

# NO TURNING BACK

## Rishi Sunak, Liz Truss and the Conservative voting coalition

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC  
August 2022

Lord Ashcroft Polls



# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Boris departs</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Rishi v. Liz</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. The bigger picture</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4. Methodological note</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>About Lord Ashcroft</b>	<b>23</b>



# INTRODUCTION

The increasingly frantic tone of the leadership election suggests that the Conservatives are making a momentous decision that will define their party for years to come. In fact, the idea that the Tories face a grand strategic choice is an illusion. With two years until the next election, the new leader's only option is to turn out as many of Johnson's 2019 supporters as they possibly can.

In the last decade the Tory vote has become much more working class and culturally conservative – more Brexit – than when David Cameron entered Number 10 (a result, ironically enough, of his decision to hold the referendum that ended his premiership). It will not be easy to reassemble Boris Johnson's big, diverse voting coalition, but no new leader can simply trade it in for a new one. It is too late to send new Tory voters home from the party and reissue invitations to people who have already left.

The trick will be even harder to pull off because none of the three stars that aligned to make the 2019 result possible – the Brexit deadlock, Jeremy Corbyn, and Johnson himself – is still in its place.

Most 2019 Tories agree it was time for Johnson to go. But that doesn't mean they're happy about it. While two thirds of them disapproved of his character and conduct, 84% say he did a good job as PM. They still rate him higher than either of the challengers for his job. And for many of them his unconventional approach to politics was part of his appeal as well as his downfall.

That is one reason why Rishi Sunak is finding it hard to make headway. Even those who think Johnson's departure was overdue are reluctant to give Sunak any credit for helping to bring it about. "He resigned to tee things up for himself," as a man in our focus groups put it. "He stabbed Boris in the back."

This is not the former chancellor's only hurdle. The first things our groups mentioned about him were always his wealth and his wife's tax status. Tory voters don't disapprove of financial success – they just want to feel that their leaders can relate to them and play by the same rules. Views about his record as chancellor were mixed: people praised the furlough scheme and his calm authority but grumbled about wasted money, bungled PPE contracts and rising taxes.

People knew less about Liz Truss, and often wrongly assumed she was the less experienced candidate. Seeing clips of her campaign events many found her to be direct, authentic and believable and were more impressed than they expected to be. In our poll of 10,000 voters, the word most often associated with Sunak was "rich"; for Truss the word was "unsure". Part of her advantage is that she hasn't yet disappointed them and is, for many, a blank canvas onto which they can project their hopes.

Many had also clocked the big dividing line between the two: their approach to tax and debt. In principle, many agreed with Sunak that we should not land the next generation with bills we are not prepared to pay. But they felt people were struggling and needed help now (and, as one woman put it, "I wonder if he would be saying the same thing if he was on my wage"). The Truss pledge of early tax cuts found a ready audience; Sunak's own subsequent promises sounded to many as though he was playing catch-up and undermined his dismissal of economic "fairy tales".



Such contrasts of policy and style have so far made little impression on voters in general: in my poll, 56% said they would prefer Starmer and Labour to a Sunak-led Conservative government, compared to 55% who would prefer a Labour government to the Tories with Truss at the helm. Only one in three think Sunak and Truss would be very different prime ministers; nearly half say what happens in Britain over the next few years will be pretty much the same whoever is chosen. People say their likelihood of voting for each party varies little between these still hypothetical scenarios.

The question is which of them is better placed to keep together more of the unwieldy Johnson coalition, with its competing demands for low taxes, high spending, worldly realism and boundless optimism. Tories themselves are coming to a view. They say Truss is more likely to get things done, to be honest with the public, and to care about people like them. And while voters in general think Sunak would be more likely to win a general election for his party (perhaps being a non-Tory's idea of what a Tory should be like), Conservatives see Truss as the more likely victor.

Two years before the last change of government, in 2008, I was the Conservative party's deputy chairman in charge of polling. I remember clearly how the Tories enjoyed huge double-digit poll leads at a time of impending economic crisis and rising living costs. Two years later, they just crept over the line into government. Labour's current lead is not on the same scale – but the economic outlook is worse, and the Conservatives have been in office longer and suffered more mishaps than the Blair-Brown administration.

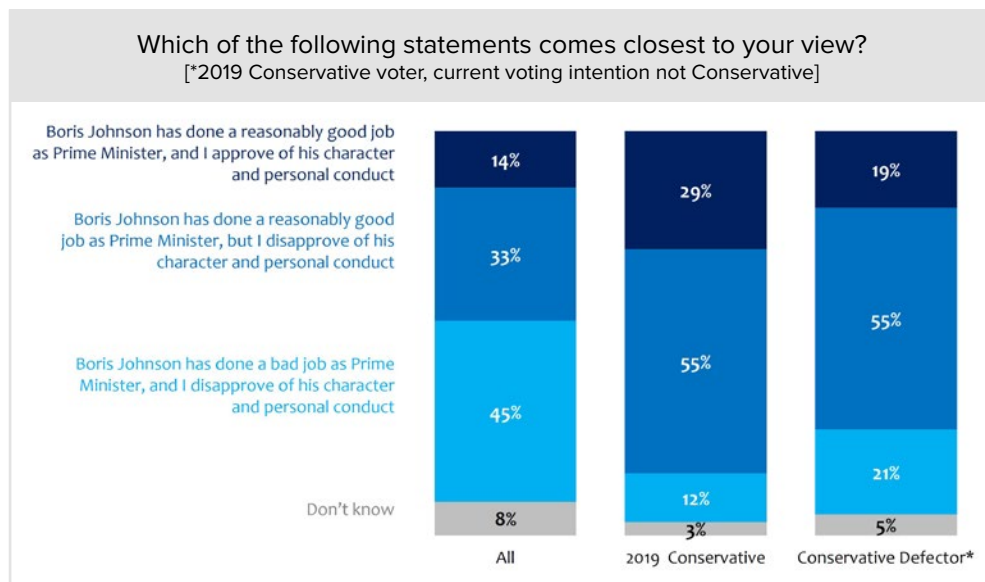
The powerful message that it is time for a change will be hard to counter, even among those who rejected Labour so decisively in 2019. Sunak wants to reassure them with sound Tory prudence; Truss seems to want to come out swinging. We will soon see which route their party has decided to take.

**Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC**

August 2022

# 1. BORIS DEPARTS

## The Johnson premiership



One in three voters (including 55% of 2019 Conservatives) said they thought Boris Johnson had done a reasonably good job as prime minister, but they disapproved of his character and personal conduct. A further 14% (including 29% of 2019 Tories) said he had done a good job and that they approved of his conduct. Just under half (45%) said Johnson had done a bad job and that they disapproved of his character and conduct.

This means a total of 47% (including 84% of 2019 Conservative voters) said they thought Johnson had done a reasonably good job as prime minister, while just over three quarters (including two thirds of 2019 Tories) disapproved of his personal conduct.

Conservative defectors (who voted Conservative in 2019 but say they do not currently intend to do so at the next election) were as likely as other 2019 Tories to say they think Johnson did a good job but that they disapproved of his conduct (55%). However, they were nearly twice as likely to say they disapproved of his conduct and that he had done a bad job as PM (21%).

Our focus groups of 2019 Conservative voters who were undecided about the next election expanded on this theme. While one or two in each group said they wished he had tried to hang on (“I felt like they had it in for him;” “As human we all make mistakes; I think we should cut him some slack”), most felt Johnson’s resignation was timely or overdue. More often than not this was because they felt he had been dishonest over partygate or other matters and could no longer trust him. Some said the prolonged episode, and the fact that other ministers had defended Johnson for so long, had seriously undermined their trust in the party and government more generally.

