

What future for Labour?

A comparative study of attitudes within the Labour movement and among swing voters

Lord Ashcroft, KCMG
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Introduction

Lord Ashcroft, KCMG

For many years after its defeat in 1997 the Conservative Party failed, or refused, to understand what had happened to it. Too many Conservatives believed not only that the voters had made a terrible mistake, but that the voters themselves would come to realise this and flood back in remorse. Meanwhile, the Tories just needed to stick to their guns. History records the success of this theory in the results of the 2001 and 2005 elections.

I thought it would be interesting to find out whether the Labour Party is about to make the same mistake.

A poll and six focus groups among what we can broadly call the Labour movement – party members and Labour-supporting members of affiliated trade unions – have explored the reasons for Labour's defeat as they understand them, and their views about what the new leader needs to do to win again. A further poll and six focus groups asking similar questions of people who voted Labour in 2005 but for a different party in 2010 sheds some light on whether the Labour movement gets it. Does the party understand what drove away the people whose support it needs to win again? And will the solutions favoured by loyal Labour supporters help the party back to power or push it into the electoral wilderness?

In some ways Labour's predicament is not as bad as that of the Conservatives in 1997 – for one thing, they have 258 seats, 93 more than the Tories' post-defeat total. But it does not follow that Labour will bounce straight back. The party's future depends on accepting why it lost, learning the right lessons, and making the necessary changes. From our research, the evidence that it shows any signs of doing so is mixed at best.

The Labour movement is dramatically at odds with swing voters – the ones who decide the outcome of elections – over the causes of its defeat. The switchers say the problem was Gordon Brown, the fact that Labour did not have answers on important issues, and the impression that Labour had run out of steam. Labour loyalists blame voters' lack of appreciation for Labour's achievements, the influence of the right-wing media, and the party's communication of its policies (not the policies themselves).

The Labour movement does not accept that the party deserved to lose. Far from apologising and showing it has learned from its mistakes, as swing voters need it to do, loyalists are more inclined to defend the Labour government's record – in other words, to tell the voters they were wrong. Nor do many Labour loyalists accept, as swing voters largely (if reluctantly) do, that the deficit is a serious problem that needs to be dealt with urgently.

Though some in the Labour movement acknowledge the need to win back middle ground voters who moved away, most are much more interested in motivating the party's core. Indeed given their contempt for swing voters, whom they regard as ignorant, credulous and selfish, it is hard to see them reaching out to them with any enthusiasm or conviction.

Most damning of all, a majority in the Labour movement thinks the coalition will prove so unpopular that the Labour Party will win the next election almost by default. But swing voters – those who voted Labour in 2005 but switched to another party in 2010 – feel the party is no longer on their side. They say they will not vote Labour again until they see some pretty fundamental changes.

Key points

- Swing voters say Labour lost the election because Gordon Brown was not a good Prime Minister, Labour did not have answers on important issues, and the Labour government had run out of steam. According to the Labour movement, the party lost because voters did not fully appreciate what it had achieved, they were influenced by the right-wing media, and although Labour had the right policies, it did not manage to communicate them effectively.
- Three quarters of swing voters say Labour deserved to lose the election. Three quarters of Labour movement respondents say Labour did not deserve to lose.
- A majority in the Labour movement believe the party lost the election because its traditional core supporters decided not to vote Labour, not because middle class swing voters went to other parties. Swing voters are more likely to think Labour seriously lost its way and is not on their side than to think the party's heart is still in the right place and Britain just needed a change.
- A majority of swing voters think the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition is the right outcome given the number of seats each party won. They are cautiously optimistic about the government and willing to give it a chance; many are pleasantly surprised by David Cameron. Two thirds of Labour movement respondents think the coalition is not legitimate, and Labour should still be in office.
- Three quarters of swing voters think the Labour government must accept a large part of the blame for the economic problems it left. A majority in the Labour movement disagree.
- Swing voters are more likely than those in the Labour movement to think private sector workers have so far borne the brunt of the recession, with public sector workers protected with job security and generous pensions.
- Swing voters are more likely than those in the Labour movement to believe the deficit is a serious problem that must be dealt with urgently. More than two thirds of swing voters think the coalition's proposed cuts are "unavoidable", compared to less than half in the Labour movement.
- A majority of Labour movement respondents think the next leader should support public sector strikes. Swing voters say, by a 21-point margin, that they would be less likely to go back to Labour if this happened.
- Swing voters say an apology from Labour for its mistakes in government would make them more likely to consider returning to the party. Those in the Labour movement are resistant to the idea. 69 per cent say the new leader should defend the record of the previous government, especially on the economy; swing voters say this would make them less likely to consider supporting Labour.
- A majority in the Labour movement believe the coalition will prove so unpopular that Labour will win the next election without having to change fundamentally. Two thirds of swing voters say Labour will have to change quite fundamentally before they will consider voting for it again, even if they do not like what the coalition is doing.
- People in the Labour movement generally believe swing voters to be ignorant (because they did not understand what Labour had achieved), credulous (because they believed what they read in the right-wing press) and selfish (because they thought only of their own interests, rather than public services and the poor).

1. Why did Labour win? And why did they lose?

Throughout the report, quotes from Labour movement focus groups will be labelled ‘LM’ and quotes from swing voter focus groups ‘SV’.

- Many swing voters said they had voted Labour with enthusiasm in 1997 and even 2001: Tony Blair offered something fresh and new, and seemed to represent the average person. By 2005, though, Labour were already merely the “best of a bad bunch”. The Labour movement groups also felt the party was helped at this stage by a weak opposition.

