ELECTION REVIEW

2019

Labour Together

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

A historic defeat, a long-time coming, a mountain to climb

Labour has a mountain to climb to get back into power in the next five years. This report lays out in stark detail the scale of that task. Unless as a party and a movement we face up to that we will not win.

Our report echoes the consensus of many reports that a combination of views of our party leadership, Brexit and a manifesto that was not seen as credible sealed our defeat in 2019. This report is also honest about the failings of our campaign in 2019.

In the words of our candidates and activists, the strategy was inadequate, the organisation was muddled and the execution was poor.

Just as we need to face up to the mountain we have to climb, and the failures of the last election, so too this report traces the deeper roots of this result. It would be a mistake to believe that a different leader, with Brexit no longer the defining issue, would in itself be sufficient to change Labour's electoral fortunes. Our report lays bare that our defeat had deep roots. This loss is the story of more than one election—indeed it is a story that stretches back two decades.

The institutional and cultural bonds that linked many voters to Labour have become weaker and weaker over time. From the loss of local Labour clubs to declining Trade Union membership, Labour has lost many of the institutional roots it had within communities, resulting in disconnection. Labour lost millions of voters before it lost office in 2010 partly as a result of political alienation from politics more generally, and from the Labour Party particularly, including perceptions that there was little difference between the parties and the prominence of new cultural divides. Over many years previous Labour voters and traditionally Labour communities have moved away, either to abstention or to smaller parties such as UKIP. Some of those voters also chose the Conservatives for the first time in 2019, enough to help tip a number of seats over the edge where the long-term decline in Labour's vote share had been evident for years.

Unless we recognise and accept this triple challenge of the scale of our task, the failures of 2019 and the deep roots of how we got here, we will not win or deserve to win. None can be ignored. Every part of the Labour Party has something to learn from what has gone wrong and can contribute to our renewal.

Keir Starmer has just been elected by our party. While it will be for him and his team to lead the strategy for the future, the scale of the task before us means we must look beyond and deeper than this simply being for the leader alone. Every member,

every affiliate, every elected representative and candidate must take responsibility for that task. It need not be a paralysing endeavor but should be a mobilising one.

Through the work we have undertaken as a Commission, we are clear about the potential strategy and the organisational elements to support it. This includes:

- A coherent strategy to build a winning coalition at the next election, forged with awareness of where voters stand and what arguments we need to win, understood across our party and our movement. This report provides a starting point in Chapter 8 setting out the beginnings of a political strategy and the change required to begin to deliver this.

- A renewed commitment to transformational economic change in the country, which our report suggests can win over a broad coalition of voters who share a desire for change and a leadership that can speak to that change. Such an agenda must be rooted in the daily experiences and struggles of people's lives, in their place and in their community, and must be seen as credible and deliverable, without shying away from the scale of change needed.

- The building of a culture of inclusion and diversity, generosity and teamwork, not factionalism and patronage in the party, including a well-led, professional organisation. The internal arguments and divisions of recent years have damaged our electoral fortunes and must end.

- A root and branch reform of our party organisation and structures, bringing it into the 2020s, so it connects better to the communities and voters that we seek to serve, including a wholesale transformation of our digital and online campaigning.

- A commitment to building a genuine popular movement of party members, trade union supporters, elected representatives at all levels of our nations, regions and localities, deeply rooted in our communities through good local government, open thriving local parties and integrated continuous community organising, campaigning and engagement. Our members and supporters are our greatest strength and are central to our prospects of winning the next election and changing our country and should be focused outwards not inwards.

This report is not a counsel of gloom and despair for our party but a call for realism about the situation we face and determination to change things. Nor is it a call for minimalist politics or going back to a bygone era. The next election will be a change election and Labour must be the agents of that change.

The country continues to need big change: to tackle insecurity, inequality, the climate emergency and all the other problems that afflict us particularly in light of the Coronavirus pandemic. We on this commission all believe in this transformative politics.

We believe there is a winning coalition for Labour to be forged which can build 21st century socialism. This report may make uncomfortable reading and so it should. We owe it to ourselves and the country to change to win.

The Labour Together Election Review 2019 Commissioners

OUR COMMISSIONERS

Manuel Cortes

General Secretary of the TSSA

Manuel is General Secretary of the <u>Transport Salaried Staffs' Association</u>, the UK's second-largest rail union. He has a long history of working within the trade union movement across the public and private sector. He has been General Secretary of the TSSA since 2011.

Karin Christiansen

Former General Secretary of the Co-operative Party

Karin was General Secretary of the Co-operative Party. She has worked extensively in the world of open data as founder of Publish What You Fund, she has been an Executive Director of Open Knowledge International.

Councillor Louise Gittins

Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council

Louise has been a councillor elected to Cheshire West and Chester Council since 2011. In May 2019, was elected as Leader of the Council. As leader she wants to continue to empower local people and communities to be at the heart of decision-making; building on the work and ethos of inclusive democratic models such as the Poverty Truth Commission.

Daniel Jackson

Director, The Campaign Company

Daniel works primarily with local government, helping councils better understand and engage with their communities. He has run focus groups and polling across the country, including in the general election.

Common Knowledge

A not-for-profit worker's co-operative

They work directly with grassroots activists to design digital tools that make radical change possible. During the 2019 election campaign Common Knowledge built **Vent Your Rent** with Generation Rent and assisted Momentum with the development of their suite of activist organising tools like **My Campaign Map.**

Shabana Mahmood
MP for Birmingham, Ladywood
Shabana is a member of Labour Together's Executive and represents
the Parliamentary Labour Party on the National Executive Committee.

Martin McCluskey
**2017 and 2019 Parliamentary Candidate and Former Political Director of
Scottish Labour**
Martin is a former Political Director of Scottish Labour and adviser to two Shadow
Scottish Secretaries. He was Labour's candidate for Inverclyde in the 2017 and
2019 elections.

James Meadway
Former Adviser to John McDonnell
James is an economist and former adviser to Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell
and is currently writing a book on an economy for the many.

Ed Miliband
MP for Doncaster North
Ed was leader of the Labour Party from 2010 until 2015. In April 2020 he was
appointed Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Ellie Mae O'Hagan
Journalist
Ellie Mae is an author and freelance journalist writing mainly for the Guardian and
Independent. She has also worked for NEON, the Centre for Labour and Social
Studies and as a Unite Community Organiser.

Jo Platt
Former MP for Leigh
Jo was elected the first female Labour MP for Leigh in 2017 and lost the seat in
2019 to the conservatives - a seat held by Labour for almost 100 years.

Lucy Powell
MP for Manchester Central
Lucy is a member of Labour Together's MP group and was vice chair of Labour's
2015 general election campaign.

Marcus Roberts
Pollster and Campaigner
Marcus is Director of International Projects at YouGov. He has worked in campaigns
for the Labour Party and the Democrat Party and has written on campaigning
organisation and culture.

Sienna Rodgers
LabourList
Sienna is the editor of LabourList. During the election campaign she toured the country speaking to candidates, activists and voters.

Mary Wimbury
Parliamentary Candidate for Wrexham, 2019
Mary stood as a candidate in the formerly Labour held seat of Wrexham in Wales in the 2019 General Elections. Though a marginal seat in recent years, Wrexham has had a Labour MP since 1935.

THE REVIEW TEAM

Hannah O'Rourke
Acting Director of Labour Together,
Commission Convenor

Martin McIvor
Review Author

Trevor MacFarlane
Review Senior Researcher

Jonathan England
Review Researcher

Anthony McCaul
Review Press and Communications

Chris Clark
TSSA, Review Researcher

HOW THIS REPORT WAS CREATED

Labour Together spent the last 3 years, creating spaces for people from different traditions within our movement to have difficult but necessary political conversations face-to-face with people they might not ordinarily speak with. We've convened events, run projects and created a network to bring new ideas into our politics. We are a space within the Labour movement for all of us to step forward, to be heard and to listen together. Our General Election Review is a culmination of this work, bridging the divides within our party by bringing together **15 Commissioners from across our movement** to explore our general election loss.

We intentionally designed our review so that our whole movement can feel part of it, because the process of constructing a project that involves all our traditions is as important as what we conclude. Our analysis is drawn from the combined insights from **over 11,000 survey responses** from our members, supporters, and former voters on their views and experience of the campaign (**covering 638/650 constituencies**), alongside more than **50 in depth interviews** with activists, organisers and party staff, Labour candidates and MEPs across the UK. It is supported by **submissions from groups across the movement** including Momentum, Progress, Labour Business, English Labour Network, a Labour LGA councillors' survey, Labour's Community Organising Unit and our affiliated Trade Unions

To construct a foundational analysis of the 2019 general election, we commissioned work from **data analysis firm Datapraxis**, making use of exclusive access to a **YouGov dataset of private polling responses from almost 240,000 people** during the 2019 general election. This was combined with early analysis from the **British Election Study** to identify both the long term and short-term factors at play in this election for Part One of our report. Our analysis of Labour's campaign in Part Two is supported by independent research and reviews of Labour's strategy and campaign organisation, which we commissioned from research firm **The Campaign Company** and expert digital consultants **Valent Projects, Common Knowledge and the Centre for Countering Digital Hate**. Part Three of our review which lays out the way ahead, draws on further quantitative analysis provided by **Datapraxis** and a ground-breaking deliberative Citizens' Panel which we commissioned from **research firm Britain Thinks** that brought together voters from groups which are crucial to the formation of a winning electoral coalition.

Labour Together's Members' Survey submissions by constituency

1-10 responses   10 - 20 responses   20 - 30 responses   30 - 40 responses   Over 40 responses   0 responses

Link to map and EMBED https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2662831/
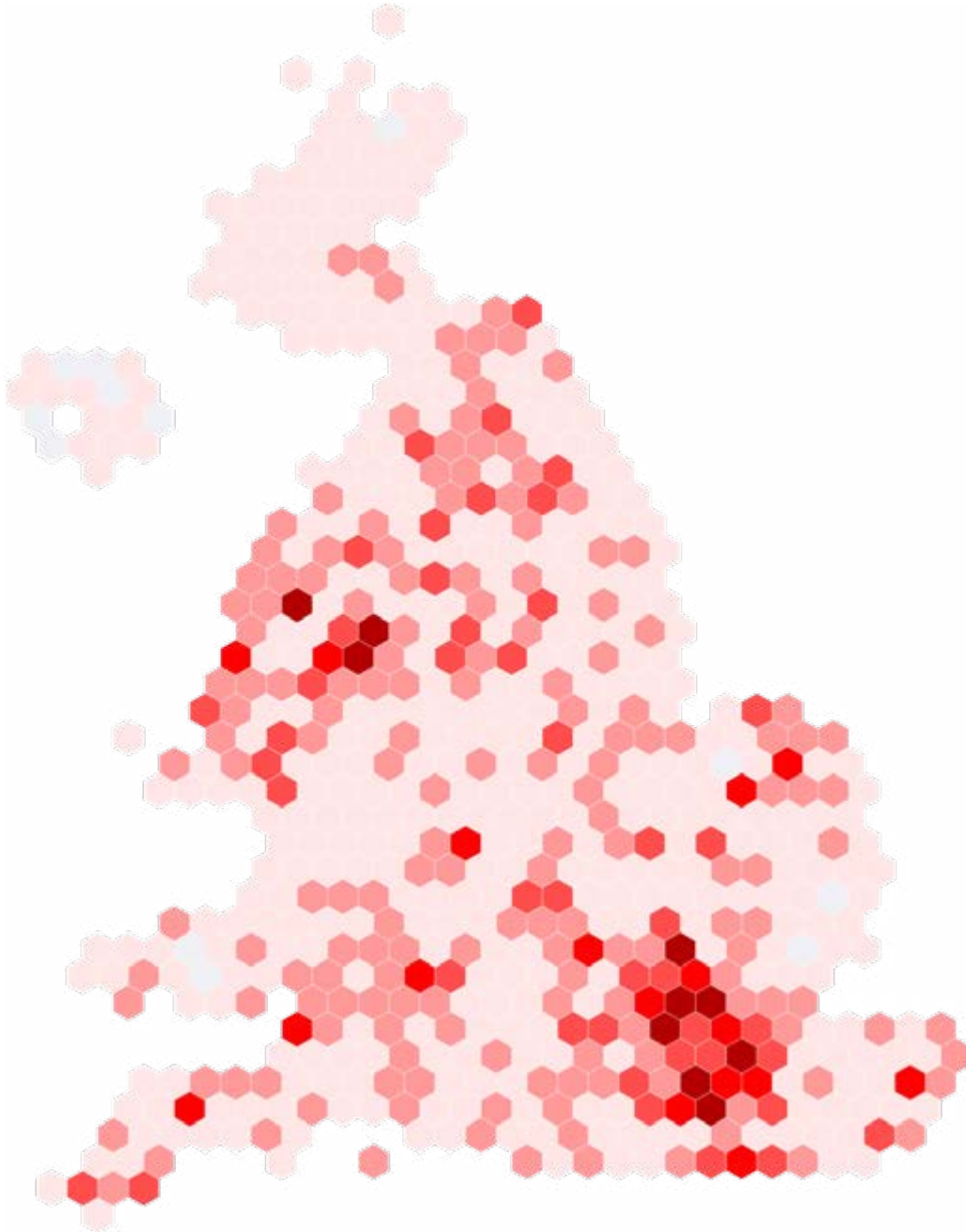
KEY FINDINGS AND SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PART ONE
AN HISTORIC DEFEAT

CHAPTER ONE: THE SCALE OF THE DEFEAT

- This was a terrible defeat for Labour. This result, with losses across the North and Midlands, Scotland, and North Wales, poses profound questions about the future prospects of our Party. Labour's electoral coalition had been fracturing for a long time and was broken in 2019. We were rejected by many of the communities we were founded to represent.

- We lost all types of voters everywhere compared with 2017, except in London.

- Age, education and place are the new electoral divides even more than traditional conceptions of class.

  › We have seen dramatic changes in relation to older voters, those with lower levels of education and qualifications.

  › Labour lost votes across every region and country in the UK; Labour's vote share declined most in small, medium, and large towns, but consolidated in cities.

  › Labour lost support amongst all classes but amongst working class communities the most.

- The swing away from Labour in our heartland seats in the 2017 election, masked by the much better than expected result, foreshadowed our 2019 defeat. The Conservatives made significant gains in 2017 in seats they would go on to win in 2019.

- Labour faces a substantial challenge to win the next election, with a historic swing of over 10 percent needed to gain a majority of one seat. No major party has ever increased their number of MPs by over 60 per-cent, which is what Labour would need to do to win in 2024.

CHAPTER TWO: LONGER-TERM DRIVERS

- The roots of our 2019 loss stretch back over the last two decades. In that time, we have seen a steady realignment of our politics through long-term changes in the relationship between our party and voter coalition, including political alienation, demographic change and cultural shifts.

- Across the regions and nations of the United Kingdom, the Conservatives have steadily increased their vote share and seat tally over this period. Labour's vote share declined dramatically between 2001 and 2010, then recovered marginally in 2015 and increased again substantially in 2017, before collapsing in 2019. The consistent nationwide growth in Conservative support since 2001, particularly marked in some places where seats became vulnerable, prepared the ground for the significant increase in seats in 2019.

- Labour's roots in many of our traditional communities have weakened, as party loyalty has declined, and trade union membership has reduced, whilst many of the structural and institutional links between our party and the Trade Union movement have declined. In the 2000s, we saw a move away from Labour in our working class communities driven by a perception that there was little difference between the major parties, as well as deindustrialisation and demographic change. This showed itself in abstentions, or protest votes for other parties exacerbated by crisis points such as the financial crash of 2008 and the expenses scandal in 2009.

- Cultural divides have accentuated the drift away, leaving some voters with the view that Labour no longer represents them, and are not listening to them.

- Labour has failed to renew our bonds with older voters, resident in many of the town seats in our (former) heartlands. These areas have experienced demographic aging and an exodus of younger voters. Labour has done badly with older voters who have lower levels of qualifications.

- Labour has experienced substantial losses amongst voters, who went on to support Leave in the referendum, for over a decade. Labour had already lost significantly more of these voters before the referendum than it did in the 2019 election. Four in ten of those who voted Labour in 2010 and went on to vote Leave in 2016 had already defected from Labour by the time of the 2015 election. In 2019, 25 per cent more of this group were lost, leaving Labour with only a third of its 2010 'Leave minded' voters.

- Voter volatility has been high throughout the last decade. It peaked in 2015, when around 40 per cent of 2010 voters switched to different parties. This helped Labour in the 2017 election. In 2019 high levels of voter volatility worked against us, with more voters swinging to the Tories, Brexit Party, Lib Dems and nationalists in Scotland and Wales.

- Many of these trends are global and have had similar and negative impacts on social democratic and centre-left parties around the world.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ISSUES IN THIS ELECTION

- There is a broad consensus across our Party – mirrored in the results from our survey of Labour members - that a combination of concerns about the leadership, Labour's position on Brexit and our policy programme damaged Labour's chances in this election. Our weaknesses going into this election were interlinked, and indivisible. They catalysed long term trends between Labour and our voter coalition.

- This was an election where people were more often voting against the scenario they feared most, rather than for the party they liked best. We failed to provide a believable narrative for change, that enough of the electorate could vote for.

- Concerns about Labour's leadership were a significant factor in our election loss in 2019. 'Stop Jeremy Corbyn' was a major driver of the Conservatives' success across all their key groups including previous non-voters, and among all the swing voters Labour lost to the Tories.

- In 2017, Jeremy Corbyn's personal poll ratings dramatically improved over the campaign. Had these levels been maintained, Labour's vote share in 2019 would have been 6 points higher. The very low poll ratings on leadership going into the 2019 election cannot easily be disentangled from the handling of issues like Brexit, party disunity and anti-Semitism.

- The Tories won the 2019 election primarily by consolidating the Leave vote. In contrast, Labour lost support on all sides. Compared with 2017, in net terms, Labour lost around 1.7 million Leave voters; and around 1 million Remain voters. We also failed to attract swing voters, winning over far fewer swing voters than at any other recent election, and turning out fewer new non-voters than in 2017.

- Non-voters (both those who did not vote in 2017 but turned out in 2019, and those who voted in 2017 but not in 2019) played a critical role in the Conservative success. According to analysis conducted by Datapraxis, well over 4 million voters turned out in 2019 who had not voted in 2017. In 2017 Labour benefited much more from 2015 and 2016 non-voters but in 2019 the Tories overtook Labour among 2017 non-voters, by turning out many older and Leave voters as well as some younger voters.

- Whilst individual policies polled as popular, resistance to Labour's reform programme came as people evaluated the overall package in our manifesto. Affordability, and the negative impact on the economy or their own personal finances were raised as concerns by voters. Unlike in 2017 many thought our manifesto was considered as unrealistic, risky and unlikely to be delivered.

- Labour suffered a meltdown in Scotland, polling well below even the Tories, with the SNP making significant gains. The SNP gained at Labour's expense among key swing voter tribes. Brexit, the UK leadership and our position on a second Independence referendum were key factors in our loss.

PART TWO
LABOUR'S 2019 ELECTION CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER 4: THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

- The absence of an objective and open review of our 2017 general election loss was a key strategic error for Labour. The 2017 result masked continuing underlying voter trends in Labour's historic voter coalition. Many of the constituency advances made by the Conservatives in 2019 were built upon significant advances in 2017.

- The 2017 election result shaped the Brexit debate, by breaking the consensus that had held to that point, and the hung Parliament that followed. This provided the context for the 2019 general election, which was an extremely difficult one for Labour.

- Labour went into the 2019 election without a clear strategy of which voters we needed to persuade or how. In the aftermath of 2017 there was an intention to reconcile Labour's traditional supporters but this was not sustained and the strategy that was developed was inadequate. There was no sustained strategy for dealing with Labour's perceived weaknesses.

- It was unclear who was in charge with insufficient lines of accountability for decision making. There was an unrealistic target seat strategy that was not evidence based. Hard decisions on seat targeting and prioritisation were avoided.

- Labour was unprepared for an election, with no clear message compared with our *For the many, not the few* campaign in 2017. The number of policy announcements created doubts about their deliverability and the media strategy meant policies didn't have time to land and left candidates poorly briefed.

- Our Party has spent substantial periods of the last five years in conflict with itself resulting in significant strategic and operational dysfunction, resulting in a toxic culture and limiting our ability to work effectively. Responsibility for this rests not wholly with one side or part of our movement. Across our movement we should accept our part in these divisions and the impact this had on our ability to work together and present a united front to the public.

CHAPTER 5: THE ONLINE CAMPAIGN

- Despite all the activity and resources invested, Labour lost the online campaign in an election where it was more important than ever before.

- Whilst the Tories learnt from their failure online in 2017, Labour did not invest and strengthen its online capacity, making use of the brightest and the best available. The groundwork was not properly laid to test strategy, tactics or messages ahead of the 2019 election campaign.

- Online campaigning was hamstrung because it was siloed off from broader

strategy and communications rather than centrally integrated. Poor internal coordination, exacerbated by factional tensions, resulted in slow, inconsistent decision making and an inability to act quickly.

- Our digital infrastructure was underfunded and inadequate. Candidates and local party campaigners found it very difficult to access and use the tools or support necessary to wage the campaign online consistently enough. Some of these systems were creaking in 2017, but the lack of internal reflection meant that issues went unresolved.

- Not enough was done to rebut attacks in digital spaces or elsewhere against the leadership, our Brexit position, or to reassure people about our policies and plans for the country. The Party's social media channels became simply an additional broadcast platform rather than a dynamic and responsive tool for targeting, engaging and persuading groups of voters.

- Labour's supporters online spent too much of the campaign talking to themselves rather than reaching out to convince swing voters to support Labour. In contrast the Tory online presence was vastly improved from 2017, at national and local level, using proxies to attack Labour and build support for the Conservative campaign in key seats. The Conservatives central message of "Get Brexit done" lent itself to their very effective approach to organic shares and "distributed spin" online.

CHAPTER 6: THE GROUND CAMPAIGN

- Labour activists should be proud of their campaigning efforts in tough conditions. Our volunteer army is one of Labour's strongest assets. Yet in this campaign, they were let down.

- Activists were misdirected and resources were limited and misallocated. Too much attention was paid to seats Labour was unlikely to win, and not enough to defending our vulnerable seats in our heartland areas of the UK including in Wales and Scotland.

- Ground campaigns were undermined, with Freeposts arriving after postal votes had been received by voters, crashing digital tools that created more work not less for candidates and campaign teams, and a lack of best practice messaging and policy and doorstep briefings.

- A long-term lack of engaging, relevant year-round campaigning and Labour locally taking the blame for austerity has fuelled mistrust in Labour and the view that we are the 'establishment' Party in areas that have seen little investment over many years.

- Our campaigning structures were not well integrated, including around community organising and digital organising, with resources split, and distrust, including between and within staff teams and relationships with elected representatives, limiting joined up effective campaigning and member mobilisation.

- Divisions and factionalism undermined our election readiness, with a lack of trust hampering teamwork at all levels of the Party. Our membership base and areas of high activity are not in the places we needed them.

- A lot of the issues with our ground campaign relate to old fashioned, highly bureaucratic, siloed and hierarchical organisation that has not been brought up to date and methods of campaigning and communication that do not fit modern reality.

PART THREE
THE WAY AHEAD

The final part of our report seeks to offer a way forward. As a commission we set ourselves the challenge of looking to the future at how Labour could build a majority coalition. This was no easy task, but we believe there are grounds for cautious optimism, as the ground-breaking work we commissioned provides the basis for a political strategy moving forward.

Our view is that our 2019 loss should be mobilising not paralysing. Labour can, and should be, the party of big and transformational change in our country and our communities, as long as this is believable and rooted in people's lives and communities. Indeed, this is what many who voted Conservative for the first time in 2019 were voting for. However, Labour cannot be complacent about the seats we currently hold, and we must be mindful that without fundamental change there is further we could fall.

Our political strategy, organisation and campaigning infrastructure needs major overhaul. We must not shy away from necessary and tough choices if we are to rebuild our relationship with the country and revolutionise the way we engage and listen to voters.

Part Three contains further explanation of what a winning coalition could look like and how it could be forged. It also contains a large number of recommendations about work that needs to begin now to develop the political strategy and fundamentally reform the Party's campaigning ability. The summary below explains the main themes.

CHAPTER 7: THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

- This Commission does not think the task of rebuilding a majority for Labour at the next General Election is impossible, but no-one should underestimate the scale and nature of the change that is necessary within our Party and in how we interact and engage with the public in order to achieve that.

- Labour should not be complacent that our vote share can only go up at the next election. There are 58 seats across the country which only require a small swing away from Labour to the Conservatives to be lost. Given the long-term trends set out which are particularly stark in some places, there is no evidence that these trends are abating. This should be of primary concern.

- Moreover, there is no guarantee that our new 'core vote' will stick with us, given that this is concentrated in areas where other parties have held seats in the last 10 years, and this electorate is particularly volatile.

- Labour faces a substantial challenge at the next election. To be the largest Party we would need a swing to Labour of 1997 proportions. To win a majority of 1 we would need to increase our number of MPs by 60 per-cent up by 123 seats, something no major Party has ever done.

- If Labour does not reverse its fortunes in Scotland in a significant way, it would need to win North East Somerset from Jacob Rees Mogg to form a majority government.

- Labour needs to build a winning coalition of voters which spans generations, geographies and outlooks. This requires holding on to our current voter base (which should not be taken for granted), mobilising and inspiring more younger voters to turn out for Labour, as was achieved in 2017, while at the same time building a bridge with former Labour voters who are very distant from Labour presently, and attracting more swing voters.

The next chapters lay out a potential basis for how Labour can go about building a winning coalition for the future (Chapter 8), and building a Party and movement that can meet this challenge (Chapter 9).

CHAPTER 8: BUILDING A WINNING A COALITION FOR THE FUTURE

- All parts of the Labour Party need a collective process of reflection and reconcilliation about the scale of the electoral task Labour faces to create a shared understanding about what it will take to rise to it.

- Labour should reassert its mission to fundamentally change the country by getting into power, winning elections and being a movement that can bring change. Our entire organisation must be focused on that task.

- Labour needs to organise in local areas over years not months so that is seen as being at the heart of communities that it seeks to represent.

- We recommend that this report and other materials should form the basis of a political education programme across the party, from the Shadow Cabinet to CLPs, Labour groups to the wider labour movement, via webinars and social media to training events and dissemination of key findings. It's a process Labour did not go through after any of the recent election defeats which allowed for views to widely diverge about the task in hand and how we might rise to it.

- The Party should organise a series of training and listening events around the country bringing members together with communities in round table style events, and in new style, conversational door-knocking exercises – when public health permits - to listen to and engage with communities and the voters we lost.

- We need an agreed strategy about the voters whose support we must win to form a government to build a majority winning coalition. Detailed quantitative modelling undertaken by Datapraxis explained in [Chapter 8](#) outlines the make-up of potential coalitions for Labour and what would be required politically to build them. Our innovative Britain Thinks work – bringing together different voter groups in a [deliberative coalition building exercise](#) - begins to show how bridges can be built and difficulties navigated. Crucially, this is about developing a narrative about what voters believe Labour should be for and its priorities while negotiating areas of difference.

- Based on this work outlined in detail in [Chapter 8](#), the Commission believes a political strategy for building this future coalition should include the following:

  › Labour must be the agents of change, and the party of big economic change for the whole country and every part of it, reaching places and people who have been held back.

> The change Labour offers must be rooted in people's lives, showing that we have understood and are acting upon hopes and concerns of voters we have lost, and relevant to the places people live. Understanding place, and developing a politics embedded in and understanding of communities, will be a vital component of this.

> The public need to know Labour's leadership is credible and can be trusted and is up to the task of governing.

- All parts of the leadership and party must be focused on this task as it is a steep enough hill with four years to climb and requires relentless drive. Work cannot begin soon enough and will require long-term strategic focus, leadership and some tough decisions. This task is for the whole of our Party and shouldn't just be the responsibility of the Leadership. It will take a united team effort.

- A strategy group chaired by the Leader and involving key members of the Shadow Cabinet and a political lead tasked with election strategy should be established – responsibilities would be the development of political strategy and the strategic plan to execute it.

- In Scotland, Labour faces the additional challenge of resolving the constitutional questions that have undermined our credibility and relevance. Labour should get behind the resolved position on no new independence referendum set out by our new leadership.

- Labour can and must lead the debate about the different society and economy that must emerge from the coronavrius crisis. The unprecedented economic and health crisis will undoubtedly shape political and economic policies for a generation. We recommend work to understand and respond to how the crisis – health and economic – arising from coronavirus will shape this landscape.

CHAPTER 9: BUILDING A PARTY AND MOVEMENT THAT CAN MEET THE CHALLENGE

In our final chapter we make over forty concrete recommendations which arise directly from our findings and from the wealth of submissions we received. These recommendations fall under four broad objectives:

- **Labour should be a well-led, professional, innovative organisation with a more inclusive culture**
To build a winning team to change the country, we need to accept that we need to change ourselves and our Party. We need to build a long term political strategy which is understood and implemented at every level of our party with clear lines of accountability. This must be combined with serious culture change from top to bottom. From a more transparent HR and complaints processes to a more agile working culture, we must do everything we can to make our party more open to innovation and accessible and inclusive for everyone.

- **The Party must be connected with the communities and voters we want to serve**
To win again, we need to win back the trust of the British public, be in touch with voters, listening and recognising their concerns and working with communities to deliver positive change all year round, not just asking for their votes at election time. This means opening up our local Labour parties focusing outward rather than inwards, a more deliberative and open policy making

process and focusing on relational rather than transactional campaigning to build support in our communities.

- **Labour should build a genuine popular movement, involving our members, affiliated trade unionists and campaign allies so we are more than the sum of our parts** Our members and our movement are our greatest strength and to win again we must unleash their full potential. We need to make community organising central to what we do as a party and modernise our approach to doorstep canvassing by putting relationship building at its heart. We need to truly empower our members with the organising tools, training opportunities and resources they need to continue to build our movement and change the country. From our Trade Unions to our local councils to volunteer networks within Labour, we should be working more closely with our allies to grow our movement both online and offline through opening Labour Community Centres and organising across workplaces.

- **The Party needs to revolutionise our digital methods and campaign tools** As digital technology disrupts and transforms political communication and campaigning, Labour is in danger of falling behind the curve. Labour needs to invest in and upgrade its technological infrastructure and capacities and should adapt its working culture and structures to match. We need a suite of responsive, user focused digital tools that empower our members and a data ethics policy that aligns with our values and helps us to drive continual organisational learning and change.

Underlying our recommendations is a vision of the Party we believe it needs to become to meet the challenges identified in this Review:

- A Party looking outwards to the public

- A Party thinking and working relationally, not transactionally

- A Party that understands that creating this new culture and building these new relationships will take years, not months.

We hope our findings and recommendations can help propel the Labour Party's electoral fortunes in a positive direction and we as a Commission stand ready to help in the coming months and years to implement them.

PART ONE

AN HISTORIC DEFEAT

PART ONE
AN HISTORIC DEFEAT

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSION: In 250 words

The 2019 election marks a historic low point in Labour's electoral success. Long term trends in voters' relationship with Labour were catalysed by a perfect storm in this election. The scale of this loss is unprecedented. The only comparable defeat for an Opposition was 1983, yet the Tories had been in power for only four years at that election, not ten years.

The seeds of this defeat stretch back over the last two decades, with the link between Labour and the communities we were founded to represent profoundly broken. The collapse of support across the North and Midlands, our continued marginalisation in Scotland, and losses in North Wales are the result of long-term changes in the relationship between our party and our voter coalition, including demographic change and cultural shifts.

Underlying weaknesses going into this election magnified our losses including the unpopularity of our leadership, the failure to have a clear position on the key issue of the day, Brexit, and a manifesto that did not allay existing concerns about Labour in office.

Labour lost support on all sides in this election. Compared with 2017 in net terms, Labour lost around 1.7 million Leave voters, and around 1 million Remain voters. We also failed to attract swing voters, winning over far fewer swing voters than at any recent election. In 2019 the Conservatives were more successful than Labour in turning out non-voters. They overtook Labour among 2017 non-voters gaining 2 million non-voters to Labour's 1.8 million. These votes for Labour were offset by the abstention of 1.8 million 2017 supporters who did not vote in 2019.

Original research by Datapraxis shows that we lost all types of voters everywhere compared with 2017. Remain and Leave, young and old, working class and middle class, habitual and occasional voters. London is the only area that bucked the trend.

Our investigation shows that partly as a result of the loss of Labour voters, age, education and place are the new electoral divides even more than traditional conceptions of class, with new voters, non-voters and abstentions playing a greater role in determining increasingly volatile elections.

We now face a mountain to climb. We should not underestimate the scale and nature of the change that is necessary within our Party. In order to win a general election again, we must change how we campaign and reset our relationship with the public.

HOW WE PREPARED THIS SECTION

The findings in these chapters are based on an extensive review of independent evidence, including:

- bespoke analysis of the result commissioned by us from Datapraxis, making use of exclusive access to a YouGov dataset of private polling responses from almost 240,000 people during the 2019 general election, as well as response-line data from the YouGov Profiles data warehouse (and including a semantic analysis which allowed us to abstract patterns in voters' open text responses to polling questions.)

- early data and analysis from the 2019-23 British Election Study shared with us by Professor Edward Fieldhouse, Dr. Chris Prosser and Dr. Jonathan Mellon of the University of Manchester

- a historical review of trends provided to the Commission by Greg Cook, Labour's Head of Political Strategy from 1995 to 2019

- an extensive review of relevant published data and research, including that highlighted in submissions to this Review

CHAPTER ONE

THE SCALE OF THE DEFEAT

- This was a terrible defeat for Labour – but one that was a long time coming

- The losses were widespread but concentrated in the North, Midlands, North Wales and Scotland

- Labour lost support among all groups of voters compared to 2017 – but the losses were greater among lower income, manual or routine workers

- The generational and educational divide grew further at this election

- Labour was less successful in turning out new voters than the Conservatives

- Labour's vote is increasingly based in cities, not towns

- Many of the seats we lost had become contestable because of what happened in 2017

- The seeds of the loss go much further back to the 2000s and before

- The geographical landscape of this defeat is very different from comparative elections

- There is now a mountain to climb to become the largest party or win a majority

This was a terrible defeat for Labour – but one that was a long time coming

Labour members, candidates, staff and supporters worked incredibly hard in this election. The numbers out on the doorsteps, in the particularly challenging circumstances of a December election, were unprecedented.

This makes the result both more painful and more important to understand.

Labour lost 59 seats, the second largest number lost by any Opposition for a century. There are now only 202 Labour MPs in the House of Commons – the lowest number since 1935.

The Conservatives now have one of their biggest majorities since the Second World War – exceeded only in 1959, 1983 and 1987.

The only other time an opposition party has lost so many seats to the incumbent was in 1983, when the Conservatives had been in power for four years. For a major party to fall this far behind after nine years in opposition – and four elections – is historically unprecedented.

On the face of it, this result seems a sharp reversal of the advances made by Labour in the 2017 election. But a deeper investigation of the patterns and drivers behind

the 2019 vote points to underlying trends and dynamics that were already at work in 2017 and – as we explore in Chapter 2 – much earlier.

The losses were widespread but concentrated in the North, Midlands, North Wales and Scotland

In England, Labour lost seats in every region except the South East, where it is starting from a low base. In London, Labour gained one seat but lost another. The largest number of seats lost were in the North West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humberside.

Figure 1: Labour seats lost and gained in 2019 by region
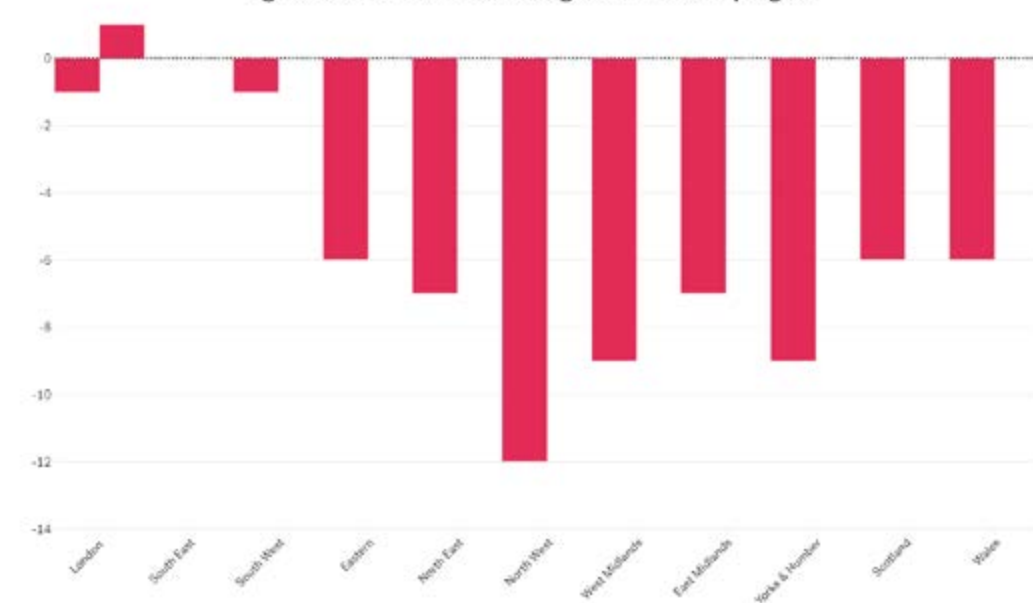
Source: David Cowling, Note on 2020 English Battleground Seats

Source: David Cowling, Note on 2020 English Battleground Seats
(Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2176481/)

In Wales, Labour lost six of its 28 seats (five being in North Wales, where we only held one seat out of six), its vote share falling from 49 to 41 per cent.

In Scotland, Labour retained just 51 per cent of its 2017 vote, and collapsed to its worst ever vote share.[1] As well as losing six of its seven seats in Scotland, Labour is now out of the top two parties in more Scottish seats than ever before, as the Conservatives solidify their position as second placed party across much of the nation.[2]

1   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
2   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together

Figure 2: Number of seats in Scotland where the Conservative Party came second place 2005 -2019
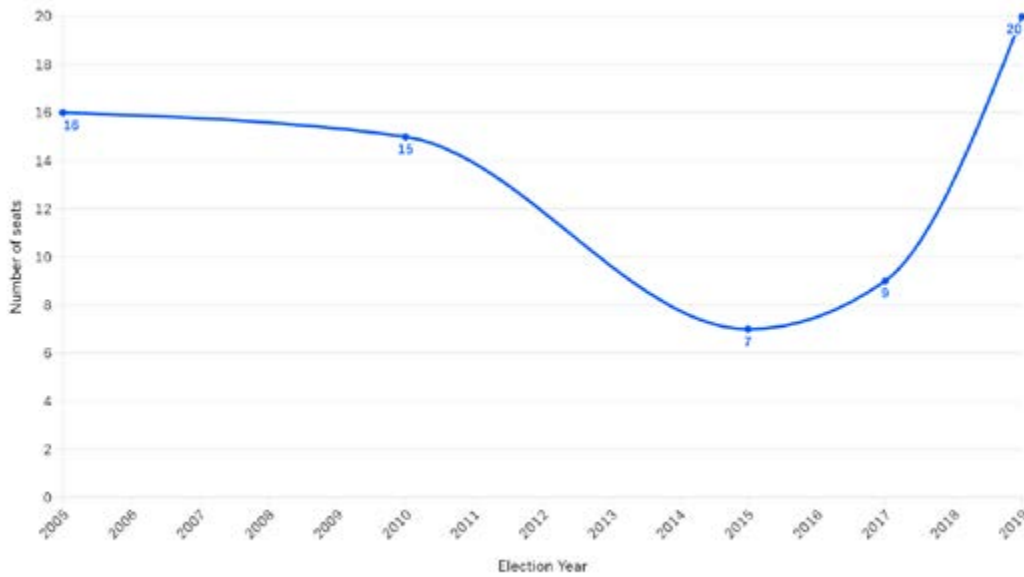
Source: Wikipedia

Source: David Cowling, Note on 2020 English Battleground Seats (Link to graph and embed: https://public. flourish.studio/visualisation/2252751/)

This pattern of seat loss is an effect of where Labour held seats with majorities that were vulnerable to voters switching to other parties.

Labour lost votes everywhere. The most significant swings were seen in the North East, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside and East Midlands.
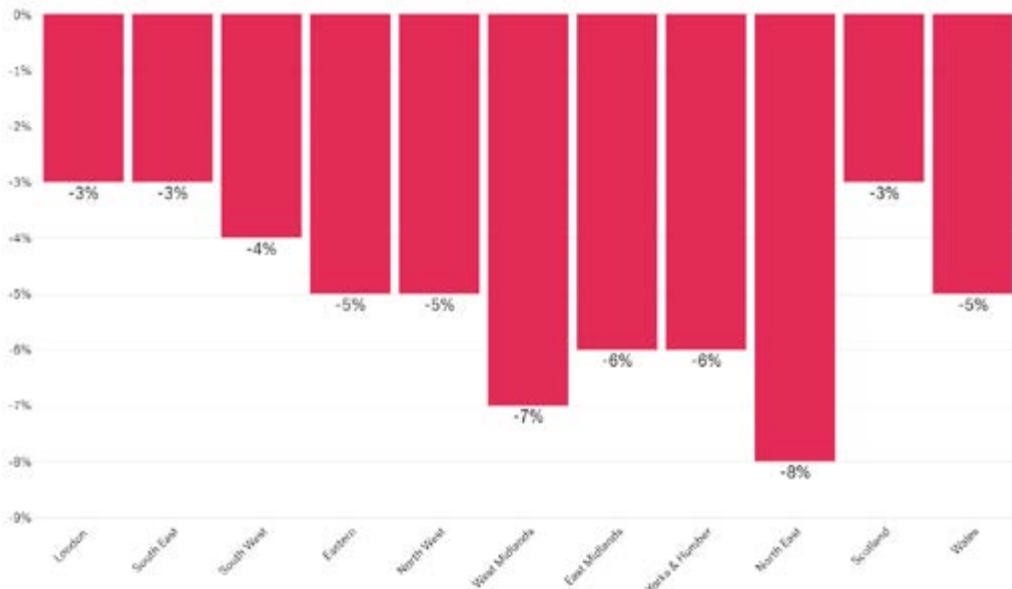
Source: David Cowling. Note on 2020 English Battleground Seats

Source: Wikipedia (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2680126/)

Labour lost support among all groups of voters compared to 2017 – but the losses were greater among lower income, manual or routine workers

There is a debate about how current polling and statistical categories relate to the modern realities of economic "class".[3] There is also nothing inherently new about support for the Conservative Party among some lower income or less educationally qualified workers, which was a recognised reality in the early 1960s.[4]

But it is clear that in this election Labour lost proportionately more support among workers in lower paid, more manual or "routine" occupations, with important electoral consequences.[5]

Using NRS Grades,[6] likelihood of sticking with Labour was noticeably lower among

- C2 ("skilled manual workers"), and

- DE ("semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers"; "state pensioners" [that is, pension-age voters without any personal or occupational pension], "casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only") respondents.

