

Labour's Northern Soul

How
Labour
can
rebuild the
Red Wall
across the
North

Labour
for the North





Labour for the North is a new group working to give Northern Labour MPs a stronger voice in the party and to make sure the government delivers for the North, open to all Labour MPs in the North West, North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber. It is co-chaired by Justin Madders, Peter Dowd and Judith Cummins.



For more information about the group, please contact justin.madders.mp@parliament.uk

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Foreword

In Summer 2019 we formed the Labour for the North Group to bring together Labour MPs from across the North of England. We felt that it was important to amplify the voice of Northern Labour MPs both within the party and outside it. We were responding to what we believed was a growing view that the Labour Party was a London-centric entity and insufficiently sensitive to the needs of the North. Our aim was to organise within Parliament but also to reach out to councillors, activists and CLPs across the North.

After the 2019 general election we returned a considerably smaller group. We lost 29 Northern constituencies to the Tories, whilst many other seats came perilously

close to turning blue. Our sense that the party had a ‘Northern problem’ had been heartbreakingly proved right. We strongly believe that this forum, alongside co-ordinated action for the North, is needed now more than ever.

This report explains what happened in December 2019. In common with other reports that have looked into the election, we steer clear of explanations that present one single factor as decisive, be it the leadership or Brexit. Instead, we analyse the longer-term trends—demographic, cultural, economic, and political—that have led us to this point.

We also look to the future and examine how the Tories will attempt

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to consolidate their gains in the North and how we, as a Party and as Northern Labour MPs, must respond. We find that their promises on ‘levelling up’ currently amount to little more than short-term projects designed to direct resources at Tory-held or Tory-target seats. We know that this will not produce the wholesale economic transformation that the North needs, but we must be alert to its political potential. Labour must convince voters in the North that we are committed to meaningful change, for example by replacing the skewed Treasury funding algorithms so that investment decisions are made more fairly.

We set out a number of recommendations on how the party must change if we are to win back our Northern heartlands and form the next government. Our challenge is to convince voters across the North that their voices have been heard and to assure them that we not only understand their anger and frustration, but also that we will address their concerns through

our policies. There is no doubt that Labour winning the next general election is the single best thing we can do to improve the lives of people across the North. This needs to be coupled with a genuine devolution agenda.

Much has changed in the months since the general election. The Covid-19 pandemic has reshaped all of our lives and refocused political debate onto new areas. The tireless fight of our Labour Metro Mayors and council leaders for fairer lockdown deals has highlighted the importance of their roles.

Their fight also perhaps tapped into an underlying sense across the North that we never have been and never will be a priority for a Conservative government. For a Labour government to win, however, it will need far more than this feeling being confirmed by Tory inaction, it requires the Labour Party to demonstrate that it is reconnecting with its former heartlands and will deliver for them in government.

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It is of vital importance for us to work closely with mayors and council leaders to develop a distinctive Northern Labour offer in order to convince voters in the North that we are listening to them. This will fuel a genuine reconnection which we will carry out on a ward by ward basis, as trust cannot be regained overnight. With our lowest number of seats since 1935 the scale of the task is huge, but the reward of a Labour government is an outcome worth fighting for.

We hope this report contributes to that vital task, because without the party reclaiming former seats in the North there will not be a Labour government.

*Judith Cummins, Justin Madders
and Peter Dowd*



Executive Summary

Labour's defeat in 2019 was not wholly the result of one election campaign, nor even of the last few years. It was a long, drawn-out loss decades in the making: the product of a complex mix of factors which we as a party have consistently failed to address.

In this report—the first produced by *Labour for the North*—we analysed a broad range of economic, demographic and polling data, surveyed and interviewed Labour councillors, candidates and MPs across the North—whose stories we feature throughout this report, identified only by their constituency (see *Appendix 5*)—to explain Labour's defeat. We found:

- **Dramatic demographic and economic transformation over recent decades characterises many of the seats Labour lost.** Ageing populations, economic neglect, and Labour's weakness in towns and with older voters were crucial to our loss in 2019.

Many voters in these seats desperately wanted to have their voice heard, particularly against a party which they thought had abandoned them, and across the three regions that make up the North, which have been dramatically held back, even before Covid-19.

- **New cultural faultlines define our politics, to which Labour is uniquely vulnerable.** Brexit gave an easy name to these divides, which have grown largely unnoticed for decades, while people have become far less loyal to parties, with a noticeable impact on voting patterns in many Northern seats. We have much work to do to re-establish trust with voters who feel we have not listened to them or disdained their values for some time, and who often see us now as uncaring and unpatriotic.

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- **Labour's perceived London-centrism has contributed to our dislocation from voters proud of Northern, national and local identities.** More than twice as many voters are strongly proud of their regional identity in the North than anywhere else in England. Despite many strong Northern Labour MPs, we have often been seen as dismissive of Northern, national and more local identities.
- **The new electoral divides in the North signal both danger and opportunity for Labour.** Though our new inner-city safe seats are very different culturally and demographically to those seats we lost in the general election, these two groups share many experiences of modern Britain, such as low wages, relatively high unemployment, and high deprivation.

Over the course of the report, we make a number of original contributions: presenting pooled cross-sectional data over much longer time periods than previously published, projecting electoral

results across old parliamentary boundaries, and pulling together a large amount of data from both public and private sources, while focusing solely on the North.

In the Northern seats we lost in 2019, we have been losing ground for decades. We need to dedicate more time to understanding these communities, understanding their anger and dissatisfaction with Labour, rather than casting back to a past era or willing them to change in the future. In this report, we wanted to get beyond debates focused solely on Brexit and the leadership, instead linking them to the wider, long-term factors we focus on.

In Part III of this report, we also demonstrate how Boris Johnson's government will attempt to hold on to seats it has won, through spending on Tory-held and target seats. For the first time, our investigation provides a comprehensive original analysis of key elements of the 'levelling up' agenda. Through a series of freedom of information requests and analysis of government data, we found that the overwhelming majority of money goes to Tory-held or target seats. Our research suggests that the

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funding which reaches councils is almost always spent on consultants, after a decade of deep cuts to council staff.

We must overcome all these challenges if we are to win again. A new leader and the passage of time will not necessarily yield victory in 2024 or sooner. Our recommendations, focused on practical ways we can change the focus and culture of the party in order to re-engage with Northern communities, cover five themes:

- 1. Creating a greater role and voice for Northern MPs within Labour**—in order to promote Northern issues and challenge the perception that we are a London-centric party.
- 2. Rebuilding voters' trust and sense of competence in Labour**—being open and honest, engaging with voters year-round, and letting them meaningfully influence policy, particularly in the North.
- 3. Focusing on unifying cross-generational areas of strength in our offering to the country**—health, a fairer economy and

investment in public services, while reflecting patriotism and pride in inclusive Northern, local and national identities without being drawn into debates on divisive cultural issues.

- 4. Making Labour work better locally**—helping and involving councillors and activists, trumpeting local Labour successes and showing how our proposals for the country can work locally and regionally. We must also commit to meaningful Northern devolution, and towards building and producing a fully-costed Northern Manifesto at the next election.
- 5. Supporting and empowering local government**—Labour must commit to reverse damaging cuts, holding the government to both the letter and spirit of its promises on levelling up, while developing our own alternative programme focused on rebalancing towards Northern economies.

Part I — The Long Retreat



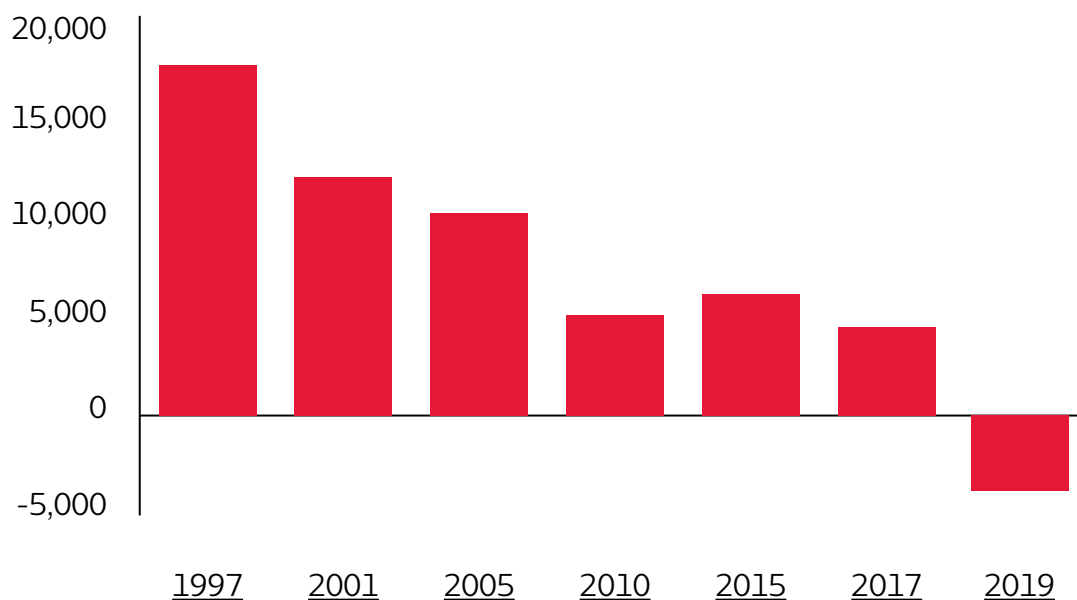
Crook, County Durham

Tast year's general election should not have come as a surprise. The signs which heralded it have been there for a long time, were we as a party more alive to them.

In some of the Northern seats we lost for the first time in 2019, Labour

once commanded majorities well over 20,000. These have shrunk steadily since 1997. Election victories or growing our share of seats nationally only masked the problem, while a perception of us as too London-centric or dismissive of Northern communities has taken hold, even while we have retained

Average Labour majorities in Northern seats lost for the first time in 2019



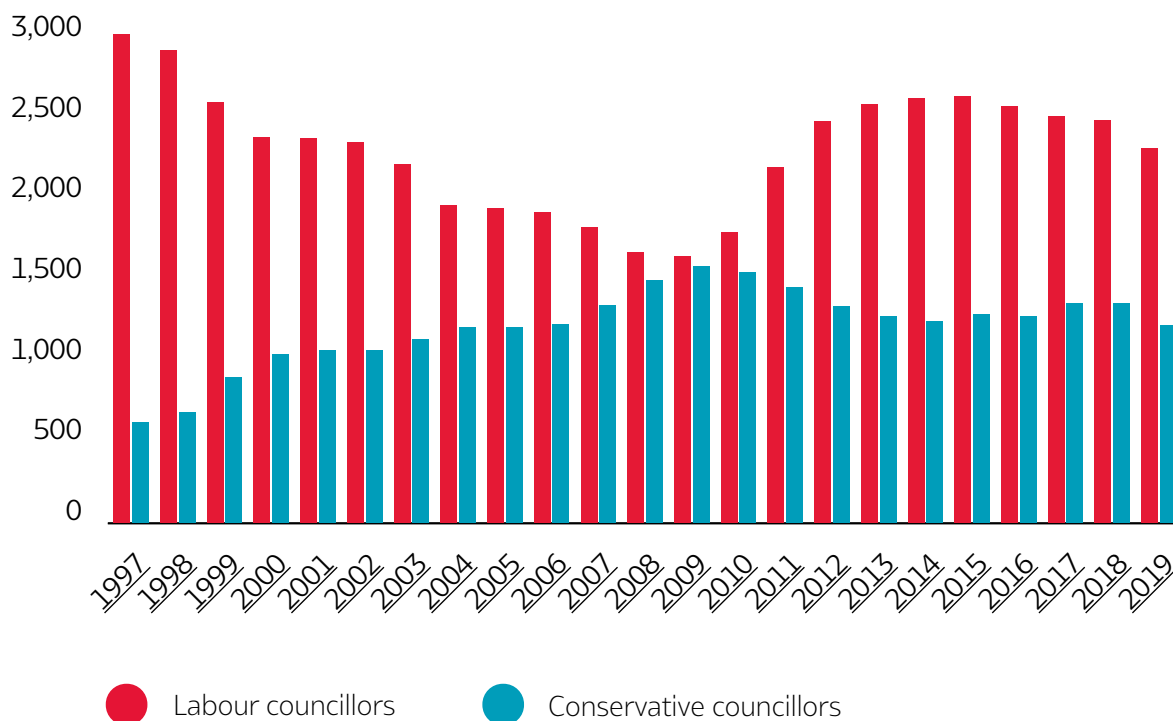
Note: We have estimated 1997–2005 based on former boundaries. Source: [Commons Library, 2020](#)

many strong Northern MPs and councillors and representatives.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives have quietly grown their advantage, expanding majorities and targeting an ever broader range of seats. In Blyth Valley, the Tory share of the vote almost tripled from 2001 to 2017, while Labour's dropped by a third.

Locally too, we have been losing ground. Despite a surge in seats across the North after 2010, since 2015 the number of Northern Labour councillors has steadily declined. More concerning, although the Tories have not increased their number of seats, they have retained them over the past decade. They now have more than half the number of councillors in the North as us. We have also been losing

Councillors across the North



Single and upper tier councils only.
Source: [Open Council Data, 2020](#); matched to data from [ONS, 2018](#)

control of councils. From 2015 to 2019, we lost control of eight councils across the North, such as Hartlepool and Middlesbrough in 2019.

If not addressed, these figures signal an existential crisis. The constituencies and communities which for so long we took for granted have fundamentally

changed. These places began to fall to the Tories in 2017 before leaving Labour en masse in 2019. Unless we recognise how and why, they may be lost for good. And without understanding what isn't working for us on a local level, we cannot hope to win back power nationally. The North is not the only place to be experiencing this. Yet its historical, cultural and political

position is unique in the Labour Party—a heartland and a source of strength. Research which focuses solely on Labour’s heavy losses in the North is limited, while this strength and position is not always at the forefront of the modern party, especially in parliament. We must ensure that it is.

This report provides a basis for further study of how Labour’s problems nationally look in the North, and how concerns felt most acutely here can define our problems nationally. We make sure throughout never to lose sight of practical issues, nor forget the people who need a Labour government now more than ever.

New divides

To understand the post-2019 electoral landscape in the North, we analysed a range of economic, demographic and social indicators across four groups of Northern seats: those Labour has held in every election under current parliamentary boundaries (from 2010), those Labour gained in 2017 or 2019, those Labour lost in those two elections, and those Labour has not held under current boundaries. You can view the full database and list of seats in *Appendix 2*.

Our dashboard reveals a varied picture:

- **Labour's new inner-city safe seats—those held since 2010—actually have much in common with those seats we lost in 2017 and 2019.** Despite having very different demographic profiles and rates of home ownership, these are areas united by relatively

high deprivation, poor school performance, low house prices, and low wages. They also have similar workforces—with the same share of managerial professions—and similar skill levels in the economy.

- **However, the seats Labour lost in 2017 and 2019 can feel culturally like those we have not held since 2010.** Though these two groups of seats are very different in terms of wealth, jobs and deprivation, they are generally older constituencies located in towns and villages,¹ and are mostly white.
- **Labour's safest seats in the North are some of the most left-behind.** Far from the portrayal of Labour as increasingly middle-class and wealthy, the seats we have held since 2010 in the North

¹ We define 'towns' as between 7,500 and 175,000 residents, and 'villages' less than 7,500. See *Appendix 2*.

Northern seats

	Labour held	Labour gain 2017/19	Labour loss 2017/19	Labour not held	UK (excl. Northern Ireland) [†]
% Working age population (mean)	64%	62%	61%	59%	62%
Most common settlement	City	Large town	Large town	Village	Large town
% Managers (mean)	40%	46%	41%	48%	46%
Median deprivation rank (of 533)	78	280	161	378	267
Change in rank since 2010 (mean)	-10	-18	-14	-8	-
Median house price	£137,500	£175,000	£147,748	£200,000	£222,500
Median annual salary	£26,000	£29,600	£27,000	£29,300	£28,800
% Claiming unem. benefits (mean)	4.2%	3.1%	3.7%	2.2%	3%
% Own home (mean)	59%	68%	68%	73%	64%
% Social rented (mean)	24%	16%	17%	11%	18%
% White (mean)	88%	90%	94%	96%	88%
% GCSEs A* to C / 9 to 4 (mean)	59%	63%	61%	67%	64%

[†] Some figures are for England or England and Wales only, due to data availability.

