

The ChEx Factor

Economic leadership in hard times

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Contents

Introduction: Voters can handle the truth	4
Methodology	6
Key points	7
Osborne and Balls	9
The economy, whom to blame, and what to do	11
Plan A and Plan B	14
Poll results	16

Voters can handle the truth

George Osborne can take comfort from two things as he prepares to deliver a gruesome autumn statement to the voters. First, they will be more impressed to hear honest gloom than they would be by a cheerful assessment that seems to deny the evidence of their own eyes. Second, nobody believes there is very much he, or any government, could do today to overcome the economic crisis.

As part of my research on the economy, focus groups watched clips of the Chancellor and his Shadow, Ed Balls, reacting in news interviews to the latest growth figures. Osborne's claim that growth of 0.5% represented encouraging news sounded incredible to many, if only because that was what you would expect him to say in his position: "he's not going to say it's tough but we've got to stick it out because there's nothing we can do". The response from Balls, that things were going very badly indeed, seemed more realistic but this did him few favours – if the two politicians swapped positions, they would also swap scripts: it's easy to oppose, but "if he was in charge of the economy he wouldn't be telling the truth either".

We found that Balls was at least as well known as Osborne, particularly in the North, though most could not name them from memory. Our poll found only just under half could correctly identify a picture of either. This is a useful corrective to Westminster wisdom, which takes for granted that Osborne is known as the master strategist, the Prime Minister's de facto chief of staff, and Balls is seen as the scheming Brownite bully. In fact, relatively few know who they are and hardly anyone knows more than that.

While Osborne must have some influence over policy, people feel it is the Prime Minister who calls the shots. (The dynamic in the Labour Party is less clear to people, because having seen him in action they often remark that Balls seems rather more feisty and capable than his boss). For this reason, views of economic competence are determined much more by the parties' overall approach, and impressions of the leaders, than by the main economic spokesmen. Our poll found Osborne leading Balls on overall economic management by 12 points; Cameron and Osborne leading Miliband and Balls by 16 points; and Cameron, Osborne and Clegg beating Miliband and Balls by 18 points.

Strangely, some voters will feel reassured by a bleak assessment from the Chancellor, because at least it will show that the government realises how bad things are. Most people's main guide to the economy is their own experience, not what they hear on the news. Rising prices relative to static incomes is their biggest concern: in our poll three quarters mentioned prices as one of their top three concerns, and petrol, energy and food prices were mentioned spontaneously in every group. This was followed by worries about finding or keeping a job. But nearly two thirds of those aged 65 or over were concerned about low interest rates for savings – bigger even than the proportion of 18-24 year-olds worried about finding work. Overall, poll were respondents were evenly divided over whether the situation will improve or deteriorate in the next three or four years. For the swing voters in our focus groups, the consensus was that things would get worse before they got better.

International circumstances tell people that there is little the government can do about this. Most people readily admit they do not understand the Eurozone crisis. But from what they do grasp, many now see it as a function of the single currency, rather than excessive debt, and the main lesson they draw is that Britain was right not to join. Beyond that, it results from what people see as a characteristically southern European tendency to combine profligacy with tax avoidance. Even so, given the unpredictability of events, the government seems to many to be right to curb excessive spending as its consequences take such spectacular effect.

The scale and nature of the problem, though, mean that measures proposed by either party to promote growth seem piffling. New apprenticeships and work programmes for the jobless are welcomed, but thought to be little use if there are no real jobs to go to. The streamlining of planning

laws makes people fear for the Green Belt. Temporary cuts in VAT or National Insurance may help at the margins for a short time but could exacerbate the debt problem. Bringing forward infrastructure projects sounds appealing but the benefits would take a long time to appear, and anyway, haven't we run out of money?

That is not to say there is nothing the government can do. When living standards are falling, people become even more acutely sensitive to the notion that people are getting out more than they are putting in. Though the government's welfare reform message is getting through, it needs to be emphasised. A widespread feeling remains that many of those living on out-of-work benefits have chosen to do so, and in some cases live more comfortably than others who work at low-paid jobs. On the same theme, there is continued anger and confusion about the scale of bonuses paid by banks bailed out by the taxpayer, and their apparently continued reluctance to lend to smaller businesses at anything like a reasonable rate of interest. The government's words and deeds in these areas can help to indicate to people whether it is on their side or not.