“He did a good job with certain things, but a liar is a liar.”

“He probably did a lot of damage sticking in there, just made it more and more toxic. His whole cabinet now, I’ve got no faith in any of them.”

Several participants felt that Johnson's unorthodox premiership was always something of a gamble ("It's almost like an experiment, and it just hasn't paid off.") Some reflected that the flaws were always evident but became unignorable, or that in disappointing them he had turned out to be much like other politicians after all.

“It's like if you're with a girl and they're quite good looking and you're willing to overlook the fact that their personality isn't quite there, and you enjoy it for a little while. And then towards the end you're like, well, actually I can't continue with this.”

“I think he offered something different. But that was his downfall as well, because it quickly became not different.”

Even so, participants in all groups were at pains to point out that Johnson had achievements to his name – most notably getting Brexit done, the furlough scheme, covid vaccine procurement and leadership over Ukraine – in which his character and approach to the job played an important part.

“Without him, we would still be negotiating the Brexit exit now.”

“One of the reasons I voted for Boris in 2019 was his opportunism and not necessarily going by the rules, grabbing the bull by the horns and getting things done. And I think we saw that in certain areas of his premiership, especially during the pandemic. I think he was heroic in that area.”

“The sad part is that he actually did some good things. So my thought is that you're a bit of a fool because you've undone all that hard work and we're going to get someone like Keir Starmer in.”

A few speculated that the pandemic had in fact prolonged Johnson's premiership by postponing the point at which his flaws got the better of him.

“Covid saved his skin a little bit, I think. It deflected away from how he was. It seemed to buy him those extra 18 months or so when the country was upside down. Nobody wanted to be shoving someone out in the middle of covid.”

Some said that they would miss Johnson even if his position had become untenable. Often these people felt a connection with him that had not been present with other political leaders, and that they did not expect to feel with his successor.

“They're big shoes to fill. We've never had any other Prime Minister visit this part of the country [the North East] so much.”

“Much as I thought he should go, he's better than the two they're choosing from now.”

## The proximate cause

Voters as a whole said in our poll that they would rather have a prime minister who resigned from Johnson's government (37%) than one who stayed (15% – see Rishi v. Liz, page 4). For 2019 Conservatives, however, the reverse was true – they were nearly twice as likely to say they would prefer a new PM who stayed (30%) over one who left (16%).

This was reflected in our focus groups. Though most participants thought Johnson's resignation was necessary, most were unwilling to give Rishi Sunak any credit for helping to bring it about. The prevailing view was that Sunak's resignation had been a tactical move to advance his own interests. Only a few noted that he had been prepared to act when others were not.

- “ Being loyal wasn't going to help. He was the one with the balls to say ‘come on mate, off you pop.’ ”
- “ The fact that he was at the head of this mutiny – maybe he genuinely thinks he's doing it for the greater good of the country, but it gives off the impression that he's willing to throw you under the bus for a ten-pound note.”
- “ He knew what he was doing. He wanted the job and he thought ‘this is the time’. His website for the leadership was registered back in December.”
- “ He did it to tee it up for himself. He stabbed Boris in the back.”

Most were more willing to accept Liz Truss's reasons for staying on as Foreign Secretary.

- “ She said she was staying in post because she couldn't abandon her role at this crucial time with Ukraine and everything, which I can understand.”
- “ They were rats leaving a sinking ship. When you see all these people jumping overboard and her hanging on till the end, you think, credit to her.”



## 2. RISHI V. LIZ

### The early stages

Though most in our focus groups had paid little attention to the early stages of the leadership race, a few candidates had stood out – Tom Tugendhat, Penny Mordaunt and Kemi Badenoch were all mentioned in positive terms.

Some also said they found it refreshing that the field was more diverse than usual – though they also argued that a candidate's background and identity mattered less than what they were offering.

- “ I do think it's refreshing. Sometimes when you look across the benches, they don't really look like the population. At least the leadership race was beginning to look a bit more like the population.”
- “ I don't care who it is, it's what they stand for. Do they have integrity?”
- “ I didn't look at them and go, oh it's a black man or an Indian man. I just looked at them as politicians.”
- “ Just because someone's a man of colour doesn't mean he represents your heritage or background.”



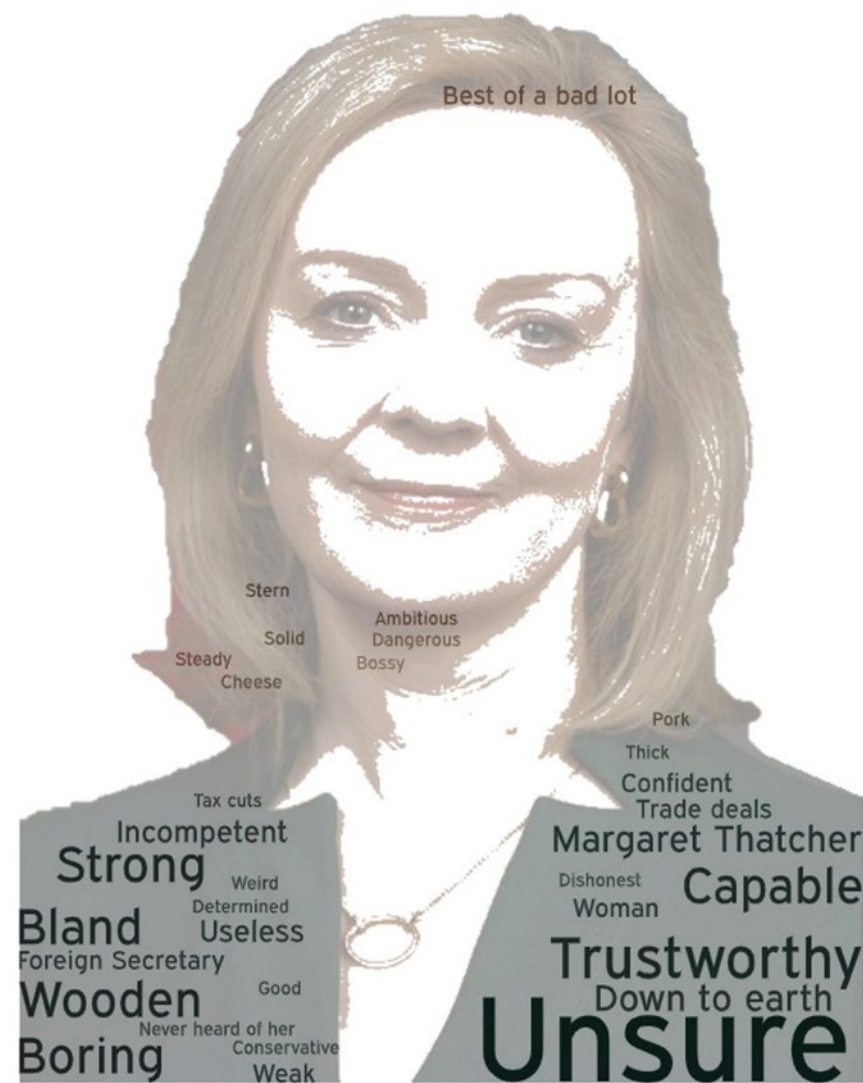
## The candidates in one word

We asked our poll respondents for the first word or phrase that came to mind when they thought of Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss. These were the most common responses from 2019 Conservative voters.

