

14<sup>th</sup> January 2020

**BritainThinks**

**General Election 2019**

**What happened? What did we learn? What can we expect in 2020?**

[britainthinks.com](https://britainthinks.com)



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**BritainThinks is an international insight and strategy consultancy.**

**We put the people who matter most to your organisation at the heart of your thinking.**

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# Our expertise

## Insight

Shed new light on the experiences, views, feelings and behaviours of your key audiences

## Strategy

Insight-driven strategic counsel to guide your decisions

## Communication

Pinpoint the messaging, tone of voice, words, images and spokespeople to deliver the greatest impact

## Engagement

Bring your key audiences with you. Build stronger relationships with colleagues, stakeholders, clients and customers

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## Some of our clients



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# General Election 2019

A BritainThinks Breakfast Briefing



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# 1

# Introduction

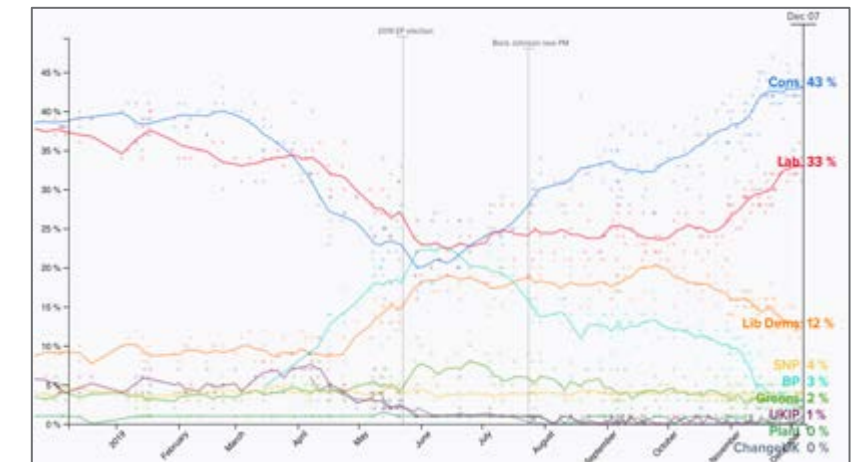
# This election briefing draws on a range of sources



Qualitative research  
conducted during and after  
the election campaign  
(online panel, focus groups  
and interviews)



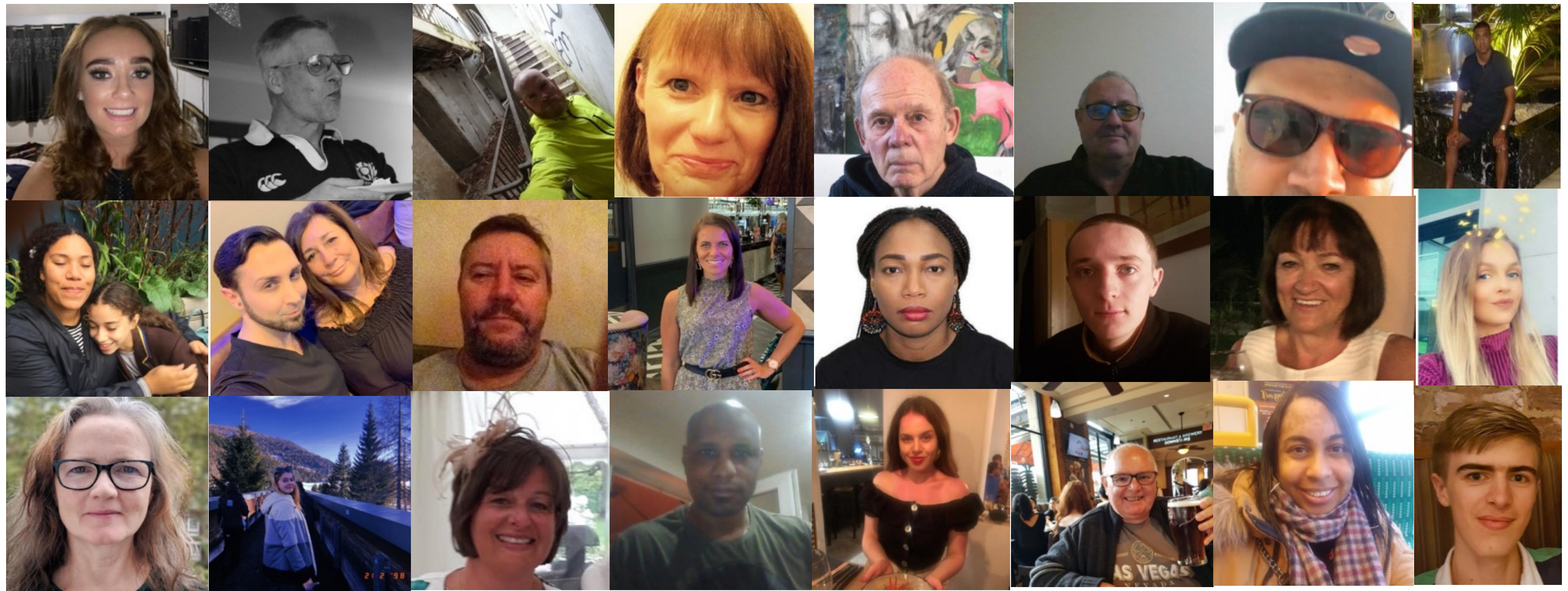
Our Mood of the Nation  
study from June 2019



