

The Politics of NHS Reform Special Report

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PoliticsHome worked with think tank YouGov@Cambridge, which combines the leading opinion research of YouGov with Cambridge academics, to produce the first in-depth study into public attitudes towards the Coalition government's proposed reforms to the NHS.

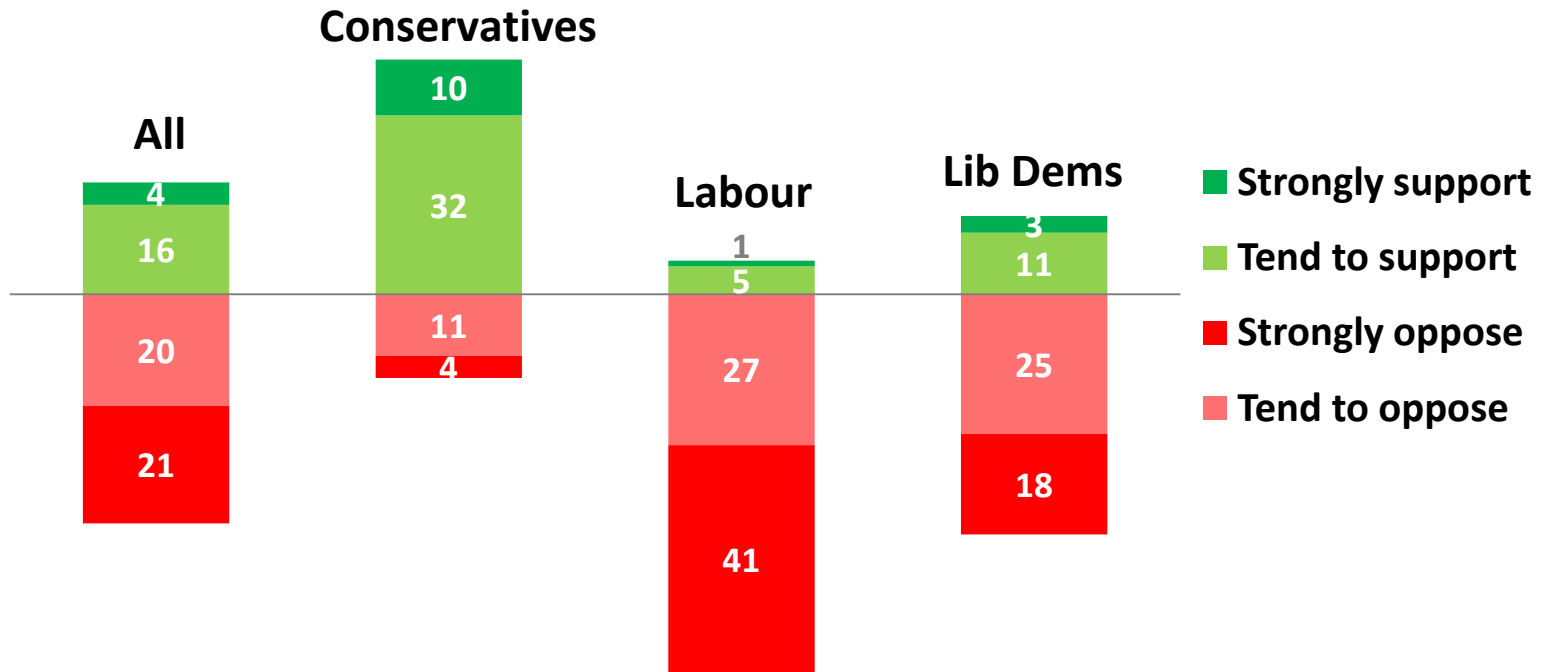
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Spontaneous support is low

Strong instinctive opposition to the reforms.

Labour voters' opposition is a lot stronger than Conservative voters' support.

Q. From what you have seen or heard, do you support the government's plans to reform the NHS?



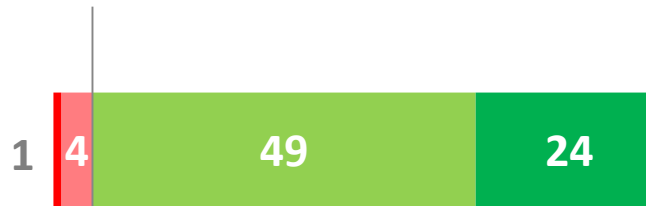
Support for reform and localism

It is not that the NHS reform proposals themselves are unpopular.

