



Project Red Alert

Labour's gamble

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC

Cover image: Collected answers to the question “What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of Ed Miliband?”

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, author and philanthropist. He is founder and Chairman of the Board of Crimestoppers, a member of the Board of the Imperial War Museum and a Trustee of the Imperial War Museum Foundation, Chairman of the Trustees of Ashcroft Technology Academy, Chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University and Treasurer of the International Democrat Union. From 2005 to 2010 he was Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party.

His previous political books and research papers include *Smell The Coffee* (2005), *Minority Verdict* (2010), *What Future For Labour?* (2010), *What Future For The Liberal Democrats?* (2010), *Crime, Punishment & The People* (2011), *Project Blueprint* (2011 & 2012), *The Leadership Factor* (2011), *Degrees of Separation* (2012), *The Armed Forces & Society* (2012), and *Blue Collar Tories* (2012)

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Contents

Labour's gamble: realists or rejectionists?	5
Methodology	9
Labour Loyalists	10
Labour Joiners	11
Labour Considerers	12
The things that matter	13
Full poll results	22

Labour's gamble: realists or rejectionists?

Much of my previous research has explored the Conservatives' strategic conundrum: how to attract enough new voters to win a majority while keeping on board their 2010 supporters, at a time when Labour are given a head-start by disillusioned former Liberal Democrats. My conclusions on how to build the Conservative voting coalition are set out in Project Blueprint. Here I want to look at the other side of the equation. Labour have a coalition of their own to build and, like the Tories, a dilemma to go with it.

Labour's current, potentially election-winning, vote share comprises traditional Labour voters who supported the party in 2010, plus defectors from the coalition parties, particularly left-leaning Lib Dems aghast at finding themselves sharing office with the Conservatives. Labour's poll rating in the mid-40s is consistent, and certainly enough for a comfortable overall majority if translated into an election result, but how firm is it? What does an election-winning coalition look like for Labour – and how different does it look from the one they have today?

Labour Loyalists, who voted for the party at its lowest ebb in 2010 and say they would do so again, make up a quarter of the electorate. They are not going anywhere. They say Labour shares their values – a rare enough thing for anyone to say of any party – and overwhelmingly rate them as the best party to manage the economy.

A further 17% of voters are Labour Joiners – who did not vote Labour at the last election but say they would do so tomorrow. Combined with Loyalists, they take Labour's current share to 42%. Our poll found that the factor that most unites Joiners is the view that Labour is on the side of people like them. Qualitative research among this group helped to show what lay behind this view, and their broader motivation for switching to Labour.

Buyer's remorse plays a large part for many of them, particularly those who simply voted for change, or liked David Cameron, but had not considered the need for cuts or expected them to happen. Not surprisingly, this is even more the case among those for whom austerity has brought personal consequences. Public sector workers and those whose families have lost out on benefits feature heavily in this group. Blaming the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats for policies they do not like, and seeing Labour as the only alternative, they have switched directly to the party. Like many other voters, the feature of the Labour Party they most often mention spontaneously is that it is for the working class – unlike the Tories, who are for the better off. (The fact that this is often said by people who both regard themselves as working class and voted Conservative at the last election probably says as much about the strength of the Labour brand as it does about the caprice of voters).

Labour Joiners will often recount a litany of things that have changed since 2010. Significantly, the Labour Party is never among them. In our poll, the huge majority of Joiners said they thought Labour had learned the right lessons from its time in government and could be trusted to run the country again. In discussion, though, much of this is revealed to be wishful thinking on the part of people who are angry with the coalition and want to justify to themselves a move back to the party they voted against two years ago. They struggle to think of any evidence that Labour has changed or learned, often insisting simply that "they must have done".

Many Joiners hit by austerity hope or assume that a new Labour government would restore some or all of what they have lost out on. This is not based on any specific promise they think they have heard, but on their view of Labour as the party for ordinary people and public services, combined with its opposition to cuts. This has echoes of private research I conducted for the Conservatives in mid-2008 when, two years before the last election, they were further ahead in the polls than Labour

are today. We found that all the things people wished could be sorted out if only they had a different government – from immigration and public services to the economy and the cost of living – were being projected onto the Tories as unmeetable expectations of what a Conservative administration would actually do. It is easier for voters to allow themselves this kind of fantasy in mid term; it rarely survives a general election campaign.

Not all Labour Joiners are resolved to stay with the party. A quarter of them – a much higher proportion than for Loyalists – say they have not finally decided and may well change their minds before the election. Of these “soft Joiners”, four in ten say one of the concerns they have about voting Labour is that they might spend and borrow more than the country could afford.

A further 10% of all voters are Labour Considerers. These did not vote Labour in 2010, and would not do so in an election tomorrow, but say they would consider the party in future. Notably, our poll analysis finds that a low to neutral view of Ed Miliband is the factor that most distinguishes this group. While not an attraction for Joiners (who often candidly say he is the price to be paid for a Labour government, as do some Loyalists), he is a factor preventing some people from switching to Labour. If this were not the case, Labour’s poll share would be above 50%.

Qualitatively, another thing that distinguishes Considerers from Joiners is that the former are much less ready to say that Labour has learned the right lessons and can be trusted to govern again. In particular, they mean spending and borrowing – indeed by far the most common answer they give when asked what would be different today had Labour won the last election is that they would have carried on spending and borrowing as before, perhaps with disastrous consequences. Labour’s opposition to cuts, and apparent refusal to take responsibility for the state of the public finances when they left office, only reinforce this view.

With its double-digit poll lead, and the probability that the next election will be fought with the same favourable constituency boundaries as the last, Labour may decide it needs only to seal the deal with Loyalists and Joiners, and need not broaden its appeal any further. On the evidence so far, this seems to be the party’s inclination.

But a strategic decision to consolidate rather than expand its support would be a gamble for Labour. The wild card is the economy. Even some Joiners say they would have to reassess their voting intention in the event of a tangible recovery in which they felt their living standards start to rise. Having so vehemently opposed the Conservative economic strategy, Labour had better be sure it is not going to work. If a plan which Miliband and Balls have portrayed as the road to ruin is actually seen by the time of the next election to produce more jobs, better take home pay and a lower deficit, many will have to conclude that the Tories were right and Labour were wrong.

For Labour, creating a more stable voting coalition means bringing on board the Considerers who are not yet ready to say they would vote for the party tomorrow. This in turn means restoring credibility on the economy and, in particular, showing they are serious about the deficit. Some in the Labour movement argue that by talking about the deficit the party can only lose, since it is a Tory issue: they should “frame” the debate in terms more favourable to themselves. This has a familiar ring to those involved in the Tory wilderness years, when it was argued that we should avoid talking about the NHS for similar reasons. It also misses the point that the deficit is not something the Conservatives have invented to scare people, in some sinister “framing” exercise of their own. It is all too real, a fact recognised by many of the voters Labour needs. The party has no chance with people who think it wants to shy away from the central economic question of the day.

