



UK IN A  
CHANGING  
EUROPE

## **Understanding the Red Wall**

**Politics and identity in the new electoral battlegrounds**

## FOREWORD

Two years on from the election won so convincingly by Boris Johnson, what do voters in those much-discussed Red Wall seats make of Brexit, and indeed of politics in general? In this report, Paula Surridge and Alan Wager report on a series of focus groups held in West Yorkshire and Humberside in September and October 2021. They offer a unique and fascinating insight into the thinking of voters in this key electoral region.

My heartfelt gratitude to Paula and Alan for putting this report together. Thanks too to John-Paul Salter for checking the final copy and Thomas Mansfield for sorting out design and printing.

I hope you find what follows useful and informative. As ever, do get in touch if you have any queries or comments.

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## SUMMARY

The 2019 general election gave birth to a new term for understanding electoral geography, the Red Wall. This report focusses on a series of focus groups conducted by [Ipsos](#) on behalf of UK in a Changing Europe with voters in seats across Yorkshire and Humberside, that had either been won by the Conservatives in 2019 or held by Labour with a significantly reduced majority.

The groups focussed on the issues and priorities of these voters; their understanding of the 2019 general election with the benefit of 18 months hindsight and their identities both political and non-political. Full details of the groups can be found in the accompanying report from [Ipsos](#).

### Key points

- **Few people knew what levelling up meant, and they were cynical about what it would deliver for their areas. Nonetheless they believed positive change in their area was a key election promise that must be delivered.**
- **While people were concerned about crime and the local physical environment, the cost of living was the largest concern for many, with both personal household difficulties and concern about how the country would pay for the cost of the pandemic expressed.**
- **Participants expressed distrust of politicians of all parties and there was widespread cynicism about the prospect of real change being delivered for their areas.**
- **People were generally positive about their local areas. They saw transport and local infrastructure as positive features alongside community spirit and friendliness.**
- **Many participants suggested that votes at the 2019 election had been influenced by Brexit, 'lent' to the Conservative Party to 'Get Brexit Done'.**
- **That Brexit was 'done' was a widely expressed view, but there was also a recognition of on-going issues to be resolved.**
- **National identities were a positive sense of belonging, though many did not distinguish between Englishness and Britishness and these were not connected to political identities.**
- **Party images were strongly connected to class imagery, though there was also a sense that this had been changing over time.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 2019 general election gave birth to a new term for understanding electoral geography. This Red Wall is a group of 42 seats identified by James Kanagasooriam where the Conservatives were underperforming given local social profiles. Not all of them were won by the Conservatives in 2019, but many were and often for the first time. The image of a crumbling wall proved tantalising for political commentators and these seats have become a touchstone of political analysis since the election. At least three books have already sought to understand the remarkable electoral results in what were once thought of as Labour heartlands, and analyses of what voters in these seats think has become a mainstay of political analysis. We should note that our choice of constituencies does not fully align with the list of Red Wall seats which was published after our fieldwork was completed.

This report draws on seven focus groups conducted by Ipsos on behalf of UK in a Changing Europe between 28 September and 13 October 2021. It differs from other analysis of the Red Wall in three ways. First, while not designed to be representative, it is designed to offer a *breadth* of coverage of the voters in these areas. While those who switched from Labour to the Conservatives are included, so too are (often overlooked) non-voters, those who voted for the Brexit Party, and those who continued to vote Labour. A group of Muslim voters were also selected, with the aim of understanding voters from minority ethnic groups. Crucially, we explicitly sought to understand the commonalities as well as differences between the groups.

Second, our research focusses on the longer-term. While we look at how the groups understood the 2019 election, we also consider how they understand the challenges now facing the nation and their local areas and how they articulate these personally and politically. Focus groups are not designed to capture the public mood at a particular time, and while the experience of fuel shortages was an important factor during the period of the fieldwork, we aim to place issues like within the context of the more enduring political narratives the groups articulated.

Finally, the groups were recruited in Yorkshire and Humberside, with emphasis on those constituencies the Conservatives gained from Labour in 2019, or which Labour held on to with a substantially reduced majority. This more constrained geographic focus allows for an exploration of both regional and national identities and issues.

The focus groups were primarily organised around the voting (or non-voting) behaviour of the

participants at the 2019 general election.

The report paints a picture of how voters in part of the Red Wall viewed the 2019 election with the benefit of hindsight, how they felt about the position of the country and political competition during the period of sustained economic and social disruption created by the pandemic and what their priorities were for the future of the nation and the region as the pressures of Covid-19 eased.

