



bright blue

Understanding how conservatives think  
about human rights and discrimination

# Individual identity

James Dobson, Freddie Lloyd  
and Ryan Shorthouse

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The polling included an online survey of 6,530 British adults and was conducted between 18th and 22nd July 2017.

## Executive summary

Britain is the home of human rights. The protection of human rights has been a defining and fundamental part of our society for decades – ever since 1215, when the Magna Carta was published, outlining human rights that were, over many centuries, developed in English common law.

Chapter One will show, however, that Conservative voters and politicians are often considered to be sceptical of many aspects of Britain's current human rights framework. This apparent scepticism has led to a promise by the Conservative Party, initially stated in their 2010 manifesto, and restated in 2015, to repeal the Human Rights Act (HRA) and replace it with a British Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. The current Prime Minister has been a vocal critic of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), calling for the UK to withdraw from it. The latest Conservative manifesto stated that the Government would reconsider the UK's human rights legal framework after Brexit.

There is no inherent reason why conservatives should be sceptical of human rights. Conservatives typically believe in the principles of personal freedom and a government limited by the rule of law. There is a strong tradition of Conservative politicians championing the development and protection of human rights. The ECHR was drafted and championed by Conservative politicians after World War Two. It was actually a Conservative MP – Quintin Hogg – who first advocated

a bill to incorporate the ECHR into UK law.

Human rights are about protecting individual freedom. Discrimination is, like the abuse of human rights, an unjustified barrier to individual freedom. Tackling discrimination should be comfortable territory for Conservatives; unfair barriers that prevent humans from flourishing should be removed. Indeed, tackling discrimination has been a significant focus for the current Conservative Government, with the current the Prime Minister highlighting the “burning injustices” which prevented people from different social groups – especially Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) backgrounds and women – achieving their full potential in Britain.

This report seeks to unearth in detail what most ‘conservatives’ really think about the existence of, importance of, and measures on human rights and discrimination. As will be outlined in Chapter Two, we think the views of ‘conservatives’ are best captured by analysing the views of those who vote ‘Conservative’.

## **Focus of the report and methodology**

This report addresses the following research questions:

1. What do Conservatives believe about the importance and role of human rights?
2. To what extent do Conservatives support legislation to strengthen human rights and reduce discrimination?
3. What role do Conservatives believe human rights should play in British foreign policy?
4. What do Conservatives believe about the prevalence, and ways of addressing, discrimination in the UK?

To answer these research questions, we designed and undertook polling of the adult general public in Britain. The large sample size of the polling allowed us to compare the views of Conservatives with voters

of other political parties. It also allowed us to examine how different sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity affected Conservatives' views on human rights and discrimination. We also tested how the views of Conservatives varied according to how they voted in the 2016 EU Referendum.

This polling enabled us to identify what Conservatives think about the following issues: the existence, applicability, value, misuse and political salience of human rights (Chapter Three); the importance and universality of specific human rights (Chapter Four); different human rights legislation and institutions (Chapter Five); the role that human rights should play in shaping Britain's foreign policy (Chapter Six); and the extent and experience of – as well as measures on – different types of discrimination in the UK (Chapter Six).

## **General attitudes to human rights**

Conservatives generally believe human rights exist. When asked to select their position in relation to the statement “human rights generally don't exist” (zero) and “human rights generally do exist” (ten), Conservatives select, on average, 6.8. This is a similar result to voters of other political parties.

However, Conservatives are more divided on whether human rights should apply to all people at all times. When asked to select their position in relation to the statements “human rights should not be given to everyone all the time” (zero) and “all people have human rights, simply because they are human” (ten), they select, on average, 4.9. In fact, the response is very polarised, with 25% selecting either of the two extremes of zero and ten. In contrast, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters select 7.2 and 7.0 respectively, but UKIP voters only select 4.9.

Conservatives are also divided, but much less polarised, on whether human rights prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens. They select 5.5 on a scale of “human rights prevent governments from

unfairly treating their citizens” (zero) to “human rights do not prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens” (ten). Meanwhile, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters are more sympathetic to the positive role human rights can play, selecting 7.2 and 7.0 respectively. UKIP voters are more sceptical, nonetheless, selecting 6.2.

What is very clear is that Conservatives strongly believe that human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution. On average, they selected 3.1 on the scale “human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution” (zero) and “human rights do not allow criminals to avoid prosecution” (ten).

Just 4% of Conservatives regard human rights as their top five election issues – a smaller proportion than all other political parties. Human rights are not a political priority for Conservatives; their top political concerns are Brexit, immigration and asylum, and the economy.

### **Attitudes to specific human rights**

Conservatives believe the most important human right is the “right to a fair trial” (selected by 68% of Conservatives). This was followed by the “prohibition of slavery and forced labour” (54%) and “freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (39%). These are also the top three rights for voters of other political parties.

We asked Conservatives about the universality of specific important and high-profile human rights. Specifically, we asked whether three human rights (“the right to a fair trial”, “the right to freedom of expression”, and “the right to a family life”) should apply for suspected or convicted criminals, terrorists, and hate preachers

We found that a majority of Conservatives thought a right to a fair trial should apply to suspected criminals (79%), foreign suspected criminals (63%) and suspected terrorists (54%). Contrastingly, a minority of Conservatives thought the right to freedom of expression and the right to a family life should apply to convicted criminals (29% and 30% respectively), terrorists (8% and 10% respectively) and hate

preachers (8% and 12% respectively). We found that Conservatives were consistently and significantly less likely than voters of more left-wing parties to believe that these specific rights should apply to such groups of people.

## **Human rights legislation and institutions**

Conservatives identify English common law as the legislation that best protects human rights (35% of Conservative respondents selected this option), followed by the Human Rights Act (14%) and the Magna Carta (7%).

International sources of human rights protection, for example the ECHR and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), are regarded as less effective in protecting human rights in the UK. Only 5% of Conservatives, for example, believe the ECHR best protects human rights. For Labour voters, the most popular choices are distinctively different: the ECHR was the most popular option with 22% of respondents citing it. This, combined with the fact that Labour voters are also more likely to select the UDHR, highlights their greater positivity towards international sources of human rights protection

We wanted to test just how important the UK remaining a signatory of the ECHR was for voters for three reasons. First, because it is the most important international treaty on human rights for the UK since, through the HRA, it is incorporated into UK law. Second, because the ECHR is a vital document that Bright Blue believes the UK should remain a signatory of. Third, because the Government have committed to re-consider the UK's "human rights legal framework when the process of leaving the EU concludes", and the current Prime Minister has previously argued in favour of withdrawing from the ECHR.

A significant minority of Conservatives (35%) believe it is important that Britain remains a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, a majority (53%) do not think it is important. It should be noted that this does not necessarily mean

Conservatives want to withdraw from the ECHR. It simply shows that remaining a signatory to the ECHR is not very important to the majority of Conservatives. Although Conservatives are significantly more likely than UKIP voters (22%) to believe remaining a signatory to the ECHR is important, they are significantly less likely than Labour voters (75%) and Liberal Democrat voters (74%).

On human rights institutions, a slight minority of Conservatives (45%) believe that British courts should have the power to overturn laws enacted by the UK government, whereas a firm majority of voters from more left-wing parties do: 66% of Labour voters and 72% of Liberal Democrat voters. Conservatives, though, are particularly opposed to giving this power to international courts. Only 13% of Conservatives think international courts should be able to overturn domestic UK legislation for human rights reasons. By contrast, 51% of Labour voters and 53% of Liberal Democrats are of the same opinion.

## **Human rights and foreign policy**

The overwhelming majority of Conservatives believe that Britain should promote human rights through its foreign policy. Only 6% state that “Britain should not promote human rights”.

In fact, 33% of Conservatives think that Britain should always promote human rights, irrespective of other foreign policy objectives. Another 33% think that Britain should promote human rights, but balanced with other foreign policy objectives. Approximately two thirds of Conservatives, therefore, support what we deem to be a ‘significant’ role for human rights in British foreign policy.

After Brexit, the United Kingdom must and will seek to sign new trade deals with different countries. The majority of Conservatives (65%) think that Britain should sometimes be prepared to do trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights depending on “the importance of the trade deal and the severity of the human rights violation”. A small minority (18%) believe that Britain should never do

trade deals with such countries, as smaller proportion than voters of Labour (43%), Liberal Democrats (37%) and even UKIP (21%).

We also tested Conservatives attitudes to whether the granting of UK aid should be contingent on the human rights record of the recipient country. We found that Conservatives were much more likely to believe the giving of aid, as opposed to doing trade, should be contingent on the human rights record of the country. Nearly half (45%) of Conservatives believe that Britain should never give aid to countries that have a poor record on human rights. Only 29% of Labour voters and 28% of Liberal Democrats believed this. Only a small proportion of Conservatives (4%) believed that Britain should always be prepared to give aid to such countries. Overall, in fact, only 7% of voters of all parties believe aid should be given regardless of human rights failings.

Conservatives identify North Korea (67%), Saudi Arabia (49%), and Iran (27%) as the countries with the worst records on human rights.

## **Prevalence of and tackling discrimination**

A clear majority of Conservatives believe that five main types of discrimination and abuse – gender, racial, sexual, disability and religious discrimination – currently exist – to varying degrees – in Britain. Under 3% of Conservatives believe that none of the discriminations ‘exist’ at all – a notably low figure.

Conservatives believe that the most prevalent type of discrimination and abuse in the UK is racism. Ninety-five percent of Conservatives believe that it exists, while 69% report a ‘significant’ amount of it exists.

Indeed, for all five types of discrimination and abuse that we surveyed, a clear majority of Conservatives believe a ‘significant’ amount exists. However, Conservatives are less likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters to believe that any of the five types of discrimination and abuse exist.

Conservatives – along with voters of all political parties – are much less likely to have experienced different forms of discrimination and

abuse compared to perceiving it exists in the UK. For example, only 28% of Conservatives report they have experienced racism compared to 95% of Conservatives who believe that racism exists.

A notably smaller proportion of Conservatives have experienced a 'significant' amount of all forms of discrimination. For example, Conservatives are most likely to have 'experienced' sexism (40%), but only 14% of Conservatives have experienced a 'significant' amount of it.

Labour voters are more likely to report having experienced a 'significant' amount of all the types of discrimination we surveyed. Sixteen percent of Labour voters reported they had experienced a 'significant' amount of racism and 28% reported this about sexism, exactly double the percentage of Conservatives that reported the same for both types of discrimination and abuse.

The employment rate for certain social groups in the UK is significantly below the national average. We wanted to identify what respondents thought the main cause of lower employment rates for people from 'minority' groups was. Conservatives are in fact most likely to be sceptical that they have a lower employment rate at all. The most popular answer is "not applicable – I do not believe certain minority groups are less likely to be in employment than other groups" which 23% of Conservatives selected.

After this, the next most cited answer was "poor education" (22%). Generally, Conservatives tend to believe that the responsibility for the poorer employment outcomes of certain 'minority' groups is down to individual reasons, such as "lack of ambition" rather than societal ones, such as "discrimination by employers". For example, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters are roughly twice as likely to choose the societal reason of "discrimination by employers" than Conservative or UKIP voters. Thirty-four percent of Labour voters and 28% of Liberal Democrats chose this option, compared to 14% of Conservatives and 15% of UKIP voters.

We also examined what measures Conservatives would be in favour of to help improve the employment rate of certain ‘minority’ groups. We tested attitudes to three possible measures, the last two of which Bright Blue has advocated for certain minority groups: quotas, tax incentives, and name-blind admissions. Just 8% of Conservatives support the introduction of “quotas for certain minority groups”, and only 7% support “tax incentives for recruiting certain minority groups”. Labour voters are more than twice as likely to support both. But it is still the case that only 20% of Labour voters support quotas, and only 17% support tax incentives.

Conservatives, nevertheless, are generally supportive of name-blind admissions with just 22% of Conservatives opposing “name blind admissions or applications”. This policy enjoys support across the political spectrum.

## **Main trends**

As the report shows throughout, we found significant variation among different types of Conservatives in their views on human rights and discrimination. Younger Conservatives and Remain-voting Conservatives are consistently more sympathetic towards the existence and importance of human rights and discrimination. They were both more likely to: believe in the importance and universality of human rights; that human rights should play a ‘significant’ role in British foreign policy; that discrimination exists and they have experienced it; and to support policies designed to tackle discrimination.

There are other, more occasional, socio-demographic characteristics that make Conservatives sometimes more sympathetic about the role of human rights and prevalence of discrimination. Specifically, Conservatives of a higher social grade (ABC1) and gay and lesbian Conservatives.

In addition, two other socio-demographic characteristics stood out. First, gender. Men were sometimes more sympathetic to the importance

of human rights, but, on other occasions, women were. Second, if Conservatives belonged to a social group that is disproportionately affected by discrimination and abuse, they were more likely to believe it exists, to have experienced it, and to support legislation which prevents it. So, for example, BME Conservatives were more likely to believe racism exists and to experience it and women were more likely to believe sexism exists and to have experienced it.

The final chapter (Chapter Nine) summarised the eleven main findings from the report:

- Conservatives believe human rights exist, but strongly believe they help criminals to avoid prosecution.
- Conservatives do not believe human rights are an important political issue.
- Conservatives believe the most important human right is the right to a fair trial.
- Conservatives are more likely to believe that human rights are best protected by traditional English common law.
- Conservatives do not think that Britain remaining a signatory to the ECHR is a priority.
- Conservatives are sceptical of the role of courts in overturning laws from Government that violate human rights, especially international courts.
- Conservatives strongly believe that Britain should play a significant role in promoting human rights around the world.
- Conservatives believe that the most prevalent type of discrimination in the UK is racism.
- Most Conservatives have not experienced discrimination, and are less likely to have experienced it than voters of more left-wing political parties.
- Conservatives are sceptical that certain ‘minority’ groups have lower employment rates.

- Conservatives support name-blind admissions to tackle the lower employment rates of certain ‘minority’ groups.

This report demonstrates that Conservatives believe human rights exist and strongly believe that Britain should play a significant role in promoting human rights around the world. After Brexit, the current Conservative Government must ensure that human rights do indeed play a significant role in Britain’s foreign policy.

This report also suggests that Theresa May was right to highlight the “burning injustices” that prevent individuals from certain social groups in Britain from succeeding to the best of their potential. Most Conservatives agree that all different types of discrimination exists to a significant level, even if a majority of them have not experienced it.

Truthfully, however, the report does reveal some scepticism among conservatives towards the use of, current legislation on, and the institutions related to human rights. Conservatives are especially sceptical of international legislation and institutions. Generally, Conservatives are more sceptical about the role of human rights than voters of more left-wing parties.

The strengthening of human rights and mitigation of all forms of discrimination ought to be popular with those who are attracted to conservatism: both aims seek to support individual liberty and flourishing. With considered approaches and policies, a Conservative Government ought to be able to build a popular and successful agenda on human rights and discrimination.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Britain is the home of human rights. The protection of human rights has been a defining and fundamental part of our society for decades – ever since 1215, when the Magna Carta was published, outlining human rights that were, over many centuries, developed in English common law.

This report uses ‘human rights’ as a broad term for those rights that an individual possesses simply by being human. Human rights are generally characterised, including by the United Nations, as being universal, inalienable and indivisible.<sup>1</sup> They are universal as they are possessed by all people, regardless of nationality, race, age or gender; inalienable as they cannot be taken away from a person, though they can be violated; and interdependent as the denial of one right invariably involves the frustration of others. In this vein, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 defined human rights as “a common standard of achievement for all peoples”.<sup>2</sup>

Human rights contrast with civil rights, which are those that an individual possesses through citizenship of a particular nation or state. Human rights are often guaranteed by law through international treaties, national conventions, and ordinary national law.

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1. Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, “What are human rights?” (2017), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatareHumanRights.aspx>.

2. UN General Assembly, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948”, [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf).

The most common human rights are featured in international treaties such as the UDHR and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).<sup>3</sup> Examples of human rights include the right to life, the right to freedom from torture, and the right to free expression.

Past polling indicates that human rights receive significant support from the majority of people in the UK. Polling by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) found that 81% of the British public agree that “human rights are important for creating a fairer society in the UK.”<sup>4</sup> Polling also consistently shows support for specific human rights. For example, a 2013 poll found that the overwhelming majority of the British public described specific human rights as “vital” or “important”: 96% of respondents described the right to a fair trial as “vital” or “important”, and 88% said the same about the right to free speech.<sup>5</sup>

However, previous polling also suggests that the British public are sceptical of the institutions and legislation that currently protect human rights in the UK. More people think that the UK should withdraw from the ECHR than think the UK should remain; only 23% of respondents from a recent poll oppose plans to repeal the Human Rights Act (HRA).<sup>6,7</sup>

This report focuses in particular on the views of ‘conservatives’ towards human rights. We think conservatives are most appropriately described, for the purposes of this research, as those who have voted for the Conservative Party. These ‘Conservatives’ are less likely to believe

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3. For a full list of human rights in the UK, see: Sir Michael Tugendhat, *Fighting for freedom? The historic and future relationship between conservatism and human rights* (Bright Blue: London, 2017), 17.

4. Equality and Human Rights Commission, “Human Rights Enquiry: Report of the Equality and Human Rights Commission” (2009), 32 [https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/hri\\_report.pdf](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/hri_report.pdf).

5. ComRes, “Liberty – Human rights tracker” (2013), 2, [http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/themes/comres/poll/Liberty\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Tracker\\_Data\\_Tables\\_November\\_2013.pdf](http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/themes/comres/poll/Liberty_Human_Rights_Tracker_Data_Tables_November_2013.pdf).

6. YouGov, “Scepticism about human rights as well as the ECHR” (2014), <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/07/20/scepticism-about-human-rights-well-echr/>.

7. YouGov, “Support for Tory human rights plans falls along party lines” (2014), <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/10/08/support-tory-human-rights-plans-falls-along-party-/>.

that human rights exist than voters of the Labour Party. And they are more likely to want the UK to withdraw from the ECHR.<sup>8</sup> However, previous polling also reveals that specific human rights do consistently command support from Conservatives, for example a recent poll showed that the central human rights from the ECHR are supported by a large majority of Conservatives.<sup>9</sup>

There is no inherent reason why conservatives should be sceptical of human rights. Conservatives typically believe in the principles of personal freedom and a government limited by the rule of law. Human rights codify these fundamental conservative principles to protect individuals from an overreaching state and undue power.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the philosophical link between conservatism and human rights, there is a strong tradition of Conservative politicians championing the development and protection of human rights. The ECHR was drafted and championed by Conservative politicians after World War Two. As revealed in Bright Blue's last report, it was actually a Conservative MP – Quintin Hogg – who first advocated a bill to incorporate the ECHR into UK law.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the scepticism of human rights among Conservatives has led to a promise by the Conservative Party, initially stated in their 2010 manifesto, and restated in 2015, to repeal the HRA and replace it with a British Bill of Rights and Responsibilities (BBRR). Whilst David Cameron was Prime Minister, the preferred option seemed to be to remain a signatory of the ECHR, but repeal the HRA. However, the current Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, has been a vocal critic of the ECHR, calling for the UK to withdraw in a speech in

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8. YouGov, "Scepticism about human rights as well as the ECHR" (2014), <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/07/20/scepticism-about-human-rights-well-echr/>.

9. YouGov, "Support for Tory human rights plans falls along party lines" (2014), <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/10/08/support-tory-human-rights-plans-falls-along-party-/>.

10. The development of human rights legislation in the United Kingdom, and in particular the close relationship between conservatism and human rights, is detailed at length in Tugendat, *Fighting for freedom?*

11. *Ibid.*, 11.

2016.<sup>12</sup> The latest Conservative manifesto stated that the Government would reconsider the UK's human rights legal framework after Brexit.<sup>13</sup>

Bright Blue has taken the view that tackling all forms of discrimination – specifically racial, gender, sexual, disability, and religious discrimination – should be associated with strengthening human rights. This is for two reasons. First, at heart, human rights are about protecting individual freedom. Discrimination is, like the abuse of human rights, an unjustified barrier to individual freedom. Second, the equalities agenda and equalities legislation to mitigate discrimination in the UK is often connected with human rights.

Tackling discrimination has been a significant focus for the current Conservative Government. Last year, on the steps of Downing Street, the Prime Minister railed against the “burning injustices” which prevented people from different social groups – especially Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) backgrounds and women – achieving their full potential in Britain. The speech sparked the beginning of the Prime Minister's social reform agenda. Tackling discrimination should be comfortable territory for Conservatives; unfair barriers that prevent humans from flourishing should be removed. And it is not a new focus for the Conservative Party. Over the decades, the Conservative Party has introduced a number of measures to support certain social groups. These include, for example, the Disability Living Allowance in 1992, the legalisation of same sex marriage in 2014, and gender pay gap reporting from 2018.

This report seeks to unearth the nature and variation among Conservatives in their attitudes to the existence and importance of human rights and discrimination. It also seeks to identify both the political opportunities for implementing centre-right policies – including those already advocated by Bright Blue – in these areas of

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12. Theresa May, Speech on Brexit, 25 April, 2016, <https://www.conservativehome.com/parliament/2016/04/theresa-mays-speech-on-brex-it-full-text.html>.

13. The Conservative Party, “Forward, together: Our plan for a stronger Britain and a prosperous future”, <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/manifesto2017/Manifesto2017.pdf> (2017), 37.

human rights and discrimination, as well as the political challenges where support for action to strengthen human rights and tackle discrimination among conservatives is weak.

## Focus of the report

In this report, we conduct polling to explore Conservatives' general attitudes to human rights and discrimination.

Our polling questions seek to explore the nuance of Conservative views on human rights and discrimination. We seek to unearth any variance in views on these topics among different kinds of Conservatives by analysing differing responses according to socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, socio-economic grade, and UK region.

This report will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What do Conservatives believe about the importance and role of human rights?
2. To what extent do Conservatives support legislation to strengthen human rights and reduce discrimination?
3. What role do Conservatives believe human rights should play in British foreign policy?
4. What do Conservatives believe about the prevalence, and ways of addressing, discrimination in the UK?

This report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter Two** explains in detail the methodology employed for the public polling we conducted;
- **Chapter Three** explores the attitudes of Conservatives towards the existence, applicability, value and misuse of human rights. It also examines the extent to which Conservatives regard human rights as an important political issue;
- **Chapter Four** assesses the attitudes of Conservatives to specific

human rights. It examines which human rights Conservatives regard as being most important, and whether these rights should apply to all people;

- **Chapter Five** explores Conservative attitudes to different human rights legislation;
- **Chapter Six** examines the role that Conservatives believe human rights should play in shaping Britain's foreign policy, especially with regards to trade deals and aid;
- **Chapter Seven** explores Conservatives' views on discrimination in the UK, both its prevalence and ways it can be addressed;
- **Chapter Eight** concludes with the main themes of Conservatives' thinking on human rights and discrimination which have emerged from our polling.

## Chapter 2: **Methodology**

This report aims to discover, in greater detail, the attitudes of conservatives towards the existence of, importance of, and measures on human rights and discrimination. This chapter describes in detail the polling we used to achieve this.

### **Conservatives**

We understand conservatives to mean those that voted Conservative at the 2017 General Election in Great Britain. In this report they are called ‘Conservatives’. It is worth highlighting that the group of people who have conservative values or a centre-right political outlook may be broader than just those who have voted for the Conservative Party. Equally, it is possible for Conservative voters to hold positions which would not typically be regarded as conservative. But we are confident that the views of conservatives are best described through the views of Conservatives.

### **Polling of Conservatives**

The polling was undertaken by YouGov. It was conducted between 18 and 23 July 2017 and consisted of 6,530 British adult respondents, who were surveyed online. Using the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, the sample has been weighted to be fully representative of the adult British population according to age, gender, socio-economic

grade, and government region. The sample is also representative of the vote share from the 2017 general election. It therefore included 2,240 Conservative voters.

The large sample size for this polling enabled us to analyse voters' views in two ways. First, we could compare the opinions of Conservative voters with Labour, Liberal Democrat and UKIP voters.

Second, the large number of Conservative respondents enabled us to analyse how Conservatives differ in their views on human rights and discrimination. We included sixteen cross-breaks, which enable Conservatives' views to be analysed and broken down according to their response to particular questions. For example, respondents were asked whether they voted to 'Remain' or 'Leave' the European Union in the referendum held on the 23rd June, 2016. This cross-break will allow us to determine how the EU referendum vote relates to Conservatives' views on human rights and discrimination.

We have also included cross-breaks relating to socio-demographic characteristics such as age, regional geography and socio-economic grade, in order to determine how these factors affected Conservatives' beliefs about human rights and discrimination. This variation between different groups of Conservatives will be discussed throughout the report.

The cross-breaks that were used to differentiate between Conservatives are detailed in full in Box 2.1.

