



Ipsos MORI Summer Survey of MPs

Report prepared for Dignity in Dying

October 2009

Dignity
in dying
your life, your choice

Ipsos MORI



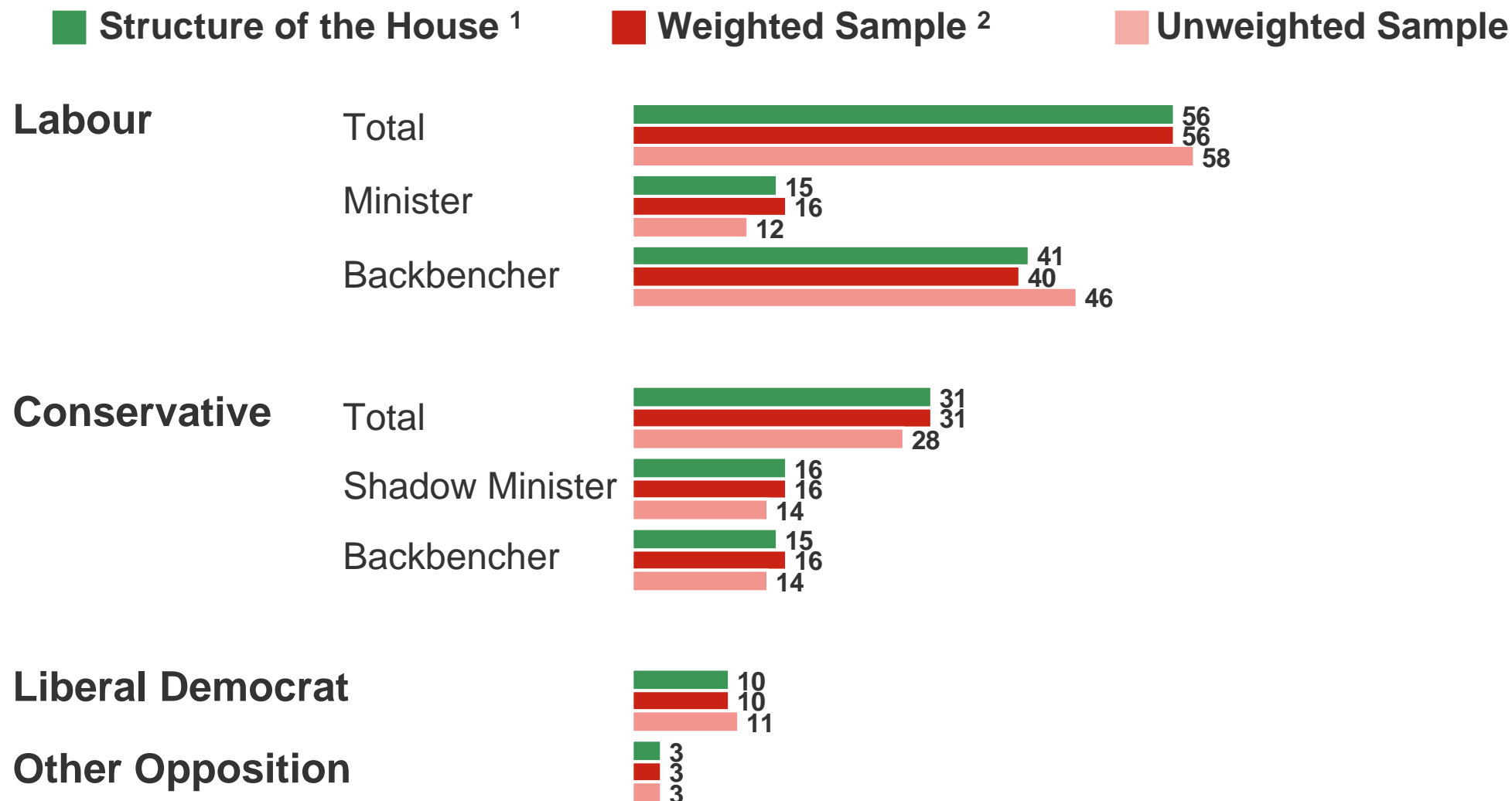
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Methodology