Likelihood of sticking with Labour was higher among

- ABs (higher and intermediate "managerial, administrative and professional" workers) and

- C1s ("supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional" workers).
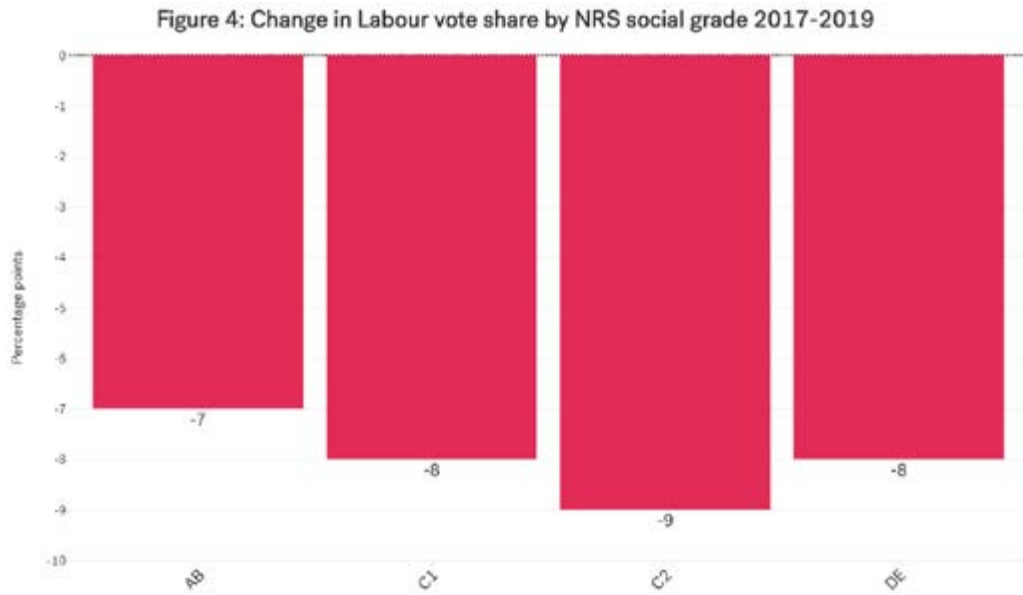
Ipsos MORI data also indicates that, compared to 2017, the deepest net falls in Labour's vote share were among C2s. Figure 5 below shows in 2019 the Conservatives took the lead among DE voters, overtaking Labour.

3   See for example: Luke Cooper and Christabel Cooper, The Devastating Defeat: Why Labour lost and how it can win again; Part 1: Britain's new political divides in the Brexit election, Europe for the Many, 2020: https://www.europeforthemany.com/tdd-web.pdf; Paul Mason, After Corbynism: Where Next For Labour?, December 19: https://www.paulmason.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/After-Corbynism-v1.4.pdf; Ash Sarkar, 'It's a myth that Labour has lost the working class', The Guardian, 10 December 2019: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/10/myth-labour-lost-working-class-pollsters
4   Robert McKenzie and Allan Silver, Angels in Marble: Working Class Conservatives in Urban England, University of Chicago Press, 1968.
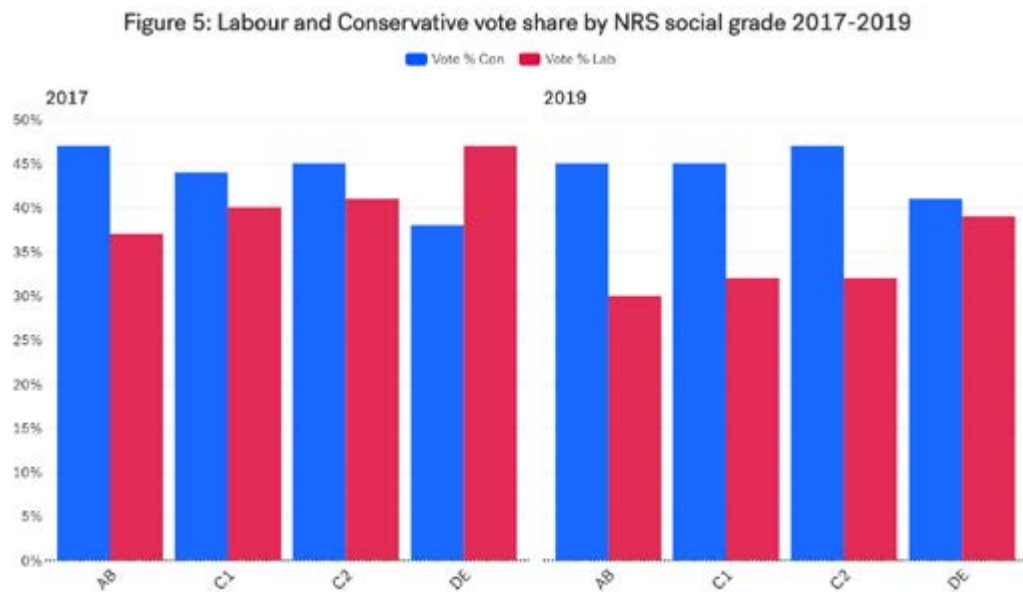5   British Election Study, Mar 2020: https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/the-re-shaping-of-class-voting-in-the-2019-election-by-geoffrey-evans-and-jonathan-mellon/#.XnEKNKj7TIU
6   For background see 'Social Grade', National Readership Survey: http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/

Figure 4: Change in Labour vote share by NRS social grade 2017-2019

Source: Ipsos MORI (2019)

Source: Ipsos MORI (2019) (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429066/)

Figure 5: Labour and Conservative vote share by NRS social grade 2017-2019

Source: Ipsos MORI (2019)

Source: Ipsos MORI (2019) (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2455451/)

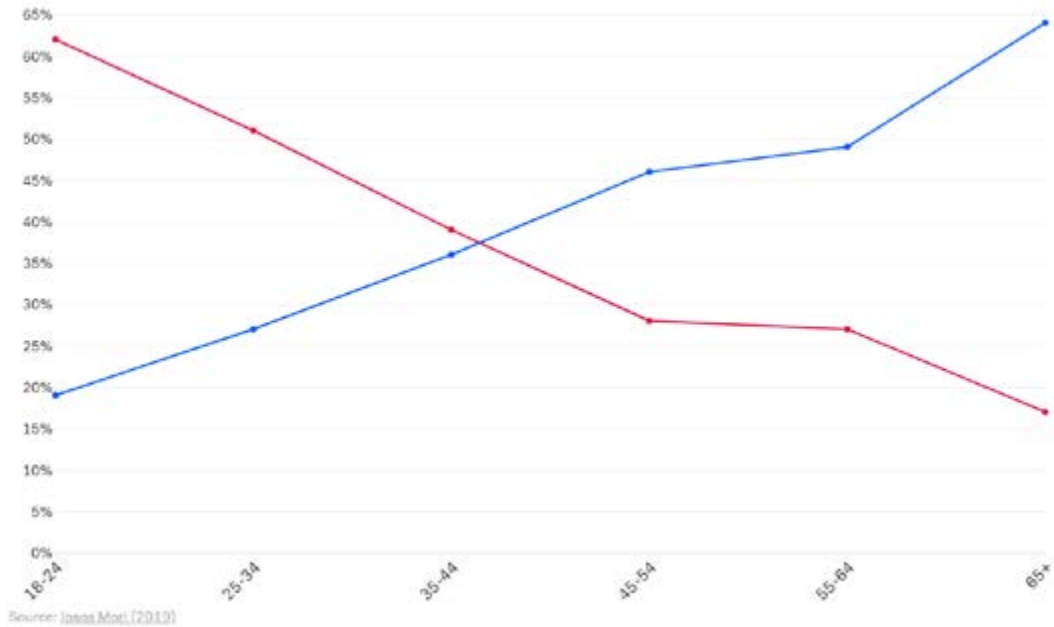## The generational and educational divide grew further at this election

This result displays an electorate starkly polarised by age and education level.

- Labour won a large share of voters under 35 - according to Ipsos MORI, 62 per cent of 18-24 year olds and 51 per cent of 25-34 year olds. But Labour was well behind the Conservatives among voters over 45 - by 18 per cent among

45-54 year olds, 21 per cent among 55-64 year olds and 47 per cent among voters over 65.

- According to YouGov, Labour was ahead of the Conservatives among graduates, but 17 per cent behind among voters with medium level qualifications, and 33 per cent behind among voters with no qualifications.

Figure 6: Labour and Conservative 2019 vote share by age group

Source: Ipsos MORI (2019)

Source: Ipsos MORI (2019) (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429163/)

Figure 7: Labour and Conservative 2019 vote share by education level
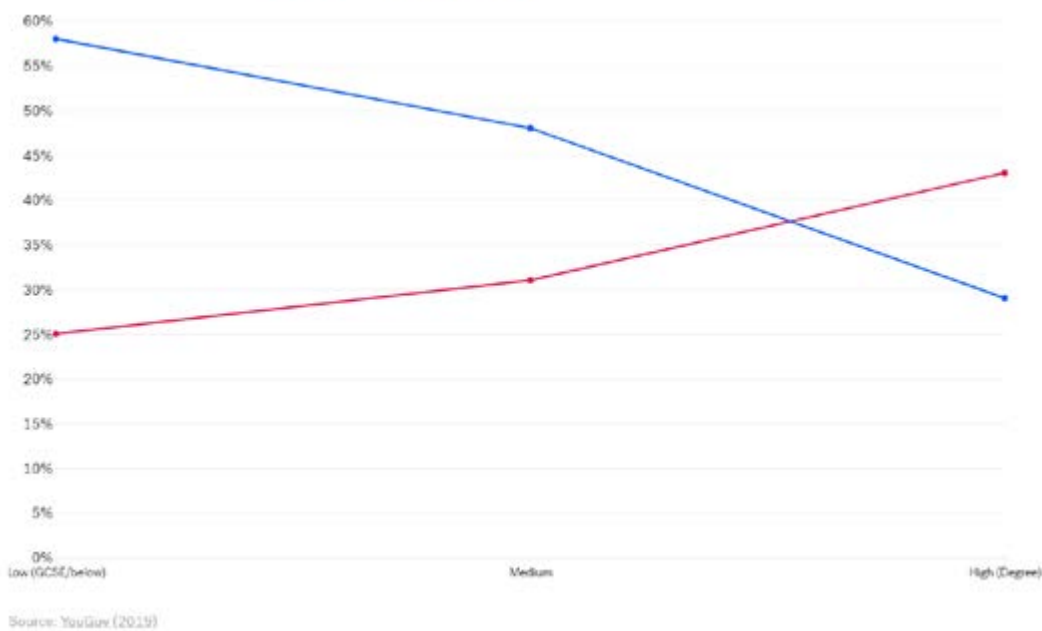
Source: YouGov (2019)

Source: YouGov (2019) (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429203/)

Of Labour's 2017 supporters, younger voters were more likely to stick with the Party than older - 79 per cent of 18-24-year-olds voted Labour again, compared to 69 per cent of voters aged over 55.[7]

These divisions have been apparent over a number of recent elections, but their depth is unprecedented.

Since at least 1992, younger voters have been somewhat more likely to vote Labour, and older voters Conservative. However, this polarisation sharpened dramatically in 2015, even more in 2017 and further in this election.

Figure 8: Labour and Conservative vote share by age group 1992-2019
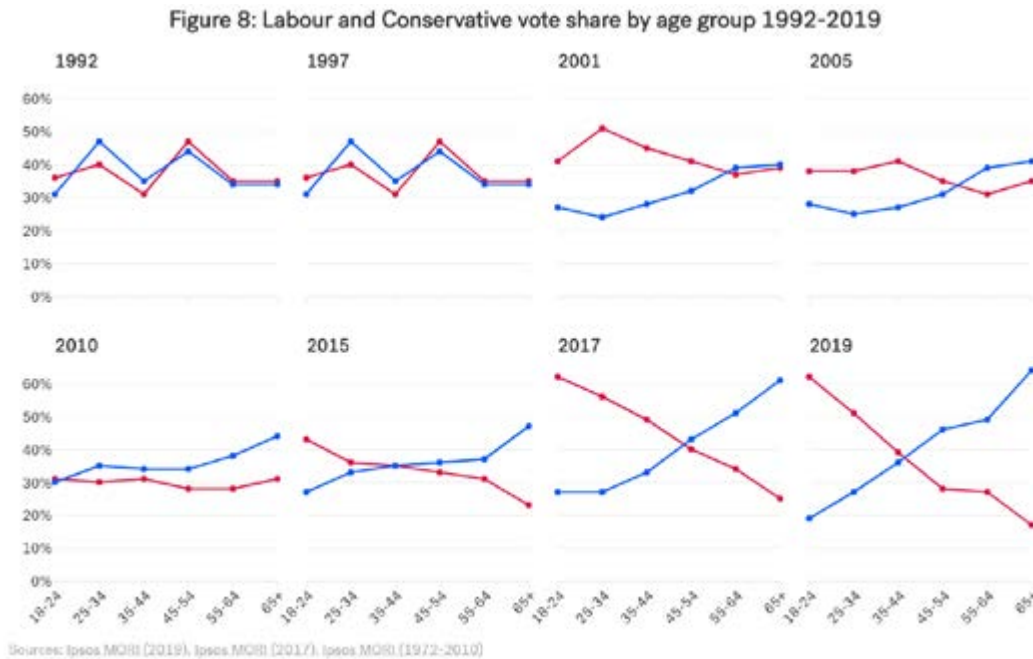
Source: Ipsos MORI (2019), Ipsos MORI (2017), Ipsos MORI (1972-2010) (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429229/)

Labour was less successful in turning out new voters than the Conservatives

Over 3.2 million people registered to vote during the election campaign (although it is likely that 1 million may have already been registered).[8] While not all of these will have been first time voters, two thirds of them were under 35. This was more than the 2.3 million who registered during the 2017 campaign.

However, overall turnout was slightly down on the 2017 election, at 67.3 per cent. The biggest increases in turnout were mostly in cities; turnout was generally down in the seats that Labour lost, with the sharpest fall in Stoke-On-Trent North.[9]

Though non-voters have always been difficult to study (as panels tend to heavily over-represent the politically interested, and under-sample the politically

7   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
8   Benjamin Butterworth, 'At least 1m of the 3.2m people who registered to vote in the general election aren't new voters', The I, 26 November 2019: https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/general-election-2019-regis- ter-to-vote-registration-figures-voters-explained-1325269
9   Tory Landslide, Progressives Split: A Datapraxis Analysis of the UK General Election, Datapraxis: http://dave- levy.info/Downloads/Tory%20Landslide%20-%20Progressives%20Split%20-%20DataPraxisEU.pdf

disengaged), the large YouGov dataset which Datapraxis used for this Labour Together review includes a much larger and more balanced sample of non-voters than most previous political pollsters' datasets. It therefore enables us to make the first serious estimates of the role of previous non-voters in the 2019 election - both in terms of those who did not vote in 2017 but turned out in 2019, and those who voted in 2017 but not in 2019.

This analysis indicates that in 2017 Labour benefited much more than the Conservatives from 2015 and 2016 non-voters, particularly in the 18-44 age bracket.

In 2019 the data indicates that well over 4 million voters turned out in 2019 who had not voted in 2017.

Labour's main gains in this election came from 1.8 million people who hadn't voted in the 2017 election, most of them young. 59 per cent were aged 18-34 and around a third were newly registered. However, these were offset by 1.8 million 2017 supporters who abstained in 2019.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives turned out around 2 million who didn't vote in 2017. This mobilisation of previous non-voters accounted for almost two thirds of the Conservatives' increased vote in this election.

Figure 9: How 2017 non-voters voted in 2019
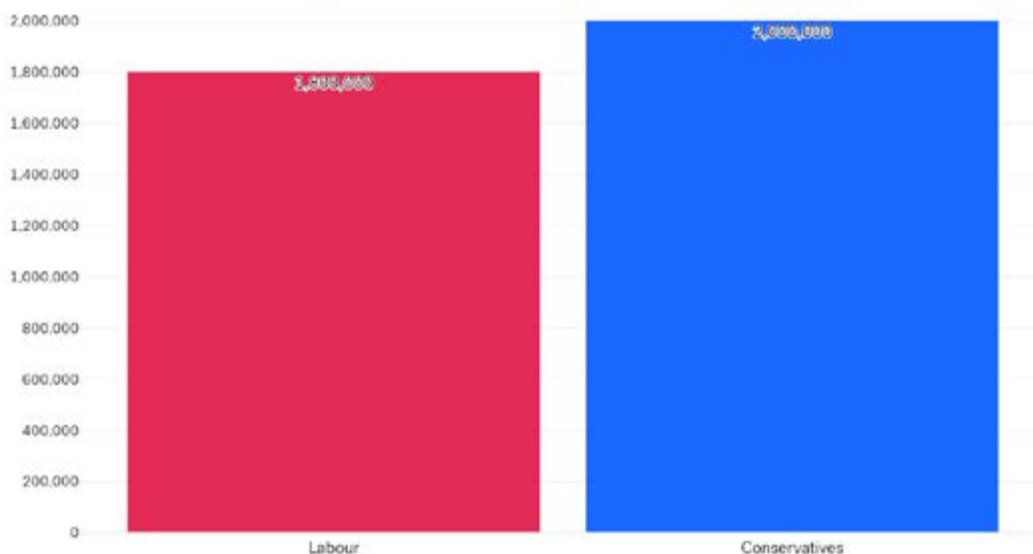
Source: Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together • 2017 non-voters include those who were unable to vote in 2017 as they were too young

Source: Datapraxis, Submission to the Commission (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2676786/)

Almost half of these previously abstaining Conservative voters had voted Leave in 2016; most of the rest were habitual non-voters. They had a balanced mix of ages and social grades, and were spread right across the nations and regions, with greater concentrations in the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside and the South West, and fewer in Scotland, London and Wales. Only a small fraction had voted Labour at previous elections since 2010.[10]

10   Tory Landslide, Progressives Split: A Datapraxis Analysis of the UK General Election, Datapraxis: http://dave-levy.info/Downloads/Tory%20Landslide%20-%20Progressives%20Split%20-%20DataPraxisEU.pdf

Labour's vote is increasingly based in cities, not towns

Figure 10: 2019 General Election vote share by place type
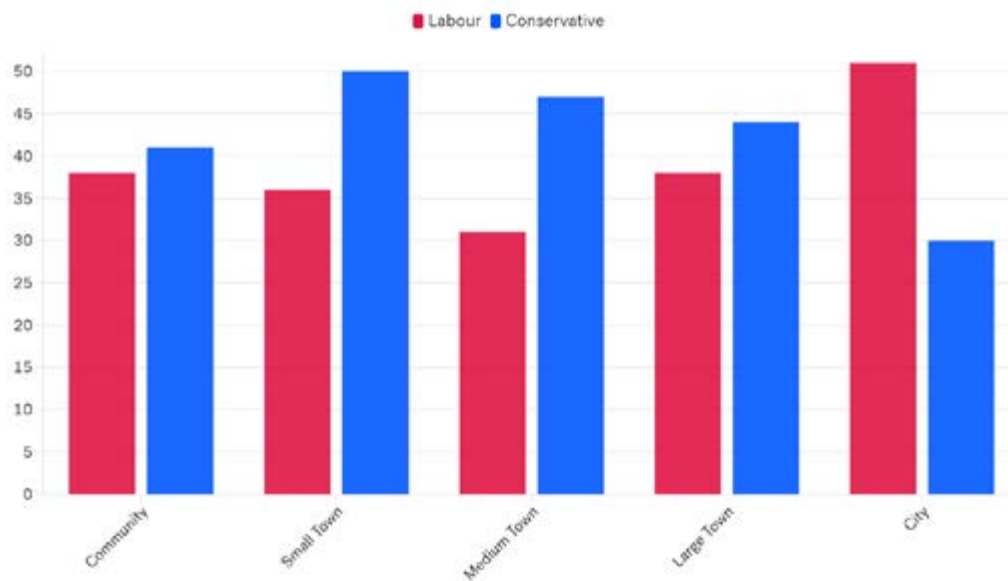
Source: Ian Warren, Centre for Towns (2019) • ("Community" indicates rural or "village" areas)

Source: Ian Warren, Centre for Towns (2019) , ("Community" indicates rural or "village" areas) (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2684203/)

Behind the general swing against Labour, this election continued the concentration of our support in metropolitan areas. The one seat Labour gained in this election (Putney), as well as the 12 others in which our vote share increased, and those in which we suffered the lowest swing, tended to be:

- in or around large cities, especially London but also Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham and other multi-constituency cities

- characterised by both high measures of deprivation and significant numbers of professional workers, often with relatively high numbers of BAME voters or students

Although this election saw a swing against the Party that was manifested in almost every constituency, many of these seats had such large Labour margins that they could absorb these setbacks without changing hands. In a few cases such as Canterbury, Portsmouth and Putney, Labour consolidated support. Across 18 cities outside London that are large enough to contain three or more constituencies, Labour still holds 53 of 73 seats.[11]

Labour retained a strong advantage among Black and Minority Ethnic voters, winning 64 per cent of BME voters against the Conservatives' 20 per cent.[12] According to research from Datapraxis, Labour retained a comparatively high proportion (over 80 per cent) of Labour 2017 voters identifying as Arab, white and black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani, compared to 73 per cent of voters identifying as White British.

11   Peter Kellner, 'Five crucially important but frequently ignored facts about the 2019 election', Prospect, 16 December 2019: https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/five-crucially-important-but-frequently-ignored-facts-about-the-2019-election-labour-conservatives-brexit-corbyn-johnson

12   'How Britain voted in the 2019 election', Ipsos MORI, December 2019: https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2019-election

Retention rates among voters who identified as Indian were even lower, however, at 68 per cent – likely reflecting the growing support for the Conservatives among voters identifying as Hindu. Hindu voters who had supported Labour in 2017 were 42 per cent likely to withdraw their support in 2019 – compared to Muslim voters who were 80 per cent likely to stick with Labour. Data also suggests that Labour had difficulty retaining voters identifying as ethnically Chinese.[13] However, this commission notes that some care needs to be taken when interpreting current estimates of ethnic minority voting patterns as BAME voter groups are often underrepresented in polling samples and panels.

The majority of the seats Labour lost were centred on towns and small cities rather than within larger conurbations. Many of these seats were once centred in mill towns, potteries or collieries. Today they are characterised by:

- below-average living standards – though not as low as Britain's poorest constituencies

- a comparatively stable and ethnically homogenous population

- slightly higher-than-average rates of home-ownership but comparatively low property values.[14]

Many of the seats we lost had become contestable because of what happened in 2017

Some of the seats Labour lost might be seen as typical "bellwether" swing seats that have been won by the Conservatives in the recent past.[15] However, many others are seats that have never before returned a Conservative MP and would not long ago have been regarded as core Labour strongholds.

The loss of these longstanding Labour seats to the Conservatives may be shocking. However, the shifts in support that have led to this outcome have been slow, not sudden. Most of these seats were lost as a result of swings that continued a long-term trend of fragmenting Labour support and a rising Conservative vote apparent over previous elections.
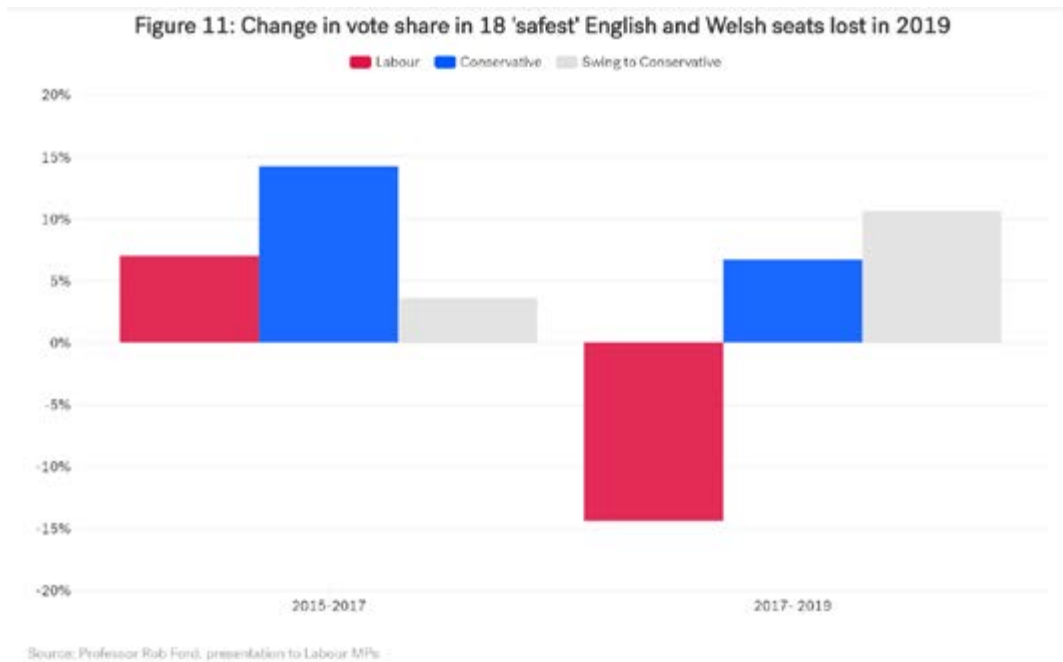
Many of these constituencies had already been left highly vulnerable by the larger advances made by the Conservatives in the 2017 election.

Analysis shared with us by Professor Rob Ford of the University of Manchester shows that in the 18 English and Welsh seats lost in 2019 for the first time since 1945, the Conservatives had increased vote share by an average 14 per cent in the 2017 election. This meant they only needed a smaller increase in 2019, combined with a fall back in Labour's share, to take these seats in 2019. The Conservatives had already paved the way to victory in these seats back in 2017.

13   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
14   Charlie McCurdy et al, Painting the towns blue: Demography, economy and living standards in the political geographies emerging from the 2019 General Election, Resolution Foundation, February 2020: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/02/Painting-the-town-blue.pdf
15   Lewis Baston, 'The Myth of the Red Wall', Lewis Batson, The Critic, 18 December 10: https://thecritic.co.uk/the-myth-of-the-red-wall/

Figure 11: Change in vote share in 18 'safest' English and Welsh seats lost in 2019

Source: Professor Rob Ford, presentation to Labour MPs (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429510/)

In line with this, analysis by the Resolution Foundation has shown that, across all constituencies, it was in 2017 that the Conservatives made the largest increases in vote share relative to the strength of the 2016 Leave vote. The further increase in Conservative vote share relative to Leave votes was smaller in 2019, but enough to tip many more constituencies over the edge.[16]

Data reveals that 2017 was also when the Conservatives made their biggest increase in support from voters in "working class" occupations (which under this NS-SEC-based classification make up the largest group in the electorate), though it was not yet enough to tip the balance in many seats. Analysis by the British Election Study indicates that the Conservatives achieved their big increase in support among "working class" voters in 2017, an increase which was consolidated in 2019.

16   Torsten Bell, 'Election dissection', Resolution Foundation, 13 December 2019: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/election-dissection/; See also Matthew Sowemimo, Labour's Last Stand?, Compass: https://www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/LabourLast_MS_FINAL.pdf

Figure 12: Conservative working class vote share 2015-2019
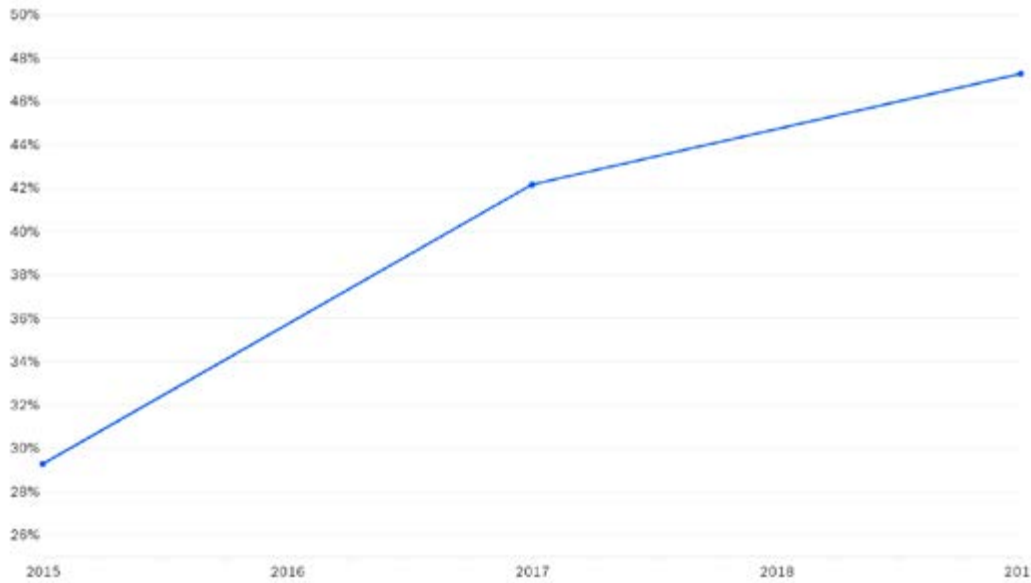
Source: British Election Study, Submission to the Commission (Link to graph and embed https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2672791/)

In Scotland, there was clear evidence in 2017 that Labour was losing support to the Conservatives among anti-independence voters, as nationally the Conservatives overtook Labour in terms of vote share.

Figure 13: Scottish vote shares in UK General Elections 2010-2019

Sources: BBC News (2019); BBC News (2017); BBC News (2015) (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429542/)

However, as shown by Figure 14 in 2017 the impact of this in terms of seat gains was partly offset by a fall in turnout among SNP voters that was reversed in 2019. This allowed Labour to win back some seats from the SNP in 2017, despite Labour only gaining less than 10,000 additional votes between 2015 and 2017.

Figure 14: Scottish votes in UK General Elections 2010-2019
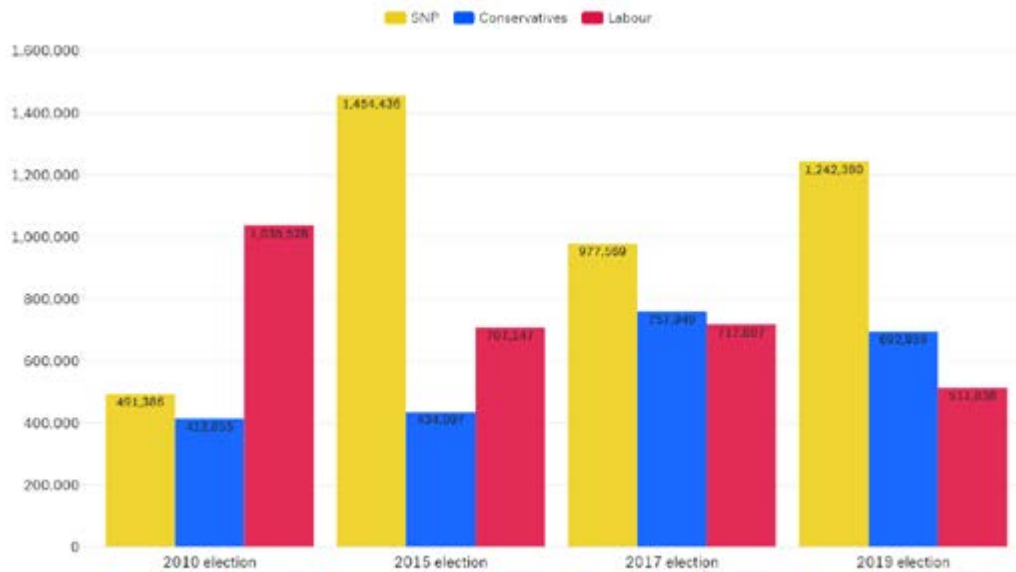
Sources: BBC News (2010). BBC News (2017). BBC News (2015)

Sources: BBC News (2019); BBC News (2017); BBC News (2015); BBC News (2010) (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429591/)

The seeds of the loss go much further back to the 2000s and before

A longer view of voting trends in these seats indicates that the roots of these losses go further back than 2017.

Over the last two decades, the Conservatives have steadily increased their votes and seats across all the nations and regions of Great Britain, except in London. They took the lead in the Midlands a decade ago. Meanwhile Labour declined dramatically in every region between 2001 and 2010, losing most seats in Southern England as well as many in the Midlands and North.[17]

In many English and Welsh constituencies, the Conservatives have been achieving significant increases in vote share since 2010. These Conservative advances often followed in the wake of falls in Labour support evident from the 2001 election onwards.

This pattern of Labour support dropping and remaining at a lower level, followed after some delay by cumulative increases in Conservative vote share, can be seen in seats that Labour lost in this election (such as Rother Valley or North West Durham). This is also true in seats that had already been lost (such as Amber Valley or Cannock Chase).

17   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together

Figure 15: Rother Valley General Election results 1983-2019
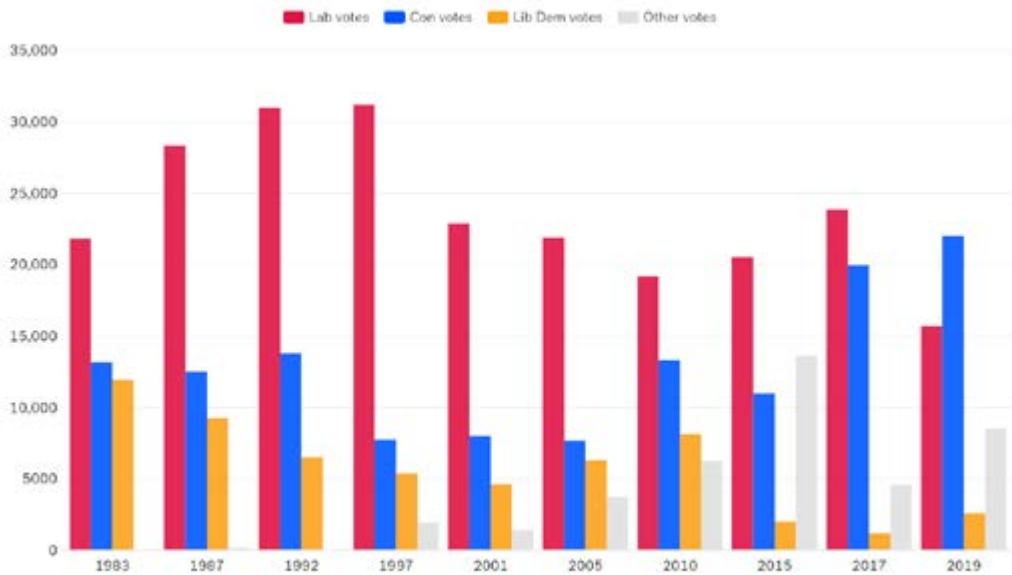
Source: Greg Cook Submission to the Commission

Source: Greg Cook Submission to the Commission, Wikipedia (Link to Graph and embed: https://public. flourish.studio/visualisation/2429640/)

Figure 16: North West Durham General Election results 1983-2019
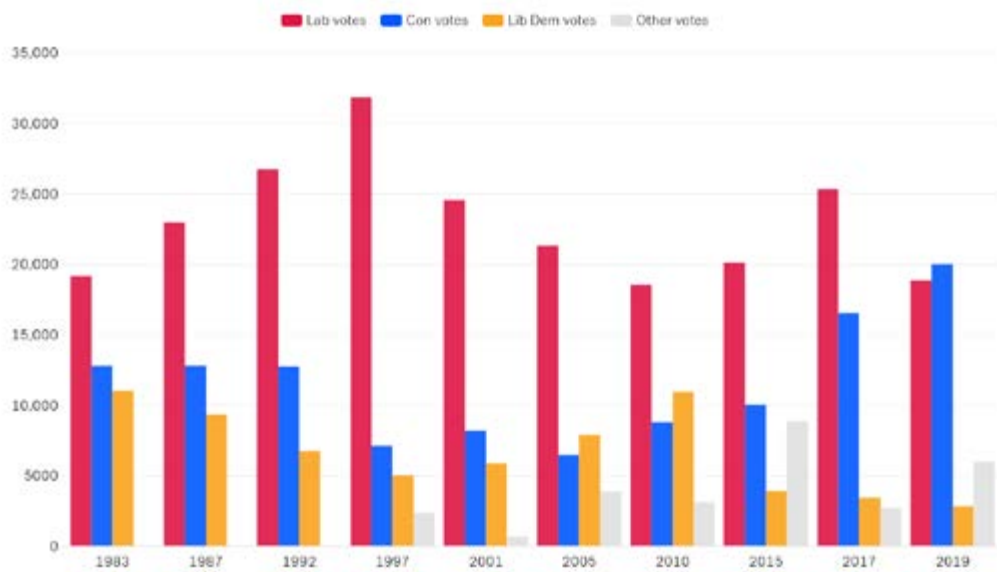
Source: Greg Cook Submission to the Commission, Wikipedia

Source: Greg Cook Submission to the Commission, Wikipedia (Link to Graph and embed: https://public. flourish.studio/visualisation/2429682/)

For example, the biggest swing to the Conservatives since 2005 was seen in Mansfield. This was lost narrowly by Labour in 2017, but data highlighted by Professor Rob Ford clearly shows that the decline of Labour support and rise in Conservative support was in evidence by 2010 and continued in 2019, so that it now has a relatively large majority.

Figure 17: Labour and Conservative vote shares and swing in Mansfield 2005-2019
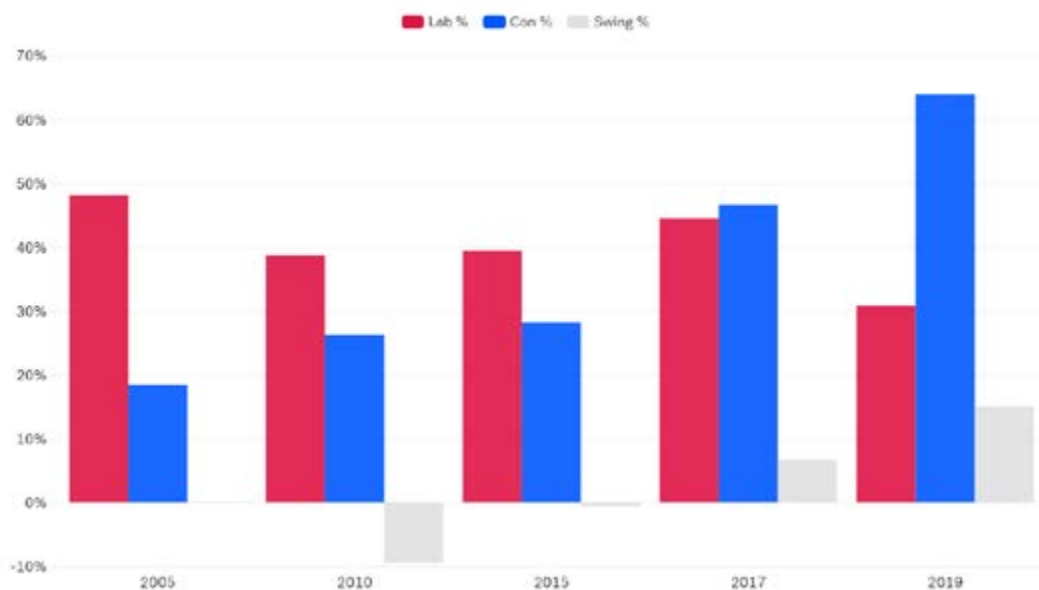
Source: Professor Rob Ford, presentation to Labour MPs

Source: Professor Rob Ford, presentation to Labour MPs (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429703/)

Seats lost in 2019 such as Bolsover, Sedgefield and Walsall North are among 12 seats in England and Wales that have seen a cumulative swing from Labour to Conservative of more than 25 points since 2005.

A further 27 seats in England and Wales, most of them in the North and Midlands, have seen swings of more than 21 points from Labour to Conservative since 2005 – some of them lost before 2019 such as Tamworth or Amber Valley, and others such as Normanton, Pontefract & Castleford and Barnsley East that were retained.

The 2019 election result thus confirms and exacerbates profound shifts in political representation that, in some cases, have been underway for many years.

Election results do not give us definite data on how specific groups of voters shift their support from election to election. However, analysis of the available evidence by the British Election Study[18] and others[19] suggests that many traditional Labour voters started moving away from the Party around two decades ago.

For a time, these "lost" voters abstained in elections, lent support to the Liberal Democrats or Conservatives, or lodged protest votes through smaller parties such as UKIP, the Brexit Party or the BNP. However, in recent elections, and particularly since the 2016 European Referendum, the Conservatives have been increasingly successful in bringing them into their electoral coalition.[20]

18   Geoffrey Evans and Jonathan Mellon, 'The Re-shaping of class voting', British Election Study, 6 March 2020: https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/the-re-shaping-of-class-voting-in-the-2019-election-by-geoffrey-evans-and-jonathan-mellon/#.XnEKNKj7TIU
19   David Cutts et al, 'Brexit: the 2019 General Election and the Realignment of British Politics'", The Political Quarterly, Vol 91, Issue 1, February 2020: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.12815
20   David Cutts et al, 'Brexit: the 2019 General Election and the Realignment of British Politics'", The Political Quarterly, Vol 91, Issue 1, February 2020: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.12815

In Wales, Labour's vote declined from 2001 to 2010, recovered in 2017 but has now fallen back again. Meanwhile the Conservatives have been increasing their vote share steadily since 2001 and are now a closely placed second to Labour in vote share.

In Scotland, Labour's vote held up between 2001 and 2010, but collapsed after the 2014 independence referendum. As Figure 13 shows, although 2017 produced a slight revival, the Party has now fallen even further.

The geographical landscape of this defeat is very different from comparative elections

One way of seeing how Labour's "base" has changed is to compare Labour's result in 2019 with the seats it held onto in 1983, its most comparable result in terms of seats since the war.

Greg Cook, has estimated that in England and Wales there are about 35 seats – most of them in the West Midlands (11), North West (6), East Midlands (5), North East (5), and Yorkshire and Humberside (7) – that were Labour even in 1983 that have now gone to other parties. Meanwhile, Labour now holds around 80 seats in England and Wales – most of them in Greater London and the North West – that it did not in 1983.

