Will supermajority fears save Tories?

38% of 2019 Conservative supporters likely to back party to ensure it survives

By Jason Groves
Political Editor

MORE than a third of people who voted Conservative in 2019 say they are more likely to stick with the party this time over concerns about a Labour supermajority.

A poll by Lord Ashcroft found that 38 per cent of former Tory voters said the prospect of a big Labour majority makes them more inclined to back them again 'to ensure the Conservative Party survives and there is a proper opposition'.

Among them, one in six of those planning to vote Reform say fears of a Labour supermajority have made them more likely to return to the Tory fold. Some 35 per cent of undecided voters who voted Tory in 2019 also say they are now considering backing the Conservatives again.

The findings will give fresh impetus to Tory efforts to persuade disaffected former supporters to return and head off the prospect of a Labour landslide next week.

Work and pensions secretary Mel Stride yesterday said he was 'extremely worried' about the prospect of a 'totally unrestrained' Labour government with a 'massive majority, which is what we appear to be heading towards, with very little opposition in Parliament'.

He added: 'I would just say to people on that score that I think it's really important that we think very carefully about holding Labour to account, if they are to win this coming General Election, and that people do vote Conservative so that we have a decent opposition at least to an overweening Labour Party.'

However, Lord Ashcroft found that 42 per cent of 2019 Conserva-

'Holding Labour to account'

tive backers say the idea of a supermajority will make 'no difference' to their vote this time, while 13 per cent believe the Tories are going to lose badly so they 'might as well vote for another party'.

The survey found that 73 per cent of voters now think Labour will win a majority, with 51 per cent predicting a landslide.

The poll found a slight tightening of the overall standings, with Labour down three points on the previous week on 40 per cent, the Conservatives up one on 19, Reform down one on 17, the Lib Dems up one on 10 per cent and the Greens up two on 9 per cent.

It also uncovered concerns about Labour's plans for the 'strategic' release of green belt land for house building.

Some 61 per cent of people said the green belt should be protected 'even if that means we end up building fewer houses overall', while just 28 per cent said 'urgent' housing needs should come first.

Labour's manifesto states that the party will 'preserve' the green belt but says it will allow the

release of some land for housing on a 'strategic' basis. Labour has also said it will redesignate some low quality land as 'grey belt'.

Sir Keir Starmer last week denied claims by a Labour source that the party was ready to 'flatten the whole green belt' to build more houses.

The new poll also found that Rachel Reeves is now Britain's 'least unpopular' politician. Ms Reeves, who hopes to become Britain's first female chancellor if Labour win next week, had the highest satisfaction rating of any leading politician in a survey carried out by Lord Ashcroft Polling.

But, in a sign of public disillusionment with mainstream politics, the survey found no figure currently enjoys a positive rating.

Ms Reeves topped the poll with a net satisfaction rating of -1, well ahead of Sir Keir on -14 and her counterpart Jeremy Hunt on -36.

The Shadow Chancellor has risen to prominence by promising to impose fiscal discipline on Labour's plans. Writing in the Mail, Lord Ashcroft said she now appeared to be Britain's 'least unpopular' politician but added: 'We'll see whether those numbers survive her first Budget.' In a bleak finding for the Tories, Rishi Sunak came bottom, with a net satisfaction rating of -50.

The highest ranked well-known Tory politician was Commons leader Penny Mordaunt on -12. Security minister Tom Tugendhat rated higher on -5, but two-thirds of voters said they did not know enough about him to judge.

Both Ms Mordaunt and Mr Tugendhat are expected to stand in the race to succeed Mr Sunak as Tory leader if the Conservatives lose the election – and they manage to hold their seats.

Nigel Farage was languishing on a satisfaction rating of -31. The poll found 24 per cent of voters (and 46 per cent of Tory voters) were interested in the idea of the Reform leader and 'would consider' voting for him. A further 16 per cent said they would not vote for him but liked to see the main parties challenged. But in a sign that his overall appeal is limited, 49 per cent said they did not like him and wished he and his party 'weren't part of British politics'.

THE STATE OF PLAY WITH JUST ONE WEEK TO GO

■ Thinking about the Election on the 4th of July, which of the following best describes you?

	% All	HOW PARTIES' 2019 VOTERS FEEL NOW		
		Con	**Lab**	**Lib Dem**
I have definitely decided how I'm going to vote	50	53	66	55
I am leaning towards a party, but I may change my mind before Election day	28	32	26	34
I'll probably vote, but I'm completely undecided who for	7	10	3	7
I probably won't vote	13	5	3	3
Don't know	2	1	2	0

The proportion saying they had definitely decided is up from 44% in the last two weeks

■ How positive or negative, if at all, do you feel towards each of the following people?

