

## The UK 2019 election: defeat for Labour, but strong support for public ownership

30 January 2020

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## 1. Summary

Despite the large Conservative majority in the election, direct surveys of voters show that Brexit and leadership were the key issues influencing the way people voted, not party policies on public ownership.

On the contrary, opinion polls show that a substantial majority of UK voters support nationalisation and public sector operation of post, water, energy, rail and buses utilities - as proposed in the Labour party manifesto. Moreover, this majority support is very consistent across all age groups, regions, class, income, gender, and ethnicity. It also extends across political parties; Conservative voters support public ownership in rail and water, and Lib Dem voters favour public ownership in energy, buses and post too.

This is a new ‘political consensus’, which has developed as a result of Labour policies and campaigns, against the background of continued economic and operational problems with privatised services. Even the Conservative party no longer offers a general defence of privatisation, and since the election, the new government has nationalised a second rail franchise and is likely to do the same with other franchises. In other sectors it continues to rely on regulation but may come under greater pressures if regulators continue to be ineffective.

The most natural conclusion for the Labour party is that these policies are an electoral asset, enjoying widespread public support even with current non-Labour voters. They are relevant to people’s daily lives as consumers, and as key parts of economic and climate change policies.

## 2. The result, Brexit and other factors

The UK election of 12 December 2019 was decisively won by the Conservative Party under the leadership of Boris Johnson, with an overall majority of 80 seats. The Conservatives got 14.0million votes and won 365 seats, Labour received 10.3 million votes and won 202 seats.<sup>1</sup> (for further details see Annexe 1)

Two large polls asked why people voted as they did. The dominant issues by far were Brexit (one way or another), leadership and the NHS.

The first poll, conducted on the election day itself by the Conservative Lord Ashcroft, voters were asked “which were the most important issues in determining how they voted?”. Across all voters, Brexit (mentioned by 57%) and the NHS (55%) were by far the biggest issues, followed by the economy and jobs (20%), climate change and leadership (16% each). By party, 72% of those who had voted Conservative said ‘getting Brexit done’ was the main issue, with 41% naming the NHS, 29% the economy/jobs and 25% the right leadership. For Labour voters, the NHS was the biggest issue (72%) followed by stopping Brexit (28%), poverty and equality (27%) austerity (22%) and climate change (19%). For Lib Dem voters, again Brexit was the biggest issue, followed by the NHS – and then the next most important was climate change (30%). (see Annexe 3 for more details).

**Table/chart 1. Most important issues for voters (Ashcroft)**

	All voters	Conservative voters	Labour voters	LibDem voters
Brexit/Remain	57	72	31	69
NHS	55	41	74	58
Economy and jobs	20	29	13	17
Climate change	16	5	20	30
Leadership	16	25	8	10
Prices/cost of living	14	11	18	11
Immigration	13	24	2	3
Poverty/inequality	13	2	27	12
Crime	13	19	7	6
Transport/housing/local services	11	6	17	13
Spending cuts/austerity	11	3	22	9
Benefits/pensions	10	7	15	8
Schools/education	8	4	14	9
Elderly/social care	7	6	9	8
Terrorism/security	6	11	1	2
Taxes	4	7	2	3
Deficit/debt	3	5	1	2

- o [Source: Ashcroft: How Britain voted 13 Dec 2019](#)

The second poll, by Opinium, asked a different question: what was the one main factor as the reason why they did NOT vote for a specific party. Amongst ‘Labour defectors’ who had voted Labour in 2017, but did not do so in 2019 – whose change of vote effectively swung the election result - 37 % said the main reason was the leadership, and 21% its Brexit position. Only 6% mentioned Labour’s economic policies, and none

<sup>1</sup> HoC Briefing Paper CBP 8749, 19 December 2019 General Election 2019  
<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8749>

specified the proposed nationalisations. It is worth noting that Conservative ‘defectors’ also chose Brexit and leadership as the key factors for them not voting Conservative. (see Annexe 3)

**Table/chart 2. Single main factor influencing voters to NOT vote Labour: Brexit, leadership**

<i>Choose one main factor as reason for NOT voting for specific party:</i>	<b>Lab defectors – voted Lab 2017 but NOT in 2019 because of:</b>	All who did NOT vote Labour in 2019	<b>Cons defectors - voted Cons 2017, but NOT in 2019 because of:</b>	All who did NOT vote Con in 2019
<b>Leadership</b>	<b>37%</b>	43%	<b>26%</b>	26%
<b>Brexit</b>	<b>21%</b>	17%	<b>38%</b>	26%
<b>Economic policies</b>	<b>6%</b>	12%	<b>5%</b>	7%
<i>sample</i>	<b>413</b>	2843	<b>221</b>	2346

[Source: Opinium Day of Poll survey Dec 2019](#)

These polls do not provide any direct support for the frequent suggestion that Labour’s nationalisation policies were in some way responsible for Labour’s defeat.<sup>2</sup> Both polls indicate that ‘economic policies’ were a relatively very minor factor, slightly more often working against Labour than the Conservatives, but without specific evidence of the role of public ownership policies in voters assessment of those economic policies. Indeed, in view of the direct evidence in the next section, these policies might have been expected to favour Labour, rather than otherwise.

Some attempt has been made to suggest that the leadership factor was linked to the nationalisation policies being seen as typically Corbyn – e.g. in the BMG survey, but unconvincingly, see below. The ‘leadership’ factor is more plausibly related to the Brexit issue itself, since ‘leadership’ is a core part of the appeal of right-wing nationalist parties, and so may simply reflect Johnson’s relative suitability for that role - ‘leadership’ as a shorthand for ‘right-wing nationalist leadership’.

This also explains the discrepancy between those statements about leadership and Corbyn’s performance in poll questions about ‘who would make best prime minister’. Corbyn was actually gaining ground on Johnson up to the week of the election, with support of around 29-30% - better than was ever achieved by Ed Miliband, for example; and on the day he was regarded by under-35s as the best person for PM by 48% to 27%, though not by elderly voters, which reflects the general age divisions on the Brexit issue and the election result itself. Attempts to compare the result with the 1983 election are also misplaced, overlooking for example the minor factor of the Malvinas/Falklands War rescuing Mrs Thatcher from being the most unpopular prime minister in history (see annexe 6).

The importance attached to the NHS is more surprising, since voting Conservative is not usually seen as the best way of protecting the NHS. The simplest interpretation is that although the NHS was seen as very important, Brexit was prioritised, with the Conservative promises on the NHS being seen as sufficient reassurance to justify that choice. It does not mean that the electorate rejected the Labour party because of its strong support for the NHS.

The direct evidence for voters’ views on public ownership, examined in the next section, strongly suggests that the same process of prioritisation was at work as with the NHS. Brexit was prioritised, but that does not mean that public ownership policies were unpopular. Quite the opposite.

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<sup>2</sup> as expressed for example by the FT’s Lex column: “Jeremy Corbyn’s nationalisation plans helped lose his Labour Party the UK general election.” FT 28 Jan 2020 Air India/state sell-offs: Thatch unmatched

“ <https://www.ft.com/content/145d036c-d388-4144-8e2f-b4409d39f7db>

### 3. Widespread public support for public ownership and operation

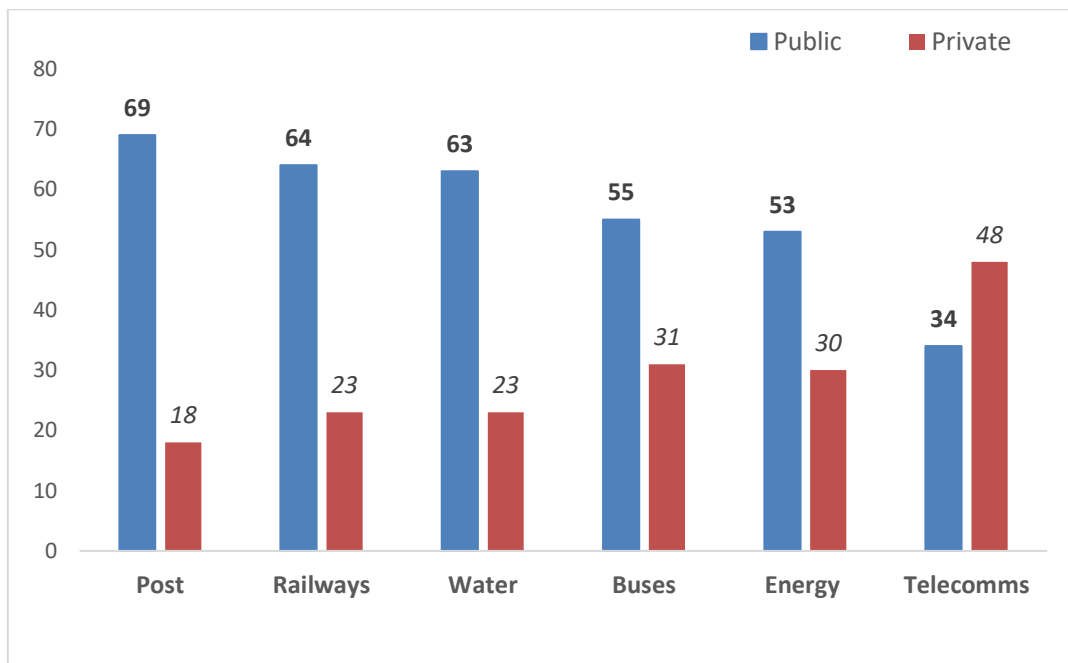
We have clear evidence from two separate surveys, conducted on the same day and just after the election, that this was not a vote against policies on public ownership and operation. Paradoxically, the same voters who elected the Conservatives in December 2019 were also strongly in favour of nationalisation and public provision of major services including post, water, energy, railways, and buses (though not telecoms). Moreover, support has grown significantly since 2017, and enjoys consistent majority support across all age groups, regions, Brexit and Remain supporters, gender, and ethnicity. It is also strong across all parties: extremely strong amongst Labour voters, but LibDem voters also support public ownership and operation in all sectors, and even Conservative voters are evenly divided and actually supportive of public ownership of water and rail.