This shifting "core" in England and Wales is visualised below: seats coloured grey were held in 1983 but lost in 2019. Most of them are in the North and many are geographically large town-based constituencies. Seats coloured red were not part of Labour's core in 1983 but were retained in 2019. Most are in densely populated urban areas in London and the North West. In Scotland the picture is particularly dramatic. In 1983 Labour held 33 seats that it doesn't today, while the sole Scottish seat Labour holds today, Edinburgh South was actually won by the Conservatives in 1983. This comparison illustrates the significant shift in Labour's core support over the past four decades.

Figure 18: Seats won in 1983 but not 2019, and vice versa

■ Lab won in 1983 but not 2019   ■ Lab won in 2019 but not 1983

Source: Greg Cook, Submission to the Commission *(Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish. studio/visualisation/2442536/)*
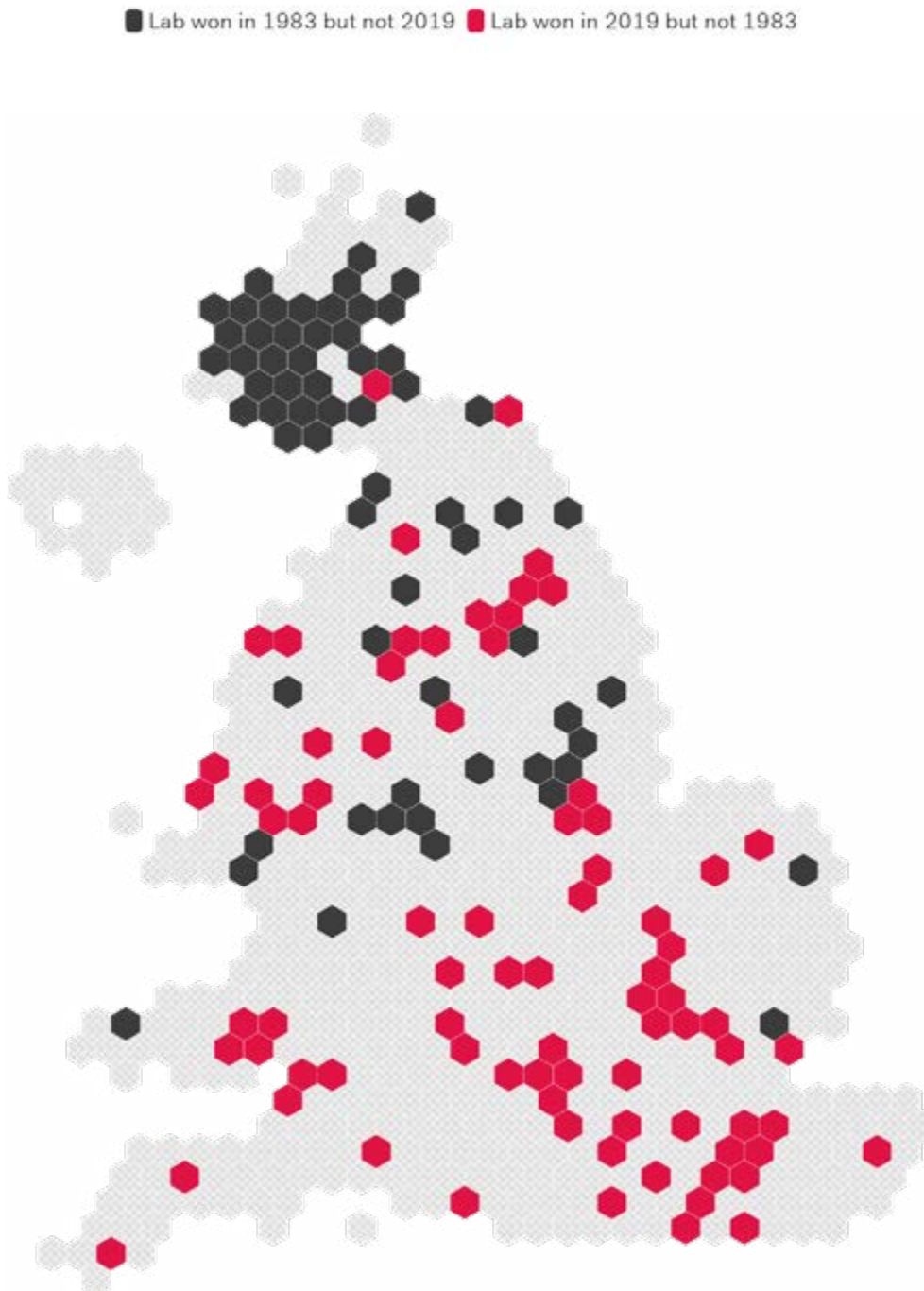
Another relevant comparison is the defeat of 1987, when the Conservatives won a comparable advantage in terms of both seats and vote share to 2019. However in 1987, according to YouGov estimates, social grades C2 and DE made up 62 per cent of the electorate, and 78 per cent of Labour's support; today they make up 43 per cent of the electorate, and 40 per cent of Labour's support.[21]

21   Roger Liddle submission to the Labour Together Review, 2020

There is now a mountain to climb to become the largest party or win a majority

To be the largest party at the next election, Labour now needs to make a net 82 gains from the Conservatives, requiring a swing of 7.9 per cent. This is almost as much as the 8.8 per cent swing achieved in 1997.

To win a majority at the next election, Labour now needs to win 124 seats. This has few recent parallels.

In 1997 Labour won 145 seats, but the Party had already won 271 at the previous General Election. The 1997 landslide amounted to a 54.2 per cent increase in seats.

In 2010 the Conservatives won 96 seats from a much lower level of 210, which amounted to a 54.5 per cent increase.

To win the 124 seats needed to have a majority in the next Parliament, Labour needs to increase its number of MPs by more than 60 per cent. This has never been achieved by any major party.

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

- This was a terrible defeat for Labour. This result, with losses across the North and Midlands, Scotland, and North Wales, poses profound questions about the future prospects of our Party. Labour's electoral coalition had been fracturing for a long time and was broken in 2019. We were rejected by many of the communities we were founded to represent.

- We lost all types of voters everywhere compared with 2017, except in London.

- Age, education and place are the new electoral divides even more than traditional conceptions of class.

  › We have seen dramatic changes in relation to older voters, those with lower levels of education and qualifications.

  › Labour lost votes across every region and country in the UK; Labour's vote share declined most in small, medium, and large towns, but consolidated in cities.

  › Labour lost support amongst all classes but amongst working class communities the most.

- The swing away from Labour in our heartland seats in the 2017 election, masked by the much better than expected result, foreshadowed our 2019 defeat. The Conservatives made significant gains in 2017 in seats they would go on to win in 2019.

- Labour faces a substantial challenge to win the next election, with a historic swing of over 10 per-cent needed to gain a majority of one seat. No major party has ever increased their number of MPs by over 60 per-cent, which is what Labour would need to do to win in 2024.

CHAPTER TWO
LONGER-TERM DRIVERS

- The immediate issues of this election accelerated and crystallised a worsening disconnect between Labour and key groups of voters

- Party loyalty has declined, and vote switching has increased

- Deindustrialisation, de-unionisation and widening geographic inequalities have strained the solidarities that Labour once relied on

- Political engagement among less skilled and educated workers has fallen, driven by political alienation

- Austerity and stagnation have had uneven effects on different groups of voters and places

- Cultural divides have increased in salience at the expense of economic and distributive issues

- Online media has transformed the public sphere within which political views are formed

- Some of these trends are global

The immediate issues of this election accelerated and crystallised a worsening disconnect between Labour and key groups of voters

Behind and beneath the immediate issues that harmed Labour in this election lie a number of longer-term political and sociological shifts, some of which have been in train for decades.

A poll conducted after the election found that, among voters whom Labour lost, the third most important reason (after dislike of Jeremy Corbyn and disbelief that Labour's promises were deliverable, but ahead of Brexit or dislike of Labour's actual policies), was: "The Labour Party no longer seems to represent people like me".[22]

Academic assessments of the result have concluded that Conservative Party gains had been "a long time coming", the result of Labour's weakening relationship with parts of its historic voter coalition: "As such, 2019 is not a critical election but a continuation of longer term trends of dealignment and realignment in British politics."[23]

22   Lord Ashcroft, 'How Britain voted and why: My 2019 general election post-vote poll', Lord Ashcroft Polls, 13 December 2019: https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/12/how-britain-voted-and-why-my-2019-general-election-post-vote-poll/
23   David Cutts et al, 'Brexit: the 2019 General Election and the Realignment of British Politics'", The Political Quarterly, Vol 91, Issue 1, February 2020: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.12815

The economic, sociological, cultural and political dynamics involved here are complex and inherently harder to measure or track over time than simple election or survey results. There remains much debate around the relative importance and impact of these developments, none of which can be reduced to simple, causal stories.

However, available data and independent studies suggest that the key strands or layers in this history include:

- from the 1960s, a generalised fall in party loyalty and increase in voter switching

- from the 1980s, deindustrialisation, falling union density, and widening regional and sub-regional inequalities

- from the 1990s, an apparent fall in political engagement among lower income and less educationally qualified voters

- after 2010, a period of austerity and stagnation that had an uneven impact on different parts of the country and elements of Labour's coalition

- in 2016, a referendum which crystallised an emerging trend for voting choices to be organised more around cultural values than an economic "left-right" divide

- in very recent years, an accelerating transformation of the ways in which most voters receive news and exchange opinions, as news and debate shifts from traditional media to online platforms

Party loyalty has declined and vote switching has increased

There is evidence that for many decades voting has become less an expression of duty or affiliation and more individual and transactional.

Since the 1980s, the proportion of voters that can be characterised as "strong" partisans has fallen from around half to a third, while those with no identification at all have risen from less than a tenth to almost a quarter.

Figure 19: Strength of party identification over time 1987-2012
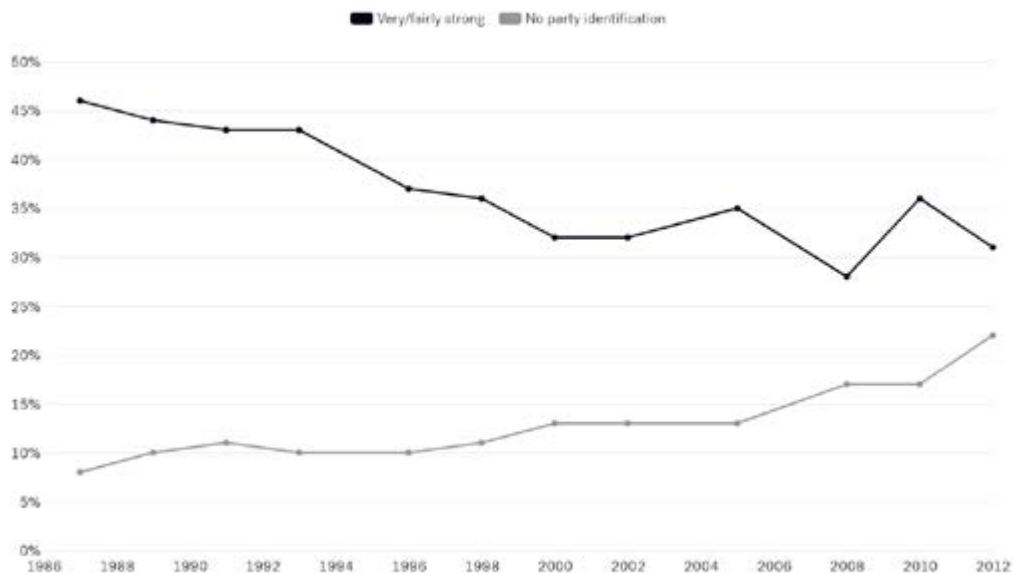
Source: British Social Attitudes 30 (2013)

Source: British Social Attitudes 30 (2013) (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429766/)

The last decade has seen unprecedented voter switching between every election. Upwards of 30 per cent of voters switched parties at each election from 2010 to 2017, peaking at around 40 per cent in 2015.

Cross-cutting voter flows between the parties have become very complex and turbulent over the past four elections. Some of the larger movements have been the fragmentation of the Liberal Democrat vote between 2010 and 2015, the transfer of UKIP votes to the Conservatives between 2015 and 2017, and the sizable flow of previous non-voters to Labour in 2017 and the Conservatives in 2019. [24]

The British Election Study has shown that the percentage of voters choosing a different party from the previous election stood at just over 10 per cent in 1966, but reached 43 per cent in 2015.[25]

Ahead of the 2019 election it was thought that as many as half the electorate might vote for a different party than they did just two years previously.[26] In fact early findings from the latest British Election Survey are that, although the volatility index remains much higher than fifty years ago, this measure has fallen from that peak, suggesting that "support appears to be settling into a new pattern as a result of Brexit".[27]

24   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
25   The British Election Study Team, 'Electoral Shocks: The Volatile Voter in a Turbulent World', British Election Study, 13 December 2019: https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/electoral-shocks-the-volatile-voter-in-a-turbulent-world/#.XmHIPaP7TIU
26   Jessica Frost, 'Nearly half of voters will switch parties at next general election', The Times, 22 October 2019: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nearly-half-of-voters-will-switch-parties-at-next-general-election-rs7ffs-f9z
27   British Election Study submission note to Labour Together, 2020

Figure 20: Percentage of voters choosing a different party from the previous election, 1966-2019

Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission

Source: British Election Study Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2672830/)

The British Election Study found that switching *during the campaign* (the proportion of voters switching parties during the campaign) was at its highest level they had ever seen (looking at campaigns from 2005-2019). Datapraxis found that a large proportion of voters were undecided until very late.

Figure 21: Percentage of voters switching between parties during the campaign, 2005-2019

Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission • This includes switching to "Don't Know"

Source: British Election Study (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2672931/)

Deindustrialisation, de-unionisation and widening geographic inequalities have strained the solidarities that Labour once relied on

Many of the seats taken by the Conservatives in this election were particularly badly hit by the unemployment impact of the early 1980s recession, which was concentrated in industrial areas of the North and Midlands.[28]

Since then there has been a strong shift of employment away from older industries, in which traditions of collective solidarity were strong, into expanding service sectors, both professional and "precarious" that have been seen as more fragmented or fluid. Recent academic work has pointed to the decline of manufacturing employment as a strong factor in the decline of traditional social democratic parties across Europe.[29]

Trade unions have often been seen as a key link between the Labour Party and working people. In the post-war era, surveys indicated that unionised manual workers were three to four times more likely to vote Labour than Conservative, while those not in unions were evenly split.[30] In 1997 union members were still three times more likely to vote Labour than Conservative.[31] However, since 1979 union membership has fallen from around half the workforce to less than a quarter, and to just 13 per cent outside the public sector.[32] Trade Union membership density has also fallen across all regions of the UK between 1995 and 2018.

Figure 22: UK Trade Union Membership 1979-2016
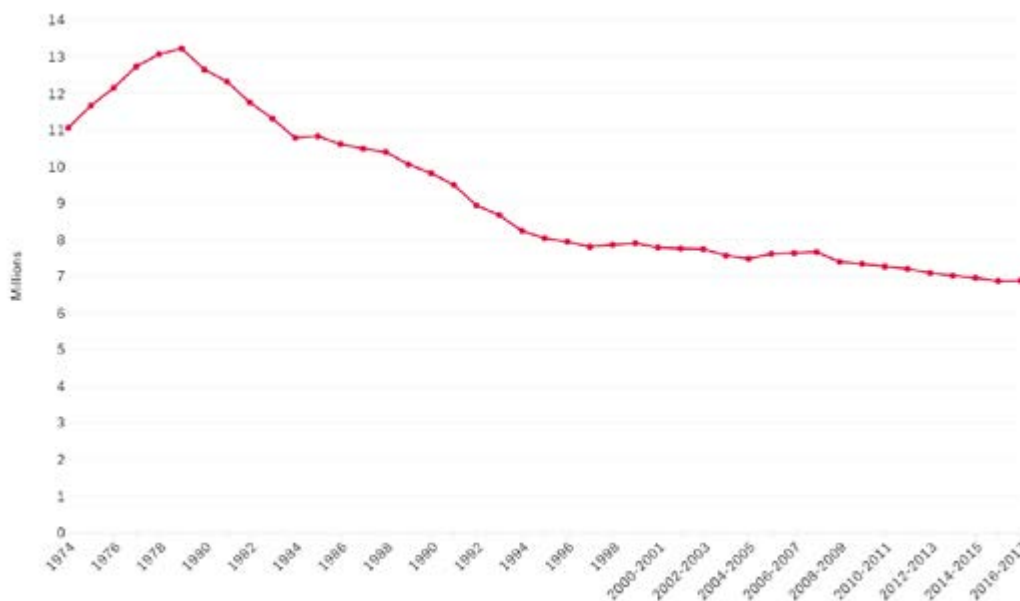
Source: UK Government (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429819/)

28   Charlie McCurdy et al, Painting the towns blue: Demography, economy and living standards in the political geographies emerging from the 2019 General Election, Resolution Foundation, February 2020: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/02/Painting-the-town-blue.pdf; George Bangham et al, Intergenerational Audit 2019, Resolution Foundation, June 2019: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/06/Intergenerational-audit-for-the-UK.pdf
29   Giacomo Benedetto et al, 'The Rise and Fall of Social Democracy, 1918-2017',forthcoming, American Political Science Review: http://personal.lse.ac.uk/hix/Working_Papers/BHM_Rise_and_Fall_of_SD.pdf
30   Jean Blondel, Voters, Parties and Leaders – The social fabric of British politics, Pelican, 1963.
31   'How Britain Voted in 1997', Ipsos MORI, 31 May 1997: https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-1997
32   Trade union statistics 2018, Departmebt for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 20 May 2019: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2018

Political engagement among less skilled and educated workers has fallen, driven by political alienation

Academic studies of the 1997 election noted "a tendency for past and potential Labour supporters to stay away from the polls in larger numbers".[33] Subsequent elections confirmed a trend of declining turnout that was most acute among less skilled or lower income voters, linked by some studies to the professionalisation of politics and increased focus of political debate and media coverage on "middle class" issues and concerns.[34]

Figure 23: Non-voting rates by education 1985-2015
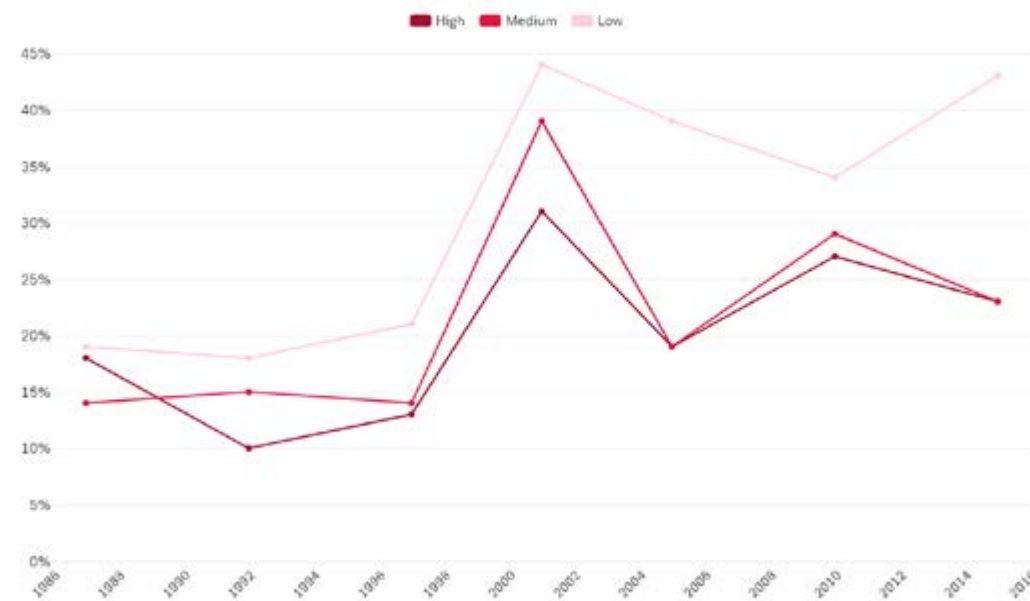
Source: The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class (2017), Professor Geoffrey Evans and Professor James Tilley, p. 173 (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2429868/)

Data shows that the share of voters saying there was "no difference" between Labour and the Conservatives rose sharply between the late 1980s and the early 2000s.[35] These trends may have been exacerbated by events such as the 2008 financial crisis and the 2009 parliamentary expenses scandal, which provoked anger against "elites" that might be seen as particularly damaging to Labour's legitimacy and ability to differentiate itself from the Conservatives.

In 2013 the British Social Attitudes Survey reported that "a number of important British institutions have fallen in the public's estimation over the last thirty years, including the press, banks and politicians". Just 18 per cent of citizens trusted governments to put the nation's needs above those of a political party, down from

33   David Denver and Gordon Hands, 'Turnout', Parliamentary Affairs, Vol 50, Issue 4, 1 October 1997, pp. 720-732: https://academic.oup.com/pa/article-abstract/50/4/720/1475582

34   Oliver Heath, 'Policy Alienation, Social Alienation and Working-Class Abstention in Britain, 1964–2010'" British Journal of Political Science, Vol 48, Issue 4, October 2018, pp. 1053-1073: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-political-science/article/policy-alienation-social-alienation-and-working-class-abstention-in-britain-19642010/70E409B4E2274FAE7844449B95DA0EBB/core-reader; Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class, Oxford University Press, 2017

35   Professor Rob Ford, forthcoming

38 per cent in 1986.[36] Research into how British people view the economy has revealed a strong sense of the system being "rigged",[37] a common phrase being that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer".

This rise in cynicism and fatalism about both politics and the economy among many voters has been pointed to as a challenge for progressive politics.[38] Furthermore where there is energy for change on the ground, it has been argued that Labour has often been disconnected from it.[39]

Clearly, the erosion of Labour membership and organisation in key areas has both reflected and exacerbated these problems. On-the-ground contact and campaigning by all political parties has focused much more narrowly on swing seats and voters - between 1987 and 2010 the proportion of voters (across all seats, whether seen as "safe" or "swing") who said they had received a house visit from a party canvasser in the run-up to the general election fell from 47 per cent to 11 per cent (in 2017 this recovered to 25 per cent). Even within target seats, total voter contact rates declined: in 1992 Labour canvassed 53 per cent of the electorate in their target seats; by 2010 this had fallen to 29 per cent. [40]

Some data suggests that the fall in turnout among workers in traditional "working class" occupations disproportionately affected Labour and was a key factor in the long-term fall in its support from the turn of the century onwards. Professors Geoffrey Evans and James Tilly conclude that

> *"After the war, there was around a 30 percentage point gap between the old and new middle class groups and the "working class" in Labour support. From 1997 onwards that gap was more like 10 percentage points. The BES data shows that, at the most recent election, that difference has completely disappeared."[41]*

YouGov data suggests that in 2001 Labour's support fell particularly sharply among C2DEs and has continued to decline since then.

36   Alison Park et al (eds), British Social Attitudes: the 30th Report, NatCen Social Research, 2013: https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38723/bsa30_full_report_final.pdf; see also Robin Bowman, 'Three quarters of people think the system is rigged against them', World Economic Forum, 17 August 2017: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/08/trust-is-in-decline-around-the-world/

37   Framing the Economy, NEON/NEF/FrameWorks/PIRC, 2018: https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/Framing-the-Economy-NEON-NEF-FrameWorks-PIRC.pdf

38   For example: Paul Mason, After Corbynism: Where Next For Labour?, December 19: https://www.paulmason.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/After-Corbynism-v1.4.pdf; James Meadway, 'Labour's Economic Plans: What Went Wrong?', Novara Media, 17 December 2019: https://novaramedia.com/2019/12/17/labours-economic-plans-what-went-wrong/

39   John Harris, 'A Labour revival must tap into the energy for change on the ground', The Guardian, 15 December 19: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/15/labour-revival-change-community-activists-plymouth

40   British Election Study data quoted in Rob Ford, forthcoming

41   Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class, Oxford University Press, 2017

Figure 24: Labour votes by class 1974-2010
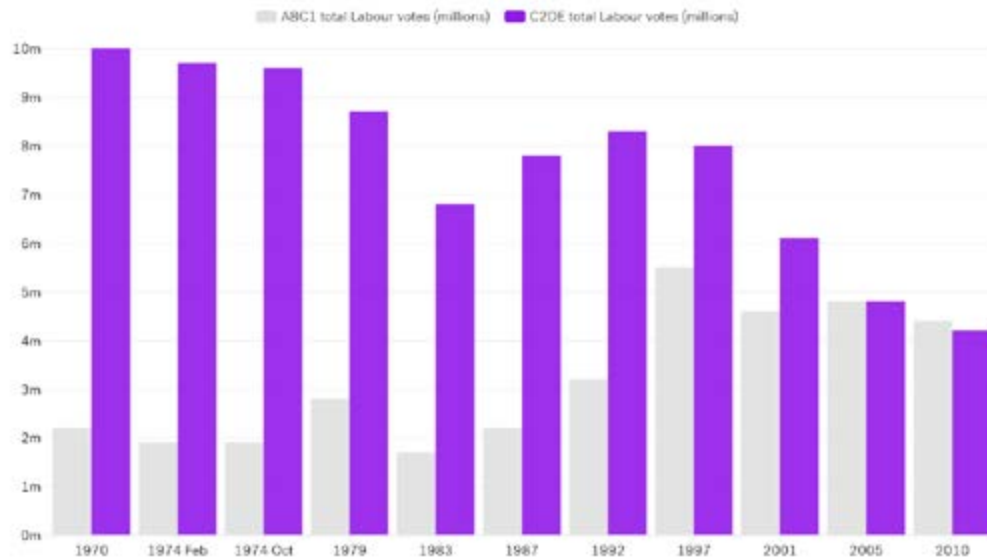
Source: YouGov (2016)

Source: [YouGov](#) (2016) (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2441222/)

In more recent elections, the fall in turnout among lower income and lower qualified voters has been partially offset by their growing support for other parties such as UKIP; this revival in turnout was accelerated by the 2016 referendum, and much of it has now been successfully captured by the Conservatives.[42]

In Scotland, a report of focus groups conducted in 2017 with a group of voters who had switched from Labour to the SNP found it was:

"scathing in its assessment of the Labour Party: from being a "shambles," to "totally duplicitous"; a "shower of career politicians," who "have lost their way" and no longer represent the "working class". The reasons for this palpable sense of hostility towards the Party were varied: unsurprisingly, some referred to the Blair era and the feeling that the Party had lost touch, with the specific issue of Iraq being mentioned, while others raised the issue of the independence campaign and its fallout."[43]

Academic studies point to a big jump in support for the SNP among manual and routine workers from 17 per cent in 2010 to 42 per cent in 2015.[44]

Austerity and stagnation have had uneven effects on different groups of voters and places

Economic data suggests that the diverging experiences and priorities of different parts of Labour's electoral base have been widened further by the spending cuts and earnings stagnation of the past decade. Despite this being a critical front in Labour's campaigning against the incumbent Conservatives, it has not been an automatically unifying experience for the Party's electoral coalition.

42   Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, 'The New Politics of Class after the 2017 General Election', The Political Quarterly, Vol 88, Issue 4, 5 October 2017:https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-923X.12434
43   Scott Dickson and Bridget Phillipson MP, "Labour in Scotland", Labour Together report
44   Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class, Oxford University Press, 2017: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-923X.12434

Analysis by the Resolution Foundation has revealed that, as well as suffering relative economic decline since the 1980s, parts of the country where Labour lost seats in 2019 have seen particularly low growth in employment and pay since 2010, at the same time as being particularly exposed to cuts to tax credits, universal credit and disability benefits.[45]

However, they have not faced the same challenges and pressures that have been salient to other parts of the electorate over recent years - property prices in these areas are comparatively low and home ownership widespread, for example.

Meanwhile younger and more city-based voters have, on average, found it easier to find work, albeit often precarious, but are more likely to be carrying student debts and struggling with the costs and insecurities of renting, as house price inflation takes home ownership well out of reach.

The average house price in seats gained by Labour from the Conservatives over the past two elections is £200,000, with private renters making up an average 20 per cent of the population; while the average house price in seats gained by Conservatives from Labour is £143,000, with private renters making up an average 13 per cent of the population.

These differences suggest that the salience or priority given to different policy issues is likely to vary significantly across different voters - campaigning around student finance or the rights of renters will have less resonance in areas where key issues are stagnating wages and cuts to benefits. This may help to explain why Labour is consolidating its support among one set of voters with a particular experience of austerity, while Conservatives are gaining traction with groups that have had a different experience.[46]

Cultural divides have increased in salience at the expense of economic and distributive issues

Divides in values and outlooks have been playing an increasingly important role for several elections. Responses to questions of culture and identity - which have always been more variable across Labour's electoral coalition than the Conservatives - have begun playing a more important role in influencing voters' choices, while views have become polarised, often along generational and educational lines.

Datapraxis analysis for this Labour Together Review found that Labour has been losing "socially conservative, anti-immigration and pro-Brexit voters" for some time. Four in ten of those who voted Labour in 2010 and Leave in 2016 had already been lost by the Party in 2015.[47]

The British Election Study highlighted recent research indicating that "second dimension" (socio-cultural) values have become as important as "left/right" values

45   Charlie McCurdy et al, Painting the towns blue: Demography, economy and living standards in the political geographies emerging from the 2019 General Election, Resolution Foundation, February 2020: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/02/Painting-the-town-blue.pdf
46   Luke Cooper and Christabel Cooper, The Devastating Defeat: Why Labour lost and how it can win again; Part 1: Britain's new political divides in the Brexit election, Europe for the Many, 2020: https://www.europeforthe-many.com/tdd-web.pdf
47   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together, 2020

in predicting party support in recent elections.[48] Their data shows that, in 2019, the average Labour voter was even more socially liberal than in 2017, which may reflect both changes in the attitudes of its consistent supporters as well as shifts in its support composition.
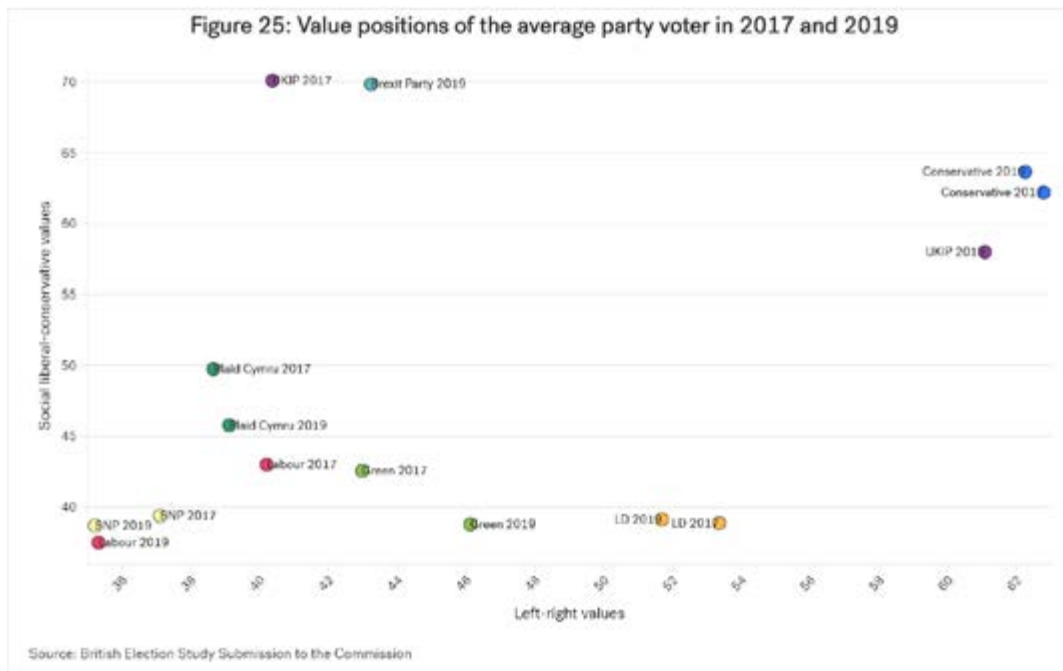
Figure 25: Value positions of the average party voter in 2017 and 2019

Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2673137/)

To take one symbolic issue as an example, the share of voters naming "immigration" as one of the most important issues rose from under five per cent in 1997 to peak at over 45 per cent in 2015. (After this, it declined to levels of early 2000s, perhaps because it had to some degree been subsumed within the Brexit debate.) 89 per cent of non-graduates aged over 65 think there are "too many immigrants", against 44 per cent of graduates aged under 40. 57 per cent of graduates under 40 think immigration "enriches cultural life", against just 17 per cent of non-graduates over 65.

48   The British Election Study Team, 'Electoral Shocks: The Volatile Voter in a Turbulent World', British Election Study, 13 December 2019: https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/electoral-shocks-the-volatile-voter-in-a-turbulent-world/#.XmHlPaP7TIU

Figure 26: Percentage citing immigration as 'important issue facing Britain today'
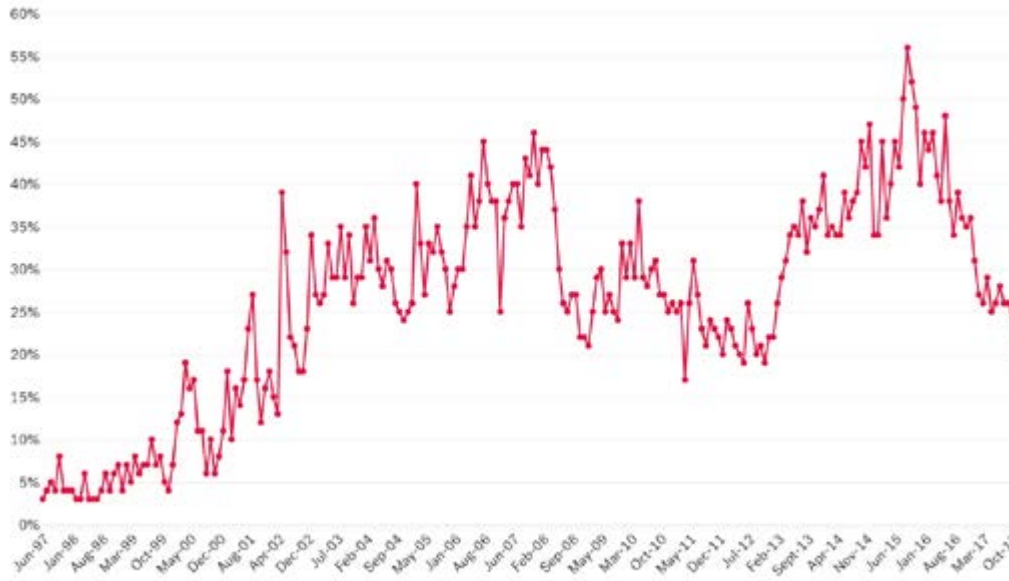
Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index (1997-2019)

Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index (1997-2019) (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2441257/)

Figure 27: Social attitudes and values by age and education
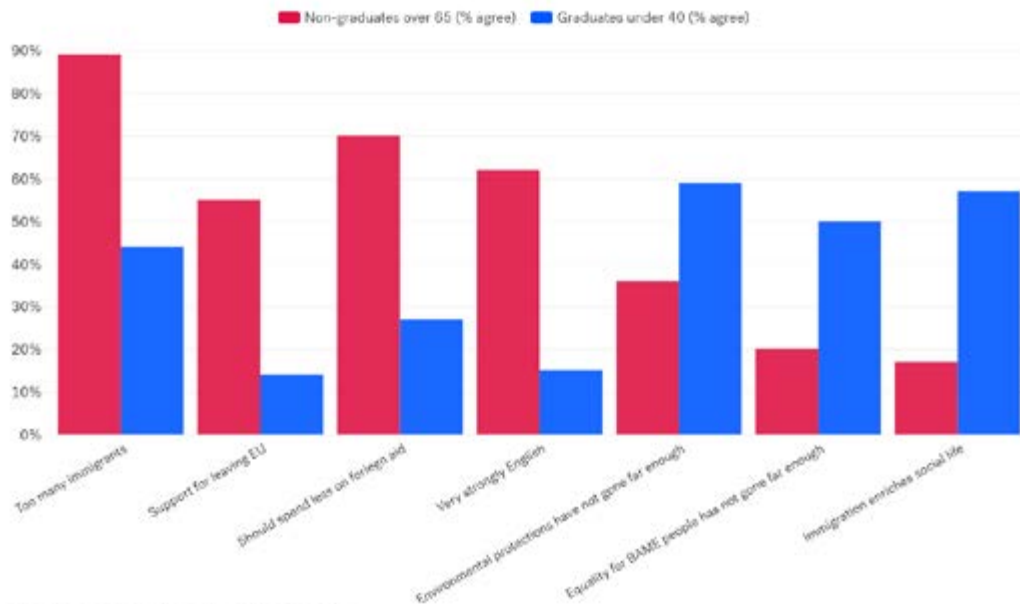
Source: Professor Rob Ford, Presentation to Labour MPs

Source: Professor Rob Ford, Presentation to Labour MPs (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2441290/)

Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath argue that, while on economic issues "people on low incomes tend to hold much more left-wing attitudes than people on high incomes" and "there is not much evidence of any long-term change in these values in one direction or another", on a "liberal-authoritarian axis" there has been a marked shift since 2010, with people on lower incomes now "much more socially authoritarian than they were at the beginning of the new millennium".[49]

49   Oliver Heath and Matthew Goodwin, 'Briefing: Low income voters in UK general elections, 1987 – 2017', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 2019: https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/low-income-voters-uk-general-elections-1987-2017

As Paula Surridge puts it, although the proportion of the electorate with broadly "left" leaning views on economic issues has been broadly stable at around 55 per cent since 2005, over the same period Labour has found it increasingly difficult to win electoral majorities, as this base of potential support has become "increasingly opposed to each other on more 'cultural' issues".[50]

In recent years, an explicit backlash against "politically correct" or "woke" views has been increasingly aired and arguably accelerated by the interplay between traditional and new media.[51]

Online media has transformed the public sphere within which political views are formed

The share of the electorate interacting daily with online and social media platforms has soared in a very short space of time, at the same time as consumption of newspapers and linear broadcasting has declined.

Figure 28: Main source of news by age group
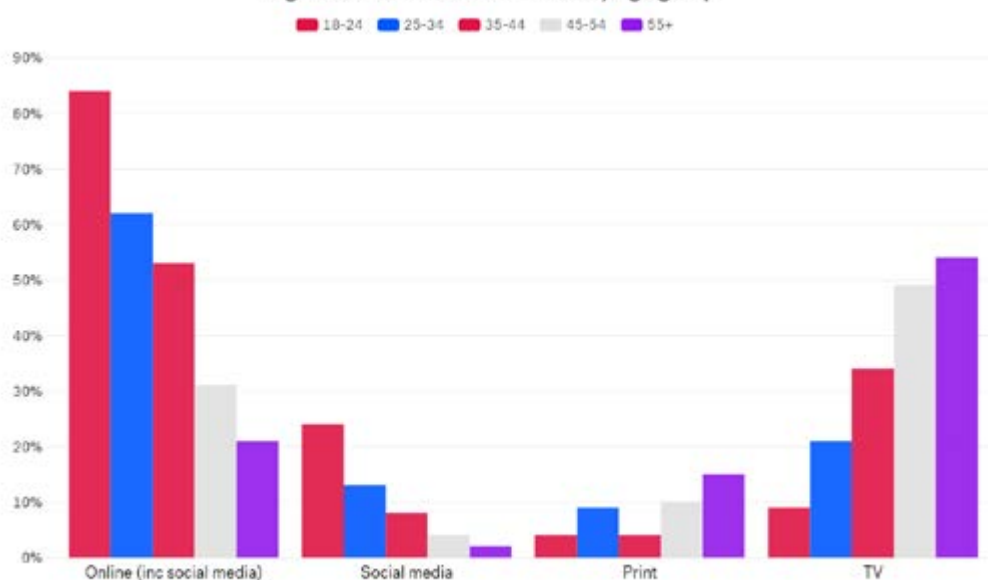
Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017 , Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2441332/)

Though younger generations have embraced this transformation fastest, it is increasingly mainstream. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University found in 2018 that online media (including social) are now more important sources of news than print for every age group (though social media considered on its own is still less important than print for those aged 45 and over).[52] Ofcom reported that the number of 65-74 year-olds with a social media account rose from 28 per cent in 2012 to 48 per cent in 2016 - and the number of over-75-

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50   Paula Surridge, 'The fragmentation of the electoral left since 2010", Renewal, Vol. 26, No. 4, November 2018: http://www.renewal.org.uk/articles/the-fragmentation-of-the-electoral-left-since-2010

51   Ellie Mae O'Hagan, 'The "anti-woke" backlash is no joke – and progressives are going to lose if they don't wise up', The Guardian, 30 January 2020: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/30/anti-woke-backlash-liberalism-laurence-fox

52   Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, 'Where do people get their news?', Oxford University, Medium, 30 May 2017: https://medium.com/oxford-university/where-do-people-get-their-news-8e850a0dea03

year-olds from 13 per cent to 41 per cent.[53]

This poses huge challenges to the ways in which parties seek to organise or communicate with people and opens up political debate and preference formation to new influences and forces that can be seen as either creatively anarchic or worryingly unaccountable.

An illustration of how fast this environment is moving is given by the rapidly increasing importance of closed group discussions on Facebook. Place-based forums can be hugely influential – in Merthyr Tydfil for example a group, whose membership amounts to a third of the adult population, has been credited with helping to end Labour's control of the council and building support for the Brexit Party ahead of the European elections.[54] During the election, social media reporters suggested that "a huge proportion of the national conversation was happening in these often more localised groups, far from public scrutiny".[55]

Some of these trends are global

Many of these developments and dynamics - including declining party loyalty, industrial restructuring, voter disconnection and cultural divisions - have had an impact on social democratic and "centre-left" parties across the world.