Published polling and other  
external data sources

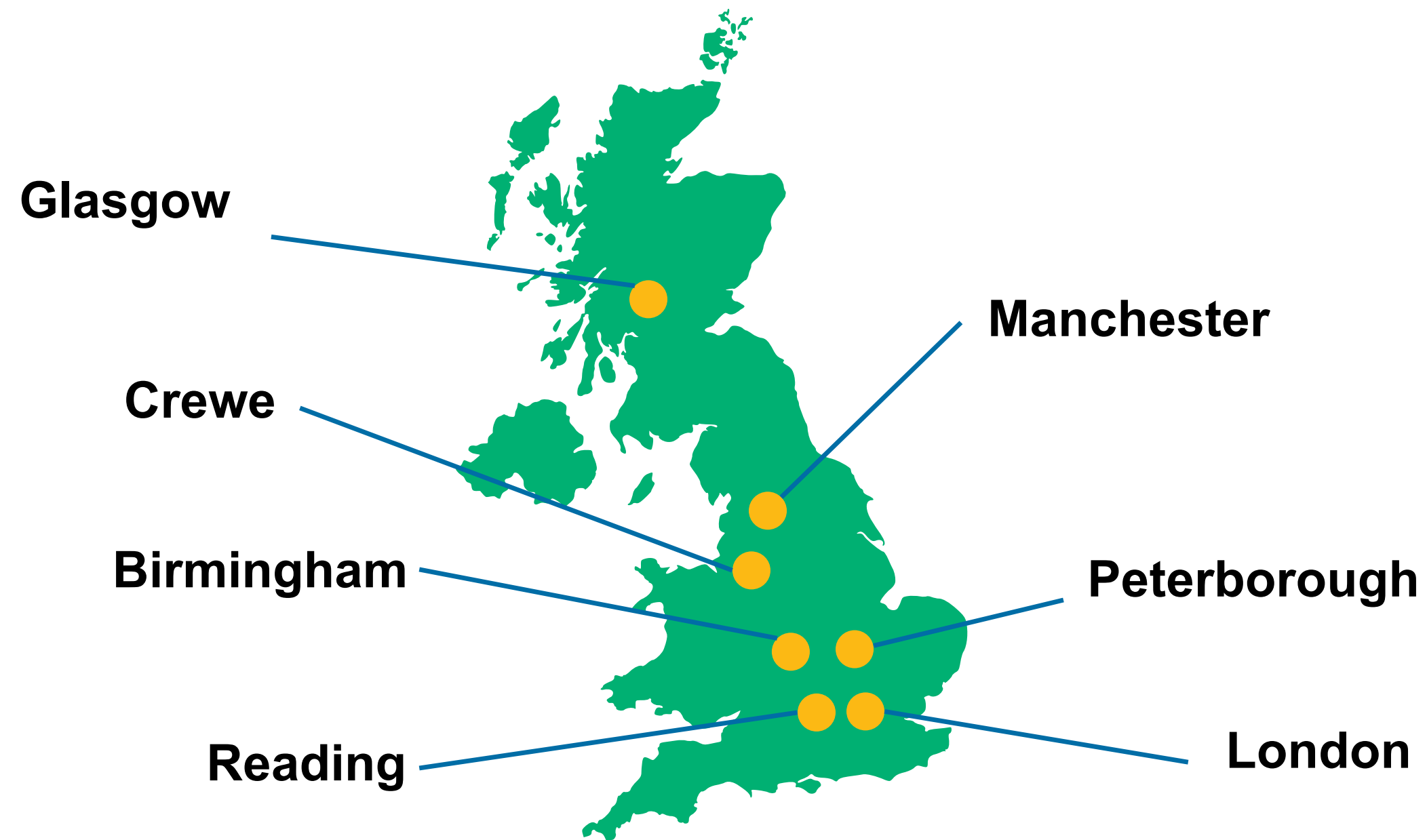


# We heard from swing voters from across the UK over the course of the campaign and since the result was announced





**We heard from swing voters from across the UK over the course of the campaign and since the result was announced**



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# 2

## What happened?



# Boris Johnson led the Conservatives to an historic victory, and it was a major defeat for Labour

## The result

 **43.6%**      **365 seats**

 **32.2%**      **203 seats**

 **3.9%**      **48 seats**

 **11.5%**      **11 seats**

 **2.0%**      **0 seats**

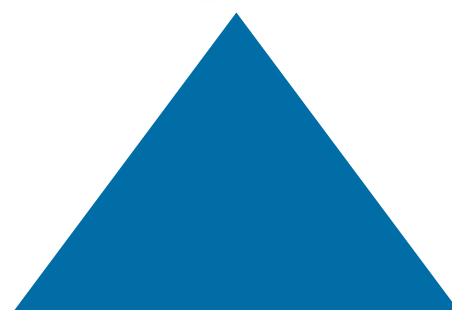
**Turnout**      **67.3%**



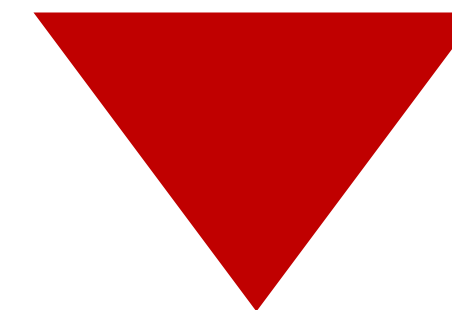
- For the Conservatives, largest majority since 1987 and highest vote share since 1979
- Labour's worst electoral performance in terms of seats won since 1935

**The Conservatives only slightly increased their vote share from the last election. They won because Labour failed to hold onto their 2017 vote share**