It is easy to see why Labour are reluctant to be talk about the deficit. Doing so would mean disabusing a proportion of their supporters of the notion that another Labour government would mean a return to the good old days of lavish spending and no hard choices. But if Miliband does not take this step, he will be relying on a precarious coalition of the disaffected and the dependent who do not see, or do not want to see, the economic reality that the post-2015 government will have to

face. Perhaps he thinks it would be better to wait until he is in Number Ten to disappoint them – in which case he will miss out on voters who are open to a change of government but want some reassurance that Labour will not return to form. Making such a choice could mean him missing out on Number Ten altogether.

Many Labour Loyalists and Joiners say that while a Labour government would inevitably have to make cuts, they would somehow manage to do so in a way that completely avoided affecting important services or people who need help. Giving the impression that this would be possible, tempting though it may be for Labour, carries its own dangers. As one Joiner put it, “they should cut other things. Don’t ask me what, but that’s their problem”. Gaining credibility or allowing unrealistic expectations to continue will be a painful choice for Labour but it is one that needs to be made.

The shape of the coalition Labour decides it needs will help determine the story of politics to 2015. But the fact that it is even a matter of debate for Labour whether its vote needs to include deficit realists shows how the party has changed, and not for the better. In opposition, New Labour went out of its way to establish sound economic credentials. It would never have allowed itself to risk losing because voters feared a Labour government would be profligate. The Labour orthodoxy today seems to be that New Labour was a failed experiment, but it wasn’t – as an electoral force, it worked like nothing before or since. Perhaps they should ask themselves what Tony would do.

I think this research clearly shows the strategic path Labour should choose.

But why would they take advice from me?

MAA
November 2012

Methodology

QUANTITATIVE

- 8,103 adults were interviewed between 17 and 28 October 2012. Results have been weighted to be politically representative of all adults in Great Britain.

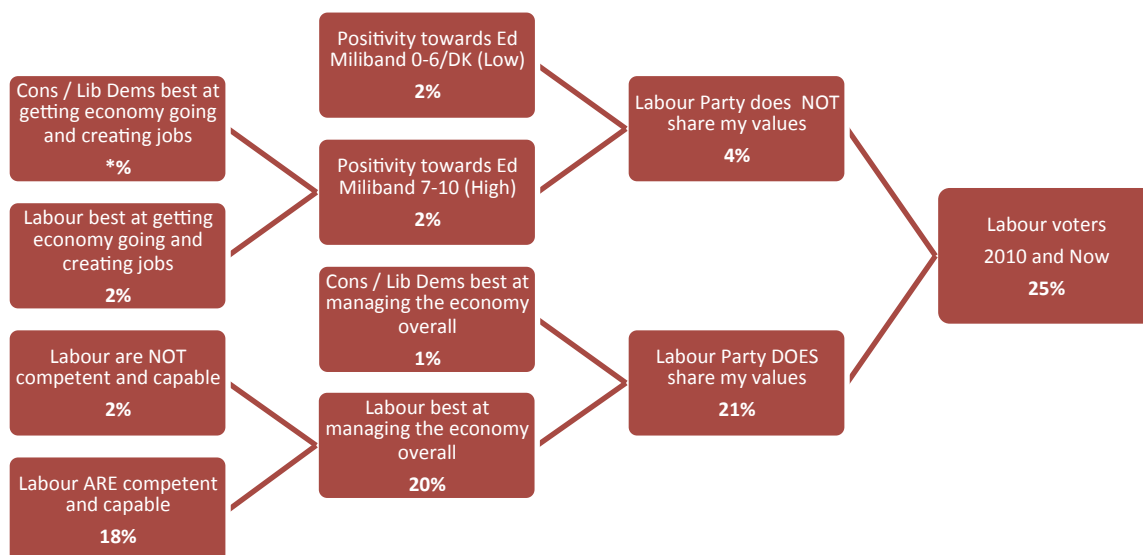
QUALITATIVE

- Twelve focus groups were held between 23 October and 8 November 2012 in Nuneaton, Pudsey, Warrington, Hastings, Watford and Thurrock.
- Groups comprised Labour Loyalists (who voted Labour in 2010 and would do so again tomorrow), Joiners (who would vote Labour in an election tomorrow but did not do so in 2010), and Considerers (who did not vote Labour in 2010 and are currently undecided but would consider Labour).
- Separate groups were held of men and women.

Labour Loyalists

2010 LABOUR VOTERS WHO WOULD VOTE LABOUR AGAIN IN AN ELECTION TOMORROW

Those who voted Labour in 2010 and say they would do so again in an election tomorrow account for a quarter of those who say they would vote. They make up three out of five people who say they'll vote; Joiners (the 17% of voters who did not vote Labour in 2010 but would do so in a new election) take the party up to its current level of 42% in the polls.



The single factor that most distinguishes Labour Loyalists is that they say the party shares their values; more than four in five Labour Loyalists say this is the case. They are also overwhelmingly likely to name Labour as the best party to manage the economy overall, and to say Labour are competent and capable.

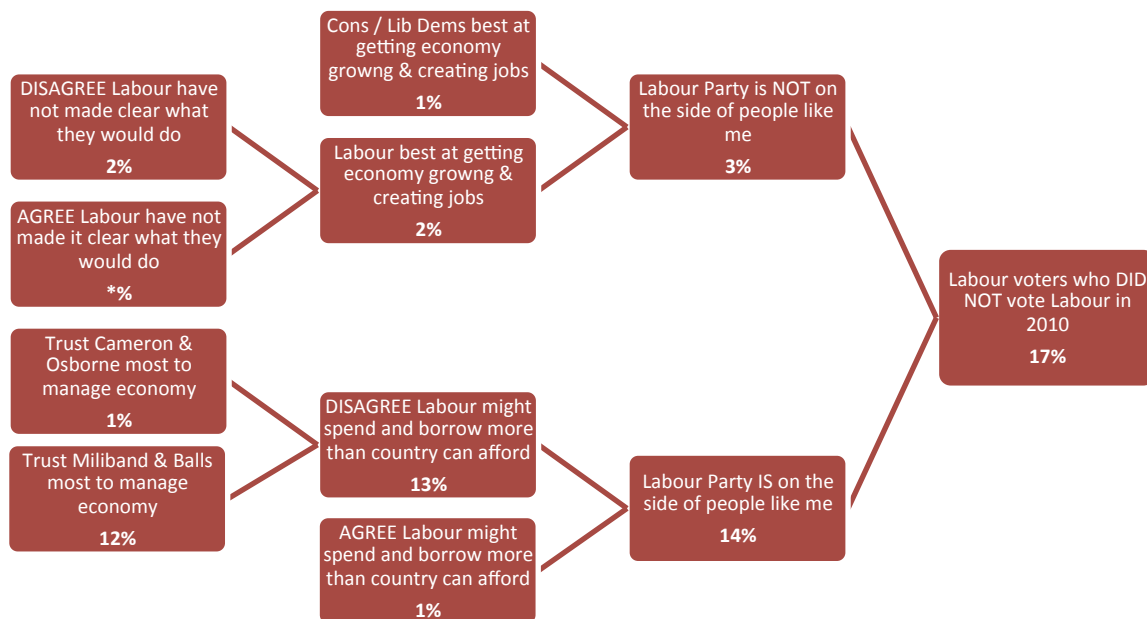
Labour Loyalists who do not think the party shares their values are divided in their views about Ed Miliband; those who rate him highly also say Labour are the best party when it comes to getting the economy growing and creating jobs. (Labour Loyalists who do not think the party shares their values and give low marks to Miliband may be Labour voters by habit as much as anything else).

