

Voting Intention Autumn 2019: What do we know of what the public think?

Danny Dorling

At the very end of September 2019 Ipsos MORI, the polling organisation, revealed that 8 in every 10 people polled in the UK were dissatisfied with how the government was running the country.¹ Only two other governments had ever been more unpopular; that run by Theresa May just before she was ousted from office earlier in 2019; and that run by John Major just before he lost power to Labour in 1997. These comparisons have been made every year since 1977 and only Conservative governments have ever managed to be this unpopular, and then only for a brief period. The current Conservative government has the opportunity to take poll position and become the most unpopular government in at least four decades, possibly ever, if it plays its cards right.

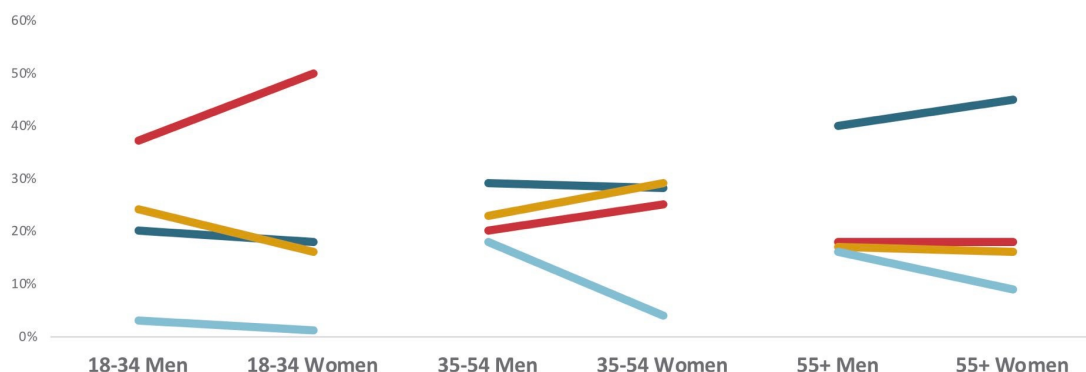
Ipsos also revealed some remarkable information on who most favoured which political party. They did this by combining a number of polls taken during July, August and September 2019 to allow voting intention to be reliably disaggregated by the age and sex of all voters. They summarised their findings in the graphic shown here, where red stands for Labour, dark blue for the Conservatives, orange for the Liberals and light blue for the Brexit party.

The Labour party held a significant lead among adults aged below 35. This was especially the case for younger women, a majority of whom said they would vote Labour if a general election were held tomorrow. There was almost no support for the Brexit party among people aged under 35. Women of all ages were particularly unimpressed by the Brexit party.

For people in middle age, 35 to 54 years old, men most supported the Conservative party and women the Liberals; but the Labour party was just fractionally below the Liberals in popularity at this time. The Brexit party was least popular among men of these ages and remarkably unpopular among middle aged women.

Age is still the great divide

How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow



Base: c.2,000 British adults aged 18+, July-September 2019

Ipsos MORI

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

For people aged 55 years and above the Conservative party held a commanding lead in the summer of 2019. They were no longer the party of the rich. They were now the party of the old. Older women were slightly more likely to support the Conservatives than older men, but that was entirely attributable to the lack of support for the Brexit party at this time among older women. Just over 20% of all people aged 55 and above supported the Labour party and just under 20% supported the Liberals.

Because of the way voting is organised in UK general elections, in most seats voting Liberal will not result in a Liberal MP winning that seat. This means that more detailed survey data needs to be looked into, to try to guess how those who most prefer the Liberal party might actually vote in an upcoming general election.

