

Likely voter age profile and the impact on 2024 General Election voting intentions

EPOP 2024 Conference

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Background

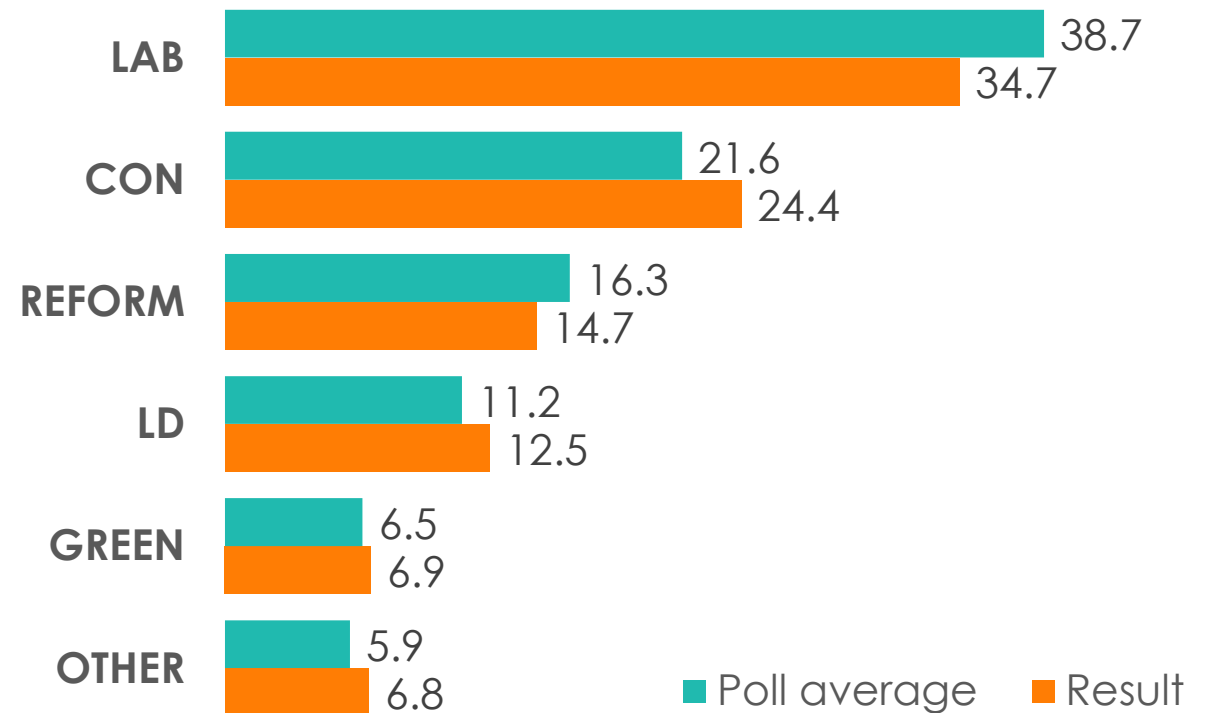
General Election polls tended to overstate Labour and understate Conservative party

Immediately before the election 18 BPC members released voting intentions
(mostly polls, some MRPs)