“In the beginning there was the whole Tony Blair thing. He was young, enthusiastic, fresh – no-one else was offering what he was offering. Then it gradually felt as though things were becoming stale – I really only voted for them in 2005 because there was no-one else to vote for.” (SV)

“I didn’t believe anything they said, but I believed them more than the Tories.” (SV)

“With an ineffective opposition and a booming economy it was an easy run for Labour to be re-elected.” (LM)

“There was no strength in the Conservative Party. There didn’t seem to be a choice of someone else to vote for.” (LM)

- The poll offered ten potential explanations for Labour’s defeat and asked swing voters and members of Labour movement to give each a score out of ten for its importance. For voters who had voted Labour in 2005 but not in 2010, the three most important explanations were Gordon Brown not being a good Prime Minister; Labour not having answers on important issues like the economy and immigration; and Labour running out of steam and needing a spell out of government. For the Labour movement, the most important factors were voters not fully appreciating what Labour had achieved; the influence of the right-wing media; and Labour having the right policies but not communicating them in an appealing way. (See section 6 for full poll details).

Poll: Why did Labour lose?	
<p>Swing voters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gordon Brown was not a good PM 2. Labour did not have answers on important issues 3. Labour had run out of steam 	<p>Labour movement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Voters didn’t appreciate what Labour had achieved 2. Voters were influenced by the right-wing media 3. Labour’s policies were right, but not communicated well

- Asked to suggest their own reasons for Labour’s defeat, the Labour movement groups often blamed what they saw as the party moving away from its traditional roots. The expenses scandal was the next most frequently cited reason, with Iraq and Afghanistan, a wider loss of touch with the public, a general desire for change and a mistaken belief that Labour was to blame for the recession also widely mentioned. These groups were as likely to blame Tony Blair

for Labour's unpopularity as Gordon Brown. Immigration and infighting were also suggested as reasons for the defeat.

"They were flirting with the middle classes." (LM)

"Scandals, war, the economy – people didn't trust them any more. And a change of leader to the most useless Prime Minister we have had in our lifetime." (LM)

"They lost control after 2004 with all the infighting. It became a total mess." (LM)

"They blamed Labour for all the ills of the world. The fact that Labour were in power at the time." (LM)

"I think it was expenses. They were all as bad as each other but they were the government at the time." (LM)

"Some decisions and policies felt more Conservative. Blair did things that we would never have let Maggie Thatcher get away with, like grants. Taking away the ladders of social mobility." (LM)

"Immigration – they didn't pay any attention to us. I was in London on a site and of 600 blokes, 450 were Polish on under the minimum wage, because they were contracted." (LM)

"[The new government] have got in not because they're wonderful and people believe what they're saying, but because it's a change." (LM)

- In the swing voter groups, the most often mentioned reason for their decision to switch from Labour was a feeling that the government had run its course and it was time for change. The expenses scandal was also important, with many saying that, though it affected all parties, Labour as the party of government had been in a position to do something about it. The episode had also been a failure of leadership by Gordon Brown, who reacted more slowly and less robustly than David Cameron. Immigration, the wars, the economic situation, infighting, broken promises, losing touch with people like them, a welfare system than discouraged work, the departure of Tony Blair, and the presence of a credible alternative were also mentioned.

"They lost touch with normal people. That Gordon Brown gaffe [Mrs Duffy] showed contempt for ordinary people." (SV)

"The only thing that made me vote Labour in the first place was Blair. Whether you loved him or hated him, he was a figurehead". (SV)

"Too much bickering and infighting – they lost the point of where they were going." (SV)

"The expenses scandal. I blamed the government as they were the ones in power." (SV)

"Too many wars – six I think." (SV)

"The war. I didn't pay a lot of attention in the beginning but now week after week these young boys are being killed, it's really bringing it home to people." (SV)

"It felt like there were a lot of power struggles behind the scenes, and infighting. It gradually deteriorated, and we had an alternative in 2010." (SV)

"They just seemed to run out of steam. People felt that it was time for a change. It all felt a bit weary, as though it was just chugging along." (SV)

"The recession. They over-borrowed, and the Conservatives wanted to start paying it back." (SV)

"I see people refusing work on a daily basis because they're better off. They don't encourage people to get out and do something with their lives." (SV)

"Immigration. Hundreds of thousands. In the debate he said they would bring it down, but they've been in power for 15 years!" (SV)

- Despite acknowledging multiple failings of the Labour government over many years, the Labour movement groups were reluctant to concede that the party deserved to lose the 2010 election. Voters had mistakenly blamed Labour for problems that had happened “on their watch”.

“They lost because of everything on their watch. They could have had St Peter up there and he’d have got shafted.” (LM)

“They deserved to get a wake-up call and a bloody nose, but they didn’t deserve to lose.” (LM)

“There was a lot of confusion in the electorate – is it Labour’s fault?” (LM)

- This was borne out in the poll. More than three quarters of Labour movement participants said Labour did not deserve to lose – almost the mirror image of the result among swing voters.

Poll: Did Labour deserve to lose?	
<p>Swing voters:</p> <p>Yes, Labour deserved to lose: 73%</p> <p>No, Labour didn’t deserve to lose: 27%</p>	<p>Labour movement:</p> <p>Yes, Labour deserved to lose: 23%</p> <p>No, Labour didn’t deserve to lose: 77%</p>

- Few participants in either set of groups had a very positive view of Gordon Brown. Some swing voters felt he had been unlucky but ultimately “he couldn’t make decisions, or the right decisions. He kept cocking things up”. Most in the Labour movement groups thought he had been a significant factor in Labour’s defeat, though many felt that this was due to unfair treatment by the media.