The first survey was carried out by YouGov on the day of the election itself, 12 December 2019, and asked a sample of 1650 adults ‘Do you think the following should be nationalised and run in the public sector, or privatised and run by private companies?’. The answers, as shown in the chart below, are strongly in favour of public ownership in all the sectors where the Labour party proposed public ownership and operation, except for telecoms.<sup>3</sup>

A second survey was carried out by BMG a month after the election on 8-10 January 2020. It showed a similar strong support for public ownership, though relatively less sharp in post, and sharper in energy: it did not ask about buses or telecoms.

These results should not be surprising. They confirm the results of YouGov’s poll in 2017, the poll of the Legatum Institute later in 2017, and a sequence of polls dating back to the 1980s showing consistent public hostility to privatisation in most of these sectors (see annexe 2).

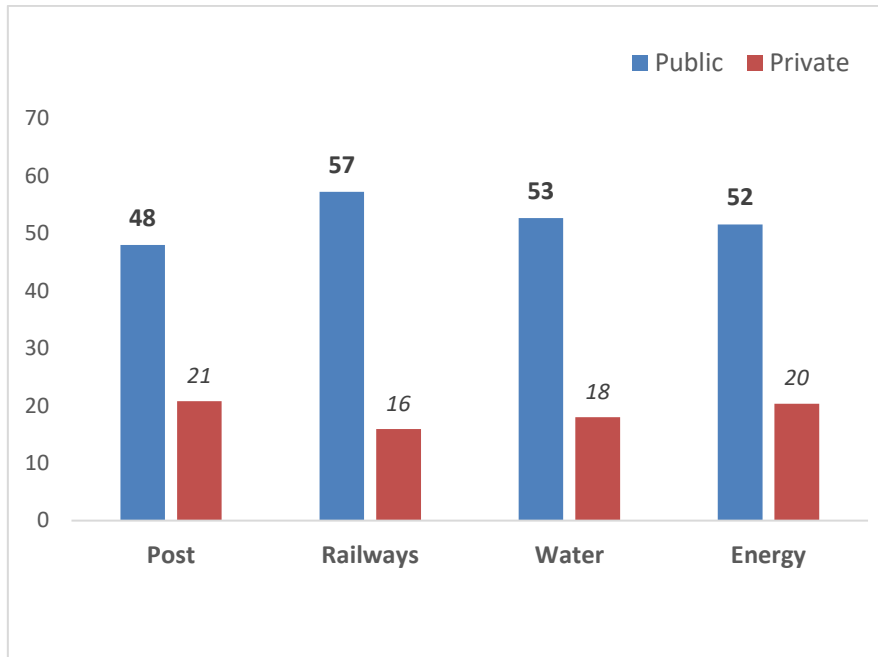
**Table/chart 3. Public support for public ownership GB Dec 2019 (YouGov)**



Source: [YouGov/Neon survey UK Dec 11-12 2019](#)

<sup>3</sup> The survey also covered existing public services such as NHS, schools, police, BBC; and banks and airlines. For details see annexe 1.

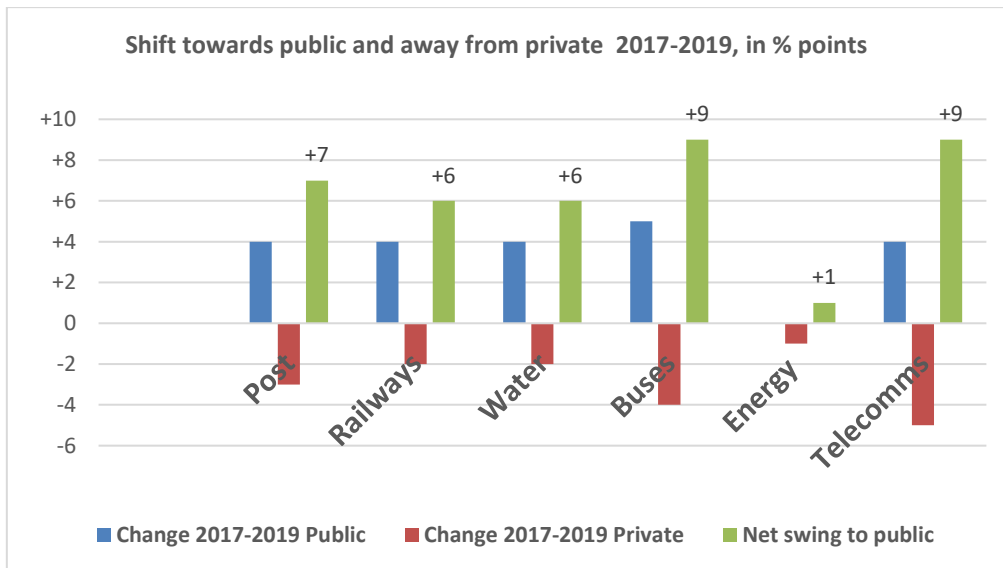
**Table/chart 4. Public support for public ownership GB Jan 2020 (BMG)**



Source: [BMG/Independent Survey Jan 2020](#)

Moreover, the YouGov survey showed a clear growth in support for the public sector since an identical question was asked during the summer 2017 election. Support for public post, rail and water has grown by a net 6-7%, whilst there was net growth of 9% points in support for public buses and telecoms – both of which were the subject of public debates during the election.

**Table/chart 5. Growth in support for public sector 2017-2019 (YouGov)**



Strikingly, unlike the voting patterns of the election itself, support for public ownership is widespread and broadly consistent across age groups, gender, education, class, income, ethnicity and region. The tables

below from the BMG survey show this very clearly, with support for public in the 46-57% range in nearly all sub-categories, and support for private scoring in the 16-23% range in nearly all groups. <sup>4</sup>

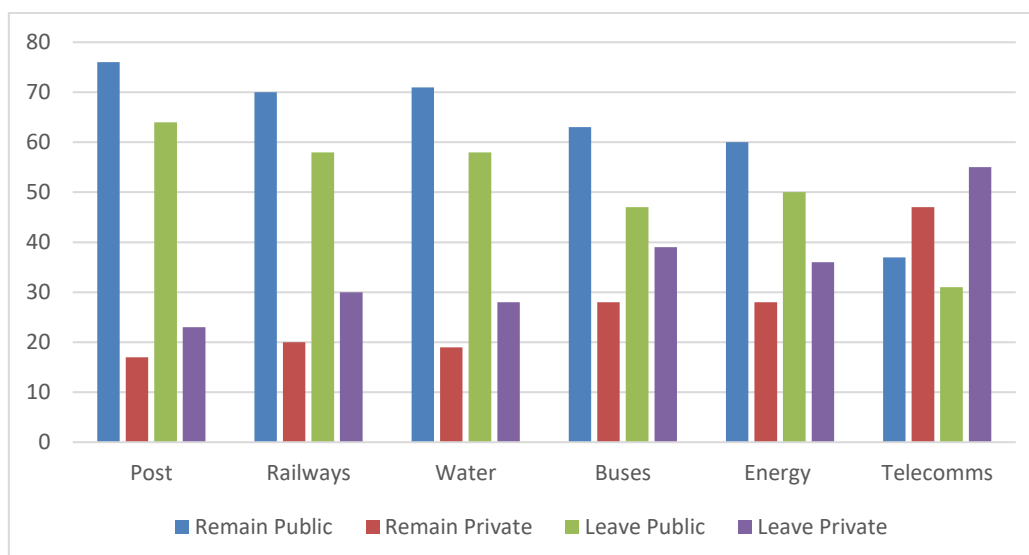
**Table/chart 6. Consistent across age, region, gender, class, income, ethnicity (BMG, water)**

	Age							Gender		Education		Class		Income				Ethnicity	
	Total	18to24	25to34	35to44	45to54	55to64	65+	M	F	Degree	Non-Degree	ABC1	C2DE	<£20k	£20k-£35k	£35k-£60k	>£60k	White	BME
<b>Support</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Oppose</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>Sample</i>	<i>1508</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>259</i>	<i>241</i>	<i>264</i>	<i>229</i>	<i>351</i>	<i>736</i>	<i>771</i>	<i>564</i>	<i>847</i>	<i>885</i>	<i>623</i>	<i>414</i>	<i>364</i>	<i>366</i>	<i>226</i>	<i>1243</i>	<i>246</i>

	Region												
	EM	EE	Lon	NE	NW	SE	SW	WM	YH	Scot	Wal	Eng	
<b>Support</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>53</b>	
<b>Oppose</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	
<i>sample</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>144</i>	<i>204</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>131</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>1303</i>	

Again, cutting across the greatest division in the recent election, each survey shows that supporters of both Brexit and Remain are majority supportive of public ownership for all services except telecoms.

**Table/chart 7. Brexit vote and support for public ownership (YouGov)**



The data on the views of supporters of different parties is also striking.

<sup>4</sup> The tables show the BMG data on water, but similar uniformity is displayed in relation to other sectors.

Firstly, Labour voters support public ownership in post, rail, water, energy and buses by huge majorities according to both surveys, in post (85-8, 68-9), rail (82-10, 80-4), water (80-10, 75-5), energy (72-16, 73-8), and buses (70-18) : even for telecoms there is a clear 50-33 majority support for public ownership. This is not an issue on which Labour voters are significantly divided.<sup>5</sup>

**Table/chart 8. Labour voters’ overwhelming support for public ownership policies (Yougov, BMG)**

	YouGov		BMG	
	Public	Private	Public (nationalise)	Private (oppose nationalisation)
<b>Post</b>	85	8	68	9
<b>Rail</b>	82	10	80	4
<b>Water</b>	80	10	75	5
<b>Energy</b>	72	16	73	8
<b>Buses</b>	70	18	-	-
<b>Telecoms</b>	50	33	-	-

Source: [YouGov/Neon survey UK Dec 11-12 2019](#) , [BMG/Independent Survey Jan 2020](#)

Secondly, there is also unexpectedly strong support for public ownership of these sectors amongst those who voted for other parties.

In the YouGov survey, Lib Dem voters support by big majorities public ownership of post (67-23), rail (61-24), water (63-21), and also support public ownership of energy (49-37) and buses (54-36) – they are only opposed to telecoms nationalisation (25-60). Even more remarkably, Conservative voters also support nationalisation and public operation of post (55-31), water (49-38), and railways (48-41); though not buses, energy or telecoms.

The BMG survey gives a similar picture, but with Conservative voters stronger for rail nationalisation, and a small majority in favour of public ownership of energy. Nationalisation does not appear to be a policy which puts off those voting for other parties.