A recent academic survey of trends affecting European social democratic parties confirmed that

> *"Measured by the total share of the electorate … support for social democrats declined in the late 1980s and then fell precipitously in the 2000s, so much so that, as a proportion of all voters, social democratic parties' support in 2017 was down to the same level as it was in the early 1920s".*[56]

53   'Rise of Social Seniors revealed', Ofcom, 14 June 2017: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/me-dia/media-releases/2017/rise-social-seniors
54   Centre for Countering Digital Hate submission to Labour Together review, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SCkIXOltaI
55   Amol Rajan, 'Five lessons from the "social media" election', 13 December 2019: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50785051
56   'Rose thou art sick', The Economist, 2 April 2016: https://www.economist.com/briefing/2016/04/02/rose-thou-art-sick

Figure 29: Average share of votes for social democratic parties across Europe since 1918
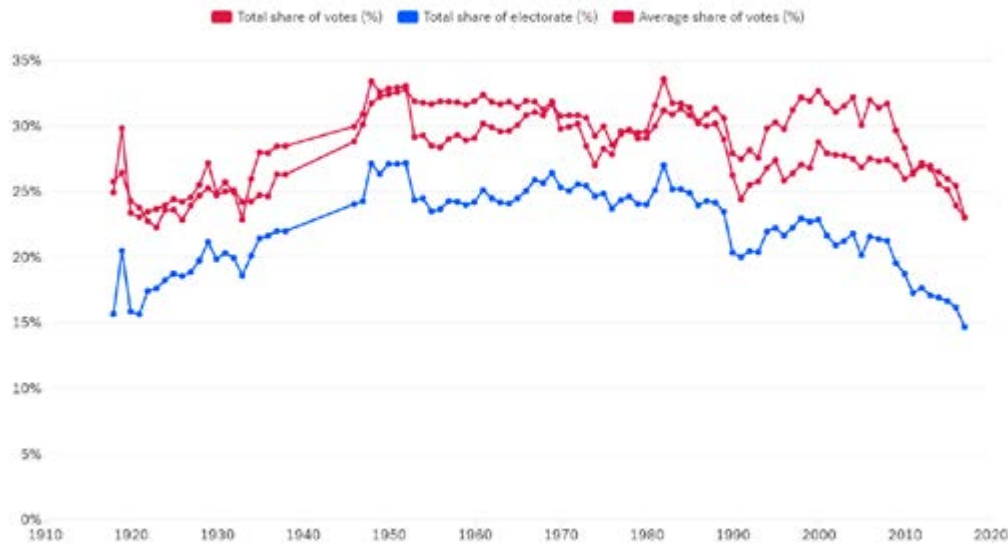
Source: Giacomo Benedetto, Simon Hix, and Nicola Mastrorocco (2020) "The Rise and Fall of Social Democracy, 1918-2017", American Political Science Review, forthcoming. (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2441383/)

Similarly, an analysis of European social democratic parties' vote share by Professor Chris Hanretty of Royal Holloway shows that both the simple average and population-weighted average (which gives larger influence to larger countries) have declined sharply over the past two decades.[57]

Looking at more recent specific results, in legislative elections over the past three years the Swedish Social Democrats, French Socialist Party, German Social Democratic Party and Dutch Labor Party have all recorded their worst results since the Second World War, with "centre-left" parties in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Spain all near historic lows.[58]

57   Professor Chris Hanretty, 'Electorally, West European social democrats are at their lowest point for forty years', Medium, 5 October 2015: https://medium.com/@chrishanretty/electorally-west-european-social-democrats-are-at-their-lowest-point-for-forty-years-ac7ae3d8ddb7
58   Kyle Taylor, 'Swedish election highlights decline of center-left parties across Western Europe', Pew Research Centre, 12 September 2018: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/12/swedish-election-high-lights-decline-of-center-left-parties-across-western-europe/

Figure 30: Decline in vote share in national elections for European social democratic parties 1998-2018

Source: Pew Research (2018) (Link to graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2441758/)

In the UK, these trends can be seen as having divergent impacts in different parts of the country and electorate:

- In Scotland, many of these factors fed into the sense that Labour was out of step with its voters, that crystalised in the wake of the 2014 referendum and resulted in the loss of both more traditional and younger voters to the SNP

- In England and Wales, they manifested themselves in declining turnout and increasing support for other parties, including UKIP and the Conservatives among some voters, especially outside cities and the South East; while in other areas, Labour faced a growing competitive struggle for voters increasingly ready to switch between it and the Liberal Democrats, Green Party or in Wales Plaid Cymru

In short, Labour has increasingly struggled to prove its relevance in a world where workspaces are not organised, where community and family ties are fragmented, and where political perceptions and preferences are often formed in chaotic and fast-moving online spaces.

Unfortunately, instead of reversing this story, this election continued it.

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

- The roots of our 2019 loss stretch back over the last two decades. In that time, we have seen a steady realignment of our politics through long-term changes in the relationship between our party and voter coalition, including political alienation, demographic change and cultural shifts.

- Across the regions and nations of the United Kingdom, the Conservatives have steadily increased their vote share and seat tally over this period. Labour's vote share declined dramatically between 2001 and 2010, then recovered marginally in 2015 and increased again substantially in 2017, before collapsing in 2019. The consistent nationwide growth in Conservative support since 2001, particularly marked in some places where seats became vulnerable, prepared the ground for the significant increase in seats in 2019.

- Labour's roots in many of our traditional communities have weakened, as party loyalty has declined, and trade union membership has reduced, whilst many of the structural and institutional links between our party and the Trade Union movement have declined. In the 2000's, we saw a move away from Labour in our working class communities driven by a perception that there was little difference between the major parties, as well as deindustrialisation and demographic change. This showed itself in abstentions, or protest votes for other parties exacerbated by crisis points such as the financial crash of 2008 and the expenses scandal in 2009.

- Cultural divides have accentuated the drift away, leaving some voters with the view that Labour no longer represents them, and are not listening to them.

- Labour has failed to renew our bonds with older voters, resident in many of the town seats in our (former) heartlands. These areas have experienced demographic aging and an exodus of younger voters. Labour has done badly with older voters who have lower levels of qualifications.

- Labour has experienced substantial losses amongst voters, who went on to support Leave in the referendum, for over a decade. Labour had already lost significantly more of these voters before the referendum than it did in the 2019 election. Four in ten of those who voted Labour in 2010 and went on to vote Leave in 2016 had already defected from Labour by the time of the 2015 election. In 2019, 25 per cent more of this group were lost, leaving Labour with only a third of its 2010 'Leave minded' voters.

- Voter volatility has been high throughout the last decade. It peaked in 2015, when around 40 per cent of 2010 voters switched to different parties. This helped Labour in the 2017 election. In 2019 high levels of voter volatility worked against us, with more voters swinging to the Tories, Brexit Party, Lib Dems and nationalists in Scotland and Wales.

- Many of these trends are global and have had similar and negative impacts on social democratic and centre-left parties around the world.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ISSUES IN THIS ELECTION

- Negative perceptions of our leader were a key reason why Labour lost so many votes in this election
- Labour's position on Brexit alienated voters on both sides of the 2016 referendum divide
- The popularity of our policies was undermined by a lack of confidence that we could deliver them
- In Scotland these issues combined with and were reinforced by national debates and dynamics
- These issues served as focal points for deeper divisions of values and outlook
- Value-based analysis of Labour's vote base reveals a coalition that is crumbling

YouGov data analysed for this Review by Datapraxis confirms that the three main factors in Labour's losses were:

- widespread concern about Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, his perceived weakness and his role as a potential Prime Minister
- Brexit-driven vote switching
- concerns about Labour's agenda - particularly affordability, economic risks, unrealistic aspirations or an inability to deliver[59]

To go into an election with any one of these vulnerabilities – an unpopular leader, a problematic position on the key issue of the day, or serious questions about the deliverability of key policies – would be a challenge, one that might be offset by strengths on the other two fronts. But to be in a weak position on all three at once arguably had a "snowballing" effect that was fatal to Labour's chances of securing sufficient support to win.

Behind these issues lie differing overall perceptions and evaluations of the Labour Party across the electorate, and significant difference in values and outlooks among key groups.

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59   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together

As we saw in Chapter 2, these differences and divisions have been germinating over a long period. However, Chapter 3 focuses on the immediate factors behind Labour's 2019 loss.

Negative perceptions of our leader were a key reason why Labour lost so many votes in this election

In 2017 Jeremy Corbyn succeeded in winning over many more voters than some had expected - improving both Labour's and his own personal poll ratings dramatically over the course of the campaign.

Evidence we reviewed from the British Election Study, Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data, and other independent sources indicates that this was not repeated in 2019, and that negative feelings about Jeremy Corbyn had become a key deterrent for much of Labour's voter base.

According to the British Election Study, in 2017 the difference in voter "likes" between Jeremy Corbyn and Theresa May had narrowed to within the margin of error at the close of the campaign.
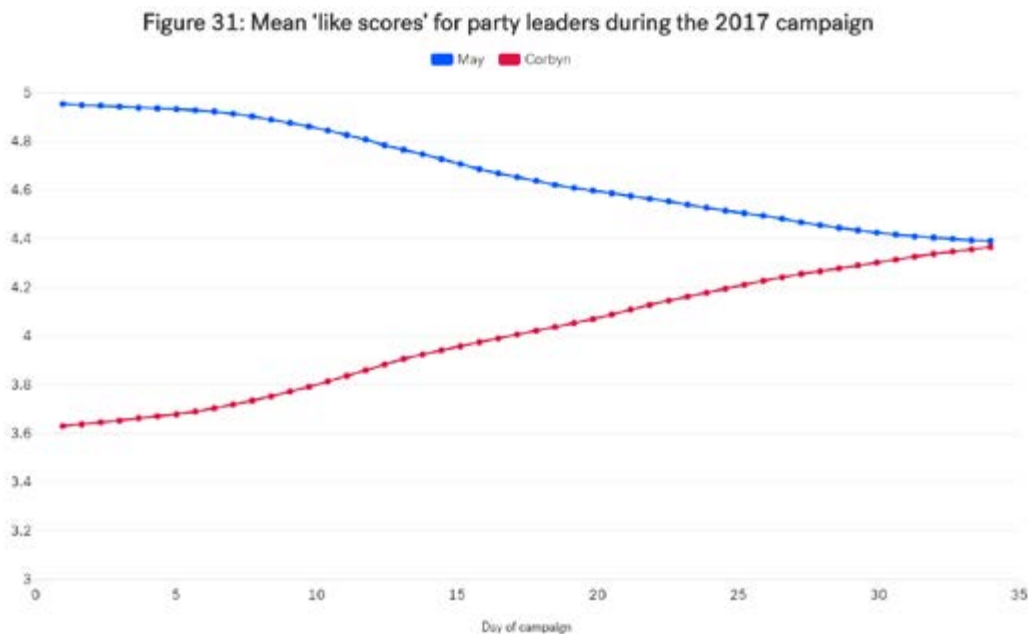
Figure 31: Mean 'like scores' for party leaders during the 2017 campaign

Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission (Link to Graph and embed: https://public. flourish.studio/visualisation/2673345/)

Had voters' feelings about Jeremy Corbyn remained at the peak they reached after the 2017 election, the British Election Study team estimates that Labour's vote share in this election would have been six points higher - over 38 per cent.[60]

However, Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data shows that perceptions of Labour's leader began to decline from this point, independently of the Party's ratings, with a particular drop in Spring 2018. From the end of 2018 views of Jeremy Corbyn declined in step with the Party's poll ratings.

60   Edward Fieldhouse, Chris Prosser, and Jonathon Mellon, preliminary analysis of British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 1-19 (DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-8202-2) provided to Labour Together

The timing of these shifts suggests that negative perceptions of Labour's leader were bound up with people's awareness of divisions and disunity within the Party.

The sharp collapse in support both for Jeremy Corbyn and Labour between December 2018 and June 2019 coincided with the defection of MPs to form "The Independent Group", disagreement over Labour's position on Brexit going into the European elections and the controversy of the Party's handling of anti-Semitism.[61] (Among 2017 Labour voters who withdrew their support in 2019, the perception that the Party was divided was given as the third most important reason why Labour lost the election, after "Brexit dominated the election" and "Jeremy Corbyn was not an appealing leader".)[62]

Figure 32: Do you have a favourable or unfavourable view of Jeremy Corbyn?

Source: YouGov (2017)

Source: YouGov (2017) (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2441808/)

By September 2019 Jeremy Corbyn's ratings were at record lows. YouGov data shows that 67 per cent of all voters "disliked" him, most of them strongly, and only 12 per cent "liked" him. Even of those who had voted Labour in 2017, more "disliked" him than "liked" him, and most saw him as weak and indecisive.

61   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
62   Diagnosis of Defeat, Lord Ashcroft Polls, February 2020: https://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/up-
        loads/2020/02/DIAGNOSIS-OF-DEFEAT-LORD-ASHCROFT-POLLS-1.pdf

Figure 33: 2017 Labour voters' views of Jeremy Corbyn in September 2019
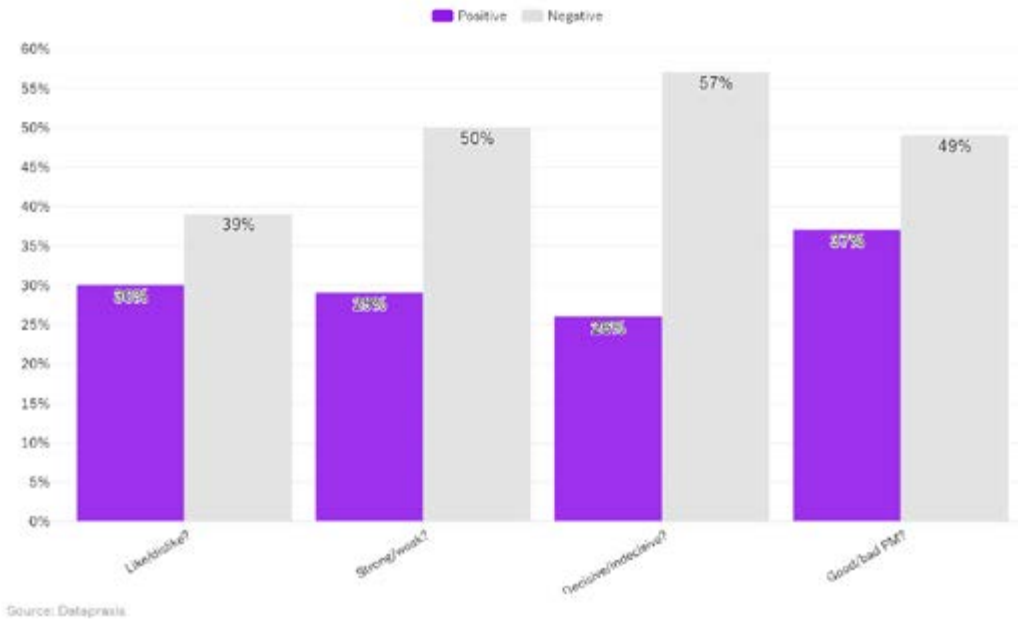
Source: Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2441866/)

YouGov data also shows that, between the 2017 election and the eve of the 2019 campaign, both Leave and Remain voters became significantly more likely to regard Jeremy Corbyn as "weak", and less likely to regard him as "in touch with ordinary people".[63]

Unlike in 2017, the 2019 campaign itself did little to rectify this position. YouGov data shows some recovery in Jeremy Corbyn's "favourability" ratings in the last few weeks before polling day.[64] However, according to measures used by the British Election Study, Jeremy Corbyn "gained little ground" during the campaign, having started at a much lower base than he did in 2017.

Labour's disadvantage on leadership was also reflected in unfavourable "best PM" ratings, despite a late dip in Boris Johnson's rating.

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63   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
64   Matthew Smith, 'Corbyn favourability plummets off back of election defeat', YouGov, 17 December 2019: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/17/corbyn-favourability-plummets-back-election-defeat

Figure 34: Corbyn/ Johnson "Best PM" during the 2019 general election campaign period
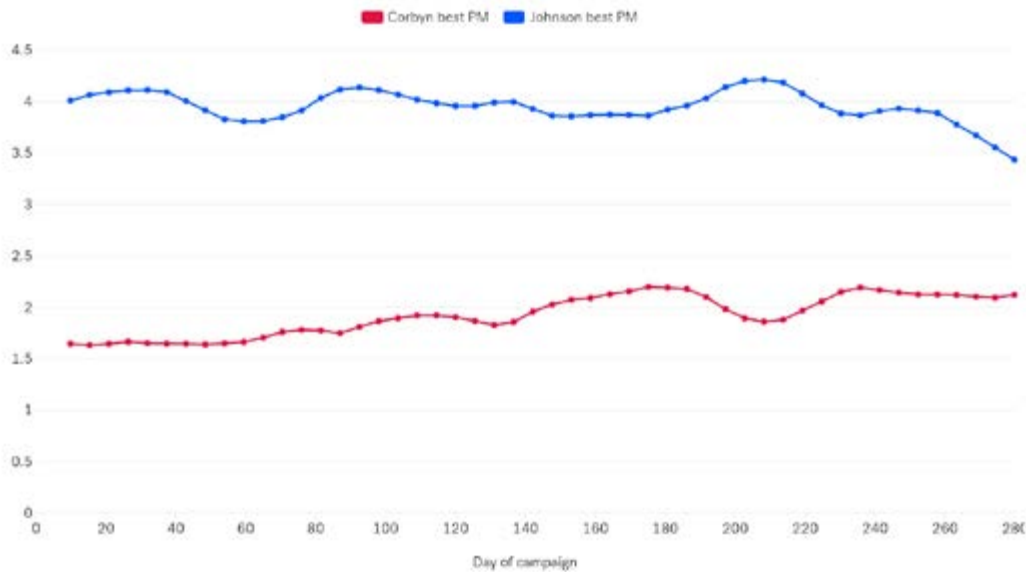
Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission (Link to Graph and embed: https://public. flourish.studio/visualisation/2675457/)

Semantic analysis[65] of responses to open-ended questions conducted for this Review by Datapraxis suggests that negative views of Jeremy Corbyn were a key factor behind support for the Conservatives.

Among voters who switched from Labour to the Conservatives, concern about Jeremy Corbyn was intense, whichever way they voted in the referendum. According to analysis by Datapraxis, when asked for their thoughts about Labour and its policies, Labour Leave voters who switched to the Conservatives were likely to talk about terrorism, anti-Semitism, what they saw as extreme far-left policies, or unaffordability. A typical quote, flagged up by the semantic analysis as illustrating this segment's viewpoint, was as follows:

> *"Frightened at the possibility of a Marxist government. Disgusted at Corbyn being a terrorist sympathiser. Most disturbed about plan to nationalise BT as I fear it would allow a Labour government to spy on internet users"*
>
> ❯ `woman, 52, local authority renter, voted Brexit Party in the 2019 European`
>   `Parliament elections and the Labour Party in the 2017 General Election.`

Labour Remainers who switched to the Conservatives also typically expressed negative views of the leadership:

> *"I don't think he is fit for the role of UK's prime minister as he is hiding from the press and I feel and believe he is a weak candidate"*
>
> ❯ `man, 34, private sector worker, voted Labour in the 2019 European`
>   `Parliament elections.`

Among the 2017 Labour supporters who didn't vote in the 2016 referendum and abstained in this election, over three-quarters had negative views of Jeremy

65   A semantic analysis allowed us to abstract patterns in voters' open text responses to polling questions. This was achieved by running an open question text through an AI which then identified recurring keywords and topics across different voter groups.

Corbyn by 2019. A typical quote which was flagged up by the semantic analysis as illustrating this segments' viewpoint was as follows:

> *"Their policies are good but I just don't like Jeremy Corbyn"*
>
> > 20-year-old woman, student, voted Labour in the 2017 General Election, did not vote in the 2019 General Election.

Even of the 2017 voters Labour hung onto, a large minority had negative views of Jeremy Corbyn, suggesting they voted despite, rather than because of, the leadership. In Datapraxis message-testing at the start of the 2019 campaign, among those who turned out for Labour in both 2017 and 2019, 33 per cent of Remain voters, and 45 per cent of Labour Leave voters had negative views of Jeremy Corbyn. Even when we turn to the 1.8 million mostly younger 2017 non-voters who turned out for Labour in 2019, just 27 per cent "liked" Jeremy Corbyn and 35 cent actually "disliked" him; 39 per cent were neutral towards him.

According to the British Election Study, compared to 2017, there was little change in voters' positions on the EU or "left/right" scales, but there was a drop in how much people liked Labour in general, and a much larger drop in how much they liked Jeremy Corbyn. This suggests perceptions of leadership are a central factor in the change in Labour's vote share between 2017 and 2019.

British Elections Study's preliminary conclusion from this evidence is that "the most dramatic difference since 2017 was in Jeremy Corbyn's likeability ratings and this could account for a substantial proportion of Labour's drop in support."[66]

Labour's position on Brexit alienated voters on both sides of the 2016 referendum divide

Compared to 2017, Labour lost voters on both sides of the referendum debate. In net terms Labour's vote in 2019 comprised:

- around 1.7 million fewer Leave voters
- around 1 million fewer Remain voters[67]

These net figures account both for 2017 Labour supporters who didn't vote Labour in 2019, and smaller numbers of voters on both sides of the divide who hadn't voted Labour in 2017 but did in 2019, offsetting the loss of 2017 supporters.

Focusing only on those who had voted Labour in 2017, analysis conducted for this Review by Datapraxis concluded that Labour lost:

- 1.9 million Remain voters who had voted Labour in 2017
- 1.8 million Leave voters who had voted Labour in 2017
- 950,000 who had voted Labour in 2017 but didn't vote in the 2016 referendum[68]

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66   Edward Fieldhouse, Chris Prosser, and Jonathon Mellon, preliminary analysis of British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 1-19 (DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-8202-2) provided to Labour Together
67   Calculations based on percentages from Adam McDonnell and Chris Curtis, 'How Britain voted in the 2019 general election', YouGov, 17 December 2019: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/17/how-britain-voted-2019-general-election
68   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together

Because most of Labour's 2017 voters voted for Remain, these figures reflect a far higher loss rate for Leave voters than Remain voters. 2017 Labour supporters who had voted Remain were over 75 per cent likely to stick with the Party; those who had voted Leave were less than 50 per cent likely. Those who hadn't voted in the 2016 referendum were less than 67 per cent likely to be retained.

Figure 35: Labour voter retention by 2016 referendum vote

Source: Datapraxis Submission to the Commission

Source: Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2680530/)

In the 40 previously held Labour seats lost by the largest margin at this election, Labour's greatest losses were among Leave voters, accounting for slightly more lost votes than Remain voters and Referendum non-voters put together. In 20 more narrowly lost seats, Labour lost more Remain voters than Leave voters.[69]

One of the most predictive factors for voters Labour lost was how they voted in the 2019 European Parliament election, which effectively served for many as a conveyor belt to both Leave and Remain rivals.[70] 2017 Labour supporters who voted Green, Plaid Cymru, Liberal Democrat or Change UK - The Independent Group in the European Elections were between 65 per cent and 80 per cent likely to return to Labour in December 2019; those who had voted Conservative, UKIP, Brexit Party, or SNP in June were less than 30 per cent likely to return.

British Election Study data indicates that Labour lost 32 per cent of its previous Leave voters to the Conservatives, and another 4 per cent to the Brexit Party; at the same time as losing 10 per cent of its (larger number of) Remain voters to the Liberal Democrats, and another 3 per cent to the Conservatives.[71]

Datapraxis found that Brexit was a major driver of Labour Leaver voters being lost to the Conservatives and the Brexit Party. The overwhelming majority of Labour Leave voters lost to the Conservatives and Brexit Party also preferred a hard Brexit, wanted

69   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
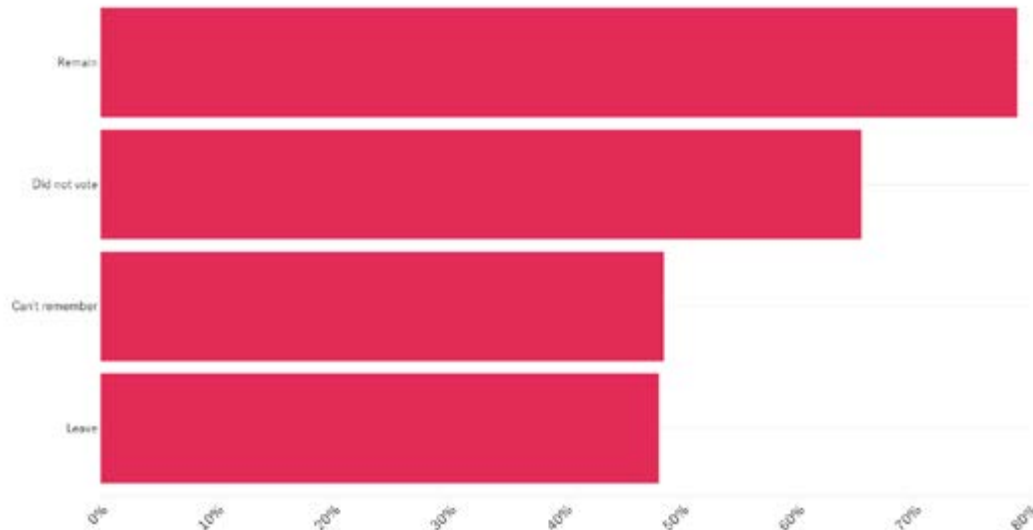70   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
71   Edward Fieldhouse, Chris Prosser, and Jonathon Mellon, preliminary analysis of British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 1-19 (DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-8202-2) provided to Labour Together

tougher immigration controls, strongly disliked Jeremy Corbyn and did not trust Labour to lead the country.

Polling data analysed by Datapraxis suggests that those who stuck with Labour through 2017 and 2019 did so not out of enthusiasm for Labour's second referendum position - those who had voted Remain tended to prefer "stop Brexit" to "final say"; those who had voted Leave were seriously tempted by "get Brexit done" - but because wider policies were more important to them than Brexit.[72]

However, there are clear indications that Labour's protracted avoidance of a clearer stance on Brexit contributed to perceptions of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership as weak or indecisive.

Other published polling evidence is consistent with this picture. One poll conducted after the election found that:

- 57 per cent of voters cited either "Getting Brexit Done" or "Stopping Brexit" as one of the three most important issues when it came to deciding how to vote in this election

- 73 per cent of voters who were lost by Labour to the Conservatives (and 30 per cent of all of Labour's lost voters) said it was because they "wanted to get Brexit done and voted to try to make that happen"

- 65 per cent of Liberal Democrat voters, and 43 per cent of SNP voters, said that "Stopping Brexit" was among the top three most important issues determining their vote[73]

The popularity of our policies was undermined by a lack of confidence that we could deliver them

Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data found that Labour's policies were individually popular, but the overall package raised concerns about affordability, economic risks or damage, a lack of realism and crucially, an inability to deliver on the promise of real change.

In open-ended questions, Labour's bold policies were frequently cited as a positive reason to vote for the Party, and the overwhelming majority of the policies attracted super-majority support - including some of the most controversial such as Inclusive Ownership Funds and free broadband (though some lost voters also cited this as an example of Labour's unrealistic or excessively "radical" ideas).

The resistance came mostly as people evaluated the overall package of proposals. Some were concerned about affordability, others about negative impacts on the economy or their own personal finance. Many came to the conclusion that the manifesto as a whole was unrealistic, risky and unlikely to be delivered. This undermined the positive response to individual policies, making them seem less credible.

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72   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
73   Lord Ashcroft, 'How Britain voted and why: My 2019 general election post-vote poll', Lord Ashcroft Polls, 13 December 2019: https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/12/how-britain-voted-and-why-my-2019-gen-eral-election-post-vote-poll/. See also Matthew Sowemimo, Labour's Last Stand?, Compass: https://www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/LabourLast_MS_FINAL.pdf

This was a clear contrast to the 2017 manifesto which, while bold, was seen as more deliverable.

Negative perceptions of the Party and its leadership reinforced these concerns; this made it easier to paint the manifesto as impractical and unrealistic. Most importantly, most people simply did not believe that a Labour-led government would in fact deliver real change. [74]

The impression that Labour's policies added up to less than the sum of their parts is reinforced by other published polling and focus group evidence. Polls conducted shortly before the election found that:

- 85 per cent of voters supported a right to free personal care for over-65s who are most in need of it[75]

- 73 per cent of voters supported increasing the minimum wage to £10[76]

- 70 per cent of voters supported a target to reduce net carbon emissions to zero by 2030[77]

- 66 per cent supported tax rises for those earning more than £80,000[78]

- 66 per cent supported the building of 150,000 council homes[79]

- 59 per cent supported the idea of a Green Industrial Revolution[80]

- 57 per cent supported free education for life[81]

- 52 per cent-57 per cent supported nationalising energy, water and railways[82]

However, support for individual policies falls when they are attached to the Labour Party.[83]

Another poll found that, when asked about Labour's plans to "spend significantly more money than the UK has witnessed in our lifetime" in areas like the NHS, schools and nationalisation found that:

- 45 per cent of voters thought it was "right and proper to spend this kind of money to restore public services", against 39 per cent who thought the country could not afford it

- However, of those who supported the spending in principle, more than half did

74   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together
75   'Labour policies popular, but many want change in direction', BMG, 14 January 2020: https://www.bmgre-search.co.uk/bmg-independent-labour-policies-popular-but-many-want-change-in-direction/
76   Lord Ashcroft, 'How Britain voted and why: My 2019 general election post-vote poll', Lord Ashcroft Polls, 13 December 2019: https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/12/how-britain-voted-and-why-my-2019-general-election-post-vote-poll/: http://www.deltapoll.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Deltapoll-MoS191123.pdf
77   'Labour policies popular, but many want change in direction', BMG, 14 January 2020: https://www.bmgre-search.co.uk/bmg-independent-labour-policies-popular-but-many-want-change-in-direction/
78   'Deltapoll Survey Results', Deltapoll, 21-23 November 2019, http://www.deltapoll.co.uk/wp-content/up-loads/2019/11/Deltapoll-MoS191123.pdf
79   'Deltapoll Survey Results', Deltapoll, 21-23 November 2019, http://www.deltapoll.co.uk/wp-content/up-loads/2019/11/Deltapoll-MoS191123.pdf
80   'Deltapoll Survey Results', Deltapoll, 21-23 November 2019, http://www.deltapoll.co.uk/wp-content/up-loads/2019/11/Deltapoll-MoS191123.pdf
81   'Deltapoll Survey Results', Deltapoll, 21-23 November 2019, http://www.deltapoll.co.uk/wp-content/up-loads/2019/11/Deltapoll-MoS191123.pdf
82   'Labour policies popular, but many want change in direction', BMG, 14 January 2020: https://www.bmgre-search.co.uk/bmg-independent-labour-policies-popular-but-many-want-change-in-direction/
83   'Labour policies popular, but many want change in direction', BMG, 14 January 2020: https://www.bmgre-search.co.uk/bmg-independent-labour-policies-popular-but-many-want-change-in-direction/

"not trust the Labour Party to spend the money wisely".[84]

The Ashcroft poll carried out immediately after the election[85] found that, among voters Labour lost:

- 26 per cent, including 49 per cent of those lost to the Conservatives, cited "I do not like the policies Labour were proposing" as a reason

- 40 per cent, including 62 per cent of those lost to the Conservatives and 36 per cent of those lost to the Liberal Democrats, said "I did not believe Labour would be able to deliver the promises it was making"

Other polling indicated that:

- fewer than one in five voters believed that policies, including the four-day week or net zero emissions by 2030, would in fact materialise if Labour was elected

- less than half of voters thought that policies, including higher taxes and free dental check-ups, were affordable if a Labour government was elected[86]

There is evidence that perceptions of Labour's manifesto were compounded by the effect of having had a recent Party Conference featuring a number of high-profile policy debates. Among Labour Together's 11,000 survey respondents, 36 per cent of whom had actively campaigned in the election, Labour's position and plans around private schools were raised as a problematic issue on the doorstep, despite having not been a particularly prominent element of Labour's manifesto or campaign.[87] It seems likely that perceptions of Labour's position on the issue were influenced by misconceptions of what the policy actually was: YouGov polling found 50 per per cent of voters, including 35 per cent of Labour voters, were against "banning" private schools (which was not Labour's policy).[88] This contrasts with strong support, for example, of Labour's policy of putting VAT on private school fees.[89]

84   Peter Kellner and Patrick Loughran, Northern Discomfort: Why Labour Lost the General Election, Tony Blair Institute, 18 December 2019: https://institute.global/sites/default/files/articles/Northern-Discomfort-Why-Labour-lost-the-General-Election.pdf

85   Lord Ashcroft, 'How Britain voted and why: My 2019 general election post-vote poll', Lord Ashcroft Polls, 13 December 2019: https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/12/how-britain-voted-and-why-my-2019-general-election-post-vote-poll/

86   Matthew Smith, 'Labour economic policies are popular, so why aren't Labour', YouGov, 12 November 2019: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/11/12/labour-economic-policies-are-popular-so-why-arent-

87   Labour Together Survey Responses, 2020

88   'Would you support or oppose banning private schools?', YouGov, 23 September 2019: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/education/survey-results/daily/2019/09/23/79420/3

89   Will Daghlgreen, 'Wide support for tackling private school tax exemptions', YouGov, 27 November 2014: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/11/27/strong-public-support-tackling-private-school-tax-

In Scotland these issues combined with and were reinforced by national debates and dynamics

In Scotland the unpopularity of Labour's leader was linked to his perceived equivocation on Brexit, which antagonised younger, more city-based voters; and his political reputation, which alienated more traditional, especially older, Labour voters. Apparent disagreements around Labour's position on a second independence referendum added to the confused message around key election issues.

A pre-election poll found Brexit/Europe to be a key election issue for 56 per cent of voters - ahead of all others.[90] The SNP's clear position on Brexit allowed them to win the support of many Remainers who had opposed independence, and win back supporters they had lost to Labour in 2017. The SNP's shift in messaging during the campaign, from focussing heavily on independence to focussing on opposing Brexit, showed that they knew these were the voters who needed to be won over.

Criticism that Labour was seeking to avoid the Brexit question went hand-in-hand with Labour's confused position on a second independence referendum, and the misplaced belief that a pro-second referendum stance would win support back from SNP voters. Scottish Labour lost pro-UK and pro-independence Remain voters while the SNP continued to win support from Leave voting independence supporters.

In both the independence and Brexit debates, Labour was caught between more forceful voices on either side with a message that, to many, looked confused or evasive.

Scottish Labour's position was appealing to a tiny proportion of the electorate. A pre-election poll found that just 12 per cent of Scottish voters said neither Brexit nor independence would influence which party they would vote for.

Figure 36: Factors influencing Scottish voters in 2019

Source: Ipsos Mori (2019)

Source: Ipsos MORI (2019) (Link to Graph and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2442135/
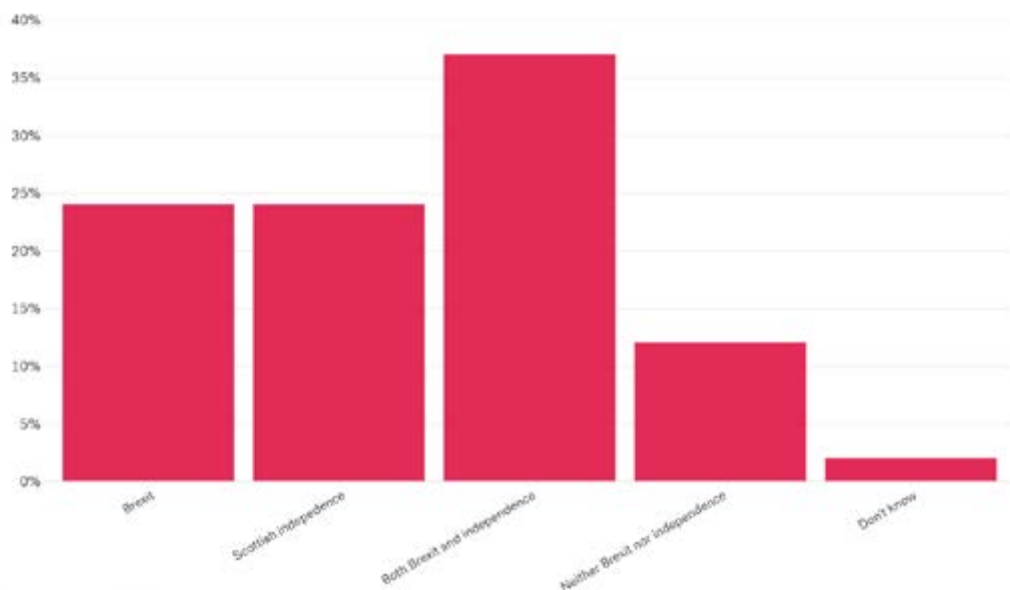
90   'Ipsos MORI November 20019 Scottish Political Monitor: Topline Results', Ipsos MORI, 28 November 2019:
        https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2019-11/ipsos-mori-scotland-election-2019-
        pm-topline.pdf

In 2017, Scottish Labour had taken a clear position against independence and a second independence referendum, while also advancing an argument against the SNP's stewardship of public services. This had succeeded in winning over SNP voters sceptical of the SNP's lack of vision, and those who were opposed to independence and another referendum.

These issues served as focal points for deeper divisions of values and outlook

Differing views of Labour's leader, Brexit position, and credibility expressed deeper differences across the electorate, such as:

- authoritarian/liberal divides
- deep distrust of politics
- people's perceptions of their own political position

Authoritarian/liberal divides explain some of what happened in this election.

To bring out deeper differences of value and outlook, Datapraxis analysed responses to statements of value and outlook, to see which provided the strongest guide to voters' preferences and decisions.

Among Labour's 2017 voters, one of the clearest responses was to the Old Testament quote *"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"*. Of those who agreed with this, Labour lost 44 per cent in 2019, compared to 24 per cent of those who disagreed. 60 per cent of lost Labour Leave voters agreed with it. Of Labour's 2019 voters, 32 per cent agreed with it.

Another key driver of previous Labour voters from the Party was deep **distrust of politics**.

Of Labour's 2017 voters, 41 per cent of those who agreed with the statement that *"there is very little difference between the three main parties"* were lost in 2019, against just 22 per cent of those who disagreed; 65 per cent of lost Labour Leave voters agreed with this. Given the clear differences between the main parties' manifestos in this election, this view is more likely to be an expression of distrust, fatalism and anti-political sentiment than an actual assessment of policy.

People's perception of their own **political positioning** was also a key predictor of which voters Labour lost. Labour was likely to hold onto voters who identified as "very" or "fairly" "left wing", but voters who identified as politically in the "centre" were 47 per cent likely to be lost, and those who identified as "slightly left-of-centre" were 32 per cent likely to be lost.

Complimentary analysis by the British Election Study shows that voters are most likely to see themselves as near the "centre", but in this election saw Labour as much more to the "left" than in previous elections. Voters were less likely to vote Labour the more they saw it as being to their own "left".

Figure 37: Voters' perception of themselves on a left to right scale
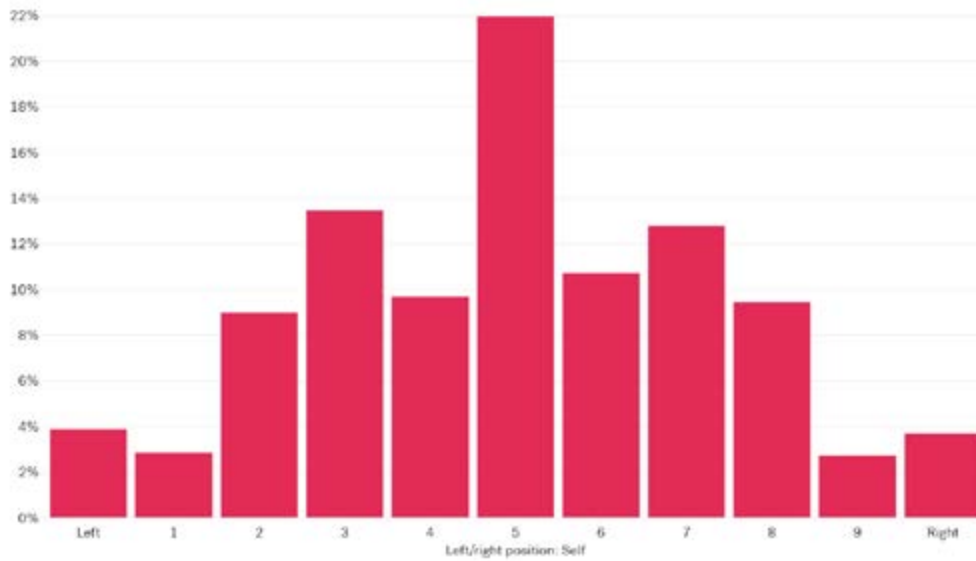
Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission

Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission *(Link to Graph and embed:* https://public. flourish.studio/visualisation/2675500/)

Figure 38: Voters' perception of Labour on a left to right scale
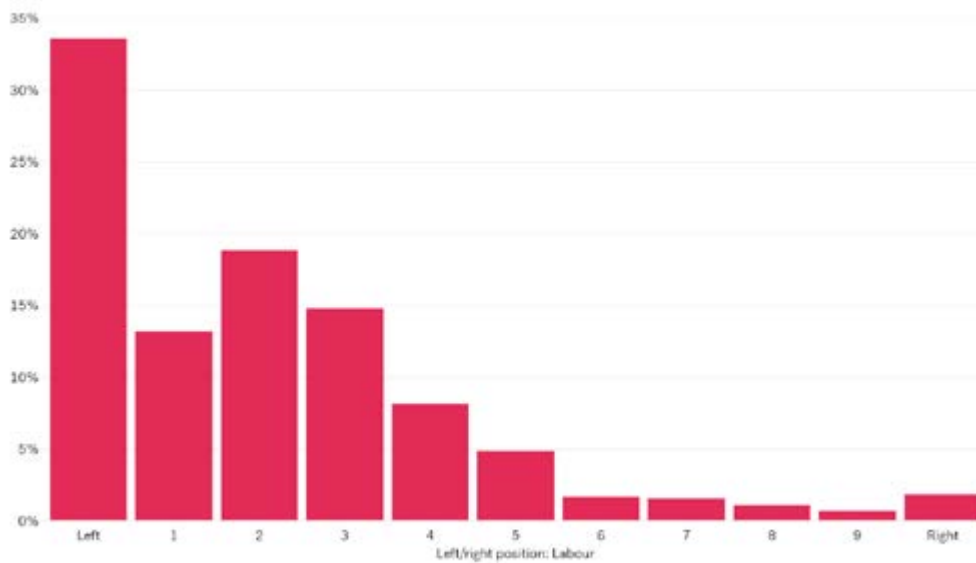
Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission

Source: British Election Study Submission to the Commission *(Link to Graph and embed:* https://public. flourish.studio/visualisation/2675572/)

It should be borne in mind that this is a matter of where a party is generally perceived to be on an imagined "left/right" spectrum, rather than a function of its actual policies[91] - on economic policy, at least, academic analysis of survey evidence has concluded that the "centre ground" moved significantly to the "left" after 2010,

91   Ed Fieldhouse, 'Is Labour too left-wing to win an election?', British Election Study, 28 July 2017: https:// www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/blog-update-is-labour-really-too-left-wing-to-win-an-election/#. XoXnJohKjD4

though in 2015 (the latest year for which this analysis is available) was still to the right of where it had been in 1997.[92]

Value-based analysis of Labour's vote base reveals a coalition that is crumbling

Using polling data and responses to value statements such as those cited above, Datapraxis have clustered the electorate into 14 groups according to their worldviews, value systems and political tendencies.

This analysis confirms that these fault-lines became fractures that split apart Labour's voter base in 2019.

