

Lessons for Labour



Findings from an Onward megapoll

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What is this?

We conducted a mega-sample poll with J.L. Partners in August/September 2022 to understand the undercurrents of British public opinion. What are voters' hopes and concerns? What are their core values?

- Sample: 10,114 GB representative sample
- Fieldwork: 20th August – 2nd September
- Quoted for: interlocked Age/gender; region; education; past vote; BES Political Attention
- Economic and social values: Standard British Social Attitudes question set of values statements used

This summarises the polling results, alongside other analysis of past elections and demographic trends, to provide lessons for Labour as we look ahead to the next election.

Recent success



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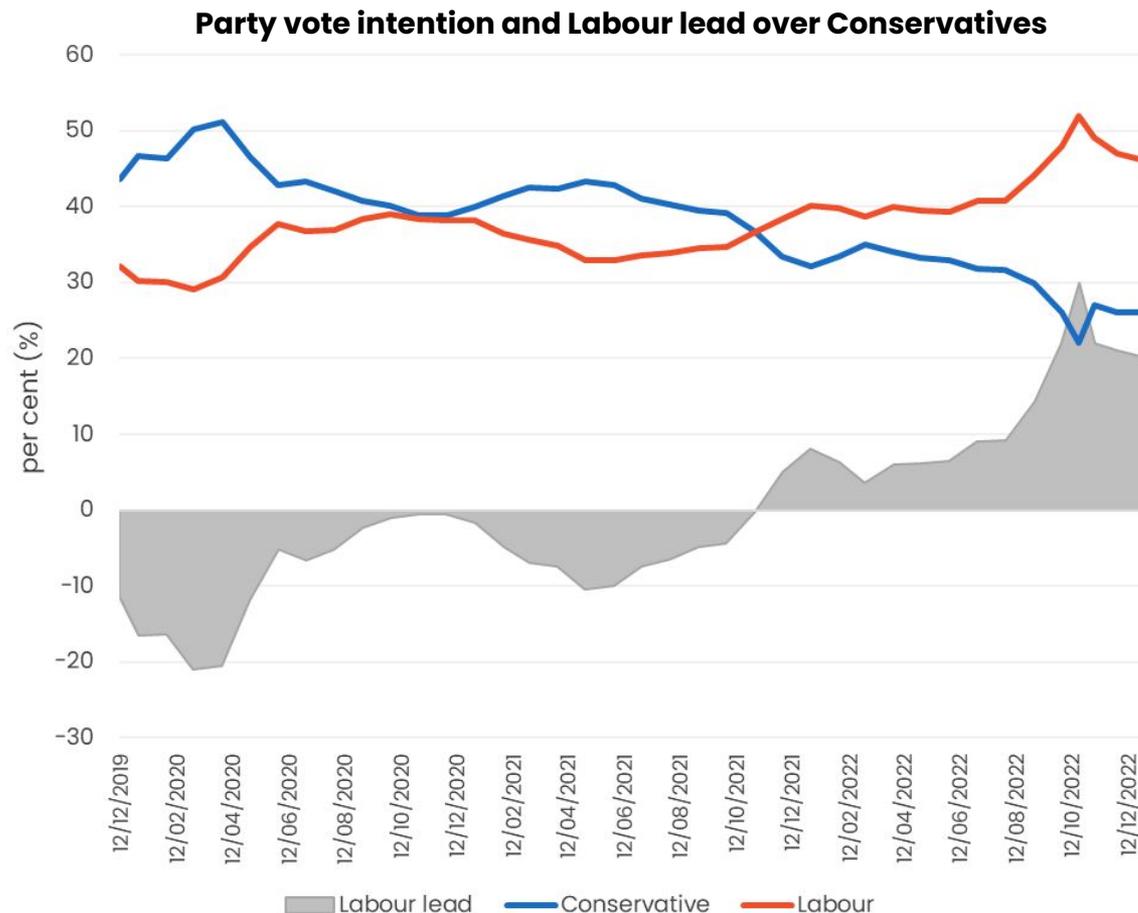
Labour is polling well

Where are we now?

Labour has been on an upward trajectory since May 2021.

Labour vote intention rose from 33% (May 2021) to 46% (Jan 2023).

They have led the Conservatives consistently since December 2021.



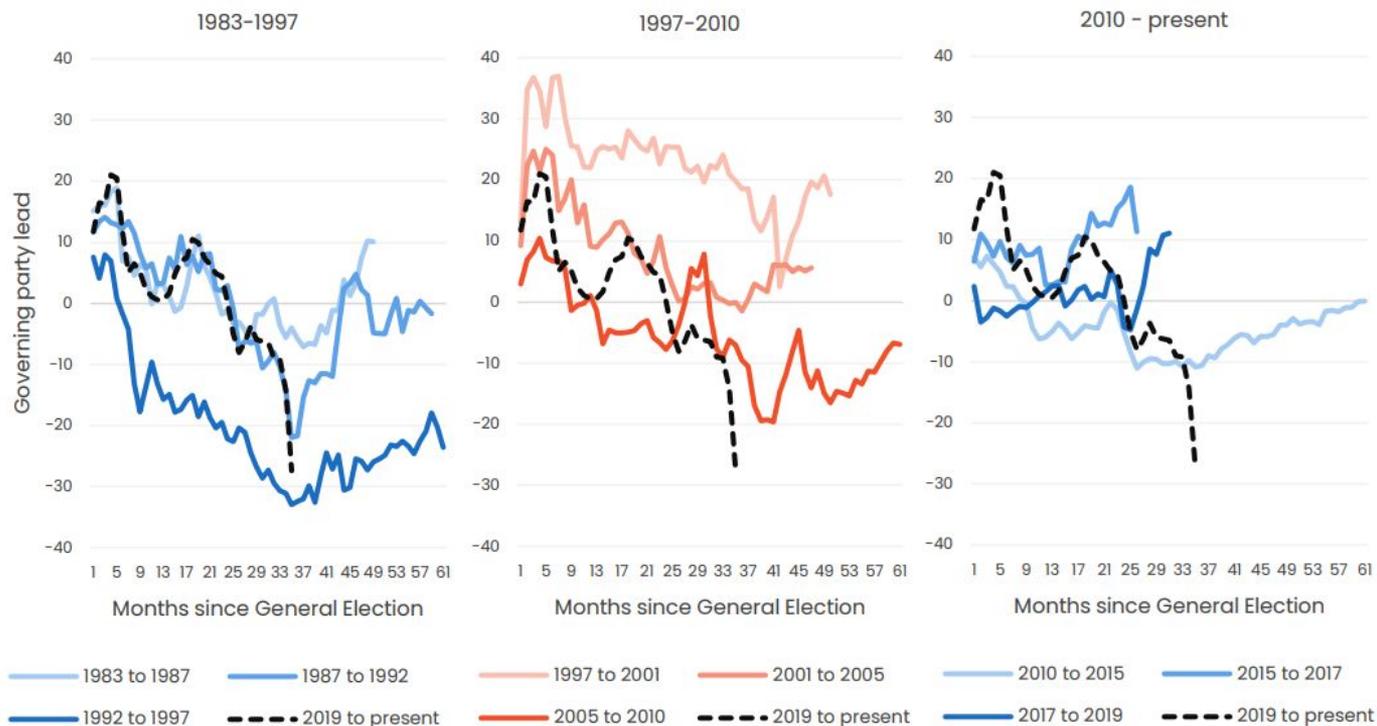
But nothing is certain

Labour's lead over the Conservatives is roughly where it was in the early 1990s, just before John Major's shock victory in 1992.

There is precedent for a Conservative recovery.

