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# Northern Discomfort: Why Labour lost the General Election

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In 1992, following Labour's fourth election defeat in a row, Giles Radice published a pamphlet for the Fabian Society entitled 'Southern Discomfort'. It described Labour's "crippling political weakness" in Southern England and underscored the need for the party to transform itself in order to regain the trust of the voters it needed in order to win.

Now Labour has again suffered its fourth election defeat in a row.

This time the election story is different. It is one of 'Northern Discomfort'. Labour's problem – the primary reason for its worst defeat since the 1930s – is the switch of traditional Labour voters away from the party in the Midlands and North of England – the breakdown of the so-called 'Red Wall'.

The Tony Blair Institute commissioned the polling company Deltapoll to conduct three surveys and six focus groups in the last week of the campaign. The surveys were of the general public: voters who had stayed loyal to Labour and those who had defected from Labour since 2017. The focus groups were conducted in three Labour heartland areas where the party's support in recent years has crumbled: Bishop Auckland, Walsall and Worksop (part of the Bassetlaw constituency). These groups focused on traditional Labour voters, some of whom had decided to not vote Labour in this election and others who were still considering whether to vote Labour.

The surveys and focus groups tell the story of why Labour lost so many traditional voters and why the party suffered previously unthinkable losses.

In many ways, this was a Brexit election. The simple message, 'Get Brexit Done', appealed to many traditional Labour voters, especially those who voted Leave, but also for Remain voters yearning for Brexit to be over. What united both Leavers and Remainers in this election was that Jeremy Corbyn provided no clear leadership on the central issue of our time, particularly during the election.

However, Brexit is not the main explanation for Labour's 'Northern Discomfort'. This would blind the party to the real

reasons for the scale, consequences and reasons for this historic defeat. It was the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and the politics he represents that caused the real rupture with long-held loyalties. Brexit loosened some of the bonds of traditional support for the party, but at root it was a symptom of more fundamental discontents.

This is clear from past trends in many of the heartland seats that Labour lost this time. By 2015 – that is, during the pre-Corbyn and pre-Brexit era – Labour had already shed thousands of voters in each of these constituencies. To take just a few high-profile examples, between 2005 (the last time Labour won a general election) and 2015, the party’s share of the vote fell by 16 percentage points in Hartlepool, 14 points in Bolsover, 12 in Sedgefield, 10 in Don Valley and Workington, and 9 in Wrexham and Bishop Auckland. In Scotland, of course, Labour’s collapse in 2015 was even more dramatic.

Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership, then, did not cause Labour’s crisis. That crisis has been brewing for some years. To eject Boris Johnson from Downing Street Jeremy Corbyn had to reverse Labour’s decline in its heartlands. Instead, his leadership and his political strategy achieved precisely the opposite. They drove even more traditional Labour supporters away from the party.

What is more, a significant minority even of those who stayed with Labour did so despite its leadership and policy positions not because of them.

This report identifies five pillars of the ‘Northern Discomfort’ Labour suffered on 12th December:

1. **Leadership**
2. **Brexit**
3. **Extremism**
4. **Security and patriotism**
5. **Economic credibility**

Woven throughout these issues was a common feeling that Labour was no longer on the side of traditional working-class voters. Some in our groups were angry that Labour had moved so

far away from them. Others were sad that Labour was no longer providing an acceptable alternative to the Tories.

This report examines the five pillars of Labour's 'Northern Discomfort'. Our research shows that the breach need not be permanent, but simply changing the leader will not be enough. The problems go far deeper; and so must the solutions. Labour needs not just a different driver, but a different bus. The first task is to discard the sectarian ultra-left politics that has taken the party over and condemned it to the wilderness of opposition. Only then can Labour begin the journey back to government.

## THE FIVE PILLARS OF LABOUR'S NORTHERN DISCOMFORT

### 1. LEADERSHIP

The leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, and the politics he represents, lie at the heart of the disaffection with Labour at this election. If in 2017 the history of Jeremy Corbyn and his politics did not quite cut through to voters as many had expected, then that knowledge, awareness and a deep distaste for this history had clearly seeped into the bones of voters' attitudes this time around.