- This report presents the findings of the Summer 2009 study of Britain's Members of Parliament, part of Ipsos MORI's programme of regular multi-sponsored studies among key audiences
- Methodology details:
 - Fieldwork dates: 8 June – 31 July 2009
 - Total number of respondents: 122 (Labour 71, Conservative 34 and Others 17)
 - The questionnaire was 'versioned' to keep the interview to a reasonable length, with 112 MPs answering the Dignity in Dying questions (Labour 66, Conservative 29 and Others 17) unless additional filters were applied e.g. on familiarity
 - An initial sample of 327 MPs was contacted to ensure that those interviewed closely represent the profile of the House of Commons
 - Interviews were conducted face-to-face
- The total sample interviewed is closely representative of the House. Based on those asked each question, data have been individually weighted where necessary to reflect the true balance by party and ministerial or spokesperson position
- Sometimes the percentage result for "All MPs" may be greater than the sum of the percentage results for Labour and Conservative MPs, as it also includes results from other parties. Where results do not sum to 100%, this may be due to computer rounding, multiple responses, or the exclusion of "don't know" categories

Composition of sample (%)



1) Population of House of Commons excluding N.I. MPs and Speaker (626), All MPs interviewed (122), Summer 2009.

2) Data weighted by status (minister/backbencher) within party. All results in this report are weighted results.

Summary of main findings

Summary (1)

- When asked “if a doctor in England or Wales helps a terminally ill, but mentally competent adult patient to die when directly requested to do so, by the patient, should that doctor be prosecuted or not?”, 53% of MPs said the doctor should not be prosecuted, while 40% said they should be prosecuted.
- Labour MPs were more likely than Conservative MPs to say that the doctor should not be prosecuted. 59% of Labour MPs gave this response compared to 34% of Conservative MPs.
- Conservative MPs, on other hand, were more likely to say the doctor should be prosecuted. 52% of Conservative MPs expressed this view compared to 35% of Labour MPs.
- These results form an interesting comparison with the Dignity in Dying survey recently conducted among adults aged 18 yrs + in England and Wales (5th-11th June 2009). 80% of adults in England and Wales said that a family member or friend who enables or assists a terminally ill but mentally competent adult to travel abroad to have an assisted suicide in a country where this is legal should not be prosecuted. While the results are not strictly comparable due to the difference in the wording of the question asked, they do give an indication of the difference in opinion between MPs and the public*. During the interview, these adults were not informed of the present day penalty. Of those who were informed of the penalty, 76% said that a family member or friend who enables or assists a terminally ill but mentally competent adult to travel abroad to have an assisted suicide in a country where this is legal, should not be prosecuted.

(* Technical details for this survey and the questions asked appears within the Appendix)

Summary (2)

- When asked for the reasons behind their opinion, 54% of MPs who thought the doctor should be prosecuted answered that it is against the law. Some (but not all) of these added that they wished to see the law changed.
- Others mentioned the Hippocratic Oath (“Above all, do no harm”) and the ethical standards which doctors are required to uphold. More Labour MPs gave this answer than Conservative MPs (25% compared to 7%).
- Moral reasons were also given with 18% citing that they do not believe in euthanasia or pointed out that it was against their beliefs. More Conservative MPs gave this answer than Labour MPs (27% compared to 15%).
- Various other concerns relate to the circumstances under which such a decision is made, that helping a patient to die sends out the wrong message / is open to interpretation, and that the doctor should be prosecuted.
- There were also MPs who felt that the law should remain unchanged but that doctors should be (and already are) able to act on their discretion

Summary (3)