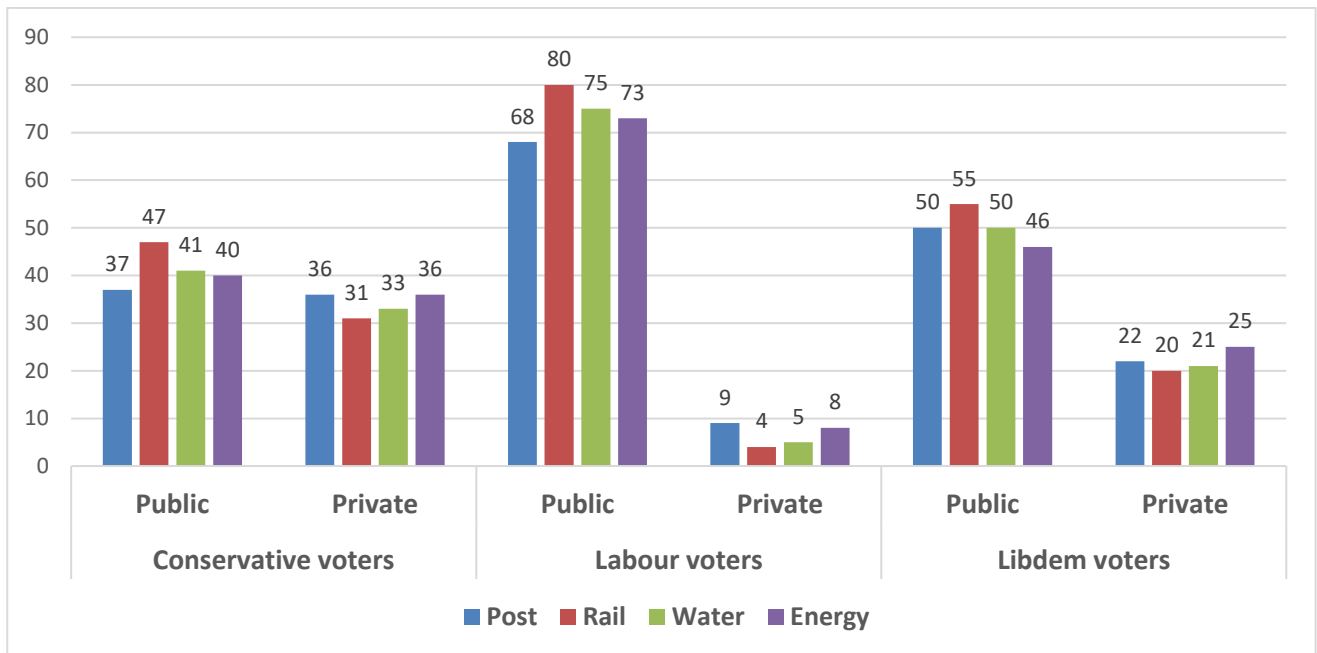
The graphic below summarises the views of voters across all three major parties. It raises a question rarely asked: why do the Lib Dem and Conservative parties not reflect their own voters’ preferences?

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<sup>5</sup> The YouGov data classifies voters according to their reported vote in 2017, the BMG survey used the reported vote in December 2019.



**Table/chart 9. Conservative, Labour and Lib Dem voters support for public ownership (BMG)**



Source: [BMG/Independent Survey Jan 2020](#)

Despite this widespread support for public ownership, the BMG survey asked additional questions to see if people think Labour should drop policies associated with Jeremy Corbyn, including nationalisation, even if they were supported in isolation, asking: “Thinking about the following policy areas, do you think the new Labour leader should keep a policy agenda broadly similar to that of Jeremy Corbyn, or change course and pursue a different [unspecified] agenda”.

The results, as shown in the table below, imply that 39% of voters think Labour should ‘change course’ away from its nationalisation policies. BMG suggest that one explanation for this is that the media image of Jeremy Corbyn “means that his policy positions become ‘toxified’ simply by name association. ... voters may say the party needs to change direction.... despite actually agreeing with many of his manifesto commitments.”<sup>6</sup>

However, these results include an extremely high level of don’t knows, suggesting that the question itself is unclear, perhaps because non-Labour voters are not sure what the relevant policies are, and also do not have strong views on how a party they do not support should modify its position. This confusion may also explain why the results show one-third apparently favour moving away from ‘Jeremy Corbyn’ policies of support for the NHS, which is very unlikely. And amongst Labour voters, who are directly interested in the party’s future policies, there is a decisive majority (57-22) for keeping the nationalisation policies, as well as policies on climate change, austerity, taxation and the NHS.

The question does show that the media image of Corbyn can create confusion over policies, but certainly does not show that this is a compelling reason for abandoning those policies, still less that there is some majority support for that. For Labour voters, the opposite is emphatically true.

<sup>6</sup> [BMG/Independent 14 Jan 2020: Labour policies popular, but many want change in direction](#)

**Table/chart 10. Change course from Jeremy Corbyn policies? (BMG)**

	All voters			Labour voters		
	Keep a policy agenda broadly similar to that of Jeremy Corbyn	Change course and pursue a different agenda	Don't know	Keep a policy agenda broadly similar to that of Jeremy Corbyn	Change course and pursue a different agenda	Don't know
Health / NHS	32	33	35	71	12	17
Taxation	20	40	39	52	23	25
Austerity / Public spending	21	40	39	54	22	24
Climate change	23	36	41	51	26	23
Defence / Security	15	44	41	39	32	30
Crime / Justice	19	39	42	45	23	32
Nationalisation / Public ownership	23	39	38	57	22	21

Source: [BMG/Independent Survey Jan 2020](#)

#### 4. A new ‘political consensus’ and Conservative nationalisations

So, far from being a marginal idea, support for public ownership is more widespread than ever, and that has changed the overall political dynamic. After the Conservative governments of the 1980s and early 1990s, other major political parties accepted the view that public ownership was a notion tied to a failed communist ‘ideology’ and an inefficient pre-Thatcherite past – despite the persistent public opposition to privatisation.<sup>7</sup> In the 2010s, this consensus amongst party leaders has been actively challenged, notably by the We Own It campaign, and by the Labour party from 2015, leading to the Labour manifesto commitments in the elections of June 2017 and December 2019 to public ownership and operation of water, rail, post, energy and broadband.

These campaigns have won strong and growing public support because of the continuing real problems with the economics and operation of privatised companies, including the excessive charges of the water, energy and rail companies, the failure to deliver important public policies such as a shift to renewable energy, operational failures such as train delays and sewage flooding, and the economic collapse of the PFI construction company Carillion. The Independent, writing about the YouGov survey, summarised the results as a new consensus:

“The public is now even more likely to want the railways, water companies, buses, energy companies, Royal Mail and the health service to be run in the public sector than they were at the last election – to the extent that there is now a “political consensus” among voters.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hall D. and Lobina E. PSIRU 2008 From a private past to a public future? - the problems of water in England and Wales P.24-27 <http://www.psiru.org/sites/default/files/2008-02-W-UK.doc>

<sup>8</sup> [Independent 16/12/2019 Public support for nationalisation increased](#)

During the election campaign the political commentator of the Financial Times, Robert Shrimmsley, noted the shift in the political debate, and the failure of Conservatives and business interests to respond. He observed that Labour's confidence in proposing nationalisation of the fibre broadband network was:

“... a sign not only of this Labour party's ease with the notion of state ownership, but also of how far it has already succeeded in shifting the debate. Nationalisation has ceased to be a dirty word in British politics, partly because the Conservatives have failed to keep fighting against it with any conviction and partly because of the failures of governments adequately to regulate private monopolies..... Complacent Conservatives thought they had won the argument on state ownership. As a result, they failed to act to curb the greed and incompetence of privatised utilities.....”<sup>9</sup>

Shrimmsley's analysis was that the public ownership policies were popular because they responded to public experience of bad performance and commercial exploitation of consumers:

“The result is that first on rail, then on water and now on broadband Labour has managed to ally nationalisation with consumer interest. With trains it was about bad service and overcrowded carriages; with water companies it was about excess profits, outrageous bonuses and leaks. With electricity companies it was rising prices and dividends out of all proportion to the risks taken by natural monopoly. Now with BT, it is about slow broadband speeds and poor coverage. Labour has a point when it argues that the private model has left the UK falling behind on its telecoms infrastructure.”

His assessment was that Labour was winning the argument, and though he doubted – correctly – if it would win the election, he also urged the Conservatives to find a way of responding:

“This all signals... the skill with which Labour is moving the centre ground on renationalisation. It remains to be seen whether all this is enough to mount a serious electoral challenge or whether voters may be put off by the sheer scale of Labour's economic revolution. What is not in doubt is that the Conservatives are going to need to start winning the case for the private sector all over again.”<sup>10</sup>

Immediately after the election, this analysis was endorsed by Graham Ruddick, deputy business editor of The Times, who acknowledged that Labour's policies on public ownership and worker participation had become 'mainstream', and that commercial interest had lost the argument:

“The threat of a Jeremy Corbyn government may be gone but the business world must accept that some of his policies appealed to the public. The Labour manifesto brought previously outlandish concepts into the mainstream debate — nationalising water, energy, rail and broadband services, a third of boardroom seats reserved for elected worker-directors”<sup>11</sup>

Instead of Shrimmsley's call for stronger political defence of privatisation, he argued that the Conservative government might have to adopt some of these policies to address real problems:

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<sup>9</sup> (FT 15 Nov 2019 Labour's broadband plan shows nationalisation's consumer appeal: <https://www.ft.com/content/a7aafb0-0796-11ea-a984-fbbacad9e7dd> )

<sup>10</sup> FT 15 Nov 2019 Labour's broadband plan shows nationalisation's consumer appeal: <https://www.ft.com/content/a7aafb0-0796-11ea-a984-fbbacad9e7dd>

<sup>11</sup> The Times 16.12.2019 Business must accept that some of Corbyn's policies may yet be on the agenda Graham Ruddick <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/business-must-accept-that-some-of-corbyn-s-policies-might-yet-form-the-agenda-f9htwm9wg>

“..... some un-Tory policies could be on the agenda. This should not be that surprising. Look back to the 2015 election. Ed Miliband lost but some of his policies — such as a price cap on energy bills — were taken up by a Conservative government. The business world should not assume it has won the argument. It has not.”<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, some ‘un-Tory’ policies were already in the Conservative manifesto section on rail, which rejected ‘nationalisation’ of railways, but did promise that “we will end the complicated franchising model and create a simpler, more effective rail system, including giving metro mayors control over services in their areas”: which strongly implies some governmental ‘guiding hand’ to replace the franchise marketplace, as well as a strong local public sector role.<sup>13</sup> And historically, it is inaccurate to call these policies ‘un-Tory’: the nationalisation of the telegraph system in the UK in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was carried out by the Conservative government of Disraeli – with the full support of Gladstone’s Liberal party.<sup>14</sup>

Within 7 weeks of the election the Johnson government had already carried out its first nationalisation. In January 2020 Transport minister Grant Shapps confirmed that Arriva, the company operating Northern Rail would lose its franchise, and that it would be taken over by the public sector - as was already the case with the East Coast line.<sup>15</sup> This will probably be followed by nationalisation of other failing franchises, including Trans Pennine and ScotRail, and South Western Railway, which an audit report by Deloitte says faces “material uncertainty” over whether it can continue operating. Rail commentator Christian Wolmar observed: “The model has broken down...the system has to change - it’s just not workable as it is.”<sup>16</sup>

In other sectors, the government has also shown awareness of the need to address issues, but is so far attempting to rely on the current system by highlighting announcements from regulators in telecoms, water and energy.