House ownership counting mortgage and outright ownership. Nominal prices.

All data for 2019 where available. You can find full details of the methodology in Appendix 2.

perform worse on almost every indicator, from deprivation to school performance and unemployment. Nearly a third of these constituencies (28 per cent) are highly deprived. This is almost three times higher than the national average and seven per cent higher than seats we have held since 2010 nationwide.

These broad new electoral, social and economic geographies signal both opportunity and danger for us. The inner-city constituencies where Labour is now dominant share many of the same experiences of modern Britain as those Northern seats we lost in 2017 and 2019. This is not something to celebrate. These communities, in places like Blackpool South, Middlesbrough, and Bootle, are among the most deprived in the country. Around 30 per cent of people have at least a degree-level qualification, compared to 46 per cent nationally; exposure to Universal Credit is high and employment often lower than average. Although not something to celebrate, these shared experiences may be a basis on which we can begin to rebuild bridges.

Though Labour is increasingly winning support from young, relatively better-off graduates, of the top 20 most deprived seats in the North, 18 have been held by Labour since 2010. The seats we have not held since 2010—often wealthier small towns and villages such as Harrogate and Hazel Grove—in almost all cases have lower unemployment, lower deprivation, higher salaries and educational achievement, often significantly ahead of other Northern constituencies.

The real danger for us is the cultural divide developing between the seats we have lost in recent elections and those where we are now dominant: between older communities in large and medium towns, and younger, more diverse populations in cities. Despite some of the shared experiences of modern Britain, those key differences—on age, settlement and diversity—can make these two groups of seats feel very different. If we do not bridge this separation, then we may find it harder to reach out in the future.

This data also reveals something about Britain's new class divides. There is a risk of seeing 'working

class', especially in the North, as a white, industrial identity. Labour has not lost its working class character—the most deprived Northern seats are almost all Labour—rather,

Top 20 most deprived seats in the North by election classification



Index of multiple deprivation. Discounting by-elections. *Won by Labour from the Lib Dems in 2015

what it means to be working class in Britain has changed. The modern dividing line is harder to draw, with younger graduates in diverse cities often living alongside highly deprived communities, or themselves struggling to find decent jobs and housing. In towns on the edge of cities and in villages—typically older—home ownership and salaries can be higher, but economies sluggish and public services still hard to access.

The North is held back

The second part of our analysis took the same constituency-level indicators and looked at seats across the three Northern government regions—the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber—as well as the North as a whole.

Here, our dashboard is awash with red. The North falls well behind national averages in key areas—deprivation and unemployment are higher, salaries lower, and school performance worse. As a whole, it has almost double the number of highly deprived areas than the rest of the country. The extent to which

Northern regions

	North	North East	North West	Yorkshire & the Humber	UK (excl. Northern Ireland) [†]
% Working age population (mean)	62%	62.2%	61.9%	62.1%	62.3%
Most common settlement	Large town	Large town	Large town	Large town	Large town
% Managers (mean)	43%	41%	43%	43%	46%
Median deprivation rank (of 533)	145	129	136	158	267
Change in rank since 2010 (mean)	-10	-14	-10	-8	–
Median house price	£150,000	£139,950	£155,000	£155,000	£222,500
Median annual salary	£27,000	£26,900	£27,600	£26,650	£28,800
% Claiming unem. benefits (mean)	3.6%	4.2%	3.5%	3.3%	3.0%
% Own home (mean)	64%	63%	65%	64%	64%
% Social rented (mean)	19%	22%	18%	18%	18%
% White (mean)	91%	96%	91%	89%	88%
% GCSEs A* to C / 9 to 4 (mean)	62%	61%	62%	62%	64%

See note to table on page 15

the South has drawn investment and attention is already obvious; public spending on the economy and investment in the North is half what it is in London.² Yet the acute image the data draws here is still jarring.

Though the North contains many dynamic centres of growth, such as Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and others, the share of managerial professions is generally lower, an indication of the major draw London and the South have on businesses and jobs. Economic activity is also lower, as are qualifications, and it is startling that all three regions perform worse on every health outcome we measure here, from heart disease to cancer and obesity.

The North East performs on most indicators, with noticeably higher deprivation and unemployment benefit claims than average. It also has some of the lowest levels of school funding for any region in the country, and its constituencies, by median, have fallen 14 places in the deprivation ranking since 2010, a staggering amount for a region which has ostensibly long been a

priority for governments.

Only in a few areas, noticeably access to housing, does the North do significantly better than the rest of the country. Even this is mostly due to depressed house prices across most of the North, where median prices are £72,500 lower than average.

² IPPR North, 2019

Demographic change

We cannot understand this new electoral landscape without understanding how the demography of once-safe Labour seats has changed, often in large or medium towns with slowly-growing and rapidly-ageing populations. More than almost every other social or political indicator, age now determines how we vote, something which should be very concerning for a party which has struggled to attract older voters in recent elections.

towns and ten times as likely to live in villages than Labour-held seats. Almost half—46 per cent—of our seats across the country are now in core cities, primarily London.³

|| Whilst 'the North' is uniformly disadvantaged economically, it is very diverse culturally, for instance big cities versus small towns and rural areas, especially post-2016

Liverpool Riverside

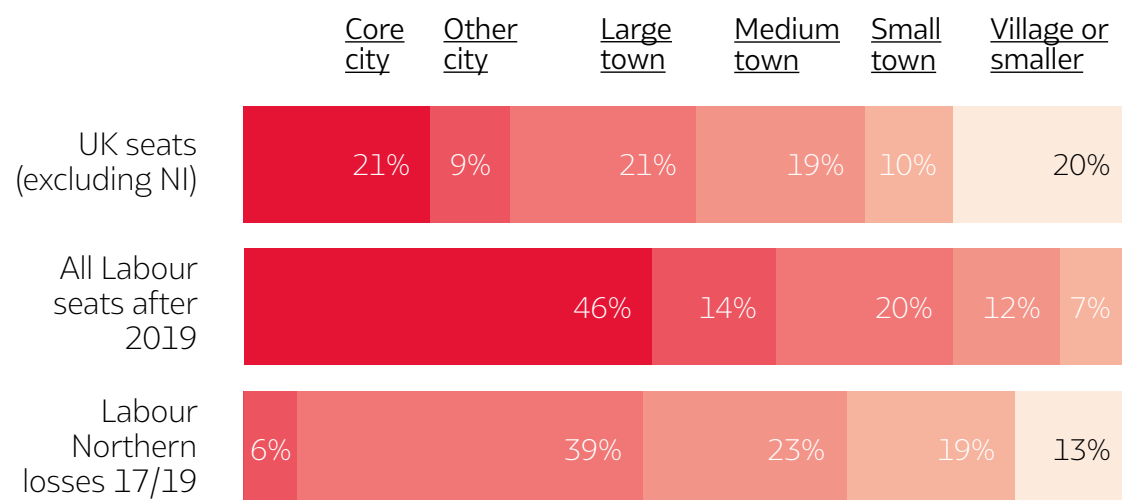
Labour's Northern losses are primarily in towns

Labour, particularly in 2017 and 2019, is now a party that draws nearly all of its electoral power from cities, where we have often stored up massive majorities. Voters in seats we lost in the North in 2019 are more than twice as likely to live in

Towns and villages are not always isolated geographically, yet they have often been left behind economically. Even large towns do not always share equally in the proceeds of the UK's growth, which is usually driven by big cities.

³ 'Core cities' are major population and economic centres; see *Appendix 2*.

Parliamentary seats by primary settlement



Primary settlement defined by most residents. See Appendix 2.

Labour's increasing dominance here reinforces a sense of us as disconnected from most of the country, something many of those we interviewed and surveyed spoke about. Yet we have done little to address this, often not taking enough time as a party to design policies for towns, or to engage enough with voters outside of cities. This is extremely concerning, for we cannot and should not try to win power nationally from cities alone.

These seats have also experienced dramatic age shifts

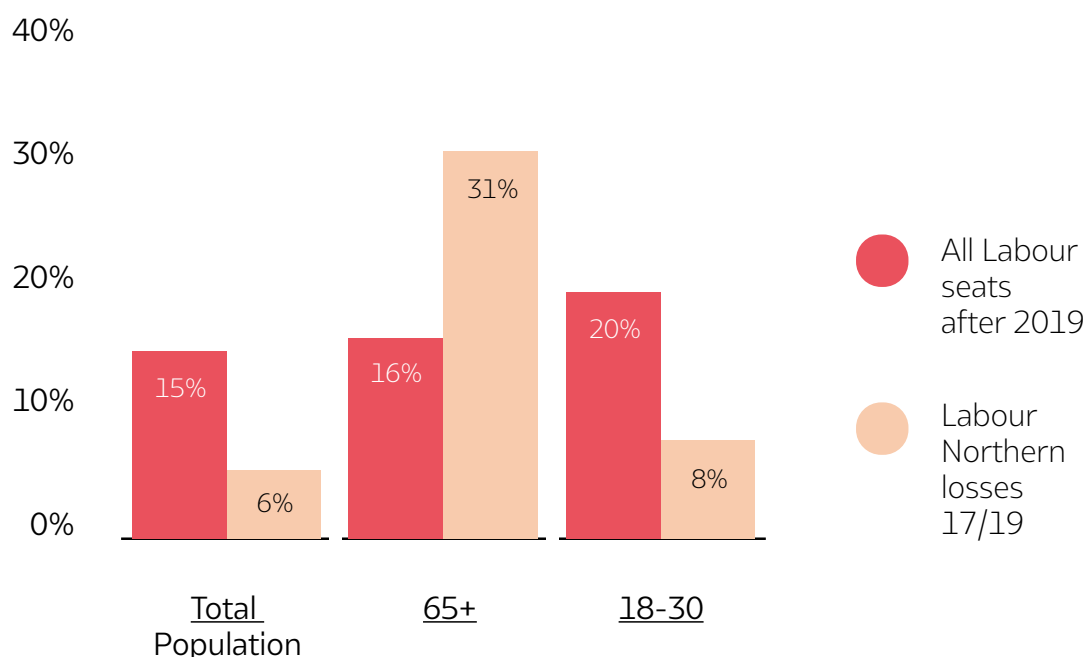
Many of the Northern seats we lost in 2017 and 2019 have been marked by rapid rises in their age profiles over the past few decades, and are now far older than other Labour seats and the country as a whole. Rather than experiencing an exodus of young people, these places have often had lower population growth than the UK average, while attracting fewer younger people from outside.

Part I The Long Retreat

From 2002 to 2018, the population of over-65s in the seats we lost in the North increased by 31 per cent on average, far higher than other Labour seats. In eight of these seats, such as Warrington South, Stockton South and Penistone and Stockbridge, the population of over-65s increased by more than 40 per cent.

At the same time, younger populations have stagnated or declined. The growth in the population of 18–30 year olds from 2002 to 2018 was more than double in Northern seats that we won in 2019 than in those we lost.

Average population growth from 2002–2018



Note: We have estimated pre-2010 figures based on former seat boundaries. Data for 2019 was not available. Source: [ONS, 2019](#)

Case Study: Blyth Valley

These trends are best illustrated in Blyth Valley. While the number of people over 65 in the constituency has increased by almost 50 per cent, the number of 18–30 year olds has shrunk by five per cent since 2002. Many community facilities in the area have subsequently closed. Public services in the neighbouring town of Ashington have been cut back far further than the UK average, with fewer GPs, bus stops, health services and schools in 2018 than in 2011.¹ Amidst concerns over falling pupil numbers, some schools have closed in the area and free bus services stopped.²

The imposition of central government funding cuts has forced Labour councils to oversee the closure of local services. In Blyth, fire and police stations were shut, a decision greatly unpopular with residents, which fuelled feelings of distrust with Labour more widely. The rapidly ageing population has necessitated more and more funds be spent on accessible housing and primary care for older residents, though other projects, such as the regeneration of the old coal staithes, have been successful. Lack of access to affordable housing and the absence of social and cultural facilities remain a constant concern, however.



Old coal staithes, North Blyth

¹ Bennett Institute, 2019

² Chronicle Live, 2014

// Traditional industries that helped form the character of our community have completely disappeared

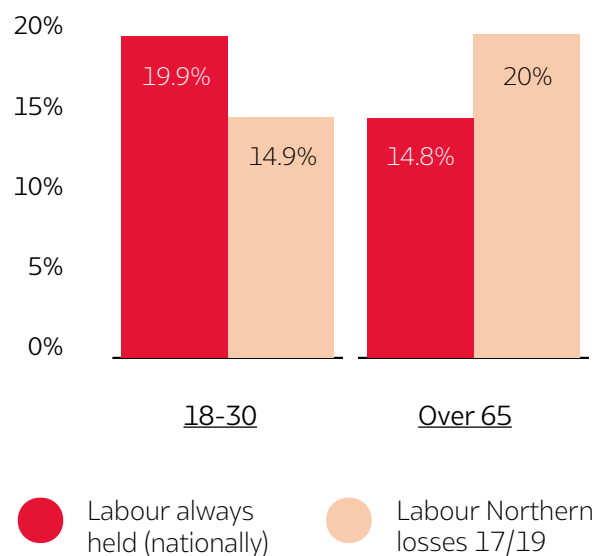
Rother Valley

These demographic changes reflect and reinforce economic stagnation, where fewer and fewer young people, from Britain and abroad, are drawn to those areas, often towns, with sluggish and undynamic economies. This creates a vicious cycle of lower investment and economic neglect, leaving left-behind areas to slowly age, while more economically and demographically dynamic cities grow at a faster pace. As the remaining population ages, pressure increases on local health and support services, leaving less and less money for other priorities.

Age is now one of the strongest indicators of voting preference

The changing age profile of

Constituency age profiles

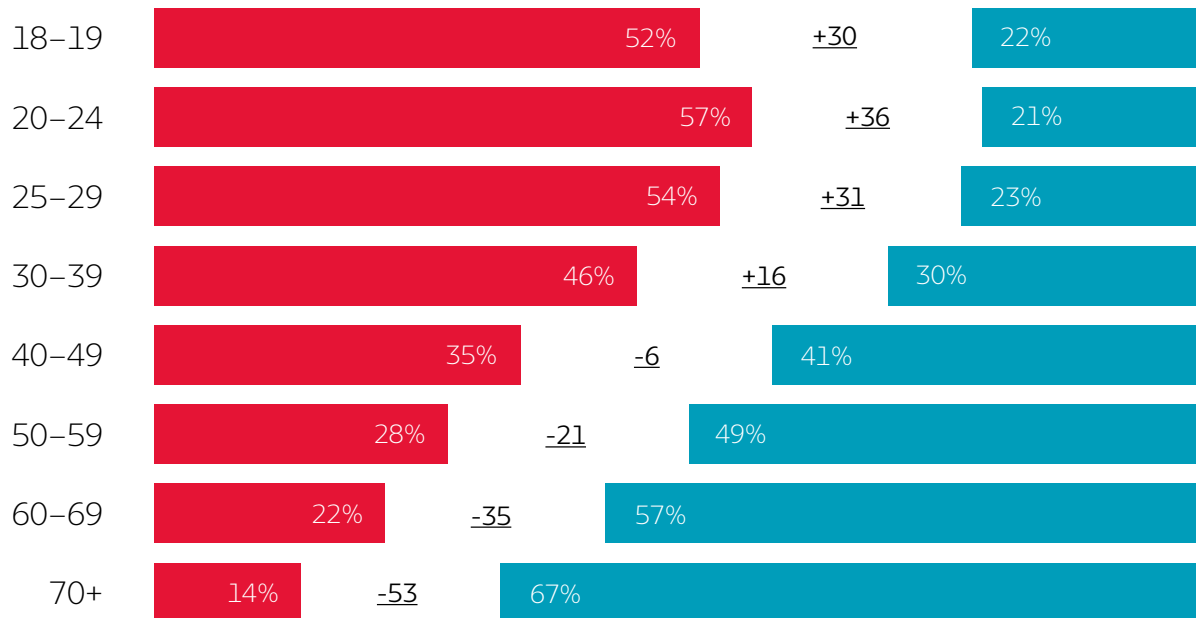


% of the constituency (mean). See Appendix 2.