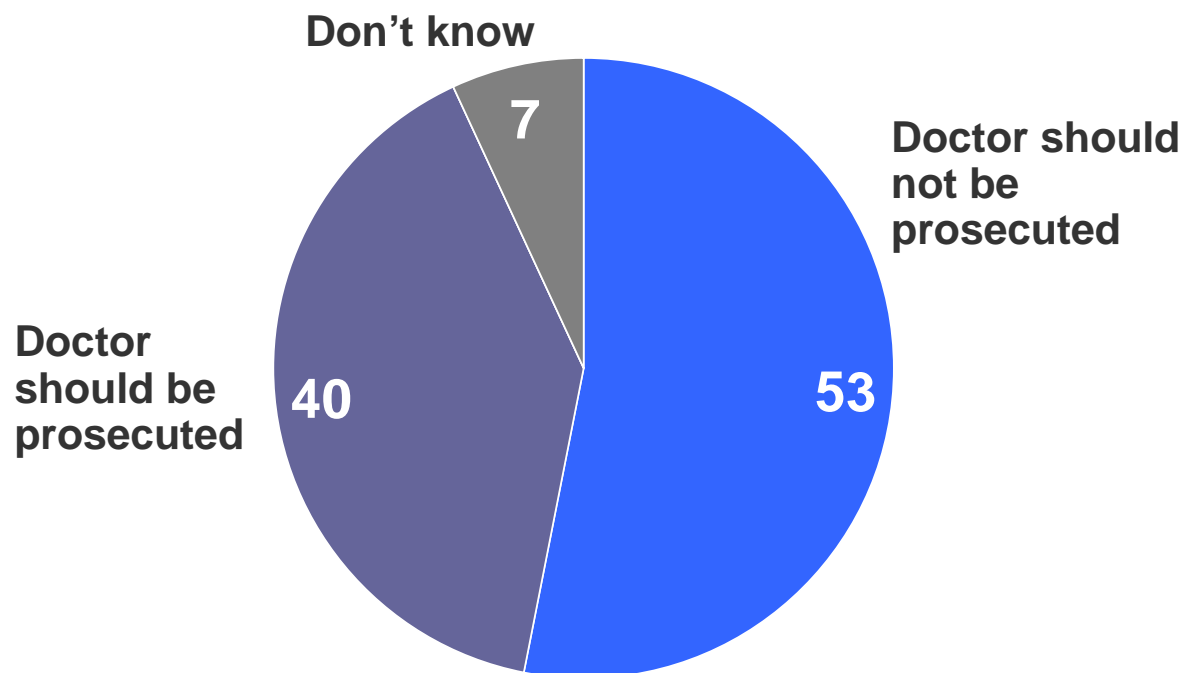
- When asked why the doctor should not be prosecuted, 34% of MPs said that the patient has a right to choose. Only Labour MPs gave this answer.
- Other MPs approached the matter differently. 22% said that a doctor should only help such a patient to die in special circumstances; 19% said the doctor should not be prosecuted if the patient is able to make his or her own decision.
- 13% of MPs (all of them Conservative) felt that doctors should not be prosecuted and believe that some doctors already help terminally ill but mentally competent adult patients to die in such circumstances.
- Numerous other reasons were given relating to the MPs personal beliefs and the consideration of various circumstances surrounding various situations.
- MPs of all parties weighed up emotional concerns (some cited personal experiences of the deaths of loved ones) against ethical and legal ones. There was no evidence of any difference of opinion on matters of party policy.

Main findings

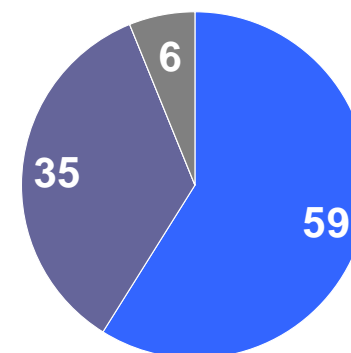
Attitude towards prosecution of doctors

If a doctor in England or Wales helps a terminally ill, but mentally competent, adult patient to die when directly requested to do so, by the patient, should that doctor be prosecuted or not?

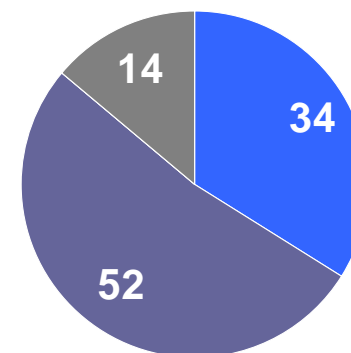
All MPs



Labour MPs



Conservative MPs



Base: All MPs (112), Labour MPs (66) and Conservative MPs (29) who answered, Summer 2009

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Reasons for attitude to prosecution (1)

Why do you say the doctor should be prosecuted?

