

11th December 2019

BritainThinks

General Election 2019

Presentation from breakfast briefing

britainthinks.com

BritainThinks is an international insight and strategy consultancy.

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

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

Some of our clients



1

Introduction

This election briefing draws on a range of sources



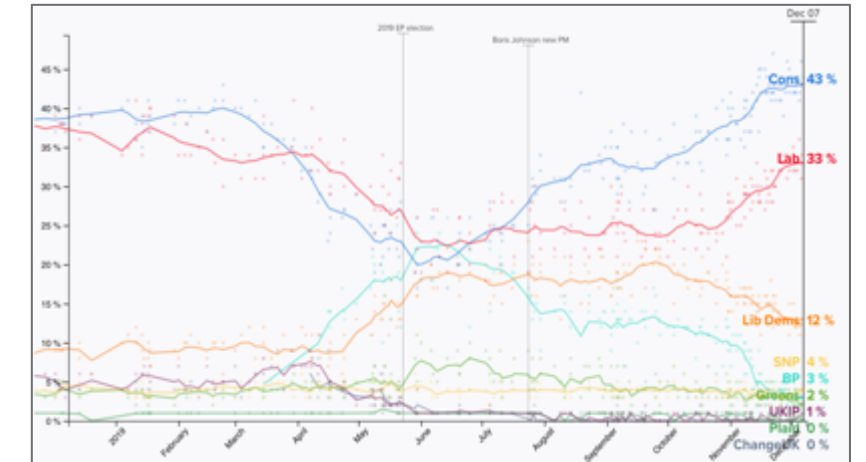
Qualitative BritainThinks research since election announced (online panel and focus groups)



BritainThinks projects around previous elections (particularly 2015 and 2017)



Our Mood of the Nation study from June



Published polling and other external data sources

Headlines

1

The national mood is generally one of pessimism, apprehension and uncertainty, with the election regarded as an unwanted reminder of how angry and divided the country is

2

Most undecided voters are fed up with politics and electioneering – and few are paying much attention to the campaign

3

Mistrust is at the heart of this election campaign; of the leaders themselves and the promises being made by all parties

4

This is a Brexit election but the narrative has shifted from being about the positives and negatives of EU membership to just finding a way to ‘get it over with’

5

The four-horse race has narrowed to two rather unappealing options and most undecided voters feel they are having to choose the party they disagree with least

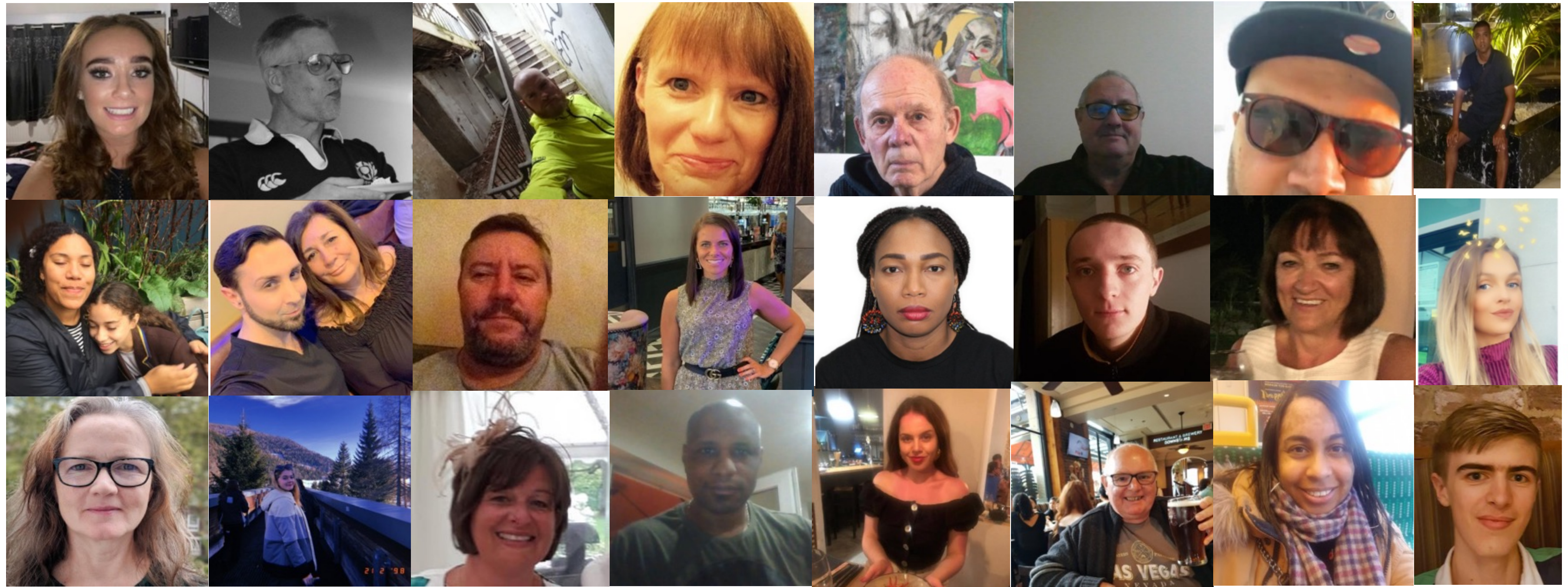
6

There are two big variables which will make the difference tomorrow: the extent of tactical voting and turnout