- Broadband: on 8<sup>th</sup> January OFCOM announced a series of measures aimed at fulfilling Boris Johnson’s pledge to connect all homes by 2025, by allowing BT to charge higher prices, as well as the £5billion subsidy already announced.<sup>17</sup> The announcement demonstrates the government’s policy of subsidising the market, in contrast to public ownership option advocated by Labour.
- Water: on 16 December, OFWAT confirmed its final price determinations for the next 5 years, which were already well known. Media reports treated the announcement as ‘the toughest yet’, reinforced by a government-issued statement from the Environment Agency that “Ofwat’s new price determinations will challenge all water companies to improve their performance and resilience to flooding and drought, while delivering for their customers and the environment.”<sup>18</sup>
- Energy: on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2020 the government announced that a new report on the power outage of last August which “unveiled government-backed plans to strengthen Great Britain’s power network”. The privatised system is defended: “number of power cuts has shrunk significantly since 1990 alongside a

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<sup>12</sup> The Times 16.12.2019 Business must accept that some of Corbyn’s policies may yet be on the agenda <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/business-must-accept-that-some-of-corbyn-s-policies-might-yet-form-the-agenda-f9htwm9wg>

<sup>13</sup> [Conservative manifesto 2019 p. 27](#)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/staggers/2019/12/why-publicly-owned-broadband-isnt-radical-it-seems>

<sup>15</sup> Guardian 30 Jan 2020 Northern rail franchise to be renationalised

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jan/29/northern-rail-franchise-to-be-renationalised>

<sup>16</sup> FT <https://www.ft.com/content/5b8feaae-3235-11ea-a329-0bcf87a328f2> , <https://www.ft.com/content/713e4ef6-3193-11ea-9703-eea0cae3f0de> <https://www.ft.com/content/5b8feaae-3235-11ea-a329-0bcf87a328f2>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/b8c70be2-31ec-11ea-a329-0bcf87a328f2>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chair-of-the-environment-agency-statement-on-ofwats-pr19-determinations>

60% cut in the length of outages.... customers can be confident that we have one of the most robust energy systems in the world”<sup>19</sup>

In energy, however, the difficulties of defending the status quo were highlighted on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 when the national Audit Office (NAO) produced a damning report on the excessive charges which the energy grid companies had been allowed to get away with. The government and OFGEM responded by reminding the public of OFGEM’s future price controls, which had already been announced. Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB), which had first exposed the overcharging 2 years ago, commented warily that: “The regulator must hold its nerve, resist the efforts of networks to water down its proposals and deliver a price control that works for consumers.”<sup>20</sup>

While politics is thus turning towards public ownership, the economic interests at stake can be seen in the reactions of investors in the companies running the privatised services. The day after the election, there was a huge leap in the share prices of companies which had faced nationalisation under Labour’s proposals, including water companies Severn Trent, United Utilities, and Penmon; energy grid companies National Grid, SSE (and Centrica); transport groups First Group and Stagecoach; BT; and Royal Mail. In each case, the share price was broadly level in the days preceding the election, followed by an instant leap in value of between 4% and 10% (except for Royal Mail) as soon as the stock market opened on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December.

The combined increase in the market value of these companies in just one day was over £4billion. Most of these sectors are however owned by overseas or non-listed companies, whose value will also have increased, so the total gain implied by these figures is closer to £11billion. (The data, and charts, can be seen in annexe 5. The companies on the chart include the large Hong Kong group CK Infrastructure, which showed a similar jump in value, because CKI has large holdings in water (Northumbrian Water, 5% of Southern Water) , energy (UK Power Networks, 47% of Northern Gas, 30% of Wales and West Gas) and rail (UK Rails Group – rolling stock) in the UK.) This reflects the value to the shareholders of continuing with the privatisation system that enables them to extract dividends, and the corresponding loss to consumers and employees who pay for those dividends.

By contrast, the (re-)announcement of OFWAT’s price framework on 16 December, and the (re-) announcement of OFGEM’s price framework on 30<sup>th</sup> January, resulted in no downward changes in the share prices. The companies do not fear any serious squeeze from the regulators, rather ‘business as usual’.

This also highlights the governments dilemma in relying on the regulators, who have manifestly failed to control the privatised companies for the last 30 years. If that continues to be the case, consumers will be unimpressed that the government has delivered any change.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/asures-to-make-britains-power-network-more-resilient-planned-after-august-power-outage>

<sup>20</sup> FT 30 Jan 2020 Ofgem criticised for oversight of electricity companies  
<https://www.ft.com/content/f553de9c-4280-11ea-a43a-c4b328d9061c> ; <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/nao-report-is-more-evidence-of-major-windfall-for-energy-networks-says-citizens-advice/>

## 5. Conclusions

### ➤ Election result and public ownership policies

The evidence from polls is clear that the pattern of votes at the December 2019 election was driven by Brexit, and the 'leadership' issue. There is no direct evidence from voters that nationalisation policies were a factor in losing votes; and the 'leadership' issue is far more plausibly linked to the same nationalism as the Brexit issue, rather than nationalisation policies, especially as under 35s thought Corbyn would be the best PM, by a wide margin;

On the contrary, there is very clear evidence that proposals for public ownership of post, rail, water, energy and buses are very popular, and that support for nationalisation of key sectors has been growing. This has been the message from opinion polls for a number of years, but the scale of the support, its growth in the last 2 years, and the consistency of the support across an electorate which was otherwise very divided on Brexit and other issues is remarkable.

The simple conclusion about the election is that support for public ownership, like the support for the NHS, was subordinated to the central issue of Brexit by voters in the 2019 election. But, as with the NHS, that political support remains real.

### ➤ Government

Despite the election result, there is now clearly a public consensus that rejects the old Thatcherite privatisation ideology. The Conservative party under Boris Johnson said very little about this issue during the election, and may have stopped defending privatisation as such altogether. It has already been prepared to nationalise a failed rail operating franchise, and is likely to take over more, but this also increases the pressure for a full re-integration of the rail system under public ownership - especially as Brexit should remove the constraint of the current EU directives. The government is also likely to come under increasing pressure in other sectors if it simply relies on continued regulation, and that regulation fails to deliver any improvement. So it is very likely that debate about, and public support for, public ownership will grow.

### ➤ Labour party

For the Labour party, the natural conclusion is that these policies are an electoral asset. Labour lost the 2019 election because it was about Brexit, but in the next election Brexit is unlikely to be the main issue. It would be perverse to abandon public ownership policies which have such widespread public support across different age groups, region, gender, Brexit/Remain, and even across political parties – and overwhelming support amongst Labour voters themselves. There is strong anecdotal evidence that voters questioned if the policies were achievable, which would partly account for their being given less weight than Brexit; but that is a reason for working further on the implementation of the policies, not for rejecting them.

They could be even more important in addressing the widespread economic decline which has been highlighted by the Brexit voters. The core issue in elections will continue to be 'economy and jobs', the cost of living, equality, as well as the growing political issues of climate change and social care. Public ownership of the energy, transport, post and telecoms sectors are relevant to all these issues not only as services but as economic structures with wide connections to suppliers and users. The green economy plans set out in the 2019 manifesto demonstrate how these policies can provide the framework for a programme of democratised economic development across regions and cities.

## Annexe 1. Divided by Brexit, regions and age

The election was held over 2 years earlier than required, because the parties wanted to break the parliamentary deadlock over Brexit. The Conservatives chose to campaign almost entirely on the message of ‘getting Brexit done’, and the pattern of results reflects the dominance of Brexit as a factor.

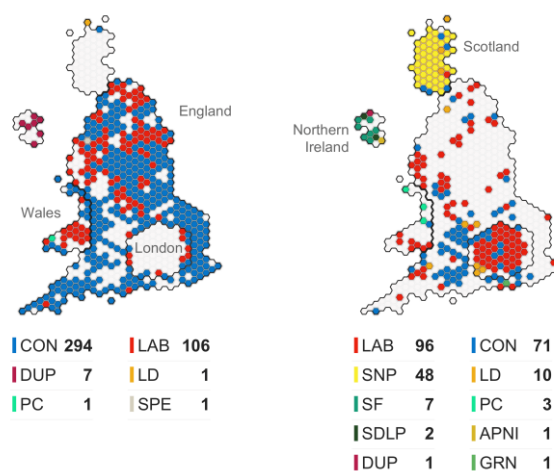
### Table/chart 11. Conservatives win Brexit-supporting areas,

#### Conservatives won most of the UK's Leave supporting seats

General election results by estimated 2016 referendum results

Leave, 410 seats

Remain, 240 seats



After 650 of 650 seats. Map built using hexagons by Esri UK

Source: EU referendum estimates by BBC and Professor Chris Hanretty



Source: BBC 13 December 2019 Election results 2019: Analysis in maps and charts

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50770798>

There were sharp regional variations in the results:

- The biggest change was that the Conservatives gained many seats in the north and midlands of England, and some in Wales. These gains were in areas which voted Brexit in 2016, with a high proportion of working class voters
- Scotland however voted almost entirely for the SNP, for the third successive election, implicitly supporting both nationalist independence and remaining in the EU
- In Northern Ireland, for the first time ever, elected more nationalist MPs than unionist MPs. Again, this is a shift towards stronger links with the Republic of Ireland and thus with the EU.
- There was also a clear difference between big cities, notably London, and the rest of England. In London, Labour suffered only a small loss in votes, and no net loss of seats.