	% Top Mentions	Labour %	Con %
It is the law/ it is illegal to help someone die	54	58	60
Doctors take the Hippocratic oath / shouldn't be allowed to play God	21	25	7
Don't believe in euthanasia / it is against my beliefs	18	15	27
Need to seriously consider the reasons / pressure from family/ financial reasons, etc.	9	8	13
Should not be legalised because sends out the wrong messages / is open to interpretation	7	6	7
Depends on the circumstances / doctor involved	6	8	7
Yes / they should be prosecuted (no explanation given)	2	0	0
		10	0

Base: All MPs (45), Labour MPs (22) and Conservative MPs (17) who say the doctor should be prosecuted, Summer 2009

Why do you say the doctor should be prosecuted?

"I am opposed to so-called assisted suicide because these people don't have the right to play God"
MP – Labour Minister

"We have laws about not having assisted dying in this country and while we have them they should be enforced and there should be prosecution where such acts occur"
MP – Lib Dem

"I am completely against the euthanasia culture and all the evidence from countries that have allowed euthanasia is you rapidly move from personal choice to a situation where older people feel obliged to opt for euthanasia"

MP – Conservative Shadow Minister

"It is unethical, it is immoral, doctors are there to save lives not to take them"
MP – Conservative Backbencher

"I am a practising Catholic and that is against my religious beliefs"
MP – Labour Minister

"I don't think it is right that a third party assists an individual" – Labour Minister

Why do you say the doctor should be prosecuted?

“The doctor's obligation is to his only ethics of keeping people alive, not listening to their demands and transforming themselves into executioners”

MP – Labour Backbencher

“I have real concerns about the doctors forsaking the Hippocratic oath which is all about allowing people to thrive and live or another mode of behaviour which is making judgements about where people should not live. I don't want a society where doctors make those judgements, even with the connivance of the patient”

MP – Lib Dem Spokesperson

“If he is daft enough not to be able to do it quietly, as I am sure they do in their dozens already, he should be prosecuted. But I am sure doctors find all sorts of sensible ways to ease the final moments of people's lives. I think one has to be rather careful, it is an area where a slight vagueness in the law helps everybody”

MP – Conservative Backbencher

“At the moment the legislation says he should. There is a clear public mood at the moment that means doctors should perhaps be given some leeway, it is a very difficult one”

MP – Labour Backbencher

Reasons for attitude to prosecution (2)

Why do you say the doctor should not be prosecuted?

	% Top Mentions	Labour %	Con %
Patient has a right to choose	34	45	0
Doctor would have only acted in special circumstances	22	18	20
Not if patient is able to make own decision	19	19	20
Doctors already do it anyway as a last humanitarian act	13	0	50
I believe in euthanasia/assisted suicide – the law should change	12	16	10
It is pointless to prosecute	12	14	10
If there are appropriate safeguards in place/terminal illness is genuine	12	8	0
Depends on the circumstances/ doctor involved	11	9	20
Need to consider pressure from family/financial reasons	9	10	10
Sends out the wrong message/open to interpretation	9	9	10

Base: All MPs (61), Labour MPs (40) and Conservative MPs (10) who said the doctor should not be prosecuted, Summer 2009

Why do you say the doctor should not be prosecuted?

“In general where the doctor has been very careful to understand the situation of the individual and has made absolutely certain that this is a genuine and informed decision, then it is a responsible course of action to take, but only in very very specific circumstances”

MP – Labour Backbencher

“It depends on whether the doctor is giving them medication to kill pain, and make their lives more comfortable which indirectly leads to their death”

MP – Labour Backbencher

“I have watched members of my family die and all the discussion about palliative care is complete rubbish, that is said very much to make people feel more comfortable who have not been through the experience of watching someone die in agony”

MP – Lib Dem Backbencher

“Doctors put people out of pain and misery and it has been going on for years and no one talks about it, it is one of these things that gets done. I don't think we need to make a moral issue out of it. In the main doctors and their patients know what needs to be done”

MP – Conservative Shadow Minister

“The truth is, with the advancement of medical science, it is not a question of "if" it is a question of "when" and the sooner we face up to that the better”

MP – Labour Backbencher

Why do you say the doctor should not be prosecuted?

