

Review of Survation's 2024 General Election Telephone Polling

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Summary

- Survation's final telephone poll for the 2024 General Election was fielded between 26th June and 3rd July and surveyed 1,679 GB adults. It showed a large Labour lead, low Conservative support, and a strong result for Reform UK — all of which aligned with the overall direction of the election result.
- The poll overstated Labour's lead over the Conservatives by 7.6 points (Labour 37.6% vs. 33.8%, Conservatives 19.9% vs. 23.7%), with symmetrical over-and-under-estimation of those two parties. The poll's average error across parties was 1.9%, making it one of the most accurate telephone polls of the election and fourth overall among all pollsters.
- Following the election, we conducted an internal review to investigate possible sources of error. We audited interviewer conduct, tested alternative weighting approaches, and evaluated how we handled undecided and refused voters. None of these methodological adjustments substantially improved accuracy or explained the error.
- We then recontacted a subset of respondents from our final poll. The recontact sample produced a Labour lead of 12.1 points, close to the actual 10.1-point margin, and moved all major parties' estimates closer to the result. The data suggest that a late swing — particularly from those previously indicating they would vote for Labour at the election - occurred largely after our fieldwork concluded.
- The 2024 election took place in an unusually information-rich environment, shaped by daily, and sometimes hourly voting intention updates, widespread MRP seat projections, tactical voting tools, and broad expectations of a strong Labour majority. This context may have contributed to later and softer vote decision-making, especially among anti-incumbent voters.

- We found no evidence of systematic methodological error in our final poll. The discrepancy between our final estimates and the result appears to reflect genuine behavioural changes in the final days of the campaign, rather than a failure of measurement. While we are exploring further improvements, we remain cautious about methodological changes that may not be generalisable to other electoral contexts.

Background

In the run up to the 2024 General Election, Survation released voting intention polls conducted through online and telephone methods. Our online polling was used to aid our MRP predictions, whereas our telephone polling was used to present national-level voting intention estimates. This report therefore focuses on our telephone polling.

- Our final telephone poll for the 2024 General Election was conducted between the 26th of June and the 3rd of July 2024.
- The poll was conducted by telephone and surveyed 1679 GB adults:
 - 1049 respondents from England
 - 494 from Scotland
 - 136 from Wales
- Our poll was broadly correct - it indicated a large swing from the Conservatives to Labour, and the rise of Reform UK.
- Compared to other pollsters, we are pleased with our performance - we were the fourth most accurate pollster in this election (out of 18) in terms of average error, and we produced the most accurate telephone poll.
- However, we overestimated Labour's lead over the Conservatives by 7.6 points (17.7 in our final poll vs. 10.1 result).
- This is not isolated - it follows a long-term tendency for the final polls to over-state Labour and under-state Conservative support, however, it is larger than the differences between our final call and the result for either party in 2019.¹
- The *Mean Absolute Error (MAE)* for the final poll was 1.9%, meaning that we were *on average* around 1.9% wrong for each party score.² Table 1 shows the final voting intention figures from the poll and the actual results.

¹In 2019, our final call overestimated Labour by 1.5 points and the Conservatives by 2 points.

²The British Polling Council's polling profile groups the smaller parties (Plaid & SNP) into one "Other" group. This grouping results in a slightly higher average error of 2.4%.

Table 1: Survation Final Call vs. Actual Result

Party	Final Call	Result	MAE
Lab	37.6	33.8	3.8
Con	19.9	23.7	3.8
Rfm	17.0	14.3	2.7
LibDem	12.1	12.2	0.1
Green	7.2	6.8	0.4
SNP	3.0	2.5	0.5
PC	0.6	0.7	0.1
Other	2.4	6.1	3.7

- The final voting intention figures overstated Labour’s vote share by 3.8% and understated the Conservative vote share by 3.8% which were the two largest points of error in our estimates.
- We overstated Reform UK by 2.7%, as well as Others by 3.7%.
- Notably, we were very close to the actual result for smaller parties - the Liberal Democrats, Greens and Plaid Cymru, while we were slightly above on the SNP share.

