



Conservative comeback: Is there a path back to power by 2029?

Conservative Party Conference Fringe Event 2024

Progressive Activists



Civic Pragmatists



Disengaged Battlers



Established Liberals



Loyal Nationals



Disengaged Traditionalists



Backbone Conservatives



...a group for whom politics is an important part of their identity and who seek to correct long-standing injustices

...a group that cares about others, at home or abroad. They wish for less conflict and more compromise.

... a group that are just getting by. They blame the system for its unfairness, but not other people.

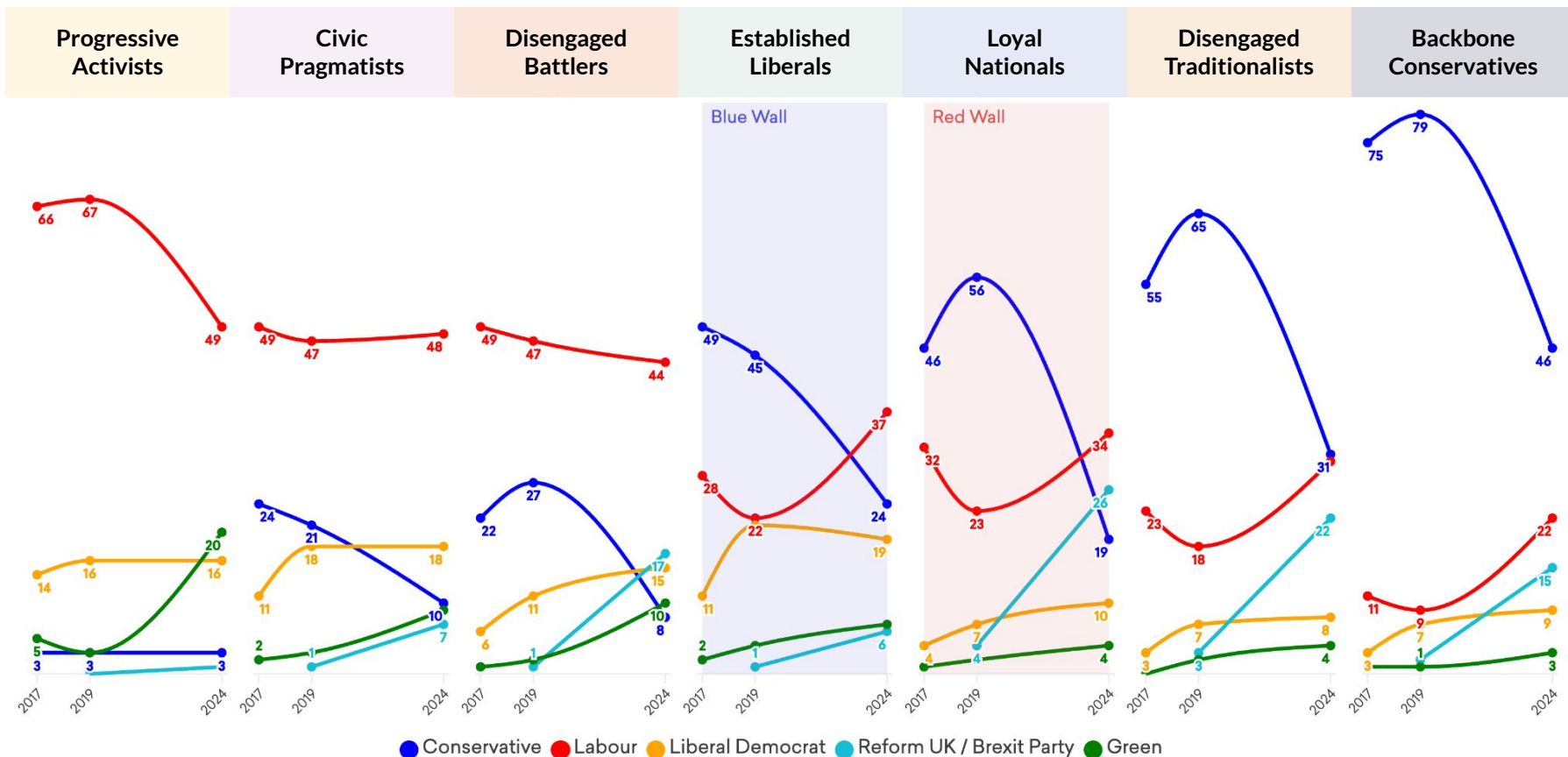
...a group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo.

...a patriotic group, who worry that our way of life is threatened and also feel our society has become more unfair.

... a group that values a well-ordered society takes pride in hard work. They want strong leadership that keeps people in line.

... a group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future, and who keenly follow the news.

How did the Seven Segments vote?



The Conservatives' Pathways back

Can the Conservatives win in 2029?

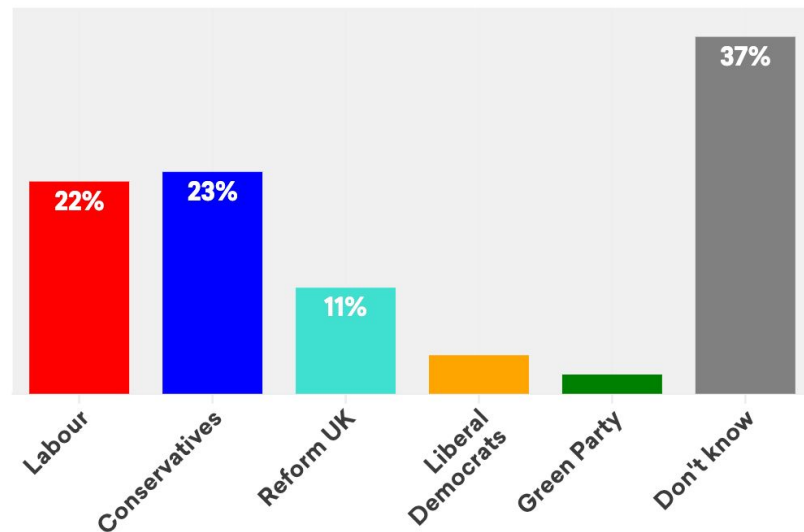
After such a significant defeat, the default assumption is that the Conservatives' path to recovery will be long and hard, as in 1997.

But a more volatile electorate mean old assumptions don't hold - there is already a real chance that the Conservatives can plot a path to power in 2029. The most compelling evidence for this is the plummet in Keir Starmer's approval ratings post-election. Polling shows the public already believe the Conservatives are more likely to win the next election than Labour.

The possibility of a win in 2029 means the Conservatives need to be approaching this leadership election thinking how best to manage a restive electorate, and how to rebuild a coalition of 'everywhere, everything all at once'.

Public split on who will win the next General Election

Who do you think will win the next General Election?



The opportunity of a new leader

Keir Starmer's personal unpopularity means that - despite their low name recognition - all of the Conservative leadership candidates poll well against Labour.

None of the current candidates are far behind Starmer in a head-to-head, giving the newly elected leader a very real chance of returning to power. These numbers have all improved since August.