Interestingly, a positive view of Miliband is a significant driving factor for fewer than one in twelve 2010 Labour voters who intend to vote for the party again.

Labour Joiners

CURRENT LABOUR VOTERS WHO DID NOT VOTE LABOUR IN 2010

17% of all voters say they would vote Labour in an election tomorrow but did not do so in 2010. More than two thirds (69%) of these Labour Joiners voted Liberal Democrat at the last election; 24% voted Conservative and 6% voted for another party. Labour Joiners are disproportionately likely to be aged under 35, and especially between 18 and 24.



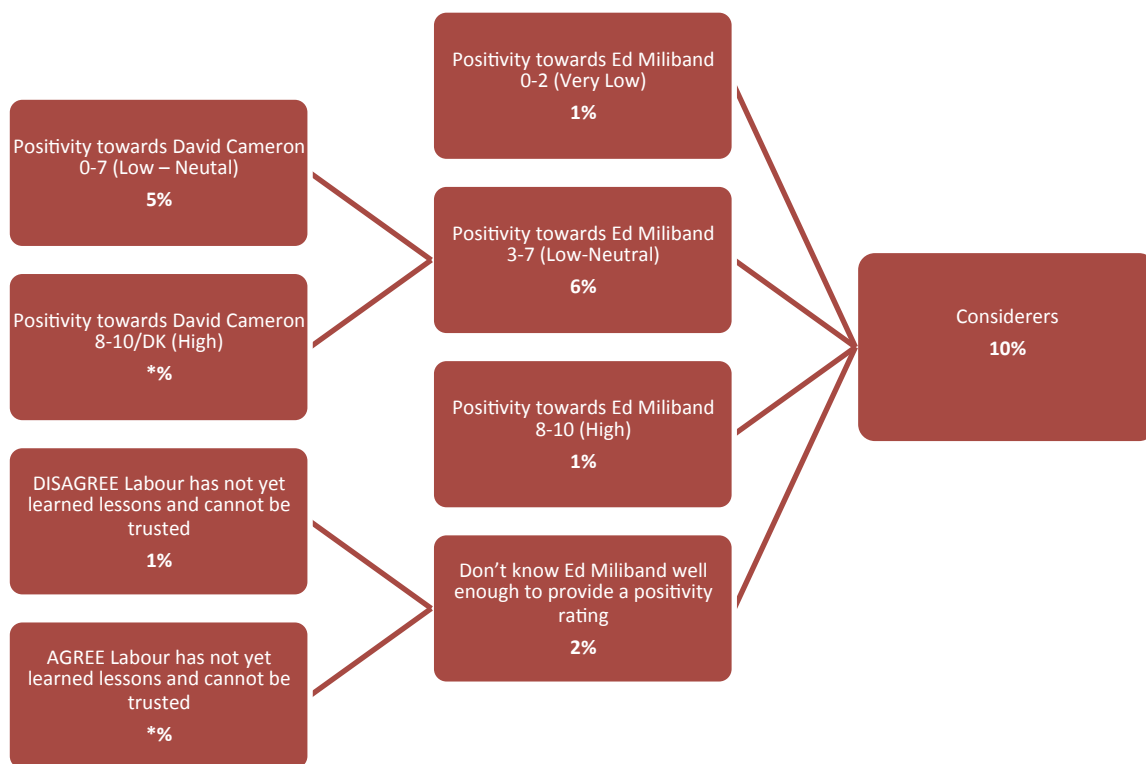
More than four fifths of Labour Joiners say they think the party is on the side of people like them. These people also say they are not worried that Labour in government would spend and borrow more than the country can afford, and overwhelmingly trust Miliband and Balls over Cameron and Osborne to manage the economy.

Among those Labour Joiners who do not think the party is on the side of people like them, Labour are the best party when it comes to getting the economy growing and creating jobs. Those who think that also say they are not put off by the idea that Labour have not made clear what they would do to improve things.

Labour Considerers

THOSE WHO DID NOT VOTE LABOUR IN 2010, AND WOULD NOT DO SO TOMORROW, BUT WOULD CONSIDER DOING SO IN THE FUTURE

One in ten voters are Labour Considerers – they did not vote Labour in 2010 and would not do so in an election tomorrow, but would consider voting for the party in the future. As with Joiners, the majority (58%) of this group voted Liberal Democrat at the last election; one third (34%) voted Conservative, and 9% for another party. They are even more disproportionately likely than Joiners to be aged under 35, and 61% of them are women.



Notably, Ed Miliband is a factor for Considerers in a way that he is not for Joiners. 7 out of 10 of them have either a low or neutral view of him, but most of these also give low ratings to David Cameron. Only one in ten Labour Considerers give high marks to Miliband – suggesting that while he is not a major attraction for Joiners (see above), he is one of the factors that keeps this group from fully switching to Labour and taking the party's vote share above 50%.

The things that matter

Not the coalition

Those who voted for a different party in 2010 but said they might vote Labour next time were mainly motivated by dislike of the coalition government. Different views about the Labour Party determined whether people became Joiners (those who said they would vote Labour tomorrow) or Considerers (who would not vote Labour tomorrow but might do so at a future election), but for switchers from the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats, disappointment with the government they helped elect was the starting point.

This was particularly the case for those who had simply voted for a change, or because they liked David Cameron, but had not bought into the need for cuts. Not surprisingly, this was even more the case for those who had lost out personally as a result of austerity.

“Cameron put himself out that he was like us... I knew he was posh, but I thought he was down-to-earth posh.”

[Joiner, Warrington]

“He did say there were going to be changes, but he didn’t give an inkling of what it was until it had all been done. That’s why people are the way they are now”.

[Joiner, Warrington]

Many who voted Liberal Democrat in 2010 were moving towards Labour simply because they were the only alternative to the coalition. A few were considering Labour on the apparently illogical grounds that they did not like the coalition because they had wanted a Conservative government.

