

Labour Leaders Since 1980	How did they become leader?	Policy Positions	What wing of the Labour Party did he represent?	Context	How did their leadership end?	How aligned is this leader's ideology to the current leader?
Michael Foot (1980-1983)	Defeated Denis Healey to become Labour leader following the resignation of James Callaghan following defeat in the 1979 General Election.	Tax: Advocated radical progressive taxation and vigorous wealth redistribution. Law & order: Favoured community-based approaches and addressing the social roots of crime over punitive measures. Europe: Sceptical of European integration; cautious about transferring power to supranational bodies. Health: A strong supporter of a comprehensive, state-funded NHS. Education: Championed increased public investment to promote equality and social mobility.	Foot was on the socialist-left wing of the Labour Party, which mirrored the move to the right by the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher.	Foot's only general election as leader occurred when Margaret Thatcher's popularity was on the rise following the Falklands War. The move to the left under his leadership contributed to a split within the party which gave birth to the SDP.	Resigned as Labour leader following defeat in the 1983 UK General Election in which the Conservatives increased their majority. Labour MP Gerald Kaufman described Labour's manifesto in that election 'the longest suicide note in history' in reference to its distinctly left-wing policies.	Alignment: Weak Tax: Not aligned. Foot advocated for significantly higher taxation, especially on the wealthy and businesses, going beyond Starmer's measured approach. Law & Order: Not aligned. He took a more left-wing stance, opposing heavy policing and supporting trade union power. Europe: Not aligned. Foot was strongly anti-EU, campaigning for withdrawal from the European Economic Community (EEC). Health: Aligned. He strongly supported NHS investment, much like Starmer. Education: Aligned. He favoured significant investment in education. Overall: Foot was far to the left of Starmer, particularly on tax, law and order, and Europe.
Neil Kinnock (1983-1992)	Elected leader overwhelmingly with over 70% of the vote to replace Michael Foot.	Tax: Supported progressive taxation while moving towards more moderate, business-friendly policies. Law & order: Emphasised a balanced approach: strengthening law enforcement while investing in community initiatives. Europe: Pro-European; advocated for closer engagement with European institutions. This was a clear contrast to his predecessor and traditional left-wing Labour opposition to the EEC. Health: Committed to the NHS with an eye on reform and efficiency improvements. Education: Endorsed modernising education through increased investment and measured reform.	Moderate/centre-left. Kinnock began the long process of modernising the Labour Party, moving it away from its traditional left-wing basis, and challenging Militant.	Kinnock's attempts to modernise the Labour Party were met with opposition by some on the left of the party. Brought modernising figures into the leadership of the party, including Blair and Brown, as well as Peter Mandelson behind-the-scenes who helped to change Labour's image.	Resigned as Labour leader after losing two general elections to two different Conservative prime ministers – Margaret Thatcher (1987) and John Major (1992). Later served as the UK's European Commissioner.	Alignment: Moderate Tax: Somewhat aligned. Kinnock supported progressive taxation but initially leaned further left than Starmer before moderating in later years. Law & Order: Somewhat aligned. He was not as tough on law and order but did not oppose policing outright. Europe: Aligned. Kinnock shifted Labour towards a pro-European stance, backing EU membership. Health: Strongly aligned. He supported NHS investment and modernisation. Education: Strongly aligned. He advocated increased funding for education and reducing inequality. Overall: Kinnock and Starmer share some alignment, particularly on Europe and public services, but Kinnock was initially more left-wing on tax and policing.
John Smith (1992-1994)	Elected overwhelmingly (91% of vote) to replace Neil Kinnock.	Tax: Endorsed a fair, progressive tax system with pragmatic redistribution measures. Law & order: Promoted balanced policies combining effective policing with community support. Europe: Strongly pro-European; backed active participation in the EU. Health: A staunch defender of the NHS, with a focus on efficiency and improved access. Education: Advocated for significant investment and reform to reduce educational inequalities.	Centre-left. Continued modernisation process that began under Kinnock.	Regarded by some in Labour circles as the greatest prime minister the country never had. The trajectory of both main parties suggests that he would likely have won the next general election. His death would trigger a race for the party leadership between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown that would define the next 16 years of British politics.	Died of a heart attack in May 1994.	Alignment: Strong Tax: Strongly aligned. Smith supported a fair but responsible tax system, similar to Starmer's current approach. Law & Order: Somewhat aligned. He did not prioritise law and order as a major policy area. Europe: Strongly aligned. Smith was strongly pro-EU and supported closer cooperation. Health: Strongly aligned. He was a committed advocate for NHS investment. Education: Strongly aligned. He prioritised education funding and improving standards. Overall: A close ideological match, though Smith placed less emphasis on law and order.