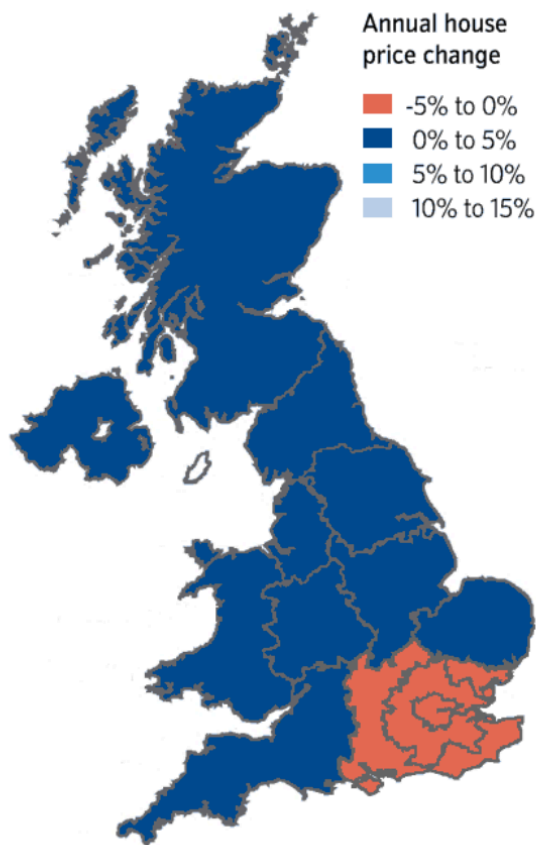
Lord Ashcroft conducted a large poll of 8,075 British adults who were asked a series of questions between the 12th and 17th September 2019.² This was before people learnt that the proroguing of parliament had been unlawful. Of people who said they had voted Liberal Democrat in the general election of 2017, 75% said they would never vote for the Brexit party, 39% that they would never vote for the Conservative party; but only 22% of these voters, the most loyal of Liberals, said they would never vote for the Labour party. Thus four out of five people who voted Liberal at the last general election would consider voting Labour at the next general election. It is likely that an even higher proportion of current Liberal supporters would do so.

Lord Ashcroft's September 2019 poll also revealed that if those who had voted Liberal in 2017 HAD to choose (the word "had" was capitalised in the question) then only 35% would favour a Conservative Government with Boris Johnson as Prime Minister as compared to 65% of Liberal voters who would prefer, given that choice, a Labour Government with Jeremy Corbyn as Prime Minister.

Lord Ashcroft uses a different set of age ranges to Ipsos MORI. He has more older groups in what he reports, which makes the fate of the Conservatives look better. In his September 2019 polling Labour was ahead of the Conservatives by 19 points amongst those aged 18-24; by 5 points among those aged 25-49; but it was below by 17 points among those aged 50-64;

and below by a massive 34 points among people aged 65+. Lord Ashcroft does not discriminate between men and women when he produces his tables of data, nevertheless his work reveals the same huge age divide as the earlier summer polling did. If anything, this gap has widened.

Finally, in September 2019 the Nationwide Building society mapped the most recent changes in house prices in the UK. Prices were now falling across England as a whole; but with the greatest falls being recorded in London and the South East.³ The house price falls that had begun in London in August 2016 had now solidly spread out to the area of greatest Conservative support – the South East ring around London. Those most likely to own their home outright in the South east, outside of London, tend to be older people who normally vote Conservative. The value of all their houses is now falling and the fall in the value of their homes is currently accelerating.



Nationwide Building Society Estimates – published end of Q3 2019

¹ <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/8-in-10-dissatisfied-how-government-running-country>

² <https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/09/state-of-the-nation-my-new-polling-on-the-political-landscape-and-the-battle-lines-for-the-next-election/>

³ https://www.nationwide.co.uk/-/media/MainSite/documents/about/house-price-index/2019/Sep_Q3_2019.pdf

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Danny Dorling is a British social geographer and is the Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography of the School of Geography and the Environment of the University of Oxford and the author of a number of books including the recent "Rule Britannia: From Brexit to the end of Empire" with Sally Tomlinson.



Prof Danny Dorling

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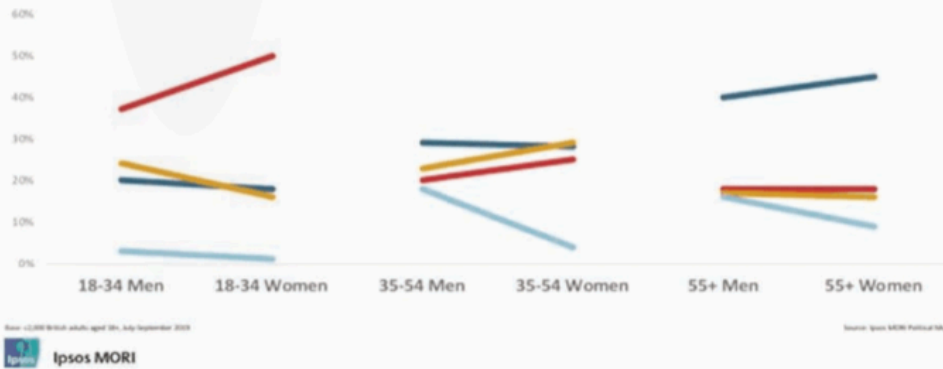
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