



What people think,
feel and do

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The Political Report

19th August 2021



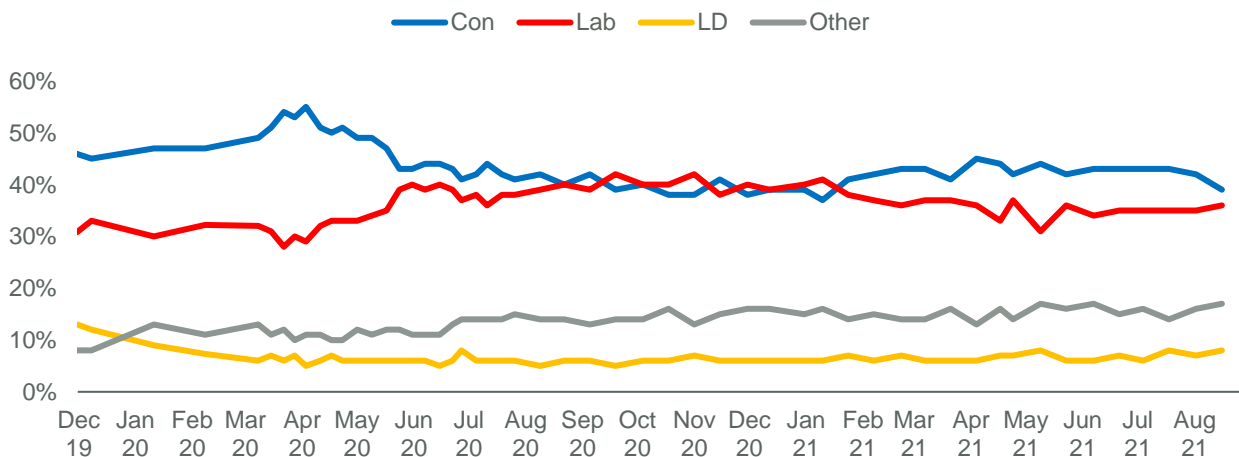
From the Opinium/Observer polling series

20th August 2021

One-minute takeaway

- **Headline:** The Conservatives lead has reduced to three points, down four points from two weeks ago. The Tories are on 39% (-3), with Labour on 36% (+1), the Lib Dems on 8% (+1), and the Greens on 6% (+1).
- **Covid:** Government's handling of Coronavirus increased from a net of -9% to -3.
- **Afghanistan:** Half (48%) think it was a wrong decision for the US to end its military involvement in Afghanistan
- Half (51%) think it was the right decision for NATO to have invaded Afghanistan in 2001; 32% think it was the right decision but think NATO have stayed until they were no longer needed, while only 9% think it is right for them to have left when they did, and 10% think they should have left before they did. A small minority (20%) think it was wrong for NATO to have invaded when they did.
- Over half (55%) of the public think the UK is now less safe from terrorist attacks now that the Taliban is in control of Afghanistan
- The main two concerns the public have with the situation in Afghanistan is the human rights of women being under threat (35%) and the potential of Afghanistan becoming a launchpad for anti-Western terrorists again (28%).
- **Bespoke refugee programme for Afghan refugees:** There is more support than opposition to the UK having a dedicated refugee programme for Afghanistan to make it easier for those fleeing the country to live in the UK (43% support vs 27% oppose). There is a split along party lines on this with opposition rising to 40% of Conservative voters while support for this idea rise to 59% of Labour voters.
- Support for the UK granting refugee status is strongest for people that gave the UK support during our time in Afghanistan and their families (65%), compared to all high profile Afghans who are opponents of the Taliban (44%) and any family who fears the return of the Taliban and their harsh version of Sharia Law (45%)