The vast majority of voters accept the general principles behind the reforms – particularly Andrew Lansley’s core argument that the drugs bill and increasing life expectancy will mean the NHS is always becoming more expensive to run. Even Labour supporters agreed 59% to 12%.



“The people deciding how the NHS spends its money in a local area should be more accountable to people living in that area.”



“The way in which the NHS spends its money needs to be reformed, as increased life expectancy and new drugs mean it is always becoming more expensive to run.”



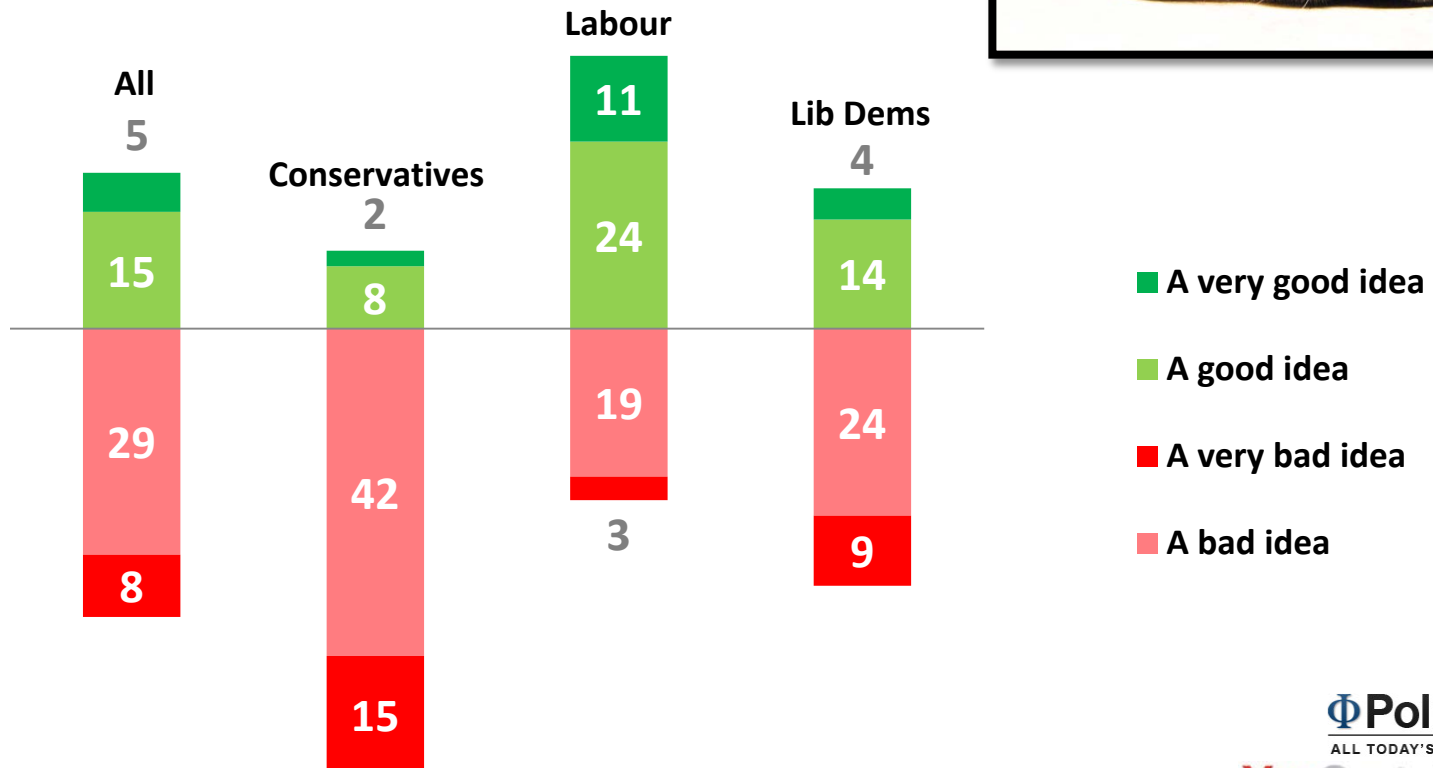
- Tend to agree
- Strongly agree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

Doing nothing is not an option

Not changing the way the NHS commissions services is clearly opposed, 20% to 37%, though is supported by a plurality of Labour supporters.