The focus groups undertaken help us to understand why. People recounted their own and their own families' long histories of voting Labour, followed by either clear declarations that they were switching their support this time, or were having doubts whether they could cast their vote for Labour this time – even if they distrusted the Conservatives on issues such as the NHS and support for families.

His past associations and what it said about his patriotism; a perception of extremism and his left-wing attitudes particularly on issues of security; his high spending policies; and his “sitting on the fence” on Brexit; failing properly to tackle anti-Semitism; and general leadership capability and difficulty in seeing him as Prime Minister all congealed together into a lethal mix in many of these voters' minds. Again and again, the issue was Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and the deeper politics it represented:

#### **Jeremy Corbyn's leadership**

*“I've always voted Labour all my life, always voted Labour. I will not vote Labour this time, I will only vote Conservative and that's because of the party leadership. I could never vote for Jeremy Corbyn. I just couldn't do it.”* Male, Worksop

*“I've always voted Labour, but this week, I have no idea, even now, I don't know. There's something about Jeremy Corbyn that I don't trust.”* Female, Walsall

*“I don’t think he’s credible. I will go out and vote for my MP and it would be my best Christmas gift and birthday gift if Jeremy Corbyn resigns Friday morning.”* Male, Walsall

*“The Labour Party as well, they’re a bit of a mess, Jeremy Corbyn, all right, he’s not the most relatable person for me, personally, but again, not charismatic, he doesn’t look like a leader, so for me, just a bit confused, he’s scruffy, he doesn’t look like a force to be feared.”*

*“I just don’t know, I don’t know. I just don’t believe him, I don’t think he’ll make a very good leader.”* Female, Worksop

*“The best thing they could have done was get rid of Corbyn before this General Election came up”.* Male, Bishop Auckland

*“I like the Labour Party, I just don’t like Jeremy Corbyn.”*  
Female, Worksop

*“If they had a different leader that had a better public opinion, then I think it’s in the bag for them.”* Male, Worksop

### **Jeremy Corbyn’s politics**

“I really don’t like Jeremy Corbyn and I think his past experiences and stuff like that has put me off voting for him now. I don’t like Boris Johnson, but I think that outweighs, I’d rather him stay in power than Jeremy Corbyn and some of his policies and some of the things that they’ve been doing in the area and stuff.” Female, Walsall

“I don’t so much say I dislike him, I dislike the way of what he’s doing to the Labour Party. I think he tends to close his eyes to things like anti-Semitism.” Male, Walsall

“That’s the extreme link he has, it’s the link with the terrorists and his Israel views. His policies, I just think they’re a flash in the pan, just quick, ‘Free Wi-Fi for everybody, come on, get some votes in’” Male, Walsall

“I won’t vote Labour this time because Jeremy Corbyn is an out and out communist. I look at his history, I look at the history

of where he's been, and what he's said in the past, and who his friends have been, and, I despise the man, passionately. I think he's destroying the Labour Party." Male, Bishop Auckland

"I was watching him last week, on one of the morning TV programmes, with Philip Schofield. He was asking him to apologise for anti-Semitism in his party. He must have asked him, quite aggressively, 'Are you going to apologise? Just say you're sorry'. He finally half-heartedly did it, but only after Philip got aggressive." Male, Bishop Auckland

The surveys show that the members of our focus groups spoke for millions. The following table shows how Jeremy Corbyn's standing has harmed his party. Labour defectors are evenly divided on whether they still support Labour's values, but a large majority don't like Jeremy Corbyn. Moreover, while Labour loyalists remain overwhelmingly devoted to the Party's values, as many as 34% dislike its leader. Of the 10.3 million people who voted Labour this time, 3.5 million did so despite Jeremy Corbyn, not because of him. Those apparently open to his politics comprised barely 20% of Britain's total electorate.

In some ways this figure highlights both the challenge and the problem for the Labour Party. The problem it shows is that the politics of Jeremy Corbyn cannot win if it owns and leads the Labour Party. But conversely, it cannot be said that there is no support for it. The question is whether this support would stay with Labour if moderate leadership took over. We believe most of it would.