This matches closely the patterns of right-wing nationalists winning power based on economically depressed rural and small town regions, contrasted with large cities with liberal and young populations, electing more progressive politicians, e.g.: Turkey, Hungary, Poland, India, Thailand, USA.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> see FT JULY 30 2018 Urban-rural splits have become the great global divider A political phenomenon is pitting metropolitan elites against small-town populists [Gideon Rachman https://www.ft.com/content/e05cde76-93d6-11e8-b747-fb1e803ee64e](https://www.ft.com/content/e05cde76-93d6-11e8-b747-fb1e803ee64e)

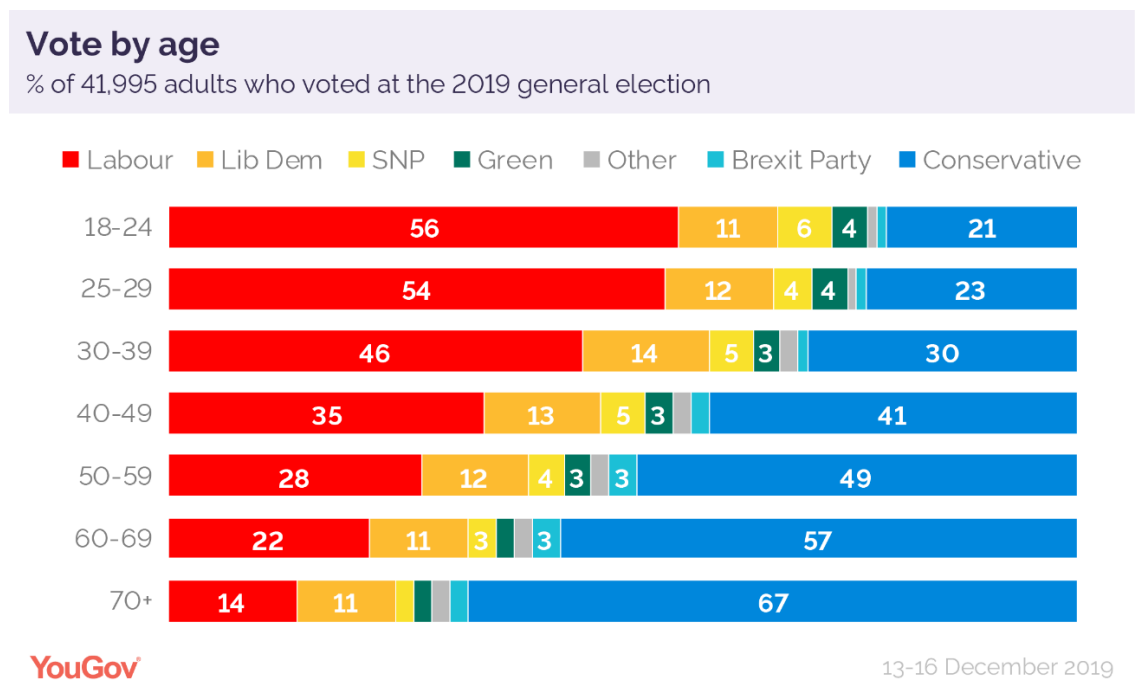
There were huge variations in voting patterns between different age groups, in both the YouGov survey and Ashcroft's poll: the younger the group the bigger the support for Labour, the older the group the bigger support for Conservatives. Of the under 25s, 56% support Labour and 23% Conservative, for the 60-69 group it is almost exactly reversed, with 57% Conservative and 22% Labour. The cross-over comes about age 40. (see annexe 1,3)

This age disparity is linked to the urban and regional differences: the population of London is much younger than the population in the UK as a whole, and the population of other major cities such as Newcastle and Manchester are much younger than the regions they are in (annexe 4).

It is also linked to the level of education: people with higher qualifications and degrees are more likely to vote Labour, but in the UK few people over 65 have degrees (annexe 1).

It means that Conservative voters are much older on average. By the time of the next election in 2024, about 10% of those who voted Conservative this time will be dead, compared with about 3% of Labour voters. (annexe 4).

**Table/chart 12. Voting patterns by age group**



Source: YouGov 17 December 2019 How Britain voted in the 2019 general election  
<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/17/how-britain-voted-2019-general-election>

There was some gender difference, according to both the Ashcroft and the YouGov polls, with men voting 48% Conservative, 29% Labour; women 42%-36%. The sharpest difference was in the 18-24 age group, according to YouGov, where men voted 46% Labour and 28% Conservative, but women voted 65% Labour and 15% Conservative (annexe 1).

Class made little difference: Labour got roughly one-third of votes across all classes, Conservatives 40-50% (annexe 1). This is clearly related to the scale of the working class pro-Brexit vote.



## Annexe 2. YouGov, BMG, Legatum polls on public/private preference

[YouGov poll 11-12 December 2019](#) Sample: 1650

The table shows the results of the poll for all sectors, and for 2017, and the changes, and the variations between Brexit and Remain voters – which are also shown graphically in the next figure.

**Table/chart 13. Public opinion on public ownership: YouGov poll Dec 2019 (GB)**

Do you think the following should be nationalised and run in the public sector, or privatised and run by private companies?									
	2019 (11-12 Dec)			2017 (17-18 May)			Change 2017-2019 Public	Change 2017-2019 Private	Net swing to public
	Public	Private		Public	Private				
Healthcare (NHS)	88	3		84	5		+4	-2	+6
Schools	82	7		81	6		+1	+1	0
Post (Royal Mail)	69	18		65	21		+4	-3	+7
Railways	64	23		60	25		+4	-2	+6
Water	63	23		59	25		+4	-2	+6
BBC	57	25		58	25		-1	0	-1
Buses	55	31		50	35		+5	-4	+9
Energy	53	30		53	31		0	-1	+1
Telecoms	34	48		30	53		+4	-5	+9
Police	88	3		87	3		+1	0	+1
Armed forces	85	4		83	3		+2	+1	+1
Banks	27	55		28	53		-1	+2	-3
Airlines	14	68		14	68		0	0	0

**Table/chart 14. Public opinion on public ownership by Brexit and party: YouGov poll Dec 2019 (GB)**

	2019 (11-12 Dec)				Party voting (2017)							
	Remain		Leave		Con		Lab		LibDem			
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private		
Post	76	17	64	23	55	31	85	8	67	23		
Railways	70	20	58	30	48	41	82	10	61	24		
Water	71	19	58	28	49	38	80	10	63	21		
Buses	63	28	47	39	40	47	70	18	54	36		
Energy	60	28	50	36	40	46	72	16	49	37		

Telecoms	37	47	31	55		22	66	50	33	25	60
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**Table/chart 15. BMG Survey Jan 2020**

To what extent do you support or oppose the following policies: 'Nationalise (i.e. take back into public ownership) the mail system/railways/water/energy?'

			Conservative voters		Labour voters		LibDem voters	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
Post	48	21	37	36	68	9	50	22
Railways	57	16	47	31	80	4	55	20
Water	53	18	41	33	75	5	50	21
Energy	52	20	40	36	73	8	46	25

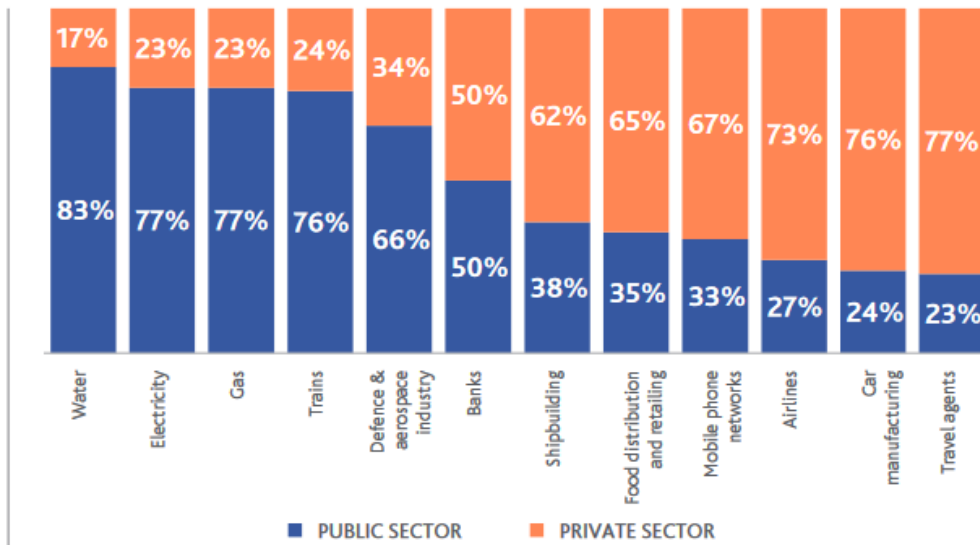
Note: voters classified according to actual vote in Dec 2019 election

Source: [BMG/Independent Survey Jan 2020](#)

**Table/chart 16. Public support for nationalisation. Legatum Institute September 2017**

From [report by Legatum/Populus](#) Oct 2017“Public opinion in the post-Brexit era: Economic attitudes in modern Britain”