These broadly forecast the outcome of the election

However, Labour support was over-stated and Conservative party was under-stated

Average voting intentions for the 18 BPC members vs GB results

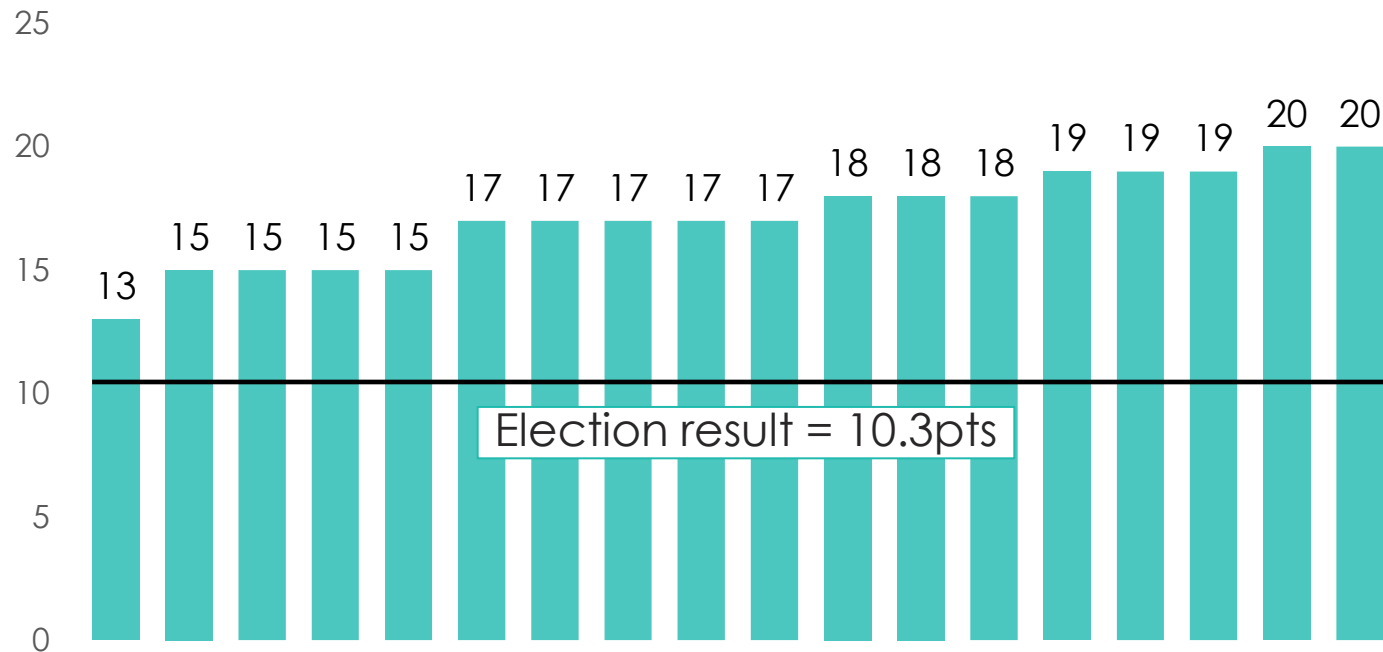


Source: <https://www.britishpollingcouncil.org/the-performance-of-the-polls-in-the-2024-general-election/>

Reasonable variation in VIs between pollsters

Labour lead over the Conservative party ranged from 13pts to 20pts

Labour lead over the Conservative party - GB (18 final VIs from BPC members)



Although notable that:

- All pollsters overstated Labour lead
- Range of 7pts between pollsters somewhat smaller than earlier in 2024 and at various points in 2023 e.g., in late February 2023 the range was 16pts (11pts-27pts)

Source: <https://www.britishpollingcouncil.org/the-performance-of-the-polls-in-the-2024-general-election/>

Age profile of likely voters also varied between pollsters

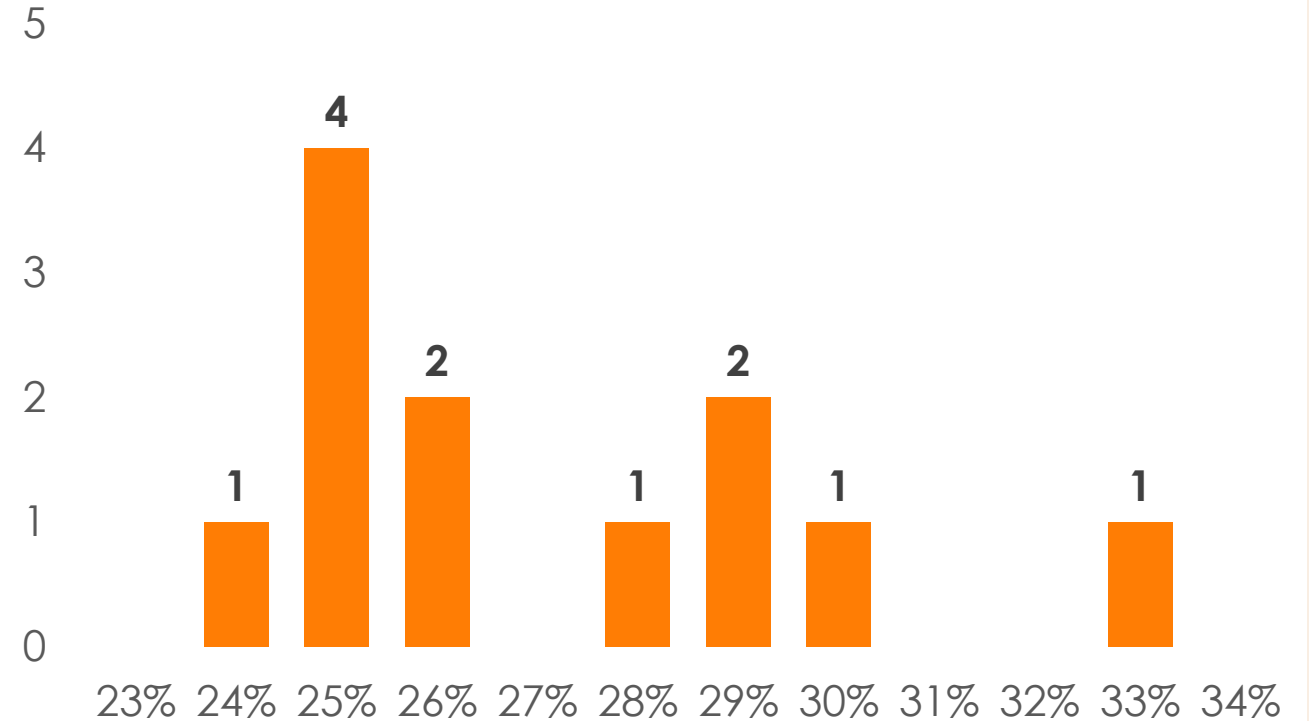
The proportion of likely voters aged 65+