Datapraxis's analysis shows that in 2019 Labour's most resilient support was found among one group: "The Green Left", who make up 7 per cent of the electorate. Labour slightly increased its support among "Older Establishment Liberals" - the only group among which Labour increased its vote share.

However, Labour lost large numbers of votes among three groups that in 2017 were a core part of its vote: "Progressive Cosmopolitans", 9 per cent of the electorate with strong pro-European views; "Centre-Left Pragmatists", 7 per cent of the electorate who tend to have socially liberal views but somewhat negative views of big business and party politics; and "Anti-Tory Heartlands", a group representing 6 per cent of the electorate who also tend to have negative views of politicians and a more socially conservative outlook.

Labour's result was further damaged by significant falls in support among "swing" groups, whose votes tend to be distributed across a wide range of Parties and had played an important part in Labour's overall vote share in 2017: "Older Brexit Swing Voters", "Anti-Establishment Hard Brexiteers", "Older Moderate Traditionalists", "The Older Disillusioned", and "Pragmatic Tories". Together these groups contributed around 21 per cent of Labour's total support in 2017; in 2019 this fell to 9 per cent.

92   John Bartle et al, 'Policy accommodation versus electoral turnover: policy representation in Britain, 1945-2015', Journal of Public Policy, Vol 39, Issue 2, June 2019, pp. 235-265: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-public-policy/article/policy-accommodation-versus-electoral-turnover-policy-representation-in-britain-19452015/A8577DECDEC25A302CE1DE1D26DD28D7/core-reader

Figure 39: Labour voter group characteristics

Group name	% of popn	Key positions	Demographics	Social grade	Geography	Lab vote 2017	Lab vote 2019
The Green Left	7	Support redistribution, Anti Big Business	61% 25-54	65% ABC1	More in London and Scotland, less in SE & SW	79	79
Progressive Cosmopolitans	9	Pro migration, identify strongly as European	77% 35+	79% ABC1	More in London & SE. Less in North and midlands	60	57
Centre-Left Pragmatists	7	Think politicians are out of touch, Anti- big business	63% 25-54, 63% women	60% ABC1	More in Scotland, NW and Wales, less in E/SW	78	70
Anti-Tory Heartlands	6	Think politicians are out of touch, say people take advantage of welfare	74% 35+, 56% men	59% C2DE	More in Scotland and the North. Less in midlands and the South	60	50
Young InstaProgressives	5	Think politicians are out of touch, most oppose privatisation	72% 18-34	69% ABC1	More in London & Scotland, less in West Midlands, NW, Wales	15	46
The Younger Disengaged	8	Few strong views, moderate on Brexit	57% 18-34, 60% women	56% C2DE, 44% ABC1	More in North West & West Midlands, less in South	13	21
Young Apathetic Waverers	5	Few strong opinions	74% 18-44	61% C2DE	More in London & NE, reasonable number everywhere	20	21
Older Brexit Swing Voters	8	Think politicians are out of touch, mix of views on immigration, more pro deal	77% 45+, 65% women	56% C2DE, 44% ABC1	More in NE, Yorkshire & Humber and Midlands, less in London	35	13
The Older Disillusioned	5	Think politicians are out of touch, think big business take advantage, want to reduce immigration	72% 35+	62% C2DE	More in Yorkshire & Humber and West Midlands, less in London	13	4
Anti-Establishment Hard Brexiteers	10	Think politicians are out of touch, want to end free movement, anti big business	73% 45+, 64% men	53% C2DE, 47% ABC1	More in Y&H, NW & Wales, less in London & Scotland	15	3
Older Establishment Liberals	6	Oppose ending freedom of movement, identify as european	66% 45+	77% ABC1	More in SE & SW, less in North & Midlands	14	16
Pragmatic Tories	8	Support government investment and borrowing, pro Boris deal, trust the government	66% 45+	70% ABC1	More in London & East, less in North, Wales & Scotland	7	2
Older Moderate Traditionalists	4	Think politicians are out of touch, mix of views on immigration	75% 55+, 56% women	62% ABC1	More in SE & SW, less in Yorkshire & Midlands	23	18
Establishment Tory Brexiteers	12	Most want to end free movement and tend to think people take advantage of welfare	70% 55+	58% ABC1	More in SE, SW and E. Less in Scotland, North and Yorkshire		

Source: Datapraxis • * note that many of those in the younger groups were aged under 18 in 2017, so the share who voted Labour in 2017 and 2019 are not comparable

Source: Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together **(Link to Graph and embed:** https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2442387/)

This analysis shows that the coalition of voters Labour managed to pull together in 2017 - which itself fell far short of what was needed to win a parliamentary majority - crumbled in 2019.[93]

93   Datapraxis analysis of YouGov data for Labour Together

The most immediate pressures producing this collapse were Labour's worsening difficulties with concerns about the leadership, Brexit, credibility and the underlying divisions in value and attitude these revealed. However, as we saw in Chapter 2, the underlying social and economic forces driving this disintegration go back much further.

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

- There is a broad consensus across our Party – mirrored in the results from our survey of Labour members - that a combination of concerns about the leadership, Labour's position on Brexit and our policy programme damaged Labour's chances in this election. Our weaknesses going into this election were interlinked, and indivisible. They catalysed long term trends between Labour and our voter coalition.

- This was an election where people were more often voting against the scenario they feared most, rather than for the party they liked best. We failed to provide a believable narrative for change, that enough of the electorate could vote for.

- Concerns about Labour's leadership were a significant factor in our election loss in 2019. 'Stop Jeremy Corbyn' was a major driver of the Conservatives' success across all their key groups including previous non-voters, and among all the swing voters Labour lost to the Tories.

- In 2017, Jeremy Corbyn's personal poll ratings dramatically improved over the campaign. Had these levels been maintained, Labour's vote share in 2019 would have been 6 points higher. The very low poll ratings on leadership going into the 2019 election cannot easily be disentangled from the handling of issues like Brexit, party disunity and anti-Semitism.

- The Tories won the 2019 election primarily by consolidating the Leave vote. In contrast, Labour lost support on all sides. Compared with 2017, in net terms, Labour lost around 1.7 million Leave voters; and around 1 million Remain voters. We also failed to attract swing voters, winning over far fewer swing voters than at any other recent election, and turning out fewer new non-voters than in 2017.

- Non-voters (both those who did not vote in 2017 but turned out in 2019, and those who voted in 2017 but not in 2019) played a critical role in the Conservative success. According to analysis conducted by Datapraxis, well over 4 million voters turned out in 2019 who had not voted in 2017. In 2017 Labour benefited much more from 2015 and 2016 non-voters but in 2019 the Tories overtook Labour among 2017 non-voters, by turning out many older and Leave voters as well as some younger voters.

- Whilst individual policies polled as popular, resistance to Labour's bold reform programme came as people evaluated the overall package in our manifesto. Affordability, and the negative impact on the economy or their own personal finances were raised as concerns by voters. Unlike in 2017 many thought our manifesto was considered as unrealistic, risky and unlikely to be delivered.

- Labour suffered a meltdown in Scotland, polling well below even the Tories, with the SNP making significant gains. The SNP gained at Labour's expense among key swing voter tribes. Brexit, the UK leadership and our position on a second Independence referendum were key factors in our loss.

PART TWO

LABOUR'S CAMPAIGN

PART TWO
LABOUR'S CAMPAIGN

OUR CONCLUSION: In 250 words

This Commission believes that the surge of support among new voting groups in 2017 masked continuing underlying decline in support for Labour. The unexpected surge in vote share in 2017 meant that these significant trends, laid out in Chapter 2 of this report, were not collectively and openly analysed, accepted or addressed.

The context of the 2019 election was challenging for Labour and would have been for any Labour leader because the issue of Brexit divided Labour's historic voter coalition. The campaign strategy developed was inadequate when faced with the challenges that have been set out in Chapter 3, including perceptions of leadership and the underlying trends of our traditional supporters moving away from Labour.

The evidence submitted to the Commission suggests that Labour was not ready for an election and the campaign was poorly managed and executed. There was no clear national campaign lead. The message was inconsistent and shifting and there was no evidence of a systematic strategy to identify which voters we were targeting and why and how we were reaching them. Our policy programme contained popular individual measures but taken together, our manifesto was seen by many voters as undeliverable and not credible.

The support provided to candidates and key activists was poor and often provided too late and resources – both human and financial – were badly targeted and allocated.

In 2017 we were believed to have had a relatively effective online campaign, but whilst we continued as we were, the Conservatives transformed their online capabilities significantly for 2019. Our digital infrastructure and campaigning systems were weak, with poorly targeted resources, and inadequate support that left candidates and activists at a disadvantage. A failure of coordination across the party led to a shortage of resources, and a lack of clear and consistent messaging which undermined our position.

Labour's ground, air and online campaigns were working in silos rather than being part of a single coherent political strategy. Our failure to innovate, learn and develop new campaigning strategies also cost us as the political environments (both online and offline) in which we are fighting elections are changing.

Labour has spent substantial periods of the last five years in conflict with itself. We were not speaking to the public but arguing amongst ourselves. Responsibility for this rests not wholly with one side or part of our movement. Across our movement, we should accept our part in these divisions and the impact this had on our ability to come together and work together effectively.

HOW WE PREPARED THIS SECTION

The findings in these chapters are based on evidence reviewed and received from across the party, including:

- 11,060 responses to our online survey

- 30 face to face interviews with defeated MPs and candidates

- Research and reviews of Labour's digital strategy and campaign organisation commissioned from expert consultants Valent Projects, Common Knowledge and the Centre for Countering Digital Hate

- Written submissions from key stakeholders and participants across the movement such as Progress, Momentum, the Community Organising Unit, affiliated trade unions and the LGA's Labour group

- Several follow-up anonymous research interviews conducted for us by Common Knowledge with participants with direct experience about relevant functions within the Party

- Submissions taken by Commission members and secretariat with key Labour Party staff, candidates and campaigners with relevant experience and expertise

CHAPTER FOUR
THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

- The very significant 2017 increase in vote share masked underlying fractures in our electoral coalition

- The campaign lacked leadership

- The context for the 2019 election was a very difficult one for Labour

- Labour was not ready for an election

- Labour's core message in 2019 lacked the clarity and consistency of 2017

- Labour's vulnerabilities on leadership, Brexit and credibility were not adequately addressed

- Labour's media strategy was inflexible and often self-undermining

- The number of policy announcements created doubts about their deliverability

- Labour's targeting approach missed observable trends in its voter coalition

- Longstanding organisational, operational and cultural weaknesses became entrenched

The very significant 2017 increase in vote share masked underlying fractures in our electoral coalition

"The Conservative Party did not lose Britain's 2017 general election, but it has spent the last two and a half years trying to understand why it did. The Labour Party, in contrast, did lose the 2017 election but has acted as if it did not".

> Tom McTague, co-author, Betting the House[94]

"I think that probably when most of the mistakes were made, looking back, is actually in the aftermath of 2017. Because actually at that point we probably should have sat down very soberly and gone 'okay, how do we now win, because we've done the easy stuff, we've won the low hanging fruit'. That was probably the point where we really failed, collectively... 2017 conference... was like a rally ... very hubristic ... somebody should have just gone 'woah, we haven't actually won anything yet'... looking back we should have been a lot more strategic after 2017 than we were"

> Andrew Fisher, Labour Party Executive Director of Policy, 2015-1995

94   Tom McTague, 'Boris Johnson Bets on a Strategy Theresa May Ignored', The Atlantic, 29 November 2019: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/11/britain-election-conservatives-labour-2017/602737/; see Tim Ross and Tom McTague, Betting the House: The Inside Story of the 2017 Election, Biteback, 2017

95   'The Battle of Hustings', Novara Media, 20 January 2020: https://novaramedia.com/2020/01/20/the-battle-of-hustings/

The Commission believes that the significant and unexpected increase in Labour's overall vote share in 2017 contributed to a failure to reflect honestly on the reasons for the increase or analyse the continuing underlying weaknesses in Labour's voter coalition outlined in Part One.

The absence of any open, objective, collective and consensual process for scrutinising and understanding what happened in 2017 allowed for different conclusions to be drawn internally, by those advocating different strategies and approaches including around Brexit, with the result that the post-referendum consensus within Labour began to fracture. Organisationally, the accepted view that the 2017 campaign was effective meant that longstanding and emerging problems were not addressed.

The respective contributions to the increase in Labour's vote share made, for example, by Remain/Leave dynamics, the appeal of radical policies, or the Party's increased membership base, were not rigorously investigated or tested; neither was how they might play out in different circumstances against the much bigger challenge of winning a parliamentary majority, nor were the reasons often cited as holding Labour back, such as disunity and division.

Moreover, as we summarised in Part One, there were clear signs in the 2017 result, as in previous elections, of the trends and dynamics that would cost Labour support and seats in 2019. There were swings away from Labour and a consolidation of Conservative votes in many seats we went on to lose in 2019. In fact, all six of the seats we lost in 2017 were long-standing Labour seats in Leave-voting towns including Mansfield, North East Derbyshire, Copeland, Stoke-on-Trent South, Walsall North and Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland. With the exception of Copeland, these seats now all have very large Conservative majorities of over 10,000 votes.

There is evidence that the leadership were conscious of these worrying trends. In the summer following the election, Jeremy Corbyn launched a "summer tour of the towns".[96] The subsequent reluctance to adopt a second referendum position reflected concerns about the fragmentation of Labour's historic voter coalition. However, the task of holding together Labour's coalition might have been made easier had these trends and what they meant been more widely understood across the labour movement.

This failure to interrogate the 2017 result applied equally in Scotland, where a planned retrospective did not go ahead due to the Scottish Labour leader resigning. Though Labour improved on its 2015 position, there was no external process looking at the role of Labour's arguments on independence, public services or its position on a second referendum; nor were the benefits of maintaining a consistent campaigning message from the local elections thoroughly analysed or investigated. Furthermore, the numbers underlying our small recovery at the 2017 general election show that Labour was far from turning the tide on the long-term trends highlighted in previous chapters.

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96   Patrick Maguire, 'Jeremy Corbyn's Two Universes', The New Statesman, 30 August 2018: https://www.new-statesman.com/politics/uk/2018/08/jeremy-corbyn-s-two-universes; Patrick Maguire, 'In the towns stupid…' The New Statesman, 11 September 2018: https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/09/it-s-towns-stupid-how-labour-plans-win-next-election

The campaign lacked leadership

A central problem afflicting Labour's ability to develop an election strategy and prepare to implement it was confusion about leadership, governance and lines of accountability. Time and again in oral and written evidence we heard that a lack of clarity about where and by whom crucial decisions were being taken, during the build-up to and during the campaign, significantly hampered Labour's efforts.

This is an old problem that has beset Labour campaigns in the past, but instead of being addressed seems to have got worse. There were multiple power centres with no clear chain of command – including an Executive Director of Campaigns, Leader's Office, Party Chair, General Secretary, National Coordinators – with no single person setting the strategy. We have heard that the National Coordinators were "side-lined". [97]

Significant staffing changes were made in October, with the Leader's Chief of Staff and Political Director moved to Labour HQ. Whatever its merits, this restructuring turned out to be unfortunately timed, deepening what some saw as a vacuum of leadership just as the election period began.

As a result, the Party lacked a shared strategy and approach that everyone across the organisation both understood, and felt accountable for, their part in advancing. This was a key factor behind a lack of focus and consistency running through the campaign that we highlight in this chapter, and failures of coordination and integration running through digital and ground operations that we look at in the next two chapters.

The context of the 2019 election was a difficult one for Labour

As we find in Part One, what many voters saw as the central question in the election, Brexit, was a particular weakness for Labour.

The Commission recognises that this was always going to be a difficult issue for the Party, given its voter coalition. Disagreements within the movement reflected a real dilemma and real trade-offs between positions closer to different sections of Labour's electoral base, which would have been likely to lose the Party support on one side or the other.

It was clearly damaging for Labour to be seen as not wanting to come down on either side of what was widely acknowledged as the main issue of the day. At the same time there is no doubt that promising simply to stop Brexit, or drive it through, would have cost Labour significant numbers of votes. The Commission saw no conclusive evidence that a more absolute position on either side of the debate would have led to a better net result.

What does seem clear is that the drawn-out process by which Labour's position was arrived at, and lack of clarity in how it was communicated, added to the costs of a compromise position. Had Labour's final position been settled earlier, and communicated with greater consistency and conviction, the difficulties posed by the Brexit question might have been mitigated. As things were, however, Labour's

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97   Jonathon Read, 'Senior Labour MP returns to backbenches saying he felt "sidelined" during election campaign', The New European, 6 April 2020.

response to the issue was too easily framed as reactive rather than proactive, based on fence-sitting and fudge rather than democratic principle, exacerbating perceptions of its leadership as indecisive, weak, and evasive.

After two years of a hung parliament, defined by Brexit indecision with a series of meaningful votes, indicative votes, and the failed cross-party talks where the public mood was growing tired with the lack of progress, and with a new Conservative Prime Minister in their honeymoon, there is little question that Autumn 2019 was a profoundly difficult context for Labour in an election.

We have received submissions arguing that Labour should not have "allowed" the December election to proceed when it was self-evident that the Conservative Party wanted an election around these issues. However, for the purposes of learning lessons for the future, the Commission is conscious that Labour is unlikely to have much say on the timing of the next election. Our purpose is to ensure we are in the best possible position whenever it is called.

Labour was not ready for an election

Labour was not "election ready" in November 2019. It is clear from the following chapters on the online and ground campaign that our infrastructure was creaking and not fit for purpose. Labour HQ in Southside was under-staffed, with many teams subjected to hiring embargoes.

Labour's finances had been under pressure for some time. It had been reported in February 2019 that Labour was forecasting a budget deficit for the first time since 2015. National Executive Committee (NEC) members were concerned about Party finances, with one member tweeting in February 2019 that "now an election looks unlikely anytime soon, we need to cut costs to build the war chest", although another said that the Party had built up a "very healthy fund to fight a general election."[98] House of Commons analysis shows that Labour received 47 per cent less in donations in 2019 than in 2017. The Electoral Commission reports that the Conservatives raised three times as much as Labour in pre-election donations, with the Liberal Democrats also receiving more donations than Labour.[99]

Labour's election-readiness had also been disrupted by the process for reselecting sitting MPs, which had taken up much of 2019. Many constituencies did not have their candidates confirmed until late in the day. Party staff told us that this often delayed the assignment of Organisers, in some cases out of concern not to be seen to "take a side" in factionally sensitive contests. Some MPs told us they had held off preparation of campaign literature till after the summer for fear of "tempting fate".

Furthermore, the time of year was a particular challenge, limiting Labour's ground campaign in many seats, particularly those in rural areas. It is not clear that the Party had any contingency plan for a winter campaign, despite the creeping inevitability of one with the appointment of a new Prime Minister, and looming Brexit extension.

98   Paul Waugh, 'Labour finances set to plunge into the red for first time under Jeremy Corbyn', Huffington Post, 1 February 2019: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/labour-finances-plunge-into-the-red-for-first-time-under-jeremy-corbyn_uk_5c547ef6e4b09293b203bb5b

99   'General Election: Which Party received the most donations?', House of Commons Library, January 2020: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/insights/general-election-2019-which-party-received-the-most-donations/

> *"We weren't ready to fight an election – staff were unprepared and we were at a complete loss as a local campaign most of the time"*

> ❯ Labour Together Survey Respondent

> *"Evenings were unusable because of the winter – most of [the] constituency is isolated, rural communities. Over a 5-week election I lost 30 campaign sessions which in a summer campaign we could have used. Couldn't get people out to open doors."*

> ❯ David Hanson, Former MP for Delyn

Labour's core message in 2019 lacked the clarity and consistency of 2017

Many of our respondents and submissions highlighted confusion about Labour's message in 2019, often contrasting this with 2017, when they felt we had a much clearer one.

Labour's initial headline message, "It's time for real change", put economic and policy issues front and centre in a way that implicitly linked to some of the underlying issues and frustrations that the Brexit vote was seen to have expressed. According to some accounts, this "tested brilliantly".[100] In responses to our survey, several comments highlighted the Party's promise of change as its most effective message.

However, opinions within the Party on "It's time for real change" remained mixed, and it was not used consistently.[101] Indeed, very few we spoke to could spontaneously recall that this was Labour's core message.

Labour often seemed to default to a message focused on the negative impact of austerity and its promise to end it, though this emphasis proved less effective than in 2017, in the face of Tory claims to have turned the page on austerity and their manifesto pledges in areas such as the NHS and policing.

In later stages of the campaign, it was deliberately supplemented or replaced by "Labour On Your Side", intended to appeal more effectively to Leave-supporting voters.

This lack of any consistent message which linked to an overarching political strategy was a significant disadvantage in the campaign.

The effectiveness of the Conservatives' "Get Brexit Done" is widely acknowledged. It's clear that they started testing this approach as soon as Boris Johnson became Prime Minister, developing a clear and powerful campaign which captured a public mood. "Get Brexit Done" was not just a well-crafted slogan but an integrated political and governing strategy, with the Conservatives using every opportunity to create the impression that their words would be backed up by action, ahead of and during the election campaign.

100   Tory Landslide, Progressives Split: A Datapraxis Analysis of the UK General Election, Datapraxis: https://www.dataprax.is/tory-landslide-progressives-split
101   Heather Stewart, 'Crushed by Brexit: how Labour lost the election', Heather Stewart, The Guardian, 21 January 2020: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/21/crushed-by-brexit-how-labour-lost-the-election

In contrast, Labour's lack of an overall, unifying and agreed campaign strategy was reflected in its lack of message discipline and consequent lack of cut-through with many voters.

"There was an idea that we would use the #realchange but it was not used consistently."

> Labour candidate

"The belief that things could be different … that a Government could actually dramatically improve the quality of our lives, this stream really created hope where there was none offered by other parties"

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

"Messaging was not particularly successful during the campaign this time round (as opposed to 2017 where there was a very clear theme throughout)"

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

"We had a clear message in 2017 – 'for the many not the few', positioning ourselves as a clear alternative to the Tories on domestic policy – but 2019 was different – 'time for real change' failed to set out what we stood for and what kind of change we wanted"

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

"Messaging was also problematic. The party lacked a strong narrative arc, either to combat the Conservative's mantra, 'Get Brexit Done', or provide a positive, optimistic set of reasons to vote for us."

> Progress written submission

Interviews with Labour's prospective parliamentary candidates show that there was also a failure to devolution-test some of our key messages and to give the devolved campaigns enough freedom to operate. For example, in both Scotland and Wales, where the NHS is devolved, lots of messaging and focus from the Labour Party is much less relevant. There was often a failure to coordinate on this, as Scottish Labour and the Welsh Labour Government and special advisers were not given advance warning of significant Labour policy commitments in devolved areas. This meant they were unable to line up their own announcements on those areas to come out at a similar time in a coordinated way. This was problematic as commitments made for England in devolved areas always led to immediate questions about what the Welsh Government or Scottish Labour will do, meaning campaigns in Scotland and Wales often ended up being reactive and "on the back foot".

"There seems to be a disconnect between Labour and Welsh Labour. Labour campaigned on saving the NHS yet here in Wales we couldn't contribute much to that messaging because Welsh Labour are technically in charge of the NHS here, so all we could really do is talk about the financial restrictions put on us because of the Tory government. When you have to explain these things, they lose their effect"

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

> *"More targeted message by area. Factors which were significant here in North East Fife Scotland totally different to elsewhere. Manifesto was impressive, but difficult to package to target voters here."*

> ❯ Labour Together Survey Respondent member

The Commission understands that Labour in Scotland invested few resources in polling and research between the 2017 and 2019 elections, with only one Scottish poll conducted in this period. The loss of in-house voter research capacity after the 2017 election also diminished the party's ability to constantly test and refine messaging. Given Scottish politics operates in a totally different context to England or Wales, the lack of any voter research was a failure that essentially meant people were operating without adequate information. In the future, this must be addresses and a substantial investment is needed in voter research in Scotland.

Labour's vulnerabilities on leadership, Brexit and credibility were not adequately addressed

As we have learnt from Part One, perceptions of Jeremy Corbyn, perceived indecision on Brexit, and a lack of trust that the Party could or would deliver its policy promises drove significant levels of support away from Labour in the 2019 election.

Leaders of left-wing parties will always face a barrage of ruthless personalised attacks and smears from the right, both in the mainstream media and now increasingly via social media networks.

There was clearly some hope that negative perceptions of Jeremy Corbyn would soften when he was seen on the campaign trail, as had been the case during the 2017 election. However, as polling evidence set out in Part One shows, perceptions of Labour's leader started at a much lower level at the beginning of the campaign and had barely improved by polling day. This was entangled in a range of issues including Brexit, defence and security, foreign policy and the handling of anti-Semitism.

A key reason for the Party's failure to deal with these issues effectively was a fundamental problem of disunity around Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Labour has been, and has been seen to be, a divided Party. Criticism of the leadership from within – and from those who had left the Party – as well as public factionalism, clearly contributed to negative public perceptions. As energies were focussed internally, less attention was given to how to deal with the Party's vulnerabilities or how to take voters' concerns seriously.

> *"Overall, we lost because of a very effective smear campaign against Jeremy Corbyn that we didn't manage well"*

> ❯ Faiza Shaheen, PPC for Chingford and Woodford Green

> *"As I am sure has become abundantly clear, the key question on almost every doorstep was about the leadership. Be it due to a smear campaign or not, this should have been addressed. It detracted from any wish to even begin discussing policies (effective or not) in many instances."*

> ❯ Labour Together Survey Respondent

Labour did have a plan to blunt the impact of the Conservatives' promise to deliver Brexit by highlighting the threat to the NHS from a trade deal with Donald Trump. This had the merit of linking the Conservatives' most important message with potentially potent concerns, such as the affinity of their Leader with a particularly unpopular US president and their trustworthiness on the NHS.

In retrospect, Labour could have mitigated the difficulties created by Brexit had it moved more quickly, by defining and communicating its position more clearly from an earlier stage to limit the damage. By the time the election was called, Labour's position was not only less than ideal to many voters on both sides of the debate, but also seen to have been arrived at in a way that weakened its ability to project strong or principled leadership on the issue.

Thousands of our survey respondents described Labour's Brexit policy as one of the most unpopular and challenging to sell to voters. Indeed, over half of the Labour Members (57 per cent) who responded to our survey cited the policy to have a second referendum as the single most unpopular with voters.

In some cases, Brexit "blocked almost all other conversations". Responses characterised it as "dithering", "dire", "reflecting division", "clearly a turn off to some voters and not sufficient to others", and a policy that "made Labour look like it wasn't listening to voters".

Some described it as having merit but difficult to sell: "when explained people saw sense in it, but many were already set against it and didn't want to talk".

For some, the lack of clarity surrounding the policy was seen as "indecisive" and therefore "wasn't trusted by Remainers, Leavers or those in between".

> *"We were seen as betraying the referendum result of 2016, and Jeremy "Corbyn was seen as the person who had betrayed them, a weak leader, and somebody who was indecisive in his leadership. It was undoubtedly Brexit – anybody who tries to produce a different view is deluding themselves. The reality is that in 2017, just 2 years ago, we came within touching distance of power. We had a platform and a radical manifesto; Jeremy was popular with the electorate, on the basis that we would leave the European union and that we would respect the 2016 referendum result."*
>
> **> Len McCluskey, General Secretary, Unite interview with Labour Together Commission**

The closest thing to a strategy for dealing with negative perceptions of Labour's leadership and position on Brexit seems to have been a heavy reliance on policy announcements to shape public debate and media coverage. However, as we see below, this served to exacerbate another of Labour's long-standing vulnerabilities – that of "credibility".

Labour's media strategy was inflexible and often self-undermining

It is widely believed that Labour's 2017 advances were helped by a popular manifesto which, combined with the operation of broadcast impartiality rules, offset some of Labour's disadvantages by focusing coverage and debate on issues such as taxation, public services and the economy.

In 2019, however, the evidence we reviewed in Part One suggests that an attempt to use new policy announcements to distract attention from Labour's perceived weaknesses in other areas was self-undermining.

The media strategy appeared to be to announce a new policy every day, but there seemed to be very little flexibility in adapting or responding as the debate developed. This meant that the Party would end up gazumping its own positive coverage, rather than letting a story run and build from it if a policy landed well, and sometimes distracted the press from negative stories about the Conservatives. It also left the Party very little flexibility in anticipating and harnessing the symbiotic relationship between traditional and social media, as we explore in the next chapter.

Our inquiries indicate that this rigid adherence to a traditional media "grid" did not simply reflect a lack of creativity or failure to keep up with an evolving media landscape, but was directly related to a combination of silo-like structures and factional tensions that fostered a culture of top-down control and internal territoriality.

The number of policy announcements created doubts about their deliverability

The many policy announcements of the election campaign had merits in themselves, but their aggregate effect was to create doubts about their deliverability, detracting from the value of the programme as a whole and Labour's credibility as an alternative Government. This included policies announced or debated at Labour Party Conference in September, which the General Election followed usually soon after, as well as the Manifesto itself and subsequent announcements rolled out during the campaign.

One problem was that the quantity of policies, and lack of prioritisation among them, meant that those that could have been most electorally advantageous were overshadowed. For example, the Resolution Foundation has shown that seats lost by Labour to the Conservatives included a particularly high proportion of households reliant on Universal Credit,[102] but Labour's plans in this area did not seem to be prioritised as a policy or campaign message.[103]

The scale of the programme and apparent lack of focus also created doubts about whether it was a realistic plan for government. Many have said that Labour's agenda of economic reform felt like a programme for several terms of office squeezed into a single document. One experienced Labour Council Leader told us they feared Labour's policy programme risked sounding like "a 25 year programme crammed into a five year government" – a feeling echoed by a sympathetic commentator, who described it as "a programme more suited to ten or 15 years than a single parliamentary cycle".[104]

102   Charlie McCurdy et al, Painting the towns blue: Demography, economy and living standards in the political geographies emerging from the 2019 General Election, Resolution Foundation, February 2020: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/02/Painting-the-town-blue.pdf

103   Aditya Chakrabortty, 'On the doorstep, Labour faces the questions: who do you speak for?', The Guardian, 26 November 2019: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/26/on-the-doorstep-labour-faces-the-question-who-do-you-speak-for

104   James Butler, 'What Happened?', London Review of Books, 6 February 2020: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n03/james-butler/what-happened

> *"The manifesto felt like it was published in a rush and there was no reason for that. I was doing my best to keep up with all the policies in the manifesto. Every day there was a new announcement....We have to start developing a policy offer as soon as possible – one which is well worked through with the public before it is realised. We should also start thinking about new and better ways of engaging the public in policy development."*
>
> > - Thelma Walker, Former MP for Colne Valley

This meant that some pledges to key target groups, such as a promised 5 per cent public sector pay increase, or fulfilment of the demands of the WASPI campaign, seem not to have cut through to – or been believed by – enough of the voters who stood most to benefit.[105] Meanwhile much of the agenda, whatever its merits, appeared to be insufficiently relevant to, or rooted in the lives and communities of, the voters Labour needed to win over; this risked reinforcing the dangerous sense of disconnect we highlighted in Chapter 2.

As the data in Chapter 3 show, the overall effect of this approach led to a further breakdown in trust and credibility, a problem that had been growing over many years and was greatly catalysed in 2019.

Respondents to our survey thought that Labour's most popular policies were:

- Ending austerity/increasing public spending
- Nationalisation of rail and utilities
- Green New Deal and 2030 net zero carbon target
- Raising the minimum wage

However, 67 per cent of survey respondents didn't think Labour's manifesto was effective at appealing to the public. Other than the Brexit position, Labour's least popular policies, according to our respondents, included:

- Free broadband
- Abolishing private schools' charitable status
- Nationalisation
- Compensating the WASPI women

Clearly there is variation here – with nationalisation seen as a positive by some and negative by others – and these views do not always match up with polling evidence on the popularity of policies; for example, as noted in Chapter 3, there is in-principle support for Labour's position on private schools, correctly stated. However, these responses give a strong sense of which policies, for whatever reason, Labour members and campaigners felt worked well or proved problematic on the doorstep - which may have been related to issues of how policies were perceived and whether they were felt to be a sufficiently relevant priority.

> *"The point is that there were too many and thrown together with no real theme. It was not that – individually – some of them were not good. But the culmination of them all had little credibility or confidence that they could be delivered."*
>
> > Labour Together Survey Respondent

105   Heywood and Middleton written submission to the Labour Together Review, 2020

"The policies were progressive and good in many instances. But there seemed to be no thought to how they matched with the issues key voters

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

"The most effective policies were those that had been trailed for significant time before announcement. The manifesto had an 'advent calendar' feel to it, with each new day opening a door promising more stuff. This is not credible; policy has to be planted in soil that has been well fertilised."

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

An LGA survey of 822 Councillors found that 51.2 per cent judged the manifesto to be "Mixed – some popular policies but hard to sell overall."

A review of Labour's campaign by former adviser to the Shadow Chancellor and Labour Together Commission member James Meadway[106] argues that Labour's economic policy offer was less compelling than in 2017 for a number of reasons:

- less prominence was given to tax rises that highlighted who would pay for new spending (appealing to some voters' perceptions of the economy as a "zero-sum game") while greater reliance on borrowing – whatever the economic justification – reawakened voters' worries about affordability

- the sheer number of pledges, lack of prioritisation among them, and lack of emphasis on the most electorally significant, meant that those that were receiving the most attention were often not the most relevant to voters' lives and concerns

- as the Conservatives moved to an ostensibly post-austerity, pro-interventionist position, Labour emphasised the greater quantity and scale of its pledges, but didn't engage sufficiently with the issues of democratic control and pride of place that are increasingly key for many voters

Many of these points were reinforced in other evidence this Review received or reviewed.

Labour's targeting approach missed observable trends in its voter coalition

The warning signs of previous election results, coupled with the very clear fragmentation of the Labour electorate over previous months and years, should have made the risks of a snap election clear. Had a proper, open review of the 2017 election taken place, not only would the underlying trends be better understood and shared, the process itself would have helped foster a culture that was data- and evidence-driven.

The key seats target list illustrates this point: at best, an insufficiently evidence-based over-reaction to the 2017 results; at worst, a failure to take necessary decisions with limited resources.

Labour's initial target list was ambitious: 96 battleground seats of which 66 were

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106   James Meadway, 'Labour's Economic Plans: what went wrong?', James Meadway, Novara Media, 17 December 2019: https://novaramedia.com/2019/12/17/labours-economic-plans-what-went-wrong/

offensive and 30 defensive.[107] This was defended with the argument that judgments made in 2017 had proved excessively timid.

According to one report, 80 per cent of Labour's resources were directed towards the seats the Party hoped to win.[108] Huge numbers of staff and activists were sent to campaign in constituencies such as the Prime Minister's own seat of Uxbridge, while numerous candidates in seats targeted by the Conservatives were left to fend for themselves without national support.

This Commission has heard evidence that this strategy was pursued in the face of clear evidence available from the start that a far larger number of Labour seats were at risk:

- Labour began the campaign defending fewer than one in five of their tightest defensive marginals, leaving most of those seats targeted by the Conservatives wide open.

- Of the 27 Labour-held seats most narrowly lost to the Conservatives, only six were on the Party's initial defensive target seats list. The 21 that weren't included Bury North, Bolton North East, Bury South, High Peak, Heywood and Middleton, Stoke-on-Trent Central, Gedling and Blyth Valley, all of which the Conservatives won by fewer than 700 votes.

- 13 highly vulnerable seats not on the list were only saved by effective local campaigning – among them Coventry North West, Alyn and Deeside, Dagenham and Rainham, Coventry South, and Weaver Vale, all of which now have majorities of less than 500.

The Commission also heard that Labour's identification of potentially winnable seats was not properly evidence-based, for example in Scotland, where insufficient resource was being directed to constituencies which might, under different circumstances, have offered opportunities for advance.

Several weeks into the campaign, as evidence mounted that many more seats were in need of urgent defence, Labour did eventually add them to the list. However, this was done without reducing the number in other areas, with the effect that resources were being spread too thinly and, according to some accounts we received, no seats were being adequately defended. For example, by the end of the election campaign, nearly every seat in North Wales was on the target list – meaning, in the view of local campaigners, that none were.

> *"I don't think we reacted to our own polling, we should have directed members to defend seats. I think there was a fear that the party would be accused of being too defensive like there was in 2017"*
>
> > Labour Together Survey Respondent

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107   Heather Stewart, 'Crushed by Brexit: how Labour lost the election', The Guardian, 21 January 2020: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/21/crushed-by-brexit-how-labour-lost-the-election
108   Sebastian Payne and Jim Pickard, 'The Campaign teams behind Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson', Financial Times, 11 November 2019: https://www.ft.com/content/8610dc48-0148-11ea-b7bc-f3fa4e77dd47

"Based on the 2017 baseline, it was believed that an offensive campaign would work. In this environment – dominated by Brexit polarisation and huge waves of anti-Labour propaganda – this approach was very difficult to achieve, and showed naivety"

› Labour Together Survey Respondent

"The campaign itself was unfocused and founded on a monumental strategic mistake – that we were fighting an offensive election."

› Progress, written Submission

Longstanding organisational, operational and cultural weaknesses became entrenched

As important as Labour's failure to thoroughly analyse and understand the dynamics at work in the electorate, was an absence of informed reflection on the effectiveness of its organisation and operations. This was even as the Conservatives' machine overhauled their campaign structure, digital know-how and ground campaign methods in the aftermath of 2017.

This left longstanding weaknesses unanalysed and unaddressed; in some areas they were allowed to get worse.

Complexity and lack of clarity at senior level fed through into Party functions. The structure of the Party is far from transparent, but an organogram prepared for this review by Common Knowledge identified at least five "Executive Directors", at least 13 "Directors", at least fifteen "Heads of" and five "Managers". This reliance on separately managed teams risks institutionalising "silo-working", limiting horizontal communication and collaboration, and making it harder to provide strategic leadership and coordination of functions that cut across different teams.

The absence of a widely agreed and understood strategy, confusion over who was in charge, and barriers to internal flexibility and collaboration, were exacerbated by the fact that internal factional tensions had led to the duplication of functions, structures and responsibilities, with many internal turf battles and conflicting approaches.

The failure to conduct a rigorous and honest appraisal of what had and hadn't worked in 2017 also meant that weaknesses in Labour's campaigning techniques and infrastructure were not addressed. Many of the tools and methods that, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, caused so many problems in 2019 were already creaking and outdated by 2017.

However, this challenge was about more than a one-off review or "upgrade". Most profoundly, it has become clear to us that Labour does not have the structures or the culture needed to foster innovation and learning. This requires a willingness to experiment, combined with a framework to ensure outcomes are objectively assessed against relevant metrics, data is shared, and lessons consistently implemented. Instead, we found that a lack of strategic and organisational coherence resulted in a campaign that was disjointed and unimaginative, defaulting in many areas to closely guarded domains of authority and time-worn ways of doing things.

In the next two chapters we look at how this fundamental lack of strategic integration and structured innovation, not a new problem for Labour but one deepened by the internal divisions and culture of distrust of recent years, fed through into Labour's campaign both online and on the ground.

> *"For the whole duration I've been here, it's been very rare to have someone trying to lay out 'this is what we're trying to achieve' on a cross-organisational basis. It's generally always been much more compartmentalised and then sort of run through the structure of daily meetings, with a whole lot of people in, then cascaded down to their team..."*
>
> **>** `Labour staff member`

> *"The Party as a whole is lost and confused, they are not sure what direction they are heading in, which results in teams not working well together."*
>
> **>** `Former Labour staff member`

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

- The absence of an objective and open review of our 2017 general election loss was a key strategic error for Labour. The 2017 result masked continuing underlying voter trends in Labour's historic voter coalition. Many of the constituency advances made by the Conservatives in 2019 were built upon significant advances in 2017.

- The 2017 election result shaped the Brexit debate, by breaking the consensus that had held to that point, and the hung Parliament that followed. This provided the context for the 2019 general election, which was an extremely difficult one for Labour.

- Labour went into the 2019 election without a clear strategy of which voters we needed to persuade or how. In the aftermath of 2017 there was an intention to reconcile Labour's traditional supporters but this was not sustained and the strategy that was developed was inadequate. There was no sustained strategy for dealing with Labour's perceived weaknesses.

- It was unclear who was in charge with insufficient lines of accountability for decision making. There was an unrealistic target seat strategy that was not evidence based. Hard decisions on seat targeting and prioritisation were avoided.

- Labour was unprepared for an election, with no clear message compared with our *For the many, not the few* campaign in 2017. The number of policy announcements created doubts about their deliverability and the media strategy meant policies didn't have time to land and left candidates poorly briefed.

- Our Party has spent substantial periods of the last five years in conflict with itself resulting in significant strategic and operational dysfunction, resulting in a toxic culture and limiting our ability to work effectively. Responsibility for this rests not wholly with one side or part of our movement. Across our movement we should accept our part in these divisions and the impact this had on our ability to work together and present a united front to the public.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ONLINE CAMPAIGN

- Online and social media battles were critical in this election
- The Conservatives' campaign was a dramatic improvement on 2017
- Labour's online campaign reflected a general failure of integration and innovation
- Labour's online campaign was weakened by a lack of professionalism and capacity
- Labour's online campaigning suffered from poor internal coordination
- Labour's online supporters did not reach or win over a wide enough range of voters

Online and social media battles were critical in this election

The importance of new online and social media in influencing voters' perceptions and behaviour has risen rapidly over recent election cycles. Social media now plays a key role in amplifying messages placed in traditional media and in influencing what traditional broadcast and print media covers during election campaigns. The potential for narrowly targeted advertising, as well as the "organic reach" achieved when content is voluntarily shared, can make it a highly cost-effective form of political communication.

The level of online campaigning and advertising in this campaign was unprecedented. Labour declared its central focus to be "making viral persuasive content – bypassing the media and breaking out of the bubble".[109] Significant resource was dedicated to this strategy:

- Labour employed digital media teams in both Head Office and the Leaders' office, as well as consultants and groups across the Party.

- Labour spent heavily on paid online communications – including £1.4m on Facebook advertising – more than the Conservatives' £900,000 (though this figure does not include spending from outrider pages or on sponsored posts)

- Labour invested in "Promote" software designed to enable narrow targeting of individuals' social media timelines

- Labour could call on the support of numerous allied organisations and individuals active on social media, many with very large followings

Successes were claimed by Labour's digital teams, including:

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109   'Labour runs most successful social media campaign ever seen', Labour Party Press Release, 11 December 2019: https://labour.org.uk/press/labour-runs-most-successful-election-social-media-campaign-ever-seen/

- Over six million views for two videos

- 1.5 million likes for Jeremy Corbyn on Facebook and 2.2 million followers on Twitter

- More shares and retweets for Jeremy Corbyn than Boris Johnson or the Conservatives

- A large scale mobilisation of members and supporters on the ground in which digital communications clearly played a role

However, the evidence we have received shows that overall the Conservatives were far more effective in this arena.