2

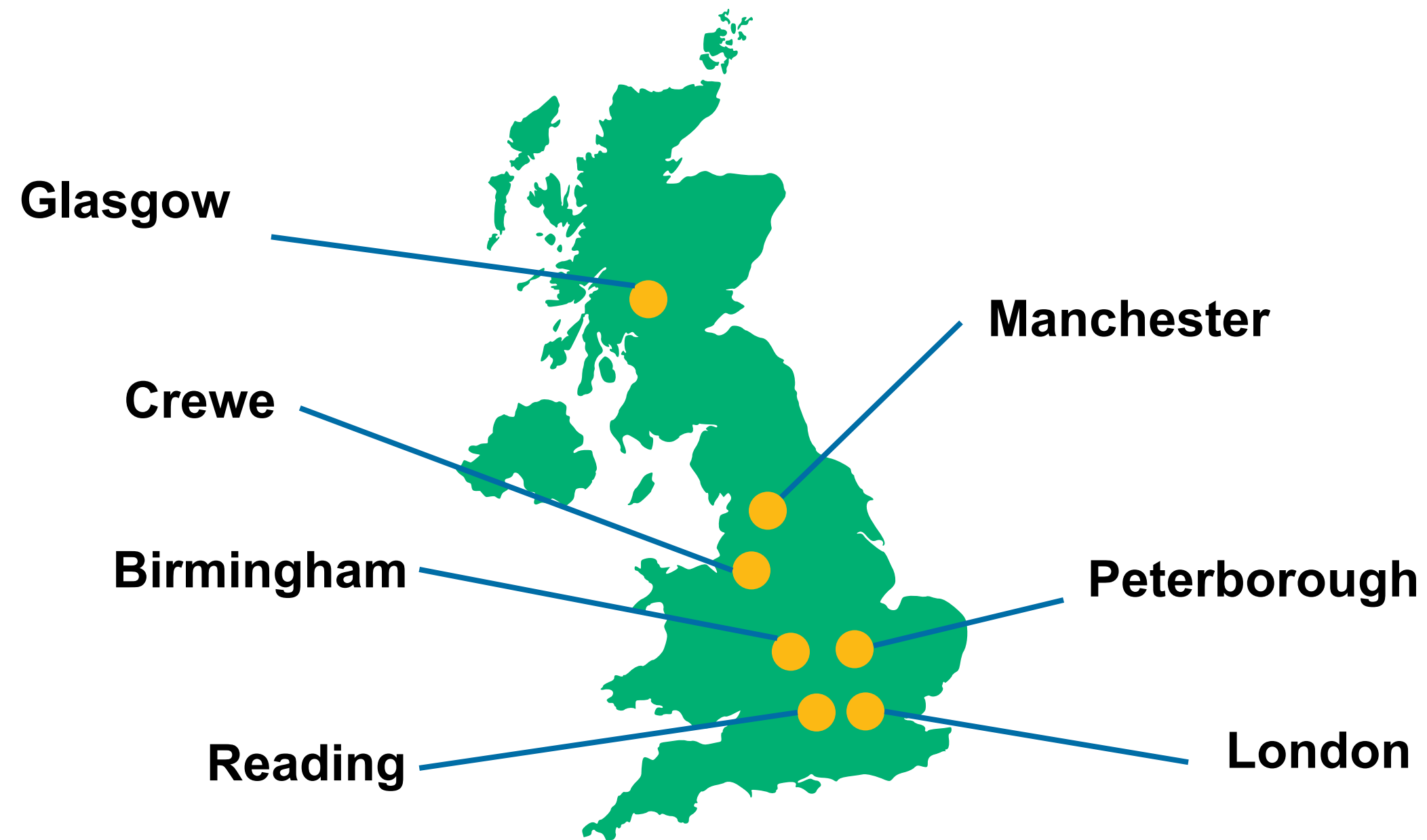
Meet the undecided voters

This briefing focuses primarily on the views and experiences of undecided voters



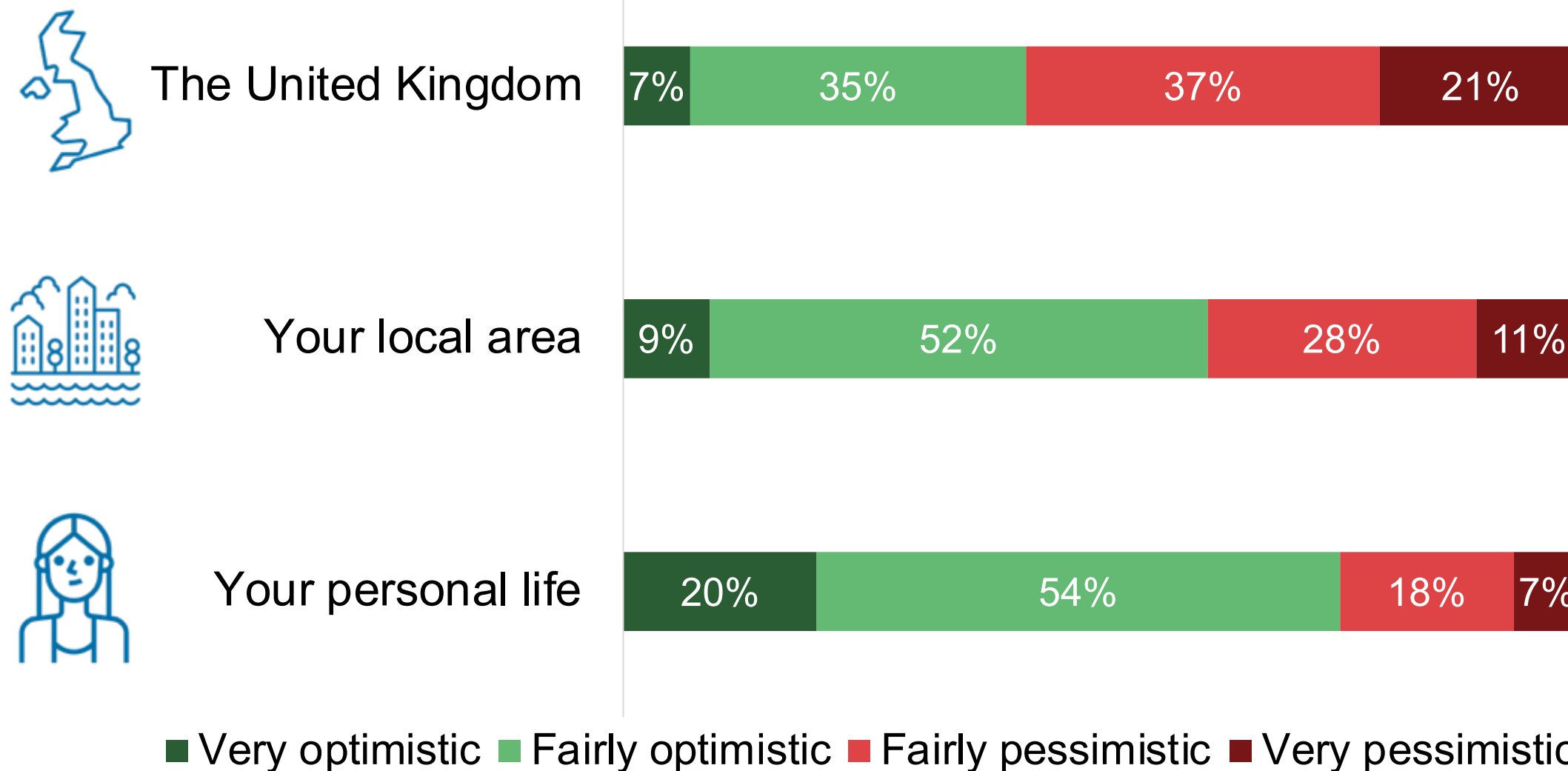
Selected photos from BBC undecided voter panel recruited by BritainThinks