Methodological Considerations

In the immediate aftermath of the election, we conducted an internal review of the possible sources of error for our final poll. This included:

Interviewer Error: We, together with other pollsters observed a rise in the Reform UK polling share in the last week of June which raised some questions on whether we are correctly identifying those respondents.

- All of our telephone polling during the campaign involved a ballot prompt question which aimed to mimic the way voters would see candidates and parties at the polling station.
- While our callers have extensive training and live quality assurance during fieldwork, one possible hypothesis was that some respondents were providing an answer before the interviewer had read all the names, and/or they were providing a party name before the candidates’ names were read out.
- We listened to a random selection of over 100 interviews which confirmed that this was not a source of error, and we could not identify any systematic issues with responses to our voting intention prompt.

Weighting Decisions: The results in our final poll were weighted to be representative of the GB population based on the following schema:

- **Age** (7 categories)
18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75+
- **Sex** (2 categories)
Female, Male
- **GB Region** (11 categories)
[East Midlands, East of England, London, North East, North West, Scotland, South East, South West, Wales, West Midlands, Yorkshire and The Humber]
- **Country** (3 categories)
[England, Scotland, Wales]
- **Age (broad category), interlocked with Region** (33 categories)
[18-34, 35-54, 55+] x 11 regions
- **2019 General Election Vote, adjusted for differential mortality** (8 categories)
[Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, SNP, Green, Plaid, Other, DNV]

The above variables exclude some of our usual weighting targets - Education, Income and 2016 Referendum Vote for the following reasons:

- Education was not collected using our standard approach, but instead using a simplified single-choice question which did not give us the confidence that it was accurately capturing respondents' highest level of qualification. Furthermore, we included "Don't know" and "Prefer not to say" options in order to minimise non-response bias based on sensitive questions which, in turn, substantially increased the missingness in our data for this variable. We had the same concerns with the household income question.
- While we collected 2016 Referendum vote, we made the decision to not use it for weighting in any of our pre-election telephone polling because i) the raw data were strongly skewed towards Remain, and ii) our targets were not adjusted for differential mortality since 2016.
- Table 2 shows the difference in our final estimates had we used alternative weighting schema. We found that there are marginal improvements in our estimate of Labour's vote share when including 2016 as a weighting target, however, these are counteracted by the higher Reform figure due to the high number of upweighted 2016 Leave voters. The weighting approach that we used was therefore the best compromise given the data that we had.

Table 2: Survation’s final call compared to alternatives using additional weighting variables

Party	Result	Final		2016		Edu		Inc		All	
		%	MAE	%	MAE	%	MAE	%	MAE	%	MAE
LAB	33.8	37.6	3.8	36.7	2.9	37.7	3.9	38.0	4.2	37.3	3.5
CON	23.7	19.9	3.8	20.0	3.7	19.2	4.5	19.6	4.1	19.0	4.7
RFM	14.3	17.0	2.7	18.6	4.3	18.2	3.9	17.1	2.8	19.3	5.0
LD	12.2	12.1	0.1	11.9	0.3	11.9	0.3	11.7	0.5	11.4	0.8
GRN	6.8	7.2	0.4	6.9	0.1	7.1	0.3	7.5	0.7	7.2	0.4
SNP	2.5	3.0	0.5	3.0	0.5	3.1	0.6	3.0	0.5	3.0	0.5
PC	0.7	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.5	0.2
OTH	6.1	2.4	3.7	2.3	3.8	2.3	3.8	2.6	3.5	2.4	3.7

Treatment of Undecideds: We followed our standard approach towards Undecided and Refused respondents - to exclude them in the final reported voting intention question. The common argument against doing so is that the implicit assumption of this approach means that those who are undecided or refuse to give an answer would vote proportionally to the rest of the sample - i.e. when we remove all Undecided respondents, we assume that the same proportion of them would vote for Labour as the proportion of decided voters.