Figure 3: Governing party poll lead over opposition

Source: *PollBase*



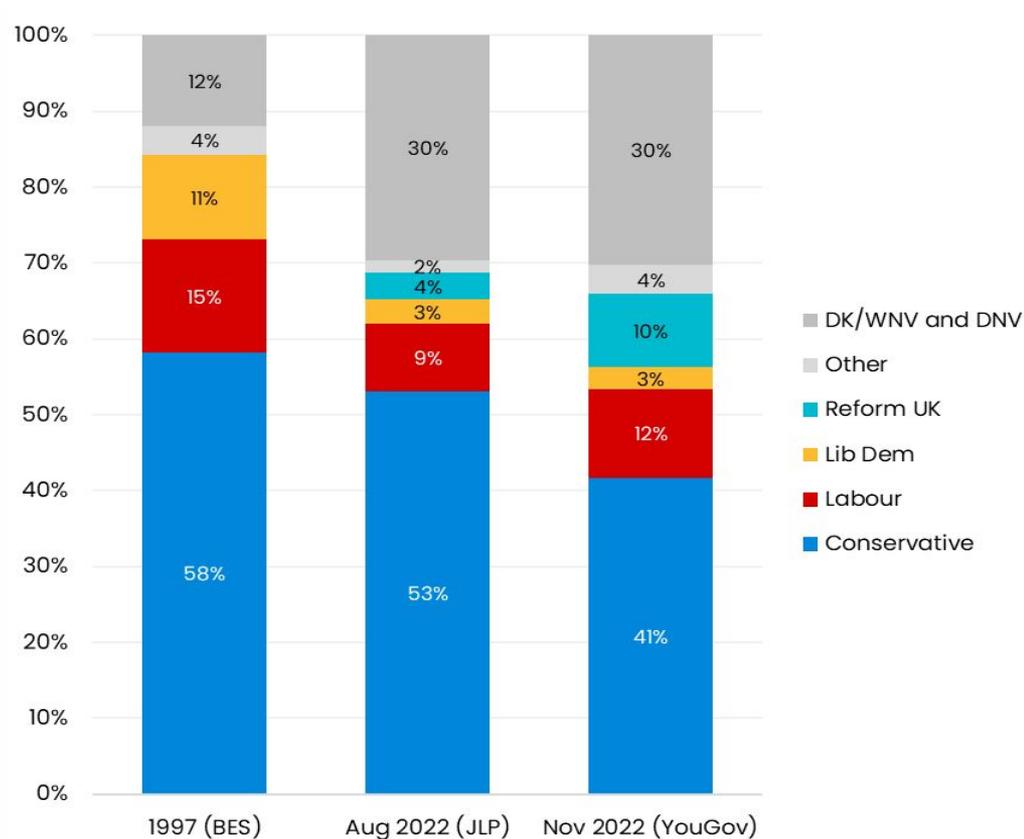
How does this compare to 1997?

The 1997 victory was built on low enthusiasm among 1992 Conservative voters as much as high enthusiasm for Labour.

15% of those who voted Conservative in 1992 switched to Labour in 1997. And 12% of 1992 Conservatives didn't vote at all in 1997.

The pattern of defections from Conservative to Labour is starting to reach 1997 levels.

Like in 1997, Conservative voters are defecting en masse

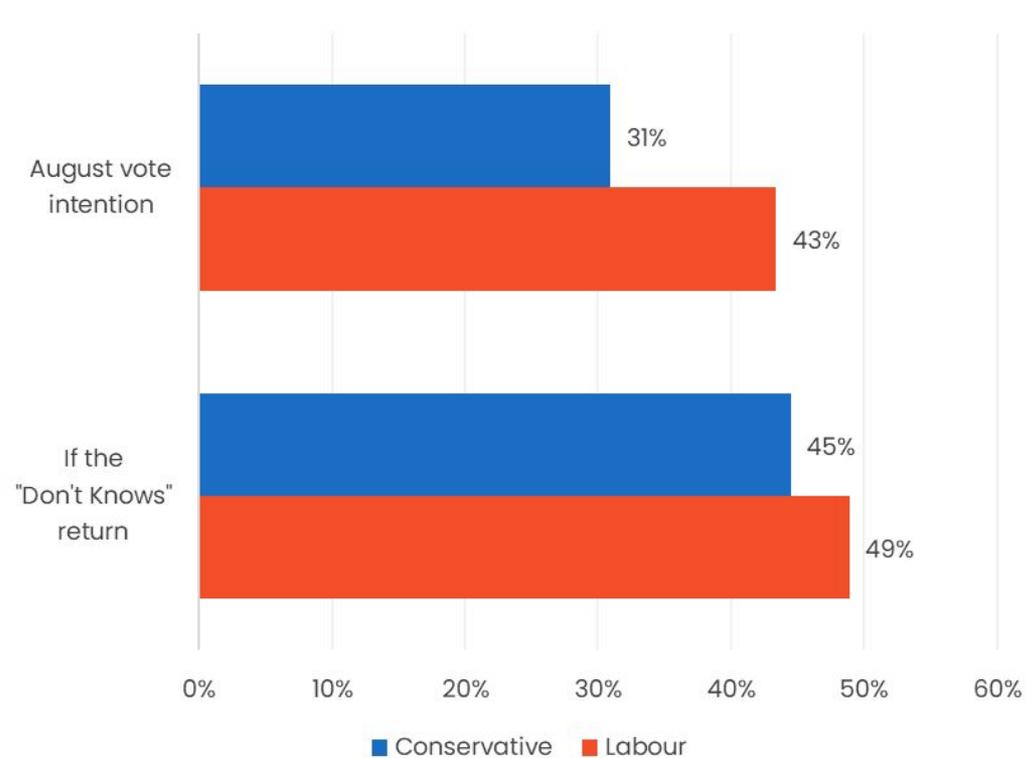


If the Don't Knows return, Labour's lead narrows

If the Don't Knows return to the party they voted for in 2019, the 12-point Labour lead that we found in August would fall to 4-points.

This would mean that Labour would win 287 seats and the Conservatives win 286.

Current vote intention vs vote intention if 2019-to-Don't-Know voters returned to the party they voted for at the last election



If the Don't Knows return, Labour's lead narrows

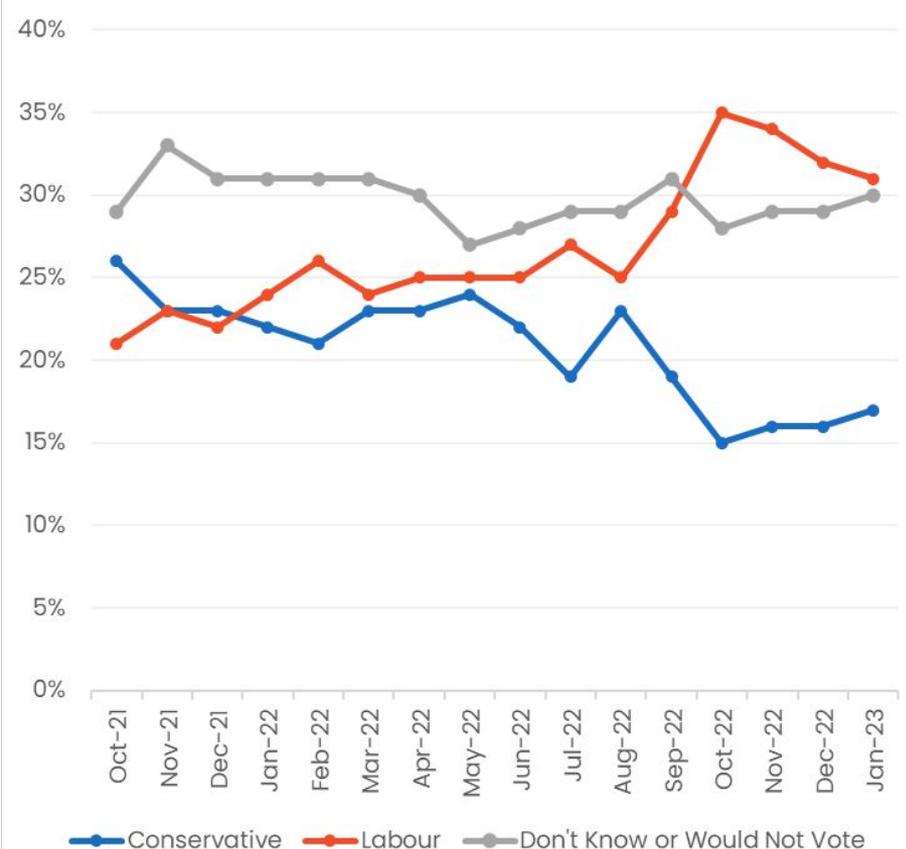
More recent polling shows a similar pattern.