We have heard from undecided voters from across the UK over the course of the campaign

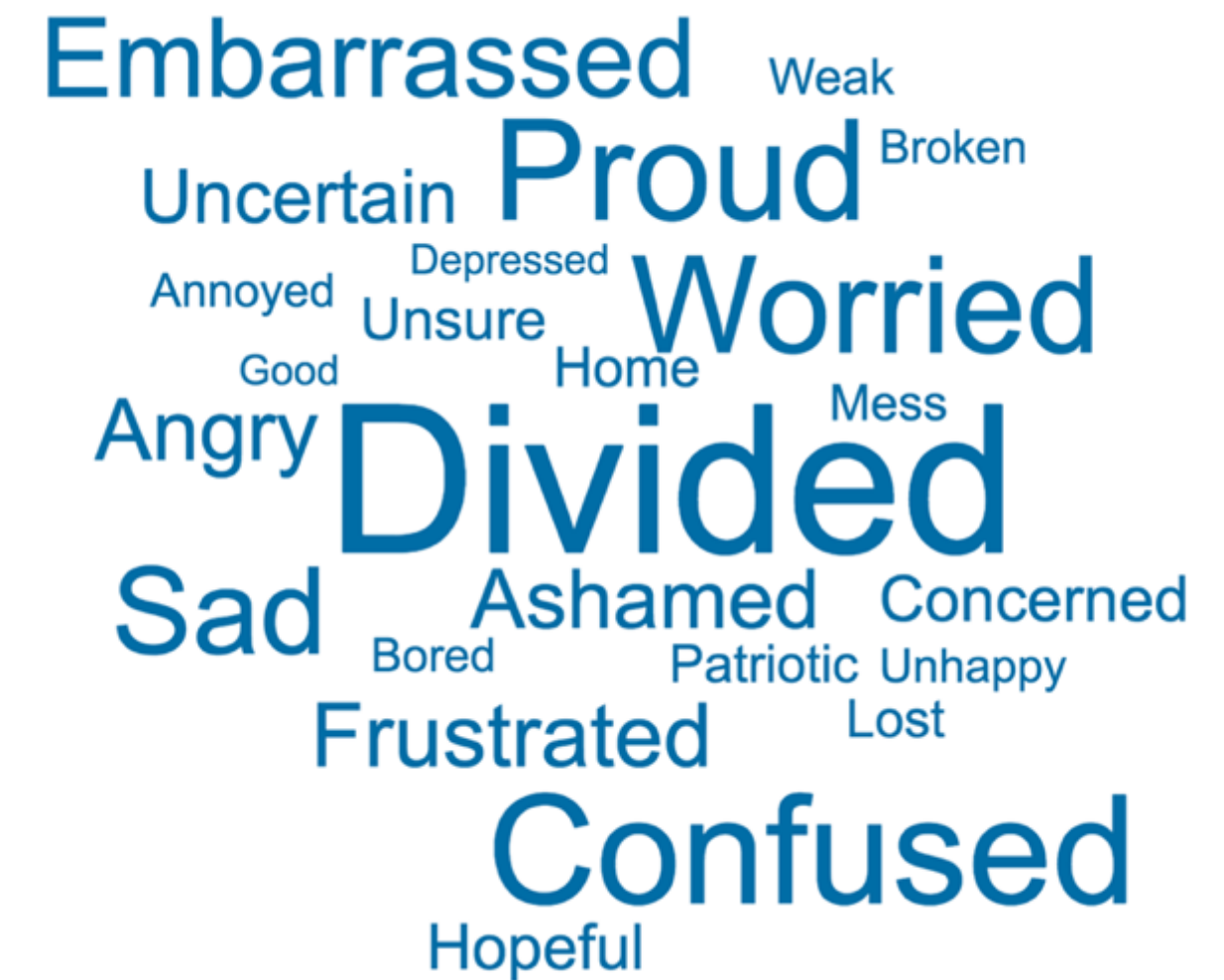


The backdrop to this election is considerable pessimism about the UK – but more optimism about local areas and personal lives

Thinking about the next year or so, how optimistic or pessimistic do you feel about each of the following?