- One way to reduce possible bias from this after data collection is to remove those respondents prior to weighting the sample, which has the effect of turning the rest of the sample to be representative of the population, while ignoring the Undecided and Refused. In our sample, this marginally increased the Conservative vote share while Labour’s vote share remained the same which had no effect on our overall error.
- Another way which some pollsters have adopted is to impute the voting intention for those respondents based on other information such as past vote and demographics. It is, however, worth considering it in this case given that our Undecided and Refused respondents comprised 22.6% of our final voting population. While this is expected in a telephone poll, it is possible that some respondents did not want to share their true voting intention and instead responded with Undecided.
- We used a machine learning model to predict how those Undecided respondents would have responded to the voting intention question based on demographic characteristics related to voting (age, sex, region) and past vote. The resulting vote share was much closer to Labour’s actual result in the election (34.9 vs. 33.8), however, it increased our error of the Conservative vote share to 4.8 points which would have provided the lowest Conservative vote share we had recorded.

Table 3: Survation’s final call compared to alternatives using different treatments of undecided respondents

Party	Result	Final		Removed for Wt		Imputed	
		%	MAE	%	MAE	%	MAE
LAB	33.8	37.6	3.8	37.3	3.5	34.9	1.1
CON	23.7	19.9	3.8	20.9	2.8	18.9	4.8
RFM	14.3	17.0	2.7	17.1	2.8	17.5	3.2
LD	12.2	12.1	0.1	11.8	0.4	12.3	0.1
GRN	6.8	7.2	0.4	7.0	0.2	8.1	1.3
SNP	2.5	3.0	0.5	3.0	0.5	4.2	1.7
PC	0.7	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.1
OTH	6.1	2.4	3.7	2.4	3.7	4.2	1.9

- Either of the two approaches would have marginally reduced our overall error, but at the expense of increasing individual party errors for a particular party, as shown in Table 3.
- Adopting either of these approaches would have been a significant change in our methodology for voting intention towards the end of an election campaign which we were highly unlikely to do, and we had no reason to doubt our current approach at the time which remains our view.

Based on our initial investigation, we had no reason to doubt our methodological approach nor the quality of our interviews. We have explored a variety of different approaches to analyse our data, however, based on the data which we have, we find that no adjustment would have been significantly closer to the final result in order to justify a change in methodology for this or future elections.

One outcome of most of these adjustments was to reduce Labour’s vote share in our data which would have brought us closer to the actual result, though this would have resulted in higher deviations in the vote shares of other parties from the result. This is not to say that our sample and methodology were completely perfect, and we will continue to conduct reviews of our approach, but it does show that further adjustments to the data would have had a very limited impact on our estimates. Therefore, we do not believe that our methodological decisions resulted in a polling error and we proceeded with the next hypothesis - a late swing which we tested through a recontact study.

Recontact Study

In the aftermath of the election, we attempted to recontact 1174 respondents from our final telephone poll to understand how they really voted in the election. This constitutes the core

sample used to construct a representative sample of GB residents, excluding the additional boosts from the two devolved nations.

An overall recontact rate of 48.3% was achieved, with a total of three attempts made to contact each respondent. To account for differential non-response, we used an imputation model trained on respondents' demographic data, as well as voting history and reported voting intention prior to the election for the rest of the sample. The recontact sample was weighted by age, sex, region, and 2019 general election vote.

Figure 1 shows the vote shares from the recontact poll, compared to the election result and our final poll. The vote share for Labour is within 0.8% of the result, and our error for the Conservatives is -1.4 points. There is still a notable overestimation of Reform UK's vote share compared to their election result - with an error of 2.5 points.

Nonetheless, the estimate for each party is within the margin of error of the election results. Most notably, the Labour lead over the Conservatives in the recontact study is 12.1 points, which is 6.4 points lower than the lead in our final poll, and much closer to the 10-point lead in the election, which points against issues with sample composition and weighting decisions.