Including those who say they “don't know” or “would not vote”, 31% of all people currently say they would vote Labour.

That is still less than the 35% who voted Tory in 2019.

Excluding DK and WNV, Labour lead the Conservatives by 21-points. This lead falls to 14-points when including DK and WNV.

YouGov voting intention, including DK and WNV



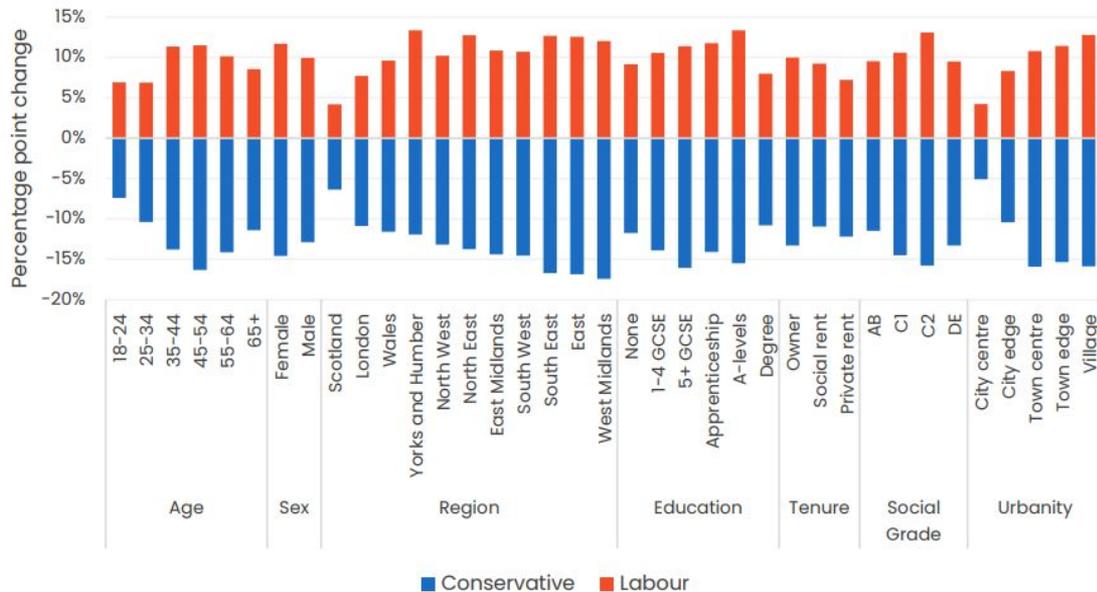
Labour is gaining among the “middle-middle”

Labour’s support has increased across the board – every age group, every region, every social grade.

The greatest increases come from:

- Middle-aged (35-54)
- Skilled working class (C2)
- Homeowners
- Middle-level qualifications (A-level or apprenticeship)
- People living in towns and villages

Figure 14: Conservative losses, and Labour gains, since 2019 by demographic group

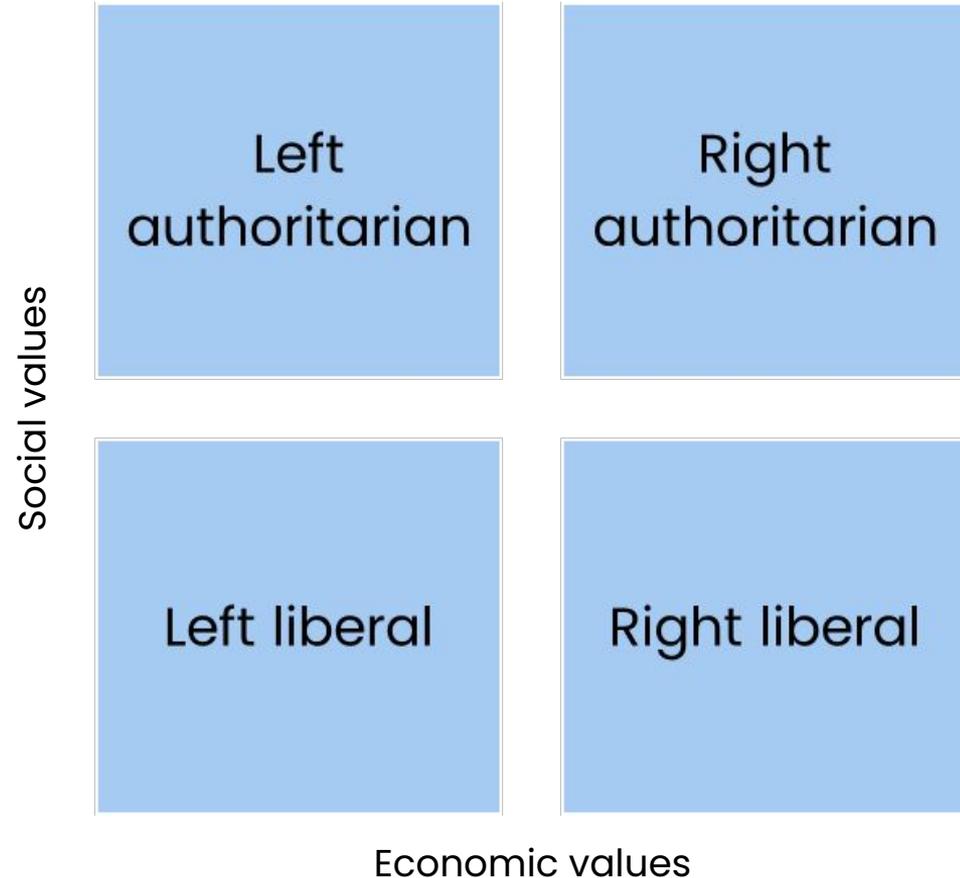


Labour need to win over the left-authoritarians

The electorate splits into a two-by-two grid, based on their values.

Social authoritarians value obedience to the law, stricter sentencing for criminals, censoring media to uphold moral standards, and respecting traditional British values.

Economically left-wing individuals think that government should redistribute income more, that employers generally exploit their workers, ordinary people don't get their fair share, and that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor.



Labour need to win over the left-authoritarians

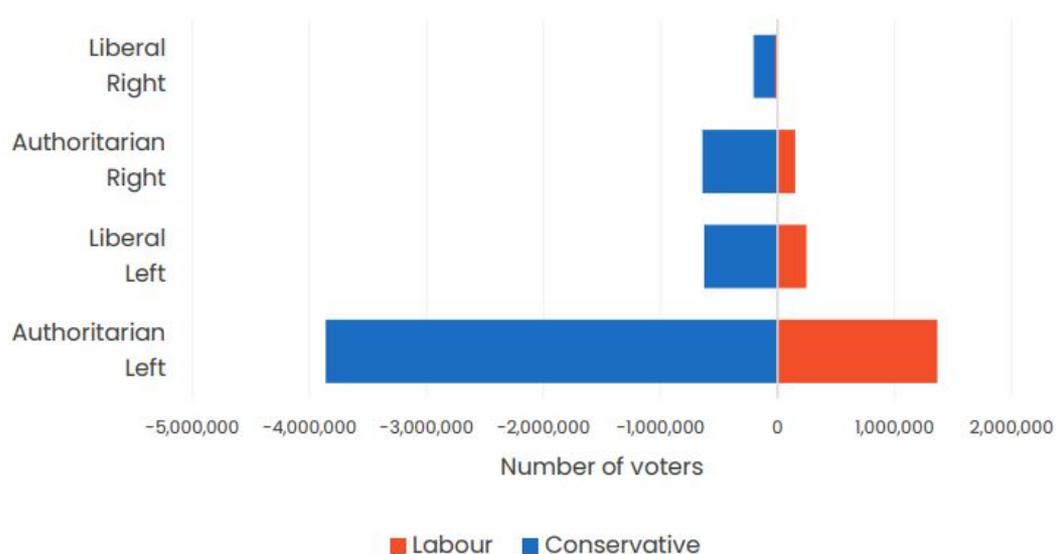
Left-authoritarians are the largest group in the electorate. Six-in-ten (61%) of voters fall into this category.