## 2. THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

### The 2019 election

*'...it's always been Labour, Labour, Labour, Labour and now we've got a Conservative MP'*

With the benefit of 18 months hindsight, how did voters feel about the election? Almost all the groups expressed a degree of surprise at the results, either expecting a closer outcome nationally or a stronger performance for Labour locally. The sense that the 2019 election had marked a real break with the past was evident:

**'...for the North to turn completely upside down, that was a complete bombshell'**  
(Conservative voter)

**'I expected it to be closer'** (Conservative voter)

**'...a mining community, and it's always been Labour, Labour, Labour, Labour and now we've got a Conservative MP'** (Brexit Party voter)

Yet some felt that even such a dramatic result didn't mean much for their everyday lives.

**'I didn't really feel anything because it doesn't matter who's in charge, they're still going to do whatever they want.'** (New Conservative voter)

Analysis of the [2019 election](#) has highlighted Brexit, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn as the key factors behind the result. Participants also identified these influences – sometimes when explaining their own vote, but more often when making sense of other people’s votes. It was, at times, difficult for voters to disentangle the influence of Brexit from perceptions of the Labour leader.

**‘I thought if Labour come into power, there’s no way we’re leaving...’**

(Conservative voter)

**‘Jeremy Corbyn didn’t help, but they were borrowed because people wanted to get Brexit over and done with.’** (UKIP voter)

That being said, some were clear that Corbyn had been a motivating factor, in one case moving a previous non-voter to turn out to vote against Labour.

**‘...the leader of the party, they’ve got to have a likeability ... it’s just human nature isn’t it? I just didn’t like Jeremy Corbyn.’** (Non-voter)

**‘...you couldn’t have Jeremy Corbyn...’** (Conservative voter)

**‘I would agree with that as well ... in years past, haven’t bothered voting because I’ve lived in such a heavily Labour area ... But seeing Jeremy Corbyn on the news ... I just thought ... this time I’ll actually put an effort in’** (Conservative voter)

This however led to a sense that votes were ‘lent’, perhaps only for the short-term, to ‘get Brexit done’ or because of a dislike of the Labour leadership. Interestingly, there was little evidence in the focus groups of positive feelings towards the Conservatives – even among those who had voted for them.

**‘I don’t think it was so much a vote for the Conservatives, it was a vote against Corbyn. That’s why many people switched from Labour to Conservative...’**

(New Conservative voter)

**‘A lot of it was lending a vote and it was a protest vote ... I think it was a vote to say ‘Look we’re really pissed off and this is how pissed off I am’.’** (Conservative voter)

**‘Best of a bad bunch’** (New Conservative voter)

One of the focus groups stood out as having a much more positive view of the Labour leadership: younger (under 45) Labour voters. This group were keen to stress the role of the media in undermining the Labour leadership and linked this to the loss of Labour 'heartland' voters.

**'I think the media properly went to town on Labour ... Jeremy Corbyn was made out to be an absolute clown and ... I saw old pit villages and mining villages which supported Labour all their life vote for the Tory party based on pure media lies..'** (Labour voter)

**'I totally agree. They made Jeremy Corbyn look like a lost soul...'** (Labour voter)

**'I agree that the media painted him in a really negative light and I think there were a lot of lies told about him ... that he was a terrorist sympathiser and ... people fell for it and voted for the Conservatives'** (Labour voter)

Boris Johnson was rarely mentioned as a direct influence either on their own choices or those of other people. However, one did reflect on the Prime Minister's personality and likeability, a reflection perhaps of the 'Heineken' politician.

**'You know he seems like a nice enough bloke but he seems to be a bit of a buffoon to me ... God my dad would turn in his grave if I said that I was liking a Tory, but I do like him as a person ... But it's just the word Tory that gets my heckles up...'** (Labour voter)

## Levelling Up

*'I've heard it quite a bit but there's not much content that comes after that little slogan'*

There were few specific mentions of policy in discussions of the election, whether that be reactions to the result, or the reasons people gave for how they had voted. However, given the importance of levelling up to the government's policy agenda, we prompted the groups, asking them directly what the phrase 'levelling up' meant to them. Responses ranged from the amusing to the well-informed, though by far the most common was 'I've not heard of it'.