Words that describe how people feel about the UK:



Source: BritainThinks, Mood of the Nation, June 2019

A key driver of negativity is widespread dismay at the political system, with trust in politicians at an all time low

74% of the public agree that 'the UK political system is currently not fit for purpose' (only 5% disagree)

6% of the public agree that 'UK politicians understand people like me' (and 72% disagree)

Trusted to tell the truth:



43%



30%



14%

"Lies, damn lies and statistics!!! It seems that the politicians want us to believe every word that they say!!! If one party offers one thing then another party offers more!!! They're making outrageous promises and spending commitments that seem just plain wrong!!!"

"I would want the parties to be more trustworthy and be more honest – even if this is what they think people do not want to hear. I think this is why the parties do not discuss welfare much."

Source: BritainThinks, Mood of the Nation, June 2019; Ipsos MORI, November 2019

Many undecided voters are fed up with politics and electioneering, and some are attempting to avoid the campaign entirely



"I usually listen to Radio 2 and get a lot of my information from that. From Jeremy Vine. But I've changed in the past few weeks. I listen to Heart now. I can't abide the music, but the news is brief. It's not as depressing as Radio 2."



"Lies, spin, lies, dirt tossing, did I mention lies? They are all playing to their own crowds, they are supposed to be getting elected as representatives of the people of the UK but they are only representing their parties! Did I mention lies?"



"I haven't watched a great deal of the election campaign so far... I feel that there is a very heavy and negative rhetoric used by the media and politicians."

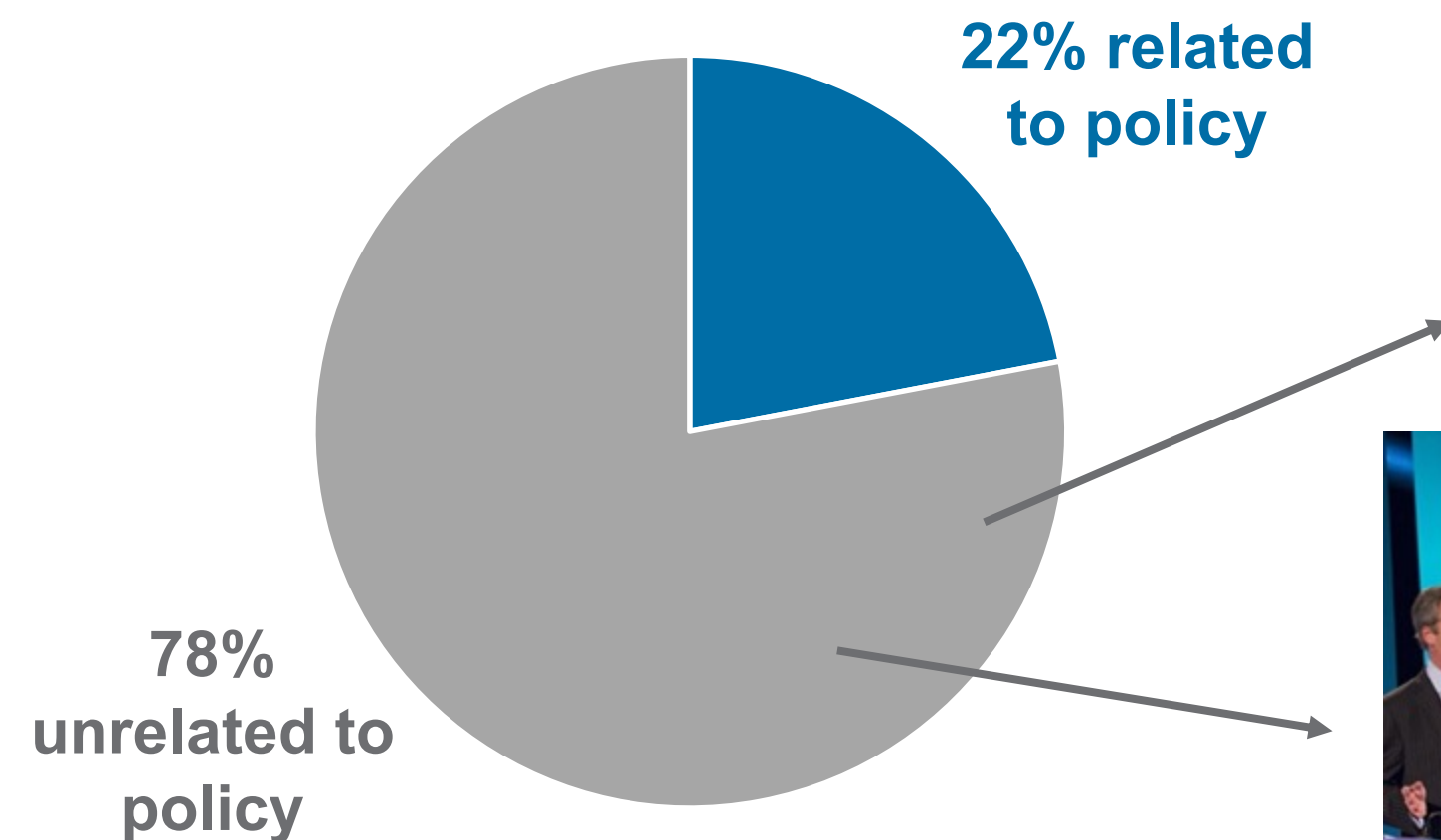
Source: BritainThinks, Election research, 2019

3

How will the undecided decide?