78% of Labour's new supporters are in this group. This equates to gaining 1.4 million additional votes.

The Conservatives' 16-point lead among this group in 2019 has been reversed and is now 6-point lead for Labour.

This is the ideological battleground.

Figure 30: Change in Conservative and Labour support among different values groups



How far to go?



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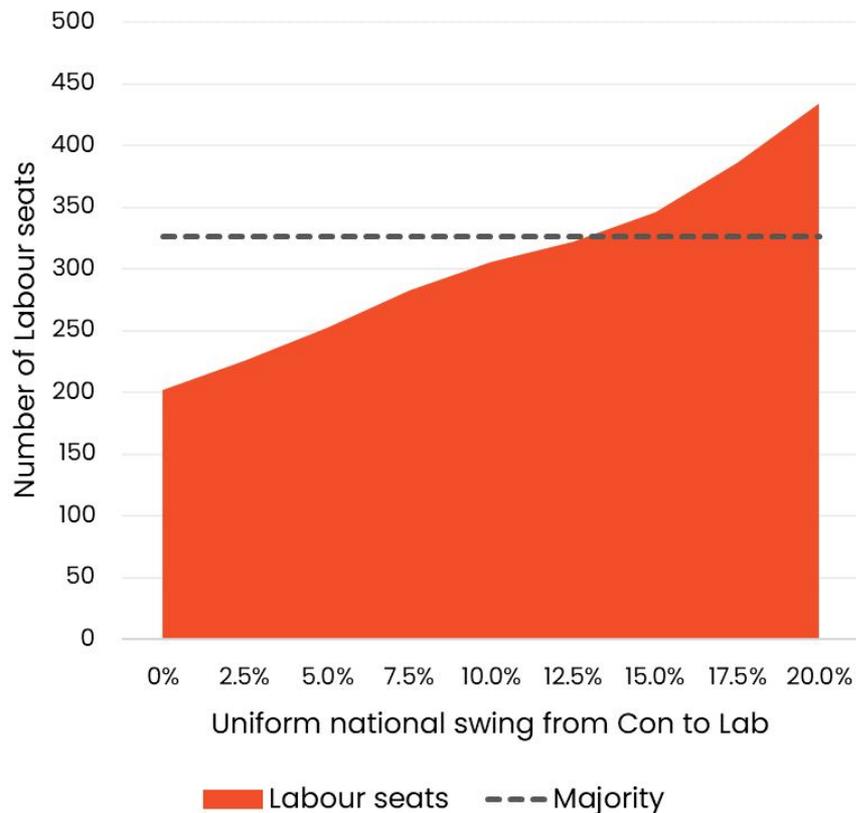
Climbing the electoral mountain

To win an outright majority in Parliament (326 seats) Labour would need a uniform national swing from the Conservatives of at least 13%.

This translates into a **gain of 2.5 million votes**, increasing their share from 32% to 40%.

Labour could make this easier by gaining additional votes from other parties or from non-voters.

Labour needs a 13% swing from the Conservatives to win an outright majority



The climb is longer and steeper than in 1997

1. Longer

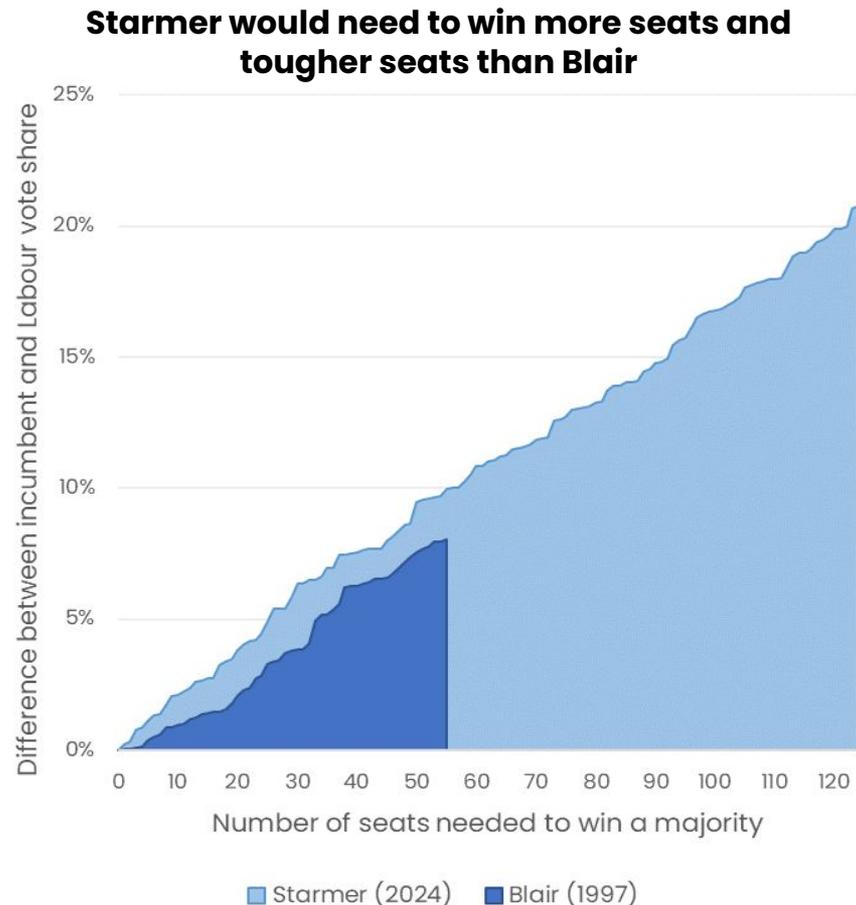
Labour need to gain 124 seats to win a majority.

But Blair only needed to win 55 extra seats in 1997.

2. Steeper

In 2024, Labour will be facing incumbents with larger majorities than they faced in 1997.

In 1992, the average gap between Labour and the winning party was 27%. In 2019 it was 31%.



Why do non-Labour voters refuse to switch?

We asked all non-Labour voters what are the **main barriers to voting Labour**. These are the top five reasons:

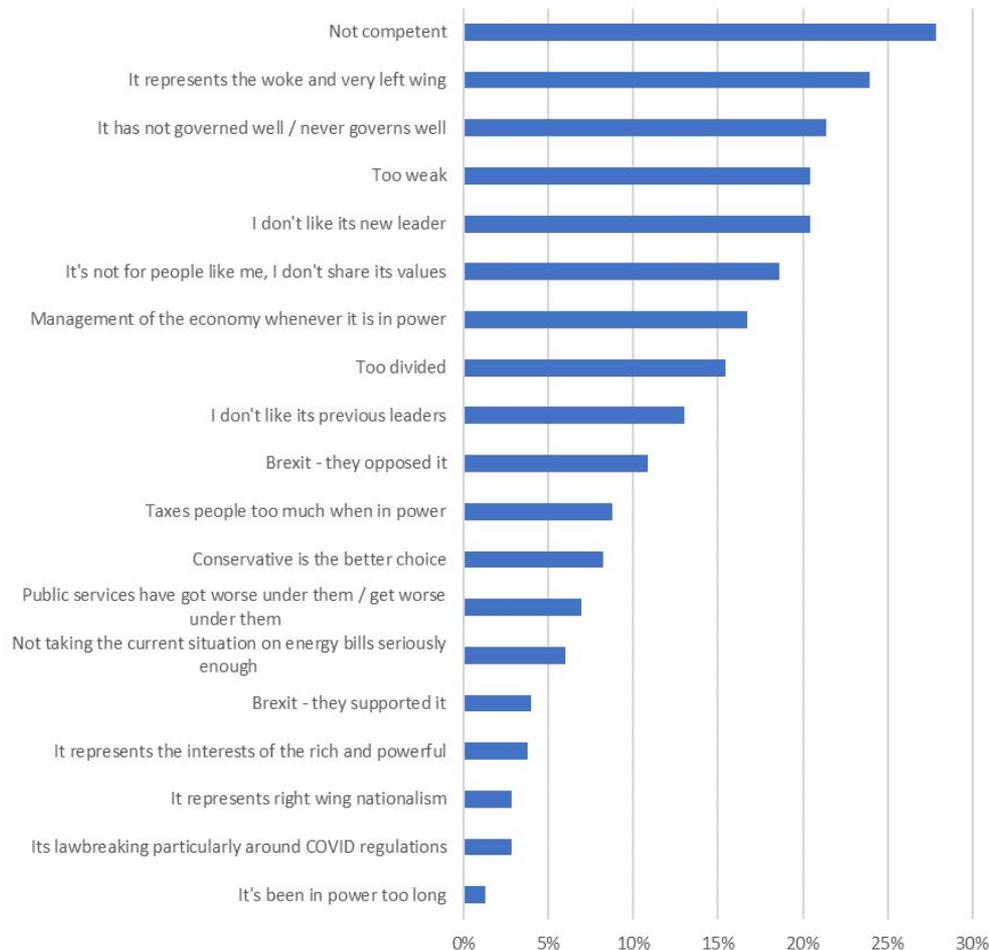
28% - **Not competent**

24% - It represents the very woke and left-wing

21% - It has not governed well / never governs well

20% - I don't like its new leader

19% - It's not for people like me, I don't share its values



Labour's brand is weak

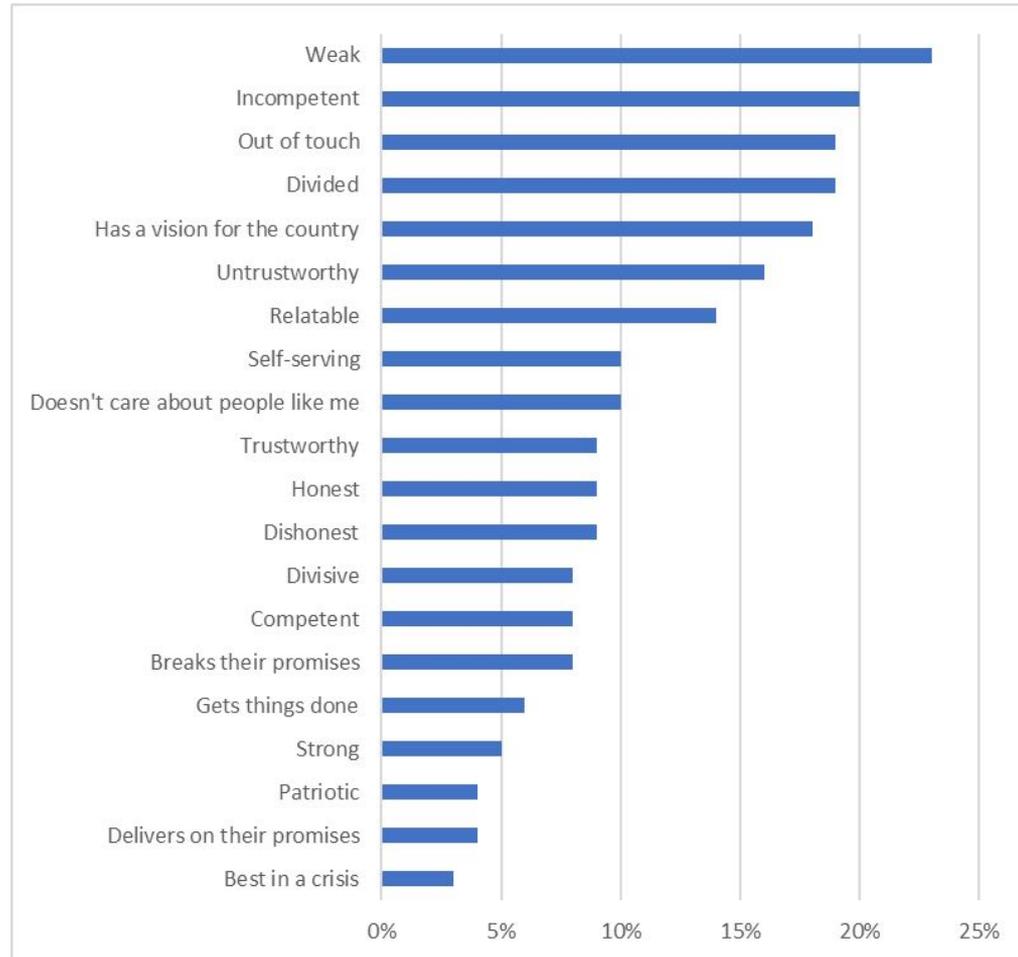
Despite a recent upswing in the polls, Labour's brand is still negative. They are very much the lesser of two evils.

Labour is seen as:

1. Weak
2. Incompetent
3. Out of touch

But 18% of people think Labour "has a vision for the country".

NB: The Tory brand is also poor, but in different ways. They are seen as "Untrustworthy", "Dishonest", and "Self-serving".



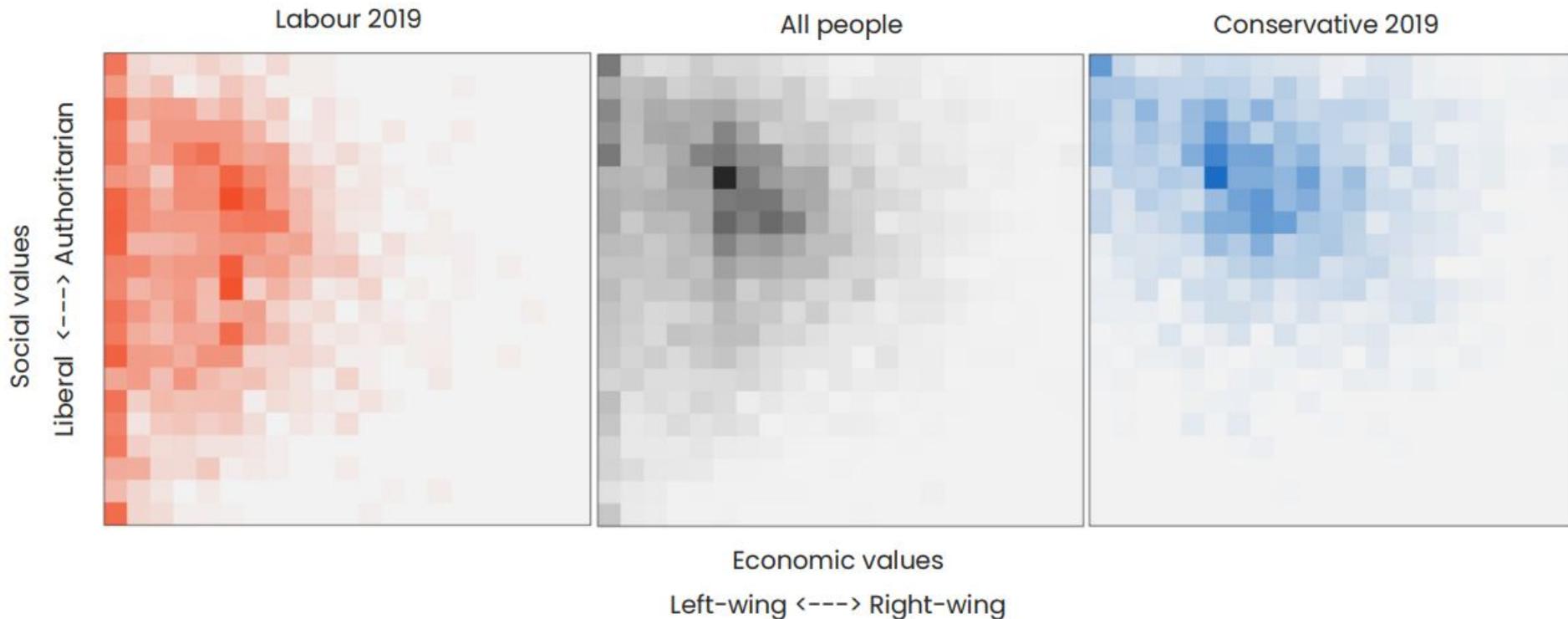
How to get there?