What word or phrase first comes to mind when you think about **Rishi Sunak**?  
[NB 2019 Conservative voters only]



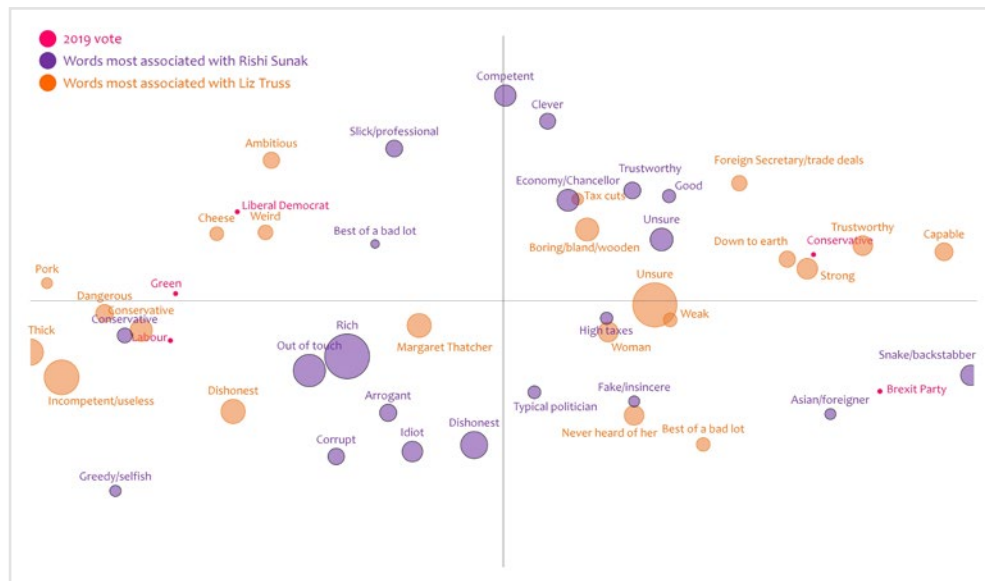
What word or phrase first comes to mind when you think about **Liz Truss**?  
[NB 2019 Conservative voters only]



For Sunak, “rich” was by far the most common answer. Positive or neutral responses included “competent”, “economy”, “trustworthy” and “clever” but less complimentary words and phrases included “snake”, “out of touch”, “dishonest” and “backstabber”.

The single most common response for Truss was “unsure”. The most frequent positive words were “trustworthy”, “strong”, “capable” and “down to earth”, with “bland”, “wooden” and “boring” the most common negative answers.

The political map below charts the responses of the population as a whole in relation to their vote at the 2019 election. Those with the most positive things to say about Truss – such as “down to earth”, “trustworthy”, “capable” and “strong” were to be found close to peak support for the Tories. Positive responses for Sunak – such as “competent”, “clever” and “trustworthy” – were to be found further from the epicentre of the Conservative vote, further towards liberal territory and more removed from the strongly Brexit-supporting quadrant of the map, where words like “snake”, “backstabber” and “typical politician” were more likely to be found.



## Rishi Sunak

Asked what they knew about Rishi Sunak, our focus groups nearly always immediately mentioned his wealth or that of his wife, together with the stories about her tax status. For some, these matters were irrelevant – the tax arrangements were perfectly legal, and the schemes Sunak had put in place during the pandemic had shown his willingness to help. Often, however, these 2019 Conservative voters felt that the scale of their wealth meant he was too far removed from life as it was lived by most people. For some, the tax stories added to an impression that the former chancellor’s family lived in a different world from them.



Image: ComposedPix / Shutterstock.com

- “ I think the way his wife was dragged through the press was appalling. She’s a billionaire, but it’s not a hanging offence. She paid tax in India on the money she earns in India.”
- “ I don’t think you can be too rich to be leader. But if you become out of touch with what’s going on in real life, like voting against free school meals when the country is in a very difficult place, and you’re possibly not paying your taxes and all the things we’ve heard about him and his wife, then that becomes the issue.”
- “ Remember when he was pictured wearing those sliders at home that are like £100 a pop, and going to Teesside in his bespoke suits. He’s got no concept of how hard it is for the normal person. And it came out about his wife’s wealth and how she reluctantly ‘agreed’ to pay tax.”
- “ There’s a lack of trust in relation to declaring taxes and things. It’s like the old school where they’re looking out for themselves. Do as I say, not as I do.”
- “ If he does what he wants to do, which is going to put a lot of people into debt, it’s not going to sit well if he’s there in his fancy suits while everyone else is struggling. I don’t think it matches up to how people are feeling.”

Many in the groups had also heard a good deal about Sunak’s background and upbringing. Though they knew he came from an immigrant family, there was also an impression that he had enjoyed a good deal of privilege. Some participants, including some whose families had come from overseas, argued that his experience was very far from typical.

- “ I remember that he has come from a different background, but his education has been very public school and Oxford.”
- “ He says how he had a regular upbringing, but his dad was a doctor and his mum was a pharmacist. They didn’t work in Tesco.”
- “ There was this meme on social media about how he doesn’t have any friends who are working class.”
- “ He tried to say he’s a common man and he’s come from immigrants and they came with nothing. He wants to get the Asian and black population to think he’s one of them. But we all know where he’s come from. My dad’s dad left Kenya with pretty much nothing, so compared to GPs and doctors they’re chalk and cheese.”

Many focus group participants said they thought Sunak had done a good job as chancellor during the pandemic – or, sometimes, that they had thought so at the time but were less sure after hearing stories about wasted money and questionable contracts. Furlough, business loans and Eat Out To Help Out were mentioned spontaneously in most groups. Some complained that Sunak had broken a Conservative manifesto promise by increasing the tax burden, or that he had removed the £20 Universal Credit uplift and resisted the Marcus Rashford campaign to expand free school meals – both of which had been widely seen on social media.

- “Initially he came across really well with the covid announcements and furlough. But as time goes on things come out, you hear stories, PPE contracts and so on, and it kind of affects how you feel about them.”
- “Didn’t he vote against free school meals?”
- “Eat Out To Help Out was a joke. Everyone got covid.”
- “They said they wouldn’t raise taxes but he got the National Insurance through and effectively increased taxes by keeping the thresholds the same. It’s worse than Gordon Brown. Socialist-lite.”
- “I really liked him as the chancellor during covid because I thought he was in touch despite his status. He listened to people to know what was needed on the ground. But I’m not so fussed about him being the next prime minister and I don’t know why.”
- “He took £20 off the poorest people. He’s got no grasp that people are really struggling, no grasp of reality.”

There were mixed views as to how Sunak came across personally, both during his time as chancellor and during the leadership campaign. Some had seen highlights of the TV debates, and the groups were also shown both candidates’ launch videos. While participants agreed that Sunak was professional and capable, for some his polished presentation gave rise to doubts about his sincerity and authenticity. Some also thought he had been too aggressive in his exchanges with Liz Truss – though for a few this showed a willingness to argue robustly.

- “He’s clearly very smart and articulate.”
- “What he says makes sense, but it doesn’t seem like he means it. I don’t think he’s genuine.”
- “I thought in that debate on Monday he was really rude and obnoxious and that put me right off him. He spoke over Liz Truss pretty much most of the time.”
- “He knows how to speak to the House and he can debate, whereas some just collapse when they get questioned.”
- “He comes across as Tony Blair in Tory clothing. I think he’s smarmy, I don’t trust a word he says. With his background, he hasn’t got a clue.”

## Liz Truss

Our focus group participants were less familiar with Liz Truss, and sometimes assumed that she was less experienced than Rishi Sunak. Those that knew more about her career said she seemed to have kept her head down rather than seeking to make a name for herself. Many were not sure of her current job, let alone previous ones. Some approvingly mentioned her work on Ukraine, trade deals, and the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe (though people were not sure whether she had been instrumental in the deal or had happened to be in post when it came about).

The groups spontaneously mentioned that Truss was from a less affluent background than Sunak, had been to a comprehensive school (which some believed she had tried to make sound worse than it was), and some recalled a story about cheese, but couldn't remember why. Some knew she had been a remain supporter during the referendum, but most of these did not criticise her conversion on the Brexit issue.