“The narrative was that he was a train wreck.” (LM)

“He was set up in the media to look like a weak person.” (LM)

“It’s about prettiness, and David Cameron is pretty, and Nick Clegg is pretty, and Gordon Brown isn’t pretty.” (LM)

“It was impossible to follow Blair. He was a man of his time, an entertainer. Brown was a more serious politician, which the media didn’t seem to respect.” (LM)

- According to the poll, Labour supporters would have expected the party to do better, and swing voters would have been more likely to consider voting Labour, if Gordon Brown had been replaced as leader a few months before the election. In the group discussions, though, this view was not held with any conviction – indeed the lack of an inspiring alternative candidate made a better result unlikely (though Labour movement participant volunteered that the party’s chances would have been higher with “Tony Benn or someone – someone seen as having integrity and intelligence, and policies based traditionally in the Labour Party”).

“No, they were already broken by then”. (SV)

“I think everybody was ready for a change.” (LM)

“Trust had gone”. (LM)

“I’m not sure a change of leader would have made a significant difference. They would have had to toe the party line. They needed something brand new, and they weren’t going to get that from the leadership contenders we’ve got now.” (LM)

- Some in the Labour movement groups acknowledged the importance of modernisation and a move to the centre ground as part of Labour’s appeal in 1997: “they targeted the message towards the centre, repealed clauses on nationalisation”; “they went to the middle ground so it

wasn't seen as left wing"; "until then Labour was old. Labour clubs, men with caps, what your dad went to". However, they were much more likely to put the 2010 result down to Labour's core vote staying at home than to middle-ground voters switching to other parties.

"The core of the Labour Party found it really hard to vote for those policies. They lost half of their membership since Blair got in." (LM)

"With things like tuition fees and right-wing policies, it was difficult for people to vote Labour." (LM)

"The working class thought, what has Labour done for me?" (LM)

"It was for the white working class but now it's white middle class professionals." (LM)

"They put a lot of the core voters off by going right wing, then they put a lot of other people off, so they lost everybody." (LM)

- Many swing voters could not recall Labour's message at the 2010 election, explaining that they had stopped listening by that stage. Those who could remember a theme usually recalled attempts to "scare people into voting for them" by warning about Tory cuts.

"The Child Tax Credit – they said the Conservatives were going to stop that." (SV)

"We had a thing from the union saying if you don't vote Labour you won't keep your job. Everyone at work thought I voted Labour!" (SV)

- Swing voters did not dismiss the Labour government's overall record since 1997. Peace in Northern Ireland, the minimum wage and tax credits were all readily recalled with approval. The tenor of many comments was that Labour had started with great promise but squandered their opportunity, along with large amounts of taxpayers' money. In the poll, swing voters awarded an overall mark of 5.46 out of 10 for Labour's overall record in government since 1997; Labour movement participants awarded 6.83.

"They spent a fortune on education and the NHS and built many more hospitals and schools, and got more people going to university than ever before, so there were some good things. But the way they did these financial schemes, we're still paying for things to this day. The system operates very much against the taxpayer. They put it on a different set of books." (SV)

"They should have been bolder in the early years." (SV)

"Peace in Northern Ireland. Minimum wage. Tax credits. They did a lot for children – nurseries, Sure Start, smaller class sizes." (SV)

"A tragic wasted opportunity. The expectation in '97 was that something was really going to happen. Then they became very self-centred. They lost sight of what was right for the country." (SV)

"They started off with the best intentions... then it was spend and spend and spend and they created a great black hole." (SV)

"They did well to start off with – helping young families, schools, the NHS, tax credits. But they kind of ruined it really on the financial side. Things like maternity grants – you get £190 if you're more than 25 weeks pregnant. Silly money, wasted." (SV)

2. The coalition

- The poll found a majority of swing voters thinking that, given the number of seats each party won, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition was “probably the right outcome for Britain”. In the Labour movement sample, though, two thirds thought the current coalition “is not the legitimate outcome of the election – Labour should still be in government with a coalition including the Liberal Democrats”.
- In the Labour movement groups, some conceded that for Labour to have continued in office having come second to the Conservatives would have been “dishonourable” (and, after all, Gordon Brown “wasn’t a sharing kind of guy”.) Nevertheless, many felt that Liberal Democrats, who can only have voted that way to keep the Tories out, must be furious at the outcome.

“Lib Dem supporters would have been more comfortable with Labour. They completely sold out their voters.” (LM)

“They’ve lost Liberal Democrat voters – they’re all going to vote Labour now. Guaranteed.” (LM)

“A lot of Labour voters voted Liberal Democrat because they didn’t want to vote Conservative.” (LM)

“Lib Dem voters are horrified. They voted Lib Dem to keep the Tories out. My parents live in the South West and they voted Lib Dem to keep the Tories out.” (LM)

“The Lib Dems will suffer. Their traditional supporters are up in arms already.” (LM)

- Swing voters, meanwhile, were on the whole rather pleased with the way things had turned out. Most thought it was the best outcome given the number of seats each party had won. Swing voters were also more likely than those in the Labour movement to think the Lib Dems wielded real influence within the coalition.

“If Labour were still in control they would be defending the mistakes of the last few years.” (SV)

“I like it. They have got rid of some of the lunatic Lib Dem policies and are a good influence on the Conservatives.” (SV)

“I quite like how it’s worked out. When I watched the debates I quite liked Nick Clegg first, then Cameron, so I was quite glad when the two came together.” (SV)

“I think it is collaborative. Probably a lot is going on behind closed doors.” (SV)

“I don’t think Nick Clegg is a pushover. Surely it must mean he has some sway.” (SV)

“Cameron says ‘let’s talk about it, then let’s do it my way’.” (SV)

“It’s like Spitting Image, with [Nick Clegg as] David Steel sitting on his shoulder.” (LM)

- Former Labour supporters who had voted Liberal Democrat were by no means uniformly disappointed to be in coalition with the Conservatives. Some were saddened that the Lib Dems had “sold themselves out” in their desperation for power, and felt that had Labour had a different leader the outcome would have been the Lib-Lab coalition with which they would have felt more comfortable. At least as many, though, said they had voted for change and welcomed the Lib Dems’ influence in a new government, or were at least willing to wait and see what happened.