Twelve of the 18 VIs published have data tables with sufficient information to determine proportion of likely voters aged 65+*

Proportion aged 65+ ranges from 24% - 33%

As context, ONS mid-2022 population estimates indicate 65+ are 23.8% of the general population of GB aged 18+

Percentage of likely voters aged 65+ (for 12 estimates available)

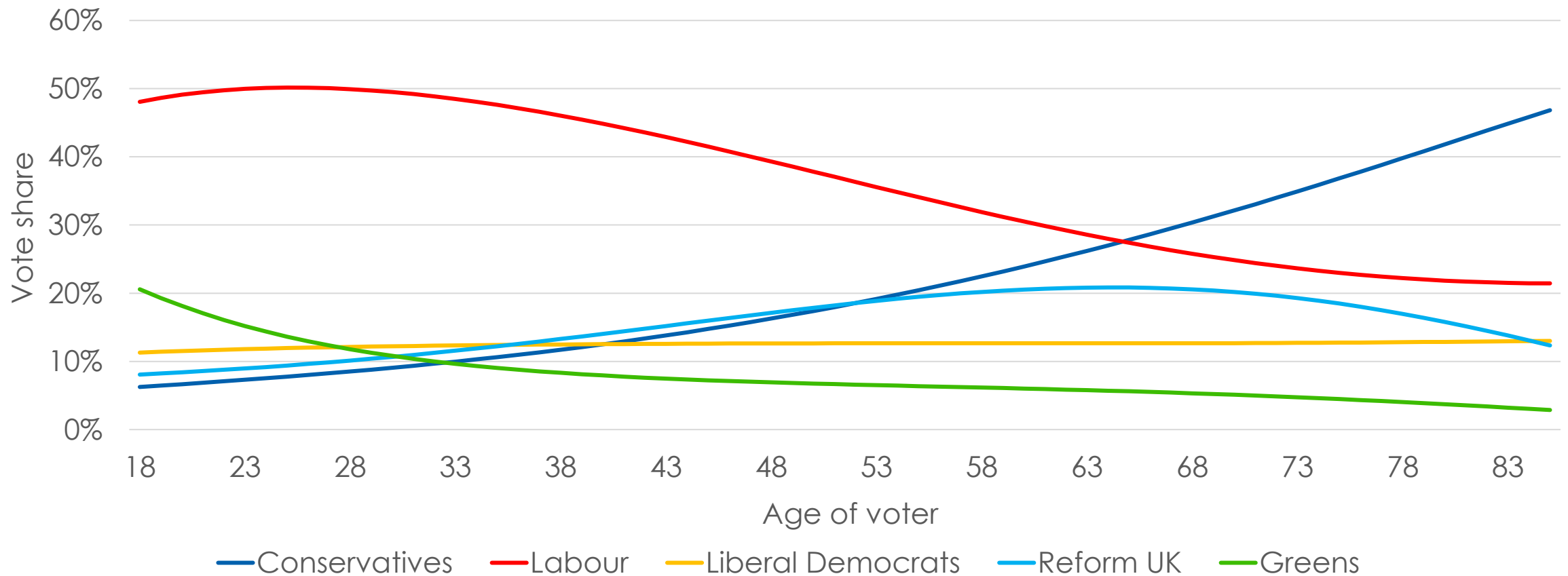


*Tables including weighted bases of the different age groups used for the published headline Voting Intentions

