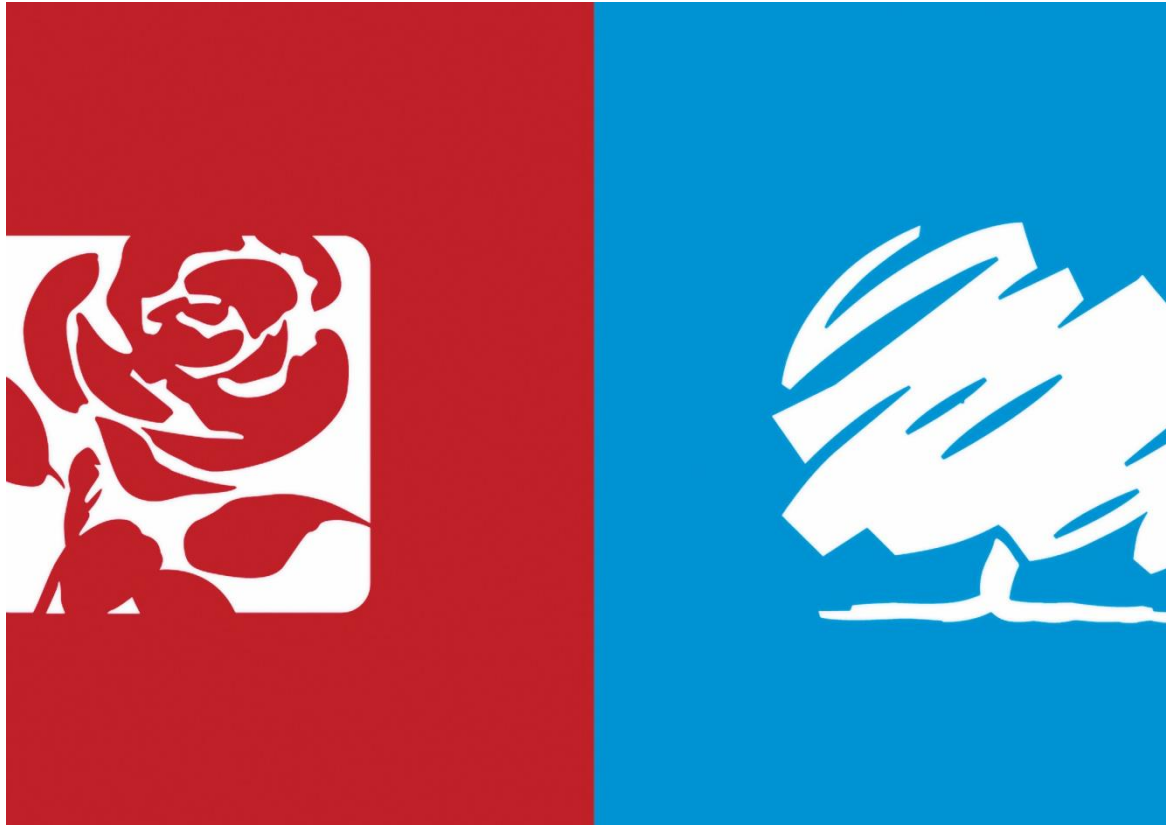


Why the Tories Won and Labour lost:



The 2019 Election Explained

By James Prentice.



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Key data sources:

This book mainly uses the 2019 British Election Study (BES) to analyse voter trends during the 2019 election. The book also uses constituency election results from the House of Commons online archive and polling data from polling company data archives.

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Chapter 1: The outcome and proposed explanations

The 2019 election produced a historic win for the Conservative Party and a devastating loss for Labour. The election gave the Tories their first large majority since the 1980s, making it the first such win within my lifetime. The Conservative Party picked up seats they have not represented for decades, and in some cases never have. This election has redrawn the political map within the United Kingdom, and as a consequence has produced much discussion as to how this phenomenon was able to occur.

In fact, the debate started as soon as the decisive exit poll was released after the polls closed on December 12th. Labour representatives on the left of the party were quick to blame Brexit, with some going as far to say that they had won the argument. Others within Labour struck a different tone, indicating they acknowledged the party had multiple problems and the cause of the defeat could not be placed on any one factor, no matter how significant it may have initially appeared.

The Labour Party leadership debate, following Corbyn's agreement to step down after his re-election as MP for Islington North, also often focused on the cause of Labour's defeat. The candidate most associated with the left faction of the party, Rebecca Long-Bailey, emphasised the party's need to communicate their policies better and not overload the manifesto with too many of Labour's approved policies. In other words, the policies and overall narrative was right, just not the message they used to sell them. On the other hand, the other two candidates that lasted until the end of the race often stated that there were multiple reasons for Labour's defeat. Although there was some lack of detail on the exact reasons behind Labour's failings,

theories put forward stated that they got it wrong on Brexit, leadership, policy-making and spending decisions.

With the election of Starmer and his initial indications that the party needs to go in a more moderate and pragmatic direction, this has reopened old factional rivalries and very quickly created internal party debates around what could make Labour electable. The radicals within Labour naturally defend the last manifesto and maintain other factors, especially Brexit, was the problem, whilst moderates argue that the radical manifesto used the 2019 election cannot win elections.

Conversely, whilst Labour were debating why they lost the Tories were celebrating that their campaign had gained them the majority they so desperately craved. After the Tories had ousted May and replaced the former leader with Boris Johnson, their plan to regain control of events focused upon securing a reformed deal and then putting this renewed Brexit deal to the people in a general election.

Johnson nearly came unstuck, as he was constantly blocked through parliament. However, the government had a few tricks up their sleeve and they attempted to cajole opposition MPs into accepting their offer of an election. The Conservative Party prorogued parliament, offered an election to the opposition on more than one occasion, blocked opponent's efforts of alternative ways forward on Brexit, proposed legislation on their revised deal and threatened a no-deal Brexit if the government was blocked. Eventually, with all the opposition's proposals going nowhere, a second referendum feeling not politically possible and the government refusing to back down (despite extensions that the government were compelled to offer the EU) opposition groups started to re-think the offer of an election. With the polls looking good for opposition parties, especially for the SNP and Lib-Dems, they decided to help support the government's one-line bill for an election in December. Labour also appeared confident they

could take on a government that looked weak so gave the bill their support, which gave the government the numbers they needed to get out of the deadlock that was crippling them.

The Tories' plan had worked, they had managed to force an election on the issue of Brexit with a leader they felt was best placed to sell their New Brexit deal. To make things even better for them, Labour had no clear position on the issue they had forced an election over (Brexit), giving the Conservatives control of the agenda heading into the election. This would pay off for the Tories, and come back to haunt Labour.

Percent of the vote party obtained in the 2019 election

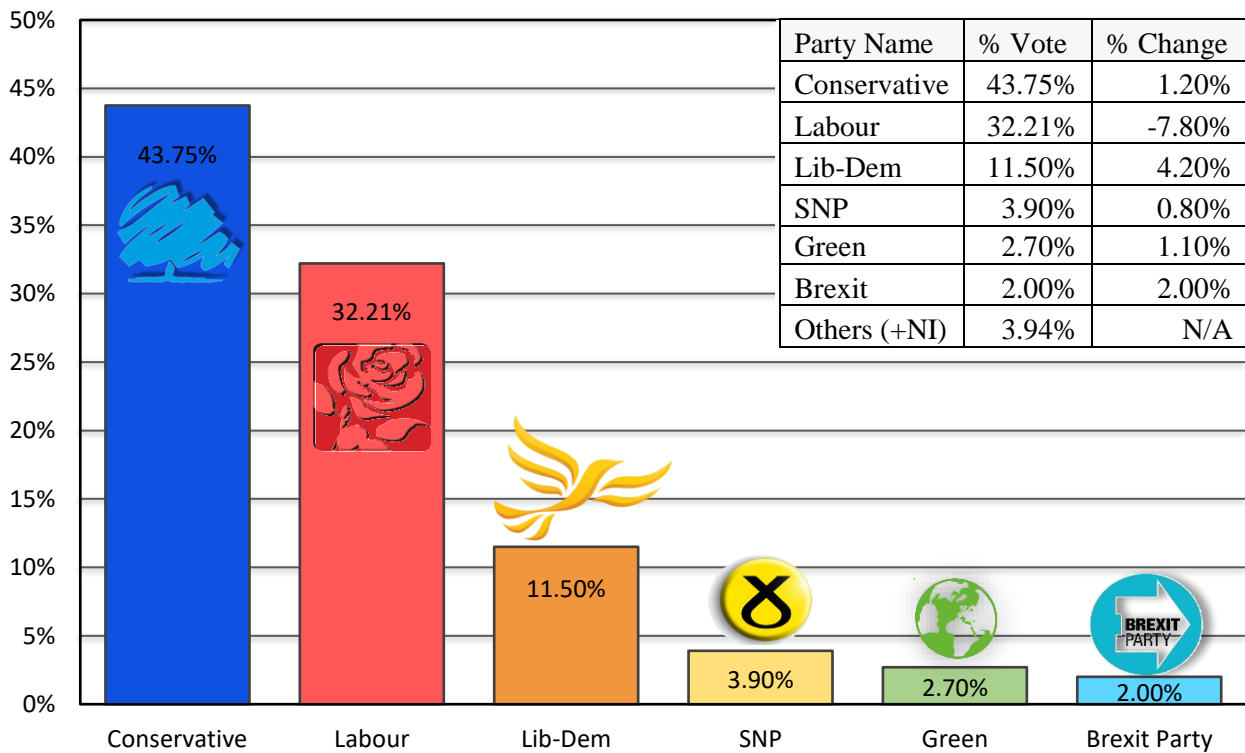


Figure 1.1: UK 2019 election outcome: share of the vote for the main parties.

The Constituency results:

Before we cover the theories to how this election result developed the book states how voting behaviour translated into the election result and parliamentary power.

Table 1.1: 2019 UK constituency election results by party:

Party	Seats	% Seats	Loss	Gain	Net	% Vote	2017 diff
Con	365	56.24%	10	57	47	43.75%	1.20%
Lab	203	31.12%	60	1	-59	32.21%	-7.80%
SNP	48	7.40%	1	14	13	3.90%	0.80%
Lib-Dem	11	1.69%	4	3	-1	11.50%	4.20%
Green	1	0.15%	0	0	0	2.70%	1.10%
PC	4	0.62%	0	0	0	0.5%	0.0%
Other (NI)	22	3.39%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

The large swing against the Labour Party in favour of the Conservatives, of around 5%, clearly did translate into a direct transfer of seats from Labour to the Tories, see table 1.1. Most of the seats Labour lost were transferred to the Conservatives, with a few going to the SNP. Although many votes could have been lost to the Lib-Dems and the Greens due to the nature of the First Past the Post electoral system (FPTP) this does not appear to have cost Labour seats to these parties. Crucially, Tory gains were not uniform throughout the UK.

Region	Con	Lab	Total	Net Con	Net Lab
East	52	5	57	2	-2
East Midlands	38	8	46	7	-7
London	21	49	70	0	0
North East	10	19	29	7	-7
North West	32	41	73	12	-12
South East	74	8	82	2	0
South West	48	6	54	1	-1
West Midlands	44	15	59	9	-9
Yorkshire	26	28	54	9	-9
Wales	14	22	36	6	-6
Scotland	6	1	7	-7	-6
Total				48	-59

Table 1.2: UK 2019 election outcome, by region.

Breaking up the parties' performance into regional variations, it can be stated that Labour lost out directly to the Conservatives most often in Yorkshire, northern and Midland parts of England. Scotland is slightly different due to the rise of the SNP, but Labour probably lost votes to both the SNP and the Conservatives when losing seats in this part of the United Kingdom. The main reason Labour's losses were particularly so great in northern parts of England was because the swing of the vote against Labour was enough to allow relatively small gains in the Conservative Party vote to translate into a large number of new Tory MPs and a loss of long-standing Labour representatives.

Region	Con Net % Vote	Lab Net % Vote	Con Lab Difference
East	2.62	-8.19	10.81
East Midlands	3.95	-8.91	12.86
London	-1.15	-6.82	5.67
North East	3.60	-13.10	16.70
North West	1.34	-8.36	9.69
South East	-0.01	-6.34	6.33
South West	1.58	-5.88	7.46
West Midlands	4.93	-8.50	13.43
Yorkshire	3.12	-10.76	13.88
Wales	2.51	-8.27	10.78
Scotland	-3.29	-8.39	5.10
Grand Total	1.43	-8.16	9.59

Table 1.3: UK 2019 election outcome: change in regional share of the vote.

Key Constituency trends in 2019:

Delving deeper than regional trends, by analysing individual constituency trends, critical voter patterns are discovered. The 2019 election shows that the Conservative's strong performance not only came from new seats located in specific parts of the country, but also amongst specific demographics. These demographics outline the key voters the Tories were able to gather support from, and therefore understanding these patterns of socio-political support is the key to understanding why the Tories were able to win, and Labour so badly lost the election.

Age:

The greater the extent older people formed a constituency's population the larger the Conservative Party's vote share was, see figure 1.2. Conversely, Labour experienced lower shares of the vote in constituencies with such populations. The Conservative Party did win most of the seats with more than average middle-aged and older populations, whilst Labour won areas with large amounts of younger voters. This highlights the potential that the generational divides could have translated into political party support, and thus shaped the election outcome.

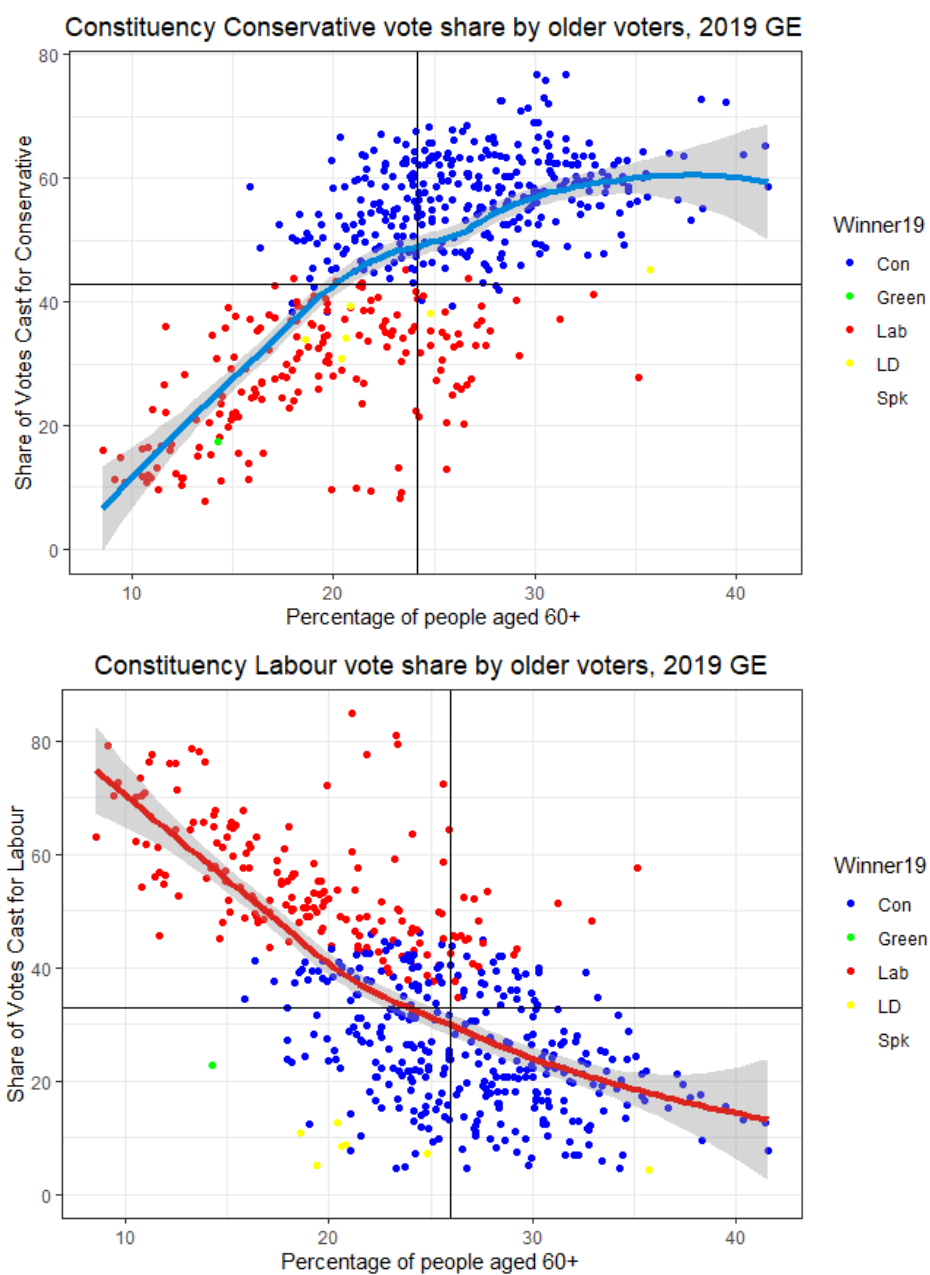
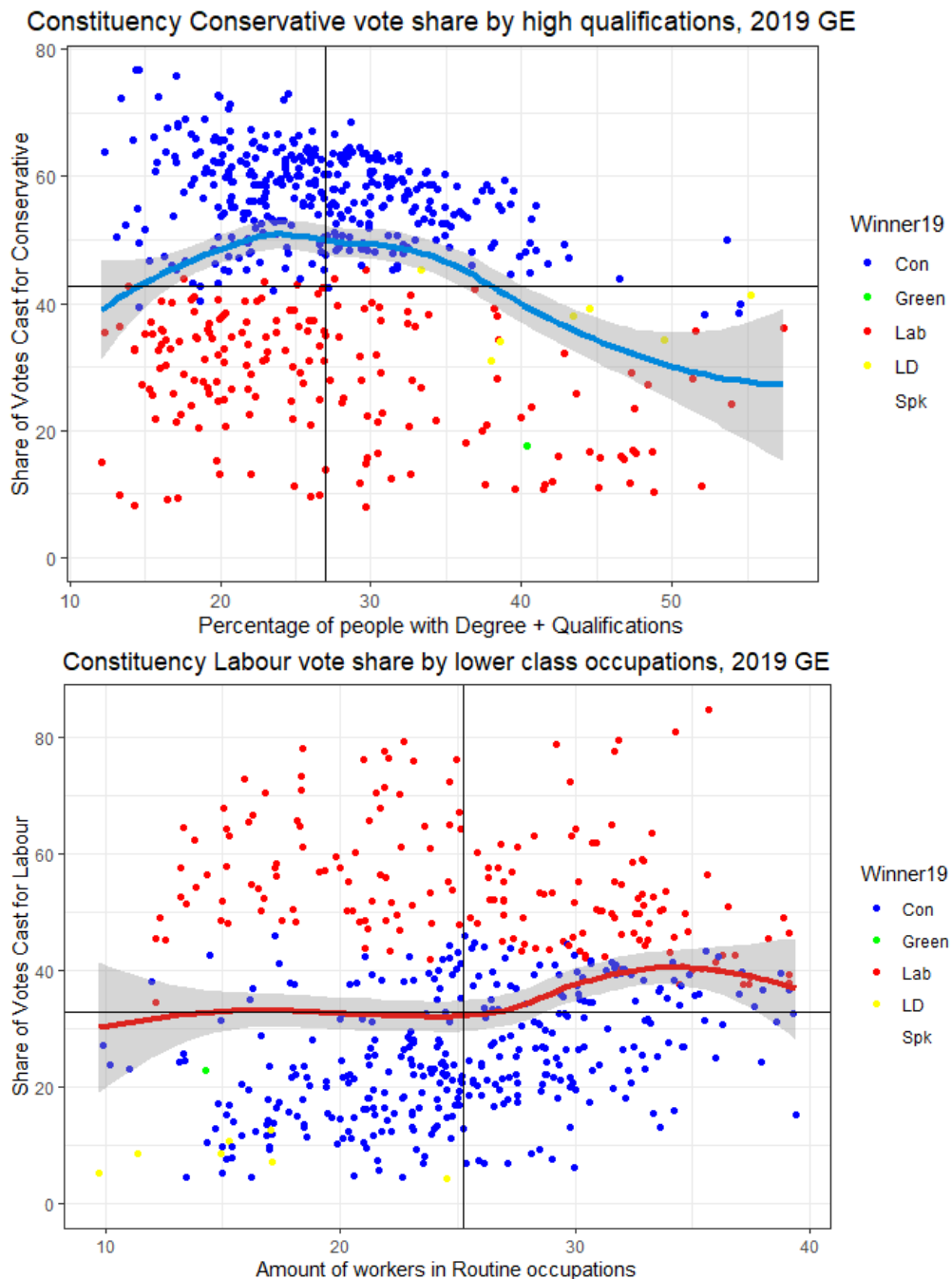


Figure 1.2: The average age of a constituency's population by the share of the vote for the Labour and Conservative Party.

Education and Class:

Figure 1.3 shows that as the proportion of the constituency's population with a degree-level qualification gets above 25% the Conservative Party vote share sharply declined. With regards to Labour, this is the same with the number of people with no qualifications. Alternatively, Labour's vote share increased significantly amongst areas with higher levels of qualifications, and the Conservatives received more votes in areas with more lower-level qualifications. Alternatively, constituency occupational class statistics appear not to strongly correlate with either party's vote share.

Figure 1.3: Education and class correlations with party vote shares.



Leave:

Figure 1.4 shows that as the Leave vote within a constituency increased so too did the Conservative Party vote. Meanwhile, Labour support increased as the percentage of the Remain vote increased. The graphs also show that the Conservatives won seats that heavily voted to Leave, with a few exceptions. They also show Labour won seats that heavily voted Remain, with a few exceptions. This was a key trend through the 2019 constituency election results.