“I’m glad, because they are a stabilising effect on the Conservatives.” (SV)

“Initially I thought it was a mistake but they do seem to have got their heads together.” (SV)

“I’m happy. I wanted it to go that way. I didn’t want to see a Labour government.” (SV)

“We did need change but I didn’t want the full Conservative change. I don’t know if it’s going to work like that or not but they’ve got five years.” (SV)

“I would have voted the same way. I wanted new blood and I didn’t want to vote Conservative. The fact that they are in is neither here nor there.” (SV)

“I think Nick Clegg is trailing round after Cameron a bit. I hope I’m not going to be disappointed.” (SV)

Poll: The coalition	
<p>Swing voters:</p> <p>The Conservative-Lib Dem coalition is the right outcome: 54%</p> <p>A Labour-Lib Dem coalition would be better for Britain: 46%</p>	<p>Labour movement:</p> <p>The Conservative-Lib Dem coalition is the right outcome: 35%</p> <p>The coalition government is not the legitimate outcome of the election: 65%</p>

- The Labour movement groups were unsurprisingly scornful of the coalition government’s policies: “just exactly what you’d expect from a Conservative government”; “people who voted for them will reap what they sowed”. Swing voters, though, were cautiously positive, even though they had some misgivings about spending cuts.

“I’m pleasantly surprised – so far there have been no major arguments between the parties, and apart from the odd slip up by Cameron abroad there have been no real problems, and they’re addressing the most important problem of all, the economy. The jury is still out, but...” (SV)

“Better than I expected. More open and honest than I expected. Not as glib as I thought they potentially might be.” (SV)

“They seem to be making decisions and getting things done – abolishing quangos and so on.” (SV)

“It’s too early to say. They’re going to have a hard time.” (SV)

“I like the fact that they’re pushing people to get back to work.” (SV)

- There was also a good deal of general approval among swing voters of David Cameron’s performance as Prime Minister so far – indeed several admitted to being surprised at how well they thought he was doing.

“Better than I thought.” (SV)

“He’s done surprisingly well. He’s up to speed very quickly.” (SV)

“Good first impression. I feel more confident in David Cameron than I ever did with Labour in the last ten years. I feel like he’s talking for the working man.” (SV)

“At least he’s being honest about how bad it is. He’s being very blunt. That’s what Labour should have done, but they didn’t. They were pushing it under the carpet.” (SV)

“It reminds me of when Blair first came in for Labour.” (SV)

3. The economy and the deficit

- The poll found significant differences in views on the economy between swing voters and the Labour movement. Those who moved away from Labour between 2005 and 2010 believe “the last Labour government must accept a large part of the blame” for Britain’s economic problems by a 48-point margin; a majority of Labour movement participants disagreed with the statement. Two thirds of swing voters accepted that the the public spending cuts being proposed by the coalition are “unavoidable”, though a majority of Labour movement participants disagreed. Both sets of voters agreed that “the deficit is the most serious problem facing the British economy and needs to be dealt with urgently” and that Labour needs to come up with its own plan to deal with the deficit – “it can’t just oppose every cut” – but swing voters by a much bigger margin in both cases.

Poll: Is the Labour government largely to blame for Britain’s economic problems?	
<p>Swing voters:</p> <p>Yes, it is: 74%</p> <p>No, it is not: 26%</p>	<p>Labour movement:</p> <p>Yes, it is: 48%</p> <p>No, it is not: 51 %</p>

- In the Labour movement groups, participants tended to feel that Labour had been wrongly blamed for economic problems that happened to have occurred while the party was in office. Swing voters accepted that Labour could not be blamed for a worldwide recession, but they often argued that the situation could have been managed better and that the government had been slow to react, particularly to the banking crisis and the build-up of debt. Some also felt that Labour had consciously failed to come clean about the scale of the problem for fear of damaging the party’s election chances.

“OK, it was a world recession, but we were poorly placed to deal with it when it kicked in. We were in a worse position than some European countries.” (SV)

“We had ten really good years with loads of money sloshing around. We should have had some reserves. And we were borrowing to the hilt. And they didn’t take responsibility. There was no accountability for their policies. And no-one’s ever said sorry.” (SV)

“We were in more debt than we realised and Gordon Brown was hiding it up.” (SV)

“It was almost as if they knew about it but didn’t want to tell anyone in case they didn’t get into power again.” (SV)

“They were in control. If you’re in debt as a person, it’s your fault, nobody else’s. If you earn £350 a week and you spend £450 a week, you can see what’s coming.” (SV)

- In the poll, swing voters were more likely than Labour movement respondents to agree that people in the private sector have so far been hardest hit by the recession, “while public sector employees have been largely protected with job security and generous pensions”.
- The swing voter groups were much more ready to accept that the deficit was a serious problem that needed to be dealt with urgently than the Labour movement participants. Though they were uncomfortable about some of the cuts in prospect, and there were some qualms about the risk of a double-dip recession, swing voters largely accepted that cuts were necessary, and that they had at least been warned before the election what was to come. For some, the

contrast between the Conservatives' determination to address the deficit and Labour "burying its head in the sand" had helped determine how they voted.