Age was strongly correlated with vote choice at 2024 election

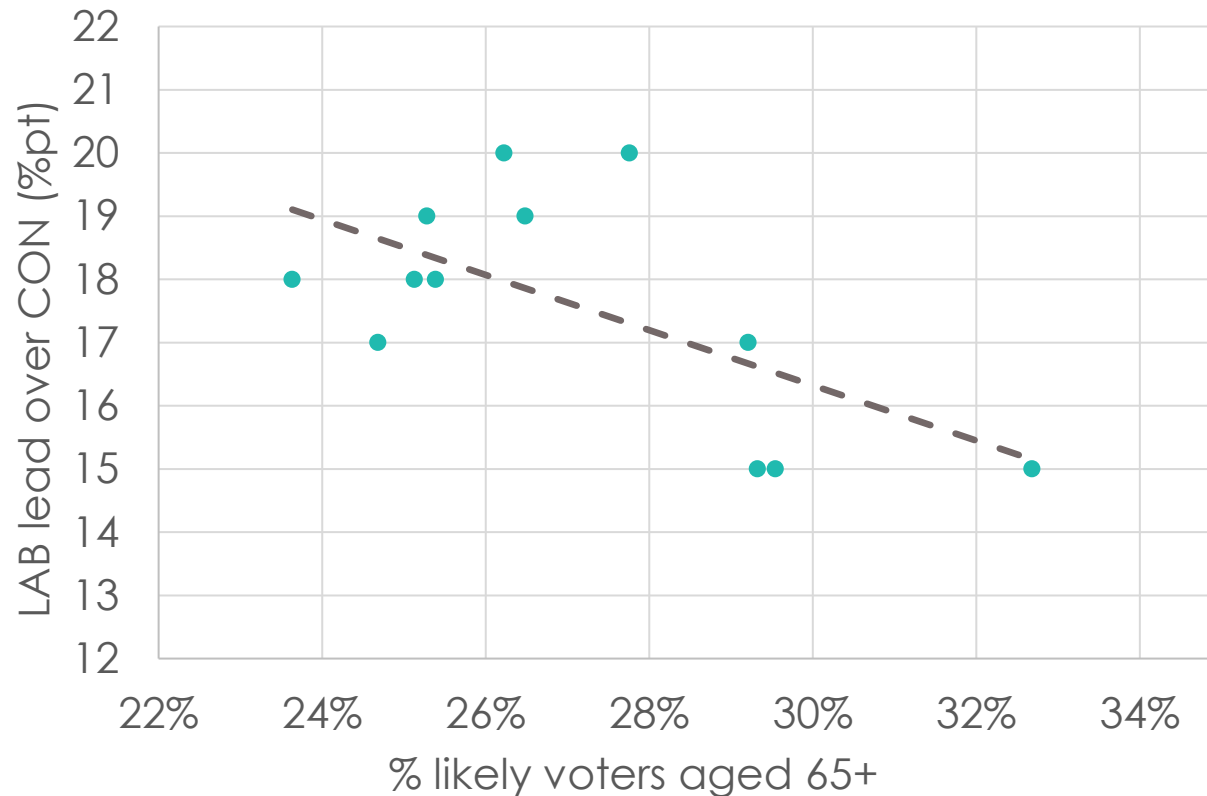
Younger voters more likely to favour Labour, 65+ Conservatives

Verian 2024 pre-election polls – smoothed vote share



As a result, the Labour lead over Conservatives in each poll is associated with the age balance of the likely voter sample

Labour lead over Conservative party - as a function of the percentage of likely voters aged 65+



The proportion of 65+ in the likely voter sample has a negative association with the Labour lead

For every 1pt increase in proportion of likely voters aged 65+ there is a 0.44pt decrease in Labour lead

p-value = 0.03

R² = 0.39

What was the age profile of voters in 2024?