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Labour splits on social/cultural issues

Figure 29: Left-right and liberal-authoritarian values, by 2019 vote

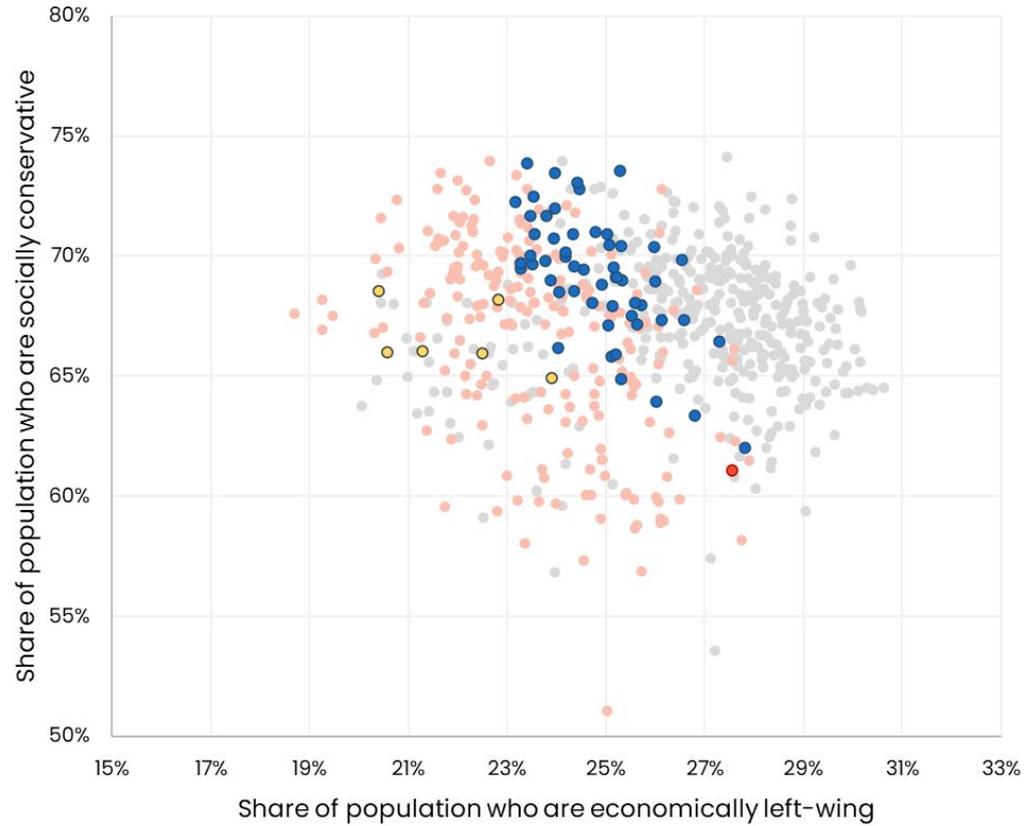


Labour lost their 'socially authoritarian' seats in 2019

Most of the **seats that Labour lost in 2019 are centre-left on the economy and strongly authoritarian on social issues.**

Seats like West Bromwich East and Dudley North are among the most socially authoritarian in the country – tough on crime, preferring order and discipline, and valuing tradition.

In 48 out of 60 seats lost, over two-thirds of people are more socially authoritarian. Even in Stroud, 62% of people are socially authoritarian.



- All other seats
- Labour hold
- Con gain from Lab
- SNP gain from Lab
- Labour gain

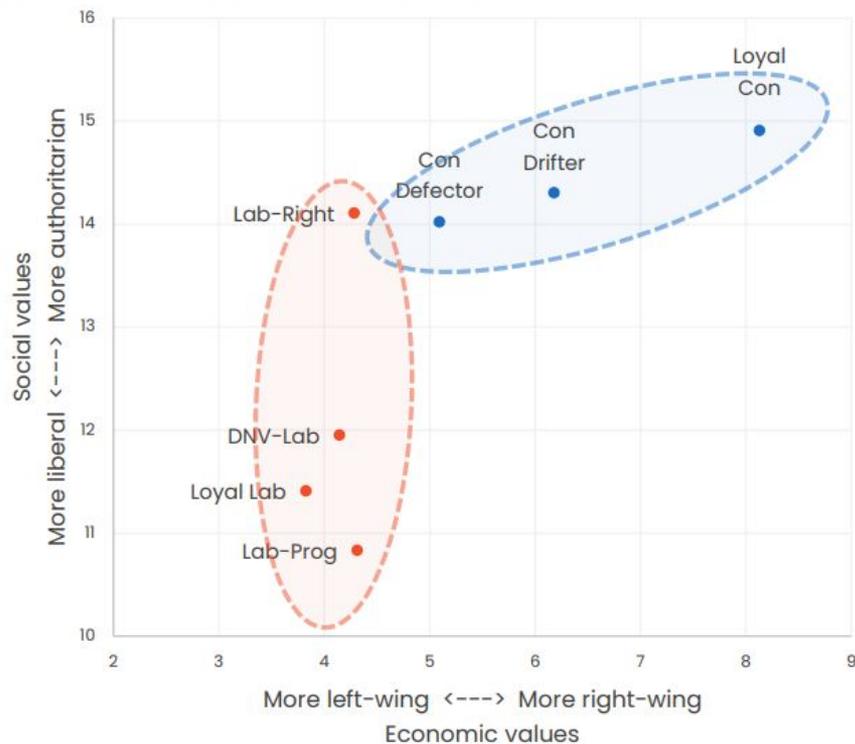
Labour's "vertical" coalition unites on economic values

The voters that the Labour Party has gained from the Conservatives and Brexit Party since 2019 (11% of their current base) are 35 percentage points more likely to be socially authoritarian than the voters they have won from the Liberal Democrats and Greens (6% of their current base).

They are also 25 percentage points more authoritarian than loyal Labour voters who have stayed with the party since 2019.

Despite disagreeing on culture, they are united around left-wing views on the economy.

Figure 26: Average position of each party's coalition



Note: Loyal Con = Con 2019 + Con VI; Con Drifter = Con 2019 + Don't Know VI; Con Defector = Con 2019 + Non-Tory VI; Loyal Lab = Lab 2019 + Lab VI; Lab-Right = Con or BXP 2019 + Lab VI; DNV-Lab = DNV 2019 + Lab VI; Lab-Prog = Lib Dem or Green 2019 + Lab VI

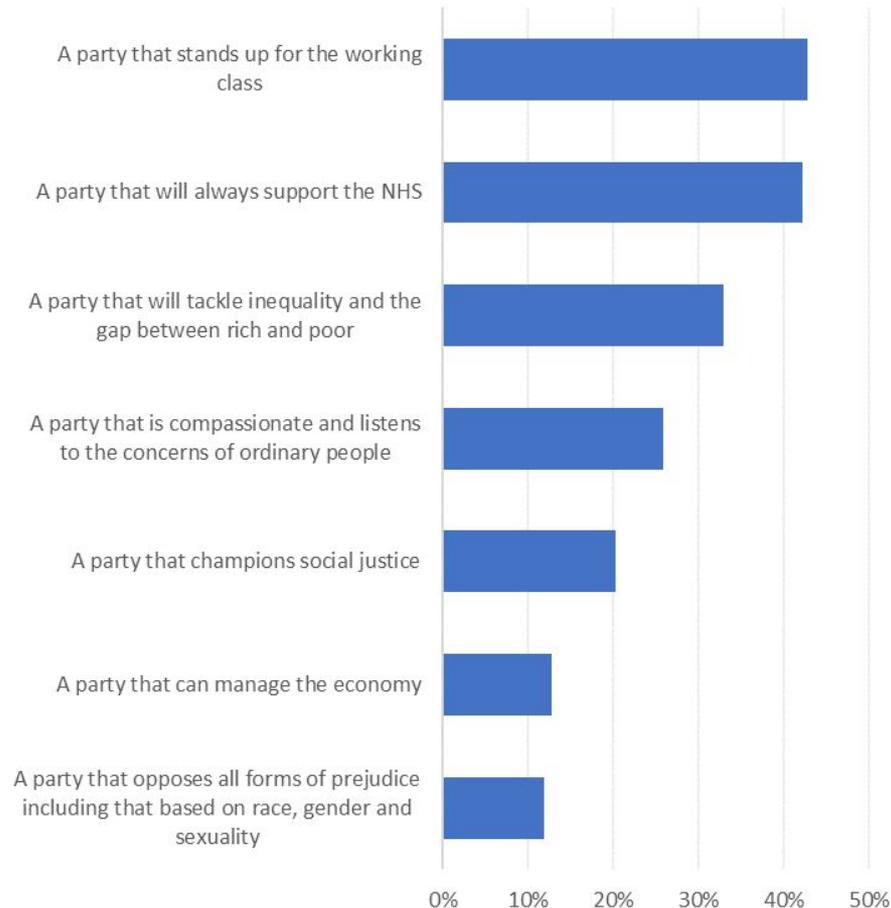
Labour's core brand strength is poverty-reduction

We asked voters, “when the Labour party is at its best what does it represent?”