**'I thought it was from a Playstation game, Fortnite or something'**

(New Conservative voter)

**'It sounds like a game, like a Playstation game. Like you've got to the end of one stage and you go onto the next level.'** (Labour voter)

**'Do you mean when men and women are paid the same money for the same job, that levelling up...'** (Conservative voter)

**'Regarding the North South divide isn't it...to create the same opportunities nation-wide rather than it all being weighted down south.'** (Brexit Party voter)

Even those who had heard of levelling up were rather cynical about its content and what it would deliver for their areas.

**'Yes I heard it regularly...even Boris today mentioned Doncaster in this speech but you know it doesn't really pan out in real life.'** (Labour voter)

**'I've heard it but I don't think it means anything. I think it's a political phrase to make people up North ... think that the government does care and are going to do something'** (Labour voter)

**'I've heard it quite a bit but there's not much content that comes after that little slogan'** (New Conservative voter)

**'I think it's a bit of a sales pitch to the North.'** (New Conservative voter)

**'I don't believe for a second that the Conservatives are going to do any levelling up'** (Labour voter)

Yet there was still a sense that delivery on the ill-defined set of priorities linked with levelling up was important.

**'I think, well after Brexit weren't there some, sort of, promises about improving things in the North? ... they've got to stick to what they said ... or those voters will be gone forever, because it's a broken promise.'** (Conservative voter)

**'...deliver on your promise, what you say and deliver on that. If you're saying level up, level up, deliver on that, do what you say you're going to do.'** (Non-voter)



## Brexit

*'It's not the dream we were sold, for sure.'*

The groups were clear that that Johnson, and the Conservatives, had delivered on their election promise and 'Got Brexit done'. However, there was a definite sense that although Brexit was 'done,' numerous issues still needed to be addressed. Voters, moreover, were pessimistic about what Brexit was going to mean for their lives and for the areas in which they lived. They were also critical of a perceived lack of preparation for the impact of Brexit.

**'Well at least we did finally leave. They did what they said they were going to do...with regards to Brexit...'** (Non-voter)

**'It's a mess...yes, we signed the paperwork, we're out. But we're a long way from being out. It's not the dream we were sold, for sure.'** (Conservative)

**'I don't think we got what we were promised because it's not really delivered on much, has it?'** (Conservative)

**'We haven't got what we were promised and all the teething issues that we are currently going through, surely should've been anticipated and prepared for.'** (Conservative)

Some commentators have speculated that fighting a 'forever war' with the EU might bind the Conservative coalition together. The responses of our participants, however, cast some doubt on this.

**'If they've got it done how come there's all this trouble with Northern Ireland?'** (UKIP voter)

**'I think that it's about 60%, that he's done enough so that he can say to people he's done it, but behind closed doors the deals and the contracts are still there, are all going to have to be negotiated still and they're going to be on-going...'** (Brexit Party voter)

Participants found it difficult to separate the effects of Brexit and the pandemic, though some felt the impact of the former had at least been partly hidden by the latter.

**'I think it's been swept under the carpet for now...You don't really hear anything about anything now. It's not headlines.'** (Labour voter)

**'I think people have pretty much forgotten it because Covid has taken over now...'**  
(Labour voter)

**'I think the pandemic covered up Brexit, made us forget about it. Now we're...seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and Brexit's right there waiting for us.'** (Labour voter)

### 3. PARTY POLITICS

#### Party Images

*'...a bit of a do gooder. That's how I see a Labour voter'*

Rather than a focus on parties and leaders, our approach was driven by how voters perceived the people who voted for each party. When asked to describe a typical Labour or Conservative supporter, all the groups turned to class-based descriptions – despite there being little relationship between class and party choice at the 2019 election. When asked to describe the typical Labour voter 'working class' was by far the most common initial reaction, while for the Conservatives 'posh' or 'wealthy' were the terms most commonly used.

However, there were some interesting differences within this. Participants also mentioned how they thought the typical Labour voter had changed.

**'I think a typical Labour voter, right now...She's early to mid-twenties. She wants to save the world. She wants to include everybody. She wants to travel around Europe with her friends.'** (New Conservative voter)

**'...all the flat hat type people that I know were very Labour all voted Tory. Yet I know so many young twenty odd year-old women, they've only been to uni, they're governed by quite strict social rules. You know, if you walk into their house and say the wrong thing, they'll ask you to leave.'** (New Conservative voter)

**'...a bit of a do gooder. Someone who sees the world through rose-tinted glasses. That's how I see a Labour voter at the moment.'** (Non-voter)

Others linked this change to a wider perception of the Labour party and the kind of voters it attracted:

**'...Northern working class ... but I think there are a lot of people that are university educated and are in good jobs but that want a fair society ... the people who vote for Labour, are people who want a fair and equal society.'** (Labour voter)

A similar variety characterised views of Conservative voters. While the groups all mentioned 'wealth', there was a recognition that this wasn't the case for all those who voted Conservative in 2019.