Why do you say the doctor should not be prosecuted?

"If a doctor gives life a doctor should be able to take life. There are cases which every MP has where you just think the kindest way out would be what we do to an animal, and there is a dignity in dying as much as a dignity in living"

MP – Conservative Backbencher

"It should be for a competent adult individual to decide how they end their life"

MP – Lib Dem Backbencher

We have a crazy situation now where people have to go abroad to do what could be done at home...At the moment we have the situation where people are outsourcing...and I would rather see it properly regulated in the UK"

MP – Labour Backbencher

"The doctors should not be prosecuted and they are put in a very difficult position. We need to introduce laws to protect the patients and the doctors"

MP – Lib Dem Backbencher

"Because I am a great believer in voluntary euthanasia. I don't think it is up to society or religious bigotry to decide that people should have to live in misery"

MP – Labour Backbencher

"I think it would be a waste of money"

MP – Labour Minister

Appendix 1: Technical details of the survey among adults in England and Wales

Technical note for survey carried out among English and Welsh adults (18yrs +) on CAPIBUS

- Dignity in Dying commissioned a separate survey among English and Welsh adults aged 18 years and over.
- All interviews were carried out on Ipsos MORI's Omnibus survey (CAPIBUS).
- A nationally representative quota sample of 1,755 adults, aged 18 years were interviewed in-home and face-to-face across 170 sampling points across England and Wales. Fieldwork dates were 5th – 11th June 2009.
- Survey data were weighted to the known profile of this population. Half of the sample (879) were informed of the current penalty and the other half were not (876) (before being asked the question relating to whether or not person should be prosecuted).
- A questionnaire and topline results are appended.

Technical note for survey carried out among English and Welsh adults (18yrs +) on CAPIBUS

- Statistical Reliability
- Only a sample of the 'population' has been interviewed so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have found, had everybody been interviewed (the 'true' values)
- For any percentage given, however, we can estimate 'confidence intervals' within which the true values are likely to fall.
- Margins for other percentages and sub-groups of the respondents are given in the following table. It should be remembered that, in any case, the 'true' finding is much more likely to be towards the centre of the possible range of responses than towards the margins
- For similar reasons, apparent differences in results relating to sub groups may, if small, not necessarily reflect genuine attitudinal differences. We can be 95% sure that differences exceeding those in Table 1 are genuine, or 'significant' differences

Technical note for survey carried out among English and Welsh adults (18yrs +) on CAPIBUS

Table 1: 95% Confidence Intervals

	10% or 90% ±	20% or 80% ±	30% or 70% ±	40% or 60% ±	50% ±
Approximate size of Sample on Which Survey Results are Based					
1,755	1.4	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.3

Source: Ipsos MORI

■Tolerances are also involved in the comparison of results between different elements of the sample. A difference must be of at least a certain size to be statistically significant. The following table is a guide to the sampling tolerances applicable to comparisons between sub-groups.

Table 2: 95% Confidence Intervals

Sample sizes being compared (sub-groups or trends)	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
Informed (879) vs. Uninformed (876)	2.8	3.7	4.3	4.6	4.7

Source: Ipsos MORI

Topline results for survey carried out among English and Welsh adults (18yrs +) on CAPIBUS

UNINFORMED

Question DD01A

SHOW CARD DD01

Think of a situation where a terminally ill but mentally competent adult travels abroad to have an assisted suicide in a country where this is legal. This adult asks a family member or friend to enable or assist them to travel abroad to die. In your opinion, do you think this family member or friend should or should not be prosecuted if they enable or assist that adult to travel abroad to die? Please just read out the letter which applies

PLEASE READ OUT QUESTION SLOWLY AND CLEARLY AND REPEAT IF REQUIRED
%

A. Should be prosecuted	10
B. Should not be prosecuted	80
I would prefer not to answer	5
Don't know	5

Base: Split sample of **876** English and Welsh adults 18+

Topline results for survey carried out among English and Welsh adults (18yrs +) on CAPIBUS

Question DD01B

SHOW CARD DD01

At present assisting somebody to commit suicide is a crime in England and Wales and punishable by up to 14 years in prison

Think of a situation where a terminally ill but mentally competent adult travels abroad to have an assisted suicide in a country where this is legal.

