



**My husband and I spent decades subsidising our 'poor' friends...**



*...then we heard they'd bought a second home and a £75,000 Range Rover!*

# TORIES TRAIL LABOUR ON DEFENCE, TAX, MIGRATION... EVEN BREXIT

**But exclusive poll for Mail finds 45 per cent still DON'T want a Starmer government**

**THE Tories trail Labour on every major political issue, a landmark poll has found.**

Sir Keir Starmer's party enjoys a commanding lead over the Conservatives on the issues of most concern to

### EXCLUSIVE

By **Jason Groves**  
Political Editor

voters, including a 35-point advantage on the NHS.

And in a major wake-up call for Rishi Sunak, the Conservatives also trail Labour in a string of

traditional Tory policy areas, including defence, tax, immigration – and even Brexit.

The survey of more than 5,400 voters was conducted by former Tory treasurer Lord Ashcroft.

It reveals that 45 per cent of the public do not want a Labour government, but its findings will

**Turn to Page 6**

## DIARY EXCLUSIVE



This is a CA Caption WOB caption style at 10pt

# GOODBYE BRITAIN

## Harry registers America as his official home

SEE PAGE XX



# Vital issues and Keir leading on them all

Continued from Page One

ple pressure on Mr Sunak to demonstrate to Tory MPs that he can find a way to avoid an electoral wipeout.

The results suggest that most voters believe the Conservatives have lost their way – and that Sir Keir is on course for a thumping victory.

Just 13 per cent of people believe the Conservative Party's values are closest to those of the public and just 11 per cent think the Tories will win the election.

The survey gives Labour an overall lead of 21 points. It puts support for Sir Keir's party on 44 per cent, the Conservatives on 23, Reform UK in third place on 11, the Green Party on 8 and the Liberal Democrats on just 6.

If repeated at this year's general election, it would produce a landslide Labour majority of historic proportions.

Lord Ashcroft said the findings highlighted the dilemma facing the PM about whether to hold out for an autumn election as planned or gamble on a summer poll. 'We can surely understand why a beleaguered PM would want to put off calling an election for as long as possible in the hope that something might turn up,' he said. 'But what if things just keep getting worse?'

Some 34 per cent of respondents said Sir Keir would make the best prime minister, compared with just 19 per cent who backed Mr Sunak. In a finding that will be noted by leadership rivals, just 40 per cent of those who voted Conservative in 2019 think Mr Sunak would make the best PM.

But in a sign that Sir Keir still has work to do, 48 per cent said they did not know which man would do the best job of leading the country. There are also concerns about how Sir Keir will fare on the world stage, with just 5 per cent of voters saying a combination of him and Donald Trump would be the best outcome for Britain.

On the economy, which Mr Sunak has made his central pitch to voters, Sir Keir and Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves are identified by 35 per cent of voters as likely to

## 'What if things just keep getting worse?'

do a 'better job', compared with 23 per cent who back Mr Sunak and Jeremy Hunt.

Just 8 per cent of voters say they are satisfied with the current government, including just one in ten of those who voted Conservative in 2019. However, in a rare silver lining for the PM, 37 per cent say that although they are dissatisfied with the Government, they still prefer it to a potential Labour administration.

The finding suggests there is potential scope for the Conservatives to win back voters who have defected to Reform if they can persuade them it is the only way to avoid a Labour landslide.

But even here, 56 per cent of voters say they would prefer a Labour government, suggesting that Mr Sunak would also have to win over current Labour supporters to have any hope of clinging to power.

The survey suggests that making a success of the plan to deport Channel migrants to Rwanda is vital to galvanising Conservative support. Two-thirds of those who voted for the Tories in 2019 want the flagship scheme to be implemented 'as soon as possible'.

But support among the wider electorate is divided, with 38 per cent wanting the scheme to go ahead, while 42 per cent support Sir Keir's call to scrap it.