Image: ComposedPix / Shutterstock.com

- “ She keeps saying where she's from. She made a big thing about going to a comprehensive school. She was asked a question about Rishi being privileged and wearing expensive clothes and she dismissed it all straight away. But then she's doing it more subliminally by saying 'look at my circumstances, where I come from'.”
- “ I think all politicians tell us what we want to hear, but her background gives us that little bit of trust.”
- “ The mistake she made was slagging off Roundhay School before she had that thing at Elland Road. She said it was a poor school. That backfired.”
- “ Cheese. There was definitely something about cheese.”
- “ She was a remainer and used to be a liberal. She obviously questions things and can say, 'actually I'm changing my mind,' which is refreshing.”
- “ She's been good with Russia, with the sanctions in the last few months. She's stepped up with the war.”
- “ She dropped a bollock saying you should go off to Ukraine to fight.”
- “ She's quiet behind the scenes, getting on with things and achieving results. She hasn't got the showmanship, she's getting on with the job and not shouting about it.”

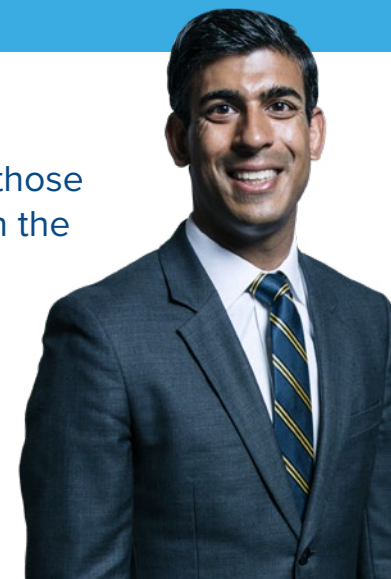
Most had seen little of Truss in action before the leadership election, and some had not seen her speak before they saw her campaign launch video. A few said she seemed “a bit stern” and several thought she seemed to be modelling herself on Margaret Thatcher (for good or ill). However, many were more impressed than they had expected to be, finding Truss to be authentic and believable.

- “ It sounds like she doesn’t take any crap. ‘Assertive’ is probably a better word for it. Or ‘feisty’.”
- “ She comes across as more genuine, more trustworthy. Possibly because she’s not such a good blagger.”
- “ It sounds like she’s got her ear to the ground and does actually know what’s going on in the real world.”
- “ She doesn’t skirt round the question. She was asked the other day ‘would you do another lockdown?’ ‘No’. Wham, finished. Whereas most politicians, 10 minutes later they still haven’t answered the question.”
- “ She seems a bit more human, more well-rounded. More relatable and grounded. It sounded like she meant it.”
- “ She seems friendly, which I didn’t expect. I thought she’d be quite stiff and straight-laced. But she’s got a track record of getting things done and when she says, ‘I love this country’ I actually believe her.”

The groups were asked what animal each of the candidates most reminded them of.

#### For Rishi Sunak:

- “ A squirrel, storing all those nuts away.” “Yeah, in the Cayman Islands.”
- “ Smooth, like a puma.”
- “ A snake – the fact that he did for Boris.”



#### For Liz Truss:

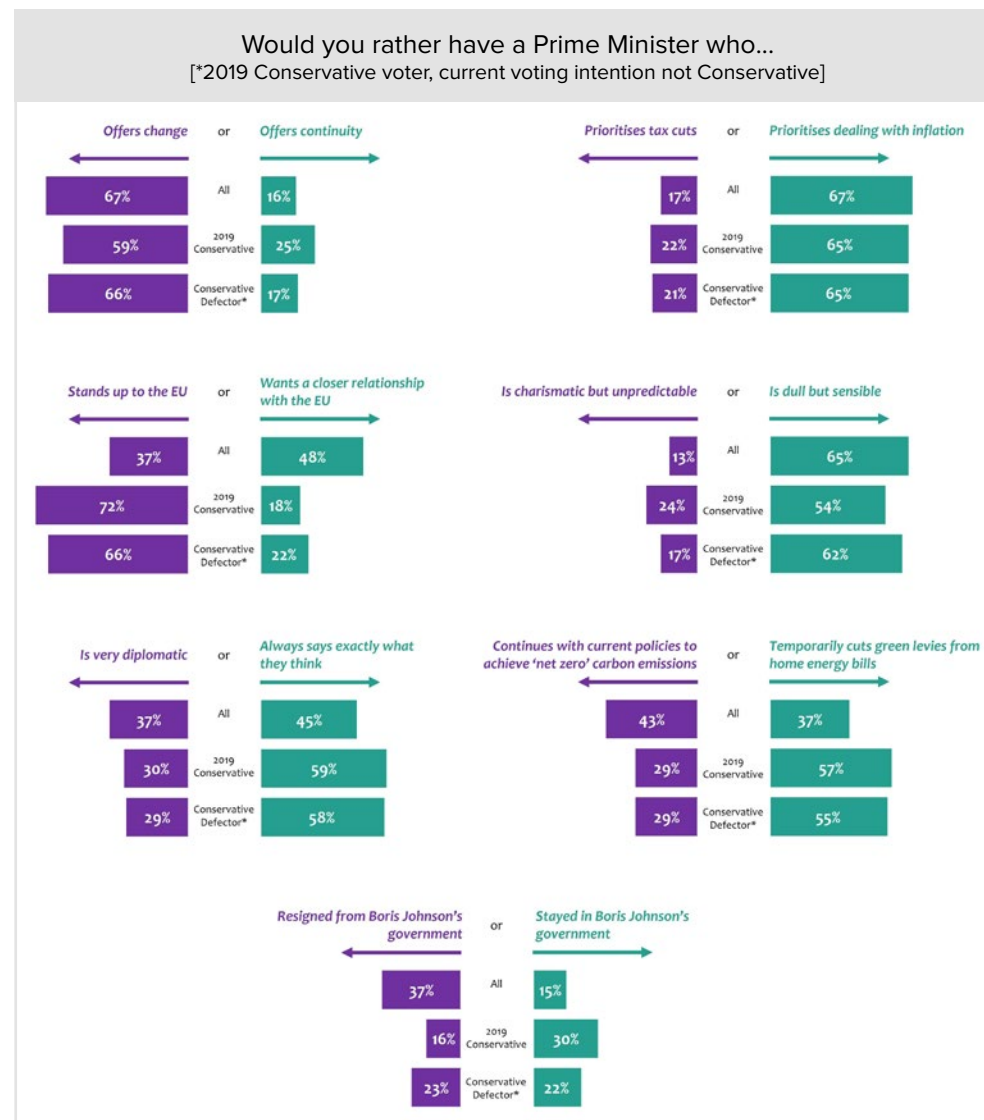
- “ A Jack Russell or a little Yorkie. Got a bit of fight.”
- “ A lioness – quite powerful, in control, strong. Or a leopard – if you cross her she’ll bite back.”
- “ A Labrador – they’re loyal. A golden Labrador.”