Ultimately, the decision over whom to trust more on the economy depends on their view of the big questions. Most people say they have been affected by "the cuts" in some way, because anything that erodes their standard of living (stagnant private sector wages, higher food prices, trouble getting a loan) is regarded as a "cut". And as far as public spending is concerned, the cuts are everywhere. Few believe that the overall NHS budget is being protected, and even if it is this is irrelevant if people have seen changes to their own local services which look to them like cuts. (We found in the focus groups that nobody knew the International Development budget was being increased, but more interestingly, almost nobody knew what it was. It sounded to many like a scheme to develop foreign trade links – which they would have considered a rather better investment than aid).

Consequently people often echo the Labour complaint that the cuts are going too far and too fast. But on the question of government spending, they also know that the inevitable corollary of cutting less and more slowly is that Britain will be borrowing more for longer. Intuitively, then, many or even most people do accept, however reluctantly, that the coalition is right on this central question. Very few thought the economy would be in a better position today had Labour won the election – in fact, they were more likely to think it would be worse.

The other prominent part of the coalition's argument – that we inherited this mess from Labour – is wearing thin. In our poll only 40% named the last government as being among the top culprits for the economic situation, behind British banks and only just ahead of "people who borrowed more than they could afford". In the groups Labour were chastised for failing to see the crisis coming and make provision, as well as for spending more than Britain could afford. But even those who felt this said they were fed up with hearing it from the government.

If the Chancellor's message seems unpalatable, it will at least have the merit of being, for voters, believable. Over-claiming on the economy would not just be unconvincing, it would reinforce persistent perceptions that he and his party are out of touch with life as it is lived by most people.

Methodology

Quantitative

- An online poll of 5,000 adults was conducted between 11 and 16 November 2011.

Qualitative

- Ten focus groups were conducted between 7 and 17 November in Thurrock, Bolton, London, Newcastle and Taunton. Participants had voted in the 2010 general election, and were open to voting for a different party at the next general election. Separate groups were held of men and women.

Full data tables are available at lordashcroft.com.

Key points

- The cost of living was the biggest economic concern. Three quarters of poll respondents named “rising prices” as one of their top three worries, compared to 53% who were concerned either about job insecurity or finding a job. Women were more likely to be worried about finding or keeping a job (59%) than men (47%). Nearly two thirds of those aged 65 or over were concerned about low interest rates for savings.
- Asked which two institutions or groups were the most to blame for the problems of the British economy, 58% chose “British banks”. “People who borrowed more than they could afford” (37%) were named nearly as often as “the last Labour government” (40%). Only 14% blamed “the current coalition government”. In the groups, Labour were held responsible for failing to see the crisis coming, and making appropriate provision, nearly as much as for creating the deficit by overspending. Those who did largely blame the last Labour government nevertheless emphasised that they did not wish to hear this any more from the coalition.
- Respondents were more likely to agree that “we have to bring the debt and the deficit under control even if that has some painful effects” (60%) than that the government “should cut taxes, and/or cut spending less fast, even if that means we go on borrowing more for longer” (40%). Labour voters were the only group in which a majority agreed with the second statement; public sector workers were evenly divided.
- There was resignation among focus group participants about the ability of the government (of any colour) to overcome the crisis or create jobs. Initiatives proposed by either party – such as new apprenticeships, temporary VAT or National Insurance cuts, or extra spending on infrastructure – either sound insignificant compared to the scale of the problem or would exacerbate the situation by creating more debt.
- Poll respondents were more likely to say they recognised a picture of George Osborne (62%) than said they recognised Ed Balls (51%). However they were more likely to mistake Osborne for someone else – one in 17 of those who thought they new who he was mistook him for Nick Clegg. Only just under half of respondents identified either picture correctly.
- In focus groups, most people knew very little or nothing about either Osborne or Balls – though if anything knew more about Balls, remembering him as Education Secretary. Though some thought of Balls as a “bolshie” character, there was no recollection of him as a henchman for Gordon Brown or a participant in damaging battles with Tony Blair. Several noted that he seemed a lot more competent than Ed Miliband.
- Asked to choose from a list of positive and negative words and phrases to describe Osborne and Balls, poll respondents’ four most popular choices – all negative – were identical for each but in a slightly different order. The fifth choice for both, “understands what needs to be done”, was more likely to be chosen for Osborne (17%) than Balls (11%). The Chancellor was also more likely to be seen as “competent” and “decisive”.
- Views of the party leaders play a bigger part in determining trust in a party’s economic management than those of the Chancellor or Shadow Chancellor. Asked who they most trusted to manage Britain’s economy overall, respondents chose Osborne over Balls by 12 points. However, they chose Cameron and Osborne over Miliband and Balls by 14 points, and Cameron, Osborne and Clegg over Miliband and Balls by 16 points.
- Poll respondents were evenly split over whether the Conservatives or Labour would do the better job on “helping businesses to grow” and “making banks and bankers behave responsibly”. Labour were ahead 60%-40% on “creating jobs”. The Conservatives led on “cutting