“Not making any changes to the way the NHS decides to spend its money in a local area.”



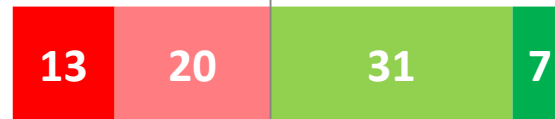
Commissioning by staff is popular

GP commissioning, supported by a plurality, 38% to 33%.

When this is broadened to include “a wide range of local medical staff” it is supported by 50% to 21%, including Labour voters by 40% to 31%.



“Making local groups of GPs responsible for deciding how the NHS spends its money in a local area.”



“Making a wide range of local medical staff responsible for deciding how the NHS spends its money in a local area.”



- A good idea
- A very good idea
- A bad idea
- A very bad idea

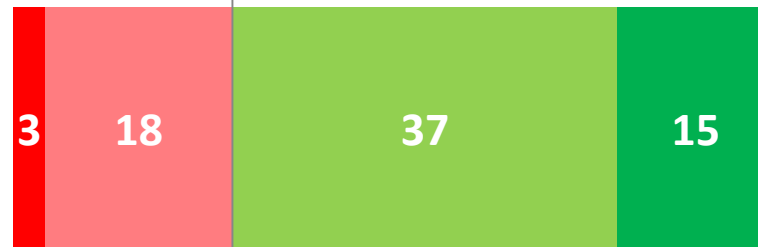
But NHS staff are thought too busy

Part of the gap between the theory and practice of the reforms may be based around doubt about the involvement of medical staff in commissioning

As much as people like the idea, the vast majority thought people who actually practice medicine too busy – 52% to 21%, including 44% to 30% of Conservatives.



“People who actually practice medicine are too busy to be involved in deciding how the NHS spends its money.”



- Tend to agree
- Strongly agree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

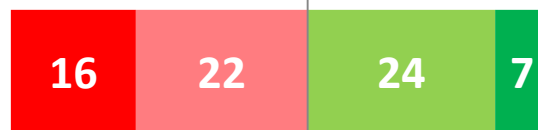
Competition isn't that unpopular

Even the controversial role of Monitor to regulate competition for NHS services, which Nick Clegg wants scrapped, is narrowly supported 33% to 29%.

The idea of NHS services being commissioned from “any willing provider” is opposed 38% to 31%, less than might be expected – around this however, there is a clear partisan split, with Labour voters opposed by 19% to 59%.

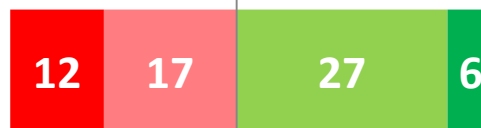


“Allowing the NHS to spend money on services from any willing provider - by this we mean that other organisations, including private companies or voluntary organisations, can bid to provide selected services that the NHS will pay for rather than directly supply.”



- A good idea
- A very good idea
- A bad idea
- A very bad idea

“Getting a government regulator to ensure there is competition for the provision of NHS services.”



The problem? “Same old Tories.”

Voters still don't trust the Conservatives' instincts on the NHS. The most unpopular idea polled, opposed 7% to 71%, was a full privatisation of the NHS. When respondents were presented with a series of statements about all three parties 49% to 21% agreed that “deep down, the Conservatives want to fully privatise the NHS” while only 34% agreed that the Conservatives are genuinely committed to improving the quality of NHS care. This being said, 38% to 26% did feel that the party thinks the NHS should be free at the point of use.



“Fully privatising the NHS.”



“Deep down, the Conservatives want to fully privatise the NHS.”