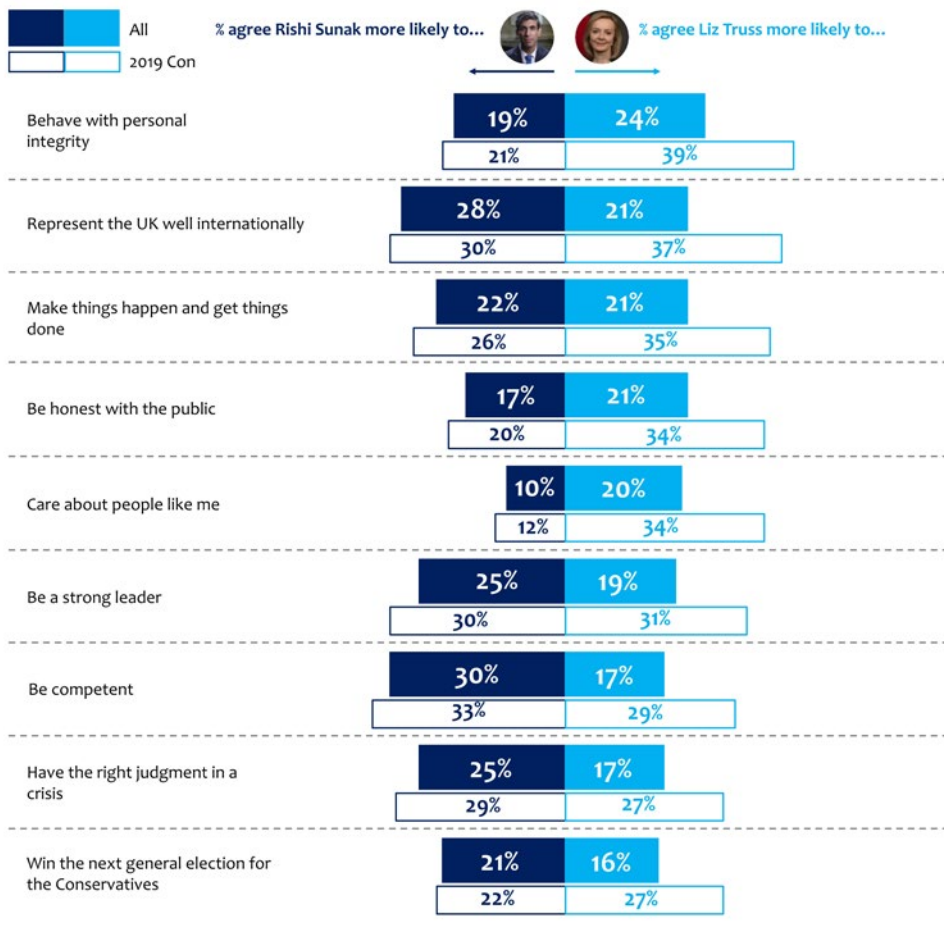
## Head to head

Both 2019 Conservatives and voters as a whole said they would prefer a PM who offers change rather than continuity; prioritises tackling inflation over tax cuts; is dull but sensible rather than charismatic but unpredictable; and always says exactly what they think rather than being very diplomatic.

However, while voters in general said they would prefer a PM who wants a closer relationship with the EU (by 48% to 37%), 2019 Conservatives wanted a PM who would stand up to the EU (by 72% to 18%). Voters as a whole would rather see the PM continue with current 'net zero' policies (by a 6-point margin), while 2019 Tories would prefer a PM who temporarily cuts green levies from home energy bills (by a 28-point margin). And while 2019 Tories would rather see someone who stayed in Boris Johnson's government (by 30% to 16%), voters in general would prefer a PM who resigned from it (by 37% to 16%).



If they became leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister, do you think Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss would be more likely to...



Asked whether Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss would be more likely to do various things, at least half of voters in each case said they didn't know or that there was nothing to choose between them.

Voters as a whole said they thought Sunak was more likely to be competent (by a 13-point margin), have the right judgment in a crisis (by 8 points) and represent the UK well internationally (by 7 points). By smaller margins they also thought him more likely to win a general election for the Conservatives and be a strong leader. However, they thought Truss more likely to be honest with the public (by 4 points), behave with personal integrity (by 5 points) and "care about people like me" (by 10 points).

Among 2019 Conservatives, however, Sunak led only on competence (by 4 points) and judgment in a crisis (2 points). Truss led in all other areas – most strikingly on being honest (by 14 points), behaving with integrity (by 18 points) and caring about "people like me" (by 22 points).

Conservative defectors, who voted Tory in 2019 but say they do not currently intend to vote for the party, said they thought Truss more likely to care about people like them by 27% to just 8% for Sunak. However, nearly two thirds (65%) did not feel able to name either candidate.

## The dividing line: tax and debt

Apart from the differences in background, personality and presentation described above, our focus groups had picked up that the major contrast between the two candidates was in their approach to the economy – specifically tax and debt. The groups were also shown a clip from the BBC debate in which Sunak and Truss discussed their respective positions.

Some participants were drawn to Sunak's stance that tackling borrowing and inflation should be the priority, and that promises of tax cuts amounted to "fairy tales" in the current circumstances. However, several had also noted that Sunak had since proposed a number of tax cuts of his own, which they felt undermined his argument and his wider credibility.

- “ He has a good understanding of how much debt this country's in, and it's got to be paid back. We don't want it passed on to the next generation.”
- “ We went through this in the 70s and 80s when inflation was running at sort of 20%, people were going mad with wage inflation and that lasted for years.”
- “ He's the only one who seems to have been honest about the finances and said as much as he'd like to reduce taxes, we're not in a position to do that at the moment.”
- “ In the 80s or 90s when there was a recession and interest rates were really high I don't remember them dishing out money to help with electricity bills. We just seem to keep chucking money. I don't think it's the right thing to do.”
- “ He's changed his tune already about taxes. It beggars belief. What else is he going to change his mind on? I just don't trust the fellow.”

There was also a widespread view that while Sunak was right in principle about passing on debt to the next generation, his position did not take sufficient account of the hardship many were facing today. They were more inclined to accept the Truss position that taxes should be cut and covid debt should be treated as a once in a century event to be paid over a longer term.

- “ He says we've got to look after the next generation, but we've got to look after this generation. People need it now, not in 30 years' time.”
- “ I understand Rishi's argument completely, he believes it's the right thing and he's got enough principle to run with that. The problem is that everybody's struggling with the bills and just the weekly shop. So although he's right, there's a balance, and he's not living the lives of everybody every day.”
- “ I wonder if he would be saying the same thing if he was on my wage. He's cushty. I think she's caring more about the little people.”
- “ He was a bit 'woe, woe and thrice woe'. She was a lot more positive.”