"We knew whoever was in, major decisions would have to be made to cut spending across all departments." (SV)

"Labour said they wanted to wait and not do anything right now. That worried me. How long can we carry on?" (SV)

"It's necessary but it's very scary the direction they are going. It's too fast, and not as fair as it should be." (SV)

"I like action. At least they are doing something." (SV)

"The outgoing guy said 'good luck matey, there's no money'." (SV)

"I don't agree with all the cuts they're making but they were quite upfront that they were going to have to make changes." (SV)

"At least we're kind of getting what we signed up for, whereas with Labour it was promised and not delivered." (SV)

"I think we knew it would be worse than with Labour. They were quite honest about that." (SV)

"I would rather have cuts now than waiting round until it's even worse." (SV)

"It was a ticking time bomb and they needed to do something." (SV)

"We have to get on with it. If you're personally in a lot of debt you have to deal with it now." (SV)

- The Labour movement groups were much more resistant to the idea of cuts. Though a few volunteered that they saw plenty of waste in their own public sector jobs ("I work under a directorate that is a load of hot air"), they argued that public sector cuts would damage the economy, and were ideologically driven (a charge that most swing voters rejected – why would a government that wanted to be re-elected deliberately do something that was both unnecessary and unpopular?) Instead they argued for higher taxes for the rich, a clampdown on tax avoidance rather than welfare fraud, and withdrawal from Afghanistan. While cuts may have had to happen under a new Labour government, these would not have come in for another year and would have been "different cuts".

"What's the point of taking people in the public sector and throwing them on benefits? Are we going to turn into a country where there are no public services?" (LM)

"It is a problem that needs to be sorted but not by picking on the wrong people." (LM)

"They are trying to make out the situation is worse than it is. Cameron is preparing people for it." (LM)

"I don't buy it [that cuts are unavoidable]. They're just going to cut public services." (LM)

"I work for the government and I see a lot of waste. But the issue is they're not tackling where the cuts ought to be. What about those who are evading tax, and Trident, and bankers?" (LM)

Poll: Are the coalition's proposed cuts unavoidable?	
Swing voters:	Labour movement:
Yes, they are unavoidable: 69%	Yes, they are unavoidable: 44%
No, they are not unavoidable: 31%	No, they are not unavoidable: 56 %

- Both sets of voters thought public sector strikes were quite likely, but Labour movement participants were far from gung-ho about the prospect. Several worried that the public would not sympathise (a fear that was borne out in the swing voters groups, where several remarked that “public sector workers have had it good for a long time”; “the private sector has had pay freezes for two or three years”; “if the nurses went on strike and my daughter broke her leg I wouldn’t be happy”), that union members were too apathetic, and that the precarious labour market would make workers reluctant to rock the boat. If strikes did occur, few expected Labour to support them – the party would probably keep its distance to avoid alienating voters.

“Customers will get annoyed with us because we’re not there to provide the services because we’re on the picket lines.” (LM)

“There is a perception that public sector workers don’t do anything. I think there will be very little sympathy.” (LM)

“And it depends what they’re striking for. If it’s for pay rises, they wouldn’t have sympathy when there are people losing jobs.” (LM)

“I think people [in unions] are quite scared. There is complete apathy.” (LM)

“We would be shooting ourselves in the foot at Birmingham City Council. If people go on strike now they will just privatise them.” (LM)

“Ideals go out of the window. You’ve got to pay your mortgage...” (LM)
- A majority of Labour movement respondents said in the poll that the new leader should support strikes by trade unions over public sector pay and jobs. Swing voters said, by a 21-point margin, that they would be less likely to consider going back to Labour if this happened.

4. What should the new leader do?

- Swing voters felt that big changes were needed in the Labour Party before they could consider voting for it again (“if they’re going to carry on as before, what’s the point?”). Though several talked about Labour returning to its core values, they often added that this was not the opposite of appealing to the middle classes – it meant exactly that. Some emphasised that Labour would need to come up with its own approach to dealing with the deficit – blanket opposition to cuts would not be good enough.
 - “They need to reinvent themselves.” (SV)
 - “They need to go back to the ground floor”. (SV)
 - “It will take time for people to restore faith. They can put forward their manifesto over time and show they are making changes.” (SV)
 - “They can’t just change the figurehead, they’ve got to change the organisation. They were too interested in celebrity. That’s not Labour’s roots. They were seduced by big money.” (SV)
 - “Acknowledge that action has to be taken [on the deficit]. Come up with their own approach, how they would address the issue.” (SV)
 - “Look at the traditional values of the Labour party, the ordinary working man – that includes most people who describe themselves as middle class now. People who do a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay.” (SV)
 - “Aren’t their core values aimed at people climbing chimneys?” (SV)
- For most Labour movement participants, the party’s core supporters, traditional working class voters, were the priority – not switchers. Some recognised the need to appeal more broadly, and a few acknowledged that what appealed to them as solid Labour supporters might not appeal to some voters whose support they would need to win.
 - “They need to appeal to the working class.” (LM)
 - “The traditional base, the grassroots. The south of England was never Labour.” (LM)
 - “Tony Blair forgot about the grassroots. He left them behind.” (LM)
 - “I don’t want them to woo a focused group because then it’s obvious what you’re doing. I want them to be for everybody.” (LM)
 - “They don’t need to appeal to us. They need to appeal to people who didn’t vote Labour.” (LM)
 - “What we want them to do, they just can’t do it because they will never get elected.” (LM)
- Swing voters were very clear that the Labour Party needed to acknowledge the mistakes made in government, and many suggested that the new leader should apologise for its errors. In the Labour movement groups, few felt that this would be the right course. The idea of an apology was anathema to many – they would prefer to see the party defend its record. This approach would actively discourage swing voters from returning: asked what the new leader could do that would put them off, they said: “if they carried on defending Gordon Brown’s policies to the hilt and don’t hold up their hands and say ‘we made some mistakes’”; “the same again”; “not acknowledging that the spending has to stop”.
- In the poll, 43 per cent of swing voters said an apology would make them more likely to go back to supporting Labour, while 5 per cent said it would make them less likely to do so; respondents in the Labour movement were evenly divided as to whether an apology should be issued.