Figure 3.2a:  
The British public's support for nationalisation



### Annexe 3. Ashcroft and Opinium surveys on voting patterns and factors

Ashcroft: How Britain voted and why: post-vote poll Friday, 13 December, 2019

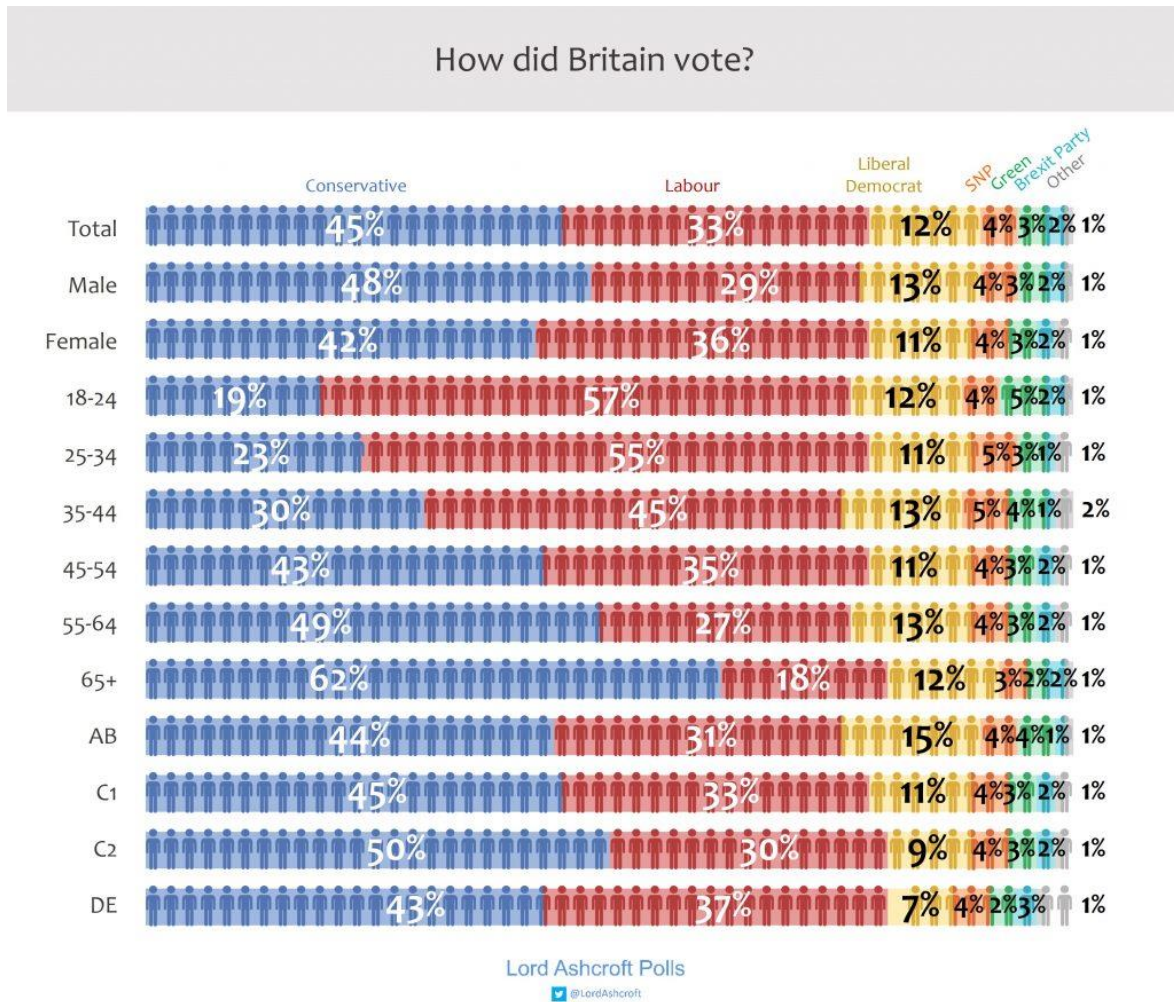
<https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/12/how-britain-voted-and-why-my-2019-general-election-post-vote-poll/>

Ashcroft surveyed over 13,000 people on election day who had already cast their vote.

#### The demographics

Labour won more than half the vote among those turning out aged 18-24 (57%) and 25-34 (55%), with the Conservatives second in both groups. The Conservatives were ahead among those aged 45-54 (with 43%), 55-64 (with 49%) and 65+ (with 62%). Men chose the Conservatives over Labour by a 19-point margin (48% to 29%), while women did so by just 6 points (42% to 36%). The Conservatives won among all socio-economic groups by margins of between 6 points (DEs) and 20 points (C2s). 49% of all voters said Boris Johnson would make the best Prime Minister, with 31% naming Jeremy Corbyn and 20% saying they didn't know.

**Table/chart 17. Voting patterns by gender, age group, and class**

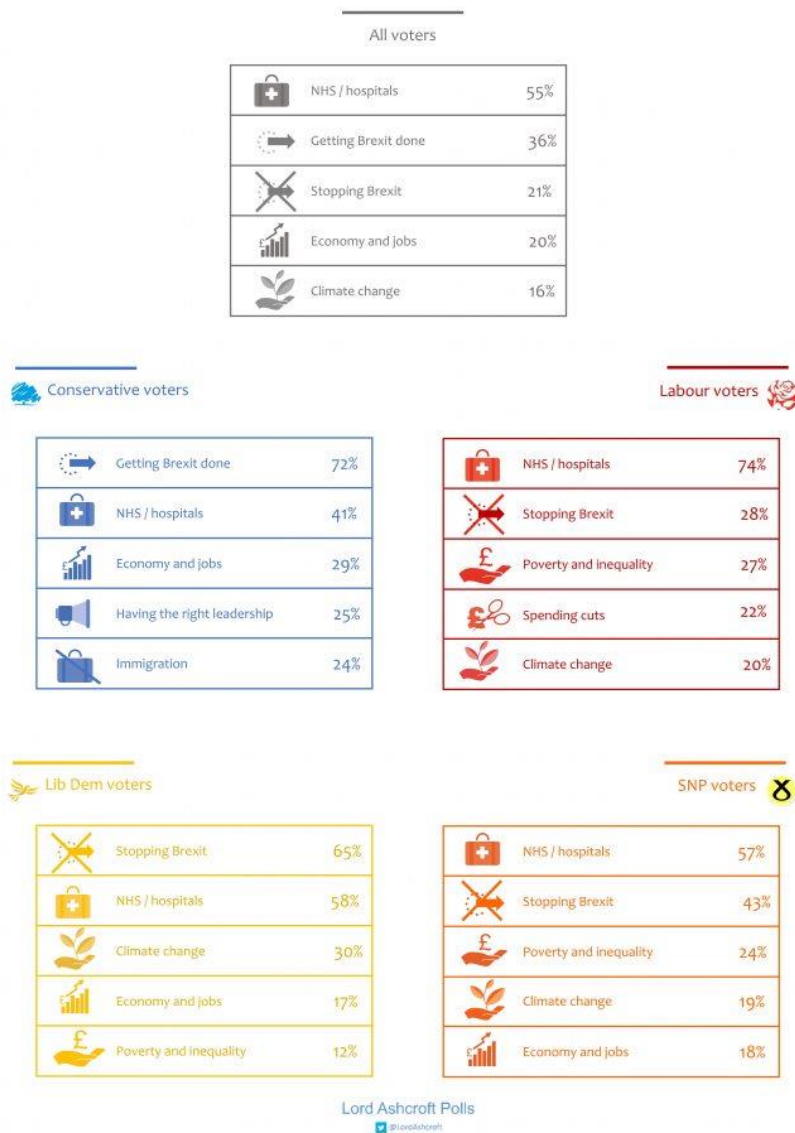


#### Factors

Asked to choose from a longer list of issues which three had been the most important in their voting decision, 72% of Conservative voters named getting Brexit done, with 41% naming the NHS, 29% the economy and 25% the right leadership. For Labour voters, the NHS was by far the most important issue, named by 74%; 28% mentioned stopping Brexit or getting a second referendum, while 27% mentioned poverty and inequality. Among Lib Dems, 65% mentioned stopping Brexit or a getting second referendum, 58% mentioned the NHS and 30% mentioned climate change and the environment. 27% mentioned poverty and inequality. Among SNP voters, 57% mentioned the NHS and 43% mentioned stopping Brexit or getting a second referendum, while 24% mentioned poverty and inequality, 19% mentioned climate change and the environment, and 18% mentioned the economy and jobs.

**Table/chart 18. Issues in deciding votes**

Which were the most important issues when it came to deciding how to vote in the general election?  
NB % naming in top three



**Opinium Day of Poll survey Dec 2019** [https://www.opinium.co.uk/preview\\_day\\_of\\_poll\\_survey/](https://www.opinium.co.uk/preview_day_of_poll_survey/)

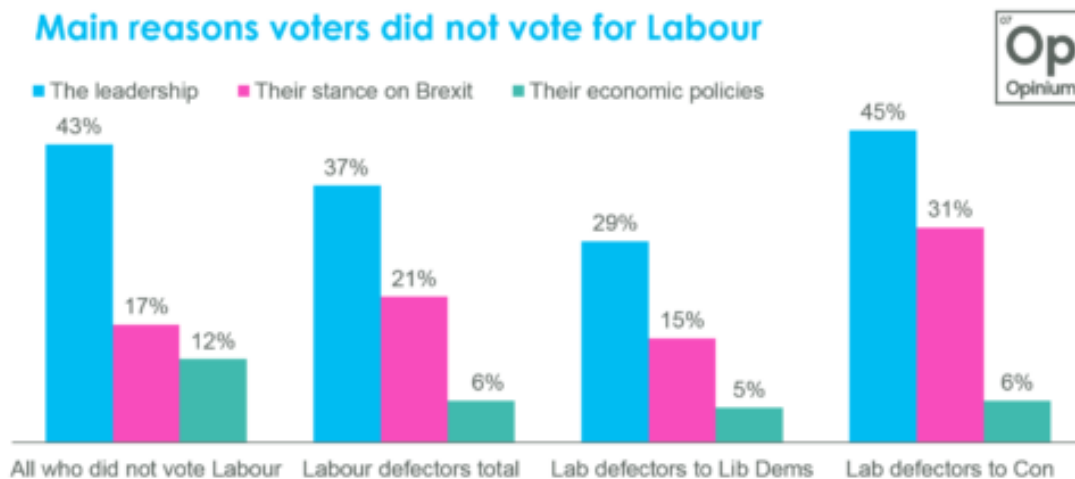
After the election, Opinium carried out a survey which asked people how they voted on election day itself, and then looked into the main reasons (a) why people did NOT vote for other specific parties, and specifically (b) why voters who defected from one party to another had withdrawn support from their original party. Respondents were asked to pick their one main factor in each case.

