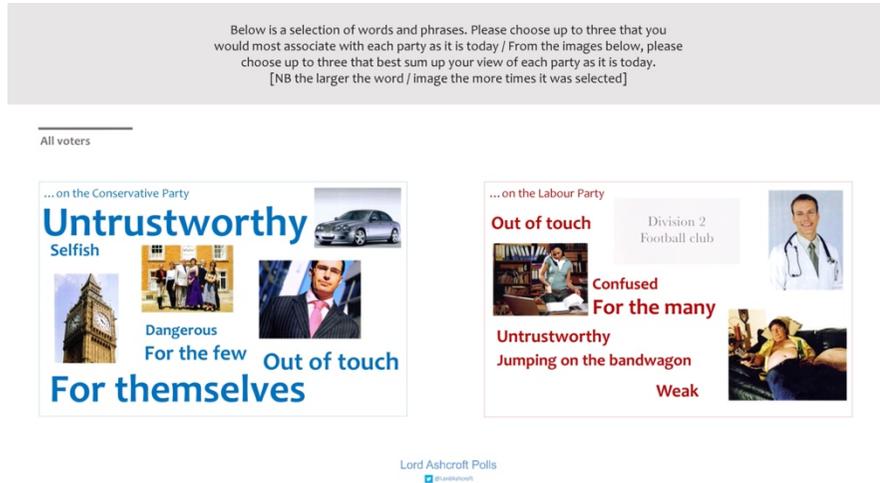


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Labour leads were wider when it came to being “on the side of people like me” (with 24% saying it was true of Labour, and just 7% of the Tories) and wanting “to help ordinary people get on in life” (41% saying it applied to Labour, 10% to the Conservatives).

Party brands

Poll respondents were shown a wide selection of words and images and asked to choose three of each that they most associated with Labour and the Conservatives.



Among voters as a whole, the words and phrases most often associated with the Conservative Party were “untrustworthy”, “for themselves”, “out of touch” and “for the few”. The most frequently chosen images were a prosperous-looking man in a suit, a rich family in front of a big house, an expensive car and Big Ben.

Labour’s “brand board” as constructed by voters as a whole was more positive, including the words “for the many” and pictures of a doctor and a busy working woman. However, it also prominently features a man on a sofa drinking beer, often chosen in the past to suggest Labour as a party for people who prefer not to work. The idea of Labour as a Division Two football club, suggesting a slightly second-rate operation, also featured widely, along with the words “weak”, “confused” and “jumping on the bandwagon”.

Below is a selection of words and phrases. Please choose up to three that you would most associate with each party as it is today / From the images below, please choose up to three that best sum up your view of each party as it is today. [NB the larger the word / image the more times it was selected]

2019 Conservative joiners



Among those who voted Conservative in 2019 having not done so at the previous election, the most popular selections were similar to those of the electorate in general – but with the more positive addition of “patriotic” and “optimistic”.

The same group had a more negative view of Labour, adding the word “woke” and an image representing fear – but also a picture of a miner, usually chosen to represent the party’s traditional alliance with working class voters.

While many in our groups thought the Conservative Party seemed different compared to the Cameron and May eras, especially in being more diverse. However, some felt that attempts to show it was on the side of working-class people had been shown to be superficial.

“I don’t think they’ve changed in the way they go about things. They’re trying to look different and for the people by having someone like Boris as leader, but it’s just a cover.”

“It’s much more diverse than it has ever been before.”

“They managed to push through Brexit, but the issue is where are we now and what’s the long-term plan going forward?”

“I feel that when David Cameron was Prime Minister there was more sense of a team, a cohesion and a plan. And that might be unfair because of covid. But please, Conservative Party, if anyone’s listening, can they just create a much better, get their act together and have a much more cohesive strategy.”

Aside from Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak there were positive mentions in our focus groups for Liz Truss, Nadhim Zahawi and Sajid Javid, and strong views of Priti Patel, both positive and negative.

There was very little enthusiasm for Labour in our focus groups, even among those who had been highly critical of Johnson and the Conservatives. There were concerns that Labour could not be trusted with the public finances, and Starmer himself was widely thought to be criticising the government without offering any constructive alternatives.

“With the parties Keir Starmer is like a dog with a bone. He’s got nothing else.”

“He’s a nonentity really. All he does is bitch about what everybody’s doing wrong, but he’s not telling us what he’ll do. He’s just a trouble causer and a stirrer.”

“There’s no kind of solution coming out of his mouth. It’s just ‘we wouldn’t have done that, this shouldn’t have happened’. Nothing to make me think ‘this guy’s got a plan, he knows where he’s going’.”