To apologise, or not to apologise?	
<p>Swing voter groups:</p> <p>“Apologise for the past and look to the future and what the voters wanted”.</p> <p>“They should say they’ve made mistakes and they will try harder”.</p> <p>“A whole new mission statement, and stand up and acknowledge the mess they’ve made”.</p> <p>“They fooled us into thinking we were prospering when in fact we were becoming bankrupt. They should be saying ‘this is where we possibly went wrong and this is how we could move forward’.”</p>	<p>Labour movement groups:</p> <p>“I don’t think an apology is needed. I don’t think any politician goes out to do the wrong thing.”</p> <p>“They should defend what they’ve done. Stop the Tories saying ‘we are inheriting this’. Look at the amount of new hospitals...”</p> <p>“[The govt] are saying this is our fault. Nobody seems to be saying this is twaddle”.</p> <p>“Just move on. You can’t do anything about what you’ve done in the past”.</p>

- The poll found 69 per cent of Labour movement respondents saying the new leader should “defend the record of the last Labour government, especially on the economy”. According to swing voters, this would be more likely to put them off supporting Labour than to encourage them to return.
- According to the poll, a move to the left would be at least as likely to put swing voters off Labour as to attract them (though more said they did not know what “moving to the left” meant than said that they would be either attracted or repelled by the concept.)
- A number of policies proposed by the leadership candidates were tested on both poll samples. The only one to produce a significant discrepancy in support between Labour movement and swing voters was the proposal for a 10 per cent estate tax to fund long term care for the elderly. While a majority of Labour movement respondents supported the idea, swing voters rejected it by a 22-point margin.
- Those in the Labour movement groups who thought the party needed to change fundamentally if it is to have a chance at the next election were in a small minority – though several argued that Labour needed to “set ourselves apart from other parties” rather than continue with “watered down Tory policies”. The prevailing view was that once Labour have regrouped, the coalition government will prove so unpopular that those who moved away from Labour – particularly if they voted Liberal Democrat – will return to the fold. In the six Labour movement groups, only one or two participants doubted that Labour would win the next general election.
 - “I think they will get in next time anyway, because no-one will vote Conservative because it’s all going wrong. And no-one will vote Lib Dem again.” (LM)
 - “The party that is in at the moment will hang themselves. People who moved over will see the light.” (LM)
 - “If the coalition carries on what it is doing, we will probably win it fine.” (LM)

“Labour will win, if they don’t make a complete balls of it”. (LM)

“Labour will win almost by default, even if they don’t do anything”. (LM)

“The Lib Dems will never get back in. I doubt they will ever receive the same number of votes again.” (LM)

“When the cuts start to hit, no-one will remember that Labour failed on this and that. They shouldn’t spend too much time self-flagellating and saying ‘we were wrong, we were wrong’.” (LM)

“I think we will get the lower income people back without even trying”. (LM)

“I don’t think they have gone so far that swing voters won’t swing back. With honesty and integrity I don’t think it will be too long before they are back.” (LM)

- Swing voters were much less sure that the Labour Party would bounce back so quickly. Though the coalition’s performance would inevitably be a factor for them, they were much more ready to be convinced by the new government than Labour movement groups anticipated. Swing voters also said that how the Labour Party looked at the next election would be an important part of their decision – rather more than the Labour movement groups had suspected.

“It depends what the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats do”. (SV)

“Labour need to come out fighting with a definite plan, but I wouldn’t necessarily expect them to win the election”. (SV)

“They need to prove that they’ve learned from their mistakes”. (SV)

“They will have to push very hard and work very hard, but whether the general public will warm to them is another story. It might take a long time before people trust them again.” (SV)

“I can see it being a good two or three elections before people go to the Labour Party again.” (SV)

- This was also reflected in the poll. A majority of Labour movement participants thought the coalition would prove so unpopular that “the Labour Party will probably win the next general election without having to change fundamentally”. The verdict of swing voters casts doubt on this prediction: two thirds of them said “the Labour Party needs to change quite fundamentally before I will seriously consider voting for it again, even if I do not like what the coalition government is doing”.

5. Swing voters: a different species?

- Though some in the Labour movement groups grudgingly acknowledged the need for the party to win back swing voters, their disdain for these voters was striking. Almost without exception they thought people who had left Labour to vote for other parties, particularly the Conservatives, were ignorant, credulous or selfish. Ignorant, because they did not understand what the Labour government had achieved and the damage that would be done by the Tories; credulous because they swallowed the output of the right-wing media without thinking carefully about the consequences of their vote; and selfish because they thought only of their own interests rather than the need to support public services and the poor.

How are swing voters different from people like you?

“They’re not into policies, they don’t dig deeper. They walk through life and don’t care what happens to them.”

“They choose not to be informed.”

“The Mail, the Express, the Sun – some people just believe what they read in the papers.”

“People who didn’t vote for Labour don’t actually care. They don’t have children or grandchildren, they have private health. Some people are very ‘self, self, self’, they don’t think about others.”

“My brother switched. He just agreed with what the Conservatives had to say. He was being selfish, and he’s middle class.”

“They don’t think about the knock-on effect that it will have on them.”

“A lot of people, their only source of news is the Sun.”

“We look into the background. Not a lot of people are like that.”

“They’re fickle. They read the paper and something big happens and they think ‘oh, typical Labour’ and switch allegiance.”