#### **Box 2.1: Complete polling cross-breaks**

- 2017 General Election vote
- 2016 EU Referendum vote
- 2015 General Election vote
- Age
- Gender
- Region of Britain

- Socio-economic grade
- Urban/Rural
- Private/Public Sector
- Parent: Are you a parent or a guardian?
- Marital Status
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Born in the UK
- Disability
- Sexuality

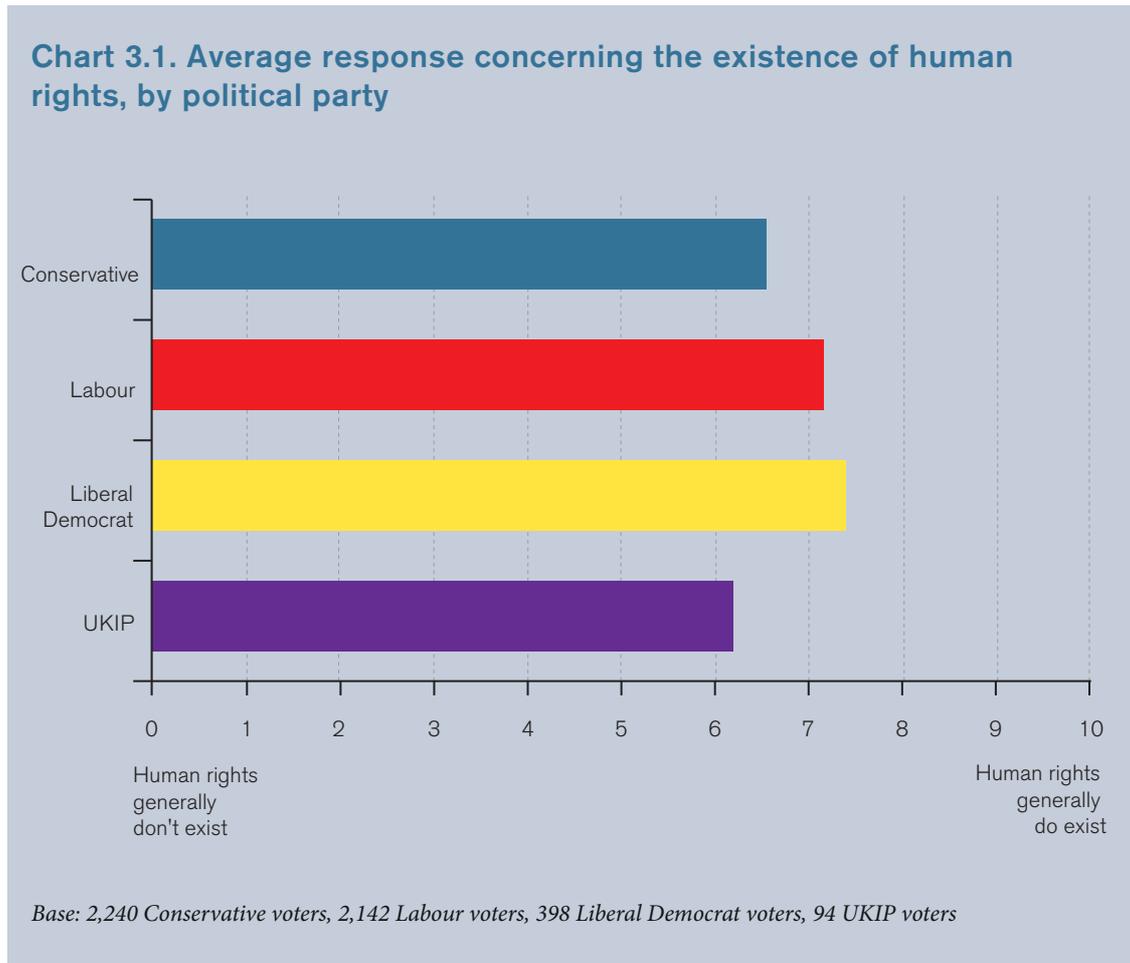
In this report, we have not reported any data for which the sample size was under 50. In a small number of cases, we have reported data for which the sample size was greater than 50, but under 100. For this reason, polling data for UKIP voters, Conservatives born outside the UK, and gay or lesbian Conservatives, should be treated with caution as the small sample size makes them relatively less reliable.

## Chapter 3: **General attitudes to human rights**

This chapter examines the attitude of Conservatives towards the existence, applicability, value, and misuse of human rights. Respondents were asked to select their position on a scale of zero to ten between two contrasting statements about human rights. In addition, we also explored the extent to which Conservatives regard human rights as an important political issue.

### **Attitudes to the existence of human rights**

We asked respondents to select their position in relation to the statements “human rights generally don’t exist” (zero) and “human rights generally do exist” (ten). Chart 3.1 shows that, on average, Conservatives do believe that human rights exist, with an average score of 6.8. Furthermore, Conservatives are a little less likely to believe in the existence of human rights than Labour and Liberal Democrat voters. However, they are a little more likely to believe in human rights than UKIP voters.

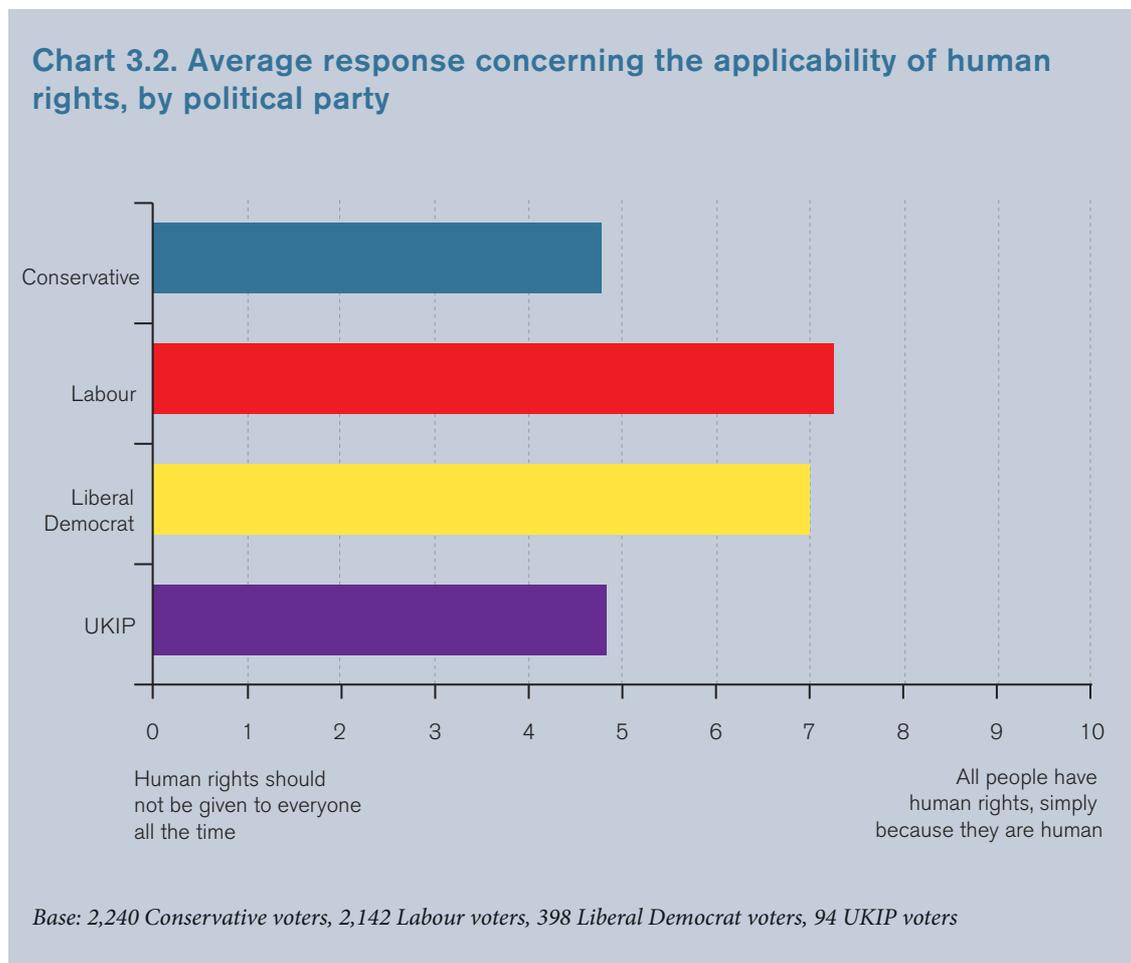


There are certain socio-demographic characteristics that dispose Conservatives to be more likely to believe that human rights exist. For example, Conservatives from ages 18-24 select 7.0 on average, whereas those Conservatives aged 65 and over select 6.5. Vote in the EU referendum is also a relevant characteristic, with ‘remainers’ (people who voted to remain in the EU) selecting 7.0 on average, compared to ‘leavers’ (people who voted to leave) who choose an average of 6.7. Despite these variations, it is the case that Conservatives of all types overwhelmingly support the idea that human rights exist.

### Attitudes to the applicability of human rights

We asked respondents to select their position in relation to the statements “human rights should not be given to everyone all the time” (0) and “all people have human rights, simply because they are human”

(10). This question aimed to determine whether Conservatives agree with the idea that human rights are universal and inalienable. Chart 3.2 shows that, on average, Conservatives select 4.9, indicating that they are divided on whether human rights can be withdrawn for particular people at particular times. In contrast, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters overwhelmingly think that all human rights are inalienable, with an average selection of 7.2 and 7.0 respectively. UKIP voters have a similar level of response to Conservatives.



The division of opinion amongst Conservatives is also highlighted by their tendency to cluster around the extreme ends of the spectrum with regards to this question. A quarter select the two most extreme options (zero and ten).

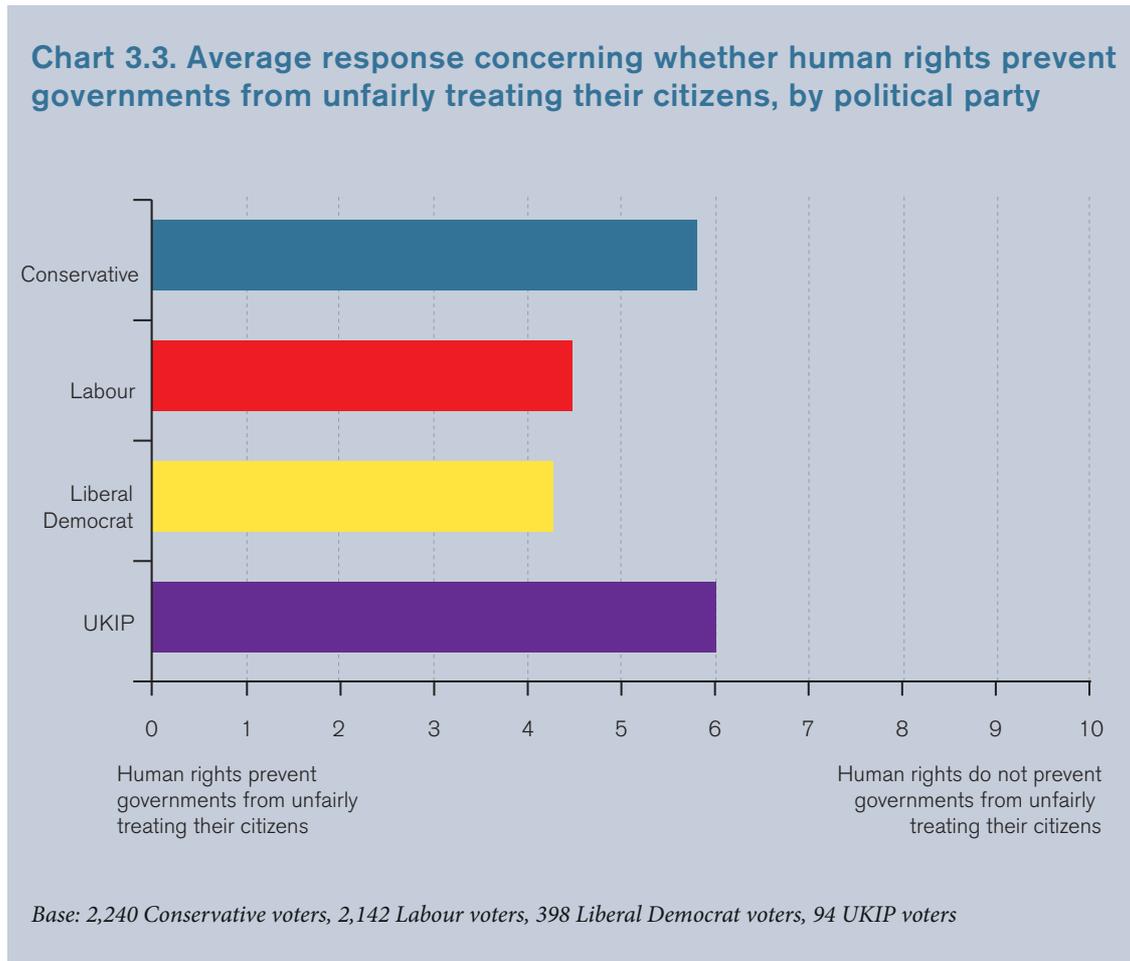
There is division of opinion concerning the applicability of human rights amongst Conservatives according to EU referendum vote.

On average, Conservative remainers select 5.7, compared to 4.4 for Conservative leavers.

### **Attitudes to the value of human rights**

We asked respondents to select their position in relation to the statements “human rights prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens” (zero) and “human rights do not prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens” (ten). Conservatives in the UK frequently champion limited government. Therefore, this question was designed to test whether Conservatives believed that human rights were effective in restricting state power.

Chart 3.4 shows that, on average, Conservatives select 5.5. This indicates that Conservatives are divided on this issue, but are slightly more likely than Liberal Democrat and Labour voters - whose selections averaged 4.5 and 4.6 respectively - to believe that human rights do not prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens.



Younger Conservatives are more positive about human rights limiting government. On average, they select 4.6. In contrast, Conservatives over the age of 65, on average, selected 5.7, putting them closer to the view that human rights do not prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens.

Sexuality also proved to be an interesting variable, with gay or lesbian Conservatives (5.5) significantly more likely than heterosexual Conservatives to believe that human rights prevent unfair treatment of citizens by governments. A possible explanation for this disparity is the extensive history of human rights legislation being used to protect this group from discrimination. For example, human rights legislation had an important role to play in the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Northern Ireland in 1982, and the decision to let homosexuals serve in

the UK military in 1999.<sup>14</sup>

### **Attitudes to the misuse of human rights**

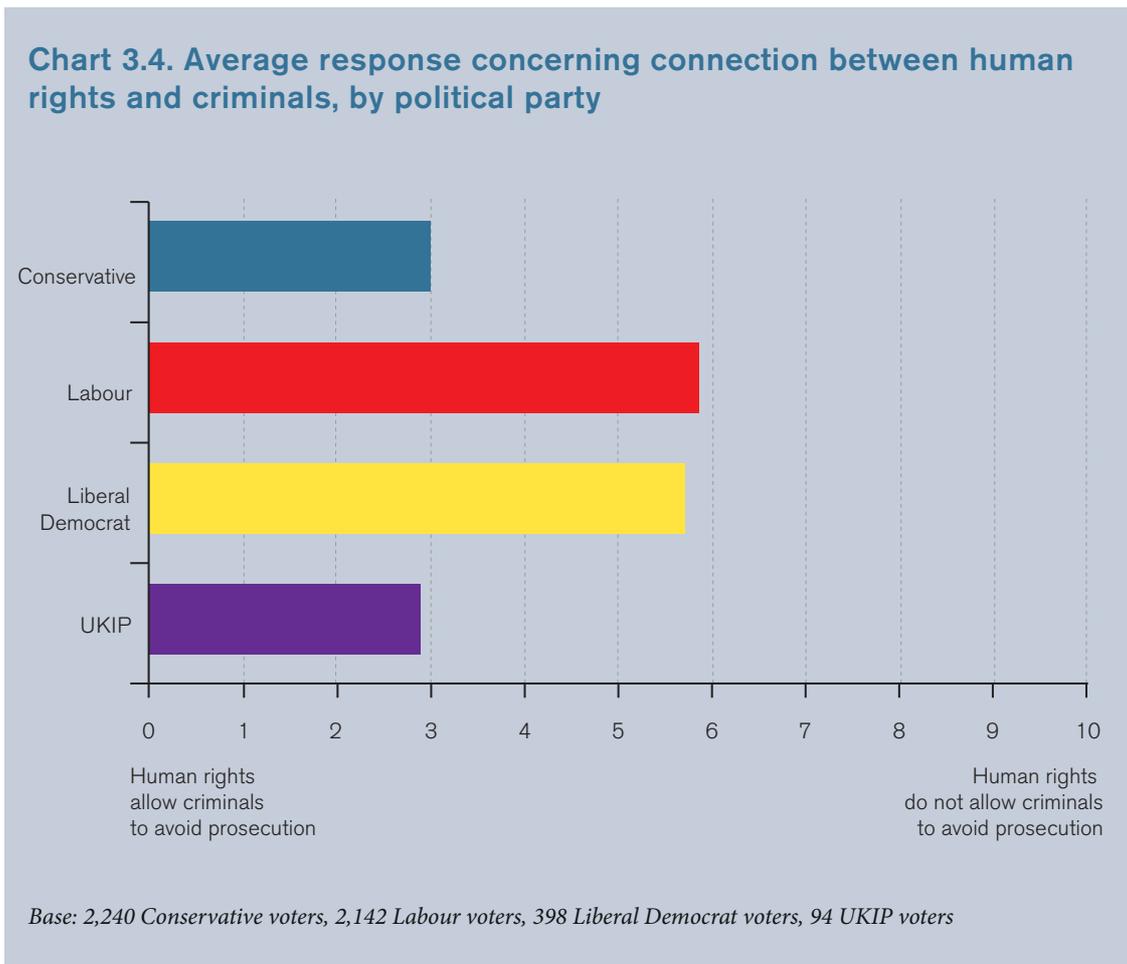
We asked respondents to select their position in relation to the statements “human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution” (zero) and “human rights do not allow criminals to avoid prosecution” (ten). Chart 3.4 shows that, on average, Conservatives select 3.1. Conservatives therefore strongly believe that human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution.

A belief that human rights allows criminals to avoid prosecution has also been professed by Conservative Ministers. In 2013, when in office as Secretary of State for Justice, the Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, said that “human rights laws need to change” to make it easier for government to deport foreign criminals.<sup>15</sup>

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14. *Dudgeon v UK* 7525/76 [1981] ECHR 5; *Smith and Grady v UK* 33985/96 [1999] ECHR 180.

15. Steven Swinford, “Human Rights Act is stopping us deporting foreign criminals, minister says”, *The Telegraph*, 31 October, 2013.

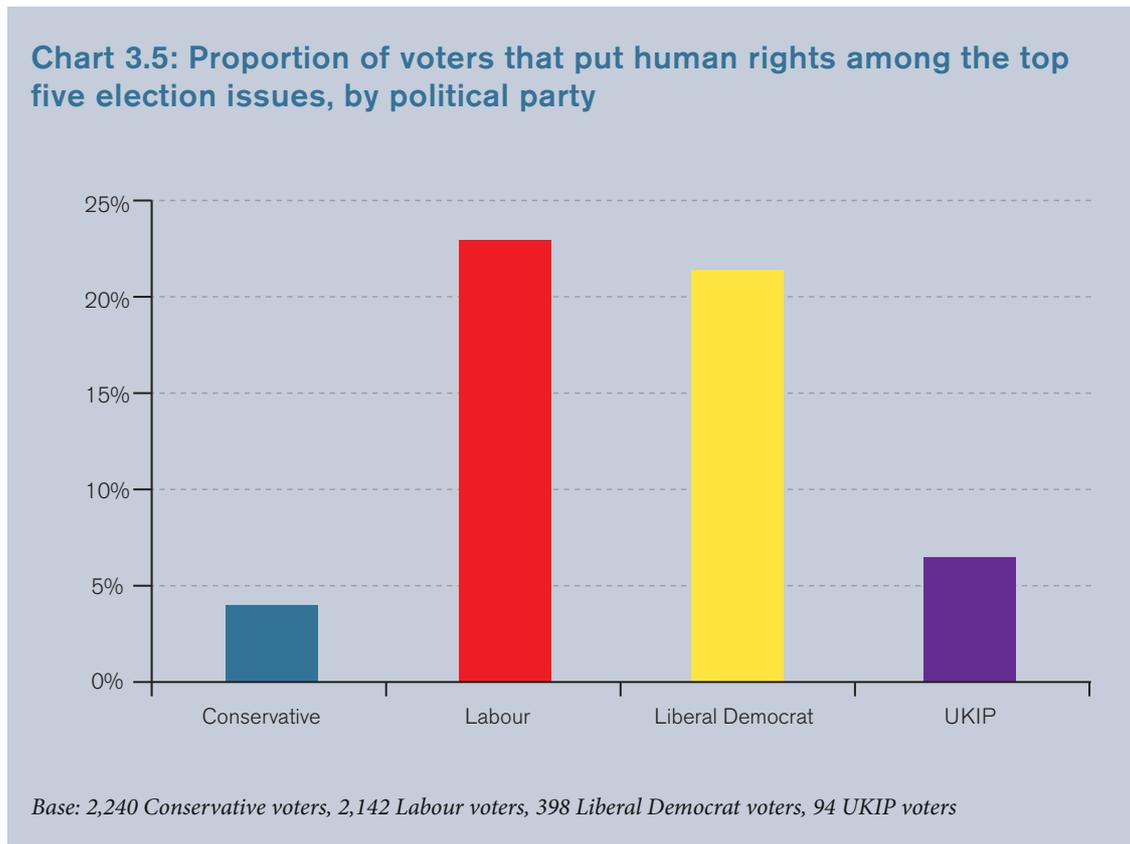


Conservatives are much more likely to believe that human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution than Liberal Democrats (5.6) or Labour voters (5.7), and roughly as likely as UKIP voters (2.9).

The variations between different Conservatives of different types follows a similar pattern to past questions, with young 18-24 Conservatives (3.9), Conservative remainers (3.9), and gay or lesbian Conservatives (3.5) all holding views closer to Labour and Liberal Democrat voters. However, all these groups select an average of 4.0 or less. The belief that human rights can aid criminals to avoid prosecution is therefore a strong and consistent feature of Conservative thinking that provides a tangible point of contrast with the views of voters of political parties to the left.

## Human rights as a political priority

Very few Conservatives see human rights as a major political priority. As Chart 3.5 shows, just 4% of Conservatives rank human rights as one of the five most important issues when deciding how to vote in a general election.



Whilst previous questions have shown patchy but significant support for human rights, it is clear from Chart 3.5 that human rights are not a particularly motivating political issue – relative to other issues – for Conservatives. This stands in contrast to Labour voters, 23% of whom rank it in their top five election issues, and Liberal Democrat voters, 21% of whom do the same. Even UKIP voters regard human rights as a more significant political priority than Conservatives (7%).

In this case, there is not significant variability between Conservatives with different socio-demographic characteristics, although 12% of gay or lesbian Conservatives do rank human rights as one of their top five election issues.

For all Conservatives, the top three political issues are “Britain leaving the EU” (71%), “immigration and asylum” (58%) and “the economy” (58%).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that Conservatives tend to believe that human rights exist, and are about as likely to believe this as voters from other parties.

But Conservatives are undecided about whether human rights should apply to all people all the time, and on whether human rights prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens. Labour and Liberal Democrat voters meanwhile, are significantly more likely to agree that human rights should apply to all people all the time and that they prevent government from unfairly treating their citizens. Young Conservatives and Conservatives who voted ‘remain’ in the EU referendum display similar levels of positivity on these points as voters for the left-wing parties.

Meanwhile, Conservatives strongly and uniformly believe that human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution, in stark contrast to the views of more left-wing voters.

Finally, only 4% of Conservatives regard human rights as a pressing political issue (defined as ranking it in their top five) – a smaller proportion than all other political parties.

## Chapter 4: **Attitudes to specific human rights**

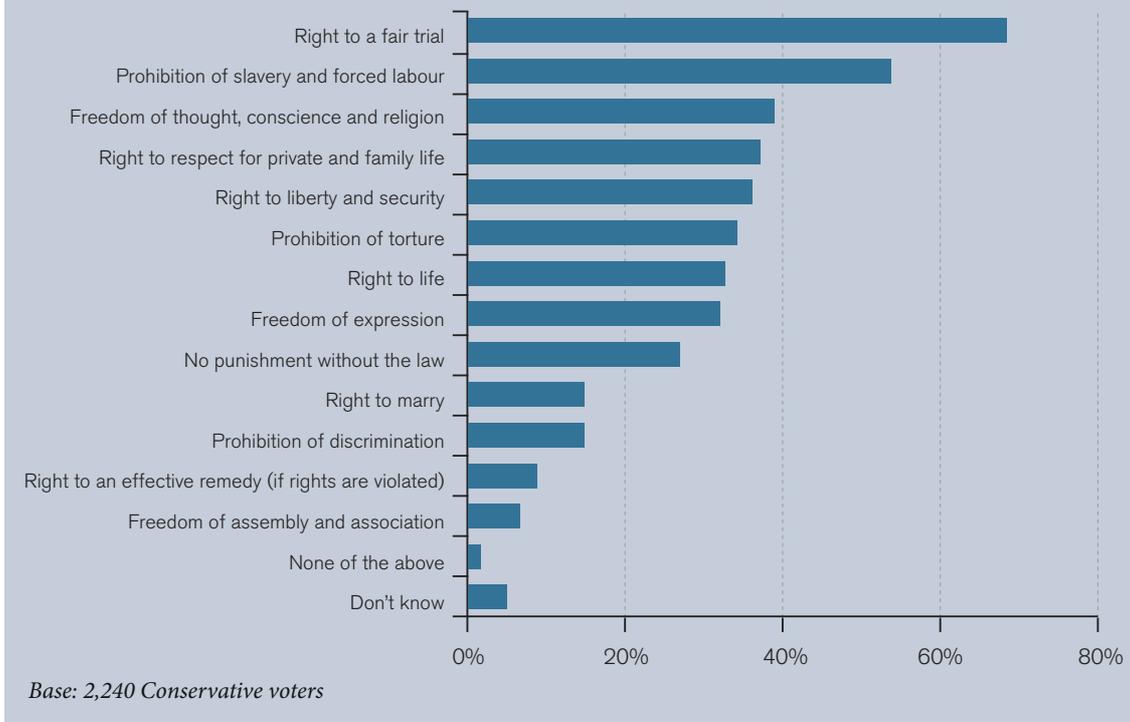
In this chapter, we take a more detailed look at how Conservatives view specific human rights. First, we examine the specific human rights that Conservatives regard as most important. Second, we analyse the attitudes of Conservatives towards the inalienability of human rights, in other words, to which people Conservatives believe these rights should – and should not – apply.

### **The importance of specific human rights**

Little research has been conducted into how voters of different political parties differ in their attitudes towards specific human rights. We asked respondents to select the four or five most important human rights from a list of 13 rights that correspond to those in the ECHR.

Chart 4.1 shows that the three rights regarded as the most important by Conservatives are the “right to a fair trial”, which is chosen by 68% of Conservatives, the “prohibition of slavery and forced labour”, which is chosen 54%, and “freedom of thought, conscience and religion”, which is chosen by 39%.