In preparing this chapter, we were able to draw on

- a review of Labour's campaign, based on an investigation of Party structures and research interviews with key staff and campaigners commissioned from campaign cooperative, Common Knowledge[110]

- expert assessment and comparison of the Conservative and Labour digital campaigns commissioned from digital communications agency Valent Projects[111]

- analysis of the role of online outriders in the campaign commissioned from the Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH)[112]

- insights of Labour Together's 11,060 survey respondents and 30 interviews with defeated Parliamentary candidates

The Conservatives' campaign was a dramatic improvement on 2017

Research conducted for this Commission by Valent Projects found the Conservatives were determined to improve on their 2017 campaign, and invested in infrastructure, skills and expertise, developing a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy to beat us next time.

Key elements of this included:

- a strategic focus on digital media as central to engaging and persuading voters outside their traditional supporter groups

- a clear senior role for the digital team, based alongside the head of the campaign in the election 'war room'

- a professional team who knew how to create quality content most likely to gain reach through algorithms and organic shares, as opposed to paid advertising

- less emphasis on narrow targeting of individuals, more on reach among broader groups of voters – including through banner ads on newspaper websites or Google and YouTube, where they spent significantly more than Labour[113]

- a creative focus on finding fresh and controversial ways of reiterating and

110   Common Knowledge: https://commonknowledge.coop/
111   Valent Projects: https://www.valent-projects.com/
112   Centre for Countering Digital Hate: https://www.counterhate.co.uk/
113   Mark Bridge and Billy Kenber, 'Election 2019 result: how social media gave Labour false hope', The Times, 14 December 2019: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/election-2019-result-how-social-media-gave-labour-false-hope-5whzhnt3s

reinforcing the same core messages

- deliberate exploitation of the effect social media can have in increasing the "fluency" of talking points repeated on print or broadcast media or enabling "distributed spin" on running stories – made possible by the close coordination of digital and news functions at the centre of the campaign

- a willingness to allow creative experimentation with content, without slow or cumbersome sign-off procedures

- intensive testing of content for impact, that began when the new Leader took office in July 2019 and continued throughout the campaign; we were told the Conservatives tested 11,000 different ads compared to 2,500 tests by Labour in the same period

- a system of support for candidates in 50 target constituencies, provided by consultancy firm Westminster Digital, that allowed them to create their own, personalised, localised content to a professional standard that was reinforced by national messaging and themes.[114] Analysis by Valent Projects suggests that, since August, the company succeeded in raising their clients' social media followings by between ten and twenty per cent

- a network of supportive outriders that succeeded in drawing voters away from rival parties – from abrasive groups like the Campaign Against Corbynism Rebel Media, which was seen as drawing Labour Leave voters into their orbit, to less obviously political groups such as Working4UK or Parents' Choice. According to Valent Projects' research, as a rule, the groups did not acknowledge a link to the Conservative Party, although investigation often revealed a Conservative Councillor,[115] official or lobbyist[116] behind each.

Over the summer, and well ahead of the election, the Conservative Party was running hundreds of ads with slight differences in colour, wording and even using different emojis. Although Facebook's portal for political advertising doesn't show what criteria advertisers are using to identify those they want to reach, the content of the ads and relatively small budgets (often under £100) suggests they were being targeted at individual constituencies.

By using the statistical feedback provided to ad buyers on the performance of ads, the near £100,000 that the Conservative Party spent on the ads in the summer of 2019 would have bought immense amounts of constituency-level data on what messages work best with different groups of people, based on their ages, gender, area of work and political affiliation.[117]

By the time the election campaign began, the Conservatives were able to capitalise on the information they had accumulated. Their ads have been described as "laser-guided" – using neon graphics and up-tempo music to push a "Get Brexit Done"

114   'Under the radar: how do politicians use social media?', Sky News, 8 December 2019: https://youtu.be/eKlGj5tHpew

115   Will Hayward, 'How a Conservative politician uses Facebook to disguise party political smears on Jeremy Corbyn", Wales Online, 28 November 2019: https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/conservatives-facebook-corbyn-general-election-17324805

116   Rowland Manthorpe, 'General election: women accused after posting ads costing £17,000 on Facebook attack adds', Sky News, 7 December 2019: https://news.sky.com/story/general-election-woman-accused-after-posting-ads-costing-17-000-on-facebook-attacking-labour-11880162

117   Who Targets Me, 'What do Facebook Ads tell us about Parties' UK General Election Strategy?', Medium, 15 August 2019: https://medium.com/@WhoTargetsMe/what-do-facebook-ads-tell-us-about-parties-uk-general-election-strategy-af84dddb675: Who Targets Me, 'Conservatives' Boris ads primarily targeting men over 45', Medium, 5 August 2019: https://medium.com/@WhoTargetsMe/conservatives-boris-ads-primarily-targeting-men-over-45-1b3a6511d8fe

message to 300,000 men under 34; classical music, softer colours and additional pledges on the NHS and crime for 350,000 women over 55.[118] Towards the end of the campaign, the Conservatives ramped up its Facebook advertising, with 7,000 ads in early December – 90 per cent of which contained misleading claims, according to analysis by First Draft.

Clearly this approach proved highly effective, particularly in exploiting negative perceptions of Labour's Leader, with many candidates and campaigners reporting the impact of a surge in negative online campaigning in the final week of the campaign.

Figure 40: Conservative Party content testing examples, summer 2019
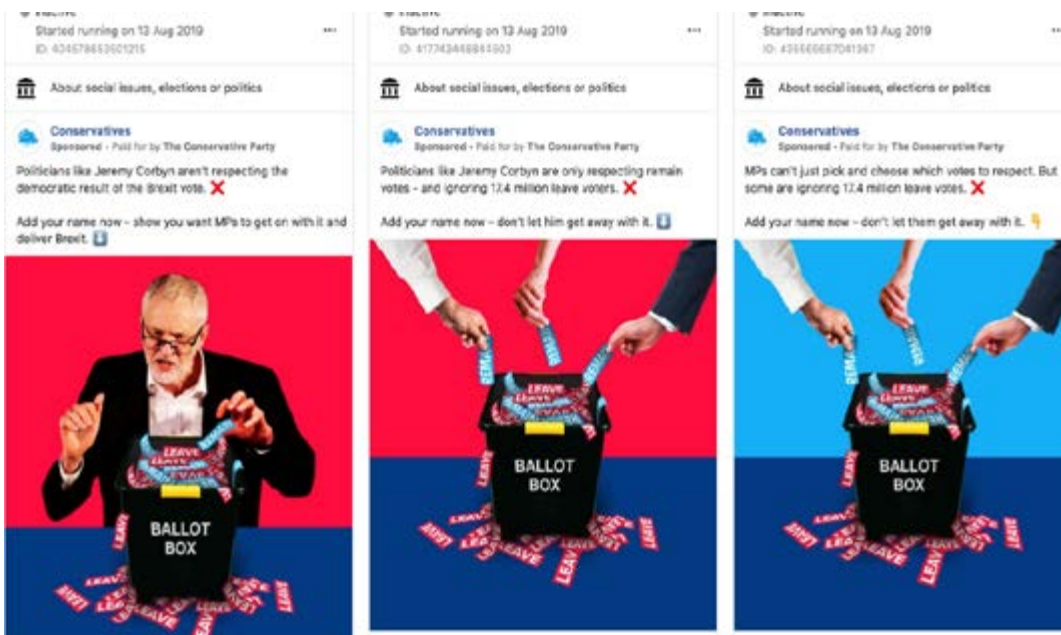
Source: "What do Facebook ads tell us about Parties' UK General Election Strategy?", Who Targets Me, Medium, Aug 2019 Link to Image and Embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2684479/

This was reinforced by "outrider" activities. Monitoring group "Who Targets Me" identified nine non-party groups that spent around £300,000 on Facebook ads in the month before the poll.[119]

118   Beth John and Carlotta Dotto, "UK Election: how political parties are targeting voters on Facebook, Google and Snapchat ads", First Draft, 14 November 2019: https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/uk-election-how-politi-cal-parties-are-targeting-voters-on-facebook-google-and-snapchat-ads/
119   Mark Bridge and Billy Kenber, 'Election 2019 result: how social media gave Labour false hope', The Times, 14 December 2019: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/election-2019-result-how-social-media-gave-la-bour-false-hope-5whzhnt3s

Figure 41: Conservative outrider page Facebook ad spend and reach

	Campaign	Budget	Reach
	Working4UK	£85,000 spent	4.25 million impressions
	Right to Rent. Right to Buy. Right to Own	£56,000 spent	2.7m million impressions
	Campaign Against Corbyn	£49,000 spent	2.5 million impressions
	Parents' Choice	£44,000 spent	2.2 million impressions
	City Action	£40,534 spent	2.1 million impressions

Source: Valent Projects

Source: Valent Projects Submission to the Commission *Link to table and embed:* https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2442426/

Local groups may also have had an important influence. For example, research conducted for this Commission by Centre for Countering Digital Hate identified a Facebook Group in Dudley which built followers by posting local news which hosted a large amount of anti-Labour and anti-Jeremy Corbyn content, with "comments" being used to organise protests against Jeremy Corbyn's visit to a local pensioners' club during the campaign; this story later appeared in *The Sun,* with the headline "Jeremy Corbyn heckled as 'dirty IRA scum' when he arrives in key Dudley marginal."[120] The account hasn't posted since 12 December 2019.[121]

Labour's online campaign reflected a general failure of integration and innovation

Reviews we commissioned from Valent Projects, CCDH and Common Knowledge show that, despite all the activity and resources invested, Labour's online campaign fell well short of the Conservatives in this election. The primary source of this shortcoming was the absence of strategic integration and structured innovation, identified as a fundamental organisational and cultural weakness in the previous chapter.

Labour lacked an imaginative strategy for digital campaigning. Online output was siloed off from broader strategy and communications, instead of being centrally integrated. The Party's social media channels simply became an additional broadcast platform, rather than a dynamic and responsive tool for targeting, engaging and persuading key groups of voters. Our communications with the voters remained one rather than two way, seriously limiting their effectiveness.

120   Holly Christodoulou, '"SCUM!" Jeremy Corbyn heckled as "dirty IRA scum" when he arrives in key Dudley marginal', The Sun, 22 November 2019: https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/politics/10396246/jeremy-corbyn-ira-scum-dudley-votes/
121   Campaign for Countering Digital Hate research for Labour Together

Valent Projects and CCDH found a lack of focus and – reflecting broader criticisms of Labour's communications effort – no consistent messaging strategy. The Conservatives' core message "Get Brexit Done" lent itself easily to the "distributed spin" approach, whereby supporters can pick up and disseminate frames and messages and help to shape audiences' views of the campaign and related news stories. By contrast, the proliferation of different messages and policies in Labour's online campaign made it harder for online supporters to find a core message to reinforce, and made it easier for them to get diverted into less helpful activities such as criticising the BBC's election coverage.[122]

As in other areas, Labour was not well-prepared for the online campaign when it began. Valent Projects' research shows that the Conservatives began using Facebook to stress test messaging and imagery in the summer, as soon as Boris Johnson was elected as their Leader. Labour only began similar testing once the election had been called. In August, independent online monitoring group "Who Targets Me" noted that, while the Conservatives were investing heavily in data collection and attack ads, Labour's strategy was "unclear" and "notably less disciplined".[123]

Labour's online campaign was weakened by a lack of professionalism and capacity

According to the findings of the reviews we commissioned, the fast-moving nature of online campaigning saw Labour's collective levels of skill and understanding fall well behind the curve. Labour does not have enough politicians, staff or activists up-to-speed on digital campaign techniques – something the Conservatives addressed by handing most of it over to a commercial consultancy.

Symptomatic weaknesses included:

- a senior level focus on limited metrics such as number of shares, rather than more meaningful measures of impact and quality of interactions

- a continued focus of attention by MPs and parliamentary candidates on Twitter, despite the far greater importance of other platforms (such as Facebook or Instagram) for the voters they need to reach

- a failure to understand how effective content and ongoing optimisation for engagement, in relation to algorithms operated by platforms like Facebook, can result in far greater views and reach than static and costly paid ads

- an insufficient commitment to message experimentation and testing; available online evidence suggests Labour conducted far fewer content tests than the Conservatives, and tended to settle on content, rather than testing continuously

- overemphasis on Twitter and likes for Facebook pages, both of which focus on one-way communication, and the failure to use forums like Whatsapp groups and Facebook groups more effectively. For example, Labour support among Hindu voters fell significantly in this election, due to the extensive sharing of

122   Campaign for Countering Digital Hate research for Labour Together
123   Who Targets Me, 'What do Facebook Ads tell us about Parties' UK General Election Strategy?', Medium, 15 August 2019: https://medium.com/@WhoTargetsMe/what-do-facebook-ads-tell-us-about-parties-uk-general-election-strategy-af84dddb675

anti-Labour content across a network of Whatsapp groups[124]. Labour has yet to work out how to respond to this more invisible and engagement-driven form of social media campaigning

Labour's online campaigning suffered from poor internal coordination

Labour's confused messaging was compounded by the number of people involved in producing or approving content without any shared framework or strategy. It's clear from all submissions that little thought was given as to how different platforms, channels and messengers across the Party could be used effectively to reach different audiences, both members and voters.

An organogram prepared for this Review by Common Knowledge shows multiple social media teams across the Party, without clear lines of communication or coordination with each other. The Leader's Office established a separate social media team of eight, which had no clear relationships to the team in HQ. This led to internal battles, leaked reports and frustration on both sides.[125] The involvement of an agency in message testing further complicated the split responsibilities.

The Commission heard that the Party's digital campaign team were held back by a lack of creative freedom, and that cumbersome sign-off processes were a problem, despite it being public knowledge that the Conservatives knew a key weakness of their 2017 digital campaign had been slow and unresponsive decision-making.[126] We were told there was a significant time lag between social media content being produced and it then being shared on the Party's social media channels, reducing Labour's ability to manoeuvre in a fast-moving online environment.

Problems of leadership and coordination at the centre were compounded by insufficient guidance, support and leadership given to Parliamentary Candidates and CLPs, who were left to devise their own strategies, without professional support or a framework of consistent messaging.

Labour Party staff certainly did their best – for example, the Campaign Office for Rosie Duffield's successful campaign in Canterbury "welcomed the exceptional support with social media from the Regional Office team".[127]

However, lack of coordination from the centre meant the level of social media support available to candidates varied, depending on the resource available to regions and nations. The digital campaign was highly centralised, with little resource given to Regional Offices for content production and minimal training or support for candidates to produce content. Many Labour candidates and activists did not know how to use the Promote tool, or found it difficult and cumbersome. Candidates often did not understand how to use Facebook effectively, let alone shoot quality videos or create shareable content. One defeated MP complained that the Party did not "inform or consult us on what Facebook/social media they were directing and to

124   Rowland Manthorpe, 'General election: Whatsapp messages urge British Hindus to vote against Labour', Sky News, 8 November 2019: https://news.sky.com/story/general-election-whatsapp-messages-urge-british-hindus-to-vote-against-labour-11856692

125   Ned Simons, 'Jeremy Corbyn's digital team hits out at Labour Party's Online Election Performance', Huffington Post, 21 January 2020: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/jeremy-corbyns-digital-operation-labour-election-performance_uk_5e309224c5b6e8375f641e75

126   Tim Ross and Tom McTague, Betting the House: The Inside Story of the 2017 Election, Chapter 9, Biteback, 2017.

127   Pete Smith, written submission to Labour Together

which voters, so our own could complement these".[128] Another told us "the internal mechanics of getting social media to work was terrible in 2017 and 2019… Real difficulties with Promote – we weren't able to use it in either election".

This contrasts strongly with the effective use by the Conservatives of a professional consultancy to support candidates' social media campaigning in key constituencies, which the review we commissioned from Valent Projects showed to be a key ingredient in the Conservatives' online success.

Labour's online supporters did not reach or win over a wide enough range of voters

Labour-friendly organisations and individuals with large social media followings clearly played a role in engaging and mobilising Labour activists and supporters.

Momentum, for example, believe they "significantly outperformed the Party in terms of member engagement and mobilisation while also filling substantial gaps in Labour's campaign". This included what they saw as a "dramatically" improved social media performance, including:

- a targeted online advertising campaign that resulted in the registration of approximately 201,000 voters in key marginals

- 106 million social media video views, more than twice the level of their 2017 campaign

However, it is unclear what effect many Labour-friendly organisations and individuals had in broadening Labour's support. One digital consultant commented: "While organically Labour did really well…most of the views and shares came from people who were already going to vote Labour."[129]

The review conducted for us by CCDH showed that many alternative media sources have declined in reach since the 2017 election, partly due to changes in Facebook's newsfeed algorithms, which gave greater prominence to content posted by friends and family and discussions taking place within Facebook groups or forums, and less to "followed" pages.[130]

These outlets also tend to operate in silos, focused on internal Labour Party processes and debates taking place within "the Left". They were not focused on reaching across political divides, to target particular demographic or interest groups, or undecided voters.

We analysed ten of the most active Labour supporting Twitter accounts: in total, these accounts collectively have 667,600 followers, but their unique reach is half of this, as they collectively only have 373,800 unique followers. Of those 373,800 unique followers: 257,000 follow just one of the ten accounts, while 115,800 follow multiple accounts. This shows that the large following of many "left-wing" Twitter accounts could actually be the result of a much smaller number of accounts

128   Helen Goodman, written submission to Labour Together
129   Mark Bridge and Billy Kenber, 'Election 2019 result: how social media gave Labour false hope', The Times, 14 December 2019: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/election-2019-result-how-social-media-gave-la-bour-false-hope-5whzhnt3s
130   Rowland Manthorpe, 'The UK's left is scrambling to adapt to Facebook's algorithm change', Wired, 20 March 2018: https://www.wired.co.uk/article/facebook-algorithm-changes-engagement-labour

just following each other, resulting in little reach beyond those who are already supportive of Labour.[131]

Figure 42: Twitter audiences of "Left outrider" accounts

Handles	Number of Followers
@ToryFibs	126957
@PeterStefanovi2	112435
@Rachael_Swindon	77687
@AaronBastani	76560
@SocialistVoice	71233
@TomLondon6	60724
@ThePileus	53835
@ScouseGirlMedia	38385
@chelleryn99	27834
@Leftiestats	21558

Total supposed audience of 667,608 followers

257,987 accounts follow just one account

+

115,861 accounts follow multiple accounts

Source: Correct as of 30th March 2020, data extracted from Twitter

As indicated above, there was not a strong strategy for creating content for supporters that would likely be picked up and shared further to broader audiences. Occasions when Labour's Twitter supporters reached the widest audiences were often in the context of issues unlikely to win over new supporters, such as disagreements over the Party's handing of anti-Semitism or criticism of the BBC's reporting of the election.[132]

131   Labour Together analysis, correct as of 30 March 2020, data extracted from Twitter.
132   Campaign for Countering Digital Hate research for Labour Together.

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

- Despite all the activity and resources invested, Labour lost the online campaign in an election where it was more important than ever before.

- Whilst the Tories learnt from their failure online in 2017, Labour did not invest and strengthen its online capacity, making use of the brightest and the best available. The groundwork was not properly laid to test strategy, tactics or messages ahead of the 2019 election campaign.

- Online campaigning was hamstrung because it was siloed off from broader strategy and communications rather than centrally integrated. Poor internal coordination, exacerbated by factional tensions, resulted in slow, inconsistent decision making and an inability to act quickly.

- Our digital infrastructure was underfunded and inadequate. Candidates and local party campaigners found it very difficult to access and use the tools or support necessary to wage the campaign online consistently enough. Some of these systems were creaking in 2017, but the lack of internal reflection meant that issues went unresolved.

- Not enough was done to rebut attacks in digital spaces or elsewhere against the leadership, our Brexit position, or to reassure people about our policies and plans for the country. The Party's social media channels became simply an additional broadcast platform rather than a dynamic and responsive tool for targeting, engaging and persuading groups of voters.

- Labour's supporters online spent too much of the campaign talking to themselves rather than reaching out to convince swing voters to support Labour. In contrast the Tory online presence was vastly improved from 2017, at national and local level, using proxies to attack Labour and build support for the Conservative campaign in key seats. The Conservatives central message of "Get Brexit done" lent itself to their very effective approach to organic shares and "distributed spin" online.

CHAPTER SIX

THE GROUND CAMPAIGN

- Labour's ground campaign should have been its strong point
- Disunity and factionalism undermined the Party's efforts
- Labour is failing to learn and adapt in a fast-changing campaigning environment
- Efforts were misdirected and resources misallocated
- Support for local campaigns was weakened by high staff turnover and inexperience
- Candidates and campaigners needed more messaging and policy support
- Labour's digital infrastructure and campaigning tools failed on multiple fronts
- Levels of membership involvement are uneven, with campaigning capacity hollowed out in many places
- Community organising was not well integrated with the wider campaign effort
- The potential of our affiliated trade unions was not mobilised
- Labour's local government base is not always effectively linked in

Labour's ground campaign should have been its strong point

Labour's ground campaign is traditionally seen as our strong point, and might have been expected to be even more so, given the recent growth in membership. This strength was recognised by our Conservative opponents, who reportedly regarded Labour's active membership and large-scale ground campaign as the "juggernaut" that blocked their advance in 2017.

Labour went in to the 2019 general election campaign with significant resources to mobilise:

- At the end of 2018, Labour had over 518,659 constituency members, down from its 2017 peak of 564,443 – but still two and a half times as many as in 2015.

- According to Labour's annual report, 26,000 had used Organise, the primary tool for mobilising volunteers.

- In 2018, Labour had 320 full-time staff, and 59 part-time, spread across Regional Offices and headquarters. The Party had advertised for 17 Trainee Organisers across nine regions in summer 2018.[133]

- At its peak, Labour's Community Organising Unit employed a team of 20

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133   Published job advert at http://w4mpjobs.org/JobDetails.aspx?jobid=66461

Community Organisers and 9 Digital Organisers. This included 17 Community Organisers working across the UK with five members of staff seconded to the Member Mobilisation team, along with trainee Organisers working across the country.[134]

- Labour's ground campaign was also supported – as always – by the significant organisational and volunteer capacity of its many community-based allies, particularly of its affiliated trade unions.

Yet the evidence we have received tells us that, although some activists on the ground saw their local campaigns as a strong point, the national campaign experienced multiple failures.

Not all of these problems were unique to this election, and many have been issues for several elections. However, in a particularly challenging election where it was hoped that mobilisation of campaigners on the ground would offset other disadvantages, they made for major lost opportunities.

Key problems identified in the evidence received by this Commission included:

- Efforts were not effectively directed, and resources misallocated
- National support for local campaigns was weakened by systemic faults and problems
- Campaigners felt they needed more support on messaging and policy
- Labour's infrastructure and digital tools failed on multiple fronts
- Levels of membership involvement and capacity were not where they were needed most
- Community organising was not always well integrated with the wider campaign effort
- Disunity and factionalism undermined the Party's efforts
- The potential of our affiliated trade unions was not fully mobilised

Mobilisation of large numbers of volunteers was felt by our 11,060 survey respondents to be the main strength of the campaign. "The amount of people the party was able to organise was astounding"

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

"We had lots of people and very enthusiastic, young volunteers"

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

"Door-to-door canvassing" was by far Labour's "most effective" way of "getting its message across" compared to social and traditional media.

Yet our respondents had divided views on the effectiveness of Labour's ground campaign, with 44 per cent judging it to be "quite effective" or "very effective", but 47 per cent saying it was "not very effective" or "not effective at all".

134   Community Organising Unit, written submission

Disunity and factionalism undermined the Party's efforts

This commission has received evidence that there was a politicisation of staff in operational roles, meaning that decisions made during the General Election were not led by evidence. We were told that, at Southside (Labour's London base), contentious and unconstructive meetings between senior managers and directors became the norm. Both current and former staff have told us that they witnessed a toxic culture take hold, resulting in low staff morale, with many staff being put under undue pressure and stress.

Lack of agreement around the Party's aims left staff uncertain of their role and objectives within the wider plan. Lack of trust fostered a culture of secrecy that compounded this problem. Staff reported that, day to day, they didn't know what to get on with or what campaign interventions they should be preparing for.

This commission notes that factional tensions and disunity amongst the staffing team is now the subject of a major independent inquiry, following the leaking of a report into the Party's handling of anti-Semitism allegations. Whilst it is not for the Commission to comment while the inquiry is progressing, it is clear that disunity and factionalism also seriously undermined the Party's efforts in the 2019 campaign.

As this Commission has received some evidence containing troubling allegations and detailing experiences of structural discrimination including anti-Semitism, anti-black racism and misogyny, we also support that the inquiry includes explicitly in its frame of reference investigation into "the extent of racist, sexist and other discriminatory culture within Labour Party workplaces".

> *"There is no culture, no feeling of community as no one supports each other, which makes the London office feel very hostile and cold."*
>
> **>** `Former Labour staff member`

> *"Very little is ever written down, therefore there is poor communication and dissemination of information, and it's close to impossible in terms of having an accurate picture of what is required. This is time consuming and not productive, minutes are not shared or taken (often people claim it is to do with leaks). Due to things not being written down or recorded, we end up with multiple meetings with often seemingly the same agenda with more or less the same people, which is totally a waste of time."*
>
> **>** `Current Labour staff member`

At the local level, many Constituency Labour Parties have been consumed by highly factional battles over motions and internal elections, resulting in low membership engagement.

Many of our 11,060 survey respondents indicated that they saw "factionalism" as a critical weakness in the Party's organisation. Respondents from across the Party described the damage to working relationships, and discouragement felt by dedicated activists, as a result of the Party's internal divisions.

There is also a view among some MPs that trigger ballots were a particularly stressful and distracting process for candidates to be put through, at the expense of

work focused on the wider electorate in the constituency.[135]

> *"I have campaigned my socks off for Labour in the past. There is nothing like door-knocking to really get a grip on your local area and to hear the authentic voices from your community... I felt I was chased out of my local CLP because of my vocal complaints about anti-Semitism within the party... The atmosphere locally was divisive, hostile, unwelcoming and fractious. Campaigns and winning elections rely on collaborative, friendly effort."*

> `Labour Together Survey Respondent`

> *"I have campaigned actively against Austerity since 2011. I joined the Labour Party in 2017 to further those aims. I have been viewed with suspicion, bullied, and threatened in Messenger and by email because I have tried to stand up for a Black Woman against the endemic structural racism in the Party."*

> `Labour Together Survey Respondent`

> *"The party needs an open debate where people listen to each other. This will probably not happen. For example, people will argue their side of the Brexit policy while attacking the downfalls of the other side, without discussing or accepting the downfalls of their side too. Factions in the party are staying put with their candidates and strategy, without debating and thinking of how to win the next election. I joined the party because of Corbyn. I am forever indebted to the man on a personal level. However, it's over now and we lost and the blame sits on us all."*

> `Labour Together Survey Respondent`

> *"We need to change the culture, until we do that, we can't win... It shouldn't be the case that the most stressful meeting for anyone who is elected is their own CLP meeting. It's a toxic environment. We have to sort that out. While so much energy is being drained into fighting, it's impossible to be outward facing... Also there's a fundamental hypocrisy, people think we treat people fairly and decently, but that's not mirrored in our behaviour to each other."*

> `Anonymous submission`

> *"People stopped going to CLP meetings. I used to love them, ended up being a place I dreaded"*

> `Anonymous submission`

The way that Scottish MPs coordinated and supported each other was also referenced in our candidate interviews. A lack of co-ordination and divisions over the policy towards independence, meant the Party was not unified in working together to defend key seats.

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135   Heywood and Middleton CLP written submission to Labour Together, 2020

Labour is failing to learn and adapt in a fast-changing campaigning environment

The political landscape in which Labour is campaigning is constantly changing. As party loyalty decreases and new online political spaces emerge, Labour must innovate to stay ahead. Our Commission heard strong evidence that Labour, like many traditional progressive political parties, is failing to adapt to a changing world, with a strong centralising tendency and risk-averse culture. Little innovation in campaigning is attempted beyond the isolated and limited efforts of individual candidates, organisers and activists.

It is clear that running through Labour's campaign were tensions between those newly involved in the Party, who found it bureaucratic and resistant to change, while more longstanding campaigners sometimes felt frustrated with others' lack of experience[136]

Many who fed into our Review argued that Labour's campaign practices have not moved with the times and have become outdated.

For example, in the context of declining voter loyalty and increased switching described in Chapter 2, new campaign methods may become even more important. Some argue that the Party's approach to voter contact should be less "transactional" and more "relational" and incorporate more "persuasive" canvassing alongside traditional "Get Out The Vote" techniques. We make recommendations on this in Chapter 9.

There is also a need to adapt and tailor approaches to different contexts. The seats Labour has lost and needs to regain – and those that might newly become viable targets – are in very different constituencies with very different situations. Some will have a strong fabric of community organisations, others may be more fragmented or atomised. Some CLPs may have small but active memberships, but good relationships with the community, while others may have large memberships which are not mobilised. Generic, one-size-fits-all organising models and skillsets will not meet the complex challenge the Party faces.

> *"I've always been a strong believer in door knocking. I do it because I enjoy it. But I would like someone to tell me if it is worthwhile... Not exciting. No exciting tools. No experiments. No thinking outside the box. Some of that ties to policy, as we enter the fourth industrial revolution, we have augmented reality companies that could have helped, could have been imaginative and exciting. Where was the fun part. The funny posters that took the mick out of Boris. Where was the David Cameron meme generator? No fun giggly bits? Campaign in the run up to Xmas, there was no personality to the campaign"*
>
> **❯ Ruth Smeeth, Former MP for Stoke-on-Trent North**

> *"Late 90s and early 00s the strategy was to target just those who vote Labour and narrow down on that pool, but actually if you're dealing with voter disillusion this doesn't work... targeting the captive audience doesn't make sense, as they are no longer certain or a core vote. When we were out canvassing using recommended voter selections on Contact Creator, whole houses were missed for reasons that were not easily identified. We need*

136   Labour Together Survey Respondents; Common Knowledge research for Labour Together.

to make sure the selections Contact Creator throws out make sense for the election we are fighting, not 3 or 4 elections ago..."

> Richard Burden, Former MP for Birmingham Northfield

"My seat is 240 square miles made up of many villages – and those villages are all very different. This geographical factor has a huge impact...we must resource candidates in rural areas properly. Posted materials are key...it is too difficult to get big teams of canvassers out. The needs of these smaller villages are all very different. This is not one community, but many."

> Susan Elan Jones, Former MP for Clwyd South

Efforts were misdirected and resources misallocated

A mismatch of resources with tactical and strategic requirements was, in part, the inevitable result of the targeting issues identified in [Chapter 4](). In addition, the geographical distribution of Labour's most active members is concentrated in cities, and not where the electoral challenge actually was in this election. However, the Party failed to offset these factors and didn't even get sufficient support to many of those seats it had identified as targets.

Labour's internal analysis is reported to have indicated that during the short campaign, of 135 key marginals, only 25 saw contact rates above 20 per cent, while 56 saw contact rates of just ten per cent or lower. London marginals recorded 23,000 contacts - 28 per cent of eligible voters – while in Scottish marginals there was a contact rate of just 6.4 per cent, contact with 4,745 voters,.[137]

When we asked our 11,060 respondents to say what was least effective about how the ground campaign was organised, a common response was the inefficient deployment of volunteers and resources.

"Duplication of a small number of contacts. Large areas of voters not contacted"

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

"We were in what should've been a safe seat, but we had been telling the regional office for months that it was looking bad. We got no help until weeks into the election. Some doorknocking sessions we had 4 people, whereas a seat down the road which we had no chance of gaining was getting over a hundred members sent there"

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

Momentum's written submission to Labour Together acknowledged the impact of their campaign was undermined by, among other things, "targeting based on expectations set by the 2017 result". After "early high mobilisations in London and some other key urban areas" Momentum adjusted My Campaign Map "to encourage more activists to canvas in non-metropolitan areas", and believe they "had some success in increasing mobilisations in marginal seats accessible from metropolitan areas". [138]

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137   Kate Proctor, 'Labour's canvassing strategy had "major deficiencies", leaked report says', The Guardian, 7 February 2020: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/07/labours-canvassing-strategy-had-major-deficiencies-leaked-report-says
138   Momentum, written submission.

Defeated MPs we spoke to describe the deployment of resources as "haphazard", with many telling us they felt they had run good local campaigns, but their effectiveness was limited by little regional or central support.

Support for local campaigns was weakened by high staff turnover and inexperience

The Commission heard from many who told us how appreciative they were of support from Labour Party staff. Yet there were also many frustrations. Defeated MPs told us they felt let down by the support available to reinforce their local campaigns. A common example of this was the arrival of the direct mail (campaign leaflets that are sent to voters) after the postal vote deadlines.

> *"Bunch of leaflets delivered to get registered to vote arrived day after deadline. Freepost leaflets went out possibly after postal votes."*
>
> ❯ David Hanson, Former MP for Delyn

> *"Freepost was being delivered on the 5th Dec, which was a week after the postal votes dropped even though we knew it was not going to work; Regional Offices did argue against this, but they were not listened to."*
>
> ❯ Susan Dungworth, PPC for Blyth Valley

We learned that hiring and finance was a problem for a number of Southside teams, and that regional staff had voiced concerns that organisers were not always hired quickly enough.[139] Candidates and campaigners on the ground found organisers and other staff to be less experienced than in 2017, with many only very recently employed.[140]

In Scotland, the high level of churn of staff and teams is epitomised by the loss of the Party's General Secretary in the run up to the election. This had a destabilising impact on the Scottish Party and meant that new staff, who had never run a national campaign before, were immediately expected to run a General Election campaign. Scottish candidates we spoke to felt the support available to them was minimal.

> *"People are multi-tasking in jobs they are not qualified or experienced to do. A number of press releases have to be re-released. Doesn't characterise an organisation that is ready for government or indeed second party status…. Even if you look at when we arrived in 2017 there was no mentoring or support on being an MP. No structure…No regular meetings between Scottish MPs. One away day in summer of 2017 with MSP's and that was it."*
>
> ❯ Martin Whitfield, Former MP for East Lothian

Candidates and campaigners needed more support on messaging and policy

139   Common Knowledge research for Labour Together
140   Defeated MP interviews and Momentum submission to Labour Together

Weaknesses in the Party's messaging and communications were compounded by poor quality guidance on core campaign messages and headline policies to local candidates and campaigns. Candidates had little guidance on policy beyond Party press releases – in contrast to previous elections, in which the Party provided draft responses to campaign emails and phone conferences with Shadow Cabinet members.[141] In some cases, local campaigns and candidates succeeded in making up for some of these weaknesses with their own local and personal strategies.[142]

Candidates were left to design their own freepost addresses (one of the most valuable outputs to any campaign) and leaflets, with little or no common messaging, guidance on best practice, or effective and tested ideas. Inevitably, this resulted in uneven and inconsistent outcomes.

A number of candidates were critical of the information they were provided with in daily updates. While the daily Welsh emails were described as "helpful", PLP briefings were described as "just too long and impossible to read" as well as too late ("needs to come first thing in the morning so we can actually use it").[143]

This lack of support to local candidates and campaigners on Labour's messages and policies was rendered particularly problematic by the Party's reliance on multiple policy announcements to try to influence news coverage, noted above. A rapid stream of often unfamiliar new policies left spokespeople and canvassers struggling to keep up, and risked reinforcing negative perceptions of Labour's policy agenda as implausible and insufficiently thought-through.

Concerns were also raised over the lack of briefing for UK Labour Shadow Cabinet Members on Welsh and Scottish devolved policy and issues ahead of major media appearances in those locations or when they were up against prominent figures from Plaid Cymru or the SNP. As Wales is currently the only UK Labour-led administration, this was particularly a problem, as the opposition were able to attack Labour on its current record in government in Wales without Labour spokespeople being adequately prepared to respond.

Labour's digital infrastructure and campaigning tools failed on multiple fronts

Over recent elections, digital technologies have become increasingly critical to equipping and empowering local candidates and campaigners and delivering a well-coordinated, well-targeted, high-quality ground campaign. In this election, they were a significant source of weakness.

Vital systems and platforms were frequently unreliable, slow, hard to use, glitch-ridden, or tied up by complicated access restrictions. Examples included:

- Labour Connect, Labour's tool for designing freeposts, direct mails and leaflets, frequently crashed and was extremely slow, leading to serious delays

- Dialogue, Labour's online phonebank, wasn't available to use until late in the campaign and kept crashing

- Promote, Labour's targeted digital advertising platform, was so hard to use that

141   Mary Wimbury, written submission to Labour Together
142   Helen Goodman, written submission to Labour Together
143   Faisal Rashid, Labour Together interview

many campaigns did not take advantage of it

- Contact Creator, Labour's elections and campaign database, didn't have the capacity to cope with high levels of data input

These problems made it extremely difficult for local candidates and campaigners – who are for the most part unpaid volunteers – to do essential parts of their job, such as producing and posting campaign materials, organising phone banks or canvassing sessions, or recording and reviewing voter contact data. In many cases local campaigns saw these tools as creating more problems than they solved, and resorted to their own workarounds, including buying their own burner phones and using local print and copy services.

> *"Dialogue just didn't work. We had to buy burner phones."*
>
> › Nic Dakin, Former MP for Scunthorpe

> *"My CLP has rarely, if EVER, used Contact Creator, Insight or Promote."*
>
> › CLP Secretary

> *"Dialogue was not up and running until very late and also kept crashing"*
>
> › Labour Together Survey Respondent

> *"The digital tools were useless. We either couldn't use them like Promote or it was very hard to make them work... The literature production system was really bad and couldn't have been worse. There were real issues with functionality and being able to log in, and when it did work there was no copy or paste function and no saving, so when it crashed you lost everything, and it crashed often... My agent had to get up at 3am just so he could log into the system, when we thought it would be quieter, to design our leaflets."*
>
> › Anonymous Labour Candidate

> *"Campaign creator was buggy. We used it for two address freeposts but then designed our own leaflets. It would be helpful if there was a national database of different leaflets – library of leaflets."*
>
> › Paul Sweeney, Former MP for Glasgow North East

The tools were clearly not built to be responsive to the needs of CLPs and members. The training guides, which often ran to more than 30 pages, were too long and complex to be of much use to many candidates and organisers. Problems of usability, combined with a lack of reliability, resulted in low levels of confidence and adoption of digital tools across the Party, meaning their potential to enhance Labour's campaign simply wasn't harnessed.

Again, factional rivalries also played a role here. We were told that access to information or tools such as Contact Creator, Insight and Mosaic was often influenced by local or national power struggles, disempowering many CLPs and members. Lack of training and guidance on GDPR rules meant this could be used as a justification for gatekeeping.

> *"Bore them into submission tactics" are required to get access to digital tools"*

> `CLP Officer`

> *"GDPR, or the party's interpretation of it, has meant that the only way I can contact our members is through a national email system that doesn't work effectively, adequately, or often enough... Over many years, administrative power has been removed from CLPs and gobbled up by the centre — this is bad enough: but when the centre has failed to create reliable systems, it's worse."*

> `CLP Officer`

Although a general election had been likely for some time, systems had not been adequately upgraded, user-tested, debugged and prepared for the inevitable rapid scale-up of demand that would be placed upon them. The Party had not planned or invested enough money and resources to deliver the data-driven, technologically sophisticated campaign it was promising.

A lack of full-time development staff meant that a backlog of improvements, fixes and new features for tools like Dialogue, Organise and Events were still outstanding when the election began. It had only one permanent software developer, responsible for seven digital systems, meant for use by 500,000 members, a user-base larger than many technology companies that hire significantly more engineers. Moreover, a hiring embargo meant that agency developers could not be brought in to do critical work on the dialogue system until after the election began, meaning the team was only its full size two weeks in, despite its critical role in campaigning. Half-way through the election campaign, Labour's Director of Technology resigned after just two years in office.

The lack of investment and resource suggests a collective failure of the Party to prioritise digital transformation, and an absence of strong technical leadership that could have provided oversight, analysis, coordination and advocacy. This was reinforced by factional rivalries, which in turn reinforced gatekeeping mentalities and resistance to new ideas and user consultation.

We learned that a "Digital Transformation team" (skilled former staff of the Government Digital Service) brought into the Party a few years previously had collectively resigned after six months, describing it as "the most miserable experience of their professional lives"[144]. Staff who worked on the project said the effort lacked buy-in from senior management, with the team denied access to key tools like Contact Creator.

We were told that digital volunteers were given a bigger role in 2017, but by 2019 these volunteer communities felt completely isolated from the Labour Party machine. From Coders for Labour and the Momentum Tech Network to the much more active Campaign Lab, Labour members have huge untapped technical skills. As the code to Labour's tools is closed and not documented, even to members, these communities are not able to contribute towards the Party's digital infrastructure, such as fixing bugs, adding simple improvements to usability, or additional features. They also do not have any access to Party data, so volunteer

144   Common Knowledge interview with former staff member, submitted to Labour Together 2020

data science capacity (which is particularly large within the Campaign Lab community) is not being used.

All this is evidence of the Party's failure to evolve in an increasingly digital context. This lack of investment in digital capacity, and lack of focus on digital transformation, is completely out of step with most other modern organisations. Digital technology is not an optional add-on or enhancement, but the core of how effective businesses, organisations and movements now operate. It is revolutionising every part of our economy and society, and political campaigning is no exception to this.

Levels of membership involvement are uneven, with campaigning capacity hollowed out in many places

Labour's activist base is its key advantage on the ground – and levels of mobilisation in this election were among the highest ever achieved. It wasn't hard for members to find things to do in the campaign. 65 per cent of our 11,060 survey respondents thought it was easy to get involved in campaigning. The main ways for them to find out were emails from CLPs (28 per cent of responses), CLP Facebook groups (14 per cent) and Momentum's My Campaign Map (11 per cent).

Yet despite the large numbers of members and volunteers Labour could call on in the 2019 election, there are serious problems around both their distribution and representativeness. It was far easier to mobilise members to work in marginals around London and other major cities than in constituencies in Scotland, for example, which saw much lower voter contact rates.

Bussing campaigners to vulnerable constituencies has limitations as a response to this problem. Respondents to our survey highlighted "lack of representativeness amongst canvassers" as a key weakness in Labour's ground campaign, highlighting the importance of building a movement that reflects the communities it is trying to engage.[145]

Many of the constituencies lost to the Conservatives in this election had struggled to muster local campaigns. Membership had been hollowed out or disengaged from Party work over multiple election cycles, combining in some cases with loss of council seats. The defeated candidate for Dudley South (which was lost by Labour in 2005) compared the 300 Party members in the constituency with 3,000 in Lambeth, where she is a councillor.