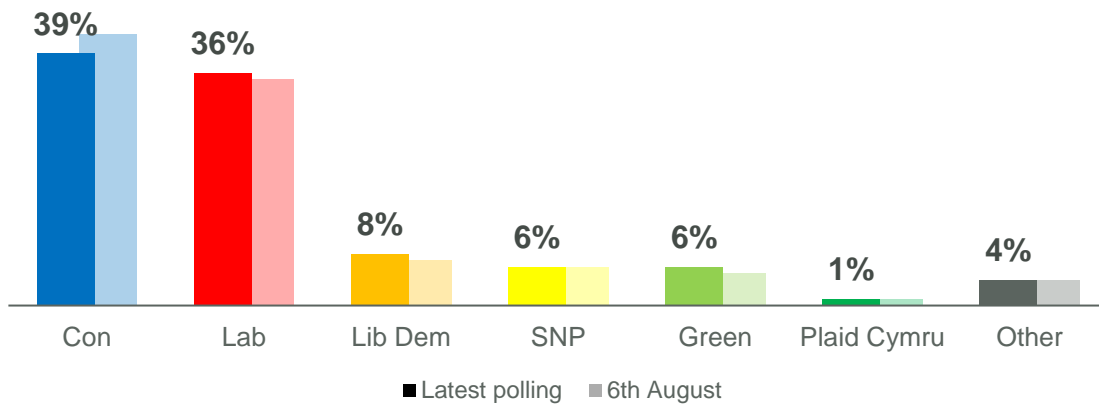
Voting intention since the 2019 general election



Headline Trackers

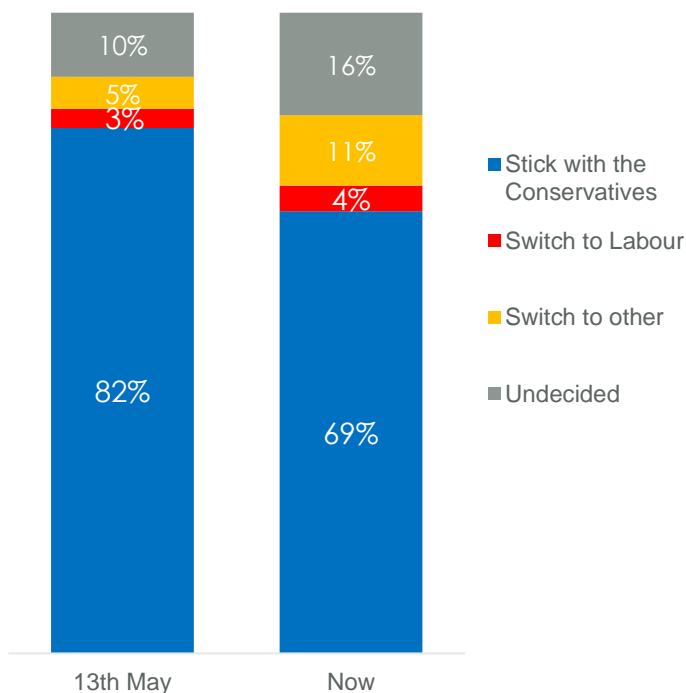
Conservatives hold a three point lead

The Conservative lead has fallen to three points, down from seven points a fortnight ago. The Conservatives are now on 39% (-3), with Labour on 36% (+1), the Lib Dems on 8% (+1) and the Greens on 6% (+1).



This is the smallest lead we have recorded for the Conservatives since January, and signifies how the vaccine bounce the government has enjoyed in recent months seems to be fading.

What is happening to the Conservative 2019 Vote?



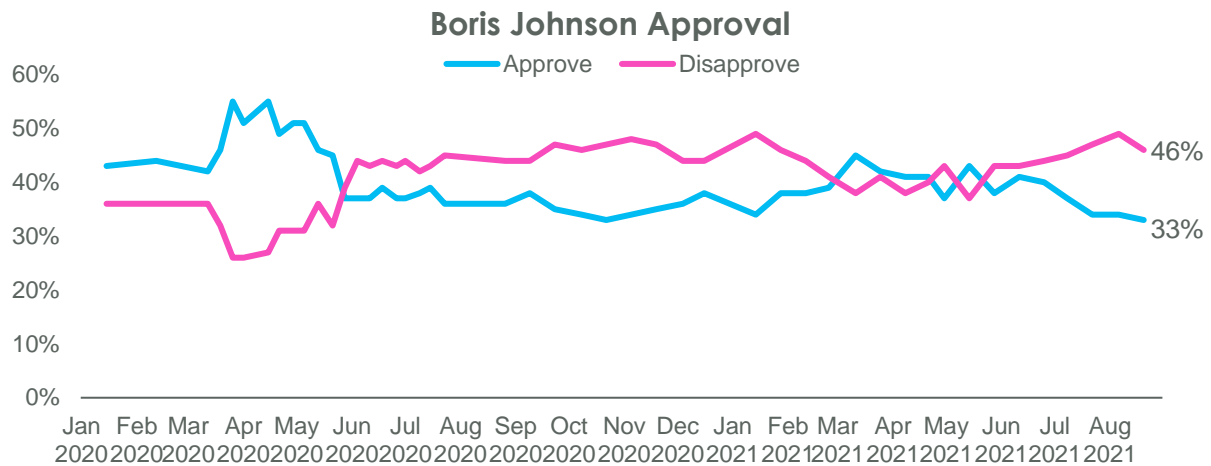
If we compare the latest polling with the “peak” of the vaccine bounce, May this year when the Conservatives held a 13 point lead, we can see where the Conservative vote is going.