	% net score (total positive – total negative)	% saying 'don't know enough about this person'		% net score (total positive – total negative)	% saying 'don't know enough about this person'
Rachel Reeves	-1	42	Kemi Badenoch	-15	53
Ed Davey	-5	37	Ed Miliband	-17	18
Angela Rayner	-6	29	Nigel Farage	-31	7
Penny Mordaunt	-12	33	Jeremy Hunt	-36	15
Keir Starmer	-14	7	Rishi Sunak	-50	5

■ 'Green belt' land means countryside around some towns and cities, currently protected from most building. Some argue more 'green belt' land should be used for house building, while others disagree. Which comes closer to your view?

	HOW PARTIES' 2019 VOTERS FEEL NOW				CURRENT 2024 LIKELY VOTE				
%	All	C	L	LD	All	C	L	LD	R UK
We urgently need to build more homes in Britain, even if that means building on parts of the green belt	26	22	34	26	26	22	33	32	20
We need to protect the green belt, even if that means we end up building fewer houses overall	61	70	54	65	61	69	55	59	72
Don't know	13	8	12	10	13	8	12	9	8

Most (55%) prospective Labour voters said we need to protect the green belt even if that means building fewer houses

40% (-3) Labour
19% (+1) Conservative
17% (-1) Reform UK
10% (+1) Lib Dem
9% (+2) Green

(*Change on last week)

■ Looking at those more likely than not to vote for a particular party (those whose highest likelihood of voting for one party was at least 50/100), this implies current vote shares of:

■ Thinking about the economy, including things like prices, jobs, wages and living standards, do you think:

	% All	HOW PARTIES' 2019 VOTERS FEEL NOW		
		Con	**Lab**	**Lib Dem**
Things are starting to improve, and the Government deserves some credit for that	21	48	4	16
Things are starting to improve, but not because of anything the Government has done	20	18	24	32
Things are not improving yet, and that is largely the Government's fault	45	24	63	41
Things are not improving yet, but the government is not to blame for that	4	5	3	4
Don't know	9	5	5	7

41% say things are starting to improve, while 49% say they are not

■ Some studies have predicted a big majority for Labour at the General Election. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

	%	2019 Con voters
The idea of a big Labour majority makes me more inclined to vote Tory again to ensure the Conservative Party survives and there is a proper opposition		38
If the Conservatives are going to lose badly anyway, I might as well vote for another party		13
The idea of a big Labour majority makes no difference to how I will vote		42
Don't know		7

17% of 2019 Conservatives who now say they are likely to vote Reform UK say the idea of a large Tory majority makes them more inclined to vote Conservative, as do 35% of 2019 Tories who now say they don't know or won't vote

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Voters see Rishi as leading a gang out for themselves

by Lord Ashcroft

A COUPLE of weeks ago I reflected here that the Conservatives could not correct in a month-long campaign what had gone wrong over several years. But what they could do, it turns out, is find a series of new and innovative ways to make things worse.

Even the Tories' harshest critics would have to concede that Rishi Sunak doesn't seem to have much luck. A few days ago, the PM must surely have thought things had hit rock bottom, only to be floored by a spectacular scandal which might not be his fault but is very much his problem.

Sunak is said to be furious about aides betting on the election date that they knew before anyone else. I'm sure he is.

But even if it's just a handful of bad apples parlaying their insider knowledge into a few quid at the bookies — stupid and reprehensible though that may be — it adds to a picture of a party shot through with corruption. The obvious echoes of Partygate suggest that the rules being only for the little people was not merely a Boris-era phenomenon, but an institutional problem for the Conservatives.

However innocent Sunak may be in this particular case, voters still fit him into the general picture: his wife's non-dom status and Covid contracts for top Tory contacts — regularly raised in focus groups — all add to an impression of a gang just out for themselves.

All of this overrides what the Tories once hoped would save them — a belief that a recovering economy would prove their plan was working and that we should stick to it.

Nearly half of 2019 Tories say they are interested in the party's ideas and would consider voting for them; another quarter say that even if they can't see themselves voting Reform this time, they like the fact that they are around to challenge the status quo.

Suspicions of Labour remain, especially on taxes, debt and immigration. But in focus groups, some wavering former Tories have started to say that at least Labour will be a change and their intentions are good, even if they won't deliver everything they promise.

How much of this is for real and how much these voters are merely reconciling themselves to the inevitable is hard to say.

At the same time, another strand of thought is also emerging: a suspicion that after a few days the new administration will say 'we've seen the books now and it's even worse than we thought', giving itself permission to be more punitive than Starmer and Rachel Reeves dare admit before July 4.

The lack of fiscal headroom combined with the sheer absence of enthusiasm for Labour means that a new government could

former Conservatives are divided as to whether the most effective opposition after the election will come from the Tories or from Nigel Farage and Reform UK.