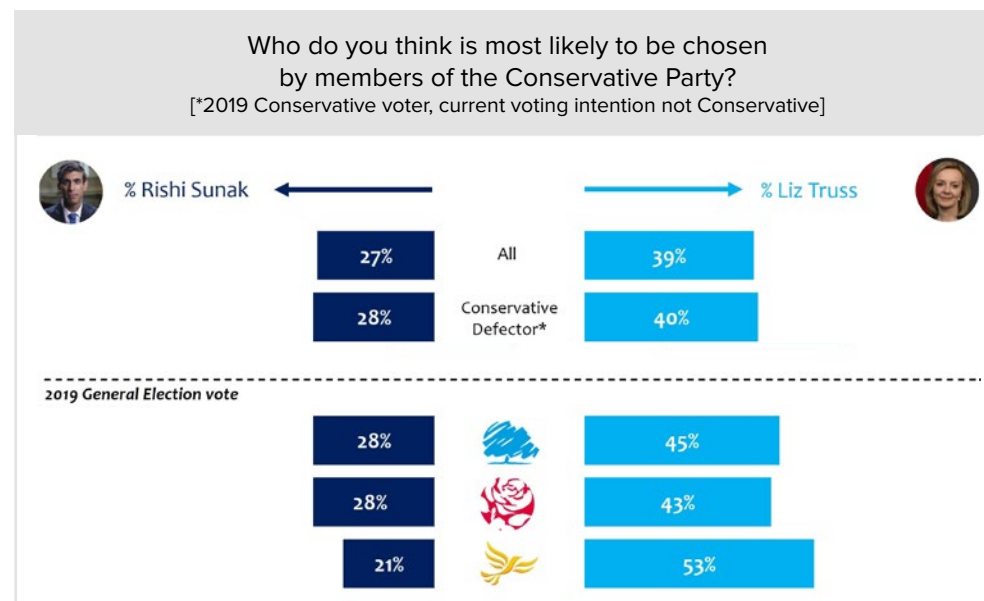
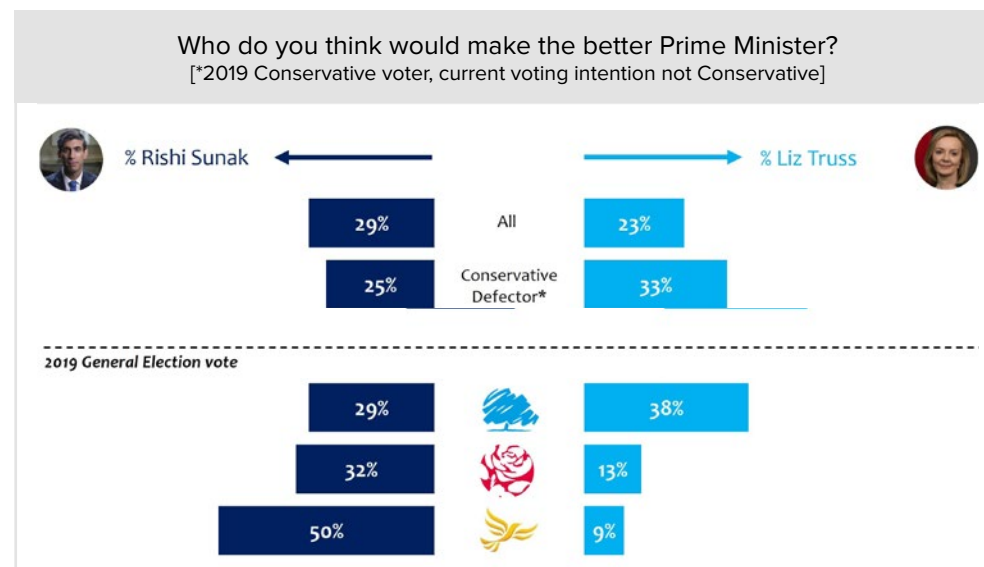
## Best prime minister

Asked in our poll who they thought would make the better prime minister, voters as a whole chose Sunak over Truss by 29% to 23% (with nearly half saying they didn't know). However, 2019 Conservatives chose Truss over Sunak by 38% to 29%, with one in three undecided. Conservative defectors named Truss by 33% to 25%.

While 2016 Remain voters preferred Sunak by 40% to 13%, Leavers chose Truss by 35% to 23%. Conservative remain voters chose Sunak by a 17-point margin; Conservative leave voters chose Truss by 16 points.

Professional voters in social groups ABC1 said they thought Sunak would make the better PM by 35% to 22%. Those in groups C2DE chose Truss by a 3-point margin (25% to 22%).

Despite thinking Sunak would make the better prime minister, voters as a whole were more likely to think Conservative Party members would elect Truss (39%) than Sunak (27%). 2019 Conservatives thought the same, by a wider margin (45% to 28%).



### 3. THE BIGGER PICTURE

#### It's all relative

Asked how positive or negative they felt about various politicians and parties on a scale from -5 to +5, poll participants gave Defence Secretary Ben Wallace the highest mean rating (-0.4). Of those contesting the latter stages of the leadership election, Tom Tugendhat (-0.9) was the only candidate to score higher than Keir Starmer (-1.2) and the Labour Party (-1.1).

Sunak and Truss received identical mean scores (-1.5) among voters as a whole. From 2019 Conservatives, Truss received a marginally positive +0.3 and Sunak a marginally negative -0.3.

Among 2019 Tories, Wallace led the field (+0.6) and was the only figure with a higher rating than the Conservative party itself (+0.5). Next were Boris Johnson (+0.4), Liz Truss (+0.3), Kemi Badenoch (-0.1), Tom Tugendhat (-0.2) and Rishi Sunak (-0.3).

How positive or negative do you feel about each of the following, where -5 means 'very negative indeed' and +5 means 'very positive indeed'?  
[NB Mean scores]