borrowing and debts”, “steering the economy through tough times”, “stopping Britain getting into the same problems as Greece and Italy”.

- Just under half (48%) said cuts in public spending were “too deep and being made too quickly” – exactly the same proportion as in an identical question asked in August 2011. In groups, it became clear that by “the cuts” people meant everything that has contributed to a decline in their living standards, not just reductions in government spending.
- While many of the swing voters in groups felt the cuts were too deep and quick, most accepted even more readily the proposition that “you can’t borrow your way out of a debt crisis”. Since cutting more slowly implied borrowing more for longer, this made most more inclined to stick with “Plan A” than switch to “Plan B”.
- Groups were very surprised to hear that the government was increasing the International Development budget. However, it was also clear that most people did not know what “International Development” meant – many mistook it for schemes to develop trade links (which most would have considered a more worthwhile investment at such a time).
- Many saw the Eurozone crisis as being related primarily to the euro itself, and the lesson they drew for Britain was therefore that Britain was right not to join. Though most did understand that debt played a central role in the crisis, this was usually seen as a function of the national characteristics of the countries concerned.
- Poll respondents were evenly divided over whether “the right decisions are being made and things will improve significantly over the next three or four years” (49%), or whether by that time “the economy will be no better, or even worse, than it is now” (51%). Conservative and Lib Dem voters, older people, ABs, and those in the South East were the most likely to be optimistic. In the groups, the consensus view was that things were likely to get worse before they got better.
- Respondents were more likely to think that, had Labour been in government since the last election, the economic situation would be worse than it is now (39%) than better (21%). People were more evenly divided over whether things would be better (19%) or worse (24%) with a Conservative government rather than a coalition, with most (57%) saying the situation would be about the same.

Osborne and Balls

- Only just under half of poll respondents correctly identified either George Osborne or Ed Balls. Though 62% said they recognised a picture of the Chancellor, they regularly mistook him for someone else – most often Nick Clegg.
- Asked who they most trusted to manage Britain’s economy overall, respondents chose Osborne over Balls by 12 points. However, they chose Cameron and Osborne over Miliband and Balls by 14 points, and Cameron, Osborne and Clegg over Miliband and Balls by 16 points.
- In focus groups, few could name the current Chancellor, and very few indeed the Shadow Chancellor. Once their names were mentioned, Balls was at least as well known as Osborne, especially in the North.
- Most people knew little or nothing about the Chancellor beyond his name. Their impressions, though, were often that he was typical of the current crop of senior Tories, and had perhaps been a school friend of David Cameron. Those who had voted Conservative gave him credit for sticking to his policy in difficult circumstances.
 - “Doesn’t make much impression... You don’t sit up and take notice when he talks”.
 - “Typical Tory.”
 - “Doesn’t seem to have a great deal of personality.”
 - “He’s got the most difficult job in Christendom. He came along when the entire economy was falling apart. There was nothing he could do that would make him look good.”
 - “Focused and determined. He’s set his policies out and he’s standing by them.”
- The groups were shown a news interview with Osborne discussing the third quarter GDP figures. Most felt he had no choice but to be as upbeat as possible, but this – combined with what they did not regard as particularly commanding delivery – made it hard for participants to take his optimistic message seriously.
 - “Seems quite meek. You don’t have faith in what he says.”
 - “He says what I want him to say but I don’t believe it. I’m sure he would love to make us all rich, but with the state of the economy I can’t believe it.”
 - “He’s on shifting sands. Greece, Italy – every day the facts are different. Anything he comes out with could be turned around by events he has no control over.”
 - “He’s trying to make out things are better than they really are.”
 - “He’s got to go to work, do his bit, say what he’s meant to say. He can’t say, ‘we’re in a recession, there’s nothing we can do about it, and it will be like that for another couple of years’.”
 - “They’ve got a sheet of paper they have to follow word for word on TV.”
- Very few in the groups could spontaneously name the Shadow Chancellor – guesses included Danny Alexander, Alistair Darling and Sir Ming Campbell. Among those who had any view at all of Ed Balls, opinions tended to be positive. Several said they remembered him as Education Secretary (and did not realise he was now Shadow Chancellor – prompting some to wonder whether he knew anything about the subject), in which position they usually thought he had done a reasonable job. Some thought of him as “bolshie”, but nobody knew that he had been a close adviser to Gordon Brown, or mentioned any accusations that he had been involved in the Blair-Brown disputes.