**'Someone that's wealthy that wants to keep their wealth'** (Labour voter)

**'I think they think of the economy first and then the people'** (Labour voter)

**'Large detached house. More than two cars on the drive.'** (Labour voter)

**'Go hunting at the weekend.'** (Labour voter)

**'Look after their own.'** (Brexit Party voter)

**'Working class, family person. Someone that wants to economy to be driven and the economy to go somewhere.'** (New Conservative voter)

**'Public schoolboy that's always been spoon fed by his mum and dad and has had everything handed to him on a plate.'** (New Conservative voter)

The last two extracts above are from participants in the same group – a group of 2019 Conservative voters who had previously backed other parties – highlighting both the persistence of class-based understandings of politics but also the way this has been eroded over time. Thus, while the first instincts of the groups were to think of Labour and Conservative voters in class terms, in both cases this was qualified with a recognition of the weakening of class ties.

## Party loyalty and volatility

*'It's like which football team you follow'*

A feature of recent elections has been an increase in 'volatility': more and more voters choose different parties at successive elections. One of the key psephological features of the 'red wall' was that these areas had persisted in voting Labour despite having socio-economic profiles which suggested that there should be a higher Conservative vote. This had been explained in terms of the loyalty of voters to the Labour Party, and the idea that Labour voting was handed down across the generations: 'you could put a donkey in a red rosette here and it would win'.

We were keen to explore this sense of party loyalty. It was something participants were acutely aware of. Some articulated the strength of these family ties in previously anchoring them to the Labour Party, having voted for the Brexit Party in 2019.

**'You've been Labour all your life and it's just a family thing...'** (Brexit Party voter)

**'It's like which football team you follow'** (Brexit Party voter)

**'My grandad was a miner and he always said you vote Labour. My nana used to say 'You must always vote because you are a woman and we fought for your votes.' So number one I have to vote, even if I didn't want to, and number two I had to vote Labour...'** (Brexit Party voter)

Party loyalty did not come up in relation to the Conservative Party, but there was a sense that the link to Labour had weakened. Loyalty to Labour was often expressed in terms relating to class and particularly to family, while a sense that these ties had weakened was also clear.

**'...in the past it has always been Labour and I think it's purely because my mum and dad did it and...they always put themselves out there as 'They are there for you' the normal average, normal, working class person.'** (New Conservative voter)

**'My dad voted Labour all of his life but when it came to that election, he voted Conservative. It's the first time ever, it nearly blew me away...'** (Labour voter)

**'I feel in a Yorkshire region, that you vote whatever your family's voted. But...peoples' views are changing and they're making their own decisions...'** (Brexit Party voter)

**'...with Labour it was always for the working class wasn't it. Well, that's what it was when I was a kid, and my mum voted Labour all her life, my dad did. Over the last five or six years, old people I live next door to, they've all not voted Labour...'** (Non-voter)

That participants viewed both party images and long-term party loyalties in terms of class is significant. While there are clear indications that some people saw this as changing and felt that Labour were no longer as closely connected to the working class as they had been, they nonetheless understood politics through a class lens. This is in keeping with [recent polling](#) that showed one in four voters felt that the class divide was still the most important in the UK. The interplay between region ('Northern working class'), occupation, family and local history was important in shaping the way all the groups narrated politics and their political experiences.

## 4. PEOPLE: IDENTITIES AND PRIORITIES

### Identity and Belonging

*'Friendly...There's a really good community spirit'*

Political identities make up only a small part of most [people's sense of themselves](#) and where they belong. When discussing party loyalty, narratives quickly become interwoven with identities based on place, family ties and class. To better understand these connections, the focus groups were designed with a particular geographical focus in mind. All the participants were recruited from constituencies in Yorkshire and Humberside, with the majority from Yorkshire.

A striking feature of all the groups was the way in which people described their areas. All groups commented on the scenery and countryside around them. In contrast to many of the stereotypes about Red Wall places, there was also a focus on rural or village life. Many participants also commented positively on the transport infrastructure (though for most this meant private cars).