	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
<b>Which one of the following do you most agree with?</b>			
I support current Labour values and I like Jeremy	34	59	12



	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
Corbyn			
I support current Labour values but I don't like Jeremy Corbyn	34	32	33
I don't support current Labour values but I like Jeremy Corbyn	8	3	8
I don't support current Labour values and I don't like Jeremy Corbyn	12	2	38
Don't know	13	4	9
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT LABOUR VALUES</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>TOTAL DON'T SUPPORT LABOUR VALUES</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>TOTAL LIKE JEREMY CORBYN</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>TOTAL DON'T LIKE JEREMY CORBYN</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>71</b>

Our survey also finds that Jeremy Corbyn was widely seen as out of touch. By almost three-to-one (60-23%), Labour defectors agree that “Jeremy Corbyn does not understand the concerns of people like me”. Concerns extend to many party loyalists. As many as 39% either agreed (24%) or did not know (15%).

It was a feeling that had settled into a perception in the focus groups, as well as the general public, that the Labour Party had

moved away from them and no longer fulfilled its historic purpose in standing up for them and their values. Among defectors, 70% agreed that “the Labour Party used to stick up for people like”. Just 33% think it does so today.

<b>For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you think...</b>	<b>All %</b>	<b>Voted Lab in 2017 %</b>	<b>Labour Loyalists %</b>	<b>Labour Defectors %</b>
<b>The Labour Party used to stick up for people like me</b>				
Agree	44	64	75	70
Disagree	26	9	7	10
Don't know	8	3	1	1
<b>The Labour Party these days sticks up for people like me</b>				
Agree	32	60	79	33
Disagree	41	14	4	40
Don't know	8	3	1	2

We should note that many Labour defectors – indeed many voters generally – feel just as badly about the Conservatives. For example, 18% of defectors say the Tories “used to stick up for people like me”. From the swathe of Labour heartland seats that changed hands this time, we might expect a sharp rise in the numbers saying the Conservatives stick up for them nowadays.

In fact, among Labour defectors, the number is unchanged – again just 18%. Among the general public, there is also little sign

that voters think the Tories have widened their appeal. 29% say that the party used to stick up for people like them; that figure is up a mere one point, to 30%, when people are asked if they think the Tories do so today.

These findings confirm what polls found consistently through the election campaign: Boris Johnson is not a popular leader. He was merely far less unpopular than his opponent. In short, the problem is not that Boris Johnson and the Tories have succeeded in broadening their 'One Nation' appeal, as the Prime Minister claims, but that Labour has driven millions of voters away.

## 2. BREXIT

This was in many ways a Brexit election, and was the prism through which much of the election was fought.

The views expressed in the focus groups were virtually unanimous:

“I don't think anybody can think of any politics without thinking of Brexit”. Female, Bishop Auckland

“Nothing else can be resolved until Brexit is out of the way.”  
Male, Bishop Auckland

Labour's approach was widely dismissed. Among both party loyalists and defectors, just one in six (17%) agreed with Jeremy Corbyn's plan to call a second referendum but make no recommendation either way. More generally, most defectors, and even a significant minority of loyalists, felt that Jeremy Corbyn was failing to provide clear leadership on the issue:

**Labour says it will negotiate a new deal on Brexit with the EU and then hold a referendum on whether the UK should leave the EU on the new deal, or Remain in the EU. If such a referendum is held, should Labour's leadership.....**

**Labour Loyalists %**

**Labour Defectors %**

Recommend voting to remain in the EU	60	38
Recommend voting to leave the EU	17	38
Not make a recommendation either way	17	17
Don't know	6	7

**Do you think Jeremy Corbyn has or has not provided clear leadership on Labour's Brexit position?**

Very / quite clear leadership	67	22
Very / quite unclear leadership	27	73
Don't know	6	6

Undoubtedly, Brexit was a key issue for those Labour respondents who had voted Leave. Weariness of the issue even among those not committed to Leave meant the Tories' message of "get Brexit done" had a simple appeal.

But it should be noted that Labour defectors are equally split, with 38% saying Labour should support Remain and 38% saying Labour should support Leave. Among Labour loyalists, the figure saying Labour should support Remain was 60%.