These problems will become even more acute in the absence of a Labour MP. Labour faces a huge challenge in learning, or remembering, how to rebuild membership and campaign capacity in areas where it has been lost.

> *"We need to show a wider range of individuals on the doorstep as representative of labour's movement"*

> Labour Together survey respondent

> *"The Party needs a plan to increase active membership outside of London and outside of cities. This will make us far more credible in our local communities*

145   Christine Berry, 'Long read: Lessons from the 2019 election result', 20 December 2019: https://www.chris-tineberry.net/2019/12/long-read-lessons-from-the-2019-election-result/

> *- bussed in activists are less effective than neighbours."*

> **>** `Labour Together survey respondent`

> *"We need to put resources into constituencies with a small membership base to help them increase, so that they have stronger campaigning teams by 2023/4."*

> **>** `Labour Together Survey Respondent`

Despite good intentions, the Party did not succeed in translating the enthusiasm of an expanded membership base into higher levels of local engagement outside the campaign period itself. The Commission notes evidence of a lack of "year-round" levels of activity ahead of the election, especially in parts of the country with small numbers of members, which is critical, both to maintaining Labour's visibility and legitimacy in communities and to building up voter ID data needed to direct efforts when the campaign begins. The resulting reliance on paid Organisers to conduct essential voter contact work impacted on their ability to free up time for other forms of member and community engagement.

This in turn was partly due to a general lack of support, guidance and training for members. Newly involved activists were inevitably unfamiliar with Party rules, procedures, techniques and structures, while CLP officers were given little support or advice on how best to induct, integrate and build relationships with new members. Defeated MPs felt that volunteers tended to be less experienced than in 2017. On the other hand, some new activists found the Party unreceptive to their desire to become involved, and felt that the limited ways of becoming involved – primarily, door-knocking or standing for a local position in the CLP – did not allow the Party to make full use of the time and skills of new members.

> *"We've generally seen the Membership Officer role as an administrative one, but I guess we should have a strategy"*

> **>** `CLP Executive committee member in the South East`

> *"Local communities and non-active members need to feel part of something more than a campaign machine."*

> **>** `Labour Together Survey Respondent`

> *"We need to become more focused on building the extra-parliamentary machine, local CLPs, national political campaigns outside of Parliament, growing the party and making inactive members active. Our greatest strength is that we are a mass movement, we need to utilise this resource."*

> **>** `Labour Together Survey Respondent`

Community organising was not well integrated with the wider campaign effort

Labour's experience with community organising illustrates its ongoing difficulties with strategic integration and innovation.

The Party has sought to integrate community organising methods for some time, as seen in the work of Movement For Change and the involvement of Arnie Graf in Labour's campaigning before the 2015 election. Following the 2017 election,

the Party took a different approach of hiring new Community Organisers to work alongside existing staff and members.

Labour's 2019 Annual Report stated that "our investment in community organising is starting to show tangible results as our team of Community Organisers across the UK become fully integrated with the regional teams".[146] However, one of the biggest problems of the 2019 campaign was a failure of integration and coordination between community organising and other campaign work.

In their submission to the review, the Community Organising Unit provided accounts of some strong local campaigns and mobilisations it helped to seed or build relationships with, around issues such as housing in Putney, Hendon and Westminster; diversity and community in Broxtowe; recycling facilities in Carmarthenshire; or health and community services in Wolverhampton or Rushcliffe.

However, the establishment of a new community organising structure side-by-side with older, parallel and sometimes conflicting systems created its own problems of strategic coordination and integration.

The roles and responsibilities of the Community Organising Unit weren't clearly understood across the Party. Often, they were confused with the Training Team or were expected to fulfil the role of election organiser. Often they were confused with the Training Team or were expected to fulfil the role of election organiser. Confusion over different kinds of organisers (trainee, community and regional), their functions and level of training meant that some candidates felt they did not have enough support in terms of core campaign functions (eg. running boards, promise data).

There was confusion around the extent to which their performance should be judged on voter contact rates, or the role of their engagement events in Party policy formation. Some Labour Party staff felt that the Community Organising Unit worked at odds with their efforts and consumed campaign resources at their expense,[147] while others felt the Community Organising team was subject to a level of pressure and scrutiny not applied to other parts of the operation.[148] Too often, the result was unproductive interpersonal or inter-organisational tensions, where there should have been cooperation and synergy.

As noted above, much of this is a symptomatic consequence of the historic unresolved tensions between community organising models and traditional electioneering. In this election, cultural and organisational fault lines were reinforced by political and "factional" divisions, but the basic clash of philosophies and priorities has proved an obstacle to the Party's efforts to learn from community organising in the past, including the 2010 to 2015 period.[149]

146   Annual Report 2019, Labour Party: https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/NEC-Annual-Report-2019.pdf
147   Kevin Schofield, 'GMB Union condemns Labour bosses over claims "community organisers" were success despite election drubbing', Politics Home, 28 January 2020: https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/labour-party/news/109459/gmb-union-condemns-labour-bosses-over-claims
148   Common Knowledge research for Labour Together.
149   Arnie Graf, 'Labour's failure had little to do with organisers in the field', Labour List, 4 August 2015: https://labourlist.org/2015/08/labours-failure-had-little-to-do-with-organisers-in-the-field/

We believe both models have an essential role to play and that they can, and should be, complimentary and mutually reinforcing activities. Building and developing new relationships through community organising has massive potential to increase support for Labour and make traditional election methods, such as door-knocking, more effective. Yet the Party has still to find an answer to the question of how to join up these approaches strategically or organisationally.

> *"The fact that the hundreds of canvassers aren't visibly out changing society between elections. I think we'll deliver a Labour government by demonstrating that we are a year round, grassroots force for good in our communities. The election stuff is vital, but so is Community organising and it sometimes feels that is lacking."*
>
> **>** `Labour Together Survey Respondent`

> *"We have to demonstrate that Labour is there for the people we represent. We have to be a resource within the community, to take up campaigns for them and help them create their own. We should not be floating above them asking for their vote every three years... we need to be a lot less transactional. It's not 'please deliver your vote so we can deliver for you'. This is a noble message but it's not very empowering... we need to think about issues of voter empowerment, and how political parties can help to take that forward is something we have to learn..."*
>
> **>** `Richard Burden, Former MP for Birmingham Northfield`

The potential of our affiliated trade unions was not mobilised

Unions formally affiliated to the Labour Party are an underused asset. Collectively, they represent four million members and tens of thousands of active workplace reps. According to TULO, which coordinates joint political work across the twelve unions affiliated to the Party, there is evidence that "union members trust political messaging from their union more than they would trust messaging directly from a political party."[150]

Even in the USA, where union membership has shrunk even more dramatically as a share of the workforce than in the UK, their role in campaigns has been a key spur to Republicans' investment in improved targeting and mobilisation techniques – Karl Rove, a major influence on conservative "movement-building", described his key motivation as "labor envy".[151]

In the UK, trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party devote considerable resources to raising their members' awareness of the Labour Party and encouraging them to get involved in campaigning, as well as policy debates.[152] According to TULO, they have "learned a lot from their counterparts in Australia and the USA, and have

150   'Refounding Labour: The TULO Submission', TULO, 2011: https://labourdemocracy.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/tuloresponse.pdf

151   Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Ground Wars: Personalized Communications in Political Campaigns, Princeton University Press, 2012, pp. 41-2; see also Sasha Issenberg, The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns, Broadway Books, 2016, pp. 95-98.

152   See for example: https://unitetheunion.org/what-we-do/unite-in-politics/unite-and-the-labour-party/; https://www.gmb.org.uk/sites/default/files/GE2019-CAMPAIGN101.pdf; https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2019/12/ge-doorknocking/; https://twitter.com/DavePrentis/status/1190274097005187072

used sophisticated and varied methods to communicate with their members with a political message".[153]

However, there is recognition across the union movement that their ability to influence and mobilise their own members, as well as members' families and wider communities, has suffered from some of the trends and dynamics set out in Chapter 2. The disappearance or downsizing of historically unionised industries, and the diminished role of associated institutions such as Labour Clubs, has reduced unions' visibility in those parts of the country where Labour's support has declined.

> *"in many of these communities, the so-called "Red Wall" communities, that historically would have been dominated by one industry and/or one employer – many of these places had that industry move out decades ago, and with it sadly well-paid trade-unionised jobs. So people were voting Labour out of habit, to be brutally honest, because they had no direct link with organised labour on a day-to-day basis".*
>
> **> Manuel Cortes, General Secretary, TSSA**

> *"Our members are reflective of society ... They don't come from a place where joining a political party or direct activism of that nature is common, it's not a part of their world".*
>
> **> Michael Wheeler, Political Officer, USDAW**

Many unions, including key Labour affiliates, have made efforts to address these challenges. Noteworthy initiatives include:

- TSSA hired a number of Community Organisers and organised successful actions around the country such as the #Fairfail coalition, which brought together disability rights activists, commuters and Labour Party figures

- Unite has built a 20,000-strong "community" membership, open to people who don't have a workplace branch or are unemployed, retired or students; these have played a prominent role in campaigns around issues such as universal credit or zero-hours contracts

- USDAW organised a number of events focused on the retail crisis and local high streets, which gave members campaign experience that proved useful at election time

- new unions forming in areas like game-working are tapping into a desire for collective organisation and representation among younger workers in growing sectors of the economy

- open spaces like online platform Organise! and the London College of Political Technologists are experimenting with new ways of bringing activists together to build campaigns from the bottom up that unions could learn from

> *"Work with unions should be about more political education. I'm an education officer of a union - nobody in the leadership has ever asked me or my colleagues how we could politically educate our members and collaborate."*
>
> **> Labour Together Survey Respondent**

153   'Refounding Labour: The TULO Submission', TULO, 2011: https://labourdemocracy.files.wordpress. com/2011/07/tuloresponse.pdf

"Labour needs to recruit and organise among the growing precariat, as in the early days of trade unions. This is a second industrial revolution and Labour needs to get on board."

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

"With less and less people in unions, people no longer have a link with the Labour party. We need to show people that Labour is there to fight for them, not just a bunch of career politicians out for themselves, which is definitely how it can look."

> Labour Together Survey Respondent

We received some evidence that effective political campaigning was held back by a lack of co-ordination. In the 2019 campaign, Datapraxis report that "the unions punched well below their weight, hamstrung by the failure of Labour headquarters to share its strategic analysis or data".[154]

Labour's local government base is not always effectively linked in

The Commission received mixed reports in terms of councillor activity and contributions to Labour campaigning at election time. While some areas had strong campaigning activity led by councillors all year round, in other places there was a distinct lack of local campaigning structures.

Analysis done for the Local Government Association shows there is clear evidence that where we have a strong local council and effective campaigning – as seen, for example, in Plymouth Moorview – we can beat the swing against Labour nationally. There are also many examples of constituencies where loss of council control preceded, and could perhaps have been taken as a warning sign of, the parliamentary seat being lost.

Figure 43: Councils and Parliamentary loss patterns 2007-2019

Constituency / local authority area	Council lost	Parliamentary seat lost
Blyth Valley / Northumberland	2008	2019
Newcastle-under-Lyme/ Newcastle-under-Lyme	2015	2019
North Warwickshire / Nuneaton and Bedworth	2018	2019
North West Leicestershire/ North West Leicestershire	2007	2010
South Derbyshire/ South Derbyshire	2007	2010
Stoke-on-Trent Central/ Stoke-on-Trent	2015	2019
Stoke-on-Trent North/ Stoke-on-Trent	2015	2019
Stoke-on-Trent South/ Stoke-on-Trent	2015	2017

Source: Open Council Data

Source: Open Council Data (Link to table and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2442491/)

154   Tory Landslide, Progressives Split: A Datapraxis Analysis of the UK General Election, Datapraxis: https://www.dataprax.is/tory-landslide-progressives-split

In other areas there is evidence of a negative "incumbency effect", where voter frustrations create a perverse advantage for Labour's opponents in a general election.[155] A long-term, lack of engaging, relevant year-round campaigning in some areas has fuelled mistrust in Labour, and reinforced the view that we are the "establishment" Party, in areas that have seen little change over many years as a result of Conservative austerity. This came up as a strong theme in post-election focus group work with former Labour voters who had switched their support in 2019.[156]

Often there is a disconnect between local government and parliamentary offices, which can lead to frustration on both sides. Joint working is particularly important in terms of messaging. In this election there were times when Labour's national messages were at odds with local messages, particularly on austerity. According to defeated MP and Commission member, Jo Platt (Leigh), Wigan council was issuing lots of positive stories about their successes, while Labour's national message was one of cuts to council services.

More effective joint working and joined up campaigning can really make a difference. For example, we heard how close working relationships and effective collaboration in Cheshire West and Chester helped to build support for Labour in the area and maintain what has historically been a more marginal seat since 2015.

> *"When I went to the Stoke by-election, I was struck by how much council level issues and casework was being brought up on the doorstep. If you aren't dealing with people's issues at that level, you aren't present on the ground. It's a problem with assumed safe seats and Labour being the establishment."*

> ❯ `Current Labour MP`

> *"We ... need to use local councillors more effectively in their communities, equipping them to engage with residents – even to the point of requiring candidates to contract with the Party to be the face of Labour on the streets. Similarly, using Labour 'teams' in areas where we do not have councillors. We also need to value both groups much more and recognise that their success locally provides a foundation for national success."*

> ❯ `Alex Cunningham, MP for Stockton North`

155   Ian Warren, 'The hidden predictor? Council control', Medium, 26 November 2019: https://medium.com/@ianjohnwarren/the-hidden-predictor-council-control-1f762866641c

156   Diagnosis of Defeat, Lord Ashcroft Polls, February 2020: https://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/DIAGNOSIS-OF-DEFEAT-LORD-ASHCROFT-POLLS-1.pdf

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

- Labour activists should be proud of their campaigning efforts in tough conditions. Our volunteer army is one of Labour's strongest assets. Yet in this campaign, they were let down.

- Activists were misdirected and resources were limited and misallocated. Too much attention was paid to seats Labour was unlikely to win, and not enough to defending our vulnerable seats in our heartland areas of the UK including in Wales and Scotland.

- Ground campaigns were undermined, with Freeposts arriving after postal votes had been received by voters, crashing digital tools that created more work not less for candidates and campaign teams, and a lack of best practice messaging and policy and doorstep briefings.

- A long-term lack of engaging, relevant year-round campaigning and Labour locally taking the blame for austerity has fuelled mistrust in Labour and the view that we are the 'establishment' Party in areas that have seen little investment over many years.

- Our campaigning structures were not well integrated, including around community organising and digital organising, with resources split, and distrust, including between and within staff teams and relationships with elected representatives, limiting joined up effective campaigning and member mobilisation.

- Divisions and factionalism undermined our election readiness, with a lack of trust hampering teamwork at all levels of the Party. Our membership base and areas of high activity are not in the places we needed them.

- A lot of the issues with our ground campaign relate to old fashioned, highly bureaucratic, siloed and hierarchical organisation that has not been brought up to date and methods of campaigning and communication that do not fit modern reality.

PART THREE

THE WAY AHEAD

PART THREE
THE WAY AHEAD

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSION

We believe there is a way ahead for Labour to win the next election, but the road is hard and the journey will not be easy. The broader labour movement needs to have a shared understanding of what has gone wrong, how Labour can win again, and what kind of opposition it will face.

In Chapter 7, our Commission sets out the scale of the challenge facing Labour. Chapter 8 looks at how we can bridge the divide between our voter coalition and embark on some first steps of a necessary winning political strategy. This chapter analyses how we can unite different groups of voters, and sets out our recommendations for action to deliver on this new strategy. Chapter 9 lists our recommendations for how we must change our organisational strategy as a Party and movement to re-engage proactively with the British people and bring our capabilities up to date.

As a Commission we set ourselves the challenge of looking to the future at how Labour could build a majority coalition. This was no easy task, but we believe there are grounds for optimism, and the ground-breaking work we commissioned provides the potential basis of a political strategy moving forward. However, it will require further development, not least because of the unprecedented public health and economic crisis caused by Coronavirus. Though this report focuses on what Labour can affect and control, Chapter 5 in particular has shown us that Labour needs to generally be more aware of external shifts in the political environment and in particular play closer attention to the Conservative's evolving positioning, tactics and strategies.

Our Commission's view is that our 2019 loss should be mobilising, not paralysing. Labour can be the party of big and transformational change for our country and our communities at the next election, as long as this is believable and rooted in people's lives. But Labour cannot afford to be complacent about the seats it currently holds and we must be mindful that if we do not fundamentally overhaul our mindset and our mission there is further that we could fall.

Our political strategy, organisation and campaigning infrastructure (on the ground, and in the digital space) needs major reform and revamping. We must not shy away from necessary and tough choices if we are to rebuild our relationship with the country, and revolutionise the way we engage and listen to voters.

To achieve our winning political strategy, we need to reform our Party and our movement to meet this challenge.

HOW WE PREPARED THIS SECTION

The findings in these chapters are based on a broad range of independent analysis, including bespoke work commissioned for this review, including:

- a [deliberative Citizens' Panel](#) bringing together different groups of potential Labour voters by Britain Thinks in March 2019

- Extensive and bespoke analysis of Labour's Core Voter Groups from Datapraxis

- YouGov research

- analysis of the new electoral landscape provided to the Commission by Greg Cook, Labour's Head of Political Strategy from 1995 to 2019

- early data and analysis from the 2019-23 British Election Study shared with us by Professor Edward Fieldhouse, Dr. Chris Prosser and Dr Jonathan Mellon of the University of Manchester

- an extensive review of relevant published data and research, including that highlighted in submissions to this Review

- Work commissioned from Common Knowledge on organisational change and digital transformation

- Interviews with Trade Unions conducted by TSSA as part of their submission to the review

- Submissions from groups including the Community Organising Unit, Momentum, Progress and others

- Conversations with staffers, organisers and people working within the party.

- The views of Labour members who took part in our General election survey

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

- Labour cannot afford to be complacent about the seats it currently holds
- To win a parliamentary majority of one at the next election, Labour needs to gain 123 additional seats across the UK
- We should not assume we will be rescued by demographic or geographical trends
- Labour needs to identify and build a coalition of voters that spans generations, geographies and outlooks
- Our potential voting coalition shares much common ground on economic issues
- There is a much broader range of viewpoints on cultural and values-based issues

Labour cannot afford to be complacent about the seats it currently holds

A key element in the story of this election was Labour's insufficient recognition of the threat it faced in dozens of marginal seats.

Despite now representing fewer constituencies than at any time since 1935, Labour cannot afford to be complacent about the seats it currently holds.

The pattern described in Chapter 1 – of Labour support dropping and remaining at a lower level, followed after some delay by cumulative increases in Conservative vote share – can be seen not only in seats lost in recent elections, but also in those we still hold but which now look much more marginal.

There are 58 seats across the country that would be lost with a further swing of 6 per cent to the Conservatives. There is no evidence, yet to date, that the long term trends described in Part 1 are yet abating.

Figure 44: Seats Labour will lose with a 1%, 2%, 3%, 4%, 5% and 6% swing to the Conservatives by region

Search...

Swing	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%
Scotland					
Wales	Alyn and Deeside	Newport West	Gower; Newport East		
Yorkshire and Humber		Hemsworth; Kingston upon Hull East; Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford	Bradford South; Doncaster Central; Doncaster North; Halifax; Wentworth and Dearne	Batley and Spen	Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle; Rotherham
East Midlands		Chesterfield			
West Midlands	Warwick and Leamington; Coventry North West; Coventry South	Wolverhampton South East			Walsall South
North West	Weaver Vale	Warrington North; Oldham East and Saddleworth	Lancaster and Fleetwood	Stalybridge and Hyde; Wirral West; Worsley and Eccles South	
North East		Stockton North; Wansbeck		Houghton and Sunderland South; Sunderland Central	Hartlepool; Tynemouth; Washington and Sunderland West
Eastern	Bedford				
South West					Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport
South East		Canterbury			
London	Dagenham and Rainham			Eltham	Battersea; Enfield, Southgate; Erith and Thamesmead; Putney
Total	7	11	8	7	11

Source: Greg Cook Submission to the Commission • Note this table shows seats that will be lost where the Conservatives are in second place.

Source: Greg Cook, Submission to the Commission, Note this table shows seats that will be lost where the Conservatives are in second place. Link to table and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2693530/

Figure 45: Map of seats Labour will lose by % swing to the Conservatives
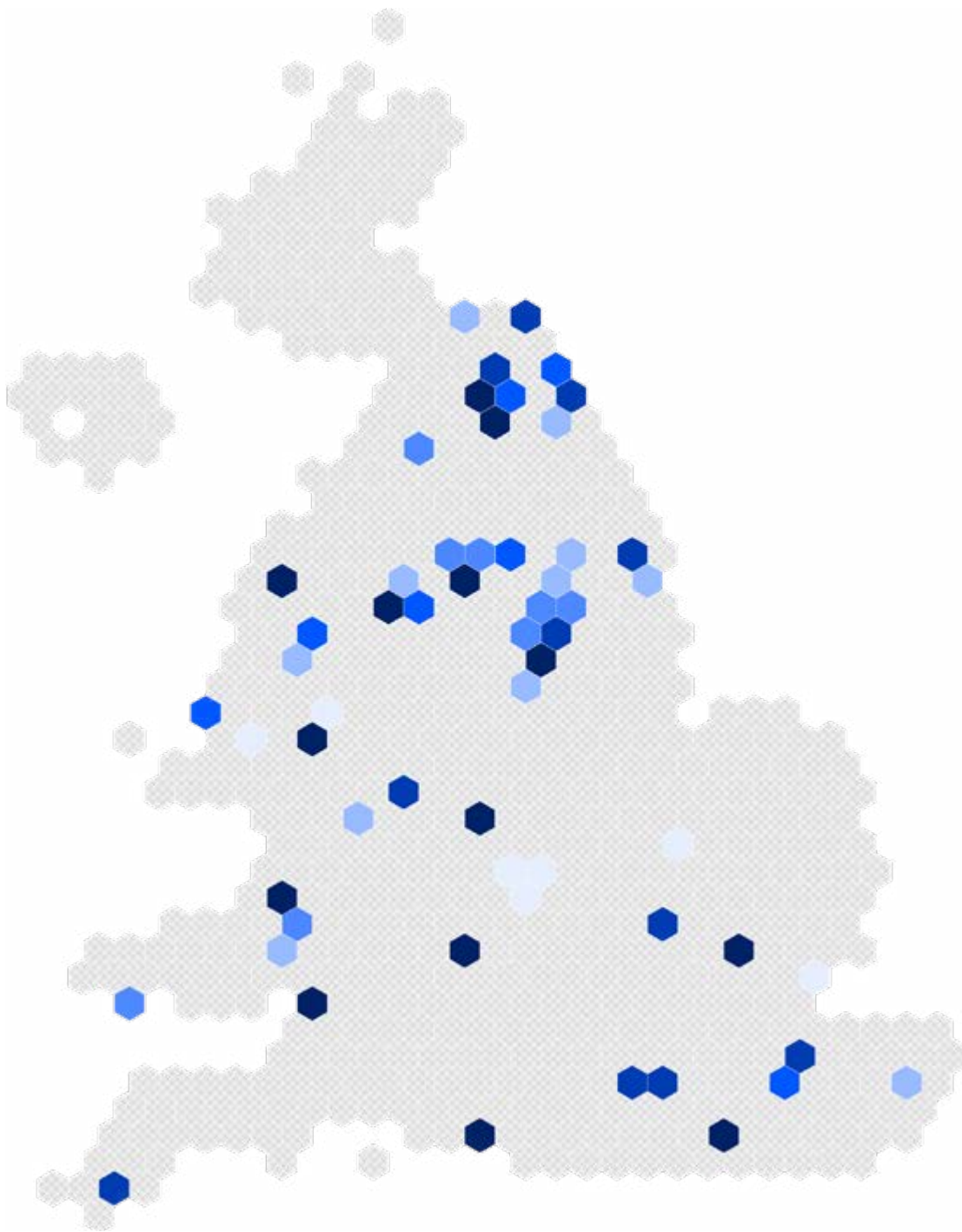
Source: Greg Cook, Submission to the Commission, Note this map shows seats that will be lost where the Conservatives are in second place. Link to table and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2694377/

At the same time, it would be wrong to imagine that Labour's new areas of concentrated support amount to a new "core" or "base" that it can count on to stick with it.

Many city-based and academic seats were lost by Labour to the Liberal Democrats and even the Conservatives in 2005 and 2010. High levels of switching and tactical voting among these electorates mean Labour cannot take for granted advances it has made in these areas over recent elections.

To win a parliamentary majority of one at the next election, Labour needs to gain 123 seats across the UK

To win a parliamentary majority at the next election, Labour needs to gain 123 seats on top of its 2019 result. This would require a swing of over 10 per cent. In doing so, the party would need to win seats in every part of the UK and from other parties as well as the Conservatives. For example, without winning seats from the SNP or Plaid Cymru, the swing required in England and Wales would need to be over 12 per cent. If a boundary review goes ahead as now seems certain, it has been estimated that the net effect would probably be to increase the required swings by at least another percentage point.[157]

According to analysis by the Fabian Society,[158] on current boundaries, if the seats Labour needs to win are ordered simply by the swing required relative to the 2019 result:

- Most (63 per cent) of these seats are in the North, Midlands and Wales, and over 80 per cent are in what the Fabian analysis classifies as "towns" rather than cities. Most are now held by the Conservatives and are in areas where Labour has been losing support for many years as part of the long term decline we have discussed. There is no route back to power - even a minority government - without winning these seats.

- Winning back seats in the North, Midlands and Wales is essential, but will not be sufficient to rebuild a majority. Around a quarter (24 per cent) of these seats are in the South, and 30 per cent voted Remain. If it is to form a Government again, Labour also needs to win more seats in London, commuter suburbs and towns like Swindon.[159]

- 13 per cent of these seats are in Scotland (16 seats), 15 of them held by the SNP, and 14 are in Wales, 2 held by Plaid Cymru. Winning back seats in Scotland and Wales is essential to win a majority. Unless Labour wins seats from the SNP and Plaid Cymru, winning a majority would require us to win everything up to and including Jacob Rees Mogg's seat of North East Somerset, which has a Conservative majority of 26.2 per cent.[160]

Winning 123 seats would give Labour a majority of one. A majority that could see a radical, reforming Labour government through a full parliamentary term would need to be larger than this, entailing an even more profound electoral advance.

157   Greg Cook research for Labour Together
158   Another Mountain to Climb: Labour's electoral challenge in the 2020s, The Fabian Society: https://fabians. org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Another-Mountain-to-Climb.pdf
159   Sebastian Payne, 'UK's Labour faces a battle to retake its southern territory too', Financial Times, 12 February 2020: https://www.ft.com/content/bc2d233e-4cae-11ea-95a0-43d18ec715f5
160   Greg Cook research for Labour Together

Figure 46: 123 seats Labour needs to gain to form a parliamentary majority of one
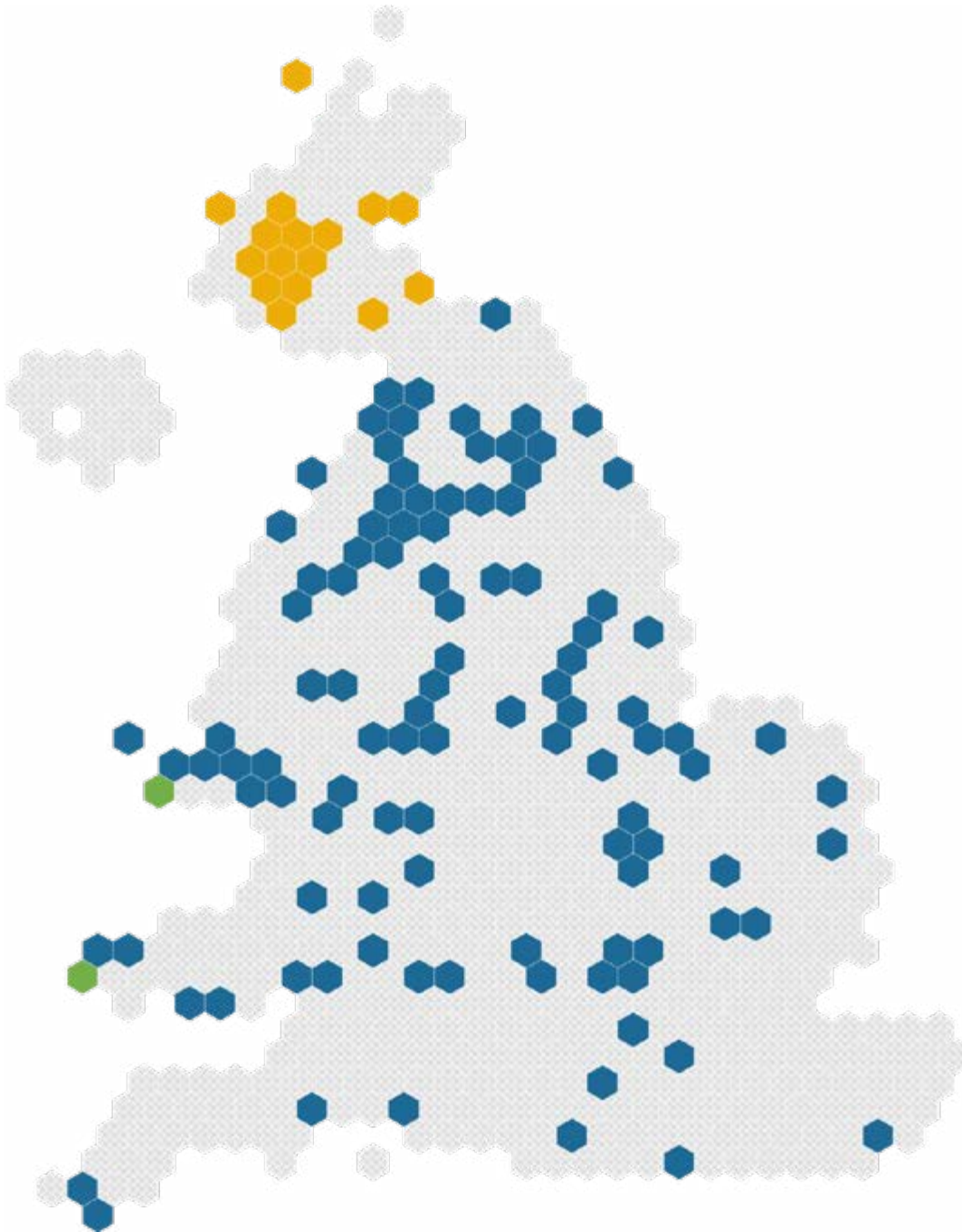
Source: Another Mountain to Climb,The Fabians (2019) (Link to table and embed: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2692641/)

We should not assume we will be rescued by demographic or geographical trends

Labour's advantage over the Conservatives among younger voters and those living in cities might lead us to hope that the Party's position will be helped by increases in the relative weight of younger cohorts or more urbanised constituencies in future elections.

The effect such trends may take is highly uncertain, however. There is no guarantee that the political preferences and allegiances of today's younger voters won't shift as they grow older[161] - indeed, as we show below, there are signs that support for Labour policies among younger voters is highly variable. Nor is there strong evidence that the spread of conurbations to outer suburbs will automatically increase Labour's vote share in those constituencies.

Even if there are trends that could work in Labour's favour, they are not moving fast enough to tilt the balance by 2024, and would take several electoral cycles to bring a decisive benefit. One of the most important lessons of this review has been that losing political ground can be cumulative and increasingly difficult to reverse: the loss of councillor networks, closure of MSP or AM offices, and erosion of CLPs' membership and links with the community, can reinforce each other and reduce the Party's presence and campaigning capacity below the critical mass needed to maintain visibility and relevance.

This does not mean that the Party should not take a long-term view that looks beyond the immediate electoral cycle. Given the long running trends described in Part One, we should be using data analysis as well as political judgment on the ground, to develop strategy for building our support in constituencies over time horizons that reach beyond the next election cycle.[162]

Labour needs to identify and build a coalition of voters that spans generations, geographies and outlooks

Chapter 3 cited analysis by Datapraxis of polling data which maps the UK electorate into fourteen different clusters, each with a prevailing set of views, values and behaviours, and different socio-economic, demographic and regional distributions.

161   James Tilley, 'Do we really become more conservative with age?', The Guardian, 3 November 2015: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/03/do-we-become-more-conservative-with-age-young-old-politics
162   Momentum, written submission

Figure 47: Datapraxis Breakdown of UK Electorate 2019 by Voter Groups
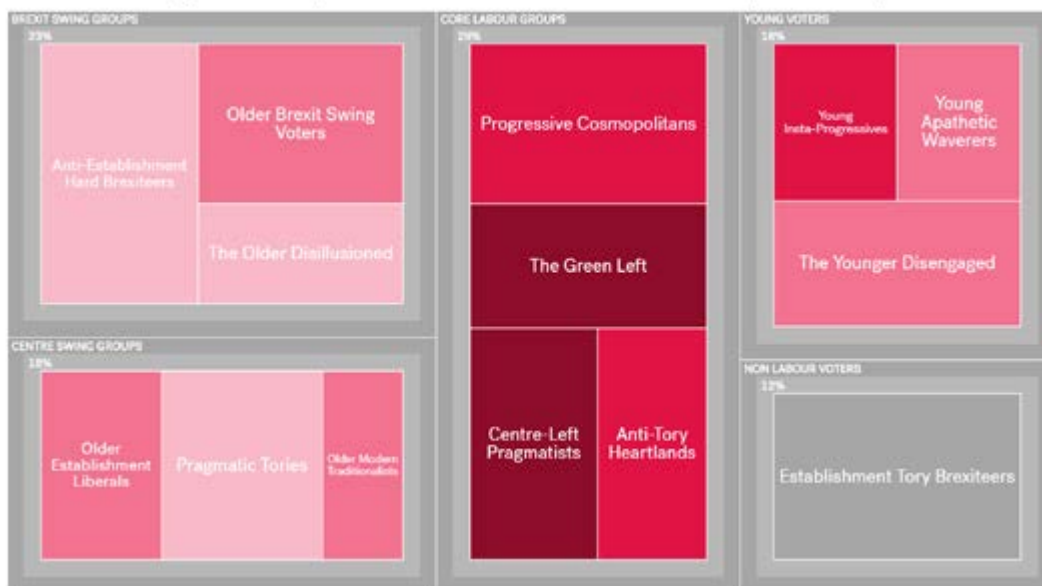
Source: Datapraxis Submission to the Commission (Link to table and embed, explore this graphic here https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2694803/)

Looking at how these groups vote, Datapraxis found that 13 of them, together accounting for 88 per cent of the total electorate, contained significant numbers of Labour voters in 2019.

Four "core" groups together comprised 29 per cent of the total electorate, of whom 50 per cent or more voted Labour in 2019:

• Two of these, the "Green Left" and "Progressive Cosmopolitans", both predominantly ABC1 and relatively concentrated in London, the South East and Scotland, proved relatively resilient in 2019.

• However, support for Labour among "Centre-Left Pragmatists", mostly ABC1s in the North West, Scotland, and Wales, and "Anti-Tory Heartlands", mostly C2DEs in Scotland and the North, fell significantly between 2017 and 2019.

These are the Labour voters we are most familiar with, and among whom it should be easiest to rebuild support. However, it is worth stressing that, even in the unlikely scenario of Labour winning the support of all of these voters, it would give it a vote share of less than 30 per cent.

Labour's core support was augmented in 2019 by three young groups, together comprising 18 per cent of the total electorate, many of whom were eligible to vote for the first time in 2019.

• Labour approached majority support among one of these groups, "Young Insta-Progressives", predominantly ABC1s most commonly found in London and Scotland

• Two others, "Young Apathetic Waverers" and "The Younger Disengaged", mostly C2DEs spread throughout the UK, a fifth of whom voted Labour in 2019

The other key groups whose decisions have determined the outcome of recent elections are six groups of "swing" voters, together making up 41 per cent of the

electorate, each of which includes voters who have supported Labour in the past and will be important to building a winning coalition.

- Three of these, "Older Brexit Swing Voters", "Anti-Establishment Hard Brexiteers", and "The Older Disillusioned", are most commonly found in the North, Midlands and Wales and tend to be middle aged or older voters in the C2DE social grades.

- Another three "centre-right" swing groups, "Older Establishment Liberals", "Older Moderate Traditionalists" and "Pragmatic Tories" are more likely to be found in the South and fall within the ABC1 social grades

Of these, the most decisive in the last election may have been "Older Brexit Swing Voters", relatively concentrated in the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the Midlands, and less represented in London. In 2017 Labour won the support of 35 per cent of this group - up on 2015 (26 per cent) and 2010 (23 per cent). However, in 2019 support for Labour among this group fell to just 13 per cent.

The final group, labelled "Establishment Tory Brexiteers", amount to 12 per cent of the electorate, and included no significant numbers of Labour voters in recent election.

Our potential voting coalition shares much common ground on economic issues

Datapraxis found that across all the thirteen groups from whom Labour has been able to draw support, there was little opposition to most of the Party's key economic policy positions, from redistribution and corporate regulation to nationalisations, a higher minimum wage, and intervention in the housing market and the economy more generally.

This is consistent with data reported in Part One, indicating that many of Labour's economic policies were broadly supported, individually and in principle. However a critical issue, as we have seen, is the overall credibility and deliverability of the package.

Digging deeper into the responses helps us to see some important patterns and differences within this broad context.

Views of this agenda are particularly variable among the three younger groups: clear majorities of "Young Insta-Progressives" support these positions but most "Young Apathetic Waverers", and a significant minority of the "Young Disengaged", say they don't know or are neutral. This suggests that support for such policies among younger voters is not as solid as might be inferred from headline polling, and reinforces the case for caution in expecting Labour's job to get easier as these cohorts make up a larger share of the electorate.

On a more optimistic note, attending to the distribution of "strong" support for different policies also offers indications of what may be most useful in winning over significant shares of key "swing" groups:

- 56 per cent of "The Older Disillusioned" express strong support for a much higher minimum wage; 42 per cent strongly support a lot more redistribution of wealth; and 31 per cent strongly support a wealth tax

- 43 per cent of "Anti-Establishment Hard Brexiteers" strongly support nationalising rail and 40 per cent strongly support nationalising utilities

- 39 per cent of "Older Moderate Traditionalists" express strong support for much more government intervention in the housing market

Geographical patterns will also be worth investigating. Messages around NHS privatisation may be less resonant in Scotland and Wales, for example, given the devolution of relevant policies in those nations.

There is a much broader range of viewpoints on cultural and values-based issues

The cluster analysis conducted by Datapraxis confirms the divergence on social and cultural issues, highlighted in Part One of this report as an underlying tension and weakness in Labour's potential coalition.

It is important to recognise that there are areas of relative consensus - some of them hard fought for. Equal marriage is comparatively uncontroversial, consistent with other polling data indicating that views around sexuality, as well as gender and race, have converged over recent decades.

A key fault line runs between the three most "socially liberal" groups - "Progressive Cosmopolitans", "The Green Left", and "Younger Insta-Progressives" - and much of the rest of the electorate on many currently salient issues.

- tighter immigration restrictions are opposed by these three groups, but widely supported in every other group across the electorate

- "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" is a statement that these three groups (and the Centre-Left Pragmatists) tend to oppose, but which finds widespread agreement among other groups

- similarly, these three groups are less likely to agree with the statement "I am proud to be British", but large majorities in every other group do

- There is a range of views within every group, so these divisions are not absolute.

However, the broad analysis makes clear the challenge Labour faces in this area: the three groups with the most "socially liberal" views across all questions make up the majority of Labour's "core vote", but just 21 per cent of the total electorate - barely half of the proportion needed to achieve a winning vote share. Disagreement with these three groups on some social issues is particularly sharp among the three "Brexit swing groups", who are closest to them on many economic issues and are likely to be key to winning back seats in the North and Midlands.

Managing these differences will require a careful mediation, understanding and bridge-building between different groups, while not departing from Labour's values and principles. As John Denham, who held a marginal seat for Labour for many years, has observed in the past "Labour does not need to agree with the voters on everything, just that we should not disagree with them on everything". How this is achieved in terms of Labour policy is not a matter for this review; however, in the next chapter we set out how the Commission believes the party should strategically approach the challenge of coalition building between these different groups.

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

- This Commission does not think the task of rebuilding a majority for Labour at the next General Election is impossible, but no-one should underestimate the scale and nature of the change that is necessary within our Party and in how we interact and engage with the public in order to achieve that.

- Labour should not be complacent that our vote share can only go up, at the next election. There are 58 seats across the country which only require a small swing away from Labour to the Conservatives to be lost. Given the long-term trends set out which are particularly stark in some places, there is no evidence that these trends are abating. This should be of primary concern.

- Moreover, there is no guarantee that our new 'core vote' will stick with us, given that this is concentrated in areas where other parties have held seats in the last 10 years, and this electorate is particularly volatile.

- Labour faces a substantial challenge at the next election. To be the largest Party we would need a swing to Labour of 1997 proportions. To win a majority of 1 we would need to increase our number of MPs by 60 per-cent up by 123 seats, something no major Party has ever done.

- If Labour does not reverse its fortunes in Scotland in a significant way, it would need to win North East Somerset from Jacob Rees Mogg to form a majority government.

- Labour needs to build a winning coalition of voters which spans generations, geographies and outlooks. This requires holding on to our current voter base (which should not be taken for granted), mobilising and inspiring more younger voters to turn out for Labour, as was achieved in 2017, while at the same time building a bridge with former Labour voters who are very distant from Labour presently, and attracting more swing voters.

- The next chapters lay out a potential basis for how Labour can go about building a winning coalition for the future (Chapter 8), and building a Party and movement that can meet this challenge (Chapter 9).

CHAPTER EIGHT

BUILDING A WINNING COALITION FOR THE FUTURE

In Part One and Part Two, we set out the long-term and deep fracturing of Labour's voter coalition over many years and several elections, and how these were catalysed in 2019 by strategic and organisational weaknesses. In the previous chapter, we outlined the scale of the electoral task and the significant challenge Labour faces in winning a stable majority government.

As a Commission we set ourselves the task of looking to the future at how Labour could build a majority coalition. This was no easy task, but we believe there are grounds for cautious optimism, as the ground-breaking work we commissioned provides the basis for a political strategy moving forward. However, it will require further development, not least because of the unprecedented public health and economic crisis caused by Coronavirus.

Our conclusions in this chapter must also be read in conjunction with Chapter 9, which sets out the organisational tasks facing Labour in building a movement which can represent the country and persuade voters to give us their support.

Our findings in this chapter explore *what* a winning coalition would comprise of and *how* it could be built.