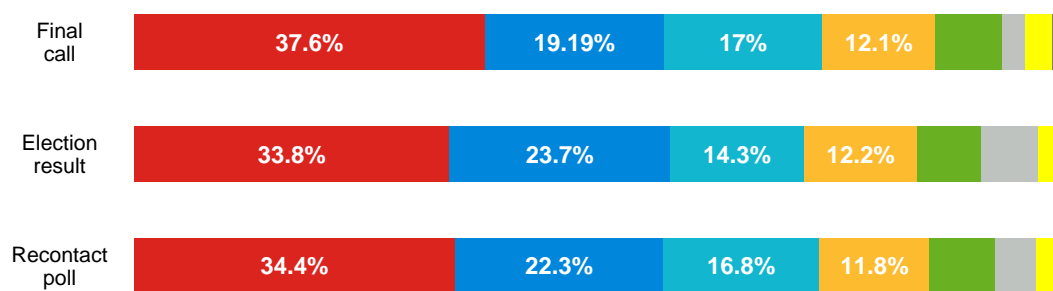


Figure 1: Vote share in Suration's last poll and the recontact poll compared to the election result.

Differences with Pre-Election Voting Intention

There are several key patterns in the recontact data which are likely contributors to the difference in Labour's lead in our pre-and-post-election polling.

(1) Differential Turnout

While we observe higher reported turnout in the recontact data than in the election itself (79.5% vs. 59.8%), those who reported that they would vote Conservative *prior* to the election were 4-5% more likely to report that they turned out on polling day than voters for any other parties. Additionally, Figure 2 shows that more than half (53%) of those who initially told us they

would not vote ended up voting on polling day, while almost a third (29%) of those who were undecided prior to polling day ended up not turning out to vote.

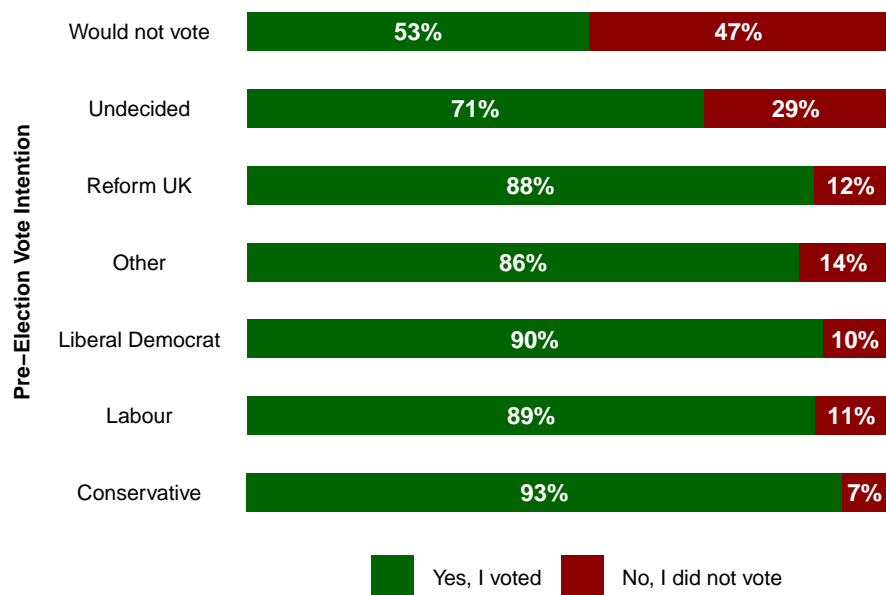


Figure 2: Differential turnout by pre-election reported voting intention

(2) Late vote switching

Figure 3 shows that of those who told us they would not vote, 16% ended up voting Conservative on polling day, and 14% voted for Labour, while the Undecided voters ended up voting in equal proportions for Reform and Labour (18%), while 15% voted for the Conservatives on polling day.

This indicates a non-proportional voting behaviour of undecided voters compared to those who had made their minds up prior to the election, and indicates that some further work needs to be done to guess how those voters would eventually act at the ballot box.

The vote flows also tell another story - only 56% of those who had originally indicated a vote for the Liberal Democrats ended up voting for the party, while 14% voted for the Conservatives. Of those originally indicating a Labour voting intention, we see some movement away from the party, with only 7 in 10 voting for them on polling day, compared to a slightly larger share for the Conservatives.