However, given each of the candidates has relatively low name recognition, the current ratings reflect votes against Starmer rather than for any of the individual candidates

Conservative candidates are making progress against Starmer

Who do you think would make the better Prime Minister?

● Candidate ● Keir Starmer



Voters' remorse

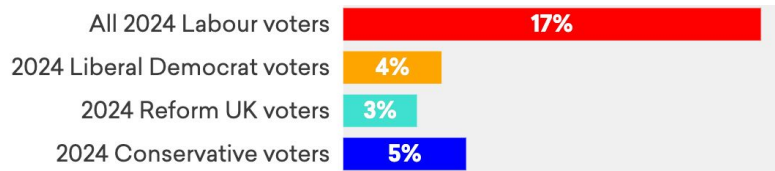
Almost a fifth of Labour voters now say they regret their vote.

In fact, the general public is now more likely to say that they preferred the previous Conservative Government to the current one. If the mood crystallises against the Labour Party and the Conservatives are able to take advantage of that, it could make for a path back to power.

As the last Government showed - it will be difficult for Labour to recover from a position of extreme unpopularity, and the Conservatives will need to move rapidly to establish themselves as a credible party of opposition - because in a fragmented electorate they are not the only choice on offer.

Almost a fifth of Labour voters regret their vote

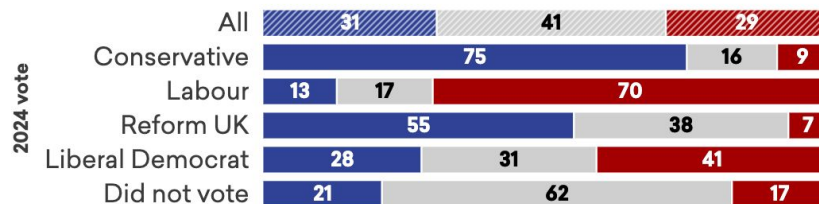
Proportion of voters who say they regret their choice of vote



Narrowly, the public preferred Sunak's government

Which of the following do you prefer?

- The previous government, led by Rishi Sunak
- The new government, led by Keir Starmer
- Don't know



Conservative switchers are open to coming home

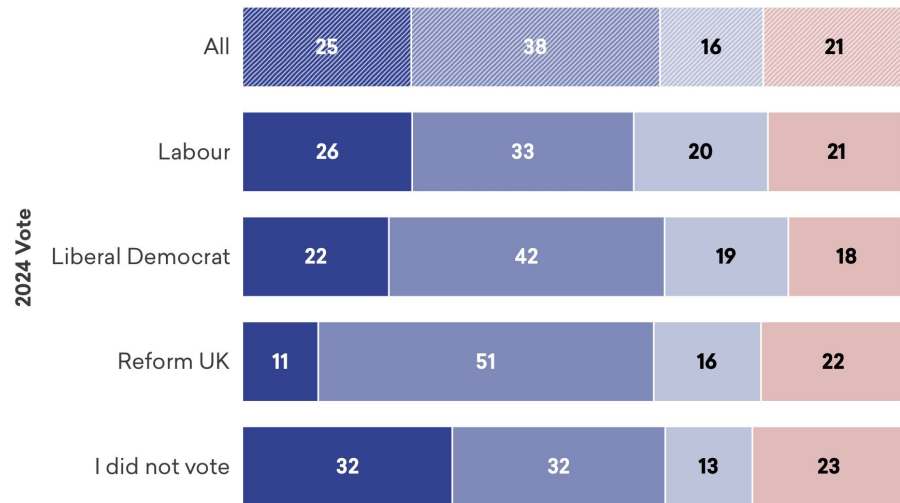
In 2019, Boris Johnson acknowledged that many of the Party's new voters had only 'lent' their votes to the Conservatives and that the Government needed to earn their vote again. While that failed - it seems the reverse is true this time, many former Conservative voters have only 'lent' their vote elsewhere.

More than seven in ten former Conservative voters who voted Labour at the last election say they could return to the Conservatives within a decade.

Reform voters are most sticky - 38% of previous Conservatives who voted Reform say they will not vote Conservative again for at least ten years.

You said you voted for the Conservatives before but did not at the last election. How long do you think it will be, if ever, before you vote for the Conservatives again?

● Within the next four years ● Five to ten years ● More than ten years ● Never



Public indifference to Tory-Reform crossover

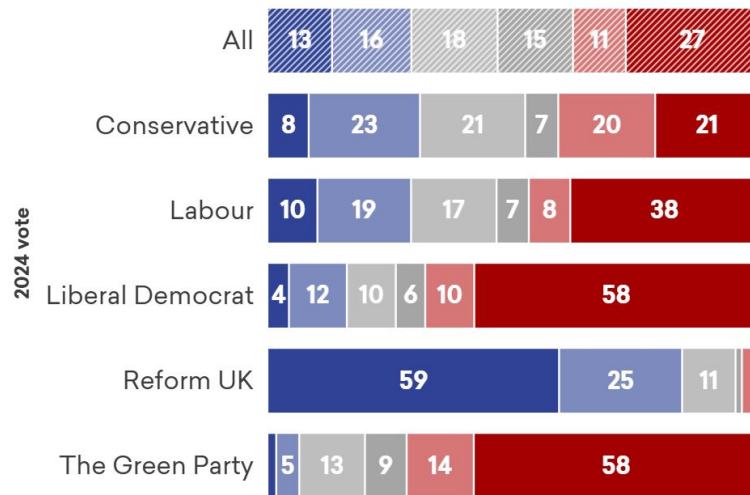
The public are relatively narrowly more likely to say that Reform overtaking the Conservatives as the largest party on the right would be a bad thing for the UK (38 per cent) than a good thing (29 per cent).

Interestingly, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters are significantly more likely than Conservative voters to think a Reform-Conservative cross-over in the polls would be a bad thing for the UK.

The only group of voters who think the crossover would be a good thing are 2024 Reform UK voters - more than four in five of them (84%) think it would be a good thing.

If the Reform UK were to replace the Conservatives as Britain's largest right-wing party, do you think that would be...

● Very good for the UK ● Quite good for the UK
● Neither good nor bad for the UK ● Don't know ● Quite bad for the UK
● Very bad for the UK



The path to victory

More in Common has modelled approximately how many seats the Conservatives could win if they expanded their voter base by attracting voters from the right.

The risk of appealing purely to Reform voters is that this could deter the other pools of current and potential Conservative voters.

Even if the Conservatives manage to reverse two thirds of the 2019-2024 Conservative to Labour swing, pursuing a strategy of 'uniting the right' could keep the Conservatives in second place at the next election.

This is based on how many Reform voters say they are likely to vote Conservative next time, how many Conservatives say they would never vote Reform and who they would vote for instead. Assuming no other changes in votes or turnout.

A 'unite the right' strategy:

If 31% of 2024 Reform voters are encouraged to vote Conservative...

This could push 7% of 2024 Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats and 2% to Labour...

If Labour stay strong...

Then at the next election
Conservatives have 140 seats
Labour have 393

If Labour are weak

Then at the next election
Conservatives have 265 seats
Labour have 277

The path to victory

More in Common has also modelled approximately how many seats the Conservatives could win if they expanded their voter base by taking votes from the Liberal Democrats.