“Voting Lib Dem was kind of a wasted vote. You just think, if I’m going to vote Lib Dem again I might as well vote for the Conservatives. We don’t have another option. We have seen that it isn’t working and we have one other option to choose.”

[Joiner, Leeds]

Even some Loyalists remarked that one positive thing the government was doing was trying to reform welfare. However, among determined Joiners, much of the focus group discussion concerned changes to disability benefits, tax credits, public sector employment conditions or social housing rules of which the participants had direct experience, either themselves or through their families. They usually felt that Labour would have avoided making the cuts the coalition had made and, by implication, would restore at least some of what they had lost. They extrapolated this from Labour’s opposition to the cuts, and their view of Labour as the party of public services and the working class, rather than any specific promise they had heard Labour make.

"I was due to retire in 19 years, now I have got to work for 29 years, and as a policeman I haven't had a wage increase for three years. I don't think Labour would cut as much, because they are behind public services and working class people. That's my motive for voting Labour this time."

[Joiner, Leeds]

"They're taking benefits off people who genuinely need them. My brother is not well at all but they still want him back in the workforce."

[Considerer, Nuneaton]

"Lloyd George would be disgusted with the NHS now."

[Considerer, Nuneaton]

At the same time, there was a widespread view that while genuine cases were losing out, lavish help still seemed to be available to those who did not need or deserve it. Immigrants were usually cited directly or indirectly. To those who had lost out themselves, this view only heightened their sense of injustice.

"I just think there needs to be stricter rules because there are so many people who claim for everything. I work hard and I look after my three children and I haven't everything in the house that someone on benefits has got. My son's nine and he's never been abroad because we can't afford it, but there are people I know on benefits who are going away three or four times a year."

[Joiner, Warrington]

"It's shocking that you can't get disability benefit for a family member but you can get people from different countries... It's for other people, do you know what I mean?"

[Considerer, Warrington]

"Social housing in Basildon is restricted to immigrants and mental cases".

[Considerer, Thurrock]

Has Labour learned? Does it need to?

Labour Loyalists tended to think the last Labour government did a good job and had no particular lessons to learn. They blamed the world economy, public weariness with a long-serving government, lack of momentum, false Tory promises, and Gordon Brown (who many felt was unfairly traduced).

Joiners and Considerers usually did think the party needed to learn lessons before being trusted with government again, but were divided over whether it had actually begun to do so or not.

Those who thought Labour had not yet learned cited the absence of any apology, or even acceptance of responsibility, for the state of the public finances at the end of the party's time in office. This raised concerns that when it came to public spending, another Labour government would carry on where the old one left off.

"I think they're in denial. They never admitted it was their fault."

[Considerer, Thurrock]

"It's got to be the spending. They've got to come out and admit that, yes, they did throw money away."

[Considerer, Warrington]

"If you showed what we're saying to the Labour Party, they'd just say 'they don't know what they're talking about'."

[Considerer, Thurrock]

For some potential Labour voters, and even several Loyalists, the biggest failing of the last Labour government was not on the economy but what they regarded as its failure to control immigration. They wanted an acknowledgment that the party understood this.

"The worst thing the Labour government did was open the gates."

[Considerer, Thurrock]

Some felt the party simply had a long way to go to recover credibility all round. Few had heard anything from the Labour apart from opposition to whatever the government was doing.

"I think they're going through adolescence, that's how I see the party. Or more than that, childhood".

[Considerer, Hastings]

“One thing that really winds me up is I haven’t heard anything positive from the Labour Party. I’ve just heard them bitching.”

[Considerer, Hastings]

“If it’s so easy and you have all the answers, what the hell were you doing?”

[Considerer, Thurrock]

Participants who said Labour had learned the right lessons from its defeat were at a loss to cite evidence for their claim. They usually said that they *must* have learned. It was notable that those who said this were often the most determined to switch to Labour.

“I think they’re probably aware of the mistakes they made, like any politician would be after time has gone by. I like to think they know why they lost.”

[Joiner, Thurrock]

“They did apologise. Labour did apologise for something.”

“What was it for?”

“I don’t know. I can’t remember”.

[Joiners, Warrington]

Just over a third of voters (35%) said Labour “have learned the right lessons from what went wrong during their time in government, and can be trusted to run the country again”. Meanwhile, more than half (52%) said they had not yet learned the right lessons and could not yet be trusted to run the country. Labour Loyalists, not surprisingly, were twice as likely as voters as a whole to pick the third option, that the last Labour government “did a pretty good job and I don’t think they have to learn lessons in order for me to be happy for them to run the country again”: one quarter of Loyalists thought this, compared to 13% of all voters.

Labour Joiners were the most likely to say they felt Labour had learned the right lessons and could be trusted again (71%), though the groups suggests much of this may be wishful thinking. Nearly a fifth said the last government had done a pretty good job and had no lessons to learn (even though they voted for a different party at the 2010 election). Labour Considerers, however, were rather less likely to say Labour had learned and could be trusted (45%), and rather more likely to say they had not learned and could not yet be trusted to govern (36%).

Less than a third (32%) of Labour Considerers said the performance of Ed Miliband and Labour in opposition made them more likely to consider voting Labour at the next election than they had been before. Only two thirds of Joiners said Labour’s performance had made them more likely to consider the party, underlining that the voting intentions of many were driven mainly by the government.

16% of those who said they would vote Labour in an election tomorrow – including 9% of Loyalists and more than a quarter of Joiners – said they had not finally decided and may well change their

minds. Among this group of potential switchers, nearly half (48%) said that one of the concerns they had about voting Labour was that “they have not made clear what they would do to improve things”. Notably, Joiners were less likely to think say this than Loyalists – perhaps because they think a Labour government with unknown plans could only be an improvement on the current coalition.

The most widespread specific concern was that Labour “might spend and borrow more than the country can afford”. Four in ten “soft Joiners” thought this, along with a nearly identical proportion of “soft Loyalists”.

For “soft Loyalists”, the biggest specific concern about voting for the party at the next election was that “if Labour won, Ed Miliband would be Prime Minister”. This was a concern for 41% of 2010 Labour voters who said they would vote for the party tomorrow but may yet switch. Just under a quarter (24%) of Joiners said they were concerned about Labour’s links with the trade unions, and just under a fifth (19%) said they were worried that the party was not on the side of people like them.

The economy and the deficit

More than one in ten Labour Loyalists (11%) and 13% of Labour Joiners said they trusted Cameron and Osborne more than Miliband and Balls to manage the economy in the best interests of Britain. This rose to 48% among Labour Considerers, who most trust the Labour team by a 4-point margin (compared to a 6-point margin for Cameron and Osborne among voters as a whole). While 99% of current Conservative voters most trust the Prime Minister and Chancellor, only 88% of current Labour voters most trust their opposite numbers.