“Starmer was Corbyn’s right-hand man. He stood there and said ‘this man is the best thing since sliced bread, I agree with all his policies’. I hated Corbyn because of his policies but I can’t hate Starmer because I don’t know what his bloody policies are. And I don’t think he does.”

“He is more eloquent but he hasn’t got the oomph. If you were in bother he could write you a nice letter to get you off your charge but if you took him down the police station to rough up the coppers he’d be useless.”

“I worry with Labour. I agree we’ve got to help the poorer people, but what if they had been in power before all this? Would we have had the money to cope with the pandemic? They don’t seem to care about getting themselves into so much debt.”

Only two other Labour frontbenchers – Angela Rayner and David Lammy – had made an impact on our participants. There were mixed views of both.

“We need someone like Angela Rayner – comes from a mining village, was a carer for years. She’s got that passion to try and make a difference.”

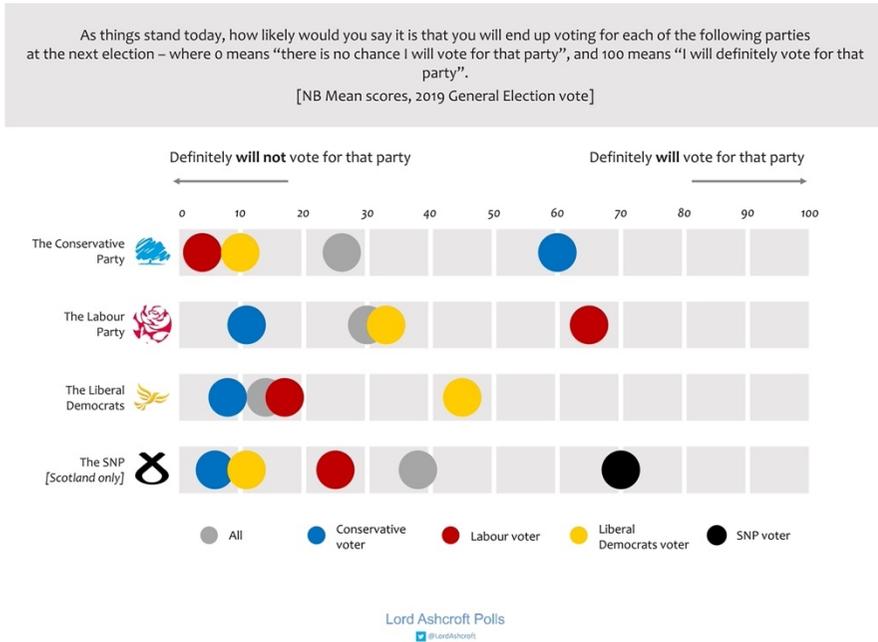
“She doesn’t seem like a politician. She just seems like the woman who lives across the street and goes on a rant and a rave.”

“I like the way David Lammy gets stuck in. He doesn’t shy away.”

“He’s that one in London who is always shouting. Even if he’s trying to make sense you can’t understand because he’s always shouting.”

3: The next general election

Likelihood to vote



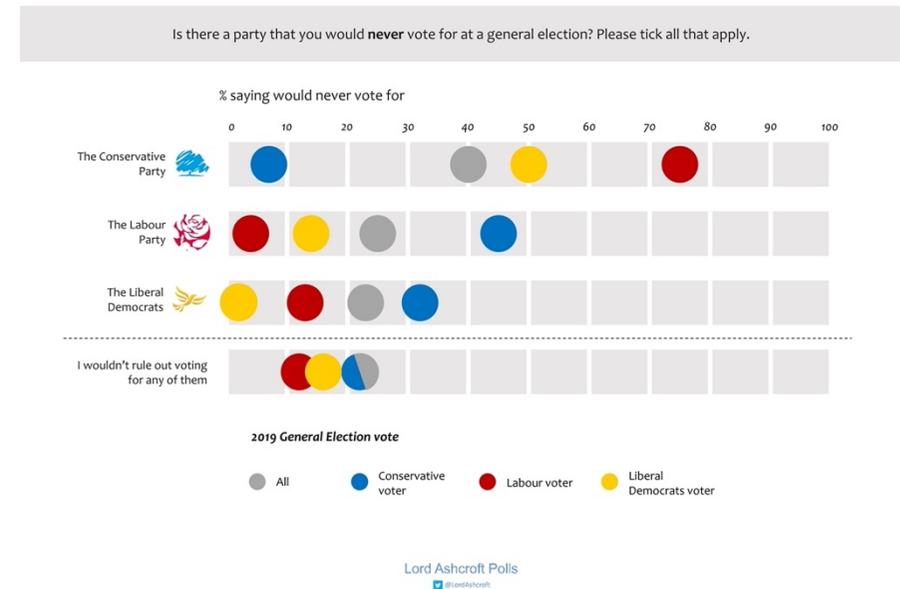
Poll participants were asked how likely they thought they were to vote for each party at the next election on a scale from 0 (no chance) to 100 (definitely).