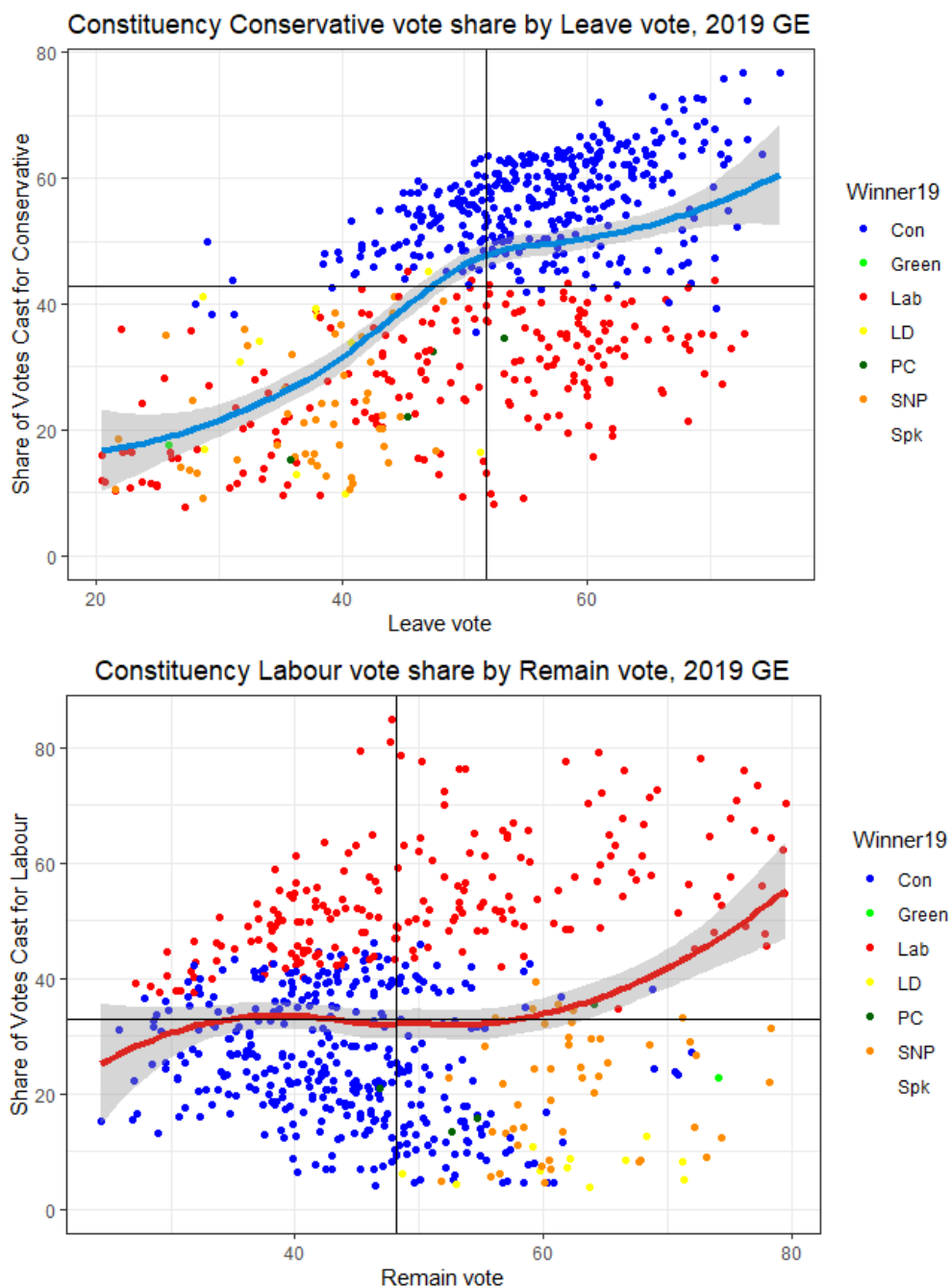


Figure 1.4: The share of the Conservative Party constituency vote by its Leave vote and the share of the constituency Labour Party vote by its Remain support.

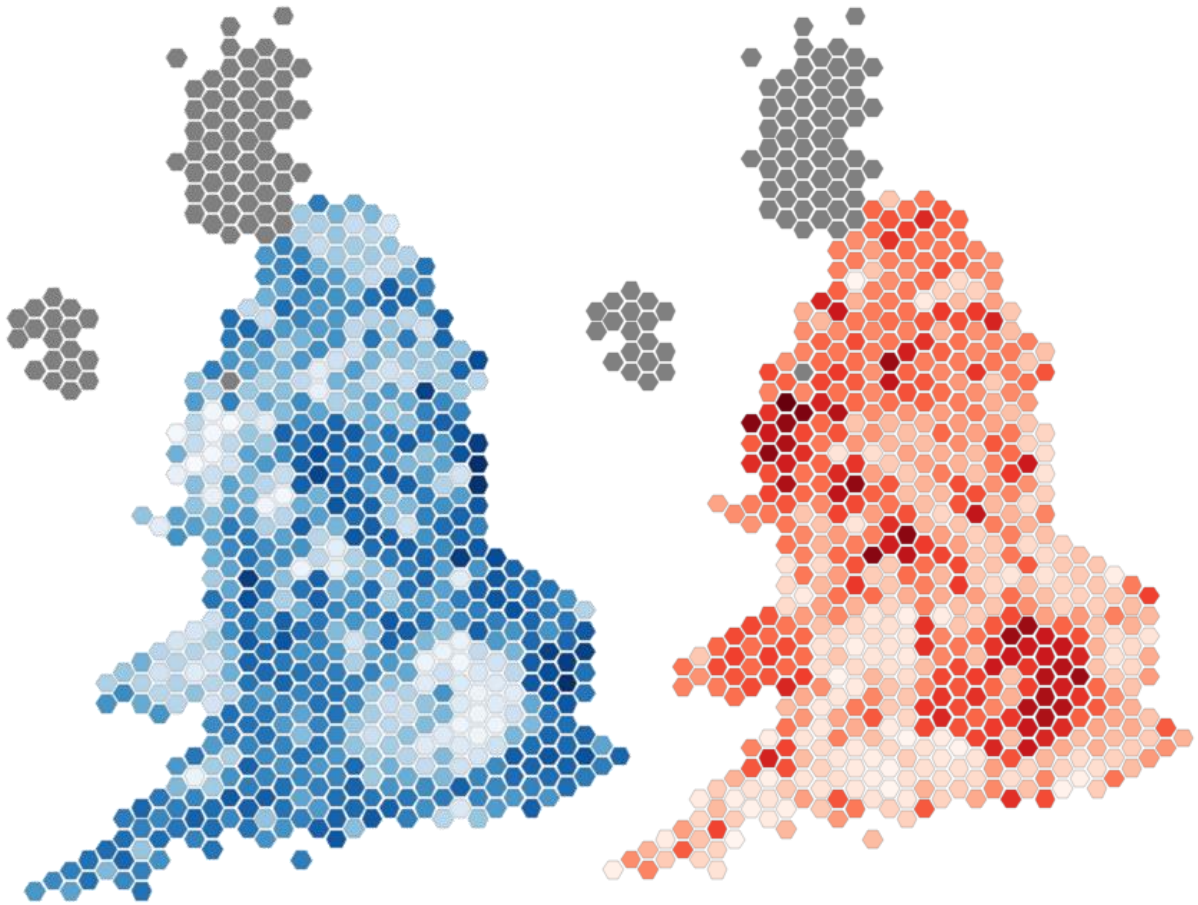
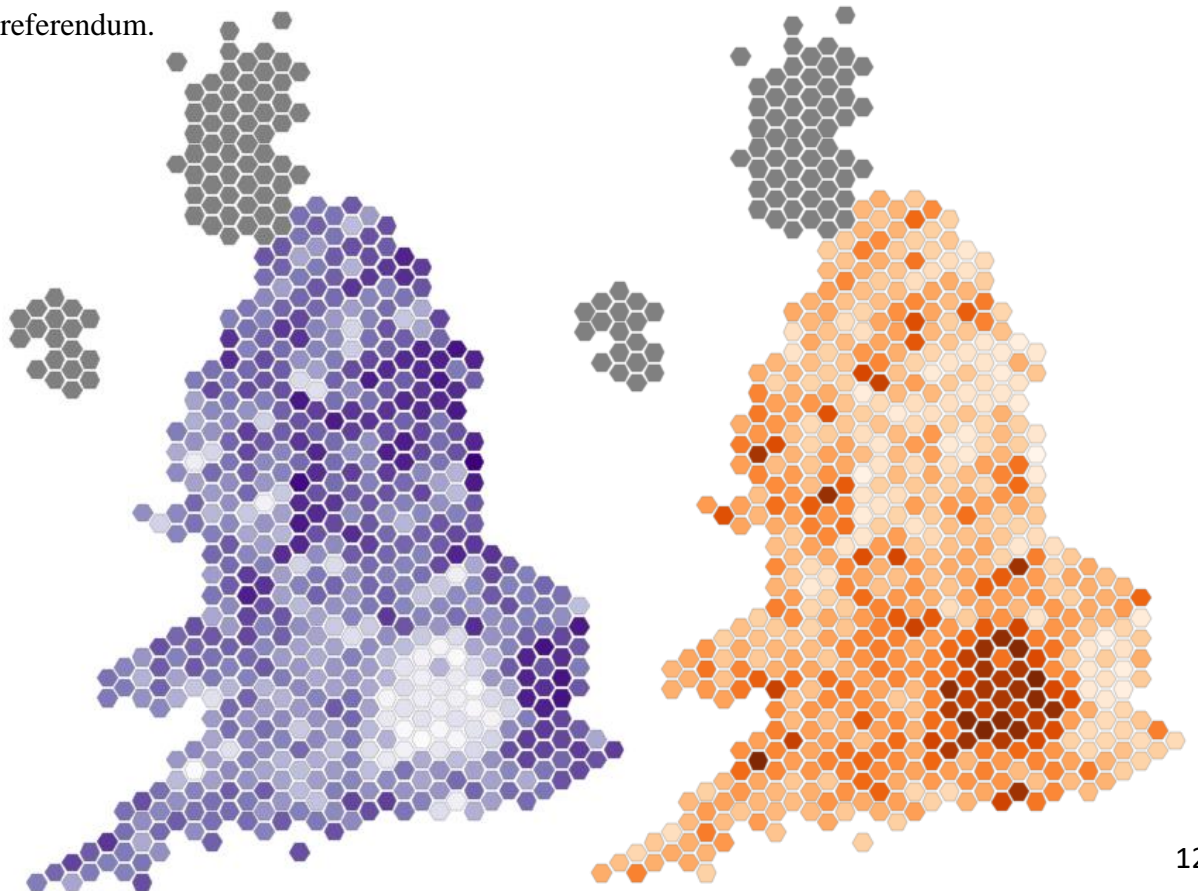


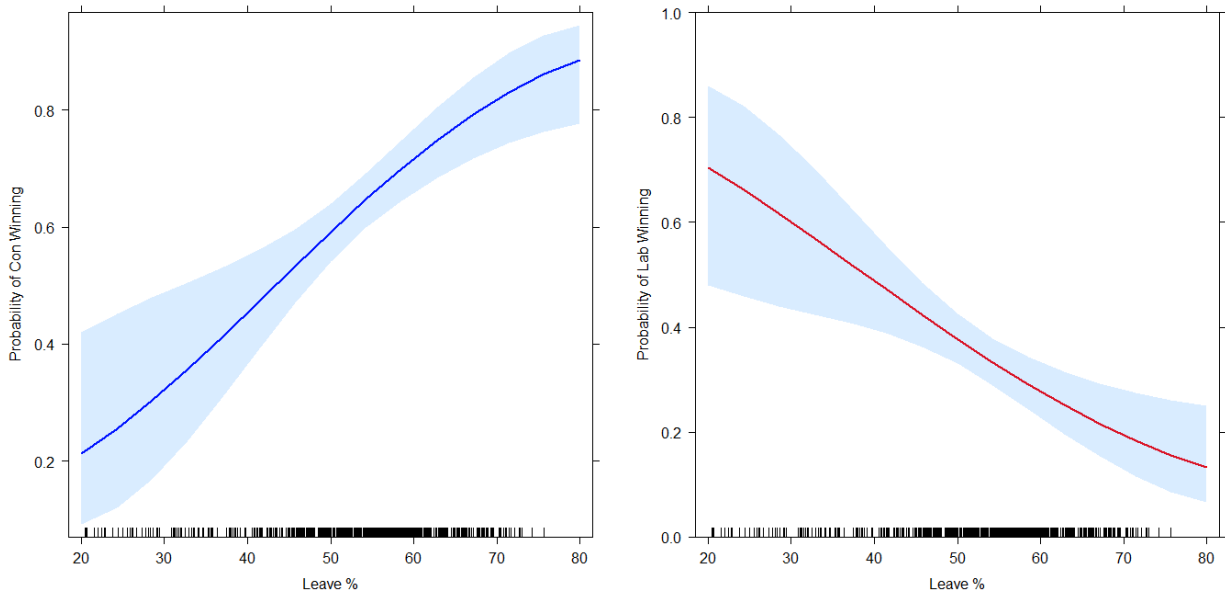
Figure 1.5: Share of the Conservative and Labour Party vote, by constituency, UK 2019 GE: Crucially, this distribution was very similar to the one witnessed in the 2016 referendum, indicating the election could have been influenced by the same factors that decided the EU referendum.



These trends in all probability matter:

Logistic model 1.1: Probability of winning a constituency, 2019 GE DV: did the Conservatives/ Labour win a constituency?	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Con_win (1)	Lab_win (2)
Leave_Vote	0.275*** (0.063)	-0.178*** (0.050)
No Qualifications %	0.375*** (0.131)	-0.226** (0.112)
% 20_39 of population	-0.299* (0.172)	0.269* (0.153)
% 60plus population	0.137* (0.079)	-0.161** (0.076)
Unemployment rate	0.287 (0.262)	0.045 (0.236)
% Workers in Routine jobs	0.045 (0.107)	-0.038 (0.097)
Constant	-0.125 (5.939)	3.169 (5.334)
Observations	573	573
Log Likelihood	-74.526	-89.124
Akaike Inf. Crit.	169.051	198.247
<i>Significance Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01	

Importantly, the constituency voting patterns outlined above were unlikely to be insignificant. This is because model 1.1 shows that voting patterns on the EU, alongside age and education variables, were significant in altering constituency election results in the 2019 election. Model 1.1 shows that the more a constituency voted to leave the EU the greater the likelihood was they would elect a Conservative MP, with a lower chance of electing a Labour one, see effect plot 1.1. Labour was more likely to gain an MP the more an area had voted Remain. The younger a constituency's population the greater the chance a Labour MP would be elected, with the Conservatives gaining MP's in areas with an older than average population. Class had no clear significant effect. Therefore, as these groupings affected the probability of the two main party's winning MPs understanding why these demographics voted the way they did is key to understanding the causes behind the 2019 election outcome.



Effect plot 1.1: The effect the constituency’s Leave vote had upon the probability of the two main parties winning a constituency according to logistic regression model 1.1

The historic shift of the Tories gains:

The average change presented in table 1.3 only compares change to 2017 and ignores important historical facts that better show just what a huge change this election produced. It can be said that some of the seats Labour lost in this election to the Tories were typically in key-marginal areas you would expect to see change in any decisive election. However, table 1.4 shows the majority of the seats the party lost were long-term Labour seats, some of which not so long ago would have been considered to be “safe” Labour areas, even strongholds for the party.

Seat last lost to Tory	Losses
Never	18
1906	1
1914	1
1924	1
1930	1
1931	2
1976	1
1977	1
1983	8
1987	2
1992	2
2010	2
2015	14
Total	54

Table 1.4: Last time Labour lost the safe seats they lost in 2019.

Type	Total
Old Safe Labour	40
Marginal	13
Old Safe Conservative	1
Grand Total	54

Table 1.4 highlights just how much the Labour and the Conservative Party's bases have changed in terms of the constituencies they represent. Out of the 54 seats the Labour Party lost to the Tories 40 could be described as once former safe Labour seats. The other seats could be described as traditional key-marginal seats that often switch between the two.

Out of the 40 seats that could be labelled as once safe Labour Party areas 18 have never been won by the Conservatives, 25 of these seats had not been won post-1945 and 34 had not been won since the landslide victory of the Thatcher government in the 1983 general election. The majority of these seats had not been gained by the Tories since the emergence of New Labour and the turn of the 21st Century, see table 1.4.

These large historic changes represent the possibility that both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party have changed their bases of support, and Labour's once impenetrable red wall is now just a historical footnote in the long history of British politics.

Critically, tracking the results in these changing constituencies it can be stated that there has been a narrowing of Labour's lead since the 1997 election, indicating that the phenomenon witnessed in these constituencies could have been developing for around two decades. This does highlight something quite troubling for the Labour Party, their problems, and the causes of this huge electoral defeat, might not be isolated to one given factor at one given time. Instead, the data suggests that Labour probably has experienced multiple problems with various sections of the electorate within these particular constituencies. The decline of New Labour appears to have caused the first wave of a loss in support, but Labour's problems continued into opposition, indicating these voters have wider concerns than just what Labour did in government. The next wave occurred in 2015, indicating migration could have been a factor as this issue dominated this particular election. Along with this, in 2017 the gap between the two main parties closed, indicating that dissatisfaction with Brexit and Corbyn's Labour occurred

pre- 2019. Figure 1.8 shows this long-term decline of Labour’s majority over the Conservatives in the seats Labour lost, also known as the Red Wall.

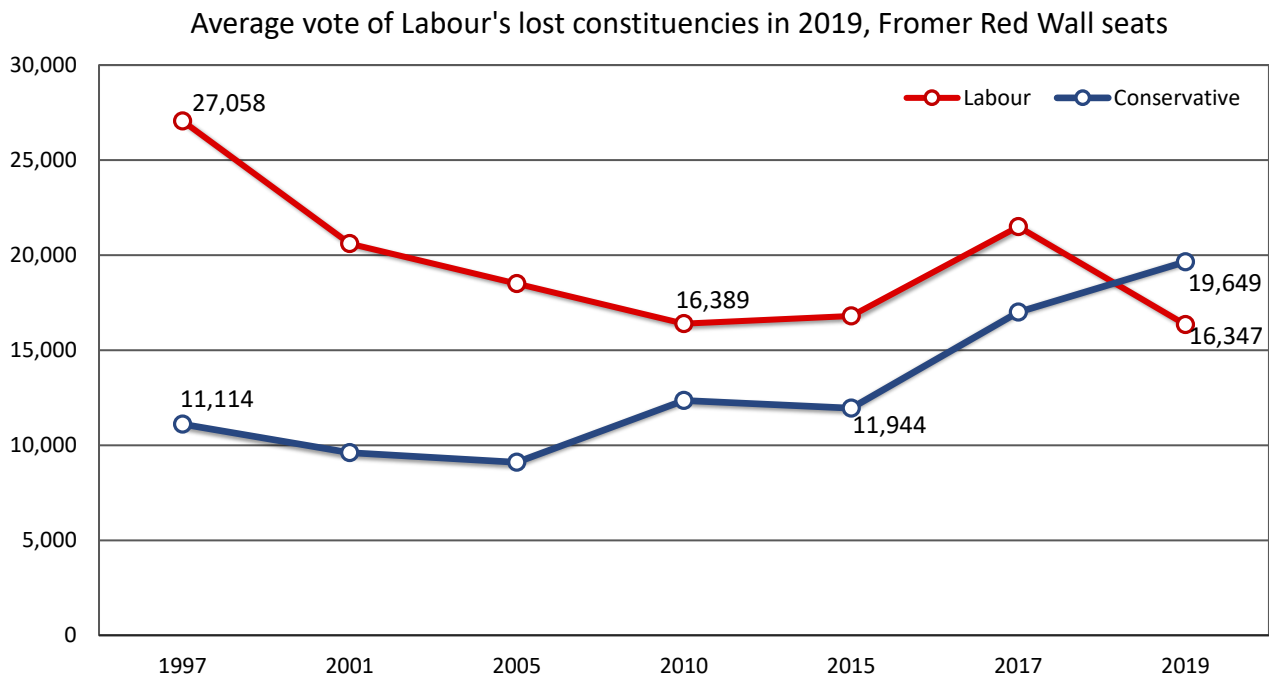


Figure 1.6: History of Labour and Conservative votes amongst 2019 lost safe Labour seats.

Labour’s Lead	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019
Copeland	29%	14%	19%	9%	7%	-4%	-14%
Mansfield	43%	29%	30%	12%	11%	-2%	-33%
Middlesbrough South	20%	21%	18%	4%	5%	2%	-24%
North East Derbyshire	35%	29%	23%	5%	4%	-6%	-26%
Stoke-on-Trent South	40%	29%	23%	10%	7%	-2%	-29%
Walsall North	29%	29%	21%	3%	5%	-7%	-33%
AVG	33%	25%	22%	7.2%	6.3%	-3%	-26%

Table 1.5: Labour’s historical performance in the five seats lost in 2017.

Table 1.5 vitally shows that Labour’s long-term problems in specific types of constituencies are not isolated to just the ones they lost in 2019, but also the five constituencies they lost in 2017, on top of Copeland (the by-election they lost just before the 2017 election). The swing within these constituencies since 1997 was even larger than amongst the once safe seats Labour lost in 2019. Crucially, the majority the Tories had in these seats increased from the 2017

election in 2019. Moreover, Labour lost these seats at a time where the party nationally increased their vote share. Labour lost these areas as they made limited, or no gains, whilst the Tories made major gains. These areas also had a high UKIP presence in 2015, which mostly flowed towards the Tories in 2017, all indicating this vote had left Labour well before its 2019 defeat.

The final piece of evidence that suggests the Tories' gains and Labour's losses in key constituencies could be due to factors beyond the 2019 election is that many of Labour's new marginal seats are in similar parts of the country, and share similar characteristics, to the seats they lost, see figure 1.7. These constituencies have experienced gradual declines in Labour's lead over the Conservatives, which has brought Labour close to losing these seats. With one more bad election Labour could lose more seats with similar profiles, with the Tories being the sole beneficiary of the change.