Northern towns should greatly concern us, for age is now a key indicator of how we as a country vote. This divide really became apparent in 2017, but has been growing over the last few general elections.

Where a decade ago Labour and the Conservatives won roughly equal shares in most age groups, now the gulf is dramatic. Though it has been growing since 2010, it was hugely accelerated in the last two general

2019 vote share by age



Source: [YouGov, 2019](#)

elections under the previous party leadership. In 2019, we won over half the vote of those under 30, while winning just 14 per cent of the over-70s.

For every 10 years older a voter was at the 2019 election, their chance of voting Tory increased by nine per cent, while the chance of them voting Labour decreased by eight. We were 53 points behind the Conservatives among the over-70s

in 2019, a staggering amount among voters who are most likely to turn out at elections.

These changes in voting behaviour partly reflect the diverging fortunes and views of different generations in modern Britain. Partly they are a phenomenon every rich democracy is experiencing. Yet, in a country which is ageing, particularly in key Northern seats, and when older voters are far more likely to vote, we

must begin to address this enormous asymmetry. Most younger voters, now strongly Labour, tend also to be concentrated in safe inner-city seats, where their electoral strength is blunted. We cannot simply hope that this issue will rebalance itself. Without making efforts to win over voters who left us in 2019, who tend to be older and concentrated in the key seats we lost, we cannot hope to win back power.

II The ‘brain drain’ to London, lack of high quality jobs in the North, the dominance of large cities and their elected mayors has left towns trailing in their wake with little or no power to control the lives of ordinary people

Chorley

Economic and social transformation

Deindustrialisation, economic change, insecure work, and disinvestment extending far back beyond 2010—though austerity was a critical and malign catalyst—characterise many of the Northern seats we lost in 2019. Voters in these constituencies felt let down by governments of all colours and sought a chance to have their voice heard, in 2019 as they had in the 2016 referendum. And, as their world changed around them, some staunchly felt that we were not present in their communities, and had for many years taken them for granted.

The economy of the North has been neglected

The North has been disproportionately impacted by deindustrialisation and economic changes over the past half century. Jobs in mining and manufacturing have been replaced by work that is more likely to be low-paid,

low-skilled and more precarious. Traditional industries which once defined Northern communities have disappeared, without anything to replace them, particularly in seats we lost in 2017 and 2019.

Despite a number of prosperous cities with resilient service-based economies, many areas outside of these places in the North are defined by more low-skill and low-wage economies. As we saw on our dashboard, the North as a whole suffers. Even in cities, wages are lower than the rest of the country. Towns lag further behind, and many graduates are drawn to the South by higher wages and better jobs.

Today, the North's economy has a greater share of jobs in low-paying industries than nationally. Median annual salaries are almost £3,000 lower than the rest of the country, while the higher concentration of manufacturing and retail work has contributed to slower than average employment growth and easier layoffs. At the same time, its

share of employment in high-paying sectors falls behind the national average.

Median annual salary



See Appendix 2

The North has suffered immensely from a decade of austerity since 2010, as well as slow employment and weak pay growth following the financial crisis. Spending cuts from the Tory government were deeper here than anywhere else. From 2009–10 to 2017–18, public spending in the North dropped £3.6bn, but

rose £5.1bn in the South. ⁴ Since 2014 the number of children living in poverty has risen by 200,000, to 800,000. ⁵

Labour councils have been disproportionately hit by these cuts. Between 2010 and 2020, the spending power of local authorities, often Labour, in the North fell by 25 per cent, compared to 20 per cent in the South. ⁶ In transport, spending on London is seven times more per capita (£3,636) than on the North East (£519) or Yorkshire and the Humber (£511). ⁷

Loss of manufacturing jobs, large areas of empty homes where people no longer want to live, insecure employment has replaced skilled work, income and health inequality, depressed high streets, austerity has meant cuts in council services supporting the community

Redcar

⁴ IPPR, 2019

⁵ IPPR, 2019

⁶ iNews, 2018

⁷ IPPR North, 2019

Case Study: Keighley

The fortunes of the former mill town of Keighley in West Yorkshire embody many of the economic changes the North has experienced. The closures of mills and factories left a landscape blemished by shuttered buildings and a community with little work and less to tie it together, despite an incredible enduring local pride. Twenty per cent of residents still work in manufacturing, many in low-wage roles—more than double the national average.

Skills in the economy are lower than the rest of the country, with more than 30 per cent of people having no formal qualifications. The town is also hampered by poor transport links, from slow trains, few buses and sluggish roads, despite its closeness to Bradford city centre and Leeds.¹

The town has faced savage spending cuts. The local Airedale hospital is starved of funds and, like so many other towns, shops on the high street are closing. Poverty and substance abuse are growing issues, and food bank usage is at record levels.² In the past year, the much-loved local Carnegie Library has come close to closure.

Keighley constituency is a traditional



Cavenidish Street, Keighley

¹ CityMetric, 2018

² New Statesman, 2019

election bellwether—53 per cent of people voted for Brexit in 2016—and elected a Conservative MP in 2019. Though a marginal win, many residents felt that Labour nationally did not speak to either their history and aspirations, a sentiment evidence from our survey and interviews reflected. Despite respect for local Labour representatives, as a party, residents often saw us as isolated from their lives, and unable to propose

// [There was] a feeling Labour no longer represented the working class living in small towns of the North and Midlands

Keighley

anything they felt could reverse years of neglect in their area.

In part, this is because the government's funding formulas for allocating money are deeply flawed. For decades, the Treasury has used the 'Green Book' as a decision-making tool for investment decisions. There is considerable evidence that the appraisal methods and formulas contained within it favour investment in parts of the country with already higher economic activity, creating a catch-22 in which investment is channelled into areas with existing good infrastructure and higher productivity. These areas tend to be in London and the South-East, while the North repeatedly misses out.

The government has recently published a new Green Book,

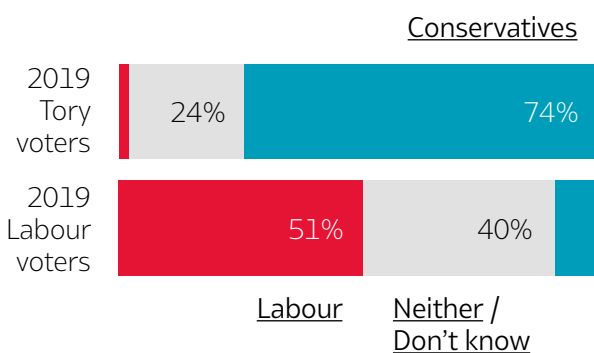
supposedly in order to take account of the 'levelling up' agenda. Labour must scrutinise how the government uses this tool to ensure that we actually see long-term meaningful reform of the way investment decisions are made in the UK. Simply publishing a new Green Book will not be enough; Labour must hold the government to account for their actions in this area.

Many former voters felt as if they had been abandoned

It is common to hear that voters are fed up with central government. Yet the reality is still shocking: only 15 per cent of people in Britain think Westminster politicians reflect the concerns of their part of the country.⁸

Among Labour-Conservative switchers, the sense that Labour was aloof or did not listen to their concerns was higher than almost any other group. In 2019, only 51

Who best represents the public's values and general outlook among voters?



% of respondents
Source: [Ashcroft Polls, 2020](#)

per cent of Labour voters thought that we reflected people's values and outlooks, compared to 74 per cent of Conservative voters for their party. These sentiments have been apparent in many Northern seats for years, yet we have not done enough to address it as a party, despite our many committed Northern Labour MPs.

// I think austerity has changed everything. Labour councils are hit the hardest and have the littlest to spend on communities. Council tax, police and fire, parish rises are inevitable to people who are all struggling and even they don't come close to covering the social care pressures

North West Durham

Brexit is partly responsible for this impression, though in many ways it became a metaphor for a party which these voters felt had been

⁸ [Yougov, 2018](#)

drifting away from them for years (see *Section II*). They sought a chance to have their voice heard in any way: in 2019, just as for Brexit.

As Labour councils were some of the hardest-hit by austerity, they also often received the blame for cuts to public services. In long-held constituencies—where there is often not a strong campaigning culture—this could be compounded by a sense that we were not involved enough in the community, and only knocked on doors to ask for votes.

Many of the Northern Labour representatives and candidates we surveyed and interviewed talked about this, particularly sitting local councillors, speaking of a profound disconnect between national policy debates and local issues, a deep-seated feeling amongst voters that the political system wasn't working for them and an enduring perception of us as ineffective, complacent or indifferent.

During Labour's most recent time in power, there was a feeling among our panel that we failed to truly address economic neglect in many Northern seats—though we improved lives in many ways—that

“ We were unrealistic with promises when out of power - losing trust, taking our support for granted. Our voters felt powerless and we did nothing to make them feel any different.

Redcar

we were seen as isolated in London and did not listen to local issues. Even when our proposals offered to reverse economic neglect, then and since, people have not always taken us seriously, partly out of this sense of separation from their lives, as well as a broader lack of trust. Such profound feelings of abandonment, of a party which they saw as taking them for granted, meant that voters who left us could switch to a party which, despite having been in power for ten years, usually had little history in their communities and so could present itself as radical and novel.

This does not need to be a permanent state of affairs. One of the most important things voters have always wanted to see from parties is an ability to involve a range of voices and ideas in a transparent way, rather than looking

inwards.⁹ Though voter loyalties are at an all-time low (see page 39), if we genuinely listen and learn: speaking to aspiration as well as history when we talk about regeneration; rebuilding trust and a sense of competence; and making use of our MPs and councillors—then voters might place their confidence in us again.

⁹ Dommett & Temple, 2018

Cultural faultlines

Culture has rapidly replaced economic issues as the key political divide in modern Britain, particularly in the last two general elections. At the same time, old political certainties have been undermined: voter loyalty to parties has weakened and class-based voting has all but vanished. Our 2019 coalition was particularly vulnerable to these new forces, forces which we have often struggled to adjust to.

New cultural faultlines have opened over the past two decades

In recent decades, new cultural faultlines—along issues such as immigration, multiculturalism, and globalisation—have opened in Britain. These new divides

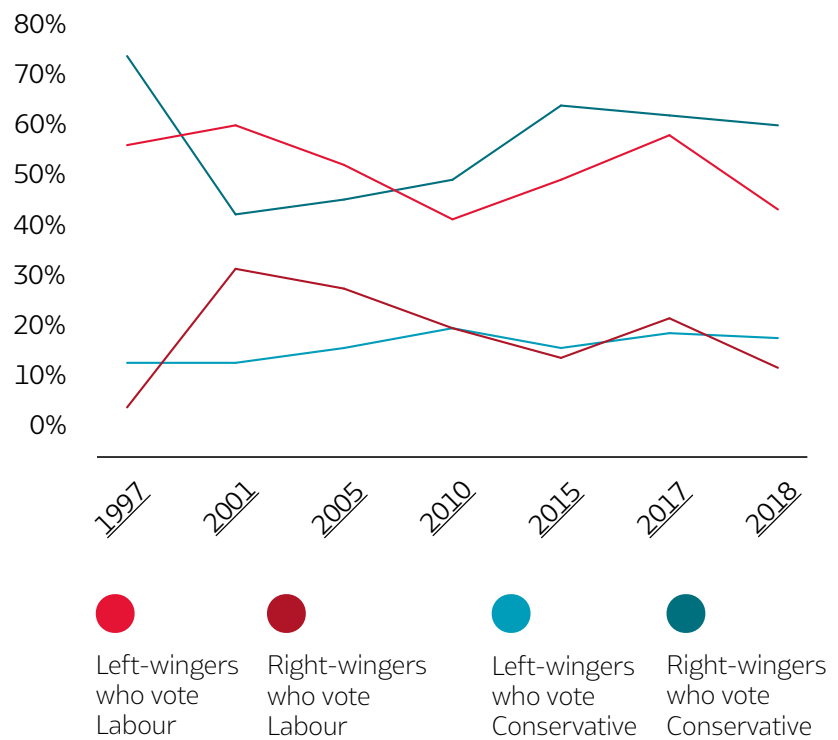
can best be understood on a progressive spectrum, from what social scientists call ‘social liberals’ to ‘social authoritarians’. The former are more likely to support progressivism over social conservatism, personal liberalism over authority; social authoritarians the reverse. In most polls, this scale is composed of a set of key cultural questions (see *Appendix 1*).

Since 2015, this liberal-authoritarian divide has deepened. While the proportion of social liberals supporting Labour has climbed steeply, to almost two-thirds (58 per cent) in 2018, the proportion supporting the Conservatives has dropped precipitously.¹⁰ Meanwhile, voting patterns in the traditional left-right divide has largely remained the same over the past two decades. In every election since 2001, around 40–60 per cent of those

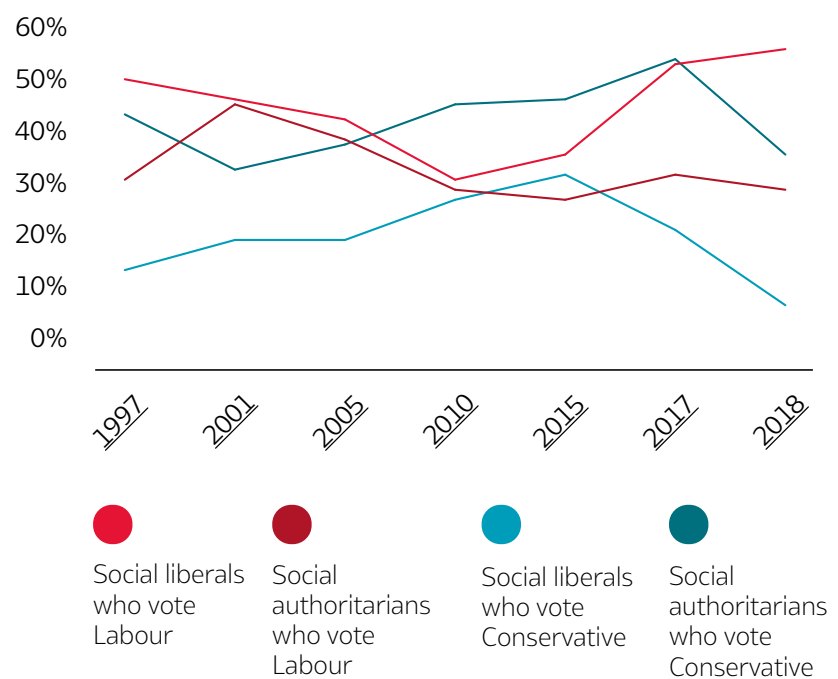
¹⁰ Note that this data is only available up to the period before Boris Johnson became Prime Minister, when the Conservatives were haemorrhaging votes from Brexit-supporters. It is very likely that many more socially authoritarian voters have since returned, which is not reflected in the graph.