Labour movement focus groups

- The poll revealed some distinct attitudinal differences between the Labour movement and swing voters, but not across the board: they were opposed in similar degree to the legalisation of cannabis, and were equally likely to think that “Britain should aspire to be more like Scandinavia and less like America” and that “if you work hard, it is possible to be successful in Britain no matter what your background”. Swing voters were more likely than the Labour movement to think that “if people manage to become extremely rich, that is a good thing for Britain rather than a bad thing”; the Labour sample was more likely to think “the government should intervene to try and make society more equal even if this means reducing living standards for those at the top as well as raising them for those at the bottom”. The biggest differences were over immigration, which swing voters are much less likely than firm Labour supporters to regard as having brought more benefits than costs, and the proposition that private schools should be banned, which is comfortably rejected by swing voters but divides the Labour movement quite evenly.

6. Full poll results

1. Here are some things that various people have suggested as reasons why Labour did not win the general election in May 2010. On a scale of 0-10, please say how important you think each of these is in explaining the election result – where 0 means it was not important at all and 10 means it is extremely important.

Swing voters			Labour movement		
1	Gordon Brown was not a good Prime Minister	7.17	1	Many voters did not fully appreciate what Labour had done in government	7.35
2	Labour did not seem to have answers on a range of important issues, including immigration and the economy	6.97	2	Voters who switched from Labour to other parties were influenced by the right-wing media	6.72
3	Labour seemed to have run out of steam, and clearly needed a spell out of government	6.72	3	Labour's policies were broadly right, but the party did not manage to communicate them in an appealing way	6.71
4	Labour did not keep the promises it made at previous elections	6.71	4	Labour spent too much time trying to appeal to middle class swing voters, and lost the support of many traditional, working class supporters as a result	6.03
5	Labour spent too much time trying to appeal to middle class swing voters, and lost the support of many traditional, working class supporters as a result	6.30	5	Gordon Brown was not a good Prime Minister	5.90
6	Labour's policies were broadly right, but the party did not manage to communicate them in an appealing way	5.99	6	Labour did not seem to have answers on a range of important issues, including immigration and the economy	5.57
7	Many voters did not fully appreciate what Labour had done in government	5.84	7	Labour did not keep the promises it made at previous elections	5.26
8	Many of Labour's policies were wrong	5.74	8	Labour seemed to have run out of steam, and clearly needed a spell out of government	5.11
9	Labour were particularly responsible for the scandal over MPs' expenses as they were in government at the time	5.70	9	Labour were particularly responsible for the scandal over MPs' expenses as they were in government at the time	4.66
10	Voters who switched from Labour to other parties were influenced by the right wing media	5.00	10	Many of Labour's policies were wrong	4.38

2. **LABOUR MOVEMENT:** Which of the following do you think was the more important factor when it comes to explaining the election result?

Many working class voters who are Labour's traditional core supporters decided not to vote Labour this time	55%
Many middle class swing voters decided to vote for other parties this time	45%

SWING VOTERS: Who do you think it is more important for the Labour Party to listen to and reconnect with if it is to win the next general election?

Traditional Labour supporters and union members who have always been their core support	58%
Middle ground swing voters	42%

3. Whose values do you think are closer to those of the British public as a whole?

	Swing voters	Labour mov't
Tony Blair	66%	56%
Gordon Brown	34%	44%

What future for Labour?

4. If you had to give the Labour government a mark out of 10 for its overall performance in office between 1997 and 2010, where 0 means 'extremely poor' and 10 means 'excellent', what mark would you give?

Swing voters	Labour mov't
5.46	6.83

5. **LABOUR MOVEMENT:** Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: 'Labour would have had a much better chance of winning if they had replaced Gordon Brown as leader a few months before the election'.

Strongly agree	20%	Agree: 57%
Somewhat agree	37%	
Somewhat disagree	26%	Disagree: 43%
Strongly disagree	17%	

- SWITCHERS:** Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: 'I would have been much more likely to vote Labour if they had replaced Gordon Brown with a new leader a few months before the election'.

Strongly agree	20%	Agree: 65%
Somewhat agree	45%	
Somewhat disagree	24%	Disagree: 36%
Strongly disagree	12%	

6. All things considered, taking into account their record in office and what they were proposing in their manifesto, do you think Labour deserved to lose the 2010 election, or not?

	Swing voters	Labour mov't
Yes, Labour deserved to lose	73%	23%
No, Labour did not deserve to lose	27%	77%

7. **SWING VOTERS:** Which of the following statements comes closest to your own view about the Labour Party and your decision not to vote for it in 2010?

I think the Labour Party is basically on my side and has its heart in the right place – it just ran out of steam and Britain needed a change	46%
I think Labour seriously lost its way in the last few years and I do not feel the Labour Party today is on my side	54%

What future for Labour?

8. Here are some arguments that people have made about the economy and the deficit (the fact that the government spends more each year than it receives in tax revenue, increasing the size of Britain's debt). Please say whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each one.

NET AGREEMENT	Swing voters	Labour mov't
The deficit is the most serious problem facing Britain's economy and needs to be dealt with urgently, beginning this year	+ 64%	+35%
However unpleasant they may be, the public spending cuts being proposed by the coalition government are unavoidable	+ 38%	-12%
More of the money needed to cut the deficit should be raised from increasing taxes, rather than cutting spending	+ 1%	-27%
The coalition government is cutting spending because it is instinctively hostile to public services and the public sector – it is just using the deficit as an excuse	+ 9%	+60%
The last Labour government must accept a large part of the blame for the economic problems that Britain faced at the end of its time in government	+ 48%	-4%
Bankers are largely responsible for the current situation, so it is not fair that ordinary people should have to bear the brunt of measures to reduce the deficit	+76%	+76%
Labour will not be taken seriously on the economy until it comes up with its own plan to deal with the deficit – it can't just oppose every spending cut	+68%	+32%
People on higher incomes should have to pay significantly more tax to minimise the cuts necessary in the public sector	+55%	+67%

9. Thinking about the number of seats that each party won at the general election and the coalition deal that followed, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

Swing voters	
The coalition government between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats is probably the right outcome for Britain	54%
It would be better for Britain if Labour were still in government in coalition with the Liberal Democrats and others, even though they won fewer seats than the Conservatives	46%

Labour movement	
Given the number of seats each party won at the election, the coalition government between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats is probably the right outcome	35%
The coalition government is not the legitimate outcome of the election – Labour should still be in government with a coalition including the Liberal Democrats	65%

What future for Labour?