Labour Joiners were as pessimistic as Loyalists about the prospects for the economy. 83% of them thought that in two or three years the economy would be no better, or even worse, than it is now, compared to 53% of voters as a whole (and 13% of Conservatives). Only 17% of Labour voters, and 41% of the country as a whole, thought that although things are difficult now “the right decisions are being made and things will improve significantly over the next two or three years”.

Considerers were rather less pessimistic than current Labour voters (though more pessimistic than people in general). Just under a third (31%) thought the economy would improve significantly by the next election, with 69% disagreeing.

Among voters as a whole, Labour had a 4-point lead (47% to 43%) on “getting the economy growing and creating jobs”. This margin rose to 81 points among Joiners, compared to 26 points among Considerers (32% Conservatives, 58% Labour).

On “cutting the deficit and the debt”, however, the Conservatives led by 50% to 41% among Considerers, and the Tories were ahead by 57% to 34% among voters as a whole. 29% of Labour voters rated the Conservatives as the best party on this issue.

When it came to “managing the economy overall”, 50% of Considerers put Labour ahead, with 34% naming the Conservatives and 16% the Liberal Democrats. Among voters as a whole, the Conservatives led by 46% to 42%.

What would be different today if Labour had won in 2010?

Asked what would be different today had Labour won the election and the party had been in government for the last two years, the most frequent response from focus groups participants was that unaffordable spending would have continued, perhaps with disastrous consequences. Re-election would have apparently validated their overspending, so the government would have had no reason to change course.

"I think Labour would have kept on spending as much as they could, and with a few quid on top".

[Loyalist, Nuneaton]

*"We'd be in a serious, serious mess, because they would never have admitted that they'd made this terrible mistake. So they would have just said, 'right, we'll borrow more money so we'll keep everyone happy' and we'd get more and more in the s***".*

[Considerer, Thurrock]

However, some thought that while a re-elected Labour government would have had no choice but to make cuts, it would have done so less drastically and in a way that somehow managed to avoid hitting poorer people.

"The Conservatives are making a lot of cutbacks on everything, and I think Labour would make cutbacks on, say, two thirds of those things".

[Joiner, Thurrock]

"They should cut back on other things. Don't ask me what, but that's their problem".

[Joiner, Thurrock]

This reflected the findings of the poll. Nearly half (45%) of all voters – including 16% of Labour voters and a third of Labour Considerers – said the “overall state of the economy” would be worse if Labour had won the last election and Britain had had a Labour government for the last two years instead of a Conservative-Lib Dem coalition. Only 26% of all voters, just over half of Labour voters and only 22% of Labour Considerers, said the economy would be better.

Still more voters in general (49%), Labour voters (20%) and Considerers (38%) said “Britain’s overall level of debt” would be worse today had Labour won the last election. Even among Labour voters, only a third thought the current debt level would have been better had Labour been in government for the last two years.

“The impact of cuts in public spending” is the thing people were most likely to think would be better were Labour still in government. 42% of voters in general thought the impact would have been better, while 30% thought it would be no different and 28% worse. 70% of Labour voters thought the impact would have been better, though only 45% of Considerers agreed; 36% of them thought the impact would have been no different.

“Public services like the NHS” was the second most likely policy area which voters thought would be better today had Labour won. 38% of all voters, including 40% of Considerers and 70% of Labour voters, thought things would be better – though voters generally were nearly as likely (36%), and Considerers more likely (44%), to think things would be no different.

Seven in ten Considerers thought the unemployment rate would be no better today, or even worse, had Labour won in 2010, closely matching the view of the population as a whole. 60% of Labour voters thought unemployment would be lower today were Labour still in government.

When it came to “the issue of managing immigration into Britain”, “the problem of some people living on benefits when they are able to work”, and “the crime rate”, clear majorities of Labour voters and Considerers – let alone voters in general – thought things would be no different or worse had Labour won the last election. Only just over a third of Labour voters thought things would have been better under Labour in any of these areas, as did only around 15% of Considerers.

These perceptions echoed the poll’s other findings of a big lead for Labour as the best party on the NHS and schools and, as mentioned above, a smaller advantage on getting the economy growing and creating jobs. The Conservatives were ahead on dealing with crime and – even among Labour Considerers – defending Britain’s interests in Europe, reforming welfare, and controlling immigration.

Party attributes

Conservative voters were the only group to put the Tories ahead when it came to “ensuring people are treated fairly”. However, while Labour Loyalists and Joiners gave Labour leads of 90 and 82 points respectively in this area, only just over half of Labour Considerers (59%) put Labour ahead on this score.

On wanting to “help ordinary people get on in life” and being “on the side of people like me”, Considerers gave Labour an even bigger lead than the population as a whole. However, they were no more ready than people in general – and around half as likely as Labour Joiners – to say Labour “stands for equal opportunity for all”, “shares my values”, “stands for fairness”, “represents the whole country”, that the party’s “heart is in the right place”, or that it is “competent and capable”.

The Conservatives lead by 20 points (48% to 28%) on being “willing to take tough decisions for the long term”, and nearly a third of Labour voters (31%) put the Tories ahead on this score. Labour Considerers gave the Conservatives a 12-point lead on this measure (40% to 28%).

In the focus groups, the feature of the Labour Party which people most often spontaneously mentioned was that it was for working class people. This was often said by people who regard themselves as working class, and who voted Conservative in 2010.

The Miliband factor

There was no enthusiasm for the prospect of Ed Miliband as Prime Minister in the focus groups. A widespread view among Joiners and Loyalists was that he was “the price to pay” for a Labour government, and some were rather more negative than that; the word “nonentity” featured more than once. His one advantage over Cameron was the perception that he had a better understanding of how ordinary people lived – though this appeared to be a reflection of the Labour brand, since few knew anything much about him. Those who were most keen on a Labour government tended to emphasise that the election was “not just about him”.

In our poll, some two thirds of Labour voters said they were more favourable towards the Labour Party generally than to Ed Miliband in particular. While Joiners were more likely than others to say they preferred Miliband to Labour in general, only 14% did so; 61% said they were more favourable to Labour and 25% said there was no difference. David Cameron was the only leader to whom voters in general had a more favourable view than they did of his party.

Nearly one in seven Labour Joiners said David Cameron would make the best Prime Minister of the three party leaders. Among Labour Considerers, Cameron (40%) was practically tied with Miliband (42%). Labour Considerers rated Cameron higher than Nick Clegg, Yvette Cooper and Ed Balls – and rated Boris Johnson higher than Ed Miliband, or any of the other politicians named.

Voters in general thought David Cameron would do a better job than Ed Miliband as Prime Minister when it came to “representing Britain in international negotiations”, “making the right decisions even when they are unpopular”, “being able to lead a team”, “doing the job of Prime Minister overall”, and “having a clear idea of what he wants to achieve”. In all but the last of these, Labour Considerers also put Cameron ahead, albeit by a smaller margin. Miliband led only on “understanding ordinary people”.