FOLLOWING news this week that inflation was down to 2 per cent, my poll found that more than four in ten voters believed that things were indeed starting to improve — but only half of them were inclined to give the government any credit.

Meanwhile, the half who thought things were no better were all too ready to give the government the blame.

The Conservatives' new message — that people should vote for them to ensure a Labour government faces some kind of opposition — seems to be faring little better. More than half of all voters now expect a large Labour majority, up from 35 per cent at the start of the campaign.

Just under four in ten 2019 Tory voters say the idea of a Keir Starmer landslide makes them more inclined to stick with the Conservatives — but slightly more say this makes no difference to their decision, and for a fair chunk, the inevitability of defeat means they feel free to vote for whoever they like. In any case,

quickly run into problems, or at least unpopularity.

Last week my poll found solid opposition to revaluing properties for council tax, which most would see simply as a ruse for the state to grab more cash. This week I found strong and widespread opposition to Labour's plans for housebuilding. Only just over a quarter overall agreed that we urgently need to build more homes in Britain, even if that means building on parts of the green belt.

MORE than six in ten — including a majority of likely Labour voters — said we need to protect the green belt even if that means we end up building fewer houses. Starmer will soon find that a big Commons majority doesn't mean carte blanche.

My poll also found that Reeves herself is perhaps Britain's most popular (or least unpopular) politician: 20 per cent have a positive view of her, and only 21 per cent a negative one.

Then again, 42 per cent say they don't know enough about her to have a view. We'll see whether those numbers survive her first Budget. More realistically – and perhaps surprisingly – we can say that the most popular well-known politician is Angela Rayner, who scores some way above her party leader.

Both do better than all senior Tories, and well above the prime minister, who must be counting the hours until it's finally over.

■ Lord Ashcroft is an international businessman, author, philanthropist and pollster. His research is at LordAshcroftPolls.com. Follow him on X/Facebook @LordAshcroft

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Reform candidate 'said he'd slaughter migrants'

By David Churchill
Chief Political Correspondent

A REFORM UK candidate said he would 'slaughter' migrants arriving on small boats and have their families 'taken out'.

Leslie Lilley, who is running for the party in Southend East and Rochford, reportedly made the threats on his Facebook account.

In a post in June 2020 he commented on the arrival of a small boat in Dover, saying: 'I hope I'm near one of these scumbags one day. I won't run away, I'll slaughter them then have their family taken out.'

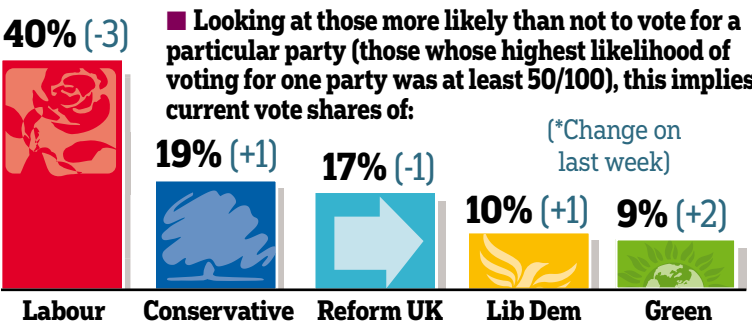Within weeks he posted again, railing against 'more scum' entering the UK. 'I hope your family get robbed, beaten or attacked', he added, according to The Times.

Mr Lilley also suggested that razor wire should be carried by Border Force guards to tear the boats making the dangerous journey across the Channel.

In another concerning post, he commented 'gas' alongside laughing emojis under a video of Muslims praying, the newspaper said.

The 70-year-old also claimed that the Covid-19 pandemic was a plan to 'depopulate the world' and

was 'mass murder by government'. He is one of 41 Reform candidates who are 'friends' on Facebook with the fascist leader Gary Raikes.

Raikes is a former organiser for the British National Party and heads the New British Union, modelled off Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.

Meanwhile, the Reform candidate in Meriden and Solihull East, Malcolm Sedgley, has likened the Royal Family to 'Nazis' and branded the late Queen a 'tax avoiding OAP on benefits'.

He wrote alongside it: 'An OAP on benefits, heading an extended family with barely a job between them, manages to save a few quid and sneak it away for a rainy day. What's wrong with that?'

In one social media post from 2019, Mr Sedgley said: 'Just because the Royal Family believe

they have an almost divine right to rule because of their superior genetics, and that the plebs should swear allegiance to them and show deference at every opportunity, doesn't make them Nazis. Oh... hang on.'

In a post from 2017, he shared a link to a BBC story with the headline, 'Tax haven secrets of the ultra-rich exposed', which included a picture of the late Queen.

Online posts: Leslie Lilley