Tony Blair (1994-2007)	Elected party leader with 57% of vote. Helped by Granita Pact which meant Gordon Brown did not contest leader.	Tax: Favoured a mix of progressive taxation with incentives for economic growth—moving away from old-school radical redistribution. Law & order: Emphasised a "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" stance: increased police funding combined with community programmes. Europe: A strong proponent of European integration and closer EU ties. Supported the introduction of the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty and had a more favourable attitude towards adopting the euro currency. Health: Prioritised massive investment in the NHS, introducing managerial reforms and performance targets. Education: Reformed education with a focus on raising standards, accountability, and incorporating market-oriented elements.	New Labour/Centre-left - Rebranded Labour as a centrist, modern party, distancing it from traditional socialism.	The only Labour leader to win three successive general elections, and the longest serving Labour prime minister. His modernisation of the Labour Party made them competitive in parts of the country it had never before seemed likely to win. The second half of his premiership was overshadowed by the Iraq War.	Resigned as prime minister and Labour leader in June 2007 following mounting pressure due to declining popularity.	Alignment: Strong Tax: Strongly aligned. Blair pursued a centre-left economic policy, maintaining some progressive taxation while prioritising economic growth. Law & Order: Strongly aligned. Blair's government took a tough approach to crime while also focusing on social justice reforms—very similar to Starmer's position. Europe: Strongly aligned. Blair was a strong advocate for EU cooperation. Health: Strongly aligned. He expanded NHS funding and modernisation, aligning with Starmer's approach. Education: Strongly aligned. Blair prioritised education investment and reforms to raise standards. Overall: A strong match. Starmer is often seen as trying to emulate Blair's centrist, mainstream appeal.
Gordon Brown (2007-2010)	Elected unopposed to replace Tony Blair as Labour leader and prime minister. Succeeding Blair as leader had been part of the pair's arrangement in 1994.	Tax: Maintained a progressive tax regime with an emphasis on fiscal discipline and economic stability. Law & order: Continued New Labour's balanced approach with both robust law enforcement and community measures. Europe: Supported EU membership and integration, though with a somewhat more cautious approach than Blair. Health: Reaffirmed commitment to the NHS, focussing on long-term funding and performance improvements. Education: Backed sustained investment and reform in education, emphasising equal opportunities and modern curricula.	New Labour/Centre-left - Continued with the centrist policies that had become the norm for Labour over the past decade, but with a more technocratic and fiscally cautious touch.	Having stood aside in 1994, Brown's determination to succeed Blair led to the growing schism between the pair. By the time he succeeded to the leadership, Labour's fortunes had turned, and they were now up against a more modern and popular Conservative leader in David Cameron.	Resigned following defeat in the 2010 UK General Election, which ushered in the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition.	Alignment: Strong <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax: Strongly aligned. Brown supported progressive taxation but was fiscally responsible. • Law & Order: Somewhat aligned. His approach was pragmatic, though not as prominent a focus as under Blair. • Europe: Strongly aligned. Brown was pro-EU, though more sceptical of full integration. • Health: Strongly aligned. He championed NHS investment and reform. • Education: Strongly aligned. Brown prioritised funding and tackling inequality in education. Overall: A strong alignment, though Brown placed less emphasis on law and order.