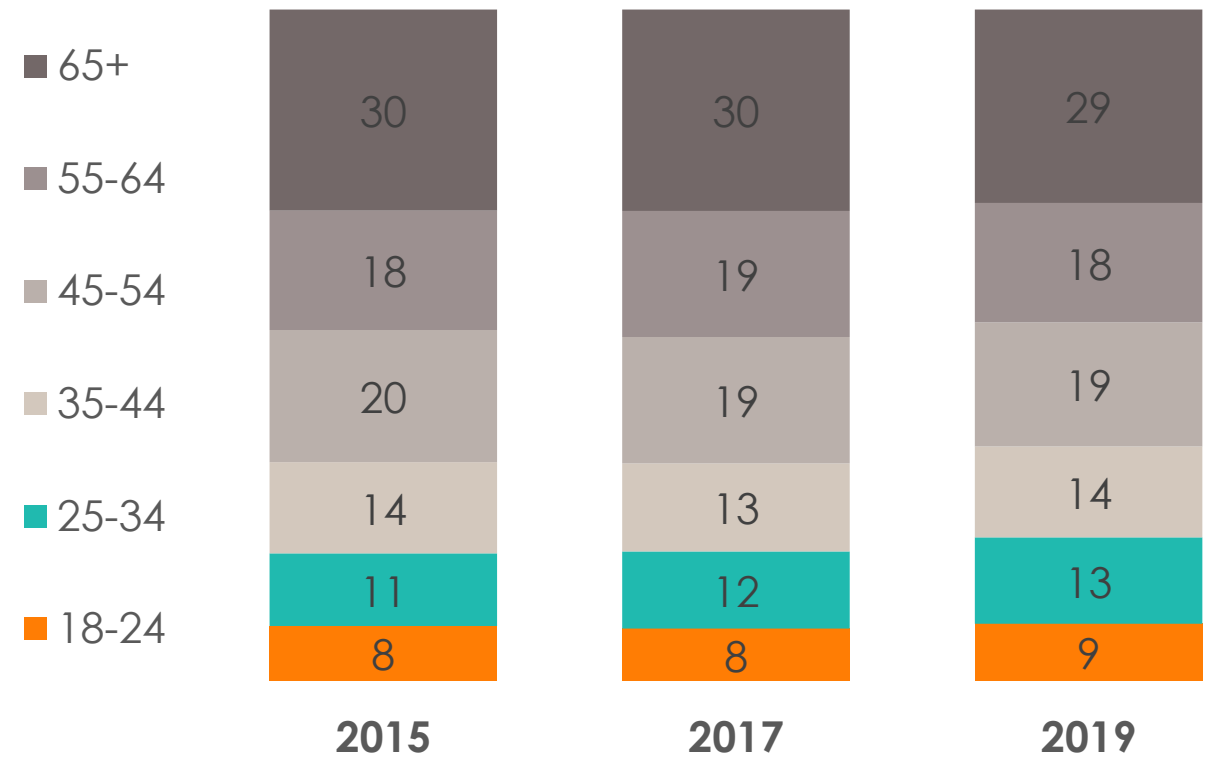
We will need to wait until the publication of the 2024 BES RP survey for definitive data

However, we can look back at **BES RP surveys from previous elections** to get an idea as to what the age profile tends to be at general elections

Very consistent pattern, although turnout level broadly similar at each of these elections

- 2015 – 66%
- 2017 – 69%
- 2019 – 67%

Age profile of self-reported voters – BES RP surveys* (%)



*For 2015 and 2017 where there is validated vote data available - the validated vote age profiles are very similar to the self-reported vote age profiles

Re-weighting polls

Where published VIs have an age breakdown - we can reweight the contribution of each age band to match the BES 2019 age profile

Sixteen of the 18 BPC pollster published VIs including an age breakdown

We have “re-weighted” these polls by amending the contribution each age band has towards the **overall VIs** to match the 2019 BES voter age profile

Caveat – this re-weighting will affect likely voter profile in other respects and may introduce / increase impact of other biases


verian  Formerly Kantar Public

Table 5 : Headline Voting intention for General Election - including squeeze and imputation, weighted by likelihood of turning out in the General Election

		Total	Gender		Age band						
			Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	
Base: All adults in GB 18+, excluding those who are not registered to vote - with imputed values for those who plan not to vote & those who refuse to say who they will vote for											
Headline Voting intention for General Election - including squeeze and imputation	Unweighted Base	2030	968	1054	115	266	370	375	348	556	
	Weighted Base	1289	624	656	93	200	189	194	234	378	
	Conservative	275	131	144	4	17	27	32	43	151	
		21%	21%	22%	5%	9%	14%	16%	19%	40%	
	Labour	464	222	241	47	96	77	74	79	91	
		36%	36%	37%	50%	48%	41%	38%	34%	24%	
	Liberal Democrats	161	71	90	5	27	30	27	31	41	
		13%	11%	14%	5%	13%	16%	14%	13%	11%	
	SNP	38	18	20	3	5	7	8	7	8	
		3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	4%	4%	3%	2%	
	Plaid Cymru	17	8	9	0	3	3	4	3	3	
		1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	
	Green	97	36	56	18	19	12	12	14	21	
		7%	6%	9%	19%	10%	6%	6%	6%	6%	
	Reform UK	208	125	82	9	29	26	32	51	61	
		16%	20%	12%	10%	15%	14%	16%	22%	16%	
Other	29	12	15	7	4	7	5	4	3		
	2%	2%	2%	7%	2%	4%	3%	2%	1%		