Back in May, the Conservatives were retaining 82% of their vote, with 3% going to Labour, 5% going to other parties, and 10% undecided. Now, they are retaining just 69% of their vote, with 4% going straight to Labour, 11% going to other parties, and 16% undecided.

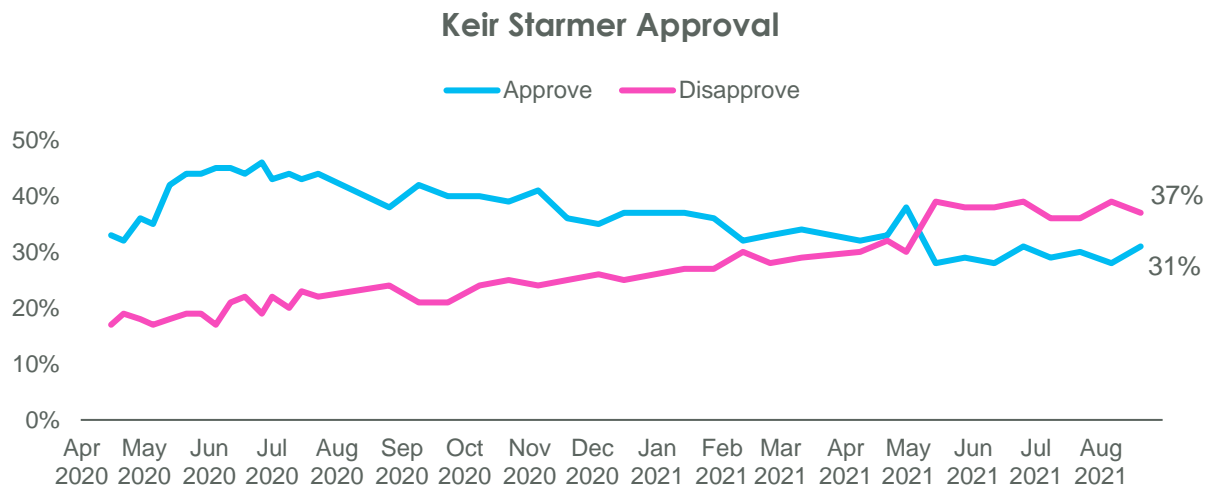
Meanwhile Labour are now retaining 75% of their 2019 vote, with the biggest movement away from them being voters going directly to the Greens.

Johnson's approval rating stands at -13

Boris Johnson's rating sits at -13, slightly up from -16 a fortnight ago. A third (33%) say they approve of his job performance (-1) while 46% disapprove (-3).



Meanwhile Starmer's approval rating is up slightly, although still in negative territory, with 31% approving of the job he is doing (+3) and 37% disapproving (-2). This puts his net score at -6, up from -11 a fortnight ago.