Ed Miliband (2010-2015)	Defeated his brother, David Miliband, to become Labour leader. David received greater support from MPs/MEPs and membership, but Ed received significantly more support from affiliated members (eg trade unions).	Tax: Proposed a shift towards more progressive taxation aimed at reducing inequality, with targeted increases on high earners. Law & order: Advocated for balanced policing—supporting law enforcement while addressing the social causes of crime. Europe: Generally pro-European; favoured deeper, yet democratically accountable, engagement with the EU. Health: Firmly supported a well-funded, publicly run NHS, with plans to tackle waiting times and improve care quality. Education: Pushed for significant investment to reform education and reduce inequalities in opportunity.	Left-centre - Positioned slightly to the left of New Labour, blending traditional redistributive ideals with modern policy approaches.	Miliband's background as a special advisor added to the suggestion that the upper echelons of Labour were far removed from its traditional base. Having become leader of the party following the conclusion of 13 years of Labour rule it was always going to be a difficult task for Miliband. The capitulation of the Lib Dems in the 2015 election would be to the Conservative's benefit rather than Labour's.	Resigned as leader following defeat in the 2015 UK General Election in which the Conservatives increased their share of the vote. Later served in Keir Starmer's cabinet.	Alignment: Moderate Tax: Somewhat aligned. Miliband advocated higher taxes on the wealthy but was not as focused on economic pragmatism as Starmer. Law & Order: Somewhat aligned. He did not prioritise law and order but did not oppose strong policing. Europe: Strongly aligned. He was pro-EU and would likely have pursued closer ties post-Brexit. Health: Strongly aligned. He prioritised NHS investment. Education: Strongly aligned. He supported increasing school funding and tackling inequality. Overall: Similar on public services and Europe, but Miliband leaned further left on tax policy.
Jeremy Corbyn (2015-2020)	Election as leader came as a surprise after he only qualified for the ballot as some MPs 'lent him support'. Won the overwhelming support of 'registered supporters' – a new category of voters introduced by Ed Miliband to broaden the voter base.	Tax: Advocated for substantial tax increases on the wealthy and large corporations to fund public services and reduce inequality. Law & order: Favoured community-led, socially informed approaches over heavy-handed policing, emphasising prevention and social justice. Europe: Although generally supportive of EU membership, he was critical of its neoliberal structures and, during Brexit, called for more democratic reform of the union. Health: A vocal defender of the NHS; strongly opposed privatisation and pushed for increased public funding and service expansion. Education: Campaigned for free education at all levels, seeking to remove market influences and abolish tuition fees.	Left-wing: Significantly shifted the party towards traditional socialist and anti-austerity positions.	Whilst popular with the grassroots, Corbyn's background as a left-wing Labour MP would remain a millstone for him throughout his leadership, as would accusations of antisemitism. The left's takeover of Labour and the infighting meant that the party provided ineffective scrutiny of the Conservative government during one of the most significant periods in recent history.	Resigned as Labour leader after losing two general elections to two different Conservative prime ministers – Theresa May (2017) and Boris Johnson (2019).	Alignment: Weak Tax: Not aligned. Corbyn pushed for significantly higher taxation and heavy government intervention. Law & Order: Not aligned. He was highly critical of policing and security policies, diverging from Starmer's position. Europe: Not aligned. Corbyn was ambiguous on Brexit, whereas Starmer was firmly pro-EU during the referendum. Health: Strongly aligned. He supported NHS investment and modernisation. Education: Strongly aligned. He prioritised tackling inequality in education. Overall: Major ideological differences, except on public services.
Keir Starmer (2020-Present)	Elected in 2020 to succeed Jeremy Corbyn with 56% of the overall electorate.	Tax: Proposes a pragmatic return to progressive taxation—ensuring fairness while emphasising fiscal responsibility and economic stability. Law & order: Supports robust law enforcement measures alongside social justice reforms and community support to tackle crime. Europe: A strong advocate for maintaining and strengthening close ties with the EU post-Brexit. Health: Committed to the NHS with plans to invest in modernisation, reduce waiting times, and ensure equitable access to care. Education: Endorses increased investment in education with to tackle inequality and raise standards.	Centre-left: Seeks to recapture mainstream appeal by blending traditional Labour values with measured, centrist policies, in order to reclaim voters who abandoned the party in the 2010s.	Starmer made a relatively meteoric rise through the Labour Party, having only become an MP in 2015. He portrayed himself as the 'serious' candidate to succeed Jeremy Corbyn, although he faced numerous questions about his decision to serve in his shadow cabinet.	Serving as PM from 2024.	