Labour vote share Absolute Error

Re-weighting reduces error for 14 of the 16 estimates

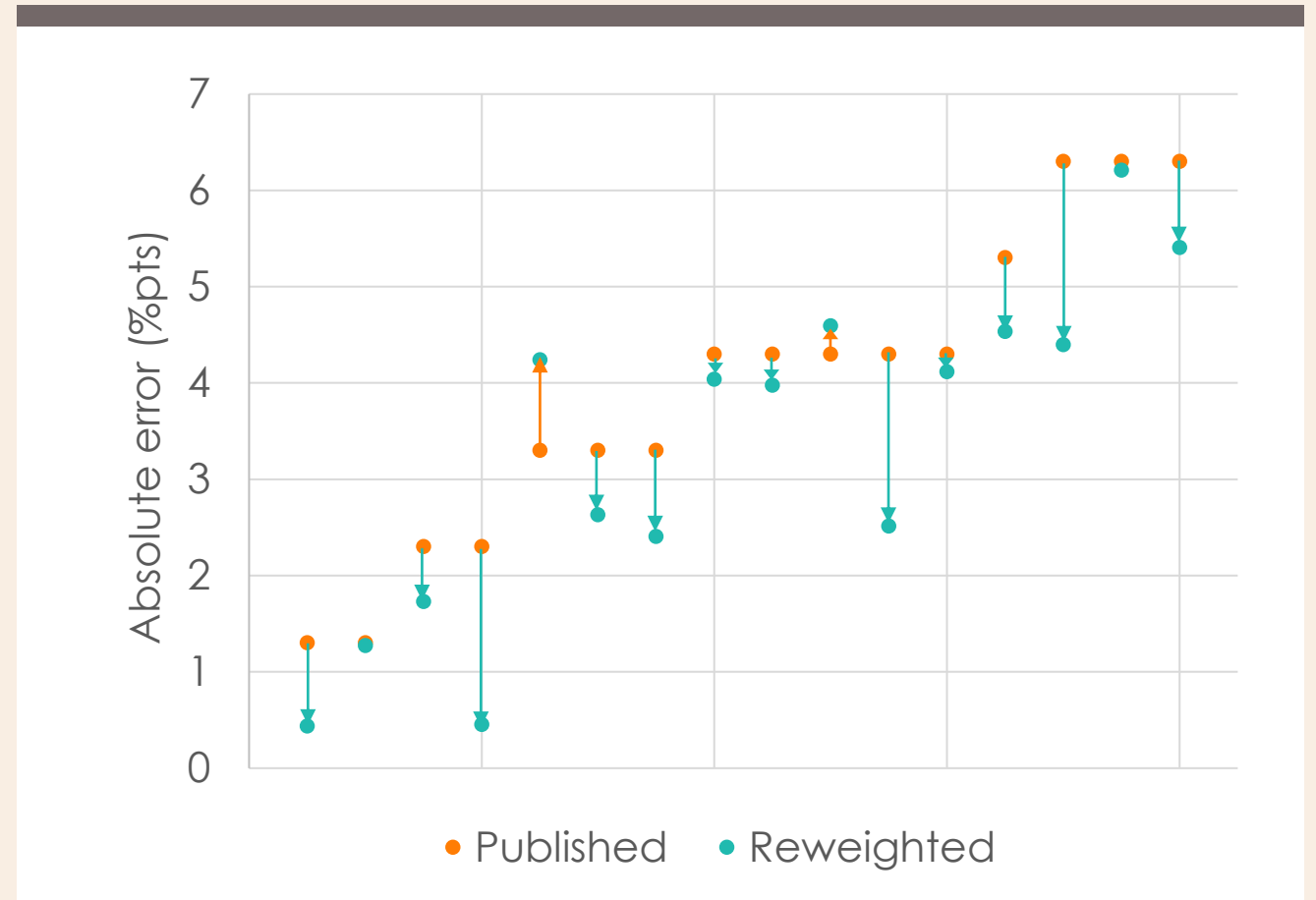
Fairly dramatic in some instances – reduces error by 1.8-1.9pts for 3 estimates

Across all 16 estimates:

- MAE of 3.9pts originally
- MAE of 3.3pts after re-weighting

Number of polls with AE <3 pts

- 4 originally, 7 after re-weighting



Conservative party vote share Absolute Error

Reweighting reduces error for 13 of the 16 estimates

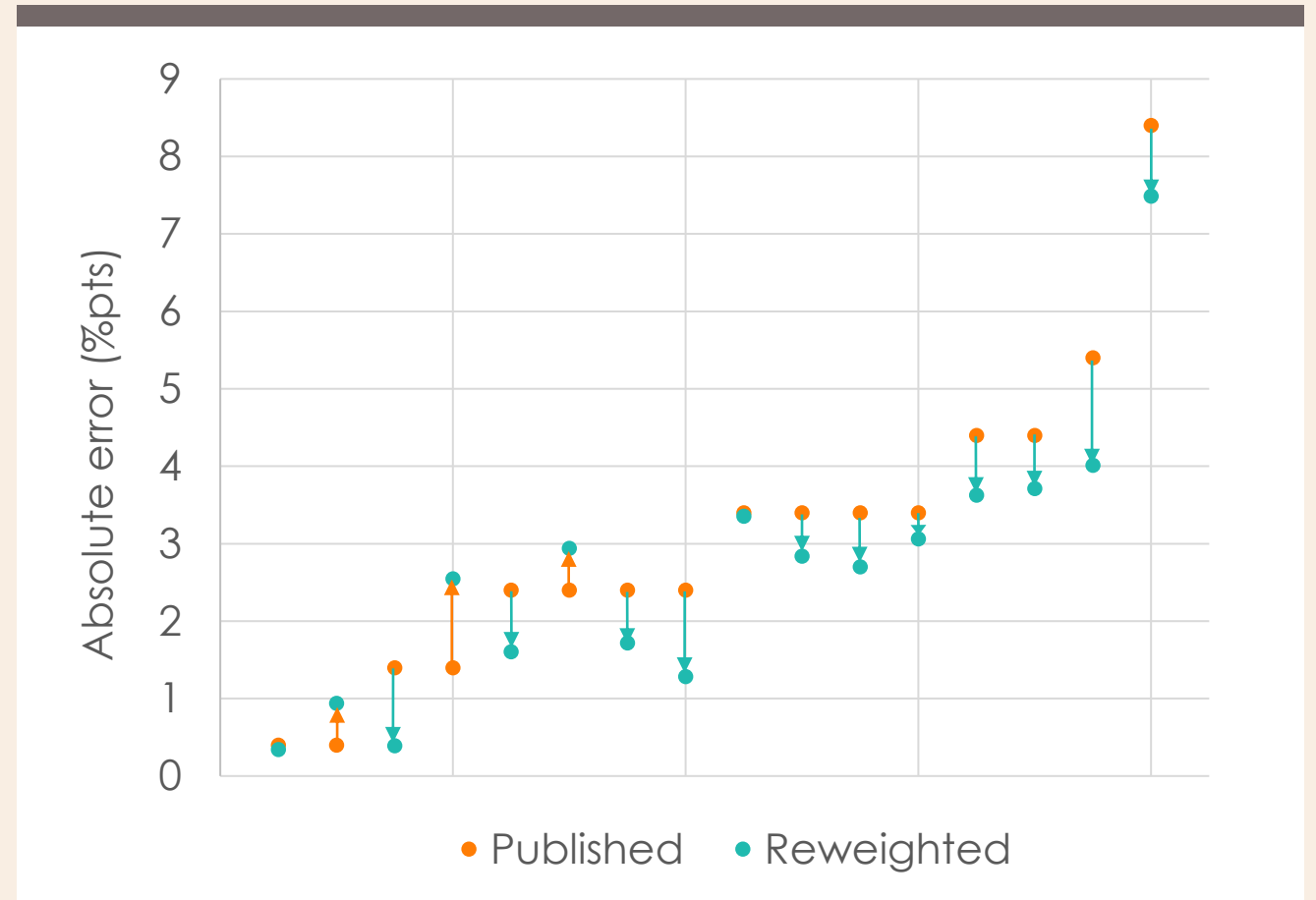
Increases error for three estimates

Across all 16 estimates:

- MAE of 3.1pts originally
- MAE of 2.6pts after re-weighting

Number of polls with AE < 2pts –

- 4 originally, 6 after re-weighting

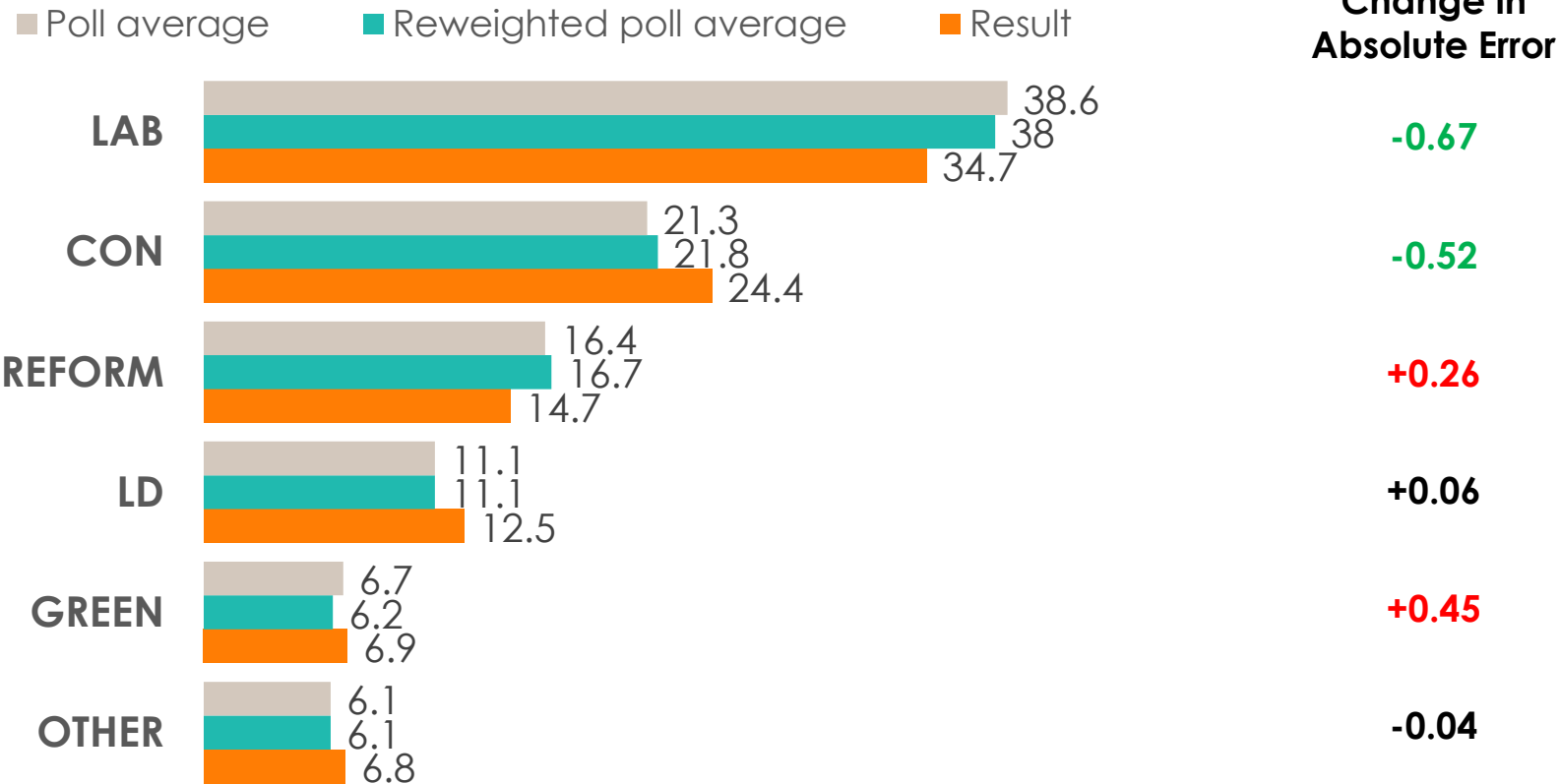


Mean Absolute Error across parties

Improvement for two major parties

But offset to some extent by increased error for minor parties

Average VIs 16 estimates vs results



Total Error

Original = 11.1pts

Re-weighted = 10.6pts

Conclusions & thoughts

There was reasonable variation in final VI estimates – although all understated Conservatives and over-stated Labour

- Polls with a relatively low proportion of over 65s in their likely voter sample tended to provide less accurate estimates for Labour and the Conservatives

Crude “re-weighting” of 2024 polls to match the voter profile from the 2019 GE generally reduces error for the two major parties & would have reduced number of polls with “large” misses

Although the “re-weighted” polls...

- Still over-stated Labour and under-stated Conservatives
- Increased error slightly for Green and Reform UK

...indicating other biases still remain

Conclusions & thoughts

Each election is different – so I don't recommend specifically weighting polls to match the profiles of voters at previous election(s)

For instance, lower turnout in 2024 – likely to have affected profile of voters

- My hypothesis: drop in turnout was mainly among younger age groups, so voters in 2024 were older on average than those in 2015, 2017 and 2019 – to check once BES RP published

However, when modelling turnout and generating a likely voter sample to produce VIs, important to conduct sense checks on voter profile

- Use historical BES RP surveys as benchmarks
- Age balance is critical
- Can also do other checks – e.g., education level, region, gender, etc.

If profile is markedly different – suggest revisiting turnout modelling as there is likely to be an issue

Thanks for your time!



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