**Chart 4.1. Proportion of Conservatives that chose each right as one of the four or five most important**



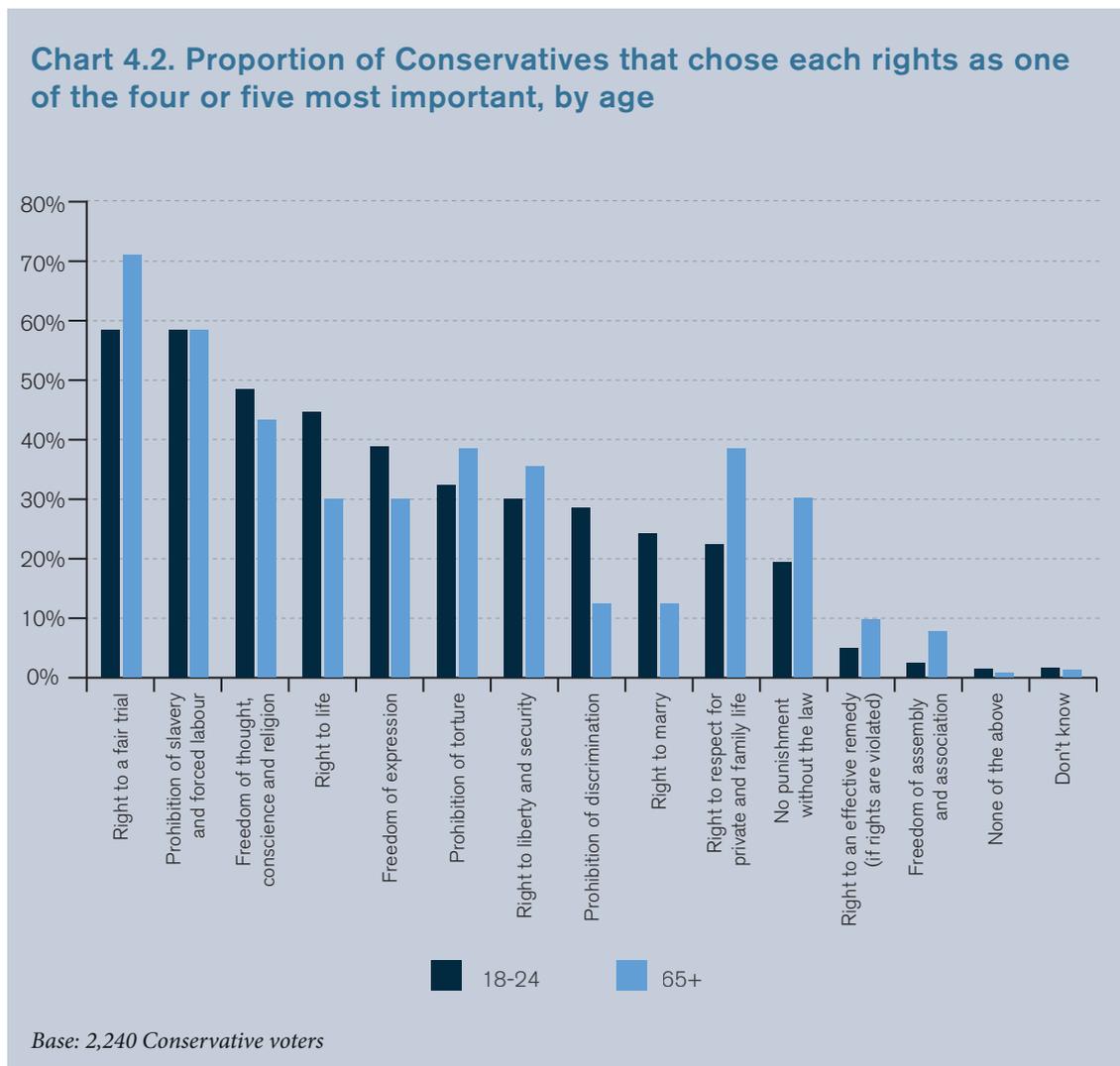
Voters from other parties give a similar ranking of the most important human rights. For example, Liberal Democrats and Labour voters also regard the same three rights as the most important, and in the same order.

The most significant disparity between voters of different political parties concerns the “prohibition of discrimination”. Only 15% of Conservatives regard it as one of their four or five most important rights, compared to 29% of Labour voters and 28% of Liberal Democrats. This is important context for Chapter Seven which explores the existence of – and handling of – discrimination.

Large disparities in the views of Conservative voters emerge when examining the responses of different socio-demographic groups. “Prohibition of discrimination” is more likely to be considered important by female Conservatives (18%), Conservatives from London (21%), Conservative remainers (20%), and gay or lesbian Conservatives

(45%). In fact, gay or lesbian Conservatives regard “prohibition of discrimination” as the second important right, behind only “the right to a fair trial”. For heterosexual Conservatives, the “prohibition of discrimination” is ranked as the tenth most important right.

The largest disparity in opinion between Conservatives is again between different age groups, as shown in Chart 4.2 below. Younger Conservatives are more likely to rank the “right to life”, “freedom of expression”, and “prohibition of discrimination” as one of the four or five most important rights. Forty-four percent of 18-24 year old Conservatives select the “right to life”, 39% “freedom of expression” and 28% select the “prohibition of discrimination” compared to only 31%, 30% and 13% of over 65 Conservatives, respectively.



On the other hand, older Conservatives are more likely to rank the

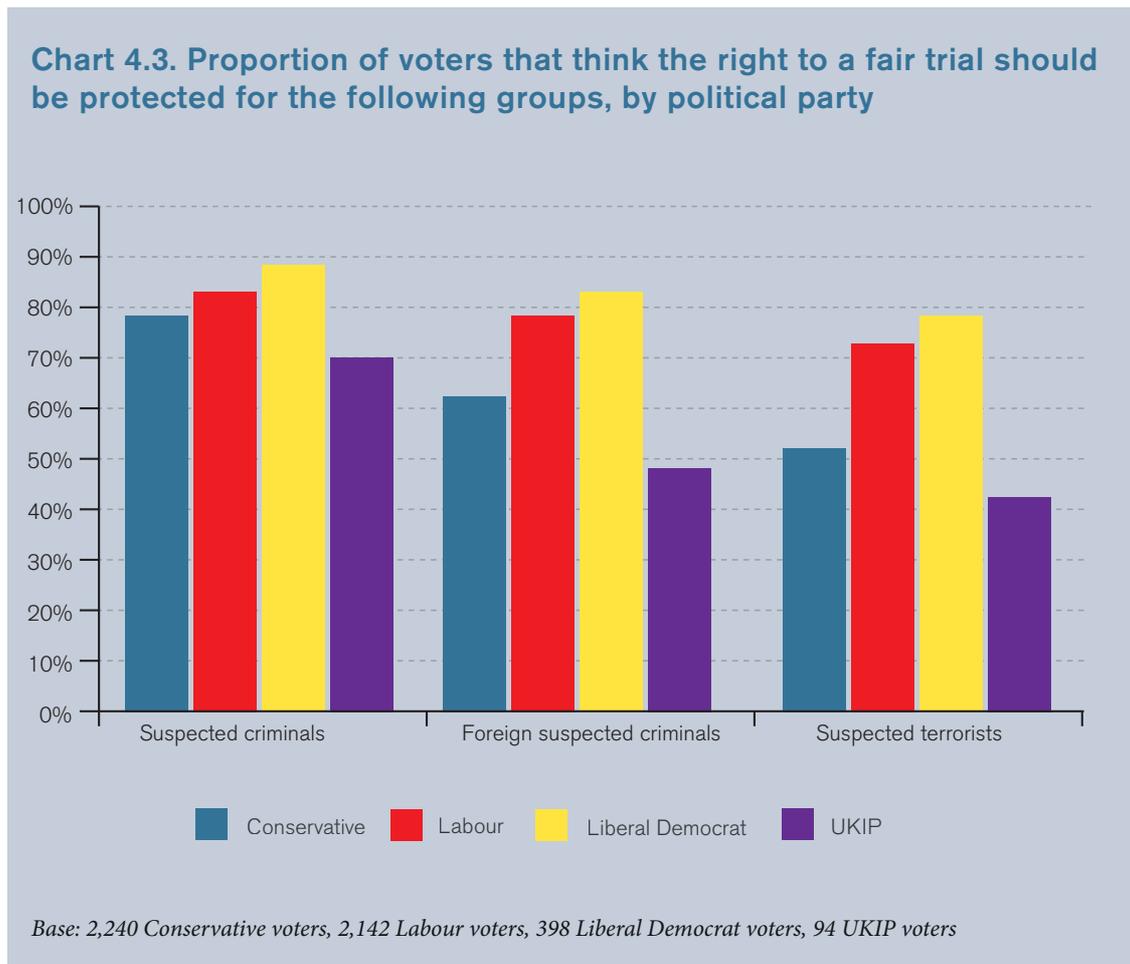
“right to a fair trial”, “right to respect for private and family life” and “no punishment without law” as one of the four or five most important rights. Seventy-two percent of over 65 year old Conservatives select the “right to a fair trial”, 38% select “right to respect for private and family life” and 31% select the “no punishment without law” compared to only 58%, 23%, and 21% of 18-24 year old Conservatives, respectively.

## Who should have human rights?

As we saw in the last chapter, Conservatives are less likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters to believe that human rights should be given to everyone all the time (Chart 3.3). Conservatives are also significantly more likely than voters of these two other parties to believe that human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution (Chart 3.7). This section explores these two views in detail: specifically, whether Conservatives believe specific human rights should be extended both suspected and convicted criminals, foreign criminals, terrorists, and hate preachers.

We selected three high-profile and, as Chart 4.1 revealed, important ECHR rights for Conservatives: the right to a fair trial, the right to free expression and the right to a family life. We then asked respondents to state whether these rights should be protected for a variety of offenders, including both suspected and convicted hate preachers, terrorists and criminals. For the rights to free expression and a family life we focus on convicted criminals, terrorists and hate preachers whereas for the right to a fair trial we focus on suspected criminals and terrorists since that right can only be relevant to them.

Chart 4.3 shows that the vast majority of people from all political parties support the right to a fair trial for suspected criminals. Seventy-nine percent of Conservatives are in favour of protecting this right for suspected criminals, more than the proportion of UKIP voters in favour (71%), but less than Labour voters (85%) or Liberal Democrats (88%).

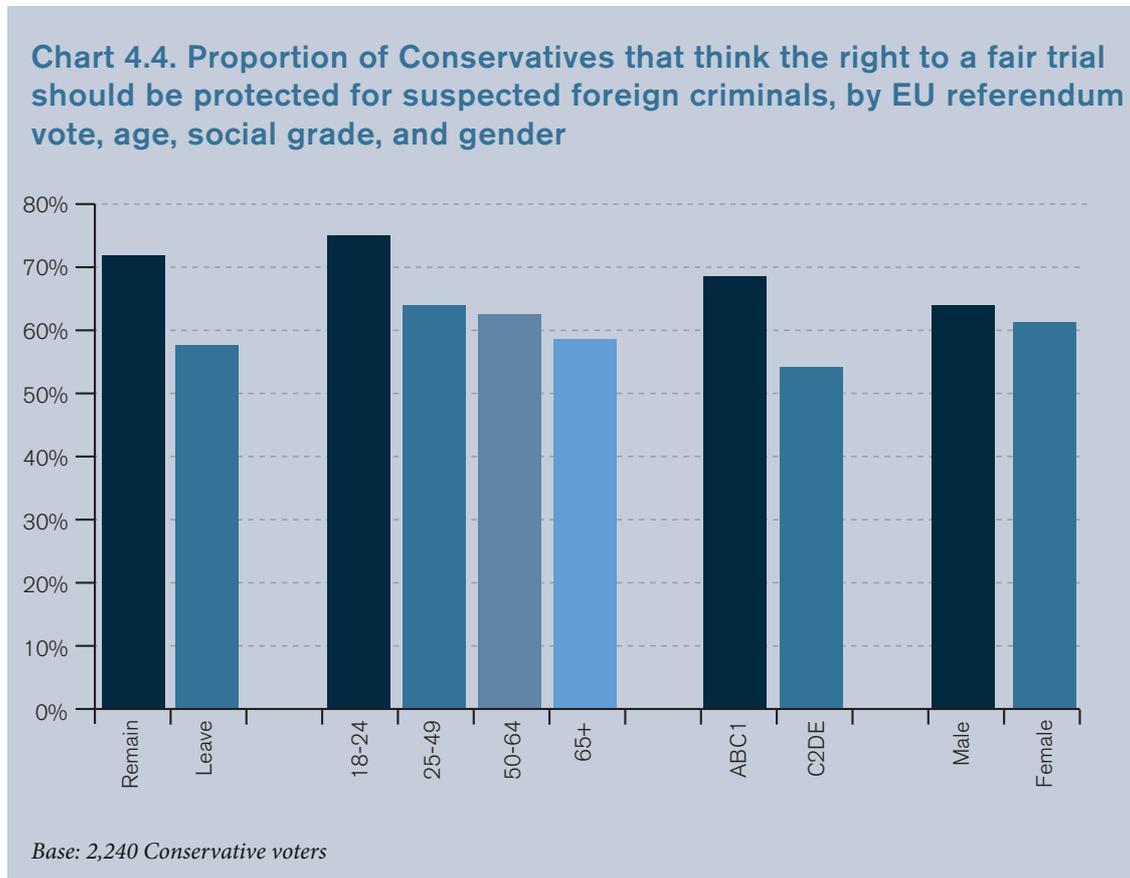


Being a suspected foreign criminal garners less sympathetic responses with 63% of Conservatives believing they should have the right to a fair trial. Protecting the right to a fair trial for foreign suspected criminals is supported by a larger majority of Labour (79%) and Liberal Democrat voters (82%).

Finally, with regards to suspected terrorists, Conservatives are roughly evenly split, with 54% supporting that group’s right to a fair trial. There are stark differences between voters of different parties on this issue. Forty-two percent of UKIP voters believe that suspected terrorists should receive a fair trial, compared to 73% of Labour voters and 78% of Liberal Democrats.

There are some interesting disparities in opinion between different socio-demographic groups of Conservatives in response to this question, with characteristics including age, social grade, gender, and

EU referendum vote all proving relevant. Chart 4.4 shows the results concerning foreign suspected criminals, which prove a particularly contentious issue among Conservatives.

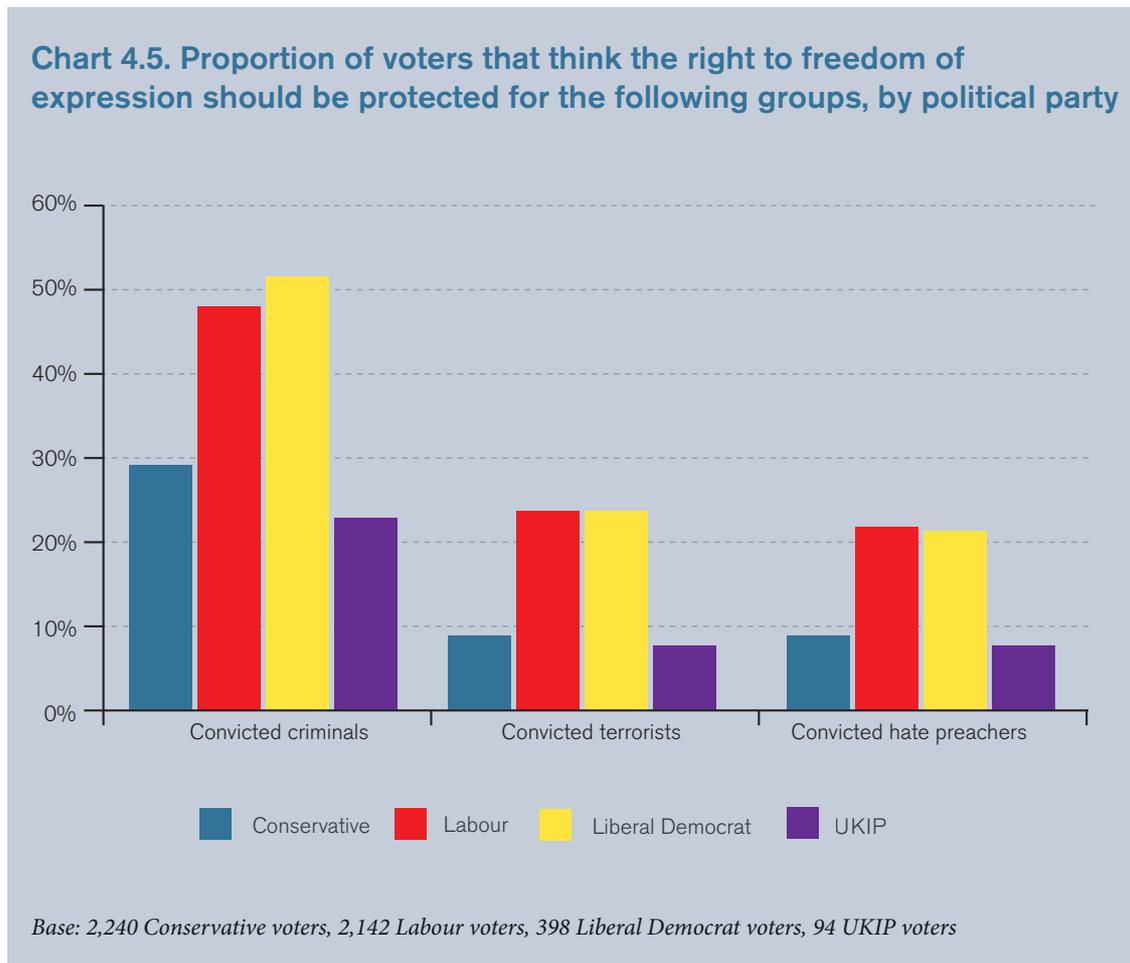


Remainers are 16 percentage points more likely than leavers to support protecting the right to a fair trial for foreign suspected criminals (74% remain and 58% leave). Conservatives aged 18-24 (75%), those from higher ABC1 social grades (68%), and male Conservatives (64%) are also more supportive of this right.

We also asked respondents whether the right to freedom of expression should be protected for convicted criminals, convicted terrorists, and convicted hate preachers.

Chart 4.5, below, shows that there is generally less support for the protection of freedom of expression of particular people, across the political spectrum, than there is for the protection of the right to a fair trial for particular people. This could either be because freedom

of expression is regarded as a less important right, or because this question concerns convicted rather than suspected offenders.



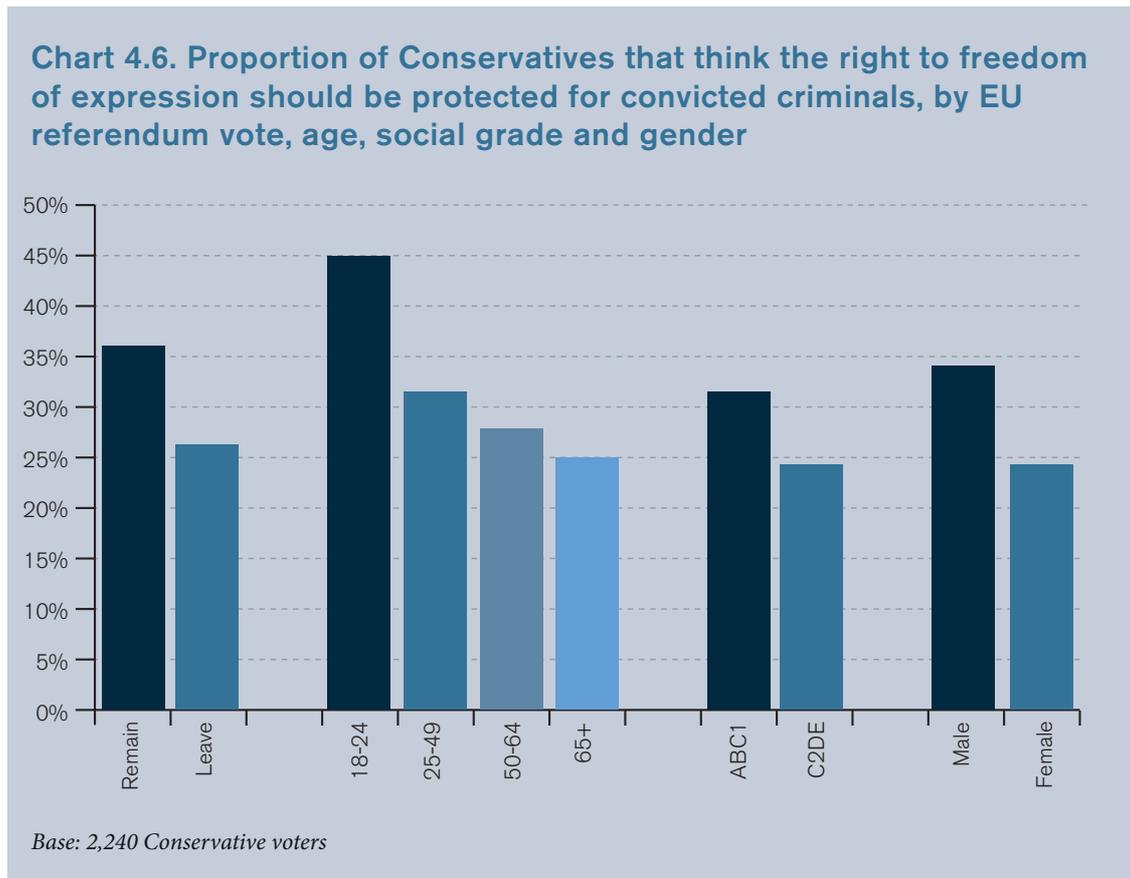
Twenty-nine percent of Conservatives think that the right to freedom of expression should be protected for convicted criminals. This is much less than the proportion of Labour voters (48%) and Liberal Democrat voters (51%), but more than the proportion of UKIP voters (23%).

Only 8% of Conservatives believe that freedom of expression should be protected for convicted terrorists, compared to 24% of both Labour and Liberal Democrat voters. There is a similar trend with regards to convicted hate preachers. Labour (22%) and Liberal Democrat (21%) voters are roughly three times more likely than Conservatives (8%) to think the right to freedom of expression should be protected for this group.

However, it is important to note that those in favour of protecting the

right to freedom of expression for convicted criminals, terrorists, and hate preachers are in the minority for voters of nearly all parties.

There are some significant differences between Conservatives on this issue according to different socio-demographic characteristics. Chart 4.6 focusses on convicted criminals to illustrate some of these differences.



Young Conservatives are again much more likely to think we should protect rights for criminals. Forty-five percent of Conservatives aged 18-24 support protection of the right to freedom of expression for convicted criminals compared to 25% of Conservatives over the age of 65.

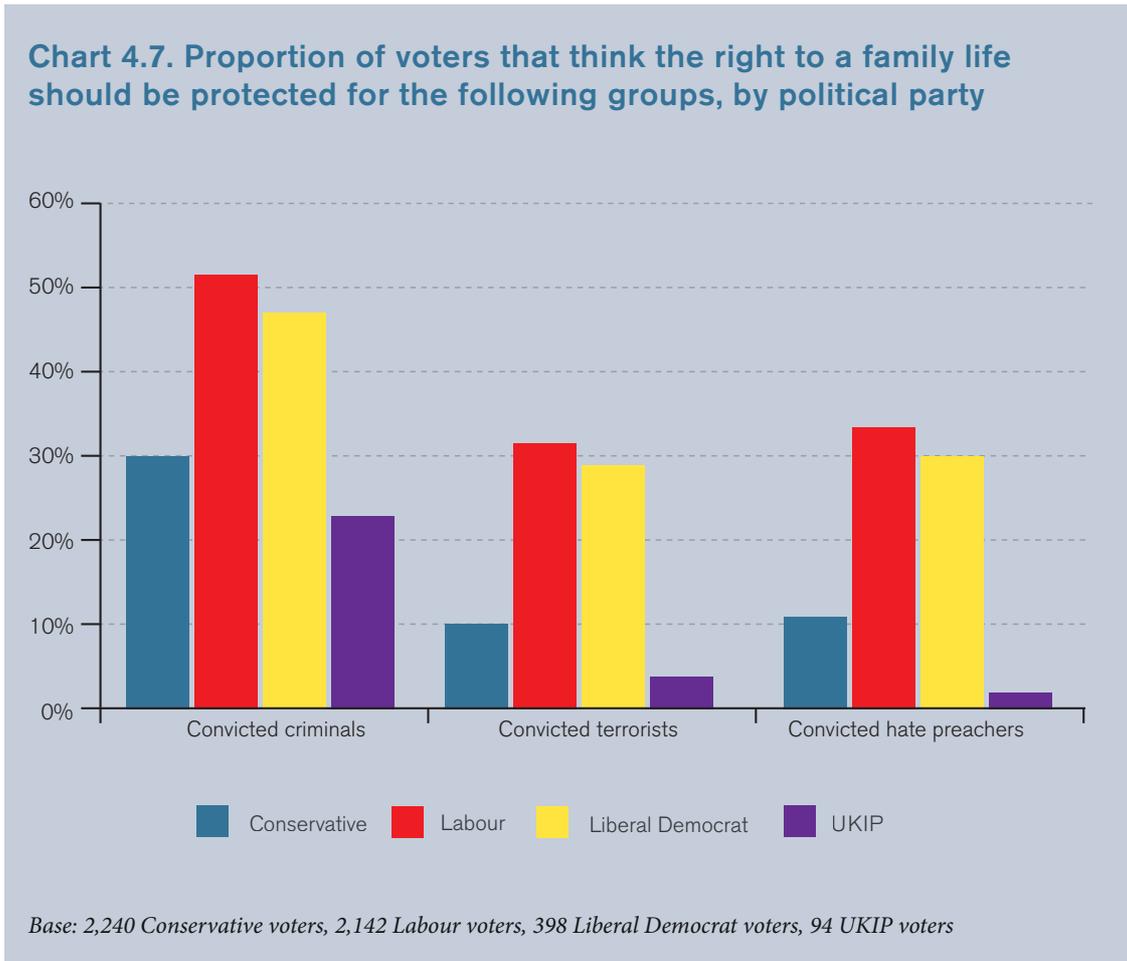
Gender is also a relevant factor again. Thirty-four percent of Conservative men support freedom of expression for convicted criminals, compared to 24% of Conservative women.