A strategy that pulls voters back from Labour and the Liberal Democrats may give the Conservatives the best chance of regaining power at the next election.

This would give the Conservative's a bare majority, more seats than under a purely unite the right strategy - but not enough over the longer term.

Instead, a combined approach of reaching Reform and centrist voters is needed to restore the Conservative Party as a governing coalition.

This is based on how many Liberal Democrat voters say they are likely to vote Conservative next time, and how many Conservatives say they would never vote Liberal Democrat. Assuming no other changes in votes or turnout.

A 'defend the centre' strategy:

If 25% of 2024 Liberal Democrats are encouraged to vote Conservative...

This could push 10% of 2024 Conservatives to Reform...

If Labour stay strong...

Then at the next election
Conservatives have 163 seats
Labour have 412

If Labour are weak...

Then at the next election
Conservatives have 325 seats
Labour have 245

The path to victory

The most viable scenario for the Conservatives, and the one that guarantees them a stable majority in parliament, involves regaining votes from all sides. One way of doing so would be starting with those 2024 Labour and Liberal Democrat voters who say they would consider voting Conservative. Then, it is possible that Reform voters who are already committed to voting Reform again might be squeezed back to the Conservative Party if they think there is a credible chance of ousting the Labour Government.

This is based on how many Liberal Democrat voters say they are likely to vote Conservative next time, and how many Conservatives say they would never vote Liberal Democrat. Assuming no other changes in votes or turnout.

A broad church strategy:

Win back a quarter of 2024's Liberal Democrat voters, and reverse half of this year's Conservative to Labour swing



Win back a third of Reform UK voters



Then at the next election:
Conservatives have 356 seats
Labour has 220 seats

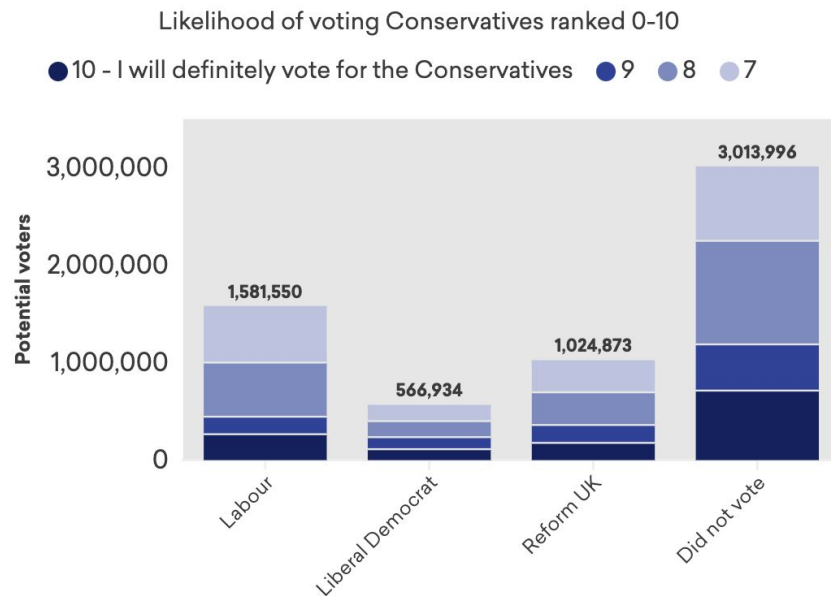
The Conservatives' Potential Voter Universe

Who could vote Conservative?

There are pools of possible Conservative voters in all parties, but by far the largest source of potential voters for the Conservatives at the next General Election come from those who voted Labour or did not vote in 2024 - of whom more than 4.5 million give themselves a seven or above (likelihood out of ten) for voting Conservative.

Reform voters are slightly more likely to see themselves as possible Conservative voters but, because there are a smaller number of Reform voters in the country, this means fewer potential votes. And because so many seats are Conservative-Labour marginals, Labour switchers count twice compared to votes won back from Reform.

Conservatives' biggest pools of potential voters come from Labour and non voters



Never getting back together

Only around a fifth of former Conservative voters rule out voting for the party again.

Reform voters are most likely to say they will never vote Conservative again, whereas Liberal Democrat and non-voters say they are most likely to return to the party. Targeting some of these voters could be the easiest “low hanging fruit” for the Conservative party.

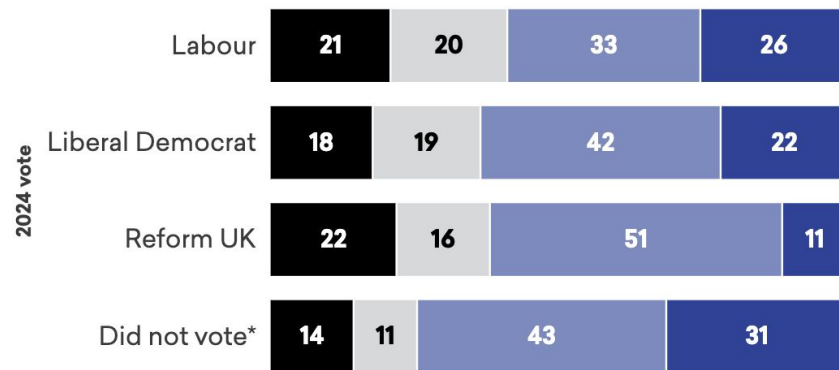
One possible route back to power is three phased approach-which involves:

- 1) Re-engaging normally loyal Conservative voters such as Whitby Woman.
- 2) Winning back Labour and Liberal Democrat voters by broadening the party's appeal.
- 3) Squeezing Reform voters once the Tories are competitive again, by making the election a straight fight between Labour and the Conservatives

Reform UK voters are most likely to rule out voting Conservative again

You said you voted for the Conservatives before but did not at the last election. How long do you think it will be, if ever, before you vote for the Conservatives again?

● Never ● More than ten years ● Five to ten years
● Within the next four years



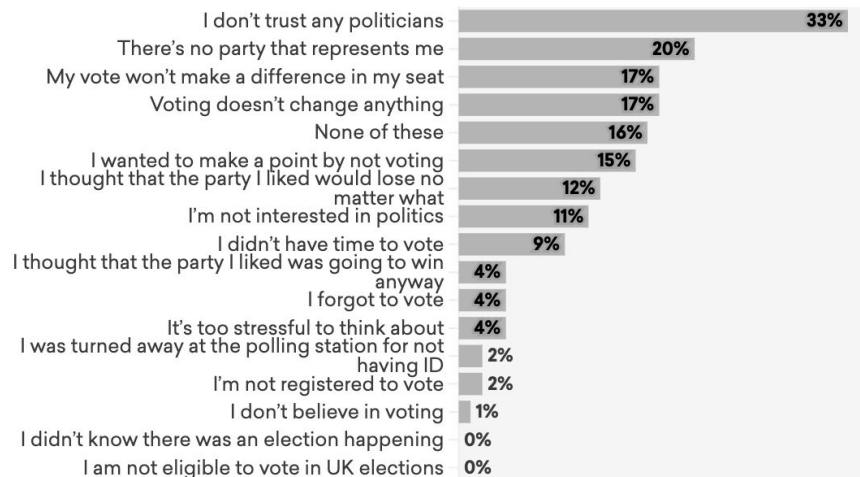
Step 1) Re-engage Conservative abstainers

Over a million people who voted Conservative in 2019 opted to stay at home in 2024. Nearly twice as many as the number who switched directly to Labour. Encouraging some of these people out to vote is essential for the Conservatives' path to victory in 2029.