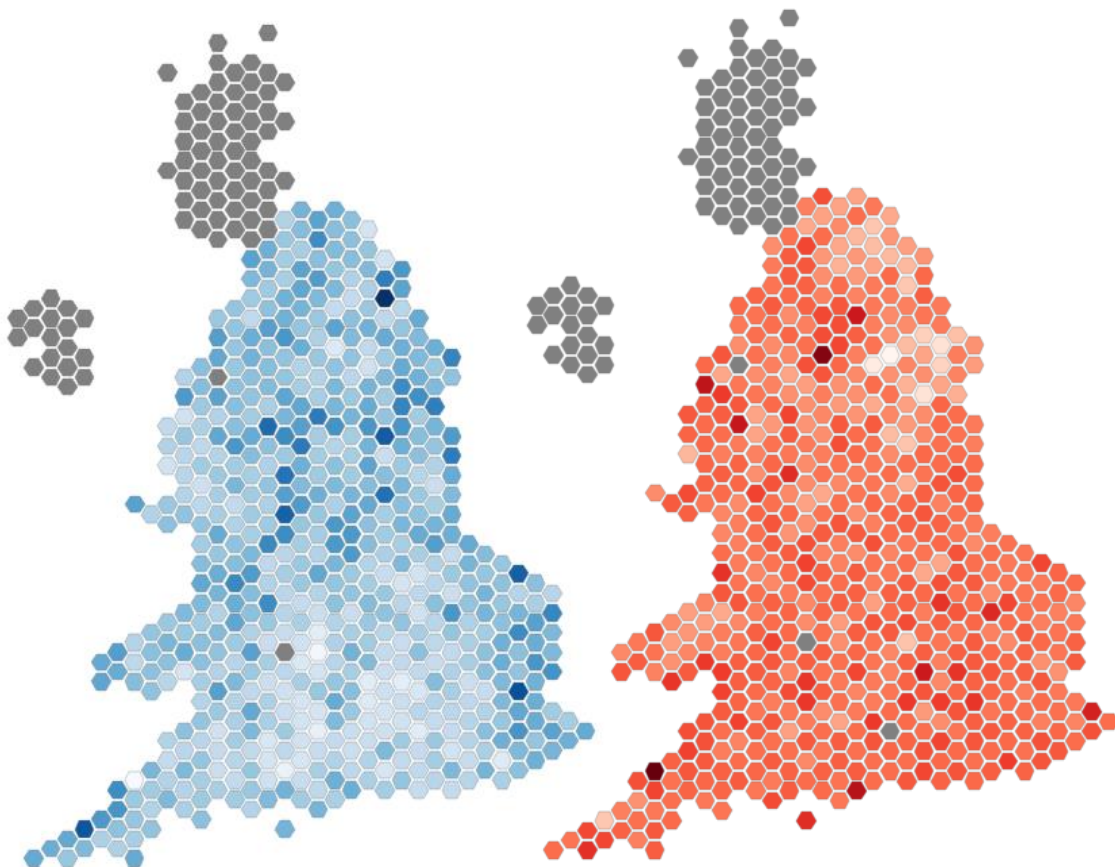


Figure 1.7: A heat map showing the change in the Labour and Conservative Party vote from the 2017 election, constituency by consistency (England & Wales).

Crucially, this highlights that the Tories' gains might be due to factors beyond the focus of just the 2019 election and might instead reflect a changing mood within certain parts of the country, see also figure 1.7. This changing mood has made it harder for Labour to gather enough support to be able to win these constituencies comfortably, whereas the Conservatives no longer find it tough to compete in such areas. This indicates the possibility that the 2019 election result might have been building up for two decades and factors within, and outside, the election could have contributed to the dramatic results displayed above.

Possible theories in explaining the election result:

There are a few competing theories that have the potential to explain the 2019 election outcome. These theories are as followed:

1. The campaign and messaging by the Conservatives was good, whilst Labour's communication was poor:

This theory argues that the Conservatives mainly beat Labour by a ten-point margin because they ran a much better campaign than the Labour Party did. The Conservative Party's message of "get Brexit done" was much clearer than Labour's communication, and as a result, this allowed the Tories to successfully target voters they were competing with Labour for. Moreover, it can be argued that the Conservatives had a centralised campaign that focused on appealing to voters in key marginal seats, whilst Labour targeted areas they were unlikely to win and failed to defend areas that were under threat. This was the case with both on the ground campaigns and online campaigns. Labour's social media campaign was found to have targeted groups that were not concentrated in the areas they were competing against the Tories for, whilst the Conservatives successfully targeted around 30 Labour Leave constituencies in the North of England with succinct pro-Brexit messages. Therefore, it is argued that the

Conservatives won primarily because their campaign allowed them to target key voters far better than Labour's campaign. This encouraged voters to think the Conservative Party was the best party to deliver for them and their communities, and thus this increased the chances of the Tories winning over these critical voters, and from this getting the majority they were searching for.

This theory is often argued by the radical left of the Labour Party in order to defend the policies the Labour Party promoted during the 2019 election. Rather than accepting accusations that their chosen leadership, or their selected policies, could not be that electable this group cites issues of a lack of clear messaging. They often highlight how internal factional rivalry undermined the campaign, directed efforts away from key areas and stopped a coherent message from being deployed. Conversely, this theory is often advocated by those within the Conservative Party that support Brexit, Boris Johnson and the hiring of Dominic Cummings and the campaign strategies he uses. Such members argue this demonstrates that replacing PM May with Boris Johnson was justified as it was the correct move that helped the nation move forward.

2. The leadership of the Labour Party and Conservative Party caused many voters to change:

Researchers and commenters of UK elections have often stressed the importance of leadership in determining election outcomes. On top of this, some figures within political parties have placed emphasis on how the changing fortunes of the two main party leaders could have contributed to the dramatic changes witnessed throughout 2019 and the election that took place at the end of the year. Such political figures tend to be Labour moderates critical of Corbyn's leadership and Tory members supportive of Boris Johnson's takeover.

This theory consequently can be summarised as, the change in leadership for the Tories, alongside the Labour leader's perceived declining performance, was the main cause of why the gap between the Tories and Labour increased, and from this why the Conservatives gained

a large majority. This theory is proposed as past research has shown how leadership can push parties' vote share upwards when received positively, and downwards when rejected (Clarke 2009). When Johnson took over a resigned PM May the government's approval rating went up, and the gap between positive ratings of the Conservative Party compared to the Labour Party increased. Moreover, PM Johnson became to be seen as much more of a better candidate for the role of PM than Corbyn could ever be. Further to this, the Conservatives gained a large lead in being perceived to deal with the biggest issues of the day, especially Brexit.

The impact of leaders in 2019, therefore, caused perceptions of the parties to shift. The increase in positive feelings towards the Conservative Party that Boris Johnson managed to generate allowed the Conservative Party to enter the election in a strong position. Oppositely, the declining favourability of Corbyn increased the amount of negative perceptions around Labour, and this created a 10-point lead for the Tories in voting intention going into the election. The campaign changed little as there were no gaffs producing moments of great change, and as a result, the leadership of Boris secured the Tories a victory by over 10%, giving them a strong majority. Meanwhile, Labour was not able to close the gap due to poor leadership, and as a consequence lost the election due to weaknesses surrounding leadership.

3. (A) Labour's anti-Brexit position made it easier for the Conservatives to take votes off Labour:

This theory asserts most voters who left Labour in favour of the Conservatives only did so because Labour adopted an anti-Brexit message. The idea behind this theory is that after Labour started to favour a second referendum on Brexit to try and break the deadlock Labour Leave voters were repulsed by this policy change. These voters felt Labour had betrayed them and felt abandoned by the party. Meanwhile, as the Conservatives adopted a clear Brexit position and were going to great lengths to try and force Brexit through the commons they appeared to be the party of implementing the referendum result. Consequently, Labour no

longer was seen as a viable option on securing Brexit, but the Tories were. As a result, many of these traditional Labour leave voters chose to lend the Conservatives their vote and this gave the Tories the seats they needed to secure a healthy majority.

This theory is upheld by elements within the Labour and Conservative Party. The left of the Labour Party rejects that problems originated from the leadership or policies they put into the manifesto, instead they put the emphasis on the change of the party's Brexit policy for Labour's failings. Alternatively, those on the Eurosceptic side of the Conservative Party support this theory as it shows how popular Brexit is, whilst also showing how the electorate decided to back a party led by a Brexiteer. Therefore, this reinforces their belief that the party should be led by such a politician.

3. (3B) The Tories appeared competent and trustworthy over Brexit, helping them gain votes, whilst with Labour Brexit instead demonstrated concerns over competence, credibility and trustworthiness, causing them to lose votes.

Crucially, there is a competing explanation around the impact Brexit could have had. Instead, the Brexit issue can be thought to have affected the 2019 election outcome in a way more associated with assessments over competence. This approach theorises that the main reason Brexit damaged Labour was not due to their anti-Brexit position, but instead due to their inability to demonstrate that they had a clear policy on the issue. The lack of a plan presented to the electorate on how Labour would deal with the Brexit issue gave voters the impression Labour did not know what they were doing, and consequently could not be trusted to handle the issue if they were to form a government. Moreover, Labour's constant manoeuvring over their Brexit policy since 2017 indicated to both sides they could not be trusted to honour any commitment they would make in their manifesto. This lack of credibility on the Brexit issue going into the election meant Labour lost votes from individuals both for and against the Brexit process.

Conversely, whilst Labour's credibility on the issue declined mid-2019 the Tories' perceived credibility increased, in part due to their securing of a new Brexit deal. Boris Johnson's government securing a new, and seemingly improved, Brexit deal gave something for Leave voters to back and unite around. It allowed these voters to unite around a government who in their eyes could deliver a Brexit deal good enough to be implemented, even if such a deal did not have everything these individuals felt they had voted for in the Brexit referendum. The Conservative Party's renewed perception of being able to deliver on the big issues of the day, which coincided at a time when Labour was seen as unable to deliver, caused the Conservatives to gain, whilst Labour lost. It was therefore competence over the biggest issues of the day that helped the Tories secure a big win, and Labour a huge loss.

This theory tends to be most supported by Labour moderate groups and political science researchers who focus on valence theories, a theory that stresses the importance of perceptions, especially feelings towards competence on the key issue of the day.

4. The Conservatives are trusted more than Labour over issues that many former working-class Labour voters care about, such as immigration.

This theory primarily focuses on the issue of competence and representativeness. This is covered in hypothesis 3B, but also might relate to concerns some Labour defectors have had over immigration and Labour's perceived inability to be trusted to handle such an issue. Instead of just fears surrounding Labour's handling of Brexit being a factor, this theory stipulates that Labour's problems of perceived competence extend much wider than this. Another example of perceived incompetence can be seen on the issue of immigration, which crucially some who left them really care about. Oppositely, these voters have greater confidence in the Conservative Party being able to deal with such issues these voters greatly prioritise.

Consequently, some voters have abandoned Labour as they think a Labour government would likely not improve things and indeed could make things worse. As they see the Conservatives as the best available option to perform on issues they value they have gradually switched their support, and by 2019 were often more inclined to vote Tory over Labour. This is theorised to be the most significant factor in causing Labour voters to become Conservative voters, and consequently, changes in the two main party's performance on a range of important issues enabled the Tories to win, and Labour to lose.

Political scientists studying electoral behaviour, amongst some journalist reporters also, tend to advocate this theory the most. Some Labour moderate groups have also put forward the theory that the Tories are more trusted than Labour to run the government.

5. (A) Labour got it wrong on the economy and the Tories gained from this:

This hypothesis is a long-established theory surrounding the debate as to what factors most decide election outcomes. The state of the economy, and how contending political parties are thought to perform on the issue, has often been thought to determine election outcomes. Indeed, Labour was thought to be frozen out of government throughout the 1980s after they were held responsible for economic failures that occurred in the late 1970s and released manifestoes deemed not to be economically credible. Meanwhile, the Conservative Party's focus on producing messages of increasing trade and maintaining small levels of spending cause them to come across as more economically credible, and as a result win. The theory in this election is no different. In regards to this election, it states that Labour's commitments to spending large sums of money, along with some of their economic policies on nationalisation and managing the economy, were not seen as credible. Consequently, key swing voters did not view Labour as credible on the economy. Meanwhile, the Conservatives' pledge to invest moderate amounts came across as more realistic. These two factors caused some voters to

distrust Labour and believe the Tories were a better, and safer, option. This lost Labour key swing voters who jumped straight to the Conservatives, thus explaining the gulf between the two parties on polling day.

This theory tends to be accepted amongst many figures within the Conservative Party, with Labour moderates and is often rejected by those towards the more radical end of Labour's factional spectrum.

5. (5B) Labour is too radical in its left-wing politics and ideologically does not resonate with the average voter, allowing the Tories to appeal to the electorate, subsequently making it easier for them to win.

This theory is similar to the above economic theory, but goes further and states that the bulk of Labour's manifesto policies did not appeal to the electorate, and the more Labour announced the less the electorate liked what they heard. Therefore, the overall direction of the Labour manifesto was perceived to be wrong and this helped the Tories. This helped the Tories because it spooked many voters and confirmed wavering voters' largest fears over Labour, that they could not be trusted to handle government operations.

Alternatively, the Conservatives sticking closer to moderate and centre-ground positions on many of their policies meant in comparison they came across as much more capable of being able to run government departments, and as a result, were the less risky option. This theory states that Labour's radicalism and the Tories' moderation in their manifesto helped the Conservatives accumulate many swing voters, which consequently helped them secure a large a majority at Labour's expense.

This theory is mostly proposed by Labour moderates and journalist reports, whilst is rejected by left-wing factions within Labour that promoted Labour's adoption of a radical manifesto in 2019.

6. The electorate have changed, and this alteration has made it easier for the Conservatives to secure a large base and harder for Labour to secure its traditional support:

This theory argues that long-term factors have changed the electoral landscape and this changed electoral arena has not benefitted left-wing parties but has bolstered right-wing ones. The realignment theory states that globalisation has brought great changes that has benefited some of Labour's base, whilst hurting other parts of it. As a result, Labour's base has drifted apart in reaction to the effects of internationalism and globalisation. The fragmentation of this group of voters in a UK context has benefitted the Conservatives.

For example, some of Labour's base is more cautious towards the growing influences of migration and the EU over their lives, whilst other parts of Labour's base has embraced such changes. As events across the last decade have brought these issues to the forefront of British politics parts of Labour's base has drifted apart and this has made it harder for Labour to keep their base together. It has become tougher as no single set of coherent policies can appeal to both groups that have drifted apart with successive elections, and as a result, Labour has found it harder to secure a base large enough to win them an election. This is the problem Labour had in 2015 in addressing the migration issue, and in 2017 and 2019 when confronting the EU issue.

Conversely, the Conservatives have been able to form a new larger base through their sceptical messages on the EU and immigration. Consequently, Labour's old electoral alliances no longer work and the Tories have been able to steal part of Labour's former base. This phenomenon has occurred in many EU political systems where many left parties have witnessed declines. This long term-trend has taken longer to develop in the UK due to the FPTP electoral system, but now these long-term trends have arrived they are probably here to stay. Critically, in such a new electoral landscape this now means the Tories are finding it easier to keep a hold of a large electoral base than Labour is, consequently the Tories are

finding it easier to win elections than Labour. As the 2019 election focused specifically on an issue that has caused such divisions, that of Brexit, Labour could not keep their old base together and this has allowed the Conservatives to form a new electoral base that has stuck Labour in opposition and given the Tories new constituencies and a new large majority.

In order to assess the viability of each theory, the book will use the 2019 British Election Study (BES) datasets and analyse relevant variables that will enable the book to test the viability of each hypothesis. The book contains chapters that will be designed to test at least one of the theories presented above. The book will state the viability of each theory within its conclusions sections. The study will conclude by ranking the explanatory power of each theory and stating what the most compelling explanations for the outcome of the 2019 UK election are. The book will also state what explanations are likely not to be useful in explaining the election result.

The study will calculate which theories can most explain the 2019 UK election outcome through comparing statistics in each chapter, the explanatory power of different models and the relevance of variables representing each theory in a final statistical model. This final model will be displayed within the conclusion chapter.

This book now goes on to test the first theory that potentially explains the election outcome, the theory that focuses on the quality of the two-main parties' campaigns.

Chapter 3: Leadership?

Perceptions of party leaders, the parties themselves and how competent they are to handle the key issues of the day have consistently been found to influence voting behaviour in many UK elections (Whiteley et al. 2013; H. D. Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley 2017). This is broadly known as Valence theory, where perceptions of competence can sometimes be more significant in determining election outcomes than voters' analysis of a party's policies and positions (H. Clarke et al. 2011). The theory focuses on the psychology and natural behaviour of voters and produces evidence that voters use party leaders to make judgements on wider political matters they may not pay as much attention to. The leaders the electorate tend to think are more competent and rate better tend to generate more positive assessments of their respective party and the overall political positions they have. Such research has found evidence that perceptions of party leaders, and their performance, matter in determining election outcomes in UK politics (H. D. Clarke et al. 2016).

This chapter examines the credibility of this theory by measuring the potential impact of changing perceptions of the political parties, and their leaders, before, and throughout, the campaign. In 2019 this theory focuses upon the change in perceived leadership quality since the 2017 election. In this regard, much had changed. Theresa May was defeated by the Brexit deadlock and the Conservative Party had a new PM, Boris Johnson. Boris Johnson gained a boost in positive ratings when taking up the job of PM, and after securing a reformed Brexit deal the public appeared to increasingly rate Boris over other leader rivals. Meanwhile, Corbyn had performed well enough to stay in power and take full control of the Labour Party. However, the Brexit deadlock appeared to have caused the public to negatively assess all leaders less favourably than they did during the 2017 election. Corbyn was no exception and

his ratings plunged to new depths. With Corbyn’s ratings declining and Johnson’s increasing the Tories opened up a healthy gap to their Labour rivals, with this trend being consistent until polling day. Theories that seek to explain the 2019 election based on leadership assessments argue that these developments were vital in creating the large Tory majority.

This chapter finds evidence supporting this theory as it highlights trends where the Conservatives had a clear lead over leadership ratings going into the election, with this lead being fairly consistent throughout the election. Moreover, Boris Johnson tended to be much more liked and highly rated than Jeremy Corbyn going into, and throughout, the campaign. This, therefore, displays how Labour was unable to close the gap between perceptions of leadership quality like they did in the 2017 election, something that likely weakened their chances of forcing another hung parliament. The trends also show that the Conservatives were more trusted to lead the country through the Brexit process and this competence correlated with higher levels of Conservative support than compared to Labour support. The chapter also discovers that regression models that focus on leadership have a high explanatory power in explaining voting behaviour patterns in the 2019 election. This means that how parties were perceived to handle the most important issues of the day, alongside party leadership assessments, appear to influence the 2019 election outcome quite considerably.

Key Leadership Trends:

Ratings of the party leaders:

Like Johnson		Like Corbyn	
Dislike	44.86%	Dislike	60.36%
Neither	18.41%	Neither	18.46%
Like	32.37%	Like	16.23%
DK	4.37%	DK	4.95%

Table 3.1: Average rating of the Conservative and Labour Party leader during the 2019 election campaign. Source: BES.

Going into the election, the gap the Conservative leader had over the Labour leader was quite high, and this lead was fairly static throughout the campaign, see table 3.1. This would again indicate that the campaign was not that important in changing voter perceptions, whilst events before the campaign might have been critical. As Boris Johnson was much more liked going into the campaign than Corbyn was this would indicate that events before the election favoured the Conservative Party's brand over Labour's. The extension of Brexit and the dithering over Labour's Brexit policy looks to have decreased the favourability of the Labour leadership. The ratings for Corbyn were less favourable than compared to figures produced at the end of the 2017 campaign by the BES. Therefore, it is possible that as the Labour leadership team struggled to find a way through the Brexit crisis their favourability and chances of gaining votes might have decreased from this.

Conversely, the Conservative leader's ratings had increased since 2017, and had even increased going into the general election, with the campaign not doing much to change these positive turn of events. This would again indicate that actions the new PM took before the election helped him resonate with the electorate. It would indicate that the securing of a new Brexit deal helped increase confidence in the leadership the Tories could provide. Alongside this, it would also indicate that Boris Johnson was able to resonate with the new voters the party needed to win over far more than former Tory leaders had been able to. Significantly, it would appear that the Tories forcing a leadership change, and this new leadership being perceived to react well against the problems the country faced, might have helped the Conservatives attract voters in the election.

Further to this, how much a leader was rated highly correlated with voting intentions. Those who were more inclined to look upon Johnson more favourably than Corbyn were significantly more likely to have a voting intention of Conservative throughout the campaign, whilst reporting a low intention of backing Labour. Crucially, this highlights how the contrasting

ratings the two parties had over leadership going into the election could have helped determine voting patterns and shape the election outcome.

Moreover, this pattern was also reflected through assessments surrounding Corbyn, see figure 3.1. Those who rated the Labour leader more highly than Boris Johnson stated a high likelihood of considering to vote Labour throughout the election, whilst they repeatedly reported a low potential of voting for the Conservatives. However, the issue for Labour was that there were very few voters who believed Labour’s leadership was more credible than compared to their Conservative opponents. This might have contributed to this consistent trend across the campaign of more voters stating a high likelihood of backing the Tories on polling day compared to the proportion of voters expressing likely support for Labour. Therefore, a correlation again has been found that highlights how voters expressing positive assessments of a party leader might have led to particular voting patterns. This, therefore makes decisions party leaders made before the election, and the perceptions such decisions placed on these figures, potentially very significant in shaping the 2019 election outcome, with the change from May to Boris potentially being vital.

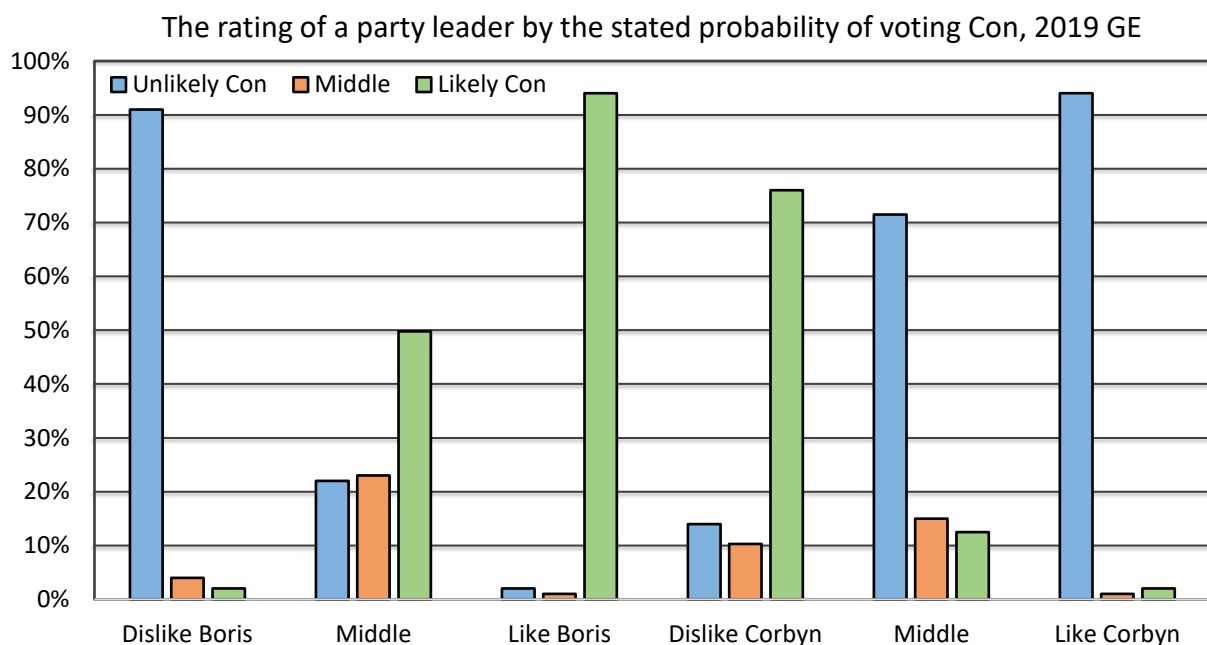


Figure 3.1: Rating of a party leader by their stated probability of voting for the leader’s respective party. Source: 2019 BES.