Finally, we asked respondents whether the right to a family life should be protected for convicted criminals, convicted terrorists, and

convicted hate preachers.

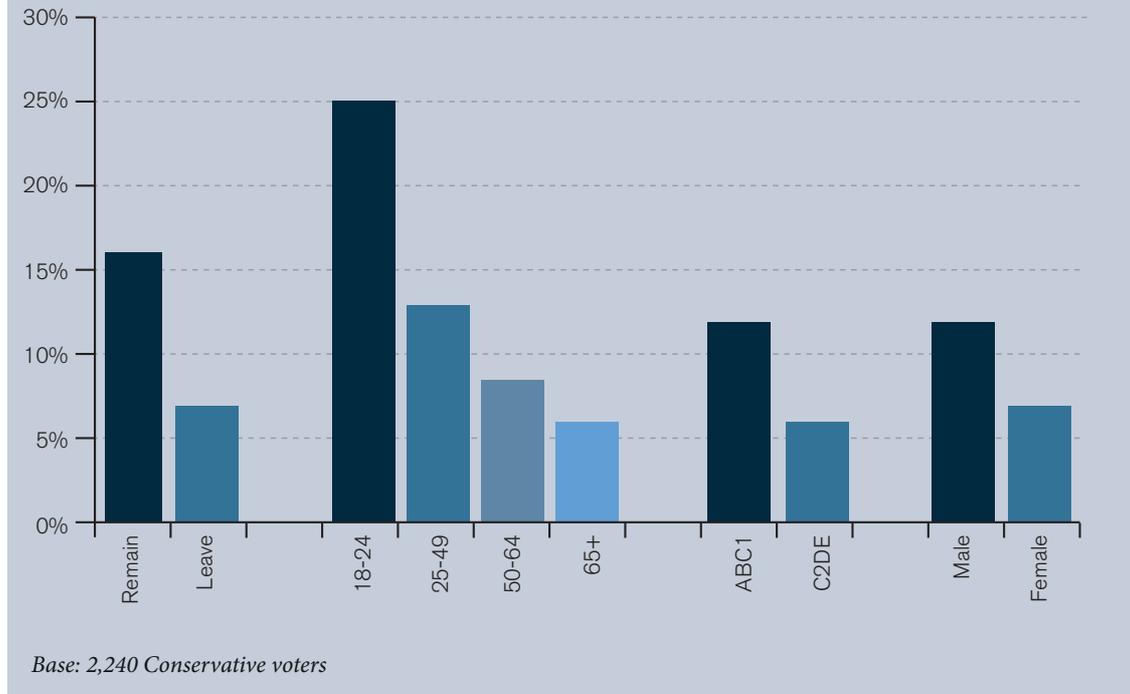
Chart 4.7 reveals that attitudes towards the right to a family life follow a similar pattern to attitudes towards the right to freedom of expression. First, because voters across the political spectrum are more likely to support the protection of the right to a family life for convicted criminals than convicted terrorists or convicted hate preachers. Thirty percent of Conservatives support the right to a family life for convicted criminals, whereas only 10% support this right for convicted terrorists.

Second, because Conservatives are more likely to support the protection of the right to a family life for these groups than UKIP voters, but much less likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters. Whereas only 30% of Conservatives believe the right to a family life should be protected for convicted criminals, 51% of Labour voters, 46% of Liberal Democrats, and 16% of UKIP voters do. For convicted terrorists, 10% of Conservative voters think this right should be protected compared to 32% of Labour voters, 28% of Liberal Democrats, and 5% of UKIP voters. Finally, 12% of Conservative voters believe the right to a family life should be protected for convicted hate preachers; while 35% of Labour voters, 30% of Liberal Democrats, and just 4% of UKIP voters say the same.



Of the three specific rights we polled, attitudes towards the protection of the right to a family life varies most according to socio-demographic characteristics, as shown in Chart 4.8 below.

**Chart 4.8. Proportion of Conservatives that think the right to a family life should be protected for convicted terrorists, by EU referendum vote, age, social grade and gender**



Seventeen percent of Conservative remainers support the protection of the right to a family life for convicted terrorists compared to just 7% of Conservative leavers. Twenty-five percent of 18-24 year-old Conservatives support the protection of this right, while the figure for Conservatives over the age of 65 is only 6%. Similarly, 12% of ABC1 Conservative support the protection of this right compared to 6% of C2DE Conservatives. Twelve percent of men support this right, significantly higher than the 7% of women who report the same.

## Conclusion

Conservatives believe the right to a fair trial, the prohibition of slavery and forced labour, and the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion are the most important human rights. Overall, we have shown that Conservatives' attitudes on what the most important human rights prove are similar to voters from other parties, apart from in relation to the prohibition of discrimination, which Conservatives regard as less

important.

Conservatives are more likely to believe specific human rights should be protected for suspected and convicted criminals, terrorists, and hate preachers than UKIP voters, but consistently less likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters. However, there are certain types of Conservatives whose attitudes concerning the applicability of human rights are more in line with the parties to the left. Remainers, young Conservatives, richer Conservatives and male Conservatives are considerably more likely to support the protection of specific human rights for suspected and convicted criminals, terrorists, and hate preachers.

## Chapter 5: **Human rights legislation and institutions**

This chapter will take a more detailed look at Conservative attitudes towards the different types of legislation and institutions that protect human rights in the UK. First, we examine which forms of legislation Conservatives believe best protect human rights in the UK. Second, we analyse the attitudes of Conservatives towards the most important international human rights treaty, the ECHR. Third, we look at whether Conservatives believe that courts should be able to overturn government legislation that violates human rights, and if the attitudes of Conservatives on this question vary depending on whether the courts in question are British or international.

### **The most important forms of human rights legislation**

As noted in Chapter One of this report, Conservatives tend to be more critical of the legislation and institutions that protect human rights rather than specific human rights. Human rights legislation in the UK has developed over the centuries through common law, statutes and international treaties.

Chart 5.1 below shows the legislation that Conservatives believe best protects human rights in the UK. Conservatives view traditional English common law as the legislation that best protects human rights, with 35% of Conservative respondents selecting this option. The HRA

and the Magna Carta are the second and third most popular choices, with 14% and 7% respectively.

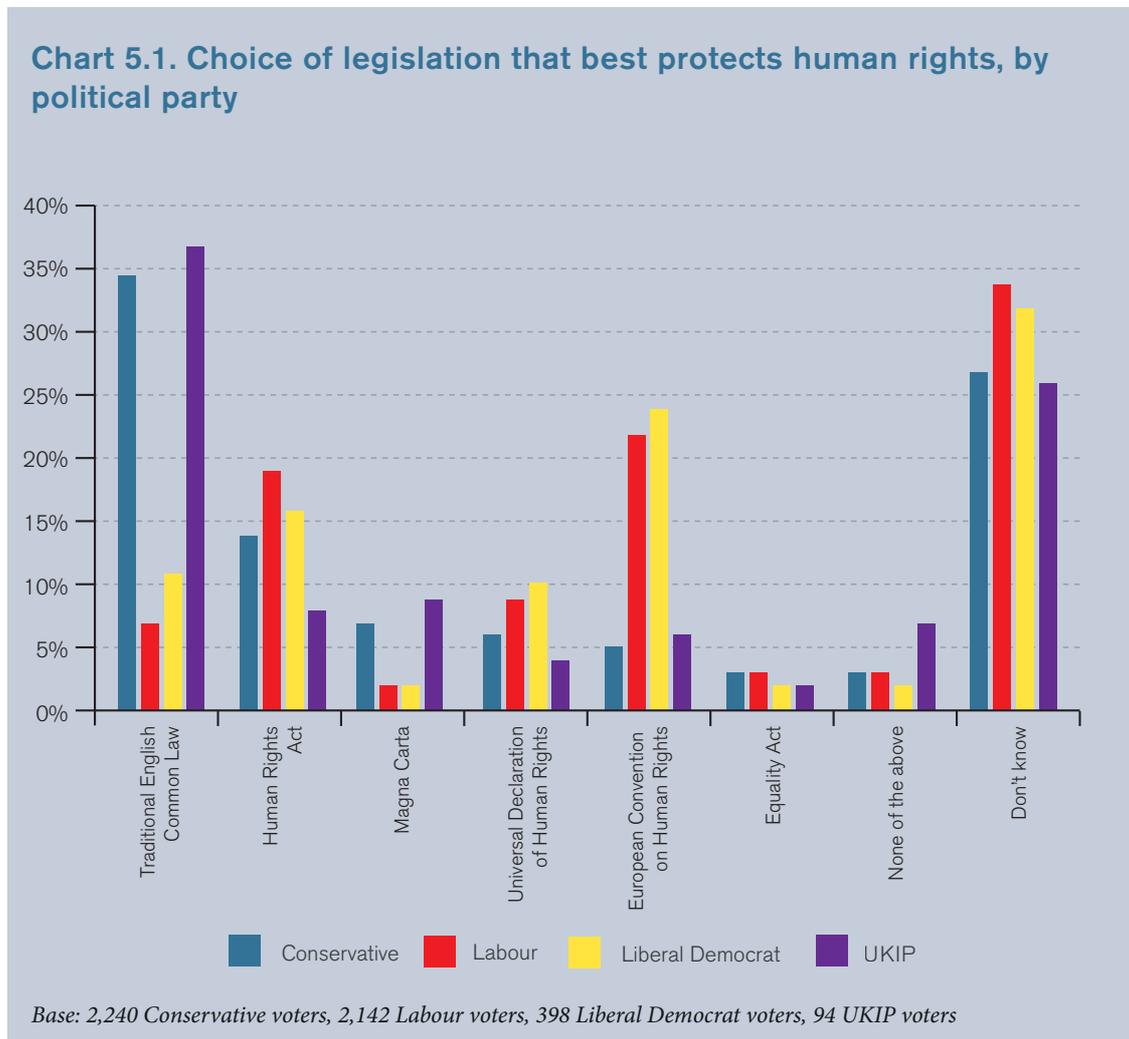


Chart 5.1 suggests that Conservatives believe domestic UK legislation provides the best protection for human rights. International sources of human rights protection, for example the ECHR and UDHR, are regarded as less effective in protecting human rights in the UK. Only 5% of Conservatives, for example, believe the ECHR best protects human rights. In fact, almost three times as many Conservatives choose the HRA over the ECHR, despite the fact that the human rights protection offered by the two is very similar since the HRA incorporates the ECHR into UK law.

For Labour voters, the most popular choices are distinctively different: the ECHR was the most popular option with 22% of respondents

citing it. This, combined with the fact that Labour voters are also more likely to select the UDHR, highlights their greater positivity towards international sources of human rights protection.

Importantly, over a quarter of respondents from all political parties state that they do not know which of the options provides the best protection for human rights.

The variation in responses between Conservatives with different socio-demographic characteristics are just as pronounced as the variation between voters of different parties, with age, EU referendum vote, and place of birth all providing particularly large points of contrast, as shown in Chart 5.2.

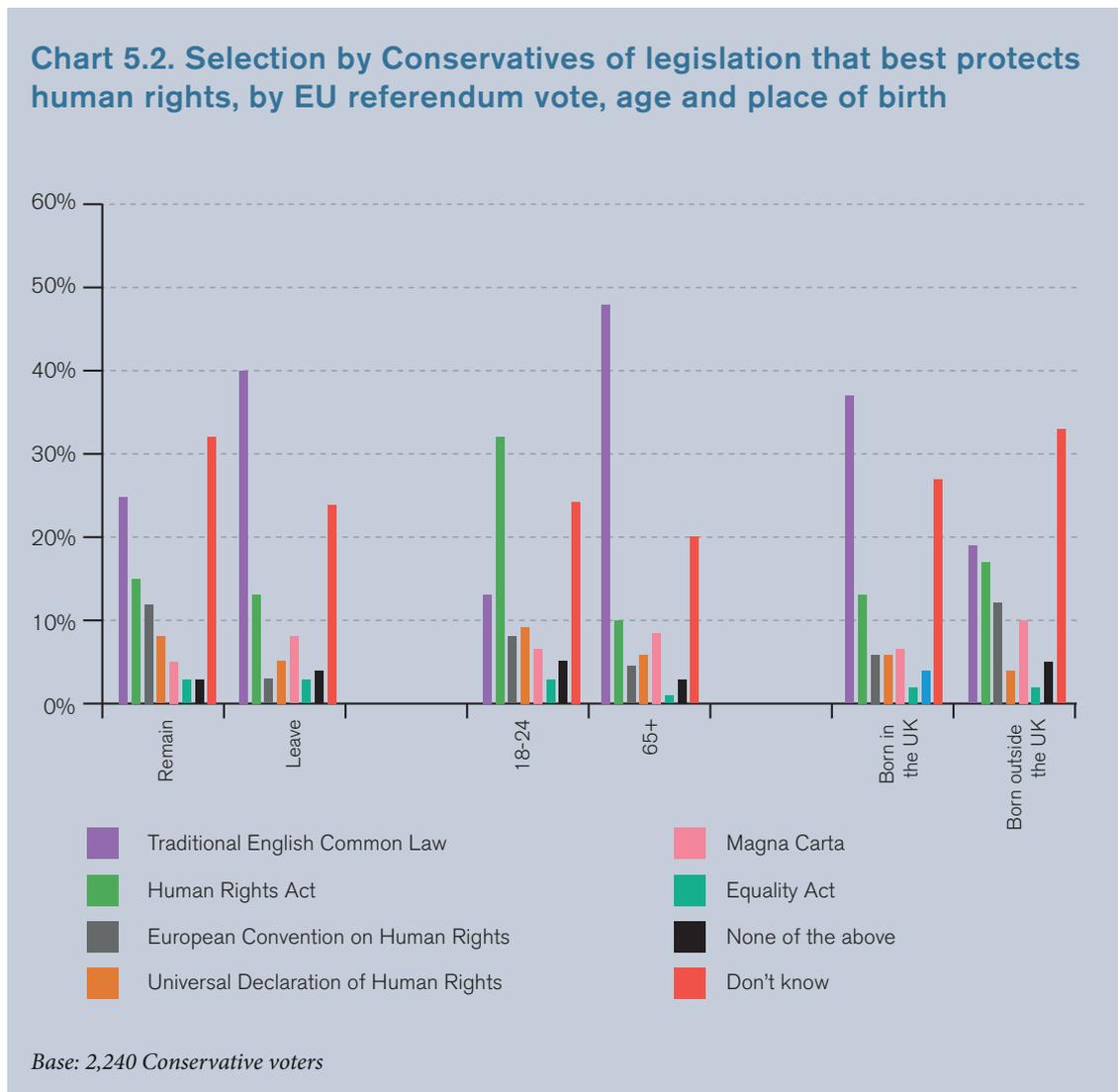


Chart 5.2 again reveals the large disparity between Conservatives of different ages in their attitudes to human rights. Only 13% of Conservatives aged 18-24 view English common law as the legislation that best protects human rights, in comparison to 48% of Conservatives over the age of 65. In contrast, 40% of the youngest group of Conservatives select either the HRA or the ECHR, significantly more than those over the age of 65 (14%).

Conservative remainers and Conservatives who were born outside of the UK are much less likely to choose English common law, and much more likely to choose the HRA or the ECHR. Forty percent of Conservative leavers opt for English common law compared to 25% of Conservative remainers. In contrast, 15% of remainers choose the HRA and 11% choose the ECHR compared to 13% and 3% of leavers, respectively. Thirty-eight percent of those born in the UK select English common law while just 17% of those born outside the UK choose the same. In contrast, 16% of those born outside the UK choose the ECHR compared to 5% of those born in the UK.

Another noteworthy result shows that 13% of gay or lesbian Conservatives view the Equality Act as the piece of legislation that best protects human rights, compared to just 2% of heterosexual Conservatives. This highlights the important role of that piece of legislation in protecting the rights of gay or lesbian people in the UK.<sup>16</sup>

## The importance of the ECHR

We have seen from Chart 5.1 that the ECHR is regarded by very few Conservatives as the piece of legislation that best protects human rights in the UK, although attitudes to it do differ according different socio-demographic characteristics of Conservatives. The ECHR itself is chosen by only 6% of Conservatives. While only a small minority of Conservatives regard the ECHR as providing the best protection for

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16. Equality and Human Rights Commission, "Sexual orientation discrimination" (2016), <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/sexual-orientation-discrimination>.

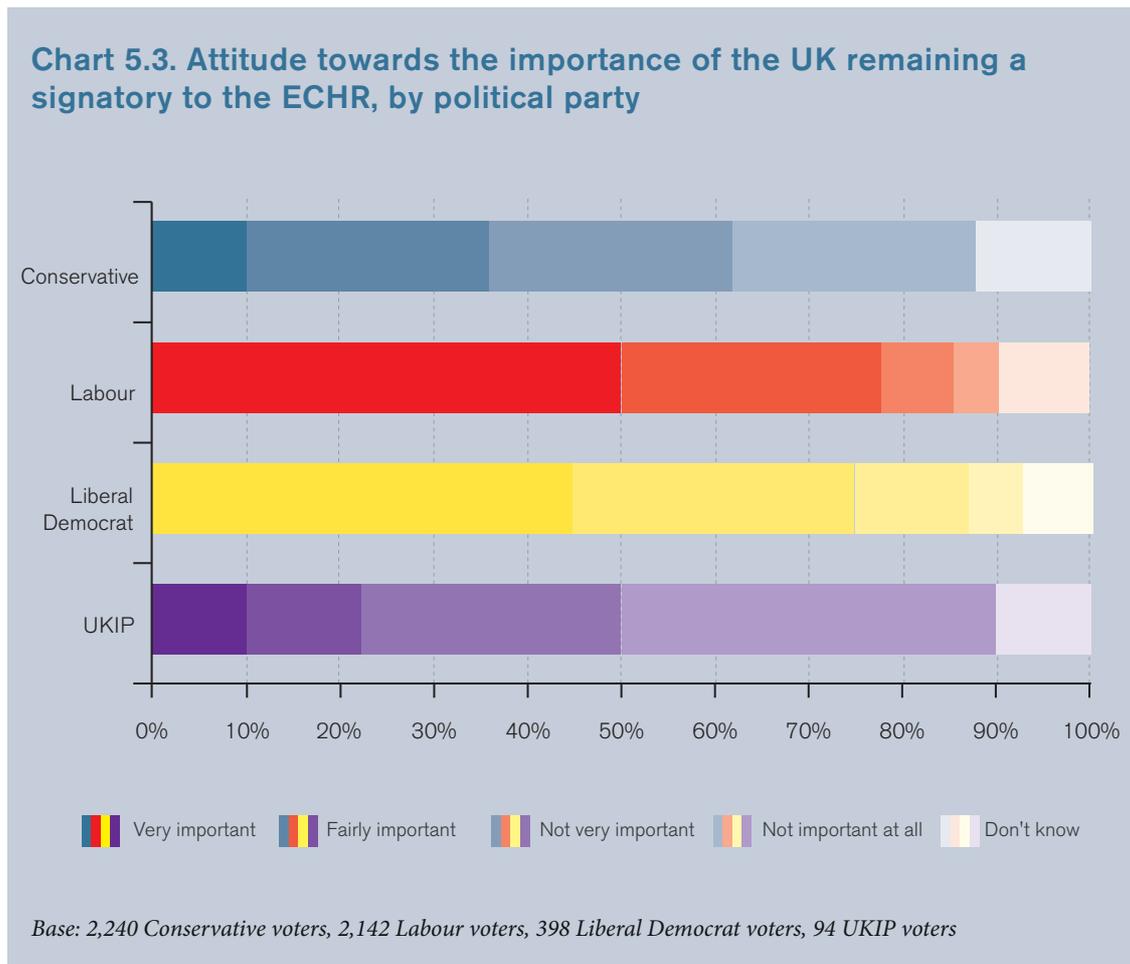
human rights in the UK, this does not in itself imply that Conservatives do not regard the ECHR as a necessary source of protection for human rights. In order to assess this, we asked respondents how important they think it is for the UK Government to commit to staying a signatory to the ECHR.

We have chosen to focus on the ECHR for three main reasons. First, because it is the most important international treaty on human rights for the UK since, through the HRA, it is incorporated into UK law. Second, because the ECHR is a vital document that Bright Blue believes the UK should remain a signatory of. Third, because the Government have committed to re-consider the UK's "human rights legal framework when the process of leaving the EU concludes".<sup>17</sup> The Prime Minister, Theresa May, has previously argued in favour of withdrawing from the ECHR.

The attitudes of both Conservatives and voters from other parties concerning the importance of remaining a signatory to the ECHR are detailed in Chart 5.3.

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17. The Conservative Party, "Forward, together: Our plan for a stronger Britain and a prosperous future", <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/manifesto2017/Manifesto2017.pdf> (2017), 37.

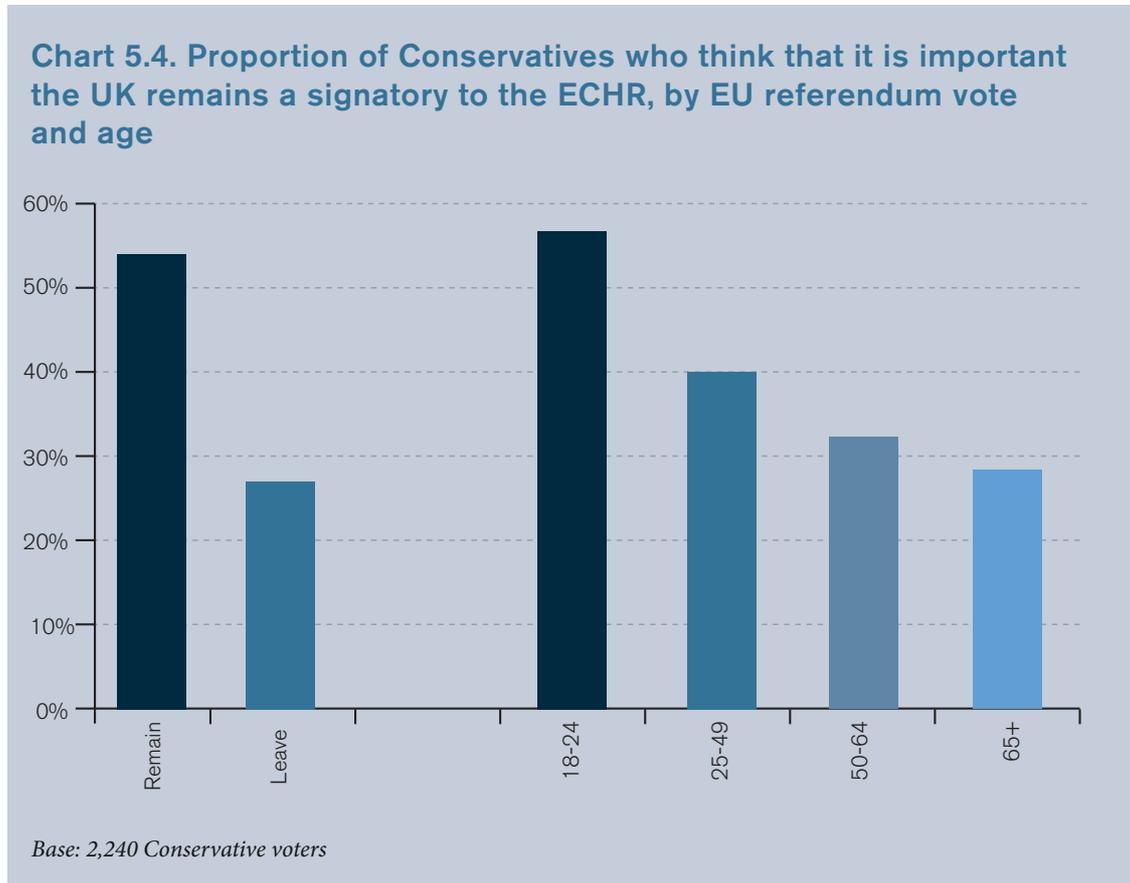


A large minority of Conservatives (35%) think that it is important for the UK Government to commit to staying a signatory to the ECHR. This is significantly more than the 22% of UKIP voters, but significantly less than the 75% of Labour voters and 74% of Liberal Democrat voters.

The contrast between voters from different parties towards the ECHR becomes even more stark when looking solely at those who stated that it is “very important” for the UK Government to commit to staying a signatory to the ECHR. Only 9% of Conservatives are of this view, compared to 50% of Labour voters and 46% of Liberal Democrats.

The scepticism of Conservatives towards the ECHR revealed in Chart 5.4 does not necessarily imply that they would like to withdraw from the Convention. It simply shows that remaining a signatory to the ECHR is not very important to the majority of Conservatives.

There are major variations in attitudes to the importance of remaining a signatory to the ECHR among different socio-demographic groups of Conservatives, in particular based on EU referendum vote and age. These variations are shown below in Chart 5.4.



Fifty-three percent of Conservative remainers think it is important for the UK to remain a signatory to the ECHR, compared to 27% of leavers. There is a similar disparity with regards to age: 55% of Conservatives aged 18-24 think it is important to remain a signatory to the ECHR, roughly double the proportion of Conservatives over the age of 65 (28%).