Change in vote share from 2017



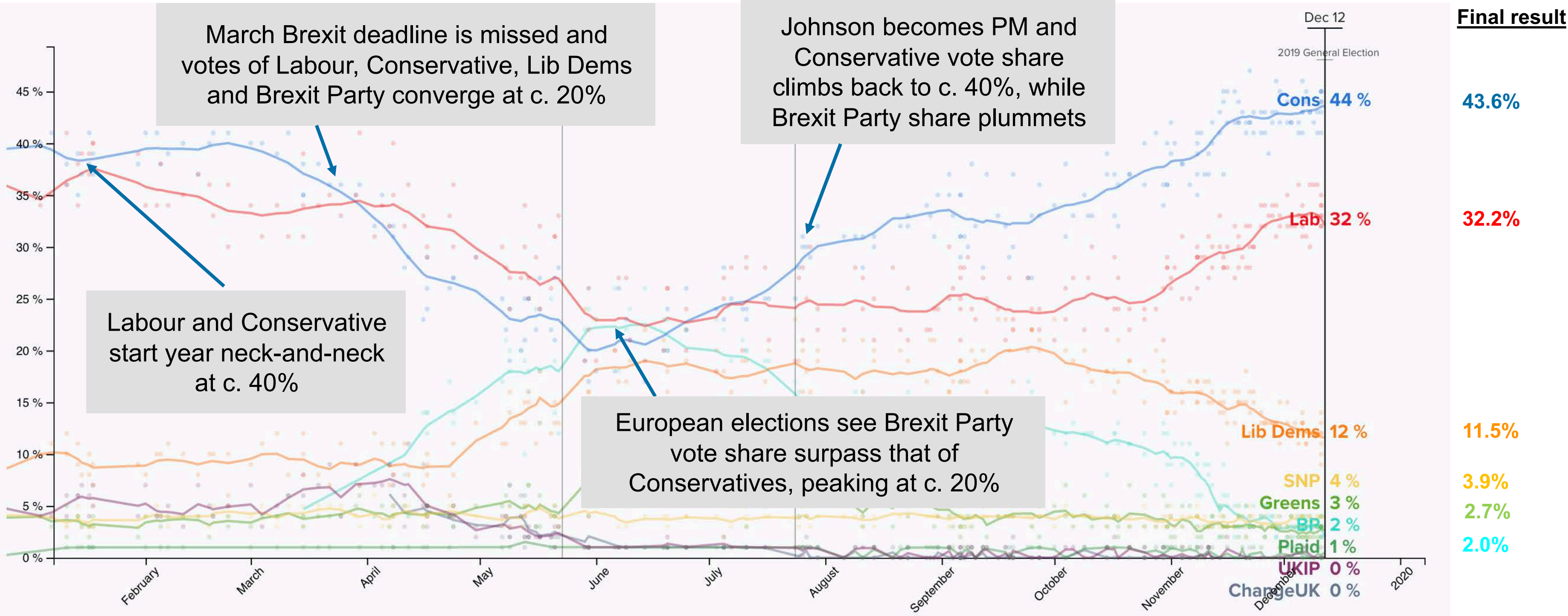
**+1.2%**



**-7.8%**



# This story of the polls this year (in the end they were accurate)



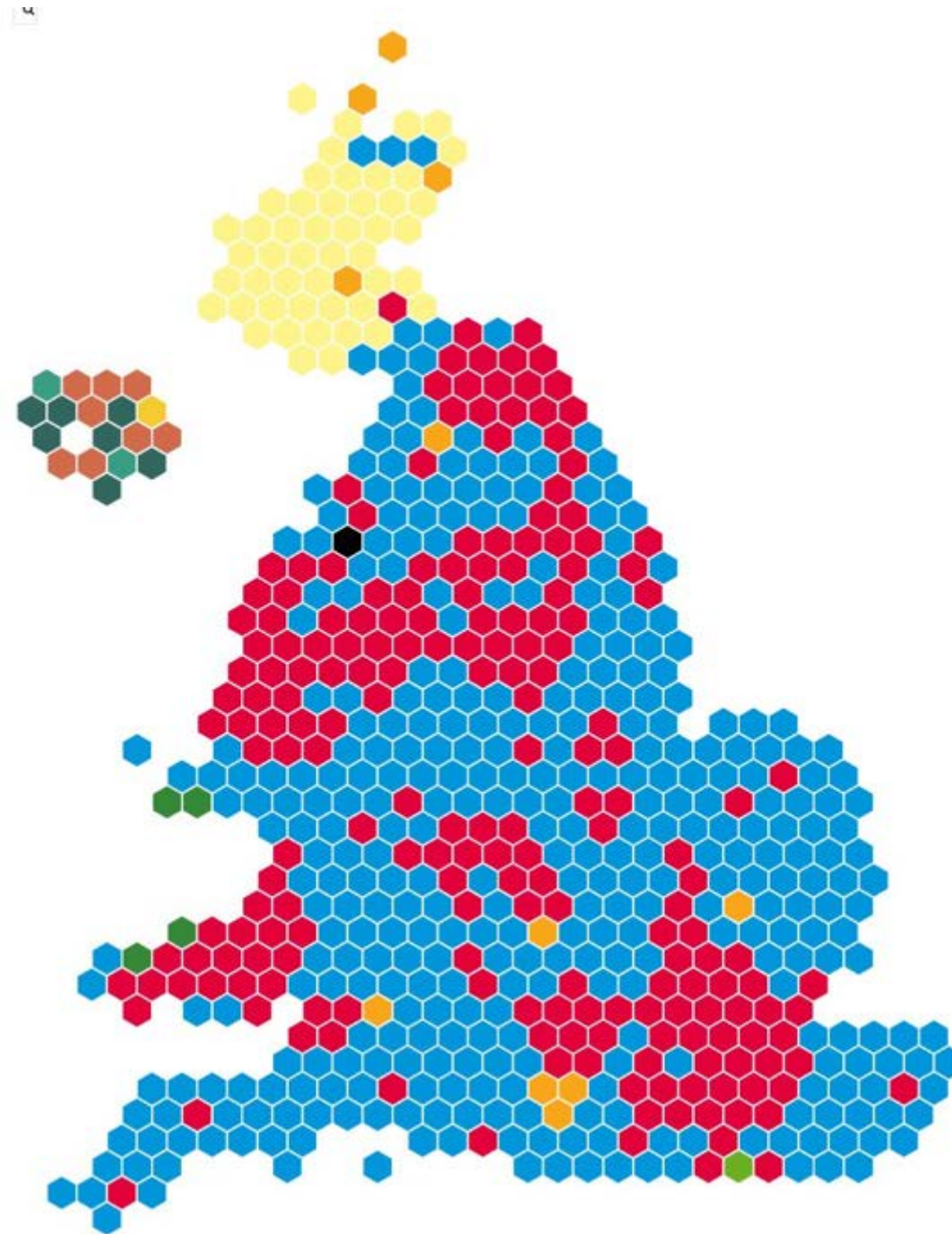
Source: Politico, 2018-2019



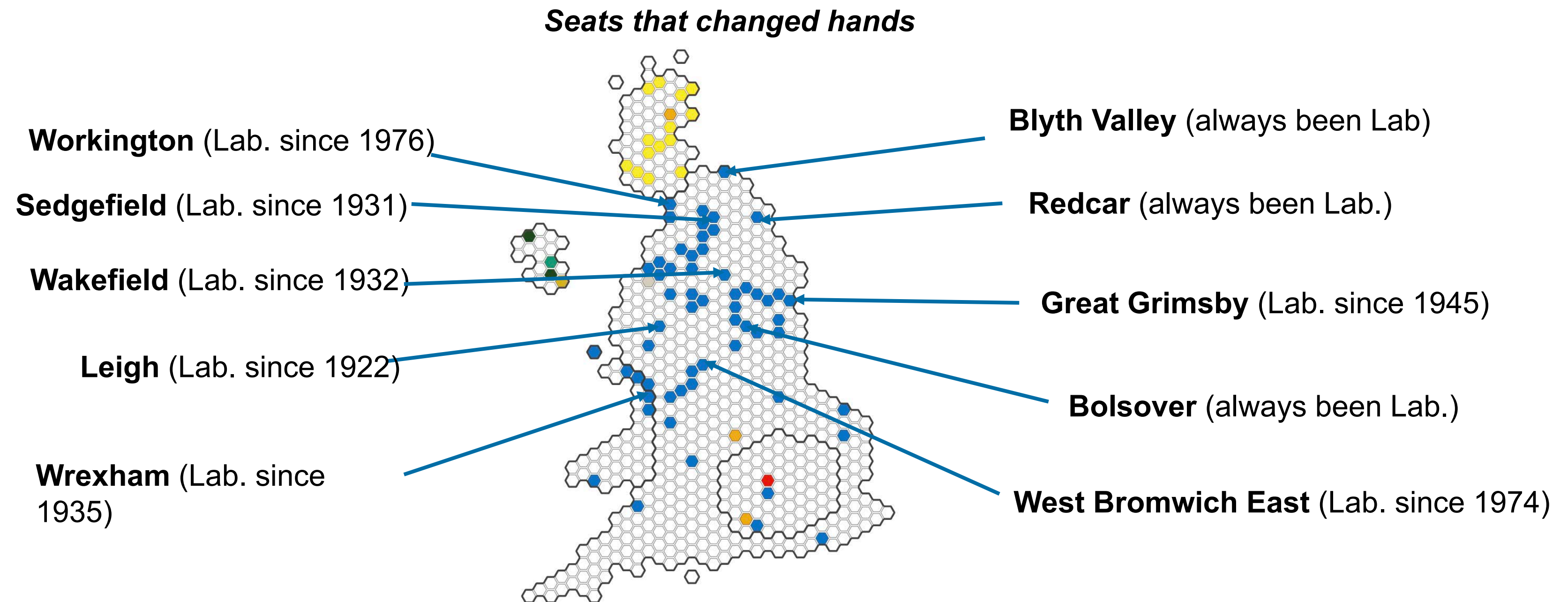
# The Conservatives now dominate England & Wales, leaving Labour largely confined to a few cities and university towns