- The groups were shown an interview with Balls talking about the same growth figures. The message that the situation was very bad sounded more realistic to participants, but like the Chancellor's, it was exactly what you would expect to hear from someone in his position. Nevertheless, Balls seemed confident and knowledgeable, and several noted that he seemed rather more capable than Ed Miliband.

"It's hilarious considering where we were with the previous government. I don't know what they would do that was different."

"I don't know who to believe. He seems more believable because we're all feeling the pinch, but who knows?"

"It's easier to be in opposition, damning everything."

"He's more personable. He talks in layman's terms."

"He sounds more authoritative".

"He's bound to say that. If it was the other way round, he'd be saying what the other one was saying and he'd have been saying what he's saying."

"If he was in charge of the economy he wouldn't be telling the truth either."

- Asked to choose from a list of positive and negative words and phrases to describe Osborne and Balls, poll respondents' four most popular choices – all negative – were identical for each but in a slightly different order. The fifth choice for both, "understands what needs to be done", was more likely to be chosen for Osborne (17%) than Balls (11%). The Chancellor was also more likely to be seen as "competent" and "decisive".
- The fact that Ed Balls had been a close economic adviser to Gordon Brown came as news to nearly everybody in the groups. For those who firmly blamed Labour for the economic situation, this was a mark against him (though it was an open question how attention Brown was likely to have paid to advisers). Among people who felt less strongly that Labour were to blame, this either made no difference or was a point in his favour.

"It doesn't fill you with confidence."

"Look at the mess the country's in. He must have been part of it somewhere along the line."

"It would be interesting to find out if he advised Gordon Brown to sell the gold."

"If he's done the job, he's got a bit of insight."

"It gives him a greater understanding of the situation and how we got here."

The economy, whom to blame, and what to do

- People said their impressions of how the economy was doing came mostly from their own circumstances and the experience of the businesses they worked in. The cost of living was the biggest economic concern. Three quarters of poll respondents named “rising prices” as one of their top three concerns, compared to 53% who were worried either about job insecurity or finding a job. Women were more likely to be worried about finding or keeping a job (59%) than men (47%). Nearly two thirds of those aged 65 or over were concerned about low interest rates for savings. Every focus group spontaneously mentioned petrol, energy and food prices, emphasising their particular impact given static incomes. Several in the north had the impression that things were rather better in the south, particularly in London.

“For the average person like us, everything’s gone up except wages.”

“We can’t have the heating on because it’s too dear.”

“Two years ago I had agencies calling me with work every week. Last year I did three months’ work, and this year I’ve had six months’.”

“As a beauty therapist it’s a luxury. People come in every six weeks instead of every four.”

“Pasta has doubled in price.”

“It’s the cost of living, fuel, petrol, diesel. They’re making billions of profits but the price is still going up.”

“In Morpeth in October this year, our little firm had 105 clients dealing with mortgage repossession.”