Generally, undecided voters rely on broad impressions of leaders and party brands rather than policy detail

Of 596 Election Diary entries in 2015, only a fifth were related to policy



"In my dream government, I'd have Labour with the Lib Dems in coalition because I think they're more about working people. But I'd have David Cameron as my Prime Minister because he's strong and confident."

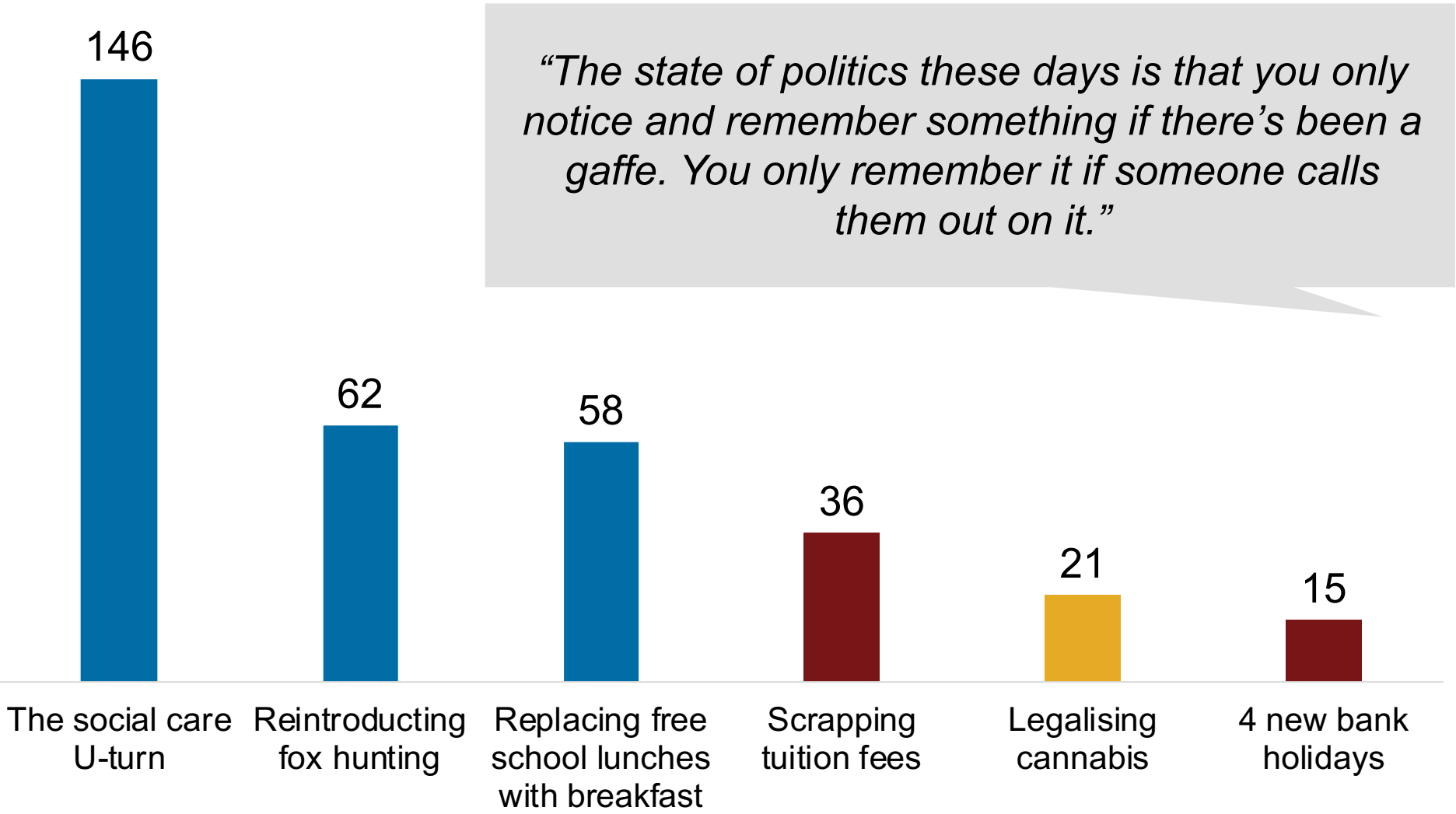
Source: BritainThinks, Battleground Britain, May 2015

Campaigns *can* cut through and make a difference, typically only when things go wrong