Our key conclusions are:

- All parts of the Labour Party need to recognise the scale of the electoral task with a shared understanding about what it will take to rise to it

- We need to understand the coalition of voters whose support we must win to form a government

- If we are willing to work at it a coalition can be built, as common ground can be found across a broad range of potential supporters

- Labour must be the agents of change at the next election

- A political strategy for building this future coalition should include the following:

  › Labour must be the party of big economic change for the whole country and every part of it, reaching places and people who have been held back

  › The change Labour offers must be rooted in people's lives, demonstrating we have understood and are acting upon hopes and concerns

> ❯ The public need to know Labour's leadership can be trusted and is up to the task of governing

- Labour needs to organise in local areas over years, not months, so that is seen as being at the heart of the communities it seeks to represent

- Labour needs to be mindful of, and responsive to, our opponents' strategy

- In Scotland, Labour faces the additional challenge of resolving the constitutional questions that have undermined our credibility and relevance

- Work cannot begin soon enough and will require long-term strategic focus, leadership and some tough decisions

- Our recommendations should be mobilising, not paralysing. Labour can and must lead the debate about the different society that must emerge from the coronavirus crisis

All parts of the Labour Party need to recognise the scale of the electoral task with a shared understanding about what it will take to rise to it

As we have seen from Part One and Part Two, disunity, division and factionalism have seriously hampered Labour's electoral fortunes. Unless the Party goes through a process of collective internal healing and reflection, then the very difficult task of building a winning coalition will fail. Every member, every part, every grouping and every tradition within Labour has some reflecting to do, and all parts of the party have a contribution to make to the future. There is no one part or view that has a monopoly on being "correct". Indeed, Labour's founding principles are that, as a Party, we should reflect the country and the broad-based opinion across our wider movement.

Our hope is that the objective, evidenced-based conclusions of this review, reached by a Commission drawn from across the Party, will create a strong basis for that collective process and collective understanding to take place. It is vital that every member, activist, councillor, MS, MSP and MP accepts the scale of the challenge Labour faces and shares a determination to rise to that challenge, even when it involves difficult reading and tough choices.

We recommend that:

- **this report, and other materials included, should form the basis of a political education programme across the party, from the Shadow Cabinet to CLPs, Labour groups to the wider Labour movement, via webinars, social media, training events and the dissemination of key findings. It's a process Labour did not go through after any of the recent election defeats. This allowed views to widely diverge about the task in hand and how we might rise to it.**

- **the Party should organise a series of training and listening events around the country, bringing members together with communities in round table style events, and in new style, conversational door-knocking exercises (when public health permits) to listen to and engage with communities and the voters we lost.**

Moreover, and it may seem obvious to state, but it is important nonetheless, Labour needs to reassert its mission to fundamentally change the country by getting into

power, winning elections and being a movement that can bring about change. Our guiding mission should not just be to become "an effective Opposition"(as important as that is in the meantime), or to protest and agitate (as important as these activities can be in changing policy). Labour's task is to win power to form a government in order to then change the country, a task that requires our entire organisation's focus.

We need to understand the coalition of voters whose support we must win to form a government

Work must begin to understand what a winning coalition comprises of and what the route map to building it involves. As a Commission we have begun this task, but this work should be ongoing and embedded at the very heart of the Party and its leadership.

As we found in previous chapters, Labour's current voter base is narrowly formed demographically, centred in cities and is largely liberal, culturally open and historically remain-minded. While there is still further scope to increase turnout amongst younger voters, many of whom did not vote in 2019 but did in 2017, this is necessary but not sufficient in order to win an election.

As our long-term trends analysis shows, the move away from Labour in other voter groups is increasing and, without a strategy to abate it, could continue. So any strategy for a future coalition must, at the very least, maintain most of the support Labour currently enjoys, mobilise an increased turnout amongst younger voters, and regain ground with previous Labour voters who are drifting further from us.

In the previous chapter we summarised work commissioned from Datapraxis that analyses the electorate by dividing them into groups, based on their views, values and voting patterns. The analysis explores the commonalities and differences between these groups that need to be considered in any attempt to build a winning electoral coalition in 2024. On the basis of these groupings and analysis, we asked Datapraxis to undertake a detailed quantitative modelling exercise to show the make-up of potential coalitions for Labour, and outline what would be required politically to build them

The analysis conducted by Datapraxis identified three options, summarised as:

- *a strategy which prioritises almost exclusively winning back lost Leave voters and "Red Wall" seats by combining left economic policies with strong emphasis on controls on immigration and less social liberalism. This would assume the current voter coalition is retained which is a risky assumption to make. It could yield a higher vote share than in 2019, but would likely lead to losing a significant number of socially liberal voters to the Greens, the Lib Dems and/ or the Nationalists, leaving Labour well below its 2017 vote share, with lots of younger voters abstaining too.*

- *a strategy which combines a move to the centre on economic issues with mild social liberalism tempered by a "tough-on-crime" posture could also deliver a better result than 2019, but would likely lead to the loss of some left-wing and younger voters to the Greens, Liberal Democrats, nationalists or abstention, without making any significant advances among socially conservative Brexit swing voters. Again, this could improve on the 2019 vote share but remain*

below that of 2017.

- *More difficult to execute than either of these approaches, but more likely to attract a coalition of voters broad enough to return Labour to government, would be a strategy that builds greater public support for a big change economic agenda, that is seen as credible and morally essential, rooted in people's real lives and communities. This economic agenda would need to sit alongside a robust story of community and national pride, while bridging social and cultural divisions. The message of change would aim to enthuse and mobilise existing support and younger voters while at the same time being grounded in community, place and family, to speak to former "leave-minded" Labour voters. The bridging approach across divides would need to neutralise cultural and social tensions. Such a strategy could achieve more than 40% vote share, but would require an exceptional leadership team able to navigate building and winning trust of this very diverse voter coalition.*

If we are willing to work at it a coalition can be built as common ground can be found across a broad range of potential supporters

To compliment this quantitative work, we sought to explore a unique, deliberative approach to coalition forming through interaction between the voters themselves. We tasked Britain Thinks with conducting a bespoke <u>"coalition-forming" exercise</u> one and half day workshop, bringing together a range of voters from across Labour's potential future coalition. These were drawn from two broadly representative groups:

- A group of Labour voting "urban remainers" from London and Manchester

- A group of former Labour voting "town leavers" from towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire

These are not the only voter groups that need to be won to ensure a winning electoral coalition, but they do represent perhaps the most culturally divergent groups, so the exercise helped to focus our attention on some of the toughest challenges involved. We believe this was an incredibly insightful exercise, which could be built upon with further research and deliberation.

The Datapraxis quantitative analysis, outlined in <u>Chapter 7</u>, complements the findings from our "citizen's jury-like" exercise. Through our deliberative and robust coalition-building task between these divergent voters, we found a strong and unifying desire for economic transformation of their lives. This was particularly notable in relation to issues which affect their personal security and lives; issues ranging from social housing and rent controls, to decent pay and living standards, as well as significant investment in their local infrastructure and amenities, like high streets, town centres and decent employers. While only being a start, this work suggested there was a coalition which could be built, comprised of those who had supported Labour and those who had left us.

Yet, even among the groups brought together, difficult issues like Brexit and immigration needed to be navigated. For all the former Labour voters we assembled, they needed to see evidence Labour was changing and understood their lives and their concerns.

There was a mood for understanding and compromise among both groups. "Urban

remainers" were willing to listen to concerns of leave voters, particularly in the context of a desire for Labour to rebuild its coalition. For the "town leavers" there was an acknowledgement about the benefits of immigration, and their demands were not as far-reaching as some in Labour may worry about - their key concern being that there should be fair rules. It is not for this Commission to resolve these very difficult and complex questions, but the kind of dialogue and acknowledgement of these issues begun in our workshop is essential and we believe offers a strong starting point for continued work.

You can [watch a short video of our citizen's panel on bridging Labour's coalition here](#)

On the basis of the Datapraxis and Britain Thinks work, the Commission is optimistic that there is a route to a winning coalition, while acknowledging that this will require boldness and recognising there are some difficult roadblocks to navigate.

Labour must be the agents of change at the next election

From this work and all our retrospective analysis, it is clear that Labour is at its most electorally and politically successful when it is the Party of big and real change. This desire for change, as it directly and tangibly could affect people's everyday lives, enthuses our current supporters, mobilises younger voters and is a key driver for former Labour and potential Labour supporters. Undoubtedly the next election, as with most, will be a change election. This is a challenge Labour must rise to, while also meeting the necessary conditions of trust and credibility.

We heard time and again throughout our work of a desire from voters for Labour to be "for" things and "for" me, not just against things, and for us to offer realistic hope for them and their communities. The big change Labour offers should be rooted in tangible expressions of how such an agenda would impact on voters' community, place and family, such as restoring pride in the high street and town centre, or through meaningful changes to people's cost of living or housing tenure.

Labour must be the party of big economic change for the whole country and every part of it, reaching people and places left behind

A clear finding is that a new economic settlement to change lives and communities must be the centre-piece of Labour's political strategy.

This should be a story told around people's own personal financial security, such as housing and decent work, and real communities through investment in town centres, high streets and amenities.

We found a strong expression of this in housing, a sense that the whole system needed fundamental change; far greater access to social housing, action on private rents and landlords, and, strongly amongst town dwellers, a sense that Right to Buy should be halted until more houses were available. Restoring a sense of pride in local high streets or towns also featured strongly, and valuing those institutions and spaces that are seen as cornerstones of communities such as post offices, pubs, neighbourhood and voluntary groups. There is also real potential for Labour to tell a clear story about the possibilities of new, decent jobs from green and technological developments.

It is vital these policies are told in a compelling way for people and places who have been excluded from prosperity, and not seen as just more advances for places which usually benefit. There is a strong sense of injustice and anger about prosperity not being fairly shared across the nation, which Labour's future agenda must recognise.

This injustice risks being made significantly worse by the likely economic impacts of Coronavirus, if the winners are likely to be the global, online tech giants and the losers the long-established British manufacturer based in these communities. This only reinforces further the need for Labour to champion a new economic settlement for every part of Britain.

The change Labour offers must be rooted in people's lives, demonstrating we have understood

This point is of particular importance to "town leavers" and comes through strongly from all our findings. It is perhaps the most difficult aspect to execute. In the 2019 election, Brexit was a key expression of whether Labour understood and was acting upon their hopes and concerns. While Brexit may become a much less salient issue in coming years, the root causes of disaffection in Labour (which go further back than Brexit) will continue to find other expressions.

As we have discussed elsewhere in this report, this concern is made more difficult by the divergence in Labour's current voter coalition, and by the fact that Labour's elected representatives, and membership base, is concentrated in urban centres. However, as we have found in our research above, this gulf is not insurmountable and the bridge between is possible. This area needs much more work, combined with an extended process of listening and engaging.

We recommend that Labour launch a major engagement tour (once travel and events are allowed). The Leader, Shadow Cabinet and every part of the party should be going into places no longer represented by a Labour MP, and where there are drops in Labour support, to engage with people directly in a series of "citizen's jury" style participatory events. These should include deindustrialised communities and workplaces in areas with large populations of town leavers.

The Party organisation and the broader labour movement should be set the task of running this exercise, identifying and persuading local figures in the community and ordinary voters to attend, and engaging in these deliberative events alongside the new Leader, Shadow Cabinet, MPs, locally elected representatives and twinned MPs.

This exercise can extend and build upon the work of this report and should lead to new policies, positions, and methods of organising. Critical to this, is that the listening and understanding is followed by dialogue, hearing, and acting.

The public need to know Labour's leadership can be trusted and is up to the task of governing

Finally, showing strong leadership, and building trust and credibility, is vital. This theme runs through each part of our report and comes through again in our citizen's jury. It must be understood however that, for many who we want to support Labour in the future, key tests for leadership are related to the two points above i.e. that

Labour has a compelling message of change and hope, and that we have heard and acted upon voters' views.

The qualities of leadership sought encompasses both more traditional and newer forms of leadership. More traditional expressions like taking clear positions, not fence-sitting and leading a united and disciplined team are valued. Yet also, a more subtle form of leadership is desired like "not opposing for opposition's sake", being positive and "for things", and crucially being relatable and "getting me and my life".

Building trust and credibility, while also advocating a compelling powerful story of change, is not easy to execute either. This will involve careful prioritisation of policies so that the overall package is credible, while offering the big change voters want to see in their everyday lives. Such an approach is now almost certainly going to be dominated by the story of necessary economic recovery and renewal arising from the Covid economic crisis, which we return to below.

Labour needs to organise in local areas over years not months so that it is seen as being at the heart of communities it seeks to represent

Crucial to winning is the movement we build in communities across the country, to win the necessary arguments to succeed at the General Election, and then change the country. While this is covered in detail in Chapter 9, it must also be recognised as an essential part of our political strategy. Labour's support in communities will take time to rebuild and will require the efforts of every part of our movement, including Labour councillors, our trade unions, the Cooperative Party, civil society and our local members.

This loss of deeper roots within our community has been highlighted by Manuel Cortes's review of trade union and Labour Party activity, which draws attention to the long-standing breaking of institutional ties between voters and the Labour movement. This underlying structural problem is also referenced in Chapter 2 where we examine the long-term trends in Labour's declining support. Most importantly, his review emphasises the significance of long-term work required to make Labour a presence again, something which is the responsibility of the whole Labour movement and is laid out in Chapter 9.

Labour must be mindful of, and responsive to, our opponents' strategy

It was clear from our research (undertaken just at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic) that former Labour voters who voted Conservative at the 2019 election did not have 'buyers' remorse.' The Conservative message of 'levelling up' neglected parts of our country, particularly in the so-called 'Red Wall', resonated with high levels of trust in the Conservative government to deliver on this commitment.

Any political strategy must look forward, engaging with the frame of the election the Conservatives are building. Labour's strategy must mitigate the impact of their strategy, while ensuring Labour's approach will resonate in the build up to that election. In the context of a massively altered economic outlook for the country due to Covid 19, it is of particular importance for Labour to be looking ahead, being mindful of the terms of the next election and being clear about where we stand on the big emerging questions.

In Scotland Labour faces the additional challenge of resolving the constitutional questions that have undermined its credibility and relevance

As this report notes, the Labour Party's unclear position on Brexit, and the time it took to come to an agreement on this position, damaged Labour's electoral prospects. In Scotland, our lack of a clear position on the SNP's proposal for a second independence referendum similarly damaged our prospects and, in the 2019 election, combined with our Brexit position to create the impression that Labour did not know where it stood on the most important questions of the election. This has been reported by members and activists in Scotland who responded to our survey.

The Labour Party – both across the UK and in Scotland – oppose independence because it would harm the lives and livelihoods of people across Scotland. This has been made clear by both Keir Starmer and Richard Leonard. Since 2017, the Scottish Labour Party's official policy – passed by Scottish Conference - has been for a federal Britain.

Keir Starmer has recently said that "we will be going into [the Scottish Parliament election] with a Labour Party position that is not for a second referendum." This position has now recently been agreed by the Executive Committee of Scottish Labour. This clarity is welcome, and as a party we should now unite around this position and focus on building a strong message for the 2021 elections that makes this clear, and that promotes Labour's distinctive policy for a federal Britain.

Such is the scale of the electoral challenge and the task of building a new coalition from where we are, that this work cannot begin soon enough

Four years might seem a long time, but changing the destination of a political strategic arc must begin early. As we have seen from Part One and Two, the strategic work towards a general election is done long before the "short campaign". Moreover, the nearer to the election itself, the harder and steeper the strategic hill is to climb if the work hasn't begun soon enough. Also, the window for a new leader to make an impression is often a relatively short one.

All parts of the leadership and party must be focused on this task as it requires relentless drive from all parts of our movement.

To do this we recommend:

- **Agree the broad outline of a winning voter coalition and a political strategy to build it (drawing on the work of the Commission).**

- **Strategy group chaired by the Leader and involving key members of the Shadow Cabinet and a political lead tasked with election strategy – responsibilities would be the development of political strategy and the plan to execute it.**

- **Systematic programme and capacity within the organisation to commission and get the views of the public including innovative approaches and citizen's juries.**

- **Appoint a senior and experienced full-time General Election Director/ Manager to report directly to the Leader, at least two years before a likely general election.**

Understand how the crisis – health and economic – arising from coronavirus will shape this landscape

The biggest economic downturn for 300 years and the largest public health crisis for a 100 years is undoubtedly going to reshape the economic and political landscape for years to come. Labour must seize this moment of change and shape it. As Keir Starmer has already said, people have suffered so much in this crisis that we cannot just go back to business as usual.

We want this report to be mobilising, not paralysing. We believe there is an appetite for big economic change and building back better. Labour must lead this debate, shaping the different society we need. These are unprecedented circumstances and Labour must respond with boldness, equal to the moment.

To do this we recommend:

- **Updating the political strategy and research work in light of Coronavirus focusing our attention on how we develop recovery plans, and options for a fair and sustainable future economy in the light of the pandemic.**

OUR COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- All parts of the Labour Party needs a collective process of reflection and reconcilliation about the scale of the electoral task Labour faces to create a shared understanding about what it will take to rise to it.

- Labour should reassert its mission to fundamentally change the country by getting into power, winning elections and being a movement that can bring change. Our entire organisation must be focused on that task.

- Labour needs to organise in local areas over years not months so that is seen as being at the heart of communities that it seeks to represent.

- We recommend that this report and other materials should form the basis of a political education programme across the party, from the Shadow Cabinet to CLPs, Labour groups to the wider labour movement, via webinars and social media to training events and dissemination of key findings. It's a process Labour did not go through after any of the recent election defeats which allowed for views to widely diverge about the task in hand and how we might rise to it.

- The Party should organise a series of training and listening events around the country bringing members together with communities in round table style events, and in new style, conversational door-knocking exercises – when public health permits - to listen to and engage with communities and the voters we lost.

- We need an agreed strategy about the voters whose support we must win to form a government to build a majority winning coalition. Detailed quantitative modelling undertaken by Datapraxis explained in Chapter 8 outlines the make-up of potential coalitions for Labour and what would be required politically to build them. Our innovative Britain Thinks work – bringing together different voter groups in a deliberative coalition building exercise - begins to show how bridges can be built and difficulties navigated. Crucially, this is about developing a narrative about what voters believe Labour should be for and its priorities while negotiating areas of difference.

- Based on this work outlined in detail in Chapter 8, the Commission believes a political strategy for building this future coalition should include:

  › Labour must be the agents of change, and the party of big economic change for the whole country and every part of it, reaching places and people who have been held back.

  › The change Labour offers must be rooted in people's lives, showing that we have understood and are acting upon hopes and concerns of voters we have lost, and relevant to the places people live. Understanding place, and developing a politics embedded in and understanding of communities, will be a vital component of this.

  › The public need to know Labour's leadership is credible and can be trusted and is up to the task of governing.

- All parts of the leadership and party must be focused on this task as it is a steep enough hill with four years to climb and requires relentless drive. Work cannot begin soon enough and will require long-term strategic focus, leadership and some tough decisions. This task is for the whole of our Party and shouldn't just be the responsibility of the Leadership. It will take a united team effort.

- A strategy group chaired by the Leader and involving key members of the Shadow Cabinet and a political lead tasked with election strategy should be established – responsibilities would be the development of political strategy and the strategic plan to execute it.

- In Scotland, Labour faces the additional challenge of resolving the constitutional questions that have undermined our credibility and relevance. Labour should get behind the resolved position on no new independence referendum set out by our new leadership.

- Labour can and must lead the debate about the different society and economy that must emerge from the coronavrius crisis. The unprecedented economic and health crisis will undoubtedly shape political and economic policies for a generation. We recommend work to understand and respond to how the crisis – health and economic – arising from coronavirus will shape this landscape.

CHAPTER NINE

BUILDING A PARTY AND MOVEMENT THAT CAN MEET THE CHALLENGE

- We need to be a well-led, professional, innovative organisation with a more inclusive culture
- Our Party must be connected with the communities and voters we want to serve
- We should build a genuine popular movement, involving our members and trade union supporters so we are more than the sum of our parts
- We need to revolutionise our digital methods and tools

In Part One we set out the long term factors that led to Labour's 2019 election defeat, and the short term issues that catalysed these trends among the voters that we lost. In Part Two we illustrated the major failings of our campaigning strategy, organization and digital infrastructure over recent elections.

Chapter 7 underlines the political, geographic and demographic mountains Labour needs to climb to win again. A generational shift in our capabilities and an historic effort will be needed to win the next election.

Chapter 8 seeks to set out the foundations of a winning political strategy for Labour, identifying the voters that Labour needs to engage and regain to win a working majority, and setting out some ideas for how we can find common ground across the coalition we need to build.

These twin analyses underpin the recommendations in this Chapter: how we can climb the mountain to electoral success; and how we can rise to the challenges we have been set by the voters who want us to succeed.

Our conclusion is that, unless the Party undertakes a radical reform of its culture and ways of working, it will not be able to deliver the ambitious but necessary political strategy set out in Chapter 8. This Chapter sets out the key steps and changes we believe the Party needs to make.

Underlying and running through our recommendations is a vision of the Party we need to become to meet the challenges identified in this Review:

- a Party looking outwards to the public

- a Party thinking and working relationally, not transactionally

- a Party that understands that creating this new culture and building these new relationships will take, not months, but years

Completing this journey together will take shared commitment, patient cooperation and continual collective learning at every level of the Party and the movement.

We need to be a well-led, professional, innovative organisation with a more inclusive culture

To build a winning team to change the country, we need to accept that we need to change ourselves and our Party.

Changing the culture of our Party must flow from the top down, as well as the bottom up. We must learn to respect and value each other, be led by evidence, learn from experience, and act professionally.

It should not need stating that Labour Party members have much more in common with each other than that which divides us, but our Report makes clear that we do. It is vital that each of us recognises our responsibilities to do politics differently and better.

To realise this step-change in the way our Party and movement operate we recommend:

A coherent, clear, shared political strategy

1. **Build a clear long-term political strategy for Labour.** In Chapter 8 we set out recommendations for how a new political strategy for Labour to get into power and transform the country could be developed. This strategy needs to be based on data and evidence and robustly scrutinised and understood by all levels of the organisation. All levels of the Party and movement – MPs, devolved representatives, local government, trade unions, and CLPs – should use this Report to understand the scale of this task, and be involved in drawing up this plan.

2. **Ensure this strategy integrates the need for Labour to advance in every election as well as in the next General Election.** This review has highlighted the cumulative impact of losses in local and devolved elections on Labour's community presence and campaigning capacity, and the need for the Party to join up its approaches to winning votes and increasing its representation at every level. Next year's elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Senedd, and London Mayoralty and Assembly, as well as mayors, councillors and police and crime commissioners across the country, will be a critical stepping stone to positioning Labour to win the next General Election but must be part of a long term strategy.

3. **Establish operational plans to support this strategy across our Party and movement.** We must ensure this strategy is understood and implemented consistently through every level of the Party. Each part of the organisation and movement needs to be treated as an essential partner and work in alignment. The strategy needs to be translated by every part of our movement into concrete plans for how they can each contribute towards achieving its goals. Each staff team, CLP, MP, affiliated union, and Labour Group should have their own plans, laying out how they are contributing to the overall goal to get Labour back into government.

4. **Reinforce the strategy with clear chains of command and lines of accountability.** Everyone in the Party should have a clear sense of their role and responsibilities in advancing its goals. Decisions and resources should be devolved to the lowest possible level, within a clear framework that ensures outcomes are monitored and decision-making structures optimised. The extent to which the strategy is being effectively operationalised should be subject to ongoing scrutiny and review, up to and including senior levels. As part of this approach, the Party needs to identify one official who is in charge of election strategy. This should be someone with expertise in campaigning, who is directly accountable to the Party Leader.

5. **Better public coordination across our different nations and regions.** As we have seen in [Chapter 6](), there needs to be better coordination between different geographical parts of our Party particularly on messaging and policy. There needs to be an understanding of devolution, devolved policy and devolved governments throughout the Labour Party and more careful consideration of what our offer is to target voters in those areas rather than just assuming it is the English offer minus the devolved areas of policy. There should be advanced warning of key policy announcements for Welsh and Scottish Labour so they are able to prepare public responses proactively in support. UK Labour HQ should also seek to obtain briefings on Scottish and Welsh issues for Shadow Cabinet ministers, ahead of major media appearances, particularly given Wales is currently the only Labour-led government within the UK. We should proactively showcase policies we are implementing in power to show how Labour values can be delivered in government. Labour should also seek to utilise a broader range of voices on the national stage around devolved issues, including spokespeople from Welsh and Scottish Labour, as well as Metro Mayors and prominent leaders in local government.

A professional organisation with an inclusive culture

6. **Overhaul Party operations and HR practices.** To achieve its goals the Labour Party needs a skilled, professional, diverse, and engaged workforce. Staff appointments should be based on ability to do the job, experience, and commitment, both to the Party's core values and the organisational culture we want to build. HR practices need to be independently audited and overhauled as necessary to achieve this. Processes for recruitment and promotion should be transparent, with full equality and diversity monitoring. The Labour Party should be an exemplar employer, its staff valued. Morale, retention, inclusion and diversity should be measured and reported on

using the best HR standards. Pastoral care should be a clear function of HR practices, so staff are supported to thrive in a positive working environment. Factionalism and favouritism of any kind must be rooted out. Teamwork and discipline, with the Party's agreed strategy and policies placed above personal views and interests, should be an expectation across the Labour Party and at every level.

7. **Develop robust, independent and transparent complaints, disciplinary and appeals processes to reinforce tough action on anti-Semitism, and every form of racism, misogyny, bullying, intimidation, sexual assault, harassment and discrimination.** We support the establishment of a clear process to deal with complaints and disciplinary matters. We should localise compliance procedures and practices with specialist staff in every regional office, supported by a strengthened national team, to ensure professional practice and speedy responses and actions to resolve concerns raised. This would also ensure that regional organisers could focus on building local campaigning and organising capacity, not adjudicating internal disputes.

8. **Conduct a thorough Race Audit of every level and function of the party.** The Commission has received some evidence containing troubling allegations and detailing experiences of structural discrimination including anti-black racism. While we have encouraged people to report this to the relevant authorities, Labour needs to conduct a thorough Race Audit to prevent further instances of discrimination. The audit should monitor diversity in staff recruitment, local parties and candidate selections and explore the experiences of BAME activists, staff members and politicians to identify and remove structural barriers at every level of the organisation. We would encourage the party to consider outside expertise to inform the audit process and to provide external challenge.

9. **Be a learning organisation.** To survive and succeed in a fast-changing and increasingly diverse social and political environment, Labour needs to be agile and adaptive. That requires an organisation that at every level is open to new information and ideas, ready to experiment and innovate, rigorous in evaluating what works, and seeks to mainstream best practice in a way that is consistent but also sensitive to context. It also means measuring success impartially, while keeping those metrics themselves under review to ensure their relevance to strategic priorities. This is most obvious in rapidly evolving areas such as online communications and the use of data, or evidence on the most effective use of communications budgets. However, as we indicate below, it applies equally to others areas such as methods of canvassing and campaigning, which this Commission believes should be subject to ongoing evaluation and evidence-based evolution.

10. **Take operational decisions based on evidence.** This is critical both for internal legitimacy and strategic consistency. For example, Labour's target list should be based on objective evidence and clear principles, not preferment. Resources must be allocated in line with the core general election campaigning strategy, rather than funnelled to particular seats on factional or personal grounds.

11. **Invest in culture change and commit to it.** Strengthening and steering an organisation's culture requires a serious long-term commitment of time and resource. Processes need to be carefully designed and reviewed. Change needs to be led and consistently backed from the top. This will take significant investment of both political and financial capital over years, not months.

Our Party must be connected with the communities and voters we want to serve

To win again, we need to win back the trust of more of the British public whilst retaining our existing supporter base. We must be in touch with voters, listening and recognising their concerns and working with communities to deliver positive change all year round, not just asking for their votes at election time.

This objective needs to be embedded in our culture and ways of working, from the top to the bottom of our Party. It needs to be reflected in the roles, responsibilities, plans and metrics of success through which our strategy is operationalised. And it needs to be pursued in the innovative, adaptive way we recommended above - continually evolving best practice and finding ways of tailoring it to specific contexts and circumstances.

As well as making our existing organisation more open and outward-facing, we also need to become one that is present in every community and part of the country where we need to build support. This means finding ways of rebuilding our contacts and connections in constituencies where we have lost seats and our membership has become thinned out.

Policy that is radical and inspires people to believe we can deliver real change is vital, particularly on the economy, as we have discussed above. We must have policymaking processes that are rooted in people's lives, and the problems they and the country face.

To achieve this goal we recommend:

Listening, learning and facing out

12. **Expand the *Call Keir* outreach programme to every constituency, using our MPs, councillors and members.** All CLPs and all elected representatives should play their part in engaging the public regularly through listening events, and other forms of engagement activity, to listen and understand the public's concerns and work with them to realise real change in our communities, showing Labour is in touch.

13. **Open up local Labour Parties.** To encourage greater accessibility and transparency between Party and community, make some meetings open to the public and advertised as forums to discuss local issues. CLPs should be more relational and less transactional, encouraged and supported to organise outwardly. This entails a major cultural shift in many cases, which will take time and sustained commitment to embed and needs to take the form of options that are sensitive to different contexts and situations. One

way of supporting this might be through the development of different goals and metrics that could help to dislodge an exclusive focus on voter ID and contact rates; another might be to offer training in community organising to CLP campaign officers or dedicated community engagement officers. This work should be done in partnership with the work of local elected representatives, and trade unions. Strengthen support from the centre and regions, so CLPs and elected representatives can access resources and training to help them engage their voters and community groups in policy-making

Rebuilding our presence across the country

14. **Adopt a broad list of seats Labour needs to proactively engage and build in so that we can form a majority government at the next general election.** We need to learn from and adopt best practice approaches to building capacity and presence in constituencies where we do not now have an MP. In some places this may entail early candidate selection, while being mindful of the demands and potential financial detriment that PPCs (Prospective Parliamentary Candidates) can be subject to, and the risks that this can pose to diversity. Where there is no PPC, another elected representative could be chosen by members to fulfil a role of Labour Community Champion until the selection process starts.

15. **Implement Seat-Twinning now, with MPs in Labour-held seats twinning with target seats Labour has lost.** In Scotland and Wales, this support role could instead be played by sitting MSPs or MSs representing the same or nearby constituencies or regions. Elected representatives could mentor or support Community Champions in these seats, and support CLP campaigning activity locally as well as in home seats, increasing campaigning volunteers and capacity. Through the Co-op, TULO and the LGA co-op parties, affiliated trade unions and Labour Groups should also twin with these seats, so that the whole movement is focused on supporting activity to win elections.

16. **Each region should have a shadow cabinet lead to help coordinate all aspects of the party's efforts and resources.** This will help build up the relationships between the leadership and the grassroots of the party. For Scotland and Wales, this role should be played by the Shadow Secretary of State and, in the political cabinet, the Scottish and Welsh Labour Leaders.

Making policy that is relevant and resonant

17. **Reform our Party policy-making process** at all levels, to ensure that it is connected to our communities. This must be a more deliberative form of policy-making which involves the public. Use methods such as People's Panels, Citizens' Juries, and Citizens' Assemblies and other methods involving the voices and experiences of people across our movement, alongside the public, to develop policy between the public and members. Public engagement should be measured and valued in our policy-making, resulting in policies that are co-produced with the public, supporting our

political strategy. CLPs and elected representatives should be encouraged to organise regular People's Panels or other engagement events, with numbers per year benchmarked to promote good practice.

18. **Think local,** by more fully integrating the experiences and knowledge of devolved administrations and local government who are delivering credible and radical change on the ground for communities into our policy processes.

19. **Engage independent organisations,** to help ensure our manifesto is credible and deliverable. There are a wealth of organisations across civil society who are keen to work with Labour to transform our country for the better. Build more ways for them to engage with our policy process, especially outside of Westminster, and test the plans we develop to ensure they are believable, credible and deliverable.

20. **Dedicate polling and resources to conducting genuine, high quality research of BAME voters on a regular basis to better understand and represent their needs and concerns.** As shown in Chapter 1, too often Labour has taken for granted the support of BAME voters, treating them as a homogenous group rather than understanding their different concerns and viewpoints. Insufficient polling data exists currently to monitor the evolving concerns of specific BAME groups. Labour should consult with experts to consider how it can use its position as a procurer of data and polling services to help polling become more inclusive and capture the views of minority communities more accurately.

We should build a genuine popular movement, involving our members, affiliated trade unionists and campaign allies so we are more than the sum of our parts

Our members and our movement are our greatest strength. However, evidence in this Report shows we can and must do more to give them the tools they need so we can leverage this advantage, and be ready to think creatively and innovatively about the best uses to which their time, skills, knowledge, and commitment can be put.

We must unleash the potential of our movement to ensure everyone can make a contribution to the task ahead. We need to encourage, equip and empower everyone in our Party and wider movement to be the bridge we need between our Party and their family, friends, workplace colleagues and communities.

In line with previous recommendations, this needs to be taken forward in a way that maximises autonomy and enables experimentation within a framework that ensures strategic coherence and shared learning. The cultural and organisational changes we have identified above are intended to enable and underpin this.

Mobilising our members, councillors, affiliated trade unionists and allies in the cooperative movement be our bridge into communities and workplaces

21. **Make community organising central to what we do as a party.** As recommended above, Labour needs to learn from experience and be ready to do things differently if that is the best way of harnessing our members' energies and advancing our political strategy. We believe this Review adds

to the evidence that community organising has a vital role to play in helping Labour to reconnect with voters and rebuild our capacity in key parts of the country. This work needs to become a permanent and integrated part of our structure from top to bottom, from a clear and coherent stream of work in party headquarters down to our CLPs. Ideally, each CLP would have an officer trained in how this method of building support can work locally.

22. **We should evaluate and modernise our approach to doorstep canvassing.** As party loyalty declines and Labour's "core" vote becomes less stable, we need to look at integrating relationship-building and persuasion into our communications and campaigning, developing less transactional approaches to door knocking and a more engaging approach to online spaces for different points in the electoral cycle. We should have a rigorous evaluation of the value and effectiveness of our canvassing techniques. Looking both to international best practice and internal innovation, our canvassing methods should be updated to include persuasive canvassing practices, and our members and elected representatives trained in this method when it is agreed. In line with our recommendations above, there needs to be a consistent approach to structured experimentation and evidence-based evaluation. Different approaches should be piloted in elections in 2021.

23. **Embed a community organising approach that links up across the Labour Party and its affiliated trade unions.** Labour needs to work with the trade unions nationally and locally to make the vision of community organising succeed, including reaching out to union members to root Labour policy in their priorities. This will require not only dedicated staff resources but also the development of shared training programmes. There may be value in bringing together Labour Party members and members of different unions for training. The Party should also look to extend this approach to other parts of the movement, such as the Cooperative Party.

24. **Make the Labour movement an empowering presence in our communities.** In a number of areas where Labour has lost ground, and in particular suffered from the loss of an MPs' office as a focal point for the community, the Commission believes the party and unions should pilot Manuel Cortes' innovative recommendation to this review for Labour Community Centres. These would offer a range of services, employment rights advice and spaces for community groups to meet and organise, not only working with local partners such as Coop branches, but also tapping into and linking up relevant local resources. This would help us serve the needs and interests of communities and put Labour back at their heart. Something similar is already being attempted by Leigh Constituency Labour Party in collaboration with the Cooperative Party.

25. **Explore new innovations in workplace organising.** The Labour Party and trade unions should look to learn from innovative methods being developed by workplace organisers and campaigners, to look at how we can build support for Labour among workers from traditionally non-unionised background, including using new technology to reach out.

26. **Strengthen support for local government year-round campaigning and**

engagement activities. Councillors are vital to our future, yet there are mixed approaches to campaigning with some people doing lots of political activity, while others do less. We should ensure councillors can share and learn from best practice in maintaining levels of contact and campaigning ahead of and beyond elections.

27. **Map and engage with local online activity.** Increasingly, local communities come together and interact online as much as in streets, neighbourhoods and shared physical spaces. Labour councillors and candidates, supported by CLP social media officers, should be mapping local online groups and spaces, such as Facebook Groups, and work on building relationships with the admins and being an active presence. This should not just be at election time but throughout the year. We must organise in online community spaces as well as offline.

Supporting campaigners and candidates to succeed

28. **Conduct a full audit of each of our target seats identifying their unique campaigning needs and capacities.** The seats we have lost and need to gain will all have different needs. Some may have small memberships and lower campaigning capacity, while others may have large memberships which are not mobilised. Some seats will be rural, others more connected. There is no "one-size fits all" approach, and Labour needs to provide the right kind of political infrastructure and support that meet each seat's needs. Working with local representatives, local parties and using targeting analysis, the party should have a clear long term strategy for each of our target seats.

29. **Empower and upskill our movement through a national network of support for learning and skills development.** As our campaigning capacity in some seats is limited, we recommend setting up a network of support, which might include Regional Organising Academies as well as a full range of online resources and delivery methods, to train staff, politicians and members in all forms of organising, campaigning and leadership. We believe this would be well in line with Keir Starmer's proposal for a Labour College for developing campaigners and candidates. This will help to ensure our political strategy is understood and knowledge is shared across all layers of our movement, so a culture of campaigning is embedded at all levels. This should include training in social media campaigning.

30. **Give our members access to the digital tools they need.** We should invest in creating more usable digital tools that are available to people who need them. There are more detailed recommendations in the submissions from Common Knowledge, that the Commission believes could have merit. We should be investing in digital tool training, adopting a "train the trainer" model (equipping an initial group or network with the skills that enable them to go on to train larger numbers) to better distribute training for Labour Party tools. Digital volunteer communities can help with this. Introduce a transparent and understandable system for establishing digital credentials and access, so that the right people have credentials for the right tools.

31. **Improve support for candidates and campaigners.** This review found

that policy and message briefing was a particular weakness of the 2019 campaign. Alongside this, Labour should strengthen the consistency of messaging in election communications, and the quality of our leaflet and direct mail offer to local areas. Candidates should also be given access to a set of core support services and templates, for example access to a professional videographer and the latest evidence-based guidance on campaign methods (for example, likely impacts of social media or direct mail) to inform budget spend.

Making the most of our members' capacities

32. **Create a volunteer timebank.** Members with particular sought-after skills should be able to volunteer their time to the Party either at a local or regional level, to increase campaigning capacity or share skills. We believe this is in line with Angela Raynor's proposals for a "Labour Community" platform to facilitate skills-sharing across the movement. Initiatives such as Swing Left in the US match volunteers with specific skills to the campaign nearest to them that needs their particular skill. Such initiatives are worth investigating.

33. **Engage with volunteer networks.** The Party should seek to engage more officially with affiliated organisations, Party groupings like Campaign Lab, or Labour Graphic designers, to better harness the skills and talents of networks in our movement. Labour HQ should open up to these groups to work together to solve particular problems or build capacity in an area.

We need to revolutionise our digital methods and tools

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 showed that, as digital technology disrupts and transforms political communication and campaigning, Labour is in danger of falling behind the curve. Labour needs to invest in and upgrade its technological infrastructure and capacities, not just as a one-off push but with an ongoing commitment, and should adapt its working culture and structures to match.

A digital transformation

34. **Establish a fully resourced, cross-functional digital team centrally** working on digital tooling at all times, including software engineers, user-experience and digital design specialists, and product and project-management specialists. Ensure plans are in place to quickly scale this up and integrate staffing during busy election times.

35. **Completely overhaul our suite of digital tools** to support our campaigning activity and deliver our political strategy, including tools to more efficiently produce leaflets, support relational organising (for example by mapping community relationships or recording data from one-to-ones) and tracking our contact with voters and their responses on key issues (the Conservatives have a bespoke tool for tracking what is resonating with the public – Labour should develop and integrate its own).

36. **Work towards open-sourcing Labour tools**, with a phased rollout to open

up the tools to additional volunteer communities, supported by increased staff, with a defined pathway to full open source. This should be combined with a strategy to create an open API platform (allowing programmers controlled access to the Party's systems and software without risking their security or integrity) that can facilitate third party toolmakers, as was done recently by Elizabeth Warren's campaign in the US.

37. **Engage productively with tech volunteer communities like Campaign Lab.** This could mean developing a process for incorporating volunteer-made upgrades to Labour Party tech. It could also mean sharing challenges with volunteers through facilitating Hackathons (bringing together coders, project managers and others to form interdisciplinary teams to find solutions to key challenges over a short period of time), funding digital community management and these communities directly.

A more sophisticated approach to data

38. **Improve data literacy throughout the organisation.** The Party needs to be able to keep up with and harness the latest techniques in data science, appreciating its potential uses while also understanding its limitations. This will require improved levels of data literacy across the organisation. Ideally regional staff and local organisers should be able to appreciate the uses of such analyses, as well as challenge or test their assumptions.

39. **Use data to empower members and drive organisational learning.** Labour's organisers and campaigners need to be able to access the data they need to target their efforts and evaluate their impact. This could range from demographic and polling information to social network analysis that can help spot social influencers. Systems also need to incorporate feedback channels that allow this evidence to be shared, and also for tools and platforms to be continually improved, as bugs are fixed and usability enhancements identified. This applies to everything, from the design of voter ID sheets to Party tools such as Insight and Contact Creator.

40. **Analyse long-term trends using both data and local insight.** The Party should be thinking about how we can anticipate demographic trends, by undertaking much more long-term strategic analysis and modelling of seats we currently have, and anticipating how this might change. Working with local representatives and Parties and using targeting analysis, the Party should have a clear assessment of the needs of each seat, based on their CLP development plans.

41. **Make better use of social media data:** We need to see social media as a rich source of data and be clearer about what metrics we are using. Labour needs to overhaul its metrics, focusing not just on vanity measures like number of shares but also metrics that measure engagement. We should be monitoring how our messages are received online by different audiences, and this should be acting as a feedback loop.

42. **Establish a data ethics** policy to ensure we are at the forefront of the ethical use of data in campaigning.

Laying the groundwork for victory in next year's elections

43. **Integrating campaigns for 2021** where we will be fighting between one and four elections in any given part of the country, with parties with very different capacities and skills. That will need advanced planning and regular communication to coordinate between the layers of campaigns. Ensuring that this is collaborative rather than competitive will require:

    › Clear win numbers, for voter groups that form winning coalitions in each area and election.

    › Campaign managers in place and ready.

    › Integrated plans for media, message, field, digital, and fundraising and are adapted for the level of campaign capacity

    › Regular coordination and communication to relay lessons and re-deploy resources

    › Working effectively with Welsh Labour and Scottish Labour HQs.

    › Coronavirus contingencies pre-planned, with surge capacity for digital and home phone banking and a postal only election

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