Seat change:

- Con. **+ 47 seats**
- Lab. **- 59 seats**



# The Conservatives won 47 new seats, many of these within Labour's 'red wall' in the North, Midlands and Wales

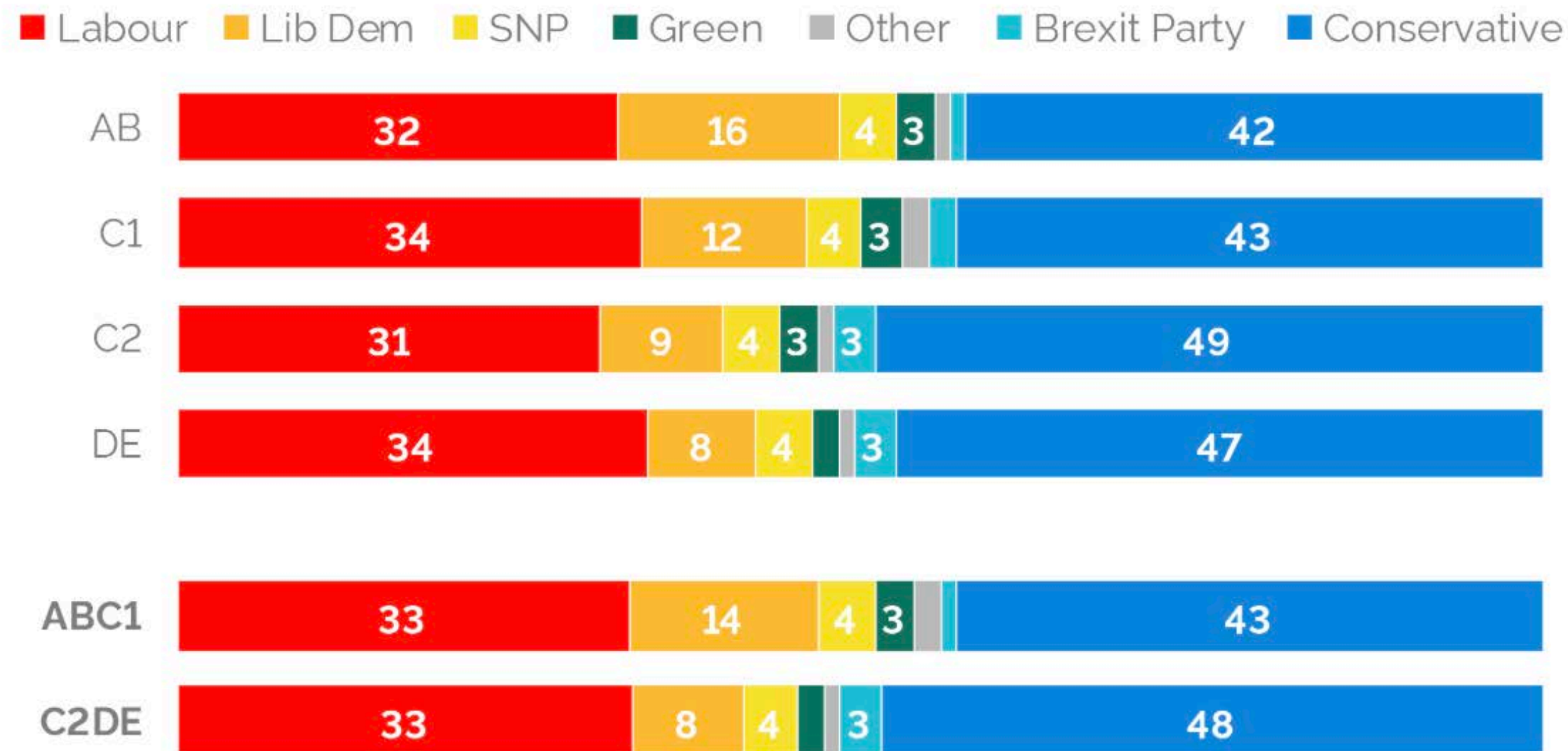


**This is the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive defeat for Labour and they need to do more than simply gain back 'red wall' seats to win a majority**





# Old class-based tribes have become less relevant in determining vote. Education matters more than ever



Conservatives boosted their showing amongst **C2DEs** since 2017 (44%) - whilst retaining their marginal lead over Labour with ABC1s