The top answers are standing up for working class interests, reducing economic inequality, and supporting the NHS.

The “concerns of ordinary people” ranks fourth.

Social justice causes are not seen as central to the party's brand.

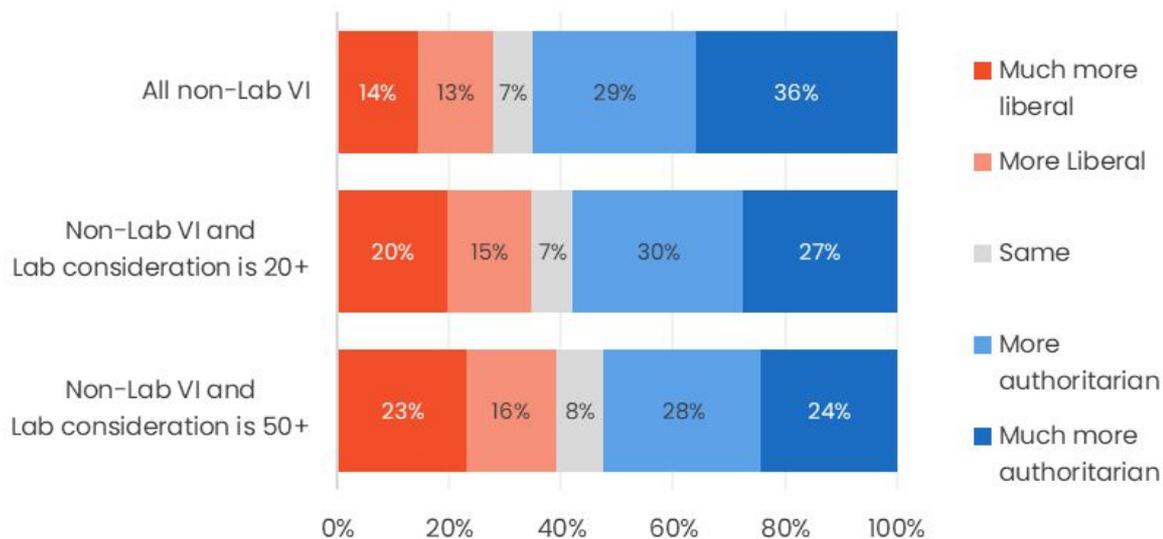


Tack right on culture

Shifting to be slightly more conservative on social issues unlocks more voters than becoming more progressive.

Even among those who rate their likelihood to vote Labour as 50% or higher, but do not currently support the party (i.e. the pool of voters the party should be able to most easily win over), 50% are more authoritarian than the average Labour voter, versus 40% who are more liberal.

Non-Labour voters, including potential supporters, lean authoritarian on culture

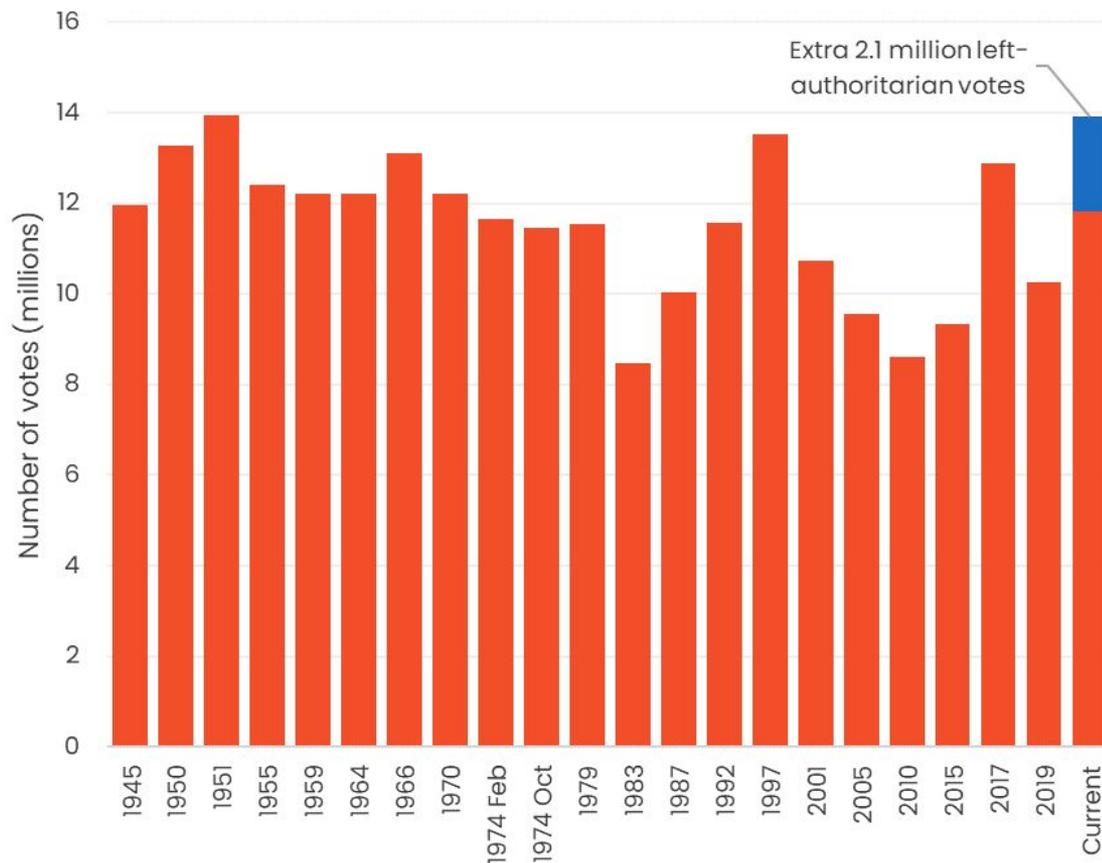


Tack right on culture

A ***small shift rightwards***, to become more socially and culturally conservative, could ***deliver an extra 1.1 to 2.1 million voters.***

This upper estimate would give the party its largest vote total since 1951. Even the lower estimate would be their largest coalition since 1997.