Perceptions of Theresa May in 2017 Election Diaries

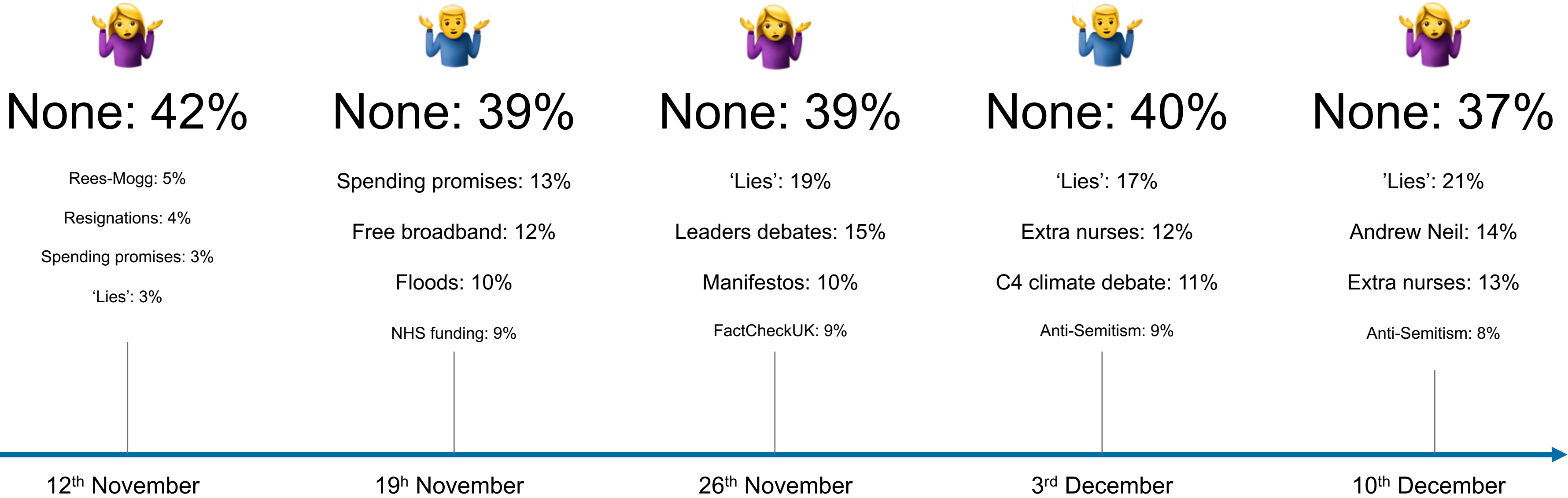


Mentions of specific policies in 2017 Election Diaries



Few voters pay much attention to the election campaign and not many stories or announcements cut through

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

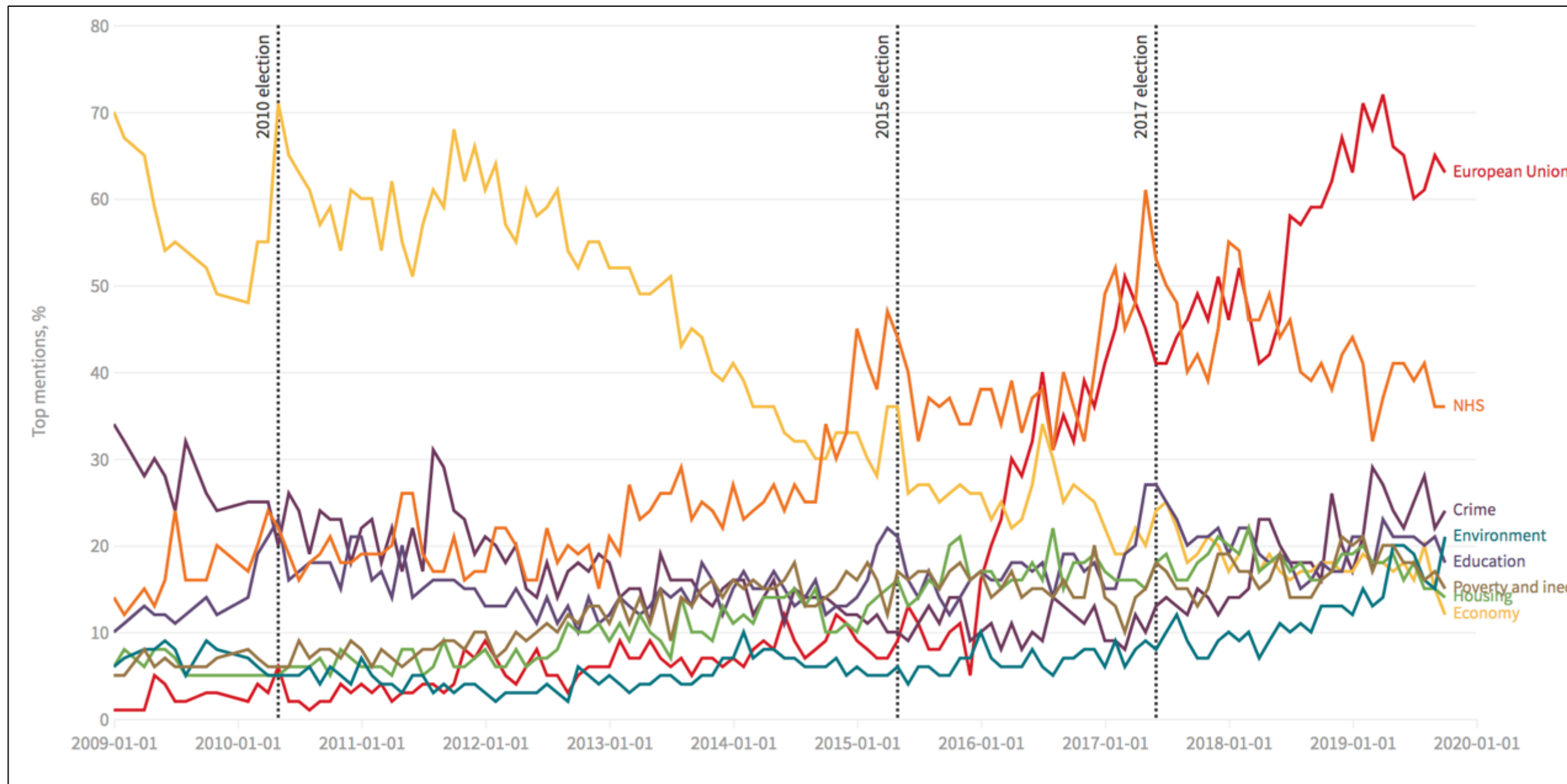


Source: Lord Ashcroft Polls, November - December 2019

What are the issues that matter to undecided voters?

This time it really does feel like a Brexit election...

What do you see as the most important issues facing Britain today?



31%

Of the public say Brexit is the single issue they will most likely base their vote on – vs. only 19% at the start of the 2017 campaign

Source: Ipsos Mori, Issues Index, 2009 – 2019; Opinium, November 2019

Most undecided voters care more about other, 'bigger' issues than Brexit and feel they have been neglected by politicians



Health / NHS

"The NHS is such a fundamental, great system, and it needs the resources desperately. A lot of politicians are saying it's a priority and not delivering."