SNP voters in Scotland were the most sure that they would end up supporting the same party at the next election as in 2019 (70/100). In Britain as a whole Labour had a slightly higher mean likelihood score among voters as a whole (30) than the Conservatives (26). This was largely because 2019 Labour voters

gave a higher mean likelihood of repeating their vote (65) than 2019 Tories (60). Those who switched from Labour to the Conservatives in 2019 had a mean likelihood of voting Tory again at 42/100 – lower than among Conservative leaners as a whole, but higher than their likelihood of voting Labour next time (23/100).

There was little difference in mean likelihood to vote Tory again between 2019 Conservative Remainers (58/100) and Conservative Leavers (62/100).

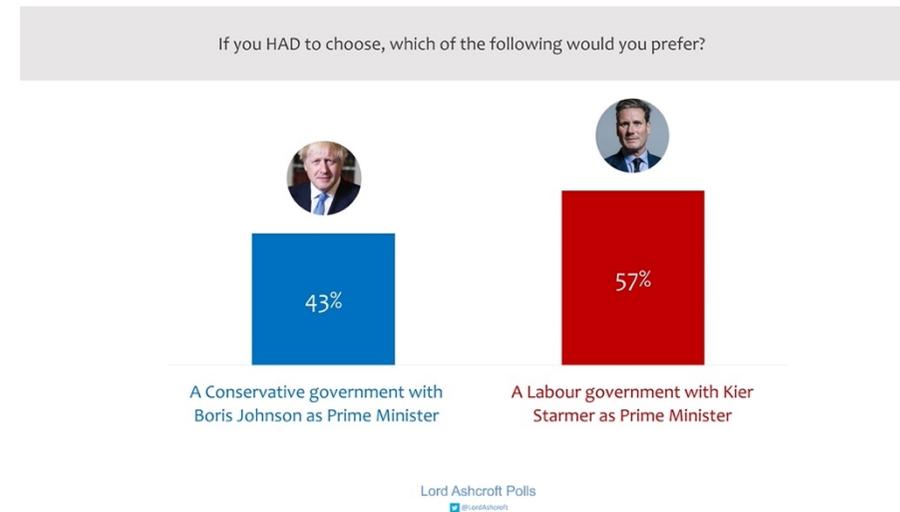
Never vote for them?



Four in ten poll participants said they could never vote Conservative at a general election, including 7% of those who did so in 2019 and 16% of those who switched from Labour to the Conservatives. One quarter of all voters said they could never vote Labour.

75% of 2019 Labour voters said they could never vote Tory, while only 45% of 2019 Conservative voters said they could never vote Labour.