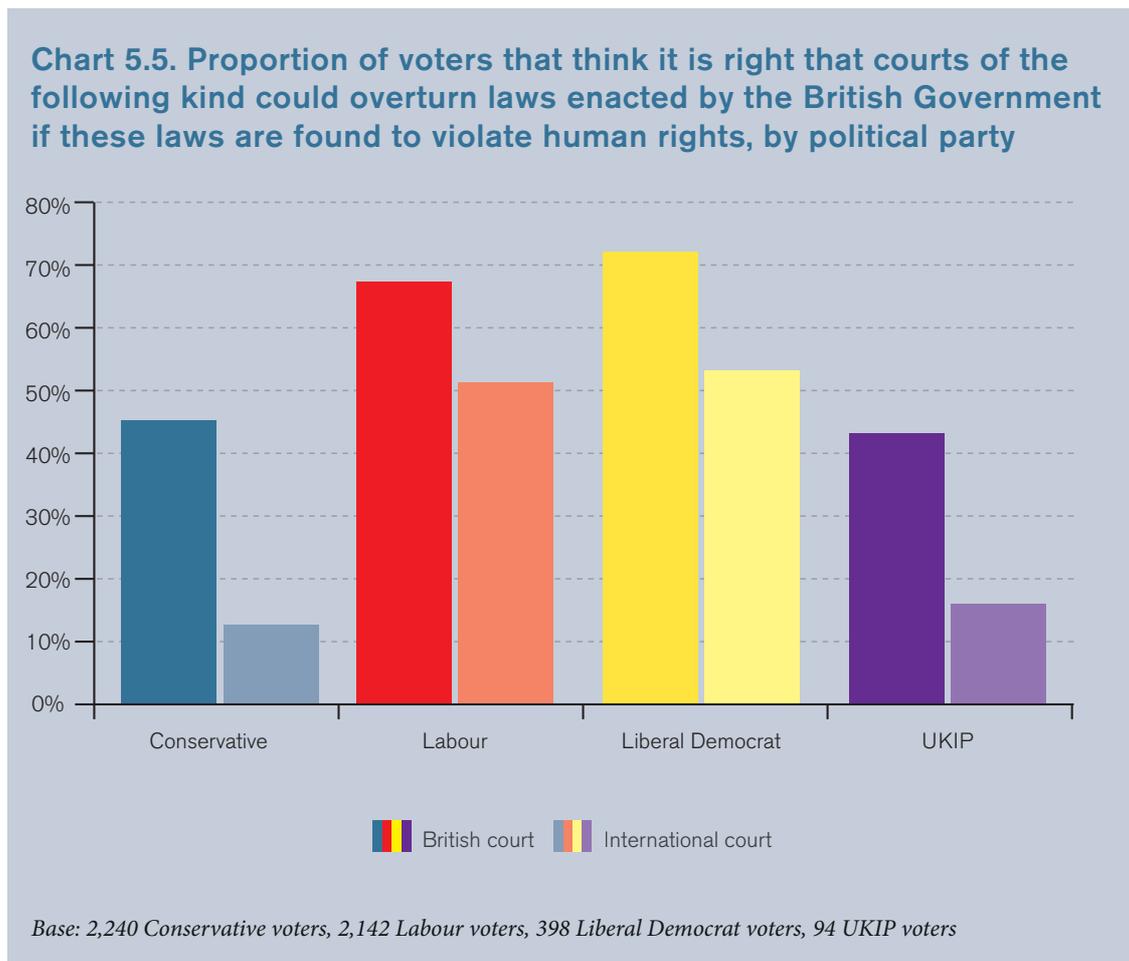
## The role of courts in enforcing human rights legislation

We asked respondents two questions about whether, in principle, courts should be able to overturn laws enacted by the British Government that violate human rights. We asked this question with

regards to both British and international courts in order to discover whether Conservative attitudes to these institutions revolves around the power of courts over governments or the power of international courts in particular.

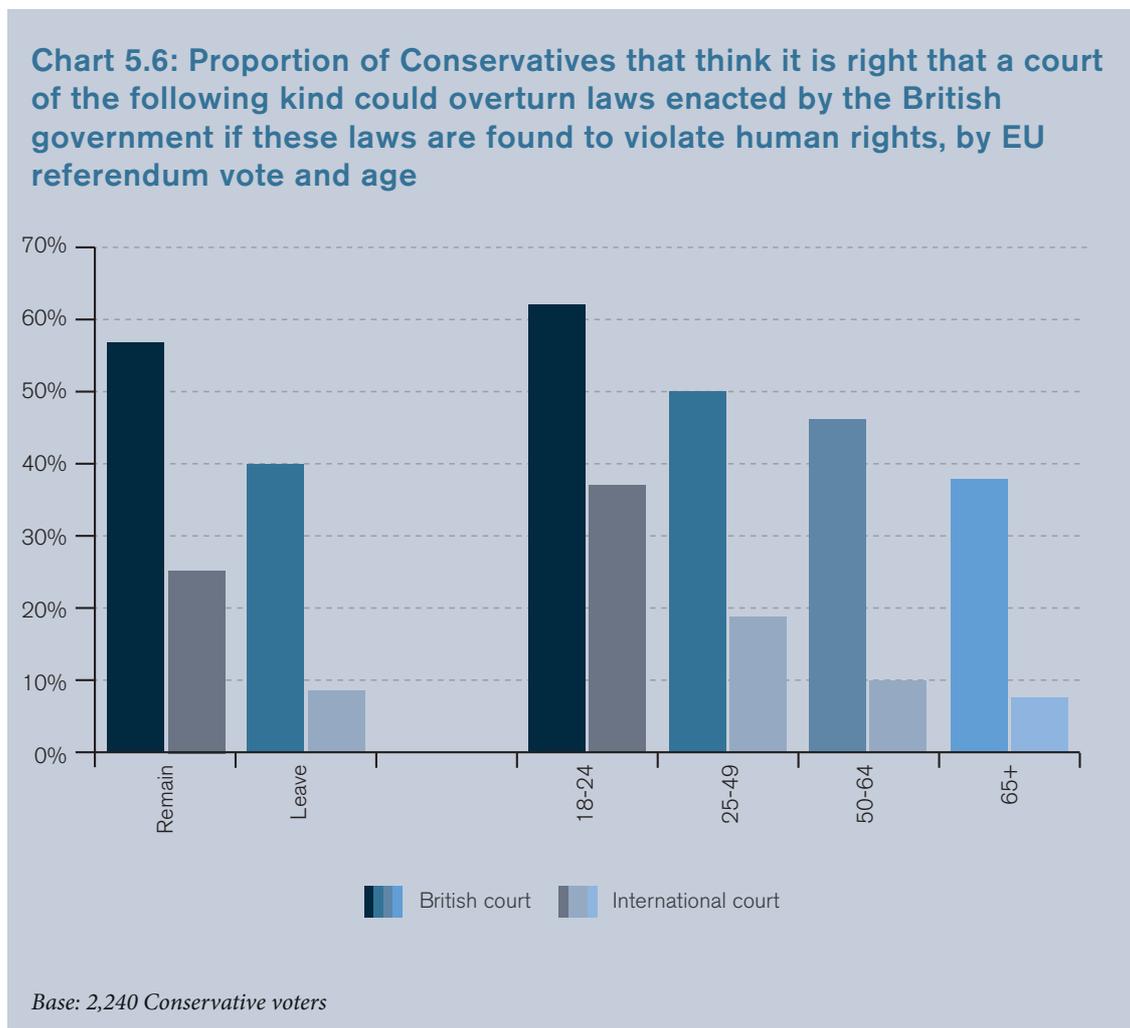
As shown in Chart 5.5 below, 45% of Conservatives think British courts should be able to overturn laws enacted by the British Government that violate human rights. In comparison, 66% of Labour voters, 72% of Liberal Democrats, and 42% of UKIP voters think that British courts should have this right.

There is a much larger difference of opinion with regards to international courts. Only 13% of Conservatives think international courts should be able to overturn domestic UK legislation for human rights reasons. By contrast, 51% of Labour voters and 53% of Liberal Democrats are of the same opinion.



All voters are more sceptical of international courts than British courts having the right to overturn laws enacted by the British Government if they violate human rights. Nonetheless, with regards to Conservatives, they were 32 percentage points less likely to support international courts overturning laws than British courts. The difference for Labour voters was only 15 percentage points.

The variation between particular socio-demographic groups of Conservatives is again very substantial, as shown in Chart 5.6.



Once again, EU referendum vote and age are the socio-demographic characteristics which mark the most substantial difference in attitudes to human rights. Twenty-five percent of remainers think that an international court should be able to overturn UK laws if they violate human rights, compared to only 8% of leavers.

Equally unsurprising is the decreased hostility expressed towards international courts by younger Conservatives. Thirty-six percent of Conservatives aged 18-24 think international courts should be able to overturn UK laws if they violate human rights, whereas only 8% of those aged 65 and over agree.

Remainers and younger Conservatives are also substantially more positive about the role of British courts in enforcing human rights law. Only 40% of Conservative leavers think that British courts should be able to overturn government legislation for human rights reasons, whereas 56% of remainers say the same. Similarly, 38% of those aged over 65 believe that British courts should be able to overturn UK laws if they violate human rights, compared to 61% of those aged 18-24.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown which pieces of human rights legislation are considered the most important by Conservatives. Conservatives are more likely to believe that human rights are best protected by traditional English common law.

This chapter also sought to understand the attitudes of Conservatives towards the ECHR in particular. Only 5% of Conservatives regard the ECHR as the piece of legislation that provides the best protection for human rights. Furthermore, just 35% of Conservatives think that it is important for the UK to remain a signatory to the ECHR, compared to 53% who think that it is not important. Despite the limited importance ascribed to the ECHR by Conservatives as a whole, a majority of Conservative remainers, and those aged 18-24 regard staying a signatory to the ECHR as being important.

Finally, we discovered that Conservatives are much less likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters to believe that British or international courts should have the power to overturn laws enacted by the UK government. Conservatives are particularly opposed to giving this power to international courts.

## Chapter 6: **Human rights and foreign policy**

In this chapter, we examine the role that Conservatives believe human rights should play in British foreign policy. First, we examine the extent to which Conservatives think that Britain should promote human rights around the world. Second, we look into Conservative's attitudes to whether Britain should trade with, or give aid to, countries with poor human rights records. Third, we detail the countries that Conservatives believe have the worst record on human rights.

### **Role of human rights in foreign policy**

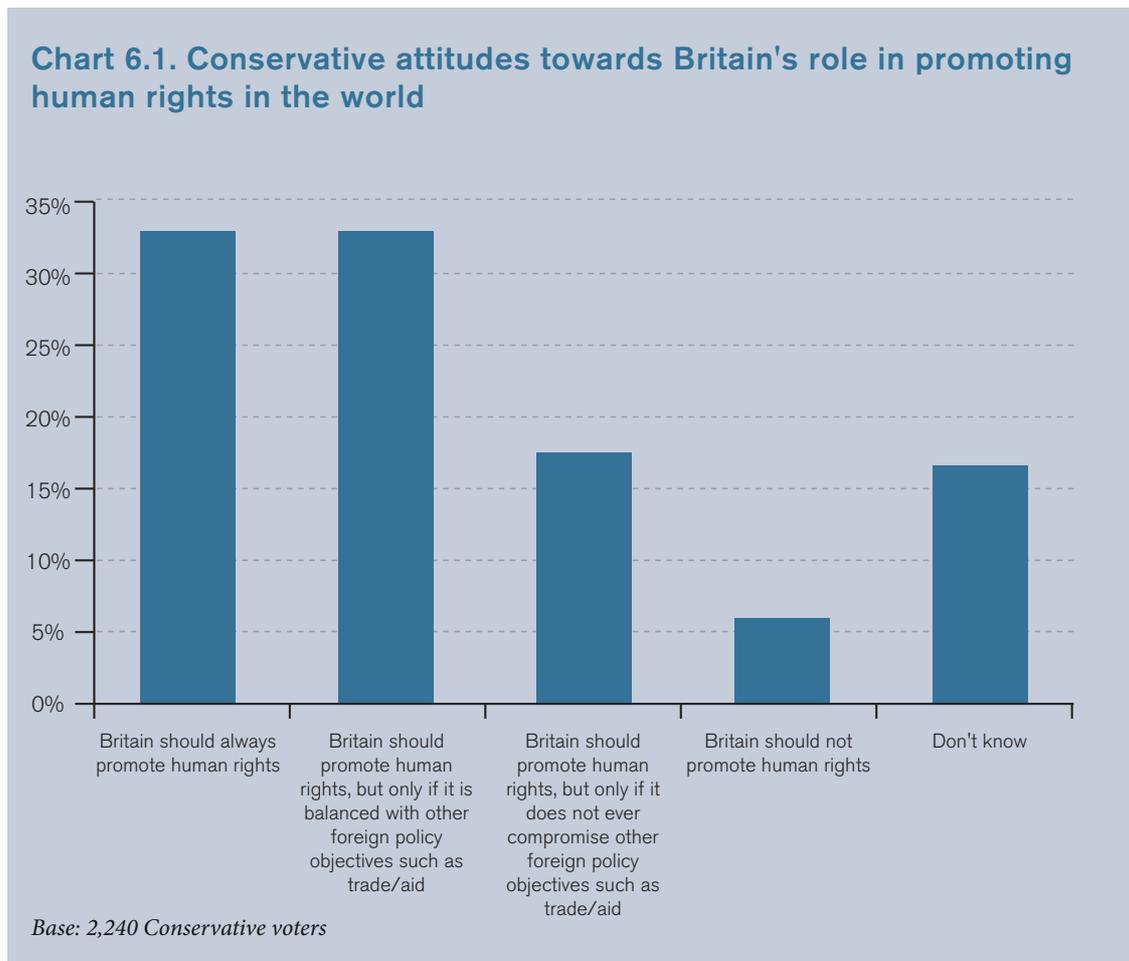
Bright Blue believes Britain, as the home of human rights, should be a global human rights champion after Brexit.<sup>18</sup> This polling gives us a chance to examine the current level of support among Conservatives for a British foreign policy which has a significant role for human rights.

Chart 6.1 shows that the overwhelming majority of Conservatives believe that Britain should promote human rights through its foreign policy, with only 6% stating that "Britain should not promote human rights". Thirty-three percent of Conservatives think that Britain should always promote human rights, irrespective of other foreign policy objectives. Another 33% think that Britain should promote human

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18. Ryan Shorthouse, Brexit is Britain's chance to become a human rights superpower, *The Telegraph*, 17 July, 2017.

rights, but balanced with other foreign policy objectives. Only 15% believe that human rights should be promoted “but only if it does not ever compromise other foreign policy objectives such as trade or aid”. Two thirds of Conservatives, therefore, support what we deem to be a ‘significant’ role for human rights in British foreign policy.



Conservatives are considerably more likely to think there should be a significant role for human rights than UKIP voters, but less likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters. In fact, only 50% of UKIP voters think there should be a ‘significant’ role for human rights compared to 82% of Labour voters and 86% of Liberal Democrats.

The variation in attitudes between different socio-demographic groups of Conservatives mirrors previous questions throughout the report. For example, 76% of Conservative remainers think there should be a ‘significant’ role for human rights, while 62% of Conservative

leavers were of this opinion. Age is, again, a significant factor. Seventy-seven percent of 18-24 year old Conservatives believe there should be a ‘significant’ role for human rights compared to 63% of Conservatives aged over 65.

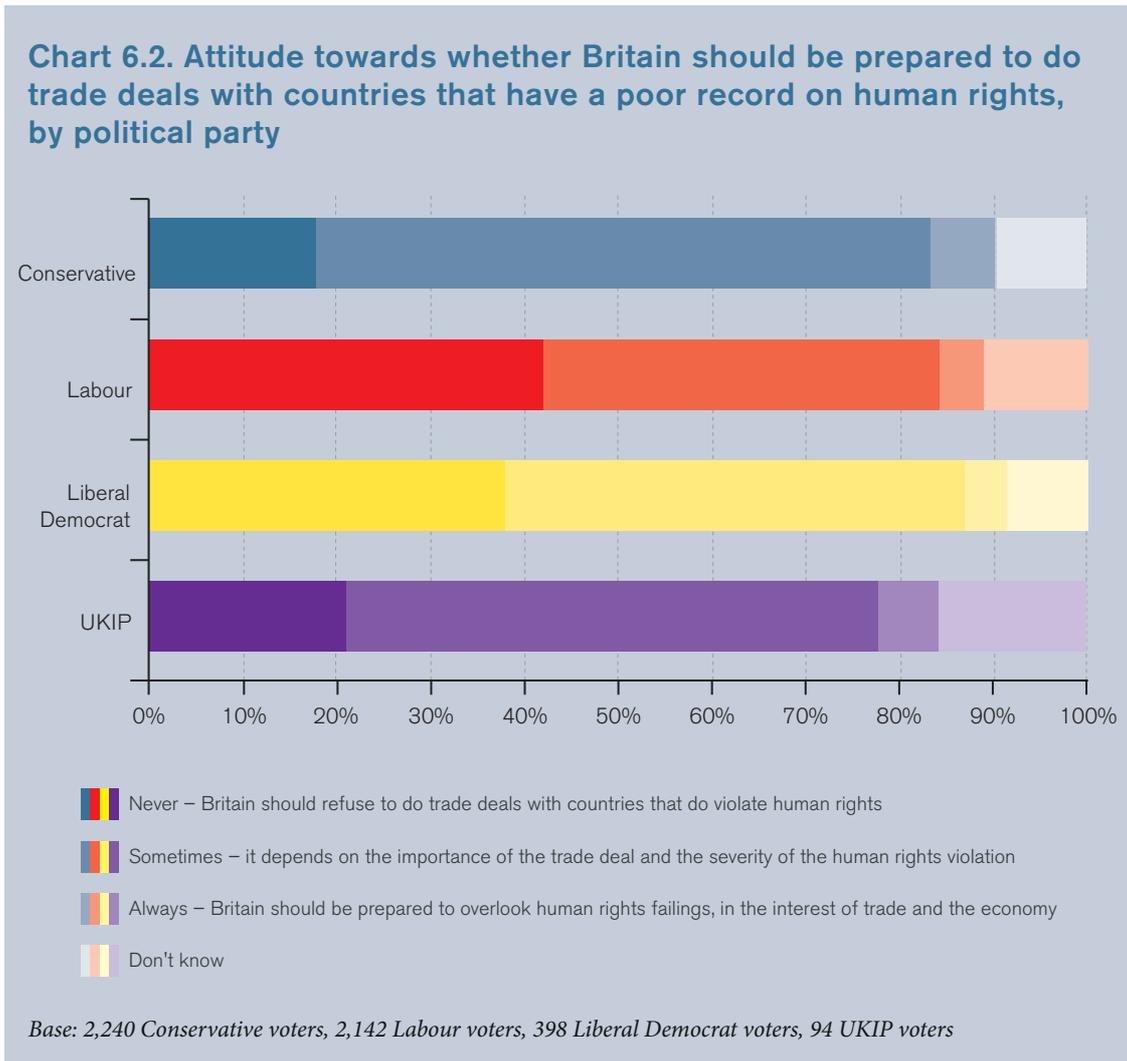
## **The role of human rights in trade deals**

Bright Blue recently proposed that, after Brexit, the Department for International Trade “should ensure that trade deals, where possible, include obligations to improve human rights in the partner countries.”<sup>19</sup>

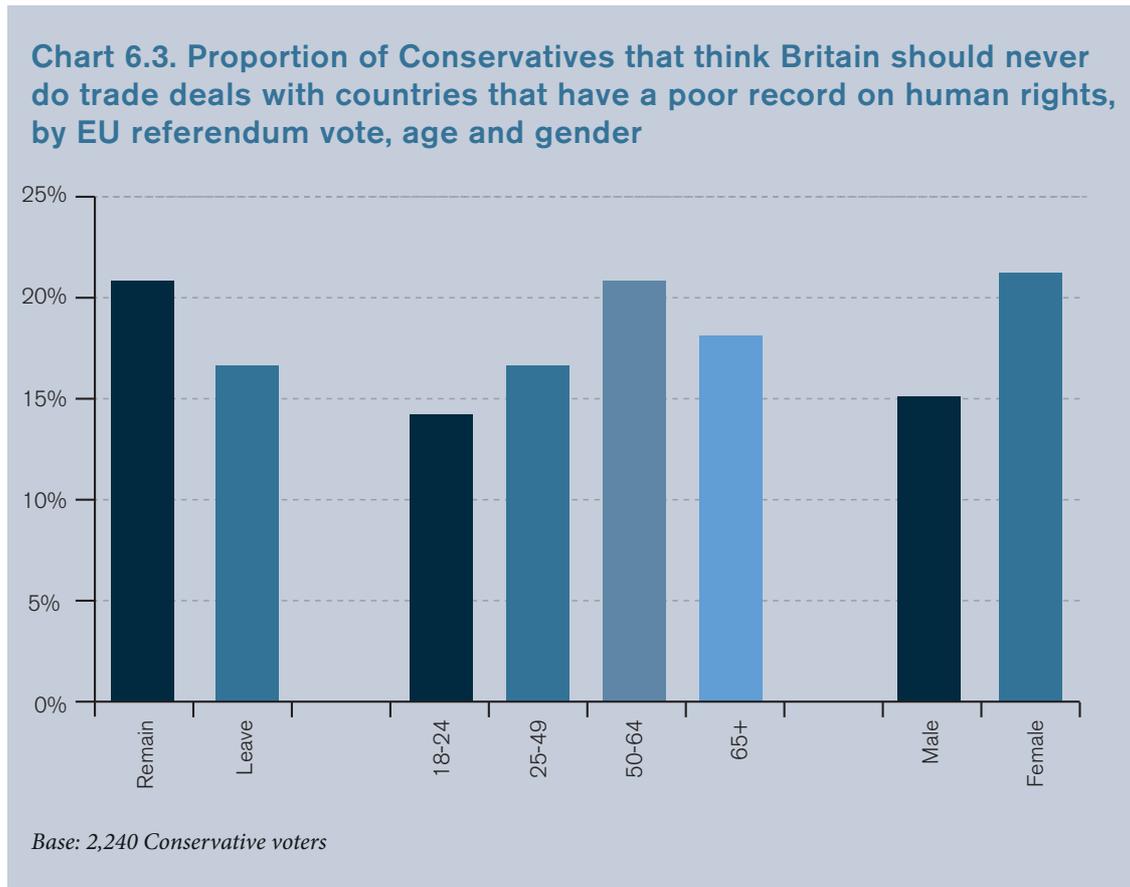
We asked respondents whether they think Britain should be prepared to do trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights. Chart 6.2 shows that the overwhelming majority of Conservatives, 65%, think that Britain should sometimes be prepared to do trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights depending on “the importance of the trade deal and the severity of the human rights violation”. This option is also chosen by 42% of Labour voters and 52% of Liberal Democrats. Conservatives are, however, less likely to believe that Britain should outright refuse to do trade deals with countries that violate human rights. Only 18% of Conservatives take this view, a smaller proportion than Labour voters (43%), Liberal Democrats (37%) or UKIP voters (21%).

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19. James Dobson and Ryan Shorthouse, *Britain breaking barriers: strengthening human rights and tackling discrimination* (Bright Blue: London, 2017), 60.



There is some variation between Conservatives with different socio-demographic characteristics. EU referendum vote, gender, and age proved the most significant factors, as detailed in Chart 6.3 below.



As with results have emerged for the rest of the polling, there is some difference in views according to their vote in the EU referendum. Twenty-one percent of Conservative remainers believe that Britain should never do trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights compared to 17% of Conservative leave voters.

Surprisingly, the results according to age disrupt the normal pattern of this report. Young Conservatives are in fact the group least likely to support the idea that Britain should never make trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights. Only 14% of Conservatives aged 18-24 support this idea, in contrast to 21% of those aged 50-64.

Unusually, gender is the most important socio-demographic factor, with 21% of female Conservatives stating that Britain should never make trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights. Only 15% of male Conservatives state the same.

## The role of human rights in aid deals

Bright Blue recently recommended that the Department for International Development (DfID) add improving human rights as a sixth priority for UK aid.<sup>20</sup>

We asked respondents whether they think Britain should be prepared to give aid to countries that have a poor record on human rights.

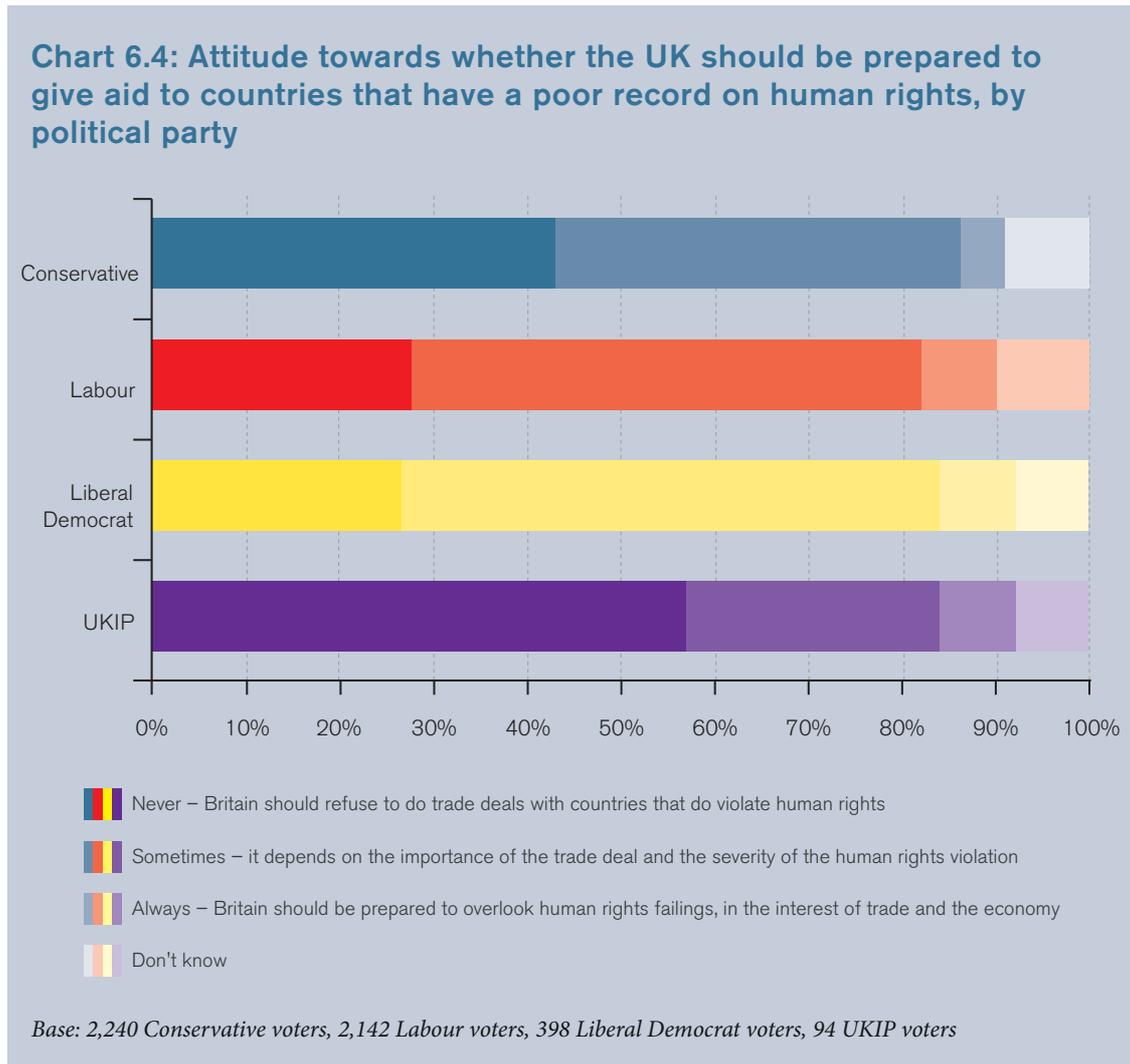
Chart 6.4 shows that Conservative and UKIP voters are both significantly more likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters to believe that Britain should never give aid to countries that have a poor record on human rights. Forty-five percent of Conservatives and 57% of UKIP voters choose never, as opposed to 29% of Labour voters and 28% of Liberal Democrats.