What united Leave and Remain voters in the groups was that Jeremy Corbyn had not provided leadership on this issue, with constant derision of his "sitting on the fence". He ended up with a reputation for being both weak and ideologically extreme.

"He sticks on the fence. He says he's neutral, how can he be neutral? You want to leave, or you don't." Male, Bishop Auckland

"The Labour Party, their stance on Brexit was just wishy-washy for ages and I still think it is now. The message that they send

over, are they for Brexit or are they against Brexit? Jeremy Corbyn still hasn't said." Male, Worksop

"I don't believe Jeremy Corbyn is a Remainer. He campaigned all his life to leave Europe, he didn't like this establishment, so he's a Brexiter and I'm not even convinced that he voted Remain in that referendum". Male, Walsall

"You need somebody who's got direction, and he hasn't got any at all." Male, Bishop Auckland

"No, I don't think it's doing the Labour Party any good standing on the fence (general agreement). He doesn't want to upset that side, and he doesn't want to upset that side. He's trying to say, 'You'll just all vote for me.' Male, Bishop Auckland

"He actually said he wanted out of Europe. He was a Leaver, but he's just a coward, and I don't want a coward running my country." Male, Bishop Auckland

"I know Boris might be, but at least he's got an opinion. I don't like the man, but at least he is trying something, whereas at the minute the other parties are, sort of, sitting on which way it goes." Male, Worksop

"Let's go back to the Brexit thing a little bit and say, 'You know what? Labour Party, you as a person in charge of that has not come out and said which way you want to go.' That just sums him up in terms of indecisive." Male, Worksop

"You need a leader, I want someone that's going to lead the country." Male, Worksop

It would, however, be wrong to think that Brexit dominated voters' minds because they felt passionately about the European Union. Our survey listed thirteen ways in which different people said Britain had been damaged in recent years. We asked people to identify the three or four "which are doing most harm", first to Britain, and then "to you and/or the area in which you live".

When asked about Britain generally, one in four (25%) picked "The European Union imposes too many rules on Britain" – the

proposition at the heart of the Leave campaign three years ago to “take back control”. It was equal fourth in the list of thirteen.

Among Labour defectors, the figure was slightly slower: 22%. Resentment of EU rules came ninth in the thirteen-factor ranking.

When we asked people about “you and/or the area in which you live”, the figures were lower still. Among the general public, 17% picked out EU rules; it came eighth. Among Labour defectors, the figure was just 15%; EU rules were in eleventh place.

In short, Brexit has provoked a domestic political crisis and shone a harsh light on Labour’s leadership. But the strong feelings the crisis has aroused have little to do with the practical impact of “London” ceding power to “Brussels”. This is further evidence that “Brexit” is a symptom of deeper discontents around identity, culture, austerity and insecurity.

### **3. EXTREMISM**

In the election campaign Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, his Shadow Chancellor, continually sought to reassure voters that Labour’s manifesto was a moderate plan that would improve public services, strengthen the economy and improve the lives of the great majority of voters, without raising their taxes or increasing the role of the state beyond levels common in other European countries.

Their failure to counter the charge of extremism played a large part in Labour’s heavy defeat. By two-to-one (52-26%) Labour defectors agreed that “many of Labour’s policies in the current election are too extreme” – but as many as 24% of loyalists also agreed. Once again, Labour was saved from an even more catastrophic defeat by people who stayed loyal to Labour despite, not because of, Labour’s platform for government.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	All %	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
<b>Many of Labour's policies in the current election are too extreme</b>				
Agree	48	32	24	52
Disagree	27	47	58	26
Don't know	24	20	18	21

In our focus groups, the move of the Labour Party to the left – some said “extreme left” – was a reason for disaffection and the feeling of the party having moved away from them. For a small number, the issue was Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership and could be resolved by his departure. For several members of the groups, however, the left-wing direction of the party now went deeper and would be harder to resolve.