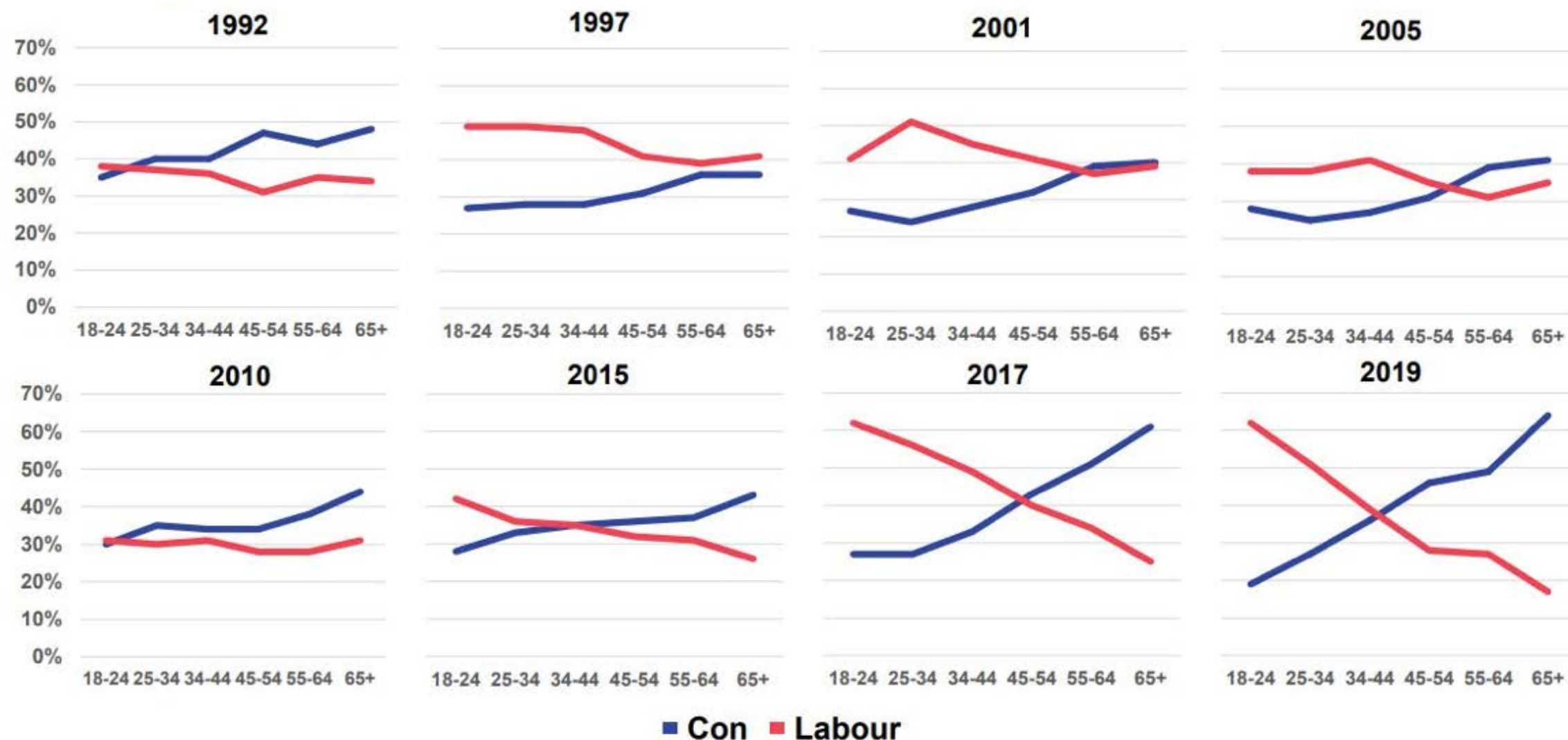


But Labour continues to do well with **those with a degree** or higher - 43% vs. 29% voting Conservative

Source: YouGov, December 2019

## Education also correlates with age - which remains the starkest divide in politics - although the 'crossover' age has fallen

Vote by Age over time



### In 2019

Labour continues to do well with younger voters and Conservatives with older

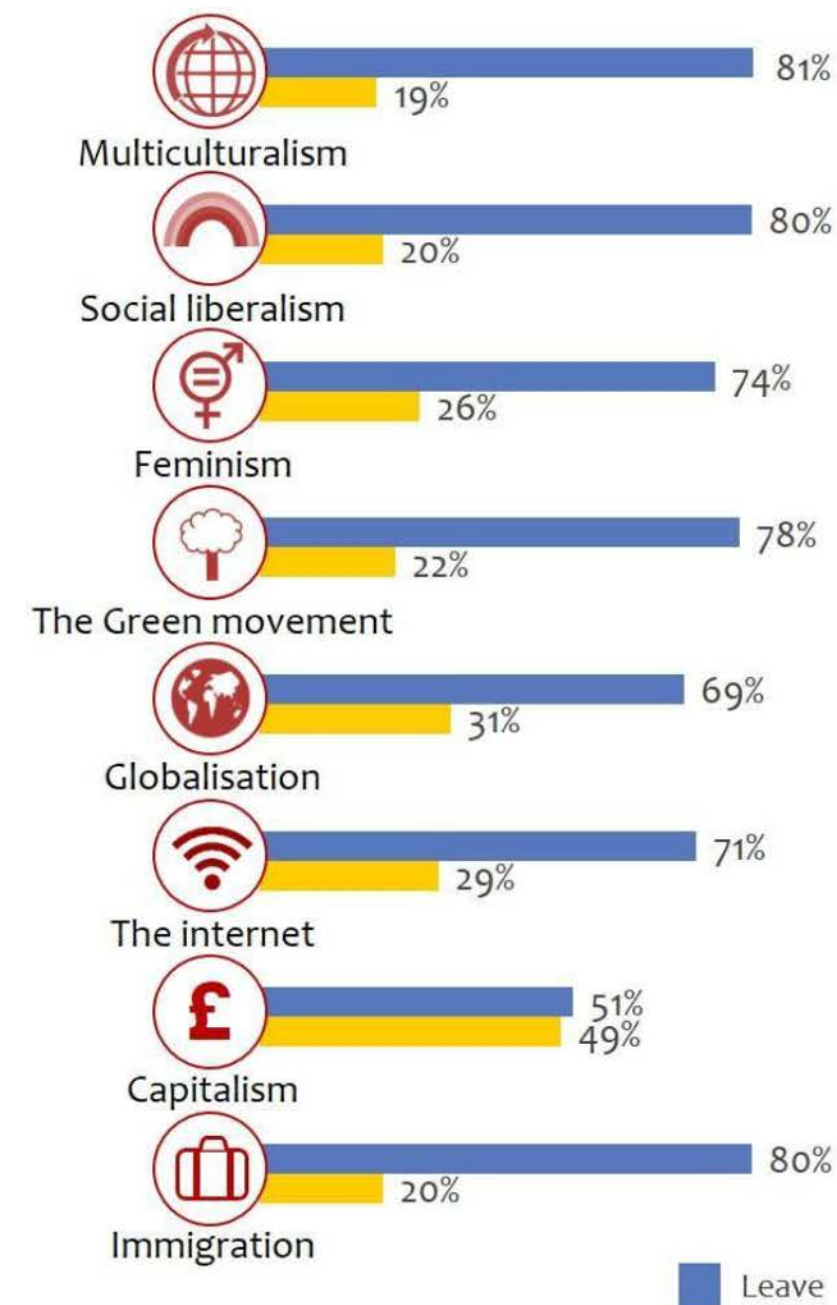
- Lab 43 pt. lead with **18-24s**
- Con 47 pt. lead with **65+s**