Figure 3.1 shows that when a voter liked Boris Johnson they were much more likely to vote for the Conservative Party than not. When a voter highly rated Corbyn they became less inclined to vote Tory.

Another crucial sign that assessments of party leaders could have helped shape voting patterns was in how different groups perceived the party. Importantly, there was disparity amongst different social groups, with different generations in particular having very different perceptions of the party. Younger groups of voters had a much more positive perception of Corbyn than compared to older groups, a trend that only increased as the campaign progressed. Perceptions of Corbyn decreased with each increasing cohort, middle-aged groups had a slightly better perception of Boris, whilst older groups had a significantly better view of PM Johnson than compared to Corbyn. Crucially, these perceptions also follow voting intention across the campaign. Younger groups reported a high likelihood of backing Labour over the Conservatives and this trend deepened over the campaign, whilst older cohorts increasingly backed the Tories. This again highlights the potential of how leaders could have shaped voting patterns across the campaign.

Figure 3.2 shows this trend was also replicated for groups with different levels of qualifications. Individuals who had obtained higher-level qualifications tended to be much more receptive of Corbyn than of the Tory Party leader. This group stated a much higher likelihood of voting for Labour than compared to the Conservatives throughout the campaign as well. Conversely, individuals with fewer qualifications indicated they would back the Conservatives far more often than Labour throughout the election. This correlation with actual voting patterns again indicates how leaders appealing to specific groups might have determined voting patterns, again showing how important the leadership theory could be in explaining the 2019 election.

The divide around how people voted in the EU referendum was perhaps the largest divide. Remain voters overwhelmingly favoured Corbyn over Johnson, whilst Leave voters felt completely the opposite way. This indicates that the decisions leaders made before the election might have helped them resonate with certain voters over others. For example, Boris Johnson securing a reformed Brexit deal and trying to force it through the commons might have caused Leave voters to gravitate towards the Tories. Meanwhile, the Labour leadership’s repeated efforts to block Brexit leading up to the October deadline might have repelled Leave voters and helped them secure favourability amongst Remain voters. Therefore, the idea that such events shaped the election might have some validity to them.

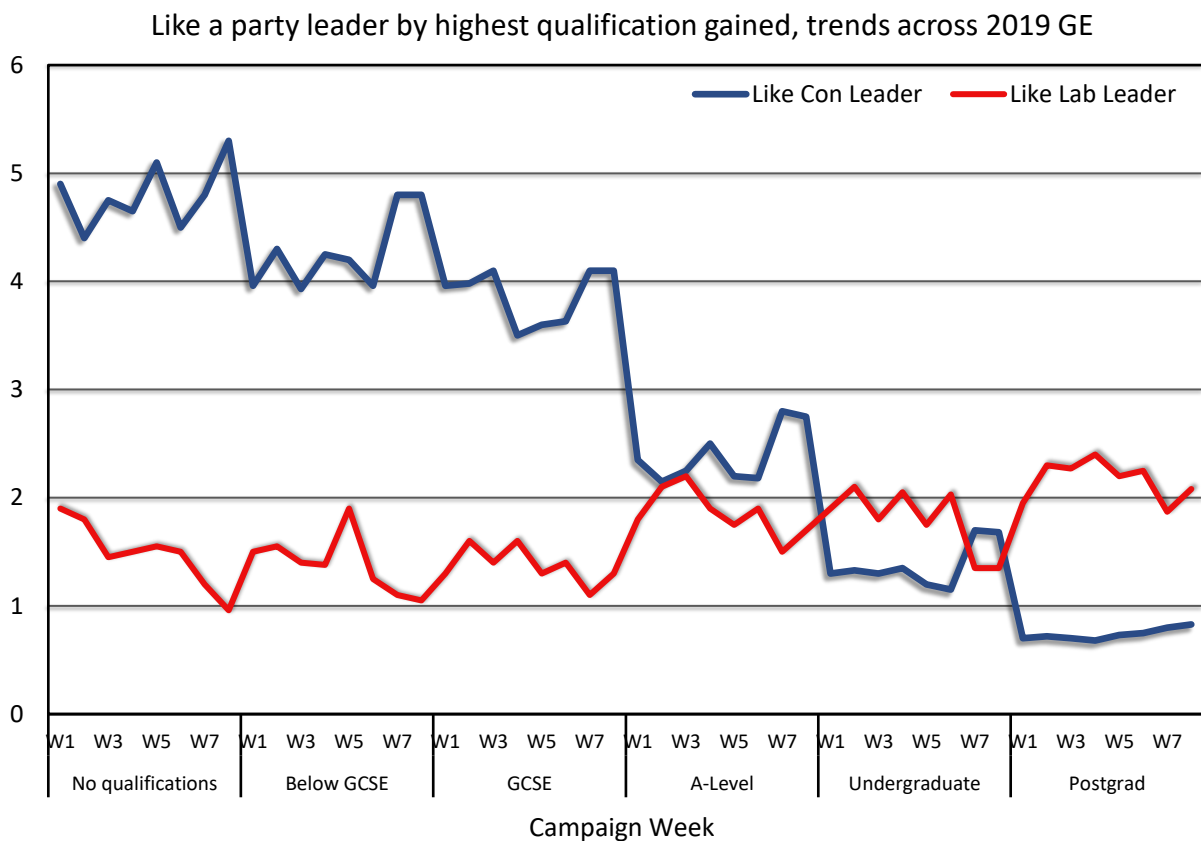


Figure 3.2: The approval rating of a party leader, 0 – dislike to 10 – like, by each qualification group. Source: 2019 BES. Note: education group is defined by an individual’s highest obtained qualification. Figure 3.2: The graph shows that perceptions of the party leaders were very much split to how groups voted in the election. In this case, individuals with more qualifications approved of Labour more, and those with fewer qualifications backed the Tories.

Ratings of the Parties

Opinions of how much the two main parties were positively rated also followed similar patterns to how the party leaders were assessed. The Conservative Party on average were thought to be a more favourable option than the Labour Party. This was the case both going into the campaign and throughout all the various weeks of campaigning. Younger groups were quite different from this average outlook where they tended to perceive the Labour Party to be much more desirable than the Conservative Party. Further to this, groups with more qualifications and individuals who voted Remain also favoured Labour as a party much more than the governing party. These groups all had a higher probability of voting for Labour in the election, again showing how assessments of leaders and their parties could have influenced group voting patterns in the election.

Alternatively, older people, along with individuals who had obtained fewer qualifications and had voted Leave instead perceived the Conservatives to be the natural party of government. Therefore, decisions the Conservative Party made leading into the election could have influenced the election outcome. One such decision that might have gained the Tories such voters was their decision to unite as a party around a reformed Brexit deal after Boris Johnson's leadership contest victory. On top of this, such individuals could have also agreed with the government's decision to oust MPs who refused to back Brexit. Moreover, the Conservative's decision to navigate parliament could have given further reason for such groups to back the governing party as they felt that the Conservative Party was seeking to advocate their Brexit viewpoint.

Alternatively, voters who were younger, more qualified and had voted to Remain likely would have been repulsed by such actions, pushing them to assess the party negatively and be less likely to vote for them. These voters were instead more likely to rate Labour, who had become

seen as the main opposition of Brexit amongst some, see figure 3.3. However, Labour’s dithering on the subject might have meant that some of these voters lost faith and instead rated other parties, like the Lib-Dems, much more highly. Importantly, the evidence here suggests party decisions could have shaped voter perceptions, their votes and the election.

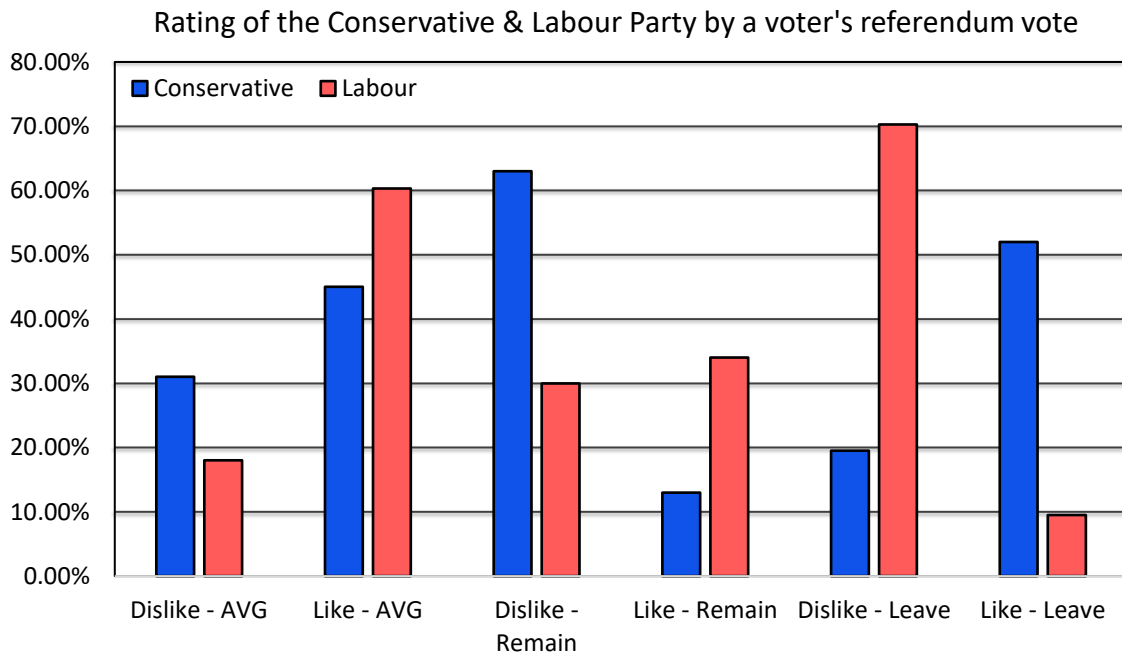


Figure 3.3: The percentage of voters who liked the Conservative and Labour Party, split by voter’s 2016 EU referendum vote. Source: 2019 BES.

Figure 3.3 highlights how Remain voters disproportionately highly rated Labour & Leave voters disproportionately liked the Conservative Party.

Party leader that would make the best PM:

Assessments of the parties being able to form a coherent government also correlated with voting intention, again indicating the potential importance leadership had in the election outcome. The electorate felt that a Conservative Party government would be better led and organised than a Labour Party one. One measurement that reflected this overall sentiment was that the voters believed that the Conservative Party leader would be better able to perform the role of PM than

compared to the leadership Labour had on offer. Figure 3.4 demonstrates how those who felt that Boris Johnson would make a better leader of a government than Corbyn would often report a much higher likelihood of voting for the Conservatives, especially when compared to Labour. This likely helped the Tories gain votes over Labour, indicating that again leadership could have played an important role in determining the election outcome.

Further to this, it again highlights how key developments before the election took place could have influenced the election outcome. Replacing the former PM with Boris Johnson, alongside this new leader focusing on securing a new deal and ramming it through the commons, could have caused the Conservatives to appear that they had the better leader. This behaviour could have shown some voters he was on their side and that he could run the country in a more competent way than the possible alternatives. This effect may have been especially strong amongst leave voters as their main opponent decided not to fully address the issue.

Oppositely, with Corbyn leading a party that seemingly had no clear plan on Brexit voters wanting to pursue Brexit might have grown tired of their perceived inability to make a decision on the issue or provide alternative leadership on the issue. These conflicting events could have caused older leave voters to view the Conservative leadership as more able to lead an administration capable of securing Brexit and the Labour leadership as likely not up to the job. This could have made such voters more likely to back the Tories over Labour as they felt the Tory PM was more capable of delivering what they wanted than compared to Labour's potential PM.

This again shows how leadership could have affected election outcomes, giving increased credibility to the theory which argues changing fortunes in leadership created a radically different result from the 2017 election. It also supports the theory that changes in leadership perceptions favoured the Conservatives over Labour.

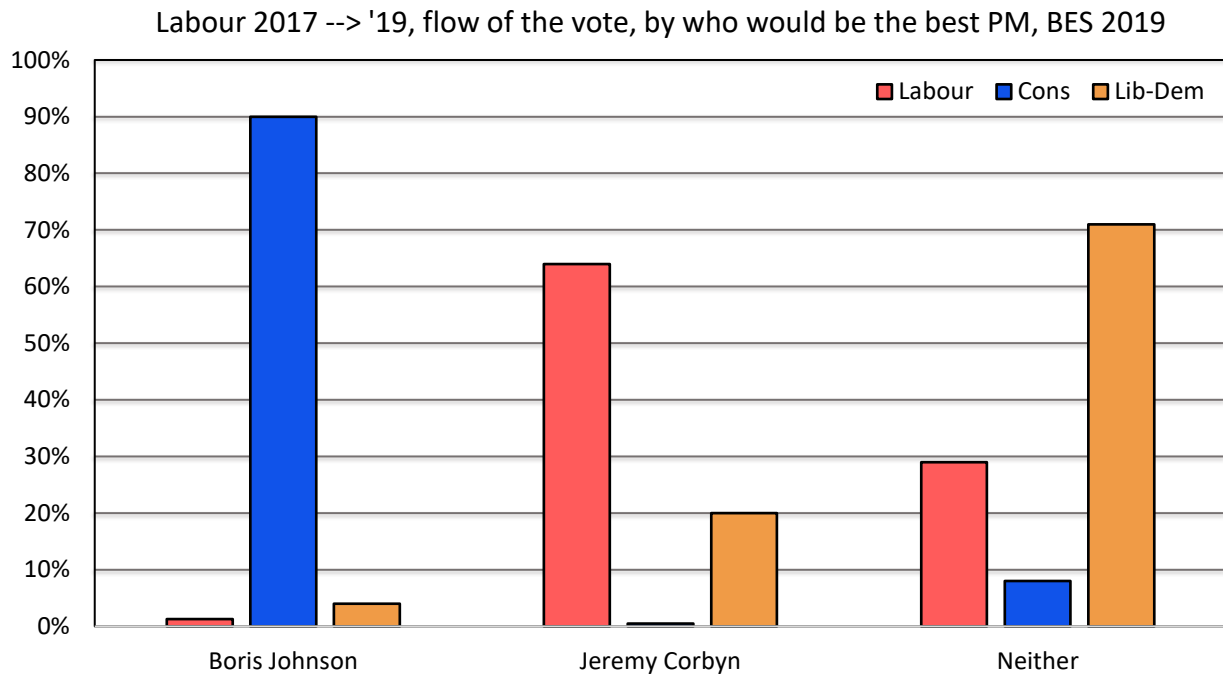


Figure 3.4: The flow of the Labour Party vote from the 2017 election to the 2019 election for the three main parties by the party leader an individual thought would perform best in the role of Prime Minister. Source: BES 2019.

The graph shows that voters who backed the Tories in 2017 overwhelmingly thought that the Conservative Party provided the best leadership, thus providing little incentive for voters to break Conservative support. This likely helped the Tories expand their base and win.

Quality of Leadership (Competence and Integrity):

Integrity Johnson		Integrity Corbyn	
No Integrity	46.62%	No Integrity	51.97%
Neither	21.41%	Neither	17.87%
Integrity	25.10%	Integrity	22.73%
DK	6.87%	DK	7.43%

Table 3.2: Perceived level of integrity for the Conservative and Labour Party leader, the average figure given during the campaign. Sources BES 2019. It shows that Corbyn was not seen to have more integrity than Johnson, despite his clear ideological position.

So far the chapter has argued that the events leading up to the snap election cast the image of competence over the Conservatives in key voters' eyes, with Labour being perceived as mostly inept by such individuals. This theory is supported by table 3.2 which shows responses to the question that asked the extent an individual thought the two main party leaders were competent and could be trusted in what they said. The BES showed that Johnson displayed more competence, integrity, and trustworthiness than compared to his main rival, Jeremy Corbyn. Therefore, it is a real possibility that events leading up to the general election helped Boris increase his approval ratings and come across as the leader to back to "get Brexit done". This would also explain why Leave voters perceived Boris to be more competent than Corbyn. Meanwhile, Labour's vague position and dithering on the Brexit issue could have caused a lowering of positive perceptions for Labour and forced the gap between them and the government to widen. From this, the Tories' lead grew enough to give them their majority.

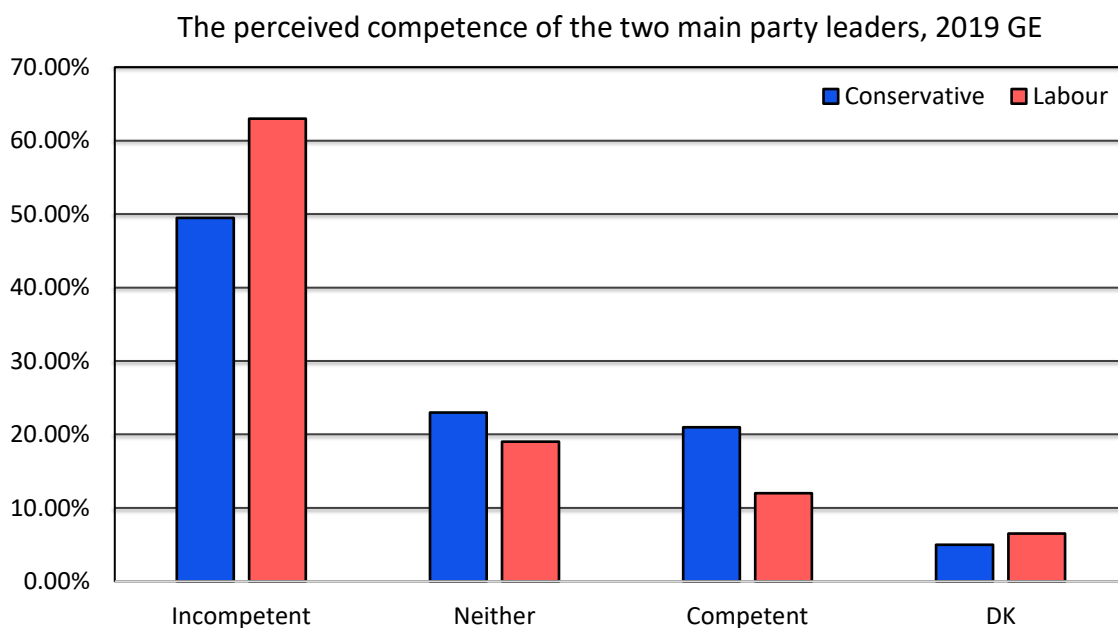


Figure 3.5: The perceived level of competence of the two main party leaders in the 2019 UK election campaign, the figure represents the average response across the campaign. Source: BES 2019. Figure 3.5 demonstrates that Jeremy Corbyn was assessed to be incompetent more than Boris Johnson was, something that was consistent throughout the election campaign.

Party Best on Most Important Issue (MII)

Party	% of Voters	Party	% of Voters (Eng & Wales)
Conservative	33.52%	Conservative	38.27%
Labour	15.08%	Labour	17.21%
None	19.35%	None	22.10%
Others	19.63%	Others	22.42%

Table 3.3: Responses to the question of which party was thought to perform best on a voter's biggest concern. The figures represents the average figure given during the 2019 election campaign. Source: BES 2019. The table outlines that the Conservative Party was thought to be the party that could perform best on the key issues of the campaign.

The leadership theory discussed throughout this chapter is given further credibility when considering that table 3.3 demonstrates that the Conservative Party was more trusted to handle the biggest issues of the day than the Labour Party was. The theory that argues that the change of leadership, and this leadership's focus on securing Brexit, helped them come across as more competent amongst some voters does therefore have weight. This is because the lead the Conservatives had increased when isolating groups most likely to have wanted to ensure Brexit was delivered. People who sat within older, less qualified and Leave-supporting groups were much more likely to view the Conservatives as the best party to handle their most pressing concerns. Alongside this, when these voters felt the Conservatives were clearly more able to handle the toughest issues facing the country they were significantly more likely to vote for that party.

Conversely, Labour was perceived as being better to handle the country's biggest problems amongst very young, highly educated and strongly Remain groups. This indicates that Labour again might be more able to appeal to some groups better than the Tories despite losing the election quite heavily to the Conservatives. Yet, the problem Labour had was that the voters

they clearly lost in this election viewed the party as not able to handle a voter’s biggest priority. Instead, these voters mostly gravitated towards the Tories and the Liberal Democrats. In particular, dissatisfied Labour leave voters with such views flowed to the Tories. This would indicate Labour’s perceived incompetence on big issues might have helped them lose, and the Tories win the election.

The most commonly reported issue voters believed to be the biggest problem facing the country was Brexit, which is hardly surprising considering it caused a lengthy parliamentary deadlock and political crisis, see table 3.4. This meant that voters more often than not believed the Tories to be better placed to solve the problem than compared to Labour. This again would indicate that how the parties handled Brexit before the election was called may have affected the result. Crucially, this again gives weight to the argument that Labour’s constant manoeuvring and dithering around the Brexit issue since making their 2017 manifesto commitment to leave the EU hurt their credibility, and from this their ability to win voters. This could also explain why Leave voters gravitated towards the Tories, as the Tories had a clearer plan to solve this pressing problem whilst people felt unsure about Labour’s approach to this vital issue.