(3) Late decision/swing against from Labour

While it is an imperfect way to objectively measure the time of a decision, the high shares of vote switching, combined with a self-reported decision time for their vote at the election provide

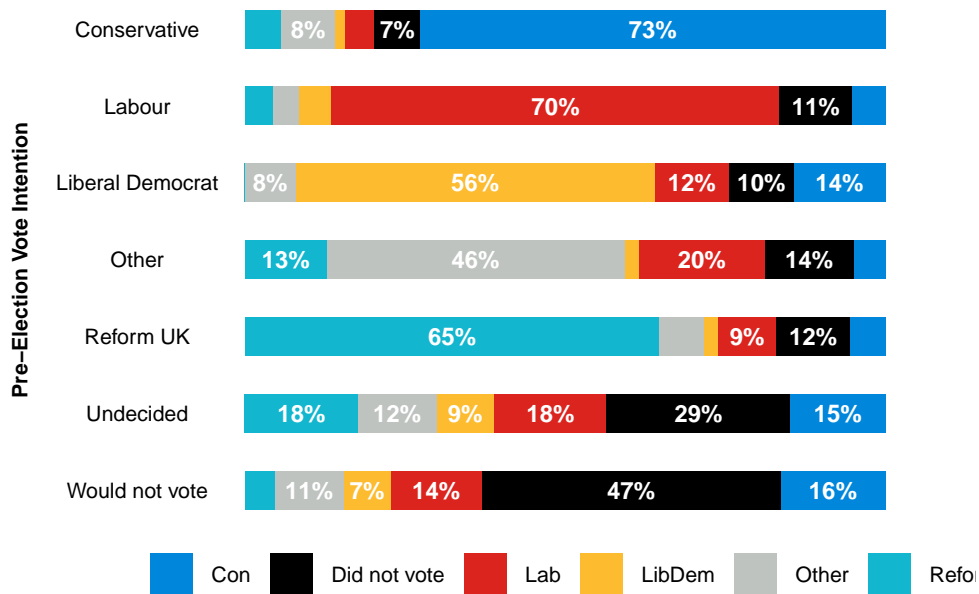


Figure 3: Vote switching between our last poll and the election

some indication of the decision being made after our final poll was conducted. Figure 4 shows that a quarter (25%) of those who voted Conservative in the election made their minds up either on polling day itself or on the day/night before polling day which was after our final poll was conducted. This share is slightly higher for those who voted for the LibDems (28%), but lower than those who voted for Labour (22%) and Reform UK (21%).

While it is of course imperfect, the results here do support our observations from the last weeks of the campaign prior to polling day. Combined with Nigel Farage's campaigning on a personal level, we noticed an uptick in Reform UK support in the few weeks prior to polling day, while the Labour vote share began decreasing in our telephone polling in the 10 days prior to polling day. This is supported by the 29% of Reform UK voters who indicated that they made their decision in the few days before polling day, up to a week before, while almost one-in-five Conservative voters (19%) also made their decision around that time compared to 12% for Labour voters.

While the differences between voter groups are relatively small, the findings reinforce a picture of a *soft electorate*, many of whom made their final voting decision within the last few days of the campaign. The high rate of late decision-making among Reform and Conservative voters, combined with a modest decline in Labour's polling share just before polling day, suggests a late swing — one that occurred mostly after fieldwork for our final poll had concluded. While retrospective reports of vote timing are imperfect, the alignment with observed polling trends strengthens this interpretation.

We are considering additional methods in future elections to better capture late movement, including increased cadence of fieldwork in the final week, the use of vote likelihood questions, and follow-up among undecided voters, though none of these methods have proven that useful in the past.