“Jeremy Corbyn, I think he has pushed the party too much to the extreme left and some of the unrealistic things that he’s promising don’t seem that we can achieve that and I always say that anybody who needs to win an election in this country cannot go to the extremes and I think that is my problem with Jeremy Corbyn.” Male, Walsall

“It’s not just his view. It’s Momentum as well.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“Too far left isn’t good for the country”. Female, Bishop Auckland

“Jeremy Corbyn wants to nationalise everything, and I look at the 70s, bin men on strikes, national strikes, British Steel on strikes, car strikers. I used to have to read books with candlelight

because there were always power strikes for the electricity board. British Telecom was dreadful. British Rail was horrendous. I think, 'This man wants to take us back to that?' He's lived in the 70s. Why does anybody want to go back to those days?" Male, Bishop Auckland

"But in terms of where we are now with the Labour Party, that is a confusion and I mentioned extremist because it seems run by people who are everything anti and it has become a mass protest movement. Jeremy has pushed it in that direction to be frank, Jeremy likes a demonstration." Male, Walsall

"I just think the people we've seen to be behind Jeremy Corbyn have the same feelings, they've got extreme views, haven't they? So, there's nobody who are holding him back or he's not listening to the wider party." Female, Walsall

"I'm a socialist, but I'm a realist and I think the party has become like a cult. A cult movement with the saviour being Jeremy Corbyn. I'm thinking if he goes, will these people stay, or will they want to see a photocopy of Jeremy Corbyn in order to keep them in the Labour Party." Male, Walsall

"He was a Marxist, always has been, far-left, but he won't admit the things that he's said and done in the past. His conviction was always for being on the picket line, striking, standing up for the working man, but now he's not standing up for the working man, because he's ignoring everything." Male, Bishop Auckland

"M: It's his buddy sidekick.

M: Yes. If you ever want anybody who's far-left, there's another guy.

M: I honestly think, if Labour do get in, Corbyn will soon be kicked out for McDonnell to come in.

M: That will be even worse.

M: He was just as bad as Corbyn when he was younger." Male respondents, Bishop Auckland



#### 4. SECURITY AND PATRIOTISM

For a party and leader aspiring to run Britain, the polling figures on this issue are truly shocking. Although no direct comparisons are possible with past Labour leaders, it is scarcely credible that Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson or Tony Blair, the only three leaders in the party's history who have led it to victories with clear majorities, would have faced such public condemnation – or won any elections if they did.

Even among Labour loyalists, doubts about Labour leadership's patriotism are widespread. Just 61% consider him patriotic; this is the kind of question where any party leader would expect a positive rating of at least 90% among their own supporters. To score 80% would be disappointing, 70% worrying – and only 61% terrifying.

	All %	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
<b>Do you agree or disagree with this statement?</b>				
<b>Jeremy Corbyn is patriotic</b>				
Agree	24	43	61	27
Disagree	45	28	11	43
Don't know	31	29	28	30
<b>Do you think the current Labour Party...</b>				
Would keep the UK safe from terror and other	28	52	66	31

	All %	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
threats				
Would not keep the UK safe from terror and other threats	40	19	15	38
Neither	11	11	9	16
Don't know	20	17	10	15

What is more, Jeremy Corbyn’s patriotism rating, and Labour’s reputation for keeping the UK safe, matter greatly. Voters in our focus groups – again, we should remember that they were all traditional Labour supporters – were visceral in their distrust of Jeremy Corbyn as a leader who could stand up and defend Britain. His perceived associations with the IRA and terror groups, his perceived lack of support for the armed forces, his opposition to the nuclear deterrent, and the perceptions of his stance on terrorists all contributed to a general perception he was a leader not sufficiently trusted to defend and stand up for Britain.

The London Bridge terror attack had real impact with many of these respondents and raised the salience of the issue of security, with perceptions that Jeremy Corbyn’s stance would be too weak.

“He shot himself in the foot this week. ‘All terrorists don’t need to stop in jail.’ We’ll just free them all, and blow you up... Don’t keep them in jail, let them out early.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“That’s because of his IRA affiliations in the past.” Male, Worksop

“I think it’s because a lot of terrorism that’s about and to be a supporter of that, people are scared. That is for me and you know, it’s really hitting home now that the IRA were terrorists but Corbyn was happy to sit down with them.” Female, Worksop