For these Conservatives, staying at home wasn't a passive decision but an active choice - their way of registering their disapproval and disappointment with the previous four years and a disastrous campaign. For more than three in four (77 per cent) of this group, it was their first time not voting in a General Election. Restoring trust with this group is essential to getting them to vote Conservative again.

Lack of trust drove Conservative voters to stay at home this election

You said you did not vote in Thursday's election. Why was that? Select all that apply. [Conservative 2019 voters]



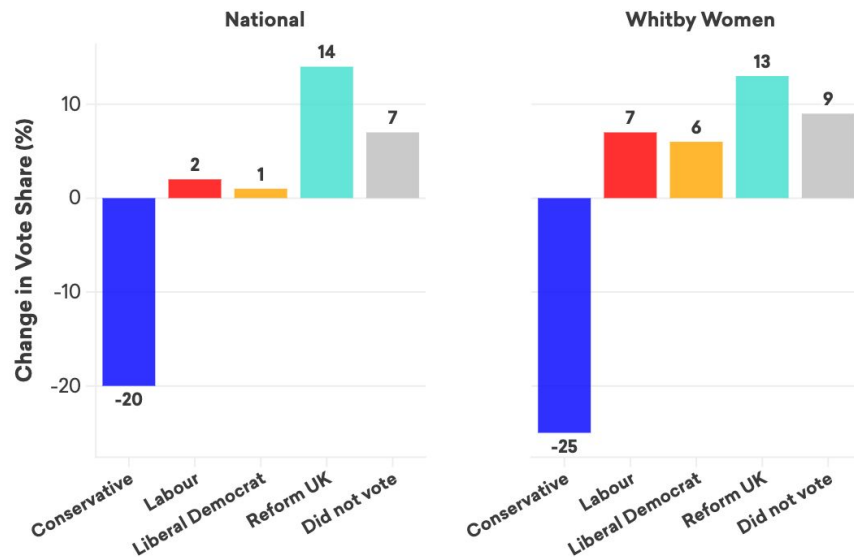
Step 1) Winning back the Whitby Women

‘Whitby Women’ - a group that consists of older women who own their homes and are unlikely to have a university degree - came to define this year’s election. Traditionally they supported the Conservative Party but went into the campaign undecided about who they would vote for, with many not voting at all.

In 2024, a quarter of them (up from 15% in 2019) chose to stay at home, and for half of that group (49 per cent), this was the first time sitting out a General Election.

The Conservatives now hold just 21 of the 40 constituencies where Whitby Woman is most represented. The path back to a Conservative majority means winning these seats back, the party will need to find ways to convince Whitby Woman to turn out and vote for the Conservative Party again. Labour’s decision on the Winter Fuel Allowance makes this job much easier for the Conservatives.

Whitby Women voters left the Conservatives and stayed-at-home in greater numbers than the general public



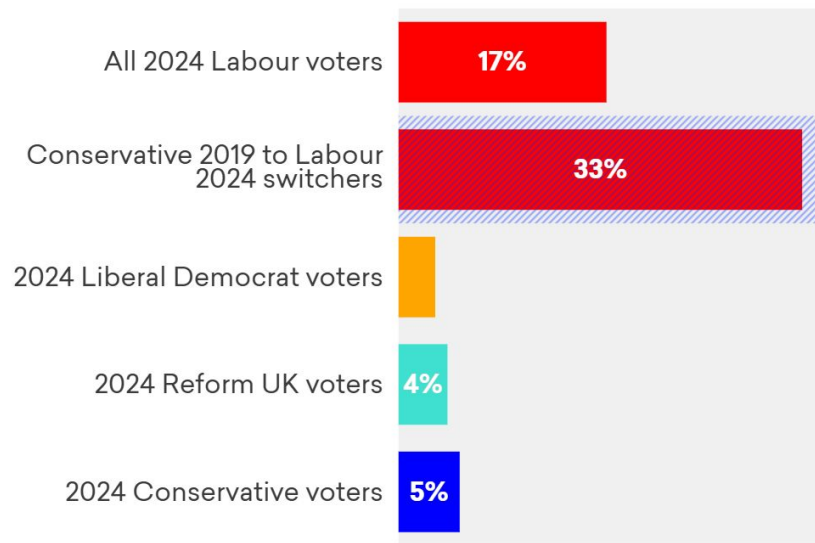
Step 2) Labour voters

The Conservatives already have an opportunity to reverse some of the direct swing to Labour at this General Election - a third of those who switched to Labour already regret their vote and, in focus groups with Conservative to Labour switchers, there are already notable early signs of dissatisfaction and upset with the Labour Party.

Given that Labour voters count double in terms of vote share lead, the Conservatives should focus closely on what could tempt these Labour voters back to the Conservative Party.

Conservative to Labour switchers are the most likely to regret their vote

Per cent saying they regret their vote



Step 2) Labour voters - in their words

*I'm still glad that I voted for Labour instead of the Conservatives but I feel like they do like all political parties do and just promise a lot and then you don't see any tangible changes. **I hope not but we could be in the same situation in three years time and I just hope that it hasn't got worse by then.***

Ellie - Education administrator, West Yorkshire

*I've lost all faith. If Starmer can lie about the WFA, what else is he going to lie about? **It's the first time I've ever voted Labour and I wish I hadn't now.** I just couldn't vote for Sunak because he was such a weasel.*

Ken - Teacher, Hendon

*I think they've got a whacking great majority. So I think they think they can do whatever they like now. So again, **the spots are coming off***

Martyn - Construction worker, Hendon

I was really hopeful, you know, because we've kind of been static, it feels like for a number of years. And I had so much hope that there's going to be change and then, you know, right away they start attacking older people.

I'm actually just shocked by that and disappointed.

And it worries me where it's going what's coming next. It hasn't been a great start for them.