“The Conservatives believe the NHS should be free at the point of use.”



- A good idea
- A very good idea
- A bad idea
- A very bad idea

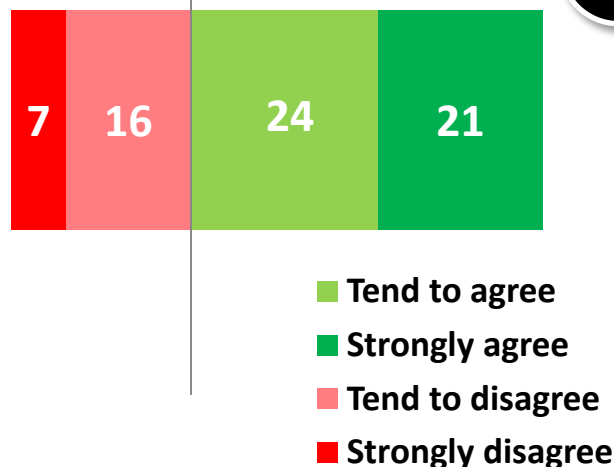
- Tend to agree
- Strongly agree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

Conservatives helping their friends

This points to the failure of David Cameron to truly detoxify his party on healthcare. A large plurality, 45% to 23%, believe that “any changes the Conservatives make to the NHS will be motivated by a desire to help business rather than patients.”

Even 16% of those who recall having voted for the party in 2010 believe this is true.

“Any changes the Conservatives make to the NHS will be motivated by a desire to help business rather than patients.”



“The government plan to carve up the NHS for private interests in return for various favours, such as lucrative jobs later on. it is a corrupt and wicked plan to make private companies and politicians rich at the expense of the public.”
- Poll respondent

“GP commissioning, abolition of PCTs, privatisation of services, patient choice, ensuring contributors to the Tory Party get some plum contracts”
- Poll respondent

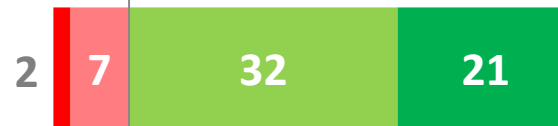
But Labour aren't capitalising

There is cold comfort for the Labour Party. By 53% to 9%, respondents agreed that “the Labour Party have not come forward with a viable alternative to the government's NHS reform proposals”, including Labour supporters by 31% to 21%.

Respondents also disagreed by 25% to 46% that “only Labour governments can really be trusted on the NHS.”



“The Labour Party have not come forward with a viable alternative to the government's NHS reform proposals.”



“Only Labour governments can really be trusted on the NHS.”



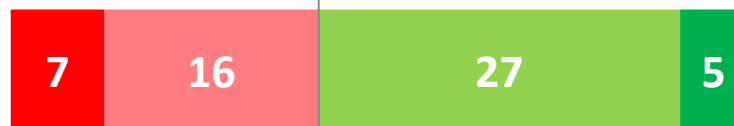
- Tend to agree
- Strongly agree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

Lib Dems are getting a little credit

By 70% to 8%, the NHS reforms are seen as rushed, and the “government should wait as long as it takes to give the plans proper scrutiny.” This backs up Nick Clegg against the Conservative Right in wanting to take the bill back to committee. A plurality believed the Liberal Democrats were bringing changes to the NHS bill because they were genuinely interested in protecting the NHS, 32% to 23%. A similar number (35% to 23%) felt that they were ensuring the Conservatives weren’t able to do whatever they wanted on the reforms



“The Liberal Democrats are trying to bring changes to the NHS reforms because they are genuinely committed to protecting the NHS.”