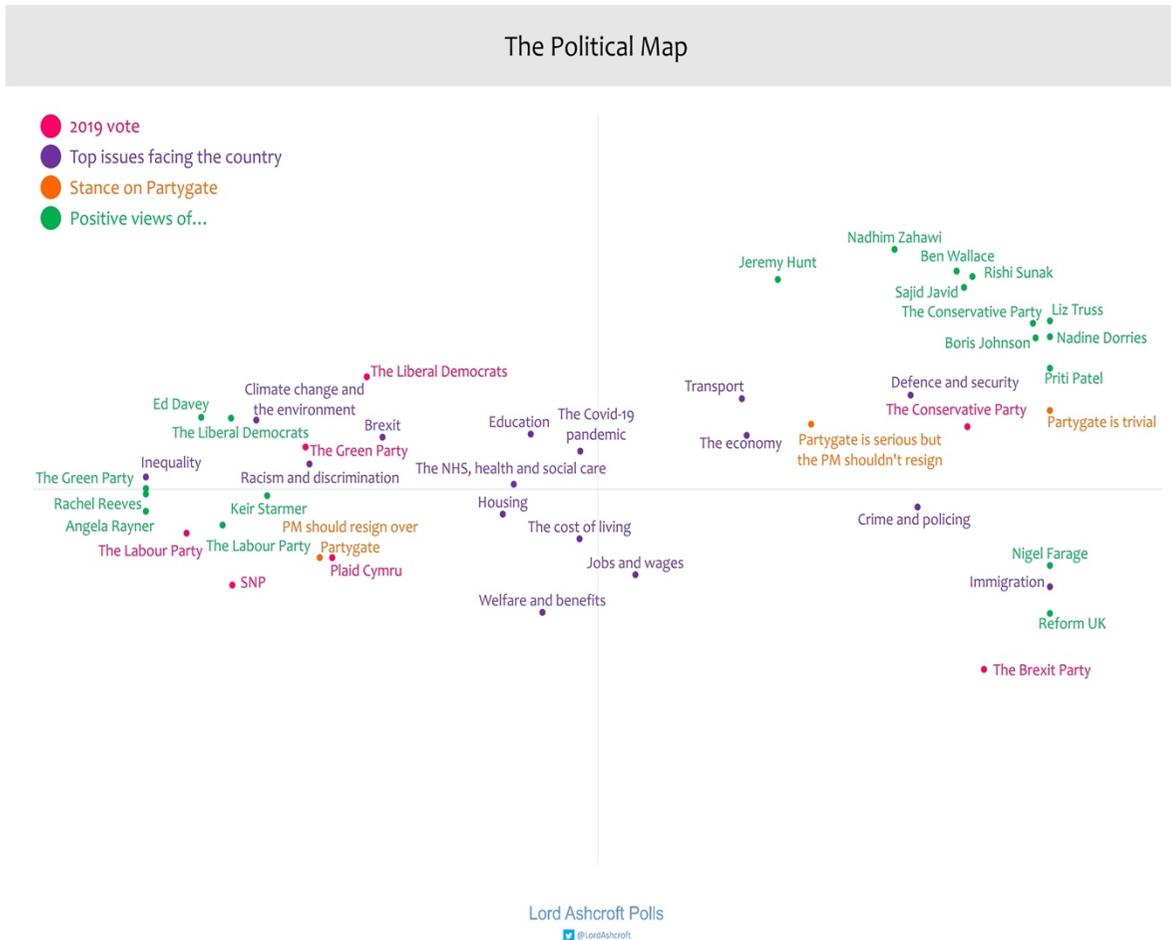
If you had to choose...



Forced to choose between a Conservative government with Boris Johnson as PM and a Labour government with Keir Starmer as PM (with no option for ‘don’t know’), respondents chose Labour under Starmer by 57% to 43%.

17% of 2019 Conservative voters chose a Labour government led by Keir Starmer, as did 79% of 2019 Lib Dems. 28% of those who switched from Labour to the Conservatives in 2019 said they would now rather have a Labour government.

4. The political map



Our political map shows how different issues, attributes, personalities and opinions interact with one another. The closer the plot points are to each other the more closely related they are.

We see that among voters as a whole, peak support for the view that the PM should resign over Partygate is to be found among those already most hostile to Johnson and the Conservative Party.

Those who currently have the most positive views of Johnson and the Conservative Party are also found closest to peak support for Priti Patel, Nadine Dorries and Liz Truss, while peak support for Jeremy Hunt lies somewhat further from the Conservative core vote.

ABOUT LORD ASHCROFT

LORD ASHCROFT KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. He is a former treasurer and deputy chairman of the UK Conservative Party. He is also honorary chairman and a former treasurer of the International Democrat Union. He is founder and chairman of the board of trustees of Crimestoppers, vice-patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, chairman of the trustees of Ashcroft Technology Academy, a senior fellow of the International Strategic Studies Association, former chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University and a former trustee of Imperial War Museums. His political books include:

Smell the Coffee: A Wake-Up Call for the Conservative Party

Call Me Dave: The Unauthorised Biography of David Cameron

Hopes and Fears: Trump, Clinton, the Voters and the Future

Well, You Did Ask: Why the UK Voted to Leave the EU

The Lost Majority: The 2017 Election, the Conservative Party, the Voters and the Future

Jacob's Ladder: The Unauthorised Biography of Jacob Rees-Mogg

Diagnosis of Defeat: Labour's Turn to Smell the Coffee

Going for Broke: The Rise of Rishi Sunak

Reunited Nation? American Politics Beyond the 2020 Election

Red Knight: The Unauthorised Biography of Sir Keir Starmer

First Lady: Intrigue at the Court of Carrie and Boris Johnson

Life Support: The State of the NHS in an Age of Pandemics

Victoria Cross Heroes, Volumes I and II

Special Forces Heroes

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Special Ops Heroes

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White Flag? An Examination of the UK's Defence Capability

Unfair Game: An Exposé of South Africa's Captive-Bred Lion Industry



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