A few focus group participants had registered Miliband’s conference speech. His being the son of immigrants was the fact that had made the most impact, and was not always regarded in an entirely positive light.

“He said recently he was over here because his parents were immigrants, and I wasn’t sure about that”.

“His father was a Jew and escaped the Nazis”.

“Oh, that’s not so bad. At least they weren’t gypsies. Or one of those people who make bombs”.

[Considerers, Nuneaton]

“He claims he didn’t go to a posh school. Well it was posher than mine, I’ll tell you.”

[Considerer, Thurrock]

Only a handful of participants had noticed Miliband’s claim that Labour was the “one nation” party, and even fewer knew what he meant, let alone understood that it had historically been a phrase used to describe the Conservatives. For many, their best guess was that “one nation” referred to the United Kingdom in the context of the Scottish independence debate.

“One Nation is just about trying to get SNP votes. It’s about independence”.

[Joiner, Leeds]

The only other Labour figures mentioned spontaneously more than once were Ed Balls – about whom views were distinctly mixed but tended towards the negative – and Andy Burnham, who was well-regarded by those who named him, especially in the North West.

“Who are the other prominent Labour figures at the moment?”

“Michael Foot. No, I’m thinking of Heseltine. And there’s Galloway”.

[Joiner, Thurrock]

The next election

Asked to note down the reasons why they were attracted to Labour, Joiners most often wrote that they are not the Conservatives and could hardly be any worse. The feeling that they were for the working classes, supported public sector, and would find a fairer way of handling the cuts were also important. Considerers also mentioned support for working class people and the less well off, but often also said they hoped Labour would find more money for the NHS and other public services, and would be less tough in assessing disability benefit claimants.

The factor most likely to put Considerers off the idea of voting Labour were Ed Miliband, the fear of a Labour government spending and borrowing too much, and the perception that the party was soft on welfare reform. Joiners had fewer concerns, but mentioned Miliband, borrowing, Ed Balls, the economy, and immigration.

Our poll found that more than five out of six Labour and Conservative voters (84%) said they were pretty sure which party they would vote for at the next election. Among Liberal Democrat voters – who only amount to 9% of those who would vote – this fell to just over two thirds (68%). More than nine out of ten Labour Loyalists were fairly sure of their vote, but more than a quarter (26%) of Joiners said they may yet change their minds.

A quarter of current Labour voters who said they may change their minds before the next election said they would consider the Conservatives, and 30% of current Conservatives said they would consider Labour. Of current Liberal Democrat voters, 42% said they would consider the Tories and 40% Labour.

Just over a fifth (21%) of Labour voters said they could see themselves voting Conservative at some time in the future. 22% said they could see themselves voting Lib Dem, and 22% that they could see themselves voting for UKIP.

Nearly half (45%) of Labour Considerers said they were moving towards Labour, while 14% said they were moving away and 41% said they were doing neither. Only 10% of them said they were moving towards the Conservatives, and 9% towards the Lib Dems.

Overall, 31% of all voters in the poll said they would like to see a Conservative government after the next election, while 36% said they wanted a Labour government. One in five preferred a Labour-Lib Dem coalition, and 13% a Conservative-Lib Dem coalition.

Significantly, more than a fifth (21%) of Labour Joiners and 16% of Labour Loyalists said their preferred outcome was a Labour-Lib Dem coalition. This was also the choice of 30% of Labour Considerers.

However, it was clear from the focus groups that even for Joiners, the state of the economy at the time of the next election would be an important factor in their decision. Several commented that in the event of a tangible recovery and a rise in their own living standards, and if the government was achieving its aim of cutting the deficit, they would have to give some credit to the Conservatives and reassess how to vote.

“You would have to give them credit [if there were a real recovery]. The two parties had such different ways of tackling it that if things were better, you would have to give the Tories credit”.

[Considerer, Watford]

“If the Conservatives are going to reduce the deficit, surely you’d end up voting for them on the proof, rather than on promises from the people who got us into this mess in the first place”.

[Joiner, Thurrock]

Full poll results

8,103 adults were interviewed between 17 and 28 October 2012.
Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in Great Britain.

LOYALISTS = voted Labour in 2010 and would do so again in an election tomorrow

JOINERS = did not vote Labour in 2010, but would do so in an election tomorrow

CONSIDERERS = did not vote Labour in 2010 and would not tomorrow, but would consider doing so in future

1. If there were to be a general election tomorrow, which party do you think you would vote for?

	ALL	2010 Con	2010 Lab	2010 LD	Lab considerers
Labour	41%	7%	91%	36%	-
Conservative	32%	77%	3%	10%	33%
Lib Dem	9%	2%	1%	37%	35%
UKIP	9%	12%	1%	7%	10%
Others	10%	3%	3%	10%	21%

- Among private sector workers, Labour led by the same 9-point margin as among voters overall (Lab 41%, Con 32, LD 7%). Among public sector workers, Labour led by 25 points (Lab 51%, Con 26%, LD 7%).

2. Have you definitely decided which party you will vote for at the next general election, or do you think you may well change your mind?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
I am pretty sure which party I will vote for	79%	84%	84%	68%	91%	74%	-
I have not finally decided and may well change my mind	21%	16%	16%	32%	9%	26%	100%

3. Which of the following parties would you seriously consider voting for at the next election?

[All those saying they have not finally decided and may well change their mind]

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD
Conservative	37%	24%	93%	42%
Labour	43%	91%	30%	40%
Liberal Democrats	25%	23%	27%	92%
Another party	36%	21%	22%	12%

4. Here are some things that people have said about the main political parties. Please can you say in each case whether, on balance, you think the statement is true of the Labour Party/the Conservative Party/the Liberal Democrats?

<i>Lab%/Con%/LD%</i>	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Wants to help ordinary people get on in life	49/24/24	89/4/15	27/71/31	38/15/76	91/3/14	86/4/17	54/12/24
On the side of people like me	39/27/17	87/3/9	6/80/15	19/14/78	90/2/7	83/4/11	45/13/23
Stands for equal opportunity for all	39/22/21	79/3/15	16/65/24	26/11/70	84/3/14	72/4/17	37/9/20
Its heart is in the right place	38/23/29	76/5/25	16/65/35	27/16/77	81/4/22	70/6/28	37/10/30
Shares my values	35/27/16	82/4/10	4/82/10	16/11/77	86/3/9	75/5/12	34/14/18
Stands for fairness	35/22/21	77/3/16	9/68/23	18/13/75	81/3/15	71/4/17	34/10/21
Represents the whole country, not just some types of people	34/20/16	76/3/11	9/61/15	18/11/67	81/3/10	68/3/12	31/07/15
Competent and capable	30/30/10	71/9/5	3/78/7	14/26/57	77/7/6	63/11/5	29/16/11
Willing to take tough decisions for the long term	28/48/12	64/31/9	3/91/9	19/47/52	69/28/7	56/36/12	28/40/13
Will do what they say	27/23/8	65/6/5	3/64/6	11/18/48	70/6/4	58/7/5	22/11/9

5. Which of the following do you think would make the best Prime Minister?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
David Cameron	48%	13%	97%	35%	12%	15%	40%
Ed Miliband	40%	82%	1%	11%	85%	78%	42%
Nick Clegg	12%	5%	1%	54%	3%	7%	18%

6. Now please indicate how positively or negatively you feel about the following individuals using a scale from 0 (very negative indeed) to 10 (very positive indeed). If you don't know enough about any of the people to have a view either way, please say so.