Two-thirds of Labour voters want the scheme to be axed, with most describing it as a 'harsh way to treat people'. A fifth of Tory voters also want to ditch the scheme, mainly on the grounds it 'sounds expensive and impractical'.

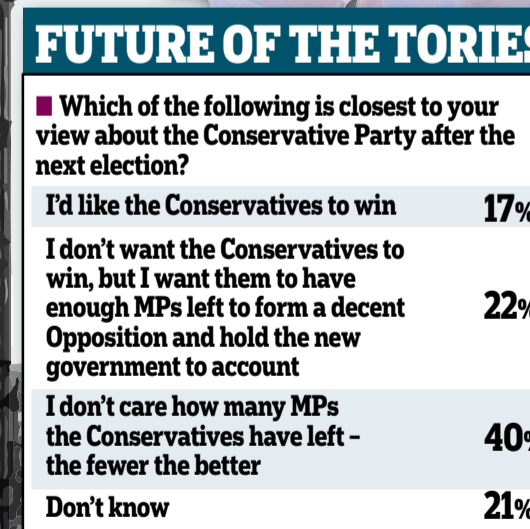
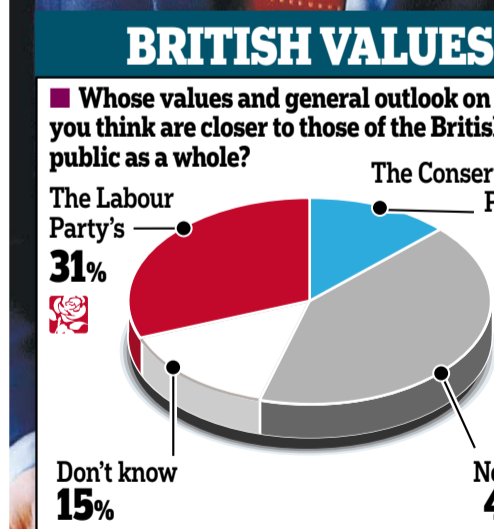
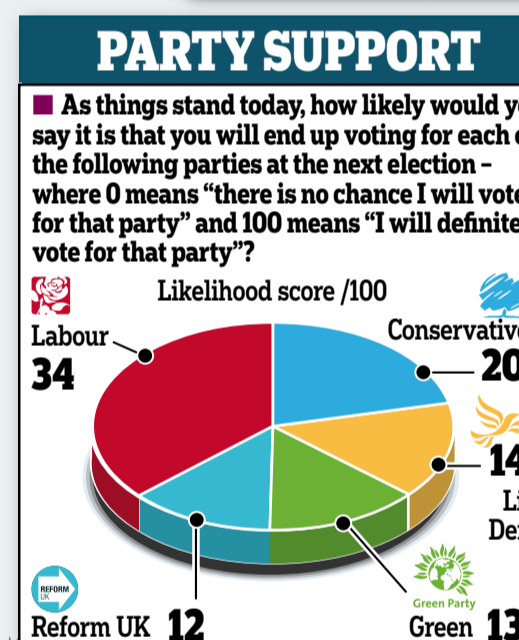
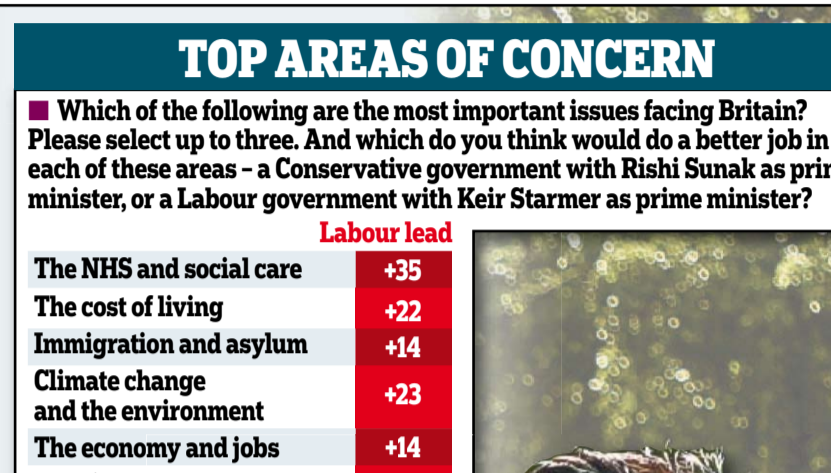
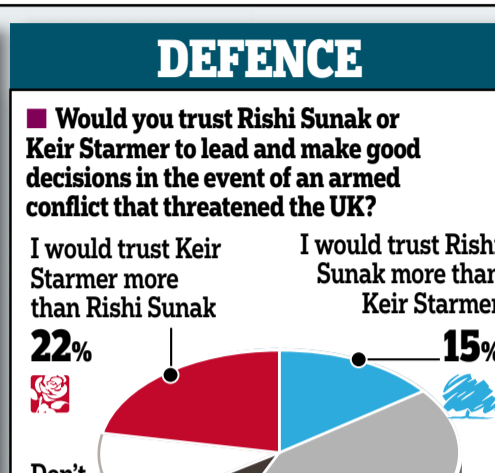
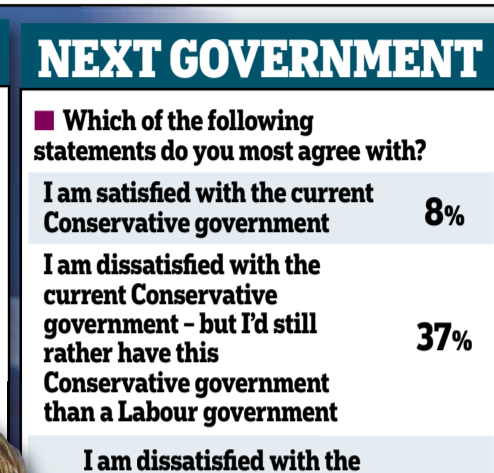
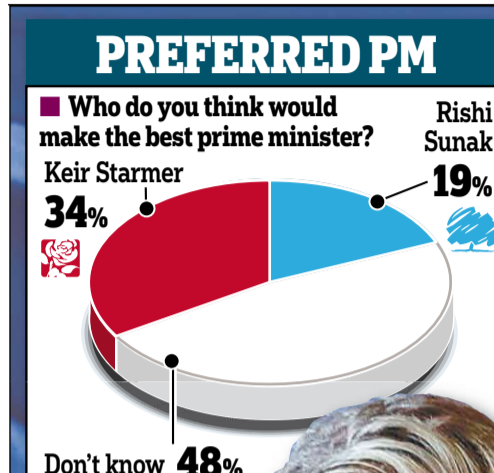
Opinion on whether to quit the European Convention on Human Rights is divided. A third of Tory voters want to quit the agreement, but the idea is supported by just 16 per cent of the wider public. Elsewhere, the poll sets out the huge scale of the challenge facing the Tories. Of the 16 issues identified by voters as most important, Labour leads in every single one. Even on Brexit, which was bitterly opposed by Sir Keir, Labour leads by a margin of 31 per cent to

