

Conservatives really are from another planet

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The Guardian [has reported](#) on research led by Tim Bale, a professor of politics at Queen Mary, University of London, this morning. As they note, he began tracking the opinions of UK political party members after the 2015 election. The latest figures come from polling of more than 1,000 members of each of the four parties following last June's election. That certainly feels like a sample chosen to be statistically significant.

As they report, what is clear is that the opinion of Conservative Party members is likely to be significantly different to that of members of a Labour, the LibDems and SNP. I presume the Greens and UKIP were not included in the survey. In particular they note:

The study found that the various party members' opinions on leaving the EU were ... divergent ..., with only Conservatives supporting a harder Brexit. Around a quarter of Conservative members support the UK remaining in the EU's single market or customs, while just 14% back a referendum on a final deal.

In contrast, there is overwhelming backing for these options among members of the other parties, even Labour, which under Jeremy Corbyn is occupying the middle ground over Brexit. Among Labour members, 87% want the UK to remain in the single market, 85% in the customs union, and 78% support a new referendum.

I am not very surprised. Nor am I by this:

Similarly, on the economy there is what the authors describe as "a gulf between the Tory grassroots and the rest": just 11% of Conservative members agree that austerity has been taken too far, against 98% for Labour, 93% in the SNP and 75% among Lib Dems.

And age is not necessarily a factor:

The average age for members was remarkably similar, at 57 for Tories, 53 for Labour, 52 for the Lib Dems and 54 in the SNP.

All have a male bias: it is much more marked in the case of the Conservatives.

Three thoughts. First, if you thought Conservatives were hard to get along with now you know why; to anyone with a socially liberal persuasion they really are from a different planet.

Second, Labour needs to take note on Brexit. I am no great fan of Adonis, but he and others in the Labour centre ground are likely to correctly reflect the mood of the party on this issue and the Labour leadership, who say they pride themselves on reflecting members' views need to take serious note on this one if that claim is to remain credible.

Third, of course there are serious differences of view between Labour, the SNP, LibDems and the Greens too, come to that. If not they would not all need to exist. I do not for a moment wish to dismiss the importance of those differences, because they are real. But equally, the bedrock on which each of these parties is built is not that dissimilar in terms of opinion. Surely there is room for cooperation to ensure that we do not suffer the abuse of the more vulnerable in society that is the hallmark of Conservative policy again? Is that really too much to hope for?