“There’s the bollocks of ‘we’re all in this together, but believe me we’re not. I was in London last week and it’s not a North-South divide, it’s the M25 and the rest of the country.”
- Most focus group participants believed the economic situation was still getting worse, and would continue to do so for some time before it improved. In the poll, respondents were divided as to whether “the right decisions are being made and things will improve significantly over the next three or four years” (49%), or whether the situation by that time would be “no better, or even worse, than it is now” (51%).

“It will be better in the long term but it will take a good few years.”

“I’d like to be optimistic but there is not much sign of it so far.”

“It will take a hell of a long time. I don’t think the majority of Britons realise how much debt the country is in. People complain about the cuts but it will take years to get out of it.”

“It has to get worse because so many people are losing their jobs. There has to be a knock-on.”
- Most people felt that any improvement in the economy was a matter of time, and not something the government could bring about with particular policies. Asked what the government should be doing to help the economy recover and promote growth, most felt there was nothing much it *could* do. Some mentioned cutting VAT (though just as many felt strongly that this would make no difference), withdrawing from Afghanistan, reducing immigration and tackling welfare dependency, and a number complained that “we don’t make anything any more” – but nobody felt that the economic crisis could be solved if only the government had the right plan.
- Accordingly, government initiatives aimed at promoting growth sounded trifling compared to the scale of the problem. Apprenticeships and work programmes for the unemployed were all very well but of little use if there were no real jobs to move onto; streamlining of planning laws sounded like a threat to the Green Belt; building infrastructure would take years to bring

benefits, and sounded unaffordable to many; efforts to get banks to lend to businesses did not seem to have had much success so far; and the argument that tackling the deficit helped keep interest rates low went over the heads of most people.

- Many participants readily admitted that they did not understand the Eurozone crisis. It was largely seen as a problem directly related to membership of the euro, from which people concluded that the main lesson for Britain was that we had been right not to join. People recognised that debt played a large part, however, and some felt that Britain could have been sucked into the crisis if action were not being taken on the deficit – but most felt that the problems in the countries directly concerned (though there was some confusion about which countries these were) resulted from a combination of profligacy and failure to pay taxes that could never happen in Britain. Participants differed over whether Britain should contribute to bailouts (often speculating whether other countries would help Britain in a similar situation), but all believed we were contributing, if only indirectly.

“Not much interest... It’s not that it doesn’t matter, it’s that I don’t understand it.”

“All these countries borrowed too much money, and Greece in particular refuses to pay any tax.”

“All they do is kebabs and holidays. You can’t survive on ouzo and kebabs.”

“If we were in trouble, I very much doubt anyone would bail us out.”

“How can we bail them out if we’ve got no money?”

“We bailed Portugal out and Spain and now it’s Greece and next it will be Italy.”

“If we go bankrupt it will be bad for us because we trade with them.”

“We’re contributing, because we’re part of the EC, or the UN, or whatever.”

- Asked which two institutions or groups were the most to blame for the problems of the British economy, 58% chose “British banks”. “People who borrowed more than they could afford” (37%) were named nearly as often as “the last Labour government” (40%). Only 14% blamed “the current coalition government”. In the groups, Labour were held responsible for failing to see the crisis coming, and making appropriate provision, nearly as much as for creating the deficit by overspending. Those who did largely blame the last Labour government nevertheless emphasised that they did not wish to hear this any more from the coalition. Several also mentioned what they regarded as the high cost of immigration and welfare spending.

“The previous government. They didn’t save anything, and they were spending money we hadn’t got.”

“The government at the time should have recognised what was coming. There should have been some foresight.”

“Unemployed people who won’t get off their backside to work. You see them in the pub. You can’t make them work because it’s against the human rights.”

“Blair made a pact with the City, to let them get on with it so the money could fund stuff elsewhere. I don’t remember people complaining about bankers’ bonuses when we were doing well up here.”

- Participants in several groups said the expansion of the public sector in recent years had, with the benefit of hindsight, been unsustainable – but that people had been happy to take advantage of it at the time, as had the beneficiaries of risky banking.

“We had Northern Rock, and plenty in the North East were happy to take their shares and mortgages and turn a blind eye to the unethical trading. People talked about ‘my Northern Rock car’ and ‘my Northern Rock holiday’ and ‘my Northern Rock kitchen’.”

“I think it suited us to have more salaries and fringe benefits. None of us stopped to think, hang on, how do we pay for this?”