Crime and justice

"You can be in Peterborough and you only see police on football match day. We've all sorts of crimes in the centre, and you never see policemen on the beat anymore."



Environment

"I think climate change is the biggest issue by far. It is important to me because I feel quite embarrassed that we continue to maraud on as if our current abuse of the planet is either hysterical or just not a priority yet."



Education

"I feel that at present there is disparities in the allocation of regional and national funding. As a result of this children from poorer backgrounds has access to less resources which prevents them from fulfilling their potential."



Economy

"The first priority of the Government after Brexit is to get the economy sorted out. We need them to focus on keeping prices down, on growth and making things much fairer for the poorer off in our society."

Source: BritainThinks, Election research, 2019

But, ultimately, most undecided voters see resolving Brexit as a necessary step to addressing these other issues

“Brexit shouldn’t be the big issue but until it’s sorted, all the others pale. It’s the biggest issue but it shouldn’t be.”

“It needs to be about the bigger issues, but it will be all about Brexit.”

“It’s all about Brexit and they’ve forgotten everything else. It’s too much discussed and we want it done.”

“This is the third election we’re having about Brexit and it’s just annoying. We can’t have any other policies until we’ve sorted this one.”

Source: BritainThinks, Election research, 2019

‘Getting Brexit done’ is the dominant narrative and has largely replaced debate about the merits and demerits of EU membership

“I think we need to “get Brexit done” as it just seems to get more and more boring. Everyone's fed up with the delays and the rhetoric coming from every politician you see on TV.”



“I actually voted to remain but I just want the issue of Brexit to be done. I don't care about it one way or the other, so I'd just vote Conservative.”

How do undecided voters see the parties?

As voters focus on election day, Labour and Conservative are seen as the only feasible options



"The Brexit Party are unrealistic. They will never achieve a working majority or even tip the balance of power."

"They say things people want to hear but they have no power. Even when they had power, it didn't feel like they did anything with it."

"At the end of the day, you'll only ever have your Labour and Conservative in government."

Source: BritainThinks, Election research, 2019

But neither Labour or Conservatives are appealing – undecided voters feel they must choose between the lesser of two evils

“There aren't any parties that I can currently see myself supporting and I dislike the idea of having to vote for the least worst option again.”

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

“They're both quite depressing prospects for me, but in this moment, I think Labour could possibly be the least depressing.”

Source: BritainThinks, Election research, 2019

The Conservatives are much more trusted than Labour to handle several key issues, including Brexit, the economy and crime

Issue	% choosing as one of top issues facing UK	% choosing each party as best to handle the issue	
		Con	Lab
Brexit	57%	31%	13%
NHS / Health	54%	26%	35%
Education	21%	26%	30%
Economy	19%	37%	19%
Crime / Law and order	18%	36%	19%

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

While few engage in any detail, the broad impression of the parties' policy offers is that they are undeliverable – particularly Labour's



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."



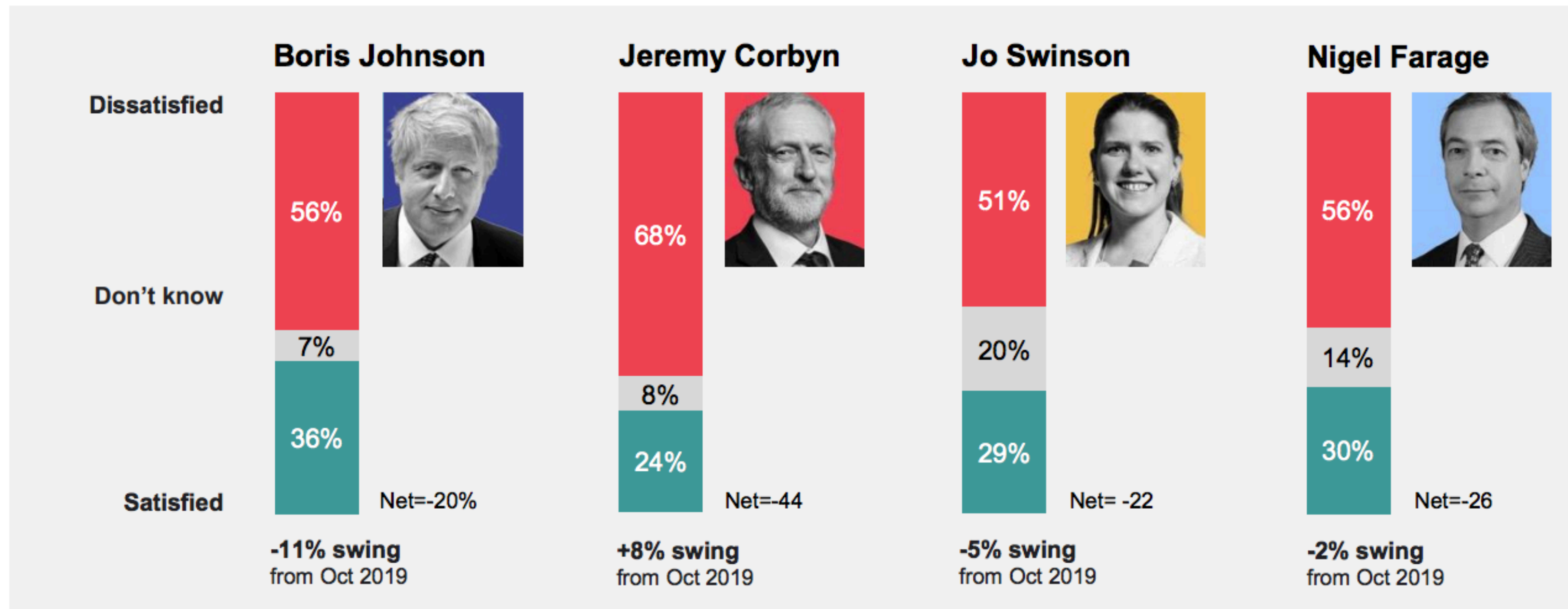
Misleading

"Boris Johnson saying we're going to get 50,000 new nurses even though 19,000 are already there. They're treating you like idiots."