22. On the NHS and social care, 49 per cent say Labour would do a better job, compared with just 14 per cent for the Conservatives. Labour also enjoys leads of more than 30 points on housing and welfare. On the cost of living, Labour leads by a margin of 41:19, while the margin on the economy and jobs is 37:23. On immigration, which was named by Tory voters as the most important issue, Labour leads by a margin of 34:20. Just four years after Jeremy Cor-

byn quit as Labour leader, the party has also taken a narrow lead on defence and security. The turnaround follows a concerted effort by Sir Keir to reposition Labour on the issue, including an article in the Mail last week in which he insisted Labour would never again vacillate on the nuclear deterrent. It may also reflect public concern at the Government's failure to sanction a major increase in defence spending at a time of growing global uncertainty. Lord

Ashcroft said that although national security was 'climbing the political agenda', the Conservatives 'should not expect a dividend' of the kind they might have enjoyed in the past. Writing in the Mail, he said: 'My latest poll now finds Labour to be ahead on the issue, for the first time I can remember in my years of polling. Only 28 per cent of voters think Labour would do a better job on defence, but the Tories languish on 26 per cent.'

Comment – Page 14



## MPs' defence cash anger

DESPAIRING Conservative MPs opened fire last night after the Treasury confirmed there will be no increase in defence spending before the general election. Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's refusal to commit to a cash boost could mean the Tories face an even tougher battle at the ballot box. The attack was led by former defence ministers James Heappey, Mark Francois and Tobias Ellwood. Mr Heappey submitted a parliamentary question asking when an increase in defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP would happen. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Laura Trott, confirmed the 'pathway' to 2.5 per cent would not be 'set out' until after the election. Mr Heappey said: 'I was hugely disappointed by this answer.'

# Starmmer is hardly Sir Winston, but Labour IS more trusted on defence

## COMMENTARY By Lord Ashcroft

IN A survey just under a year ago, I found that defence and national security was the one area in which the Conservatives were still trusted more than Labour. As the world seems to become more unstable by the week, and with UK forces taking part in an operation to shoot down Iranian drones, might these issues come to play a bigger part in people's voting decisions, to the Tories' advantage? There is certainly evidence that defence is on the minds of more voters. Only 8 per cent named it among the top three issues facing the country a year ago, compared to 13 per cent today. But four times as many mention the cost of living and even more name the NHS. In any case, the Conservatives should not expect a dividend if national security is climbing the political agenda. My latest poll finds that Labour is ahead on the issue, for the first time I can remember in my years of polling. Only 28 per cent of voters think Labour would do a better job on defence, but the Tories languish on 26 per cent, with nearly half of voters saying they don't know. In the event of an armed conflict that threatened the UK, only just over one in five say they would trust Keir Starmer more than Rishi Sunak to lead and make good decisions, but only 15 per cent say the reverse. who voted Conservative four and a half years ago say they are satisfied with the Government. The loss of trust in the Tories that followed the Partygate revelations has not been repaired, and for many more the problem is simply one of competence. Though inflation is falling, most people say they feel worse off than at the time of the last election. Despite high taxes and record spending, public services such as the NHS are just not good enough. Some who had high hopes that Sunak would get a grip on things after the post-2016 circus now lament that nothing seems to be changing for the better. It's not surprising, then, that most people – even most 2019 Tories – now expect Starmer to win, though they are divided as to whether we will see a big Labour majority or a modest one. With some studies suggesting the Conservatives could lose more than 200 seats, around one in five say they want the defeated Tories to be left with enough MPs to form a decent Opposition and hold the new government to account – but four in ten, including around one in seven of those who voted for the party in 2019, say they don't care how many Tories are left in Parliament: as far as they are concerned, 'the fewer the better'. On the 'sexting' blackmail scandal that dominated recent Westminster coverage, it is possible in a certain light to detect a degree of sympathy in my poll. Six in ten voters say they have been targeted by a scam, including 12 per cent who admit to falling for one. When it came to sending texts with inappropriate pictures, a clear majority thought MPs were probably no more or less likely to do this sort of thing than anyone else. But in political terms the broader moral of that story, if there is one, is that when things are going wrong for a government it is hard for it to catch a break of any kind. We can surely understand why a beleaguered PM would want to put off calling an election for as long as possible in the hope that something might turn up. But what if things just keep getting worse? Lord Ashcroft is an international businessman, author, philanthropist and pollster. His research is at LordAshcroftPolls.com. Follow him on X/Facebook @LordAshcroft