- For all who did not vote Labour, 43% said leadership was the key factor, 17% Brexit policies, and 12% economic policies.
- For Labour defectors, 37% selected leadership as the main reason they did not vote for Labour, with a further 21% saying it was Labour’s Brexit stance that stopped that from voting Labour this time around, 6% identified economic policies, and 4% immigration policies
  - o Labour defectors who voted Conservative Party gave higher ratings to both factors: Labour’s leadership was the main reason for 45%, Labour’s Brexit stance for 31%, economic policies 6%, and immigration policies 6%;
  - o For Labour defectors to the LibDems, 29% said leadership was the key issue, 15% Brexit, 5% economic policies
  - o for Labour defectors to Brexit party, 41% said leadership was the issue, 19% said it was immigration policies, 16% said Brexit

The same two factors were identified when similar questions were asked of why people did NOT vote for the **Conservative** party, and specifically why defectors had switched away from the Conservatives,

- For all who did not vote Conservative, 26% said the leadership, and 26% said their Brexit policy
- for former Conservatives who defected, 26% said the leadership and 38% Brexit

**Table/chart 19. Main reasons for not voting Labour (and Conservative)**



Which of the following, if any, would you say is the main reason why you did not vote for Labour?	Total	Lab defectors (voted Labour 2017, but not in 2019)	LAB switch to CON	LAB switch to LD	LAB switch to BREXIT

<*>Base: all respondents who did not vote for the Labour party in the 2019 GE	2843	413	164	132	30
The leadership	43 %	37 %	45 %	29 %	41 %
	1215	153	73	38	12
Their stance on Brexit	17 %	21 %	31 %	15 %	16 %
	483	87	50	20	5
Their economic policies	12 %	6 %	6 %	5 %	12 %
	332	23	10	6	4
Their immigration policies	4 %	4 %	6 %	2 %	19 %
	115	18	9	3	6
The local candidate	2 %	3 %	1 %	4 %	2 %
	59	11	2	5	1
Their security policies	1 %	0 %	1 %	1 %	0 %
	34	2	1	1	0
Their health policies	1 %	2 %	2 %	3 %	3 %
	27	9	3	4	1
Their housing policies	1 %	2 %	0 %	5 %	0 %
	23	7	0	7	0
Their environmental policies	1 %	1 %	0 %	2 %	0 %
	23	4	0	3	0
Their education policies	1 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
	19	0	0	0	0
Their crime, law and order policies	1 %	0 %	1 %	0 %	0 %
	16	2	1	0	0
Other	12 %	13 %	3 %	20 %	7 %
	339	54	4	26	2
Not sure	6 %	10 %	6 %	13 %	0 %
	159	43	10	17	0

Which of the following, if any, would you say is the main reason why you did not vote for the Conservatives?	Total	Con defectors (voted Conservative 2017, but did not in 2019)
<*>Base: all respondents who did not vote for the Conservative party in the 2019 GE	2346	221
The leadership	26 %	26 %
	621	58
Their stance on Brexit	26 %	38 %
	605	83
Their health policies	9 %	2 %
	222	5
Their economic policies	7 %	5 %
	163	11

## Annexe 4. Age-related issues

The great division in voting patterns between different age groups is linked to the division between cities and regions. The population in large cities is much younger than in the rural/small town regions.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2018>

**Table/chart 20. Population distribution by age**

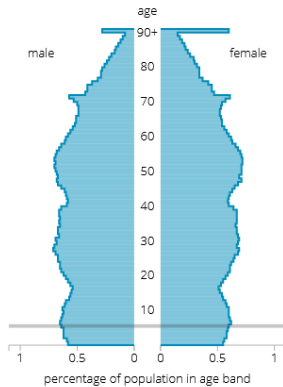
Choose an area

66,435,550 people in 2018

age 5

421,934 males 51.3%  
 401,270 females 48.7%

823,204 people (1.2% of total population)



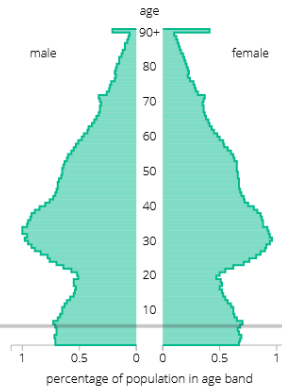
Choose an area

8,908,081 people in 2018

age 5

63,406 males 51.0%  
 60,867 females 49.0%

124,273 people (1.4% of total population)



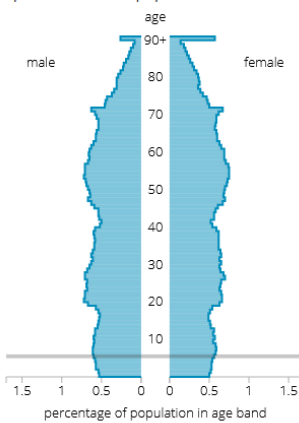
Choose an area

2,657,909 people in 2018

age 5

15,839 males 51.4%  
 14,956 females 48.6%

30,795 people (1.2% of total population)



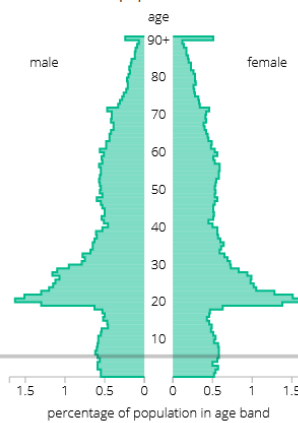
Choose an area

300,196 people in 2018

age 5

1,781 males 50.4%  
 1,752 females 49.6%

3,533 people (1.2% of total population)



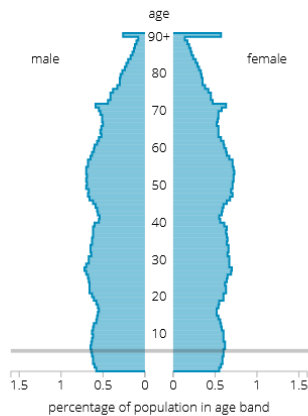
Choose an area  
North West

7,292,093 people in 2018

age 5

46,506 males 51.4%  
43,947 females 48.6%

90,453 people (1.2% of total population)



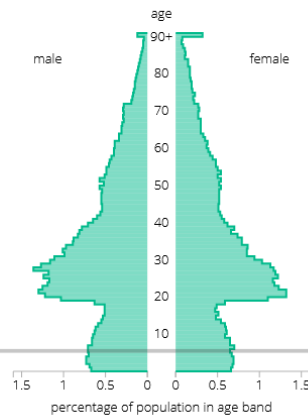
Choose an area  
Manchester

547,627 people in 2018

age 5

3,901 males 52.2%  
3,569 females 47.8%

7,470 people (1.4% of total population)



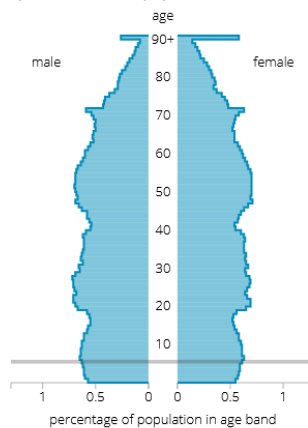
Choose an area  
Yorkshire and The Humber

5,479,615 people in 2018

age 5

34,675 males 51.1%  
33,247 females 48.9%

67,922 people (1.2% of total population)



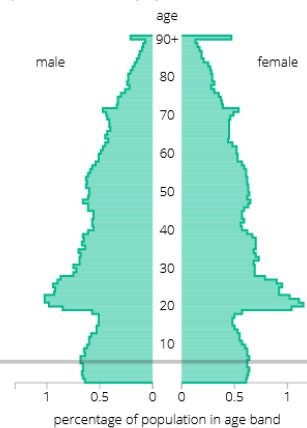
Choose an area  
Leeds

789,194 people in 2018

age 5

5,389 males 52.4%  
4,903 females 47.6%

10,292 people (1.3% of total population)



Mortality rates and voting patterns by age mean that Labour has a probable demographic advantage at the next election. There are about 600,000 deaths per year in Great Britain (ONS Vital statistics in the UK <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/vitalstatisticspopulationandhealthreferencetables> ). About 90% of these are over the age of 60, about 70% of whom vote, and of these about 62% voted Conservative, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/insights/general-election-2019-turnout/>. So about 220,000 deaths per year are of Conservative voters, compared with only 65,000 Labour voters. So by 2024, over 1million people who voted Conservative in 2019 will have died, representing about 8% of the entire Conservative vote at the December 2019 election; whereas about 300,000 Labour voters will have died, only 3% of the 2019 Labour vote.



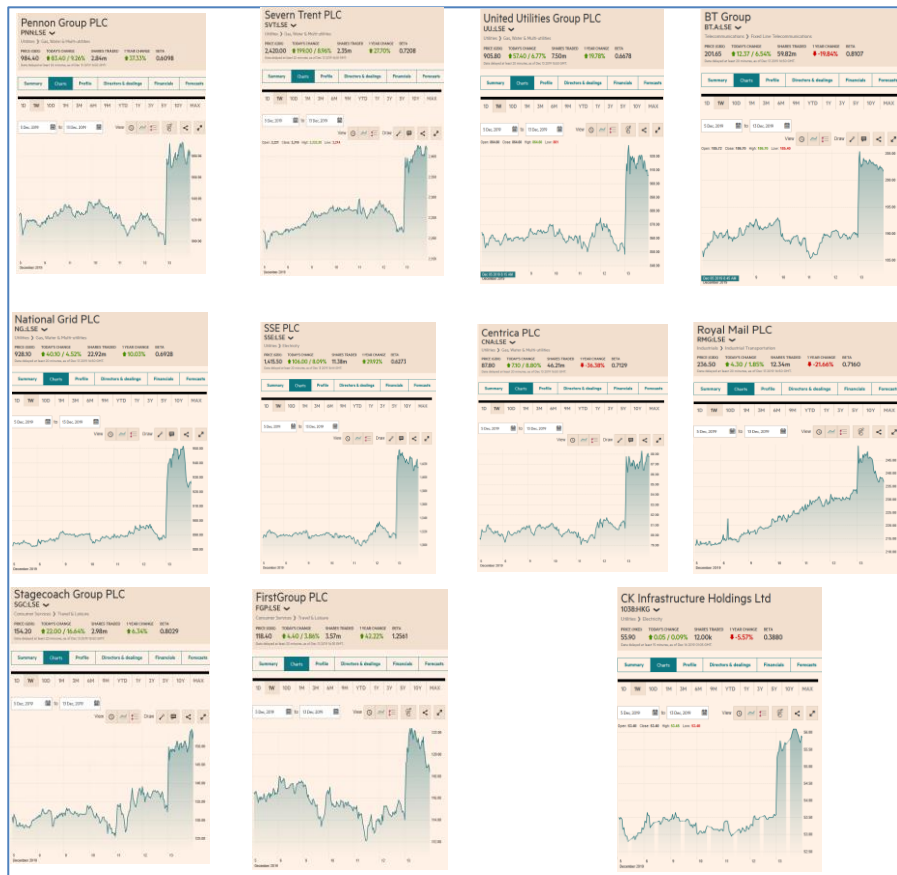
## Annexe 5. Company share prices

The data on the increase in the share price and the total market value included in the box of company graphs come from the Financial Times. The table below shows the specific company data. For water and energy this was used as the basis for estimating the overall rise in value for the whole sectors, using RAV/RCV values as a measure of the proportion of the sector represented by these companies. These estimates, and the total, are shaded yellow in the table. The CK Infrastructure table is shown as a separate memorandum item.