Pollster	EU/Brexit	NHS	Economy	migration	Crime
Ipsos Mori	68	32	22	20	24
YouGov	59	44	25	20	22
DeltaPoll	52	37	22	24	26
Opinium	52	59	22	21	16
Panelbase	54	66	26	28	16
Average	57	47.6	23.4	22.6	20.8

Table 3.4: The most important issues during the election campaign by individual mainstream polling organisations. Source: Online polling archives. For example, YouGov polling archives.

The table shows that the EU issue dominated the electorate regardless of the polling company that investigated the question.

Table: 3.5 The long dominance of the EU issue. Source: mainstream Polling Archives.

MII by Year and Quarter	Average EU	Average Immigration	Average Health	Average Crime	Average Environment
2016					
Qtr3	58.3	47.1	31.9	10.0	8.4
Qtr4	61.6	44.6	33.6	9.4	9.8
2017					
Qtr1	62.0	40.6	45.4	9.2	9.4
Qtr2	62.0	36.0	43.3	9.6	8.3
Qtr3	64.0	37.2	37.8	11.2	9.4
Qtr4	65.0	31.7	39.3	10.7	9.0
2018					
Qtr1	59.3	30.6	48.8	11.6	11.2
Qtr2	58.9	30.9	42.9	22.0	12.0
Qtr3	64.9	30.6	38.4	21.8	12.8
Qtr4	65.4	27.0	36.3	22.1	15.6
2019					
Qtr1	69.0	27.6	32.0	26.6	15.6
Qtr2	66.6	26.2	32.0	27.6	22.4
Qtr3	67.3	25.9	32.3	28.1	26.0
Qtr4	66.4	26.9	40.0	25.4	26.3

Table 3.5 shows how Brexit had dominated the British political landscape for some time, making it likely large parts of the electorate wanted the issue dealt with once and for all. Therefore, as people increasingly demanded that Brexit be dealt with in a way that would end the crisis individuals frustrated with Labour’s vague non-committal positions may have lost faith in their ability to effectively deal with the issue. Those wanting to secure the Leave result may have gravitated towards the Conservative Party as they were offering a new better deal and displayed a strong commitment to implementing the deal when elected. Alternatively, those wanting to have a second referendum and give the option to Remain grew tired of Labour’s stance on the issue and also felt they could not be trusted. This could have meant that Labour’s perceived incompetence over handling Brexit may have lost the party votes, whilst increasing the Conservative Party’s vote share. Importantly, this, therefore, could explain how the Tories managed to win the election and why Labour so badly lost it.

Crucially, the BES confirms this theory as it also shows that the Tories were thought of as being more able to handle the Brexit negotiations than the Labour Party was. This will be covered in more detail in the next chapter, but critically it does show that changing fortunes in leadership could well have allowed the Conservatives to present themselves as more able to lead on voters' biggest concerns, whereas Labour was often not able to do so. Interestingly, figure 3.6 shows voters who felt this way stated they were more likely to back the Conservative Party over Labour on Election Day. Further to this, this was particularly the case amongst key swing voters that Labour lost. Moreover, this was not just limited to the issue of Brexit, but other key issues like the economy. All this indicates that changing favourability of party leaders could have been a factor in swaying the decisions of the very voters that shaped the contrasting outcomes of the two main parties in 2019. This again highlights how theories surrounding leadership could be very relevant in explaining the 2019 election outcome.

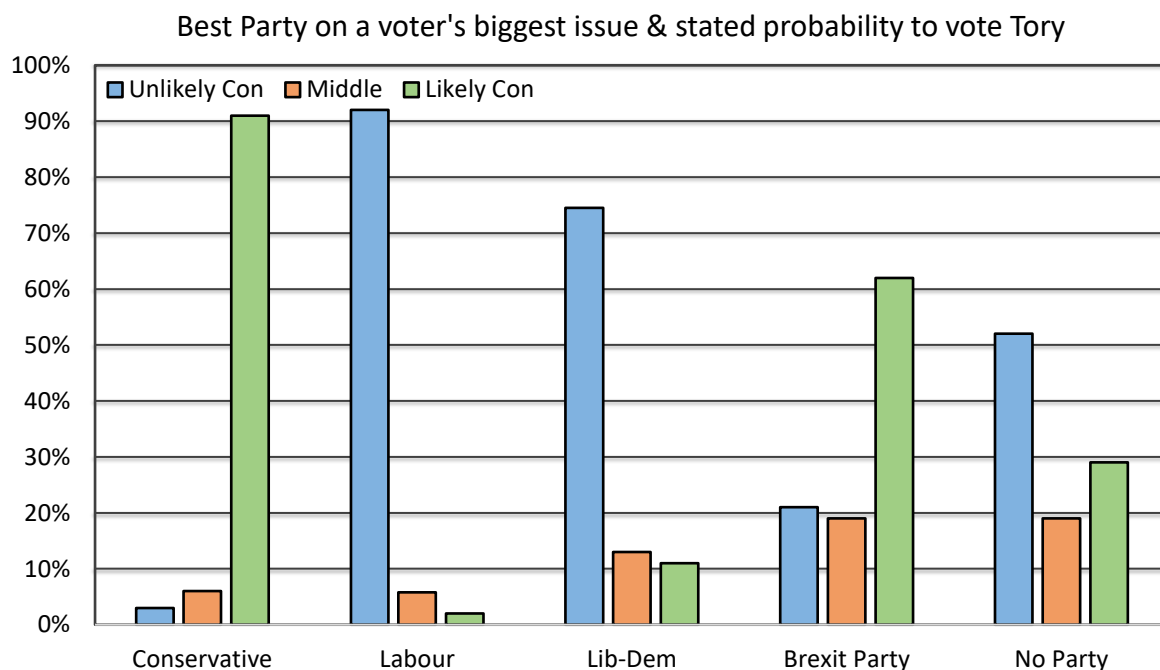


Figure 3.6: The party a voter thought was most able to deal with this pressing concern by their imagined likelihood of voting for the Conservative Party. Figure 3.6 outlines how those who believed the Tories to be most able to deal with key issues were highly likely to support them.

Testing the leadership theory

Regression Model 3.1 - The Leadership linear regression model:

The following model uses the variable from the BES that asks the perceived probability of an individual voting for a given party, 0 being very unlikely and 10 being very likely.

Dependent variable: Probability to vote Conservative/ Labour	Prob vote Tory (1)	Prob vote Labour (2)
Best On biggest issue_Conservative	1.877*** (0.245)	-0.872*** (0.280)
Best On biggest issue_Labour	-0.918*** (0.254)	1.651*** (0.290)
Best On biggest issue _Lib-Dem	-0.730*** (0.253)	0.069 (0.289)
Like Boris_Dislike Boris	1.064*** (0.274)	-0.260* (0.313)
Like Boris_Middle	2.579*** (0.342)	-0.796** (0.391)
Like Boris_Strongly like	3.654*** (0.352)	-0.810** (0.403)
Like Corbyn_Dislike	-1.354*** (0.301)	2.291*** (0.344)
Like Corbyn_Middle	-1.788*** (0.267)	3.013*** (0.305)
Like Corbyn_Like	-2.303*** (0.396)	4.357*** (0.453)
Best PM_Jeremy Corbyn	-1.582*** (0.202)	0.998*** (0.231)
Best PM_Neither	-1.692*** (0.150)	0.293* (0.171)
Con Tone_Positive	1.309*** (0.253)	-0.464 (0.289)
Lab Tone _Positive	0.077 (0.229)	1.082*** (0.262)
Handle EU Negotiations_badly	0.377** (0.190)	-0.844 (0.218)
Handle EU Negotiations_Neither	0.585*** (0.224)	-0.387 (0.256)

Handle EU Negotiations_well	0.538** (0.222)	-0.625 (0.253)
Con Campaign_GoingBadly	0.171 (0.304)	0.579* (0.327)
Con Campaign_GoingWell	2.657*** (0.331)	-0.918*** (0.356)
Lab Campaign_GoingBadly	0.171 (0.261)	0.461 (0.281)
Lab Campaign_GoingWell	-0.850*** (0.327)	2.408*** (0.352)
Constant	3.405*** (0.318)	3.510*** (0.363)
Observations	1,132	1,132
Adjusted R ²	0.824	0.727
Std. Error (df = 1082)	1.883	2.152
<i>Note: Significance</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

The models findings:

Perhaps the most important finding from the statistical model is that if a voter perceived the Conservatives as being more credible on their most pressing concerns they were more likely to back the Tories, see effect plot 3.2. This, in all probability, produced a net gain for the Conservatives over Labour as more voters backed the Tories on key issues going into, and during, the election. Crucially, as swing voters who left Labour for the Conservatives overwhelmingly perceived the Tories as more able to lead on addressing issues they felt were the most pressing ones facing the country this indicates this could have been a large factor in why Labour lost out to the Tories, and therefore why they lost the election.

Further to this, perceptions of the party leaders also look to have had a large impact on voting choices in the 2019 election. According to model 3.1, Boris Johnson tended to overall be an increasing force on the Conservative Party vote share, whilst Corbyn in all probability decreased the Labour Party vote share, especially when competing for key swing voters. This, therefore, supports the hypothesis that the increased favourability of the Conservative leader

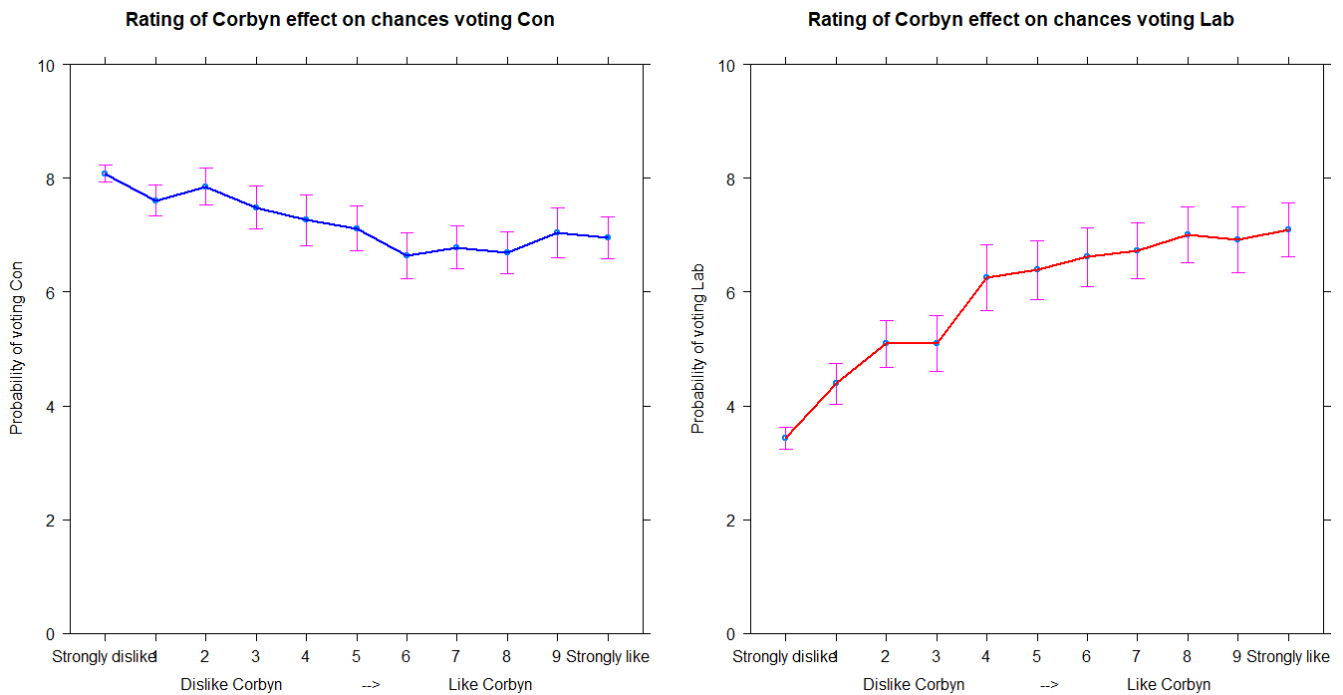
over the Labour Party leader did help the Tories win and probably was a significant factor in why Labour lost, see effect plot 3.1.

Assessments of which leader would make the best Prime Minister also made it much easier for the Tories to win this election, with Labour finding it harder to pick up votes. When a voter assessed the Conservative leadership as more able to run the government than the Labour leadership this in all likelihood produced a net gain for the Tories in votes. Therefore, this is another indication that the perceived abilities Johnson had, against the numerous concerns many swing voters displayed in Corbyn, helped contribute to giving the Conservatives a sizeable majority.

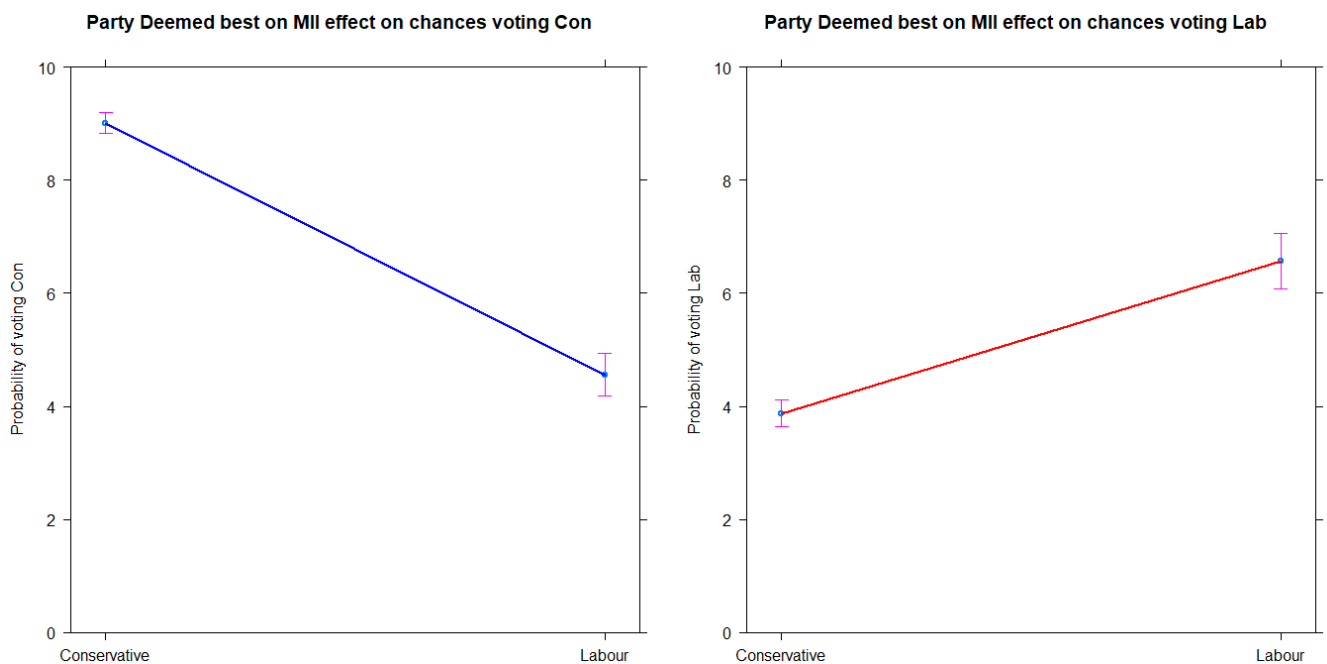
Competence assessments were also found to be important, especially on the perceived ability of the party leaders to be able to handle the EU negotiations. When a voter thought the Conservatives could better handle the EU negotiations they were much more likely to receive votes than Labour. Crucially, this was particularly the case amongst key voters who switched between Labour and Conservative. This indicates that Boris Johnson's securing of a new Brexit deal could have helped improve assessments of the Tories' competence and gain votes. Oppositely, it also indicates that Labour's dithering on the issue probably lost them confidence, decreased faith in Corbyn and likely lost Labour votes. Therefore, the changing trends in perceived leadership and party competence, especially, on the Brexit issue, probably did contribute to the Conservative's victory and Labour's loss.

Finally, the model shows a slightly negative effect on the Labour Party's vote share compared to the Conservative Party's when voters felt the Labour campaign was a significantly poorer one than the government's campaign, which was the case for many voters. This indicates that Labour's poorly received campaign might have contributed to negative perceptions around the party, and from this be a factor in why they lost. However, there is limited significance to these variables, possibly indicating that this was not the main cause behind Labour's loss of support.

Instead, this suggests that wider leadership factors that affected the main parties' ratings before the election were probably more influential than issues in the election campaign.



Effect plot 3.1: An individual's rating of Corbyn and its effect on a voter's stated probability of voting Conservative and Labour. It displays the decreasing effect Corbyn had on the Labour vote with many voters, whilst Corbyn made no real dent into the Conservative Party vote share.



Effect plot 3.2: A voter's view on the party most able to handle their biggest issue upon their stated likelihood of voting for the Conservative and Labour Party. Data source: BES 2019.

Effect plot 3.2: Displays how the Conservatives being rated on the biggest issues of the day increased the likelihood of the party gaining votes at the expense of Labour. The perceived lack of leadership that could deliver on these big issues within Labour therefore likely played a part in Labour's downfall.

Overall, the evidence in this chapter suggests that Leadership factors appear to be an important determining factor in the likelihood of considering to vote for one party over another. This indicates that the change in perceived party leadership credibility before the election was important in allowing the Conservatives to gain a majority. Crucially, this theory is supported by the trends outlined in the chapter. Further, the Conservative Party did not lose their lead on leadership ratings over the Labour Party throughout the campaign and its lead was quite steady, also indicating that the campaign changed little. Critically, the Conservative Party's lead occurred before the election took place, and this lead was created soon after Boris became PM, again indicating the change in leadership altered the Conservative Party's fortunes.

Moreover, the theory that the changes in leadership assessments meant that the Conservatives were more trusted to handle the most pressing issues of the day than compared to Labour was also supported by the evidence outlined in this chapter. The study found that perceptions around competence on the EU and Brexit, and in particular being able to handle the coming EU negotiations, in all likelihood increased the Conservative Party vote. Moreover, these perceptions highly correlated with how much individuals rated both the two main party leaders. This all produced another gain for the Tories over Labour as a greater number of individuals tended to view the Conservatives as more able to handle the negotiations than Labour. This is critical as according to model 3.1 this produced an increase in votes for the Conservatives, whilst also possibly creating a loss for Labour. Therefore, this effect can help explain why the

Tories were able to expand upon their base and win the election, whilst Labour could not, causing them to lose the election.

Therefore, the decision to replace Theresa May with Boris Johnson in the job of PM was a key moment that shaped the political outcome of the election. Along with this, the decision of the Labour Party to stick with Corbyn and his perceived inability to lead on the big issues of the day, especially on the Brexit issue, likely cost the Labour Party many votes they won in 2017. Thus, it can be stated that the trend of better leadership ratings, alongside better assessments of competence on the big issues of the day for the Conservatives over Labour, likely contributed towards creating a win for the Tories and a loss for Labour.

Chapter 4: Brexit did it?

In the time between the 2017 and 2019 elections, several developments occurred, but perhaps the most significant change was the decision not to have implemented Brexit before the next election had been called. Interestingly, this was a fairly new issue that has been prominent in UK elections, giving an element of the unknown on how this issue might affect voting intentions. This chapter uses some of the variables provided in the BES dataset that measures individuals' thoughts and feelings on the EU and Brexit. It particularly focuses upon opinions about how the Brexit stalemate should have been addressed and how such opinions may have determined voting patterns. This chapter also produces a statistical model indicating that it was not the referendum result itself, but the potential effects of Brexit and how to best proceed with the long-running political crisis of Brexit, that was important. Generally speaking, the Conservatives were perceived to have performed better in addressing these concerns about Brexit than the Labour Party, which appears to translate into higher support for the Tories compared to Labour.

Earlier this book found that the EU and Brexit was the most commonly reported concern amongst the electorate going into, and during, this campaign. Therefore, this issue had the potential to greatly influence the outcome of this election. This chapter tracks trends on the EU/Brexit issue and analyses how parties were perceived to perform on the issue, particularly in how they would manage the EU negotiations. It shows how the Conservatives were perceived to be more able to handle this most important issue, especially amongst groups that drifted towards supporting Labour throughout the election campaign. The voters who drifted from Labour towards the Conservative Party during the campaign had a consistent set of opinions during the election, where they tended to perceive Labour as unable to deal with the issue and were also confused about their Brexit position. This again confirms the theory that events

surrounding parties' decisions on Brexit could have altered perceptions of Labour and Conservative, and from this been a large factor in shaping the election result.

Importantly, the chapter also shows how divisions over Brexit might also represent a wider value divide. This divide appears to be putting these contrasting social groups into distinct groups that have formed the new support bases of the two main parties. This highlights how such value divides might be pushing different groupings into opposite political directions and could be the cause of shifts in voting behaviour, indicating that the impact of Brexit could actually represent something more substantial, the emergence of a realignment.

The chapter generally finds the Conservatives to gain over Labour when it constructs a model that aims to capture the theory that Brexit cost Labour the election. However, a key finding from the model shows that Labour's perceived inability to handle the issue compared to the Tories' perceived competence on Brexit was the largest contributing factor to Labour's defeat. So whilst Brexit did not benefit Labour another key factor to Labour's defeat, and the Tories' victory, were concerns around how Labour would proceed with Brexit, again indicating that leadership on key issues was in all probability one of the largest reasons behind Labour's defeat. Therefore, events before the election where Labour dithered over Brexit and the Tories appeared decisive on the issue was a major factor in shaping the dramatic change in results from the previous election.

Voting Divide by Brexit views:

Figure 4.1 shows Brexit clearly divided the electorate in how they voted in the 2019 election. In fact, it can be said to be the clearest divide that was witnessed on election night. As a result, this has led many to conclude that it must have been Brexit, and how people voted in the 2016 EU referendum, that was the main factor that shaped the 2019 outcome. However, when putting this variable into statistical models this factor appears not to be powerful and significant in

explaining the variation in the levels of support for the two main parties. This raises the possibility that instead of Brexit being the most important factor in explaining the election result it could actually be the components that caused Brexit that were influencing voting behaviour, rather than Brexit itself. In other words, thoughts around Britain’s place in the world, the perceived impact of the EU and globalisation, feelings towards increasing migration levels and attitudes regarding UK sovereignty might have continued to shape how voters perceived the two main parties more than their 2016 referendum vote did. Moreover, individuals’ hopes and fears post-Brexit could have been more important than past voting behaviour. This would indicate a wider value divide around Brexit being influential, indicating the Leave-Remain divide could signal a deep divide around differing mind-sets that can be described as a new political divide. This crucially means this new ideological divide could have shaped the result.