“His views on especially the armed forces, which is a big thing for me, is why I don’t trust him in power.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“IRA, whichever it is. He’s supported all the terrorist organisations.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“People always refer to him as a terrorist sympathiser. The IRA. My family, my mum’s side is Irish, anyway, who come from Northern Ireland, but he used to go for tea, didn’t he? At the head of the IRA’s house and stuff. Straight away, is that somebody we really want in power?” Female, Walsall

“They had the head of MI5 or MI6; the previous head and he was saying he would not even pass the security questions to receive information. Now, that’s someone I would probably trust, the person that used to run MI5, the secret service. And he says Jeremy Corbyn, if he becomes Prime Minister, they would struggle to swear him in for those secrets because of his past affiliations. You know, do I trust him to run a country? No, I don’t. Do I trust him to keep my country safe? No, I don’t.” Male, Worksop

“If we went to war, what happens then?” Female, Bishop Auckland

“More so, because I’m ex-forces and he wants rid of our nuclear deterrents. I worked with nuclear weapons, so it’s part of our life, we need them for defence and that’s what we have them for. He wants rid of them, same as Nicola Sturgeon.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“Obviously on the armed forces side of it all, he wants to reduce our force sizes, that our country will do well without nuclear weapons, I’d like to know why he thinks that?” Male, Bishop Auckland

## **5. ECONOMIC CREDIBILITY**

Polls during the election found that a number of Labour’s policies, tested individually, were popular. Taken together, however, most voters felt they lacked credibility. Labour needed to convince enough voters of two things: that its ambitious spending plans were a good idea in principle, and that a Labour government could be trusted to spend the money wisely. Fewer than one in four of

Britain's voters, and less than half of those who had voted Labour in 2017, believed both things:

<b>At this General Election, the Labour Party is proposing a number of policies on the NHS, schools, nationalisation and other things that would require an incoming Labour government to spend significantly more money than the UK has witnessed in our lifetime. Do you think that...</b>	<b>All %</b>	<b>Voted Lab in 2017 %</b>	<b>Labour Loyalists %</b>	<b>Labour Defectors %</b>
It is right and proper to spend this kind of money to restore public services and I trust the Labour Party to spend money wisely	22	46	64	20
It is right and proper to spend this kind of money to restore public services but I do not trust the Labour Party to spend money wisely	23	21	18	34
The country cannot currently afford to spend quite so much extra money on public services but I do trust the Labour Party to spend wisely	9	11	10	9

At this General Election, the Labour Party is proposing a number of policies on the NHS, schools, nationalisation and other things that would require an incoming Labour government to spend significantly more money than the UK has witnessed in our lifetime. Do you think that....	All %	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
The country cannot currently afford to spend quite so much extra money on public services and I do not trust the Labour Party to spend money wisely	30	8	1	26
Don't know	16	13	6	10
<b>TOTAL AGREEING IT IS RIGHT AND PROPER TO SPEND THIS KIND OF MONEY</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>TOTAL SAYING COUNTRY CANNOT AFFORD TO SPEND QUITE SO MUCH EXTRA</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>TOTAL TRUSTING LABOUR TO</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>29</b>

At this General Election, the Labour Party is proposing a number of policies on the NHS, schools, nationalisation and other things that would require an incoming Labour government to spend significantly more money than the UK has witnessed in our lifetime. Do you think that...	All %	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
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**SPEND WISELY**

<b>TOTAL NOT TRUSTING TO SPEND WISELY</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>60</b>
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Even among Labour loyalists, almost one in five did not trust the Labour Party to spend money wisely, whilst this figure registered 60% among Labour defectors.

It is worth noting that among the general public, slightly more people thought that Labour’s promises were affordable than not affordable; but a clear majority did not trust the party to spend wisely. Among Labour loyalists, the gap between affordability (82%) and trust (74%) was a modest eight points; among defectors the gap was as much as 25 points (54% thought the plans affordable, but just 29% trusted Labour to spend wisely). While Labour would have preferred more voters to LIKE its policies, its bigger problem was that the party’s leadership lacked the credibility to deliver them.

Responses to other questions underline this finding. Only 26% of all voters considered Labour to be “credible on the economy”. Among those who voted Labour in 2017, the figure rose to 52% - but this means that almost half of those voters considered the party to be not credible (20%) or said “neither” or “don’t know” (28%).