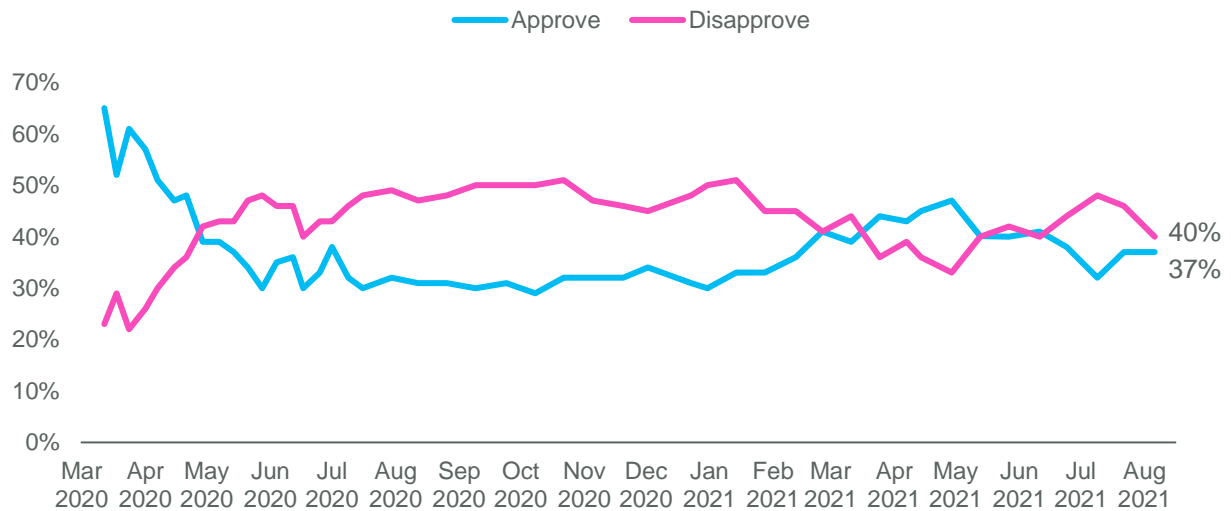
When it comes to who would make the best Prime Minister, 31% currently select Boris Johnson (unchanged) while 26% select Keir Starmer (+1). However, 30% chose neither (unchanged) and 13% said they don't know (+1).

Covid

Perceptions of government handling of Coronavirus have improved

Net approval of the government's handling of Coronavirus has improved from -9% two weeks ago, to -3%. The number approving is unchanged at 37%, but the number disapproving has dropped from 46% to 40%. The number who say they neither approve or disapprove has increased from 15% to 20%, assumably off the back of covid dropping from the headlines.

Approval of the government's handling of Coronavirus



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Under two fifths (37%) now think the government is underreacting to the situation, down from 47% a month ago.

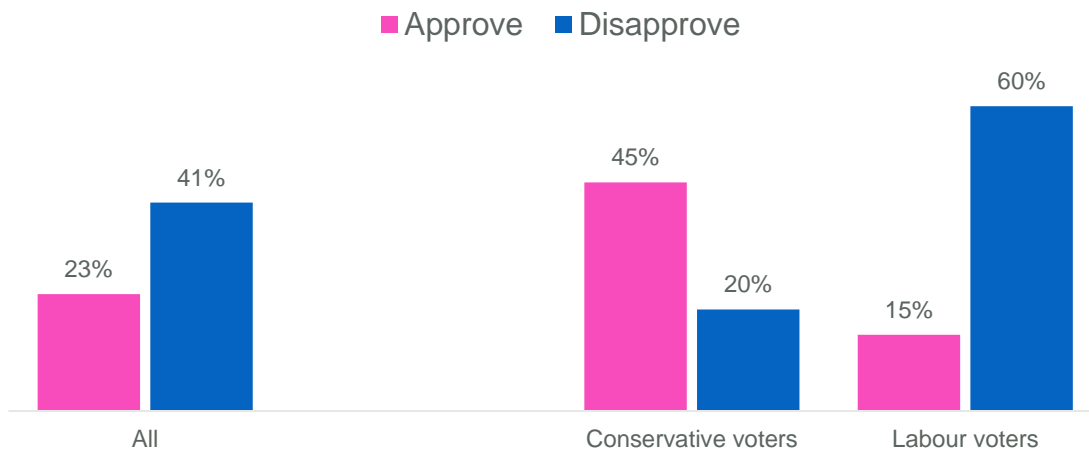
Afghanistan

Dominic Raab holds an approval rating of -18

Just 23% of the public approve of the job Dominic Raab is doing as Foreign secretary, compared to 41% who disagree. This gives him a net approval rating of -18, lower than both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition.