This adult asks a family member or friend to enable or assist them to travel abroad to die. In your opinion, do you think this family member or friend should or should not be prosecuted if they enable or assist that adult to travel abroad to die? Please just read out the letter which applies

PLEASE READ OUT QUESTION SLOWLY AND CLEARLY AND REPEAT IF REQUIRED

%

A.	Should be prosecuted	12
B.	Should not be prosecuted	76
	I would prefer not to answer	7
	Don't know	5

Base: Split sample of **879** English and Welsh adults 18+

Topline results for survey carried out among English and Welsh adults (18yrs +) on CAPIBUS

UNINFORMED

Question DD02

SHOW CARD DD02

Currently, in England and Wales it is illegal for a family member or friend to enable or assist a terminally ill, but mentally competent adult to travel abroad to have an assisted suicide in a country where assisted suicide is legal.

In your opinion, do you think that the law in England and Wales should be changed to allow a family member or friend to enable or assist a terminally ill adult to travel abroad to a country where assisted suicide is not a crime, or do you think the law should not be changed? Please just read out the letter which applies

%

A. The law in England and Wales should be changed so it is no longer illegal	65
B. The law in England and Wales should not be changed so it is no longer illegal	22
I would prefer not to answer	5
Don't know	7

Base: 876 English and Welsh adults 18+

Topline results for survey carried out among English and Welsh adults (18yrs +) on CAPIBUS

INFORMED

Question DD02

SHOW CARD DD02

Currently, in England and Wales it is illegal for a family member or friend to enable or assist a terminally ill, but mentally competent adult to travel abroad to have an assisted suicide in a country where assisted suicide is legal.

In your opinion, do you think that the law in England and Wales should be changed to allow a family member or friend to enable or assist a terminally ill adult to travel abroad to a country where assisted suicide is not a crime, or do you think the law should not be changed? Please just read out the letter which applies

%

A. The law in England and Wales should be changed so it is no longer illegal	62
B. The law in England and Wales should not be changed so it is no longer illegal	23
I would prefer not to answer	7
Don't know	7

Base: 879 English and Welsh adults 18+

Appendix 2: Technical details of the survey amongst MPs

Statistical reliability for the survey of MPs

- Statistical Reliability
- Only a sample of the 'population' has been interviewed so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have found, had everybody been interviewed (the 'true' values)
- For any percentage given, however, we can estimate 'confidence intervals' within which the true values are likely to fall. For example, if 50% of our sample of 122 MPs believe that the state of the economy is going to get worse over the next twelve months, we can be 95% sure that the 'true' value would be between 42.0% and 58.0%, i.e. a margin of 8.0% on each side
- Similar margins for other percentages and sub-groups of the respondents are given in the following table. It should be remembered that, in any case, the 'true' finding is much more likely to be towards the centre of the possible range of responses than towards the margins
- For similar reasons, apparent differences in results relating to sub groups may, if small, not necessarily reflect genuine attitudinal differences. We can be 95% sure that differences exceeding those in Table 1 are genuine, or 'significant' differences

Statistical reliability for the survey of MPs

Table 1: 95% Confidence Intervals

	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
	±	±	±	±	±
Approximate size of Sample on Which Survey Results are Based					
MPs (122)	4.8	6.4	7.3	7.8	8.0
Labour MPs (71)	6.3	8.4	9.6	10.3	10.5
Conservative MPs (34)	9.3	12.4	14.2	15.2	15.5

Source: Ipsos MORI

■Tolerances are also involved in the comparison of results between different elements of the sample. A difference must be of at least a certain size to be statistically significant. The following table is a guide to the sampling tolerances applicable to comparisons between sub-groups.

Table 2: 95% Confidence Intervals

Sample sizes being compared (sub-groups or trends)	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
Labour MPS vs. Conservative MPs (71 vs. 34)	11.2	15.0	17.2	18.4	18.7

Source: Ipsos MORI

Thank you

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