**'The whole thing is just a natural beauty around here..'** (Green Party voter)

**'I can be in the city centre in twenty minutes as well as in the middle of the Peak District in twenty minutes.'** (Conservative voter)

**'...everything really easy, there's lots of buses, trains, easily accessible.'**  
(Conservative voter)

Alongside this description of the physical geography of the places they lived, all the groups also spoke about the community spirit or friendliness of the areas they lived in. Often contrasting this with a perceived unfriendliness elsewhere, particularly in 'the South'.

**'...the best thing for me is the community spirit, I find the whole of the north...much friendlier and just very accepting, just a great community.'**

**'Friendly...There's a really good community spirit...if you are down and you've got problems, you can always find someone to help.'**

## **National identity**

### *'Being English or British: what is the difference?'*

We were also interested in the extent to which participants felt a sense of national pride, or national identity and how that was expressed. We tackled this first by asking whether people felt English or British, a question which elicited confused responses about how to differentiate them. This has been a feature of research on English and British identity but in these groups, we see not only this running together of English and British identities but also how each is connected to different understandings of national identity.

British identity was most often associated with an 'official' designation used for filling forms, while English identity was more commonly associated with familial ties or sports teams. The discussion here was often shaped by the first things mentioned in the groups but all the groups articulated a complex understanding of national identity.

**'...every time I fill in a form...and it asks you what your nationality is and your ethnicity and it always says 'White British'...' (Labour voter)**

**'It's never something I've really thought of, but if I think about it, I use English more...I don't know why' (Conservative voter)**

**'I always say I'm British, I don't really know why I would say, what the difference is to be honest. Being English or British what is the difference?' (Labour voter)**

**'...it's dead simple...Everything that builds my identity is in England, so I've got to say England.' (New Conservative voter)**

Those from Muslim backgrounds perhaps had more cause to reflect deeply on this question and articulated how identity depended not only on their sense of self but also how they were viewed by others. The initial reaction of the group was to identify as 'British Muslim' but this came with qualifications.

**'No the question you're asking me is 'How would you describe yourself to other people?' So it depends on where I am.'** (New Conservative voter)

National pride was articulated across a range of domains, including sport and national institutions - particularly public services. However, there were differences across the groups in whether British identity was a positive or negative. One group described British identity as outdated:

**'British has connotations of colonialism, the British empire. It's dated, I don't know when I'd ever use British'** (Conservative voter)

**'Yes, it might have a bit of a stigma with some countries as well.'** (Conservative voter)

Another group pointed to the benefits of belonging to Britain and to the importance of British institutions, particularly the National Health Service.

**'I think there's a sense of belonging to Britain, and I think we should promote that, and I think that's respected abroad as well in exports and everything'.** (Labour voter)

**'I'm proud to be British...We've got a good health system, although it's not as good as it used to be, we've got education, yes so I'm proud of coming from the country that gives you all that.'** (Labour voter)

**'I'd proud to be British because I think we have good hospitals, good schools, you know we've got everything really.'** (Labour voter)

However, what was striking about these discussions was that they did not invoke political discussion. Participants reflected on how they would use identities, British, English and a sense of belonging to Yorkshire in different ways and at different times but they did not connect these to their voting behaviour or that of other people.

## Issues and Priorities

*'I can't remember the last bit of good news.'*

Our final section turns to the issues the groups raised spontaneously, the problems they face and their hopes (or fears) for the future.

Three issues were repeatedly raised in relation to the local areas - crime, housing and the local physical environment. The lattermost was mentioned most often in relation to empty shops, and this was true of cities as well as the local high streets.

**'Talking about the big retailers, John Lewis, Debenhams, they're gone.'**

(Green Party voter)

**'It's like the big retailers if they've closed down, what hope have we got for the small retailers?'** (New Conservative voter)

**'So many empty buildings. They're just ruined. Years and years of empty buildings. It's a disgrace really it looks awful'** (Labour voter)

While all the groups mentioned crime as an issue for their areas, this was often qualified by a recognition that this was less serious than elsewhere. Both the physical environment and crime were more likely to feature as a description of the local area than as a key priority issue.

**'The crime is rural crime...you know...it doesn't reach into like living in London...'**

(Conservative voter)

**'Not so much gun crime. Luckily at this stage, we haven't had many shootings, but it is quite bad for drugs and things like that.'** (Conservative voter)

Housing was also mentioned as a challenge, but for voters in these places it was particularly in relation to people moving into the area.