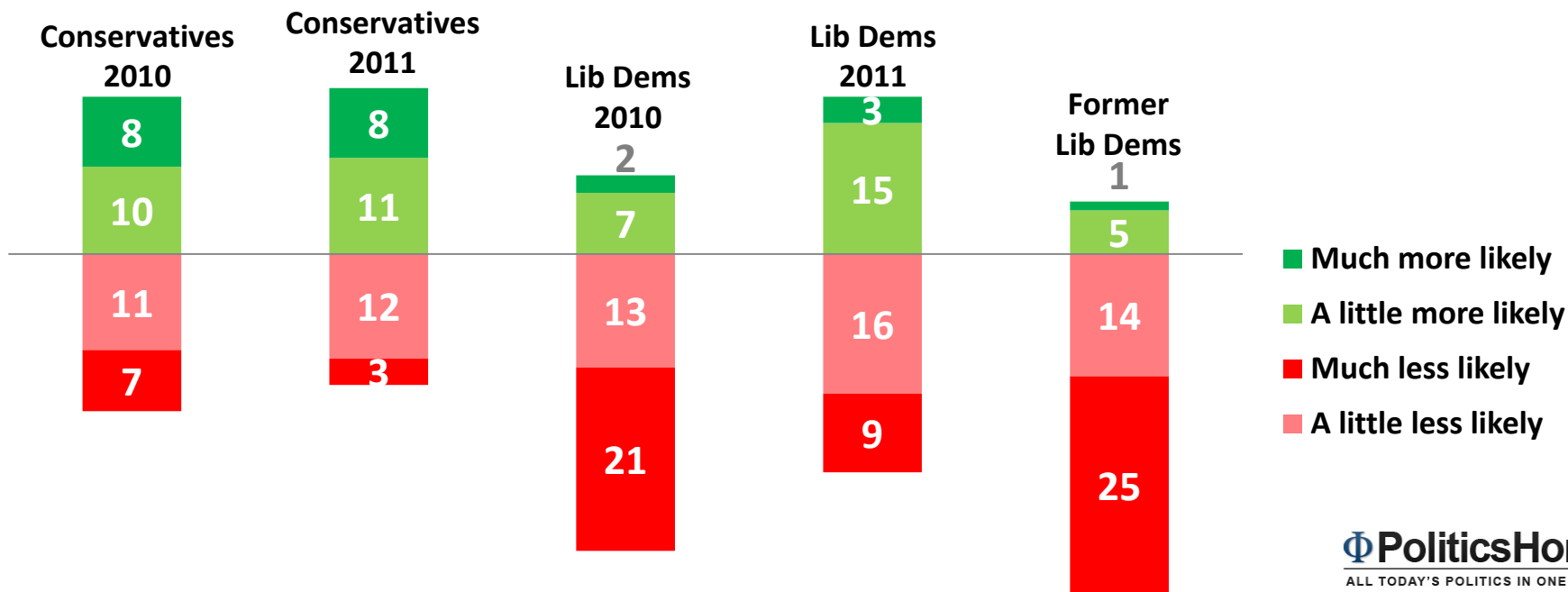
“The Liberal Democrats are ensuring that the Conservatives can't do whatever they want on the NHS reforms.”



- Tend to agree
- Strongly agree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

But they have the most at risk

An unchanged bill would make 25% of Lib Dems less likely to support their party as against just 15% of Conservatives – with 22% of Lib Dems saying it would make them more likely to support Labour. This is particular true of the former Lib Dem voters Nick Clegg has lost since last May, and is fighting to win back; 39% of those who recall voting Lib Dem in 2010, but who are not planning to do so next time, say it will make them less likely to back the party, with 36% saying it will make them more likely to vote Labour.



BACKGROUND

This spreadsheet contains survey data collected and analysed by YouGov@Cambridge. No information contained within this spreadsheet may be published without the consent of YouGov@Cambridge and the client named on the front cover.

Methodology: This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of 185,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey. (The sample definition could be "GB adult population" or a subset such as "GB adult females"). YouGov Plc normally achieves a response rate of between 35% and 50% to surveys however this does vary dependent upon the subject matter, complexity and length of the questionnaire. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.

YouGov plc make every effort to provide representative information. All results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to statistical errors normally associated with sample-based information.

For further information about the results in this spread sheet, please contact YouGov@Cambridge (+44)(0)20 7 012 6000 or email joel.rogers@yougov.com quoting the survey details

EDITOR'S NOTES - all press releases should contain the following information

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Any percentages calculated on bases fewer than 50 respondents must not be reported as they do not represent a wide enough cross-section of the target population to be considered statistically reliable. These figures will be italicised.