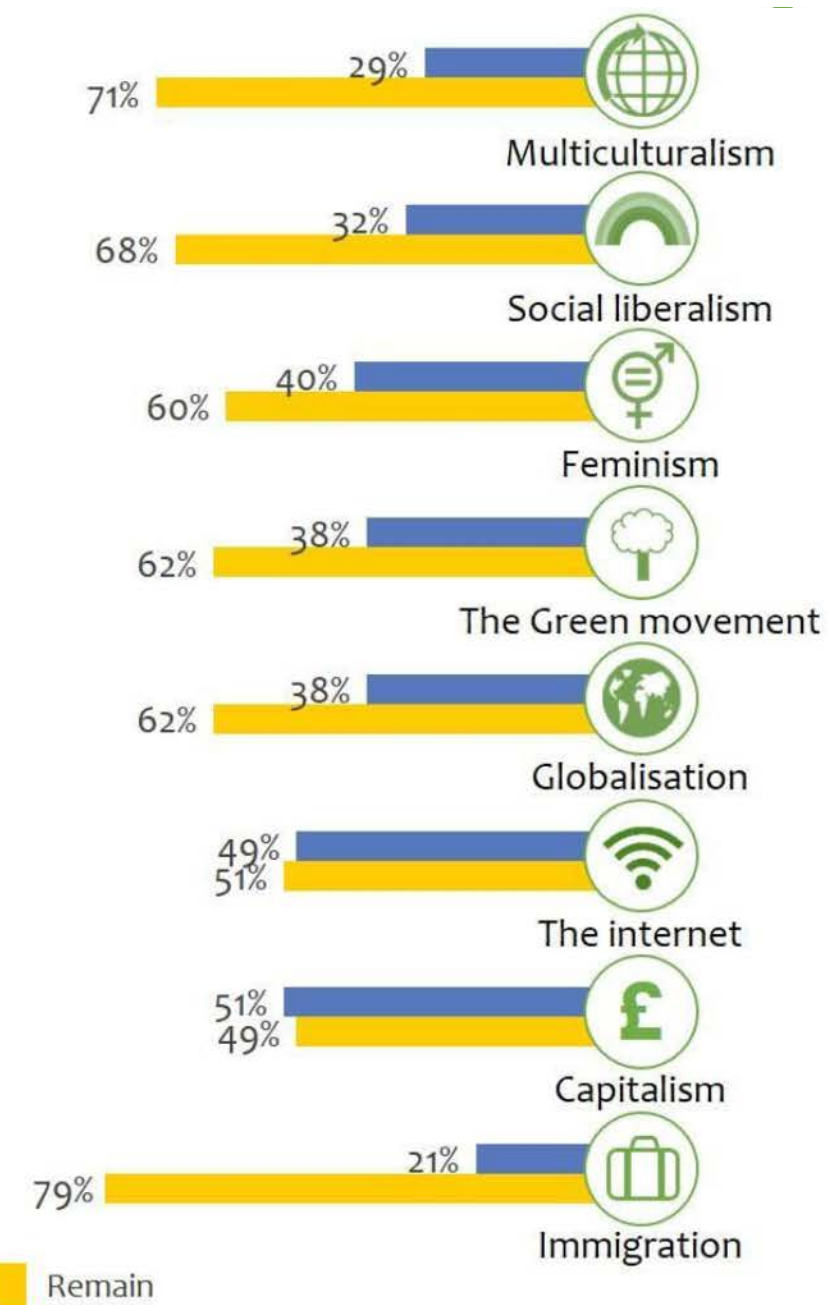
Biggest change among **35-54s** where a 7 pt. swing from Labour to Conservative

## Reminder: there is also a stark values divide which manifested itself in the EU referendum tribes

*Showing how those who thought the following were 'a force for ill' voted*



*Showing how those who thought the following were 'a force for good' voted*



Source: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2019



## Summary

1

It was an historic victory for the Conservatives, especially considering they have been in power since 2010

2

Labour's poor performance confounded even its harshest critics

3

The breaching of the 'red wall' by the Conservatives shows old electoral tribes are less relevant

4

Values divisions now mark out the most significant political divides

5

It is important to remember that re-capturing the red wall will not be enough for Labour to win back power

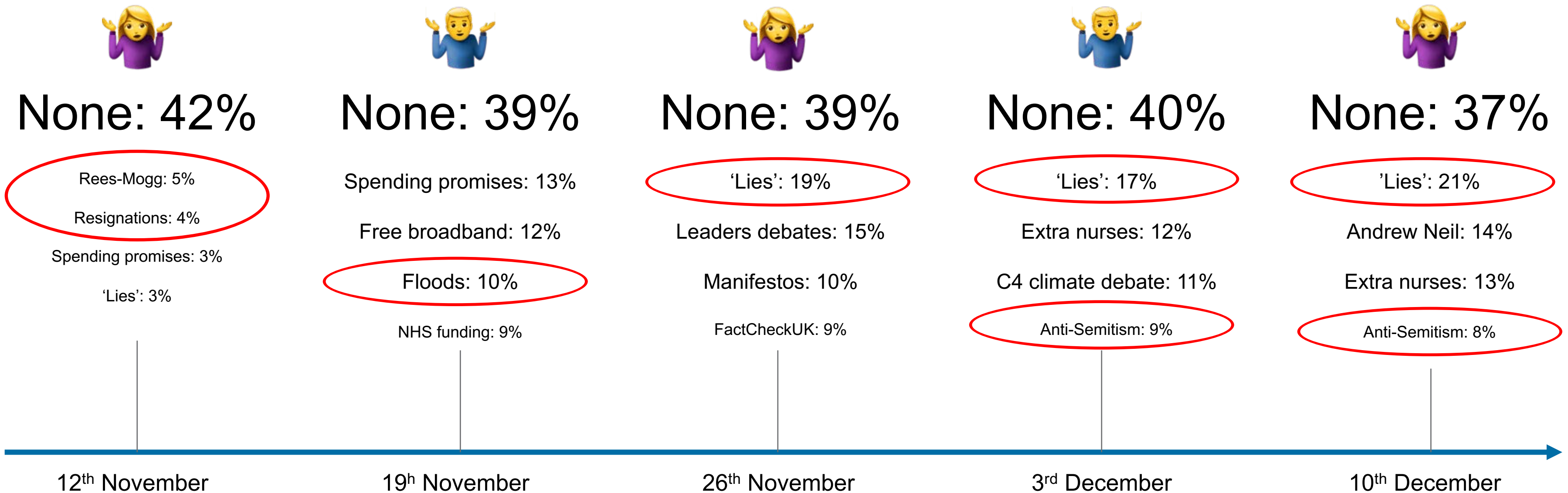
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3

**What did we learn?**

# Overall very little of the campaign cut through to voters – and what did was largely confined to gaffes and missteps

*What incidents, events, stories, etc. have you noticed from the election campaign in the past few days?*



Source: Lord Ashcroft Polls, November - December 2019



## For many voters it was a tough decision between the lesser of two evils – leading many to decide close to the wire

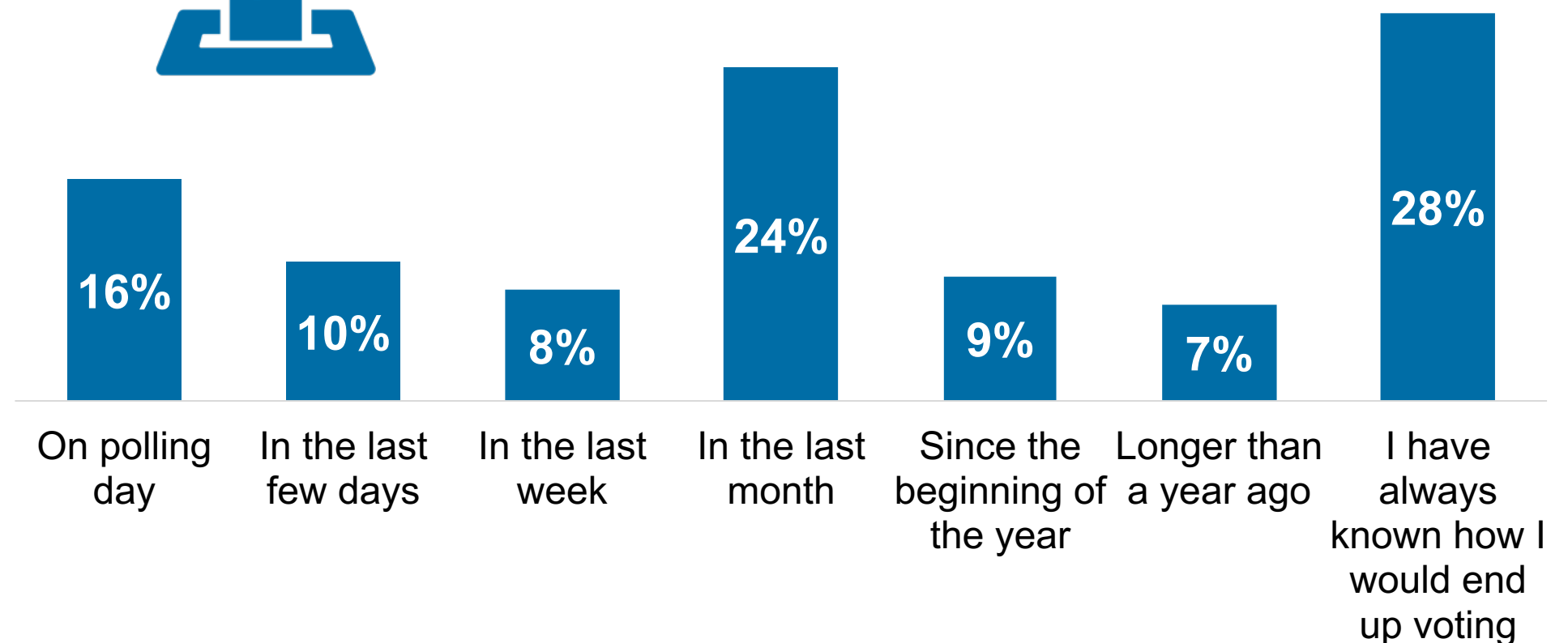
- Voters saw this as an important election for the country and wanted to use their vote well
  - Concern that going with a smaller party would be a ‘wasted vote’
- But both the main parties seen as unappealing