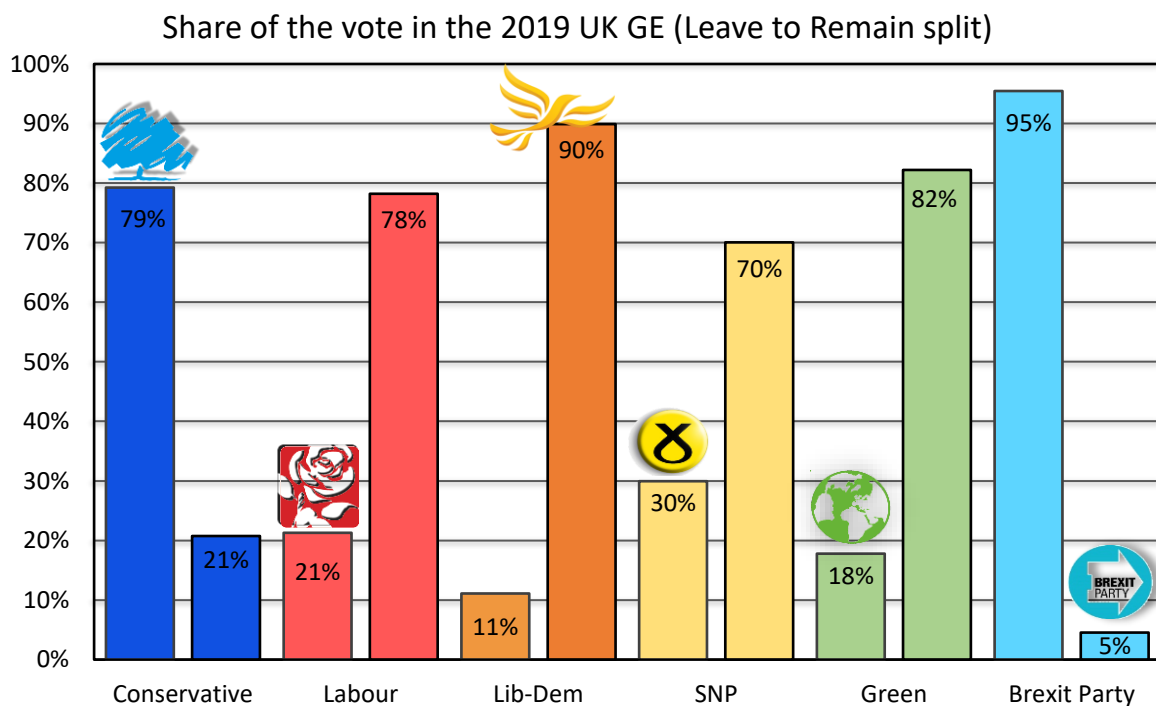


Figure 4.1: The parties’ vote share by EU referendum vote, according to the 2019 BES. The graph demonstrates how right-leaning parties, the Conservative and Brexit Party, heavily relied on Leave voters for their support. Alternatively, left-liberal leaning parties, the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Party, found their support primarily amongst Remain voters.

Brexit Outcome:

Brexit Outcome	Cancel Brexit	2nd Ref on Boris' Deal	Boris' Deal No Referendum	No Deal
Acceptable	42.55%	66.76%	73.50%	50.56%
Unacceptable	49.70%	25.49%	18.75%	41.69%
Don't know	7.75%	7.75%	7.75%	7.75%

Table 4.1: the electorate's view on what potential Brexit outcome could be acceptable, an average figure across the campaign. Source: BES 2019. Table 4.1 shows that the electorate was heavily divided over what forms of Brexit could be acceptable, with PM Boris Johnson's deal being a compromise certain sections of the electorate could form around.

Views on the future of Brexit being more important than past views has a considerable amount of evidence behind it. Firstly, there were policy options on how to break the Brexit deadlock that some groups of voters simply found to be unacceptable ways forward. Therefore, these views limited the number of voters the parties could realistically appeal to, as these groups' version of what an acceptable Brexit outcome could look like often were incompatible. For example, those who found cancelling Brexit unacceptable believed that accepting Boris Johnson's deal without a second referendum was the best way forward. However, those who were against accepting Johnson's deal often thought that having a second referendum, or just stopping Brexit altogether, were the only two acceptable ways forward.

Consequently, as table 4.1 demonstrates, the electorate can be said to have been much divided about the future of Brexit and this could have directed voting patterns. Looking at how voters were divided over which Brexit outcome they found acceptable, it can be stated that younger groups with more qualifications backed solutions that would give the option of the UK remaining in the EU, whereas contrasting social groups most favoured options that would allow the UK to leave without any confirmatory vote. The starkest divide was between Remain and Leave-voting groups, with Remain voters nearly always finding a second referendum

acceptable and Leave groups mostly rejecting this option, see figure 4.2. Instead, leave voters thought taking Boris Johnson’s revised deal with no second referendum was the only acceptable way forward.

This at first appears to show that the Brexit divide is shaping how individuals think and vote, especially when considering those that preferred a second referendum often backed Labour and those who found this unacceptable voted Tory. However, it could be much wider than this, with Brexit instead representing a broader set of attitudes that form how people perceive Britain and its future, and from this which political party they were likely to support. Crucially, one aspect these trends show is that thoughts around the future of Brexit did highly correlate with how much a voter rated a party, and also how likely they were to back this party.

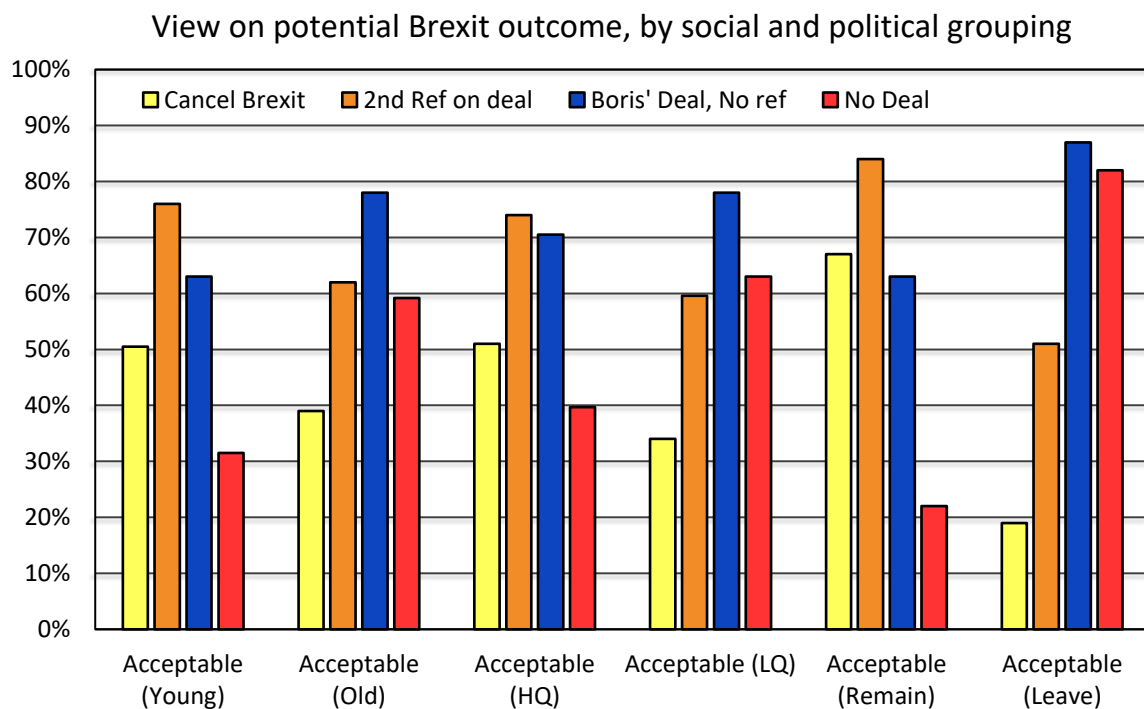


Figure 4.2: Views on acceptable Brexit outcomes by social and political grouping in the 2019 Election, Source: BES 2019. Figure 4.2 shows how different socio-political groups were heavily divided over what Brexit outcome they felt they could accept, thus producing strong divisions that could split voters across the two main parties.

Confusion over Labour's Brexit policy:

Policy Most Proffered	Con Brexit Preference	Lab Brexit Preference
Cancel Brexit	2.63%	16.13%
Second referendum	2.12%	48.98%
Leave with a deal	44.78%	12.54%
Leave with no deal	35.48%	1.67%
Don't know	15.00%	20.68%

Table 4.2: How the voters perceived the Labour and Conservative Party's most preferred Brexit policy. The table shows a greater distribution across perceptions around Labour's Brexit policy and that more individuals felt they did not know what the party's Brexit policy was, indicating more voters were confused about Labour's Brexit policy.

If how to deal with this Brexit crisis and what Britain should look like post-Brexit was important to voters, then this was problematic for Labour. This is because Labour's perceived Brexit policy was seen to be much less clear than the Tories' position. Labour's position was thought to be anything from cancelling Brexit to accepting a Brexit deal without giving the public a second referendum. Figure 4.3 shows that Labour's position on Brexit was particularly misunderstood by Leave voters, who stated that they thought Labour would just cancel Brexit if they got into government. Individuals who felt this also stated they did not rate Labour, their leadership or think they were best placed to handle their biggest concern, which most likely was Brexit. Moreover, when a voter misunderstood Labour's Brexit policy they often had a low likelihood of voting for Labour, signalling that Labour's confusing Brexit position could have limited their appeal. Therefore, this likely damaged Labour's ability to win the election. Crucially, as the BES shows that this finding was consistent across the campaign it indicates that Labour's Brexit woes likely started before the campaign had begun. It also raises the potential that committing to a second referendum later in the campaign probably did not hurt the Labour Party as it provided some rare clarity for voters when thinking about Labour.

Labour's Brexit position by 2016 EU referendum result

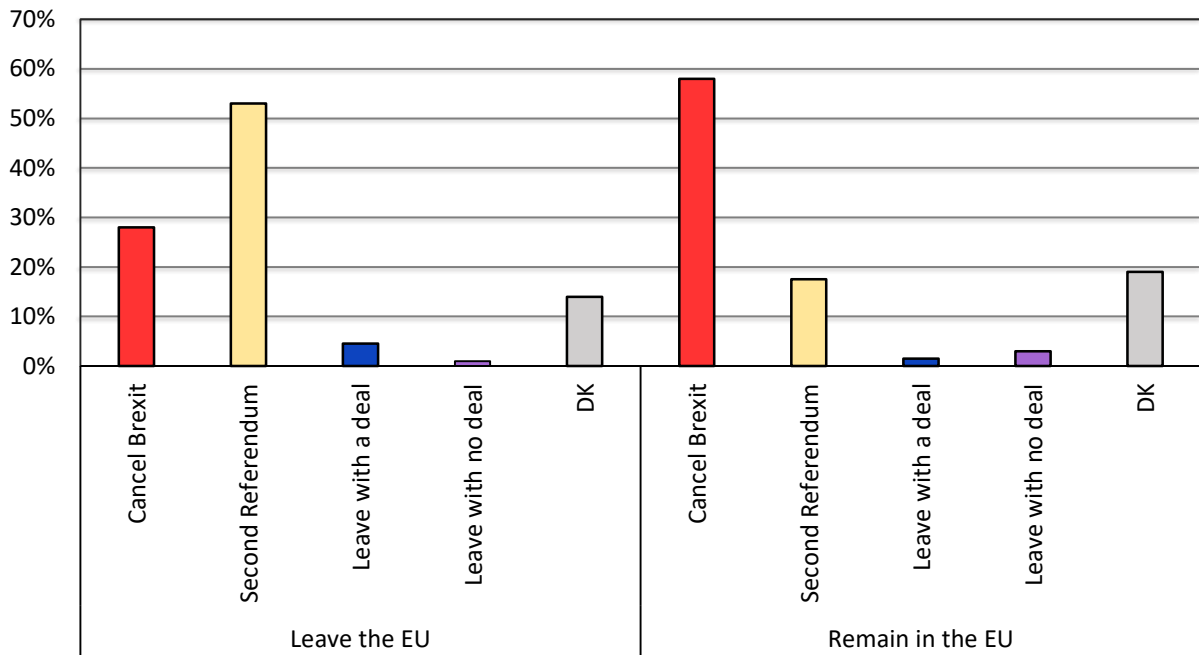


Figure 4.3: Views on Labour's Brexit position by a voter's 2016 EU referendum vote, Source: BES 2019. The figure shows Leave voters were unsure of Labour's position, with a noticeable split between such voters thinking Labour was going to either cancel Brexit or hold a second referendum. This confusion over very different policy positions therefore potentially shows a lack of understanding in Labour's Brexit policy.

What Voter's most wanted to happen with Brexit:

Brexit Preference	% of responses
Cancel Brexit without a referendum	17.87%
Have a referendum on a deal	23.92%
Leave with a deal with no referendum	26.89%
Leave with no deal	20.12%
Don't know	11.21%

Table: 4.3: Voters' most preferred Brexit policy during the 2019 election, Source: 2019 BES.

The table shows that cancelling Brexit was the least preferred outcome.

The misunderstanding of Labour's Brexit policy could have severely damaged their chances of gaining votes as it meant that some voters wrongly assumed Labour was advocating a Brexit

future they found unacceptable. Moreover, voters generally had a clear idea over which Brexit outcome they most preferred. Generally speaking, a majority of voters preferred having a second referendum or implementing the reformed deal with no second referendum. However, amongst many swing Leave voters, Labour was portrayed as the party that could cancel Brexit or have a second referendum on a deal they thought would be less good than Boris Johnson's Deal. Therefore, when Labour fudged their position and offered another renegotiation with Europe on the withdrawal agreement this could have repelled many wavering leave voters before the election had started.

Meanwhile, as the Conservatives endlessly repeated their plan was to implement Boris Johnson's new deal, or if this could not be secured to leave with No deal, they managed to appeal to more voters. Figure 4.4 shows most individuals, especially Leave voters who rejected a second referendum, understood the Tories' position was to offer either of these two options and reject any option that could allow the UK to Remain in the EU. Crucially, this meant that the very voters they needed to win over could correctly identify their policy, whilst often failing to understand what Labour was communicating. Therefore, it is possible that the Conservatives were more able to appeal to these crucial voters than Labour, allowing the Tories to attract such voters and Labour to likely repel such individuals. This critically would mean a net gain in votes for the Conservatives, possibly helping to explain the election result.

Critically, Leave voters who understood the Tories' Brexit policy and felt Labour would renegotiate Johnson's new EU deal badly, or cancel the negotiations altogether, were much less likely to rate the Labour Party and indicate a voting intention of Labour. Alternatively, such individuals were likely to highly rate Boris and vote for the Tories from the start of the election, signalling the amount of clarity over the main parties' Brexit message may have determined the election result.

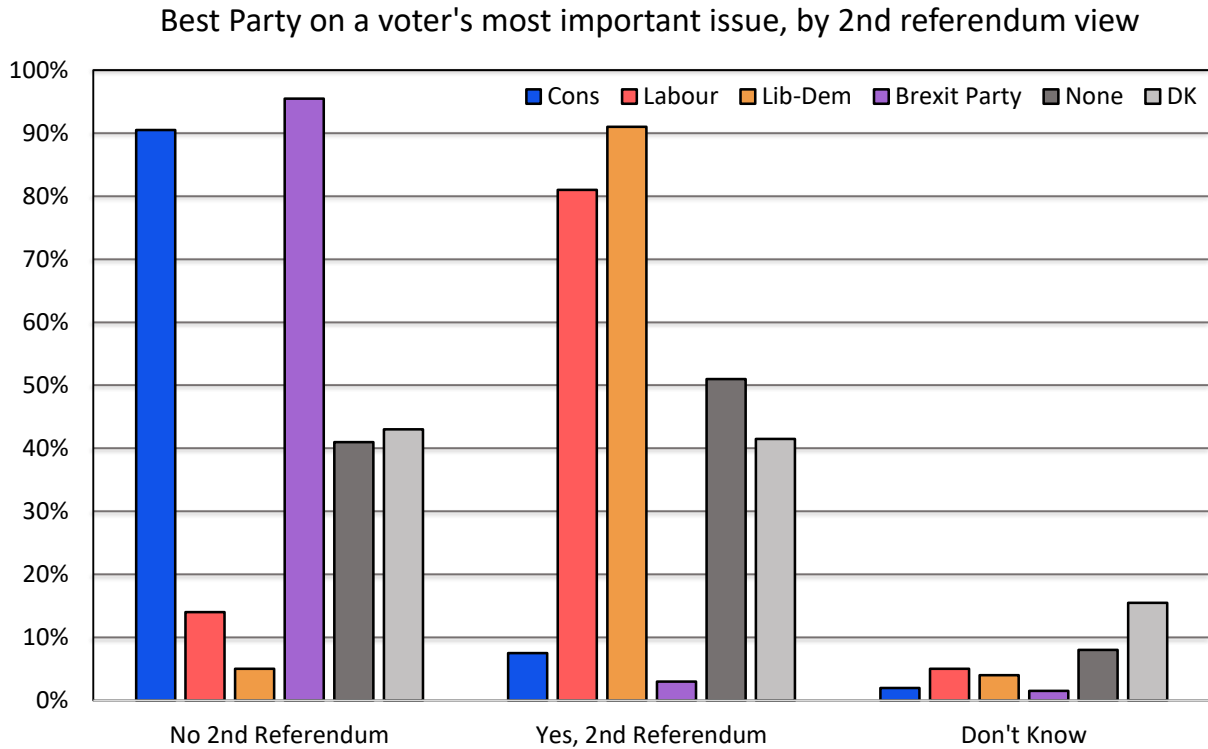


Figure 4.4: Best Party on a voter’s most important issue by responses to the question that asked a voter’s most preferred Brexit outcome. Source: 2019 BES.

Figure 4.4: shows those who thought offering a referendum on Labour’s negotiated deal was a good idea backed Labour and those who rejected this way forward on Brexit heavily backed the Tories.

Views on Boris’ Deal:

Boris Deal View	% of Responses
Remain in the EU	45.60%
The government's withdrawal deal	36.42%
I would not vote	7.57%
Don't know	10.41%

Table 4.4: View on Boris Johnson’s deal vs other alternatives, Source 2019 BES. The average figure shows that the public were much divided over this newly reformed deal, but this hides trends that showed Leave groups gathered around accepting the renegotiated deal.

The Conservative Party's clear communication of implementing Boris Johnson's renegotiated deal straight away could have also been a large factor behind the Conservatives' victory. The deal the Tories managed to renegotiate could have been a game-changer as table 4.4 shows it provided an option that many voters could find acceptable, especially if No Deal was promised in the event it could not be implemented. Moreover, the deal was rated more than May's deal and was very popular amongst the voters they were trying to win over from Labour. Therefore, at the same time, these key voters became more sceptical of Labour's policy they started to prefer the option the Conservatives were offering.

Importantly, according to BES data Leave voters from the start of the election stated a much higher approval of Johnson's deal than any proposed second referendum on a theoretical Labour deal. Crucially, the BES also indicates this led to a scenario where these voters were much more likely to have a voting intention of Tory over Labour at the start, and throughout the campaign. This would suggest that the Conservatives securing a reformed deal alongside Labour's position seemingly becoming ever more confused in the months leading to the general election were two important political events that could have shaped the election outcome before it had even been called. This would again indicate that rather than Brexit or the 2019 election campaign being the most important factors determining the election result it was in fact key political events that occurred in 2019.

Importantly, figure 4.5 shows evidence that how voters felt about Johnson's renegotiated deal could have impacted their likelihood of rating the Conservatives. Those who felt that Boris' deal, with a No-deal option if future negotiations went badly, was the right way forward more often highly rated Boris Johnson and the Conservative Party than they did Corbyn's Labour. Further, they also believed the Tories to be the more competent party in handling the Brexit process, again indicating that Boris Johnson securing a revised deal helped his party win over voters at Labour's expense.

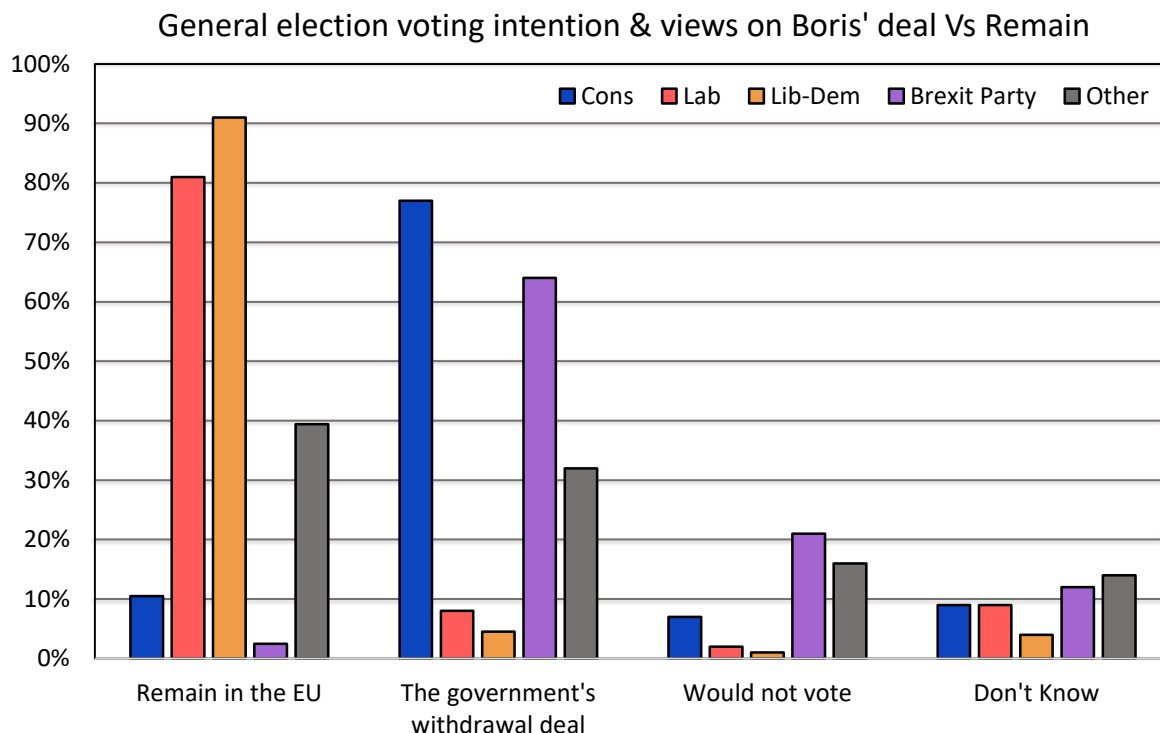


Figure 4.5: Voter’s general election voting intention divided by groups who preferred Boris Johnson’s renegotiated deal, and others who preferred to Remain. Source: BES 2019. Figure 4.5: shows that those wanting to take the government’s new deal were much more likely to have a voting intention of Conservative, whilst those who wished to have a second referendum and Remain much preferred Labour.