In comparison, 43% of Conservatives state that Britain should sometimes be prepared to give aid to countries that have a poor record on human rights.

Only a small proportion of Conservatives (4%) believe that Britain should always be prepared to give aid to such countries. Overall, in fact, only 7% of voters of all parties believe aid should be given regardless of human rights failings.

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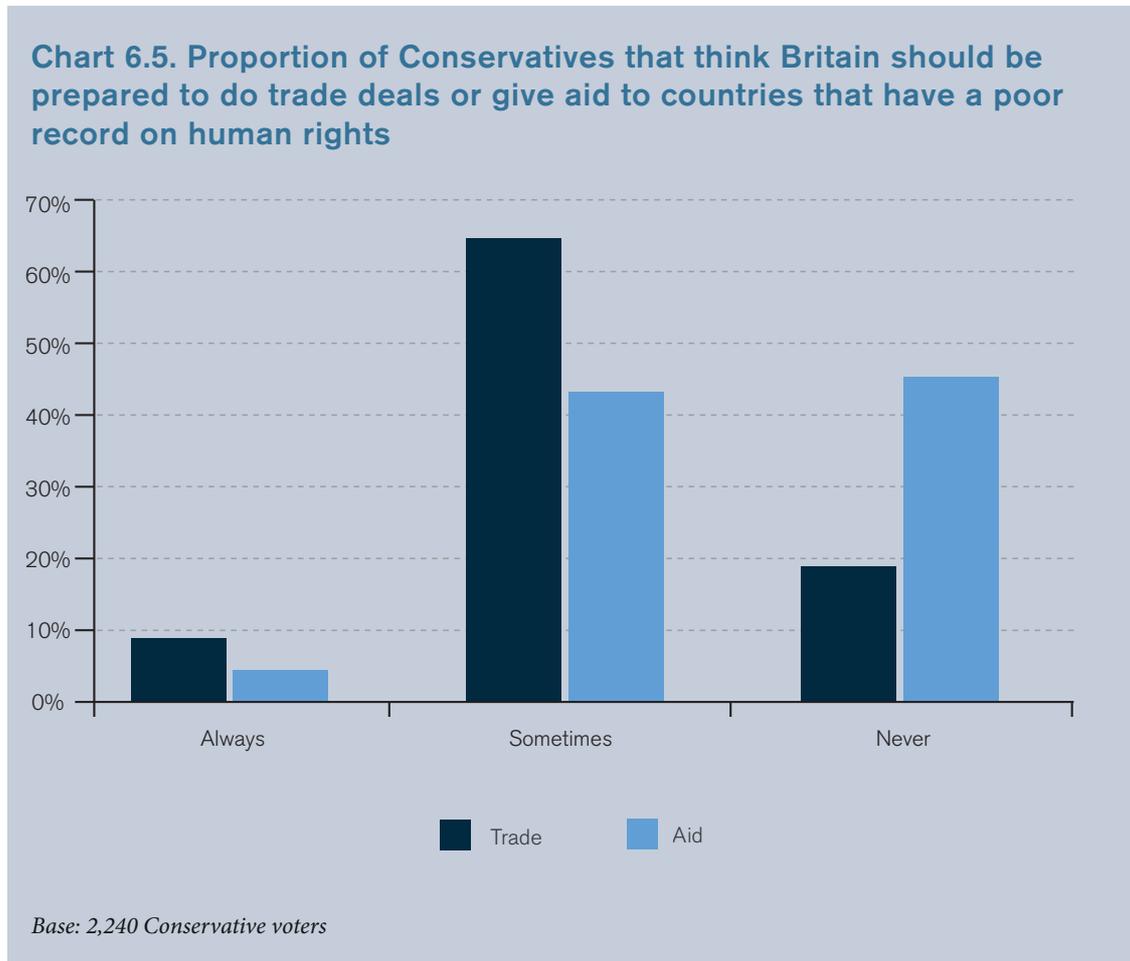
20. Ibid., 62.



Ostensibly, the results shown in Chart 6.4 suggest that Conservatives are more supportive of the UK Government using the economic leverage provided by its aid money to improve human rights throughout the world. However, it is also possible that Conservative attitudes shown here are a result of greater scepticism towards the value of international aid generally, and a corresponding belief that Britain should provide less aid to all countries, including those that routinely violate human rights. Certainly, past polling indicates that Conservatives are more likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters to believe that Britain

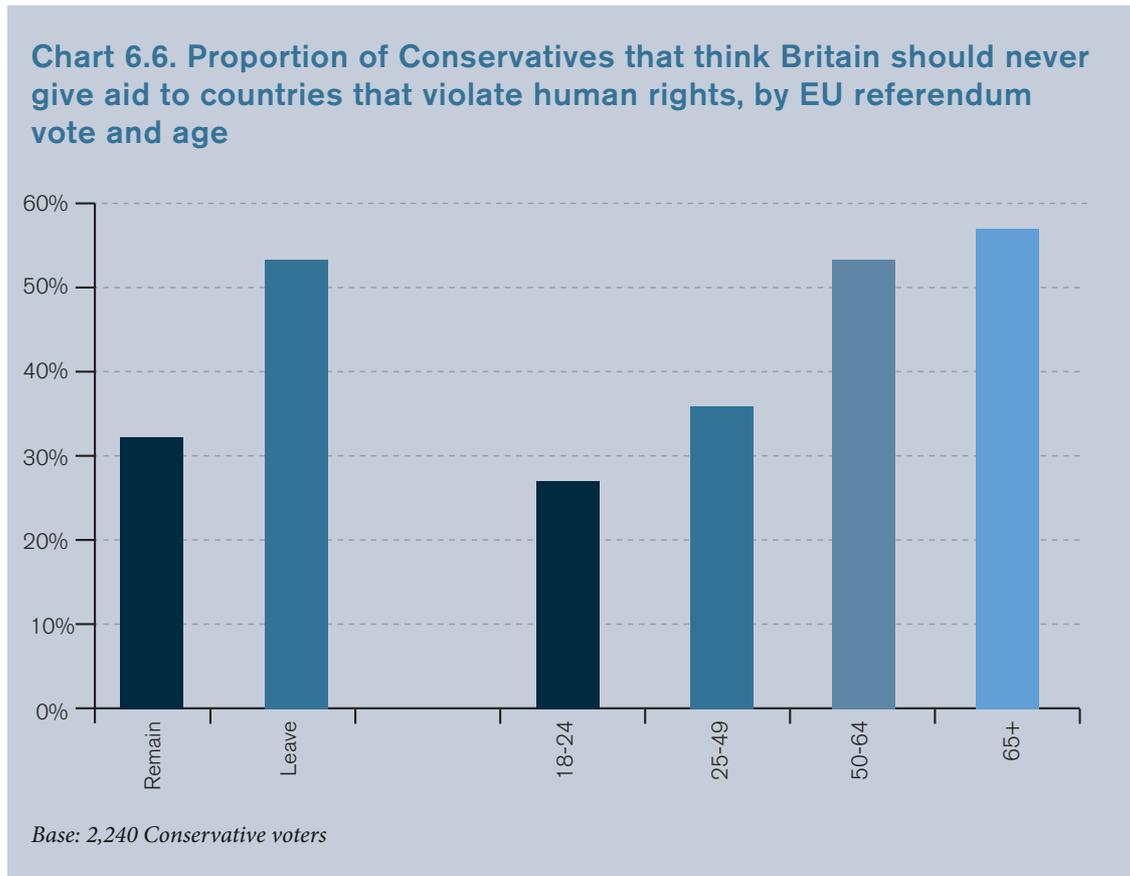
should cut its international aid budget.<sup>21</sup>

The difference between Conservative attitudes to the role of human rights in trade policy and in aid policy are demonstrated more clearly in Chart 6.5.



There is more variation among rights. Chart 6.6 below highlights the socio-demographic characteristics that lead to the greatest variation of opinion. It is clear these characteristics are commonly appearing as important differentials.

21. Chatham House and YouGov, “Internationalism or Isolationism? The Chatham House–YouGov Survey” (2015), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/internationalism-or-isolationism-chatham-house-yougov-survey>.



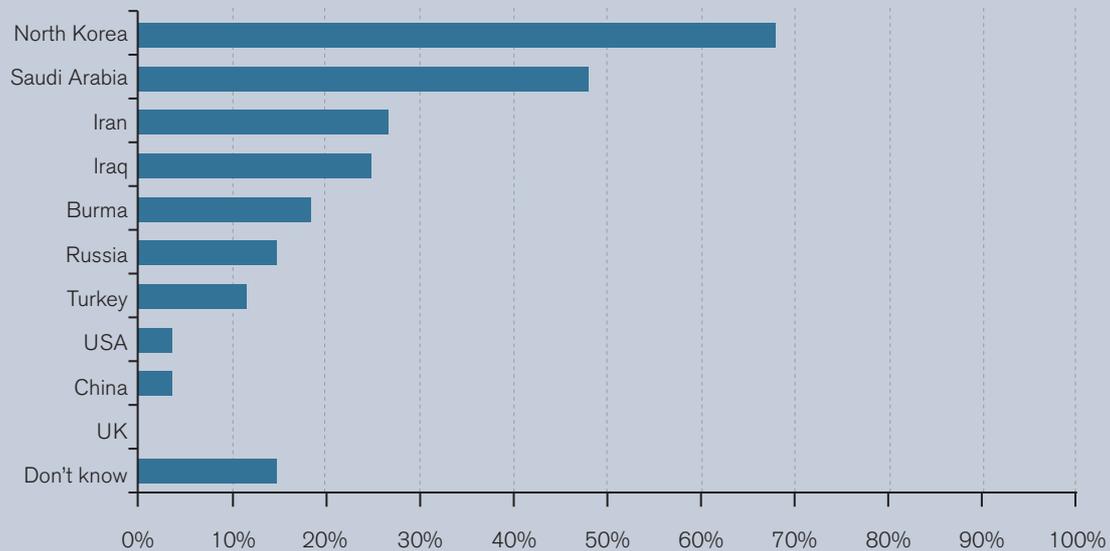
Fifty-one percent of Conservative leavers think that Britain should never give aid to these countries, in comparison to 32% of Conservative remainers.

Just over half of both Conservatives aged 50-64 (51%) and those aged 65 and over (52%) state that Britain should never give aid to countries that violate human rights. For 18-24 year-olds, the figure is 27%.

### **Countries with the worst record on human rights**

Chart 6.7 reveals the countries that Conservatives believe have the worst records on human rights.

**Chart 6.7. Proportion of Conservative voters that chose each country as one of the two or three with the worst human rights record**



Base: 2,240 Conservative voters

North Korea is the top selection, with 67% of Conservatives believing that it is one of the two or three countries with the worst record on human rights. Saudi Arabia is the second most popular choice with 49%. Notably, 0% of Conservatives report the United Kingdom as the world's worst.

Conservative results for this question are roughly in line with voters from other parties. The only significant differences being that Conservatives are more likely to choose Iran (27%) or Iraq (24%) as one of the countries with the worst human rights record than Labour voters – 19% of whom choose Iran and 19% who choose Iraq. Conservative voters are also more likely to choose these two countries than Liberal Democrat voters – 18% of whom choose Iran and 16% Iraq. Conservatives are, however, less likely to choose the USA or Russia. Nine percent of Labour and 7% of Liberal Democrats voters cite the USA as the world's worst compared to 3% of Conservatives. While 21% of Labour voters and 24% of Liberal Democrat voters identify Russia as having the worst record on human rights compared to 15% of Conservatives.

## Conclusion

This chapter examines the role that Conservatives believe human rights should play in Britain's foreign policy. A clear majority of Conservatives believe that Britain should play a significant role in promoting human rights around the world.

The vast majority of Conservatives are not in favour of ruling out trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights. Most believe that a decision should be made based on the importance of the trade deal and the severity of the human rights violations involved.

With regards to giving aid, Conservatives are evenly split between those that think we should never give aid to countries that abuse human rights, and those that think a decision should be made based on the importance of the aid and the severity of the human rights violations involved.

Conservatives differ from Labour and Liberal Democrat voters in that they are more likely to believe that Britain should make trade deals with countries that violate human rights, but less likely to believe Britain should give aid to countries that violate human rights.

## Chapter 7: **Prevalence of and tackling discrimination**

In this chapter, we will examine Conservatives' views on discrimination in the UK, both regarding its prevalence and ways it can be addressed. First, we examine how much discrimination and abuse of various types Conservatives believe currently exists in the UK. Second, we discover how much discrimination and abuse that different Conservatives have experienced. Third, we analyse the reasons that Conservatives think people from certain minority groups are less likely to be in employment, and assess Conservatives' attitudes towards measures for improving the recruitment of minority groups.

### **The prevalence of discrimination and abuse**

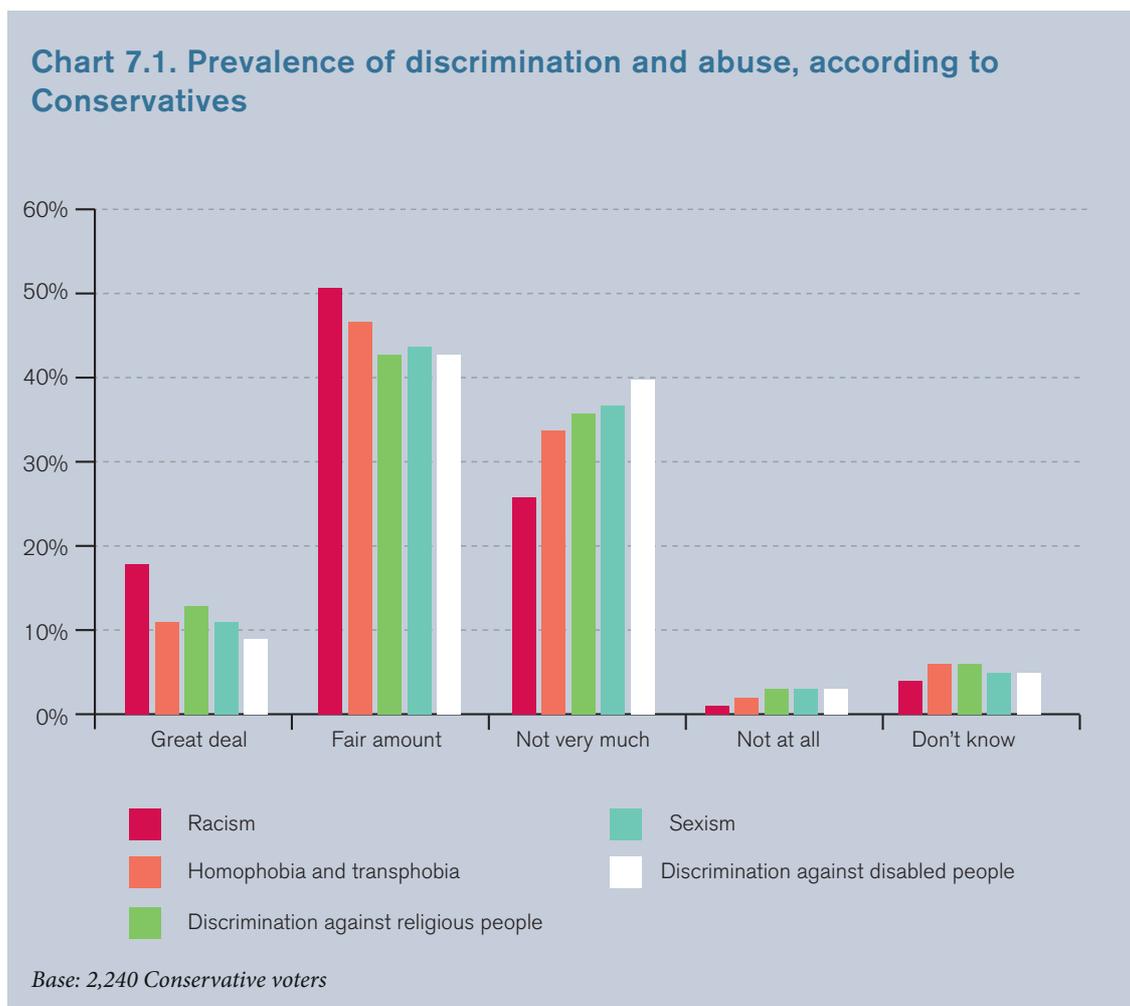
In her first speech as Prime Minister, Theresa May lambasted the “burning injustices” that prevent certain minority groups from reaching their full potential. The Government has since published a race disparity audit detailing differing outcomes in education, health, employment and other areas for different BME groups.

We asked Conservatives how much discrimination and abuse of five types they believe currently exists in Britain: racism, homophobia and transphobia, discrimination against religious people, sexism, and discrimination against disabled people.

Chart 7.1 reveals that a majority of Conservatives believe that each of these types of discrimination currently exist – to varying degrees –

in Britain. We deem all Conservatives who report that “a great deal”, “a fair amount” and “not very much” of each type of discrimination and abuse to believe it exists. However, respondents who report “not very much” obviously do not believe it is common. Therefore, we deem respondents who report that “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of each type of discrimination and abuse exists to believe a ‘significant’ amount of it exists.

The type of discrimination or abuse that is regarded by Conservatives as most prevalent is racism: 95% of Conservatives believe that it exists, while 69% report a ‘significant’ amount of it exists. Under 3% of Conservatives believe that none of the discriminations exist at all – a notably low figure.



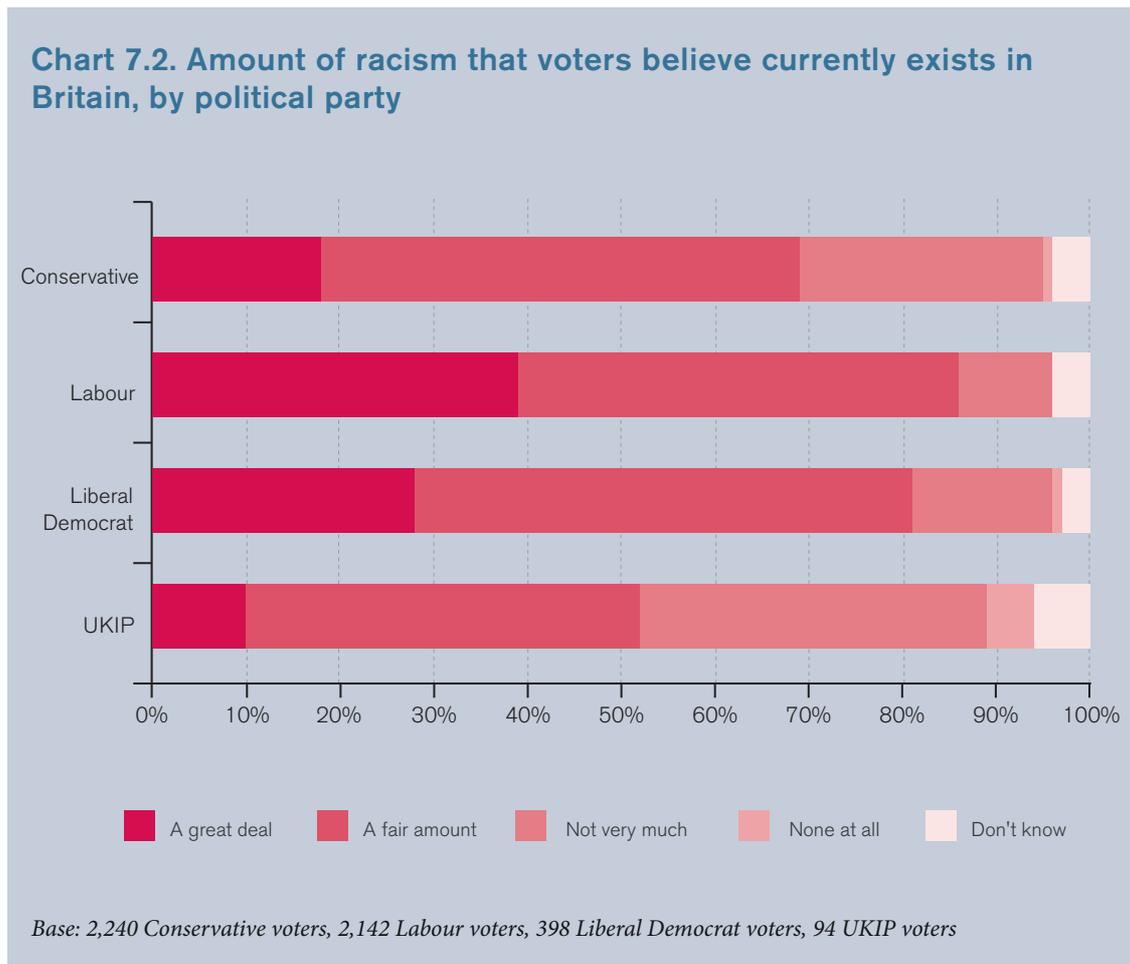
Discrimination and abuse against disabled people is regarded by Conservatives, and voters of other parties, as less likely to exist. Even so,

92% of Conservatives still report that discrimination against disabled people exists in Britain.

There are substantial differences of opinion between voters of different parties regarding the amount of ‘significant’ discrimination and abuse they believe currently exists in Britain. For all five of the types of discrimination we included in our polling, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters are substantially more likely to believe that either “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of discrimination and abuse exists towards them. For example, 86% of Labour voters and 81% of Liberal Democrats believe that either “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of racism exists compared to 69% of Conservatives.

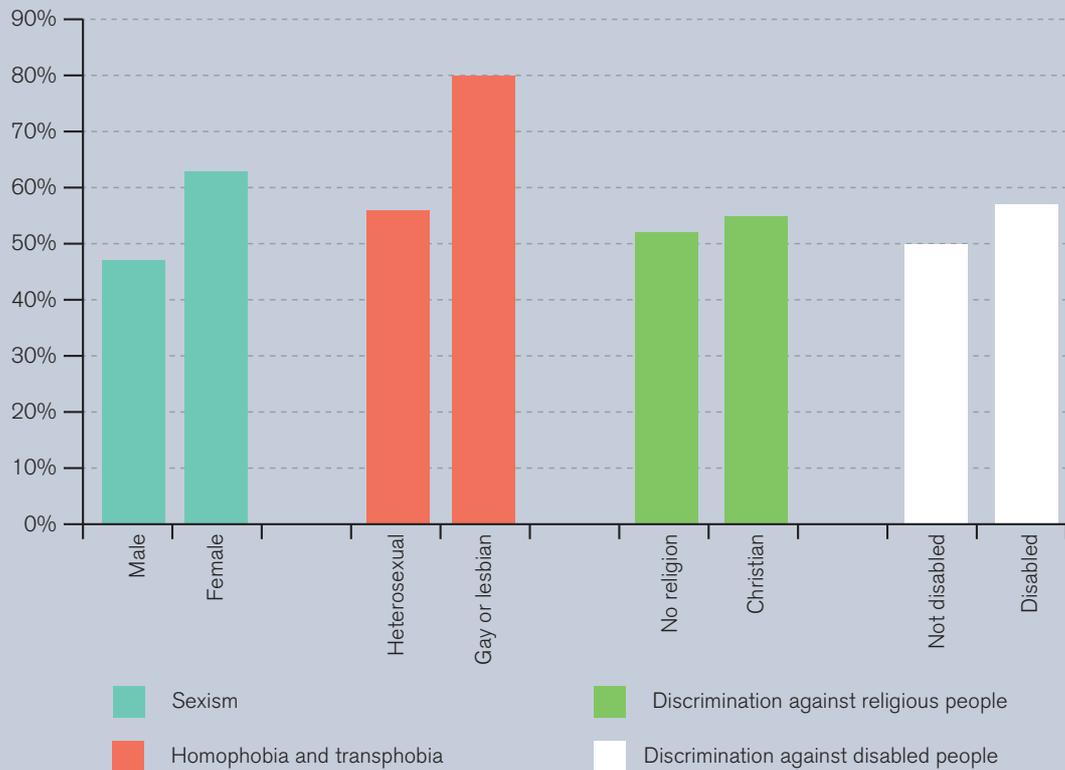
UKIP voters are substantially less likely to believe that ‘significant’ discrimination exists in Britain. For instance, 52% of UKIP voters believe that either “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of racism exists. The only exception to this is discrimination against disabled people where they report similar levels to Conservatives – 53% of UKIP voters believe that this type of discrimination and abuse exists “a great deal” or “a fair amount”.

In order to give more detail on the difference in attitudes among voters for different parties, Chart 7.2 focuses in on the results by political party for racism. The pattern evident in these results is consistently replicated, not necessarily with identical figures, in the results for the other four types of discrimination and abuse.



Equally, there are substantial divisions in attitude between different types of Conservatives. Chart 7.3 gives the results for each of the types of discrimination and abuse we surveyed in relation to the socio-demographic group that is most relevant to it. For example, Chart 7.3 shows the difference in attitudes between Conservative men and women in their attitudes to the prevalence of ‘significant’ sexism in Britain.