*“It’s not about who you agree with most, it’s about who you disagree with least.”*

*“Previous ones I’ve usually decided a bit earlier on...Usually I’ve read the manifestos when they’ve come through my door and I’d tend to make up my mind.”*



**When did you finally decide how you would vote?**



Source: Lord Ashcroft Polls, December 2019

# The biggest fear was further stagnation in parliament, and for many the worst outcome would have been a hung parliament

*“If there was a hung parliament again, there would have to be a penalty shoot out or something to sort it out.”*



## Even for loyalists, there were many reasons not to vote Labour, and one outstanding one to vote Conservative

*A party seen as having many issues...*



- Poor leadership
- A divided party
- Proliferation of unrealistic policies
- Party brand and identity issues

**Vs.**

*A party with a single, repeated promise...*







# Whilst Johnson had some shortcomings, in voters' final analysis his positive qualities won out

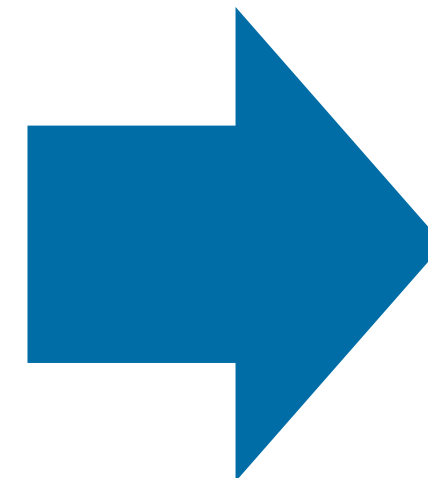
**October 2019: 'If Johnson was a fictional character...'**



*"He's a bit like a buffoon. Homer Simpson in the power plant thinking 'what do I press here? What do I do?'"*



*"I put James Bond, he's trying to get things done, I like him, and there are loads of obstacles in the way."*



**Post-election:**



*"Boris is a plonker but you feel like he's talking to you and he's positive, upbeat. He makes you feel up."*



## Little policy detail cut through during the campaign, but Labour's in particular were judged as undeliverable



### Unrealistic

*"My song for Labour is highway to the danger zone. They are offering us unicorns. Free WiFi, cheaper rail fares and whatever...it's just lies."*



### Unaffordable

*"They're proposing to spend so much money that every section of the population would benefit. But the downside is that there will be an even bigger bill to pay later on. Their spending promises are fanciful."*



### Impractical

*"The ideas that Labour play around with have all been tried...and they've failed. If we're operating on 4 days of work and everyone else is doing 5, we're not going to be in a strong position globally."*



# 19%

Choose Labour as best at handling the economy vs. 37% choosing Conservatives

Source: Ipsos Mori, December 2019; YouGov, December 2019



## Party brands mattered too – and there are deeper reputational issues for Labour to address beyond Brexit and Corbyn

- Long-standing cultural issues
  - Less clearly representing working classes and more associated with other groups e.g. immigrants
  - Confused identity means no longer an easy choice to vote Labour



Labour then



Labour now

*“We’re from a working community and Labour must have really got the message wrong in places where factory workers have been voters...[voting Conservative], it's gone against everything your dad and grandad voted for.”*

*“They used to be casserole and now they are quinoa.”*

# Summary

1

Voters saw this as an important election and wanted to use their vote well

2

But for many, the choices of who to vote for were unappealing – particularly the two main parties

3

Most of all, voters wanted a decisive result and to avoid a hung parliament

4

From voters' perspective there were many reasons *not* to vote Labour...