**Table/chart 21. Share prices of listed privatised companies and estimated total value**

	% of sector (RAV/RCV)	Market capital value close Friday 13/12/2019 (£bn.)	Day's change	Increase in market value (£bn.)
<b>WATER</b>				
<b>Pennon</b>	5.1%	4.14	+9.3%	<b>0.35</b>
<b>Severn Trent</b>	13.0%	5.76	+9.0%	<b>0.47</b>
<b>United Utilities</b>	16.4%	6.18	+6.8%	<b>0.39</b>
<b>TOTAL water sector</b>	<b>100%</b>			<b>3.5</b>
<b>ENERGY GRIDS</b>				
<b>National Grid</b>	32%	32.3	+4.5%	<b>1.40</b>
<b>SSE</b>	11.0%	14.63	+8.1%	<b>1.09</b>
<b>TOTAL energy grids sector</b>	<b>100%</b>			<b>5.8</b>
<b>OTHER (telecoms, post, transport)</b>				
<b>Centrica</b>		5.11	+8.8%	<b>0.41</b>
<b>BT</b>		19.93	+6.5%	<b>1.22</b>
<b>Royal Mail</b>		2.37	+1.9%	<b>0.04</b>
<b>First Group</b>		1.44	+3.9%	<b>0.05</b>
<b>Stagecoach</b>		0.85	+16.7%	<b>0.12</b>
<b>TOTAL other</b>				<b>1.85</b>
<b>TOTAL of listed and non-listed</b>				<b>11.2</b>
<b>CK Infrastructure (Hong Kong)</b>		14.2	+4.2%	<b>0.57</b>

**Table/chart 22. Privatisised companies jump for joy: Friday 13th December 2019**



## Annexe 6. Best PM ratings, previous leaders, and 1983 election

According to Ipsos Mori, Corbyn’s ratings on the question of best PM rose to a peak of 38% against May. Against Johnson he initially scored 33% - 18% behind – and then fluctuated: Corbyn’s final YouGov rating, the day before the election, was 29, but the gap had shrunk to 14% because Johnson’s ratings fell steadily, to a final rating of 43% - worse than May.

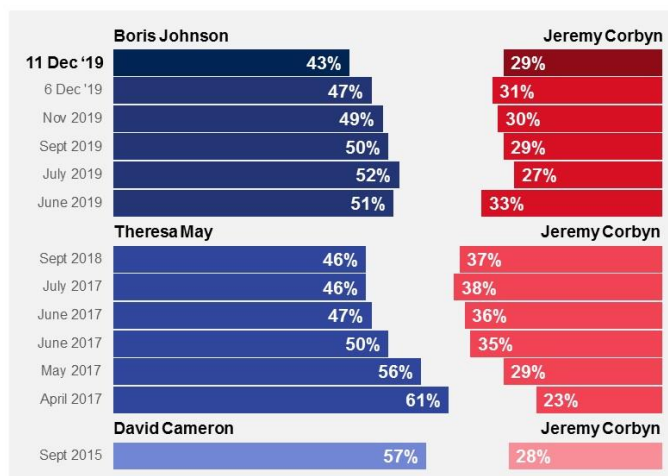
Ashcroft’s survey on election day showed Corbyn on 31%, but Johnson on 49%, so a gap of 18%.

Ipsos Mori also reported a strong age divide on this issue, with under 35s saying that Corbyn would make the best prime minister by a large margin majority that : the day before the election: “young people prefer Mr Corbyn (by 48% to 27% among 18-34s) while older voters still opt for Mr Johnson (by 58% to 17% among those aged 65+).

**Table/chart 23. Corbyn and Johnson: Best PM ratings**

### Who would make the most capable Prime Minister?

Who do you think would make the most capable Prime Minister, the Conservative’s Boris Johnson, or Labour’s Jeremy Corbyn?



Base: 2,213 British adults 18+, 9-11 December 2019

13 © Ipsos | Ipsos MORI Political Monitor | December 2019 | Version 1 | Public

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

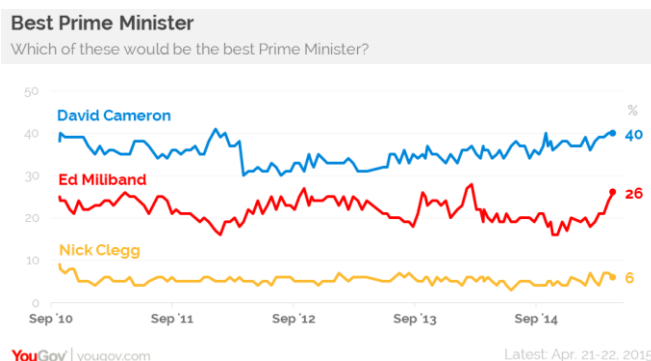


Source: Ipsos MORI’s final 2019 election poll for the Evening Standard 12 December 2019

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/ipsos-mori-final-election-poll-predicts-conservative-victory>

From May 2017, against first May and then Johnson, Corbyn scored between 29% and 38%. These scores compare favourably with the scores of Ed Miliband from 2010-2015, when Miliband’s highest score was 28% and his lowest below 20%.

**Table/chart 24. Miliband best PM ratings**



Source: YouGov April 23, 2015 Best PM: Cameron lead at 14 <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2015/04/23/best-pm-cameron-lead-14>  
[https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/axuqr6j92z/YG-Archives-Pol-Trackers-Leaders-Perceptions-220415.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/axuqr6j92z/YG-Archives-Pol-Trackers-Leaders-Perceptions-220415.pdf) ])

### The 1983 election

Some commentators claim that the contents of Labour’s 2019 manifesto explain the election result, and argue that this is the same problem of left-wing leadership and manifesto as in the 1983 election, when Labour under the leadership of Michael Foot was defeated by the Conservatives under Mrs. Thatcher.

However, this appeal to 1983 ignores some other important factors.

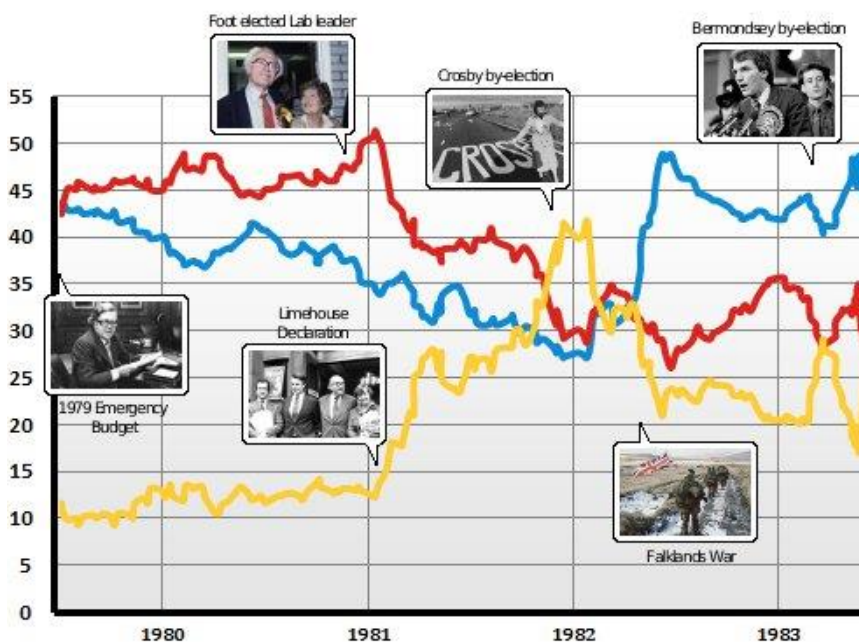
Michael Foot was elected leader of the Labour party in November 1980 as a compromise candidate between the left of the party, headed by Tony Benn, and the right, headed by Denis Healey. By that stage the Conservative government led by Mrs Thatcher had become deeply unpopular because of the rising unemployment resulting from the government’s economic policies. In the 2 months following Foot’s election as leader, the polls showed Labour support rising to over 50%, against only 35% for the Conservatives. Support for the government continued to fall, to less than 30% by the end of 1981, when it was the Conservatives who had the major leadership crisis and : “Mrs. Thatcher [was] called Britain's most unpopular leader since WW II” (UPI <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/12/18/Mrs-Thatcher-called-Britains-most-unpopular-leader-since-WW-II/7728377499600/> ).

However, two major developments disrupted this pattern.

Firstly, in January 1981, some right-wing Labour MPs left to form a breakaway party, which then merged with the Liberals, taking 20% of voter support from Labour during 1981.

Secondly, in early 1982, the ‘Falklands War’ broke out, and the role of wartime leader enabled Mrs Thatcher to rebuild support, despite continuing unemployment. Those two factors massively changed the electoral picture, and explain the result of the 1983 election, as shown in the graphic.

**Table/chart 25. Polls 1979-1983: Thatcher unpopular, breakaway party, Falklands War**



Source: UKPollingReport <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/voting-intention-1979-1983>

The Labour 1983 manifesto was labelled by a right-wing Labour MP as ‘the longest suicide note in history’, but there is no hard evidence that it made voters more or less likely to vote Labour. The breakaway party and the ‘Falklands War’ provide sufficient explanation of the result.

Ironically, that 1983 Labour manifesto included a commitment to withdraw from the EU (then known as the EEC): “British withdrawal from the EEC is the right policy for Britain - to be completed well within the lifetime of the parliament. .... On taking office we will open preliminary negotiations with the other EEC member states to establish a timetable for withdrawal”. (<http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1983/1983-labour-manifesto.shtml> )

After the 1983 election defeat the Labour party chose a more right-wing leadership. Fourteen years later, in 1997, Labour finally won an election.