

Lord Ashcroft press cuttings extracts  
Hard thoughts, not warm words for Tories  
The Times — 01 July 2005

“MICHAEL ASHCROFT has done the Conservative Party a big service, and by no means his first. His report, *Smell the Coffee: a Wake-up Call for the Conservative Party*, is the most candid and devastating commentary on an election campaign I have read.

Lord Ashcroft’s main interest is in getting the Tories elected, as he showed in his help in certain target seats. The report is written in a detached, analytical way, based on public polls and a number of private polls and focus groups he commissioned.

The implications are stark for the Tories. Individual polls may be wrong, but, collectively, they are right. Listening to them would have saved the Tories from wrongly assuming that immigration or calling the Prime Minister a liar would bring in votes. The leadership deluded itself and others about its prospects from last autumn onwards. The Ashcroft research showed that the party was doing no better than in 2001.”

Peter Riddell  
Political Briefing

Lord Ashcroft press cuttings extracts  
We're seen as old-fashioned and dishonest says top Tory  
Daily Mail — 06 July 2005

“In a speech to Tory councillors, Theresa May the spokesman on family matters said private polling carried out by party donor Lord Ashcroft found that six times as many people thought the party was ‘old-fashioned’ rather than modern.

‘Twice as many people saw us as “dishonest” rather than “honest” and “not concerned”,’ said Mrs May who three years ago told the Tory conference they were seen as the ‘nasty party’.

‘The truth is that no single policy or idea will be sufficient to rebuild the Conservative Party’s relationship with the British people’.

She said Lord Ashcroft’s research had shown that only 2 per cent of voters could actually recall Tory policies on core issues such as schools and hospitals. ‘They just didn’t think we were worth listening to,’ she claimed.

The party should spend the next few years building the ‘values, vision, beliefs, hopes and dreams’ which define the modern Conservative party, she added.”

Graeme Wilson  
Political Correspondent

“It needs to. If there were any lingering doubts that the Tories urgently require a new direction, they were dispelled at the end of last week by Lord (Michael) Ashcroft, a successful, if controversial, businessman and former party treasurer. Lord Ashcroft has published an analysis of £750,000 (\$1.3m) worth of polling he privately commissioned covering the seven months up to the election. “Smell the Coffee: a wake-up call for the Conservative Party” is a devastating critique of the campaign the Tories fought.

Part of Lord Ashcroft’s purpose is to show how the strategy of targeting 164 seats (the minimum the Tories needed to win to form an overall majority) was absurdly over-ambitious and “a disaster waiting to happen” that only limited their gains. But its most important conclusions for the future relate to the negative way the party presented itself to the electorate.

In particular, the anti-immigration message that was designed to appeal to the reactionary instincts of working-class Labour supporters was a terrible miscalculation. It was never an important enough issue to detach Labour voters from their traditional loyalties. However, as Lord Ashcroft says, it prevented “us from connection with our real core vote ... the election-winning coalition of professionals, women and aspiration voters without home the party risks becoming a rump.”

For his party, the perceptive Lord Ashcroft is interested in only one thing: winning the next general election. Which of the Davids would he choose?”

“I have always found that the successful businessmen were realistic. I am not surprised that Lord Ashcroft’s pamphlet *Smell the Coffee – A Wake up Call for the Conservative Party* has been the best analysis to date of the Conservative defeat at the general election. It is based on considerable expenditure on polling and focus groups, and it makes scary reading for the candidates for the Conservative leadership and, indeed, uncomfortable reading for Michael Howard.

One graph was particularly interesting. Asked whether they agreed with the statement ‘Britain was a better country to live in 20 or 30 years ago’, 67% of Conservative voters said ‘yes’. But so did 43% of AB voters and 36% of 18-24 year olds. Reasonably enough, Michael Ashcroft is struck by the difference between Conservative voters and the young. I was struck by the scale of disillusionment in all groups, with Conservatives only the most disillusioned.”

William Rees-Mogg