Again, there was a massive gulf between Labour loyalists (69% said credible – a clear majority, but less than overwhelming enthusiasm) and defectors (just 23%).

In our focus groups, a constant refrain of ‘Where is the money coming from?’ underpinned the electorate’s disbelief on the credibility of Labour’s spending programme. The free broadband policy had cut through with these voters – not as a cause for enthusiasm, but as a tipping point for the lack of seriousness of Labour’s ‘free’ offers.

“The free broadband thing, it’s just ludicrous. Where did they pull that from? They’re the sort of things that make them look daft.”  
Female, Worksop

“As this campaign goes on, it seems ludicrous, the sorts of things that he’s offering. I’m not saying they’re not good things. So fees for university students, everybody on a four day week and we don’t lose any money, free broadband for everybody in the country, under 16 free railway travel, all great things, and, if we could get them all brilliant but there are other things he just keeps coming out with...Now it just seems too many, it just seems ridiculous.”  
Male, Bishop Auckland

“This time, how many billions is he giving to the widowed pensioners who have had their pensions? Free Wi-Fi? How much is free Wi-Fi?” Male, Bishop Auckland

“We all want free Wi-Fi. It’s not going to do anything to the economy. BT will lose jobs, your phone charges will probably go up. Virgin and all the other internet companies will go bust.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“Corbyn did a manifesto-type talk in York a couple of years ago now, I was just inspired and was like, ‘Wow, wow, wow. He’s just ace and he’s going to do everything that is really relevant for us and paving the way for our future generation.’ But then, you have to think, ‘Where is the money coming from? What’s going to happen, are they going to hike the taxes up to pay for it all basically.’”  
Female, Worksop

“There are just too many things free. I think you should be able to work for things and gain them.” Female, Walsall

“Now some of the policies that the Labour people want, and they are advertising is you know, you’ll make the country bankrupt. How is he going to pay for all of this? It’s like, ‘You know what, come to Poundland’. This is a giveaway culture at the moment. Do you know what I mean? Someone’s got to pay for that at the end of the day, you can’t live off promises, we can’t live on that stuff.” Male, Worksop

“I should vote for Corbyn’s Labour because my youngest boy, he’d get at £6,000 year increase straight away. My wife who should have retired at 60, she’d be getting a back-dated pension. Where the hell is the money coming from? It’s all very well saying, “We’ll do that”. But, please, come out with a plausible situation we can fund.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“They’re all saying, ‘Oh, I’m putting this in’, but where are they going to get the money from? Are they going to print it out the bank? It’s like Monopoly money.” Female, Walsall



## “A NEW DIRECTION”: WHAT LABOUR NEEDS TO DO TO RE-CONNECT

That Labour has taken a wrong turning under the wrong leader is clear from our surveys and focus groups. But most people in our groups have not given up on the party altogether. They want it to change and give them reasons to vote Labour again. These comments reflect the views of many.

“A different leader and a different direction.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“I think the working-class people; a lot of people are Labour, and they wanted to see the old Labour back that was going towards more the centre ground... I think they can bring it back because I think most people, a lot of people from round here, they aren't Conservative so we're all struggling to know who to vote for.” Female, Walsall

“I've never voted Conservative, whatever Labour's done they're doing it wrong, aren't they? They need to overhaul the whole party if they want to get back into power.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“I think a new leader in place could transform it. Nothing has changed in terms of the whole package of Labour. It's just the leader that people are a bit sceptical of. I think they have to seriously think and judge the temperature in the country in terms of how people are thinking and not necessarily come down heavy-handed with that left-wing principle. People are not attracted to it. It seems radical and it seems unrealistic.” Male, Walsall

“No-one's voting for them, they must know they have got to get back to the centre ground.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“I think it goes all the way back to before Ed Miliband. I think if David won that vote and got in over Ed Miliband all the way back there, I don't think the Conservatives would be in power as they are now, and I think that's how important having the right leader in place is.” Male, Worksop

“It was reborn again, as the new Labour Party. I can see it having to change, to a new Labour party.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“We’re losing identity. All of a sudden now England, in the World Cup, you can’t wave the flag because it offends some people. People walking, you might just see their eyes. That’s basically how I feel the country’s going in a hole and we’re losing identity.” Male, Bishop Auckland

“I’m not saying I would never go back to Labour. I’m voting Conservative on Thursday and it’s the first I’ve ever voted Conservative”. Male, Bishop Auckland

What, though, should a new leader do? What direction should they set? We have seen that Jeremy Corbyn and the wider leadership were widely seen as out of touch, extreme, unpatriotic and incompetent.