By tacking to the right on culture, Labour could command its largest coalition since 1951

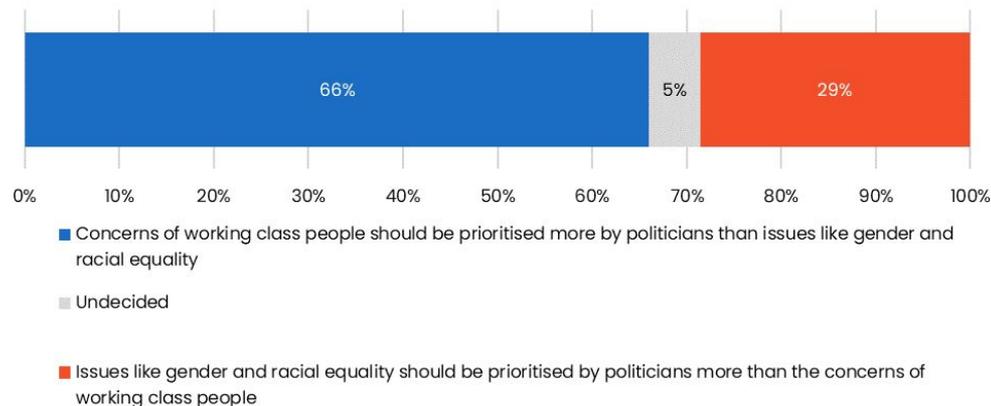
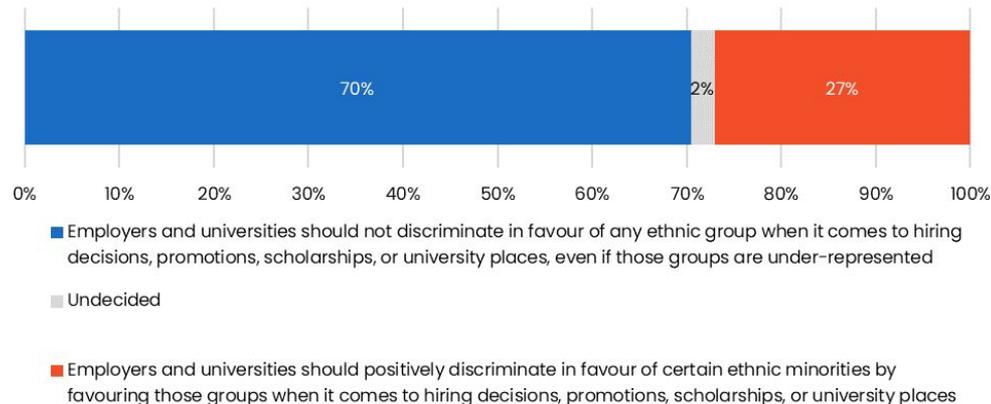


Drop identity politics

Key target voters (those who consider voting Labour but currently don't intend to vote for the party) are not interested in identity politics.

66% are more concerned about class than race or gender.

70% oppose positive discrimination by universities and employers.



Scotland



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The SNP is a significant barrier for Labour

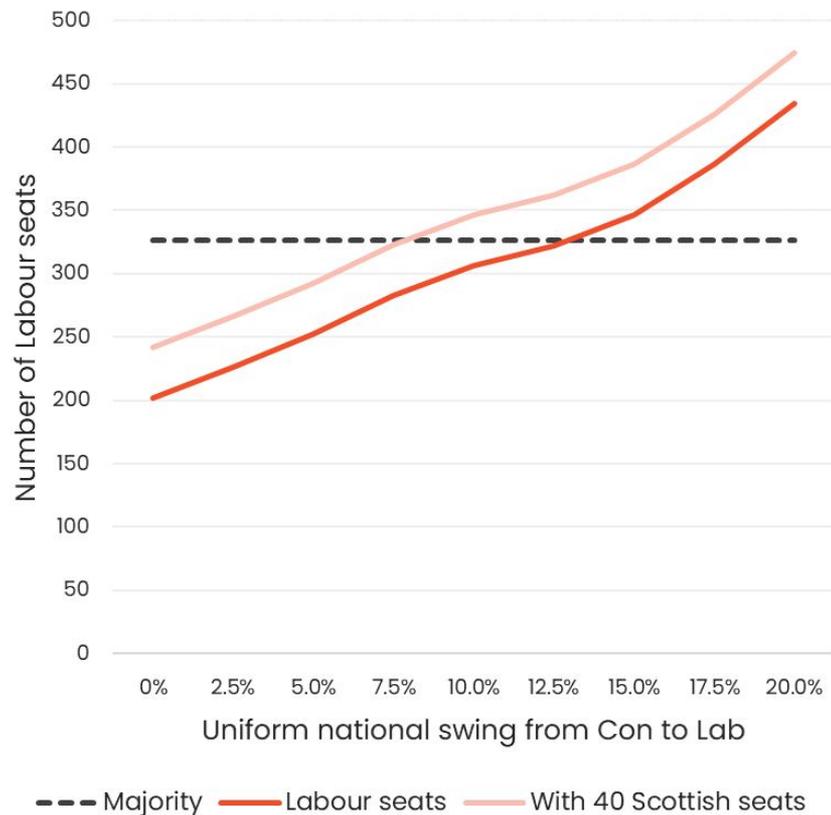
Blair won around three-quarters of Scottish seats, making his victory even more secure.

This is equivalent to adding 40 seats to Labour's current total.

Labour need to win 124 extra seats to win a majority. But if they could rely on Scotland the way Blair did, they would only need to gain 83 across England and Wales.

With 40 extra Scottish seats, the Con-Lab national swing would only need to be 7.5%, rather than 12.5%.

With 40 Scottish seats, Labour would only need a Con-Lab national swing of 7.5% to win a majority



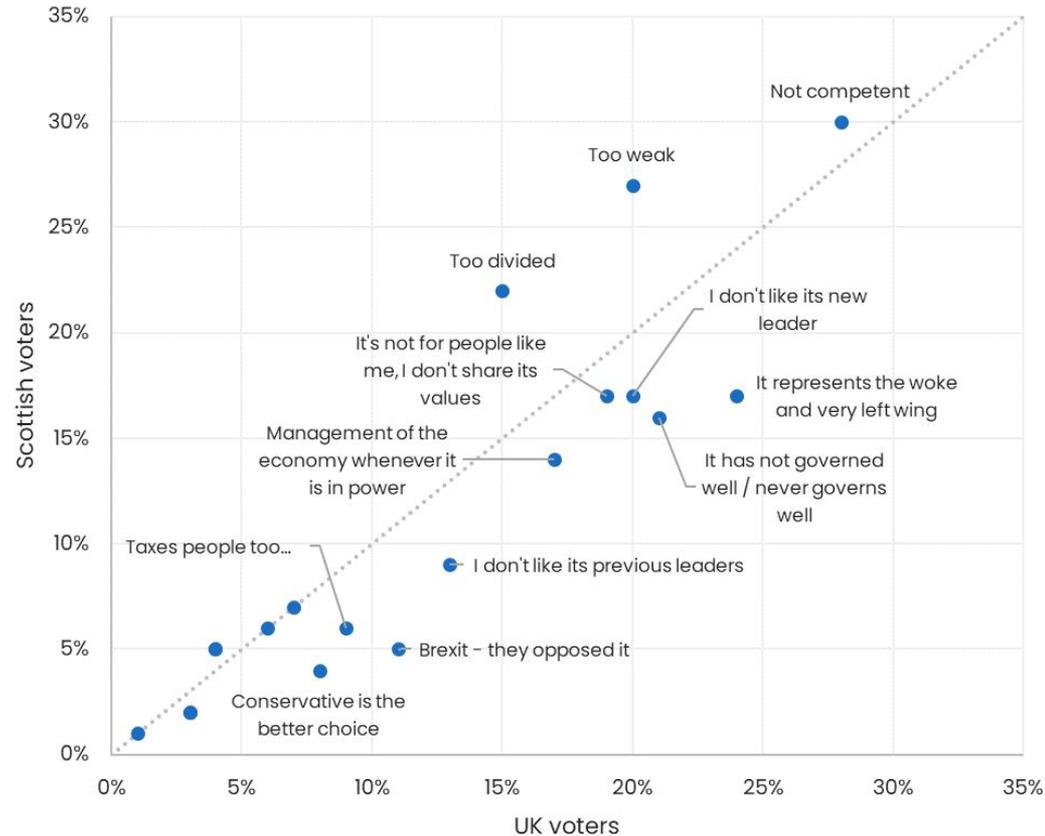
Labour are seen as weak and divided...

For Scots, Labour is just not a credible option. Labour is not passing the “vibe check”.

More than all UK voters, they think Labour is “too weak” and “too divided”.

But they actually have less of a problem with its leadership, its values or its policies.

What are the main barriers to voting Labour?



...But the SNP are strong and patriotic

Compared to the SNP, Labour is more “weak”, “divided”, and “out of touch”.

The SNP are seen as more “patriotic”, “strong”, “competent” and having “a vision for the country”.

But there are weaknesses to exploit as well. The SNP are more likely to be seen as “dishonest”, “divisive”, and “self-serving”.

Traits associated with Labour and SNP