"I think they have hidden behind the recession to downsize the structure of the public sector to what it should be. We couldn't afford all that."

"I employed people to work in three childcare centres. We were promised funding but nobody had looked at the future."

"It wasn't ever affordable."

"We had it good for ten years. People complain, and I think 'how big is your mortgage? How much did you put on your credit card?'"

- Despite the crisis, there was little sympathy for (or comprehension of) the protesters outside St Paul's Cathedral. Though some felt they had a point, they were usually unable to say what they thought it was, other than in rather vague terms. Most groups knew that the tents had been found to be unoccupied at night. Very few felt that the protesters represented them, given that they evidently did not have to work, or chose not to.

"I haven't heard enough about what message they're trying to put across."

"It's getting banks and businesses to make less profit and share the love a bit more."

"They need to get a f***** life and get a job. I don't see why the police can't move them on. They are ruining a perfectly good business."

"Bless them, aren't they posh?"

"They say they're anti-capitalist. That probably means daddy was a merchant banker."

"They go home at night, and the weekend."

"A bunch of crusties moaning about something else."

"They're using the cathedral as a toilet. Don't do that."

Plan A and Plan B

- The groups felt that the government had two main messages on the economy: “tighten your belts” and “it’s all Labour’s fault”. Both of these found varying degrees of acceptance – though several felt that they were being asked to pay for the mistakes of others, and even those who did feel that Labour were largely to blame felt the government still made rather too much of this point.

“Labour are quite a lot to blame. But they need to stop going on about it, it’s getting boring.”
- Most participants said that the cuts had had some impact on them, but this was because everything that contributed to declining living standards was regarded as a “cut” – not just apparent reductions in public spending. Rising prices, stagnant private sector wages and higher utility bills were all cited as examples of cuts that had affected them.
- Most did not know that the government had said it was protecting the NHS budget, and even fewer believed it. Many would have doubted the political promise in the abstract, but it became impossible to accept – and more to the point, irrelevant – if it seemed to be contradicted by their own experience or that of people they knew.

“GPs don’t write as many prescriptions as they used to.”

“Wards are closing.”

“My doctor says we are waiting longer for appointments because of the cuts.”



“There is no receptionist. You have to check yourself in at outpatients.”
- Nobody in the groups had heard that the government was increasing the International Development budget – but more strikingly, very few knew what it was. Asked to guess, several assumed it was to do with developing foreign trade links or international relations. Most – though not all – were opposed to increasing overseas aid, particularly when the government was having to make cuts elsewhere.
- Given the state of the economy and the extent to which they felt their living standards were falling, several felt that the cuts were too fast and too drastic. However, when asked to choose between the two arguments – that the deficit was a major problem and needed to be tackled urgently, or that the economic situation could be eased by reducing the deficit more slowly – most chose “Plan A”. This was because they largely accepted that arguing the cuts were “too far, too fast” meant advocating borrowing more for longer – which would exacerbate the problem in the long run while doing little to improve things now given the scale of the crisis.
- In the poll, 48% agreed “the cuts are too deep and are being made too quickly” (exactly the same as the proportion who said this in August), 41% said they were “necessary and unavoidable” and 11% said they “do not go far enough”. Two fifths agreed “the government’s spending cuts and tax rises are hurting the economy. It should cut taxes, and/or cut spending less fast, even if that means we go on borrowing more for longer”, while 60% felt “borrowing more at a time when we already owe so much will simply make matters worse... we have to bring the debt and the deficit under control even if it has some painful effects”.
- Poll respondents were evenly split over whether the Conservatives or Labour would do the better job on “helping businesses to grow” and “making banks and bankers behave responsibly”. Labour were ahead 60% to 40% on “creating jobs”. The Conservatives led on “cutting borrowing and debts”, “steering the economy through tough times”, “stopping Britain getting into the same problems as Greece and Italy”.