But they will need more than to reverse those negatives. They will need a compelling narrative of what is wrong with Britain and how to put it right. The fierce arguments over Brexit have exposed deeper problems that have flowed from a decade of austerity and a generation of great economic and social change. Nowhere have these problems been greater than in Labour’s heartlands – and nowhere has Labour suffered more electorally in recent years. (This point, of course, also applies to Labour’s former Scottish citadels. But Labour’s support north of the border collapsed well before the Brexit referendum. It cannot be blamed solely on the traumas of the past three years.)

Our survey asked people to identify which problems have done the most harm to them and their area. (We have already touched on the findings on the EU.) Two big lessons emerge.

The first is that there is no massive difference between Labour and non-Labour voters, or between loyalists and defectors. Naturally, different people have different priorities; but they are largely independent of political allegiance, and whether that allegiance is constant or changing.

The second big lesson is that some of the issues that appear to generate the greatest noise are of least direct concern to voters. Of the thirteen problems we listed, three come at or near the bottom of the table, regardless of how people have voted in recent elections: EU rules, immigration, and taxation.

Of far greater concern are cuts in local services, dishonest politicians and NHS waiting lists. In as far as there are slight differences between different groups, we should note that Labour defectors were MORE likely than the general public to pick out these issues, and LESS like to pick out EU rules.

<b>Which three or four of the following would you say are doing most harm to you and/or the area in which you live? Please tick up to FOUR answers if you think they apply.</b>	<b>All %</b>	<b>Voted Lab in 2017 %</b>	<b>Labour Loyalists %</b>	<b>Labour Defectors %</b>
There have been damaging cuts in the services provided by our local council	30	37	40	44
Politicians have become less honest and less interested in helping families like ours	29	24	27	33
Members of our family have had to wait too long for NHS hospital operations	27	27	30	31
Rising crime is making the streets in our neighbourhood more dangerous	30	24	27	30
Rich and powerful people have got richer and more powerful at the expense of	24	27	38	29

Which three or four of the following would you say are doing most harm to you and/or the area in which you live? Please tick up to FOUR answers if you think they apply.	All %	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
families like ours				
The rising cost of buying or renting a home has caused our family real problems	24	25	25	23
The quality of education in state schools in our area has declined	16	18	19	20
It has been getting harder for members of my family to find secure, well-paid jobs	16	16	23	17
Cuts in welfare benefits have hit our family	15	22	24	17
Modern life generally has become too frantic; things change too fast	18	18	15	16
The European Union imposes too many rules that affect our family's daily life	17	8	7	15

Which three or four of the following would you say are doing most harm to you and/or the area in which you live? Please tick up to FOUR answers if you think they apply.	All %	Voted Lab in 2017 %	Labour Loyalists %	Labour Defectors %
Our family has suffered from immigrants who have been taking homes and jobs in our area	11	9	8	12
The burden of taxation paid by our family has grown	13	13	11	11
None of these	3	2	2	3
Don't know	6	6	4	4

Each era of Labour rule has faced different problems and needed different solutions. But each had important things in common: they understood the lives of the people whose votes they needed; they applied big ideas to everyday challenges; their reforms were far-reaching but severely practical; they won the trust of voters in all walks of life and all parts of Britain.

To win next time, the problems and solutions will be different once again, but the basic electoral tasks will be the same.

First, however, the lessons of the 2019 disaster must be learned, and acted upon.

Labour's most urgent task is to demolish the five pillars of its Northern Discomfort. This report has set out the reasons why. The party must now work out how – and then what to put in their place.

Download the full data tables from Deltapoll for Labour voters  
(/sites/default/files/inline-files/  
Final%20results%20-%20All%20Labour%20voters%20-%20web.pdf)  
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