Part I The Long Retreat

Party support
from social
liberals and social
authoritarians



Party support
from left-wingers
and right-wingers



% of each group who vote for party at election. Note: We have calculated 2018 using next election voting intention (PartyIDN), and 1997 using party support (PartyID1). Data for 2019 was not available. Source: [British Social Attitudes, 1997–2018](#)

Part I The Long Retreat

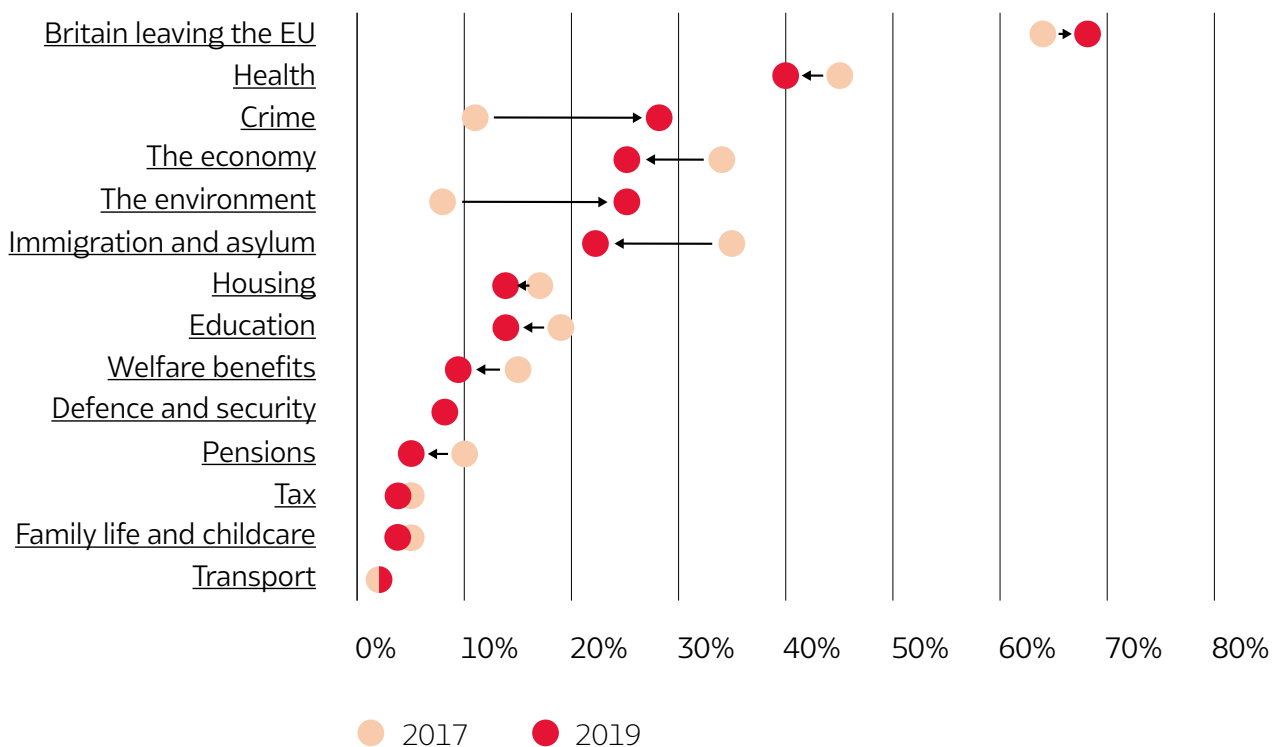
voters who favour traditional left-wing economic values have backed Labour, whilst a similar proportion of those who support right-wing economic values voted for the Conservatives.

This means that, while traditional left-right divides are not necessarily redundant, they have in recent

elections been superseded by dramatic new cultural ones, with voters more split on this spectrum than at any time in the last 20 years. These new cultural faultlines far predated Brexit, yet they have come to be defined by it (see *Section II*).

This is also reflected in the relative decline of some ‘valence issues’—

Perceived most important issues from 2017 to 2019



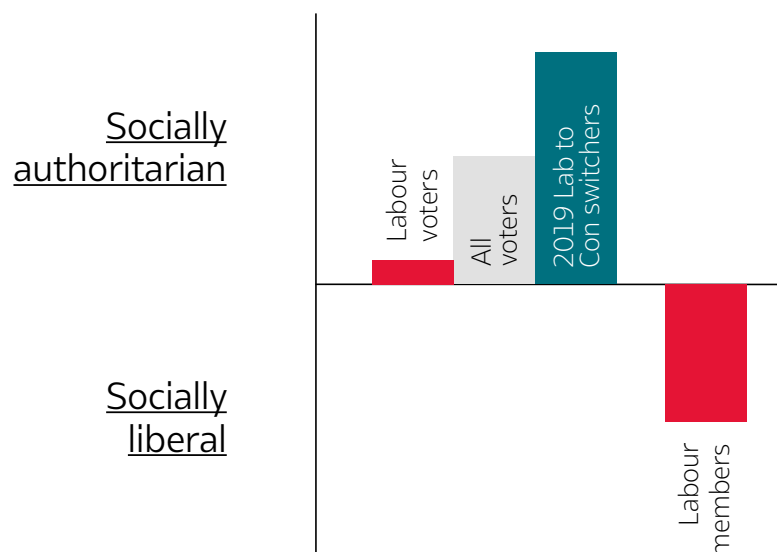
% of respondents; up-to-three selection. Note: 'Defence and security' wasn't included on the list in 2017. Source: [Yougov, 2019](#)

issues where there is usually broad consensus among voters on what to do, such as health—and the rise of more ‘position issues’, such as the EU or crime, which can become cultural battlegrounds.¹¹

Labour straddles greater divides than the Conservatives

In the general election, Labour was particularly vulnerable to these new cultural divides, which so readily cut across traditional cleavages and

Social values of key groups



Arbitrary scale. Source: [UK in a Changing Europe, 2020](#)

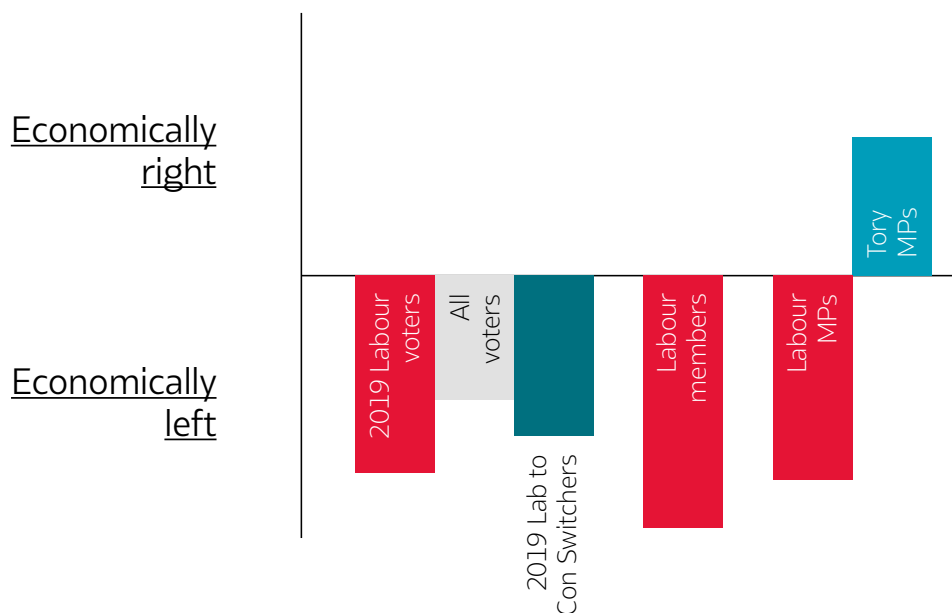
¹¹ This effect is not uniform, however; from 2017 to 2019 the perceived importance of immigration actually declined, though this may have been due to people increasingly associating Brexit with immigration policy.

party loyalties. The social values chart above shows how large the gap between 2019 voters' position on these key cultural questions which make up the scale, and that of Labour members. Those voters, generally older, who switched from us to the Conservatives in 2019—crucial in the swathe of seats we lost across the North—were further along

the spectrum than any other group.

We will continue to struggle if the debate remains over cultural issues. We should remember that Labour mostly represents voters who are more socially liberal than the rest of the country, and that a significant move rightwards on cultural issues would likely come with losses.

Economic values of key groups



Arbitrary scale. Representative poll of MPs
Source: [UK in a Changing Europe, 2020](#)

This does not mean that we should dismiss the concerns of socially authoritarian voters. Though more liberal than other groups, 2019 Labour voters were almost directly in the middle of the spectrum. Many of our Northern supporters, even those who stayed with us in 2019, simply felt that we did not reflect their outlook, and were not willing to listen on issues they cared about. In many cases, the leadership did not come across as patriotic or trustworthy and, too often, were seen to obsess over certain liberal topics. Important though these may have been, many voters felt they did not really impact upon their lives.

Boris Johnson and his new group of Blue Wall Tories are attempting to draw us into new theatres of the culture war and onto divisive topics which can replace the Brexit divide. Looking at the graph on the economic values of key groups above, we can see why the Conservatives are desperate to keep the debate fixed on cultural matters and away from economic values, as Labour-to-Tory switchers—in fact the whole country—are more in tune with Labour's economic values. The

// Labour was seen as non-aspirational and unpatriotic.

Rossendale and Darwen

challenge Labour has is to convince voters that we have the economic competence to deliver on these shared economic values.

Voter loyalty to parties has weakened

British voters are now less likely to express loyalty to parties than at any other point in modern electoral history. We felt this particularly strongly in the North where, in many of the seats we lost, voting Labour was once seen as a cross-generational and social duty.

Of course, low voter loyalty does not only affect Labour. It is also a product of a greater volatility in our politics, in which nearly half of all voters switched their votes from one party to another between 2010

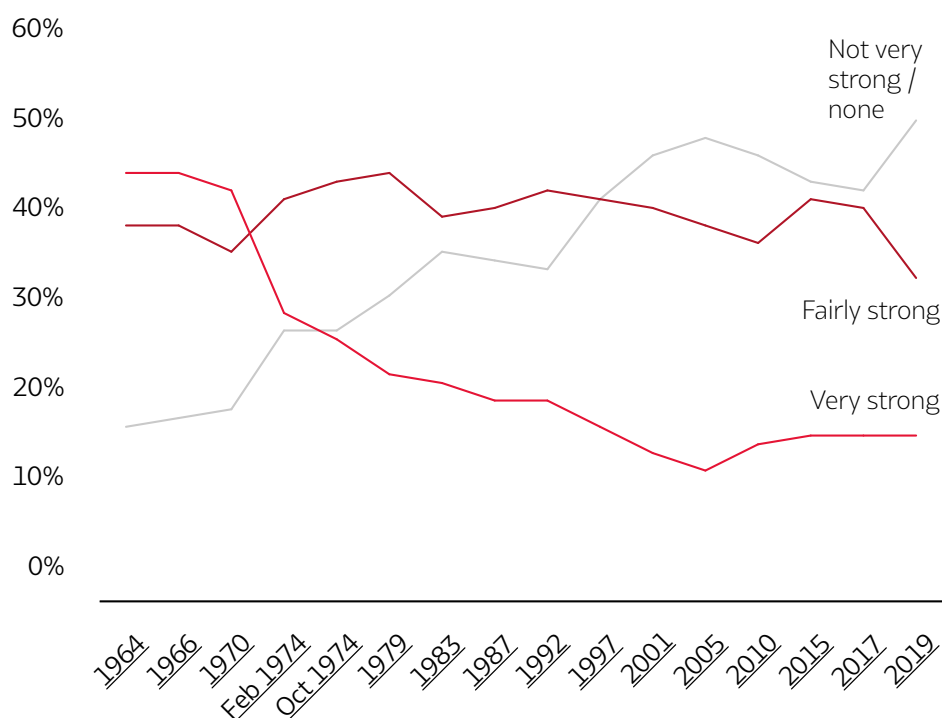
Part I The Long Retreat

and 2018.¹² We have often been unwilling to address this newly-volatile reality. An inability to see voters as more than supporters to turn out on election day, or to address perceptions of us as isolated in London, helped to engender a

“ If Labour are seen to step back from anti-austerity or triangulate on issues of equality and liberty, we will fracture the coalition we already have.

Sheffield Central

Strength of party identity



% of respondents. Note: 2019 indicates voting intention.
Source: [British Election Study, 1964–2017](#); [Yougov, 2019](#)

¹² Fieldhouse et al., 2019

deep disconnect in 2019, where Labour was only seen as part of the problem.

Class is now a poor predictor of voting patterns

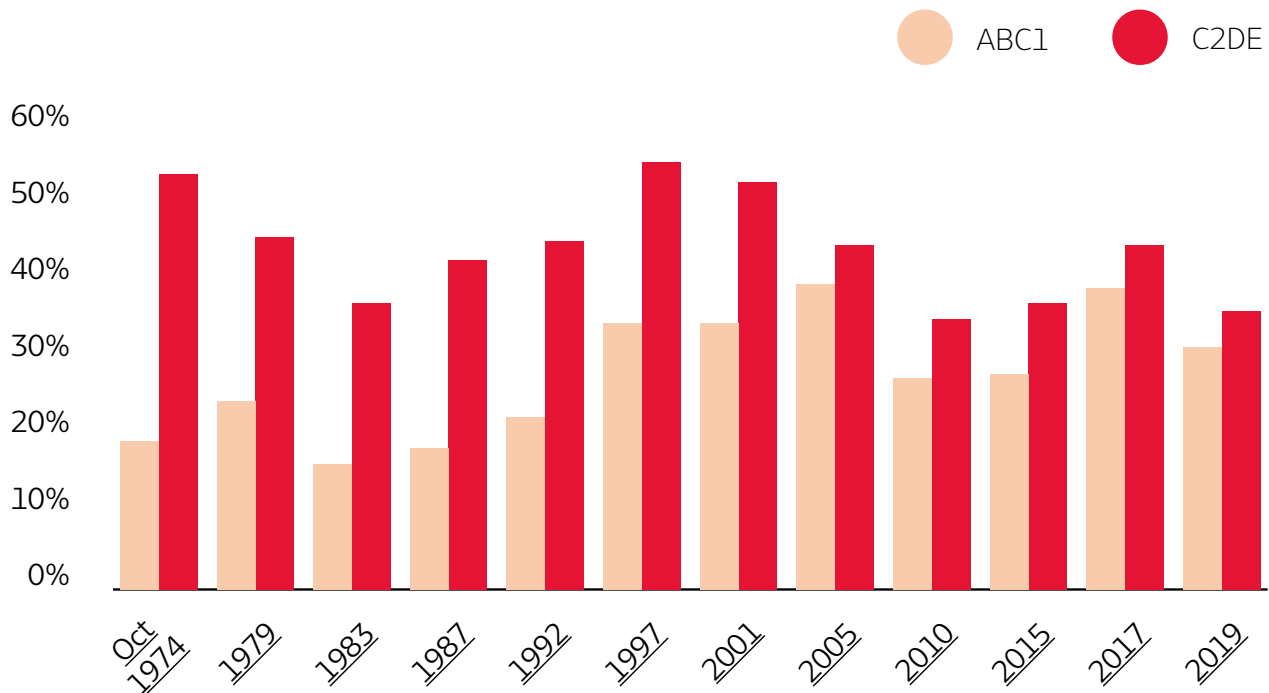
One of the most significant trends in this new volatility is the decline of traditional conceptions of class

II [There has been a] disconnect between local politicians and national politicians and involvement and opportunities to feed in to campaigns on the ground.

Bishop Auckland

in how we vote. Since the turn of the century, the voting divide

Labour share of class vote



Source: Ipsos MORI, 1974–2019

between middle class voters (ABC1) and working class voters (C2DE) has disappeared. In 1974, Labour reliably turned out over half of working class voters (53 per cent), yet only a fifth of middle class voters. Since 2005, we have drawn almost equal support from both groups.

This is reflected across other European left-wing parties, which have also become more dominant among younger, middle class university graduates in cities, while losing voters in former industrial towns. Yet, as we saw on our constituency dashboard, it is also because what it means to be ‘working class’ has changed in Britain, beyond what the ABC1/C2DE distinction can really capture.

As with voters who now hold little affection for party, Labour has often struggled to adjust to this new reality. We have much work to do to re-establish trust with former voters. We should achieve this not by casting back to a past era, but by making sure we listen to their concerns and aspirations, and more often tune our policies and outlook to their priorities. The greatest risk for Labour is complacency: that, in this newly-turbulent politics, we

II The loss of jobs in primary industry - mostly railway engineering and railway operations - has destroyed the strength of the trade unions, undermined community solidarity and the traditional ‘class loyalty’ has largely vanished

Crewe and Nantwich

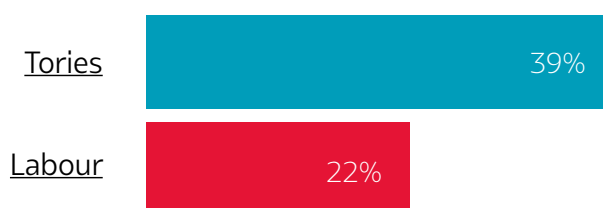
fail to listen to our former voters, and allow another party to build lasting links.