**'I think too many people are coming up here to buy houses. They've kind of thought 'God it's fabulous. Let's get out of London, and let's get out of the south where it's just a traffic jam everywhere.'** (Conservative voter)



Turning to the national picture, the economy and the cost of living featured heavily in people's concerns about the future. There was concern about how the cost of the pandemic would be met.

**'How do we get this money back? And the only people that are going to be affected are the workers. The people that get up every day, go to work, they will be the ones that are affected, because we're the ones that are paying the tax and national insurance.'**  
(New Conservative voter)

**'...the three day week and power cuts. That's where we're heading unless we can turn it around. It just seems to be a spiral at the moment ... I can't remember the last bit of good news.'** (Conservative voter)

However, the most serious concerns for people seemed to be around their own household budgets and the rising cost of living. Several participants expressed concern about how they would manage. These groups were conducted in the Autumn of 2021, before the more recent the cost-of-living rises had begun to bite, but paint a picture of voters worried about their economic future.

**'I know the cost of living seems to be going up, it seems to be costing more each month just to live, just to do your shopping, just to maintain your house...'**  
(Labour voter)

**'...wages are not going up, cost of living, food's gone up, petrol's gone up, gas and electricity are going to soar through the roof, so how do you make ends meet if our wages aren't going up...'** (Labour voter)

**'I think it's (the economy) in a bad place. We've got families that have been relying on this £20 Universal Credit and they're using the food banks... I really worry for these families, I just don't know how they're going to cope, and these are people that are working already, just beggars' belief that they've got to do that, really. Really sad.'**  
(Non-voter)

## 5. CONCLUSION: POLITICAL FUTURES IN THE NEW BATTLEGROUND

*'I think they're annoyed, they're angry, how do they express it?'*

Our focus groups were conducted in places that will be a key part of the battleground at the next general election. Holding onto seats gained here is essential for the Conservative party, increasingly under threat in affluent remain leaning seats in the South. However, there was little to offer cheer to either party. Distrust of politicians of all parties was high and there was little optimism that things would improve. Those who voted Conservative for the first time in 2019 expressed a certain amount of regret:

**'I won't be voting Tory again. Put it that way'** (New Conservative voter)

**'I just distrust so much at the moment, more than I've ever distrusted any government and I second guess why they are saying things a lot...there does seem to have been quite a lot of corruption as well.'** (New Conservative voter)

It is worth reiterating that these groups were conducted in Autumn 2021, well before any of the December scandals had hit the headlines. That this level of distrust already existed may help to explain why the revelations had such a potent effect on public opinion.

However, participants also revealed that the Labour Party has much to do to regain their support. Those who had switched to the Conservatives in 2019 described Labour as 'broken', 'untrustworthy', 'clowns' and 'fake'. And while they had lost faith in their new party, they had yet to find a reason to return to Labour.

**'...nowadays the Labour Party is just middle-class people, career people...They come straight from university into Labour and they don't know what real Labour people...they don't really know what we are like.'** (Labour voter)

Distrust and disengagement were themes that resonated throughout, during a period where the immediacy of the pandemic seemed to be fading and the worst of the cost-of-living crisis was yet to come. Tuning out and turning away from politics seemed to be attractive options for many, while the weight of the pandemic was heavy and perhaps it's political consequences still to be fully felt.

**'I mean, people I speak to, it's like they don't want to talk about politics nowadays, that's what it's got to, you know. Because I think they're annoyed, they're angry, how do they express it?'** (Labour voter)

**'I think when you sit and watch the news and things like that, I think you're better off not doing. Not watching...and just getting on with your life. I just got myself in my little bubble with my family and I'm quite happy with that.'** (Non-voter)

**'I just want this country to change so much, because I'm going back to the day when they said that Covid-19's in England, and from that day on my life just changed. I just felt like something's just hit me with a ton of bricks...'** (New Conservative voter)

Much will be written in the coming months about how either Labour or the Conservatives can win the Red Wall. First, however, both parties need to try to understand the voters who live there. The discussions in these groups focussed on the 'old' politics of class, of economic struggle and of public services. These are difficult waters for the Conservatives to navigate. To hold onto voters in these areas the Conservatives need to deliver, but it is not clear that they yet understand what that means. These groups were not demanding infrastructure projects, new bridges or even more jobs. They wanted their standard of living to be protected from the dual storms of Covid and Brexit and for the places they lived in to feel more vibrant. These are the messages that are most likely to resonate with Red Wall voters over the next 18 months – the question is who will be able to articulate them successfully.

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