Negotiation Priorities:

Negotiation priority should be:	% of Responses
Keeping Market Access	35.56%
Middle – A balanced policy	20.06%
Controlling Immigration	31.05%
DK	13.32%

Table 4.5: Voters’ responses to what a government’s Brexit negotiation priority should be, an average figure during the campaign.

Source: 2019 BES. It outlines the electorate were fairly divided across the possible approaches to Brexit, thus providing a potential new political divide.

So far, the evidence has shown how individuals voted in the 2016 EU referendum and how voters wanted Brexit to be concluded mattered in shaping voting patterns in the 2019 election. Yet, figure 4.6 provides evidence that voters might be shaping their opinions on what they want from Brexit based on broader values they have. For example, although table 4.5 demonstrates roughly a similar proportion of voters who wanted to maintain EU market access compared to the proportion of individuals who valued securing migration controls, these two groups had very different perceptions of the two main parties. Furthermore, these groups were heavily socially divided, with younger highly educated voters demanding market access and contrasting groupings preferring to secure migration controls. Thus, this value divide may have helped fragment the electorate as it pushed voters closer to one of the two main parties, see figure 4.6.

For instance, if a voter prioritised securing greater border and migration controls from the Brexit negotiations then they were much more likely to have rated Johnson's Conservative Party highly and Corbyn's Labour very poorly. Conversely, groups that wanted to ensure continued access to EU markets were significantly more likely to feel much more positive feelings towards the Labour Party and its leadership than compared to the Conservative Party and their leader, Boris Johnson. Moreover, these groups viewed the parties' abilities on Brexit quite differently. Those who valued securing market access clearly thought Labour or the Liberal Democrats were better placed to handle the coming Brexit negotiations than when compared to the Conservative Party. Moreover, those focusing on securing trade with the EU often felt Labour was better to handle issues such people identified as being the biggest problems facing the country. Conversely, those prioritising securing migration and border controls clearly perceived the Conservative Party to be more competent in handling the EU negotiations and the big issues of the day than compared to the alternatives on offer.

Further to this, this trend can also be viewed amongst opinions towards EU integration. Those who were more content with modern developments that has led to closer UK-EU integration

generally favoured Labour and perceived them to be more competent on Europe than compared to the Tories. These voters were also more likely to vote Labour. Yet, those who had grown concerned of integration clearly felt the Conservatives to be more likeable and competent and were likely to back the Tories over Labour.

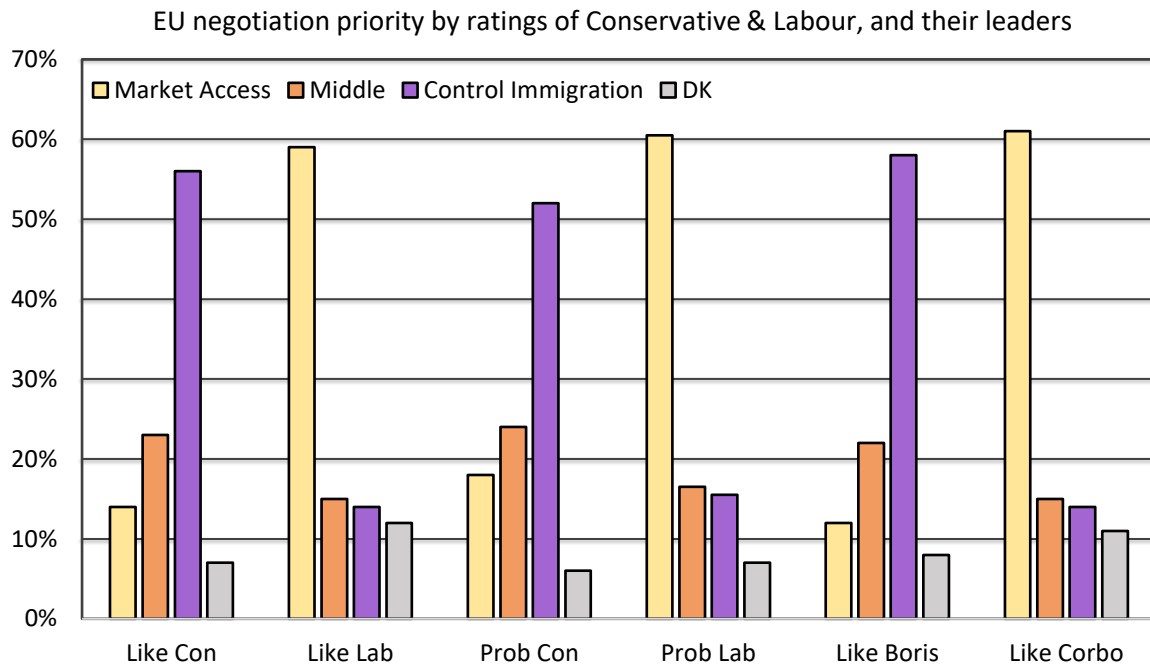


Figure 4.6: Shows those who favoured controlling migration liked the Conservatives more and were quite likely to vote Tory. Those who valued maintaining EU market access favoured Corbyn and stated a higher chance of voting Labour.

Effects of Leaving the EU:

Effects of Leaving EU	Migration	Trade	Job losses	Terror	International Voice
Higher	7.88%	26.51%	36.48%	25.02%	17.60%
Similar	41.45%	26.28%	39.16%	55.53%	32.05%
Lower	41.01%	36.14%	14.19%	9.95%	42.32%
DK	9.66%	11.07%	10.17%	9.49%	8.04%

Table: 4.6: Perceived effects of leaving the EU on key policy areas. This figure represents the view voters had on this question at the start of the campaign. Source: 2019 BES. The table shows the electorate had very mixed views in regards to whether Brexit would bring positive or negative consequences to the UK.

Moreover, there is further evidence that an individual’s broad set of attitudes on the EU question might have influenced the outlook voters had in the 2019 election, and from this contributed to determining the result. Focusing on the perceived effects of leaving the EU there were again clear correlations between views and voting patterns. Figure 4.7 shows those who felt the effects of leaving the EU would likely be negative for the UK tended to have a better than average outlook on the Labour Party and Corbyn, thought Labour to be competent on Brexit and had a higher likelihood of having a voting intention of Labour.

Conversely, the individuals who had a more optimistic view of the UK’s post-European future were more likely to rate the Conservative Party’s leadership, believe the Tories were the right party to lead on Brexit and were considerably more likely to think of voting for the Tories compared to Labour.

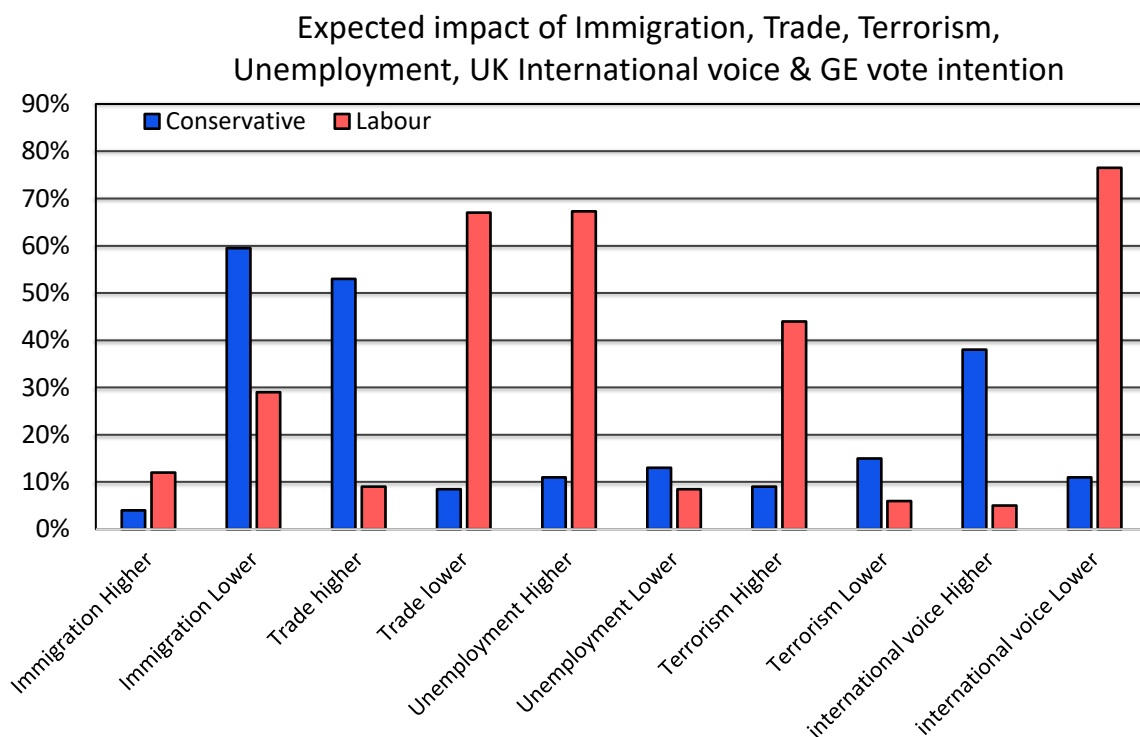


Figure 4.7: The expected impact of Brexit on key policy areas by an individual’s voting intention during the campaign. Source 2019 BES. Figure 4.7: shows that Labour gained votes from those sceptical of Brexit and the Tories gained from those more optimistic. Therefore, a wider ideological divide affecting cultural issues may have shaped the 2019 election outcome.

Controlling Migration and UK sovereignty:

Controlling Migration	Young	Older	Remain	Leave
More control	26.86%	49.95%	4.48%	63.92%
Neither	32.24%	31.97%	41.23%	24.19%
Little More Control	21.98%	12.36%	15.60%	5.69%
DK	18.93%	5.71%	9.81%	6.20%

Table 4.7: View on controlling migration by socio-political grouping. This is an average figure that was recorded during the election campaign. Source: BES 2019.

The general outlook towards the EU and Brexit correlating with voting outcomes in the 2019 election continues when analysing other variables found within the BES, such as when asking voters the extent to which they thought the UK would be able to control migration post-Brexit. Those who felt the UK would gain more powers to control borders and have a greater say over the amount of net migration the country would experience in subsequent years tended to vote Leave and be more likely to support the Conservative Party in this election. See table 4.7.

Oppositely, those who thought the UK would not gain much more powers over immigration post-Brexit tended to have voted Remain and also looked upon the Labour Party more favourably. These voters were also more probable to have voted for Labour over the Conservatives as well, see table 4.8.

More UK Sovereignty Post Brexit	Like Boris	Like Corbyn	Prob Con	Prob Lab
More Likely	65.41%	23.86%	64.48%	26.02%
No difference	21.73%	31.14%	22.39%	31.23%
Less Likely	5.78%	31.96%	6.42%	31.47%
DK	7.08%	13.05%	6.71%	11.29%

Table: 4.8: Feelings on how Brexit would affect UK sovereignty by the proportion of voters who liked the Conservative and Labour Party leader and by the probability to vote for their two respective parties on polling day. Source: 2019 BES.

This trend was reinforced when the BES presented the question over how much power they thought would return to the UK on a range of issues post-Brexit. Table 4.8 shows individuals who believed that more powers would return tended to be much more receptive to the message Boris Johnson gave out during the campaign than compared to the image Corbyn exuded. Such voters also stated they were more likely to vote for the Tories, especially when compared to their chances of voting Labour, see figure 4.8. Conversely, those who thought little powers would come back to Britain tended to be more receptive to Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders and were more likely to have voted for these parties. Therefore, based on the information presented in the last few pages it can be said that there is evidence that not just opinions on Brexit and its future shaped voting outcomes, but so too could have a broad set of attitudes on Europe, signalling a wider value divide that split voters between Conservative and Labour.

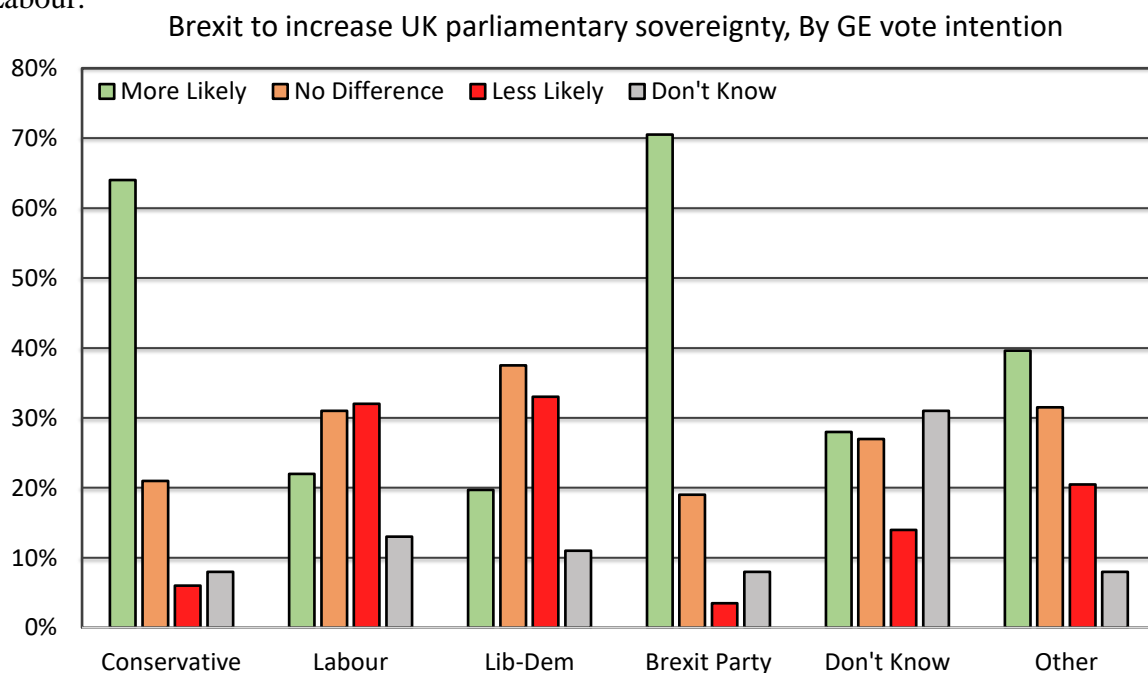


Figure 4.8: View on Brexit’s capacity to increase UK sovereignty, by individual voting intention.

Figure 4.8: Displays that those who felt UK sovereignty would increase post-Brexit were much more likely to back the Tories and those who were sceptical that such a trend would occur mostly backed Labour and the Lib-Dems.

Perceptions on how the Labour would handle the EU negotiations:

Labour Handle EU negotiations	
Handle Well	10.45%
Neither	13.45%
Handle Badly	64.40%
DK	11.70%

Table: 4.9: Responses to the question of how well a future Labour administration would handle the ongoing Brexit negotiations. Source: BES 2019. It shows that a majority of the electorate felt Labour would not manage the negotiations well and they were unlikely to feel they could get a better deal from the EU.

Throughout this book, there has been much data outlining the correlations between views on Brexit and the perceived level of credibility of the two main parties to manage the Brexit crisis. Trends that found Labour to have problems amongst certain groups of voters, especially with wavering former Labour leave voters because of perceived weaknesses on their Brexit position, could have been very significant. Table 4.9 outlines the Labour Party was generally thought of as unable to handle the issue by many voters, and particularly by Leave voters they were losing support from. These opinions crucially correlated with the stated level of consideration a voter had of voting for Labour throughout the election. Those who thought they could do a reasonable job stated a much higher likelihood of thinking to vote for Labour throughout the campaign than compared to the Conservative Party, see figure 4.9.

Alternatively, those who thought Labour could not handle the coming trade negotiations with the EU stated a very low probability of voting for Labour and a much higher than average potential of backing the Tories on polling day. This was problematic for Labour as many voters felt this to be the case, especially as the 2019 parliamentary deadlock dragged on. Crucially, this supports the potential that Labour's vague Brexit position and desire to keep EU-UK integration could have cost the Labour Party votes and gained the Conservatives much support.

If this is the case, the decision Labour made of not having a clear policy on the Brexit issue and the Tories' decision to back Boris Johnson's deal really could have altered perceptions of competence on the biggest issue of the day, and from this shaped voting patterns. After all, if an individual wanted to implement Brexit, or just wanted to accept Johnson's deal to end the seemingly endless political deadlock, why would they back a party they felt less able to end the crisis than a party who they felt had the policies and leadership to "get Brexit done"?

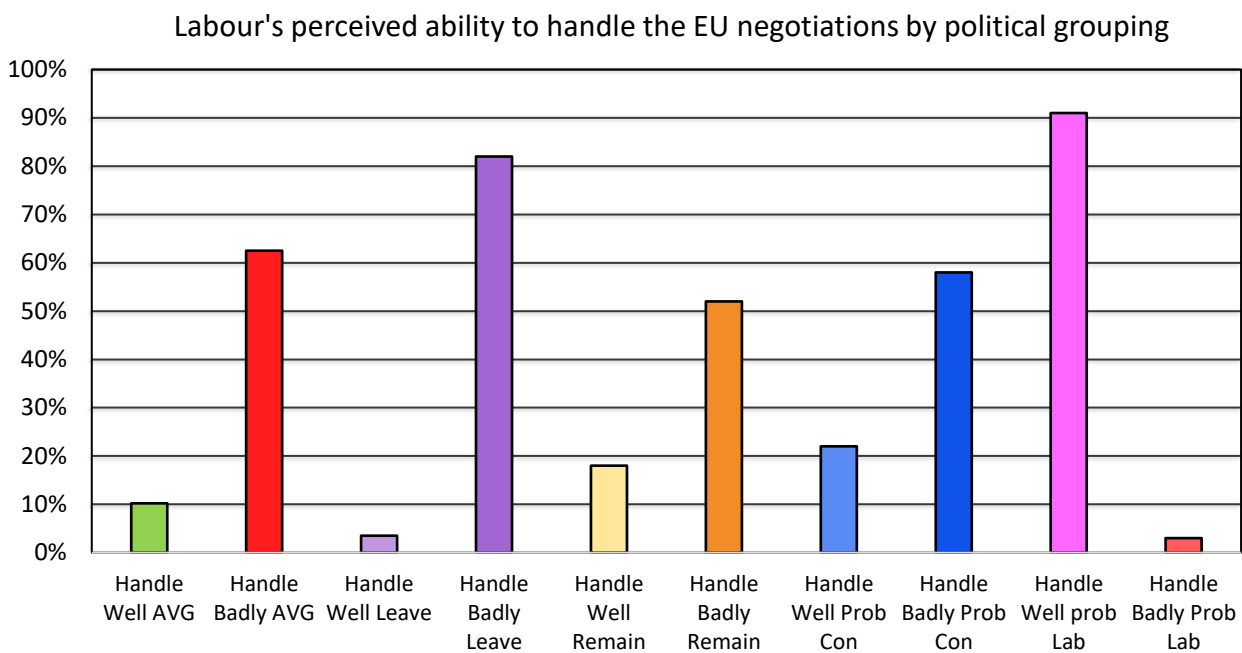


Figure 4.9: Labour's perceived ability to handle the coming EU negotiations by various political groupings. Source: 2019 BES. Figure 4.9: Displays that Labour was generally perceived to not be able to handle the EU negotiations well and were not trusted on the biggest issue of the day, especially amongst Leave voters likely to back the Conservatives.

The book next uses linear regression analysis in order to determine if Brexit, Brexit's future and broad opinions on the EU likely did alter individual's political perceptions and voting behaviour. This enables the book to examine the extent to which divisions over the Brexit issue determined voting patterns in the 2019 election, especially for the two main parties.

Regression Analysis: Brexit's potential impact:

Model 4.1: Brexit Policy Model. A linear model that estimates Brexit the factor's effect on a voter's stated likelihood of voting for the Conservative and Labour Party.