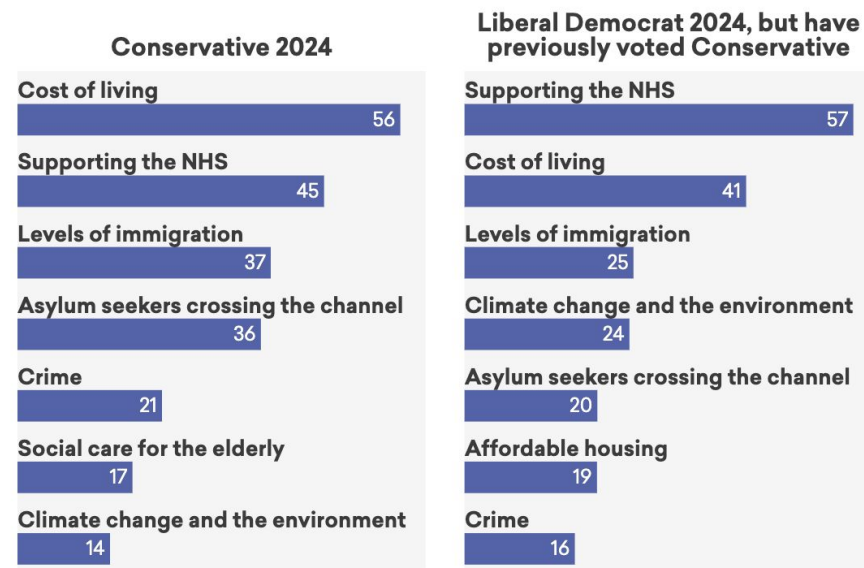
Kerry - Office manager, West Yorkshire

Step 2) Liberal Democrat voters

The Liberal Democrats represent a smaller pool of potential voters for the Conservatives, but the Conservatives will need to win back some seats from the Liberal Democrats to form a majority. It is not unreasonable to think of the Liberal Democrats blocking a Conservative victory in much the same way a large tranche of SNP seats in Scotland has the potential to stand in the way of Labour.

While Liberal Democrats differ significantly from the median Conservative voter, these differences are not irreconcilable. 57% of this year's Liberal Democrat voters have voted Conservative in the past - and this subset of voters have similar priorities to Conservative voters.

Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters' top issues are not irreconcilable



Step 3) Reform voters

Reform voters are defined by an extremely high personal approval for Nigel Farage, and a deep distrust of both Labour and the Conservative Party. But some of them are more reachable than others.

The unreachable Reform voters

Represent about half of Reform voters - they are deeply dissatisfied and opposed to the Conservative Party and their views are far from traditional conservatives. They are closer to the radical right we see on the continent and define themselves against multi ethnic Britain and the establishment.

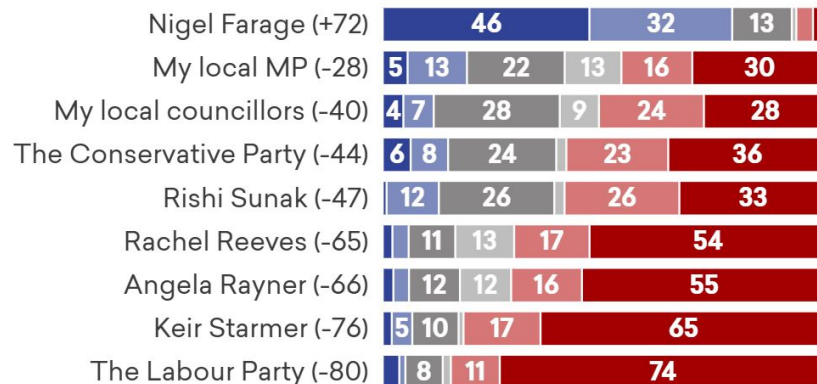
The reachable Reform voters

These voters wanted to punish Conservatives at this election, but are strongly opposed to Labour and might return to the Conservatives in an election where their votes have a greater chance of keeping Labour out of power. Reform voters are eight times more likely to prefer the previous Tory government to the current Labour one.

Reform UK voters are extremely positive about Nigel Farage, and highly critical of both Labour and the Conservatives

For each of the following would you say they are doing a...

- Very good job
- Somewhat good job
- Neither a good job nor a bad job
- Don't know
- Somewhat bad job
- Very bad job



More in
Common

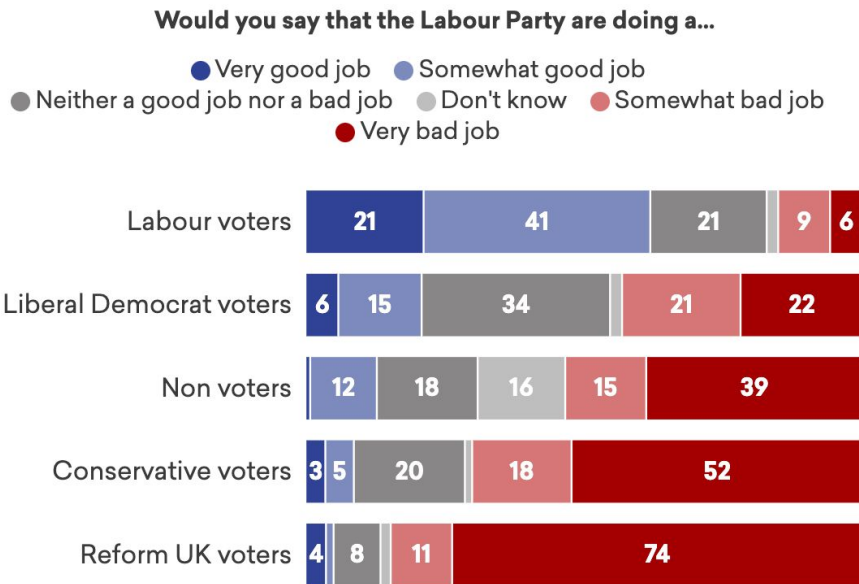
Source: More in Common, September 2024 • 2024 Reform UK voters

Step 3) Reform voters

More than any other group of the public, Reform UK voters are critical of Labour, with 85 per cent expressing a negative view.

In this election, many felt comfortable voting for Reform because they knew that Labour was likely to win anyway and Reform allowed them to register a protest - but if Reform voters felt that their votes could make the difference to a Conservative victory, the disillusioned populist segment of Reform voters might be reachable for the Conservatives.

Reform UK voters are exceptionally critical of Labour



Step 3) The challenge with ‘very online’ Reform voters

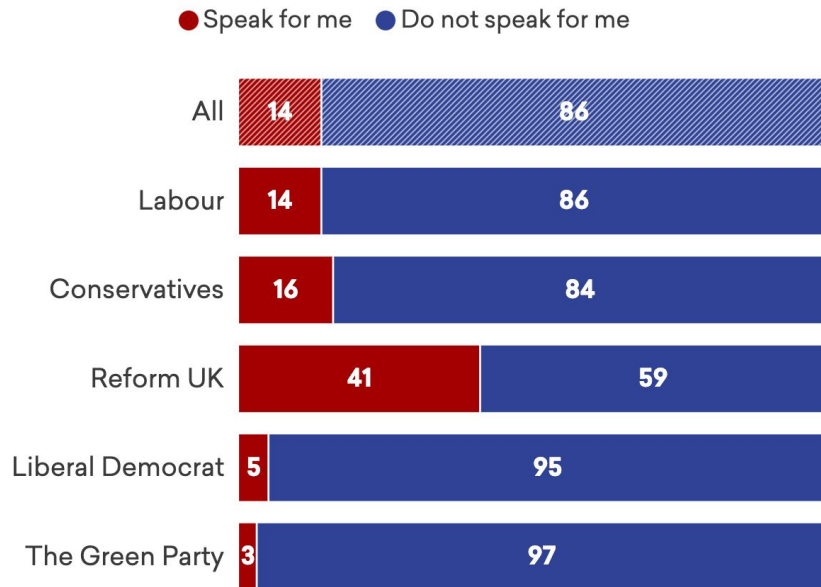
One of the challenges the Conservatives will face in attracting Reform voters is that there are a subset of this group of voter who are increasingly online.