Northern and national identities

Voters who care deeply about Northern and national identity, as well as those proud of their more immediate local area, have become a powerful political force, a group which wants to see their pride reflected better in their representatives and government. Northern identity, in all its diversity, is much stronger than for any other region in England. Labour has frequently failed to act strongly enough on this strength of identity: contributing to the alienation of many former voters and fuelling a disconnect between party and place.

are more energised to engage in politics and more likely to punish the parties and politicians they see as arrogant or dismissive. Indeed, our limited qualitative survey and series of interviews brought up many stories of deep pride among constituents, almost always accompanied by feelings that it was not being reflected by the established parties, particularly Labour.

Who do people think best represents 'British values'?



% of respondents. Among those who say they 'have a lot of respect for British values'.
Source: [RSA, 2020](#)

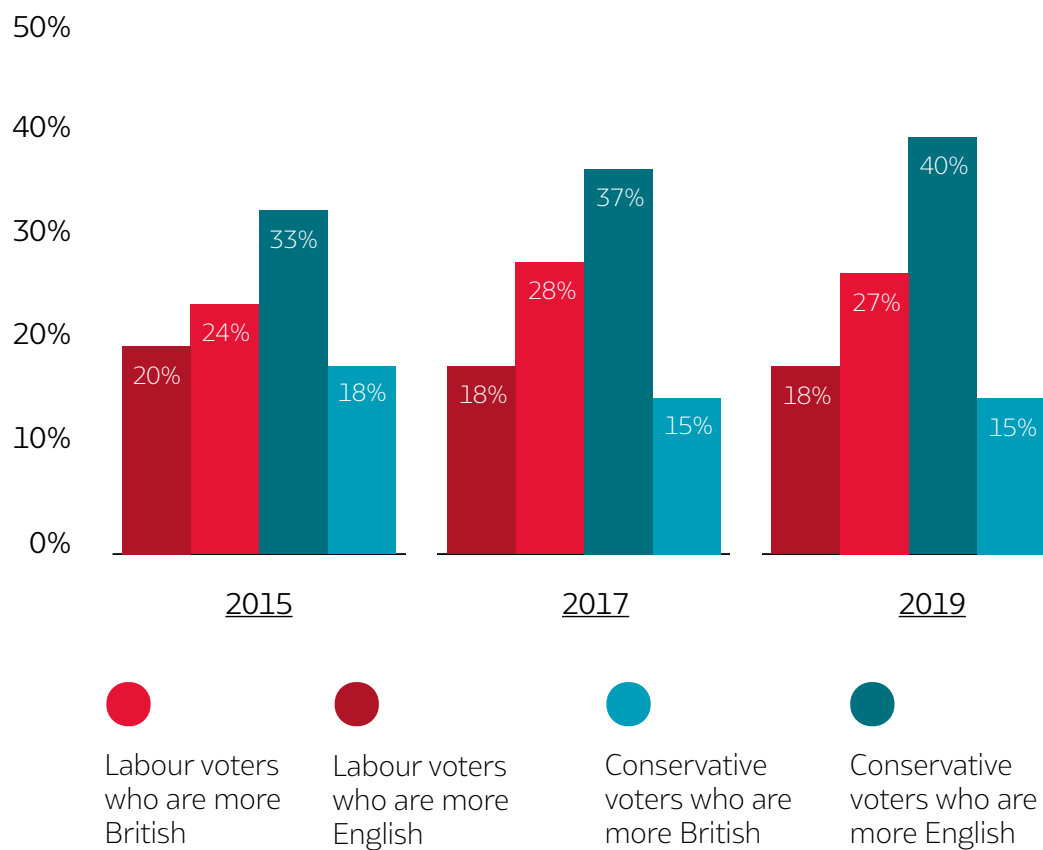
Identity is increasingly important at elections

National, regional and local identities have never been more politically important. While direct data remains limited, it seems that voters who are proudest of their local and regional identities, particularly when they feel this is neglected by their representatives,

With regards to national identities, this phenomenon is partly discernible in voting patterns, particularly in England. In 2019, 40 per cent of all Conservative voters described themselves as ‘more

English than British’, up from 33 per cent only four years ago, while more than twice as many Labour voters were ‘more British than English’. This identity divide is partly a reflection of the cultural spectrum

Party vote and national identity



% of respondents. England only. Amalgamated Moreno identity. Not including 'Equally English and British'. Note: 2019 indicates voting intention rather than previous vote.
Source: [Centre for English Identity and Politics](#); [Yougov](#); 2017, 2019

we discussed in the previous section, with those who identify as more English, as well as those who associate with a national identity at all, more likely to be social authoritarians.

This should concern us, for Labour has not been seen to care enough about identity, particularly national identity and the values people associate with it: something the left can view as, at best, distasteful. Among voters who say they have a lot of respect for ‘British values’, only 22 per cent think Labour nationally best represents them. Of those Labour representatives and candidates we interviewed in seats lost in 2019, all were hugely proud of their town, city, village or local area's identity, and all told of voter anger at the national Labour party's seeming inability to respect this pride.

National, regional or local identities of course do not need to be divisive or exclusionary. To be proud of your area is to want to see it do better, and to have your passion recognised more widely. On national identity, most voters who identify as English

tend to value patriotism and self-governance over more controversial topics.¹³

Northern voters are proudest of their identity

Pride in identity is enormously strong in the North. Almost twice as many people in the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber express very strong feelings of regional identity than any other area of England, even those with prominent identities, such as the South West.

Voters can see us as a London-centric party, unwilling to listen to their concerns, despite Labour's roots in the North and many strong Northern MPs fighting this perception. Almost three-quarters of Northern voters think we no longer represent our traditional voters here. Our in-depth interviews brought up deeply personal stories from interviewees of huge pride in their local areas, and how we were often seen to ignore this, particularly

¹³ English Labour Network, 2020

Part I The Long Retreat

when local representatives and campaigners weren't consulted on proposals which would have affected their area, or when national policies were not seen to fit local priorities.

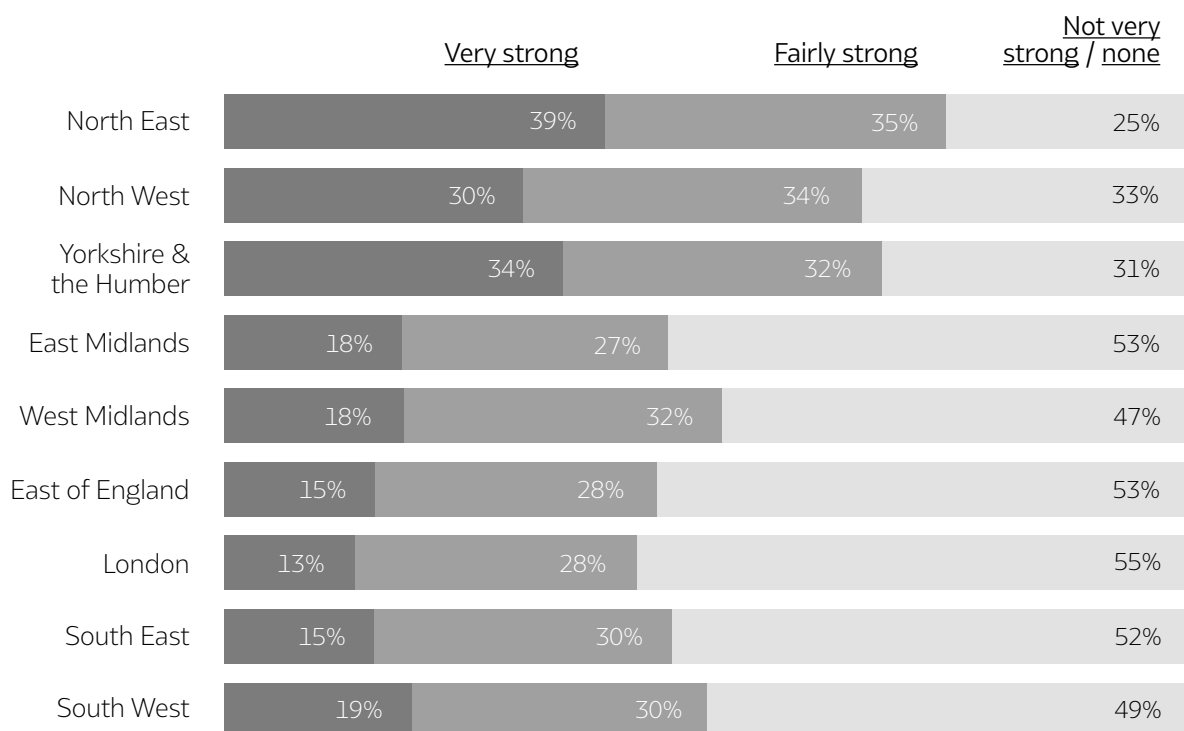
These identities are built around a common narrative and collective values unique to the North, which also reflects diverse cultural and

II [There was] a sense of the party being out-of-touch (both at national and local level)

Manchester Withington

social heritages, from Tyneside to Merseyside and many other places in-between: from wards to villages,

How strongly people identify as being from a region, across England



% of respondents. Source: Yougov, 2018

// Labour has failed to engage with communities
Newcastle East

towns, cities and regions. They are not ‘imagined communities’ but concrete characters, shaped by a shared sense of community, fellowship and history, and pride in landscapes, sports teams, buildings and symbols.

We were not seen to respect or even recognise this pride in 2019, and allowed ourselves to be presented as isolated, uncaring and untrusted by our opponents and the media. To even begin to reverse this, Labour needs a stronger Northern voice, in parliament and across the country, talking about Northern issues and reflecting patriotism and pride diverse Northern identities, while listening to local concerns.

If we fail to do this, then we are limiting our appeal to large parts of the country, and may allow other parties to define these identities in

Asking Northerners:

Does Labour no longer represent its traditional voters?



% of respondents. Amalgamated 10-point scale.
Source: Ashcroft Polls, 2020

// Communication recently has been poor (2017 manifesto was not really relevant to the North East), Labour leadership was seen as too London-centric and focused on metropolitan issues rather than what matters locally

Bishop Auckland

a more exclusionary and divisive way. There is broad support for new regional representation which listens to local views.¹⁴ If Labour is

¹⁴ Yougov, 2018

to talk about devolving power, then we need to recognise this, ensuring that any proposals meaningfully take control away from Whitehall, make sense culturally and geographically, and are not portrayed as more politicians for politicians' sake.

Part II — 2016 And After



Brexit and the party's leadership were overwhelmingly cited by deserting 2019 voters as reasons for their decision. Indeed, this was strongly reflected in what our Northern councillors, candidates and MPs told us. It would be a mistake, however, only to change leader, forget about Brexit and

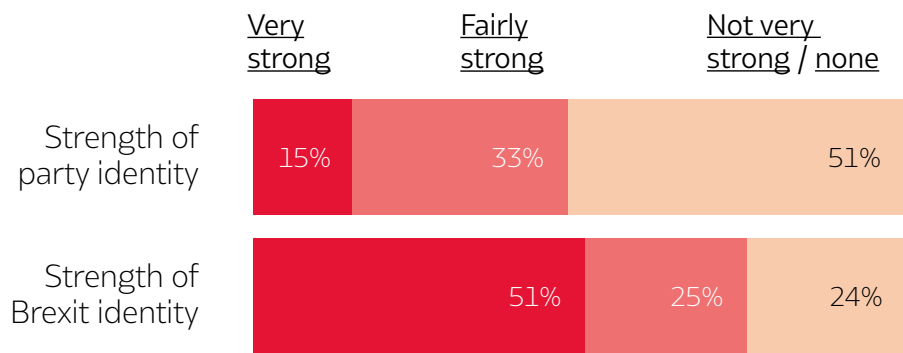
assume that we will nonetheless win back the seats we have lost. Our defeat was the product of factors which long predated Jeremy Corbyn or Brexit, though these two factors catalysed and provided an easy shorthand for them.

Brexit defines divides long in the making

We have seen, as old divisions have waned in importance, they have been replaced by powerful cultural faultlines. These long predated Brexit, yet ‘leave’ and ‘remain’ helped define them in 2019: a boundary that fell neatly across many of the issues which have been pulling our voters apart for decades.

Following the Brexit vote, how people felt about these new cultural faultlines, such as multiculturalism, globalisation, feminism and immigration, mapped clearly onto Brexit divides. And, while 72 per cent of socially authoritarian people voted Leave, only 21 per cent of liberal voters did.¹

How strongly people identify with Brexit and Party

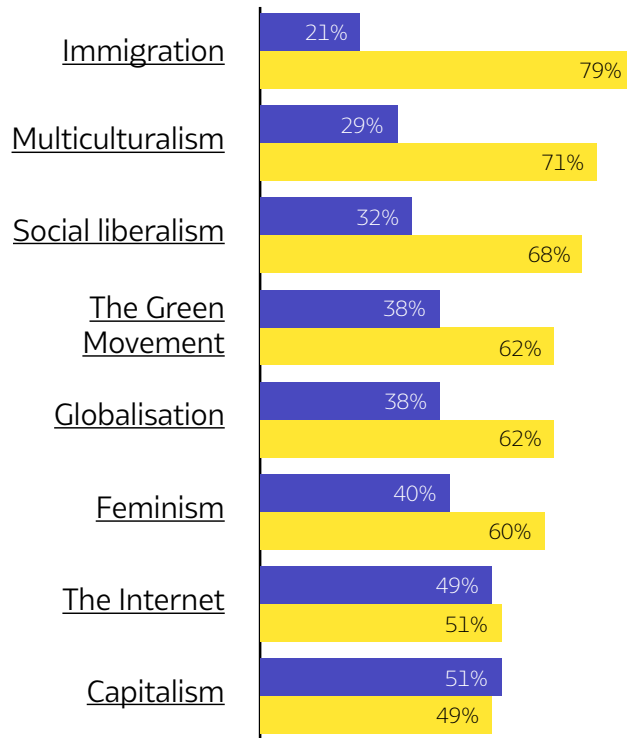


% of respondents. ‘Not very strong / none’ includes ‘not very strongly’, ‘not strongly at all’ and ‘no id’. Source: [Yougov, 2019](#)

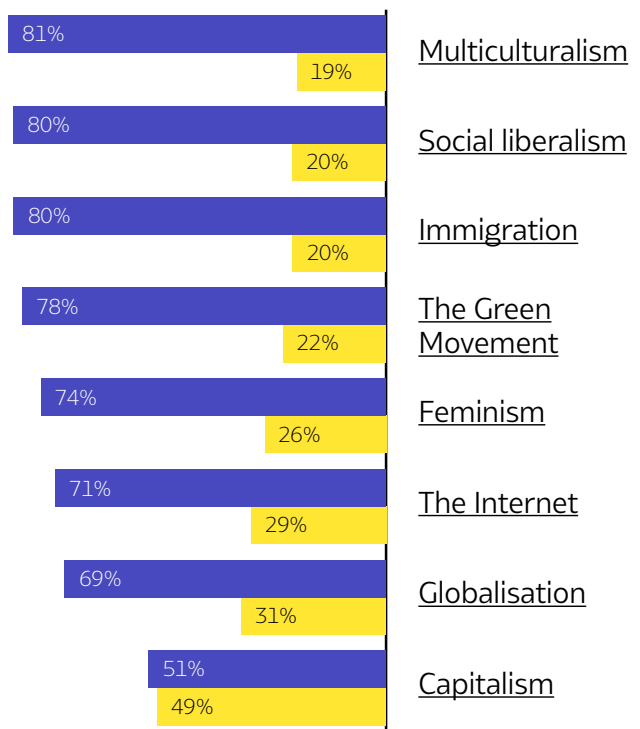
¹ [British Social Attitudes, 2017](#)

Part II 2016 And After

How did the people who thought these were a force for good vote?



How did the people who thought these were a force for ill vote?



● Leave ● Remain

% of respondents. Source: [Ashcroft Polls, 2016](#)

Where before voters with different cultural views could more easily support the same party, Brexit and the cultural faultlines it represents transcended party at the general election. Over three-quarters of people had a strong Brexit identity in 2019, where less than half felt the same about party.