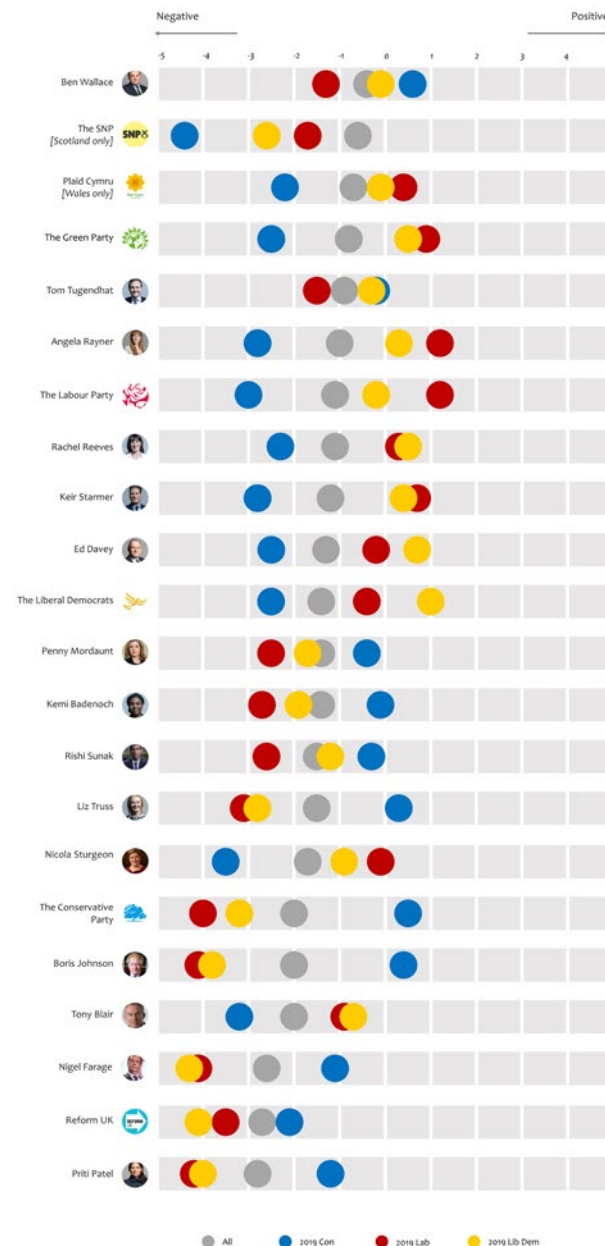




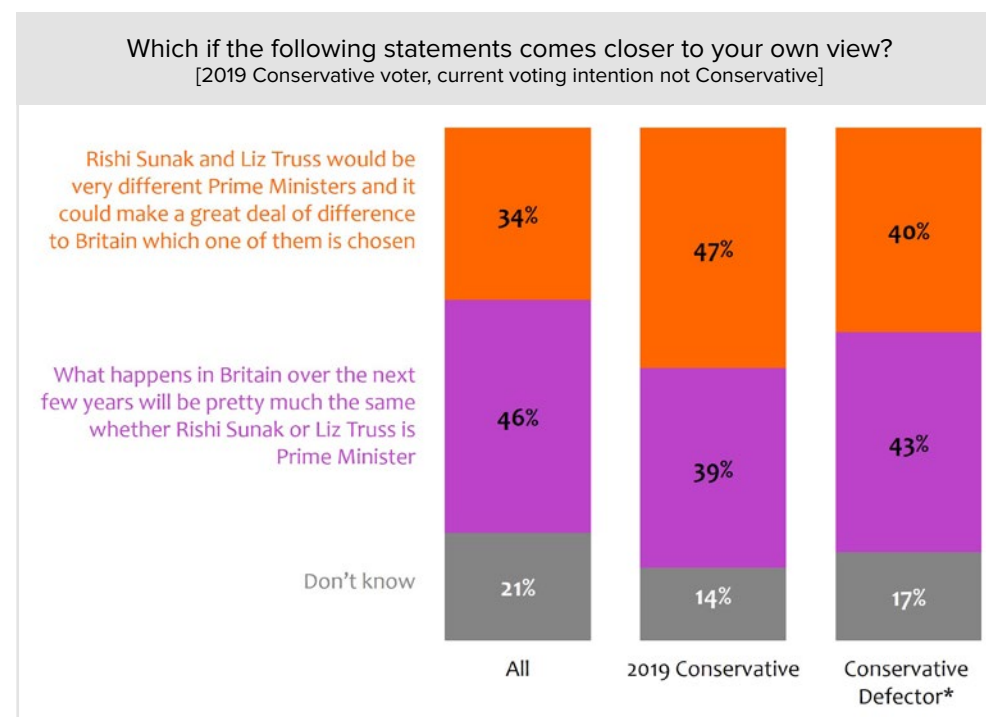
Image: REUTERS / Alamy Stock Photo

## Does it matter?

Only 1 in 3 voters (34%) agreed that Sunak and Truss “would be very different prime ministers and it could make a great deal of difference to Britain which one is chosen”. Nearly half (46%, including a majority of Labour voters) agreed instead that “what happens in Britain over the next few years will be pretty much the same” whether Sunak or Truss becomes PM.

2019 Conservatives took the opposite view, saying the decision could make a great deal of difference by 47% to 39%.

Conservative defectors were more evenly divided, with 40% saying the two would be very different prime ministers and 43% saying the outcome will make little difference to what happens in Britain in the next few years.

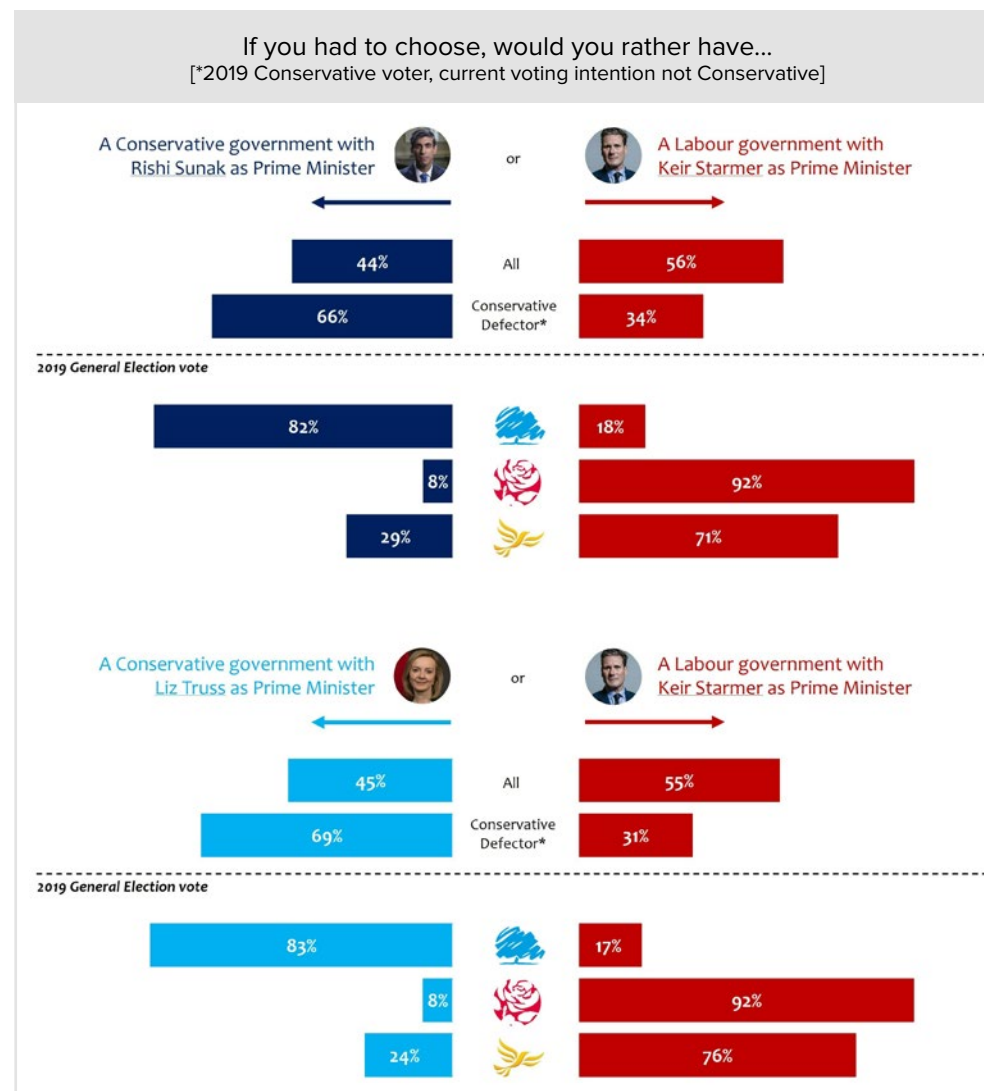


## Preferred government

Forced to choose between a Conservative government with Rishi Sunak as prime minister or a Labour government led by Keir Starmer (with no option for “neither” or “don’t know”), voters as a whole chose Starmer and Labour by 56% to 44%. Offered a similar choice but with Liz Truss as Conservative leader, they chose Starmer and Labour by a slightly narrower 55% to 45%.

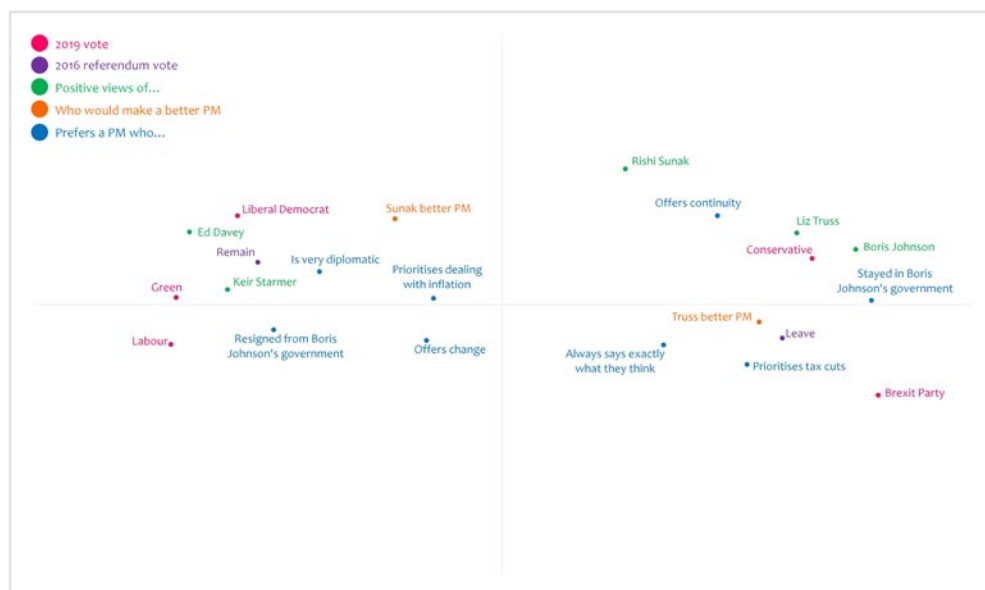
18% of 2019 Conservatives said they would prefer a Starmer-led Labour government if Sunak were Tory leader, while 17% said the same if Truss were in charge.