During the Corbyn years, Labour faced a challenge of having an increasingly online base - with the retort ‘Twitter is not Britain’ applying to their progressive base. In 2024, this challenge - of how representative on-line views are - now applies to parts of the Reform UK base and its supporters.

This is best exemplified in response to the riots across the country in August. Four in ten Reform UK voters said that the rioters spoke for them - while still a minority of Reform UK voters, they are three times more likely than average to say rioters speak for them.

Despite being small in size, this group’s presence is amplified by the fact it is more active “online” – those who say the rioters speak for people like them are almost twice as likely than average to post about politics on social media.

People participating in these riots and protests...



Remember that Reform voters are outliers

	Median Conservative voter	Median potential Conservative voter	Median Reform UK voter
Donald Trump:	-45 net disapproval	-44 net disapproval	+19 approval
Ending support for Ukraine:	-47% net oppose	-34% net oppose	+1% net support
Abolish the House of Lords:	-4% net oppose	+15% net support	+39% net support
Build more homes, even if some are on green belt:	-2% net oppose	±0% net support	-15% net oppose

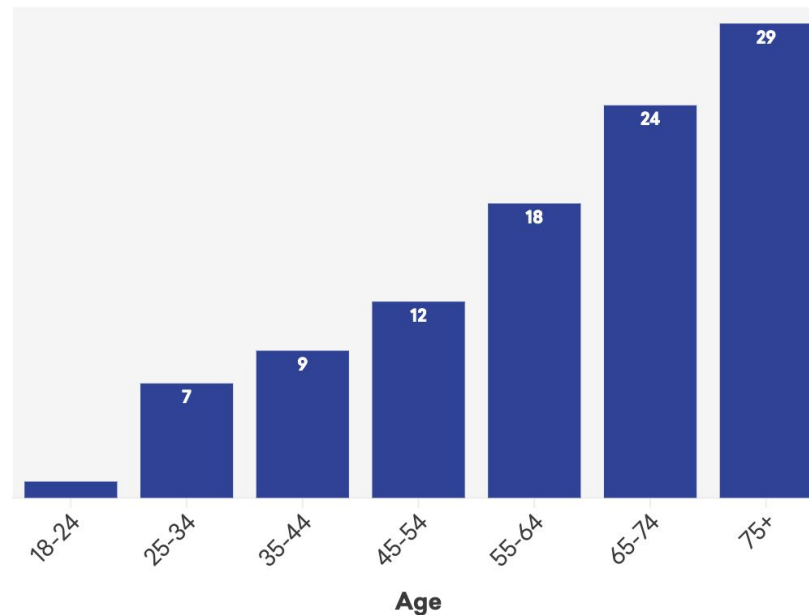
On many of the most controversial issues, Reform voters hold drastically different views to both current and potential future Conservative voters. Chasing the most extreme Reform voters first will put off the Conservatives' base and make the party more unattractive to their other potential voters.

The Conservatives' age problem?

The median age of those who voted Conservative is now 66. **40 percent of all Conservative voters are now aged 70 and above and 65 per cent are aged 60 and above.** Although optimists will point to the historical shift of voters to the Conservatives as they age, the ageing of their remaining base presents real challenges for their ongoing viability as a major political force.

The crossover age at which someone becomes more likely to vote Conservative than Labour is 62, up from 39 in 2019. Given current life expectancy, 10 per cent of the Conservatives' current voters will likely have died by 2029, the scheduled year of the next election. The 2024 Conservative vote's steep age gradient could mean time is working against them unless they can diversify their vote.

Age profile of 2024 Conservative voters



Where are Conservative voters getting their news?

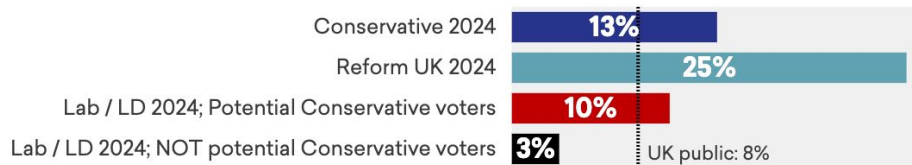
It is clear that GB News is a growing source of information on the right.

A quarter of 2024 Reform voters watch GB News, but a tenth of those who voted Labour or Liberal Democrat in 2024 but might vote Conservative at the next election watch GB News too.

In the GB News audience there are many more potential voters from Reform than there are potential voters from Labour.

Who watches GB News?

Proportion watching GB News



Who is GB News' audience?



What next for the Conservatives?

The Conservatives' legacy

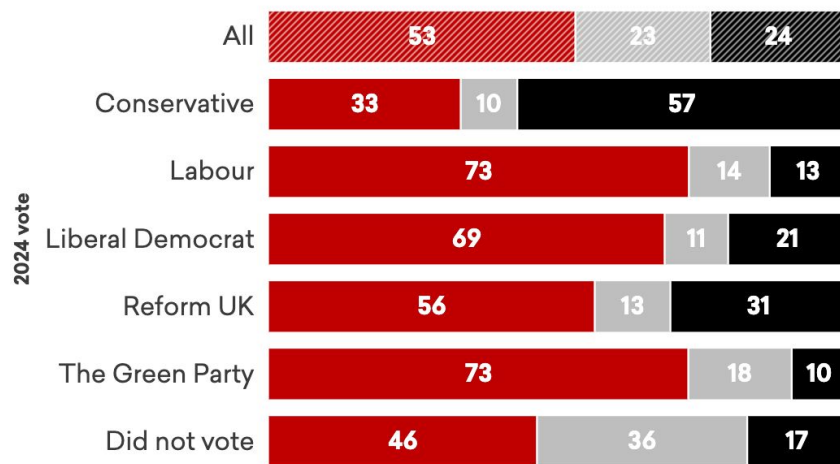
Most Britons now think that the Conservatives should apologise for their record in government. The party will have to decide what it is willing to apologise for in order to show that they have learnt their lesson.

Moving quickly to distance themselves from the failings of the previous government (while owning the successes) will be necessary to restore credibility in the party and show that they are listening to the concerns of the public.

Most think that the Conservative party needs to apologise for their record in government

In your view, should the next Conservative leader apologise for the Conservatives' recent record in government?