**Chart 7.3. Proportion of Conservatives that believe “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of the following types of discrimination and abuse currently exist in Britain, by gender, sexuality, religion and disability**



Base: 2,240 Conservative voters

All of those social-demographic groups of Conservatives that are likely to be disproportionately affected by a particular type of discrimination are more likely to believe that “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of this type of discrimination exists in Britain. The largest difference of opinion is over the amount of homophobia or transphobia in Britain. Fifty-seven percent of heterosexual Conservatives believe that there is “a great deal” or a “fair amount” of homophobia or transphobia, compared to 80% of gay or lesbian Conservatives.

Similar, although less extreme, divides exist for each of the other four types of discrimination. For example, 63% of Conservative women believe that “a great deal” or a fair amount of sexism exists compared to

47% Conservative men. Fifty-five percent of Conservative Christians believe a 'significant' amount of discrimination against religious people exists compared to 52% of non-religious Conservatives. Fifty-seven percent of disabled Conservatives report that "a great deal" or a "fair amount" of discrimination against disabled people exists compared to 50% of non-disabled Conservatives.

Other socio-demographic characteristics also prove relevant when identifying Conservative attitudes to the prevalence of 'significant' discrimination and abuse. Conservative remainers are more likely to believe that there is currently "a great deal" or a "fair amount" of all five types of discrimination abuse we surveyed. On average, across the five types of discrimination and abuse, remainers are 9 percentage points more likely to believe it is happening "a great deal" or "a fair amount" in comparison to leavers.

The results for age are less consistent across the various types of discrimination. Older Conservatives are more likely to believe that there is "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of sexism in Britain. Fifty percent of Conservatives aged 18-24 believe this, compared to 57% of those aged 50-64. The opposite pattern is evident for homophobia or transphobia, with young Conservatives believing that it is more prevalent than older Conservatives. Sixty-five percent of Conservatives aged 18-24 believe that homophobia or transphobia exists "a great deal" or "a fair amount" in Britain, compared to 56% of those aged over 65.

Attitudes towards the prevalence of 'significant' racism and discrimination against disabled people follow the same pattern as sexism, with older Conservatives regarding them as being more prevalent in Britain. Sixty-five percent of Conservatives aged 18-24 believe "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of racism exists compared to 70% of Conservatives aged over 65. Equally, 41% of 18-24 Conservatives believe that discrimination against disabled people exists compared to 54% of Conservatives aged over 65.

Attitudes towards the prevalence of 'significant' discrimination

against religious people and discrimination against disabled people are more in line with homophobia or transphobia. Sixty-two percent of Conservatives aged 18-24 believe “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of discrimination against religious people exists compared to 53% of Conservatives aged over 65. Equally, 54% of 18-24 Conservatives believe that discrimination against disabled people exists compared to 41% of Conservatives aged over 65.

Gender is also an important factor in respondent’s beliefs about the prevalence of ‘significant’ discrimination. Sixty-five percent of female Conservatives state there is “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of homophobia or transphobia in Britain; whereas 51% of male Conservatives say the same. This disparity is replicated for all kinds of discrimination and abuse surveyed. On average, across the five types of discrimination and abuse, women are 13 percentage points more likely to believe it is happening “a great deal” or “a fair amount” in comparison to men.

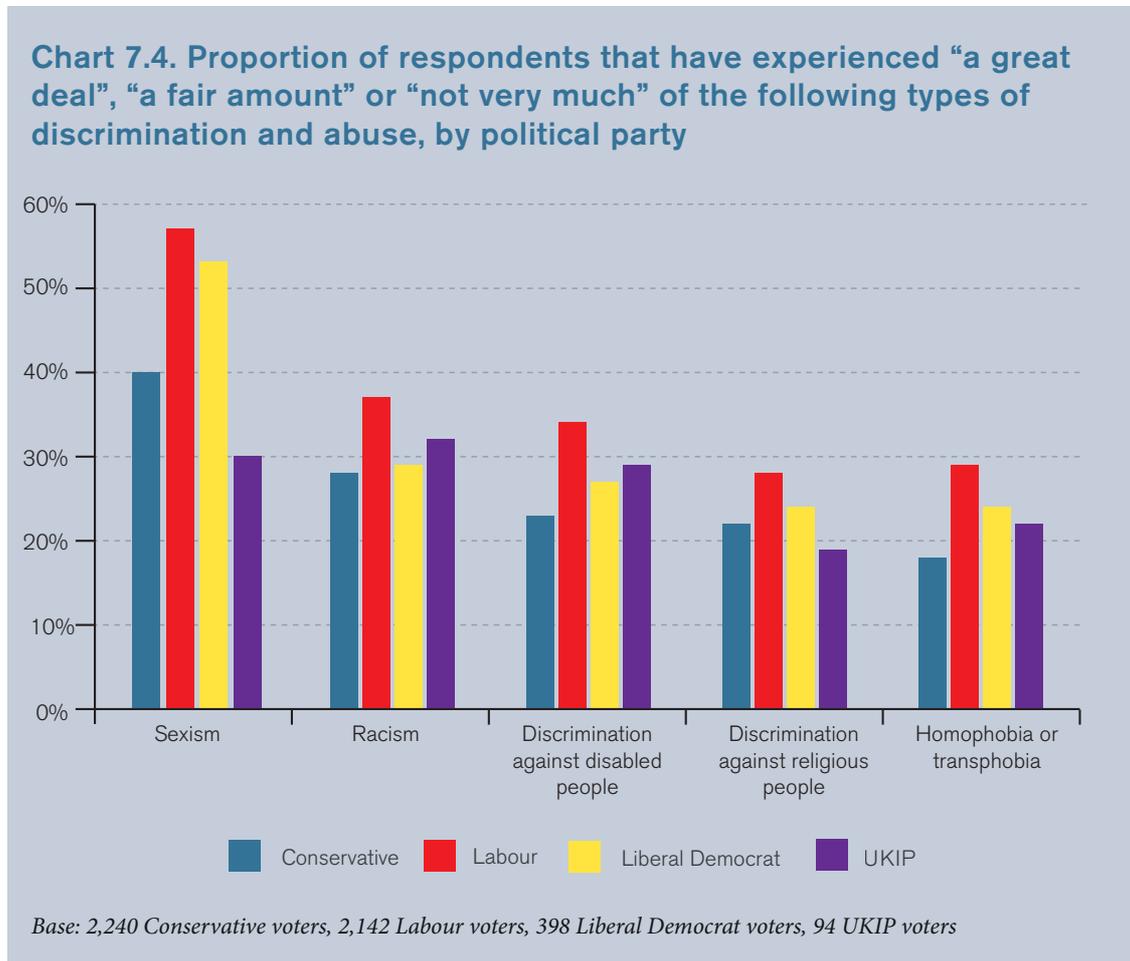
## **Experience of discrimination and abuse in Britain**

We asked respondents about the amount of discrimination or abuse that they have – to varying degrees – experienced. It is important to note that the experience of discrimination and abuse could mean either personally experiencing it or witnessing it. It could also refer to either discrimination experienced face-to-face, or through the media or the internet.

We deem all Conservatives who report that “a great deal”, “a fair amount” and “not very much” of each type of discrimination and abuse to believe it exists. However, respondents who report “not very much” obviously do not believe their experience of it is common. Therefore, we deem respondents who report they have experienced the different types of discrimination and abuse “a great deal” or “a fair amount” to have experienced a ‘significant’ amount of it.

Chart 7.4 shows the proportion of respondents who believe they have

experienced each of the five types of discrimination we surveyed, by political party.



The first thing to note is that, unsurprisingly, the proportion of Conservatives who have experienced discrimination and abuse, of all variables, is much lower than those who believe it exists in Britain. For example, only 28% of Conservatives report they have experienced racism compared to 95% of Conservatives who believe that racism exists. This observation applies to all voters of all political parties.

The second thing to note is that, for every type of discrimination and abuse, a majority of Conservatives have no experience of it.

The type of discrimination that has been experienced by the highest number of Conservatives is sexism. Chart 7.4 shows that 40% of Conservatives have experienced sexism. Discrimination against disabled people has been experienced by 23% of Conservatives. Only

18% of Conservatives have experienced homophobia or transphobia.

A notably smaller proportion of Conservatives have experienced a 'significant' amount of discrimination. Fourteen percent of Conservatives have experienced a 'significant' amount of sexism, 8% a 'significant' amount of racism, 8% a 'significant' amount of discrimination against disabled people, 7% a 'significant' amount of discrimination against religious people and 5% a 'significant' amount of homophobia and transphobia.

Labour voters are more likely to report having experienced 'significant' amount of all the types of discrimination we surveyed. Sixteen percent of Labour voters report that they had experienced a 'significant' amount of racism and 28% report this about sexism, exactly double the percentage of Conservatives that report the same for both types of discrimination and abuse.

The reasons behind the variation in the amount of discrimination and abuse experienced by voters for different political parties are complex. The demographic composition of the parties certainly explains some of the disparity. For example, in our survey, 2.8% of the Conservatives we polled were gay or lesbian, compared to 4.2% of non-Conservatives. However, this does not provide a complete explanation. First, because Conservatives from minority groups are themselves less likely to state that they have experienced 'significant' amount discrimination and abuse. For example, 5% of gay or lesbian Conservatives state that they have experienced a 'significant' amount of racism, compared to 10% of all gay and lesbian respondents. Second, because certain socio-demographic factors do not vary by party. For example, both Conservatives and non-Conservatives have roughly the same proportion of women and disabled people. But Labour voters are still considerably more likely to have experienced a 'significant' amount of sexism or discrimination against disabled people.

There is another demographic consideration that helps explain the disparity between voters from different parties on this experience of

discrimination and abuse issue. Younger people are more likely to report having experienced a 'significant' amount of all the different forms of discrimination and abuse, and Labour voters have a significantly younger average age.

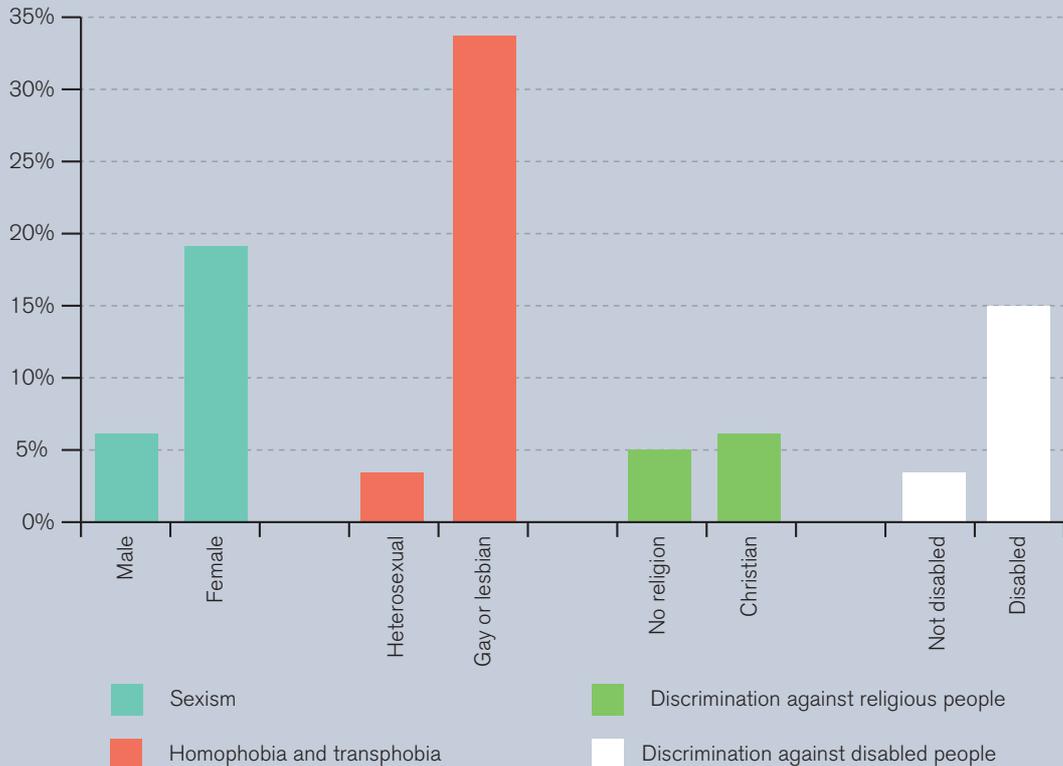
Voters of all political parties over the age of 65 are generally between two to three times less likely to state that they have experienced a 'significant' amount of all five types of discrimination than those aged 18-24. And, in our survey, only 4.6% of Conservatives were aged 18-24, compared to 7.6% of non-Conservative voters. Furthermore, 31.4% of Conservatives were aged 25-49, whereas the figure for non-Conservatives was 42.7%.

However, this disparity in the experience of discrimination by people of different ages again does not provide a full explanation of the fact that Conservatives generally experience less discrimination. Conservatives aged 18-24 are also less likely to state that they have experienced a 'significant' amount of all the five types of discrimination than non-Conservative of the same ages. For example, 15% of Conservatives aged 18-24 stated this about sexism, while 31% of non-Conservatives aged 18-24 said the same.

All of the above suggests that a large variety of factors are relevant in driving the sizeable disparity in the 'significant' experience of discrimination and abuse for voters of different parties shown in Chart 7.4.

As there was with the question concerning the existence of discrimination and abuse earlier in this chapter, there are substantial divisions in attitude between different types of Conservatives. Chart 7.5 gives the results for each of the types of discrimination and abuse we surveyed in relation to the socio-demographic group that is most relevant to it. For example, Chart 7.5 shows the proportion of Conservative men and women who have experienced a 'significant' amount of sexism.

**Chart 7.5. Proportion of Conservatives that have experienced “a great deal”, “a fair amount” or “not very much” of the following types of discrimination and abuse, by gender, sexuality, religion and disability**



Base: 2,240 Conservative voters

All of those social-demographic groups of Conservatives that are likely to be disproportionately affected by a particular type of discrimination are more likely to have experienced a ‘significant’ amount of the relevant type of discrimination and abuse.

The largest difference of opinion is over the experience of homophobia or transphobia in Britain. Three percent of heterosexual Conservatives have experienced ‘significant’ amount of homophobia or transphobia, compared to 33% of gay or lesbian Conservatives. Similar, although less extreme, divides exist for each of the four types of discrimination and abuse.

As with Conservatives more generally, the proportion of Conservatives

who belong to a ‘minority’ group who have experienced discrimination and abuse is much lower than those who believe a ‘significant’ amount of it exists in Britain. For example, 33% of gay or lesbian Conservatives have experienced a ‘significant’ amount of homophobia or transphobia, yet 80% report a ‘significant’ amount of it exists.

## **Reasons for the lower employment rate of certain social groups**

The employment rate for certain social groups in the UK is significantly below the national average. For example, the Government’s recently published race disparity audit found that, in 2016, there was a ten percentage point gap between the employment rates of the ethnic minority population and the overall population.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in 2016, the disability employment gap — the difference between the employment rates of disabled and nondisabled people — stood at 32 percentage points.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the gender employment gap currently stands at 10%.<sup>24</sup>

There is a substantial and growing body of evidence concerning the different reasons for the lower employment rate of these groups. These include employer attitudes, uneven caring responsibilities, inequality in educational achievements, weaker social networks, and, particularly for disabled people, difficulty in completing work.<sup>25</sup>

We asked respondents what they believe are the reasons for the lower employment rate of certain ‘minority’ groups. Chart 7.6 shows the main reason given by respondents to our survey, by political party.

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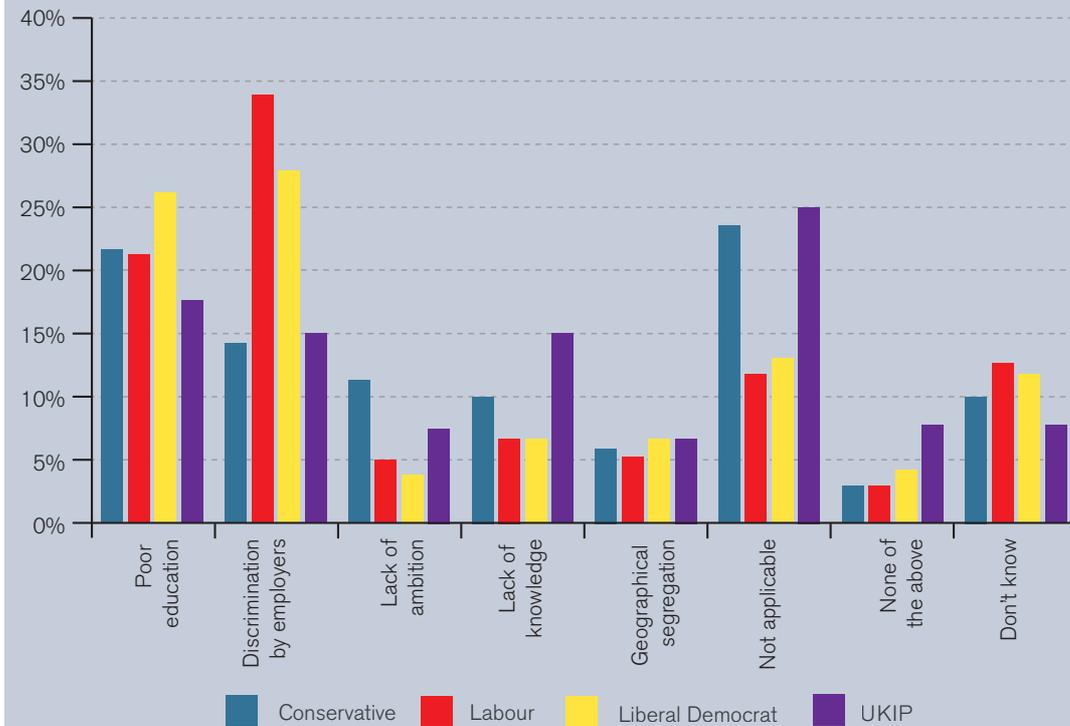
22. Cabinet Office, “Race Disparity Audit”, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/650723/RDAweb.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650723/RDAweb.pdf) (2017), 9.

23. Work and Pensions Select Committee, “Disability employment gap”, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmworpen/56/56.pdf> (2017), 32

24. Eurostat, “Gender statistics”, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_statistics) (2017).

25. Jergen Elmeskov and Karl Pichelmann, “Interpreting unemployment: the role of labour-force participation”, <https://www.oecd.org/eco/labour/33826311.pdf> (1993).

**Chart 7.6. Proportion of respondents that believe each of the following is the main reason why certain 'minority' groups are less likely to be in employment, by political party**



Base: 2,240 Conservative voters, 2,142 Labour voters, 398 Liberal Democrat voters, 94 UKIP voters

The most popular answer for Conservatives was “not applicable – I do not believe certain minority groups are less likely to be in employment than other groups”, meaning that 23% of Conservatives do not believe that certain ‘minority’ groups are less likely to be in employment than other groups. The popularity of this response suggests that a substantial minority of Conservatives are lacking in accurate information on this issue, an impression compounded by the fact that 10% of Conservatives select “don’t know” in response to this question. Almost twice as many Conservative voters (23%) were of the view that certain minority groups are not less likely to be in employment than other groups than Labour voters (12%).

The next most popular answer given by Conservatives for the lower employment rate of certain ‘minority’ groups was “poor education”, which was chosen by 22%. Generally, Conservatives tend to believe

that the responsibility for the poorer employment outcomes of certain ‘minority’ groups is down to individual reasons, such as “lack of ambition” rather than societal ones, such as “discrimination by employers”.<sup>26</sup>

The main points of contrast with voters from other parties is over the role of “discrimination by employers” and “lack of ambition” in the lower employment rates of certain ‘minority’ groups. Labour and Liberal Democrat voters are roughly twice as likely to choose the societal reason of “discrimination by employers” than Conservative or UKIP voters. Thirty-four percent of Labour voters and 28% of Liberal Democrats choose this option, compared to 14% of Conservatives and 15% of UKIP voters.

Meanwhile on the individualistic reason of “lack of ambition”, 11% of Conservatives believe that this is the main reason that certain ‘minority’ groups are less likely to be in employment. In contrast, only 5% of Labour voters, 4% of Liberal Democrats, and 7% of UKIP voters believe the same.

Chart 7.7 shows the proportion of particular groups of Conservatives that select “discrimination by employers” as the main reason for the lower employment rate of certain ‘minority’ groups. We chose to focus on the applicable social groups with poorer employment outcomes as referenced earlier in this chapter: namely, women and disabled people.

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26. A previous Bright Blue report, *Give and take*, also found that Conservatives are more likely to attribute poorer outcomes in life to individualistic rather than societal reasons. See: Ryan Shorthouse and David Kirkby, *Give and take: How conservatives think about welfare* (Bright Blue: London, 2017), 8.

**Chart 7.7. Proportion of Conservatives that think “discrimination by employers” is the main reason why certain minority groups are less likely to be in employment, by gender and disability**



Base: 2,240 Conservative voters

People from these two ‘minority’ groups are all more likely to identify “discrimination by employers” as the primary reason for this lower rate of employment. Sixteen percent of women believe this, as do 20% of Conservatives who are limited a lot by disability. In contrast, 12% of men and 14% of Conservatives who are not disabled believe the same.

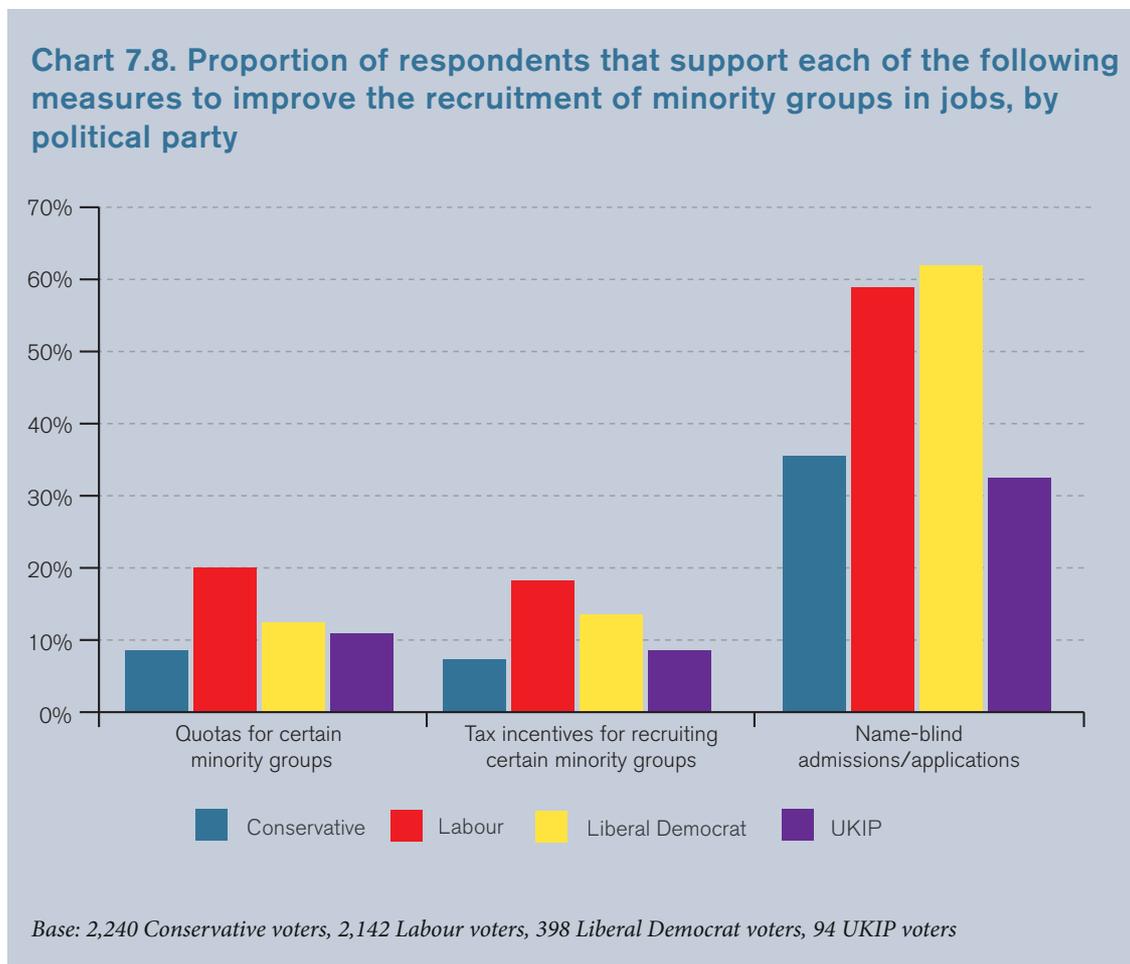
## Measures to tackle lower employment rate of minority groups

Bright Blue has recently advocated various policies designed to tackle discrimination in education, employment and society. One of the policies that we have advocated is that “all advertised jobs in the civil service and Government agencies, including senior civil service roles, should have name-blind and gender-blind recruitment procedures”<sup>27</sup>.

27. Dobson and Shorthouse, *Britain breaking barriers*, 24.

We have also advocated cutting employers’ National Insurance Contributions (NICs) on each disabled person earning below a certain gross salary an employer permanently hires.<sup>28</sup> We wanted to test these policies for the level of public support they attract.

Chart 7.8 shows the proportion of people that support name-blind applications, tax incentives for the recruitment of minority groups (of which Bright Blue’s NIC policy is a version), and quotas for minority groups, which is not a policy advocated by Bright Blue but is regularly suggested as a policy to improve the recruitment of minority groups into employment.