It comes after a week of criticism against him for being on holiday while the Taliban retook control of Kabul.

Dominic Raab's approval rating

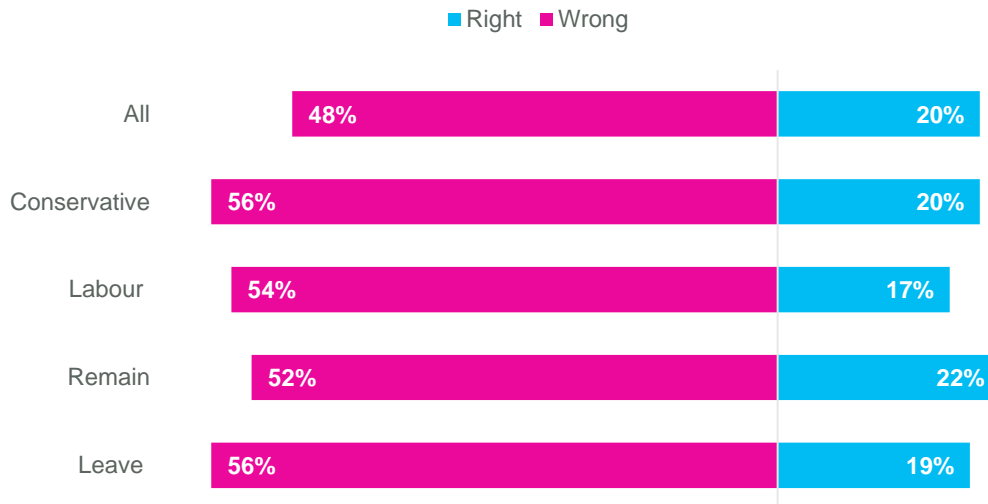


Labour voters disapprove of the job he is doing by a margin of 60% to 15%, whereas Conservative voters approve by a margin of 45% to 20%.

Half of the public think it was the wrong decision for the US to end its military involvement in Afghanistan

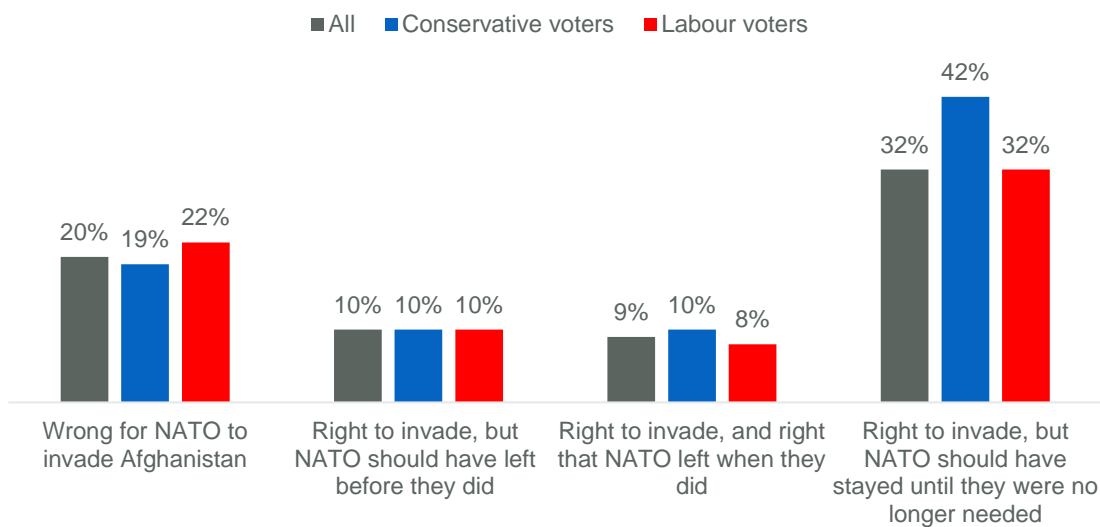
The past week has caught the world off guard with the rapid gains the Taliban made in Afghanistan after the US withdrew their military involvement in the country. Half (48%) of the public think that the US policy to end their military involvement in Afghanistan was wrong, with a small minority (20%) believing it was the right decision. There is strong agreement on this across different voters, with 56% of Conservative voters and 54% of Labour voters agreeing this was a wrong decision.