- Labour's Five Point Plan for the economy (of which none had heard) did little to help restore the party's credibility. When explained, some participants thought some of the five proposals had some merit, but – as with government growth initiatives – sounded small given the crisis. They did not need to be taken seriously because they were not likely ever to be implemented, and sounded as though they would cost money, further underlining suspicions that Labour were not serious about the deficit.
- Respondents were more likely to think that, had Labour been in government since the last election, the economic situation would be worse than it is now (39%) than better (21%). 41% said it would be about the same as it is now. People were more evenly divided over whether things would be better (19%) or worse (24%) with a Conservative government rather than a coalition, with most (57%) saying the situation would be about the same. This was reflected in the groups. The scale of the crisis meant it would probably make little difference which party was in power, but if anything, given Labour's record and their current message, a Labour government might have continued with unaffordable spending and made the situation worse.

Full poll results



8,000 adults were interviewed online between 11 and 16 November 2011. Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in Great Britain.

1. Do you recognise this person?

	Yes	No
	62%	36%
	51%	49%

- 73% of men said they recognised George Osborne. Only 50% of women said they recognised him, and 50% did not.
- 62% of men said they recognised Ed Balls, compared to 40% of women.

2. Who is he? [Those who say they recognise the picture]

	
George Osborne / the Chancellor of the Exchequer (80%)	Ed Balls / the Shadow Chancellor (90%)
Nick Clegg (6%)	Ed Miliband (1%)
David Cameron (2%)	Other answers (4%)
Ed Miliband (2%)	Don't know/can't remember (4%)
Ed Balls (1%)	
Other answers (5%)	
Don't know/can't remember (5%)	

3. Which of the following do you most trust to manage Britain's economy overall?

<i>Split sample A</i>		Govt lead
George Osborne, the Chancellor	56%	12pts
Ed Balls, the Shadow Chancellor	44%	

<i>Split sample B</i>		Govt lead
David Cameron and George Osborne	57%	14pts
Ed Miliband and Ed Balls	43%	

<i>Split sample A</i>		Govt lead
David Cameron, George Osborne and Nick Clegg	58%	16pts
Ed Miliband and Ed Balls	42%	

- The biggest difference within the three samples is among Liberal Democrat voters. 2010 Lib Dem voters preferred Balls to Osborne by 6 points, were evenly divided over Cameron & Osborne or Miliband & Balls, and preferred Cameron, Osborne & Clegg over Miliband and Balls by 60% to 40%.

4. Below is a list of things about the economy that some people have said concern them at the moment. Please tick the *three* that most concern you.

Rising prices	73%
The level of the country's debts	43%
The European economic crisis	42%
Low interest rates for savings	31%
Job insecurity	28%
Trouble finding a job	25%
Big loans or credit card debts	13%
Trouble finding somewhere affordable to live	12%
Difficulty making mortgage payments	7%
Problems getting credit from a bank	7%

- Women (75%) were more likely to name rising prices in their top three concerns than men (70%). They were also more likely to be worried than men about job insecurity (30% to 26%) and trouble finding a job (29% to 21%).
- For 18-24 year-olds, trouble finding a job came second (51%) after rising prices (66%). 29% were concerned about finding somewhere affordable to live, compared to 12% overall.
- Nearly two thirds (65%) of those aged 65+ were concerned about low interest rates for savings. They were also more likely than other groups to be concerned about the level of the country's debts (64%) and the European economic crisis (66%).
- People in the private sector were more likely to be worried about rising prices (73%) than those in the public sector (67%). People in the public sector were more likely to be concerned about job insecurity (44%) than those in the private sector (37%).
- 66% of ABs named rising prices among their top three concerns, compared to 71% of C1s, and 78% of C2s and DEs.

5. Which *two* of the following do you think are most to blame for the problems of the British economy?

British banks	58%
The last Labour government	40%
People who borrowed more than they could afford	37%
American banks	27%
The current coalition government	14%
The American government	5%
None of these	3%

- 76% of those saying they would vote Conservative tomorrow named the last Labour government, compared to 8% of those who would vote Labour.
- 28% of those who would vote Labour blame the current government, compared to 2% of Conservatives and 6% of Lib Dems.
- People in the private sector are more likely to blame the last Labour government (40%) than those in the private sector (30%). Public sector workers are more likely to blame the coalition (19%) than those in the private sector (11%) – though even those in the public sector are more likely to blame the last Labour government than the current coalition.

6. Here are two arguments that have been made about the amount the UK government borrows and how quickly this should be reduced through spending cuts and tax rises. Please say which of them is closer to your own view.

