



**The final straight**

| <b>Poll of Polls (week to 9 December 2019)</b> |     |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Conservatives</b>                           | 43% |
| <b>Labour</b>                                  | 33% |
| <b>Liberal Democrats</b>                       | 13% |
| <b>Brexit</b>                                  | 3%  |
| <b>Greens</b>                                  | 3%  |
| <b>Others</b>                                  | 5%  |

As this election race enters the final straight, the fundamentals remain largely unchanged. The Conservatives have a steady lead in the polls and appear to be on course to achieve a working majority. Their current ten point lead would suggest a majority of around 35-50 on a uniform national swing. Whatever they may say in public, this is pretty much in line with the parties' current private predictions.

This expectation is illustrated by where each party leader is being sent by their campaign organisers in the final 72 hours before polling day. Boris Johnson will be spending the next three days almost exclusively in Labour seats with a majority "Leave" vote in the 2016 referendum. In a more defensive play Jeremy Corbyn will be visiting a mix of Labour held seats and Conservative marginals.

In anticipation of the result, media speculation has started to turn to who might replace Jeremy Corbyn if Labour loses, together with the make-up of the next Conservative cabinet.

Yet it would be a mistake to believe that this election is a foregone conclusion. Although a modest Conservative majority is the most likely outcome, under the First Past the Post electoral system a fairly small shift in votes could have a big impact. A 2% swing to Labour from the current polls could result in a hung parliament (albeit with the Conservatives as the largest party), while a 2% swing to the Conservatives from the current predictions could see their majority start to approach 100 seats.

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Such relatively small shifts in support could easily be accounted for by undecided voters breaking for one party rather than another or through tactical voting. It could also be the result of differential turnout, where one party's supporters are more motivated to go to the polls and so turn-up in greater numbers.

That is why there will be no let-up in campaigning, with party leaders in a frantic dash to the line and the bulk of social media ad spend coming in the final days. It is also why the ground game and "Get Out The Vote" operation for each party on Thursday matters.

This most important of elections has seen a largely subdued campaign so far, with few memorable events. That suits Conservative strategists whose priority has been to maintain their steady lead and avoid anything that could shake up the race. Labour meanwhile has so far failed to change the campaign narrative in the way they were able to in 2017.

Voters tell pollsters that they are engaged with this contest and they know it matters, but many also say they are dissatisfied with the choices on offer. As the campaign has progressed, the ratings of all of the main party leaders have gone backwards. Whatever the result on Thursday, the next Government and Prime Minister may find their political honeymoon is a short one.

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