Source: BritainThinks, Election research, 2019

What are undecided voters' impressions of the party leaders?

None of the leaders are popular – but Corbyn stands out as being especially unpopular (despite Johnson's ratings dropping recently)



Source: Ipsos Mori, December 2019



Johnson is regarded by undecided voters as decisive and focused on Brexit– but also as untrustworthy

What three words do you associate with Johnson?



“He is like an eagle. Sometimes the stuff that he says and does, he goes straight in for it, he’s quite focused on what he wants and not what everyone around him wants.”



“He puts on the image that he’s bumbling but he’s actually really intelligent. He puts it on. If he wasn’t a politician, he’d be a used car salesman.”

Source: BritainThinks, Election research, 2019



Undecided voters tend to see Corbyn as genuine but also weak, extreme and promoting unrealistic policies

What three words do you associate with Corbyn?



Source: BritainThinks, Election research, 2019

“If they had a different leader, they’d be so much higher up in the polls. He’s so unpopular that even real Labour voters don’t like him. He’s got very extreme and unrealistic views.”

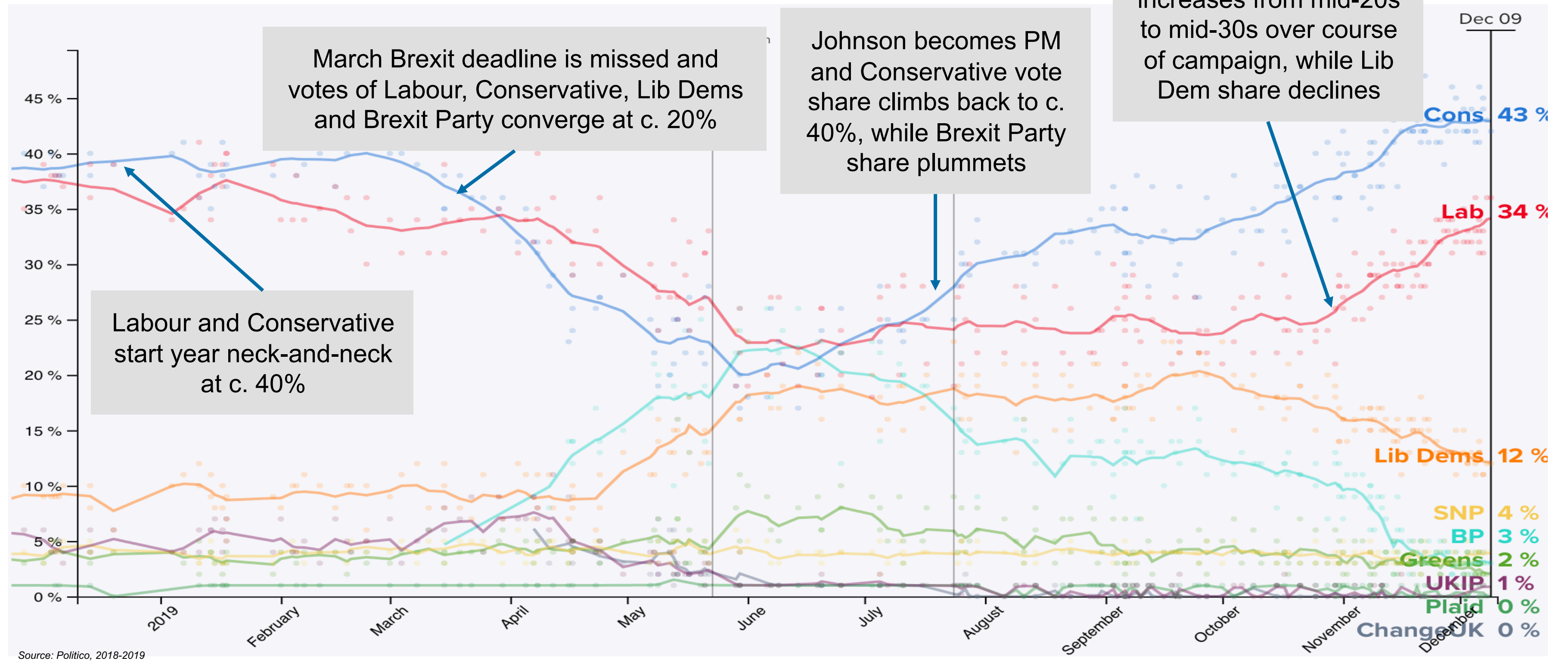


“He’s a bit like a mermaid. He’s like this fantasy character that quite a few people want to believe is true and have a lot of hope in. I don’t want to say it’s like believing Santa Claus, but you do want to believe in Santa Claus.”

4

Polling day and beyond

The story of the polls this year



Some reasons why this election has been tricky to call



Voting volatility

Voters becoming less loyal to particular parties. Around half of voters did not vote for the same party in 2010, 2015 and 2017 (BES).



Tactical voting

Significance of Brexit issue means some treating the election as a proxy referendum and considering voting tactically. Median seat is likely be won on 39% of vote compared to 53% between 1918-2017 (BFB).



Turnout

Election considered historically important – but impact of electoral fatigue, heightened dissatisfaction with politics and rare December election on turnout unclear.

Thank you

For more information:

Raphael Malek | rmalek@britainthinks.com

Katy Allen | kallen@britainthinks.com

BritainThinks
Somerset House
Strand
London
WC2R 1LA

britainthinks.com