<i>Mean score (don't know)</i>	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
David Cameron	4.69 (7%)	2.71 (4%)	7.99 (1%)	5.44 (4%)	2.73 (4%)	2.70 (3%)	4.19 (12%)
Ed Miliband	4.55 (9%)	7.26 (4%)	2.39 (4%)	4.03 (6%)	7.49 (4%)	6.92 (3%)	4.95 (18%)
Nick Clegg	3.66 (8%)	2.62 (4%)	4.85 (2%)	6.93 (3%)	2.60 (4%)	2.65 (4%)	3.72 (13%)
Yvette Cooper	3.87 (34%)	5.38 (28%)	2.93 (27%)	4.33 (30%)	5.59 (23%)	5.00 (35%)	4.11 (53%)
George Osborne	3.51 (14%)	2.44 (11%)	5.68 (6%)	4.03 (9%)	2.46 (9%)	2.41 (14%)	3.02 (25%)
Ed Balls	3.81 (16%)	5.82 (12%)	2.49 (7%)	3.72 (12%)	6.11 (10%)	5.36 (16%)	3.84 (28%)
Vince Cable	4.47 (21%)	4.41 (17%)	4.91 (13%)	6.53 (16%)	4.41 (14%)	4.41 (21%)	4.64 (37%)
William Hague	4.94 (14%)	3.65 (11%)	7.12 (7%)	5.60 (9%)	3.55 (9%)	3.81 (15%)	4.50 (25%)
Chuka Umunna	3.84 (46%)	5.23 (41%)	3.09 (42%)	4.30 (46%)	5.44 (36%)	4.87 (47%)	4.20 (64%)
Boris Johnson	5.99 (8%)	5.08 (6%)	7.56 (2%)	5.96 (5%)	4.86 (5%)	5.40 (7%)	5.86 (15%)

7. Would you say you were more favourable to David Cameron, or the Conservative Party generally?
 Would you say you were more favourable to Ed Miliband, or the Labour Party generally?
 Would you say you were more favourable to Nick Clegg, or the Liberal Democrats generally?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
More favourable to Cameron	20%	16%	25%	41%	16%	17%	23%
Neither	61%	73%	43%	49%	76%	69%	67%
More favourable to Conservatives	18%	11%	32%	10%	9%	14%	10%
More favourable to Miliband	9%	11%	7%	12%	8%	14%	9%
Neither	51%	26%	67%	50%	27%	25%	44%
More favourable to Labour	40%	63%	26%	38%	65%	61%	47%
More favourable to Clegg	10%	6%	20%	17%	6%	7%	7%
Neither	61%	59%	57%	38%	64%	52%	62%
More favourable to Lib Dems	29%	34%	23%	45%	30%	41%	31%

8. With our economy facing challenges in the months ahead, who do you most trust to manage the economy in the best interests of Britain – David Cameron and the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, or Ed Miliband and the Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Cameron & Osborne	53%	12%	99%	67%	11%	13%	48%
Miliband & Balls	47%	88%	1%	33%	89%	87%	52%

- 54% of those who voted Lib Dem in 2010 now most trust Miliband & Balls to run the economy, compared to 46% for Cameron & Osborne.

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

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Although things are difficult now, the right decisions are being made and things will improve significantly in the next two or three years	41%	17%	87%	52%	17%	17%	31%
In two or three years' time the economy will be no better, or even worse, than it is now	59%	83%	13%	48%	83%	83%	69%

10. Which party do you think would have the best approach to each of the following issues – the Conservatives, Labour or the Liberal Democrats?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Getting the economy growing and creating jobs							
Con	43%	7%	95%	32%	7%	8%	32%
Lab	47%	91%	4%	18%	93%	89%	58%
Lib Dem	10%	2%	1%	51%	1%	3%	10%
Cutting the deficit and the debt							
Con	57%	29%	98%	51%	26%	35%	50%
Lab	34%	67%	1%	11%	72%	61%	41%
Lib Dem	9%	3%	1%	385	3%	4%	10%
Improving the NHS							
Con	29%	3%	72%	12%	2%	4%	17%
Lab	54%	93%	16%	26%	95%	90%	66%
Lib Dem	17%	4%	12%	62%	2%	5%	18%
Improving schools							
Con	34%	5%	81%	15%	4%	5%	20%
Lab	48%	87%	9%	19%	89%	84%	60%
Lib Dem	18%	8%	9%	66%	7%	10%	20%
Protecting the environment							
Con	25%	6%	56%	9%	5%	8%	17%
Lab	34%	67%	6%	11%	72%	61%	36%
Lib Dem	40%	27%	38%	80%	24%	31%	47%
Dealing with crime							
Con	50%	19%	94%	43%	16%	23%	40%
Lab	39%	77%	3%	15%	81%	72%	47%
Lib Dem	11%	4%	3%	43%	2%	5%	13%
Defending Britain's interests in Europe							
Con	51%	22%	94%	38%	19%	27%	44%
Lab	36%	71%	3%	14%	76%	65%	41%
Lib Dem	12%	6%	3%	48%	5%	8%	16%
Reforming welfare to stop scroungers & cut dependency							
	60%	36%	94%	51%	34%	39%	54%
	30%	59%	3%	10%	63%	54%	35%
	10%	5%	3%	39%	3%	7%	11%
Controlling immigration							
	54%	29%	91%	42%	26%	33%	44%
	32%	64%	3%	11%	67%	58%	38%
	14%	7%	5%	47%	6%	8%	16%
Ensuring people are treated fairly							
Con	28%	3%	71%	9%	2%	4%	13%
Lab	48%	89%	10%	15%	92%	86%	59%
Lib Dem	24%	8%	19%	77%	6%	10%	28%
Managing the economy overall							
Con	46%	9%	97%	34%	7%	11%	34%
Lab	42%	87%	2%	11%	90%	83%	50%
Lib Dem	12%	4%	1%	55%	3%	6%	16%

11. Some people say they could never see themselves voting Conservative / Lib Dem / UKIP under any circumstances, while others say they could see themselves doing so some time in the future. Which is closer to your own view?