Was Joe Biden's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan the right or wrong decision?



We then asked people about military involvement from a different angle. There was majority support for the UK's decision to join the US and other members of NATO to invade Afghanistan back in 2001 in order to remove the Taliban regime (51% thought it was right to invade while 20% think it was wrong). A third (32%) think that while it was the right decision, NATO should have stayed until they were no longer needed, while 10% think they should have left before they did. Only 9% think it was right for NATO to invade and also right that they left when they did.

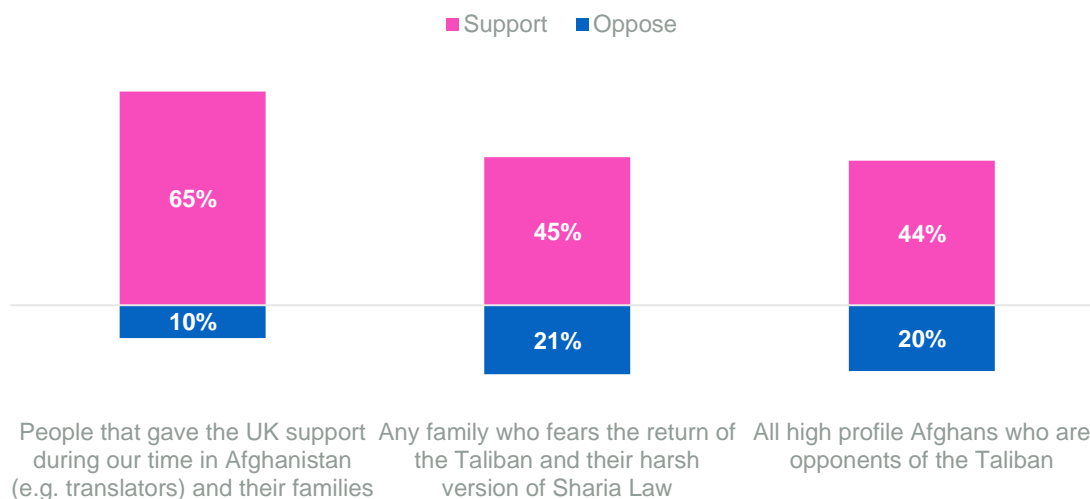
Views on NATO's intervention in Afghanistan over the last 20 years



There is more support than opposition (43% vs 27% respectively) amongst the public on the UK having a dedicated refugee programme for Afghanistan to make it easier for them to live in the UK. There is more political division over this topic compared to questions on withdrawing. Conservative voters are more likely to oppose than support this idea (40% vs 31% respectively), while Labour voters are much more likely to support a dedicated programme (59% support vs 19% oppose).

Support for the UK granting refugee status is strongest when we ask about people that gave the UK support during our time in Afghanistan and their families (65%), compared to all high profile Afghans who are opponents of the Taliban (44%) and any family who fears the return of the Taliban and their harsh version of Sharia Law (45%).

To what extent would you support or oppose the UK granting refugee status to any of the following groups of Afghans?



While Conservative and Labour voters are both in agreement about support for granting refugee status to Afghans that have provided the UK with support during our time in Afghanistan and their families (both 70%), views are more split when it comes to the other two groups of people we asked about.

Just over a third (36%) of Conservative voters support granting refugee status to all high profile Afghans who are opponents of the Taliban compared to 54% of Labour voters. Similarly, 34% of Conservative voters support granting refugee status to any family who fears the return of the Taliban compared to 57% of Labour voters.

Now that the Taliban are in control of Afghanistan, over half (55%) of the public think the UK is now less safe from terrorist attacks. However, this is split between “somewhat less safe” (29%) and “much less safe (27%)

The main two concerns the public have with the situation in Afghanistan is the human rights of women being under threat (35%) and the potential of Afghanistan becoming a launchpad for anti-Western terrorists again (28%). 23% are most concerned about the lives of Afghans who supported the UK.

About Opinium

OPINIUM is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people **think, feel** and **do**. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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