● Yes ● Don't know ● No



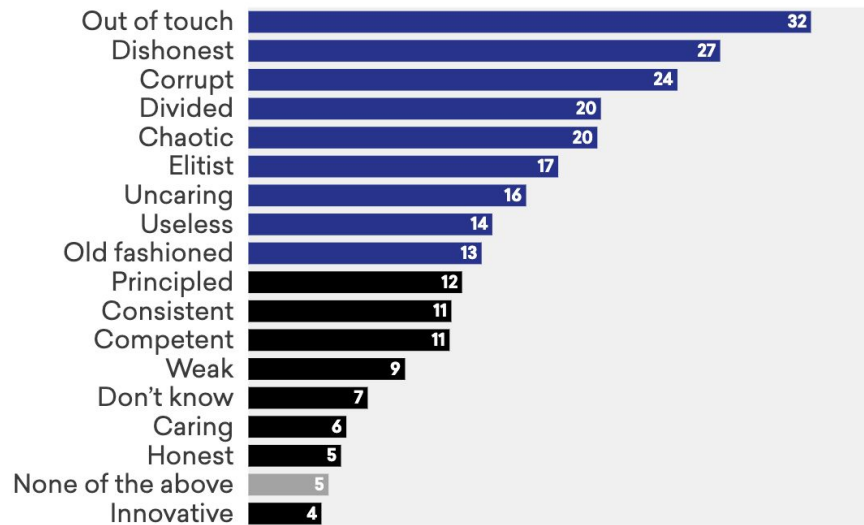
Understanding Conservative defeat

The most frequently used words to describe the Conservatives is “out of touch”. The new leader will have to consider how to avoid the mistakes of Rishi Sunak’s premiership which appeared not to be able to relate to ordinary people during the cost of living crisis.

Along with that, the Conservatives will need to overcome their perception as being dishonest and corrupt which emerged from scandals such as Partygate. Having a leader who can level with the public matters in this regard.

"Out of touch", "Dishonest" and "Corrupt"

Which of the following adjectives best describes the Conservative Party?



Understanding Conservative defeat

In a word, how would you describe the Conservative Party?



In a word or two, why did the Conservatives lose this General Election?



Rebuilding trust - the top priority

Given that word cloud, it is no surprise that rebuilding trust in the Conservatives is listed as the top priority for the next Conservative leader - and a bigger priority than coming up with good policies or holding Labour to account.

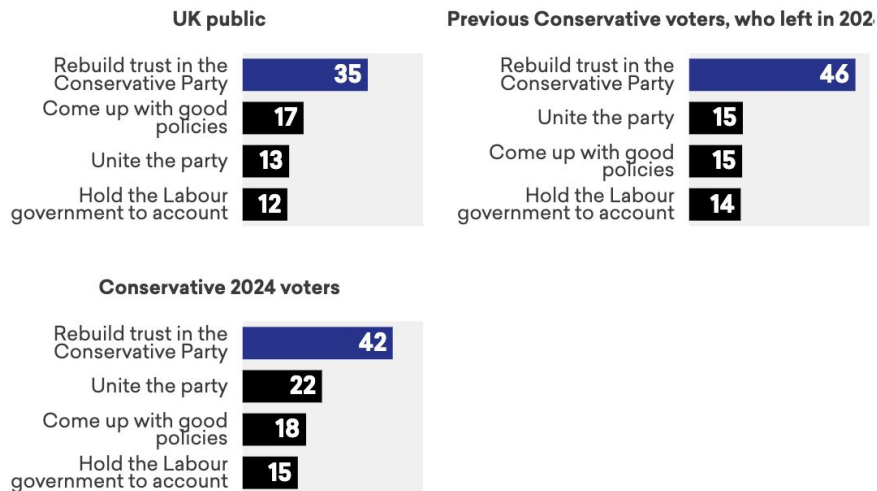
This is even more true for those who have voted Conservative before but did not vote Conservative in 2024 - 46 per cent of whom say that rebuilding trust should be the next leader's priority.

It's very, very difficult. I think it's a matter of trust. I think we've lost trust in the [Conservatives] and previous governments and the things that they've done. Jeanie, Birmingham

So I think it's lack of trust. I think they lost an awful lot of goodwill due to obviously the Partygate situation, but I think the bottom line is lack of trust from a lot of people. Tracy, Stockton

Rebuilding trust should be the top priority for the next Conservative leader

What do you think should be the top priority of the next leader of the Conservative Party?



The need for change

Even Conservative 2024 voters think that the party needs to change a lot if they want to win the next General Election.

The Conservatives are just making poor decisions time and time and time again... I think that all (any) of us really want to see change for the good. Charlotte, Thanet

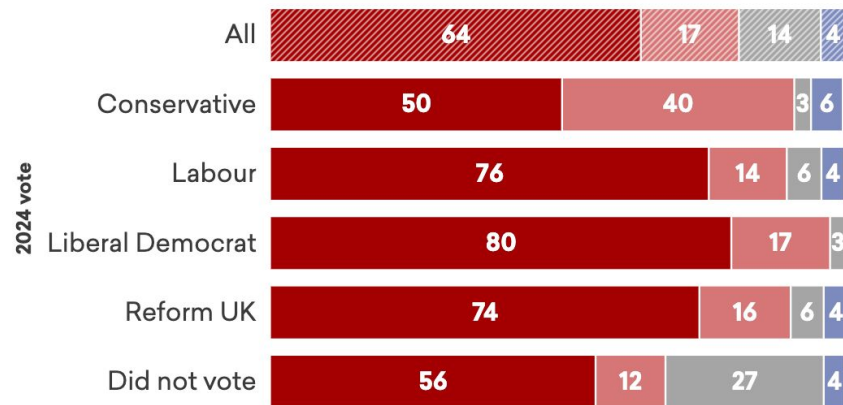
I think they need to get back in touch with the real world and the people out there that have to work for a living. Peter, Welwyn

They've got to clear out all the old deadwood. Let's have some good people of good standing, not looking after their mates. Jeanette, Surrey Heath

Most think that the Conservatives need to change a lot before the next General Election

To win the next election, to what extent do you think the Conservative Party needs to change?

● Needs to change a lot ● Needs to change a bit ● Don't know
● Needs to not change much ● Needs to not change at all



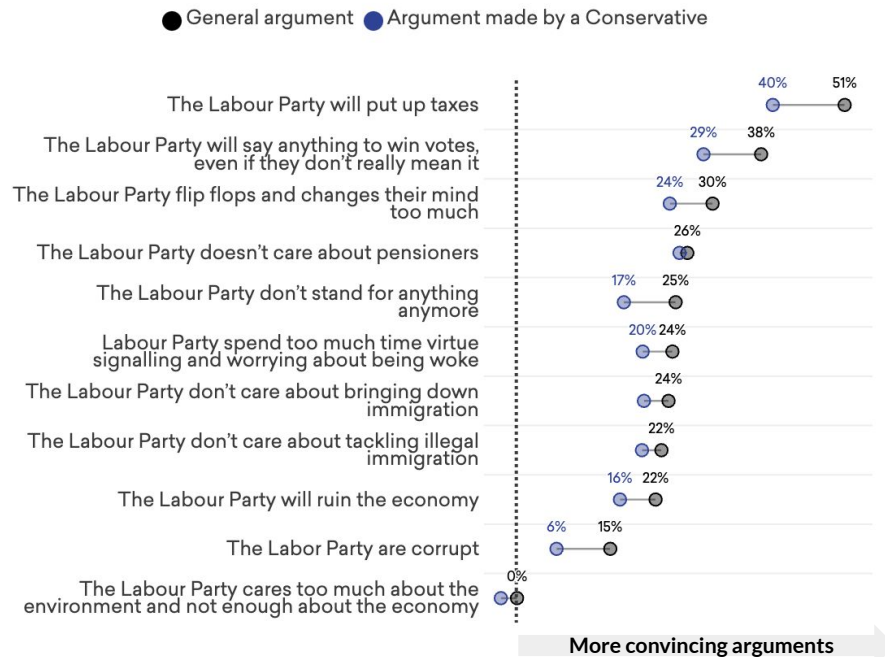
Conservatives in opposition

An opportunity for the Conservatives is that many anti-Labour arguments land well with the public - top of the list being claims that Labour will raise taxes.