Though most of our voters in 2019 voted remain, in those Northern seats lost in 2017 and 2019 Brexit-supporting former Labour voters may have played a crucial role, either in voting for the Conservatives or choosing to stay home. Of course, this is much more than about Brexit. Had it not been an issue in 2019, almost all voters in the North would have still voted the same way.²

Some of these former voters will be very difficult to get back, and Labour will have to work hard to rebuild trust. In a political environment defined by these new cultural divides, to make the changes necessary to win them over could risk alienating some of our younger, more middle-class,

“ Brexit is the obvious reason for our supporters to finally turn their backs on us, and it is that feeling, rather than unbridled commitment to the Tory Party, that has driven the loss of seats; people wanted to give the Labour Party a kicking so that it wakes up and recognises why it exists

York Central

city-dwelling supporters. This does not mean, however, that we cannot make some appeals to them: on less controversial cultural issues, particularly Northern and local identity and patriotism, which they still highly value, and on Labour’s non-cultural areas of strength, such as health and public services.

There are grounds for optimism here. Already, 23 per cent of former Labour voters in Northern seats we lost in 2019 would vote for the party again,³ and recent polling

² Ashcroft Polls, 2020

³ ECFR, 2020

has shown that these same voters overwhelmingly want a trade deal rather than a no-deal Brexit.⁴ Labour shouldn't try to re-fight Brexit battles. Instead, we should show voters that we have turned a page on Brexit and encourage them to look at us afresh.

⁴ Best for Britain, 2020

Opinions on the party leadership hardened after 2017

For a party which was struggling with new cultural and social divides, and increasing alienation from former Northern voters, a leader at the election who was perceived as weak or indifferent on many issues important to them only exacerbated this decline.

Voters began to form concrete opinions of Jeremy Corbyn during the 2017 campaign, when he became more nationally known. Where once they were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt over a largely discredited Theresa May, two years of news about Brexit disagreements, antisemitism, party unity, and his position on the Salisbury poisonings and national pride more broadly, ensured these were not positive. Among voters who initially liked his leadership, indecisiveness and trust were major factors in their dislike of him after 2017.⁵

Clearly, opinions were partly shaped by issues of identity and culture, such as a perceived lack of patriotism and unwillingness to accommodate local differences. A feeling that Labour was obsessing over some liberal issues, particularly foreign policy, also helped to alienate more socially authoritarian voters. Even among Brexit supporters who switched to the Conservatives, the leadership was a bigger factor in their decision.⁶

// The issue which came up most frequently was the perceived failings of Jeremy Corbyn as leader and as a possible future Prime Minister, coupled with the labour manifesto. People liked certain policies in it but it was too wide ranging and scattergun that people didn't believe we could deliver on it

Bury North

⁵ Yougov, 2019

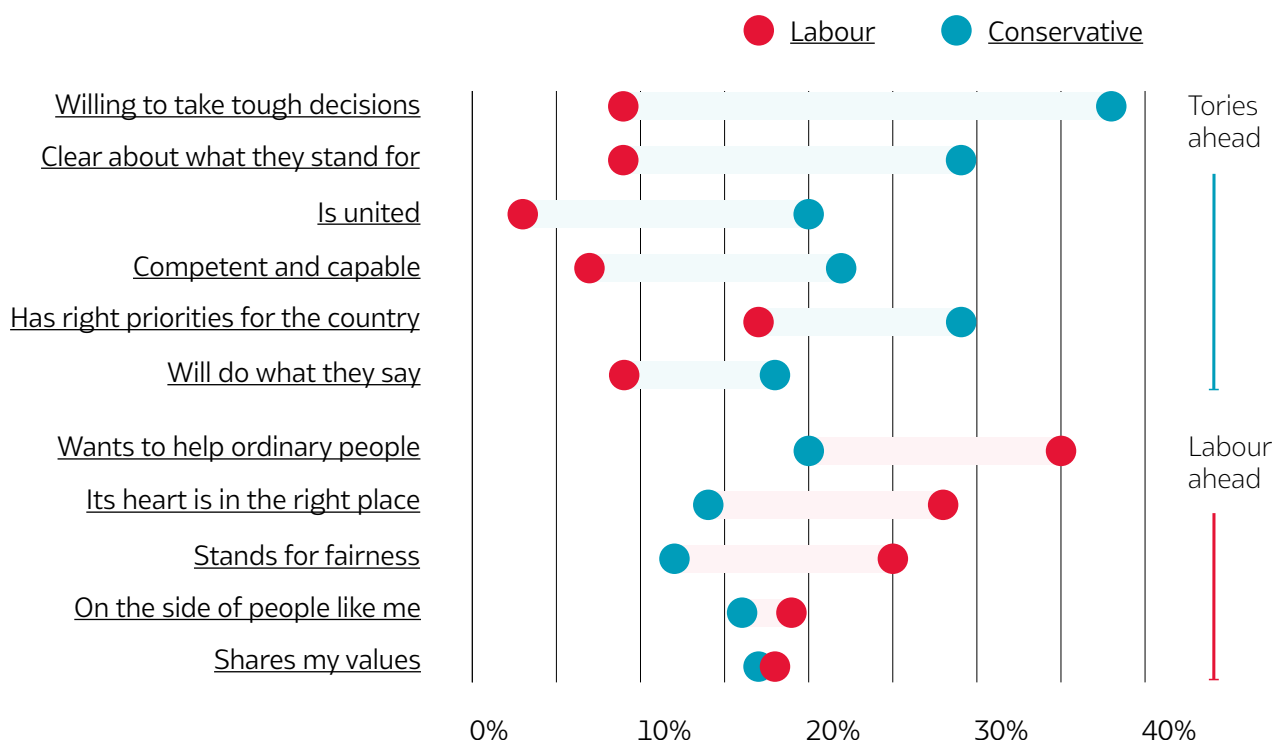
⁶ Opinium, 2019

Part II 2016 And After

Part of this personal unpopularity was also rooted in long-term perceptions of Labour's competence and trust, effectively shaped by other parties over the last decade. We have not done enough to counter these. At the election, the Conservatives were seen as far more credible on a swathe of important issues, including willingness to take tough

decisions, general competence and caring about local issues. We were only ahead on fairness and good intentions, though most voters did not believe we meant what we said.

Which statements people think apply to the two main parties



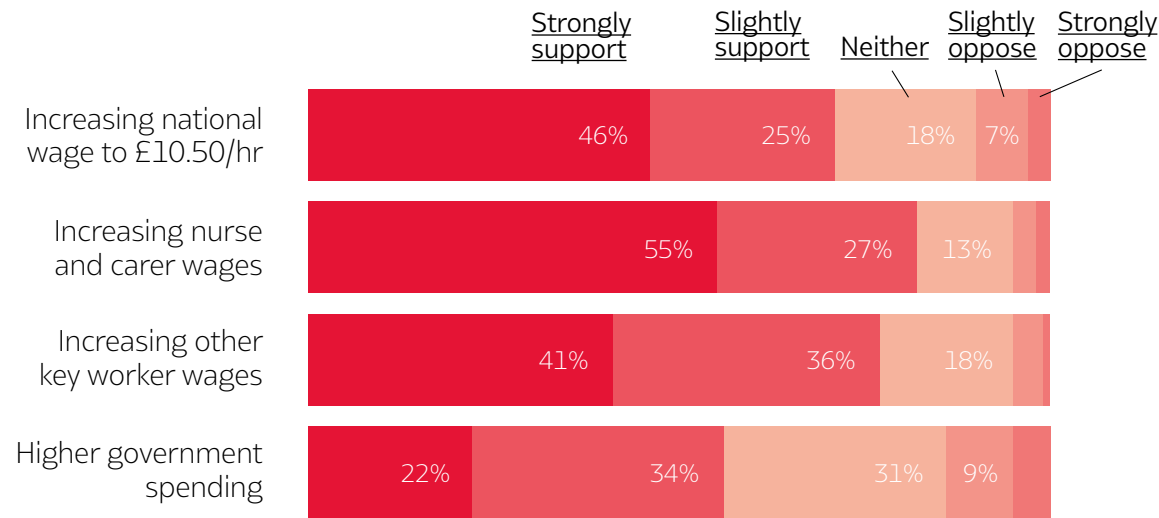
% of respondents; multiple-choice selection. Source: [Ashcroft Polls, 2020](#)

Voters still support Labour policies and values

The growing importance of identity and culture should not blind us to the enduring popularity of some of our policies and signature issues. Some proposals, such as increasing the minimum wage and investing in public services, have significant support in the country, when handled right.

In recent years, we have been too willing to be drawn onto cultural issues, where Labour voters are more divided, than playing to our potentially unifying strengths. These cross-generational issues—health, investment in public services and making the economy work for all—are the reasons voters stuck

National support for Labour policies and values



% of respondents. Source: [ECFR, 2020](#)

with us in 2019.⁷ Though the UK is increasingly divided nationally along generational, cultural and political lines, when brought together and encouraged to engage, we are often able to find compromise.⁸ Labour should make the most of this.

// We lost connection with disinterested but traditional Labour voters. Failed to offer a coherent but relatable and understandable policy narrative

**Lancaster and
Fleetwood**

Though most voters still associate us with fairness and a desire to help ordinary people, in recent elections we have allowed the Tories to define themselves favourably on traditional Labour areas, as in 2019 when they led polling on the NHS.

⁹ Again, although some voters may have supported policies from the 2019 manifesto, they often express disbelief that we will be able to deliver them, a sentiment reflected by almost all of those we surveyed or interviewed.

Covid-19 and a bad Brexit deal will disproportionately hit underfunded and left-behind Northern communities, particularly towns. We have already seen how much more the North suffers under lockdown. At the same time, it is unlikely Boris Johnson's promise to 'level up' will result in the wholesale economic change the North needs (see *Section III*). To help these areas, Labour needs to focus on unifying areas of policy, and build a programme to truly rebalance towards Northern economies, with a renewed commitment to competence and trust.

⁷ Ashcroft Polls, 2019

⁸ Engage Britain; Britain Thinks; 2019

⁹ Page, 2019

Part III — What To Expect



Scarborough, North Yorkshire

While we have dedicated the majority of this report to unpicking the foundations of Labour's defeat, it is important also to look to the future and what the Tories will do to hold on to power. For the first time, we provide a comprehensive analysis of key elements of their plan—where, bereft

of any real growth agenda or desire to help, they are spending on Tory-held and target seats, doing little to address people's needs, across the North and the country as a whole, in this time of crisis.

Our investigation: an analysis of the ‘levelling up’ agenda

We looked at two key planks of the government’s ‘levelling up’ agenda for England—the *Towns Fund* and the *Future High Streets Fund* (FHSF). The Towns Fund is a £3.6 billion scheme, originally announced by Theresa May as the ‘Stronger Towns Fund’ in March 2019, intended to boost local economies in deprived towns. The Future High Streets Fund allocates £1 billion from the Towns Fund to develop struggling town centres.

At this stage, both funds must be competitively bid for, though importantly councils may only bid if they have been shortlisted by the government. A total of 101 towns have been shortlisted for the Towns Fund, and 101 for the FHSF. Selected councils do not automatically qualify for funding but, once shortlisted, are allocated up to £173,029 for the Towns Fund

and £150,000 for the FHSF to develop their bids. ¹

Towns Fund money goes to Tory-held and target seats

The first part of our investigation focused on the allocation of Towns Fund money to certain constituencies. By matching the 101 shortlisted towns to parliamentary seats using OS data, we found that:

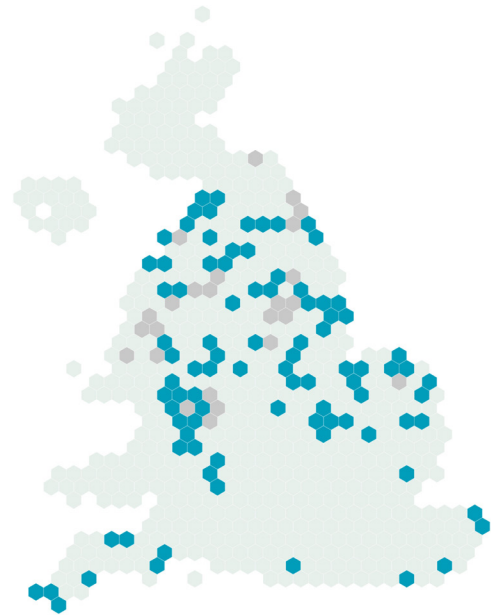
- **Over three-quarters (76 per cent) of seats in-line to receive money from the Towns Fund were Tory-held or target seats at the 2019 election.** ²
- **Of the top 20 Tory target seats in the North at the election, 80 per cent are in-line to receive funds.**

¹ Towns Fund and Future High Street Fund

² Target seat defined as a majority of less than 5,000. You can find a full list of seats and towns in Appendix 3.



Constituencies in-line to receive money from the Towns Fund



Over three-quarters were Tory-held or target seats at the 2019 election

Mapping: ODI Leeds, Flourish
[Click here to access the interactive map](#)

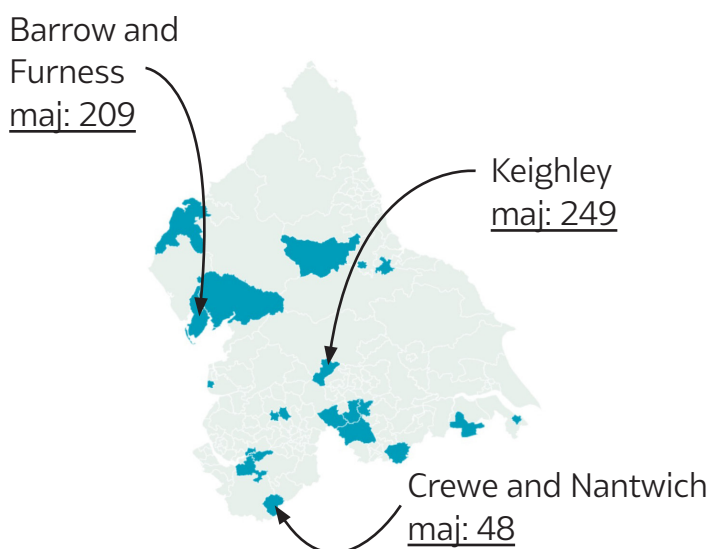
The seats containing multiple shortlisted towns—those who could potentially receive the most funding—were also some of the most marginal going into the election, such as Calder Valley (majority 609), Scarborough and Whitby (3,435), and Copeland (1,695). Northern seats account for over a third of towns

selected. Of those top 20 Northern target seats in-line for money, all but one fell to the Tories at the election.

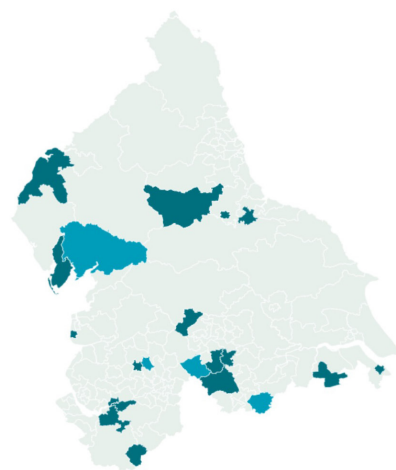
National Audit Office investigation

In July, the National Audit Office published a report into the Towns Fund selection process.³ It outlined a ‘traffic light’ system, where the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government

(MCHLG) removed the 50 per cent least deprived English towns, then ranked the remainder on key economic indicators, such as income deprivation, qualifications and productivity, before dividing them into high, medium and low-priority by region for selection by ministers. While ministers accepted



Top 20 Tory target seats
in the North at the 2019
election



80 per cent are in-line to
receive money from the
Towns Fund

Mapping: ODI Leeds; Flourish
[Click here to access the interactive map](#)

³ [National Audit Office, 2020](#)

officials' advice to shortlist all 40 high-priority towns, they did not follow it in choosing the remaining 61. Ultimately, ministers chose 12 low-priority and 49 medium-priority towns.