34% of Conservative defectors said they would prefer Starmer and Labour to a Sunak-led Conservative government. This fell to 31% preferring Labour if Truss were to become prime minister – a 38-point preference for Truss over Starmer, compared to a 32-point preference for Sunak over Starmer.



## The political map

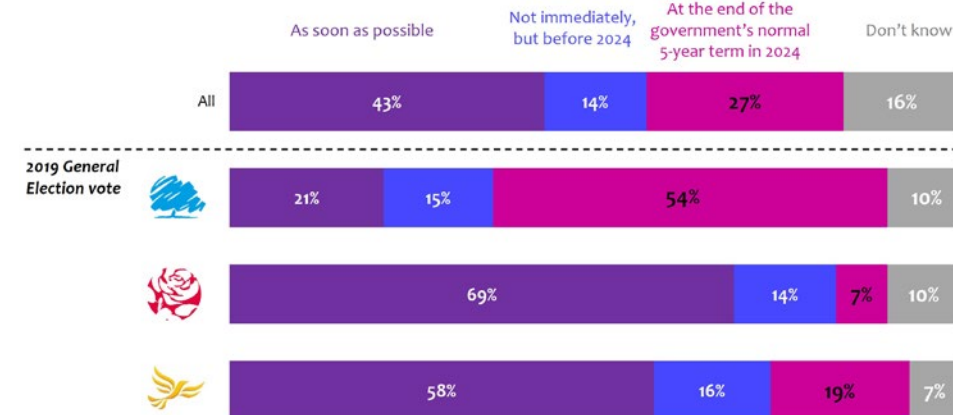
Our political map shows how different issues, attributes, personalities and opinions interact with one another. The closer the plot points are to each other the more closely related they are. Here we see that while the most positive views of Truss and Sunak are both to be found in the more Conservative-supporting top-right quadrant, the view that Truss would make the better prime minister of the two is most prevalent in solidly Conservative and Leave-voting territory. This is where we are also mostly likely to find those who prefer a PM who always says exactly what they think, prioritises tax cuts, and stayed in Boris Johnson's government rather than resigning. Peak support for the view that Sunak would make the better PM is found further over into the liberal and Remain-voting part of the map.



## The next general election

More than 4 in 10 voters – but only one fifth of 2019 Conservatives – said they think a new general election should be held as soon as possible once the new prime minister is installed in September. A further 14% said they would like an election before the end of the government's existing 5-year term. Only just over a quarter (27%) – but a majority of 2019 Conservatives (54%) said they wanted the current government's term to run for the full 5 years.

The new Conservative leader and Prime Minister is expected to be announced in early September. How soon after that should the next general election be held?



## Voting intentions

We asked poll respondents how likely they thought it was that they would vote for each party at the next election as things stand today. We then asked the same question imagining that Sunak becomes Conservative leader, and then again imagining that Truss were PM.

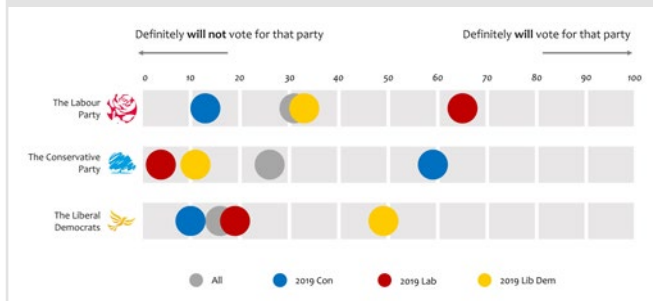
“As things stand”, the mean likelihood to vote Conservative was 26/100, compared to 31 for Labour. With Truss as prime minister this fell 2 points to 24; with Sunak as PM it fell a further point to 23 (with Labour’s mean likelihood rising to 32 in both cases).

Among 2019 Conservatives, the mean likelihood to vote for the party again “as things stand” was 59/100. This fell to 55 with Truss as PM, and 51 under Sunak.

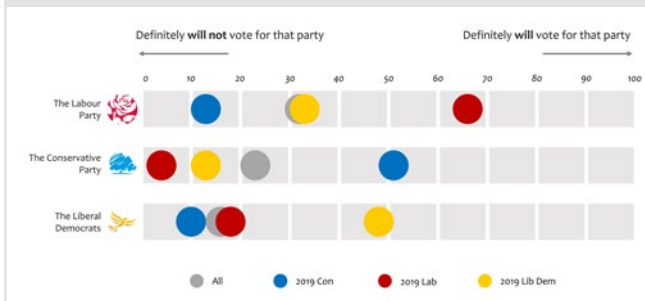
2019 Labour voters were slightly more likely than Tories to say they would vote the same way next time: 65/100 “as things stand”, and 66 under both Sunak and Truss.

Conservative defectors put their likelihood of voting Conservative again at 22/100 “as things stand” (behind Another Party on 23). With Sunak as PM this fell to 21/100 (behind Labour on 22 and Another Party on 25). With Truss as PM, their mean likelihood of voting Conservative again rose to 25/100, ahead of Labour on 21 and Another Party on 23 – the only scenario in which their likelihood of voting Tory was higher than for any other party, though still only around half as likely as 2019 Conservatives as a whole.

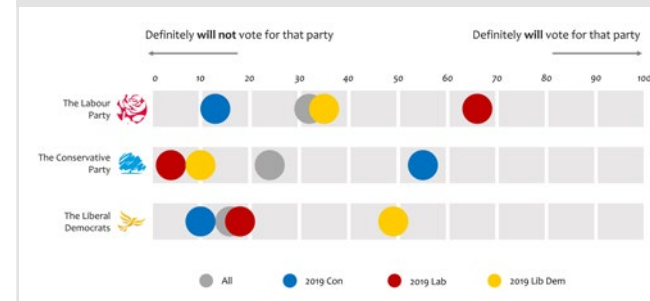
As things stand today, how likely would you say it is that you will end up voting for each of the following parties at the next election – where 0 means ‘there is no chance I will vote for that party’, and 100 means ‘I will definitely vote for that party’.  
[NB Mean scores]



Imagine **Rishi Sunak** becomes leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister. If that were to happen, how likely do you think you would be to vote for each of the following parties at the next election – where 0 means ‘there is no chance I will vote for that party’, and 100 means ‘I will definitely vote for that party’.  
[NB Mean scores]



Imagine **Liz Truss** becomes leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister. If that were to happen, how likely do you think you would be to vote for each of the following parties at the next election – where 0 means ‘there is no chance I will vote for that party’, and 100 means ‘I will definitely vote for that party’.  
[NB Mean scores]



## 4. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

10,454 adults were interviewed online between 25 July and 2 August 2022. Data have been weighted to be representative of all adults in Great Britain. Full data tables are available at [LordAshcroftPolls.com](https://lordashcroftpolls.com)

12 focus groups were held between 26 July and 4 Aug 2022 in the following constituencies:

- Esher & Walton
- Peterborough
- Wolverhampton South West
- Cheltenham
- Pudsey
- Middlesbrough South & East Cleveland

Participants had voted Conservative in 2019 and were undecided about the next general election. The groups represented a wide range of backgrounds and included equal numbers of men and women overall.



# 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

## His other books include:

- Victoria Cross Heroes, Volumes I and II
- Special Forces Heroes
- George Cross Heroes
- Special Ops Heroes
- Heroes of the Skies
- White Flag? An Examination of the UK's Defence Capability
- Unfair Game: An Exposé of South Africa's Captive-Bred Lion Industry