10. The result of the Labour leadership contest will be announced on 25 September. Here are some things that have been suggested that the new Labour leader should do once he or she is elected to start winning back support.

LABOUR MOVEMENT: Please say whether you think the new leader should, or should not, do each one.

SWING VOTERS: Please say whether each of these things would make you more likely or less likely to go back to supporting Labour, or whether it would make no difference.

	Labour mov't – net 'should do'	Swing voters – net 'more likely to support Labour'
Apologise to voters for the mistakes made by the last Labour government	+0%	+38%
Oppose all spending cuts	-12%	-17%
Introduce more policies designed to restore support among core Labour voters	+78%	+40%
Introduce policies designed to restore support among swing voters	+70%	+38%
Support strikes by trade unions over public sector pay and jobs	+6%	-21%
Defend the record of the last Labour government, especially on the economy	+38%	-13%
Propose new taxes on the richest so they bear more of the cost of reducing the deficit	+58%	+49%
Commit to a massive expansion of apprenticeship schemes to provide new opportunities for young people	+80%	+62%
Develop policies to reform and improve public services built around the principle of giving consumers more choice and power	+70%	+59%

11. **SWING VOTERS:** Which of the following three statements comes closest to your view?

I would be more likely to go back to supporting the Labour Party if it moved further to the left	31%
I would be less likely to go back to supporting the Labour Party if it moved further to the left	32%
I am not sure what is meant by 'moving further to the left'	37%

12. Here are some policies that have been proposed by various candidates for the Labour leadership. Please can you say whether you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose each one.

NET SUPPORT	Swing voters	Labour mov't
Scrapping university tuition fees and introducing a new graduate tax	+43%	+42%
Starting the 50% top rate of Income Tax at £100,000 a year, instead of £150,000 as is currently the case	+54%	+61%
Scrapping the renewal of the Trident missile system, Britain's nuclear deterrent	+25%	+29%
Increasing the minimum wage to more than £7 an hour	+69%	+77%
Introducing a new High Pay Commission to restrict high salaries in the private sector	+62%	+70%
Introduce a new Mansion Tax on homes worth over £2 million	+72%	+78%
Re-nationalise the railways	+58%	+57%
Introduce a new 10% tax on people's estates when they die, on top of Inheritance Tax, to fund long term care for the elderly	-22%	+6%

What future for Labour?

13. Thinking about Labour's chances at the next general election, scheduled for May 2015, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

Labour movement	
The coalition government will prove so unpopular in five years' time that the Labour Party will probably win the next general election without having to change fundamentally	53%
The Labour Party needs to change quite fundamentally before it will win back enough support to win a general election, even if the coalition government is unpopular in five years' time	47%

Swing voters	
I will probably seriously consider voting Labour at the next election, even if the Labour Party has not changed very much, because I don't like what the coalition government is doing	33%
The Labour Party needs to change quite fundamentally before I will seriously consider voting for it again, even if I do not like what the coalition government is doing	67%

14. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements?

NET AGREEMENT	Swing voters	Labour mov't
On balance, immigration into Britain has brought more benefits than costs	-30%	-9%
So far people in the private sector have been hit hardest by the recession in terms of pay cuts and job losses, while public sector employees have been largely protected with job security and generous pensions	+26%	+12%
If people manage to become extremely rich, that is a good thing for Britain rather than a bad thing	+41%	+35%
The government should intervene to try and make society more equal, even if this means reducing living standards for those at the top as well as raising them for those at the bottom	+44%	+60%
Private companies should never have any part to play in delivering public services like health and education	+28%	+42%
If you work hard, it is possible to be successful in Britain no matter what your background	+46%	+38%
The privatisation of British industries and utilities by Margaret Thatcher permanently damaged the British economy	+50%	+70%
Private schools should be banned so that all children have to go through the state system	-33%	-4%
People who live off state benefits should be required to work in the community	+76%	+66%
Tax relief should be given on private health insurance so as to relieve some of the pressures on the NHS	+53%	+35%
Private company boards should have to include representatives of their workforce to ensure that workers have a voice in the key decisions affecting them	+72%	+79%
Higher education is a right, not a privilege	+62%	+71%
Britain should aspire to be more like Scandinavia and less like America	+65%	+67%
Cannabis should be legalised	-23%	-22%

7. Methodology

Labour movement research

- Six focus groups of Labour Party members and Labour-supporting members of affiliated trade unions were conducted between 16 and 24 August 2010. The groups were conducted in London, Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham. The groups comprised equal numbers of men and women and covered a full range of working ages and social groups.
- A poll of 2,010 Labour Party members and Labour-supporting members of affiliated trade unions was conducted between 3 and 14 September 2010.

Swing voter research

- Six focus groups of people who voted Labour at the 2005 election but for a different party at the 2010 were conducted between 16 and 24 August 2010. The groups were conducted in London, Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham. The groups comprised equal numbers of men and women and covered a full range of working ages and social groups.
- A poll of 2,091 adults who voted Labour at the 2005 election but for a different party at the 2010 election was conducted between 3 and 13 September 2010.

Full data tables are available at lordashcroft.com.