Both “quotas for certain minority groups” and “tax incentives for recruiting certain minority groups” are overwhelmingly opposed by

28. Ibid., 27.

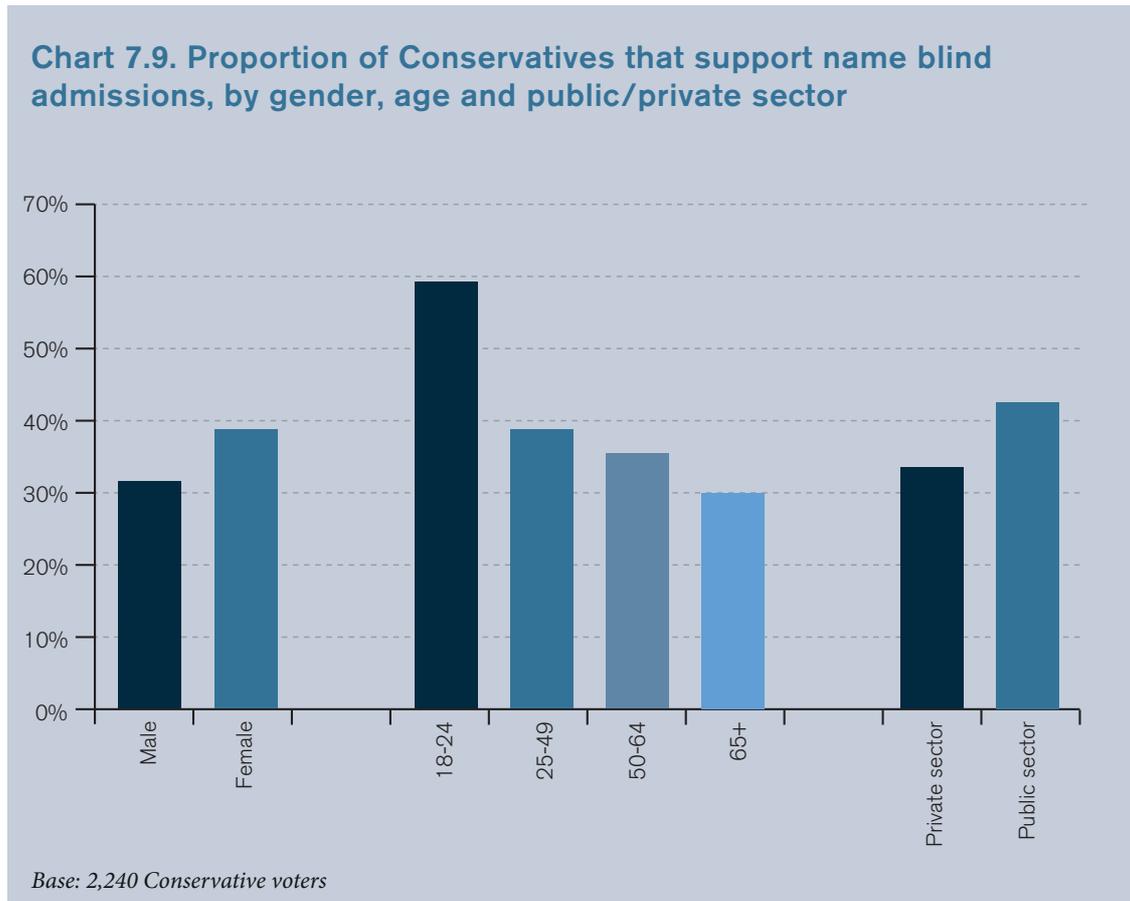
voters from all parties. Conservatives are the least likely to support either of these measures. Eight percent of Conservatives “strongly support” or “tend to support” (from this point on, simply support) the introduction of “quotas for certain minority groups”, and only 7% support “tax incentives for recruiting certain minority groups”. Labour voters are more than twice as likely to support both. But it is still the case that only 20% of Labour voters support quotas, and only 17% support tax incentives.

While the majority of voters from all parties oppose these two policies, it is also important to note that a significant minority of voters “neither support nor oppose” them. For example, 19% of Conservatives and 26% of Labour voters “neither support nor oppose” quotas, which is in line with the figures for the other two measures to improve minority recruitment.

However, “name blind admissions or applications” is supported by a much higher proportion of Conservatives than the first two policies. Twenty-eight percent “neither support nor oppose” it, and 22% “tend to oppose” or “strongly oppose” it (from this point on, simply, oppose). The measure is therefore opposed by less than a quarter of Conservatives.

This policy receives support across the political spectrum. Fifty-nine percent of Labour voters, 61% of Liberal Democrat voters, and 32% of UKIP voters support the policy. Indeed, only 27% of UKIP voters oppose it.

There is no significant variation among Conservatives in support for quotas or tax incentives. With regards to name-blind admissions, however, there is more variation between different socio-demographic groups of Conservatives. As Chart 7.9 illustrates, 39% of female Conservatives support this measure compared to 31% of male Conservatives. Name-blind admissions receive the most support from young Conservatives, with 59% of those aged 18-24 supporting their introduction compared to 30% of Conservatives aged over 65.



The measure also receives support from 41% of Conservatives working in the public sector compared to 33% of those working in the private sector. The strong level of support from these Conservatives is particularly interesting as Bright Blue recommended the introduction of name and gender-blind admissions to all civil service and public sector agency jobs.

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed both the amount of discrimination and abuse that Conservatives believe currently exists in the UK, as well as the amount of discrimination and abuse that they have experienced. Not only among Conservatives, but across all voters, people are much less likely to have experienced different forms of discrimination and abuse compared to perceiving it exists in the UK.

Conservatives believe that the most prevalent type of discrimination

in the UK is racism. And they are less likely than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters to believe that any of the five types of discrimination we surveyed exist.

Certain socio-demographic groups of Conservatives are, however, much more likely to believe that there is a significant amount of discrimination in the UK. In particular, groups that are disproportionately affected by discrimination and abuse, for example gay or lesbian Conservatives or female Conservatives, are more likely to believe that it exists.

We also revealed the amount of discrimination experienced by Conservatives. Conservatives are less likely to have experienced all forms of discrimination and abuse than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters. But certain types of Conservative are more likely to have done, in particular gay or lesbian Conservatives.

This chapter investigated Conservative attitudes towards the reasons for the lower employment rates of people from minority groups. After not believing they have lower employment rates, “poor education” is the most cited cause. Conservatives are generally sceptical of societal causes of poor employment outcomes such as “discrimination by employers”. Instead, they were more likely to identify individual causes, such as “lack of ambition”.

Finally, we examined whether Conservatives are in favour of three measures to tackle the lower employment rates of certain minority groups. Conservatives, and voters from all other parties, are overwhelmingly opposed to the introduction of tax incentives or quotas. Name-blind admissions are, however, supported by a higher proportion of all voters, including Conservatives. Only a minority of all voters oppose this policy.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This report has unearthed the views of Conservatives about the existence of, importance of, and measures on human rights and discrimination. It explains how their attitudes are different to voters of other political parties, as well as how they vary according to different socio-demographic characteristics.

Our report examined what Conservative views are on: the existence, applicability, value, and misuse of human rights; the importance and applicability of specific human rights; the role of different human rights legislation and institutions; the extent to which human rights should play a role in Britain's foreign policy; and the prevalence of, their experience of, and measures to tackle discrimination and abuse in the UK.

This report revealed eleven main findings:

- **Conservatives believe human rights exist, but strongly believe they help criminals to avoid prosecution.** The majority of Conservatives believe human rights exist, and are as likely to do so than voters from other parties. They are, however, divided about whether human rights should apply to all people all the time, and whether human rights prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens. More than voters of more left-wing political parties, Conservatives do strongly and uniformly believe that human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution.

- **Conservatives do not believe human rights are an important political issue.** Only a very small minority of Conservatives regard human rights as a top election issues, citing Brexit, immigration, and the economy as the most important issues.
- **Conservatives believe the most important human right is the right to a fair trial.** Conservatives' views on this are very similar to voters of all political parties who identify similar rights as the most important human rights. Conservatives are, however, much less likely to believe specific and high-profile human rights – such as right to a fair trial and freedom of expression – should be protected for suspected and convicted criminals, terrorists, and hate preachers than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters, but consistently more likely than UKIP voters. In particular, Conservatives are very sceptical that suspected or convicted terrorists and hate preachers should have key human rights.
- **Conservatives are more likely to believe that human rights are best protected by traditional English common law.** Only a small minority of Conservatives identify the HRA, and a very small minority the ECHR, as the piece of legislation that provides the best protection for human rights in the UK. Labour and Liberal Democrat voters are more likely to believe international legislation is most important, whereas Conservatives are more likely to believe national legislation is.
- **Conservatives do not think that Britain remaining a signatory to the ECHR is a priority.** A slight majority of Conservatives think that it is not important to remain a signatory to the ECHR, whereas an overwhelming majority of Labour and Liberal Democrat voters do. However, this does not necessarily mean Conservatives want to withdraw from the ECHR.
- **Conservatives are sceptical of the role of courts in overturning laws from Government that violate human rights, especially international courts.** A slight minority of Conservatives believe that

British courts should have the power to overturn laws enacted by the UK government, whereas a firm majority of voters from more left-wing parties do. Conservatives are particularly opposed to giving this power to international courts.

- **Conservatives strongly believe that Britain should play a significant role in promoting human rights around the world.** The overwhelming majority of Conservatives support a significant role for human rights in British foreign policy. Almost two thirds of Conservatives believe that a decision to sign a trade deal with a country that abuses human rights should be based on the importance of the trade deal and the severity of the abuses. Contrastingly, with aid, nearly half of all Conservatives believe that we should never give it to countries violating human rights.
- **Conservatives believe that the most prevalent type of discrimination in the UK is racism.** The vast majority of Conservatives believe that all forms of discrimination and abuse that we surveyed (racism, sexism, homophobia or transphobia, discrimination against religious people, and discrimination against disabled people) exist. But racism is the form of discrimination that Conservatives believe is most prevalent in the UK.
- **Most Conservatives have not experienced discrimination, and are less likely to have experienced it than voters of more left-wing political parties.** Conservatives – along with voters of all other political parties – are much less likely to have experienced different forms of discrimination and abuse compared to perceiving it exists in the UK. In fact, a majority of all Conservatives have not experienced discrimination or abuse. Conservatives are less likely to have experienced all forms of discrimination and abuse than Labour or Liberal Democrat voters. The form of discrimination and abuse that Conservatives are most likely to have experienced is sexism.
- **Conservatives are sceptical that certain ‘minority’ groups have lower employment rates.** The highest proportion of Conservatives

– almost a quarter – report that they do not believe that certain ‘minority’ groups are less likely to be in employment than other groups, despite the evidence showing otherwise. If they do accept it, Conservatives are most likely to attribute the lower employment rates to “poor education”. In comparison to voters of left-wing political parties, Conservatives were sceptical of societal causes of poor employment outcomes such as “discrimination by employers”. Instead, they were more likely to identify individualistic causes, such as “poor education” and “lack of ambition”.

- **Conservatives support name-blind admissions to tackle the lower employment rates of certain ‘minority’ groups.** Only around one in five Conservatives oppose name-blind admissions. But Conservatives, and voters from all other parties, are overwhelmingly opposed to the introduction of tax incentives or quotas to support ‘minority’ groups into employment.

### **Variation according to socio-demographic characteristics**

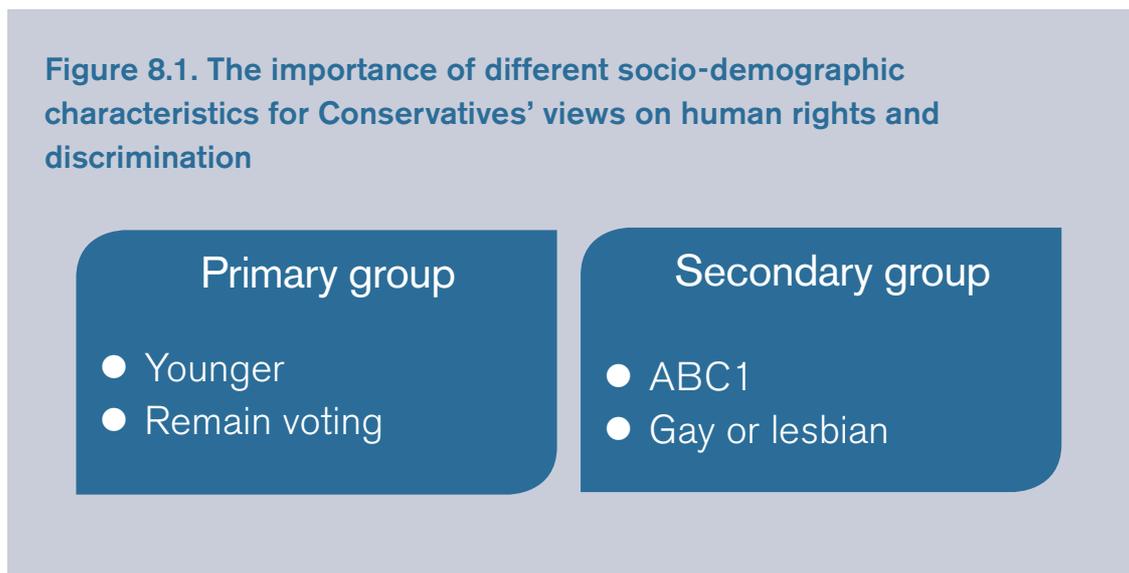
Overall, we found significant variation among different types of Conservatives in their views on human rights and discrimination. There were groups of Conservatives who are frequently more sympathetic towards the existence and importance of human rights and discrimination.

Young Conservatives and Conservatives who voted to remain in the EU referendum are consistently more positive about human rights and concerned about discrimination. For example, they were both more likely to: believe in the importance and universality of human rights; that human rights should play a ‘significant’ role in British foreign policy; that discrimination exists and they have experienced it; and to support policies designed to tackle discrimination.

Occasionally, there was also variation among Conservatives by sexuality and social grade. Specifically, Conservatives of a higher social grade

(ABC1) and gay or lesbian Conservatives are often more sympathetic about the role of human rights and the prevalence of discrimination.

We can divide these socio-demographic characteristics into two groups: a prime group, which includes characteristics that are consistently associated with sympathetic views towards human rights and tackling discrimination, and a second group, which includes characteristics that are sometimes associated with these views. This is shown in Figure 8.1.



Two other socio-demographic characteristics stand out. First, gender. Men are sometimes more sympathetic to the importance of human rights, but, on other occasions, women are. For example, men are more likely to support the protection of specific human rights for suspected and convicted criminals. While women are significantly more likely to believe that Britain should never make trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights.

Second, if Conservatives belonged to a social groups that are disproportionately affected by discrimination and abuse, they are more likely to believe it exists, to have experienced it, and to support legislation which prevents it. So, for example, disabled Conservatives are more likely to believe discrimination against disabled people exists and to experience it and women are more likely to believe sexism exists and to have experienced it. Gay and lesbian Conservatives are much more likely than

heterosexual Conservatives to identify the Equality Act – which provides significant protections to gay or lesbian people in the UK – as the piece of legislation that best protects human rights.

## **Conclusion**

This report has demonstrated that Conservatives believe human rights exist and strongly believe that Britain should play a significant role in promoting human rights around the world. After Brexit, the current Conservative Government must ensure that human rights do indeed play a significant role in Britain's foreign policy.

The Prime Minister was right to highlight the “burning injustices” that prevent individuals from certain social groups in Britain from succeeding to the best of their potential. Most Conservatives agree that all different types of discrimination – including gender, racial, sexual, disability and religious discrimination – exists to a significant level, even if a majority of them have not experienced it. Conservatives will support some policies – such as, name-blind admissions – to improve the employment rate of ‘minority’ groups

Truthfully, however, the report does reveal some scepticism among Conservatives towards the use of, current legislation on, and the institutions related to human rights. Conservatives are especially sceptical of international legislation and institutions. Generally, Conservatives are more sceptical about the role of human rights than voters of more left-wing parties.

The strengthening of human rights and mitigation of all forms of discrimination ought to be popular with those who are attracted to conservatism: both aims seek to support individual liberty and flourishing. With considered approaches and policies, a Conservative Government ought to be able to build a popular and successful agenda on human rights and discrimination.

## Annex: Polling questions

1) Which, if any, of the following are the most important issues to you when deciding how to vote in a general election? Please tick up to five.

- Health
- Immigration & Asylum
- Crime
- The economy
- Tax
- Pensions
- Education
- Family life & childcare
- Housing
- The environment
- Britain leaving the EU
- Transport
- Welfare benefits
- Infrastructure
- Airport expansion
- Human rights
- None of these
- Don't know

**2) Thinking about the following statements, where would you place your views on the scale below?**

- Human rights prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens (0) | Human rights DO NOT prevent governments from unfairly treating their citizens (10)
- Human rights should not be given to everyone all the time (0) | All people have human rights, simply because they are human (10)
- Human rights allow criminals to avoid prosecution (0) | Human rights DO NOT allow criminals to avoid prosecution (10)
- Human rights generally don't exist (0) | Human rights generally do exist (10)

**3) Generally speaking how concerned or unconcerned are you about human rights?**

- Very concerned
- Fairly concerned
- Neither concerned nor unconcerned
- Fairly unconcerned
- Very unconcerned
- Don't know

**4) For each of the following, do you think their rights to a fair trial should be protected or not be protected?**

- Suspected criminals
  - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
  - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
  - Don't know
- Foreign suspected criminals

- Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
  - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
  - Don't know
  - Suspected terrorists
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
    - Don't know
- 5) **For each of the following, do you think their rights to freedom of expression should be protected or not be protected?**
- Convicted criminals
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
    - Don't know
  - Convicted terrorists
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
    - Don't know
  - Convicted hate preachers
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
    - Don't know
- 6) **For each of the following, do you think their rights to a family life should be protected or not be protected?**
- Convicted criminals
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
    - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
    - Don't know
  - Convicted terrorists

- Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
  - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
  - Don't know
- Convicted hate preachers
  - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD be protected
  - Their right to a fair trial SHOULD NOT be protected
  - Don't know

7) **Here is a list of rights that different people say are important. There may be special circumstances in which each right may be limited; but, in principle, which four or five of these do you think are most important?**

- Right to life
- Prohibition of torture
- Prohibition of slavery and forced labour
- Right to liberty and security
- Right to a fair trial
- No punishment without law
- Right to respect for private and family life
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of assembly and association
- Right to marry
- Right to an effective remedy (if rights are violated)
- Prohibition of discrimination
- None of the above
- Don't know

8) **The European Convention on Human Rights or ECHR is an international treaty designed to protect human rights and freedoms in Europe. How important, if at all, do you think it is**

**for the UK Government to commit to staying a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights?**

- Very important
- Fairly important
- Not very important
- Not important at all
- Don't know

**9) Which, if any, of the following do you think best protects human rights?**

- Traditional English Common Law
- Magna Carta
- Equality Act
- Human Rights Act
- European Convention on Human Rights
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- None of the above
- Don't know

**10) In principle, do you think it is right or wrong that an international court could overturn laws enacted by the British Government if these laws are found to violate human rights?**

- Right
- Wrong
- Don't know

**11) In principle, do you think it is right or wrong that a British court could overturn laws enacted by the British Government if these laws are found to violate human rights?**

- Right
- Wrong
- Don't know

**12) Generally speaking, how much, if any, of the following types of discrimination and abuse do you believe currently exists in Britain?**

- Racism
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all
  - Don't know
- Sexism
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all
  - Don't know
- Homophobia and transphobia
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all
  - Don't know
- Discrimination against religious people
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all

- Don't know
- Discrimination against disabled people
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all
  - Don't know

**13) How much, if any, of the following types of discrimination and abuse have you experienced?**

- Racism
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all
  - Don't know
- Sexism
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all
  - Don't know
- Homophobia and transphobia
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all
  - Don't know
- Discrimination against religious people
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount

- Not very much
- None at all
- Don't know
- Discrimination against disabled people
  - A great deal
  - A fair amount
  - Not very much
  - None at all
  - Don't know

**14) Which one, if any, of the following do you think is the main reason why certain minority groups are less likely to be in employment?**

- Lack of ambition
- Poor education
- Lack of knowledge
- Geographical segregation
- Discrimination by employers
- None of the above
- Don't know
- Not applicable – I do not believe certain minority groups are less likely to be in employment than other groups

**15) To what extent do you support or oppose the following measures in helping to improve the recruitment of minority groups in jobs?**

- Quotas for certain minority groups
  - Strongly support
  - Tend to support
  - Neither support nor oppose

- Tend to oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know
- Tax incentives for certain minority groups
  - Strongly support
  - Tend to support
  - Neither support nor oppose
  - Tend to oppose
  - Strongly oppose
  - Don't know
- Name-blind admissions/applications
  - Strongly support
  - Tend to support
  - Neither support nor oppose
  - Tend to oppose
  - Strongly oppose
  - Don't know

**16) Do you think Britain should or should not be prepared to do trade deals with countries that have a poor record on human rights?**

- Always – Britain should be prepared to overlook human rights failings, in the interest of trade and the economy
- Sometimes – it depends on the importance of the trade deal and the severity of the human rights violation
- Never – Britain should refuse to do trade deals with countries that do violate human rights
- Don't know

**17) Do you think Britain should or should not be prepared to give**

**aid to countries that have a poor record on human rights?**

- Always – Britain should be prepared to overlook human rights failings, in the interest of providing aid
- Sometimes – it depends on the importance of the aid and the severity of the human rights violation
- Never – Britain should refuse to give aid to countries that violate human rights
- Don't know

**18) Thinking about Britain's role in promoting human rights in the world... Which one of the following statements comes closest to your view?**

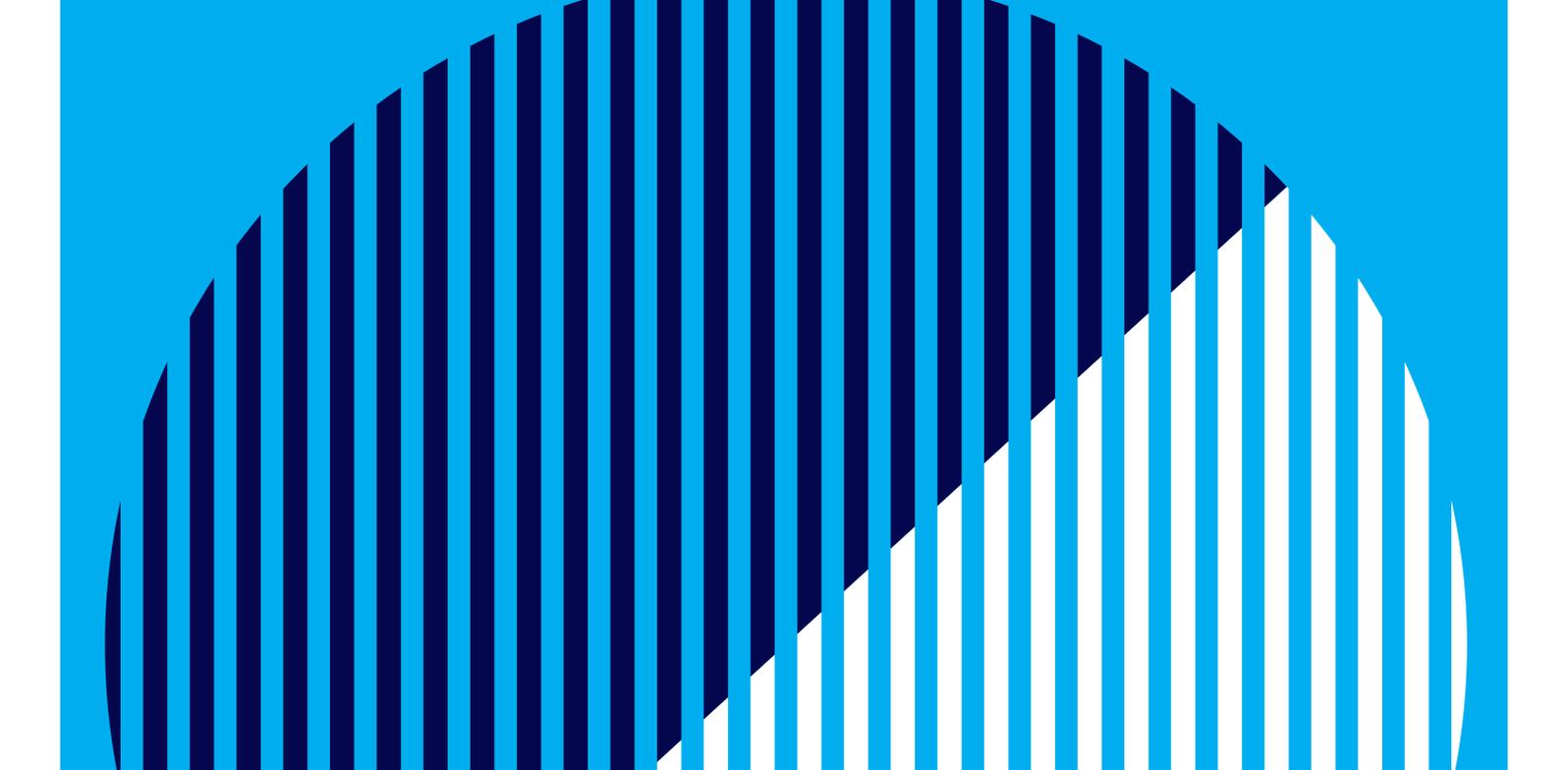
- Britain should be proud to always promote human rights
- Britain should but only sometimes if it is balanced with other foreign policy objectives such as trade/aid
- Britain should but only if it does not ever compromise other foreign policy objectives such as trade/aid
- Britain should not promote human rights
- Don't know

**19) Which two or three, if any, of the following countries do you think has the **\*\*worst\*\*** human rights record?**

- Burma
- Iran
- Iraq
- North Korea
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- The United States

## Individual identity

- The United Kingdom
- Turkey
- Other “please specify”
- None of the above
- Don’t know
- Not applicable – I don’t think any of these countries have the worst human rights record



Discrimination and the abuse of human rights are immoral, unjust and illegal barriers to individual freedom and flourishing. Tackling them should be at heart of conservative thinking and policymaking. However, conservatives are often considered to be sceptical of measures to strengthen human rights and tackle discrimination.

This polling report unearths in detail what Conservatives – including those from different social groups – really think about the existence of, importance of, and measures on human rights and discrimination.

Bright Blue Campaign  
[brightblue.org.uk](http://brightblue.org.uk)

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