5

...and one outstanding reason to vote Conservative

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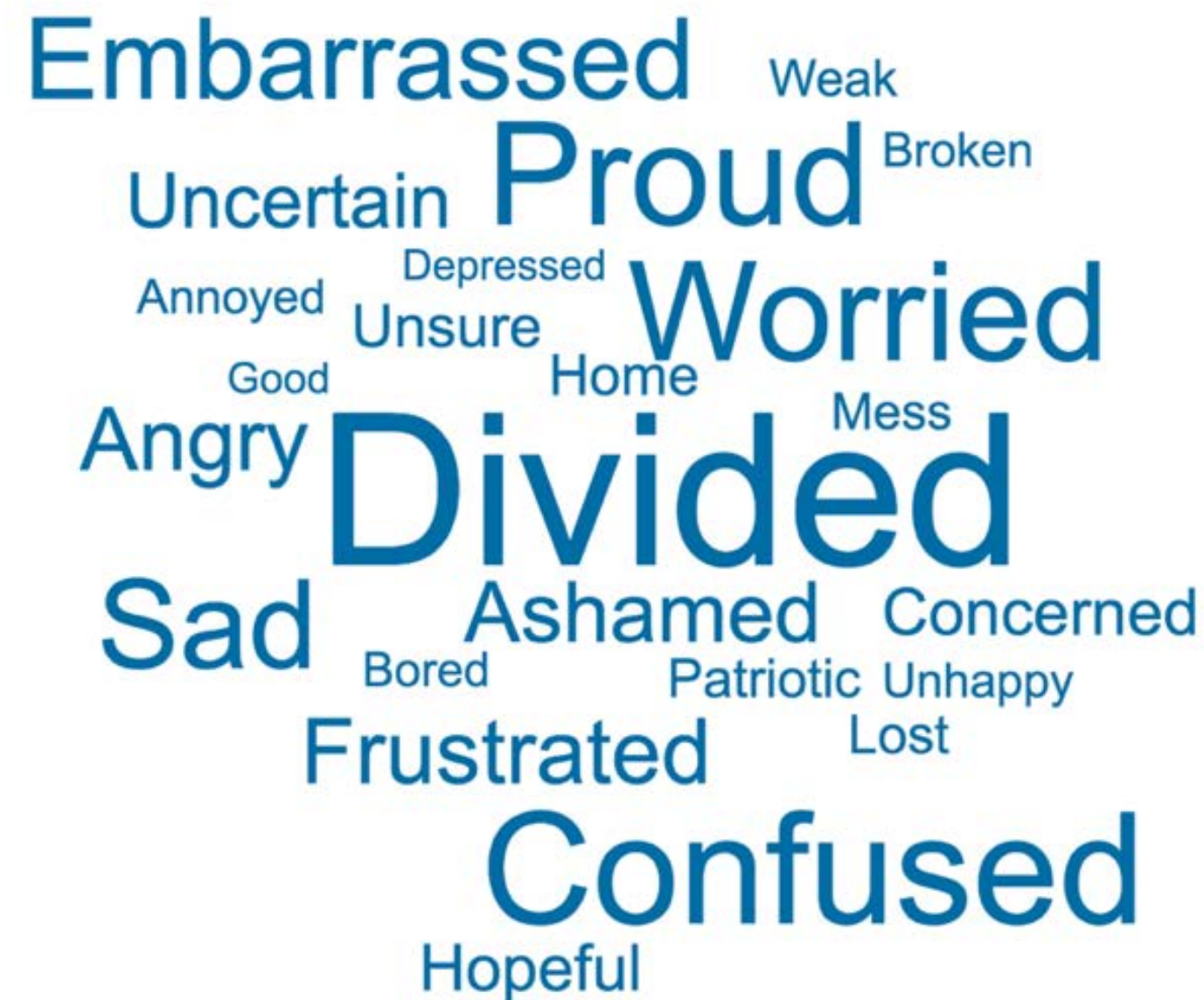
# 4

## What can we expect in 2020?



# Voters' mood going into the election was notably downbeat, meaning expectations for the new government have been managed down

*Words that describe how people feel about the UK:*



- The best many can hope for is that things won't get worse under the new government
- Few expect that Brexit will be immediately 'solved'

## 58%

Were worried that 'having a General Election would not resolve anything on Brexit'

*"I think things are pretty much at the bottom as they are...I just hope they can't get worse, but they probably can?"*

## Although there was disappointment for some, the dominant feeling about the election outcome was relief

*What 3 words describe how you feel about the election outcome?*

*"I was amazed, at the extent of it, and the seats they gained off Labour, remarkable. I watched the exit poll at 10 o'clock and I was like, this is crazy, unprecedented...but I'm glad it's over and it's a majority."*

*"I'm a bit despondent those were our options, but hopeful as a nation we can now just move on from this issue that's hogged the headlines."*



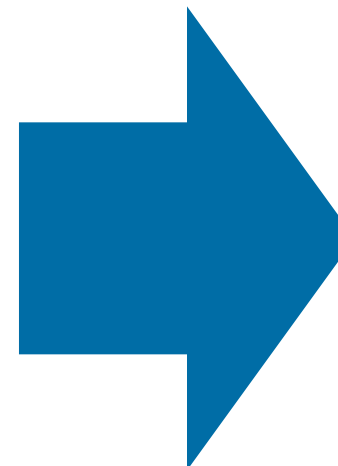
*"Thank God they've got a majority. If we'd had a hung parliament again it would have delayed every single decision...when you talk to people who've been investing in this country, they don't want to invest with the uncertainty so I'm hoping this will stop that."*



## The hope for the next year is that we can put Brexit behind us, allowing focus to return to key issues like the NHS and crime



*“In the next 12 months it is still going to have to be Brexit, that is the priority, so we can move on and look at everything else like the NHS which is in crisis, more police on the streets.”*



- Helpfully for the new government, expectations are low

*“I think the NHS will stay the same under the Conservatives, it’s such a huge issue, I don’t think anybody can sort it out unless they’re extremely radical.”*

*“I think we’re probably rock bottom so I’m not sure how things could get worse, with how the feeling is in the country, the NHS, the country’s morale.”*



## Johnson is felt to be the right leader of his party for now, but voters want to see him mature and deliver, especially for ‘new’ voters

*“I think at the moment he’s the right person for the job because it appears to be happening and working, in the future I think as a country I’d like to have someone who is taken more seriously by other international leaders.”*

*“The new government should listen to the people about the NHS, about police, and I think Boris himself should try and come across less like a buffoon and give less about his private life.”*



*“I hope he delivers on his promises around the redistribution of wealth away from London, that would be good. He needs to actually help all those Northern places that voted him in power.”*

*“I feel 50/50 about whether he will deliver, but he needs to if he wants to retain those seats...is that enough time, if he gets another term, I would go 70 or 80% confident he will deliver. If there’s no progress though, people will return to Labour.”*

# Labour are seen to have their work cut out in winning back voters



## Leadership

*“Corbyn was stuck in there for a long time, whoever takes over really needs to capture the public imagination a little bit...fostering a bit of middle ground would make whoever the leader is more appealing.”*



## Policy offer

*“I think they need to be more realistic. It feels to me Labour have a lot of ideologies of this is how the world should work, they should actually have plans of how they'd make things happen and where the money is coming from.”*



## Reputation / brand

*“We're from a working community so voting Conservative, it's been a very strong Labour place, to go against that was hard work but the Conservative majority was massive so Labour must have got the message wrong in places where factory workers have been voters.”*

# Voters know little about the Labour leadership candidates, but can outline their 'ideal' leader



*"They need someone who recognises what's going on in the UK and what the general public want off the government."*

***Understands me***

*"They need someone with some charisma, somebody with a set of balls, whether a woman or not, a strong leader."*

***Strong and charismatic***

*"They need to be where Tony Blair was, his party, it was more centre. Under Corbyn it was so left wing it was quite unbelievable."*

***Less 'extreme'***

*"I'd like to see another female PM, women voters do get sidelined and that would give them an edge."*

***Different?***



**But most of all, the Labour leader needs to have something of the 'X' factor**



## However, our sample of Labour to Conservative switchers are not expecting to return to the party anytime soon



*"I can't see myself voting for them again, they're too Marxist and too left wing."*

*"They've got to completely reinvent themselves."*

*"I'd not be inclined to vote Labour again, their idea of throwing money round doesn't appeal to me."*

## Summary

1

Voters were gloomy at the outset of this election

2

Relief is the overwhelming response to the election result, particularly among Labour to Conservative switchers

3

Helpfully for the new government, voters' expectations for the next year or so are incredibly low

4

Labour and their new leader are seen to have much work to do

5

Voters who switched to Conservative in this election are not expecting to return to voting Labour anytime soon



# Thank you

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