[Those who voted Labour in 2010]

	ALL 2010 LABOUR	Labour Loyalists
Could see myself voting Con	21%	15%
Could never see myself voting Con	79%	85%
Could see myself voting Lib Dem	35%	33%
Could never see myself voting Lib Dem	65%	67%
Could see myself voting UKIP	22%	20%
Could never see myself voting UKIP	78%	80%

12. Thinking about the performance of Ed Miliband and the Labour Party in opposition, do you think you will be more likely to consider voting Labour at the next election, or less likely, or has it made no difference?

[Those who did not vote Labour in 2010 but would consider doing so in future]

	ALL	Con	LD	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
More likely	52%	14%	25%	67%	32%
No difference	40%	55%	55%	29%	55%
Less likely	8%	30%	19%	4%	13%

13. Would you say you were moving towards or away from Labour / the Conservatives / the Lib Dems?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Towards Cons	21%	4%	43%	15%	4%	3%	10%
Neither	37%	27%	34%	37%	28%	26%	43%
Away from Cons	42%	69%	23%	48%	68%	71%	47%
Towards Lab	34%	77%	4%	17%	69%	87%	45%
Neither	36%	21%	37%	38%	28%	11%	41%
Away from Lab	30%	3%	59%	45%	3%	2%	14%
Towards Lib Dems	12%	5%	12%	58%	5%	5%	9%
Neither	45%	33%	53%	32%	35%	30%	51%
Away from Lib Dems	43%	62%	35%	11%	60%	65%	39%

14. What, if anything, do you think would be different about Britain today if Labour had won the last election and we had had a Labour government for the last two years, instead of a Conservative-Lib Dem coalition? If we still had a Labour government, do you think each of the following would be better, worse or not different from the way they are now?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Britain's overall level of debt							
Better	17%	34%	6%	11%	36%	31%	14%
No different	34%	46%	9%	27%	45%	47%	48%
Worse	49%	20%	85%	62%	18%	22%	38%
The impact of cuts in public spending							
Better	42%	70%	24%	35%	70%	70%	45%
No different	30%	15%	32%	33%	15%	16%	36%
Worse	28%	15%	45%	32%	15%	14%	20%
The unemployment rate							
Better	31%	60%	11%	19%	60%	61%	30%
No different	34%	25%	25%	39%	24%	27%	46%
Worse	35%	15%	64%	42%	16%	13%	24%
The overall state of the economy							
Better	26%	54%	7%	15%	56%	51%	22%
No different	29%	30%	10%	30%	28%	34%	46%
Worse	45%	16%	83%	55%	16%	15%	33%
The issue of managing immigration into Britain							
Better	18%	36%	6%	11%	36%	35%	15%
No different	40%	43%	26%	45%	44%	42%	50%
Worse	43%	21%	68%	44%	19%	23%	35%
The problem of some people living on benefits when they are able to work							
Better	17%	34%	7%	10%	35%	31%	15%
No different	36%	42%	22%	37%	41%	42%	45%
Worse	47%	25%	72%	53%	24%	27%	40%
Public services like the NHS							
Better	38%	70%	14%	25%	72%	69%	40%
No different	36%	17%	43%	48%	15%	20%	44%
Worse	26%	12%	43%	27%	13%	11%	16%
The crime rate							
Better	18%	38%	7%	8%	39%	36%	14%
No different	53%	50%	44%	63%	49%	51%	66%
Worse	29%	12%	49%	29%	12%	12%	21%
Britain's overall reputation in the world							
Better	20%	44%	6%	9%	45%	42%	17%
No different	43%	44%	23%	49%	42%	47%	59%
Worse	37%	12%	71%	42%	13%	11%	24%

15. You said earlier that you would probably vote Labour at the next election but you may well change your mind. I am going to read out some reasons people have given for not voting Labour. Please can you say in each case whether or not it is one of the concerns you have about voting Labour.

[Those who say they would vote Labour but have not finally decided and may change their mind]

	ALL LABOUR	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners
They have not made clear what they would do to improve things	48%	57%	43%
They might spend and borrow more than the country can afford	40%	39%	40%
They might not have learned the right lessons from their time in government	34%	31%	36%
If Labour won, Ed Miliband would be Prime Minister	34%	41%	30%
Labour have strong links with the trade unions	19%	10%	24%
I'm not sure they're on the side of people like me	18%	15%	19%
They have policies in areas apart from the economy that would be bad for the country	9%	9%	8%

16. Thinking about David Cameron as Prime Minister, and Ed Miliband if he were to become Prime Minister, who do you think would do a better job when it came to...

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Representing Britain in international negotiations							
DC	65%	32%	98%	82%	29%	35%	65%
EM	35%	68%	2%	18%	71%	65%	35%
Making the right decisions even when they are unpopular							
DC	62%	31%	98%	74%	28%	35%	59%
EM	38%	69%	2%	26%	72%	65%	41%
Understanding ordinary people							
DC	37%	6%	97%	40%	6%	6%	23%
EM	63%	94%	21%	60%	94%	94%	77%
Having a clear idea of what they want to achieve							
DC	54%	18%	95%	68%	15%	21%	47%
EM	46%	82%	5%	32%	85%	79%	53%
Being able to lead a team							
DC	57%	21%	97%	70%	18%	26%	53%
EM	43%	79%	3%	30%	82%	74%	47%
Doing the job of Prime Minister overall							
DC	56%	18%	91%	52%	17%	20%	52%
EM	44%	82%	9%	48%	83%	80%	48%

17. Which of the following statements comes closest to your own view about the Labour Party, even if none describes exactly what you think?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Labour have <u>learned</u> the right lessons from what went wrong during their time in government, and <u>can be trusted</u> to run the country again	35%	69%	5%	21%	67%	71%	45%
Labour have <u>not yet learned</u> the right lessons from what went wrong during their time in government, and <u>cannot yet be trusted</u> to run the country again	52%	9%	92%	71%	8%	10%	36%
The last Labour government did a pretty good job, and I <u>don't think they have to learn lessons</u> in order for me to be happy for them to run the country again	13%	22%	3%	8%	25%	19%	18%

18. The next general election is expected to be in May 2015. Though it is still very early to judge, given what you know about the coalition's performance so far, and what you expect it to do in the future, and what the other parties are saying or doing, which of the following would you most like to see as the outcome of the next election?

	ALL	Lab	Con	LD	Labour Loyalists	Labour Joiners	Labour considerers
Conservative government	31%	4%	80%	9%	3%	5%	17%
Conservative-Lib Dem coalition	13%	2%	14%	45%	3%	2%	10%
Labour-Lib Dem coalition	20%	18%	3%	41%	16%	21%	30%
Labour government	36%	76%	3%	5%	79%	72%	42%