Using our previous model, we found that:

- **All of the low-priority towns chosen by ministers were in Tory-held or target seats at the 2019 election.**
- **92 per cent of the medium-priority towns chosen were in Tory-held or target seats at the election.**

Officials insisted that ministers provide strong written rationales for their choices. They are striking both in their brazenness and laxity. Frequent justifications include 'potential for investment', 'poor transport links' and 'geographic spread'. Important certainly, but not justifications for depriving the most left-behind towns of funding. And, despite the repeated references to good investment opportunities, not

a single low-priority town chosen scored highly on the department's own investment opportunity scale.⁴ The North lost out overall in the ministerial selection process as well. Though officials recommended 51 towns overall were chosen from the North, ministers instead chose 43, picking the remainder from the South and East.

The Tories won these places in part because they appealed to left-behind communities, many of which are in desperate need of funding from programmes such as this. Yet many other places in need were left out. As our constituency dashboard showed, the most deprived seats are almost always Labour-held. Cheadle, selected from the low-priority group, was the lowest-ranked town in the North West, where medium-priority towns, such as Salford, Bootle and Blackburn—with scores almost ten times greater—were left out. All three of these towns are in safe Labour seats.

Since our investigation concluded, the Public Accounts Committee have also published their report:

⁴ See the [web-only appendix](#) to the NAO report.

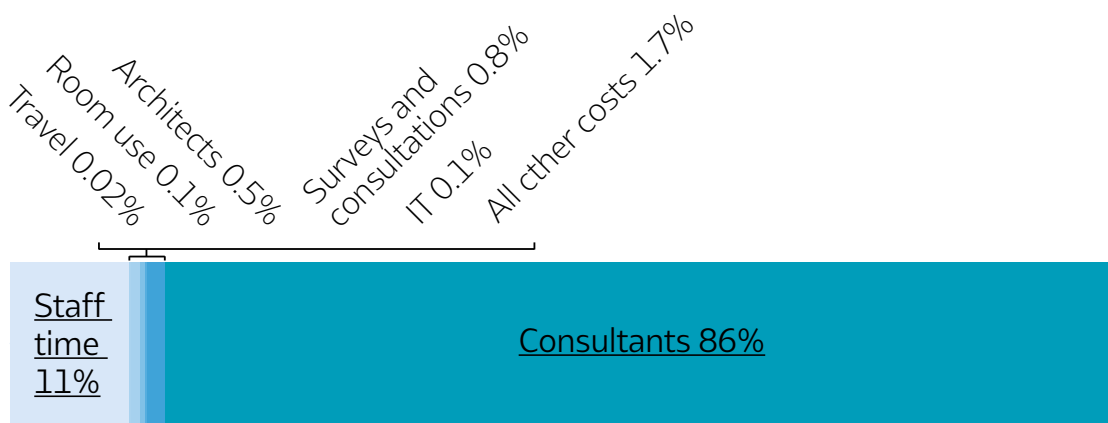
Part III What To Expect

‘Selecting towns for the Towns Fund’, concluding that the selection process for the fund was not impartial and that the MCHLG had a weak and unconvincing justification for not publishing any information on the process it followed.⁵ The clear manipulation of this fund for party political purposes demonstrates what will undoubtedly be the government’s strategy for the next general election: where

investment and infrastructure projects are selected for their political expediency, allowing incumbent Conservative MPs to trumpet success in their local area at election time. This political investment programme is also far from over, with the Chancellor in the November spending review already announcing another £4 billion 'Levelling Up Fund'.

⁵ Public Accounts Committee, 2020

Towns Fund and Future High Street Fund spending



Mean of two schemes. Towns Fund accurate as of 11/09/20; FHSF accurate as of 06/10/20. See Appendix 5

Almost all levelling up funds spent on consultants

The second part of our investigation looked at how levelling up funds were spent. Here we analysed both the Towns Fund and the Future High Streets Fund.

We sent freedom of information (FOI) requests to each of the 136 councils directly responsible for the 202 shortlisted towns, as well as the government: asking how they had spent money—allocated if spending figures were not available—on their bids, and where that money came from. The full database of responses is available in *Appendix 5*.

We found that:

- **Councils spend on average 86 per cent of the funding from both schemes—a total of over £10 million so far—on consultants**, after a decade of cuts to their ability to operate their own projects.
- **Some councils across the country, such as Rossendale,**

Tendring, Tamworth and Lancaster, are contributing up to £250,000 of their own money towards their bids, despite the government's promise of limited self-funding of bids for the FHSF and none for the Towns Fund.⁶ Not all towns will be successful in bidding, so this money may be wasted. Furthermore, most councils had already used their grant, and did not directly record staff time, so spending from their own budgets is likely to be considerably higher.

- **Despite being launched over a year ago, as of early September only 18 per cent of money for Towns Fund bidding has been spent by councils.** Some councils had not even received all their allocated funding; many told us that they were waiting on scant and patchy government guidance, even before the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁶ Based on MCHLG responses to our FOI requests.

Overall, our investigation has shown that, where public money should be spent on improving the lives and communities of some of the most deprived towns in the North and across the country, instead it is selectively parcelled out to politically important areas for the Conservative Party. Furthermore, those areas which do receive funding, find the money comes in unmanageable, time-limited lump sums—further encouraging the use of consultants—rather than the regular funding councils desperately need.

Over the course of our investigation, we submitted over 50 FOI requests and written questions in parliament directly to the government, asking for explanations. In every case, we were refused satisfactory answers or our requests were denied.

There will be a future competitive round of bidding for the Towns Fund, as well as numerous other programmes, including the *Regional Growth Fund*, *Local Growth Fund*, *City Deals*, *Restoring Your Railway Fund*, the *Getting Building Fund*, and the recently announced *Levelling Up Fund*. Preliminary analysis we

conducted using the same methods in this report shows similar concerns with many of these, and often a disproportionate focus on London and the South. Labour should probe and highlight the government's so-called 'levelling up' agenda at every turn, particularly in the Covid-19 crisis.

We need to hold the government to both the letter and spirit of its promises—public money to help left-behind areas must be fairly allocated—and develop our own programme to truly rebalance towards Northern economies. Central to our critique should be that all these initiatives are Whitehall-led and decided, relying on ad hoc, politically divisive decisions rather than a genuine attempt to see parts of the country given the power and the resources to shape their own destiny.

Full Recommendations



he story we have described here, stretching back over the past two decades and beyond, should be a dire warning to Labour. Though few have sketched the long view in such stark terms, we are certainly not the first to make such observations. It will take much to reverse this years long decline, and there are significant hurdles for us to overcome in order to win again.

Yet, there is also much to build upon: in our common experiences, in the values which guide us and the identities we share. Above all, we must take different communities as they are now. We cannot will them away or hope that they will soon change.

Based on our research, we make the following key recommendations to the party leadership, focusing on practical ways we can change the focus and culture of the party in order to re-engage with Northern communities. Many of these policies were reflected in what Labour councillors, candidates and MPs told us:

1 Create a greater role and voice for Northern MPs within the Parliamentary Labour Party. We must challenge the perception that we are a London-centric party by enabling Northern MPs to work together and speak with a more powerful voice.

1.1 Hold regular meetings of Northern Labour MPs and the leadership to discuss policy

// By selecting candidates from the communities that they seek to represent, candidates that can connect with the electorate and are willing to be part of a team that delivers for the constituency and is prepared to tackle constituency matters with relish. Rather than see the constituency as a platform to boost national or international profile and arguments

A Yorkshire constituency

proposals, strategy and how to change the focus and culture of the party.

1.2 Increase support from the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) office to produce more Northern-focused policy briefings, working with regional trade unions, think tanks, mayors, local leaders and other stakeholders. This will provide Labour with more answers to the government and would also help us to design better proposals for the North.

1.3 Elevate the Shadow Minister for the North to the Shadow Cabinet, as part of the Treasury Team. They should be able to speak on and promote Northern issues, respond to government announcements in the House and the media, and co-ordinate policy with Northern Labour mayors and local leaders. This would also be an important symbol, after the government's downgrading of the already impotent Minister for the Northern Powerhouse.

1.4 Inaugurate a Northern Labour response to the budget, focusing on the North's needs and priorities, how budget proposals will work in the North, and what Labour would do instead.

1.5 Seek out more opportunities to raise Northern issues in parliament, such as through opposition day motions, or in Prime Minister's Questions.

1.6 Front more Northern MPs on national and regional media platforms, not to debate contentious issues but to talk about Northern issues and help build an image of competence and trust.

2 Engage with voters in lost Northern seats. Many voters across the North feel an increasing disconnect with Labour. We should demonstrate that we are able not just to listen on everyday issues, but to heed advice and take action in a transparent way, working together as a party, from councillors and MPs to members and mayors.

Engage with communities; we win elections by being part of our communities all year round, not just at elections

Newcastle East

2.1 Interact more with voters, and not just in cities. The leadership could do this through consultations, campaigning, town hall-style meetings, polling, focus groups and events. This will have to be virtual at first, with Covid restrictions in place. It cannot just be a media strategy, but a real opportunity for voters to impact policy, and to see the effect of their influence.

2.2 Select parliamentary candidates earlier, and encourage well-known local figures, trade unionists and councillors to stand. Too often, MPs are seen, often unfairly, as out of touch with the communities they represent. Candidates who can go into the next general election with a solid track record of local work and campaigning will be better placed to overcome that perception. It is also important that we select parliamentary candidates earlier.

2.3 Aid Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), branches and Labour groups in engaging with their areas year-round. Much more of this will have to be online now, and could involve digital public meetings, consultations, surgeries, local newsletters and targeted campaigns. Many great activists already do this, yet in too many areas Labour is seen only at election time.

// Demonstrate competence, trust and patriotism

Sefton Central

2.4 Promote and aid the work of trade unions in the community. Labour needs to try and build back as many bridges to people's lives as we can. An important part of this should be the non-political work of trade unions and local reps, which Labour must wholeheartedly support: encouraging more people to become reps, highlighting the work they do, and providing local support from councillors and activists where possible.

// Basics - listening, responding and telling the truth

Newcastle Central

2.5 Encourage activists to listen and engage more when campaigning, particularly outside of elections. Labour's electoral machine is designed for turning out supporters when voters are more than ever willing to switch parties. Activists should focus on the issues we have described in this report: trust, competence, the economy, health, local issues, and a readiness to listen and take heed of residents' advice.

3 Don't get drawn into debates on divisive cultural issues. Labour will find it harder to win back more socially authoritarian voters in Northern seats if divisive questions of identity and culture are paramount. We need to reconnect with these voters, or risk cultural divides calcifying.

3.1 Establish trust and competence above all else in our offering to the country—reflected across policy, media appearances, party presentation and materials—while attempting to reconnect with lost voters on issues such as patriotism and pride in regional and national identities.

3.2 Don't attempt to outflank the Tories on the right culturally, because we simply won't be taken seriously, and will lose more socially liberal voters in the process.

4 Embrace inclusive Northern and national identities. We need to cultivate respect for and recognition of diverse identities across the party, ensuring that Northern voters are always considered in policy-making.

4.1 Reflect patriotism and pride in Northern, national and more local identities as part of our offering to the country (3.1), shaped by those across the party who know their local areas best, an adaptability of messaging and policies for different contexts—in the North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber, for instance—and a focus on re-establishing trust without being drawn onto divisive cultural topics. Regional media should be given as much attention as national media in this, and this approach must be based on people's aspirations for their area, not on harking back to the past.

4.2 Commit to produce a fully-costed Northern Manifesto at the next general election—working with Labour mayors, councillors and local leaders—focused solely on Northern issues and policies. This has been tried abortively in the past, but should be a regular production for the party at election time and should help to focus policy and minds.

// There is a view here that Labour is dominated by a liberal elite in London: that the party is middle class and too few MPs speak with a local dialect

A constituency in the North East

5 Focus on unifying issues which appeal across generations, particularly the economy and health.

Nationally, we need to constantly shift the debate onto making the economy work for all, investing in public services and the NHS: areas where we have broad support across the North and the country, and where our voters, current and former, are less divided.

// We should double-down on unifying cross-generational issues - like the economy and public services

Sheffield Central

// We need to offer economic opportunity, apprenticeships and job creation

Liverpool Riverside

5.1 Be open and upfront about where money will come from, and be transparent about how it will be spent. Voters are well aware that increased public spending will have to be paid for, and are more receptive to tax increases if they can see where the money is being spent and are confident that it will be spent wisely. We should be honest about this.

5.2 Build a cohesive national programme which works on a local level. Show how our proposals could look—in each ward, town, region and country—working with CLPs, branches, Labour groups and candidates to reflect local identity and culture where appropriate. This could make use of highly-targeted online advertising during campaigns or by offering easy online tools for people to see policies.

5.3 Include all regions in this agenda—particularly the most left-behind in the North, which will also be most affected by Covid-19 and the likely economic fallout from a bad Brexit deal—and never exclude by political identity, as the Tories do in ‘levelling up’.

6 Involve councillors, mayors and local teams more.

Local government should be an example for us to prove ourselves, particularly in Northern seats we must win back. Councillors are often people's most immediate link to Labour, yet many responses to our survey from them showed frustration at a lack of involvement in the party or recognition of their work.

// Labour councillors have to lead the way and motivate others to help. Keeping in touch with the electorate is essential

Chorley

6.1 Ensure that Labour councillors, mayors and local leaders are consulted and involved in national policy decisions which may affect their area, particularly in the North, as part of our national programme (5.2). This could involve regular consultations with the Leader's Office, more local government representatives on the National Executive Committee (NEC) or more opportunities for MPs to engage with local Labour representatives.

6.2 Involve councillors in the national conversation more. Local Labour councillors and leaders should appear on national and local media more—to build an image of competence and trust, not to debate contentious issues—and Labour successes in local government need to be championed nationally as a model for what we can do.

6.3 Provide more assistance from the national party—in funding, staff support, electoral resources, advice and media attention—to win back councils, mayoralities and parliamentary seats across the North, particularly in communities where we have historically been seen as absent.

7 Support and empower local government. As part of making Labour work better locally, we should do more to help mayors, councils and councillors in the North, as across the rest of the country, particularly during this pandemic.

7.1 Commit to properly fund local government, fully reverse local government grant cuts and to reduce dependence on time-limited government funding schemes that drive spending on consultants, as we found in our investigation (see *Section III*).

7.2 Ensure that council planning and development departments have the resources they need, without having to spend public money on consultants, as we also found.

8 Commit to meaningful devolution in the North.

Clearly there is an appetite for greater local decision-making in the North, and a resentment of power and wealth concentrated in London and the South. Labour needs to commit to Northern devolution which truly moves decision-making to the most appropriate level, often out of Whitehall.

8.1 Base proposals on the idea of ‘devolution on demand’. This approach would involve listening to what sort of representation and powers people want for their area and creating proposals to reflect this, where too often devolution has been a case of proposals imposed from the top. This could include more powers to existing councils and mayors, if chosen, though we must ensure that proposals are based on intelligent subsidiarity.

// Listen to [voters], develop policies that reflect what constituents need and want

Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough

8.2 Include options for meaningful devolution of powers, which are too often lacking in existing Northern devolution.

8.3 Ensure that further devolution is shaped by local and regional identities and that any new bodies make sense culturally and geographically as well as politically. Proposals shouldn't be seen as more politicians for politicians' sake.

8.4 Make sure that other sub-regional devolved structures have enough local political accountability. Bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) or Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) often have significant control over local spending but little input from local people. Too often this spending has been based on a local version of national priorities, which rely on central government decisions

8.5 Frame this programme against the Tories' minimalist proposals for the relocation of junior civil servants or devolution of nominal powers primarily to city regions: creating mayoralities they can win or devolving responsibilities without resources. Metro mayors, for instance, are generally only given existing local powers; big decisions are still made in Whitehall.

// We need more investment in the local economy

Blackpool North and Clevellys

9 Hold the government to both the letter and spirit of its promises on levelling up. We must ensure in opposition that public money is spent fairly and efficiently on left-behind areas, particularly in the North. We need to remain vigilant for politically-

targeted spending in all new government spending, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis.

// We need to emphasise the importance of our public services, including local government, and have a plan to redress the years of underfunding under successive Tory governments, which have been thrown into sharp focus by the coronavirus pandemic

**Rossendale and
Darwen**

9.1 Develop proposals for an alternative programme: a distribution of resources and rebalancing towards Northern economies, particularly left-behind areas, with additional money for local budgets, not merely one-off policies which can overwhelm local government, as the Tories do. This should be part of the policy process described here—listening to local concerns, credible and part of a cohesive package.