Model 4.1: Brexit Policy Model:	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
Dependent variable: Probability to vote Tory/ Labour – 10 point scale.	Prob vote Con (1)	Prob vote Lab (2)
Second Referendum - Yes	-0.976** (0.473)	1.372** (0.561)
Johnson's deal Vs remain - Remain	-2.440*** (0.437)	1.303** (0.518)
Johnson's deal Vs remain - Abstain	-1.551*** (0.442)	0.730 (0.524)
Have a referendum on a deal	-0.673*** (0.255)	0.769** (0.302)
Leave with a deal, no referendum	1.580*** (0.579)	-1.065 (0.687)
Leave with no deal	1.643*** (0.593)	-1.448** (0.704)
Second Referendum _Unacceptable	0.446** (0.209)	-0.586** (0.248)
Unacceptable_Deal, No referendum	-0.718*** (0.211)	0.122 (0.250)
Unacceptable_No Deal	-1.156*** (0.278)	0.818** (0.330)
Tory Brexit Preference _Leave with a deal	4.432*** (0.625)	-4.196*** (0.741)
Tory Brexit Preference _No deal	3.381*** (0.626)	-3.719*** (0.742)
Lab Brexit Preference _2 nd referendum	-0.303 (0.226)	0.663** (0.268)
Lab Brexit Preference _Leave with a deal	-0.477 (0.317)	-0.317 (0.376)
Self – EU Integration_EU Integration	-0.347*** (0.430)	0.106*** (0.493)
Self – EU Integration - UK Independence	4.859***	-3.019***

	(0.476)	(0.546)
Handle EU Negotiation_badly (Cons)	2.621*** (0.242)	-2.027 (0.282)
Handle EU Negotiation _well (Cons)	3.798*** (0.204)	-2.968 (0.238)
Lab EU Negotiations_Go Badly	1.439** (0.912)	-1.622* (1.082)
EU negotiation Priority_MarketAccess	-1.734*** (0.653)	0.644* (0.720)
EU negotiation Priority_Control immigration	2.696*** (0.467)	-2.663*** (0.514)
Observations	1,132	1,132
Adjusted R ²	0.665	0.440
Std. Error (df = 1113)	2.597	3.082
<i>Significance note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Regression analysis main findings:

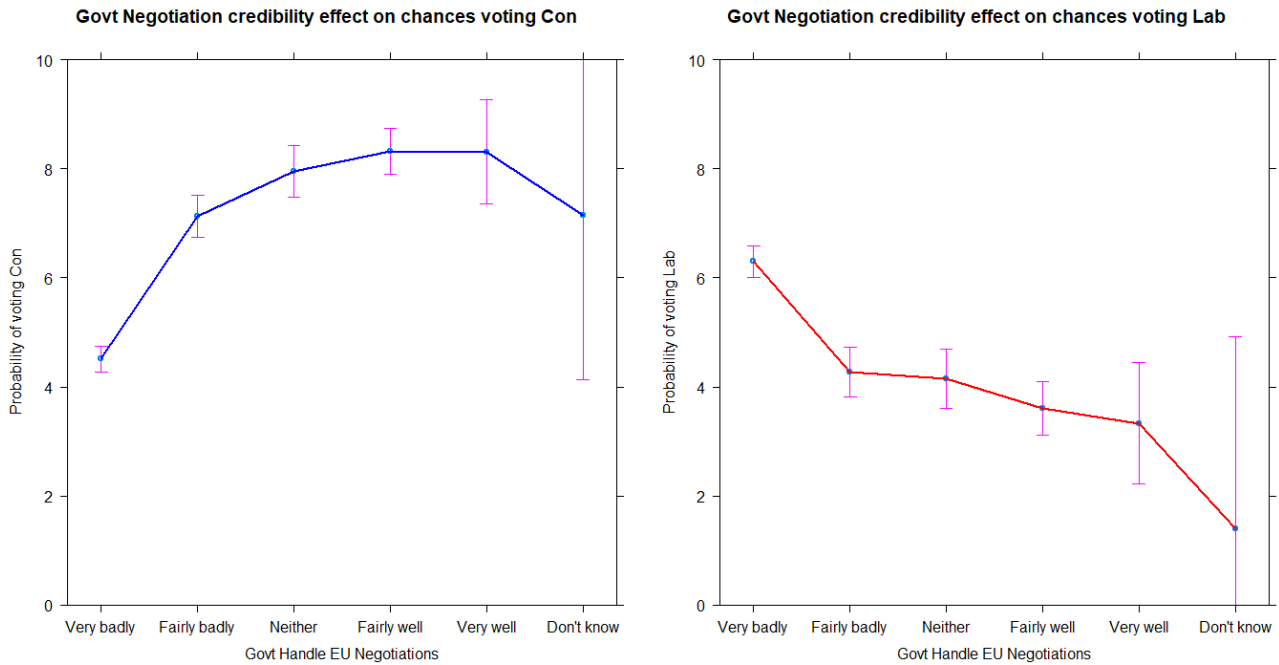
The position a voter took on the European question did have quite a significant effect upon the result of voting outcomes according to model 4.1. This model can explain over 60% of the variation in voters' responses to how likely they were to vote for one of the two main parties. Model 4.1 shows us if a voter placed themselves towards the side of the EU divide that favoured keeping EU connections they were less than likely to vote for the Conservative Party. On the other hand, those who placed themselves in the camp of seeking greater independence from the EU tended to be more than likely to back the Tories, with Labour experiencing a decrease in their vote share from these types of voters. As a result, one reason why Leave voters moved away from Labour, and towards the Tories and Brexit Party this election might have been because they felt Labour had strayed too close to a position that favoured keeping EU ties. The Tories on the other hand experienced a decrease in the likelihood of gaining votes when the Conservative Party was perceived to want to sever too many ties and have moved too far in a hard Brexit direction.

Therefore, Labour giving off an impression that they both wanted to keep EU ties and separate connections from the EU could have decreased their chances of gaining votes from both EU camps. Meanwhile, the Conservatives Party's position may have deterred a few of their Remain voters, but it maximised the amount of Labour leave voters they could appeal to, consequently overall producing a net gain for their vote share. Critically, model 4.1 demonstrates a real possibility that mistakes from Labour, along with decisions deployed by the Conservatives over Brexit that took place before the election, could have dramatically shaped the election outcome.

Another interesting finding was that the decision a voter made in the 2016 EU referendum was not as impactful on voting behaviour in the 2019 election as views on a second referendum were, see effect plots 4.2-3. Firstly, those who had voted Remain were more likely to back the Labour Party than Leave voters were, and Leave voters had a higher probability of voting Tory than Remain voters did. However, the size of this effect was smaller than views concerning a second referendum. Those who favoured a second referendum were more likely than not to vote for the Labour Party, whereas the Conservative Party experienced a decrease in the likelihood of gaining votes when such views were present in a voter's mind. If a voter strongly felt that a second referendum should not be on offer the Tories quickly became much more likely to gain votes, whereas Labour was less than likely to pick up such votes. However, as stated earlier, this probably was the case at the start of the campaign, so Labour's decision to back a second referendum option in all probability gained them more voters than an anti-second referendum position would have. This is because these voters were very unlikely to think of backing Labour from the very start of the election.

This again shows that Labour's attempts to block Brexit leading up to the 2019 election might have limited their ability to gain votes from Leave supporters and made it easier for the Tories to make gains off Labour. Moreover, the Conservatives' focus on "getting Brexit done" leading up to the election appears to have increased their chances of taking votes off Labour and

reduced Labour’s ability to compete for these voters’ support. Therefore, the Tories’ decision to hammer home Brexit before the campaign also likely helped them win, and Labour to lose.



Effect Plot 4.1: A voter’s thoughts on how credible they felt the government to be in the Brexit negotiations, and its effect on their desire to vote for the Conservative and Labour Party. Effect plot 4.1 shows that unless a voter felt the government was going to handle the EU negotiations very badly, and do a worse job than Labour (which was rarely the case) the Tories were more likely to gain support than Labour.

How to settle the issue of Brexit also divided voters heavily in a way that in all probability did translate directly into voting patterns. The preferences a voter had in how to best settle the Brexit stalemate does appear to have translated into voting patterns at a statistically significant level. Those who favoured options that might have allowed the UK to stay within EU institutions, such as cancelling Brexit and having a referendum on Johnson’s deal, increased the Labour Party’s vote share and limited the number of votes the Tory Party could expect to gain. Meanwhile, groups who rejected having a referendum on Boris’ deal and just wanted to

implement Brexit, even forcing a No-Deal Brexit if necessary, were much more likely to increase the Conservative Party's vote share, whilst Labour was likely to lose votes from such groups. If a referendum was forced over implementing the government's deal a voter who would support the government's deal over remaining in the EU backed the Tories, whilst those with the opposite view were likely to increase the Labour vote share. However, whilst this was significant these trends existed at the start of the campaign, indicating Labour lost Leave voters before their commitment towards a second referendum.

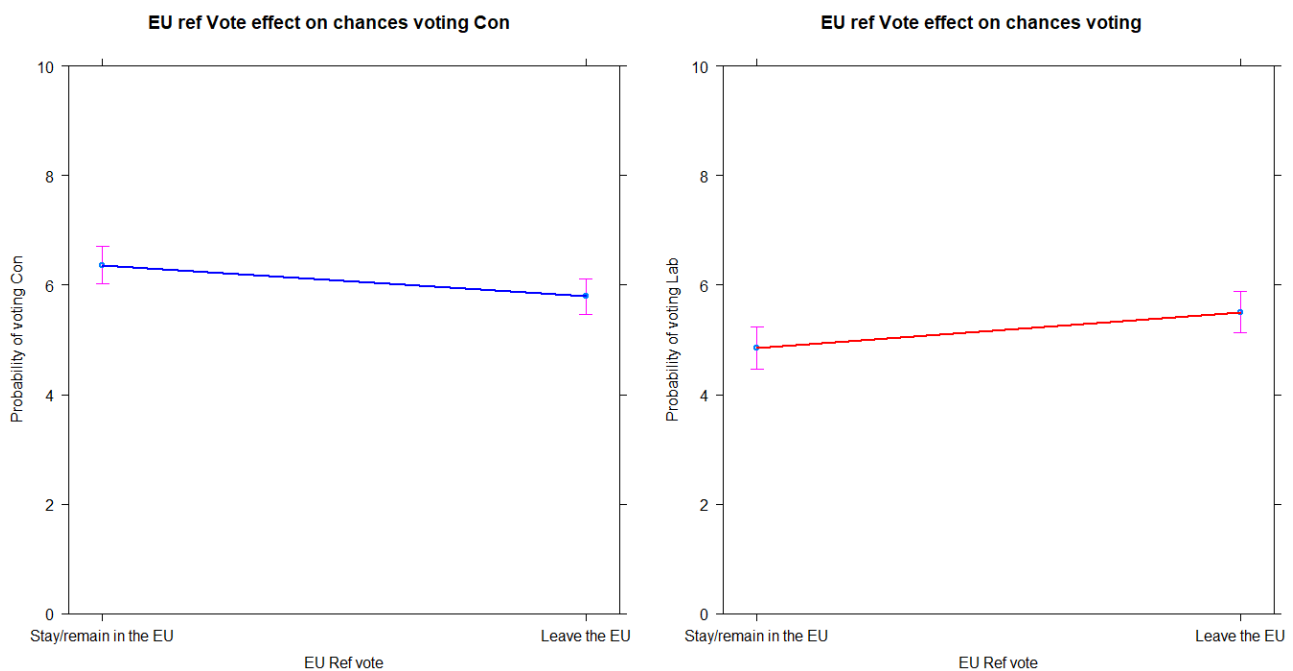
This again shows how Labour lost their ability to appeal to Leave voters after the Tories claimed ownership of Brexit and Labour retreated from the Brexit debate, which was highlighted with their vague Brexit plan, if they were to be elected.

The Brexit outcome voters wanted in the coming negotiations regarding the UK's economic relationship with the EU had some significance in altering voting behaviour in the 2019 election. If Brexit was to be implemented those who preferred a negotiation strategy that prioritised gaining market access over securing controls on migration were mathematically more likely to back the Labour Party over the Tory Party. The Tories had a negative effect from these voters, indicating they struggled to pick up votes from groups who held these views. The reverse was the case for individuals who prioritised controlling migration over keeping ties to EU markets. The Conservatives received a significant increase of support from groups who held this view, whilst Labour struggled to gain support. This downward effect for Labour was bigger than the downward effect the Tory Party experienced with voters more concerned about keeping current economic relations, indicating the EU question might have hurt Labour more than it did the Tories. Consequently, it can be stated that the clear position the Conservatives adopted in securing migration controls and a free trade deal, which were away from single market interferences, likely helped the Tories gain votes. Labour likely improved their vote share when they indicated a pro-single market agenda later on in their campaign. However, this

commitment came too late for some voters and there was a limited gain of such voters for Labour, with some of these voters more inclined to vote Liberal Democrat. This again highlights how Labour's vague Brexit position could have lost them votes, whilst the Tories clear position secured them Leave votes that already were seeking alternatives to a Labour Party they felt increasingly disappointed by.

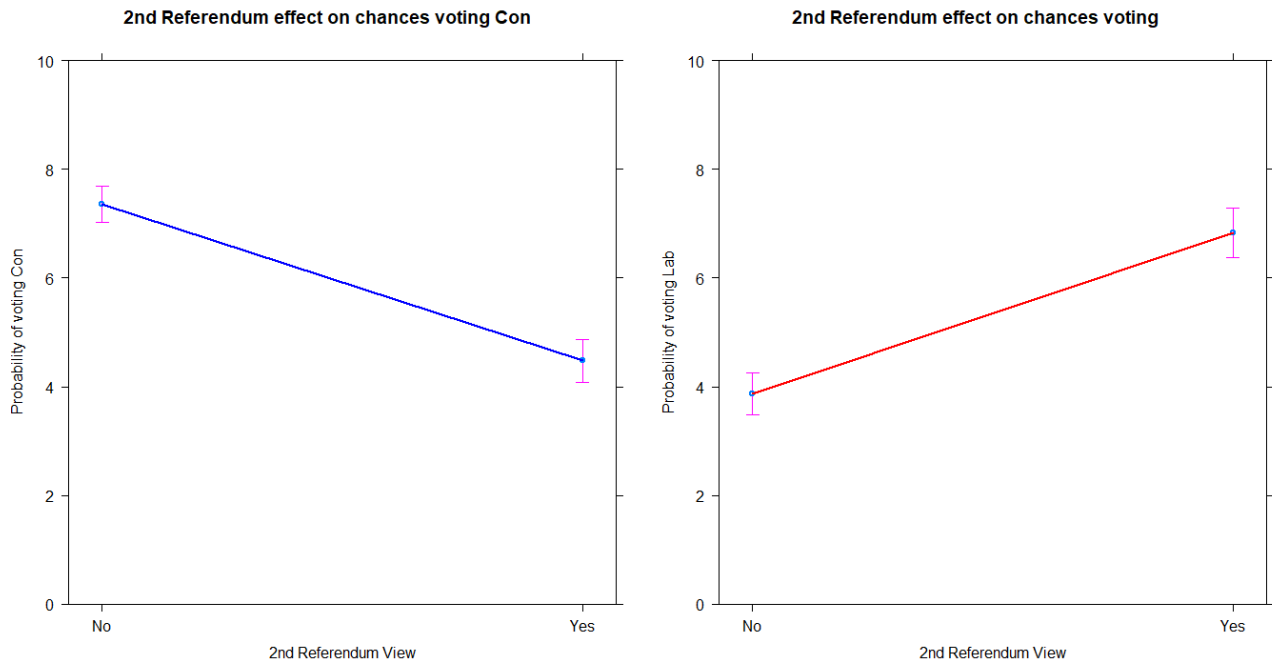
In terms of being able to handle the coming Brexit negotiations, the Conservative Party was often thought of as better in being able to deal with such a large task than the Labour Party were. This in all likelihood did translate into a net gain of votes for the Tory Party as when a voter stated that the Conservatives were more trusted to handle the negotiations over Labour there was a sizable increase in support, whereas Labour became less likely to gain votes. Labour did become more likely to gain votes when a voter felt the Labour Party could do a better job than the government's perceived poor job, however, this gain was limited as the number of voters who trusted Labour over the Tories on this issue was limited. As a result, it can be said the Tories made a net gain, at a statistically significant level, over Labour on the EU issue partly due to perceptions around competence on this important issue, see effect plot 4.1. Therefore, it can be stated the securing of a reformed and seemingly improved Brexit deal, alongside a great effort by the new Conservative leader to push the Brexit agenda forward, likely did help the Tories come across as the best party to perform on this issue by Leave voters, and from this secure them votes. Alternatively, Labour appeared to have no clear end destination on the EU question and this likely made Labour appear incompetent over the issue, only making it easier for the Tories to appear credible on the most critical issue of the day. Consequently, the changing events that led up to the 2019 election on the big issues of the day probably helped the Conservatives appear more competent and Labour less so, helping the Tories win the election and Labour to lose it.

Overall, the model outlined in the pages above shows the Brexit position a party took in all probability mattered in shaping voting behaviour at a noticeable level. Labour taking a pro-remain, second referendum position helped them gain Remain voters and the Tories gained from their harder Brexit stance on the leave side of the debate. The positions a party took on Brexit's future and our EU relationship also shaped outcomes, with those wanting to stop Brexit backing Labour and those wanting its implementation flocking to the Tories. The priorities voters had on Brexit's outcome also mattered, with those wanting to keep economic ties and accepting EU integration backing Labour, and those more concerned with severing ties and gaining border controls opting for the Tories. Finally, the clear position taken from the Conservatives in all likelihood helped it gain more voters than they lost, and this gain over Labour was cemented through Labour's vague Brexit stance creating no significant positive effect on their vote share. This all indicates that there were a wide set of factors that influenced voting behaviour as the EU divide might represent a wider set of value divides that has hurt Labour's chances of winning, and only improved the Tories' prospects.



Effect Plot: 4.2. A voter's 2016 EU referendum vote and its effect on a voter's perceived likelihood of voting Labour or Conservative. Source: BES 2019.

Effect Plot 4.2: Displays that a voter’s 2016 referendum vote was probably not that significant in determining election results during the 2019 election, according to 2019 BES data and this regression model.



Effect plot 4.3: A voter’s view on whether a second referendum should be held and its effect on a voter’s imagined probability of voting for the two main parties. Sources: BES 2019.

Effect Plot 4.3: The output shows how views on the question of whether a second referendum should be held to settle the Brexit crisis probably strongly impacted the likelihood of both Labour and the Conservatives gaining a vote in the 2019 election.

Conclusion:

Overall, trends and opinions of the EU/Brexit question do appear to be a quite significant factor in determining the election result. Trends on a range of questions highly correlated with voting intention throughout the campaign. Moreover, these views also correlated highly through actual voting patterns created on polling day. This repeatedly has given the indication that the EU issue had some impact on changing voting trends in the 2019 election. However, it is important

to note that this could have been more related to individuals' opinions of how competent they felt the parties were in getting a good trade deal and taking the country forwards post-Brexit, rather than it being specifically about how they had voted in the referendum.

For example, opinions on a second referendum helped bring stark voting divides in the election outcome, much more so than the divide of how people voted in the 2016 EU referendum. Those who preferred a second referendum, or an option that could secure a Remain option, tended to be significantly more likely to vote for Labour or another left/liberal party. Meanwhile, those who wanted to guarantee some form of Brexit were significantly more likely to back the Tories. Therefore, it can be said the future of Brexit was perhaps much more important than the past referendum in shaping the election outcome. This would again highlight how decisions taken before the election around how parties would seek to proceed with Brexit could have been an important factor in shaping the election outcome.

For instance, Labour's vague and confusing stance on the Brexit issue leading into the campaign particularly appears to have damaged their credibility on this vitally important issue, and as a result, limited their election prospects even before the election was called. Labour's vague Brexit policy likely left voters confused about how they wanted to proceed with the issue and cast doubt over their abilities to lead the country through difficult negotiations.

Alternatively, Boris Johnson's renegotiated deal looks to have united Leave voters around an option they could find acceptable, which subsequently increased Conservative support and decreased Labour's vote share. This made Johnson's new deal a game-changer and again highlights how events before the election were more important in determining the result than the campaign itself.

Labour's perceived large weakness in handling the EU negotiations compared to the government's perceived ability to handle such things was something that produced a large net

gain for the Tories. This again indicates events in mid-2019 that shaped party competence over Brexit is crucial in understanding the election result. This again provides more evidence supporting the idea that Labour's long muddle on Brexit cost them heavily in 2019.

Different priorities on the Brexit issue also appears to have divided the voters in the choices they made. A voter who valued EU connections and market access tended to back Labour or another left/liberal party. Conversely, individuals who strongly felt that severing EU ties in order to gain greater migration controls was a good policy were considerably more likely to back the Tories. This crucially highlights that the EU might actually represent wider value divides, where the electorate are splitting across wider policy aims. For example, voters Labour lost might be rejecting the EU partly because they preferred securing migration and border controls over maintaining European market access. On the other hand, Labour might have experienced a change in its base where they have gathered together more liberal voters who are less concerned with migration and more concerned about maintaining market access, and are prepared to accept the influence of foreign institutions to gain this.

Finally, the Pro-EU side was more divided over which party to back when compared to the Anti-EU side, indicating Labour's base was more fragile, and also their vague stance cost them support from some of their new electoral base. The statistical model showed that the Conservatives' clearer position on Brexit was overall an asset to the party than compared to Labour's unclear position. The Conservative Party's clear position produced a downward effect on their vote share from pro-Remain outcome voters, but it did significantly increase their support levels from individuals pursuing a Leave option. Consequently, this created a net gain of votes for the Tories, whereas Labour did not have any statistically significant increase from either group based on their perceived Brexit position. Therefore, the confusion over their Brexit position does not appear to have allowed Labour to gain voters as it did in the 2017 election, resulting in mostly a downward effect on their levels of support.

Moreover, model 4.1 showed that this also caused the Conservative Party to be seen as more competent, and from this likely gain votes off Labour. As a result, the net gain the Tories got from this can be said to have contributed to the Conservatives' victory, meaning that decisions the parties took before the campaign over Brexit likely shaped the election outcome before the election was even triggered. Therefore, Labour's late commitment to a second referendum in the campaign likely was not the cause of Labour's Brexit damage. This also suggests that the campaign might have been less important than it had been in the 2017 election.

Therefore, the evidence in this chapter tends to support the hypothesis that states competence around Brexit mattered far more than how voters had voted in the 2016 EU referendum. This is because variables representing how people had voted in 2016, and how they would vote in a second referendum, were not as significant as variables that tracked competence. Moreover, the variables that asked if people wanted a second referendum were also more important, indicating that the extent an individual wanted to "get Brexit done" mattered more than their referendum vote. This could be why the Tories' message of "get Brexit done resonated", why these people viewed the Conservative campaign to be better and why the Conservatives Party won and Labour lost.

The book now goes on to examine another policy factor that has the potential to explain changing voting patterns, the issue of immigration.

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Polling archives, such as the YouGov polling archive. Used to create graphs that tracked polling trends.

Parliamentary constituency election data archives. Used to track constituency trends and generate findings from constituency data.

Thank you for your interest and reading of my work – James Prentice.

About the Author



James Prentice was born and raised in the English south east coastal town of Hastings. He attended Hastings College during his A-Level studies and attended the University of Kent during his undergraduate degree. After working a couple of years in local government, he went back to university and studied electoral behaviour at the University of Essex, gaining a distinction Masters degree in this field. He is currently close to completing his PhD at the University of Sussex in British electoral research and has made this book partly out of research contained within his PhD. If you are interested in other research undertaken by this author you can use the following link to view other titles and blog posts. Website: <https://www.capturepolitics.co.uk>

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