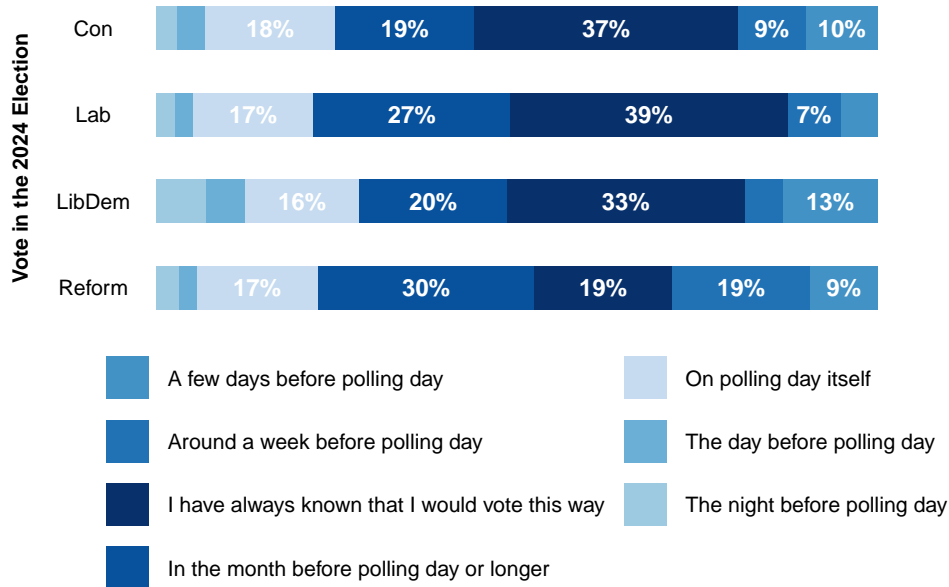


Figure 4: When did you decide you would vote this way?

Conclusion

Survation’s final telephone poll for the 2024 General Election performed well in identifying the broad shape of the result - a significant Labour lead, a collapse in Conservative support, and a historically strong showing for Reform UK. However, the poll overstated Labour’s lead over the Conservatives by 7.6 points, driven by a symmetrical overstatement of Labour (+3.8) and understatement of the Conservatives (-3.8).

Following the election, we undertook a structured internal review to test several potential sources of error. We evaluated interviewer performance and confirmed that the delivery of the ballot prompt was consistent and in line with protocol. We explored alternative weighting schemes (including education, income, and 2016 EU referendum vote) and found no approach that improved overall accuracy without introducing compensating errors. We also tested two approaches to handling undecided and refused respondents — pre-weighting exclusion and post hoc imputation — both of which marginally altered party shares but did not substantively reduce the overall error.

Our subsequent recontact study, which achieved a 48.3% response rate from our final poll sample, produced vote share estimates for all major parties within margin of error of the result, and substantially reduced Labour's lead to 12.1 points — close to the eventual 10-point margin. This evidence is further supported by vote recall data and self-reported decision timing, which indicate that a meaningful proportion of Conservative and Reform UK voters made their final decision in the last few days before polling day - towards the very end of our fieldwork period, and partly after it.

The most plausible explanation lies in genuine changes in voting behaviour after the final poll fieldwork concluded. We believe that this late movement should be interpreted in the context of a highly unusual campaign and election. The 2024 election took place in an environment saturated with information — including high-frequency polling, seat-level MRP estimates, an abundance of tactical voting tools, and clear expectations of a large Labour majority. These conditions arguably lowered the perceived stakes of tactical voting and increased voters' willingness to switch parties, express preferences more freely, or delay their decision until very late in the campaign.

While it is difficult to measure the precise effect of this information environment, the behavioural signals we observe are consistent with a more fluid electorate, particularly among the right and anti-incumbent voters. The extent of late switching, and its direction, suggest that assumptions about vote stability may not hold under certain conditions — particularly when the outcome appears foregone. While we recognise the limitations of retrospective data, the convergence of these indicators provides credible support for a late swing hypothesis. We do not believe the polling error was attributable to systematic methodological failure. Rather, the discrepancy is more consistent with changes in voter behaviour occurring late and post-fieldwork.

Looking ahead, we are considering adjustments to our pre-election operations, including:

- Increasing fieldwork cadence in the final week of the campaign;
- Inclusion of a measure for voter certainty or 'decision status' measures;
- Continued use of structured recontacts as part of post-election diagnostics.

However, we remain cautious about reactive methodological changes that may not yield gains in future accuracy. The core methods used in our final poll were consistent with our standards and reflected Survation's internal best practice at the time of fieldwork. While there is clear value in improving how we account for late swing, our priority is to ensure that any changes are evidence-led, replicable, and appropriate to the electoral context.