9.2 Make sure that funding formulas for our policies take account of local context and growth potential, and ensure that money isn't poured into overheated economies in London and the South East. Labour must scrutinise the government's use of the new Green Book in order to ensure that the North receives government investment on a fairer basis.

9.3 Ensure that Labour proactively comments on new levelling up announcements, highlighting our own proposals, and that the party researches, promotes and leads news stories on new spending controversies. We must be careful not to refute the idea of 'levelling up' itself. Instead, we need to call attention to the dubious tactics and questionable priorities of the Tory version of it, while showcasing our own proposals.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who participated in our survey, and to those who granted us interviews, giving us so many rich stories and insights into their communities. In particular, thank you to Cllr Simon Henig, Peter Robbins, and the rest of the Association of Labour Councillors, and Labour LGA for helping to publicise this research project.

We would have been unable to complete this work without help from Yougov, the British Social Attitudes Survey, John Denham, and the Centre for English Identity and Politics in accessing their data. Thank you also to the House of Commons Library for providing briefing papers and data.

In particular, we would like to thank those councils who responded to our FOI requests over the course of our investigation, during such a difficult time for them.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Note on survey methodologies

Most of our data comes from a wide array of secondary sources, including census, social and economic data, and polls on identity and values. Unless otherwise indicated, these are all representative of the population of Great Britain, since most political polls and government data exclude or separate out Northern Ireland. Discussing the different methodologies would be beyond the scope of this report, but please note:

- Where applicable, we have removed ‘don’t knows’ and ‘other’ from survey data and graphics, unless otherwise stated.
- It is often difficult for polls to consistently record what people mean when they think of their national, regional or local identity, or to provide explanatory data. Thus, we try to focus only on the broad trends here.
- Poll data can also be erratic over short periods, particularly when comparing results between different polls. It can be difficult to tell whether this is the result of actual change or just methodology, hence we also only focus on broad trends here.
- Unless otherwise indicated, we have combined cross-sections using reported votes with those using voting intention, when pooling data for time-series.
- Since different question phrasing regarding national identity often produces different results, we have included only polls of national identity which use the Moreno

Scale, usually amalgamating the two ends of the scale, for instance combining 'British not English' and 'More British than English' to make 'More British'.

- For data on the liberal-authoritarian social scale, we only include polls which compose this scale using the standard five questions for social science research, or slight re-wordings thereof.¹ Those who agree with these statements are more likely to be social authoritarians; those who disagree, social liberals.
 - a. Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values.
 - b. People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences.
 - c. For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence.
 - d. Schools should teach children to obey authority.
 - e. The law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong.
 - f. Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards.

¹ Here taken from the British Social Attitudes survey.

Appendix 2: Full constituency and region database

[Click here to access the full database of economic and social indicators for all constituencies nationwide and the three Northern regions](#)

Age: ONS, 2019; NRS, 2019. Data for mid-2018. Working age population defined as 16–64.

Settlement: ONS; NRS; Centre for Towns; Commons Library; 2018. Data for mid-2016. Primary settlement by most residents.

Settlements are classified using the Commons Library and Centre for Towns taxonomy:

‘Core Cities’ are 12 major population and economic centres across the UK, such as London, Sheffield and Manchester; ‘Other Cities’ are settlements with populations greater than 175,000; ‘Large Towns’ between 60,000 and 174,999; ‘Medium Towns’ 25,000 and 59,999; ‘Small Towns’ 7,500 and 24,999; and ‘Villages’ less than 7,500.

Work classification: ONS Nomis, 2019. Data for January–December 2019. ‘Managers’ indicate Standard Occupational Classification System (2010) grades 1–3: managers, directors and senior officials; professional occupations; associate professors and tech occupations.

Deprivation: Commons Library, 2019. Estimates based on Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government (MCHLG) data for 2015/16. Index of multiple deprivation. England only.

House prices: Commons Library, 2020; ONS, 2019. Data

for year ending September 2019. England and Wales only. Nominal prices.

Wages: Commons Library, 2020; ONS Nomis, 2019. Data for year ending September 2019. England and Wales only. Nominal prices.

Unemployment benefits: Commons Library, 2020. Estimates based on Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data for 2019. Alternative claim count.

Housing tenure: Census 2011. House ownership counting mortgage and outright ownership.

Ethnicity: Census 2011

Educational attainment: Commons Library, 2020. Estimates based on DfE and Ofsted data for 2019. England only.

Birth: Census 2011

Northern seat breakdown

Seat ownership is compared with the last election (i.e. not counting by-elections), and not counting speaker seats. We define Northern seats by their local government region. Please note that this methodology does not include all seats.

Labour held

These are seats Labour has won at every election from 2010–2019, under current parliamentary boundaries.

Ashton-under-Lyne	Hull East
Barnsley Central	Hull North
Barnsley East	Hull West and Hessle
Batley and Spen	Jarrow
Birkenhead	Knowsley
Blackburn	Leeds Central
Blackley and Broughton	Leeds East
Blaydon	Leeds North East
Bolton South East	Leeds West
Bootle	Liverpool Riverside
Bradford South	Liverpool Walton
Bradford West	Liverpool Wavertree
City of Durham	Liverpool West Derby
Denton and Reddish	Makerfield
Doncaster Central	Manchester Central
Doncaster North	Manchester Gorton
Easington	Middlesbrough
Ellesmere Port and Neston	Newcastle upon Tyne Central
Garston and Halewood	Newcastle upon Tyne East
Gateshead	Newcastle upon Tyne North
Halifax	Normanton, Pontefract and
Halton	Castleford
Hartlepool	North Durham
Hemsworth	North Tyneside
Houghton and Sunderland	Oldham East and
South	Saddleworth
Huddersfield	Oldham West and Royton

Preston	Sunderland Central
Rochdale	Tynemouth
Rotherham	Wallasey
Salford and Eccles	Wansbeck
Sefton Central	Warrington North
Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough	Washington and Sunderland West
Sheffield Central	Wentworth and Dearne
Sheffield Heeley	West Lancashire
Sheffield South East	Wigan
South Shields	Wirral South
St Helens North	Worsley and Eccles South
St Helens South and Whiston	Wythenshawe and Sale East
Stalybridge and Hyde	York Central
Stockport	
Stockton North	
Stretford and Urmston	

Labour gain 2017/19

Bury North	Sheffield Hallam
Colne Valley	Stockton South
Crewe and Nantwich	Warrington South
Keighley	Weaver Vale
Leeds North West	

Labour loss 2017/19

Barrow and Furness	Colne Valley
Bishop Auckland	Copeland
Blackpool South	Crewe and Nantwich
Blyth Valley	Darlington
Bolton North East	Dewsbury
Burnley	Don Valley
Bury North	Great Grimsby
Bury South	Heywood and Middleton

Hyndburn	Redcar
Keighley	Rother Valley
Leigh	Scunthorpe
Middlesbrough South and East	Sedgefield
Cleveland	Stockton South
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Wakefield
North West Durham	Warrington South
Penistone and Stocksbridge	Workington

Labour never held

These are seats Labour has not held in any election under current boundaries.

Altrincham and Sale West	Macclesfield
Berwick-upon-Tweed	Morecambe and Lunesdale
Beverley and Holderness	Pendle
Blackpool North and Cleveleys	Penrith and The Border
Brigg and Goole	Pudsey
Calder Valley	Ribble Valley
Carlisle	Richmond (Yorks)
Cheadle	Rossendale and Darwen
Cleethorpes	Scarborough and Whitby
Congleton	Selby and Ainsty
East Yorkshire	Shipley
Eddisbury	Skipton and Ripon
Elmet and Rothwell	South Ribble
Fylde	Southport
Haltemprice and Howden	Tatton
Harrogate and Knaresborough	Thirsk and Malton
Hazel Grove	Westmorland and Lonsdale
Hexham	Wyre and Preston North
	York Outer

Appendix 3: Towns Fund towns and matched seats

We matched constituencies to towns on a best-fit basis, counting only the named town and any suburbs. Smaller settlements within the local government area were excluded.

Town	Constituency
<i>Workington</i>	Workington
<i>Kirkby-in-Ashfield</i>	Ashfield
<i>Sutton in Ashfield</i>	Ashfield
<i>Goldthorpe</i>	Wentworth and Dearne
<i>Barrow-in-Furness</i>	Barrow and Furness
<i>Bedford</i>	Bedford
<i>Darwen</i>	Rossendale and Darwen
<i>Blackpool</i>	Blackpool North and Cleveleys
	Blackpool South
<i>Bolton</i>	Bolton North East
	Bolton South East
	Bolton West
<i>Boston</i>	Boston and Skegness
<i>Bournemouth</i>	Bournemouth East
	Bournemouth West
<i>Keighley</i>	Keighley
<i>Shipley</i>	Shipley
<i>Stapleford (Nottinghamshire)</i>	Broxtowe
<i>Brighouse</i>	Calder Valley
<i>Todmorden</i>	Calder Valley
<i>Carlisle</i>	Carlisle
<i>Loughborough</i>	Loughborough
<i>Crewe</i>	Crewe and Nantwich
<i>Staveley (Derbyshire)</i>	North East Derbyshire
	Chesterfield
<i>Colchester</i>	Colchester
<i>Cleator Moor</i>	Copeland
<i>Millom</i>	Copeland

<i>Corby</i>	<i>Corby</i>
<i>Camborne</i>	<i>Camborne and Redruth</i>
<i>Penzance</i>	<i>St Ives</i>
<i>St Ives (Cornwall)</i>	<i>St Ives</i>
<i>Truro</i>	<i>Truro and Falmouth</i>
<i>Bishop Auckland</i>	<i>Bishop Auckland</i>
<i>Crawley</i>	<i>Crawley</i>
<i>Darlington</i>	<i>Darlington</i>
<i>Doncaster</i>	<i>Doncaster Central</i>
	<i>Doncaster North</i>
<i>Stainforth (South Yorkshire)</i>	<i>Doncaster North</i>
<i>Dudley</i>	<i>Dudley North</i>
	<i>Dudley South</i>
<i>Mablethorpe</i>	<i>Louth and Horncastle</i>
<i>Skegness</i>	<i>Boston and Skegness</i>
<i>Goole</i>	<i>Brigg and Goole</i>
<i>Burton upon Trent</i>	<i>Burton</i>
<i>Lowestoft</i>	<i>Waveney</i>
<i>Long Eaton</i>	<i>Erewash</i>
<i>Great Yarmouth</i>	<i>Great Yarmouth</i>
<i>Runcorn</i>	<i>Halton</i>
	<i>Weaver Vale</i>
<i>Harlow</i>	<i>Harlow</i>
<i>Hartlepool</i>	<i>Hartlepool</i>
<i>Hastings</i>	<i>Hastings and Rye</i>
<i>Hereford</i>	<i>Hereford and South</i>
	<i>Herefordshire</i>
<i>Ipswich</i>	<i>Ipswich</i>
	<i>Central Suffolk and North</i>
	<i>Ipswich</i>
<i>King's Lynn</i>	<i>North West Norfolk</i>
<i>Dewsbury</i>	<i>Dewsbury</i>
<i>Morley</i>	<i>Morley and Outwood</i>
<i>Newhaven (East Sussex)</i>	<i>Lewes</i>
<i>Lincoln</i>	<i>Lincoln</i>
<i>Mansfield</i>	<i>Mansfield</i>
<i>Glastonbury</i>	<i>Wells</i>
<i>Middlesbrough</i>	<i>Middlesbrough</i>
	<i>Middlesbrough South and</i>
	<i>East Cleveland</i>

<i>Milton Keynes</i>	Milton Keynes South
	Milton Keynes North
<i>Newark-on-Trent</i>	Newark
<i>Kidsgrove</i>	Stoke-on-Trent North
<i>Newcastle-under-Lyme</i>	Newcastle-under-Lyme
<i>Clay Cross</i>	North East Derbyshire
<i>Grimsby</i>	Great Grimsby
<i>Scunthorpe</i>	Scunthorpe
<i>Northampton</i>	Northampton North
	Northampton South
<i>Blyth (Northumberland)</i>	Blyth Valley
<i>Norwich</i>	Norwich North
	Norwich South
<i>Nuneaton</i>	Nuneaton
<i>Oldham</i>	Oldham West and Royton
	Oldham East and Saddleworth
<i>Nelson (Lancashire)</i>	Pendle
<i>Peterborough</i>	Peterborough
	North West Cambridgeshire
<i>Preston</i>	Preston
<i>Redcar</i>	Redcar
<i>Redditch</i>	Redditch
<i>Rochdale</i>	Rochdale
<i>Rotherham</i>	Rotherham
<i>Rowley Regis</i>	Halesowen and Rowley Regis
<i>Smethwick</i>	Warley
<i>West Bromwich</i>	West Bromwich East
	West Bromwich West
<i>Scarborough</i>	Scarborough and Whitby
<i>Whitby</i>	Scarborough and Whitby
<i>Bridgwater</i>	Bridgwater and West Somerset
<i>Southport</i>	Southport
<i>Stocksbridge</i>	Penistone and Stocksbridge
<i>Leyland</i>	South Ribble
<i>St Helens (Merseyside)</i>	St Helens North
	St Helens South and Whiston
<i>Stevenage</i>	Stevenage
<i>Cheadle (Greater Manchester)</i>	Cheadle
<i>Thornaby-on-Tees</i>	Stockton South

<i>Swindon</i>	North Swindon
	South Swindon
<i>Telford</i>	Telford
	The Wrekin
<i>Margate</i>	North Thanet
	South Thanet
<i>Grays</i>	Thurrock
<i>Tilbury</i>	Thurrock
<i>Torquay</i>	Torbay
<i>Castleford</i>	Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford
<i>Wakefield</i>	Wakefield
<i>Bloxwich</i>	Walsall North
<i>Walsall</i>	Walsall North
	Walsall South
<i>Warrington</i>	Warrington North
	Warrington South
<i>Birkenhead</i>	Birkenhead
<i>Wolverhampton</i>	Wolverhampton North East
	Wolverhampton South West
	Wolverhampton South East
<i>Worcester</i>	Worcester

Appendix 4: Top 20 Northern Tory target seats

These are the top 20 target seats in Northern England by majority at the 2019 election.

Constituency	Majority
Crewe and Nantwich	48
Barrow and Furness	209
Keighley	249
Bishop Auckland	502
Westmorland and Lonsdale	777
Stockton South	888
Colne Valley	915
Penistone and Stocksbridge	1322
Wakefield	2176
Blackpool South	2523
Warrington South	2549
Great Grimsby	2565
Darlington	3280
Dewsbury	3321
Scunthorpe	3431
Bolton North East	3797
Rother Valley	3882
Workington	3925
Weaver Vale	3928
Bury North	4375

Appendix 5: Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund spending

[Click here to access the full spending breakdown for local authorities from our Freedom of Information investigation](#)

Appendix 5: Note on interview and survey methodology

Our primary qualitative methodology was a limited survey, made available to every Northern Labour councillor through the Labour LGA and Association of Labour Councillors, and to MPs and candidates for parliament in the 2019 general election through parliamentary contacts. This was an open-ended online methodology, with only a small set of direct questions provided, in order to elicit as many in-depth responses as possible, and to give us an insight into seats and communities where quantitative data did not provide enough detail or descriptive richness. The survey was made available from June to August 2020.

For a small number of responses from representatives and candidates in key seats, we followed up with a series of semi-structured interviews, conducted over Zoom and Skype. These allowed us to pursue responses from the survey, letting participants develop their stories, incorporating elements of their lives and experiences more effectively into their answers, and providing us with a detailed background to their local area. Fieldwork was carried out from July to October 2020.

We featured evidence from the survey and interviews throughout the report, as well as direct quotes, attributed only to the participant's constituency or, in some cases, general region.

For more details on this methodology, and access to ethics documentation, please contact albertjamesward@gmail.com.



Graphics and design by Albert Ward

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If you would like access to any of the data used in this report, or the ethnics documentation, please contact albertjamesward@gmail.com

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