The government's spending cuts and tax rises are hurting the economy. It should cut taxes, and/or cut spending less fast, even if that means we go on borrowing more for longer , because given how much we already owe, borrowing an extra few billion pounds cannot do much more harm	40%
Borrowing more at a time when we already owe so much money will simply make matters worse, as the country will have to pay even more money back in the longer term – we have to bring the debt and the deficit under control even if it has some painful effects for the economy in the short term	60%

- Two thirds of Labour voters agreed with the first statement – the only group which preferred the first statement to the second. Those in the public sector were very slightly more likely to agree with the second statement than the first (by 51% to 49%).

7. Which party, Labour or the Conservatives, do you think would do the better job on each of the following – even if you think neither would do a particularly good one?

	Labour	Conservatives
Helping businesses to grow	50%	50%
Creating jobs	60%	40%
Cutting Britain's borrowing and debts	32%	68%
Steering the economy through tough times	43%	57%
Stopping Britain getting into the same problems as Greece and Italy	38%	62%
Making banks and bankers behave responsibly	49%	51%

8. Thinking about the government's proposed cuts in public spending, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

The cuts are too deep and are being made too quickly	48%
The cuts are necessary and unavoidable and are the right thing for the economy	41%
The cuts do not go far enough – the government should do more to reduce public spending	11%

- Among voters aged 18-54, a small majority says the cuts are too deep and too quick. For those aged 55+, they are either the right thing or do not go far enough.
- Current Labour voters (81%) and those in the public sector (58%) are the most likely to say the cuts are too deep and too quick.
- Current Conservative voters (89%), Lib Dem voters (64%), ABs (59%), those in the South East (56%) and those in the private sector (55%) are most likely to say the cuts are right or do not go far enough.
- The proportion saying the cuts are too deep and too quick is identical to that when we asked the same question between 19-24 August 2011.*

9. Thinking about Britain's economy, which of the following comes closest to your own view?

Although times are difficult now, the right decisions are being made and things will improve significantly over the next three or four years	49%
In three or four years' time, the economy will be no better, or even worse than it is now	51%

- Apart from Conservative voters (87%), the groups who took the optimistic view were Lib Dem voters (64%), those aged 65+ (58%), ABs (56%), people in the South East (53%), people in the Midlands (51%) and those in the private sector (51%).
- The proportion saying the economy will be no better in three or four years is identical to that when we asked the same question between 19-24 August 2011.*

10. If Britain had had a Labour government since the last general election, instead of the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition, do you think Britain's economic situation would be better, about the same, or worse than it is now?



Better with a Labour government than it is now	21%
About the same with a Labour government as it is now	41%
Worse with a Labour government than it is now	39%

- Women were much more likely to say 'about the same as it is now' (45%) than men (35%). Those aged 18-24 were also much more likely than average to think things would be little different with a Labour government (55%).
- Those in the private sector were much more likely to say the situation would be worse with a Labour government (38%) than those in the public sector (28%).
- Only 50% of current Labour voters said the situation would be better with a Labour government; 44% said it would be no different.

11. If Britain had had a Conservative government since the last general election, instead of a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, do you think Britain's economic situation would be...

Better with a Conservative government than it is now	19%
About the same with a Conservative government as it is now	57%
Worse with a Conservative government than it is now	24%

12. Please pick up to three of the of the following words or phrases that you think best describes George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer / Ed Balls, Labour's Shadow Chancellor.

	
Smug (22%)	Out of his depth (20%)
Arrogant (22%)	Arrogant (19%)
Out of touch (21%)	Smug (17%)
Out of his depth (21%)	Out of touch (15%)
Understands what needs to be done (17%)	Understands what needs to be done (11%)
Competent (14%)	Weak (10%)
Decisive (9%)	Competent (9%)
Up to the job (9%)	Explains himself clearly (8%)
Weak (7%)	Up to the job (8%)
Gets things done (7%)	Strong (7%)
Explains himself clearly (6%)	Fair (7%)
Strong (5%)	Likeable (7%)
Fair (5%)	Listens (6%)
Safe pair of hands (4%)	Decisive (6%)
Likeable (2%)	On my side (5%)