But the damage to the Conservative brand is such that these arguments are far less convincing when coming from a Conservative politician. Restoring the Conservative brand is key to getting a hearing - and that will involve broadening the range of messengers speaking for the Conservatives.

The only case where a Conservative messenger does not weaken the argument is on Labour's treatment of pensioners - perhaps because this is seen as being rooted in 'fact' following the winter fuel allowance restrictions. The extent to which the Conservatives can make evidenced rather than hyperbolic claims will be key to getting a hearing.

Anti-Labour arguments are convincing, but less so when made by Conservative politicians



Numbers are a net score of the proportion of people saying an argument is convincing minus those who say it is unconvincing

Unite or die

More than anything else, voters are sick of the sense of chaos that dominated the last Government, and their key measure of success for the next leader is whether they have been able to unite the party. This is even more true for those who left the Conservative Party in 2024.

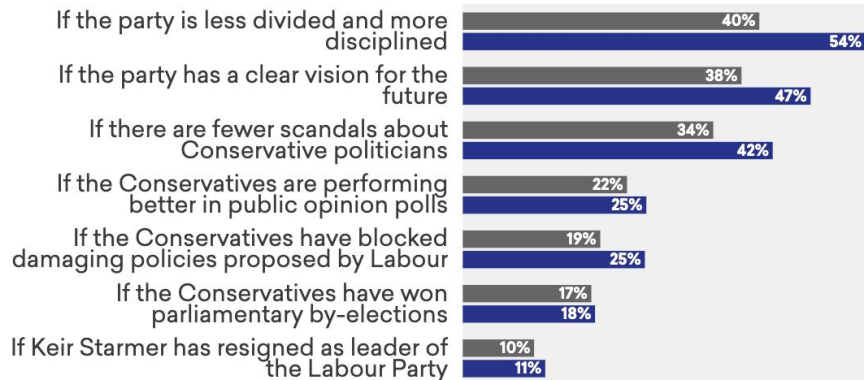
[They've] just become a laughing stock in my eyes and a joke. Sue, Surrey Heath

They seem to plot against each other and there was too much in-house fighting. There was no consistency. There was no united front. I think that's what people want. They want a united party that can stand by each other, support each other and go forward. It was just a shambles. Angela, Farnham

Uniting the party is the number one way the public will judge the new leader's success

The Conservative Party is about to elect a new leader. In five years' time, what would show you that this leader was doing a good job?

● UK public ● Have voted Conservative before, but not in 2024



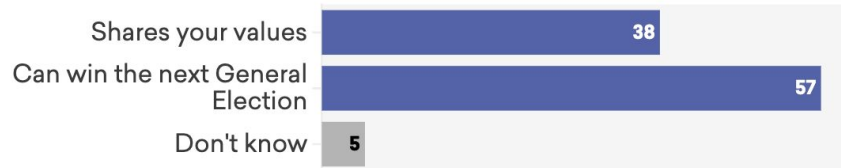
Conservatives need a winner not an ideologue

Taken together, it is clear the Conservatives do have a real chance to win the next General Election, but only if they pick someone who is capable of restoring the Conservatives reputation for honesty - who can rebuild trust with the public and re-establish the party as a competent force for good, rather than ideologically chasing the values of the most opinionated voters.

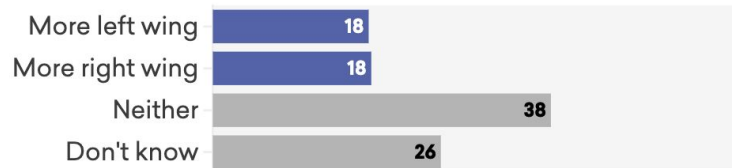
Even those who voted Conservative in 2024 would be happy for the party to choose a leader who can win the next election over one who shares their values.

Conservatives need a winner, not an ideologue

You said you voted Conservative in the recent election. Thinking about the next Conservative leader, would you prefer that it was someone who...



Do you think the Conservative Party should become...



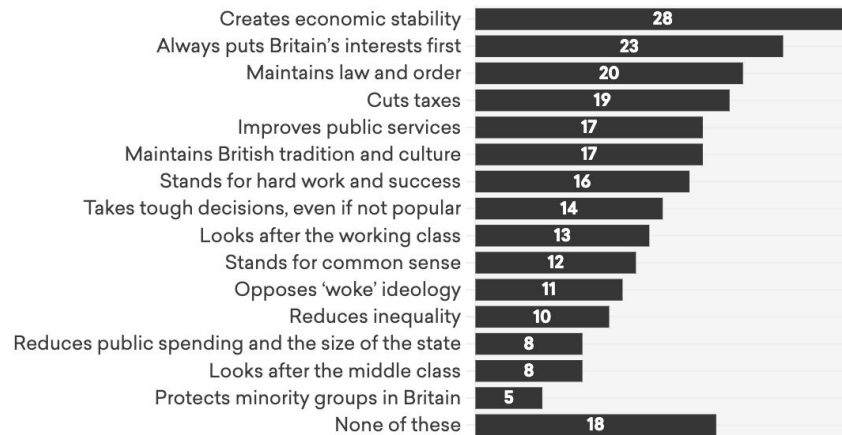
Who are the Conservatives at their best?

At their best, the public see the Conservatives as a party that creates economic stability, puts British interests first, and maintains law and order. Returning to these key conservative values are essential to a Conservative recovery.

Those who left the Conservatives for Reform UK are more likely to value the fact the party prioritises British interests, and loyal Conservative voters disproportionately describe the party as one that values and preserves British tradition. Very few voters list “opposing woke ideology” as one of the Conservatives’ best attributes.

The Conservative Party at their best creates economic stability, prioritises British interests, and maintains law and order

Setting aside how you intend to vote at this election, thinking about when the Conservative Party is at its best, what should it represent? A party that...



**How do the leadership contenders
fare?**

Leadership Contenders - Strengths and Weaknesses

Main strength

Main weakness



Refreshing

Inexperienced



Energy

Likeability



Prime Ministerial

Posh



Relatability

Seriousness

How can the Conservatives win?

Summary: How the Conservatives can win

Three stage approach to coalition building



1 Re-engage Conservative abstainers



2 Win over switchers to the centre



3 Squeeze Reform

Address three key weaknesses

Trust

Reliability

Chaos

Methodology

Polling

More in Common polled 2,080 people, representative of GB adults between 24-25th September.

Further data was taken from our Change Pending report, published in July.

More in Common is a member of the British polling council and abides by their rules.

Further information: contact ed@moreincommon.com



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